



Mildred Haun Review

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Beyond the sunset come the stars

Becky Parker

A thousand years from now,
I hope for a moment captured
like this, where beyond the purples
and yellows of sunset has come
the canopy of stars, sparkling prisms
of light; its firmament blanketing us
with wonder.

Your path and mine will still be intertwined,
as the rivers meet the seas forming
strong pulsating waves, healing waters
transforming our anguish
to joy; shells to roses in the sand.
Our corporeal bodies
will recline in a glass bottom boat,
drink rum, and make a wish
on the brightest star
for such a lasting union,
ten thousand years or more.

Traveling down the highway

Becky Parker

in 1975, singing at the top of my lungs “Love Will Keep Us Together”;
I saw a billboard for a quarter pounder, fries, and coke, only a buck 69.
Simultaneously keeping a safe distance from the big rig in front of me,
checking my rear view mirror, and contorting like an octopus;
I searched the “borrowed” Chevy Laguna for change.

Sifting through the owner’s discarded candy wrappers; receipts,
unopened bills, old soda bottles, and a selection of
smashed French fries, laden with lint; my fingers finally latched onto enough coins.
“Eureka! Baby, you’re gonna eat tonight!” I cooed to my unborn nomad
wriggling under my sweater.

Once off the interstate, I cranked down the window, signaled a left hand turn, as
the blinkers had conked out 150 miles back, and pulled up under the golden arches,
lured by the big red smile of a clown, who resembled my ex.
I never could resist a man with big feet.

The cow fiddled while the barn burned

Becky Parker

on the isolated farm built squarely
in the middle of the flood plain.

Farmer lay sleeping in the heat of the day,
holes in his socks as he snored away.
Wifey made plans with the milk man sharing
giggles on the bales of hay.

Sun scorched the fleshy part of all that life had left,
and melted ideas into dust,
crabapples withered, rakes left to rust,

Farmer hired a mouse to do the cooking.
Now all they eat is cheese.
This crazy living is
driving Granny to her knees.

The chickens in the coop
gobbled their corn
and spat them out like spaghettios
forming words in the dirt
on how to propagate the fields.

Hound dog climbed out beneath the porch,
ears low to the ground, went to the landfill,
sniffed out an old fire hydrant splattered with paint,
raised his leg and gave it a sprinkle,
woofed and ambled back home.

The cow fiddled while the barn burned.

Loitering

Braden Weaver

I have always felt something honest about loitering.
It is, to me, a worthwhile endeavor, a noble pursuit.
Words other men use to describe hard work.

Hands in pockets, standing by a curbside
Or sitting on a curbside.
Sipping from a tin can or slurping from a tin can.
The dust on your jeans kicked up from a semi outside Albuquerque
Or sand from your sleep near Galveston
Or, better yet, whatever is collected there in your cuffs —
Shake them out now and see.

Would we ask that which is floating:
“Where are you to go?”
That which accumulates invisible there on the ground:
“What are you to be?”
And besides, who else would tell tale of the steel-toes and bent-backed?
My pockets are full of nothing but my hands,
And the insoles of my boots remind me of socks.
The sun will set again tomorrow, surely,
But not like it has tonight.

Seasonal Affective

Braden Weaver

My mind, the one now pressed between the blue bells
and filled with the smell of the dew damp soil,
is struck by the knowledge of spring.
I smile.

Then wonder where that smile and my mind wander off to
at the end of each fall. When the cedar drops its needles
and covers the woodchuck's hole like copper confetti on his peering head.

Dreams, Feeding Memory

Chris Wood

Overnight, rain frosts the pavement, yard
hushing the landscape white.
A brown leaf skips across the driveway
disappearing behind his silver Honda.

My breath vapors, mingles
with steaming coffee, my palms warm,
knuckles cold and dry
as last night's web, unraveling,
drifts over my head.

Dish Towel

After Ann Quinn

Connie Green

Wave in the summer breeze
like a field of ripe wheat,
light as a baby's hair,
flatter than a pancake.

Lie quietly in the drawer
with your kin,
kiss the moisture
from the dinner plates.

Child of the flour sack,
cousin to the bathroom hand towel,
grandmother to rags
in the cleaning closet.

O cotton boiled and beaten,
bleached by sun,
pounded and struck
by river rocks.

O memory holder
of childhood chores,
song of my daily trek—
stove to table to sink.

You who neither ask
nor answer, you
who just are
and shall be.

Hungry for Love

Connie Green

I was too young to know
the cause of my hunger.

I ate all day—a snack
before breakfast, again
midmorning, midafternoon,
just before bed, three solid
meals filling in the time gaps.

I was ribs and sharp hip bones,
gangly arms and narrow wrists.

My body shed fat like a dog
shaking off water. Even my dreams
were a banquet snatched away
before I took the first bite.

Not until I found you
did flesh find its nourishment—

a feast of marbled muscle,
juicy earlobes, lips of honey,
sweet neck for nibbling,
my own body filling out,

curves where angles had defined
my space, a jagged landscape
dissolved into smooth hills
and long green meadows,
rich with all I needed for survival.

Sorrow

Connie Green

Sorrow took all the handkerchiefs—
the one you bought for your mother
on a trip to Switzerland, its embroidered
pansy still fresh as a March morning,
your husband's red bandanas, grease
stains embedded like an uncle who
came to dinner and didn't depart
until the hearse carried him away.

Sorrow takes over your bed, leaves
you to sleep hanging onto the coverlet's
fringe. She throws out the cinnamon
and sugar, stocks your shelves
with dandelion, rue, and wormwood,
makes sure you keep onions, a knife
nearby to slice the teary layers.

She doesn't pat the dog or stroke
the cat's soft fur, prefers tables
with sharp edges, leaves her shoes
where you trip over them.

Sorrow opens the windows in winter,
hides your wool socks and heavy pajamas.
When you think she's finally gone,
she sneaks up the basement stairs, slides
into the empty chair at the breakfast
table, swears she'll never leave you.
And you know she means it.

Sweet Joy of Clothes Drying in the Sun

Connie Green

My sister and I stand by the washer
feeding sheets through the wringer rollers, fat
lengths of fabric flattened into pastel
boards we'll pin to the clothesline where wind
and sun will restore the softness we'll spread
on our bed, our parents' bed, our younger
sister's bed, sleep that will knit the raveled
edge of day, the bard wrote, his own lines hung
with color we still mine some four hundred
years later, my sister and I gone on
to lives striped and streaked and mottled, rainbow
hues wavering before eyes that someday
will dim along with memory and breath and
the sweet joy of clothes drying in the sun.

Quilting

Gay Marie Logsdon

I.

When I was only nine or ten,
my grandmother started a quilt for me,
using cotton scraps from other projects—
dolls clothes and small dresses when I was younger—
with tiny floral prints on solid backgrounds,
adding new material in wide concentric circles,
each octagon, a reminder of past gifts
and the outfits that I had loved.
The quilt was meant to be a bedspread,
but Gramma never got a chance
to finish it before she died.
Years later, my mother added to the quilt,
using her new sewing machine
to stitch the octagons together,
then arranging them in rings and
adding a border to make it bigger.
After Mother died, I found the quilt
packed in a box, neatly labeled,
still unfinished, in a drawer.

II.

My grandmother taught me how to embroider,
and I made a sampler for her when I was eight.
After she died, Mother gave the sampler to me.
It hangs in a frame on my bedroom wall.
I wasn't good at using a sewing machine.
In high school, I almost flunked Home Ec
when we had to make a nightshirt
with a button plack and set-in sleeves.
I easily sewed the first sleeve in,
but I then struggled and struggled
to keep the other one from puckering.
I gave up and stood in line for help.
When I finally reached the front,
before I could explain the problem,
the teacher grabbed the shirt
and ripped out the one good sleeve.
That night, my mother helped me cheat:
she sewed in both sleeves for me.

Since then, I rarely use a sewing machine
to make outfits or even to hem pants.
Instead, I stitch together thoughts,
choosing words and metaphors as carefully
as Gramma picked patterned cloth,
surrounding memories with new images
in notebooks and on scraps of paper,
then arranging and rearranging them
to create small quilts of prose and poetry.
Perhaps my daughters will one day find
my sentences and phrases in files,
neatly labeled, partly finished,
waiting for them, on my computer.

God Breaks the Heart

Gay Marie Logsdon

“God breaks the heart again and again and again until it stays open.”

— Hazrat Inayat Khan

What is this human heart that it can break
so many times and yet survive?

Not a massive igneous tower,
rising dark against the foam
at the ocean's edge in Oregon,
withstanding the rhythmic pounding,
pounding of the breakers
throwing their force against
the stolid face of rock,
wearing it smaller over millennia.

No, not such a rock, yet also formed
in fierce fire deep within a greater majesty,
abruptly cast into realms of earth and light,
to weather outside forces
and outlast bitter sprays of salt.

Nor is it a speckled brown egg,
fresh from a backyard hen,
warm with treasure,
awaiting one soon chance
to be released,
new life or spilled promise.

No, not such an avian gift,
yet once borne on wings,
and similarly fragile
when first formed,
also possessing
the wonder of creation.

More like an iridescent pearl
within the rarest oyster,
the heart glistens within the flesh,
nacreous concentric layers
exquisitely deposited

in defiance of some past injury
or in defense against another,
hidden, often without our knowing,
but with a cold crystalline form
trapping, not hard unwanted grit,
but the tender inmost spirit.

These, then, are the layers
that must be removed,
chipped, stripped, bit by bit,
over and over, day after day,
even hour by hour,
as often as we lay them down.
Only through such refinishing,
willing or unwilling restoration,
can the human heart
be ready to admit
the fullness of God's blessing.

The Request

Gay Marie Logsdon

Do you believe
it is possible
to love someone
on behalf of another,
to be asked to love
for now
even without knowing
what that might mean,
what wounds it would reopen,
what hurt could be endured,
how long joy might sustain,
while honoring memories,
past hopes and promises—
hesitating, imagining,
waiting for a sign,
wondering what is real,
sensing the longing beyond,
knowing loving arms
in the hereafter
beckon over time,
so this request is
only temporary,
and the response is,
the desire is,
to live fully
with connections
of the heart
as long as possible
with as much joy
as is possible
now?

Breaking Up Housekeeping

for Michael

Jane Sasser

You haul them into my basement,
boxes of odds you haven't used:
bottles of wine for celebrations
that never came, cleaning supplies
that failed to motivate,
a reindeer towel still smiling
in its tags, grandfather clock
that ticked away six years.
In the dim light you order them
beside my mother's vanity,
the sealed boxes from cleaning out
her rooms when Alzheimer's
sentenced her to a different home.
So many things to anchor us
to this world—as though
this weight I feel could ground
my heart, could certify
that you'll come back,
my child whose baby chair
I finally gave away.

Condolences

Jane Sasser

After the hurricane spins on,
I pack for the friend who spends
his days shuffling through debris
washed up of his former life,

a box lined in bubble wrap, and
the last of the fig preserves.
Thick and sweet, like liquid gold,
their heft shifts in the jar, last

of the favorite tree, cut down
and extracted by its roots,
along with our other trees,
not by a hurricane, but by saws

and grinders hired by the couple
who bought our house. I shouldn't
be surprised—taking no prisoners
is the order of the times.

These days, any sweet thing left
from our old regimes must go,
and I pack these figs for my friend,
consolation prize for loss,

for his, for mine, for all
of ours.

Before I Die, I Want To...

Jane Sasser

invites the coffee shop chalkboard,
and we comply, scrawling our dreams
in orange and white lines across
the slate: *go to Greece, become an artist,*

save the environment, milk a goat,
hike Half Dome, marry Jared,
each releasing a prayer of sorts,
fledgling bird into a universe of hopes.

Almost lost in this avalanche
of aspirations, this small plea:
think well of myself. I wonder
about the writer—a woman,

I presume, seeing a small girl
years ago, how someone maimed
her nascent joy and mocked
her fractured wings, so now

her greatest wish is for self-respect.
You know her, too, have looked into eyes
that flit away, have watched her tremble
as she flails to stay aloft.

Harvest

Jane Sasser

In the quiet cool of the oncology ward,
my father thought how spring
would be bursting from dogwood boughs,
daffodils nodding in warming air.

He remembered that fall in France, apples
falling into ruts of tanks. He breathed
the smell of diesel fumes and cigarettes,
heard the chorus of his work: *now boarding,*

on track three, for Monroe, Polkton, Hamlet,
Lumberton. He felt the weight of an ax,
the wealth of logs piling high, the sky
blue as the eyes of his own first son.

Overhead, a hawk sailed, its cry true
as any story he'd ever read.
He remembered the apple tree
where his father had died,

just resting in the shade,
slumped over onto grass,
the way he'd always thought
he'd like to go as well.

A Formal Feeling

Jane Sasser

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—Emily Dickinson

A nuthatch perches on our sill,
cocks her head to peer inside,
and though the glass still bears
smears of an eager nose,
no one comes. No bark threatens
this bird, or all the deer who dare
to roam her woods, and though
light falls as before into the house,
though her sister lies in its stripes
and hopeful touch, none of us
feel its warmth, or stir to gaze
at the season's turn, leaves aglow
in a blur of orange and red.
I catch myself at doors, on the cusp
of calling for a soul who will not show,
and when, at a restaurant, a woman
says *Emma*, we are stricken so
we can barely eat. *No one should love
a dog this much*, I tell a friend,
except of course, everyone should,
but oh, how hard it is to make
our feet go round.

Contemplating Color

John C. Mannone

October's maples dissolve their yellows
into a swift stream tinted with pine.
A late southern sun hides in the elms.
Eddy pools by a dock, collage the sky
with leaf-blur and muted browns
within the ripples—an abstract masterpiece
that ensconces the sun diffracting
through a canopy of leafy pinholes.
Starbursts reflect in the water's shade,
cottony light feathering like angel
wings so luminous it must be holy.
A rising prayer, the resurrection of a sun
fish, breaks the surface, sparkles gold
that's on its belly, a complement to the silver
blue of its scales speckled with dark
spots of hope, while shimmering in chaos.
The dorsal fin, a translucent web
of spikes, fans out in defense while
the whole body, strung up, quivers
in the wind, desperate for freedom.
Its gills gasp to breathe water,
a hook buried deep in its lip, mouth
open after swallowing the lure
of a worm, unable to voice complaint.

But standing on the world-worn
wood, the old sure-footed Black man
understands its gaping silence

and lets it go.

The Old Mailbox

John C. Mannone

Just before twilight, the old mailbox
shadowed across the road, pointed
to my house, brought me poetry
that I could sing— I used to live
under a peaceful country sky full
of stars sparkling the sacred dark.
And when April air was scented
with floral esters, hounds bayed
in the woods, with a full moon
illuminating silvery pin oak leaves
while crows squawked murder
along with squirrels chortling
in my backyard walnut tree.
Black walnuts rewarded my palate
but inked my fingers dark green
after probing their leathery husks.

There was so much
presumption of beauty— its pastoral
scenes— until intruders daggered it:
lampposts bled light, glared at night,
trespassed into my bedroom.
Even they could be sequestered
by intelligent pleas to smart leaders
who could arrest the incursions
with effective countermeasures.
But certain intruders couldn't be
put out with light— the darkness
they brought—

they have raped
my privacy: shattered windows, kicked
down my doors, trashed my home,
stole my scant possessions, my dignity,
so many times. I called out
for help, sent letters to detectives
from that old mailbox but its mouth
battered shut couldn't speak
a word, or bring me any more poetry.

Blueberry Fields

John C. Mannone

Blueberry bushes with that silvery
sparkle in the sun against a Smoky
Mountain blue on the way to Andrew's
Bald off New Found Gap Road.

My shirt with blueberry colored
flowers to match my blue jeans.

Blueberry ink with the hue my poetry
takes: violet and passionate rose.

At breakfast, moist muffin berries
or pancakes with a blue-black syrup.

I love blueberry
skies. And the white metal of my plane
against a cloud, with that red and blue
paint-striped reminiscence of the flag.

If I were to place that flag on Mars,
backlit by striking blue sunsets
from the scattering of rust-red dust,

I'd think of you, our long conversations
on the cellphone boxed in blue
back on Earth.

There's something Elysian
about blueberry fields, your smiles,

and the color of my longing to hold
you again and feel the quiver
of my lips on yours.

Butterfly Within a Butterfly

John C. Mannone

A metal sculpture by the entrance of an Assemblies of God church.

Copper-red and orange-brown gossamer wings
flit and float on a wisp of clover air, yet they are
metal and absence of metal. Metamorphosed

from copper—sheared, punched, hammered
on a wooden cross-shaped workbench, pressed
in a vise, scribed, gouged, and hung above
an anvil altar—into something beautiful
because that is what already is in the inside.

Inside us, there's a gold metalwork— menorah
or candelabra, fashioned with beautiful
scars glistening in the lasting Light, brilliant
noble metal whose branches are bones
of outstretched arms reaching for heaven,
while the center shaft is the fleshy side
according to the Hebrew in the Torah.
Metaphor inside metaphor.

Hammered and reformed into something
with hope and full of truth to be set free
as a bird but with the grace of a butterfly.
Transformed from unattractive caterpillar
to glorious butterfly. A spiritual rebirth.

How fitting, the copper butterfly planted
by the church. I can almost hear it beckon,
Come, quoting from the book of Romans,
Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.

This is where one comes to change
from chrysalis to a lifter of prayers.
Let us stir the wind.

She's a Train Wreck About to Happen

John C. Mannone

For my daughter, Melissa

I suppose it began
at the roundhouse
where engines get
turned around
when she was grandfathered
into service but with a lack of loving
maintenance, a lackluster that replaced
natural beauty, further betrayed
by the rust
of her words:
same old, same old
flaking off the tongue,
and poor engineering,
hooking up
with one after the other—
a bunch of empty cars
never hauling their weight,
pulling
her down at every hilly grade,
rattling on the whole length
of track, screeching at every
curve.

A constant loud beating
of spirit, never the kind
quiet of progress—that
lulling rhythm of the train
always hidden from her.

Instead,
one drama after another.
A queen of the rails, she
steams in retaliation but
to the indifferent air,
chugs
through constant danger
of unprotected crossings,
simply blowing her horn.
Passersby at great risk,
let alone

those who love this loco-
motive waiting for her at
the whistle switch, jumping,
waving on RxR ties, crying

Stop!

but selfish
tracks won't
let her.

She is
flat out
of options

yet

an Orange Blossom
Special, and she's mine
... but I have to get off
the tracks before I am
crushed.

Lavender Stars and a Jasmine Wind

John C. Mannone

A skein of clouds unrolls into flat sheets, their pink cast warps the sky, and the full moon seems to wink down at Mr. Jimmy, who is sleeping naked as a jaybird in his neighbor's yard. Force of habit. So Mrs. Hingerty, his neighbor, seeing him out the kitchen window in the morning, calls the cops. And of course, they arrest Mr. Jimmy A. Woverton.

At the police station, the officer sets down a glass of water on the table in front of the old man. "Mr. Woverton. I've phoned your son."

"Just call me Jimmy." He slurps down the water. "Thank you, Officer."

"Jimmy, why did you do that—expose yourself like that?"

"My Annie and I like to go *moonin'*." His eyes starry lit.

"Now, Mr. Jimmy, you can't be doing that sort of thing in public."

He smiles; his dentures slip as his words click out, "Officers, Annie and me." Mr. Jimmy repositions the teeth. "She's been my sweetheart since the high school prom—we like go camping right under every harvest moon—that's moonin'—and we'd be smoochin' butt naked all night long, too..."

The lead officer, blushing a bit, clears his throat. "Okay, Mr. Jimmy, that's enough; there's no need to go into details, we get the picture."

"Officer!" Mr. Jimmy leans in closer clutching the blanket they put around him earlier; whispers in a scratchy voice, "Where's my Annie?"

"Mr. Jimmy." The officer stands up and saunters around the table toward the old man; he looks at his partner, then back to Mr. Jimmy. "Sir. There was no lady with you. We found you alone."

"How can that be?" Mr. Jimmy's mouth hangs half-open and his eyes no longer have that gleam.

"Okay, Mr. Jimmy." The officer breathes slow and deep. "Just sit here until your son arrives."

Late in the afternoon, the front desk sergeant directs Mr. Woverton, Jr. He stomps up the stairs in his lawyerly suit with a satchel in one hand and a brown paper bag stuffed with clothes in the other. He hurries through the glass doors of the interrogation room.

Panting, the middle-aged attorney says to the officers in a softened voice, "Sorry it took so long; I was held up in court. I got here as soon as I could." Then turning to his father bundled in a blanket at the end of the table, he continues with exasperation, "Pop! They called me in the middle of court to tell me you've been arrested! What's going on?"

"Sir, wait a moment." One of the deputies pulls the attorney aside and whispers to him for a few minutes, his voice rising slightly toward the end, but Mr. Jimmy is not close enough to hear. "You're going to have to do something about your father." Mr. Woverton, Jr. nods in agreement.

"Pop, what am I going to do with you?" His tone is almost apologetic. "Last week you went on a shopping spree and bought all that hiking gear from the Army surplus."

"I got a good deal, too." Mr. Jimmy smiles a proud smile.

"But Pop, you spent nearly all you had on stuff you don't need."

"I need it for the mountain trip, Son."

"Pop, we've talked about this before. You're not going to traipse off on your own up some damned mountain." His eyebrows shift as he speaks. "Then the week before that, you nearly burned the house down by leaving the stew on the stove on high heat unattended. It's a good thing Mrs. Albert was passing by to check on you. The smoke alarm was screaming... and where were you? In the backyard playing chess with the squirrels!"

"No, Son. I was playing the game with Annie."

"Pop! Stop it! Annie's gone."

"Where'd she go?"

His son takes him by the shoulders, as if he's about to shake him, but pulls him in close instead, wrapping arms around his father. His voice cracks. "Mom's gone. She's been gone for four years, Pop."

Mr. Jimmy's eyes redden; tears drip on his thin mustache.

"Where did she go, Son? Why?"

"Don't you remember, Pop? Her heart gave out."

After a long pause, he says, "I want to go home, Son."

"Sure, Pop... Here, put these clothes on."

Not many words exchange on the way to the house, or during dinner. Mr. Jimmy slurps his soup, but mostly stares at the rest of his food.

"Pop, it's getting pretty late and I have to pack. I got to fly out of town in the morning to

see one of my clients. I'll have Mrs. Albert come stay with you."

"No! Annie will get mad."

He looks at his father, tries not to show his frustration. "We'll have to talk about that when I get back from my trip."

Mr. Jimmy shuffles straightway to his bedroom. He sits in a French provincial, then murmurs, "Annie loved this chair so much." He gazes at the picture on his dresser that a hiker they met on the trail took—Annie and him on a trail in the Great Smoky Mountains. That's where he kissed her for the first time, there on that mountain under a quilted scarlet sky fifty years ago, and later, where he had proposed to marry her. Claspings the gold-braided picture frame, he closes his eyes and breathes deeply, as if to smell the soft green sassafras and the wintergreen berries there, and that hint of her jasmine perfume. "Remember that kiss by the stream? And what we did afterward?" Mr. Jimmy's eyes sparkle in the light of the Tiffany lamp.

He falls asleep right where he sits, still in his clothes, but with a smile, and a squint still there behind the bifocals despite his eyes being shut.

A usual bladder call wakes him up; he eases out of the chair. When he returns to the bedroom, he turns the lamp off and notices that there is no full moon in the window. It had already set, and it's dark outside. He starts to undress, but quickly re-straps his suspenders and stares at the closet door. Then, as if snapping out of a trance, he lunges toward that closet and scrambles to pack the things he will need, all the while mumbling "I'm coming, Annie, I'm coming. It's our secret. I can't wait see you again." He face dimples, but at the same time, he presses his lips hard together to stop that old familiar pain from slowing him down.

The late night air is brisk, and swirls with lavender stars; coolness brushes against his wrinkled skin. A cold front had slipped through the normally warm summer night. He cinches his thin parka and cranks up the old, blue pickup truck. Its tired engine hums in the midnight quiet. Mr. Jimmy's jaws are set firm—as much as his dentures would allow. He grips the steering wheel and drives intently toward the mountains. Glancing at the stars again, he giggles—giddier than a teenager in love for the first time.

Looking into the rearview mirror, he says, "We're going hiking, Annie, just like we used to."

He flicks the radio on and a Merle Haggard tune livens the night, then Patsy Cline sings *Walkin' After Midnight*. But her song, *I Fall to Pieces*, changes the expression on his face to a sad one. Miles slip by in silence on the two-hour drive to the mountains.

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The fuel guage creeps toward empty, and a low-level fuel light ambers the driver's console. Mr. Jimmy blares out. "Crap! I'm low on gas... Oh well, it's time to pee again, anyway." He pulls into a 24-7 Exxon a few miles down the road. He pumps the gas first, then hurries to the one-and-only bathroom, while holding himself. He lays his wallet down on the back of the commode, and forgets it there. A half-hour later, when he thinks of the pictures of Annie in his wallet, he remembers and slams on his brakes. He turns around and drives back to the gas station. Luckily, his wallet is still there. He smiles at the service attendant on the way back to his truck, but doesn't understand her strange look. She mumbles something to him, yet he doesn't see the trail of toilet paper still



snaking from inside his pants and out through the ankle cuffs.

The moonless night shows Orion throwing its legs over the horizon, but the dark and secluded road only flashes its mesmerizing streaks of white in the truck's headlights. Mr. Jimmy's eyes grow heavy; he glances at his wrist watch—two a.m. "Annie, I gotta stop and catch a couple of zzz's at the next rest area." Soon, the blue and white sign couldn't have been more timely. He parks under a tree, reclines his seat as far back as it'll go, and tips his fedora to cover his eyes.

He talks in his sleep. Anyone listening in would be able to tell he's dreaming of Annie. He dances with her into the morning until the sun slips through the tree branches and cracks his eyes open. But Mr. Jimmy continues to smile. He rubs the stiff bristles poking from his face—a sandpaper sound that drowns the song of nearby chickadees. He pours himself some coffee from the thermos, still hot, and slurps it in small sips. The V6 turns over and he motors away while rubbing the coffee steam off the windshield with his handkerchief.

Newfound Gap Road curves past the Chimneys and the Alum Cave Bluff Trail, before winding up at the Boulevard's trailhead. The two-hour drive had stretched into six, but now he can see the smoky blue Unicoi kiss the peach-fuzz face of the sky. The horizon glows its warm orange.

Dawn air braces his not-so-young body. He stretches in the parking lot to limber his leg muscles. He laces his boots and grabs his favorite hiking stick—a poplar tree branch he's used for years. With it, he methodically stabs the trail, one step in front of the other, over limestones outcropping from the dirt, and over tree roots twisting below the surface. He stops frequently to regain his breath lost in the thin mountain air. Cool fog shrouds the trail; five thousand feet up, Mr. Jimmy glides through the ground-hugging clouds.

"Come on, Annie." He gasps, "Hang in there." The jagged ridge climbs into higher clouds then rollercoasters into the hollers before ascending again. Each breath is heavier than the one before, and the cool air pierces his old bones.

"Hurry, Annie, we got to get there soon." He keeps his forward stride. "We a have a long way to go and we don't want to get caught up here in the dark." He doesn't look behind him, but he remembers her flush look, the red cheeks... the panting.

He works the switchbacks zigzagging the trail as clouds thicken cottony white to denim gray. Soon the thunder booms as if Thor is pounding his hammer on the anvil'd sky, throwing sparks as big as bolts.

"There's no safe place to hide, not under the trees, but that's all there is," he shouts. Mr. Jimmy fetches the raingear and curls under the table mountain pines; folds into himself. Through the deluge and hailstorm, he prays, his voice wavering, "Annie, hold me." He hugs himself tighter under the thin plastic cover.

The rains finally stop, but the pines, bruised in the storm, bleed their essence. Mr. Jimmy jumps to his feet and yells out loud into the pine-scented air, "Come on, Annie! We still have time. The last mile is a bitch, but we can do it."

Mr. Jimmy spears through a virgin stand of timber, crests the last lump of hills on Mt. LeConte that look like humps on a Brahma bull, then knifes through a narrow creviced

trail and emerges on top. The whole sky in panorama is rumpled with mountains. He turns saying, "Annie, we made it!" But his rejoicing abruptly stops.

"Annie? Annie!" But there is only wind and the sound of swishing pines; their branches sway to a haunting loneliness. His forehead wrinkles and his face droops; he stares hard at the ground and wonders out loud, "What am I doing here?"

He can barely stand; lets his tired body slump to the ground. He unlaces his hiking boots and yanks them off; tosses them by the myrtle shrubs hedging the sky. His cotton socks are soaked and his feet have swollen; his fallen arches ache.

"Rest... I need to rest," he says; his eyes shift toward the precipitous drop.

"Where are you, Annie?" He continues to stare over the expanse of mountains, which are also silent. He lies down on a great slab of rock jutting out and cantering downward. Sloping down toward a great abyss of clouds. He lets himself slip, slip by the inch to the edge. Pebbles roll off the ledge and fly quietly, as if there is no bottom, as if they found peace there.

"Annie!" He yells, "Don't you hear me?" But only empty echoes of his own voice return.

The wind begins to swirl and, for a moment, there's a whisper of jasmine in the air. The sun shafts through the clouds and caresses his face.

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I know *that* touch, the soft pressure, the taste of moist rain on my man's lips. And by the way his chest thumps—as if there was a songbird trying to fly out of his heart. I know.

I hear you, Jimmy.

Job Interview

Kay T Fields

“Good afternoon, Mr. Hayduke. My name is Morgan McMarmot, and I will be asking you a few questions to get to know you better. I understand you are applying for our opening in the Banalities Department.”

“How do you identify, Mr. Hayduke?”

Hither and yon except on alternate Tuesdays when I prefer to be addressed as a sailor with blue coconuts.

“What social media do you use regularly?”

Tikfarce and Blinked Out

“What was your main responsibility at Walzon?”

Looking busy

“What is your position on dental implants?”

Chewing is an unalienable right like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness unless it is considered offensive to the toothless

“Do you own a chest freezer, and if so, what is in it?”

Yes, I do, frozen rabbits, 12 gallons of Ben and Jerry’s, Cherry Garcia, flavor and my mother’s body, cryogenically preserved

“Where do you see yourself in our organization in five years?”

First assistant to Dolly Parton’s wig stylist

“In ten years?”

Acting as senior policy advisor and ice dancing coach

“What are your strengths?”

*Milking cows
Slopping hogs
Convincing a crowd*

“What are your weak points?”

*Cowing milk
Hogging slop
Crowding the convinced*

“Have you ever been arrested for any of the following;
loitering, spitting on the sidewalk, public drunk and disorderly,
walking on the grass saying, ‘don’t mess with Texas’ or otherwise
demeaning the Lone Star state, or manslaughter?”

No, but I once ordered steak, medium well

“What branch of the military did you serve in?”

United States Air Cavalry

“Did you serve in combat and where?”

*I was Drone and Horse Captain in Soddy Daisy, Tennessee during the
Second Civil War*

“If I offer you this position, when can you begin?”

The 12th of Never

Creature Comforts

Kay T Fields

In my late seventies, I discovered the joys of Kleenex and hats. My adult daughter introduced these delightful products to me personally. They became my later-life indulgences; then, turned into necessities.

In the 70's as a teen, I read Rachael Carson's, *Silent Spring*, heard all the hullabaloo about environmental disaster, but failed to fully embrace that notion of bone, blood, and teeth erode, but plastic prevails.

I stopped using some paper products like napkins and tissues. I chose cloth and handkerchiefs. A small nod to responsible stewardship of Mother Earth. A few months ago, my adult daughter moved in with her stash of Kleenex.

Those tissues so conveniently placed, so hygienic, so soft, so disposable, were magical. I let my hankies languish, forgotten in a drawer, relics of an age of responsibility. I was a Kleenex convert. My nose was grateful, no longer chapped.

We began to knit hats on a loom for a church project like diligent ants in constant motion. Yarn in gorgeous hues of color took shape into lovely, warm beanies. We yarn shopped together, bought matching arm chairs at a thrift store for my office, moved in a footstool and side table for maximum comfort.

We made pompoms for special hats. What kind of fashion statement is a beanie without a sassy pompom? *Kleenex* now is placed anywhere I might find convenient. My head is rarely bare. It's winter and I began to wear a certain beanie, so snug, so warm, so stinking cute.

Walk On

Kay T Fields

Before aerobic walking came into vogue, mother decided to walk a mile each day. No tennis shoes were available for women of a certain age. Unfazed, mother went to Rivercrest Country Club's pro shop where she purchased golf shoes.

Spikes removed, these shoes were ideal for her daily stroll. She was as much a curiosity as a nude woman vacuuming while singing, "Chattanooga Choo-Choo." Cars stopped to ask if she was ill, lost, deranged, or intoxicated.

Me, her daughter, born with a competitive nature, took a simple stroll to new heights. I began to walk for exercise while pregnant, logged two miles per day. My obstetrician was so impressed he stopped smoking and gave up lunchtime liquor.

My walks escalated to six miles daily on a monstrous treadmill, next came a Fit Bit pedometer. A recommended 10,000 steps daily became a necessary 20,000. I felt such relief when a broken femur ended this trudge.

My daughter is a hiker. Her special trail shoes cost more than rent for my first apartment. She carries poles for stability. Her backpack has her prepared for any imagined emergency. She totes food, water, wipes for bathroom breaks, and baggies to leave no trace. Her cell phone connects her to massive amounts of information.

Three generations of women ambled through life while sharing a familial bond. Our distinctive, sturdy, slightly pigeon-toed feet have yet to fail us.

Remnants of Rituals

Kay T Fields

My daughter is a ghost of my father.
Tiny traits, scavenger hunt clues, emerge
in unexpected places.
My father, creature of habit, used his orange,
plastic, coffee cup for decades.

Daily, he rinsed out the cup in hot water.
Me, an insufferable twit of a teen, jeered
at his refusal to clean the cup with dish soap.
He lived to a healthy ninety-five, never once
cleansing his cup my way.

My daughter refuses the dishwasher. Living
in my home, she stakes her claim. A dish towel,
on the kitchen counter, holds a pyramid of her
rinsed dishes, no soap involved.

When he retired, my father simplified his routine.
He dressed early each morning in a uniform of khaki
pants then, selected one of three Sears wash and wear,
short-sleeve button-down shirts. At 3:00 each afternoon,
he changed into his pajamas and house slippers.

Daughter arises when the cock crows, accomplishes
her daily chores, indulges in her pleasures, runs a bath
at 3:00; dons her pajamas and house slippers afterwards.
She doesn't smoke a pipe like he did, or crack and eat
walnuts after dinner.

She never tells me,
 "Do your best, that's all a mule can do."
She never calls me, "squirrel or rabbit."
She leaves her "to do" list on the kitchen table
exactly like he did, in precise cursive with things
done, lined through.

When I Die:

Kay T Fields

I won't lie in state like some
great potentate.
Flags will not fly at half-staff,
pontificating pundits will not
drone about my demise.

Financial institutions and Wall
Street will continue to fleece,
flourish, holidays will not occur
in my honor, government offices
will still grind their bureaucratic gears.

Few will notice my departure
from this mortal coil, an obituary will
appear in the local paper, brief and
succinct, conserving printer's ink.

A smattering of choice words uttered
by a godly man will be spoken to speed
me on my journey home. A little music
will be nice, up-tempo at my request.
Neil Young is best. My choice, *Cowgirl in
the Sand*, backed by *The Crazy Horse Band*.

This simple coffin will be consumed
by flames, with my empty husk returned
to the dust from where it came. A stone will
mark my exit zone.

Not sure who or what will be in my future
home. I am ready to venture forth, alter
course, change my circumstances, meet
my friends, foes, family, dogs, cats, fainting
goats, flying pigs, leaping lizards, jumping
Jehoshaphat, Johnny Appleseed, and the rest
of those who believed.

Our Fab Four

After The Beatles

Natalie Kimbell

I used to be eleven yesterday,
fifty-three years ago and I would sing
through the album,
Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band
with my sister Roxane,
my cousin Judson, both nine,
and my cousin Vicki, who was probably four.

Our stage, an open sleeping bag,
flannel side-up. Our go-go boots,
white tube socks. Our microphone,
a pink hairbrush tossed back and forth
as we each sometimes sang,
more often lip synced
solos and duets waxing
the whole album trying to groove
with the beat or weave our bodies
to the psychedelic strains
of the sitar and sarangi never anticipating
the group would split and marry
or that John would be shot by a delusional man.

When our families came together to watch
our show, we sang without wondering
what Ringo meant about getting high,
never questioned *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'* lyrics
but we welcomed *the one and only Billy Shears* with wide
arms, swaying in fringed vests and bell-bottom jeans mouthing
When I'm 64 as if it would never happen.

And Yet the Weather Remains the Same

Natalie Kimbell

For Austin and Alexis

I implored the clouds to rain in torrents
but when the water didn't come
not even in a drizzle
I realized clouds had no
empathy to cry with me.

So, I urged the wind, begged
for a blast of arctic air
to make others shudder. Chill
all to the core so they would
possess that empty pit of frost
Grief forced me to swallow.

When none stirred, I beseeched
the sun believing that one scorch
would bend all to their knees
twisted in hot agony
and I would not kneel alone.
But the sun did not change

and you both are still gone.

Why I Still Struggle with a Cloudless Sky

In Remembrance of 9/11

Natalie Kimbell

Maybe It's the irony that still twists my gut
when azure sky blankets instead of gray clouds
in September and I remember Twins Towers.

Maybe my initial denial that day haunts
me when the first plane hit, watching
on a TV screen in a rheumatologist's waiting room peering
between artificial plants from a vinyl chair.

The aircraft looked small
against the blue sky on TV.

Maybe because *just an accident* fell
from my lips, *a tragic accident*
someone careless
not terrorists, not here.

Maybe it was the eerie
coincidence of my calling
home from the doctor's office
of saying, *I'm all right*
at the same moment hundreds
were calling and saying, *I'm all right*
when in an instant, they'd be gone

and I'm still here.

Maybe it was the shock of seeing the second plane
packed with breath, broken into Tower Two
and my running across the parking lot to my car
when the natural world gave no sigh
when I needed to be home to touch my kids
when I clung to the kinship on the radio, alone.

Maybe it was the opulent cerulean sky
without clouds or planes of its own
just televised pillars of dust and flames
a canvas for horror when nature
showed no sympathy
no rain.

The Fish

Natalie Kimbell

I felt him tug—gripped the rod—stared
as the bobber dipped and line bent
while charged voices urged me to pull

I eyed his form rise like a ghost
beneath the watery membrane
his body over-whelmed by mine

the fish burst through the veil—dangled
on clear thread—its scales sparked sun beams
its gills struggled with empty air

I'm stunned—too deaf to digest praise
for my first prize— *a small sunfish*
Instead I'm entranced by circles

in the water the fish and I
started—all that he knew behind
all my learning in front of me

my uncle nudged —placed the fish's
rough flesh— flat body—bulging eyes
and his last breath into my hands

I flinched—dropped him to the bottom
of the boat—my cousin Stephen
nose-dived like a pelican--cupped

him and ripped free the thorny bait
threw him with a host of others
in a pail—I stared at the lake

they fried the fish with those they caught
and cleaned—to them I was silly
for not wanting to eat my catch

I kneeled close to the dark water
in the campfire's shadows –plopped
pebbled sorrow in empty rings

BEWARE: A Performance Poetry Piece

Natalie Kimbell

Me: Beware!

Sometimes, when writing, I tap a stream of voices.
my Momma, and her Momma's voices
distinct like skipping stones on placid water—
strong like current.
Voices of cousins or
conspicuous strangers
who I snagged
like salmon.
Voices of the living,
the dead,
and the imagined,
all spawning their stories in me.

Sometimes, I cast my story out to them.

Sometimes I catch myself
listening and not writing.

Sometimes they all talk to me at once.
It's then I wish for one strong original character
To take them to the page.

Someone like Rhett Butler

Male Voice from Audience: "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

Me: which means he is not interested in the job.

Sometimes I catch voices
when I didn't know I was fishing for them.
Voices of long dead Sisters from church consoling me...

Female Voice from Audience:
"Bless your heart!"

Me: And Gospel thumpers with “Jesus on the line”.

(Beat)

And advice...Mercy...I can't make a move without hearing...

(Beat)

Now, You're looking at me funny.

(Beat)

Well, I'll show you.

(Beat)

Let's say, I say in my head,

“I sure would like some candy, but I'm feeling fat today.”

Evangelical Preacher Voice: Sisters! Open your hymnal to the “I am so Fat Responsive Reading.”

Me: I don't need to eat this. It will make me fat. I need to be on a diet.

Congregational Response: Oh Honey, you are not fat.

Me: Yes, I am fat.

Congregational Response: No, Honey, you are not fat.

Me: I need to lose weight.

Individual voice from Audience reads: No, No. You don't need to lose weight. You're big boned.

Another strong, older female voice: No Child. You don't need to lose weight. Now my sister Twanda Girdle Lee...Lord, she is FAT. She is O BESE. Why she was washing the car and holding a garden hose the other day. Well, her back was toward me and she was leaning over the car and her arm was a holding the hose way up and a wiggling it over that car and all I could think of was...

Me: Circus Peanuts!

Audience: What?

Me: You know the ones I mean. The orange kind. I finally had to buy a bag because a voice who sounds a lot like you said...

Voice in Audience reads: Honey you ain't fat. Eat one. It will make you feel so much better.

Me: A faint voice from my personal trainer says...

Individual from Audience: (weakly) ...don't

Me: But the “Let’s Eat” voices sing!

Let’s Eat It Voices from choir: (To **Chariots of Fire** theme) Eat it, eat it,
EEEEAT it, Eat it, eat it EEEEat, Eat it Eat it EEEEat it, eat it eat it EEEEat....

Me: My personal trainer gasps in desperation and with all his might!

Personal Trainer Voice: (choked whisper) Eat a carrot!

Me: But the “Let’s Eat it” voices sing louder!

Let’s eat it Voices: (to the tune of “What a Friend we Have in Jesus)
What a friend we have in Peanuts.
All our sins and griefs to bear...
What a privilege to carry
A convection beyond compare

Me: I am moved by those voices.

My hand grasps the bag and
brings the plastic to my mouth.
The voices are humming in unison a religious melody.

I am fervent. I am convicted.
One hand clutches the bag and
I bite and pull the plastic
until a hole allows the other hand to drop
like a claw in one of those drop and grab coin operated machines.

Now the solid orange confectionary high is in my hand.
The congregational voices shouting, *Halleluiah!*

The one strong prophetic voice comes forth.

Evangelical Preacher Voice: “Oh we have but one life to live.
We must have faith. We must trust
that one more peanut cannot hurt us.
One more will defeat the craving.
One more will satisfy.
One more will reveal the answers of the universe.

Me: I believed!
And as the sugar crossed my lips
my mother’s voice killed the moment.

Mother’s voice from the Audience: Put that down. You’re gonna’ make
yourself fat and sick.

Me: I freeze. Momma's voice is a tough one to ignore.

I look at the frenzied opening of the plastic bag
Plastic pieces clinging to my lips
I might as well have been a bass with a plastic worm.
I had been caught by weakness.

Momma is right.
The trainer is right.
I'm going to start...

Scarlet O Hara Voice from Audience: "Fiddle de dee!" , "As God is my witness, I'll never go hungry again..." "After all, tomorrow is another day."

Me: Who is going to stop Scarlet O Hara?
Today, I'm going to eat every peanut in the whole damn bag
and work on that diet tomorrow...
(Beat)

I wish I was Margaret Mitchell
to lure the voices in and land them.
I want to mount them on paper
I want to fling them into a book
And let their words hook you.

Then, you will be my trophy.

Beware.

Button, Button. Where Is the Button?

Natalie Kimbell

Remember when you were a child and had a Fisher Price Cash Register? If you didn't have one, you knew a kid who did. Remember the primary colored coins? Remember the thrill of pushing the buttoned levers and making the bell ring or the cash register drawer open? There was excitement when you thought of the possibility of running a real cash register. When my daughter was little, for example, she could not wait to grow up and become a Walmart cashier. Now Walmart has made that dream come true for all with their self-checkout, but sadly buttons have changed. The bell has been replaced by a less pleasant computerized, "Urk". No cash drawer opens up (for good reason). Your cash is vacuum-sucked right out of your hands. Paper change is spit out in a clump (if you are lucky enough to get cash back) and the only semi-pleasant sound is the swirl of change that rolls into the return. You don't feel the movement that comes with pressing a button. The closest moment you have is when you touch the number for your pin when you don't use cash and even that does not press down with the satisfaction of buttons of old.

You are in a pivotal moment in history. The button as we know it in all its forms and functions is on the precipice of extinction—even the sew-on variety is threatened to be relegated to its earliest historic function...a mere decoration. I have only one shirt where the buttons are necessary. My pants are even more pull on than fasten on. Is it surprising then that young people more than ever before cannot re-attach a button with needle and thread? What has happened? Suddenly no one appreciates the button! Ask yourself. What happened to the act of accumulating caches of buttons like our mothers and grandmothers? Do you not see the obliteration of button-eyed dolls and craft projects? Can you not see the downward spiral?

Face it. It's not happening just with the clothes. This demise began long ago with the typewriter. Those tall majestic buttoned-keys that built stamina in your fingers were replaced with electric, overly-sensitive wannabee buttons. Where is the music—the clatter of clicking buttons—click, click, click, click, zing! Your senses drive your existence and when one activity is muted the way the pushing down of those buttons has been—and don't get me started about the zing they stole with the removal of the sliding carriage. Today the onslaught continues on computer lap-top keyboards. Advertisers claim so-called improved silence options. *They cry Peace! Peace! But there is no peace*, not for you who loved and continue to love the comforting tap and the plopping action of those buttons!

And what of the phone? First, They robbed you of the slow swish of the rotary, but they gave you buttons to invigorate your fingers. Then insidiously they reduced the size of phones and made them portable. They made you giddy with cell phones with even smaller buttons and then when you least expected it, these deviant perpetrators gave you a flat screen where fingers of your generation struggle to make contact with letters and numbers. How easy it is to reach for a T and get an R? And what of voice

recognition? Siri! Alexa! They steal all thought and movement from your hands! I tremble at the five-finger dexterity of the future!

Oh, they have tried to placate you. Some devices have sound effects to mimic what is no longer there. This mimicry I liken to imitation crab which is a disgrace to palates everywhere. Only the ignorant are fooled and pacified. And what about your language? Can you still say, *Stop pushing my buttons!* with any real effectiveness? Can you tell someone to *button up* before he or she goes outside when no buttons are being worn or tell some overtalkative child to, *Button your lip*, and expect any understanding? My friend, you are standing in a lexicon graveyard.

I'm afraid now all you can do is pay your respects and watch the button's place of superiority deteriorate. Try to tell your children about the joys of learning to count with these amazing gems of human ingenuity. Relish the memories of decorating paper plates, t-shirts and necklaces. Treasure the games of yore. The button has lost its dominance in our world and much of our technology. Its existence has fallen to mimicry on our clothes. The comfort of the movement and the sound is lost to the young. Even the buttons most basic functional uses have been supplanted by Velcro (which granted at my age I shouldn't lambast too much with the onset of arthritis). No matter, the need to draw attention to the plight of this childhood companion thirsts to be recognized. It has given our generation the best years of its life. Oh Button, Button: hold fast Dear Button!

Rust

Patricia Hope

*A sword, a spade, and a thought
should never be allowed to rust.*

James Stephens

Rust ruses our lives, unless we oil it, keep surfaces
smooth and flexible. Eventually, it flakes, scorches us
with illness and death, like the bolt on a gate hinge long
left to weather the elements, protesting when pushed
open; like a hoe hung on the barn wall that no longer turns
the earth, its blade dulled by the singe of seasons; like
the sword left in its scabbard, unwielded and un piercing,
its soldier long ago buried, felled in some ancient war;
like a forgotten hydrant, once painted red then yellow,
the two colors like one now, water, its only smoldering
memory, abiding alone against the tyranny
of too much time.

The Big Red Tractor

Patricia Hope

*I learned not to fear infinity,
the far field, the windy cliffs of forever....*

Theodore Roethke

I was nine the summer I first drove a tractor,
my grandpa letting me take the controls while
he got off and opened the pasture gate. I felt
all grownup, pleased that I did just what he showed me.
I watched my grandpa, sometimes for hours,
as he plowed the fields near our house. They didn't

belong to us but to the man my grandparents
worked for. So did the big red tractor my grandpa
used to do all the plowing, planting, and harvesting
that a 50-acre farm demanded. Still, we thought of it
as our farm since we did all the work that kept it going.
My grandpa didn't have an ounce of fat on him.

He was tall, lean and wore overalls unless
he was going to church. He would stop for a break
when I brought him a bucket of water, taking off
his hat and wiping his face and bald head
with a handkerchief he carried in his front overalls pocket.
Then, he'd hop off the tractor and drink his fill

of the cool water me and grandma had just pulled out
of the well. Sometimes he'd pour a dipper full
over his handkerchief and wrap it around the back
of his neck, saying that kept him "cool as a cucumber,"
as he chuckled and climbed back up to the driver's seat.
I'd carry the bucket to a big oak tree on the edge of the field,

and sit there in the shade until almost time for supper.
Grandpa would stop by the oak and help me climb

up beside him to ride back to the house. I might as well
have been riding in a limo. It couldn't have felt any better
as the tractor chugged up the road to the barn.
Grandpa would park the tractor, I'd jump off, lugging

the water bucket, which we'd fill up again at the well
then go onto the back porch where we'd wash up for supper.
As we sat down with grandma to eat, I'd listen as they
talked about the weather, the fields plowed, or crops planted.
That night I'd dream about steering the tractor across *far fields*
and doing all the things grandpa did. Even if I was a girl, all
I wanted to do when I grew up was drive that big red tractor.

The Motorcyclist

Patricia Hope

He is made from sinew and bone,
likes the feel of wind in his beard,
as he grasps the handlebars centered
over his lane of the lonesome road.

His spirit is happiest on his bike,
two wheels eating up miles as the engine's
roar trails off behind him. The leather seat
between his thighs almost as good as a woman,
but a woman pressed to his back feels fine, too.

His booted foot shifts down to first gear as he comes
to a stop, then, as he pulls out, he toes up through
second, third, and fourth and picks up speed.
He rolls onto the freeway, leaning the bike into
the right-hand turn, checks to see what is coming,
revs the engine to weave in and out of traffic,
his destination undetermined. For him,
only the journey matters, the sights, sounds,
and smells, of the highways ahead.

Cut him open and you would smell his exhaust,
see the flow of red, white, and blue blood course
through his body, feel the hardness of steel muscle
it takes to manhandle a 100-horse Harley. Beneath
his tattoo, the pulse of power vibrates through his arms,
his resilient bones, his heart thumping
to the thrill of the open road.

Reflections on Feeding a Meat-and-Potatoes Man

Patricia Hope

You were a meat-and-potatoes man,
tolerant of chicken and pork,
but from the school where beef
was the *real* meat. So, I learned
101 ways to cook hamburger –
meatloaf, spaghetti sauce,
chili, burgers, and casseroles.

Oh, and I peeled so many potatoes,
I could do it with one eye open, always
trying to think of a new way to cook them.
Mashed or boiled, baked or fried, layers
of au gratin, hashed into crispy goodness
for breakfast, always the backbone of our meals.

Next, I looked for something green,
sometimes salad, cabbage, or green beans,
or greens such as turnip, spinach, mixed,
but often I turned to peas for that “healthy”
addition to our plate, which you barely tolerated.

Of course, the meat was better as a roast
or steak, cubed or round most often,
but every now and then, we’d splurge
on a meal out and your ribeye or T-bone steak,
like everything you ate, had to be well done.

Even now, years after your death, I think
of food in terms of meat and potatoes,
see each meal I cook in three parts, but I dare
order my steak medium and have it with mushrooms
if I’m so inclined, those “toadstools” you hated
and would never eat. More and more, I defy
those old habits these days, sometimes, having
only a vegetable or a bowl of cereal for dinner, no longer
needing to feed those around me as if we are
planning to plow the lower forty.

River Fog

Patricia Hope

At this hour, phantom fog rises from the riverbank
like apparitions at a ghost gala. By mid-morning
it will lift as the spirits retreat to sleep the day away.
Somewhere below the fog's footing, the river follows
an ancient path carved millennia ago through rock and stratum,
around an island of scrub brush and muscadine vines,
under a bridge man constructed last century.
Rain sprinkles spring's late growth, as if doling out
the water sparingly, but the trees drink the moisture
as if each drop is their last, even though some
of their roots live in the river.

Every day, the ridge beyond the river grows thicker,
greener, taller. It could swallow up everything if not stopped
by turned fields, manicured landscaping, and mowed lawns.
Summer will June soon and spring rains will yield
to occasional thunderstorms when gentle weather
will fall prey to violent winds, lightning, and even tornadoes.

The river ghosts will return on other mornings like this one,
in August when their numbers foretell winter's snowfalls,
in October, when the fog will be thicker, hiding the spiders
spinning their wintery webs over bush and bank.
Then, only a dedicated fisherman or two will troll their boat
close to shore casting into the quiet waters. An occasional egret
will startle the solitude as he takes flight when the boat drifts too close.
The fish will swim closer to the surface then, seeking whatever
warmth the sun has left, but they will dream about the cool depths
of the river bottom where they played last summer.

The river fog will always return, quiet as the Indians who once
called the distant mountains *smoky*. Here on the riverbank
the fog is a frequent visitor welcomed by some, disdained by others,
ancient as earth's spin around the sun.

Hearth and Home

Ray Zimmerman

My father banked a fire at night, so coal
burned in a furnace for our warmth, but gas
burned in my mother's stove to cook our food.

No wood fire heated or cooked within our home,
but there was a time when hearth and home were one.
We'll keep the home fires burning was a pledge.

To cook at the fireplace is a toil beyond
our modern thinking, but there comes a time
when I set out for the woods with my tent and pack.

I build a fire and sit on logs where
I cook my food in blue enamel pots
and watch the stars if the night is clear.

Come morning, I will blow upon the coals,
revive the fire upon my woodland hearth
and set the percolator on a grate above the flames.

Mike

Ray Zimmerman

With an internal rhyme scheme, he told of a dream
of California haze and his surfer days
perhaps spent in a daze after Vietnam.

I wondered about that shark tattoo outlined in blue.
Through the water, it flew as it sat on his arm
to protect him from harm. It failed in the end.

When Covid struck, he was out of luck,
no one passed the buck. The doctors tried,
but on a ventilator, he died in a hospital room.

They folded the flag and gave a salute with
twenty-one guns and a bugle to boot.
On Federal land, he made his last stand.

With hope, I say, “we’ll meet again someday
in a land far away.” We may toast him with cheer
if heaven allows beer and hear a few poems.

Advice in Time of Plague

Ray Zimmerman

Do not *Abandon all hope ye who enter here*
nor let the weight of current events crush your soul.
Mourn what is lost, but not too long.
Crush the hurdle of despair and
the dark thoughts lurking there.
Pitch a tent near cool mountain streams.
Lay spoil to grim demeanor and resurrect hope.
Revel in the comedy of a fence lizards display.
Delight in wild violets and trout lilies.
Never forget, you are called to live.

The Golden Hour

Ray Zimmerman

Under the swirling cosmic dust, the land
is covered by a tangle of branches.
Light from overhead won't reach the ground.

But the hour comes when sun is going down
and the angle of the light illuminates
the forest outside my door.

The autumn leaves catch fire and blaze.
Translucent in red and gold they filter light
as clouds take on the color of the sun.

Lights come on in the town below.
The highway dreams of holiday decorations
and clouds turn dark against the nightmare sky.

Etheree On the Cusp of Being

Sherry Poff

Bright
Venus
lights the west
while Jupiter
glimmers from on high
through branches of walnut
and oak: cold, clear winter night.
Wine-stained light of the setting sun
still rims the dark pines at the far edge
of the field. An unseen owl wings softly
through the forest. His innocent prey,
calmly unaware, has eaten
its last meal, already slept
its final sleep. Nothing
does it dread, but feels
a simple joy
for the light
over
head.

Friday Night at the Lovin' Oven

Sherry Poff

They pour through the door, chattering
and laughing, tripping over the threshold
but landing on their feet. Table legs scrape
the worn floorboards as they rearrange
the furniture and plop onto chairs, already
scanning the menu hand-lettered on the wall.

Amid the smell of pizza sauce and the slap
slap of dough on the kneading board,
bright-eyed freshman from the college
up the hill edge in next to upperclassmen,
eager to share opinions on philosophy
and local politics.

The sons and daughters of beauticians
and coal-miners, these first-generation
college students long to see their own
names in print, their words etched
into the community's future. Who
will tell them? They'll always be fighting
for a place at the table.

Cartography

Sherry Poff

In Mrs. Halsey's class beside the river I learned
to love geography. Colonial America,
Louisiana Purchase, fifty states--counting Alaska
and Hawaii: our nation's proud history laid out
in bright colors--red, blue, forest green, gold.

And then exploration: the Cape of Good Hope,
Straits of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego:
names to stir imagination and fire
the mind. The varied continents, the seven seas,
setting me up for stories I would learn

and stories I would live. From the green
mountains of my birth, across muddy water
traversing valleys to find landscapes
I first saw in pull-down, expanding
visions, a colorful world at the center.

Rains in Appalachia

Sherry Poff

Mist rises like a sigh above the warm earth,
hovers over mountains and valleys rich
with life. Gathering clouds shade the hills;
before the grieving sky releases its heavy burden.

High on a ridge pelted with rain, a trickle
becomes a stream, collecting sand as it runs.

Further on the stream joins another and empties
into the creek, brown and rushing, tumbling
rocks from banks, lapping up against a field
of potatoes, a cow pasture, the playground.

The swollen river, turgid with mud
rolls like a muscle on the back of the land,
sweeps cars into its current, then houses.
It displaces trees, whole acres of soil.

Even children, wrenched from parents' frantic grip
disappear in a maelstrom of tears and sorrow.

When at last the storm subsides, silt and debris
settle softly into the warm ground as the mist rises.

Phenology, Southeast Tennessee

Sherry Poff

Nightly we draw the shades,
gather around a steaming pot,
the rocking-chair's creak
competing with the cat's purr.

Each morning we rise, take stock
of the day, gather supplies, fortify,
button a ragged sweater
to ward off the chill.

Outside in the trees,
blackbirds amass their forces;
whistling hawks
take counsel in a nearby wood.
A chittering titmouse fills the void
left by absent hummingbirds
and a visiting junco fluffs her feathers
against the cold.

Bios

BECKY PARKER resides in Tennessee. Her works are included in *Spirit Fire Review*, *Agape Review*, *Sweetie Cat Press*, *Yellow Mama*, the *Potato Soup Journal*, *Sequoyah Cherokee Journal*, *Appalachia Bare*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, the *Rye Whiskey Review*, the *Green Shoe Sanctuary*, and upcoming in *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Amaranth Journal*.

BRADEN WEAVER is a writer from Chatsworth, Georgia. His writings have been published in *Corner Bar Magazine*, *Floyd County Shine*, and elsewhere.

CHRIS WOOD lives in Tennessee with her husband and several fur babies. She is a member of the Chattanooga Writers' Guild and her work has appeared in several journals and online publications, including *Poetry Quarterly*, *Panapoly*, and the *American Diversity Report*. Learn more at chriswoodwriter.com.

CONNIE JORDAN GREEN lives on a farm in East Tennessee where she writes and gardens. She is the author of two award-winning novels for young people, *The War at Home* and *Emmy*, published originally by Margaret McElderry imprint of MacMillan and Simon Shuster, respectively, reissued in soft cover by Tellico Books imprint of Iris Press; two poetry chapbooks, *Slow Children Playing* and *Regret Comes to Tea*, both published by Finishing Line Press; and two poetry collections, *Household Inventory*, 2015, winner of the Brick Road Poetry Award, and most recently *Darwin's Breath* (Iris Press). Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies. She frequently leads writing workshops. More information is available at conniejordangreen.com.

GAY LOGSDON: Originally from Spokane, Washington, I worked as a technical editor and writer for 17 years at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where I was assigned to the Environmental Sciences Division. Before that, I taught English literature and linguistics at the University of Tennessee and the University of Texas. In October 2016, a car accident initially left me paralyzed from below the shoulders down. Since then, through many hours of rehabilitation, I have regained considerable mobility, and I now give presentations on how to be a medical advocate. I have served as a judge at poetry slams at the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, and I participate in public poetry readings. Recently, I began submitting poems for publication.

JANE SASSER: I was born and raised on a farm in Fairview, NC, where I grew up in a family of storytellers and began writing my own stories and poems at the age of six. My poetry has appeared in *JAMA*, *North American Review*, *The Sun*, and other publications. I have published three poetry chapbooks: *What's Underneath* (Iris Press, 2020), *Itinerant* (Finishing Line, 2009), and *Recollecting the Snow* (March Street Press, 2008). After a full career as an English teacher in Oak Ridge, TN, I once again live in Fairview, NC, with my husband and retired greyhounds.

JOHN C. MANNONE has poems in *Anthology of Appalachian Writers XV* [Barbara Kingsolver], *Windhover*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *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). His full-length collections are *Disabled Monsters* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2015), *Flux Lines: The Intersection of Science, Love, and Poetry* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2022), *Sacred Flute* (Iris Press, 2023), and *Song of the Mountains* (Middle Creek Publishing, 2023). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and other journals. He's an Assistant Professor of Physics and Chemistry (and an invited Professor of Creative Writing: Poetry) at Alice Lloyd College, and lives in southeast Kentucky.

KAY T. FIELDS: I am an author of one book, a memoir published in 2019 by Bambaz Press. It is titled: *Godsmacked: A Memoir of Mania, Mayhem, and Mischief*. I have not published a book of poetry, but have been working towards that goal. Poetry is my first love. I live in Dandridge with my spouse and our Yorkie, Victoria.

NATALIE KIMBELL was born in Norton Virginia, lived for eight years in Worcester, Massachusetts and grew up in Sequatchie County, Tennessee. She has spent forty years teaching, and directing plays at her alma mater, Sequatchie County High School. She is a mother, grandmother and writer. Her work appears in several publications including *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *Mildred Haun Review*,

Anthology of Appalachian Writers: Kingsolver Edition and *Tennessee Voices*. Her first chapbook, *On Phillips Creek*, will be published by Finishing Line Press.

PATRICIA HOPE'S award-winning writing has appeared in *The Mildred Haun Review*, *Tennessee Voices Anthology*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Guideposts Blessings in Disguise*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Southern Writers*, *The Writer*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Agape Review*, *Pigeon Parade Quarterly*, *Liquid Imagination*, *American Diversity Report*, and many others. She lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

RAY ZIMMERMAN is a retired park ranger and naturalist who lives and writes in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His poetry, freelance journalism, essays, and short fiction have appeared in numerous journals

and periodicals, including *The Mildred Haun Review*, *The Avocet*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology-Volume VI: Tennessee*, *Appalachian Voice*, *The Hellbender Press*, *Cagibi Review*, *The Tennessee Conservationist*, *The Chattanooga Pulse*, *Tennessee Magazine* (electronic edition), and other fine publications. He believes that writers should be aflame with enthusiasm. Links to works published online appear on his website, <https://rayzimmermanauthor.com>.

SHERRY POFF grew up in the hills of southern West Virginia and now writes in and around Chattanooga, Tennessee. She holds an MA in Writing and Rhetoric from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and is a member of the Chattanooga Writers' Guild. Sherry's work has appeared recently in *Silver Blade Magazine*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, and *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*.



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