

A close-up, black and white photograph of a cat's face, focusing on its eyes and whiskers. The cat has dark fur with a white patch on its muzzle. The background is dark, making the white whiskers and muzzle stand out.

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Connections

SPRING 2021 LITERARY MAGAZINE



The logo for 'Connections' features the word in a serif font. Behind the text are two overlapping, semi-transparent rectangular shapes. Below the text is a stylized graphic of a spiral or swirl.

Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
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EDITOR

Neal Dwyer

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Christopher Ankney, Sonia Fernandez, Rachel Heinhorst,
Krista Keyes, John Kulikowski, David Phalen, Diana Sydnor

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN

Darius Sanchez

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Connections

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Sunrays, *Diane Payne*

Fireflies

William Miller

That summer I taught him the magic
of a mason jar screw lid,
how to catch them
in prayer palms first.

Six months divorced, his mother
and I spoke only through him,
words on a night breeze,
gentle, harmless.

He learned like kids do
by killing first, clapping to death
before the art of catching light.
A dozen glowed brighter

than a table lamp.
He unlearned that lesson
when words became vicious,
wasp-winged, stingers beneath the skin.

Somewhere, out there,
he lives without light, in his
mother's basement or on
a stone pillow, the curb

of a city street between
three rivers. I'd go there,
find him, if my heart wasn't made
of hollow glass.



Pretty Kitty, *Mona Weber*

city by the bay

Randolph Bridgeman

Shelia works in a headshop
she bubbles like the water
in her glass pipes
and smells like
strawberry zig zags
and peach lip gloss
as she moves under
the flower power posters
in a black light afternoon
a headband blond
in hip-huggers
bellbottomed blues
her midriff swirling the heat
of that summer of love
on the high sidewalks
as buzzing counter culture
heads down the zodiac streets
on their way to
demonstration park

date at the Chinese restaurant

Michael Casey

fortune cookie says
not to wait
to let someone else
open the right door for you
and I know what it means
but is that saying
someone else can open
the left door for you?
would that be all right?
what about the middle door?
and the middle right?
or middle left?
what is the correct
democratic perspective
manifested in that?
and my date says to me
sometimes it's best
not to think about it
just eat the cookie



Amsterdam, Mona Weber

Mary Had a Little Breakdown

Jennifer Polhemus

Autumn trembles brilliantly
I remain transfixed
By her ginger harvest moon.
Beneath its haloed glow

Orange and yellow shiver.
Red yields up to brown.
Death remains beautiful
When decisions must be made.

Does fall cleaning get done this year?
Cover the windows in plastic?
How many pain killers will it take
To scrub the kitchen floor?

This has nothing to do with love, she says.
The apples have grown ripe.
An equal division of labor, she says.
What happened to the girl I married?

She's in a Super 8 Motel room
Trying to decide
While leaves flutter on the ground
Thoughts scatter away.

Two pills or four bottles?
Go back to therapy?
Find the girl that I lost?
Weren't hayrides fun?

Wind breaks the hydrangea bushes,
Takes their blooms away.
I can save one, not them all.
It's already half dead.

Call down the moon, Gaia.
Pull me to another shore.



The following eleven stories were written in Associate Professor John Kulikowski's Spring 2021 ENG-2950: Introduction to Creative Writing class. Students were asked to create microfiction works of no more than 100 words.

The Mind of a Pessimist

Delaney Brittin

If I knew I would be stuck lying on the hot desert sands of the Sahara, I never would have said yes to this crazy trip. I have a hoodie on, despite the blistering heat, to cover up my fair skin, knowing the sunburn I get would be far more stifling than feeling overheated. I took refuge in what little shade the plane wreckage brought me and gazed out towards the endless horizon. I blame myself. This is what I get for trying to be adventurous. I should have stayed back in my cozy urban apartment with my dog.

Catalyst Hat

Megan Burton

I bought a new hat yesterday. It's a straw hat with a ribbon of sunset-looking reds and oranges. Aunt Cheryl said it made me look like a fruit. I told her to suck my dick. I love my hat, even though it has some new rips and tears, and a big brown footprint from the dudes at school. Bryan said it was girly before socking me. Even Mr. Jonso gave me weird looks. What's wrong with being girly? I wish I could wear this hat with a sundress. No one tell my mom I bought one. I'll never wear it outside. Maybe I could one day.

Out of the Water, Into the Ground

Sarina Garity

My feet ache as I wade my way through the forest.
Three days and I am still wandering, looking for something.
What am I looking for?
Escape?
I don't know why I'm here. How I got here.
So I just wander. I wish I had a map.
Not to lead me out of here but to give me some idea of where I
would even want to go.
Maybe I want nothing at all. Nothing but to lay my head down
upon a bed of grass and sleep there, forever under the trees' canopy.
So that's exactly what I do.

The Perils of Being an Unstable Influencer

Lilin Holley

Rain pounds on the roof of his apartment complex. You rummage through your bag as you stand over his lifeless body. You let the gore-splattered icepick fall to the ground from your other hand. Your bloody fingers smudge your pink phone case as the screen illuminates your face. His blood seeps into your designer sneakers. You open your Twitter app, another bloody smudge appearing on your screen.

You type out a few words. Seen by tens of thousands of strangers. Absolutely no regret.

“Thank you for watching, everyone.”

Send.

You pick up the icepick and plunge it into your throat.

Paratrooper

Sidney Maynard

The line shortens and my heartbeat is in my throat, threatening to suffocate me. None of the faces around me give me reassurance, only another reason to question my choices yet again. This is a choice I don't have control over anymore, and the deafening hum of the aircraft I stand in for a few more seconds reminds me of that. There's more yelling, and soon I'm rushing toward the opened door, where the line disappears. I push back my mother's voice telling me I made a mistake, and instead I take that leap no one thought I would.

“Geronimo!”

Silent Film

Sydney A. Mitchell

Mildred sits silently at her vanity, hearing the bellowed “how dare you” and “continue and we will recast you” of last night's argument with the producers. She hears the laughter of her cast-mates. “Oh, look, it's our blacky broad!” one of them says. Mildred raises her head to see his darkly-painted face. Her neck strains as she lowers her eyes and swallows her waned words. Noiselessly, she nods and pushes a damp cloth and soap towards the group. They try and accost her further, but she hears nothing. Mildred only solemnly pats a powder puff to her cheeks.

Waiting—

Hath No Fury

Noah Newsome

She wasn't sure if she could trust him. Not after what happened between them. That other girl she had found him with was lucky; if she found them a second sooner, then the girl he was sleeping with probably wouldn't have walked out of the apartment alive. Luck was not on his side however, as she had left him black and blue before packing up her things and leaving. He had tried calling, texting, even sending letters to say he was sorry, but she was having none of it.

She did agree to meet him, however, before loading her handgun...

Class of 2021

Marissa Steury

She hung the dress on a hook and shoved it all the way to the back of her closet, past her winter coat and communion dress. This was where outfits went to die. She threw her phone across the room, the school's email still open with "Prom Cancelled" in bold red letters. No class, no homecoming, no prom, no graduation. A straight A student to a failure. The year had quickly become a horrible mess. She crawled into bed in full surrender. She looked at her desk, piled with work, and thought that her next senior year will be better.

Hunted

Dana Tellechea

I run through the crowded trees and vines, trying to hide or find a way out of this place. I can still hear the faint noises of metal clanging together slowly approaching behind me. I'm not going to be able to last for much longer. I can already feel the burning in my lungs, and my legs start to give out. With that I trip and fall on my side, the big gash on my arm spewing out more blood than before. I have to move. I get up, only to stumble again, with tears threatening to spill from my eyes.

...It can't end like this.

Be Good and Don't Get into Trouble

Cory Tsark

"Take the keys," I heard from behind me. "This is our chance; she called you up."

I got up and wrote my answer on the blackboard. Returning to my seat, I stepped back towards the cabinet door where her keys were left in the lock and carefully fumbled them into my pocket.

The rest of the day, I felt like the baddest person on campus. Before school let out, I was called to the principal's office.

He grilled my friends and me about Mrs. Lum's keys, but we held it together like seasoned idiots ready to do some dumb shit.

Sleeping Beauty

Mariah White

The raindrops beat onto the marble framed window. Peacefully awoken by the rain's knocking, the princess arose from her silky blush pink sheets, her honey brown hair falling out of its braid. She stood, walking towards the window to sit, a humble smile painted on her face. Her eyes grazed the garden blooming with the brightest roses the springtime had ever created. Gently pressing on the window, she released the stained glass from its marble lock. A sweet, gentle prayer escaped her lips before she tossed her fragile body to greet the bed of roses below in an eternal slumber.

The Stain

Desiree St. Clair Glass

There it sits,
warm and inviting,
arms wide and welcoming
me to sit,
yet I won't.

It boasts puffy pillows,
a soft place to land,
suede-like fabric,
smooth to my hand,
but I won't give—I won't.

It changes colors
as I glide my finger
along its surface,
but I won't linger.
No, I won't.

I spy the spot I blamed on her
the very day it came.
She cried and I tried
to wipe it off,
but it won't budge—it won't.

Just three years old, she was
excited for something new
to try,
but I warned her not with dirty hands.
She said, “Grandma, I won't.”

Yet the spot was proof
she'd disobeyed.
And, oh, how I scolded her that day!
Now I will not sit on the dirty seat.
No, surely, I won't.

For now I know it wasn't her.
It was the delivery guy
who made the spot that made me scold,
that made my sweetheart cry.

But the stain won't go—it won't.

Flight of Dreams

Ashley Groves

I woke up in a mind consumed with shame.
That morning I felt hatred of existing and my name.
I woke up wanting to go back into my castaway dreams.
My dreams contained only what you thought Peter Pan would
introduce to you onscreen.
I saw fear in my eyes through mirrors every day.
I saw the pain of hating to breathe and it constantly replayed.
The depths of the ocean couldn't bear the streams that crossed
my face.
No therapist could evaporate the pain I felt and the desire I
wanted to erase.
I sat in puddles of tears near my droopy pillowcase.
I passed out in a sea of displacement and disgrace.
The restraint of my mind dictated every inch of my physical being.
In my dreams, I felt the brisk of the morning air cause me
unbearable bleeding.
Rather than sitting in a puddle for the rest of eternity,
I decided to find my flight of dreams externally.
I paddled the depths of the ocean and cast out to the sea of a
black hole.
The flight was the title of the story I just unfold.



Sunny Day, Mona Weber

Mom

Moni Soller

"Hilfe, Hilfe!" she cried as her eyes darted around with the look of sheer terror.

She had reverted back to her childhood in a war-torn country where you never knew who was going to terrorize your family or friends. Neighbors disappeared in the night to either escape or had been dragged off by the enemy. A dark time, a dark world meshed with fear and hunger. The cloud of confusion got thicker and darker as she sank deeper into the state of confusion.

"Mom, I am here. What can I do? How can I help? Are you in pain?" I asked as her look of panic settled on her face.

I had heard people speak of, tell terrible tales of it, but never thought I would be caught in the middle of it and its ugly claws. Dementia cruelly robs a person of their life, respect, and dignity. The darkness continued until she took her last breath, not knowing we all stood by her hoping we could help.

Mauve

Kathleen Martin

I have western facing windows
So in the morning the new light is always soft
I told you that, and then we discussed adjectives
You insisted it was weak light
We looked up definitions
And I'll give you that
While I'll still say that it was warm
Regardless of its tones and hues
Because that was just how it made me feel
I ran my fingers through it that morning
And it reminded me of doing the same to your hair
Weightless and silky-soft
We quieted, after that
Contented in each other's presence
Stayed in bed together
You listened to the noises of my house
While all I could think was
We were art at that moment
I felt your arm shift under my head
And your fingers wrapped around mine, mid-air
We touched the light together
I lost track of us
We became complimentary colors
Washed out by dawn

Wilted Flower

Natalie Chapman

You saw I was young
Fresh like a flower
So you plucked at my petals
Taking my power

You liked my hair
So you tore it all off
Leaving me bare
Mind left aloft

You were never a friend
Just a leech on my thighs
Causing my childhood to end
And almost my demise

You destroyed the flower
Petals falling down
Bloody shower,
a seed rose after, all brown



Rushing Through Life, *Elizabeth Pruitt*

A Letter on Life During Covid

Elizabeth Pruitt

My Dearest,

This past year has sucked! For almost a year now, I feel like I have been cut off from the world. Limiting everything I do, who I see. I can't even go see my Dad without having to quarantine when I come back from a three-hour trip. Maybe I asked for this since I moved a state away to start my own life...at least there is Facetime that helps. I'll tell you everything...

Physically, I am ok, I have been sick a bunch this past year, I even got Covid. Those tests are horrible. I hope you don't have to get one. I've had two and they hurt. You know how much I hate being sick and how sickly I was when I was younger with my asthma. Nothing I couldn't handle though. Actually, getting Covid was a wild ride. There are so many different opinions about the whole "virus thing," as people say. I am here to tell you it's real, I had it, and I'm pretty sure in my head I almost died. It was like the flu and pneumonia had a nasty baby and set it loose in my body. I couldn't smell or taste anything for a month! I am really lucky it was just a mild case and I didn't end up needing to go to the hospital. I can't imagine what it would have felt like had it been worse. I am so thankful we caught it before I made anyone else sick.

Mentally, I have been very up and down. Unfortunately, more down than up. But every day is new, and the days are getting better. I went in May to have what I thought was an adjustment made to my anxiety medication and he ended up adding a second medicine. I was devastated. I have been on my main medicine since late 2019 and it was doing great, I was finally getting back to me and caring about life again...then it was like the world shut down. Everything that was stable got pulled out from under me and I went backwards for a while instead of forward. In hindsight, the new medicine was a positive as it let me sleep peacefully with no night terrors that woke me up, screaming. It took the edge off for me to properly process a new way of life. I am happy to report that I only take that PRN now. Things have leveled back out and my brain doesn't feel like it's about to explode. The one constant that has stayed stable in everything has been hubby, and it's been amazing that even when I can't see that I am struggling, he can. He can say come on let's go for a walk and clear our heads, knowing that I need to step away from whatever is upsetting me. Or hey, let's binge some tv show or watch a movie that he'll hate but he knows it's my happy place and will help me feel better and get out of my "funk." Even hey I made you a doctor's appointment. I think it's time to talk to your doctor since you keep putting off going because you don't want to face the reality that you are struggling with your emotions and how to process them. I know that I am not alone and that anxiety is a struggle for so many people. It's so important to take that first step and get help.

I mentioned that things were getting back on track and slowly but surely things are improving. Work was really up and down. I was really worried about being furloughed when campus went remote, but I got lucky and have been on campus steady since August. I love what I do, and I get to meet so many new people. The governor actually opened some things back up last week and

Continued on next page

since the numbers are dropping, I can go see Dad safely. He turns 70 soon, and keeping him safe is my first priority. I want to keep all of my family safe, but Dad is getting older, and his health is okay, but there is always a chance

Speaking of family... my aunt in Michigan died last year. Thanks to Covid there was no funeral or service of any type. No closure for the people that needed it. The local family in Virginia had an outdoor socially-distanced gathering. I didn't go, but I heard it was nice. Everyone else is doing okay, as far as I know. When a family doesn't communicate before a lockdown, there really is no need to communicate during. It only leads to fighting, and right now I don't want any part of that.

Well Dearest, this letter is already longer than I had planned. I hope you are well and know you are in my thoughts. Write soon.

All my Love,
E



Falling, *Richard Taylor*

Distance

Michaila Shahan

October.

Two numbers on the clock now, instead of the one, marked the sun's beaming through the trees. It was cloudy, behind the willow, behind the brick Arts building, maybe 20-or-so miles off in the next town. The blue screen told her those clouds were heading northeast and they'd disguise the blue-yellow sky in an hour. But for this moment, the rarity of October sunlight speckled on her face. Maybe even the blind can see the glow when their eyelids are closed. The light chill brushed her fingertips, and she turned from the warmth to follow it into the shadow of the lamp that stretched from here to there.

One of the clocks was white, one brown; one wasn't there at all. She didn't need the last one to know it was 2:30, 15 minutes before he said, "Any questions? We've run a little late today." Each time there was a vagueness of the tree on the other side of the glass, or a faint glow that gave something shadows, or a dancing of yellow, gold and whitish-light on the walls. Lectures on Mondays were shorter because the field into the woods stretched out longer from the window of the corner room.

The hallways were shadowy. Rubber soles squeaked from rain or sogginess or newness. A little chink from a keychain came every other day from that one person in that one class that came out at 12 o'clock. On Thursdays, the books on her back were heavier, but the day after, she could fit her fingers between the straps.

She took the staircase to the last building, through the last bricks. A goldenness touched the tips of orange at the reach of the sky, almost sparkling, as leaves waved in the wind. It fell closer in the distance, making the earth gleam colorless somewhere between the present tree and the ones beyond the sidewalk. The sound of an engine blended with the drone of radio mumbles, as the college became one red-brick spot in the rear-view mirror. A person and a dog made a swift moment of color on the right side, far enough away not to hit them backing into the gravel and past the mailbox.

March.

In an hour, or possibly half of it, the light turned hazed-out and foggy, and orange. It created shadows of chairs, shelves, bedframes...a laptop which moved constantly but hosted dust. It came at her own will, and left when she reached tiredly for a metal knob. She couldn't remember if she'd run late or was early, because there was no on-time or not.

A pattern of openness, blackness, rain, and window-filtered light erased the names of each day. She couldn't remember when it was Thursday or Monday, or which order they came in. The morning pinkness woke her and she tottered into a room of spoons and pans and a little window over a sink. Drip – drop. No cars were outside, not even the little yellow Toyota. A black silhouette of that man and his leash and the furry one attached to

Continued on next page

it. Around him the chill warmth of March's pink-orange sunrise made microwave-like lines. She thought of what he looked like, what he wore when she would see him in the warmth and the light at 4:20 pm. What the other half of his face made up and how and if he smiled when he talked. The estimate he made of his own health to be wearing that around his mouth and nose outside, and perhaps, the weakness she never knew of it. The scuffling of her slippers on gravel was making a noise different than they sounded on the rug; she was lifting her palm to him. A disappearing of fuzzy greyness revealed another hand, several lengths away and up the hill. "Stay safe!"

Streaks of yellow caught on a few green buds. She was watching it stray filtered on the black keys, across her finger knuckles. 8:15 a.m., the dusty silence mingled with a tick tick of emerging letters on Word was interrupted with a sigh of her own and a pause. It was all a change, but more, it was all distance.

Chesapeake

Michaila Shahan

I was born here
Balmy breath from the other side,
Mingled Mimosa, like hair
High tide takes away what was already a sliver
Pushing against the reeds, the boxes of wood with shutters
Footprints of crushed white shell on the pavement,
Always inclining
Put poot
They never change, dotting along the waves with the other white
noisy ones
They never change,
Tanned to another skin color, walking with the smell of coolness,
of clay, of crab
Of shadows on humid days
With salt dried on their hands, their backs
And lines, like the bars of sand,
Marking the openings of their green, grey, sometimes bluish eyes
It is always changing
The sounds that come faster, louder than then
Always coming back, always going out,
Never touching the sand, sometimes looking, sometimes saying
I wasn't born here

Songbird

Taylor America

The sweet summer days provide the warmth that she yearns for
She basks in the sunlight, loves it even when it burns her
She sits in an empty field, plucking dandelions from the ground
As she questions whether loneliness is meant to be so profound

Her only companions are in the lyrics she writes
She's an audacious little songbird with a fear of heights
She got a little dizzy when her world turned upside down
Wonders how to stay grounded when her head's up in the clouds

Scribbles in her notebook to make the pain go away
Searching for her purpose, hopes she'll find it one day
She knows that she has work to do, but doesn't know when to finish
And she wonders what her world would be like without her living in it

She truly always has been somewhat somber and melancholy
But the darkness in the world has not yet stripped her of her purity
Her sadness is always dominant, as though it runs through her veins
And her weary heart is in a constant struggle to flush out the pain

Her only consolation comes in the form of a song
Her music always soothes her, makes her feel like she belongs
When life becomes too tedious and living becomes a chore
There's nothing that can't be solved by an elaborate classical score

Scribbles in her notebook to make the pain go away
Searching for her purpose, hopes she'll find it one day
She knows that she has work to do, but doesn't know when to finish
And she wonders what her world would be like without her living in it

When her thoughts become too loud, music relieves her of
the burden
It cradles her in a sweet embrace and comforts her when
she's hurting
Music is her remedy, her shelter, and her home
Whenever she hears music, she no longer feels alone.



Abandoned Fields

Sherbie Corazza

He knows nothing of the soil, except her breaking.
The swell of power within his grasp.
Her face as she crumbles.
The musings of a weak man.
Self-centric at the expense of his children.

He knows nothing of his seed, except they carry his name.
The swell of pleasure and release.
His seed left unwatered.
Unsheltered by his shadow.
Left to scorch in summer sun.

At whim, he returns from pastures appearing green.
To curse the Earth in his own field.
She no longer yields her fruit to him.
She no longer longs for the mud of his boots.
She no longer allows herself to bend beneath his weight.

His fragile tyranny threatened by the strength of her clay.
Her water dried deep beneath his feet.
Left to realize that it was never the force of the plow.
But her willingness to self-sacrifice, the sole source of his harvest.

In solitude, she learned the strength of feral freedom.
Beneath moonlight she found her own voice reminding
You belong... among the stars colliding.
You belong... to the River that runs alongside you.
You belong... in the hands of the heart that will stay.

Cool Summer Mornings

Sean McNutt

Cool summer mornings
just outside the steel city
in the skinny, tall home
that has housed four generations
of those who are loved
and those I have lost
serve to remind me
of all that I still have.

Sean McNutt is a recent graduate from CSM and is still figuring things out.

Five Ws and One H

Micaiah Lloyd

I desire to know the voices of my own,
To hear answers to questions that have never been asked
To know narratives of my lineage that are lost to me
The lives of my women whose stories have only been told
secondhand to the men she nurtured in her bosom

I ask

Who did you cry to in a world where
dark women are the shoulders to be cried on,
and the shoulders to be climbed on?

What is like it when the work on the field was done
and the emasculated needed their fill of worth?

Where were you when the thick lipped became
thinned at the expense of your freedom;

When the lyrics of abolition rang but the songs of enfeebled men
was all that was sung in your home;

When the violence endured came from ivory chants
and ebony melodies;

When you were the most exponential voice of a movement but
the most linear in its forthtelling;

When your duality was patronized, an abandoned issue for the
breeze;

When your liberation was a gift given by a brother,
only unlocked by his key;

When the choice had to be made:
my womanhood or my blackness?

When... and when?

Why do they not know that each burden is the same,
that neither is first nor last, but inconceivable equal?

And how?

How were able to see value in yourself
when the world that values you the least?

As time continues, I desire to know the voices of my own
To know answers to questions that have never been asked
To examine the narratives of my lineage that are lost to me
and that are found to me
The lives of women whose stories are currently being told
secondhand to the men who promised her freedom.



Butterflies

Maria Sokolowski

Sammy was more than nervous to start kindergarten. The last time that he had been around any children his own age was over a year ago, before what Mommy called “the end times.” These days it was just Mommy, Daddy, Grandma, Grandpa, brother and sister. And masks. All the masks. Sammy was sick to death of them. But in just a few weeks, it was time to start school - backpacks and pencils and learning how to read and write and tie his shoes. Starting school during a pandemic was enough to make any five-year old anxious. There were new friends to meet and Mommy had told him over and over not to lose his mask. But Sammy had one more thing that made him nervous, more than masks and new friends and what Daddy would put in his lunchbox every day - Sammy was a boy who wore dresses.

Sammy loved dresses. He had been wearing them since he could remember. Mommy would tell him that he asked for her to make him a skirt when he was two years old, which she obliged by tearing out the seam of a pair of his old cotton shorts and creating a makeshift pencil skirt. Soon Sammy was wearing dresses all over the house, pretending to be his favorite Disney princesses. In a single afternoon he could be Cinderella at the ball and Queen Elsa in her ice castle. Mommy said that it had been too cold for dresses during the winter, but summer was a wonderful time for sundress with straps and pleated ruffles on the bottom. Fall was right around the corner, and even though Sammy was nervous about the looks he would get, he insisted that it was still warm enough to wear a dress on the first day of school.

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School was starting in two weeks, so Mommy plopped Sammy in his car seat and drove to Target, in search of school clothes and last minute supplies. August in California is the temperature of the sun, so Sammy insisted on wearing a sundress on their shopping adventure, telling Mommy that the mask was going to make him too hot to wear a t-shirt and shorts. Sammy bounded out of the car in the Target parking lot, not having been to many brick and mortars since “the end times” began. Just going anywhere these days was like a vacation. Mommy lead Sammy to the clothing section, not directing him to the aisles of arbitrarily gendered shirts and pants, but taking his lead, watching him search for the perfect outfits for first meetings with new best friends. As Sammy approached a row of gowns with butterflies and tulle ballet trim, a shopper did a double take at the beaming boy leafing through the garments.

Mommy could see that this was going to be a confrontation; an uninvited opinion from a stranger over both parenting and clothing choices were not frequent, but also not new to her. But suddenly, before the opinionated stranger could speak, another adult appeared, as if out of nowhere, and spoke to Sammy.

“I love that dress,” the tall, thin, beautifully dressed person said. “I have an adult one at home that looks just like it.” Sammy looked up to see a person who looked like him, only bigger. They were wearing a lovely sundress with little flowers on it, their eyes smiling above their mask. Sammy couldn’t believe what he was seeing. This was the first time that he felt connected to another adult that wasn’t his family. The kind face glanced at the uninvited stranger, who slunk away, too baffled and startled to announce her displeasure. “I hope that you ask your mommy to buy that one for you,” they said. “Everyone should wear what makes them happy.” And before Mommy could ask any questions, or say thank you, the well dressed stranger was gone. Sammy was excited as he got dressed for the first day of school. Mommy had bought him the dress with the butterflies and tulle, and even though the encounter with the kind stranger made him feel better about his clothes, Sammy still had bubbles in his

tummy. Mommy told him that her and Daddy had spoken to the school and they knew that he would be dressing a little differently than the other kids, and that was ok. Sammy still had the feeling that not everyone would think it was ok.

Mommy and Daddy got Sammy out of the car and grabbed his backpack and lunchbox. The bubbles were growing in Sammy's stomach as he felt the eyes of parents and students looking at him, as his dress sparkled in the sunlight. Was this a mistake? He thought about asking Daddy to take him back to the car and change him into the shorts and dinosaur t-shirt that they brought for back up. As Sammy slowly eased into the classroom, he searched the room for new faces, and for the teacher who would certainly have something to say about his attire. "My friends, please take a seat on the carpet," came a voice from across the room." "I am so excited to meet all of you. My name is Mx. Terry, and I will be your teacher this year." Sammy couldn't believe it. Here was the same beautiful, kind face that greeted him two weeks ago in the store. Mx. Terry was wearing a pink blouse with little butterflies and a black skirt with black running shoes. "I see we have some nervous faces this morning," they said. "It's ok. I'm nervous every first day of school. But we are going to have so much fun together." Mx. Terry looked at Sammy and winked.

When Mommy and Daddy came to pick Sammy up from school, he couldn't wait to tell them about his day. A girl named Lisa said she liked his dress and told him that she had one that was purple that looked just like it. A boy named DaVon said that he liked Sammy's drawing of a dump truck, and then asked him to play with the dump trucks on the playground at recess. And Mx. Terry said that they couldn't wait to see what Sammy was going to wear tomorrow. Sammy was more than nervous to start kindergarten. The last time that he had been around any children

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Contributor Notes

TAYLOR AMERICA is a CSM student.

RANDOLPH BRIDGEMAN graduated from St. Mary's College of Maryland. He is the recipient of the prestigious Edward T. Lewis poetry prize. His poems are published in numerous poetry reviews and anthologies. He has five books of poems, "South of Everywhere" (2005), "Mechanic on Duty" (2008), "The Odd Testament" (2013), "The Poet Laureate of Cracker Town" (2015), and "The Not So Happy Hour Poems" forthcoming in 2022.

DELANEY BRITTIN lived amongst Floridian palm trees for 11 years before journeying to Maryland where crabs and Old Bay run rampant. Her mother would sometimes say, "You shouldn't spend so much time escaping into books; it's not reality." To which she would respond, "But that's exactly why I read them." While she enjoys writing fiction of her own; she also expands her writing to things such as journaling, poetry, and music.

MEGAN BURTON has always loved turning words into adventures. As a toddler she could be found in a rocking chair reading picture books upside down. A few years later she was scribbling poems and stories in a glittery notebook. Now she does a similar thing, just legibly.

MICHAEL CASEY has published two books of poetry: "There It Is: New & Selected Poems," published by Loom Press of Lowell, Massachusetts, and "Obscenities," part of the Yale Younger Poets series.

NATALIE CHAPMAN is a freshman at CSM. "The poem I wrote is a little dark but that is life. I hope to share my words and experiences with others so that they may feel less alone or simply gain a better understanding of my authentic voice. I am not sure what my future has in store but I do know it holds great promise and lots of hope."

SHERBIE CORAZZA has contributed to Connections before.

SARINA GARITY is 17 years old, born and raised in Maryland, and a student at North Point High School doing dual enrollment at CSM. She spends her free time reading—particularly fantasy romance novels—and shipping fictional characters. When it comes to reading and writing stories, she focuses more on character than on plot. Her goal is to write a novel with characters and relationships readers feel connected and attached to.

DESIREE ST. CLAIRE GLASS' writing has appeared in 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, and previous editions of Connections. Currently a high school career and technology education teacher, St. Clair Glass has 30 years of experience, teaching all ages from infant to adult. She earned her master's degree at Notre Dame of Maryland University and her bachelor's at Salisbury University. She is active in her church, serving as trustee, greeter, and leader of a women's small group. She is the mother of three adult children and grandmother of 10. In addition to spoiling the grandkids, she enjoys kayaking, hiking, and life on the farm. St. Clair Glass' blog can be accessed at desireeglass.blogspot.com.

ASHLEY GROVES is a CSM student. This would be the third time she submitted a poem for Connections Literary Magazine. Her first poem, "Life Hurts," was submitted for the spring 2017 issue. Her second poem, "Strength in Me," appeared in the fall 2020 issue. This issue features "Flight of Dreams" which captures the essence of depression and the tribulation of challenging depression. A main side effect of depression is the loss of interest in regular daily living and the main character battles the addiction of sleeping her dreams away.

LILIN HOLLEY is a gender non-conforming cryptid last spotted in Mechanicsville, Maryland. He is known to write about strange and disconcerting things, hacking up manuscripts in front of the Leonardtown Campus on full moons.

MICAIAH LLOYD is a CSM

KATHLEEN MARTIN is a history major who loves words and grammar, and how they impact syntax and voice. She wrote this a while ago and never intended to do anything with it.

SIDNEY MAYNARD is a 20-year-old college student, aiming for creativity in not only her written work but in her life overall. Her origin of life has no distinct place since she has moved among states and countries throughout her childhood, shaping her work out of personal experiences and nature. Always creating artwork, she hopes to illustrate as well as write many short stories for future avid readers.

SEAN MCNUTT writes from time to time.

WILLIAM MILLER'S eighth collection of poetry, "Lee Circle," was published by Shanti Arts Press in 2019. His poems have appeared in "The American Poetry Review," the "Penn Review," "Shenandoah," "Prairie Schooner," and "West Branch." Miller lives and writes in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

SYDNEY ALEXANDRIA MITCHELL loves Billy Holiday and Louis Armstrong and has always been drawn to art which encaptures the zeitgeist of tragedy in time. Because of this, she began writing harrowing historical fiction at the seasoned age of nine. Though she has since adopted modern realism, historical fiction still has its grasp on Sydney's atman and has erupted in her short story, "Silent Film."

NOAH NEWSOME is an undergraduate student with a globetrotting past. Born in Virginia 21 years ago, he has moved nine times. This travel is due to his father's service in the United States Navy and has allowed him to live all over the country and the globe, from California to Tennessee, to even Japan. His writing is inspired by the many sights he has been given the privilege of seeing over the course of his life, as well as his experience in the Boy Scouts of America, with which he earned their highest award: the rank of Eagle Scout. His breadth of experience will only continue to grow as he keeps writing and traveling.

ELIZABETH PRUITT moved to Southern Maryland three years ago. She enjoys traveling and capturing memories while in the moment.

MICHAILA SHAHAN is a native of Calvert County and in her second year at CSM. She loves reading historical fiction and learning about the culture and ideas of past and present generations.

MARIA SOKOLOWSKI The main character of Sam is inspired by my five-year-old son, Obery. Obi is gender fluid, and has been since he was two years old. He is set to begin Kindergarten in September, and I am positively terrified about how his classmates will react to his outward appearance. The rest of the story is what I would hope for Obi for his first year of school. In the story, the teacher is the hero, but Obi is his own hero, speaking up for himself whenever anyone has said anything questioning to him while we have been out in public (spoiler: it is always an older woman who says something, and his answer has always been, “You’re wearing pants, and I wear dresses, and both things are okay”).

He is my hero every day for choosing to be himself.

MONI SOLLER is a CSM student.

MARISSA STEURY is an 18-year-old dual enrolled high school senior attending classes at CSM. Her childhood consisted of a suitcase that carried her across the East Coast and Europe, but she currently resides in Illinois. She plans to tap into her passion for writing to pursue an English degree at Allegheny College next semester.

DANA TELLECHEA is a 20-year-old college student, born and raised in Southern Maryland. She is the youngest of four daughters and has always had a strong sense of creativity in everything she does, whether it be sketching out a character or writing something on a whim. She hopes to become an animator someday and help inspire people through art and storytelling.

CORY TSARK is a reluctant reader who chooses to write what he experiences. Joining the Air Force in 1997, he spent the bulk of his time in and out of the Middle East. Tsark's passion for responsible and creative re-creations of his past is evident within his writings.

MARIAH WHITE is a 20-year-old college student studying communication. Having an eye for fashion and design, she spends a lot of time designing new outfits and coming up with different styles. Born with a compassionate and empathetic heart, she strives to help people in any way she can and be a positive influence on others.



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