

Clinch Mountain Review 2024

Notes about *Clinch Mountain Review*

Welcome to the *Clinch Mountain Review* for 2024. The *Clinch Mountain Review* is the literary review of Southwest Virginia Community College and features poetry, fiction, and memoir.

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. Additionally, cover art can also be submitted. Submission guidelines can be found on the *CMR* website: <http://www.sw.edu/cmr>.

S. Russell Wood, Editor

August 2024

Clinch Mountain Review 2024

Cover Art by Kohava Blount

Cover Art Design by John Dezember

Copyright 2024 *Clinch Mountain Review*

All rights to works in *Clinch Mountain Review* revert to individual authors after publication herein. Authors should cite *Clinch Mountain Review* as place of original publication when republishing a work elsewhere.

Cover Letter	Craig Kurtz	3
Snuffboxes	Craig Kurtz	7
Nostalgia and the Sky	Dustin King	9
Alligator Pear	Lou Gallo	12
Music	Lou Gallo	13
Elegy for Barns	Gretchen McCroskey	16
A Fence of Words	Gretchen McCroskey	18
Lucha Dome	Kevin McDaniel	20
Illuminations	Matthew J. Spireng	21
Pseudo Soulmate	Kohava Blount	22
What We Are Dealt	Bob Foster	23
Destruction of Home	Caitlyn Russell	25
Ah-ah-ah	Linda Hudson Hoagland	27
Garden	Ashlee Taylor	28
Sitting in a Chair	Cody Hester	29
When Johnson Came to	Les Epstein	31
Sliding	Justin Askins	33
Wild Bobby Wade	Dustin King	35
Winter Walk	Jenny Horton	39
I and You	Julie Blevins	41
Towhee at Spring Box	Marjorie Gowdy	43
Two Geese	Mark Fryburg	44
Blackberry Winter	Tom Cooper	45
From Buffalo Mountain	Katherine Chantal	48
Fire and Water	Piper Durrell	53
The Storm	Linda Hudson Hoagland	56
After the Storm	Gretchen McCroskey	67

Poetry

Cover Letter

By Craig Kurtz

Some people praise veracity
and that's their business, verily;
the principled stand we applaud
and swear we all deplore a fraud.

But practice often demonstrates
it's better not to tempt the fates;
consider Touchstone when he used
diplomacy which sounds confused.*

It's rather rare people object
to flattery when they connect;
and likewise we all tend to pose
whichever way the beau monde goes.

No gentleman cares to be called

advanced in years, obese or bald;
no proper lady will submit
to nat'ral tints for her portrait.

We like perruques, rouge and colognes
and girdles neither sex disowns;
it's better if we look our best —
there's no point getting all depressed.

The 'back to nature' mode is fine
such as the Hameau de la Reine;* *
but if my vanities decrease,
I will be calling the police.

We all like our prerogatives —
who cares how the other half lives?;
opinions come, and get replaced —
what counts is, do they have good taste?

We say we don't want ambages
but don't deny our privileges;
if I would like to get published
this sort of talk I should desist.

Sincerity's a toss of dice —
it's better if we all look nice;
nobody wants to hear bad news
so take care with the words you use.

Ill nature makes a little wit —***
the trick is knowing when to quit;
admonishment is always what
you get from rotten scuttlebutt.

It's always gauche to ask one's age
or, even worse, about their wage;
we'll not be talking Trump, or we'll
require a big fat chill pill.

In order to remain civil
we all must endure some drivel;
I'll not be disingenuous
when I say we need artifice.

* *As You Like It*, "Upon a lie seven times removed"
speech, act V, sc. IV.

** Marie Antoinette's custom-designed rural commune.

*** "[T]here's no possibility of being witty without a
little ill nature."— Richard Sheridan, *The School for
Scandal*, act I, sc. I.

Snuffboxes

By Craig Kurtz

I wouldn't want to go two blocks
without the use of my snuffbox;
it's flummery with the beau monde
and more and more the hordes are fond;
they say the Queen did fancy one
and likewise did Napoleon;
how did we ever get through life
before snuffboxes were so rife?

You take a pinch right up the nose —
make sure to strike a handsome pose;
of course there is a proper way
to utilize one with cachet;
please note that some have cute designs
which show which way your style inclines;
the more expensive is the best

to make sure ev'ryone's impressed.
To whip one out was once poor form
but now it is the social norm;
it seems democracy's agreed
the instant huff doth supersede;
and anywhere, you'll get no flack —
it's even employed on horseback;
I've seen two lovers yank them out
and each one gratify their snout.

A few years back, you never saw
snuffboxes stuck to ev'ry jaw;
but now they are ubiquitous,
that usage insalubrious;
it's like we're puppets on a string,
oblivious to everything;
it's very sad how people will
be made a slave to a small thrill.

Nostalgia and the Sky

By Dustin King

Every work of art is a self-portrait so I place the straw
hat

(the one Cousin Coco gave me in some far-off city
overtaken by mist)

on my head and check my look in the mirror like Van
Gogh,

who wrote poems without words, just punctuation,
golden, lavender

periods, dashes, commas. He was mad as a hatter but is
it sane

to love sky more than family because it will always be
there?

Today, I believe they're up there.

That storm cloud looks more sarcastic than grumpy,
so that's cousin Jon.

Imagine the carpet they rolled out for Aunt Chris,

the flowers tossed to her feet, the applause,
our and now their exalted Italian angel.

Mothers wear so many hats, clutch them to their heads
so they won't fly,

hidden bills sewn in the lining. There was earth and
seed on the brim,

garlic and tomato vine sprouting. The crown, concave,
shaped for harvest.

Flip it and serve pasta, the weave too tight to leak sauce.

Each year the disc extends, children and grandchildren
sheltered from storms

that bark and belch like so many husbands and
grandfathers.

Can we forgive the thunder for the lightning?

Sometimes art is silly and Coco knew a hat could make
you imagine yourself someone else,

elsewhere, as well as wine or a passed joint could so
she'd hand them out, gaudy,

to every family member, feathers and flowers spilling
from the bands.

Cousin Jon stopped laughing at you and laughed with
you.

Aunt Chris closed her eyes, angled the brim to the
clearing heavens,

the light on her face as warm as the rising chatter of
progeny.

Alligator Pear

By Lou Gallo

When I pick them out of the store bin
I gently squeeze each one that I know
will ripen to the exact texture I crave.
Takes half an hour or so of squeezing.

Back home it goes onto the counter
and will be ready to peel tomorrow
when I will cut off chunks with a knife
douse them with virgin olive oil
and apple cider vinegar and sprinkle on
some herbs and black pepper (no salt).
Ah!

Usually I scale off the skin from the pod,
my fingers slimy green, and toss it
along with mealy remnants into the trash.

But yesterday I scraped off all the meat
and beheld a perfect sphere, the jewel
in the lotus, so to speak. How flawless
and smooth and beautiful, the globe.
I shall keep it in my desk drawer
until it starts to decay—or perhaps plant it,
though I don't think the climate here
will nurture. And the pale, tan color—
don't think I have ever seen that hue before.
I advocate avocados or, rather, alligator pears.

Music

By Lou Gallo

There's always music in my atmosphere
whether actually playing on some device
or re-playing in the strata of my mind—
from Ray Charles to Stephen Foster to Radiohead
or Bach, Mahler, Mozart and Beethoven,
a pastiche of glory from every direction
aside from the eternal music of the spheres,
origin of it all.

What is the soundtrack of your life?

I wanted to write a treatise on the mystery of music
but ditched that task to write this poem instead,
a poem about music and its uncanny magic
(like all art, really) to transmute sadness and grief
into monuments of beauty, to transcend its own
sadness and grief *if* it originates in those . . .
what would you call them? Emotions? Sensations?
Doesn't matter, you know what I mean—
which is why I prefer poetry to treatises.

What differentiates music from the other arts,
including poetry, is that it defies mimesis,
makes no pretense to replicate reality.
Oh, you may think bony “moonlight” when listening
to Ludwig but that's only because

it's called popularly "The Moonlight Sonata."
The word "moonlight" feebly attempts
to link the music to Diana.
But music exceeds the cosmos.
Words are conceptual and music is not—
unless you force the issue.
Even painting and sculpture, less conceptual,
still strive at depicting the world in some fashion,
even if surreally.

The score is not the music that resounds in your mind.
As Hass said of words, the score is elegy to what it
signifies.
Remember, Einstein (not a great mathematician but
better than me or you) played violin.
The ultimate question: what *is* music?
Mathematical schemata? Does nobody any good
to cite sound waves meeting eardrums.

*Just as my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the selfsame sounds
On my spirit make a music, too.*

*Music is feeling, then, not sound;
And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you . . .*

--Wallace Stevens

Ah, I like the sound of that. *Desiring you.*

Music is desire then, perpetual yearning
fulfilled only for the nonce, until the next crave
ransacks your equipoise, like friendly bombs.

Your mind is a tape recorder. Instead of the nightly
Now I lay Me Down to Sleep's you can prefer
Ravel's Pavane or that Moonlight Sonata
by thinking them.

But where and how does gray matter sustain
the notes always ready to be re-heard?
Beethoven wasn't deaf. His brain had ears.
So ditch the hearing aid unless you want to listen
to the latest news on Ukraine or Disney World.
Press PLAY and feast on mysteries.
If a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it,
does the crash make a sound?

I guess this has turned into a quasi-treatise after all.
Sorry about that, but you know how it is
when the call calls. You jot down the words
or the notes for others, not for you—
because they *are* you. Feed and be fed,
sow and harvest, listen, listen.

Elegy for Barns

By Gretchen McCroskey

Who will remember
the cool fragrance of barns—
 curing tobacco
 moldy hay
 worn leather and horse manure?

Storage building
 for bridles, hay rakes
 hand tobacco setters
 garden hoes, tobacco baskets
 strings of fodder twine
 rows of coiled rope.

Shelter
 where cows gorged
 at hay-filled mangers
 in winter, and horses
 slept away the cold
 on straw pallets.

Storytelling centers
 in Rich Valley, Moccasin Gap,
 and Green Springs where men
 stripping cured tobacco leaves
 bragged about coon hunts

and panther calls.

Abandoned timbers, discolored
and decaying, fall to earth—
graves without markers
ghosts of an agricultural past.

A Fence of Words

By Gretchen McCroskey

I'm going to string these words
taut as barbed wire between
neighboring farms. These words
will glow like silver barbs catching light—
sing gossip as titillating as farmers' talk
while men rest, leaning on hoe handles.

*Did you hear Nan tell
how Jake Taylor's kids
been smelling like "weed"
ever since Jake's wife deposited
\$10,000 in Wells Fargo Bank?*

*What about that Gracie
Withers? She's been sent
out West to have Grover
Singleton's baby.*

*I've heard that Ted Blevins's
truck has been parked at
Lucille Cummins' house
every night since her husband's
been working out of town.*

Like fences worn down by long necks

of horses straining for greener grass,
these lines sag under boundless words
prying into country prattle.

Lucha Dome

By Kevin McDaniel

People pay to see
The World's Tallest Wrestler,
Renaissance Horsemen,
Barefoot Jack in plaid,

Demon Kate's
kaleidoscopic red contacts,
Legsy Steel scissoring
her humongous calves.

Black concrete walls,
duct tape covering a hole
in the gray wrestling mat
is like a rip in fabric of fantasy.

Fans have a right to cuss
villains like Mad Man Folton.
Ropes are red, white, and blue.

The gaunt guy finds a way,
smashing a fluorescent tube
across Behemoth's hairy back.

Let us all forget Kate
having her daily bread in her car
before a match ever begins.

Illuminations

By Matthew J Spireng

He tried to paint pictures with words,
but a century later his language seemed old,
words heavy on the page. Still,

the illuminations were bright, black
and white though they were, and there were
those who were drawn to the pages, glancing

at his poems in passing while admiring
scenes illustrated with skill that
outlasted the words that inspired them.

Pseudo Soulmate

By Kohava Blount

Illuminated glimpse in a
momentary molding. As souls
enmesh amid sanguine
connection. Transient reverie;
mutual musing crafting idealized
harmony.

Highest extent of purity
cultivated in consecrated endeavor.
Until the consequent break of dawn
unveils the pulsating crypt laden;
ensnared and solely pithily obscured.
Yearnings for a deliberate devotion dispelled in natural
rift.

Fleeting encounter lapsed
Solitary descent into the proceeding.
Spirits redirected;
Ensuing passage in unified progression.

What We Are Dealt

for Doc and Joyce

By Bob Foster

Tonight,
your father and I
crack Wild Turkey,
play poker badly,
and I find myself
heart-hungry,
though I love the man
too sentimental
to discard
his queens.

Later,
I dream
bubbles in your aquarium
are your voice, whispering,
one... one... one...

as they shoulder
past violet fish
and burst.

Plumbing
nighttime waters,
our union finned the stream.

Subtending sunken treasure,
refraction casts
a fractured beam.

The Destruction of Home

By Caitlyn Russell

Thistle and thorn on cobblestone floors

Broken promises scattered about

Ashes piled up from all of our wars

Cobwebs accrued like all my self doubt

Letters we wrote so tirelessly

Nothing more than kindling now

Battalions fell to insurgency

Bombing laid waste to all of our vows

Rotting here, in the garden I lie

My soul demolished in the fire

Sheltered in weeds, enveloped by sky

Lost in the sound of heartbreaks choir

Roots and rot wrap round the cold carcass
All that's left of who we were before
Decaying alone in the darkness
Blood still clotting from the wounds you tore

Apologies rained down like water
On withered and brittle forest ground
Earth left infertile from the slaughter
Life would not grow, I would only drown

Ah-ah-ah

By Linda Hudson Hoagland

My lady just had to go walking
to be healthy in miserably
hot weather. To me, Bobo the dog,
the only thing healthy about this
two-mile, steaming pavement trek was when
we arrived at the parking lot and
I dived into the ice cubes that had
been emptied from a cooler. “Ah-ah-ah.”

Garden

By Ashlee Taylor

Garden filled with fairies and pixies

Air filled with a floral aroma

Radiant colors in varying shapes and sizes in full bloom

Dancing in the warm summer sun

Enduring the heat of the season with a cool summer
shower

New summer solstice brings a fresh conservatory

Sitting in a Chair in Chilhowie, Virginia

By Cody Hester

At the back of Chilhowie
Between the rough blue ridges
Low-flowing hills are covered in
Round hay bales corralled by a fence line
A house in the middle
A cabin to the side
A quaint place to reside

Deer graze on the distant hilltop
As their fawns chase each other
Between the golden hay bales

Songbirds call all around throughout the trees
As a red-tail hawk circles above
And a woodpecker drums a faraway stump

The breeze blows beckoning calm misty rain

Welcomed in the heat of summer

There's no better place to be than in God's country

When Johnson came to James Road

By Les Epstein

I see him now as though through a tunnel,
a man of congressional wrinkles,
framed by black borders around a fading
technicolor vision of

a street so wide—
full of cars, trucks so fast
that no one could escape
these vehicular desperadoes
gunning for the new freeway only a block away.

Shaky as misfed film edging through a projector,
I see a sleek Lincoln-Continental limo
slowing down on the very street,

James, where in just a few years
we gambled our lives gamboling across
to a corner shop in pursuit of the latest Pete Rose

card or Spiderman issue
chockfull of snarky battles on newsprint
but that was much, much later
after a psychedelic sneak peek

of reaching to be a part great society
promised by the waving craggy figure
tiny—though tall I was later told---
seen over mobs gathered at gutter side.

Perhaps now I've an almost kaleidoscope view
gathered while upon my father's shoulders a balcony...
I looked skyward in fear of coming
sonic booms from the jets barking war's ahead.

Sliding

By Justin Askins

I have started to go through
A big cardboard container of old slides,
All stored away in paper and plastic
Boxes of yellow, blue, white and red:
The Big Horns and the Green Mountains,
The Northern California coast and Vancouver Island,
The Brooks Range and Yellowstone,
And oh so many more.
I want to put a few hundred on a flash drive,
But many thousands are being thrown away,
Tossed in the garbage like avocado skins,
Chicken bones or banana peels.
Now hardly able to walk up a slight grade
For 30 minutes, or lift more than 25 pounds,
I will not get back to the Neversink Gorge

Where I wrote a good portion of my dissertation
On Herman Melville's landscapes
While waiting for a mayfly hatch to begin,
Or the Poudre where I caught
Hundreds of browns and rainbows
And kayaked a number of class III rapids,
Or Bear Creek full of cutthroats
Where I taught my ex-wife to fly fish
After carrying her to a huge flat stone
In the middle of that tumbling creek.
Those slides sing the ballads of my life,
But so many of my songs are never to be
Sung again.

Wild Bobby Wade

By Dustin King

My brother's name is Colin but Bobby called him Tully.

Some say it was because he was hard of hearing

but he didn't nickname you, he renamed you

and each of us from Fincastle

would offer ourselves for the ritual

or pass him our children, one by one,

if he walked this town's streets again.

As a child, you recognize the adults

that never lost that bit of mischief in their eyes,

the ones you know won't mind a bit of ruckus

in the balcony on Sunday during the sermon.

They say there was a time he liked drinking,

moonshine from some mountain friend I bet.

Today I'd be afraid of the hangover
from the sweet wine he squeezed from grapes for
communion
but I envy those that heard the stories
he'd never tell sober to a youngster like me.

Here's one he did tell me-
Late one night, Bobby and his gang,
just boys in the early 20th century,
dis- and reassembled a horse-drawn carriage
on the roof of the town pharmacy.
Can you imagine the customers
in the light of day, there for their prescriptions?

He took me and Tully turtlin' once.
The stubborn mini-dinosaurs
chomped down on the twine-tied chicken thighs
he splashed out into the pond
and refused to let go.

He told me they could take a finger,
maybe a hand at the wrist at my age.
He pulled them in slowly, lifted them by the tail,
heaved them into the bed of his pick-up truck
where they prowled and snapped the air
until he parted their necks with a hatchet.
Yes, fried up, they tasted like their bait
but what's the fun in eating
what you can buy in a grocery store?

I never knew his occupation as a child, still don't.
I figured he just walked off into the forest
after black coffee in the morning,
yesterday's and last week's animal guts
and engine oil stains on his overalls,
to hunt deer or fossils, forage mushrooms,
track the decline in the local snake population,
wrap their shedded skin in elegy

around the brim of his hat.

I have city friends that never met him,
will never lay a flower on his grave,
who have never merged the clouds of milky way
and their breath in winter night sky,
never walked out into woods alone
to stand with its beasts
or wash their faces in creek,
friends who choose to believe the untruths
of what rural folk have brought down on a country.

But they'll ask me to retell these stories I've told you.

He would have stopped paying attention
from the start in a chattering group of them,
but you don't need context or to adjust your hearing aid
when anything you say will soon be the center of the
conversation.

Winter Walk

By Jenny Horton

Take note in winter

When leaves are absent from trees

See the empty nests

The small and larger

Woven with care and tucked in

Both high and lower

No house numbers, here

The tiny homes holding fast

In dogwood and oak

With dried grass and clay

And hair, sparkles, plastic trash

Reuse, recycle

A family home

For a season or many

It is for the birds!

I and you

By Julie Blevins

I go thousand mile per hour,

And yet you do not move.

I spin like the world around and around,

And yet you do not spin.

Not even like grin purple tin.

I hold my breath to breathe,

And yet you are underwater.

I would hold this blade for war,

And yet you would not for peace.

I see myself as a copy,

And yet you don't see yourself in a mirror.

I say these words are meaningless.

And yet you say they are drawn like a thin green trend.

I say there's nothing more,

Than the lightly falling snow.

And yet you say there is more to be seen.

But yet, when all is said and done.

I say you for I and you say I for you.

Towhee at the Spring Box

By Marjorie Gowdy

Seven springs on a hundred acres
Flattest pastures you've ever seen
Jump up mountain
with the deer

Along the fence line, a spring box
Quiet now, shares in shade its
cold clear water
with the towhee

Two hundred years back, they built here
Planted small sweet apple trees
Hired men. The bobcat
retreated up ridge

Songs at the spring box
Shape note
Cloaks of rust and black
Bow, flutter

Judgment free.

Two Geese

By Mark Fryburg

Gray layered sunset

Low flames from the fire pit

We sit, watching

Silently inviting darkness

In still air

A honking report

Above, to our left !

Two duskie zoom low

Overhead from nowhere

Wingtips almost touching

“It’s a sign,” you say

I reach for your hand

Blackberry Winter

by Tom Cooper

Early this evening in the cold, spring rain

Our dad splashes out through the yard for the night
shift

With two sandwiches in a brown paper bag

Swisher Sweet Cigars in his shirt pocket

A couple of dollars and some loose change.

He heads towards “Ol’ Yeller”, his faithful pickup truck

A 1974 International crew cab

Faded Sunburst Yellow, as rare as he is

Both worn and older now

With the same scars and honor of blue-collar work.

Blackberry Winter has come...

The last, long, cold rain of the season

Before spring comes in all its glory

And somehow, he has made it through
Just a few more days until he retires this year.

He may never know
How many times we watched him
Drive down the long gravel lane
To meet his crew at the plant
And the Mack trucks that ran through the night.

We said no one worked harder,
But perhaps there were a few
Other dads with calloused hands
But he was ours and we loved him so
Held him close at heart through the sun, rain, and snow.

Winter is almost gone now
And his life has been like that --
The years too hard and cold

But he goes on as rain kisses his cheek

Just a few more days until the spring.

From Buffalo Mountain to Croagh Patrick

Irish Pilgrimage 2024

By Katherine Chantal

Here in Ireland

St. Patrick's Mountain

Looms large in County Mayo

It occurs to me

I have traveled from the

Land of Buffalo Mountain

In the Blue Ridge Mountains

A place holding history

Spirit from centuries passed

Native peoples gathering to

Celebrate, give thanks

Their blessings upon a sacred

Mountaintop where

Views stretch miles

In all directions
Centuries later
We offer ritual, ceremony
On Celtic Holy Days
For earth's rhythms of
Seasonal changes
Buffalo Mountain, large
From afar, soft in the lay
Of its placement in landscape
Visible, palpable energy
Receptive recognition
Significance as a site
Deserving of honor

Here, in Ireland,
Croagh Patrick claims
Just such mystical awareness
Even before St. Patrick arrived

Druids gathered there
Celebrating passing of seasons
Today, and for centuries passed
The only pyramid shaped peak
(the only one so shaped
In a mountain range of softly
Rounded summits)
Croagh Patrick receives
Thousands of pilgrims
To walk the holy ground
In gratitude
A chapel sits at the top
From over 15 miles away
In my home for the month
I view this ancient mountain
Each day
A Guardian to all
Ever present, ever mysterious

Steeper than the Buffalo
Offering the same reverence
As barefoot, native peoples
Gave homage to such magnificence

Truly, all land is sacred
Mountains provide a unique
Awareness of grandeur
Encouraging humility, awe
Innate wisdom at their core
In their stature

Another way, another insight
As to why I traveled here
Reciprocity from across
Time and space
Sea and land
We are

One people of this Earth

Fire and Water

By Piper Durrell

Roaring Run is howling
water on a rampage
means no harm
wet fall, wet winter, thus
slippery muddy trails and fallen trees
roaring creeks, overflowing waterfalls
just following the rules of gravity
down until there is no more down.

Rivulets sliding
trickling here and there
every now and then
spawning enviable swimming holes.
We climb by, step up
sit on, misty moss and pitted rocks

walk under overhanging ledges
heading high up to the headwater waterfall
conversations muted by bellowing water
rippling downwards wherever it chooses.

Our path down ends
at an early 19th century furnace
hand built from blocks of local stone.
Iron ore, lime and charcoal once fed this furnace,
a furnace named Jane. An acre of forest
a forest that once surrounded this creek
would have been cleared every day to keep the fire
roaring.

Cackles of a raging furnace, hustling workers
created the iron needed for nails, staves, all
the armaments of war, including some of the
twenty million horseshoes used in the Civil War.

Slag, shiny and rough edged

still can be found

surrounding the furnace.

Today, as it has now for a century,

the furnace stands quiet

while the tumbling waters roar.

Fiction

The Storm

By Linda Hudson Hoagland

“Did you feel that?” asked Mattie as she brushed her hair back from covering her face.

“No, I didn’t feel anything,” responded Tommy.

“You didn’t feel that strong breeze. It felt more like a big fan blowing at me,” Mattie said.

“No, I think you’re imagining things,” said a skeptical Tommy.

“I really felt it. It blew my hair onto my face. It definitely wasn’t my imagination. It came from that direction,” said Mattie as she pointed to her left.

Tommy turned to see where she was pointing. His mouth dropped open when he saw the enormous black clouds that were racing toward them.

“It looks like there is a storm headed this way.

Maybe we should go back,” said Tommy.

“See – it wasn’t my imagination,” Mattie said smugly.

A streak of lightning was followed by a clap of thunder that roared over their heads.

The thunder was so loud that both of them jerked with fright. Then the sky opened up and the rain poured down on them with such a force that it felt like it was driving them to the ground.

“It’s too far to get back to your house. Is there any place we can go to find shelter from the down pour?” asked Tommy as he tried to shield his eyes from the unrelenting rain.

“I think there is a cave up ahead. It is tall enough for us to go inside and wait out the storm,” said Mattie.

“How far?”

“Not far, a few hundred feet maybe.”

They started running with Mattie leading the way.

The rain was falling so fast that there was no chance for the ground to soak it up. The rapidly moving water was lapping up around their ankles.

When they reached the cave, they ducked inside of it to rid themselves of the falling water. They looked around to see if any wild animals had also sought shelter. They didn't want to be chased out of the area by a bear or bobcat. It never occurred to them that the fact that there were no animals hiding out in the cave was because they instinctively knew what was about to happen.

Mattie started shaking from the cold water that was dripping off of her clothes. Tommy put his arm around her to try to warm her and stop the shakes. Mattie tried to back away but thought better of it. They were friends and she wanted it to stay that way; only friends, but she was so cold.

They stood huddled together for that seemed like hours. Tommy's arm on her shoulder felt comfortable. His body heat was warm and exciting but she only wanted to be friends.

"The water is starting to come into the cave," said Tommy as he extracted himself from her side.

“Let’s move a bit further inside,” said Mattie as she glanced around, again, to see that there were no animals waiting to attack her.

They backed up and searched for dryer earth. As they moved further into the cave, the water followed them.

“Maybe we should try to get on out of here,” suggested Tommy.

“How? Look at the rising water. We can’t get across that. It looks like a flood,” said Mattie.

“If we stay in this cave, we will drown and nobody will even know it,” explained Tommy,

“No, we won’t drown. Please don’t say that,”
said Mattie tearfully.

“If we stay in this cave, it will happen. Our
bodies will wash on down to the creek and then to the
river. Someone might find us floating down stream.”

“Look out there. The rain is beginning to
lighten up,” said Mattie. “Maybe the mud will wash on
down into the valley.”

“We’ll give it a few more minutes and then we
will try to get out of this cave so we can get back to your
house,” said Tommy in an official tone.

“Okay, but how long should we wait? We’ve
been here for quite a while, you know. All we can do is
wait and see.”

“Have you ever experienced a flood around here before today?” asked Tommy.

“No, we haven’t lived here for a lot of years. As a matter of fact, we moved into this area a few months ago,” said Mattie.

“Oh, that’s too bad,” said Tommy as he moved closer to the mouth of the cave so he could look around to see how far the water had risen. “I was hoping you could tell me if this ever happened previously so we would know if it is too dangerous to stay in this cave.”

The water had receded some from the cave opening and he could see the mud that had replaced the water.

“How does it look?” asked Mattie.

“Where did all of this mud come from?” asked Tommy.

“Up on the mountain, I guess. They are doing some excavation up there,” explained Mattie.

“Are they planning to build something up there?” asked Tommy.

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t want to live on top of Bear Mountain. I bet you can guess why it’s called Bear Mountain. Maybe they are doing some logging up there. That can cause a lot of mud.”

“Well, we need to get out of here.”

“Okay, but it’s going to be difficult crossing that mud,” said Mattie who had moved closer to Tommy so she could also look out of the cave.

“Look up there!”

“What?”

“Look at the trees toppling over. I think there is more water on the way down the mountain,” said a scared Tommy. “Let’s get out of here?” he shouted.

Mattie walked toward Tommy.

He pushed her forward.

“Go! March! Please don’t slow down!”
shouted Tommy.

“I can’t march. The mud is too deep. I have to move slow and keep pulling my feet up from the mud suction,” said Mattie.

“We have to keep going. The waters are rushing this way,” Tommy screamed.

“I’m trying” were the last words Mattie said.

Memoir

After the Storm

By Gretchen McCroskey

At the first clap of thunder, Aunt Mildred high-tailed it down the road to our house. But it was our house that had been struck by lightning before Aunt Mildred was born and when Grandma had told Daddy and all his siblings, “Children, climb up on the bed. You’ll be safer there.”

Daddy told the story many times how the bolt of lightning shot down the chimney in the room that Mama made into the dining room, but that Grandma used as a bedroom because the fireplace was a principal source of heat in those early days. Daddy said the

lightning killed every chicken under the house and it would have killed Grandma and Daddy and Uncle Clyde and Uncle Campbell and all the other aunts and uncles if Grandma hadn't urged precaution.

If that story lived on in Aunt Mildred's head, I'd think she would want to stay far away from our old farmhouse, but, no, when the sky darkened and the thunder began to roll, two occurrences were as certain as the electricity that would soon fill the air. One was Aunt Mildred running down the road – that is if Uncle Glenn was not at home, and the other was Daddy riding bareback on Ole Bird, the horse he had raised from a colt, to get out of the hills before the hail began to fall.

Mama was never as afraid of thunder and lightning as Aunt Mildred, but Mama had the premonition the house was going to blow away in a wind storm. If you've never experienced a storm in a 100-year-old, weather-boarded farmhouse with shaky windows and a tin roof, you've never really experienced a storm. And to make the wind more frightful, the towering walnut, maple, and hemlock trees would bend like aging human limbs, brushing the tin roof and the double-pane windows.

For farmers like my father and Uncle Glenn, the rains came as manna straight from the water bucket of God. It was better if a good "study" rain came. This was my father's description of a steady, continuous soaking

of plants and soil. But farmers also thanked God when the sky opened up and poured torrents on the dry, sun-parched fields. While the women folk crouched inside on straight-back chairs and rockers and beds, my father sat on the front porch, rolled his Prince Albert cigarette, crossed his short little bony legs and said, “Let her rain.”

And so I have learned to be both wary and reverent in the face of a storm, whether the storm is brewing raging weather in the natural world or in my own personal world. I can choose to take either the outlook of Aunt Mildred and Mama and fret and worry, or I can adopt the attitude of my father and know that storms must come in my life and that the internal rain may hold the promise of a future crop of joy and

abundant living. I regret that sometimes when difficult circumstances surround me, I mimic the perception of my mother and my aunt, but eventually, I think of my earthly father and realize that his attitude is in harmony with that of my heavenly father, and I can honestly say, “Let her rain.” I am convinced that a soaking of pain and sorrow will yield a richer crop of blessings.

Notes from Contributors

Justin Askins is a retired Professor of English at Radford University. His poems, photos, essays, and book reviews have appeared in many newspapers and journals, with his main interests being the natural world and environmental issues. His volume *The Legendary Neversink* was published by Skyhorse Press in 2007 and his chapbook *Changing Terrain* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2011.

Julie Blevins is a high school student. She likes reading and writing in her free time. She finds many things interesting from music to video games. She is in both FBLA and Envirothon. She wishes to start a field in both creative writing and teaching. She is currently working on writing her first fantasy novel.

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, a writer of many years, finds her aging days compel her to reflect and write her experiences about the monumental metamorphosis of becoming an elder. She has four published books. Her pilgrimage to Ireland this past spring has offered a new awareness of belonging, which has informed much of her current writings. Material for the next book! She lives in the beautiful, ever-flourishing Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Tom Cooper is a native of Virginia, born and raised in the Shenandoah Valley. His only published works thus far are here in the *Clinch Mountain Review* and in a few yearbooks and newsletters. Tom has been to trade school classes and a few colleges over the years, including Southwest Virginia Community College. Tom currently lives and works in southwestern Virginia. In his spare time (which is rare), he tries to write, do artwork, fix things, and tinker with all sorts of stuff, junk, and cars.

Piper Durrell uses poetry to express the joy and wonder she finds in nature. Many of her poems are based on what she sees/hears/ trips over on hikes near her home in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Les Epstein is a poet, playwright and opera librettist. Epstein's books include *Sleep Cinematic: A Golem's Quartet* (Gnashing Teeth), *Kip Divided* (Finishing Line) and *Lorenzo by the Ghost Light* (Gnashing Teeth). Gnashing Teeth will release his new book, *Teddy Orloff and the Three Onions* in March 2024. Recent credits include Slant, Empyrean, Otherwise Engaged, Clinch Mountain Review, and Jelly Bucket as well as the anthologies *Heat the Grease* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing), *Pain & Renewal* (Vita Brevis Press) and *Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology* (Local Gems Press). He teaches in Roanoke, VA.

Previously a resident of Montgomery County, **Bob Foster** is a native of Purcellville, Virginia. His poem, "What We Are Dealt," is dedicated to the memories of Doc and Joyce Ashby.

Mark Fryburg, age 73, is a very late bloomer. He hit the "reset button" when he, his bride Laura, and two pups returned to the Roanoke, Virginia, area in late 2022—after 33 years in Oregon. That sparked Mark's poetry, live storytelling, and other writing. This year, he won First Place in a Poetry Society of Virginia contest category, and Honorable Mention in *Passager Journal's* national contest, with publication late this year. You can also find Mark's

work in the 2024 *Journal of Medical Humanities* and the 2023 *Clinch Mountain Review*.

Lou Gallo: I regard almost all creative writing as autobiographical and, as such, can be excavated by the varied psychoanalytical critical methodologies. I liken myself as a creative writer to an archaeologist (one of my first volumes is entitled *ARCHAEOLOGY*) in a mine shaft excavating varied strata of meaning and experience. The shaft leads in myriad directions, most into the past, even remote past, and others into the present and future. When I excavate a load—either a memory, a word, an image, an epiphany of whatever kind, I elaborate on that source, a kind of motherload for the poem or story to come, by either straight narration or lyrical and surreal musings, letting them take me where they will. I lose rational control of the material and allow it to drag me to wherever it will. I also rely on memory mostly because I believe the past and present and future (as in dreams) all congeal into this singularity we call “NOW,” which in duration amounts to roughly two hundred milliseconds. How’s that for magic?

Marjorie Gowdy writes and paints on a Blue Ridge mountain farm in Callaway, Virginia. Author of three poetry chapbooks featuring her own illustrations, Marjie is inspired by our lush, rolling landscapes. This is a land which opens as a book with many pages, full of tales both exquisite and bittersweet. Her latest chapbook, “Pillow Fight,” was published in July 2024 by Prolific Press.

Cody Hester is from Marion, Virginia, and currently lives in Abingdon, Virginia, with his wife, Abby. He graduated with his bachelor's at Virginia Tech in 2021 and is completing an MFA in Creative Writing at Liberty University. Cody teaches Literature at Cornerstone Christian Academy. He loves to write poetry about many topics and finds inspiration from Appalachia.

Linda Hudson Hoagland, a regional writer from Tazewell, Virginia, has written many mystery novels along with works of nonfiction, 5 collections of short writings and 5 volumes of poems. Short stories and poems are her favorite pastime, and she has won many awards as well as being published.

Jenny Horton is an academic librarian who enjoys the creative and performing arts, literature, and gardening. She lived the first 40 years of her life in southwest Virginia and now lives in central Virginia with her husband, her dog, hummingbirds, and a peony garden. These are her first published poems.

Dustin King was born and raised in Fincastle, Va. Now he teaches Spanish and plays backgammon in Richmond. His poems pop up in *The Potomac Review*, *Ligeia*, *The Tusculum Review*, *Sublunary Review*, and other spots.

Craig Kurtz is the author of *The Better Sort*, a decades' collection of lyrics (available through the antichrist of retail). His work has been featured in diverse publications such as *Dalhousie Review*, *Crannóg*, *Stand* and *Quadrant*. He first came to prominence with the post-punk band the Philosophic Collage in 1981.

Gretchen McCroskey retired as Associate Professor of English at Northeast State Community College in 2011. Her poetry has been published in a number of regional journals. Her most recent publications are included in *The Southern Poetry Anthology: Vol. IX: Virginia*.

Kevin J. McDaniel lives in Pulaski, Virginia.

Caitlyn Russell is a proud Russell County native and lover of all things Appalachian. She lives in Bristol, VA with her husband and three young children. Poetry has been her lifeline throughout her youth and recent postpartum experiences. At the age of 26, Russell celebrates her first publication.

Matthew J. Spireng's full-length poetry book *Good Work* won the 2019 Sinclair Poetry Prize and was published in 2020 by Evening Street Press. Spireng's book *What Focus Is* was published in 2011 by WordTech Communications. Spireng's book *Out of Body* won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. 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, Spireng's poems have appeared in publications across the United States in such places as *The Clinch Mountain Review*, *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Poet Lore*. Spireng is a 12-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. Spireng holds an M.A. from Hollins College (now Hollins University).

Ashlee Taylor: I am an optometric physician at Eye Physicians of Southwest Virginia. I received my Doctorate of Optometry from the University of Pikeville-Kentucky College of Optometry and my Bachelor of Science in Biology from The University of Virginia's College at Wise. In my free time, I enjoy writing, photography, painting, drawing, embroidering, biking, hiking, and walking, and listening to records as well as live music. I also enjoy spending time with friends and family and traveling.

Southwest Virginia Community College does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status in its programs, activities, employment, and admission.