

Connections

COLLEGE of SOUTHERN MARYLAND  
Fall 2014 Literary Magazine

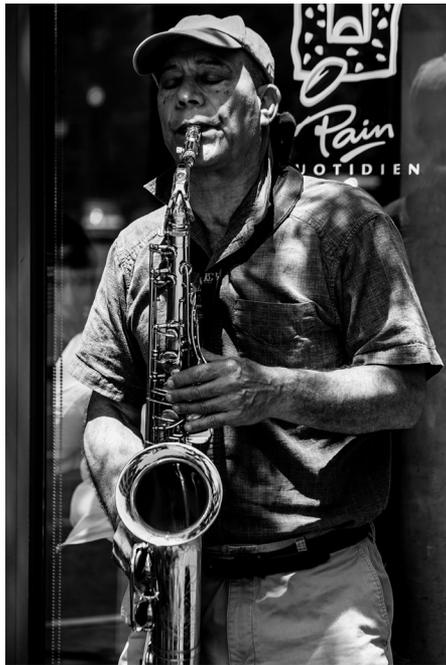


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# Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND  
Fall 2014 Literary Magazine

volume 22      number 1



**DC Street Musician** by *Paul Toscano*

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# Table of Contents

## POETRY

|   |    |
|---|----|
| For Those Who Plant Seeds, <i>Sherbrooke Lea Carson</i> .....   | 5  |
| Reading Before an Audience, <i>Dan Cuddy</i> .....              | 6  |
| What We Don't Tell Our Children, <i>Victoria Thornton</i> ..... | 8  |
| Batman Umbrella, <i>Peter Hershey</i> .....                     | 16 |
| Nothing but Crickets, <i>Mitzi Phalen</i> .....                 | 18 |
| Dreaded Dragon, <i>Tracey Stuller</i> .....                     | 29 |
| The Grace of Her Lips, <i>Rachel Heinhorst</i> .....            | 30 |
| Up in the Air, <i>Judith Allen-Leventhal</i> .....              | 35 |
| The Mask, <i>Lexi Jahed</i> .....                               | 37 |
| The Lobsterman, <i>Kelsi Eiane</i> .....                        | 38 |
| The Bronze Buckaroo, <i>Patrick Allen</i> .....                 | 44 |
| Clambering, <i>Ethan Fugate</i> .....                           | 54 |
| Corona, <i>Brianna Marshall</i> .....                           | 63 |

## PROSE

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Tony Bennett, Aldous Huxley, and Eddie, <i>Lynne Viti</i> ..... | 10 |
| Our Daily Bread, <i>Dee Sydnor</i> .....                        | 21 |
| Hungry, <i>Sherbrooke Lea Carson</i> .....                      | 31 |
| Troll, <i>Zachary Sieg</i> .....                                | 45 |
| The Decision, <i>Beth Portner</i> .....                         | 56 |
| The Shot Heard 'Round the Block, <i>Michael C. Osborn</i> ..... | 64 |
| Washington State 1961, <i>Randolph Bridgeman</i> .....          | 68 |

## PHOTOGRAPHS/DRAWINGS

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| DC Street Musician, <i>Paul Toscano</i> .....                 | cover photo |
| Chained Up, <i>Cathy Hobbs</i> .....                          | 9           |
| Neither Rain nor Sleet . . . , <i>Anna Readon</i> .....       | 17          |
| Built to Last, <i>John Karis</i> .....                        | 20          |
| Untitled, <i>Ravyn Hicks</i> .....                            | 28          |
| The Thinker: A Self-Portrait, <i>William Poe</i> .....        | 36          |
| HMS Victory–Portsmouth, England, <i>William Moroney</i> ..... | 39          |
| Linear Translation, <i>Clinton Carmichael</i> .....           | 53          |
| Winter Wonderland, <i>Naomi Harward</i> .....                 | 69          |



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# **For Those Who Plant Seeds**

*Sherbrooke Lea Carson*

If we should anchor our soul to no more than human hope,  
We are most to be pitied among men.

If we must desperately cling to perishable dreams,  
Our hands will forever remain empty.

But if, we might withstand the plowing of our fields,  
The Soil will ripen for planting.

If we could allow the Earth to be broken,  
We would Invite the coming of Spring.

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# Reading Before an Audience

*Dan Cuddy*

reading before an audience  
you are never sure  
how they will or do take it  
because your poem is your experience  
your words are your purchase of language  
but maybe it isn't high rent enough  
or too rich  
for those whose faces are shadows

and if in a bar  
glasses clinking  
conversations as liquid as the drinks  
you compete with that  
inebriated indifference  
the dull roar of opening doors  
the inarticulate laughs  
and bravado  
that may also be in your poems  
but are so otherworldly

do they hear your words  
or do your poems knock like glasses  
or pull back like chairs

are your words self-contained  
as any who have had too much  
and walk their way to  
another room to be relieved

---

do your poems wash their hands  
dry with the venting of sound  
or rub themselves on the paper  
friction themselves dry, clean

do your poems reach  
and touch hearts, minds, eyes  
with more than tipsy cliché

you hope the faceless  
and friends see your genius  
but you know genius  
is for college professors  
applause is for PR  
your poems are as inadequate  
as the dinner you cook  
emptying the big corporation's box  
into the pot or pan  
and thawing the leeches out flavor  
the artificially colored vegetables  
the tasteless chunks of arrhythmic  
thrown in words  
that a fast food guy  
uses

how does your audience appraise  
your nervous beating heart  
the tapping toe  
the too loud voicing  
of the wrong stressed words

but you go on  
take the opportunity  
put no question marks  
at the end of your declarations  
the doubts too

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# What We Don't Tell Our Children

*Victoria Thornton*

Fear of the future is like hell fire and flames.  
We suffer under its thick carbon gas while we twitch in our sleep  
during the dreams of the day.

Burning flowers, white calla lily.  
Birth mother and her blood noose.  
We fear our fate is laid by DNA.

Faith found in self-help aisles and infomercials  
but do nothing but collect heat in our empty bellies, and may  
or may not confuse us.

These thoughts are as real as we hold them in our minds  
and are continuously held as we scream cries of hate  
with glass thorns at the foot.

Fear is alchemy, a manifestation of the soul to meet flesh.  
A lie taught since birth.



*Chained Up by Cathy Hobbs*

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## **Tony Bennett, Aldous Huxley, and Eddie**

*Lynne Viti*

What every Baltimore teenager longed for was an unchaperoned week in Ocean City with friends. Lots of friends. Six to a hotel room meant for two. Coke or coffee and doughnuts for breakfast, and maybe a slice or two of pizza for lunch. Dinner was on the fly, as well—takeout or a Dairy Queen burger. And there was beer. Lots of it. And there was sex—or what passed for it. The girls didn't talk about it much, but you knew, or thought you did, what a girl was up to. The guys might've been just as secretive, or else, they could've exaggerated how far they'd gone. Most of us had to wait until we had graduated from high school to get permission to go to the beach unchaperoned.

My girlfriends and I lined up summer jobs, but put off our employers until the end of June, and we were ready to cut loose after our first year of college. My friend Robie, a tall, slender blonde with a quirky sense of humor and a major smoking habit, drove a little red Ford her parents had bought her when she decided to go to college in town. Five of us squeezed into the car. We blasted the radio and sang along as we motored out of Baltimore down to the Bay Bridge and across to the Eastern Shore. Suddenly, cornfields lined both sides of the highway and then I half-noticed black teenage boys walking along the road, shirtless, wearing overalls and straw hats.

The boys were a year or two ahead of us, all dayhops at the local Jesuit college, and we had planned our Ocean City getaway with them in mind. They were led by a couple of brothers, both middling lacrosse players. Richie was fair, dark-haired and nervous. Eddie, a year older, had dark

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Mediterranean skin and a hint of red in his chestnut hair. Eddie was super smart, a math whiz, and quick-witted. He drank more beer than any of the other guys and never stopped talking. A devotee of Tony Bennett, he knew all the words to the most obscure old songs, verse and chorus. He fancied himself a student of literature as well, and quoted Aldous Huxley (in the future man would be a “mixture between an imbecile and a sewing machine”), Stephen Spender and Evelyn Waugh. Eddie was fine when he had three or four beers, but when he went past seven or eight he got sloppy. I preferred him sober.

The four-day stay was fun—for awhile. There was lots of beer, and impromptu dancing on the beach and in motel rooms to music from someone’s portable radio. We made last minute bargains so that a girl and a guy could have a little private time—never more than an hour. There were unwritten rules: don’t hog the room, don’t leave your towel on the bathroom floor, hang up your swimsuit if it’s wet, and if the beer runs out, get more, if you had a fake i.d. If not, find someone who did, and never forget the ice to refill the cooler. The girls stayed in two adjacent rooms at the Stowaway, whose management didn’t care if there were too many in one room. The place had barely survived a hurricane a few years before when the roof was ripped off by a fierce wind, so I guess they figured a bunch of twenty year olds couldn’t do much worse. The renovated Stowaway looked pretty flimsy, but it was clean, and the police kept it reasonably quiet. They routinely swooped down after 1 a.m. to caution us, “Keep the noise down, folks.”

Eddie and his friends were ensconced nearby at the French Quarter, which had a better pool, nicer towels and maid service. None of us swam in the pool, and few of us ventured into the surf. Not much of a drinker, I sat on a blanket on the beach, carefully covering up my pink and white-checked

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two-piece bathing suit with a t-shirt after I'd been in the sun for forty minutes. My mother had warned that the sun would ruin my fair skin, and she had nursed me through bad sunburns when I was in my early teens. By nineteen I'd learned my lesson. I sat and smoked Newports and nursed a lukewarm Diet Coke.

More than once, I waited for Eddie for hours even though he gave me the rendezvous time and place the night before. Sometimes he stood me up. Or he came late, always with his group of followers, three or four of them in tow. I couldn't get him to separate from them. I wanted a walk—a long walk along the shore our feet in the water, maybe holding hands as we walked past jetty after jetty and talked about elegant mathematical solutions, Aldous Huxley, and Camus. Saturday morning the two of us sat down to a full breakfast—he had pancakes and sausage, orange juice and coffee, what Tony Bennett sang about. I had black coffee and toast. What I wanted was not the simple life but a great big love affair, and what Eddie wanted was a brief encounter, no strings. I wanted gazing into one another's eyes, staying apart from the rest of my friends and his, drinking red wine out of glass goblets and watching the orange sun set over the bay. He wanted to be with his boys, making sure there were always a couple of cases of Bud on ice. My notions of romance came from the movies—Natalie Wood and Steve McQueen, Richard Burton and Liz Taylor, Julie Christie and Dirk Bogarde. My notions of sex came from a paperback marriage manual that Suze had bought in a downtown bookstore. It contained such useful information as, “When the man is on top during intercourse, the woman might wrap her legs around his waist and when he reaches orgasm, squeeze his buttocks.” Eddie's ideas about women must have come from his friends. They flitted from one girl to the next. If the girl was easy, the guy took what he wanted and moved on. If the girl withheld her

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favours, the guy moved on. None of them, least of all Eddie, was ready for what I had in mind, grownup love and grownup sex.

On Monday night, I went straight for someone's tequila, drank it straight over ice with salt around the rim of the glass. I soon found myself climbing up from the bench along the edge of the boardwalk to the rail above it and trying to tightrope walk in my inebriated state, then quickly losing my balance and falling. Robie caught and steadied me, walking me back to the Stowaway where I passed out on one of the twin beds. I awoke the next morning in the bathtub, cuddled up with pillow and blanket. I tossed my makeshift bedding out of the tub and took a hot shower, then slipped into my best Bermuda shorts and a white halter top that I thought showed off what little tan I had.

Tiptoeing past my sleeping friends, two to a bed, I walked next door to the French Quarter and knocked on the door. Eddie's brother answered my knock, and I told him to get lost. The radio was playing softly and it looked as though no one had slept in two of the beds. Eddie was sitting on the third bed, and the sheets were ruffled and twisted. He wore a white towel wrapped around his waist. His skin was golden brown from the sun, and his arms and chest muscled from the construction work he was doing that summer. He had trouble looking me in the eye. I sat next to him, took his hand and leaned against him. He smelled of Ivory soap and cigarettes. He lit a cigarette, not bothering to offer me one. He couldn't be with me, he said, because he'd just spent the night with my friend Suze. Suze! Suze of the golden hair, green eyes and high cheekbones, small breasted but with the best legs. She had an older boyfriend she'd been sleeping with for two years, and she'd left him back in Baltimore at his well-paid, full time job. How dare she. How dare Eddie.

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We were supposed to go out to dinner at English's Chicken House that night, a date we'd made the first day at the beach. "The least I can do is take you to dinner," he said.

"Oh, sort of a consolation prize?" I asked him. "Forget it, Eddie. The Chicken House is off!" I hollered. I stomped out of the room, making sure to slam the door extra hard.

The strong sun warmed my back as I walked away from the motel. The ocean's perpetual rhythm was in the background, calling me in for a swim, but all I thought about was catching the bus home. I wanted to sleep in my own room, in my own bed, without six or seven people tramping in and out all night long. I wanted to eat real food for breakfast instead of making do with cigarettes and coffee.

I saw Eddie a couple of times after that and I tried to be cool, standoffish. When my parents went away for the weekend, he came over and spent the night. It was what I'd wanted for so long, but he left before dawn the next day, hitchhiking back to his house. I longed to be with him, but then sometimes told him I was busy when I wasn't. A few days before I left for Michigan, we sat on my back steps looking out into the small backyard. I only half heard the cicadas' constant hum in the background. Eddie said he couldn't trust me because I was on a quest for experience.

"Who isn't?" I asked him.

He said he was afraid that if we kept on, I might get pregnant and trap him. I was incensed. Why would he think I wanted to get married when I had college and my whole life ahead of me? Why would he think I would want to be with an alcoholic in training? I knew all about contraceptive foam, and Suze, once we'd made up, showed me exactly how to use it.

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Eddie and I wrote to each other that fall, letters full of ordinary details and literary allusions. When I came home for Christmas break, he surprised me by meeting me at the bus station. He wore a coat and tie because he was working holiday hours at a department store to make extra money. He dropped me at my house and then went back to work. A week later, he invited me to a college dance and to the ratty downtown apartment he and the guys had rented, where they went to drink. The furniture was losing its stuffing through slits in the old upholstery, and the bathroom was the dirtiest I'd ever seen.

The last time I saw Eddie was two days after New Year's at Robie's. He brought another girl. She told me she was studying to become a beautician. I wore my little black dress and felt overdressed, when I had aimed for sophisticated. Eddie ignored me, and then for a moment, he met my eyes. I smiled a tight little smile, then turned away. You win, I thought. I went on with my quest for experience, never glancing back. What sticks with me most are the lines from Tony Bennett and Aldous Huxley, and my fear of walking tightrope on boardwalk railings, nothing more.

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# Batman Umbrella

*Peter Hershey*

So I electrocuted myself today  
And by that I guess what I'm really trying to say  
Is that today was quite a shock  
As I've been taught by scholars and journalists to do  
I traced everything back to a grey and black  
Batman umbrella I bought when I was six years old  
It was ten dollars, bought from a store in the mall  
In preparation for a new school year in the fall  
It was to protect me from rain, snow, sleet or hail  
Whatever the weather forecast, the batman umbrella would  
thus prevail  
For I walked to school, sixteen blocks, across one road  
Past three civil war houses and a large playground  
As I carried my batman umbrella back and forth from school  
to home  
And finally the day came when it started to rain  
Excited, I opened my umbrella large and wide  
In plain sight for everyone, all the other elementary school kids,  
the two crossing guards, commuters, and one old lady jogger  
to see  
Then suddenly, before it really started to pour  
A large gust of wind snapped my umbrella in half  
And then it was no more  
And I got really wet



*Neither Rain nor Sleet . . .* by Anna Readen

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# Nothing but Crickets

*Mitzi Phalen*

Emptiness  
Cavernous, like a dark night  
Heavy and thick

Nothing but crickets

I cry out  
A call for help  
Will you answer?

Only more crickets

Comfort me with bird song  
Cue the full-throated thrush  
Give me sounds soothing

I do not want crickets

Then, as though imperceptibly  
A stirring  
A voice, distant, small, still

Amplified by crickets

A slight breeze, gentle  
Exploring the emptiness  
Diluting the darkness

Guided by the crickets

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An invitation  
I knock  
A door opens, backlit

Calming the crickets

You meet me on the road  
You talk as we walk together  
Yet I do not recognize you

My mind is on the crickets

Breaking bread, you feed me  
I know you now  
Your light has reached me

Using nothing but crickets



*Built to Last by John Karis*

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## Our Daily Bread

*Dee Sydnor*

Sometimes, it seems like I don't have enough hands. Like now, I'm mixing the dough for a loaf of bread. My hands are in the dough, and flour sticks to damp spots all the way up to my elbows. If I had an extra set of hands, I'd use them right now to pull back the hair that seems to either be curled at the end of my nose or folded into the corner of my eye. Seems like the Lord gives us just what we need though, so I shrug my shoulder up to move my hair. My mother's old "kiss the cook" apron's keeping my clothes from getting messed. This is the last of the yeast, and I've still got apple jelly I put up last fall. Check comes on Friday.

I can't help but think of Momma while I'm making this bread. I feel her presence while I'm looking at her handwriting on the recipe. Her notes in the margin tell me so much. *Add water slowly*, she's written in the right top corner of the index card. That's the truth. Too much and you have to add more flour, then you might not have enough yeast. Just add what you need to make the dough pliable. It's all a balance.

Once it's workable, I start to knead. Push, fold it over, push again. Use my hand heels, give that dough a good massage. Close my eyes, imagine it's Henry, whose shoulders I'm relaxing after he's come in from a long day of work. *Oh, and do you like that, honey?* He'd take a sip of his beer then, offer me a taste. I feel the dough caressing my fingers, springing back to my touch like it's alive, full of muscle, and I imagine his head tossing back into the weight of my hands, resting the scruff of his scalp against my chest, looking up at me with those big brown eyes. He'd tease me, rubbing his head in the cleavage between my breasts. His eyes are like none I'd seen before. Deep chestnut brown, but flecks of gold burst out from the pupil like a sunflower.

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You've got to get your hands into the dough and work it—it's how you make a nice loaf. Momma told me that too. She's got written on this card, *Work the dough, then work some more*. She taught me the art of it, step by step what it takes. Nothing worth having you don't have to work for.

The dough is right and ready to rise when it feels satiny smooth. No stickiness. I gather all the dough into a ball then, and I put it in another bowl that I've oiled. Moisten the top by rubbing it all around in the oil and then flipping it over. I put a clean tea towel on top and set it in the oven with just the pilot light on to raise. Like Momma's got on this card, *Give it time*.

It wasn't so tight around here before Henry left. He had a good job. Don't even know if I want him to come back now though. We're getting by. Some men treat their women like something they can shape and form the way they want, and it's my thinking that a woman can shape herself just fine, and don't need some man telling her how she needs to be. I would've done anything for him. I did. Didn't matter how it made me feel or how it made me look, even.

I was just a young thing when I met him, and I didn't know much of anything about the world. Just happy to follow him around, fix his supper, and put on a pretty dress before he came home at night. He'd come in, say, "Darling, we'll go out to Darcy's tonight," and I'd go put on my prettiest dress and my red strappy dancing shoes. I'd paint my toes all up, and we'd have a fine time.

My black dress is the one with the sweetheart neckline cut down low, and I had sewed it to wear next time we'd go to Darcy's. The fabric of that dress hugs me like a baby hugs its mama. The fabric is crepe, nice to work with. Got three yards folded up in a bag with a pattern for a dollar at a yard sale. Must've been something the woman was planning to make but hadn't gotten around to. I remember the day I made it. I'd just finished the last bit of hand stitching around the hem when I looked up and saw it was nearly four, so I figured I'd better get

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the chicken soup warming up for supper. I had the bread on its second rising and the oven warming up. I hung the dress I'd made in the coat closet that sits right behind the front door so I could show Henry when he got home.

Henry always liked a fresh loaf of bread. It made leftover chicken soup more tolerable. That was before Carissa was born, and before we knew to be expecting her. He had come in from work just as I was hanging up that dress. I should've heard him pull up, but you can't hear a darned thing in there. I came out of the closet as the front door swung open. Hit me square in my temple. He didn't mean to hurt me at all. He was just coming in the door after a hard day, threw it open, and I was in the way.

"What are you doing back there?" he'd said.

"Oh, Lord, I'm all right Henry." But I rubbed my head just the same.

"Don't you have enough sense not to stand behind the door?"

"I was just coming out of the closet. Finished making a dress. You want to see it?"

"Yeah, in a minute. What's for supper?"

"Not quite ready yet. I warmed up the chicken soup and made a fresh loaf of bread, but it's still rising. Got the oven warming up, and it's almost ready to bake. How about you sit down in your easy chair and I'll bring you a Bud. Sound good?"

Usually just a few minutes of pampering would cheer him up. It did that day too. A man's always happier once his needs have been satisfied. He told me to go and get that dress on and show him how good I looked. I protested just a little, playing with him really, and told him I might burn dinner, but he insisted that the kitchen could wait until I was done.

I walked on over to that closet again, shut the door, and pulled that dress on over my head. Even had my red strappy shoes in there with it, so I came out, walked straight by him

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into the kitchen. The bread dough was standing straight and tall in the pan. I opened the oven door, bent over, and put that loaf of bread in the oven. He was sitting there like a twelve year old who'd just seen his first girly picture when I came back from the kitchen, and I took his hand and led him to our bedroom.

He was all cheered up by the time we made our way into the kitchen for supper and said it was the best chicken soup he'd ever eaten. We nearly ate that whole loaf of bread too. I was just getting up to get the pitcher of sweet tea to refill our glasses when I heard a knock.

“Somebody’s at the front door.”

“I know,” I said, “I’m getting it.” I walked through the kitchen into the living room. I still had my dress on, but I’d left the shoes in the bedroom so I was padding around barefoot. He’d left his button up shirt hanging on the corner of the dresser and had his untucked t-shirt over his work trousers. He was still sitting at the table and was just getting ready to butter another piece of bread.

I went to the door then, not expecting anything or anybody in particular, and I found two policemen standing there. They were nice looking white men, both of them, dressed in their blue uniforms, all starched up crisp and tucked in tight. Silver badges and silver name tags—one was Staunton and the other Chambers. Staunton looked like the older one, had a little grey in his hair and wore a pair of bifocals, and Chambers must have been his assistant. His shoes looked extra shiny. Staunton asked me if Henry Long lived here. I asked why he wanted to know and if he’d needed to park so close to my forsythia out front.

About that time, I heard the chair slide back from the table, heard a few footsteps, and heard the back door open. I coughed, tried pretending like I wasn’t hearing anything. I said, “You say you’re working for the state police department? Do you know anything about that robbery that

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happened over on Vine Street? Did they find the people that did it? Poor Mrs. Stone's been worried to death."

The men at the front door must have heard Henry too, and they left that front porch without saying another word to me or answering my question. I was looking out the front curtain that was all bloomed out from the breeze coming through when I saw them bringing Henry around the house in handcuffs. He had his head hanging down, looking so ashamed of himself. I felt bad for him, but I didn't know what he'd done. I opened the front door and stepped out. "Henry!" I yelled. He looked up at me and said he was sorry. Looked so sad. Turned out he had stolen some money over in Kentucky, back before he ever knew me. He'd never told me, had hoped he could just start all over in Maryland. Turned out, too, that I'd be looking about like that curtain in another seven months.

That was nearly five years ago, and Henry will be released soon. Sounds like he'll be able to get the job he had at the garage. Mr. Chaney told me things hadn't run smoothly there since he left. I guess Henry just plans to get back to the way things were before, like he took a long vacation. We get by, Carissa and I, though sometimes just barely.

I hear the screen door open and shut, shoes slung off, and the pat pat pat pat of Carissa running into the kitchen. "Momma, whatcha doing?"

"Clarissa, I was just about to punch down the bread dough. Want to help?"

"Okay!" She comes running then, and I pull up a chair for her to stand on.

We get her hands all sudsed up at the sink, she rinses, and I hand her the towel to dry off. Her little hands with her pink painted fingernails move around with the towel trying to get all the wet off.

"Okay, I'm ready," she says. I take the mounded mixing bowl out of the unlit oven, and I place it in front of her eager

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face, which is already looking at the counter with an arm raised awaiting the plunge.

“Okay, on the count of three,” I say. “One, two three!”

Her balled up fist pops the balloon of dough that has raised over the rim of the bowl, and as the ball of dough puffs out its last breath of air, she giggles and looks at me.

“Good job. Now we need to let it raise up even bigger before we make the loaves of bread.” I cover the bowl with the oiled cloth again and set it inside the oven.

While it rises, we decide to play a game of Old Maid. She fans the cards in her baby fingers, working hard to hold them all. I reach over and help her from my side, without looking at them, so she can spread them out and see them all. While we’re playing, she talks. She talks about Jesus and Bible School, and then she talks about starting to Kindergarten in the fall. She’s excited, but she’s scared too. She asks what I’ll do all day when she’s gone.

“Tess’s mommy goes to work. Are you going to go to work too?”

“Maybe I’ll see if I can find a job. I don’t know right now.”

“I like having you here with me, Momma.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way. You know, Carissa, I need to tell you something.”

She looks at me with her big brown eyes, and I see those same sunflowers staring at me that her Daddy has. I’ve told her about her Daddy, but somehow it didn’t ever seem like he’d be coming back here. I know this is his home, and she’s his little girl, but it feels like this is our world, mine and Carissa’s.

“Carissa, your Daddy is going to be coming back home soon. What do you think about that?”

I wonder then how it would be different if Henry hadn’t been sent away. I don’t have any money, but I’m happy. I do some mending jobs, sew a quilt here or there, and I’ve had some people I don’t even know call me and have me do

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alterations on their clothes. It's not much, but it's enough. These years with my baby, watching her grow and learn, reading her books, this is what's important. What would extra money buy? What if we could go to Disney World or drive a car or eat dinners out? Would we be any happier? What would be better if Henry were here? Does she even miss having a Daddy around?

"Home, here?" she asks.

I think how this doesn't even seem like it should be his home to her, and I say, "Yes, this is his home too." Carissa has never seen Henry in person, but she's seen his picture and knows who he is. She just thinks he's away at work. I wouldn't take her to Little Sandy the times I've driven to see him.

"We don't have any more beds," she says.

"He will share my room," I tell her.

"Oh, like Tess's Mommy and Daddy."

"Yes, just that way."

We get through a few rounds of Old Maid, and Carissa gets up to run into the kitchen. "Look, Momma! It's B-I-G" She deepens her voice as she says it like she's Fat Albert and sticks her tummy out and her arms like she's holding them around her big belly.

"I think it's ready. Want to help again?"

We both wash up again, and she pops the bubble of yeast dough. Once it's been deflated the second time, the dough's all soft and ready to mold and shape. I pinch off a ball and hand it to her. Breaking the rest into halves, I roll one piece out, then I start on the end rolling it back up, tucking the ends, pushing them in, and sealing it up tight so it will fit in the pan. Carissa's been kneading and rolling her plum-sized ball of dough to form her own loaf. She's got a miniature pan for the loaf that she and her dolls will share later with tea.



*Untitled by Ravyn Hicks*

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## **Dreaded Dandelion**

*Tracey Stuller*

Low to the ground yet standing erect like a soldier  
awaiting orders  
Unaware and unapologetic  
Its member seeds perched there waiting to parachute  
Outward and on to the other

How uncertain they must be these tiny parasols  
(Though you wouldn't know it to look at them)  
Waiting on the edge of the known and the unknown  
Waiting for the wind to lift them  
Or for a child to give them a hopeful puff

They are not unlike me—these soft and spiky oddities  
Are we not both waiting for the wind to blow?  
How precarious a spot to be in us two  
So full of hope and uncertainty

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# The Grace of Her Lips

*Rachel Heinhorst*

A bee has stung her on her lip;  
she comes to me crying and swelling,  
and she has the cutest lips.

I met them nine years ago  
when the nurse handed her down  
for her first feeding, and she latched,  
and my body trembled courage and fear  
and my mind emptied the room  
until all I could see was the grace of her lips  
and they were moist and shining  
and she was sucking hard and I could move on  
to look her over, to touch each knuckle of her hand  
clamping my hospital gown,

and when she fell asleep, when a drip of my milk ran  
from her mouth to find the curve of my breast,  
I released her and she swallowed and puckered and calmed  
and with one finger I circled her lips,

and with one finger now, I touch where it hurts,  
and I tell her how this bee didn't know any better,  
that it must have mistaken her lips for a flower.

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# Hungry

*Sherbrooke Lea Carson*

Three thousand miles away from the land of distracted opportunity dwells a Hunger that is able to be filled.

It beams through the brown eyes of a beautiful people who, through the necessity of poverty, have learned to sever Spirit from stomach.

Even in the desert heat, well-trenched smile creases are bountifully irrigated with sweat and joyous tears.

When within her soul she recognizes a loss of the urgency that accompanies desperate hope—the land and people draw her back. Back to the place of radical dependence on Faith alone.

There are some places, most near the equator, where a wanderer may come face-to-face with a body of water and find her truest reflection there.

In time she must leave, on the silver wings of man's creation, back to the familiar square of Earth that most resembles her temporary Home, beneath the clouds. As a horizon that by very nature must disappear upon arrival, so is the fleeting security that the infamous American dream is a universal, or worthy goal. Each time she returns branded by distrust of the culturally infused tendency to amass wealth as individuals—to climb ladders built for one—to find success upon the shoulders of another, rather than alongside them.

Just as Oliver Wendell Holmes recognized the brain's inability to return to the same size after having been expanded by a new idea, so her heart took notice that its American clothing

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could no longer cover the swell of the third-world surging inside her veins.

Naked. Exposed. Transparent. She comes. She comes Hungry, to the land of hunger. One of twelve missionaries, a size perfectly suited to those carrying the name of Jesus to a far-off land.

Above the moonlit reflection of the nation's capital in the early morning stillness of the Potomac River, they rise above the nation of individualistic pursuit—and land, as a team, in the collectivist nation of Guatemala.

Encumbered by the weight of suitcases overflowing with medications, they can no longer bear the burden of self. As one body, they lift the custom-fit yoke of purpose—immediately yielding comfort and desire in exchange for a glory, not their own.

Young Elvi stood, with bare feet, at the gate of the church and waited. Waited in hopeful expectation, for a prayer delayed in being answered. As though his bones were fashioned of the cinderblocks he leaned against, he waited. At only three feet tall, he carried a resolved Faith, not often found even in fully-grown men.

Sunrise burst through his eyes as the dust from their chicken bus met his longing. With fair skin, and golden hair that seemed to allow the sunlight to linger, they disembarked. At 6'4" and 17 years of age, an energetic missionary lifted Elvi from the dirt of the third-world and hoisted the young boy upon his shoulders—and there he stayed for the next 8 days. The hunger inside of each of them filled, in one another.

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Medications aligned the concrete altar, as the village witnessed the transformation from church to medical clinic, altar to pharmacy, foreigner to friend.

With fragmented recollections of high school Spanish randomly bubbling to the surface, they spoke the universal language of Love most eloquently to those waiting in line through the tender application of glittered nail polish. With gentle stokes of a hairbrush the children were drawn into the familiarity of loving touch.

The illusion of personal space became a distant afterthought in light of the presence of one another. Away from the permeating electronic feedback of the mainland, they resolved, with single purpose to truly connect—to the people, the land, the hunger. To feel, all that there is to feel, and allow themselves to be felt, by little hands that desire no more than to be held.

A Hunger demanding of attention was recognized.

As the team travelled up the mountain, in the back of pick-up trucks designed for standing room only—knees buckled beneath the burden of blessing recognized by each of them. “To whom much has been given—much will be required.” And it was.

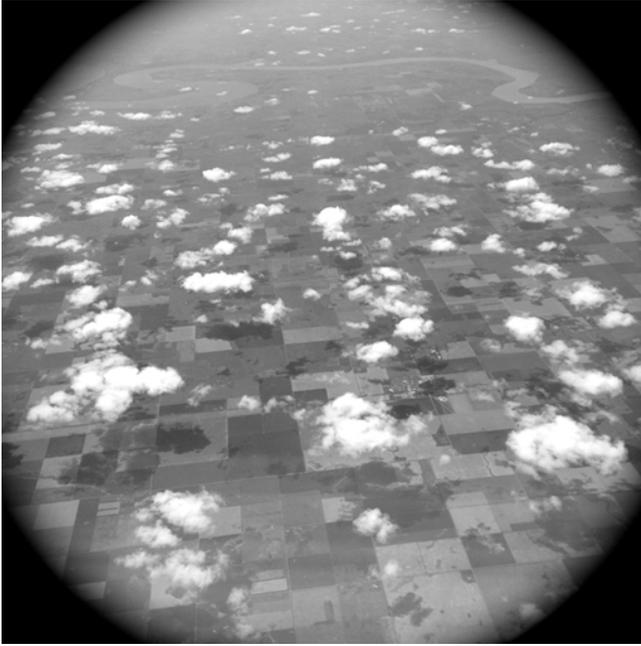
As the air thinned, so did the provisions. Absolute poverty engulfed each of them, with biting conviction to offer more. Clinics remained open until every woman and child was seen—until every man returned home from his labor, farming corn and cantaloupe on the mountainside. It was a harvest that he would never call his own, working the land belonging

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to another—his 2-hour morning commute spent navigating steep canyon walls on foot—for a single dollar.

And yet, Gratitude so permeated the region that after hours of waiting in line for the rare opportunity to receive medical care, no one complained—not a single fussy child, not a disgruntled mother insistent on “informing the staff” about how she had been slighted when the pharmacy ran out of vitamins. Mercy abounded, and Love consumed the barren land. The harvest was ripe, and the workers were overwhelmed by the concept of “Amazing Grace,” previously known only to them in anthem, rather than experience.

With shining crosses and tarnished faith, they crossed the ocean to serve a people with tarnished crosses and shining Faith. A Faith planted in seeds of desperation—watching as children rummage through landfills to fight wild dogs in the battle for survival. A seed watered by tears—tears that accompany absolute surrender to the will of a sovereign God. A tender Faith, nourished by the light of the sun—that is completely reliant on the heavens to water and preserve crops—and the people who labor, dwell, and are sustained by them. A thirst for Living water, that leads the one who tastes the sweetness of her spring, to discover rest and peacefulness at her shore. A Hunger that is able to be satisfied. A contentedness that does not desire castles built for one, and an entourage of servants to care for the accumulation of possessions stored there. The Faith of a people that recognize the value of the wealth that they have in one another. Radiant Faith that keeps a Spirit full, while the stomach remains empty.



## **Up in the Air**

*Judith Allen-Leventhal*

Gathering thoughts—  
clouds buffeted by wind unseen,  
sheep without a shepherd—  
en plein air.



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# The Mask

*Lexi Jahed*

We all disguise ourselves in these fake expressions,  
Happy, angry, elated,  
On the outside...  
Never really sure what anyone is actually feeling on the inside.

She sits there nervously,  
Says I need to tell you something.  
She pulls up her sleeve,  
Even rows of slashes appear.  
She smiles, laughs, cries,  
But you can see the pain in her eyes.

She gets screamed at, she disappoints them,  
She laughs it off.  
Sarcastic smirk, witty comments.  
Darts to her room,  
Hides in her closet corner.  
Cries as hard as her eyes allow,  
No one really ever knows.

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# The Lobsterman

*Kelsi Eiane*

He, whose hands have worked  
And body aches,  
From the constant labor  
That has painted his life.  
His skin shaded the color  
Of the sun.  
His palms calloused  
By the ropes  
That are his life line.  
The hum of the motor  
Deafening the sound of the sea,  
Along with his ears.  
The salted hull of his body  
A spectacle.  
Strong and weathered,  
Hauling the traps  
That once fed the poor  
And now only the privileged.  
He who can barely  
Stay afloat,  
With the changing of tides.  
He who is.  
He who always will be.  
A lobsterman.



*HMS Victory—Portsmouth, England by William Moroney*

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# The Bronze Buckaroo

*Patrick Allen*

For Herb Jefferies

“When I’m riding with my cattle  
With my rope and my saddle  
My horse and my gun  
And I’m always on the run  
I’m a happy cowboy!”

“Herb Jefferies, a jazz balladeer whose matinee-idol looks won him fame in the late 1930s as the Bronze Buckaroo—the first star of all black cowboy movies for segregated audiences—died May 25 at a hospital in West Hills California.”

## I

Slow fade to white:

Bob Blake; resplendent in a white, ten gallon, Stetson hat,  
a white neckerchief tied over a black western shirt with  
mother of pearl buttons,  
double ivory-handled pistols on a two gun rig,  
with shining silver buckles and turquoise ornamentation,  
hanging low around his waist,  
rides up on a snow white charger.

In the loud darkness

Black faces stare in wonder at his grace and beauty;  
Check out his cool stride as he sidles up to the bar,  
Spins one hundred and eighty degrees, so that his back is  
to the mirror  
Leans his elbows on the ledge, surveys the room coolly,  
and orders,

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“Barkeep, Whiskey.”

“You new ‘round here, pod’ner?” the barkeep asks,  
While spitting into and polishing a whiskey glass on his  
filthy apron.

“Just ridin’ through.” Bob draws, nonchalant and easy like,  
“Looking for a friend.

He’s got a ranch six miles from town  
His name is Joe Jackson ...”

The bartender sputters, “Say you don’t want to go out there,  
there’s trouble a brewin’.”

Bob says, “I think I’ll mosey on out there, just the same.”  
Circle wipes to black.

The audience murmurs, “Oh, Oh, ole Bob is in for some  
trouble now.”

“He said the idea for an all-black cowboy picture came to  
him while touring the South as a singer in the mid-1930s  
and visiting the tin-roof movie theaters meant for black  
audiences.”

## II

Sing of the Buffalo Soldiers;  
The Ninth and Tenth Calvary,  
The Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry,  
Who preserved the peace in the Western Territories,  
Of Nat Love, also known as Deadwood Dick,  
Who drove cattle up from Texas to Kansas.  
Remember Cherokee Bill, who at his hanging said,  
“I came here to die, not make a speech.”

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And Rufus Buck, who after the killing of Deputy John Barret,  
terrorized Oklahoma along with his gang.  
And that old cattle thief and trickster, Ben Hodges,  
Buried on Boot Hill "... so they could keep an eye on him."  
Tell the story of that two-fisted drinker, Stage Coach Mary  
Delivering the mail, her shotgun ever at the ready,  
And Bill Picket, the champion of bulldogging and rodeo.  
Honor the ten thousand black cowboys,  
Riding all the Goodnight/Loving and Chisholm trails,  
of the West.

"Mr. Jeffries learned to ride on his grandfather's dairy farm  
in Port Huron Mich., and he had grown up loving the cowboy  
films of Tom Mix and Buck Jones."

### III

Slow fade to white:

The peanut gallery shouts, "Bob, look out behind you!"  
Bob seems unaware and is about to be bludgeoned unconscious.  
Then, his Stetson never leaving his head,  
He drops to one knee, whirls and shoots the club from  
Dirty Dan's hand,  
Jumps up in a swift balletic move and he has the drop on him.  
"Where's Joe?" Bob demands.  
Standing there stupefied, holding his still stinging hand  
Dan starts to say, "I don't know..."  
But Bob puts the barrel of his silver thirty-eight under  
Dan's nose and cocks the hammer.  
"I aint a gonna be askin' ag'in, Where's Joe?"  
Dirty Dan's eyes bug out to the size of a nickel peppermint  
sucker,

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“They got him out at the mine shack.  
They holdin’ him for ransom!  
Don’t shoot, don’t shoot!”  
Circle wipes to black.

The entire Saturday afternoon crowd lets out a loud guffaw;  
“Ole Dan knew better than to mess with Bob once he get  
serious and start to pointin’ them six shooters!”

“At first he said, Buell was hesitant to cast Mr. Jefferies  
because of his light skin. ‘I asked him what do you want,  
someone who can ride and sing and act, or a color?’ ” ...  
“I challenged him: Darken me up if you want to. And I will  
keep my hat on tight so no one can see my hair.’ ”

#### IV

Stiffing hot summer nights  
On the stoop in front of Jessie and Little Ronnie’s house  
Little black boys regale each other  
rehearsing their favorite scenes and dialogue.  
They do not know that they are playing out  
an odd Jim Crow symmetry:  
of their black cowboy hero,  
imitating a white cowboy,  
who learned what he knew about Cowboying  
from those original black cowboys,  
now long lost in time.

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“Sometimes billed as Herbert Jeffery, he starred in a cluster of low budget “race” pictures in the 1930s: *Harlem on the Prairie*, *Rhythm Rodeo*, *Two Gun Man from Harlem*, *The Bronze Buckaroo*, and *Harlem Rides the Range*.”

“So when the day is ending  
Beneath the setting sun  
A happy cowboy’s work is fun”

(“Herb Jefferies, 100.” *Obituaries. The Washington Post*, 27 May 2014: B6. Print.)

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# Troll

Zachary Sieg

“MOPEDS AIN’T REAL ROCK. THEY SUCK ASS & UR A FAGOT IF U THINK OTHERWISE.”

The fifteen-year-old leaned back, hands resting on the back of her head. Her work here was done. Now all she had to do was wait for the wave of flame to come through, and satisfaction would be hers.

She hit the refresh button on her browser.

Thirteen hours earlier, Benny Lorizo leaned back and admired his work. A four-minute video concisely reviewing a newly-released album by the Color Gray (titled *Shape and Form*). Staring, written, filmed and edited by himself. The fourth video on his YouTube channel (MediaBot), still only two weeks old.

All that and he still had time to do his Spanish and Algebra homework over the weekend.

The very next thought made his heart sink. Tomorrow was Monday. The start of another week as a freshman at Blue Jasmine High School.

He brushed his teeth in silence, checked his homework one more time, and went to sleep.

On the internet, surely, he was a rising star. His fan base (such as it was, being a grand total of five people) liked what he was doing so far, and were already sending in requests.

Hence, his review of *Shape and Form*—by a band he’d never even heard of until two days ago. And it wasn’t hard to see how he could go far with his channel. In a realm where mere amateurs clumsily gave their opinions on the latest entertainment trends, Benny delivered four honest (and, again, concise) reviews with confidence, intelligence and humor.

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In the real world, Benny only had the second attribute. He was about as meek as a mouse, with dark brown hair that was equally mousy, almond-shaped hazel eyes, and a light sprinkling of freckles on his rounded face (which, combined with his shorter-than-average height and meager frame, made him look three years too young to be a freshman). Each time he left the house, whatever charisma he even *thought* he might have had evaporated. Benny had no friends, no one went out of their way to talk to him during lunch, and the only time it seemed anyone took notice of him was when he did something embarrassing.

(Case in point: last Wednesday, *everyone* saw him trip over some senior punk's expertly-timed leg stretch as he boarded the bus home. Nobody laughed—he (Paul Madison) really was a punk, just a few tattoos and one brow piercing short of forming his own band—but a few students formed the word “ouch” with their mouths.)

When Benny's alarm went off, as usual, he decided to suck it up and try to survive another day.

It started with a bowl of Cheerios. Was there a less original breakfast than that? Maybe—but someone (probably his dad) had finished off the last box of Jimmy Dean's in the freezer, so his options narrowed exclusively to the most iconic, tasteless cereal in the nation. Already this was going to be a fun day.

Things picked up a little after his shower, though. He checked his messages and discovered that someone under the username “ImOuttaStyle” not only subscribed to his own channel, but also made a request, right there in the comments section of his recent video:

“Looking good with these videos so far. Think you can do a review of *Plastic Sleeves* by the Mopeds? They're like my favorite rock band 'k thanks.”

Benny thought about it on his way to the bus stop. He'd heard of the Mopeds, but the album in question wasn't out

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yet. But in a few days' time, it would be. If he could make a video on that day, he would be among the first to talk about it, making it more likely that people looking it up on YouTube would find him.

He smiled. This was a sure thing.

No sooner had he arrived at the bus stop did he hear the roar of the bus' engine as it pulled up to let him and the three other students on.

Benny took a seat in the very front row.

Fifth period was when Benny had lunch this school year. Today, though, he got permission to visit the counselor's office. In theory, this was more important than overcooked spaghetti and a carton of milk, but he still had time to eat it first.

The counselor, Mr. Bradson, had just stored a folder in one of his desk drawers when Benny came in. This was the second time they'd seen each other, but Bradson recognized him right away, not that he shouldn't have.

"Benny, right?" asked Bradson. "You were in here last Thursday, weren't you?"

"Yeah," said Benny after a short pause.

Bradson pushed his glasses up from the tip of his nose. "I'll get right to it," he said. "This is about the Madison kid, Paul, the one you said tripped you on the bus."

"Uh huh?"

"I had a word with him..."

Benny sat up. Already, this was more than anyone at Gregsfield Middle School had done for him.

"...and he says he didn't do it."

Benny sighed. "Of course he didn't," he said. "I mean, did. Of course he said he didn't."

Bradson looked down at a sheet of paper on his desk before replying. "Well," he said, "what he *actually* said was, and I'm quoting him here, 'I'm sure I'd remember if I'd

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tripped someone with his face.” He paused. “Then he clarified by saying there’s nothing wrong with your face, but... The point is, he says he didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Then he’s lying.”

Bradson sighed. “I believe you,” he said, “but I can’t just take your word for it. I hav-”

“Why not?”

“It’s rude to interrupt other people.”

“Sorry.”

“But to answer your question, suppose Paul told me you tried to get even with him by putting jalapenos in his mashed potatoes.”

Benny sat up again. “But I didn’t,” he said.

“Exactly,” said Bradson. “Do you see why I can’t just take your word for it, even if I *believe* you?” He paused. “Now, *because* I believe you, I could go talk to some of his friends, see if they say anything. Or probably a few students that ride your bus...”

Benny stood up. “No, thanks,” he said.

“Are you sure?” asked Bradson. “I’m trying to help you, Benny, but I can’t help you unless you let...”

But Benny had already walked out the door.

Mr. Bradson sighed again, and wrote himself a note on a Post-It to email Benny’s parents about this meeting.

Benny *didn’t* really notice that Paul Madison was actually standing by where he usually sat at lunch, and wouldn’t have if he didn’t speak up.

“Hey, Benny?”

He didn’t know if he was surprised or actually scared that he was there—either way, he recoiled at seeing him.

“What?” he asked nervously—with, somehow, a little bit of anger over the bus incident.

Paul sat down. “That counselor, Mr. Bradson, said you told him I accidentally tripped you up on the bus last Wednesday.”

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*An accident?*

“If you just went to see him,” he continued, “he probably told you I said I didn’t do anything.” He sighed. “What I meant was, I didn’t *mean* to do anything.”

*AN ACCIDENT?!*

“...I was just stretching my legs.”

“Oh,” said Benny, “*sure* you were. *SURE.*”

“No,” said Paul, “no, really! I didn’t realize what I did until my friend Jacki told me about. He was all, ‘man, that wasn’t called for.’ So I wanted to come by to say I’m so-”

“YOU ARE NOT!” Benny exploded, and were it not for the overpowering student chatter, everyone in the cafeteria would have heard it.

“No re-”

“Don’t even lie to me!” said Benny. “Because you’re *not* the only one that’s out to get me every day. You’re not! You’re not *anything* positive, ‘sorry’ least of all!”

Paul frowned. “I’m just trying to apologize. I mean, I get it, you’re busy. And not just schoolwork, either, I saw your Y-”

“You know what?” said Benny. “I don’t *care* what you saw.”

Paul stood up. “*YOU* know what?!” he said. “*Nobody* cares about *your* opinion!”

The bell rang. End of Fifth Period. Barely two seconds later, Paul was lost in the crowd of students—gone with a barely audible “*Motherfucker!*”

It only got worse.

Sixth Period was biology, but this is the only thing that mattered for today: after Benny sat down and put his notebook on his desk, another student walked by, flipping it off the desk and to the floor.

“Sorry,” he said—with definite sarcasm this time.

Seventh Period was Spanish, and that wasn’t nearly as bad. Everyone in that class was at least a little friendly.

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But Eighth Period—Psychology—was the worst. *Nobody* paid attention during that class except Benny, and even he was distracted sometimes by the antics of the other students, which the aging teacher Mr. Faradene was either indifferent to or, given that he didn't hear very well out his left ear, possibly unaware of.

When the bell finally rang to mark the end of class, Benny was the first out the door—but still not fast enough to avoid the impact of a paper airplane.

Benny turned around to pick it up. He knew he wasn't going to like what was folded up inside it, but he unfolded it anyway.

He was right—it was a drawing of him, but an absolute caricature of his mouse-like features. Which is to say, he was depicted as a literal mouse.

He barely looked at the number on his bus to make sure it was the correct one. He didn't even notice that the only available empty seat happened to be the one in front of Paul Madison. He didn't even hear a word anyone said to him.

Because all he could think about was Benny the Rat.

Finally, he was home. Sanctuary at last. He had done it. A written note greeted him on the refrigerator:

“Benny, Dad and I are out for Ms. Ford's retirement party. Won't be back until 8:00 or so. We left you \$25 to order a pizza. Whatever's left over is your allowance for this week. Love you,  
Mom.”

That almost made his day worthwhile.  
Almost.

Because upon checking his messages on YouTube, Benny found out that someone had replied to the person requested to review the Moped's album. According to the timestamp, it

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was sent just a few minutes after the school day ended. It ran as such:

“ MOPEDS AIN’T REAL ROCK. THEY SUCK ASS & UR A FAGOT IF U THINK OTHERWISE.”

It wasn’t even addressed to Benny, but the effect that it had was undeniable.

Not even fifteen seconds later (by which time he’d read it twice more), his eyes were starting to tear up. *Who am I kidding?* he thought to himself. *I’m not going to go anywhere in life.*

Then, the worst thought of all: *Paul was right. Nobody cares about my opinions.*

It didn’t take long for Benny to find the bottle of Tylenol. It was open in his hand, now; it still looked like it was almost full. He wondered how many it would take to cause death.

He looked into it like he was looking down the barrel of the world’s smallest gun.

Long enough to start thinking about what he was actually doing.

*Would this actually solve anything? No, not really. There would still be a bunch of mean people in the world, and they would still be messing with other people’s lives. The only difference is I wouldn’t have to deal with it anymore... But the thing is, I wouldn’t be able to do anything else, either.*

He screwed the cap back on, set it down, and went straight to his room before he could change his mind.

It was there, after he closed the door, that he noticed he was holding onto a piece of paper. He didn’t remember picking one up earlier. Except...

It was the drawing of Benny the Rat, immortalized in ink—but there was more on the back, partially bleeding through the front. Benny turned it over, and saw this message:

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“Drew this during lunch. If you’re not too busy, could we maybe hang out after school sometime? I could use some help studying for midterms + seems like you could use a friend. (My bro just got his driver’s license).

Also sorry ‘bout the airplane, but we kinda sit on opposite sides of the room.

-Mark Allens”

He turned the paper over again.

The drawing didn’t seem to bother him as much anymore. Actually, now that he could really look at it up close, Benny the Rat looked kinda cool.

Benny had more algebra and Spanish homework, in addition to a section of his biology textbook to read (all due tomorrow), and an English essay due in two weeks. But somehow, this seemed more important.

He’d bought *Plastic Sleeves* (the Mopeds’ album) from iTunes, and it was sitting on his computer for about fifteen minutes now. That, however, was not his priority either.

He carefully read over a two-page script for a different video on a different topic altogether. It definitely wasn’t what his six fans knew him for, but maybe that just meant he had to branch out.

His camera was still sitting on a tripod, in the same position as when he recorded his last video.

Benny Lorizo hit the record button and sat down in front of it. As always, he would edit those first few seconds out.

It wouldn’t be so easy to edit his moment of depression. But maybe that just meant his life was worth living, by and by.

He took a deep breath and smiled.

“Hi,” he said, looking right into the camera. “I’m doing something different today. Today, I’m going to talk about internet trolls.”



*Linear Translation by Clinton Carmichael*

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# Clambering

*Ethan Fugate*

It takes a bit of magic,  
To watch October baseball  
And dream of diamonds  
Stuck between asphalt  
And concrete—I love it though;  
With fireworks over downtown  
I trek onwards just like  
Milwaukee four years ago,  
No idea where I'm going—  
Just that my skin is growing old.  
The worst words to hear uttered are  
“Maybe you were right”  
I've been saying that a lot lately,  
Over the realization that I was  
Afraid, I still am afraid—I never

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Wanted to yield, I wanted to strive,  
To reach much further than  
The cigarette smoke escaping  
Out of third story windows  
Onwards towards heavens of  
Nothingness, where one does  
What one does and that is all.  
Alas, change is my biggest fear,  
I try to remain stoic about it,  
But the depression remains,  
Beating through my head  
Like funeral dirges on Water Street,  
And onwards to the bay as I sit on  
The bench and taste the polluted  
Chesapeake Bay cocktail that fills the air.

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# The Decision

*Beth Portner*

The year is 2273. One hundred years ago physical contact was outlawed by The World Eye, our Government in the Sky. They said it was for the good of the people; research had shown touch to be a common factor in nearly every illness and evil of the world. The changes came slowly and the people learned to accept them.

My name is Nicoleta Dalca. I live with my mother and father in the Seventy-Third housing zone of Upper West Inidred. From my room I can see the misty peaks of the ancient mountains all the way to the broken down clocktower. I was educated at the Seventy Zone Education Center, a high tech facility surrounded by extravagant fountains and sculptures. I was one of thirty-five hundred students in the four hundred and forty-fifth education division. I was born at the largest and most up to date medical facility in the world, the Inidred Medical Facility, on the seventh of August in the year 2250, making me 23 and five weeks old today.

I am a good girl. I listen to my parents, I go to my education center every day, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I check into my social productivity station on time. The World Eye publicly recognized me and my education division as spectacular world citizens. I could have been a great political figurehead for them. However, one week ago I met a rebel who believes The World Eye is corrupt. One week ago my whole world began to change.

I missed my train. I ran into the polished station, nearly slipping on the smooth marble floor, just in time to watch the blinking red lights on the rear of the train disappear into the dark of the tunnel. I sighed, closing my eyes and slowly

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turning around. I would have to wait twenty minutes for the next train, and it was my job to prepare dinner this evening. I'd walk home.

I thought I knew the city fairly well; five minutes later I realized I did not. The train provided me with an excellent view of certain landmarks: the large satellite dish which sits on the mountain, the old clock tower now filled with political offices, and the Inidred Medical Facility. These landmarks were all but invisible to me on the ground, obscured by buildings that scrape the sky. Many of these city buildings look the same so one might imagine that would make it difficult for things to look unfamiliar. The buildings surrounding me, however, looked entirely unfamiliar. I attempted to double back and just wait for the train but only managed to get myself more lost. I stood in the midst of the most dilapidated buildings I'd ever seen. The air smelled faintly of garbage and something more pungent that I couldn't quite place. I looked down the narrow alleys looking for any indication that they might lead to a more pleasant area.

"You look lost, poppet," a deep voice chuckled behind me. I turned to see a man, about my age, with incredibly pale skin and bright orange hair dressed in the most ridiculous clothing I had ever seen: tight black pants, a ruffled and billowy white shirt under a deep blue coat with a top hat. I opened my mouth to speak but couldn't quite find the words. He just laughed.

"You got a name?" He spoke with an affected accent that made me cringe, as if he wanted to be viewed as unintelligent. I looked around, wondering why he was here in this awful part of the city.

"Dalca. Nicoleta Dalca," I said, looking back at him. He carried himself differently than most other people I had met.

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As if he knew something no one else was allowed to know. It made me... uncomfortable. He sauntered closer to me, and I took a few steps backward as he closed in on me.

“Ah, sorry! I forget sometimes,” He grinned, taking a step back and putting his hands out in front of him.

“You... forget?” I didn’t understand what he meant. Not at that point. I smiled politely at him before quickly turning around to find my way back to the train station. It was getting dark, and I was certain he was crazy.

“Wait! Wait, wait, I can get you home. Walk with me,” The man called out, his accent gone, taking a few steps and walking next to me. I moved to put several more inches between us.

“I don’t want to walk with you,” I muttered quietly. I recognized the scent mixing with garbage on this street. It was death. The only experience I’d ever had with death was in educational situations, but it turns out that no matter where it is, death smells the same. The more I looked around the more animal carcasses I saw. I could feel my heart racing. I just wanted to be home.

“Just hear me out. I promise I won’t hurt you. My name is Torin,” he assured me softly. I think he could see the tears in my eyes. I took a deep breath.

“Get me home,” I murmured, “get me home and you can talk about whatever you want on the way.”

Torin began to explain to me all the ways in which The World Eye is corrupt: false records, unjustified executions, poor kept in cruel living conditions, and on and on. I decided to tune him out. Nothing he was saying seemed real. To me he was speaking of some ridiculous other world. My education division had helped the poorest of the poor, and their conditions were not ideal but certainly not cruel either. I had

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agreed that he could talk, but not that I would listen. I still wasn't quite comfortable with his presence, but I had a better chance of getting home with him. I hoped, anyway. The sound of Torin clearing his throat roused me from thought.

"You think you're so smart. Fine, I get it. Don't listen," he scoffed and fell silent. I liked it better that way anyway. Still, I couldn't help the feeling of guilt that bubbled up inside me.

"Torin what?" I asked, looking at him sideways. His introduction was much more casual than I was used to. I saw him flex his jaw and wondered what kind of reaction that was. A name is just a name.

"My father was Kane Malloye. But I've abandoned that name. It's just Torin," he responded, eyes guarded and smile tight. I looked down, puzzled. Kane Malloye is a high profile politician. What would his son be doing in such an awful part of town? And why would he not want to be associated with as important a person as his father? I looked up at him and I think the question must have been written all over my face because he rubbed his head and continued.

"My mother was put to death because of him. It's... something you wouldn't understand. The important thing to remember is that he is a selfish and cruel man who cares only for his career," he explained, speaking low as if worried someone else might hear. I looked around but the street was empty and no one was near who could hear him but me. His manner seemed to be getting more tentative as we neared the upper regions of the city.

"I've never seen a more gentle politician than Kane Malloye, Torin. I just find it hard to believe." I am not sure what led me to say that to him. After I did, though, there was a stretched silence.

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I thought on everything he had told me as I watched the building I live in grow ever nearer. I had apologized several minutes ago, but it hadn't alleviated the heavy atmosphere. It bothered me that I had been acting so unkind.

"Listen, Torin. Torin, right?" I asked, not quite sure I was saying his name properly, "I don't know what you want from me. I'm not special," I asserted, facing him and giving him a "what can you do" look. It is one I have perfected. He laughed and shook his head, which took me by surprise. I felt my brow furrow. He glanced over at me and laughed again.

"Nicky-"

"Nicoleta," I interrupted, flashing a smile when he gave me a look. He just chuckled more.

"Fine, Nicoleta. You are special. Your face has been broadcast through the whole world as an example of perfection," he explained. I shook my head.

"That's an exaggeration. My face was not shown any more than any other face in my class," I argued as I felt myself blush. Torin exhaled loudly and looked ahead of us. I couldn't tell if he would speak again. We walked in silence until we stood at the doors to the building that was home.

"Well, thanks," I said awkwardly, avoiding Torin's eyes. I hoped that he would leave quickly and I could forget everything he said.

"Nicoleta, I know you're not interested. You took a wrong turn and lost yourself. I get that you weren't looking for a life change. But I don't believe in chance. We met each other for a reason, and I think you know that just as well as I do." Torin spoke quickly, there was no sign of the affected accent, and he couldn't seem to meet my eyes. It was not easy for him to admit his belief in fate. At the time I didn't care, but the more I consider his words the more I wonder why it was so difficult.

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“I don’t know any such thing, Torin. And I’m sorry, I really am, that your mother is dead. But maybe you should consider that she actually did put you in danger.” At the time what I said seemed reasonable. But I regret it now. The hurt I saw in Torin’s eyes is something I hope to never see again. His voice was rougher the next time he spoke.

“Nicoleta, you don’t know anything. Open your eyes.”

His words stuck with me. I couldn’t shake them. “Open your eyes.” Over the next week, they echoed in my head. Because of that, I think, I did open my eyes. I saw things I never noticed. The cameras lining every street, watching every hallway in the buildings. The people who made themselves smaller, blending into the garbage of the alleys. I had always thought that I was helping the poorest of the poor when I did community service with my education division. Yet the broken down neighborhood I met Torin in was something that I had never seen before. As if it was specifically ignored.

I began to research. 95% of the population of the world got sick no more than 5 times a year. But was that because we are an exceptionally healthy people, or was The World Eye controlling the percentages? I normally couldn’t find an answer. That doesn’t mean there isn’t an answer, though. Only that I am not allowed to know it. The more I examine the evidence, the more I recognize that there can only be one explanation for why I can’t know such information.

I don’t want to admit that Torin’s cause is just. I don’t want to admit that the world we live in is corrupt, and I don’t want to admit that nothing I have been taught can be trusted. But I am a logical person and none of it adds up. I was always taught that the government was good. Is good. Somehow I never questioned it. I never had cause to, before meeting Torin. Now that I am questioning, though... I can see that something is not right.

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One week ago, I met Torin. One week ago Torin told me things I didn't want to know. And today, one week later, I am attempting to find him again. Because I know what I can do and I know what needs to be done. The smell of death and refuse surrounds me, and as the sun sets in the windows of the buildings they shimmer like fire. I see him leaning against a nearby wall.

"Hello, poppet. Lost again?" I roll my eyes at his ridiculous accent. I walk closer to him and he peeks at me from under the brim of the same top hat he wore a week ago.

"Not quite." I respond. He grins, blue eyes smiling, and I wonder what he knows. I watch as he pushes off the wall and begins to walk away, motioning for me to follow.

"Don't kid yourself, poppet," he calls. "We're all lost."

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# Corona

*Brianna Marshall*

I am walking on  
The surface of the sun,  
Casually, with the knowledge  
I could burn alive.  
I step just enough  
To avoid any black spots.  
If this giant swallows me  
At least I will have lived  
In passion and flames so  
I arch like the corona and  
Let myself glow.

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## **The Shot Heard 'Round the Block**

*Michael C. Osborn*

In 1952, Bobby Thomson of Major League Baseball's New York Giants hit what is perhaps the most famous home run in history, "the Shot 'Heard Round the World." With the Giants vying for the pennant against their neighbors the Brooklyn Dodgers, Thomson hit Dodger pitcher Ralph Branca's delivery over the left field fence in the bottom of the 9th to win the game. That dramatic homer sent the Giants on to the World Series and sent the Dodgers home for the winter.

When we were kids my friends and I dreamed of duplicating the feats of our heroes, like scoring a winning touchdown in the final seconds of a football game or hitting a defining home run at the end of a season to win the pennant. To while away the days of summer vacation we played baseball with a Wiffleball, a plastic bat, and rules curtailed to fit the limitations of a backyard turned ballpark. The tall oaks on one side and the back of a house on the other served as our stadium, and the sound of the wind rustling through the leaves was our roar of the crowd.

It was a special time, though we didn't know it then. As our 1981 (and final) season was coming to a close, we would get our own famous home run. Our "Shot Heard 'Round the Block" was only for us, and meant more than the end of our season or our Wiffleball days, it sent our childhood home for the winter.

Sandalwood Drive down Hillside Place, up Briarwood Drive and back around to Sandalwood via Briarwood Place

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was our block, our neighborhood. In the summer of 1979, twelve kids from around the block started a Wiffleball baseball league. One kid equaled one team. He or she was pitcher, infielder, outfielder, and batter. We kept stats and records. It was magical.

In the summer of 1980, eight kids started the season, but only half would play into the fall. As the school year progressed and winter turned to spring, May turned to June, and 80 became 81, the four of us who finished the prior season were the lone players. Brian, Kenny, Toby and I were the only ones around to have the last crack of the plastic mean anything.

All of our baseball games were only ever played in two backyards. For the entire first season and half of the second, my backyard showed the effects of the steady trampling of growing feet. Two bare spots in the yard where we pitched and batted packed the dirt and made it hard as cement. My grandfather thought it an eyesore and halted play. So like any group of friends looking for fun things to do during summer vacation, we improvised and moved from the cozy confines of my backyard (where homers were hit in abundance) to finish the second season two doors down in Toby's backyard. There was, however, a problem. The layout was a little more spacious, and not one of the four of us was able to hit a plastic Wiffleball far enough to go over the fence for a home run.

In the late summer of 1981, due to planned replanting and construction, Toby's backyard would no longer be available, leaving us nowhere left to play our Wiffleball. We trudged through the season anyway, trying to get in as many games as we could. As a way to alleviate the frustration of the lack of

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home runs hit in Toby's backyard we tried other combination types of bats and balls. A tennis ball bends and ruins a plastic bat; a golf ball and a wooden bat we noticed might get the pitcher killed; a tennis ball and aluminum bat meant we spent more time retrieving the ball than playing; and a regular baseball and wooden bat was too much of a danger to nearby aluminum siding and windows. We always went back to plastic on plastic, as it was becoming a test of manhood.

The date of the concrete pouring and start of construction was fast approaching, and the challenge of hitting that first homer with a plastic ball became all encompassing. As hard as we tried it was to no avail. School finally started, and the last day we could play came; and though we had come close many times that August and September, closer than ever before, no one had yet hit one.

We decided on the matchups for our final day of the '81 season. I would play Brian in the first game that day, and Toby would play Kenny in the last. Winning and losing was inconsequential, hitting a home run, however, was all important. Brian and I played our homerless game and promptly left for my house while Toby and Kenny played theirs.

While watching television at my house, Brian and I heard the yelling and screaming. Toby and Kenny ran straight to my house to announce the quest was over. Toby had hit a pitch high, deep, and over his fence for a home run. The four of us celebrating, immediately ran to retrieve the ball. There it was resting in our neighbor's grass, a plastic Wiffleball. We stood over it for a second, and without much fanfare, picked it up and went about our day. The season was over.

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We were finally getting big enough and strong enough to hit a plastic Wiffleball over a fence. If there had been a 1982 season there probably would have been plenty of home runs, leaving Toby's homer as only being special to us because it was the first. As it turned out, there was no 1982 season, and it wasn't just the first—it was the only.

Our “Shot Heard ‘Round the Block” ended a chapter in our lives. That one and only home run, on that final day, in that final game allows me to wax nostalgic about the end of our childhood, and the onset of winter.

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# Washington State 1961

*Randolph Bridgeman*

The Pacific North West was always gray, mossy rock slippery, weighted down soggy like a wet blanket on a fire the clouds smoky and as low as the tree tops, pushing down on the senses, the heaviness I breathed in, a chill, bone deep, in that place tucked away in the Cascades where the clouds knocked up against the Skagit River Valley walls until they drained themselves on everything. This is what I remember everything washed born again clean, baptized, over and over as if the whole world had lost its salvation.

The Skagit River, its whirl pooling waters as deep as Steelhead swim, that valley was glacier made its evergreens filtering sunlight in the peaks, waterfalls appearing from rock as if Moses had struck them with his stick, girder bridges crossing its water as natural as fallen trees across streams, those unexpected opportunities for crossing over. This was my catechism this is where my story begins, there where the word was written under the rocks in the bottom of those trout streams.

There was something there in the comings and goings of the wind, bending the Douglas Firs silver side up, flashings in the woods like thoughts through the un-kept lots of my young mind, the whisper of field grass as it parted to let me through like I was a stranger, a sojourner who stumbled upon a gathering, a congregation, some ritual maybe—the distant sounds of these streams of conscience—like vocal cords vibrating water over rock—the ancient voice of these Cascades broken open on this valley and I have stopped to let God in without religion getting in the way.



*Winter Wonderland* by Naomi Harward



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## Contributor Notes

**PATRICK ALLEN** is the division chair of the Social Sciences and Public Services Division at the College of Southern Maryland. “I write poetry that seeks to understand how we are driven by the force of our belief into action,” says Patrick.

**JUDITH ALLEN-LEVENTHAL** taught writing and literature at the College of Southern Maryland for many years, and has been a long-time supporter of the Connections Literary Series.

**RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN** is a graduate of both the College of Southern Maryland and St. Mary’s College of Maryland. His poems have been published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has three collections of poems, *South of Everywhere*, *Mechanic on Duty*, and *The Odd Testament*. His fourth collection, *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town*, is forthcoming in the spring of 2015.

**CLINTON CARMICHAEL** is a first-year student at the College of Southern Maryland, working towards a degree in computer science. He has practiced photography for five years alongside painting. He says, “Even though many of my photos are simple compositions or still lives, I enjoy portraiture and communicating with people.”

**SHERBROOKE LEA CARSON** is a recent graduate of the Communications program at the College of Southern Maryland. Her greatest loves are serving as a missionary overseas, friends who became family, and those who call her mom.

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**DAN CUDDY** is currently an editor of the *Loch Raven Review*, and in the past, has been a contributing editor with the *Maryland Poetry Review*, and with *Lite: Baltimore's Literary Newspaper*. He has been published in many small magazines over the years, e.g, *Antioch Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, online magazines, as well as the *Baltimore-Post Examiner*. In 2003, his book of poems *Handprint On The Window* was published by Three Conditions Press.

**KELSI EIANE** was born and raised in a small coastal town in Maine, and moved to Maryland four years ago after graduating from college.

**ETHAN FUGATE** is a College of Southern Maryland student who states he's "equal to accident and hazard."

**NAOMI HARWARD** is a sophomore at the College of Southern Maryland, working towards a bachelor's in journalism and pursuing a career as a photojournalist. She is a self-taught photographer, and she loves photographing people and concerts.

**RACHEL HEINHORST** teaches English courses at the College of Southern Maryland's La Plata Campus. She believes poetry screams loud and clear, pure examples of human experience.

**PETER HERSHEY** has poetry which has previously appeared in *Winged Nation* and the *Loudoun Times Mirror*, among other places. He has self-published several fiction novels, and his non-fiction has appeared in the University of Oregon's *Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation*, the University of Massachusetts *Law Review*, and the Florida Coastal *Law Review*. He currently works as an attorney in Annapolis, Maryland.

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**RAVYN HICKS** is a 17-year old dual enrollment student with Leonardtown High School. She enjoys volunteering with SMAWL (St. Mary's Animal Welfare League) and Sugar Faces Rescue, drawing, and observing behaviors in different environments. When she graduates, she is going to double major in psychology and philosophy. She would love to become a general psychiatrist and work in a mental institution.

**CATHY HOBBS** was born and raised in Calvert County, but currently lives in St. Mary's. She is currently studying photography at the College of Southern Maryland. In her down time, she enjoys listening to music, playing bass guitar for her church, exploring, taking photos, and spending time with friends and family.

**LEXI JAHED** is in tenth grade at Calvert High School. She says, "I don't get excited for the homecoming dance and the football games a year in advance. I'm the type of person who gets excited when I finish a poem or a drawing or painting, or maybe if my cousin sends me a letter in the mail." She is grateful for a thing as beautiful as poetry in the world.

**JOHN KARIS** lives in Maryland and enjoys golf, warm weather, and spending time with family.

**BRIANNA MARSHALL** is a sophomore at the College of Southern Maryland and has been writing since she was a kid. Brianna plans on pursuing a marketing or communications degree with a minor in English.

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**WILLIAM “ED” MORONEY** is an assistant professor at the College of Southern Maryland and coordinator for the Criminal Justice and Homeland Security curriculums.

**MICHAEL C. OSBORN**, born in 1967, is a native of the Washington, DC metropolitan area, but lives in Charles County with his wife and step-son. He received an AA from the College of Southern Maryland (Charles County Community College at the time), and a BA from the University of Maryland, College Park.

**MITZI S. PHALEN** lives in St. Mary’s County with her husband.

**WILLIAM POE** is the author of *African-Americans of Calvert County* and a contributing writer for the *Chesapeake Current*.

**BETH PORTNER** is an aspiring author; this is the first short story she has completed. She is currently majoring in art and is one of the co-presidents of the College of Southern Maryland’s A.R.T. Club. She hopes to eventually write a book expanding upon the premise of this short story, and in the long run, would like to be a self-published, self-illustrated author.

**ANNA READEN** is a student at CSM, completing her associate’s in the spring. She has had an interest in photography for a long time. Black-and-white is her favorite medium because of its simplicity and one is only limited by their imagination.

**ZACHARY SIEG** is a student at the College of Southern Maryland. He is being published for the first time in *Connections*.

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**TRACEY STULLER** is an assistant professor for the Biological and Physical Sciences Division of the College of Southern Maryland on the Leonardtown Campus. Some days, she wishes she had taken more literature and writing classes in college, because nothing impresses her more than being able to convey thoughts well in writing.

**DEE SYDNOR** is the mother of four, grandmother of two, and wife of one. She enjoys reading, writing, and relaxing on the boat. She is employed as an adjunct instructor at the College of Southern Maryland.

**VICTORIA THORNTON** is a dedicated student and a lifelong lover of the arts and expression of the self. She is enthusiastic about looking at the seemingly mundane with an informed and discerning mind to make the most out of everything.

**PAUL TOSCANO** has been on the staff of the College of Southern Maryland since 1980. As a 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, The Washington Post Magazine*, and previous editions of *Connections*.

**LYNNE VITI** wandered up the East Coast from her hometown, Baltimore, stopped awhile in New York and Connecticut and ended up in Boston. She now teaches at Wellesley College. Her work has appeared in *Sojourner, WILLA, Meat for Tea: The Valley Review, Barefoot Review, \*82 Review*, and at the Boston, Massachusetts and Portland, Oregon City Halls.



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