



# Mildred Haun Review

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# Homecoming

*Ann Thornfield-Long*

Most of the places I've considered home don't resemble the way they looked when I was there.

My great-grandfather's farm with the horse trough just inside the gate to the barn, where Grandpa was struck by lightning twice. A small ranch style house with a gravel drive. They would never guess that Old Frank, the faithful Collie, rests in peace beneath their swing set.

The knotty pine cottage where my grandparents lived year-round, next to the Chicago Boys Club, went from a tiny neighborhood of old-fashioned cabins and trailers near the lake, replaced by summer homes with big glass windows.

The house on Harvard Avenue with the crab apple tree, now has a roof that sags in the middle. The tree was cut down the yews removed so the renters have less maintenance. I played hooky one day in my junior year of high school and painted my bedroom apricot. I wonder what color it is now.

The house on Buffington Road was surrounded with 40 purple lilac bushes. Dad spaced them out. The purple blooms made it smell like heaven every spring, the built-on room in the back with the fireplace for Santa. The airport is directly to the southeast. I went to sleep listening to the whine of small craft engines straining to get into the sky.

The house on Jackson Street Pike where my father jerked my baby brother out of the path of a speeding car, is remodeled so much the original house is hidden within additions. I can't tell where it was.

But the house that stays in my memory, has a huge red Christmas cactus in the chilly dining room and an earthen root cellar that smells of apples. The mint green bedroom has a plastic clock where the pendulum is a dark-haired girl in a rope swing, her feet crossed at the ankles. She has brown hair and eyes like me.

There is a bullet hole in the headboard near the clock, where the hunters trespassed. They missed the deer they were aiming for and shot a bullet into the headboard, inches from my Aunt Thelma's head. She never recovered from the cancer that had a truer aim.

# Harry Scary

*Chasity Guy*

Harrison Taylor thought the worst of everyone. This was due to the fact he was born with the spirit of discernment, and whether he liked to admit it or not, most people were shitty. He sat in the uncomfortable train seat staring out of the window at the passing landscape and gave a smug smile. Had anyone witnessed that smile in passing, they would have picked up their pace and averted their eyes. Harrison made people uncomfortable in ways they could not explain, but he did not care either way because the opinions of others simply did not matter to someone who could see the very worst in people.

Growing up, Harrison's father, Digby Taylor had given his profoundly serious son the nickname "Harry Scary" because as Digby was wont to proclaim, "the kid had a thousand-yard stare that could see right through to the dark core of a man." This was after Harrison had whispered into his father's ear that he knew about the petite blond lady who worked with him and wore tight dresses and bright red lipstick. If Digby did not want his only beloved son to divulge this juicy bit of information to his rabidly jealous mother, Digby should allow Harrison to stay up one hour past bedtime. Digby, facing the threat of having his deepest darkest secrets exposed, relented at that time and ever after because it wasn't about staying up past his strict bedtime, it was about setting the stage for Harrison to always have his own way.

The brightly colored trees and rolling hills outside the train window gave way to one of many small and often forgotten towns along his route. This trip for Harrison, like many in the past, was simply a means to an end. Instead of extorting small-time bankers out of small-time pay, Harrison decided to use his gift on a much larger scale. The place he going to as the train barreled down the tracks was named Bitterness, Ohio. There was nothing special about Bitterness if one were just passing through, and most people chose to do just that, however, Harrison knew things about his shit stain of a town that others did not. Although Bitterness was home to just over twelve hundred souls, two red lights, and the world's oldest cat, Snickers, it was also the place where a young man with very deep pockets lived and who went by the name Freddie Warner.

Freddie did not know Harrison but that did not matter, because Harrison knew Freddie, every deep dark secret. Little did Freddie know that his one-time trip to a resort town in North Carolina would put him in brief but informative contact with a man who could not only read minds but also exhort lots of money from those who kept secrets. Everyone kept

secrets, it was just that some were more profitable than others. Freddie's particular secret was very profitable indeed. Drug money was the best kind of money in Harrison's humble opinion, anonymous and untraceable, much like Harrison himself. He gave another smug smile and imagined Freddie Warner sitting down to eat dinner, unaware that fate was hurtling ever closer as the train ate up the tracks in its rapid approach to his undoing.

Harrison put the thoughts of Freddie Warner aside, all in due time as his philandering father used to say. As he closed his eyes to rest, he thought back to seventh grade when he had made his first profitable deal with his teacher, Mrs. Lancaster. Harrison knew that she had a considerable sum of money in the faux leather bag she carried every day to Kramer Elementary, go Vikings! Of course, Mrs. Lancaster had not verbally offered up this information, but she didn't have to, not with the gift her brightest student possessed. Despite his impeccable grades and attendance, Harrison knew that most of his teachers, hell most people, found him off-putting. He was after all, Harry Scary, but what Harrison could not abide was arrogance. Despite her fake smile and melodic voice, Mrs. Lancaster was cloaked in arrogance. In fact, she practically *reeked* of it.

This was the reason Harrison stayed after class as the rest of his animal-like classmates whooped and yelled their way down the gloomy halls to escape into sun-lit freedom. As he approached Mrs. Lancaster's desk at the front of the classroom, he saw a flash of annoyance cross her face. Her arrogance would cost her three thousand dollars to be exact.

"What is it, Harrison?" She asked in a clipped voice.

Harrison decided to get down to brass tacks, why hem and haw Digby Taylor often wanted to know. He plastered a fake smile on his face and began to offer his teacher a sweet deal.

"I should like to discuss Frieda Lancaster," Harrison said in his best grown-up voice.

He had discovered most adults found this pleasing despite the discomfort his presence could bring, but not the teacher before him. Her usually pretty face spun through a carousel of emotions before settling on barely controlled rage. Her plump lips thinned considerably and her perfectly arched eyebrows knit together as she frowned. Harrison wanted to tell her that this expression made her look ten years older, but why should he do her any favors?

"Harrison, what are you on about?" She barked.

"What I'm on about," Harrison began primly, "is Frieda Lancaster, your mother-in-law. How would she feel if she knew you had stolen five thousand of her hard-earned dollars? That money is for her *funeral*, Mrs. Lancaster! What about Mr. Lancaster? Surely, he would like to know about his beloved bride of six months taking advantage of his very own mother. Why, stealing off an old lady with Alzheimer's makes you no better than- "

"Stop!" Mrs. Lancaster hissed as spittle flew from her mouth. Harrison took a step back to avoid the spray.

"What I need is very simple, three thousand dollars for my silence," he said smugly.

In the short silence that followed, Harrison had the insane urge to laugh, spray Mrs. Lancaster with some spit of his own. Instead, he stood calmly in front of his seventh-

grade teacher, his white, blonde hair perfectly parted down the middle, his wide blue eyes unblinking. Mrs. Lancaster opened and closed her mouth, giving her the appearance of a freshly caught trout and he knew she would comply.

“How did you-?” She managed to ask, glancing at the door to make sure they were alone.

“That doesn’t matter,” Harrison said, annoyance creeping into his tone. He was ready to finish here, it was time, as his father liked to point out, to shit and git.

As Mrs. Lancaster reached for her purse, she glared at him.

“You’re no better than a common hustler, Mr. Harrison Taylor,” she said self-righteously.

At this, Harrison expelled a loud bray of laughter, he did not take this insult personally. After all, *he* had not stolen five grand from a feeble old lady *she* had. After she handed him the money, he bid her good day and got the hell out of there. The rest of the year Mrs. Lancaster never spoke directly to him or looked his way. Harrison did not blame her; it wasn’t every day you come face to face with your own depravity.

As the train conductor announced the next stop in Bitterness, Ohio, Harrison straightened his tie and patted down his already perfect hair. Just because he had dirty work ahead of him did not mean he had to look sloppy. When the train rolled to a stop and Harrison made his way up the aisle towards the exit, he felt that old familiar surge of excitement in the pit of his stomach. Nothing made him happier than exposing the sins of others. Of course, money was also a big part of it, but nothing beat the ability to demoralize people with just a few shared words.

Standing in the darkness of the train station platform was a shadowed figure Harrison failed to notice at first. As he passed by, the man reached out and grabbed his arm. Harrison felt a jolt of recognition as Freddie Warner leaned in close with a serpentine smile.

“Harry Scary, I’ve been expecting you.”

# Beat No More

*Chasity Guy*

They want you to wear that martyr mask  
    To bask in the glow of their fires  
They want you to drink from that half-empty glass  
    Lift their poison to a mouth sealed shut  
They want you to be thankful, trash  
    Licking from the floor the crumbs from the table  
They want that last laugh  
    Erupting from the throat of a dead man  
He gives that fake grin  
    Pushing at the hands of a ticking clock  
He's wearing those coffin clothes  
    Going to a dance inside a box  
He's crossing those shadowlands  
    Nightmare bound and dream escaped  
He has those whispering words  
    Mouth full of dirt tells where he stays  
You want that green grass  
    A flower in bloom on a wasted land  
You got that life blood  
    Spilling from the wrists of a half-moon  
You live that full life  
    Chasing the sun that ends the night  
You have that second chance  
    Stopped his heart and those beating hands.

# This Hollow Night

*Chasity Guy*

Down in darkness, 'round comes moon  
Ghosts do dance in shadow fallen rooms  
Twisted like branches on winter laden trees  
Wind carries music, shrieking through the eaves  
Up rises mist, he's crawling on fours  
Harvestman arrives, knocking on doors  
A traveler most weary lurks within the gloom  
Scythe at the ready, preparest thou tomb  
Stars gaze not upon this hollow night  
Sorrow is the path, with teeth it doth bite  
Bitter words are spoken from the well within  
This saturnine frost captures craven men  
The bones of intention fall into decay  
Proclaiming on this night to find a better way.

# When I Was Eight

*Chris Wood*

I remember waking at dawn one Saturday,  
mom and dad still asleep, no alarm  
this morning. My sister, her eyes closed, purrs  
in the stillness of soft light permeating  
our bedroom. I slip from the covers.  
Tiptoe to the bathroom. I don't dare flush.  
In the kitchen, I down a glass of orange juice  
and willing the door not to squeak, sneak  
out to the backyard. I sit in a webbed lawn chair  
and pull my knees to my ribcage.

Morning smells nice, honeybees suckling clover  
still wet with dew. Cicadas, chirping long and low,  
drown out the warblers and thrushes.  
I trail barefoot to the poplar hoping to find  
the dull brown shells they left behind.  
Circling the tree, I see three and a line of wood ants  
following each other across the trunk and along a root  
peeking the surface. A butterfly, fluttering  
over squash blossoms, catches my attention —

The back door clicks, screen door slams,  
cigarette smoke drifts over my dad as he sips  
from a cup of steaming coffee. He catches up  
with me in the garden, his familiar scent  
mingles with the radishes and green onions.  
I walk with him as he checks the beans and tomatoes,  
pulls a handful of looseleaf lettuce,  
and lays them in my open arms.

# Honeysuckle Summer

*Chris Wood*

It's a quiet morning, no birdsong this warm July day.  
Where are the chicks? Have they flown the coop?  
The air is stagnant, still. Non-moving leaves  
and pink crepe myrtle blossoms frame my picture window.  
Stormie lays across the couch back, her black fur  
highlighted by sun streaming through the window.

My weather app says a high of ninety-eight degrees,  
heat index over a hundred. I remember pool days as a kid,  
popsicles melting down my arm, and shooting bow and arrow  
at the YMCA day camp. Today, I will lounge in the air-conditioning,  
read the latest edition of *People* magazine, and dream.

# August

*Chris Wood*

Fire licks the edges  
of the burn barrel  
in summer's last full month.  
The harbinger to Fall, school,  
and football.  
The last of the dog days  
before winnowing the trees  
of their summertime beauty.

# She Does Everything, Says Nothing

*Chris Wood*

Percolating aroma drifts to my nose,  
I wake to coffee grinding,  
dress in the clothes she laid out last night,  
then go sit at the kitchen table.  
She pigtailed my hair, fingers twisting each,  
leaving a smooth curl dangling  
on either side of my face.

Dinner thaws on the counter,  
breakfast fries on the stove.  
A towel slung over her shoulder,  
she forks bacon onto a plate  
and lays a handful of Cheerios  
on the highchair for baby brother.  
Dad slips out the back door.

She slathers mayonnaise on bologna sandwiches,  
stuffs them in brown paper bags.  
The school bus honks,  
she motions for us to hurry.  
I watch her button my sister's sweater  
as I punch my hands into my jacket,  
then she pushes us out the front door.

# Under the Swing Set

*Chris Wood*

I poke a stick into the brown mound  
of sifted earth. Black ants appear  
and swarm toward me. I giggle  
as they march up my legs to explore  
my orange and pink flowered sundress.

I call daddy to come see.  
He drops the hammer,  
spits nails out of his mouth,  
and roughly brushes the ants  
from my three-year-old body.

He swings me high in the air,  
hugs me, and plops me  
back on my feet. Scolds me  
for I don't know what, then  
pushes me to the back porch  
where mom sits snapping beans.

# One Peony

Keith Gorman

That's all I have. At least the last time I looked,  
the ants were working overtime, tickling  
the pods, but the husky casings remained  
closed. And today I learned this legend is false, that  
buds really bloom all by themselves

without the aid of sugar ants. Like the wise-three  
men who never were, or the myth that bulls are  
raged by red, that Vikings wielded horns,  
the ants are simply saccharine goats, informing  
their friends with pheromone trails:

*Climb aboard; the sepals are sweet!* Another fact:  
ants do defend their peony bulbs quite well  
by breaking up the aphid camps and smacking them  
to hell. Those caustic, little, irksome bugs that  
hang around in herds, thieving on the honeydew,

vying for the kill. I cannot say I like this way of  
blooming minus ants, the legend getting  
tossed, the pain and disappointment almost more  
than I can bear. I'd rather think the ants are there  
to liberate the pods.

# The Drunk Man

*Chrissie Anderson Peters*

Nursing a bourbon on the rocks in the humidity of Miami, Josie Morgan recalled the time Hank Parker came bursting through the front door of the Morgans' farmhouse back in Langston, Virginia, unannounced and unwelcome, when she was just a child. Her Papaw Sam jumped up from the table to head him off, warning her to stay put. Little Josie ran to the living room, folding her four-year-old frame behind the velvet-upholstered sofa, trying to stare out at what was transpiring in the entryway to their home. She was unaccustomed to seeing people under the influence of alcohol back then.

Little Josie recognized Hank from seeing him hanging out on the bridge on the main road, the bridge that spanned the Clinch River, just a creek at that point, that ran beside the farmhouse. She and her Mamaw Abby often spied on the activities on the bridge from the piety of their front porch. Mamaw Abby frequently called the law on Hank and his friends after their drinking spilled out of Hank's house, across the road, and onto the bridge "where good folks with common sense and decency" had to watch and hear them "in their drunken stupor." Little Josie heard Mamaw Abby say these things so many times, she had them memorized, even if she wasn't quite sure what they meant. Her mamaw was gone that afternoon to her beauty shop appointment and the grocery store, though, and little Josie was glad. Her mamaw's heart could not have taken this sort of intrusion. Her mom was at work in the sewing factory over an hour away. It seemed like her mom was always somewhere other than at home when Josie was young. If she closed her eyes and tried real hard, she could almost bring her image back to mind, standing in their bedroom in bell bottom jeans and a white poets blouse, both made with her own hands, ready to go out for a night on the town with her friends, maybe to see a band somewhere in Carters Corner, and Mamaw Abby's disapproving lecture of her whereabouts when she had a daughter to think of at home.

Drifting back to the day when Hank Parker barged into their house, she could see her papaw carefully trying to push the drunk man towards the door, but Hank would not be moved. He seemed to be on some sort of mission Josie couldn't understand. His words slurred together, and she could smell his sweet, sweaty smell from her hiding place a few feet away.

"They locked me out, Sam," the drunk man exclaimed. "They locked me out of my own

damned house. Damned bunch of freeloaders. I ain't got nowhere to go until they let me back in." He drew a deep breath and tottered forward towards the living room as he did so, Josie's papaw trying to steady him to keep him in the entryway and out of the living room.

"Hank, you can't just come into our house like this! You're drunk and you're scaring my granddaughter. And you're starting to make *me* mad."

Hank stood looking around for a minute, seeing no one. "Sam, I ain't gonna hurt nobody. That girl ain't got nothing to be scared of. I just need a place to stay until they let me back in. It's starting to rain, and I can't stay outside."

"How about you just go back over to the Mason place?" The Mason place was a rundown beer joint two curves over from where they lived.

Hank shook his head. "They done kicked me out for getting in a fight. It wasn't my fault, though. Dalton started it."

Sam nodded. "And with Dalton being their son, of course, they're gonna take his side."

For the first time, Josie noticed that Hank was bleeding. A fine trickle of blood made its way down the side of his forehead and stopped with a flourish across his cheek, as though it had been swiped away in haste. Her papaw looked confused for a split second, then told Hank to sit down on the front step, just outside the entryway. "You'll be out of the rain. I'll bring you out some coffee so you can get sobered up. Then you need to go on home."

Hank made it clear he didn't want to sober up, but Sam made it equally plain this was the only way he was staying on his property without him calling the police to come get the drunk man.

For what felt like a long time, Sam went back and forth from the front stoop to the kitchen, taking cups of coffee back out to the raggedy man. The rain picked up in earnest and thunder rolled in the distance. Little Josie wanted the drunk man to go away, but she also marveled to see him up close, not from the safety of the front porch, hearing her mamaw say what a disgrace he was to the community. To Josie, seeing him from her hiding place, he just seemed sad and lost. His friends, drunks like him, had locked him out of his own house. Her family were not his friends, at least not that she knew of, and here he had come charging into their house, looking for shelter, looking for something little Josie didn't have words for. And despite the fuss her mamaw would raise when she found out, her Papaw Sam offered him a place to sit out of the storm, gave him coffee to help him think straight, and, after a while of talking softly to him about Hank's various troubles in life, sent him on his way back across the road, away from their home, away from their sanctuary and supposed safety.

Little Josie asked her papaw why he had been so nice to Hank. "Well, hon, I've seen hard times, too. Not for a long, long time, but sometimes, everyone needs someone to talk to. Even a drunk man deserves some kindness."

Grown-up Josie downed the rest of her bourbon in one great gulp and reached to pour another. Mamaw Abby had been gone for a year now and her cousin Ruth Ann had called that morning with news that her Papaw Sam had joined her. Langston beckoned, but she refused to go back now. Little Josie was long-gone, too. She missed them all, and her mom. What was left to go back to but a bunch of used-to-be's and might-have-been's? She was no better now than Hank Parker had ever been, and truthfully, probably a lot worse. She looked over at the bed where the man who had hired her lay passed out and wondered how her life ever got to this point. Grown-up Josie needed some kindness, too.

# Old Doc Jones

*Chrissie Anderson Peters*

It was the year Russ and I moved into our house, Spring 2003. I'd been in Bristol almost three years and had brought two cats with me when I moved. At that time, my co-workers had suggested I take them to Jones' Animal Hospital because I was looking for a new vet in the area. I thought it was interesting that none of the vets in the clinic were named Jones, but I never asked why.

When we moved into our new house, there was a problem in the neighborhood. A cat problem. They were everywhere. And if they were on my back porch, I was going to put food out for them. Even if they weren't mine – although Russ maintained they were mine because I was feeding them.

They belonged to an old man named Mr. Smith, who lived in a house one down and over to the left of us, as we looked down the hill. He owned a big ramshackle barn across the side street, where I guessed most of the cats had slept until their population got out of hand. We could easily identify at least eighteen different cats. Some were more acclimated to humans than others. Some were absolutely feral, while others would come up to be petted. Some of the females were pregnant. The population was out of control and about to skyrocket even more.

I had a stepfather Mr. Smith's age. I knew his mentality about the situation before Russ ever went over to ask him about the cats. These cats weren't pets; they were intended to be pest control. Chances were, none of them had ever been to a vet for shots or anything else. He certainly wasn't concerned about having them spayed or neutered. Then kittens started popping up and showing up on our back porch, too. That was when we knew the problem had extended to us and we needed to be part of the solution, rather than ignoring the situation. We joined a group in the area called People United for Animals (PUFA), and they gave us vouchers to help us get reduced-cost spays and neuters, but it was still costly. We were paying about \$50 for spays and \$25 for neuters. We were using PUFA's humane traps to catch the more feral cats and taking them to the vets at Jones' Animal Clinic. We were thankful for the help, but it wasn't a cheap endeavor.

Someone in PUFA told us about Old Doc Jones, who lived out in Blountville, a “suburb” of Bristol. Apparently, he was a retired vet who sometimes operated out of his garage. It was spring and Jones’ was inundated with cats and dogs whose owners were making appointments ahead of time. Getting animals in on the spur of the moment was getting tricky, but we were in desperate need of the services right then. Catching ferals, you can’t make appointments ahead of time...

I had managed to catch three neighborhood cats and had them in cat carriers the afternoon I first called old Doc Jones. He answered the phone, and I told him who I was. “Someone in PUFA told me you will do spays and neuters. We have a cat over-population problem in the neighborhood we moved into a couple of months ago and we’re trying hard to do what we can to help get it under control.”

“Are the cats yours?” he asked.

“Well, technically, no. They belong to a man named Mr. Smith, but we’re feeding them.”

“Tell me where you live.” So I told him. “Oh, yeah, I’m familiar with that area. And that situation. You’re right. You all need all the help you can get. You said you’ve got three?”

“Right now, yes, sir. We’re trapping them and doing as many as we can. We’ve been taking them to Jones’ Animal Clinic, but they can’t fit us in...”

“Here’s my address. Bring them on. I’ll be waiting.”

Dr. Basil Allen Jones attended Auburn University and graduated in 1951 as a Doctor in Veterinary Medicine and came back home to East Tennessee, having graduated from Blountville High School in 1944. I learned numerous things about him over the next few months as he helped us tackle the overpopulation problem in our neighborhood. He was the namesake of the clinic where I took my own cats but had retired from daily practice several years earlier. Yet, here he was, working with me out of his garage, to spay and neuter as many cats as I could catch and bring to him. That first afternoon, he apologized for having to charge me extra for one of the cats because she was pregnant. “Will \$25 be too much for you to pay for her? I normally charge \$15 for neuters and \$20 for spays.”

I told him he was charging about half-price of what I’d been paying at the clinic, and he replied, “That’s another reason I’m not still in practice. I know folks can’t pay that much. It’s important to take care of the animals. They’re why I do this. I care about the animals. They need all the help they can get, and that’s why I’m still doing what I do, the way I do it.”

He rarely talked about himself but focused on the animals. He didn’t keep them overnight, as there wasn’t room in the garage for that. He told me how to care for them when I got them back to my house and I did what he told me to do. There were other clients taking

their animals to the garage, too. There was always someone else there when I went. I was a steady customer for about three months. It turned out that our down-the-hill neighbors, Jackie and Mike, were tackling the problem, too, unbeknownst to us. They were also working through PUFA. And, running into the same issue with no available appointments at Jones' Animal Clinic, they were taking some to Doc Jones, too. "You're not in this alone," he told me one day, then went on to tell me that Jackie and Mike were bringing cats to him, too. I hadn't met the neighbors yet, but I went straight home and stopped at their house to introduce myself. We became fast friends, knowing we had a common goal and a love for cats.

One of the last days I visited him, I had delivered one of our favorite cats, Sam, who was relatively tame, but had eluded being caught for quite some time. When I went back later that afternoon to pick him up, old Doc Jones informed me very matter-of-factly, "That cat you brought me, Sam? He's got cryptorchidism." I thought it sounded like some horrible disease and my mouth dropped open in fear. He waved my worries away as he went on, "Just means he's only got one ball." I laughed with relief.

He still looked serious, though, so I curtailed my laughter. "I'll tell you this, though," he continued, "I've been practicing since 1951, and that's the meanest son-of-a-bitch cat I've ever come across! He bit me so hard, it went all the way down to the bone!" And he held up his finger for me to see his wound. I was terrified he was gonna be angry and tell me not to bring any more cats to him, but instead, he reached into the cage and scratched Sam behind the ears and said, "And now he acts like a big baby."

That was 2003. Within two years of when we started our mission in the neighborhood, Jackie and Mike, and Russ and I combined, had paid for more than fifty spays and neuters, most of them going through old Doc Jones' garage. None of those original colony of cats remain. PUFA ceased operations around the time the Margaret B. Mitchell Spay/Neuter Clinic was established in Bristol in 2005. Mr. Smith died about three years after we moved in. Jackie and Mike moved to Alabama a few years ago. Old Doc Jones kept operating out of that garage for several more years, until he wasn't able to do so, anymore. He passed away in 2019, leaving behind a legacy of love and passion for animals in the Bristol area in countless lives and across numerous species.

# The Hawk Flies

*Chrissie Anderson Peters*

Ridgetop to ridgetop, careening, she flies,  
her black wings extending into the blue;  
she knows the valleys, but prefers the highs –  
perspective is based on all points of view.

Sparkling sunbeams fall in broad shafts of light  
creating shadows in hollows below;  
she dips with great grace, focusing her sight  
and still, she goes where we don't want to go.

Flying alone, at the top of the world  
she's a witness to the shackled and free;  
cruising along with her wingtips unfurled,  
her wisdom rests in what we cannot see.

No matter the world's problems, or how dire,  
the hawk flies where she must, then soars higher.

# Haiku for the Earth

*Chrissie Anderson Peters*

Breathe, behold nature,  
Cardinals' bright red plumage,  
Close your eyes to see.

Frosty morning air  
Crisp with possibility  
Focus on the trees.

Redbird flits and darts,  
Hear birdsong whispered softly  
On the chilly breeze.

Make room for the earth  
Hold her close and let her breathe,  
She's made room for me.

# January Morning

*Chrissie Anderson Peters*

Snow-skiff covering  
the frozen ground  
again this morning;  
a decent dusting like  
confectioner's sugar  
dousing a doughnut –  
nature's eye candy,  
temptation and treat  
all in one glance;  
tree limbs outlined  
by ice-laced fingers  
sparkle in dim sunshine;  
partly cloudy prefix  
to another somber day  
quieted by snowfall;  
Mother Nature smiling,  
pretending to be sorry  
for the tangy chill outside.

# Subconsciously

*Natalie Kimbell*

On her wedding day she wove  
into her bride's bouget

Columbine, as pink as any sailor's  
warning, still teared in morning dews.

The blossoms wide like jester hats  
called out a silent plea.

The words, "I will" on parted lips,  
"Goodbye" written on his shoes.

# Making Biscuits

*Natalie Kimbell*

The family bought my Grandmother Edwards  
a Whirlpool electric stove, which stayed unused  
only to store her cast iron skillets and pans  
so her counter space improved

She chose to cook in the woodstove well in her eighties  
filled it every day with kindling stacked by the wall  
long before any of us crawled out of bed  
warming the back of the house and hall.

The house filled with percolated coffee  
which sat toward the back on the stove  
while the bacon popped and the fried eggs sizzled  
slow cooking oatmeal bubbled on the stove.

Its black cast iron frame blazing to the touch  
orange flames peeking under lids when she stoked,  
no gauge told her temperature, yet she knew  
when food was done, when bread could be baked.

Every morning, she hand-formed her biscuits  
on a Hoosier cabinet laying them close in a cooking tin  
baking them until brown, squared, layered and flaky  
ready for homemade jams, bacon gravy and hungry kin.

but in fifth grade, when I felt superior winning  
4-H bread baking contests practicing Martha White  
procedures of accurate measuring, kneading, cutting

to a recipe—a thing I had never seen her do right,

I teemed it necessary to show her how to cut and lay  
my dough precise, keeping the mounds  
from touching, equally spaced  
to achieve that even golden brown

new was better and less archaic, disappointed  
all preferred her large and uneven product in lieu  
of the modern, blue-ribbon biscuits I offered.  
So I ate mine out of pride knowing I preferred hers too.

## A 70's Summer Afternoon

Natalie Kimbell

And I'm slathering my skin in Hawaiian Topic Dark Tanning Oil. Swatting sweat bees. Dodging the buzz of June Bugs. Soaking up the smell of enough Love's Baby Soft, coconut and sweat to secure a beach beauty tan. I stretch. Reach for my transistor radio. Pull the antenna to clear the static. The Captain and Tennille promising *love will keep us together*. I settle back on a vinyl chaise lounge striving to be a 70's icon—a Farah Fawcett— feathered bangs—check—toasted skin—check—slender curving figure—turn over— peel my thighs from the vinyl. Thunder thighs my sister calls me —too fat for summer— too fat for boys—too fat to be beautiful. I live on ice cubes and suck cherry Jell-O through the gap in my front teeth. Imagine desire from a Barbara Cartland's romance—ignorant of sex—ignorant of skin cancer—time to turn—hoping to burn just enough to be someone else.

# October Arm Wrestling

*Natalie Kimbell*

When Autumn and Summer test  
each other's strength,  
elbows bent on the horizon  
palms stretched in each other's grip,  
we spectators linger to bask in technique,  
watch how each season strains to pressure the other.

When the match opens  
Autumn takes the upper hand,  
makes Summer chill,  
leverages temperatures, presses  
leaves from green to red, orange to yellow to brown,

but Summer flexes, pulls hues up from defeat,  
blazes fields with pink coneflowers and golden milkweed  
crumples not to Autumn's cold hook  
but contracts, posting her heat in late afternoons.

Then, when Autumn's arm is almost down  
caught off guard by a burst of Indian Summer,  
young people place bets, lay on shorts and thin shirts  
while elders pull thick sweaters  
free from stale plastic totes  
and cedar-lined chests  
to prepare for the match's inevitable outcome.

# If You Are My Age

Natalie Kimbell

I realize that my doctor has been trying to prepare me for this moment for the last thirty years. For the last thirty years, he begins every diagnosis with the phrase, *Well, at your age*. I have tried to ignore him. For years, I blamed my crow's feet, my poor night vision, bizarre skin colorations, and skin tags on weak inherited genes until the Medicare card came in the mail. I can no longer pretend. Now I accept the fact that I have reached a level of maturity (a much classier way of saying old) given to those honored enough to live this long.

Even though I have reached the age of being distinguished, I still have tried to deny just how distinguished I have become. I often compare myself to strangers or former high school classmates who I presume are my age when I see them at the local Walmart. I tell myself that I don't look like other old people...that I look young for my age. I expressed this thought to my Granddaughter at least three years ago when she was ten. She gave that pity- look so many youthful souls offer and said, *Let's not lie to ourselves Grandma.*

I was young once. I get it. The way I judged the external shell of a person, the withering cocoon of sagging skin. Never realizing how young their insides felt and I was so impatient in their company. *Look at that little old lady. She sure is slow. Quit digging in your purse for the exact change! I have places to go and boys to chase.* I also presumed that old people had nothing I wanted to hear. I remember people giving me advice when I was eighteen and I was as deaf as most political candidates the day after they get elected.

Ironically, back in those days, I wished to be older. I compared myself to friends. If I had one month of age more than they did, I was the oldest. I wished for age like bald men wish for hair. I longed to be nineteen. I would count every month. *Oh I can't wait to be twenty -one.* I remember saying that, believing that somehow with age would come some vast array of complete knowledge and with it, an understanding of all of life's deepest truths and I would stop making poor relationship judgements. Ha! At sixty-four and ten months, I have gained the truth that there is no magic age when wisdom is imparted. The only thing age gives me is the knowledge that I have less time and more things I want to do. The funniest thing about age I have found is that the more lessons of life I have collected, the more I can't give them away. I can't warn a soul about marrying too early or saving for a rainy day in the face of a tanking economy. It's almost like karma coming back for me. I can't warn a teenager about anything because like them I knew so much

at eighteen. I could see the correct path no matter how many red flags. I knew I was right then when I was often so wrong. Three heartbreaking marriages down and I know the only thing promised is change. I also know that as senior citizen I hate change. With age I feel I have earned the right to be a curmudgeon. I hate change and the confusion it causes. It seems more and more like a plot to render me not only “age challenged” but helpless.

For example, the people at the grocery store rearrange things on purpose just to intimidate old people, I mean, those of us in our “golden years.” I hate the way they put the bread and the milk at the back of the store. They say it’s to entice people to buy more on the way to get the staples they came for, but I have my suspicions that it’s much more underhanded than that. They just want to exasperate the elderly. It’s like they know the distilled water I need to pick up for my C-PAP machine is higher than I can comfortably obtain it. Don’t tell me these so-called executives lack the understanding that my body is shrinking in height. I hope they live long enough to have to survive on social security, and pack on a few pounds...

And that’s another thing— what kind of a joke was a slow metabolism...the natural process my doctor says at my age. His solution was a stool softener. I like Rodney Dangerfield get no respect...I know if you are my age you understand.

# Homeless Joe Says

*Finn Bille*

Cars swoosh overhead, sizzle  
like frying bacon I smell  
behind the Waffle House.

At the Bank of America  
I was mired in columns and numbers  
like a pig in its slaughterhouse sty.

I quit when I saw that painting  
the one by Hieronymus Bosch  
of souls damned to hell.

My mattress is lumpy  
my tarp smeared with snot and sweat.  
Nights I get cold.

I am free, I think  
not damned, I believe.

# Preserving Identity

*After a painting in the local library by Preston Reed*

*John C Mannone*

The multicolor image, a painting in pastels  
proclaiming to be a self-portrait, might tempt  
Carl Jung to draw some conclusion from  
his synesthetic deductions of personality  
based on what and where the collage of colors  
warm or cool the temperature of the soul.  
He said *Color is the language of the unconscious*.

But I see the litany of characteristics sounding  
more like an astrologer's zodiac sign. And like  
those descriptions, the color palette has much  
overlap and generalizations that would be difficult  
to dispute. What does this self-portrait mean?

The face, and lifting hand, is mostly Dijon yellow:  
perhaps an energetic confidence, or could it be  
cowardice? The eyes, dark, gothic; eye shadows—  
one mud, the other, eutrophic green. Somehow  
this is supposed to convey harmony and spring's  
fertility; mascara, blue-black, should speak of peace  
and intelligence, not run. Is it a mystery? Mascara  
smudged, tears hidden in shallows of the long river  
of disappointment.

"Physical abuse" are words stricken, forbidden  
to be uttered, yet the eyes betray: a midnight  
of irises—steely gray, nothing glamorous  
but innocence, and the waxing of a hint of violet  
a passionflower blooming  
as a bruise  
there's nothing spiritual about that, except for prayers

lifted into the dim sparkles, spilling out like stars  
edging the night.

Forehead and cheek, blushed plum and pink—  
a visionary kindness not deserving any abuser.  
Nose shadow, a chiaroscuro of deep olive, fertile  
and stable. Yet, the strong and seemingly passionate  
blood red patch on the shoulder—mauve strapping  
crisscrosses into the sanguine confusion—tells  
another story. She lifts her finger,

her index finger on the right hand, and forefinger,  
with thumb under the chin—scaffolding the head,  
colors climbing—the kind, feminine pink edging  
the nose—guides that same mustard yellow  
confidence. Energetic and defiant. Determined  
in the wake of confusion. The back of the hand  
knuckles a necrotic dirt brown, the color of failure  
of a relationship. Mysterious, but organized, mixing  
with worry so often thrust into the dark plum  
shades that fear the right cheek.

But also, it's the color  
of survival.

# Parallel Universes

John C Mannon

*There is evidence that premonition may exist, that the subconscious mind may know more, and that a change in heart signature and brain waves and skin properties may be experienced up to ten seconds before the unexpected stimulus is applied.*

—Research at Northwestern University, October 2012

In bloodstained gray, I crouch in a cornfield at Antietam, the brass buttons of my uniform are tight to my chest and pressing heavy on my heart. Questions flow through my veins with each pulse, desperate for answers, for meaning to this war, and a hope of a better future.

Angels whisper as they drift toward me, right through the vengeful cannon balls and musket fire. Smoke, acrid, sulfurous, fresh from hell, burns my nostrils, my lungs. My heart yells, yet I am deaf to the explosions raining dirt and bits of bone and shrapnel-torn flesh upon me. I taste blood; gasp the last breaths of my command. And I weep for my men, those very young men.

~ ~ ~

The thin film of space-time quivers; blurs the present with the past, the past with the future, I weep now for myself—for the man-who-is and for the man-who-was. Worlds are colliding, engulfing them in temporal eddies of non-causal froth. And I drown in that river.

~ ~ ~

The walls of my study are drab, and heavy with the scent of books. In my leather chair, I read about Einstein's general relativity—we are all carried in a stream of time swirling back on itself. Time travel is impossible without affecting history. But feelings and premonitions do not follow the laws of physics.

# Teenage Turns

*Jennifer Susan Smith*

At sixteen, I drove a high school carpool on the west side of my small hometown. Car seats were full with neighborhood friends in my mom's used Buick sedan. A Skylark perhaps? I knew the make, but gave no attention to models until I later bought my own Ford Gran Torino, powder blue, whose engine blew shortly after its purchase. My passengers, however, had a safe ride to school, with me at the wheel of the green Buick.

Navigation was simple on those mornings, straight streets of Seventies LaFayette, with well-placed signs. Names like McLemore, the one I lived on, Magnolia, Colerain, and the four Mains, north, west, east, south. We didn't need maps back then to find our way. Somehow, we knew just where to turn.

I paused at the railroad tracks, listening for a whistle's warning, then eased toward LaFayette High's parking place reserved for me. The spot was painless to pull into, easy to fit in. Then, I could not parallel park, and never learned to. I had not driven on expressways, didn't yet know my phobia of steering up steep roads, and I still can't drive up Lookout Mountain to Rock City. I got us to school on time, though, and I've prided myself for promptness ever since.

We exited the car in clunky suede clogs, clutching textbooks and snappy three-ring binders, covered in a lighter denim than our flare leg pants. Circumventing the parking lot's smoking circle, we hoped for no pop tests in algebra or chemistry.

A bypass had not yet been built, to get out of town quickly, even if we wanted to. Months slipped by, toward time to declare our intentions. Some of us chose majors and minors, often changing our minds. I switched from journalism to communicative disorders, hoping to have more job security. Other classmates took vows of forever with high school sweethearts, while many committed to service in the military or work force. We all declared our independence. Some flew among stars, some drove to the moon.

Now flipping pages of my junior yearbook, *The Rambler*. I read ads purchased by sponsors who believed in futures of the Class of Seventy-seven, whose addresses were a map of our past. I crunch into a Dari Dip double dipped cone on North Main, remember double dates on South Main at the Big Orange, our youth rapidly melting like vanilla soft serve over hot apple pie.

# Angel of 1966

Jennifer Susan Smith

Georgia wind wafted an angel  
over West LaFayette railroad tracks,  
wisped her through my childhood  
windowpane on McLemore Street.  
Barefoot angelic child, her miniature  
crown on curls the color of lemon pie  
just learning to fly, as was I, wings  
feathery light, like meringue.

She arrived in storybook style  
tiny harp in her hand, gracing  
the Rand McNally hardback cover  
a seventh birthday gift from Mama.  
*Little Lost Angel*, 1953 edition  
its title page cursively inscribed  
in pristine penmanship.  
Susie Smith. October 10, 1966.

Mama must have purchased  
my book at Dixie Dime Store  
with minimal money earned  
from pressing clothes for people.  
Let's Make a Deal on television  
sprinkle water, iron, repeat  
hands that toiled for every cent  
sprinkle water, iron, repeat.

At seventeen, my parents' divorce

misplaced many youthful treasures  
*Donna Parker* and *Trixie Belden* series  
Pebbles doll and Little Kiddle lockets.  
*Little Lost Angel* was spared, a volume  
now bound by time and crackled tape  
rests in the cedar chest that Mama left  
me, years before she died at ninety-five.

Each December, little angel guides me  
through my grief with her gentle story  
as she and I take flight together  
on Christmas Eve, no longer lost.

# Color My Life

*Patricia Hope*

A picture of my life would have light and dark tones,  
a shadow lurking here and there, although it wouldn't  
be in black and white but have many bright colors.  
Bold reds that bleed into yellow sunrises and sunsets,  
purple nights that rain into blue mornings reflecting light  
in a million ways – dew on the grass, love in a spouse's  
eyes, happiness in the smile of a friend. My picture  
would show summer greens of the lakeshore,  
the sparkling blues of a lake where grandkids jump off

the boat with giggles of delight and blooms in every color  
of the rainbow would peek from the flowerbeds of my life.  
You'd see brown mud on our shoes from hiking in the rain,  
and the reds, greens and golds as we gathered in front  
of the mantle to take Christmas pictures. It would have  
the yellow flames from a cozy firepit where we gathered  
to roast hot dogs and make gooey s'mores. The hues  
in my picture would include the aqua blue of the Caribbean  
Sea, and a fiery sunset over the Arabian Gulf as our plane

screamed to a halt six thousand miles from home. My picture  
would show the tenderness of a grandson's hand tucked  
in mine, the softness of my own bed after a long trip  
and the bittersweetness of a kiss on my grandmother's cheek  
when I told her goodbye, but also the rough edges of life's  
disappointments -- broken hearts, anger at the injustices  
of the world, tired eyes and gnarled hands, aging skin  
wrinkled from life's weather. The last thing you'll notice  
is a glow of thankfulness in the western sky for a life well  
blessed with more sunshine than rain.

# Adrift

*Patricia Hope*

They said a fish could never fly  
yet here I am sailing above the waves  
of bread dough islands and dark  
ink, water black as funeral drapes.

See all the fish on my back?  
They are hitching a ride until we find  
a place that's safe to land. Our  
touchdown will be disastrous if

we land in the brink, long contaminated,  
but the sodden islands of trash present  
a challenge too. We had to adapt, the sea  
too dangerous for our species. Now,

we roam the globe looking for a spot  
to call home and a chance to take  
a fresh breath before we tell  
others where we've been, let alone

what we've seen. Even the air grows  
thick with the waste that humans  
inflicted upon this place where we live.  
They are gone now, the vessel they rode,  
adrift, among the ageless stars.

# What Lasted

*After Jack Gilbert*

*Patricia Hope*

You and I should have grown old  
together, should have comforted  
each other in our 80s and 90s  
but the cigarettes and fast living  
of your youth took that away.

What lasted is what our souls ate –  
the Mexican burritos and rice  
we shared for your birthday two  
days before you awoke unable  
to breathe, the tubes and ventilator

for you, now hooked to someone  
else in critical care. What lasted is  
the room where you died that I pass  
so often. What lasted was the honor  
guard folding the flag from your coffin,

a soldier down on one knee presenting  
it to me. What lasted was the bugler's  
taps echoing across the hillside  
as the traffic on the road below  
moved on and on.

# Lullaby

*Megan Hutchinson*

Since I was a child, the most sacred lullaby I've known  
has been the one that trickles in from the bell  
of our hollow on late summer nights.

It starts off sweet and simple—a choir of cicadas  
and frogs rising from the dewy grass—  
and is given an extra richness when a hoot  
owl sings his stuttering chorus from somewhere  
high in a sycamore tree.

If the windows are open and the night is cool,  
you can feel this lullaby in your bones—  
each strum of the thorax,  
each vibration of the vocal sac,  
each heaving of the downy chest—

Then, from the bowels of a sandstone cave  
a mile away, a voice as sharp as a woman's cry  
tears through the fabric of the melody  
and sends a chill—darkly satisfying—  
down your spine.

It's so piercing that for a moment all other voices  
seem to fall silent, afraid to breath  
another note.

Before it can come closer, though—  
before another cry can escape its lips—

the dog sleeping outside your window barks  
a warning into the night that lets you know,  
like a mother's warbling hum,  
that you are safe.

# The Return

*Megan Hutchinson*

She came on a late summer night,  
the scent of fresh gardenias trailing her  
like a cape draped around her  
slender shoulders.

She came with pearls,  
forest green kitten heels and a matching handbag,  
a cloche hat with dark curls  
peeking around the edges, like she used to  
wear on her trips to Woolworth's.

She came like a cool September breeze  
slipping through the cracked bedroom window  
and smoothing her skirt before sitting  
on the bed beside my sleeping grandmother.

She didn't say a word.  
She didn't need to.

She only held that small, wrinkled hand  
resting on the pillow, maybe not so different  
from when her Mary was a baby.

She only smoothed the silver hair that had been gold  
when she left those seventy years before  
and hummed the wavering tune of "Way Down Yonder  
in the Paw Paw Patch" with the voice of a whip-poor-will.

She only laid her head on the pillow beside her  
and cradled her to her chest as if the gulf  
of time between them had vanished  
in the twinkling of an eye.

# The Dog Star

*Megan Hutchinson*

This bitter cuts deeper than the New Year's snow.  
Silent. Stoic. It casts its shadow  
over the vast, white ground, bleakening  
the purest flake to a funereal black.

At dusk fall, even that christened earth—untouched  
save for a pattering of interwoven pawprints—  
wears her coolest shade of blue,  
entombs herself beneath  
the frigid clutch of a cloudless night.

What she won't utter is that, just hours before—  
with a host of sparrows swimming and chirruping  
in the pale morning sun—a mouth opened up  
somewhere within her hills. A cavity,  
like a bit of moonless sky, and every bit as hungry  
for its scraps of borrowed light.

And now, oh, how quiet these hills have become.  
How bone chill, as if afraid to breathe  
for fear of shattering, puncturing  
some secret thing cased away in their depths.

The fox horn has stilled.  
The voices, too—thin and high as train whistles—  
have taken on the heavy quiet of the land.  
But yet, just beyond the hollow—just beneath  
the fickle surface of some forgotten pond,  
a milk white eye glimmers up at the brightest star.

# Vulture's Sacrament

*Megan Hutchinson*

O, holy thing,  
that sharp scent of rust  
on the cold summons me  
to you. Fur matted red  
above the belly, still warm,  
your heat rises heavenward.

You are given to me fat, ripe  
with the fruits of a forest  
that now sleeps as you do.

O, holy thing,  
I feast upon you where your death is  
the purest. From that wound  
on your immaculate body, oozing  
manna sweet as milk and honey.

I wash my face in it, that death  
that is life. I revel in it.  
Ravage it until your fat is mine.

O, holy thing,  
what a gift you are,  
to have appeared in this valley just for me.  
To have offered flesh and blood  
until I'm content to perch on your antlers  
and watch the bit of sky captured  
in your milky eyes.

I would fly there if I could.  
I would hang halos above you  
and sing your praises  
lovely as a lark.

But instead, o holy thing,  
I bow my naked head to you  
and I know in my bones  
you receive it.

# Doldrums

*Megan Hutchinson*

The snow has picked up the grime  
of the city, melted and clumped  
along the edges of pot-holed streets  
like so many heaps of coal.  
January is full of such ghosts,  
full of such yesterdays.  
A deflated Santa on a neighbor's lawn,  
a birthday card that was never sent,  
a staling box of dog treats on a murky sill.  
I've been nursing this heartache  
for nearly a month—the heartache that swells,  
calcifies within you after a great loss.  
The heartache that nests under your ribs  
and flutters its wings at a raw snatch of music,  
at a face in the crowd,  
at the shimmer of a collie's tail.

But we keep going.  
I set the birthday card on the kitchen table.  
Say I'll mail it on my way out.  
Christmas trees still twinkle from nearby  
windows as if no time has passed.  
At night, I think I can hear the drowned dog  
clawing at the door.

# A History of the Colony and Ancient Dominion of Virginia

Pauletta Hansel

They thought it was their destiny to change the land.  
Cogito, ergo vici. Though not so fast, big boys. First came  
the starving time, where on your knees you dug “*dead corpses  
outt of graves... , licked upp the Bloode ... fallen from ...  
weake fellowes.*” And don’t forget Good Friday morn, 1622,  
the whetted knife once drew your meat from pot to plate,  
did gut you bow to stern. Not a good day. One for the history books,  
but what to call it? Powhatan Uprising, first Revolutionary War?  
And now we’ve gutted all you saw and more, destiny manifested.  
Ei, vos, nos— I’m right there with you, or you in me,  
revisioning away. We make our mark. My ancestors were X’s  
on the page, Ezekiah’s 50 acres stripped and plowed, tobacco leaf,  
dead Indian at Margaret’s feet, her “negro woman” willed to heir,  
and me, granddaughter centuries hence, wrought in history’s forge.

Note: The poem’s title is from a book by Charles Campbell. J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1860. The first line is a paraphrase from the film *Beyond the Palisade: Life in 17th Century Virginia*, Lion Heart Film Works, 2019. The cannibalism quote is from the 1625 accounts of George Percy. It is a myth that The Powhatan Uprising of March 22, 1622 happened on Good Friday (check the calendars!) but the original communication to London from the colonists included this flourish, which I then reference in this poem.

# Conversations with My 4th Great-Grandmother's Photograph

*Eveline Guthrie Rhoton, circa 1816-after 1888*

*Pauletta Hansel*

I see but do not know you, grandmother.  
Your round-eyed gaze unblinking  
into the camera,  
the future,  
me.  
How unaccustomed you must have been  
to stillness.  
No hint of ease.  
The shifting world around you  
muted into fog.  
Look how you sit uncentered  
in the frame, aslant  
as if another unseen shoulder  
waits to touch your own.  
I see but do not hear you, grandmother.  
Your lips remain closed tight.

# My 3rd Great-Grandfather Goes to War

*Samuel Patton Qualls, circa 1830-after 1900, to*

*Elizabeth Rhoton Qualls, circa 1834-after 1880*

*Northern Virginia, August 1862*

*Pauletta Hansel*

Dear Bettie,  
I take the time to write to yew  
hoping when these few lines  
come to hand  
they will find yew well  
I am gitting better from the disuntary  
tho I am not vary well  
I would like to see yew all  
one time more  
tho I cannot be at home at the present  
I don't think it will be long  
There is some talk of peace  
We understand  
that Jackson at Mannassat  
has the troops surrounded  
and has been whipping Yankees  
twenty-five miles a day  
He means to drive them  
onto their own soil  
before he quits them  
some say he is going to follow them  
clear to Washington City  
I want the old man to stay at my house  
till I come back  
if I ever do  
and I want yew and him  
to seed my ground that is in corn  
Tell the one who reads to yew  
the words to rite to me  
as soon as you receive this letter  
Rite how yew and the childred are coming on

Bettie I want yew  
to do the very best yew can  
Remember me  
Your Sam

Note: This poem is an adaptation of an actual letter by another of my kin, David Roten, which I have appropriated for my great-grandfather, who likely could not write. Born in North Carolina in 1829, David died December 13, 1862 in Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, Virginia, at 33 years of age. His body was interred in Richmond, Virginia, Oakwood Cemetery.

# My 3rd Great Grandmother Sends Two Letters to the Front

*Elizabeth Rhoton Qualls to Samuel Patton Qualls*

*Natural Bridge, Virginia, November 1862*

*Pauletta Hansel*

Write this back to him,  
she says:

Dear Sam,  
we are all good  
enough, so don't you worry none.  
Ebbie is in any thing that she  
can pull herself up to,  
and she is starting to say words,  
so I have teached her Pa.  
I drew a little picture for her,  
but it don't much favor you.  
Be safe.  
Your Bettie

But later, by the light of fire, the children  
sleeping one against the other,  
the scratch of branches at the cabin wall  
like some hungry creature wanting through,  
these words are in her head:

Oh, Sam,  
there are so many things  
I could but will not tell you  
for fear you'll take a notion  
to come home, and they will shoot you  
as a traitor to the cause, though what it is  
you boys are fighting for I'll never figure.  
To keep old Rosie up there working  
for the Kanes until she passes?  
It don't seem right. And anyway,  
we need you here, Sam,  
more than they need Rosie or her boys.  
What stores the Army didn't take

bushwackers stole away,  
and there's hardly nothing left  
here with the winter blowing in.  
I told the old man not to write you none  
of this, but here I spill it all into the air,  
half-hoping that this wind  
will scatter it to you.  
What will come of us  
if not for neighbors, I don't know.  
Polly brought a little grain and beans  
she'd set aside, a bit of fatback for the flavor,  
her young Tom a-carrying the sack.  
He and our Patton hid behind our skirts  
like they had never seen another boy,  
but Ebby was right taken.  
Come home, Sam.  
There, I've said it,  
but only to the you I carry always  
like a locket on the inside of me.

## **CW: Medical trauma, suicide, and animal death.**

# **Awash in it: Vignettes on Touch**

*Melissa Helton*

Before her back got so bad she spent the rest of her decades sleeping in recliners, when momma would rest on the couch and watch TV, she would lie on her side, slowly swing her feet off the edge of the couch, say “Hop aboard the bus!” and I’d struggle to climb up behind her knees. She’d make a shushing sound as she closed her bus-door-legs, click them closed, tucking her feet back in. I rolled off this couch when I was four and busted my clavicle. Momma said she knew something was wrong because I was just sitting there, quiet and still. I didn’t cry or ask for help or tell anyone I was hurting. I remember wearing the brace, not being able to put my arms up for t-shirts. I remember momma sitting on that couch, her hands buttoning me into red-plaid blouses with white lace on the pockets in classic 1984 style, and how much I hated those shirts.

\*

When I was 16, I went to the hospital for an emergency D&C for an incomplete miscarriage. The doctor, an old man, did not give me any anesthesia. I wouldn’t know until 25 years later that I should’ve had drugs to dull the pain of a D&C. As med students watched, looking up inside me, the doctor inserted thicker and thicker rods to force my cervix to dilate, then he scraped out the remainder of the lost pregnancy. I gasped and cried out from the terrible pinching, burning, and stabbing. The doctor ignored me. A female nurse came and held my hand but did not mention anesthesia or my obvious pain to the doctor. The medical students learned this as appropriate procedure and acceptable patient experience. As I left, aching, cramping, and bleeding, she gave me a book titled *Leaving with Empty Arms*.

\*

The first time I kissed the boy I first fell in love with is missing from my memory. I was 15. He had bright blue eyes and an overbite. I know he was tender for this kiss because he was tender every moment I remember before that and after that. One of us was probably wearing flannel. It was 1995 after all. Did I touch his shoulder? Did I touch his face? Were his eyes closed? I have imagined this moment in so many ways, especially after he died. He piped his car exhaust back into the vehicle and died in a high school parking lot. I wonder who found him that Saturday morning. Were the doors locked? Did they bust the window? Was the car still running? He was 22. Did they shake his shoulder? Did they touch his face? Were his eyes closed? It was 24 years ago this spring. He’s been gone now longer than he was alive, and I don’t understand that. As he laid low in the cheap coffin, I tucked a letter I had written him beside his terribly still arm.

\*

When I kissed a woman for the first time, her hands were shaking, because of her bipolar meds she said. Her dog, a basset named Sebastian, barked at me from the couch. She stepped back out of my reach and we both giggled, nervous in multiple ways. When I told a woman I loved her like that for the first time, we were hip to hip, our legs dangling over the edge of a sandstone log rock, wild open air below and before us.

\*

When my second child was being born, she got stuck. During labor they had calculated her weight from the length of her bones on the ultrasound, said 6.5, give or take a pound. Her sister had been 7 even so I felt like we could do this, she and I. I was unmedicated, fully awash in it. And she got stuck, her head stretching me as the contraction ended and I fell back, unable to push without my uterus's help. Her head was half out, and my skin was slowly tearing. It was like a blowtorch on me for two minutes until the next contraction came. The nurse pushed at the top of my belly. Me and my contraction pushed against the unbearable fire of this child. The OB grabbed the baby's head when she could and eased those shoulders out and my kid and I were separated. Her face was so bruised from the passage, it was purple, and the whites of her eyes were red where the vessels burst. It was violent, this last time we touched as one connected being.

\*

I don't remember the last time I nursed either of my children, nor the last time my dead father or dead brother hugged me.

\*

My firstborn wrecked her bike as a teenager, staggered into the house disoriented and mumbling "I'm OK, I'm OK." Her hands were torn up, the front of her shoulders scraped where she stood up too quickly, passed out and fell face-forward onto the road. Her tooth was broken, and her chin was split where she hit the asphalt. When I gently raised her chin with my hand and saw the gash, I knew she needed stitches. I took her elbow and helped her toward the car. A couple hours later, I sat on her bed as the ER doctor explained a brain malformation had been found while scanning for concussion. It finally gave an explanation to the many times I held her after she passed out in the bedroom floor, the dining room floor, the living room floor, my hand under her neck, other hand shaking her shoulder, trying to get her open, rolling eyes to focus on me and be responsive.

\*

My ex-husband and I stood at sunset atop a 700-foot sand dune halfway into our relationship. I had a bandana covering my ears which were blistered with sunburn from our canoe ride down the Two Hearted River in the Upper Peninsula. We had been fighting about something I don't remember. We asked a stranger to take a photo of us, both of us still roiling with hurt and anger. We stood too far apart from each other to look friendly, our backs to the solicited photographer, our faces turned out toward the giant expanse of Lake Michigan, at the edge of the sand cliff. A recent landslide created a mini island in the water below. We stood looking out at the lake and the

setting sun, far apart from each other, and we reached out and held hands, stubborn in our love. The morning I left him, he reached out his hand when I began to talk. He thought I was just saying bye before heading to work for the day. When my sentence “I no longer want to be married” registered in his brain, he looked confused, asked “What?” and sharply took his hand back.

\*

On easter morning last year, after I heard my small chihuahua/dachshund being attacked by what was probably a coyote in the 5:30am mountain dark, my new love and I found her dead, thankfully not having suffered long. I toweled the blood from her, my tears raining down on her still body. I lifted her and placed her in a cardboard box and carried her into the house. We placed the box on the coffee table. I went into the teenagers’ dark rooms, reached my hands out and took a shoulder or a knee and gently shook them awake, my chest clamped down with the terrible words I needed to greet them with.

\*

My new love and I put our feet in the cold Pacific. Everything October gray and overcast. Surfers bobbed like seals on their boards, waiting. Sadness was heavy in my ribs wishing my kids were with me my first time at this ocean. I took off the necklace my ex-husband had put some of my dead father’s ashes in and unscrewed the top. I breathed my lungs full of that green sea smell and sprinkled some of the ash that used to be my dad on a wave, and the earth took a little more of him back. My love took my hand in his and he felt warm in the cool breeze.

\*

More than a dozen artists have scrawled ink into my skin. A crabapple blossom because my ex-husband and I first kissed in that tree. Sea turtles with celestial shells for my kids. A blue feather to remind me to be my own messiah. A half sleeve of decomposers and detritivores to process the divorce and make room for new life. I sit on a black table as a young woman tattoos me again. The day of the divorce, she drew waves on my arm as I thought about the waters of my life, being born along the Ottawa River, falling in love along Lake Erie, a difficult relationship along the Kentucky River, Troublesome Creek flooding us all out and changing me at my core. She tattooed a sexual assault flower as another step in reclaiming my body from unwanted hands and unwanted men. She tattooed a silly, screaming possum on me, my new love, and our friends. Now, she’s inking a spoon on my shin, a spoon my teenaged mother bought to put in her 1950s hope chest. As this artist wipes paper towel against my stinging skin, she asks the story behind the spoon. It’s something about dreams that are taught to us, dreams we strive for, that don’t work out, that do work out, that it’s about how we follow rules and violate them, that we make our own happiness, that sometimes we’re dealt shitty cards and also brilliant cards, that it’s about legacy. I hold the spoon in my hand and look at the spoon being drawn into my skin.

It’s about love.

# Because I Have No Letters: A Found Poem Using Correspondence from Other Families

Melissa Helton

The Norwegians here  
keep more or less to the old ways.

We often sit by the radio and at Christmas  
we heard *Glade jul, hellige jul*  
all the way from Norway!

I found the sheath knife you sent, Father.  
Sven can't use it much yet because he turns  
the blade in toward his chest  
but I will hide it until he can use it right.

Now I must break off, as the womenfolk  
want to chase me away from the table.

It is fun to be with Americans,  
for you learn so much.

Over here they can lots of tomatoes.

The butter is cheap. We would get  
6¢ to 18¢ a pound.

I have been waiting and waiting for the life  
and action that comes with spring.

The crops look rather bleak this year.

This fall I am thinking of giving  
my farm to my son.

Baby Evelyn is very good  
and seems to be thriving.

Just think, old Jens Berge married!

The Russian influenza is raging  
everywhere in America.

I must inform you with sorrow  
that your dear brother and my uncle Hans  
died on the 18th of December 1912,  
in Juneau, Alaska.

As you know, I am alone yet  
with my small ones. I have no help.

The very worst is for my little daughter,  
Betsy Sofie, who calls "Mama!" day and night.  
It is so heart-rending that I must cry  
my bitter tears when I hear her call.

It is a long time since I heard  
anything from you.

Let us declare a truce  
in our religious war, my dear Ivar.

In our time, the ministers are not anything  
other than radicals who don't preach  
God's pure word.

More and more Jews are moving in here.

Birger and I were over on the other side  
of the Red River in Dakota  
last week to look for work.

I have a good income, that is to say,  
I have a salary of \$25.00 per week.

Lots of people are unemployed.  
It is not like in Norway, where  
you get three months' notice.

Poor Dina is out of work again.

Change is the spice of life!

Lillegutt goes to kindergarten  
every day. I wish you could hear him tell  
about school. His language is so strange.  
He mixes the languages.

I'm tired of this world and wish  
to rest on the Lord's happy shore,  
where there is no change anymore.  
I can't understand the English,  
so everything is lost for me.

He never speaks Norwegian anymore.  
If we ask him to speak it, he can't.

# Women Kneeling in Ohio

*Melissa Helton*

We are Pride parade drunk: tequila shots  
and kissing in drizzly Ohio gray  
under all these damn rainbows.

I plop down on a rickety chair  
at a sushi place, other  
drunk queers and loud disco.

I curse my muddy shoestring  
unraveled and unkempt-  
like me. She kneels.

Servile. Thick hands reaching  
for the red Chuck Taylor.  
Her blue eyes flick up

as she ties. Wobbly. Playful.

We like her on her knees.

    Within a beat of diva disco

    it's 1996. I kneel  
    on a wooden porch,  
    Ohio dark, thick autumn

    bonfire at a cute girl's house.  
    16. Red hair. Blue eyes  
    also. I kneel and reach my thin hands

    toward her Chucks, black  
    high-topped feet. I am two twists  
    into tying her laces. She jerks

    her foot out of my hands.  
    They had not been tied  
    since heroin and depression

blew Kurt Cobain's brains  
from his skull. I continue to kneel,  
looking at the space

where we had both been,  
together. My drunk love,  
in the present,

rises to her chair with a grin.  
Helpful. Silly. She kisses  
me and slides a menu across.

That bonfire girl—I try  
to remember if that  
is the only time I was able

to touch her.

# Longing Is

*Connie Jordan Green*

like hunger  
and no food in sight,

a canoe  
moored to a deserted dock,

like letters  
from a first love,

a baby  
crying in the night,

a leashed dog,  
rabbits romping,

the ocean  
over the next dune,

like you've never  
known sunlight,

like it's always  
four a.m.

# Note Left by my Husband's Cereal Bowl

*Connie Jordan Green*

The house is yours today,  
its familiar creaks, the way the tub faucet  
drips after a shower, the cats chattering  
their jaws at birds beyond the window.

The quiet, too, belongs to you,  
those moments when you listen  
for a footstep, when only the open  
window gifts you with the caress of breeze,

a love message I send  
as I pause here in a strange  
doorway, my out-of-town  
tasks a ladder I'll labor up all day,

a climb that carries  
me no closer to you,  
only this scrap of paper  
to say I think of you.

# Today's Lesson

*Connie Jordan Green*

Is wind scattering  
dogwood petals  
yellow buttercups  
dotting the fields  
white clouds above  
distant mountain peaks.

Today's lesson is  
a wren in the eaves  
a mockingbird  
on the garden fence.

Today's lesson is  
hardscrabble soil  
around a weathered  
farmhouse, a woman  
in an apron  
a man with a hoe.

Today's lesson is  
a kid on a battered  
bike doing wheelies  
in a parking lot.

Today's lesson is  
scooping up joy  
in a dented tin cup,  
head, face and back  
drenched  
with unfettered grace.

# A Brief Note to the Blue Ridge Mountains

*CW Nelms*

Your blue watchtowers hover yon;  
Magistrates of the Horizon.

Like a great rumply alligator you stretch;  
out in the sun confounding the wind.

In January, I see your frosty tips;  
off to the east of my life down here.  
In July I see your green mane;  
your luster wrapped in the hot haze.

All things flow down from you;  
water and blood, life and death, sweat and tears, abundance and grace.  
That's all written in your history;  
carved in the memories of here and gone.

There is a foreboding about you;  
your folds hide centuries with sophistication.

A façade of stillness and majesty that minuscules a time-stretch'd confluence of  
peoples;  
of many hues and many dreams.

From different directions they come, have come;  
and speak about you, on you. An array of tongues.

All those many have laid on you to offer a last breath;  
covered in sweat from the hunt  
covered in dust from the coal  
covered in sticky from the tobacco  
covered in weariness from the striving  
covered in joy from the striving

Time and pressure have taken grain by grain from you;

your tectonics long gave way to erosion.  
But you were here when I got here;  
you'll survive me, too.

And eventually absorb me, somehow;  
you'll have my bones and then some.

But for now I'll tarry near you;  
a knower of your stories.

# The Hanger-On

*CW Nelms*

Pain has roots; pain as a root;  
roots around, roots in, roots out.

It has barnacled into the brain;  
into the nerves and everything else.

For everything it has a response, a tease even;  
the breaking of the day, the falling of the night;  
it blooms in it all.

It's there. It rests in the crevices and watches me, waits for my move.

Then accompanies me on my way;  
down the ashen walk in the gray day.

# A Matter of Thyme

Gay Marie Logsdon

The young herb on the window sill  
watches for signs of warmer days,  
lifting twisted pale green tendrils  
and tiny pairs of verdant leaves,  
reaching outward toward the light  
of lengthening afternoons,  
patiently waiting and waiting,  
waiting for the chance to thrive  
in softened soil and open air  
beyond the threat of sudden freeze.  
This sweet gift of *Thymus vulgaris*,  
in sharing its delicate scent  
and hopeful hues of tender green,  
counteracts my house-bound gray,  
offering the gentlest reminder  
that life will yet again arise  
outside in spring, in the garden bed,  
where mother of thyme now sleeps,  
still robed in her burnt sienna of winter.

# These, Too, Remember

*Gay Marie Logsdon*

A special tribute to  
all the men and women  
who trained and served,  
willingly or unwillingly,  
in Asia, the Pacific, or  
other areas of conflict, then  
returned to mixed reception  
or, more recently, none at all,  
some with broken bodies,  
broken lives, and broken spirits,  
bearing wounds few understood,  
partly visible or buried deep within,  
wounds that could not, would not  
be fully healed over a lifetime,  
not by physicians or therapists  
and not by alcohol or drugs,  
leaving some to lead lives  
of unholy desperation,  
losing families, friends, and jobs,  
some homeless, dying all alone.  
This is no song of valor,  
glorious patriotism,  
or heroic sacrifice.  
This is a prayer for light and hope  
to illumine the dark recesses  
of returning warriors' brokenness.  
It is a call to us, the living,  
to reach out and ease the burdens  
of those who have dutifully served,  
not because we always agree  
with their actions, beliefs,  
or choices, but because  
they are brothers  
and sisters  
to us all.

# Peonies in Spring

*For Georgia O'Keefe*

*Gay Marie Logsdon*

Tender buds await  
nascent effulgence,  
delicate petals  
with a thin red streak.  
Young girls play outside.

# In That Kitchen

*Gay Marie Logsdon*

You and your father made cinnamon rolls curled around gooey centers, dripping brown sweetness, hot from the oven on cookie sheets, cake tins, and glass casserole pans, enough rolls to feed a crowd of hungry parishioners escaping the long sermon and the stand up–sit down–stand up drill of late Sunday morning, enough to take leftovers to friends and neighbors who didn't follow the Sunday ritual but were companions on occasions you needed them or they needed you or were simply folks you happened to remember. In that kitchen, you laughed and left flour tracks on the counter, the floor, your apron, even on the cupboard doors you opened to get more corn syrup and on drawers when you pulled out measuring cups and spoons, doors and drawers you left open as you thrust the doughy masses into the oven and later retrieved them, left open as you put the rolls on paper plates and covered them with foil for the trip to church and afterward to the homes of neighbors and friends, left open all afternoon and evening until I wandered into the kitchen and found that you were gone. In that kitchen, I remember all the rushing and clattering and chattering, and it feels so empty now, too tidy, and too, too quiet here alone.

# Mama's Home is a House

*Sharon Shadrick*

I'm glad we made pictures  
before we took it all apart.  
Dismantling the home you created  
from hand-me-downs and flea-market finds.

Divvying up your beloved dishes and cast iron,  
taking away a pink lamp and furniture,  
donating clothing we couldn't keep.  
Each of us claiming a small part of you.

My daughter-heart yelled, "Put everything back!"  
Wanting your fried chicken on the fancy green platter,  
and a pitcher of fresh lemonade on the faded yellow counter,  
laughter and family banter around a pine table.

But, my head knows- there is no putting back.

Today I'm thinking of  
ivory curtains on the kitchen window,  
African violets on the sill.  
I'm glad we made pictures  
before we took it all apart.

## Bios

**ANN THORNFIELD-LONG** is a writer and poet with work in *Still: The Journal*, *Artemis Journal*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel* and other publications. She is a retired nurse and is working on a chapbook about medical issues.

**CHASITY GUY** was born in the western North Carolina mountains but now makes her home in east Tennessee. A member of the NSLS, Chasity is a senior at Southern New Hampshire University where she is pursuing a degree in English. She was also a semi-finalist for her short story titled *The Mountain* for the *North Carolina Literary Review*. She currently lives with her three children and a plethora of animals in her beloved Appalachian Mountains.

**CHRIS WOOD** resides in Tennessee with her husband. Her poems appear in many publications including, *Salvation South*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *Lit Shark Magazine*, and her work also appears in anthologies including *Nothing Divine Dies*, *The Poetry of Nature* (2021), *Bayou, Blues*, and *Red Clay: Poetry Anthology* (2024), and *Lit Shark's Best of 2024 Anthology* (2024). Learn more at <https://chriswoodwriter.com/>.

**KEITH GORMAN** is a southern-born poet and retired factory worker who lives with his two cats, Iggy and Ozzy, near the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Eastern Tennessee. He is a scholarship recipient and graduate of *The Sherwood Conservatory of Music* in Chicago, Illinois, where he focused on classical guitar performance. Currently, he divides his time between writing, playing guitar, and hiking the slopes. His poetry appears in various literary journals and magazines, including *Delta Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly Review*, *I-70 Review*, *Chiron Review*, *The New Verse News*, *Broad River Review*, *Plainsongs Magazine*, *Salvation South*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Night Owl Narrative*, *Disturb the Universe Magazine*, and *Impspired Magazine*.

**CHRISSE ANDERSON PETERS** lives in Bristol, Tennessee. She holds degrees from Emory & Henry College and the University of Tennessee. She has been published or is forthcoming in *Women of Appalachia Project*, *Red Branch Review*, *Untelling*, *Salvation South*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Cutleaf*, and others. Read more at [www.CAPWrites.com](http://www.CAPWrites.com).

East Tennessee writer, **NATALIE KIMBELL'S** work appears in *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *The Mildred Haun Review*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Tennessee Voices*, and *Artemis*. Her first poetry chapbook, *On Phillips Creek* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2024. Her second chapbook, *And the Weather Remains the Same*, by Finishing Line Press will be released in June 2025.

**FINN BILLE'S** poetry reflects his dual national life: He attended high school and university in Denmark; and college and graduate school in the US. He served in the Danish Navy. His current activities include teaching, consulting, and writing in Tennessee. His four poetry collections include *The King's Coin* (Maecenas, 2020), which Julie Allen, editor of *The Bridge*, calls ". . . a sensually and emotionally rich contribution to the literature of hyphenated identity that should resonate with readers far beyond the borders of both the remembered Denmark and America he so skillfully evokes." Finn lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee with Jeanne, his wife of sixty years.

**JOHN C. MANNONE** has poems in *Artemis*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Red Branch Review*, *Appalachia Bare* and others. He won the Emma Bell Miles Prize in creative nonfiction (2024), Jesse Stuart Prize in YA fiction (2024), Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest (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 poetry collections are *Disabled Monsters* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2015), *Flux Lines: The Intersection of Science, Love, and Poetry* (Linnet's Wings Press, 2022), *Song of the Mountains* (Middle Creek Publishing, 2023; nominated for the Weatherford Award), and *Sacred Flute* (Iris Press, 2024; nominated for the Elgin Book Award). He's a semi-retired physics professor teaching physics, mathematics and creative writing at every opportunity.

**JENNIFER SUSAN SMITH** was born in Summerville, Georgia and now resides in Rock Spring, Georgia. A retired speech-language pathologist, she holds a Master of Science Degree in Communicative Disorders

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**PATRICIA HOPE'S** award-winning writing has appeared in *The Mildred Haun Review*, *Bluebird Word*, *MockingHeart Review*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Guideposts' Blessed by His Love*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Agape Review*, *Spirit Fire Review*, *Dog Throat Journal*, *American Diversity*, *Abyss & Apex* and many newspapers, magazines, and anthologies. She lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

**MEGAN HUTCHINSON** is an award-winning poet and fiction writer from the Appalachian foothills of southern Ohio. Her writing has appeared in *HeartWood Literary Magazine*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Ponder Review*, and *Untelling*, among others. She lives in Huntington, WV, where she is an English instructor at Marshall University.

**PAULETTA HANSEL** is a poet, memoirist and teacher. Her books include *Will There Also Be Singing?* (Shadelandhouse Modern Press, 2024), poems of witness and protest; *Heartbreak Tree* (Madville Publications, 2022), which won the Poetry Society of Virginia's 2023 North American Book Award; and *Palindrome* (Dos Madres Press, 2017) winner of the Weatherford Award for Appalachian Poetry. *Understory: A Women's History of Appalachia*, a hybrid book of poetry and prose, is forthcoming Fall 2026 from University Press of Kentucky. Born and raised in southeastern Kentucky, she is past managing editor of *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the literary journal of the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative. Pauletta was Cincinnati's first poet laureate, and the 2022 Writer in Residence for the Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library.

**MELISSA HELTON** is Literary Arts Director of Hindman Settlement School, a cultural nonprofit in Kentucky. Her work has been in *Shenandoah*, *Women of Appalachia Project*, *Still: The Journal*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and more. Her chapbooks include *Inertia: A Study*, and *Hewn*. She is editor of the anthology *Troublesome Rising: A Thousand-Year Flood in Eastern Kentucky* and *Untelling*, the literary and

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**CW NELMS** lives in Jefferson County, Tennessee with his wife, Karen, and their two sons. They have a small farm and he is a Social Studies teacher. He is a graduate of Carson-Newman and Tusculum Universities. They have a coonhound named Clover. She enjoys chasing things at night.

**GAY MARIE LOGSDON** writes poetry and nonfiction. Originally from Spokane, Washington, she worked as a technical editor and writer in the Environmental Sciences Division at Oak Ridge National Laboratory for 17 years. Earlier, she taught English literature and linguistics at the University of Texas and the University of Tennessee. Currently, she teaches continuing education classes on being a medical advocate and making medical appeals. She is frequently invited to speak about her ongoing recovery from a traumatic spinal cord injury in 2016. Her poetry has appeared in *The Mildred Haun Review*, *Witcraft*, and *The Avocet*.

**SHARON SHADRICK** is a full-time writer and retired teacher. She has been published in WOAP's *Women Speak Anthology vol 9*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel: Volume 27 Appalachian Fusion*, and *Mildred Haun Review*. Her co-written book, *The Power of a Paper Clip*, was released in the fall of 2024. She lives in Dunlap, Tennessee with her husband and three rescue dogs.



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