

PORTALS



Spring 2008

PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

Editors

Bridget Floyd
Gary Hurley
Jacque Jebo
Meredith Merrill

Editorial Assistants

Susan Clarke
David Covington
Linda Eiken
Lynn Ezzell
Cheryl Farinholt
Blythe Ferguson
Rhonda Franklin
Alan Katz
Jill Lahnstein
Catherine Lee
Ann McCray
Katherine McEwen
Kerry McShane-Moley
Marlowe Moore
Dylan Patterson
Subi Rajendra
Cheryl Saba
Pamela Stewart
John Wells
Margo Williams
Patrick Williams
Quyen York

Art/Photography Editors

Ben Billingsley
Deborah Onate
Sherrie Whitehead

Layout/Design

Gary Hurley

Spring 2008

Volume 1, Issue 6

Portals Literary and Arts Magazine
wishes to extend appreciation to the CFCC Student
Government Association, the CFCC Foundation, and the
CFCC Arts and Sciences Division for their support in
making this project a reality.

The 2007 *Portals* awards were given by
Philip Jacobs, Humanities and Fine Arts Instructor,
CFCC, in memory of
Professor Paul H. Jacobs
Professor of English
University of Illinois
1964-1984

Portals would also like to thank The Basics for hosting
the *Portals* reception.

Portals is a publication of Cape Fear Community
College student writers and artists,
published by Cape Fear Community College
411 N. Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401

Cover photo by
Alyson-Elizabeth Atwill

All rights reserved. Material herein may not be repro-
duced or quoted without the permission of the authors.
All rights revert to authors after first serial publication.

Table of Contents

Poetry

Charlotte Mertens, <i>Untitled</i>	4
Mike Kinsella, <i>Ancient Air</i>	6
Melina Reed, <i>Gideon Bible</i>	8
Mike Kinsella, <i>The Beat</i>	22
Candace Roberts, <i>Black Woman's Song</i>	29
Jason Jennette, <i>Haiku</i>	38
Adam Iannucci, <i>Ode to Wine Drinkers</i>	59
Brandon Weavil, <i>Prelude</i>	78
Celeste Wilken, <i>Lego Life</i>	80
Lois Basiliere, <i>Lost Love</i>	84
Walter L. Sharp III, <i>Music: A Sonnet</i>	87

Non-Fiction

Teo Ninkovic,	
<i>What Does It Mean to be a War Refugee?</i>	18
Green Lee Meadows III,	
<i>Daddy I Want to Walk with You</i>	39
Stacy Hawkins, <i>Funerals are for the Living</i>	61
Lisa Maslak, <i>Please, Pass the Rice</i>	66
Teo Ninkovic, <i>A Struggle for Survival</i>	73

Fiction

True Edwards, <i>Lost and Found</i>	10
Steven Vineis, <i>The Texan</i>	24
Stacy Hawkins, <i>The Gift</i>	32
Rachel Kaiser, <i>DMV</i>	47
Joy Shortell, <i>The Singing Bridge</i>	82

Untitled

Charlotte Mertens

She asked me if I was a poet,
and I said, sister,
I do not write poetry,
but I am a poem.

Yes, my hips are commas carving
out a space in the air,
and I sing sonnets into
the negative space beyond
my fingertips.

Yes, I breathe in stanzas,
and step in pentameter.
I drink leaves of paper
steeped in my green existence.

And yes! My DNA forms
acrostics. Yes! I evolve in a
skipped line.

I am the sigh of the letters as
they fight their way into words,
and lowercases and capitals.

And yes! I am even the ink
and the arc of new beginnings,
crumpled and revised.
I am not a poet, but, sister, I am
poetry.



Jennifer McGroarty

Ancient Air

Mike Kinsella

The ancient air takes wing
In blustery births,

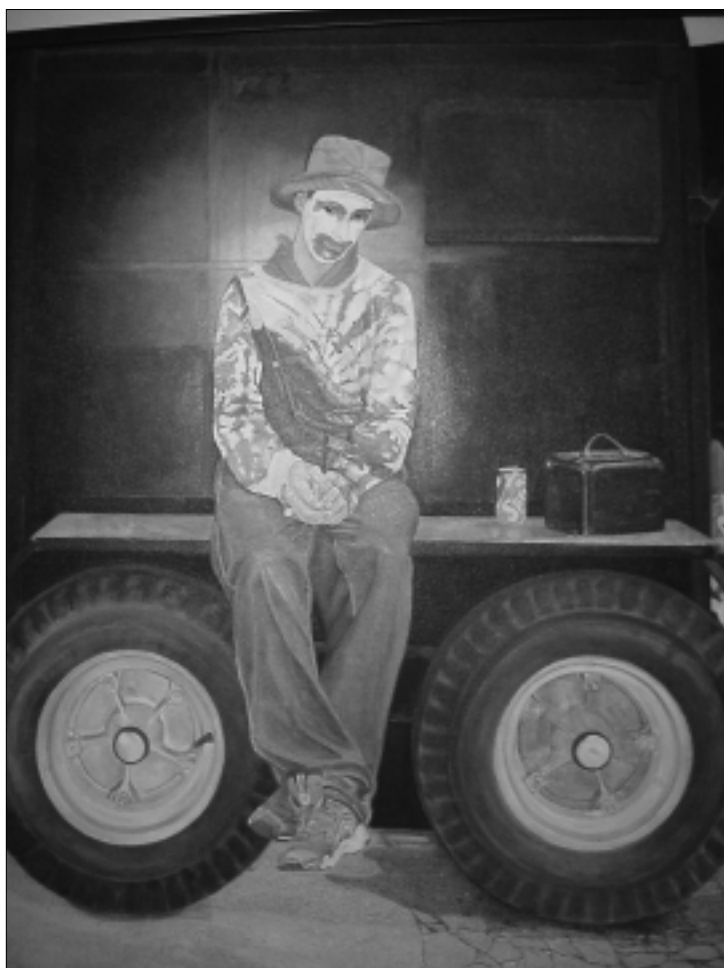
Like the antiquated soul
That meanders through unenlightened vessels
 Lifetimes spent unaware

The life that is old, the body, new

The stone is cast, Father Flesh
And its ripples are conceived
On a calm lake
Mother Earth has perceived
I ask her
who was my soul-brother?
The one who came before.

Tell me, mother of mine,
to whom will I go when my body departs?

Who was I
when my soul-line began?
How many lifetimes have I spent
 as a ripple on a calm lake?



Robin Mead

The Gideon Bible

Melina Reed

Within the top dresser drawer
Of every Best Value,
Motel Six or Eight
(Where was Motel Seven? I would
Speculate
That seven, the holy number,
Held with heavenly high regard
Would hardly represent
“Glory to God in the Highest”
In the form of one night stands.)
One nightstand,
Its drawer kept slightly open
By something sticky stuck to its sliding track
Transferred secretly from the mouth of some
CEO’s daughter,
Bored,
Left alone in room 335 while
Daddy Warbucks booms a lecture on profit increases
On the first floor.
Through the sticky drawer,
Always open,
A column of light illuminates Gideon
Lying centrally in his empty drawer
Surrounded on all sides by discolored wood
Distorted by layers of dust a room-key thick.
Gideon knows not the chaste chapel
The silent sanctuary
The cold confessional
The all-powerful altar
The sweet simplicity of Sunday school
Filled with youth and innocence.
He is not the nightstand vigilante

Soothing the self-loathing servant kneeling bedside.
No, Gideon is the harlot handbook.
The desperate scratch paper
For flashing porno phone offers.
The flat writing surface for guilt-ridden checks written
Leaving a faded front cover indentation reading
“Freaky Fucks For Hire”
Beside a business account routing number.
He is the extra voice
Hitting hard the hollow drawer
Drumming harmoniously
With moans of Monas
Susans
Angelas
Heathers.
He is the disappointing phone book look alike
Thrown back in his drawer at midnight
Through misplaced anger
By unstable stalkers and
Moody ravenous almost-mothers.
He is the insect killer
His back cover littered
With single spider legs glued on by roach juice
Bent in disturbing upright formations
Like the coarse kinky hair left clogged
In the shower drain.
He is a tool of sinners.
He is the embodiment of “Motel 7”
A place of God
Vacant, dark, disturbed.

Lost and Found

True Edwards

The child had gone through the doorway, and now that it was done she really wasn't sure why she had done it. She rather liked it where she was, but now she was here and that was that. So she walked forward through the creepy hallway until she came to a series of doors, each with a bright sign above its wooden frame.

The first said, "Yesterday." The second said, "Tomorrow." The third said, "Today." The fourth said, "Eventually." The fifth said, "Never," but it was the sixth that the child took an interest in. It said, "Lost & Found."

That seemed a good place to start, and it was certainly much less scary than the other doors. The heavy wooden door creaked and groaned as if it had not been opened in a very long time, certainly not in the child's lifetime, and maybe not for several lifetimes before that. After much huffing and puffing and an incredible burst of strength from a child much too small to open such a heavy door, the door was opened and she was inside.

For some reason it seemed that the door made no noise closing, despite its weight, age, and the amount of racket it had made in opening. This frightened the girl much more than the slamming would have. Again, she found herself wondering why she had felt the need to go through the doorway when she had felt much safer on the other side.

Looking around, she saw that she was in a very large, very empty room. The walls were white, the ceiling was white, and the floor was white. It was rather like being in a giant marshmallow, or perhaps like being in a regular sized marshmallow, if one were as very tiny as one would have to be to fit in a regular sized marshmallow. "No," the child thought, "it's definitely like being in a very large, very square marshmallow." Although she did indeed feel very tiny, she

knew that it was just because of the vastness of the room.

After taking a few steps into the marshmallow room, whose floors were quite solid and not spongy at all, she saw that it wasn't empty. Against the furthest wall, which was really very far away, were two tables. Having nowhere else to go, the girl headed toward them.

After much walking, much thinking, and much realizing that she did not want to be here at all, and then deciding that she didn't want to be walking to where she was walking but since she was going there anyway, she may as well get used to it, she reached the two tables at the furthest end of the room. Upon arriving, she noted two things. First, each table had a figure sitting behind it. Second, each table had a sign above it much like the doors in the hallway.

The signs were quite simple and straightforward. One said, "Lost," and one said, "Found." The figures sitting under these signs, however, were another thing all together. What kind of thing they were, the child just wasn't sure. They looked a bit like people but also a bit like animals. One was sort of people-shaped but still seemed to have the shell of a turtle on its back with the ears of a rabbit. Its face looked a bit like a cat's, while its hands were tipped in claws. The other had too many arms to be a person—at least four that the child could count—but its face looked very human. Only its head was topped by what looked like insect antennae, and it had six very human-looking eyes in its otherwise human-looking face.

She caught a glimpse of this creature's legs under the table and wished she hadn't. She saw at least four legs, and each of them looked very much like a kangaroo's. She wondered if it also had a pouch. Maybe she could hide in it? Only that made very little sense, because what she really wanted was to hide from these creatures, and surely one of the creature's own pouch, if it indeed had a pouch, wouldn't

be much protection from that same creature.

She decided to speak. The creature with the turtle shell and rabbit ears, who was sitting under the "Lost" sign, looked the least frightening. So, she spoke to him—or was it a her?

She said, "Excuse me, but could you help me?" The long rabbit ears twitched, and the creature's head looked up, apparently just now noticing the girl. When he spoke, the girl noticed that he had whiskers.

"Well, that depends, my darling dearest. What exactly is wrong? You see, I'm the finder of lost things, and my companion here is the keeper of found things."

Yes, the creature must be male. Its voice was very deep, thought the girl, as the creature continued. "So have you lost something that you need to find, or have you found something that was lost but is not yours, and thus you need to put it somewhere where it can be claimed, or perhaps you want to claim something that was lost but now has been found? What is it, then? Speak up, darling."

It took the child's brain a moment to catch up, but eventually she answered the rapidly fired questions. "I'm not really sure what I'm looking for because I'm not really sure where I am. I just sorta stumbled upon this place. I don't think I belong here at all."

The creature's rabbit ears and whiskers twitched this time. It seemed truly excited. "Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, you don't know where you are. You are somewhere you don't belong. That means that YOU yourself are lost. So, I indeed can help you."

"Ahem," the other creature called attention to itself, seemingly roused out of a very deep sleep. Its voice was much deeper than the others, so perhaps the other was a female, and it moved all its arms, definitely more than four, the girl noted, as it spoke. "Actually, if she is here, then she is no longer lost, because she has made it here, which makes her very thoroughly found. So, she actually should be speaking

to me."

The first creature's rabbit ears slicked back like an angry cat. "No, my dear. She belongs to me, because SHE still does not know where she is."

"What she knows or doesn't know is very irrelevant. WE know where she is, and that means that she has been found and now must be cataloged and boxed up until someone comes to claim her."

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, she is not to be cataloged because she is still lost. Thus, this is my business and none of yours."

"Wait, excuse me," said the girl, who had been trying to follow this conversation but was getting an ache in her neck from all the back and forth. "I'm not really lost or found, you see. I'm not a thing. I'm a little girl. You can't just box me up. I'd surely die, and no one will come to claim me because no one knows where I am."

"Well," said the spider-kangaroo-thing, "if you don't know where you are, and neither does anyone else, then I suppose you are lost."

"Yes," said the rabbit-turtle-cat, "but I have now found her. So, she is all yours after all."

"Oh, that's so kind of you. It has been so long since I got to catalog anything."

"No, you aren't listening!" The girl was now very scared. "You can't just box me up!"

"But I have to. You see, I am the keeper of found things and you, having been lost but now come here, are a found thing."

"No, I'm not a thing at all. I'm a little girl."

The rabbit ears twitched again, and the creature butted in. "I don't think I see a difference, my dear. Thing, little girl, table, chair—all the same."

"Yes," said his (or her?) companion, "all the same."

"But what if someone wanted to box you up and cata-

log you? How would you feel about that?"

"That would be quite impossible," said the spider-thing, its antennae flailing all about, "I am the keeper of found things. No one boxes and catalogs but me, and seeing as how I couldn't possibly box and catalog myself, it could never happen. Also, I can't be found because I'm not lost, because I'm always here. So, you see, this could never happen. So I couldn't possibly have any feelings at all about it."

"But...", said the girl, but she really had nothing else to say. As she was being asked for all the details of her very short life for the catalog so that they would have the proper information for any claimant that came to get her, all she could do was wonder how long she could live in a box, and if the creatures would give her food or water.

But why would they? she thought. You don't give a table or chair any food or water.

So, the information was really useless, as all any claimant would find in the box would be bones, and, truthfully, she knew that there would be no claimant because truly she wasn't found at all. She was still very much lost, and she very much doubted that she would ever be found again.



Chason Huggins



Ryan Turnstall



Jennifer Cessna

What Does It Mean to be a War Refugee?

Teo Ninkovic

What does it mean to be a war refugee? It means a lot of things, and at the same time it means nothing at all. It's a title given to us by people who think that we are in some way different. The fault in this idea is that we are no different than anyone else—we are human beings, flesh and blood. We just have a lot more nightmares, a lot more broken dreams, a lot more death and sorrow, and a lot more hope for the future.

To be a war refugee, first you must go through a war. How many Americans can say they have been through a war? Not very many. No American could ever imagine, not even in their deepest, darkest nightmare, what it's like to be in the middle of a war zone, with death-dealing bombs going off every five minutes, shaking the very ground you walk on.

Bullets fly through the kitchen windows, slicing through the walls that you once thought protected you. Could you imagine no electricity, no water, and no food for days on end? Can you imagine the feeling of your stomach beginning to eat itself because all you have eaten for the past week is a few pieces of bread? A war refugee knows the pain. We know what it's like to see slain bodies lining the streets, to smell burning flesh in the air, and to have the thought of death looming in our minds every second of every day.

We know what it's like to lose everything, including our minds, but then one day comes a blessing, or so we think. A truck comes in with soldiers saying that all the families with young children get to go to a camp—a refugee camp.

After the war-time horror begins a new kind of horror, refugee camp horror. Thousands of people are

crammed into small tents and houses, forced to live together on small amounts of food and water. Can you imagine sharing a bathroom with fifty or more people, bathing in the streets with a cold water hose through summer and winter weather? The whole time armed soldiers are watching over you like hawks with a look of disgust and hatred in their eyes.

We were caged like animals in a wire-fenced prison, not allowed to leave. It sounds more like a concentration camp than a refugee camp, but you won't hear that on the news. Every day you hear the screams of those who have lost their minds, along with everything else, and attempt to take their lives, hanging themselves on home-made nooses or burning themselves alive. Here in our hell, the days go by for a year or maybe more; some get out, and some don't. Luckily for me, I did.

After the camp, the war refugee moves on to his new life in a new land, a new land where he is despised and looked down upon. For children, they are isolated in the schools by others because they are different and new, teased by the other children for not knowing the language, for not being like them. A refugee child doesn't know what it's like to be a child, how to be like them, how to play outside, how to joke, or how to feel safe. A refugee child loses all sense of innocence and has grown up in an environment of hate and terror with images of mutilated bodies and death forever imprinted in the brain. A refugee child's only sense of reality is that of horror and affliction.

For the adults, work is hard to come by. Life is new and shocking having to raise a family in a strange new world, alone, not knowing the language and customs. But soon the refugee learns to adapt, as always, and the new way of life becomes the only way of life. The language is learned, and a job is found. The child grows and makes friends, acting more and more like them every day in order

to be like them, to be accepted, but always in the back of his mind knowing that he will always be an outcast, that he will always be different.

How can you ever be the same as someone who can never imagine the life you've lived? How can you ever be the same as someone who thinks that nightmares only live in dreams, someone that eats four to five times a day, someone who has no idea of what life and death really are? Being a war refugee means to be strong, to have lived through agony, anguish, anxiety, bitterness, distress, grief, heartache, hurt, misery, sadness, shock, suffering, and torment, and to have overcome all that. We know what love is and what is truly important in life. We know that life is precious and should be cherished, not wasted on trivial matters that seem to consume everything in this day and age.

In the end, life goes on and being a war refugee is just a memory that stays in the back of the mind. It's a memory that no one likes to talk about because of the pain it brings. It's a pain that stabs like a knife and brings tears to the eyes. It's a pain that no one but a war refugee knows, a pain that you can never imagine and can never feel.



Jennifer McGroarty

The Beat

Mike Kinsella

I close my eyes
Like the cacophonous drone of a distant stereo
My heart's words echo throughout my vessels
So much to say
To keep me alive

Since when do crimson stains
evoke the thought of death?

Every word my heart speaks
Is immersed in the warm liquid of my veins
Every word spills blood
Into the channels of my chest

So at my heart's last words
It tells me of the day it first spoke

The opening of the brilliant wound
Bleeding ever since.



Chason Huggins

The Texan

Steven Vineis

The Texan jammed his thumb on the pull tab of the cigarette machine. It seemed to hurt worse than all the other shots he'd taken this evening. He pulled the pack from the drop drawer with a single fluid sweep of the hand, noticing a tiny splotch of red rising to the surface of his skin along his thumbnail. Somehow the sight of this is what sickened him most, never mind the open gash in his mouth, every swallow tasting of the iron, salt, piss, vinegar, and battery acid that made up his blood. He wiped some of the sweat from his brow and returned to his seat at the dark end of the bar, under a single dim 40-watt bulb.

He was still wearing his black and gold trunks and a sleeveless grey hooded sweatshirt, as if this night was just an extension of the rigorous training schedule he'd come to put himself through. The Fixer had picked this no-name dive for the payday, but he was late to arrive as always. The Texan always listened to the Fixer despite the brevity of their partnership.

The Texan looked around, passing the still unopened pack of Camel Filters between his hands. Left, then right, tap. Right, then left, two taps. Camier's was a place for the weak, the short; and the ones that had broken and agreed to shoulder the burden of the heavens to pay off a compounding debt to this Earth. It was dark and dank, but the Fixer always chose places like this. He and the Texan could speak freely amongst these men. The patrons had already soured of good, tired of evil. They'd been pissing in the sink for a long time.

But even the most far-gone and lonesome of the bunch could feel the tinge of heaviness in the air that the Texan brought with him. His body was muscular yet slightly emaciated, and his features exaggerated by years of swells, bumps, bruises, cuts, knocks, breaks, shatters, tears, scars, and welts. To-

night was a ninth-round K.O. drop, and the ringing of the final bell still reverberated between the walls of his nearly empty skull. The Texan had only one of two thoughts at any given moment and never at the same time, nor one rapidly succeeded by the other. The scrambling photographers shook up these thoughts further with their hot flashbulbs that stuck to and burned the skin. Their size-12 leather boots indenting the flesh and scraping muscle from bone as they clamored for that heroic shot of the winner, a local kid younger than the Texan with charisma and charm.

He recalled the winner being raised onto someone's shoulder, the angle of his head and the crook of his smile paralyzing the daily terrors in the crowd's hearts and bringing a win to the home team in the lonesome schoolyard of men's souls. The Texan just had water splashed on his face that he was certain came from the spit-bucket.

The Texan finally peeled the cellophane off the pack and stuck the end of a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. He nibbled the filter as he struggled with his shaking hands in an attempt to light a match. His fingers were shivering, and his palms soaked the cheap matchbook with sweat and the stink of old. Behind him, the 40-watt bulb finally burned out for good, which attracted the bartender's attention for the first time all evening towards the Texan.

He walked heavily; the sounds of his steps creeping closer could've frightened a deaf man, but the Texan was dead to the world. His brain had focused all its meager attention on the lighting of that cigarette; the tobacco smoke, he hoped, would tease him with periodic relief. The bartender extended a gold Zippo already lit. With his opposite hand, he slid a drink underneath the Texan's clasped fingers.

"On the house. You want that bulb fixed? You got no light now."

The Texan could only muster the tiniest shake of the head, but it was enough to satisfy the bartender's inquiry. The

Texan took a heavy belt as the alcohol soaked and massaged the tissue of his throat, chest, and finally settled in the stomach. He felt the need to praise the human race on only one occasion—always after the first belt of a strong scotch. The door opened. Not the Fixer. The Texan took another belt, draining the glass, and then slammed it down on the bar with authority.

He was hoping the bartender would pity him a second time, or else he'd have to wait for the Fixer and his money before he could get another drink. The bartender was a unique character with a soul too tough for the world but too soft for hell. He was a ghost in a private purgatory reserved for one. But he did, in fact, pity this redneck whom he'd never seen before, so he returned to his place at the bar with a bottle of even better scotch than the first handout of the evening.

The Texan nodded once again, sucked the glass dry, gently placing it on the bar this time. His eyes burned. The fear was growing. The childlike fright of his new surroundings caressed him as he pictured his wife in a small ranch-style home watching a Denton sunset. He imagined a baby that wasn't his kicking in her belly. There were pictures of her and some new fellow, a fancy white-collar Dan or some management-level Mexican, a '95 Mercedes Benz in the driveway, summer heat, and the peace of Southern Comfort on ice enjoyed under a canopy of ferns.

He was jerked out of this wide awake nightmare by the arrival of the Fixer. His awkward, shuffling gait was the only clue to his identity as he emerged from the shadows at the far end of the bar. He was dressed in a long, black coat and a derby that mystified his appearance. The Texan caught a glimpse of a wide smile on his face exposing yellowed chipped teeth, each stinking and individually laughing at him. Every time he met with the Fixer, the Texan needed a shower and a spray of pine cologne to get the stench of the Newark twilight out of his nostrils. The Fixer patted the bar twice with an open

palm and gestured with two outstretched fingers towards the bartender. As he turned his back to fetch a set of shot glasses, the Fixer slid a manila envelope towards the Texan. Eight one-hundred dollar bills were in plain sight.

“You were beautiful tonight. Absolutely beautiful. You’re my bruised goose, babe. Just keep laying them eggs. Sorry it was in the ninth tonight, kind of a long way to go with a Joe like that. Rest up for a week, and get a doctor to give you an up and down real good. We got another one of those guineas coming down from Queens in a coupla’ weeks, and I don’t need you gettin’ crippled.”

The Fixer continued talking, but the Texan just looked down at his glass, stroking the corners of the stained bills. His childhood dream of being somebody—that championship belt around the waist and that name up in lights—now reduced to a month’s rent and some food for a week while he watched his rating dwindle. That long drive from Texas solo in a Pontiac LeMans, turning his wedding band around and around and around and around on his finger before he gave up and pawned it outside of Baltimore.

The Fixer had done as he had promised when they had first met: he got the bouts, he did the deals, he nailed the bets, and then he paid the Texan. If anyone found out they were fixing every match that the “the bum tan from Southern sun” (as the local paper dubbed him) fought, they’d be worse off than dead for sure. It didn’t matter to either of them, especially not tonight. Never tonight.

The Texan abruptly excused himself once he polished off the contents of the tumbler. He bee-lined directly to the single-person bathroom, every step sloshing the liquid around in his stomach and daring it to rise. The tile was cold to his naked knees as he vomited in the toilet, and his hands clenched with a white-knuckle grip around the handicap bars on both sides of the bowl. He felt his forehead touch the surface of the water, and he didn’t even care. He rose, the blood rushing to

his head, clouding his vision and dizzying his eyes even further.

As he hunched over the sink, he at last caught a glimpse of an old man, a stranger, in the mirror. There was surprise at first, then an odd, hollow peace. Tears came to his eyes. The spark died without objection. No more fires. Just cold. A Texas horizon's worth of brittle, frozen soil. He leaned in closer towards the mirror and the stranger. The Texan's jaw locked forever in horror as he realized the reflection was his own.



Rena Powell McQueen

Black Woman's Song

Candace Roberts

I've been lied to, hurt and betrayed.
My heart's been broken and my ancestors were slaves.
I've worked two jobs to make ends meet.
I've worked hard to keep shoes on my kid's feet.
I've ironed, I've sewed, I've cooked, and I've cleaned.
My own kids have even called me mean.
I've had my share of tears and hurt.
At times I've felt worthless, like dirt.
I've been depressed, I've made mistakes, I've gone to church.
I've eaten Grandma's delicious cakes.
I've taken care of Momma. I've been in fights.
I've fallen to my knees every night.
I've been embarrassed and I've been sad.
I've had one bad friend, two bad friends, too many.
Ungrateful men, well, I've had plenty.
The joy, the pain, the happiness, the sorrow!
I've had my days of not wanting to live to see tomorrow.
Battles, I've lost many, but come back strong.
I've had those days that were cold and long.
This is every black woman's song.



Joshua Everett



Bob Brennan

The Gift

Stacy Hawkins

Between the raising of four children, working a full time job, and being a mother, Kylee Pierce barely had time for a potty break, more or less time to think, and today was no different. “Mommie, mommie,” the twins yelled from upstairs in angst as they had their usual fight about who was the oldest. “Get down here now and get into the van. We’re already running late,” Kylee shouted while tripping and snagging her last pair of stockings on the coffee table. Whatever happened to the days when people kidnapped your kids from the bed in the middle of the night? she thought.

This morning was definitely off to a great start. In the fifteen minute drive to the two schools, the kids had managed to get rid of her last bit of sanity. By the seventh encore of “The Wheels on the Bus,” Kylee was ready to find the bus, slit the tires, and break the windshield wipers in half. As a matter of fact, she would have done it if she wasn’t so nauseated from the smell of last week’s spoiling milk coming from the back seat.

Finally settling down in her office, she had a moment to take off her ripped stockings. Just as she hiked her skirt above her waist to remove the nylons, her boss walked in. Kylee rushed to pull her knit skirt back over her thighs, slightly catching the flustered look on Mr. Johnson’s face. She thought, Him embarrassed, right? This was probably the most action this pot-bellied man had gotten in years.

“What can I do for you?” she asked half enthusiastically, half sarcastically.

“Here’s the McNeil file. I’ll need it finished by lunch time.”

“OK, I’m on it,” she replied, wanting to shake him into reality. “I’ll just go into my magic box under my desk and take care of this, and while I’m at it I’ll get the recipe to remove

this spare tire from around my waist,” she mumbled to herself.

Just as lunch approached, it hit Kylee that she’d forgotten to turn her cell phone on. Rushing to her tote, grabbing her Blackberry, and turning it on, she was certain there would be a message from the local middle school stating her oldest son once again was interrupting the class by way of gas. Instead, it was her husband Jack calling from his business trip in Florida. She couldn’t wait for him to return home. After fifteen years, he was still the love of her life. They’d shared their PB&J sandwiches the first day of elementary school and had been inseparable ever since. Though a job in himself, he was a bit of a safe haven at the end of a hectic day. At first there was just silence. Then Jack spoke, “Honey, I don’t know how to tell you, this but I’m leaving you.” And with that, the call ended.

Kylee stopped breathing as the phone dropped from her frozen hands. She snapped out of her coma-like state and picked the phone up off the floor. She must have heard him wrong. Surely he hadn’t said that he was leaving her. She played the message again and listened closely. Yep, the same thing as before. She quickly dialed his cell number; it went straight to his voicemail. Kylee hung up and tried again and again, but she got the same thing as before.

She threw the phone against the office wall. Immediately, she dialed her mother’s number from her office line.

“Hello,” her father said as he answered the phone.

“Hi Daddy, where’s mom?”

“She just left with Mrs. Price from across the street to go shopping.”

“Alright Daddy, I’ll catch up with her later.”

“What’s wrong?” her father asked, sensing the urgency in her voice.

“Everything’s fine, Daddy,” she replied as she hung up the phone. The cavemen from the Gieco commercials even had cell phones now and her mother didn’t, she thought, frus-

trated.

She next dialed her second lifeline, her best friend Jill who picked up on the third ring. “Jill, I’m so glad I got you. You’ll never believe the message I just got off of my phone.”

“I told you to take that child to the doctor. He may actually have a problem,” Jill interjected. “Anyway, I’ll have to give you a ring later. I have a client in five minutes.” And with that, she hung up.

Kylee sat with her mouth open for a few seconds. She couldn’t believe her so-called best friend. After all the long, drawn-out conversations she’d had to sit through about the losers Jill dated and why she couldn’t stop dating them, Jill couldn’t give her two minutes of her precious time in the middle of her crisis.

After sitting in silence for the next thirty minutes, Kylee decided she wouldn’t sit by and be a victim. If Jack wanted to leave her, he’d leave with nothing. He and his little barber better like bologna. She cleared her schedule for the rest of the day, hopped in her van, and left. Heading down Market Street towards their bank, she couldn’t believe her eyes. It was Jack a few cars in front of her. She put the pedal to the metal, and after almost running a old man into a ditch and forcing a homeless man to abandon his cart of cans in the street, she was close enough to tail him.

Riding about twenty minutes out of the city, they finally ended up at a jewelry store. She felt as though she was trapped in the middle of a Lifetime movie special. Parking in a nearby alley, she quietly stepped out of the van and right into a pile of animal poop. Tiptoeing around to the side of the building, she ducked down into some bushes to hide while catching the action. In doing so, her skirt ripped, making her split six inches higher. She peeked inside as Jack stood at the counter making his purchase. The clerk handed Jack a ring box.

He was going to propose to Miffy, the name she’d given her husband’s new lover. She was also a 21-year-old blonde

cheerleader who did splits on the drop of a dime. Racing back to the van, the following two steps of grief hit fast: bargaining and acceptance. Maybe she could save her marriage. She could change; she could be blonde, lose about 20 pounds, and learn to do splits. Well maybe five pounds and make those splits cartwheels; however, she could definitely go blonde. Who was she kidding? Jack no longer loved her. It was over. She was pathetic. She at least wanted to see who she was losing to, hoping that this next stop would be her.

It appeared she would get her wish as they pulled into a well-to-do neighborhood. Surely Miffy couldn't afford to live here alone. She must still be living with her parents. Jack got out of his BMW and ran up the stairs of the beautiful white house. The entire scene was sickening, but Kylee was determined to see who this was. She figured she'd work her way to a window through some of the neighbors' back yards. Peeking from behind a tree, she was ready for her next move. Just as she attempted to step out, she got a tap on her shoulder. Turning around to see who it was, there was an old lady wielding pepper spray.

"Get away from here you scarlet, you Jezebel. We don't like your kind around here."

Stumbling back to her van, she reached behind her seat and grabbed two bottles of water to flush out her eyes. She was done. If Jack wanted to leave her, he could. Picking the leaves from her hair, she tried to get herself together before picking up the kids. Gathering them together and heading home, Kylee realized she needed a plan for the rest of their lives.

Reaching the front yard, she was shocked to see Jack carrying his luggage to his car. She became enraged. "Children go upstairs to your bedrooms and get your homework done." As they got inside, Jack came out with what appeared to be the last of his things. She sprinted from the van ready to pounce as Jack stood looking shocked.

“Honey, what happened to you? Were you attacked in the city?”

“Don’t give me that!” she shouted. “How could you?” she screamed, as she fell to her knees in the middle of the front yard. Jack rushed over to help her up. “Don’t you touch me, you liar!”

“Honey, let’s go inside and talk,” he replied. As they turned to go inside, Kylee noticed many familiar faces: her mother and father, Jill, Tammy, Mark, Cody, Leah, and many others. Stepping inside the door, she whispered, “What’s going on here?” Just past the clearing of the guests was a banner that read Happy Birthday. In all the chaos, she’d forgotten that the following day was her birthday.

Kylee was embarrassed as she stood in front of all her friends looking like a prostitute and smelling like poop. “Let’s go get cleaned up,” Jack said.

“But what was your message earlier all about?” she asked.

“Oh that. I’d just gotten out of a meeting with my boss, and he informed me that my trip to Hawaii was going to be all business, so I’d called to let you know that I’d be leaving you behind instead of our original plans. My phone went dead mid-sentence, and I was already on the highway coming home to set up for things. I decided I’d try to make it up to you with a little weekend vacation.”

“That’s what the luggage was about?” Kylee sighed with relief. “What about the jewelry store?”

“It was supposed to be a surprise but here,” he presented the box from earlier. “You’ve been on this Earth for 40 years, and I was hoping you’d spend the next 40 or more with me. I love you with all my heart. Will you marry me again?”

Kylee began to cry as Jack slipped the ring on her finger, “And there’s no Miffy?”

“What?” Jack asked confused.

“Nothing, honey,” she said. “What a great gift!”



Alexandra Morse

Haiku

Jason Jennette

Your smile haunts my dreams:
Pearls in a ripe red ocean.
Why can't it be mine?



Joe Heiderschett

Daddy, I Want To Walk With You

Green Lee Meadows III

That afternoon, outside of the courthouse, holding my daughter with her trembling arms tightly around my neck, she pleaded with me. "Daddy, please don't let Mommy take me," she sobbed.

Unexpectedly, Jessica's mother walked up and snatched her from my arms. "You will never see your daughter again or ever have a life!" she shouted. She abruptly turned away, walked to her car laughing, and put Jessica in the back of the car.

Then, she slammed the door shut and garbled, "You don't have a clue, do you?" She got in her car and rolled her window down. "You're a stupid, worthless man! Your family does not even want you. Matter of fact, they are my family now! You are so stupid that you never saw me setting you up. You are a fool! You know that?" she insisted.

"Why are you doing all of this?" I muttered.

"Because I can, and you can't stop me!" she proclaimed.

Reaching her arms toward me from the car window, Jessica begged, "Daddy, please don't let Mommy take me, please Daddy."

"Shut up, you little shit!" her mother harshly commanded. She started the car and drove off while laughing. I stood there on the edge of the curb helpless. I could see Jessica in the back of the car pleading with her mother. "I want my Daddy!" she cried.

The car turned the corner and disappeared. Motionless, I stood there staring down the street. I wiped the tears from my eyes and whispered to myself, "One day, I will bring you home, Jessica. I promise."

For two years, I moved from motels to apartments trying to avoid my ex-wife's senseless assaults against me.

She knew if she could get me in trouble that I would never be able to get Jessica back. She used everything at her disposal to try to get me in trouble. She was out to make my life miserable. She would show up unexpectedly, regardless of where I was, and call false accusations on me to the police. Nevertheless, she failed each time. I tried to hide where I lived, but she always managed to find me. Patiently, I hid and waited.

Slowly, the promise I made Jessica that day outside of the courthouse was becoming a reality. I started to put my life back together. I gave Jessica's mother the illusion that I was helpless, stupid, penniless, and clueless. Without her knowledge, I was taking my life back. I secretly assembled my army, and I took back my family, friends, and job. Her walls of lies and deceptions were crumbling, without her having a clue that the mortar between the joints in the walls was turning to dust.

In her underworld of lies and deceptions, my brother Joe was my secret spy. Even though her deceptions won him over at first too, he quickly realized the game she was playing with him and everyone else. For two years, he pretended to be her best friend. They would go everywhere together. He would record her when she told him about her plans to try to get me in trouble. She would even invite him along, and he gladly went. He told her they should videotape everything, so they could sit around later and watch it. She thought that was a great idea. He became her personal photographer, and she loved having her picture taken. For two years, he videotaped, took pictures, and made notes of everything she did. Her every movement had been completely documented.

I hired a lawyer even though everyone told me, including my lawyer, that I had a slim chance of winning. I refused to listen. While sitting in my lawyer's office, I explained to him that I had prepared for the case during the

past two years, and I mainly needed him to be my voice in court. He seemed shocked by the eight boxes of evidence I had collected. He agreed to take my case, and one week later without warning she received her summons to court.

That night, my phone rang. “You are a foolish and stupid man! You are going to look like a fool standing there all alone as you did before!” she yelled into the phone.

I hung the phone up. I was ready.

My lawyer and I walked into the courtroom that Monday morning on the first day of court. To the right of us, she sat with her lawyer, and directly behind them was her new husband and their two friends. She looked over at me and started laughing. “I see you have a lawyer this time. I am shocked! I don't see anyone else behind you in all those empty chairs,” she said.

I looked over at her and glanced to the back of the courtroom to see my first witness coming through the door. Within an hour, all of my forty-eight witnesses entered the courtroom, and many had to stand outside in the lobby. I glanced over at her. For the first time, she looked worried. I noticed the sweat running down the side of her face. Her lawyer seemed confused and questioned her.

A few minutes later, my brother entered the courtroom and walked toward us. She looked around and smiled. “Hey Joe, glad you could make it,” she said. Her mouth fell to the ground, and her eyes went into shock when he turned and sat behind me. “What the hell are you doing, Joe?” she screamed. Joe looked at her with hatred in his eyes. “I thought we were friends,” she said.

“Friends? You’re foolish to think I ever was your friend,” Joe said.

“Why?” she asked.

“For no reason, you have done nothing but hurt Lee and Jessica. Today, people will find out how terrible of a person you are and who you are,” he said.

“Do you believe that Mr. Meadows is a bad father? All of your false accusations against him we have proven wrong this week. Are you going to continue to sit there and deny the truth to this court? Are you?” my lawyer yelled.

She sat there in the witness stand with a cold look of a woman that had been battered all week. Her husband and friends had abandoned her. She stood alone against our ruthless attacks for the truth. It was two o'clock in the afternoon that Friday.

“Once again, I am going to ask you! Is he a bad father?” my lawyer yelled in frustration.

Finally, the walls of her lies and deceptions came crashing down to the ground. She lowered her head and started to cry. “No, he's not a bad father. Matter of fact, Lee is a good father, and he loves Jessica,” she cried.

“Then why do you accuse him of all these false accusations?” he asked.

“I am jealous,” she replied.

“Jealous of what?” my lawyer yelled.

“Jealous of the fact he might love her more than me,” she said.

My lawyer looked over at the judge in disbelief of what he had just heard. He turned and walked over to me to ask what to do next.

“We have the answer that we have been looking for all week; it's time to end this,” I said.

He looked at the judge and said, “Honor, we rest our case.”

I knew it was over at that moment. The woman I once loved appeared for a brief moment to tell the truth. As soon as she heard we rested our case, she screamed, “I lied! He is the worst father in the world! There is something wrong with him!”

“Silent!” the judge ordered.

Her lawyer stood up. “Honor, we also rest our case!”

he said. He looked over at me and whispered, "I'm sorry."

The judge entered the courtroom and sat in his chair. He leaned back in his chair and stared directly at me. Without warning, he told me to stand up and face the court. Trembling, I slowly rose from my chair and stood before my family and friends as I waited for his decision. The courtroom was mute, but I could hear a siren from a fire truck racing by outside of the courthouse. Motionless, I stood there, and his decision finally came.

He pronounced, "This court awards full custody of Jessica to her father."

Before he could finish speaking, the courtroom erupted in cheers and laughter. Suddenly, I felt a hand from behind me take my shoulder, and a whisper came within my ear. "You have done what most fathers never would have done. You are a good father, and one day Jessica will thank you."

That whisper came from my mother as she proudly put her arm around my father. My hands touched the wooden table in front of me, and I looked up at the ceiling. The weeklong battle was over; finally, my daughter was safe.

The sun was setting on the horizon, and a storm was approaching from the north. I stood at the ocean edge with my hands in my pockets. Seagulls hovered above me speaking words in some strange foreign tongue I did not comprehend. I closed my eyes and reminisced about the events that took place that day in court.

I opened my eyes and unhurriedly turned my head to discover Jessica standing over a ghost crab with enthusiasm and pointing down at him. The ghost crab stepped backward with caution in a defensive posture as if he had expectations of a scuffle for his own existence. "Look Daddy, a ghost crab," she yelled out.

I smiled as tears filled my eyes. I glanced at my little girl and started walking down the beach as I tried to conceal my tears.

The rain stopped, and the stars flickered within the night sky. I slipped my fingers into my pockets and continued walking. Suddenly, I felt something behind me tug on my pants. Looking back, I found an adoring gaze of a small child. I reached down, picked her up, and looked into her eyes. She tilted her head to the left, and in a tender voice she whispered, "I love you, Daddy." When I put her down, she placed her small hand in mine and murmured, "Daddy, I want to walk with you."

My daughter and I strolled along with her tiny hand folded in mine, and a sudden rush of contentment washed over me. I smiled and looked out over the moonlit horizon and realized, finally, that I would never change the past to replace what I had at that moment, not now, not ever.

Today, I sit on the steps of my house reading a book while enjoying a glass of wine. Unexpectedly, I feel a hand touch my shoulder. I turn my head to see my daughter who is now a beautiful, young woman. She sits down and places her glass of wine beside her. She puts her arm around me and leans her head against my shoulder. The air is tranquil, and there is a fragrance of the sea floating within the air around us.

"Daddy, I love you," she whispers.

"I know you do, sweetheart. I love you, too," I say.

With a guilty look, she softly says, "Daddy, I know I have never told you, but I want to thank you for fighting for me when I was a little girl."

I smile and reply, "You will always be my little girl."

When she starts to cry, I gently wipe the tears away from her cheeks and pull her close. I ask, "What's wrong, sweetheart?" With a disheartened expression on her face,

I notice there was something more specific she wants to tell me.

“Daddy, you tried to tell me years ago that I would find out when I became a mother. You said, one day you will wear the very shoes I wear now and will find it is a hard road to walk alone. Daddy, I wish I had listened to you. It has been a year since he left us. It has been hard, Daddy. I'm scared and feel so alone,” she cries, and then begins to tremble.

I feel the deep pain and fear in my daughter. I gently lift her head, look into her weeping eyes, and whisper, “Jessica, you have never been alone. I have always been right here. You have nothing to fear. As a little girl, you took my hand on the beach years ago, and now I will take your hand. We will walk together regardless where this path may lead us.”

“Daddy, it's getting late, and I need to get home,” she says and gives me a hug and a small kiss on my cheek. She gets up and walks to her car. She turns her head toward me while she brushes back her silky, long blonde hair. Her lips sparkle in the moonlight and with a soft voice she says, “Daddy, I want to walk with you.”



Kaylla McCullough

DMV
Rachel Kaiser

The room was ordinary. It was small and gray with chairs along the side and middle. Most of these chairs were occupied by a very odd variety of people. In fact, the only thing they all had in common was the look of downright annoyance that sat on their faces. This had to do with the blinking red letters that hung above the double doors to the DMV offices. Right now, they had the numbers 149, 150, and 151 flashing from their spot on the wall.

A voice from a very angry man came from one of the corners. "You have got to be kidding me. Those numbers have been blinking for an hour. This is ridiculous!"

Those were the first things Matt saw and heard when he walked back into the sitting area. The man who had spoken was short and round and looked so angry Matt thought he might roll off his chair.

"What number are you, honey?" his fiancé Kate asked while bouncing their son Jordan on her thighs.

"164."

Matt sunk back into his seat. He had forgotten how much he hated the DMV.

Someone new walked through the entrance of the sitting area and went to get her number from the workers at the DMV office. She was rather tall, very skinny, and wore clothes that looked so tight Matt wondered if she could breathe. She stormed right back into the lobby looking more heated than the little round man.

"Where is everybody!" she demanded from the quiet waiting room.

Everyone was staring at her with such a confused look that Matt had to smile. It was very clear that no one had a clue what she was talking about, especially considering that the waiting room was quite full of people.

“Well, do any of you know?” she said, exasperated.

“Um well, it appears to me that everyone is sitting right here,” Matt replied with a grin. Jordan started laughing, and this made him feel like a real comedian, even if the baby had no idea what Matt was saying.

An old married couple sitting across from Matt and Kate started laughing, too. The man leaned over to his wife and whispered loud enough that Matt could hear, “That’s a funny one over there, Ester! It is so refreshing seeing young people so patient and witty in places that are so dull.”

“Shhhh David! You are being very loud, dear,” Ester replied, but she gave Matt a weak smile.

By this point, Matt had forgotten about the girl he was speaking to in the first place. She was looking at him, and he couldn’t help but notice that she was breathing heavily. He wondered whether it was because she was angry or her clothes were causing her to suffocate.

“I am not stupid. There is no one in there.” She pointed to the door where the DMV offices were located behind.

At this statement, the round man stood up and went to the doors to peer through the tiny windows to see what this girl was talking about.

“You have got to be kidding me. You have got to be kidding me! People have better things to do than just sit around the DMV all day. Are they all on their lunch breaks at the same time or something? You have got to be kidding me!”

Matt could feel Kate’s body next to him become tense. He was sure it was because she was trying her hardest not to laugh. She always found people who lost control of their tempers, especially when the situation wasn’t that bad, very amusing.

“I don’t think she’s kidding,” Matt said smiling. He knew before he said it that it was probably not a good idea, but he had said “you have got to be kidding me” so many times Matt couldn’t resist the retort.

He didn't know whether the man heard him or not. If he did, he did a great job of pretending that Matt had never spoken and kept muttering "you have got be kidding me" under his breath every few minutes while sitting back down on his chair.

However, the tight-clothed girl whipped out her cell phone, gave Matt an evil look, and stormed out the front doors of the DMV. He heard her muttering before she left, "Oh my God, girl, you will not believe the kind of people that were at the DMV. It's whatever, but I was pissed!"

"I wonder why she wasn't enjoying herself. I for one am having a great time!" Matt thought that only his fiancé and Jordan would laugh at this, but the whole waiting room found it amusing.

Twenty more minutes passed by, but it felt like two hours to Matt. The DMV has to be the most boring place on earth.

The red lights started blinking the new numbers of 150, 151, and 152.

"Yes!"

The little round man, who Matt overheard introduce himself as Arnold to the girl sitting next to him, stood up quickly, and ran for the doors leading to the DMV offices. He looked like a very determined bowling ball rolling to knock down his pins.

Kate started laughing, and Matt joined her. She was bouncing Jordan on her knees and cooing at him. Matt couldn't believe how big he was.

"Are you flirting with the pretty girl back there? Are you?" Kate was talking in that annoying baby voice to Jordan. This bothered Matt tremendously. Jordan was going to be a man and didn't need that sissy, girly voice.

Matt turned to look and see who his little boy was charming, and he saw a very pretty girl sitting in the corner smiling at his son. She had dark brown hair, green eyes, and a very pretty smile. She reminded him so much of a girl he dated

in high school.

“Kate,” Matt turned back around to face his fiancé, “do you know who she looks like? Sarah! That chick I dated in high school for a while. Do you remember her?”

Kate’s smile quickly fell, and she looked rather grim. Matt couldn’t figure out what triggered the mood swing, but frowning did not compliment her.

Matt’s attention was quickly taken away from Kate and back to the old married couple who had spoken to him before. The man was yelling “what?” at his wife. It wasn’t in a mean way but more like he needed a hearing aid.

“David,” Ester said with annoyance in her tone, “what is your number?”

“My what?”

“Your number.”

“My mother? What about her?”

“Your number!”

“Oh, my number! Why didn’t you just say so?”

Ester gave Matt a look of frustration, but there was laughter in her eyes. Matt smiled at them. He could see Kate and himself turning out just like them.

“My number is 162,” David replied to his wife.

“Really? I am 164,” Matt said while looking around the room. “Who is 163?”

“I am,” came a girl’s voice from the corner. Matt looked and saw that it was the same girl that Jordan had been flirting with. She was sitting in between a very old woman who Matt was sure was asleep and a young black man who was texting on his phone. She looked funny placed between them.

“Cool,” Matt replied with a smile. He felt Kate tense again but couldn’t figure out what was funny this time.

“I guess,” she said quizzically, but she smiled back. “What’s his name?”

“Jordan,” Matt said. “And I think he likes you. He is such a charmer, isn’t he?”

“Oh yeah. Not to mention he’s the cutest baby I have ever seen!”

“Thanks,” Matt replied. He got that a lot about his son. He turned and smiled at his fiancé, but she didn’t return it.

“Doesn’t he remind you of Caleb?” Ester said suddenly. She was looking at Jordan with a huge grin on her face. He didn’t know smiles could stretch that long.

“Well, Caleb had different colored hair,” replied David as he took his glasses off and started to clean them with his shirt.

“I swear you are the most oblivious man I have ever met! Caleb’s hair was brown.”

“Really? I could’ve sworn that Caleb had red hair as a baby.”

“No, David. That was Molly.” Ester rolled her eyes in frustration again. She turned her attention away from her husband and faced Matt. “You see Caleb was our son, and your little boy reminds me of him.”

Ester and David then started sharing stories with Matt and his fiancé about their kids, especially Caleb. They both laughed at their stories and then started sharing some of their own. Jordan just bounced on his mother’s knees giggling away.

All five of them were laughing at a particularly funny story when all of sudden Arnold came bursting back into the waiting room, tripped over an empty chair, and stormed through the front doors just like the tight-clothed girl. At this, the whole waiting room laughed hysterically. Apparently, everyone thought he resembled a bowling ball.

After that, Matt just remembered the blinking lights again, and when he looked up, he saw the numbers 160, 161, and 162.

“David! They called your number!”

“Well, there goes our entertainment!” Matt was not happy that he was going to be bored again.

“Oh, we’ll see you in a little bit,” Ester said while walk-

ing through the door.

“See ya,” he replied. The waiting room got considerably quieter. Matt thought he heard a clock ticking or maybe a heart beating. He wasn’t entirely sure, but it was annoying none the less. He got up and looked through the window and noticed that the DMV personnel were back from their lunch breaks. Ester and her husband were sitting at a booth discussing something with the worker. He was so distracted he didn’t notice the pretty girl tap him on the shoulder at first.

“Can I get through? They just called my number.”

“Oh yeah, of course.” He moved out of the way and smiled at her. She gave a huge smile back and laughed a little. Matt turned and saw his fiancé looking fiercer than ever.

He began to sit back down next to Kate, but before his bottom could touch the seat, his number started blinking. Matt jumped up, tried giving his fiancé a high five (which she ignored), tickled Jordan, and yelled, “See you suckers later!” to the waiting room. Everyone laughed as he walked through the double doors to the DMV offices.

It was a lot quieter in the offices than it was in the waiting area. There were three booths against the right wall, waiting seats at the back, and a picture taking station at the front, left corner. The walls were a blue-gray color, and Matt decided that this was the most boring room he had ever seen.

He saw Ester and David sitting at the picture-taking station, and he waved. They both waved back and smiled. He walked over to sit at an available booth, and it happened to be next to the very pretty girl who smiled at him when he sat down.

The worker that Matt had chosen was a short, black man, who had a front tooth missing. He looked almost as grumpy as Kate was.

“What are you here for, sir?”

“I’m here to get a license.” Matt gave him a half smile, which he did not return.

“All right. I’m going to need you to fill out these forms for me.”

For the next twenty minutes or so, Matt filled out forms, took a signs and vision test, and paid the \$32.50 it costs for a license that probably takes \$5.00 to make. He gave Matt a piece of paper to give to the DMV worker at the picture booth and got up to sit next to Ester. She was sitting alone while her husband got his picture taken.

“He is going to be so upset with his picture,” she said after they had said hello to each other. “Every time we come here he wants to go back and get it re-done. He doesn’t understand that these pictures were meant to be bad. He can be such a woman.”

Matt laughed. He could hear David saying, “You took it already? But I wasn’t ready!”

David joined them while he waited to get the license back mumbling under his breath, “That is going to be such a bad shot. I wasn’t even smiling.”

“Anyways,” Ester said, ignoring her husband. “What are you here for?”

“Getting a license again,” Matt said casually. “I got my license for the first time when I was sixteen which was twelve years ago. Now, don’t get me wrong, I have driven for all twelve of those years. But I have only had a license for about...,” he looked up at the ceiling pretending to count, “...three years.” Kate would not have approved of Matt saying that. She always said that he would say anything for a laugh, no matter how it made him look.

Ester and David both laughed heartily, and, to his surprise, a new laugh had been thrown in the mix. He looked to his left and saw the pretty girl sitting next to him holding a similar piece of paper.

Matt smiled at her and then turned to face the photo desk to continue his story to all three. “I would’ve been fine not getting a license again, but my fiancé wants me to be all

responsible now. Like that's important." Matt rolled his eyes in a mock sort of way. He really hoped they knew he was kidding. Since they laughed, he assumed they did.

"By the way," started the pretty girl. "You have the cutest baby in the whole wide world."

"Thanks. We tried."

At this, she started laughing again. It was one of the oddest laughs he had ever heard. It was almost as if a giggle met a suffocating donkey. It was the funniest thing Matt had ever heard which made him laugh along with it. It was quite contagious.

"You're hilarious. My name's Elizabeth," she said holding out her hand for Matt to shake.

"Thank you. It comes naturally. And my name's Matt." He took her hand and gave it a shake. He thought to himself that Elizabeth was the most common name in the world and made a mental note that if he ever had a daughter, to not name her that.

She laughed at him again with that hilarious laugh of hers. Then all of a sudden, the picture person yelled, "David Cohen!"

"That's me," said David standing up to go get his license. He tapped Matt on the back on his way.

"It was very nice meeting you," Ester said to him while shaking his hand. "Good luck with your kid and your license. Kids like it when you have those, so they can use you as chauffeurs."

She followed her husband who said to her, "Do you see my eyes? Why didn't you tell me they were so small and squinty?"

"Oy Vey!" Ester turned back and rolled her eyes at Matt one last time before walking through the double doors. He was very sad to see them leave. He found their uncanny resemblance to Kate and himself oddly comforting.

"Matthew," called the picture taker.

“That’s me,” he said while he stood up. Elizabeth laughed.

He gave the paper to the picture man who looked like a white version of the worker he had had early.

Matt sat down, got his picture taken, and signed a piece of paper to put on the license. He made somewhat of a goofy smile on purpose because, as Ester said, everyone has bad pictures.

He went to sit back down and wait for his license to be ready when the man called Elizabeth’s name.

“I hate these things,” she said to him while walking to give the man her paper.

“You’ll be fine. Really, it’s only bad for the first few minutes until you get your license back. Then you realize you actually look worse then you thought you did!”

“Thanks,” she replied with sarcasm in her tone. However, she laughed, which was what he was hoping for. He couldn’t get over how hilarious it was!

Matt sat there alone while he waited for his name to be called. He let his thoughts drift to the Panther game this weekend that they were definitely going to lose. They had been such a letdown this year.

He didn’t even notice Elizabeth sit back down next to him. He was now thinking about converting to a Patriots fan because they could actually win. He was startled when he finally noticed she was back.

“How was it?” he asked casually.

“Terrible,” she replied.

“You know you look just like a girl I dated in high school.” Matt randomly stated this fact for no reason. “It’s actually really weird how much you two look alike.”

“Thanks?” she replied in that same puzzled voice she had used earlier before changing the subject. “How’s yours?”

“Let’s just say Abraham Lincoln looks better than me. You?”

“At least you don’t look like a deformed creep,” she replied with a laugh. She had a better laugh than anyone else he knew. It was so hilarious sounding and had a way of making you feel like the funniest person on earth. Making her laugh was like a reward. They headed to the double doors and pushed them open still laughing at each other’s pictures.

He was surprised to see Ester still there sitting next to his fiancé. David was standing by the door holding his license up to the light.

“Now really,” Matt heard Ester say. “You do realize you’re being absolutely ridiculous. You think that he is going to like a girl who he has known for less than two hours because she looks like a girl he dated in high school? Honestly?”

“I didn’t say that exactly,” Kate replied. They then noticed Matt and Elizabeth standing at the doors. Kate immediately looked down at Jordan, but Ester didn’t seem to care that they had overheard her.

“Well, I think you should get a grip,” Ester said while getting up. “It was nice meeting you both again.” She walked over to her husband, grabbed him by the elbow, and pulled him through the front door. David barely seemed to notice.

“Yeah, it was nice meeting you guys,” Elizabeth said. Matt looked at her and noticed she was blushing. He smiled at her and waved. She gave one last giggle before following Ester and David out the door.

He walked over to his fiancé, who was standing up and placing Jordan on her hip. At least he knew now why she was in such a bad mood. She really had no reason to be jealous. He loved her and Jordan more than anything and considered himself lucky to have her. Women. Matt mentally rolled his eyes.

I guess that’s just how women are, Matt thought. Always jealous. I for one know that I never get that way.

He tickled Jordan and kissed Kate. For the first time in awhile, she smiled at him. The three of them walked to the

front door where they had seen so many people walk through already.

“That was so weird,” Matt said to Kate once they were outside.

“Why?” she replied looking up at him with her huge brown eyes. “I thought it was pretty fun.” She paused and then added in an undertone, “Even though you were kind of flirting with that girl.”

Kate looked away, but Matt touched her chin and gently tilted it up to face him. “I love you. I was not flirting with anyone.” He thought of wise Ester, vain David, the tight-clothed girl, Arnold the bowling ball, and laughing Elizabeth. “And it was quite fun, and that’s why it was weird.”

Then, he leaned down and kissed her.



Jessi Hunt

Ode to Wine Drinkers

Adam Iannucci

wine glasses loosely gripped,
stories slip,
roll off the tips of lips
drunk. words. trip.
forever
slur together, however,
whenever our endeavor ends
depends, on our friend
Wine

crimson sin, sinful grins,
thoughts begin,
our bodies, pinned
yours and mine
like grape vines, entwined
Wine

thoughts fleeting,
sleep's greeting
seeps into me,
creeps, patiently,
and seems to deem
it's time for dreams.
time for yours,
time for mine,
our dreams align.
we are together
dreaming.
drinking.
Wine



Alyson-Elizabeth Atwill

Funerals are for the Living

Stacy Hawkins

I remember the first time I was introduced to what would soon become my step-great-grandmother. Who knew that shortly thereafter I would be calling her Grandma and loving her more than some of my biological family?

Grandma opened the door, and with a comforting voice said, “Y’all come on in.” Though having never laid my eyes upon her before this crisp afternoon, she seemed so unexplainably familiar.

The first thing that grabbed my attention was her smile; it was wide, reminding me of a child just discovering themselves in a mirror. Her dark pecan skin seemed so smooth, no indication of the 50 years she’d spent as cook at the local family restaurant. Grandma’s beautiful gray hair lay loosely in curls around her thinly framed face. Her eyes, which I’m sure were a tad more closed than her youthful days, were so filled with life.

As she backed away from the door, her thin, flowered housedress swayed behind her. “Y’all have a seat,” she said to my mother and me, motioning toward the couch. My step-father eased his way to the back of the house (I assumed to find the pot with the aroma that filled the house). My eyes wandered around the large, wooden-floored home. Antiques, pictures, and knick knacks were everywhere; these are the things that make a house a home. As the day went on, Mom and I began to loosen up.

Grandma made small talk; she told us stories and jokes and in the meantime offered us everything but the kitchen sink. Though I was genuinely enjoying the company, I was under the weather, and Grandma could tell. “Baby, come on back here and lay down,” she said as she led me to a large room with a large bed. That’s when I knew I’d love her always.

As the years changed, so did Grandma's situation. Our talks moved from the living room to the edge of her bed, yet the conversation was still the same. Slowly though, she answered the door less and less, and her head nodded more and more during our talks. Age was finally taking a toll, and Grandma had a mild stroke.

After this incident, her son in Raleigh, N.C., wanted her there with him for a while, so he and his large family could keep a close eye on her. Though I had long since left my mother's home, I was in the car with her making that two-hour trip. Grandma's eyes seemed a little less filled with life those days, but I just assumed it was her being in this new environment, and things would return back to normal when she returned home.

It didn't happen that way though. Not long before she was supposed to be going back home, she found out she no longer had one. Somehow Grandma's home of many decades had gone into foreclosure. Now, visiting her just a few blocks away from where she'd spent most of her life just wasn't the same. Her hair was now frazzled, and her housecoat hung discarded on one of the posts of her bed. Though Grandma tried to muster up some joy, I could tell her heart was broken. Little by little, she was slipping away.

Then I got the call. As my phone vibrated in my purse, I was concerned; however, when I dug it out and saw "Mommie" across the screen, that concern turned into sheer fear. I had just spoken with her before I entered class, and my education was more important to her than to me. When we finally talked, she said for me to meet her at her house. Every possible scenario went through my head on the way over; however, none of them were good. I entered the open door, and everyone was sitting around crying. It was at that instant I knew what it was, but I just needed to hear it.

"What's going on?" I shouted.

“Grandma’s dead,” my step-cousin blurted out.

I felt faint as I stumbled down into the den to cry alone.

My mother arrived shortly thereafter, and we all piled into the car on the way to Whiteville, N.C. to be with the family. On the way, my step-father received the news that they planned on cremating Grandma. He and I both became irate. Had someone completely lost his mind, I thought? They wanted to throw my Grandmother in the furnace like trash and turn her into ashes. No way, no how! She was too good for that! Cremating is what you do to people who don’t have families who love them, or to the bodies of the homeless found under bridges. No, Grandma deserved a proper burial.

After days of arguing and people spending money they didn’t have, it was finally settled. Grandma would be buried. I was so relieved to know Grandma would receive what she deserved.

Over the next few days, I found it so hard to grieve with so many things going on. Within a couple of hours of Grandma passing, she was already being referred to as the body. Before we could really come to terms with everything, the funeral home directors were pushing for the arrangements to be made within 24 hours. They acted with no compassion to the obvious grief on everyone’s faces.

At one point, the family demanded that another funeral home take charge of Grandma’s funeral. However, as the other business’s van pulled up, the directors ran outside and demanded that they leave. The body was theirs after all; they had taken chairs to the deceased’s home, they remarked. It would be over their dead body that this body was going anywhere.

A couple of nights later at a family meeting, a heated argument broke out. Only a few minutes later, a weapon was drawn. The fact that Grandma’s dress would be matching the stuffed bear she was being buried with had started this

all. Things were spiraling out of control fast.

The very night before the funeral, the unbelievable happened. After a day filled with drowning sorrows and frustrations in alcohol, things climaxed. One of Grandma's dearest family members got into a physical altercation right in the front yard where she'd taken her last breath. I hated to admit it, but I couldn't wait for the funeral to be over.

The service was beautiful as far as funerals went. It was more of a celebration than anything else. My Grandma had truly gone to a better place, and I had finally let myself rejoice in the fact she was no longer with me. After being on this earth for 93 years, she deserved the gift of heaven.

As we all stood around the gorgeous, gold trimmed, pink casket, I came to terms with the situation. So many emotions filled my body as death in its entirety finally became clear to me. As I stared at the closed casket, Grandma's face was still so visible to me. Her smile and her touch were forever engraved in my mind.

Tears swelled as I remembered the last talk we had. It wasn't about anything particular, but that didn't matter to me at all. I stepped forward and touched the casket as my heart wept, for the rest of me could do nothing. Memories of me screaming, "Tell Grandma I said I love her" across the room to whoever was speaking with her on the phone at that time ran through my mind.

Grandma was long gone. Though her physical form was before me, her soul had left days before. What we did with the remains didn't take away the smile she greeted us with the first day she met us, nor did it change the jokes and stories she'd told. All the meals that she'd served the hungry were still relevant, and all the kind words people used to describe her were still true.

No, this coffin, this plot, or this day didn't make Maggie Thompson any better. How could it when she was already so high? Funerals are for the living.



Katherine Little

Please, Pass the Rice

Lisa Maslak

While visiting rural China in 2006, I was invited to be a guest of honor at a dinner. There was not an opportunity to say no, just a moment to graciously accept the invitation. The last thing I wanted to do was to eat the food that I imagined they would serve. Suddenly, out of my mouth came the words: Dui, xie xie (yes, thank you, in Mandarin). It was at that moment I devised my strategy. I would practice what I preached to my children and employees. When in doubt, always return to good manners. By remaining open-minded and respecting the Chinese culture, I was presented with an immensely valuable experience.

When my son was born, a friend asked me what my hopes were for him. After some thought, I responded that I want him to have exceptional manners and everything else would fall into place. I believe that manners are a tool that can guide people through most experiences, especially if they are uncertain of the situation in which they find themselves.

Through a previous role as Cultural Diversity Manager at GE, I was aware of the level of pride that exists in Chinese culture. Image is everything for this five-thousand-year-old civilization that puts ultimate value on saving face. To turn down food or show dislike with emotion is of the highest insult. It is important for westerners to use as little emotion as possible when conversing, in order to save face. For one to be humiliated before a group or losing face in front of one's constituency is a fate worse than death in some cases. It is the responsibility of visiting foreigners to conduct themselves in a way that won't induce such shame.

Having the opportunity to put to use the lessons that I have taught businessmen and women was invaluable and more challenging than I thought possible. I recall reading the menu at my first dinner in China. I could not believe my eyes when

I noticed many items that I regarded as pets. If given a choice about the type of meal to have in Asia, and there probably is no choice, there would be two options. Ordering from the menu would give some control over the type of food to select, or choosing the buffet would give the opportunity to use the imagination.

Meals are very important in Chinese culture. When of means, dinners are quite extravagant with many courses including fish, vegetables, and meat. Dinners are traditionally served dim sum style, which is similar to family style. A variety of food is served in several small dishes, always accompanied by tea. The table is round with a turn-table in the middle. China, hence the name, is the originator of porcelain, and the very finest is found in Southern China. Even when the food is modest, it is nearly always placed on beautiful plates. An interesting contradiction is formed when someone sees so much food going to waste with millions of starving people. My initial experiences were in cosmopolitan areas of Hong Kong and mainland China, and I was shocked at how much food had gone to waste. As a guest in China conducting business, I rarely had the opportunity to make my food selections. I believe my meals were more enjoyable that way.

After some time in Hong Kong and Beijing, I relocated to Jiangxi Province. Jiangxi is the poorest province in China; it was reported in 1997 as having an average net income per capita equivalent to \$14 American. There were noticeable differences, and the meals were much less extravagant. One of the most remarkable days of my life was when a truck brought me to a city called Jianxin, which was five hours from the nearest airport. I saw men and women plowing their fields with oxen. They were barefoot with rolled up pants to the knee in filthy, snake-infested water. I couldn't help but wonder what they ate with such polluted resources and no stores in the area.

When I got out of the truck, I received my invitation to

dinner. Fortunately, I had a busy day of meetings and tasks to keep me occupied, but it was not forgotten. Chinese people exude warmth and hospitality; it would be unfair to seem pre-occupied. There is a major sense of curiosity, especially where Westerners are concerned. Westerners are referred to as “laowai,” which translates to “honorable foreigner” or “big-nose,” depending on the situation and candor of the traveler. When spoken amongst them, it is understood which definition is meant.

My hosts graciously invited me into the schoolhouse, and the pride showed on their faces as they gave the tour. I recall noticing the wet floors that they had freshly mopped. In reality, it only brought more attention to the terrible condition of the foundation. There were no screens in the windows, and the lead paint was all crumbled and dirty. The air was thick with pollution from the leaded gas and coal-burning factories nearby. Not ordinarily congested, I travel with an inhaler in China as breathing becomes quite labored. During my tour, I began to cough wildly. My hosts were greatly concerned and offered me water and told me to lie down.

I was humbled by the attention when there were more dire needs at hand. To explain that the very environment in which they live was making me sick was not an option. Quickly, I made up a story about my condition and tried to move forward, ignoring my symptoms. Incidentally, to seek medical care in rural China is largely a bad idea; the cure is often worse than the ailment. After drinking the water, which I had mixed feelings about, I pretended to feel better, all the while wondering if I had enough penicillin for the duration of my trip.

During a visit to China in 2001, I acquired a form of salmonella that was rarely seen in the United States, and I became very ill. Each time I sat to eat was another decision as to whether I could endure this illness again. That evening, I attended dinner and was placed at the most honorable seat.

In feng shui terms, I had a view of the water, and the sky and was furthest from the entrance. I sat opposite my host with the second-highest ranking official to my left and the third-in-command on my right. Surrounding the table were several people waiting on my every need. I realized that I am more comfortable at home being completely unimportant. I hoped that my sigh of relief was not evident as the first course turned out to be a banana.

The next was an unrecognizable vegetable which was delicious. My third course was rice, which tasted remarkably like what I serve at home. After that, things became more complex. I know that the ribs they served weren't the size that I am accustomed to. The meat did not have a familiar taste either. In my heart, I was certain that some of the things that entered my mouth that day would not have been there if I were at home. As all of the local people studied my face for expression, I said, "Hau Ch," meaning delicious. Finally, I bowed and expressed that I was full. This must have come as a surprise since I was about three times larger than any people present.

I cannot say that the food was great, but the experience was priceless. Those few weeks in Jiangxi were perhaps the most memorable days of my life and, by far, the most educational. Recently, I read that the next Survivor series will take place in Jiangxi Province, China. I will watch with interest the experiences that they have and wonder what types of food they will eat. If I could give them advice at all, it would be to not question the food and pretend that it is something else. I know that I will watch with hope that the participants will be respectable of their host and help them save face.

I will remember with love and admiration my time spent in Jiangxi. After all, I spent time with people that had less to offer than nearly anyone in the world. They gave gladly and proudly from their hearts. I was honored to accept such generosity.



Payton Andrews



Joseph Nye



Joshua Everett

A Struggle for Survival

Teo Ninkovic

Walking through the park with my best friend Roki, I noticed that everything was eerily quiet. The birds in the trees weren't chirping. The normal hustle and bustle of town was dulled down. The wind stopped blowing, and so did the rustling of the grass and leaves. The sky was clear, and the sun was shining. It was a little hotter than usual, and we were walking with our shirts off. All in all, it was a beautiful day.

Just as we were nearing the monument of The Worker, a statue which had been placed in the center of the park the day our small city Banovici had been established, we heard a strange whistling noise, an unknown noise, which for some reason seemed so familiar, yet at the same time completely alien. It was a noise that raised the hairs on our arms and brought chills down our spines.

For a split second, it felt as if time had stopped. Roki looked at me, and I back at him. BOOM! The ground moved from under me, and I fell to the grass. The strange whistling noise had turned into a loud blast, causing my ears to ring. Everything around me was shaking. As I started to get back on my feet, I fell back down; the ground was moving violently. I began to hear screams intermingled with sounds of whistling and explosions. I was confused and wondered what was going on as I lay on the once peaceful ground.

Just then Roki picked me up from the ground and helped me gather myself as we began running in the direction all the other people seemed to be going. Every ten to twelve feet, we would be thrown back to the ground by the violent shaking of the earth, but each time we quickly got up and started running once again. My heart was racing; everything around me was chaotic. The screams were

becoming louder now.

As I looked back at the park, a dark, black cloud had replaced the clear blue sky where bright, reddish-orange sparks of explosions were becoming visible. After about a minute of running, we finally made it to the main street of the city. People were everywhere. Women were crying out for their children, and men were trying to help everyone get under some kind of cover. The ground was continuously shaking, along with the buildings, as if an earthquake had been triggered. Glass began shattering, sides of buildings began crumbling, and debris was filling the city.

Just as I began to turn the corner to head down the street to my building, I was lifted off the ground from behind. Roki was no longer in sight, and I was being carried under someone's arm. All I could see was the blurry pavement and the familiar Adidas shoes of my father. At that moment, the chaos stopped, and I knew I was safe. I was carried like this for a few more minutes until we arrived in the lower hallway of our apartment building, where we were met by my mother and brother. Here they hugged and kissed me, with tears in their eyes, thankful that I was all right and unharmed.

The war had begun. My life had changed forever. For the next four years, my life would be filled with despair and misery, a struggle for survival in which I learned to appreciate life to the fullest and not to take everything commonplace for granted.

Days without food and barely enough water—this is how I lived. A loaf of bread a day for an entire family of five was our daily ration. I spent hours upon hours just lying on the floor because of the stabbing pain of an empty stomach. Lying down in a fetal position, the pain was too great to move around. I was skin and bones; my rib cage showed through my skin. Every now and again my parents

or grandparents somehow found some meat or a few vegetables to add on to our constant diet of bread and other baked products. Flour was the only readily available food resource at the time because the opposing armies had a blockade on all food supplies. Flour was snuck in and sold for outrageous prices.

After a while, the pain began to fade, and the hallucinations began from the lack of food. But in the end, it all passed, and a lesson was learned. Knowing what real hunger is taught me to appreciate what I have at the moment and not to overindulge and gluttonize. It also taught me what's most important in life—family.

In those days of war I learned the most important lesson of my life. I learned that the only thing I can depend on in this strange and beautiful life is my own flesh and blood, my family. Everyone else will eventually turn their backs when times get hard and all hope is lost, but not my family. My family sacrificed everything for me to survive when times were hard, for me to learn and further educate myself, for me to escape a place that was no longer welcoming.

Everywhere I went after the war began, I was an outcast. In one place, I was not welcome because I'm half Muslim. In the other, I was not welcome because I'm half Serb. Before the war, I didn't know there was a difference. I didn't know what I was, and I didn't know what anyone else was either. I thought we were all the same; no one ever talked about it.

Then one day, as if a powder keg had exploded, everyone took to a side and began to hate the other. Friends of over thirty years were suddenly torn apart and forced to hate each other. I, on the other hand, was a mix of the two warring ethnic groups. My family and I were looked down upon and despised by many people. When we went places, we tried to disguise what we were. It wasn't too

hard because we never thought of ourselves as either ethnic group; we were just people. Not many people thought like us, but there were a few.

Even in those times, both sides of my family came together and spent time with each other. Blood is stronger than any obstacle. They all paved the way for me to be where I am today, in a situation I could only dream about during the hard days of war. They taught me the true meaning of love—true, unconditional love, which is so hard to come by. They showed me how to care and how to appreciate the little things in life which so often go unnoticed but which often bring more joy. From them I learned to not judge and hate, that we're all the same people. This is a lesson that comes in handy here in America, where instead of ethnic groups it's changed to skin color and race.

Eventually, I would make it to America, land of the free, home of the brave. I moved from a place where I grew up in war and struggled for most of what I had to this place of abundance and excess. Growing up the way I did shaped me into the person I am today. I look at the world through a broad scope in which everything is important in its own little way, no matter how big or small. I treat other people equally, as I would my own brother, until they show me a reason not to. I live and enjoy my life, very simple and basic, with little attachment to material things because I know how quickly they can be taken away.

Without a struggle, life is boring. A struggle is needed in order to learn new things and learn more about life. It's needed in order to cherish all the little things which mean the most. Without it, people lose touch with themselves and become mechanical, causing them to overlook and take for granted the things that make them happy.



Shannon Fussell

Prelude

Brandon Weavil

This is only a prelude,
The beginning of an epic,
I gave you my heart and you kept it,
Lock it away in a safe so you'll never lose it,
Hold it very gently so you'll never abuse it,
Keep it close to yours so you'll never be alone,
Keep it with you all the time so you'll always be at home,
Love's like a book, a real page turn,
With every new chapter, something new to learn,
In the story of us, this is only chapter one,
I could never fill up enough pages for it to be done,
Now flip to chapter three, what do you see?
You standing in a white dress, staring back at me,
Happiest day for both me and you,
Each taking turns saying, "I do,"
Now turn to chapter six,
We're on our way to being rich,
Happily married, and, oh, by the way,
Our family just keeps growing,
And our love just keeps glowing,
Chapters seven through eleven are filled
With packed lunches and bedtime reading,
School plays, dance recitals, football games and cheerleading,
The twelfth chapter is a sad day,
When we send our babies off on their way,
To get their degrees and start their own story,
And leave us to bask in our own glory,
Chapter thirteen is laid-back easy reading,
My hair is grey and receding,
We each get five new letters added to our name,

After all these pages, still a new member came,
One by one new babies arrive,
Together, we watch our family tree thrive,
Chapter fourteen is time to retire,
Now vacation is our only desire,
Chapters fifteen and sixteen we are almost through with
our ride,
But just as in chapter one, I'm still by your side,
When is the conclusion? You might want to know,
Well, that's why I wrote this, I wanted to show,
True love's never ending, it doesn't conclude,
That's why all of this...is only a prelude.

Lego Life

Celeste Wilken

Her life's been like a stack of Legos,
Everyone building it up to suit their own needs.
She's got no control over how it's made.
No clues to the end result,
No idea who'll do it next.
Whatever they want is what she gets.
She's sick of being taken down and getting
 re-built just to be torn down all over again.
When will this cycle start to stop?
It's beginning to hurt a little now.

This tearing down and gluing back is getting to be old.
The pieces won't stay together now,
The glue just won't hold any longer.

The destructors and builders are changing more rapidly now,
No one person for too long anymore.
The new ones aren't ever any better
Than the last one to work on her.
It's getting harder to find someone.
She's starting to run out of choices.

They aren't doing anything to help with her scars,
Just adding to the collection.
You can start to see the rips now,
The re-construction's a little more careless than the
 stripping down.
Even the piece in the center has been torn to shreds,
No longer hers since the first time she chose.
Losing little bits and pieces each time she chooses again,
It's getting smaller and smaller as her time goes by.

How much longer can this go on?
It's taken everything to try and hold herself together.
The hopeless attempts to re-claim herself,
Have been given up on one too many times.

She's decided to give up.
Each time she's tried to fix herself,
She falls apart even more.

The Singing Bridge

Joy Shortell

She lived in the Carolina Low Country now. She had never appreciated the significance of this when living in the North. An entirely new experience had opened to her in moving here. In a coastal community, it was common to travel across bridges spanning rivers or meandering creeks fallen victim to the tides. She had even thought to get herself a tidal chart so she would know how to predict water levels. All the tributaries to the ocean were subject to this ebb and flow. An overflowing river could be rendered muddy and abandoned to the occasional crane at low tide.

She always looked for alligators in the murky water. She had never seen one in plentiful wetlands or lazy creeks, but she knew they were there. The sign in the riverside park where she sometimes walked her dog said “Keep Dog Leashed. Beware of Alligators.” Besides, almost everybody down here had a gator story or two. Even her neighbor had seen a 12-footer cross the road at the Gator Hole while filling up with gas. There was a little 3-footer in the creek behind her house, but it existed as a curiosity more than anything else, except maybe to her cats, and she trusted their own natural instincts to protect them. Sometimes her same neighbor would search out the red floating eyes with his flashlight at night. Her own reptile repertoire included snakes. She’d had personal encounters with at least three in her new home.

Rarely a day passed that she didn’t remind herself that she lived here. This was her choice, and she never had to “go home” from this place. She loved driving around the area looking for discoveries and traveling over the wetlands to the beach. She had not been there long when she heard the song of her large SUV traveling across the metal roadway. Startled at first, she noticed the low baritone voices of her tires belting out the lost notes of a Gregorian chant. What a delight. Though

she didn't find much good in growing older, she was grateful for the increased capacity to enjoy life's little unexpected pleasures. Actually, she looked for them and was sure that the search produced results.

As it happened, she crossed this bridge often on trips to WalMart or solo visits to the movies. She had taken to going to the movies alone as there was a senior discount and going alone seemed much easier than finding a companion. Tuesday night was popcorn night when she could get almost any sized container filled with buttered popcorn and nacho seasoned salt. She took some pride in the fact that she could do this at only the smallest risk of embarrassment. It also provided an acceptable excuse for being away. She was finally beginning to appreciate the solitary side of her nature: she was not a victim of circumstance but the product of intention.

This bridge had eventually become part of her daily travel to and from work. Though she liked to alter her route, she almost always included this section of the roadway. It never sounded the same to her. It varied according to the car she drove. The large SUV that was commonly thought of as her husband's car played a very different tune than her aging but sporty Cavalier, the low vibrating base compared to the zippy tune of the smaller car. The song was never the same. Some days it sang of adventure or had the raw wail of rebellion. Some days she was so absorbed in the challenges of work or promise of planning that she forgot to notice, often wondering that she may have missed the perfect melody.

She had a new car now. The convertible she had coveted for so long was miraculously hers. It was the perfect compliment to this vibrant life wrought with doubts and adjustments but revealing rich tradition and new loves. She had to go across a bridge to get to the ocean in any direction, the place she loved the most which always offered renewal and balance. Only one bridge sang boldly with the promise of a new song.

Lost Love

Lois Basiliere

A woman collected as many shells
as she could in the silk purse
she had earlier released ashes from to the sea.
She ran in and out with the tide
as if she were a child again.
Her gray hair was ruffled, filled
with sand and salt water.
The wrinkles in her face belied her age
like the hair she did not color.
Carefully packed in her suitcase,
The shells were later placed in a glass container
filled with water and put on a table.
The smell of the ocean was still intact.
The water brought out the tiny particles inside
the shells and she changed the water
like changing lifeblood to reinvent the particles.
The colors and particles were brought back
to life through the water
from a nearby river as a substitute.
As she watched the shells floating around,
it brought back memories
of what she left behind.
The shells called her back to the beach
to find what was lost.



Jessica Kovach



Halina Michlen

Music: A Sonnet

Walter L. Sharp III

A refuge of relaxation for the mind,
A time of plentiful and provoking imagination.
A source of pleasure no one leaves behind,
A possible birth of pure concentration.
Music may take on many genres and forms,
One of the most penetrating methods of expression.
A possible shelter from a spiritual storm
To my knowledge, a most valuable possession.
An infinite artistic vehicle of aggression,
Music has provided a truthful reality to some,
A gift passed down through generations of procession
A subjection to which everyone will ultimately succumb.
Music is a constantly evolving life form.
A sacred sound for everyone.

Guidelines for Submissions

Writer's Guidelines

1. All writing entries must be submitted electronically as a .doc, .rtf, and/or .txt file.
2. Entries should include title of each work and author's name, address, and telephone or e-mail address on the first page (or on each poem for poetry submissions). Also, label each writing as poetry, fiction, or non-fiction.
3. Fiction and non-fiction should not exceed 3000 words. Poetry should not exceed 50 lines.
4. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than a total of three pieces of writing may be submitted.
5. *Portals* acquires First North American Serial Rights. All other rights revert to the author upon publication. Previously unpublished submissions only.

Artist's Guidelines

1. All art entries must be submitted electronically as a .jpeg, .gif, or .tiff file (with a target dpi of 300 and a minimum image width of 4 inches).
2. Entries should include title of each work and artist's name, address, and telephone or e-mail address. Also, label each piece of art as either 2-D or photography.
4. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than a total of five pieces of art may be submitted.

Portals Literary & Arts Magazine

Cape Fear Community College

English Department

411 North Front Street

Wilmington, NC 28401-3993

(910) 362-7238

portals@cfcc.edu