Notes about *The Clinch Mountain Review*

In 2019, *The Clinch Mountain Review*, the literary review of Southwest Virginia Community College, celebrates its fifteenth year of publication. *The Clinch Mountain Review* presents authors who have a tie to the southwestern Appalachian region of Virginia. In these pages, you will find poems, short stories, and memoirs. Some are humorous; others are poignant. I hope you find something that delights.

Additionally, I want to remind CMR readers that the editor of the *Clinch Mountain Review* accepts submissions from authors and artists who live, work, or have a tie to southwest Virginia. Submission guidelines can be found on *The Clinch Mountain Review* website: [http://www.sw.edu/cmr](http://www.sw.edu/cmr).

S. Russell Wood, Editor
Fall 2019

*The Clinch Mountain Review 2019*

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POETRY

Christmas Morning Coming Down

(Floyd, VA, 2018)

By Joseph Womack

At Xpress Mart, no thirsty vehicles fill up this morning;

no one moves inward through the doors with anticipation;

no one moves outward with satisfaction.

Even Hardee’s lacks movement this morning.

Outside no cars line up to give their drivers the opportunity to bark orders into a voice box surrounded by pictures of the offerings.

Today all that is offered is a lifeless cold stare from the pane of a locked window.

Inside no burgers sizzle with charbroiling;

no fries grow golden with deep frying;

no drinks flow from the levers that release them.
Usually the tables are the middle of the fellowship of friends eating and gesturing as they fill the air with words; now the tables stand alone--mute, stiff, silent.

Two churches, on opposite sides of a bend in the mostly silent street, stare stoically into the morning, each resting behind closed doors, doors that opened last night into the darkness, welcoming the faithful gathering to celebrate THE birth with prayer, praise, song, scripture, fellowship --reverently offered.

Even though bright lights frame its windows embellished with season’s greetings, Farmers Supply has no light within that enlivens inventory, beckoning the passerby to “come and see.” But today no farmer seeks supply.
Only two forms of labor are present on this holy day:

deputies somewhere behind the door marked “Sheriff’s Office,” and a lone streetlight grinding out the clicks that move the light from green to amber to red.

A man and his dog, content, walk steadily the deserted streets, listening to the silence of the stores.

Somehow the dog senses the warmth of her master’s feelings.
Misanthropes’ Lullaby

By Craig Kurtz

There does not exist, or rather, there seldom exists, a criminal who is wholly criminal. Neither do we ever meet with a dishonest nature which is completely dishonest. . . . If only from self-love, curiosity, or by way of variety, or by chance, every man has his moment of beneficence; he may call it his error, he may never do it again, but he sacrifices to Goodness, as the most surly man sacrifices to the Graces once or twice in his life.

— Honoré de Balzac, *Un Début dans la Vie.*

To all you criminals out there,

make sure your wives know that you care;

to all you crooked congressmen,

take time to play with your children;

to devils of white-collar crime,

give to the bells of Christmastime;

although bad guys deserve our hate,

they prob’ly have one decent trait.

To senators who grease their palms,

be pious at church and give alms;
to courtesans who ruin men,
bequeath to beggars now and then;
to landlords who oppress peasants,
subordinates enjoy presents;
one can’t be evil night and day —
it’s too much work, all that foul play.
To murderers we put away,
remember when it’s Mother’s Day;
to gen’rals who make sure war’s hell,
at least fain tip the bar wench well;
to tyrants who demos defeat,
please help old ladies cross the street;
it’s not so hard, most villains find,
to spare a minute to be kind.
Home

By Maddie M. White

We spend summer nights
Driving
No destination
Just gas in the tank
And time to kill
The only headlights for miles
Down the dark roads
Our knees bump together
Wheels buried in mud
Small-town love
A place so small
Nowhere to be
Nowhere to go
Nothing to do
But it’s home
And we wouldn’t trade it
On a Summer Day

By Bill Glose

On a summer day in Styron Square
beneath an elm’s sun-dappled shade,
hand-in-hand with my girlfriend,
it’s easy to forget the plagues
of this world. From a gazebo
at the center of a grassy sward,
a band wearing flip-flops
and tank tops plays beach music
as couples swing dance in grass.
Encircling them, an armada
of blankets and towels anchor
in the green, families spread atop
with cold drinks dripping sweat
on knuckles. A mother races after
a diapered toddler, who weaves
through the laughing throng.
When she scoops him up
to a smattering of applause,
I’m reminded of the day
my sister opened our front door
and I streaked down the sidewalk,
a neighbor yelling, “Run for it kid,”
or so I’m told—too young
at the time to recall the legend
that comes up every time
our family gets together
for Thanksgiving or birthdays.
I turn to share this story with Dawn,
but her eyes are closed,
head tilted back, blond tresses
swaying in the breeze
as a blossom of purple phlox
floats past her upturned face.
Lists

By Bill Glose

Before dawn cracks its egg
on horizon’s black skillet,
I rise to pen my list of tasks,
nodding with each stroke as if
inscribing them to a manifest
is enough to ensure my ship
will sail across its ocean.
Like willing and able deckhands,
each item climbs aboard
eager to throw off hawsers,
winch and cleat sheets,
put out with prow to froth
before the day’s begun. And there
in harbor’s mouth is where
their wind escapes and sails
fall slack. And though it makes
no sense on such calm water,
the boat begins to tip, to list
as if the main yard were fastened
to that industrious sun plowing
a mackerel sky toward tomorrow,
a day so full of second chances
that crewmen lower lifeboats
and commence paddling to shore
listlessly.
The Button

By Matthew J. Spireng

The button in the cornfield, metal,
from a U.S. soldier’s uniform
worn during the War of 1812.
That old—lost then and found
now, corroded a bit, back flat,
but the eagle on the front
still evident, words still there,
and don’t we wonder now
how the soldier lost it, why
he was here in this field
where no battles were fought
then—Returning home from
war? Wounded or whole?—
and how he lost the button,
if another was sewn in its place.
After Escher

By Matthew J. Spireng

Reflections on the lithograph “Belvedere”

by M.C. Escher (1898-1972)

Imprisoned by the possible, just one
cannot escape, while another ponders
what cannot be, though he holds it
in his hands. Above, there is no
in or out and nothing can be
held for long, though climbing higher
puts things aright. A woman looks
out where a man looks out, but sees
another view. Beyond it all,
where no one looks, we see a land
untamed. Always, though, the prisoner
stands—his way out barred and blocked—and
watches as the philosopher holds
freedom’s illusion in his hands.
Summer Color (two-part haiku)

By Ken Dunn

Backlit by sunlight,
the viceroy’s wingspan is burnt
black and flame amber.

Amid her garden
wares awaits a green grocer
in ruby enrobed.
Schnapps, 1982 (For Augusta Spritzer)

By Les Epstein

His pinochle ends at 5:00

When the players—

A meld of scholars and street toughs—

Leave with failed tricks

Curse through the Adirondack pines

Flick cigar soot and shuffle

Inelegantly away to suppers

Of borscht, broccoli

And basted baked chicken

Washed down with hot Lipton Tea

Steamed with only the finest

Echo Lake tap liquecent

Her cup of Schnapps began at 4:00

A spirited shot—

To keep fluid blood and things adenoidal—

Deeply poured sans formality
In a sand stained juice glass
Set beside apple slices
Blanketed by muenster
And devoured after Nero Wolfe
Cracked another Manhattan Whodunit—
Brilliantly in his Brownstone—
While tending to orchids
And the day’s chicken—no salt—
Snaps and sparks away in the oven
She tunes to Quincy at 5:00
As he is on the mortuary case
And downs Schnapps
Tainted by reservoir grit
(And a hint of citrus)
She dreams that the Borscht Belt
Now dead
Was somehow better.
At the far edge
Of a dank lake,

Three eagles

Land carp for a supper
Hollins
By Lou Gallo
I, also pilgrim, stood on the bank of Tinker Creek
While awaiting my daughters to make their rounds
About campus. We had seen two white cranes
Soar overhead, later two turtle doves in the
driveway
And Maddie spotted a bluebird perched on a willow
branch.
Good omens, we rejoiced, prophetic pioneering.
The rational mind knows only boundaries, chance.
It forgets what may linger in the sky, the trees,
The water and blue-black soil, what royal auguries
Slip in through vision, hunch and dream, what
Animals know and those crazed out of education—
That everything is connected, intertwined, from
worm
To hawk, rainbow to stream, shamanic fusion.
There is no chance despite what logicians say.
Nor time despite the imminence of Doomsday.
Nor did our cat Sweetie die the next day
Though a sudden knock at the door brought a lily
In a lacy glass vase from the veterinarian staff.
I’m kissing the joys as they fly today
As I should have done throughout history
But could not because locked in the prison-house
Of chronology. I’ve broken free!
For this moment at least, beyond angel or beast.
Abraham and Sarah
By Lou Gallo

My sixty-year-old, gnarled, twisted and weather-beaten apple tree has burst into bloom again—white aromatic petals, babies, pristine as if new and young.
Metamorphosis

By Frank Shortt

He scanned the countryside, as an
Ogler probes lovely specimen,
Viewing every nook and cranny
Without regard as to whether,
Each glance would become his final.
What he searched for only he knew.
Each glimpse, every darting shadow,
Became the image that he sought.

One late afternoon he espied
The object of his affection!
She suddenly appeared in sight
Ending his lifelong quest for truth!
Dressed in robes of white, beautiful,
In splendor, that only wisdom
Could afford, as she was revealed
Showing all her exquisiteness!
As he succumbed to wisdom’s charm
He too, suddenly realized,
That his vesture had changed
Resembling that of his tutor!
Now, he too, as she, is pursued
By those seeking truth and verity
Observing each crevice for clues
That leads to realms of ecstasy!
Louder Than Words

By Nyssa Nichols

Actions, events, unspoken emotion—they all mold me to be who I am today; whether it be the one time I got sick from the sugar cookies my grandmother made, they were bland. The trip to Pigeon Forge that quickly turned into a family intervention because my step-father decided to act out a scene in the middle of Splash Country, it was more like a wave.

The rainy 4th of July that went off without an expression of happiness, fireworks because my mother was in the hospital, recuperating from something that never should have happened. The time my mother and I screamed so loud it threatened to ram heaven through the clouds and into the soil below, “It’s just a faze,” she thought.

It wasn’t, months after that discussion I was busted for hiding contraband; a razor. I wanted to feel something more, even though I realized it was the wrong way to go about it. Wrists, thighs, shoulders, stomach, chest. All scarred up now, a reminder of how far I’ve come.

A reminder of how far I’ve come.

I sit at night, seldomly, in ornate thought. I sit with my scars exposed because, no, I’m not ashamed of them—I wear them with strength, because I know somewhere out there, there’s someone sitting with similar regrets as I had once.
I sit with thoughts of the future, an attempt to move away from the far too painful past. Radford—a fine creative writing program. New York City, despite never visited, it feels much more like me than my current place of residence, the novel I’ve been dreaming of for years.

Fabulous me, I’ve always yearned to be. I don’t beckon any animosity; those who wronged me; on the contrary, I wish them good fortune—that’s backwards, and I know it. But why wish them pain.
It Stayed (to Jack Bradshaw who was there February 11, 1960)

By Joseph Womack

My mother dead, suddenly,

My father bewildered.

Questions came to my

Father from friends gathered.

“What can we do for you?”

“Anything we can get for you?”

And then the one that stayed:

“Do you want anyone here?”

Quickly my father responded:

“Yes, Jack Bradshaw.”

The question and answer came and

Stayed with me—now 59 years later.

Stayed because I heard

My father’s need.

Stayed because of his friend.

I still want to be a Jack Bradshaw.
Chewy Chips Ahoy Recall Due to Unexpected Solidified Ingredient

By Lee Hodge

Is how I felt
Biting into a piece of gravel
Suspended in peanut butter or
Opening a packet of sugar inside of which was only
A single perfect dead bee,
Not unlike how you felt
Telling me over the phone to see a professional
And now I’m repeating it like a mantra printed
On the polyester carpet—a last bastion of induction into the cult
Of radical love of acceptance of forgiveness of I am one
With all things except the unexpectedly-solidified things.
Hearing this is anyone who looks the slightest bit like
It is the last thing they want to know.
Today there will be a horrible crime involving your mother, I will announce to them
Did you know that?
Your mother, not mine, mine is PERFECTLY FINE.
It was all so well and good once and smelling of
Not being pushed out of a moving car
Which is something like being born
And therein lies this sympathy
With those perfect disks of
Studded gold inching toward a horizon
Grey and dusky in an almostnight
Ticking toward in and eventually
Flannel & Sawdust

By Kevin McDaniel

Grandma rolled out of bed early on Saturdays.

Put on her crocheted shawl, her straw hat.

She lumbered in tired tennis shoes to Grandpa’s garage where she scooped heaping handfuls of sawdust into flannel bags she had stitched together from scraps.

Danny, Tommy,
Skippy, and Sue
had their bases
when they played ball
in the pasture,
summer afternoons
when Grandma
hung their britches
on the clothesline
and watched their feet
kick up measures
of shavings every time,
when a day lasted forever.
Falling for Sleep

By B. Chelsea Adams

Each night I search for sleep, determined to find him, feeling the desperation Alice must have felt when she chased the White Rabbit, knowing she’d follow him anywhere, plummet down any hole, do anything to catch up with him, do anything for him, find his gloves, drink out of broken tea cups, listen to haughty caterpillars, use a flamingo for a croquet mallet.

Night after night I try to learn where sleep hangs out. I need him to show himself, to emerge from the shadows, so I can pull him toward me, feel his soft touch closing my eyes.
Ancient Everlasting

by Sam Dixon

We used to play behind the wood-sided house
after Grandma filled us three cousins
pouring milk into our bowls
of lattice crust deep-dish cherry pie,
with sticks we dug into the hillside dirt
finding fossils of shells that belonged to creatures
from when Powell Valley was an ocean floor,
cupping the fossils, ancient, everlasting,
in our hands, saving on a shelf,
at the creek left over from the earlier ocean
we launched these sticks for races
and chased our poor entries downstream
to the finish line
where a culvert at the mountain
sucked the water under a road,
after buttered cornbread
we tossed gnarled branches and empty milk cartons
into Grandpa’s trash drum –
I will never forget the smell of that burning drum
beside the house that has now gone to extinction.
Black-Lung Miner Eulogy

By Ben E. Campbell

He knew of carnal darkness
before darkness knew of him,
before the sprout of coal-charred roots
broke free from dampened floors—
before time even—
a black so dark he could taste
its belched-up soot,
feel crawl beneath the
surface of his deepest, pulsing vein.
The Earth he disemboweled with
a butcher’s common grace,
and by anthracosis’ touch
he’ll grow hollow just the same.
Ashes to dust and dust corroding vapor,
to the ground this dredger crawls.
Let no one carve on rivaled stone
by granite hastened words.

For a diamond trails not coal

when forged from earthly pressure,

nor a river flooding time

beyond a mountain’s unveiled tear.
Voiceless Wisps

By Kohava Blount

Silent wind engulfs, and departs; dissipates; impassive.
And swiftly, the gusts bluster across; yesterday, erased;
But the burden of its memory lingers, unseen, concealed.
A soul encumbered imperceptibly.
Chilling wafts turn to seeming warmth; yet the spirit’s sorrow
Fades not.
Gaping chasm obscured; never mended, deepens, as the ages
dither in progress of retrograde.
Collapsed evolvement in a fallen realm; laments of perpetuities past
Reawakened.
Fervent gales recede to tranquil currents swathing each trace of the form’s outlooks.
Suppressed mourning veiled
Alone, unknown until the next rush.
Home

By J. Claude Asbury

The upside-down arrowed L points
from faded yellow puckered by double-ought buck
toward the ruins of my grandfather’s store
stone stairs crumble down
leading up to a kudzu burial mound on the edge of
a forgotten neverbeen,
the road dodges creek bank as it leads me
past the old prep plant --
an abandoned garden of broken mantrips,
rolls of belt decomposing,
rotting teeth of continuous miners,
all scattered at the foothills of giant mountains of
slag,
waiting to be gleaned after the harvest --
changing from smooth cement, to slurried tar, to
gravel,
and then to dirt,
past the hand-cut chimney that survived the fire
that took mamaw’s house,

past the sagging trailer, empty in her front yard,

past the rusted double gate that protects the
cemetery,

it clings tight to high hillside

as it rises from hollow to ridgetop

leaving the dark cool green mist,

it emerges into bright wide sky

and finally,

I am home.
Rounding the Corner

By Chrissie Anderson Peters

You know that feeling
In the middle of the night
When you have to get up to go pee
And you’re on your way back to bed?
And even though it’s dark
It’s all familiar:
You’re the one who placed all of that
Furniture exactly where it belongs.
And then it happens:
You hit the corner of the platform bed
Just right, and, alone in the dark,
You scream an obscenity, or two,
Or three, or a string, depending on how
Deep in sleep you are,
And how deep the pain is;
You wonder how bad the bruising will be,
You long it will hurt, and you might even
Cry a little, as you try to go back to sleep.
That’s what it’s like,
Rounding the corner
Seeing you two, together.
Dead White Males

By Craig Kurtz

I hear the boots upon the floor,
I know it’s me they’re coming for;
they say the reckoning is due –
but dead white males have feelings, too.
I’ve heard it said we lost our groove,
all of us old farts in the Louvre;
now politics are philistine –
this schadenfreude’s pretty mean.
We man’splained, perhaps, for eons
and pasquinaded the peons;
we did it for the public weal –
you scolds don’t know how bad I feel.
The masterpieces we devised
were worth the lands we colonized;
at least that’s what we thought back then –
you can’t blame us for being men.
I know some natives suffered want
but we brought them Hegel and Kant;
elites caused hardships, but take heart —
at least you got to hear Mozart.
Who misses Thomas Jefferson,
he meant goodwill to everyone;
who mourns for old Prometheus —
how ’bout a little goodbye kiss?
It wasn’t easy, I’ll tell you,
to get myself as a statue;
I hear they’re taking it away —
that’s most unkind, I have to say.
I see the tumbrel in the street,
they tell me that I’m obsolete;
it’s now the many, not the few —
but dead white males have feelings, too.
FICTION

The Deal

By Ken Dunn

In effect, he scuttled his own company. The remains were a building - ill-equipped - and the sign on the street. He was asking five flat. The deal within inking distance, he jacked.

Five five.

I balked.

Balked.

Four five.

The smile perished on his face.

Four point five. Why would I sell for half-a-million less? It’s worth five million.

I know. Why would I buy for half-a-million more?
The first time Louis met her she wore a short pink miniskirt and red high heels. Her orange hair was teased and stiff as one of those orange scouring pads. But that is not what he remembers most. He remembers the way her long red fingernails clicked across the Kroger counter as the tired-looking clerk rang up her eighteen jars of artichoke hearts. She was ahead of Louis in line, and she turned, her wiry hair jiggling, her long fingernails laced into her red net shopping bag, and asked him, "Do you like artichoke hearts?"

"Sure," he said. She smiled, and her hand reached toward his. "I don't," she said. "They're too bland. Not soft enough, you know, they have so many layers. One is always tough."

He couldn't help but point and shake his head as he watched her load her net bag with the eighteen glass jars of artichoke hearts. "But if you don't like artichokes?"

"Well, maybe I could give them to you," she said, as she paid the clerk for her purchase. "But?"

"Well, I hate to throw this all away."

"But why are you...?"

"I'm Germaine Springer," she extended her hand to shake his. "If you wouldn't think it odd, I live two blocks away. On 702 Tenth Street. You come right over. I'll stick the artichoke hearts in those paper containers I've saved from Chinese takeout. I hate waste. I really hate waste."
"Louis Arnold," he said introducing himself, "but I don't understand."

"Don't you worry. It's just artichoke hearts. You come to 702 Tenth Street. If you can't eat them all, well, you probably know other people who like them." And with that she grabbed her net bag filled with the white hearts and swung out of the store.

"Strange bird," the clerk, who put Louis's coffee and newspaper in a bag, said, "Bet she cleaned us out of artichoke hearts."

"Why do you think she bought them all if she doesn't like them?"

"I don't get it. But, hey man, I'd go, just to find out. Come in and tell me sometime."

The sun had fallen and left one straight silver line blazing across the horizon. It could have been a sign, a line to follow, but he'd never been good at reading signs. He only understood the easy ones like red for stop and green for go.

Red was such a fiery color, such a flame-licking, wild color, it set him in motion, made him want to go—not stop.

Well, she wore red shoes and a pink skirt, and had that orange hair. His daughter, Maggie, always dismissed people whose clothing clashed as ignorant and without taste. Maggie dismissed him because his socks and shirts often clashed. He explained that his feet seemed so far away from his shirt. His teenage daughter didn't buy that excuse and told him to stay in the family room when her dates picked her up.

But Louis couldn't seem to dismiss Germaine Springer. He was too curious. Eighteen
jars of artichokes hearts and those long red fingernails.

Her apartment was in a white house, a colonial, very ordinary. But her car, or at least the one parked next to her apartment that night, was bright orange. When she answered the door, she was folding her net bag, telling Louis that when she has a big grocery order she gets paper bags and returns them for reuse. After all, they're usually in fine shape, almost always. "Don't you agree?" she asked.

He did, and she walked into the kitchen where she was emptying the hearts into the containers from the Chinese restaurant. The red symbols on their sides seemed somehow appropriate, though again he didn't know what they stood for.

"I only keep the containers fortune cookies and rice come in," she pointed out, looking at her watch. "Oh, would you flick on the TV?" she asked.

"Sure," he said, and Dan Rather flashed onto the screen, but she kept talking about how many artichoke hearts one person could eat, so they couldn't hear a word of the news.

Then she raised her voice, looked very excited, and said, "Quiet, the commercial's starting."

It was a Frigidaire commercial, and Louis didn't follow the whole thing. There was a frog, then a white refrigerator, attractive vegetables, and then more frogs leaping across a kitchen floor. Louis didn't understand what slippery-looking green frogs had to do with selling refrigerators.
When the commercial was over, she clicked off the TV.
"Are you in advertising?" he asked.
"No," she said, "I'm not really 'in' anything. I work at Ernie's Health Food Store. Well, these are ready for you," she put the filled containers in a paper Kroger's bag and handed them to him.

He took the hearts, and somehow left having more questions than when he arrived.

Germaine filled her sink with hot soapy water and put the empty artichoke heart jars in the water, thinking that Louis Arnold didn't say much. Taking them out of the water, she wrinkled her nose; the strong smell of the marinade still clung to the jars. Sliding the labels off, she put them back in the water for another wash and rinse.

The jars dried on wire racks on her counter. She’d wait until tomorrow to fill them. Everything’s a process too many steps long, she observed. She wanted to put her life in fast forward. Everything good always seemed a few days or weeks ahead.

Louis drove up the hill leading out of town wondering how he and his wife were going to eat all those artichoke hearts. In town there was a light at almost every street corner, but as he travelled out of town, he found himself mostly in the dark.

Two days later, they served the artichoke hearts as an appetizer to three couples they'd invited to dinner. The couples finished off one and a half of the five containers Germaine had
filled. Louis had eaten most of another container, off and on the first few days he brought the hearts home, coming to the conclusion that most of the hearts did have one tough leaf.

Five days later, when he decided to stop by Ernie's Health Food Store to pick up some granola, they still had two- and one-half containers left.

Germaine wore a tight purple tank top and a short black skirt. Her fingernails were still painted red. He wished he could tell Maggie that he understood that the red clashed with her purple top and orange hair.

"Sick of artichoke hearts?" she asked.
"Well, not yet," he lied, trying to be polite.
"Better find someone to give them to or you will be. I lived on pineapples and Swiss cheese for two weeks; it was years before I could enjoy either one again."

"How did that come about?"
"Like everything, irrationally," she laughed. "You know, picking your favorites then vowing to keep going with them."

Louis didn't know what to say to that, so he asked which aisle the granola was in.
"Packaged or do you want to scoop it from a bin?"
"From a bin," he said, "that will be fresher."
"Well, that's the idea, but you can't count on anything," she sighed.
"You sure are cynical."
"Well, I only look like a fool." She rolled her eyes; "I wear a good disguise."

Louis didn't know what to say to that either, so he mumbled something and went off to find the granola.
Germaine wasn't too surprised to see him. And she was pretty sure he hadn't been here before, even before he asked where the granola was. He had a kind face and soft brown eyes you could take to indicate innocence, like a cow's. She believed that men who were tall could afford to look gentle. He was nice looking but not striking; most people wouldn't notice him.

She knew her own looks were incongruous with what most people expected from a health food store worker. They expected a long cotton skirt and tie-dye shirt, in earth tones, no or little make-up, and long unpermed hair. Those whole-grain types didn't understand her dyed hair, high heels, painted fingernails, tight-fitting outfits and the bright colors that didn't match. She also knew that someone who looked as bizarre as she did could be ignored, not given serious consideration. That was the idea. She'd been here five months now and rarely missed her long black hair.

Last night, she had watched the Frigidaire commercial again. For a long time now, she had been more intrigued by commercials than the other programs on TV, especially the news. Reality wasn't her choice anymore.

The Frigidaire commercial with its slimy frog, crisp vegetables, and gleaming white appliances was as incongruous as she was. If they needed "a leap" to emphasize their product's new ability to provide crispness, why not have a little girl in a starched white dress leaping off a swing or
a skydiver leaping into a perfect blue sky? Or if they had to have a frog, have him leap from the edge of a pond into crystal clear water. Instead the frog's slippery dark skin seemed dirty compared to the glistening white appliances and fresh vegetables.

The lack of connection in the ad made her think of going to church when she was a girl. Germaine's family was French Canadian and Catholic. Each Sunday morning, the priest would come out dressed in a robe and read Latin. No one knew what he was saying; they were mesmerized by the hypnotic way he spoke, by the rhythmic repetition of certain phrases. But none of it made sense, at least not to her.

When she thought back to the statues and stonework, the incense and candles, the people genuflecting and crossing themselves, that sense of mystery and wonder was how she had defined God's love. The power of the unknowable, the words you didn't need to understand, just follow. She had never known who wrote the Catechism. When she asked her parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, they didn't know either. No one asked questions. They took it on faith; they thrived on the mystery. Politicians, priests and admen seemed to be good at making people love what they couldn't understand. They all asked people to trust them without question.

Most men did.

"My Little Runaway" was playing. Arthur, the manager of the food store cooperative, played old rock and roll songs. That was what she was, wasn't it, a "runaway"?
She had done it. Just packed. The day before she had done it, she had not known she would do it. That was what she liked most about it. The spontaneous flow. She tried to feel regret, guilt, like she'd been trained, but she didn't. Her fingernails clicked against the counter in time to the tape. "Run, run, run runaway."

Five months of completing her own thoughts. Five months of sleeping with the windows open, wearing her nightgown all day on her days off, and saying whatever she pleased, buying whatever she pleased.

The night after she met Louis, she had lined the artichoke heart jars on her table and spooned the spices into the labeled jars, eighteen different smells, eighteen different tastes. She had started at the beginning of the alphabet. She could afford only eighteen jars per week. After she filled the first jar with allspice, she covered it over the top with a brightly colored cloth square, just wide enough to make a lid. She had cloth squares in vivid abstract designs in colors like popsicle green, orange DayGlo, and a red the color of poppies; she also had stripes and checks in red and white, green and white, and yellow and white. She chose a paisley print to cover the allspice, tying it on with a silky red ribbon. Anise came after allspice, and then came the three Bs: basil, bay leaf, and black pepper. She made the decision to put the pepper under B for Black rather than P for Pepper; these were the kind of decisions she made now. For the Cs, she chose cardamom, celery salt, chili pepper, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin and curry powder. It was the letter she had most of. Then came dill and fennel, and the
garlics: flakes, powder and salt. She had made it a third of the way through her spices with the first eighteen jars. She wondered who she would find to give the contents from the next eighteen.

When she remembered that night, she remembered thinking Louis was a nice man, too polite to ask many questions, probably a Presbyterian or Episcopalian, one of the genteel sects. At the same time, she had wondered what Louis had told his wife about the jars of artichoke hearts; she had, of course, noticed his wedding band, though he didn't have it on today. As he was coming up to the counter with two bags of granola, she was wondering what he had told his wife about her.

His eyes are so deeply set, you don't notice them at first; you only notice his forehead. It is wide and high, and, in the center, there are crosses. Germaine doesn't know if she should consider these strange manifestations as spiritual. She can't help thinking of the crosses as representing trouble, his eyes as having fallen in under the weight of that trouble. Yet, she believes he is a man of vision, one who doesn't know how to obtain his dreams. His cheeks are sunken too, and deep lines dip down from his nose toward his mouth.

She hadn't noticed those lines the first day, just the gentleness in the way he stood, holding his packages. She didn't think he'd ever crush one.
"I guess, this will be all," Louis said putting down his bags.
"That's a lot of granola, but I guess you're used to getting things in quantity."
"Actually, only when I get them from you."
"Of course."
"Huh?"
"Relax. You're trying to make sense of things. That's a waste of time. I don't try to make sense of things anymore. When I read now, I read three quarters of the way through the book and stop. That way I can imagine a variety of endings." Germaine remembered the walk she took last week. A white blanket had been rolled up in the middle of the sidewalk. She'd walked around it without picking it up, without even poking it to see how heavy it was.

"What made you stop...trying to figure things out."

Germaine smiled, "Unsatisfactory answers, too much strangeness."

The screen door banged, and Arthur walked in. Arthur Ice. Such a weird last name. That had been part of the reason she took the job. Anyone with a last name like that was sure to be an interesting boss. His father, an actor, had chosen the name for his stage name. Then liking it, he had changed it legally.

Germaine wished that she could meet his father, hear him speak. She liked the crisp, quick sound of the name. It made her think of skate blades cutting precise patterns, figure eights, Xs, and tight, tight circles. But it also had a coldness, a hard, frozen edge.

Germaine guessed Arthur knew she lied to him about her past. She felt they had agreed implicitly to allow her prank, deceit, whatever in that first meeting. They had also accepted that there were certain questions they wouldn't ask, certain mysteries they wouldn't explore. He had
stopped her too, when she began to ask about his father. He was after all paying her cash, off the books.

"The strangeness I've been wondering about..." Louis stammered, "is why you needed those artichoke hearts?"

"If I tell you, it will spoil it." Germaine flicked her hand up.

"Well."

Then on a whim, she said, "For spice jars." And knew she had spoiled it as Louis's eyebrows quivered. When he left, Germaine thought again that mysteries make life more interesting.

Louis felt disappointed as he sat in his car slipping his wedding ring back on his finger; he decided to keep wondering about the commercial and why she wore those garish outfits. But he knew he wouldn't ask.

Germaine thought again about Arthur's father, the actor, and wondered how long it had been since Arthur had spoken to him, and what had made his father choose the name Ice.

Fathers. Her father, a quiet man, had nonetheless learned the words, the hypnotizing, rhythmic words that swayed people's reasoning. Father Larry certainly knew them, and, of course, Tony. Latin, incense, sweet-smelling flowers, magnetic voices. She used to think that Tony and Father Larry were in cahoots, listening to Tony's soft voice, smelling the roses he brought her. He would lie down beside her, place his hand on her thigh, before he'd whisper that he gambled away his pay. Then the next day, telling Father
Larry and listening to his deep, rhythmic voice, she'd believe forgiveness was a virtue.

She'd been in a trance, a hypnotized state for years. All those soft persuasive voices. She was just coming out of it, just learning how it was done. It was like rising up out of the dentist's chair, out of the ether into the hard, white room. And she had waited to leave, hoping to prevent her now college graduated daughters from becoming mesmerized by a religion or a man. But then, she hadn't been able to tell what had bound them to their lovers, and she didn't know what should bind one person to another, or to anything for that matter.

She had felt like an imposter for a long time before she left.

But now that she really was one, she avoided truly getting to know anyone because she knew a real friend, someone who discovered she was an imposter, would not only ask how long she planned to remain in hiding. They'd go ahead and rip off her clashing-colored costume.
New Orleans is a complicated city, a place of convoluted contradictions. The Big Easy is way hard for a lot of people. Especially when you’re homeless, or mostly homeless. It’s hard to be laid-back when you ain’t even got a place to lay your head at night. It wasn’t always that way for me. Once upon a time, hell, that’s just a fairytale now, ain’t it? But a long time ago, I had a place to live. Then Katrina came, and nothing was ever the same. No point dwelling on that, except to say that I was a little girl then, and now I’m just about grown up, and the world’s a lot nicer to little girls than it is to teenagers who ain’t got nowhere to go.

Here’s another thing: I know how to talk all proper-like. There’s just no need to do it out here on the streets. You do what little things you can to try to fit in. Which is hard. ‘Cos I’m really not meant to be on the streets. I’m not trying to be all high and mighty; I’m not delusional, or on drugs. But I had a teacher once who told me that I was good at stuff, that I was smart, that I could do something good with my life—this was a while back, when I still went to school, sometimes. Before everything spun way out of control and school became another impossible dream. She told me, “Gemini, you got dealt a bad hand, sure, but you gotta keep trying, ‘cos, young lady”—it always made me smile when she called me that, ‘cos nobody else in my whole life ever called me that without being sarcastic or mean somehow—“’cos young lady, there’s a fighter...
inside of you. That’s what your name means—duality. Don’t you lay down and let the world trample you. You stand up and make your mark!”

So that’s what I’ve been doing out here in Treme. The Treme is another section of the city, but this one is kinda special to me. It’s where my grandparents and great-grandparents and their grandparents before them lived. It’s the oldest African-American neighborhood in the entire country. It’s really weird, though, ‘cos there’s this white woman and her husband and their little boy that live there now, in my great-grandparents’ house. Everyone calls her “that Caucasian woman.” I don’t know if that’s polite or not, but I reckon she could be called lots worse, moving in with the African American and Creole crowd that lives there now. What makes a white woman want to do that? I wish I could ask her. She saw me painting one day and called out to me; I ran really fast.

Painting is how I make my mark. Graffiti. Not your typical writing my name or laying out gang symbols graffiti, although some of that stuff can be pretty beautiful. And I don’t want to make graffiti forever; it’s hard to make real art when you ain’t got proper canvases, brushes, and paint. And nowhere to keep any of that. Someday, I want to make real art and sell it in Jackson Square with the other artists; you can’t sell side street walls in Jackson Square, no matter how good a job you think you did on them.

I wander at night. I never live in one place too long. Sometimes there’s safety in numbers,
sometimes—well, when you’re a seventeen-year-old girl on the streets alone, sometimes there ain’t nowhere very safe. Someone’s always trying to get you to do drugs, or sell drugs, or have sex, or sell sex. Somebody’s always got an idea to help you make money. And sometimes, when you’ve got absolutely nothing, it gets awfully hard to say no. Whether you’re with the group under the I-10 underpass, or by some dumpster on some side street. They recently put a dumpster over closer to the Caucasian lady’s house. Even though she yelled at me that once, it feels safer to me there than just about anywhere.

I leave my mark different places in the city, though. I’ve even been bold enough to do a couple down in the French Quarter. Other graffiti artists and locals get to know your style. Even if you don’t sign it, they find out your name, or they make one up for you. Lots of people call me “Girl,” because that’s one of my favorite images. Not just spelling it out, you know, but turning each letter into a character with attributes that show strength. ‘Cos I believe in girl power. I know firsthand how powerful girls have to be to survive anywhere, especially on the streets.

So, how does a homeless teenager get spray paint? Every now and then, I’ll find or beg money to get something special, but mostly, I trade stuff with others, or wait until the huffers have passed out from their highs and take the rest of their basic colors. I guess that’s stealing, technically. They’re not all bad people; mostly, they’re just people having bad times and trying to do something about
that for just a little while. So, once they get to
where they’re going, I collect up the remainders
and find a blank slate—my canvas for the project,
so to speak. Some of them figure it out and are
 kinda proud that their paint cans got used for
something artistic. You figure out fast which ones
get pissed and make sure not to use theirs again,
unless it’s an emergency. But I guess that’s how I
get my high. The art. The graffiti. The knowledge
that some people know me by my marks.

It’s typically warm in New Orleans, even during the
rains. But tropical storms and hurricanes are part
of the scene. I hate dumpster diving. When those
storms come up, lots of times, the Red Cross opens
shelters. Those of us who are homeless go in
droves. One time, one was coming in, but my
project needed some finishing touches. It was the
next street over from the Caucasian Lady and her
family. I saw them heading out in their pretty
white SUV. She waved, then stopped. Oh, no, I
thought, she’s been watching Blind Side or
something and thinks that she’s here to save me!

The rain hadn’t started falling yet, but the skies
were really dark. “Hey, there,” she smiled. “It’s
Gemini, right?” She held out her hand to shake
hands. “My name’s Cassie. We live the next street
over.”

“I know where you live,” I sounded all tough. “You
live in my great-grandparents’ old house.”

She smiled. “Yeah, we do.” Then she looked up. “I
don’t know if you’ve got somewhere to go, but
we’re driving by a couple of the shelters. We’d be more than happy to drop you off. I’ve been a real admirer of your work for a while now. When this one passes over or through and we get back home, maybe we can talk about your painting more.”

I thought to myself, *What the hell? She must be huffing paint, too, or something!* I looked down at my supplies. I had a pretty decent stash. Going to a shelter would almost certainly mean that those would disappear. Staying out here could mean even worse. It was a tough decision.

Ms. Cassie seemed to understand. “If you want me to, I’ll put them in a bag and keep them for you until we come back home. You know where we live. Just come tell me when you’re ready to get them back. They’re yours. I don’t want you to get in trouble with the law, but I’d love to see more of your work around here. You’ve got a real positive message that I think we all need to be reminded of.” She looked up at the sky as the rain started to come down. “But if you stay out here, you might not be around to put it up there for us, anymore.”

When you live on the streets, it’s hard to trust anyone. Especially a Caucasian woman with no reason to be nice to you, who lives smack-dab in the middle of the oldest African-American neighborhood in the nation, in a fine house that once belonged to your great-grandparents. But I knew that she was right. We gathered up my paint cans and dumped them into a plastic grocery-store bag and put them in her van. I got in the back seat
with her little boy, who smiled at me and said, “Hi, Gemini, I like your pictures!”

A week or two later, when things were back to normal, I went to Ms. Cassie’s house to get my spray cans. She had bought me more colors, and much better-quality paint to go with my original cans. At first, I was mad. “I ain’t no freaking charity case!”

“No, you’re not. And I bought you the other colors to ask you a favor. But if you don’t want to, I can just take them back to the store. I still have the receipt.” And she started separating out the colors.

“Wait,” I said, really wanting those pretty colors that wouldn’t run so easily. “What is it that you want?”

“I’d love to have a Gemini original on our garage across the street. Full permission so you can take your time. You don’t have to worry about the police running you off while you’re doing it. In fact, I wonder if you do stuff besides graffiti. Maybe, I could buy some other paint, whatever you need, and you could do a mural of some sort on one wall. Something to remind the neighborhood of the roots here. Of your own heritage—your past, but your future.”

Gemini laughed, “Look, lady, I’m homeless. I ain’t got no future.”

Cassie put her hand on her hip and smiled. “I don’t believe that for a second. And neither do you. I
hear that, before you had to quit school, you were quite the canvas-and-brush artist. I figure you can do some practice runs of what you’ll do on the garage on these canvases that I bought. I got some different sizes. I had the brushes and the paints left over from the last project that I did. But if you need something else, just let me know.”

Gemini looked up at Ms. Cassie. “You’re an artist?”

“I like to paint,” Cassie admitted. “If you wanna come upstairs to the landing, I’ll show you a couple that I’ve done.”

Gemini followed her. “Oh, Ms. Cassie!” she exclaimed. “This is the Blue Angel from Metairie Cemetery. She’s beautiful!”

Cassie blushed. “Thank you. It’s one of my favorite spots in the city.” Then she asked Gemini if she’d like some old clothes to paint in.

“Um, these kinda are my old clothes,” Gemini laughed an easier laugh.

“I’ve got some stuff that you can have, if you want it. I was taking it to Goodwill. I’ll give you a key to the garage, but you have to promise that you and you alone will go in. There’s an old couch in there, and a sink so you can wash your brushes out, so you can wash, too. I’ll put some towels and stuff out there. You can keep all of your painting stuff out there and not have to try to figure out how to keep up with it. You’re welcome to eat with us while
you’re working on the garage, and I’ll pay you, too. You tell me what a fair price is.”

“I’ve never priced what I do. I think everything you said sounds good enough. And maybe some more canvases. To practice,” she added quickly. “And maybe you can give me lessons occasionally?”

Cassie laughed, “Oh, Gemini, I’m no art teacher. I just do what feels right to me. Kinda like you do.”

“Then teach me how to do that, please, won’t you? I love your blue angel.”

“I’ll make you a deal. We’ll teach each other.”

Over the course of the next few weeks, the garage took on murals of a Treme long past, a Treme that Gemini remembered from stories and childhood pictures. Canvases filled with all sorts of images. The Caucasian woman took her under her wing, managed to get Gemini to agree to study some for the GED in all of her spare time, which admittedly wasn’t much. The canvases added up, and Ms. Cassie hung them all over the garage. Occasionally, Gemini would disappear for a couple of days, and a new graffiti piece, more like a snippet of mural would pop up somewhere. Making her mark was in her blood, after all.

Ms. Cassie looked at the canvases once the garage was nearly finished. “What would you like to do with these?”
Gemini hung her head for just a moment before lifting up her head and saying, “Can I tell you my dream, Ms. Cassie? I’ve always wanted to be able to sell my art in Jackson Square. To earn enough money to get off the streets. At least for a while. To share my vision, to spread my mark. To be the someone that my teacher promised me that I could be.”

“Gemini,” Cassie held her friend’s face in her hands, “you’ve been that someone all along. But we’ll get the necessary paperwork and set you up in Jackson Square. And you’re welcome to stay here in the garage as long as you want. And to continue to eat with us and come to the house and hang out like part of our family. That house is part of you. Just promise me that I get to buy the first piece from Jackson Square. I have my eye on that blue angel with the pink shadow that says ‘Girl’ up in the corner.”
CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Boogity-Boogity-Boogity:

Or, How This Librarian Became A NASCAR Fan

By Chrissie Anderson Peters

I moved to Bristol from the Roanoke Valley in May 2000 to take a librarian position with the Bristol Public Library. I had grown up in Tazewell and had gone to college at Emory & Henry, so I understood the importance of the NASCAR races to the region, at large -- “The Races” were what Bristol was best known for, with its “fastest half-mile” track in the sport. However, I was not a NASCAR fan. I could appreciate how the two races stimulated the economy, but I left town the weekend of each race, going as far from Bristol as possible, and returning only after the dust from all of the visitors had cleared.

Those were the days when people fought over the Bristol tickets in divorce settlements, and contested them in family wills. They were the hottest tickets around, and the races were always sold out. Finding a place to stay was no mean feat, either. Hotels in the region, from Asheville, North Carolina, all the way to Knoxville, Tennessee, and to Wytheville, Virginia, required a three-night stay for any hotel reservations, and the rates were jacked up three to four times the regular costs. People rented out their houses in the vicinity of the track for one week and were able to pay their mortgages for three to six months. The socio-
economic impact wasn’t lost on anyone in the area. Thus, we proclaimed, whether we meant it or not, “Welcome, Race Fans!”

My favorite author was Sharyn McCrumb, and I remember hearing her speak at a book reading about her forthcoming book around 2003. It was to be a retelling of *The Canterbury Tales*. Oh, I thought, *how enlightened, how original!*

Then I nearly dropped my cup of punch as she went on to explain that her “pilgrimage” would begin in Bristol, Tennessee, at the Bristol Motor Speedway, and continue with a group of Dale Earnhardt, Sr., fans touring tracks in the South. I wanted to tell her that this was nothing short of professional suicide. Because I was her biggest fan; and I loathed NASCAR. How could she risk her literary success in this way?

By this time, I had become a librarian at Northeast State Community College’s lovely Basler Library. And, one day in 2004, I got an email from Ms. McCrumb, asking my opinion about one of her characters in the book, *St. Dale*. Shane, a young man in the book, who was about to start college and get married, needed a life. Beyond the book. She explained his background to me in the email and told me that she was worried about him. “If he doesn’t have a real vocation, his marriage is gonna fail, and I just don’t know what is going to happen to him.” So I set about planning the life of a fictional character, as though he were one of our very own students at Northeast State. Although almost none of my life-plan for Shane made it into
the final draft of the book, I think it made a difference, because Sharyn and I both saw that the possibilities did exist for him not just to find a job, but to make a career in NASCAR, which, of course, was Shane’s dream come true.

The book was released shortly before the 2005 Daytona 500. I read it with great gusto and furious fervor. When the day of the race came, Sunday, 20 February, I sat down with my husband, and for the very first time, I heard the immortal words of Darrell Waltrip begin a race: “Boogity-boogity-boogity! Let’s go racing, boys!” I was so giddy that I jumped all over the den, exclaiming and explaining about bump-drafting, side-drafting, “competition,” and more!

My husband looked at me incredulously. “I have no idea what you’ve done with my wife, but I hope that she’s still in there somewhere!”

Jeff Gordon won the race, but I didn’t really “have a driver” yet, so that was neither here nor there. I had watched an entire NASCAR race, and, for the most part, I understood it, thanks to the genius of Sharyn McCrumb and her modern-day Canterbury Tales.

About five weeks later, Ms. McCrumb joined us at Northeast State’s Basler Library for two programs on Monday, 28 March. I was on Cloud 9, my name prominently mentioned in the author’s notes in St. Dale, on page 311, right there alongside the Junior League of Bristol. My pride boomed because our community college was mentioned by name in the
book, as well. I had helped to make our mark in literature by giving Shane a viable future! More than that, though, she explained how the concept came to her, how watching a segment of the sport’s fan-base mourn the death of Dale Earnhardt, Sr., from 2001 forward, had reminded her of Chaucer’s collection of stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, how she could see parallels between regular people in both instances and then draw out those parallels to be more than just a group of modern-day pilgrims paying homage to their “homeboy patron saint, Dale Earnhardt,” but to truly create characters whose actions and personalities shadowed the pilgrims from Chaucer’s tales in this modern-day setting. The beauty was, as with most good books, people could read it on a literal level, as well as a literary level, and still gain enjoyment. I thought back to that first program where I had heard her talk about this when it was still her “forthcoming book” and thought, *How brilliant! And now you’ve captured the attention of an entire group of fans who might not have ever paid attention if you hadn’t chosen NASCAR for the foundation of the book!*

Later that same week, on Thursday, 31 March, with the help of one of my work colleagues, Deb, who had been friends with Mike Helton for years (since they had both worked long before at Bristol Motor Speedway), Mr. Helton came to a program that I arranged for us at Northeast State, as well. In case you don’t know who Mike Helton is, he was, at that time, the President of NASCAR! He engaged in a lively question and answer program answering questions about all sorts of NASCAR-related topics.
Was there a set fine structure for specific swear words and what was it? (He simply answered yes, and wouldn’t give examples, much to many students’—and my—dismay.) What was race day really like? How do they go to the bathroom in those race cars if they need to? What’s it like being President of NASCAR? (I believe that he responded to that one as it was something akin to a two-edged sword, really great when everyone played well together, but not much fun when he had to hand out penalties and fines.) Sharyn McCrumb, who was still in town to go to the races that weekend, was even on-hand in the audience! It was the best week of my life professionally up to that point, and probably still stands so in the field of librarianship up to now. You just don’t get that sort of magic to come together when scheduling programs for NASCAR-related topics. Especially when you have no budget for programs! That’s when you know that a sport and its participants, spectators, and management are something special—when they give their time freely to promote what they do and what they love.

Kevin Harvick won the race that Sunday, 3 April. Even though I hadn’t exactly picked “my driver” yet, I had started ruling out drivers, and he was in the “not my driver” category. But it was an engaging race. And, living just about five miles from the track, down a hollow, we went out onto our front porch and could hear the thunder of the motors start at the track, as though they were heading straight for our house down Carden Hollow Road. And we watched the fighter jets fly over before they even reached the track. I was back in
the den in time to hear Darrell Waltrip proclaim what had become my own favorite sports anthem, “Boogity-boogity-boogity!”

It had been a stellar and unbelievably exciting week at work, then to wind it all down Sunday with the Food City 500, right there, practically in my back yard! The next work week would be another busy one, taking me to the Tennessee Library Association Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, where I was on several committees, co-presenting, running for President-Elect, and on the first leg of establishing a scholarship for the association. And even knowing that all of that would happen on 6-8 April, it paled in comparison to the excitement and fever that I had just experienced the previous week.

The first morning at the Nashville Conference Center, all I wanted to talk with anyone about was what an event-filled week we had just had at my library. I talked about being mentioned in Sharyn’s book—and showed it off, of course; I talked about how down-to-earth Mike Helton was. My co-worker, Shelley, who was supposed to co-present with me the next day, but had contracted laryngitis over the weekend and could still barely talk, nodded her head a lot as I told everyone about all that had happened.

And then, around noon, Shelley, who had always claimed proudly to know absolutely nothing about any sport whatsoever, squeaked, “Oh! Oh! It’s him! It’s that racing guy!”
I spun around, looking for someone from racing. I didn’t know many of the drivers, but I figured that it had to be someone pretty recognizable for Shelley to pick him out. Maybe Mike Helton, and I’d go up and then introduce him to my library friends.

No. No. “Oh. My. Gosh! It’s Darrell Waltrip!” My husband was helping with sound and was nearby. “It’s DW! He’s here! I’m gonna go find him!” Mr. Waltrip had started walking in the opposite direction, no one following him or talking to him. And I was determined to change that.

I grabbed Shelley’s arm and said, “Come on! Let’s go find him!”

He had a decent lead, but there were only two or three doors he could have gone into. Two of them led into the exhibits hall, which was still being set up. I popped my head in and asked if a tall man with dark hair had passed through and was told no. I said thanks and joined Shelley again. That left only one door. I was about to open the door when Shelley pointed out to me that it was the men’s bathroom.

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“Oh, my gosh! It’s Darrell Waltrip!” And I told him my name and introduced Shelley and shook his hand. “I just love you,” I told him. “And I love boogity-boogity-boogity!”
He was so incredibly gracious to both of us. Especially me, because, of course, I was the one who basically accosted him and wouldn’t shut up! “We’re from the Bristol area,” I told him. “I’m a new convert to NASCAR.”

“Well, how long have you lived in Bristol?”

“Almost five years.”

“I can’t believe they’ve let you live there that long, and you’re just now coming around to NASCAR!” he laughed.

I told him all about meeting Mike Helton the week before, and about Sharyn’s book.

“What are you gals doing here?” he asked.

“We’re librarians; we’re here for the state librarian conference! What are you doing here?”

“Well, I was here for a prayer breakfast,” he smiled.

“I can’t believe I’m actually talking to you!”

Shelley found her voice enough to say, “I saw you first. I told her it was you. She almost followed you into the bathroom.”

I blushed. “I just had to say hello!”

By then, some of our friends had seen us and joined us, and my friend Debbie took a picture of Shelley,
Darrell, and me. Instead of “cheese” though, we all said, “Boogity-boogity-boogity!” It was, by far, the best part of the conference. And that’s how this librarian became a NASCAR fan!
Country Roads and Hollows

By Oscar L. Price

I hear thunder over the city tonight and see lightning dancing across a dark sky. There's a cool mist coming through the screen on my partly open bedroom window. The rain makes the air smell fresh and, after a hot day, helps take my mind off our sometimes upside-down world. The sound of raindrops softly hitting the windowpane brings back memories of my growing up days in Southwestern Virginia.

I grew up with red clay, graveled country roads, and hollows. A place with hundreds of cow paths crisscrossing the steep hills and cows grazing on lush green grass. A place with big oaks and black walnut trees growing on the sides of rocky limestone hills. A place where one could get real maple syrup made from maple trees growing there.

I was born in a little white house alongside Loop Creek at Rockdale near Elk Garden, Virginia. I grew up with some of my younger uncles and aunts, over the hill south of Lebanon, on a farm owned by my Grandmother and Grandfather Ferguson.

I was three and half years old when my father and mother divorced. My father was Vernice Neal Price, and my mother was Lucille (Ferguson) Price. I had a full brother who was raised by my mother in Northern California. My dad remarried and worked for the railroad as a fireman; then, he moved away to work in a chemical plant during World War II. My
dad and Gladys (Sword) Price had four children. One little half-sister died shortly after birth. One half-sister and my half-brother are both gone. My youngest half-sister lives in Lebanon, Virginia.

Shortly after my mother and dad divorced, my mother got a job at the old Maple Grove Hotel in Lebanon. She later got a job in a bomb factory during World War II in Newport News, Virginia. She left my brother and me with our grandparents on the farm south of Lebanon.

The war days were hard times, and Americans had to use ration stamps to buy gas, tires, sugar and coffee. After paying rent and buying food, perhaps my mother didn't have money to pay a babysitter.

Over three and a half years had passed when she came back home to take my brother and me with her and her new husband, who was serving in the Coast Guard. By then, the only dad I knew was my granddad, whom I called Poppy, and my grandmother, whom I called Mommy. I loved them and had become bonded to them. They were the only dad and mother I had and loved.

I overheard my stepfather tell my mother, "You better get those kids' clothes packed because you know we have to leave early in the morning. It's a long drive to New Orleans, and I am not going to be AWOL." I couldn't go to sleep that night from worrying and crying because they were going to take my brother and me away from our Mommy and Poppy.
I quietly opened the bedroom window and crawled through. I had tried talking my little brother into running away and hiding with me, but he was too young and too sleepy to go with me. I was wondering where would be the best place to hide. I was afraid in the dark, but I ran as fast as I could to the old tobacco barn up on the hill. After a while, the old rooster started crowing down at the chicken house, and I could hear them calling me, hollering real loud, "Oscar, where are you?"

I could see them through the spaces between the planks on the old tobacco barn. They went all over looking for me. They looked in the chicken house and tool shed. I watched them go over to the horse barn where they milked the cows. I was afraid they might think to look in the old tobacco barn up here on the hill, but if they had started walking up the hill, I was going to run and hide in Pruner's woods west across the ridge from granddad's farm. Finally, they gave up. I could hear the step-dad hollering, "We will never find that kid, so let's go. You're going to make me late reporting in to the base so, damn it, we have to go."

Little Cedar Creek was running over its banks and over the bridge leading up the hollow to the farm when they arrived, so they had to park their car over near the hospital in Lebanon and use the walk bridge to cross the creek and walk across the hill and down into the hollow. As I peeped through the boards of the old tobacco barn, I could see them leaving, hurrying across the hill to get their car. My eyes were full of tears as I watched my little towheaded brother being taken away from me.
I missed my little brother for a long, long time. I missed taking popped corn over to the barn with him to feed the cats. No one had ever told us that cats didn’t eat popcorn. We probably thought they were eating the popcorn, but they were only licking the butter off the kernels. They loved the fresh warm milk mommy fed them when she was milking the cows.

My brother and I used to make glider airplanes. We used the round pieces of pulp from the inside of a dried corn stalk for the body and turkey and chicken feathers for the wings. We were a little young to be climbing up a wooden ladder to get on top of the chicken house roof, but we discovered that was a good place to make our airplanes fly. We tossed them off the roof to see whose would fly the best. We were always trying to outdo each other and laughed when one of our airplanes crashed to the ground. Corn stalks also made good horses that we called Scout and Silver.

But life on the farm was good. Hard at times but good. There were always chores to do no matter what the weather, but there were always the good times.

I had lots of friends and lots of laughs, growing up on Country Roads and Hollows. I remember going fishing with a can of worms and a bamboo fishing pole down on Little Cedar Creek. Gathering and cracking out black walnuts to sell to the creamery in Lebanon or for one of my aunts to make black walnut cookies.
I remember one of my buddies from town came over to see me. It had been raining, and the branch that ran over by the tool shed was running high and muddy. With nothing better to do, we decided we would build a raft. There was always plenty of locust posts and planks there by the shed. We helped ourselves to some large nails. Boy, were we proud of that raft, and, of course, we had to try it out. We always had bamboo poles around. We pulled the raft over to the branch that was still running high. We pushed the raft into the water and jumped on with our bamboo poles, and away we went.

We were having fun until we lost our poles in the muddy banks, and we forgot that Little Cedar Creek was also running high. We were lucky that the fence crossing the property line had logs attached to a woven fence running across the creek. The logs were attached to keep the fence from washing away when the creek flooded and kept the livestock from going over to the neighbor's land. I told my friend, "Get ready, and, as soon as we get to the wire fence, jump over on the big log and grab hold of the fence." Thank God for the fence across the creek. It saved us from drowning. We would have been in big trouble if mommy or poppy knew the dangerous stunt we pulled.

I remember the first time I rode a bicycle. Boyd Fields let me ride his bike over on Church Street in Lebanon. I lost control at the curve and went crashing into the bushes beside the Methodist church at the foot of the hill. The only thing that
got hurt was my pride, but I was embarrassed, and my face was red as a pickled beet.

As a teenager, I walked the woods on Clinch Mountain looking for ginseng or gathering other herbs. I love the mountains back home. The woods were always shady with wild grapes and other vines growing to the top of the trees. Wildflowers grew alongside rotten logs covered with moss. I loved going to the Russell County Fair, or down to the Home Land Cafe for a chili dog, or going to the drugstore on Main Street for a Cherry Coke or an ice cream cone. The hot buttered popcorn always tasted the best at the old Russell Theater.

I still remember the good meals we had on the farm. I grew up eating cornbread and beans cooked with ham hocks. I loved greasy greens, hot buttered biscuits with country ham and eggs. Grandmother's fried chicken and deep-fried catfish were the best.

I was still in high school when one of my aunts told me, "Guess what? Your dad is living in Lebanon now, and you have two half-sisters and a half-brother. He's working as the head custodian at the school." I was really happy to hear I had a family in Lebanon.

I remember how I first met my dad. I was riding my bike one Sunday afternoon over in Lebanon, and it was getting close to the time for me to get home. I saw a man standing outside a house across from the school. I didn't own a watch, so I rode my bike up the street to ask the man for the time. A strange
feeling came over me as I approached the man and asked him for the time. He pulled out his gold pocket watch and smiled, and said, "Do you know who I am?" I had never seen a picture of my dad and didn't know what he looked like, and he had not seen me since I was around three and a half years old. I said, "Yes, you are my Dad." I finally got to know my dad after all those years of looking out the school window wondering what he looked like.

What a joyful time the first time I met my two half-sisters and half-brother. I tried to be around them as much as I could and spent a lot of time with them.

After joining the Army and being stationed in Colorado, I got very lucky; I have a great wife whom I love very much. She's my best friend and cooks wonderful meals. She worked as a secretary most of our married life and has helped me with my grammar and spelling over the years.

I know time has changed things since I grew up in the hollow. I can't get over how so many people never talk to each other but tweet with their thumbs going up and down and up and down. Fifty percent of the people in the US don't cook. We drive big SUVs and big pickups three blocks to get a five-dollar and fifty-cent cup of coffee and a four-dollar muffin. Our addiction to fossil fuel has altered our planet's atmosphere.

I wish I could wake up hearing an old rooster crowing instead of hearing my neighbor's dog
barking. The world still has many good things going on.

When I hear John Denver singing “Country roads, take me home,” it sure takes me back home. Russell County will always be home to me. I'll just let the raindrops softly hitting my windowpane tonight bring back the good memories of Country Roads and Hollows.
Contributors’ Notes

**B. Chelsea Adams** lives on five wooded acreage in Riner, VA. She is now retired, but taught Creative Writing at Radford University for over twenty years. In 2012 her poetry chapbook, *At Last Light* was published by Finishing Line Press; her chapbook, *Looking for a Landing*, was published in 2000 by Sow’s Ear Press. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in many literary journals including *Poet Lore, Thin Air, Connecticut River Review, Common Ground, Potato Eyes, BlackWater Review*, and *Clinch Mountain Review*. In 2013, she was the featured poet in Floyd County Moonshine. She received her BA from the University of Connecticut and her MA from the Hollins University Creative Writing program.

**J. Claude Asbury** was born in Richlands. He is a graduate of Emory and Henry College. He spent what seems like many lifetimes living and working all across SW Virginia until he finally gave up and moved to Richmond where he currently works for a large and mainly misunderstood federal government agency. J. Claude Asbury owes all of his success to his eighth-grade English teacher (locally noteworthy poet Gretchen McCroskey) who has no reason to remember him, but whom he will never forget.

**Kohava Blount**, a dedicated and enthusiastic author and poet, has had her work published in newspapers, literary journals, and magazines since the age of eleven. Having won numerous writing
contests, she passionately seeks to inspire and to uplift. In addition to writing, she enjoys composing and performing music, playing sports, speaking foreign languages, creating artwork, and volunteering.

**Ben E. Campbell** is a native of southern West Virginia. His poems, stories, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in more than three dozen literary venues including *Yemassee, Now and Then, Roanoke Review*, and *Broad River Review*. For the last eleven years, he has served as professor of English at New River Community College in Dublin, Virginia. In 2016, he was awarded a professional development fellowship that allowed him to complete research in his ancestral homeland of Scotland.

A native of Norton, Virginia, **Sam Dixon** has lived and worked throughout the Mid-Atlantic states and overseas in Taiwan, mainland China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. After 30 years abroad, he has returned home to his birthplace in the Virginia mountains. His poetry can be found in *Jimson Weed* and *Plum Tree Tavern*.

**Ken Dunn** - lifelong Roanoke VA resident - was previously published in *CMR* 2018. He writes mainly haiku and the occasional short-short story.

**Les Epstein** is a poet, playwright and opera librettist. His work has appeared in journals in the United States, Philippines, India and the U.K. Recent credits include *Eyedrum Periodically,*
Mojave River Review, Fourth & Sycamore, Saudade and Jelly Bucket. His poem, "Rhonda Threw a Reuben On," appears in the forthcoming anthology, Heat the Grease, We’re Frying up Some Poetry, published by Gnashing Teeth. His play (co-written with Claudia de Franko), "Llorona of the River," is slated to be published this fall by Silverton Plays in the UK. Cyberwit recently released a collection of his short plays and libretti (Seven), and his poems were featured in the podcast, “Sunflower Sutras,” broadcast out of Washburn University. He teaches in Roanoke, VA.

Louis Gallo was born and raised in New Orleans and now teaches at Radford University in Virginia. Three volumes of his poetry are forthcoming soon: Archaeology (Kelsay Press) and Crash and Clearing the Attic (Adelaide Books).

Bill Glose is a combat veteran and former paratrooper. Now a civilian, he undertakes intriguing pursuits—such as walking across Virginia and participating in a world-record-setting skinny dip—to write for magazines. The author of four poetry collections, Glose was named the Daily Press Poet Laureate in 2011 and featured by NPR on The Writer’s Almanac in 2017. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including The Missouri Review, Rattle, Narrative Magazine, and The Sun. His website (www.BillGlose.com) includes a page of helpful information for writers.

Lee Hodge is an MFA candidate in poetry and fiction at Virginia Commonwealth University, and a recipient of a 2019 Carol Weinstein Grant. Her work
has appeared in *F News Magazine* and *Funny Looking Dog Quarterly*. She lives in Richmond, Virginia.

**Craig Kurtz** is the author of *Wortley Clutterbuck’s Practical Guide to Deplorable Personages*, illustrated by Anni Wilson. Recent work featured in *Quadrant* (Australia), *Rattle* (US), and *Orbis* (UK). More content at [https://kurtzandwilson.blogspot.com](https://kurtzandwilson.blogspot.com).


**Nyssa Nichols** is a student at SWCC.

**Chrissie Anderson Peters** grew up in Tazewell, VA, and has lived in Bristol, TN, since 2000. She resides with her husband, Russ, and their 6 feline children. She holds a BA in English/Education from Emory & Henry College and a Master of Science in Information Sciences from The University of Tennessee. Her passions include traveling, 80's music, and writing. She is the author of the three books: *Dog Days and Dragonflies* (2012); *Running from Crazy* (2013); and *Blue Ridge Christmas* (2019).
Oscar L. Price was born in a little house on Loop Creek, at Rockdale, near Elk Garden, Virginia. Price was raised in Lebanon and graduated from Lebanon High School in 1957. He now resides in Colorado. Oscar L. Price began writing for his own pleasure and has numerous published and unpublished poems and short stories. He regularly contributes to the CMR.

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. 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 and an online magazine The Spectator, has contributed to the Virginia Mountaineer in Grundy, Virginia and 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!

Joe Womack has degrees from Baylor University, The School of Law of the University of Texas, and The Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He has taught English literature at Stetson University, was an attorney for twenty years with the U.S. House of Representatives, and before retirement, served as an ordained minister for three churches. He and his wife, Cynthia, make their home in Floyd, Virginia.

Maddie M. White is a Flash Fiction Writer, Mental Health Advocate/Writer, and YA Fiction and Fantasy Writer. She is currently working with RhetAskew Publishing on :08 SECONDS to make it bigger and better than before.
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