

# Birmingham Arts Journal

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# Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **SHEBOYGAN.** Sam Collins, Digital Photograph – Nikon D2Hs  
*This is one of a series of digital images reflecting Sam's interest in signage from the 1920s forward. The image is 12" x 18" on archival paper.*

Back Cover: **THREE DOLLARS A BASKET.** Amy Collins, Oil on Canvas

*Sam and Amy Collins have been medical illustrators for over twenty-five years, creating art work for clients throughout North and South America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim. They live in Homewood, Alabama, with their two children, Sara and Matthew.*

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## HOMER'S TRILOGY

Steve Meador

1

The German soldier waited,  
nerves chattering,  
knife in his filthy hand  
tapping a dirge on the stone wall,  
and when my grandfather eased past  
the corner of the building  
the German lunged,  
arm pounding mechanically --  
rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat --  
driving the blade into toughened meat.

My grandfather swung his gun around,  
knocking the attacker to the ground,  
then shot him in the forehead.  
After stripping the dead man of papers,  
Luger and dagger,  
he hurried off to find a medic.

This is how I believed the scars,  
shining like ten skinny maggots,  
found their way to my grandfather's  
shoulder. He never told me the real story,  
never gave the wounds any words,  
only said he hoped I never  
had to see a war.  
But the little slits called to me,  
begging me to place an ear near his naked back  
and let their whispers burrow  
into my imagination.

He would kill you  
if you touched him  
as he slept. Spring up  
and send the Max Brand  
or Zane Grey paperback,  
splayed across his chest,  
flapping at spine-breaking speed  
into the wall--desperados  
and Indians were his release  
from the Luftwaffe  
and Blitzkrieg. His massive  
frame poised to crush  
the Iron Cross shining  
through the fog on every breast.

Those French nights  
of sleeping with open eyes,  
hair-trigger ears  
and a six pack ready  
to snap him into action,  
turned my grandfather into a man  
who had no dreams.

Stick and Frye Funeral Home  
 had been in business forever,  
 it seemed, handling the town's  
 special needs with quiet care.  
 When I lived with my grandparents,  
 my grandfather, a large, crusty  
 WWII sergeant-turned-brick mason  
 would answer our phone,  
 "Hello, Stick and Frye Funeral Home,  
 you stick'em, we fry'em." My face flushed,  
 turned hot enough to heat up whoever  
 was on the other end, leaving me praying  
 for the use of Mr. Stick's fine services. It was  
 nearly impossible for me to be somber  
 at any funeral there, until I was an adult.  
 I just could not look at those gathered,  
 or the one they gathered for,  
 without hearing my grandfather's voice  
 answering our phone, over and over.

.....

*Steve Meador's work has appeared in Loch Raven Review, Word Riot, Boston Literary Magazine, Autumn Sky, Umbrella, The Writer's Eye, Clapboard House and many others. He has two chapbooks by Pudding House Publications. His book Throwing Percy From The Cherry Tree won the D-N Publishing 2007 National Book Competition and will be released in 2008. He lives in Lithia, Florida.*

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## JUDAS GOAT

Wes Wood

35mm photograph taken on the outskirts of Port Au Prince, Haiti.

*Wes Wood lives in Dadeville, Alabama, and is a professor of environmental science at Auburn University. He has worked and traveled extensively around the world, particularly in undeveloped countries. woodwes@hotmail.com*

## SENECOLA

Guy Busby

### Prologue:

Teodoro fought for balance as the world rolled forward again. Bare feet slipped on wet planks. In dreams, he often leaned toward a dark abyss, knowing that nothing could keep him from falling forever. What he felt now was real. While the opposite bulkhead was only a few feet away, just beyond that was the sea and eternity.

He could not see the men huddled near him. Lighting a lamp or candle in the gyrating ship would be madness. The space was so dark that he doubted that he could see his own hand held in front of his face, but wasn't going to let go of the timbers to test the theory.

Voices around him cried or cursed, but words were lost in the shriek of the wind. From the rhythm of a nearby voice, Teodoro thought someone else was praying as he was. Pray for us sinners in the hour of our deaths.

That hour felt near for the San Paolo and her crew. Teodoro had lost track of time. The storm went on forever. For a second, the howl would seem to slacken. Let the worst be over, he prayed. Please, no more. Then, the wind came back worse than ever.

He thought of a cat playing with a wounded lizard, lifting its paw for a second, before clamping down, harder, when the creature stirred.

"Hold together, Fortuna," he whispered as the ship groaned again.

The veteran sailors had told him that the natives of this world believed these storms were a living, malevolent spirit. Teodoro had dismissed the tales as heretic nonsense in Cuba. He wasn't so certain now.

Far from Spain, the San Paolo seemed trapped in the claws of the pagan demon. He remembered its name -- Hurrikahn.

The image of the demon's claws reaching down for the San Paolo, and for him, flashed in Teodoro's mind just as something slammed into the deck over his head. He wasn't the only man who yelled. In the darkness, he heard someone retching and a sharp sour smell joined the scent of

mildew, unwashed men and fear in the hold. That's just what we need, Teodoro thought.

Other sounds joined with the storm noise on the deck above. Men were moving, scrambling. Disoriented in the pitching dark, he couldn't be certain, but the ship seemed to have a distinct list and the roll felt different. The next wave pushed them farther over until it seemed the ship would keep rolling into eternity.

The hatch cover slammed open. The wind rushed into the small space and a flash of lightning lit the huddled men. In the light, Teodoro saw a huge figure filling the opening.

"Out! Time to work for a living." Fuentes' voice carried over the shriek. Not even a New World monster was going to out shout the bosun.

Fuentes wanted them on deck; out in the middle of all this. Teodoro's dark, terrifying corner of the hold began to seem much more comforting.

As hands shoved him out on deck, the force of the wind slammed Teodoro to his knees. He had been in storms, but nothing like this. No one could stand upright against the gale. Each wave that struck felt as though the ship had run aground under full sail. Water surged over the deck.

Fine drops, rain, spray or both, stung his face like needles. Even with his eyes narrowed against the painful mist, he saw why they'd been summoned.

The main had snapped chest high above the deck. Still attached to the stump, however, the mast in the water acted like a steering oar, pulling against the anchors to bring them broadside to the wind and waves. If they did not cut it loose, the San Paolo would founder.

Teodoro stumbled toward men trying to clear the tangle of wood and lines as others with axes hacked at the stump. He grabbed a broken yard jammed against a hatch cover. As Teodoro's hands slipped on the wet wood, he heard a report like a cannon. The mass of debris jerked and slid toward the sea. He pushed away, but felt a line tighten around his ankle. Pulled off his feet, he heard someone yelling "Teo..." before the darkness and sea closed over him. Cast off the ship, the demon had snatched one victim as it left.



The water enveloped Teodoro, warm as blood. He struggled; then stopped. He was not dead, not yet. Reaching down, he worked at the line that trapped his ankle. He tried not to think about breathing as he pulled his foot free, moving carefully to avoid entangling anything else in the web of line and broken wood around him.

His lungs screamed for air, but he wasn't sure in the blackness where the surface was. If he struck out blindly, he could easily find himself swimming forever into the depths. Teodoro waited until he felt himself floating in a particular direction, at least he hoped he felt it was that direction, and struggled forward. His lungs convulsed. He could not stop himself from inhaling violently. It was air. He had broken the surface as he took what he thought would be his last breath. Gasping in the torrent, he now only had to figure out what to do about being alone swimming in the ocean in an unimaginable storm.

Huge waves lifted Teodoro, then dropped him into canyons. His muscles burned as he struggled. His ribs ached where he'd been thrown against the deck. It was harder to keep his mouth out of the water as he gasped for breath. Something seemed to be silhouetted on the horizon to his left. Imagination or reality, it was all he had.

As he swam, he began to pray. "Thank you for keeping me alive this long. Thank you for letting me learn to swim. Please don't let me die now." Without success, he tried to keep the next thought from popping up. "I'm only 16. Don't let me die a virgin."

A wave dropped him into another trough. Something brushed against his feet. The thought of the demon or whatever monsters lurked in this deep made him snatch his foot up. Then it touched again and he realized it was solid. The wave rose, crested and broke. He rolled on real ground. Teodoro scrambled, half crawling, half running, to be out of reach of the sea before the demon noticed he was gone and came back for him.

As he plunged into the wind and dark, his feet went out from under him. Hundreds of scaly arms grabbed at him. Teodoro thrashed and then stopped. He was fighting roots. He had fallen into the hole left where a great tree had blown over.

Teodoro crawled up, feeling his way around into the shelter of the fallen tree, trying to get out of the wind and the worst of the rain. He was on solid ground. The feeling that came over him was one that he had not

felt in what seemed like days. He just might not die in the next few minutes.

I'll rest for a second, he thought. Then I can decide what to do. He closed his eyes.

When he opened them again what felt like a moment later, the wind was gone. Light filtered through a still-cloudy sky. A steamy heat weighed down the air, but the only rain was a light drizzle.

Teodoro moved like an old man, his bruised body aching and stiff. He was in the shelter of an oak that had fallen at the top of a small rise. A large limb slanted up at a 45-degree angle, no challenge for someone accustomed to scrambling up rigging. He climbed as far as he could for a better look.

Trees stretched out as far as he could see. Below, the ground sloped down to the shore. He looked out over a bay at the opposite shore about a league away, but could not recognize landmarks from when they anchored ahead of the storm. He saw no sign of the San Pablo or any indication of humanity. He shivered despite the steaming heat.

An expedition had disappeared in this land three years before. When he had heard the story in Cuba, Teodoro had cringed at the thought of setting out into such a wilderness. They, however, were hundreds of men, equipped with horses, guns, armor and supplies. Teodoro was alone, hundreds of miles from civilized men in a land filled only with monsters and savages.

"Dear God," he whispered. "Florida."

Still, he was alive. Also intact was the sense of indestructibility that God gives to teens. The ship had to be anchored farther along the shore. Even if he couldn't reach it, he could find the expedition. After all, he thought, there couldn't be that much land north of Mexico.

He could walk to Mexico if necessary. Someone had done that from here a few years ago, if he recalled the story correctly. Teodoro walked down to the small beach at the base of the rise. Walking toward the shore, he felt his spirits rise until he glanced down at a shape he could just make out below the water. The dark, flat surface curving into the depths was too regular, too broad to be a tree. It was the side of a hull. He stared at the corpse of the San Pablo. Teodoro fell back on the sand, sitting on the beach until the dizziness passed.

Surely, he wasn't the only survivor. Someone else must have reached shore. He put the thoughts of giant waves and his own struggle out of his mind. Who else on the ship could swim? Most would have been below when the ship foundered. Teodoro tried not to imagine being trapped in that darkness when the water rushed in.

He could not be alone. The night's fear returned. Teodoro spun, shouting. "Is anyone here? It's Teodoro! I'm here! Hello?" The only sound over the birds and insects was his voice echoing back from the alien forest. He listened to the water lap on the shore for a long time.

"God please don't let me be alone here." Something snapped behind him. He heard footsteps. "Thank you," he breathed and turned around. Three men emerged from the woods 15 feet away; but Teodoro's shipmates did not tend to wear breechclouts or have bronze, tattooed faces. Two of the men carried spears. The one in the center held what appeared to be a war club.

Teodoro looked to the sky. "Thank you, but this was not quite what I had in mind."

His new acquaintances looked at him without blinking. Teodoro had received warmer welcomes, but something about the Floridians seemed more curious than hostile. Maybe that was understandable. They were the ones with the weapons and an idea of where in God's world they all were. He was the lost wretch in shredded clothes.

He went over options. He could run and catch a spear in the back in three paces. He might try to overpower them and die even sooner. He could leap in the water and try to swim the 1,000 miles or so back to Cuba.

Teodoro took his one other option. He smiled. He opened his arms in what he hoped they would consider a gesture of friendship and stepped forward into his new world.

.....

*Guy Busby is a journalist living in Silver Hill, Alabama. Senecola is the prologue to a novel in progress. [guybuz@gulftel.com](mailto:guybuz@gulftel.com)*

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## DIRGE

Neil Dennis

-- for Ryjy

where have you gone  
my lefthanded son  
we won't see you  
around here again

where have you gone  
o whistling boy  
big child with  
a quick shy grin

there's a place  
where your absence  
does roam in my heart  
there's a place  
where you are never gone  
there's a place  
where we used to  
play catch in the yard  
and goddamn, I just  
feel so alone

.....

*Neil Dennis cares for dogs and practices yoga near Birmingham, Alabama. He began writing thirty years ago. His work has appeared in Aura, Deep South and other inconspicuous publications. A fictional memoir, Beautiful Illusions, and the story collection Magic Sweat were published at lulu.com and are also available at merefiction.com.*

.....

where is it you've gone  
my wild only son  
who never knew when  
to say when

are you up  
with that hawk  
on that limb?  
calling out?

is that you  
in the breath  
of the wind?



## **LETCHWORTH TRAIN, LETCHWORTH STATE PARK, NY**

Jenn Gaylord

Digital Photograph - Kodak Z7590

*Jenn Gaylord is a photographer from Jamestown, New York. She is a 2007 graduate from the University of Geneseo, where she worked for a year as the staff photographer. She is currently living in Western New York, where she runs her own freelance photography business.*

## DRAWN SOUTHWARD

Grady Sue Loftin Saxon

Each year brings  
an unsettled longing  
deep inside of me.  
I must breathe salty air.  
I must immerse myself  
in the warm waters of the sea.  
I must walk the sandy beach  
and feel the soothing breezes.

Is this magnetic force deep inside my bones?  
Do my genes,  
passed down through the ages,  
traceable to the coast of Wales,  
cause this ache for the coastal sun?

It seems so,  
for each fall  
the migrating monarchs and I  
are drawn southward.

We arrive on the shores of the gulf together.  
They fly on  
while I,  
wingless,  
stand on the shore  
staring out at the horizon,  
pondering our irresistible  
inner pull.

.....  
*Grady Sue Loftin Saxon of Leeds, Alabama, is an award-winning artist,  
photographer and poet. Her latest book of poetry, Sand Between My Toes, and a  
book for young parents, How to Raise Children: A Recipe in Plain English,  
are available on amazon.com, at Prime Time Treasures in Homewood, the Leeds  
Public Library, Hugs Florist and Two Chicks in Leeds.*  
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## THE GIFT OF FEAR

Seth Tanner

Standing on the soft sand of San Francisco Bay, I count twenty latex caps: lime green, pearlescent blue, neon pink,—yellow. Ten or so octogenarians swim without benefit of modern comforts, wearing swimsuits, perhaps only out of decency.

I imagine Aquatic Park, a large pool refreshed by its narrow opening to the Bay. The currents and nutrient-rich downwellings from Alcatraz beckon Great Whites and California Sea Lions northward to Tamales. I swallow hard. The wild unwelcome among the tame. Experienced swimmers plunge into the frigid gray, submersed, fluidly taking form—Mer-people guarding their entrance to the depths. We brace against the cold in Orca quarter-inch neoprene, our feet throb before going numb, we put on our goggles. Some put on booties, gloves. Training for open water, we take the form of an alien race, ripe for exploration despite an unfortunate aversion to salt.

Amidst yelps, gasps and whoops we wade in. The wind spits hypothermic foam against our cheeks. As captain of this bunch, I forge ahead—my day-glo cap, a moving buoy, guiding the school around the concrete perimeter. Steering clear of Mermen, the tame unwelcome among the wild. Goggles serve little purpose, showing me only what I can not see. Mesmerized. My hand and forearm disappear into the brine.

Ahead of the group—bobbing in the water, waiting for the team to spot me and alter their course. I feel It. A quick upwelling from just beneath? No. The chill I feel is coming from within, seven layers of skin already numb, devoid of feeling. The chill is coming from within.

I swim, hard, fast, finding my rhythm, with the ridiculous notion of out pacing the wild. I turn my head right to breathe. And there, matching my stroke easily, I see dark brown eyes staring back at me. I stop, allowing my feet to dangle in the fright of Spielberg's below. The wetsuit, my second skin suctioned tightly to muscles nearly depleted, burning with

lactic acid. In the distance the older swimmers, nearly naked, wild, maybe even free.

Drifting, I gather the courage to look, hold its gaze, the frigid water reflected, rippling, nearly disguising the fearlessness in those eyes. I watch it slip into the deep.

.....

*Seth Tanner studied at the Vermont Studio Center (VSC) residency program for up-and-coming artists, writers, and poets. This piece is one result of time spent at VSC. Originally a narrative poem, "The Gift of Fear" works best as a short piece of prose. [sctanner@hotmail.com](mailto:sctanner@hotmail.com)*

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**"May I write words more naked than  
flesh, stronger than bone, more  
resilient than sinew, sensitive than  
nerve."**

**--Sappho**



## MADE IN CHINA

Charlie Stewart

Today I found your plastic sword,  
quite by chance,  
in that space  
between the hedge  
and the summerhouse,  
where the ladders are kept,  
and some jerry-cans of diesel.

And I have spent a long hour,  
turning it over, in my mind and hands,  
grieving, my son, to think  
that you have gone unarmed these twenty years.

.....

*C.P. Stewart lives with his family in North Yorkshire, England. Formerly a singer/songwriter with the cult band Laughing Gravy, his poetry has been published in England, Canada and the United States.*

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**"If a word were misspelled in the  
dictionary, how would we know?"**

**--Ziggy**

## WHO KILLED TREVOR ROPER?

Margaret Buckhanon

In Trevor Roper's short life he had a family: a mother, a sister, a younger brother, and a father who held him once then went away. His mother gave no further explanation to his father's sudden disappearance. "He had to leave," she said, and that was the end of that. Trevor was forbidden to ask any questions about his father, but did so anyway. The answers to his questions were screams, a slammed bathroom door followed by "I can't take it anymore!" There she'd stay for hours ignoring the children's plead of hunger.

Trevor and his siblings always had a plan of action to their mother's tantrums: go to Nana's house whenever Mama locked herself in the bathroom. He'd hide behind his sister, frightened, as Nana went on a tirade about his mother as she opened and slammed cabinets, rattled pots and pans and then barked at them to sit down and eat. The children became immune to Nana's tantrums, too, quietly eating their meals until one day she threatened to call the Child Bureau of Welfare on their mother.

"My daddy's coming back," Trevor reasoned.

Nana exploded in rage and laughter, then proceeded to tell Trevor about his Daddy. That night Trevor lay in bed with his little brother huddled close to him and asked God to kill Nana for what she said about his daddy. He also prayed for his mother to stop locking herself in the bathroom every day.

His prayers went unanswered, and Nana kept her promise. Trevor and his siblings were taken away and each went to a different home with a different "pretend mother." Trevor was released from the first foster home and joined his sister in the house of Miss Kitty, a friend of their mother.

"She's mean," Trevor whispered to his sister upon his third week with Miss Kitty. They had to be quiet when Miss Kitty watched her daily soaps. Trevor's sister adapted survival skills of quietness. She developed an interest in soaps to exercised restraints and Miss Kitty would speak without yelling at her. But it was difficult for Trevor, for soap operas were boring and he could not stay still. He had the whippings to show for it.

Trevor's little mind could not comprehend such meanness from her, could not understand how a little woman's big screams toppled buildings. How small hands inflicted sharp, stinging, pain that radiated to the bone.

He was full of energy. His social worker explained to Miss Kitty; surely she could understand that such an active child like him needed to

release the abundance of energy trapped in his little body. His energy made it difficult to sit in his chair at school, that it was responsible for the damages to Miss Kitty's favorite glass figurines, the ones given to her by an elderly Aunt who told her how valuable they are.

The trips to the hospital did not contain his energy. The bruises and broken bones did not, either. Nor did the smacks, the insults, the hits and welts from the belt. Locked in the darkness of the hallway closet proved ineffective, too.

He wanted to fly. Trevor told the social worker this as she walked beside Miss Kitty from the hospital after his brief third stay. She did not understand Trevor, as he kept repeating over and over, "I wanna fly, I wanna fly." He ignored Miss Kitty's twisted face and continued to plead his urgency to fly.

His cold little body appeared peacefully at rest on the hard steel slab in the county morgue. The morning sun pierced through the small window high above the table where he lay, reaching across the room to bless him with sunlight as he patiently waited for the medical examiner to begin his day. He is scheduled to be the first of many. The most difficult one. The littlest victim, the examiner thought, upon viewing the body, will be the hardest task.

He immediately knew this little boy suffered unimaginable horrors in his short five years. Fresh bruises barely concealed the old ones. Though his face was burdened with contusions, visible broken bones, and lumps in various shapes and sizes, the examiner still could see that he was a beautiful boy.

He knew this dead child before him had never known the comfort of a hug, his sweet little ears had never heard a kind word. Probably had never felt warmth, or the security of love. Nothing. He was more cold alive than dead.

Who killed Trevor Roper? The prosecutor said Miss Kitty did; the neighbors said the social worker did; the social worker said the system did. Trevor's mother blamed the grandmother, his father blamed Trevor's mother, and the grandmother blamed Trevor's parents.

.....  
*Margaret Buckhanon's fiction has appeared in Mississippi Crow magazine and the Literary House Review. Her mystery novel, Siren, was published in 2000. She is currently working on a novella, By Midnight. She lives in Valley Cottage, New York. mbuck40@aol.com*  
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## **SASE**

Jim Reed

When he was a kid he used to dig into all those little classified ads and small display ads that were everywhere within the magazines he read.

He'd send off for anything he could afford and he'd order anything that was free because he liked to get things in the mail...he liked to receive packages and envelopes from faraway places...he liked to open those packages, never knowing what was inside each of them because by the time they arrived he'd already forgotten what he had ordered.

He liked to read the ads that touted services and items he felt he could never afford, and he always kept a mental list of things he would purchase if he suddenly could afford to get anything he wanted, and he even wondered how he would feel if he could purchase any and everything he wanted. If that were the situation what could he hope for thereafter... what would his dreams be like after he had bought up everything in every ad in every magazine?

As he grew up and passed young adulthood, whizzed by middle age and verged on the edge of ultimate maturity he still liked to dream about those mail-order things he never got when he was a child.

Now he could afford them, but where were they? The ads were no longer the same. The mail-order stuff he could buy now was different.

One day he passed by an old junk shop and saw a stack of magazines...the kind of magazines he had when he was oh so young...the magazines that had lurid pulp paintings on their covers...the magazines that were chocked full of adventure and fantasy and humor and...ads.

He bought those magazines and took them home to dream.

And one day, when he wasn't really thinking too seriously about what he was doing, he bought some old penny postcards and started mailing off requests for free things and more information, to the addresses that existed only when he was young, addresses with zone numbers in them, to companies that were so important in their respective communities that they had not needed street addresses--just the name of the city and state, you know.

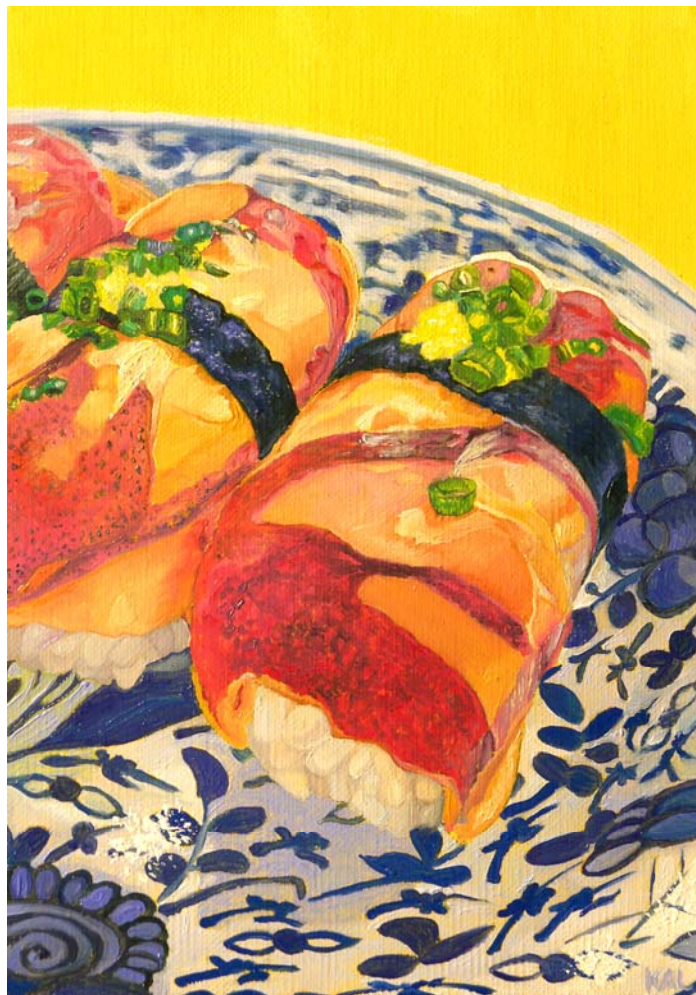
Then, he felt satisfied and drifted back into his dreams of childhood and imagined what it would be like to actually receive mail from those long-departed places.

And one day, the mail started pouring in and he knew at that moment that he was at last in a place where no one could deny him his dreams and fancies...and after that he went around smiling to himself quite a bit more than one actually should smile at himself in times like these.

.....  
*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. Jim lives in Birmingham's Southside neighborhood with his wife Liz. [www.jimreedbooks.com](http://www.jimreedbooks.com)*  
.....

**"This book's...purpose is to entertain the reader although, as is usual with my books, the discerning person will find brilliant and subtle philosophical observations half-concealed behind the clowning and the smart-alecking. I can't help this. Somehow, in spite of unshirted hell, the wisdom seems to creep into my stuff. This is saddening to me, for all I want from life is truth and beauty and money."**

**--H. Allen Smith**



### **SUSHI ON A BLUE PLATE**

Kathy Lumsden  
Oil on linen on birch

*Kathy Lumsden is a self-taught artist who has been painting exclusively in oils since 2004. She finds painting a wonderful, creative outlet and stress reliever after working a hectic 12 hour shift as an RN in the intensive care unit at Brookwood Medical Center. She is a resident of Pelham, Alabama, and a member of the Birmingham Art Association. Her paintings grace the walls of homes in the Birmingham and Mobile areas, and have been exhibited in BAA Members' Shows. Sushi on a Blue Plate is the second in a series of five paintings with sushi as the subject.*

## MEMORIES OF WARREN

Chris Lee

I was jolted to life by a frantic 6:00 am wake up call in January of 1996. It was my sister, who couldn't wait another hour to tell me that Warren Zevon was coming to Louie Louie's in Birmingham, Alabama, and that we just had to go. Now I liked Zevon, but I was apprehensive. We had never been to this bar, and I wasn't sure what their clientele would be. But she had her heart set on going, so I agreed to take her.

A few days before the show I visited a friend's record shop and picked up a vinyl copy of "Bad Luck Streak in Dance School." I had CDs that I could've gotten signed, but when it comes to autographs, nothing beats a signature on a vinyl cover. I also picked up a brand new Sharpie pen just for the occasion.

My sister's boyfriend decided to join us, and when we arrived I was glad we had brought along some extra muscle. The clientele was much different than the rowdy college students we were used to in Tuscaloosa. They were as old as our parents, pursued careers that were very physical, and seemed to get a kick out of seeing twenty something's at a Zevon concert. The album under my arm led to several conversations like:

"Is that Zevon's new album?"

"No," I would answer, "Zevon's new album wouldn't be on vinyl."

"Can I look at it?" Not wanting to upset a drunken construction worker, I gave it to him praying he wouldn't bend it.

"Where'd you find it?"

"At the Vinyl Solution in Tuscaloosa."

"Are they open right now?"

"No, I don't think so."

It was only eight o'clock and the show wasn't starting for another couple of hours. So if George had been open, it would have been theoretically possible to make the round trip to Tuscaloosa, and still be back for the show. It would have been a crazy thing to do, but possible nonetheless.

"What do you want for it?"

"I don't want to sell it."

"I'll give ten bucks for it."

"No, thank you, but no."

“Well, can I take it in the next room and let my friend see it?” We were wedged in there like sardines, and there was no way I was going to let that album out of my sight, even if it meant losing a couple of teeth.

“Uh, well...why don’t you bring your friend over here to see it?” This was obviously not the answer that this would-be thief wanted to hear, but he got the message and left us alone.

Around ten o’clock a few roadies appeared and made some last minute adjustments, which meant that the show was about start. But just as Zevon was about to appear, some drunk grabbed my arm and said, “Hey, when Zevon comes out, I’m going to run onto the stage, give him a high five, and then dive into the audience. You be sure to catch me.”

Now there was no way I was going to be responsible for catching this idiot, and was about to tell him so, but he disappeared into the crowd before I could. My sister and her boyfriend had heard this exchange and looked genuinely concerned. One of us could get hurt trying to catch this fool, and he would surely get hurt if we just stood back and let him hit the floor. But what if the impact of the floor didn’t hurt him? What if he got up infuriated because I had missed?

After much anxiety, the show finally started. The daredevil redneck never made his appearance, and from the moment Zevon walked onto the stage, he held that rowdy crowd in the palm of his hand. Occasionally he would explain the history behind a song, and when he did, no one dared to interrupt him. His music had all of the power and intensity of his recordings, and then some. But I was completely taken aback by his kind and gentle demeanor. Virtually every picture I had seen of him displayed a dark tormented soul, and much of his music reflected the images on his album covers. In real life, however, he appeared to be a genuine person with a warm smile that completely changed the contours of his face. He kind of reminded me of Johnny Fever from WKRP. I then understood why so many other artists loved him.

Naturally “Werewolves of London” was the finale, and at the end of the song he burst off the stage and out the side door. With that, the lights came on and everyone started to leave, except for me. I took off after him and chased him down the sidewalk to his camper where he immediately ran inside, closed the door, and turned off the lights.

I had waited outside of campers before. I had once waited outside of David Allan Coe’s camper until two am, but that had been in my hometown of Tuscaloosa. This was downtown Birmingham in the middle



of the night. Normally I would have been prepared to wait as long as it took, but I didn't want to put my sister and her boyfriend through that. They did offer to wait for a few minutes, but none of us wanted to wait very long.

A pretty lady then came out of the camper and said that Warren would be out in a few minutes and that we were welcome to wait in the bar until he was ready. We went back inside and waited and waited...and waited. Then after about thirty minutes I had a chilling thought. Was the camper was still out there? Did he merely drive off after we had left? No he wouldn't do that. Would he?

But just as I was about to go check, Zevon appeared in the bar once again. There were quite a few of us left, but I was the only one with a Sharpie, so I was the first to get an autograph. I nervously walked towards him and introduced myself, and he could obviously tell that I was shaking with fear. He graciously agreed to give me an autograph, but just as he was starting to sign, he looked up and said, "Hey this pen doesn't work."

I went into a sudden panic. I had specifically bought a new pen to prevent this, and had even tested it on a couple of bar napkins before the show. How could this happen after the night I had just had? How could a new pen dry up so fast? Somebody at the pen company was surely going to hear from me. I desperately screamed out, "PLEASE, DOES ANYBODY IN THIS PLACE HAVE A PEN?" Then, with a slight chuckle in his voice, he said, "Oh wait, its working now." I turned and faced him, and he had a sheepish look of sheer delight on his face. Mr. Bad Example himself had duped me, and I was honored. I still have that album to this day.

Warren Zevon passed away a few years later, and I'm sorry I didn't get to see him again. But I'm certainly glad we braved that crowd to see him once.

.....

*Chris Lee has been published in Modern Drummer, Old Tennessee Valley Magazine, Old Southern Times, and Weird Alabama. His most recent book is Becoming A Santa: A Guidebook for Parents and Santa Helpers. He is a counselor at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.*

*www.Publishedauthors.net / Chrislee*

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## VALLEY OF FIRE, NEVADA

Jack Criswell  
Digital Photograph

*Jack Criswell is a practicing lawyer, whose other passion has fed twenty-seven years of experience in event, product, promotional, travel, sports and commercial advertising photography and photojournalism. Frequently published nationally, this is his first appearance in Birmingham Arts Journal. He lives in Birmingham, Alabama.*

## STUDYING

Danny P. Barbare

In the notebook, I'm studying  
For a test, closing my eyes.  
Some words are coming out  
Of the dark. Others are hiding  
On the page. Some words are  
Borrowed from other memories.  
Some are in the open, dead  
As a fox.

.....

*Danny P. Barbare grew up and lives in Greenville, South Carolina. He has been writing for 27 years and has been published over 300 times. Most recently his poems have appeared in Canopic Jar, The Houston Literary Review, and Muscadine, a Southern Literary Journal. He is studying to be a Veterinary Assistant at Greenville Technical College.*

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**"We are confronted with  
insurmountable opportunities."  
--Walt Kelly**

## A BOAT

Thomas White

His wife found a newspaper he had left on the kitchen table. This was unusual as he had always before placed the paper in a box in the garage each night before he came to bed. His solitary routine, previously testament to their abandoned marriage after his return from war, was now broken. She picked up the paper and started to the garage. A pen fell to the floor. She sat at the table. In the classified section, he had circled advertisements for boats. There was no lake, no pond, not a river or a stream within miles of their home.

She had not heard him call any number the night before. He had not even spoken the usual goodnight to her. He rarely now opened his mouth, if at all. He did not even hum. He was not the kind of man who would have sung lullabies to his children, if he had any. He was considered stoic and austere at work, aloof and quiet among acquaintances, reserved and reticent with family. The neighbors commented at various times while in their front yards, or on chance meeting in restaurants, that he had never spoken to them. “Me neither,” she would want to say. Family, if they came to visit, left him to his chair in the kitchen. She tried to remember his last words to her. Were they “I do.”?

She took the newspaper to the garage. Sorting among the papers in the box, she found more ringed offerings of boats. He had marked them all, regardless of age or size, a price given or not. For three months, on a daily basis, each craft offered for sale had been identified. There were no scraps of paper, no notes in the margin, no torn edges to signify any contact had been made.

\*

When he returned home from work that evening, he brought out her coat, her gloves, her hat. She rode with him in the car to a meadow surrounded by pines. Falling snow caught in the heads of tall hay pulsing in the wind. He took her hand and led her into the field. They came to a boat. Small, wooden, once red, with oars extended into the grass.

He stepped into the boat and held her elbow as she joined him. They sat side by side, faces to an early moon. Snow clouded grey the sky and covered their blanketed lap. He spoke. "I have read that patience is but a small boat upon the ocean." He looked at her. She felt it was for the first time. "I fear I am at a shore too far," he said.

She pointed toward a pair of grouse landing at the tree line. "I can row forever," she said.

.....  
*Thomas White lives in a valley tucked against the edge of the Cumberland Plateau. His work has appeared in The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, Southern Hum, and The Write Side Up. twhite493@earthlink.net*  
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**"There is only one sort of man who is absolutely to blame for his own misery, and that is the man who finds life dull and dreary."**

**--H.G. Wells**



## BLUEPRINT COMPTON

Jane Linders

Enhanced Digital Photograph

*Jane Linders is a fine art photographer living in St. Louis, Missouri. She has exhibited her work everywhere from her hometown of St. Louis to the Smithsonian in Washington D. C. Her favorite subjects are the eerie beauty of historical cemeteries as well as the oddities of roadside America.*

## GILMAN STREET

Van Newell

Gilman Street.

That is the goal. That is the dream. Me on guitar, Jeffrey on bass, Kirk playing drums, all piled in Mom's Blazer leaving the wheat fields of Kansas and ready to drive all the way to Berkley to the heart of punk rock.

Gilman Street. Where Green Day, Rancid, and Operation Ivy all got their start.

We'd graduate high school, head out with the congratulations dough and our gear: my dad's Gibson that I would "borrow," Jeffrey's bass, the shape of a battle axe, and Kirk's three-piece drum kit, which is more duct tape than anything.

Kirk's aunt is hot, thirty-seven, and a blackjack dealer in Vegas. He says she'll hook us up with a place to stay there. Until then, Kirk says we can spend the night in Wal-mart parking lots to save money. If we can't find any Wal-marts, Jeffrey thinks we can spend the night in state campgrounds along the way for ten bucks.

We'd practice our songs in the Blazer with Kirk driving and playing the steering wheel with his hands like a drum. I'd get out my acoustic as well so we could practice our songs.

After Vegas and Kirk's hot aunt, we'd take a little detour to Yellowstone, holding true to our pack of "no showers till 'Old Faithful.'" We'd throw off our clothes and scare away all the tourists as the water off Faithful would fall down on us like it did when we were kids playing in the lawn sprinkler.

Then Berkley and Gilman Street. As a backup, we recorded a demo on Kirk's karaoke machine if they wanted to hear what we sounded like. And then we'd get on stage and we'd rock it out. I'd even make some of my signature jumps. I've also been practicing my extra-hard flips with my guitar on the trampoline.

After we got finished playing, maybe some old-school punk in a cool, black leather jacket with spikes, studs, and Ramone's buttons would come up to us.

He'd say "nice set." We'd start talking to him about how we came all the way from Kansas to play this one show.

He'd say, "Yeah, I was fifteen when I saw Green Day play here, but back then they all had long, nasty dreads."

And we'd say, "Oh man."

Then the punk would take off this Ramone's button he had on, light as a penny, and he'd show it to me. He'd say "I saw them when I was seventeen at CBGBs. You know where that is, don't you?"

I'd look Jeffrey and Kirk in the eyes, they'd approve with their brace-face smiles, and then I'd ask the punk if he wanted to ride with us to New York. I bet we could get a show there.

.....

*Van Newell received an MFA degree in writing from Columbia University and currently teaches at the University of Alabama. He is frequently published in periodicals. vannewell@yahoo.com*

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**"It's not hard to understand modern art. If it hangs on the wall, it's a painting. If you have to walk around it, it's a sculpture."**

**--Joe Moore**



## A NOVICE'S GUIDE TO CARTOGRAPHY

Kristina Marie Darling

The end  
of any Monday  
leads children to question  
the fine print  
of beginnings, and you  
my daughter, whose freckles misfired  
across the synapse  
of your skin  
ask how it is  
that any watch makes its own promises.  
I crunch the leaves  
with my worn out red heels.  
You and I were sure  
we wouldn't need to know  
the way back home.

.....

*Kristina Marie Darling recently completed a degree in English at Washington University. She is the author of five chapbooks of poetry and nonfiction.*

*natalya178@aol.com*

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**"A person who won't read has no  
advantage over one who can't read."  
--Mark Twain**



### **MIRROR, MIRROR**

Lindsey Terrell

Digital Photograph

*Lindsey Terrell is 18 years old and currently attends Lorain County Community College. She plans to transfer to an art school in two years and major in photography. She lives in Elyria, Ohio, and has been producing photographs for about two years. Taking photographs continues to challenge her and is a satisfying way to translate ideas into a physical reality.*

## ANUBIS

Darlene Gray

It was March and I was riding in an SUV down Dennison Avenue in Birmingham, Alabama, when I saw him lying on a grave in Elmwood Cemetery. My new co-workers and I were on our way to lunch, but I kept this knowledge to myself. Over my salad and entrée, my mind wandered back to the grave and suddenly I wanted to be finished and on the road again, going back the way we had traveled to see if he might still be there. I purposely got on last and secured a seat by the window. I listened with one ear and concentrated as we drew close to the final leg of the journey. My stomach tightened in anticipation. I kept my eyes trained out the window and ...sure enough...there he was. I guess he had not moved in that hour or if he had, he returned to the same spot.

He had black fur that looked slightly gray or maybe it was the combination of dirt and dust from the cemetery. His long, pointy snout was resting gently on his paws and he seemed as content as a dog lying on a grave could be. These observations happened quickly as we sped by. I had the presence of mind to notice that the grave said YOUNG in large carved letters. Then, we were down the road and the cemetery was far behind.

That night, I measured out several cups of dog food and placed them in a plastic bag. This bag joined two pie tins and a bottle of water. Finally, I pulled down an ancient, beige, electric blanket whose controls had ceased to work and whose surface was covered with fuzz balls and actually worn smooth in places. The blanket had been relegated to the closet where, my husband said, we would have it if we needed it. I did not tell him I had found a use for it. He would have been appalled that I was planning to go to the cemetery the next day to find the dog.

The next day, I took my lunch break to drive to the cemetery. The cold, March wind was blowing against the car as I entered the cemetery and wound my way around and around and back and over until I finally saw the headstone. I stopped the car, parked and picked up the bag and electric blanket. It was about ten feet to the grave from where I had parked. I was almost to the headstone when he came around the grave and looked at me. Around his slender neck was a well worn leather collar which had been cut abruptly near the notch holes and looked too ragged for such a fine animal. I stopped and waited, holding the bag by my side.

He sniffed intently. Whether he was finding my scent or he had detected food, I was not sure. With the cars and trucks whizzing by on the road near us, I told him I had brought some things for him. I proceeded to open the bag and dish out the dry dog food. His ears perked up as the pieces fell pling, pling against the pie tin. Then, he listened as the cold water was poured into the next pie tin. My hands shook slightly as I placed the tins on the ground. I waited.

He would not come near the feast I had set out for him. I tried coaxing him in a gentle voice. Then, I decided to move away from the food and water. Pulling my coat tightly to keep out the wind and cold, I walked around the grave and noted it was not freshly dug and the dirt was not in a mound from head to foot. There was grass growing on the grave and no remnants of a backhoe or shovel were evident. I looked at the dates and saw that the owner of this grave had died almost seven years ago.

I could not hurry him along. He did not know about travel time or lunch hours. Time stood still in this place. I was concerned that anyone policing the area would see the tins and blanket and it might be hard for him. I placed the blanket on the other side of the grave near the road and away from the prying eyes of caretakers. Then, I got back in my car and drove away. I had done all I could for him...that day.

I imagined all types of scenarios that could account for his being in the cemetery. Was this his owner and the faithful dog had found him at last, only to be separated by dirt and earth? Was he a run-away who had found sanctuary in the cemetery where the dead would not be able to lift a hand to strike him? Had his owners put him out in the cemetery because he (or maybe they) proved to be difficult? It was a mystery, but I did know one thing. All dogs need a name and his name became Anubis after the Egyptian Dog-god of the Dead. After all, he was a dog and he was in a cemetery. The name seemed fitting.

As I fed my dogs and mused at the lack of appetite from my youngest, Caesar, I could not help wonder if Anubis was warm and his belly full. I put more food in a plastic bag and filled the water bottle. I had given him enough food for Saturday and I knew that on Sunday, as I left church, I would have to hurry to the cemetery and feed him. I had told no one about this new male in my life. They really would not understand and would be afraid for my safety as well as my mental health!

I made several more trips to the cemetery before there was a breakthrough in our relationship. It happened the day he allowed me to

pet him as he ate his lunch. My fingers grazed his short, dull fur that I knew would be so silky if I could just give him a nice, warm bath. At first, I was not sure if he was aware that I was petting him. I withdrew my hand and leaned against the headstone. He looked up at me with those soulful eyes. I held my breath, reached out and commenced to pet his head once more. We stayed that way until all the food was gone. I packed up the food tin and told him I had to leave. I entreated him to come with me. Then, I turned and started toward the car. Hearing a noise, I turned back. Anubis had taken a few steps toward me. I was elated. I had no idea how to explain this dog to my husband, who liked animals but did not feel the same kinship with them that I did. That did not stop me. I encouraged him to come closer. I walked toward the car, opened the door and stepped back. With his head high, he looked at me but stopped about five feet from the car door. He would not come any closer. I could not wait any longer. I had to go.

As I pulled away, he was walking back to the grave.

I visited him the next day on my lunch break. I was standing by Anubis, petting him as he ate when my cell phone rang. I answered it and it was my husband. If he heard the wind, cars, and traffic, he was not surprised since I did travel with my job. He had taken Caesar to the vet that morning because he would not eat and he was favoring his right paw. He had bad news. As he told me that my beautiful, nine-year-old friend was dying of cancer, I leaned against the headstone and sobbed. Our choices were grim. The vet could remove Caesar's shoulder where the cancer was stationed or we could have him put to sleep. These were not choices; they were both death sentences. How could this energetic dog live with part of his upper body removed? How could I do that to him? How could I decide he needed to die when, just a few days ago, he had been so full of life? I would have to go to the vet's that afternoon and help make the decision.

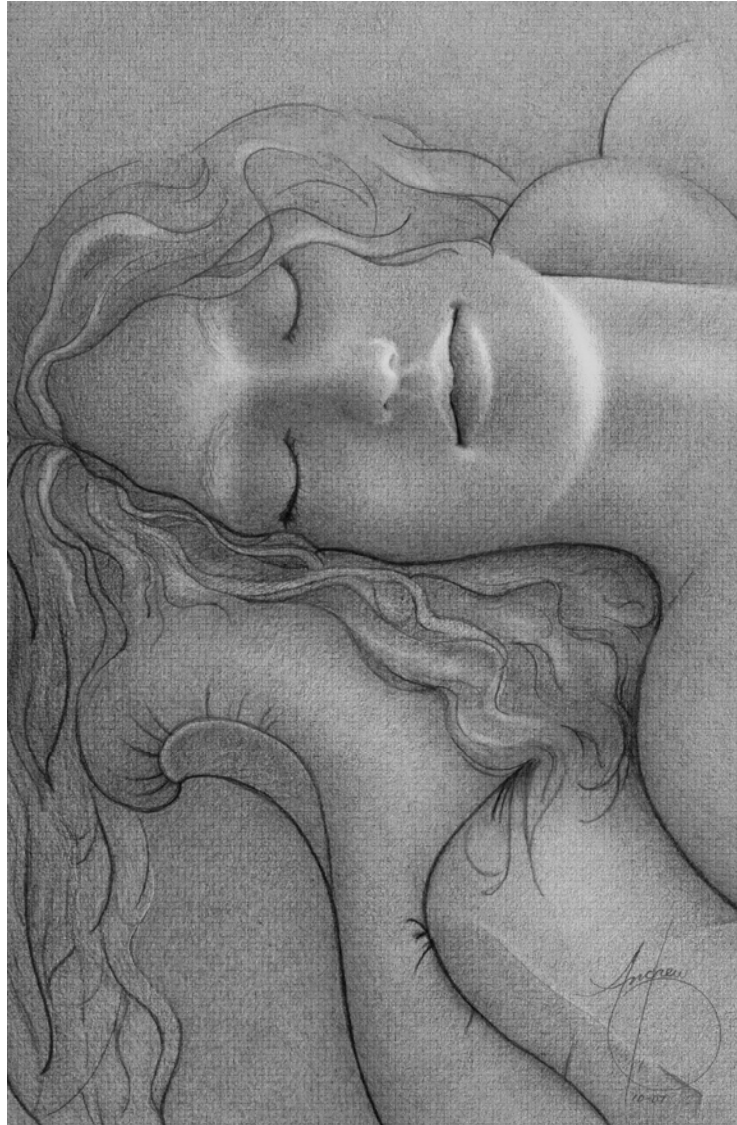
I reached out and took Anubis' face in my hands; we had become such friends that he would allow me to do that and I cried so hard my body shook. He patiently stood there and waited with me as I sobbed. I thanked my new friend for being there for me and I told him I had to go. I beseeched him to come with me. Again, he followed me for a few steps but would not come any closer. He would not let me rescue him. I pleaded with him, tears streaming down my face, to come on and get in

the car. I drove away with him standing on the lawn, the March sun breaking through the clouds.

That afternoon, I held Caesar's right side and my husband held his left side as the vet gave him the shot that ends all physical pain. I sobbed for my lost friend and told him he was the best friend anyone could ever have, that he was the best dog and that he would never be forgotten.

The next day, I went to the cemetery to feed Anubis and to lament with him my loss. He was not there. He was not on the grave or near it. He was not on the path or near the fence. His pie tins, tossed by the wind, and leaf-covered electric blanket were still there. This could not be happening! I had just lost one dog and now Anubis was gone. I gathered up the tins and the blanket and drove to the Humane Society. To their amazement, I gave a quick synopsis of the story and described him to the vet techs. They checked their records and made calls...to no avail. He was not at the pound nor had anyone seen him on their rounds in that area. I made two more trips to the cemetery, but I never saw Anubis again. I still think about him when I pass the cemetery and see that headstone. I have often wondered what happened to him. Did I imagine it all? Was he sent to that grave to be noticed? I consider myself a lucid person, but the thought that he might have been a ghost-dog has crept into my mind from time to time. More likely is the thought that he was sent from heaven as a conduit for Caesar's goodness—a way to refract the sorrow that was to come away from myself and onto another being. I have decided that Anubis was truly the Dog-god of the dead—the canine dead.

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*Darlene Gray has been educating children and adults for twenty-six years. Her family consists of three dogs, one cat, and seven ferrets. She has recently returned to her first love: writing. tidefan8@charter.net*  
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## **LADY ON SOFA**

Andrew Tyson  
Charcoal on Paper

*Andrew Tyson, a self-taught artist and photographer, lives in Homewood, Alabama. His pencil drawings and digital photographs have won several awards, including recent recognition in Japan. Andrew has been commissioned to draw the reigning Miss Alabama for the past three years.*

## REQUIREMENTS

Darlene Gray

The first time was for love.  
The next time I will be more practical.

This time, I have a list.

It is very stringent.  
Usually, they don't get past the first two requirements.

I don't mind dismissing them.

I have no regrets.  
I am not needy.

I am not worried about being alone.  
There are worse things than being alone.

Some people would say I have a hidden agenda.  
Some people would say I have made it difficult on purpose.

I would say I don't do well with baggage.

You might say I am selfish.  
I would say I am honest.

Are you curious?

Do you want to know the requirements?  
Come closer and let me share the list with you...

.....  
*Darlene Gray's bio is on page 37.*  
.....



## THE CANDY BAR THIEF

Michael Fontana

I set out to steal a Clark Bar for my kid. I was unemployed at the time and hated to see him go without. It was one thing to cut corners for my own needs and another to cut corners on him. The daddy already cut out a long time ago, so he was no great loss. We lived in an apartment complex where the grass failed to grow but the cockroaches didn't. I spent good portions of the day sitting out on the steps and watching cars blow up and down the block. The kid played but did so listlessly, like the whole thing made him grow up too fast. He wanted to protect me almost as much I wanted to protect him.

For my first shoplifting expedition, I decided to dress like a burglar on TV. All in black, from black sweat pants and shirt to the black stocking cap and black boots. This contrasted with the paleness of my skin while matching the color of my hair. Plus the bulkiness of the clothes added the appearance of some much-needed weight to my spindly frame.

I entered one of those everything-for-a-dollar stores and took note of the candy racks right up by the register. The strategy was simple: drop one candy bar into my pocket while palming the other to actually pay for it. Two for the price of one. My own little sale. Of course, they would have called it five-finger discount.

I started shaking when I approached the counter. I was already pushing a cart with some ugly pink stationery, some odd citrus scented shampoo that smelled more like floor wax than something you wanted in your bath, and some past-the-expiration-date sugary cereal. Already I had blown the whole purpose of shoplifting, which was to save money, not to lose it on a basket full of junk. On the other hand, the whole enterprise gave me a flash of excitement like a bulb in a camera going off, so maybe that made up for the waste of money. I hadn't had any excitement since I was laid off from my job of icing cakes at the grocery store bakery months ago.

Shaking hand or not, I pushed the cart in front of me so that the cashier would hopefully be distracted by its contents rather than anything I was up to. I palmed one bar. Good. I dropped the second into my pocket. Also good. Then a bell rang in the store and I nearly peed in my sweat pants. I could feel my face fill with blushing.

The cashier stood with her hands on her hips, scowling at me. She was a short woman with curly blonde hair and a mess of wrinkles on her face like the rings of an oak. "Now what did you do, sister?" She asked.

"Nothing," I said, the blush heating me up good. My mouth was so bone dry I thought the word must have clicked out loud when I spoke it.

"The cameras don't lie," she said. She pointed to the ceiling where a camera was pointed straight down on the register. "And the camera's wired to the alarm. For a discount store, we don't discount on security."

"Nothing," I said again, the click sounding louder, the word making no sense but at least it was a word. My hands continued to shake so much that I dropped the candy bar that I had intended to pay for. When I bent over to pick it up, the bar that I meant to steal fell out of my pocket and hit the floor with a splat and a crackle of wrapping.

"There it is," the woman said, exhaling it easy like she was letting out a puff of cigarette. She went around from behind the register and picked the bar off the floor, then dropped it into a pocket on her smock. "Now don't you feel better not having done that?"

"I'm sorry." I kept my head down and abandoned the cart, making for the door. She stood in my way. "You know, we prosecute shoplifters."

"I didn't shoplift," I said, which sounded incredibly stupid given the circumstances. "It's back on the shelf where you put it." There was nothing arrogant in the tone of my voice. In fact it percolated like the morning coffee.

"You still tried. That's a crime right there." I sighed and held out my wrists. "So arrest me."

She laughed at this. "The police won't come for that. We just need you to talk to security a minute, that's all. Then you'll be on your way. Of course, you can't come back in here again."

"I wouldn't dream of it," I said. I was too damned embarrassed to.

She took me into a back room and sat me down in a hard metal chair. The chair across from mine was empty for a second while I waited for the presence of some hulking man to sit down and grill me good. But it wasn't taken by a man of any kind. The cashier took it. "I'm security for the store too."

"Who's out front then?"

"Waldo. He usually just mops the floor. But he also lets me know what's doing pretty quick if someone comes in the door."

“Haven’t you already talked to me?”

“Yeah, for the most part. I’m thinking you’re not like the kids who usually come in here and shoplift. You’re too nervous to be an expert at it, for one thing.”

“I’m sorry,” I said again, with less a quiver to my voice. I was starting to like this woman, and felt almost sorry that I wouldn’t see her again.

“You work?”

“No. Unemployed.”

“You trying to find any work?”

“I’ve tried all over. I don’t have the greatest skills. I used to ice cakes.” The blush came back again.

“I used to work on cars,” she said, leaning forward as if telling me a great secret. “The men never got along with me there. Didn’t like me on their turf.”

“It’s hard being a woman.”

“It’s hard everywhere. But you have to be hard bit too. Otherwise you won’t make the climb.”

“I’m sorry,” I said again.

“Don’t be sorry,” she said. “Be strong.”

She escorted me to the front door as if to keep me from coming too close to touching anything that might then disappear inside my pocket. Waldo was mopping off in a corner, not looking at us. As soon as I hit the pavement outside, she stopped me. “You doing anything for lunch?”

“Drinking hot broth,” I said, even mustering a small laugh.

“Meet me back here. Right where you are, outside. I think we have more to talk about than what I can go into in here.” Then she did something even more unexpected. She tossed me the candy bar that I had meant to steal. “Now you’re a shoplifter. Beat it.” She said this with a smile, and so I did.

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*Michael Fontana’s works have appeared in Amoskeag, SamizDada, Wanderings, and others. He lives in Rogers, Arkansas, and works at a mental health center in northwest Arkansas. paz9461@yahoo.com*  
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## MONKEY MIND

Frederick W. Bassett

Heraclitus tells us we can't step  
in the same river twice.  
But what would he say about the same  
river stepping in me twice?  
It happened just this morning.  
But wait! Years ago, I'm waist deep  
in the Tallapoosa River on a starless night,  
flashlight in one hand, rifle in the other,  
wading across to Hester's Island.  
On a rock above the swirling shoals,  
a bobcat crouches, hidden,  
until my roving spotlight shatters  
the darkness between us.

Now about this morning. My monkey  
mind is jumping all over the place.  
High school football practice  
in late August, helmets cracking,  
boys groaning, retching in the grass.  
A seminar on the Dead Sea Scrolls,  
Emanuel Ben Dor's voice barking  
the Hebrew, resurrecting  
those ascetic Essenes, word by word.  
Then my mind squats like a frog  
in utter stillness. For What?  
Certainly not the yogi's nothingness.

Out of the stillness, the Tallapoosa rises.  
And there, enthroned above the roiling  
river of my youth, that crouching bobcat  
quickens yet again the blood of a boy  
who once ran wild and unfettered.

.....

*Frederick Bassett's poems have been widely published in journals and anthologies, including Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry (Negative Capability Press, 2007). Paraclete Press has published two books of "found" poetry that he created from Biblical lyrics — Love: The Song of Songs (2002) and Awake My Heart (1998). A native of Alabama, he lives at Hilton Head, South Carolina, with his wife, Peg.*

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**“The most identifiable trait of Anglo-Saxons is that we always mistake a short memory for a clear conscience.”**  
**--Argus Hamilton**



## CALIFORNIA FALLS

Liz Reed

Digital Photograph

*Liz Reed retired from the business world to pursue a career in art. After completing a degree in art studio/art history at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, she works in oil pastels, acrylics, photography, textiles and metals. She lives in Birmingham's Southside neighborhood with her husband, Jim. [www.lizreed.com](http://www.lizreed.com).*

## CORE STUDY: NOTES ON AN APPLE

Peter Schwartz

imagination says  
in time everything becomes  
something else

an apple  
sits by my window  
for 300 years

one day a woman  
takes a bite and  
a flock of birds  
takes off

it becomes wine  
for a monk or the beginning  
of an orchard

its life is yours  
but has happened as  
if in translation

a few steps  
from the vertebrate  
before you ever  
really got to

eat that  
apple.

-

this apple  
might scent your  
grandmother's skin  
at her wake

nervously you  
memorize your furniture  
as if each piece were a  
passenger

on some final  
voyage west, straight  
into the sunset  
of your imagination

the corners  
we most live  
in crumble

alas some places  
are too small  
for apples.

-

once in holland  
I saw a painting  
of an apple

now some nights  
I hang myself on the  
wall like a painting  
and wait

for a power  
greater than  
sleep to take  
me to my

orchard.

.....  
*Peter Schwartz is a painter, poet and writer. He's also an associate art editor for Mad Hatters' Review. His artwork can be seen all over the Internet but specifically at: [www.sitrahahra.com](http://www.sitrahahra.com). He's had hundreds of paintings, poems, and stories published both online and in print and is constantly submitting new work as if his very life depended on it. His last show was at the Amsterdam Whitney Gallery in Chelsea NYC and went well enough for them to invite him back. He lives in Augusta, Maine.*  
.....

**"I merely took the energy it takes to  
pout and wrote some blues."**

**--Duke Ellington**



## LOVE, THEN LAUGHTER

Peter Huggins

I love the mess that love makes,  
Its complications, its bereft shoes,

Dropped clothes, tangled sheets,  
Unmade beds, its punctuation

Of day and night with falling  
Shoulders and settling bones.

I am glad to touch this mess,  
To add to it and not clean it up.

Let me be like a sparrow  
In this, not a crow.

.....  
*Peter Huggins is the author of four books of poems, including South, forthcoming from Louisiana Literature Press in 2009. His picture book, Trosclair and the Alligator, came out in 2006 from Star Bright Books; a middle grade novel, In the Company of Owls is due from NewSouth Books in 2008. He lives in Auburn, Alabama.*  
.....

**“If everybody agreed with me, they'd  
all be right!”**

**--Lucy Van Pelt**

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