

Birmingham Arts Journal

Volume 7 ~ Issue 1



Published without profit by passionate volunteers who believe that exceptional works by the famous, not-yet-famous, and never-to-be-famous deserve to be published side by side in a beautiful and creative setting.

\$5.00



Birmingham Arts Journal

Table of Contents

ECHO	Kevin Marshall Chopson	1
NOAH'S WIFE	T. K. Thorne	2
FREE ENTERPRISE	Jim Reed	3
THE SHARK	Deborah Cidboy	4
THE SHARK	Deborah Cidboy	5
JADED	Claire T. Feild	9
SCRIBBLING	Rick Coonrod	10
OCEAN	Kay Williams	11
ORANGE	Pete Sipchen	12
THE DISTANCE SHOWS US HOW	John Abbott	13
EMPATHY FOR HITLER	Barry Marks	14
DADDY GOT SHOT	Joey Kennedy	16
CONFETTI OF SAINTS	Katelyn Romaine	22
WALKING DOWN MORDECAI LANE	Libby Swope Wiersema	23
THE LUNA MOTH FLEW	Shelleigh Buckingham	24-25
ONCE UPON A CAR--DR. SEUSS IN SUBURBIA	Susan Martinello	26
ON THE ROAD	Fred Bassett	28
NANNY NUN	Sheila Dené Lawrence	29
REMEMBERING DOSTOYEVSKY	Kevin Fuller	32
UNTITLED	Laura Hunter	34
BEGINNING	Elizabeth Costello	36
FINAL SALUTE	Sharde L. Richardson	37
SUNSET	Kim Hagar	38
PRESERVATION	Joy Godsey	39
LETTER TO ODYSSEUS	Rebecca Gaffron	40
IT SITS IN A RIVER	Lydia Bailey	41
SUMMER STORMS	Joanna Grant	43
OR WHAT'S A HEAVEN FOR?	P.T. Paul	44
MAGGIE	Tammy Hawk-Bridges	45
HOW TO RAISE A GIRL-POET	Melissa Dickson Blackburn	46
CAMP COFFEE	Tom Sheehan	48

Front Cover: **HELLO, DALI**, Raymond Mears, Underwater Photograph. *Raymond Mears owned his first underwater movie camera during high school and photographed barracuda and other denizens around the Florida Keys. This background led to graduate work in Marine Biology. He studied nature photography with award-winning photographer, Beth Young, and drawing with medical illustrator Floyd Hosmer. His work has been published in the Annual Report of the Cahaba River Society, Alabama Sports Festival, and Birmingham Arts Journal. gobi1@earthlink.net*

Back Cover: **IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD**, 24" x 30", mixed media, Kay Vinson. *Birmingham, Alabama artist Kay Vinson, arranges textures, shapes, and found objects, then adds layer upon layer of glazes to create a multisensory experience for the viewer. www.wildwoodarts.net*

Visit us: <http://BirminghamArtsJournal.org>

ECHO

Kevin Marshall Chopson

blind from birth	each note
he found the platform easily	lifted from bondage
judging closeness by echo	no longer flat
	and held fast
he sat behind a music stand	
like the others	filled with his breath
	released to fly
four clicks from the drummer	to the last row of the balcony
and the band played	or to the moon
twelve bars in	a distance measured and familiar
the trumpet is raised to his lips	places he had been before
bringing light to the black shapes	found again
on the metered page	
	through this exchange
	of incarnate sound
	and echo

.....
Kevin Marshall Chopson received his Masters of Fine Arts degree from Murray State University in Kentucky. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Aureorean, Concho River Review, English Journal, The Broad River Review, New Madrid, The South Carolina Review, Poem, and The Hurricane Review, among others. He teaches writing at Davidson Academy, a small private school in Nashville, Tennessee, and serves as an adjunct professor at Volunteer State Community College. This is his second appearance in Birmingham Arts Journal.
.....

NOAH'S WIFE

T. K. Thorne

5497 BCE - Black Sea Region of Anatolia (ancient Turkey)

My name, Na'amah, means pleasant or beautiful. I am not always pleasant, but I am beautiful. Perhaps that is why I am trundled atop this beast like a roll of skins for market and surrounded by grim-faced men. If my captors had bothered to ask me, I would have told them that their prize is of questionable value because my mind is damaged. But they did not, and I lie draped belly-down across the back of an auroch, a large black ox with an eel stripe that runs down his spine and a stench worse than a rutting goat. My mouth is parched and swollen with dried blood, and every step the animal takes sends a jolt of pain into my chest. Snatches of ground appear between the cloven hooves--a succession of earth, grass, and rock obscured by the dark tangle of my hair--all I have to measure the growing distance from the life I have known.

Savta, my grandmother, believes a narrow birth passage pinched my head. A skilled midwife, she convinced the Elders that my disfigurement would right itself, and they allowed me to live. Tubal-Cain, my brother, would prefer it otherwise. He claims I tore our mother from inside and killed her. I did not intend to do such a thing, but if I did it, we are even, since she squeezed my head. Well, perhaps not even, as she is dead, and I am not.

The auroch stumbles and I grunt from the jerk. The tall man with fiery hair who leads the auroch looks back at me. My village sees many traders, so the strangeness of these men's dress and speech means they are from a distant land. Where are they taking me? As much as I hate the days, I dread the nights. The tall man pulls me off when it becomes too dark to travel, and I can barely stand. It is a chance for food and water, but I am fifteen summers, and I know the intent of men who steal a woman. So far, they have not tried, perhaps because I smell like the auroch, but when they do, I will fight. I am small, but my teeth are strong and my legs have climbed the hills since I was very young. My hills. How I miss my hills.

To distract me from the aches in my body and my heart, I will put together the words of my story. I remember everything. Memories and thoughts appear as images in my mind. Each word-sound I hear has its

own color and shape and fits together with the others in patterns that I can recall as easily as I can name every sheep on my hillside.

This story will be truth. I speak only truth, unwise as it may be, since lies distress me. And it will be for my own ears, as my words and manner seem odd to other people. I am more comfortable with animals, who do not expect me to be any way than the way I am. I will start with the day three summers ago when Savta told me I had a secret.

.....

This excerpt is from Teresa Thorne's novel, Noah's Wife. Teresa writes in Springville, Alabama. www.tkthorne.com for more information and to read the rest of the chapter.

.....

FREE ENTERPRISE

Jim Reed

The city needed an inexpensive way to light its stadium.

The inventor sold the city a large lamp, consisting of one 100-watt light bulb and one million mirrors to reflect the light.

He noted that within a year the electrical apparatus company's sales were down by one million bulbs, the power company was producing one hundred million fewer watts of electricity per day, and the cost of light bulbs had increased to one million dollars each.

He was thankful that he had retired after collecting one dollar per mirror from the city

.....

Jim Reed is a life-long Alabama resident who writes and thrives at the Museum of Fond Memories/Reed Books Antiques in Birmingham. Free Enterprise is a one-page novel from Jim Reed's book, Stickier Novels: More Tales Jotted Down on Sticky Notes. <http://www.jimreedbooks.com>

.....



THE SHARK

Deborah Cidboy

18" x 24"

Acrylic on canvas

Deborah Cidboy is a Pittsburgh Yankee transplanted in Georgia. Self-educated in writing and art, Deb loves to incorporate folklore and fantasy in her stories and paintings. More samples of her writing and art are on her website, <http://debsrealm.com>.

THE SHARK

Deborah Pischke Cidboy

Dawn engulfed the atmosphere around the tiny cottage in a heady essence of ionic charge. So palatable was the taste of change, the old man's tongue slipped from his sleeping mouth to savor it. Watery blue eyes opened, glimmering with excitement. He patted the empty side of the bed, as he did every morning. "Miss you, Sarah." He pressed his lips to his fingers and smoothed the kiss where once she'd lain. Then, with uncharacteristic eagerness, he pushed himself up to face the waiting day.

His ablutions were rapid. With a pitcher of water, he splashed his stubble and damped down his wayward frizz of white hair. No need to primp or waste time before a mirror. Not on this day of days. His fingers balked at buttons too stubborn for crippled joints. A break-tide of oaths flowed from his lips. He stopped and listened to the echo of his diatribe and congratulated himself on remembering such exotic phrases.

They called him Shark. Though the rage of his youth had long been spent, it was still said that his nerve had never been matched. Like his namesake, he'd bitten into life with gusto, braving the toughest seas and laughing into the face of death. He was a legend whose time was long past.

In the corner of the room stood a miniature ship, so perfect in detail that his chest expanded with pride at the sight of her. Too old, too frail to heave the nets, retirement had been forced upon him by younger hands and stronger backs. These days, he sat on his stool in front of the cottage, gazing out onto the sea like a drunkard unable to quench his thirst. It was a torture that nearly drove him mad. In desperation, he transformed driftwood into miniature vessels, which he released into the shipping lanes. Fishing picked up and, much to his amazement, the superstitious townsfolk looked upon his offerings as the source of their bounty. And so it was that the yearly tribute began.

Shark smoothed his hand over the sleek sides of the three-masted schooner and tested each line of her rigging for tautness. The rudder and spanker moved at his touch, guaranteeing that the little ship would flow with the waves and speed with the current. She was the largest and finest of his creations, four feet in length from bow to stern with masts that stood three feet high. "You'll do," he whispered gruffly, patting her sides.

With slow, tentative steps, he walked to the door and threw it wide. Pink tongues of light licked the horizon, vanquishing the blackness that had once been night. He yearned for the roll of the decks that should accompany the sight. He drew a deep breath and tested the breeze with each nostril. "You'll do too," he promised the dawn.

The old man turned back to the room with more bounce in his step. He cooked a hearty breakfast, chuckling to himself as he gummed the scrambled eggs and swallowed them down with black coffee. When dishes were done, he swept and cleaned the tiny cottage from bow to stern, touching on pieces Sarah had loved with an extra wipe of his cloth. Finally, all was as he wanted and he glanced from the pristine room to the open door. Golden fingers beckoned from behind violet clouds. The red of the horizon whispered a secret promise. He nodded, understanding the message as only a seasoned mariner could. He bowed his head in answer, then affixed his cap.

Turning, he strode to his work. For twelve months he'd labored, fitting each plank with nails and glue. The miniature ship was built watertight and extra strong for her maiden voyage. He wrapped his arms around her and heaved. She was heavier than he'd realized. His back screamed in protest as he attempted to straighten. His knurled hands grasped the bow like crab claws. Using the strength of his forearms to hold her weight, he maneuvered her through the door and into the waiting day.

Though the sky was barely light, Piet waited for him to emerge. The little boy was dressed in a T-shirt, overalls, and a heavy, red wool sweater. His blonde hair was topped by a sailor's cap and curled around a Raphael-cherub face. The angelic illusion of his features was dispelled as soon as the boy opened his mouth. "It's the Shark! His boat's the biggest yet!"

The old man wrinkled his brow and narrowed his eyes. "If you intend to be my crier, you better get your facts straight. This here's a ship, not a boat. She's a three-masted schooner." He lowered the miniature onto a low stone wall, so the little boy could fully appreciate her details.

"I'm going to be a sailor too." Piet touched the hull with reverence.

"Bite your tongue. If your mother hears--" The old man screwed up his face in a parody of toothless terror that made the little boy fall on the ground in a fit of hilarity. "Now, be off with you, I'm taking her to the dock."

Piet's laughter died. He lifted himself from the ground. "I ca...can help."

The old man softened his voice. "This here's important business, Piet. I have a ship to launch and no time to play." He shifted his load, preparing to lift it once more.

"But I can help. I have a new wagon."

The old man looked down the street. It was a goodly distance to the dock and his hands were already numb from the weight. What if he should drop the ship on the way? He peered at the child's eager expression. "If you do have a wagon, and if it's big enough to transport my ship, I might be able to incorporate you into my plans. Go fetch it."

With a squeal of delight, Piet ran.

A creak of wood and a rumble of wheels announced the boy's return. He maneuvered a sizeable cart to the side of the house and stopped in front of the old

man. The wagon was homemade, with great wheels and a heavy body made of unfinished pine. Piet was painted in bright red letters on its side. "See? I told you. My dad made it for me."

The old man studied the wagon. "It's big enough. I see you brought a blanket as well. Aren't you clever?" He reached into his pocket and produced a small, neatly wrapped package. "I wanted you to have this to--" He broke off and pushed the gift into the boy's hands.

Piet untied the string. The bright yellow tissue unfolded and drew apart, revealing a beautifully modeled sculpture. "A shark, you made me a shark."

"Not just any shark, that there's a great white." The old man winked and cleared his throat. "Now, hold your cart steady and I'll swing her on board." Gently, he settled the craft into the wagon and tucked the folds of wool around it.

Piet offered the wagon-pull. "She's all yours."

The old man shook his head. "You lead. I'll bring up the stern. Just be careful you don't bounce her out."

A grin dimpled the boy's plump cheeks. His blue eyes glowed with halos of pleasure. "Aye, aye, Captain Shark." Piet tucked his new treasure into the bib of his overalls, grasped the handle and began to march.

As they moved down the brick road that served as the main street of the town, Piet yelled, "Come watch. Come see. The Shark's going to launch his new ship." Doors banged open as they passed. One by one, the villagers came out to cheer, some with babes on their hips, some with breakfast spoons grasped in their hands.

The old man waved to his friends and neighbors. He knew them all by name, had celebrated and mourned each birth and death in his village family. As exclamations of delight touched his ears, he waved and smiled with pride.

Once through the city gate, they could see the harbor and the docks where Jordy waited, his eyes to the sky. "Shark, you might want to delay your launch. We're in for a bad blow." His eyes glanced to his son's disappointed face. He smiled. "You can always do it another day."

"Calm your mind, Jordy," the Shark admonished. "I've been predicting the weather since before your father was born. My bones are in tune with the sky and tides. The storm won't threaten my launch." He levered himself into his rowboat and tightened the mooring ropes.

With a troubled frown, Jordy pushed back his cap and pointed to a line of black on the horizon. "I'm not doubting your expertise, Shark, but no craft is safe if that comes our way."

"I applaud your caution, Jordy and I agree, this day is better spent mending your nets. But, I have no intention of delaying this launch. Now, kindly hand me my ship."

Jordy lifted the vessel out of the wagon, knelt and lowered the ship into the dinghy, wedging the hull between two piles of coarse burlap sacks. The sky looked darker and more threatening than it had minutes before. He glanced at it, then at the aged captain. He could see grim determination in the old man's eyes, hands that trembled on the oars with eagerness to be off. "If you see you're wrong, don't be afraid to turn back. I won't think any the less of you."

"Cast off," the Shark barked with strength of command not heard in his voice for a decade.

Jordy reacted swiftly and automatically. Untying the rope from its cleat, he pushed her off. "Good luck."

The old man didn't reply, merely tugged his cap and pulled hard on the oars. When he reached deep water, he gazed up at the darkening sky with experienced eyes. The wind had picked up speed, its breath icy, turning his cheeks a ruddy pink. He could see Jordy and Piet, surrounded by a large group of townspeople. They waved and called, but their words were whipped by the wind and drowned in the churning waves before they reached him.

The cold wind bit through the old man's wool jacket. He took his time, savoring the feel of the choppy waves, pacing his strength. Glancing landward he saw Jordy lift his son into his arms and turn towards home, pulling the wagon. He bent to his oars and pulled all the harder.

By the time he crossed into open sea, the storm was upon him. Overhead, the sky was black cut through by an eerie purple. The old man felt the pull of the tide and knew he'd reached the ocean's current. With a sense of coming home, he released the oars and bent to the task of lifting out his prize. A wall of water hit the dinghy broadside and it flipped like a toy.

Dragged down, the old man fought the ocean's grip, not for survival, but to ascertain if his small ship had stayed afloat. His head broke the surface and he found himself in an unearthly calm. Taking advantage of the stillness, he scanned the horizon. A brilliant white sail crested the next wave. The miniature moved like a ghost ship, skillfully manned by seaworthy pixies. His eyes searched her stern for one last glimpse of the name he'd painted on it, Sarah.

The wind gusted, signaling the return of chaos. He was grabbed and pulled under. This time the old man didn't fight the tide's embrace, but let it have its way with him. It was his time. He'd awakened with the knowledge. As darkness closed around, he became aware of a movement; something white racing towards him. He opened his arms to embrace his fate. She'll do, he thought, she'll do.

.....
deb@debsrealm.com & <http://debsrealm.com> (see bio on page 4)
.....

JADED

Claire T. Feild

She hunches over, picking up the straggly
babe, his arms thin as zippers,
his face a mockery of the rotund. His
screams welt the sky, his
mom's attention span shriveled so that
she can tolerate his boyish
grievances. After his squeals seem to
be stolen by a squall, she prays
to scarcity, this nothingness she thinks
will ferment, and over time,
develop into an ambrosial god.

.....
Claire T. Feild, the writing consultant for Lowder College of Business students at Auburn University, located in Auburn, Alabama, has had her poetry published in numerous literary journals, such as Runes, The Carolina Quarterly, South Dakota Review, Hurricane Blues: Poems about Katrina and Rita, and most recently, the broken plate and Convergence Review. Her first poetry book, Mississippi Delta Women in Prism, is set in Yazoo City, Mississippi, a Delta town. Excerpts of her memoir, A Delta Vigil, have been published in Boston's Full Circle: A Journal of Poetry and Prose.
.....

SCRIBBLING

Rick Coonrod

Last week, my four-year-old son brought home a picture he colored in daycare. It was a picture of a cow, cut out and glued to a piece of light blue construction paper. Using crayons, he had colored all over the cow in different colors. He ran the colors across all of the lines and across each other. No part of the cow was a single color. The whole thing was a blob of scribbles. There was a dark blue, square sun over the cow's head and red grass under the cow. He proudly held it up to me and said, "Look: the sun is blue! That's silly!" I agreed and we laughed about it. Then he mentioned his teacher always said not to scribble, and that it was important to color inside the lines.

The thing is--I believe in scribbling. I believe it is the last little bit of individuality that my son can grasp. Every day, my son is taught how to do things the "right" way. He can write out his name in nice block letters so everyone can read it. He uses play dough tools and stencils to make the exact same types of shapes as all of the other kids. Most of his toys have a right way and a wrong way to play with them. He lines up for the bus when told to. He puts his right shoe on the right foot, and the left on the left foot. Every day he is regimented, formed, told what to do, and forced to act a certain way. His free-will is straight jacketed so he can fit in and function in this society. Scribbling on a cut out cow is really the only place he has to be truly free, and exercise the creativity that allows him to understand things in an abstract way. If he wants to draw a purple, red, and yellow cow; standing on red grass; under a blue, square sun--then I think he should.

I think it's important that humans do not sacrifice individuality and creativity for the sake of social coexistence. I fear the day will come when humans will lose the capacity to think abstractly about such things as a cow and the sun that shines on it. Thinking abstractly about everyday things, and using those abstractions to see problems in a new light, is what has made modern civilization possible. If we marginalize creativity our civilization will suffer.

When my son told me what his teacher said, his smile faded, and he looked at his picture with a furrowed brow. I looked at him and said, "You can scribble if you want to, it's your picture." He perked up, smiled ear to ear, and said, "Yeah, it's my picture. I like scribbling!"

.....

Rick Coonrod is an Idaho native and father of four busy children. He teaches composition at Boise State University, where he pursues a Master's degree in Fine Arts. He eats too many Cheetos. rjcoonrod@ctcweb.net

.....



OCEAN

Kay Williams

30" x 30"

Acrylic Mixed Media

Kay Williams studied art at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting and sculpture and a Master's degree in Art Education. Kay's work is all about color and texture and marrying both sculptural as well as painting qualities together. She has exhibited throughout Alabama and the Florida panhandle. www.KayWilliamsArt.com or kaywilliams@bellsouth.net

ORANGE

Pete Sipchen

Such wonderful heft in your
sunfilled roundness; a weight to
savor and put to childish use.
If it weren't for the bright singing
eye-stinging juice within that
tight-naveled tight-pored skin, the
flavor that oils my fingers and burns
my tongue with wild tang, I'd
fling you, oh royal king of fruit,
but what a waste! Sweeter than
Halloween treat, gift from coconut
climes, you are a poem of taste
with which nothing rhymes.

.....
Pete Sipchen is a poet and writer of short stories working out of St. Louis, Missouri. His poetry has appeared in Hidden Oak, The Main Street Rag, Poem, and Atlanta Review, and is upcoming in The South Carolina Review. He's published numerous short stories, one of which was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.
.....

THE DISTANCE SHOWS US HOW

John Abbott

We came to a place where the trail ended and sycamores grow slanted across the water. A rope is tied to the branches of a swamp oak the coiled hemp seems natural here. Like Spanish moss hanging from a cypress. I suppose it's only a matter of time before one of us says something about death or how the river symbolizes life and the proximity of the two should give us pause; make us reflect on the state we're in.	But maybe it's not that sort of day. Maybe the intensity of the sun hitting the river's surface and sneaking to the forest floor is only telling us how strange we are for standing in one place too long. So one of us suggests diving in but as we scramble up the sycamore we look back, see the rope, and realize there are so many ways to cross the distance between here and there.
--	--

.....
John Abbott is a writer, musician, and English instructor whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in several nationally recognized literary journals. "The Distance Shows Us How" originally appeared in Poetry Quarterly. John lives with his wife and daughter in Kalamazoo, Michigan.
.....

EMPATHY FOR HITLER

Barry Marks

*- Because my wife said I would write better poetry
if I could put myself in someone else's skin and
really really really feel what they feel*

And now the workday is over
and I am clearing the dishes.
The children are watching a movie about a man
who enters a dense forest, a sword in his hand.
And I am that man as I put
each spaghetti-encrusted fork on its plate.
My heart pounds and I adjust my helmet.
I am about to stride into the forest
when suddenly I am the forest.
I am dark, deep, numb with age,
indifferent to the lives within me.

When I turn and carry the dishes to the sink,
glancing at my daughter's painting
of a crouching panther, I feel the hairs on my back rise
and the hunger grow within me.
I can scarcely contain my need to leap through the window
and go on a delicious, tense prowl.
Mrs. Cochran's Westies are in serious jeopardy.
If only you would call.

I turn on the faucet, set the temperature,
measure out the soap. If only you would call, soon,
I might stop myself from being the water.
From doing my work on the sauce
and pasta and ground beef,
then hurling myself down the drain.
Please call because if you do not,
I will flow down, then through the sewer,
past the rats and possible crocodiles,
and then, without you as my focus,
I will become the sea.

Oh Lordy Lord, my Darling
we can't have that!
I will roil and rise and
heave up my back against the stars
and spread out all the way to China.

China?
Oh, please call.
It is very boring here.
And I am afraid.

.....
*Barry Marks is 1999 Alabama Poet of the Year, author of There is Nothing
Oppressive as a Good Man (winner of the 2003 Morris Chapbook Competition)
and co-author of two anthologies available at www.churndashpress.com. Barry's
solo book of poems, Possible Crocodiles, will be published this spring by Brick
Road Press. bmarks@marksweinberg.com*
.....

DADDY GOT SHOT

Joey Kennedy

They are the kinds of words every family dreads to hear:

“Joey, Martha shot your daddy.”

My mother’s voice, in her characteristic Texas monotone, came from the other end of the telephone line that January evening in 1995. It was past 11 o’clock at night, and I was drowsy, having gone to sleep a couple hours earlier.

“What?” I mumbled.

“Martha shot your daddy. And Red Duke’s his doctor.”

My mother went on to explain that my father’s wife (his third) had apparently gotten fed up and, well, shot him. In the middle of the chest. With a .38-caliber pistol.

Martha meant business.

Of course, Martha and my dad were drunk at the time. Dad was in pretty bad shape, Mom said, and had to be taken by Life Flight helicopter to Hermann Hospital in Houston from his apartment forty miles away in Dayton.

Mom said the police had somehow tracked her down in Houston, where she lived, and that’s how she found out. She said she thought Red Duke would be able to save Dad’s life.

I told her I hoped so – but I wasn’t sure if I meant it.

Dad’s timing in accepting Martha’s bullet was, as usual, lousy. It was Wednesday night, and Thursday morning Veronica and I were scheduled to leave on a long-planned trip to Aruba, our first vacation in more than a while. Dad and I hadn’t really talked much in years; for the past decade or so, he’d cared about very little except whiskey and beer. I hadn’t cared enough to try to do anything about it. Besides, Dad lived in Texas; I lived in Alabama. The distance seemed just about right.

I did not rush to my father’s bedside. Our suitcases were already packed, and I just wasn’t going to let a thing like my daddy getting shot by his wife keep us from going to Aruba.

Veronica and I spent the weekend playing nickel slots, walking the beaches and eating well. Yet, as our jet left the runway in Aruba and pointed us back toward Birmingham, I felt nothing but dread. I did not care whether Dad lived. As far as I was concerned, he was already dead. I hoped he also had been buried while we were out of the country.

That damn Red Duke.

Dr. Red Duke is a legend in Texas. We used to watch him on TV, even in Louisiana and Alabama, dispensing health tips on news programs. “This is Dr. Red Duke,” he’d say in that Texas drawl, after giving advice on how to treat poison ivy or on the proper way to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on a baby. Red Duke’s resume was forty-six pages long.

Dr. Duke not only developed the Life Flight helicopter transport system that hauled my father to Hermann Hospital, but he also served as director of the hospital's trauma center and was a world-renowned surgeon. One of Dr. Duke's specialties was gunshot wounds.

Martha shot Dad in the sternum, almost point-blank.

"Half an inch, and your father would be dead," one of Duke's assistants told me over the phone after we got back to Birmingham.

Instead, the bullet glanced off Dad's breastbone, clipped the top of his right lung and exited under his right arm. Duke operated to sew up the loose ends, but by the time we returned to Birmingham from Aruba, Dad had already left Hermann Hospital's intensive care and had been transferred to the Veterans Administration Hospital nearby.

He was stable, I was told.

Stable, but not buried.

An alcoholic has to hit bottom, my therapist told me once, before he'll ask for help. My father, she said, had never hit bottom.

Well, if Dad hadn't hit bottom this time, I didn't want to know where the bottom was. My sisters quickly told me they couldn't help; my older sister was at her daughter's wedding in Oregon, and my younger sister simply said to count her out. I didn't blame them; I, too, was bitter for the inconvenience Dad was causing.

And one other thing: Guilt. From somewhere deep inside, I felt guilt.

When I left Louisiana in 1977 to work for The Cullman Times, I was doing more than just changing newspaper jobs; I was changing lives. I conveniently put my parents' troubles behind me, leaving them alone to sort out their shattered union. Before I left Louisiana, my father was drinking more than ever, even disappearing from home for days at a time. Sometimes my mother pleaded with me to go find him, and sometimes I'd try.

Once, Mom called me worried when Dad, already drunk, had left in a huff. I found him at the parking lot of the A&P store on Bayou Black, sitting in his white El Camino under a streetlight near the back of the store. He had a six-pack of Budweiser tucked between his legs, and two more next to him on the seat. I told him it wasn't good for him to be out drinking in his car in the back of a grocery store. I yelled at him.

"Your mother doesn't understand me," Dad said, the words slurring together. "Nobody loves me."

I bruised my fist when I slammed it into the El Camino's door after Dad refused to come home with me. From that day on, there was a dent in the door where I drove my knuckles.

I was tired of it all, so I moved two states away.

On the few times I visited my father after leaving Louisiana, or on the rare occasions he visited us, I never – not once – discouraged his drinking. Heck, I

mixed drinks for him sometimes, or bought him a bottle, or paid for a round of beer when we went out to eat supper. I'd read enough about alcoholism to learn the language: Enabler.

I was an enabler.

"You are not responsible for your father's drinking," said my therapist, who knew the book, too, and who went by it. "You shouldn't feel guilty."

Less than a week after returning from Aruba, my wife and I were on a jet plane again, this time to Houston, to try to clean up a mess even too big for a famous surgeon like Red Duke.

At first, the list of rules I drew up that my father would have to agree to if we were going to help him was long. They were designed for one thing: To ensure he wouldn't agree to them. Then I could say, my conscience clear, that I really had tried to help Dad, but Dad just didn't want the help.

I would be an enabler no more.

My therapist, during a long session of yelling and crying, talked me out of that. If you are going to your father, she said, go to help him. Otherwise, just leave him alone. "You need to set reasonable boundaries and acceptable behaviors," she said.

So I came up with four rules, which my therapist endorsed:

1. Dad could never drink an alcoholic beverage again.

2. He would have to agree to some kind of rehabilitation program for alcoholics.

3. He would have to divorce Martha.

4. He would have to testify against Martha in court.

I thought Dad was getting off easy.

When Veronica and I entered his room at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Houston, he looked pretty bad. He had an oxygen tube running into his nose, and had two more tubes coming out of his chest, draining fluids from the lung that had collapsed when the bullet clipped it.

He was alert, though, and smiled at us.

Of the four rules, the only one Dad balked at was the one about testifying against Martha. He didn't need to drink, he said, because he wasn't an alcoholic, no matter what we thought. He could give it up, no problem. As for an alcohol rehab program, if we wanted him to go to one, he would go to one – but he didn't need that, either, he said. Of course he would divorce Martha; she had, after all, shot him.

But Dad would not agree to press charges against Martha or to testify against her in court. We argued about that for awhile, and then, frustrated, I laid down my law.

"Do you want help or not?" I asked, turning cold, staring through him.

"Yes," my dad said, turning his eyes. "Yes. Help me."

The next day, Veronica and I drove to Dayton to start putting things right.

Dayton, a tiny town on the Trinity River in southeastern Texas, northeast of Houston, is my true hometown, if I have one. It's the town where my father was a star football player for the Dayton High School Broncos; where, as a senior, he was selected "Most Handsome Boy" by the 27 students in the Class of 1948; where he met and married my mother. I was born in Dayton, as were both of my sisters, but our family didn't live there long. The little hospital we were born in is boarded up now. Unable to keep up with federal health regulations that came down in the late 1960s, it shut down. The hospital's closing was no great loss. A world-class medical center already was growing just down the highway in Houston. While no interstate goes through Dayton, the town sits on U.S. Highway 90 – just like Houma, Louisiana, 400 miles to the east. Besides, good health care is only a helicopter flight away, as my father learned on the night Martha shot him.

My grandfather Kennedy was one of Dayton's most respected citizens. He owned an independent insurance agency and had operated branches all over that part of Texas. My grandfather and grandmother lived long enough to spend most of their money, though after my father retired from the sulfur company in the 1980s, he took an advance on his inheritance to buy a Texaco service station in Liberty, three miles east of Dayton across the Trinity River. My father was not the businessman his father was: The Texaco station went belly-up.

My grandfather died in 1993 at age 93. My grandmother died less than a year later, at age 89. I was a pallbearer at both funerals, but my father, who lived just a few miles away, attended neither funeral. The Kennedys weren't finished with Dayton, though. A few months after his mother died, Dad moved back to Dayton. He returned with Martha, moving into a small, dumpy, government-subsidized apartment. He came back home as, basically, the town drunk.

In 1995, Dayton's population was a little more than 5,000 people, and the main employer in town was the Dayton Independent School District. People go to live in Dayton, not work there. They toil in the oil fields nearby, or they commute west to Houston or east to Beaumont, where the other jobs are. Or they are retired. Or they are living in Dayton on the government dole, like my father and Martha.

My dad's older sister, Dorothy, met us there. Aunt Dot was a member of the Dayton Garden Club, one of the more prestigious organizations for women in town, and she was embarrassed by the trouble her brother and Martha had caused, and by the publicity that followed in the local newspaper. Aunt Dot had already hired a lawyer, and, using the power of attorney my dad gave me earlier that day, we quickly filed for divorce from Martha. We decided on "irreconcilable differences" as the grounds. "Shot by wife in drunken argument" wasn't a choice. The lawyer said the divorce wouldn't take long, and I said good. I didn't ask what this was costing and, to her credit, Aunt Dot didn't ask me to

pay. She did, however, tell me that as her brother's only son, he now was my responsibility.

We'll see about that, I thought.

The state Department of Public Safety ranks Dayton as one of the ten safest places to live among towns its size in Texas, though I'll bet Dad and Martha screwed that up. The Dayton Police Department is tiny like the town, with 12 full-time officers and one detective. That was fine, because we wouldn't need Sherlock Holmes on this case.

As a journalist who had covered the police beat in bigger towns, I expected little cooperation. I was surprised. The detective brought us coffee, and then the photographs from the night of the shooting.

They were as grisly as any crime scene I had covered.

A dark, brownish patch stained the couch where my father had fallen after Martha shot him. That wasn't the grisly part.

There were beer cans and liquor bottles all over the place. The dining room table was covered with cans and bottles. A cardboard box by the couch was full of them. In the kitchen, there were more cans, the garbage overflowing, and in the bedroom, more cans and bottles.

It was horrible.

The detective asked if we wanted to listen to Martha's taped statement after she was arrested that night.

Sure, I said, and he cued it up.

Martha's voice, the words slurring, told of an evening of drinking that ended with her demanding that my father walk. He had suffered a stroke a few years earlier that had left him in a wheelchair. He always complained of being dizzy. Dad could hardly stand, much less walk.

Martha, like some crazed physical therapist, got a .38-caliber pistol from their bedroom and ordered my dad to stand and walk. Martha said Dad had just managed to stand up from the couch where he was sitting when she pulled the trigger.

With Martha, it was his last stand.

As it turned out, Dad wouldn't need to file charges against Martha, or even testify against her. The detective told me that because Martha had shot Dad, a fact not in doubt, the State of Texas would press charges. The case likely would never go to trial, anyway, the detective said, because these things usually were handled through a plea bargain.

Texas doesn't like people shooting people, even if they're drunks.

I needed to talk to Martha because she knew where Dad's papers were – his bank account, credit cards and the like.

The detective in Dayton called over to the county jail in Liberty. It wasn't visiting day, he said, but they'd let us see Martha because we were from out of town.

We drove across the Trinity River bridge that separated Dayton from Liberty, home of my father's bankrupt Texaco station, and had little trouble finding the jail. Liberty isn't much bigger than Dayton, but, unlike Dayton, it's grungy. Worn out. Liberty isn't located on a hill like Dayton. When the Trinity River floods, as it does nearly every spring, Liberty floods.

That seems right to me.

Veronica and I were taken into a small room with a table that was divided in half by a thick Plexiglass window. A black phone receiver was attached to our side, and another to the other side.

Martha, dressed in a county jail orange jumpsuit, was guided into the room by a guard, who stood by the door, disinterested. Martha picked up the phone on her side, and I picked up the phone on my side. She was pleasant at first, like this was a regular visit. Martha told us where to get Dad's personal papers, where his bank account was, which credit cards were still good. Veronica made careful notes.

Then Martha tried to apologize. "I'm sorry, Joey," she said. "I didn't mean to shoot Joe. I was walking by, and, uh, the gun just went off."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Martha didn't explain why she was carrying the gun to begin with. Besides, only an hour earlier I had listened to Martha's drunken confession to the police on the night of the shooting.

"C'mon, Martha. You shot him point blank in the chest," I said, pointing to the point-blank part of my chest. "You sure weren't trying to wing him."

"Well, f...youuu!" she said, slamming the phone on the cradle. She turned, signaled the guard, and walked back into the Liberty County Jail.

As for my stepmother Martha Kennedy, that was the last time I saw her.

I spent the next couple days on the phone canceling my father's credit cards, closing his bank account and getting his Social Security disability check transferred to another bank.

I had my father's power of attorney and was acting on his behalf, but when I told the bank about that, the bank officer wanted to see the power of attorney before he would close my dad's account. So I just called back as my dad and closed the account over the telephone. I was Joe Kennedy when I canceled Dad's credit cards, and I was Joe Kennedy when I got Dad's Social Security check moved to the new account we had opened at another bank.

I didn't have to lie. Not really. I am, after all, Joe Kennedy.

Dad would be in the hospital for awhile, the doctor said. There was no need for alcohol rehabilitation, he said, because Dad wouldn't be drinking at the Houston VA. When he got out, he'd be dry.

High and dry, I thought.

I told Dad he couldn't come to Birmingham. Our parent spot was already full. Veronica's mother, who had had her own stroke in 1991, lived with us. It was all we could do to take care of her. There was no room.

Dad said he understood, and thanks for coming. I told him we'd figure something out later, but I wasn't too worried. In just four days, we had filed Dad's divorce, investigated his shooting, and sorted out his finances. I'd done pretty good for a son whose father had turned his back on him for the bottle. He wouldn't ask for anything more.

Dad sure wasn't coming to Birmingham. No way was he coming to Birmingham.

.....
Joey Kennedy is a Pulitzer Prize winning editorial writer for The Birmingham News. He also teaches writing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This story is from his unpublished memoir, Father and Son: Episodes in a Life. Kennedy and wife Veronica live on Birmingham's Southside. joeykennedy@me.com
.....

CONFETTI OF SAINTS

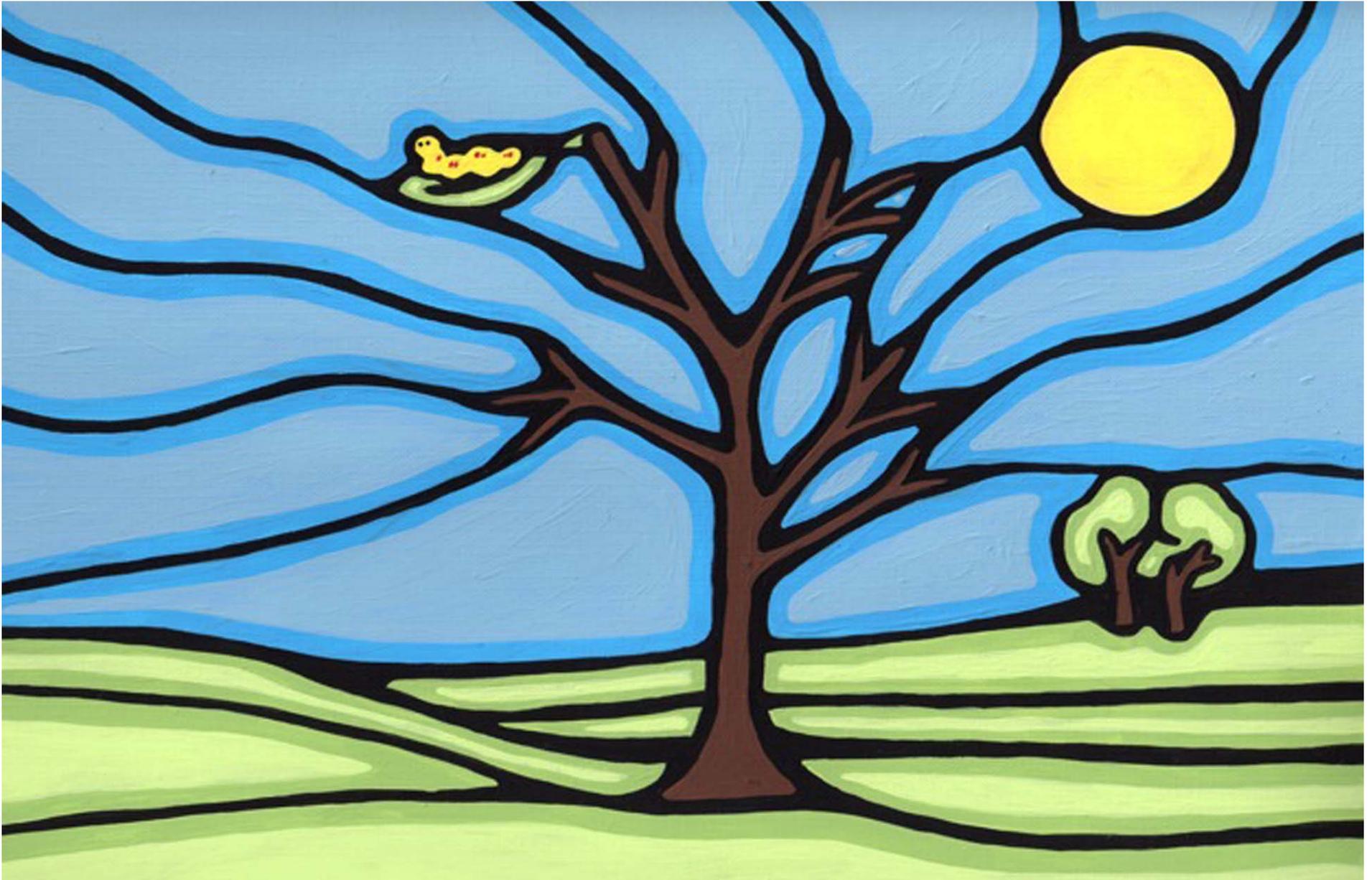
Katelyn Romaine

Lily still knows the names of all the useful saints, even remembers her attitude of body in which she learned them. Tucked and folded beneath her mother's arm, she heard of Stephen, the man they stoned. She remembers hearing this story in the seatbelt of her mother's arms, smelling honeysuckle perfume.

Every Easter now, Lily's mother sends a note, always white and folded once like wings, with a single sentence like something you'd leave on the fridge for someone you had just left in the morning, though it's been four years since she left them – her mother and the church. And this year, as always, she cuts it carefully in the kitchen she shares with a lover. And this year, as always, Lily tells him about Andrew, the saint of things lost.

For three days after, she carries the pieces in her pocket, smokes with them outside their apartment, sleeps with them (in sin, her mother said), careful not to let her boyfriend feel the crinkle of paper in her pocket, and walks with them to class. She touches the pocket whenever she remembers that they're there, like a name she suddenly recalls and then, like the repeated weight of stones. After three days, Lily tells him her secret and they empty her pockets together on the balcony, release the confetti into the sky.

.....
Virginian Katelyn Romaine is seeking her Bachelor's degree in creative writing at Longwood University. She has worked on the Dos Passos Review and plans to be a Spanish literary translator. Her work has appeared in the New Delta Review, Knock, Blackbird and other publications. ibelieveingalt@yahoo.com
.....



THE LUNA MOTH FLEW

12" X 9"

ACRYLIC ON PAPER

Shelleigh Buckingham

Shelleigh Buckingham is an optometrist and illustrator whose whimsical paintings delight children and adults alike. Her artwork is evocative of stained glass, topographical maps, and wood block prints from the early 20th century. She lives with her husband, Todd, also an optometrist, and their two daughters in the historic Roebuck Springs area of Birmingham, Alabama. shelleigh@bham.rr.com

ONCE UPON A CAR--DR. SEUSS IN SUBURBIA

Susan Martinello

The brunette with long, sleek hair
backs out early, drops
two blonde-haired little girls at school
or camp or the house of a friend.
The gray Jaguar is absent
early morning to late afternoon.

The red convertible is in and out--
the young-faced man with graying hair
and cell phone
must often work from the house.

Sometimes the little blonde heads
duck in and out of the red car, instead.
The gray car stays put late
or is gone all day.

Infinite combinations
of opening and slamming doors,
bright bathing suits, print dresses, sandals, shorts,
loading and unloading of trunks,
bulging bags and thin pizza boxes--
the only constant, four
illegible faces.

Once running feet and daddydaddydaddy
greet the red car's return.
The graying head emerges,
lips forming rapid-fire shapes.
The blonde head wilts and slowly,
like the needle of a compass, turns
in the direction of his back.

The red car swings in, the gray leaves.
The leather seats, AC, CD give ease--
red ease, gray ease,
red fun, gray fun,
red route, gray route,
red day, gray day.
Oh, how to choose?

.....
*Susan Martinello lives in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Her poems have appeared in
POEM, Grandmother Earth, The Pen Woman, The Valley Planet, Voices
& Visions, Pens & Brushes, and Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology
of Alabama Poetry.*

.....

ON THE ROAD

Fred Bassett

I'm taken by the blooming redbud that hails
the woodland glories of spring.
Oh, to be young and in the wild again!
How I'd love to find that old beech
with my initials carved in its smooth bark.
There I would slip away from all
to dream and dream upon my back.
The world I peopled was ever so gentle,
and the girl I loved was ever so true.

Flashing railroad bars descend to stop me.
I count the boxcars trailing two diesels,
screaming for Birmingham.
A hundred and seventeen but no caboose!
It will soon pass my boyhood
swimming hole, where I once mooned
the engineer of a coal-burning locomotive.

In Georgia, two fieldstone chimneys rise
above the ruins of an old farmhouse.
From the branches of a gnarled yard oak,
older than any living person,
matted clusters of yellow jasmine
take me back to Pleasant Grove Churchyard
where I watch two men close my own grave
with that red, red clay. But how
did the yellow jasmine know? One morning,
one morning, one morning in March.

.....
A native of Roanoke, Alabama, Fred Bassett is an award-winning poet and Biblical scholar who holds four academic degrees, including a Ph.D. in Biblical Literature from Emory University. His poems have been published in more than 50 journals and anthologies. Paraclete Press has published two books of "found" poetry that he created from Biblical lyrics -- Love: The Song of Songs and Awake My Heart: Psalms for Life. He lives his wife Peg in Greenwood, South Carolina.

.....

NANNY NUN

Sheila Dené Lawrence

“She’s perfect.”

“She’s exactly what we were looking for and we can afford her.”

“Now, Auntie will be able to stay in her home and we can still have some semblance of our lives, coupled with a measure of self-respect,” Savanna, the oldest of the three siblings, chimed in.

Thus, the verdict was delivered. Sienna, Serena and Savanna agreed unanimously as the interview with Angel Mason, ex-nun, new nanny, concluded.

The Worthington trio offered the job of sitting with their spinster aunt, Miss Sara Bell Worthington, to the meek, soft-spoken woman who cradled an equally timid-looking cat in her arms.

* * *

“I don’t like her,” was all Miss Sara Bell said. At least she had waited until Angel left the room.

“What don’t you like?” Sienna asked. “She’s quiet and kind.”

“I don’t like her,” Miss Sara Bell repeated.

“But Auntie, even her name is perfect,” Serena added.

“I don’t like her. There’s something about her. And she has a cat.”

After some time, the sisters finally convinced their aging aunt to give the new sitter a fair chance. If things didn’t work out, Savanna promised to find someone more suited to the matriarch’s likes, once Angel’s probationary thirty-day contract expired.

Miss Sara Bell sulked and pulled her afghan closer to her face.

Angel went about her duties in the kitchen oblivious to her character’s trial being argued in the outer room. The conversation hushed as Angel entered the room with a tray of snacks for Miss Sara Bell’s nibbling pleasure while she watched the Hitchcock marathon.

Savanna, Sienna and Serena each took a small morsel from the tray and popped into their mouths; not that they were hungry, but they did so to reassure Miss Sara Bell that the new help wasn’t trying to poison her.

Not having dealt with dementia before, the girls were unsure of just how much their aunt imagined and how much was reality in Miss Sara Bell’s world when she accused Angel of “trying to off her.”

The sitter busied herself in the kitchen while the girls were around; she never sat in on the visits.

Savanna whispered to her sisters, "Auntie watching the horrors of Hitchcock is not helping matters."

"She's mean," Miss Sara Bell told them when they asked how Angel was treating her. But then she couldn't tell them what Angel had done that caused that conclusion.

"She's nasty," complained Miss Sara Bell, although she could not say why she deduced that.

Miss Sara Bell grimaced like a wounded gargoyle. "She can't cook, neither."

"Aunt Sara Bell has lost a few more pounds since the sitter became responsible for her meals," Serena admitted.

"That's because she's just being contrary. She won't eat. She's been scraping her meals in the big flower pot over there. I saw the cat nibbling," Sienna said.

The girls pulled away to have a private discussion.

Savanna began, "I think Angel is fine; Auntie is just rebelling because she doesn't want anyone here. This is new to her, having to be watched ... and she's not coping well. That's all."

"But Angel does have that cat with her all the time. That can't be sanitary," Serena said.

"And she was a nun. Remember how mean Sister Mary Margaret McCall was?" said Sienna.

They laughed when they recalled the pinchings and knuckle paddlings.

"I have wondered why she's no longer a nun," Serena said.

Savanna was first to suggest, "I figure it has to do with a man. How hard is it to go a lifetime with no man?"

"Not so hard if you ever had a bad one," said the twice-divorced Serena.

"We know she's a woman with principles, morals and strong beliefs. I think Auntie is imagining things," Sienna added.

"But Auntie does sneeze a lot, so maybe she has allergies to that cat," Serena said.

Savanna offered, "Then perhaps we should ask Angel to keep the thing confined in her room since, according to her resume', she has no family that can take it in. I think Auntie would be happy with that."

Serena repeated, "I want to know why she left the convent. Why didn't we ask her that?"

Sienna whispered, "It seemed very personal and too sensitive an area to breach."

"It has to be that she wanted a man. And that could embarrass her if we ask," said Savanna, showing a rare moment of sensitivity. "We checked and she didn't have a police record, warrants or bad credit. It has to be the chastity thing. I bet she's got herself a man."

"Yes, he might even be married ... or worse," Serena said.

"There's worse?" Sienna wanted to know.

"Yeah, he could be ... a priest."

The trio snickered.

"She had references. We could check back with them since they didn't say much in their letters about why she was no longer in their employ, just that she was a good worker."

"That's brilliant, Sienna. I'll contact one or two of them and casually ask about her nun background," Serena said.

* * *

"So, you found out why she left the convent?" Sienna asked.

Serena spoke excitedly, "Yes and you'll never guess. It has nothing to do with a man. It's because they asked her to get rid of the cat and she flew off the handle."

"So she'll give up sex, liquor and cussing, no problem, but goes on a tirade to hold onto a cat? That's amazing. By the way, where is Savanna? We need to tell her the mystery's been solved."

"Oh, oh."

"Oh, oh?"

"She went to Auntie's ... to ask Angel to get rid of the cat."

.....
Sheila Dene' Lawrence lives in Birmingham, Alabama, and divides her time between working as a systems analyst, an associate minister and a writer. Her short fiction has appeared in Aura, Birmingham Arts Journal and Faith...and she won an Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine contest. ohsheila@writeme.com

.....

REMEMBERING DOSTOYEVSKY

Kevin Fuller

I was a student at the University of Alabama once. Unfortunately, I was completely uninterested in football. This statement may seem a bit odd to someone not from central Alabama, however, this admission will undoubtedly confound any native. “Why would you attend the University of Alabama if you didn’t like football? You mean to say you attend classes in an effort to learn? What a novel concept. I knew there were other sports besides football in the SEC but I didn’t know there were real classes. So what do you think the team’s chances are in the Iron Bowl?” In retrospect I guess I went because I didn’t have anything better to do.

As with any other situation where one’s presence is due to a lack of substantial motivation, I was bored. So I found myself neglecting my studies. The dormitory allotted a student one very small desk permanently affixed to the wall. With it came a bookshelf that was half again too small to hold my required reading material. I found that the desk was much better suited as a television platform. I would waste my time watching MTV until the late afternoon. Then, rather than study, I would go downstairs to the cafeteria and get a sandwich.

It was a daily routine, getting the sandwich. I would walk downstairs and order a chicken sandwich with fries. Then I would cover the plate with condiments. Ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise were all required in great abundance to improve the flavor such that the food was palatable. I would eat the meal back in my room and watch the fading light cloak the view from the window. A view of the university maintenance building would disappear every night and leave me and my roommate to reruns of Star Trek.

The completion of my routine was to gather the needed items for a shower and travel the few steps down the hall to the community showers, (there was one for each floor, and in each wing). Upon completion of the simple task of the shower I would return to my room, to the sink provided as a convenience in each domicile -- otherwise all one hundred plus students in the wing would have to stand in line to brush their teeth, (a task which tended to happen at the same time for everyone). There at the sink I would comb my hair, brush my teeth and then go to bed.

This particular night my roommate spoke, oddly enough on a subject that appeared to have no relevance to anything at all, “Do you remember Dostoyevsky?”

I was lucky to have a roommate that I had known from high school and so could reminisce from time to time, but this question was rather unusual. “Vaguely, I guess.”

“In particular, Crime and Punishment?”

“Of course I remember it. But probably not as well as I should.” I was never fond of required reading at that age. I was much more interested in the genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

“Do you remember that he was a student?”

“Yes”

“Do you recall what he did?”

“Debated the meaning of life for over 400 pages and then decided the world would be a better place if he killed some old woman with the dull part of an ax.” Cliff Notes were the long version of a synopsis in my opinion.

“Do you remember the environment that drove him mad?”

It was at this point that I realized my friend and roommate had not spoken all night until this conversation. This subject had consumed him and he must have been pondering it for some time.

“No, honestly, I don’t.”

He paused and then stated very plainly, “He had a small room, with a small desk, one bookshelf, and a wash basin. He had a view of the wall of an adjacent building and had to share the bathroom with everyone else in his own building. The only thing different about our environment is the presence of a roommate.”

I quickly responded, “You are wrong. We have one other thing he didn’t have. Our room comes with an invisible line down the middle where on my side we will keep all blunt objects and on your side we will keep you and only you. That is where you stay from now on.”

.....
Kevin Fuller is a former president of the Birmingham Art Association.
kevinf@fuller-photo-image.com
.....

UNTITLED

Laura Hunter

Hannah saw the boogolly on a Monday, two months before she turned six. Mondays, Maggie washed clothes in her white wringer washer on the front porch. By mid-afternoon, pants, underwear, dresses hung water-heavy on the clothesline between the house and barn.

Hannah listened while her mother washed clothes. Caught, and there would be a switching. When the washer stopped, Hannah, ignoring threats, crept into the darkness created at the base of the narrow attic stairwell to play.

Maggie had prodded Carl to put in an attic door. Instead her daddy nailed a quilt over the doorway. Clifton Young, Hannah's daddy's hunting buddy, later brought a splintered slat door from his barn. The door stood too tall for the opening, so it balanced precariously against the frame, threatening to slide down with a bang. Fearful that the door would fall on Hannah, Maggie demanded Hannah not go near the heavy, metal-hinged embarrassment. But Hannah loved the door, the dark space beneath it and the dingy light spilling from the attic. She could hide a new dog there.

Mondays, Hannah listened to know when Maggie had hung the last bed sheet. One footfall on the porch and Hannah popped from under the door, into the open.

Maggie walked in, her face flushed. "It's miserable hot today. I'm going to the well and wash my hair," she said. "You stay away from that door."

"Yes'm." Hannah twisted the doll's handkerchief dress around her hand.

Maggie took her jar of white Pond's face cream and Ivory soap off the dresser and left. Through the screen door, Hannah watched her go.

Hannah laid down her doll and walked around the room, running her fingers across slick white paint on the iron bedstead, down the wall, and over the dresser top. She picked up her mother's hairbrush and brushed the top of her head, smoothing back wild blonde hairs that had escaped from two pigtails Maggie had plaited that morning. In the mirror and behind her, the door to the attic stood propped against the stairwell frame.

With her mother gone, she could see why she shouldn't go to the attic. She bent over at the waist, like a crooked half-moon, and peered out the front door. Her mother nowhere in sight, she tip-toed, as if somebody could be listening, to the stairwell opening. At the foot of the stairs, she peeped under the old door. A pasty shaft of light cut into the far wall at the stairwell top.

Hannah crawled in, lifted the quilt and started up the stairs. Moving on her hands and knees, she could barely see. She hadn't expected to climb toward nightfall in the middle of the day. The stairwell smelled dirty, like the underside of the house.

On the top stair, she stood, looking into the room's dusty light to see what was there. Nothing moved.

Once she stepped out of the stairwell, it was easier to see wiggly shadows on the walls and stringy spider webs in corners. At the far end, more light tried to come in the window, but a piece of old newspaper shaded the room. Little speckles of dust moved in circles where stripes of light hit the side wall.

Closed up oldness sneaked into her nose, making her sneeze. And sneeze. And sneeze again. Hannah wiped the back of her hand across her nose and stepped into the attic.

"Hannah."

Hannah whirled. Between her and the stairs stood a monster twice as high as Hannah. Its face floury white with dark eyes and mouth, bubbles covered its head. Water dripped down onto its dress. It breathed hard. It must have been running.

"Boo," it said, quiet-like, and snorted, like it was drawing in air to pump itself up.

Hannah screamed.

"Golly," it whispered. "Girl, I knew I'd find you here."

Boogolly was all Hannah heard. She pushed past, going for the stairs.

"Wait." The boogolly stuck out its grabbing hand.

Hannah ran, ripping down the quilt still under the propped door when she hit the floor. She didn't stop till she struck the cedar tree's trunk. Squeezing her arms around the tree, ignoring the bark digging cuts into her skin, she flung her own knowing-self straight up to the safest top branch.

Maggie ran out of the house, slamming the screen door, calling. Silent as a rock, Hannah sat in the dust, staring at nothing, plastered in a hug against the cedar.

"Hannah?"

Hannah stared at her mother, Maggie's face slick and clean, her hair wet from its washing.

"Come on inside, Girl."

"No." Hannah turned away.

"Hannah? Look." Maggie laid her hand on Hannah's shoulder. "It's just me."

"No." She flinched her body away, hugging the bark harder. "There's a boogolly in the attic," she whimpered.

"There's no such thing." She loosened Hannah's hands from the trunk and lifted her up. "I told you not to be around that attic door." She put her down. "What a baby. You peed your pants. Get inside."

Hannah waddled toward the house, her underpants heavy with caked dirt. Maggie followed, nudging her across the yard. "We'll forget all about this."

After the boogolly came, Hannah didn't sleep. She'd lie awake, wanting her daddy to lift her in his arms and spin her round and round. But he slept in the room where the stairwell was. She wouldn't go in there in the dark.

At first when she'd cry out in the night for her daddy, her mother would lie with her till Hannah drifted off. Then one night Maggie came and, instead of lying on the bed, she tucked the blanket around Hannah's neck and told her, "I need to sleep in there. With your daddy. I won't be coming ever time you cry." She patted the blanket and left.

The next night, when her daddy's beagles got restless, Hannah climbed out the window and brought a pup in for sleeping.

.....

Laura Hunter lives outside Northport, Alabama. Her work has appeared in Belles' Letters, Climbing Mt. Cheaha, ALALITCOM, Crave, Explorations, and Marrs Field Journal, among other publications. lhunterauthor@hotmail.com

.....

BEGINNING

Elizabeth Costello

Every morning they circled the green, the dog a scrambling orbit to his head down, hands jammed in pockets path. What they didn't know was that, just a car-skulking street across and three stories up, this was as much a part of her morning ritual as brushing her teeth or drinking in the tang rich smell of coffee and just peeled orange.

One morning, they didn't show. On the balcony an invisible layer of smog coated her skin. She was late for work and her in-tray grew fat.

"You're looking a bit peaky these days," said Jason a week later. "I don't want my best worker burning out. When was the last time you took a vacation, anyway?"

The next day she found herself train-bound to a town of sandy sandwiches and jellyfish sting memories. It was raining when she got there so she ran into a tea and scones place with red and white checked tablecloths and a collection of teapots that ran all the way along a room-round shelf. Just as she was ordering it happened.

"Excuse me, sir," said the waitress. You can't bring that dog in here."

She looked around, found his face just as she always imagined it.

.....

Dublin, Ireland, resident Elizabeth Costello's work has appeared in the Irish literary journal Southword and has been broadcast on Irish national radio. She was shortlisted for the Sean O'Faolain International Short Story Competition 2008. costelliza@gmail.com

.....

FINAL SALUTE

Sharde L. Richardson

The old man wrestled his broom into every floor nook and cranny its bristles would reach outside the hall. He gathered what dirt he could into a pile in front of the double doors and pulled out his handkerchief to wipe away the sweat from his neck. It was the same handkerchief that had seen many horrific days of sweat in the trenches of Vietnam--the piece of cloth that absorbed the tears of the old man as he lost fellow soldiers.

He was tired. His knuckles ached from gripping his broom, and his thighs were chaffed from his britches. He bent down to sweep the filth into his dustpan, sneezing from the few loose particles that floated into his nose. He rose, took off his hat, and placed it on the end of his broom. With dustpan in hand, he moved past the double doors to give the great hall the same attention, but not before his tired eyes looked inside.

It was nearly lunch-time for the old man, and the first few chimes of the church's bells rang out. He followed the center aisle lined in tattered red carpet, passed the mahogany pews with church programs and fans scattered about them, to a couple standing at the altar. The missus was a very short, plump woman dressed in black, the mister was average height, and thin, the oversized sleeves of his black suit jacket hung past his knuckles.

The woman reached out to touch the closed white casket covered with the American flag. It was raised on a black marble slab wreathed in a soft mix of carnations, daisies, and lilies. She rubbed her beefy fingers over its smooth surface, only stopping when the mister put his arm around her shoulder to grab her closer to him. The wide brim of her hat curled upward as her face crashed against the mister's stomach, her shoulders shrugged up and down uncontrollably as she cried.

The mister rested his chin atop the woman's head as a tear escaped down his cheek. He exchanged glances with the old man in front of the double doors. Both tired and bereaved eyes met as the old man stood erect as he could to give a final salute. The last of the church bells chimed, and the hall filled with the echoes of the missus's cries.

.....

Sharde L. Richardson lives in Montgomery, Alabama, with her husband, Durell, and their son, Nolan. She enjoys reading, writing, and a funky assortment of music, which often inspires her writing. She has a soft spot for children's literature, and currently is working on her first novel. shardel.richardson@gmail.com

.....



SUNSET

Kim Hagar
Digital Photo

Kim Hagar has been a resident of Alabama all her life. She currently lives on the Elk River and has had poetry and prose published in many local publications as well as others across the country. She has recently developed a love of photography and considers it poetry of another sort. bkhagar@yahoo.com

PRESERVATION

Joy Godsey

Some time ago, along an Alabama beach road, a left turn north of the bridge led to a bait shop. The lane, its median grassed over with matchweed and railroad vine, was wide enough for a single car to bump along in search of cigar minnows, weights and floats and flounder gigs. The way to the shop ran parallel to the bay and was better suited for discovery on foot, or on a bike with fat rubber tires and a wire basket to carry tackle and bait wrapped in last week's newspapers.

On a recent trip, my truck tires crunched bleached white oyster shells that surface the two narrow strips of roadbed. I found the winding lane abbreviated – a victim of the corps of engineers, who commodiously rearrange shorelines, providing harbors for yachts that rarely weigh anchor.

Terminating the truncated byroad is a lone squat cottage standing mere feet from the bay and hard by the condominium towers that intrude on skies to the east and west. The house, once one of many bungalows along the waterway, is absurdly decrepit – a disparate neighbor to gated buildings fitted with faux marble facades, miles of mirror glass and sweeping circular drives.

Movement signaled the appearance of a woman – her bronzed face crazed with tiny white lines bearing witness to deep creases not touched by the sub-tropical sun. She moved measuredly from her stoop to the remains of a car – a corpse with no engine, no headlights, no seats. The hood, trunk and all four doors were opened wide and a hundred cats crawled inside and out and under, around and on top of the rusted sedan.

I called out: I'm looking for the bait shop and the crone looked up but not at me. She paid no heed and went about her work – opening bags of kibble and filling pans with water from a garden hose and pots with milk from plastic jugs.

My search for the bait shop was left behind as the scene widened to include an unlikely assortment of shorebirds. A large shaggy heron perched warily on a sagging roof corner. Another, sitting some distance from the first, watched the felines' buffet with mistrustful glances. Laughing gulls, a brown pelican, plovers and bitterns completed the plummy assemblage. They cawed and squawked and vied with beaks and wings as the woman reached into a tin bucket and cast the bony scraps of yesterday's catch into the air.

Calling fraaawnk, kee-aaw and urrrEEE, the birds flew away at the end of the feast. The old woman watched them go, then gazed across the broad fetch of open water. She turned and gave me a sidelong look. She croaked: this is my job.

The cats arched their backs, pawed the air, and caressed her thighs with their licked-clean fur coats. And she told: I am the last and I'm left here on the edge where fish swim in numbers uncountable and birds flock for their supper and cats chase mice that often get caught but never go away. And I cannot go away for who would feed the cats, who would feed the birds?

.....
Joy Godsey works as a fund-raiser for Childcare Resources, a Birmingham, Alabama, non-profit agency. Her current obsessions include writing, drawing, cooking, and always fly fishing and coastal cruising in her little boat, Pyxis. You can follow Joy's adventures and writing on her blog "Time and Tide" at <http://yesdog.wordpress>.
.....

LETTER TO ODYSSEUS

Rebecca Gaffron

You leading me upstairs. Afternoon sun. Youth. These remain in my memory. Vivid. Like they really happened. Stormy eyes. Alive with adventure. And desire. Boring into me. Time to get off the fence. Stay or go. I knew what staying meant. Crisp sheets, untouched by women's skin, till mine. And the taste of you--sweetly clever affection mingled with salty tears.

I've grown wiser with age. Or perhaps more reckless. I should have yielded to your one request, let you learn who you were through me. That day you could not bear not touching me. But I regarded Penelope with contempt. The abandoned woman. Her patience a testament to weakness. I chose to channel Athena. Came and went at will. Sacrificed one city to save another.

But now I understand--Penelope won in the end. I know this in your absence and the reality that waking in your arms is just a dream.

.....
Rebecca Gaffron is fascinated by sea-green spaces, words, and men who behave like cats. She is a sometimes writer and can be found at her virtual home, rebeccawriting.wordpress.com
.....

IT SITS IN A RIVER

Lydia Bailey

I have a rock. There is nothing particularly special about my rock, but it's mine just the same. It sits in a river, and a little peninsula of accumulated sticks and stones lead out to it. When I say it is mine, I mean only that if, one day, I were to come upon another person sitting on my rock, I would ask them to leave. Or at the very least, share it. My rock is on public property, a nature trail, so it'll never be officially mine. I have written on it though, I mean actually on it. I wore all my pencils down one day, writing to whomever might read. I figure, anyone who is fond enough of my rock to examine it, find the messages, must be a person like me and so would appreciate it.

The river it slants into is always cold, and clear. The bottom is paved with slabs of rocks and smaller, tumbling rocks, and grit. The tips of some poke over the water, like icebergs. I once walked through the river, following the iceberg trail to a small tree that'd washed downstream a bit. I left pennies and dimes behind me, balancing on the slick stones. They led to the tree, and then quarters marched up it and then there was a whole dollar in coins, stacked like the Tower of Pisa. I figured only children or young-spirited people would be romping through the river, and only inquisitive ones would follow the trail. Then they'd have something to think about, someone to imagine. What kind of person paves a path of pennies in a river? I hope I'm not the only one.

Every spring evening, after school, I walked down to the rock with my dearest friend. And we would sit, pants rolled up to our knees and toes slowly turning to raisins. And we would talk. And rejoice in the contradiction of our conversation, swinging in the spectrum, from vapid to deep. She stayed seated, while I would wander, feeling the ridges of stones digging into the arch of my foot. Then I'd gather rocks, no bigger than my fist, and walk back towards her. Then I'd squat by her, my feet out of the water, and throw the stones back in. I felt discontent and the splashes were satisfying, soothing. Sometimes she would throw, too.

But it's not her rock. It's my rock. And so I go there alone, and lie on my back with my feet bare. I take a candle with me, a box of matches, and light it. I don't know why. Then I drip wax onto leaves and peel off their imprint, and toss them in the water. I don't know why. I've even reached in, and then with wet fingers lightly touched my eyelids, my lips, the base of my neck. It seemed the right thing to do. It seemed very spiritual. It felt like a baptism.

During honeysuckle season, I gather bunches of wilted, yellow flowers, they're the sweetest, and I pinch the end of the flower, and pull out the translucent sting, and let the single drop of juice fall onto the tip out my tongue. I

savored all but three. Those three drops I let fall into my candle, be evaporated by the flame. I don't know why I did that, either. And I saved the spent flowers in a pile, and then ripped them into petals and dropped them in the water.

I like to visit the day after a storm. The water is higher and stronger and everything is completely different. The rocks have been shifted, always, and I go to re-accustom myself to the geography. I sit, soaking my toes in a thin sheet of river, my knees in line with my hips. All around, everything is deeper. The flat slabs have been tilted. The bushes are all leaning downriver, they look like the trees of the Serengeti which grow tilted with the ever present wind. There's a small dam downstream, of logs and bunches of bushes. And all the greenery of the woods is thicker. It looks as though it's all the same color, one plant that's sprouted into a forest. It makes me feel like a bug in the grass, seeing everything magnified.

I wonder how high the water rises. There are deposits of sand in the crevasses of my rock, even two feet above the average level. Sometimes a tiny plant will try to take root, only to be washed away with the next rain.

I have only ever noticed one other set of regulars to the nature trail. A troop of boy scouts, high schoolers, who I suppose are training for a hiking trip. They are loud, and ridiculous. One of them has let his hair grow down near his shoulders, and he gathers it into a ponytail right above his forehead. With every step he takes, it wags up and down, nearly reaching his eyes. I have never addressed the boy scouts, nor they me. If my friend is with me, we quiet our conversation a bit till they pass, so they won't overhear.

It's strange. I've never had a conversation with a stranger on the nature trail. And rarely do I see people solo, like I mostly am. Why is no one publicly alone anymore? Why can't I eat a dinner out on my own, without being asked if I'm expecting someone? My brother likes to sit with strangers at restaurants, and movie theaters. And to talk and share with them, bring an extra straw along so they can have some of his drink, in exchange for a handful of popcorn. I sometimes hope there will be someone on my rock, because then we could share and talk. And then we'd both have a story to tell, about the strange person on the nature trail who isn't a stranger anymore, but is still strange. And it's always nice to think you've given someone a story. And it's always nice to have one. And it would be nice to know that my rock has more than one regular visitor.

.....

Lydia Bailey is a creative writing senior at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. She has placed in the Emmet O'Neal Library Writing Contest, the Alabama State Poetry Society contest, the Alabama Writers' Forum Literary Arts Awards, and the Hollins University Nancy Thorp Poetry Prize. lydianbailey@gmail.com

.....

SUMMER STORMS

Joanna Grant

The air hangs heavy and slow today.
Yellow skies pierced by the steeple
of the stark new Korean Baptist church
dare us to pray and take our cares
to the Lord. And to accept what gifts
we might get in return.

In our living room the television
bleats its flat notes of emergency.
Tornado watches to the east, dire warnings
here. Take shelter. Watch the sky. Beware of
flying shards of glass. Cover yourself
and your dear ones with mattresses if there's time
once you know that you, yes you, are one
of the unluckiest ones.

Downstairs he stomps and rumbles. Drunk.
And not just on the cheap beer he's conned
out of his brother with the job. On God.

In his mind's eye the eagle soars above
the lightnings snap through the synapses--

Sharp fingers rake the treetops, the ragged leaves
shuddering to the gutters--
downstairs the visions rend the paper--
smears on a notepad, a jagged ridge
where the pen tore through the white sheets
strewn on the bedroom floor.

Down in the street the transformer blows

.....

*Joanna Grant currently teaches in the English Department at Tuskegee University in
Tuskegee, Alabama. Her work has appeared in The White Pelican Review, The
Southern Humanities Review, Philament, The Old Red Kimono, and
elsewhere.*

.....

OR WHAT'S A HEAVEN FOR?

P.T. Paul

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

Robert Browning,
"Andrea del Sarto"

My father longed to find the jar of coins
his father buried behind the house –
 coins that shamed him by making themselves
 precious in his eyes.

This memory, kudzu covered,
belonged to no man's map,
 but burned holes in his dreams
 and fell into the substratum of myth.

For my mother, it was her mother's bread bowl,
a hollowed, hallowed, wooden artifact
 that held her memories of winter mornings
 kneaded, knuckle-flattened, and lard risen.

Such a heart-breaking desire to face,
such a work-a-day heirloom to covet,
 when households lose the treasure of a parent's love
 and grown children become beggars in their own eyes.

Which was the greater tragedy? – a jar of coins lost
to the developers bulldozer, irredeemable under macadam,
 or a wooden bowl left on the porch in the freezing rain,
 thawing on a sun-split spring morning, breaking its only promise?

.....
P.T. Paul is a graduate of the University of Montevallo and the University of South Alabama (Masters of Arts in Creative Writing), and has been published in the Oxford American Magazine, Birmingham Arts Journal, Oracle, Tower, Vanguard, and other publications. P.T. has won various scholarships and awards, and her thesis "Southerner" is being published by Negative Capability Press as "To Live & Write in Dixie."
.....



MAGGIE

Tammy Hawk-Bridges
Digitally Enhanced Photograph

Tammy Hawk-Bridges is a photo artist. She takes ordinary photographs and turns them into extraordinary customized art pieces. She is the owner of PhotoCandy and has recently turned her hobby of several years into a full-fledged business. Tammy resides in Leeds, Alabama, is married and has three kids. tammy@photocandy.biz

HOW TO RAISE A GIRL-POET

Melissa Dickson Blackburn

Next time your daughter asks,

Why is the sky blue?

Tell her,

It's not. You think it is.

You will have told a truth.

The kind she needs to hear.

No long tales of princesses
and fairies who hover in the glade.

Facts

for your girl-poet:

all colors strain in light.

Earth's sieve returns blue.

Let her know one particle

(of light)

held hostage

has no measurable presence.

Our vision expands frantically.

Our perceptions grow I r r e t r i e v a b l e y.

Tell her,

 she needs to know,

there is no blue,

only things

we call blue

for a moment.

.....

Melissa Dickson Blackburn is a poet, visual artist and mother of three from Auburn Alabama. She completed a Masters in Fine Arts degree at the School of Visual Arts (NYC, 1995). Her painting has been reviewed by New Yorker Magazine. Her poems have appeared in Southern Humanities Review, Caesura, Driftwood Review and Southern Women's Review. Her reviews of other poets' collections have appeared in First Draft online. She is a Masters in Fine Arts candidate in poetry at Converse College, South Carolina.

.....

CAMP COFFEE

Tom Sheehan

When we fished the Pine River, Ed LeBlanc, Walter Ruskowski, and I, for thirty-some years, coffee was the glue; the morning glue, the late evening glue, even though we'd often unearth our beer from a natural cooler in early evening, a foot down in damp earth. Coffee, camp coffee for your information, has a ritual. It is thick, it is dark, it is pot-boiled over a squaw-pine fire, it is strong, it is enough to wake the demon in you, to stoke the cheese and late-night pepperoni. First man up makes the fire, second man the coffee; but into that pot has to go fresh eggshells to hold the grounds down, give coffee a taste of history, a sense of place. That means at least one egg will be cracked open for its shells, usually in the shadows and glimmers of false dawn. I suspect that's where scrambled eggs originated, from some camp like ours, settlers rushing westerly, lumberjacks hungry, hoboes lobbying for breakfast. So, coffee has made its way into poems, gatherings, memories, a time and thing not letting go, like old stories where the temporal voices have gone downhill and out of range, yet hang on for the mere asking.

.....

Tom Sheehan's latest books are Brief Cases, Short Spans, Press 53 of NC, From the Quickening, Pocol Press of Virginia, and Where the Cowboys Ride Forever (pending). His work has been accepted by Ocean Magazine, Perigee, Rope and Wire Magazine, Qarrtsiluni, Milspeak Memo, Ensorcelled, and Canopic Jar. He has 10 Pushcart nominations, a Noted Story of 2007 nomination, the Georges Simenon Award for fiction, and will be included in the Dzanc Best of the Web Anthology for 2009. tomfsheehan@comcast.net

.....



The non-profit Birmingham Arts Journal is sustained by its editors, donors and readers, with additional support from

Hackney Literary Awards Committee

<http://hackneyliteraryawards.org/Home.html>

Latham's Hair Clinic

<http://www.lathamsonline.com>

The Museum of Fond Memories at Reed Books Antiques

<http://jimreedbooks.com>

The Birmingham Art Association

<http://birminghamartassociation.com>

In-kind support comes from

Baker Donelson Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC

<http://www.bakerdonelson.com>

Maralyn Wilson Gallery

<http://208.75.85.114/pages/wilson>

Downtown Birmingham Public Library

<http://www.bplonline.org>

Emmet O'Neal Library

<http://www.eolib.org>

Alabama School of Fine Arts

<http://www.asfa.k12.al.us>

The Journal is published without profit by passionate volunteers who believe that exceptional works by the famous, not-yet-famous, and never-to-be-famous deserve to be published side by side in a beautiful and creative setting.

SUPPORT THE BIRMINGHAM ARTS JOURNAL, Inc.

with a donation of \$25 or more (individual membership)

or \$100 or more (company membership).

In return you will receive the next four issues as a special gift.

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Mailing address: _____

Donation amount: _____

Many thanks from the editors of Birmingham Arts Journal!

Birmingham Arts Journal, Inc. • 2021 Third Avenue North • Birmingham AL 35203

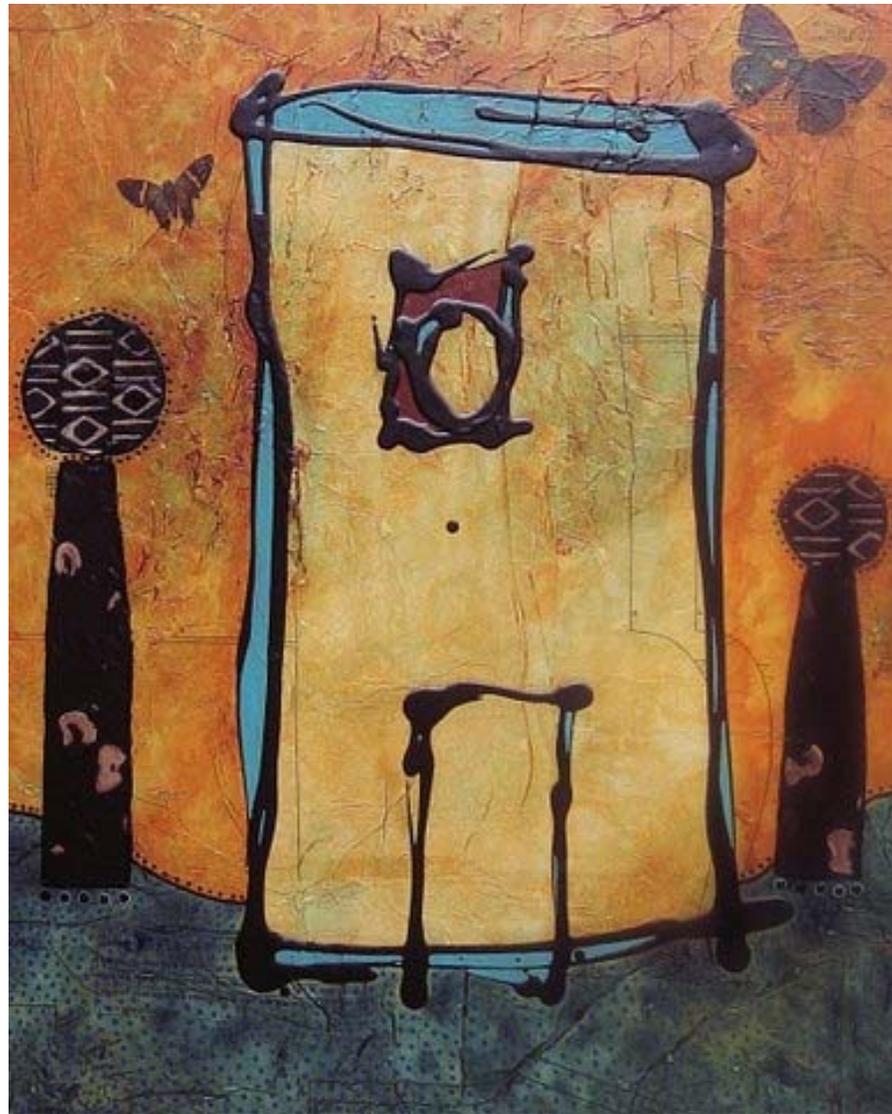
www.birminghamartsjournal.org

© 2010 A.D. by the Birmingham Arts Journal, Inc.

Submissions of art, photography, poetry and prose are welcomed. See guidelines at our website, or contact us: editor@birminghamartsjournal.com

Editor: Jim Reed...Poetry Editor: Irene Latham
Art Editor: Liz Reed...Production Editor: Kathy Jolley

Birmingham Arts Journal



www.birminghamartsjournal.org