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

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Mr. Dan Byford, with his quiet voice and a simple “hello,” was a man who changed lives for the better. I consider myself a very lucky person – I am one of those people. Mr. Byford was one of the first faculty members I met as a student at Calhoun. I never had him as a professor; however, we passed each other on the sidewalk often enough that one day he said “hello” and introduced himself to me. We began conversing on a regular basis. He would ask how my classes were going, and I would ask his opinion about a paper I was writing. He gave me advice about school and life that I will carry with me forever. It was with great sorrow I learned he was ill, and even greater sadness when I learned of his passing. Mr. Byford made a huge difference in my attitude towards college and how I approached the next phase of my life. I am a better person having known him. I never took the time to thank him for saying “hello.” Unfortunately, I can only tell him good-bye.

Kat Padilla

Through his dedication for written expression, Mr. Daniel Byford taught me how powerful language can be when one just puts emotion and imagination into it. He was my teacher during my first semester back to school after almost a 30-year hiatus. He drew out my ability, which I never realized I possessed, for putting what is in my thoughts and heart to paper. He gave me an appreciation for poems through the passion and accomplishment of his own. Mr. Byford was an intense instructor, but quickly became a fearsome friend. Dan left an impression in my life, and he will be greatly missed.

Orlaina Francis

Excerpt from
What the Wind Said
By Dan Byford

In Winter

Shut up and listen. Grow quiet and put on layers against the killing frost. Become as solid as you can, for time dates no one for long. As you say your prayers, that sound you hear is me laughing as you plan.

As aches grow in the joints, lights dim in the eyes, as your vine withers or your blooms fade and shed—remember nothing means much, except the surprise at those who still love you and the gnawing dread

as you hear that certain phone voice telling you someone close is dead. You are not born alone. Even orphans had help getting through to this mortal quicksand. Scorn is the fruit of scorn.

Life can truly come alive, but many walking it are dead. You make it a sunny meadow or lightless pit all on your own. And you carry that in your head or heart when you leave and nothing else will fit. In the end, I had no real power over you but power to make you stronger and fill your sail in the final hour.
The Big Picture
By Dan Byford

I do not know
how many angels can dance
on the head of a pin
but I imagine it would be as many
as the Big Kahuna said on any given
day
and that with the pointy end
just as many demons could be
skewered
as they sat around cracking smoke
and sniggering.

I wonder if you get a job in heaven
or if it, too, suffers unemployment at
times
and you have to just sit around
blissfully
watching the stars come and go
or visiting with dead relatives and
friends
or playing with all your former dogs
and cats
and that pony you rode when you
were a kid.

I wish I could reach into the past
someday,
maybe through my mirror
so I could slap myself awake right
now.
And that I could ask God for a favor
or two about wisdom
and splitting the baby between time
and money.

And how about that expanding
universe?
Lights floating across an ocean of
nothing?
And where did that entire nothing
zero in from anyway?

And if I am one way the cosmos can
see itself
I sure wish it would take time
to bang out a nice, neat self portrait.

Your Eyes When Full
By Dan Byford

Your eyes when full mint poetry no words ever coined.
I often figure my future minus your unspent looks.
We stumbled broken paths, blind with loss, and then the paths joined—
then storied visions spoke what could only be paraphrased in books.
Our blessings and our blights seem unwashed, unpearled.
Yet your country flair, your crooked smile, your spitting will to survive
make me trust upon a star tonight that all will be righted, trimmed, unfurled
like a sail. And I see hope kindle in eyes reflecting my eyes. Alive
with faith, the wind gyres wee off, circling steady and quiet
yet labored, sick and tired of the day-to-day struggle. Still,
we only have ourselves to hawk—our own hearts to gauntlet flight.
Though I don’t quite get it, I hum the tune the piper plays and fill
my restless mind with all the whys and wheres and whens —
and the sun’s last promise, the first star’s wish, the moon as it grins.

Some Distant Rain
By Dan Byford

Tired winter bones buried
deep in the April earth
await magic morning airs
to spring them up into new flesh

of passion and power and fresh
feelings flowering a storied
pattern. We have a winter’s worth
of puffing out cold and practiced prayers

and surviving the daily bungee jump
into our safe skins. At night all season
we dream of soulful sun baking the brain
into some mystical gel that matters.

After all, we’re mostly mad as hatters
and late for dates with destiny. We bump
up through the topsoil of our tired reason
stretching thirsty lives toward some distant rain.
The Day You Fed My One-Clawed Crayfish to Your Tabby Cat
By Vadim Osadchi

Cars and trucks above us, gnats in the air
Graffiti on the underside of the bridge
The spray paint memorandum reads: Dates – III, Rejections – 0
Empowered, I think of taking your hand. It's a date
But there are passersby and I know that you don't want to be seen with me

Our knees, muddy
I'm searching for fossils
Meanwhile, 'I'll find a whole lot of river gold and buy us a three-course meal, with lobster,' you say
The kind in the supermarket aquariums, with their claws all tied up
Because the crayfish - mini, stream bed lobsters - slip away from you

I catch one with a missing claw
And put it into an empty potato chip bag. 'It'll hang out in my bathtub until its claw grows back'
You say nothing
I wonder if it's because you're thinking about tomorrow – The Move
2 states up, 5 across. A board game, and the odds are lose/lose

At home, you feed my one-clawed crayfish to your tabby cat
'Why?'
You spilt your juice. 'It bit me'
Your cat. With bits of reddish exoskeleton lodged in its jaws. 'Crayfish don't bite'
They pinch

We pass through a cotton field.
A shopping complex will be built on it in the years to come
Where we say our goodbyes - a frozen yogurt stand
A young couple would have looked up at us over their desserts
'Remember when we were that much in love?' or 'Were we ever that much in love?'

The tire-streaked dirt road is the boundary line between neighborhood and neighborhood
Yours, with the stained glass windows. Mine, with the stained windows
We say our farewells,
'Bye, I guess.' Exhale. 'Hold out your hand'
There, a crayfish claw
Corduroy
By Josh Dendy

By other ways, by other ports
Thou to the shore shalt come, not here, for passage;
A lighter vessel needs must carry thee.

My kingdom is comfort,
Dreams are my demesnes,
I who many times in woe am grasped
By both young and old,
Reign sightless, between pillow-banks,
Embraced now only by dust
And the shades.

But I have seen youth play fondly in its prime,
Play, that age
Like a thick rime of forgetting
Took away from me,
And I,
I am only left with
The solemn duties of solace,
A mere token to recall.

And I recall now
In the October of childishness,
A belief that some would plant their dead
That they would rise up again like flowers;
I Goliath,
Stuffed full,
With buttons for eyes.

The Wise Call It by Many Names
By Josh Dendy

But don’t you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if I put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them?
L. Pirandello

Tell me why we express
Ourselves through a language
That fails us, filling our hearts
With empty words, screaming
Through a verbose bottleneck,
Hoping that an attuned ear
Might hear us and make good sense
Of the gobbledygook
Of I love yous
Or the pitter patter
Cadence of illusory words,
Creating a mask or a shield,
Or a gauntlet for the truth to run
Before it reaches its destination.

For somewhere in the room the message
Is unfailingly lost between mouth and
Ear, vanishing quickly; what you
Say is not what I hear. Only
Dissociate phonemes that
I’ve plucked down and
Weighed against my
Lexical heart get
Through
To the
Inner
Me.

Through My Mask
Sarah Abney
Morning
By Lendsey Coil

You wake.
Two mahogany moons
Arise, sink, rise again
Coming to rest on smooth horizons
Gazing from behind
A tilted slope of lashes

Black irises, Gemini orbs
Absorbing
The long line of my honest body
The sphinx of my smile

Come to me, my love,
With your net of woven kisses
So we may capture
All that we lost to dreaming

In the Mail
By Preston Pylant

Your cell phone bill came in the mail today
I’ll pay it again like I have since May
It’s a special bond between a dad and a daughter
A simple way of keeping up with each other
Just a short phone call every day
Four rings and I hear you say

“Hey I’m sorry I missed your call
These finals are getting crazy
Name and number and I’ll give you a call
I hope you’re having a real blessed day.”

It’s the same old message every time
That your mom and I are doing fine
And how I miss seeing your smiling face
Now that God has you in a better place
You’d probably think it’s silly of me
Paying that bill just to hear you say

“Hey I’m sorry I missed your call
These finals are getting crazy
Name and number and I’ll give you a call
I hope you’re having a real blessed day.”

I’ve prayed to God about being strong
I’ve talked to my friends about moving on
But when I’m down and don’t know what to do
It just helps to hear from you

“Hey I’m sorry I missed your call
These finals are getting crazy
Name and number and I’ll give you a call
I hope you’re having a real blessed day.”

Your cell phone bill came in the mail today
I’ll pay it again like I have since May.

Eiffel Tower
Emily Broadwater
April in Alabama
By Ryan Wood

Twisted trees lie in the streets.
Ripped out by their deep, ancient roots,
Their thick trunks splintered and stripped.
Some still stand, limbless, skinless,
Tan colored toothpicks,
Towering to the sky.

Two piles at the road:
Wood.
Metal.
And a sign painted with the names
of those who once
Lived here, loved here, made their home here.
This is what is left.

Here, a handcrafted dollhouse
A birdhouse painted red, chipped, and scratched,
Some blocks of wood, which
Could have been made into something.
Anything.

Evening now, lightless in my apartment.
Through the impenetrable darkness the radio
Announces the newest numbers of the Dead.
A caller, shrill-voiced,
Asks when the power will be restored.
She doesn’t want to miss the royal wedding.

Billboards
By Kenneth Thai Sandlin

Tonight I’m awake with a toothache
I can hear my cats prowling around the apartment doing whatever
it is cats do at 1 am
I’m counting down the days until this year ends
Twenty-seven
I cannot recall a year that has passed me by as rapidly as this one
But I remember some nights in it that felt as if they would never end
hours like lifetimes
though it’s strange the way memory works
how day to day details, your everyday movements-
driving home from work, cooking dinner, talking to an old friend on
the phone, a novel you read
all merge together into a sequence of events that make up a period
in your life
and as the years continue
details become vague
like billboards on the interstate
read and forgotten in no time at all

I hope that calendars and calendars from now
I’m able to look back on these last twelve months affectionately
as a revisionist
those tormented nights and exaggerated hours erased-
an embrace in the place of a bloody nose
The summer Odysseus slept in his car
*By Kenneth Thai Sandlin*

I gave up politics
to pursue imagination

I left my relationship on the outskirts
of a savage jungle
in order to explore physical pleasure
my heart grew darker than Conrad could express

my thoughts ran like an engine without oil
I shocked my veins and set my mind on fire
at a Molotov cocktail party

Jefferson’s constitution was shelved in favor of Marx’s
manifesto
that is, until I pawned my library

my hands stole and my lips covered for them
until my boss gave me the slip
so I slithered into the attic of a record store
and spent my nights

singing dirges
wailing and gnashing my rotting teeth
spitting blood

I filled my flask with science fiction
put art into my pocket
stirred bad poetry into even worse coffee

wrecked my scooter
under the influence of Hemingway
shredded my calves and elbows
like shells had shredded his knee in Italy

I cursed luck for all of it
as if luck had any part in my strange odyssey

---

Perhaps some make it there
*By Kenneth Thai Sandlin*

moths are naturally nocturnal creatures
most anyway

not colorful like butterflies
though they undergo the same transformation

from a caterpillar

they aren’t celebrated
or considered beautiful
kids don’t chase after moths with nets

at night on my porch I watch them fly into the light above my
doors and bounce off
repeatedly
accomplishing nothing

someone once told me that they did this because they
thought it was the moon

I don’t know how true that really is
but it struck me as a cruel trick of fate
to be born into the night
driven towards the reflection of the sun

shackled to darkness
seeking only light

perhaps some lucky one
caught in a swift wind
will be carried far away

from every flood light and street lamp mirage
up and up into nothing

and make it there

---

My Charlotte
*Angela Stephens*
Bright Sun Sky
Tabatha Thomas

I'm not lost! I have a map.
Amy Saylors

Prayer
Angela Stephens

Reflection of the Elk River
Tabatha Thomas
Reawakening Romanticism: In Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha

By Kris Bennefield

Hermann Hesse’s writings were nearly a century after the period of the Romantics and in a completely different country. Yet the topics of romanticism are so important that they cannot be avoided through barrier of country or idea of religion and/or belief system. Whether or not Hermann Hesse followed romantic tendency on purpose, the topics of romanticism arise in his great work Siddhartha. The tale follows a man on an unending search for not only the truth, the way, and purpose, but more specifically the answer to life for him. This road leads him down a few paths connecting many if not all of the characteristics of the romantics.

Hesse explores the characteristics of romanticism in his novel Siddhartha with Siddhartha becoming a common man, his deep belief in individualism, an internal revolution, a more natural supernatural, and a new appreciation into the most basic aspects of nature.

Much like Lord Byron’s Childe Harold, Siddhartha is the son of a Brahmin (the highest ranking social class), and he quickly gives all of this away in the very beginning of the story to join the Samanas. The Samanas are actually ascetics in this setting like monks of the early church. He gives away his robe to a poor man on the street and leaves his hometown with only his loincloth and best friend. Throughout the story, readers see his search for the complete loss of everything until he meets the first girl who interests his eye, Kamala. However, even though he seems to fall in love he still does not take on his Brahmin class in the story, but continues to try to “win” her by being an “equal” or commoner. She quickly finds him work to obtain money to buy her trinkets and the sort in trade for her kisses. However, even though Siddhartha quickly learns the way of business and amasses a house and yard, he later abandons all that he has once again to continue what he originally set out to do.

William Blake would not be the last artist to seek liberty or write about it. The entire purpose of the novel Siddhartha is the liberation of Siddhartha. He grew up with everything, not only possessions making him free of want but also the endless age of wisdom which had been passed down to all the elders. His entire life he had the library of answers within a moment’s grasp, yet he was never full. He had a void in him which is often spoken of in the world. That hole was his personal search for liberty of the inner self. It would not be one lesson or path to fill this hole but many lessons over the course of many years. By leaving his loved ones, he chooses to refuse the common collective thought and instead pursues independent thought and action. While it seems that this would be a very egotistical thing to choose, it would actually be the sacrifice of the ego to reach his goal on this path which is almost confusing in itself for one to do.

During Romanticism, revolution was occurring; however, in Siddhartha the revolutions happen on the inside like the age old saying “change comes from within.” Almost the entire novel consists of an overthrow of the original-self in Siddhartha. He must constantly do away with what has been passed down generation through generation. Even though the answers given by the elders from his village have imparted wisdom and occasionally help him, the answers are all still experiences that helped them or the elders before them, not a lesson Siddhartha himself learned. Answers that are given and not learned rarely ever prove to hold retention or meaning to a person. It is much like someone’s friend asking for advice over a topic. What is usually said is actually helpful advice for the person giving it when they went through a similar topic of discussion. After hearing this advice and gaining something from it, the friend who originally sought this advice then goes and does the opposite. It is now that the friend asking for advice realizes what they have done by making their choice, and are more likely to see why the correct answer is correct after dealing with the consequences. By making the decision for themselves, the friend goes through a learning phase, which now can be retained in memory through personal experience. Siddhartha realizes this early on in the novel that the elders answers will never be the answers for him. Siddhartha explains this idea the best in the end of the book to his old friend Govinda by saying “One can find wisdom, one can live it, one can be supported by it, one can work wonders with it, but one cannot speak it or teach it” (119). Siddhartha does this constantly by putting himself back at a starting point with no help or doctrine. He also shows a personal revolution by even denying the opportunity of following a true Buddha of his lifetime, The Sublime One, and learning from him the secrets and the answers of the world. He decides that the Sublime One’s doctrine has a flaw in it by deducing that no one has ever reached enlightenment through doctrine, but “through meditation, through knowledge, through enlightenment.”
Not through doctrine” (30). Of course, after he denies the opportunity to follow the Sublime One, he wanders into a town of “child people” and begins his new life working in business to ensure he is allotted time with the beautiful Kamala, and while this lasts long because of Siddhartha’s enthrancement to her he leaves his “child people” as yet another teacher.

While there are no magic like elements of Siddhartha, it stills portrays the supernatural, but more with a comparison to the natural world, much like William Blake’s poems like *The Tyger*, with the idea of the many phenomena that exist here such as the Hindu belief of Sansara, the continuous cycle of birth and rebirth. Not only does Siddhartha and others in the story meditate, but they also go about it in long strands of time completely emptying their wants, needs, desires, and minute thoughts. Occasionally, the monks will fast, and while this may not seem supernatural, The Sublime One when getting alms for his meal would not take enough to quell a pigeon’s hunger possibly receiving his energy from somewhere else. There is a part of the supernatural in this with the end gain being enlightenment, which will be a new mode of thought. Once Siddhartha’s friend the ferryman attains this state he is described as "watching him go: saw each of his steps full of peace, saw his head full of splendor, saw his figure full of light” (115). None of these descriptions can be used in the everyday sense when witnessing a man walking.

Probably the most important topic with Romanticism and Siddhartha is that of nature. Nature is the biggest thing in this universe encompassing entire galaxies to small ecosystems to the many microorganisms that inhabit our skin. Since the dawn of man we have constantly walled ourselves off from nature, preferring the comfort of our fellow man more so than what gives life. Siddhartha himself understands that his goal will probably best be found by being away from society, so most of the novel is spent outdoors, and more importantly he gains most of his wisdom by being there. His goal in the end is even dependent on a form of nature, water. While with romantics this may usually be overlooked due to all of the trees and flowers of creation, that is also what water is, a creation in itself of the combination of two elements found in the natural world. Even though water is not living, it is the sole reason we even have life on this planet and is most often taken for granted. While water may seem bland and usual, considering what we know today, it is actually a phenomenon in itself now that scientists know water was not originally on this planet in the beginning of its formation. Siddhartha recognizes its importance first when he returns to the ferryman who helps others cross the river and originally helped Siddhartha cross to learn from the child people. Upon returning to the river, Siddhartha is given his first lesson from the river, that the river is constantly flowing; it always appears as the same river yet is new every second in its flowing. His final epiphany also comes from the river when he understands by listening to the river that all things are connected, "all the voices, all the goals, all the longing, all the suffering, all the pleasure, everything good and everything bad” (114). While water is important as it is, Siddhartha shows first hand his enlightenment by explaining, to Govinda, the importance and love he has for just a single stone. He explains the stone's importance by saying that it is an animal, human, Buddha, and God today because one day it will become these things. As confusing as it is, Hesse's explanation of the more inanimate nature proves to be just as beautiful as the animate nature if not more by providing the reader with a new sense of appreciation for the smallest things in life with the understanding that one day they too will become life, experiencing things just as he is doing now.

Hermann Hesse lived nearly a century after the first generation of Romantic poets and the revolution in literature that they brought to the world. Yet the idea of these characteristics being used cannot be denied of their importance to the world and their inhabitants. It is through these works that these artists and poets have tried to bring a call to us as William Wordsworth would say that “The world is too much with us” and that we truly do “lay waste our powers” (line 2). Siddhartha did not waste his power, but eventually reached enlightenment. Siddhartha did this by taking on the class of a common man, refusing the societal views and taking on his individual thoughts for his guide, constantly revolting against himself in which he would completely start from a new beginning, reveling in the supernatural that happened all around him, and finding true enlightenment from that which gave him life in the end, which is nature.

**Work Cited**


*Selected for presentation at the 2012 International Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta Convention*
I rushed my mother to the hospital on a Sunday morning and held her memorial service the following Saturday. I can personally identify with the chaotic emotions of Mrs. Mallard in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” after she received the news of her husband’s death. I can truthfully say I know what she was going through. The untimely death of my mother hurled me into an emotional tailspin; consequently, the varied emotions of grief, fear, and liberation are all familiar to me. As I read the story, I felt a validation for the muddled feelings that came and went at will, leaving me holding a bittersweet freedom. It was the first week of November, and it would take me to depths I had never encountered.

When Mother’s heart stopped, I was holding her hand, and for a moment my heart stopped also. Then a rush of energy poured over me as I took out running down the corridor of the hospital. I ran until I could run no farther, faced a brick wall, and collapsed right there. I awakened sobbing in the arms of strangers, without shame. Grief knows no shame, and after it had run its course, I left the hospital alone. Just as Mrs. Mallard wanted solitude and was “pressed down by physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul,” I too was emotionally and physically exhausted (524).

After some time alone, I found myself becoming fearful, as waves of emotion and feelings of helplessness operated within me. I thought back over the previous five years. Mother’s quadruple bypass surgery required I put a halt to my life, quit my job, and spend six months as her constant attendant. After that time, I began working three jobs to meet her needs and my own. This was my reasonable service to one who had always been my helpmeet. Chopin explains Mrs. Mallard’s solitude as being thought provoking: “There was something coming to her, and she was waiting for it fearfully. What was it? She did not know, it was too subtle and elusive to name” (525). Along with my thoughts came fear, then guilt for the feeling I was experiencing now: relief.

I trembled at the thought of never seeing her again, never eating at her table again, never braiding her hair again, never insisting she wear her dentures in public again. Then feelings of relief would creep in as I realized the long struggle had come to an end. I began planning the memorial service to be held on Saturday. The body would be cremated, “not laid out for everyone to see and carry on about,” as Mother had always said with absolute firmness. The choir would sing a medley of songs, and her favorite song, “Amazing Grace,” would be sung by her dearest friend. “Then, I want y’all to eat and celebrate, let the dead bury the dead,” Mother’s saying says since the beginning of time. I had several bittersweet moments during this week; thus, I strongly identify with Mrs. Mallard’s feelings of liberation in the following passage: “But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome” (525).

Today, I welcome my emotions, and I express them more freely. Feelings of grief, fear, and also guilt come back to visit occasionally. Mostly, I choose to “live in the moment,” a concept I learned in therapy. I have learned through my experience with death that I can stay bitter and live hopeless, or I can get better and live liberated.

Works Cited

I Should Have Known
By Bridgette Pylant

I am not sure how I should have found out that my grandma was dying. Should my dad have set me down and told me? Should he have asked my mom to tell me? My grandmother was diagnosed with lung cancer just before Christmas in 1995. I have since found out that her prognosis was bleak from the very beginning. She survived almost a year after she was diagnosed. It seems that during that time the issue would have come up that “the girls,” as my little sisters and I were often called, should be told that their grandma has a terminal illness, and that we needed to prepare ourselves for her passing. Instead, we were told that “she was fine” or that “she is getting better every day.” My dad never did tell us how serious Grandma’s condition was, but I remember very clearly the moment I realized she would not survive the battle.

I had just turned sixteen, and I was visiting my dad for the weekend. It was also the weekend that my dad, my aunts, and my uncle decided to move Grandma in with Aunt Kathy. They told us that it would make things easier for Grandma since Aunt Kathy lived closer to the hospital. It never occurred to me she wouldn’t be moving back.

If I had known that it would be my last trip to Grandma’s house, I would have paid more attention as we traveled down the long dirt road that led to the old, gray, cedar shingled house where I spent so much time as a child. Looking back, I can see how humble it was, but as a child, I thought it was wonderful! The house was once the foreman’s quarters for the dairy farm that surrounded it. It had a small kitchen complete with a hardwired, yellow rotary phone that hung next to the refrigerator. The small rectangular dining table, around which so many holidays and birthdays were celebrated, was tucked in the corner of the large living room. The living room was cozy with its pale yellow and delicately flowered wallpaper covering the walls and a large fireplace and wood burning stove. The one hall led to three bedrooms and the single bathroom at the end. The best part of the house though, the place where we spent most of our visits, was the large screened-in front porch. We would spend hours swinging with Grandma on that porch. Often, she would sit and watch us play in the yard or would swing us in the handmade swing that hung from the pecan tree in the front yard. That house was as much a comfort to me during my childhood as my favorite teddy bear.

On this particular day, the house was buzzing with activity. My dad, aunts, and uncle were all busy packing things up. I remember thinking it was strange that they were packing the whole house for what I thought was going to be a temporary situation.

I walked back to Grandma’s room. I stopped at the door and noticed how small she looked in her queen-sized pineapple four-poster bed. Her bedside table that was usually strewn with the big gaudy jewelry that she loved instead looked like a neatly arranged pharmacy. She was awake but lying still, and she smiled as I walked over to give her a kiss and a hug. I sat on the bed, and we chatted for a while as the house rattled noisily around us.

After a while, Aunt Kathy poked her head through the door and asked if I could help Grandma with her bath and help her get dressed. I remember selfishly wishing that I was not the oldest granddaughter, but I nodded and took the small plastic tub they used to give her baths to the bathroom to fill it with water. When I returned to the room, Grandma was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her cotton nightgown hung loosely from her now thin frame. I helped her lift the nightgown over her head and began the task of washing her back. Her emaciation became more apparent as I gently moved the washcloth over the bony protrusions of her ribs and vertebrae. When her back was clean, I turned and started gathering her clothes, giving her time to finish her bath with as much privacy as possible. Bathing and dressing complete, I left Grandma to rest as it seemed the simple task left her exhausted.

When we arrived, my grandmother was moved into her new bedroom furnished simply with a hospital bed, a dresser, and a few chairs for visitors. We visited for a while until my dad told us to start saying our good-byes. It was Sunday, and our weekend visit was ending. I hugged my grandma.
“I love you Grandma. See you next time,” I said.
“I will be here,” she replied.
I was waiting patiently in the kitchen for my dad and my sisters to finish their own goodbyes when I saw it. Lying innocently on the kitchen table, the pamphlet made with brightly colored glossy paper, the image of a nurse with a caring smile tending to her patient, and the big bold letters of HOSPICE SERVICES screaming at me what my family had concealed and forcing me to acknowledge and believe what I already knew.
My grandma was dying.
Aunt Kathy came over and squeezed my shoulders as a tear rolled down my cheek.
My grandma lost her battle with lung cancer in August 1996, just a few short weeks after moving in with Aunt Kathy. The day she moved was the last time I saw her or spoke with her.
I am older now, and I have kids of my own. I understand my dad’s reluctance in telling us the seriousness of Grandma’s illness. I think for the most part he just did not want to believe it himself. I cannot imagine my pain any less if I had known. I do not know if it is possible to be prepared to lose a loved one, but I would have liked to have more time to come to terms with the idea, and to say a better goodbye.
I hope that I never have to tell my kids those hard truths, but I know that I will. When the time comes, I want to be the one who comforts them and answers their questions. I want to be the one who reassures them that every thing will be okay. I want to be the one to explain to them that losing someone is a hard, inevitable part of life, but the pain will lessen over time.
Penitentiary Summer
By James Kelly

The reverberating sounds of wood on metal and loud voices startle me awake at 4:30 A.M. The last of the cool night air is already dissipating from the cell block. By noon the temperature will reach 100°F. The smell from this pit of hell will sour as the air thickens with the rising temperature. Things slowly go from bad to worse as the day drags on. On this torridly hot July evening, I stare at the cold steel bars of this prison cell, wondering where it all went wrong.

It feels like the inside of an oven while I am making my bed. Like an animal in the jungle, I always keep watch for possible predators. In the jungle, sometimes one has to fight to show he is not weak. The blistering temperatures have already made the place sour with the smells of an unkempt animal. During these long, sultry summer days and nights, the inmates have become extremely volatile and aggressive.

The thick and stagnant air is full of dust. As the sweat pours down my feverish forehead, I find it hard to breathe. There is a fat man lying on the floor by one of the only fans the cell block has. He appears to be struggling for breath like a fish out of water. In these conditions, if he is not transferred soon, he might not make it. I am finding it hard to cope, and I have already lost fifteen pounds in two weeks. The water here is rusty and almost undrinkable. I feel like I am on the verge of dehydration. The older inmates with medical problems are being slowly moved to the medical unit. I find myself wondering if I fake a medical problem then maybe I can escape this hellish place for a while. The day is long and I feel wrath-like as night approaches.

It is slightly cooler now, but there is no breeze. Night has come to the penitentiary, and with it things slow down to a snail’s pace. Lockdown is called, and the heavy metal doors are slammed into place with hammer-like blows. I am always startled when this happens. I think that’s when the finality of it sinks in. I think about the guys with twenty, thirty years, and I know I could not endure this horrific nightmare that long. A deep sadness settles inside of me as I think of my children and the loved ones I left behind. Scenes from my life play out in my mind like a movie on fast forward. The night to come will be restless. My mind will run like the water of a stream, forever flowing. I pray like a child, “Please, God, let me sleep, and let me be away from this place, if only for awhile. “

I awake once again to the torturous heat of the new day. The monotonous routine has finally settled in. Like a soldier in the desert, I prepare myself for the day. It is hard to keep your wits when you feel like you are being roasted like a duck on Chinese New Year. I grab my wet rag to keep the salty sweat out of my eyes and step out onto the cell block. The heat is already stifling, and two inmates are fighting in the corner. The guttural cries are disturbing, and I think this is what hell must be like.
Standing in the doorway, the MMA event promoter is scanning the fighters and coaches milling around. I scrutinize him from the far corner of the make-shift dressing room where I am jumping rope. His polo is wrinkled and now, half un-tucked. His dress slacks are frumpy and ill-fitting. My earlier impression of Steve Something-or-Other proved to be right. This guy is a disorganized mess. First he re-scheduled weigh-ins for the previous night and did not inform coach. We had to take a picture of me on the scale with a camera phone and send it to the guy. The worst blunder is that he forgot to bring the head gear and boxing gloves he insisted on providing. End result- just enough cheap equipment purchased from the closest sports store, which is currently being recycled between thirty fighters. What really pissed me off was that he forgot to tell me I had to take a mandatory pregnancy test before the fight. I called my boyfriend, who luckily was in the audience, and begged him to rush out and buy a pregnancy test. Meanwhile, I chugged water so I could pee on the damn thing. I am not a fan of this Steve guy, whose eyes have settled on me. He is headed my way, weaving around tables and chairs, with red boxing gloves tucked under his arm.

“Hey. Lendsey, right?” he asks as he approaches. His voice reeks of false sincerity. His eyes look hollowed and dark behind smudged glasses. I notice he has a beer, but probably not a razor or an iron.

“Yeah. Lendsey,” I say curtly and keep jumping rope.

“These are my personal gloves from back in the day.” He pushes them out towards me. I stop and stare at the gloves. I glance over at coach. He is standing by the wall, arms crossed, face stern. He looks annoyed, but gestures with his head towards Steve’s outstretched hands, which means I am to take the gloves. So I do.

“Thanks,” I say with forced politeness.

“So this is your first fight, right?” he asks. I sense he is judging me.

“Yep. My first one,” I say with irritation. I set the gloves down and pick up my jump rope. I am hungry, tired, and nervous as hell. All the issues caused the show to start almost three hours late. I have not eaten in six hours. I really dislike Disorganized Steve right now.

“Well, good luck,” he says with a smirk. “Ranford is up next, then you, so it’s almost time. Sorry for the inconvenience.” He gives Coach an apologetic glance then he hurries off, stopping to shake a hand along the way.

I take a deep breath and sigh. What crap. The damn gloves are still sweaty from the last fight. I hope the guy that wore them didn’t get his ass kicked. I look at Coach and shake my head. He is quieter than usual, which makes him seem more intimidating. He is six foot two, broad backed, dark-skinned and ex-military. He has been training and teaching fighting for almost as long as I have been alive. I turn twenty-nine next week. He is one of the people I most trust and admire.

“These are actually good gloves. Better than the other crap he bought,” he says.

“Yeah. They look better than mine-but,” I say doubtfully as I hoist myself up on the table.

“But, what?”

“It just seems like bad luck to use a stranger’s gloves, you know?” He looks me over skeptically. He has a dissatisfied expression on his face, an indication that I am about to get a lecture.

“Trust me. I know exactly what you are feeling. This is part of the game, though. All this bullshit going on—you can’t let it get to your head. Do you understand?” he asks sternly. I just nod my head, but keep looking at my feet.

“What did you come here to do?” he asks loudly. I look up, startled by the tone in his voice. I can feel eyes turn in our direction.

“I came here to fight, Coach,” I say, hoping he does not detect the tremble in my voice. I slide off the table and wiggle my fist down inside
a glove. The fit is snug. The inside is warm and sweaty, the only familiar sensation I have experienced all night.

“RANFORD, YOU’RE UP!” yells a voice from the conference room door way. A small, elegantly muscled black man turns his head to the call. I watch his coach gather their things. Together, they disappear into the corridor. That means I’m next. My stomach and throat shrink up inside of me. I close my eyes and try to breathe. The echo of a roaring crowd fills the silence of the dressing room.

“Come on,” Coach says. “It’s time to finish getting warmed up.” Our routine calms me down, but I am still acutely, almost painfully, aware of the inevitable scene waiting for me—a crowd of two hundred people surrounding an octagon wrapped in a black, chain-link fence. Inside that cage is my opponent. She is a rare occurrence in the South—another girl who likes to fight.

An excited wave of yelling sweeps down through the corridor. I can hear a long applause and whistling. The announcer is babbling something over the microphone. Instinctively, I know that Ranford’s fight is over already. It was barely two minutes. I count down the seconds it takes for the promoter’s assistant to walk down the hallway and call my name. Thirty-two, thirty-three, thirty-four.

“Coil! It’s go time!” he shouts. My insides cringe at the sound of my own name. I can feel my feet start to sweat. Coach is in front of me gently pulling red head gear over my cornrows. I squeeze my hands open inside of the warm boxing gloves. My heart is pounding.

“Are you ready?” Coach asks with concern. He is leaning down to get a good look at my eyes. I peer back at him openly. I am not afraid, at least, not afraid of getting hurt. No one questions my physical toughness, my technique, or my athleticism. Everyone is worried about how I will handle the stress. Because everyone who knows me also knows that I am shy. What if she cracks under pressure? What if she freezes up in there? These are the questions that are asked when I am not around, the same questions I have been asking myself. I am afraid, but more importantly, I am sick and tired of being afraid. I am going through with this. I am a fighter. I have been fighting my whole life. I have to see what is on the other side of this fear.

“I’m ready, Coach.” I look him in the eyes, and I lie. After a long pause, he accepts my lie, or maybe he accepts the underlying determination.

“Open up,” he says and puts in my mouth piece. I take three deep breaths and start walking to the door. Coach is beside me, his arm around my shoulder, and the bucket of supplies hanging from the other hand. I fix my eyes into the space in front of me. I focus on walking. One foot in front of the other, Lendsey. Deep breaths. The linoleum tiles are cold under my bare feet. The corridor is quiet and dark. My spine shivers. My neck feels tight. My stomach is vibrating with anxious energy. We go through a side door that leads to the back-stage. I have to come out on the main stage in a spotlight and wait to be announced. This next moment could make or break my performance. There is one more door between me and the audience. I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

“When you get in there, your adrenaline is going to crash your whole system, so be prepared. The most important thing is to breathe. Now—go out there and do your thing.” He says this with a grin and turns the door knob. I step out into a flood of blinding light.

“From Huntsville, Alabama—LENDSEY COIL!” The announcer calls into the microphone. There is cheering and clapping. Everyone is staring at me. I come down the stage stairs, and I make my way through aisles of people. Some are smiling and holding up fists of encouragement. Others are analyzing my potential weaknesses. Coach is squeezing my neck. I realize in this moment that I am not going to die of nervousness. I make eye contact with people around me and smile. I am okay. An official is checking all my gear. He gives me the thumbs up to enter the cage. I bump fists with Coach and bound up the stairs into the cage.

Three photographers are hanging over the sides with cameras. Their constant flashing makes me blink. I feel disoriented by the brightness inside the octagon. The floor and support beams are covered with canary yellow padding. I hear people calling out my name. I squint in their direction. My boyfriend is waving.
hold my glove up for a second and then turn to look at my opponent. The first thing I notice is that her arms are not defined. She looks soft. She is wearing make-up. Interesting. The referee stands in front of me and blocks my view. I gaze past his shoulders and make eye contact with her. She looks down at the mat. The referee checks my gear and then calls us to the middle of the cage.

“This is an Amateur Muay Thai fight. No knees to the head. No elbows at all. You are scheduled to fight three rounds. Each round is three minutes. If I call ‘time’ go to neutral corners. Are you ready to fight?” We both look at him and nod our heads. He sends us back to our corners. There is a wild feeling coiling up in my guts, something hungry and primal.

“FIGHT!” yells the referee from the middle of the octagon, bringing his raised hand down in a chopping motion. We move in and circle around. Suddenly, she is too close. Her gloves are around the back of my neck. She is kneeing me in the leg and again in the stomach. I feel slow and confused. Coach’s voice comes crashing through the numbness in my brain.

“KNEES, LENDSEY, THROW YOUR KNEES!” He screams from outside of the cage. My body isn’t working. My brain is sending commands, but no one is getting messages. Shit. Okay. Just breathe. There is no amount of running to prepare for this,” I say while desperately sucking air into my lungs. I have no idea of what really just happened. I am too tired to care.

“Listen to me,” Coach says quietly. “She is using her kicks to close the gap, but your punches are hurting her. She doesn’t have any hands. She just has that kick. Work your combinations and finish her. Don’t look at the fucking ref to save her ass. You finish her.” I nod and sip more water. He slaps the back of my head and leaves the ring.

I have water, a little rest, and a game plan. I feel wealthy. She is standing in her corner with her hands on her hips, breathing hard through her mouth. This is my fight now. The bell rings. The referee calls us back to the middle. We touch gloves. She comes straight in throwing kicks. I block her kick, nail her twice with my jab and circle out. I do not wait for her to come back. I let my hands go free. She is eating punches left and right. She is so focused on trying to kick me that she doesn’t protect her face. Her nose is bleeding. I circle and hit her again, but she gets back inside, grabs the back of my neck with her gloves. I do not wait for her to throw a knee. I step back and throw first. She hunches over. I push her away and hit her again. She is backing away into the cage. My punches are bouncing off of the fence. I throw an arcing kick that slams into her ribs. She leans on the cage with her hands down. She is hurt. I hold back. The crowd is yelling excitedly. I can hear, “FINISH HER! FINISH HER!” A white towel flies over her side of the cage and lands by her feet. The referee jumps between us. I am relieved. I did not want to hit this girl anymore. I could see she had enough. I turn away from her with a gleeful spin, throwing my hands up in the air. I blow a kiss to my boyfriend. I am elated, joyful. I walk back over to my opponent and hug her tightly. She hugs me back. Her make-up is smeared under her eyes, and the bridge of her nose is swelling. She is smiling. We touch gloves one last time.
Saved by Immersion
By Alaina Hamaker

There aren't many men in the Cloudus family, and those that exist are bedeviled by the women Cloudus's. The Cloudus men either die off, run off or don't get born due to some biological preference for females in our family. I can't begin to tell you all the male Cloudus's that didn't even get born over the last few generations, but it must have been the best of them judging by what my female relations say about the men that were born. The belief held by all Cloudus women is that all Cloudus men have a predilection to be ne'er-do-wells and will, without the resolute influence of good Cloudus women, totter unerringly toward failure.

The archetype of Cloudus women, at least in the living generations, is Aunt Cleo Cloudus. And, perhaps the most heathen of all male Cloudus's is my daddy, Gun Cloudus. Long as I can remember, Aunt Cleo has been after Daddy Gun to quit smoking, to quit drinking, and to get baptized in the name of the Lord, or as she was always putting it to him to “get saved by immersion.” Aunt Cleo was staunch Church Of Christ and believed with all her heart that baptism was synonymous with Christ and believed with all her heart Aunt Cleo was staunch Church Of Christ and believed with all her heart to get baptized in the name of the Lord. She extracted herself from the huge car and then called Fluffy who hopped out yapping and looking around for somebody to bite, preferably Ol' Olfactory who was as pestered by the little dog as he was by horseflies. I knew Ol' Olfactory was way up under the porch because he had followed Daddy Gun up under there when he had crawled under to hide his big bottle of Wild Turkey whiskey and a carton of Pall Mall cigarettes from the search Aunt Cleo was sure to make for such contraband.

I went out and got Aunt Cleo's suitcase out of the Buick while Sister helped her up the front steps. I had to keep high stepping to keep Fluffy from nipping at my ankles. As Aunt Cleo came in the front door, Daddy Gun was going out the back.

I came back out after a minute to get away from all the woman chatter going on inside, and Daddy Gun was extracting equipment from the yard shed. "I'm going frog gigging tonight. You wanna go Cleatus?" he asked me. Did I ever! We packed our waders and lights and our pitchforks and a big old tow sack. "This'll keep us out late and the less noise we'll have to see of Aunt Cleo. Come on Ol' Olfactory," he called, and Ol' Olfactory squeezed out from under the house with a kind of watchful look about him, and we were off!

When we got back, it was about nine o'clock at night. The women still had the house lit up, so Daddy Gun decided to visit the old outhouse in the back yard and he entered it carrying the sack of gigged frogs slung over his shoulder. Just as I mounted the back steps to the house I met Aunt Cleo descending. It was then I remembered that she always used the outhouse when she visited us. Her place out in rural Stick Willa County was still serviced only by an outdoor privy, and Aunt Cleo wasn't one for gladly adopting new routines.

"Well!" she said, "I think it's about time a young man of your age should be in the house thinking about bathing and Bible reading bedtime."

"Yes'um Aunt Cleo, that's just what I'm about to do," I said.

The outhouse was a two holer, and Aunt Cleo went in next to Daddy Gun. Daddy Gun commenced to make a low, slow growling noise like a painter down from the mountain. But Aunt Cleo was on to that in a second. "Who's that in there making that noise as if I didn't know. I can smell those Pall Mall's, and if I'm not mistaken I believe I can smell whiskey breath too—is that you Gun Cloudus?"

"It's me, Cleo," he answered her back. "And quit your belly aching. A little cigarette and whiskey smell will do the place some good."

"Well, if you like it so well, Gun Cloudus, you can just smell it a little longer!" and as she was leaving Aunt Cleo stuck a nail through the hasp on the privy door locking Daddy Gun inside.

It wasn't until Daddy Gun finished his business that he discovered that he was locked in. He started striking matches and moving them all around the perimeter of the door to find what was preventing it from opening. Unfortunately, his match grazed the tow sack containing the frogs, and
the dry burlap immediately ignited. It only took seconds for the old wood of the privy house to kindle.

Sister saw it first from the kitchen window and set up a howl that something was afire in the yard. I had already gone up to my room, and by the time I got down the steps and out to the back yard, the family was haphazardly attempting to extinguish what was already a huge bonfire. Aunt Cleo was squirting it with a puny stream of water from the hosepipe, and the other women were circling like lunatics throwing wash pans full of dirt at the flames. Aunt Cleo was especially overwrought, and finally I understood her to scream that she had caused Daddy Gun to be burned up alive. At first I wasn't convinced that Daddy Gun was in there until I caught on that Aunt Cleo had put a bolt in the latch, and then I broke down too because I figured that Daddy Gun was lost for sure. Even Ol' Olfactory was distraught and was loping around the fire barking and baying worse than he does when he's treed a possum. Then the little building exploded like hell-fire into a last intense conflagration, and the Cloudus clan found itself standing in a helpless and immobile circle as a hot vortex of flame and sparks spiraled viciously up into the black nighttime sky.

By the time the Volunteer Fire Department Hook and Ladder truck arrived, all us Cloudus's were sitting on the front steps of the house. We were a woebegone bunch. The women were all crying, and Aunt Cleo was especially inconsolable in her grief. A few of the firemen drug a line back to hose down the glowing heap of lumber that was all that was left of the Cloudus outhouse and what was effectively the crematoria of the most senior of Cloudus manhood. The Fire Chief had already called the Stick Willa County coroner to come and help extract what might be left of Daddy Gun's body from the smoldering embers.

Sitting with my family but somehow alone with my grief, I heard the firemen shout and Ol' Olfactory bark, and I figured some last timber had exploded from the spray of cold water and had blown enough sparks and ashes of my daddy into the air to cause them to yell. Next, when I heard their excited voices approaching I figured they had found the body. Suddenly, they rounded the corner, and there draped on the shoulders of two firefighters was the sooted, but quite alive and walking body of Gun Cloudus himself!

When she saw him, Mama shouted and leaped to him and while the rest of us, awestruck, scrambled up after her. Aunt Cleo let out a gasp and promptly swooned into Sister's lap.

"He survived by jumping into the cesspool!" one of the firemen shouted. "And unharmed too," another added, although I could see a few scorch marks and could smell an odor coming off him as bad as Ol' Olfactory when he's tangled with a pole cat.

Never minding the odor and filth, all us Cloudus's were touching and hugging him and wiping his hair back like he was a newborn babe. Even Ol' Olfactory was on his hind legs trying to get up to lick Daddy Gun's face. And from that blackened face we could see the two white circles of Daddy Gun's eyes as he looked at the just reviving Aunt Cleo lying in the loving arms of Sister. As Aunt Cleo beheld Daddy Gun, she seemed dumbstruck for the first time in her life.

"Well, Aunt Cleo," Daddy Gun said hoarsely, "I reckon finally I done been saved by immersion!" And later that night we gathered around the Cloudus table and feasted on fire baked frog legs.
The majestic creature approached, its silvery mane glimmering in the evening light of the wooded plain as it lifted its head. Its paw-like hooves met the ground with a graceful rustle of the leaves underfoot, imitating the smooth gait of a cat rather than the rude, noisy trot of a horse. It was significantly taller than the biggest horse he had ever seen. Sleek and shining white, its body was more elongated and aerodynamic than a horse’s. Its wings, hardly visible when they were not extended, seemed to shine like a coat of glittering mail folded on either side of its back. Its three-foot long horn glinted awe-inspiringly. Up close, he realized it was so large a beast that he might have difficulty mounting its great height. Its dark eyes fixed on him for a moment. They gave a subtle threat, but in their captivating depths he read an irresistible challenge. To observers, taming a unicorn appeared to be a thrilling enterprise, but in reality it was a perilous test of courage and endurance.

It was hard to imagine that such a beautiful, noble beast could be perilous. Quickly, he reached out, firmly grasping two handfuls of soft, velvety mane. Muscling up, he managed to get a leg high enough to swing over the massive back. Clinging to the unicorn’s thick glossy mane, he sat for a moment looking at the ground a surprising distance away and deeply inhaling the woody smell of fresh juniper that seemed to emanate from the mane. The creature stiffened slightly and moved forward again, breaking into an easy canter. Then with a pop of air, it spread its wings, stretching them wide so that both shimmering lengths rippled in the breeze. With a single beat of its wings that seemed to reverberate through the air like a terrific heartbeat, the ground seemed to drop away as they shot into the sky. He clung to the mane, barely able to keep from tumbling backward with the force of the takeoff as the wind seemed to press him back and leave his stomach many miles below. It was a thrilling ascent. Then the violently plummeting wind seemed to die as the unicorn leveled, gliding high in the sky. He looked below him. The tree under which he had mounted moments before was lost in the tiny forest beneath his feet. He thought with mild surprise that it was more amazing than terrifying.

However, paralyzing fear was quick to follow in the wake of pleasure. Without warning, the unicorn dived straight downward. The tiny landscape below sped towards him as he jerked backward, and a horrible, weightless, empty feeling filled his whole body as the wind tried to rake him off the back of the unicorn. Forcing himself forward again, he fought against the powerful wind and clutched the mane closer, straining the muscles of his legs and back as he pressed his own body straight against the unicorn’s back, trying to merge into its form. When it was seconds away from hitting the ground, the unicorn looped neatly back up, performing a twist that nearly threw him over its side. It steadily increased its speed as it proceeded into a tight, terrifying series of rolls, spins, and dives. The whole world was a sickening blur of earth and sky about to crash into him as each maneuver brought repeated bouts of terrifying weightlessness followed by the horrible sinking weight of free-fall and the sudden sickening sensation when he found gravity sucking him off the unicorn into the ground very far above or below him. At first it felt as if the
contents of his stomach were being forced out, but then he forced himself to ignore the earth and sky blending and swirling dizzyingly all around him, as he focused entirely upon holding on with all his might. He wanted to rest safely on solid, unmoving ground, but deep inside he felt an insatiable longing for this wild flight that required him to continue without reserve, no matter how thrilling or terrifying it was, until some untamed instinct trapped inside him could finally soar free. This primitive desire grew steadily until to his astonishment, he actually began to revel in the weightless, wind-buffeted sensation as he soared on the back of the unicorn with power and speed that he could not have previously imagined. He was finally unshackled, and there was nowhere he could not fly!

Even after conquering his fear of height and his motion sickness, the battle of endurance and perseverance was only just beginning. As the minutes dragged into hours, his muscles began to ache and cramp. He desperately needed to rest. The ache grew into one throbbing pain, and he realized with a pang of fear that he could not hold on indefinitely with every muscle in his body. The unicorn continued to soar and plunge ineluctably, and he knew that unless it landed and gave up soon, he would eventually cramp up completely, lose his hold, and fall from the terrible height. He had learned to predict the next stunt the unicorn intended based upon which muscles it tensed. Therefore, at the next opportunity, he flexed his stiff cramped hands and found that they were already raw and bleeding from hours of continual chaffing against the beast’s mane, despite its feeling soft at first. He had been too terrified and focused upon merely holding on to notice before. Quickly he twined his hands into the unicorn’s thick mane, securing them safely in case they should lose their grip. At least hanging upside down by his hands from the mane was better in the end than falling off, even if he dislocated a few joints. Thus secured, he continued to fly, though he grew increasingly exhausted with each passing hour.

As the sun began to set, he wondered if the unicorn would fly indefinitely, or merely until he fell off. Just as he was beginning to think that he could not stay on another minute, the rolling and tumbling gradually ceased, and the unicorn glided across the sky, slowly sinking in a downward spiral. He was struck by the quiet peace of the flight, with no more violent gravitational forces battering him, only a gentle wind blowing coolly into his face. The sinking sun played across their path in multicolored rays, illuminating the unicorn’s shining coat with splendor and making the earth below seem to glow with golden light as it drew nearer. Soon the trees were rustling around him. The unicorn landed so softly he did not know the exact moment it touched the ground. Only as it trotted several paces to a smooth halt did he realize that the breakneck flight was over at last. As they stood still, the unicorn turned its great head to look at him, and he knew then that it accepted its rider.
Assortment
Amberly Reese

Movement
Amberly Reese

The Mad Hatter
Brooke Alexander

Oceano oscuro
Isidro Arroyo-Solano
In the sixty-plus years of its existence, Calhoun has steadily grown to become the largest community college in the state of Alabama. Each development has been beneficial and exciting, especially this year. Like buds on a tree, some of the changes can be seen as they wait to bloom. To find out exactly what's about to bloom, there is no one better to ask than Calhoun's President, Dr. Marilyn Beck.

One of those blooms, shared Dr. Beck affably, is the previously tattered Tennessee Valley Rehab Center, which is nearing its transformation into the proud and promising Clean Energy building. The fruit of a $3 million-plus grant from the Department of Labor, the newly renovated building will house the technology and environment for learning about other energy sources. The goal of the building is to educate students and faculty about energy conservation and, most importantly, give students the skills to work with different power sources. Not only will new fields of energy technology be explored, but the current heating and cooling and electricity programs will be enhanced as well. Courses will hopefully be ready to start in the summer after the building’s opening at the end of the spring semester. Keep an eye out for the solar panels that will soon be installed outside for studying solar energy! Dr. Beck shared that ACECET (Alabama Center for Excellence in Clean Energy Technology) is the first, and currently the only, center of its kind in the state.

Although biased by my major, the largest and most exciting change is the move that the visual arts department will be making to their new building. And by the way, the new home for visual arts is across the street from Decatur’s Princess Theatre! This Fine Arts Center will house all the current classes and programs with the addition of some new courses. Our sister college, Athens State, will also be sharing the space. Included with the new fields of ceramics, sculpture, pottery, printmaking, and printing is the expanded computer-assisted design curriculum.

With the Fine Arts Center opening for classes in the fall, where will the performing arts be? They will continue to reside in the Fine Arts building on the Decatur Campus. Dr. Beck says that she holds “long-term dreams” for growth of the downtown facilities that would include the performing arts. She says that the north Alabama region would benefit from a more “comprehensive program” that included more drama, music, and one day even dance.

Also on that list of possibilities and long-term dreams is the expansion of the Huntsville campus. In September of 2011 the Decatur Daily printed an article about the opposition to purchase land for the possible Calhoun addition. The campus desperately needs more space for its students. “The campus on Wynn Drive is just about maxed out in students, and parking has been a major issue. We are still working on a solution,” said a hopeful Dr. Beck. “We need more science labs. We need more computer labs. We need more classrooms. We need more space for our student services programs, as well. The spaces there are not adequate to serve the number of students that we have.” If these were added to the Huntsville campus, not only would students be much more comfortable, but their transfer programs would also be expanded. However, all the technical programs will continue to be based in Decatur. “We have technical programs here and they are very expensive, so we would not duplicate the programs that we have in Decatur,” explained Dr. Beck. Both campuses are growing remarkably, and both campuses should be a source of pride for the region they serve.

The final inquiry about the college veered away from the theme of growth to that of reflection. I asked Dr. Beck what was the most difficult decision to make for Calhoun during the storms of April 27, 2011. She said that was “when to reopen the college without negatively impacting the students and their families, or faculty and their families, who had been negatively impacted by the storms. When can we open back up and people will be glad to get
Muse

Interview with Dr. Beck, Continued

back to regular life again? A lot of us were ready, but most of us were not as impacted as people in certain areas. The greatest challenge,” according to Dr. Beck, “was not to have a system of communication. We couldn’t just send out an e-mail and ask our faculty, ‘How are you? Do you have damage in your homes?’

With telephone lines and computers down, Dr. Beck said that Facebook worked the best to check up on people. People could access Facebook through their cell phones if they were charged. “You didn’t have the communication system so you could find out which faculty, which students needed the help and where we could go to really help out people here at the college. That was really frustrating not to have a communication system.” As a result, “We installed a generator that will run our computer system. So those people who do have the mobile units- we can communicate with them from the college. We can e-mail or send announcements to a large number of people.”

One last thing Dr. Beck wanted in this year’s MUSE was this statement: “We really have a fine community college, and even with the loss of state funding, our college has been able to remain financially stable. We have been able to maintain our level of excellence in all areas including having the most advanced technology to use in teaching classes.”

The growth of the Art and Technical Departments and the dreams we hold for the future can stand alone on their merit. But I think our college’s recent growth is all the more special because of the events of April 27th last year. Our communities were hardly recognizable. Our hearts ached with loss. But we have traded our tatters in not only for restoration, but also for thriving and advancing our lives and communities.

Calhoun Community College and the QEP
By Leah Vallely

Calhoun Community College has very recently participated in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reaffirmation process. As of 2004, SACS requires that colleges and universities include a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) as part of the accreditation process. A QEP is a course of action for institutional improvement that is designed to address one or more issues related to enhancing student learning. The QEP topic selection is left to the individual institutions, but it must emerge from current institutional planning, evaluation processes and must be compatible with the college’s strategic plan. After careful research and input from all stakeholders, Calhoun’s QEP committee designed a QEP with an overall purpose of improving academic reading across the curriculum. The QEP was driven by a three-pronged, focused approach, which included building the necessary support structures for the success of the QEP, incorporating researched-based reading strategies in reading-intensive courses, and instituting environmental changes that will help to create a culture of reading. The kick-off date of the QEP is Fall 2012. For further information, please contact Leah Vallely, QEP Coordinator.

The Calhoun Cupboard
By Heather Congo

I remember what it was like being on food stamps. Even with those embarrassing stamp booklets, we sometimes still did not have enough for groceries. So, I was a bit nostalgic when Alana, one of my English students, came to me hungry. She had disclosed that she had not eaten in two days. She had recently obtained a job at a fast food chain, received her first paycheck, and was about to buy groceries for her mother and herself. Her mother convinced her to hand over her paycheck so that she could be in charge of buying the groceries. When Alana came to me, her mother had been gone for days, with Alana’s grocery money and had used the money to buy drugs. I brought Alana back to my office and gave her the snacks I had in my desk drawer: three small bags of chips. I will never forget her face of surprise when she said to me “Mrs. Congo, you are giving me all of these?!” At that moment, I realized very suddenly that Alana was not the only Calhoun student struggling with the issue of hunger. When Alana left my office that day, I began brainstorming what has now become known as The Calhoun Cupboard. This project is year-round and provides food and hygiene items to Calhoun students in need. All visits to the Cupboard are completely confidential, and no student ever has to prove a need. Donations are needed and welcomed year-round. As faculty, staff, and administration, we cannot expect our students to do their best academically if their bellies are empty. The Calhoun Cupboard’s mission is to feed the body so that the mind can focus on learning.

If you wish to obtain or donate food and hygiene items, please contact Mrs. Heather Congo on the Huntsville campus, Office #7, hcongo@calhoun.edu, 256-890-4761.
Calhoun’s Annual Writers’ Conference
By Sheila Byrd

Our Writers’ Conference is celebrating its 11th year in 2012, which is an acknowledgment to the success we have had over the past ten years.

Judith Ortiz Cofer will be on campus this year on April 26th, 2012. Ms. Cofer’s sessions are at 9:00am and 6:00pm at the Aerospace Training Center on the Decatur campus. Ms. Cofer’s book, Woman in Front of the Sun, is this year’s focus. Additionally, this event will be a part of Calhoun’s ARC program in conjunction with our SACS initiative. Ms. Valls de Que-sada’s Guitar Ensemble and a special choral presentation of the Spanish song “Muñé Rendá Fon-seca” under the direction of Dr. Holly Poe will begin our conference.

As with writers in past years, Ms. Cofer has agreed to hold a private session with our local Sigma Kappa Delta Honor Students on the Friday after the conference. This session traditionally has been intimate, informal, and fun.

Over the years, we have had many distinguished authors including Clifton Taulbert, Miller Williams, Linda Pastan, Michael Knight, and Tom Kimmel. Last year was the first time we had a repeat appearance: Michael Knight had just published The Typist, and his reputation and popularity prompted another Cal-houn visit. Once again, he educated and entertained the audience members. While The Typist was historical fiction centering on the years after World War II, Ms. Cofer’s book is a set of memoir essays describing her childhood and focusing on experiences which shaped her as a writer as the entire title suggests: Woman In Front of the Sun: On Becoming a Writer.

The history of our Writers’ Conference hinges on a set of happy coincidences.

The U. of Alabama Press contacted Dr. Randy Cross about having Ms. Mary Ward Brown come and read from her latest book, It Wasn’t All Dancing, and he asked me about having her come for a small reading for SKD students and others. I had just attended a Writers’ Conference with my friend, author Dr. H. E. Francis, and thought perhaps we could do that sort of event here. I told Dr. Cross that perhaps we could develop this into a conference, so we secured funds, made arrangements for Ms. Brown to come, and acquired copies of her book for students. Many of us on the English faculty taught her book in our classes. Next, we advertised on local public radio, gave lectures and held discussions on her book to local clubs and schools around the area, and we had our first Writers’ Conference. It was much more successful than we anticipated: we had over 500 people to attend. With the success of the first year, we decided we could hold this event every year.

Finally, I am happy to note that ALL of the writers have commented on this being their best audience. They are complimentary of our students’ interest and excitement in their works.

Each year students, faculty members, staff, administrators, and community members come together to enjoy these literary festivities.

Although the standing committee of Ms. Rhea, Dr. Cross, and myself plan and prepare for the conference each year, it is a complete team effort which includes many people who volunteer their time. We expect an excellent conference this year and appreciate the administration’s support of this activity.
I never expected to be in any kind of theatrical production; acting was something that seldom ever crossed my mind. However, that changed when I noticed on the bulletin board an audition for the Shakespeare play *Twelfth Night*. Luckily, I was familiar with the comedy due to having studied it in Mrs. Jill Chadwick's English literature class; I was also very fortunate to be in her last class before she retired and departed for merry old England. With her help, I was better able to understand *Twelfth Night* and the humor in it.

If *Twelfth Night* could be described with a single phrase, it would be "Nothing that is so is so." These wise words, ironically spoken by the fool, Feste, accurately summarize the general nature of the play, which is that of misdirection and mistaken identities. Love, in its varying forms, would be another theme that *Twelfth Night* has in abundance; from the very beginning of the play, the Duke Orsino expresses his undying love for the Countess Olivia in his famous "If music be the food of love, play on" soliloquy. However, she will have nothing to do with him, or any man for that matter, as she is mourning the loss of her brother. My character, Valentine, the Duke's head lieutenant, has the duty of informing the Duke of the Countess's rejection of his affections. He takes the news quite well, yet continues on living in his lovesick world.

Incidentally, the play is set in the fictional country of Illyria, and just off her shores a ship is sunk in a violent tempest. Twin brother and sister, Sebastian and Viola, being separated and believing each other dead, set out to find their fortunes in this new land. Viola is assisted in her efforts by a sea captain who disguises her as a man in order for her to gain employment with the Duke; Sebastian is accompanied by the pirate, Antonio, who is incredibly and strangely fond of Sebastian, even to the point of risking his life.

After being taken in by the Duke, Viola, dressed as a man and under the name Cesario, is sent to the Countess Olivia to woo her on the Duke's behalf. (Valentine has become quite weary of playing matchmaker.) Upon doing so, the Countess becomes enamored of the oddly feminine youth and seeks to gain his, or rather her, attention; all the while Viola, dressed as Cesario, grows fond of the Duke. Seems a bit confusing, does it not?

The Countess Olivia's court is one that is replete with madness. Her fool and mentor, Feste, waits at her side, offering wisdom and guidance whenever it is needed. Indeed, he is "wise enough to play the fool." Maria, the Countess's gentlewoman, is a faithful and playful individual who is in love with Olivia's uncle, the drunken and aptly named Sir Toby Belch. Sir Toby and his friend, the lovable and idiotic Sir Andrew Aguecheek, form a ram-bunctious pair who wreak havoc with their drunken reveling and mischief, much to the dismay of the pompous and pious butler, Malvolio. They, along with Fabian, another of Olivia's boisterous servants, form a group of humorous characters that are sure to give anyone a chuckle.

The cast members are an interesting lot, and I'm having a great deal of fun working with them, though I'm still trying to get accustomed to the environment that is theatre. I consider myself an introverted individual, and a quiet one at that, so it is rather difficult for me to be as expressive as the rest of the cast. However, I am learning to open up and show myself to the world, as they have shown themselves and their talents.

With our combined efforts, the direction of Bill Provin and the assistant directors, and the support of our dedicated crew (Bubba, Kathy, Joy, Angie and others), I am quite sure that *Twelfth Night* will be a delight to anyone who wishes to join in our revelry.
Calhoun Meets The History Channel: An Interview with Dr. Randy Cross

By Sarah Abney

In 2011, Dr. Randy Cross, English and Literature instructor at the Decatur campus, sat in the homes of approximately one and a half million people in America and the homes of a few million people abroad. When given an audience, Dr. Cross is more than eager to talk. So, what did he speak about before such an audience? He educated them in all things Southern. Thanks to the History Channel, such a feat was possible via their primetime show You Don’t Know Dixie. Dr. Cross amiably answered a few questions to share his experience with the MUSE.

What was it like to be on a TV show?

“It was interesting to me because I had never been on a television show like that. It was exciting to me knowing it was a network show.”

What was the funniest thing that happened?

“The folks from the History Channel had said- when they called from New York- that we would film for two hours and take a break, but we would go all day until we got the segments done. That’s not how it turned out...and so the day was long and tiring. And although all the crew was wonderful and everybody was friendly, because I am a novice, I had to do a lot of segments over. We had maybe taken one break instead of those every-two-hour breaks. I had a hard time getting my tongue wrapped around the right words and I would get them twisted up. After I had messed up two or three or four times in a row- the producer was so patient- she said, ‘It’s alright. Try it again.’ The cameras are rolling and all the crew’s doing what they’re doing, so I just looked at her and I said, ‘She sells seashells by the sea shore.’ And the sound man over behind the sofa said, ‘Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.’ And then the producer said another one of those alliterative tongue twisters and we all laughed and laughed and laughed. I learned where outtakes come from...but that was the relief that we needed. The next time I did the piece without a hitch.”

Where were the scenes shot?

When the History Channel asked whether or not he wanted to be flown up to New York for the interview, Dr. Cross consulted his wife about the setting. Her response was, “Well, why would you do an interview about the South in Central Park?” The History Channel agreed that the interview be done in Decatur. “We actually did the interview in a beautiful house in old Decatur on Line Street... It was the home of some friends of ours. It’s a beautiful house with a balcony and all that. It’s so Southern.”

Is there something that you learned that stood out to you?

“I will say I have a newfound respect for every television show, every television commercial I watch. I know that someone put a lot of time in it and there’s no telling how many times they had to do it over to get it right.” Dr. Cross shared a peculiar experience that happened at the end of the shoot. He said the producer said, ” ‘Sound, how much time do you need?’ A man from the other side of the room said, ‘thirty seconds.’ Everybody just sat quietly and she just kind of looked down at the floor. I thought, ‘Well, they’re praying.’ I didn’t have any idea. I knew how to sit prayerfully, and so I did. About thirty seconds later she said, ‘Cut. How’s that?’ Ok. That’s a wrap.”

Bewildered, he asked what had happened. The producer proceeded to tell him that they had just recorded ambient sound: the natural sounds of the environment. Should they need to insert pauses or splice something with sound behind it, they would need “Alabama” quiet and not “New York” quiet. The sounds make for a more cohesive, and truly Southern, interview. “I thought, ‘Gosh, there’s a whole lot to this that I don’t know.’”

If you could do it again, what topic would you choose to do a television program about?

“One of the things that I would like to talk about, because it’s what I do for a living I suppose and my interest, I would like to talk about Southern literature-Southern writers.” Southern readers of the MUSE should be proud to know that the reason Southern literature and authors were not addressed on You Don’t Know Dixie is there are too many authors to squeeze into a segment of a show. The History Channel would much rather have an entire program dedicated to the subject.

Did the show meet your expectations?

“It did. I was really nervous before the show came on. My wife and I watched it. Although I felt pretty good about what I had done, I didn’t get to see any of it. I didn’t get to hear any of it.” As Dr. Cross and his wife watched he kept thinking, “Oh, please don’t have messed up. Oh, I hope you do get your subject and verbs matched up...At the end of the two hours I remember having a big sigh of relief. Yeah, it met my expectations. I thought the producers did a good job. I was relieved that I got through it without bumbling too much.”

Since its premier, You Don’t Know Dixie has aired approximately nine times. To be on an internationally televised show is an honor not only for Dr. Cross, but also for the college and community he represents: our college and our community. Maybe we will all get to experience that honor again if the History Channel airs a special on Southern literature.
As an actress in Calhoun's theatre department, my life has been enriched, and my future has been constructed to have a brighter horizon. *The Dining Room* was my fourth show as a performer in seemingly challenging roles. As an insider looking into depth of the play, I will elaborate on the overall experience I had throughout this brilliant work of art.

*The Dining Room* is set just where it sounds, in a dining room. Actors portray different characters and circumstances in various time periods ranging from the 1940's to today. Each actor had numerous parts and costume changes, which made the backstage experience quite exhilarating. Costume changes ranged from thirty seconds to ten minutes. If I managed to have time to sit down, I would definitely be bombarded by half-naked actors scrounging around for pieces of their ensemble. Needless to say, our theatre family never had a dull moment while working on this show.

I personally had six different characters to portray, and, believe me, they were not easy to pull off. I began the play as a soft-spoken house maid named Annie, who worked for an upscale family in the 40s. I then had to literally run backstage ripping off clothes to change into a deranged over-controlling mother named Grace from the 50s. (She was definitely an interesting character to take on, seeing as I am nothing like her.) With a comfortable costume change, I then became a five year old named Winkie celebrating her birthday party while her mother was openly cheating on her husband. Next, I curled my back and put on my granny panties to become a forgetful old mother during Thanksgiving dinner. I have to admit, playing a forgetful granny made for some great laughs with the cast on stage. After a seriously concentrated intermission, I toned down my enthusiasm to become Meg. This was my favorite part to play, even though I ended the scene crying every performance. The role of Meg was dramatic since she was going through a separation with three children. Her husband had been cheating on her, and she admitted to having two separate relationships with a man and a woman. I could see audience members night after night clutching their chests in sorrow and squirming in their seats to get away from my emotions. As an actor, nothing makes you feel like you did a great job more than seeing the audience uncomfortable. Lastly, I dolled myself up for the final scene where my monologue summed up the play's mission. I remained onstage alone to talk one on one with the audience and express my emotions as Ruth, a middle-aged mother hosting a dinner party that she would never forget.

All in all, I believe *The Dining Room* was an amazing play that I am grateful to have been a part of. I extended friendships with the cast and gained acting experience that I will take with me into my future. I would not trade these experiences for the world.
The recent tornadoes in April 2011 affected many people, including some of Calhoun’s faculty and a total of 25 students. In an attempt to help these tornado victims, Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) began working on some fundraisers. They came up with Project S.H.A.R.E. This project was developed to create scholarships and tuition reduction for any of Calhoun’s students affected by the tornadoes. The ultimate goal was to raise $10,000 by February 1, 2012.

One of the fundraisers was to sell tickets to Courtland, Alabama’s Haunted House of Horror. Charlie Chaney is a part owner of the attraction, and in the summer he presented the idea of a fundraiser to Necia Nicholas, chapter advisor for PTK. The idea was that a percentage of the ticket sales would go to Project S.H.A.R.E. Nicholas said that although she did not attend the House, “There was a lot of great feedback from those who attended.” However, “very little of the funding came out of it.” The majority of the money came from a fundraiser with Martin’s Clothing Store in Decatur. They had a benefit sale, and Calhoun sold tickets with the proceeds going to the project. Another fundraiser is that $20 from the $70 lifetime membership fee for PTK goes to help the tornado victims.

After talking with Ms. Nicholas, I learned that Calhoun has “always wanted to help the community whenever possible. And Calhoun, being one of the largest community colleges in the state, felt we should be able to raise at least $10,000 to help the student victims.” She also said that “In case of tragedies like this in the future, Calhoun will do its best to help the surrounding community in any way possible.”

An Interview with English instructor, Heather Congo
By Stephen Mobley and Sarah Abney

Wednesday, April 27, 2011, was the day north Alabama was slammed by a series of Category Five tornadoes. No one will forget the astonishment and pain they felt as communities, homes, and lives were uprooted and destroyed so unexpectedly and so mercilessly. Many were touched by the devastation, but many were also touched by compassion. Heather Congo, an English instructor at the Huntsville Campus, shared her experiences with both of these as she answered some questions we asked.

**Had you ever experienced a disaster like this before?**
“Once, when I was 10 years old, I was in my grandmother’s mobile home when a tornado touched down across the highway from us. Her property was not damaged and we were safe, but that was the scariest encounter with weather that I had experienced before April 27th.”

**How bad did you originally think the storm would be prior to its arrival?**
“The meteorologists had been warning that the storms were going to be bad, but I really wasn’t that worried about it. My daughter had tubes put into her ears that morning, and my son was supposed to go to daycare for the day, but we decided to keep him home because of the potential for bad storms. I am so glad that both of my children were with me that day, so that I didn’t have to worry about them at daycare.”

**Who helped you with the recovery process? Did anyone help you with cleaning up the damage, or provide for some of your needs?**
“Our church, family, students, and co-workers helped us pick up debris, empty the existing contents out of our home, and clean up as much as possible. Complete strangers volunteered countless hours to our family and home.”

**How has the experience changed you?**
“I really cannot begin to describe how this has changed me. I will never be the same. The kindness and love of strangers is what humbles me the most. There were more donations than could ever be counted. My daughter is still using diapers that were donated to us nearly four months ago. We got gift cards, money, furniture, clothes, food, and plastic totes in which to put our salvageable items. The way that people helped us expecting nothing in return is still unbelievable to me. I now have empathy for people who have had house fires and pipes that burst in their homes. I now know exactly what they are going through.”

**What is one possession you lost that you wish you could have back?**
“Two days after the tornado, I found two journals that I had kept during both of my pregnancies. They had been in my closet and had been sitting in water when they were found. The ink was smeared and the pages were beginning to mold. I cried when I saw them. They were some of my most precious belongings. We also had a 150-year-old oak tree that shaded our entire backyard. The tornado pulled it straight out of the ground. Without that tree, our home is completely different. It is almost as if we have lost a piece of us with that tree.”
Calhoun Community College
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Sigma Kappa Delta National Convention, Pittsburgh 2011

Favorite convention speakers:

Dave Eggers!, author of numerous books, including A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius and co-founder of the literacy program 826 Valencia

- Eggers presentation was “comedic and full of energy.” — Erica Scruggs
- ToBorsha Swope noted that he used humor to “stress the importance of volunteering” and to “encourage students to find out who they are and know exactly who they are supposed to be.”
- The opportunity to see him in person and to talk to him one-on-one was priceless for Giannina Jensen who named him as “one of my favorite authors since I read his memoir a few years ago.”
- “His stories gave me hope in humanity.” — Slate Goodwin

John Bayne, author of Gravely Concerned: The Graves of Southern Writers

- Bayne spoke about his book, which identifies the gravesites of southern writers, including that of George Washington Harris, which would have gone unknown if not for the sleuthing of Calhoun professor Dr. Randy Cross and his lovely assistants Dr. Sheila Byrd and Mrs. Jill Chadwick.
- “John Bayne has inspired me to one day go on this same journey for famous musicians who have passed away.” — Blake Bivens

Student panel Transformational Texts, featuring Calhoun honor students Blake Bivens and Kat Padilla

- ToBorsha Swope appreciated Blake’s point to “cherish every moment we have,” while Kat’s presentation reminded ToBorsha that “we are all heroes just like Beowulf or Don Quixote because of the personal journeys we go through in life.”

Out and about in Pittsburgh:

- Restaurants Houlihan’s and Max and Erma’s — Giannina Jensen
- Andy Warhol Museum — Kristopher Bennefield, Erica Scruggs, and Slate Goodwin
- The coffee shop on every street — Katelyn McKee
- Architecture — Melissa Bennefield and Blake Bivens
- Hospitality — Kristopher and Melissa Bennefield

Overall Convention Experience

- Without exception, all members who attended the convention responded that their favorite part of the experience was meeting other students with similar interests and getting to know Calhoun’s members better.
- “Phenomenal! I have made so many new friends, and I have gained a greater understanding of the English language and its literature.” — Slate Goodwin
- “Overall, this experience rekindled my love of writing. It also proved that there was more to English than just reading literature written by dead people. If you really learn to appreciate it, you can make connections from the literature with your own life and learn something about yourself or someone else that you never realized before.” — ToBorsha Swope

Alabama’s Immigration Law

By Elizabeth Willingham

The Alabama Immigration Law that passed in June of 2011 was designed to save Alabama millions of dollars spent on illegal aliens. It basically deter illegal aliens from setting up residence in Alabama and urges illegal aliens already living here to move out of state. Also, it requires police to detain people they suspect of being in the U.S. illegally if they do not have proper documentation.

Many groups have conducted multiple studies on the pros and cons of this law since its proposal. Here are a few of the most interesting:

Pros

- The illegal aliens fleeing the state have left behind an estimated 80,000 jobs. This should significantly decrease the state’s unemployment rate.
- The state will save money on programs that were serving the immigrants such as healthcare, school and social programs.
- It will decrease the transfer of diseases.
- It will increase public safety and decrease illegal activity such as theft and violence.
- It will decrease the conflict between competing cultures.

Cons

- Students being pulled out of schools will cause teachers to lose jobs.
- A sudden drop in population causes economic disparity. The workers who left are no longer paying in state and federal taxes. A drop in sales tax at the state, city and county levels will also be a problem.
- Supply and demand. With a decrease in demand for goods and services due to this law, jobs of citizens are in jeopardy.
- The sudden loss of workers causes economic hardships on employers. It is difficult to replace workers suddenly and find workers skilled in a particular field. It has also been noted by Alabama farmers that it is difficult to find workers willing to do hard labor in outdoor conditions. This will eventually lead to much higher priced foods from Alabama farmers.
- Increase in the cost to businesses and law enforcement to run checks on citizenship. This will cause the cost to be passed on to the consumer.
- Families can and will be separated.
- Alabama citizens can be arrested for suspect of being in the U.S. illegally if they do not have proper documentation. This portion of the law has been blocked temporarily by the U.S. Appeals Court. However, it can be reinstated at any time.

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