



Mildred Haun Review Journal

A Celebration of Appalachian Literature, Culture and Scholarship

2021

The Beauty of the Metaphor is that it Breaks Down

Andrew P. Dillon

I've never had much faith in words,
but with these knobby knuckles, I'm no guitarist.

With this color defect,
I'll never paint. Too bad I have only joy & sorrow,

one & a half languages, and the belief
that all words become useful if you hold on to them long enough.

Too bad there are no words
that will convince you to love me again. I know because

no word resonates with heartbeat
or synapse the way a dulcimer snakes into gyri & fissures.

No word carries meaning
like the wounded voice. Some days I just read these poems

in front of the open window.
Even if that sound can't climb the roof, I have to believe

my words can find their utility
somewhere in the ether—that my voice can still find

the frequency at which the past dissolves
and the tongue's flapping can mean something like a new beginning.

I Feel the Earth Move

Andrew P. Dillon

Today, NPR reminds me that five plainclothes New Orleans police officers murdered James Brissette, 17, & Ronald Madison, 40, and seriously wounded four others trying to cross Danziger Bridge to escape flooding six days after Hurricane Katrina.

I had forgotten about that. Maybe breathed it in once, years ago, felt its poison leech into capillaries, then sighed it out toward the clouds.

Too much hurt at once, back then, to remember every story. How could we track all the ways we injure each other? And who would take that job? There are so many atrocities occurring at just this moment, and I'll hear of only one or two. Can you fault me for being relieved?

In my own body, a vein slowly occludes, building steam before that sticky bullet can rip through my lungs.

I grind my jaw so often, one side swells and radiates down my neck, beneath my shoulder blade & collarbone, so every breath bores deeper into the body I'm trying to salvage.

Everyone I love is dying of either cancer or hope.

There are so many reasons to give up on this life, but I keep finding one or two so I can ground myself in the new day.

I tell Alyssa this, and she hugs me. A deep hug that makes me believe again in old souls. I feel the sky tumbling down as a clear rain rinsing acid & used-up cells from muscle folds.

Then the baby inside her kicks, maybe because the energy we exchange has blanketed him, and I remember that in a month, I will be Uncle MadBear.

I'll sing Motown & Brill Building to him when he cries: *Ooo baby, when I see your face/ Mellow as the month of May/ Oh darlin, I can't stand it/ When you look at me that way.*

He'll watch me & Niles embrace each time we say hello & goodbye, and know each man charts the boundaries of his own affection. And one day, at a Vols tailgate, we'll probably pass him his first pull of whiskey.

I take a breath that seems to fill a third lung, exhale a year of worry, & kiss Alyssa's cheek. Tomorrow, I have another reason to dig my heels into this perilous earth. And another poem to write.

for Alyssa, Niles, & Arthur

tar- Banner

Andrew P. Dillon

O can you see the dawn's
proud
stripes— bright

rockets, bombs—
proof that

the land of the free

dimly seen through mist
where haughty repose,
that towering steep,
half conceals, half discloses

glory reflected?
O! long may it wave

where
havoc and battle
leave us no more.
Blood
could save the slave
from terror, the grave,
the star-spangled banner in
the home of the

freemen
between their home and
Heav'n .
Praise the Power,
then conquer. It is just.
Our motto: God

O'er the free. shall wave

Killing Your Darlings

Andrew P. Dillon

You thought you had a feel for the grip of the roof:

the right shoes, a proper distribution of weight. But
here you are, pigeon-toed,

the ball of one foot & opposite heel hanging
off a ledge. For a moment

you're weightless, and you understand

how even your hair could shift the balance—how
just one word will pitch its mass.

Meditation

Andrew P. Dillon

most afternoons I check into my body feel its weight
where it's going/ how its breaths aches fears exist/ in
a single arbitrary moment I find myself/ in your office
you sit at your desk I turn/ your chair kneel down wrap
my arms around your waist/ lie my head against your
chest tell you I love you/ my heart

swells like a swirl of wind/ gathering leaves grows
so large it snares/ a sunshower pours cool rain/
through my arms and belly glows warm & orange
and surrounds you/ you take my head like happiness
were a quarter/ you could coax from behind my ear
say/ I love you too and radiate your ice blue light/ for a
moment

time is visible and a color I can't name/ except to say
clouds over an ocean horizon/ at sunset/ words like *joy*
& *grief* carry no meaning the clouds touch/ every pain
we've known until light fades to gray each in our own
town/ it would make no difference if not/ for the new
color you shine from the ceilings of your city/ house
& my aching knees that prove we can/ unbind whole
days from time's rule when/ we let our souls bloom.

for SM

There's No Place

Chrissie Anderson Peters

Jo was missing “home” something awful lately. She could go back to her family’s graves and put flowers there. She could go back to her hometown and visit old friends. But she could not, in truth ever go “home” again because none of the places that she had ever called home existed or still belonged to anyone she knew. There were very few family members left there in her old hometown, and all of the “homeplaces” had been sold for various reasons.

When her Aunt Lucinda had sold her grandparents’ last place, Lu sold it less than a month after Jo’s Mamaw had died. She had sold all of the furniture and other pieces of Mamaw’s life in less than a week, starting the day after the funeral was over. Jo hadn’t understood that “need” to be shed of all of those memories. For one thing, Lucinda said that it hurt to be reminded, but she also needed the money. Jo thought, in the end, that was mostly the reason for the huge hurry in shuffling off the estate, and was bitter for quite some time about not having a family “place” to gather. There was still her mother’s and stepfather’s, on the “God-forsaken hill,” when the weather permitted, even her 4-wheel drive SUV to reach their house on said hill. When Jo’s mother died two years after her Mamaw, that was gone, too.

Lucinda lived in a small trailer, crowded with dogs and desperation. Jo’s younger sister Pauline lived in the doublewide where their mother had last lived, but it had never been “home” to Jo; even though her grandparents had lived there when she was younger and she could remember some good times there from then, it was also the site of some traumatic memories from her teenage years. With memories like that, it would never be home, just a house. Besides, Jo was no great housekeeper, but Pauline was even worse. Her place was bigger than

Lucinda’s, but reeked just as much of loving animals, and letting them have the run of the place. The two times that Jo had had to spend the night when their mother died, to try to help with funeral or estate matters, her asthma had kicked in and she had thought that she would die before the night was over. From that point on, she just booked a hotel twenty-five minutes away. It seemed healthier for her on many levels.

Jo couldn’t get shut of the feeling of having nowhere she belonged to anymore, though, no matter how hard she tried. *All of my family homes are gone now, she kept thinking. There is no front door to knock on. No kitchen to go into and know that there’s something special waiting for you. No mail to rifle through, to see who has written and what they’re up to.*

There are memories, she went on. Sometimes bittersweet memories, sometimes fond memories, and they get all tangled up, like that day that Mamaw pulled the butcher knife on Mom, little Paulina, and me, over something going on in the hayfield. Memories that can make me laugh until I cry, or cry until I can smile again.

There were no two ways about it. Jo missed having a physical place that belonged to her family, whether it was her grandparents, or her mother. But she wondered if the place could exist without the people? Was it possible to have a “homeplace” without the matriarchs there to fix your favorite dinners and the patriarchs to plant the fields? Without all of them there to share their stories and pass on their experiences and collective wisdom? Could a “homeplace” ever exist again, now that all of those brilliant people were gone from her life?

What would she do if she did have one and could go back? She decided that she would most like to have one for the purpose of going home to pull herself together and regroup for whatever the next chapters of life held sometimes – to cry it out, draw strength from others, and be able to get back on the road and to her own life. She'd definitely like to sit down to some meal prepared especially with her in mind, because she was coming up to visit for the day, maybe meatloaf, or pan-fried pizzas, and peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream. She'd like the opportunity to sit down at the dining room table and play rummy again with her mom and her Mamaw, after they all ate, to watch her Mamaw cheat and maybe decide to turn a blind eye today, because she's competing so fiercely with her mother for the win. She'd do just about anything to sit down across from her Papaw, who would good-naturedly rib her about her hair, ask what in the world she has done to it, and if he paid for it, could she have it undone, all the while knowing that he likes it okay, despite the odd colors and cuts that she chooses, because never once has he actually given her the money to get it changed, and if he truly didn't like it, he surely would. And while they're sitting there laughing, getting him to tell

some old family story that she has heard a hundred times, because she knows that someday, she will hunger for those stories with everything in her.

Jo took a look at the graves of her grandparents and mother again, on this chilly almost-spring day. There was no place like that now and she mourned that as hard as she mourned these people. A lumpy bed that she could crash on. A sagging sofa almost as old as she was. An old easy chair that was anything but easy to get out of. Those are the places of her adulthood and her youth, the places treasured by her heart and by her people. And as her people passed, so did their places, to somebody else's hands, the person with the most money to salve a hurting heart and wallet. Because there was never much left in that last department and money was needed.

She put down her final silk bouquet and thought almost aloud, *It really doesn't matter, because money will never bring back anything real to the table, even if the table were still there.* She missed those open doors and dear hearts. More than anything in the world. Because now there was no place like home. There was simply no place.

Knoxville Week

Sam Campbell

Monday: seven foot four,
bearded, with Richard Petty eyes.
Entrepreneur and creator,
we tested his original card game
out at Remedy Coffee before Pad Thai.
He won. I got food poisoning.

Tuesday: so round I thought he'd be earthly.
Job ☒ House ☒ Car ☒
Comic book conversations;
stuck somewhere between 12 and 50
without finding balance.
Mature in all the wrong ways,
He had me home by nine.

Wednesday: a warrior,
Marine turned student
with a one-way to Russia.
Beat me at darts, beat me at billiards,
fed me sushi on Gay Street
then jetted away to Macchu-Picchu—
but not before asking me to come along.

Thursday: thirty and had seen a thing or two,
retired intelligence officer
and terrorist interrogator.
Looked like an off-brand Superman,
made Afghanistan sound like Memphis.
I wondered why it was so easy to lie to him.
Friday's name was Chip. He had one on each shoulder.
Another marine, but falling apart:
Half deaf in one ear, Crohn's, nightmares,
the unfortunate hobby of talking about himself.
But, damn.
that six pack and cinnamon hair.

Saturday, a Lambda Chi,
“taking a semester off”
—every semester—
Dinner of failed conversation, dessert of silence.

Sunday, a cop, equipped with handcuffs.
Malaysian with a southern accent,
an arsenal of Asian jokes,
just wanted to come to my apartment.
I cancel Starbucks.
Sunday should be for self-care anyway.

Matt

Sam Campbell

had “Hakuna Matata”
tattooed on his ass
and he lived by it—
my trilingual redneck
with a hound dog.

He rolls up to my apartment
forty minutes late
with dolphins on the dashboard,
fuzzy dice hanging from the rearview.

Credence Clearwater Revival
drowns out my complaints.
I cannot help but laugh
when he shouts “Hakuna Matata”
over the melody and I translate:
You need to loosen up, doll.

He got demoted to Corporal
for showing that moon over Japan,
years before I entered his orbit.
Three weeks he phased through my sky,
waxing and waning before he eclipsed.

With grand declarations of return,
I now get notes from Yaroslavl.
I have no doubts he’ll come back for me
forty minutes too late.

Sleepless in Speedwell

Sam Campbell

The mind runs on darkness like gasoline
fuels the Jeeps I envy, galloping
down the highway, neural pathways
lit up like Christmas lights brighter
at bedtime, then dimmer all day. Conversations
on repeat like the chorus of a Carly Rae
Jepson single: I really really really really really
really wish I could sleep. Alternatives
to decisions pave roads in infinite directions
only visible after midnight. I wander
until breathless, exhausted without moving.
Eyes open. Eyes shut. No matter.
Bottle of NyQuil, magic potion equipped
like life's an RPG, I drink a capful,
shudder, return to bed. The mattress
is cool and with five hours left until sunrise,
slip into toss-and-turn dreams I won't
remember.

Ode of the Seventh Day

Sam Campbell

Late to rise, let worms rest
beneath earth, rain-softened.
Auto-brewing French roast,
smoky and intense, burgeoned.

Sunlight peeps between curtain-cracks.
I stir slow, limbs unraveling, check my phone;
ignore the weather, headlines, maniacs,
lift myself up, naked, and happy to be alone.

I drink deep, window-gaze at the world already awake.
Sunday opens and gifts time. I do everything:

watch *South Park*

paint a replica *Starry Night*

practice piano-scales and arpeggios

write a novel

walk down to the lake.

I drop stones into the water, break my reflection.

Evening bath is robin's egg blue
liquid; a mountain bubbles over me.
Sponge off week's residue,
exfoliate and trim cactus-legs.

Late to retire, admire midnight's velvet hue—
attempt to manufacture more minutes—
1,440 is far too few—
For my Sunday, beautiful Sunday.

Blue Willow and Rococo

Amy-Ellen Laws

I am
Smoky Mountain sunrise and Champs de Mars sunset
biscuits and baguettes
honeysuckle and Chanel N°5
Tennessee Williams and Victor Hugo
cornbread and crème brûlée
Dolly Parton and Edith Piaf
patchwork quilts and tapestries
Highway 11E and the Champs-Élysées
Je suis tennesseeseaise
with that
Je ne sais quoi
I am
Blue Willow and Rococo.

Snow Day

Jane Sasser

February 4, 1996: It snowed some more. Most churches cancelled. Dick, Nell, and Rosa came in afternoon. They had more ice than we did. We went to Monroe and ate at Denny's. The trees looked like fairy land with all the ice on them and the sun shining.
–Belzora Sasser's pocket diary

Before he died, snow days were joys,
memories of years of children home
from school, their rushing out
to snowball fights, to sliding down
pasture hills on plastic trays spirited away

from the lunchroom at school,
laughter sharp in cold winter air,
and inside her kitchen, windows weeping
from her oven's heat, baking bread,
and the stovetop, steam of cocoa.

Or later, the years they made chowder
and parched peanuts to eat
by the crackling fire,
just the two of them, cradled
in their warm ark in a world

gone wet and white. Now
it's the quiet she feels, stillness
unbroken by another living thing.
Only when her siblings come,
their voices arguing and waking

the dead of this day,
can she lift her head to see,
once again, the wonder
of warming sun setting fire
to fingers of ice-clad twigs.

The Paranormal Press:

‘True’ Gost Stories from Historic East Tennessee Newspapers

Michael Sobiech

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Introduction

Americans believe in ghosts. A fall 2019 survey by *YouGov* found 45% believe ghosts either probably or definitely exist, and 36% believe “they have personally felt the presence of a spirit or ghost” (Ballard). Chapman University’s 2018 “Survey of American Fears” found even higher numbers, with 58% believing “places can be haunted by spirits” (“Paranormal America 2018: Chapman University Survey of American Fears”). This same survey found that Americans in 2018 were more likely to believe than in 2016, and one wonders how a year of COVID exile at home might affect our current beliefs about haunted houses. Speaking of which, in 2017, Realtor.com surveyed people’s willingness to live in a haunted house (“Realtor.com Survey Indicates Haunted Homes Don’t Always Have to be a Deal Breaker”; Meyers). A third of those surveyed said they were willing to live in a haunted house, but most of them wanted something non-spiritual in exchange:

- 40% needed a reduction in price
- 35% needed a better neighborhood
- 32% needed more square footage
- 29% needed more bedrooms

What people will do for granite countertops or an en suite bathroom!

Americans believe in ghosts. Americans in Appalachia believe in ghosts, too—or, at least, they like a good story. Folklore includes ghost stories, and in the early 1930s, folk-song scholar John Lomax noted that the mountains of Tennessee were “the richest in folklore of any portion of the United States” (qtd. in Olson and Cavender 399). Our region boasts a number of ghost legends and tales; the majority, though, never make it onto the printed page; instead, they’re told and retold as part of oral tradition. But sometimes, these stories make it into print; sometimes they make it into newspapers;

sometimes people tell them not as fiction, but as fact—as “true” ghost stories.

Tonight, I’m sharing the initial results of a sabbatical project I will continue after my sabbatical ends—collecting our region’s ghost lore. I’m starting with East Tennessee, but I hope to expand this to other areas as part of what I envision, The Appalachian Ghost Project. (Go big or go home, I guess.) My project aims to recover some of our region’s history, some of our stories, for we tell our history through our stories. And it’s a project, perhaps, that will challenge stereotypes; for while ghost stories can be fun, they can also be used to diminish other people as superstitious and backward. In the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (2006), Bill Ellis describes how those “who perpetuate stereotypes of Appalachian subcultures continue to link people in the region to beliefs in quaint superstitions” (865).

I do need to state one caveat, here at the start: there are many caveats to my research, but for time’s sake, I’m not going to go into them. I will start by briefly discussing how I have been conducting my research, and then I will talk about some results from my research. We will have time at the end for questions. If we run out of time, feel free to email me at msobiech@cn.edu. Email me not only if you have questions, but if you have stories—I’d love to hear them.

Research

For my project, I’m using Newspapers.com, a digital archive of over 20,000 newspapers. Let me briefly explain how to use this database. You begin by typing in a search term, which will bring up results, and when you click on the results, it will give you a thumbnail view of the term. If the thumbnail is promising, you click on it, and the whole newspaper page comes up, with the search term highlighted on the page.

There are multiple terms I could use in my search for the spectral, for there is more than one word attempting to describe the denizens of the dark; right now, I'm using the word "ghost." Like any search term, "ghost" conjures up results I'm not wanting, such as "Holy Ghost," "ghost of a chance," or a frequent 19th-century point of reference to Shakespeare (taken from *Macbeth*), "Banquo's ghost." I have chosen "ghost" because I believe it is the fundamental term, one that will capture more stories than any other single word, phrase, or expression.

If you search for "ghost" on Newspapers.com, you'll get over 11,000,000 results. If you narrow the search to Tennessee, you'll get over 200,000 results. That's a lot of ghosts! If you narrow it down to East Tennessee, you still get tens of thousands of results, which I am working through, beginning with the counties closest to me and other counties that had a small enough number of results I could look at them before tonight's presentation. I'll get to the other counties, though, in time.

The number of results vary by county. Knox County has around 30,000 results; Hamblen County has over 2,300; Greene County has over 2,600, while Jefferson County newspapers have only 60 or so results for "ghost." The numbers vary for a variety of reasons including not every county has the same number of newspapers, not all historic newspapers are digitized and available via *Newspapers.com*, and sadly, not all historic newspapers have survived. Hamblen County generates 2,300 results spread out over seven different newspapers, stretching from the 1870s through the 1960s. As of this presentation, I have not yet finished looking through results for Greene County, but thus far, I have been able to look at results from around fifty newspapers in ten counties.

Results

So that's the research process. I would like to talk with you now about the results, and I am going to focus on results from four neighboring counties: Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, and Hawkins. I have found eleven "true" ghost stories. Of these eleven, two are basically anecdotal recollections, where people talk about ghosts from long ago, not specters they have personally experienced; one is a brief mention of how, basically, "there was talk of ghosts" in an abandoned dance hall; the remaining eight, though, are contemporary news reports of alleged actual hauntings. So, based on these initial, non-comprehensive results, if you are, say, a "meddling kid," what might you

see if you see a ghost in East Tennessee? Let me answer by considering the where, when, who, what, and why of ghosts. (Why no "how"? Because I couldn't figure how to include it.)

Where do you find ghosts?

Naturally (or perhaps I should say, supernaturally), you might find one in a cemetery. For example, in late 1953, there was quite the hubbub about a haunting in Hamblen County's Bent Creek Cemetery. Indeed, East Tennessee ghosts are often rural, but they are also urban: you can find them in town or country. You will find our ghosts, or rumors of ghosts, in a farmhouse, a vacant house, an old church, an antebellum mansion/inn, an abandoned dance hall, and even the middle of a street, as took place in 1897, on Cumberland Street, in Morristown ("A Spook" 2).

When are people haunted?

The contemporary accounts I have found stretch out over two centuries, with reports from 1878, 1896, 1897, 1905, 1907, 1933, and 1953. Hauntings can take place in different seasons, though I have not found one attached to Halloween. I was struck, though, by how often a story either occurred or was reported in April (six of the eleven newspaper accounts are connected to an April date). With one exception, the stories take place at night: an 1878 Greeneville ghost is reported as being seen at 4:00 PM ("Greeneville is ghost-infested, spook-ridden" 3). The hauntings tend to take place over more than one night. For instance, the 1878 Rogersville street ghost is seen over ten nights ("A mysterious creature has been perambulating the streets of Rogersville for the last ten nights" 3). Perhaps it is the extended duration of these events that help lead to these stories making it into the newspaper—these were not one-and-done events, but events that took place over a long enough period of time as to draw attention from the community at large.

Who sees ghosts?

The newspapers do not always name the person who sees the ghosts, but over half the time they do mention the presence of more than one witness. I would suggest that the fact there are multiple witnesses also helps place particular stories onto newspaper pages. Having more than one person testify that he or she saw something, whatever that something might actually be, gave a greater level of believability to the story. But whether people saw them or not, rumors of ghosts could

attract hundreds of the living—and sometimes, they came with guns (“Ghost Visits Barret Home In Hawkins” 5).

What happens when you’re haunted?

You might hear screaming or the clanging of chains in Bean Station (“Old Homes Near Morristown: The Bean Station Home” 1). You might see red lights, the size of grapefruit, ascend 50 feet, as people claimed in 1953 Bent Creek Cemetery (“Again, Ignis Fatuus, Or Ghost Seen” 1). You might see, as some claimed in 1878 Greeneville, a woman with a sheet around her body and something white on her head with eyes that are black (“Greeneville is ghost-infested, spook-ridden” 3). If you are Bill Barrett in 1933 Stanley Valley, in Hawkins County, you’ll face off with a figure the size of a 200-pound man, who steals your chickens, opens your doors, unlocks your locks, and even throws rocks at you (“Ghosts Visit Barrett Home In Hawkins” 5; “Ghost Stories Bring Hundreds To Stanley” 1). Indeed, you should be careful in approaching a ghost—the 1878 Rogersville ghost did not want to be approached and threw a red light that temporarily blinded a person (“A mysterious creature has been perambulating the streets of Rogersville for the last ten nights” 3). The 1896 Goat Valley ghost, in eastern Hamblen County, turned John Eversole’s brown hair “a piebald hue” (“Dover” 1).

Why do ghosts appear?

In trying to explain these alleged paranormal moments, the newspapers relate a variety of possible reasons for the hauntings, occasionally offering more than one explanation because no one reason was obviously true or false. The haunting might be caused by biology or chemistry. For instance, the flying fireballs in Bent Creek Cemetery could be nothing more than will-o-the-wisp, which is when swamp gas, from decomposition, allegedly ignites (“Again, Ignis Fatuus, Or Ghost Seen” 1). The haunting might be human—a living human. Some suggested that Bill Barrett’s 1933 chicken and wood thief was either an enemy of Barrett’s or a former lodger at his home (“Ghost Stories Bring Hundreds To Stanley” 1). Sheriff C. L. Franklin claimed the Bent Creek Cemetery ghost was a hoax, caused by neighborhood boys (“Cemetery Ghost Draws Crowd; Sheriff Franklin ‘Kills’ It” 1). And the 1905 female ghost that caused a stir in Bright, in Hamblen County, could have been a man dressed up like a woman (“Bright” 2).

But for those involved in a haunting, the ghosts might be actual ghosts, all of whom had experienced

loss in life before their afterlife, perhaps pointing to a reason for them to return—or not leave. And so, the 1907 Noe’s Chapel ghost is that of a certain widower (“Noe’s Chapel” 3), and the 1878 Rogersville street ghost could be someone killed in a church or grocery fire. Hamblen County’s Blinkey Moon, the abandoned dance hall and gambling joint, was said to be haunted by the spirits of two men murdered near there in 1945 (“Blinkey Moon Ends Career As Bonfire” 1). The 1896 Goat Valley haunting was traced to the 1864 killing of a man named Bolen, who refused to halt when called to by a band of guerillas. And before a substantive fire in 1885 hit the mansion in Bean Station, the place was said to be haunted by a slave who had died by suicide due to cruel treatment by his master.

All of these stories point to a tragedy in life that remained even after death, which of course illustrates a truth of ghost stories, whether the stories are actually true: what we do and what happens to us in this life have consequences beyond our life. Anyone who grieves the tragic loss of a friend or family member well understands the pain that continues in a world without them. Ghost stories, then, are a way to remember and talk about real loss.

Conclusion

The ghost stories I’ve found, so far, tend to be purposeless, not purposeful; that is, they tend to not have an explicit message for the living. Only one of these is recorded as having said anything—and he only said “Oh,” after being shot (“Ghost Visits Barrett Home In Hawkins” 5). Perhaps these ghosts are silent because they don’t have anything to say—no buried treasure to dig, no unburied corpse to bury, no vengeance to wreak. But these silent specters might still have something to say.

Ghost stories perhaps caution us, or our young, that you don’t need to be out and about late at night—nothing good can come from it. (Though these same stories could have the opposite moral—nighttime is when the cool stuff happens!) Ghost stories, though, can remind all of us that certain places are not to be intruded upon lightly—we should treat cemeteries and places of human loss with respect, with a certain reverence. Ghost stories may suggest to us that things exist which we cannot see. If looked at hopefully, ghost stories remind us that there is something on the other side, that death is not the end. In the end, our ghost stories perhaps reveal not a superstitious nature but a storyteller’s heart—and

that sometimes, not everything can be easily, or ever, explained.

1933 Hawkins County farmer Bill Barrett, who had hundreds of people come check out his property for the chicken-stealing ghost, said, "I wish they would quit putting that stuff in the papers" ("Ghost Stories Bring Hundreds To Stanley" 1). While I can understand Mr. Barrett's frustration, personally, I'm glad they did. flood is in reaction to the spring, and only by recognizing the importance of maintaining a tradition of sustainable living can the Brier and the Appalachian people he represents recoup their connection to the hills they call home.

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Company

Zoe Pendleton

The old, scraggly goat had stared
vacantly at some fixed point in space
each and every day of its life, its yellow eyes like weak headlights of a truck.
I never knew what it found so interesting,
to stare at the dirt path leading
into the dark of the mountainside, where a rusted moonshine still sits alone,
untouched by time and left to rot.

The old goat isn't what it used to be—
those yellow eyes, those headlights, are now just sparks of a wire, and its once
great bleats are now but whimpers.

Once, when its breath grew uneasy and labored, I took it by lead to the rusted
still and let it meander around the uneven, rocky ground,
and I left it there,
so they could keep each other's company.

The Working Man

Jade Garcia

Once there was a man who worked tirelessly at his job
He spent days and nights behind his desk
With the only glimpse of his family
Captured within a small, wooden frame
However, each lonesome night for him was justified
Because through his work he was able to provide
His wife with the finest jewelry
His daughter with the trendiest clothes
His son with the newest game
Although, he showed his love with gifts
The only gift they could have wished for
Is the empty seat at the dinner table
To be filled with his presence

Christmas in Homeplace Hollow

Roger D. Hicks

It was Christmas Eve all over the world. In houses big and small, worldwide, Christmas trees burned with bright lights. Gaily wrapped packages lay under trees. Warm glows shone out on landscapes of snow, reflecting scenes of families waiting for the coming of Christmas day. In the last house in Homeplace Hollow in Central Appalachia, a family was also waiting for Christmas day. But the Christmas tree in that window was small and had been cut from the ridge above the house. There was only one small string of lights on the tree and the glow in the window couldn't be seen by anyone outside the house. No one was coming to Homeplace Hollow on Christmas Eve. There were no presents under the tree. There would be no presents under the tree when Christmas morning came. It was Christmas Eve in Homeplace Hollow. It was Christmas Eve all over the world.

In the house, a family slept. They had known when they went to bed no presents would be under the tree. They understood they were very poor. They knew no one would come to bring them gifts. They knew the only gifts they could give each other would be love and support. They simply waited for Christmas day because they loved Christmas and they loved each other. They had talked as they cut and decorated the Christmas tree about their poverty and their love of Christmas and each other.

The walk from the house to the ridge top had been a family affair. Both parents and both children had made the hike a few days before Christmas. The father, mother, brother, and sister had all walked through the winter darkened woods to a windy point overlooking the house where a small cedar had risen a few feet despite the elements and poor soil. The father, John Terry, had carried an axe as he led the way. His wife, Mary, had followed close behind carrying a small picnic of cornbread, the final four small pieces of last year's hog, and the only jar of

canned peaches remaining from those they had salvaged and canned from a stunted little tree down the hollow. The children, Sam and Ruth, followed their own circuitous routes as they played under the bare trees near their parents.

The family climbed slowly and talked little until they found themselves at the base of the cedar. They spread themselves around the little tree and Mary was the first to speak. "Let's talk just a little while here before we cut the tree. We all need to understand that Christmas is not just about how much we can give each other. We get a lot more from Christmas than just having somebody give us something." John and the children nodded in agreement as Mary continued, "Now we don't have much this year and there won't be any presents. But we all have each other and we live in a good place here in the mountains. We've got a lot of things that other people in other places don't have."

Ruth and Sam asked nearly simultaneously, "Tell us about some of the things we've got that other people don't have." John nodded in quiet agreement with the children's request.

Mary began a story which the children and their father had heard many times before; but each of them sat raptly awaiting each familiar word. "Well, here in Homeplace Hollow we own our own little house. We can live here as long as we want and nobody can ever make us leave. Your grandparents and their parents lived in this hollow and we buried them over yonder on the other ridge. This place will always be ours. This place will always be home."

John and the children nodded in unison and Mary went on, "We have love, children. We love each other. We love our family and our mountains. We love this land and this

place. We know that for as long as we can remember our ancestors have been living right here in this place. No matter how hard times got they always stayed right here in Homeplace Hollow."

John nodded and smiled and then said "You know, in a way, our family is a little like that cedar tree standing there. We came here to a hard, rocky, windy place and we put down our roots and stayed. We grew up strong and loved this place. That little tree grew up right here in the same rock pile we did and it made it big enough to be our Christmas tree. Our family may never be big and rich and famous just like that cedar tree won't ever be a big tree. But we all lived here and made something out of ourselves." John reached for the axe and stood up to cut the tree. "Now you all stand back uphill over yonder while I cut it down and then we can eat before we go home."

The axe began to rise and fall in a soft rhythmic pattern and the little cedar tree vibrated with each blow just as it had with the winds on the rocky ridge. The children and their mother watched excitedly as the tree began to lean and then fell to the ground. John cleaned up the edge of the cut as the children and their mother spread out their meager picnic on a smooth rock nearby. The family slowly ate the meat and bread pausing only to smile at each other and their tree between bites.

When the last of the meat and bread were gone, the family slowly passed the quart jar of peaches from hand to hand as they drank the sweet juice to cleanse their

mouths. Then the small peaches were distributed evenly among the four as they chewed slowly, enjoying the last of the canned goods, thinking not of how there would be only cornbread and a few potatoes until spring, but rather of how they had worked together to pick the peaches and carry them home to be canned for this picnic on a ridge dear to their hearts as they prepared for another Christmas in Homeplace Hollow.

Mary gathered up the jar and its lid as John began to shoulder the tree. The children played from rock to rock and tree to tree as the slow descent toward home began. The family walked off the ridge to the little cabin and carried the tree inside to decorate it with the single string of lights and a few ornaments that had passed from hand to hand until they came to Homeplace Hollow. They did not talk of what Christmas morning would bring. Each of them knew it would bring nothing except a feeling of love and trust and a renewed commitment to stay on in Homeplace Hollow because several other generations slept in the cemetery on the other ridge who had chosen not to leave this place either.

Now the little tree was decorated and the few lights which still burned shone out on a snow laden hollow where no one came. The family lay asleep in their beds under quilts made by people who loved them. The last coals of the fire glowed dimly through a coating of ash. No gifts were under the tree. The gift of love was shared in each of the four hearts. It was Christmas Eve in Homeplace Hollow. It was Christmas Eve all over the world.

Eleven Facts about My Uncle Jinx

Tracy Haun Owens

1) I did not have an Uncle Jinx. My mother's father had a monkey named Jinx, and my Uncle David said he liked to think of him as a little brother, except that he didn't brush his teeth or wash dishes like the monkeys on TV. So I think of him as an uncle who was not quite right, who has been missing all these years.

2) People on both sides of my family "went missing," so this is not a stretch. My father's Aunt Alice left on a bus from Knoxville to California when she was 16. My mother's Aunt June had six husbands but everyone counted five—they pretended the last two were the same, like *Bewitched's* Darrens. She was married to husband number six for 40-something years, if you count the time she spent with husband number five.

3) Jinx was a chimpanzee, which is a kind of ape. So when my brother says, as he has said constantly, since we were children, "Now I'll never get my monkey," he is not technically correct.

4) The aunt who got on the bus was named Ruby, not Alice. My Great-Uncle Edgar says that 50 years later the sanitarium called to say Ruby had had a breakdown and were there any relatives to take her in? He said he and his twin Edna had been just babies when she left, and he wouldn't know if she was his real sister, so he passed. He might have heard later that she was dead.

5) My mother tried to tell us once that there was no Jinx, that she had made the whole thing up so vividly that my Uncle David actually thinks that he remembers the chimp. As this is the kind of thing she does to my uncle, I would find this plausible, except that I have heard strangers ask her what happened to her father's monkey.

6) My father says his Uncle Edgar did not have a twin and that her name was not Edna. He says he did have an Aunt Alice. Unlike his Aunt Ruby, who left alone and died alone, Aunt Alice took off with a man she wasn't married to. They might have heard later that she died rich.

7) No one would remember Aunt June's husband number five except that after he went missing Uncle David overheard some to-do about her shooting him. David is now a man in his 50s, but whenever June's name comes up, he does a rat-tat-tat with an imaginary machine gun. No one except June has ever thought this was funny.

8) I have no idea what happened to Jinx, but my grandfather had paid a lot of money for him, so I know it wasn't anything bad. A monkey was someone whose disappearance you had to account for, not like a husband or a sister.

9) June has won the lottery twice, and she is pushing 90, so all signs point to her getting away with whatever it is she did scot-free. If someone called from the nervous hospital to ask my uncle to take her in, he would say yes and ask if she still has those persistent delusions about having killed her fifth husband. Then he and June would do the little rat-tat-tat together for the rest of her life.

10) If I had to take in any of my relatives, the sick ones, the rich ones, the ones who are not quite right, I like to think I would do it. But I would always leave a little room for Jinx, for the day someone calls and says, "He's tired. He's been hard traveling. He'd like to rest with his family for the end."

11) Tell my brother this is how I get my monkey.

Song of Habit

Abby Lewis

Her fingers play piano keys across her leg.
Her fingers play piano keys across her leg.
She looks like a piano herself—
white blouse, black skirt over thin black leggings.
The whites of her fingers flash across her calf.
Sometimes the tempo in her head
seems to be trailing, skin gliding across skin.
Other times it is the beat of a metronome,
each hard, soundless tap
knocks around the heads of onlookers.
She notices the eyes.
All on her.
The dead skin of a finger
catches in the fabric of her leggings.

Tsunami

Abby Lewis

*I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea*

—Edgar Allan Poe

I. Right-side up

The woman sits under the covered porch. Drops
ping off the top of the aluminum roof. As time passes,
the rain learns the language, alters its course to a slant,
manages a few seductive landings on her arm, her back.

The dewy grass taunts and entices, shimmering in the misty morning.
She must admit, it does look fun. The squelch of mud between toes,
the pleasant chill of diving feet-first into a black mirror.

II. Upside down

Slender clouds drift inches over the dense water
above the woman, now a child below the surface;
if heaven had cars, this is what it would look like—
a parade of colorless cotton candy, just out of reach.

Dark fingers snake through the water to her,
suck the treat from her vision as her eyes blur.
The water is a cartoon Big Bad Wolf wound
backwards—no huffing and puffing, no blowing
down. That is not good enough. It leaves things
like her, the child, behind. This wolf is more
efficient, inhaling it all, greedy maw.

Guidepost

Carla R. Bailey

Early in the morning
old barn light sneaks through
dusty, but with a purpose
we have long forgotten.

Cardinal-bird stories
seem to follow me everywhere.
I know I'll never splash head-high
Riding wide up the creek
now it's all dried up, they say.

Uncle Charlie cut down
that old, old willow tree.
And there's nothing left
but the roots to show.

Untouched Roses

Carla R. Bailey

Beneath the Hickory tree
and watching each little pod
plummet to a drawn-out death
I glance at the pre-winter fields
And I thought of you

You waited until spring
when all things were new
to trim the rose bush
even as the buds were green.

I was startled when she bloomed
and you followed each petal unfolding
marveling at the fruit of your own labor
and you loved all her thorns away.

Beneath the hickory tree
overlooking the winter fields
Alone, I still think of you.

The Great Overlook

Carla R. Bailey

Old signs nailed to the general store
The bubbly by the hinge-screened door
The whittle chips upon the ground
The greener hills a rolling down

The laps beneath the quilting hoop
The ladle left in the vegetable soup
The dust of a thousand barn-lit crack
The feather beds with tic and tack

The worn-smooth dash of a butter churn
Fox and geese, I've still to learn
Hope and hearth still hangs on
To warmer days, past and gone

Gold in the Chill

Carla R. Bailey

We walk differently in the autumn light
like change is heading our way to stay
Shiny is shiner and deep is deeper
and colors darken with the evening sun
who leaves us cold and weary and waiting
for just one more day with you.

Piles and stacks of moss-soaked rocks
that would mostly go unnoticed
still mark our own ways,
searching for yellow leaves and roots
you should only dig in the fall
Where the poor soil filters all that's left, away
We keep looking and we find less and less

The shuffles and crunches around my feet
under the whispering of pine trees
where the reality meets the road
And we'll be back this way someday, soon
I hope to find the path is less clear
and the newlings will make it out of spring.

The Promised

Carla R. Bailey

I'm never not be thinking of the sounds
of all the biggest of things.
Right, then left, then to the right again.
The pressed and polished parts of my soul
let go of the things not meant for me.

It is remarkable, to be leaning here today.
I've learned to throw away the umbrella
just to wake up in the prickling rain.
Dreams are heavier than I thought they'd be.
There's courage, and then there's sincerity.

I've wondered if you still hear my voice so clear?
Would your views of hope be arranged differently?
I'll say, take all the chances, a lot of them.
It will always be the way it should, with you and me.

Dear Hunting

Antonio Vallone

Appalachian
holy day: the opening
of buck season, schools

close, churches and woods echo
with gunshots, quiet
camo shadows pray in trees.

Lost Connection: A Tanka

Antonio Vallone

Appalachian

Internet service: iffy

At best. Video

And/or sound go out any-

Time in the middle of a...

Summer Dining: A Tanka

Antonio Vallone

Appalachian
roadside ice cream stands: soft-serve
and foot-long hot dogs,
homemade sauce, teens take orders,
call numbers, bugs wait in line.

Lawn Design

Antonio Vallone

Appalachian
grass-scapes: Virgin Marys stand
in sunken bathtubs.

Pickups and cars parked
in overgrown weeds wait for
rebirth or rust death.

Saint Remington: A Tanka

Antonio Vallone

Appalachian
pickups: rifles hung in back
window racks like saint
icons, protecting travelers
driving dirt roads, interstates.

The Color of Fear

John C. Mannone

Fear comes in all colors. The fear of failure might be traffic-light red where you're frozen in place, stopped to make a move. It might even be green and you still can't move. It might be a presidential fear or fear of the president, the secession of elephant blue from donkey red, but most everybody doesn't forget, and almost every naysayer's a jackass. The color of civility blends too easily with incivility. Not too different from Lincoln-era gray and blue, both the colors of musket smoke. The color of fear in soldiers' eyes is not yellow, nor is it white or black or brown. How can a nation prevail when crippled by the wrong color of the heart? Fear takes on every shade. We remember purple, the hurt that some of us wear as a medal. And blood red. No, not the red from oxygenated blood pumping through arteries and veins, but the red left behind—the bleeding—the stroke of fear in a man and a woman, or any couple for that matter, from a broken heart—whether on the battlefield, or in the streets, or in the pastel darkness of the bedroom where there's a vanishing low faint glow of reconciliation, while the orange moon wolfs down a city full of rage. It has gone viral. The fear of imbalance has its own color. The tipping of the silvery scales of justice, tarnished. Tomorrow is full of gray, like the color of exhaustion. The media, like x-rays, show it. I can't breathe. America's lungs are full of smokestack smoke, and coal dust, and COVID. And I am afraid. Afraid of unbridled hatred, even to speak of its black words, because they are the color of cancer.

The Wafflemaker

John C. Mannone

A battered sweet-life pours into molds,
of *la waflera*, the iron shuts,

the excess oozes through the seams—
bubbles, turns brown. In her apron,

Verónica escucha for the chime, then smooths
the lips before opening.

Sus ojos se encuentran con los míos.
Her eyes meet mine.

The egg-crate surface always traps the melting
butter (*manteca*) and maple syrup.

I take a swig of black coffee with the dregs,
but today *no es amargo*. It's not bitter at all.

Nature Is Loud but I Don't Hear Her

John C. Mannone

All the stars are singing
every color I can feel.

And I sing back my notes
of grief. I ponder each

tone, let the music
of the spheres subsume

the deep dark spaces
in my life. Do she understand?

Robert Frost asked the same
question when he chose

something like a star.
It remained taciturn, too.

I do not understand
the language of the stars

yet I should because
I am stardust.

Perhaps I should ask
the wind. It is blue

like the smile in your eyes.
But I cannot discern

the answer from the static
hiss of leaves.
I interrogate the ocean
sweeping wave after wave

of questions in its rhetoric
and I am left on the beach
washed clean of answers.

So I look up, above the ocean,
past the wind, beyond the stars

and listen for that small
still voice.

Listening to 'Adagio for Strings' by Samuel Barber

John C. Mannone

full of pathos and cathartic passion

—Alexander J. Morin

the sky on fire before the sun dissolves; the ocean
swallowing whole, leaving darkness, the stunning

beauty, crescendo of dawn light, then the blindness,
only the pain of remembrance remains, the craving

of the violin, its B-flat minor in resonance
with the heart, coaxing uncontrollable tears

the petrichor of morning's rain mixing in
the scent of her auburn hair, the chemistry

in her touch, her hand in mine—
a soft caress, electrifying, her lips

supple with passion, replaced
with memory, the breathtaking

loneliness
of absence

Shiitake Mushrooms

How to grow and eat them

John C. Mannone

After the river breeze dissolves
the morning fog, lay the axe wedge
a couple feet above the stump,
first, on the side of the felling,
 then behind, to let gravity
 pull and have its bending moment
 topple the tall tree to the ground.
Saw-blade the fallen five-inch oak
tree into four-foot-long sections,
Drill inch-deep holes, a half-inch wide
—stagger in a diamond pattern.
Fill the holes with mycelia-
 -inoculated sawdust, then
 compact the holes before sealing
 with melted cheese wax by mopping
 with steady, patient paintbrush strokes.
Stack logs, crisscrossed, under the shade
of a stand of trees near the lake
where the logs can be dunked in case
the season is unusually dry.
 A year later, the harvesting
 of the fruit, the mushrooms themselves
 pop out of the colonized logs,
 their tan to burnt orange caps, shagged.

~~~

Slice and sauté them in butter,  
thin-sliced shallots, thyme, and white wine.  
A garlic-pine aroma, rich  
with earth, releases an intense  
    mythical power with the taste:  
    soft, fleshy, yet chewy texture—  
    buttery smoke, woodsy mushrooms  
    full of dense umami flavor  
[from the savory glutamates;  
addictive neurochemicals  
along with hallucinogens—  
psilocybin and psilocin].

Perhaps well-suited to Let's Eat  
Grandma, a psychedelic sludge  
band: a couple of teenage girls  
playing smeary, woozy, jazz-pop  
breaking into a fitting rap  
they call *Eat Shiitake Mushrooms*.

# Ant Hill People

## *Inspired by a Hopi legend*

*John C. Mannone*

Once the world was destroyed  
by fire. Stones from the sky burned  
the air, convulsed the mountains

which vomited lava, oceans boiled.  
Then destroyed again by ice  
when the poles shifted. Floods, too.

Now there is a pestilence  
that I see breaking loose  
on the news, I wonder

of the consequence. Do we pray  
as before, "Save us or let the rocks  
fall on us?" Make it quick.

But to whom do we pray?  
To the angry one with fire  
in his eyes?

Great grandmother spoke  
of passage into a new world—  
a new heaven, a new earth.

But I sit and wait for a sign,  
a cloud of hope, a pillar of light  
leading me to the Ant Hill people.

They will take me to the caves,  
teach me how to survive  
on beans, or grow a beanstalk

to heaven if I am good enough.  
Great grandfather would say  
none of us are

but believes the Great Spirit  
loves us anyway. For a moment  
his eyes were almond-shapes

as he raised his shiny, spindly arms  
in praise; stood up proud and  
danced; his head puffed-up as  
big as the moon full of light.

# Blood

John C. Mannone

There's always some kind of war around these parts, as if Lyndon B. Johnson's declaration of *War on Poverty* wasn't enough; American involvement in Vietnam was rapidly escalating about the same time.

I was born a baby boomer in a tiny four-room shanty, newspaper crammed into the seams of pine board walls to stay the chill; the tin roof, a rusty scab. Daddy and Uncle Ronnie worked double shifts just so we could eat; coal dust always in the air. After the accident, Mama swore she wouldn't let me work in the mine. I was almost five and didn't understand why Daddy was gone. When the blood red moon poured its light over the winter pines, I cried out loud to the man up there like Daddy did so many times. Mama overheard and came running, grabbed hold of me and clutched me to her bosom, saying in a soft voice but straining not to crack, "It's okay, John David. *Shsh, shsh, shsh*. It's okay." She was crying, too. When I was older, Mama told me about the brakes of a dang coal truck broke. Daddy didn't see or hear it coming in time to move before the runaway truck crushed him against the rock wall.

Mama said that for me to be successful, I would have to break the cycle: leave this place and go make something of myself. If I stayed, I'd probably be stuck here forever, probably die in some down-deep godforsaken mineshaft. But at least I wouldn't miss the cherry-fizz phosphates with my sweetheart, Becky Ann, at the corner Five & Dime. But how does someone poorer than dirt-poor get to go to college?

When that other war broke out, the one in Southeast Asia that I didn't want to fight in, let alone escalate aggression, I wasn't much interested to "nail the coonskin to the wall" as the President put it, but I heard about the GI Bill, and by golly, this war just might be my ticket to college. Mama said I was good with words and I didn't take kindly to all that doubletalk the Company tried to sell us when any of the men got hurt working at the mine.

Even the mayor thought I would make a good politician. I started thinking hard about becoming a lawyer. Yep, that's what I fixed my mind on.

When the day came to ship out, I remembered my mama's smile, but I could see her eyes shimmer like wet glass. I set down my black & brown suitcase and the green duffle bag, too, so I could hug her hard. My little sister, Katie Lynn, was cuddling her corn shuck doll that Mama fashioned with a frilled-up doily. The doll, dressed for a wedding, was just like the ones propped up on a wood-shiny shelf staring out the china closet glass in one of those fancy department stores. I kissed Sis on the cheek and tenderly placed another one—finger to lips—on her doll. I winked at her as I slipped out the door.

When I landed in Đà Nẵng, I could feel the devil in the air. Met some Kentucky boys from across the state, but I would soon learn about making friendships... they don't last in these jungles. Too many booby traps. I took shrapnel to my leg; tore it up real good. The doctors couldn't get the metal out, so I was left with a limp.

After the war, I went to college in upstate Illinois. The cold penetrated the metal in my leg, but I managed getting through my undergraduate classes, and even law school. I didn't set up practice in Chicago; I felt compelled to come back to the mountains, to the place I was born. Disability money would help me serve my hometown; Appalachian winters can be brutal to these kinds of wounds, too, but I could still stand against oppression.

And yes, I had to come back here to where the blood of my ancestors drenched the mountainside—just east of here on Ivy Mountain. And over yonder by the banks of the Licking River, where my kin were ambushed by militiamen when this great nation labored in birth. These fields of bluegrass are still stained. I could talk about *all* the wars in between... and all the feuds, too, but that would just be more politics. There was too much innocent blood spilled—humanity betrayed—to reduce it to that.

I had to return here, to where my own father's blood still soaks the coal dust under grave dirt, not because of any mine explosion, or because of any silent killer like black lung that got my Uncle Ronnie, or runaway trucks.

I had to return, not just to see Kentucky sunrises splashing crimson all over Rockhouse. I had to return to this place. *This* place, where the Bible's red-lettered words often spoken by Lincoln showed me the color of grace. I've come back to my roots to unshackle my soul, to stop its bleeding. This place is who I am; it's in my veins. I've come home, home, to blood.



# The Promise — Dramatic Monologue

John C. Mannone

## CAST OF CHARACTERS:

GRANDFATHER: Man in his 60s

SETTING: A hospital nursery in east Tennessee

AT RISE: A grandfather stands in his own spotlight facing the nursery window, talking to his infant granddaughter.

## GRANDFATHER

(smiling)

You sure are the pretty one, just like your momma. You, my little sweetie. Katie Ann, you're gonna love going to the mountain lake with your granddad. Your momma sure did when I took her when she was a little girl. I can see you now, splashing in the water overshadowed by Big Frog Mountain, and you digging up the flour-sand with a red plastic shovel. Then dumping it into a yellow bucket. Yep, looking for treasures: pretty pink and white stones, cubic chunks of fool's gold and colored pieces of glass—all their edges smoothed by the water.

(pause)

Now your momma, Leanna May, we just called her Leni, she was something else. You look just like her!

(pause)

I wish I could've been a better father to her. I'm not going make excuses for not being around when she was growing up. I'm not even going to blame her mamma either. I've fallen short on a lot of things. I loved her with all my heart, but I don't think she knew that, but I'm gonna make sure *you* know that I love you!

(beat)

It's a bit early, but I have a present for you—a glass globe just like the one I gave Leni for Christmas one year when she was just six...

(pause)

I promise I'm not going to break it like I did your momma's. We were arguing over stupid things, really. When I stood up from the couch, I stumbled into the coffee table and knocked it to the floor. It broke into a zillion pieces. She just stopped. Stopped yelling and just stared at me, her eyes glassy wet. I knew I had failed her, again. I apologized, tried to hug her, but she pulled away.

(He dries his eyes with his fingers)

I suppose all the fighting came from my wanting to blame her for my failures.

(pause)

I promise you, Katie Ann, I'm not going to let those bad things happen to you like they did to your momma. Nosiree! None of that lifestyle with an endless string of bums taking advantage of her. You won't have to give them a place to stay to return a favor, you won't have to beg for rides, or bum a pack of cigarettes! (But I hope you don't smoke.) You won't have to put up with their getting drunk... their beating you! I'll know about it this time if anyone tries to hurt you or any of the people I love.

(pause)

I didn't know; I've always been too late to help your momma before she ran off or got caught doing drugs. But now, no one is going to steal from you. I'd hunt him down like a junkyard dog and...

(He clenches his fist)

You are not going to end up on the streets or on a floor (from a so-called friend), which wouldn't be much better than a rat-infested alley. People like that... People like that stole your mother blind. They only wanting her food stamps or the hydrocodone that was suppose to be for her aching back. They made her a pusher of sorts and she'd booze it up to help swallow her misery.

(He grits his teeth)

But I drank, too, trying to forget my own failures. I couldn't let your momma move back to my house... Couldn't risk those bedbugs she got from those losers she was with. I'm telling you all this now, Sweetie, because I might not have the courage to tell you later.

(beat)

Leni moved away thinking she'd be better off in a big city. The last time I saw your momma she called me from a gas station, packed up and ready to go with another asshole. I drove down to meet her. She was all stunk-up with cigarette smoke—I could barely stand the smell. I wanted to hug her, hug her hard.... but I didn't.

(long pause)

Katie Ann, we're going to talk every day, or at least every week when you get all grown up. After Leni left with that bum, I didn't hear from her for a really long time. Weeks... months would go by before I'd hear from her, and then it was because she wanted something. When I got the call from the police department, I just shook my head thinking she was in just trouble again...

(pause; he lowers his head, closes his eyes)

...but then they told me what had happened. I didn't know how to cry. I couldn't, because I knew my own heart would...

(long pause; he raises his head, looks at his granddaughter with a half-smile)

Your momma sure had a lot of problems. Those drugs and all. But the doctors said you're going to be fine. Sweetie, tomorrow I'm coming back here. We're gonna talk more about that favorite place of your momma's when she was a little girl. We're gonna talk about pretty stones, and smooth, smooth glass.

(Lights out)

END OF PLAY

# Mid-March in Tennessee

*Lacy Snapp*

Heaves of wind  
ripple down  
the ridgeline

stop signs flap  
and double  
back, rooted

wind chimes  
smack siding  
still tethered

golf ball hail  
to dimes, coat  
garden soil

# Whistle Stop

*Michelle Young*

I remember lying awake at night,  
a skinny teenager snugged  
beneath Granny's log cabin quilt,  
head sunk into goose feather pillow  
with the sides plumped up  
almost covering my ears.  
I listened carefully –  
it was almost time.

Ten-thirty sharp, distant rumble  
of the Great Iron Horse  
powering toward our house,  
my breath speeding as it neared,  
thunderous 'chug, chug' of effort  
as the synchronized wheels turned,  
a mechanical mantra chanted  
in tempo of momentum.

As it passes by, I quake in the maelstrom  
of high pitched hum, screech  
and squeal of friction, metal on metal,  
clanking iron jostled by tons of titanic,  
unstoppable energy.

I imagine adults in the dining car,  
important, with pressing engagements in the city,  
dressed in fine linen and silk, high fashion  
hats, sipping hot tea from fancy, fragile china  
with pinkies raised in affectation  
that would make my grandfather guffaw.

I think about travel weary children crying,  
begging to play in the caboose  
so they can try to out-brag the others  
in well-intentioned bravado,  
fantasizing how they would hop  
off at the next stop and live the hobo life,  
letting the train schedule determine their future.

So many times my cousins and I walked  
those tracks, balancing  
on the tarnished rails, or hopping along  
weathered, wooden trestles,  
avoiding the large gravel and twisted ankles.  
North to school, but never far enough.

I always wondered if I would make it to the city,  
or be stuck forever hoeing in the corn rows,  
slopping the hogs, rendering lard  
or canning beans for winter.  
But today, I find myself longing  
for quiet moments  
in the country of my youth.  
I sip my hot tea from a thick,  
stoneware mug, and contemplate.

# House of the Sky Blue Door

*Michelle Young*

They said my sister hid  
behind a sky blue door.  
I searched back streets, alleys,  
huffed hot air in  
and out of my thin lungs,  
felt the headiness of city heat  
soak my body in sweat.

Car horns squawked  
as I skipped cross walks,  
moved through crowds  
like the fin of an orca  
splitting the ocean,  
careful not to trip  
on lips of broken sidewalk.

She told me she was a model,  
but I knew she was paid  
to remove her clothes.  
My sister.  
My heart.  
It was time to tell her what I knew.

Soon I recognized the run down building,  
stared at white peeling paint framing the door –  
that sad, sky blue door,  
and paused.  
I was afraid to interrupt her.  
My knuckles tapped weathered splinters,  
flakes of blue flurried the front stoop.  
The door opened a few inches,  
scraped its swollen, misshapen edges  
as a tall, red faced man looked to see  
who knocked.

"Excuse me sir."

I pushed past him, burst into the room,  
saw my naked sister sitting on a chair,  
surrounded by men and women  
who stared, eyes studying her curves  
as if trying to memorize every line.

"Sister, you have to come home.  
Mama says dinner is ready."

My sister smiled, donned her robe  
and went to dress behind a wooden screen.  
The others began to wash the paint off of their brushes,  
pack their canvases, and fold their easels before heading home.

# Homesick

*Michelle Young*

Elegant stemware hangs upside down,  
a militia of champagne and wine glasses,  
sorted by designer shapes  
line after line,  
row after row.

My thoughts follow, absorb  
the warm, tiny lights that sparkle soft reflections  
on shiny surfaces,  
create invisible Christmas trees draped in golden tinsel,  
frozen in snow globes of water and glitter.

A river of ice blue neon  
runs in squiggles along the table -  
is broken, then redirected by imperfections  
in the thick, clear finish  
that glazes dark wood beneath.

Hearth fire makes me sluggish  
as chilled molasses,  
and I linger over my coffee, dreading  
the slap of North wind  
that will scoot me along  
like a caffeinated gerbil.

I miss the valley,  
the patchwork of farmers' fields  
that blankets Appalachia  
in shades of yellow green and dusty pine.

The hayrides,  
snuggling under Mama's quilts  
while watching high school football,  
sipping Russian tea, and the excitement  
of stringing lights in broad spirals  
down the Christmas tree.



I time travel along those twinkling strands,  
back and forth  
between two worlds  
that will always be,  
sip my coffee,  
and ignore the clock.

# Amnesias

*Melissa Helton*

The first time I kissed the boy I was falling in love with.

What happened between the big guy punching me and when the man found me standing alone in the dark road.

Where I was before I came to earth.

Learning to speak, walk, ride a bike, brush my hair.

What I did after grandpa finally let me off his lap.

The name of the black cat who left us to live with the old lady two houses down.

Hurting after first sex.

If the first sex I remember was the actual first sex.

How Jamaica is tied to this sadness.

All of 3rd grade.

How it felt to daydream about her.

Those songs I wrote.

What I learned of Arabic, Navajo, or Welsh.

How to make that dill bread they loved so much.

# Communion

## Barred Owls Under Bishop's Knob

*Kirk Judd*

The tree knows the owls,  
Understands their form and shape  
In its limbs  
Recognizes an absence of absence  
When they are there

But doesn't expect them now  
In this slant of ocher light  
Slipping through the thinning canopy  
On the west side of the mountain  
An hour before dusk

Nevertheless they've come  
Moved by my movement  
On this abandoned haul road  
They settle side by side in the familiar ash  
An old couple on a park bench

They turn to each other  
Press their foreheads together  
In some ritual of expression  
Some eloquence of owlness  
A language I almost remember

One turns towards me, the other away  
I simply stand in the road  
Aware I am in this conversation  
But unaware of how to speak  
How to join in

I raise a hand slowly  
One continues to stare, the other turns to look  
I lower it just as slowly  
And reluctantly move on  
So as not to worry them

Farther up the trail  
I suddenly know they were not worried  
Nor was the tree, nor the light, nor the mountain  
They all merely spoke to me  
In an owl moment

I heeded that small ceremony  
Witnessed, somehow heard  
As I hear now, a slender whispered gratitude  
That I passed by  
And did not ask for more

# Potato Thief

Patricia Hope

*I can't cook taters that ain't rightly ours!*

*They belong to us, Mollie. They're ours.*

But you didn't pay for them, Henry. He spilled several potatoes from the burlap sack into the sink where Mollie stood. She picked one up and held it in her hand.

*Cook them, he urged. We'll eat good tonight.*

*It ain't right, she protested again, but picked up a knife and peeled one of the brown orbs, letting thin peels fall into the sink. She was careful to save as much of the potato as possible.*

Henry took a pot off the shelf and pushed it toward her. The first potato clunked to the bottom. *I'll pay him back . . . somehow, he said.*

*We don't have no money.* Another potato joined the first.

*I know that but I'll do a job for him. Besides, he had a whole building full and nobody can afford the prices he's charging.* Henry held the pot as she added more.

*Stove up the fire, she shooed him away from the sink.*

He broke kindling into small pieces and laid the wood into the stove then struck a match to get it burning. Soon the kitchen was filled with the warm earthy scent of cooking potatoes. Their fried corn cakes of water and cornmeal tasted better that night dunked and crumbled into the thick potato broth seasoned with a spoonful of lard. Henry watched as his three young girls ate their fill, and for the first time in weeks Mollie ate a full serving. Nothing was wasted. Even the peelings were saved for the stray dog they'd befriended.

Mollie prayed that night for forgiveness, but she dreamed about all the ways she could cook the rest of those potatoes.

# All That's Left of August

*Patricia Hope*

Wispy tendrils of gray wrap the dogwood trees,  
cross the street to the neighbor's pear tree, pears  
so ripe and plentiful they plop the ground where  
deer gather in ghostly clusters to munch the summer  
fruit. Only the occasional car passing, or dog bark,  
perking their ears to see if they need flee.

It has been 10 weeks since the solstice spun us  
into the long days of summer. Now, it's as if  
everyone is hurrying a little more, trying to taste  
one more bite of August sweetness before we are  
thrust back into shorter days of the next season.  
A few gold dogwood leaves flutter through the softness

leaving their spotted siblings among the  
green leaves and red berries on the tree. A cardinal  
lights on the bird feeder causing it to spin like a ride  
at the fair. He is joined by a chickadee and a nuthatch  
who steals a seed then rushes back to the tree  
working his way down the trunk then up the other side,

Our gray cat comes down the hill in total silence,  
except for the cry of the birds who give up their spot  
on the feeder in protest. She pays no attention to them,  
no doubt thinking more about a human-provided breakfast.  
I open her a can of food, then return to my chair. I sip my  
coffee, check the time, wish I could stay suspended here

with the wildlife, all of us partially hidden by the fog.  
But duty calls and the fog will soon lift. The next equinox  
creeps closer as the earth begins its tilt away from the sun,  
hurling us toward the end of summer, when only a sliver  
of the Harvest Moon will light our way to autumn's stars.

# Me and Mildred

Patricia Hope

Colored tents like candy canes,  
people crowding narrow lanes,  
books bound by plastic walls,  
names echoed in hallowed halls,

pages primped in poetry blush,  
sellers pleased by weekend rush,  
vendors hawking shirts and bags,  
everywhere a book or mag.

Writers, readers with the rapture,  
seeking out each verse and chapter,  
Marius, Dykeman – Cornwell fans,  
looking for the book at hand.

Then a sign appears below,  
as if some angel watched this show,  
and points to antique books so shy,  
that off I go to gawk and buy.

A place of rare and first editions,  
where long-sought titles seek fruition.  
One single book from Mildred Haun,  
one classic book, *The Hawk's Done Gone*.

Inside her name signed long ago,  
inspires the value triple fold.  
I hesitate then turn to go,  
Torn by need and want – my foe.

Should I have bought that book so rare?  
Or try again at next year's fair?  
Someday I'll wake in heaven's shine,  
and touch the hand that wrote that line.

We'll become friends like you and I,  
we'll walk and talk and in a while,  
we'll visit book fairs, walk through tents,  
and laugh at mortal's poor lament.

# The Poetry of Trees

*Kirk Judd*

This is the way they write,  
With blossom, and bloom,  
And the beginnings of green

When you see them, you know  
You are hearing poetry  
Hearing words you no longer understand  
Hearing the sound of color

When you send your children  
To the top of the hill to look,  
When you send your grandchildren  
And their children and grandchildren  
To the top of the hill behind the barn  
To look down across the meadow  
And the small pond,  
When you send them to the top  
Of the hill in April  
To look down at the edge of the wood  
There past the small pond  
And the meadow  
To see the poetry of the redbud in bloom,  
The clouds of purple  
Whispering in that old language  
This elegy to this Spring,  
Whispering, those purple clouds  
In that old language, the poetry  
Those children will hear,  
Will recognize, will never forget...

When you send them,  
Tell them this,  
Tell them I said to them,  
Say to them now,  
"I planted these for you."



# Things You Can Only See If You're Not Looking

*Kirk Judd*

A lark's condensed breath  
As it sings a too-cool morning into day

The star next to the star  
You think is Alnilam  
Sparkling in The Hunter's belt  
Low in the November sky

Your lover's hand reaching  
Just before it touches your shoulder

Ghost cats

The infinte grace  
Of the first raindrop

Green knowing it will be yellow  
In February forsythia

Owls at night

Mars winking  
Jupiter too  
And Saturn  
Venus with both eyes

The corpse's smile  
Just before you pass

The tear you never cried

Yahoes in the canopy  
Just after the limb to limb leap

The last pin oak leaf as it falls  
The soundwave it makes

Squirrels in a beech grove  
The bend in the tail of the comet

The animal nobody has ever seen

Sleep

The first purple redbud

The rise of trout downstream from your cast

Cedar Waxwings eating the last cherries

The color of the devil's eye

You mother's last breath

The spirit rising from everything  
From you  
From the river  
From the grass blade and the elk  
From the sentient wolf  
And the sheep in the pasture  
From hay in the field  
From peaches in the orchard  
From turtles in the pond

The swell and pull of it all  
Lifting, lifting, lifting

## Workshop

### Comparing Chinese Zen Poetry to Appalachian Poetry

*Kirk Judd*

Inside

Poets write about nature.

Outside

Honeysuckle blooms,  
Birds laugh,  
Pine boughs nod in the wind,  
Rain drops,  
Fallen tree sinks into Mill Creek.

Inside

Poets read their poems to each other.

Outside

I drop this poem,  
Like you, Li Po,  
On the water,  
Send it to the creek,  
To the river,  
To the bay,  
To the sea,  
To the sky,  
To the cloud,  
Where then,  
Like you, Li Po,  
It will fall down,  
Come back  
To sluice the wind,  
Amuse the birds,  
Glisten the pine,  
Swell the creek,  
Feed the honeysuckle,  
And me.

# She Heard It from the Weatherman

*Lauren Fowler*

The summers were hot,  
Even hotter behind the aluminum siding on grandma's trailer.  
In the mornings, we played canasta, while we could bear it.  
But by midday, the heat pushed us onto the front porch.  
And out there, with our ginger snaps and decaf coffee, we would do our supposing.  
"Do you want to see some magic?" She'd say.  
And I always did.  
Her wand was an old green garden hose,  
And with it, she cast streams of water against the house.  
Such a sight she was, veiled in a shawl of sun and covered in diamonds of water.  
No sooner than it had begun, her work was finished,  
And the sky pondered it for some time.  
Soon, the clouds answered with a darkening brow.  
Then the rain came.  
It fell from the sky like an old rag rung out, cooling everything in its sight:  
The gravel, the dirt, the sweltering house.  
"Now back to our game," she'd say.  
As if Mother Nature changed her plans just to watch another hand.

# Vertigo is Your Friend

Larry Thacker

Vertigo is your friend.

It should scream in your good ear when something's a terrible idea.

*Pssst. You're about to screw up, bud.*

Vertigo and gravity are close first cousins. They grew up together.

*What the hell are you thinking, man?*

But if you're too spontaneous, too quick to dive into your own self-created maelstrom of riskiness, vertigo can get rendered mute pretty quickly. Rest assured though, gravity is happy to just watch from the ground, waiting, knowing he's always right. He's a know-it-all, but never says much.

Not even, *I told ya so.*

Like when you're already most of the way up the steel ladder of a fifty-foot advertising billboard, stoned drunk, with some old buddies from school. In on leave from the army. In downtown Edgewood. With a storm moving in. Nothing to lose but life or limb in idiotic fashion. Etc.

It was an old dare from years ago. Back when doing it meant something completely different. Who knows who first brought it up. Things get fuzzy over the years. Fuzzy in the panic of spontaneity. At some point up the ladder the details don't matter any longer. You're committed. That brave drunken dizziness kicks in. You can either be dizzy and still stupid on the way back down if you change your mind and turn around, or finish out what you start and hope to live through what might be a pretty cool memory if you remember it the next morning and write about it twenty-five years later.

Sometimes the latter prevails.

I was home on two weeks of leave. I'd just finished two years in South Korea and was on my way to Fort Lewis, Washington, after this little break. It was day three and I was already getting that strange boredom that sent me running to the recruiter's office in the first place. I couldn't sit still. I'd drive. Park. Eat something. Nap. Drive. Take a walk by the river. Drink. Watch girls. Flirt. Window gaze at the mall. Eat. Nap. Watch movies. Nothing satisfied. Two weeks of this would kill me.

I'd happened across Keith and Jo at The Kaintuck, a rickety old drinking spot down in town. I hadn't seen them since school. Since I'd left for those few semesters at Lincoln. Just like that, we picked up where we left off easy enough – drinking, killing time. At least I wasn't bored alone. We were slogging through it together, if only for a few evenings. I'd sleep late, roll out of bed and maybe clean up, eat a little something, and head back to bar. It opened by three in the afternoon. Perfect timing. The boys were between jobs. They were coal truck drivers. Whoever showed up first got a head start. Last one in bought the next round. Easy rules for easy days.

By Friday of my first weekend I could almost forget where I'd come from and

where I was headed, all the while forgetting what was just outside the door. Just enough low light, the right songs repeating on the jukebox, and a goodly number of beers and the occasional shot working their magic. I was almost floating, static, and I didn't mind.

I'd stumbled outside for a smoke. It was like daylight. It hurt my eyes.

The tallest structure in town, a billboard, forever advertising Coca-Cola in one way or another and for as long as I can remember, lit up the street like no one cared what the light bill got up to. It was a good five stories tall, higher than downtown's tallest buildings, visible for a mile before you reached the clover merging into town from Highway 25.

The bar was a block away, still the thing looked like a bright monster on steel girded legs spotlighting for victims.

I lit another cigarette. Studied the sign. It stared down on me like a second moon whispering what I should drink next. We were a Coke town after all, one of the few small mountain towns still bottling Coke products. That plant employees more people than anyone in town. That and the mines. But the mines are too off and on to be a sure thing anymore.

Keith walked out to smoke.

"There you are," he said.

"Yep."

"Didn't know where you'd gone to."

He lit up.

There was a flash of quiet lightning in the west. The wind was coming in just cooler enough to hint at rain.

I nodded up and asked him, "You boys ever climb that sign like we used to threaten we'd do?"

"Shit, no. Jo was too chicken shit to ever."

I gave him a look, his face lit by the sign, by his smoke, just right so I could see his real features.

"And you ain't?"

Personally, I had a bad habit of climbing things when I was drinking. There were always things around to climb in the Army. I'd taken up free-climbing a little in Korea. There were some nice rock formations out in the mountains. Mountains that looked a lot like southeast Kentucky. I was lean and strong and pretty good at it. You've heard of ten foot tall and bullet proof? Well, a climber thinks they're ten foot tall and made of rubber when they're drinking. Enough rubber to bounce, they hope.

"Go get him," I told Keith.

"Who?"

"Jo."

"Why?"

"We're going climbing," I said, stamping my smoke, convinced he'd be all in and ready to get Jo psyched up for the task.

"He won't."

"He will. Buy him another shot if you have to. Before you bring him out."

A little rumble of thunder sounded. If felt it in my feet. A subtle quake. All I saw was cloud lightning moving in, no streaks stretching down and rooting to the ground. It didn't matter, we were headed up the sign, by God.

We had Jo walking toward the base of the sign before he asked where we were headed.

"Where we going?"

"Jo," I started, "I only get to come home every once in a while, right?"

"Yep. We sure are lucky to've run into ya, man."

"I'm glad, too. And who knows how long it'll be 'til I come back, so Keith and I thought we outta do some something to remember our time together. Something kick ass."

He noticed where we were headed about then.

"Oh. Really, fellas? This? The sign finally?" He tried turning around, but we caught him and steered him straight. He was easy to steer he was so intoxicated.

"It'll be okay, man. I promise," Keith assured him, but not very convincingly. "I climbed up there just a few weeks ago myself," he lied. I could tell Keith was full of it.

"You did? You did and you didn't tell me, man?" Jo was disappointed.

Would he do it? Would Keith really do it? I led the way. Like a scout brewing for a fight.

I thought back to basic and all the drill instructors screaming obscenities at us as we tried climbing – or negotiating, as they said – the obstacle courses. Structures that would have easily killed us if we'd fallen. They didn't care if we got dizzy. If we were afraid of heights. If we had nagging injuries or were so tired or distracted that we might make a mistake. Hurt someone else. It was always the same: "Get your fuckin sorry ass up and over that obstacle you lazy piece of shit or get out of my army!"

We found a spot to crawl under the barbed wire enclosure at the base. We weren't the only ones coming and going it looked like. Kids were still daring each other to climb the sign in defiance of getting caught. It was our turn, but we weren't kids any longer.

I started up the steel ladder. My head was swimming right off the bat. My weight pulled back on my arms as I climbed. Each stretch higher, every grip, each lift of the thigh and placement of my boot had to be both relaxed and an individual thought. I had to remember to focus on keeping three points of contact at all times. That's how you keep from falling. I felt sleepy deep back in my eyes. I wondered how the guys felt down behind me. I kept on.

"C'mon now, it's easy, y'all," I lied. "We've got to hurry." I could see our shadows exaggerated above from the enclosure's spotlights below. We'd get caught for sure if we weren't careful.

It thundered. Louder than before. A cloud lit up a little closer on the west side of town. There was rocking to the structure. The thunder vibrated down the ladder rungs. One of the guys whispered, *Whoa*.

Jo climbed after me, then Keith. They were both talking, drunk mumbling, concentrating.

"You better not puke on me," Keith warned Jo. We were still managing to laugh in our nervousness to hurry.

I felt a rain drop right between my eyes. Sudden and cool. For a second I fully realized what we were doing, unfazed by the alcohol, the raindrop sobering me for an instant. I was close to telling them to stop and head back down. That this was stupid. But then some other things I'd done came to me and I pressed on. I've done stupider things. More dangerous things, though climbing up a lightning rod five stories was dumb as hell.

I got up top and sat on the steel platform real carefully. The spotlights were right in my face, blinding, preventing any view of town or down below. One bulb was out far out near the end and more over the street. I wanted to see. As I scooted down Jo's head popped up, wide-eyed, from the ladder top.

"Hot damn, I made it."

"You did, man," I whispered. "C'mon up." We had to be quiet now.

He crawled out to where I was. We waited for Keith.

No Keith.

"Where's Keith?"

"He's right behind me."

It didn't appear so.

"Keith!" we both whispered as loud as we could. Nothing.

"Keith!"

Of course, our first thought was the only thing you could think in such a moment. Paranoia takes over.

"Crap."

We flipped over on our bellies to peek over the platform's edge, figuring we'd see Keith mangled up in a pile at the foot of the ladder. In my haze I think I was resigned to the idea of what I might see. "You look," Jo begged. I suddenly felt very sick.

But he wasn't there. Not piled up at the bottom of the ladder. Not still climbing the ladder. I leaned out and strained to look around. He was nowhere down in the secured enclosure. I was relieved at least by that, but where was he? I saw movement, out in the lights of the street. It was Keith stumbling back to the bar. He'd given up.

"You see him?" Jo asked, still worried.

"Yep."

"Is he dead?"

"No. Just chicken shit."

There wasn't much to downtown. Most of the original city burnt in the forties. Old downtown was only half a dozen blocks of old brick and stone with the rest of town sprawling out toward the dying mall and the aging Wal-Mart. We were on the north-facing side of the sign. Highway traffic stretched for miles in two directions. Headlights, taillights, brakes lights, the occasional police blues and reds. The lightning picked up. Someone's stereo thumped down the road. Some kids laughed.

Up on that billboard, risking falling, risking arrest? In a few more minutes maybe lightning struck? We were free for a little while. Untethered and above it all. Looking down our noses at town. Judging it. Judging what we were. Where we were. Defying a pull that would demand we descend back down into it. At least that's how I viewed it through my own persisting fog of vodka and beer.

I can't remember what the sign behind us actually said, besides something Coke related, like something cool and apropos to the moment. Probably just said ENJOY. And if it did say such a thing as ENJOY, I was only half-heartedly trying, but giving it a shot nonetheless. I was, after all, up here.

And we were, up there, trying, somewhere between scared and thrilled, our breaths cast off the girding into the heavy spring night air. Up that high it felt like everything wanted to give up and collapse.

I pulled a coin from my pocket. A quarter. Held it out straight-armed and waited, as if the coin itself might have known what was coming. I wondered if it would bury itself in the grass below. I dropped it. We watched it fall. Didn't hear a thing.



"Nothing," I said.

Jo hushed me. A cop car was passing down below, slowing up by the bar. An officer in the squad car spoke to a couple standing outside. I mentally willed them not to look up and notice us, or if they had, not to rat us out. The officer went on. The couple stood there in the shadows, their faces glowing and fading as they'd drag on a shared smoke.

*This town*, I thought. It glowed a strangeness when viewed from up high. Nothing changes. I realized in this moment we were the highest human beings in town.

*We are the all-seeing eyes of Edgewood. Know all. See all.*

At the same time, though, I could have jumped and no one really cared. Nothing about my hometown would have altered in the least. Not a hiccup. The sun would have kept rolling toward morning.

I asked Jo, "Did you guys know I left town, man?"

I could tell he had to think on it.

"Well, we remembered you leaving. Once we saw you was back, ya know?"

"I figured."

I thought, *If no one would miss me, who'd miss Jo? Who'd miss any of us in this town?* Not that we'd jump off the brightest, tallest damned thing in town. More like just walking off. Down the road. Like I sort of did when I joined up. Like people do every day, I suppose. Just packing up and driving off. Maybe calling a taxi for some long trip. Never looking back. Or if they do and come back, keeping a part of themselves stretched just far enough to not be all the way in. Like being in mid-fall off something up really high, feeling gravity do its dirty work.

# As I stepped down darkened stairs

*Lisa Kamolnick*

in the       middle       of the night

I saw a luminous sliver on the ledge  
of our bottom stair       a narrow slice  
that tumbled from the sky like cake  
or pie, the way we celebrate all our  
birthdays, and this was Ollie's day.  
I'd never noticed a slice here before,  
not that I have a habit of waking up  
and taking eleven dark stairs down

in the       middle       of the night

on Oliver's birthday. He's been here  
four years and I've been thirteen but  
either way you look at it, it's still true.  
Lately I keep waking up with insistent  
ideas, so I felt a need to give up sleep  
to patter down my stairs ... and write,  
just as the moon unleashed a narrow slice  
right through a window over our door

in the       middle       of the night

at an unusual angle given time of day  
and season of year—its effect on height  
and sheer brightness of Fall's full moon.  
In sudden staired stupor, I lost my ideas  
about poetry and science, and thought,  
felt ... my house is bursting wide open, sliced  
like a heart—in love or broken—I could  
not say which, under a full blue moon

in the       middle       of the night.

# The Meet-up

*Lisa Kamolnick*

It's been two months  
since they've seen each other.  
Two texts triangulate  
a designated time and place.

We meet at that McDonald's play area. Two women settle,  
still as rabbits, on two concrete seats  
and will ourselves invisible  
while sisters stand beside a slide  
and face each other, a stair-step pair of bookends.  
Can they read the bound books of electric air between them?

They exhale hazy clouds and stare—  
two sisters size each other up like strangers  
who wear familiar scents. Aromas of home  
waft up noses painted on forlorn doll faces.  
Problems and promises  
lay like pop quizzes in furrowed brows.  
Suddenly, their silent study breaks.

"What's it like?" the youngest squeaks.  
"Ok, I guess," the eldest sighs.  
They ponder their new lives, lock eyes, utter  
a stereo whisper: "Have you seen our mother?"

They shake heads in unison, look over their shoulders  
at us, two spied rabbits with facts no one can hide:  
foster mothers, actual strangers. We look away. We know  
they are sorting it out and sizing us up, as if  
love  
can somehow  
be measured.

# Tennessee Mountain Duet

Jason A. Terry

Your/my people: a people  
of too many blue eyes. Too many guns,

too much suffering, too long mere survival,  
too hard to love. But also too soft

to stop weeping inside. I inhale  
your literature. I sip from your history.

I cook from your recipes  
in generations old cast iron.

Tell me your *evil mean stories*  
so that I can tell myself a story

of where I'm from, who I am, and how  
I survived

you. These hills gave us Dolly Parton  
and Mildred Haun and two hundred

twenty years of people named Terry in the Free  
and Independent State of Scott.

I hate you.  
I read of you so as to reconstruct

you, crafting a narrative for myself  
that nurtures instead of murders, gives hugs

without first dousing them in abuse, shares hope  
bigger than the next mountain over. I sing

*an old fashioned love song* for you anyway.  
I love you.

I love you  
like I love to rib people who put sugar

in cornbread. I'm told we're too cutting  
with each other, but that's just how we do.

Down here we all know that "how nice"  
means "fuck you." We perfected the art

of keeping enemies closer. If we know someone  
and we're too polite, they should be afraid.

We value the freedom to be left alone,  
community over country, family

over community. And we accept  
that family is rarely a functional enterprise.

The oldest mountains in the world tell  
the best stories, even if they are evil and mean

and shattered-hearted. These same voices  
are somehow indefatigable and undefeatable.

That's how we stay together, you and I,  
with strength of granite and softness of eroding

limestone. Our meanness is our lovingness, pulsing  
through the twisted W-roads and gushing

over the  
waterfalls

of your/my  
soft-boiled heart.

# Small City Gay Bar

*Jason A. Terry*

I've never imagined being dead  
anywhere but in Tennessee.  
All my family is dead there,  
or will be.

This makes me think about my sense  
of place. How twenty years removed  
from a riparian valley between Appalachian  
and Cumberland ranges, I still feel like some traveller.

As though my adult life is but a sojourn  
and there's a porch rocker waiting  
for me to tell tales to nephews and nieces  
and cousins somehow removed.

I used to tell stories  
of urban living at Chuck's II Bar.  
Nobody knew where Chuck's I  
was, if it ever existed at all.

Men at various levels of Friend of Dorothy hung  
on my every word of big northeastern city antics.  
My trips to a traffic circle or grocery store  
as enthralling as random makeouts in clubs.

I was living their  
ever deferred dream.  
A Christmas Eve moment of vicarity  
could sustain these men for another year.

These old country queens never  
imagined being dead anywhere  
but Tennessee. Never imagined  
surviving Tennessee either.

But they did and they have and they're  
stronger than me for having stayed,  
even if they fawn over my body  
of stories.

# Grandma Jane

*Jason A. Terry*

I want to taste Grandma Jane's biscuits,  
snuck out of the warming oven while she tends  
her garden, and see if I really did inherit  
her gift for making them.

I want to see Grandma Jane at work in her two  
specialties, babies and bullets, both removed  
from bodies that could no longer  
hold them, a day's ride from any doctor.

I want to help Grandma Jane cultivate  
her herbs and mix up a tea or potion  
when folks come a-callin' with this or that ailment,  
always knowing just what to prescribe.

We've never met, great-great-Grandma Jane and me.  
I only know her through her 82 year old grandson,  
who still nourishes her memory each day,  
and yearns for her biscuits.

The closest I got to her was seeing him  
kneel down, pull back  
the weeds, and weep  
over Grandma Jane's grave.

But when it's time to reunite with my hillbilly  
forebears, I hope Grandma Jane is there with a pan  
of biscuits, and just the right herbal tea  
to heal my death.

# Highway Home

*Jason A. Terry*

These roads are darker,  
this night is deeper  
than the roads I most travel.

Stars overhead tell me I've left  
the coastal melee and set my tires  
in real America.

Truckers, minivans, all more in an amble  
than a rush. I'm going home.  
Or, where home once was.

And still is. Yet isn't.  
I'm not there much anymore.  
That much I know is true.

The "Keep America Great" signs  
gloss over the layers of my  
relationship with this homeplace.

You, dear reader, assume they stand in  
for what I left here. But again,  
this story is deeper than that.

At 18, I traded trees for books,  
waterfalls for college laundromats,  
and "hey faggot!" for Head Queen on Campus.

But this isn't a poem about leaving.  
It's a poem about returning,  
like an upstream bound trout.

My tree is rooted here,  
planted 200 odd years ago  
as other trees were extinguished.



These mountains speak my language,  
a lilt and twang and clip  
that fascinates linguists as much

as it terrifies outsiders.  
But it's just a dialect in the end.  
And ultimately it's mine.

I don't speak starless nights  
in neutral coasts. I speak a cosmos  
of flora beside a bubbling spring.

# Sorting Recipes

*Jason A. Terry*

I knew you, but I never knew you.  
And now I'm organizing  
a few hundred of your hand-written  
recipes, trying to discern you

from your too-fast script,  
overly-sugared  
measurements, and terse  
instructions.

At your funeral, I didn't recognize  
you – and it wasn't just the cancer turban  
in place of your hair – it was the stories told  
of you that confirmed our estrangement.

Who was this lost source of mirth  
to a family who knew you as distant and cold?  
Did your history hinder you  
from holding close those closest to you?

I recognize that you willed yourself  
to die when death was not your prognosis.  
Your own original sin proved irreversible;  
refused to be healed.

And so you hopped on the cancer train  
at the Choo-Choo and never looked back.  
Nothing could be finer than dinner in the diner  
of heaven after a month of hospital sludge.

Bastard child of a railroad man  
raised by his two sisters, you were taught  
to cook the pain away. And when you could cook  
no longer, you knew it was your time.

So now I sort recipes for all the sweets  
made for the family you chose,  
on whom you showered more love  
than on the family you birthed.

# Culicidae

*Rachel Swatzell*

Luminous eyes in the night  
moans against my skin  
proboscis piercing holes  
leaving itchy bruised kisses.

Tickling thorax in the day  
swatting at you to go away  
one hundred more surround my cabin  
stitching silk down my back.

The fever and chills increase  
it won't be long until  
I join your tribe  
in the Reservation haze.

# If Home Had a Multilingual Definition

Rachel Swatzell

God's work bench.

A stone carver who took his time  
perfecting Ol'Smoky. Tall enough  
to hold his daddy's hands when  
disasters erupt Smoky's meditation,  
for a child should never suffer from  
third degree burns, drown in his father's tears,  
or lose his balance to the hot-aired bullies.

Home.

Where the Iris dances in the backyard medicine cabinet  
and the Mockingbird sings a lullaby  
to the crickets at the stroke of the cotton candy sunset.  
Where backroads end  
and the creek bends,  
summer in the fall and fall to spring,  
seasons change at mother nature's beckoning call.

Me.

I am Appalachian,  
But what does that mean?  
I'm not the stereotype,  
a hillbilly or an overall wearin' redneck drinkin'  
moonshine  
with her clothes hangin' on a line  
while she cooks roadkill for dinner.  
*I do know a few of those.*  
Some think they have us figured out  
but no amount of Volunteer pride  
shuts out the Pioneers we welcome,  
"Ya'll come back now ya here?"

Appalachians.

Storytellers with rhythms so  
carefully chosen like the mountain's curves.  
Sacred acts, testimonials to the Cove  
sworn under an oath to take  
the Black Dust to the graves on the hill.

# Peaches n' Cream

*Rachel Swatzell*

*To my Nana*

Heavenly roads  
take you home,  
to the place  
Papaw knows you belong  
and I'll miss you  
but it's your time to sit  
on the pearly white throne,  
"Take Me Home, Country Roads" on the radio.

For four years it's been  
orange bottles  
and paper thin bleeding skin  
delusions of purple bruises and  
strands of silver lining hair.

My dashboard Jesus and  
quilt top maker, adolescent caretaker.  
I've never said I'm grateful  
but I hope through whistled breaths  
your last hand to hold is enough.

I know you would not stop for death  
but it came to you in the form  
of blue hospital gowns  
morphine-iced yellow roses  
and peaches and cream.

And somewhere over the rainbow,  
curly brown hair, and overalls  
it's ok.

## An excerpt from *The Bunker*

David Roncskevitz

1999

It was hard not to see everything as it soon would be. The semi-cold air barely kissed Hank Stubek's skin, air that was meant to be much colder for December 31st. It was one of the warmest New Year's Eves on record. Hank stood outside his house in a jacket and jeans, smoking a cigarette with the double-door that led down to his basement open behind him. The blue sky above was interrupted by only a few clouds. By all accounts, it was almost a beautiful morning. Soon, however, Hank knew that blue sky would be choked by spires of dark smoke that would turn the blue black. He would see birds rushing through the cumulous plumes, each small winged creature bat-like, trailing thin streams of darkness behind them like tiny, black chem trails, slicking through and between the smoky digits of the hand of a destructive god. Not that Hank really believed in God. Still, the last couple years he'd come to appreciate the true magnitude of an idea like God. It expands you.

The Stones River rushed loud and cold through Hank's back yard—really, it was Hank's back yard since there was only about 20ft between the door to the basement and the river's bank—and Hank looked across it to the early light pooling at the exposed ribs of the apartment buildings still being put up on the other side of that river, an apartment complex he'd fought the construction of tooth and nail for years. But they had been able to afford a better lawyer than his who had a better name than his and they eventually won out. Hank exhaled another lungful of smoke, his feet sinking into earth too soft for winter, and through the cloud he saw the apartment buildings, too, smoldering, the cranes and trucks blowed up, maybe a child's red ball rolling between them downward, toward the water, trailing oil or whatever it had run through behind it. He could smell the tear gas that would be drifting over the unprepared masses looking to take what they did not earn, had not

made ready for themselves. They would be dripping as they emerged from the River, their eyes bloodshot and insane, choking on the crowd control gas that was also choking the grass, perhaps even settling into the trees like dew. He could hear traffic collisions drowning out the early bird songs.

Hank smoked the cigarette down to the filter, field stripped it, dropped it in the cold mud. A white egret cut through the blossoming sky into the tree line hedging the river. It flew smooth and straight, close to the water between he and the apartments. A fish flopped out of the water, perhaps begging for death. Hank watched the bird, waiting for the dive, but when it flew past Hank wondered if even animals had lost their survival instinct. He stamped the cigarette into the mud and panned the landscape one last time before the plunge. All that he had imagined, the smoke, the gas, the crunching metal, the cries crazed and desperate, perhaps he would hear all them while lying on the twin bed he'd placed in his bunker, the one he'd taken down from his daughter's room when his wife turned it into a studio for her painting. Perhaps he would have a shotgun draped over his chest, his hands folded under his head. Perhaps he would be smiling, not a worry in the world. No matter what, he would be prepared.

Hank smiled.

A scent of raw earth hung in the air, the petrichor of leaf-death accelerated by the rain from the night before. He'd been anticipating a more concrete turn in the physical world in light of what was coming despite knowing it was not a force of nature, it was a sickness digital. Hank looked up and could finally see a bit of the sun coming over the trees, rushing the ghost of the moon away from the earth. The car sounds from the nearby highway were finally creeping in on his morning ritual.

No, no cataclysmic event. It would be a conspiracy of 1's and 0's that would tear the scaffolding

of Big Brother out from beneath the hyper-civilization that had been constructed to keep humans helpless. To strip them of their resourcefulness, to force them to need. Despite his certainty of what was to come, it was hard to reconcile that morning with what he'd spent his entire childhood imagining when taught about the end—the “wars and the rumors of wars,” natural disasters, a man in a white robe that was dipped in blood upon a horse galloping down the street. At least it was supposed to be really cold. Not humid and fresh from rain.

Hank ground the tip of his foot into the mud.

Though he knew he was falling behind schedule, Hank decided to smoke one last cigarette. Take in the final quiet morning, unsure of when he'd even have the opportunity to be above ground this long again if the bug fires off the nukes. Hank looked back at the house and up to the second story to see if the light was on in his wife's room. It wasn't. He walked a little closer to the water to relish the sound and pulled another cigarette from his pack, positioned and lit it. He packed his cigarettes hard and puffed them like cigars to get them started. The crackling sound of the slowly lighting tobacco brought him great pleasure.

He was running out of time to bring Deb into the bunker willingly, which was the only way it would happen.

Things had changed, but he still saw in her someone who startled him in a way he often became furious he couldn't explain. He hardly saw her now except for at the meals she demanded he eat up in the house. Last he mentioned the bunker over dinner weeks ago, she did not react well.

He decided it was a timing thing, she always hit her low-lows around the holidays when she would melt into the couch with the home videos or disappear into open closets, sitting on the floor with photo albums and touching their daughter's old clothes, left behind when she abandoned them to Europe. He should have waited for a better moment.

Hank closed his eyes so he could hear the stream *shhhh* and feel and taste the wind that swept over it as he felt his blood pressure rising, which was a signal to de-escalate (which is something their old doctor'd said). A better moment had not come, but he'd researched supplies for a hydroponic garden he would set up where his ammo-assembly station had been, and he planned to buy supplies for it that day, the last day there was to convince her to come down. She'd agree.

She'd have to agree. Though it boiled his blood, made him drag his cigarettes so long it burned his insides, he couldn't imagine living down there without her. They'd agreed to life, and he still meant it.

# Domestic

*Phyllis Price*

In gloaming gray the shade of weathered barn wood  
I turn into the asphalt drive that doesn't feel at all  
like home, like gravel used to grate beneath my tires.

Beside the lane a herd of deer  
graze in a pinewood grove, full-moon eyes aglow,  
before they freeze in headlights,

flee on chiseled legs—taut residual  
of evolution. Flash of ivory tails  
punctuate the darkness.

My spirit follows— far from pavement,  
engines, artificial light, this road I'm on—  
predictable, anything but wild.



# Extinction

## *life in the time of Covid*

*Phyllis Price*

Stroke of purple sombers sky  
along the summit's crest.  
White pine crowns wake winter lungs,  
exhale in green to quell the brittle tones.  
Coyote-tracked and deer-pawed  
old snow patches thatch the frozen ground.

In easy conversation, we count the weeks  
'till Daylight Savings Time, discuss varieties  
of seed to court May ground, who will mow  
the upper pasture come spring rains,  
how phases of the moon and earth are linked,  
feign, for now, mortality has gone extinct.

# Ode to Desire Lines

*Phyllis Price*

Let us praise the whimsical lattice  
of footpaths on college campuses,  
laud thatched hillsides  
where Angus cattle plod and bawl  
along dark strands of soil.

Let us raise voices in delectation  
for orbits made around kitchen tables  
in preparation and passing of bounty,  
linoleum worn from bare feet and brogans,  
homage to home.

Let us acknowledge neural spirals  
spun on sleepless nights—  
demons behind us, angels before us,  
rush and retreat of waking from dreaming,  
alone.

# Spectrum, 1957

*Phyllis Price*

A faint smell of cedar and mothballs  
braids the air in her bedroom.  
Dust motes dance on sunlit floor.  
She stands by the wardrobe mirror,  
slips on his old dress uniform jacket,  
pushes thick brass buttons through holes,  
straightens the collar, tugs at the cuffs,  
twists a curl on her forehead,  
lifts her chin, clinches a delicate jaw,  
turns to look at herself  
from a different perspective.

I wait for the trance to untangle,  
for her to remember  
the cast iron pot on the stove.

Steam streaks kitchen windows,  
obscures the familiar view.  
Tree limbs and rooflines

mingle angle and curve,  
spread open-weave shadows  
across the hardwood floor.

# We Bury My Mother's Daughter

*Phyllis Price*

I visit your grave  
uncertain if you sense me  
the way you did that time  
I swiveled my legs  
in a church pew  
to let your spirit enter.

I leave a broken shell  
from the ocean you never saw,  
or a rock tumbled in God's creek,  
or lay a sprig of dried seaweed  
from the Oregon coast  
on the stone that bears your name.

While your old peonies  
push new growth through rocky soil  
in our yards, we come to bury  
your daughter's ashes  
in this verdant womb. Another spring,  
and sorrow comes to roost.

## Biographies

**Andrew P. Dillon** graduated in the University of Tennessee's inaugural MFA class. His work is forthcoming or has appeared most recently in *Beautiful Cadaver Project*, *Analog*, *Stirring*, & *Connotation Press*. He lives in Nashville while he completes his first collection. He is tragically committed to the Buffalo Bills, Buffalo Sabres, & Tennessee Vols. He strongly supports the use of semi-colons, em dashes, & the serial comma. He maintains an online presence at [andrewdillonpoetry.com](http://andrewdillonpoetry.com).

**Chrissie Anderson** Peters is a native of Tazewell, VA. She lives in Bristol, TN, with her husband and their four feline children. A graduate of Emory & Henry College and the University of Tennessee, she has written three books *Dog Days and Dragonflies*, *Running From Crazy*, and *Blue Ridge Christmas*. Her passions include music (especially 80s) and travel. Her website is [www.CAPWrites.com](http://www.CAPWrites.com).

**Sam Campbell** is a writer and teacher from Tennessee. She earned her English M.A. from East Tennessee State University, where she was the Editor-in-Chief of *The Mockingbird*. She serves *Arkansas International* as Social Media Editor, and holds editorial positions at *Orison* and *The Great Lakes Review*. She is the fiction editor and co-founder of *Black Moon*. She publishes across all genres; her work appears in *October Hill*, *Tennessee's Emerging Poets Anthology*, and *Bloodroot*, among others. Her awards include, but are not limited to, the 2019 James Still Prize for Short Fiction and 2019 Jesse Stuart Prize for Young Adult Writing.

**Amy-Ellen Laws** grew up in the small town of Greeneville, TN, and found her way to Paris, France. She has equal love for the Smoky Mountains and the Eiffel Tower. She is a certified French instructor and her column *The Vivacious Voyager* appears in the Accent section of *The Greeneville Sun* every other Wednesday. Her essay *Cornbread and Crème Brûlée* was featured in the 2019 *Mildred Haun Review*. She earned a Master of Arts in French at the University of Georgia and a Master of Arts in Teaching from East Tennessee State University.

**Jane Sasser** has published poems in the *The Sun*, *North American Review*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and others. She has three poetry chapbooks: *What's Underneath* (Iris Press, 2020), *Recollecting the Snow* (March Street Press, 2008), and *Itinerant* (Finishing Line, 2009). A retired high school English teacher, she lives in Oak Ridge, TN, with her husband and retired greyhounds.

**Dr. Michael Sobiech** teaches English at Carson-Newman University, where he directs the first-year writing program and the professional writing minor. *The Paranormal Press: 'True' Ghost Stories from Historic East Tennessee Newspapers* is part of his ongoing research concerning East Tennessee folklore.

**Zoe Pendleton** lives in the mountains in Northeast Tennessee. She will be in a local art show in late 2021 and has had poems published in the *Cougar Classics*.

**Jade Garcia** resides in the beautiful, northeast region of Tennessee. She is actively pursuing her education in English and Biology. She also partakes in creative writing and digital design. Her work has been published in the *Cougar Classic Journal*, and her poems have been featured on the *Cougar's* postcards.

**Roger D. Hicks** is an Appalachian writer, blogger, and auctioneer living in West Liberty, KY. His work has appeared in *Freshwater*, *Mush*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Orpheus at Lindsey Wilson College*, *Now And Then*, *True Christmas Stories From The Heart Of Appalachia*, *Wingspan*, *Across The Margin*, *the Mildred Haun Review*, *River Babble* and numerous other venues. He is working on a final edit of a short story collection and a biography of an Appalachian coal camp town.

**Tracy Haun Owens'** work has appeared in *Salon*, *The Humanist*, *The Pigeon Parade Quarterly*, and more. She is a contributing writer for a couple of Knoxville news publications, writing about arts and the environment. A graduate of the University of Tennessee Knoxville, where she studied with Arthur Smith and Marilyn Kallet, she received the English department's Margaret Artley Woodruff Award for Creative Writing and a Robert A. Burke award for fiction.

**Abby N. Lewis** is a poet from Dandridge, Tennessee. She is the author of the chapbook *This Fluid Journey* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and the poetry collection *Reticent* (Grateful Steps, 2016). Her work has appeared in *Timber*, *The Mockingbird*, *The Allegheny Review*, *Sanctuary*, and elsewhere. You can keep up with her on her website: [freeairforfish.com](http://freeairforfish.com).

**Carla R. Bailey** is an Appalachian educator, mother, and writer living and working in the heart of Central and Southern Appalachia.

**Antonio Vallone** is an associate professor of English at Penn State DuBois. Founding publisher of MAMMOTH books, he is also poetry editor of *Pennsylvania English* and a co-founding editor of *The Watershed Journal* Literary Group—which provides journal and book publishing opportunities for Pennsylvania writers and runs Watershed Books, a writer's space and used bookstore. He is a board member of *The Watershed Journal* and the Pennsylvania College English Association. His collections include *The Blackbird's Applause*, *Grass Saxophones*, *Golden Carp*, and *Chinese Bats*. Forthcoming are *American Zen* and *Blackberry Alleys: Collected Poems and Prose*. He can be reached at [ajv2@psu.edu](mailto:ajv2@psu.edu).

**John C. Mannone** has poems appearing in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Foreign Literary Journal*, *Le Menteur*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Poetry South*, *Baltimore Review*, and others. He won the Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest in poetry (2020), the Carol Oen Memorial Fiction Prize (2020), and the Joy Margrave Award (2015, 2017) for creative nonfiction. He was awarded a Jean Ritchie Fellowship (2017) in Appalachian literature and served as the celebrity judge for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (2018). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and other journals. A retired physics professor, John lives between Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

**Lacy Snapp** teaches as an adjunct professor of Composition and American Literature at East Tennessee State University and as a woodworker for her business, Luna's Woodcraft. She earned her undergraduate degree from UT Chattanooga, and her MA in English from ETSU. She serves as a board member for the Johnson City Poets Collective and is pursuing an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

**Michelle Young** has been published in the poetry anthology *Blanket Stories* by Richard Jochum and Ruth Zamoyta, as well as *Festival Writer Issue 2:6 July 2014: Sestinas special issue*, *American Diversity Report*, *Quill and Parchment*, *Crazy Buffet: Curbside Pickup*, *Silver Blade*, and others. She has participated in readings from *Blanket Stories* at Columbia University and the Princeton Public Library, and enjoys travel that inspires her writing. Michelle and her husband, Corey Green, reside in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

**Melissa Helton** lives, teaches, and writes in southeast Kentucky. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Shenandoah*, *Still: The Journal*, *Appalachian Review*, and more. Her chapbooks include *Inertia: A Study* (Finishing Line Press, 2016) and *Forward Through the Interval* (Workhorse, 2022).

**Patricia Hope** has won awards in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, *Voices on the Wind*, *The Avocet*, *The Weekly Avocet*, *Tiny Seed*, *Liquid Imagination*, *American Diversity Report*, *Maypop*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, *Muscadine Lines*, and *Southern Writers*, as well as *Mature Living*, *The Writer*, *Blue Ridge Country*, and many newspapers and anthologies. Born and raised in Appalachia, she lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

**Kirk Judd** has lived, worked, trout fished and wandered around in West Virginia all of his life. Kirk was a member of the Appalachian Literary League, a founding member and former president of West Virginia Writers, Inc. and is a founding member and creative writing instructor for Allegheny Echoes, Inc. He was co-editor of the anthology *Wild Sweet Notes – 50 Years of West Virginia Poetry*. He has published three volumes of poetry and his work has appeared in many regional literary journals and magazines.

**Lauren Fowler** is a Visiting Instructor of English at the West Virginia University Institute of Technology. She received her Master of Arts in English at East Tennessee State University in 2015. As a native of West Virginia, her writing interests often include personal stories about family, nature, and growing up in Appalachia.

**Larry D. Thacker's** stories can be found in past issues of *The Still Journal*, *Pikeville Review*, *Fried Chicken and Coffee*, *Dime Show Review*, *Vandalia Journal*, *Grotesque Quarterly*, and *Story and Grit*. His books of fiction include the short story collection, *Working if Off in Labor County*, from West Virginia University Press, and the forthcoming short story collection, *Everyday Monsters*, co-written with C.M. Chapman, from Unsolicited Press. His poetry is in over 170 publications including *Spillway*, *Still: The Journal*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry South*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. His stories have been nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net recognitions. His books include *Mountain Mysteries: The Mystic Traditions of Appalachia*, and the poetry chapbooks *Drifting in Awe* and *Memory Train*, as well as the full collections *Drifting in Awe*, *Grave Robber Confessional*, *Feasts of Evasion*, and the forthcoming, *Gateless Menagerie*. His MFA in poetry and fiction is earned from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Visit his website at: [www.larrydthacker.com](http://www.larrydthacker.com)

**Lisa Kamolnick**, after a nomadic military childhood, planted herself in northwest Florida's sugar-white sands. In 2007, she retraced an ancestral trail to Appalachia and settled in northeast Tennessee highlands. She holds a B.A. in English from University of Florida. Lisa explores human nature, the human condition, the natural world and what lies between and beyond. She currently serves as vice president of communications for Poetry Society of Tennessee's Northeast Chapter. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ink to Paper*, *Tennessee Voices*, and *Black Moon Magazine*.

**Jason A. Terry** (he/him) is a misplaced Appalachian from Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee living in Washington, DC. He is an abuse survivor with a degree in peace. He was once a choirboy. He was once an award-winning queer activist. He is still a passionate international educator. He uses his middle initial so you don't confuse him with an NBA player or an attempted country singer who is probably a distant cousin.

**Rachel Swatzell** is a Creative Writing and Literature major alum from Tusculum University. Swatzell has been previously published in *The Blue Route*, *The Mildred Haun Review*, *Stillpoint Literary Magazine*, and more. She serves as the Social Media and Communications Creator for Gypsy Soul Market and is on a new path to discover how her poetry will transcend.

**David Roncskevitz** originally hails from Nashville, Tennessee. He lives in Chicago, IL, where he works at Columbia College Chicago. David is working on his first novel, *The Bunker*, from which this excerpt is taken. It follows a man who feels he's lost the respect of his family. As a result, he decides to subscribe to the apocalyptic predictions of Y2K in the hopes that, in his bunker, he can reclaim what he felt was his former position as master of his domain over his wife and adult daughter who refuse to buy into his mania.

**Phyllis Price** is a Virginia poet and the author of the chapbook *Quarry Song* (Finishing Line Press) and a spiritual autobiography, *Holy Fire* (Paulist Press). Her work has appeared in anthologies and the journals *Appalachian Heritage*, *Greensboro Review*, *Atlanta Magazine*, *Blue Ridge Country Magazine*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, and *Poem*, among others. Price's work reflects the interdependence between nature and humanity with emphasis on rural life. She resides on a small farm in Blacksburg.





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