

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **AUTUMN PRAISE**, Mixed Media, 24" x 30".

Jerome Vason is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. He graduated from Berea College with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree and recently retired from the U.S. Army. His dream is to connect with the artist in each of us and translate his love of creation through color and texture. vasonb@bellsouth.net

Back Cover: **STREET SCENE**. Sherry Alvis, Oil on Canvas, 16" x 20".

Sherry Alvis is a Birmingham, Alabama, artist who began painting for her own enjoyment. Now an exhibiting artist, her passion is painting animal portraits and children with their pets. She has designed a line of Christian greeting cards, *Word Alive Creations*. "Whatever the subject, it's just a sheer joy to paint." Her art can be found at www.jenniferharwellart.com.

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AFTER APPLE-THINKING

Brian Roberts

She plucks the apple
from its sheltering branch,
considers it

while midday light
catches its curve and ripples along the edge.
A red, delicious sunrise.

Sugar, water, seeds
in a compact sphere.
Simple. But

the first bite
through its taut skin
complicates matters.

It is among the finest things
she has ever tasted.
The day-warmed

juice sparking her tongue
calls up images
of the old and the new.

Places long-since visited
and places yet to visit.
Childhood gone

and new childhoods not her own.
All is brought to light.
All is acknowledged.

In that bite she knows everything.

Remembers everything,
believes everything,
understands everything.

It is the flavor of the world,
of life, of memory.
Simple?

Hardly.

.....

*Brian Roberts was raised in the small town of Douglas, Alabama, and currently
resides in the small town of Jacksonville, Alabama.
thomasbrianroberts@hotmail.com*

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**“I preserve things that are
significant to me. Only time
will determine what is
important in the long term. But
something can be rediscovered
only if someone has collected
and preserved it.”**

--Michael Feinstein

VERACITY

Jeff Faulk

She bares her breasts
Bathed in chiaroscuro
Transitions of light and dark
Highlights glow
Shadows hide
Gold cuirass defines the form
Armor against imperception
Light proves the intransigence of wisdom
Compels the heart to live
Half in search of illumination
Half in progression of impulse
Roses seek the sun
Barbs adorn the flesh
The sun always caresses the earth
Earthnight communes with cold distant stars
Dawn and dusk chase each other
Moments of transition
Seeking to dispel the spinning enigma
She is truth
She is ideal
She unifies lake and cloud
With lightning
She grows a beauty soft as love
Fragrant as compassion
Atop a path of thorns
Rooted in the marrow of the world

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Jeff Faulk is a painter and poet in Birmingham. Jeffart61@aol.com

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BLACKBIRD

Rachel Roberts

That ol' blackbird of death
Be waitin' outside my window.
I seen him there,
On the telephone wires.
Black as night it be.
Swoopin' across the sky,
Cryin' out at the sun
To go away; He got work to do.
It be hard carryin' around all them souls,
Wires be droopin'
He been sittin' there so long
Starin', tryin' to put the scare in me,
Remind me-
I best be livin'.

.....

Rachel is a student at Jacksonville State University where she is actively pursuing a bachelors degree in art. Rachel has been writing poetry for twelve years, working to further develop her distinctive creative voice. She lives in Jacksonville, Alabama with her husband and their dog. Rachus_02@hotmail.com

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**“Poetry is the art of
substantiating shadows, and of
lending existence to nothing.”**

--Edmund Burke

HIGH

David Tenorio

4' x 2'

Oil on Panel

David Tenorio was born and raised in McAllen, Texas. As a student of the University of Texas at Austin, David divides his time between freelance work and concept art, portraiture, mural painting. His personal work involves concepts of voyeurism, greed, and social class. tenorioart@yahoo.com



JAMES AND HIS SKATIEMOBILE

Chervis Isom

I'd been warned over and over again never to go down there, down that potted, rocky dirt road, down where what we back then called the "colored" quarters were. I never knew if folks were afraid of the people who lived in the quarters; or was it the railroad tracks they feared that lay beyond the dirt road that petered out and was swallowed up where the brush and the briars began? Oh, how I worried what my mother would say if she learned I had ventured down that dirt road through the quarters to the tracks beyond.

The fear I felt as I raced through the quarters was the fear of the unknown. Passing through the quarters was, after all, a necessary obstacle to the adventure that lay ahead. It was the railroad tracks, the trestle and the creek beneath that summoned me, that called me to race with fear through the quarters.

I suppose that must have been my first taste of freedom. There was nothing I'd ever known that felt so good as balancing on the railroad beam, tiptoeing, arms outstretched like a ballerina, focused on nothing but the rail and planting one foot carefully before the other, all the way across the trestle.

Even now, after all these years, whenever I find myself close by a railroad track, I can't resist the urge to try again – to walk the rails. It's every time a disappointment to me. I suppose age has caught me, that I'm not as nimble as once I was. And no one seems to understand. Just this past weekend, my wife and I took our young granddaughters to Chattanooga for a train trip. I showed them how to "walk the rails", but could barely make ten steps before staggering into the cinders. The girls showed no interest at all. My wife said something uncomplimentary. But even so, I have no doubt I'll try again the next time I have the opportunity.

Thinking of it now, sitting here at my desk in the cave of my office, I can feel the tension in my waist as I begin to balance, my hands fluttering up, and I'm poised to take the first step. It's so real; I can almost smell the creosote.

I grew up during the '40s in Birmingham, Alabama, in a small residential enclave of Norwood, a neighborhood bordered on the north, east and south by steel mills, foundries and other heavy industries. Our

street was paved, and the houses were small cottages occupied mostly by blue collar workers and their families, but we were all white.

The quarters had always been a mystery to me, down the dirt road and almost in the woods. The houses were run down, dilapidated shacks, most covered with tar paper. I never knew anything about the African-American families who lived in those shacks. They were so different from us in so many ways. I remember one Sunday we heard shrieking and wailing from down there that wouldn't stop. It was summertime, way before air conditioning, and all our doors and windows were open. We couldn't shut out the wailing. I asked my mother what was happening down there, and she told me it must be a wake – that someone had probably died. Nobody from our block went down there so far as I know. What happened down in the quarters didn't much matter to us except for the sounds, and I guess whatever happened up on our block didn't much matter to them.

I'd seen him there in the quarters when I'd run through, headed for the tracks and the creek under the trestle. He was a year or so older than I. But we'd never spoken. He was as alien to me as I suppose I must have been to him.

That's how I recognized him later, when I saw him trudging up the dirt road, limping in his awkward way toward my street, his right foot turned outboard, dragging by a rope some kind of contraption which bumped and clattered over the gravel. Whatever I had been doing I stopped and quietly watched.

When he reached our paved road, it began to roll, and from the metallic sound the wheels made on the asphalt, I knew they had once been roller skates.

I really couldn't see the car very well, but I stayed there on the sidewalk, immobile, as he came alongside me and continued up the slight grade of our street. He was not smiling or frowning. It was like he was studying something far ahead.

I was about ten years old at the time. I had never owned anything with wheels. Some of the older boys had bicycles, and they peddled around my street showing off. Envy may not be the exact word I felt, and at that time envy was a word that had probably not yet entered my vocabulary, but I couldn't wait for the day I had something to ride. I'd never even thought about a homemade car! And here it was! On my

street! But pulled by a boy from the quarters?... No way I'd ever have a chance to ride!

He didn't seem to notice me as he slowly lurched by, tugging and jerking the car behind as it darted from side to side. He held his right forearm level with the street, his hand drooping down, flopping lifelessly as he lurched along. Polio! It had to be Polio. We knew about Polio and what it could do. Polio caused a boy at my church to be paralyzed and in a wheelchair. It was on my mother's mind all the time. You can't do this, you can't do that. You don't want to catch Polio now, do you? That was another reason we weren't allowed to play in the creek polluted by the industries.

By then, I found I had unconsciously moved along the sidewalk in tandem with him, but holding my distance. I wondered, would it work? How can he steer it? Will it go fast? How will he stop it? The questions kept coming, but not a word passed my lips. It would have been wrong to ask him these questions. He was not "our kind".

When he reached the "T" intersection at the end of the block, he had a lot of trouble turning the car around. Mostly, he lifted the front end by raising the rope above his head with his left hand. His right hand didn't seem to give him much help. I had the impulse to race over and help him turn the car, but I knew it would be wrong to socialize with him. At the same time I was surprised to find myself on the sidewalk at the end of the block. So I just watched as he struggled with his one good arm.

When he got the car turned to go downhill, he awkwardly plopped down on the skittish vehicle. Once seated, the car barely moved. He bounced but nothing much happened. He got off it and holding the rope, pushed it with his good foot and almost fell down.

For the first time, his blank face showed something. He was visibly frustrated. Then he began to pull the car and when it was in motion, he tried to leap on. But he simply couldn't do it. He sat dejectedly on his car. I didn't say a word. He never looked at me. It was like I was invisible. I think I felt sorry for him, even though we were so different. He had tried so hard. But mostly, I wanted to ride. I knew I could make it go.

Looking back after all these years, I still remember the confusion and conflict I felt as I stood there in indecision. I wanted so badly to help him.



RED SUN

Hakima

22" x 28" – Watercolor

M Hakima MD has been an artist since age 3. Self-defined as “folk eclectic,” recent retirement from her private practice of medicine has meant more time for art production and exhibition. Hakima lives in Flomaton, Alabama. wise8angel@yahoo.com

In Sunday School, we were taught to help other people, to express compassion with deeds. But this was different. He was not white like me. And his ragged, worn out clothes. We were not rich. I suppose at the time I was unaware of how poor we really were, but my clothes were unpatched. Perhaps that amplified my confusion.

Somehow I must have reached a resolution. I like to think that my sense of compassion overrode the cultural taboos of the time, but I'm not certain of that. I fear it was simply that I wanted so badly my turn on the car.

Without a word or even a look between us, I timidly placed my hands on his thin shoulders and gave him a tentative push. The car clattered off, then began to slow. He turned his head and looked back at me – he seemed to see me for the first time. I think he was as surprised as I was, but his face was as impassive as ever.

I ran up behind him then and really pushed, the heels of my hands gouging his shoulders, running hard, the car clattering and bumping along and lurching from side to side as he tried to guide the car by the rope with his one good hand.

When I released him, I wondered how he would stop it, because he was coming to the steep downhill part of our street. But he got it stopped before he plunged down the hill. He staggered up from the car, hauled it around and for a moment, no more than a moment, joy and triumph flashed across his face. He began his trudge back up the street, his face again an impassive mask. He never acknowledged my presence.

I returned to the sidewalk and again followed him up the street. I wanted more than anything to ride that car.

When he got to the end of the block, he tugged the car around by the rope. He then looked at me for a second time, his face now wary.

“Wanna ride?” his voice flat and emotionless, as if he didn't mean it. But I wanted to ride so badly, I hardly noticed the apprehension in his voice and bearing. I was aware that by accepting the ride, I was breaking the rules and doing something absolutely forbidden, but it didn't occur to me that by his offer he might be breaking rules laid down to him.

“Sure,” I replied awkwardly, without commitment and ventured off the sidewalk to the car. Then, taking the rope, I jumped onto the seat. I tried to push off with my feet, but was not making much progress. Then I felt one hand on my shoulders and the pressure as he pushed, and the car began to roll, faster and faster as he clip-clopped behind me on his bad leg.

The car darted about as I tried to steer with the rope. When I finally got it stopped just before the steep part of the hill, I was laughing and laughing, but his face showed no expression.

We said nothing as I hauled the wagon around and started back up the hill. He took the rope from me without a word and limped silently back up the street. I returned to the sidewalk.

We took turns riding and pushing, no words passing between us.

Then suddenly he said "I gotta go," taking the rope and turning toward the dirt road. I followed a few steps.

"What's your name?"

"James," he responded without a backward glance.

"What do you call your car?"

"It's my skatiemobile. I made it myself," he said almost defiantly, as if I wouldn't believe him, looking back for only a moment, his face devoid of any expression.

"Bye, James," I said, and turned toward home, feeling somehow cheated.

I watched him as his car left the street and began clattering and jumping behind him down the dirt road where he lived.

Summertime in the South is oppressive. The heat and the humidity can sap your strength. On days like these I normally would've played in the shade of the trees along the alley. There was no shade along our street, but I managed to keep myself busy along the sidewalk for several days waiting for James to return with his stakiemobile. He did come back once, and it was a lot easier that time to play together with his skatiemobile. My brother Eddie, and Bobby from down the street, joined in.

After that, we waited. Weeks went by. James didn't come back. Meanwhile, we ventured to the railroad and the creek, but curiosity had overridden our fear. Now, instead of sprinting through the quarters, we slowed to a cautious stride as our eyes darted about in search of James at each tar paper shack. Each adventure was a disappointment. We began to think James had disappeared forever.

Then one afternoon, unexpectedly, James trudged up the dirt road and onto my street, dragging his skatiemobile behind. I was ecstatic to see him, but his face was as impassive as ever. How many black faces have I seen since then with that stony, blank expression? His face was a study of

disinterest, of detachment, of terminal ennui. No matter what you do to me you can't hurt me. You can't touch me.

Playing with him was so wrong in my mind at that time that I never thought of him as a friend. I suppose I thought of us as co-conspirators, though it never occurred to me that he too may have had second thoughts about our playing together. I guess that's why I just couldn't understand why his face was always so blank, never happy or sad, just blank, as if he had no interest in anything. I was so happy to see him. Maybe that's why I was confused and puzzled as he approached me. He dragged the skatiemobile as if it weighed three hundred pounds, slowly and deliberately, clip-clop, clip-clop.

"Hi, James," I said. It was all I could manage because of the look on his face.

"This is yours," he said as he halted in front of me and powered his skatiemobile around his left side and thrust the rope to me.

I stepped back, uncertain what to do.

"Why? Why you givin' me your skatiemobile?" I asked in alarm. I still had not taken the rope.

"Cause it won't run on my road," he said, and then exploded, "And cause they tol' me I cain't come up here no mo!" He stepped toward me and tried to thrust the rope into my hands.

I retreated, throwing my open hands above my head. His outburst had frightened me.

"I cain't use it no mo. You keep it!" he demanded.

I didn't know what to do, but I wouldn't take the rope. I had been taught never to take what is not mine, that we must work for what we have. I didn't know how to accept a gift.

Then his face began to change. His eyes opened wide, startled looking, and there, for an instant, were all the pain and anger and hurt and humiliation gathered together in one small place I've ever seen. He sucked in his breath, scrunched up his eyes and his whole body seemed to clench up for a moment. Then he threw down the rope, whirled and darted toward home, clip-clopping wildly down the street, his right hand flopping.

"Wait," I called behind him. "Wait." It was all I could say.

I was stunned. I didn't know what to do or say. I knew I couldn't follow him down to where he lived. I bent down and picked up the rope and pulled the car to the curb, but I was not happy the car was now mine.



TREE PLANTED BY STILL WATER

Amanda Cole

14" x 18", Acrylic, Tissue Paper, Himalayan Paper, Magazine Paper

Amanda Cole is an art teacher in Birmingham Schools. She is inspired by international culture and the Bible and has served in ministry as an artist in Asia, Latin American, Dominican Republic, and India. She lives in Homewood, Alabama. Ablake.amandablake@gmail.com

As I stood there by the side of the road, uncertainly holding the rope, I felt shame wash over me. I felt a conflict of values – I had refused to accept James’ gift to me and unintentionally hurt his feelings. I felt a failure of courage, in not chasing after James, in not thanking him properly, in not being the kind of friend he tried to be. And I wondered who had told James he couldn’t play on our street.

Later, when we rode the skatiemobile up and down our street there was no fun in it. It just wasn’t the same without James. I never saw James again, though almost sixty years later I can still see the pain in his eyes.

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Chervis Isom writes and remembers in Birmingham, Alabama. He’s a member of the Alabama Writers’ Conclave. cisom@bakerdonelson.com

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**“To write a love letter we must
begin without knowing what
we intend to say, and end
without knowing what we have
written.”**

--Jean Jacques Rousseau

THE NEW WORLD

Robert S. King

Every word I've said has taken root,
grows the definitions of me—wildflower or wildfire—
smokes from truth's fiercest battle
from whose barrel the best of me blooms,
or remains a scent, a possibility, a whisper
as leaf-rustle in a flock of thrashers
who know how they change color
before the fall.

Every word I've said has been uprooted,
a forget-me-not given rain but no light,
given to the wind of God's conscience,
around the small world
blowing things together, apart.

The same word wages war as powers peace:
desire, the stem of fire and flower.

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Robert S. King has published in hundred of journals, including The Kenyon Review, Chariton Review, and Spoon River Poetry Review. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, is currently director of FutureCycle Poetry, and is employed as a Software Engineer. www.futurecycle.org,

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THE FALLEN

Cheryl Lynn Moyer

A fragile robin's egg lay in my path, unbroken
about forty-five feet below its mother's nest.
Stepping over the unseen fetus, the first
rays of dawn reflected its tranquil blue, cooler
than the required mother's 104 degree feathered belly.
No more than fourteen short days before escape
from that hollow inside to inevitable blue skies.
Then, there must be feedings every fifteen minutes.
Impossible to even contemplate.
Now late for my classroom full of disabled
children, also demanding attention, slowly learning
their way out, I hurry along surprised
to find my palm cradling a tiny blue shell.

.....

Cheryl Lynn Moyer is a retired FEMA inspector, special education teacher and widely-published poet. Most recently her work has appeared in Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry. She lives and writes in Montgomery, Alabama.

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JUST OURS

Irene Latham

Not even our bodies are our own,
belonging as they do to the earth
and our children who tug at our breasts,
our hands, our attention lost, sucked
into the whirl of everyday life
which isn't ours either,
though we sometimes claim it.

There was a movie once,
a story we scratched out on paper,
my mouth on your pulsing flesh;
a photograph of us not together
but on the same beach,
a bungalow with shoes beside the door.
Nothing in it was ours,

but when the sun finally set
everything around us disappeared,
even we disappeared, those selves
made of shell, the dark walls heavy
with the scent of sea wrapping around us
until the world was as small
as the smallest freckle on your left ear.

How time drifts when we share space,
escapes metaphor and defies the definition
a shore might provide, or the curve of a wave —
becomes sand and wind and the whole world
slipping through a crack of light that contains
everything and nothing
just ours.

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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

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SUNRISE SERVICE

Ted Openshaw
8" x 10" – Watercolor

Ted Openshaw recently moved to the Birmingham metro area from Clearwater, Florida. He lives and paints in Lipscomb, Alabama.
fireball61@bham.rr.com

SARAH

Reilly Maginn

How a horse ever got the biblical name Sarah, I have no idea. Sarah, the wife of Ibriham and the mother of Isaac. A gentle, loving mother. This was not my Sarah. She was mean as a rattlesnake with a bad back. And she didn't like me. No, she didn't just, "not like me," she hated me; or so I thought. Ill tempered and completely unpredictable, she would squint at me as I approached with a saddle. If she was in one of her moods, she'd rear up with her back legs widely splayed, flailing the air with her front feet, daring me to saddle up. "Not today, cowboy" was written on her furrowed forelock. Then she'd start her "no saddle shimmy," and I would have to chase her in circles, vainly trying to throw my blanket and saddle across her broad back.

At other times, Sarah would stand still as I saddled up in preparation for a work day. She would blow up her belly so the cinch I was trying to tighten wouldn't hold when she exhaled. I'd swing up in the saddle, only to have it shift, tumbling me to the ground. She'd turn and look at me as if surprised. I'd know she was thinking: "gotcha, cowboy." I'm certain her "hissy-fits" were related to a hormone imbalance. She was a fat mare diva who'd never been near a stallion and never foaled a colt. Her rough coat, the color of mud, had the texture of the bark on a shag bark hickory; and it felt the same when I rubbed her down. She was the visage of the proverbial "horse that's been rode hard and put up wet." Broad beamed as a coal barge, her short knobby-kneed legs made one think of an atavistic mule. She was as ugly as dirt but she was all I had.

Let me explain. It was my first job after high school in Cut Bank, Montana. I had some ranching experience back home in Miles City but my dad did most of the "cowboyin'." He wanted me to be a lawyer but I liked the freedom of the open range, so I went north and became a cowpuncher. Twenty-five dollars a month; lived in the bunkhouse, ate chuck wagon beans and possibly got a bonus, if the price of calves was over fifty-two dollars after spring branding. I was on my own and lovin' it. No one to tell me to milk the cow, bring in some wood or grease the tractor axle. I was a real life cowpoke. I even started chewing; but it made me sick so I quit after one quid. Since I was the newest tenderfoot in the bunkhouse, I had the cold bunk in the dark corner, farthest from the big woodstove that sat in the center of the room. I also got last pick of the green-broke cow ponies in the remeuda. And that's how I got Sarah. She was the last of the

bunch and I was soon to learn why. I didn't complain though, for if the bunkhouse crew thought you were a whiner, they'd hoorah you right off the place. So I accepted this mare, this seething bag of raging hormones, as my new partner.

As the newest tenderfoot, with little cowboyin' skills, I became the designated fence-rider that spring and summer on the 85,000 acre ranch that was the Lazy Diamond. I rode fence, righted catawampus fence posts, re-spliced downed wire and re-stretched sagging sections across washes and deep coulees. My partner, Sarah, was not much help. She could tell I was a green tenderfoot and let me know it from day one.

She'd slow to a "tired horse two step" as we rode up even a mild grade, or hesitate and sulk if we had to traverse down a boulder strewn coulee. On long stretches of level prairies, she would begin to "hobby-horse" her gait, rubbing my thighs raw with the constant back and forth whipsawing motion. When she suspected that I might be sitting loose in the saddle, she'd shy as if snake bit, sending me flying into a cactus patch. If I were not on guard in a prairie-dog town, Sarah would lurch as if she'd stepped in a hole and dump me, unceremoniously, over a cut bank. When the pair of us had to pitch camp on the prairie, my fickle partner would take the opportunity to drift off if I forgot to hobble her and the next morning I'd spend two hours trying to coax her in with a feedbag full of oats.

During two months of riding fence, only once did I have to walk all the way back to the ranch after Sarah abandoned me. Other times, she'd stand quietly, as I brushed her, then suddenly turn and bite me on the tender backside of my upper arm. She was as mean as a silverback grizzly with a toothache. Some mornings she would unexpectedly kick out at me with those powerful short hind legs as we started our daily grind. On other mornings she'd act nervous, prancing and shuffling, wide-eyed and wary as a long-tailed cat in a roomful of rocking chairs. I was much like the farmer, who, after his first airplane ride, remarked, "I never let my full weight down." And so it was with Sarah. I never did ever trust her and was never fully at ease with her.

One sunny afternoon, we had to cross Powder River Creek above the little town of Jordan. The creek is little more than a quiet rivulet in the spring and is a dry boulder-strewn creek bed the rest of the year. It was October, cool and crisp. The ground had been hard froze for a week and we were heading home. I'd been living on cowboy coffee, hardtack and jerky for more than a week and was anxious to get a bath, some

bunkhouse fare and sleep in a real bunk. I was dreaming of hot food and a warm bed with clean sheets. I was not alert. Approaching the creek, I wanted her to jump a three-foot channel left by the spring rains. She loped up to the edge of the creek bed crouched as if to leap but suddenly planted her two front feet and stopped dead, bucking her hindquarters to beat thunder. I took a header, vainly clutching her neck and mane, as I landed in the rocky creek bed taking the hide off both my hands and knees. She stood there, staring at me with those wide, malevolent eyes as if to say again, “gotcha, greenhorn.” I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening tending to my wounded hands, knees and pride. I was getting pretty tired of Sarah’s “Spawn of Satan” behavior.

The next morning, stiff and sore, I saddled Sarah, leaned down to pick up my lariat, and throw it over the pommel. Sarah, wild-eyed and whinnying, reared up on her back legs, front hooves pawing the air just above my head. I think she really wanted to hurt me. I yelled and threw my hands up as the lasso struck her tender soft muzzle, forcing her back. She took several quick shuffle steps backwards, lost her balance and fell over backwards landing on her back crushing my saddle. There was a loud crack when the saddletree broke as the twelve hundred pound horse fell full on the cantle and the pommel. She scrambled to her feet, jittery and wild-eyed, nervously quivering and shuffling. She broke out in a sweat and was immediately drenched. She’d had the “bejesus” scared out of her. One arm of the broken saddletree had punched through the worn leather in the saddle’s seat and was now scraping the mare’s flank. The wound, though superficial, was painful, I imagined. I, too, was frightened. She might have killed me with those flailing feet. We both stood there, wide-eyed and sweating. In my mind, I could hear her thinking, “what in the world have I done? I really made him mad this time.”

The incident was Sarah’s epiphany. From that moment on, she became a docile, obedient mount and partner. In her mind she perceived I had thrown her over on her back as punishment and would brook no more of her erratic and malevolent behavior. Since I couldn’t ride with the damaged saddle, I took the reins and we walked the two miles back to the ranch. She followed along behind me, compliant as my blue heeler cow-herding pup. It was a long painful trek, as cowboy boots, with their high heels and pointy toes are meant for riding and not for walking. But Sarah followed me dutifully and submissively with the remnants of my saddle still gouging her flank. I left it in place as a reminder of her place in the

hierarchy of my team and as a warning of what might ensue if her bad behavior persisted.

When we walked, instead of riding, into the corral, the fence birds began to hoorah me. Then they saw the broken saddle and finally noticed how subdued Sarah had become. Then came the “attaboys” and the kudos. “Did you reason with her with a 2X4?” came the question.

“No, I just discussed the problem with her and we came to an understanding.”

I never did tell them my action was pure self-defense. No need to dispel my now burgeoning tale as a newly verified competent cowboy.

Sarah and I remained partners for two more years. She loved to nuzzle and find an apple I hid in my pocket when we started our work day. She never again misbehaved, threw me or bit me.

I finally listened to my dad, quit my cowboyin’, and went to college. Sarah stayed on the ranch and was inherited by the ramrod’s daughter. She loved the little girl and remained docile as a kitten. I saw her once on a visit to the ranch years later. She remembered me and nuzzled my pocket for her hidden apple.

I miss her.

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Reilly Maginn is an award-winning writer in South Alabama.

redreilly@earthlink.net

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**“We are all here for a spell; get
all the good laughs you can.”**

--Will Rogers

LESSON

Donna Vorreyer

Trapped in a church basement,
I was instructed by nuns to accept
my faith as a young adult, to water
the seeds my parents had planted
at baptism, now bursting into
glorious bloom. But the blooming
that attracted me was of a different
sort — Jimmy already boasting a full
mustache, Roy's muscles sinewy
beneath short sleeves and skintight
jeans. I tucked my hair just so behind
my ear, snuck one glance at Mark's
dimples while I studied Mark's gospel,
ended up kneeling on a yardstick as
penance, Sister Angele counseling
the harsh judgment of the Lord even
as I was told, line by line, to memorize
forgiveness.

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Donna Vorreyer lives and teaches in the suburbs of Chicago, trying to convince teenagers that words matter. Her poems have appeared in many journals, including New York Quarterly, Flashquake, Barnwood, Literary Mama, After Hours, and Boxcar Poetry Review. You can visit her online at www.djvorreyer.googlepages.com

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MY FEET HURT

Jeff Glenn

Jeff Glenn is a 31 year old, self-taught artist who loves to sketch and paint with oils as well as take digital photographs. He lives in Ashville, Alabama, with his wife and their five children. Jeff has had a deep desire the last few years to cultivate his artistic gifts and pursue art as a part-time career. jeff@southassociates.com





MOONSCAPE

Darcy Glenn
Photograph

Darcy Glenn is a self taught painter and photographer from Vestavia Hills. She recently returned to work in the financial services industry after a two year hiatus during which she renewed her focus on art. She has won awards for both photography and painting and shows her work at area festivals and exhibitions. darcyglenn@bellsouth.net

CIRCUS

Jessica Hollander

After months of doing nothing, here was the street. Here stood the streetlamps, there went the traffic with the cold evening breeze blowing, and the gray sky above them; and they, bundled in coats, buttons buttoned, scarves wrapped around necks, hurrying past all these people who had ceased to exist; and here it all was, the same, and recreated.

They'd gone to the circus earlier and that was what Marie wanted to talk about: the grinning buffoon who made ducks of the same color waddle in groups around the ring: white ducks, black ducks, blue ducks, green and gold ducks. She loved the part where one of the white ducks broke stride and ran after the blue ones.

"That wasn't part of the show," Frederick told her.

"I'm not talking about the man," she said. "I don't care about him."

"We've got ducks at the park. The golf course. You want to see ducks?"

"I've never seen ducks like that," she said.

They walked awhile in silence, Marie sniffing; her face frightening when Frederick stole looks at her, the red etching brutally into her pale cheeks. He checked his watch, but the battery was broken; he put the watch on every morning without thinking. It had stopped; he did not know what day, at 3:00.

"I'm hailing a cab," he said, and stepped toward the street.

"Go if you want, but I'm going to keep walking." She swept a gloved-finger beneath her nose.

Frederick sighed, returned from the curb. He already missed the months of mourning, after Marie's mother passed away: the deep sighs upon coming into the apartment, the slow, silent meals, the tilted smiles, the blinking, muted television in the bedroom as they undressed, embraced, slept until morning, that dark heavy sleep. But today, a Saturday, three months after her mother died, Frederick had woken to Marie's muffled laughter. She wasn't next to him in bed, she wasn't in the room; he found her on the phone in the living room, looking out the window. Laughing!

He felt trapped by his own inclination. Better never to have known it, because how can one help being drawn to a simple, somber routine? How can one help if one likes Marie all to oneself? It was true: mourning

had suited him better than life. But he didn't know how to go on without Marie's cooperation, it being her mother they were supposed to feel sad about.

Marie stopped to look at a store display: a bunch of egg-beaters shaped like chicks, complete with yellow feet. "To live here in the city and be trapped in an apartment," she said. "We're paying all this money to stare at the walls and those sappy paintings you brought from Mom's." She sniffed.

A freak heart attack. And he didn't know if his watch had stopped at 3:00 in the morning or 3:00 in the afternoon.

"Who'd want to be out here?" he asked as the wind stung his face and sprayed dirt into his eyes. "And her paintings are lovely. The vases and the china, the tablecloths, table-tops, the hands around the teacups."

She looked at Frederick. "You're depressing me." She moved away from the store and he followed after her. "You know what I hated though?" she asked. "That Strong Man, sneering the whole time. He didn't smile once."

They passed a long, inset doorway, the stoop filled with blankets, and Frederick looked away, not wanting to know if a person was beneath them. "I thought the magician was the worst," he said.

"You mean the man with all those yellow hats? And he kept juggling them and placing them on his head while he was dancing?"

"What's magical about that?" he asked.

She shook her head. They joined a group of people waiting at a streetlight, and Marie smiled at someone. All night she would be smiling. And laughing.

"I don't want to go to Clay and Mika's," he said as they crossed the street. "The circus was enough."

"You don't have to come," she said.

He went to the well-lit window of a shoe store and looked at all the high-heeled sandals.

"Plus my watch is broken."

Marie stood a few feet away from him, near the street. "I don't think I can go home with you tonight."

He sighed and put his forehead against the glass. How he had loved murmuring the words to people: Marie isn't quite up to it yet.

He listened for awhile to the traffic. The motors racing and slowing, the occasional hiccup, growl, or screech. Frederick waited until he was

pretty sure she'd walked away before he turned back to the street. He glanced both ways and saw she was gone, and then he stepped to the curb. At the circus, there was a girl with silver hula-hoops, trapped by their spinning. At the circus, there was a man who stood on his head.

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Jessica Hollander is currently pursuing her Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in The Emerson Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Hobart, and Barrelhouse among others. www.jessicahollanderwriter.com.

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**“Would that we could at once
paint with the eyes! —In the
long way from the eye through
the arm to the pencil, how
much is lost!”**

--Gotthold Lessing



IDAHO STREAM

Liz Reed

Digital Photo

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.

GETTING SAVED

Jim Reed

As Bronnie Nichols lowered my head underwater, I squeezed tight my eyes and suddenly realized I was about to die.

I can't swim! I thought in panic. What if he lets go of me? What if I get disoriented and can't figure out which way is up, which way is the surface? Holy Moly!

I obviously survived the ordeal, or I wouldn't be telling this true story more than fifty years later. So, to begin at one of the many beginnings I could select to begin at:

Bronnie Nichols did his job and Baptized me and got me *wet with God* and made me sputter a bit.

Reverend Bronnie Nichols was our pastor at Forest Lake Baptist Church when I was trying to grow up in Tuscaloosa, back in the 1940's and 1950's. We called him *Brother* Nichols, out of respect and tradition.

Brother Nichols was a distinguished-looking white-haired man with a laconic and pleasant manner, and in the pulpit, he appeared even more laconic and pleasant. He didn't act like the other Baptist preachers we listened to on the radio or saw delivering guest sermons at the church. Bronnie Nichols was nothing like the fire-and-brimstone evangelists who came through town during revivals, or who pitched tents or commandeered Denny Stadium for mass soul-savings.

No, Brother Nichols was kind of laid-back, intellectual, mildly profound, though he was judged harshly by some who said he didn't make us in the congregation feel *guilty* enough to get through the week, once the Sunday sermon was over. Bronnie Nichols' delivery was a sort of sweet, sing-song series of Bible quotations and moral lessons *which he never seemed to read*. He actually "winged" his sermons!

That was impressive, because back in those days, folks felt a preacher ought to be inspired by God or Mary or Jesus or Somebody Up There...so inspired that he didn't need notes or written-out sermons. Baptist preachers were supposed to walk back and forth across the stage (and during sermons like that, it certainly *was* a stage), waving their arms and making you regret the day you were born in sin—or at least regret what you did late last night. So, Brother Nichols did fill the bill to that extent—not having to rely on notes or worked-up speeches—but he failed in the

arm-flailing department. He was just too distinguished to stoop to that sort of behavior.

One particularly guilt-provoking part of the Sunday sermon always came at the end (the end being *way past Noon*...a good preacher proved his goodness by showing you how long he could hold you captive past Sunday lunchtime). That was when the choir and congregation joined together in a sad, passion-filled hymn-singing and Brother Nichols invited those who were ready to come down front and dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ and the other Powers Up There. In fact, the success of his sermons depended almost entirely upon how many people came down the aisle and said they wanted to Get Saved. If nobody came forth that Sunday, the Sunday lunch (we of course called it Sunday Dinner, as did just about everybody else except Yankees) conversation centered around whether or not Brother Nichols' sermon had been good enough.

We really loved Brother Nichols, because he looked so much like a preacher in the movies, and because he never made us feel too guilty to show our faces in church next Sunday.

Anyhow, during those end-of-sermon hymns, little boys like me quivered in fear and expectation. We fought the impulse to run down front and let everybody know that we, too, wanted to be righteous and holy and forgiven for all we'd done or wanted to do (in those days, we were mostly wanting pardon for what we *wanted* to do, since we didn't get much opportunity to escape the watchful eyes of family and neighbors). But going down in front of all those people was a terrifying prospect. Everybody would be *looking* at you. Everybody would be reminded that you hadn't *already* Been Saved, which meant you were probably still sinning regularly. Then, they might want to know what you had been sinning *at*. Also, if you Got Saved, you'd have to exert the effort to be good *all the time*, and that was totally alien territory.

But the sermon and the hymn pulled and pulled at you. The joyful sadness of knowing you couldn't get to Heaven without a passport personally signed by Bronnie Nichols was almost unbearable. *What if you didn't go down this Sunday, and you got run over by a '52 Ford pickup during the week?* In spite of all your good intentions, you would wind up in Hell, and Hell was definitely a hell of a place, the way Brother Nichols described it.

But the hymn went on and on, and if one or two people went down front, Brother Nichols would have the choir sing yet another chorus,

which put even more pressure on you. Getting down to that sixth stanza that nobody knew by heart, was excruciating.

I held out till I was 13 years old. In fact, I was so stubborn that I held out till a revival meeting was in progress, and a guest minister—not Brother Nichols—grabbed my guilt and wrung it dry. *Then* I got the urge and followed it. I went down front, but immediately had second thoughts. That's because during revivals, dozens of people poured down each night. In fact, many of them must have spent the year preparing to go down only during revival. We knew of some who went down every year, even though they had long ago been Baptized and Saved. They would usually confess to additional sins and want some re-cleansing.

But going down front with so many others sort of took the *show biz* out of the moment. I was hardly noticeable among the throng. It was hardly worth doing a good deed if no-one was watching. I later learned that comedian Tom Lehrer knew this all too well, too, when he sang out,

"Be careful not to do your good deed when there's no-one watching you."

I went through with it, though. Getting Baptized was a big event in the life of every Baptist. It was a cross between graduation and a funeral. You had to wear these stiff white robes (they told you to wear a bathing suit underneath) and step into a pool (that's what the kids called it) in front of the Sunday night congregation...and get dipped...submerged, not sprinkled...shaken, not stirred. I identified with other confused people, such as Dorothy Parker, who was expelled from Catholic school for referring to Immaculate Conception as Spontaneous Combustion. What if I got all the terms mixed up?

The robes clung to my skin once I was standing there up to my chest in warm water, and Brother Nichols was kind of wet, too, calmly doing his recitation. Then, he leaned me back into the water and took me all the way under (I was told to hold my nose and cross my arms at the same time, so that I would look like a devout drowner. I longed at that moment for a cyanide capsule).

After that, it was over. I returned home feeling sacred for a whole night, before all doubts and temptations crept back in.

Strangely enough, getting Baptized sort of washed me clean of wanting to go to church anymore, and I fought with my father for years over the fact that I didn't want to go and he wanted me to. It wasn't the Baptism so much as it was the structure of Sunday School that turned me away from the organized church.

Sunday School was painful, though I learned a great deal about what the Bible spins in the way of interesting and dramatic tales. In fact, I've remembered those Bible tales all my life and am amazed when others don't know anything about some of the Biblical heroes and parables we studied in Sunday School. These are great stories to live by, fables to guide me, and I still use them every day, just to get through the day.

The teachers were only human, often preaching against the very things they did themselves—smoking in the alley after telling us smoking was sinful, telling “dirty” jokes while urging us never to do such a thing, using profanity after cussing us out for doing the same thing, and so on—like real humans! There were exceptional exceptions. Pearl White and Festus Barringer were teachers who were every bit as good as their teachings! How did they *do* that?

At home, I had been taught that really good people practice what they preach. So I figured church was no place to go in search of really good people. We were told that only Christians could get into heaven, which made me worry about what happens to heathen babies and Jews and people who have never even heard of Christianity. Of course, Sunday School and Bible School teachers were always annoyed by such ideas, so I learned to keep my mouth shut—most of the time. I can open it now, because I understand more about the need to preach what my Mother called *little white lies* in order to give people hope and the energy it takes to get through a day...Santa Claus and Jesus give us something to strive for, something positive and benevolent.

So, thanks, Bronnie Nichols, thanks for giving me a standard to live up to. Thanks for setting an example I can at least work toward.

Sorry about not becoming a preacher myself, which Pearl White always assumed I'd do. I may not get into a Christian heaven, but at least I know right from wrong and, on good days, manage to *do* more right than wrong.

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Jim Reed is curator of Reed Books Antiques/ The Museum of Fond Memories in Birmingham, Alabama. www.jimreedbooks.com

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on sunday mornings mama scratches my head

Erika Wade

you sit down behind me, legs clasped around my sides like seat belts.
sunlight creeps in through the open window, illuminating our faces as you
begin your work. as you part squares into my scalp, i mimic your
movements, trace the faint blue veins in your honey skin. my back relaxes,
i exhale and forget that you are even there until you leave: bologna fries
on the stove, your sundress waits by the hot iron to be pressed. we don't
have time for this ritual, this pause in the sunday morning rush, but you do
it anyway. i ease my back as you settle behind me again; my head tilts back
and melts into your chest. i can smell orange juice on your breath when
you ask me to hand you the hair grease. it is thick, clear, like the aloe vera
that you rub on your feet. (i remember when you cracked the plant in
half. i was scared of what would come oozing from those spindly octopi
stems.) your fingers spread grease over my scalp; it tingles, breathes relief
onto my burning skin. this is a mission to you. excited, you press the thin
tooth comb a little too hard into my head. i pull away from your calloused
hands, looking back like you meant to hurt me. but you ignore my
objections, reel me back in and continue your work. you smile, if you
don't yank out the weeds, how will flowers grow? your hands take root,
twisting in and out of my thick hair until you spot another patch of flaked
skin. if weeds are like hair, i'd rather not have flowers, i say. we laugh,
and against my better judgment i lean back, allowing your fingers to sow
their seeds.

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[see bio on page 39]

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FIREFLOWER

Carroll Andrews
11" x 14" – Watercolor

Carroll Andrews enjoys several techniques in producing his art. He started painting with watercolor in the 1980's, and continues primarily in that medium. Carroll is a member of Birmingham Art Association and the Watercolor Society of Alabama. He was recently chosen to exhibit a painting in the WSA Members' Showcase. carands@bellsouth.net

UNTITLED

Rob Gray

i've only been to the lake
a few times since
my brother drew died
but i have often wondered
if he is still there
skiing through the narrows
like he always did
a single step off
the wooden platform
at the back of
the ski nautique
barefoot
with one leg crossed
over the other
as though he were sitting
in his own church pew
in his own cathedral
holding the rope handle
in the crook of his elbow
cigarette in one hand
and a miller high life in the other

if you're not out there
on the water now brother
i hope heaven is as good
as the lake would have been

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Robert Gray lives in Mobile and works at the University of South Alabama. He holds a B.A. and M.A. in English and a Ph.D. in Instructional Technology from the University of Alabama. His chapbook, I Wish That I Were Langston Hughes, has recently been published by Negative Capability Press. grayrobe@bellsouth.net

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THE DESERT OATH

Mark Cantora

"Your oath is binding," he told me. "So you must never come back. Do you understand?"

Of course I did not understand. It's dust-hills and camels. Just aluminum shacks inundated with hookah smoke and veiled wives. There are no fences or borders—no delineations or markers. How could I be banned forever from a place with no beginning or end?

"As sure as you know where your nose ends and your face begins, you will know the beginning and the end of the desert," he had told me.

"How will I know?"

"Because if you enter the desert, we will hunt you, and find you, and leave you to rot."

Today, I remember when the hamsin would lift dust so thick I gagged. The sand whipped through the air and formed a scorching wall of heat. But when the muezzin's evening call to prayer cut through the dust and haunted my ears with the soul of an ancient melody, I could feel all around me the dawn of civilization. I experienced the honest beginnings of Man's relationship with the land—with the world.

And now I have lost it all. The desert is an estranged lover. I reach out to her, and she ignores my now-unfamiliar touch. I have lived in the cradle of Man's emergence. I have felt the whispers of the distant past.

Now, I am lost and alone outside the dunes. And I will stay this way—this lost—forever.

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Mark Cantora is a graduate of Muhlenberg College in *Pennsylvania*, where he studied *Civil War and Middle-Eastern history*. When not writing, Mark attends law school and dreams of the day he can move down South to Memphis.

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AIN'T NO HOPE

Erika Wade

There are two types of blood: that that runs
through the veins that that flows out of them.
Hatred armed with knives and guns
stole all the blood that was left of him.

See, N lovers ain't welcomed in our town.
Home of sweet southern ladies magnolia white,
and smooth like silk gowns. Where
black animals, they know their place,
and thick tar lips can never graze a white face.

That ole boy had to learn it the hard way;
thought maybe he was different. He
tricked a poor little lady into his arms,
then we had to save her; we pulled her away from harm.

Take that boy on to jail we said.
We were really merciful; he could've been dead,
but ole darkie don't know when he got it good. He ran
'way from jail, ran fast as he could.

Hang him from a tree and watch his mouth twist. Watch
his eyes bulge, and his rope bound wrists.
Teach 'em a lesson about stepping out of place.
Ain't no hope in Maycomb for a fallen race.

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Erika E. Wade is a senior at Alabama School of Fine Arts, where she majors in Creative Writing. She has participated in several spoken-word events, and recently won Birmingham Public Library's county wide Word Up contest as part of the 2007 focus on To Kill A Mockingbird by Alabama native Harper Lee. Ain't No Hope was inspired by the book. Erika currently lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

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KEYHOLE

Humberto Valle

28" x 40" - Acrylic on Canvas Board

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

ALL MY GIRLS

Chelsey Flood

Control alt delete. Get the hell outta here, dirty girl!

My littlest daughter Krista runs over to me gaspin' and splutterin', excited to tell her about what just happened on TV. I squeeze her palm, heart racing as the screen goes to blue.

That's amazing, I tell her, kissin' her hot forehead, Go find out what happens next for Daddy.

Kim sighs, chewin' on some potato chips. She changes channel. Krista whines and runs upstairs, no point crying to me.

Why d'you do that? I say and Kim just shrugs.

My TV, she says, like that's reason enough and I don't say nothin' else cause if we start on that again we'll never get to stopping. She shakes the crumbs off her vest, big white thighs sunk into new red couch.

I go sit by her, thinking maybe we can still get along.

Come to think of it, it's my couch too.

She shoves me and I get up, keepin' my mouth shut.

Was a time when my woman used to gasp for me, splayed out in my car. She'd giggle in my ear, telling me to do it harder and I'd kiss her pretty mouth, thinkin' I can't believe my luck.

What you lookin' at on there, anyway? she hollers and I holler back. Work, of course, close down a picture that looks too much like one of my girls.

Been a long time since those days. There's Krista and Jenna here now and another on the way. When bedtime comes it's lights out and no messin', just peck on the cheek and roll over.

So, I look at dirty girls on the Internet from time to time, try not to think how they ended up there. Just control alt delete when my girls get too close.

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Chelsey Flood lives by the sea in Cornwall. Her fiction and poetry can be seen in places like Word Riot, Route Magazine, Riptide and Southword Literary Journal. She is very excited about being read in Birmingham, Alabama, instead of Birmingham, the Midlands. chelseyflood@hotmail.com

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two a.m. in the cosmic kitchen

P.T. Paul

does God ever dodder?

does He ever totter
into His cosmic kitchen
and wonder that He left
the suns on?

does He ever nod off
in the middle of the day
and spill whole Milky Ways
on the rug?

does He shrug off
that bothersome bore of a Devil
and tell him, forgetful,
to go straight to home?

does He ever feel alone?

wandering through eternities
of night, does He put out stars,
stretch and yawn?

does He sleep alone?

cuddling His pillow,
does He moan in His sleep,
dreaming of a love He can keep
for His very own?

has He grown?

I only ask because,
nether nights, in my house alone,
the scraping of my slippers
echoes universe wide,
and companions some great silence.

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

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3 PARROTS

Derek McCrea

12" x 16" - Watercolor

Derek McCrea first started painting with oils in the summer of 1984. From 1985 to 1986 he painted under the instruction of Jimmy Peterson. Derek joined the US Army in 1987 and continued self study in Europe. Through self discovery he has developed a very unique impressionistic style. His gallery is at www.derekmccrea.50megs.com

LEGEND

Sara Jane Bush

Day faded slowly from the trees until the ever-present shadows deepened into evening and only a faint light attested that the sun still clung to the edge on the horizon. The forest was oddly still. The small animals were edgy and went about their business with quiet haste. Of the larger animals there was no sign at all. A bird sang, but its call went unanswered and it did not repeat it. A rabbit fled into the brush.

Wind sprang up, driving leaves into a wild frenzy. With it came a low mist that crept along the ground and swirled around the knees of tall horses that had not been there a moment before. They bore unsmiling riders who guided them west at a swift pace and spoke to each other in quiet murmurs. Mail clinked faintly, and a trumpet call soared as if from a half-remembered dream. The wind caught pale banners and unfurled them, but the leaves on the ground no longer stirred or made sound. The forest was silent, held by the spectacle of passing phantoms.

Minutes passed. Slowly the army began to fade until it had vanished from sight altogether. The wind faltered and died, the mist dissipated.

Crickets and birds broke the silence. The sun slipped away at last and was replaced by the silver moon. There was nothing to show that anything unusual had happened, save, for an instant, hoof-beats in the west like thunder.

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Sara Jane Bush is a freshman at Dixie High in Due West, South Carolina. A former Alabama resident, she wrote this story in band class during music interpretation.

scribbler@bushlets.com

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"A hick town is one where there is no place to go where you shouldn't be."

--Robert Quillen

SERENGETI

Doug Van Gundy

In whose cellar, remade into a family room, did I crawl
across crushed pile carpeting to kiss Carrie Dugan
on her freshly-glossed lips because a bottle she had spun
had pointed in my direction? We were in the seventh grade:

I stood a towering four-foot-seven in my black
canvas sneakers, while she, willowy, swayed above me
at five-eleven. She moved in a way that said: gazelle!
all limbs and neck and careful, watching eyes; in love

with the joy her moving body could bring, but in fear
of notice, of being singled out from the herd. I didn't know
then that the feeling I was feeling was called desire, I only knew
that I wanted to be near her in a way I hadn't known.

I wanted to catch her unawares, alone, and watch her
from a place in the tall grass downwind
from the waterhole. I wanted to see her gaze nervously
in all directions, mine even, but never notice

me, and then, when she finally bowed, shyly, to drink,
I wanted to leap toward her and pull her to the ground
and press my hungry mouth
to her trembling throat.

.....

*Doug Van Gundy lives and writes in Elkins, WV. His poems and essays have
appeared in Ecotone, The Lullwater Review, The Fretboard Journal,
Goldenseal, and Wild Sweet Notes: Fifty Years of West Virginia Poetry.
His first collection of poetry, A Life Above Water (Red Hen Press), is not yet an
Oprah's Book Club selection.*

.....



EYE SPY

Sharon Supplee

30 x 24 x 1

Acrylics on Canvas

Sharon Supplee is a self-taught artist who lives in Birmingham's Southside with her husband and 2 year old son. She works from home as a computer programmer and stay at home mom by day, and she paints late into the night. Her inspiration comes from her travels and her everyday life as a wife and mom. asmartchk27@hotmail.com

CHICKEN SOUP

Ash Hibbert

In the beginning, when Lama Yeshy was first initiated, he looked down from his immense mountain in Tibet, and saw greatness in the land and people. He thanked Buddha for creating such a beautiful world of harmony for the people, plant life, and creatures to live in, in peace and harmony. It was then that he came up with the idea of Chicken Soup. His new fellow-Monks became fascinated by the idea of Chicken Soup, and soon merged it into the monastery's diet.

That was many years ago. Lama Yeshy has worked and lived at the Monastery ever since then. Every morning, at sunrise, he looked down at the land below, and thanked Buddha. Each sunrise, the land in view changed a little. Time went by, and the Lama would look around. He saw his old masters dying and new Monks initiated into the Monastery, while in the land below, Yeshy saw greater changes; floods and droughts, war and peace, the exile of great men, the coming of evil men, nations born, nations destroyed.

The slaughtering of many men occurred, but the same was applicable to the chickens. Then one day white men came to his monastery breaking the harmony, as if destroying the walls of a temple. They left, but they took with them his Tantra, his totality.

Yeshy now lives with a few others at the monastery, looking out in the sunrise during the cold mornings, as the earth warms up like a lizard basking beneath the sun, seeking his Tantra, searching for Buddha. Asking why Yin is slowly invading Yang; asking why The Whole is now an imbalance of power; asking why Buddha does not answer any more.

Yeshy continues to search for the Buddha within himself, and seeks his answers in Chicken Soup.

.....
Ash Hibbert has recently finished his novella for a Master of Creative Arts degree, has completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Creative Writing, and an undergraduate degree in Professional Writing with honors. He has been published in the English-Arabic journal Kalimat, the University of Melbourne journal Strange2Shapes, and can be found at www.acoldandlonelystreet.blogspot.com.

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