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Between the Lines 2019

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300 South West Avenue
El Dorado, Arkansas 71730

PREFACE

Another year has passed, and with it much joy and sadly, some losses. Last year, two of our dear friends, and frequent contributors to this magazine, passed away. It is to them we dedicate this 21st volume of *Between the Lines*, declaring our appreciation for their friendship and their great talent as writers. Each year they contributed to these pages, making us laugh, cry, and think. We will never forget Jim Barton and Reverend Troy L. Pritt, for their work is forever kept in our hearts and in the pages of this humble journal. We hope you enjoy this year's edition.

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Ode to young colleagues

By Lauri Wilson

Bless you, my much younger colleagues
For putting up with me
My many, many lapses in memory
And the stiffness in my left (right?) knee.

There's still a lot that I can contribute
Though your patience must be starting to fray
I can see you wondering how on earth
That old lady found her way to work today.

Yes, it was bad when I stepped in the wrong restroom
That man did seem rather curt
Folks were shaking their heads and muttering
Something about a Silver Alert.

But my stories – I'm not making them up:
That brick through the window - could have hit my head!
Someone called me a witch (you know who you are) and
One man who refused to eat wheat bread.

So some day when my office stands empty
With nothing left but a stray M & M on the floor
I hope you'll remember me sometimes and think
"Don't forget to lock up that back door."

Coffee Cup

By Allan Pirniquie

Two rabbits in the green,
some yellow flowers too.
A soft and quiet scene.

Our friends just talk and preen
and seem to ask "what's new?"
Two rabbits in the green.

The flowers curl and lean
but do not hide our two.
A soft and quiet scene.

Gossip? Could they be mean?
Their softness duping you?
Two rabbits in the green.

Turn the cup and is seen
the same pastoral view.
A soft and quiet scene.

No fight to see who's queen
just frolic in the dew.
Two friends in the green.
A soft and quiet scene.

My Mother's Secret

By Dana Harvey

It was in March of 1975, March 28th to be exact, that my life as I knew it was dramatically altered; my home was destroyed, and I learned a secret about my mother that would forever change my perception of her. I had just turned seven years old on March 16th and believed I would live in the old Victorian style house on Baker Street until I finished school and married someday. But that was before the F4 tornado hit Warren, Arkansas, claiming the lives of seven people and injuring over fifty-one more.

March 28, 1975, fell on a Friday, Good Friday, as a matter of fact. Torrential rain had fallen most of the day, so I was forced to play inside. I could hear the sounds coming from the sawmill across the street, busy with workers, some of which would flood out of the eastern gate at the end of their shift; everything was normal like any other day of my young life. At that time, I wasn't afraid of thunder or lightning; I just accepted these were part of nature. The rain finally subsided in the early evening, but severe thunderstorms continued to plague the surrounding areas. I could not explain it then or now, but for some unknown reason, I was very anxious that evening; it was as if there had been some shift in the atmosphere that had unsettled me.

It was a typical Friday night; we were all gathered in the living room to watch television. My grandmother had come to visit, and I was sitting by her side on the couch. My dad was in his recliner and my mother was comforting my younger sister who was suffering from the mumps. We were getting ready to watch one of my favorite shows, *The Nightstalker*, when the broadcast was interrupted to report that a tornado had been spotted southwest of Warren and was tracking toward Fordyce. The wind was not blowing at that time; there was no thunder or lightning; just silence. *The Nightstalker* came on and as we were watching, we started to hear a noise that sounded like a freight train. My dad got up and walked out into the hallway that led to the front door of our home, trying to determine where the sound might be coming from. I remember the sound of my dad running back down the hall and seeing a huge dinosaur appearing on the television screen. Simultaneously, my dad yelled, "Get down; it's a tornado!" and the electricity went out. We all seemed to jump in unison onto the floor, just in front of the couch, as the windows behind us shattered. The roof was ripped off the house as the suction of the tornadic winds caused boards from the sawmill to soar through the broken windows. We were in a huddle in the middle of the floor and I can remember feeling the sawdust and broken glass whirling just mere inches from my face, but not hitting me. It was quite surreal; I knew I had only to reach out my hand and I would feel the debris that swirled around us.

When the winds subsided and the rain began again, my dad said we needed to get out of the house. There were only two exits in our home, the front door at the end of the hallway and the back door in the utility room. We climbed over debris from the roof and the sawmill to get to the front door. My dad couldn't get the front door open; we did not know it at the time, but the tornado had lifted the old house upward and slammed it down, pushing the front of the house forward against the concrete front porch. The only other option was going out the back door. My dad was holding onto my grandmother while carrying my sister and my mother was carrying me as we made our way to the back of the house. When we got into the utility room, my mother was in the lead and we saw that the back door was no longer intact; however, the tornado had suctioned the dryer outward and had firmly jammed the appliance in the door frame. My mother calmly put me down and placed her hands on the wedged dryer; she then proceeded to throw the dryer out into the yard as if it were simply an empty cardboard box. That was the moment I knew

my mother had a secret she had been keeping from me: she was a super hero in disguise instead of an ordinary mom! I was flabbergasted! All this time I had been living with this five-foot-tall, one hundred- fifteen-pound woman and I had no idea she had super powers! That singular occurrence has stood out in my mind all these years, prominent over anything else that occurred that evening. My mother faced the destruction of her home as she did any mild occurrence; she moved forward and made the most out of her new normal.

Through the years, glimpses of my mother's super powers were often subtler, but still shown through. When my sister and I were bored and swore there was nothing to do, my mother got out the flour, salt, and food coloring. She taught us how to take those simple ingredients and some water to make homemade Play Doh; this provided endless hours of entertainment for us. Kool-Aid filled, soda bottle shaped wax vessels were a favorite treat during our childhood; she taught us to save the wax and use it to make homemade candles. Under her tutelage, we took the wax, some food coloring, cotton string, and some of her perfume to make these candles. She used her super powers to transform an old sock into an amazing hand puppet for a school project on Billy Goat's Gruff. When my sister and I would swear there was nothing to eat in the house, my mother would open the pantry and miraculously produce a tasty meal.

My mother worked most of my life that I can recall; this did not prevent her from preparing three meals a day for our family. She made homemade biscuits for breakfast each day from scratch. She came home from work at lunch and prepared the noon meal. She prepared a delicious dinner each night; all while working forty hours a week. My dad always raised a huge garden, what some people in this area refer to as a "truck patch"; the garden would be at least an acre in size. My mother would come in from work and go to the garden with my dad, often working there until dusk. She was always a helpmate to my dad, whether he was hauling hay or working on a vehicle. My mother never ceased to amaze me.

Her life, and ours with it, was again forever altered in May of 2016. It was the Saturday before Mother's Day, May 7th. I was at my home preparing for the meal I was going to make for our Mother's Day luncheon the following day. My husband and I had started a tradition a few years before of having my mother, his mother, and his stepmother as guests of honor to celebrate Mother's Day. Our children were always there and several other family members, so I was very busy with preparations. I was in the kitchen and my cellphone rang; I saw that it was my mother and I answered the phone, expecting her to ask some question about the next day's meal or just to have a chat. I wasn't prepared for the words I heard. My mother seemed out of breath as she stated, "Dana, we've had a fire and I need you to get over here right now." The line went dead, and I yelled for my husband to get the keys because we needed to get to my parents' house. At the time, I had no idea where the fire was or how bad. I tried to call my mother back to see if I needed to call 911 for a fire truck or an ambulance, but there was no answer. I then tried to call my dad and he didn't answer either. I was almost in a panic when I finally got in touch with my dad. He told me that my mother had been burned and that she needed to go to the emergency room; he then ended the call. I was calmer after I heard both their voices, but still anxious. My parents live fewer than ten minutes from my home; we made the trip in record time. I was relieved when we started approaching their place and there was no smoke or flames coming from the house; that relief did not last long, however.

My heart almost stopped when we pulled up the drive and I saw my mother standing in a cotton button up gown, just inside the carport. Her beautiful silver hair, which had fallen in cascades to her mid back, was burned off to just above her shoulders. Her left arm was extended outward from her body, the skin hanging down in tissue paper like tendrils. There had been a fire

in my dad's work shop, and he was trying to put the fire out. The circumstances surrounding the fire aren't important; like so many accidents, an activity that had been executed thousands of times ended up in an unforeseen blaze. My husband and I helped my mother into the truck to take her to the hospital. My mother was so calm as my husband sped toward town, hazard lights flashing. I called the hospital and the local police station to let them know we were in route. As we came into the business section of Warren, we approached a stop light that was red. There were several cars in the right-hand lane, but no cars in the left-hand turn lane. My husband steered the truck into the turn lane, never slowing down. My mother very calmly told my husband that the light was red and that he needed to go straight to get to the hospital. I couldn't help but chuckle as I pointed out that he was going around the cars in the right-hand lane and through the intersection despite the red light.

We arrived at the hospital, pulling underneath the awning that opened the bay doors to the emergency room; I was in the backseat of the truck. Before my husband could even put the truck in park and race to the other side to help my mother out, my mother had opened the door, gotten out, and started walking into the emergency room. Later, after she was assessed and we knew the extent of her burns, one of the hospital staff commented that he had never seen a person burned so badly walk into the ER. A quick assessment revealed that in addition to her left arm, my mother had sustained third degree burns to her back and to the backs of her thighs. She was to be transported to the burn unit at Arkansas Children's Hospital. When my dad arrived after extinguishing the fire, we discovered his right arm had been burned. Immediately, my mother was more concerned with him being burned than she was with herself.

My mother was the calmest one of us all as she left to be whisked away to ACH. Her head had to be shaved to make sure she didn't have burns that were hidden; sure enough, the back of her scalp had been burned as well. She was intubated in case her throat started to swell. She was sitting up in the hospital bed, bald and smiling when we arrived. The nursing staff attending her were amazed. Her primary concern was my dad and how his arm was doing, whether he had his medication with him, and how he was doing emotionally. My little super hero mother was so worried about the rest of us, who were barely holding it together, while she was the one in physical pain. We were told to expect approximately a month and a half stay in the burn unit. My mother had eleven surgeries in the span of fewer than two months. The anesthesia suppressed her respiratory system until it was determined a paralytic would have to be used to prevent the suppression.

My mother had almost every bacterial infection that is common in hospital settings. She was hospitalized in one hospital or the other from May 2016 until January 2017. She had to have a trach due to being intubated for so long and a gastric feeding tube. So many times, she was at the threshold of death's door; even the nursing staff who had come to love her so much could not hide the tears from their fear that my mother was going to pass away. But those staff did not know her secret like I did; they didn't know about my mother's super powers, two of the strongest being her faith and her intestinal fortitude. Lesser individuals would have succumbed to injuries like she had sustained and the related grueling treatments; the rigorous wound care and all the surgeries; but my mother wasn't a lesser person, she was a super hero. She needed every one of her super powers to survive the surgeries, to which I eventually lost count of the number, and the many other obstacles that seemed to plague her recovery.

My mother was unable to speak for almost two years due to the type of trach she required. She was down for so long in bed, she couldn't walk. There were people I would encounter who asked about her well-being and then proceeded to tell me to be prepared because

she wasn't going to be able to swallow or various other morbid predictions. Again, these people didn't know my mother's secret.

Today, my mother can walk, and she can talk. She does have a tube to allow her trachea to heal from repair surgery, but that's only temporary. She can eat and drink without difficulty. Her hair is once again cascading down past her shoulders, the silver waves and curls more beautiful than before. When she is dressed, her left arm bares the only visible scars from her burns. Her use of the arm is still limited, and she lost just the tip of her pinky finger, but she continues to work with it each day to increase her hand's mobility. My little super hero mother, who has lost so much and faced so much adversity, tells me all the time how blessed she is. She doesn't choose to reflect on what she's lost, but only on what she has gained.

My mother did not pass her super powers on to me; I'm as human as can be. She did teach me a valuable lesson that I didn't really understand until just this past year. She never spoke these words, but through observation of her, I have learned that this daily walk we each endeavor in is a series of life altering events; some good and some bad. What we do in response to these events is what defines us, not the event itself. We can choose to move forward and make the best of our new normal, or we can let it define and defeat us. Through it all, she has remained the strongest of all of us; her super human capacity to love and forgive her greatest strengths.

We attended a small rural church from my childhood through to my adulthood. On many a Mother's Day past, whoever the preacher was at the time would ask if anyone would like to stand up and say something about their mother. I always wanted to stand up so badly but just couldn't. I knew I would be so overwhelmed with emotions that I could not properly convey my feelings about my mother and to pay tribute to her. So here I am now, as tears flow on the pages just as they would have then; paying tribute to my little super hero mother.

I Ain't Gonna Pray

By Mindy Farley

I ain't gonna pray,
Don't know how to,
I shout praises anyway.
Hoping for something,
Reaching for nothing,
The devil on my shoulder,
I climb back inside.
Like dirty water,
Dark, stagnant, cold,
Haven't seen sun in 40 days.

So I ain't gonna pray,
Don't know how to,
Now the choir is gone.
Looking for brightness,
Finding only pain,
The sharpness hurts,
I still bleed words.

But I ain't gonna pray,
Don't know how to.
I shout praises anyway,
But I ain't gonna pray.

Hips of Mine

By Moriah Hicks

Ooh, Chile,
These hips of mine are wide
Gapping-
Open enough to be a safe haven
These hips be a homeland
These hips are made to birth generations
Chile, these hips of mine be rhythm
They are a Congo drum line
These hips are heartbeats
These hips are speech
Ancestral tongue chants
These hips are language
Rosetta Stone-

Ooh, Chile,
These hips of mine are freedom
These hips roam
Free and uncompromised-
These hips go where they need be, these hips roam
These hips of mine are flowin'
Like the Tigris-
The Euphrates-
Like the Jordan-they bend and dip
These hips are fluid like water, so they are Holy

Ooh, Chile,
These hips of mine they wind
Like time
In and out of season-
These hips of mine are magic
Black magic-
Voodoo vexed, these hips place spells
These hips are arches-
A type of golden gateway
A Promised land

Ooh, chile,
These hips of mine are weighted
Heavy, cause you to use yo' strength
These hips of mine are royal
Regal-
Queen.
These hips belong to me, and ooh, Chile,
These hips of mine...

Talkin' 'bout Tellin' us What to Do

By Benjamin Cagle

before you start tellin' us what to do
you need to know something

one thing for sure:
we have just about had it!

who is you?
always tryin' a tell us what to do?
don't-tell-us-what-to-do!

that should tell you one thing right there
let us explain something to you

don't you dare speak to me like that!
i ain't got a clue what you're talkin' about

yes you do
because we're tellin' you

and you're gonna do it
whether you like it or not

The Song of the Oil and the Brush

By Gary Hall

An eruption!
Vesuvius-like
Vermillion splashes
A cacophony of red
Across the palette
Stroked softly
By camel hair
Immersed completely
In passionate pigment
Swabbed so slightly
In soft solvent
Thinning...thinning
Diminuendo
Diminuendo
Awaiting the maestro's nod
The sensual sonata gambol
Chromatic caress contra canvas
Staining crisscrossed singular strands
Intertwined in uniform staves
To cradle the anointing liquid
Of the masters
The waltz begins...
Allegro
Allegro
A dazzling, diachronic dalliance
Drammatico
Mezzo forte
Mezzo forte
Decrescendo
Decrescendo
Da capo al fine
Capo...CAPO...capo
Largo
Crescendo
The warmth of umber
Intermingling
Reticulating
A dissonant union
With cool cobalt
A phantasmagoric fugue
Cold and hot
Hot and cold
A jolting discord...

Resolved incongruity
Andante
Andante
Forte
Forte
Ochre
Alabaster
Ivory
...Interval...
Light breaks free
From its captive Dark
Legato
Legato
Melisma
Modulating shadows and shine
The marvelous emergence...
Da capo al fine
Presto
Presto
Presto
Decrescendo
Sforza do
Staccato
Staccato
Tonic
Tremolo
Tremolo
Staccato
Staccato
Scrape, scrape
Brush, brush
Scrape, scrape
Brush, brush
Glissando grandioso
Rest...rest...fermata
Allegro, allegro
Diminuendo
Diminuendo
'l-u-f-t-p-a-u-s-e '
...Interval...
TONIC...tonic
Resolution
Coda
Fine

Stained-Glass Heart

By James Yates

We are the Saints of the Stained-Glass Heart
We sigh the names we love deep into the night
We sing the songs of past regrets
We are the Saints of the Stained-Glass Heart

We're not that hard to see, guys like me
 We pass by in the halls and by the frozen foods
Shyly offering a smile to the downcast eyes gliding by
 We live alone inside our skins and within our hearts
Weaving dreams around the girls we love
 Who belong to someone else
We wear our hearts on our sleeves
Hope someone might meet our glance or return a smile
 Or read the love lines written on our faces
 Or hear the words on the lips of guys like me

We spend our lives, guys like me,
 Waiting and aching for the girls we love
To leave the poor choices they made
 Who beat them down with words and fists and straying eyes
We spend our nights aching that we were there
 To hold, to caress, to kiss their tears away
Guys like me get overlooked when hearts are passed around
 But still we stand steadfast and play the fool
Even as we bend to wage war with what could have been

Guys like me look our demons in the eye
 We shake our fists, rip open our chests,
"Come on, drive your nails to destroy me,
 I've risen from the ruins so many times
You only just manage to bore me."
We wrestle with the angels of our past desires
 Sink under the weight of shame
And rise to hurl ourselves at Time to turn it back
 To deeds done and left undone by guys like me

We are the Saints of the Stained-Glass Heart
We sigh the names we love deep into the night
We sing the songs of past regrets
We are the Saints of the Stained-Glass Heart
Saints of the Stained-Glass Heart.

My Father Versus the Arboreal Rats of El Dorado County

By Rick Vosper

In his retirement to the gold country in California's El Dorado County, my father pursued a decades-long vendetta against the squirrels raiding his bird feeder. "Bush-tailed tree rats," he called them, or in more scientific vernacular, "arboreal rats," and he wasn't far from right. But they persisted through the years, and so did he.

Over-the-counter squirrel guards and other simplistic measures were quickly implemented and just as quickly discarded. So of course he decided to bring his own not inconsiderable ingenuity to bear on the problem.

This was a man with sixteen engineering patents. There would have been a seventeenth, but an FBI agent called the house one Saturday morning and asked him to retract his submission for a jet engine with no moving parts. "Claimed it was for reasons of national security," Dad said, and never spoke of it again.

My father was not a man to be trifled with, but apparently the squirrels didn't know that.

When we visited him and Mom at their 10-acre ranchette—of course he designed and built every solar-powered inch of it—there would be a new apparatus guarding the feeder, each more elaborate than the last. And the next time it would be gone and a new one would be there in its place, and so forth. This went on for decades, even after Mom passed.

He called them "squirrel abatement devices." Some were spiky. Some had gates and ramps. Some had strategically twisted bits of sheet metal protruding at odd angles like the broken wings of fallen angels. Some were spring-loaded. Some looked like discarded pages from Rube Goldberg's lost sketchbooks, and some, frankly, like Christmas tree ornaments mail-ordered in from Hell.

But all these devices had one thing in common: they didn't do doodly-squat at stopping squirrels. Or even slowing them down. Irritated them a little, maybe, but never more than that. Who knows—although I never dared suggest it out loud—maybe the little vermin enjoyed their attempted abatement, a sort of a rodent Olympics and chess tournament rolled into one.

In the interest of sportsmanship, perhaps, Dad never designed the contraptions to kill, injure, or even capture his adversaries. But that didn't stop him from shooting at them.

He had an ancient yet wickedly accurate pump-action Crossman pellet rifle. We knew it was both ancient and accurate because as boys, my brothers and I sometimes shot it into a target Dad built against the backyard retaining wall, backstopped with some old phone books.

And, forty years later there he was, standing at the kitchen window firing the same rifle at the marauding squirrels. Yes, right through the screen. As a consequence of this unrelenting perforation, the house was full of flies all summer long. Every spring he'd go into town and come back with a new screen from the Sears & Roebuck there. There'd be a respite for a couple weeks, and then the indoor fly population would begin to swell again.

As Dad got older, he'd fire the rifle while leaning against his walker, which didn't improve his aim much. This was academic anyway, since between his unreliable vision and even less reliable hands, he'd never hit anything before and was even less likely to now.

Naturally, he blamed the gun. He was getting too old to work the pump anyway. So he drove his old white Ford pickup to Sears again and bought another Crossman rifle—this one with a CO₂ cartridge. Easier to shoot, certainly, but no improvement in effect.

Just as naturally, he blamed the Crossman company. He sat up late at night, slowly pecking out angry emails on a word processor (programmed by himself, of course, in BASIC) on his old 486 desktop computer. Then he'd send them off, one every couple weeks.

But the Crossman company never replied, and the squirrels no longer ran away when he fired through the screen at them. Didn't even flinch. So it was back to the gadgets.

The process remained the same, and the result. Only the means would change. He'd sketch out a new abatement device, build and install it, and rejoice in his triumph for a few days or weeks until the squirrels figured out how to defeat it. Then he'd start over again with another scheme, even into his last years when he spent his days alone.

Despite our insistence, arguing, and finally, pleading, he refused to go into a nursing home. He was by himself except for the visiting nurse who drove out every other day, or when a neighbor came over or one of us made the trip up to visit. Which suited him just fine. Fewer distractions, he said. More time to work on squirrel abatement, more like.

"I think we're making progress," he would say periodically. But we weren't. And so it went, down through the years, a sort of bird feeder arms race.

He never seemed discouraged, only more intent.

And he died, as everyone does eventually. For him, it came suddenly enough that none of the family could be with him at the end. Dad woke up one night complaining of chest pains, was brought to the hospital in Placerville for diagnosis and immediately rushed in for emergency surgery.

The doctors opened him up, saw what was inside, and closed him back up again. "Prepare for the worst," they told my brother, who had driven up in the middle of the night from San Jose.

The worst came a few hours later.

No funeral, no memorial, no mourners, no observance of any kind. Just his ashes scattered by four sons along an overgrown trail he had mapped, surveyed, and cleared behind the house he built. At his insistence, even our wives had to stay inside.

A few days after all this I got the chance to talk with one of the doctors who had been there for the open-and-shut part of things. I wanted to know if my father had any last words before he passed. I wasn't hoping for declarations of love. That wasn't his way. But maybe some practical advice, like how to run the absurdly complicated heating and cooling system he'd designed for the house, or the real story behind the jet engine and the FBI.

"Sorry," the doctor said. "Your father was still under anesthesia when I checked on him in the recovery room. He was pretty far out of it. Muttered a bit, but I couldn't make out a lot. Sort of rambling. But he kept saying something about squirrels. That mean anything to you?"

"No," I lied, "nothing at all."

Truth was, I figured whatever my father had to say in his last few breaths was strictly between himself and the squirrels. And, it would be disrespectful to suggest that a man of his engineering prowess had spent the final thirty years of his life being outsmarted by an animal with a brain the size of an M&M.

The Essence of Me

By Crystal Carodine

The essence of me consists of all the missing parts you don't get to see.
A woman holds many secrets, and this fact does not exclude me.
My life was dark and my world was cold, when you looked in my eyes you could see my soul.
When you talk to me, you would never know the pain I feel as my story is told.
People wonder why I am so shy and don't say much when I pass them by.
But that is because I try to hide the tears from all the pain inside.
I have escaped death's grasp so many times at a point when my father had crossed the line.
He had beat me down and left me to drown, this image will never escape my mind.
I often wondered why my life was so hard, that I was chosen to be physically and emotionally scarred.
To see only darkness in a lightened tomb, a few feet from a bullet hole left in my room.
Through all of my suffering, I always believed that God was always providing for me.
He knew my purpose and who I would be, so he kept me alive for myself to see.
I have learned to never take life for granted, that before you can live you must understand it.
That you are who you choose to be, and this is truly the essence of me.

Monday Man

By Donna Henson

Here he comes around the corner to the County Line Café
on his way to order lunch and drive on out of town.

She's caught a glimpse through the window,
and signals to the kitchen in the back:
The Monday Man is here, and right on time.

He'll order "grilled cheese in-a-hurry"
And he'll have a cup of coffee, too.
Although he never lingers, she knows that when he leaves he'll say,
"Catch you next week. I sure enjoyed the joe."
Then he'll straighten his shoulders as he strides toward the door.

She doesn't know his name, where he's from, or where he goes.
But she knows he's there on Mondays, and he's never once complained.
In her day-to-day life of many demands, he's a once a week wonder,
who leaves a decent tip, too.

Some days, she thinks she might just wish for more Mondays.

Where's My Cheese?

By Janet Ryan

OK.

Who moved my cheese?

I put it in the veggie drawer...

Well, it's really not the veggie drawer,
more like it's the deli drawer,
with pepperoni and sliced salami.

But the camembert is not there!

S o m e o n e m o v e d m y c h e e s e .

Or even worse, they ate it.

Whatever reason, it is no more.

And I want my cheese –

the nip of well-aged cheddar,

the decadence of creamy brie,

the barnyard tang of Danish blue –

geez, but am I sore.

Executives and college leaders

lounging in their over-padded chairs

swear that change is good –

it stimulates creativity.

What this change creates is just anxiety!

I want my cheese!

Grilled gruyère,

ham and Swiss,

fontina with peach or pear...

Won't someone tell me, please,

what's happened to my cheese?

I'm getting desperate here.

Pizza without mozzarella –

that's just not fair.

In pure frustration

I grab a hunk of pepperoni

to gnaw a chunk,

and stare where it had been.

There,

behind the cold cuts,

lurks a square of lovely cheese!

My Monterey Jack is back!

My life is great, it's A-OK!

But just you be aware,
please, please,
don't ever move my cheese.

Pripyat Pixel Portrait

By Micah Johnson

I'm watching the pixels emerge again: long-held blackness lingering on my screen, heavy shades of cold-oriented colors steadily interfering, dreamy, therapeutic colorization, to an eerily grassy homestead coming into view, everywhere and everything opaquely lit.

“I’M BUSY!”

I once struggled through a poor, boring high school for seven long hours five days a week. I can explicitly recall the moments when I related so heavily to other high school boys—when I just wanted to get done with stupid math classes for the day and go home. To escape for a while. Teachers always propagandizing: “my way or the highway,” that “in your future,” when you’re “studying in college,” professors “will challenge your mind,” and....

Prideful men, everywhere I trek, everywhere I crawl, and everywhere I sneak... These homegrown defenders, all dressed up in their light yellow-brown uniforms, watching, patrolling. As I observe their collective expressions of dignity... seeming to preach patriotic principles—that they will slaughter me and my partner with their tenderly polished red-orange AK-47 assault rifles and RPD light machine guns clutched in their arms.

I keep the safety off; they ain’t takin’ me warm and breathing.

We were the invaders here... I had invaded. “Don’t get seen,” I tell myself. I’m an invader, loyal to the West. Cloaked from head to toe in this brushy Ghillie suit, snooping past these crummy forgotten farms with moldy empty houses. Hurrying past bell-equipped white-walled churches. My nostrils awakening, remembering those corpse-ridden junkyards a quarter-mile from here, crammed disproportionately high with scrapped neutral cars. Freshly made olive-green helicopters sitting off to the left, their rotors unflinching. “Careful: don’t wander into hot spots.”

“Just a second!”

God help me. They bore every right to kill me, to unleash high-caliber metal nuggets, to crush my bones, shred my ribcage and tendons—now—to watch me jolting, bloodily convulsing, my world around me deafening under relentless gunfire, struggling for oxygen... and then...

“I CAN’T SAVE just yet!” Ring a bell, no?

It should. Our excuses show up everywhere: recorded on YouTube and Snapchat, talked about on Steam and Reddit—the whole nine yards. Anywhere there’s a rough tale to be told. And boys. And men. We conjure up any and every small rationalization to keep on doing that awesome mission a few minutes longer, to beat the living hell out of that extremely hard boss, to keep ourselves away from real-world responsibilities.

Video games.

You gotta admit, they make up for what textbooks can’t do. Beyond the classroom, where you just sit in your chair, taking these seemingly purposeless notes.... Picking up a controller, playing in a simulated world, you’re given privilege to that first-person perspective. Being able, visually and audibly, to connect with historical surroundings and contexts, rather than just hearing your teacher say, “People in the city moved out ‘cause of radiation....”

You *do* notice the warning signs by those man-made roads.

You *can* get chills as you witness yourself getting woozy and damaged by the uranium you’re soaking in.

And, really, “taking notes”? PowerPoint just can’t compare.

Sitting in front of a TV screen, pretending to take on such a militarily political job, in a foreign country? It expands your awareness—to a level you often can't see coming till it hits. The more you play, the more it sticks.

As a few more years went by, suddenly, I started to dabble into the actual place from the basic details the game had given me. I had asked myself before, “Why was this whole city so huge yet utterly empty?”

(Thank goodness for YouTube!)

See, the so-called Chernobyl Disaster had happened after the plant's workers held another one of their regular safety tests. (How ironic.)

There were some changes that time around. Soviet tradition. Many people still don't know that the power plant disaster could've been avoided. But when one of the plant's most skilled engineers warned of a pressure issue, his newly assigned boss shot him down and insisted that he knew what was doing.

So they continued. Soon, to regret it. The site's main reactor just heated up way too much. And then everything... became something.

I could remember lying there, sensing the immediate loss of the city strangely. It was oddly like a tragic death to a whole fascinating ancient tribe. I beheld a woman's face, who was in teary remembrance, her telling me that it felt like her life as she knew it had been stolen.

Stolen...

Lost...

Altered...

Weeping in her shaky Slavic voice, admitting painfully on camera, that her husband was one of the workers. Everything gone—just like that! **BOOOOM!**

While quietly feeling for her, and for the other survivors telling their stories onscreen to me, on just a little smartphone with a flowery cover, my heart at one point felt a brief gloomy coldness as I thought about that game's iconic quote:

“Fifty thousand people used to live here. Now it's a ghost town....”

Pripyat... may not be safe again... for over hundreds of millions of years.

No stutter. **HUNDREDS of MILLIONS of years—**

Neither you nor I will live to hear the day—see the news on TV—when that part of the world finally becomes habitable again.

Video games.

Seasons at Holliwell Bridge

By Desiree Stipp-Bethune

Summer

Water meanders under you
Attentive grass on either bank
Your red paint blazes
Against clear blue sky
The fence that protects from a fall
Is a place to lean in an embrace.

Fall

Baring trees donate leaves
To murky water below
And as brilliant colors turn to brown
Your red paint blends
And then contrasts
With transformations of the season.

Winter

The early dusk of winter's call
Gives a glimpse of breathtaking beauty
As pink sky is reflected in the Middle River
And your red paint entices amidst white snow
Ice narrows the water under you
To a tiny ribbon that makes you look too big.

Spring

Rain swells the Middle River under returning Sun
While your red paint concedes to budding life
You urge cautiousness with your rails
But Spring breeds carelessness
As hearts leap with anticipation
And your boards echo with the dance of footsteps.

The Natural State Rouses

By Marilyn Joyner

Warming sun rays sneak through barren trees
awaken bluebells in the Ouachita National forest.
Blades of future daffodils sprout from greening earth
across Wye Mountain and abandoned house places.

Spotted fawns are birthed in pine-thicken woodlands,
efflorescence of dogwoods dot the landscape.
Azaleas and Spirea emblazon home gardens
from the Ozark Plateau to the Alluvial Plain.

Wood ducks nest in hollow trees along the rivers.
Frogs and toads spawn in lesser backwater and ponds.
Rabbles of Painted Lady and Mourning Cloak butterflies
be speckle Mount Magazine as migration begins.

Clouds gather quickly and spring rains descend
often heralding ferocious storms and violent wind.
Temperatures see-saw tempting gardeners.
Trout fishermen flock to Bull Shoals Lake.

Sweet scent of honeysuckle drifts through air.
Streams swell, lakes fill, wildlife activity increases.
Nature is waking and heralding season change.
Springtime, a grandiose rejuvenation in Arkansas.

Johnny Hugs and Kisses

By Jana Wright

Standing in front of a ship,
Broad shoulders squared
 and cocky smile,
Stands Johnny hugs and kisses.
But, the crackled paper yellow with the
 crinkled edges
Does not tell the story of the last kiss
he planted on a young girl while fear
welled up inside him at his departure.
I cannot remember his real name.
Senility has crept in like thin spiders' legs
and settled in my brain.
All I know is what is on the back
Of the ancient photo:
Love, Johnny Hugs and Kisses, xoxo

Ode to Millie

By Tamara Smith

Ode to Millie-

I was the first, you were the last; of the pussy cat dolls you see,
That's what she told me while we were eating snails and giggling like girlie girls.
When she left, you said my shackles were broken, now.
But, for me, there was never any shackles, chains or bonds of any kind.
She was my friend, my confidant, my buddy and my pal.
Many times, we were more like sisters, not mother and daughter.
But the sickness slowly crept in and I watched her start to disappear.
You never knew her like I did; for she was already sick when you came along.
You never knew her silly, sassy humor or her emboldened confidence
to conquer the world.
Her amazing creative mind that changed simple stories into fantastic adventures.
She was a true city girl and the concrete jungle was her playground:
Shopping, makeup parties, symphonies and the ballet- the joys mom, Christy and I
enjoyed and we rode the city bus to utopia.
People watching brought many a midnight pseudo-novel as we imagined their lives over a hot
cup of coffee in the evening.
Slowly and surely her sickness came and stole her away, tragically I watched with no
Knowledge of how to save her.
When her sickness took over, I lost my best friend. I lost my mother as I knew her.
One day I realized she had become a shell of the once amazing woman
Who I thought ruled the world...
So as I mourn her passing...from this life to the next...
I also mourn the person she once was...totally Modern Millie Queen Bee of the Pussy Cat
Dolls

My Heart Belongs To The Z

By Susan Baxley

You'll find me in the stacks

Some like the 100, 700 and the 398.2 stacks

But I prefer to be among the BF, DA, and PS

In the stacks, I can stay all day

Reminiscing what happened in the past

Going through the pages of the D, E, and F

Travel through the G stacks

And I will be transported all over the world

Play music, create arts, and make crafts in the M, N and T

When I am in the PR, PS and PZ

My imagination roam free in the world of Sherlock Holmes, Rudyard Kipling and Peter Pan

But it is in the Z where my heart belongs

For in the Z, is where everything about books and libraries resides

An Ode to Cedar Street

By Robert Love

We are speaking now about humid summer evenings in my town, in the time when I lived there struggling to adapt with vision that made the stars a twinkling dim and distances a blurred mass and trapped in the body of a child clothed in the sorrows of brokenness.

It was an old, stable neighborhood that I lived, a neighborhood lined with broad oaks and cottonwoods which stood through unrelenting time shielding men who fed their families with the toil of the railroad, the oil fields, lawyering, school teaching, selling groceries and mercantile. And their wives with the lifetime vigilance of bees kept homes clean, tables filled with freshly cooked meals who washed, ironed and folded their family's clothes, clothes dried with the summer heat and bearing the smell of summer freshness.

It was an age of ritual in which men rolled up sleeves, drank whiskey in private, cut their lawns, trimmed hedges sprouting limbs wild as Medusa's hair, and whose own hair barbered neatly in the weekly ritual of talcum and sweet lilac.

Women joined the ritual of evening as they took off aprons and sat with dampened day dresses on front porch swings fanning summer evening's dampness to a cool, salty film on their sad tired faces.

Houses, aging with their occupants, were built in an age of horse-drawn carriages and dirt streets and built of wood and tar shingle and displayed pride of accomplishment wood or concrete porches enclosed in wire screens with wooden swings suspended with chain and hook and ivy clinging to a cross-patterned latticework whose paint long chipped exposing grey weathered pine. Hardwoods hundreds of years in the growing draped these houses like old nannies fretting over their small charges. Rose bushes, elephant ear, bougainvillea and wild sedge dotted the street and honeysuckle rich with its sweet pungent smell blanketed the neighborhood.

Few fences framed houses. Neighbors knew one another and visited for brief moments when the summer's heat lay dying and the setting of evening not cool enough to keep sweat off the brows of the men and women on their sacred nightly stroll and laughing children calling each other by names only they understood as they chased each other on bikes with high handle bars, the occasional wheel souped up with playing cards attached to spokes with clothes pins to create a clack clack clacking and announce a sense of power in its rider.

In these encounters the grown people nodded and spoke, talked in short, clipped sentences with knowing overtones of vast knowledge or parting with the day's gossip. They nodded knowingly to one another. They were friendly but not friends and never made calls on one another.

That was left to the women who gathered in ritualistic circles unconsciously performing a rite like their ancient womanhood who circled around stones carved with symbols of nature announcing a never ending circle of truth. These ancients reborn now worship at altars where wine and water celebrate continued human sacrifice so that the family may live. Animal skin and knives of bone are now crochet needles and wooden hoops. These reborn ancients now gather on weekly visits bringing pies freshly baked and

stories of grandchildren displaying hair fixed, freshly blued and permed; dresses below knees and collars high.

Of these evenings, I tell.

Evenings when the daylight spread softly as shadows reached for the sky and painted landscapes as the secret hand paints the lining of a conch; and street lamps glow bathing the street in flickering yellow light. On these evenings cicadas begin an evening symphony and tree frogs enter in perfect synchrony with bass notes perfectly timed. Fireflies, like Chinese lanterns, flickering and dancing in their summer mating ritual beckon men and women to heed their momentary lives. Men with anonymous faces hosing lawns with the sweet spray of cool splashing their face with a stream of water running down their arms. The water ran smooth like a hymn tuned to the pitch of the conductor's nozzle-baton securely balanced in its master's hand. The hose creating a host of pitched sounds as water runs through its twisted coils. The splash of water on the grass creating a sound of certain health as its dying dryness drinks in the water's essence after the summer's heat drains each leaf of life.

It is of these evenings I speak. And the question on this evening and every evening never answered, never spoken, never taught, and never, never to be asked is "Why am I broken. Who am I supposed to be?"

Breakfast

By Moriah Hicks

I always order my eggs sunny side up
When I'm with you
I do this, cause I always seem to wake up to sunshine
When I lay down with you in darkness.

When your eyes look at me for comforting
Your kiss tastes like validation
And your touch squeezes me like Floridian citrus.

You make me melt like butter on your morning's toast.

Mama's Mountain Stories

By Donna Henson

When I was a kid, stories about mountains were all I knew of them.
They were stories Mama told to me.
She started them, she said,
when I asked her once
if people on a mountain top
might be closer to God.

All through my young years, she told her mountain stories to me,
a girl growing up in flat, creek-bottom country.
There were stories of mountains you could see,
like the mountain of temptation in the Bible.
And stories of mountains you could not see,
like the Mountain of Heart Ache.

There were other mountains in Mama's stories,
all made interesting to a child.
The meaning of each story came because:
the mountain had to be climbed by someone.
And Jesus had climbed them all, she said.

I left those protected childhood years behind;
and moved on to my own "grown up" life.
But in doing so I would come to appreciate and understand:
Mama had climbed those mountains, too.
And so, in time, would I.

The Wall

By Gary Hall

I built a wall
Of sweat and stone
To protect myself
When I'm alone
I built a wall
To hideaway
To protect from night
And the light of day
I built a wall
Like the one in Berlin
No one got out
And no one got in
I built a wall
Of imaginary doubts
No one could get in
But no one could get out.

Delamar Versus The Lady
By Desiree Stipp-Bethune

I can think of nothing I hate more than a man who thinks he can do anything better than a lady, just because he was born a man.

Last year I had a party, at which, among other guests, two of my as yet unacquainted friends were invited. Both loved the game of chess to an irritation. Helen had taught all of her children how to play chess so well that they eventually gave her firm competition. Newell had won too much money competing at saloons with men who had fancied themselves worthy. He asked me one time if I wanted to play chess with him and I laughed. "My father taught me to play so he would have someone on the ranch with which to compete, and I haven't played since I was a child. I don't think you would have much of a game with me!" His response was galling. "Yes. I have never met an opponent who was actually worthy of my time."

I eagerly anticipated my two friends meeting each other, and having an amiable competition at my party. Helen arrived before Newell, and I whispered my plea in her ear. "You have *got* to win. Do *not* let him win!" I don't think I can describe the burning yearning I had for Helen to put my dear friend Newell in his place. I imagined Newell's smug superiority if he were to win this chess game. He arrived. I took him to the table with the chess board, Helen sitting gracefully and eagerly behind it, awaiting her competitor. I introduced them to each other, and I excused myself to tend to the other guests. Every now and then, I would glance over at Helen and Newell, enjoying seriously each other's skill. Newell even held his chess pieces in a self-important way. "*Beat him!*" I mentally willed toward Helen. When the meal was about to be served, chess had to be put aside. I strolled to their table, and asked how it had gone. Newell, with a smile as wide as Texas, said, "Of course I beat her three out of three games." My heart sank. I was crushed. So much for putting a man in his place.

I felt the same burn in my gut when Sheriff Delamar came in from talking to the ranch hands, bragging about how he could run a horse better than anyone in the county. He laughed as he recalled his argument with my boys outside. "They actually told me you are a darned great rider yourself, and you could give me a run for my money. What foolishness! A *lady!*" He said "lady" like it was as filthy as his cuss word. With the memory of Helen and Newell's competition lingering in my head, I knew I was being unwise when I found myself uttering, "How 'bout we put that to the test? Care to put your horse where your mouth is? I would love to show you what a...lady...can do." I purposely emphasized the word so he would start to drool with the hunger of winning against such an unworthy opponent. When I heard him say, "I wouldn't want to be the one to tax the weaker sex," I knew my face flushed. The deepest part of my gut said quietly, "I wish it were a dual. That would show him." But my mouth said, "Nonsense. Let's do it. It would be fun for me, win or lose." Of course, that was a lie. I would not enjoy losing to a man who thought his gender entitled him to win, perhaps easily.

When I later told my ranch hands about the race, they were so excited that they did the legwork to set it up, choosing Sunday, their day off. They, too, wanted to see the sheriff put in his place. They determined that to make the race fair, with no home ground advantage, we would run the route to The Stockyards, past the Livestock Exchange Building, and use the gate into the yard as the finish line. Through the week, as Sunday approached, I heard rumors about how the men were betting. It seemed that those at the White Elephant were mostly betting against me. My ranch hands were betting for me. I prayed that Helen's fate would not be mine.

She had sent me an encouraging little note expressing the same desire. No one had bet on Helen and Newell's games. The loss of this one would be even harder to swallow.

When I mounted my Morgan-Arabian, Blaze, that day, I knew he had the same fire I had to win the race. His dancing feet indicated his eagerness. Sheriff Delamar and I started at Veale Ranch, with only a couple of boys there to make sure our horses were watered, lined up, and ready for the race. All of the others were waiting near the finish line at The Stockyards. "Well," the sheriff asked, "what do I get when I win this race?" Despite the simmering soup of denial within, I managed to say, "The glory, man, the glory!" He muttered to himself, "Beating a lady is not my idea of glory." I winked at Sheriff Delamar to unbalance him, just before Dutton shot the starting rifle. Delamar was instantly in front of me, laughing as he rode. I would not be dissuaded from winning the race that easily. The sunshine in the sky, the anticipated cheers of people ahead, and Blaze's aggressive gait filled me with confidence, despite my view of Delamar's horse's rump obstructed by the dust cloud in my face.

The Stockyards were in sight. I could see men and women standing on the Exchange Building's roof and men jumping with excitement in the yard. Delamar seemed to relax, perhaps overconfident in his lead. I encouraged Blaze to broaden his stride, and I gained on and passed Delamar. The pounding of the horses' hooves didn't hide Delamar's incensed growl. As I sat high in the saddle, I glanced back at Delamar, who was hunkered down low with determination. But his determination didn't match mine. I won in a Blaze of Glory. And though he put his horse where his mouth was, he discovered his foot where his mouth was. And after dismounting in a giddy fit of joy, I thoughtlessly found my own lips where his mouth was. Helen's loss was now redeemed. Sheriff Delamar learned a lesson that day. The Lady Wins.

Fade

By Mindy Farley

How can silence be so loud?
I know my brain needs quiet, needs to recharge
Overload from memories are stuck in time
They want out, but no – I can't let it happen
Flashbacks are distant, still there, eating away at my happiness
The dark space closes in so tight that I can't feel, can't see, can't breathe!
A quick breath helps – not really – not enough to matter
I'm on a mission from a bad decision that I can't escape
No one can hear me scream!
No one can hear me cry!
No one can hear me!
I try but I can't see the light
Please, liberate me, ease the burn, or let me fade.

RUN

By Moriah Hicks

I decided to take a jog yesterday
Decided to run away my troubles
To clear my mind
So, I ran...

I ran fast-
So fast, I ran from myself
I ran away from my soul
I ran..
I ran to stop the ache of disease
Ran thirsty cause Flint's water still ain't clean

I ran-
Ran to try and make sense of this thing called poverty
Cause *they* act like gentrification in low-income housing is a good thing
I ran, cause let the truth be told, when you black that's how you remain alive
Most times...

I ran
For the loss of my hope and the black mother's sanity
'specially if they got black sons
I ran-
Ran for Malcolm and Martin
Medgar and Emmett
Tamir and Trayvon
Philando and Eric
I ran for the boys that will be next-
Since black boys are born with targets on their backs and chests...
I ran-
To catch my mind up with my spirit
For the loss of dignity and the stench of disgrace
I ran-

I ran, running from myself
Cause that's what you do when you're scared-
Don't you know?
You run
Run fast, and pray to your God, you make it out alive
So...RUN!

The Goat Woman of Smackover Arkansas Dreams a New World

By Rick Vosper

The goat woman dreams of falling asleep. But she is already asleep as she dreams this, so it is a sleep within a sleep, and from that sleep come dreams within dreams, the first of four dreams within four dreams within four sleeps. Her breath draws soft now, sweet and gentle as a child's kiss, and as innocent.

She dreams of television cameras poised like giant insects, pointed at her and at the pet goats frolicking around her. A red light blinks on and she is speaking to children all over the world. Not a speech of words, but of music. She speaks violins to them and long melodies and treble clefs soaring up through a cloudless summer sky.

But there is static in the signal somehow, and she is no longer speaking to children but instead to soldiers on the overgrown battlefield at Poison Springs a hundred years before on a soft April morning and decades before her own birth. She speaks piano and Schubert lieder to the men, who crumble slowly to sleep in the long grass. Tarpley and Minié rifles fall beside them and begin to melt, and field cannon melt, and the other weapons and wagons and equipment of war melt, all of them soaking deep into the rich Arkansan soil. In a few minutes, honeysuckle and coneflower have grown up around the soldiers, covering them until their bodies can no longer be seen and the air is still again except for the birds and spring insects. All that is left now are the horses, and they wander off soon enough.

— • —

The Smackover goat woman turns in her sleep and the wagon, the old 1926 T-model Ford circus wagon, creaks gently. There is much more built onto the house now, more rooms overlooking Smackover Creek outside of town, but she has moved back into the wagon part and still likes to sleep on the narrow fold-down bed there in the years since Mr. Meyer passed.

She turns again and the wagon creaks again and once again she dreams. She is in the back of the wagon now with the doors open on a warm summer morning standing at her "performance balcony" with the sound of cicadas loud in the old white oak by the pasture and a susurrus of breeze offering percussion accompaniment through the rattling leaves. She matches the insects' ascending pitch and begins to improvise harmonies around it, singing for some of the local children who might listen awhile or wander off to play with the baby goats as they choose.

The light is very bright, and she closes her eyes against it briefly. A *here we go again* feeling sweeps over her like a glass of champagne drunk too fast at one of the backstage parties during her Manhattan days in the Twenties when she was modeling hair products and clothing and cosmetics for the John Robert Powers agency. The rolling yard and trees and the children and goats and even the wrought iron railing she grips begin to dissolve, and she is back with the Ringling Brothers aboard their famous circus train, rumbling east out of Cleveland and into the rising sun on its way to someplace important, one of the big Eastern show towns maybe, Atlantic City or Richmond or Raleigh.

She is on a stage in the sideshow, in a dusty tent at midafternoon on a midway that smells not unpleasantly of freshly crushed grass and animal dung, playing the old pump organ or a harp or accordion or harmonica—no more than a dozen different instruments, really, although the poster outside claims two score. She plays for wanderers on the midway, families stuffed full of crackerjack and lemonade and excitement enough to part with a few dimes, each but the mere tenth part of a dollar, the barker shouts, to hear the "One Girl Band."

She plays them popular tunes of the day, “The Duchess Of Central Park” perhaps, or “Creole Belles” or “Just Because She Made Dem Goo-Goo Eyes” singing the melody and accompanying herself on various instruments, either together or by turns.

There is shouting on the midway, and more yelling, and the rush of people who come crowding into the tent. “The lion!” they cry. “The lion is loose!” Men call out orders and women scream and children scream or cower in their mothers’ skirts. The Goat Woman pauses, steps down from the tiny raised stage, a single step, and walks calmly out the canvas door flap and onto the midway.

And there, sure enough, in the middle of tramped grass lane and looking around uncertainly, is one of the Ringling Brothers’ lions.

She approaches the beast and begins to sing. A lullaby from 1913 written for the musical *Shameen Dhu* when she played violin and piano in the small pit orchestra and the show played in Philadelphia.

“Over in Killarney, many years ago,” she sings. The lion shakes his mane—from which dust and straw issue; it really is a very old lion, and nearly toothless—and pauses in midstride to look at her, standing alone in the now deserted midway in the flowing black concert dress she always hated. The animal, The King of All Beasts, the posters say, cocks his head to one side now, and listens.

“My mother sang a song to me in tones so sweet and low.” She begins extending the phrases now, improvising, weaving Celtic knots of melisma which settle over the creature, weighing it down. The massive head begins to loll, the beast seats himself, hunkers, puts chin on paws, blinks once and in a few minutes, is fully asleep. Just like that.

Perhaps some men come with ropes and chains to bind it, or to coax the lion back to its cage. But the Goat Woman is far gone again, back in her bed in the old wagon, dreaming of dreaming, more dreams within dreams.

— • —

The old woman stirs, settles, sighs and dreams a third dream. She is in the television studio again, KATV way up in Little Rock, the *Big 10 Jamboree* show on a Sunday morning. Kids and kids scatter at her feet like fallen leaves. She is playing the studio piano—a Steinway “baby grand” model tuned fresh and especially for her appearance—as the goats sing along and the children try to keep up.

“Mairzy doats,” she sings, “And dozy doats.” Comes now a low humming like an organ pedal tone, *sostenuto*, somewhere from deep within the ledger lines below the bass clef, supporting the tune and its simple harmonies. The studio and equipment and the children and goats, and even the heavy Steinway keys under her fingers start to shimmer.

“And liddle lamzy divey,” and she is on a street corner in another city somewhere in the American Midwest where it is very cold and in the cold are people dressed in rags and pressed together for the modest warmth that pressing affords, waiting half an hour for a turn at a tin cup of thin soup. She speaks to them, something from the Brahms *Sonata #1 for violin and piano*, violin and piano together as the soup begins to simmer afresh, now made from roasted beef bones and the marrow inside those bones and small pieces of the meat from them and yes, fresh vegetables too, carrots and onions and golden chunks of potatoes and turnips and even some fine-chopped parsley, all suspended in the rich and heavy-seasoned broth.

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The Goat Woman turns once more, snoring gently, and vibrations from her mouth begin to carve out patterns in the air. Fragments and then snatches and then, finally, whole motifs from Rodolphe Kreutzer's *42 études ou caprices*, the exercises her father taught her more than three-quarters of a century previous. She is a little girl again, first learning the violin at the age of four standing in the sun room of the old house in Orwin, Pennsylvania. Her father is telling her the *Etudes* are "the indispensable foundation, the very cornerstone for the development of essential violin technique." Years later, Mr. Meyer would call them "those scratchy old fiddle tunes from that frog-eater with a Kraut name."

But dust motes begin to move and then dance and then spin before her eyes, and she can no longer hear either Mr. Meyer's voice, or her father's, nor yet see the notes from the music book propped up on the old upright piano. She shakes her young head in annoyance, and it is September the twentieth, a warm humid Friday under a lowering sky in 1957. Nine teenage boys and girls, children really, walk slowly up a flight of steps. The girls hug schoolbooks tight to their chests and they all look straight ahead while hundreds of gathered mothers and children and husbands have taken the day off to carry signs and scream at them. The people curse at the children and spit on them through the phalanx of National Guardsmen with weapons held steady at port arms as they walk together up the lone row of weathered cement steps in defiance of the Governor of Arkansas and all the people assembled outside.

The Goat Woman picks up her old violin from the piano bench which seems to have come with her somehow to this time and place, and begins. Bach. Something familiar, slow and sweet, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."

The various people gradually fall silent and regard one another and then slowly begin to weep and reach, tentatively at first, to hold each other and weep together out of their own pain and rage and the shame of that rage, but it is too late. The children are gone now, gone through the massive glass-fronted doors, gone into the halls and classrooms, gone to Little Rock Central High School for the first time.

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Rhena Salome Miller Meyer turns at last onto her back. She tries to dream again, but there are no more dreams to be dreamt. Her eyelids stop twitching, her breath slows. She shudders briefly, and her breath slows again and eventually stops altogether. And then, like the children and goats and all the things of her dreams, the music settles around her and, finally, grows still.

Delta Man

By Donna Henson

Heard a young man from the Delta
say: “come on over; we’ll help ya
blow away those blues —
with music folks choose
from Dixie to North Philadelphia!”

Slightly used tissues

by *Lauri Wilson*

My car always has some slightly used tissues
lying around
for those times when I hear a song
and realize why there are so many sad ones.

At work my desk drawer has a couple of
slightly used tissues.
They got hastily stuck inside when I had to
pull myself together when someone needed my help.

At home, I can just use my sleeve
because I don't even buy tissues.
I'm very informal.
and it's just a junky sweatshirt anyway.

When I take my clean clothes out of the dryer
I have bits of white clinging to the clothes
because I left a tissue in the pockets.
still slightly used, but now clean.

At the end of the day a pillowcase
that matches a set of sheets I don't own anymore
is okay to sleep on
even if it's
slightly damp

For the Hips in Hip-Hop

(Dedicated to the Women who have blazed trails in the genre of hip-hop)

By Moriah Hicks

This is for the hips in hip-hop
Cause there's nothing better than a woman spitting vicious free-styles amongst male crowds
Letting her voice be gravity, so y'all feel the weight of her words

This is for the hips in hip-hop
For the sistas doing windmills, break dancing on cardboard boxes in Brooklyn subway stations
This is for the culture-
For the little girls with spray paint on their nails, because they're graffiti artists

This is for the hips in hip-hop
For the women who'd rather wear Addidas over Christian Louboutin
Not to say it's something wrong with those, she just chooses not to be defined by stereotypes

This is for the hips in hip-hop
For the ladies breathing life in mics
Milking bebop from her breast
Pushing rap through her womb to give birth to words

It's for the girls living to deejay a house party-
Scratching on the one's and two's with a needle and a crossfader
It's for the hips in hip-hop

This is for the "U-N-I-T-Y"
That's the Unity-
Lady of Rage and all her afro puffs
Jane Blaze for not being Jane Doe
It's for the hips in hip-hop
Lady Bug for making the Planets Digable
Roxanne Shante` for taking Revenge
You can't cook without a little *Salt-n-Pepper*

It's for the hips in hip-hop
MC for not letting anything be *Lyte* about her
Dana Owen for rebirthing herself as *Queen*
Foxy Brown, *Lil` Kim*, *Mia X*, *Eve* and all those in between...

This is for the never frontin' hips of hip-hop
For the wrapped up
twisted up
locked down
home-grown
poetic
rhythmical Queens of hip-hop

On the Way to Roseman Bridge

By Desiree Stipp-Bethune

These dusty summer roads
Cover my car in grey
But through billows
A beauty to behold
Endless lines of yellow butterflies
Border the rough angular gravel
And only take flight as I drive by
Brilliant clouds in dancing synchrony
Difficult to capture
Flutter away.

Neighbor

By Lauri Wilson

I missed you, neighbor
Tonight when it was raining
I stepped outside on the porch and felt the mist hit my face and it was cold.
After all, it is November.
I looked at your porch,
But you were gone.
It was dark.
We used to step out, wave and say
“Wow, look at this rain! I’m so glad, we needed it!” or sometimes
“I’m afraid we’re going to have a tornado!”
And we had to yell because it was raining so hard.
You’re gone, moved away.
Dry grass is over-the-knee high, seeded out.
You promised me you would mow it before winter.
Now it’s fall.
The Razorback flag you left behind is still hanging,
All wrapped up around the pole, faded and tired.
Pretty much like the season they just had.

Maigret and the Bath at Seventy-Five

By Janet Ryan

It was a dark and stormy day and my joints ached. Had been aching, all day, way down deep inside. I used to laugh when old folks said they could tell in their bones that bad weather was coming. Ha ha. Old folks. Ha ha ha.

Maybe a soak in hot water up to *here* with lots of bubbles and a good book would help. I didn't have to start supper for an hour, so I could relax and read.

I saved what I'd been working on and exited the programs. My desk is in the library where books line the walls, hide behind cabinet doors, rest in bags and tower in piles on the floor. Reference books, history books, art books, and biographies; detective novels featuring Jules Maigret, Brother Cadfael, Mma Ramotswe, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot; novels telling the stories of the YaYa sisters and geishas, Pern's dragons, Disc World, and Anne-with-an-e of Prince Edward Island, all read and loved, and many re-read over again. But not today.

I left the library, walked through the living room where we eat our meals in front of the TV and the dining room where we haven't eaten anything since the kids were young, and into my retirement room. Ah, yes, my retirement room, which used to be my office/sewing center/hobby room. Two decades ago, when I first began to think about retiring, I feared that all the free, unstructured time I'd have would cease being a pleasure and I'd face boredom. I started saving things to work on "someday." The room gradually filled up with boxes of yarn and fabric, beads, stamps soaked off envelopes, envelopes to be soaked, and envelopes not to be soaked because they had fancy cancels; books about tying flies, caning chairs, and binding books; and kits for making model ships, lighthouses, and carousels. I've been retired for nine years now and haven't had a chance to do any of those things except to add boxes of discount books – and occasionally take one book out to read and then add to the stacks in the library. Somewhere in all the debris I knew I could find something fit for reading in the tub on a dark and stormy day when my bones ached.

Yes. There in the carton balanced precariously on top of the dehumidifier, I found two slim novels by Georges Simenon, Maigret and *The Carter of La Providence*, and Maigret and *The Night at the Crossroads*, two of his earliest works. I'd just finished Maigret and *Pietr the Latvian*, the story which first introduced Jules Maigret to the world, so I grabbed the second, *The Carter of La Providence*.

I turned and walked through the dining room where we don't eat but the table holds the model train that Jack hasn't had time to work on since he retired and into his office. I waved the book at him. "I'm going to go soak. See you later."

"Have fun. Do you need any help?"

I kissed him on top of his head, walked back through the dining room where the train waited at its empty station and the living room where *Pietr the Latvian* rested on the floor next to the couch where I'd been reading yesterday and into the kitchen where I had a snack and a glass of water. I ate a wedge of cheese, but if my doctor asks, I had a carrot. The dryer was finished so I emptied the clothes into a laundry basket, put the wet things in the dryer and got a new load washing. Then I carried the basket and the book back through the kitchen and the living room where...well, you know, we eat and read... and into the bedroom where I emptied the clothes onto the bed. I'd put them away later. I put the book and my glasses on the bathroom counter, pulled the shower curtain out of the tub, groaned my way to my knees and cleaned out the tub. I groaned my way back up, turned on the water, and pulled some fresh clothes out of the pile on

the bed.

Then I went back, ready to sink into the filling tub. *THE BOOK WAS GONE!* My glasses were on the counter, but *The Carter of La Providence* had done a bunk. Jules Maigret, where are you?

I checked under the pile of laundry, thinking I'd left *The Carter* on the bed and then tumbled clothes over him. Not there. So I went back through the living room-where and checked the counter and the top of the dryer. No. I checked the refrigerator – that's my default place to check when I've misplaced something. After all, what's more logical? You're holding something in one hand and realize it takes two hands to get whatever you're after, so you put down what you're holding and forget to pick it up. So far I haven't actually done that, but it's so reasonable it's one of the first places I check. Not there.

Back through the living room-where and the bedroom where the clothes were piled. Not there. Really not there. And really not on the counter, not anywhere on the counter. Through the living room-where and the dining room-where – not on the chairs or mixed in with train things on the table. I walked back into my retirement room – not on the table or cabinets there – so I picked up

The Night at the Crossroads, the third Maigret. Then back through the dining room-where and into Jack's office. Neither *The Carter* nor Jack was there.

Through the dining room-where and the living room where Jack was just coming from the bedroom.

"I turned off the water. It was getting pretty deep."

"Thanks. Have you seen my book? I can't find it."

"Which book, the one in your hand?"

"No, that's the replacement. I can't find the one I had when I told you I was going to take a bath, the one I wanted to read next."

"Is that it on the floor by the couch?"

"No, that's the one I finished yesterday."

"Tell me what you did when you left my office."

So I did – water and cheese...ah, carrot; laundry; clothes on bed; counter; clean out tub.

He went to check the washer and dryer, I went back through the living room-where and bedroom-where.

And my doctor asks if I do any walking.

I decided to put the clothes away. Maybe *The Carter* was tangled up in them. No. Checked the bathroom again. Not on the counter. Wait – caught in the shower curtain? Yes!! Back through the bedroom-where and the living room-where. Jack was just closing the refrigerator door.

"I found it!"

"Where was it?"

"Tangled in the shower curtain, down between the sink and the tub. I must have knocked it off when I moved the curtain out of the tub."

I hugged *The Carter* as I headed back through the living room-where and the bedroom-where. I checked my watch – almost time to start supper. I stepped into the tub and sank down into the still-steamy water with Jules Maigret.

Supper might be just a little late tonight. I had some aches to soak away.

Authors

Susan Baxley is the Archives and Technical Service Librarian at South Arkansas Community College Library (SouthArk Library). If she is not at the front circulation desk, you will most likely find her digging through the archives in the special collection room. However, her most favorite spot is in the stacks among the library books. She guides her writings through her life experiences. She believes that creative imagination, whether in words or arts, makes this unique world a better place. She lives in El Dorado, Arkansas.

Benjamin Cagle and wife Holly have seven children who, many a time, do not like being told what to do, especially when it is something that they do not want to do, even though what is being told for them to do is what is best for them and for the enterprise. Some of the times, when their children choose to do what they want to do as opposed to choosing to do what they are told by Benjamin and wife Holly to do, they get the wooden spoon. The wooden spoon is a way to encourage appropriate behavior and develop proper attitudes of respect, which leads to a more functional society and the strongest idea of a nation. Benjamin is employed by South Arkansas Community College to support and promote distance education.

Crystal Carodine was born in Pontiac Michigan, on March 18, 1993, to her parents, Christopher Carodine and Madinah Alexander, who are also from Michigan. She is the oldest of nine brothers and sisters. Crystal graduated from Junction City High School in 2012 and received a scholarship to attend Southern Arkansas University in Camden. Recently, she moved to Hot Springs to major in business and culinary arts.

Mindy Farley grew up in Bossier City, Louisiana, and has served at the SouthArk Library as Programming/Outreach Librarian since 2017, after working in the public library system for 18 years. She is married to Danny Farley, and has one daughter who graduated from SouthArk and became a math teacher and one stepson who is a commander in the United States Navy. She also serves as Mimi to three granddaughters and three grandsons with whom she loves spending time. Mindy began writing song lyrics when she was 13 and recently took up writing poetry. Mindy attended Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana on a band scholarship.

Gary Hall is the Director of Entertainment and Media Arts at SouthArk. He has a BA in Radio, TV and Film from UALR and an MA in Theatre from Louisiana Tech. Gary has been working in theatre and media for over 30 years and has had three of his plays produced. He is also a visual artist and very involved with the South Arkansas Arts Center.

Dana Harvey was born and raised in Warren, Arkansas. Recently she attended the University of Arkansas-Monticello prior to transferring to SouthArk. Dana claims she inherited her love of the written word and writing skills from her mother. She is the assistant administrator for Southeast Arkansas Human Development Center. Dana resides in Warren with her husband Darrell Jr. The couple has three daughters and five granddaughters.

Donna Henson is a native of Union County. She has lived and worked in several states; yet, in a strong sense, has always been thankful that South Arkansas has defined her identity. Donna's working life involved writing (communicating through writing) in one way or another. Now in

retirement, she is an active, founding member of South Arkansas Poets of the Pines and an active member of Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas, the state division of National Federation of State Poetry Societies.

Moriah L. Hicks, an El Dorado native, is a 2001 graduate of El Dorado High School and a proud alumnus of The University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff. With a BA degree in Theatre and Mass Communications, Moriah currently is employed at South Arkansas Community College as a Business & Education Specialist. Moriah is also a published playwright, having co-authored the award winning "Hip Hop Project: Insight to a Hip Hop Generation." She is a published spoken-word artist having performed with Tara Betts, Jus Marvin Smith and others. Moriah is also a professional acting talent signed with the Blue Talent Group Agency based in Los Angeles.

Micah Johnson has been a student at South Arkansas Community College since fall 2015, expecting to graduate with an Associate of Arts degree by December 2019. Micah began getting into language, and especially literary contests, during his senior year of high school. Ever since, writing, editing, linguistics, and English have influenced his everyday life. Now he is 22 years old, living happily at home with his still-wedded mother and father, ten-year-old sister, and fraternal twin brother near El Dorado, Arkansas. In late October 2018, Micah became a volunteer intern with South Arkansas Arts Center. His other interests include listening to foreign music, reading European history and Norse (and some Greek) mythology, and discussing social politics. Recently, his allegoric short fiction piece entitled "Elder's Word," became one of five stories published in *October Hill Magazine's* Volume 2, Issue 3. In addition, his Southern-themed blog can be seen at www.diamondextra.net.

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.

Robert Love is a native of El Dorado, Arkansas, and grew up on Cedar and West 5th Streets. He currently lives in Conway, Arkansas, working as a Special Education teacher with the Little Rock School District. He received a Masters in Education and a Masters in Teaching from Southern Arkansas University. He has been a writer and musician for most of his life, while also serving as editor of the *Times of North Little Rock* and as Communications Director for Pulaski Technical College. He has worked in the classroom since 2006, teaching English Arts in middle and high school and working with students with special education needs. He has three children and two grandchildren.

Allan Pirnique is an Arkansan--born in Little Rock on October 21, 1939, reared here, and stayed. He took his education in Arkansas and Detroit. In 1964 he married a Benton girl, Janey Kelley. They have two boys, David and Michael, and have had fifty-four wonderful years. In 2010, he retired after forty years of medical practice. He often says, "My patients were great; I learned a lot from them." When describing his writing process he quips, "My poetry writing is enjoyable to me--sometimes easy and sometimes it just ain't there. Will keep trying."

Janet Ryan is a retired chemistry teacher and math tutor, a semi-retired turophile (lover of cheese, strictly amateur status), and a former Northerner. She considers South Arkansas her home. Current occupation: Retired, and proud of it!

Tamara Smith is a great student at South Arkansas Community College.

Desiree Stipp-Bethune has lived in 18 different places in the United States, mostly in the East and Midwest, including Des Moines, Iowa, a stone's throw from famed Madison County. She enjoyed visiting the six remaining Bridges of Madison County in good times, bad times, snow, rain, and sun. Her previous professions of Oceanography and Limnology were an outgrowth of her natural born interest in exploration. Currently she is Director of Religious Education in Camden. She belongs to the South Arkansas Writers group.

Rick Vosper is an advertising copywriter, magazine features writer, and sometime fiction author. He is also a musical theoretician (really!), spicy food enthusiast and recovering vegetarian. Rick lives in South Arkansas on forty acres of forest at the bend in a dirt road twelve miles from the nearest town with his wife, assorted children, granddaughter and an indeterminate number of cats.

Lauri Wilson is a lifelong resident of El Dorado. She works as the Cataloging and Digital Content Manager at the SouthArk Library and has been there since 1997. She hasn't written poetry since her high school days but is now trying it again. This is her first submission.

Jana Wright resides in Barkada, a small community in Drew County. She is married to Shawn Wright and they have a son, Dustin Barnett, a daughter, Taylor Swain, and a grandson, Beaux Swain. She graduated from Wilmar School in 1984. When she was 27, she returned to college at the University of Arkansas at Monticello and graduated in 1998 with an English major and secondary education minor. In 2005, she graduated from UAM with a Master's in secondary education with an emphasis in reading. While enrolled at UAM, she had several poems and short stories published in their literary magazine, *The Foliate Oak*. She was a public school teacher for 20 years and recently moved to the adult education realm. She is currently employed by South Arkansas Community College Education Center in Bradley County as the program coordinator. Reading and writing have always been loves of hers. Poetry and prose are ways for her either to express feelings or just create imaginary worlds to escape reality sometimes.

James Yates is the Associate Vice President of Arts, Sciences, and Academic Support at South Arkansas Community College in El Dorado, Arkansas. He was born and raised in Booneville, Arkansas, and graduated from Booneville High School in 1979. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications in 1983 from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia; a Master of Arts degree in English in 1985 from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro; and a PhD. in English specializing in Rhetoric and Composition and in Film in 1995 from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Prior to coming to SouthArk, Dr. Yates served as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Carl Albert State College in Poteau, Oklahoma, from 2008-2013. He was also Associate Professor of English at Independence Community College in Independence, Kansas, from 2014-2016. James

was Professor of English and Chair of the Department of English, Foreign Language, and Humanities at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva, Oklahoma, from 1990-2008. He began his career as English Instructor at Rich Mountain Community College from 1985-1988. James has taught Composition, American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, Film, Mythology, Journalism, and Creative Writing.

James has been the Area Chair for Film and History for the Southwest Popular Culture Association, a member of the Conference on Christianity and Literature, and the Melville Society, a member of the South Central Modern Language Association, area chair for the Film & History League, and has made conference presentations and published scholarly articles on a variety of subjects including Herman Melville, The U.S.-Mexican War, Abraham Lincoln, Arctic exploration, and stage/film adaptations.

In April 2001, he was selected by the Student Government Association as the John Sheffield Teacher of the Year, the highest faculty honor at NWOSU. He was also President of the NWOSU Faculty Senate for three terms. He was named an *Outstanding Young American* in 1998 and recognized in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers* in 1998 and *Who's Who in America* for 2001.

Yates has two children, a son, Brendan, who is a junior at Northwestern Oklahoma State University in Alva, Oklahoma, and a daughter, Caitlin, who lives in Bethany, Oklahoma, and is in the ninth grade.