



# **Mildred Haun Review**

A Celebration of Appalachian Literature, Culture and Scholarship

2024

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# Wildfires

*Hannah Houser*

"It's starting to cool down"

I told you as we

watched the Tennessee sky darken before

the Autumn equinox,

filled with gratitude for

chilly evenings and the absence of

blaring sun.

The forecast called for

no rain but the air was thick gray.

We sat outside sipping Dark and Stormies

and toasting to a break from indoor isolation.

Then someone on Twitter said the haze

was the clouds from the

California wildfires,

having crept across the breadth

of the country.

And my cheeks flamed over my brief respite,

knowing it was someone else's torture,

worlds away.

# To the woman holding up the grocery line

Hannah Houser

Your cart held only a few things,  
and I expected a speedy thoroughfare,  
prepared with payment already in hand.

When you mentioned your dead husband to the bagger,  
I had to loosen the grip on my handlebar,  
keeping myself from pushing you forward  
long after the cashier'd passed over your receipt.

*He went and got hisself killed on a motorcycle 40 years ago*  
you said, and I thought about the need to tell that story,  
to remember that it's true and it happened and  
his recklessness wrecked your life.

*After that I followed my son here, and now I have a grandson,*  
The second time I'd heard you say that,  
first to the woman in the adjacent line.  
*And he does great in school. So I'm staying.*

Before you walked ahead you turned back and  
smiled at me with wrinkles that said  
*Look at all the life I've lived.*  
I smiled too.

# ***Pool Shoes Recommended***

*Kay T. Fields*

Just as I finished my last lap,  
a woman fell by the pool steps.

Not a familiar figure, or regular swimmer,  
but a kindred spirit as she slipped

on that rubber mat, a slow-motion tumble  
as she fell on her left hip and side.

No young, slender, water nymph, but a substantial  
woman past her prime sprawled like some beached

turtle. Immediately, she looked around  
to see who glimpsed her ungainly mishap.

Concerned, an attentive, young lifeguard hurried  
towards her. She waved him off, maneuvered

onto all fours, then hoisted herself limb by  
limb upright with hand rails on the pool steps.

With a tentative walk and a bemused expression,  
she approached a chair, gingerly sat down, began

to check for evidence of her tumble. No immediate  
damage appeared, and my empathy was instant,

as a comrade-in arms from accidents in aging  
balance. I imagined how her thoughts were racing,

confusion was primary, how had this fall occurred?  
An unwelcome feeling of vulnerability grasped her,

shaking her usual self-confidence. I could approach  
her later, confide while skinny-dipping at midnight

has run its' course, no matter, come on  
in, the waters still fine. Silence prevailed

as an urge to offer advice was thwarted,  
I didn't say, "Always wear water shoes."

# ***Blood Will Tell***

*Kay T. Fields*

*For: Mary Stephens Thompson*

It was revelation not pleasant,  
as I pulled wadded tissues from my purse.  
I have become my mother, I thought.

My purse was leather, unlike her colorful  
collection of vinyl bags adorned with faux  
gold chains that matched her chosen outfit.

My bag wasn't filled with miscellaneous paper  
scraps with no obvious purpose. My wallet wasn't  
covered with zippered compartments and hidey-holes  
where items disappeared forever. Coins weren't loose  
at the bottom of my bag mixed with tobacco grains.

No cigarette case or box of matches lurk in the dark  
recesses of my purse. No box of *Luden's* cough drops  
is open that spills its random contents into the bottom mix.  
My keys aren't attached to a large, puffy pink ball. I don't  
have at my fingertips a plastic tip chart to calculate  
a restaurant tip, down to the exact cent, for example \$1.82.  
I do carry lipstick, but not Revlon's *Love That Red*.

We were so very different, but fundamentally in blood,  
bones, and heart, the same. I now carry *Kleenexes* she did,  
a white flag of surrender to that inevitability of maternal love.



# ***The Collar***

*Kay T. Fields*

That small, worn leather collar in front of me seemed forlorn. Those bold metal spikes that implied, “bad boy” were lost without his neck literally bristling with tiny, fierce swagger.

It first encircled the Yorkies neck in 2006 when he was just an appealing puppy. The ID tags that remained were burnished to a metallic red and blue. They clicked against his water bowl with musical notes in times before the collar came off forever.

That collar endured brutal Texas summers when it was too hot for the Yorkie to chase ducks in frantic, but futile pursuit. The leather grew supple in snow when the small dog plunged down mountain trails in his Utah days.

The collar moved with the old dog to the green, green hills of Tennessee. That boy who loved him with such devotion asked only one thing of his grandmother. “Always keep his collar, please.”

That old dog and the boy’s grandmother found themselves to be a perfect match. Days passed in joyous abandon. Nights were for the old dog to burrow deep against his beloved person.

The collar came off on October 10, 2021 for a last time. Seventeen years of faithful service across many acres of land, and down highways, trails, through forests, snow, mud, and brittle fall leaves that so enticed the little Yorkie.

That collar went into the mail today to the young man who so loved that small dog who had such a huge heart, and indomitable spirit.

# **Chase**

*Kay T. Fields*

He has been gone a few weeks now.  
Grief has yielded ground to grateful  
memories of that old Yorkie. My favorite  
image is when my husband asked him,  
“You want a biscuit?”

Our seventeen-year-old boy vibrated  
like a plucked guitar string as he followed  
his old man into our kitchen. A biscuit was  
presented, and politely the old Yorkie  
accepted his treat.

The treat hung awkwardly from both  
sides of his mouth, and with his canine  
grin, he challenged his person to try to steal  
his biscuit. The chase was on.

They circled the couch at a brisk gallop,  
careened off a side table, ran into the hall,  
and back again. Both seemed oblivious to  
age, infirmities, or dignity.

I sat and laughed helplessly at their antics.  
When the biscuit softened sufficiently,  
the old Yorkie chewed his prize. The old  
man flopped onto the couch.

# Meditation

*KB Ballentine*

Sunflowers smiling  
through summer drought  
swallow my sighs –  
dust a lighter weight  
than my worries.  
Never mind.  
The barred owl still  
summons twilight's purple.  
Horizon full  
with light of the rising  
moon guiding my eyes  
to those wide centers –  
yellow petals bright  
even after darkness falls.

# Should Seasons Darken

*Jennifer Smith*

When autumn flecks scarlet with somber shades,  
I accompany the creek on its cursive route,  
among hickories' gold leaf ambience.

Memories echo through canyon's arena;  
sunset narrates in crimson voice.

While winter strays aimless amid bare trees,  
I scout white draped mountain's silhouette  
for portraits sketched in snow.

Sterling cascades stream February's song,  
verses tumbling in lyrical waterfalls.

If thorns pierce spring's most delicate balance,  
I wait under a canopy of old growth forest,  
urging sun to sweep the ancient floor.

White trillium and spring beauties whisper rebirth;  
Virginia bluebells hush my loneliness.

When June scripts summer in mournful tones,  
I capture assurance from cornflower sky,  
and finger-paint the clouds.

A flame azalea choir summits me to their brilliance.  
My soul retraces seasons, then rests upon the bald.

# Call of Cataloochee

*Jennifer Smith*

I remember Cataloochee in September,  
summer night, soft bed in a Maggie Valley motel,  
small-town slumber before two nights in backcountry;  
but first, rearranging essentials in voluminous backpack,  
trying to trim my thirty-pound load.

Smoky Mountain mist ushered hikers  
into remote land where Cherokee hunted,  
Cataloochee Valley, a pastoral place;  
trees erect in rows along ridges,  
mountain waves rising through morning fog.

I imagined a black bear  
rambling his dwelling at dawn,  
roaming meadows and scrambling  
rocks and roots of his ancestral home.

Friends traversed the Caldwell Fork Trail,  
comradery easing weighted shoulders;  
soul cleansing water sounds spoke our names,  
guiding us to the footbridge  
over Cataloochee Creek.

Colors of the forest greeted us in goldenrod,  
ironweed's purple and jack in the pulpit's maroon,  
We paused in the peace of Palmer Chapel,  
its steeple pointing to the Appalachian sky  
that we slept under in a hardwood grove.

My backpack, a daypack now,  
is lighter as I have aged,  
yet I recall the paths of Cataloochee;  
ankles deep in mud on paths walked by horses,  
spirits soaked in solitude on the Boogerman Trail.

I remember the face of a lone black bear,  
bidding us farewell as we walked to our car,  
his arms hugging a poplar tree,  
before scurrying amid sourwoods  
under late summer's sun.

# Frost Crystals

*John C. Mannone*

Throughout the night, ice  
laces the windshield—  
from a distance, a textured  
amorphous mass, but close up,  
a crystalized layer translucent  
to the morning sun. Soon  
heated air tempers the glass  
ice interface. Loosens their  
grip and interlocks. Exposes  
dendritic branches and their  
branches within branches—  
a fractal universe or better  
said a micro universe. Each  
facet catching myriads of glints  
producing a thousand suns  
of their own. A galaxy of  
icy stars, each with its own  
worlds. And for just a moment  
I am on one of their moons  
longing for you.



# After the rain

John C. Mannone

there's something holy  
in the petrichor air  
of April, the flowering  
dogwood, blooms  
palmate in the sun  
piercing through clouds,  
white petal-bracts tinged  
scarlet, at its heart  
a regal cluster crowns  
the true flower, blood  
red seeds—the fruit  
of fall.

There's something holy  
about the cardinal's  
“loud, clear down-slurs  
or two-parted whistles  
ending in a slow trill”  
singing *cheer, cheer, cheer*  
while perched on rough  
outstretched branches  
in tiers. Joyous. Just  
because the echoes  
of an ancient chant  
that jeered the ears  
are now muffled by swish  
and sway of refreshing

wind moist with promises  
of spring.

There's something holy  
beyond the chorus  
of nature's hymns  
threading time,  
especially on Friday  
remembrances, so good  
to know that the cold  
indifferent winter—with  
its sepulcher-white snow—  
has given way to new life  
after the rain  
when all the sins  
of sadness  
have been washed away.

---

Quoted text is from The Cornell Lab, All About Birds

# Promise

*John C. Mannone*

The thick branch of a black willow  
arcs across the pond, framing water,  
rippled by morning rain. Below,  
the drizzled surface etches silver  
linings on the waves advancing toward  
the shore to be caught in a thicket  
of zigzag twig patterns on mirrored  
surface, while sky sifts through the net,  
hope's blue wedges parting clouds  
emptied of their rain. Soon the sun  
and harbingers of spring sing loud  
through February's shroud:  
a flaming red cardinal, undone,  
mourns for his mate. And I too  
burn with passion for release  
from winter's grip of loneliness.

# The Passage

John C. Mannone

*It's one of the most beautiful places to take a walk*  
—Tripadvisor, Chattanooga, Tennessee

I stare in awe at the nine-foot bronze  
structures, each weighing two thousand  
pounds, elevated another four feet on  
granite and concrete bases. The Russian  
artist, Daud Akhriev, sculpted four wax  
molds before casting the metal statues  
using an ancient technique. These ladies  
representing the four seasons, stand  
near the Market Street Bridge.

Every artist is inspired before his  
or her creation is wrought. I ponder  
what the sculptor thought about.  
Before he cast "The Four Seasons"  
in bronze. Perhaps he edged his  
tools to the same liveliness

that Antonio Vivaldi orchestrated  
with his *Le Quattro Stagioni*.  
Who in turn had prayed to God  
for inspiration. He was a Venetian

priest who penned four Petrarchan sonnets; translated them into four violin concertos of allegro music.

“The Four Seasons” manifested by young women, goddesses in ancient Rome, as portrayed by Horae: holding hands, dancing in a garden, bringing gifts of the season. Spring bears flowers in a basket, Summer wears a crown of corn, Autumn shares a cluster of grapes, Winter covers her naked body with a warm cloak.

These women standing on the south end of the Market Street Bridge are grimaced, perhaps for their indirect witness. They feel the ground beneath, the heaviness there, sense the density of injustice. Seeing the trail, they cry tarnishing their eyes at Ross Landing.

I wonder if the fall harvest of grapes is not for a wine of celebration because there are reservations and eulogies, and winter’s coat won’t stay the chilling deaths. And their spring flowers? For the burial. And summer’s crown of corn, one of the few native American foods to be thankful for, is reminiscent of the crown of thorns.

The atmosphere is palpable with Vivaldi’s harmonic contrasts and innovative melodies. But do they cover the wails, the screams,

of the Cherokee, their forcible  
expulsion to The Passage west?

It is said that this path from  
the Market Street Bridge  
—originally named after the great  
Cherokee Chief, John Ross—  
to the ferry at Moccasin Bend  
is beautiful.

But beauty is in the eye  
of the beholder. The Cherokee's  
tears have blurred any beauty there  
as had those from the "Four Seasons"  
—theirs, gushing toward the river.

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Photograph of one of the bronze structures at Ross landing on the Tennessee River:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/gs-waymarking-images/d5056aab-0670-4885-a762-f151c06d5df6.jpg>

# Appalachian Herbs and Wild Plants

John C. Mannone

## *I remember*

dandelion and sassafras teas releasing  
the blood from toxins and winter's dietary  
deficits from lack of fresh greens. An elixir  
to help liver, kidneys, the urinary tract; and  
blood sugar. Goldenrod checks cholesterol.  
Relax with chamomile and lavender.  
Unknot your stomach from stress or flu  
with ginger, alehoof, creeping charlie,  
or mint. No more pain with henbit or nettle  
nor inflammation and high blood pressure.

## *When I was a toddler,*

only four and feeling down, my Nonna  
brewed rosemary tea for my upset stomach.  
She said, in a mix of broken Spanish  
and Sicilian in simpler terms because

## *I didn't have a clear mind*

to understand these words: that rosemary  
is an antispasmodic, mild analgesic;  
cures intercostal neuralgia, headaches,  
migraine, insomnia, emotional upset,  
and depression.

## *And now, I still don't have*

the understanding of all that jargon but  
I like to collect clear vials of herbs and wild  
plants, especially rosemary in May. Because  
May is designated special awareness month for  
*good mental health.*

# Appalachian Psalm

*Laura Miller*

I will lift my eyes to the hills  
and give praise to the Lord our maker.  
I will lift my gaze through forest lace,  
a leafy view through sweetgum and maple.

Compared to his words of holiness,  
mine are hollow rumbles like rolling glass  
marbles in warped washtubs or breezeless  
August through wind cymbals.

His words are rubies of truth, a knife  
dividing good from shadows of evil  
exposing each man's heart, yet  
they are far sweeter than honeysuckle.

He is water to a panting spirit,  
a poultice to my pummeled soul.



# Hold Still a Little Longer

*Laura Miller*

The sound of chalk is hollow  
on the sidewalk capturing  
unbound creations with you  
dusting your hands as if  
you're a bee visiting flowers  
summers ago, skipping  
across hopscotch, walking  
on homemade stilts, or planting  
marigolds and tall cannas  
with grandma who once asked you  
to stand still  
as she marked a level chalk line  
for stitching an even hem  
around your floral dress.  
You, a brief princess,  
reigned before seasons  
fashioned bleary ghosts.

# FOREST PRIMEVAL

*Kevin Collins*

I step where forest feet have trod in time  
The fleeting deer and ambling 'possum sure  
And bright'ning day illumines forest prime

I, wending 'mongst the rooted feet, adjure  
The acts of humankind which may protect  
The fleeting deer and ambling 'possum sure

For many passageways, I recollect,  
Have disappeared as we forget to do  
The acts of humankind which may protect.

The leaves which rustled underfoot, they knew  
Their destinies through cycles ever spun  
Have disappeared as we forget to do

We fail to understand what we have done  
As barren trees can ne'er make life fulfill  
Their destinies through cycles ever spun

Where human footprint crushes nature's will  
I step where forest feet have trod in time  
As barren trees can ne'er make life fulfill  
And bright'ning day illumines forest prime.

# HENLEY STREET

*Kevin Collins*

When I cross this bridge, I see your face,  
Your long blonde hair swept back  
Your wistful smile, modest, teeth turned sideways.

When I cross this bridge, I know your parents  
Meant well,  
Gave you everything, youngest  
Always beyond my reach,  
Poor, shy.

When I cross this bridge, I remember  
The last time I saw you,  
Married young, seventeen, different culture  
Rich beyond measure  
Gifts and promises  
To you,  
Naïve beyond belief  
Goodly people, Godly places  
Man and woman created.  
She to him subjunct

When I cross this bridge, I recall  
The last look I saw on your face.  
“I need help. I need a friend.”  
Sitting in the crowd, noisy, boisterous  
Amidst and alone  
Darling and desolate  
Lost.

In your eyes a plea  
To me.

When I cross this bridge, I acknowledge  
My weakness, peer-bound, tongue-tied,  
Pretty young lady.  
Lovely.  
How to breach the married bans,  
The feminine pedestal of bearing, grace, and privilege.

When I cross this bridge, I realize  
That I looked down.  
The moment passed  
Intervention impossible  
Youth being young for the future.

When I cross this bridge, I know  
In two months  
She sailed  
From this bridge  
Gracing the space  
Long hair floating, angelic  
The long fall.  
Cross-cultural victim  
In-bred naivete.  
I was away.

When I cross this bridge, I hear again  
The radio report  
When I heard. No details.  
Your name.  
Your act.  
Your desperation.

When I cross this bridge, I remember  
You.

So that you may live your life  
More.

When I cross this bridge, I falter  
Feeling your self as you  
Stepped from this bridge  
Onto that bridge, choosing,  
Precipitate,  
The bridge I too must cross.

# STILL LIFE FROM A RED ROSE

*Kevin Collins*

As the vigor fades with tear  
Crispy leaves and petals sere  
Red from brilliant turns to rust  
As the matter turns to dust.

Velvet smooth and tissued web,  
Perfumed scent in time to ebb,  
Roses crumble not to die,  
Transforming life, a breathless sigh.

# DANCE

*Kevin Collins*

When tingling feet scratch grooves into the floor  
Anticipating rhythm, movement, too  
Scant opportunity to voice their say.

For moving feet are bound, constrained, a-moor  
To customs, practice, place, and time, to rue  
Their instinct, bouncing, prancing, play away

Frustrated by the bonds of social bore  
When movement means to only tread the few  
Slow walks, predictable and typic way.

Why pace when skipping steps express much more  
Delight in daily ventures ever new  
When life calls, "live" the most of ev'ry day

So dance the morn, and dance the noon, your feet  
Can dance the night along, new dawn to meet.

# Turn of the Wheel

*Ray Zimmerman*

The years roll back like  
the turn of a wagon wheel  
and I am home again.

The rocker on the porch  
returns me to the smell  
of woodsmoke and barbeque,

the sound of a tractor,  
and my dad on horseback  
at my uncle's farm.

Uncles and aunts, parents  
and grandparents long gone  
step up to the porch.

Even the cousin that passed  
last week says hello. He was  
a disagreeable old cuss.

Still, he was family and  
I tried to be kind until  
he ran me off for good.



# Rebirth

*Ray Zimmerman*

Like Jonah from the belly of the whale,  
the bear emerged from her winter den.  
Three cubs were her message of salvation.  
Despite frost and snow, life continued.

Jonah was grouchy, having spent  
three days dead. Not yet the symbol  
of the risen Christ, he wanted God  
to smite the Assyrians.

The bear was grouchy too,  
having given birth in the frozen ground  
and nursed cubs with stored reserves.  
No berries waited to restore her strength.

On the way to the river, her cubs saw leaves  
shivering in the breeze and stopped to play  
as all young things do. She swatted one cub  
on the backside and proceeded to fish.

# Coyotes' Howl

*Ray Zimmerman*

They awakened us one morning.  
Safe in the cabin we listened.  
Without fear, we searched  
for the new moon.

No highway noise disturbed  
our peaceful scene, although the roads  
would take us home on Sunday.

When morning came, I made grits  
and eggs but saved the chili peppers  
for another dish. The coffee awakened  
our nostrils and taste buds.

I thought blackberries might be good  
if pancakes were in the picture, but  
hiking shoes and the ridgeline beckoned.

# Ode to the Craft of Poetry

*Natalie Kimbell*

Gather thoughts like random flower bulbs,  
scatter them on lined paper under an expectant hand.  
Some sprouts root and blossom, others shrivel.  
Growth as a writer comes when least expected.

Scatter words on lined paper under an expectant hand.  
Poetry buds with toil and persistence.  
Some lines root and blossom, others shrivel;  
many seedlings require more weeding than others.

Poetry buds with toil and persistence.  
Some plants are culled for strong development.  
Many seedlings require more weeding than others.  
When flowers bloom, satisfaction abounds.

Some lines are culled for strong development.  
Gather thoughts like next year's flower bulbs.  
When poems bloom, satisfaction abounds.  
Growth as a poet comes when least expected.

# Stolen

Natalie Kimbell

Wichita, Kansas, January 25, 2024

*A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.*

*Jackie Robinson*

A bronze body  
on home plate, poised  
to add to his 313 batting  
average, 972 runs scored,  
1,563 hits and 200 stolen bases.

Formed to remind us  
the man who bore  
hard curved  
“good ole boy”  
*Go back to the cotton field*  
hatred on the open diamond.  
and never broke.

then like an echo  
of heinous racism  
his statue cut down  
on a kid's ball field  
by those who hide  
in the night

sliced at the ankles  
and stolen away  
dismantled

and burned  
like garbage.

Now hands of all colors  
replace this tribute  
remember the legacy  
of the man who wore 42.

# To be Twelve and Innocent in the 1970's

*Natalie Kimbell*

Even young elm saplings double dare  
*Keep Out* signs, and thread their branches  
through construction fences.

We, elementary school trespassers, mimic the saplings,  
and wiggle past wires after men's work hours.  
We gather welts scraping passed barbs and briers  
and create elaborate tales of the day's battle scars.

We crawl belly- down on enemy terrain  
like we had seen in movies and news flashes  
between skeleton- framed subdivision houses,  
and deep mud- filled craters. In this realm,

drill bits and bent nails are spent shrapnel.  
Loose boards become bridges in rice patties,  
standing cement mixers our aircraft artillery,  
outlined houses, our imagined destruction.

We yell, *Boom!* Someone drops and moans  
taking his turn being a dead soldier or mourning wife,  
knowing nothing of the sights and smells of battle,  
too young to be grateful for our ignorance.

# Trying to Explain How to Survive a Broken Heart

Natalie Kimbell

*After **Purple Rain** by Prince*

It's like steering your car on a narrow switchback  
two lane road on an unfamiliar mountain through a storm  
when you know you have never seen rain like this.

A gale that topples trees,  
floods tributaries of the soul.

Torrential rain spiders splat then scurry  
grab new positions on the windshield—  
distort what lies ahead.

Moving is like traveling on ice through banks of fog.  
You creep, crawl, inch forward  
and the instant you praise yourself for moving,

his voice becomes the radio.  
*I never meant to cause you any sorrow.*

Your flashers on, your eyes aimed low,  
straining to keep on the right side of life's white line,  
center lines blurred by advancing highway halos—

his voice croons, *I never meant to cause you any pain.*

You clutch the wheel staring through the windshield

wind whipped— pelted with hail  
that wipers can't appease.

And all you can, and must do, is drive.



# Tennessee Spring

*Sharon Shadrick*

Cold, damp air- full of winter  
Ambushed by daffodils  
Poking their fragile, yellow heads  
Through a chilly russet earth.

A Tennessee spring is a sneaky thing  
Sending its first flowers on a reconnaissance mission.

Winter reclaims its God-given rights  
No quarter given  
While the daffodils playfully retreat  
A game of peek-a-boo cut short.

# Romance Novels

*Sharon Shadrick*

We burned trash in the backyard  
On Fredonia Road in 1964  
Relatives close, times hard-  
And Daddy made the times harder.

“Why did you treat Mama like that?”  
Gifting me a sorry blueprint for relationships and life.  
Your mistakes provided nails  
For others to keep me in my place.

So I risked nothing, playing it safe  
Reading my happily-ever-afters.

# On the Banks of River Affric

*Sharon Shadrick*

Water rushes over rock, crashing like cymbals  
at the foot of the falls.

Loch liquid saturated with peat  
churns to a tea-colored brew  
with enough force to knock a man down  
Licking the river bank in the aftermath.

Wild ferns and marsh marigolds grow up  
together like old friends.

A spray of water teases the chill breeze  
gray rocks tinged green with lichen  
slippy as a freshly waxed floor.

Soft inlets of calm water puddle  
on stepping stones of flat, fickle rocks.

# Babylon

*Kelsey Solomon*

The hotel burnt so long ago.  
Mud, walnuts, and buckeyes  
buried the tales of healing  
waters, where tourists hankered after  
the clay-persimmon elixir  
to wash away the ache.  
Neighbors counted up in years,  
down in cars that skidded  
along the gravel driveway,  
fortified by sycamores.  
Every July, fruit cracked  
as they hit ground,  
the well sunk still.  
They figured God withheld  
their cure as sacrifice,  
but she knew.  
Whispers, giggles, splashes  
from behind her farm  
brushed through the sweet gums  
to a grocery bag crinkling  
from her finger's crook.  
She packed stone after stick after seed  
as heavy as plastic meshes  
and stacked each piece for  
when the rain comes.

# Atropa Belladonna

*Kelsey Solomon*

*For Abbagail*

I cup our namesake in my palms and  
sing about the lore of our birth: a berry,

as wide as our pupils should be on the night  
we offer our lace to a split-level floor, poor  
for prayer. We are not the amaryllis here. We rise

closed and fall on the next little girl's lips,  
where she will whisper giddy secrets

through white teeth as strong as the tremors  
of a man whose legs can now frame  
repentance. I told her that it's our way,

but we feign poison. We know the dosage  
and harmonize with the steady hum of bubbles

floating to the top of champagne glasses  
we hold to keep company at a distance.  
We save the fruit for the end. The jam is sweet.

Gods order it so. They eat, spread like dandelions  
across tables and books and cities, too rooted

to pluck, and we are born to be too much  
of a lady, so we fake our intent, erase memory  
cupping new berries, but we're ripe, they say.

# Fourth of July

*Kelsey Solomon*

The collision caused his eyes to burst.  
Equine tears mucked mahogany  
atop his nose ridge and rippled  
along summer tar, a canvas:  
the firefighter tried to hose it away  
for the sake of approaching patriots

while fireworks waltzed above.  
Headlights curtail his broken neck, twisted  
upward, mouth hung open like a hurried robbery.  
And he slept. Sleep—to put him down.  
His caretaker raised her cup  
to our banner, stripes, strikes,

as she left the stable cracked to watch  
history in the sky, propane blue to red fuse,  
flashing sharp white before the boom,  
and as I drove, the blacktop drank up  
seal brown's blood, sweet as cherry wine.

# After Church

*Kelsey Solomon*

I plant a dogwood tree  
where deacons align

in rocking chairs outside  
a country kitchen, their

faces like Shar-Pei pups  
posing for a picture.

A camarilla of strong  
secrets, they wave

shyly to some gallant  
women in chambray.

It makes them feel  
young again.

## Bios

**HANNAH HOUSER** (she/her) is a lifelong East Tennessean, writer, and manager of internationally renowned musicians. She has been a part of the music industry for over a decade and specializes in artist relations and management, community building, and creative content management. She holds undergraduate degrees in English and Art from Carson-Newman University, where she was named the Outstanding Graduate of 2012 in both departments. She has been previously published in *The Red Branch Review* and *The Pigeon Parade Quarterly*. She resides with her husband and black cat in Knoxville, TN.

**KAY T. FIELDS** resides in Dandridge, Tennessee. She published a memoir in 2019 titled, *Godsmacked: A Memoir of Mania, Mayhem and Mischief*. She is a poet and a transplant from Texas who moved with her spouse to Dandridge in 2010. Her work has been published in several literary magazines, including the 2023 *Mildred Haun Review*. She and her spouse enjoy life with their Yorkie, Victoria.

**KB BALLENTINE'S** eighth collection, *Spirit of Wild*, launched in March with Blue Light Press. Her earlier books can be found with Iris Press, Blue Light Press, Middle Creek Publishing, and Celtic Cat Publishing. Published in *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Atlanta Review* and *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, and others, her work also appears in anthologies including *I Heard a Cardinal Sing* (2022), *The Strategic Poet* (2021), *Pandemic Evolution* (2021), and *Carrying the Branch: Poets in Search of Peace* (2017). Learn more at [www.kbballentine.com](http://www.kbballentine.com).

**JENNIFER SUSAN SMITH**, a retired elementary school speech-language pathologist, resides in Rock Spring, Georgia. She has work published and forthcoming in WELLREAD Magazine, *The Bluebird Word*, *San Antonio Review*, *First Literary Review East*, *Grub Street's Our Planet*, *Our Stories*, and more. Her grief writing sample will appear in Diane Zinna's *Letting Grief Speak*, with Columbia University Press. Jennifer is a member of Chattanooga Writer's Guild. She serves as chairman of Alpha Delta Kappa International Pages and Pearls Book Club, and is a member of the Gamma Beta chapter.

**JOHN C. MANNONE** has poems in *Anthology of Appalachian Writers XV* [Barbara Kingsolver] and XVI

[Ann Pancake], *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; nominated for the Weatherford Award). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and *Silver Blade*. He's a physics professor teaching mathematics and creative writing at an East Tennessee magnet high school.

**LAURA GUNNELLS MILLER** is a writer from southern Appalachia where she has been a longtime teacher and community volunteer. Her recent poetry appears in *Salvation South*, *Artemis*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Abyss & Apex*, *American Diversity Report*, *Silver Blade*, and elsewhere.

**KEVIN D COLLINS PHD**: performer, writer, musician, artist, activist. He's worked in hunger and disaster relief, prison reform, houselessness, racial, environmental, and immigration justice, and nuclear weapons abolition. He loves Shakespeare, arts-based research, megapuppetry, Hannah Arendt, and quantum physics. He plays music with the Emancipators folk band and is the founder and creator of the Catalystica Players megapuppets.

**RAY ZIMMERMAN** is a former president of the Chattanooga Writer's Guild. He has published poems in numerous journals, including *The Mildred Haun Review*, *The Avocet*, *Number One* (Volunteer State Community College), and *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Tennessee, Volume 6* (Texas Review Press). He has also published a series of broadsides featuring his poetry and photography and is currently publishing on Substack. His feature articles have appeared in *The Chattanooga Pulse*, *Photo Traveler* (Los Angeles), *The Journal of Interpretation* (Fort Collins, Colorado), *Appalachian Voices* (Boone, North Carolina), and *The Hellbender Press* (Knoxville).



**NATALIE KIMBELL**, a longtime resident of Sequatchie County, Tennessee is a parent, grandparent and public school teacher. Her first chapbook, *On Phillips Creek* is on sale with Finishing Line Press. Her work is available in several anthologies and online collections including the *Mildred Haun Review*, *Tennessee Voices*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *The Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Women Speak*.

**SHARON SHADRICK** is a retired teacher and aspiring writer. She recently had two poems selected for publication in the *Women of Appalachia: Women Speak Anthology*. She lives in Dunlap, Tennessee with her husband, two grandchildren, and three rescue dogs.

Born and raised in Hamblen County, Tennessee, **KELSEY A. SOLOMON** teaches composition and literature for Walters State Community College, where she serves as the Faculty Senate President and spent four years as the chair of the Mildred Haun Conference Planning Committee. She holds a Master of Arts in English from East Tennessee State University and a Bachelor of Arts in English (Creative Writing) and Philosophy from Carson-Newman University, where her irrevocable union with poetry truly began. Her poems have appeared in *Still*, *Black Moon Magazine*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, most which she's written in someone else's kitchen or in the Notes app on her phone when the muses demand.



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