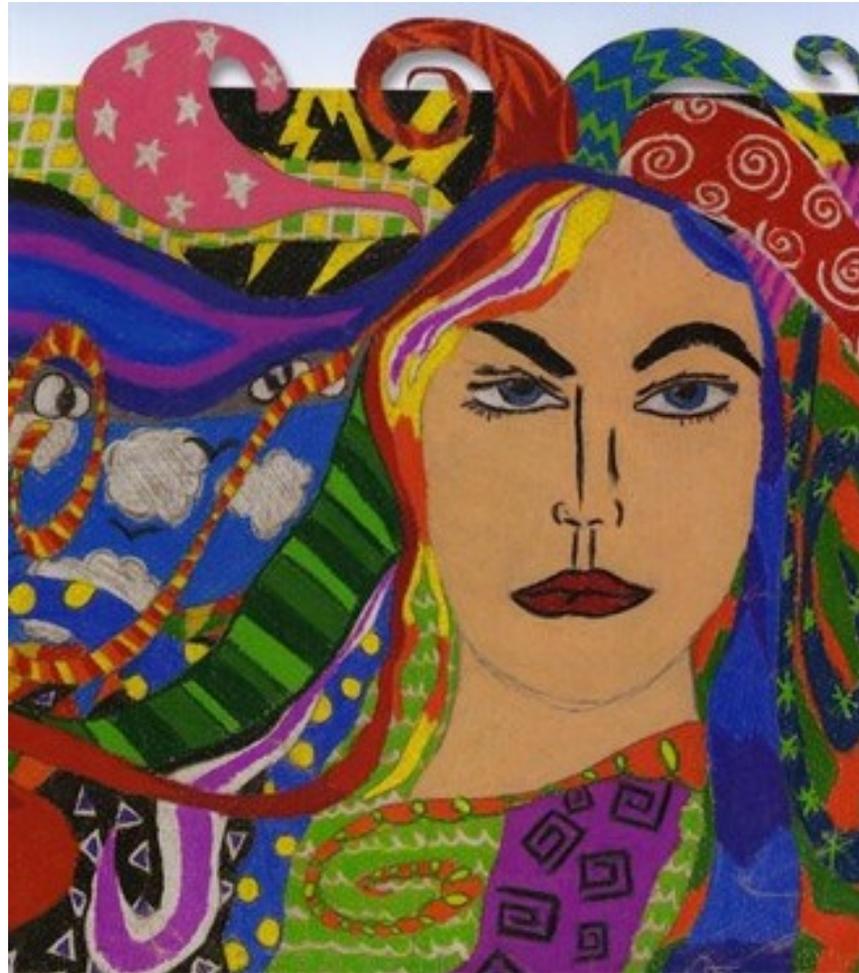


# Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **SERENADER**, Colored Pencil

*Kristina Lynn drew incessantly at age 5. By 9, she sketched all her favorite cartoon characters. At 17, "Serenader" was drawn for a school assignment using colored pencils and displayed at the Carnegie Visual Arts Center. Kristina grew up in Birmingham and Decatur. She attends college and takes art in Huntsville, Alabama.*

Back Cover: **LONE GRAZER**, Oil on Canvas

*Les Yarbrough is a highly-regarded landscape painter who shares his expertise in classes offered by Alabama Art Supply. For more information, contact [alabamaart.com](http://alabamaart.com)*

## ROD EXPLAINS MARRIAGE

John Grey

Marriage becomes  
this domesticated destruction.  
I feel like a zoo creature,  
hear the voices,  
"Look, a full grown male."  
I am violent toward  
my food dish,  
and the leather back chair  
I dump my bones in  
to watch t.v.  
Marriage becomes  
love translated into  
another language,  
like German  
with all those hard consonants,  
Some parts are stored  
in safety glass.  
Others are used illicitly  
by strangers.  
Marriage is the discovery  
that vacuuming requires no romance,  
that a garden is a kiss  
five years down the road.  
You stay together  
the way objective  
can live with subjective.  
You stay together because  
you can't live alone.  
You've reached the age of fifty-five  
and none of your loneliness  
survived the journey.

.....  
*JOHN GREY is an Australian born poet, playwright, and musician. His latest book  
What Else Is There is available from Main Street Rag. John's work has appeared in  
The English Journal, Northeast, Pearl and the Journal of the American  
Medical Association.*  
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## PRIMORDIAL CORD

Seth Tanner

I.

Awake before the sound of its ring could vibrate the hammer in my right ear. Sitting straight up. Somehow in the hallway with a black Panasonic cordless in my right hand. Cognizant enough of neighbors and bedmate to tiptoe, to whisper, aware enough to think that the phone must've stopped ringing by now. Yet, not aware of time—just an emerging sense of knowing and feeling—and feeling that know at the base of my navel. "*It's about Grandmother.*" Your voice *Honey and Salt* in my ears. The floor creaks here, I thought, as I closed my eyes against the pain of the hallway light. "*But you said—*" I didn't finish the thought. It was as if at that moment I knew—you are a daughter, too. Feeling the know where a strange primordial cord fused us together three weeks longer than science thought prudent. As woman, both mother and daughter, your navel connects generations. As man, mine connects only backward. Yours reaches across time and bloodline has been tickled from both inside and out. Standing in the hallway, eyes closed, mind on autopilot just to get through this conversation, I felt a faint tug inward—like your mama Kate was pulling at me through you. We didn't discuss details. We didn't have to. Y'all were calling me to Anniston.

II.

I knew some of the details—enough to know to hurry. Fara had called a few days before, told me about the tubes—Grandmama's strength and courage: the end of a forty year struggle that had crippled and gnarled her. Even then Grandmama shone through in her smoky blue eyes, I just knew. A continent away with no direct flights—I did my best to get there, to hold her hand, to say goodbye, to say thank you for showing me courage and grace, dignity and resolve. On the way to Birmingham by way of Charlotte, in the middle of row seven or eight?—I knew. I felt the know. I felt the tugging at my belly. I said my goodbyes from the plane. Twenty-five and embarrassed, the tears gully-washed from my eyes. The woman to my right, fifty, maybe fifty-five, placed her hand over mine. I turned my head slightly to see her. Her eyes were kind and smoky and blue. The man to my left sixty, maybe sixty-five, sighed and shifted his weight to his outer hip, inching away from me. Embarrassed, I cried anyway. As if I had the will to stop. But part of me wanted to pick up the phone on the back of the seat and

scream through my tears, pasty saliva and runny nose—the way I did when I was two and told you that I hated you. And I was mad. Mad at the mother who didn't think how important it would be for her son to make it back—in time.

III.

How the words at the funeral home Fara spoke, "She told me she wasn't ever going to see you again,"— How the words will echo at the strangest of times—in a meeting to review company benefit plans—on a second date over coffee—I know the empty strangling chords in an echo. But I cannot be mad at the daughter in you. Because if I felt her tug through you, the tug you felt must've knocked the wind out of you.

.....  
*Seth Tanner writes in Talladega, Alabama. He serves on the board of the Alabama Writers' Conclave.*  
.....

**"It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation."**

**--John Stuart Mill**



**DECADES, 2 of 6**  
Liz Reed

**MAPLE LEAF**

Liz Reed

*Here you are in Autumn, holding on to summer:*

*Green tree silhouetted against yellow sky  
Blue/green pond in a field of brown  
Orange setting sun blessing a desert of sand.*

*Here you are in Autumn, reaching for winter:*

*Grey and black ashes from a fire  
Red quilted coverlet for a lap  
Brown cocoa warming hands and heart.*

*You have one life beginning, many lives ending:*

*Each with different experiences  
Each in its own time  
Each in its own way.*

*Maple Leaf*

.....  
*Liz Reed, a retiree, graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2005 with a degree in Art Studio. She enjoys photography as well as painting and mixed media. More of her work can be seen at [www.lizreed.com](http://www.lizreed.com). Contact [liz@lizreed.com](mailto:liz@lizreed.com).*  
.....

## SADIE

Barry M. Cole

I made my way toward the podium but nearly slipped. The cane ain't been enough to keep me upright lately, so I usually has two of the young men to walk with me. I am one hundred years old and can see the congregation like shapes moving in a fog on this late October day in 1853. It's time to be honest with them. It's cloudy at that moment, but I pray for sunshine and the Good Lord lets it shine as I raise my face to the flock. My voice cracks these days like a shoe stepping on broken glass.

"Children, we be God's people."

"Amen!" comes from the flock like a trumpet. Even my thick old ears can hear its music.

"I speak blessing to you today, as everyday. The Good Lord seen fit for me to live a hundred years to bless you. Children. My children. Each one of you a treasure to me. Don't even know the beauty God has placed in each of you. I seen your eyes each time I be here at this podium. To me, it be like stars on a black sky. Light that guides you over rough water. Ole' Sadie been through lots of rough water. Though the fires come near to you and your skin breaks into blisters, I bless you. Though the smoke rises above you to quench the daylight and you labor for every breath, I bless you. When your young'uns scream in the cold night, and they ain't got that familiar touch to ease them to sleep, I give you my blessing. Like a river, we rolls from place to place, and from face to face. Though the river runs red with our blood, I bless you. I seen your tears. God seen your tears and blessed you with angel wings to brush against your faces.

"I seen you buried in the dirt heaped up under fire and brimstone and though you cry, your sweet voices find strength to rise like a rose to bless me with song. One day, your song will go out over the land like thunder and the hills will burst forth in joy as the trees clap their hands to know that you be free. Keep singing, my children. Sing blessing into the world!"

"Ole Sadie won't be here much longer. It ain't a surprise, but a blessing itself. I want to see the Sweet Lord's face. I want my mama's touch and to hold my babies. I want to roll back over the sea and touch the banks of home again. I'll let my mama braid my hair and let the young'uns spin laughter and music until it echoes through the river valley. I is ready to go. But I take the blessing of your faces and your songs with me. And I leave my blessing with you."

At that moment, I felt as though I floated above the flock, as though in a moment I could shuffle off my coil of flesh. But the Good Lord gave me strength and I raised my cane again until it stretched over them and I pressed myself against the podium while my face rose to meet the sky. My voice came fresh to me and poured forth in youthful blessing over my flock.

"I speak blessing to you!"

In the distance, for the first time in all my sermons here, I saw that there weren't no guards, only a White woman near a pine tree dressed as plain as I'd ever seen her, holding on to the bark and weeping. As I raised my staff to match my voice, I held my balance as though unseen hands were steadying me, as though I could float toward the distant clouds at the Lord's bidding. I trumpeted the words again and again, until all Black hands were raised toward the sweltering sun, until the words echoed off the distant hills and trees, flooded over the guards and their horses, penetrated the walls of the wretched furnace, wept at nameless graves, and brushed against every tortured soul with the fragrance of dignity and freedom:

"Children, we be God's people!"

"Children, we be God's people!"

"Children, we be God's people!"

"Hallelujah! We be God's people!"

.....  
*Excerpt from SADIE, a manuscript by Barry M. Cole. See bio on page 47.*  
.....

**"Of late, I have no friends; I must be  
doing something right."  
--Somerset Maugham**

## HOWARD HOLDS COURT

Peter Anderson

He rambled on and on, as he did every afternoon, right here. *All* afternoon, it seemed to his captive listeners, all of whom were captive simply from having nowhere else to be. Retired, with no time clock to be chased or conscientious duties to be completed, they sat here in the barber shop day after day, whiling away the hours of the rest of their lives.

He sat, far too rigidly for the casual ease of his patter, his feet flat on the linoleum and fists clenched on his chair's tubular aluminum arms, as if he might be dragged away and his latest anecdote halted at any time, the blue veins which bulged from his wiry forearms showing his readiness to withstand any such show of force.

A few minutes earlier it had been a rant against Clinton, but now it was Normandy—storming the beach, lucky just to escape the surf alive, crawling under barbed wire over blood-soaked sand. How the unseen horror of land mines under his feet was no more terrifying than the Jerry bullets whizzing past his head. How his instincts told him to keep his ass down even as he pushed forward as fast as he could, to cross the beach and reach the overgrowth just beyond, and ascend the slope where machine gun nests and cannons lined the ridge. Where he could see Jerry helmets bobbing ever so slightly, just over the edge, as he reached for the grenade and slipped his finger through the ring. . . .

But that was Normandy, and though he reveled in telling the story again, he sensed he was losing them. They had heard his story before, and a few of them had fought there themselves. Though he loved hearing himself talk, he needed even more to believe they were hanging on his every word.

"So I came back Stateside," he began, seamlessly shifting into his days as a young plumber's apprentice, and his first job out alone with the young pretty housewife who greeted his service call wearing nothing more than a silk robe, and how when his hands were occupied and his attention was focused on an overhead pipe in the cellar she suddenly grabbed him, where he wouldn't say.

Grins and winks renewed their interest. What exactly happened, if it was the first time for him, if the husband ever found out—none of this was said. It didn't need to be said. Their aging imaginations desperately filled in the details.

He *had* them, again.

.....  
*Peter Anderson's short stories have been published in Storyglossia, THE2NDHAND, The Angler and elsewhere. He writes in Joliet, Illinois.*  
*pete\_anderson@comcast.net*  
.....



**UNTITLED**  
Michael Ballew

.....  
*Michael Ballew paints the spirit of nature in brilliant colors at his home in Hartselle, Alabama, when not working in Birmingham or playing with his three daughters.*  
*michael@mballew.com*  
.....

## A NIGHT LIKE EVERY OTHER

John Sharp

Animal, vegetable or mineral?  
Mineral.  
Bigger than a bread box?  
How big is a bread box?  
Who has a bread box anymore?  
We don't.  
We used to, but mom gave it to the Amvets.  
What made you say 'bread box?'  
My dad used to ask that one in the car, on trips.  
Oh.  
How'd he die again?  
Shut up Bobby.  
No, it's okay. He had cancer. In his liver.  
From drinking?  
Shut UP, Bobby.  
No, he didn't drink. It just happened.

Mineral?  
Yeah.  
Is it a rock?  
No.  
Is it metal?  
Yeah.  
Do you wear it?  
Yeah.  
Is it your necklace?  
Yeah.

You wear it all the time? Even in bed?  
Shut up, Bobby, it's from his dad.  
Shut up, Anthony, I can ask.  
He never takes it off.  
Even when you swim?  
Maybe then.  
What does your new dad say about it?

He's not his new dad, Bobby, Jesus. He's a step-dad.  
I don't give a shit what he says about it. And they aren't even married.  
And he's not calling him "Dad" or any of that shit, are you, DJ?  
Nope.

It's almost time for dinner.  
Yeah, I got to go.  
What are you having?  
Burgers. Want to come?  
Maybe.  
We're having spaghetti.  
Bobby's mom makes great spaghetti.  
Can I eat with you?  
Yeah, DJ.  
Cool. How late can I stay?  
How late do you want to stay?

You can't sleep over though. It's a school night.  
I know.

It was awesome spaghetti.  
Mom said you can come over for spaghetti anytime.  
How often does she make it?  
I don't know.

.  
Need a ride? My dad can take you.  
No, thanks.  
It's kinda far.  
Yeah.

.....  
*Editor/author/poet F. John Sharp of Aurora, Ohio, has published (in print) in Peninsular, Snow Monkey, GUD: Greatest Uncommon Denominator, and upcoming Opium, and online in Pindeldyboz, Salt River Review, Paumanok Review, Lunarosity, Flashquake, In Posse Review, and Quantum Muse. He has been nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize. [fjsharpjr@aol.com](mailto:fjsharpjr@aol.com)*  
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## I SEE THE WORLD IN POLKA DOT

fybraun

Because it takes a certain type of personality to get up every morning and do the same thing. Per usual, Tammy's alarm woke her up, she wore a similar outfit as yesterday, took two shots of her favorite vodka, Stolli, and got ready for work.

Before walking in to her office, she took another shot in the bathroom. Once at her desk, she tried really hard to ignore her co-workers talking. However, it was not acceptable to ignore this morning routine, so she got up and joined in the conversation. Every morning it was an office ritual to talk about the popular reality show aired the previous night. Before she started with the company, Tammy did not own or watch television for seven years, but it had become very obvious it was important to be able to discuss television every morning, so she had decided to purchase a TV.

Joseph Bell had just purchased a condo across the street from Tammy's office right after he had settled out of an ugly divorce. Two weeks ago he had decided to quit his job, and concentrate on decorating his condo. It was going to be a busy day for Joseph; he had planned to meet with his interior designer, to purchase furniture and accessories for his new and empty condo. He was also going to celebrate his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday on the coming Saturday with a few friends at his favorite restaurant, Fork. He was also busy putting a list of friends together who had stayed mutual throughout their divorce. Joseph and Pamela were married--with no children--for 13 years. Pamela was a successful immigration lawyer and Joseph was an art director for a popular magazine in the city. Every year, Pamela, Joseph and their friends would go on an exotic cruise to celebrate Christmas and Joseph's birthday, which was on Christmas. This Christmas, only two weeks away, Joseph had decided to celebrate his 45<sup>th</sup> birthday only, and not Christmas. He had also decided he would not purchase any gifts for anyone, but would accept gifts.

Tony Brown woke up that morning and smoked a joint and kissed goodbye his girlfriend of seven months, and left for work. Tony was a crane operator, and he was one of the best in the business. He had been at the job for over ten years, and never had an accident or a probation period. He had gotten in a little bit of trouble with his pot smoking while operating the crane, but due to his excellent performance he somehow had managed to get around the controversy. As a daily routine, Tony stopped by the donut place, and before he got to the site he would finish his joint. They were

building a new 40-story condominium between Tammy's office building and Joseph's condo.

Once Joseph and his decorator arrived at their 9AM appointment at GARY M., an upscale furniture store, he knew exactly what he wanted: everything his ex-wife had hated and he had wanted for the past 13 years. Once he sat on the polka dot cream and yellow recliner he immediately wanted it, and, like that, he purchased more and more furniture.

Around lunchtime, Tammy went to see her analyst few blocks away from her office. She stopped by and purchased some chocolate for him as a Christmas gift. "I brought you some chocolate," Tammy said. "Thank you, how are you feeling today?" Her analyst responded. Per usual, Tammy started her session by asking the same question, wondering if she was ready to call Albert. Three months ago, Albert had left to do an assignment for an agency in Paris, and since he had never been faithful, Tammy had decided to break up with him via email. Since the email, Tammy had not heard from Albert and had always wondered if she should call him to explain. Tammy wished she could talk about Albert more, but her analyst usually tried to shift the focus more around Tammy and her incident.

Tammy had never loved anyone as much as Albert. Besides Albert, there was not much to talk or think about. Her life was simple. Every morning, she woke up and went to work, drank a bit of vodka to get her through the day, and at night watched TV drunk, so she could discuss television in the morning. On the weekends she usually had a date, which lately had turned into one-night stands. She never really had a problem meeting men, except no one compared to Albert. Many times, she dreamed about Albert, living in Paris with him, and finishing her novel. Suddenly her analyst moved closer to her on the couch, and asked about her sex life. "I only have one-night stands," she replied. He got closer. "Would you like to have something more?" he asked. "I don't care," she said. And from that moment on, she ended each session with putting on her clothes, while asking her analyst if it was time to call Albert.

By 2pm Joseph and his decorator stopped for lunch and decided to put furniture shopping on hold. Joseph enjoyed being single, and couldn't help being attracted to his decorator. She was a tall, slender woman with beautiful hair and green eyes, and she seemed a bit cold. A perfect match for a one-night stand he thought, but he wondered if she would be open to it, or better yet, just friends with benefits. He never had an arrangement like that, and always wanted one. He wondered at what point in furniture shopping do you ask someone if they want to have sex? After lunch she told Joseph she'd meet him at the condo around 7PM, since the furniture

wouldn't get there till then. On the way home, Joseph thought of all the ways he could talk her in to staying for more than the furniture arrangement.

Around 5:30 pm, Tammy packed her things and started to head home in traffic. She got in her car, took two shots of vodka, and, while waiting in traffic, noticed the crane, and the workers still working in the rain. She couldn't wait to get home and make herself a cocktail, listen to her records, and look at Albert's photographic work on the wall, then watch her television. She thought about her therapist, and how she started seeing him. Four weeks after Albert's departure, one of her one-night stands had gotten ugly, and he had forced himself on her. She had been too drunk to fight him off, and after the accident it was recommended she see a therapist. All she really wanted to talk about was Albert, and the rape, her job, and every one else was obsolete compared to Albert.

Tony had already put in a ten-hour day, and around 8:30 pm they were going to start wrapping things up. He and few other guys noticed the crane tilting, and immediately called the engineers in charge. After asking millions of questions the engineers told them to stop working, and they'd check it out the next day. Tony and the guys gladly stopped, and went to the bar down the street to have a few beers. Tony called his girlfriend to inform her he was hanging out with the boys and not to wait for him for dinner. Though disappointed, she agreed, continued to watch TV, and started her dinner alone. Tony and the boys were confused and shocked about the engineer's decision, but it was out of their hands. They decided to enjoy their night anyway.

Once all the new furniture was dropped off at Joseph's, he asked his designer to stay for a glass of port to celebrate his new and furnished apartment. She accepted and informed him she couldn't stay for more than one drink. "Do you have a date?" Joseph asked. "Yes, a late date," she replied. "I think my boyfriend is going to propose to me," she said with a smile on her face. "Propose? How old are you? You look so young." He knew he was asking too many questions. He felt uncomfortable and wanted to take her clothes off. "I am 32, and a girl always knows. I have been waiting for this day for a long time. I been with him for five years," she said, finishing her port in a hurry.

"You want some more?" he asked, "No thanks, I am in a hurry to see my boyfriend," she said, while putting her coat on. Joseph shook her hand and thanked her for all her help. He sat on his polka dot recliner and couldn't stop thinking about the attractive decorator, wishing she were naked on his lap, with her breasts exposed. He kept thinking about the smell

of her hair, and her nipples as they always poked out through her blouse. He could feel her at the tip of his fingers and he was hard as a rock. Images of her nipples, her long legs, long, beautiful soft hair and perfectly firm body had taken over his train of thought. Suddenly, there was a shaking on the floor, but Joseph had decided to ignore it. Before he knew or had any time to move, the crane fell over his condo. Although the polka dot recliner survived the accident, Joseph didn't. In fact, Joseph was the only casualty from the accident. Tammy's office across from Joseph's condo was also damaged, but no one was hurt, since no one was working.

The next morning Tammy took her two shots of Vodka, and headed to the office. Once she got there, the streets were blocked, and a large crowd had gathered around the construction site. She thought nothing of it and took her usual shot of vodka and walked in. Her coworkers were gathered around the shattered windows of their offices while looking down at the construction site and the remainder of Joseph's destroyed condo. There was not much left, and everyone was talking about the man who was killed, and not the TV show they saw last night. Tammy and her co-workers were informed they would be working from home till further notice, due to the crane accident.

News reporters were covering the crane accident, talking about a man who was killed abruptly, and there was some news about the crane operator, but the majority of the news was about the law suits, and the large amount of damage the crane had done. Shortly after the incident, Tony was put on suspension, and the group of engineers fired.

Tammy slowly picked up her laptop and looked down at the construction site. No one was working that day. Tammy slowly walked to her car, realizing if the crane had fallen a few hours earlier everyone in the office would have been dead or hurt. She wondered what the man who was killed was doing when the crane fell on him, and wondered if he felt any pain, and how suddenly his life ended. She had an urge to go and see a new analyst to talk about the crane, the man that was killed, and just for that day she didn't want to talk or ask about Albert. It felt good to do something different then her daily routine.

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*The author known as fybraun has appeared in earlier issues of Birmingham Arts Journal. A native of Iran, she can be contacted at fedrayazdi@yahoo.com.*  
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## IN MY GARDEN

Lindanne Phillips

As a small child, gardening was always a hands-on experience. Mother would say, "The best hoe handles are shared." I thought it rather strange because I had my own hoe, pint size of course, and we never shared. I even tried to visualize hoeing simultaneously, using the same hoe. Well, I can tell you, the thoughts of sharing a hoe conjured up all kinds of images. Who's in front, who's behind, and who decides when you chop? Hoe-sharing takes too much engineering to chop down a darn weed. Daddy always said his hands didn't fit a hoe handle; he preferred the "bend and pull" technique. Mother would tell me he preferred the "squat and sit" method on the sofa in the garden room. Anyway, my daddy convinced me stores sold hoes to fit people's hands, and he didn't own one.

Our neighbors always wondered how my mother's garden was so lush and green, but this was a secret mother would never share. However, we did live next to a chicken house, and I know they had an abundance of chicken "stinkalizer" that mother hauled regularly. I don't see how our neighbors did not know about her secret; they knew everything else we did, we must have been important. When it rained, our garden gave off the most memorable aroma. Mother said, "That's the smell of greenery."

My favorite times as a child were when my mother and I would visit my grandmother's garden in Oneonta, Alabama. Granny Matt had the most incredible knowledge of flowers and vegetables. Once some members of her garden club laughingly told her she had such a green thumb she could root a telephone pole. I always believed she did root the poles. There were vines growing all over them. I, of course, being the little Belle'yun that I was, and still am, was always under foot, literally, constantly aggravating. Granny Matt would say, "Sugah, get out of here or I'm gonna kick your little belle-bottom." I would just giggle, run away for about two seconds...then I would be under foot again. Absorbing Granny's gardening knowledge (which could never be taught in any horticultural school) was not what I had intended to do. Learning was just a by-product of being a little Belle'yun under foot.

Granny did glow in her realm. Her eyes would sparkle with pride when one of her special treasures would bloom. She beamed even brighter when I asked her questions about why a flower was this color or why it smelled so good. Granny Matt was delighted I wanted to know. She took extra time explaining to me every little detail of her secrets to success; my mother also used her secret.

Granny's flower garden was her escape, and a spiritual time. For me, the garden was bouquets to be picked, flowers or weeds...it didn't matter. I loved to gather all the colors in the garden and arrange them in beautiful

"beau-kays." For this reason, I was not allowed in Granny's garden without an escort. I was the flower bandit; my mission was to pick the garden clean. Well, isn't that what a five-year old is supposed to do? I do know my rear suffered from acting out my incredible need to pick *all* the flowers.

Granny could grow the most exquisite flowers: irises, dahlias, roses, daylilies, hollyhocks, sweet williams, old maids, tulips, camellias and a myriad of others. Of course, she had vegetables growing alongside her flowers as well. Her garden was a pallet of impressionistic colors. I know in my heart that Monet walked beside her every day, helping her paint with every planting. When I close my eyes, I can see her image, her little bowed body, her straw hat socked down on her head, and the incredibly cool, thin dress she wore every day. And in her hand the hoe Granddaddy made for her, which she was never without. She even took the hoe into her kitchen and propped it by the back door. It was the first thing she grabbed, then her hat, as she went out into her garden. The hoe handle was made from a hickory sapling, skinned and whittled with Granddaddy's proclamation of love, "*Love me as you love your garden, Challie.*"

Granny's precious hoe was passed to my mother, who also inherited the love of gardening, but that's another story. The honor of owning this wonderfully worn hoe, now in its third generation, is mine. It's truly the best hoe I will ever own, and I consider it my most prized heirloom. The hoe just seems to know what to do, as if it has a mind of its own, and it does. I know it actually has two minds, my granny's and my mother's. You see, my garden is a reflection of their love. We Southern Belle'yuns do not infer bad connotations to getting down and dirty in our gardens...just sweet memories. Southerners have the love of traditions, tried and true, right or wrong. We know the tradition of gardening is truly the hardest work you will ever enjoy. To me, nothing relieves stress nor is more peaceful or self-gratifying than digging in my garden. With my Granny Matt and Monet looking over my shoulder, stress is brushed aside when I create my own impressionistic masterpieces as I paint with my flowers. And, best of all, now I can pick all I want!

Lindanne Phillips  
A Bona-fide Belle'yun

.....  
*Lindanne Phillips teaches art at North Jefferson Middle School, and writes, paints, and gardens in her spare time. A resident of Hayden, Alabama, she graduated with a Master of Art in Art Education from University of Alabama in Birmingham and has been teaching and making art for 25 years.*  
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**PATHWAYS**  
**Jan Weir**

.....  
Jan Weir paints in her Hoover, Alabama studio and shows her work at  
Artists Incorporated Gallery in Vestavia and Art Alley in Homewood.  
[www.janweirfineart.com](http://www.janweirfineart.com).  
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## CASINO CONFESSION

Carol Carpenter

Dark does not descend  
in this house of neon lights  
where I play all the angles,  
grab my chance at life.

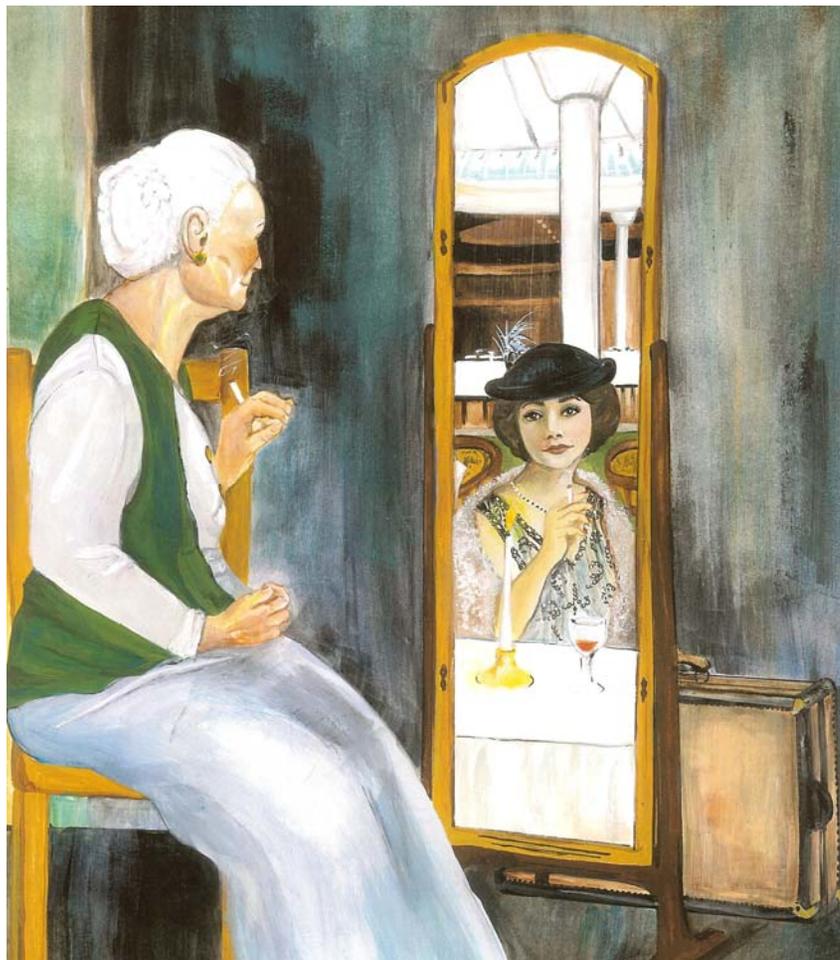
My eyes do not close  
against the probability  
that I may toss snake eyes  
when the red serpent bites.

Venom pumps in my veins,  
the promise of a lost paradise  
I must regain. I shake two die  
and watch them as they fall.

I confess I am no innocent.  
I have slept with Lady Luck  
more than once on white sheets.  
When I woke, she was gone.

I search for that woman  
who abandoned me when I held  
all the hearts. Flush with losing,  
I vow to lure her back again.

.....  
*Carol Carpenter's poems and stories have appeared in over 200 publications and anthologies, including Not What I Expected (Paycock Press, March 2007). Her work has been exhibited by art galleries and produced as podcasts. Formerly a college writing instructor, journalist and trainer, she now writes full time in Livonia, Michigan.*  
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**SMOKING AT THE SAVOY**

Deborah Ann Cidboy

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*Deborah Ann Cidboy is a writer and painter who lives in Jefferson, Georgia. She has won writing prizes awarded by the Alabama Writers Conclave, Southeastern Writers Association, and Tennessee Mountain Writers. Her poetry and paintings have previously been published in the Birmingham Arts Journal. She is the cover artist for Walking Wounded (Iris Press, 2006) and Wounds That Bind (soon to be published by Iris Press).*  
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## SMOKING AT THE SAVOY

Jimmy Carl Harris

(with illustration by Deborah Cidboy)

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*Dear Sage:*

*Mama is eighty and lives with my wife and me. Mama smokes, which is bad enough, and she tends to go into a sort of trance, with a lit cigarette in her hand. Several times, she's burned her fingers. I'm afraid she'll start a fire. What is your advice?*

*Al in Alabama*

*Dear Al:*

*Two things you MUST do. The cigarettes have to go. Be gently persuasive if possible, firm if necessary. And, your mother needs medical attention. What you call a "trance" could be the early stages of Alzheimer's. The sooner you get a diagnosis, the better.*

*Sage,*

A girl can do so much with a cigarette. Just the fact that she's smoking says she's mature, experienced, a woman of the world. Mysterious behind her veil of smoke, she may be waving a wand or wielding a subtle weapon. Who knows? And, her choice of smoke heightens the mystery. Marrakech? Paris? San Francisco?

At the same time, she can use the ritual of the cigarette to accentuate her femininity. For one thing, there's the business of holding it. Ever so lightly, always between the first two fingers of the left hand, with the wrist bent away from the face, graceful as only a lady can be. On the right occasion, she will accept a cigarette and a light from a gentleman. Their hands touch, she whispers her gratitude, he catches a hint of her perfume, he gives her fire and is left full of it.

Richard has come to the lobby, as I have, for an after-dinner smoke. I know his name because, while coming in to dinner last evening, I inquired about a certain table and the Maitre D' said it was permanently reserved for the man known only as Richard. As is his custom, Richard is sitting with his back to the wall, reading *The Financial Times* and smoking a short, unfiltered cigarette—Camel is my first guess, but maybe something unanticipated, Egyptian or Indian. He smokes like a man sure of himself—crisp movement, deep inhale, forceful exhale.

I open my little gold lamé evening bag and remove my pearl inlay cigarette case. Daddy gave it to me, despite Mother's disapproving glare, the day I left for college. Daddy's little girl is all grown up now and needs grown-up accessories, he said as he slipped it into the pocket of my linen jacket. Now, it captures a glimmer from the cut glass chandelier and tosses it around the lobby. I love these European hotels, with their blended bouquets of chamber music and cognac.

The movement of reflected light captures Richard's attention. I take a Karelia from the case. Hardly a woman's cigarette, but it's the only reminder I have left from the summer of my Greek seaman. I lift it to my lips, where Richard's gaze remains while I take my lighter from my purse. It's the silver Ronson Billy gave me the night before his unit shipped out, engraved with something very private, in French. Billy and I always used the rare occasions of our intimacies to practice our French. Poor, sweet, doomed Billy.

But, a girl must get on with her life. I pause, then click-flare-click and it's lit. Richard collapses the newspaper onto his lap and leans forward. With fingers longer and slimmer than the cigarette, I take it from my lips and hold it aside. I tilt my head back and release a slow stream of smoke in his direction. Through the smoke, I see him sink back into his chair and smile.

"Al. She's at it again."

"What?"

"Sitting there, with her eyes closed, waving her cigarette around like some movie star."

"She's okay."

"Hello? Is this more denial? If you don't believe me, believe Sage. You wrote to her."

"My mistake."

"Al, we have to do something. I'm willing to take care of her, but I'm not going to be burned up by her. Take her cigarettes now and take her to the doctor tomorrow."

The Sûreté agents are on the other side of the lobby. They've recognized me. They have their heads together. The female agent whispers to her male counterpart, tells him to take me now. But he isn't sure and that gives me time. Hoping to appear unhurried, I crush out my cigarette in the crystal ashtray. I risk an unmasked glance at Richard, but he's watching the Sûreté. He's already finished his cigarette and now he puts his

newspaper aside. Even from across the room, I see his knuckles whiten on the arms of his chair. Then, he returns my glance and nods toward the big, brass-trimmed double doors that open to the avenue. I rise. Careful. Haste will create unwanted alarm. Careful.

"Al. She's headed for the door."

"Cool it. She's got her purse, so she's going to the Piggly Wiggly for more cigarettes."

"Sure. And, maybe, like last week, she'll throw herself into the arms of the postman and thank him for rescuing her from the Chinese warlord."

"Okay, okay. I'll keep an eye on her."

The bad cop remains seated but the good cop is up, following me. Now, Richard, now!

.....  
*Jimmy Carl Harris lives to write in Birmingham, Alabama. The author of two collections of short fiction, Walking Wounded and Wounds That Bind, he has won four Hackney Literary Awards, in addition to honors bestowed by the Alabama Writers Conclave, Southeastern Writers Association, Appalachian Writers Association, Tennessee Mountain Writers, and Green River Writers. His stories have been published in the Louisville Review, Appalachian Heritage, Confluence, ByLine, and previously in the Birmingham Arts Journal.*  
*<http://www.jimmycarlharris.com/>*  
.....

**"Majorities, of course, are often mistaken. This is why the silencing of minorities is always dangerous."**

**--Alan Barth**



## PIANO

Brandon Evans

*Brandon Evans is a senior at Hoover High, in Alabama where he is in the Advanced Placement Art course taught by BAA member James Knowles. Brandon is a member of the Hoover High lacrosse team and plans to study law in college as well as further develop his artistic talents. Contact: jamesknowles1@mac.com.*



**UNTITLED**  
Robert Hendrickson

.....  
*Robert Hendrickson paints in his studio in Tuscaloosa, Alabama*  
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## **BLIND MAN FLYING**

Jack Swenson

The blind men were called Good Blindy and Bad Blindy by the other dorm residents. Not to their faces, of course. There were lots of nicknames. There was Fuzzy Goldman, Snake Erickson, and Pecker Nelson. Some of the residents were so bizarre they didn't need nicknames, such as Dale Junke, famous for taking an axe to his car and making a convertible out of it. Bud Smith was halfway in between. He had a nickname, Bud, but it was so common that it didn't seem like one. Bud was also bizarre; he liked to blow up things. He once blew a urinal off the wall in Folwell Hall with a cherry bomb. Folwell Hall had a nickname, too. It was called Foul Smell hall by some of the students at the university, probably those who did poorly in English. Another oddball was Philip Mayo (yes, he was one of those Mayos, the Mayo Clinic Mayos) who shaved his head, which in the fifties was odd indeed, and who refused to talk for one whole semester. Philip didn't have a nickname. Then there was Gerald Hovland who never studied except for the last three days of the term when he closeted himself in a corner of his room, tipped back his cushioned chair and did nothing but read for three days and nights. He had a cooler for sandwiches and soft drinks, a stack of books, and a pillow and a blanket for when he would interrupt his cramming marathon to get a few winks of sleep. The only time he left the chair was to go to the bathroom. Gerald didn't have a nickname, either.

Good Blindy's name was Fred. He was an affable fellow who had lost his sight in combat during the Korean War. He was always cheerful and friendly. Everyone liked him. He hung out mostly with other veterans; there were half a dozen or so in the dorm. They were going to school on the G.I. Bill. His best friend was Jim Erickson, a.k.a. Chicken Erickson. Chicken got his nickname as the result of an incident that also occurred in Korea. He was in a mortar unit, and during an engagement one day when it became clear to Jim that the enemy had their position zeroed in, he opted to hastily leave the scene of the action. He was joined by the rest of the squad in spite of the outrage of their lieutenant who told them to maintain their position. The lieutenant did not report the incident.

Bad Blindy was ill tempered and unfriendly. He kept to himself. Very few of the dorm residents even knew his name, which was Leland. Leland hated his sightlessness. Alone in his room he would shake his head back and

forth and shed agonized tears and curse his God and feel very, very sorry for himself.

Bad Blindy had been blind since birth. His fellow students steered clear of him. Many of them had witnessed an incident in the dormitory cafeteria one evening when Leland accidentally bumped into a concrete pillar in the chow line. His tray went flying and he tumbled to the floor. A student seated nearby got up to help him, and when Leland regained his feet he swung his white cane in a murderous arc at the head of his benefactor who luckily saw the blow coming and ducked.

During the winter, some of the fellows went to a rink to ice skate, and one time Good Blindy decided that he wanted to take up the sport. His friends later reported that it was an outing that none of them would ever forget. They got Fred outfitted with a pair of rented skates and turned him loose on the ice. His idea of fun was to go as fast as he could until he ran into something, which was of course the barrier at the far end of the rink. Back and forth he went, his hair and his scarf streaming out behind him like the wings of some wild bird, and then crash, he would hit the boards and fall down, and then he would get up and push off and go hell bent for election in the opposite direction.

The whole time, his friends said, Fred had this mad grin on his face as if he had never had a better time in his life.

.....  
*Jack Swenson is an avid reader and writer of flash fiction. He teaches a class in creative writing to "a bunch of rascals" at a local senior center. His second book of stories is now available from iuniverse.com or from any online bookstore.*  
*swenjack@comcast.net*  
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**"A conclusion is the place where you  
got tired of thinking."**

**--Steven Wright**

## AUNT MYRTLE'S GARDEN ADVICE

Joseph L. Whitten

It's the manure, Honey!  
That's what makes these zinnias  
cause people to put on their brakes

and crawl past this little garden patch.  
Now, I know that Mary Harriet  
over on Evergreen Road swears

by Miracle Grow® and buys four  
or five bags every spring;  
Waste of money! Give me manure any day.

Sometime in March every year I go  
down to Don Walker's cow barn  
and get two 5 gallon buckets full.

Come back here, dump it out  
and dig it in with a garden fork—  
mix it in real well before I plant my seeds.

Now, I get my seed from Wal-Mart;  
they seem to give me the best blooms.  
One year I ordered seed from New Hampshire,

and I didn't grow doodley that year—  
even with help of cow manure!  
Everybody wondered what happened.

I told them, "Yankee seed in Southern dirt!"  
You take my advice, missy:  
get Wal Mart seed and cow manure;

then just sit back and wait from them  
to sing the Hallelujah Chorus all summer.  
I'll call Don Walker and tell him you're coming.

.....  
*Joseph L. Whitten was born in the mountains of north Alabama but grew up in  
Glencoe, Alabama. He began teaching in Odenville, Alabama, in 1961, where he  
lives with his wife Gail. Now retired, Joe's poems have been published in numerous  
journals, two chapbooks, and a full-length collection entitled Mulled Memories.*  
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## ROUND WORLD

Thomas Healy

A stain of sweat spread across the back of her blouse as Janice made another loop, but she ignored the chill, determined to complete half a dozen more loops before she quit tonight. Breathing heavily, her arms straining under the weight of the gigantic spool, she trudged on, the guitar of Eric Clapton blaring from the radio in the corner of the shed. Earlier she sang along with what was playing on the radio, but now she was so tired she could barely pronounce her name. She had been rolling the spool of sisal twine for nearly forty-five minutes, thought she would be in better shape since she had been doing it every night for the past four months. But it was as tiring and painful as ever once she went longer than twenty minutes.

"Why do you do it?" her husband demanded again the other night while she soaked in the bathtub.

"You know why, Frank."

"It's stupid," he barked in exasperation. "Some nights you're so wasted you can hardly support yourself."

She did not answer him but slid farther under the soothing hot water.

"You hobble around here like someone twice your age."

She really had no choice but to continue the project their daughter started last summer before her sophomore year in high school. Marny saw a report on television about a farmer upstate who for almost six years had rolled scraps of twine into an enormous ball that was nearly the size of his tractor. She decided to start her own ball because she wanted to be on television some day, so every night after dinner, she rolled twine for half an hour. Her father thought the whole thing was ridiculous but her mother, as usual, was supportive and asked her friends at church to save any twine they didn't want for Marny's project. By the end of summer, the ball was as thick as a fire hydrant.

"In another year you'll be on the tube," Janice predicted one evening while she watched her daughter toil away in the shed. Round and round like a hamster in a cage.

"You really think so?"

"I know it, dear."

Marny appeared on television much sooner than her mother had imagined, just seven weeks after her prediction, to her amazement. One afternoon the girl did not come home from school and soon reports of her

disappearance appeared on the newscasts of every television station in the area. For weeks, volunteers scoured the neighborhood for signs of her, and her photograph was posted in store windows and on bulletin boards throughout the east side of town.

Night after night Janice sat by the television, waiting to hear from her daughter, then one night she went out to the shed and looked at the squat ball of twine which already had begun to collect dust. The next night she returned to the shed and got out the spool and rolled a few strands. It felt good to be doing something, she thought, certainly better than sitting idly by the telephone all night long. When her daughter returned, she wanted her to find the ball as large as it would have been if she had never been away.

.....  
*Thomas Healy was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, and his short stories have appeared in such publications as the Fairfield Review, the Houston Literary Review, Lily, and Sequoia. laurel462001@yahoo.com*  
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**"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."  
--Desmond Tutu**

## DODIE AND THE GENTIAN

Vanessa Gebbie

Dodie is high up. She's walking high in the Swiss Alps, looking at her feet. Watching for a flash of blue that will say to her, "The sky has fallen, Chicken Licken, the sky has fallen at your feet."

The earth is not the earth here. It is grey; stones carried ice-miles aeons ago, piled up by the strength of more than man, heaped in living strings along the valleys. Dodie has left her husband. Not like that. No. Left him back at the town, in a nameless hotel, far below, waiting for her while she walks high above him, looking for blue.

Max, his name is. She doesn't think of him as Max, just as that man, sitting at breakfast this morning, "How do you like your eggs, Sir?" while she plans her day, and watches out of the corner of her eye for the waiter, the youngish one with the crew cut and the skewed grin, who promised her he'd keep an eye out for Max while she was gone....

Funny, she thinks, kicking the stones aside, balancing on the very edge of the moraine, where the shale has slid in a cascade down to the valley floor, and she is perched here in the sky alone... funny. All those years when Max walked on his own up here and I stayed at the hotel.

She can hear herself. "This book is too good, Max. Can't you go on your own?"

Or, "I just need to finish this painting, Max."

Or, "I want to visit the museum, Max."

Then later, older, "I'm too tired, Max."

Or, "I'm no botanist. I'm a reader, I'm a painter."

And Max would leave her painting, or reading, or eating pastries, while he went out and up mountains in his laced up boots, wielding his sticks (always two, walking Norwegian-style) logging the exact locations of gentians.

'Honestly, Dodie, it's like a little bit of sky has fallen.'

"You make me think of Chicken Licken... a little bit of sky... honestly...."

"We speak the same but don't *see* the same."

"Don't we? Does it matter?"

Now, the kind waiter with the crew cut and the skewed smile has promised to take him out in the sun. He'll wheel Max to the terrace and let

him take in the sun in his rest-time after lunch, while Dodie looks for a little bit of sky for him.

She hears him, a voice from the past... "Honestly, Dodie, there's no point in me picking one for you. The whole point is to see one up there. To see a gentian on the mass of grey, like it's fallen from someone's pocket. Like God has dropped something precious...."

"Don't be silly. You don't believe in God."

But here. Now.

Up here, on the edge of a glacier heart, her foot brushes a piece of sky so clear and so whole and so perfect that she can't breathe for a second, and she understands more in that second about Max than she ever did when he could walk.

.....  
*Vanessa Gebbie is a journalist and a prize-winning short fiction writer. She teaches Creative Writing and is also Assistant Editor of a literary small press magazine, Cadenza.*  
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## KOVACS AND ME

Stan Freberg

*Excerpt from 1999 interview with humorist Stan Freberg:*

Freberg: Ernie Kovacs was a contemporary of mine. We came up at approximately the same time. I was on The Ernie Kovacs Television Show which they did locally in New York and I almost got him in trouble, I almost got his sponsor to cancel. It was Chock Full of Nuts coffee... Somewhere I gotta find a tape of this, yeah, a kinescope of the Ernie Kovacs Show with Stan Freberg on it. I was only on it once, he was afraid to ask me back after he almost lost his sponsor.

We went to black during the Chock Full of Nuts commercial so I said (to Ernie) "That woman singing the Chock Full of Nuts jingle... she's singing flat!" He says. "Yes, I know." I said "Well, how did she get the job singing the commercial?" And he said, "She's married to the guy who owns Chock Full of Nuts," then, "Hold it, hold it, we're back now. I'm sitting here with Stan Freberg. Stan, how did you get started in show business?" And I said, "Ernie I really don't have much talent, but fortunately I'm married to the woman who owns Chock Full Of Nuts Coffee." [Ernie just] rolled his cigar around in his mouth and blew smoke out and then leaned into the lens of the camera and said, "Goodnight, folks."

The next morning I was awakened at seven o'clock, like at the crack of dawn at the Algonquin hotel there in New York, by the Capitol Records promotion guy, asking "What the hell did you say on the Ernie Kovacs Show last night?" And I said, "I was just interviewed, that's all. What do you mean what did I say?" And he said, "Well, we have a subpoena for you. The guy says he's canceling the Ernie Kovacs Show and he's bringing a suit against you. When are you going back [to LA]?" And I said, "Oh I thought I'd go back tomorrow." And he said, "Oh no you're not, you're going back this morning!"

So I threw everything into my suitcases, I didn't even shower, I got out of the hotel and called the airline and got myself on another flight. I never heard anything more about that.

I never told this story before by the way. I met Kovacs a couple times after that and he said, "Thanks a lot, Freberg. I managed somehow to throw all the blame on you, by telling the man that I was sorry, that I had no control over what you were saying since we were on live. But Stan, the guy was sitting there in front of the television set, with his wife!"... The guy

obviously had to defend the honor of his wife, even though deep down, he'd have probably said, "Right, that's my wife's story." She was actually like a half a tone flat.

.....  
*Stan Freberg, a pioneering comedy performer, advertising executive and author, lives in Los Angeles, California. Quoted with permission from Rusty Pipes interview 1999; "Cosmik Debris Webzine" David Dugle AKA Rusty Pipes dugledavid@cox.net*  
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## **SOMETHING TO DREAM ABOUT**

Cyndie Goins Hoelscher

Ears searching strands,  
Ripples of jazzy pleasures;  
Sequences of sequins, strung out  
What don't you know about this?  
Listen, and I will tell you.  
This world is not always a happy place.  
But here on the keyboard plains,  
Life plays out.  
With a trumpet's blare,  
And a drum roll, please  
Show me some flare won't you?  
So I can find something  
To dream about.

.....  
*Cyndie Goins Hoelscher considers it her life mission is to bring laughter and hope to others. She strives to keep the story real, so audiences will identify with the main characters and their journeys. Hoelscher lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, with her husband, Ronnie, and her cat, Lady Tiffy.*  
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## SANTA LUCIA DAY

Richard Modlin

December 13th is Santa Lucia Day. And, except for being mentioned on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*, the significance of this saint remains obscure to most Americans. But as I learned during my sabbatical at the University of Lund in Sweden, Santa Lucia is a serious cultural icon to the Scandinavians. Although St. Lucy is really a canonized Italian virgin, martyred by the Romans back in the 4th century for secretly providing food to starving Christians who hid in caves, the Norwegians, Finns, Danes, and especially the Swedes, made this Saint's day a national holiday.

There are many legends about how this minor Italian saint became so strongly incorporated into Scandinavian society, but the one I found most interesting—and most representative of the Swedish standpoint—is the myth related to me by the faculty and students with whom I interacted.

In pre-Gregorian times the winter solstice fell on December 13th. As the longest night of the year, the Vikings built great bonfires around which they engaged in overindulgence and excessive imbibitions to brighten the night. But when the Vikings accepted Christianity, Scandinavia quaked when the forces of Rome crushed this winter orgy.

Interestingly, also on December 13th, the feast day of Santa Lucia was being celebrated on the island of Sicily—a similar, less raucous event, but definitely Christian. In Italy, Santa Lucia is the patron saint of the blind, and in a stretch can be associated with "light." To brighten her way in the caves, St. Lucy wore a wreath of candles on her head. Since rumor had it that St. Lucy once visited Scandinavia, she became the perfect Christian symbol for the longest night in the land of the Vikings.

In the 11th century King Canute, a Viking king, declared that the Christmas holiday season would begin on December 13<sup>th</sup>, with the celebration of Santa Lucia Day, and last until January 13, the feast day of the king's patron saint. This led to a month of festivities and very little work, the tradition that is continued in modern day Sweden.

As a newcomer to Swedish culture, I was drafted into the ceremonial spell of Santa Lucia Day and assigned as an attendant to march in the Zoology Department's Santa Lucia candlelight procession. Such celebratory processions, I learned, are held in every nook and cranny throughout Sweden. The event heralds a month of festivities.

I quickly learned that my hosts were serious. Not only did I have to march, but I also had to sing, along with the other attendants, the tribute to Santa Lucia. You all have heard this hymn that ends in "Santa Lucia—Santa Lucia." But, there is more to that tune and, of course, it all had to be sung in Swedish. Additionally, to gain the proper ambience all participants had to wear a white gown with a red sash tied around the waist. Attendants also wore a white, conical crown decorated with gold stars, and each carried a white candle. And, according to tradition, the designated Santa Lucia was topped with a wreath of seven lighted candles.

Now this is where a problem arose! We did not have a beautiful virgin with flowing blond hair to symbolize Santa Lucia.

The only female in our group had jet-black hair and a stature that was too short. So we elected Swen, a six-foot-five Swedish student, whose golden locks were in dire need of a haircut, and crowned him.

With the wreath of seven lighted candles precariously balanced on his head, Swen produced an ungainly Santa Lucia. He looked more like the Statue of Liberty.

Our procession began down darkened hallways, with Swen gingerly following the attendants. With his height now over seven feet, he had to duck to clear his flaming crown through the doors and passages.

The parade route took us down two flights of stairs to a coffee/meeting room, where our colleagues waited to hail our arrival. We entered the room and completed the final melodious tributes to the saint. Then, when Swen, our stalwart Santa Lucia, made the scene, the waiting faculty and students, who had already help themselves to ample quantities of glögg and traditional saffron cakes, exploded in hilarity and applause. The Christmas festivities had officially begun and all semblance of work had ended. And, it was only 8:30 in the morning, the 13th of December.

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*Richard F. Modlin lives in Owens Cross Roads, Alabama. He is on the board of the Alabama Writers' Conclave. [rjm1937@earthlink.net](mailto:rjm1937@earthlink.net)*  
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## CONQUEST

Pat Rumore

### KIDNAPPED

The ships of the expeditions of Alonso de Hojeda and Diego de Niceusa to the Spanish Main traveled together for several weeks, with over a thousand men between them. Then Niceusa's ships veered east toward Veragua while Hojeda's went south toward the Gulf of Darien. Seven hundred men traveled with Niceusa, whose license from the Spanish crown gave him authority to explore and settle the Caribbean shores of the area which would later comprise Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Having taken part in the explorations of Juan de la Cosa and several expeditions among the islands of the Indies, Raul was hardened to the life of a soldier of fortune as well as a sailor. He believed that he was capable of bearing all of the hardships that such expeditions encountered. Yet none of his previous experiences prepared him for what he found in Veragua.

With seven hundred men in tow, Nicuesa anchored off the coast of Veragua. The bay they chose was shallow, so that the ship had to anchor far out and smaller boats carried the explorers onto the narrow beach. Just beyond the beach they encountered jungle, thick with undergrowth, through which a path had to be hacked. With seven hundred men, it was difficult to set up a camp in the limited open area. It was hot, there were insects of every sort biting even in the most private and tender areas, the fresh water available was in swampy pools which were green with algae and snake-infested.

It was not long before the men were struck with chills and fever from their lack of good water and wholesome food. Although they worked to clear an area for a colony, they were not prepared even to address the essentials of daily life, like food production. The plant life was plentiful, but unfamiliar, so they were not sure which plants were edible. The animal life was exotic and hunting was not productive for the large number of men who had to be fed. It was not long before the provisions that they had brought on the ship were gone, with little to replace them.

Then added to these problems, the Indians of the area soon became aware that the Spaniards had arrived. Raul remembered his conversations with sailors who had been on Columbus' last voyage. They had landed in Veragua and had been driven out by the Indians. Thus the Indians of Veragua had encountered Spaniards before. They did not come out into the

open and greet Nicuesa or his men, but if one of the men ventured far from the cleared area alone, chances were that he would be found later with a poisoned arrow in his body. The poison used by the Indians did not merely kill. It caused suffering. The body swelled and became bloated, the person developed a ravening thirst which couldn't be quenched, and death inevitably followed.

The men did establish a colony of sorts in the jungle of Veragua. They named it Nombre de Dios. Yet as time passed more and more of the men died there, of disease brought on in large part because of their lack of good food and water, sickness, Indian ambush, and encounters with the wild animals that shared the little good water available at the small ponds in the jungle.

The dangers and discomforts of life at Nombre de Dios were beyond anything that Raul was capable of imagining from his youth in Extremadura or from his earlier experience in the new world. The heat was not dry like the heat of Extremadura. Sweat poured off the skin in buckets in the jungle humidity, leaving a person clammy and craving respite in a pool of water. Yet the water might be infested with crocodiles or snakes or even fish that would attack a man.

There was no return even though the ship still rested at anchor, because they had no provisions and Hispaniola was several hundred miles away. Thus Raul was forced to watch his companions become emaciated shadows of themselves, filthy and awful to behold. He could only guess that he looked the same. He felt ill most of the time and crusted with filth.

Raul soon lost track of the time that he had been in Veragua. He only knew that now just a handful of the original seven hundred still survived. One day in a daze he left the colony and made his way to the beach. He was going to walk out into the ocean and let the salt water clean away the filth and clamminess that covered him.

He must have been in the water a half hour when he realized that coming into the bay was a large vessel, filled with natives unlike any he had previously seen. He was familiar with the small canoes of the Indies Indians, but this canoe was much larger, as long as a galley and probably eight feet in breadth. It must have had twenty or thirty men in it, rowing, and still had a large covered area in the middle where some women and children sat. The Indians were dressed differently from natives he had previously seen.

Raul swam toward the shore, but in his weakened condition he wasn't able to get very far before the Indians overtook him. He felt a sharp pain in his head and then he saw blackness.

When Raul came to, he found himself in the bottom of the dugout canoe, amid the Indian rowers. He didn't stir but tried to look around before anyone realized he was conscious, in order to get his bearings.

In the center of the canoe was an area sheltered by a canopy of mats where he could see various goods, including objects of tortoise shell and gold, as well as copper plates, hatchets and bells, and a considerable quantity of colored cotton garments. He decided that these Indians must be traders, not warriors, especially since there were women and children in the vessel.

He heard them speak in a language like none he had heard before, certainly unlike the language used by the Indies natives. Therefore he knew that these natives were unlikely to take him anywhere where he might find his own kind. Still, at least he had been rescued from what was sure to have been death by starvation at Nombre de Dios. And if the Indians intended to kill him, they could have left him in the water to die when they hit him over the head. Therefore he decided that he would attempt to cooperate with his captors until they showed themselves to be his enemies.

He quietly observed the Indians and soon could tell that one stood out as the leader. He was a man perhaps in his thirties who was robust and muscular, broad-chested with wide shoulders and long arms. Like the other Indians, his head appeared to be unusually flat, almost as though it had been flattened by some device, and he looked at things with a kind of squint. His nose was large and curved and his chin receded. His coarse black hair was long in back, braided and fastened with colored yarn. It looked like it had been shaved across the crown of his head, except for a fringe over the forehead, which was pushed up to form a crest and bound by a thin colored band of what looked like the bark of some kind of tree.

All of the Indian men wore loincloths in various colors. These long narrow cotton bands of dyed cloth had been passed between the legs and three or four times around their waists. The ends, which hung down in front and behind, appeared to have different kinds of ornaments, either embroidery or featherwork. All of the men wore mantles, a large square of cloth which passed under the right arm and was knotted over the left shoulder. Most of these were very plain, but the one worn by the man leading the group was elaborately decorated.

He was the only one of the Indians wearing a jacket. It was a short sleeveless thing, which was interwoven with many bright colored threads and feathers. He also wore a collar of green stone beads and had a long bead of yellow topaz inserted in an opening in the septum of his nose. Although he looked like no one Raul had ever seen, somehow Raul found his looks pleasant. Since so many of the Indians Raul had encountered had intentionally decorated themselves to look fierce, the fact that these Indians had a pleasing appearance made Raul feel better about his own chances of survival.

Soon the leader of the group noticed that Raul was awake. He gestured for Raul to sit on one of the seats and began to speak to him. Raul threw up his hands to indicate he did not understand. The leader seemed to change to another dialect, but again Raul indicated that he couldn't understand. Finally the leader pointed to his own chest and said, "Balam." Raul pointed to himself and said his name, "Raul", which the leader repeated with some effort. Then Raul pointed to the leader and said, "Balam." Thus they began a hesitant effort at communication.

Balam gave Raul some bread-like food, made from maize, and some water. Then he turned back to the other men and began giving them orders. The Indians appeared to change the direction of the canoe and head toward the shore. Raul noticed smoke rising among the trees near the shore line. Apparently they would be stopping at a village for the night.

The following days passed for Raul with great interest. He had no complaints about the way he was treated. His captors had helped him get cleaned up and had given him sufficient food to regain his strength. Balam sat with him often, trying to communicate, and Raul was beginning to understand some of the basic words of the Indian's language. He found himself fascinated by Balam, who seemed a man of great intelligence. Balam showed intense curiosity about Raul and the culture from which he came.

.....  
*The above is an excerpt from "Conquest," attorney Pat Rumore's historical novel-in-progress. The second edition of Pat's non-fiction work, "Lawyers in a New South City: A History of the Legal Profession in Birmingham," was recently published by John Compton of Association Publishing Co., through the Birmingham Bar.*  
*PBRumore@aol.com*  
.....

## GLUGGED NOT STIRRED

Jim Reed

I hear it, even when I'm not listening to it.

Listen: *you can hear it, too.*

It's a sound peculiar to the South, and most peculiar to Uptown Birmingham right now. It's a rattle that's immediately recognizable, a multiple-clinking, hollow sound that gurgles just a bit.

Now, this sound is accompanied by certain movements, if you cast your eyes sideways and take a peek.

The hand next to me in the eatery is shaking, the glass of iced tea rattling loudly. A Yankee might think the diner is palsied, but we indigenous folk know the facts. This person is doing exactly what thousands of Birminghamians do each and every day--he's shaking loose the ice cubes right before glugging some tea. There's a purpose to this act of quivering. Everybody knows that ice cubes tend to stick together once they've sat for awhile. If you don't shake them down a bit before drinking, they're likely to come loose when you tip the glass, and spatter you with more fluid than you're prepared to absorb.

I like the iced tea palsy. It has a rhythm that is mere underlayment to the noise of the restaurant. If you tune out the conversation and listen to everything else that's going on, it's like a free-form jazz concert. There's rhythmic throat-clearing, a snort now and then, a guffaw that punctuates a melody, the aluminum squeak of a door that doesn't hang just right. You can also hear a flushing toilet nearby and hope, usually in vain, to hear the sound of a faucet running for a moment afterward. There's the loud waitress's call to the customer, "*WhatCHUgonehave?*" and there's the even louder translation of what the customer mumbles, "*Chicken salad hold the pickle add fries...eye-TAL-yun!*" Other parts of this continuing jazz festival include slurping noises as a child finishes up a Pepsi through an air-bubbled straw, rustling of newspapers as diners squeeze their shoulders tight to accommodate other diners, some kind of whiny country music on the speaker system not quite tuned to the station's frequency, the distinctive noise produced when you carefully dismantle a styrofoam cup piece by piece.

There's always a free jazz concert Uptown. It's everywhere all the time. All for the cost of one tumbler of stuck-together ice drowned in powerfully caffeinated tea.

To start the concert, raise high the cup (baton), shake but don't stir its contents, and glug away. Make as much noise as you like. Daintiness just doesn't go down here. In My South, the best rhapsodies are the loudest. The best jazz is improvised on the street or at Scott's Koney's Diner or Tony's Terrific Hot Dogs.

It's that parallel-universe overlap of excruciatingly beautiful and provocative sounds that makes life in the city so special.

Come do some jazz, Uptown. Be a player (use your drinking straws for countertop impromptu drumming, your nervous twitch to follow a boombox beat) or be a good listener (is the air conditioning hum in tune with the street-level brake squeal?), or be a good watcher (peek over your menu to observe the three-year-old slapping some catsup on his forehead, look over the table at the nervously tapping shoes).

There's music to be had, and there's music that will have you, if you'll only stop to notice.

.....  
*Jim Reed feels the jazz through his feet and then lets it vibrate up to his writing fingers, in Birmingham, Alabama. [www.jimreedbooks.com](http://www.jimreedbooks.com)*  
.....

**"Part of the pleasure of being alive is the knowledge that you're not dead yet."**

**--George Carlin**

**TO SYLVIA PLATH**

J. William Chambers

October 27, 2003

Dear Sylvia:

Our birthday again . . .

A day you seem to have dreaded.

Becoming a senior is not as odious

as you once imagined:

*I don't see . . . how people stand  
being old. Your insides all dry up.*

Not so, if you focus on

the *queer and terrible and exotic* world.

All those *real things* you yearned

to write about flourish in rich confusion.

Just imagine the enchanted syllables and words

that come together as you muse over

these ripples in recent news:

happy Serbs, at a wedding, fire guns

into the air and shoot down a small plane;

deer wander into a clothing establishment in New Jersey;

dead catfish in the thousands wash up

on the banks of Alabama rivers;

a bear barges into a hospital in Japan;

a German names his canine Adolf,

then teaches it the Nazi salute;

the president of Zimbabwe spends

\$9 million to construct

a 25-bedroom "retreat."

Well, Sylvia, there you would have discovered all you desired:

certifiably *real situations* in our *real world* –

life's drama of *blood, lust and death*.

I regret that you did not want to grow old.

By the way, I suppose I'm lucky;

my insides have not yet dried up,

but reaching 71 today,  
after hearing so many decades of  
*This cracked world's incessant gabble and hiss,*  
my nerves may yet become mangled,  
my insides dry as yellowed parchment.

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Note: Lines or phrases in italics are taken from poems and journals of Sylvia Plath.

.....  
*J. William Chambers is a native of Athens, Alabama. His poetry, reviews, and essays have been widely published in many journals, magazines, and other media. Negative Capability Press published his most recent volume of poetry, A Taste of Wine and Gentian, in 2000, and his Collage: A Tribute to Steven Owen Bailey, an anthology in 2006. He is co-editor with Alabama's Poet Laureate, Sue Brannan Walker on Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry (2007).*  
.....

## SONG FOR THE VOLUNTEERS

Barry Cole

When the volunteers come  
With their golden hearts  
And bags of goodies  
To wear out a weekend afternoon for me,  
My hair a thin fleece of silver and white,

I'll call them 'my gentlemen lovers'  
To my jealous husband of sixty years,

Who lies totally still  
In the bed beside mine,  
Sounding off an occasional combination  
Of groans and snoring  
Ripping through whatever vapid thing I say.

I'll show them  
The way shingles grow on a wrinkled back  
And how my unsteady hands with their jagged fingers  
Still move with the same grace  
That caressed a young woman's piano.

I'll show them  
Newspaper clippings of award-winning cookies  
Baked fifty years back and flavored with the love of a German town  
Forgotten after being bombed to cinders during the war.

I, too, have been bombed with time  
And my Beloved, his painful chorus  
Erupting beside me,  
Is slightly closer to the final opus.

And when he goes,  
You'll know by the charcoal sketch  
Perched silently on my little table.  
The only thing left of a dying chorus is paper,  
And the world quickly forgets  
The music of a withered hand.

.....  
*Barry Cole lives in Alabaster and works as a software quality assurance analyst. He has authored two fictional manuscripts documenting the lives of African American slaves in what is now Tannehill State Park. A screenplay has been developed based on the first manuscript, titled God's River, and is being represented by Daniel L. Oppenheim, Executive Producer of Keeping Up with the Steins and former Alabama resident.*  
.....

## BIRD IN HAND

Steve Cushman

The boy sat huddled in the butterfly bush, poised, waiting to catch a bird. He didn't care what kind. Lucky, the family cat, had caught a red one thirty minutes ago and shook it to death. While his mother chased Lucky around the yard, swinging at him with a broom, the boy had picked up the discarded bird. It was no heavier than a store-bought egg.

"Now I'll have to bury this damn thing," she said, walking toward the boy.

"I'll help," he said. He held the bird out in front of him like an offering.

"No, you'll get all dirty. Go wash your hands."

The boy was sure that if this had happened a month ago, back before his father left, he would have been allowed to help bury the bird. But his mother seemed angry all the time now, like everything was his fault. Last night, she had yelled at him for spilling soap on the bathroom floor. When he said it was only soap, she glared at him and said, "Don't sass me, boy."

The idea of catching a bird came to him as he crawled under the butterfly bush to retrieve his tennis ball. Lying on his back, in the soft dirt, he looked up at the green sheet of leaves and purple flowers. Birds flew in and out and he could hear their wings flap, swoosh, and their untamed, quick songs. An orange butterfly landed on one of the flowers, took its time eating, and then flew away.

The boy was watching his mother work—on her knees, digging holes for new plants on the far side of the yard—when he spotted the tiny bird out of the corner of his eye. It was less than a foot away, gliding from flower to flower. Its wings buzzed and flapped so quickly he could barely see them.

The boy glanced over at his mother again, but she was busy, not watching him at all. The buzz of the tiny bird's wings filled the boy's ears and he knew he would only get one chance. He reached up and brushed what he thought might be its tail. Then the bird was gone and the boy was rolling around the bushes, crushing her new flowers.

She screamed his name and started for him, her hands in the air in front of her. He smiled, ready for the punishment. He imagined her chasing him around the backyard like she'd done to Lucky. Her voice grew louder and angrier as she approached, but he continued to roll around in the tall, green bush grabbing his side, laughing, yowling, *got it, got it, I got it.*

.....  
*Steve Cushman's novel, Portisville, was the winner of the 2004 Novello Literary Award. He writes in Greensboro, North Carolina.*  
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