



BETWEEN THE LINES

South Arkansas Community College
2018

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PREFACE

We are proud to present our first online publication in this our 20th volume of *Between the Lines*. Over the years it has been our privilege to publish the great work of south Arkansas and north Louisiana writers. They have touched our hearts, prompted our memories, gave us a chuckle, and made us sigh. The writers in this volume are no different, all talented, insightful, and impressive. We editors hope you enjoy the great work presented here on the South Arkansas Community College website.

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SHADOW OF A GHOST

By James Yates

Just a shadow on these walls,
that's all that I am.
The candles have all blown out
leaving her memory in the smoke.

I'm just a ghost
haunting the place
where her heart once loved.

Haunted by her eyes
and chained to her smile,
My ghost doesn't rest
but drifts past our window
to dance with the dust
caught in the moonlight
wanting her back,
dreaming her open arms
reaching out for him.

Just a shadow on these walls,
that's all that I am.
Just a ghost wandering
this room where her heart once loved
waiting for her to come back.

ILLUSIONS DISEASE

By Samantha Sadoh

Our world has designed standards and ideals,
They want people, especially females, to uphold.
Standards to make the human flesh seem perfect,
But leave unsolved problems,
While forging new ones mentally and physically.

No flaws, soft skin, hide the authentic self; it brings shame,
And not fitting the molded structure is disgusting.
We promote body shaming and downgrade females who're outside the standards.
Models not healthy while maintaining the image.
No matter how much glory they get for the image,
Their pain is still there behind closed doors.

The ones being downgraded are wounded, feeling off brand.
We accept these illusions and standards,
They stab and drain blood from the hearts of many women.
It's the sick game of an illusionist,
To slaughter as many souls as it can take.

We have partaken in this,
And hold the broken souls in our hands.
Stuck on futile things that will fade away,
That has nothing to do with worth and identity.
People so used to fake, they can't accept anything real,
Insulting her as if she is inadequate.
You all in the king's court of puppeteers,
Your gloomy pedestal will soon collapse.
The illusions, riches, and glory won't save your soul.
We came from dust and shall revert to dust,
But your heart contains an arctic blizzard.

We say we like the natural skin but don't promote it,
Appreciation subsides as the droppings on the street.
Sprouted as a mythical place but became altered by intruders.
Along our journey, we encountered snares and traps,
That made us stronger from our scars.

We shouldn't be afraid to show our imperfections.
Territory, size, or how much we have is insignificant.
We should be grateful that we've sustained this far in life.
To be able to help others and grow to be a stronger fighter.

As the body of this world, we are responsible.
We making excuses and playing the blame game,
Isn't going to make things improved for the future generations.

PREDICTIVE TEXTILLIOD

By Benjamin Cagle

!
help
behaviors
of a profile
ones of value
memory worthy

start event log secret trial and error messages. interrupt service men and women
who holy seed everything whether guilty or what clearly ought to peak atop recent
counterfeit searches for names & numbers, addressing forms that shape opinion
asterisk*

court reports
backup to date
medical records arrest records
property records
social information
warranty information

burning across work history, use charismatic user-friendly exchanges to confess
up deadline items break rhythm omission control witness close accounts of end
root devices that draft testimonies for profit due blank consumers who zoom-in
the camera lens
add exceptions
read locations
frequencies
cover now
map out
exposé

whereabouts

void militant alarms but remember post-leg reactions pulled hand over symbols
cashing your dull empty cart. signal a breach of contacts. register hostage
aftermarket forwards to check-in bans on public data flashing behind glass into
slight of watch fields required by suspect links of fire

capture and spread
photos of those
fingerprints
documents
a headshot
a photo shoot
the head of statutes
where long-arms rule!

A WALK TO SCHOOL

By Matthew Nation

Winter was always a little more difficult when I was kid. Getting to and from school was always interesting when feet of snow would fall. We had heard about the predicted snowfall a few days before and were hoping for the ever elusive “snow day.” John and I shared a room, and we whispered quietly the night before about what we would do if it happened. My brother John was a bit shorter than I and stockier. “Big boned” is what mom would tell me, but I just figured he was a little chubby. We were less than a year apart and were the same age for three days out of the year, John being the older of the two us. We weren’t only close in age, but we were best friends too and did everything together and even shared the same friends growing up.

Mom would always take John and me to school if the weather was too bad for us to walk. She would wake us up every morning and have us get ready. She was so nice for the first couple of attempts, but if we weren’t up by then, she would get mean. I can’t say I blame her. The family car was a white ’90 Ford Taurus station wagon. It wasn’t the greatest car; besides the fact of having no heater, it was prone to breaking down, so my dad named it “Twinkle Toes.” He always named the family cars we owned, but he particularly disliked Twinkle Toes, probably because it was a Ford. He was a Dodge or Chevy guy, well anything but a Ford; however, finances dictated otherwise, and we tried to make the best of it.

After mom stuck her head in the door and told us to wake up, I jumped over to John’s bed and looked out the window to see just how much snow we got. John was already sitting there trying to wipe the fog off the window, but after noticing ice on the window sill, we decided to check in the living room. We lived in a motel that had been partially converted into rental “apartments” you could say. Mom worked the front desk and cleaned rooms part time and also did housekeeping at the hospital. We noticed that Dad was up and dressed, which was odd considering he was never up and dressed before we left for school. My dad was disabled and couldn’t work, so Mom worked and Dad stayed home with us when we didn’t have school.

“Good morning, boys, Twinkle Toes won’t start so I’ll be walking you guys to school,” my dad said, as he reached out and pulled us both to his chest. “What do you boys think?” he asked. “Awesome man!” we yelled, distracted if only for a moment but then running to the window to look outside. It was so beautiful, about a foot and a half had fell that night. The pine trees were weighed down by the fresh snowfall, their limbs looking like they were almost to the breaking point. Everything was blasted white but had a certain softness to it; the snow made everything look puffy like it was covered in cotton balls. Unfortunately, our view quickly became blurred by our breath upon the window due to the excitement, with only the smell of the heater vent on the floor below the window to bring us back to the task at hand. We peeled ourselves from the frosty window and looked towards the kitchen. On cold days, Dad would make us Quaker Oats oatmeal with canned milk (For some odd reason it tasted better to us that way.) and hot cocoa. Dad had made his way into the kitchen and by the smell, we could tell he was

dishing up hot bowls of oatmeal; we could hear the little white kettle of hot water begin to quiver as the water reached the boiling point. He had already placed the small red and white can of milk where John and I sat at the table, along with the sugar bowl. Breakfast seemed to fly by as John and I were getting so excited to see Dad out in the snow.

We didn't have snow boots, so we wore our cowboy boots in the snow. They had absolutely no traction on snow with ice underneath but that added to the wonderment that was our world on this snowy morning. We would have competitions on who could slide the farthest without falling. Falling meant it didn't count so you had to have good balance. We threw on our boots and snow pants as fast as we could to hurry and get outside. I had a blue pair of snow pants that John had worn the year before. They had a hole in the knee from sledding and playing recreational hockey, but they still did the job of keeping me warm. Before those, I doubled up on jeans and long underwear. We dashed outside in a flash but were forced to turn back after hearing Dad remind us not to forget our backpacks. As we were heading out, we noticed that Dad didn't seem to be bothered by the cold like we were. We just figured that was something that came with age. My dad couldn't participate in the snow games we'd play due to his back problems, but he would always watch us from the window. Our mother was always working, but there were occasions when she would play with us, if only for a little while. That's what made this so special.

The first thing we checked to determine what kind of snowfall we got was by making a snowball with it. Snowballs were something of an art form. While some would cheat and let fresh powder begin to melt in hand, and then place new snow around it, we would simply keep it loose without the fresh snow. Leaving the fresh snow around the melted stuff would pretty much make an ice ball, which was no good as it could seriously hurt someone if people were careless. I know this from experience. One can't really make a snowball of dry powdery snow; it had to be from either a damper snowfall or from snow that had begun to melt a bit. Without hesitation, John and I ran straight for the largest drift we could find and were stunned to see the snow plows running and cars traveling to and from businesses. It seemed like no amount of snow would bring this place to a halt. Dad carefully came out wearing his trademark cowboy hat, aviator sunglasses and brown vest with cowboy boots on his feet.

"Hey, you boys stay close. Let's head 'em up and move 'em out. I don't want you guys to be late!" he shouted, from where the sidewalk should've been. With that, he turned to start walking in the direction of the school but slipped and fell hard on the snowy road. John and I turned to each other terrified that he had hurt himself since we could hear him groan during the impact. "Dad!" we cried, half running and sliding over to him slumped over in the snow. He didn't seem to move much. We started to get scared, being young and not really knowing how to approach him in that state.

Without warning, he quickly rolled towards us, with his hands under him full of snow. With no time to react or to make sense of what was happening, we both stood there and got covered in snow! Freaked out at first, I fell next to him while John just threw himself on top of the snowy man. Suddenly realizing what was

happening, I lunged forward yelling, “Aaaahhhhh!” as we dog piled on top of him. “All right that’s enough boys,” my dad said in a strained voice. “We need to get going. Here, help me up.” The old cowboy slowly motioned us off and held out his hand. He was wearing his old pair of buckskin gloves he and my mom shared. John and I grabbed each of his hands and pulled with all our might to bring him to his feet. His arms felt shaky as he got his balance. Snow slowly peeled off his arms and legs as he finally stood upright. “Ah, you boys are getting strong!” he told us, smiling out of the corner of his mouth. “Are you okay, Dad?” John asked him. “Me? Oh yeah I’m all right,” he replied, assuring us both with a slight nod of his head. He dusted off his still snowy jeans, straightened his hat, and began to walk.

John and I were right behind him, walking beside each other, sliding on the ice that built up on the intersections’ gutters along the way, and stopping periodically to slap snow on each other. Attempting to make snowballs with snow that was too dry, Dad looked at us and said, “You boys go ahead now to school; you’re about half way.” “Wait. What?” I exclaimed. “You said you were walking us to school!” We were having so much fun, listening to his stories about how far he had to walk to school, singing marching songs from his time in the army, (not too loudly because I believe some were inappropriate) and sliding on ice. We hadn’t noticed that our pace had slowed, and he was walking with a bit of limp and breathing hard. He never really showed he was in pain, but we could tell in little ways. “I’ve got to head back and see if I can get that Twinkle Toes running so your mom can go to work. I’ve walked too far with you guys already. My dad never walked with me. Now get going; you boys don’t be late!” he cried. We looked down and agreed. “I love you boys and be careful the rest of the way, and watch out for idiots,” he always said. We set off on our own, John asking me why I had to argue with him about it. “Why do you have to do that?” He always seemed like he knew how properly to deal with dad. “We were having fun, that’s all.” I replied. “Well, don’t,” he cautioned. Our dad never liked to be questioned, and sometimes it was easy to forget that.

It was so quiet. All I could hear was our footfalls in the newly fallen snow, deafening at times. It was dangerous along the road. If there were a newer model car, you couldn’t hear it coming from behind. You always had to check over your shoulder, especially with snow still coming down like that day. Snow is a great insulator and it dampens sound very well. We were about a block away from where we parted ways with dad when I felt the uncontrollable urge to check behind us to see if I could see him. I turned and squinted my eyes to peer through the snowfall just in time to see a snowball hitting the road several yards behind us. I could see him vaguely in the distance with the falling snow, one hand in the air waving goodbye to us.

While I noticed his limp and the strain he presented while parting ways, his actions on that day always left me with more questions than answers. I was curious as to why. Why would he walk so far with us and play if it brought him pain? Things of that nature, perhaps due to my age, I just didn’t understand. With my sorrow slowly building, I suddenly felt a hard punch on my shoulder. “C’mon,

let's go!" John yelled at me, smiling from ear to ear. He turned as if to run, like he wanted me to chase him, but he slipped and fell.

Only with getting older have I realized my father walked with us because that's what needed to be done. Maybe not playing with us in the snow, but that may have been a distraction to make an uncomfortable task more fun for him. It was his way of showing us he still liked to play in his heart, even if his body wouldn't let him anymore. Dad did what needed to be done, one of his traits I learned and inherited, for which I'm truly grateful.

SAINT FRANCIS IN A RAIN SHOWER

By Donna Henson

Saint Francis has been returned
to his Spring and Summer Home
at the edge of the garden
where he is in our view.

He stands there in a gentle shower
with arms outstretched like a child;
the Spring rain washing away
his winter coat of grime.

Now, he is joined by birds,
those who frequent the site.
They frolic there with him in the rain,
feeding on tiny seeds beside the path.

Becoming like a child, I imagine:
The birds welcome him back.
And he blesses them.

ENGLISH TEACHER

By Jim Barton

She tried.
Despite your inattention
to detail, to punctuation,
to her lectures and questions,
she tried.
It was difficult, back then,
to inspire, to capture
your mind sparks,
flitting like so many fireflies
just beyond the huge windows
of her classroom, but she tried.
Even now, as you seal your manuscript
lick the glue and paste the stamp, you know.
She will read it in a wingback armchair,
lace doilies on the side table,
severe eyeglasses perched atop
her nose, silver hair perfectly coiffed.
In her right hand, a blue pencil,
(red always reminded her of shouting)
and she will first proofread,
shaking her head, squinching her eyes,
gently making notes in the margins.
After tea, she will read the poems,
pausing after each, eyes closed, and faintly smile.
She will recall your trembling recitation
in front of her class, “Eldorado” by Poe,
how you shifted from foot to foot, perspiring,
how you scurried back to your desk,
face as red as the shouting pen,
how you put your head down
when the class began to applaud,
how years later, you signed your first book for her,
hugged her, and whispered “Thank you.”
Morning sun will find her still in that chair,
glasses keeping watch on her lap,
your poems held close to her heart.

SEPTEMBER COMES

By Marilyn Joyner

September comes
rather quickly
Slips in and Bang
Summer's over.
Time to prepare
Park the grill
Stack firewood
Put the harvest in the barn
Slow down
come in and rest
and wait
When September comes.

THE MECHANICS OF CLEANING UP

By James Yates

I

Morning. Ranch-style house,
tree-lined somewhere, USA.
Her father leads us down the hall.
“It was a shotgun,” he says,
Outside his daughter’s room.
This is gonna take longer, I hiss.
Pink walls. Pink comforter. Pink blinds.
Eminem and Limp Bizkit
Glare down from the wall;
Britney and Faith peek out
behind Titanic on the TV cart.
Bookcases and Barbies,
Softball trophies and love letters.
“Kara-n-Kale” above their prom shot.
Sunny, seventeen, and blonde, beaming;
Glasses, skinny, pimpled, unsmiling.

Two feet away. Halo effect.
White bits of skull, like diamonds.
Gray bits of something else
In a wide pool of blood;
Red splatter across Britney’s smile.
Fred drips red drops from his punkass smirk.
Buddy asks, “Boyfriend dump her?”
Father replies, “She barely knew him.”
Nineteen-year-old stalker
Worked with her at the Tastee Freeze.
Came around this morning
and broke into her room.
Knelt down while she slept,
Tilted his face to her,
and blew off his head.

II

“Lots of wackos out there,” Buddy says,
“Thank God, he only killed himself.”
The Police came and did their job,
Except for the cleaning.
“They gave us your name and number.”

Newest growth industry.
Thirty percent suicide,

Usually in January,
After a credit card Christmas,
And in the summer,
When the heat brings it out.
As he starts cutting carpet, Buddy asks,
“Remember the guy tried hanging,
but died too slow, so he shot himself?”

Or that nine-year-old bullied at school,
Or that baby shot with her brothers and her momma
By her momma’s ex before he did himself.
Or that old man, dead alone
in two weeks of summer heat.
I knew him from the address over the radio.
Nice, quiet old guy with an overbite.
I’ve seen folks step over
Their dead grandmother
For her benefit check.
These days, I don’t even
Let my wife go into a rest stop
since cleaning up once after a scumbag
beat a woman to death,
then raped her there.

See, I used to be religious.
But with this job, though,
Now, I don’t believe in much.

III

Outside in the late spring day
And the rows of neat ranch houses.
I watch a little girl
Jumping rope in her yard,
An old man walking his dog
On the sidewalk across the street.
Red-White-and-Blue sign reads
“God Bless America” on a fence.
Neighbors watching on porches
With fat coolers of beer.
Old woman on her cellphone
Eying our van, sucking on a cigarette
As we strip and pull on
Blue suits and plastic booties,
Gloves and goggles.
They keep us safe from body fluids.
Hauling on respirators,
We look like baby aliens.

IV

We ask the parents to leave
Before we spread out the blue plastic
Sheet on the lawn and wrap
The place with crime scene tape.
In the pink and red room again,
Buddy kneels on the carpet,
Like he's praying over the pool
With a razor and starts cutting.
"You have to be careful with carpet,
Tacks cut the same as drug needles."

I check the closet for spots
And spray Lemon Pledge on the phone.
The bedsheets are ruined
And go in a box on the blue plastic.
Buddy rolls the drenched carpet
Into a black plastic bag.
The wood's soaked underneath.
"Damn, gotta cut the floor," Buddy groans
as Jesus looks down in tears
With love from the wall.
I haul the mattress out to the van
when Buddy yells behind me,
"Watch out for that piece o' jaw."
See, he's got an eye for body parts.
I hunker down and wipe off her CDs
And a spot on her hair dryer.
You can't hurry a job like this
Or you miss things.
Buddy bluelights the room,
Looking for any traces left.
Then it's time for lunch.

People ask me, "Are you a religious man?"
I just shake my head and shrug,
"This job makes you not believe in much."

V

Most people never see what we see:
One guy found a thousand bucks
Under his poor dead mother's bed
And broke his leg from the excitement.
Two brothers cracked their heads
Grabbing their dead nephew's TV.
One time, I found a fresh skull bit

From a kid's suicide;
The mother saw her son's hair
And went nuts on me.
We ain't delivering pizzas
And we don't get many tips.
See, we're taking their loved ones away
Like blue-skinned angels of mercy.
But there's no such thing as a good death,
Even when it's one of the better scenes.

VI

We're finished around midnight.
The last thing to do:
Run the fogger to take away the smell.
We talk to the parents before we leave.
"This is a happy ending.
That guy won't bother your girl again."

These are the mechanics of cleaning up.
So someone's gotta do it.
We see the natural order of things
In life's little cruelties.
We don't look at the murder or the suicide
Through some fancy moral prism.
We just see all the results
As the facts of our existence.
We may like to separate ourselves
From the animals, but we're just like 'em,
Only they're better.
Suicide's just another name for selfish.
Someone just trying to get back at someone else.
If he really wants to kill himself,
You can't stop it. No way. No how.

See, I was religious once.
But with this job, though,
I don't believe in much.

SKIN

By Sarah Teague

I first made contact with Mrs. Dubach when I finished the seventh grade. My mother, once again convinced her recording career was one gig away from taking off, shipped me back south to Gaddy, my grandfather in Lakeland, Florida. This time I could sense that I'd be staying for more than June, July, and August. I was alone, already a little worried about starting a new school in the fall, and wanted a project for the summer.

I filched four twenties from Gaddy's dresser drawer one evening. The next morning, over our bran flakes in the Florida room, I asked him, "How hard is it to sew?"

Glad to see me take an interest in something, he drove me to a fabric store that afternoon. Sleeves and collars looked complicated so I decided to go with a strapless party dress in a flirty red polyester, like Karen Lynn Gorney wore in the film *Saturday Night Fever*, which had come out the winter before. Surely, I could follow the instructions to create a top, flare the skirt, and sew in a zipper. Back home, I fished my grandmother's sewing kit, dustier than I expected, out of the carport storage closet, where Gaddy had placed some of her larger possessions after she passed away. Full of hope and ambition, I cut the pattern shapes, pinned them to the fabric, and then cut out the pieces. But pinning the fabric sections to each other was impossible. I couldn't remove puckers on one side without them cropping up somewhere else. Maybe I hadn't cut the fabric right.

Two square feet and about nine pounds. Skin, the largest organ, can be glowing, nondescript, ashen or pockmarked. It can be sensitive in rarely revealed places, or it can bear extreme exposure. It sheaths our muscles and bones, webs between our fingers, smooths over connective stations such as the tender valley where shoulder attaches to chest. We say fits like a glove; why not fits like skin?

Whenever she left me, Mom always tucked in that "Call in an emergency" mush to her goodbyes. But through the years, the only call that counted as an emergency was when I broke my arm in elementary school P.E. And that was probably because Coach Segal, who was single and close to Mom's age, had phoned her instead of me.

And maybe she was right. Burning a grilled cheese and setting off the fire alarm in the apartment when I was in the second grade, or starting my period at home by myself in the sixth, perhaps those weren't emergencies. But at Gaddy's, surrounded by already cut fabric, I couldn't think of anything else to do. So I called her.

"I was going to sew some stuff, but I'm having trouble with it." Through the phone I could hear her flipping through a magazine.

"N'kay."

"I cut the pattern pieces and the fabric, but when I try to pin the parts together, they kind of bubble. And they don't line up."

"Start at the opposite end."

"I tried that. Besides, if I start at the waist and work up, the back-left side of the, what they call the bodice? It stands up higher than the right."

I have been lonely with or without company. I have experienced how solitude can create its own form of contentment out of desire. When Coach Segal guided me through the emergency room before my mother arrived, his big clumsy hand on my back and the other at my good elbow, and later when the med technician handled my broken arm and positioned it for the x-ray, I was surprised at how much comfort their touch gave me, above my pain.

“That’s the learning part,” Mom scolded on the phone. “You have to do it yourself.”

“Even if I learn that,” *which I won’t*, “I can’t put it together.”

“Why not?”

“There’s something wrong with Gramma’s machine.”

Mom hadn’t thought about the sewing machine since my grandmother died, so she couldn’t argue. I hadn’t even pulled off its cover, but only now did I acknowledge to myself that as soon as I saw all the cobwebs, I knew I couldn’t work that rickety contraption.

I could sense her frustration in the silence, and it pleased me a little. I could feel, how on her end of the line, she was leaning into the counter, the sole of her right foot planted perpendicular on the arch of her left foot, a remnant of her ballet career. Finally, she sniffed, “You’ll have to call Mrs. Dubach.”

While I hadn’t expected her to say that, I wasn’t surprised. I would have to visit the middle-aged woman alone. She performed alterations one subdivision over from Gaddy’s. I had only been to her house, the tiniest one on her street, a couple of times with my mom years earlier.

When I called, Mrs. Dubach probably expected me to say I was selling Girl Scout cookies, candles for the junior high band, or Christmas cards. I wondered if they had a scout troop for girls as old as I in Lakeland. But even I knew from the paint-peeling Ford Galaxy, her bare carport, and her old-timey watch that she couldn’t buy two boxes of Vanilla Sandwich creams from every scout in town.

Three types of sensory nerves are dedicated to touch receptors, compared to a single sensory nerve each for sight, sound, smell, and taste. Skin can identify textures: burlap, steel, velvet. It quickens in contact with the skin of another.

There was just enough room on Mrs. Dubach’s front stoop for me, the sack of pieces I hugged to my chest, and two planters of healthy mother-in-law’s tongue. The leaves looked sharp enough to slash an innocent bystander who stood too close. I rang the doorbell and teetered down a step.

She held open the door for me, a look with no feeling behind it. Her slightly protruding eyes were proportionate to her large head; in fact, she was a big-boned woman, not tall but wide.

My explanations: “Thanks for your help; I haven’t had much practice. My mom said you’d know what to do,” dwindled in my throat. She ushered me through a small living room into the kitchen. A Kit-Kat clock stood guard over the enamel stove, the tail pendulum gliding back and forth, no sound. When I pulled the pattern parts out of the sack, their crinkling sound soothed me. While I tried to avoid staring at her whiskery chin, she adjusted the straight pins and the rippling around the bodice sections disappeared.

“Wow. How’d you do that so quick?” I stopped myself from saying *with your stubby fingers*.

She spoke rather business-like. “Maybe you should see what it’ll look like on. We can let you see it, just pinned, if you’d like.”

I knew the way down the narrow hall to the fitting room, her second bedroom. I wondered who would be a guest in her house, as Gaddy said she had no family. Inside the room, while I shucked shorts and yanked my tank top over my head, she pinned the parts together on the bumpy white bedspread. She gathered the papy shift and turned back to me. I held out my arms to the sides and she wrapped the mosaic around me.

The knot of fabric she held against my waist, and in between and just lower than my shoulder blades, was comforting. The fabric tickled my sides, and the crinkly pattern skimmed against my calves.

Skin contact comes in various degrees of intimacy. We grasp an arm to get a stranger’s attention, rub a friend’s shoulders, apply sunscreen. We nuzzle feet under the table, knee against knee, hand on thigh. The more we trust, the greater the physical intimacy. But these rules of contact don’t apply for people who touch the body for a living: physicians and nurses, hair stylists, masseuses, even seamstresses.

She said, “The fabric’s kind of thin. I wanted you to see how it would do.”

I braced for the long sleek brush against my abdomen as she whipped the fabric away from my body, indifferent, the way a shop girl denudes a manikin. She adjusted pins in the pattern on the bed while I pulled on shorts and tank top. We walked down the hall. In the kitchen, she folded the parts and slid them into the paper sack, that nice smooth noise again.

“Thanks,” I looked at the clock as she handed me the sack, and then dispatched me out the door.

Back at home I dumped the sack in my room and then rode my bicycle up and down the street, my hands sweaty on the handlebars. I wished I would see kids my age sitting on the front porches of the neighborhood, that they’d invite me to join them, but it didn’t work out that way. The sack was shuffled from bed to chair to carpet through the week. By the next Tuesday I was really bored.

Instead of calling, I rode over to Mrs. Dubach’s and knocked on the door. She didn’t exactly frown when she saw me.

“Good morning,” I started. “I didn’t pay you the last time and”

“I didn’t expect you to.”

I handed her the sack, “I need help and I plan to pay you.”

I don’t know if she had heard anything about my mother’s comings and goings. She reached in the sack and rubbed the soft tissue in between her thumb and pointer, as if she were appraising the fabric, the situation, and me.

“Come inside.” She pulled the pieces out of the sack, which was wearing thinner, especially as I had bumped it against my legs every churn of the bike pedals. Kit-Kat’s eyes kept locking above my head, then moving off. I let out a deep breath I hadn’t realized I was holding. She dropped the pieces on top of the sack. “Check back with me by Friday.”

Skin has its own tasks: it alerts to heat, cold, pressure, pain. It provides the first defense against invasion. It betrays behavior through bumps, bruises, even hickeys. Skin endures exposure to impurities from inside: pimples, wens, and boils; and out: snake or spider bites, blood blisters, poison ivy. It suffers frostbite, pox, measles, and melanoma, to name a few.

At home, Gaddy sat in the front screened porch with the newspaper, recording the value of his precious stocks, as he did every day. As I approached, I could hear the kids from next door behind the wooden fence of their back yard, playing *Jump or Dive* in the pool with their friends. I sneaked into his room and lifted two hundred-dollar bills from the dresser drawer, and then approached him on the porch.

“Will you take me back to the fabric store?”

I picked out brown cotton for a vest like Diane Keaton’s in *Annie Hall*, white flowing polyester for a gown like Princess Leia’s in *Star Wars*, and a blue cotton blend for a blouse like Sally Field wore in *Smokey and the Bandit*. The clerk’s scissors snipped through the fabrics, crisp and satisfying. At home I cut out the pieces to the new patterns myself, even sleeves and collar for the blouse, but made myself wait until Friday when I went to pick up the red dress before I showed Mrs. Dubach my work.

Her eyebrows rose when she saw the sheaf of patterns. “Guess we’ll have to get you measured.”

She padded down the hall ahead of me. The tape flicked around my waist, buzzed like a hummingbird along my arm from shoulder to wrist, dangled from my side, true waist to knee. I also got to try on the red dress, with that luscious red ruffle across the bodice. I stood there, closed my eyes, and breathed in the peace and quiet of the room and her house, that I felt more than heard. It was such a nice break from Gaddy’s television blaring those daytime game shows. That summer Mrs. Dubach completed fourteen outfits for me. My mother visited in October to borrow a little money from Gandy. When I showed her my wardrobe, she made a face. “Couldn’t you find anything better to do?”

I had expected a sarcastic comment from her, but it was okay. I knew there was nothing better I could have done that summer than visit Mrs. Dubach. Near the end of eighth grade the next spring, Mom came to haul me back.

“All those outfits are going to Goodwill before we leave town.” We could have made room in her Mustang, but the blouse and dresses were growing a little tight through the armholes and shoulders. Besides, I had gotten what I wanted out of them. “Of course.”

She looked at me, surprised that I wouldn’t argue or plead. It was nice to have a way to show I didn’t care about her indifference. Living with Mom the next summer, I didn’t have the luxury of raiding Gaddy’s dresser drawer to buy fabric and patterns, much less the acquaintance of a reliable seamstress. Mom wouldn’t have done it the way I wanted, nor when I wanted, and working in her apartment with the continuous television racket, just like at Gaddy’s, wouldn’t have been the same. I forgot all about old Mrs. Dubach.

With age, skin thins, heightening perception of even a single hair fallen to a forearm. We use the terms thick- or thin-skinned to describe a person’s capacity

to deal with feelings: what we feel through our skin, what we feel through our emotions.

Fourteen years later I was back in Lakeland, single once more, chair of a fundraiser sock hop for my daughter's elementary school, and in need of a poodle skirt. At the fabric store, I selected pink broadcloth and black felt for the poodle. A simple task, but I still couldn't even hem a pair of slacks, so I had reached out to Mrs. Dubach for help, just as I had done long ago.

Once again, I stood with my arms stretched out to the sides. I peeked at Mrs. Dubach's face as she noted the hip measurement. She was all business; she could have been thinking about what she would prepare for dinner, or the upcoming school millage vote, or a movie she wanted to see. She pushed the other end of the tape against the outside middle of my calf as if she were measuring a window for curtains.

She had shrunk some. The skin on the backs of her hands looked like moldy rice paper, and though the tips of her fingers were calloused, her fingernails were neat and manicured. Her measuring tape whisked around the opposite curve of my waist, nudged the back of my neck and traced my spine all the way down to my tailbone. The carpet was scored with tiny picks from age and wear, the dim overhead light did no one any favors, and the gray walls could hardly have been attractive even when newly painted. But I felt myself in a safe, wonderful place, once again feeling the comfort of touch.

In his prime, Peter the Great sought to locate the basis for language development. He commanded thirty women, mothers of newborns, to use no discernible sound in their baby's hearing, to discover what sort of language would evolve from a mind alienated from social or culturally-linked verbal encouragement. Deprived of the right to coo and cuddle, the mothers primarily left their babies in their cradles. Beyond the barest contact for feeding and hygiene, the babies weren't touched at all.

Before their first birthday, all thirty infants died.

A few years after the sock hop, I encountered Mrs. Dubach in a convenience store, picking up a loaf of bread, while I paid for gas. I smiled at her and said "hello," but those big cow eyes looked straight through me, no recognition whatsoever. I felt a little stunned at the slight, but she must have many infrequent customers, hard to keep up with faces and names. Maybe she didn't care, was far-sighted, or preoccupied. Or she assumed I wouldn't remember her so she chose not to speak. I paid, but for some reason hovered near the door, in front of a hospital intern who was trying on sunglasses from a display.

I thought about hosting a Masquerade party. I could pay Mrs. Dubach to create a fitting costume, like Scarlet O'Hara. She finished her transaction and turned to leave. On impulse I moved into her path. My driving moc caught on the door mat, raised up from where the sunglasses stand ran underneath it, and I stumbled to my knees. The bread loaf plopped onto the floor as Mrs. Dubach grasped my arm. But it was not her professional hand that steadied me. It was just a helping hand, utilitarian, non-magical.

"All right?" She looked me up and down for scratches or tears in my clothing with the disinterested courtesy of a stranger.

“Of course,” I brushed off my slacks and took my purse from the intern who had picked it up for me and who also held my other arm for stability. My cheeks flushed pink, and I didn’t want to make eye contact with the alterations lady. “I . . .” “Better fix that mat,” she called over her shoulder to the clerk behind the counter. She must have scooped up the bread and walked out the door. I didn’t notice because the intern had taken my hand in his, a strong hand, warm and protective. He squeezed slightly, and I hung on.

MY HEART

By Denise Lum

Deeper, darker, colder still,
Sorrow swells and anger builds.
Passages blocked by envy and hate,
No light, sound, no way of escape.
Gasping, drowning, such a horrid place,
Constant screams of torment and regret.
Tumbling, falling eternal fear,
Pain and weakness, growing, thriving.
Silent screams and muted groans,
Moving into nothingness,
Closer and closer to the unknown.
There is but one way out of this place,
Just whisper His name, call out for His Grace.
This place I'm in, it is my heart,
No one can know it, understand the dark.
The One who saves, I know He's here,
But I can't reach Him,
I'm shrouded in fear.
Please, O Lord, reach out your hand,
One minute more in this place, I can't stand.

MY DADDY'S CHAIR

By Janet Ryan

Wolves lived in our front room
 hiding
in the corner behind my Daddy's chair,
 waiting...

I never saw them clearly,
just a flash of light from fangs,
a glimpse of bristling hair.
But on winter nights
I could hear them where
the shadows gathered,
 breathing,
behind my Daddy's chair.

At supper lights were bright
above the kitchen table,
and while us women washed up dishes,
Daddy bravely walked alone
through the darkened house
and I listened as he fought them,
 grunting,
then turned the floor lamp on
and settled in his chair.
Soon he sat there
 snoring
while the wolves cowered in their lair.

But when Daddy worked at night
and just us women were at home,
no one knew or cared
about the danger
 lurking
in the corner of our front room,
no one except for me.
It was a secret we did not share.

So I crept in terror from the kitchen,
climbed upon the footstool
 leapt onto the cushions
 and flipped the floor lamp on,
then collapsed into the safety
of Daddy's chair.

FREE FROM HARM

By Allan Pirnique

In the early Spring
a car struck and killed a 'possum.
She was lying on the roadside;
the young in their mother's pouch
we're also killed.
Even in one's home
safety is a fragile thing.

TOO MUCH

By Matthew Johnson

Woken by the sound of death
Its soft and gentle breath
Dark, fearful, mysterious and gentle
Its visit was pure accidental
The kiss of death upon daily
Soft but not deep, awaken frailty

The depth of space is endless
As are the dimensions are careless
Normality sees the surface as bias
Where heaven is the state of highness
As the hells are deep as seas
Little do they know nothing is one or the other, there are keys

Too much passion
That cannot be to caution
Too much feeling of despair
Feeling as though none care
Too many feelings exploding
Days go, and feel myself corroding

Inside to out, the acid burns to kill
Lurking inside everything goes downhill
The trigger near always close to destruction
Either peace or pain to production
Unknown to the host or visitor
Always tempted to be sinister

Either too much or too little
Why does my mind try to belittle
A material home can be arranged
As a soul's home can't be changed

Days are good, days are bad, oh God
I express to be heard

Trapped and cold
I grow old
Suffering yet calm
Life in my palm
Every bit is mine
The extreme is fine

AN HOUR WITHOUT LUNGS

By *Gwen Jackson*

“Are you watching the video?” The text came in from a friend, but I ignored it until the second text appeared: “Shooting at Washington Middle School.”

For a split-second, everything in my body shut down. I stared as the words that kept banging together on the screen and wouldn't sit still. I couldn't remember the name of my son's school. “Washington? That's not it. Wait... is it?” It was as if my brain refused to accept reality for a moment. When it finally sunk in, I may have screamed as I jumped out of bed, but I can't remember.

I took in one big gasp of air, and I don't think I breathed again for the next hour. I ceased taking in or processing any information. I grabbed what I thought was my purse and ran. I ran through the dog like she was made of vapor. I may have left my front door open on the way out. I couldn't back out of my driveway, so I peeled out through my front yard. I can't say for certain if I cut off any other drivers or not. I was no longer in control of my body; my awareness was in a whole other realm, and nothing felt real. I tried to call my husband and speak words, and somehow he got the message. “I'm on my way,” he assured me. Next, I called my sister-in-law, whose child was originally supposed to ride home with me. “Shh-shhh-shooting. At the school,” I wheezed. She began screaming, and I suppose I just hung up on her. I had nothing left to provide her. I have no idea how I managed to make calls. I have no idea how I drove. I was not breathing. Surprisingly, I felt absolutely nothing. Everything went numb, including my emotions. All I could do was keep driving toward the school. “Forward. Just move forward” was the only thought rolling around my brain.

I found a parking space on the street that wasn't a parking space. It appeared to be as close as I could get to the school, so I jumped out of the car and speed-walked several blocks. I'm not sure if I turned the car off or locked it or even shut my door. I remember the thought that popped up: “Someone could hit the car where you left it,” followed by the thought, “Don't care.”

I ran up behind some men I'd never seen before and asked if they knew anything. They didn't. I searched what was becoming a huge crowd for familiar faces. If I could just breathe.... A group of adults wandered toward the office area, and I filed myself in line between strangers. The heaviness of the police presence struck me as we traipsed forward. “Forward. Just move forward.” Officers looked like stone statues wearing combat vests, holding giant guns like I'd never seen before, and lining the streets like an iron gate. This place where I'd gone to school, this place where I deposited my son every weekday, suddenly seemed foreign. The walls and the sky were drained of color.

The expression on my face must've been telling because someone tried to comfort me. “It's ok,” she said, squeezing my shoulder. An officer shouted across the street to me, “Well, hey, girl!” That made me feel a little better, though I was only able to give an awkward nod back to him. He wouldn't greet someone like that who might have a dead baby, right?

As we all continued our somber walk toward the office, there was a weird energy among us. Everything seemed eerily calm, like a funeral procession, and

several quiet voices could be heard in bits and pieces in the crowd. "...catch anyone?" "...wasn't actually on campus." "...kids are accounted for and safe." "...someone in custody." "...can't get our kids yet." "...still on lockdown." By the time we had all gathered in one area, I had pieced together what seemed to be the official story.

At this point, we all just wanted our children. My phone was blowing up with texts and calls and Facebook. People were telling everyone to calm down; people were saying the kids were all safe. I didn't care what anyone said; I didn't care if God himself floated down and told me everything was ok. I *needed* to lay eyes on my child. Right away.

It took about 30 anxiety-filled minutes of standing in line before I got my son. His cheeks were flushed, but he smiled at me.

I breathed.

I REMEMBER YOUR WORDS MORE THAN YOUR FACE

By Catherine Moran

They are strung like beads that reflect
a special glint of light whenever
I open that desk drawer to read them again.
You always caught our time together
in lined phrases and words
that mirrored more than the brief years
we stood in the same space.
Your poems are the pictures I never took
of two people who loved long ago.

Time has smoothed away your outline.
Only a silhouette of a form remains
to drift before my fingers and taunt me.
Funny how I can remember the image of
your soaring arms describing our trip to Paris,
and our quick steps up to a cathedral,
but your face is somehow shrouded
in the silk of night pillows
and cool spring breezes from a veranda.

Traces of you linger like the warmth of fire
in every sonnet on winter pages of our journal.
Those lines melt the edge of iced shingles.
And your scent trails in wonder
along summer verses with the ease of lilacs.
Lakes reflect a hint of your hiding below reeds.
We spilled love across sheets
and sensual pages touching the moments,
but your image drifts apart from every season.

Words are the only portrait I can frame.

SONG OF MY YARD

By Don Hoyt

*Nothing but bounce and stab
And a ravening second.*

Ted Hughes

Out in my yard, the thrushes pipe staccato tones,
the ivy fills those shadowed blanks
where the grass goes hungry by the trees' greed
as they struggle to make new leaves.
Over it all rushes a deaf wind.

We can't live without each other:
the bulbous trees my silent icon,
Bermuda grass an ancient idiom,
silken as the shanks of sacrificial beasts,
and the protean ivy rendering barriers inept
 (there's no logic to it)
as the whole day drifts eastward languidly.

Later I'll go inside the house with mud on me,
the lingering melody of a day's work
crafting the commonest, iambic yard.

I take pride in my crude architecture:
rearranging the roughhewn boards and bushy greens,
 walking about stepping on things
as lyrics spring from the brush like swarming insects.

We all blend in filial harmony:
the acts of continuing and changing we have known
 are a prelude to our weak staccato notes.
But what of the thrush, perched on the fence like a blatant lie,
staring down at me with cold, judgmental eye.

WHIPPORWILL

By Pat Durmon

Relentless, persistent,
sleepless insomniac!

Owls hoot and swoop
off and on, but you loop high
from your lowly branch
for flying insects.

You are hard to see, dressed
in mottled gray and brown.
But oh, how you throttle
your whip-poor-will sound.
Reminds me of a toddler,
claiming the first three syllables
he found.

I cannot sleep.

A part of me is jealous
of your joy. How you
do put it out there,
regardless of owls or hawks
or whatever else
might be hunting
for a snack.

Maybe I should belt out poems
the same way you throttle notes,
regardless of those who
might kill me
with critique.

Maybe just go ahead
and shout it out
until my throat
runs dry like a creek bed,
even outlasting you,
Whippoorwill.

PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

By James Yates

I see the sadness
Filling your eyes.
I see the weariness
Etched on your face.
I feel the years
Of emptiness masked as devotion
Weigh heavy on your shoulders.
I fight your past with that man.
I fight your present with that man.
I hope for your future with me.

I want to take every hurt,
Every tear, every disappointment
And absorb it, swallow it,
Transmute it
Like an alchemist
Taking lead
Turning it to gold
And wrap it with my body
Melt it all into my heart.

All your sadness
All your fear
All your uncertainty
All your disappointment
All your guilt
All your shame
Take it all
Upon myself.
Again, like an alchemist,
Maybe a savior,
Taking it all
In my crucifixion,
Taking it all
Upon my cross,
Bearing it all,
Merging it all,
Mixing it all,
With my own.

Every insecurity,
Every fear,
Every jealousy,
Stripped bare,
Exposed and quivering,
A mass of quaking weakness,
Becoming an exit wound
Of every tear,
Every cell of pain,
Every tendon of humiliation,
Every scar of failure,
Every broken shard
Of love offered, refuted,
Betrayed and wasted and lost.

Mixing it all
Yours with mine,
Mine with yours,
In sad, marvelous
Aching alchemy.
Merging my brokenness with yours
My tears with yours
Shaping, melting, transmuting
Melding and changing
In the refiner's fire of my heart
Pulling back scorched, shining like gold.
Let me work my magic.
Let me heal you're your wounds.
Let me resurrect your heart in mine.

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS MINING

By Desireé Stipp-Bethune

I realize now that Mom did not enjoy the annual Christmas auctions Dad loved. That's why she never went. That's why Dad, being legally blind, walked through the snow every Friday in December, year after year, either by himself or with one of his children.

Only one child. "Who wants to go with me to the auction tonight?" Dad would ask, as he was readying himself to face the dark cold outside. The response varied. Sometimes we all wanted to go. In that case, he would take one of the kids who didn't go with him the past week. Sometimes none of us wanted to go. A two-way walk in the bitter cold and deep snow didn't sound so appealing when a good TV show was on in the comfort of our cozy living room. Sometimes just one kid wanted to go, and it was his or her lucky night.

I volunteered. I bundled up, lacing my knee-high boots up the front and putting on my white and black faux leopard-fur overcoat. I wrapped my long pink scarf around my neck a couple of times, making sure my mouth and face were covered. I donned my Big Bird stocking hat. Dad and I headed toward the auction house.

We walked side-by-side on the way to the auction, filled with excited expectations about what we were going to find there. Except for the crunching of our footsteps, the deep snow muffled all of the sounds of town. Even cars driving by were quieted by the snow. Though it seemed much longer, the hike was only a mile. Down a back road clear across town sat the bustling auction house. The bright lights streaming from the small building's windows revealed the mass of farm trucks parked outside. The din of the bustle inside grew louder as we closed in on the building, interrupting the peace of the snowy world outside. And like the blast of hot air from an oven when the door is opened, the blast of voices and tobacco smoke shot out as we entered the auction house.

We were engulfed by the smoky cloud made by a huge percentage of men with cigars, cigarettes, and pipes. At the door, a lady with a beehive hairdo sat below the cloud and behind a card table with a notebook opened for "sign-in." I wrote Dad's name, and she wrote the number 56 beside it, taking a drag from her cigarette. She gave us our number on a large card. We signed up for the door prize.

All around the front of the room, past the folding chairs mostly occupied by men, were tables covered in stuff. Dad and I sauntered up the middle aisle to see what was going to be auctioned. Watches, clocks, blocks of batteries, baby dolls and their clothes, trains, tools, knives, flashlights, gadgets, slippers, and even furniture all tempted us. I told Dad what was on the tables, since he couldn't see without holding the items to his face. Dad chose which things he wanted to bid on. He asked me what I liked. Did I see anything my brother or sister might enjoy for Christmas? They had slot cars Jeff might like. There was a Barbie doll for Angel. He decided he would bid on those, too.

Finally, the auctioneer climbed into his booth like a preacher into a pulpit. How was he able to call in the smoke that grew denser toward the ceiling? Like a

congregation at a church service, the attendees all took their seats. The auctioneer's spotters stood in strategic places on the floor, while two men, item by item, picked up and displayed the treasure we were bidding on. "Now we have a...what is that, Harry? A cooking utensil set? A cooking utensil set! Let's start the bid at one buck!" And then he so beautifully and rapidly sang the bids out as the spotters shouted, "Yep!" whenever someone bid the price asked for. When the bid was maxed out, the men distributed an entire crate of cooking utensil sets to anyone in the crowd who was willing to pay that price. As the audience members showed their numbers and reached out for their precious loot, the beehive lady in the back was recording their purchases beside their numbers in the notebook. She had to be lightning fast. The crate was emptied. On to the next item. "Here's a baby doll. Perfect for the little girls!" Dad leaned over to me. "Is that what we want?" "No," I replied. We waited for the goods we had scoped out. Finally, the slot car came up. Dad's eyebrows went up and a little grin inched its way out of the side of his mouth. He was excited, but was trying to mask it. Dad bid up to the limit he had decided on before the bidding had started. Someone else won. But, the spotters were passing them out to the crowd at that price. Dad raised his number. The spotter shouted "56!" The beehive must have written our number down, and there was a slot car sitting on my lap. Dad nudged me with his elbow and smiled. On to the next item. The night went on as our lungs blackened with the second hand smoke around us. We left after all the things we had wanted were bid on. No reason to stick around for stuff we didn't care about. Dad "cashed out" at the card table, showing our number to Beehive, who tallied our purchases, and held out her hand as Dad counted out the money. And out we walked, away from the lights and the smoke, the sound of the auctioneer growing faint as we faced the cold dark.

The walk home seemed longer than the walk to the auction. Dad laughed, recalling the men helping the auctioneer. After they had told the crowd they were distributing the last box of slot cars, they found one more. "Awp! We have another last box!"

The sack of our purchases dangled from my wrist. We didn't get the Barbie. It was too expensive. Dad's arm rubbed against the branches of a yard's hedges, brushing the snow down in a trail behind us as we walked. My ears were ringing from the shadow of the noisy room lingering in my head. I told Dad I had had high hopes to win the door prize.

Last week, Angel had won it, a giant mesh stocking filled with all kinds of fun or weird stuff, including a nose-cover for sun-tanning. Because Dad and Angel had left early, they weren't there when they drew her name. We went back on Sunday to pick up her prize. The auction house was unrecognizable. We had driven there after church. We drove! And it was light outside. And there were no smokers inside, so the air was clear. No noise. The lingering stench from tobacco was the only evidence we were in the right place. A lady sitting behind an office window handed Angel her prize. This week, I wanted to win.

By the time we got home, I was pretty tired. We walked through the front door, once again from darkness to light. Predictably, from their places in the living room, the family objected to our horrible smell. "Ew! You reek! Have

you been smoking?" Jeff asked me, snorting. He thought he was so funny. While everyone was preoccupied, Dad hid our secret purchases.

When Dad slunk back into the room, we both told the family about the exciting things we had seen for sale and the bids we lost. And about my hopes for the door prize, which I never did win. Then Dad smiled. He was already dreaming about next week's auction.

SOMETIMES A STRANGER

By Donna Henson

Sometimes, a stranger
comes through as an Angel.
Provides a miracle,
completely unaware.

Sometimes a voice,
a voice such as yours,
even a voice on the phone,
connects another to hope,
when completely unknown.

You must know (I hope so)
that your work,
though sometimes seeming to you dull,
and, most often, stressed,
is a link to the Holy.
And for that you are Blessed.

GYPSY SOUL

By Tiffany Dawson

She was born with the blood of a free spirit
In the eyes of the uninformed she seemed incoherent
Through her eyes she sees what something can be
She does not notice what other humans see
In a world so different from herself she began to feel so misunderstood
As if she was standing alone in the middle of the woods
Her eyes came to realize that she is a unique creation
Even though she is of a different variation
She was blessed with the soul of a gypsy
She was instilled with a magnificent perspective
Through her eyes anything can be transformed into something beautiful
All it needs is the hands of someone suitable
Open your mind so that nothing beautiful is left behind

HIS TOUCH

By Destiny Winder

His touch was like the spring. Warm and gentle, with hints of the fun times to come. Adventures on horizon just waiting to happen. The possibilities of life just a beginning bud like the blossom of a new camellia flower. We were ready for the new.

His touch was like the summer. Hot and passionate, but brave as most young men were during a summer expedition. It was fast and easy, almost like he would be able to jump over every hurdle that life threw at him. It was strong and beautiful, like a crimson rose in full bloom.

His touch was like the fall. Cool and crisp, leaving behind fluttering traces of a younger self. One that wasn't so far away, but one that could never be again. The glimmer of the past still lingered in his eyes, the passion of summer hadn't been withered away like the petals of a daisy in the chilly weather.

His touch was like the winter. Cold, unfeeling, and lifeless. Youth that was never once forgotten, was so longed for now. The tips of his fingers still burned the surface of my skin. This time as he wished to be young again, the cold came quick like that of a winter's snow storm, and the light slipped from his eyes.

ONLY THE BEGINNING

By Micah Johnson

From the start,
They ask me if I have a dream.
Many possibilities, progress
in and out, through this uncertain heart.
I'm even further under the hot stew, still not sure what to do.

Two things, bitter further,
An answer that's to last,
And ensuring the mind
of mine won't fall by madness.
But the end is actually only the beginning.

Indeed it is, advancing like fizz,
Fated to spew out and down,
until I'm left clueless anew.
Everyone will enjoy the first adult years spinning.
For me, however, it's only the beginning.

PAIN

By Shanterica Crockett

When my mom's friend's husband touches me in my sleep is when I first felt
pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain.

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When I grabbed that knife to slice my wrist intending to hit that main vein.

Was the second time in my life when I felt this unbearable pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain,

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When my auntie's boyfriend rubbed my behind, stepping out of the uncle's lane.

Was the third time in my life when I felt this irresistible pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain.

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When my ex tried to kill me, instantly thinking he was insane,

Wasn't the fourth but another time in life when I felt this aching pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain,

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When I swallowed 10 pills and dwelled on swallowing more thinking I had
nothing to lose or nothing to gain

Was one of many days I felt this intense pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain,

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When I open my eyes more and I expanded the thoughts in my brain

Was the day I realized I needed to start looking forward to being hurt by so much
pain.

When the sun shined so pretty and later followed the rain,

It was a beautiful day that looked ruined and it made me think of my pain.

When I saw the constant pattern and didn't know who to blame,

I settled with knowing in this life of mine I have many more days of feeling this
dreadful pain.

UP, UP, AND AWAY!

By Troy L. Pritt

Tom Fielding the quarterback of the high school football team asked Penny Ashcraft, one of the cheerleaders, to go to the movies the first Saturday after the end of football season. He was pleasantly surprised when she said “Yes.” She was the prettiest and the smartest girl in the high school. He borrowed his father’s car, picked Penny up at her parents’ home and they started for Centerville. Sitting beside him with her blonde hair, blue eyes, cute little nose, and dimples, she took his breath away. Penny had no lack of breath, chattering like a warbling bird - recalling their team’s winning season and reminding Tom of some of the awesome plays he executed. Tom was glowing both from her admiration and being on a date with the most attractive girl in town.

The road was winding around the hill which separated Sharps Town from Centerville. “Tom, that truck is out of control. It’s going to hit us!” she screamed. The truck hit the driver’s side of their car. Bricks it was hauling rained down on the car. It crumpled the hood, broke the windshield, and spun the car completely around. The automobile went into the ditch on the hill side of the road. The last thing Penny remembered was the sight of Tom’s bloodied, broken face and chest.

Penny regained consciousness in the hospital. A nurse was telling a doctor, “That girl is the sweet candy striper who carried flowers and cards to patients. She always cheered them with her sunny smile and happy voice.”

Considering the massive fatal injuries received by Tom, it was incredible that Penny did not receive injuries more serious than cuts and bruises which soon healed. However, she could no longer walk. Doctors ran many tests, including x-rays, CT scans, MRIs, and brain wave exams. There did not seem to be a tangible explanation for why she could not walk.

Her parents took her home. They bought a wheel chair for her to use, built ramps to give her access to the sidewalk out front and to a large, privacy fenced back yard. The school arranged for her to complete her senior year using Skype in the classrooms and sending her assignments and tests by email. She was given physical therapy to keep the muscles in her legs from atrophy and also to reawaken the nerves. The therapist came to their home three times a week.

The once popular Penny found that she was now without friends. Her former friends did not come to see her. Some were embarrassed, some no longer had anything in common with her, some were mean enough to be glad she was no longer competing for the attention of the boys in school and in town, and some even blamed her for what happened to Tom. For these and whatever other reasons, Penny learned what it meant to be lonely.

The State Fair came to Capital City. Penny’s parents thought that it might cheer Penny. On Saturday, they left early in the morning to travel there and spend the day. As they passed the place of the fatal crash, Penny gasped and then sobbed for a long while. Making their way through the crowds at the Fair with her wheelchair was an ordeal for Mr. and Mrs. Ashcraft. Their reward was that the Fair lifted Penny’s spirits; she smiled and chuckled at the sights. At lunch time,

just for her, they ate the junk food that is usually only sold or eaten at a carnival or fair. There were corn dogs with a variety of mustards to slather on them, onions blossomed in deep fat fryers, funnel cakes, and snow cones whose fruity syrups inevitably began dripping through the bottom of their paper cones.

As they were making their way along the succession of booths and stands, they came to an old woman dressed in very shabby clothes selling balloons filled with helium. Mr. Ashcraft bought Penny a heart-shaped balloon with the words, "Love Lifted Me," a double entendre, as the balloon urgently tugged at the string restraining it, wanting to soar into the sky. Many other children and couples were walking along, holding onto balloons.

When they neared the Ferris wheel, they saw a balloon soar into the sky and the breeze carried it over the top of the turning amusement ride. As the crowd watched the flight of the runaway, a boy in the seat reaching the top caught the string. A cheer went up from the crowd and Penny clapped her hands. When the ride stopped and the boy got out of his seat, a teenage girl ran up to claim her errant balloon. As the boy gave her the string, she gave him a kiss, leaving a lipstick print on his cheek. The crowd again cheered.

They had such a good time that all three of them went home feeling at peace for the first time since the accident. Penny took her balloon home and tied it to her bedpost. She was surprised at how many days it remained inflated.

One evening when Mr. Ashcraft came home from work, Penny asked him, "Daddy, would you get me the apparatus and a bottle of helium for filling balloons and a whole bunch of ordinary round, colored balloons? I have an idea." It took several days for her father to gather the information and a couple weeks to get all that she needed. She then had to learn how to use them. In another week, Penny was in the balloon business. On a sunny Friday, soon after school began, Penny went down the sidewalk in her wheelchair, whistling and singing with ten balloons tied to each of the chair's arms. She posted herself on the sidewalk outside the elementary school just before it let out.

As the children came out of the building, they spied the array of brightly colored balloons dancing in the breeze. "Ooh! Can I have one?" Soon a crowd was circling her. "The balloons are ten cents for children or twenty-five cents for adults. BUT, if you give me your sweetest smile, tell me your name and what your favorite thing is in all this world, I can let you have one for FREE!" The balloons did not last long enough. Penny was both elated and satisfied.

The next day was Saturday and Penny went to town and parked on the sidewalk outside a loan company. People approaching the office and coming out of it had worry lines furrowing their brows. They looked puzzled at the dancing balloons and the sign she had made. "PROBLEMS AND WORRIES SPEEDILY DISPATCHED." To those who inquired, she asked their name and told them her own. "Take this balloon home with you. When someone looks at it and smiles, give them a smile in return. At home, write down your problems, all about them, just like you would unload to a friend. Roll up the paper, tie the balloon's string around it, and let the balloon and your worries fly away. Wave good-bye to them.

Who knows where your problems will go. Let them go away.” By noon all her balloons were gone.

The next week she bought post cards at the post office. She addressed them to herself. On the back of the cards she wrote, “For centuries people have put notes into bottles which they tossed into the sea. This note is being tossed into an ocean of air. Mail the postcard back to me with the name of your town so I can know how far it flew.” She had punched a hole in the cards to fasten them to the balloons’ strings. On the wall she taped a map. As postcards returned, she put pins in the map marking where her balloons had flown. Over the weeks the map began to fill with pins. However, the weather became chilly, bringing her ballooning to an end.

One postcard was returned in person instead of by mail. One day the doorbell rang. When Mrs. Ashcraft answered the door, a young man asked, “Is this where Penny Ashcraft lives? If so, could I see her, please?” Mrs. Ashcraft hesitated. “Does Penny know you?” “I’m not sure, but I have some information for her.” The young man was a bit peculiar in appearance. His face was nondescript with an absent-minded expression. His hair was uncombed and he wore thick, dark-rimmed glasses. The right sleeve of the leather jacket he was wearing was not filled all the way. On his left leg was a prosthetic shoe with heel and sole almost two inches thick.

When he saw her gaping at him, he said, “When I was born my right arm and my left leg were too short. I manage.” Embarrassed, Mrs. Ashcraft hurried off to find Penny.

When Penny rolled into the room, he introduced himself. “I am Ernst Weisbaderam. I was in a few of your classes in high school. I live in Centerville. I received several of your postcards and they intrigued me. I studied the airstreams on the days you released your balloons, factored in the air temperatures, whether the day was clear or overcast, and what was the humidity. Then I predicted the probable direction and how far they were carried, making educated guesses where they came down. I’m sure you must have kept a map of the responses you received. I wonder if you would allow me to compare it with the map of my predicted landing spots.”

Penny took Ernst back to her room. He took out his charts and compared them to Penny’s map. Mrs. Ashcraft heard their voices become more and more excited. At times, there were peals of laughter.

Penny wondered how Ernst had come from Centerville. When he left that night, she saw him go out to a Cushman motor scooter, put on a helmet, clumsily get on its seat, and noisily ride off into the night.

Ernst became a regular visitor. Sometimes he and Peggy used a balloon like a ball and batted it back and forth across the room. Ernst would take a gulp of helium gas and then talk in a high pitched, squeaky voice that made Penny laugh until tears rolled down her cheeks. Other times they carried on animated conversations about science or literature. Ernst had begun college online and now Penny was interested in doing that also. She began to see what a worthy and admirable person Ernst was. She no longer saw a nerdy geek with one arm and

one leg too short. Inside she perceived a handsome man for whom she was beginning to have feelings. She hoped that he saw her as more than a girl with useless legs.

One day, Ernst came by to drop off some physics books he had discussed and that she had expressed a desire to read. Mr. Ashcraft was at work and Mrs. Ashcraft had gone to the beauty parlor. Since neither parent was home, Ernst did not think it was proper for him to go into the house. He returned to his scooter, put on his helmet and was getting astride the Cushman. As he rocked it off its stand, the machine rolled over on its side, pinning Ernst's short leg under it. The full weight of the machine was on that foot and leg. He was screaming in pain. Penny called 9-1-1 and then rolled out to where he was screaming for help. His face was white. He was in agony. Penny got as close as she could, but could do nothing.

Penny saw Tom crumpled in the wrecked car, saw his bloodied face and body as she heard Ernst's cries of pain. Without realizing it, she was on her feet. She walked around to the other side of the scooter, grabbed its handlebars and righted the machine. With the weight of the machine off of his leg Ernst was able to scoot backwards out of the way of the machine using his good leg. "Okay you can let it back on its side. It's probably too heavy for you to rock back onto its stand." Even as he was speaking, Penny was pulling the scooter back on its stand just as she had seen Ernst do many times.

When the ambulance came, the EMT and Paramedic determined that Ernst had a broken leg and other lesser injuries. He was in the hospital for five days. Visiting him there, (with a different balloon each day) Penny became acquainted with his mother and little sister (who confiscated each balloon as soon as Penny left). His mother was puzzled. "Ernst told us that you were in a wheelchair." "I was, until Ernst needed for me to get out of it and help him." The answer puzzled his mother.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashcraft were talking that evening. "Now that Penny is no longer in a wheelchair, I hope she will get back in with her old friends and maybe go out with some young men more suitable than that Ernst!"

Penny was hurt by their remarks. She had become stronger as a person, even while she couldn't walk. She had not lost her vision of Ernst as a truly handsome man inside an uncompleted body.

She entered the room, zipping up her jacket and carrying a helmet, "Where are you going Penny?" "I'm going to visit Ernst. His broken leg and his foot are still healing. Then he will need a new prosthetic shoe to be made. While he is not able to get around, he has loaned me his motor scooter." She pulled the helmet over her beautiful blonde hair and skipped out to the curb.

MOMENTS

By James Yates

To reach out now,
To touch you, fingertips trembling,
To feel the softness of your back,
To weave through the tumbling
 falls of your hair,
To feel your smooth heat,
To melt into you,
To flow through your riverbeds,
To spill over your rocky cliffs:
 This would be the ending
 Of these moments,
 These days,
 These nights.

THE ARCHER

By Barry Bagwell

Such great force my shoulders bear
But to steady this gaze I must dare

This beast and I arrived in sync
I perched up high to addle his think

My stench on air tells no lies
This wind if swirls gives way surprise

Ears so keen. Is my pulse known?
He walks as coil of tendon and bone.

A million years to hone this sense
It served him well from that day hence

Is in my hands some hopeless thing?
My left a stick. My right a string.

Closer now. He checks and waits
The wheels now turn that seal our fates

A step he needs to clear that growth
This stage and screen we actors both

He travels this space that I require
My hand turns loose that strained so dire

An arc so slight it fools my eyes
A hurried whisper that way flies

These steering wings I follow with hope
They streak across this wooded slope

Low he moves for all his worth
To miss this day his hope from birth

Gone from sight his steps so swift
I listen now. My fears adrift.

Was tell-tale sound of stumble and fall?
Just fifty steps to hit that wall?

Quiet now save screeching bird
I pray was true what I just heard

I clamor down this sturdy pine
I hardly touch a step or vine

This hearty light will quickly fade
I rush to find this trail just laid

On it now I know the end
So much he lost he cannot mend

I see him now 'neath elm blown down
The prize I seek his antlered crown

I sit with him and stroke his nape
I see the scars upon his cape

A worthy foe he was this day
A game of chance was forced to play

There will be grins back at the rack
From stories told that are half fact

But bitter and sweet are these dull eyes
Somber knowing he will not rise

For dust to dust we both share
He walks my dreams from now to there.

MOON LIKE A SILVER DOUBLOON

By Jim Barton

On the darkened waters,
something kin to shadow moves,
something dark and dead,
dreary and dank...
a ship, perhaps, ancient and creaking,
clattering like the bones
of the unjolly Roger it flies.

In the night skies,
the moon, like a silver doubloon,
hovers, reflecting,
collecting its fee
from the rat-infested boat
that dares to float
across her creamy face--
dreams of lace, of leather,
eyepatch and feather,
rum for the dumb,
rummer for the dumber--
Buccaneers hijacking the night
beneath a coin of silver light

A DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET

By Errica Tanksley

August 10, 2007, in Bastrop, Louisiana, at Medlife Ambulance Service I was about to get the worst call I ever experienced in my EMS career. I was sitting on the couch watching TV when the call came in. “Dispatch to unit 209, I need you to 10-19 to the Budget Inn, on the square; there has been a shooting. Proceed with caution.” At that very moment I felt excitement, fear, and nervousness. I jumped up and ran to the ambulance. I immediately hit the emergency lights and sirens as my partner and I took off quickly to get to the scene. We both knew every minute counted at this point.

We pulled up at the Budget Inn and about five officers came running to the ambulance, yelling and screaming in terror, “Hurry! Come on! We will cover you! We have an officer down!” My partner and I quickly jumped from the ambulance, grabbed our gear, and began to run towards the officer lying on the pavement. Blood was everywhere and the officer was barely breathing. He had been shot twice. We worked swiftly to get the officer on to the back board. I was shaking, horrified, and heartbroken as this was a man that I called my friend lying on the ground in front of me dying. As I began to strap the last backboard strap across the officer’s chest, I heard the gun shots begin.

This is where my fight or flight instinct should have kicked in, but it didn’t; I just froze. I ducked and lay there on top of a dying officer. Shielding his body with mine. There were a lot of gun shots all around me and yelling and screaming. All of the officers and my partner left to take cover. For a moment I looked up, and there was a man with two pistols running toward me shooting. There were officers behind me shooting back at the shooter. It felt like forever but I know it was only a few seconds before the shooter fell on top of me. I didn’t know if he was alive or dead. I could feel his pistol touching me in the side. All I could do was scream. Here I lay between a dying officer and a dying man with a pistol poking me in my side.

Just seconds later I felt someone grab me by the back of my pants, pulling me to my feet as he rolled the shooter off of me. I turned and looked at the man lying on the ground as the officer unloaded his pistol shooting the man. That is a sight I will never forget! I could hear my partner yelling my name so I began to run towards the ambulance where I found my boss who had been shot in the forearm. I worked as quickly as possible to get his arm bandaged so he could get to the hospital. I was shaking so badly that I could hardly get his arm wrapped. The men got the officer who had been shot and brought him to the ambulance. My partner and I began to intubate the officer and do CPR. I was crying and shaking so badly that it was difficult for me to do my job.

My partner looked me in the eyes with tears running down his face and said, “It’s okay; we can do this. Are you okay?” I said, “Yes, I think so.” From that point forward, I began to calm down and things started going smoothly as they should have. Once I calmed down enough for my adrenaline to stop working in overdrive my head began to hurt. I reached up to touch my head with my gloved hands and when I looked back at my hand there was more blood. I looked at my

partner and said I think I've been shot. He looked at my head and realized it was true; I had been shot. He told me to get us to the hospital as quickly as possible so I jumped out of the back of the ambulance and ran to the driver seat just to realize that our tires had been shot out. I radioed for more help, and it was only a few minutes before another ambulance arrived to pick us up to go to the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital the nurses rushed us back. They checked my head wound which turned out to be just a graze.

Dennis Clem, a member of the Aryan brotherhood, a white supremacy gang, was the shooter. He was hiding out in the hotel in Bastrop, because he had just recently shot and killed an 18-year-old boy in Texas. Someone called the cops and told them that there was a man staying in the hotel that had warrants. It was a setup. When the two investigators arrived at the hotel to check out the situation, a woman answered the door and let them in. Little did they know, Clem was in the bathroom prepared for war. He came out shooting at the officers. Both officers were shot. That is when the woman, Tonya Smith, walked out of the hotel as if nothing was wrong. She went to the front office and told them that they needed to call an ambulance, someone had been shot. She was later captured and received two life sentences for her role in the murder of the two investigators. We lost two fine officers that day. They will never be forgotten.

That day was one of the scariest days of my life. I suffered from PTSD and had to undergo counseling. I learned from that day the importance of always appreciating each day. Never take the simple things for granted. Hug your kids and spouse every day, and always tell them that you love them. Never go to bed mad and don't hold grudges. Life is too short. You never know when it may be your last day here on earth. I was literally an inch from losing my life. I know that I had angels watching over me that day. God is not done with me here on earth; he still has more work for me.

DAYS OF RECONSTRUCTION

By James Yates

In the days of the Reconstruction
Scorched like Atlanta
When Sherman burned through
Raw and refined amid
The ashes of Southern ruins
As the wind of Gabriel
Wails across these hollow bones
And the artifice of our own design
Gold glowing in the dying embers
Of the love-lost, lust-layered Self.

This is how Love – like a wolf
Howling at the moon –
Dies and the damage done calls
In the days of the Reconstruction.

When it's all said and done
When the love has flown into the sun
When you're left with no one else to blame
When the truth is it will never be the same
When you think it's over, it's only just begun
In the days of the Reconstruction
You'll see how far you've come.

After the rain with the full moon on the rise
After you look inside yourself
After all the scenes that taunt and tease
After you realize that there's a chance
After the battle's been won
In the days of the Reconstruction
You'll see how much you've grown.

This is how Love – like a wolf
Howling at the moon –
Dies and the damage done calls
In the days of the Reconstruction.

RECLAIMING THE NATURAL STATE

By Donna Henson

About some things in the Natural State,
we all agree: Arkansas has beautiful lands.
Yet, on our roadsides are things we just don't understand.
Instead of natural beauty, here's what we see:

 Thrown-away cups,
 crumpled bags,
 scrunched cans

On a trail through beautiful woods, what do we pass?
Would you look at that! It's someone else's trash!
How long has it been there?
No use to ask.

Who's doing this?
Who's ruining the view?
Maybe, - just maybe - we all are
(me and you).

Rather than wonder, it's better to decide:
Come on, Arkansas, "Let's declare our pride!"
Let's reclaim our beauty;
Clean up our country side.

Where we work daily
and where we live
Let's make a Natural State pledge to
"Clean up the road's edge!"

RACE FOR COMMON GROUND

By John-David Woolsey

If I say black, would you say white?
If I took a left, would you turn a right?
If we stay in opposite directions,
Would we meet halfway with concessions?
The same as you, my constitution is strong.
This does not mean that one of us is wrong.
If I am happy, would you be sad?
If we are all angry, I know this is bad!
Is common ground a thing of the past?
Or can love and kindness outlast?
Scientific laws state that pressure can break,
But, only God will determine man's fate!

AND THEN IT RAINED

By Marilyn Joyner

March, a hint of spring,
the farmer boards his tractor,
tilling and fertilizing,
forming rich beds.

Seeds of future life,
dropped carefully,
snuggled and tamped,
into propitious soil.

Incubating seeds,
await moisture.
Rains come.
The farmer is pleased.

Rains come
and come,
and come again
for days.

Middles like slender rivers
snake through the fields.
Rows-- flatter and flatter,
seeds swim into oblivion.

He watches with anguish.
Powerless!
Finally skies clear
over saturated ground.

He waits for arable soil!
He plows again, plants again,
that springtime,
when it rained.

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

By Matthew Johnson

Pained by a world of unification
Singled out by the slightest invalidation
Pressure to be the norm
Can't even take my own form
Deceived into believing false ill
Shouldn't be forced to a pill

World in colors, vibrant and loud
All lost within the crowd
Told to be ourselves without doubt
Conformed to mental expectation makes me shout
My reality is different you see
And I hold the key

Born with a gift, to feel immensely
Others uneasiness shows intensely
For they do not feel deep passion
It's not always in fashion
Feeling in extreme isn't a crime
It doesn't matter if I flip on a dime

Perfectly imperfect, complete at ease
Humanity is the true disease
Claiming acceptance of difference
Shaming a person's emotions shows indifference
Okay to think differently to an extreme
But not if you're part of another scheme

We all have a unique brain
Why force a popular function to cause everlasting pain
Creativity comes with the gift
Medicated to cause a downward shift
They cannot suppress it forever
I find the gift mysteriously clever

Highs and lows part of the journey
The lows aren't a reason to call an attorney
There are evils of the gift as with good
To accept and love myself as I should
The evils can be there
But to the gifts positivity cannot compare

The gift comes with a rare disease
The only positive disease that causes freedom of the seas
It is called empathy
An essential to every entity
We're called crazy
But maybe they're just hazy

Thrown into a insensitive void
I will not let myself be destroyed
We're not sick and we're not weird
Sometimes I'm very glad it appeared
The gift embraces individuality
We should all try that mentality

SOME ALTERNATIVES

By Catherine Moran

How to blend away
without really leaving the scene is the key.

I practice pushing my skin
through the ancient bark of the oak tree
until I am absorbed into its resined veins.
My own summer backyard
makes it easy to disappear from this world.
My arms arch into branches
reaching to a forgiving blue canvas
and ending in green fingerprints on the edge.
Smooth as photosynthesis
I wait behind the bark
observing the world in another dimension
for as long as it takes.

In the still of a winter month
I walk straight into crooked cliffs
jagged at the borders of the sea.
My narrow bones fuse with rock ribbing
to become part of a sharp-edged marrow.
I stand strong against the waves
looking at the horizon with an eye for beauty.
Seas lick my ankles with cold tongues.
All good-byes pull away with the tide
leaving only a stone face
to remember.

An acquaintance of mine committed suicide.
I didn't get a chance
to tell him about fingering within the green or
escaping to the hidden cliffs.
I am there now waiting
until the dark subsides.

NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION

By Janet Ryan

I don't make New Year's resolutions. At least, not since I was thirteen. I used to, before that. The first time my mother sat me down at the dining room table with a pencil and a piece of paper and told me to write my resolutions, I was confused.

Wait, what? Write resolutions? That means I should promise I'll change something? How do you change something that's already just right? I don't say perfect, 'cause that's arrogant, and arrogant needs changing. But just right is just the way I want it.

"Just think about it," said my mother. "Listen to your conscience, then write."

I thought. I wrote "1. This year I resolve to..." and then I thought some more. Resolutions? That means more than one. I wrote on the next line, "2." And I thought some more.

"Mommy? How many should I write?"

"Think about what things you need to change. That'll tell you how many to write."

I erased the "2."

What should I change? What *could* I change? I mean, sometimes everyone *else* was out of whack, but *I* was fine. Could I make a resolution to change others somehow? I rewrote the number "2." for my mother. After some thought, I wrote a "3." and a "4." for my father and my best friend, Earlyn. But I couldn't think of what to write -- what can a kid do to change her parents? Or her friend?

I thought about it.

Thinking gets real boring real soon.

"Mommy, what are *you* writing for your resolutions?"

"You need to write your own resolutions, Janny. Everyone's different."

"But what *are* you writing?"

"Well, maybe I need to lose a bit of weight, eat less dessert."

I wrote next to the 1., "Lose some weight" and next to the 2., "Eat less dessert." Then I smelled the pineapple upside down cake my mother was baking.

I erased the whole second line. Finally, after considerable thought, I realized it's really not possible to change someone else. I erased the numbers 3. and 4.

I gave my list of one resolution to my mother.

"Well, it's not original, but I hope you'll stick to it."

I tried to, for about a week. That's the trouble with resolutions. They take too long, and you really can't keep them.

I rebelled against the whole resolution idea when I was thirteen. I took my pen and paper and I printed in large block letters, "THIS YEAR I RESOLVE NEVER TO MAKE ANY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS, EVER AGAIN."

That's the first resolution I ever made that I kept. At least, I kept it for sixty years. This year, I've made another resolution that I hope I will keep.

1. This year I resolve to not feel guilty about time spent accomplishing nothing. I will immerse myself in a poem or a painting, whether it's one I did or one I found online or in a museum. I will sit on the porch swing and appreciate

all the weeds in the yard; weeds grow beautiful flowers. I will pet fabric, fondle it even, designing a quilt and cutting up a yard of cloth without worrying about how much it cost; I already spent that money, so have fun. I will listen to birds singing as long as they wish to sing; laundry will wait. I will enjoy the scent of moss as I watch it grow. I will spend time with people I like and avoid those I don't.

What are my odds of keeping this year's resolution? Well, not bad, actually. Those are things I already do, but I always manage to not enjoy them fully because my conscience reminds me of what it thinks I *should* be doing instead. This year, I resolve to not feel guilty about enjoying them.

So suck on that, Conscience. This year, I resolve to ignore you.

POND FISHING

By Don Hoyt

The winter pond coats itself.
White composure glosses its imperfect deadness
like ashen skin on carcasses
that hides their inner seething.

Ice always lures me to its silent fury,
as it swallows dry and wet alike,
leaving gaping holes
as bass mouths gape in feigned surprise.

Fishermen, not easily fooled,
abuse its depths with potent lies themselves,
which tear mouths like hurtful truths,
or fill thin social units
like lures in plastic tackle boxes,
translucent, stiff, easily unlatched.

MY HUSBAND'S HAT

By Pat Durmon

As he ages,
the stain on his straw
cream colored hat
grows tall at the bottom
of the crown
like long grass
in front of a mountain range.
Sometimes I think that hat
is brimming
with life
and the wayward west.
Never does he feel dressed
without it.

SYLLABIC

By Allan Pirnique

I
lie,
and see
the tree
and blue sky
clouds float by
a dreamy day
a time to lay
troubles on the ground
worries can't be found
sleepy time gal
laugh with a pal
sing a song
nothing's wrong
earth round
cool ground,
lie
I

NOTHING COMES OUT EVEN

By Catherine Moran

I know leftover pot roast can be relegated
to a mediocre soup,
but what can I concoct with extra dreams?
My paths are filled with those lilac images
that never stepped beyond my footprints.
Their threads pull my fingers
imagining what could have happened if only
I had taken time
to weave them into a tangible fabric.

With piddles of paint from a creative project
I can spiff up the flower pots
or rejuvenate the wooden gate,
but what about the leftover sparks
from a love affair tarnished beyond polishing?
Silver earrings can be smashed,
pictures can be torched, but memories hover.
Only time can slice them into pieces
that can be barely tasted,
and then swallowed without remorse.

Ragged pieces of life yearn to be trimmed
into a proper shape,
but they angle into the slipshod hands
of human travelers traipsing
along the mad avenues of asphalt.
We sprinkle some excesses into light footprints.
We drag the rest in worn suitcases
trailing behind us
over the leftover patches of brown earth.

MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH A FOREIGNER ONLINE

By Micah Johnson

In our world of digital technology, we may communicate with anyone all over the globe. Your friend, your parents, or even you may have your own “Internet buddy”. While talking to foreign people from the comfort of your home is a rewarding privilege, it is not just a given. **Keeping your online relationship with your out-of-country friend, partner, etc. will stay friendly and on good terms when you follow these guidelines.**

Whenever we first interact with someone on the web, there is an affirmably universal question that comes to our minds before all others: “Where are you from?” This is a natural thing to wonder about. Do not hesitate. Ask where your new contact lives! Many people just say their country, if nothing more. The country is really just your essential information, with a town, city, or district as a bonus. (From start to finish, we will use China for a “buddy” example.) You learn that your online buddy is Chinese—now, where in China does he live? Is it Beijing—the capitol city—or Shanghai—a major commercial-industrial area? Ask him this as well. Your buddy’s lifestyle is largely determined by his surroundings, so region matters. Having that overall picture in your brain about the backdrop leaves you something with which to form your first impression. That way, you can then decide if you want to pursue the relationship.

Moreover, you need to be able to distinguish his culture. Often in your head come simple questions that are very important. Does he call you “Ma’am” or “Sir”? Are you addressed with your first or last name? Questions like these lead to more questions—which, in turn, lead you deeper into understanding this fascinating individual. Think of your Chinese buddy like a walking library: the more you read, the sooner you are able to form a genuine interest in his everyday life. Ask casual questions such as, “Have you ever ridden roller coasters?” You may get to know how he wears a mask in some cities, or that he visits other countries on a regular basis, or perhaps he loves roller coasters.

Also, have a gray area with trust. Chinese people come from a polite culture; however, this does not mean that *every* Chinese person you encounter is a saint in good standing. Know what you can and cannot share. You probably are comfortable sharing your name, what things you tend to buy, even what you look like—although things like your SSN, Zip, and password to Facebook all should remain in your hands. As this relationship becomes less inhibited, you still have to recognize the immediate relationship. Note any red flags. For instance, you discover your “good, kind, and well-spoken” Chinese buddy... has been using you as a living, breathing “decoration” to impress friends. Other red flags may include your buddy constantly asking you for money (which has yet been repaid), his constant chatter about social drama with you, and even his ignoring promises and pretending they were never made. If you understand the immediate relationship well, it will likely forecast the kind of relationship that you expect to develop in the long run.

Secondly, appeal to the person as an individual. This sort-of-clichéd suggestion might be familiar to you, especially if your home is the Americas or Western Europe. Nevertheless, it does pertain to a one-on-one relationship like this, online or not. Move past his first impression. While Chinese attitudes revolve around politeness, traditional values, and collectivism; this is still one individual. Like any human on this planet, he can disagree with you—or *other* Chinese people. There could be a disagreement over anything, from something as minor as liking coffee or tea more... to something as major as religious freedom. Understand *his likes* and *preferences*. Say your Chinese friend is opposed to democracy, whereas you hate authoritarianism. He does not like surprise phone calls when you do. Everyone has individuality—regardless of culture. The differences in opinion need not be a negative thing between you two. Do not be afraid to ask him some relevant personal questions. You may ask, “Do you want guns in China?” or “What do you think of the Communist Party?” With the tea-or-coffee dispute, you may just simply ask, “What do you like more—tea or coffee?”

In return, be honest about yourself. It is safe to say that, nine times out of ten, your buddy wants to know about you. Anything and everything might be a wow: like your “bustling metropolitan home”; or your “backwater cabin smack-dab in the woods”; maybe that chrome-blue Lamborghini that cost you half your future pension! Perhaps you like something unpopular or even unheard-of in your country. If you are an American whose favorite foods are spicy; for example, this might surprise your buddy since many Chinese perceive Americans as spice-haters. By opening up about yourself personally, whatever the information, this also helps him get past *his first impression of you*.

Furthermore, control the amount of generalizing you do. It boils down to this—do not prejudge. Prejudice is the foundation for generalization. Do not assume your Chinese friend is always polite, he is as human in emotional capacity as you are. While you may be able to predict his behavior under certain circumstances, jumping to conclusions hinders your own understanding. Minimalize stereotypes. To put it in perspective, it is racially offensive even in the States to think Mandarin is nothing but “Ching-chong-chang... twang-gong-shieng-chu-goong!” Your buddy has feelings, and mocking him in this way—even if the intention is playful—might just cause a total communication breakdown—or evoke *his own stereotype* about *you* back in your face. Mockery is never well-received.

For the third point, you must adhere to your conscience. Know what actions are okay and not okay, for all relationships contain boundaries. Your buddy is a Buddhist, you say? Asking questions about his Buddhist beliefs is reasonable. What is not reasonable, however, is softly urging him to “consider following the word of Jesus Christ” multiple times. Think twice before you act on an impulse. If anything feels even remotely wrong to ask, say, or share on your phone, then it probably *is*. Make sure to also give and accept apologies, even if you suspect everything *will be fine*. Chinese society and culture stress social obligations, one of which is saying (and accepting) “I apologize” for any perceived misdoing. It matters not whether it appears “fake” or “too old-fashioned”. Only after that

apology has been spoken and taken with open arms will the situation feel resolved in their eyes.

Apart from China and how it runs, this concept applies to a good “buddyship” in general. Mutual benefit triumphs self-praise. This is part of how to hold respect in high regard. Practice empathy to the fullest extent. Say, for instance, you notice your buddy struggling with something emotional. Tell him “I can understand that” if you understand the stress he is going through. Offer solitude if you notice a shift in his current moods (i.e. *currently bossy* when *normally cooperative* with you). Oftentimes under emotional stress, just ensuring someone that you care is enough to help him deal with it. Develop the mind-set that both you and the foreigner are of equal human value. Your Chinese buddy is *not* superior to you because of his total respect for authority. You are *not* superior to your buddy because you think outside the box more often. That only falls back on everyone having individuality—which has no right-or-wrong spectrum. Put yourself in your buddy’s shoes and be mindful, and he is bound to return the favor.

With that in mind, it does not end there. The foreigner is obliged to *treat you well in return*. *Speak up* if you suspect *unfair treatment*. Say you suddenly notice something off. You cannot stand it when he talks down to you, makes examples out of you in public, or does not pay you for your services. As mentioned earlier, Chinese people are human and may not act like “a saint in good standing” like you hoped. If you cannot stand being talked to like a blockhead, *confront* it. You could give him a hint, such as saying, “I know what I mean, okay? Thank you.” If you want to confront it head-on, you could straight up ask, “Do you have a problem with me?” If you cannot stand being made an example of, *confront* it. You should *definitely confront* the issue if your supposed “buddy” is not paying you for your work. The general rule of thumb here is *not to escalate the trouble*—but *ask him questions, re-evaluate the relationship, and do ask for help from someone else if you believe this is beyond your handling*.

Whether in person or online, you matter, too! Do not disregard your own dignity at the end of the day. Despite cultural, political, social, or ideological differences, your own self-esteem is *never* irrelevant or dismissible. Whatever the situation, see that you receive the basic, universal human consideration *we all deserve*. Tolerance—like many other choices we choose in the beginning—remains changeable—in whenever time, at whatever place, and however the amount. Do not feel bad if you found out later that your buddy was self-serving or fake, and you found peace again when you cut ties. Do not feel bad if you leave due to him not being a nice person in your opinion. It is true that the other person’s opinions, morals, and wants do matter; the important other truth to remember is that *yours* are not *subservient*.

Even in text, talking with foreigners has become a remarkable opportunity! **These guidelines will not guarantee you a pleasant experience—but at least offer more security and chances for success.** People are people, but do not let that be a deterrent. You just have to put forth the Golden Rule, and someone out there in another land is bound to reciprocate your actions.

ON THIS HILL

By James Yates

On this hill
I sat and thought
Dreamed and schemed
All the ways
The future would be mine
All those years ago

On this hill
I found God
And we laughed and talked
I dreamed of Love
And someone to give it to
All those years ago

The cows in the valley
Move away like Time
The Sun slips behind
The pines; my life dwindles
Down as these tears
Fall to the ground

On this hill
I made my stand
Railing against the storm
To the trees and sky
Repairing the broken pieces
Through the night.

Now on this hill
I see through
An older man's eyes
My children live
So far away

The woman I love
Keeps herself locked
So far from me.

This was my home
This was my Heaven
This was the safest
Place on earth.
All those years ago.

Now I've come home
Adrift on the wind
As my ashes softly
Cover the grass
On this hill

TRAPPING THE MYTHS OF SUMMER

By Catherine Moran

Those green-eyes beetles landed on our deck,
and I could scoop one up with sweaty hands
and tie a single thread around its neck.
No longer could it buzz to foreign lands.
It flew in circles all around my head,
and I like Circe held the string so tight.
Then after supper when the sun had fled,
the fireflies twinkled on the stage of night.
I caught them carefully and slid each one
into a prison jar and closed it hard.
That lantern brought the light where there was none.
I stole Olympian fire for my backyard.
 Those myths of ancient man played out their theme
 in childhood games where I was free to dream.

ENGINEER

By Don Hoyt

I am the engineer of woods,
spanning the vast distances between leaves
with the spittle of my innermost glands,
reaching for you with a residue
like an aftertaste or an afterthought,
a trace of knowing so slight

you can't remember;

but, long after the uneven geometry
of the woods is leveled in your mind,
when you climb out of what's current
or fashionable

you find filaments you can't brush away,
then your mind hurtles back to the woods.

Details intensify:

crackling twigs under your feet,
the insensitive buzzing of insects,
the dark smell of wet leaves
blanketing the rich dark loam
like a mother nursing a weak child,
the lips of the sun pursing through
the scraggly branches with a warm kiss.

You are not sure you remember
when I touched you.

STILL, THESE WATERS

By James Yates

Still, these waters run,
Quiet, dark, and deep,

Still, this river runs,
Winding through channels
Lying deeper than
Two hearts can descend.

Still, this river runs,
Still, these waters run.

Words fail to carry what I feel
When it comes to Love
When it comes to you.

Each time I try,
Words catch and melt away
Like music too high for the human ear,
Like catching lightning in a mason jar.

Words can't clothe
All the ways I want you,
All the ways I love you.

You strike me mute;
My heart strikes me deaf.
You are my home;
The center of my Earth.

My going up and my coming down,
My leaving and my coming home,
My waking and my dreaming.
Still, these waters run,
Quiet, dark, and deep,

Still, this river runs,
Winding through channels
Cut deeper than
Two hearts can descend.

Still this river runs
Still these waters run

A QUESTION BEFORE I GO

By Jim Barton

How many years, months, weeks,
how many days or hours
until the mosses cover my tracks,
the vines tug down what I have built,
the rooster grass and the simeonweed,
the greenbriar and the bull nettle
erase each trace of who I was,
where I was,
what miniscule part
I played on this earth?
Rock becomes dust,
scatters on the winds.
How much simpler
is it
to deconstruct a man,
to unbirth a child,
to loose a luminous spirit
into the vast black sea
of God's breath?
Tell me:
Does a heartbeat echo
in the stone halls of time?
Does a soul leave tracks
in the wind?

AUTHORS

Barry E. Bagwell's poetry is often outdoor related because that is what he knows best. He is currently the Director of The El Dorado Conference Center and the father of five girls.

Jim Barton is President of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies and a member of both the local and state poetry groups. He has published four collections of poetry, and continues working on his never ending novels-in-progress. In his spare time, he hosts Open Mics at PJs Coffee monthly. He lives in the far reaches of southeastern Union County with his wife, Cathy, an assortment of apathetic animals, and one of his seven children. He wishes he hated ice cream and sweets, but that is apparently not in the cards. His favorite literary journal is *Between the Lines*.

Benjamin Cagle was born and currently lives in Camden, Arkansas, also known as the "Queen City" of the Ouachita River. After graduating high-school from Camden-Fairview, he went to school at Louisiana Tech University for a couple of years before transferring to Mississippi State University where he chased tornadoes, all the while studying to become a broadcast meteorologist. From there he went to earn a Master of Science degree in geology at the University of Connecticut. He loves swimming, running, and reading. He also loves to explore our state forests. Benjamin is currently employed by South Arkansas Community College to support and promote distance education.

Shanterica Crockett is a 23 year old who has been through a lot in life. She was inspired to write poetry at 11 years old in the 6th grade. She felt like she didn't have anyone to talk to about the secret challenges she was going through. Her first solution was to write down how she felt and turn that composition into poetry. Ms. Crockett states, "I usually just write poetry to express how I feel after holding it in so long. I'm okay with the way I handle my jumbled emotions, but a lot of what I have been through still bothers me, so I still write. Now my home is happy, and I'm engaged to a wonderful man."

Tiffany Anne Everett Dawson was born Alexandria, Louisiana. Shortly after her birth, she moved to different parts of the great state of Louisiana. As a young child she moved to the state of Texas with her parents and two older sisters. Always considered a wild child with a free spirit, Ms. Dawson ran free outside with the wind blowing her stringy hair. Her love for the outdoors and animals never left her soul. At the age of thirteen her family moved to Arkansas where she continued to embrace her love of nature. Later she met the love of her life to whom she has been married for six wonderful years. She has an amazing and outgoing four year old little boy with whom she shares her free spirited nature.

Pat Durmon is an Arkansan who worked as a waitress, hairdresser, English teacher, and mental health counselor. Today, she works as poet and blogger at patdurmon.com. Her chapbook is *Blind Curves* (2007); followed by full-size books: *Lights and Shadows in a Nursing Home* (2011); and *Push Mountain Road* (2015). Her poems have been published in *Rattle*, *Main Street Rag*, *Poetry East*, *Cyclamens* and *Blades*, *Between the Lines*, *Lucidity* and other journals. She lives in Norfork, Arkansas, in the mountains where she loves people, nature, and writing

Donna Henson is a native of Union County, Arkansas, who returned after retirement and lives here with her husband. Donna was a founding member of the South Arkansas Poets of the Pines. She believes that the active presence of the many poets and writers in South Arkansas is key to the future of the region. Her poems in this issue were inspired by people and places here in our South Arkansas home.

Don A. Hoyt was reared in New Orleans. His mother and father divorced when he was four, and most of his formative years were spent living in the New Orleans public housing projects. He enlisted in the Navy at 17, abandoning high school in the 10th grade, just as the Vietnam conflict was getting under way. Shortly after his military service, he married his wife, Charlotte, and earned two different Masters Degrees from two different Louisiana universities. He retired in 2013 from a 35-year career in local government administration, his last position being the City Manager of Anniston, Alabama (population 23,000). Many works by Don A. Hoyt are available at Smashwords.com, Amazon.com, and most other online retailers.

Gwen Jackson is a native of El Dorado with a few years here and there in other states, but she always comes back home. She has known since 7th grade that she wanted to write, but now as an adult she is still figuring out her voice. Jackson explains, “I find that when I write with honesty and raw emotion, I reach the biggest audience, so I attempt to write my truth in a way that readers relate to. I would advise others who feel the desire to write to do it. Get the words on paper, and use practice to sharpen your skill. I’m still practicing.”

Matthew Johnson is from Norphlet, Arkansas. He is a 21 year old sophomore majoring in Film and Performing Arts at SouthArk. His intentions are to graduate and transfer to become a Theatre Professor. His passions include drawing, painting, writing poems, composing stories, and creating movie scripts.

Micah Johnson has attended SouthArk since 2015, a few months after he graduated in the final class from Norphlet High School. He was born in El Dorado and lived in Norphlet most of his life with his two loving parents, fraternal twin brother, and nine-year-old sister. When writing, he suggests, never force it, because every word matters.

Marilyn Vanhoof Joyner grew up in central Louisiana, and is now retired from Murphy Oil Corporation where she worked in Information Systems. This gives her more time to write, garden, quilt and enjoy her grandsons, Zachary and Ryan. She is a member of Master Gardeners of Union County, South Arkansas Writers and South Arkansas Poets of the Pines, a branch of Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas

Denise Lum is a 33 year addict, but has been clean and sober for three and a half years. She writes, "God used a prison cell to get my attention. He told me He was bringing me out of the dark into the light so I may go back into the dark and be a lamp for those still lost in the shadows. This desire is what brought me to South Ark." She is in her second year of study and plans on completing a bachelor's degree in psychology, eventually becoming a Christian drug counselor, providing a home for addicts and runaway teens. She feels it is such an honor to have her first publication ever printed in South Ark's *Between The Lines*.

Catherine Moran has finally retired after years teaching high school English and then years of working in a law office. Alas, there is no money in poetry and no poetry in money! The *Atlanta Review*, the *Bitter Oleander* and *Kansas City Voices* have published some of her poems, and she is still active in the Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas. Viva retirement!

Matthew Nation is a freshman here at SACC who started this spring and is majoring in general studies at this time. He was born in Colorado but lived in Wyoming most of his life. He graduated with the class of 2001 and has been writing off and on since his teenage years. He moved to El Dorado in 2015 and has lived there ever since.

Allan Pirnique was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on October 21, 1939. His parents were Alphonse and Frances Pirnique. Alphonse was born in Prague and came to the United States in the early 1900's. Frances was a Little Rock native. He has an older brother and a younger sister. There were lots of doctors in his family, and he took that same route, graduating with a Medical Doctorate degree in 1964 (University of Arkansas Medical School). Jane Kelley and Allan were married in 1964 (He was a single doctor for one week.). They have two boys, David and Michael. Allan writes, "Poetry writing has been with me for a long time, a nice diversion, but my brain has to be in the mood or my stuff is hard to write and is pretty bad. Many thanks to South Arkansas Community College and those who do the hard work on *Between the Lines*."

Troy Lynn Pritt is a retired ordained minister. He and his wife Lorraine have been married fifty-nine years and have four adult sons. He has written numerous short stories and seven novels. Five of his novels are posted on his blog www.mtnpride.com

Janet N. Ryan was born in Connecticut and has lived in Florida, Arizona, and Texas, though she now calls Arkansas home. She is married to Jack Ryan; they have two sons and a daughter-in-law, all living in California. After retiring eight years ago, she has spent her time reading, writing, sewing, traveling, and thoroughly enjoying life...in spite of feeling somewhat guilty about it all! She intends to never grow up, no matter how old she becomes.

Samantha Sadoh was born in Chicago but raised in El Dorado. She comes from a single parent household with a hard working mother. Growing up, she was an honor roll student and attended a few plays. She loves the artistic field, especially art and music. Her passion for writing started her first year in high school. During seventh grade, she wrote a poem for a class assignment that her teacher loved, but she never gave it a thought. She writes, "Poetry was an outlet to write my feelings before I began to write on more serious topics, while still incorporating my creativity. I've made progress in my writing with some help, and I'm thankful that I haven't given up."

Desiree Stipp-Bethune grew up in rural central Illinois, and moved to Kansas City while in high school. With her siblings and parents still in Kansas, she moved to Maine to pursue a career in oceanography. Homesick for family, she moved back to the Midwest, switching her study to limnology, the study of freshwater systems. At first volunteering at church, she eventually began working for the church, earning a Master's degree in Religious Education at the same time. With dual careers in science and religion, she switched back and forth between managing laboratories and managing religious education programs. The few short publications to her name are in those fields. Today, she lives in El Dorado with her husband and three children. She is currently the Director of Religious Education at St. Louis Catholic Church in Camden, Arkansas. She also belongs to the South Arkansas Writers group, which is how she learned of this publication.

Errica (Jade) Tanksley is a student at SouthArk. She has been an LPN for seven years and works at APMC Family Home Health in Crossett. She is working towards getting her Registered Nursing degree now. She worked as a EMT prior to becoming a nurse. She has a wonderful husband, and together they have four children. She writes, "I have not had much experience in writing but thought it would be nice to share my story."

Sarah Teague, Ph.D. relishes writing about the irony of how life's minor stepping stones can evolve into major milestones. Her blog, "Here's a Word" (www.sarahshellteague.net), celebrates her observations and love of language. She currently serves as associate editor for *The El Dorado Insider* and *Arkadelphia Life*. She pinkie-promises no boring posts on Twitter #ShellTeague or Instagram @sshellt.

Destiny Winder entered South Arkansas Community College's *Writer's Ink* contest and published her prose in that magazine three years in a row, but this was her first time to submit poetry for publication. She lives in Calion, Arkansas, with her dad and two dogs. Her writing process is a little unique, because she doesn't really have a process. Ms. Winder states, "Usually when I get an idea I grab the first thing I can get my hands on and start writing. Sometimes it's in the notepad on my phone, or on the back of a math homework sheet. One time it was even on a napkin I had gotten from Sonic restaurant. I don't believe a person should try to restrict her or his writing by planning out everything one is going to say. Instead, she or he should just let the words flow down from the brain and on to the paper." Her inspiration for the piece published in this magazine was her grandparents' relationship and the changing of life's seasons.

John-David Woolsey is a 15 year old sophomore at Parkers Chapel High School, currently enrolled as a concurrent student with SACC. His short term goal is to complete a Certificate of General Studies before he graduates high school. He does not have any other publications, but his family is awesome and home life is what he considers great. Often he must remind himself that not everyone has the support system his family provides for him to succeed in life, and for that, he is truly grateful. His writing process is somewhat rudimentary. He processes information and then tries to make it rhyme or flow smoothly. The inspiration for the poem in this volume came from news story after news story reporting different opinions about race relations in this country.

Dr. Jim Yates is an English professor, published scholar, poet and writer, and college administrator. He was born and raised in Booneville, Arkansas, and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from Ouachita Baptist University in 1983, a Master of Arts in English from Arkansas State University in 1985, and a PhD. In English from Oklahoma State University in 1995. He has been a faculty member or administrator at Rich Mountain Community College, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Carl Albert State College, and Independence Community College. Since 2016, Dr. Yates has served as Dean of Liberal Arts and now Associate Vice President of Arts and Sciences at South Arkansas Community College. He has been published in *The Encyclopedia of the Arctic*, *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film*, *the Journal of Film and History*, *The Encyclopedia of Stage Plays Into Film*, and *Why We Fought: America's in Film and History*. He has also presented numerous conference presentations on subjects ranging from Herman Melville, the Mexican-American War, and the Spanish-American War to Batman and David Cronenberg. His greatest accomplishment is being father to his son, Brendan, and his daughter, Caitlin.

