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. 3. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 4. (Archaic) a poet.

Editorial Committee
Linda Burns • Jill Chadwick • Randy K. Cross
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Cover art by Jessica Loch

Foreword:
Springtime calls to mind many things: flowers, love, and new beginnings, to name a few. It is also the time of year that Calhoun Community College showcases some of the many talented souls who have passed this way by publishing their offerings in Muse. We, the members of Muse’s editorial committee, are amazed each year at the number, diversity, and quality of the works submitted for inclusion in our annual publication. The poems, stories, essays, photos, and artwork are the products of students, faculty, and staff members, both current and former, and we appreciate their sharing their talents with us.

This year marks our thirteenth edition, and in honor of our Second Annual Writers’ Conference, we also include a special Writer’s Conference section that contains poems from Ms. Donna Holt and Mr. Stuart Bloodworth, who, along with Mr. Len Roberts, will be reading from their poetry at this year’s conference on April 11, 2003, here on our campus. We encourage you to attend the conference. Ms. Holt and Mr. Bloodworth will be taking part in a book signing following the readings, so be sure to bring along your copy of the Muse. Additional copies will be on sale at that time.

We hope you enjoy the 2003 Muse.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Turner
Editor

Published by the Language Arts Department and Sigma Kappa Delta
Writers’ Conference Selections

DONNA HOLT is a native of Athens, Alabama, and now resides in Decatur. She has published several poems and short stories, and in 1989, received the first-place award in the Southern Literary Festival competition for her story “Rose.” After attending Calhoun Community College, she graduated from Athens State College with a degree in English. Ms. Holt has twice been awarded the William Butler Yeats Award for creative writing, and her story “Fruit” was chosen for publication in the anthology of Alabama writers, *Alabama Bound*.

2 A.M. At The Kettle Restaurant
Huntsville, Alabama

*Donna Holt*

Trembling weak-kneed I raise
the coffee mug to my lips
thankful He took the wheel
as it spun out of control.

I wonder why waffles are so big
and ham so little. Why there’s pain
and loneliness and suffering-
and how in God’s name
Jesus ever stood it?

Fair Play

*Donna Holt*

Like a bird
I pecked at Sunday dinner
begged two dollars from my daddy
hurried out the door

stepped into Debbie’s shiny red GTO
raced up and down North Jefferson
burned rubber from Hardee’s to Burger Chef
Bibles lying in the back seat.

Stole kisses from football-player boyfriends
at an old abandoned church near Lucy’s Branch
smoked a little reefer planned our futures
got back to church in the nick of time.

My daughter begged me for five dollars today
nibbled at her dinner ran outside and got
into Mary’s blue Toyota.

I curl on the couch like a fat lazy kitten.
I regret having thought my mama stupid.

Bastard

*Donna Holt*

Full-bellied
and filled with hate
the woman-child climbed
upon the table cursing
the pains.
Went down to hell gnashing
her teeth damming the bastard child
and screaming with opened eyes
savored the snip that severed the ties.

Passage
For: Judy Living Ashford
(1952-1994)

*Donna Holt*

We stood tall upon that starlit
creek bank pretending courage.
But girls will do anything to be with boys.

The gigs lay across the back floorboard.
“Who’s first?” Eagle asked, pulling them out.
“Don,” you said, looking at me laughing.

We calmly took to the hood. Watched
them enter the creek stabbing the darkness.
They knew. And soon stopped.

We would’ve died. Run screaming at the sight
of a bleeding frog. They sauntered shyly,
less confident of us. Climbed upon the hood.

We watched the stars, laughed. Joked. Laughed.
Moved. Laughed. Then kissed. They hoped for more.
Silly Sophomores!
Weren't we the ones?
Soon to be capped and gowned?
Soon to turn our last assignment:

“One day to live.”
I copied you. I, too, would eat vanilla ice cream. Play Andy Williams records.

“Holt: Fellow Senior and sweet kind friend, when we become old, old women, you'll stand out as one of my best pals…”

Old Time, ain't you tired?
Can't you reverse that axle awhile?

Were you happy, Living?
Did you play out your hand?

Dear sweet, kind unforgettable friend.
Forty is young.

You Lied to me.

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 neighbor-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 out to lap-sit. 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, direct from a little bottle.

I heard music first, Buddy Holly’s “Peggy Sue.” I knew the song already from WVOG 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.

Aunt Shirley looked deep into her purse and pulled out a nickel, then five pennies, one at a time. The waitress gathered the change and laid down a dime.

Back at the jukebox, Aunt Jean held me up. I dropped the coin into the slot and she guided my fingers to the numbers. “Push hard,” she said.

I watched the process again and out came the voice of Richie Valens, singing “Oh, Donna.” I imagined he wrote that song just for me. I was, after all, at the center of the universe and must be the only girl on earth named Donna.

All the world was wonderful and filled with magic that night. I reckoned it always would be. I did not imagine that my aunts ordered water because they had no money for anything else, or that I had just spent Aunt Shirley’s last dime. But I suspect they already knew what we all eventually know: that the magic would not last, that it would remain in paradise where it is born and dies—the place we all start out and live for such a short while, unaware.
STUART BLOODWORTH, an Assistant Professor of composition and literature at Motlow State Community College, received his B.A. in English from the University of Tennessee at Martin and his M.A. from Murray St. University. In addition to teaching for twelve years, Mr. Bloodworth’s poetry has appeared in *American Poets & Poetry, Poem, The Lyric, The Wallace Stevens Journal, The North American Review, The Laurel Review, Potpourri, Verse Daily* (an online poetry site), and *Zone 3*, among others. A poem is forthcoming in *The Connecticut Review*.

Spring Semester

*Stuart Bloodworth*

The barn swallows are packing nests of mud in crevices between the walls above

Humanities’ electric doors where kids fly from philosophy and rhetoric

into the breeze, oblivious to long twittering notes because of their own songs.

They’re loud as jays and mockingbird-adept at improvising on the red-brick steps

that lead downhill to dorms, the swimming pool, away from insect-snatching mouths now full

of earth, forked tails and heads so black they’re blue. Some scholars in the building say that truth cannot be held in hand or daubed by beak and that’s their tune, not without its melody.

The industry, in time with spring, goes on—rapid and tireless wings beneath the sun,

the voices on the softball field, dust kicked by shining cleats, the sweet metaphysics

of blooms. Bodies move over grass and air assuming that a sturdiness is there.

Debris

*Stuart Bloodworth*

With no fanfare the truck pulls away listing with the red couch, tables and lamps and two boys sitting—a mobile living room followed by a junked Lincoln long as a barge stuffed with boxes, bed slats jutting from back windows. Another shabby house awaits and for three months, until the wiry man piloting the truck hurts his back laying brick or leaves the big woman following him, the refrigerator will hum, in a flayed deal dresser the boys will stow their clothes, and the rented-by-the-week television on milk crates will flicker promises.

Among the debris in the ditch—
a punctured plastic swimming pool with grinning whales, pile of ripped-up quarter round, nails bristling, and a scuff-less pair of black cowboy boots, white filigree down to the pointed toes, the price still stickered on the heel.

Somewhere soon they’ll unload, the silent man heaving a stained mattress to the high grass, carrying on his shoulder, heavier than his wife’s cedar chest, a sullen pride that the two weedy boys learn to bend under as they haul through a different screen door the flayed deal dresser that belongs to them.
1205 Greenwood Avenue

Stuart Bloodworth

Nothing was left but the dresser and bare bed that I brought to the union so there we sat. Did you crawl into my lap, boy nearly six, or did I force you there, hostage? Your grandparents who wouldn't look at me had picked the place so clean they were hauling out the Boston ferns and bags of safety pins.

Your mother stirred a bowl of oatmeal, brown sugared, soupy with milk, and when she handed it to me our fingers touched. I fed you while she tied your shoes, two people so sick with sadness but unable to keep germy mouths off your face. Then we heard the moving van's door slam down.

My Child, This Is a Lesson to Learn Well

Stuart Bloodworth

The quacking was in vain, the old man's fist around the yellow feet. A horse looked on, a dog's zigzag barking disturbed the dust as he laid the duck across a slab of stone—so white, an archetypal sacrifice.

I checked for lightning because a reckoning had come. The next moment would give me shape, my answer determining life and luck—

Boy, would you rather chop or hold the duck?

I took the road more traveled by and held the bird, the hot blood whacking cheek and ear. My child, this is a lesson to learn well—just look upon the man who's standing here. I might be pope or alderman right now if I had only brought that hatchet down.

Flying J Travel Center

Stuart Bloodworth

In the crook between interstate and miles of soybeans it shines. Thirty pumps, dozens of long-haul trucks grumbling at idle while drivers shower, play video poker, eat in one of three restaurants as clothes spin dry, hunker in the narrow hall beside mop buckets and stacked cases of oil, calling wives and mistresses. You have shadows in bright florescence, you have corn dogs, chicken livers, t-shirts, medicines, a wall of soda, a wall of beer, beef jerky and flags, Penthouse, Bow Hunter, diapers, gum, and a rack of acoustic guitars.

Twenty-four hours a day you can be redeemed. Take a leak, have a smoke and roll that monster onto the ramp, point the van and children into the night.

The sacrament of burrito and forty-ounce coffee abides as you hurtle west or east, under mountains, over dark waters, and you believe again that this big, rough land is where you'll get it right or, no apologies, they'll strew you into the grassy median with a hose.
What He Would Call Them

Harry Moore
— for Muse 2003.
First published in SCETC Journal, Fall 1991 (but not copyrighted).

My father walked on sandy soil after horse-drawn plows, growing cotton, corn, watermelons, fighting bermuda, crabgrass, kudzu, crows, boll weevils, and cutworms. He sawed oak and hickory for firewood, mulberry for fence posts.

Wounded at play, I walk the streets of my subdivision which sits on farms and fields.

Fescue crowds my bermuda on the north, where four white oaks, five post oaks, and a red oak tower houseless on a sloping vacant lot. A glossy blackbird with yellow eye digs at my wet lawn, a worm dangling from his bill.

Killdeers scream keenly by the drainage ditch, a mockingbird sings in the persimmon tree by the mailbox. Beyond the hackberry tangled with cow-itch vines and orange trumpet blossoms a bobwhite whistles pertly. Cut back, a yellowhammer beats a rat-a-tat-tat on a tall dead pine.

Sumac, sassafrass, and wild plum push from an untilled field onto Woodland Road; the field is awash with white queen anne’s lace. Meadowlarks with flat heads and yellow breasts whistle atop gables of two-storey houses, and purple martins dive and dip in the darkening rain clouds. A black-crested kingbird catches a fly in midflight.

These names are of no use to me. Weeds do not threaten my cotton, I’m no florist, my firewood comes precut, oak and cherry dumped in my drive. I don’t hunt birds for food. But I savor straight blackgums among the taller poplars, I relish the sad cooing of doves in the pine thicket rife with honeysuckle; I search books for the proper name of white-breasted bee-martins; I drag branches home to distinguish ash and elm, I wonder what poisonous past christened daisies fleabane. I beg a friend to say for me the exquisite globed yellow blossoms of hop clover.

Beside my concrete drive, in fresh topsoil, small ragweed grows, with johnson grass, morning glories, jimson and careless weed: green chain of years across which my father speaks the names worn smooth with long holding.

Photo by Sue Pumphrey
Grandma

Sheila Byrd

I smiled silently; secretly
surrounded by darkness
the forearm resting on my forehead
automatic
a generation ago,
grandma's forearm lay against her forehead
waiting for dawn.
messages meander through time
in
people—chariots as grandma and me
How awesome to know that everything
I am
was once bits of others
scattered
substance is dormant
substance moves forward.
We are connected
One in a diverse universe
The single intangible thread links us
I am her: she is me.
A stranger sees coincidence
A scientist, physical fact
A psychologist, familial ties
These are myths.
It is the human equation:
I am
She was
I am here
She is
I am here as her, in her, for her—
er her legacy of life and death.

The Devil’s in the Details

Michelle Hill

The devil’s in the kitchen,
as always,
watching the sunrise through the oaks.
He taps his cigarette,
runs his hand over the heavy creases
that speak of anger and age.
Behind these lines lie
a handsome man.
And some don’t seem to notice
how seldom he smiles,
his watery eyes,
crooked hands,
or the Jim Bean on his breath.
As always, the devil’s in the details.

Photo by Jessica Border
Once Upon a Time

Michelle Hill

Once upon a time
I was a poet,
taunting the world
with vibrant songs.
Now, I am mute,
starving alone
in a world where
the jesters mock
my shortcomings.

Once upon a time
I was a dancer,
enchanting the world
with my fantasies.
Now, I am crippled,
falling alone
in a world where
the swans pity
my frustration.

Once upon a time
I was a dreamer,
charming the world
with crystal visions.
Now, I am blind,
crying alone
in a world where
the hawks loathe
my determination.

Once upon a time
I was a princess,
attending the world
with painted lips.
Now, I am ugly,
thrashing alone
in a world where
the milkmaids cry
for my redemption.

Rest My Love, Sleep

Michelle Hill

Rest my love, sleep
while I hold you in my arms.
Let my heartbeat guide you
in lieu of gypsy charms.
Lay your head down on my breast
and breathe the sweetness there.
Listen to my lullaby
and let me stroke your hair.
Rest my love, sleep
but remember where you are.
I know you run away in dreams,
but please don’t run too far.
Dream away your harried day
as you fade into my song.
Slumber deep my love, my life,
but do not sleep too long!

Illustration by Josie Stapler
The Game

Michelle Hill

I’m stronger now.
I can play this game,
and I don’t mind being the toy;
because now I know
you’re not a man,
you’re just a little boy.
I won’t take the time
to show you love,
but I’ll give you a glimpse of joy.
I’m confident now.
I can play this game,
and we’ll see who becomes the toy.

I’m open now.
I will not wait
for your tired hands and eyes;
because now I know
the truth comes cloaked
behind a web of lies.
I won’t waste time
showing you my world
for you’ll leave as the beauty dies.
I’m honest now.
I will not wait
for you to close your eyes.

I’m fearless now.
I will not cry
when you try to teach me pain
for now I know
you’re not in love
and all your thoughts are vain.
I won’t make time to comfort you
when your world falls as rain.
I’m calm now.
I will not cry
when I feel a little pain.

Butterfly

Michelle Hill

Flutter by, butterfly,
on your tiny tattered wings.
Don’t stop to sing to me
the songs that the flower sings.
Just get your pollen, butterfly,
and swallow that nectar down.
Yours is not the life that lives
when it tarries near the ground.

Hurry by, butterfly,
don’t let us bruise your wings.
Watch out for children’s hands
and gifts that the sparrow brings.
Linger but little, butterfly,
for if you stay too long
we must mourn for the life that ends
that once lived for the song.

Illustration by Rea Cottingham
Places Passing
Sue Pumphrey

While her husband was driving, she looked calmly out the window through the streaks of rain running down like silent, unending tears which bothered no one, but only gave obscure views of the places she wanted to visit. Places passing her by as she sat in her silence, for she learned long ago that to ask for her wishes and be denied was harder to bear.

Fate Happens
Joy Parker

Fate happens without a care, just at the moment you are unaware. It takes no notice of your heart, or if you are playing the right part. Mind and soul — Fate comes full circle and makes you whole.

Worthless Fears
Joy Parker

Sleep never comes when wanted. My mind lays weak above my heart that is haunted. Behind closed eyes I still see visions. They are warm at first sight, then cold slithers in fright. Like a soul that cannot die, I haven't cried. Then morning comes. A new day is here. No more time for worthless fears.

Growing Up
Ronald Moore

I was once the hero of a story untold Invincible, untouchable, without a care in the world The great raider of the monkey bars No one greater, near or far.

I could fly Though the roof of my house seemed oh so high No matter how high the fall A mother's kiss could heal all.

...But with time came reality And with reality came pain The pain of the miss, the sin and the fail And now I see so much weakness in these hands...

I find that I am just a man.
The Buzzard’s Soliloquy

Jack Barham

I doubt that any one of us just went to God and said, “Lord, create me as a buzzard, for I want to eat the dead.”

God was sure he wanted buzzards, just the way He wanted trees, so He never thought of asking, “Will you be a buzzard, please?”

So we all got here as buzzards and we must be what we are, ever grateful that God also sent the possum and the car. And I don’t believe I ever heard a buzzard who complained that it wanted to be something other than what God ordained.

It’s not much fun to realize that I’m the “Bird of Death” or to hear odious creatures being called, “Old Buzzard Breath.” And sometimes it gets dangerous because it’s really true that the cars that pop the possums sometimes bop a buzzard too.

But otherwise I guess the Lord has blessed us all with luck ‘cause there ain’t no buzzard season: Woe the turkey and the duck. The creatures that we fear are really very few indeed and there’s not much competition for the sustenance we need.

Others always call us ugly, but I think we’re really blessed that nearly every one of us looks just like all the rest. We never judge each other based on how we may appear. We’re each one of God’s buzzards and our place in life is clear.

When I pick a mate, it’s not because of feathers bright and long, and I’m never swayed in judgment due to some melodious song. I just choose a handy buzzard and we go and build a nest, and I never hear a nagging word about the way I’m dressed.

I might like to be an eagle, that exalted bird of fame, to be some great country’s symbol and have ball teams take my name. But eagles now grow scarce, eagle lovers are bereft, though, when I last looked, there seemed to be a lot of buzzards left.

Though I did not ask to be one, I’m a buzzard through and through, neither proud nor much ashamed of who I am or what I do. I just glide upon the breezes, waiting for a meal to die, with a feeling of great sympathy for those who cannot fly.
The Surfacing

Ronald Moore

Another dimension towards dementia
And all those things I could not mention
Have redefined the great extensions
Of the outside, deep within
The expectation of new sensations
Redefined my education
Leaving me outside looking in

~I'll burn the page to write the book
To find the words in ash and soot
I'm looking in and looking through
Within me and without you

I suffer from my introspection
A case of chronic self-dissection
On a table, in different sections
Each a factor of the whole
In those sections, voids are surfacing
Such great flaws in my philosophies
Sins, mistakes, holes and fallacies
Lines in the mind, fractures in the soul

~Please strike the vein and start anew
Just a drop of red in a sea of blue
Within me and without you
Still looking in, still looking through

From my arms hang strange suspensions
To control the things I would not sanction
Undefined by good intentions
I'm caught between these two dimensions
Taken in the wrong direction
This was of my own selection
What you could call a social infection

Put me back together
I've fallen from the wall
Take me back piece by piece
Would you listen if I called?
My kingdom, it has crumbled
In my thoughts, I have stumbled
But now I will be humbled
Or we'll all go under

~I've lost the trees, I've lost the fruit
My hands are covered in ash and soot
Without us yet within the two
Who haven't looked nor found the truth

Church, Work, and Death

Matthew Nolan

Hello. How are you?
I am fine. Nice day to you.

The weather is nice.
My garden is grand,
and off to church we go.

How is the family? Just fine.
I just painted the house.
All things must be shiny and new,
and off to work we go.

I am telling the truth. My wife is happy.
I grab her neck. She spits in my face.
The kids are gone, I love this place,
and off to church we go.

The job is good. How dare you ask?
I told you I don't wear a mask.
Boss thinks I am good and that's enough,
for me to acquire brand name stuff,
and off to work we go.

My life is good.
It was not a waste,
my mark was made,
like a finger removing dust
afraid to risk
afraid to change
disease ate my body
but my dreams stayed the same
and off to death we go
Boxes

Matthew Nolan

In boxes we stow away lovers gifts; cards, sweet notes, ripped movie tix. There may be photos shot cheek to cheek; a pressed flower, dry, crushed, and weak.

Some boxes are big, others are small, my top closet is home to them all.

Then I met the next girl. She needed a box. I found something tiny and empty. I knew it would be enough, for what would never be filled with letters, photos, memory stuff.

The box held the surprise birthday party I planned for her. The photos show balloons, pointed hats, and my clasped hands around her arm while she blew out her candles.

The box held our trip to New Orleans; a string of beads, a brochure from the Cornstalk Hotel, and souvenir matches from that romantic French Quarter cafe where I kissed her forehead then coyly settled back in my chair with cupped hands in a sauce stained napkin.

Some boxes are big, others are small, this tiny box couldn’t hold it all.

So I started another box, empty and large, it held a pressed flower and and a few simple cards.

The box never made it to Halloween, or next year’s birthday party, which will never be seen.

So today I taped her two boxes shut, placed them in my top closet and coyly settled back in my chair with cupped hands in a tear stained napkin.

Convene

Kristin Quinlivan

I’m a day late and an hour early, Child can’t escape from a mother’s fury. The clock ticks back, silent hourly chime, Erase the ink that records the time. Point in the direction, I’ll follow your lead, I’ll find in you, what I lack in me. Take heed of my warning, mark down your price, You bid too high for honesty’s lies. My soles are worn, but my shoes are new, Looks so much easier, better on you. Predict the past, deny the future, Concave the truth, addict the user. Read this book, you won’t understand, I don’t follow a rule, a master plan.

Photo by Noel Bush
Fall and Rise

Kristin Quinlivan

Truth, 
     Beauty, 
    Innocence, 
Meet in your eyes, 
And enter 
The doorway of your 
  Soul, 
Dance through 
The valley of your 
  Heart, 
And swim through 
The ocean of your 
  Mind, 
Line dried, 
Sun kissed with 
Dew, 
The angels reach 
  Down 
To wipe your 
Tear stained 
Cheeks. 
Do not give in to 
  Turbulence, 
Do not let 
  Regret, 
Blow out your 
  Light. 
Let it burn 
  Slowly, 
Until it closes 
Its sleepy 
  Eyes, 
And the angels reach 
  Up 
And bid you 
  Good 
Night.....

Sing to Me, Mama

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Sing to me, Mama 
Sing, sing a song 
of high in the treetop 
as we swing on the porch 
of how the cradle will rock. 
Sing to me, Mama 
of butterflies and flowers, 
kittens and pups, 
of what it will be like 
when I’m grown up. 
Sing of rain on the rooftop, 
hay in the barn, 
of guardian angels 
who keep us from harm. 
Sing with that look and 
a tear in your eye, 
of a land far away, 
where the soul never dies. 

Now the swing hangs still 
till touched by the wind, 
at that house on the hill 
where no one lives. 
When did the bough break? 
I’ve fallen so far 
I can’t go home 
Home to the house, 
to the swing on the porch. 
Hold me tight, Mama, 
Don’t let me fall. 
Sing to me, Mama. 
Please sing again.

Photo by Noel Bush
Understand

By Kristin Thomsen

I always believed that it was possible to understand God. Some people claim they know, that they see into His soul. Ask them, they'll tell you so.

When I behave in the way that they say, they smile and they nod. They straighten and they glow, puffed-up from head to toe. I'm saved. They'll tell you so.

If they think I sin, they treat me with chagrin. Striking with a rod, the people claim to know the true destiny of my soul; down the pitiless hole.

Then comes Jesus with His cross and glory to destroy the rod as made by those who "know." He paid the price of my soul; sin can't make it not so.

Will I understand the love that He has shown, Divine Love from God? Those people, they don't know, or they would not be aglow. Only He can free a soul.

YOU SAY, I SAY

Eva Randolph

YOU SAY, MORAL MAJORITY
I SAY, PHARISEE
YOU SAY, PRAYER IN SCHOOL
I SAY, PRAY AT HOME, FIRST
YOU SAY, I'M A POLITICIAN
I SAY, WHO GETS HOW MUCH OF WHAT FROM WHOM?
YOU SAY, DO YOU KNOW THE DEFINITION OF POLITICS?
I SAY, E-N-R-O-N
YOU SAY, BUT I LOVE MY CONSTITUENCY, AND USE MY EFFORTS TO.....
I SAY, YOU LOVE MONEY, AND USE YOUR CONSTITUENCY
YOU SAY, I'M A POLITICIAN, I SERVED MY COUNTRY, YOU CAN TRUST ME
I SAY, PHARISEE
He Comes

Natasha George

I remember the first time he came to me. 
I was just a child. 
He came upon me without warning, when no one else was around, and I could not stop him—though I tried. 
I pushed him hard with my hands and struck at him wildly with my fists, 
But my efforts were useless. 
I could not stop him.

There is no escaping his wrath when he's intent upon having his way, 
And there's no stopping him once he begins. 
He will do what he wants. 
He howls loudly when he's angry and he is prone to violent outbursts. 
He must always have the attention, and if not given to the due amount, 
He will do whatever it takes, until he gets it.

He comes to me often and leaves as quickly as he comes. 
He has hurt a lot of people and can be trusted by no one. 
No one. 
He'll turn on you in a moment, 
And then turn around and be amazingly pleasant. 
He'll hurt you if he can— 
Kill you if he gets a chance, 
But don't you let him. 
He's really quite a dangerous fellow, 
Yet, when pleasant, I can think of no one I like better— 
No one whose company I prefer over his.

He is nasty and unpredictable, 
Yet, just as charming. 
He is often gentle and calm 
And he whistles so softly when he's happy. 
He comes to me when I'm sad and crying and he dries away my tears. 
When I'm angry, he soothes and cools the anger with his touch, 
And, takes it away with him when he goes. 
When I am lonely and sullen, he comes and replenishes my empty solitude with warmth and comfort. 
He gives me what I need to continue.

I hold in my heart for him, at once, respect and admiration, along with contempt and abhorrence. 
He still frightens me as often as he pleases me and I do not like all that he does. 
But, only he can make my tired and worn body come to life, 
Only he can make me get up and face another day. 
When he comes to me in anger, 
I hold on, 
Knowing that he'll return to me later and bring with him what I so desperately need. 
To feel his warm embrace, to feel his gentle touch, knowing that he'll always be a part of my life, a part of me.

I hear him coming long before he arrives— 
And though he shares his charms and his wrath with many others, 
I don't mind. 
I have no choice. 
Neither does anyone else who falls in his path.

I hear him coming now. 
I feel his presence, as we speak. 
He is outside my window, calling me, 
Beckoning to come inside. 
I smile broadly, because I know that today is a good day— 
Today, he is here to whisk my sadness away. 
I raise the window and in comes my friend, my enemy— 
The soothing, charming, unpredictable, violent and ever-temperamental—

Wind.

Illustration by April Heton
Robert to His Wife

Joel Fry

My moan is surprising,
risng each morning
in the room’s corners.
You can feel dissipation
course my body,
like trains
running the rim of a peninsula,
each iron wheel
bumping a trestle
of bone.
Sometimes you jerk my limbs,
but this is not enough
to beat away
nostalgic distraction.
Every time you face me
I demand the mountains,
I demand the sea,
I demand the field behind our house
that blooms acorn flesh.

The Saving Things

Bryan Summerlin

Whispers still come
from this house.
You can hear the echoes of innocence
lost.

These serpent streets contain
mysteries discussed by mothers in the dark and then
hidden
away from eyes and ears, tools
that destroy the good kids.

Slow down you’ll never hear them
from the street.
You used to only have to roll
your window down to hear

Hollow secrets
whose insides have long since
lost their appeal
to the general audience; a few teachers probably would
still care

That she said no to them at least at first.
Some would still say that makes it even worse.

Photo by Noel Bush
sophomore

Bryan Summerlin

A boat ramp doesn’t look like much, but just off the surface in the high grass, where trustees are too lazy to pick up litter, there are relics in the form of beer cans and more beer cans. A bag from gas station ice or a condom wrapper if you are lucky.

Here many have tested their new wings and these lexical ghosts are all they left behind. You’ll have to shut the car off to hear them,

Vices still slightly echoing

that have to get home before twelve
have to break up with him that have to
find a way to help her hide the bleeding from her mom
for just two more days.

Voices that don’t come readily,
whose authors are now long gone, no one remaining
to give new words to the scenes. Shhhhh—

You can hear others

that lied to her to him
that cheated in that class that snuck her into the locker room and
that party that was at the Garretts’ when they went to Colorado I think they found out.

No it didn’t last too long ‘cause I didn’t even ask she said
it wasn’t that bad, told me to stop apologizing I bet she’ll do it again.

Yeah I totally tell my mom everything I’d definitely tell her can you believe someone would write a letter to my parents saying I did that?

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Lena Sutton

Inequalities swimming through
the wrinkles and crevices of my brain
slipping along too swiftly to make
any lasting impression
impress me
don’t try to make your square pegs
fit my round holes
it doesn’t work
work me
but present your language in
my native tongue
and know yourself what you are saying before you
Teach me to speak!
speak
to my deaf ears and
Save me from drowning in your inequalities.
Naming the Flowers

Margaret J. Vann

(A poet called his “Naming of Parts,”
but this is naming the flowers.)

in my wild garden grow Adam and Eve, toadshade, stinking Willie,
then pepperroot, little pig, firepink,
foamflower, fawn lily, bluebells, and violet

there among the last year’s litter lie shooting star, star of Bethlehem, Solomon’s seal,
Jacob’s ladder, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and cross vine

beneath the Judas tree and dogwood grow the ephemerals
ladies tresses, little darlin’, heart’s-a-bustin’-with-love, rue anemone, bloodroot,
false rue anemone, and bleeding heart

if I were naming violets I have seen,
the names could be field-of-gold, wood’s delight, or curse-of-lawn-and-garden

the trillium could be shy ones, upright, ahhh
some bluebells I have known could be banks-of-blue or spring’s-faint-fragrance
I could name some other flowers of the woods scratch-my-arms, snatch-my-hair, or itch

I wonder at the ones who named these flowers
as they roamed in ancient woods,
what do these names reflect
would I name one heart’s ease? golden seal? twisted stalk?

or
would one be lover’s delight? heart’s rue? or sorrow’s desire?
Opening Scene

Christina Cheatham

He is always making an attempt
Dressing the part for a play
That is in its last scene
You, you on the other hand
So prepared
With every convincing line
And heart-stopping
End
I lose all sense of logic
And ability to reason
When you take the stage
“I am liked by many women”
Is that a petty threat to my soul
Or just fearful persuasion
He and I acted out our roles
As long-lost friends
All the while soft white skin
Drifted across my emptied mind
Hours are crawling by
At curtain-fall will I walk away
Or beg for an encore
I've tried to be your truth
But all you crave is
An occasional stand-in
Or sweet embrace
Unfortunate for you
That my role is not yet written
Perhaps I should refuse this lead
And keep hold of
The insignificant amount
Of my childlike innocence
But then again what can this hurt
So play your part
And when curtain-call arrives
I pray the ending
Is more inviting
Than saying goodbye
Or crying to sleep
Sometimes the plot takes
An unexpected twist
So God I pray
Let these scenes be written for me
In compassionate words
And if not
Leave the spotlights darkened
Red velvet seats cold
And my heart
Please let my heart keep passing this story by

Illustration by Grace Kent
Star Dancing

Christina Cheatham

You make me want to dance across stars
And sing lullabies to the yellow moon
Rising slowly, full in shape
Quiet pace of winter’s night
Stop
Watch me here
A ballet of pine needles
Whispering their way
Back and forth to catch the ground
You make me want to dance across stars
Constellations twinkle
Like fairy dust sprinkled in blue
Maybe it’s the illusion of your smile
or in the comfort of nightfall
But nothing feels more natural
More true than dancing across stars for you
Nothing is as pure as gray clouds to soften my fall
In heart-shaped whispers
Like peaceful dreams
You make me want to dance across stars
Wait
Remember me here
It’s the closing of a chapter
And the opening of wonders
Will you always keep me dancing across stars
Or one day will it fade
Will daylight break
And burn against the night’s softened scene
Tides come crashing in
And colors of morning are flying along
Carry on your sunlit way
But
Promise me
In the night’s gentle ease
Dance across stars for me

I Like It

Lena Sutton

My pen has become conscious of others’ eyes!
Crippled, wandering, striving for
acceptance. recognition. perfection.
I hold it in my funny grip
I aim for the paper
—It jumps out to people

No! I say.
My thoughts and words must not
be tossed to THEM, the sheep, the lemmings.
I will not be an entertainer,
—willing the audience to humor me.

No! I say.
For to give my work to the their eyes,
their compliments
their nods
their disapproval
would be to hand over the pen itself
and every word becomes as lifeless
as pop.

They must flow from my innermost
chamber
yet still remain there.

Illustration by Riki Crisp
**Butterfly**

*Carlisa McElyea*

I watched her as she struggled, silently. It seemed as if it were taking all she had to accomplish the task she had taken on. I wanted to help, to reach out, to free her from the bonds that enveloped her weakened body, but I knew to do so would hurt her more than anything else.

No one else had even stopped to notice the transactions that were occurring that early March morning. It was early, the sun barely lighting up the horizon, but already the dew sparkled like tiny diamonds scattered about by a careless fairy. She was the sore spot, the darkness amongst all the glitter. I happened upon her by accident, yet something told me our meeting was meant to be.

I caught my breath as she squirmed farther from the things that restrained her. All of a sudden she lay free, panting from the effort. Was she alive? Had she really made it through her tortuous ordeal?

All of a sudden my heart flew as she spread her azure wings and took to the breaking dawn. The once simple, basic grub that no one paid attention to, the creature forced to hide from the cruel hunters of the world, now stretched forth her golden-tipped wings and proudly showed all who cared to look the majesty that had always been contained within her.

In the blink of an eye she was gone, but not before teaching me the lesson of a lifetime.

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**Another World**

*Terri Ridelski*

The sewer canal behind my house is a throwback to a time before civilization. The sluggishly moving water supports a wide array of plant and animal life. There is pungent, chartreuse algae growing in the shallow parts. The edges are lined with erratic patches of tall, scraggily reeds. There is a lone lemon-colored bloom bobbing in the breeze. Tiny silvery fish flash and dart in the water, trying to avoid the long-legged, blue-gray herons that are stalking a meal. If these birds are lucky, they will instead catch one of the diminutive soot-colored snakes slithering amongst the reeds. Shiny obsidian-colored water bugs skate back and forth across the surface of the water as iridescent dragonflies dart madly about the reeds, while they look for a place to light. Placid orange and yellow butterflies float lazily by. The occasional lost mallard calls this cozy niche home for short periods of time. The denizens of this teeming megalopolis exist as if it were prehistoric times, not the bustling downtown area that it is.

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Illustration by Josie Stapler

Photo by Noel Bush
Mending Wind

Matthew Nolan

With the pinging and clanging of the wind-chime in my right ear and the wistful breeze curling my hair into my left ear, my eyes fall upon a blade of grass. My face follows and my bottom lip bends over. The muffled mimicking of the mocking bird is distant from the rustle of leaves that roar through the oak tree. The beauty of the yard is captured by a large metal fence that holds in the things that grow, breathe, and snap. Its abundance smothers me.

As I lie in the green with two rocks edged in the side of my back, I bend my knees and place my hands behind my head, flexing my chest closer to the world above me. A deep breath of the autumn-scented air tickles my nostrils. I pray it will go straight to my brain and blow the fallen leaves into a pile that I can understand. If only it could muffle the mimicking mockingbird inside my head and contain all the things I think, feel, and dwell upon. My eyes begin to cross as I gaze lightly to the right of a cloud that passes through the dirty-blue sky. A quick sweep of wind takes the rain from my brain and fills the cloud above. Like a pillow, I lock my hands behind my head and point my elbows towards the sky to raise my face in the healing space around me. Quickly, I unlock my hands from behind my head and reach for the pillow in the sky. With both arms extended in the gray puff, I grasp the passing cloud just in time to feel its moist softness. I clasp it in my arms, hug it tightly, clinch my eyes into two wrinkled balls, and like a straight rolling pin over lumps of dough, I roll down the bumpy slope of dirt and pebbles into a family of dandelions.

In another deep breath I exhale all that is cloudy within me, and my eye catches a darker cloud to my left. My face follows and my upper lip curls up. I stretch my arms through the miniature forest and snatch up two fists of dandelions. I can hear them ripping from the ground as I arch my back and smile. Then, a drop of water hits under my eyelid. Now, two more sit on a hair on my arm. Like a dog shaking off after a bath, pellets of raindrops gently hit me all at once. I stop crossing my eyes to focus on the dirty blue sky and notice the two clouds have become one.

The wind has stopped and all I can feel is the rain pressing against my body and my lips puckered together to keep the small river tracing down my forehead from running into my mouth. The rain is heavy and the grass begins to droop. All of the times I lie here in the green with the wind as my friend, allowing it inside, then pushing it to the sky—only to lie here in the mud, with the absence of the chimes and the roaring of leaves dancing among the oak tree. Now, I hear only the roar of thunder. I swallow, take a deep breath, my lips shake, and in a fragile, broken voice I whisper to the sky, “Dear God, please help me.”
The Right-of-Way Game

Kristin Thomsen

The play is about to begin. 1

The car is speeding down the street and the pedestrian is inattentively stepping off the curb. The driver is slamming on his brakes. The crowd is gasping. The pedestrian has stopped in his tracks. He is turning to face the car. Will the driver be able to stop in time?

Thunk.

The car has struck the pedestrian. The pedestrian is spinning end over end about fifteen feet above the car. He is screaming hysterically. The crowd is going wild.

Splunk.

The pedestrian has hit the asphalt. The paramedics are rushing to his side. This is terrible, folks. There is blood all over the pedestrian’s head. I will attempt to speak to the pedestrian.

“Mr. Pedestrian, do you enjoy being obliterated by your opponent?”

“Oh yes, I always delight in the sensation of having a cracked walnut for a thigh and an axe sticking in my head.”

Well, there you have it folks. This has been another exciting day in the “Wide, Wide World of the Right-of-Way Game.” 2

Like all sports, the Right-of-Way Game requires a playing field. There are several types of stadiums suited for the sport. One arena is a street bordered by cars, trucks, and vans. From such locations, a pedestrian can leap out from between parked autos and surprise oncoming traffic. Also, when a driver becomes a pedestrian, he can be run down while leaving his car.

Another ideal location for the game is a parking lot of a grocery store, a mall, a movie theater, or an airport. All of these places are famous for swarms of people and cars trying to occupy the same space at the same time. This insanity is compounded by everyone’s being in a hurry. In addition, there are usually many rows of parked cars, adding more strategic hiding places for both pedestrians and autos to emerge and surprise each other.

The third perfect playing field is a residential neighborhood. Children run back and forth across the street chasing each other, their pets, or balls throughout the neighborhood. Pets also live in a false sense of security and can be found walking, running, or sleeping in the streets. Even adults forget to look before crossing to their mailboxes. Where else can a driver find such a variety of targets?

Three types of drivers are most successful at this sport: drunk drivers, daydreamers, and drivers who do not expect surprises. Drunk drivers are lucky if they can see the road and other cars, let alone the pedestrians. Drivers who day dream have their thoughts on the music on the stereo, what is in their bed, or what they would do with a million dollars. These drivers are usually as blind to the road as a drunk driver. As for the drivers who are not expecting surprises, they fail easy prey to the crafty pedestrian. Pedestrians usually get nailed by these three types of drivers even when they have the right-of-way, such as being on the sidewalk or in a crosswalk.

The final game ingredient is an idiot or a careless person to play the pedestrian. For some unknown reason, some pedestrians believe that they will be able to defeat the driver; therefore, these people will challenge the oncoming traffic by stepping out into the road when it is unsafe. Consequently, an argument begins between the driver and the pedestrian to see who can move or stop the quickest. Whoever remains is the winner. Unfortunately, the vehicle usually holds up better than the human body, and the pedestrian has to go to either the hospital or the morgue. These pedestrians do not care to look, or they forget where they are, or they forget what the dangers are that surround them. Pedestrians must train themselves with the attitude that the driver is out to hit them. Basic modern survival depends on the pedestrian’s alertness to the traffic situation around him. Hopefully, everyone will start to follow the basic safety rules and society will not have any more obtuse people, or unchained pets, on the streets for target practice. Remember: the pedestrian may be right, but he can also be DEAD RIGHT.

1Author’s note: I heard Howard Cosell’s voice in my head as I wrote this piece. If the reader is unfamiliar with his style, this piece works best when imagining a play-by-play sports cast.

2ABC Sports “Wide, Wide World of Sports.
The Journey

Kim Holladay

It was a warm, southern October morning when Callie and her recently widowed father embarked on their journey together. Callie, sitting in the passenger seat, nervously thumbed through a magazine while her father sat silently behind the wheel. The only sounds punctuating the silence were the humming of tires and the turning of glossy magazine pages.

In the past, most of Callie's adult conversations with her father were limited: “Hi, Dad, can I speak to Mom?” as they sat on opposite ends of the phone line. After Callie’s mother passed away in July, Callie was forced to engage in conversations with her father beyond the usual benign greetings. She quickly discovered how little she knew about her father and how superficial their relationship had been. That was about to change. It began one fall morning as Callie and her father traveled back to their Indiana roots.

Periodically, Callie began to lift her eyes from the magazine pages to glance at her father or out the car window. “Pretty day for a drive, isn’t it, Dad?”

“Yeah, it’s turned out to be a nice day after all,” he replied. Then silence.

Callie spotted a crossword puzzle in the magazine. Although her hands were busy filling-in the puzzle boxes, Callie's mind was rehearsing potential discussions with her father. The silence was interrupted with Callie's occasional plea to her father for help. As the father and daughter worked together on the puzzle, their conversation slowly evolved from puzzle solutions to the weather, to the delicious chicken and noodles her grandmother was preparing for them, and to how much longer the trip would take. “Are we almost there?” Callie whined like a child, bringing a burst of laughter that echoed in the car. Before long, an intimate conversation was taking place, and Callie was learning—for the first time—who this man was she was blessed to call “father.”

She learned that he was on his high school's basketball team, sang in a barbershop quartet, played the guitar, traveled by train to Chicago when he was seventeen, and worked on a farm the summers in between his high school years. Callie began to see her father as a person who had hobbies, goals, and experiences far different from her own. His role as her father was only a part of what made him a human being, and for the first time, she felt like he was also becoming her friend.

When the pair finally arrived in Indiana, their first stop was a cemetery two blocks from Callie’s grandmother's house. Every summer throughout her childhood, Callie visited her grandmother, but she had never walked through the old cemetery, nor did she know her family roots were buried there. Her father guided her through the grass-worn path past the grave of her great uncle who was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. She never met her grandfather, but reflecting upon his grave and hearing her father's stories about him, she began to feel his presence. How little Callie knew about her father's family! It was a sobering experience to stare upon the graves of relatives whose blood, but not lives, she shared.

“Now, I would like to take you past some very special places,” Callie’s Dad announced. As the car slowly rambled through the old town, Callie began to feel like they had been transported back into the 1950s, except the sidewalks were now empty, the paint on the buildings was chipped, and the signs were faded and worn. Her father pointed to an empty building. “That used to be a movie theater. Your mother and I went there on our first date. Over there,” he pointed out, “is the soda shop where I proposed to your mother. She thought I was joking,” he laughed. The laughter stopped suddenly, and Callie noticed tears coming to his eyes. She had never seen her father cry before.

Callie panicked. “What do I say now?” she wondered. “Where is that magazine?” She had never had to comfort her father before. It had always been his job to comfort her. The progress they had made during their eight-hour journey suddenly seemed insignificant and lost in a moment of sentimental reflection. Instead of attempting to comfort her grieving father with hastily spoken words, which she knew would come out all wrong, Callie reached over and gently laid her hand on his shoulder. For a few moments, they traveled in silence, but Callie knew her gesture had soothed the awkwardness of the moment.

For the next several days, the weary travelers visited as many relatives as they could, ate too much, and grew more comfortable in their new relationship. When it was finally time to return home, Callie did not nervously clutch her magazine. Instead, laughter and conversation between a daughter and her father drowned out the noise of humming tires and honking horns. The trip was ending, but Callie knew the journey was just beginning.
Older People—Survivors

Nathaniel Mobley

Suzanne Hilliker is a sixty-year-old, tall, red-haired lady who goes to my church. She grew up in Pittsburgh in the 1940s. She has a younger brother with whom she has never gotten along and three sons who live in other states. The "olden days" are what she craves; she claims that she is not at all in step with today's generation. In speaking with her, I began to wonder how the older people of today have survived the drastic changes that have taken place in pastimes, schools, and families since they were young.

During the 1940s and 1950s, children got pleasure from playing outdoors. Boys and girls alike had fun playing hopscotch, Red Rover, hide-and-seek, and other such games with their friends. The boys, along with adventurous girls, were thrilled just to disappear into the woods for hours. They were content to swing on vines, crawl on a moss-covered log to cross a deep, fern-covered ravine, or simply climb trees and tell to one another. The older boys wouldn't be bothered a bit to sit patiently on the bank of a shallow creek with a faded cane fishing pole in one hand while swatting mosquitoes with the other. Some would take slingshots and go hunting for a day. Children had a fascinating time wading in the creeks and ponds, occasionally catching a frog or a crawdad. The lady-like girls would pass the time in their rooms with each other by reading, practicing piano lessons, or playing with paper dolls.

Whatever happened to paper dolls? Nowadays, a girl may have forty different Barbie dolls and hardly ever give them a thought. We have three million brain-numbing movies and TV shows, and a kid gets bored with the "idiot box." There are plenty of good movies and video games. However, kids can always vegetate on some violent, gross, mind-twisting virtual junk with his Nintendo, X-box, Playstation, Gameboy, or computer. Where has squirrel hunting gone? Some kids seem to have a fabulous time shooting real people instead of video's virtual people. There are Leggos galore, but even they become boring after a while. Instead of playing outside with neighborhood friends on twilight evenings, many kids are inside hooked-up or plugged-in. When today's kids complain of boredom, they may need to be reminded of what their parents and grandparents did during their carefree days.

Back in Mrs. Hilliker's day, parents sent their children to school with a small metal lunch pail. Students would walk two or three miles to school even in the harsh, frosty winters of Pittsburgh. Those who had a lake between home and school had a small advantage in the wintertime. During the summer, they walked around the lake, but in the winter they could simply walk across the frozen lake, shortening their trek to school. Neither the students nor the parents had the slightest worry about the possibility that their children might not make it home from school. There were a few wild kids but most were under their parents' control. When students graduated, they were actually very decent spellers. Some people today can't even spell a simple word. We drive marques and signs that say, "For Sale 30 Acres of Land" or "7.99 for a Stake and Baked Potato." Instead of the long, exhilarating, and sometimes dangerous walks to school, it is now just a ten-second walk to the end of the driveway where children wait for the bus. The old-fashioned homemade lunches in a pail have been replaced with the convenience of a choice of anything in the school cafeteria from pepperoni pizza to crispy fried chicken, from Gatorade to Dr. Pepper. Student "crimes" were talking, dipping your sweetheart's braid into the inkwell, or tying the big boy's overall straps to his desk. Today, rape and murder are the trend. Instead of sneaking a toad into school or passing notes, some kids now sneak guns in and hand out condoms. Parents now have a fear to hide when they send their children to public schools. Why has playing on the playground or shooting marbles at recess been replaced with doing drugs, smoking, or worse?

The area that has probably seen the most change is that of family. In the past, families were always at home together. All the children in a family would play in the same neighborhood. Parents and neighbors would sit on the front porch in huge, creaky, high-backed rocking chairs and talk together about their uncles' dairy farms in California. Many people just don't have hour-long conversations anymore because they are so busy. Some families today seem more like individuals living in the same house. They all go their separate ways and do their separate things. Some families now can no longer go to family reunions or birthday parties because they must take the kids first to the soccer game, then to ball practice, and—if there is time after all of that—to music lessons, dancing lessons or karate, cheerleading practice, and finally the swim meet. Whew! Then everybody is too exhausted to enjoy the birds or a good family devotion on the front porch, all because of this hectic lifestyle so many people have today.

Mrs. Hilliker had a computer once, and she did her E-mail, letters, and stocks on it. She started seeing all
kinds of stuff coming through her 200-a-day E-mails and realized that she was spending more time on it than she wanted to. There was nothing creative or constructive about it, so one day she just said, “Okay.” and unplugged the computer, disconnected all the cables, and handed it back to her husband. She doesn’t miss it a bit.

Mrs. Hilliker longs for the “good ol’ days” when kids could be kids, parents were parents, schools were safe and educational, and families were families. There are many modern conveniences in so many areas such as technology and transportation, but there is no longer the convenience or safety or lazy summer days like there was in days gone by. Those were the slow, peaceful days when families could enjoy life together without the fear of danger, dishonesty, terrorists, or technology mess-ups.
I Expected Lessons Learned, but I Got Lust on the Loose

Ruth Willbanks

It was the best of times; it was the worst of time. Okay, maybe that’s a little over-the-top, but it was one of the most frustrating times of my life! I didn’t expect it to be that way. I had just entered the world of divorcees—barely a fledgling, barely even fuzzed-out. I was not wise in the ways of the world, only full of lofty ideals.

In my mind’s eye, I pictured the coming months, possibly years, of manlessness as a time of emotional cleansing, a time to focus on personal and spiritual growth—a time to find myself. I would take up meditation. Yes, through surrounding myself with the crystalline light of goodness, I would transform myself into a guru of patience and wisdom—North Alabama’s own little Gandhi. Friends and family would seek me out to glean precious pearls of wisdom. I would tutor other women on how to transform the small still voice within into a chorus of intuition bellowing, “I am woman, hear me roar!” Yes, the future looked bright. The coming time of celibacy would simply be one less distraction to interfere with my metamorphosis.

I did well enough in the beginning. The long winter months provided plenty of time for introspection, and I was faithful to my designated meditation time. But as winter turned to spring, I began to get antsy. The Earth was filling up with new life. Buds were turning into blooms. Bees were busy pollinating everything in sight. Animals were searching for mates and the air was filled with pheromones—those little secret messengers of animal love.

It struck me as sweet in the beginning when I heard the spring peepers calling for a mate down at the pond, or when a pair of wrens did their outrageous mating dance on the branch outside my bedroom window. It was sweet when a pair of rabbits darted through the yard playing catch-me-if-you-can. But, it didn’t take long for the sugar-coating to wear off, and I found myself annoyed at the display of animal instincts running rampant everywhere I looked. Not only was I annoyed, but truth-be-known, I was actually jealous! I was jealous the morning I awoke, still groggy with coffee in hand, and looked out to see my own dog, my own man’s-best-friend, drunk with lust and being quickly sobered by my neighbor’s Labrador on my very own front porch! I was horrified and ran out screaming, “Oh, no, old girl, if I’m not getting’ any, ain’t nobody getting’ any!”

That’s when I realized I had a problem. My own spring-induced carnal instincts were kicking in, and I’d have to rein them in before I started foaming at the mouth over the meter-man or some other innocent bystander.

Of course, I would meditate about it! You know, it’s hard to concentrate on lofty things when all you can envision are lean, well-tanned Chippendale dancers gyrating beneath hot spotlights. I would have to take further measures!

I decided that what I needed was a mantra, something uplifting to recite during times of weakness. The Lord’s Prayer would be perfect. It is, after all, the garlic necklace, the silver bullet, the ultimate weapon in spiritual battles. Surely the Lord’s Prayer would drive those lust-filled thoughts from my mind. And it did work—for while. I would recite, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff”—Lord help me! I couldn’t even recite the Lord’s Prayer without having dirty thoughts! Surely I was guilty of some kind of blasphemy.

My personal and spiritual growth, along with patience and all the goodie, were balancing precariously on the edge of ruin. Would I be able to make it through this hallowed season, or would everything go up in the flames of my carnal lust? I reasoned that it must be possible to survive celibacy. After all, nuns do it all the time. Yeah, right. They probably have a small arsenal of novelties stashed under their floorboards for consolation!

It got so bad, even going to the grocery store became a battle between good and evil. There was the initial offense—the produce section. Fruits and vegetables of the oddest shapes and sizes, evil analogies for the perverted mind, mocked me from their bins. Practically running, I would find myself in the bakery where hot rolls were stacked cheek-to-cheek like the bare, tan bottoms of nude Herculean sunbathers. Practically running, I dared not even pause in “fresh meats,” for the utterance of nude Herculean sunbathers. Practically running, I would have to take further measures!

No, this was not how I had envisioned myself. I was in a state of moral and emotional decay. My personal growth had led me to become practically a recluse, and I was none the wiser or more patient. I was just horny! That was the longest season of my life, but I survived it. And I guess, after all, I did gain a little wisdom—if nothing else: Never declare celibacy before the onset of spring!