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A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff and alumni.
Muse

muse: def.

muse v. To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder. N. (Greek Mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 2. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 3. (Archaic) a poet.

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Cover art by Brian Handley
That Day
Matt Barber

One day at the mall, Kaleb is walking toward the arcade. He is tall for his age and very handsome, with long, black hair and a medium build. His looks are lightened by a sweetness that can only be from the innocence that still resides in his eyes. He is excited about a new game called Crazy Taxi. The player is a taxi driver, and the goal is to make the most money and deliver the most people as fast as possible. It provides for some truly exciting gameplay and is totally original. Halfway to the arcade and right next to the MasterCuts, he sees a face from his past.

“Oh my God, Kaleb. I haven’t seen you in forever,” Kristen says. They stare at each other for a second, not knowing what to say.

“I know. It must be like eight years now. Wow, you look as beautiful as ever.” She has shoulder length blonde hair. Her eyes are as green as jade and seem to penetrate anything she sees. She is slender and lithe. “So how are you, Ruby?”

Ruby was the nickname he called her when they were nine. Kristen’s mother used to read her a bedtime story about a young heroine named Ruby who could turn invisible whenever she said the magical word “Jammy.” Kristen would run around Kaleb and say “Jammy,” and Kaleb would play along, “Ruby, where’d you go? Hmm... I wonder where she could have gone.” She, laughing, would start tickling him and say, “Here I am, silly.”

They first met when they were children. Each had an older brother the same age, and they played on the same baseball team. At every game, the boy and girl laughed and played. You could say they fell in love at that sweet, innocent age, but their love was different from the love we understand as adults. Their love was purer... more real. It was not diminished by lust as is so many other relationships. They simply enjoyed one another’s company and desired it above all else. But as they grew older, they began to see less and less of each other. Their memories began to fade and fall apart. The love was beginning to be only faintly remembered and then only as a childish thing.

“How is your brother now?” asks Kaleb.

“He’s doing great. He actually plays baseball for a minor league team. He should go to the majors soon.”

“That’s great!” Kaleb remembers the boy and is proud that someone from his small town is going to make it big.

They ride quietly for a minute, each lost in thought. Kaleb is thinking how amazing the girl in the passenger seat of his ’93 Chevy Nova has become. Kristen is thinking about how much more mature Kaleb is, but he’s still the same silly little boy she knew so long ago.

“Well, here we are.”

Kaleb smoothly exits the car and surveys the park. The fields are exactly the same as they used to be. It’s laid out along the parking lot. One field faces the water park across the road to the north. The next one faces east. Between the two is a concession stand/bathroom. The building looks old and in need of new paint. A path weaves its way from field to field and by the bathroom. It smells of wet grass and earth.

As they drive to the fields, they chatter on about the normal, meaningless garbage that people incessantly force on each other, but for each of them, it is very enjoyable. “Today is unusually beautiful,” thinks Kirsten as she takes in the blue sky and its white puffy clouds. It’s funny how the brain interprets clouds. They’re like mental clay. One can see anything in clouds if she looks hard enough. When she is sad, Kristen often watches the sky move along at its slow soothing pace. It’s comforting to know that no matter what, the sky will always be there, flowing across the vast emptiness.

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He is reminded of sugary taffy and hamburgers. There is really nothing like a hamburger from a baseball game, deliciously simple. Restaurant burgers only pale in comparison.

He leans against the small wooden fence that surrounds the park. Taking in a breath of fresh air, he remembers when they used to walk along the top of the fence. It was something they used to do all the time. The fence around the park was made of wooden logs. One upright log acts as a
connector for two horizontal logs. The bottom log is maybe a foot off the ground, the other about three. They would climb up the fence and walk along the tops of the logs. It was a game that could never get boring and it never got any easier. It was a constant challenge. When one fell, the other would laugh. Whoever got left behind usually got teased, so they were very competitive. Of all their combined memories, it is these moments that are the most vivid, these and chasing foul balls. If a spectator got a foul ball, he could trade it in for a free small drink.

Kaleb breaks the silence, “Do you remember this fence, Ruby?”

“Of course I remember this fence.” She replies with a huge smile on her face, “I used to have the most fun here.”

Kaleb climbs the fence. He walks maybe three feet and starts swaying wildly. He jumps off and makes a smooth landing.

Kristen laughingly says, “Ha ha, silly. Just like always, you fail miserably. Now, watch the master.”

“I believe it was the other way around, Babe.”

She climbs the fence and walks the whole length. A triumphant smile enlarges her face, “That is how you… whoa.” She slips and falls toward the ground. Kaleb catches her right away.

She laughs before looking at him. When her eyes meet his, she is lost. Those baby blues seem to go forever like an ocean.

“My hero!” She speaks only loud enough for him to hear. In this moment they cannot contain themselves any longer. Kaleb kisses her and the world stops. Electricity runs through his veins. He has never felt this way before. The kiss, gentle like you see at weddings, was amazing. Later they would describe it as the single perfect moment of their lives.

Kristen opens her eyes to find that he is still holding her. “I’ve always loved you.” The words slip out before she has a chance to stop them.

“I know.”

Their bodies fill with that warmth that comes only from the heart. They embrace for what seems like forever.

The sky is doing that magic trick that everyone takes for granted; the sun is going down, filling the sky with color. The clouds are sending shadows across the sky. If you look hard, you can see shafts of light everywhere. Everything around them seems to glow with unnatural color.

Love has a way of sneaking up on its thankful victims. This couple was blessed with a love that would stay strong all their lives. Forever, they would remember that extraordinary day when they found each other again after all those years.

Illustration by Eric Coleman
Faraway Minds

Jack Barham

I look out at vacant faces,
dreaming of exotic places
or of lusty trysts completed
or of rivals well defeated
or of rock guitarists strumming
or of gleaming engines humming
or of men in crimson striving
or war eagles swooping, diving,
or the coming night’s excitement
or of my deserved indictment.

What they dream, of course, is only my conjecture,
but I’m sure it’s anything except my lecture.

Fault them not for inattention.
They have dreams too sweet to mention,
dreams that time and life will shatter
but, for now, are all that matter.
Later, when they feel the straining
just to match the pace, not gaining,
they may rue the time spent dreaming
for the needed coins, gleaming,
and the gems of status, glistening,
come to those who practice listening.

But when life’s long year draws nearer to December,
it is the dreams, not lectures, they’ll remember.

Birthday Dinner at the Burfield’s

Kim Conatser

Grandma Clara Faye decided to retire from Hutto Printing two years ago at the age of sixty-seven. In an attempt to cure the boredom of retirement, she throws birthday dinners for everyone. The entire family must attend every gala event. In reality, she wants us to get together and listen to a complete list of her ailments. Family togetherness is a warm thought, but we are not the Waltons. When that many dysfunctional people are placed in a confined area, things can and will happen.

My husband, children and I dread that call. We pack the car in zombie-like fashion, drive the trail of tears, and arrive at the last minute. The entire way, we think of past dinners. There were pillow fights, busted lips, crying kids, and many other hillbilly antics.

We enter the gate and are greeted by Uncle Loyd. He is dressed in his latest line-dancing attire, complete with cowboy hat. He cannot speak more than ten words without cursing, must punch everyone he meets in the arm, and apparently thinks we are all tone deaf. We continue up the gravel driveway into the house. It is extremely cold inside, but only in the living room. Trying to save money, my grandparents cool one room at a time. Going into any other room is like jumping from Juneau into Phoenix. Since it is July, we hang out in the living room. Grandma Clara has enough couches in the living room for all twelve of us.

It is hard to have a focal point in the living room. One possibility is the new twelve-inch-television that is on top of the broken twenty-four inch console model. Maybe it is the collection of National Geographics that date back to Noah. All I can picture is the silver aluminum foil Christmas tree that will be in the corner in almost six months, in all its three-foot glory.

Since the days are warm, we will eat outside. After lining up around a card table to fix our plates, we carefully sit down in rusted lawn chairs. Aunt Hilda read somewhere that water bags will keep flies away. I do not think the article meant to string the entire crime scene in water bags. They are strung from tree to clothesline to swing set like Christmas lights. Our background music, should conversation lag, is provided by roosters, turkeys, and chickens that Uncle Mike has bought from the Lacon Flea Market. He cannot, at the age of forty-one, balance a
checkbook, but he is an overnight success at farming. If the engineering career falls through, at least he has options.

We must continually swat the flies off of our food. The dogs lie in wait for food to drop. Whatever happens, we must not yell. My grandparents have fainting goats that will fall at the slightest slamming noise. All of a sudden, a roll is hurled through the air and lands in Cousin Jenna’s plate. Cousin Andy, even though he is twenty-four, thinks food fights are hilarious. He also thinks that about NASCAR wrecks.

To the left of me, Great-grandma Flora is rubbing my husband’s leg and telling him what a fine looking fellow he is, and how the panthers chase her to the mailbox every morning. She is quite randy for a ninety-one year old. She says soap operas and snuff keep her going.

Why does everyone think he or she is a chef? One should not complicate mashed potatoes by putting carrot chunks in them. And no, dressing should not have fruit in it. Tab that has been in the garage since the last commercial about it aired should not be drunk. And please, will someone inform my mother, Linda, that vegetable soup should not have one giant potato floating in the bottom of the crock pot? Why are we having vegetable soup with hamburgers? I am assuming the coal between the two slices of bread was beef. Instead of after-dinner mints, we need Pepcid.

Finally, Grandpa Coy opens his presents. Can a man have too much underwear? Along with his one-year supply of Hanes, he receives running shoes, a dictionary, hair clippers, and a pair of Hawaiian shorts. I do not think my grandfather even has knees. No one appreciated the practicality of our present, an electric razor. The present that received the most attention and caused absolute hillbilly euphoria was Billy Bass. It is a fish that sings every time someone walks by it. It is very funny the first thirty times.

Grandpa gets bored, gets up, and begins trying to knock the lock off of the utility shed with an axe, which is hard to do with Billy Bass under one arm. He has forgotten he has a key to the shed. Goats are dropping like mad.

The rest of the family hide in their cars, behind bushes, and in the garden to smoke. We cannot smoke in front of Flora because it will give her cancer. The snuff does not seem to bother her.

We gather one last time to bid farewell to each other. We are sweaty, hot, and aggravated and will, of course, talk about each other all the way home. Standard topics will be how Uncle Loyd is in the KKK, Coy does not know what planet he is on, Flora is a closet pervert, Faye is a hypochondriac, Mike should not be living with his parents at his age, Jenna needs to lose weight, Andy should get out while he can, and Linda does not know everything.

We return home with only a mild case of shell shock and have to deprogram ourselves over the next day or so. The famous saying “God looks out for drunks and fools” is very appropriate here. But when our heads hit the pillows that evening, we are extremely grateful for one thing - that the family is not any bigger than it is.

Photo by Heather Equia
Together, we walked along the road. He walked ahead of me, the cool wind blowing in his face. I could only smile and laugh as he hopped along, quietly to myself at first, then out loud, when he would turn his head towards me and smile, never once breaking his stride. He would pick up speed then, briefly, with his head tilted back, that smug look on his face, and that “I’m the King of the Mountain” strut of his, his curled, bushy tail bouncing with each step.

Looking all around as I walked, but mostly at him, I felt his sense of superiority taking over me. The air was crisp and sharp, the sky a sparkling blue, and the clouds were a spectacular and dazzling white. The sun coming down, taking the bite out of the cold, made the now gentle breeze pleasant.

It wasn’t long before I found myself walking faster and faster with each step. The walk quickly became a jog and then, suddenly, I was running, running alongside my friend. Slinging my jacket off and letting it fall to the ground, I raced up the hill. “C’mon Luke! C’mon. I’m gonna’ beat you this time!” I yelled deliriously.

Grace period over. Luke dug his heels into the ground and started to pass. Neck and neck, though only for a few seconds, we ran. As Luke pulled ahead of me, I brought all my energy forward. Arms slinging at my sides, heart racing, head pounding, I ran as hard as I could, still thinking I had a chance. Luke, well ahead now, turned his head and looked back at me, smiling. Laughing out loud, I gave it everything I had.

It was then that we heard it. At the first sounds, we simultaneously broke stride, then stopped, silent, neither of us moving. The screaming began next. The screams were sharp, echoing, frantic. Luke ran to me, pacing nervously at my feet. The screams were a ways off, out of sight, but loud enough for us to hear. We stood motionless, staring in the direction of the sound, our hearts racing, though no longer from the race.

Suddenly a sharp pang ran down my leg. Jerking my leg back and looking down, I saw Luke cowering below, whimpering, ears back, eyes big and bulging.


One of his own was hurt — possibly, probably dying. The screeching of the tires before the instantaneous thud and screams told us what had happened. As I petted Luke, pictures of the injured dog flashed through my mind. I saw a beautiful white Siberian Husky, with a fox brush tail and dark, soft bouncing eyes. I saw a sleek Labrador retriever, like Ben, an old Lab I had had years before. I saw a young puppy, spritely and lively, full of energy, that finally caught the car that he had been chasing for so long.

Then I saw an old, tired and toothless dog, crippled with arthritis, barely able to see and all but deaf. I saw him as he approached the road, unaware of the danger that lay ahead. I saw him walk onto the road, slowly, with an air of dignity, and somewhat happily perhaps, because he could still make his rounds. I saw him never see the car coming, saw him never look up as the screeching tires raced towards him. I saw the car as it crashed into his side, knocking him to the pavement. I watched as it pulled him under, and I heard
the horrible thuds as his trapped and screaming body bounced underneath the car, then spun and slid to a stop on the side of the road. I watched, horrified, as his last, mighty breath pushed its way out of his nose, the blood running in a stream onto the pavement. Then I saw no movement, no breath, no life. I saw no car. I saw no person.

Luke and I waited. Suddenly, without warning, the cries were abruptly silenced. The sound of the gunshot left us frozen in place, frightened. Waiting, we held our breath.

Enough time had passed.

There would be only one shot.

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Natasha George

My life closed thrice before its close.
Once more than Miss Emily's.

Was she as miserable as I am? Did she wail and scream —
Scratch the walls until the blood poured from her fingers —

Did she ache — so that her stomach met her back? Was she afraid of what she wanted most? Did she chase it away
Leaving hope shattered on the floor around her —
As she sat in the corner of her room —
Curléd in a small ball —
Rocking back and forth —
Back and forth.

Did paranoia take hold
And make the smallest attempt of contact with another soul —
Impossible?

So afraid — Of rejection —
Of pushing the persons irrevocably out of her life

Did Miss Emily share the same anguish —
So many years ago.

Did she die
Not knowing what it is to be —
To just be —
To love,
To live,
To step outside the walls that held her —
And, know what it is to be with other people.
Hugs, Smiles, Talks, Belonging —
At long last.

Did Miss Emily prevail —
Or did she wither away and die a long, lonely, lost death —
Experiencing that death each day
Until the final sleep came over her and she was —
No more?

No more —
Is that what awaits me —
Before I can climb the walls —
So many feet high and deep.

To just be —
What a grand thing —
What a grand thing.
The Dream

Todd Hicks

Undaunted princes, princesses beheld
dragons chasing butterflies with
wizards at the helm

Fairies follow laughter as it flows from the child
starlight sets the wood nymphs free
for they have waited all this while

An elven queen walks through roses and with kisses brings the bloom
The forest king rides the hunt
for tonight he is the groom

Winds caress the meadows, urging the grass’ gentle wave
The spirits of old look down
watching their children play

The dawn breaks the darkness with a sliver of its light
as every child begins to stir
from another dreaming night

dragons turn to butterflies, and fairies into trees
the child awakens with a smile
while remembering all of these.

Seeing Is Not Believing

Terri Hildreth

As much as I hate to admit it,
I’m probably as guilty as the next
guy of making judgments about
people based solely on the way
they look. Many times, I find
myself judging people by their
outward appearance. For
instance, if I see a seedy looking
man downtown, I automatically
assume he’s staying at the local
Mission until he can catch the next
train out of town. If I see a
sophisticatedly dressed young
lady, I immediately assume she’s a
lawyer or successful
businesswoman. And, if I see a
man in a turban or a woman in a
burqa, my first thought is to
wonder if this person could
possibly be a terrorist-in-hiding.
Most of the time, I never speak or
even see the person again, but
occasionally I get the chance to
learn more about someone and
find serious flaws in my original
observations.

Because my husband has
spent many years as a service
manager for Harley-Davidson, I
often have the privilege of meeting
his customers. Traditionally, when
one thinks of a Harley rider, one
conjures up an image of an
“outlaw biker” type: black leather,
chains, and tattoos. Due to
deliberate marketing strategies by
the factory, most of my husband’s
customers today are conservative
looking, white-collar types. Many
are businessmen, teachers,
doctors, and lawyers. Generally,
when I meet these upwardly
mobile folks, my initial opinion is
positive, and I think they seem to
be a lot like me. Every once in a
while, though, I get to meet one of
the more traditional biker types.
My immediate, snap judgment
about them is often negative –
what could I possibly have in common with them? Upon further conversation, though, I am sometimes surprised at how very wrong I am.

A few years ago, we participated in one dealership’s annual motorcycle ride, a hundred mile tour around Lake Coeur d’Alene in northern Idaho, culminating in a bar-b-que in the small town of Rockford, Washington, population 376. On this particular ride, our bike was down for repairs, so a customer, one of the “traditional” types, lent us one to ride. Certainly not something you’d expect from a hard-core, tattooed biker who often considers his scooter a more private possession than his old lady. When we got to Rockford, I was introduced to a real variety of people. The only “normal person” at our table was a professor from a local university. Others included a gentleman with nearly waist-length gray-white hair, and two men who turned out to be the president and vice-president of a nationally recognized outlaw biker organization.

I immediately assumed the professor was the only one I’d have anything in common with, but surprisingly, he was the weirdest of the bunch. He talked a lot about the “esoteric qualities” of the ride. I THINK he meant he was having fun, but even after all these years, I’m not sure! The gentleman with gray hair had it pulled back into a braided ponytail and was wearing the prerequisite black leather. During lunch, I discovered he was a Vietnam vet and a mailman. He had his young teen-age son along, who was on a rare visit to town. It was one of the few times they had gotten to spend quality time together as father and son in more than five years. Surprise! This man was much more like me than Professor Esoteric.

Far more surprising, however, were the two traditional bikers. At first, I was hesitant to talk with them. They both were “flying colors” (wearing their notorious club logo on the back of their chain-draped, leather vests), wore their frizzy, shoulder-length hair loose, and one even sported a silver skull and crossbones earring in one ear. Their arms were covered with tattoos, and they carried wicked looking knives on their chrome studded, wide leather belts. In addition, I’m pretty sure the president was toting a firearm, based on the visible bulge below his left breast.

For all their evil-looking, anti-establishment exteriors, they surprised me with the extent and caliber of their conversations. I expected curse words and drug talk to flow from their mouths. But neither swore once the entire picnic, nor did I hear them refer to any drug, legal or illegal, the entire afternoon. They talked about normal things like their kids, their homes, the weather, and their regular (and legal, I might add) day jobs. In fact, the vice-president was a CPA during the week. My husband said he looked very different that afternoon than he usually did in his “going-to-court” business suit and tie. I found myself really enjoying their company after I got past their outward appearance. I don’t know that I would ever have become “friends” with these two gentlemen, but based on their conversations that afternoon, I did find they were far more “like” me than “unlike” me.

Over the course of my life, I have found that I’m not very good with snap decisions of character based on appearance. Sometimes I wonder if this has prevented me from getting to know some really super people because my first impression of them, based on their clothing, the color of their skin, or their general demeanor, was less than positive. I also wonder if my own outward appearance has ever turned someone off from getting to know me better. Because of this, I consciously work at trying not to make judgments based on an initial viewing or meeting. Sometimes this works. Sometimes it doesn’t. Luckily, I’m usually reminded in a gentle way of my folly. At the end of the picnic that day, we stopped in a small bar next to the Rockford City Park for a drink. The place was packed with leather, chains, and tattoos, and my husband and I were decidedly out of place. We sat down at the bar next to a couple of rowdy, traditional bikers who were giving the tiny, harried-looking young lady tending bar a VERY hard time. She gave us a “thank-God-it’s finally-some-normal-people” look and cheerfully asked, “Are you folks in town for the high school reunion?” I chuckled, shook my head, and smiled. “Nope,” I replied and pointed over my shoulder, “We’re with them.”
Letting Go

Terri Hildreth

Is letting go of a child always hard for a mom?

“OOHH!” squeals my daughter. “I want to ride the BIG one!”

I feel panic begin to well up inside me as I glance at her father and grandmother, who don’t voice any type of objection to her statement. Do I really want my not-yet-eight-year-old baby flying down a waterslide that starts about a hundred feet in the air? Tell her no, John, I silently plead.

But her normally over-protective father says nothing. It’s as if he has already reached some kind of new plateau of parental emotional release that I haven’t even begun to glimpse. Well . . . maybe it’ll be okay. Than again, maybe she’ll forget about the big slide once she gets to ride the smaller ones in the complex.

All too soon, I see her climbing up the tower. Up . . . up . . . up. I lose sight occasionally in the jumble of the tower’s wooden framing. Suddenly, she’s at the top, and the lifeguard is measuring her against the wall that encompasses the waiting area. Please, God. PLEASE let her be too short. NO! She must be tall enough because he actually reaches the edge of the slide and begins the fall. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth in terror. She gains speed. Daddy and Grandma laugh and point up to her tiny, plummeting form. My heart is thundering so loudly I can’t hear anything else.

My baby is about twenty feet down the slide when, suddenly, her arms and legs fly apart and wiggle violently in the air. I’m quite sure my heart has quit beating because I can hear only a loud buzzing in my ears. She looks like a baby bird up there, frantically trying out its wings for the first time: flap, flap, flap. Will the wind eventually lift her off the slide? My knuckles are bleached white from squeezing the very life out of the fence post.

The red flag flips. Thank you, God, for letting her make it to the bottom in one piece. I slowly release my death grip on the post as I watch her stand up on unsteady legs. She seems a little disoriented, so the base guard calmly shows her the way to the exit gate. I bolt from my spot in the deep shade into the broiling Florida sunshine and envelope my trembling baby in a huge beach towel. I THINK my heart is beating. At least I know I’m breathing again because I can feel the sting of the salt air in my throat.

“I don’t think I want to ride that one again, Mom. It’s TOO scary,” she says, her voice wobbly. “No one told me not to open my eyes!”

I start to laugh, and look up just in time to see Daddy and Grandma waving to the top of the tower where my son . . . is getting ready . . . to slide . . .

Letting go is always hard for Mom, I guess. But it’s especially hard to do when you’re the one doing the “letting.”

Photo by Julie Doyle
The Jukebox

Donna Holt

I do not remember the name of the café where I first saw a jukebox, only that it sat somewhere between Michigan and home. I do remember, though, that I was still at the age where I imagined the whole universe revolved around me, and that it was late in the night when Mary Dee pulled in and parked her green and white Dodge. She was our neighborhood cousin and drove us to Michigan every summer, and no matter how many were packed into the car, her philosophy was “there’s always room for one more.” Sometimes, we were so crowded even the grown-ups had to take time about lap-sitting. Most summers Mama went, but this time, my aunts, Jean and Shirley, just out of high school, were allowed full responsibility for me.

Inside the café, my aunts and I sat separately from Mary Dee and her family. We had to sit beside a window, Shirley said. She’s always been claustrophobic, sometimes even in open spaces. Aunt Jean asked if I would eat a cinnamon roll like we sometimes had at home. I quickly answered yes and asked for a Co-Cola, too. My aunts ordered water, iced with extra lemon and heaped full of sugar from a bowl. The roll was warm and good the way I loved, and the Co-Cola was served the old way: cold with sweat, directly from the bottle.

I heard music first, Buddy Holly’s “Peggy Sue.” I knew the song already from WVOK radio station in Birmingham. I turned toward the music and saw the big, chrome-coated machine. It was awkwardly round, somehow, but beautiful with its gaudy silver buttons and lighted rainbow-shaped colors. I asked permission to go and look.

I stood and watched in disbelief as a question-mark-shaped arm picked the record up, put it back in place, then drew back—soldier-positioned—until the records stopped spinning, reached out, caught another, carried it to the spindle, released it, and remained in place while a gray handle crept over, fell down, and spun out music. I leaned my forehead against the glass and tried unsuccessfully to follow the spinning record.


She came and stood next to me, then leaned down. “It has to have money to work,” she said. “A whole dime.”

“Can’t I have just one little dime?” I asked.

She picked me up and walked back to the table. See if you can find us a dime, Shirley,” she said.
The Importance of College

Jessica Hovis

Life is just a series of roads with unexpected twists and turns that call for quick decision-making skills. I have experienced this dilemma several times. Perhaps the best example of such a dilemma is college. I am learning that college is nothing like I had expected. College life is changing my attitude toward independence, classes, and individuality.

First of all, college is changing my definition of independence. When I was in high school, I thought college would open the door to adulthood. I thought that I would be my own decision-maker and timekeeper. However, since I still live with my parents, I am restricted to the same twelve o’clock curfew I had in high school. Being a college student is not improving my rank with my parents. I now realize that I had a twisted view of independence. College is teaching me that independence means more than just making my own decisions. Independence is the ability to accept the responsibility of those decisions I make. I now understand that college does not bring independence, wisdom does.

Second, college is changing my view on classes. I thought that college would just be a continuation of high school classes. I was under the misconception that I could breeze through classes without studying and still make an “A.” I was completely wrong. Because classes cover more information and are more compact than high school classes, I have to designate more time to studying. College classes are teaching me crucial time-management skills that I did not even realize existed. I am learning that making a good grade in a class is more than just knowing the material for a test; it involves actually retaining the knowledge necessary to succeed in life.

Lastly, college is teaching me the importance of individuality. In high school, it seemed that everyone had a clique that he or she belonged to. Everyone was categorized into a specific group, and each person behaved according to the standards of that particular group. The move to college is changing things dramatically. Many people I knew in high school are maturing and becoming more secure individuals. I am even noticing the change in myself. I am developing a more acute sense of awareness when it comes to my beliefs and principles. I continue to have a firm belief in my own code of ethics, but I am also becoming more open-minded towards others’ beliefs. Being around a more diverse group of people is teaching me the significance of individuality.

College is drastically changing my outlook on life. I no longer have the same view of independence, classes, and individuality that I had in high school. College is helping me to grow as a person, both intellectually and emotionally. The transition from high school to college has left me better prepared for my future.

KUDZU

Jean McCraney

Quietly it creeps
Inch by inch and foot by foot.
Where’s the beginning or the ending?
Where is the root?

A canopy of green that covers all it sees
From the stoney ground to the tops of the trees.

Oh, the stories that it could sing
Of all it has hidden; of cars,
And houses and pretty things.

Its tendrils how fair
The blooms fragrant and fine.
Now tell me, what hides beneath
The mighty, mysterious Kudzu vine?

Photo by Jessica Danielle Border
**Angels In Disguise**

*Erin Mealer*

There are people that pass through your life that may change the way you think.
But just before you realize they’re special, they’re gone before your eyes can blink.
The words they say may touch your heart and may leave an impression on your mind.
It makes a small part of me believe that in this world there could be angels of some kind.
They may be in friendships that have come and gone and they may be right in front of your face.
They may be total strangers giving a helping hand and helping you see hopes and dreams that you may want to chase.
They make you see the good in everything wrong and they brighten your day when you’re feeling sad.
They are the people you say goodbye to every day or maybe even the best friend you ever had.
So I won’t feel bad I let them come and go and I shouldn’t be sad they went away.
I’ll be thankful I knew them that moment in time, because new ones pass through your life every day.

**More Than Just Me**

*Erin Mealer*

I thought to change the world and maybe even people.
To be someone unexpected and more than just myself.

And seeing inside a mind or heart causes me only pain.
So in ignoring my feelings, I sought to help all else.

The weight of many on my shoulders causes me to fall.
My mind strains and my heart aches and only I change.

Words left unspoken and dreams not followed lingers in the air.
Though the people I yearn to help listen not and turn away.

Being always in thought to change the perspective of those in need.
And in putting others ahead I miss out on fulfilling prior dreams.

So I give up on those that doubt me and turn attention to good.
With so much time wasted on all else I failed to make myself happy.

I thought to change the world and maybe even people.
To be someone unexpected and more than just myself.
Her Finest Hour

Jean W. McCraney

She was formed by God’s great hand;
And yet discovered by mortal man.
In the beginning she was nurtured by a few,
But because of them, she grew and grew and grew.
Beautiful, innocent, and pure,
She has a distinctive lure.
Some sought her for spiritual need,
While others looked for gold and greed.
She has been a Mother, a Sister and a Friend,
Providing a safe haven for many
And has been torn apart from within.
Her brothers have fought each other
And shed blood on her own land.
Yet, they have also valiantly died
For freedom on the shores of foreign sands.
Her finest hour is yet to come
As some seek to bring her down,
For she is AMERICA,
The brightest jewel in God’s Freedom Crown.

Drought

Margaret J. Vann

I have been watering for some days now.

My dreams have been of wet woods, mossy rocks,
and you.
In the dreams, we walked into an embrace.

The grass is maintaining.
The shrubs are holding up,
but will I? Will I?

I look at pictures of the Tetons and wonder at the snow
so cold like the dream-water running over rocks,
while I sweat in my air conditioned home
sweeping away wasps and thoughts of you.

Most of the weeds are pulled, and
I turn the dry soil as
I turn from responsibilities ranged behind me, and
I turn to you in a dream of cool woods
in another life of another me
while the clothes turn in the dryer, and
I turn and turn, and
no one’s there in the woods of mossy rocks and cold water slipping.

I have been watering for some days now.

New York Twins

Matthew Nolan

Take the New York City “C” Train to Spring.
I am in SOHO, lost, where do I go?
Look for the Twin Towers,
Twin Brother and Sister they stand,
offering me a hand, whispering, “go south.”
South go I, blue sky, through China Town.

Twin Brother and Sister tower tall,
watching over all.
They whisper, “Come downtown,
peer across the water and see the crown
on my Mother. She too is tall and holds a torch:
Wait, I feel a scorch.
What is it Sis? A fire in this...
My legs are giving.
We must protect the living.”
Twin Brother and Sister scream,
“Run lost man while we crumble . . .
Come back and wait;
Watch my Sons and Daughters rise,
and soar through Heaven’s Gates.”
Zipidy

Matthew Nolan

Zipidy dust dream,
mind spilling out sharp stars, illuminating love off sparkling bubble springs.

Zipidy dust dream,
heart, flat
reinflates to gain its shape and size
and checks for busted seams.

She listens Zipidy,
to what is seems
are words with no means.

So I crack my chest and she walks in,
choking my heart, but inspiring my pen.
Not for bad or for good, just to be understood.
I sew up my chest and trap her in.
A rhyming poem is such a sin.
I expel her from my mouth to play.
I promise no more rhymes today.

Today we hold hands, in a circle of ours,
expected to be slashed, and tied to the bars.
We lock our fingers in a weave
and rejoice in being undeceived
by love.
We must not unlock our hands to wipe the blood and tears from the face of the other. Instead look white into the pale,
grimacing hope of her, and promise to die, to live for her more.

As it has been, this inspiring pen,
has worked again, and not for sin,
as it may seem.
It is for love I write and retire tonight
on a cloudy night—no stars.

Zipidy dust dream,
take me away. I feel my senses dulled.
The sin of rhyme, in a writer’s mind,
has made this poem mulled.

But she came to me Zipidy,
from a star, and stabbed my heart to bleed.
Not to kill, but to bring it to life,
and now it can sing and scream.

Plus, she reads the words I write.
The words without any mean.

Breakfast in Bed

Matthew Nolan

She rattles in the kitchen
for breakfast in bed

Lingerie hangs still
as she robes to dress

She says,
“Can I get you something?
No shower for two
Just breakfast in bed for you”

Fans stir the hot kitchen
and smell of burnt bread,
Is that your new perfume?
Just breakfast in bed

In baby talk she says,
“Can I get you something to drink?”

I am naked in bed, I said,
Set the kitchen to flames
and come to bed

She says,
“No sex in bed. No shower for two. I must watch my weight.”
As she ate and ate and ate

I said,
“Why must this be breakfast in bed?”
Drink

Harry Moore

My granddaughter with skin smooth and dark as a Yoo-hoo drinks deeply of orange juice, smacks her lips and says, “Ahhh,” cutting her dark eyes to me, who taught her to relish drink so audibly.

My uncle, a big man, broad of shoulder, thick, ate turnip greens and chitlins, laughed at risque jokes, shot quail on the wing over trembling pointers, gave bubblegum from service station shelves to decades of children, balanced tires till nickels quivered upright on humming hoods, told delicious stories of deep dark woods, gave me a shotgun I ambushed squirrels and frightened doves with and a gold watch I marched to for years, let me drive all one summer his rose two-toned ’57 Chevrolet.

On hot childhood days beneath the Pure sign he lifted cold, dripping RCs Coca Colas, Nehi’s, and drank deeply, cutting his eyes at me as I followed suit.

Floor Whispers

Elena Mitchell

When I was six years old, I began taking ballet lessons that were held in a special room. Fifteen years later when I went back to visit it, and I could still remember all the details of the place, even though things had changed. The sunlight from the three large windows next to the hand bars reflected in the mirror made the room very bright. The mixture of the sunlight from the windows and the glow off the light yellow colored walls made the room feel comfortable, warm, and inviting. There was a huge mirror on the wall, which made the room look almost twice as large as it actually was. Opposite this mirror was a very long hand bar attached to the wall where other young girls and I performed our exercises. It was both amusing and interesting to watch the reflections of the synchronous movements of our delicate bodies in the mirror. I still remember the fresh, natural smell of the pine timber on the floor. The pine flooring made the room smell like fresh cut wood from a sawmill. The wooden floor was excellent for dancing. Out pointe shoes made a rustling noise on the floor. The sound from our shoes made it seem as if they had tiny voices that were whispering to the floor. When I went back to this room years later, I felt like I was this young girl again. It reminded me of my unforgettable childhood, where I had dreamed to be a ballerina. The memories of this place made me want to instinctively arch my back, then tiptoe and pirouette around the room to the music of our old piano like I did many years ago.
I Want A Girl Who...

Matthew Nolan

Takes a shower, instead of a bath.

Uses the cheap shampoo, because it doesn’t matter.

Rubs her hair dry with a towel and then tosses it aside, instead of wearing the towel upon her head.

When she tosses her towel aside, she never puts on a robe, but walks around naked.

She...

Puts a rubber band in her hair, instead of using a curling iron.

Wears her grandmother’s jewelry, instead of a newly set diamond.

Rarely powders her nose, except for maybe once a day.

Paints her nails pretty pink or fiery red, then digs in the dirt.

All the while, she is completely feminine.

Over dinner she stirs her coffee in circles, instead of figure eights, and can discuss...

The Civil War—without causing one,

Degas, the classics, and the speck of food on her face.

Second Hands

Matthew Nolan

Sick of everything having an expert:

An analysis of dental care for cats, computers, architecture, space travel, and how close a band aid can match the color of rotting skin

I want to rip apart the back of a clock and eat its parts.

I would dig a pencil in my chest if man didn’t widdle the pencil from the tree of God’s creation and carve out a little soul inside of me to echo a rattling in my stomach and a humming and a shaking making food and sleep for tomorrow because the tree in me has brittle roots that scream in curls around grainy dirt

because vomit expels life and starvation lead to sores

Since vomit pulls from the stomach and travels through the soul, I told you once already, mine echoes and is cold.
The Perfect Couple

Matthew Nolan

Two books stand upright on the kitchen table, pressed together by the hands of my dear wife. She glides the books in circles across the wooden table, snapping up splinters and enjoying the sound. Her arms move like a dance and her head sways freely at about half the speed. I notice a thick line of dust settled between the two books. My eyes can hardly keep up with the furious circles my wife is making, until the circle opens and the two books shoot out from the side of her hip, smack the wall, then slide down and open to any given page. As quick as my legs can bend, I leap from the kitchen table, straight for the books. I land on my belly, my chin clicks, and I swipe for the books. I cradle them both at the inside bend of my elbow and lick them clean of dust. My wife, Lolly, falls in crazy laughter straight on her back. And like a turtle, she can’t kick over, so I toss the books aside, pucker my lips, and parachute on top of her. We embrace in a long kiss until spit drips off our chins.

Oh, Lolly sure is a keeper. I knew it since the day I saw her at Dr. Pete’s office. Our eyes never met. I was too afraid. Even now, we always hug and kiss with scrunched up baby faces who peek out of the corner of their eyes. Our ears touch mostly. A typical day is spent seated in silence in the living room, counting the cracks in the plaster wall—for periods as long as four hours. Sometimes the tick of the clock makes Lolly jump from her trance, pause, then dart for the bedroom, bolting the door behind her. Her startled behavior frightens me, so I go for the bathroom and rest in the tub with the door latched.

It works out all right though. We don’t fight much because we can’t understand what the other is saying. What may cause major frustration in another marriage, confuses us enough to be happy. Luckily, I am preoccupied with the fear of dying from bacteria, brain congestion, or the house collapsing. If repeated words heat up to a shout, I start shaking and lose my eyes to the carpet—which then gives her the opportunity to speak her side. Sometimes I get stuck on one word. Other times I get lost in time and space. Either way, we both cry in a sweaty embrace, stumble to the ground, and lock and roll from the kitchen to the living room. We do this just for fun even though it hurts and feels confusing. Sometimes a suspicious noise will take us from chewing on our fingers to a wide open screech of terror that separates us on opposite ends of the house. We stay hidden from each other for days. Sometimes I seek her out from the back of her head with a fist full of hair. I may throw something or break something I didn’t want to begin with. Lolly will then call me silly and feed me my brain medicine. That takes the snap away where I can think half straight. If she don’t strike back, we laugh and coo in each others arms among broken plates. Sometimes we make castles with them.

I don’t understand our peculiarities, but it feels okay. Lolly is afraid to go outside for fear the sun will make a puddle of her body and the moon will fall if she looks up. Lolly gets hard on herself for this and will stay in the closet for days and count numbers. But she can only count to six. That leads to brain congestion, which I can’t comfort her, because I am afraid the disease will go from her to me.

Oh, I sure love Lolly. Our love stretches out over years. I can’t figure out why people give up on marriage. What is wrong with lovers? Is anyone normal anymore? Wait, I hear something. It’s my Lolly! Is that her head banging against the wall? Oh... It is a full moon outside. I must go comfort my sweetie now with slobber kisses.
Horizons

*Sue Pumphrey*

Marshall Space Flight Center’s pursuit of life beyond our horizons created a need for another entrance road. As the massive construction equipment built a new commuter road across the swampy marsh, commuter cars and SUVs rushed along, swerving briefly to avoid the cumbersome movement of the massive land tortoise, as he pursued, beyond his horizon, his vanishing home.

Commitment

*Sue Pumphrey*

The bouquet of yellow roses and the apology card beside the faded wedding portrait and the dog-eared photo album kept quiet vigil in the flickering candlelight.

My Lovesong to Language

*Sue Pumphrey*

When late September softens summer’s heat into sweater weather, and the sky above shows my favorite hue of blue, remember my lovesong to language.

When the moon is new and only glistening stars shine above, whisper words of poetry off on a river raft ride where words in the whistling winds will come to cradle and caress with the romance of sound.
Honor Them Today

Tom Reese

Fly that flag proudly, knowing that a veteran
Gave you the right to your freedom.

Look at The Wall, read the names.

See the headstone at Arlington.

Those old men conducting the ceremonies, once young,
Gave their all for our freedom.

Now they honor long dead friends, fallen comrades.

Knowing they gave their all,
knowing we remember them,
as we honor them today.

Salute and listen as the last tap is played.

This Veteran’s Day.
Waiting for the Morning

Brenda Parris Sibley

I sit awake with you
in the scary midnight darkness,
telling you everything is okay,
calming you down after a dream,
holding your hand as you wander,
searching through the house
for remains of your former life.
I sit as you sleep in your chair,
when you won’t go back to bed,
knowing you will wake in terror,
afraid of a dream, afraid of not
knowing,
afraid of everything.
And sometimes you won’t hear,
my words will be as meaningless
as the ones you sometimes say.
And perhaps you will reach out,
sometimes searching, sometimes
striking;
I’m here for you, whatever you
need;
I’ll even be your punching bag.
But I can’t fix things for you;
I can’t bring your memories back.
They are gone, just like the house
and people you search for.
All I can do is sit and wait
with you for the approaching
dawn
when things will look a little better
illuminated by the light of day.

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Little Girl Again

Brenda Parris Sibley

She walked with me to see the flowers
and the kittens at the barn.
She talked to them “Kitty, kitty”
as I held her by the arm.

She didn’t eat much lunch
but rather wanted sweets.
She got upset when I scolded,
and pouted till she went to sleep.

She was delighted again
when snack time came,
and she loved sitting all afternoon
on the front porch swing.

Again she didn’t eat much
at the evening meal,
and she grew so very sleepy
she could hardly sit still.

I hugged her and tucked her in,
and told her goodnight.
But not much later she awoke,
crying out in fright.

“Where are my momma and poppa?
Why did they leave me here?”
She sobbed “I want to go home”
as I wiped her tears.

She’s trapped in the body of
a woman of seventy-nine.
I always wanted a little girl.
My mother now is mine.

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Shannon

(in memory of Shannon Hoon, singer of Blind Melon)

someone put out a flame today
in the early morning light
quiet, so quiet
the hum of the city
the big big easy
a bird chirping in the distance
and the whispers of addiction
demons dreaming, dancing, scheming
captured up in the rhythm of the sixth dimension
could not go on another day
he left a little light behind
since god put a little extra in his box
gave some to his nico
gave some to the world
a light in colors we’ve never seen
haunting, beautiful, magical, spiral
so rare, so wild
someone put out the flame
and then it rained.

Vending Machine Blues

Jamie South

You never work when I need you most…
You just clam up in silent protest
And eat my change.
You never have what I like
But I’ll take anything you have
Because it’s the only food on campus.
Don’t make me walk away
Broke and hungry again.
That’s not very nice of you.
Perhaps someday you’ll cooperate
And spit out all the money and candy bars you’ve taken
from me.
Perhaps someday I won’t have to pay taxes
and my dog will sprout wings
and it won’t rain when I go on vacation.

Skipping Paris

Bryan Summerlin

I don’t remember the list of dorm amenities including
dreams that leave me awake and grasping
at memories, moments from separate Oxford nights
condensed
into questions.

What shadows try desperately to hang
on to the carpet and the walls?

What echoes linger
in the streets, hidden
between cobblestones that grabbed
at your high heels as we ducked
out of the bar
aware of the stares?

Whatever made us forget
the world that night?

Whatever makes me not regret
kissing you where the martyrs burned,

Still says tomorrow we have to leave this place
but tonight could last so long.
St. George

Bryan Summerlin

I remember the crystal sea was glowing green like a lit hotel swimming pool but more like her eyes.

No, that was last summer. This time,

Out at the horizon you could see where the sullen, tired sky had barely dipped into the sea. The gunmetal water had gone cloudy with the cold.

She had dressed carelessly, throwing on faded jeans and a sweater. Thinking a winter beach could be the perfect opportunity to dress like I was in a Ralph Lauren catalogue, my blue Oxford was perfectly halfway tucked into wrinkled khakis.

The bay-side gulf tide gaped and stretched, flooded in without waves, desperately wanting to possess her, to hold her in place and gently sway her back and forth in the depths. Laughing, she stood just out of its reach.

Illustration by Mike Cosgray

Interstate Underpass

Bryan Summerlin

This river still runs, never quite breaking the glassy silence that has covered her banks since we left. She calls to all her boys that have gone, usually in whispers soft enough to slip through the distance and bring some of us back.

She doesn’t even remember the girls. It must have made her jealous when we retreated to the woods with them and tried to get mosquito bites in unlikely places.

When we were hundreds on the banks all trying to drown her voice with Natural Light and teenage wisdom, she waited.

These days I stand here alone, in up to my knees, just feeling her watery fingers caress my feet and swish the world away.
Happy to Be Here

by Beth Thames

At first, there is a forgetting, like with any other death. We don’t have to slide our feet over the furry brown and white hump at the foot of the stairs when we come down in the morning, because the hump isn’t there. We can say the word “walk” out loud, because nobody will lurch forward, ears standing straight at attention, and demand that we go right now!

It’s not necessary, these days, to keep ratty old towels as dog-washing ones since we don’t have our pup. The same goes for cans of Mighty Dog, a yellow tennis ball, a blue and white braided leash. We don’t have to make sure the coast is clear for the mailman on his route. Now, we have no idea when the mail gets here; nobody barks his part threat “I thought I told you not to show up here!”, part announcement: “That guy is here again!”

Our Sheltie, Jones, died after more than a decade of living in our house. He always seemed happy to be here. Before that, he lived on a puppy farm in Madison, leaping into my son’s arms as though it had been decided. Pick me. I’m the one. And he was, for twelve years.

His end was sudden and abrupt; like a train running off a track—a ruptured tumor the doctor said. Jones had crept into middle age with joints creaking and legs and back stiffening. We could identify. We were there, too. His daily walks became shorter, more laborious. Once my husband had to come and pick us up in the car, as Jones couldn’t make it home.

Most days, his arthritis kept him from racing up the steps into the house, the way he did in his youth. On his last day, I had to lift him, part by part, onto the porch.

My husband decided we should have Jones cremated, so we did. We will scatter his remains in the back yard next to the hydrangea where he liked to doze, nose buried inside the flowering bush, backside sticking out like a huge furry leaf. A neighbor brought by a Day Lily to plant in his memory; another brought a bouquet. My daughter gave us a book called Dog Heaven. The plot is soothing. When dogs get to heaven, they just run.

When Jones and my son were both teen-agers, I saw them out walking one day and pulled my car over to talk. It was a yellow October afternoon, and the red and gold leaves made a quilt for paws and feet. My son asked if we could have take out Chinese for dinner; I said we could, and he executed one of those straight up in the air jumps, kicking his heels together before landing on earth again.

Jones leapt up, too, catching the joy of the moment. I’ll remember the day, the boy, the dog, the small hours that make up the bigger patterns of our lives. And I’ll remember that scattered ashes come back as hydrangea leaves, blades of grass, bushes that other dogs greet in a one-legged salute. I’ll remember the way some creatures, just like some people, are simply happy to be here.
Fishing with Father

by Beth Thames

On fishing trips with my father, I never had to bait my own hook. That was his concession to my femaleness. I would look away, across the green flatness of the water, and he would tell me when the deed was done. Then I'd put my line in, trying not to look at the struggling worm. My father saved his lures and fancy bait for fishing trips with his friends. It was worms for us.

He called fishing “peaceful.” I called fishing boring. We'd go in the spring and in the early fall. We fished most anywhere he had experienced a little luck. Sometimes we shoved our battered rowboat into a crooked creek crawling through the county. The muddy water, in no hurry to get to the sea, crept past the boat like so much sludge.

Other times we took my Uncle Jimmy’s motor boat out on the brown Warrior River, puttering fast toward the middle, like people on a mission. Once we were there, we sat for hours, like two chumps that had been stood up by the fish. Not one of them bought our lines.

Neither of us cared. Our trips weren’t really about catching fish; they were about being on the water on a fine fall day, skipping rocks when we’d given up on the fish.

I was there because it was expected of me. My father had no sons, and my carping teen-aged sister was not about to sit in some boat waiting for some bream to bite. She was busy with her plans, very busy, just as I would be in a few years.

My father must have known there wasn’t much time left before I would enter that mystery of adolescence: the slammed door; the coded phone conversations; the secret life. He hooked me while he could.

So I went fishing because I knew he wanted company and because a boat was a good place to read. My father went fishing because he wanted company, and a boat was a good place to fish. He liked the occasional pull on the line and the small drama about whether or not to keep the fish. We never kept the fish; they were too tiny.

I came to associate these trips with Nancy Drew books, the slow slush of lapping water, peanut butter and banana sandwiches, and Chocolate Ne-Hi drinks, floating in our cooler like glass fish.

My father must have associated these trips with loafing, which he didn’t allow himself much of, and with lecturing. A student of the natural world, he told me the names of trees, water bugs, wildflowers, creek grasses. A red leaf would float by and he’d name it by type, then scoop it up and put it on the floor of the boat like a specimen. He always wanted me to learn the names of things. I wish I had.

Out on that river, we were floating in our own country, still years away from the churning waters of the sixties and all that history would bring. When we were adrift, nothing could touch us. We weren’t anywhere, really.

At the end of our fishing trips, my father would smoke his last Tarryton cigarette and we’d finish off the remains of our lunch. Occasionally, he’d take a nap on the rocking floor of the boat while I read to the end of my book. No fish bit our hooks. No boats left a wake. There was such peace out on that water.
fall wine

Margaret J. Vann

lusting for the sharp, sweet flavor of muscadine
rolling down sand-paved road edged with browned ferns
moving toward the cove beneath old growth forest
searching canopies for the purple grape of hardwood bottoms
streambed strewn helter-skelter with giant boulders
sun-heated rocks with crisped lichens
shrunk tepid pools glazed with yellow leaves
too soon set loose from drought-stressed trees
yet there among the burned foliage
flame spires of Cardinal flower
flaming without burning
filling the eye & soothing the heart
still lusting for the sharp, sweet flavor of thick-skinned grape
lusting for the distilled memories flooding the mind
memories acrid as the glass of sweet muscadine wine
become vinegar

April

Margaret J. Vann

Yesterday I returned to my heart
and went looking for ghosts
They were not hard to find

See there
amid the dappled leaf—leavings of yesterdays
amid the violets—you do remember
amid the trout lily—fangs slicing
amid the trillium—so upright
amid the floods of flowers
the washes of streams and memories

(ghosts to keep my heart company
I left it there)
The Poetry of Life

Stuart Wilson

Falling in a symphony of colors,
Drifting slowly towards the mother who gave them life
Meandering rough space to the ear and all its strife.
It is the time, again the season
Days grow shorter, nights grow longer
All seeming without reason.
Yesterday it was summer,
A week ago it seemed spring,
Now summer turns to autumn
As green falls from the leaves
And the cycle begins all over again.
Despite our frantic search still time ticks away
Despite our advances we walk slowly into evening.
We hold so little in our sway,
And watch helplessly as golden glorified youth turns gray.
Still our lives drift slowly down
Towards the mother who gave us life.
From dust we are and to dust we shall return
This is the poetry of life.

Fear

Stuart Wilson

Have you ever stood atop a hill,
Breathed in a view, which God has made?
Perhaps, stood breathless of your stubborn will
And on an august picture gazed?

Or with awe you may have wondered what
Sir Hillary must have seen
When he first topped that snowy peak
Where no foot before had been.
I could tell you of the breeze
The grass, rocks, trees and air
Or write with skillful words a song
Of how it felt up there.
But you could not truly know the view
Unless you went yourself,
Stood worn and breathless, tired and cold
At the top of a heavenly shelf.

Life has given us the same
We choose safety or chance
‘I’ll sit and watch here on the side”
Or “Do I dare to dance?”
Lazy life has lent us love,
And loss and lamentations.
Don’t fear grief too much to take
That chance which bore creation.
My Grandfather

Stuart Wilson

Before the world had spoiled its children with materialism,
And turned itself upside down
Before the whole earth learned how to frown
My Grandfather would come in.

As early as man could rise—
While I was lost in dreams
With sandy sleep still sticking my eyes,
And before the sun had begun the day,
With a gruff kind of laugh
He would say.

“Get up, boy get your breakfast”
So slowly I would roll from my fat feathered bed,
As if I were eighty years old—
But being only twelve
I would rise to begin my day of work.

My Grandfather was a mason by trade,
As were most of the men in my family.
For forty years he had done this work,
Freeing formless rubble
To the shape that somewhere lurks.

But my grandfather knew well that place,
Where rubble becomes form
And brick becomes shelter strong but intricately laced.
To him a pile of rock became a wall,
A brick or block turned to form before him, as he stood tall
In watchful command over his soon-to-be wall.

My grandfather could see the shape that lay dormant and still.
Neither architect nor engineer
Could draw from the dust the shape he saw with his skill.
He knew that form comes only
From agreements made by hand,
With these hard unmovable things
Who, with coaxing, agree to shelter man.

But I—
I have no spade to follow men like him.
Still in my own way and yet because of him,
I aspire within my dreams to be the best that I can.