



The Literary Trunk

**A Creative Companion to the Writer's Loft:
MTSU's Low-Residency Certificate in Creative Writing**

Fall 2003 Inaugural Semester

Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service

The Literary Trunk: A Creative Companion to The Writer's Loft

The Writer's Loft:
MTSU's Low-Residency
Certificate in Creative Writing

Fall 2003 Kickoff/Orientation
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Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service

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The Literary Trunk is published each semester.

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The Writer's Loft: MTSU's Low-Residency Certificate in Creative Writing

The Writer's Loft is an intensive, 18-month program which is the focal point of a certificate in creative writing offered through MTSU's Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service. It is a unique program consisting of an exciting mixture of workshops, one-on-one mentoring, public readings, and panel discussions. The Writer's Loft's focus is on developing the student's maximum skills, style, and voice as a writer in a supportive, open environment in which the student can become the best writer possible at this point in his or her development. Additional goals include the following:

- developing a student's skills in the art and craft of poetry and/or fiction writing;
- providing a foundation in the analysis of fiction and/or poetry;
- expanding a student's grasp of grammar and syntax;
- preparing the student to face the business aspects of the publishing industry; and
- coaching the student in effective marketing techniques.

Interested in Entering The Writer's Loft?

Although Middle Tennessee State University is in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, The Writer's Loft is not limited to Murfreesboro. Our program is designed to include many different areas throughout middle Tennessee. Thanks to the program's low-residency feature, we are redefining what it means to be a student. You, the student, determine when you study, when you work—all based around your lifestyle and schedule.

Low-Residency

The program's low-residency feature gives a huge range of students spanning many different generations, lifestyles, and schedules the opportunity to pursue their craft on a customized, individual basis. Students meet on MTSU's campus once or twice a semester and participate in gatherings throughout middle Tennessee, but The Writer's Loft is a one-on-one experience between student and mentor.

The Program's Core: One-on-One Mentor Study

Throughout the semester, each student works individually with a mentor, and no mentor has more than five students—maximizing the individual attention given to the aspiring writer. After an orientation weekend, students and mentors return home, and the students submit three packets to their mentors through the U.S. mail. The students mail packets at approximately five-week intervals, and the mentors have about ten days to respond to each packet by mail. Mentors and students are paired at random, and no student will have the same mentor for two consecutive semesters unless approved in advanced by the mentor. Throughout the semester, mentors are available by e-mail if students have questions or need guidance. At the end of the semester, mentors and students will submit evaluations of the semester's progress and each student's overall experience in The Writer's Loft.

Inside the Packets: The Writing and the Reading

As agreed upon by the mentor and the student during orientation, each packet will contain a minimum of 10 pages and a maximum of 35 pages of fiction, poetry, personal narrative, or any combination thereof. The manuscript will be double-spaced with one-inch margins and set in Courier or Times New Roman. In addition, each student will read one novel, collection of short stories, or book of poetry for each packet. For that one book, the student writes a short essay on what he or she learned “as a writer” from the work. This is NOT a book report or traditional review that one might read in a magazine. (Please note that the fiction and the short essay combine to create the 10–35 page count total.)

Orientation Weekend

The Orientation Weekend is the student’s first introduction to the community of writers known as The Writer’s Loft, and it’s the official kickoff for the semester, filled with lectures and workshops during the day and readings and receptions at night. All students will participate in the opening address, at which time they will receive their materials for the weekend and semester. The price of meals and lodging (at a Murfreesboro hotel) is covered by the student’s tuition.

The weekend’s structure mirrors that of the entire program. Most of the weekend will be filled with some sort of activity, but many are optional, allowing a student to slip away for a break from time to time.

Most importantly, this is when the student meets one-on-one with the mentor to plan the semester, to agree upon the page range (or count) in each packet, and to identify what type of writing will be in each of the three packets. While the specific location could change from semester to semester, the Orientation Weekend will take place in Murfreesboro each semester.

Public Readings

Each semester, The Writer’s Loft will offer three opportunities for public readings. Each student is encouraged to give a five-minute reading of something created while in The Writer’s Loft at one of the readings. Everyone is encouraged to attend as many of the readings as possible in order to support our fellow writers.

Panel Discussion

The Writer’s Loft will sponsor one panel discussion each semester, and attendance is encouraged.

Individual Writing and Poetry Workshops

As part of MTSU’s Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service offerings, a variety of workshops exist that cover everything from the craft of poetry and starting a novel to screenwriting and self-publishing. The Writer’s Loft’s tuition allows admission to any three workshops, and attendance is required. A student is allowed to attend more than three workshops, but additional workshops require additional fees.

Publication Opportunity: Literary Journal

The Writer's Loft is excited to announce the creation of our literary journal, *The Literary Trunk: A Creative Companion to The Writer's Loft*. In addition to spotlighting the current semester's literary achievement, the journal will give our students and mentors another forum in which to publish and showcase their work.

Publication Opportunity: Short Story and Fiction Contest

The Writer's Loft sponsors a short story and poetry contest each semester for students in the program. Winners will be published in a single issue of *Sidelines*, MTSU's student newspaper, and The Writer's Loft Web site will present the winning entries for a full semester.

Potluck Events and Activities

Throughout the semester, The Writer's Loft staff will offer a variety of literary events and activities all designed to foster a sense of community among the students and mentors. Attendance is optional.

The Writer's Loft: Our Mentors

Everyone in The Writer's Loft would like to thank all of the talented visionaries who have agreed—graciously and with enthusiasm—to serve as our mentors and to help our students improve as writers and as members of a literary community.

Charlotte Rains Dixon, Portland, Oregon

M.F.A. in Writing, Spalding University

B.A. in Journalism, University of Oregon

Charlotte's work has been published in *Somerset Studio*, the *Oregonian*, *Interweave Knits*, and numerous other publications. She lives in Portland, Oregon, where she is preparing her first novel (*Language of Trees*) for publication. She has been a participating member in such organizations as the Northwest Council of Writers, the Oregon Literary Coalition, Willamette Writers, and the Oregon Writer's Colony.

Michael Garrett, Birmingham, Alabama

B.S. in Accounting, University of Alabama, Birmingham

Michael is an internationally published author and editor. His works have been optioned for movie and television productions, and he is co-editor of the *Hot Blood* short story anthology series, currently in its twelfth volume. Mr. Garrett has worked in a professional editorial capacity for two major New York publishers with such noted authors as Stephen King, Joyce Carol Oates, Harlan Ellison, Lawrence Block, and many others.

Jason Hunt, Nashville, Tennessee

M.A. in English, University of Connecticut

B.S. in Hotel and Restaurant Management, Cornell University

Jason teaches ninth and tenth grade English, Latin, and technology at Montessori Academy in Brentwood, Tennessee. He's taught college-level courses such as Freshman English I and II, American Literature, English Composition, Literature and Composition, and Creative Writing throughout middle Tennessee. His poetry was featured recently in *I Invited a Dragon to Dinner*, an anthology of poetry for children. In the corporate world, he's spent several years creating and managing Internet content for global Web sites. Jason lives in Antioch, Tennessee, where he is completing his first novel (*Cold, Cold Heart*), a tale that features Deke Rivers, a Nashville singer/songwriter turned detective. Jason has studied with William J. Kennedy, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and author of *Ironweed*.

Alvin E. Knox, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

M.F.A. in Writing, Vermont College

B.A. in English, Tennessee Technological University

Alvin is an instructor with the Department of English at MTSU, where he has taught Composition and Introduction to Literature. He has taught college-level English courses at many middle Tennessee schools. His work has appeared in such publications as *Southern Indiana Review*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Best Poems of 1995*.

Cate McGowan, Atlanta, Georgia

M.F.A. in Writing, Spalding University

B.A. in History and Art History, University of Rochester

Cate's fiction has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Snake Nation Review*, the *Louisville Review*, and the *GSU Review*. She recently won second place in the Santa Fe Writer's Project 2003 Literary Awards, second place in the *Glimmer Train* Very Short Fiction Contest, and first and third prizes in the Porter Fleming Competition. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where she writes art reviews for local publications, co-edits the literary magazine *Bobblehead*, and defers her student loans indefinitely. Cate is a former student editor for the *Louisville Review*.

Randy O'Brien, Nashville, Tennessee

B.S. in English, Middle Tennessee State University

Randy is the news director at WMOT, MTSU's campus radio station. He's a board member of the Tennessee Writers Alliance. His novel (*Creation's Fire*) was accepted for publication by Online Originals in London, England. His short fiction and screenplays are frequent finalists or winners in many major contests. One of his screenplays was a semi-finalist in the Nicholl, a yearly fellowship sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Linda Busby Parker, Mobile, Alabama

M.F.A. in Writing, Spalding University

Ph.D. in Communication Studies, University of Michigan

M.A., University of Michigan

B.A. in English and Creative Writing, University of South Alabama

Linda has taught on the faculties of Eastern Michigan University, Iowa State University, and the University of South Alabama. She is the author of two college-level textbooks. Her novel, *Seven Laurels*, will be published in April 2004 by SEMO press (Southeast Missouri University Press). *Seven Laurels* (under the title *The Sum of Augusts*) won the 2002 James Jones First Novel Fellowship. Linda has served as a student editor of the *Louisville Review* and was the publisher and editor of *Mobile Bay Monthly*. She is a book reviewer for the *Mobile Press Register*, and her short fiction appears frequently in publications and journals. This summer she was selected to study at the Sewanee Writers' Conference at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

Steven L. Walker, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

M.F.A. in Writing, Vermont College

B.A. in English Literature, Stanford University

Steven is an instructor with the Department of English at MTSU, where he has taught Composition, Introduction to Literature, and American Literature. In 2002 he was a visiting poet at the Meacham Conference at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. He's won numerous awards, and his poems and stories appear in such journals as *Unbound*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Poem*, *Poems and Plays*, and *Twilight Ending*.

The Writer's Loft: Panel Discussion

"Getting Published: From Manuscript to Book"
November 8, 2003, 2–4 p.m.

Each semester, mentors and students in The Writer's Loft join with area partners and panelists to participate in the semester's formal panel discussion at Davis-Kidd Booksellers in Nashville, Tennessee. This semester's discussion centered on the process of getting a book published, from the raw manuscript to the book on the shelf. Panelists spoke on such topics as the process of writing and publishing from a novelist's point of view; what an editor can and should do for a writer; what constitutes a finished manuscript, from an editor's perspective; and related subjects.

"When Davis-Kidd was approached about participating in The Writer's Loft, we thought it was a wonderful opportunity. We host an average of three to five authors every week for signings, so it makes sense to be a venue for The Writer's Loft's public reading and panel discussion. As an independent bookstore, we would like to believe that we have created more than just a great bookstore. We hope Davis-Kidd is a truly special place for you to escape—to connect with books, quality music, topical magazines, and other unique and wonderful products that we, as readers ourselves, love to buy and realize you enjoy as well. We will keep changing and evolving as you do, and as does the world we live in. Thank you for allowing us to participate in this program."

—Ginger Knight
PR and Events Coordinator, Davis-Kidd

The Panelists

The Novelist: M. M. Buckner

M.M. Buckner is the author of *Hyperthought*, a work of speculative science fiction about a future Earth devastated by global warming. Her next two science fiction novels will be published by Penguin Putnam/Ace in 2004 and 2005. Buckner earned a B.A. in English literature from Memphis State University, studied writing at Harvard University, then earned an M.A. in creative writing at Boston University. She has traveled through Europe, New Zealand, and North America; lived in California, Alaska, Maine, and Massachusetts; and now lives in Nashville. After a decade as marketing vice president for a nationwide financial firm, she is now a freelance writer, environmental activist, and ardent whitewater kayaker. Other publishing credits include magazine features, marketing materials, and content for numerous Web sites. She recently wrote a major research report for the World Wildlife Fund.

The Writer and Editor: Joe DeGross

Joe DeGross is a writer, teacher, and editor of fiction, memoir, and essay. His work has appeared in *Carve* magazine, *MFA Paw Prints*, and the anthology *Literary Lunch*. One of his stories will appear in the upcoming edition of the *North Atlantic Review*. He is a former associate editor and senior editor of *Carve* magazine, contributing editor of the anthology *e2ink*, and editor-in-chief of the soon-to-be-launched literary journal *The Ensign Literary Review*. Joe teaches writing workshops in his Apprentice to the Masters writing programs, and he also teaches medical humanities at Mercer University and the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. He earned his M.F.A. degree at Goddard College and is a retired physician.

The Literary Agent: Scott L. Nelson

Scott L. Nelson is president of Broadband New Media Corporation, a technology company specializing in streaming media that he founded in 1999. As the company developed its niche working with record and publishing concerns, Mr. Nelson fell into the role of a literary agent by creating products that were not yet in the marketplace.

Mr. Nelson discovered a prolific Charlotte, North Carolina, attorney, Robert Whitlow. Mr. Whitlow's first novel was extremely well-written but unpublished. Mr. Nelson sold Whitlow's project to W Publishing and assisted in building a fiction brand for the author. The Whitlow brand has now grown into a six-book publishing deal with W Publishing, four CD/cassette audio titles with Oasis Audio, and a screenplay of Whitlow's first novel, *The List*. Whitlow's latest thriller, *Life Support*, is 11 on the CBA Fiction Best Seller list. His sequel, *Life Everlasting*, will be in bookstores February 2004. Mr. Nelson's greatest satisfaction came when *Publisher's Weekly* called Whitlow "The John Grisham of the Christian market."

Mr. Nelson has also assisted W Publishing in establishing Jennifer O'Neill's book *From Fallen To Forgiven* and multiple titles written by Dr. Jim Richards. The company is developing additional branding opportunities for the self-help market featuring the content of

Dr. Jim Richard's CBA best seller, *Breaking The Cycle* (Legacy Publishers). The company is also developing mass-market products for NorthPoint Church, a congregation in the Atlanta area with a membership in excess of 20,000.

The Writer's Loft: Public Readings

Each semester, The Writer's Loft offers three opportunities for public readings. Each student is encouraged to give a five-minute reading of something created while in The Writer's Loft at one of the readings, and everyone is asked to attend as many of the readings as possible in order to support our fellow writers. The locations, dates, and times of the readings are staggered in an attempt to fit everyone's schedules. During the last session, one reading was held in the middle of the day on the weekend, and the others were on weeknights.

First Reading: Monday, October 6, 2003

MTSU's College of Mass Communication is the only U.S. college with both a recording industry program and offerings in mass communication. The Writer's Loft was honored to hold its first public reading in the college's state-of-the-art John Bragg Mass Communication Building.

Second Reading: Saturday, November 1, 2003

The Writer's Loft's first appearance in Nashville was a public reading conducted at Davis-Kidd Booksellers in Green Hills, and everyone was thrilled to have this bookseller serve as our first Nashville host. Founded in 1980, Davis-Kidd has long been an artistic center in middle Tennessee, sponsoring such events as author readings and signings and monthly book clubs. We are looking forward to a long and literary relationship with them.

Third Reading: Thursday, December 4, 2003

Linebaugh Public Library sponsored our third public reading on Thursday, December 4. Linebaugh has long offered art and writing workshops, book sales, and discussion groups. Everyone at The Writer's Loft was excited to present his or her recent writings at Linebaugh. Afterward, the floor was opened to the general public.

The Writer's Loft: Poetry and Short Fiction Contests

The Writer's Loft sponsors a contest in poetry and short fiction each semester for its students. Each of The Writer's Loft's students may submit one short story and/or one collection of poetry. There is NO charge for the contest, but each student is limited to a single entry. (At the moment, this contest is not open to the general public.) Winners were published in *Sidelines*, MTSU's student newspaper. The Writer's Loft Web site will present the winning entries for a full semester.

- Fall 2003 Short Story Winner: Terry Price for "Bridges"
- Fall 2003 Poetry Winner: Peggy Smith Duke for "Shirt Factory"

The Writer's Loft: Writing and Poetry Workshops

As part of MTSU's Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service offerings, our students had access to a variety of workshops that covered everything from the craft of poetry and starting a novel to screenwriting and self-publishing. The Writer's Loft's tuition allowed admission to any three workshops. And while many creative writing certificates focus on the literary aspects of writing, our workshops ventured into the commercial aspects—the business of writing—as well. Students were allowed to attend more than three workshops by paying the additional fee. All workshops were open to the general public.

Fall 2003 Creative Writing Workshops

- Common Errors of the Novice Writer: October 18, 2003
- Enjoying the Puzzle: Writing Poetry: November 15, 2003
- Critical Reading to Learn Writing Skills: November 22, 2003
- A Guide to Self-Publication: December 4, 2003
- Screenwriting for the Movies: December 4, 2003
- Creating Your Novel: December 5, 2003
- Short Story and Novel Feedback: December 5, 2003
- How to Sell Your Novel: December 6, 2003

Workshop Leaders

- Michael Garrett (Please see description under mentors.)
- Joe DeGross (Please see description under panel discussion.)
- Darnell Arnoult is a published fiction writer and poet. Her stories and poems have appeared in a variety of journals including *Southwest Review*, *Southern Exposure*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Sandhills Review*, *Brightleaf: A Southern Review of Books*, *Sow's Ear*, *Southern Cultures*, *Nantahala Review*, and *Now and Then* magazine. She coaches writers individually and teaches creative writing to groups through Middle Tennessee State University's Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service, the Duke University Continuing Education Short Course Program, and the Duke Writers Workshop and at Durrett Cheese and Gift Gallery in Mufreesboro. Ms. Arnoult holds a B.A. from the University of North Carolina and an M.A. in English and creative writing from North Carolina State University. Her first collection of poems is scheduled to be published by LSU Press in fall 2004. She lives in McMinnville, Tennessee, where she is at work on her first novel.

Special Thanks to Our Partners and Supporters

One of the definitions of a partner is “one that is united or associated with another or others in an activity or a sphere of common interest.” The key to that definition, we believe, is “sphere.” The forming and launching of this new idea, this creative loft, has been a three-dimensional surface upon which many people and groups have come together to help and to participate. MTSU’s Division of Continuing Studies and Public Service would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals and organizations that work with us to make this program possible.

Davis-Kidd Booksellers. Everyone at The Writer’s Loft is excited to announce our ongoing relationship with Davis-Kidd Booksellers. Each semester, The Writer’s Loft will have one public reading and one panel discussion at Davis-Kidd in Nashville (Green Hills), Tennessee. Founded in 1980, Davis-Kidd has three bookstores in Tennessee, and it has long been an artistic center sponsoring author readings and signings, monthly book clubs, and much more.

Linebaugh Public Library. Linebaugh Public Library sponsored our third public reading on Thursday, December 4. Linebaugh has long offered art and writing workshops, book sales, and discussion groups. Everyone at The Writer’s Loft was excited to present their recent writings at Linebaugh. Afterward, the floor was opened to the general public.

Sidelines. Everyone at The Writer’s Loft feels lucky to be associated with *Sidelines*, the student newspaper of Middle Tennessee State University, because they publish the winning submissions in our short story and poetry contests.

Special Thanks to **Tennessee Writers Alliance (TWA)**. The TWA is a nonprofit organization aimed at supporting the work of Tennessee writers and enhancing the role of literary arts in Tennessee. Membership is open to anyone interested in writers and writing. Its members include experienced professional writers, emerging writers, entertainers, educators, students, publishers, librarians, and book lovers of all sorts. While we do not have a formal partnership with TWA, The Writer’s Loft and MTSU would like to thank TWA’s board of directors and its members who have helped us create and launch this literary program. We remain grateful. To find out more about TWA check online at <http://www.tn-writers.org>.

Silas House. Many published authors rushed to help us this semester. Some helped in small ways, others played larger roles. One of the biggest contributions came from best selling novelist and National Public Radio commentator Silas House. Just a few weeks before Christmas, Silas traveled from his home in rural Kentucky to speak with our students at the Linebaugh Library in Murfreesboro. He read from and signed copies of his books *A Parchment of Leaves* and *Clay’s Quilt*. A native Kentuckian, House weaves a deep respect for the natural world and the enduring spirit of the human heart into his books, and he is praised for his lovely storytelling, graceful prose, strong characters, and his feel for Southern rural life. And we praise him as well for his help during our first semester.

Our Mentors. Where would this program be without its professors and its mentors?! These people travel from as far away as the Gulf Coast and the Christmas tree farms of Portland, Oregon, to come to campus and share their enthusiasm for the written word with our students . . . all for the smallest amount of pocket change. We would like to recognize their contribution of talent, skill, and time.

The MTSU English Department. Support has existed on campus, too. Wonderful poets and mentors have emerged from MTSU's literary landscape, and we would like not only to thank those mentors but also the chair of the English Department, Dr. Bill Connelly, for his guidance and support.

Our Students. And of course, certainly not last, there are our students. And not just students, but our first students, the first ones to take a chance on the idea that a group of mentors and students from five states and two countries could come together and produce something new. We would like to thank Priya, Anne, Peggy, Christy, Terry, Janelle, Bradley, Juliana, Latrice, and Ashley.

MENTORS

Strong Moon Tonight

Novel Excerpt by
Betsy Woods Atkinson

1927

“Touch the Tree.”

—Pop

Blue sky’s out. Blue mixes with green cypress and palmetto. Specks of yellow honey-suckle twist here and there. Lily pads and pollen disguise the sleepy tea-stained water, closing up the path of the boat after we pass. My pop calls it his natural chapel.

“Look here, Web. There ain’t no more beautiful place that exists in this world. Breathe it in son.”

I breathe in big. Hold my breath as long as I can. That air must’ve etched a picture of that day far in my mind because now, when those nights come when I ache and miss my pop so, I go there. See it, every cypress stump and vine. I can almost feel the chill of the murky cocoa water splashing up on me.

This day is different. I know that right off. Pop is talking in a way different than I am used to. It all starts with the tree.

“Touch it, Web,” he tells me. “Touch the tree.”

Now, I touch trees all the time. Climb them, swing on them, chop them sometimes. And this is a grand tree. I can see that clearly. Never seen one nearly this big growing out on a back bank in sandy soil. Branches hanging low like benches. It must be eight feet round. Shades the entire beach.

I touch the tree. Place hand in front of hand across the bark. Then I look at my pop. He stands close, pleased with me.

“This place means a lot to me, Web. I spent my time here as a boy. It was my hideout. I could be anything I wanted here.”

His eyes are blue. They mix with the sky that frames his face. Blue circles lined with blood red bayous. They are glassy, thick and foggy. The different thing is there too, in his eyes, in my pop. I can’t explain it, so I put it away. The day is unfolding, warm and blue, cool river rolling by us; the tree begging me to jump from her gnarled limbs.

We climb in the tree. Out on a low branch that hangs right over the river. Sit a long time, saying nothing special. Soaking in the sunshine. Then my pop sits up a little bit straighter and looks at me deep. Deep into my eyes.

“I’ve taken sick, son. Not too sick yet, but it’ll be coming. Web, I’m not gonna be getting better. Doc Callen says it’s so.”

I can't see. And I can't hear. I sit there still. If I move, the moment will be true. And if it is true, I just might fall into the cool, brown river and roll, roll, roll on away. So I sit there still. Blind. Deaf.

My pop opens his freckled arms and wraps them around my body. Pulls me into his chest. Falling safe there in a nest of muscle and the soft brown hair that tickles my nose. Then he tugs me up into his lap and holds me till there is no light left in the day. He holds me tight in those arms, and I wrap myself around him, and the tree holds us both there. Rivers flow down from us.

Summer leaves that day. Picks up and disappears. Right then, there inside that moment.

Pop stays on as long as he is able. At first he is just a bit under the weather. Then the cough grows deeper: raw cough, raw and ugly. Steals the life left in him. And then he disappears just like my summer.

“Death don't wash away wishes.”

—Momma

No rain. And not too warm considering it is the tip end of July. Yah, it is the kind of day pop would've liked. All the folks from the sawmill come to his funeral. Even Mister Winnie Davis the tall man who runs lumber in his schooner down into the Gulf of Mexico.

I shake a lot of hands, a lot of rough, timber hands. Palms and fingers wedded to axes and saws; hands like my father's. I hope if I can just keep shaking one will feel so rough, so worn and familiar that I will look up and see my father's face. But I don't.

There is some talk that follows. Talk about why my pop's lungs went bad. Flies through town. Says Mister Lucas D. Galatas, the owner of the mill, treats his employees like the coloreds round here, making them suck up the dust and smoke. And that folks in this town need a union.

My momma turns away when talk like this goes round.

“Your daddy was a lumber man, and he was proud of his work. God called him, Web. He's in the Lord's arms now. You keep your head high. Smile on your face, son. No matter,” she says, her tough face crumbling. “Having anger at someone for your father's dying don't solve a thing. Your daddy wouldn't have admired that anger. That wouldn't been his wish. And death don't wash away wishes, Web.”

I follow her advice, mostly. Smile when I can. Don't give anyone anything to feel sorry for. Keep my head high as I am able. And I got a job down at the sawmill. Feel close to my father down there. Nearing the evening I even smell the way he used to: Sweet mix of wood pulp, and smoke and sweat. Puts me at ease.

I count timber. That's my job. Counting and sweeping out the office at the end of the day. Jed Nighthawk and the rest of the timber men cut the trees using axes and crosscut saws. Every Monday afternoon I oil their saws and wipe them down. I oil down Jed's special cause my pop liked Jed. He used to say, “Jed is a strong man, inside and out.”

We have three teams of four oxen each down at the mill. The smaller mills north of us use mules, but we use the oxen. Some of the logs go straight into the bayou. The men cut them and drag them into the water. They just float there till they're needed. Then they pole them back down the bayou to the mill. Call them sinkers. Should've called them stinkers cause they smell so bad.

Most of our timber is pine. We use the whole tree. The center inside cut is made into lumber. The side bark is cut into slabs. The slabs are shipped to New Orleans. Pop said the steamships pick them up there and take them to the other side of the world.

The money helps. It's not much, but it's something. Keeps me busy which is just as good. Works a salve, my momma says. She's right cause it soothes me good. Closest thing to relief I can find.

Pop's birthday comes too soon. I figure we'll spend the day near his grave. Show our respect. But we don't.

Instead, Momma and me hike along the ridge of the bayou like there is nothing unusual about this day at all. She lays down a red gingham cloth over the pine straw and mud, and we picnic at their spot, the one Pop claimed when he and momma started courting. The spot I first learned to swim.

It is eating at me, thumping out, pounding inside my head. To be happy doesn't seem like the right thing to be on this day. To feel the sun warm on my face and swat the gnats that fly too close to my eyes just feels too normal. And things are not normal at all.

Jed Nighthawk says that you don't want to hold back someone who passes on with your own struggle about letting go, and that you got to be patient with your pain. He says that back in the old days, the Colapissa never spoke the name of those they loved after they died. The Indians believe that speaking the name holds back the spirit from its journey to heaven.

So I don't say my pop's name too much anymore, just in case. I figure after all he's done for me, I might as well make his way a little easier if I can. But sometimes, I think: Daniel Webster Hart, this is the name of my father.

You know, every single morning since my pop died there has been something sweet on my front porch: pecan pie, fig turnovers, chocolate cake, satsumas. There ain't no note to accompany them, nothing but a couple of tiny sweet magnolias left on top like some mystery calling card.

“Strong moon speaking to me.”
—Web Hart

*The moonlight is streaming in through my window,
Creating a path.
A light river
Flooding my room with its soft glow,
Pulling my dreams from me out into its current.
I close my eyes.
Moonlight river lulling me to sleep.
Crickets and tree frogs singing their night songs.
Gator barking out at the moon.
Strong moon tonight.
Strong moon speaking to me.
I drift away into the moonlight river.
It carries me to the bayou.
I see myself standing there: Bare.
Naked among the reeds and cattails and the river ferns,
Greenness against my pale, pale skin.
I look like I grew there, among the cattails and the reeds.
My legs poking out of the muddy bank.
Then, I move my body into the water.
Quiet waters standing still for me.
Standing still, deep and dark.
Night and water meet at the edges.
But the darkness is so heavy, you cannot see that place.
I walk into the water and the night,
Trusting it.
My body disappears inside of the deepness of it all, except for my eyes.
I move through the water.
Move through the old waters,
Moon’s light drawing a path down the curves and turns.
Showing me the way.
Smooth strokes moving me along.
Moonlight river opening up the shadowy corners.*

Seven Laurels

Novel Excerpt by
Linda Busby Parker

Editorial Note: This is an excerpt from my novel Seven Laurels, which will be out in April 2004 from SEMO Press (Southeast Missouri University Press). The novel (under the title The Sum of Augusts) was the 2002 winner of the James Jones First Novel Competition. This excerpt was published in Provincetown Arts, summer 2003.

Seven Laurels is the saga of a black man, Brewster McAtee, and his family and is set in the rural community of Low Ridge, Alabama, located halfway between Birmingham and Montgomery. The novel spans the years 1954–1994. Brewster is a man who desires what every man wants: the opportunity to better himself and his family and to give and receive love. The Civil Rights Movement explodes around Brewster and he is caught in the crossfire. Ultimately, when he loses that which is most precious to him, he must find an answer to the question, how can a man continue to live after losing that which he valued most? The novel also explores the relationship of one individual to the movements of his time

This excerpt is from the first chapter of the novel and depicts the death of Brewster's brother TeeBoy, who reappears in the novel in ghostly form as he directs Brewster's actions.

Brewster had not wanted to go to DuBose. The place was too dark. You couldn't see trouble coming and DuBose himself shot two boys who flashed knives and drew blood that looked like liquid gold in the dim amber lights strung on black cords across the center of the room. But he went to watch out for TeeBoy because he was young and hotheaded, always had been. It was Saturday night, and DuBose had the blues sliding like hot, sweet syrup with the High Steps playing, and the man on the trombone blowing notes slick, curvy, and smooth. Brewster had three whiskies, no ice, and he had Antonette, whose shoulders were thick, but soft as butter.

Mr. Trombone blew sounds like Charlie Patton's blues—easy moving tones. TeeBoy was with the jivers from Happy Landing, the flophouse off Limrick Road that had a red neon sign out front, but the "d" in Landing had been burned out since the red-lettered sign went up.

"That a place for rovers," Mama Tee said. "Steer clear 'round that place."

But TeeBoy was at DuBose with the Happy Landing crowd and a couple of discharged military boys who still wore uniforms. Brewster told TeeBoy not to play pool with the soldier-boys because they thought they were something in those uniforms, but the outfits didn't have any merit because they were old enough to have moth holes eaten clean through the wool, but there he was, playing pool with the Happy Landing boys and the would-be soldiers. When the piano player started with short, free and easy notes, TeeBoy

headed for the platform. His body moved to the fast beat, looking like he was in the air, not on the floor. His feet lifted short steps, clean as glass.

TeeBoy laughed with his head back and his eyes looked into the soft gold lights. Three girls tapped their feet and twisted their bodies at the edge of the raised floor, waiting for their chance to glide into the yellow light with TeeBoy. Brewster stepped outside to get some air and let the breeze wash the smoke out of his eyes. He sat on the fender of his truck, lit a cigarette, and listened to the music drift past the rafters. He slapped the beat against his thigh and he thought about going back inside, sliding in alongside Antonette, tasting her sweet neck and pressing his fingers into the full, soft flesh at her hips. That's when the door blew open with TeeBoy in the middle of the pack from Happy Landing. The door shattered. Pieces flew through the air. Brewster saw TeeBoy pinned against the wall by two of the Happy Landing boys. He jumped from the truck, but his legs moved in slow motion. He ran toward TeeBoy and he could see himself running, like he hovered above himself. He ran and ran. No sound at all. One of the boys drew the knife, the blade bur-nishing a silver streak in the dim light of the bare bulb over the door. The boy's elbow drew back, the hand flew out, the fist held tight around the handle. Brewster saw the thrust, but he didn't see the blood yet because he ran and watched himself. He saw TeeBoy stagger, fall to his knees and lean backwards at an awful angle.

The military boys running in a pack knocked him off balance. A path cleared before him and he saw TeeBoy on the concrete, hunched on his elbow, looking down at the blood that flowed from his chest so fast there was nothing that could stop it. TeeBoy didn't scream; he laid his head back and his eyes glazed like liquid glass was poured over them, and they froze in place. Brewster knelt beside TeeBoy trying to catch the blood, putting his hands on TeeBoy's shirt, over TeeBoy's heart, pushing the wound together, but the blood came up over his fingers, warm and red-orchid in the light of the naked bulb. The blood soaked TeeBoy's shirt, ran down on the concrete slab, and ran behind TeeBoy's head and off into the dirt. The crowd fleeing DuBose stepped in the dark orchid flow, making bloody footprints on the concrete and on the dirt, and all the time Brewster tried to push the slit together to hold life inside Teeboy's body.

Three men wrapped TeeBoy in a tablecloth. Brewster climbed on the truck bed of his pickup, put his arms out and the men handed TeeBoy to him, wrapped tightly in the white linen. Old Man Malone drove. Brewster cradled his brother in his lap, holding him like a child, cupping his right hand around his brother's hand, feeling the coolness in TeeBoy's fingers, watching the red stain grow in an uneven circle on the white cloth. Old Man Malone slowed at the traffic light on State Street and Brewster shouted toward the cab, "Don't stop, Malone. Ain't nobody on the road. Don't stop, man!" Malone stepped on the pedal and Brewster's head jerked, hitting the back window of the cab, but he held TeeBoy, cushioned him like a baby.

"Hold on! I'm holding on, TeeBoy. You hold on! Hold on!" Brewster's voice crashed through darkness, then murmured in dull chant and all the while he felt the coolness of TeeBoy's hand.

Old Man Malone pulled Brewster's truck to the colored door of Low Ridge County Hospital. He hopped out of the cab, leaving the door of the truck standing open. "We got

a man been cut," he shouted into the hallway of the hospital and he rushed back to help Brewster unload his brother.

A woman in a tall nurse's cap stuck her head out the door. "You'll have to wait for a colored orderly. I'll call for one." She put her head in and closed the door.

Old Malone looked almost comic now. He ran back to the door, his feet lifting high, his thin legs almost dancing, his red suspenders marking his path. He opened the door to the waiting room. "We got a dying man here. He needs a doctor right away." Old Malone jiggled back to the truck bed, but the woman in the cap put her head out again.

"I can't let you in. The colored orderly will be here in a minute. He'll take him to the colored room. I've called Dr. Hamilton. You'll have to wait." She said this sharply and she pulled the door shut with force.

Josiah Hamilton, the only Negro doctor in the county, had his office in his house, not a great distance from the hospital. Brewster lifted his brother's head, cradling it close to his chest.

"The doctor's coming, TeeBoy, but it don't matter. Don't you worry. Whatever's going to happen is going to happen anyhow. Don't you worry." He wrapped his arms around his brother, giving TeeBoy's body some warmth, but all the while feeling the coolness of TeeBoy and the wetness of blood that soaked his own shirt and pants. He rocked his brother back and forth as a mother does a small child. He felt the smallness of TeeBoy's shoulder and the heaviness of TeeBoy's head, which he cradled in the bend of his elbow, and he felt also the chasm that opened up inside himself, a bottomless, dark gorge. He longed for TeeBoy even while he held him.

Old Man Malone paced wildly by the truck, cursing and spitting, but Brewster rested his shoulders against the back of the cab and pulled TeeBoy's head up under his chin. He closed his eyes and pressed TeeBoy's body against his own. He felt no rush. He wanted to hold TeeBoy. He wanted TeeBoy to feel his arms tight around him, but when he took TeeBoy's hand again, there was no grip in it. It held the coolness of death.

"What time you got, Malone?"

"What you say?"

"Time, what time, Malone?"

"Don't know the time." Malone paced by the truck.

"Find out from that nurse."

"Hell, don't matter," Malone shouted. "Doctor be here soon. Don't matter."

"Damn, Malone, find out from that nurse the time!" Malone jiggled a path to the door again, summoning the nurse.

Forty-five minutes past one, Sunday morning, October 7, 1954, three days before his sixteenth birthday, TeeBoy slipped away. Brewster left the hospital walking in blackness too thick for breathing, too deep even for weeping.

Pulp Parody #115

by
Jason Hunt

There was a knock on the door of my Eddy Street office. There may have been a knock on the door of my College Avenue office, too, but since I was at the Eddy Street office, I couldn't know for sure. Besides, I didn't have a College Avenue office. "Come in," I said, and I meant it.

She was a tall, green-eyed redhead with more curves than the copper tubing on a moonshine still. And looking at her made a man just as drunk. She wore a black hat, dipped seductively over one eye. The other eye had long, dark lashes, a green iris, black pupil, and white everything else. (I don't think the white part has a name, just like an egg: the yellow part is the yolk, but the white part is just the white part.)

She wore a tight red shirt with a plunging neckline that left little to the imagination. In other words, you could see a lot. Not everything, of course, because if you could see everything, she would have been naked. And if she had been naked, she wouldn't have been walking into the office of Ithacansas Investigations.

Did I mention her plunging neckline and bountiful cleavage? I did? Good.

Her skirt was short and black and leather. Her legs were long and tanned and clean-shaven. She wore black shoes with five-inch stiletto heels, which must have added a good five inches to her height, which must have been five-nine before the heels, five-eleven after. What can I say, I'm good with figures.

"How can I help you?" I asked, picturing a number of ways I could help her.

"There's been a murder," she said, cool as a piece of pizza at the end of a dorm party.

"Who's the stiff?" I asked.

"A private dick."

"Like me?"

"No," she said, looking me up and down like a judge at a yoyo competition, "Not as big as you."

I nodded, for no reason other than to be doing something with my head.

"He was working for me," she said. "I had him follow my husband to see if he was cheating." Why anyone would cheat on a woman with a body like that, I'll never know. Unless of course, she was frigid. Or imbecilic. Or suffered from chronic halitosis. Or lesbian. Well, maybe not lesbian. That might actually have been inducement to stay. Still, there were plenty of things that might drive a man to infidelity.

"What did the dick find out?" I asked, no longer nodding, but now shaking my head from side to side.

She sat down and crossed her legs. I was hoping she'd pull a Sharon Stone from *Basic Instinct*, but then that would make me the fat, dorky guy from *Seinfeld*.

"Nothing," she said. "Somebody put a .357 to the back of his head and blew his nose all over the kitchen wall."

"Nice."

"Will you help me?" She uncrossed her legs for a second. Whatever she had, she wasn't Sharon.

"No."

She stood up, reached between her breasts, and pulled out a Smith and Wesson .357 magnum.

"If you can't help me . . ."

"Okay," I said. "I'll help."

I pulled a magnetic chess set out of my desk and played a quick game. I lost.

"You shot the short dick because the short dick was your husband," I told her point-blank. "You hired him to find out if he was cheating on you. He was. He was cheating on you with you. He found out about your secret life as an exotic dancer, and he started showing up at the club. Then one night he took you to a roadside motel and made love to you like he'd never made love to you before. Only, since it was the you of your secret life, and not the you of your not secret life, it was like he was cheating on you with your secret you. So you hired your husband, who in his secret life is a not-so-tall private detective, or short dick for short. He cracked the case, so you cracked his cranium. A crime of passion."

She looked at me, then turned the gun on herself.

I got up, took my coat and hat from the coat and hat rack, and went out into the cold, Ithaca night. I needed time. I needed to think. I needed a beer and some wings. Hot wings. Real hot. With bleu cheese and celery. I could deal with her when I got back.

Brendan's Farm

by
Steven Walker

It's too late to fix a thing,
except in memory.
After breakfast my son removes the coffee can
from the shadows of his closet
and dumps the contents onto the kitchen floor.
Gradually, a kind of order takes shape
on the gray-white linoleum.
Sheep and goats mingle behind a run of fence.
Horses gather around a water trough,
and his favorites, the suckling pigs,
still attached to the reclining mother's teats,
dine in the shade of the only tree.

The truest part of the scene
is the pile of junk he scoops to the side.
There's a water tanker with broken wheel,
a harrow without shanks, a plow without handles
and the assorted parts of cows, horses and chickens
tossed aside for the knacker.

I've lived that life in a place
he will hardly remember
but to hear me slip and call it home.
Home away from this rented shabbiness
with its cockroaches, the cigarette butts
and broken beer bottles strewn over the lawn,
and the siege of angry and sullen voices
booming out of apartments and car stereos
all day and all night,
"Why me, man, why me?"

I begin to mend his fence lines
close the gates and shut the barn doors
until his hand pushes mine away,
until he stammers, "No, Daddy. No."

Portrait of the Artist's Mother

by
Steven Walker

What she felt was true
beyond woodiness of wood
or blueness of blue.
By faith, she held fact
more honorable than fantasy
and stubbornly, indeed fiercely
corrected the orange skies,
the red sheep that imagination
or crayon deficiencies imposed.

One's dreams, at best,
were the orchestra tuning up,
waiting for the conductor's downbeat.
"How do you know," she would ask,
"How do you know the sky curves
this way or that? How do you know
that woman would stand in the window
looking as if she might scream
or jump into the chaos of colors beyond?"

The perception of the real
was mysterious enough.
That it was sometimes beautiful,
that fallen apples could suggest
natural law, or moral evolution;
that her son ever learned
to pay the taxes on time
or tie a shoelace,
these were proofs of God.

For Celan

by
Steven Walker

Some places are too lonely for song.
If we learn to live in them,
brokenness survives in bloodwhine,
wingchirr of parasite and bee,
wind-blasted pine without value,
worms that till.
Let yourself be empty,
let the wind chime
what is torn from you
through a barbed world.
It isn't a betrayal.
Fall into the gull-white rib,
hammered crevice,
nature, this spined residence.
Sing out from blood and smoke,
then burrow deeper.

The Light Moves

by
Randy O'Brien

"And this is the work of God," Mrs. Glover smiled.

Jerry Jason looked into the old woman's yellowed eyes and frowned. "Don't you realize this is a real little moneymaker? Why, you could charge two dollars a head to see this thing."

The sun set as she clutched her Bible to her breast. She wore a tiny cross on a necklace around her throat. She listed slightly to the left from working in the cotton fields alongside the men. Her starched stiff dress featured a pattern of little boys and girls at play. She had reached the age where it was impossible to conclude if she was in her sixties, seventies, or eighties. She gazed at the reflection of what could look, in the proper light, like Jesus.

He spat, "And look, it may not even be Jesus."

"I know it's my Lord," she said. She turned her eyes toward Heaven and smiled. "It's a sign that the end is near and Jesus is coming."

The elderly entrepreneur hitched up the lip of his trousers over his big, round belly. He had read the article about the sighting. He'd cleaned up on the two-headed calf in Kansas, the UFO in Idaho, and the world's biggest turnip in Fargo, North Dakota. In all his experience, he knew when there was a "no sale."

"Here's my card, Mrs. Glover. You give me a call if you change your mind."

She took the paper and tore it in half. "The Lord I worship isn't short of cash, buster." She slipped the bits of paper into the pocket of her apron. "It's a miracle," she whispered and clasped her hands in prayer.

"It's a menace," Mrs. Pickens said. "I can't believe you're letting this go on. Wish I'd never mentioned anything to anybody else about it."

Mr. Pickens said, without looking up from his afternoon newspaper, "The mayor likes it."

The couple sat on the swing hung from the front porch. The porch was recently attached to the anterior of their trailer. He rocked in the swing, twisting the paper out of the shadows and into the new light in the center of the porch. She stood and began pacing back and forth in front of him, twisting the edge of her apron until her fingers glowed pale. He wore bib overalls and a "CAT" hat. She wore a print dress and low-heeled black shoes. Just by looking at them, you could tell they were good people.

Her face twisted into something like a prune as she watched the procession filing into her home and out the front door. The people came to see the shadowy mixture of light and dark that appeared to some a miracle. It was the profile of a man with a high forehead, long hair and beard, and a long nose. Just like Jesus, or Willie Nelson. Estill Springs, Tennessee, had never seen anything like it.

It was the Pickens's new porch light that made the portrait of the Savior visible. Old man Pickens glanced over the edge of his newspaper at his distraught mate. "We need to save this one," he smiled.

It was a slow news day. The article about the apparition appeared on the front page, filling nearly half the space. A black and white picture showed Mrs. Glover standing on the back steps of her trailer, just left of the miracle freezer, the receiver of the image of Christ. She smiled at all the people below her. Some had traveled hundreds of miles to see the marvel. Every one of them had traipsed through the back door of the Pickens' trailer and into the kitchen. Some had stayed past midnight. A carpenter, learning of the need for some children and smaller people to stand on tiptoe, constructed a stepstool allowing for the most advantageous view of the miracle.

"Of course the mayor likes it," Mrs. Pickens said. "He owns the only store in town. He doesn't have people tottering on a stepstool in his kitchen. Don't forget, he don't have to pick up after them, either. Besides, it ain't right to make money, if in it is a work of God."

Mr. Pickens folded the paper and ran his finger down the crease. He ripped the paper along the crimp and folded the article into a square. Usually the only thing he might save from the newspaper was the "Andy Capp." He wouldn't need to clip today's strip though; it went over his head. "That's the same thing I heard the Widow Glover told that man from the fair circuit."

Mrs. Pickens wiped the sweat from her hands on the front of her apron. "As I see it, it's a joint proposition between the Widow Glover and us."

"I believe in God and everything," Mr. Pickens snorted, "but I never thought I'd see the day a major household appliance would be used by the Lord to tell folks his son is making a comeback."

A cloud of dust rolled by the front porch as the television news truck skidded to a halt. The crew piled out and scouted the best angle to capture the reflection. After setting up the tripod, Jeanie flicked on the lights she had pulled from the van. The face disappeared. "I guess they don't make miracles like they used to," Jeanie smirked.

"Save the cynicism for the city," said Harold Greene. "These are God's folks." He'd become a minor celebrity for his "Off the Pathway" features, and now he was ready to bring the midstate the lowdown on messages from the Most High.

Jeanie frowned and placed a red gel over the television camera's light. The face on the freezer reappeared.

The television people stood in Mrs. Glover's front yard and rolled tape. The grass was making a last stand against the summer heat. The path between the two trailers was a dingy beige.

After rolling a hundred feet of tape through the camera, Jeanie flicked off the camera and turned to the reporter. "What's in it?"

"Skeptic, thy name is woman," Greene joked. "Mrs. Glover," he yelled and waved at the old woman as she descended from her trailer. At the sound of her name, the old woman turned from talking to a local unbeliever. The man saw the apparition and knew it was for real, just as the Lord was real for every true believer.

The photographer swung the camera in Mrs. Glover's direction just as the new believer bent and kissed the little, old woman on the neck. Jeanie focused on the widow's shocked face and touched the record button.

"What's in the freezer?" Greene began.

"I believe there's some pork in there," the old woman put a finger to her lips, "some rabbit, venison, fish, and vegetables."

"Jesus was Jewish," the reporter said as he poked the microphone a little closer to Mrs. Glover's thin lips. "Aren't you afraid the pork might offend him?" Greene pulled at his collar as if to let out some steam. The night was sticky and he'd overdressed for the humidity. The photographer dressed wiser, but she had to carry a forty-pound camera. She wore a white T-shirt, jeans, and no underwear. It was just another thing she didn't believe in.

"If you believe that Jesus is Lord, then nothing in his kingdom is unclean," Mrs. Glover chided the Northerner. "Besides, it's not what's on the inside that's important, it's what's going on outside."

"Where did you buy the freezer?"

Mrs. Glover thought for a moment. "Had to be from D.T.'s. That's right, it was about eight years ago. We had them bring it out and hook it up. They even carried off the box."

"Why do you think your freezer was picked to be the recipient of this miracle?" Greene glanced over his shoulder and caught Jeanie's one-eyed gaze. She smiled, knowing Allan, the news director, would eat this stuff with a spoon.

"We are members of the Cowan Church of Christ. We feel this is something bigger than the church, though. We witness to everyone who comes to see it. We'd baptize the ones who weren't saved, but we don't have a tub big enough to dip' em." The old woman paused for a moment, then pointed to the Pickens's trailer. "Sister Pickens is just as instrumental in helping these people find Jesus as I am. You ought to talk to her, too."

Greene was like a bloodhound on a trail. Mrs. Pickens would have to wait. "What do you say to people who say it looks like someone took a ball-peen hammer to the side of your freezer?"

Mrs. Glover's eyes narrowed, then her eyebrows crept toward her thinning hairline. "You're saying the miracle is manufactured." She shook her head. "Taint so. People see it. They know when sometin' real and sometin' fake. You can see it in their faces."

"And this is real?"

"Two days after I learned I had Jesus on my freezer I had a dream where all this was explained to me. Jesus said he was the one who connected the porch light to my freezer, like turning my freezer into a TV. That's how I knew he wanted this for the whole, wide world to see. When the whole world sees it, it'll go away."

"Thank you, ma'am." Greene turned and drew his fingers across his neck. Jeanie quickly flicked off the camera and lamp to preserve the batteries.

"Next door, Jeanie," he said as he coiled the microphone cord around his hand. "Then we get crowd reaction."

The photographer trailed behind the man in the business suit. He greeted the Pickenses as Jeanie set up the tripod and adjusted the lights. When all was ready, Greene poked the microphone into Mrs. Pickens's face. "Do you believe it's a miracle?"

"It's just a reflection on a white background." She pointed to the back of the freezer. "You can make out some sort of hippie or something, if you want to. Who knows what Christ looked like?"

Mr. Pickens picked up the thread of the conversation. "And we shouldn't be conducting services in my front yard."

"Trampling the rose bushes and flower bed," Mrs. Pickens ended the sentence.

Greene continued with Mrs. Pickens. "So you're opposed to having the freezer here?"

Mrs. Pickens put her finger to her lower lip, then sighed. Mr. Pickens said, "My wife and her church believe it's a miracle and they want to do what's best to serve the Lord."

"Cut!" Greene yelled. "Set up over there for reax."

The TV lights went down and Harrison Greene held out a warm, sticky hand to the Pickenses. "Thanks ever so much for your time."

"Say, when's this gonna be on?" Mr. Pickens asked.

"Tonight at ten," the reporter said as he followed his cameraperson to the line of people exiting the Pickens's trailer. He pulled a gap-toothed, dusty boy from the line as the Pickenses returned to their perch.

"I seen it!" The boy grinned.

"It made me cry," said a young woman with a baby on her hip. "Does that tell you something?"

"I feel good about seeing it," said a slight, goateed young man. "I think it's a sign that he is real and that we need to be ready to meet him face to face."

A young woman with short hair and long fingernails ended the montage with "If it was really Jesus, couldn't we see him even if the light was turned off?"

Greene turned to Jeanie. "Is that enough?"

"Should be plenty," she nodded and began packing up the equipment.

The crowd swelled as the TV truck left and the moon rose over the hills. To the west, the dust settled over the road as the dew fell.

"This needs to stop," Mrs. Pickens moaned. She wrung her hands again in the folds of her apron. Her mouth twisted down into a cruel frown. Mr. Pickens nodded and went into the house. He sat in his easy chair until the ten o'clock news ended. After seeing Harrison Greene's "Off the Pathway" feature, he decided it was time to take action, even if it did mean he'd lose his favorite spot to read "Andy Capp."

The next morning, before anyone else even thought about getting up, he strode out to the porch and undid the light bulb from the socket. He checked to make sure the switch was off, brought the stepstool from the kitchen to the porch, then stuck a screwdriver into the hole and broke off the contact. He replaced the bulb and took the stepstool back into the house.

Later that afternoon, at dusk, the crowds began to gather just as they had every other night for the past three weeks. Believers came from miles around to see the spirit of the Lord on a GE freezer.

When the porch light didn't come on, everyone gathered around the Pickens' trailer.

"Turn on the light," they chanted.

"Why can't we see it?" they asked.

A tall, young man with shoulder-length black hair stepped from the crowd. He took the bulb from the socket and without a word, handed it to Mrs. Pickens. She returned from the trailer with a new bulb and handed it to the young man. He twisted the new bulb into place and whispered, "Now try it."

Mrs. Pickens hit the switch and nothing happened. The tall, young man said, "It's a sign. The hour of the Lord is come."

The crowd quickly dispersed. The next day there was a picture of Mrs. Glover on the front page of the newspaper. She held her Bible over her chest and she was smiling. The cutline read, "still faithful." The story said Mrs. Glover had decided in the meanwhile, to cover the side of her freezer with a quilt. She said the freezer would soon would be touring with "Jerry Jason's Traveling Roadside Attractions" throughout all the southeastern United States. Mrs. Glover assured the reader that it would be presented with the same reverence as when the apparition first shone in the light from the Pickens's front porch. "The work of the Lord will not be stopped," Mrs. Glover glowed.

Will Work for Love

Song by
Jason Hunt

Standing on a busy corner
Of a foul and filthy street
I search the sky for my salvation
A cardboard sign stands at my feet

Will work for love
I've had enough
This being alone
Turns out it's way too tough
Will work for love
Dear God above
My heart's grown cold
Have pity on my soul

I think of all the years I've squandered
'Bout enough to make me cry
I think how far from you I've wandered
Won't you give me one more try?

Will work for love
I've had enough
This being alone
Turns out it's way too tough
Will work for love
Dear God above
My heart's grown cold
Have pity on my soul

When the wind is in the willow
When I'm lying in my grave
Don't carve no name upon my tombstone
Just an epitaph that says . . .

Will work for love
I've had enough
This being alone

Turns out it's way too tough
Will work for love
Dear God above
My heart's grown cold
Have pity on my soul
Will work for love
I've had enough
This being alone
Turns out it's way too tough
Will work for love
Dear God above
Lead me by the hand
Into your Promised Land

Streets of Gold

**Song by
Jason Hunt**

It's just me and a quart of Schaeffer in a sack
Sitting in a burned-out Cadillac
She's all rusted with busted windows in the back
Her engine's gone
Seats are torn
Springs jut out, so be forewarned
But her dignity's intact

She belonged to an uncle that I never did know
My daddy says he bought her back in '54
He had come into some money and was coming into more
But his luck ran short
So he bought a gun
They heard the shot
He only used it once
They never really knew what for

Streets of gold are hard to find
You can search until the end of time
To get to heaven, I've been told

You don't have to walk those streets of gold
Now the car looks out on a lonely lake
He left it here, so they let it stay
Back when we were kids, this is where we'd play
But I ain't been back
For about ten years
I don't know why tonight something brought me here
Guess I just don't know much these days

I believed in a woman, I believed in love
She showed me in the end believing ain't enough
Now she's living with a man who kind of treats her rough
But he buys her things
And he takes her out
And a fancy car is what it's all about
I'd like a car like that myself

Streets of gold are hard to find
You can search until the end of time
To get to heaven, I've been told
You don't have to walk those streets of gold

Now my beer's all gone, and the night is, too
So I climb that hill to Highway 22
Sunlight sparkles on the morning dew
And I drive to work
At the packing plant
I ought to call in sick
I don't know why I can't
I guess it's something I just don't do

Streets of gold are hard to find
You can search until the end of time
To get to heaven, I've been told
You don't have to walk those streets of gold

Door

by
Alvin Knox

It once hung perfectly
framed in this tiny corner
of the universe,
swung effortlessly
inward.

It now lies here
in this rain-soaked field,
not torn from its place
but carefully removed—
screw by screw,
nail by nail—
so that if you were to place your fingers
within the hole that once held its latch
and raise it on the ghost of hinges,
stiff as the past and greedy
as the future, only a breath
of earth would greet you.
Look at the bottom,
how the drops of dew
left by cool stones
glisten like fireflies.

STUDENTS

Digital Gate Keeping: A Single Girl's Guide

by
Ashley Wrye

"Can I give you my number?" he asked with a nervous smile. And despite my bad luck in situations like this, I actually wanted it. So I looked around for something to write with. Anything really. A pen, a pencil, an eyeliner. Whatever I could find that would leave an impression like the impression he was leaving on me. Finally, I gave up my search and just admitted defeat.

"Do you have a pen or anything?" I said. "I don't have anything to write with."

"No, I don't," he said. "Why don't you just put me in your cell phone?"

The proposition had been made, and I gulped hard. He wanted cell phone directory entry. So I did what any girl would do when she didn't want to give as much as a guy wanted to take. I lied.

"I don't really know how to use this thing," I said. "Why don't I just give you my number and you can call me."

There. I'd done it. I'd given up control while it was up for grabs, thereby eliminating nearly any chance of actually hearing from the guy again. But when he'd asked me to program him into my cell phone, into my life really, he'd asked for too much.

The ultimate sign of commitment in my life is adding someone to my address book and cell phone. The digital age promises convenience in keeping up with friends, relatives and even the occasional stranger met in a bar, but the hassle of using a stylus, number pads and patience makes utilizing technology harder than ignoring it. I type all day, every day, but never have I had to use a number pad to spell out "Skank" or "College Ho." Neither God nor Microsoft intended for anyone to have to use a telephone keypad to type out words. The only ones who ever benefit from the telephone typing keypads are the people in the infomercial or 900-number industry who market their products to horny insomniacs using catchy telephone number word combos. The advertisers are smart enough to know that if you're up and at home at 2 a.m., the odds of you remembering anything, let alone a phone number, are slim. Using a phrase instead of numbers is a good tool. Using only ten numbers instead of 26 letters to add a person's name in a cell phone is not.

The pure hassle of typing in the name is one thing, but if you add the millions of commands it takes to lock it in, then you can understand why I don't let just anyone into my cell phone. Every system has a safeguard and nearly every phone wants to make sure that you really want a person in there before it'll be bothered to remember their name. I second-guess myself too much in daily life to have a phone do it too.

You would think that eliminating someone from an old-fashioned address book is much easier to do. However, my address book is written in pen. Too many times in the past have

I written someone in pencil, only to have their information rub off by the time they become important in my life. A pen provides a security and confidence in your decisions that takes time to develop. I remember being in the fifth grade and being so excited about moving on to middle school. In middle school, we were allowed to use pen on our assignments. We were old enough to have thoughts so important that only Wite-out could erase them. Wite-out or the occasional torrential downpour that freakishly soaked the backpack you left on the porch overnight.

But the effect of ink is evident. No one can be erased in a fit of fury or accidentally rubbed off. A simple line crossing someone out seems like an adequate way to do the trick, but who really wants a reminder of a friendship gone sour or a boyfriend whose heart you want used to reenact *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

Although Wite-out can still be used to alter an address book's contents, I abhor the inevitable glops of white crap that ball up and flake off, revealing bits of numbers and letters. I'm also afraid that in a moment of weakness, I'll try to use my memory and the flaked off parts to reconstruct the phone number of the asshole who only calls when he's drunk. I don't need that kind of mocking temptation around to make me realize that I can dive deeper into levels of pathos than I ever imagined.

I got my first address book as a freshman in college. It was the first time that I would actually have to write down the addresses of people because it was the first time that I would not be able to see them on a regular basis. Also it would be the first time that I would have to rely on myself instead of my mom's address book for the usual birthday present thank-you note brigade. My first cell phone came later. I had a cell phone when I went to college, but my mother made sure that I would not be running up the charges by purchasing me a bag phone. Bag phones made a limited run in the early '90s as phones to be used exclusively in cars. Attached to the cigarette lighter, my bag phone had a cord and was barely smaller than the computer used to launch Apollo 11. However, I got the last laugh on my mom by huddling under three blankets in my car during the snow-filled Januarys to make calls that I wouldn't have to pay for. I got a real cell phone the following summer.

Over the years, I've developed a set of rules to judge whether or not someone will be allowed into my address book or cell phone. At first, nearly everyone was let in and I was left months later wondering who "Dude from the copy place" was and why I felt the need to put someone in whose name I didn't know. He was filed under "d" though, so I felt good that my lack of discrimination had not impeded upon my alphabetical listing skills. Thankfully, my standard of entry has become stricter.

If you meet the requirements, you are granted entrance into the book and phone log, but the entry will come under review again next year. Every Christmas my father buys me the refills to my DayTimer, and I spend one night after the holidays religiously going over my current phone list. Some names are added permanently to the list and taken off the Post-it note regime. Others aren't even granted the dignity of an email address, even if I email them but don't call. There's no sense pretending that I will ever write them an actual letter or send them a card, because I hate self-delusion more than I hate Wite-out glops.

I spend at least an hour, maybe two, delicately adding in the names and relishing the

clean white paper without the markings of a year's worth of moves, birthdays, and baby names. It's also a little sad to come upon the reality that I've let some people slip away. The list of girls that I used to go to happy hour with has dwindled down to the one whose wedding I was in. My high school crew is only represented by the few girls that I grew closer to in college. I sit and wonder what happened to the ex-boyfriend who was a disc jockey or the Elvis-John Mellencamp hybrid who left Indiana for Austin. It's always the guys that I wonder about because I know where most of the girls are. They're in the book or they're not and it's not usually time that's made that decision but rather an event that either made them integral to my life or easily dispensable. The guys always depart on more vague terms and while it was hard to deal with when I was younger, I've grown more accustomed to the rhythm with which they enter and exit.

To make it into my phone book or cell phone the following things are required:

1) I must know you for longer than a) 6 months if you are a girl and b) 8 months if you are a guy. I've met many people and thought that they were going to be around forever only to run into them years later and not even come close to remembering their names. So, it was under this premise that I developed the rule of knowing someone for a set amount of time before allowing him or her entry. Guys have a longer waiting period because in the delusional initial rush of hormones, I might believe they'll be around when in actuality the hormones usually pass through my system within two weeks.

2) I must call you more than twice a year. What's the point of putting in someone's phone number if I know I'll never use it? There are certain cycles of life when I know I'll call people, and if I don't dial the digits twice in twelve months, I can trouble myself with looking the number up in a phone book.

3) You must be able to make the second cut when I'm making out Christmas cards. Despite buying more and more Christmas cards, I get to a point every year where I realize that I haven't bought enough. So I go through my address book listings and if by the second round you aren't getting the card with a picture of a reindeer peeing in the snow, you're cut.

4) You must send me a birthday greeting or e-card on my birthday. This rule does not apply to my friends that don't celebrate birthdays. If they don't celebrate their own births, it's arrogant of me to expect them to celebrate mine.

5) You must call me for purposes not related to work. My work numbers and addresses are listed on my work computer and will not leave those premises. Of course if you are a friend from work, this is totally different. To qualify as a friend from work, I must want to invite you to a party that would require me to write your name on an envelope and send you an invitation. Or you must have seen me drunk on two or more occasions that weren't an office party.

6) If you are related and get into the book for this reason, you must still meet requirements 3 and 4. Obviously the cut is significantly easier if I share blood with someone, but sharing blood alone is not enough. I have to be able to share family gossip and complaints and otherwise acknowledge your existence throughout the year.

Having requirements to make it into my address book and cell phone saves me time on the front end. Time spent deciphering who someone is and why they're important to me. Time spent getting mad about a soured relationship. Time spent using that damn cell phone keyboard. Despite all that, the cut in my address book is harder than open calls at Wrigley Field, but the rewards are more substantial.

To Race at Indy

by
Peggy Smith Duke

To race at Indy. This exit, west, for the Raceway,
Not east, for the Speedway, in trucks,
As diesel smells of the truck stop,
As caravans of Funny Cars and
Top Fuel dragsters are setting up. All roads point
To Indy, Labor Day, not Memorial Day.
Indy runs, if races are run on straight tracks and
Not just on benches, if rods of blocks—
Of BowTies and Hemis—still scream high
As engines, and if headers belch a bright super nova,
And smoke clouds billow like thunderheads
On the Sedona desert evaporating behind the tower.
To buckle in and burn out,
To hammer down with nitro, on cue,
To storm like trooping soldiers.
And crewmen, uniformed cadres of crewmen
Scurry. At top end, behind the air blown can of beer,
Announcers speak of records. But the Force wins,
Fans know, so fast, as fast as summer.
Air-brushed bodies and a butterfly of Petrol
Fanning through injectors, and
His resolve that hasn't waffled yet,
Just Hot Rods and drivers, sports drinks and the color
Of Christmas tree lights, and irreverent John Force.
There is never enough win at Indy,
Everyone would take a Wally, feel
The power of all runs bettering the bump,
In trials. The Top Fuel dragster's growl
Is different from that of Funny Cars.
The crew chiefs dismantle engines,
Rod by rod, but they run—
Run so flawlessly, and excitement builds
In the pits, in staging lanes and starting lines
Churning in discontent, on steel jack stands,
On alcohol, the cheaper fuel,
In tears of oil downs and in the
Strain of deadlines. Weeping fans are crowded by the ropes.

The nitro raps and the clutches seat,
The fleeted drivers brake like warring sailors under fire,
There is so little time between rounds
Crewmen double-torque fasteners.
The fans breathe deep the nitro and scatter
To distance themselves. A driver's son could have guessed
That he would pass on the legacy,
And he loves him faithfully, so worshipfully.
Interns, pumped and blank, drive for pizza.
Outside the trailers, with a tad of moxie and pure confidence, Bernstein stops to speak to
SPEED.
All believers attend a chapel service called Win,
Likening racing to life, and here is the start of
The Big Go. It shakes the earth,
Sets off alarms, fills the parking, camping,
Coursing through nearby yards,
Churning into frenzy, cheers.
The rocket slows, turns left,
The driver removes the fire mask, and
Talks to the man with the sports network.
It is racing at Indy, and though
It's a drag, it brings excitement.
And the crew chiefs douse it,
Lonely virtuosos, forever in the pits,
In conflict. Yes, go for willed wins
Clothed in adoration; matchless
Bursts of power, for seconds, a run.
But beer light bumps it, on a string and in
The groove, mechanics, drivers, crew chiefs
Raise the body and the stakes, socket wrenches
Turning like grandma making a quilt,
Sewing the squares of state birds and flowers.
Bodies, chassis, and blower belts fly.
Pulled and fluffed the spinning parachutes
Of drivers, or mechanics and crew chiefs,
And bullets slow quietly, only the whine of a
Third member sounding, crowd sounds dead
From the thrill; no time; with a yellow slip.
Fans will not ask for them, and the tow truck
Purrs, questioning the sound of testosterone.
Slowly sinks the sun, at the end, a race,
And falling silent, the Big Go,
Forever the one of all the ones.
It is Indy.

Swinging Moods

by
Latrice Williams

Every year is a different scenario
Each day of the week
You will know when it is about to happen
The "red light" comes on
It sometimes arrives early
Even if it seems like it ended just the other day
It's that time already
Not a month too soon

Miserable Monday
is "the day of the moon"
Mistakes made
When grown men play
While their women are away

At Monday Night Football outings
Manhood is merely mindless
It make the macho
Mask mad mania
While managing meanness
Most males for most friendships
With total strangers
Or meet their maker

Terrible Tuesday
is the "Third" day
and It's not so bad
Besides the torpid
temper tantrums, I've had

there's heavy traffic
and I'm pressed for time
tasteless treasures tempt
tedious toddlers
pick up things off the ground
those terrible two's can be a handful

Wild Wednesday
Today is "Woden's Day"
I waddle while walking in my sleep
I wake up
waded in a yellow pool
Ahead, a workday of woulds and shoulds

Last night, I witnessed the warmth of a wet dream
No need for me to make whoopee with what's-his-name
I'm wasted
I spent up all my wages
Now I'm weaving through want ads
I look out my window
And see waifs wondering the streets like wildlife.

Thirsty Thursday
Brings tempting thoughts
Can't wait for the 3rd
Because it's my birthday
These are tumultuous times
Because it's Thor's day
I think I'm tipsy

Finally Friday
Thank goodness for this day
My frustration lingers
For the furious
Who flinch up while flirting
And frolicking funky four-play
Finding friends
make for a fun-filled weekend

Saturday Night Supper
Somewhere a sexual superman
shows off his sensuous side
through scandalous scenes
of his sexuality.
Scrubs surf the sea of shapely bodies
in skimpy skirts.

Scammers swarm the streets for
Suckers who shell out money
Slim shadys are superficial

Scums of the earth
seduce for the sheer satisfaction

sobbing women
search for a soul-mate
in the singles bars
where some scrupulous
scuffles are sought
it's smooth sailing for swindlers
because they have the street smarts

Superbowl Sunday
Sparks superior savages
Whose senseless acts
Storm up
Shield less servants
Spirits are suppressed
Somewhere someone's life is shortened

Semi-sober souls need to be sedated
Through some form of solicitation on the TV screen
Services sold, in a matter of seconds
Social slums provoke sportsmanship
Slops smell of beer and stank breath
He says he needs a smoke
And it's not worth the soap

9/11

by
Latrice Williams

Hold firm in what you believe
Appreciate what you have
Sympathize with those who grieve
Reflect on the past

We must come together
Not only in September
Be positive
And end the negative
Where is the love?
How can we live
and celebrate patriotism?
When there is still racism.
The ones who boast American pride
No longer feel safe and hide

What happened to the good ole
Free will
This country must prosper
We shall not let it falter
Can we put aside our fear for grace?
We need kind words to embrace
Let us not forget the memorable moments
of the 9/11 events.

There were many in the beginning
But unity made us all become one
on that tragic morning.
That day brought change
in a matter of seconds.
When will we heal these wounds?
When will we get the courage
to end the violence and war
without being held hostage
in our own territory

If A Woman Were Your Car, What Would She Be To You?

by
Latrice Williams

What do you look for first?
Where is the soul of your woman?
Do the features have to be sharp?
Sporty
Or more Affordable?
Do you just look at the body and that's it?

How often would you take her out?
Would you show her off?
Or would it depend on how she acts?
[Would you just showcase her at home?]
Or leave her all alone?

Does she have to be small and compact?
A big body
Or long, lean and sleek?
Fast
Or with a lot of class?

Everything seems all right in the beginning
But when your hands get a little greasy
Or situations get sticky,
Do you stay with her all the way until the end?

Instead of referring to her, you choose to call her what you may
You should look beneath the exterior
To make sure everything's running okay
Yet, you check out the posterior
And pull up to her bumper

It's like judging the cover of a book
Sometimes men only care about how good their car look
And you are all up on that grill
And do what you will

The physical damage may be hidden
She may be a car of high maintenance
When she dies on you or breaks down
If you really love her, you're on the ground
Crying, because you feel sorry for the mishap
Or if not, then you think she's crap
When her flattering batteries are worn out
Will you charge them up?
Or will you just alternate her.

You may think, well we had our fun
Oh boy! There's a lot of work to get done
And you say, how could she do me like this?
It didn't take much, but a lot of things she really let you get away with

Maybe all that she wanted
Was a little, tenderness, love, and care
Or perhaps she just needed
For you to always be there
And give a good wax
Every now and then

But she slowly came apart
You chipped away at her paint
Through time her beauty faded
All that she needed was more polish

Bridges

by
Terry Price

Ellie had gone through life pretty much like the autumn breeze blowing through her hair. Shifting direction. Changing speeds. Leaving things in a mess. Unpredictable. Uncontrollable.

Unstoppable.

The afternoon sun was retiring for another day and she knew she had to be somewhere else . . . anywhere else but here after darkness arrived. She picked up her canvas grocery bag, took one final look off of the bridge at the river below, closed her eyes for just a brief moment, exhaled, and then turned and headed toward the market.

The wind was coming up off of the river and she pulled her jacket more tightly around her neck. She quickened her pace to get away from the water. How is it that you can be incredibly drawn toward those things by which you are repelled at the same time? She had visited this bridge almost every day for the past two years hoping each time it would be her last, but it never was.

Ellie passed by a café where warm light and fragrances blended with a little Cole Porter and poured out onto the sidewalk to envelope her. Without pausing she reached for the door and went in.

A slender woman about her own age came from what appeared to be the kitchen of the small restaurant, balancing plates of steaming pasta. She carried a rotary cheese grater in her apron and a wooden pepper mill under her left arm. Without breaking stride, she smiled and instructed, "Buonasera! Sit wherever you like. I'll be there in a sec."

Ellie had other things to do and the market would close pretty soon. She ought to go. Yet she stood and watched the waitress deftly deliver the plates to a couple of obviously delighted diners. Fluidly, she whipped out the grater and proceeded to rain parmagiano-reggiano down onto each dish. In a flash, the grater disappeared to be replaced by the grinding of the mill. Ellie was mesmerized by the culinary sleight of hand. She found a table and took a seat.

The waitress put the grinder and the mill on a cart and wiped her hands on a towel and came over, order pad and pen in hand. "Meeting anyone?"

"Ah . . . no, just me."

"Well, "just me," I'm Marti and I'll be your server." She placed a neatly printed paper on the table. "Here are the specials and everything is fresh. Can I get you something to drink? We have a really great house Sangiovese."

"Yes, that sounds nice . . ." Where did those words come from? Ellie wasn't even a wine drinker.

"Buono. I'll let you look over today's selections while I bring the wine and also some water. Do you live around here? I don't remember seeing you before."

“Um, yes, actually.” She hesitated but Marti’s smile somehow put her at ease. “I’m uh . . . a couple of blocks over on Morris.”

“Great. Welcome to Marti’s! I’ll be back in a second with your water and your wine.” The waitress, who also appeared to be the owner, turned and retreated to the kitchen, checking on diners as she went.

Content that the other patrons were engrossed in their wonderful worlds, Ellie got up and slipped out the door.

Rain. Damn.

She tossed, moving toward the side of the bed farthest from the window, facing away. It was a steady rain, persistently falling, consistently covering all beneath it. Ellie couldn’t catch a break today, or was it even still “today?” She fumbled for her glasses on the bedside table and held them just high enough to read the digital display. It was 2:17 a.m. The replacement “today” wasn’t going to be any better.

She turned and faced the ceiling and sighed.

How long had it been since she had been happy? Two years? Five? Surely she had been happy five years ago, but for the life of her she couldn’t be sure. Had she ever been happy, really happy? Maybe that sort of happiness was relegated to old black-and-white films and people who didn’t know better.

Then she remembered.

Her memories were contained in scalloped edged, black and white images, the ones with the date in the margin . . . the ones with names and descriptions, written with cursive script in pencil on the back. She remembered a bicycle and the thought generated a tinge of excitement, or at least something comparable.

She was ten . . . no, it was her twelfth birthday. It was her twelfth birthday and she had been sick and her birthday party had to be postponed. All of that anticipation, all of that excitement . . . gone because of a stomach bug, or something she ate. Ellie had waited so long for this day and now she would have to spend it in bed, alone.

There was a knock at her bedroom door. Why wouldn’t they leave her alone? She didn’t want any more Coke and crackers. She didn’t want her temperature taken again. She didn’t want to be bothered. They came in anyway.

But they didn’t say anything. What were they doing just standing there? Ellie turned toward the bedroom door and there was her dad holding a beautiful purple bicycle at the foot of her bed.

“I know you can’t ride this today, but I just couldn’t wait. Let me roll it up closer so you can get a look. Do you like it?”

Ellie had wanted a bike for so long. She loved it. She loved him.

Thunder rumbled and rattled the loose panes in her window. The rain came down harder and the suddenly the purple bicycle faded into a dark gray, faded into the distant past. It was the last birthday she would ever spend with her father.

* * *

A tapestry of wet autumn leaves covered the cold earth. The moisture saturated everything, she thought, adding that much more weight to life. She walked as if she had no place to go. She thought of a thousand things she could do, but dismissed each one in succession. It all seemed so pointless. Surely there was some rock in life she had neglected to turn over, some rainbow she had forgotten to chase.

And now she was back at the bridge.

Ellie shook her head, partially in disgust, mostly in disbelief. She honestly believed she could let go of the bridge, but it wouldn't let go of her. Wooden and worn and covered with moss it seemed inviting enough. It kept you out of the waters below, kept you safe . . . Ellie lightly slid her hand along the smooth rail as she ascended the arch to the apex. As she must have done a thousand times, she turned and looked down at the river leaning on the rail for support. The cold water rushing beneath her made the air feel so much more cooler here than anywhere else. The low roar of the currents was lulling her, comforting her, pulling her as if she were caught in a whirlpool. But there was only one direction anyone could be pulled in a whirlpool. She couldn't breathe and instinctively pushed back from the railing nearly tripping over a woman jogging behind her across the bridge. Her pulse was racing and her mind couldn't keep up. Must get away. She had to talk with someone, anyone.

Feeling her eyes starting to warm and water, she headed in any direction the railing would allow, headed away from rather than to. Her hands were clenched in her pockets as if trying to hold on to something, but her palms were empty. Ellie strode rapidly away from the river, away from the bridge to the sidewalk.

Suddenly a pain shot through her left cheek, a dull thud caught her left side spinning her and throwing her at the same time. The sound of a cry, a glimpse of the sky, the feel of rough concrete against her hands and the jolt of a sudden stop all collided in her consciousness. She hurt all over.

As she tried to rise, Ellie felt something warm and soft covering her hand. She instinctively attempted to pull away but her fragile balance wouldn't let her. A hand squeezed hers and she gave in and squeezed back. She laid her head back down not caring where she was or what might happen to her.

"Are you all right?" The voice was familiar, or was it just helpful? Ellie opened her eyes and tried to orient herself.

"No, I think I'm okay. What happened?"

"I'm not sure. I just stepped out to sweep off the sidewalk and we must have collided. Looks like you got the worst end of the deal. I'm terribly sorry."

"No, it's my fault. I should have been looking where I was going."

"Can you get up or do you need any help?"

"Let me see." Ellie began to right herself using the woman and a post for support. Ellie looked directly into the soft eyes and recognition set in. It was as if she had run into last night's date at this morning's market.

Once again she felt trapped, felt completely off balanced.

"Are you sure you're okay?"

And with that, Ellie released and sobbed in spasms, wailing as if demons were being

unleashed. Marti caught her and held her tight, shushing her like her mother used to do, smoothing her hair.

"I'm sorry . . . sorry, so, so sorry. I've got to get myself together, got to get something together. I'm Ellie. Ellie Morgan." She inhaled raggedly.

"What are you going through, Ellie?"

"What?"

"What's wrong Ellie Morgan?"

Ellie didn't know where to start, didn't know how to start, didn't want to start. She just didn't want to talk about it. Why couldn't she just get some simple sympathy and let it go at that?

"You're a mess. Here, wipe your eyes, blow your nose and come inside."

Her legs didn't welcome her weight yet yielded to Marti's leading through the metal and glass door on to a plain, tile floor, clean but unremarkable. Scents of garlic and basil and tomato greeted her, welcomed her.

The tables were dark and worn, scarred by years of plates and glasses and knives, by the scores of wanderers, friends, and strangers who took nourishment at them. Marti worked Ellie to a round corner table and took a seat next to her, both with backs to walls.

Ellie wiped her nose and dabbed at her eyes. She leaned back and longed to hear something that would make her feel less alone, something . . . anything.

Marti reached across and smoothed Ellie's hair then put her hands together bringing her index fingers up to her lips as if she was trying to decide where to begin, or if she should begin.

"Marissa." Marti was looking through Ellie rather than at her. There was more and Ellie kept quiet.

"She would have been eleven this year, eleven in November."

Ellie took Marti's hand and held it in both of her own.

Adventure at Big Holly

Novel Excerpt by
Anne Cole

There were two huge trees in the yard, 120 feet tall and 140 years old. They were holly trees that had been planted when the house was built in 1866. It was these two trees that framed the house nicely on either side and gave the house its name: Big Holly. Holly trees are not very good for climbers because of their spiky leaves.

The other old and huge tree in the big back yard was a magnolia. The girls knew its age because there was a squarish, “dressed” stone that lay a little crooked at its base with the single, badly worn name *Martha* and the date 1753 carved on it. This 250-year-old magnolia tree was tall but K8 and Holly could climb almost to the top—at least to the smaller branches way up. They could then see over the house that stood 40 feet high to the edge of the roof. The roof stuck up another 20 feet to the squared off, flat top with a little fence around it. This meant that they climbed higher than 70 feet. From their perches at the top of the tree, they could see into the front yard and down to the street that ended in the driveway to Oaklands Mansion. They could also see all around their Victorian house and the start of the Wetlands that ran down to the Maney Spring a long block away. The four cousins, sitting astride branches, called the tree Martha.

Red-haired K8 who is 13 and her 7-year-old sister Carley are staying with Nonnie and Rhea Cole at Big Holly for the weekend. Two other grandchildren, Holly, 9, and Camille, 7 and 3/4ths, have been living full time at Big Holly since their Mother got so sick four years ago.

Three of the four cousins were perched in the middle of this “Martha” tree in the spot they called “the sitting room”. Only Holly was not sitting. She was walking along one broad limb that stuck out horizontally from the trunk. Above her was another branch that was sticking out at the same angle but was about four feet higher and just right for holding on as she walked along, one foot in front of the other, about 50 feet in the air.

As the three sat there nestled close to the enormous trunk, K8 said, “What do you think Martha has seen in her long life?”

“Oh well,” said Holly tossing her blonde curls as she bounced up and down on the limb, “she has seen a war going on right here around her.”

“Yes, and lots of soldiers shooting guns,” continued Camille. “They were shooting at each other . . . some were running and some were hit. They poured their red blood right here into the ground.” It was just then that there was a tremendous crack and the limb that Holly was bouncing on gave way and snapped right off the trunk. Holly clutched the upper limb frantically and clung with her fingers as the lower limb crashed 50 feet to the ground.

“Hold tight, Holly,” K8 cried. She stood and looked at the frightful scene of Holly dangling so high above the earth.

Camille began to cry, "Oh, Holly, I really love you . . . hold on tight!" Carley wept in terror.

K8 said, "Look Holly, it's just like being on the bars at the gym. You wouldn't fall there—you won't fall now. Just do a pull-over and you'll be on the top. You can do it!" Slowly, Holly sucked in her stomach and raised her legs up and over the limb. As she got her belly across, head and feet hanging down, she finally took a deep breath.

"Be careful . . . be careful . . .," Camille kept whispering over and over.

"What do I do now, K8?" Holly asked.

"Well," K8 said, "kinda get your hands under you and your head up, then hand-walk along and back to me. I'll safety you just like Coach Ken does at the gym and you'll be back here in the sitting room."

Holly did get her body and head up, her hands under her as she inched along. It was rather a different kind of bar routine, but it worked and she slowly got back to where K8 could hold her legs, then hold her body as Holly eased herself into the big crook of the tree. Holly slid on down to sit against the tree and her shaking began.

For a moment, the shaking seemed to consume all four cousins in the fear of the close call. Suddenly, the two little girls began to giggle in nervous relief and then K8 began to laugh too. Holly took a little longer, but as she caught her breath, she too began to laugh. Soon they were all laughing and giggling with real glee.

K8 had her hand on the butt of the limb that had cracked off so violently. She looked at it and stopped laughing as she noticed that there was a white something in the dirty rotten bits in the middle of the break. She looked closer and her fingers began to pry through the rotten wood. She pulled out a whitish object with small rings indented around the sides. "It is a Civil War bullet!" she cried.

Carley held to a limb and leaned out around the tree to see better. Camille tucked her knees over a limb and leaned out and back so she could see too. "Is it a Minié ball from the Civil War?" asked Camille.

"Yes, it's a real Minié ball. Bullets must have hit this tree. Martha would have been pretty nearly full grown by the Civil War," said K8.

"Some bullets would have gone into the tree and stuck. Just think, I was nearly killed by a Union soldier," said Holly, who was beginning to get over her fright.

"How do you know he was a Yankee?" asked Camille.

"He must have been, for the Yankees conquered the Rebels right here in this yard," answered K8.

"But the South got it back," replied Carley. "And there were cannons booming all around killing horses."

Camille had moved closer to Carley. These two were best friends and cousins of almost the same age. They both had swinging ash blonde hair and happy faces and were the same height. Most important, they were both younger sisters.

"Look, I think the bullet must have come from down there and somebody was in this tree spying. Somebody else saw him and tried to shoot him down." Camille was tremendously excited at the prospect of bullets flying in the air around where they were sitting.

"I think they missed 'cause here is the bullet, I think," said Carley.

"If I'd of seen a spy, I wouldn't stop shooting until he came down or fell down," replied Holly, "and it must have been a Yankee doing the shootin' 'cause he almost got me." She had climbed over to inspect the possible bullet. "We'll have to ask Rhea Cole about it."

"First," K8 said, "we'll all get down and take it in the house and show Nonnie and Rhea Cole." K8 was only one year old when she began to call her grandfather by his whole name. It sounded like "Ray Cole" was a two-syllable word. All of the cousins, other members of the family, and most of his acquaintances now called him that too.

The two grandparents were sitting and talking at the kitchen table. Rhea Cole was a volunteer at the battleground park. He had seen many Minié balls which had been dug up from around the area, but he had never seen one that had come from a tree. Both of them were amazed.

The girls told of the limb snapping off. They didn't say how high it was—that just didn't seem to come up. Rhea Cole thought about it and said that the limb had probably been damaged in the war and the tree had been rotting at that place for the last 150 years.

Camille chirped in, "Only 143 years."

"Oh well!" said Holly. Nonnie carefully put the Minié ball in a small glass dish and set it on the window sill.

Everyone chatted about the find. Rhea Cole told them stories about the Civil War and how their yard had been the scene of fierce fighting before Murfreesboro had surrendered to the Yankees for the first time. That was the time when the original house, which was built right where Big Holly now stood, had been burned. The girls also learned how General Forrest had later retaken the town for the Confederates.

With their heads full of adventure and history, the girls were sent up to shower and get ready for bed.

K8 and Carley slept in the room that had been their mother's. It still had the same big, ancient bed and the trundle bed that rolled out from under it. The sisters always snuggled together in the trundle bed when they spent weekends at Big Holly.

Holly, whose mother just might have named her for the old house, and Camille had their own room. It too had been their mother's. Now there were two single beds instead of their mother's small, Victorian one. It wasn't long before all girls were asleep.