



Clinch Mountain Review 2023

The literary review of Southwest Virginia Community College

Notes about *Clinch Mountain Review*

Welcome to the *Clinch Mountain Review* for 2023. The *Clinch Mountain Review* is the literary review of Southwest Virginia Community College. Enjoy reading these selected poems, fictional work, and memoirs.

The *CMR* accepts submissions from authors and artists who live, work, or have a tie to southwest Virginia. SWCC students can also submit poems, short stories, and memoirs, as well as artwork. Submission guidelines can be found on the *CMR* website: <http://www.sw.edu/cmr>.

S. Russell Wood, Editor

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My Mother's Gardens

by Lou Gallo

There's the bay tree. She steeps the leaves
into a healing broth and adds to lasagna
or minestrone for zest.

Beside it the fig tree I climbed
to a moldy fork in its branches, supported
myself against the trunk and savored those figs
one after another, deliciously.

The sublime venerable sweet olive
and four o'clocks with hard black seeds
that resisted transfer to the mountains
eight hundred miles northeast.

I take a break from the dream and return to a house
near holy with the sweet scent of her bread pudding
and whisky sauce and the more somber brine
of okra, shrimp and roux boiling on the stove.

*Honey, you look skinny. Eat one of these
Creole tomatoes. They just came in season.
Sprinkle on a little salt. Then the pudding.*

The soft red petals of the poinsettia
brushed against my face whenever I leaned
my head out the window to back
out of her narrow driveway--a maneuver
I never mastered and often steered erratically
in zigzags, the tires almost crushing
an azalea bush on the other side of the slab.

This garden of earthly delights rarely knows
winter frost or snow or ice storms.
We sucked the tips of honeysuckle

for specks of sugar. We gathered figs
into wooden strawberry cartons to sell on the street.
We stood under the sweet olive and just breathed.
Some vandals broke into its wooden shelter

beside that tree—an outrage that came later,
long after I stood beholding the glistening hues
and inhaling the attars of my mother's gardens,
after she had embraced me again and waved goodbye.
As we do now. As we embrace and wave goodbye.

Remember

by Lou Gallo

The time we took a walk in the blizzard
and snowflakes, like sequins, streamed
into our eyes and we held each other
by the waists for balance and more than balance
because the blizzard came up to our knees
and you wore that red knit cap and a pea coat
and I my L.L. Bean and we stopped to kiss
under a stop light that shed buttery light
and there we were, I like to think lost,
in a storm yet with each other
and thus the storm seemed tropical,
a beach, and the snow became sand
and the stop light the sun and nothing
else mattered or ever would matter
and this happened just yesterday
on a street corner in Virginia,
just yesterday.

Container

by Fred Gordon

November's sunlight splattered
as if 17 years didn't matter, didn't infuse her hair
the mottled neck
the wilting holly blossoms of her skin
curving about her lips
stretched, brittle
desirable entranceway of in and out

Briefly, she spoke *Sorry*, spoke *Wait*
a walled copse of a girl
a container that breathed and cracked

Our *mistake* they sometimes whispered, *Everything's fine*
they explained the lessening of food, the few mouthfuls
their doubt, their *Must*
hid the eloquent pronouncement, the resistance of her body
everything's finally contained

Carrying winter's promise
she ignored her existence on the floor
this girlish imitation falling as everything falls

She pressed into the carpet and the carpet shrugged her off
as her tongue rummaged a question for her body
as her tongue governed minutiae
her bones branched like Queens and Kings in a card trick

She tasted nylon last, murmuring *I'm not sorry*
a childhood goodbye limiting the privilege of guilt
limiting admittance to that tarred interior
and with a coarse convergence
she glimpsed the perspective of insects and infants
Not being wanted warmed the air

The Color of Krishna 2022

by Katherine Chantal

Some babies are born blue

Krishna's color

To be here, they need to pink up

Quickly

Or, they will return to where

They came from

My thinning skin shows blue veins

More prominent

With passing years

The more blue

The closer to there?

Tears come so easily

These days

A thought, a song, a story

Finds them splashing gently

Upon my face

Moistening drops, a balm

To life's vagaries

A balm to life's living

Babies, toddlers, cry easily

An immediate response to
A hurt to body or soul
Injustice, though the word
Is as far from their consciousness
As it is close to my elder days

Maybe I cry more because
I have no words for the
Magnitude of all I feel
Of and in this place
Called earth

Tears and thinning skin
Turning blue
Possible passports
The agency of preparation
Certainly there is no
Packing for the
Ultimate leaving

Nothing to bring

My Krishna's blue skin
My final tears
Are the pass of entry

A Rending

by Marjorie Gowdy

Her mornings at two, oatmeal,
powdered milk, fatback sliced in a sliver
to save. Men still jump
off ledges.

Granny tears muslin into strips,
tucks worn flannel stored
in a weary blanket chest,
makes even rows for the stitching.

The girl grows. Skinny redhead
with crooked grin. Uncles off to war.
Rations. Umber nights. Waking, she flees
to the warm sunroom. Stretches skyward.
Smart wool uniforms arrive in tissue
for aunts. Jaunty, one flies to a western sea.
Sister dances with boys. They sing.
Backyard apples, sugar for Granny and a girl.

Word comes back in blood. Street of
whitewashed shotguns wails as boys fall.
Girl and Granny sit on a red tile porch.
The quilt grows. Shaped-note hope.

*Frayed amulets sewn
into felt, tatted lace
At twelve, she wrote a poem for peace
They believed in that back then*

Four score on, I huddle in covers that smell
of mamas. Soup, sweet treats on the table,
flashes of a madman's rage. This never ends?
In shade, daughter loads her duffle, clear-eyed.

Two-Horse Night

by Marjorie Gowdy

“The bears have plenty to eat this winter.”

Ball cap in hand this sixty-degree January day,
he points to a mountain of trees like torn paper.

Great horned owl calls at gloaming,
fox squirrel scurries.

“bear” sounds have many meanings on this farm.

An ebony giant ambles by on weekdays.

Bold, bare giggles float riverside in summer.

We bear a valley-load of varmints’ vicissitudes.

And we hail Bear, the quarter horse who died on Boxing Day.

At solstice, the farrier warns me:

Bear won’t be here long.

I rail against the 30 years god grants a horse,
mix oats and molasses for his last meal.

(He loved it.)

North winds slap the hunched-back, frozen ridge.

Short days pull wool around the sun.

Bear’s teeth long gone, his haunches

like the ancient granite stones
on his favorite hill.

Christmas night, sycamore limbs crack like splinters.
Rimy green water rolls upside the Blackwater.
Icicles pin my eyes as I look for Bear. There.
His friends stand, heads down,
manes as flash-frozen caramel creams.

Bear defies his last calamitous cyclone,
leaves comfort of a shelter packed with hay,
stares into the stinging storm,
kneels to face the relentless glazed pellets.
Muzzle coated with silver tatting, he nods farewell.

Note Left for Her on a Cool Morning in June

by James Owens

i have walked out alone into the world

first light is an old hammer
and mist an old bell
that shimmers and rings
above water on stones
and through the branches of memory

you and i are young monks
still naïve in this merciless world
feeling for the borders of things
for the temple gate and the garden

i will come back to you soon
and pray the prayer
of my mouth on your mouth

of our bodies together
under a silky, dawn-moted slant of sun

Road Rally, 1970

by Matthew J. Spireng

If we crossed into West Virginia when we
drove up the mountain, I never knew, though
I was navigator as my landlord steered

his hunter green sports car in that road rally
that started in the Roanoke Valley and went off
into mountains to the west. I remember

fields and woods, barns and winding back roads
first leading uphill, and a big sign that was
one of the landmarks to be noted on our checklist,

though I don't recall a map or knowing
exactly where we were except at the start
and finish. Now, decades later, as I try

to make a list of states I've been in, I
can't say whether or not it includes
West Virginia, though I have memories

of that day I might have been there as we
drove winding roads a long way uphill
and a long way down.

On the Road to Bristol

by R. R. Beach

*Sad things happen on this highway.
Don't slow down don't look back.*

An abandoned pickup sits
off the exit ramp
no sign of anyone anywhere.

A dresser and a rocking chair
heaps of big black bags
lay scattered along the shoulder.

*High up in the clouds
I see heartbeats of my brother James.*

There's a place on the Frontage Road
where two lanes turn to four

where there's a wayside park
and a quiet mill pond
fed by a rippling stream.

Chained off by the DMV
for no good reason.

Where one cold morning
in my rearview mirror

there's a lonely boy
barefoot and hatless

sitting like a little Buddha
on a picnic table.

I want to take him home

to his momma
or maybe buy him a Big Mac.

So I turnaround and go back
but he's gone and only mist
from the rippling stream remains.

*Ain't no love on this highway
no respite from my pain.*

Stopping at a fast food joint
somewhere near Chilhowie
a raggedy man comes up:

Brother can you spare a twenty?
I need a tank of gas.

My little girl is in the clinic
and may never walk again.

His face is burnt from years of toil
and in his eyes
in those dark eddies

I see reflected the monster
in my sin sick soul.

*Ain't no sunshine on this highway
ain't no light to guide the way.*

Some days I hardly see the
asphalt and the concrete

the tailgaters and the in-and-outers
the big rigs going two wide.

Only the billboards tell me

if things are on schedule.

That the world is still
spinning on its axis.

Southern Chicken Bowl 3.5 Miles

and I smell me some sausage gravy
coming up through the air intake.

Got Dip Dogs? Next Exit

and I tell myself one day
one sunshiny day

I'm going to pull off and have
my fill of Dip Dogs and taters.
Jesus Saves – Buy Guns Here

and that's my exit
from this highway

just past the hill where
a sad and tattered
battle flag still flies.

*Who is it that whispers in the prophet's ear?
Is it the great I Am, or just the wind
whistling through the pines?*

At night when the traffic thins
and the big rigs go to bed,

it's just me and my reflection
in the rearview mirror.

While all around stars are collapsing

and my soul is vanishing
into the asphalt in my headlights.

I fight the feeling
that I've been here before

that we're all just watching the same old movie
singing the same old never ending song.

*There's only one place this soulless highway ends
and it ain't Bristol or Johnson City
but some scorched valley in a forgotten land.*

Appalachia

by Maddie M. White

There's an old spot by the river
I like to go to alone
It's shaded by a large willow tree
the curvature of the trunk is a hug
Better than a hug
A connection with the earth and everything in it
It's memories of fishing with my dad
It's warm summer days without worry of the future
It's home

I Read That Bible you Threw at me

by Donita Kennedy

When I was still raw innocence,
You judged me:
Laughing girl equaled "Sinner."
Free Spirit meant only "Heathen."
Independent thinker stamped me "Hellbound."

Jeans too tight & braided hair,
Painted nails!
"Hussy!"

Singing worldly songs,
Interested in boys!
"Slut!"

You shook that Bible at me.
Bludgeoned me with it.
Threw it at me.
Told me I should read it...
Live by it...

That was your mistake.

I picked up your weapon quizzically,
And found instead,
A book.

I opened it,
Looking for your righteous judgement,
But there I found...

"Go forth and multiply,"

Water turned to wine.

Forgiveness,

70 x 7,

And More.

Rocks with no one to stone,

Love,

Acceptance,

Sacrifice.

Where you saw hatred,

I found adoration.

Where you found chains,

I basked in freedom.

Now I know that book is a tool,

Everything is in there!

It's a cautionary tale and an undying poem.

It's beautiful.

It's a friend.
But it's not a God.
It is magic,
And mundane.
But most of all...
It's a mirror.
When you read it with your eyes,
You find what is in your soul.
When I read it with my eyes,
I find what is in mine.

Did the authors paint fear and loathing,
Or bold happy spirits and adoration?
Or both?
One day we may know.
Until then I'm going to be thankful for my own eyes and my
own soul!
And be glad I don't have to live with yours!

Ever Bearing

*Who is not rich, with summer nearly done,
will never find a self that is his own.*

– R. M. Rilke, from *Das Stunderbuch*

by Phyllis Price

Oblivious to temperatures
I cling like vines to humid air,
gladly sweat out toxins,
crank up fans to temper heat rays
rising from the deck.
I push the season's passing back
like heavy covers of a restless sleeper.

So sure am I of autumn's late arrival
that in mid-July I freshen beds
with wilting sale-rack annuals,
fertilize like summer's just begun,
as though both June and I are young,
ever bearing as a berry ripened by the sun.

The Storm

by Piper Durrell

Wind and rain arrived after midnight.
The devastation was not apparent
on a sunny spring morning
until we walked our neighborhood at 7 a.m.

Branches, limbs, entire trees
crisscrossed streets and lawns
some still covered with green leaves,
others long dead.

No one was yet out with chainsaws
but you could tell it would be a busy buzzing day across our
town.

And then, we became silent.

All three of us, one by one, as we noticed eggshells
on sidewalks and soft green grass
once full of possibilities, now-broken, empty-
some the remarkable blue of robins
others, subdued browns, whites, speckled.

Soon, we started counting-
turning tragedy into empty numbers
the human way of avoiding utter despair-

One. Five. Fifteen.

One small perfect bluebird
looking almost like a specimen
pinned to the concrete sidewalk.

Five topsy turvy nests, carefully crafted
with love and the talent of scavengers
now on the ground far below their havens above.

Fallen limbs will become mulch.
Beloved trees will be missed and,
perhaps, soon replaced, with young saplings.
The bluebird will be carried off by
a wandering cat or high-flying hawk.
Some child might pick up the nests
to add to their own backyard fairy kingdom.
Those fifteen eggshells, fragmented
yet still magnificent
now a photo gallery retained in my memory.

Witch Hazel

by Sam Dixon

If under the cross-limbed triangles of the sky
we reconcile,
come from parting
to a blue division of shade
to lay down our terms,

it would be like the dowser's sense with his hazelwood

knowing the way a heart understands
what eyes will not see,
believing all that should matter
is that the magic quenches.

Blackbird

by William David Mainous II

The warning sirens yell alert
the street lights shutoff — empty out the streets.
Iron patriots and granite poets
have already run for shelter.

I hear the bad winds coming
with sounds and a smell from
some region offering nothing except
what serious frost and what
bitter cold will accomplish.

We pull our collars tightly round our necks but
the winds find our throats.

I cannot find you in dark hours
we are both alone and lost.

Wait my love for dawn,
let the sun inch
above the roof-tops.

God and Soul

by Kohava Blount

Internally replay the thundering dismay
that no other mind can seem to comprehend. A
journey through ghastly perils
that only your eyes have glimpsed;
never retold of the passages that stretched beyond the
endurance of staggered treads.
Prayer amid blackness when you persist without the
Ability to perceive your steps.
Alone, in imploring conversation that seeps into the ethers
and dissipates.
Awaken to terse breaths solely sustaining the
Extant instant.
When proceeding is but a hasty gasp
for that which can only withstand few resolves.
Undisclosed imminence;
withered spirit pleading,
yet encumbered in mounting renunciation.

The Old Home Place

by Oscar L. Price

Can you hear that squeaking sound,
It's from the windmill just up ahead.
Across the cattleguard there's a falling down barn,
And a leaning old shed.

The tumbleweeds have piled up near
The top of that old, faded fence.
Visions of my grandparents flash in my mind,
And I can sense their presence.

Grandfather has been gone
Since many years ago.
So has my Grandma.
Oh! Bless their souls.

Nothing lasts forever,
Not even prairie lands.
Now all the cattle,
Wear someone else's brands.

How long do you think those old spurs and bridle bit
Have been hanging in that tumble down shed?
And look, there's an old saddle tree,
And parts of an old bunkbed.

Listen and hear the coyotes yelping,
In the sagebrush a rooster pheasant crows.
It all reminds me that I was once young.
As the tears in my eyes start to flow.

It's only because of the cloud of dust,
That the prairie wind is blowing.
Goodbye to you, Old Home Place.
It's time for me to be going.

It Happened Only Once, But ...

by Joe Womack

A friend gave us tickets
to a college football game.
it was a first for me:
I would be going to
a football game –
with my father!

The stadium was large,
filled with people and loud noise
we could hear as we approached.
It was a classic Texas football scene--
and I was there
with my best friend!

We found a parking place
and started for the stadium.
A busy, noisy road to cross
and we did—but not without
a unique moment.
As we crossed, my father
grabbed my arm and held
onto it tightly until the

crossing was made.

Any memory of the game has gone,
but I will always cherish
crossing the road with my
Father's hand wrapped around
my arm. It was the first—
and only—time my father
reached out to me for help.

Unforgettable, even if,
and especially because,
it happened only once —
but it did happen.

Blue on Blue

by Cathy Rigg Monetti

He would be dead within the week. It was the one thing she knew for sure as she made the turn onto the entrance ramp and headed for the interstate. Her foot pressed the pedal; it gave way moving gas from tank to carburetor to piston. The vehicle accelerated; she checked the rearview, the side mirror, the lane ahead. There was traffic—a good bit of traffic—and silently, almost unknowingly, she calculated speed and distance until the car slipped into merging traffic. Just like that she was among the masses, one of a hundred thousand drivers with a hundred thousand reasons to be headed west on this highway.

She felt herself disappear. No, that was wishful, there was far too much ahead for the simple joy of anonymity. Tasks bounced all around contained by the car but unable to organize into reasonable order. *Contact the lawyer. Check the safe. Respond to the Morgans.* Over this last one she had few qualms, the Morgans being insufferable, and rich, and good lord boring. The invitation itself was so overdone she ought to have declined on

aesthetics alone. It was a summer barbecue for heaven's sake, not a White House dinner. But since Margie didn't offer email as an option (*too pedestrian*, you could just hear her say) that meant declining would require a telephone call and thus an explanation. Better to leave that be, for now.

Check the lease. Count the pills. Stop the mail.

A blue light whirled behind and she hit the brakes, glanced down, registered her speed. *Shit*, she thought. *Shit, shit*. On instinct an excuse formed: emergency, family, medical. At least this was sort of true. She pulled to the right lane and slowed. The siren came closer, the cruiser light whirring and her heart picking up speed with every rotation. She breathed in deep, held hard to the wheel.

Her mother came to mind. "Two hands, honey, two hands." It'd been a refrain in those days, time and circumstance requiring that she, the teenager, be the driver. She'd become the family's chauffeur the year her mom's eyes failed and her dad's license was revoked. For years she did the carting and the shuffling in that old '75 Honey Gold Cutlass, the one with the big burn in the front seat Naugahyde, the *taking to* and *picking up from* for all of them. So much fetching. So much delivering.

*

Closer now, closer. Blue on blue. Blue on blue on blue, then past, blowing past and her shoulders relaxed and her hands released, and they stretched.

The mountains were ahead. They rose from a flat Carolina landscape that an hour ago had swollen to hills, then up ahead lifted further into the peaks and ridges that lined the top edge of the windshield. She'd made this drive a thousand times, and this was the moment she loved—her first sighting of the Blue Ridge, soft, familiar, the interstate rushing headlong toward them as if it, too, couldn't wait to disappear among them. Her heart pulled forward, magnetic. Then the reminder, and dread.

*

By the time she was 16, she was the one fielding the questions. Her sisters were 8 and 11, and there was enough unrest in the household to warrant a lot of them. Some answers she provided with reasonable knowledge and insight, but most she simply made up; a bad answer, she reasoned, was better than no answer at all.

“He doesn't mean it,” she would say.

“Then why does he do it,” Amy would respond. Then Karla, her *why* an echo. And this would do for the moment, even if things were not nearly that simple.

*

By the time she graduated high school, her life was defined by the Oldsmobile, her sisters, her daddy. He was always up early; it was as if this act in defiance proved everything okay. One Sunday she'd taken the girls to Sunday School then returned, pulling into the carport, tucking the keys in her purse as she walked through the back door. He was sitting at the table, coffee before him.

“Where's Mom?” she asked.

“You been talking,” he said. He was rubbing his finger around the rim of his cup.

“I haven't,” she said. She moved to walk past him. He grabbed at her shirt.

“You been speaking...untruths.”

She flipped her hair over her shoulder, a dismissal, but still he pulled at her.

“I won't have it.” He was smoking, and a stubby Marlboro was tucked tight in the ashtray, its end red hot and wedged in the silver holder before him.

“Where’s Mom,” she said again.

His voice was thick with tar. “Ain’t my job to keep up.”

She took a fistful of fabric from her shirt’s long tail and jerked it from his grasp. Then she headed for her mother’s room.

*

She made her only stop at the Kingsport Quick Shop where she used the facilities then grabbed beef jerky and a small bag of Doritos. She pulled a soda from the store’s cooler, twisted off the top, then poured and watched as Diet Pepsi popped and spurted and ran through the ice in the plastic cup. It had cost an extra 35 cents but was worth it, those drink machines never having the carbonation calibrated properly. She got back in the car and pulled into the last hour of her drive.

*

Her mother’s vision loss had occurred over time, going from a little hazy to moderately impaired to, eventually, full blindness. The diagnosis was common: glaucoma. Still the source of her condition remained a secret hidden for a dozen years. “Blunt trauma to the face,” said the records, a fact that surfaced only after her mother

died. That had been in 1987, and over the decades since, her father still denied it.

She spent years in therapy dealing with her own aftermath. Amy, not so much. She moved to New York just after graduation and with few qualifications had become a poet/painter/philosopher who moved borough to borough, apartment to apartment with whatever friend or moment's significant other would take her in. It seemed a difficult way to live, all things considered, but with their mother gone, and their dad—well, with all that comprised life with their dad—she couldn't help but feel there was a tiny air of nobility in her sister's choice.

Karla was a different story, pregnant at 17. Then she married, then she divorced, then she took the child and moved west. Now she was the mother of four, a Texas real estate agent husband number three. This guy was a speculator who, by all indications, excelled at land deals and bastardism. Not that Karla ever said this. She didn't, on the rare occasions that they talked. Instead, it was all about properties, clients, the weather—which being in El Paso, never seemed to change. They also talked about Amy.

There had been the one time, all those years ago, when she'd taken her sisters to a birthday sleepover then come home to find her mother gone. There was a note on

the table, anchored by the ashtray, which had been both emptied and washed.

The writing was large and unsteady.

I love you girls. Take care of each other.

She picked up the slip of paper and tucked it deep in the pocket of her jeans. Then she set about making herself some supper.

It was later that night when her dad came home, stumbling around the house as if he was looking for something lost, as if something was misplaced and he couldn't quite remember what it was. Eventually he quieted on the sofa and passed out, and she covered him with a blanket then went to bed herself. The next morning, she awoke to find her mother shuffling about the kitchen making coffee. They looked at each other knowing, but neither spoke of it again.

*

Even with all the trips home it was odd, still, not to take the right, not to cut across at Frankie's Tires and curve around The House of Beauty, not to drive up the hill and make the quick left turn into the short, familiar driveway. But it had been years since she'd lived there, years since the house had sold to a family from out of town. Her visits now

were drive-bys, quick looks when she came to town to deal with something at the hands of her dad. Jail, outstanding debt, illegal firearms. *Would you look at that*, she'd notice, *the old oak's been hit by lighting, or the shutter color's changed*. Once she'd stopped just as a woman came to the front door and stepped to the porch to retrieve the afternoon paper. She waved, all she could think to do at being discovered sitting there, at being caught staring. The woman looked in discomfort, then turned, glancing back once more before returning inside.

This trip, today, was different. For once her daddy wasn't a bad boy looking to get out of trouble. He was an old man with cancer, begging for a mercy she wasn't sure she held.

*

His apartment was on the other side of town, a hellhole above a bar which would be ironic were it not so sad. She paid his rent and had since long before he'd moved there. Not that she was cheap. She wasn't. She'd set him up in a nice little condo but he'd had problems with "fiscal management" and had been evicted. She'd come back to town for three days then, taken over his bills, set up everything to pay direct. He'd already found this place by then, moved in, stayed. He wanted to, insisting the one

room plus its wobbly toilet and tin-can shower was sufficient. Perhaps there was a sense of comeuppance in him, is what she'd figured, and that one bit of humility had somewhat sadly given her hope. Still his physical state was dreadful, and when he started the chronic coughing, she wrote it off. Tests eventually revealed the cancer, lung and late stage.

She parked two blocks away. For once she was glad the steps went up from the alley; no one was about, and she carried the empty travel bag up them unnoticed. The door was unlocked, and she simply twisted the old knob to let herself in.

The room was dark, but she saw him in shadow, backlit by the tiny bits of light that fought their way through dingy window blinds. He was sitting up and this surprised her. She'd expected to find him as she had the last two times she'd arrived—horizontal, resolved. Today, he was waiting.

“You’re here,” he said.

She didn’t speak. She didn’t know what to say.

He laid back, satisfied. He used his arms to lift his legs and he extended them long to the foot of the bed. It was a move that took great effort, and she knew she should

walk to him. But she did not. Instead, she went to the lamp beside the gray sofa and turned on the light. He raised his arm and covered his eyes.

She saw the pills on his bedside. Tarceva, she knew. She'd paid for the things—a fortune in itself—and she picked up the bottle, opened it, counted them out. They were all there.

“Said I wasn’t taking them,” he said.

He'd foregone treatment. He didn't have insurance, didn't want her to pay, didn't have the will for surgery or radiation or chemotherapy. The pain had elevated quickly, and, for a while, he relied on weed and alcohol in ever growing quantities. The evidence was all around her now, and it heartened and disgusted her both.

“Get to the safe,” he said. He didn't open his eyes. “You know the combination.”

She did. R44, L17, R83. He'd sent it in a letter two months ago, along with the instruction to bring a suitcase into which she could put the contents. These, he didn't bother describing.

“Go on now.”

*

Go on now. Go on now. Go on now.

How many times had she heard this, her daddy at a distance, taking in a long draw of a short smoke. He'd nod his head in conviction. She was six, straddling a bike and terrified to peddle; at eight, edge of a diving board, unable to swim; at twelve a diversion, a flirt, while he pilfered and stole.

*

Right, then left, then right and CLICK, the metal door opened.

“Pull it out. All of it. I want it out of here.”

She unzipped the duffle, opened wide its mouth beside her. She reached into the safe.

—A photograph, framed, of the three girls. Easter Sunday, stair-stepped heights, dresses in pink, blue and yellow.

—Another photograph, this one loose and worn. She looked closer. It was him and her mother; god they were young. Had they really been that young? He was leaning against a car, two-door, slung low and sporty. His arms were crossed, his grin—and eyes—directed fully toward her.

She was mid-laugh but shy, hand in her hair holding back curls that were tousled.

—A black pouch with a drawstring. The thing was heavy; she put it in her lap and loosened the knot. From inside she pulled a thick, gold Rolex; a chunky man's ring with a large, rough-cut diamond; a fat gold-link chain with a big dangling cross.

—A plain pine box with a simple latch and tassel.

“What is this, Dad?” She held out the container, and she turned to face him.

He didn't look to see what she was referring to.
“Stuff I collected. Over the years.”

“This. I mean this.”

He gave a quick glance, then recovered his eyes. He didn't answer.

“You're such a bastard,” she said. It was breathy and bitter, worn as the bed he lay on. How she'd begged; how she'd pleaded with him to let her be the one to handle her mother's arrangements. He hadn't allowed it. And neither she nor her sisters had ever known there was a cremation.

She set the urn gentle to the side. Then she turned back to the lockbox, wanting to just *be done*. She reached

deep and found something tucked far in the back—canvas, a money bag. It was heavy.

She unzipped. Inside were bundles, bundles of hundred-dollar bills, and she pulled one out—each band indicating \$10,000. Holy christ there were 25, maybe 30 of these, a quarter million dollars *in the least*. He coughed, and his hand went to his chest, and the cough grew deep and she heard the pain there. “Take it,” he said. “It’s yours, free and clear.”

“But where did you...”

His hand waved, dismissive.

She waited.

“Go on now. Can’t leave it here.”

She opened the duffle; she put the pouch and bag inside. She zipped it, then stood. The photos she carried to his bedside and propped them there. Then she returned to the safe, closed it, and twisted the dial.

“Now for what you brought me.”

She heard relief from him in the mention, and by the time she’d collected the pills there was his waiting palm. It was trembling, and she wondered how, and if, he’d be able to get them to his mouth.

“Dad, I—” she started.

He shook his outstretched hand, a demand, and she obliged. “Don’t come back,” he said. “Lawyer’ll call to say everything’s been taken care of.” There was a bottle by the sink, and he pointed and she brought it to him. “Now get.” His tone was eager, dismissive, and she shook her head yes but did not move.

“Go on now.”

The walkaway felt a thousand miles. When her hand touched the knob, she stopped. She could stay. She *should* stay. She turned and saw her daddy tilt the bottle, and as he gulped, brown liquor ran loose down his gray, stubbled chin.

She lifted the bag and snugged it tight across her shoulder. Then with her mother cradled safe at her chest, she stepped to the stoop, closed the door, and headed down the stairs.

The Box

by Linda Hudson Hoagland

It was a small box, but it held a lifetime of memorable pain:

Life wasn't getting any easier for me, a divorced mother of two sons. Christmas was a time I truly grew to dread because I couldn't get the presents that I wanted to buy for my sons. As a matter of fact, it was hard to scrape together enough money to buy any gifts at all as well as feed, pay rent, and provide clothing for the three of us.

We would muddle through somehow. We always did.

God didn't always lead us down the easiest path, but he let us know that we were strong enough to survive whatever obstacles fell in our way.

I had been divorced from Eddy and Aaron's father for about five years. It had been a struggle to get him to pay any kind of support. It got to the point that the hassle wasn't worth the effort so I grew totally independent in that I counted on nothing from him or his family.

I was truly surprised when he called me one day and told me he was sending the boys something for Christmas. I was as excited as they were about the arrival of something

brand, spanking, new, shiny, and still in the box it came in. I knew the toys would not have been repaired, repainted, restitched, or washed. They would not be the used items I had been forced to get from the Salvation Army or junk stores and any other place that handed out free toys for the kids of low-income families.

I was not a welfare mother, but I didn't make enough money at my full-time job to pay for a baby-sitter, and also pay for all the other requirements of life. Pride hampered me at times when it came to asking for the free handouts that were offered by many well-meaning organizations.

The thought of my sons getting something new from their father made me so happy.

"Ellen, I'm sending the boys a Christmas present. I want you to promise me that you won't let them open it until Christmas," said my ex-husband to my amazement.

The day of the gifts finally arrived. Two boxes arrived in the mail. One box addressed to Eddy was a medium-sized box and heavy, but it didn't rattle when he shook it. The gift for Aaron was small, but rattled loudly when shaken. Both boxes had been wrapped in brown paper and taped profusely for mailing purposes. When the brown paper was removed, the boxes were wrapped yet another time in brightly colored

Christmas paper and a note was attached to each package telling the boys:

DON'T OPEN 'TIL CHRISTMAS

“Can we open them, Mommy?”

“No, your daddy said we have to wait for Christmas to arrive, after Santa Claus comes to visit.”

“Mommy, please, please, please!” chorused both boys.

“No, wait a couple more days. I’ll put them under the tree so you’ll know they are waiting for you. Maybe Santa will bring you some more presents.”

My family had always had a tradition of opening the presents on Christmas Eve. We were told as children that Santa stopped at our house first because he had so many places to visit. I carried the thought on to my sons. Even though neither one of them believed in Santa anymore, they didn’t speak the words out loud because it was much more fun to pretend.

Along with the gifts from their father, I had purchased a couple of small items for each of them and wrapped them enticingly, but I wanted the gifts from their father to be the main event of this Christmas.

Christmas Eve finally arrived, and the anticipation for opening the gifts was making the boys snap at each other and argue more than usual. My patience was wearing thin listening to them bicker, so I, along with them, was glad to see the sun go down on Christmas Eve.

Eddy ripped the paper off the gift from his father and was happily surprised to find a complete baseball card collection for a whole year. Eddy was a collector, and baseball cards were a welcomed gift for him at the age of ten. His father couldn't have gotten him a better gift. I knew Eddy would cherish the baseball cards forever.

“Mom, this is a great present. I'll keep it always,” said Eddy as he smiled from ear to ear.

Aaron hadn't settled into any one thing at the age of eight. He still played with toys sometimes. He didn't collect anything that he couldn't take apart and reassemble. And, if he did that once, the fun was over for him. He liked to read and draw.

His most recent venture into something new and different was into the art of rock polishing. He had gotten a rock polisher for his birthday eight months before Christmas, but that idea ran its course after the first set of stones were polished. Polishing rocks took a very long non-interactive

period of time because the rocks had to tumble and roll for hours upon hours in the grains of sand.

Aaron tore into his package ripping off the paper shaking the taped box once the paper had been removed.

He tugged and pulled at the tape until he could look inside the box where he saw wadded up newspapers that had been used to hold the contents from shaking around too much. He removed the newspapers, shaking each and every piece to make sure there was nothing folded inside. Finally, a small box, excessively taped, appeared in the bottom of the box. He shoved the newspapers aside and stared at the bottom of the corrugated container in disbelief.

Aaron picked up the small box and peeled layer after layer of tape from the small box until he could finally pull the top off to peer inside.

Aaron's lower lip started to quiver and tears began to well up in his eyes, but he would not allow them to fall.

The box contained about ten different small rocks and nothing else except a note.

Dear Aaron,

I've collected these rocks from several different places over the years. I hope you enjoy them.

Dad

Aaron blinked back the tears, re-taped the box, set it aside, and continued on to his next gift to open. I thanked God that I had scraped together enough money to get him a new sketch pad along with some pencils.

Unlike his brother, who was babbling about his wonderful gift, Aaron had nothing to say about his gift or his father.

I never actually saw Aaron cry about the gift of the box of rocks.

I know I did. I cried then, and I still cry today every time I think about the gift of a box of rocks.

I'm sure Ed never realized what a mental scar that his box of rocks would leave in the minds of both of us. Then again, maybe he did.

Grimsleyville Elementary School

by Frank Shortt, former student

The School and How it was Run

Grimsleyville Elementary School, often called Grassy Creek School, was built by Tom Grimsley. It was built on a flat strip by Grassy Creek, where Cherokee Indians used to camp, and attended by children who mostly had Cherokee blood running through their veins.

The Old Cherokee Trail ran along Grassy Creek, down to the Levisa River and on into Kentucky. It had its beginnings, probably in North Carolina, as wandering tribes made their way to the west searching for happier hunting grounds.

These tribes camped often by Grassy Creek, which ran like a river in those days, and did their fishing, arrowhead/weapon crafting, and cooking. There was much evidence of this as boys dug into the banks of Grassy Creek finding all sizes of arrow points, small axes, and other tools of the Cherokee tribe. Any time the Grimsleys, Roses, Davises, and other families living by Grassy Creek plowed their fertile fields, they would find many artifacts as evidence that Native Americans used to traverse the trails of Buchanan County.

The small, two-roomed school where children of these mountain folk of Buchanan County attended in the 1930's,

1940's and 1950's, were hot in summer and very cold in winter. These schools were at the mercy of a school board in Grundy, the county seat. They seemed to care little for the mountain children. Thank God, things have gotten better as time passed. Had they been required to spend one winter in one of the small schools, they would have done a better job of policing them. The two teachers remembered most by those who attended Grimsleyville School in the forties were Murtis and Lucy Wade. They were transplanted Easterners and did not quite understand the mountaineer children.

Nevertheless, those under their tutorship were shaped into, mostly, model students who moved on to Garden High School. Some of these students went on to become very good examples of how a 'hillbilly' can accomplish anything that a student of better means can accomplish if given the opportunity to do so.

The two teachers then were excellent, providing a well-rounded education for the students. Lucy Wade taught the first through third grade students in what was called the 'Little Room'; Murtis Wade, who was head teacher and principal, taught the 'Big Room' where fourth through seventh grade students were taught.

Coal was used to heat the rooms and had to be hauled in by someone contracted by the county. Usually the coal was of a

lesser grade therefore making it difficult to start the fire and having the room heated before the other students arrived. Sometimes snow and ice had formed on the coal pile, and the coal would be too wet to burn and would put out the fire. This caused much consternation on the part of the teachers. They had much more responsibility than the school board that hired them. The heaters were of the pot-bellied Burnside variety, burning one up on one side and freezing him to death on the other.

The teachers depended on the larger boys to tend the stoves. Whoever arrived first would be required to build the fire, after first having shooed the roosting hoot owls off the long stovepipe. One time one of the boys stuck his tongue to the frozen stove and could not extract it until the stove heated up and melted the frost. The boy ended up with a sore tongue for quite a few days afterwards.

The floors of the schools were of finished pine which had to be oiled in order to keep the dust down. Children who went to school barefooted, and there were many in springtime, would oftentimes get slivers in the bottom of their feet. Barefoot season was from May until the first frosts. If a child wore shoes during that time, he was either going to church or

a special event requiring him to ‘spruce up’. When a student wore shoes every day, he was referred to as ‘hifalutin’.

The greatest goal of those in the ‘little room’ was to be moved into the ‘big room’. It seemed to their young minds that this was a major promotion. Children who failed any grade in the first through third were tormented by the other children.

“You didn’t make it”! “Now you have to be with the little kids”. It was not unusual to see children who were a head taller playing with the ‘little room’ children. It was often said of these children, “He packs a razor in his lard bucket”.

Good drinking water was always a difficult necessary to obtain in this school. There was invariably a ‘pump house’ containing a large pump with a huge steel handle. This handle had to be pushed up and down in order to extract water from the well underneath. Talk about a hernia maker! If a larger student did not happen to be present to help a younger student, the younger student usually went back to the room without a drink. Most students were so poor they didn’t have a drinking cup of their own. Cups were devised by rolling up a piece of pulp paper into a cone and then trying to hold the water long enough to get one’s lips wet. Sadly, most small children went thirsty throughout most of the day.

Games the Mountain Children Played

Toys for the children were scarce or nonexistent. The county provided few balls or bats for baseball. Sometimes the head teacher would bring toys paid for from her own pocket. The children usually found a stout limb or sapling and made a bat. The ball was usually one that a more fortunate student brought to school. This ball was guarded like a precious jewel. If it landed in the creek, it would have to be laid up in the cloakroom for a period of time until it dried out. Sometimes the end result was a twisted, deformed mass of leather. It was played with, nonetheless, until the children were fortunate enough to find another one.

The playgrounds were of native soil. Roots and rocks, protruding up, were tripping hazards. More than one child broke an arm or bruised themselves badly by tripping. If one of the children brought a basketball to school, a bushel basket was punched out at the bottom and, thusly, basketball was played. Ever try to bounce a basketball on rocky soil? The ball will go careening off in any direction instead of the way one wanted it to go. The basket only lasted a short time. If it rained over the weekend, goodbye basket!!

Hard rubber balls were used for “Annie over”. The ball would be thrown over the roof of the school, and if one on the opposing team caught it, he would run around the building and tag as many of the opposing team as possible. These

tagged ones had to stay on the ‘taggers’ team, thereby increasing the number of the team. Sometimes the ‘tagger’ would choose to throw the ball at an opposing team member. That hard rubber ball would really sting. When one side or the other was diminished, the team with all the students was declared the winner. This game required a great amount of energy, integrity, and patience.

Another great pastime was to go down by the creek and dig arrowheads. A lot of students were archaeologists and did not realize it. Quite a few large and beautiful arrowheads were found on the banks of Grassy Creek. Some children, in warmer weather of fall, would sit under a huge Beech tree down by the creek and fill up on Beech-nuts. Then, of course, boys had games such as Cowboys and Indians, tag, whoopee hide (hide and seek) and a host of other rough and tumble games. The girls played hopscotch, ring around the rosy, and sometimes the more adventuresome joined in with the boy’s games.

Forest Fires

If a forest fire broke out near the school, the larger boys were excused to fight the fire. Every boy knew where the fire equipment was kept at the Ord Wade Store, and a mad dash would be made as soon as “FIRE!” was called out. Boys were assigned to one crew or another according to their abilities.

These fires sometimes lasted several days, and the boys would only be required to fight the fire until men arrived from the mines. More capable hands would take over so that the boys could go home to tend to their chores that, invariably, awaited them. Sometimes some of the larger boys would be required to continue to help put out the fire. It was an honor for one of the older boys to go to Wade's Store and get a shovel or hoe of their own. Then they would march off along with the Osbornes, Davises, Hornes, Pruitts, Grimsleys, Wades, Shortts and all the other older boys to fight the fiery beast alongside of their fathers and brothers. Such was the camaraderie in the community of Upper Buchanan County.

Hillbilly Student

Move along down the dusty road

One toe wound with a dirty rag,

Stopping to inspect each flower,

Shouldn't be late, no time to lag.

Murtis and Lucy won't put up

With nonsense such as you dish out
They'll paddle your behind until
You dance a jig and give a shout.

Study hard, you hillbilly boy,
Do you want to be a miner?
Slaving in the depths of the earth
With nothing to show, not ever?

Such is the life of mountain boys,
Working hard in the fields of home,
Slaving to get educated,
To eventually get up and roam.

Frank Shortt

School Discipline

One method of punishment was to have the errant child stand at the black board where a ring was placed just a tad higher than the child's nose. The recalcitrant one would then be required to stand on tiptoe and keep their nose in the

ring. If he or she let down, a sharp rap on the hind end with a ruler would speed the child back up on their toes. No child that I knew ever wanted to be humiliated again by this method. Another punishment was to stand in front of the classroom and write a hundred times on the blackboard, "I will not talk in school! I will not talk in school!" or whatever the offense was. Another method was to have the child stand on one foot for a period of time to allow them to think of the breach of rules, which were many in those days until the teachers gained control of those mountain children.

A last resort, for hardened flouters of discipline, was to paddle their back side with a special board prepared for this purpose. One older, overgrown boy once took the paddle away from a teacher and swatted her with it. Another, whose hands were toughened by over-work on the farm, put his knuckles in the path of the paddle rendering the half inch board into splinters. There was a great look of surprise on the teacher's face, and the boy became an instant hero. Later in the week a smaller, tow-headed boy tried the same thing, the teacher having obtained a new paddle, but the results was sore knuckles for a week or two. Of course, this boy did not ever try that again. The new paddle was less seasoned wood than the former one.

Halloween Tricks

Each Halloween the children who could sneak away from their parents' stern gazes would assemble in the playground of the old school. This was for the purpose of having a wiener (called weenies) roast, providing we could scrape up enough money to buy the wieners and buns at Ord Wade's store. This always called for moving the outhouse off its foundation and soaping the windows of the schoolhouse. (This was after the larger boys had cut down a large beech tree into the main highway which had very little traffic on Halloween night!) School, next morning, was a solemn assembly. Not only had Mrs. Wade seen the downed tree on the way to work, but was greeted at school by the askew outhouse and the soaped windows. The same boys who had pulled the tricks were commandeered to clean up the mess. They did it willingly, fearing the paddle-with-holes more than all the hard work. Besides, they got out of a lot of school work that day!

This essay has been presented with a lot of negative sounding incidents. Truth be known, life was not so bad as all the children were in the same economic conditions and surroundings. Each student who felt that they were 'poor', only had to look around at the other students to find out that they were all in the same boat!

A Piano, a Flat Tire, and a Troop Train

by Mark Fryburg

Potato peels cascaded into a bucket at the Eugene Hotel kitchen, December 7, 1941. University of Oregon freshman Russ Fryburg was just minutes into his restaurant work that evening when his boss came in. He told Russ to go home.

“Why?” Russ asked.

“The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor! Everybody’s glued to their radios. No one’s going out for dinner tonight.”

Not long after, Russ joined the “Enlisted Reserve Corps”. It resembled ROTC, modified for lower ranking soldiers. This student would stay on campus for now, playing football at the stadium one day and marching in Army uniform there the next – or sneaking beers into the fraternity house. No one knew if or when the corps would enter World War II.

Late in the school year, Russ made a routine decision that would reroute his life. During the two previous summers, he’d worked at Glacier National Park in Montana. For the summer of ‘42, he switched to Mt. Rainier National Park in Washington, where he would manage some guest cabins.

The park surrounds its namesake, a massive volcanic peak topping 14,000 feet above sea level, the highest in the Cascade Range. Tourists pick words like, “awesome” and “magnificent.” Deep glaciers descend solid rock slopes. At the timberline, a wilderness of spruce and alpine fir gives way to dense blue wildflowers, especially in a meadow named Paradise.

There, in 1917, the Park Service opened the rustic Paradise Inn. It had a high A-frame roof, gray exterior walls, and a natural wood interior. Back in the 1940s, guests gathered in its long two-story lobby called the Great Room. A tall stone fireplace warmed the far end. Hand-painted lamp shades hung from beams above. Tree trunk pillars rose from the floor, holding up the roof and a second-floor mezzanine. Half way down the side of the main floor stood a heavy, upright pinewood piano.

Members of the Depression-era work program, the Civilian Conservation Corps, or “CCC”, relaxed in that big lobby at night, sleeves rolled up high, showing off tan muscular arms. In daytime, they built trails and cleared brush until drafted into the military. They were the “babe magnets” of their day, entertaining the lobby crowd with dance steps that kids from Eugene, Oregon, and Spokane, Washington, had only seen at the movies. The war

accelerated passions as young men and women urgently knew they might never see each other again. The CCC guys would swing the gals around their waists and between their legs. For the slow dance, they'd hold their partners scandalously close, barely move, and sometimes make out to the music. The lodge staff jokingly called that "The Mt. Rainier Stomp," and quickly adopted the practice. Russ and friends would watch from the rear mezzanine.

Up there, one June night, they locked-in on the lobby's newest feature, a stunning redhead playing the pinewood piano below. She sang hit songs. And to those lonely college boys, that woman looked and sounded good enough to perform with the famous Glenn Miller band. "Who – is – that?" said the amazed friend. "I am sure going to find out!" Russ almost shouted.

Russ knew he'd have plenty of competition for her attention. Males, including the Romeos of the CCC, far outnumbered females there. He cautiously inquired about the singer. Her name was Phyllis Smith, "Phyl" to her friends. She waited tables at the Paradise Inn restaurant, having arrived from Washington State College. Russ found an obstacle: Phyl had twenty-one years on her, versus his eighteen-and-a-half. During that period, a woman dating a

man almost three years her junior was viewed as an act of desperation.

If that wasn't enough, Phyl flashed an engagement ring, given by one Bob Clauson, the well-off heir to a department store located across the state in Spokane. The ebullient coed loved to flirt, but showed firm reluctance beyond that. Russ chatted with her enough to observe high intelligence and an infectious laugh.

He shifted into courting overdrive. Over the summer, long walks (and more) in the wildflower meadows combined with Russ' good looks and sense of humor to win Phyl's heart. They also liked the dances! Poor Bob Clauson was hundreds of miles away, high and dry in the deserts of Eastern Washington.

Phyl relayed the story of new love to her parents. *They* happened to like *Bob* a great deal. Waldo and Margaret Smith arranged to drive six hours from Spokane to take a firsthand look at what the heck was going on at Mt. Rainier National Park. Phyl informed Russ he would meet them for dinner at Paradise Inn.

In the hour before that high stress engagement, Russ dressed-up in his little cabin, miles away, borrowed a car,

and roared up the mountain. He resolved to arrive on time for what could be the most important meal of his life.

The final stretch to Paradise was narrow, with nasty switchbacks, cluttered with sharp rocks. They frequently punctured tires. Just below the lodge, Russ saw a car jacked-up on the roadside, a flat tire next to it. An older man struggled to mount a spare. Checking his watch, Russ thought, “Just keep going.” That didn’t seem right. Russ hit the brakes. He finished the tire change so rapidly that not even names were exchanged. The man did say, “Thanks, Bub!” Russ sped on. He did stop to wash grime off his hands before hoofing it through the dining room doors, almost on time.

Phyl waved him to the table. Her father appeared to be just sitting down, and turned to greet Russ. To the stunned suitor, Waldo Smith grinned, extended his right hand and greeted, “Hi, Bub!” Russ had just met, for the second time, the man with the flat tire.

That dinner went very well.

By the end of 1942, Phyl wore Russ’ engagement ring. She lied about her age the rest of her life.

The Army called up the Enlisted Reserve Corps. Russ said farewell to Phyl and college and rolled east in a military

railroad car, headed for basic training. With a Sharpshooter medal on his chest, he became a specialist in the Browning Automatic Rifle, a heavy, handheld machine gun. At not quite 19, he was on a direct course to a combat zone.

On yet another troop train, headed west, in the middle of the night, an officer unexpectedly shook that sharpshooter awake, then ordered him off. Against written orders, he was stationed at an Army Air Forces bomber base in Harvard, Nebraska. “I’d never heard of the damn place,” Russ told friends. He described that country as flatter, dustier, hotter and more humid than anything he had suffered before. But he saw the futility of arguing against the assignment. He came to appreciate the Army’s mistake. The rest of his infantry unit ended up in North Africa, and as he later explained, “It was shot to hell.” Russ Fryburg’s war meant flight planning in Nebraska, the gruesome task of riding the air base crash truck and writing love letters to his fiancé. The biggest threat in Harvard seemed to be Pvt. Fryburg’s allergies – and someone who outranked him. Capt. Bob Clauson served at the same airfield! Russ described Bob as, “a perfect gentleman.” (The record does not indicate if Phyl encountered Bob there.)

After Russ made the rank of corporal in 1944, he and Phyl married. Seven years later, the war behind them, she

gave birth to me in Oregon. I was raised with laughter and much love by the mom who Russ, now just “Dad”, first saw from that mezzanine in the Cascade mountains.

Fifty years ago, I left their nest in Eugene and moved to Roanoke, Virginia, hungry for news reporter jobs at WROV Radio, and then WDBJ-TV. I married a witty Appalachian Red Cross nurse, Laura Anne James. She’s not a bad singer either. In 1989, I dragged my southern-speaking family to Oregon for 33 years. In August of last year, Laura and I came full circle, happily retiring in Botetourt County, Virginia, where she grew up.

While still on the West Coast, I finally made a pilgrimage to Mt. Rainier National Park. The mountain does look magnificent. Laura and I drove past the cabins Dad managed, then up the switchbacks to Paradise Inn. We heard a local history expert, a Park Ranger, lecture in the Great Room in front of the stone fireplace. Afterwards, I told the ranger my parents had met there. He said he often heard that from visitors.

I pointed to a big yellow wood piano about halfway down the side of the room.

“Would that piano have been there in 1942?” I asked.

“Sure thing.” he replied. “It arrived a few years after the inn was built.”

“And it’s always been in that spot over there?”

“Yes. I believe so. I have a photo of it sitting there in the 1920s.”

I took a deep breath, turned, and looked directly up into the rear mezzanine.

“Thank you, Dad!” was all I could say.

Eulogy for an Old Man

by Chrissie Anderson Peters

I have been holed-up in a hotel room since the wee hours of Monday morning, after my stepfather's death on Sunday night. Ted and I were frequently at odds, yet, in the year since my mother died, I've come to realize that, although his methods were often questionable, and his delivery methods often gruff (far more so than they needed to be), there were some isolated good times.

He taught me to cook. He taught me to fish, even to put the worm on the hook and remove the fish when I caught it – and we fished “for real,” in open streams, not in trout ponds. He introduced me to true seafood buffets. It was with him that I caught my first glimpses of the White House and other DC landmarks from the Beltway, as he struggled to figure out how to get off the loop we were on because he had forgotten the roads in the years since he had lived in the area but wouldn't admit it. He tried to teach me how to sew, quilt, and crochet, but those didn't take. He provided for me. For a price, for sure, but he provided for me.

Whenever I had car trouble, he worked on my car. He knew everything about cars. Of course, so did my Papaw, only two years older than Ted. Only, often, the “everything”

that each of them knew was different from the “everything” that the other knew. Which was always a bit disconcerting when my Escort's engine sat on the ground while they argued about what came next.

Ted grew up during The Depression, a time when people held on to everything. And he did. Even emotional baggage. And a kid doesn't know how to move around so many suitcases that never get unpacked. Our “family” dynamics made us especially dysfunctional. Four generations in the same house once my half-sister came along. Mom and I were often held in Ted's anger, but also frequently, Ted and I were held hostage in some corner against something that Mom was trying to work through. Maybe they both taught me a lot about standing on my own and working out my own issues, about not letting anyone pit me against anyone else, to truly survive. I'm not speaking ill of the dead. It taught me independence and self-survival on a crucial level.

I don't believe in elevating the dead to sainthood. I try not to vilify them, either. Upon death, I try hard to see people for who they were. Chances are, I sainted or vilified them more than enough while they were living. That was certainly the case with Ted. It was easier to hate than to continuously fail to communicate with him. I always said, from a very young age, that, when he died, I would throw a party. That was thirty-five years ago. And I realized this

week, there is nothing left to celebrate. My mother is dead. My sister is lost. And my life turned out better than I ever dreamed, thanks to letting go of mistrust of father-figures in my life. Any school-girl grudges disappeared more than verbally a long time ago. In the end, Ted was a tortured soul trapped in the past by dementia – he more than paid his dues; and I was “Mary,” or “that girl that lives in Tennessee,” but either way, I was free.

So, today, I celebrate the life of a brave man who fought for his country, a country that volunteered him to work with the atomic bomb in Pearl Harbor and didn't complain about it. I celebrate, as my cousin Andy called him, one of the hardest workers I ever knew. And he would truly try his head and hand at anything -- emus, llamas, snowplows, all well past the age when he should have. “Let me say it like this...” Ted was a legend of sorts who had a hard-scrabble life. His Mom died when he was three. His paternal grandmother raised him, because his father's second wife didn't want him raised with her children. Baggage. He's being buried beside his first wife because his former mother-in-law bought graves together for *her* family before his second wife and only child came along. Even in death, we're a dysfunctional family. But maybe what matters in the end is just that we were a family. Yeah. “Let's say it like this” – that's really all that matters.

Notes from Authors

R. R. Beach is the author of two novels: *The Number of Things* (130 Ink) and *Discobulated* (unpublished). His poems have appeared in *Wildwood*, *Diptych*, *Lyric*, and *Valley Voices*; and he annually attends the Highland Summer Conference at Selu and Radford University.

Kohava Blount, a dedicated, enthusiastic, and multilingual author and poet, has had work continually published in newspapers, literary journals, and magazines since the age of eleven. Through varying themes of subject matter, she fervently seeks to inspire, to uplift, and to rouse thought into the human condition and the innumerable marvels of creation. In addition to writing, Blount holds a strong passion for volunteering in the community and serving as a medic/first-responder on the side. Further favored pursuits include composing and performing musical works, playing sports, creating artwork, singing, reading, and cooking.

Katherine Chantal's avocation is writing about her aging days as she lives each one authentically and deeply, in these beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. A "philosopher poet," she has five published books, including two poetic memoirs, one just recently available. Contact: moonflwr@swva.net.

Sam Dixon: I am always looking up. And often in a forlorn way. Perhaps both are the fateful predisposition of poets. For me, this might be a quick glance through my car windshield at the condition of the sky on Interstate 81, hoping that black turns to clear blue. Or a glimpse at the ominous heavy undergirding of a bridge when passing beneath. Then at times I feel the absolute enormity of a great Appalachian mountain rising beside me during a neighborhood walk. One midnight crawling out of a tent I gaped open-mouthed at the immensity of a zillion stars above a sugarcane field in Taiwan. The "Witch Hazel" poem came about during an afternoon alone on Southwest Virginia's High Knob. While

lying on my back in a meadow, I gazed up into a sky splintered by branches of the witch hazel tree next to me, wondering why it is so darn difficult to find and keep love. Sometimes writing poems can be soothing solace.

Piper Durrell usually writes poems based on the beauty she sees around her, on her travels, and in her memories. Sometimes that beauty is intermingled with fragility or sadness.

Mark Fryburg: For decades, I have told the saga of my parents' World War II courtship to amazed friends and relatives. Their reactions (typically, "Wow! Is that *really* true?") convinced me the tale is too good not to share with a wider audience. I'm still hooked on the narrative's romance, dramatic twists and surprises. The Clinch Mountain Review memoir evolved from a seven minute oral presentation I gave at a storytelling event marking Father's Day, with the required theme, "Daddy Knows Best". After assembling this story, I have nothing but gratitude for my Dad's great judgement as a young man, starting with his choice of a mate, and her wise choice of him.

Louis Gallo: Seven volumes of Louis Gallo's poetry, *Archaeology*, *Scherzo Furiant*, *Crash*, *Clearing the Attic*, *Ghostly Demarcation & The Pandemic Papers*, *Why is there Something Rather than Nothing?* and *Leeway & Advent*. Two volumes of short fiction, *Flash Gardens I* and *II* are also recently published. His work appears in Best Short Fiction 2020. A novella, "The Art Deco Lung," appears in *Storylandia*. National Public Radio aired a reading and discussion of his poetry on its "With Good Reason" series (December 2020). His work has appeared or will shortly appear in *Wide Awake in the Pelican State* (LSU anthology), *Southern Literary Review*, *Fiction Fix*, *Glimmer Train*, *Hollins Critic*, *Rattle*, *Southern Quarterly*, *Litro*, *New Orleans Review*, *Xavier Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Missouri Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Texas Review*, *Utopia*

Science Fiction Magazine, Baltimore Review, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, The Ledge, storySouth, Houston Literary Review, Tampa Review, Raving Dove, The Journal (Ohio), Greensboro Review, and many others. Chapbooks include *The Truth Changes*, *The Abomination of Fascination*, *Status Updates* and *The Ten Most Important Questions of the Twentieth Century*. He is the founding editor of the now defunct journals, *The Barataria Review* and *Books: A New Orleans Review*. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize several times. He is the recipient of NEA grants for fiction and Poets in the Schools. He teaches at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. He is a native of New Orleans.

Fred Gordon was a Literature and Language Arts teacher for over 25 years and served as Poetry Editor for "Stories for Children" online magazine. He has published and written in many genres from blogging to freelancing to writing stories on autism. His work has appeared in Agape Review, Clinch Mountain Review, The Moonwort Review, Poetry Superhighway, Salt River Review, Friction Magazine, The Writer's Hood, and Muse Apprentice Guild as well as *Skipping Stones*, *Turtle Trails and Tales*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Dog Living*, and *I Love Cats* magazines.

W.D. Mainous II is currently working on a Masters in Creative Writing. He works as a tutor and in healthcare. His work has appeared in Odes and Elegies, The Windward and Rivers Edge and several others including Jimson Weed (Fall 2022).

Marjie Gowdy: On a farm, death and life are ever-present. Yesterday in mid-September, I watched as a swallowtail laid her eggs under a daisy's petals, then floated to the ground and died. These poems reflect the joys of life – the horse Bear's favorite hillside retreat – and the vigil for death, as young women prepare for war and young men exist now only in photographs. I'm grateful for this Blue Ridge mountain life and the insights it presents to me as gifts.

Linda Hudson Hoagland of Tazewell, Virginia, has won acclaim for her mystery novels that include the recent *Dangerous Shadow*, *Snooping Can Be Scary*, *Snooping Can Be Uncomfortable*, *Onward & Upward*, *Missing Sammy*, *An Unjust Court*, *Snooping Can Be Helpful – Sometimes* and *Snooping Can Be Regrettable*. She is also the author of works of nonfiction, 4 collections of short writings along with 4 volumes of poems. Hoagland has won numerous awards for her work, including first place for the Pearl S. Buck Award for Social Change and the Sherwood Anderson Short Story Contest. She won first place in 3 categories at the 2020 Chautauqua Festival that included Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry. Her work has appeared in many anthologies.

Cathy Rigg Monetti is a writer, blogger and maker who heartily advocates the joys of living a creative life. Her work has appeared in *Litmosphere: Journal of Charlotte Lit*, *Still: the Journal*, and *Clinch Mountain Review*, and short stories were finalists for the *Doris Betts Fiction Prize* (2023) and *Lit/South* (2023). She has recently finished her first novel, a work of historical fiction set in the mountains of Southwest Virginia at the time of the Civil War. Online: cathyriggwriter.com

Chrissie Anderson Peters lives in Bristol, TN, with her husband and four feline sons. Her passions include anything from the 80's and traveling. Her work appears in magazines and journals including *Still: The Journal*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Mildred Haun Review*, and is forthcoming in *Salvation South*. She is included in the ghost story anthology *23 Tales: Appalachian Ghost Stories, Legends, and Other Mysteries*, due out in September 2023 by Howling Hills Publishing. She is the author of three self-published books, and you can learn more about those and her other writing on her website, www.CAPWrites.com.

Phyllis Price's work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Artemis*, *Poem*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, and others. Other publications include the chapbook, *Quarry Song*, and spiritual autobiography, *Holy Fire*. She lives on a small farm in Blacksburg, VA.

Frank Shortt was born in 1942 at Shortt Gap, Virginia in a coal mining family. He joined the USAF in 1960 during the Cold War/Vietnam Crisis with a final discharge in 1966. He retired from the San Jose, California school department as a Chief of Operations in 2000. Since then, he has attended college, writes for a San Jose newspaper, three college journals, for an online magazine *The Spectator*, contributed to the *Virginia Mountaineer* in Grundy, Virginia, and continues to write for *The Voice* newspaper in Buchanan County, Va. He has two daughters, four grandchildren, and one great-grandson living in Texas. His hobby is, of all things, writing! Frank continues to write constantly at 81 years of age.

Matthew J. Spireng: My full-length poetry book *Good Work* won the 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize and was published in 2020 by Evening Street Press. My book *What Focus Is* was published in 2011 by WordTech Communications. My book *Out of Body* won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. My published chapbooks are: *Clear Cut*; *Young Farmer*; *Encounters*; *Inspiration Point*, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*. Since 1990, my poems have appeared in publications across the United States in such places in addition to *The Clinch Mountain Review* as *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Poet Lore*. I am an 11-time Pushcart Prize nominee and winner of *The MacGuffin's* 23rd Annual Poet Hunt Contest in 2018 and the 2015 *Common*

Ground Review poetry contest. I hold an M.A. from Hollins College (now Hollins University).

Maddie M. White: This area, these people, they are home. I'm so blessed to be able to live my life here. Thank you Mom, Dad, Shawn, and all of my family for making this place rich with memories and love.

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