



COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Connections

SPRING 2020 LITERARY MAGAZINE

The logo for 'Connections' features the word in a serif font. Behind the text are two overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular planes. A black spiral graphic starts from the bottom center and winds upwards, passing behind the text.

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COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Spring 2020 Literary Magazine

volume 27 number 2



Radiant by *Elizabeth Brown*:

My journey in photography started back in 2012 when I did a Pin-Up photo session with a local photographer. I did it so I could see how beautiful I could be, so others could see me as beautiful. I had been overweight all my life and spent most of my life trying to be invisible; I had just had weight loss surgery and had lost some weight. It was such an amazing feeling to be in front of the camera and see the beautiful results. I wanted to do the same for others, so soon I got a camera and started learning how to capture moments, feelings, memories and emotions.

I found that for me, capturing people and their emotions was very difficult. I could easily capture nature, animals, and objects, but people were so much harder than I thought. So in the summer of 2019 I had a vision I wanted to bring to life: people in the water wearing dresses. I put my request out there and had an overwhelming response from women! Then came the men! Men were willing to get in the water to allow me to capture them, and soon my “Water Sirens” piece came to life.

Here you will find a man who was willing to get in the water for me. In a field that normally portrays and captures women, these men set aside their fears and allowed me to capture their unique beauty.

My goal as a photographer is not to become the photographer that costs a lot of money: not everyone can afford the cost to capture memories. I want to be the photographer that people can afford. I may not be able to give what a professional can, and they rightly deserve the prices they have, but I will do my all to capture the moments that mean the most.

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Connections

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Navajo Native, Edgard Domenech

The Selkie

Holly Stinnett Coelho

A seagull glides across the cloudy sky as the waves crash against the rocky shore. On the rocks sits a beautiful young woman, her legs folded up against her chest, with her arms wrapped around them. Her eyes stare out at the never-ending sea, watching the little whitecaps dance on top of the water. A salty breeze ruffles her dark hair and skirt. Around her, the seals swim in the water while some lie next to her, each carrying a sad expression. She can feel it, water rushing past her, surrounding her in its cool embrace. She sees her brothers and sisters swimming alongside her, as fish try their best to scatter away from them. In the distance, she can hear her children laughing, drawing her out of the cheerful memories. She turns in their direction to see them splashing in the water. She smiles. Like her, they feel the calling of the sea, but they will never feel the urge as she does. Frowning, she turns back to the open water and begins to sing. Over seven years ago, her songs were full of joy. When her husband would go out to sea on long fishing trips, she would stand on the shore to sing for his safe return. Now, the only song she sings is her longing to go home. Soon, the seals join in with her, their sister, in their wishes for her return as well.

From the house, her husband calls for them to come inside, for it is getting late. She takes one last look at the sea and sky, that is now turning into many shades of purples and pinks, before she gathers her children and heads inside. She does not blame him for trapping her here. When they had first met, here on the shore, there was nothing but happiness and love, and when the children were born, their love only grew. But a year ago, it was time for her to return to the sea. This is why he had taken her coat; without it, she could never leave him or their children. He would try to

shower her with gifts, but even though she would accept them, she would continue to wish for her coat and to return to the sea. And it had hurt him, knowing that he could never give her what she wants without the risk of losing her, but seeing the sadness on her face hurts worse of all. the risk of losing her, but to see the sadness on her face hurt worse of all.

Before dinner, she heads up the stairs to clean up, when she heard a loud thump from the attic. Pulling the cord down, she enters the attic. Dust floats around like tiny bubbles, in the fading light of the lonely window. Scanning the room, she finds a few trunks and boxes that have been knocked over, with the cat standing on top, grooming itself. The woman places a hand on her hip. When the cat looks up at her, his green eyes widen; then, he bounds off past her and jumps out of the attic. She shakes her head. “How did I get up here?” she thinks. Shrugging, she begins re-stacking the boxes. Picking up one of the trunks, she finds that it is very light, as if it is empty. She shakes it, and something flops inside. Setting it back down, she kneels beside the trunk and gently opens the lid. She covers her mouth, stifling a laugh as tears began to stream down her face. Inside is her coat. The coat is brown with short bristle fur with the head and flippers of a seal. Grabbing her coat, she hides it under her skirt. Heading back downstairs, she has dinner with her family for what will be the last time. After dinner, she gathers the children and heads them off to bed.

“I love you, mommy,” they say as they hug and kiss her and crawl into bed.

Closing the children's bedroom door, she heads to her room. When she enters the room, her husband, who is standing there waiting for her, hugs and kisses her. "I love you with all my heart," he says, as a tear slides down his cheek, "I hope you can forgive me for what I did."

"I've told you I do, and that you don't need to apologize. If our roles were reversed, I would have probably done the same thing." She wipes away his tears. "I love you as much as I love the sea." When everyone has fallen asleep, she slips out of bed. Looking down at her sleeping husband, she whispers, "I hope you can forgive me, my love." She kisses him on the forehead. Then she enters the children's room. She watches them as they sleep before kissing them, saying how much she loves them. She tells that her leaving has nothing to do with them. Slipping out of the house, she runs to the shore. Without hesitation, she slips the coat on and plunges into the sea, reemerging as a seal. The other seals gather around her, singing in celebration of her return before disappearing beneath the waves. She is unaware that her husband is watching them through the window with the cat rubbing against his legs. He has a sad smile, but he is happy, for what greater gift could he have given his Selkie wife, but the sea.

Coffee

Kate M. Sine

I am coffee.
Ground down into a being to serve
others,
until
there is nothing left
in
my
cup.



a modern day parable

Randolph Bridgeman

1.

a bird swoops down from
the telephone wires
that line the icy road to town

straight into the wide bright grill
of my father's Oldsmobile

as if it had meant to end it
right there

she tells me that she is like
these birds that can't
fly away

for the winter

2.

she keeps dying in her like
a best friend's secret taken
to the grave

she asks me if i know
that in Latin to pray means
to beg

she says i pray your father
goes first but she is the
first to go

we had her cremated

then my father went and we
had him cremated too

they both sat on a shelf
in my sister's garage
gathering dust

until my brother-in-law
buried their ashes out back
under an old maple tree

then sold the house

so as always i have to knock
on a stranger's door to talk
to my parents

3.

the moon is unraveling like my
father's pocket knife peeling
slivers of apple

on the front porch of the old house
where all of his children wait
our turn



as he holds out each slice

first to the youngest
last to the oldest

this sweet bite of memory

and i think i'm being taught
something

say about

the impatience of youth

or the joy that comes from
others' happiness

or the humility in being last

as only he could without
a word



Lone Boot, *Richard Taylor*

Death and Life in Poetry at 73

Randolph J. May

Three decades of stone-cold silence.
Nothing!
Why did Dad start writing poetry, again –
at seventy-three?

Now no more of the plain-spoken paeans to Mom and
memories.

Like these lines from the long-buried
To Norma Upon the Gift of a Timepiece:

“So, wear this watch
and remember all the times that were a ball
and when it finally says December
there will be no regrets to recall.”

Yes. He had put those words on paper.

Before three decades of stone-cold silence.

Now. Put on paper too, these last lines from *To Norma*:

“It’s thirty years
that have raced by
What was I aware of,
And why?”

At seventy-three.

Foreboding dark visions.

Like these from *The Mystery Ship*:

“The ship then
vanished and was
swallowed by the sea.

I was afraid
to walk on
the beach again.
I didn’t know
how and when
it would come for me again.

The ship with the unknown destination
was gone
and it had not come for me.”

Until Dad was ninety-three.

I am seventy-three now.

Brooding over his lament.

“It’s thirty years
that have raced by
What was I aware of,
And why?”

Help me, Dad!

Only Ordinary

Sean McNutt. Inspired by Edna St Vincent Millay.

Your tea is cold now.
You drink it standing up
And leave the house.

You pause. Before departure, you turn around and glance
Back down the hall—toward your bedroom. Your feet start,
One before the other, nearing the threshold. And you pause,
Again. You stop yourself, knowing full-well that a day's
Work would be lost if you stepped only twice more.

You say to yourself: "I should be an adult here and not fool
With childish tendencies." But you would not have been childish
That day. Sleeping in is not childish if you are not tired from
Play. Sustenance is not childish if you have not deprived your
Body of its energies—rather than the caffeine you love so.

You spend an entire day, looking from miraculous to mystic
And see only ordinary. The trees are crying out to you, begging
For you to climb. The flowers yearn to have your schnoz inserted,
And then—inhale! Clouds attempt to peak your interest. Animals
Vie for your entertainment. And the insects—the poor insects.

The courageous insects. They yearn for you to be a part of the
Extravagance so deeply they take matters into their hands,

Or antenna—if you so prefer. They sting. They bite. They buzz
In your face and in your ear. They kick up pollen and make
You sneeze. All to hold your attention captive—to the wonder.

You ignore the calls of nature and the beckonings from the eyes
Of the innocent. Would you still want the current status if all that
Was lost was presented to you? Adulthood is not the product
Of growth. Rather, it is the product of death.
Death of the child and childish things. And you say to the world:

“Bury the dead where they are found.
But put wheels on the caskets—
I have to be at work in the morning.”



The pages that are left blank in this issue of Connections are for you to contribute your own poems, stories and reflections

Freedom

Sydney Mitchell

It is another damp and insufferable day on the cruelest waters I've ever met. Another scrawny rat scurries across the slimy wooden floor. The dusty air reeks of feces, vomit, and a wretchedly unfamiliar sour stench that chokes me with every shaky intake. Even still, I manage to be hungry. I long for the sweet embrace of my kingdom's vibrant colors even as my body aches at my every twitch.

My skin is red and boiled where the metal chains strangle my ankle. I am fully aware I am either sick or dying, likely both. My flesh is swollen in some places and seemingly nonexistent in others. Where my skin was once a soft and smooth dark brown, it is bruised and rough, black and red. My eyes roll back as a furious wave rocks the boat. For a moment, all that is smelled is the vile stench that has absorbed into the wood. All that is heard is the wretched wailing of twelve of my subjects and fifty-three people I had never met but relate to only by the stricken look about us. All that is felt is the pain eating me from the inside and out. A wave of heat hits me. I brace myself for another wretched blood-filled gag.

My eyes roll back again as a more passive wave turns the ship. My body is coated with a violent burning feeling. All goes black—and I am back in the royal garden. The air was warm and dryer than the ship but still moist. I stared longingly into Mansa's deep brown eyes, they seemed to glow in that light. The vibrant and rich tan-like orange of the castle, and the greens, blues and reds in the garden bore no match. We considered ourselves quite superior fifteen-

year olds. I, no matter what anyone detested, was the future ruler of my kingdom and him soon to be the greatest warrior and leader of our time, of any. “We will do it,” he said, holding my gaze. “Do what?” I looked over at the vibrant green of a vine and back at him. “We will take back your empire. Great Mali will stretch for miles and miles once again. We will restore the greatness of the Keita, whom you descend from.” In my own time I had thought about this and it seemed unrealistic, but I believed him. “We won’t stop.” I said sternly. Staring out past the garden, past the villages and homes, to the whole of the land. I placed my hand on his and led him to a flat land. “Here, we take what once was Songhai, then Ajuran Sultanate.” He suppressed a smile. “Truly, let’s discuss battle strategy. The most successful are always sneaky and planned. The more time we have the more brilliant it will be!” We’d talked for days planning and training. When the day came, we would be ready. We modeled our attacks after what was documented of Mansa Musa’s. Even his name was destined for victory, after the great ruler of this that was once a great empire...

Was it true I’d only been fifteen then and fifteen now? Impossible that it had only been but a month or so ago. I should be renewing the legacy of the Keita, planning new battle strategy with Mansa Kurufaba.

I should be... I should...

My eyes re-focus on the red boils on my ankle and the metal that binds them, I claw at it, bending back my nails until I cannot stand the agony. I cough and gag up blood. The woman beside me backs into the man behind her, trying to get away. I lift my head to see a pale-faced sailor. I try to stand but my limbs and skin object. The sailor demands

something of me in a language I do not understand, he loosens my chains and hoists me to the deck. The wind threatens to throw me overboard but the sailor beats the wind to it. He thrusts me with the butt of his rifle. My body stings when I break the freezing ocean. As I choke on the rough salt water I struggle, attempting to swim. My body yells and so do I, trying to expel the water from my lungs. I push at the water frantically until my head is no longer submerged. I hack up water and suck in the air I can. I manage to stay afloat as waves threaten to take me. I will not be taken, not again.

I'm in agony, but I push forward.

I have to get back to my kingdom; I must rebuild my empire.

My eyes threaten to black out but, I will them to focus. My limbs are wailing, my flesh is burning, my mind is in shambles, but even still...

I push on.



Sugar Drool, *Chaunte Garrett*

To make it happen

Patrick Allen

To make it happen
For Bacon and Eggs
The chicken has an interest
The pig commitment



Racism without Racist

Patrick Allen

We may be blinded by our culture, but we are not oblivious

I

Fish have no reason to question water.
It is there,
It was there,
It always will be there, as far as the fish knows.
What can it know beyond the Is-ness of what is?
And yet the fish responds to the currents and eddies of the
water's flow;
It swims away from the too hot or too cold;
It avoids the Red Tide that blooms in the Chesapeake Bay
each Summer season.

II

How can you claim you did not know?
Did not feel a disquiet at the report of a Freddy Gray's death?
Did not hear any shouts and screams from the street?
Swimming in your privilege,
Averting your blinkered eyes
From what you will not to see.
As all around you Baltimore is burning.
How can you claim you did not know?

Boy of Steel

Stephen Michael Berberich

Chaos reigned. The nation was at war, protests raged on campuses, cities burned in race riots, and assassins killed popular leaders.

So, did I worry that my poor grades would get me drafted out of college? Guess so.

I was worried a whole lot more whether I could buy the white Chevrolet Malibu ragtop with all black interior I'd coveted since high school. I needed tuition dough too.

Well, heavy industry came to my rescue. Aunt Kay's neighbor got me a summer job with the big Bethlehem Steel Mill at Sparrows Point in Baltimore. He said he was management.

My job title was to be as a roll-transfer man. What the hell was that?

No matter. That summer, I'd be earning the best hourly wage of any college kid.

Guardedly then, I drove my mother's 1956 Plymouth Savoy across East Baltimore through neighborhoods of small post-WWII homes built for returning GI's on VA loans. I marveled at the consistently neat, framed-in trees and little lawns.

After crossing a little bridge over a causeway and paying my stupid 25 cent toll—what was that all about?—I got my first look at the long gray and rusty-orange Bethlehem Steel mills stretching far to my left and right. No greenery there, just smoke, soot and rust.

I could not see one green plant, not a blade of grass, not a bit of algae or fungus growing at the mill. For someone like me, a true nature boy, the rusty mammoth plant was an alien planet.

I reported to the main office in a small building with large windows completely covered with soot. A crusty faced man who looked 45, with slick, graying-black hair, gave me safety glasses, a brown hardhat, heavy gloves and surgical masks. “Go to da first mill, the foreman’s cage.”

The crusty man was really only 35 years old, I learned later.

I asked what the cage looked like. He talked instead to a group of grumbling and coughing men in greasy work clothes. “Another college boy, great. Just what we needed.” He handed me rubber ear plugs and laughed maniacally. “Get moving, boy.”

Bethlehem Steel was a series of mills side to side in a row, like a gigantic package of hotdogs. Someone could walk from mill to mill and never see the sky.

I recalled my aunt’s friend advising me, “Only work there one summer. Make the money for college and get out or get old quick.”

“Really,” I asked.

He barked, “Okay then, go ahead, fall in love with the great wages, put off college, and your outside world gets dull and tiring. Your body will become partly made of metal and will start to creak.”

“Really?”

“Ever feel like you’re rusting? It would be a relief there,” he said. “You become steel mentally too: a tool of the plant. You are a solid thing that moves and smells like a metal latrine.”

“Wow, and you are management?” I asked timidly.

“No. I’m director of the board and own a majority share of the company. Whatja think?!! I’m a foreman, a year from retirement, you little dumb shit.”

Ambling tentatively into mill number one that first day, I lost my sense of hearing. The mill noise was deafening. Everything, and I mean everything, shook or rattled. Even the floor seemed to shake under my wobbling legs.

The mill floors were a rubbery black substance. Someone said it used to be a stone floor, now covered with dried up goo.

The pitched ceiling of the mill one was 75 feet high. Along the sides were tracks for overhead cranes traversing from end to end carrying giant loads of steel on cables.

Nothing was free of blackness except huge silver lathing machines lined up and manned by guys in blue hard hats,

who ground off the worn rolls.

I slipped into the foreman's cage where the noise was muffled. The cage resembled a graphite dirty ice cube—all glass about 25-foot squared. Ten or so men stood around in white shirts and white hardhats each stenciled with a name. They wore leashes of tasteless, grease-stained neck ties. I reported to the one at a desk who talked like the supervisor with a plastered-on smirk. He didn't look up when he told me, "That man there, Max, 'ill show ya yer duties."

Max and I left the dirty ice cube. He looked 60, tall, very skinny and slouching with odd posture. His face was rock hard with chiseled features and belched a quick explosive laugh with a roughneck smile. I must have looked like a little choir boy with him.

Max led me along a row of lathing machines roaring at high volume. He pointed me to one of them, which was whirring menacingly. The operator scowled at me. His head just above made the machine appear to be the rest of his body. The man/machine spit metal shavings all around, but not past a painted dirty yellow circle.

Max looked directly into my eyes, put his arm across my shoulders and leaned into my face, as if about to steal a kiss. I recoiled. He put his mouth close to my ear and shouted, "You can get hurt or killed a number of ways here, kid."

I'd already been quivering from what seemed like an infinite frenzy of scary noise from the machines clanking and

screeching as cranes overhead blasted out warning honks continually.

Max yelled again into my ear, “The roll mill operates 24 hours a day, kid. And if you work a double shift you will get weary. Mistakes can end your time here on Earth. Do you understand?”

I nodded.

“Look out!” Max grabbed me, saving me from a large, roaring forklift speeding past with a huge dumpster of steel shavings from other lathes. “See what I mean, kid?”

And then, the man/machine stopped whirring and clattering. Its scowling human face changed to a look of extreme grief of a mother finding her baby dead in the crib. I thought I saw a tear. He stepped down to munch on a sandwich of something pink on white bread already fingerprinted in grease.

A gaggle of repairing work man appeared at the idle machine, bending and poking, while its human head refused to watch them, feeling the pain. The repair monkeys were equally sad, but eager to make the man/machine happy again with giant screwdrivers twisting and oversized ratchet wrenches clicking.

The entire fix took nine minutes. The scowling human head assumed his home on the shoulders of his loving machine. Deafening rhythms resumed, as the lathe turned over and over again. The head acknowledged Max’s thumb-to-index finger “Okay?” by mouthing “Yea.” His warm smile of green, crooked teeth revealed his contentment.

I opened my mind's eye to my surroundings later that first day and thought hey, bet nobody knows about all this. I'll share.

At mill one's north end, cranes with loops of thick cables carried rollers by their end handles, like rolling pins Mom used on pie crust. Those giant rolling pins were the "rolls," in my job title. They came fresh from the hot mill.

I checked it out.

Against smoky blue light filtering down from translucent windows atop the hot mill walls came a different sort of crane. It carried an enormous cauldron of a red hot bubbling soup of iron ore. The crane carried the devilish cauldron to the far end of the mill and poured its burning liquid load into a long and narrow mold, sending orange-red sparks across the entire end of the mill. The weight of the mold of red liquid rushed it toward me down a slight incline of a path of tight-together spinning rolls. That ride begins cooling of the mold's content. Closer, closer, too close to me, one hot slab after another was lifted by a heavy hook the size of a small truck and taken to the cooling mill.

I followed.

A ramp of rolling pin-like rolls dominated the cooling mill next door. As a hot metal slab entered, it rambled down the

inclining ramp until it got squeezed by structures resembling old-time ringers on a clothes washer. A series of the rolling ringers forged the slabs into sheets of steel, sometimes thick, sometimes thin.

In the next mill where I worked, the spent rolls went back into the lathes for grinding. My duty was to lift the crane cables with fireman-like thick gloves off ends of each mammoth roll once a crane operator high above in a tiny cab delicately placed the roll into a lathe. Drop one and I could lose a limb.

Word around was that hands had been sacrificed to the man/machines when the roll transfer—man—was too slow, me. A hand could be crushed between the cable and the roll. In my mind every day, I saw flesh, bone and blood squeezed into the steel only to show up in a pink stain on an unpainted car body at the Chevy plant, or on a line of tin cans for beans or corn in a food packing plant.

I learned the entire process throughout the summer and was fascinated by manufacturing steel.

I got to cruise down to college in my new Chevy Malibu I named Steely Beth. Sometimes I wondered if under her beautifully polished white finish her naked steel frame might hold a troubling pink stain or two.

Soon, I got that draft notice and none of this mattered.

Chaos reigned again.

The Time I Experienced A Mass Shooting

By Matthew Moses

I was born in a small city in Germany called Ludwigshafen. I lived with my mom, Johanna, and my four sisters Ella, Leonie, Nele, and Melina. Leonie and I are twins, so I was closer to her than my other sisters. Ludwigshafen is home to a lot of gangs, and the gangs pretty much control the whole city. Gangs have run the city since the 70s. My mom also grew up in Ludwigshafen, so she has been dealing with the gangs her whole life. My mom had two brothers and a cousin who died from gang violence. My mom has seen people murdered right in front of her and has also been robbed at gunpoint. When I was seven, a gang war broke out between two rival gangs. The violence in the city became worse than it had ever been before. That year there was a record number of murders in the city. My mom wanted to get out of Ludwigshafen as soon as possible, so the next month she moved us to Munich, Germany.

Statistically, Munich is the safest city in Germany. The people in Munich have always bragged about how good their city is. I always heard about how fun and safe Munich was and how it's the best city in Germany, but I didn't believe it at first. Since I grew up in a city filled with violence, I didn't think that any city could be safe. I came from a place where people couldn't walk around their neighborhoods or ride their bike without getting robbed. It took me a while, but I eventually began to love Munich. Moving to Munich was the best thing that had ever happened to me. Little did I know something big was going to happen to make me think differently. I hadn't seen any crime in Munich in the seven years I lived there, but my first encounter with a crime was a huge one.

It was July 22, 2016, when myself, my twin sister, my little cousin Ada and my friend Armela, decided to go to the mall. On the way, my cousin Ada became hungry, so we all decided to go to the McDonald's across the street. While we were crossing the street to the McDonald's, we started hearing gunshots. Ada and Armela had never heard a gunshot before, so at first, they didn't know what was going on. My sister and I heard gunshots all the time when we lived in Ludwigshafen, so when we heard that sound, we knew exactly what was going on. As soon as we heard the gunshots, we grabbed Ada and Armela and immediately began running the other way. There was an electronics shop across the street, so that's where we and a whole crowd of people began running to. While we were running towards the shop, I saw the shooter walk out of the McDonalds. He began screaming "Ich bin Deutsche," which means I am German and then opened fire on the crowd of people. Armela was running right in front of me while my sister and my cousin were to my left. Two of the shots the shooter fired hit Armela. As soon as Armela was shot, I, my sister, and my cousin all ran towards her. She was lying on the ground and wasn't moving. People kept screaming at us to keep running, but we couldn't just leave our friend hurt and all alone. We ran to her and began hovering over her body. I looked back at the shooter and saw he had stopped firing and was running the other way, towards the mall. I could hear him yelling "Ich bin Deutsche" again, and he was also yelling "ich bin hier gebore," which means I was born here. When I looked at Armela's body, I saw she had been shot in the hip and the back of the head. A man next to me took her pulse and told us she was dead. Right after he said that the gunman turned around and began firing more shots at us. Even though she was dead, I didn't want to leave Armela alone, but I eventually had to because the shooter continued to fire shots in our direction. We eventually reached the electronics shop and ran out the back and hopped in a stranger's car. The stranger then drove us home, and we were finally safe.

Nine people died in the shooting, and thirty-six were injured. Right after the shooting happened, I didn't want to be in Munich anymore. I spent the rest of that summer in Amsterdam. I was staying with my cousin Jade and her wife Julia. I only had two years of high school left, and I did not want to return to Germany. My mother let my sister and I finish high school in Amsterdam. After I graduated high school in Amsterdam, I moved to America. I originally planned to attend the University of Maryland, but I had problems obtaining my visa, so I was unable to go. Instead, I enrolled at the College of Southern Maryland. After being in America for a year, I started to like it. I had heard a lot of bad things about America from when I lived in Europe, but I love it. My mom wanted me to return to Germany, but I couldn't return to the place where I watched my friend and eight other people die. The majority of my family lives in Germany, but for a while, I couldn't find it in me to go back and visit. It took me almost two years, but I eventually went and visited my family in Germany. I'm glad I finally decided to return to my home country because it helped me make peace with the whole situation. After four years of running away from my pain, I was finally forced to confront it. I spent years hating Germany and blaming the country for what happened, but returning helped me be able to grieve and move on. I spent my whole winter break back in Germany with my family. During that time, I fell back in love with my home country. I spent fourteen years of my life living in Germany.

Germany is a big part of who I am, and I could never abandon my native country. I still plan to attend the University of Maryland after my time at the College of Southern Maryland. After I graduate from college, I plan to move back to Germany. I realized that I couldn't run forever, and I couldn't give up on my country. I plan to raise a family in Germany and hopefully spend the rest of my life in my native country. Even though I experienced the scariest moment of my life in Germany, it made me love my country even more.

Ode to my jansport

By Mary Ellen Bailor

Ode to my jansport

how bright happy and pink you once were,
at the start of my junior year,
so innocent, and fresh.

The adventures we had,
late nights sneaking out,
the books you carried, the classes we actually attended.

Over night trips, how much I stuffed in you
tooth brushes, jeans, to dresses.

Doc Martins, and jean shorts on and off we went,
juggling sticks poking out.

When I wore all black, we always stood out,
you were so bright happy and pink;
even when I was doom and gloom, faithful in all black.

Ode to my jansport,

how 22 years flew by, and you always sat above my back side.
Through relationships we went, yet you always were returned.
Oh the things you and I should not have done, or places we
should not have gone.

The pounds of sand you withstood, the dragging, the throwing,
the spills, and stains.

The airports searches, the months at a time abroad, just you is
all I needed, no suitcase,
just you above my behind. We survived high school, 2 colleges,
and countless jobs.

Ode to my pink jansport,
the seams, have split, and there is a giant hole.

The seamstress said, no to sew.
No patch will hold, our memories will be close to my heart,
just as you won me over, all alone, all that shop wall,
so horrid, so bright, so pink, yet so happy.
Ode to my bright pink jansport.
No other back pack,
will have as many memories, as you.

The pages that are left blank in this issue of Connections are for you to contribute your own poems, stories and reflections



Making Peace

By Jennifer Polhemus

I will survive this family.
I will watch one brother in the bathtub
full of bloody water.
Instead of helping him stay above the scarlet surface,
I will run into the woods and scream my joyful horror
into the first greens of spring.

I will survive this family.
I will sift through the charred remains
of the place where the youngest brother died.
Instead of weeping for the pain
of his blistering, blackened flesh and boiling blood,
I will claim a grotesquely broken chunk of pottery
as forever my own and leave him in the rubble
to search for the choices he was too terrified to make.

I will survive this family.
I will see another brother's silent body
dangling from the automatic garage door's steely machinery.
Instead of cutting him down for the sake of dignity
I will take the change from his pockets
and buy myself a treat from McDonald's dollar menu.

I will survive this family.
I will return each of their legacies,
attempted, and ultimately abandoned.
I will reclaim my body, starve and carve it into submission,
celebrate the serpent now uncoiled, and hold quiet, sacred space
for my filthiest thoughts, for my triumphant recognition.
I will lay my healing hands on my very own Divinity.

Where I'm From

By Desiree St. Clair Glass

I am from plaid school uniforms,
from Ivory Soap and Ajax.
I am from the dirt farm road
(Brown, bumpy, its dust clinging to every inch of the car).
I am from the vegetable garden,
the leaning cedar tree,
whose outstretched limbs were horses for me.
I'm from dips in the river and dark suntans,
from Algie Addison and Nancy Anne.
I'm from the early risers and the just make doers,
from "Waste not, want not" and "Blessed are the peacemakers."
I'm from penance and pews and patent leather shoes.
I'm from LaPlata and Dentsville, Chaptico and Chapel Point,
fried chicken and homemade ice cream.
From mothers who died too young
and a marriage proposal on the second date.
In a squeaky dresser drawer are baby books and black and whites,
childhood chronicles and captured moments.
I am from these treasures,
glued to me
tighter than the corners on the photographs.



The View from Below, *Heather Christian*

A Gift

By Maya Miller

I never knew why I had been given my name
until I was much older.

“The name Maya,” my parents said, but
in so little words
“was a gift from Maya Angelou herself.”

Angelou who bared the silent vowel in her name first
gifted me more than just her name.

I could have been anyone—
Nova, Octavia, Sarah, Annaliese—

but I was not.

It is not because they were not pretty enough or fancy enough like
the glistening white chandelier
raised above my bedroom ceiling,

sprouting rose-quartz crystals from its wings.

It is not because they did not fit
me either

like Cinderella’s glass slipper on the rotten feet
of her wicked stepsisters.

It is simply because it was meant
to be.

The M that spurted an extra limb,
was no longer the identical twin to
the letter after it.

The name was too short, a few two syllables with
nothing to draw from.
I have been mistaken for Mya; the name like the
bitter taste of citrus fruit on the tongue
and drawing out bits of anger from the pits
of my belly.

Watched as people wrote Miya and Mia on a blank with
ignorance
as if the wording were more appropriate,
simpler.

Then it came again.
“The name Maya,” my parents said, but
this time their voices were filled with
the confidence and love that came with picking a name
for their beloved child

“was a gift from the poet Maya Angelou herself
What a coincidence since you want to be a writer too.”

Alaskan Dream

By Jack Foster

It was a cold winter night,
And they were so close, so tight.

He said, “Stars are not just what they are,
But if you’d like to see them closer, we must go far.
That beautiful place of bitter cold,
It is where I wish to live simply and grow old.”

She said, “But I live for the rhapsody of society,
And I cannot stand the anxiousness of loneliness.
My friends would berate me about sobriety and dubiety;
Do you think I would keep my sweetness and happiness?”

He said, “When we are alone, you do not seem lonely,
And of all the people I could ask to join me, you’d be my only.
I know you are afraid, but there is happiness in a simple life,
And I shall keep your heart warm with pine trees rife.”

Innocent

By Julia Nesmith

My crack in the window shade is just wide enough for the shoes of passersby to be visible. I know I shouldn't peek, but every shoe is unique and the wearer moreso. I like to draw conclusions about the owners of the shoes; I may not be able to see their faces, but shoes tell a lot about a person and where they've come from. Some shoes scream athleticism, some tell stories of street life, others tattle on the workaholic husband.

I'm looking for one pair of shoes in particular. He said he'd be back; told me not to move, not to show my face. So far, I've been successful. Regardless of how boring it is, I know a lot depends on me staying put. My only fear is that those shoes won't appear in the crack, that I'll be all alone.

My breath catches every time I see them. Sturdy, black endurance sneakers, made to hold fast against pursuit, cuffed by the stark, iron-pressed khakis, black or sunburnt tan. There are generally two or three pairs that travel together. They mingle, occasionally stalling under my window, as their owners survey the courtyard. It's times like these that I really get scared.

What if he doesn't see them? Or they see him first? Will he run; make things worse? Will he find another way around? Will they recognize him? Will he have enough time to escape? These and other questions run through my head constantly. I know the answer to every one, but that doesn't lessen the bullets that sear through my heart, every time I think of a life without him.

The menacing black shoes have finally meandered from my view, my chest heaves, and the lights dim; I close my eyes to rid the blue and green dots that have begun to float in front of me. I'm crunched in a corner in a fetal position, like a pill bug. I hadn't realized I was holding my breath the whole time, and a knot has risen up in my chest; I don't know if it's because I'm breathing again or because I want to cry.

The deep whine of a triggered alarm rings and I momentarily think it's all in my head. All kinds of shoes scuffle in my crack, and my chest has become a set of bongos. In my heart I know that his shoes are among them, that he wasn't able to get away unseen, but I can't tear my eyes from my own soleless, shapeless rags tied to my feet.

The thud of those despicable sneakers can be heard across the courtyard, they're getting close, and he doesn't have much time. Suddenly, the courtyard is silent. My eyes flutter to the crack. Mingling with the newly arrived punisher shoes are a pair of sleek milk chocolate, business casual boots, as well as a tattered pair nearly identical to mine, abandoned in their midst. My heart is traveling towards my stomach when a hot stream of breath mists my neck, and my heart changes course, now squeezing up my throat. My wrist is wrenched from my lap and a small parcel is shoved in my mud-caked, gnarled fingers.

"I gotta run. Lie low for a bit. Take what's there. Get out of here." His lips graze my ear as he hisses the command. "I'll meet you when I can." His grip on my wrist releases and suddenly he's gone. I hear his unpadded feet slapping down the hallway, a door closes, and now I'm truly alone.

I let the parcel slip from my hand and pull away the cloth. A little gold trinket, a heart-shaped locket, topples onto the worn concrete floor. A knuckle taps on the crack in my window. I look up to see the owner of the boots, his eyes, boring a hole straight through me. I've been sitting on my feet for too long, so when I start to run, it feels like I'm wading through quicksand.

“Stop.” Several cops are running after me, down the concrete walkway of the courtyard. I glance back to assess how close they are to me. Panting, I look forward again just to be hurled off course.

Before my eyes even crack open, I become aware of the dull throbbing of my head; the coppery taste of blood, mingling with dried vomit, in puddles on my tongue. My wrists are arrested, and a fleeting sense that something isn't right instructs me to acknowledge my consciousness, and view my surroundings. I'm blinded by the purity of the whitewashed walls; a sterile, metallic aroma stings my eyes, and the patter of rubber-soled, probably black, clogs can be heard just outside the one-way mirrored door. The wall opposite the bed I now realize I'm chained to is also mirrored. In an attempt to raise my arm to relieve a sudden tickle in my nose, the chain catches before I've even moved an inch. In a sudden panic, I try my other hand, then my legs. Doing so attracts the attention of the people on the other side of the wall.

The door swings inward and a swarm of white jackets swishing and rubber suctioning to the linoleum approaches the table I'm bound to. The clickity-clacking of high-heels closely following, and the sea of white jackets parts at my feet, to make room for a sturdy little woman, shrouded in a sleek, button-down shirt, tucked neatly into a dainty black skirt. Four pairs of gloved, talon-like fingers press my limbs to the metal bed, another flicks at a needle, at the end of a vial.

“Hold it.” The little lady, clipboard nestled on her hip, runs her eyes over me. The remnants of smoke linger on her throat. “Take her to interrogation. I will see her now.”

Apparently my table is on wheels, because I'm immediately whisked away and parked in a room, similar to the one we just left, only with fewer medical gadgets, and a folding table paired with a leather-back chair in the center. A single, black desk lamp gives off a faint circular glow, the only source of light in the room. One white-jacketed woman checks my chains, another abruptly lifts the portion of the bed near my head, and I wince at the pain that shoots up my spine.

When the pain subsides and I'm able to reopen my eyes, the little woman with the clipboard is hovering beside the leather chair. She authoritatively slaps the clipboard on the table and shifts the chair back a few inches. Apparently satisfied, she plops her tiny self into the chair and flips through the pages on the clipboard.

“Where is your accomplice?” Wow does this woman get straight to the point. “I know you weren’t the one that stole the locket. You were just the one caught. Wouldn’t it be a shame if you had to pay for his crime?” I clamp my mouth shut. Not that I know where he went or anything. It’s just... well I’ve always been taught not to give in to corrupt law enforcement.

All I can see, now that she’s moved her chair out of the light, are her polished black pumps that have probably never seen the light of day. In the corner, near the door, a pair of those military grade sneakers stands guard, just in case I somehow make a run for it.

“Eyes over here, missy. I don’t have all day. You’ll either tell me where your partner is, in the next ten minutes, or you’re stuck here, as his replacement,” her ex-smoker voice drones. Maybe her plan is to bore me into speaking, but all those hours watching shoes go by has made me pretty resilient. I’m ready to sit here for the rest of my life, if I must, but I’ll never hint that I may know where he is. “Very well, then. Take her back to medical.” Making a note of our chat on her clipboard, she nods in the direction of the one-way mirror. The door slides open and I’m pushed from the room, back to the medical ward. Again, I’m held down by several pairs of gloved hands, one preparing a sedative. As the needle pierces a vein in my neck, a tingly, warm sensation travels through my body. I droop limply on the hard metal frame of the bed, and I can barely keep my eyes open. The white jackets, and those rubberized black clogs file out of the room. I’m once again alone with ex-smoker, social worker woman.

“We’ll try again tomorrow.” Her raspy voice attempts to be soothing as she checks my bonds one last time. As she waddles towards the door, the clickety-clacking of her shoes seems to become fainter with every step. She looks back once she reaches the door, before flicking the lights off and disappearing down the corridor.

My greatest fear has been realized and I’m left all alone, paying for the crimes that were never mine.



Contributors

SYDNEY ALEXANDRIA MITCHELL is a first year at CSM and an avid reader and writer. She began writing in 2012 at the ripe age of nine with an unnamed novel following the story of an indigenous girl and a Viking boy in a yet to be colonized North America. Though the edgy and political nature of her work remained the same, she believes her spelling has definitely come a long way. Sydney Alexandria Mitchell hopes you enjoy her short story ‘Freedom’ which follows a kidnapped and almost enslaved royal from Mali.

PATRICK ALLEN is a retired CSM Professor.

MARY ELLEN BAILOR is a student at the College of Southern Maryland (CSM).

STEPHEN M. BERBERICH is a science/garden/business/fiction writer who wrote this short story with a Maryland angle from days of old.

RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN holds an AA in Secondary Education from CSM and BA in English from St. Mary’s College of Maryland. He is the recipient of the Edward T. Lewis Poetry Prize. He was a Lannan Fellow for the Folgers Shakespearian Theater 2004-2005 poetry reading series. He taught poetry in the Great Mills High School 21st Century Program. His poems have been published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has four books of poems, *South of Everywhere* (2005), *Mechanic on Duty* (2008), *The Odd Testament* (2013), *The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town* (2015), and *The Last Call Poems*, forthcoming in (2020).

ELIZABETH BROWN is a photographer who lives in Pennsylvania.

HEATHER CHRISTIAN is a full-time student at CSM who is getting her associates degree for graphic design and enjoys photography and writing poetry.

EDGARD DOMENECH joined the CSM family as the new Mail Services, Shipping and Receiving Coordinator in November 2019. He has been working in mailing and shipping in higher education for 28 years. Taking pictures and woodworking are his favorites hobbies.

JACK FOSTER is a Leonardtown native and graduated from Leonardtown High School and the Forrest Career and Technology Center in 2017. Now a student at CSM pursuing an Associate of Arts and Sciences and afterward, he plans to get a Bachelor's in a STEM field. He has recently picked up a variety of hobbies including sonnet writing, with this sonnet being his first submission to the magazine.

CHAUNTE GARRETT is a student and employee of CSM, a Graphic Design Major with a certificate in Graphic Design.

SEAN MCNUTT is a student at CSM.

MATTHEW MOSES is a student at CSM.

RANDOLPH MAY has focused most of his writing over the last quarter-century on policy-wonkable books, articles, essays, op-eds, and so forth. Aside from seven books he has authored, co-authored, or edited, he has published over 250 other pieces. If you are interested, you can google "Randolph J. May" or "Randolph May" and you will get more than your fill.

Contributors (Cont.)

MAYA MILLER is a Maryland native. She was raised in Waldorf. She has attended CSM for three semesters. She will be graduating this upcoming May with my Associates Degree in Arts. She has dreamed of being a writer since she was in middle school. She writes what she cannot express to others. Her mind is a constant place for plots, dialogue, settings, anything imaginable. She is a lover of fantasy and teen fiction.

JULIA NESMITH is a current student at CSM, with a love of writing, reading, animals, and coffee.

JENNIFER POLHEMUS lives in Pennsylvania's Cumberland Valley. She celebrated her 50th birthday with an eyebrow piercing, fiery tattoo, and a swath of bright pink through her short and sensible brown hair. Now, two years later, she's not much more "age appropriate". Jennifer's fourth collection of poetry, *Balloons: And Other Things That Float*, was released in February 2018 and one of its poems, *Almost Spring*, was nominated by her publisher for The Pushcart Prize. She didn't win, and it was exciting to be nominated again!

DESIREE ST. CLAIR GLASS has written for numerous publications and websites including *Guideposts*, *Short and Sweet Too*, *The Short and Sweet of It*, *Christian Devotions*, *A Joy-Full Season*, *Pen in Hand*, *Dragonfly*, *Element Connection*, *The Times-Crescent* newspaper, previous issues of *Connections*, and her church blog. Currently a high school career & technology education teacher, Desiree has 30 years of experience, teaching all ages from infant to adult. She earned her M.A. at Notre Dame of Maryland University and her B.S. at Salisbury University. She is the mother of three and grandmother of ten. In addition to spoiling the grandkids, Desiree enjoys hiking, kayaking, and life on the farm. Her blog can be accessed at <http://desireeglass.blogspot.com/>.

HOLLY STINNETT COELHO, currently attending CSM as a theater major, is a member of the English Club at CSM. When not writing or working in the theater she is outside enjoying nature.

KATE M. SINE is a Youth Services librarian in La Plata. She transferred from CSM in Fall 2015 and graduated with her Bachelors in English from Frostburg State University. This appearance in *Connections* is her first publication.

RICHARD TAYLOR is a full-time courier for Mail, Shipping, and Receiving for Operations and Planning at CSM.



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