

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **WATER LILY**, Digital Photograph.

Ty Evans lives in the Birmingham, Alabama, area and enjoys taking pictures of local icons during his spare time. With the media constantly reminding us of all the division in the metro area, Ty decided to create something to remind us of what a great city we have in Birmingham; one rich in history and culture. Ty's interests also include collecting antique books, playing the guitar, and traveling. ty.evans66@yahoo.com

Back Cover: **THE GOLD SKIRT**, Acrylic on Canvas, 24" x 36"

Janine Kilty is a representational painter, working primarily in oil and specializing in realistic portrait, genre, still life and landscape paintings. She has trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and with master artist Wade Schuman in New York City. Her art work has been exhibited in galleries and public spaces in Pennsylvania, Georgia, Florida, New England and in the Hudson and western New York areas, and hangs in a number of private collections internationally. She resides on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. www.janinekilty.com

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LOST DREAM; FELL ASLEEP

Megan Harris

If I could calculate these moments
Subtract them from the whole
I set them up into a formula
That could express a million words
No longer will it be labeled by days,
But instead by how much we could say.
Too many people think that love comes with time.
But I think love comes with voice,
Without the measurement of years.
I still hear your heart; if only in dreams
It comes in loud and beats by the edges of my head.
Same dream, every night, the same three words,
coming in, going on, and waking me up.
I look over to an empty bed and white wall; I fall back to sleep.

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Megan Harris is a writer and photographer studying at Youngstown State University. She lives in Niles, Ohio.

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**“It is useless to send armies
against ideas.”**

--Georg Brandes

HUMOR IN THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Norman Cousins

In October 1962, we were having a conference of highly-placed Russians at Andover. The purpose of the conferences, which were begun at the initiative of (former) President Eisenhower, was to do that which the diplomats could not do. The President felt that diplomats tend to dig in at a very early stage in the negotiations, where they're afraid that the slightest conciliatory move or sign will be misinterpreted by the other side as weakness. Therefore, both sides hold back, and you have a mirror image of compounded weakness. He felt that if you could get citizens that had the confidence of both countries, they might be able to examine outstanding questions between the two countries, probe for openings, and then report hopeful signs back to their governments, on the basis of which the diplomats might proceed.

We had no sooner started the conference when word came that President Kennedy was intercepting or blockading all ships going towards Cuba. Well, there were the Russians, and there were the Americans. We didn't know whether to go on with the conference or not. All we had in the first two or three days was a recapitulation of what was happening at the White House and in the Kremlin--recriminations, each side advancing its own position.

What we were not doing at that conference was trying to examine this question as human beings with a responsibility to each other. We were not examining the issue of what would happen to the rest of the human race. The real point was that neither the Russians nor the Americans had the right to fire at each other if it meant firing into the body of mankind, which is what it meant.

Well, the sessions got very tense, and it looked as if they were breaking down. I thought of Dr. (Albert) Schweitzer and his redeeming sense of humor, and I asked permission to suspend the discussion on the Cuban missile crisis and suggested that we go around the table and have each person tell his favorite story. The Russians thought this was a fine idea. The first Russian to speak was Alexander Kornichuk, a friend of (Nikita) Khrushchev's and a playwright. He spoke about the Armenian Radio, which is a species of Russian humor not unlike the shaggy dog story in the United States. What happens in the Armenian Radio is that someone

has a question. He mails the question into the Armenian Radio and then tunes in for an answer.

Now, for Kornichuk's story--someone wrote in the question, "What is the difference between capitalism and communism?"...tunes in radio and gets answer: "In capitalism, man exploits man. In communism, it's the other way around."

That completely broke the back of the tension at the conference. We went around the table. At the end of the line, we were beginning to think together. The humor had enabled us to know one another far better than any of the meetings that had taken place so far. And now for the first time, we began to speak to a common problem: how do we get out of it? We're in it. We both have to get out of it. There's no such thing as victory.

It was a powerful example of the power of humor to get people to throw off incidental affiliations--incidental in terms of the main affiliation, which is membership in the human race.

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Published with permission from The HUMOR Project and Dr. Joel Goodman, Editor of LAUGHING MATTERS magazine. At their 53rd international conference on "The Positive Power of Humor and Creativity" in June, 2010. The HUMOR Project honored Norman Cousins with the L.O.L. (Legacy of Laughter) Award. For more information about The HUMOR Project's conference, HUMOResources mail-order bookstore, and Speakers Bureau, visit www.HumorProject.com. To request a free copy of the 24-page 2010 Humor Sourcebook, call 518-587-8770.

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**“Hating people is like burning down
your own house to get rid of a rat.”**

--Harry Emerson Fosdick

PATH UNDER OCOTE TREES / CAMINO BAJO OCOTES

Isolda Dosamantes

Translation by Toshiya Kamei

When the dry milpas rustle
and dance above my ears
your voice approaches at dusk
shining on the cornfields.

Cuando se escuchan las milpas secas
y danzan sobre el oído
tu voz se acerca en el crepúsculo
que pone a brillar a los maizales.

When the wind leaves its elegant touch
on each furrow of the earth
and the rain begins to fall
a smell rises and fills
the air I breathe.

Cuando el viento imprime su toque de elegancia
en cada surco de la tierra
y comienza la lluvia
un aroma surge para invadir
el aire que respiro.

When I walk under ocote trees
among the smell of mud
and the first evening star
I feel very much alive.

Cuando camino bajo ocotes
entre el aroma inundado de barro
y la primera estrella de la tarde
tengo la certeza de estar viva.

.....
Toshiya Kamei's translations include Liliana Blum's Curse of Eve and Other Stories (2008), Naoko Awa's Fox's Window and Other Stories (2010), and Espido Freire's Irlanda (2010). Kamei lives in St. Louis, Missouri

Isolda Dosamantes was born in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in 1969. She is the author of several books of poetry, most recently Paisaje sobre la seda (2008). English translations of her poems have appeared in International Poetry Review, Minnetonka Review, and Pank, among others. Dosamantes lives in Mexico.

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A RAINY WALK

Eniko Szucs
Digital Photograph

Eniko Szucs holds a Masters' Degree in Photography and Design Management from MOME, the Hungarian Royal Institute of Arts and Crafts. A native of Hungary, she divides her time between Budapest and Flemington, New Jersey. She specializes in landscape and architectural photography. www.enikoszucs.com. photos@enikoszucs.com.

WILL BRYANT

Ted Bryant

Will Bryant was a sharecropper most of his life, a one-eyed, half-breed Indian who had a third-grade education.

A couple of days before Christmas 1965, he was buried in the sandy clay soil of Geneva County (Alabama), the dirt from which he had scratched a living for himself, a wife and seven kids. Most of the time, his wife, sons and two mules were his only allies against the seemingly unyielding soil and broiling sun.

While I knew him, he never owned a car or any other property except a few household goods. Even the mules were owned by the landlord. He always managed to keep a dairy cow or two and a few pigs.

The family story is that his father, riding a mule, led a wagon train backward from west to east, from Arkansas to Southeast Alabama sometime in the late 19th Century. His mother--I've only seen pictures of her--was a Cherokee Indian.

Will Bryant was my daddy. I never called him anything else. He was born in 1984 and was 45 years old when I, the sixth boy in a row, came into the world in an unpainted sharecropper's house in Geneva County. I had to be a disappointment, although there was never any hint of that. Witness the fact that only one other child was born into the household, a girl who was named Joy.

Will Bryant couldn't write except to barely scratch out his name, but he could read. With that one eye--the other had been destroyed at about age 14 when a weed struck him in the face while he was plowing--what he read mostly was *The Dothan Eagle*, and he read every word in it. That was my early training as a news junkie.

Lola Boyd Brewer Bryant made it to the 10th grade. She was the proverbial five-by-five, not much more than five feet tall, but obese from my earliest memories. She not only did all the writing for the two of them, but also she read, not just newspapers, but books.

Lola was my mother and from her I learned to love books, learned that they could carry me, as they did her, far from the poverty of a tenant farm in Southeast Alabama. The library in Dothan operated a bookmobile that traveled around Houston County. We moved a lot in those days, and sometimes it would take me two or three months to find the nearest

bookmobile stop. When I found them, though, the two women who ran it would have saved me a half-dozen books they knew I would want to read.

On various farms in Houston and Geneva Counties, we grew cotton and peanuts to sell and corn to feed the family and the livestock. Some of the corn went to a grist mill where the miller ground it into cornmeal and took out a share as payment for his work. From the meal, Mother would make hoecake to bake in the oven or small cakes that were fried. My brother, Bob, still fries cornbread, especially when I'm around.

Among my favorite memories are the times we would pile peanut hay and sacks of corn on the wagon and head for the feed mill. The hay and corn would be ground into feed for the cows, with molasses added. Going to the mill would be a precarious ride atop hay and corn stacked maybe 15 feet high. Coming home, though, the sweet-smelling feed would be confined in sacks within the wagon body, and I would lie on it breathing in the odor of the feed and looking at the beautiful, unpolluted blue sky as the iron-rimmed wagon wheels rolled along the dirt road.

The harvest of cotton and peanut crops was our hardest work. Instead of putting a diaper on me when I was born, I think they hung a cotton sack over my shoulder. To handpick 200 pounds of cotton in a day was an accomplishment. At one time, about age 14, I could pick 300 pounds in good cotton, meaning the time when the bolls were fully opened and the field looked like snow had fallen in the 100-degree heat.

Probably the dirtiest work on a farm is harvesting peanuts the old-fashioned way. First came the mule-drawn plow with a long sweep, a device that was attached to the plow and ran about six inches under the ground to cut the deep roots and loosen the soil. Then we came along with pitchforks, shaking the dirt off the peanut plants and placing them in stacks to dry. Finally, about three weeks later, someone with a tractor and a mechanical picker would move into the field and the stacks would be hauled to the picker, which separated the nuts from the vines.

The leaves were blown away by a huge fan inside the peanut picker, but the heavier stems were made into hay in a motor-driven compress. There were quite a few one-armed men in Southeast Alabama in those days. A few had been injured in World War II. Most had been a little slow in feeding peanut stems into a hay baler with their hands instead of the cut-off pitchfork many used.

Strangely enough, one of my earliest memories is of German prisoners of war. I don't know who paid them the 50 cents a day--I think it was--that the government charged, but they came to work on our farm at harvest time at least once. This must have been 1944 when I was a tow-headed kid and must have reminded the prisoners of their own children or brothers back home. They couldn't resist picking me up and roughing up my hair with their fingers. They brought me gum and candy. I didn't fully understand what was happening, but I liked the attention of these big, young men who always seemed happy, not at all like those pictures we've seen of war prisoners.

This was sharecropping in the truest sense. The landlord furnished the house--such as it was--mules, equipment, seed and fertilizer. He also loaned Daddy \$10 a week from planting time to the harvest. Daddy and his boys furnished the labor.

The \$10 went to buy staples--flour, salt, sugar, and the like, and in the summer, the occasional loaf of "light bread," sliced loaf bread as we know it today. Clothes were bought only when the first bales of cotton were sold in the fall. They had to last until the next fall. The same went for shoes, but that was not a big problem because we didn't wear any between early April and late October.

Practically all our vegetables were grown in a garden and eaten fresh or canned. I'll never understand how my mother managed to weigh close to 200 pounds when she cooked the daily meals and canned for the winter on a wood or kerosene stove on June, July, and August days in South Alabama. When she died in 1967, she had never lived in an air-conditioned house.

Maybe it was the pork. Much of the family's meat came from killing hogs we raised on the farm. When I was following George Wallace through Massachusetts during his last presidential campaign in January 1976, he was speaking to a big crowd on an icy night--I think it was in Worcester--and said, "I appreciate you coming out in this hog-killing weather." I'm sure Wallace and I were the only ones in the hall who appreciated the remark. People in Massachusetts apparently don't know that you kill hogs on the coldest day of the year to keep the meat from spoiling before you get it to the smokehouse.

With no climatological training whatsoever, Will Bryant could pick out the coldest day of the late fall and declare, "In the morning, boys,

we're going to kill the hogs." We would be up by 4 a.m. and build a fire in a hole in the ground. The hole would be slanted. As the fire died down to coals, a barrel would be inserted in the hole and filled with water. Then came the killing of the hogs with the broad side of an ax or, later, a .22 rifle. Their carcasses were placed in the barrel of hot water and thoroughly scalded to soften the skin and facilitate the removal of the hair. Then they would be hung up on the limb of a chinaberry tree and butchered.

Even sharecropper shacks had smokehouses nearby. The hams and shoulders were rolled in salt and hung in the smokehouse. Most of the other cuts were ground into sausage, spices were added, and the mixture was stuffed into the thoroughly cleaned chittlins', the pork intestines that had been hand-slung. The sausage then went to the smokehouse.

The pork skin, with a layer of fat attached, went into the black washpot with a fire underneath. From this came lard and cracklins', the homemade version of pork skins that are sold as snacks today. Mother used the cracklins' to spice up cornbread and biscuits throughout the year.

Our reward for this day that began and ended in the dark usually came the next morning. It was the only time of the year that we feasted on fresh pork tenderloin for breakfast, as only Lola Bryant could cook it.

Pork was not our only meat. We always had chickens and a rooster, which resulted in one of the meanest farm animals alive, a settin' hen. A hen would sit on a dozen or so eggs to hatch them. Nature didn't bestow upon a hen much in the way of weapons, but a farm boy and a rooster soon learned to stay away when she's sitting on the eggs and right after they had hatched. The ultimate result, though, was fried chicken, Sunday fare even when the preacher didn't stop by.

Another meat was catfish. We always lived within walking distance of a creek, and the Bryant boys were pretty good at catching a mess of catfish. We would head for the creek in the later afternoon and cut up to 50 green sticks about four feet long, always with a fork at one end. At the fork, we would attach a piece of cord that held a hook and a lead weight. The other end of the stick was sharpened and stuck into the creek bank right over a likely looking pool.

The hooks might be baited with pork liver or worms, whatever we could scrounge up. Our favorite bait was salamanders we would catch under dead logs. For some reason I still don't understand, we called them "puppy dogs."

Beginning soon after dark, using a kerosene lantern or flashlight, we would prowl the creek bank working the lines, usually returning to the campfire with a dozen or so catfish. Sometimes, we would go home about midnight, returning the next morning to get the last batch of fish and collect our lines. On pretty nights, we would just take an old quilt or two and sleep by the fire. We only dreamed of tents.

Until I was about nine years old, these fishing expeditions were led by my brother, Bob, while Don, Jim, and I cut sticks and caught “puppy dogs.” Then Bob joined the army and was among the first GIs to land in Korea, a place we had never heard of. He was wounded twice, severely the second time. The oldest brother, Max, had left home and sold insurance a while before joining the State Troopers. I never knew the second oldest, Rex, who died--I suspect from the lack of medical attention--during the Depression.

Bob, Don, and I still enjoy getting together for a weekend of fishing trot lines on the Alabama River north of Montgomery where Bob has a cabin. We still catch catfish, too, a lot of ‘em.

In the woods and fields around our various houses, there was always an abundance of squirrels and rabbits. Daddy had an old 12-gauge shotgun and as we grew older, we bought a single-shot .22 rifle with money made from helping other farmers in our spare time. With the exceptions of pork tenderloin, smother-fried squirrel or rabbit makes about as good a breakfast as anything, especially when you add tomato gravy, cracklin’ biscuits, and syrup we made from our cane patch.

When I was about 13 years old, a friend about the same age brought along a black kid on a catfishing trip and opened my eyes to a problem I didn’t know existed. As we sat around the campfire, I was describing some place that I don’t remember now. I remarked that it was close to a certain “nigger house.” The other kids snickered. I honestly didn’t know I had said anything wrong. But from that night on, I didn’t use the “n” word.

By modern standards or the standards of middle class Birmingham or Montgomery in the 1940s and ‘50s, we were poor and life was rough. I wore hand-me-downs, sometimes passed through two or three older brothers. I was 15 when Bob and Jim, both on the Montgomery police force at the time, bought a house for the family in Webbs, about five miles east of Dothan. It was the first time we lived in a house that had been

painted, that had an indoor bath, a shower even. It was the first house with anything other than a fireplace and a wood stove for heat.

We were poor, but no more so than most of our friends. Sure, some students in the various schools we attended were from well-to-do families, but they were the exception and we didn't pay them much attention, nor they us.

All in all, I think that one-eyed, half-breed sharecropper sleeps peacefully in a harsh land that took so much out of him.

.....
The late Ted Bryant was for many years political columnist at the Birmingham-Post Herald. He told this story in 1992. Contact Fran Bryant Birkhimer at franbryant@aol.com
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REAPING

Jim Reed

After his wife died, he went into her garden and methodically pulled up by the roots every plant she had planted over the years.

Nothing was left but weeds.

Months later, a friend dropped by and, seeing the garden, remarked, "What beautiful, exotic plants!"

When the friend had left, the widower went into the garden and began methodically pulling up all the plants and flowers that had crept in among the weeds.

He sat and looked at the weeds in all their splendor and began to smile, weeping.

.....
Jim Reed is editor of the Birmingham Arts Journal and curator of the Museum of Fond Memories / Reed Books Antiques in Downtown Birmingham.

www.jimreedbooks.com
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THE PITCHER

Lori Ditoro

Clear glass
handle touched
a thousand times
by her hand
pouring sweet tea,
lemonade, love,
and guilt
over ice

.....

Lori Ditoro is an award-winning freelance journalist who lives in Alabaster, Alabama. Her work has appeared in Portico, Birmingham Magazine, Birmingham Parent and many others. She is currently hard at work on her first novel.

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“Money may buy the husk of many things, but not the kernel. It brings you food, but not appetite, medicine but not health, acquaintances but not friends, servants but not faithfulness, days of joy but not peace or happiness.”

--Henrik Ibsen



LAST

Philip Arnold

Hunting Island, South Carolina

Film Negative Scanned for Digital Print

Philip Arnold's interest in the image is rooted in poetry. Several of his poems have appeared in The Iowa Review, Rattle, Sou'wester and The Journal (England). His photography has most recently appeared in the documentary, The Silent Realm. Arnold lives in New Albany, Ohio. <http://philiparnold.tumblr.com>

THE SUMMER OF THE RC COUPON

Stephen Edmondson

Mom had always let me be the one to go to the mailbox because we shared a keen interest in the mail. We read the paper together; me, a slightly precocious child of the depression hills of Sand Mountain, and she a frustrated ex-school teacher. And now, a lone mother of four, a woman of more genteel background and breeding than most of her contemporaries, with faded dreams long in the past.

I was about seven or eight that summer I suppose. I remember my ages by about how hard I worked, and I don't remember working real hard that summer. Anyway, it must have been after the crops were laid by and there wasn't a whole lot to do beyond feeding the cow and mules and chickens and working a bit in the grass-ridden garden. Just a lazy hot dusty Stateplace, Alabama summer. Sweaty backs, dusty ankles, buzzing flies. And nothing much to do.

Mom subscribed to the Birmingham Post, so we knew Mr. Ellis the mailman would stop by our mailbox each day. That gave a little purpose to the mornings. Some days we walked through the hot sand up the little road to the mailbox to wait on the mail. Nothing else to do. You could almost smell Mr. Ellis' old cigar before you saw his car, a '37 Chevy coupe, all yellow dust over the scratched black patina that was once paint.

It was fun waiting on the mail. Relatively at least, for you never knew what might come. We always felt that. We always knew, so we weren't really surprised, then, that day of the RC coupon. A little awed, and in wonder. Why would we be picked to receive something as this? A valuable coupon. There in the mailbox, beside the Post. Our name not even on it.

And yet it was in our box.

We passed it from brother to brother to sister to brother. Each read it carefully, or pretended to. We looked shyly at each other, then ran down the road to show it to Mom, and to ask the inevitable: Can we? Can we, Mom? Can we take this here coupon and a quarter and go to Eva and buy a carton of RC's and get a FREE carton of RC's? Can we? Now? Today? Right now?

I don't think we said "Please" because we were prepared to give up immediately. In 1947, in the sandy hills of North Alabama you gave up real easy. It was the natural thing to do. Dad gave up and left for a

girlfriend in the valley. A long time ago it seemed, and hadn't seen the error in his ways yet. Uncles gave up and went north to the assembly lines. We gave up and stayed home. We knew about giving up, so we could have taken a "no" on the RC coupon and it would have been forgotten after one night's tears.

But Mom said yes. Maybe out of the desperation of facing four lean-eyed kids for years. Maybe from defeat. Maybe she just wanted an RC. Anyway she said "Yes," and we hardly knew how to take it. Even after she dug out the quarter. We hitched the two mules to the corn wagon and all four of us kids crawled on the wagon for the hour's ride to Eva to the store. Intrepid big brother, Decherd, all thirteen, strode into the store, coupon held in front so that if the devil smote the thing from him, well, maybe he wouldn't be hurt.

The coupon was accepted. We toted the twelve big old heavy RC's out to the wagon and carefully laid them down on soft cornshucks, and reverently hauled them home.

Sundown was nearby as we rattled into the yard. Decherd said we had to unhitch the mules, water and feed them first before thinking of the RC's. Finally we gathered around the linoleum-topped kitchen table and opened the first bottle. It was divided somewhat equally among the four of us children. Mom "didn't want any" and I bet you to this day it was so we children could have more. Gingerly at first, we sipped at our half-filled glasses of warm, bubbly RC. We grinned shyly at the burning strange sweet dark taste. We wallowed around a mouthful to feel the bubbles grow.

We sipped as spiders, to make the portions last longer. And so it went for a few days that summer, that summer of the RC coupon now remembered. A dusky evening ritual of dividing a warm bottle of RC Cola among four tow-headed and dusty kids.

And in all the hot summers since, I'm pressed to remember a handful of experiences as genuine.

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Son of a share cropper, father of an Ivy League grad, Steve is always looking for ways to build the needed bridges between his existences. From a childhood home with no plumbing, to the comfort of gentle Homewood, Alabama, he writes.
edmondsonstephen@bellsouth.net

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THE LAST WEDDING

Matt Mok

The news came three months before the wedding. His wife and daughter considered postponing, told him that the time for celebration could wait, that the planning would keep everyone busy and he deserved to have peace, even if for a little while. With the smile that he had employed throughout the ordeal, he said no; it was because he only had a short time left that he wanted to see it through. He would see his only daughter get married. The sickness might take his life, but it wouldn't take this.

Invitations went out. Planning resumed. Everyone went through their routines. The only thing keeping them going was the serenity he seemed to exude. He told them he accepted his fate, had made peace with it, and once that happened, each new day was a gift.

The day came. Family and friends came from all parts of the country, some from farther away. They had decided to have the wedding at the house because it was getting hard for him to get around. Flower arrangements gracefully adorned the backyard. A live jazz band played in the background. A multi-tiered pearl white cake was on display, waiting to be cut. It was perfect and he felt his eyes moisten, but held back, fearing his tears might be mistaken for sadness.

On that beautiful spring day, he almost looked healthy if you hadn't known how fit he used to be. For the first month after the news, he was still able to run every day. Now he used a cane, although he managed without one on this day. The family had kept the news from everyone, but the guests seemed to know something was wrong, even if they didn't know what. They saw his wife paying more attention to him, frequently by his side. They saw his enigmatic smile, but it seemed different, weaker. His clothes fit loosely on him and his gait was unsteady. Whispers and rumors cast pallor on an otherwise joyous day.

This wasn't lost on the father of the bride. He saw the strange looks. He saw conversations take on a different tone when he got close. He noticed all this and it just wouldn't do. This was unacceptable.

When everyone was seated in the yard for the ceremony, he took a microphone and welcomed everyone to their house. He beamed charismatically, walked through the crowd, patting friends on the back,

delivering corny jokes. For a moment, everything felt normal again. The gloom lifted. People smiled. Some laughed. When he was done, he went back to his seat and his wife patted his hand and told him he was wonderful.

When it came time for the father-daughter dance, he took his daughter by the hand and told her she looked beautiful and how proud he was of her. Then the music came on, a much more exuberant number than expected, and he broke out into a lively rendition of the Macarena.

The crowd roared and clapped in approval as the new bride looked on with a mixture of amusement and embarrassment. After the applause subsided, he signaled to his co-conspirator, the DJ, to put on the planned music. As father and daughter swayed on the dance floor, she laughed and called him a loser.

The dance floor opened and his new son-in-law took over.

Partner-less, he motioned for his wife to join him. It took some convincing, but she could never resist him. As they danced, arms intertwined, she leaned in close and whispered in his ear. Please don't die, she said, choking back tears. She lifted her head from his shoulder. He looked at her, smiled, and kissed her on the head.

Later that night in the shower, when everyone had gone, a heavy weight fell from his shoulders. As the water cascaded onto his face, he thought of how grateful he was to have been able to walk his daughter down the aisle, but his mind wandered. He was prepared for death, but not for what he would miss. He thought of his wife's touch. He thought of the smell of grandchildren. Strength eluding him, tears began to flow, mixed with water and went down the drain. He could hold back no longer. He would let it all out, because he would not do it when someone could see him.

His wife asked him how he was when he came into the bedroom. He smiled, kissed her gently on the lips, and told her everything was fine.

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Matt Mok was born and raised in Queens, New York. After college, he moved to New Hampshire for work, started writing and soon convinced a few publications to accept his stories. In his free time, he fantasizes about being taller.

mattmok@gmail.com

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FORTY MINUTES IN A RUNNER'S LIFE

Carl Scharwath

Roads lead from the mundane existence of forgotten workdays and the fear of aging. Just another day ends with the long ride home. Uneventful and unappreciated, not noticed for the work he has accomplished.

This man has no name and thus far has lived the undistinguished existence blending into life's brotherhood of humanity.

We need to identify this lost soul for the purpose of the unfolding night. He is a runner and this is the one place he will find solace and sanctity.

As the night gives way to a blackened and sunless time, an act of an invisible passion begins

Home brings a brief hello to the family and a quick change to his favorite black running outfit. The front door is a portal into the silent meditation of hope.

Tonight a long, lonely journey begins into darkness.

Four homes up the street lives his mother; he glances at his watch and decides on a quick visit. As an aging man himself he worries about her and is thankful she lives so close.

It is funny how time can trespass and elongate a future visit. Perhaps he is scared to hear about her health concerns, or the questions she might ask about his life?

The long walk to the end of the street resumes, the runner wants to avoid any neighbors who might share this warm evening with him. Past his daughter's elementary school, a pause of reflection enlightens on how truly blessed being a father is. In the school parking lot two police cars sit in darkness. Their lone purpose is to pursue speeding cars out on their evening runs. Inside the car, an officer gives attention only to the task at hand. Do they know that in the kaleidoscope of their actions perhaps they will meet again?

Finally time to run and be one with the night. Running brings a sweet release from all the troubles in life. Fear of the future, financial stress, boredom and a chance to succeed in something. Perhaps the run will prevent any medical conditions, as the steady pounding forms fast flowing rivers of oxygen to the blood and brain. The run is a life-giving

sustenance, yet you are alone in silent meditation. In the blur of a darkened run we find in the vortex, the race away from you.

As was his life the run was nothing unique, a long slow pace into the darkness of forgetfulness. The runs had a commonality of drifting into a haze of not really knowing or giving attention to the athletic task. The stillness of the evening is broken with a slow pace. Tiny molecules of air disturbed and broken by the movement of calories burned. Inside the womb of each molecule there hibernates a light of cars moving to their own destinations. Drivers safely secured in trips to the store, rides home from work, lonely bars where life can be forgotten for a brief moment. Twenty five minutes of running seemed miles away and a hunger finally arose to return.

The run always ended with a short walk home. One street to cross and the warm sidewalk will again receive his burned feet. Before crossing just one look right, one left and his attention can waiver again. A normally busy street yields for tonight an empty road. In the distance of his psyche voices and laughter bisect the stillness. There is a vision of angels not assessing judgments for the mistakes in a life. The runner looks right again and in the picture frame of his vision a curtain unfolds to a new horror. Two headlights less than five feet away close in on the final act. Quickly he sprints out of the way, doom and destruction missed by a mere second of a long life. Heart beats faster than the pulse of a run, new hamstring pain saves a life.

This is now a lucky runner who thinks how did that car give birth to light in the darkness?

Perhaps it was the police car at the school parked in the search for speeders. The police must have sped off and forgotten to turn on the car lights a few seconds after careening down the road?

Walking down his familiar street, transfigured between reality and a dream of what really happened. Was he truly walking in the moment healthy and tired?

Two headlights suddenly morphed dreamlike into medical lamps again filling his eyes with terror. Cool sheets protect him as he thought the voices did minutes before. The hospital table stiff in its reality accepts his flawed body.

An angelic nurse in sympathy looks down on him, a human fractured physically and emotionally. A tear of perspiration trails down the runner's

eye; in his sedated state the reality of these injuries would crush him. A second tear burns his eyes in sweet perspiration of his run. The operating room bright light fades to the familiar street lights near his home.

He is happy to see the proverbial front door and the chance to enter his home once more.

This is a night of second chances, a time for one last change. The daughter happy to see her father runs to him as if knowing of her dad's new affirmation. The runner never giving of his emotions in a faint smile simply acknowledges this was a pedestrian run.

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Carl Scharwath is a competitive runner with a second degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do. Print publishing credits include Not Popular Magazine, Lake Healthy Living, Pulse and Abandoned Towers. He lives in Mount Dora, Florida. karatedow@aol.com

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**“A poet more than 30 years old
is simply an overgrown child.”**

-H.L. Mencken

EVERYTHING WAS VOLUME AND CIRCUMFERENCE

Clark Holtzman

Hard words, a door slammed,
wring more silence than you thought a house was
capable of. Everything was volume and circumference,
thought and feeling nudged together like black
plums in a bucket of black water.

But now things begin to surface toward themselves,
into their own sharp air. The feather of a mourning dove
you found together near the Chagrin River,
a sprinkler fanning the next-door yard green.

Then comes the faint hum of the refrigerator,
and suddenly, tetrahedrons of shadow and light.

It makes you delirious in ways too subtle
to acknowledge and you'd give anything to make it stop--
even more argument, even a reconciling.
Anything at all to blunt these stinging details.

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Clark Holtzman lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His poems have appeared in print and online journals, including 2River Magazine, Red China Magazine, Eleven Bulls, Negative Capability, The Antigonish Review, loblolly, River Styx, The Small Pond, and The Lyric.

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THE WANDERING BEAR

Ian Sanquist

Do you know why I hunted the bear? Do you know why I shot it full of tranquilizers and carted it away in a van, deep into the forest where it belonged, where it couldn't be hurt by all those angry people who wanted it killed? Do you know why I dressed myself like foliage and painted my face black? Why I spent a month sleeping in the woods that surround this village, always one step ahead of the rest of the hunters, tracing its movements with the skills that I learned many years ago in the Boy Scouts, all those merit badges I received which I've long since lost? Do you know why I risked certain death and dismemberment, why I shat in a hole and wiped with a leaf, why I was stung with nettles in places you'd shudder to imagine and lived off of grass and salmonberries for four whole nights? Do you know why?

It was for you, Andrea. When you witnessed them carrying the mutilated corpse of the town's favorite son from where they found it by the river and the mob gathered in the mayor's yard with torches and pitchforks and agreed that the bear must be destroyed, I saw that it brought tears to your eyes. You silently turned from the procession and went back into your small white house of stone, standing alone atop the hill, and I saw that there was no one there to comfort you.

Where was that man you had taken up with, Andrea? The one who wanted nothing more with you than to satisfy his carnal yearnings, do you know where he was? Why, he was off with the mob, Andrea, while I stood on top of your hill and watched. And Andrea, how I wish I had comforted you then, how I regret not taking you in my arms and telling you it would be all right, but I was clumsy. I was a fool. Doped up and stupid, I could do nothing but play my mandolin as you wept. Did you hear me playing, Andrea? I played it for you, always for you, only for you.

I knew it was the bear you wept for, Andrea. You had no affinity with those people who wanted revenge, but you understood the bear. You understand that a creature's nature cannot be changed, but you did not understand the nature of those men and women who thirsted for blood. I have seen you, Andrea, when you bathed in clear water at the river's edge. I have seen when the deer and the other fauna approach you, and they are not afraid. They know you are safe. They know you are gentle.

Andrea, I wish that I could touch your perfect skin with my callused hands. I wish I could brush your golden hair from your face and stare into your playful eyes for the rest of my life, because I know I would never cease to see new and beautiful things within them, and from them would spring sustenance more powerful than food or water.

Did you know, Andrea, that they once said you were a witch? They said you lived all alone up there so you could practice your wicked diableries and they told all their children to stay away. But I knew they were lying about you, Andrea, as they had once lied about me. And one night, I'd been drinking, I ran through town pounding on the doors of houses with the lights out screaming that you were not a witch, but an angel. The deputy banged me one good on the head and locked me up until next afternoon. Did you ever hear about that, Andrea?

You were not born here, were you, Andrea? You came later. I cannot imagine what fertile region could have birthed a daughter blessed with your grace and beauty, but I know it must be far, far away. West of the mountains, I am sure.

I am not from here, either. I have been a peregrine for so long I don't know what place I can call home. Where I was born has no bearing on where I've come to, so I've always just said I'm from the road. I have stayed in this place too long, I think. I'm beginning to feel settled here.

Come with me, Andrea. Wander with me a while. Let me take you to the road. It doesn't matter where we go; if we go together we'll be safe.

The bear is a wanderer, too. He is not afraid of the unknown. He journeyed bravely into this village and was met with fear and hatred. But you, you alone, Andrea, you could meet a creature that has been feared and reviled for so long that he doesn't even remember what it feels like to be invited, that he has never known, perhaps, and you could meet that creature with love.

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Ian Sanquist lives in the Pacific Northwest where he attends college. His fiction has been published in the Ink-Filled Page, Perceptions, and The Garfield Messenger. bifford22@gmail.com
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THE BEACH

Lisa Oestreich

*Lisa Oestreich sought a career in photography but was discouraged by what she perceived as fierce competition in the field. She followed her other love, medicine, and practiced neurology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, until 2002, when she took a leave to pursue her passion of documenting light, form, and texture.
lisaostreich@charter.net*



THE RETURN OF JACK MONDAY

Wayne Scheer

Arlan and Diana met at Freshman Orientation. She fantasized running her fingers through his thick, curly hair. He ogled her tight, round ass.

By the end of their first week of classes, they shared meals at the Union every morning and again in the evening. A few weeks later, he mentioned that his roommate had dropped out and no one had been assigned to his dorm room. She moved in, and they remained inseparable. Without ever really dating, they planned marriage after graduation.

Although their relationship seemed ideal, one thought tugged at the back of Arlan's mind soon after Diana's parents visited. Her mother was-- there was no polite way of saying this--fat. Grotesquely so. He recalled hearing that if you want to know what a young woman would be like when she got older, look at her mother.

Arlan tried ignoring such an obviously shallow concept. He loved Diana for who she was, not what she might look like in twenty-five years. Still, he noticed that her rear end was flabbier than he thought when not packed into tight-fitting jeans.

Diana had loved how he absentmindedly caressed her legs as they lay in bed reading, but lately his touch seemed different when he reached the meatier parts of her thighs. At his urging, they began running mornings and avoiding late-night pizzas. She understood. She had seen the look on his face when she introduced him to her mother. Although they talked about nearly everything, neither dared approach this one topic.

As the term ended, and they planned to move back home for the summer, they shared how difficult it would be to separate. But down deep, Arlan felt ready for the break. When his parents arrived to drive him home, Diana noticed how much he resembled his father, except for one factor. Arlan's dad was as bald as a doorknob.

She, too, felt ready for summer break.

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Wayne Scheer has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes and a Best of the Web. His work has appeared in The Christian Science Monitor, Notre Dame Magazine, Pedestal Magazine, flashquake, Flash Me and Camroc Press Review. Revealing Moments, 24 flash stories, is available at <http://www.pearnoir.com/thumbscrews.htm>. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia. His email address: wvscheer@aol.com
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THE WAITING ROOM

Dale Massey

Another obligatory trip
to the nursing home,
God's cruel waiting room.
My grandmother begs to leave.
Misshapen hands pluck at air
and then retreat and lie still.
I am so scared
of dying, she says.
She waits at this junction
that is not life and not death.
We used to joke about the tunnel the newly departed
go through before they reach the light.
Do they serve coffee and donuts in the hallway?
Now there are no jokes in this sterile
dingy place, grumpy and tired nurses,
a frail woman with a grimace of death.
Surely she's waited long enough.

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Dale Massey graduated from Millsaps College with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in English, and later received an Masters of Fine Arts in English from the University of New Orleans. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

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**“If one tells the truth, one is sure
sooner or later to be found out.”**

--Oscar Wilde

MAMA AT THE ZOO

Mary M. Wallace

Until 1947 I had always believed that Birmingham was a make-believe city where my mother and my older brother traveled each month on a mysterious journey, sort of like Dorothy and her little dog going to Oz. Because I did not understand those trips I begrudged them immensely, and begged often to go with them on the Greyhound Bus that in my child's mind seemed far more appealing and glamorous than the familiar yellow school bus. But, it wasn't until I was almost eight that I was allowed to go, and finally learned that their true destination had never actually been the city, as I had imagined, but had always been The Crippled Children's Clinic. That was when I finally learned about the many operations the surgeons at the clinic performed on my brother, and that any mystery and magic existed only in the medical skills that would hopefully enable him to walk.

My family was country to the core, and lived half way between the small towns of Notasulga and Tallassee, with Tuskegee, Alex City and Dadeville not too many miles away. Once yearly my father drove to Tuskegee to pay taxes on our thirty-acre farm, yet he bought his cotton seed and fertilizer at the co-op in Dadeville, the small town we always passed through on our way to Alex City to visit relatives. Any money needed for emergencies was borrowed money from the bank in Notasulga, but Mama shopped for groceries at the Piggly Wiggly store in Tallassee. It was simply the way things were done, and I suppose it gave my parents a way to touch base with the towns.

Birmingham was very different of course, so enormous that one could easily get lost among the streets and avenues that crisscrossed each other at will, going in all sorts of directions. Ever since I could remember I had heard Mama and my brother, Lavelle, talk about Birmingham, about The Vulcan and the frighteningly high hills, mountains almost, where mansions perched precariously on the very edges of rocky cliffs, the smoke-stacks of countless steel factories and the rattling noise of the non-stop trains, all of the grand hustle and bustle of a huge city, but I desperately wanted to see it all for myself. Foolishly, I even envied my brother and the club-foot he was born with that made his visits to the clinic necessary, and each time Mama climbed the steps of the bus I wished I could go. She was almost always carrying Lavelle in her arms. After what seemed a long time but

was in actuality only a day or so, she would return, relieved to find that our fairly inept father had kept my two younger siblings and me from starving to death or getting lost in the nearby woods. My other two older brothers must have helped, but for the life of me I can't recall much, other than my desire to go to Birmingham.

Blissful weeks would pass before Mama would once again board the bus to bring Lavelle home, sporting a pristine white cast all the way up to his thigh. I always stared at it fearfully, knowing very well that it might be used as a weapon against me during our frequent battles. Although it sounds awful now, I didn't care very much for Lavelle back then, probably because he was the reason my mother so rarely held me in her arms. It always pleased me when she came home without him, having left him behind where the nurses gave him candy whenever he asked for it and famous people sometimes came to visit and entertain the children. If he was home he was nearly always in her lap, clinging to her as if she were a life raft and he would surely drown without her, and she cooked and did her other chores with him on her hip for the greater part of his early life. It wasn't until he was nine or ten that she said he had grown entirely too heavy for her to carry around. By then he had graduated to a metal brace, and had learned to walk. I dared not get within kicking distance.

When Mama gave in and I got to go to Birmingham, I finally understood that the many trips there had not been the fun events I'd perceived them to be. And, although I have traveled to Birmingham countless times through the years, none of those journeys has been as memorable as the one I took at the age of almost eight. I'm not sure why my mother took me to Birmingham with her and Lavelle, but it could have had something to do with my constant pleading. My brother admitted to me in later years that he'd been torn between joy over having someone to torture during what he considered a boring trip, and resentment that I was allowed to come along. I suspected even then that he'd have preferred to leave me behind, as usual, but I was determined to enjoy what I had only dreamed about. For some reason Mama had promised to take me to the zoo, provided she didn't need to stay with Lavelle at the clinic during his treatment. I was filled with such powerful anticipation and hopefulness that I didn't even complain when he kicked me. Mama was oblivious, just stared out the window as though lost in some private reverie.

Despite my excitement, I was still nervous, having never ventured so far from home before. The noise of the bus, the chatter of animated

passengers, and the almost constant thump of Lavelle's heavy plaster cast against the seat in front of us was enough to make me wonder, at least fleetingly, what I had gotten myself into. Yet I was thrilled to be finally going to Birmingham. The mere thought of seeing the animals at the zoo was almost too much for me. If Mama felt the same way she didn't show it. For years to come I would wonder if perhaps she'd been wishing she hadn't made such a lavish promise, since money was constantly in very short supply and my bus ticket alone must've placed a financial burden on her.

Nevertheless, once we arrived at the clinic and turned my brother over to the medical staff, we climbed on a different bus and headed for the zoo. I was so exhilarated that I could barely sit still, partly because I had my mother all to myself for the first time in memory, but also because we were sharing something I would most certainly never forget. We were really going to the Birmingham Zoo!

Upon our arrival, I was so overwhelmed that I didn't know what I wanted to see first, the elephants or the monkeys. Mama suggested that we see the elephants first and save the monkeys for last, spending the time in between admiring the tigers, giraffes, bears and so forth. This was fine with me since I had never seen any of them before, if you didn't count the monkey that a man kept tied to a tree outside his gas station not far from Alex City. So, we wandered all over the zoo, staring in awe at the exotic animals, holding our noses when we neared the dens of the lions and tigers, shivering our way past the snakes and giant lizards.

Around lunch-time, my stomach growled and Mama dug into her purse and bought a Coca Cola and bag of peanuts for me, saying she couldn't eat a single bite herself if she tried. I drank the bottle dry and ate most of the nuts, saving some of them in the pocket of my dress for the monkeys. I had heard they would come up to the bars of their cage and take nuts right out of your hand. This was certainly something I did not want to miss, and was positive that it would be great fun. When we finally reached the monkey cages a lot of people had already gathered to watch the wild antics of the various apes, but Mama and I were able to squeeze through until we were standing near the very front. Later on I learned the monkeys were actually chimpanzees, and they were really putting on a show, climbing and swinging on ropes and wooden contraptions and even each other, squealing and gesturing comically at us gawking humans. Everyone was enjoying themselves, laughing and tossing peanuts into the

cage, watching in amusement as the animals grabbed and skillfully shelled them.

However, I did not want to simply throw my peanuts. I was determined to personally feed them to the monkeys. So, slowly and carefully I inched my way closer to the cage, my eyes glued to a baby playing alone on the floor, hoping it would be the one to take the nuts from my hand. Like most children, I did not notice any signs of danger, but my mother obviously did. She grabbed the back of my dress and began to pull me back from the cage, while I tried to stand firm. I was holding a nut out toward the baby monkey, with Mama tugging on my dress, when the baby's mother suddenly reached through the cage and grabbed my mother's purse right out of her hand. Mama screamed bloody murder and looked around frantically, clearly hoping someone would help her retrieve her pocket book.

The crowd was paying no attention to Mama, however. Instead, they were all watching the monkey to see what she would do with the purse. Everyone was laughing and having a high old time, clearly oblivious to my mother's distress. The monkey jumped up and down, shrieking gleefully, and with a mischievous look in her eyes expertly opened the purse as though she owned one just like it. Then she emptied the entire contents of Mama's bag out on the floor, right in the middle of peanut shells and banana peels. I soon smelled something very familiar, and to my horror saw that the awful monkey had opened the tiny cobalt bottle of Evening in Paris perfume that Mama always carried in her purse. It was her favorite, more than likely her one and only extravagance, and now the monkey was literally pouring it over her head!

Now it was my turn to scream. But the crowd was laughing so hard that my voice, which sounded loud to my own ears, was never even heard. The mother monkey was having a wonderful time rummaging through the items she had dumped onto the floor. Much to the crowd's amusement, she opened a single piece of Juicy Fruit gum and crammed it into her mouth, chewing with a silly exaggeration that drove the crowd into a new frenzy of laughter. The creature wasn't satisfied yet, however, for she quickly un-wrapped the rest of the pack and chewed it, as well. Then she began to closely examine the remaining contents of Mama's purse. With surprising dexterity, she opened Mama's metal compact and began to admire herself in the mirror, making faces that caused the crowd to laugh even harder. To my amazement, the creature proceeded to open a tube of

lipstick, which she then smeared all over her mouth, chewing gum all the while. The crowd went wild all over again and seemed to think that the whole thing was a comedy extravaganza staged just for them.

I, on the other hand, was staring at the floor of the cage at what appeared to be our return bus tickets, as well what little remained of Mama's money, trampled, dirty and damp from the monkey's exertions. One look at my mother's face told me all that I needed to know, that she knew we could be stranded in Birmingham with no money, no bus tickets, nothing to eat and no place to stay. How, I wondered, would we ever get back home?

Never one to deal well with stress, I began to cry.

Suddenly, a tall, heavysset man pushed his way through the crowd and asked sternly what was going on. He was wearing a uniform with a badge, so I knew immediately that he must be either a policeman or a zoo-keeper. Relief flooded Mama's face and my crying stopped, now that someone had arrived to actually help us.

Although several people wandered off, sensing that the fun was over, most of the crowd stayed where they were and quieted down, listening as Mama and the man talked. A few of them looked almost shame-faced that they'd had such a great time at my mother's expense. I heard the zoo-keeper/policeman tell Mama that, while he could probably save her pocket-book and some of her cash, it looked as though everything else was pretty much ruined. The perfume bottle was broken by now, as was the compact and lipstick, and the bus tickets had completely disappeared, as if one of the monkeys had eaten them.

The few meager dollar bills and coins scattered about on the floor of the cage were suddenly proof to me as to just how much of a sacrifice my mother had made to bring me to Birmingham, let alone to the zoo. I felt a lump growing in my throat, felt the sting of fresh tears, not so much from what had just happened as for my regret over all the pleading I had done during the past year. I moved to stand close to Mama and hold her hand, to somehow show her I was sorry. I could almost feel the panic emanating from her body by the loss of everything in her purse.

Then, suddenly, something very peculiar happened. A man in the crowd shouted, "Look, ma'am, I found a five dollar bill that the monkey must have thrown over here!"

Within moments, someone else spoke up and said, "Well, look here, ma'am, I found these ones on the ground." Another person claimed to

have found a five dollar bill, someone a ten, and a woman pushing twins in an expensive baby carriage even handed over a twenty dollar bill that I saw her remove from her own pocket book. It appeared that everyone now wanted to make up to my mother for what had happened, to make amends for how they had so blatantly enjoyed her misfortune. Even though I was only a child, I realized very well what was taking place: The strangers felt guilty just like I did, only they had the means to do something about it. My mother was certainly no fool, so she accepted the cash with polite gratitude. I'm certain that she felt justified in taking the money since she had darn well earned it.

Mama was quiet as we walked back toward the bus stop, and she held my hand tightly, something she rarely ever did. She didn't say a single word until we found a seat on the bus and made ourselves comfortable. Only then did she calmly open her battered purse and remove the wad of money given to her by the crowd, and place it on her lap. I watched as she carefully counted the bills and change, savoring the little smile that played about her lips. It occurred to me that it was the first time she had actually smiled all day. Once she'd finished counting, she said that we had more than enough to pay for supper, buy a new purse if she wanted to, and replace all that had been destroyed by the monkey, with plenty left over to buy our bus tickets home. She said there might even be money left over to buy souvenirs for family.

I chose that moment to remove three wrinkled pieces of paper from my pocket, smooth them out as best I could, and hand them to her. "How in the world did you get these?" she asked, looking down at me with a surprised grin on her face.

I grinned back at her and explained how the baby monkey had given them to me. Mama laughed and said she guessed it was some sort of animal instinct that made the monkey do it, but I was pretty sure it had something to do with the peanuts I'd held out to her when she picked the tickets up off the floor of the cage, just before we walked away.

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In 1952, Mary Wallace began writing poetry in Reeltown, Alabama. She has won many competitions, published prose, edited a magazine and completed three novels. She lives in Eufaula, Alabama, with her husband, Jim, two dogs and a parrot.
mmwallace3@bellsouth.net

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FIELD SONG

Brian S. Roy

There are no fields but your own
The best is out of reach to those
That choose to trespass

The night's veins are thin
The rain falls leveling the
Land and its products

But morning passes, and the
Day realizes the night's
Transgressions

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Brandon S. Roy is the editor of The Panulaan Review. He has been published extensively. People insist on calling him a poet, though he much prefers being called Brandon. Brandon lives in Carencro, Louisiana. brandonsroy@gmail.com

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**“If fifty million people say a
foolish thing, it is still a foolish
thing.”**

--Voltaire

IMPENDING BIRTH

Libby Swope Wiersema

As sure as you pinch a bud
from the marigolds
and another replaces it,
a child will come into your life.

Rising up like a bubble
from ocean depths,
it will swell to the surface,
blooming into your cupped and ready hands.

If all goes well, your heart will unwind
like the coil of a clock,
its hand willing to meet its hastener
in the stubby finger of a child.

In the worst of cases,
the heart will tighten,
its tin muscle twining, stifling
the sprout to etiolation.

The clock will knell slowly, excruciatingly
and then be spent, like a light
going out in the world.
Either way, you lose something.
Either way, you will be undone.

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*Libby Swope Wiersema is a features writer and editor for newspapers, magazines
and Web sites. Her poetry has previously appeared in the literary journals, Writing
for Our Lives and WordWrights. Raised in Bessemer, Alabama, she now resides
in Florence, South Carolina. libmich@bellsouth.net*
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HESTIA

Stephen Linsteadt

Oil and Spray Paint on Canvas

35" x 45"

*Stephen Linsteadt is an artist, writer, and poet. His creative work is an ongoing exploration into the study of cosmology, alchemy and the archetypal symbolism of Carl Jung. Stephen lives and works in LaQuinta, California.
smlinsteadt@hotmail.com www.stephenlinsteadt.com*

BEYOND MY OWN EXPECTATIONS

Andrea Cope

I am more than I am now
I will be more than I have ever dreamed
But is that possible?
Could that be?
Can I be more?
This diamond has many facets
Is that me?
It is more than I knew
And to see all the qualities and skills, I had to turn that gem
For you and me to see
To view my own glimmering future
The path I am destined to walk on, I must see myself
And in opening my true potential I experience something unimaginable
To be all that and not even know
The feathers that I earned in life will fly me higher to the unlimited and
vast sky that we see above
To reach that sky
To touch that star that was once so far away
And to look back and see the power to do this was always in me
It goes beyond my own expectations

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Seventeen-year-old Andrea Cope, daughter of Angelo and Robin Cope, recently won a national poetry contest hosted by Girls Incorporated. As a Spring Valley School student and nine-year member of Girls Inc., Andrea spends her spare time pursuing a variety of artistic endeavors.

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GANYMEDE

Barry Marks

Ganymede looked as if he had swallowed one of Zeus's thunderbolts. His eyes opened wide in shock and the blood (or whatever runs through a demigod's veins) drained from his angelic face. I realized that I had committed some form of cosmic boo-boo for which the retribution might be too awful to imagine.

In a flash, I remembered why I was here and silently thanked dear Amanda, Tri Delta's pride, SAE's little sister and my blind date to the USB Ball. My closest friends and I called the USB Ball the "Any Port in a Storm Hook Up Dance," but my fraternity-afflicted friends assured me that it was referred to in Greek circles as the "Geek Prom." I, the geek in question, was not a member of any specific fraternity although I had friends (more or less) in several. It is easy to make friends when your IQ measures more than your bowling score and you don't mind helping out with a few term papers. Unfortunately, Robert ("Bo") Networth III, SAE (Class of '011 maybe), decided that it would be fun to see just what a 4-F geek would do with a decidedly A-List blind date.

I never found how he conned Amanda into it, but I strongly suspect it had something to do with the Spring Break skiing trip to his uncle's chalet in Bozeman about which she babbled incessantly during our few hours together.

Not to say that Amanda was less than the perfect lady during our date. She was even kind, in an excruciating sort of way. Not condescending, just sufficiently over-nice to put a normal guy off his game and give a guy like me the idea that he might have a chance, despite all logic and belief in the Darwinian imperative.

It was toward the end of a very pleasant evening in which I thoroughly enjoyed being the center of all attention and envy, that I made the fatal mistake of coming clean and asking one of those questions a child asks.

"Listen, I know that I am not your sort. I don't have a chalet in Bozeman and, frankly, I don't ski. In fact, as I am sure you have guessed from my skill on the dance floor, I generally lead with my brain and not my legs or arms. Anyway, Amanda, what I'm getting at is that I know this

was not your first choice for an evening, but I've had a really good time and I was wondering if we might go out together on an un-blind date?"

I drew the response that should be expected of a patient parent as she smiled at me, put her hand on my shoulder and said in a voice just above a whisper, "No."

If we had left it at that, I would not be in my present predicament but I had to ask, "Just so I know, what sort of guy would I have to be, you know, to get a date with you?"

"One that is judgment proof."

"Judgment proof? I think that means someone who cannot pay a legal judgment. I am certainly broke enough."

Again, the patient look but with a tightening of the mouth that indicated this was the last answer I should expect. "*Judgment proof* means someone who is so good that none of my sisters at the sorority would even bother trying to judge him. Not so much rich, handsome, athletic, well-bread, well-dressed, well-, well...just enough of all of them that there is absolutely no question that he is too good for anyone to dare pass judgment. *Judge-ment. Proof.*"

I honestly do not remember if I tried to say anything else, but it was pretty clear, at 5'8" 140 pounds and with the potential to be a wealthy software designer...eventually, but no current assets or immediate prospects, my Jos. A. Bank's and recurrent acne were not going to find their way into Amanda Boutwell's heart or any other part of her.

Which is why I found myself at Tidwell's, an off-campus bar known for its "ecstatic hour." That being a happy hour at which the cheap booze is so cheap and plentiful that only the most diligent can avoid total inebriation and probable lasting physical damage, either from a subsequent car wreck or ingestion of Tidwell's napalm-spiced fries, nuclear chicken wings and *don't-eat-this-hot-sauce*-drenched burgers.

Back in the day, Tidwell's was a favorite among people who referred to recreational drugs favorably as if some sort of poison: "Bad, man! This stuff will kill ya! You will get wasted and burn your brain cells!"

For the first time in my life, I think I really understood the attraction to all that as I downed my second concoction of beer, grain alcohol and Triple Sec (a "Tidwell's Terminator").

At the end of the bar, which was as far as I could see even with my glasses, two or three of our school's finest second string interior lineman

were accosting someone. I could barely make out long hair, a golden tan, and a flash of very stretched white t-shirt. Unlike his tormentors, the victim's t-shirt appeared to lack any Greek letters. A GDI (goddamned independent) like me, he was on his own.

"I don't care what yew may have heard, Sweetie. We don't like yer kine in 'ere." Or something to that effect rang out through the roomful of laughter and squealing, under the ear-burning music and around the massive shoulders of the angry athletes.

I edged forward, emboldened by the Terminators and a death-wish resulting from the futility of my recent effort to mate above my species, to see a very handsome, somewhat effete-looking young man whose shirt and jeans were at least two sizes too tight and whose eyes were at once bewildered and bemused.

"I don't know what I have done to offend..." he foolishly began, smiling as if someone were about to tell him a punchline and clap him on the back. This kid didn't get it at all.

Fortunately, I noticed that one of the behemoths was none other than Frank Thuragood, who, despite some unlettered ancestor's decision to forgo proper spelling for phonetics, was not all that bad or that stupid. I was almost finished with a rewrite of Frank's Bio 201 term paper (rodents, their kith and kin) that might raise his grade to a C+ instead of the Q, Y or Z he deserved.

"Hey, Frank! What's up?" I hale-fellowed as best I might. He was already grinning but his smile threatened to break out the sides of his mouth when he turned and saw me.

"Hey, it's my private genius! How 'ya doin? Stay away from those Terminators, Buddy! They'll rot your brain and then I will have to go back to cribbing off ugly AEPi's!"

He didn't need to yell quite that loud, but I think he was gaining some street cred by announcing that I was doing his homework.

"Guys! This is the gee...guy I was telling you about."

Three pairs of eyes turned to me with an expression that was more-or-less entomological. The former object of their attention suddenly disappeared. Not in the sense of slipping away. Not like there was a trap door. He just wasn't where he was anymore. The football players turned back to where the young man was and then looked about in some

confusion. As confusion is a frequent state of mind for them, however, it didn't last.

"Damn queer got away. Oh, well, plenty more where he came from."

"Seemed foreign to me. Queer and foreign, that is a combination."

"I dunno. I'd say screw him but you might!" (That was Frank).

As they laughed and jostled one another I wandered off, not wanting to press my luck any tighter. Speaking of which I noticed that I was pleasantly buzzed. Also speaking of which the boy in the tight clothes was now standing in my spot, smiling warmly.

"Thank you. I didn't think they meant me harm, and it was not a worry, but that was very kind of you."

I really was not looking for conversation, especially with someone who could attract death-dealing inebriated pre-humanoids but I instinctively stuck out my hand. He took it and...

I was standing in a large room in the middle of a sunny afternoon somewhere far away from Tidwell's. The room was done in sort of Greek revival décor. Only I quickly came to understand there was nothing "revival" about it.

"Welcome to Olympus, I am Ganymede," he said somewhat shyly. Even after these few minutes, I do not remember what I said or exactly how he communicated to me that I was, in fact, atop Mount Olympus. I have a dim recollection of him explaining something about there being a precedent for situations in which mortals do something to assist the gods and find themselves richly rewarded.

Let me repeat that because it took me a while to let it sink in: This was Ganymede, cupbearer to Zeus. A young man the ever-horny king of the mythic (I thought) Greek gods brought home with him one day. Really.

I didn't believe it either.

"Well," I thought, "this evening has just crossed over to the insane side of crazy."

"Now, my mortal friend, what reward can I bestow upon you? Fame? Fortune? A physique that will allow you to combat Chimeras and attract royal virgins to your bed?"

He inched a little closer and put a hand on my shoulder. He looked into my eyes. A little too deeply.

“Uh, Mr. Gany, I mean Ganymeade. I think I should mention that I am straight. Very straight. Exclusively so. Just not very good at it.”

“Pity,” he sighed, still smiling and I felt altogether too much a good sport about it.

“But I would like another shot at Amanda Boutwell. From a better shooting position, if you know what I mean. Being someone more her style. Greco-Perfect or whatever.”

Ganymede smiled broadly and left the room saying only, “I may be able to do something about that.”

Which left me, slightly inebriated, definitely frightened, and absolutely certain that I had lost my mind, in an extremely sunny room with marble furniture, floors and walls, decorated with several beautifully-wrought urns, sephora and such.

While Ganymede went about doing whatever it was he was going to do to thank me, I noticed a half-empty wine goblet on the table alongside a small dish of innocent-looking luminescent orange grapes and lavender apple slices.

Realizing that I was famished and dry, I took a sip and a couple of bites. I suppose I should say that it was the best tasting things I ever had, but it was no big deal. The wine was indeed pleasant-tasting and the fruit was fresh but that was about it. My head did not spin. I did not feel a tremble in my soul or nether parts. There was neither music nor flashing lights.

Then Ganymede returned and from his expression I realized that I had done something very bad and he had done something very worse in letting me do what I did.

“You...you drank some of...you ate some of...Oh. Oh, dear. That was...it belonged to Zeus. It is not for humans, mortals. It is forbidden and...I don't know what to say...”

“Is it poisonous?”

“Not exactly. Now, you are immortal.” He sat down and buried his head in his hands.

“Come again?”

“You have partaken of nectar and ambrosia. You are immortal.”

Ganymede shrugs his shoulders haplessly and looks around as if the walls are going to give him a solution to an obviously perplexing situation. The idea of immortality begins to sink in slowly and I have to admit I feel

pretty good about it. I am not sure how to leverage deathlessness into a peek inside Amanda's brassier but somehow, some way, I must be more *judgment proof* than the next guy, or the last guy, or whatever guy.

Ganymede, obviously highly agitated, looks as though he would love to have a cigarette if they had been invented in his day. I am beginning to feel very sorry for him.

"You have no idea what trouble I'm in. Hera already doesn't like me for some pretty obvious reasons, although at least I keep Zeus off the maidens and I am not exactly competition in the royal sense."

I decide not to think about this any further.

"You must understand," he goes on, "I had to sneak out of here in the first place, visits to the mortal world and interaction being severely frowned upon, except in the case of Aphrodite and Zeus, of course. And Eros. And occasionally Aries."

"Occasionally Aries? I should think you'd be telling me he has set up shop with us."

"Not so much as you think, we like to call him Ol' Redundancy because your kind would be finding new ways to go about killing each other without any interference from him anyway."

So much for the political message. I start looking around for a mirror to see if I truly look different, maybe taller. I begin to wonder what I should be god of? Perhaps computer science. Or maybe underdogs. I reach over and pick up heavy, probably real silver, shinier than glass tray.

"Funny, I don't look real goddish."

"It's something only we can see. To mere mortals you look...merely mortal," Ganymede half-smiled. "It takes a real Greek god to know a real Greek god."

An owl flies into the room, circles Ganymede once, screeches loudly and heads out.

"Oh, no, no, no!" Ganymede laments. "It's *her*. If there is anyone who cannot stand mistakes, anyone who has no patience for fools..." His voice trails off. At that moment, entering through some unseen portal is a cloud. A silver cloud somehow backlit with pink neon and sporting the two most beautiful, piercing blue eyes I have ever seen in my life. The eyes are not actually on the cloud, they are in the cloud.

The voice that the cloud ushers is not at all threatening but somehow commanding. I immediately think of my third grade teacher, the college



BLONDE IN A BLUE DRESS

Lydia Poore
Oil on Canvas
24" x 36"

Lydia Poore works with oil paint, fabric, paper, and found objects in her art. She often works from photographs, rendering her own interpretation of the individual based on emotions and memories. Lydia and her husband reside in Birmingham, Alabama. LydiaPoore@yahoo.com, www.LydiaPoore.com

math professor who did his best to challenge me in the seventh grade and my mother. “Ganymede, I don’t even want to ask. Those of you who are mortal-born provide constant entertainment, but at disproportionate peril.”

And then she steps out of the cloud. No, the cloud becomes her. Or something. Whatever, I don’t have time to think about it because she is naked. No, more than naked. Very naked. Which is odd because she is wearing clothes. But not clothes. Light. Swirls of light that somehow make her look more nakedly beautiful than if she were nude. And she is beautiful. Of course, every woman I have ever seen naked was beautiful, most of them being in magazines. Pretty much all of them, but that does not matter now.

“Well, what have we here?” She turns her eyes, those eyes, on me. “No use trying to hide it, you have made off with a bit of His Majesty’s private stock like some *neotoma albigula*. And left nothing of your own behind, it seems.”

“Um, well,” I whisper, “Actually I am a very good pack-rat. I left behind my mortality, or so Ganymede says.”

She laughs, a sound like music and her eyes dance.

“How clever! And you know what a *neotoma* is! Did you know that each one is the ghost of an investment banker? It is my little joke.”

I silently thank Frank Thuragood for enlisting me to write his biology paper. “Really? That’s too much!” I honestly think my face is glowing and I’m actually talking to her like she is a fellow member of my Tuesday night bridge group.

“Oh Ganymede, he is charming, this one. What shall we call him? Some hero’s name, surely. There are far too few heroes these days.”

“Frankly, I am afraid I deserve a name like *Ridiculous Maximus*.” She guffaws and I swear she slapped her naked knee.

“Humble, funny and rather cute. But I am afraid that name sounds Roman and they renamed me Minerva. Really, can you see me as a *Minnie*?” The realization hits me like an ice bath.

“Athena?” I breathe, “Goddess of Wisdom and the Arts. Wow!”

Her smile remains but her mouth opened slightly.

“How kind of you to know me. So few of your former kind do.”

She moves closer. I know I am sweating, blushing, trembling. I am afraid to check out what else. She stares into my eyes.

“Actually handsome now that I look at him. It has been a very long time since I met a god who was once mortal and remains... uncorrupted by his own immortality. A fresh intelligent mind is... stimulating. I will enjoy very much showing you around Olympus.” She takes my arm and I feel an electricity pulse through me.

“In fact, there is much I can show you and we have quite a long time. Ganymede, Dear, tell Zeus that I was the one who borrowed a bite and sip from his table. And don’t you dare tell Aphrodite about this one for at least 100 years. I want him all to myself.”

We walk out of the building into a garden or something, who cares? She is breathtaking and she can have my breath any day.

“Did you really spring from Zeus’s mind?” I ask.

“Of course not,” she frowned slightly, “he wants to take credit for everything. But enough about me, for the moment. Tell me, what do you think of the Heisenberg Principle as it relates to the Unified Theory?”

I am so glad that she asks one I know.

.....
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 prize) and co-author of two anthologies available at www.churndashpress.com. Barry’s new book of poems, Possible Crocodiles, is published by Brick Road Press.
bmarks@marksweinberg.com
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**“Too much of a good thing can
be wonderful.”**

--Mae West

FIFTY AND STARTING OVER

Nancy Milford

Exhaustion and anger,
Energy of God,
Allow space for change.
No longer satisfied with status quo,
What is happening here?

Turning corners,
Wondering where to go.
Demands, expectations,
Not responding.
What is happening here?

Fifty's nifty,
Or so they say,
Feels uncomfortable,
Especially on work days.
What is happening here?

Reinventing, Letting Go,
You say I am supposed to care?
No time for man's plan,
There is much more to do.
What is happening here?

.....

Nancy Milford is employed as a municipal planner and grant writer in a small picturesque southern Alabama town, Spanish Fort. She is educated in biology and engineering; however, her happiest days are spent writing, gardening and getting to know her artistic nature.

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Shape shifting, contracting
Quiet times ahead,
Moments valued,
Wisdom blooms,
Force is strengthening.
What is happening here?

Starting over, recreating,
You have no business here.
Mine is the power to save the
world.
Feminine divine is opening.
I know what is happening here.

CITY SANCTUS

Ramey Channell

Sweet swinging, celestial, high-reverberating
slam-dunk sounds; new fashioned beginnings
over old fashioned endings!
Certain things are happening.
My voice carries over this city.
At last, our voices carry.
Wheels have turned. Oh, wheel!
Face to face with turning wheels, our voices carry,
anthems changing words as we speak.
No longer bound, we speak changing anthems.
At last, our voices carry, day to night and night to day.

Children all in white,
still mornings,
hearts wonder,
Will another night come?

Children all in black,
still nights,
hearts wonder,
Will another morning come?

Children all in white, I am here.
Children all in black, I am here.
Children all in red, I am here.
Lo, I am with you always.

My voice carries over the city and the sound.
Slam! We know that sound. Steel ringing,
Vulcan wields swinging steel,
foundations singing, our voices ring! Slam!
Birmingham.

.....

This poem is dedicated to The Four Little Girls of 16th Street Baptist Church,
and all the participants in The Children's Crusade, May 2, 1963.

Ramey Channell lives in Leeds, Alabama, where she is a librarian at Leeds' Jane Culbreth Library. Her poetry, short stories and children's stories have been published by Alabama Writers Conclave, Alabama State Poetry Society, Aura Literary Arts Review, Rivers Edge Publishing, the Tahana Whitecrow Foundation, and many others.

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