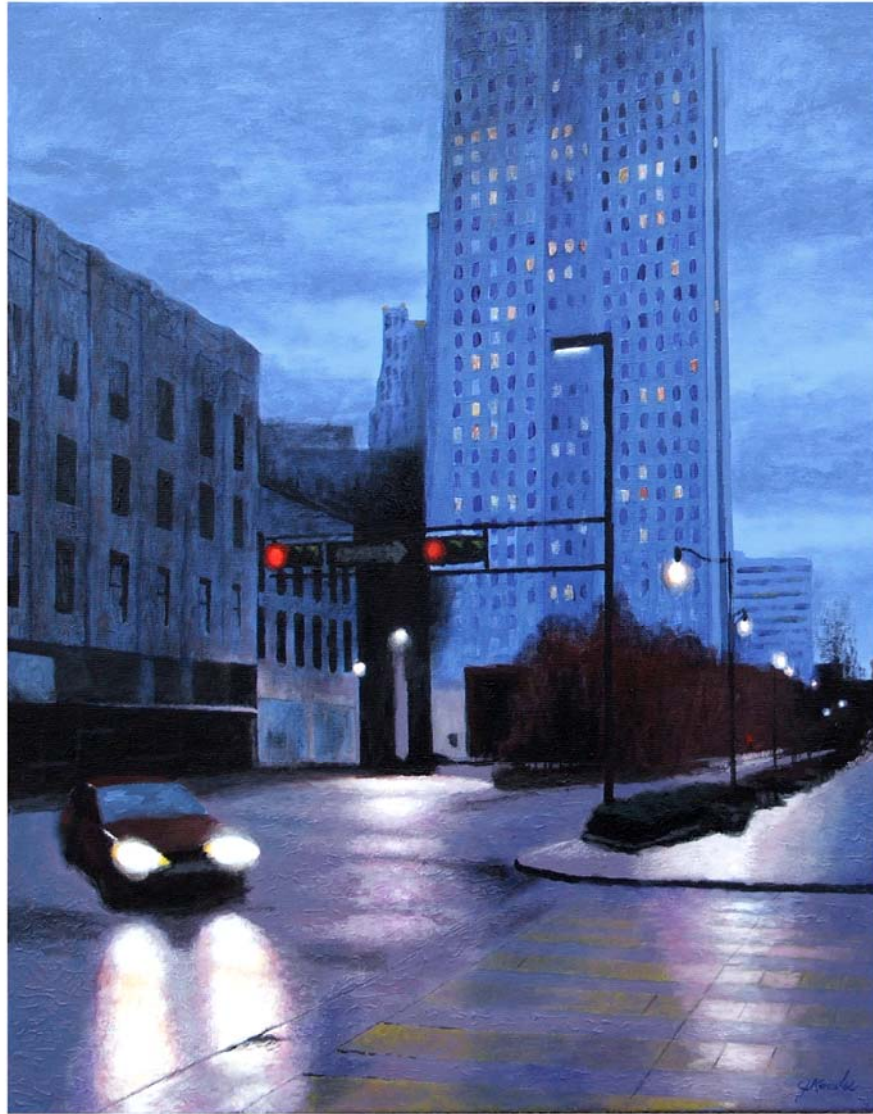


# Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **DOWNTOWN**, Acrylic on Canvas

*James Knowles lives and paints in Trussville, Alabama. More of his art can be seen at [www.homepage.mac.com/jamesknowles1](http://www.homepage.mac.com/jamesknowles1), [jamesknowles1@mac.com](mailto:jamesknowles1@mac.com)*

Back Cover: **MOON WINX**, Wood Block Print

*Selma native Charles Buchanan lives in Birmingham and works at the University of Alabama Birmingham where he writes for one of its magazines. His block prints are reinterpretations of photos he has taken of iconic Alabama images. For more of his images, go to [www.cbuchanan.net](http://www.cbuchanan.net).*

## TO MARY OLIVER

Seth Tanner

Mary, I heeded your advice, traversed  
your fields, climbed your forty dark inclines,  
crawled behind your waterfall and roared

the roar of a lion – dying, the last of his pride.  
My lips could no longer hold it in. It wasn't as  
you said it would be. I stood beneath the water

pleading for stone cold salvation. White sheets  
pummeled anguish against granite, emptying me  
of everything but my stone-hard bone. Atop a

tulip poplar a mockingbird perched witness. High  
above the valley, she sang of an imperfect, soft-  
shelled sadness. For an instant, the woods fell silent,

struck by the perfect truth in that sound. She  
laughed – created to reflect the world back to the  
world. "Don't retreat in despair. You've washed

yourself clean. Give me your pain, giddiness,  
even your pride. Give it up to me, I will find  
beauty – even in your saddest song."

.....  
*Seth Tanner lives in Talladega, Alabama. A graduate of Wesleyan University in  
Connecticut, Seth became a poet after his first major struggle with manic depression.  
His poem "God, how I have wished," was chosen for publicity placards for Birmingham  
Art Association's Random Acts of Art 2006.*  
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## ASCENSION

Dan Deem

.....  
*Indiana native and current Birmingham, Alabama, resident, Dan Deem is a self-taught photographer whose roots lie in photojournalism. His work has been displayed in such venues as The Saturday Evening Post, NBC's Today Show, and the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta. Deem's work is well represented in many private collections throughout the U.S. and may be seen locally at Lyda Rose Gallery in Homewood, Gallery 2306 and Birmingham Art Association Gallery at AmSouth Harbert Plaza in downtown Birmingham. To visit his website, go to [www.ddeemphotoart.com](http://www.ddeemphotoart.com).*  
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## SMOKESTACK

Jim Reed

It was a cool and clear and pleasant night, the night he raised his foot and placed it flat dead-center on the first rung.

The rung felt solid and made a satisfying metallic thud when his foot came to rest.

There were no handrails on each side of the rung, so he grabbed the next rusty metal rung with both hands and gave himself a little lift with his other foot, then slowly unbent his rung leg so that he could ascend and place his other foot upon the rung. He gave the next rung up a quick shake to see whether its seeming stability was real.

Looking straight ahead, he saw a rung right before his eyes, dividing the cold red bricks comprising the smokestack with a perfectly horizontal line. He looked down to the rung above the one he was facing and hesitated. Should he try to rise to this next one?

Why not? No-one else was around; the property from which the smokestack jutted was deserted this time of night. And the smokestack was just standing there, where it had been waiting for him for the fifteen years he had lived within sight of it.

His right foot rose and touched the next rung. Shifting his weight to the ball of this foot, he quickly and carefully brought his other foot up and, behold, he was standing on rung number two! His hands went one at a time up to the next rung. He remembered the first rule of wing-walking: never let go of one thing until you've gotten hold of something else. He did not want to look up yet, because the smokestack was so very tall. He did not yet need to look down at the ground because he was just a few feet up. He still could drop to the surface and not get hurt. He looked up at the next rung and grabbed it, then down at the lower rung and repeated his previous motions, carefully climbing to the next level. Then, he proceeded to go several more rungs upward, taking care to be methodical, taking care to gaze only straight ahead

**He remembered  
the first rule of  
wing-walking:  
never let go of one  
thing until you've  
gotten hold of  
something else.**

at the old red bricks. Before he knew it, he did not know where he was on the smokestack. Had he gotten halfway up? He knew he was too far up to drop back safely. He knew he would probably die were he to fall at this point, so he held on even tighter to the rusty iron rungs, aware that some of the cement holding the bricks together was beginning to flake off here and there in response to the unfamiliar tugging at the iron rungs imbedded in it.

Still, the rungs seemed firm.

Should he continue? Should he go all the way to the top? Nobody would ever know if he decided to back out, decided to descend while he still had the strength. He tried to go down one step to see what it was like. He was

**I must be near the top, he thought, though he could not quite look straight up. The next rung he grasped wiggled in the cement. It was coming loose from ages of neglect, ages of hot weather changing to humid weather changing to wet weather changing to cold weather changing to icy weather.**

surprised to find that going down to a lower rung was a lot harder than going up. His foot did not find the rung as easily as he had imagined. He could not see where his foot was on the rung because he was clinging so tightly to the upper rungs. He could look down from side to side, but he could not look straight down at his feet. He froze there for a moment, his breath made

visible in the coolness of the night, his heavy breathing the only sound he could hear at the moment, the pounding in his ears was the pounding of his heart, the buzzing was from the adrenalin rush from this unfamiliar experience.

He squeezed his eyes shut, took a deep breath, and started climbing again.

You're only fifteen years old once, he thought. Soon, he was near the top of the smokestack. I must be near the top, he thought, though he could not quite look straight up. The next rung he grasped wiggled in the cement. It was coming loose from ages of neglect, ages of hot weather changing to humid weather changing to wet weather changing to cold weather changing to icy weather. Expanding, contracting, meshing cement against brick, different

textures slowly eroding and grinding each other down and loose. He tried not to panic. I'm too close to the top, he screamed without opening his mouth or engaging his vocal folds. Gotta do it, he thought.

He parted his teeth and sucked in more cold air, then started climbing again. He was suddenly at the top, peering at the soot-stained interior of the thick smokestack rising above the town of Tuscaloosa, rising above his little neighborhood, overlooking Northington Campus and Northington Elementary School and the Board of Education and the University's Student Housing and Eastwood Avenue and 15th Street. Off in the distance he could hear the hollow mellow lonely sound of a train whistle. He could see the glow of lights from Downtown Tuscaloosa off in the distance. He could see the stars hanging exactly where they would be hanging a million years from now whether or not he ever made it down from the top of this smokestack, whether or not he ever told anybody what he had done, whether or not he ever even understood why he would do a thing such as this.

He quickly started going down the smokestack rung by rung, forgetting how difficult it was going to be, determined to stay alive to the bottom, determined to live long enough to try to understand why anybody would do such a thing as climb a tall smokestack filled with loosening bricks and wobbling iron rungs in the middle of the night in the early part of his life.

When he sat down to write it all down some fifty years later, he began to understand why he had done it but he had great difficulty putting it all down so that you could understand it as deeply as he.

.....  
*The smokestack Jim Reed climbed was located near the former site of a small German Prisoner of War Encampment and WWII surgical hospital in Tuscaloosa. The smokestack was toppled during the filming of a Burt Reynolds movie in the 1970's. Fortunately, Jim had descended some years earlier. [www.jimreedbooks.com](http://www.jimreedbooks.com)*  
.....

For more about German POW encampments, see Ruth Beaumont Cook's Story in this issue.



## **WIRE & LEAF**

Charlie Murphy

.....

*Charles Murphy has been active in photography since his early teens and enjoys capturing everyday subject matter in an abstract manner. A graduate of the University of Southern California with a BS degree in Architecture and an MBA from Pepperdine University, Charles works as a Project Director for Doster Construction in Birmingham and spends time with his wife, Nivida, and their four children.*

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## **GUESTS BEHIND BARBED WIRE** (an excerpt)

Ruth Beaumont Cook

“The day a person gives up on the Geneva Convention is the day a person gives up on the human race.”

— Sarah Vowell

Those who have said there would never be any prisoners stationed in the Aliceville (Alabama) Internment Camp won't have the pleasure of saying, “I told you so.” Approximately 1,000 arrived Wednesday, full three train loads, who were marched from the station to the camp about mid-afternoon... Others will arrive today (June 3) and from day to day until the camp is filled.

— Thursday, June 3, 1943

The Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian

In the summer of 1942, a rumor spread in west Alabama that a military complex was about to be built in Pickens County, probably near Aliceville. The rumor bubbled and brewed like the black coffee idling on the hotplate in Simon Jones' drugstore.

Anchoring one corner of Third Avenue and Broad Street in downtown Aliceville, the drugstore was a haven on muggy afternoons. Above its soda fountain, wooden paddle fans churned the heavy air. Some folks sipped steaming coffee from thick white mugs in spite of the heat, while others tipped up icy Co-Colas in plumped out green bottles as they speculated till dinnertime about what might be coming.

Tiny Aliceville, with a population of about fifteen hundred, was not well known outside Pickens County. The drugstore locals thought their town an odd choice for any kind of military installation. However, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Provost Marshal General's office were surveying land in several sections of the country that summer for secure new facilities. They searched mainly in the Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Service Commands—eighteen southern and southwestern states considered unlikely targets for enemy sabotage. Alabama belonged to the Fourth Service Command, and Aliceville in Pickens County fit the army criteria perfectly.

The town marked time in a rural, mostly isolated agricultural area nowhere near shipyards, munitions plants, or vital war effort industries. It was, as required by the army criteria, more than 170 miles from the east or

west coast, and more than 150 miles from the Canadian or Mexican border. In addition, it enjoyed a climate suitable for heavy construction during any season of the year, a climate that would not run up high heat and maintenance costs because of extremely cold weather.

Some evidence suggests national agencies considered land near Aliceville for a government internment camp before 1942. As early as 1939, the United States worried about how to deal with troublesome foreign nationals (aliens) who might have to be arrested if the country went to war. In March 1941, the War Department promised to give the nine regional Service Commands estimates of how many such foreign nationals each might have to accept and detain. War Department directives called for three permanent Alien Program internment camps—two sites for three thousand people in the Eighth Service

**Some evidence suggests national agencies considered land near Aliceville for a government internment camp before 1942. As early as 1939, the United States worried about how to deal with troublesome foreign nationals (aliens) who might have to be arrested if the country went to war.**

Command (Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and parts of Arizona), and one site for 6,000 in the Fourth Service Command (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana). Since the properties purchased near Aliceville late in the summer of 1942 created a site large enough to handle six thousand detainees, it is

likely the government had had its eye on this land as early as the 1941 directive.

Pickens is a sleepy cotton and pulpwood county nestled right up against the middle of Alabama's western border with Mississippi. Its first inhabitants were Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes believed to have been visited by Hernando DeSoto in 1540. Pickens became an official county in 1820, almost exactly a year after Alabama became a state. By the end of the 1830s, most of its Native American inhabitants had left. Reluctantly, they'd accepted the insistent dominance of European settlers and either headed west on their own

or been forcibly relocated to reservations after their leaders ceded land to the United States in a series of treaties supported by President Andrew Jackson.

When the Army Corps of Engineers began combing areas like Pickens County, they were looking for properties of more than 350 acres with even terrain and a moderate slope for surface drainage. The Corps wanted land less than five miles from a railroad line (to facilitate the transfer of detainees and the delivery of food supplies), and more than five hundred feet from any public road (to protect private citizens in the event shots had to be fired).

Aliceville's good rail service most certainly attracted attention. John T. Cochrane had brought the Carrollton Short Line down between Bridgeville and Franconia in 1902. He'd put up a depot and named the town that grew up around it for his wife, Alyce Searcy Cochrane. By 1942, the AT&N (the old Carrollton Short Line) and the Frisco (the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad) both served the town well.

The drugstore speculators thought Aliceville might be getting a massive training base. An interment [sic] camp, especially one for prisoners of war, was hard to imagine. Most folks in town kept their war images up to date with the MovieTone newsreels over at the Palace Theater. Sooner or later, in any given week, just about everybody took in a movie at the Palace – Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald in *I Married an Angel* or *True to the Army* with Judy Canova and Allen Jones. Saturdays, kids enjoyed double features like *Hurricane Smith* and *Code of the Outlaws* and maybe a suspenseful new episode of *King of the Texas Rangers*.

Whatever the marquee announced, MovieTone added a newsreel with a dramatic, deep-voiced narrative, tinny-toned music, and flickering images of faraway horrors like the Japanese defeat of American troops on Bataan or the German seizure of British troops in the swirling sands of North Africa. Such news made it difficult to envision enough Allied victories to warrant prisoner of war camps popping up in places like Pickens County. In May 1942, only thirty-two enemy soldiers were imprisoned on American soil – thirty-one Germans and one Japanese. By July, that number had grown only to forty-nine—thirty-nine Germans and ten Japanese. As far as anyone in Aliceville knew, not one of these military captives was anywhere near Alabama.

Of course, there were all those civilian Japanese and Germans and Italians the government had rounded up and investigated once the Alien Program was put in place. Aliceville residents had read about Italian merchant ship sailors impounded in American ports and sent off to detention at Fort Missoula in

Montana. There'd been photos in the newspaper of little German children peeking through barbed wire in Texas where they were held in captivity with parents suspected of sabotage, and there'd been newsreel footage of Japanese families being evacuated from neighborhoods in San Francisco and sent inland by the Wartime Civil Control Administration. Maybe Pickens County was getting a camp for people like these.

Throughout the summer, Aliceville residents pondered such rumors as they went about their regular business. Because of an abundance of rain, they

**Farmers also concerned themselves with planting and cultivating a curious crop called kudzu, a fact that amuses Alabama residents today.**

worried about the cotton crop. Wet bolls could rot and fall off without blooming. Soggy cotton was next to impossible to pick, and fiendish weevils lurked in anticipation of

just such weather as this. Farmers prayed for hot, dry days and scheduled eight boll weevil poisoning demonstrations around the county—one of them at Elmore Owen's farm near Aliceville and another at Johnny Bert Craft's farm in nearby Benevola.

Farmers also concerned themselves with planting and cultivating a curious crop called kudzu, a fact that amuses Alabama residents today. The kudzu vine is a native of Asia, but it was introduced to the American South through the Japanese pavilion at the New Orleans Exposition in 1884. Before the turn of the century, Southerners used it mainly as a shade vine for porches and arbors. Then, in the 1930s, the United States Department of Agriculture began to import kudzu cuttings as a means to control erosion on bare river banks and in vacant fields around the South. They actually paid farmers up to eight dollars an acre to plant the thick vines with their huge, three-lobed leaves.

An article in the Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian in November 1941 called kudzu the "magic vine of Alabama agriculture" and declared it would enchant farmers by enriching soil, stemming erosion, and providing good grazing for livestock. During World War II, the agricultural extension insert in the Pickens County newspaper carried frequent articles about the care and cultivation of kudzu. Because the vine was high in protein, some farmers believed it would make good fodder, but unfortunately, whenever cows and other animals grazed in a field of kudzu, they trampled the

vines to death. Eventually, domestic cultivation was abandoned, but the vines continued to thrive in the timberland at the edges of pastures, often strangling a tall tree to death in one season by choking off any sunlight. Today, kudzu is considered a bothersome weed and has become a focal point for jokes throughout the South.

When not planting kudzu or cotton, folks in Aliceville kept their ears open for more rumblings about the possible camp in their midst while they supported the war effort in whatever ways they could. Sam Wise, who had a clothing store across the street from Simon Jones' drugstore on Aliceville's "Busy Corner," put a stamp in one corner of his ads reminding local citizens to ensure victory by buying war bonds and stamps. George Downer worked so hard as war council chairman that Pickens County sold double its quota of bonds that summer. When the county held a huge scrap rubber campaign, D. B. Love got the Boy Scouts and the members of the Exchange Club to help his Gulf service station collect more scrap than any other establishment in the county—thirty-two thousand pounds of it.

In the middle of 1942, America was waging war on two fronts, but Pickens County residents seemed most clearly focused on the war with Japan. Half-page advertisements in the Pickens County Herald and West Alabamian continually reminded housewives to clean out their cellars. One cartoon featured teakettles, a cast iron stove, a well pump, a hot water bottle, an iron, and an old washtub battering a Japanese soldier above a caption that read, "Bomb 'em with Junk." Another popular slogan was "Slap the Jap with All Your Scrap."

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In August, when an appraiser from the Federal Land Bank showed up to set a value on Doc and Nannie Parker's pastureland two miles outside Aliceville, their son Tom was already milking cows on that land twice a day. He'd just put up a new barn and tenant houses, and he'd improved the broad pastures. He'd built a small house and was carving out a nice life with his wife and two small daughters.

"They were courteous, and I was courteous to them," Tom Parker has said of his several encounters with the government appraisers and surveyors. "For the same money, we could have sold that land to someone else, I suppose, but I don't think we could have got much more for it." Legally, the Parkers had two choices—accept the government offer or go to court, and with the country at war, they weren't likely to win in federal court.

They accepted the offer (\$29,295) for three tracts totaling slightly more than four hundred acres, and Tom was given just ten days to move his family and his cows off his parents' land. Whenever he considered voicing a complaint, he reminded himself that there was a war on. Like his neighbors and other patriotic Americans, he believed supporting the war called for all-out cooperation.

**“I was standing in the middle of a field with the appraiser when he let me know what was about to happen, what they were going to do....”**

“I was standing in the middle of a field with the appraiser when he let me know what was about to happen, what they were going to do....” All Tom found out for sure was that the army did indeed plan to build an “interment” camp of some sort, but neither he nor anyone else in Aliceville would discover the identity of the intended occupants until just before they were marched behind barbed wire the following June.

.....  
*Ruth Beaumont Cook's nonfiction book, GUESTS BEHIND BARBED WIRE: America's Flirtation with the Golden Rule—The Camp Aliceville Prisoner of War Experience, is being published by Crane Hill Publishers. It is an extensive and deeply personal narrative of the German Prisoner of War camp located in Aliceville, Alabama. Cook says, “The story has classic elements—escape and death, loneliness and fear, disillusionment and despair, but also humor, hope, and romance, as well as incredible creativity flourishing in confinement.”* cook9006@bellsouth.net  
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## GRAVITAS

Peggy Smith Duke

Five men stand  
around the front end  
of a race car  
contemplating  
new valve covers  
as gravely  
as G-8 heads of state  
search for solutions  
to the wild threats  
of a madman.

All heads bow,  
chin to chest, focused,  
with gravitas—  
Nitroplate  
versus Jet-Hot—  
a lot depends  
on who has  
free t-shirts. Hands

shove deep  
into dirty pockets.  
Black lines trace  
each fingernail,  
airbrush into the craze  
of calloused thumbs.  
Men who work  
for a living  
and think  
for fun.

.....  
*Peggy Smith Duke is a poet and writer living in rural Middle Tennessee. During racing season, "Dr. Dial-In" serves as crew chief for her husband's competitive sportsman drag racing. Her poetry has been published in Subtropics and is in press for Relief, Main Street Rag, and The Magazine of Speculative Poetry.*  
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## THE FATALIST

Kelsey Scouten Bates

As it turns out, it wasn't a mushroom cloud at all,  
but the enlarged autumn sun  
horizontally halved by the deceptive ridge of South Mountain.

As it turns out, it wasn't a 757 flying too close to the ground,  
just bizarrely symmetrical spotlights  
overlooking a green fairway at night.

The puppy caught between lanes on I-95?  
As it turns out, it was just a brown bag shifting  
in the wind of malicious cars.

.....  
*Originally from Maryland, Kelsey Scouten Bates is a graduate of Towson University in Baltimore with a Master's Degree in Professional Writing. In addition to writing poetry, Kelsey also writes non-fiction and paints in watercolor. She works full time at the Birmingham Public Library as the Assistant Archivist and Grants Writer.*  
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**“Those are my principles. If you don't  
like them I have others.”**

**– Groucho Marx**



## From A LETTER TO THOREAU

Edward O. Wilson

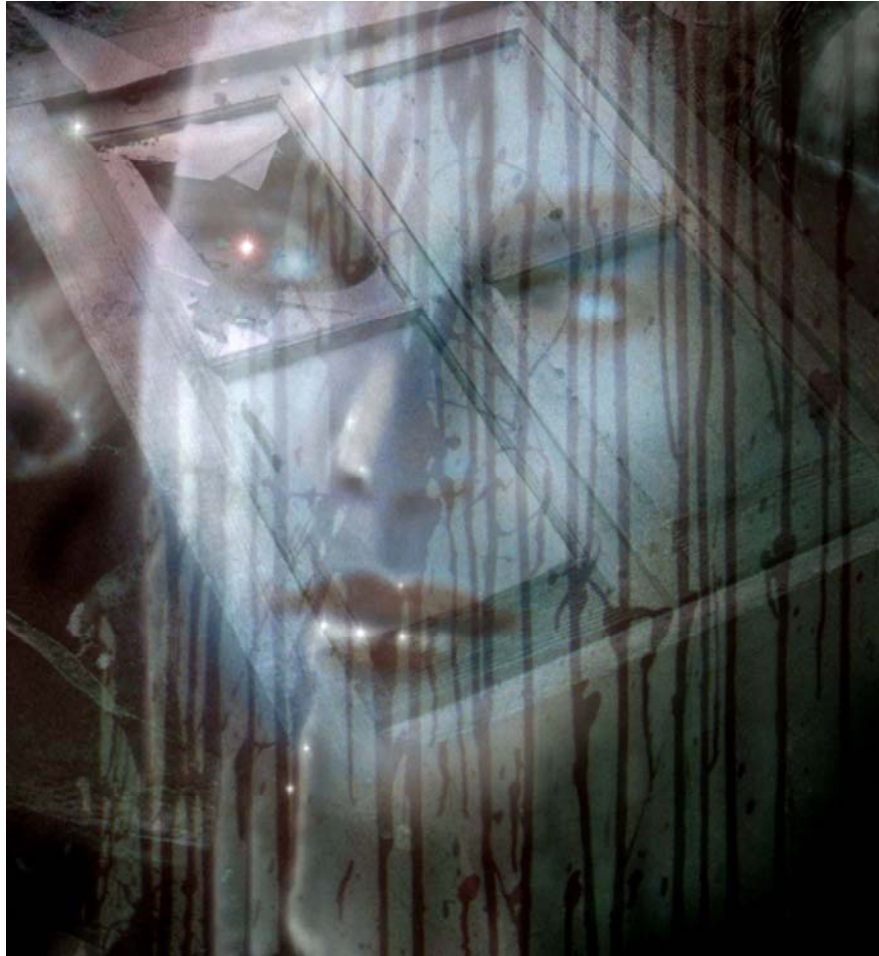
It is exquisitely human to search for wholeness and richness of experience. When these qualities are lost among the distracting schedules of everyday life, we seek them elsewhere. When you stripped your outside obligations to the survivable minimum, you placed your trained and very active mind in an unendurable vacuum. And this is the essence of the matter: in order to fill the vacuum, you discovered the human proclivity to embrace the natural world...

You traded most of the richness of social existence for an equivalent richness of the natural world. The choice was entirely logical.

.....  
*Birmingham native Edward O. Wilson, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes and one Nobel Medal (the Crafoord Award), is the world's foremost authority on ants. He has authored many books in his field.*  
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"I got an hourglass figure, but it's later  
than you think."

– Minnie Pearl



**FACE IN WINDOW – DRAWING MORNING SUN**

Digital Composite Photo

Andrew Tyson

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*"Both images are original photographs taken in Europe. The images were then scanned in at a high-resolution (put to digital) and then blended together in Photoshop. The window image was taken inside an old farm house in Spain, and the face I took on the street in Belgium (and then airbrushed over)." Birmingham Art Association member Andrew Tyson is an award-winning artist who works in various media including pencil, film & digital photography, and computer-generated images. Tysona@bellsouth.net*  
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## WRITERS ANONYMOUS

Donna H. Bowman

Hi. My name is Donna . . . and I . . . am a writer. My mother warned me it could happen. My father warned me it could happen. But as all children know better than their parents, I tried it any way.

Now, I don't go a day without it. I meet every month with a writers support/critique group. Those nights, I don't write alone. I admit – I do not think I have a problem. I can stop anytime I want to. I just don't want to.

I write in crowds. I write in seclusion. I write at red lights. And yes, during tornado warnings, I've even written . . . in the closet. I often write not just my first word, but a whole chapter – before breakfast. But, I can stop anytime I want to.

Yes, I do keep a stash in my purse – it's just a small note pad and pen. I also keep another set by my bed with a flashlight, just in case I wake up . . . needing to write a little more. And it's true – there are even times I go on writing binges; skipping little things like chores, meals and sleep . . . but I don't bother anybody else. I know I can stop anytime I want to!

The group of people I hang around with do it, too. And what if there were no writers? Then no one would read. And that's right . . . I'm a reader, too. But, I can also stop that – anytime I want to!

.....  
*Donna Bowman has canoed through alligator- infested swamps and tracked 800-pound bear in the Poconos searching for unusual stories. She's a columnist/book reviewer for Georgia's Dawson Community News, and is published in the Peterson Journal for Teaching Nature Education. Donna also leads a children's writers and illustrators organization, Southern Breeze, [www.southern-breeze.org](http://www.southern-breeze.org).*  
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## FRESH CORNBREAD

T.K. Thorne

"Excuse me." The irritated, impatient voice nudged me from my studied comparison of low-fat Triscuits and low-fat Wheat Thins. I realized my basket had wandered into the grocery aisle, blocking someone's access. "Sorry," I mumbled, scooting the basket over, barely noticing the old man a few feet away, consulting his watch.

"One week ago my wife died," he said, as though picking up a stalled conversation.

I checked the aisle, empty except for the retreating back of the woman my cart had impeded, and realized the man must have spoken to me, if to anyone at all.

"One week to the minute," he added and let his watch hand fall, joining the other to clench the bar of his empty shopping cart as if it held him up. "We were married fifty-one years." His shoulders bowed, fragile with the weight of his loss. Then he straightened them. "But I don't want to talk about it. I'm looking for Raisin Bran."

The cereal lane was several rows away. I wondered if this could be the first time he'd been in the grocery store without his wife. "Follow me," I said, sticking both the Triscuits and the Wheat Thins in my buggy. At the cereal row, I turned in, waiting for him to catch up. On impulse I pointed to the large sign hanging from the ceiling midway down the aisle and asked, "Can you read that?" Immediately, I wished I could swallow the patronizing question. How could anyone not know the signs in a grocery store indexed the items in the aisle? Still, I remembered when I took my grandmother to see my grandfather in the hospital. She stood before the elevator, very small and suddenly conscious that she might be left alone. Raising a trembling hand to the elevator doors, she'd asked, "How do you make it come to you?"

She was in her seventies at the time, but Grandpa had always taken care of those things. She'd never paid attention.



# **FRESH CORN**

Digital Photograph

Liz Reed

*Liz Reed, a retiree, graduated from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2005 with a degree in Art Studio. She enjoys photography as well as painting and mixed media. More of her work can be seen at [www.lizreed.com](http://www.lizreed.com). Contact [liz@lizreed.com](mailto:liz@lizreed.com).*

.....

The old man in the grocery store squinted at the sign. "Yes, I can see it."

"They tell you what's on the row," I explained.

Relief and gratitude swept over the crevices of his weathered face. He nodded, but the look faded as he took in the long, double-tiered row of multi-colored cereal boxes. Like Grandma, he had never paid attention. He was totally unprepared.

I moved quickly down the aisle, scanning with a practiced eye, and plucked a box of Raisin Bran, holding it out to him. "Is this it?"

He took it, nodded again and put it in his basket.

A moment of silence rose between us.

"Was it a heart attack?" I asked softly.

His mouth twitched. "Yes, a heart attack. We were married fifty-one years," he said again, as if that thought anchored him. He'd said he didn't want to talk about it, but now it spilled from him like a lanced wound. "We'd been out, riding in the car, looking around. Had us a grand ole time."

I smiled at the warmth in his voice and wondered at the thought of a fun day consisting of just riding around with someone you love.

"We went to the store," he continued, "and bought some groceries." This, I interpreted, meant he'd followed his wife around the store, while he thought about other things. He rubbed his chin. "Then back at the house, she went to the kitchen. She said, 'I'm going to make you some fresh corn bread to go with those greens we bought.'"

With the words, "fresh corn bread" his watery eyes lit. I knew as he said them that his wife's announcement had been more than the promise of a special treat. His face had transformed. With those words, my perspective skewed, allowing me to behold something I'd passed countless times, but never really seen, a secret in plain view, like elevator buttons and signs in the grocery store.

This was love. The real thing – what happens after one year or fifty-one. Sometimes. If you're lucky and you pay attention.

Love, that word that spins the world and defies definition was the simple delight of pleasing the other. I stood frozen beside the wall of cereal boxes, vaguely aware that someone had come up behind me and stopped, blocked by our carts, but I didn't move.

"She called my name," he said, his gaze focused on the memory. "I thought she wanted me to open something for her, so I got up. She met me halfway down the hall." He drew a breath. "That's when she collapsed." Another ragged breath and a whisper, "I caught her. She died in my arms."

The person behind me was silent.

"Her head never touched the ground," he continued. "I held her. She couldn't breathe; she never could get a breath."

"Fifty-one years," he repeated, his voice edged with wonder. "One week ago. Fifty-one years. It happens so fast."

I wasn't sure if he meant death or the fifty-one years.

"I'm so sorry," I said. The words seemed as pale and empty as his eyes.

After a moment he said, "Thank you. You've been very kind."

"Can I help you find anything else?" I asked, wishing I knew something better to say, some way to fix the unfixable, to promise him that I would remember that love was as simple and profound as fresh cornbread.

He smiled, waving vaguely toward the far corner of the store, as though that was familiar territory, and turned his cart around. "No, I only need some milk."

I watched him go, until I suddenly remembered the person I was blocking. "I'm sorry," I mumbled, recognizing the woman I'd blocked previously and backing my cart out of her way.

She met my eyes. They were misty, like mine. "That's okay," she said.

.....  
*Award-winning T.K. Thorne writes in Springville, Alabama. tthornecap@aol.com*  
.....

**"Words themselves become beings,  
sentences become...natural vegetation to be  
guided by the gardener's hands."**

**– Eric Sevareid**

## WHERE I'M FROM

Emily Partrich

I'm from the scrap booking mom to the joking  
dad, from the eight year old sister to the four year  
old brother from the west highland white terrier  
that barks all night.

I'm from the best grilled fish at  
Grandmommy's house to the family feast in  
Atlanta for Thanksgiving.

I'm from the extremely wild boat rides my  
dad gives on occasions to the soft gospel music  
my mom plays on the porch of the woodland  
house.

I'm from early birds to sleepy heads from Sunday  
mornings at church to Sunday afternoons at  
Grandmommy's

I'm from the delicious milk coffee Mimi fixes  
me in the mornings of my  
trips to the smarties Papa secretly fills me with,  
from the unforgetting sickness my mom battled  
to the leg burn my sister got to win the race.

I'm from anything to everything from kind  
friends to nice family and FUN!

.....  
*Ten-year-old artist / author Emily Partrich attends Lake Murray Elementary School in  
Chapin, South Carolina.*  
.....



## WHILE FORTY-SIX HEARTS KEPT TIME

Robert Leslie Palmer

Two cigar-like engines whined  
As they pulled into that awful climb;  
The cigars began to choke and puff  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

The way those cigar-engines throbbed  
And spat and choked, it was a crime  
For forty-six stomachs grew weak  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

And then the jumpmaster, that awful man,  
Barked out his command and did his mime,  
“Six minutes!” resounded throughout the craft,  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

The rapid succession of commands (each worse than the last)  
Brought forty-six sleeves to wipe off that slime,  
Perspired fear, from the faces of the silent jumpers,  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

Ghastly pale grew the faces of the forty-six  
And eyes widened, each pupil the size of a dime  
As the jumpmaster barked his last command: “Go!”  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

Twelve-hundred fifty feet they fell,  
One foot for every foot they’d climbed,  
And every man did all he’d learned,  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

And when they hit the ground  
They stood and dusted off the grime,  
And smiled, and laughed, and danced,  
While forty-six hearts kept time.

.....  
*Robert Leslie Palmer is a Birmingham attorney who received a B.A. degree in 1979 from Tulane University and a J.D. in 1982 from Georgetown University. He served as a Captain in the U.S. Army JAG Corps and wrote this poem in 1978, eight days after graduating from Airborne School.*  
.....



A PALESTINIAN WOMAN WALKS THROUGH THE RUBBLE OF  
HER HOME IN BEIT HANUN (GAZA) IN NOVEMBER, 2006.

George Azar

*George Azar lives in Gaza and has covered the Arab world for the past 25 years. His photographs appear in the New York Times and his video documentaries on Al Jazeera English. He is author of "Palestine, A Guide" (Interlink 2005) and "Palestine, A Photographic Journey" (UC Press, 1991). [georgeazar@mac.com](mailto:georgeazar@mac.com)*

## **BLACK FANG**

Josh Karaczewski

In the side yard of Danny and Matt's home in Hayward was a tight patch of anemic dirt, a brick fireplace (never used to their knowledge), and a lonely Italian Cypress, long stripped of its arsenal of lightweight, back-arm welt-leaving projectiles (at least under the five-foot high young arm's limit of reach), where spiders wove their webs in baskets with lean-to rooms at the back. The brothers made certain that these spiders were well fed with the other hapless insect residents of the yard: black beetles, sheeny backs despite their dirt accommodations; roly-polies who leave their gray melon rind armored husks; flies their favorite, with their frenzied, fruitless, high-pitched arcing keen of wings.

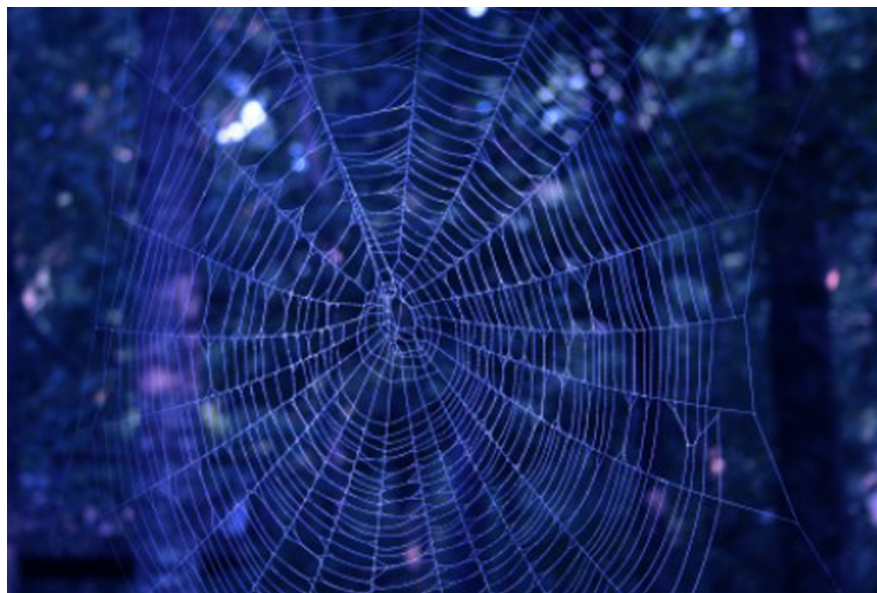
One Sunday afternoon a tilted rock unearthed a pincer-bug for the day's entertainment. Inherited boy instinct warned them against picking it up with their fingers, so, carefully pinched in a fresh leaf, it was carried over and flicked into the nearest web. The victim writhed on the axis of its middle, an announcement that brought the spider from its parlor; its pinky fingernail-sized body tensed, lowered itself for the strike, and leaping forward the pincer-bug curled its body almost to a circle and decapitated the spider with its rear claws.

Danny and Matt gasped, and looked at each other, a mirrored recognition in their eyes that they had a hot prospect on their hands.

They started at a nickel a viewing, and by the end of the week they were up to a dime. They christened him Black Fang, and kept him in a Mason jar with a perforated lid. Matt, the more studious of the two, discovered on the week's library trip that its true name was Earwig (the word ear giving Matt a wicked chill that made him unconsciously brush the overgrown hair from his ears), and informed him that the remains of a well-bitten strawberry would keep him happy between matches.

The following Saturday they shared a quarter door charge for a match against Mike Wood's prize Black Widow spider, found and caught under the hubcap of his grandfather's non-operational Jaguar; Danny and Matt wagered five two-dollar bills in numerical sequence against Mike's JFK silver half-dollar collection. But the outcome was just as quick and deft, and would have been strangely unsatisfying had Book-Mark Allen not offered a challenge for the following day.





### WEB IN MOONLIGHT

Digital Photograph

Hank Siegel

.....  
*Hank Siegel is a photographer living in Hoover. His work focuses on the forms, colors and textures of the natural world. He works in digital and traditional photographic modes. Contact: [hanknjan@bellsouth.net](mailto:hanknjan@bellsouth.net)*  
.....

“What have you got?” Danny, spokesman for Black Fang, asked.

“A fat Daddy Long-legs,” Book-Mark answered. The following laughter lightened the mood from the Black Widow’s easy defeat – if Black Fang could take out a spider that could kill a boy what chance would a basic corner-crawling Daddy Long-legs have?

“Let’s say a penny each to watch,” Danny derided to more laughter.

Book-Mark ignored the insult and offered, “I’ll put my Rafael #1 up against your two-dollar bill set,” which dropped the boys’ comments to an impressed monosyllable. Not only was the comic book valued at twenty-dollars but Book-Mark owned the only confirmed copy south of Berkeley, and had previously refused to let anybody take it out of its cardboard-backed Mylar bag, much less read it.

“You’re on,” Danny and Matt said in unison, wishing they hadn’t set the door so low.

The next day drew the biggest crowd yet, even some girls showing up for the match.

Book-Mark brought the challenger in a five-gallon tank that had once housed a blue-bellied lizard, the warming stone’s power cord still swinging from a corner. Craving the prized comic book, Danny and Matt toned down the usual pre-fight theatrics and got quickly to the match. Black Fang was dropped onto the web and began his squirming efforts to extricate himself.

From shadow the Daddy Long-legs lumbered forward to investigate, his oblong body dipping from the spindly legs. When near the ensnared Earwig, Black Fang brandished his pincers in warning. “This is what you’ll get if you come any closer,” Danny articulated for the Earwig.

But the Daddy Long-legs, unperturbed by the proposed aggression, sprang over its victim with a speed surprising for its rotundity. Black Fang’s back cracked over in his practiced, signature finishing move, but the stilt legs of his opponent kept his body well out of range. Too small to be seen by the spectators’ eyes, silk from the challenger’s rear was pulled in tandem by its legs, and began to appear around Black Fang’s frantic body, which soon began a flailing spin as his body was turned in the wrapping.

The crowd gasped at the upset, though Danny and Matt still held a last round hope for their fighter, but too soon the Earwig’s mummification had tightened around his body so that the silent clacking of its pincers grew futile and pitiful, reflective of an unaccepted certainty. The Daddy Long-legs lowered its body, gentle as a mother kissing her baby in the cradle, and drank the life out of Black Fang. The victor was proclaimed with a cheer.

Book-Mark, unused to triumph outside the classroom, tried to dilute the smile on his face as he collected his prize, slipping the bills into the back side of his comic book bag, but was inexperienced in hiding the pleasure of his clever rout from his eyes. Danny and Matt ignored his departure, formulating a plan to explain the loss of the two-dollar bills (a gift from Grandpa Moose) to their mother.

.....  
*Josh Karaczewski (pseudonym for Joshua Kearns), writes from his home in San Lorenzo, California. Email contact: [joshkaraczewski@sbcglobal.net](mailto:joshkaraczewski@sbcglobal.net)*  
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## NO MORE LOVE IN THE LYRICS

Beverly Beckham

I wonder if the old songs were true. If "It Had to Be You" and "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home to" came straight from the heart. Or were they just sentimentally tweaked to sell? Was love 60 and 70 years ago as tender and innocent as the music made it seem? Or were all the songs – I'm wild again, beguiled again, a simpering, whimpering child again – a lie, truth sacrificed for meter and rhyme?

The very thought of you, and I forget to do the little ordinary things that everyone ought to do. I grew up listening to this kind of music and believing in these kinds of songs. I grew up believing, too, that when people fell in love, they sang and that they continued to sing their whole lives long. Why not? Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and Gene Kelly and Judy Garland – all the pretty people on TV sang. And my mother sang along.

Plus, my mother sang to my father. Why this feeling, why this glow, why the thrill when you say hello? For their 10th anniversary, she took a bus and then a train into Boston to make a recording for him. I went with her. I watched her sing. I have the record now, a 78, all crackly and worn. Oh we ain't got a barrel of money, maybe we're ragged and funny, but we'll travel along, singing a song, side by side.

Even hardship, when put to music, was romantic. And there was always music in my house – a record playing, my mother singing, someone crooning something on TV.

I still listen to Perry Como and Jo Stafford and Rosemary Clooney. When I'm home; when I get to choose. But I listen to pop music, too. I like Chris Brown's "Gimme That" and Rihanna's "SOS" and Ne-Yo's "So Sick" – And I'm so sick of love songs, so tired of tears, so done with wishing, you were still here.

There's more energy in today's music, and there's rhythm and rhyme and sex and anger. But there's no innocence, anymore – Take my hand, I'm a stranger in paradise – and no tenderness.

Because of you, there's a song in my heart, because of you my romance had its start – that is the "Because of You" I grew up hearing.

This is the "Because of You" Kelly Clarkson now sings: Because of you I learned to play on the safe side so I don't get hurt. Because of you I try my hardest just to forget everything. Because of you I don't know how to let anyone else in.

Music changed way back in the '60s. We suddenly had angst-filled songs. Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing and You don't believe we're on the eve of destruction? But we also had love songs: "I Got You, Babe," "Cherish," and "Can't Stop Loving You."

So where have all the love songs gone?

If music is more than meter and rhyme, if it's an honest reflection of the times, then what today's music is saying is there is no love. Shakira's "Hips Don't Lie" is catchy and fun and energizing and boy-meets-girl.

But it's not a love song. Oh, I know I am on tonight, my hips don't lie. And I am starting to feel it's right. All the attraction, the tension. Don't you see baby, this is perfection.

Chances are, 'cause I wear a silly grin the moment you come into view, chances are you think that I'm in love with you.

Tacky? Old-fashioned? Boring? Maybe. But an invention of songwriters? No. The words were true once. Once upon a time, a long, long time ago.

.....  
*Beverly Beckham's work has appeared in periodicals around the world. She currently writes a weekly Sunday column for the Boston Globe and is the author of "A Gift of Time," a collection of personal essays and "Back Then," a memoir of childhood. She has contributed to "A 6<sup>th</sup> Bowl of Chicken Soup for the Soul," "A Second Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul," and "Chicken Soup for the Mother's Soul 2."*  
*Reprinted with permission of the Boston Globe and Beverly Beckham.*  
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**"If you could say it, there'd be no  
reason to paint."**

**– Edward Hopper**

## THE INTERVIEW

Bob Hartson

The elevator doors opened and Greg Sanbetter checked his watch; he would be right on time. Mondays were always bad, but today he had to project a positive attitude from start to finish. The interview wasn't for forty minutes.

Brass elevator doors whisked shut behind him as he spotted a Starbucks oasis to his left. He clutched his briefcase and headed that way, at the same time taking in the plush décor.

Tan marble walls glistened in the golden rays of the early morning sun streaming in through the immense wall of windows to his right. Crystal chandeliers dotted the ceiling above his head and down the entire length of the floor.

Lavish, wine-colored carpet muffled his steps as he mixed with the bustling brigade of commuters who dodged one another like reality robots in a foot race.

Somebody had spent tons of money on this baby, he thought; glittery strokes reflected the conceit of the associates who leased here. It

was all about status. He wanted to work in this building, where artistic gifts of gaud were the norm. He wondered how he would fit in if he landed the job this morning.

The dazzling sun caught his eye and he moved over to the windows to check out the view. From this height, the city seemed sculpted and silent, but busy. Cabs looked like ants on the streets below, yellow matchbox cars. Neighboring buildings jutted into the sky in every direction. Some higher, but mostly lower. Greg considered the magic of being equal to their might from where he stood. He felt small but, at the same time, empowered in some weird way.

He checked his watch again. There would be time for one last cup, he thought, as he sauntered over to the Starbucks.

**From this height, the  
city seemed sculpted  
and silent, but busy.  
Cabs looked like ants  
on the streets below,  
yellow matchbox cars.  
Neighboring buildings  
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every direction.**



A petite brunette wearing a hairnet had her hands full. She blended drinks and took cash at the same time. Greg was amazed that the clown ahead of him was paying with a credit card.

When it was his turn, Greg ordered a vanilla cappuccino, paid cash, and found a seat. He sat at a table watching the morning people parading the concourse while he sipped his drink. They reminded him of bees finding their way to their hives. Nine o'clock bees buzzing to work.

A handicapped guy with thick glasses drifted by in his wheelchair, waving and grinning as he rolled. Maybe the brunette was a pal of his.

Greg watched the brunette's helper; she was a gray-haired woman with fleshy, dimpled elbows who couldn't keep up. Her glasses, held together with adhesive tape, kept sliding down her nose. She was getting flustered by the crowd of customers who were waiting, and the brunette was losing patience with her. What a shame that she couldn't be home hugging her grandkids. He could see she was feeling the pressure, big time, and the brunette wasn't

**Life had been good, but  
Greg was prepared to  
throw it all away. The  
challenges had become  
too much.**

cutting her any slack. Greg knew pressure. Indeed, the pressure was on him. This morning he'd attempt to sell himself to Brad Holcomb, at Stearns, Holcomb, and Caruthers. Today held the promise for a new beginning. He had to forget about the past. Not that working for Joe

Brody wasn't a good thing; Greg had accumulated many friends during his tenure over there. The benefits were huge; and although the atmosphere in the building was nothing compared to this, he had been content.

He recognized that his twelve years with Brody and MaCabee would fade like a bad dream if he landed this new position. He would be out of his mental doghouse for quitting at Brody. Katie and the kids could breathe again. It seemed as though too much was riding on today, and Daddy had been out of work too long.

Life had been good, but Greg was prepared to throw it all away. The challenges had become too much. He had contemplated suicide; he wasn't getting any younger, and he felt like a failure in so many ways. Was it because he was forty-two? He knew that Katie was still supportive, but in the past six months he had also learned that he was either over-qualified or under-qualified depending on whom he talked to. Jobs weren't easy to find. He was letting his family down.

He looked at his watch once more and decided he had just enough time to take a piss. He emptied his cup and hustled to the men's room. He noted the orchestrated rendition of "Hang on Sloopy" being piped in. A Puerto Rican shoe-shine guy was busy buffing some black loafers when he walked in and sidled up to a urinal. The man hummed and gyrated his hips to the music while he worked on the loafers. No pressure there, Greg thought.

He finished, zipped up, and washed his hands. He looked in the mirror to take inventory. Clean shave, mustache trimmed to perfection, check. His double-breasted blue suit was in the cleaners, but this brown would be all right. It was still fall colors. His white shirt and pale blue tie contrasted well. Wasn't overdressed, was he? He tilted his face from side to side, checking what little hair he still had. He wished he was twenty years younger. He saw the shoeshine guy watching him in the mirror; he had to get going. Too late now if something was wrong . . . this was the Greg he was selling today, period.

In Suite 5425, a nameplate sat on the counter above the receptionist's mahogany desk. It said "Miss J. Hudson."

A modest looking brunette sat behind the desk. Attractive, yes, but her most striking feature was her tiny lips. Greg realized that perhaps that wasn't fair. Lately, he had been judging every woman by Angelina Jolie's lips. The woman was still tucking her purse away beneath her desk when he walked in. She wore a fuchsia colored business suit, with a white sprig of flowers in the lapel. It matched the bouquet in the small vase on her desk.

She flashed a perfect smile, as she began her job.

"Good morning! May I help you?"

"Yes, I have an appointment with Mr. Holcomb at nine o'clock. Greg Sanbetter is the name." She checked the planner laying in front of her.

"Yes, Mr. Sanbetter, won't you please have a seat? I'll let Mr. Holcomb know that you're here."

Greg eyed the sugar slathered jelly donut nestled in a napkin on her desk and wished he had eaten a cinnamon roll at Starbucks. He set his briefcase down, took a seat and picked up a copy of Business Week and pretended to be absorbed as he flipped through the pages. She came back and smiled as she sat down. He glanced up and saw her head dipping down behind the counter; when she bobbed back up, she was munching the donut and had traces of red jelly on her lips. He smiled to himself. His stomach was nervous; and he was tasting the cappuccino a second time. The receptionist picked up her phone.

"Yes, Sir," she said. "Mr. Sanbetter, Mr. Holcomb will see you now." She came from behind her desk; he could see that she was very wide from the hips down. Donut queen, perhaps, but who was he to judge. His paunch was Budweiser's.

"Thank you," he said, tossing the magazine back on the pile. He grabbed his briefcase and followed her past two padded doors to Holcomb's office.

Brad Holcomb was a short, fifty-fivish man. Not just heavy, nor even a "bit overweight." He was simply fat. No more than five feet; his Santa-like belly stuck out from his body like a woman eight months pregnant. He favored a fatter Danny Devito with glasses. His blue suit jacket draped over the back of his chair, a red, silk handkerchief stuck out of the top pocket. He rushed over to Greg and shook his hand. He had a clammy handshake, and Greg was glad it wasn't his own that was sweating.

"Greg! Glad you could make it. Have a seat. Beautiful day out there, don't you think?" He parked himself on the edge of his desk, one Gucci shoe, dangling in the air.

**She came from behind  
her desk; he could see  
that she was very wide  
from the hips down.  
Donut queen, perhaps,  
but who was he to  
judge. His paunch was  
Budweiser's.**

"Yes, it's still warm out there.

Hot for this early in the morning.  
Couldn't be nicer. I was taking in the  
view, earlier, it's fantastic from up  
here, isn't it?"

"Yeah, that's for sure. We love  
it. Yes, we have a splendid look-see  
from up here, that's for damned sure.  
The weather has held up ever since  
that lousy Labor Day we had." He  
slid off his desk and paced around to  
gaze out of the windows behind his  
desk. "If you remember, it rained all

damned weekend," he chuckled. "I took the family out to Jones Beach for the day, and we spent most of it sitting under a gazebo, playing cards. Kids drove me nuts. But, what are you gonna do, you know? Can I have Janie get you a cup of coffee before we get started?"

"No, that's all right. I'm fine, Mr. Holcomb. Thanks, anyway," said Greg.

"Well, then, let's get right down to it, shall we? I've read over your resume and you certainly have the stuff we're looking for. I see you were with Brody and Mac for quite awhile, eh?"

"Yes, almost twelve years to be exact, Sir."

"Now, now. None of that Sir crap with me, Greg. I put my pants on the same way as you . . . maybe mine fit a bit tighter, but they go on the same way, one leg at a time, ya' know?" He sat in his chair and leaned back.

"Yes, Mr. Holcomb."

Holcomb studied him for a moment.

"Any experience with retirement folios and the like, Greg? It doesn't say in your resume. Reason I ask is, we're in the process of expanding in that end of the business. It's like gold, I tell ya'. Course, now, with your background, it wouldn't take much to catch on to the particulars – right?"

"No, Sir, I mean I haven't got that experience, mind you, but I know I could handle most anything you've got in investments."

"Good! Well, like I said, I went over your resume and flew it by the boys – the ones that count at least," he grinned. "It looks pretty good, I have to tell you – I'm impressed. Let me just ask you – what happened over there at Brody and MaCabee, anyway? Why did you leave?"

Here we go, Greg thought. This is the punch line. Here comes the knockout.

"Well, it was a mutual agreement, Mr. Holcomb. They were making changes just like you folks, only those changes would have me moving backwards instead of forwards if you know what I mean. As you know, lots of things change as a consequence, if you're going in the wrong direction. I figured I could do better, so I resigned before they let me go."

"Yes, I'm told that's how it happened all right." He grinned. "My people did some checking down there. I just wanted to confirm, that's all."

"I see," said Greg, feeling a bit intimidated.

"Well, no sense playing games here, Greg." He stood. "I like you. Like what I see on your sheet. I think you'll make a good fit here at Stearns. My guys think so, too." He came around the desk – put his hand out. Greg stood. "Congratulations, Sanbetter, welcome to our team."

They shook hands. "Thank, you, Sir."

"There you go with that 'Sir' nonsense again. Brad. Just Brad is fine. Now, listen, Greg, Janie will get you set up with the paperwork out there, okay? The usual stuff, you know."

"Yes, Brad. And, thanks. Uuuh, Brad, when do you want me to start?"

"Hell, I'm talking yesterday, here, my man. Let's see, I don't think we should dilly-dally around, do you? You can start tomorrow if that's okay with you?" He patted Greg on the back and then went behind his desk and flipped the pages of his calendar. "Yes, tomorrow will be fine. Oh, wait! Check that. I

see here I've got United 93 out of Newark to Frisco in the morning. Damned brokers meeting. Red eye coming back, I suppose. Sorry. I'd like to be here to intro you to the guys, myself. How about you start on Wednesday, September 12th? Will that work for you?"

"Yes, Brad, that will be fine," Greg smiled. "Try to have a safe trip, Sir. See you Wednesday."

After he filled out the paperwork, he walked back to the elevators and left the World Trade Center, confident that his life was about to change for the better.

He looked up at the sun glistening on the south tower and smiled. Yes, Brad would be easy to work for, this was the break he was waiting for.

.....  
*Bob Hartson, a retired Marine living in Michigan, has won numerous awards for his writing. He has five children and four grandchildren. Bobahbooe@aol.com*  
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**“The surest way to wake up and smell the roses  
every day is to go to sleep face down in the flower  
bed.”**

**– Argus Hamilton**



**DIGITAL ELVIS**  
Rowland Scherman

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*Former Birmingham resident and present frequent visitor Rowland Scherman's work has appeared in Life, Paris Match, Time, Newsweek and National Geographic. To see more of his work, log on to [www.photomota@verizon.net](mailto:www.photomota@verizon.net).*  
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## FATHER MEMORIZED HIS SON IN SEASONS BEFORE

R. A. Nelson

Father memorized his son in seasons before  
he built a country in his head  
Before the doctors said there were only 200  
people like him in America  
more rare than a rising nautilus  
Zachary in his chamber  
picked a pointed stick and waved it  
like a wand for whole pieces  
of his days to focus his  
unjoined eyes on some gaze as far removed  
as cowbirds on a Chinese wall

Before all this  
Zachary placed his living hands  
on the white-fringed bassinet  
and kissed his sleeping sister  
who was dying on the end table  
Audrey  
lay inside a white blanket  
with red hearts tucked beneath  
her gently cooling legs; they were amazed  
and afraid of such a cool baby  
who neither cried nor lived very hard  
like Zachary. Instead  
Audrey  
lived inside the house eight  
pink and slumberous days  
then spat with great warm violence  
in the upstairs bedroom  
on the floor with no carpeting

Before all this  
they tumbled into the silent  
hysterical car, and Zachary's reflection  
held its head down  
and navigated outside the window  
through the green fields  
and the dark green unbuilt woods  
paralyzed as a cowlicked angel  
dipped in nitrogen  
Father sat in the hospital room  
gathered for a holocaust and signed  
the septic papers as a great cold hove  
into his chest like an unrolled log

and he knew that Audrey would die

Before all this  
they knelt with Zachary  
on the small wooden steps  
to watch the dying baby nursery  
Their cozened eyes pushed against the glass  
between the drawn blinds to see  
the stratospheric doctors  
move like blue astronauts  
corrupting a garden

There was a sound Audrey made as they  
became acquainted with her dying  
that father never let get far away  
from the sutures of his unforgetting  
mind. A bleating chirp slipping from  
her cobalt lips, rhythmic and disconnected  
from survival  
like the sobbing ticker of an engine  
that once assembled clouds



The doctors came and said  
Audrey had a hole somewhere  
inside her drifting heart  
Then she rose in her red heart blanket  
away from the tubes  
and the thunderclap air  
and the pestilent suffocation of hope; when it  
was finished they sat in the disemboweled  
house held by Zachary's small arms  
and wept, knowing nothing  
about him before all this  
but good things. The misaligned birds  
on the dark green wallpaper  
were all the wrong colors every day  
and through each falling soundless hour

Before all this  
each night father fell downstairs quietly  
to put his face in the red heart blanket  
and breathe Audrey's body as she  
achieved escape velocity  
and listened to the blood  
beat his ears. Then Zachary  
in a new season built a country  
in his head for other holy children  
(and their hearts)  
But they never could wash the stains  
from the floor with no carpet. They always  
came back like the memory  
of a spilt god  
shouting  
I'm alive

.....  
*R.A. Nelson lives with his family in Madison, Alabama, and is the author of the critically  
acclaimed young adult novel TEACH ME, which features the poetry of Emily Dickinson.  
Nelson's other passions include traveling, growing things, the outdoors, quantum theory,  
history, astronomy, and the works of poets as diverse as e.e. cummings, Louise Gluck, Anne  
Sexton, and Billy Collins.*  
.....

## BIRMINGHAM BLUES

Joseph L. Whitten

That morning train from Birmingham  
has drawn me from a restless sleep,  
awakening my wander-lusting heart  
before the dawning of an autumn day.

Nostalgic note that draws me out of sleep  
into its harmony of loneliness and joy  
before the dawning of this autumn day,  
like Beale Street notes from battered horns.

Diminished harmonies of loneliness and joy;  
grief-flattened chords in shades of blue;  
old Beale Street melodies from battered horns  
that sorrow through the night and dawning.

Grief-flattened chords in shades of blue  
close-crowds my wander-lusting heart,  
and through this fog-wrapped dawning  
pulls that mourning train away from Birmingham.

.....  
*Joseph L. Whitten was born in the mountains of north Alabama but grew up in Glencoe, Alabama. He began teaching in Odenville, Alabama, in 1961, where he lives with his wife Gail. Now retired, Joe's poems have been published in numerous journals, two chapbooks, and a full-length collection entitled Mulled Memories.*  
.....

**“The doctor can bury his mistakes, but an  
architect can only advise his client to plant vines.”**

**– Frank Lloyd Wright**

## CANDY

David Melody

Another one of those nights.

Of course what did I expect after finishing work at ten-thirty, just enough time get home, throw down a few mouthfuls of beans and reheated cube steak, and pull the covers over my head. Creditors, cold calls, and marketing campaigns followed me down the hall.

Sleep; perchance to dream. Tonight I wanted the sleep-only button. It was not to be, even with the new six-hundred fill-power goose-down pillows she'd purchased to soften the fall.

**He held his sign  
up higher. Will  
work for wheels,  
it said. In the  
dream I thought  
he meant wells.**

At 2:50 A.M. I woke up and wrote down what I could remember, what I'd heard, my eyes barely open.

He was standing across the street from my office. Though there were four lanes of traffic, I could hear him, easily, everything else strangely muted.

*"Jesus," he yelled. "Jesus is just us. Say it ten times fast: Jesus is just us. No, not justice, not that kind of judge. No, the guy was one of us. That's what he and I have been trying to tell anyone who'll stop long enough to hear my pitch. Ball four, on your way. Jesus. Yeah, that's right. Not in vain or anything. Just Jesus."*

He held his sign up higher. Will work for wheels, it said. In the dream I thought he meant wells. Like he was looking for oil or something. Was he selling oil? He continued talking.

*"Little girls and little guys do not make little babies. I know this and you do too, I hope, but do they out there? The ubiquitous all knowing them? Doubt it. Doubt has it cornered and his house is full of corners, no straight-aways for leaving town in a devil of a hurry. No, Jesus has 'em cornered, eight ball in the pocket of love stuff."*

He looked at me and his sign changed into a pool cue as he pointed it at the passing cars. The cars would stop whenever he pointed. The street was now a six-way intersection. I knew I'd never catch my bus.

*"I don't you don't we all don't dare take that guy Jesus. Too much man. Too much man for all of us together. Better bring him down. Better him down with the rest of us."*

*Together. Dirty the guy up a little; show him some color even. None of this lily-white holier than thou white guy stuff. Mess him up a little."*

He took a pen from his holster. It didn't look like a gun, but I could tell it was heavy. The pool cue had morphed back into a sign.

*"Means less than nothing but I got to write something on this sign. And somehow lucky for me a sign is more than nothing, which I already got plenty of anyway. That's another story for when you're in bed and I'm eating out of your fridge. I'll tell it then, over and over, like the river logs rolling till the dizziness takes you high up over sleepy mountaintop and down, down you come.*

I was worried the guy knew where I lived since he mentioned my fridge. I hated that I was afraid of him, a homeless guy no less, but the guy kept yelling and attracted a crowd.

He cried out: *"I need a back story that I can bring to the front and give a fresh coat of paint. We all could use a new coat of paint, maybe even a whole suit of paint: tie, pants, dress and corsage. Just like I said: Jesus in a coat of pain."*

He grabbed a hotdog on his way into the stadium. I realized I was hungry too, but he got the last one. I cursed myself for skipping breakfast. I could hear him shouting.

*"I am rust, I am an island of rust. Oil me after the tin man please. Salad, mineral, whatever you got and I'll clap my hands in prayer as long as you need them, on Sunday, the devil's hometown crowd day. Batter up!"*

He was now on the pitching mound and I was watching him from the dugout; it was opening day, fifty thousand people. In the dream they were a blur of faces, but I knew that most of them were my clients. Why couldn't they wait 'til the proofs were done? Then I was at bat; he was pitching from six feet away. His warm-up was all words. I kept trying to bend down to see the signal. The catcher just laughed.

**"Candy. I want my  
candy. I'll even share  
some with you if you  
give me your candy.  
That's my menu! What's  
yours? Give me some;  
now give me the sum  
that's left. Yeah, that's  
the math. I want it all."**

And then we were back on the street. He was hungry so I handed him a bag of candy. I wanted to help, somehow, but he just skipped away, calling out: "Oh to write and keep writing like candy. Yes that's it, like candy. Something to suck on and savor! I want another. I need another. Thank Jesus for candy! I'll get myself a bag, and another after that. Make it a Hefty garbage thirty-three gallon of love bag."

The streets were empty and so were the cars that passed. I still had on my cleats, making it harder and harder to keep up. He was three blocks ahead but still he whispered in my ear.

"Candy. I want my candy. I'll even share some with you if you give me your candy. That's my menu! What's yours? Give me some; now give me the sum that's left. Yeah, that's the math. I want it all."

I wanted to tell him I didn't have any candy. I wanted candy, too. I was afraid now. I was afraid. I tried to scream but nothing came out. That's when I woke up.

It took me about ten minutes once I found a pen. Then I slept, this time without interruption. Early next morning I reread what I'd written, got a red marker, drew a small heart at the top of the page. I put it on my wife's bedside table, next to her pillow.

Even though she wasn't there, I kept hoping. What I'd written was for her. Why I worked so hard was for her. It'd been five weeks since she left me and moved back to her parents. Or was she seeing her tennis coach?

.....  
*David Melody writes and dreams in Washington State. Candy is from a series he is working on titled Snap Shots.*  
.....

**“How vain painting is – we admire the realistic depiction of objects which in their original state we don’t admire at all.”**

**– Blaise Pascal**

## QUESTIONING IT ALL

Rachael Dykes

If this is life,  
What is hell?

If this is home,  
What is heaven?

If this is peace,  
What is pain?

If this is love,  
What is truth?

If I'm not yours,  
Who am I?

.....  
*Rachael Dykes is a sophomore at Alabama's Clay-Chalkville High School. Most of her poems are inspired by her own life and experiences. She says, "the words I speak flow from the mouth of a poet, but the ink with which they are written bleeds from my heart."*  
.....

"The poet's voice need not merely be  
the record of man, it can be one of the  
props, the pillars to help him endure  
and prevail."

—William Faulkner

## IN THE BACKWASH OF A SMILE

Allen Johnson, Jr.

My wife is a very smiley person. She smiles at kids, grownups, happy-looking people, grumps, old ladies, teenage boys, and dogs. She smiles at everyone.

Being English, she is a strider. On a busy street, she usually winds up five or ten paces ahead of me before she realizes it and slows down.

Once, shortly after moving to the West Coast, we were on a busy street in downtown Seattle. My wife was striding along ahead of me in her best English fashion. As I doggedly followed her, I noticed that everyone I met was smiling at me. I smiled back thinking delightedly what an amazingly friendly city Seattle was. Then I realized the approaching pedestrians were smiling because my wife had smiled at them. I was riding a little wake of happiness behind her in the backwash of her smile.

.....  
*Alabama native Allen Johnson Jr. cruises the waters of Seattle and writes books.*  
*[www.allenjohnsonjr.com](http://www.allenjohnsonjr.com)*  
.....

**"Everything has been thought of before,  
but the difficulty is to think of it again."  
– Goethe**



### **POPPIES**

Gerda Carmichael  
Stained glass mosaic

Gerda Carmichael creates glass mosaic pieces when she's not knitting scarves or afghans for Afghanistan



## THE CHOKED ART

Austin Segrest

Momma, I'm no  
Augustine.  
We stole the pears  
and burned the trees.

The cruelest thing  
was telling you.  
You clung to every  
word, as if

it was your worth.

.....  
*A native Birminghamian, Austin Segrest is getting his Masters of Fine Art degree at Georgia State University in Atlanta. His work has recently appeared in storySouth and The Bitter Oleander.*  
.....

"The right to be heard does not  
automatically include the right to be  
taken seriously."

– Hubert H. Humphrey

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