

Notes about *Clinch Mountain Review*

Welcome to *Clinch Mountain Review* for 2022. *Clinch Mountain Review* is the literary review of Southwest Virginia Community College. Enjoy reading these selected poems, fictional works, and creative nonfiction offerings. All of the authors have a tie to the southwestern Appalachian region of Virginia.

It is an exciting time at the *CMR* because the *CMR* is now part of the Southwest School of the Arts. In October, the *Clinch Mountain Review* Launch Party begins with an open mic night. I hope you will engage with this new event for 2022.

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

S. Russell Wood, Editor
August 2022

Clinch Mountain Review 2022

Cover Art & Design by Morgan Gilbert, Art Director

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Clinch Mountain Review Guest Author

The Key

by *Adda Leah Davis*

Have you ever wanted something so much that it was consuming your whole life? No, I don't mean 'drugs,' but sometimes the hunger is almost as demanding.

I'm really asking about something you hope for, strive for, and dream about, yet cannot see any way of achieving it. That has been my struggle through the various phases of my life.

I am the youngest of nine children, but I wasn't the 'pet.' Since my mother was ill and unable to care for me, I became the 'pest.' I was called 'bawl-bag,' stupid, dummy, whine-box, and many other verbal 'put-downs,' until my sweet grandfather came to live with us, when I was three years old. Then I became 'Grandpa's pet.'

I was always trying to see, do, and say all the things I heard and saw my other eight siblings do or say. I wanted to be a part of the family, but a two-year old saying the things she heard her sixteen-year-old brother say, got her slapped, warned, or just told to shut-up. So, copying the others did not garner a 'seat at the table.' I was still stupid, an 'out-sider,' and very lonely.

When my brothers or sisters brought their school-books home and read aloud, I sat watching the admiration in the eyes of my other siblings and thought that learning to read would get that attention for me. When I approached my sister, nearest to me in age, and asked to be told how to read, her answer was, "Get away from my books. You'll bawl on them and get them all wet."

I promised not to 'bawl,' but I was not allowed to touch her books. So, I had found a way to 'fit-in,' and be a

part of the family, but had no idea how to accomplish it, since I didn't have access to any books.

That changed when Grandpa came. He'd only been there a week when I approached him. "Grandpa, will you teach me to read?" I asked, thinking he would push me away like my siblings did. He didn't though.

Grandpa smiled with twinkling eyes and said, "You're a mite young to start reading, ain't you?"

"I'm three years old, Grandpa, and Daddy's friend, Mister Albert, said I was smart. I'll learn real quick. Will you help me?"

Grandpa sat looking at me and then said, "Give me a day or two. A big decision like this has a lot of parts to it."

Every morning after that I eagerly greeted Grandpa with, "Are all the parts done, Grandpa? What kind of parts do we need?"

"Well, we need paper to write on, we need a pencil to write with, and a book with the letters in it so we can copy them," said Grandpa as if deep in thought.

I knew we didn't have any paper except the tablets that my sisters and brothers used at school, and I certainly couldn't use those. There was a book, though, the Bible. I rushed to the front room and carefully lifted the Bible, which was heavy, and carried it slowly and gently to the kitchen, where Grandpa was still eating.

I struggled and finally placed it on the bench beside of Grandpa and excitedly said, "This book has all kinds of letters and words. I'm not supposed to touch it, but they will let you touch it, Grandpa. Can we use it?"

Grandpa sat, as if stunned for a moment, and then he chuckled. "You must be strong. That's a heavy book, so we'll just let the others believe I brought it in here."

Grandpa looked down at my face and patted me tenderly on the head.

“I think this book is the very thing we need to get started. I need to go to the store this morning, but I think we can start tomorrow morning. Is that all right with you?”

My face lit up in a beaming smile. “Yes, Sir, Grandpa, tomorrow is just right.”

Suddenly, an idea popped into my head. “If I could go with you to the store, Mr. Greer may want me to sing again. If he does, I will ask him to give me a pencil instead of a doll, like he did that other time.”

Grandpa’s eyes widened in surprise. “Addie, you are the ‘beatenest’ child I’ve ever seen. Go ask your Mammy, and if she doesn’t care, you can walk to the store with me.”

I dropped my head. “They don’t want me to bother, Mommy. She’s sick,” I said, as tears welled up in my eyes.

Grandpa rose from the table and took my hand. “We’ll both go see her, and I’ll ask her. How about that?”

So that day, I did get a brand-new pencil, with an eraser on the end of it, and it would be my very own, unless my sister saw me with it. I solved that, though, by telling Grandpa to keep it and telling my sister it was his.

Grandpa grinned. “That’s what we’ll do, and if she gets my pencil, I’ll use my cane.”

That startled me. “Don’t hurt her, Grandpa. She’s not much bigger than me,” I said in a pleading voice.

Grandpa nodded. “I won’t hurt her, Addie, but I’ll make her think I will.”

So, the following morning, after breakfast when the table was cleaned off, Grandpa left the kitchen and soon came back with a wide sheet of purple paper; a 25-pound empty flour bag flattened and turned inside-out, the Bible,

and also my pencil. Thus begin my introduction to writing and reading.

My grandpa had started me on a path of learning, but I found him dead one morning when, as usual, I visited his bedside, and he wouldn't wake up. I became very ill at the cemetery and did not walk, eat, or do much of anything for six weeks after he died.

So, I can truthfully say that I learned to read and write from the Bible. By the time I was allowed to start school, I was already saying the ABCs and writing them. I could recognize lots of words, knew my colors, and could count to one hundred.

By the end of that first year in school, I was promoted to the third grade, making me only one year behind my sister, who was almost three years older. This seemed to have a very detrimental effect on my position in the family, and it certainly did not lessen the knocks and bangs I had grown to expect. Now, however, I could run much faster and knew lots of hiding places.

The barn loft, behind sheaves of fodder, became my special spot to read and dream. I had been introduced to the school library and enjoyed many happy hours with Daniel Defoe, Jack London, Robert Lewis Stevens, Anne Sewell, and Carolyn Keene of the Nancy Drew Mysteries as well as many others.

The years flew by with finishing grade school and entering high school at the age of eleven, which was much too young, as to socializing. That didn't stop me, however, for I was in the school choir, the Thespian Club, and a member of the Honor Society, but I had no 'boyfriends.'

Those years of learning only whetted my appetite, and I began dreaming of attending college. I sent an

application to Berea College, which I knew was free, but Dad would not let me go.

I was very disappointed, but finally begged my dad to allow me to go to Welch and get a job. I waited, begging every day for three months, and in October, my dad came home and said he had found a job for me.

Dad was a timber contractor, and his boss was from Welch. Dad must have told him about me wanting to work, and he immediately told Dad he needed a secretary. I was hired, without an interview. I later learned that this was very unprofessional, and possibly unsafe, but neither Dad nor I thought of something like that.

That two years taught me how to cope socially, as well as many useful tips on workforce protocol, that helped in numerous ways in many phases of my life. I now know that as Grandpa always said, "Addie, there's all kinds of learning."

After two years, I found that I could attend Concord College in the summer with the possibility of earning a scholarship for a four-year degree. Then began another session of begging my Dad's permission, since I was not yet 'twenty-one,' the number indicating maturity.

Finally, I had Dad's permission, and he went with me to an old friend of his, Will Estep, who signed a ninety-day note at the bank for \$350.00, which would pay for twelve college hours in the summer of 1952. I was assigned my first teaching position with a Provisional Certificate (I could teach as long as I went back to college each summer.)

Thus began a period of borrowing money in the summers, and teaching as a substitute in the winters to repay the loans. I had little support from anyone except these kind old men who always signed my bank note each

summer. I worked on my education, all while raising four children, and moving to several different states, so my husband could find work. During these moves, I could not attend college and became very discouraged. Eventually, at the age of forty, I received my degree of Bachelor of Science in Education from Concord College, now a university.

Still teaching, but now getting paid as a degree teacher, I enrolled in West Virginia College of Graduate Studies, now Marshall University, and did my Master degree program. I was certified as School Counselor at Bradshaw Junior High School, in McDowell County in 1978. I worked in this position for eight years and then took early retirement.

I was restless, and so I started writing for the *Industrial News* in Iaeger, WV and also *The Welch Daily News* in Welch, WV before I was hired as Director of Economic Development for McDowell County and worked in that program for six years.

My husband and I sold our home in West Virginia and moved to Russell County, VA, and I felt completely lost. A long-time writing friend, Kathleen Taylor, who I had met at The Appalachian Studies Workshop in Hindman, KY, lived in Honaker, and I contacted her. Through Kathleen, I was introduced to Southwest Virginia Community College, and since then I've taken several classes and was part of the Reminiscent Writers class taught by Dr. Thomas McKnight and Hazel Bostic, after he retired.

Looking back, I sat wondering what kept me dreaming and reaching out to know and to learn all these years. I realize that anyone, from any place, any culture, any nationality, or any economic background can accomplish

whatever they dream of if they will not give up. Tenacity and hope are absolute necessities, but more importantly, one must find that one important instrument or attribute . . . This something that will not let one rest, that never gives up, that overcomes all discouragement, and has patience to wait, work, hope, and dream. So, throughout my entire life, that special something was Education, the key that opened the world to my view and gave me tools to carve out my own destiny. My advice to everyone is to find your KEY.

POETRY

35 Ain't Old

by *Matthew J. Spireng*

Nobody who's male usually much cares
about turning 35. They're in their prime,
they think. But he was vain, known for
his temper, worked out every day and,

rumor had it, got hair implants to hide
his growing baldness, so when his coworkers
learned he'd be turning 35, they pooled
their money to buy billboard space prominently

located. There it was, the morning
of his birthday as he drove to work:

*Happy 35th Birthday, Vick!
35 ain't old if you're a tree!*

The message was gone from the billboard
later that day and was only mentioned
in hushed tones at work after that. But
nobody ever spoke of wasted money.

Chincoteague, Rain
by *Matthew J. Spireng*

The Yankees and Angels have gone
into extra innings and past one
in the morning, while here rain drums
on the roof of the motel so I first think

someone in the next room is taking
a late shower. Soon it is evident, though,
that it is rain—and wind—and I wonder
how much more rain this island can take

just now, the causeway to Assateague
already flooded at high tide the previous day
before all this additional rain that is falling now
and is forecast to continue overnight, sometimes

heavier and sometimes light. It is clear
we would not want to weather a hurricane here,
too low-lying to stay above the rising water
of just an October nor'easter. On the television

rain has begun to fall in New York as well,
making pop-ups an adventure for the fielders.
But they play through the rain into the
thirteenth inning when the visiting Angels lose.

Summers in the 70's

by *Tom Cooper*

While heading home way out in the county
I stopped by to see her just for a minute
In suburbia
Her parents said to wait
She'd should be back any moment

Just then she came to the deck out back
Kicked her yellow flip flops off
Slid open the patio door
With a can of Tab on one hand
Keys jingling in the other
The smell of coconut lotion
And chlorine from the pool

She hugged me in her wet beach towel
Wrapped in big flowers of pinks and greens
And oranges and yellows
Her straight blonde hair still damp
That reached to her slim waist
The poster child of the 70's
And summer and peace

She told me about the friends
She saw that day at the pool
About her part-time job
How she hated I worked so much
How much she missed me
And how the summer was flying by too fast

But for me, right there, time stood still

If just for a moment
In suburbia, with her
Before cheerleading tryouts
The Art Club Fundraiser, the Two-A-Days for football
When there was just work, and the pool, and friends,
And the warm, quiet days of June and July.

lightning bug

by *Chrissie Anderson Peters*

way back to my childhood, I have loved you,
obsessed over you, watched for your arrival
each summer season, and then each night:

my heart has called you “sister,”
my soul has called you “friend,”
my grown-up tongue has called you “firefly;”
but I knew you first as “lightning bug,”
a magical creature in the early nighttime,
something that’s shimmering and white,
a source of pleasure, light to my darkness,
unnatural scent incomparable to any other.

no cardinal can innumerate the times I
have waited in some backyard for your
appearance, for your brilliance to take hold,
whether under the walnut tree at my
grandparents’ in the first place I called home,
or in fields besot with buttercups the first
time I was on my own, or even this morning
under poplars and pines where I now lay my head.

you come to me and dance, you make merry,
enchant me, and eventually you nestle into
highest boughs and branches of the trees

around me, or into the lowest parts of the tall
grasses of the sweet-smelling fields
surrounding us; you seek shelter from daylight,
from rainstorms, or from wind, your light
flashing its signal of safety, its promise kept.

Lonesome Pine
by *Oscar L. Price*

Take me back to old country stores.
Where bluegrass is playing and there's dancing outdoors.
There are chiggers and snakes and wild grape vines.
Way down on the Trail of the Lonesome Pine.

When I hear those mandolins and banjos play,
It takes me back to my yesterday.
I remember the possums and groundhog holes.
I wonder, do chickens still cross the country roads.

Is there still fog on the rivers and tobacco fields,
Southern fried chicken and moonshine stills.
We ate home-cured country hams and heard
whippoorwills,
In those beautiful mountains and rolling hills.

Oh, mandolin, oh, banjo, take me back to see,
The horses of Kentucky and dogwoods of Tennessee.
Take me back home to Virginia or old Caroline.
To taste again good molasses cake and homemade wine.

The people still love sweet tea and raise coon hounds.
And listen to the katydids and hoot owl sounds.
Their work is hard in the old coal mine.
At my home down on the Trail of the Lonesome Pine.

Peanuts for Blue Jays

by *M. W. Smith*

Beth feeds peanuts to blue jays

hiding them in plain sight

on window sills, the nooks of tree branches, and on the
clothesline pole

then stands by the porch window with her morning coffee

watching as the jays find them until

one by one the unshelled nuts are absconded with.

Dance Eternal

by *M. W. Smith*

I believe

when I leave this world

I'll see glimpses of creation

the singularity

I Am.

They say that in black holes

time and space evaporate into gravitational abyss.

Maybe that's where (or is it when?) souls gather

to dance eternal.

Neighbor Envy
by *Linda Hudson Hoagland*

She is close to ninety and has
a speaking disability.
She does have many family
members who care. I can see car
after car with passengers who
enter her welcoming house, staying
for a short while and leave. As that
car leaves the driveway, another
one enters with a warm welcome.

I get to see my sons rarely
even though my youngest tells all
who ask, that he returned to my
small town from his Nebraska home
to take care of me. I might see
him once every couple of
weeks. My eldest son works in a
coal mine with a solitary
life until he met a lady
that swept him off of his feet. His
time was spent with her until she
ended the relationship due
to the distance between their homes.
Even though he is alone I
might see him once a month.

Both sons live less than ten miles from
my house. The mileage grows and grows
with each passing day.

My neighbor sees her family
members daily but even though
I suffer from neighbor envy,
I continue to love my sons
with all I have in me.

The Mountain Top
by *Linda Hudson Hoagland*

The mountain top was a great place to
while away the long hours of summer.
I spent many hours at Big Walker
Lookout selling the books I wrote and
the angel afghans I designed and
created. Then came the scourge of the
COVID-19 and the world changed. The mountain
continued to be beautiful
but the people were mask covered and
scared. The few conversations that I
initiated to get them to
look at my books became bothersome
to the visitors to the Lookout.
Now, the people are returning but
the next big surge of the COVID-19 is
building with hints of making us all
re-enter the world of masks again.
The mountain will remain beautiful.

Lox Scent
by *Les Epstein*

My fingers
Carry the scent of Lox
For the afternoon.

I've salt
And smoke
Sizzling at each tip—
A deli man for the ages.

Perhaps I could swim
Against Alaskan white water
Dodge the grizzlies
Find my birth pond
And lay some fine eggs

In a corner somewhere—
Hidden from pesky sculpins—
And then flip to my side
For a well-deserved snooze

But I hold my fingers
In torn jeans pockets
Shading arthritic knobs
Such rivers run cold

Wind

by *Gretchen McCroskey*

I have known the silence
of air— a breath upon
my shoulder, the whisper
of wind, audible only
by the flutter of leaves
on a willow tree,
the opening of tiny lips
studying the way we
form sound.

Suddenly a strong storm
thunders silence away.
The weeping willow tilts
toward earth, horses and
cows seek shelter, birds
hide among hemlock branches.
Fearing gusty wind
may level our weatherboard
house, we huddle inside

a century-old springhouse—
our sanctuary amid
nature's howling—
confident no wind can sweep
away layers of cement smoothed
by my grandfather's trowel.

Still/Birth

by *Fred Gordon*

pinioned on an exit
her abandoned answer
ruins obscurity

she preserves the bony curve of extinction
the infectious rhythm
exaggerating darkness

like a door without a room
the minutiae of herself
echoes her uselessness

details fill everything
incessant as ashes
a constant, grateful echo

failing at the center
she hides
the plain and simple

These Men
by *Frank Shortt*

Seems like every Sunday they came
These bold men, kinfolk of my dad
Bringing extra drooling mouths then
To partake of our meager fare!

We watched mom serving the table,
As, these men gobbled everything.
We were sent outside with their kids
Fragrant treats, like ghosts, wafted after.

Dad had much patience with, these men
Hard unbelieving men, calloused,
Using the code of the mountains,
As means of controlling dad's kids!

After eating, stuffing themselves,
These men would coerce by saying,
"A fresh drink of water'd taste good"
This stopped the playing of our games.

We would never have an answer
For these men, thought of as our kin,
The code required "no back-talking"
Creating fear of dad's black belt!

The spring, I was ordered to by
These men, thirsty, filled with our food,
Lay a third of a mile away
Through a snake infested meadow.

The code, demanded a fear of
These men, more so than any snake,
More than any bodily harm,
Or the burnishing of the soul!

Empty plates, once stacked with food by,
These men, now lay idle, sopped clean.
All that remained were dried up wings,
Gizzards, necks, and little mercy!

Independence Day

by *Bob Foster*

Downgrade fireworks splash
in my window's lower half—
dark-color-dark.

Woolen charges are offbeat-audible
over buzz and squeak
AM dissonance.

Dusty moths whirl at the screen
and are nightly mad
to have at light.

Loud girls with beer and hard souls
clickety-clack, door to screen,
left ear to right.

A stirring breeze visits and leaves,
fetching coolness, cut grass,
and urgency.

Chilled, I switch on a lamp—
hollow-eyed shadows
retreat and flank.

Half-pint flasks comfort when grasped,
like handguns do,
but murder slowly.

A wadded snapshot of Anne when she loved me
falls one foot short,
two years wide.

Earthly Exposed
by *Kohava Blount*

Rouse and redirect your gaze
Away from the coverings, man-made
Stripped from the guise, bare before the
Scrutiny of condemnatory, mortal eyes.
Restored to the original construction.
Ensnoced, the layers of skewed interpretation that
Lead back to ego-evoking mentalities.
Make amends and abscond the shame
Rectitude to renew holdings
Return to the virtue in which you were made.
Transcend society and the beliefs that pervade,
crafted from frail sands
lacking the eternal link that adjoins
regardless of site.
Discern the ways of beings – tied to
components, disintegrating, and
stand, prepared and staunch, unwavering.
Already embedded amid your eternity.
Nude in the observance of man;
Purest authenticity in heeding the Divine
Peace surpassing time
he with finite judgment distorted
will never be the judge of thine.

FICTION

On the Water

by *Chrissie Anderson Peters*

The Seafair languished in the Port of Miami, five American flags fluttering in the steady wind wafting in off the waters. Her 228-foot body stretched before them on South Dock, reaching upward nearly sixty feet above her base, four decks high. Over 20,000 square feet of space in which to fulfill your every fantasy. For the right price.

Josie drew in one last nervous breath and began playing the part she had been paid to play that evening, beautiful escort to a very rich young man visiting the Miami area for the first time, from a small town somewhere in the Carolinas. She really wasn't exactly sure where. To be honest, it didn't much matter to her, as she was far less interested in the reality of this young gentleman than the role which she had agreed to enact with him. She liked to

think of herself as an actress. She played lots of parts with lots of people. She had been in Miami almost two years now. Her hair had gone from mousy brown to pink to blue, and most recently to professionally-bleached blonde, with soft purple highlights, which somehow came across as both playful and classy. A man called Darling Darren had met her a few months earlier and had started training her to work in his club in the Downtown area. It wasn't her dream job, but then again, she'd never exactly dreamed of ending up as a call girl in Miami when she left her small hometown in West Virginia, so learning the art of exotic dancing seemed like a step up.

She had met this young gentleman from Carolina (was it North, or South, she really couldn't remember) a couple of hours before her shift was over, and he had invited her on the spot to come to a party that he was throwing on *The*

Seafair. Everyone in Miami know the luxury yacht by sight and reputation. A party boat supreme! Josie had dreamed of getting on board the beautiful vessel since the first night she saw it from the Ferris wheel at Bay Side Mall.

Now she walked across the bridge and up the ramp, her arm entwined with Bo's -- that's what she chose to call him, after the character from *The Dukes of Hazard*, that she had watched reruns of as a kid. Nice Southern boy, blonde hair, charming accent. All part of the scene set before her this humid May night. She knew almost no one there, a couple of other struggling "actresses," maybe, vaguely familiar from lesser parties in far worse places. She smiled her most dazzling, most iconic actress smile. No one knew her here. No one knew who she was, what she was. Just that she was well-dressed and with an incredibly handsome rich guy who looked like he could have walked

in off the pages of *GQ Magazine*. The night was hers, to be whomever and whatever she wanted to be. Tonight, she was Josie Monroe, local actress, starring in her biggest role to date.

After several hours of mingling, gliding effortlessly across the deck dancing with Bo, delicately snacking on decadent delicacies passed around on appetizer trays by tuxedoed servers, some of whom she avoided making eye contact with, in case they might remember her from back-alley interludes, Josie and Bo made their way to a secluded area on the second deck. She had prepared herself mentally for this part all night. No man is ever a complete gentleman. Someone paying you that much money would most certainly expect something in return. She braced herself for whatever he would ask of her and let herself go to some beautiful place in her mind. Funny, she realized, the

beautiful place in her mind that she always went to was right here, this very yacht. And now it would be forever ruined for her.

Letting Go
by *Maria Bowling*

She was drifting, eyes open, coffee mug nestled in her lap, to all appearances conscious, but drifting nonetheless, her gaze fixed on the maple outside the window as its new leaves wafted to and fro, to and fro.

But everything she saw existed light years from where she lay, swaddled in multiple layers of brightly colored blankets.

She was in the milking parlor back in Wisconsin, standing in a wet, concrete pit between two rows of cows, the smell of manure pungent in her nostrils. The milking machine rumbled and pulsed as spurts of milk coursed through the plastic bubble below each udder and disappeared into a black hose. There was a great splat as the third cow on the right let loose a long stream of manure. She reached for the flat-ended shovel and scraped

the excrement into the gully that ran the length of the milking platform. Replacing the shovel, she turned and caught her father's grin as he watched with approval. The tips of his moustache hairs were brown with traces of the morning's first chew of tobacco, and his smile was punctuated by a missing incisor. She returned his smile, and a glow of pride ran through her at the thought that she was really helping, and that her help was important. Then he turned and swung the lever that released the row of cows on the left and let in the next six. The cows crowded down the aisle, nose to tail, huffing clear, wet snot from their giant nostrils, anxious to get at their grain and be relieved of the pressure in their giant udders.

A bird chirped outside the open window, "whet, whet, whet," and pulled her back to the present. She raised her mug carefully to her lips. She couldn't see the bird, but she knew it was there, a few branches above where the

window frame cut off her view. From the chaise lounge on the porch, she'd spied its nest in the front oak.

Then she was gone again, flung like a droplet from a sprinkler, the kind that twirled round and round and that they had run through as kids on blistering summer days.

This time she was with Paul, her college sweetheart. It was late August, and a heat wave had overwhelmed Boston. Their little apartment on the third floor along Comm Ave had become unbearable. So they rode subway cars and busses, making their way north to Marblehead, lunch stuffed into backpacks that usually held thick textbooks. When they finally reached the beach, they giggled as they spread towels between boulders the size of dump trucks and lay themselves down to watch the clouds tumble by. Suddenly she could picture his face as clearly as if it had been yesterday, as clear as if she could turn her head right now and see his profile, straight nose, closely

clipped beard, fair hair with a tinge of red, already thinning though he was all of twenty-three. His mouth turned up more on one side when he laughed, which he did now, mocking the cries of the seagulls as he turned to tickle her. She reached to stop him, sliding her hand along the surprisingly soft hair of his lower arm, catching up his hand and capturing it between her breasts.

Where was he now? An osteopath, somewhere in the Mid-west... Chicago? She shivered. Who would choose to live in that cold, barren place?

Bruce had had hairy forearms, too. Hair thicker than Paul's and not as soft, perhaps because he'd been dark-haired before the grey had taken over. The hands at the ends of those arms were small and squarish and might be taken for clumsy, but just picturing them brought back the feel of his fingers brushing gently down her back and over her buttocks, stroking her thighs and coaxing

excitement even when she was sure that the well was dry. Sex with Bruce was the best she'd had, even though she was post-menopausal and all the commercials on TV should have convinced her that sex would be awkward and uncomfortable. But he had electrified her in a way that made every square centimeter of her vagina tingle with pleasure and filled her until all she could do was cling to him with her legs and let the orgasms wash over her.

Again, she shivered, this time at the sheer intensity of her memory. But she'd let him go, too, a year into their relationship when he'd insisted that she marry him or at least move in, and she'd refused. It couldn't have worked, she knew, would have tipped some delicate balance that allowed her to give herself freely.

She took another sip of now cold coffee and carefully set the mug on the nightstand. Rosa was fond of scolding her for dripping coffee on the sheets, and they'd

switched to all white linens just so Rosa could bleach out her accidents. She felt like she might need to pee, but she was comfortable, too comfortable to contemplate leaving her memories for the shock of pushing off the blankets.

So, instead, she let her gaze fix on the painted border that ran along the top of the wall, yellow ducks on turquoise water punctuated by green reeds. The ducks had been there for decades now, faithfully paddling along, from the week she and Jim had assembled Olivia's crib to the night she'd held his hand as he slipped away from her for the final time. But this time he wasn't slipping away to rendezvous with his latest prodigy, one of which gave him and then, of course, her, a good dose of gonorrhoea. No one had ever understood why she hadn't thrown him out, not even Olivia, that it wasn't because she forgave him or that he'd become ill before she'd had the chance. It wasn't money or even the public disgrace of people knowing

what he'd done; after all, he'd never been particularly discreet. It was just that, after the initial shock, she'd reached a place where she wasn't angry enough or hurt enough to want to control him in any way. Divorce was so inconvenient, and, in the final analysis, she just hadn't had the energy.

Whatever, she said to herself, mimicking her grandson's favorite expression. She hadn't meant to open up that memory. But it was funny how long she could sit and let her mind turn. Like a revolving door, it spun erratically, and memories spilled out like patrons from the big department store downtown.

She closed her eyes and took two deep breaths to dispel the bad memory. When she opened them, she heard the front door open and close downstairs. A car started in the driveway, her son-in-law Max leaving for his job at the pharmacy. When Olivia had informed her of their

intention to move back to Catawba, she'd been full of fear. They wanted to live with her until Max could find a job. It would be easier for all of them, Olivia claimed. But after so many years of living alone, how could she cope with someone else being there all the time, not just Olivia, but Max and their teenage son, Jamie? Would her house be overrun with teenagers and that music that pounded out from car stereos passing on the street? Would she be expected to visit politely in the evening instead of keeping to her own routines? They might watch annoying TV shows and rearrange her stuff. Or, worst of all, they might grow tired of her, and then she'd catch them rolling their eyes at each other when they thought she wouldn't notice. Ironically, when she'd finally given in, she'd insisted that Olivia and Max take the big bedroom and allowed her things to be moved down the hall to Olivia's old room.

“After all,” she told Olivia, “It’s not like that bedroom has so many great memories.”

“Hey, watch what you say,” Olivia retorted, “that’s where you made me.”

They’d put Jamie in the game room above the garage, and things had really gone quite well. And wasn’t that how things happened? How many nagging fears had she wasted energy on over the years that had really amounted to nothing? Even the ones that had come true hadn’t been the tragedies she’d expected. The day her gynecologist had told her that her annual exam had turned up positive for gonorrhea, she’d almost been relieved. She knew then that she wasn’t the neurotic, suspicious shrew that Jim accused her of being. The vindication was almost worth having to go through the humiliation of having an STD.

It was amazing, really, how twenty-five years of marriage had faded into memory, with just a few snapshots that always stood out. Though it made her feel a bit like Scarlett O'Hara, she'd always gone out of her way not to replay bad memories if she could help it. Sometimes she pretended that her mind really was a file cabinet and she could just put away disturbing images, like the way Jim's body changed as he succumbed to the cancer or Olivia's panicked cries that day, twenty-some years ago, when the car slid off the ice on Route 311, and they were both pinned in place for the eternity that it took the rescue vehicles to arrive. Since she'd been staying in this room, she'd found comfort in sitting in the rocking chair by the corner window, remembering instead the nights she'd opened her nightshirt to nurse, feeling that delicious pain as Olivia's little mouth latched on and her milk let down. Most nights, she hadn't even needed to turn on the light,

but just rocked the baby gently in the moonlight, watching the shadows move across her face.

Outside the window, orange diamonds of light glinted through the leaves. Car wheels crunched on the gravel driveway; the front door again opened and closed. Was it Rosa or Amy? What day was it, anyway? She just couldn't keep track any more. She looked over at the cell phone lying on the nightstand, just a bit out of the reach of her good right arm. Darn, she really had to pee now. She leaned toward the nightstand, but as she did, the door opened, and Olivia walked in.

“Sorry, Mom, I started cleaning off the stovetop and got carried away. Do you need to use the potty?”

She opened her mouth as though to answer, then nodded and tried to muster a grateful smile.

“Here we go. “

Olivia came around the left side of the bed, pulled the blankets down and inserted an arm behind her back. With her other hand, Olivia pulled her legs around so they dangled just above the floor.

“Okay. One, two, three,” Olivia counted as she stood her mother up, turned her around, pulled down her pajama bottoms and set her on the potty chair in one smooth motion.

“Amy’s here. She’ll be up in a minute. Then we’ll do your meds, get you all freshened up and change your sheets. Do you want to sit in the rocking chair or out on the porch? It’s a beautiful day.”

She brought her lips together and managed to push out a puff of air as she pointed toward the front of the house.

“Porch it is,” Olivia acknowledged.

She smiled again. A year ago, she would have thought this type of existence intolerable, depending on others, especially her lovely daughter who truly deserved to have a life of her own, to take care of her every need. And she never, under any conditions, would have chosen it. But when they'd brought her home from the hospital, she soon realized that fighting it just made things difficult for everyone. So, she'd gathered all the grace she had left in her graceless existence to acquiesce.

Amy appeared at the door.

“Good morning, Miss Veronica,” she greeted her.

“Would you like a tub bath or sponge this morning?”

Veronica raised her right arm and squeezed her hand closed.

“Sponge. Very good. I'll be right back with the basin and your meds.”

An hour later, she sat on the second-floor porch in her favorite wicker chair, a sweater clipped around her shoulders, her breakfast tray pushed off to one side. At least, with her good right arm, she could still feed herself, as long as the food was cut small. This morning there had been scrambled eggs with diced tomatoes, ham and feta, rye toast, well-done, and a little glass of cranberry juice. Olivia would be pleased because she'd been hungry and eaten almost every scrap. Through the slats in the porch rail, she's watched her neighbor, Julie, across the street, transferring geraniums into planters, as she'd done every spring for so many years. The mail truck turned the corner and made its way down the lane. Within reach on the breakfast tray was her Kindle, loaded with the audio version of Anne Tyler's latest novel. When she got tired of watching the coming and goings of her neighbors, she

would switch it on and close her eyes, maybe even get through a chapter without dozing.

The screen door opened, and Olivia poked her head out of the house.

“Mom, I’m going to run to the store. Do you need anything?”

She turned toward Olivia and shook her head.

“Amy’s ordering your refills, but she’ll be up to check on you soon. Are you sure you don’t need anything?”

She mustered a half-smile and mouthed the words, “No, nothing,” and it was true.

Moccasins Along The Appalachian Trail

by *Oscar L. Price*

Theologians have studied religious documents going back to the Dead Sea Scrolls and further. There are writings about Adam and Eve and their sons leaving the Garden of Eden in search of wives. Most believe the Garden was located someplace in the Mideast. Were there people living outside the Garden at that time? Maybe so. It really changes nothing.

The Jewish people have written about the lives and ways of Mideastern people, mostly of their own tribes and the history of their own bloodlines, but nothing was known about the peoples living in what later became North America. Native Americans who walked a trail in the Eastern mountains in North America later named it the Appalachian Trail.

Paleontologists and archaeologists have proved that homo sapiens were walking here in Appalachia long before six thousand years ago. These American Indians were leaving their moccasin prints in the sand along a mountain trail thousands of years before Columbus arrived in America.

When I was a young teenager growing up on a farm in southwest Virginia, collecting Indian artifacts in a newly plowed field alongside Loop Creek after a hard rain, I had just found a beautiful spearhead made out of flint that a plowshare had uncovered. I often wondered how long this spearhead had been hidden under the dirt. Did this spear point kill a brave fighting in a war over hunting grounds, or

did he lose his spear trying to kill an elk drinking from Loop Creek?

Many years ago there were many flocks of wild turkeys in the Appalachian Mountains. Just before the sun came up, they started to fly down from their roosts. The gobblers strutted around beneath the trees while the hens pecked at the young buds on the saplings, and some scratched in the compacted leaves under the big oak for acorns left over from the fall. Once the sun warmed the morning air, the snakes came out from under the rocks to warm themselves.

There was a whirring sound of an arrow going swiftly through the air, and, shortly after, a hunter with a rawhide band adorned with eagle feather around his dark hair reached to the ground to pick up the wild turkey he had just killed.

Once the tribes had a treaty to share hunting grounds. Sometimes the treaty was broken, and that started a war between different tribes. This might account for so many tomahawks, spearheads, and other artifacts being found on and near the Appalachian Trail, near a place called Elk Garden, a place with an abundance of elk that came down off Bear Town Mountain to drink out of Loop Creek. The trail led the American Indians to good flint for making arrowheads, knives, and tomahawks. The trail also took them to salt mines in southwestern Virginia, where salt was processed by the Cherokee in a place later named Saltville, Virginia.

In the darkness along the trail at night, calls of the whippoorwill could be heard from the nearby woods, and a

sound like a woman screaming in terror was only a bobcat calling for a mate. From a nearby valley came the sounds of drums beating and ceremonial rattles being shaken. Wild gourds were thoroughly dried in the warm sun, and it was the seeds rattling in the gourd that sounded like a rattlesnake about to strike. The tribes used these ceremonial gourd rattles as they danced around a large campfire.

If you look closely through the fog hanging along the riverbanks, you can see American Indians dancing with painted faces. The paints were made from the juice of berries and ocher and red clay mixed with goose grease. They dance with long and short spears laced with rawhide and feathers from the wild turkeys and geese. Their axes are made of flint.

The American Indians prepared for hunting or war with another tribe over hunting grounds. Wild game was very important as it was the protein they needed in their diet. Some years it was hard to keep from starving, especially further north, in a long and bad winter.

The Appalachian Trail no longer serves American Indians as a path leading them to powwows, to trade their flint for furs and salt or dried herbs to make medicine. Today the trail following the Appalachian Mountains from Georgia to Maine is used by hikers, using walking sticks, carrying cell phones, energy bars and bottled water or water purification kits. The mountain springs have all been polluted.

There are no longer drums heard or powwows held or

people wearing moccasins leaving their footprints along the Appalachian Trail.

The Falls

by *Linda Hudson Hoagland*

He lived behind the main waterfall, and he came out once in a while when he wanted to kill someone; but, I didn't want to be that someone. Of course, those mentions of killing someone were just rumors, I hoped.

I watched as the water cascaded over the rocks as it splashed its way down to the deep, deep pool at the bottom. That pool was what initially kept me away from enjoying the beauty of the falls.

My fear of water and drowning went way back to my childhood when a friend held me under the water and I nearly drowned. I knew she did it purposely, but when she was questioned by the lady who was supervising the pool, she vehemently denied doing anything to me and the supervisor believed every untrue word that spewed from her mouth.

Nearly drowning was enough to get that fear churning and growing in my mind.

I stood behind some bushes because I didn't want him to see me, but I definitely wanted to see him. I wanted to see for myself that what everyone told me was a myth or was actually real.

This was not the first day I had positioned myself behind this scrub of bushes, and I was sure it wouldn't be the last time I watched for him to appear.

He lived behind the falls, and I lived behind the bushes. I knew that my persistence was going to allow me to see and perhaps even meet him. I truly wanted to know why he was hiding.

After staying behind the bushes for a couple of hours each day, I would finally leave so very disappointed. I varied the times that I would hide and watch just in case he ever saw me.

“Ellen, why do you go to the falls so often?” asked Annie, my longtime friend.

“I want to see if the man behind the falls is real,” I explained for, at least, the tenth time.

“You know that is a myth,” said Annie.

“No – I don’t know that it is a myth. I really believe someone lives there,” I said.

“Is it someone you used to know?” asked Annie.

“Maybe.”

“Are you for real? Who do you think it is?” Annie asked sternly.

“Never you mind. I’m not telling you because you will think I’m crazy,” I said sullenly.

“No, you need to tell me right now, or I will think you are missing a few synapses in your brain,” Annie said with a smile in an attempt to get me to spit out the truth.

“I don’t think so, Annie, not yet.”

“Why don’t you stop spending so much time at the falls?” asked Annie.

“I will eventually. Right now, while I’m still able to do it, I will go to the falls,” I said sternly.

“Okay, okay, I’ll change the subject. What’s new with you?” Annie asked.

“Nothing really. How about you?” I answered and asked in return.

Annie gave up trying to question me, and she said goodbye until we decide to meet the next time. I didn’t want to lose Annie’s friendship, but I didn’t want her meddling into my life.

I was a loner and I always was. Annie was the only real friend I had, and I didn’t want that to be final. Most of the other people I talked with, on occasion, were acquaintances. There was no closeness involved or any interest there to be close in any way, shape, or form.

The exasperating conversation with Annie forced me to do exactly what she wanted me not to do. I climbed into my car and drove toward the falls.

I was sure he knew my car, so I parked it in a different location and walked to my favorite hiding place behind the bushes.

I squatted down as far as my old legs would let me and I watched. After a few minutes of squatting, I had to stand up and shake the pain away.

I leaned over to dust off any foliage or debris I had accumulated on my jeans.

I felt the presence of someone behind me. As I forced myself upright, I resisted the temptation to turn and see who was behind me.

That was a mistake.

His arms surrounded me from behind as he clamped his hand over my mouth.

This was not the way I wanted to meet him.

My instinct was to fight and scratch myself out of his grasp, but I tried to relax my body so he would know I was going to submit to his wishes. I thought that was my best choice because I didn't want him to kill me as he tried to subdue me.

He felt me relax so he loosened his grip.

I turned around to face him.

“What do you want, lady?” he demanded.

“I wanted to meet you,” I replied meekly.

“Why?” he asked sternly.

“I thought you might be someone I knew a few years back,” I stammered.

“Who is that?” he asked in a much quieter tone.

“Frank, is that you?” I asked softly.

“Frank who? What is his last name?” he asked.

“If you are Frank, then you know the answer to that question,” I said as I looked into his eyes.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“I’m Ellen, your sister,” I answered strongly.

He stared at me, blinking his eyes quickly as if he were trying to chase away the tears.

“I have a house in Stillwell. Do you want to come live with me?” I asked.

He nodded his head and encircled my small frame with his lean but muscular arms.

“Do you have anything you need to pack up to take with you?” I asked.

“No, there is nothing that I want to keep.”

I grabbed his hand, and we walked to my car.

He was the reason I kept coming to the falls.

CREATIVE NON-FICTION and MEMOIR
My Hero (Memoir)

by *Chrissie Anderson Peters*

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, he had been an RN for a dozen years and had already seen and done things he never would have imagined back when he was in nursing school. Sitting watch with a federal prisoner who had been given his own private hall in order to ensure the safety of other patients, to recover from life-threatening wounds delivered by another inmate in a cell block showdown. Dodging a mental patient who charged at him from the other end of the hall with intent of taking him down, but stepping aside at the last moment and watching the patient crash into a wall instead -- and hours later, stopping him from breaking a window to try to jump out to kill himself. An elderly woman who accused him of sexual wrongdoing because she was angry that he wouldn't release her to go

home when she felt like she was ready, a decision that wasn't even his to make, whose sister got it out of the patient that she had actually just struck out at him vindictively for something that was beyond his control, and the sister went to his supervisors, so the investigation into his actions could end. That's not counting all the cussing, biting, hitting, kicking, feces-slinging, and worse that he had endured from a myriad of other patients. Or the general disrespect, disregard, and disengagement he had experienced from those higher up the food chain on the job. In March 2020, COVID-19 came and changed the face and routine of everything. Nothing would ever be the same again.

In early March 2020, before it really broke seriously in the US, most of us were still joking about it. The way people joke about things they don't understand and are afraid of. Calling it corona virus and comparing that

somehow to the upscale beer that some of us drank in college. My RN husband and I had been planning a specialty cruise for about a year. The 80's Cruise. Aboard a Royal Caribbean ship, the *Explorer of the Seas*, leaving out of Miami. As the date drew nearer, more 80's artists and acts started backing out. Cruise guests were given the option to back-out, as well, without penalty, and many did. I asked my husband, "Is this something we need to consider?" We had read horror stories about people being stuck on cruise ships in other parts of the world, or not being able to stop at their ports of call, because the virus had ripped through the ships' populations so quickly.

He shrugged. "I could be wrong, but I think we should go and be as safe as possible. Wash our hands a lot. Use hand sanitizer a lot. It's gonna get a lot worse before it gets any better. This may be our last chance to travel like this for quite a while."

So, we went. And we enjoyed every moment. I had opted for the internet package, so I was aware of what was going on at home. On the cruise, we had plenty to eat; at home, the stores were running out of supplies. On the cruise ship, we had ample toilet paper; back home, people were stockpiling and hoarding it. On the ship, to our knowledge, no one had the virus; back home, the number of reported cases was climbing. No one ever wants to go home from vacation. This was extremely the case in mid-March 2020 as we left the cruise terminal and headed back toward the airport.

We landed in Atlanta on Sunday afternoon, and drove the four hours or so home, stopping for gas once and using the restrooms there, washing our hands carefully and slathering on the hand sanitizer, just as we had done all week on the ship. When we arrived home, we figured the hospital would tell him to self-quarantine for a few days

since we had just traveled internationally in the Caribbean. Instead, they told him to report to work per usual on Tuesday, because they were short-staffed and needed him. His precautionary check-up consisted of answering a questionnaire and having his temperature taken. Then he donned inadequate PPEs, and went back to work, the coronavirus spreading among patients in various parts of the hospital, as they hadn't yet organized them into one unit.

The next Sunday, we received an email from Royal Caribbean reporting that at least one case of corona virus had been reported from our cruise sailing. But it had been one week. In that week, we had flown on a full jet from Miami to Atlanta. We had stopped in a gas station somewhere between Atlanta and Bristol, gone in to use the facilities, bought snacks, handled cash. My husband had been back at work at the hospital for three days. He had

been to at least three local stores looking for household supplies for us. The number of places the corona virus could have traveled to, just through us, was mind-blowing!

For two years, he has worked more overtime than I can count. He complained and requested steadfastly until proper PPEs were finally issued on the job. He has watched as his cardiac step-down unit was converted to a COVID-19 Care Unit for almost two years. He has listened to people run their mouths about government conspiracies, about how being vaccinated should be their personal right, not something forced on them by the government. All while watching unvaccinated people dying horrible deaths. But he never spoke out openly because he believes in individuals' rights, even when it means that it puts those individuals in danger for their lives – and others, as well. He has watched people his age and younger die horrible deaths because they refused vaccinations in the

name of personal rights. And very rarely did he discuss even the tiniest detail of any of that horror with me. Because he is sworn to uphold patient privacy and he takes HIPPA seriously; he takes everything about his job seriously.

For two years, he has pent up frustrations, sadness, and a desire for people to stop behaving selfishly and look out for everyone, not just cry out for personal rights. But he has rarely voiced any of these things. And when he has, it has been only in private. Because, when all is said and done, he believes in more being done than said. He takes his job seriously. He takes his oath to patients and their privacy/rights seriously. He's a Registered Nurse. He saves lives every day. And asks for no glory or recognition along the way. He simply does what he does because it is what he has been called to do. For fourteen years, he has made me

proud; but especially these past two years, he has truly been
my hero.

NOVEL?

by *Linda Hudson Hoagland*

The Novel Corona Virus Disease, shortened to COVID-19, entered my world in March of 2020 bringing with it a complete and total new way of living for this seventy-two year old female. The only novels that were in my life that I had been aware of until then, were the ones I had written.

The oddest thing I experienced in all of my years of living was the shortage of toilet paper. When I was a young adult, I went to visit my Uncle Jim in southwest Virginia who was living in my mother's home place. I found it difficult to walk through the house, at that time, because he was saving paper. Piles of newspapers, magazines, and rolls of toilet paper filled the parlor so much so that I had to travel through tunnels to get through the room. He said that he knew a paper shortage was

coming and he was saving all of it for that day. Despite the fact that we warned him again and again that the one hundred year old house was a fire hazard with all of the papers stacked inside, he refused to get rid of them.

Guess what?

The house burned to the ground. Fortunately, my Uncle Jim wasn't at home when that happened, or he might have burned with the house. And – lo and behold – there was a toilet paper shortage.

Moving on - the new deal of seniors having to shop for groceries at 7 AM was no big deal to me, but I had friends who were not up and navigating that early in the morning.

With groceries we all had to buy hand sanitizer and masks. There were warnings about the alcohol content in the hand sanitizer which was something I paid no attention to because I had collected small bottles given away at

festivals and health functions over the previous years. I rarely had to buy any sanitizer at all.

The masks were a different problem to tackle. I crocheted masks and lined them with a cotton filter layer to prevent the germs from escaping my mouth or entering from another's spit spray. I stopped making them because I couldn't sell them for what they were worth.

I bought the disposable masks in quantities of fifty. I bought the scarf type masks that I wore around my neck. I bought the specialized masks that had copper in them and other healing and healthful additives. I usually grabbed whatever one was handy, healthy or not.

Social distancing was good when everyone participated, but there were times it wasn't possible. Passing each other in the grocery aisle when you saw someone you knew didn't allow for the six foot distance. I wasn't about to ask them to step away because I was glad

to be able to talk with someone even if it was for only a moment or two.

Starving the interaction with another person only accentuated the loneliness I felt as a widow. Every television I owned was on and softly playing to give me the delusion of someone being in the house with me.

Loneliness was a hard pill to swallow, at times, and the fact that visitation from anybody was discouraged didn't help me a bit.

The cable man stopped by to perform a minor repair, and I was so glad to see the polite young man enter my house. Pitiful, wasn't it?

I hadn't been laid off from an hourly or salaried job, but I was a regional writer who was dependent upon fairs and festivals on each weekend to sell my books. I would set up a couple of tables to display all that I had

written and talk with anyone who would cast a glance in my direction.

Hopefully, the next year will bring the return of gathering places for people for fun and entertainment. I might be able to regain some of the book sales that have dwindled down to nothing.

Many of my acquaintances have tested positive for COVID-19. I was so sorry to say that some of them have passed on to heaven.

As a precaution, I was tested twice with a negative return. I received my first vaccination, so I was doing my best to stay negative. A month later, I received my second dose. About six months later I was boosted.

I washed my hands over and over again, but the germs could be there at any time in spite of my attempt to eliminate them

Unwanted new experiences tried to enter my life.

The thought of curbside pickup depressed me because I didn't want to lose the opportunity to get out of the house and wander through the store.

For a long while, maybe 3 or 4 months, I wasn't able to schedule a haircut that I desperately needed, but I finally got one, and I was so grateful that I left her a good tip.

My next unfortunate experience was to attend a meeting over the Internet. I hated that with a passion, but I had to learn to Zoom.

Self-quarantining was not a new event for a widow who had few connections with the outside world.

My neighbor, Mack, occasionally brought me a vegetable from his garden, but the neighbor on the other side of my house waved and nodded in passing.

Stay-at-home orders only exacerbated the loneliness making the space inside my house feel like it was moving in on me.

I had looked forward to retiring after many years of toiling as a purchase order clerk for the local school system. At first, it was wonderful because I hit the ground running never allowing the grass to grow beneath my feet.

Well, that came to an abrupt halt.

I had no place to go, so I had no trips to cancel. I was definitely not missing celebrations because no one showed up for my seventy-second birthday.

Staying away from family was not a problem because my two sons rarely visited, not even for my birthday. That was a little dig aimed at them.

Then there was a shortage of paper, sheets of paper. I was a writer, and that was a devastating blow.

After all of the losses of friends, money, and way
of life, I was looking forward to the normal world
returning from the pandemic.

Then came Delta followed by Omicron.

I have one question to ask:

Will it ever end?

Notes from Contributors

Featured Guest Artist: **Adda Leah (ADDIE) Davis** is a local and true Appalachian writer who has published workbooks for school enhancement, historical fiction, mystery series, biography, romance, one book dealing with results of untreated abuse, and three anthologies which include her works. She is a native West Virginian who has now lived happily in Russell County for twenty-four years.

Kohava Blount, a dedicated and enthusiastic 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, being in nature, dancing, and playing sports. Moreover, further favored pursuits include composing and performing musical works, translating, interpreting, and speaking foreign languages, reading, cooking, and creating artwork.

Maria Crofoot Bowling divides her time between residences in Radford, Virginia, and Flagstaff, Arizona. Her work has appeared in many journals including *Red Wheelbarrow* and *Timber Creek Review*. Her debut novel, *Shelter in Place* will be available in the spring of 2023.

Tom Cooper is a native of Virginia, and grew up in western Rockingham County in the Shenandoah Valley. He has also lived and worked in eastern Tennessee, and Central and Southwestern Virginia. Tom studied at James Madison University, Johnson University (Tennessee),

Bluefield College, and other schools including Southwest Virginia Community College. Tom has also worked in construction, energy, and simultaneously in the youth ministry for many years. Tom is a certified industrial and commercial electrician, and currently lives in Buchanan County, working at the Suncoke-Jewell Coke Ovens.

Les Epstein is a poet, playwright and librettist. Recent credits include Burning House Press, Clinch Mountain Review, Slant, The Bacopa Literary Review and two anthologies: *Heat the Grease* (Gnashing Teeth) and *Pain & Renewal* (Vita Brevis). His play, *Llorona of the River*, is available through Silver Birchington Plays. Epstein will have two chapbooks published in 2022—"Sleep Cinematic: A Golem's Quartet (Gnashing Teeth Publishers) and "Kip Divided" (Finishing Line). He teaches in Roanoke, VA.

Bob Foster is a native of Purcellville, Virginia. He resided in Montgomery County while intermittently studying Economics at Virginia Tech a very long time ago. He is the father of three daughters (Bobbie-Jo, Angelita, and Ebie), all of whom are wittier, more charming, and significantly better looking than he is.

Fred Gordon: I was a high school English teacher for many years, and I have published and written in many genres from blogging in *ParentingSquad.com* to writing stories on autism. My work has appeared in *The Moonwort Review*, *Poetry Superhighway*, *Salt River Review*, *Friction Magazine*, *The Writer's Hood*, and *Muse Apprentice Guild* as well as *Skipping Stones*, *Turtle Trails and Tales*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Dog Living*, and *I Love Cats* magazines. I also served as Poetry Editor for "Stories for Children" online magazine.

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

Gretchen McCroskey is a retired educator living in Bristol, Virginia. She is the author of *Finding My Way Home*, a poetry chapbook published by Finishing Line Press in 2009.

Chrissie Anderson Peters grew up in Tazewell, VA, and has lived in Bristol, TN, since 2000. She resides with her husband Russ and their 3 feline children. She holds a BA in English/Education from Emory & Henry College, and an MSIS from The University of Tennessee. In addition to *CMR*, her work has appeared in *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the *Mildred Haun Review*, *Still: The Journal*, the *Women of Appalachia Project: Women Speak*, and other publications. She has proudly placed work with contests sponsored by Tennessee Mountain Writers, Mountain Heritage Literary Festival, and the Poetry Society of Virginia, among others. She is the author of the three books: *Dog Days and Dragonflies* (2012); *Running From Crazy* (2013); and *Blue Ridge*

Christmas (2019). Her other passions include traveling and 80's music.

Oscar L. Price was born in Russell County, Virginia and raised in Elk Garden and Lebanon. He now resides in Colorado. He is a regular contributor to the *Clinch Mountain Review*. His works also include a poem “Beartown Mountain” in “Working for Stuarts” by Kathy Shearer and “A Country Boy's Memories” in the late Ralph Snead's column in the Lebanon News. He has also published various poems and stories in both Virginia and Colorado publications.

Frank Shortt was born in 1942 at Shortt Gap, Virginia in a coal mining family. He joined the USAF in 1960 during the Cold War/Vietnam Crisis with a final discharge in 1966. He retired from the San Jose, California school department as a Chief of Operations in 2000. Since then, he has attended college, writes for a San Jose newspaper, three college journals, for an online magazine *The Spectator*, 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! Frank continues to write constantly at 80 years of age.

M.W. Smith: I was born in Wheeling, West Virginia and have been a faculty member in the Humanities Department at Bluefield State University since 1997. I've written six outdoor “guide” books published by the University of Virginia Press and one book of literary theory with State University of New York Press (SUNY). Most recently, I had two poems included in *Mountains Piled upon Mountains*:

Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene published by West Virginia University Press in 2019. Also, I'm an avid fly fisherman and reside on a family farm in Floyd, Virginia with my wife and daughter.

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

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