

**INSIDE:** Connections Feature  
A Roundtable and Reading with Authors Melanie Thorne and Melinda Moustakis



# Connections

Fall 2012 Literary Magazine

**CELEBRATING**  
**CELEBRATING**  
**20 YEARS**  
**20 YEARS**



COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

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# Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND  
**Fall 2012 Literary Magazine**

**volume 20      number 1**



*Daffodils* by Wendy Kibler

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*Connections* is published at the  
College of Southern Maryland in December and May.

*Opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect  
the official views of the College of Southern Maryland.*

*Please see the College of Southern Maryland web site  
for submission guidelines at:*

**[www.csmd.edu/Connections](http://www.csmd.edu/Connections)**

*Thank you to the Languages and Literature Division for its  
generous support of the Connections Literary Series Program.*

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CELEBRATING  
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20 YEARS  
20 YEARS

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# Canoe Neck

*Erin Cornelius*

Plop.

That fish was taunting her now. Sally cast her line as close to where she'd last seen it as she could. Her lure landed a good fifteen feet off.

Sally didn't even like fish. She didn't like their taste, she couldn't stand to touch one barehanded, and she certainly wouldn't clean one up to cook. The only purpose a fish would serve was as bait in the crab pots she didn't have any more.

Reeling in her line—empty—she cast it out again. Sally had done this before. The summer she turned ten, she'd been out on this very pier every day. In that entire summer, she'd only caught one fish. Her grandmother still had a picture of her holding that eleven-inch croaker—with tongs—tucked away in her Sally-themed photo album.

Her lure was dragging along the bottom now. She could feel the intermittent tug as it briefly caught on the various pieces of debris littering the creek bed. Sally reeled faster, hoping to remedy that.

She couldn't remember what happened to that fish. She'd never liked fish, so she hadn't eaten it herself. Her grandmother might have used it as bait in one of her crab pots, though she'd always favored chicken legs as long as Sally could remember. Or maybe her grandfather had fried it up with some perch for himself and Grandma. Sally might have even thrown it back.

Her line snagged, probably on some driftwood. She tugged hard, once, twice, and it came loose. Checking the lure to make sure it was undamaged, she cast it out again.

She'd pulled a beautiful piece of driftwood from the mud along the shore that summer. Her father had taken it after it was clean and stained it to help preserve it. He still had it, somewhere in his garage with his other treasures.

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This time her line came in with a tangle of seaweed. She gingerly pulled it off the hook and dropped it on the pier at her feet. She moved to the end of the pier, and cast her line toward the center of the cove, away from the seaweed patch.

There were two boys who she'd shared the pier with that summer. They'd both had better luck than she did. They'd caught numerous perch, a flounder, and even hooked a skate. She'd been standing here when she caught a glimpse of its light underside right before it slammed into the pylon, snapped the line, and disappeared. She hadn't been too disappointed when it escaped. She recalled seeing one cut up alive, and then tossed back without its tail when she was six. The skate likely survived, but it was still a disturbing for a young child.

Plop.

The fish was further away now, along the neighbor man's seawall. She'd played along that seawall, before that summer. She'd learned how to pull crabs off the pylons with her grandmother's crab net. She'd even jumped off it on occasion when she was feeling adventurous.

Even from here she could see the dark line of wet wood and some exposed barnacles clinging to the seawall. The tide was going out. The mud near the shore would be uncovered soon, and the smell would be horrible. The one time she'd tried scalded oysters, at her father's fiftieth birthday dinner, they'd smelled like that. She'd forced two down only because her father had showed her how to shuck the oysters and had made the sauce to go with it special, even though it was his party.

A boat sped by the mouth of the cove, kicking up a wake. The waves rolled down into the cove and lapped gently against the pylons. She'd stood here, on the end of this pier a few times, waiting for one of the boats to come back. Her parents had been avid fishers in the days before cell phones became common and long before cell reception extended this far out. There were

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trips that lasted hours longer than planned, days she would still be standing here at dusk waiting for the boats to come back. They always did. Well, her parents always came back anyway. Boats sometimes broke down, and in one memorable occasion sank, but the people who mattered always came back.

In the summer, the small bay beyond the cove was good for crabbing. A trotline and some chicken necks were all it took. She was a natural at it, even at seven years old, catching the crabs in her net more often than not when they tried to escape. She'd caught the better part of most of her family's crab dinners before crabs had gone from scarce to mostly nonexistent. The crabs had since made a comeback, but nobody she knew could be bothered to bait the line, and the boat they'd used had been parked for too long to be considered seaworthy.

Croak.

The call came from the shore, somewhere in the tall grass at the water's edge. It brought Sally back to her spot on the pier. She hadn't heard the fish for awhile, hadn't even bothered to cast her line. She listened for another moment.

No telltale plop.

Her fish was gone.

The sun was still up, would be for awhile yet. There was still time to fish some more. Maybe there was another fish hiding in the seaweed patch that could be lured out.

Sally grabbed the lure and hooked it on the second guide from the end. Then she slung the rod over her shoulder and started for home.



*Sun Shower, by Rachel Heinhorst*

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# Before My Son Falls Asleep

*Rachel Heinhorst*

He wants me to sleep in his bed,  
to listen for the ghosts that whisper,  
so I trade mine for his one night.  
The fan plays music for the curtains,  
a cluster of glow-in-the-dark stars  
tries to show some hint of green,  
and I think back to ten, to being  
alone in my bed at the beginning  
of bedtime, trying to fall asleep  
with covered shoulders and eyes  
closed until the hallway light  
under the door yanks open my lids,  
and I am there now, investigating  
the dark, finding nighttime tapping  
and corner shoved toys something  
to hide from, all the way under the covers,  
asking, if you are real lift my blanket  
and when I'm sure the blanket moves,  
all my senses open, an owl, a catbird  
like my son now who lives inside believing.



*County Seat, by Katlyn Lyon*

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# The Start

*James Burd Brewster*

The *Shearwater* came upright, pointed into the wind, continued through onto a starboard (right side) tack, and leaned over under the wind.

“Bring her in as tight as she’ll come!”

Don and I bent over the twin coffee grinder winch and pedaled our arms furiously. The genoa became taught, quickly filled with wind, and the *Shearwater* leaned further, stopping when the port (left side) gunwale (edge where deck and hull meet) went under water. Don and I grinned at our result. This was one good day for a race!

Blue sky overhead, blue water below, air temp 85 degrees, wind 15 knots. I grinned again, we were going to be hitting hull speed and be on our ear all afternoon.

John Miko, a second-class cadet at the US Coast Guard Academy, stood at the windward wheel of the twin-mast yawl. An experienced small boat sailor, this was his first race skippering a boat as massive as the *Shearwater*. He stood there left leg slightly bent, right leg braced against the steering post, flexing like shock absorbers as the boat pitched and rolled. The *Shearwater* plowed through waves that were five feet tall, ninety feet apart with crests pushed by the wind into whitecaps.

I could tell from how John swiveled his head from fore (front) to aft (back) and then windward (wind side) to leeward (calm side) he was fixing where the other boats were, reckoning their direction, and gauging if he would have to exercise his “right-of-way” as a result of being on starboard tack. The *Shearwater* paused slightly as the bow ran into a wave, causing all of us to rock forward, but the rising bow caught us as the boat parted the sea. John ducked his head as the spray, inevitably created by such a meeting, was flung skyward, caught

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the wind, and rained down on his head and back, sun-bleached and tanned from three weeks continuous sailing.

“Mark!” shouted John. “Mark,” replied the timekeeper next to John. “Five minutes to start.”

“Boom,” the sound of the starting cannon reached my ears. I realized John had cried “Mark” when he had seen the signal flag lowered.

“Ready about?” he shouted. “Ready forward, ready aft, ready winches,” came the replies. “Helm’s a lee!” he shouted, spun the wheel to starboard, and we all jumped into action. The jib man let loose the inch-thick triple-braided jib sheet (rope) and the 6000 pounds of pressure created by the 1360 square foot jib ripped the line from his hands. The jib flapped like a flag in a gale and the foredeck exploded in a wild orchestra of banging sails, slapping ropes, and jingling fittings.

Don and I made love to our winches and in seconds the discordant chaos of the maneuver resolved into the wind and water noise of a port tack with the starboard gunwale now under water.

“Nice job, classmates!” John shouted, “We came around in under 10 seconds. It’ll be a standard start; signals at five minutes, three, one and go. We will go out and back for five, three, and go.

As we raced away from the starting line at over 10 knots, Commander Wilks, the safety officer and USCG “Adult” on this cadet summer cruise asked John to restate his strategy and the rules of the road that were applicable at the start. He had been leaning against the back wall of the cockpit observing the operation. I saw him lean forward to hear John’s answer.

“Sir.” John’s sentences were clipped. “Strategy—Close Hauled. Starboard Tack. Lined up for the windward buoy. Rules of the Road—Close Hauled and Starboard Tack give us right-of-way. Have to keep a lookout for barging. No buoy room unless they are forward of the beam.”

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“Who’s your serious competition?”

The answer was immediate, “Dennis Connor in *Robin*.”

“John, 10 seconds to turn,” interrupted the timekeeper.

“Ready about,” his response commanded and the *Shearwater* deftly shifted left to right and we headed in again on starboard tack.

As we rested from the exertion of the tack, I looked at Don. He was grinning again. “Jim, that’s what every skipper wants to do,” he paused for effect, “and they all want to do it at top speed, at the moment the gun goes off.”

I knew the potential for harm, damage, and destruction this presented. Boats often bumped at the start and if one skipper miscalculated badly during the melee of the start, several boats, their crews and their equipment would be crushed, torn or dismantled in yachting’s version of a NASCAR pileup. “Yeah and we got 18 boats all trying to squeeze into the same 50 foot section of the line.

Don’s grin widened, “Its gonna be a hairy start!”

John’s “ready about” rang out once more and we put the *Shearwater* back on a port tack. We had made the run out and back to the starting line in exactly 2 minutes.

“Three minutes to start,” said the timekeeper.

“Very Well. Turn us around at minute-thirty,” replied John.

Commander Wilks stood up again. “Give me your assessment John.”

“I’ve taken the windward end of the line, we’ll be on starboard tack, and everyone will be below us. We are tacking well and we timed that last leg perfectly. We should get to the line on time at the windward mark.”

“Any sign of *Robin*?”

“No Sir,” he replied.

“Minute-Thirty, John.”

“Ready about!”

---

After the tack, Don and I did not take our hands off the winch handles. The last leg of a start is adrenalin charged, full of shouted commands, sail adjustments, and course corrections.

The stress levels caused by the close proximity of tons of fiberglass, aluminum and stainless steel, bobbing and horsing under the forces of wind and water wind, became evident in the rising pitch of each skipper's commands. I knew we needed to be ready for anything.

*Shearwater* was back up to 10 knots and overhauling every other boat in the fleet with a clear uncontested shot at her spot at the windward mark. In 90 seconds they would cover the remaining 500 yards and cross the line ahead of the fleet.

I glanced up at John just as his gaze stopped scanning and focused on a point to windward.

“*Robin* ho!” he cried.

“Where away?” asked Wilks.

John's right hand pointed in the direction while his gaze shifted back to the *Shearwater's* sails and its direction of travel.

“He's gonna play chicken and try to beat us to the mark.”

“What are the Rules, John?”

“Sir, He will be abaft our beam and so we have clear right of way. Starboard tack, close hauled. He's gonna want buoy room and he's gonna try and force us off our line.”

Commander Wilks leaned back against his spot in the cockpit.

“Take us across the line, John! The higher pitch in his voice betrayed his relaxed demeanor.

John began what I call the Skipper's Dance that would occupy him till we crossed the line and emerged safely on the other side. He ducked down low to the port side to see under the mainsail and scan the sea to leeward, he stood up and swiveled forward his eyes raising their stare to take in the set of the sails from the masthead ninety-one feet above the deck

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down to the twenty-three foot long boom at the bottom of the mainsail that blocked his view to port. His eyes finished this run looking forward to see if *Shearwater* was in danger of running down any other boat. Almost like a ballerina spotting her spin, John's head rotated aft allowing him to see if any boat was overtaking *Shearwater*. He initiated the last step of the dance by pausing to look up to windward, allowing him to reaffirm the speed and direction of the wind and verify that a sharp turn in that direction was the best escape route in case *Shearwater* was threatened in the melee. Without missing a beat, John started the dance over.

"Ahoy Coast Guard Academy. Give me buoy room." That request came from *Robin* to windward, but sounded demanding. I glanced ahead. We were aimed so we would bring the buoy down our starboard side within two feet of our gunwale. Clearly no room for another boat to squeeze in.

"Come up, *Robin*. Come up," was John's reply as he added another step—glancing between the buoy, *Shearwater*, and *Robin*—to his Skipper's Dance. John's response informed *Robin* that they should alter their course to windward bringing *Robin* "Up Closer" to the wind's direction.

"*Shearwater*, give me buoy room," came the reply, louder now because they were closer and wanted to be heard above the noise.

"Come up, *Robin*. Come up." John yelled above the noise. His Skipper's Dance now reduced mostly to glancing between *Shearwater*, the buoy, *Robin*, and Dennis Connor.

*Robin* was now 50 feet to windward. We could hear the water rushing past her hull and the wind roaring as it was funneled behind the main sail by her oversized jib.

"Skipper, give me buoy room" came the demand again. We could see Dennis Connor had locked eyes with John.

---

I looked forward again at the fast-approaching buoy. This was no three-foot diameter blow-up orange beach ball held in place by a thin cord and a coffee can filled with cement that *Robin* could run over if she wanted. This was a sixteen-foot tall, ten-foot wide, steel-constructed USCG Bell Buoy weighing over 3 tons and anchored to the bottom with a 20,000 pound sinker. Ramming the buoy would seriously damage *Robin*, and being caught between *Shearwater* and the Bell Buoy would sink her.

Dennis' gaze broke from John and went to the point of impending doom.

Don and I were transfixed. Why is he doing this, Don? We are twice as big as he is.

John's answer called his bluff. "Hey Dennis, It's YOUR boat." His drawing out the "your" made the statement pregnant with meaning and consequence.

Connor took one more look around and shouted "Ready about!" With a flick of his wrist he spun the wheel to starboard and *Robin* leapt away from *Shearwater*, pirouetted through a full jibe, and settled back on her original course and direction, 30 yards behind *Shearwater*.

"Boom," roared the starting cannon. A second later *Shearwater* bounded over the line, followed close behind by *Robin*. John spoke his "Ready about," the noise of the melee now in the background.

"Ready forward, ready aft, ready winches," came the replies.

"Helm's a lee!"

Deftly, *Shearwater* flopped onto a port tack and began clawing up wind for the windward mark.



*Snow Covered Street, by Anna Readon*

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# She Was Known for Dancing After Midnight

*Patrick L. Allen*

*For all the worshipers of Gaia who have gone beyond anything  
they ever imagined, including even to becoming  
a Secretary of State - HRC*

These girls gone to women  
Their hair whispering of grey  
Their eyes creased by time's kiss upon their faces  
I see her swaying in a tie-dyed pink and purpled dirndl skirt  
Yellow and red flowers garlanded across her breast  
Her bare legs tripping through the grass  
Lost in the rhythm of clapping hands and laughter  
On golden days that go on forever  
Everything from her gypsy heart was free  
Everything was given consciously  
As something true for that moment's pure joy  
Oh sun kissed girls of summers long ago  
There is still a glint of who she was  
In the way she tips a long neck bottle to her lips  
In the way she dances  
Well after midnight

---

# A Preposition Becomes an Adverb “About”

*Judith Allen-Leventhal*

*“Seasons can only repeat themselves, they have no future.”*

*Nadine Gordimer (Burger’s Daughter)*

At first, this poem is not about you.

This poem is about times.

One time this poem is about is spring time

when sheets are laundered on bright mornings and

hung out to dry,

flapping on clothes lines in cheery winds.

The sweet dry-sheet-scent is folded into the linen closet.

This poem is not yet about you.

This poem is about summer time

when ocean waves sound against rocky Maine coasts and

dissolve into salted foamy breezes.

And it is also about summer time

when distant lawn mowers grumble and growl and

leave their green cut-grass pungency behind.

Still, this poem is not yet about you.

Now this poem is about white winter sunlight seen

through prism glass reflected and refracted in pure geometry,

cold and crisp.

This poem about passing times of spring and summer scented air

and frozen winter light

is about to end.

This poem that has not been about you must end.

At last, this poem is about you:

It’s about time.

---

# hedda

*Cynthia Hardman*

she is sobbing on the stand and she  
is almost forty-seven and she is sobbing  
on the stand so sorry so sorry baby and  
the prosecutor proceeds probing and O he  
parades he pounds his fist says Miss  
again Miss I asked you a question as she  
wipes her eyes twisting tissue fidgeting  
fingers so as guilt meets glare she nods



*Isolation, by Paul Toscano*

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# He Loves Me

*Dee Sydnor*

A young woman stood looking over a field, all green with young spring grass and noticed white splotches painted upon the green where the wildflower daisies had sprung up here and there. She stood, holding the handlebars of her bicycle parked at the end of a curvy country path. The ball she had thrown was sufficiently out of sight.

Satisfied, she returned to her yellow Schwinn bicycle with the white wicker basket hanging from the handlebars, embellished with 3 daisies on the front, and departed.

Each day she would ride to the edge of the field, take one ball from her basket, and, putting all her heart and strength into her shoulder, she would throw as far as she could into the field. She would stand, look. Satisfied that she could not see where it had landed, she would remount her bicycle, put her sandaled foot upon the higher pedal, and turn her bike back along the path she arrived on to return home.

Upon the 49th day, the woman slipped the white sandal on her foot, bringing the flowers which adorned the leather over her pink painted toes, and fastening the buckles to the side at her ankles. The woman was saddened when she approached her bicycle at her home. The daisies on the front of her basket seemed to wilt and sense her mood. One petal even fell from the daisy in the center, and she picked the petal up from the dirt road on which it lay, and placed it in the basket atop the last ball. The woman swung her foot over the center bar of the bicycle and set herself upon the seat, turning down the curvy country path to the field she had been traveling to each day.

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Once again, she dismounted her bicycle, and tentatively, she picked up the final ball from the basket, feeling the softness of the rubber within her hand. Smooth, silky, as a flower petal. She had a thought.

Looking over into the basket, she saw that the lone flower petal which had fallen from the daisy lay in the basket. Oh so swiftly, she began pulling all the petals from all the daisies which adorned the bicycle basket, gathering them in her hand. Her bicycle now had nothing but the three yellow daisy centers decorating its basket.

With the smooth rubber ball in her hand, wadded up together with the handful of daisy petals, she stood at the edge of the field, and again threw with all her strength. The petals loosed themselves from the ball and floated freely in multiple directions across the field, as apple blossoms do on a windy March day. She stood, watching, until all had reached the ground, and as she started to turn to get on her bicycle, she saw a curious shape appear from across the field. Soon she realized that this shape was a man coming towards her, and it looked like he was carrying something. She watched him as he drew near, a smile upon her face, as he emptied his shirtfront of 49 smooth, white rubber balls and 27 daisy petals into her bicycle basket.

They embraced.

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## A Family Narrative in 16 Non-traditional Haiku

*Jennifer Polhemus*

Grandfather Wilfred  
shot his father while hunting.  
He dried up that day.

Grandfather Wilfred  
loved my mother, Alice June.  
Only touched her once.

Grandmother Irma  
tied Mom to a kitchen chair  
with a tea towel.

Grandmother Irma  
loved vanilla ice cream  
laced with cherry liqueur.

Grandparents carry  
family sins, hand them down  
like undarned wool socks.

Mom left her four-  
year-old girl with newborn twins.  
Diapers are tricky.

Mania drove Mom  
into the woods for hours  
or cities for days.

Her depression brought her  
back to her bed, to Mister  
Rogers, the nanny.

---

Dad smuggled ration  
coupons in dirty carpets  
on his bicycle.

Nineteen thirty six  
was a hard year for little  
boys looking for work.

He did not know the  
tickets were there, just took his  
pay and pedaled hard.

Parents pass on sins  
of families. I open  
my mouth wide and bite.

Now I sell checking  
accounts to people who think  
they come with no fees.

Dad is so proud of  
me for surviving mergers  
to save customers.

He does not know that  
every night I go home  
and burn my left breast.

Children gobble down  
family stories. Wide-eyed  
we parrot them back.

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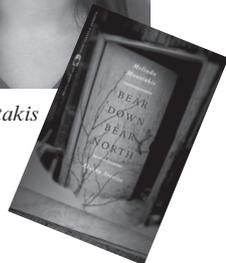
## CONNECTIONS FEATURE



*Melanie Thorne*



*Melinda Moustakis*



Roundtable and Reading  
with  
**Authors  
Melanie Thorne  
and  
Melinda Moustakis**

*By Krista Keyes*

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The first time I met Melanie Thorne and Melinda Moustakis was on a September night in 2005 at a bar in Davis, California called Little Prague. They and a few other second-year creative writers had invited us first-year students out for drinks so that we could all get to know each other at a relaxed, non-school-affiliated event. I was particularly grateful; I was lonely, as I had just moved 3,000 miles away from my family and friends.

The second-years told us about their first-year experiences, the professors they loved and loathed, and the kinds of things they wrote about. After a couple of drinks, the inside jokes began. Someone brought up how, the previous year, in Pam Houston's workshop, Melinda had written a story in which a girl and a moose seemed to be romantically involved. She laughed along with everyone else, but also calmly defended her story, knowing her classmates were just joking, or maybe jealous. She let them tease her, and I could tell she had a quiet, yet sturdy, sense of strength and confidence—invaluable qualities to have as a writer. I instantly became friends with Melanie, as she was just so incredibly honest, and so wonderfully funny. We found out that we had the same taste in music and movies, and we are both incredibly sarcastic. We clicked immediately.

I think of how funny life is: who could have known that seven years later, both Melanie and Melinda would have published (not to mention, sold thousands of copies of, and won awards for) their books, and that I would have my dream job, working as an assistant professor at the college in my hometown, a co-editor of a literary journal, inviting them to fly across the country and be a part of our Connections Literary Series readings.

This fall, I incorporated their books into my English 1020 curriculum, and of course, my students fell in love with both of them. My students told me that they had ordered their own

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copies of Melanie’s novel, *Hand Me Down*, and Melinda’s award-winning book of short stories, *Bear Down, Bear North: Alaska Stories*, that they have recommended these books to their friends, and actually complained that they didn’t have time to read both books in their entirety (they were assigned only a few chapters/stories from each).

On October 12, I was in hostess-mode, running around making sure my friends were comfortable, happy, fed, etc. I didn’t really expect to relax during the author roundtable or the reading. But when the roundtable began at 4:00, and these extraordinary writers started talking casually about their writing processes, answering my students’ questions so honestly and generously, I suddenly felt that magical feeling I used to feel when sitting in a classroom in Davis, listening to my literary idols, Pam Houston and Lynn Freed, discuss their art. I had such a surge of inspiration that I took out my notebook and furiously started taking notes. I was so inspired to hear my friends talk about their writing lives—how, like me, their biggest challenge is often finding the time to write.

After the event, I spoke with one of my students, Sandra Richardson, who was also moved by the experience. She said, “It was a surreal experience to hear the authors voice their own work. Meeting and speaking with [them] helped me understand their writing on a deeper level and also gave me motivation to continue my own writing. It’s one thing to read the stories in the *Connections* magazine but it’s an entirely different experience that makes it all come together when one attends a roundtable and/or *Connections* reading to meet and speak with the authors of the literature published.”

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Connections readings always happen on Friday nights, and it's often difficult to convince my students to give up a weekend night to come and listen to authors read from their work. I will admit that sometimes even I don't always love the idea of spending my Friday evening "at work." However, it never fails; when I go to these events, I am constantly surprised by how moved I am. I am reminded of why I love literature, and why I fell in love with it in the first place. As Sandra said, this event was indeed, surreal. I have been going to literary readings for many years now, but this one felt more like a dream. Seeing how beautifully and professionally my friends read their own words at that podium filled me with hope, and more than ever, reminded me that literature—story telling—is what connects us all, reminds us that despite our differences, we're all the same, and we're in this together, fighting the hard battle every day.

**“ ... literature—story telling—  
is what connects us all ... ”**

*—Krista Keyes*



*Leaf, by Joy Michelle Timmons*

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# Falling Leaves

*Kyle Shaw*

Love isn't just a responsibility. It is a privilege. It is a right. I never knew my dad so I never had the responsibility or privilege of loving him. He left my mom to raise two daughters, my sister and me. We're not identical twins but we were born at the same time, meaning Mom had to bear twice the burden of being a single mother. We grew up poor and didn't see her much between school and her two jobs, but we grew up happy. Unlike our dad, whoever the guy is, she lived up to the responsibility. She passed six months ago after a long fought battle with cancer. Really though, I think she fought harder to put food on the table and keep a roof over her head than the cancer itself. Her little Abel and Sable are all grown up now; educated, morally upright citizens. By the end of it, I believe she was content with that. It's all she wanted. She didn't love us because she had to. She just did. Now her pain is over.

One year when I came to visit between semesters at school, Mom let me borrow a pair of her favorite earrings for my friend's upcoming wedding. I wore them and felt beautiful like her. Unfortunately, I never returned them to her. I have them in their little box in my room as a reminder of her. I vowed never to wear them out of respect for her. I still feel guilty for not giving them back.

When I was young I realized how tired and in pain she always was. I wanted to help out anyway I could. Chores, succeeding in school, not causing trouble, and taking care of Sable (she likes to be called Maple) whenever Mom was working late at work or just needed a good night's sleep. Maple's autism was another obstacle for our Supermom. I wanted to be her sidekick. When I left for college it was only Mom and Maple at home. With her gone, Maple moved in with me in my little—I wouldn't say cozy—apartment.

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Maple has the mind of a child but the brain of a genius all wrapped up in her tiny body. We're both considerably thin (the neighbors were worried we never ate as kids) but I've got a few inches on her and I'm only 5'6". I used to use her head as an armrest—she didn't take well to that. When mom started styling her unfairly soft, dark chocolate hair into a wavy, 50's-esque bob I was too envious to mess it up. Maple kept the look. Now that she's older, she looks just like Mom.

She's in her own whimsical little world at all times. I can hardly ever tell what's brewing behind those buggy brown eyes of hers. When she's thinking intently she drowns out everything around her. Sometimes her little freckled cheeks will wince or give a subtle twitch. Talking to her is completely out of the question when she is in this state. I once dropped a glass plate on the floor next to her. It shattered all across the kitchen but she didn't so much as blink. She's always relied on habits to keep her mind occupied. If she doesn't have a set task or something to keep her focused she'll just wander around bored until some mundane object catches her eyes, leaving her to thoroughly examine it and ponder its existence like a child's sponge-like mind absorbing the universe about her. I'm worried her imagination is so powerful and vivid it will suffer a gravitational collapse and her brain will form a black hole, engulfing and feeding off the mass of every object in sight.

When she moved in she brought with her an entire art studio's worth of stuff. I'll come home after pulling a twelve-hour shift plus overtime to a frenzy of arts and crafts supplies scattered about the apartment. I'll go to pick something up and she'll snap at me because she wants it there for a reason. The process will continue until I realize the chaos was organized and planned from the start. Everything is done her way.

I have to admit though; she cranks out some pretty impressive pieces. Her first and strongest talent is painting. She's fascinated with maple trees, hence the name. The local

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park is a garden of fallen maple leaves in autumn. She likes to collect them if they are interesting enough. Most of them are. She framed three of them and hung them above her desk in her room. A red one, yellow one, and orange. When I asked her about it, she said they are Mom, her and me.

She paints the trees all the time, mainly in a fall setting. The perspective is at a lower angle because she loves painting skies. When we're out and about, she has her head tilted up like a turkey, marveling at sun beams heavenly piercing clouds. While she sees a beautiful, picaresque scene that will later be transferred onto canvas, I only see my mother. Then the sun is tucked away behind the cloud. And she's gone.

Maple always is involved in some sort of project even when she puts down the brush. Something-thousand jigsaw puzzles, paper mache animals, popsicle stick birdhouses, model lighthouses, tie-dye shirts, knitted scarves, anything. We make at least two trips to Michael's a week for supplies. All of which, of course, come out of my pocket. Paint brushes, wood glue, dye, wool, spools, needles, easel stands. None of it is cheap.

Maple's my sister, and I love her, but now I'm feeling Mom's pain. Taking care of her and accommodating all her wants and needs is a never-ending job—and when I come home from my actual job, I have little to no energy left for it. Living alone, I had unlimited freedom. I did what I wanted, went wherever I wanted. Me time was all the time. Now it seems me time is only when I'm unconscious.

I'm trying but failing to always keep her satisfied. She hates anything extreme. Too hot. Too cold. I just can't seem to get her porridge to be just right. She's the pickiest eater I've ever met. It's like a memory match game with what ingredients she prefers with which meals. She likes tomatoes in salad but will never eat them on a sandwich. She likes steak super rare but a burger has to be charred to a crisp. She's afraid of thunderstorms, absolutely terrified. Whenever the clouds get dark and she hears

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a distant rumble of thunder she will freak out. When Maple gets scared only holding onto her and singing lyrics of a certain song will calm her down, like a verbal password to unlock a magical door. She's the lightest sleeper in the universe. If I come home late and she has already gone to bed I must stealthily infiltrate my own home like a Tom Clancy novel. Of course, the quieter you are trying to be the louder and clumsier you are. I'll find the one creaky floorboard, have to sneeze, and bump my shoulder on the ricketiest door frame. Then she's up. Once she's up, she can't go back down. Even when I successfully reach the oasis that is my bedroom she will randomly wake up in the middle of the night. She'll do what kids do and come into my room and just stare at me until I wake up and acknowledge her presence. Even when I'm in a semi-conscious daze I can feel her eyes in the darkness prying needles into me like I am a pin cushion. Then she'll whisper that she can't sleep and will crawl up on the bed, under the covers, take my favorite pillow, and crash with her leg hung over my torso. Yes, she snores.

I tried starting a relationship a few months back. Maple is very protective of me and does not think I'm a capable enough woman to handle myself. She's never liked anyone I've dated. She'll intentionally scare them off so I don't get hurt like Mom did when Dad left. College made it possible, along with the transition into the real world. Now Maple's back and it's high school all over again. I'm the girl with the guard dog sister, alone, unapproachable like a dead end street.

And I put up with it. I dealt with it. I had to; it was the right and only thing to do. Without Mom there was nowhere for Maple to go. But eventually, the stress piled up. I bottled it for her benefit. I just wanted to be Mom's sidekick again, like she was still just at work and hadn't come home yet. Still, something had to give eventually.

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I had a terrible day at work and ended up working a double shift, not getting home until eleven that night. Maple had on Mom's earrings that stayed in their spot in my room since I got the apartment. She had wandered into my room and came upon them.

"What are you doing?!" I fumed once I saw them dangling helplessly from Maple's ears.

"Trying on your earrings. Is that okay?" She innocently asked.

"Those aren't mine. They're Mom's."

She paused, a bit confused, but kept adjusting them in the mirror. "Why do you have them?"

I impatiently explained the story behind it. Maple wasn't getting the picture. "I told myself I would never wear them again."

"Why? They're so pretty."

She turned to face me. In that moment, I did not see my sister. I saw a carbon copy replica of my mother from a picture of her when she was younger. I still have that picture sitting on the coffee table. Maple inherited so much of Mom's physical traits. With the earrings on, a series of images ranging from childhood memories of her to my last visit with her at the hospital surged through my head like subliminal messages. "Take those off. Now."

"I don't think she will mind," she toyed at them with her fingers.

My throat wrenched itself into a jagged knot. My words were severed to pieces by the time they reached my mouth. I swallowed and without thinking said, "Do you even realize that she's gone?"

I had immediately wondered why I would ask Maple such a question. I wanted it back. I was prepared for her to run out of the room in tears. Instead, she became my own mother for once.

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She merely cocked her head to the side and after thinking for a moment replied, “Do you?”

The two words were a harpoon to the chest, an impact with velocity to it that took the wind out of me. Maple didn’t stick around for my rebuttal; instead, she trotted off out of the room, earrings still on, and immersed herself in another task, leaving me to crawl into bed with a sleepless night wondering what she meant.

The next day when I got home around sunset, the house was empty. Maple wasn’t there. I called out her name and looked everywhere and realized she was nowhere in sight. After frantically searching, I found a note on my door. “I’ll return them for you.” The box for the earrings was gone too. I stood there puzzled, and then started my car.

I found Maple where I thought I would. I said nothing as I sat down beside her in front of Mom’s grave. I remember how crisp the air felt that day. I remember the two maple leaves that had fallen next to the stone. I remember seeing the earrings, back in their box, gently nestled against the flowers. I remember the single tear on Maple’s face, how I interrupted her apology with my own.

“I miss her,” is all she said.

Her body leaned sideways onto mine as I wrapped my arm around her shoulder. The wind stopped, the air was still. The clouds were parted by two rays of light from the sun.

“I miss her too.”



*Winter Parade, by Robin Karis*

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# wizening

*Rich Follett*

raking leaves  
late one autumn afternoon,

her shriveled hands  
diminished twin replicants of  
the rust-dotted implement  
she wields,

ruhamah

with measured strokes

mitigates impending dissolution  
beneath an ancient oak—

the one true  
companion  
her life has known.

how long they have danced  
(oak and crone)  
through growth and decline  
is nearly as remarkable as

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this rhythm  
only they can know:

the secret,  
scything sway  
of years—

of sighs.

tree and trustee,  
mirroring  
psychic dessication;

wardens, they—  
one with bark,  
the other, parchment  
stretched over bones which  
ache to recall some purpose.

for today,  
amid the petty entropy of  
autumnal swirl,

gaia's cyclopic emerald  
lawn-eye  
remains open ...

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# Golden Hills

*Heather Madden*

Our First mistake,  
We moved up to the hills.  
“We’ll get away from  
the drugs and the thrills.”  
Far from barbed wire  
Far from concrete.  
“We’ll need a car,  
No more walking the streets.”  
The farther away  
From the stench and the stank,  
The more out of touch,  
The more we drank.  
“I’ll stifle my weird  
You quiet your odd.”  
It’s a plaster and mold,  
Brittle façade.  
We can’t talk about travel  
(That’s for the rich)  
“You were homeless?  
You slept in a ditch?”  
I forgot not to mention  
The places I’ve been.  
We don’t talk about downtown  
    With middleclass men.

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# Blackberry Jam

*Jennifer Polhemus*

A boiling pot  
watches my mother.  
Blackberries and  
my mother's  
crystallized face  
bubbling, rolling, frolicking  
in sugar and pectin.

I hear her voice  
like a needle in  
my ear. It whirs  
past clouds and cliffs,  
falling straight into  
my licking spoon heart.

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# Let Me Free

*Rigina Gallagher*

Let me free.

Like a soaring winged subway car.

Let me ride your midnight line

Over the pale November moon that  
reflects like a giant

glowing holy cheese over the dark, moody, mysterious,  
voodoo, gypsy waters,

which seduce me like an Indian dancer and hug me like  
a sumptuous lady and ripple with seven on seven  
sparkles like the glitter glue I had when I was five and  
painted

pictures with

all

Day.

Falling,

Flying,

Spinning,

Twirling,

I want you.

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I want to ride a trolley car all night at ninety-five miles an hour.  
I want to road ride all the way to the Grand Canyon  
And sit

With my feet dangling free over the edge.

I want to get belly down

On the cliffs of Mohr

And stick my face over the cliff

And feel the wild wind  
rectify my face.

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# Autumn

*Jane Klemer*

“Disappearing Act”

Adiabatic fog

Enshrouds the shorn November cornfield.

Spooky!

“Flotsam”

Twigs, leaves, and grass

Are propelled, unresting,

Deeper into the marsh.

“Largess”

November teaches me

To seize the moment.

Gifts should be savored.

“Monochromatic”

Today’s wind and rain

Will take the last of Autumn’s color.

Gold becomes brown.

“Harbinger II”

Wooly Bears

Are wearing their deep piled fur coats.

So, too, will we, ere long.

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“Late Bloomer II”  
Daylily in first flower  
Courts the harvest moon.  
Her time will be short.

“El Dorado I”  
Cortez did not know the Farm.  
Trees with leaves of furnished gold.

“El Dorado II”  
Had Cortez seen the Farm road in Autumn  
His search  
Would have been ended.



*So Many Forgotten, So Few Remembered, by Bill Conway*

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## Contributor Notes

**PATRICK L. ALLEN** is the chair for the Social Sciences, Human Services, and Teacher Education Division at CSM. He tries to look at natural events to see what lessons may be revealed through examination.

**JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL** teaches English at the College of Southern Maryland. The poem in this issue is one of several that seem to focus on parts of speech but provide an indirect access to meaning.

**JAMES BURD BREWSTER** served a career in the United States Coast Guard and has now turned his sights on creative writing. Raised in New England and summering on Lake Champlain has given him a love of sailing and a sweet tooth for Vermont maple syrup. He lives in Pomfret, Maryland, commutes to Leonardtown to take Wayne Karlin's creative writing class, and this is his first submission to any publication. He and his wife, Katie Spivey Brewster, attend Wayne's class together, to the awe and admiration of their progeny: Ben, Luke, Rachel, Andrew, and Sam.

**BILL CONWAY** has been shooting images since he was a young person, about 7; he is now in his 60s. He says that he always has a camera with him and is always trying to capture new things. He enjoys taking pictures of landscapes and nature mostly.

**ERIN CORNELIUS** is a life-long resident of St. Mary's county and an amateur writer.

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**RICH FOLLETT** is a high school English, theatre, and mythology teacher who has been writing poems and songs for more than 35 years. His poems have been featured in numerous online and print journals, including *BlazeVox*, *The Montucky Review*, *Paraphilia*, *Leaf Garden Press* and *CounterExample Poetics*, for which he is a featured artist. Two volumes of poetry, *Responsorials* (with Constance Stadler) and *Silence, Inhabited*, are available through NeoPoiesis Press ([www.neopoiesispress.com](http://www.neopoiesispress.com)). He lives with his wife Mary Ruth Alred Follett in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, where he also pursues his interests as a professional actor, playwright and director.

**RIGINA GALLAGHER** is currently studying literary arts at Brown University. Previously, her work has appeared in *Fade*, a poetry magazine, and *On-Verge*, the online magazine for art criticism at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

**CYNTHIA HARDMAN** teaches English and is an alumnus of CSM. She enjoys poetry and music, playing handbells, sewing, and long conversations over dinner or coffee.

**RACHEL HEINHORST** is an adjunct faculty member at the College of Southern Maryland in the Languages and Literature Division.

**ROBIN KARIS** lives in Maryland and enjoys reading, photography, and writing.

**KRISTA KEYES** is an assistant professor at the College of Southern Maryland; she teaches composition, literature, nonfiction prose, and creative writing.

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**WENDY KIBLER** is an adjunct instructor for the Languages and Literature Division at the college. In addition to teaching, she writes, draws, and paints.

**JANE KLEMER** arrived on the local scene in the mid-sixties, having migrated from a lifetime in the metropolitan New York/New Jersey area. Upon her retirement, freelance writing became central to her life—articles published in national magazines, opportunities to meet and interview Pulitzer Prize winners and a Nobel Prize recipient, several years as commodore of the Sailing Club of Washington which provided additional opportunities as editor of its monthly newsletter as well as opportunities to spend workdays aboard the vessels of oystermen, eelmen, etc. who labored on Chesapeake Bay—those times provided ongoing opportunity to indulge her interest and prowess in photography.

**KATLYN LYON** is 17 and a senior in high school, as well as a full-time student at CSM. She has always had a huge interest in photography, and almost all of the pictures that she takes have been developed by her in a darkroom, captured using a 35 mm black-and-white camera.

**HEATHER MADDEN** grew up in upstate New York and left home for more populated pastures when she was 17. Since then, she has had the pleasure of living in Pensacola, Florida; Jacksonville, Florida; Raleigh, North Carolina; San Diego, California; New Rochelle, New York; and now Lexington Park, Maryland. Somewhere in her travels, she managed to marry an honorable man, and gave birth to the most handsome, most crazy, most wonderful now two-year-old boy. She waits tables, plays with trucks, and studies the difference between alliteration and assonance.

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**JENNIFER POLHEMUS** is a native of Southern Maryland and a graduate of the College of Southern Maryland. She currently lives in Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley with her partner of 13 years and their children (a cat and a dog...they are not specieists). Jennifer has been writing for over 25 years and her work first appeared in *Connections* in the early '90s. She works as a mental health counselor and occasionally presents writing workshops to people with mental health challenges. Finding a home for her collection of poetry, *Women Dancing*, is her present avocation.

**ANNA READON** is currently a student at the College of Southern Maryland majoring in business administration. She has had an interest in photography for many years and has been taking photos for the past five years.

**KYLE SHAW** is a Patuxent High School graduate and a CSM English major, planning to transfer to Salisbury (Creative Writing concentration) with an interest in becoming a science fiction novelist.

**DEE SYDNOR** is a wife, mother of four, and grandmother of one. She is an adjunct instructor at the College of Southern Maryland, works for a local contractor, and is a student at West Virginia Wesleyan College, where she is studying to attain her MFA in Creative Writing: Fiction.

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**JOY MICHELE TIMMONS** is the owner of Joy's Creative Arts. Timmons has 27 years of art experience, is a recent graduate of Full Sail University and a previous graduate of Towson University, Prince George's Community College, and Surrattsville High School. She has an associate's, bachelor's and masters' degree in Graphic Design. At present, she is currently working on her second associate's degree in Theatre and Dance at the College of Southern Maryland, La Plata Campus.

**PAUL TOSCANO** has been on the staff of CSM since 1980. As a certified professional counselor, he looks for the human element and emotion in his photography. His photographs have been published in *Southern Maryland: This is Living, Agora*, and previous editions of *Connections*.

