

Birmingham Arts Journal

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Birmingham Arts Journal

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Front Cover: **BLAM!** Ceramic Sculpture 10" h x 6" w x 2.25" d

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Back Cover: **GAROOFAROONIE**, Wood and miscellany, 5.5" w x 4.5" d x 9" h

T. R. Reed lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with his artist-wife, Jeanie Holland. His work is exhibited in museums, galleries, and art shows throughout the country. jhootie@bellsouth.net

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THE ANGEL

Don Stewart

How could I reply otherwise?

“You *get* it, don’t you?” this stranger asked, quite out of the blue.

He was standing close to my drawing table, leaning comfortably within the boundaries of my personal space, his friendly smile a testament to a generation of dental work.

He was not a tall man, and not at all in keeping with anything anyone would say was current fashion. He was easily past his fiftieth year. His hair was still dark but very thin, and ribboned across his shiny scalp in a haphazard comb-over, which was all the less effective for its morning dose of Vitalis, a product I thought had been off the market for twenty years.

The man's white shirt was tucked but already rumpled that morning. He apparently did not iron. Thick, black-rimmed glasses protruded from the corner of a wrinkled pocket, and his tie angled down obliquely over a generous and perfectly round paunch, toward loosely belted black trousers that hung unevenly on his hips, the cuffs of his stovepipe pant legs piling more deeply over the top of one scuffed shoe than the other.

“Yes, I do,” I replied, before I ever lifted my eyes from my work, before they had a chance to settle on and begin to absorb this unimposing and quietly amusing figure.

“Me, too,” he said, and went on to discuss in some detail how one learns over time to see through the bull, and focus on what matters in life. He was pleased to see, without explanation on my part, that I had discovered this simple and profound Truth.

“You’ll do well,” he said.

“Yes, I believe I will. *Thank you.*”

The man smiled, deeply pleased with himself, with me, and a job very well done on both our parts.

There was never any doubt in my mind that I had been visited by an angel. Really. Clarence himself from Jimmy Stewart’s *It’s A Wonderful Life*, manifest into flesh some distance down the concourse. He walked a few paces to my cart, then stopped for a moment to chat, fulfilling his agenda for the day. That done, he vaporized back into the ethereal as he stepped into the hallway, rounding the corner toward the men’s room.

I never saw him again. Not in that costume, anyway.

.....
Don Stewart is a ballpoint artist and writer who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. His drawings have been published in a grown-up picture book, DS Art - The Visual Humor of Don Stewart. www.dsart.com



RAIN

Jeff Faulk

24" h x 18" w, oil on canvas

Jeff Faulk is an artist and illustrator in Birmingham, Alabama. His drawings are soon to be published in What Came Before, by Irene Latham.

AN IGNOTIC'S VIEW OF REALITY, GUIDED BY SKEPTICISM AND HUMANISM

Sheldon Schaffer

Before turning to this ignostic's view of reality, it would probably be helpful, first, to explain to the reader the difference between *ignostic* and two closely related types, *atheist* and *agnostic*.

Atheist: Outright denial about the existence of a divine entity or entities permeates this view. Also, someone who not only denies the existence of a supreme being who created and manages the world, but one who also denies the existence of any underlying intelligence that guides the evolution of the universe. One interesting form of atheism not only denies the existence of God, but also the authority of God, even if God exists, because humans are presumed to be autonomous. This view also concludes that there is no meaning in the worship of God.

Agnostic: Doubt, rather than outright denial, permeates this view. Someone who maintains a continuing doubt about the existence or knowability of a god or of any *ultimates*. This view involves an unwillingness, on the basis of available, demonstrable, reiterative, scientific evidence, to affirm or deny the existence of God or subscribe to tenets that presuppose such existence. Also, someone who professes ignorance or uncertainty about the *ultimate*, usually on the ground of unknowability. This view also includes the idea that there is no meaning in the worship of God, even if God exists.

Ignostic: Doubt and lack of verifiable consequences, especially for humans, permeate this view. As with the *agnostic*, in the absence of available, demonstrable, reiterative, scientific evidence, someone who just doesn't know, and therefore cannot draw any positive or negative conclusions about a causative or operative metaphysical entity or force in the universe or cosmos, or life for that matter. Beyond that, for the *ignostic*, the question about a divine entity or entities or force is meaningless because there are no verifiable consequences to presupposing the existence of such an entity or force. For the *ignostic*, who is often presumed to be humanistic, it doesn't matter anyway, because humans are necessarily left with complete responsibility for their own behavior in the here and now. Here, too, is the idea that there is no meaning in the worship of God, even if God exists.

* * *

In my own now-more-than-four-score mature (or befuddled) years, I have come to realize I hold a somewhat unpopular, if not a sort of

singular, conclusion about whether there is any special meaning or purpose in the universe or cosmos and life, and what that means for humans.

As I see it, the universe or cosmos simply has no special meaning or purpose that can ever be discerned, even by the brightest humans here on Earth, or even by possibly more advanced life forms elsewhere in the universe. Moreover, we can never reliably discern any ultimate origin or ultimate destiny of the universe or cosmos. The most we can observe is that the universe or cosmos is an ever-changing totality, a dynamic *is*, and we can do no more than try our utmost to describe and understand it with dispassionate observation and scientific method. The results of such efforts, however, are always destined to be less than conclusive or complete. Some or considerable ignorance is simply part of the reality that faces all of us. Assigning an extra-cosmological (or godlike or spirit-like) explanation to ultimate origin and destiny and to ongoing cosmic activity, or to what we don't really know about them, is sheer illusion and a gross waste of time. What always amazes me is that so many people all over the globe apparently disagree with me.

Moreover, holding extra-reality views has sometimes cost life and limb because those who hold to such illusions have now and then been so delusional as to have actually killed or maimed, or otherwise made life miserable for those who disagree. (I am not contending, of course, that those who don't hold such extra-cosmological views can't also be delusional and murderous. That, unfortunately, is also part of the human condition.)

As for life itself, it too is just an *is*, with *no special meaning other than what we humans, individually or in groups, infer about it*. To make more of life than that is also sheer illusion and has also resulted in harmful delusional consequences.

The overall course and manifold paths of the universe are only partially predictable because they are only partially known and understood. To obscure matters even more, the universe seems to display, not only certain degrees of predictability or orderliness, but some chaotic or disorderly tendencies, too, although even that chaos or disorder may underscore some degree of predictability or order. Such orderly chaos and disorder are also an *is*, without special meaning, and cannot, on the basis of dispassionate observation and scientific method, be attributed to some metaphysical entity or force.

So, too, with life, although for humans its real or observable paths sometimes seem to display a greater complexity and unpredictability than

the universe or cosmos. That complexity not only includes order, chaos, and unpredictability, but, in addition, such factors for humans as uncertainty and risk (I can't get away from my economics training), fear, pain, evil or brutality, pleasure, comfort, and more. As part of order in life, there are, beyond the seasons, the eat-and-be-eaten, procreation, nurturing, and self- or group-protection realms, which tend to be integrated in our many social structures.

Most of us, however, with our unfulfilled desires, our fears, our fertile imaginations, and our ability to hypothesize and dream, want something more from life than this unsettled mixture. So, beyond or tied in with our social structures, we often introduce warm, fuzzy, emotional blankets, part of which may be imaginary, to overlay and intertwine our life processes and the complex reality. Rather than accept the unknown as something we can attack with more scientific method and reasoning, we often conjecture and introduce all kinds of unsubstantiable constructs, which are often *extra-life* or *mystical*. Many people ascribe to a God's mysteries, if you will, which is really an easy way out.

For most humans, it is apparently too baffling or frightening to think that the universe or cosmos and life as such have no inherent, discernible, or demonstrable meaning or purpose. It is just too upsetting to accept, as a life form, that we are really only finite and all alone, floating through a small piece of eternity on our global space vehicle. As a life form, all we can observe is that when an individual life reaches death, as all individual lives do, there is absolutely nothing more, other than bodily decay. Dust to dust, as it were. For most, it is just too frightening or baffling to conclude that our individual lives have no special or inherent meaning or purpose, or ultimate outcome, other than fulfilling the process of eat-and-be-eaten, procreate, nurture, and self-protect, combined with minimizing pain and suffering and maximizing pleasure and good feeling while alive (again, the economist in me).

To deal with the realities of life, we humans, as noted above and as with other species, cluster or form groups for economic advantage, for efficiency and effectiveness in our various undertakings. Those clusters or groups vary in time, place, and manner, according to a variety of factors. Those include the local physical or natural environment (however we abuse it), the technology we devise or apply, and the social inter-relationships and power systems we superimpose on ourselves. But the clusters are also affected by the myths and history we subsume and ascribe to our lives, the special values we dream up and embody in our lives, and the ethics we devise from our experience and with our reasoning power.

We use those ethics to guide us in getting along with each other and the physical world around us, although sometimes not too well, as we deal with the otherwise complex and partially known and understood reality of our existence.

Based on dispassionate observation and scientific method to date, the universe or cosmos and life as we know them remain brutally inexplicable, brutally meaningless. But, as I have suggested, with our fertile minds we devise warm, fuzzy blankets, often with imaginary elements, to shield us from that meaninglessness. Not infrequently, those blankets reflect illusion and delusion, which are sometimes dangerous to life and limb. But even cold pragmatists like me try to devise warm, fuzzy blankets of limited sorts.

Allow me, now, to take the discussion one partial step further. Given my assertion that there is no demonstrable special or inherent meaning or purpose to the universe or cosmos and life, and that metaphysical explanations are redundant, I point out that we humans can and do try to overcome the absence of meaning and purpose. Apart from ethereal religious systems, we humans do apply personal and social meaning and purpose to actual life, as we structure how we should interact and get along with each other. Consider, for example, the Golden Rule and adaptations to it, which we should recognize are experientially based. But, consider, too, the *Mein Kampf* manifesto, or even some religious obligations to destroy or otherwise diminish nonbelievers. History teaches that succeeding generations fashion for themselves self-imposed covenants to guide their lives in the here and now. Those covenants are directed toward what each generation regards as satisfying or desirable, subject to changing life circumstances and, too often, to our human illusions.

When our galaxy ultimately implodes or collides with another, all vestiges of its human and other life forms and of human thinking and imagination will disappear in the ensuing maelstrom. And purpose and meaning in the universe or cosmos and life will still be obscure. Such is reality and life. It is conceivable that other life forms, perhaps forms that are superior to humans, will emerge elsewhere in the cosmic soup, if they haven't already. They, too, however, are likely to be faced with the same dilemmas we humans face here on earth.

.....
Sheldon Schaffer (1923 - 2006) was an economist and civil rights activist in Birmingham, Alabama.
.....

MIDNIGHT VISITOR

Phyllis H. Peck

I woke from deepest sleep
To see Death
Sitting in my bedroom chair
Looking out the window
At silent snowflakes
Falling gracefully
Toward oblivion

My thoughts had called him here,
Thoughts youthful arrogance
Had buried long ago
Rejecting the inevitable authority
Of the final, great mystery.

Youth gone,
I live contented winter years,
Giving the world back in pieces,
Resigned to mystery,
Quietly accepting
My time has limits now.

Death turned
To look into my face
And smiled,
So sweet, so kind a smile,
That strangely unafraid,
As if we were old friends,
I smiled back.

Somehow I knew
He had not come for me.
Not this time.

Then, he was gone.

Someday he will come again.
I'll smile to welcome him.
He'll smile to welcome me
And extend his arm for me to take.
Without a word
He will know
I am ready.

.....
A college-level teacher of literature and writing for 24 years, Phyllis H. Peck's poetry and professional articles have been published since 1965. Peck currently lives in Fairhope, Alabama, and considers her award for poetry in the Alabama Writers' Conclave contest her entry into the world of Southern writing.
.....

LIFE TAKES FLIGHT

David Thornbrugh

Tiny green animals push
fuzzy noses through tree bark.
Every inch of sunlight is grabbed
like flotsam after a ship wreck
and folded away as a holy relic.
Einstein's ice cream
revolves at the center of the sun
without sweating a single drop.
Ecstasy at the insect level reduces us
to half-hearted swatting.
I hear Socrates sneeze
on green metal park bench
and blink two bodies one,
law breakers cracking croquet groins
in the field of physics, students
trying to banish separation.
Life aches, itches, twitches
and takes flight like dust motes
caught in beams of light.

.....
*David Thornbrugh is a former Seattle poet currently living in Poland, soaking up
Old World vibes and writing poems.*
.....

“It is no longer a question of *where*
civilization began, but if it ever *did!*”
--Alfred E. Neuman



HUMMER

Don Stewart

Ball point pen on paper

11" x 14" w

Don Stewart is a ballpoint artist and writer who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. His drawings have been published in a grown-up picture book, DS Art - The Visual Humor of Don Stewart. www.dsart.com

THE SHAYTL LADY

Judith Finkel

I finger my St. Christopher medal resting on the gold chain around my neck as I walk among bearded men wearing long dark coats and wide brimmed hats. I've passed four Kosher butcher shops, three synagogues and two fish markets.

I'm in the ultra Orthodox Jewish enclave of Baltimore looking for the shaytl lady, the woman who sells wigs. Not just any wigs but those made of human hair, the finest wigs to be found in Baltimore. I know this because my co-worker Beth heard it from her cousin Rebecca who lives here. Rebecca, an Orthodox Jewish woman, can't show her hair to any man but her husband so she visited the shaytl lady as soon as she became betrothed.

Beth assured me, "Rebecca's wig looks better than her real hair ever did. It's seen her through the births of seven children."

"Seven. Doesn't your family believe in birth control?"

Beth laughed. "Religious Jews take the commandment 'Be fruitful and multiply' seriously. The shaytl lady has seventeen children."

I'm thirty-nine and won't be having any children. I've been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I want the wig before I start the chemotherapy which will steal my hair.

I wander down a number of side streets before I find 18 Baruch Lane. It's a small shop, its window displaying a few wigs on white Styrofoam heads. A woman of about fifty sits at a table applying a curling iron to a black wig. Her hair is a beautiful shade of red worn in a single braid down her back. I can hardly believe it's a wig. She gets up and greets me. "So when is the happy day?"

I think she'll be embarrassed because she's mistaken me for a bride but when I tell her why I'm there she responds, "So when is the happy day that starts you on your path to good health?"

"I'll need the wig two weeks from today."

She takes out a pair of scissors from the pocket of her ankle length blue skirt. "May I?" she asks and snips a small sample of my brown hair. "This will be easy to match." She studies my face, walks around me. "I'd

like to style it a little longer than what you have. It will give more softness to your face."

I nod, put my hand through hair that barely covers my ears and think about how I'll need something to soften a face that will soon be gaunt from treatments and their side effects. "What's the cost?"

"Twelve hundred dollars."

I reach into my purse for my checkbook. "Will it be okay if I pay half now and half when I pick up the wig?"

"Pay me \$100 a month for twelve months," she counters. I laugh, and hear its bitterness. "Considering my diagnosis, you'd be lucky to get half if I pay you that way."

She shakes her head. "I'm not worried. I picked this location because of the address. *Baruch* means blessing in Hebrew. Eighteen represents *chai*, the Hebrew word which stands for life. See?" She points to a medallion she wears around a silver chain on her neck. The symbol on it reminds me of a three sided square with its bottom portion missing. "So the address is life's blessing."

I must look skeptical because she continues. "I've kept track of the brides who've bought wigs from me. The average number of children they've had is eight. Truly life's blessings." The shaytl lady smiles. "With you we need just one of life's blessings--good health. That should be easy enough."

She unclasps the chain around her neck, takes off her medallion and hands it to me. "You'll return it when you bring me the twelfth payment." I put her gift on my chain. It clamors against my St. Christopher medal. I write out a check for \$100, kiss the soft cheek of the shaytl lady and leave her shop.

.....
Judith Groudine Finkel has recently completed her legal thriller TEXAS JUSTICE and her memoir THE THREE STOOGES GENE. Excerpts from the latter, including "My Cousins, The Three Stooges" and "Betty Crocker and Me" have appeared in the HOUSTON CHRONICLE. Judith can be reached at finkeljsg@gmail.com
.....

DRIVING AFTER TRYING TO REACH YOU, PAUL

Jon Carter

I finish a Hero Pig story
and stop at a redlight.
“So, tell me another one,” Emma says.
The light turns green
and we blur by the row
of cedars that line the front
of Parkers’ Drugs now boarded up,
a steady pulse, each waving in the wind
as if to say goodbye to us, Paul,
with our ice cream and twirling stools.
We pass the Wal-Mart Superstore,
the cars packed in like desert stars.

“What did you learn in school today?”
She breathes on the window
and makes a dot
with the tip of her finger.
She peeks through
her tiny creation
at the gusty world whirling by.
“There’s no wind on the moon.”
Odd thing to teach a five year old.
“The astronauts left a feather up there
for the next ones to find.”
She breathes again
to fill the dot.
“It won’t blow away.”

The synthetic glove
drops the feather.
It doesn't slide this way or that but
glides
down
like an
elevator,
lands in a boot print
where it will lie
as the moon merry-go-rounds
around the earth.

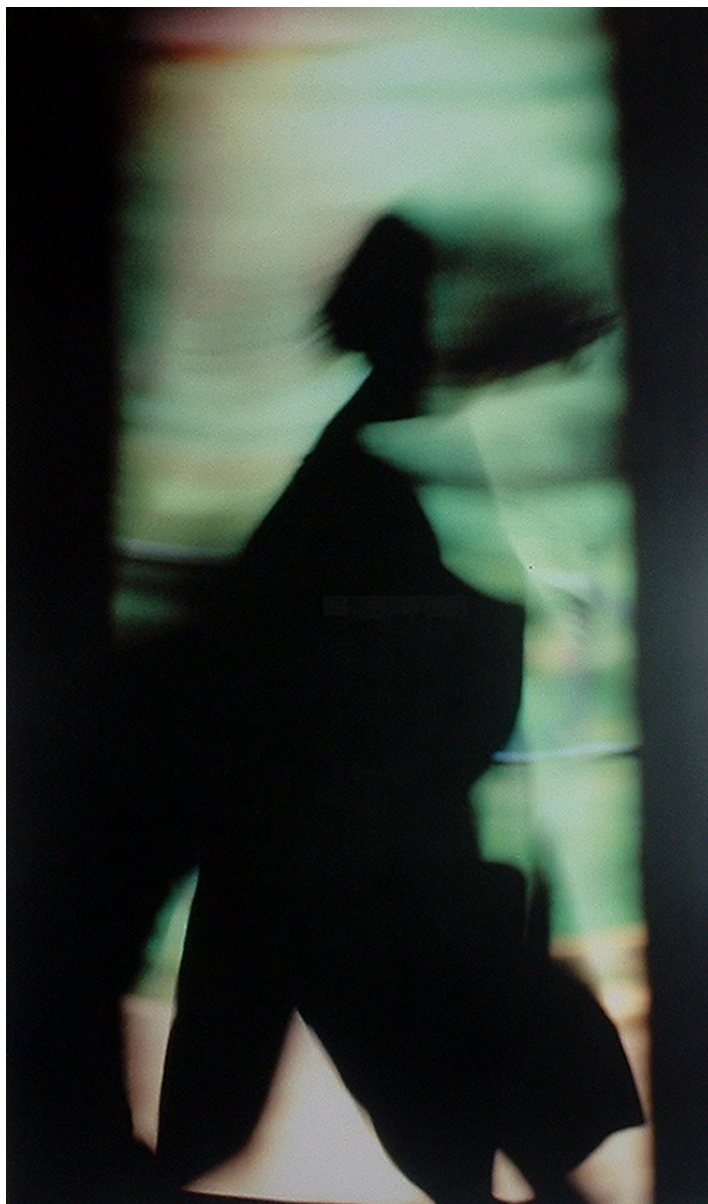
Stillness brushes progress
and I find you in the friction,
old friend.

So I'm thinking about you, Paul
grown bald, become an artist,
Heidi's e-mail tells me,
of purple and red city
scenes in evening light.
She says you ask about her husband,
"How is your partner?"

Your voice on the answering machine
though it has been twenty years
was clearly you.

"So, tell me a Hero Pig story," Emma says,
and I begin again.
I think you will call back tonight,
maybe tomorrow.

.....
*Jon Carter lives in Leeds, Alabama, with his wife and two daughters. He teaches
English and Creative Writing at Briarwood Christian School, and his stories have
appeared in The Christian Century and The Northcote Anthology of Short
Fiction.*
.....



LIZ I

Iris Rinke-Hammer

32" h x 24" w, Giclee Print

Iris Rinke-Hammer teaches at the Alabama School of Fine Arts.

THIS IS WHERE I CAME IN

Stan Holifield

He was lying in the recliner, remote in hand. The ice in his Coke had melted and the cold water and coke made a distinct division in the glass.

Clear top, brown bottom.

He looked content, a small smile on his face. He had felt fine.

The TV was on. Movie boxes were scattered across the table, opened without the discs. The discs were, like the boxes, scattered across the table. The movie in the player had cycled and the TV begged over and over and over:

Select : Play; Trailer: Set-up; Features

Select : Play; Trailer: Set-up; Features

Select : Play; Trailer: Set-up; Features

Select : Play; Trailer: Set-up; Features

No one was there to turn it off.

He had been out and about all that morning renting movies.

“How are you?” “Fine,” he said.

Being asked how he was he'd usually answer “fine.” He didn't mean the condition of his arthritis, cholesterol or blood pressure was fine. He meant his outlook, hopes, fears, thoughts, and dreams were fine.

Sometimes he would explain and say, “Behind the eyes, between the ears, under the hair I feel really well. Fine, optimistic, full of hope and expectation of happiness. I am happy; I am fine. Not always well, but fine.”

There were times when he repeated, *deja vu*. I've done this; I've seen this before; I've been here before. This isn't new.

He was a movie devotee and movie going came in threes. The three theatres changed movies three times a week, were open six days, being closed on Sunday. There were nine movies to choose from; he could have chosen from nine but, in truth, he didn't choose from nine, he saw all nine movies.

Pay no attention to start and end times. He went when he went. Continuous, starting at noon, black and white, Technicolor, stereo sound running through, without interruption until midnight.

He'd go in anytime and watch until his beginning starts again and then leave. When his beginning began it was time to go; time to move on. *Deja vu*. He'd been here before. Time to move on.

It was time to leave for some other place; *deja vu*. A better place.
Where was it? What was it?
It was like that place between awake and sleep, neither one but fully
conscious and thinking very clearly, when suddenly he knew. He knew the
secret; it was so simple, why hadn't he thought of it before?
He wakes and all that remains is the vague memory. He felt like, "I
knew that; but what was it?"
Was it a once-visited site or unknown? It felt familiar.
A better place.
A happy place.
Everything was fine. He was fine; not always well, but fine. Better
get going.
Time's up, got to go. Now.
This is where I came in.

.....
Stan Holifield writes and ruminates in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
stanlindy@comcast.net
.....

"If I had to give young writers advice, I
would say don't listen to writers
talking about writing or themselves."
--Lillian Hellman

GIVE US THIS DAY

Suzanne Coker

Cornbread: necessity raised to art. Pitas,
fresh enfolding grace, and doughnuts
with their sweet metaphysical center.

Sandwiches stacked, rolled, toasted, fried,
the world in flavors bounded by bread.
Round magic of yeast and wheat, what
patience and craft can bring to the table.

Biscuits that float, loaves that bolster,
spices, raisins, far more than seven grains.
Gravy sponge, soup sopper, rescuer
of the last morsel. Hollowed out for dip,
sliced thin for diets, humbly renowned,

the most human of foods stands for
all sustenance, wholesome wonder
offered to you; daily bread.

.....
*A veteran performance and page poet, Suzanne Coker is currently in training to
become a radiology technician. She lives in Helena, Alabama, and scratches out
poems on whatever scraps of paper she can find.*
.....

"Live one day at a time, unless you can
figure out how to live two."

--Dik Browne

AN IRON-STEADY FRIEND OF BIRMINGHAM GOES AWAY

Jim Reed

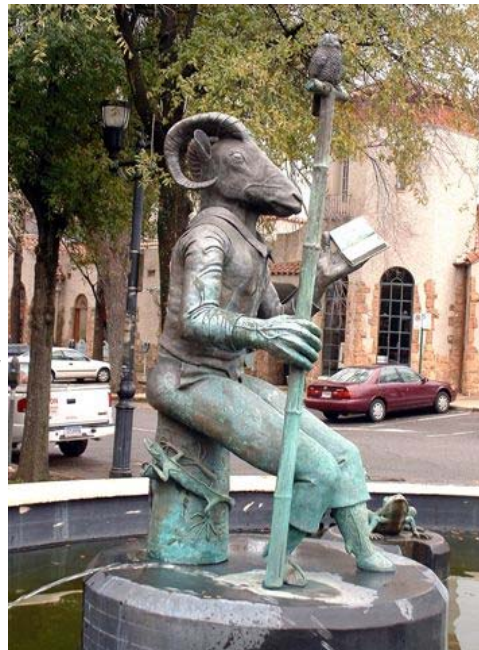
I keep gazing at two wonderful photographs taken by Birmingham's David Murray. Both are Birmingham, Alabama-centric. One depicts the Storyteller statue on Birmingham's Southside. The other depicts the rusty, old, seemingly permanent, Sloss Furnace complex from steelmaking days gone by.

For some reason, these images make me think about the late Sheldon Schaffer.

Nobody was a bigger promoter of Birmingham and its endless potential for good, than was Sheldon Schaffer. If you never met Sheldon, it would be difficult to describe him. I'll try: Sheldon was an indefatigable *instigator*, an outside agitator who becomes a many-decades resident of this city. By his own self-description, Sheldon was a liberal, secular Jew, a civil rights activist, a card-carrying ACLU member, an economist, a curmudgeon who had little patience with sluggards and uninsightful

THE STORYTELLER David Murray

David Murray is a self-taught artist/photographer who paints a variety of subjects, including country and winter landscapes in oil. He has photographically documented the monthly Birmingham Art Association Gallery shows and other BAA events. <http://BirminghamArtAssociation.org>



thinkers. Sheldon wanted you to *do something*, rather than just whine about it. And, like a bulldog, he would never give you an inch if you didn't get up off your duff and campaign for justice and equal rights, if you didn't fight against bigotry, racism, hatred, intolerance, mean-spiritedness and stupidity.

In David Murray's photograph, the Storyteller sits implacable and weaves his tales--he's not budging, because it is his job to stay in one place, tell you what you need to know, then wait for you to take some action. In David's photo of Sloss, much the same thing is happening. Sloss sits, looking like nothing you've ever seen before, waiting for you to figure out the history upon which it rests. Like the Sphinx and Sheldon Schaffer, Sloss waits for you to draw upon the wisdom you already have, and figure out the riddles yourself.

SLOSS FURNACE
David Murray



Sheldon Schaffer inspired, annoyed, egged on, a couple of generations of people who meant well but had little direction. He helped give us direction whenever we got past our irritability at his techniques. He made us feel like things were worth doing. And, since he seldom thanked you when you actually did something good for the community, you just worked all that much harder next time, hoping to win his thanks.

A lot of people did not *get* Sheldon, but I like to think I did. He was there to bring us up short when we did less than we could for each other.

Now that I've meditated upon Sloss and the Storyteller, something else comes to mind that expresses what I feel much more succinctly. It is *Poem* by Langston Hughes:

*I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began--
I love my friend.*

--Langston Hughes

.....
*Jim Reed writes and ponders in Birmingham, Alabama. Meet him at
www.jimreedbooks.com*
.....

DREAMS

G.C. Barnett

Amorphous forms in the night shadows
Standing isolated and secluded.
Those who live by them deemed imprudent and deluded.
A form of subliminal intrigue...

Their acknowledgement precluded by fear and apprehension
Creating nonexistence and giving rise to banality
Pawns marching to the drumbeat of insipid happenings.
In a slow war of attrition that ends in tragedy...
The tragedy of a graceful demise
The fire ignites, the fire dies.
Extinguished by mere happenstance...

The essence of eternity ensnared by winds of the present
Providing comedy for the humorless past...
A form of enlightenment that cannot be lost is often misplaced
Thus, destiny is thwarted...

When abandoned by the disheartened they remain...
Although as indistinct ruminations
Coveted from afar by the courageous or insane.
Rendered inconsequential by transient moments of clarity
Their perpetual flow marred by coincidence...

...the essence of humanity defined and forsaken.

.....
*G.C. Barnett is a law student at Samford University's Cumberland School of Law.
Somewhere between cases, laws, and arguments, he manages to write poetry.*
.....

LONG JOURNEY

Sue Walker

A journey lies ahead for elephants crossing remembered ground,
the wide dry plain that daily leads to a site where water's found
filtered through thousands of feet of volcanic ash. A herd
of elephants shares land with Maasai, wildebeests, word-
less creatures, Ibis, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, whose nesting place
is Amboseli where the looming white-crowned ancient face

of Mount Kilimanjaro looks down, its scarred and ancient face
bearing witness to an apelike man who walked the hallowed ground
of Kenya 18 million years ago. Sights and sounds of this place,
blue hills and sky, the whispering grass, and tiny cattle egrets are found
in clusters as they snatch insects, then roost and breed in trees. Word
has it that Africa always brings something new, music heard

in the wild like Tembo's trumpeting, the rumbling herd
on its daily route to the swamp, the massive face
of a bull resolute, alert, watching, listening. Word
of man's destruction weighs heavy, and the ground
where elephants bury their dead is found
trembling as a heart should be when this place

of seeming serenity marks man's greed, his place
in the hierarchy of being diminished. What unheard
of acts of misery, treachery, deceit are found
the work of wanting hands? Elephants don't hide their face
in shame, those who roam this Kenyan ground
in search of water. Let them be. In a word,

leave them each to each, protected, free, word-
less in their majesty, and when they come from the place
of their sojourn each day, let the ground
resound with the strength of their calling. The herd
settles in, the sun sets, and the moon's face
records another mark that is found

in annals of time. Joy shall be found
some time hence, in some tomorrow where the word
of man is "peace," where there is no war, where the face
of the earth is preserved in its rightness, a place
for love and laughter, for man and beast, for a herd
of elephants seeking the hallowed ground

where the word "peace" registered on every human face
can be heard in voices, man and beast, and found
at home in every place that is the cherished ground of Kenya.

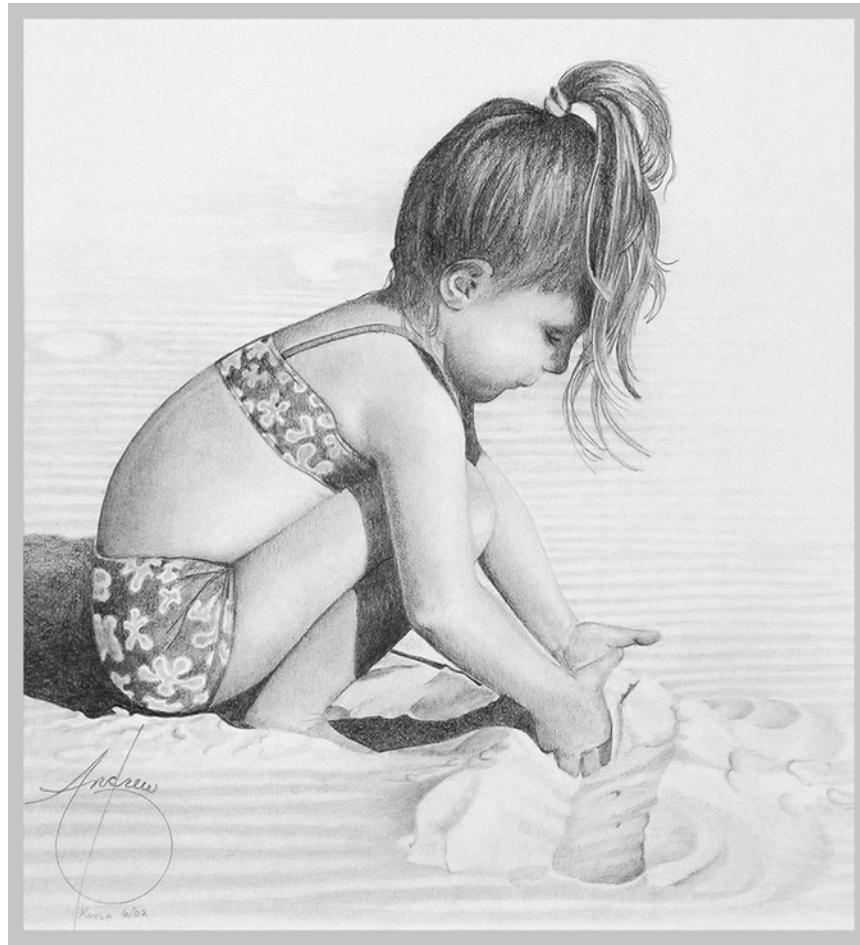
.....
*Sue Walker is Chair of the English Department at the University of South Alabama
and Poet Laureate of Alabama. Her latest books are In The Realm of Rivers and
It's Good Weather for Fudge: Conversing With Carson McCullers.*
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(CENTERFOLD Pg 24)

Dennis' photo of elephants is the centerfold

(CENTERFOLD Pg 25)

Dennis Holt has received two Television Emmy's for Wildlife Cinematography, and many other awards for his photography. He also leads Photographic and Art Safaris to Africa, Peru and Bolivia. Dennis is owner of "Morning Light Gallery and Studio" in Fairhope, Alabama. www.dennisholt.com



KAYLA

Andrew Tyson

Pencil on paper

11" x 14"

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

LETTING HER HAIR DOWN

Johnna Dominguez

"As long as I can wear my hair up," the little girl said, yanking at the ponytail that sat high on her head. "I don't like leaving my hair down."

Danny's grandmother sighed. Danny didn't care. She was always trying to make her grandmother happy, but she wouldn't this time.

"Wouldn't you rather just put on a headband?" her grandmother asked. "You have such pretty hair. Don't you want to show it off? You'd be just like the adults."

Danny wasn't worried about whether her hair looked good or not. All of her other friends always changed their hairstyles, but she didn't understand the point of that. If a person found one style that looked and felt good then they should stick with it. That was her opinion. She didn't want to be like the adults, either. The little girl looked at her grandmother, with her blue tattooed eyeliner, powder blue eye shadow, and bright pink cheeks. Her thin and high eyebrows made her look continually shocked. Her grandmother wasn't always shocked, though; she was, however, always stressed.

No, Danny had decided that she never wanted to become an adult.

"I'd rather not," Danny said.

Her grandmother looked desperate. She leaned closer to Danny and whispered, "Do it for your mother. She needs you to be a good girl right now."

Danny looked over her grandmother's shoulder at her mother, who was standing in the far corner, greeting the relatives and friends that were streaming into the house. To Danny, she looked the same as she always did: Confident, stable, energetic. There seemed to have been no change since her father had gone away a few weeks ago.

"Mama didn't say anything about taking my hair down."

"Your mother is rather busy right now. She probably didn't have the time."

"If it's that important to her, then she would have *made* the time."

Danny stared stubbornly at her grandmother, who looked as if she were about to burst a blood vessel. Danny tried her hardest not to flinch, waiting for her to yell at her. But she was determined to have her way this time, and she didn't budge. Her grandmother shook her head furiously.

"You're a stubborn child," she said angrily. Her voice was strained, giving Danny the impression that she was holding back her scream. "Your

mother is going through a lot right now and all you can think about is that silly ponytail! What is wrong with you? Your father would have--"

She didn't finish her sentence. Danny stared at her grandmother, wondering why her face had fallen and why her voice had suddenly gotten softer.

"What about Daddy?"

Her grandmother looked down at her. The lines on her face seemed to multiply, and her body slumped forward. Danny, who had always thought that her grandmother was the youngest-looking grandmother in the world, and who had always admired her straight back, wondered at this change. She waited for an answer, but her grandmother simply looked

Her grandmother looked down at her. The lines on her face seemed to multiply, and her body slumped forward.

over and called for Danny's mother.

Danny watched as her mother excused herself from the people surrounding her. Danny stared at her as she began walking over to her, and she

was filled with the same awe and pride that she felt whenever she watched her mother. Her mother was beautiful, seemingly gliding across the room. Her high heels raised her up into the air, and they clicked lightly yet powerfully as they touched the floor. In Danny's mind, her mother was perfect. Danny believed that everyone stopped what they were doing whenever her mother did anything, even as unimportant as walking across the room.

"Danny, I think you should go and change now," her mother said once she reached the two of them. "We're going to be leaving in a little bit."

"Can I wear my white dress instead? The other one is so uncomfortable."

Her grandmother's face fell once more, and she looked at Danny's mother sadly. Her mother's face gave away nothing. She shook her head and smiled gently.

"I think it would be more appropriate to wear the black one, honey. You can change right out of it when we get back, I promise."

"But...."

"We'll leave you if you don't get down here in a few minutes."

The little girl scurried off, frightened at the thought of being left alone in the large house by herself. She quickly looked behind her once she reached the stairs, and was surprised at the sight of her mother and grandmother arguing quietly, their faces close together. She fell back a few steps to hear them better. Her grandmother and mother were too busy to notice her listening to them.

"Not yet, Mother. She's not ready for it," she heard her mother saying.

"She'll never be ready for it. If you're judging by that then you'll never tell her."

Danny's mother closed her eyes. A moment of weakness, something that Danny very rarely saw. But it was gone before she could even think about it. Her mother had opened her eyes and was saying, "I'll tell her. But not now."

"When? When she's staring down at him?"

"Mother...."

Danny was becoming bored

with the conversation. It was obvious that they were not talking about anything concerning her. She always knew what was going on--she was too curious not to. She turned around and walked up the stairs to change.

* * *

Danny wasn't quite sure why she was here. She didn't even know what exactly was going on. She did know that she would rather be anywhere else.

When she had gotten out of her mother's car, she had been puzzled at the fact that they were in an isolated field in the middle of nowhere. It wasn't, to her knowledge, a picnic day or a family reunion. But maybe something had happened that she hadn't been aware of, because there was no other reason for all of her family and her parents' friends to be gathered in one place.

Danny had only gotten more confused as the large group moved farther and farther into the field. As she had looked around, she had

Danny wasn't quite sure why she was here. She didn't even know what exactly was going on. She did know that she would rather be anywhere else.

realized that the field was covered with randomly placed gray stones carved with words that she couldn't quite make out. The group proceeded on, walking closer to a bare patch of grass between three of the stones.

Danny, who was holding her mother's hand, tightened her grip nervously. Her mother didn't notice this gesture. Her gaze was fixed on the large, long, black box in the middle of the patch of grass.

Everyone around them was quiet. They were all looking down at their feet or out in the distance, almost afraid to catch Danny's or her mother's eye. Their black and white clothes contrasted drastically with the bright colors of the grass and sky. Like always, Danny's mother seemed to be the only one who could face the strange event that was drawing nearer with each step.

For once, Danny wanted to be fearless like her mother. She straightened out her back and raised her chin. To others, she may have

She wanted to know where they were, what was in the black box, why everyone was breaking down in their own way. But she kept silent.

looked comical. A small young girl with her chin too high and her tiny chest thrust forward. To Danny, though, this posture succeeded in making her braver despite her anxiety.

They had reached the box. It was even bigger than it had looked from far away. Bigger than Danny, even. Maybe twice as big. It was intimidating, and the

gleaming perfection of it didn't make it any less scary.

"Danny."

She looked at her mother, who was still staring at the box.

"I don't want you to go anywhere near that, do you understand?" her mother said. "I'll have to, later on. I want you to stay back here with your grandmother when that happens."

The little girl nodded, biting down her questions. Her mother didn't look like she would answer if she asked them, anyway.

So Danny stood quietly the entire time. She said nothing when the old man with the black suit began reciting prayers. She didn't even squirm when people around her began to cry. She kept her eyes in front of her as people shifted forward, and she stayed with her grandmother as her

mother took her own turn at the black box. All the while, millions of things were running through her mind about this strange affair. She wanted to know where they were, what was in the black box, why everyone was breaking down in their own way. But she kept silent. Danny simply clutched onto the only person who was just as unemotional as she was--her mother.

Danny's feelings, however, were confusion. Her mother's were, more than likely, strength.

After what seemed like an eternity, everyone began heading back toward the cars. The grief that had descended over the group with each step toward the black box seemed to fade away with each step away from it. They were still solemn, none of them quite ready to smile or even smirk, but they steadily began to speak to each other again. They spoke quietly at first, almost afraid that someone could hear them, and only a few held conversations. By the time the cars were in view, however, every person was chattering about one thing or another.

To Danny, the ride back home was just as long and disturbing as the events that had taken place in the field. She stared off into space, trying to forget that lone black box. It loomed in her memory, as frightening as any delusion of a monster under her bed was. The fact that she had no idea what the box contained or what it meant made it even more unpleasant. The whole day was beginning to turn into something from a nightmare.

Danny's mother went up to her bedroom as soon as they reached the house, and Danny's grandmother was left in charge of a room full of hungry, exhausted people. She took to the chore easily, immediately arranging trays and trays of finger foods and meats. The task took up all of her attention, and Danny was left to herself once more.

The little girl was becoming extremely frustrated. She was used to knowing exactly what was going on with everyone and everything around her. If she didn't know a particular thing, she would simply ask or sneak around until she finally did know it. The events of that morning were so scrambled up in her mind that she didn't even know what questions she should ask or which ones would get an answer. That is, if she could ever find anyone to talk to her, let alone look at her. Everyone she moved towards, whether they were women who usually spoiled her rotten or men who made sure to teach her something new every time they saw her,

managed to find someplace else to be. It seemed as if no one wanted to be near her.

In fact, that might have been the biggest portion of Danny's frustration. Not only was she accustomed to knowing everything, but she was almost always the center of attention. She liked the feeling of having twenty different pairs of eyes on her. No one was paying any attention to her now, and that had replaced her confusion with anger.

Not only was she accustomed to knowing everything, but she was almost always the center of attention. She liked the feeling of having twenty different pairs of eyes on her.

Needless to say, Danny was not willing to stay downstairs while the adults around her ignored her. She stomped up the stairs, making sure that she made as much noise as possible. Her angry stomping became genuine when she realized that no one seemed to notice the loud racket. This really was not one of her good days.

At the top of the staircase, Danny was distracted by the sound of heavy sobs. She looked

downstairs, certain that she would find a particularly emotional relative with tears running down his or her cheeks. Strangely, however, she saw nothing of the sort. Just men and women eating and prattling about one thing or another. Danny wondered if she was hearing things that no one else heard.

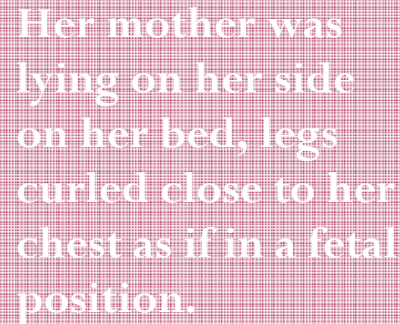
Another sob broke out at that time, though, and Danny was able to distinguish more clearly where the noise was coming from. She turned around and looked from one end of the hall to the other. Danny waited for another sob, so that she would know whether to turn left or right. She waited patiently, glad to have a smaller mystery to replace the confusion of the day.

Finally, she heard the noise again. It was to her right. She turned and marched determinedly down the hallway. Danny would figure out who was crying, and she would comfort them. Then the person would come

downstairs again and gush about how sweet and caring Danny was, and she'd be the center of attention once more. It was an excellent plan.

There was a light coming from underneath the last door on the left. Her parents' room. Danny hesitated slightly, wondering who would have barged their way into a private bedroom. Almost in slow motion, Danny grabbed the doorknob and twisted it. She pushed the door open slightly and poked her head in. She gasped in surprise.

Her mother was lying on her side on her bed, legs curled close to her chest as if in a fetal position. The high heels that always adorned her feet were slung carelessly onto the floor. They seemed strange without her mother's delicate ankles inside of them. Her mother looked smaller and more fragile than Danny had ever seen her before. She didn't look like the brave person Danny admired and loved. She looked like a completely different woman.



Her mother was lying on her side on her bed, legs curled close to her chest as if in a fetal position.

Her mother heard Danny's gasp, and looked at her through the stream of tears forming rivulets down her face. She smiled slightly (which was odd to Danny, since she was still crying) and reached out her arms towards her daughter.

"Danny," was the only thing that she said, but her voice made Danny believe that this was someone other than her mother. Her mother would never sound so weak.

Still, Danny seemed to be drawn towards this stranger. She walked slowly into the room. As Danny passed the high heels on the floor, she imagined that her mother had given them to the woman who needed them the most--the woman crying on the bed in front of Danny.

As she grew closer, however, Danny knew that this woman *was* her mother. She had more lines on her face, and her stature was nothing like the one her mother usually had, but it was her mother. This new composure scared Danny.

"Come up here, baby," her mother patted the small space on the bed next to her. "Lay next to Mommy."

The little girl did as she was told, almost without thought. She simply went through the motions and so, apparently, did her mother. Once

"You've been wondering about today, haven't you?" her mother whispered in her ear. Danny said nothing, but her mother continued. "Daddy's gone."

Danny was situated on the bed, her mother began absently stroking her hair and face. While the movement may have been somewhat comforting to Danny's mother, it only felt unnerving to Danny because her mother was still crying. Danny could feel her tears soaking into her ponytail.

"You've been wondering about today, haven't you?" her mother whispered in her ear. Danny said nothing, but her mother continued. "Daddy's gone."

It was a simple statement. It could have been taken in another way; a hopeful way that hinted that he would be coming back tomorrow or the next day. But as her mother began to cry heavily again, Danny felt shivers running up and down her spine, and just as quickly she felt nothing. She was numb.

"You're going to have to be a big girl now, baby," her mother's voice was almost too quiet to hear. "You're going to have to be a big girl."

And her mother pried Danny's pony tail out of its elastic. Danny let her.

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Johnna Dominguez is an eleventh grader in Creative Writing at Booker T. Washington Magnet High School. When she is not stressing out over AP tests, she enjoys reading and ballroom dancing. She has grown up surrounded by book lovers who have taught her the importance of creativity.
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Stranded
Deb Gallaway

Deb Gallaway is a fine art photographer and shares her love of art with husband Craig (see page 47) and their three sons."

WHERE MY HIGH HEELS COULD TAKE ME

Kellye Copas

A "walk-about," as defined by The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language is 1) a temporary return to traditional Aboriginal life, taken especially between periods of work or residence in white society and usually involving a period of travel through the bush, and 2) a walking trip. The third definition, being chiefly British, refers to walks by monarchs and such. I wonder what kinds of shoes the monarchs would wear on such excursions among the common folk. Would the Queen Mum really be caught walking the cobble-stone streets of London in a comfortable pair of Nikes or nurse-grade, Dr. Scholl-approved, orthopedic flats? Somehow I just don't think either would go well with her baby blue Channel suit, especially when accented with her favorite strand of royal pearls.

John started throwing around the term "walk-about" shortly after we met. John had the deepest, sexiest voice. He was rugged and outdoorsy. He was extremely intellectual and looked ever so smart and confident in his glasses. He could fix anything. He was adventurous and careful at the same time. He ordered for me at restaurants. And he was a Texan. John once said he was the guy that could protect me from the bears, the ones in forest and the ones in the city. He was also the guy who could accompany me to the symphony, the museum, or the opera and, most importantly, enjoy it. A perfect Gary Grant and John Wayne hybrid, so to speak.

One of our special weekends together fell in a glorious late winter. The kind we often get in Alabama that tricks us into thinking spring has arrived a couple of weeks early, only to slip away and leave us with at least one more frost before the weather really changes. John mentioned that he would like to go "walk-about" Birmingham, since the weather man had forecast such unseasonably warm weather. At first I was a little hesitant. We had talked about going to the museum, which we could include in our walk about town. But I was still puzzled, I guess, because I had never really walked to a destination. I hopped in the car to go to Subway at lunch, just two blocks from the office. I had never even "Dart"ed (the

Dart being Downtown Birmingham's gasoline-powered trolley). However odd the suggestion seemed, I knew it would be an adventure.

Being the voice of practicality, John suggested that I wear comfortable walking shoes. "We're looking at walking somewhere around 23 city blocks, cowgirl. I don't want your pretty feet to hurt." My footwear had come up on more than one occasion with John. Most recently while packing for a motorcycle ride to Texas. I had room to pack only one pair of shoes, other than the monster bike boots that I would be wearing along the way. I chose a pair of casual platform clogs. John looked at them, lifting one thick eyebrow and questioning my ability to walk any distance in them. I assured him that since I always wore shoes with a heel, they were as natural to me as running shoes to a jogger.

But I'm not stupid. Walking on 23 city blocks of cement and asphalt definitely called for a different shoe. I immediately went to my closet and pulled out a cute two-toned pair of kinda-sorta tennis shoes, and blew off the dust they had collected. Then I pulled my clogs off the shelf. I looked at the two pairs of shoes, knowing which ones I should wear but wanting to wear the pair the made me taller.

Wearing shoes without a heel or some kind of height was as alien to me as sweet iced-tea is to a Northerner. I like high heels. They're feminine. They're dainty. They can be sexy. Most importantly, they can add 1 to 2 inches to my petite 5' 2 and 3/4" frame. And the one thing that really stuck with me while studying fashion design was that clothes just hang better on a taller frame.

Even if I could get my brain around the shoes, then what? Every dress, skirt and pair of pants I owned were bought with the intent to wear heels. The cuff line of all my slacks and pant suits, even my jeans, fell perfectly on the top of my foot and just covered the back of my heel, with the right pair of shoes. I had work heels, casual heels, dressy heels and trendy heels. I enjoyed that people often commented on my attire and sense of style. And yes, I secretly felt that Audrey Hepburn and I would have been great friends and spent Saturdays shopping together.

Finally I decided on the pair of two-toned kinda-sorta tennis shoes. They were comfortable and I knew I could walk at least 23 city blocks in them. I remembered a pair of casual stretch khakis I had brought last

spring and wore with a low heeled sandal. They worked well with the tennis shoes. Adding a smart black tank top, and maroon 3/4" sleeved silk sweater, I felt fashionable enough to walk the streets.

Leaving John's Southside apartment around 1 pm, we made our way down 20th street into 5 Points. We walked to The Fountain and admired the work of a local artist before getting back on track, just to detour once again to take a closer look at The Castle, thinking how fun it would be to live in the tower. Nibbling on a muffin from the coffee shop, we talked about the city around us that was so still on an early Sunday afternoon and made our way down the hill.

We stopped at the Empire Building after crossing over Morris Avenue, and stared at the faces carved into the top of the building, wondering who these men were. With our hands cupped above our brows, as if saluting, we stared into the windows of empty stores and offices. Vainly, I watched my short reflection in these same windows we as walked by, wishing I had worn different shoes.

John shared with me his stories of being a City Stages concert volunteer as we walked the areas where the city's favorite outdoor festival has taken place for so many years. As we passed the Harbert Plaza, I shared with him that the Parisian, located inside, was my absolute favorite because they always had the best sales.

At the museum we walked silently, pausing in front of paintings and listening to the devices hanging around our necks. It was crowded and easy to lose each other as we lost ourselves in the paintings. John would come up behind me, close enough that I could feel his chin against my hair for a moment, then he or I would move on to the next piece of art.

We picked up a bag of chips at the bus station and walked passed the Civic Center to the cemetery. The stop at the cemetery was his surprise for me. He knew of my fascination with old tombstones. When we first met, he thought that was strange until I explained my curiosity about the lives belonging to the names etched in stone, and my desire to say their names out loud in case they were forgotten. We feasted on tahini and honey sandwiches and shared our chips. Before we left, John thanked the names on the stones that lay before the bench we sat upon.

My two-toned kinda-sorta tennis shoes were doing a good job of taking care of my feet so we decided to keep walking instead of "Dart"ing. We walked past the Civil Rights Institute and up to Carver Theatre. If we had been there the day before we could have seen a concert at the Jazz Hall of Fame. We were a day late and dollar short. Instead we wrote our names on dusty store fronts, and John, having never met a stranger, spoke to everyone we met along the way.

My right hip started to ache as we headed up hill to Southside and I took over John's walking stick. The sunny weather that had tempted us out into the streets was now feeling more like a chilly, fall evening, and our stomachs weren't cooperating either.

Over cold beer and warm pizza we talked about our "walk-about" Birmingham. John wondered aloud if the footwear I had chosen was appropriate. We joked about my obsession with shoes with a heel, and John said, "Cowgirl, I told you your footwear was going to be an issue. There are just some places I want us to go where you'll get hurt in the wrong shoes. You can't climb a river bank in heels." Feeling a bit "girly," I attempted to defend myself. After all, despite my desire for pretty shoes, I do have common sense. "John," I began, "I would wear the proper shoes for the proper environment. I just don't have a lot of 'outdoor' shoes because these are things I've never done. I've only..." and my voice trailed off, "I've only gone where my high heels could take me."

Our eyes met and we sat for a minute, contemplating the profound life-changing realization I had just made. I've only gone where my high heels could take me. My experiences had been predicated by my choice of footwear. What would become of me if I had never met this man who made me look beyond my heels? Would this handsome Texan hold my hand and lead me into the light, wearing a pair of rubber soled timberlands? To be continued.

.....
Kellye R. Copas works for the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.
orchestra@alabamasymphony.com
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THE WORDS OF OLD POETS

P.T. Paul

I'm eating the words of old poets
with chips
and a pickle on the side.

Their lies go down like Coca-Cola –
slightly bitter to the sweet –
unsatisfying,
once eaten.

Were these words nourishing
when written?
When eaten with tea and toast,
at most,
were they
as sweet as marmalade?

(Maidens afraid
of the wedding bed
may have fed delicately
on their sensitivity.)

We are too blunt, too over fed,
too ready to dismiss sweetness
as unsubstantial
and unfulfilling.

We bring our burger appetites
to a banquet of petit fours –
we want our poetry charcoal broiled,
heavy and dense, with ketchup
and French fries on the side.

We even want our lies
Supersized.

.....
P.T. Paul is a senior majoring in English at the University of Montevallo.
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BROMELAID
John Shadrick
30" w x 40" h
Acrylic on Canvas

John Shadrick, recently retired from the U.S. Defense Department, spends his days painting in Trussville, Alabama. His work is shown in coffee shops and restaurants throughout Birmingham.



VIOLA SINGS

Ahmad Austin

Acrylic on Canvas

24" h x 30" w

After a long day of teaching art to children at Minor Elementary in Birmingham, Alabama, Ahmad Austin comes home and paints to music that he has grown to love. Ahmad loves jazz music and tries to capture the essence of jazz and the feelings it evokes through his art.

(NO TITLE)

A. Mary Murphy

all the frustrated musicians of North America
accuse their parents
why didn't you raise me in a Christian home
all the great ones started in the choir
everybody knows that
everybody has a gospel background in the closet
even little Sarah Harmer in Canada
sang harmonies with her family after church
it's an excellent musical education
why didn't you get saved and become a minister
Sam Cook's father was a Baptist preacher
do you know how often that happens
because of you I'm not Aretha Franklin
I'm not Marvin Gaye
because of you
that's all I'm saying

.....
*A. Mary Murphy is an Alberta poet and has recently completed her doctoral
dissertation. Her poems appear in a variety of journals, including Planet: The
Welsh Internationalist, Canadian Literature, Malahat Review, Wascana
Review, and The New Quarterly.*
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"Be who you are and say what you feel,
because those who mind don't matter
and those who matter don't mind."

--Dr. Seuss

LISTENING TO THE DEAD (Birmingham, 1995)

for Brian Conly

Robert Collins

It could be a ghastly scene
straight out of the Inferno,
some lower circle of hell glimpsed
through billowing smoke-
the damned in cascading dreadlocks
with lips and nipples pierced
constantly in motion, attempting
to climb higher up the bleachers
or descend to the arena floor below
as though to escape their torment,
the pungent scent of incense,
perspiration, and patchouli
slightly incendiary like brimstone,
except I'm not Italian
and my tour guide isn't Virgil.
As my eyes adjust to the dark,
I see how little has really changed.
These kids could be my children –
hippies, freaks, or deadheads,
call them what you will, the tribe
I once aspired to be part of,
sounding my adolescent yawp
high on pot in a tie-dyed t-shirt,
my unkempt hair too long for
anybody's parents.

As if the 1960's
never ended, an ethereal young woman
weird and ripe in wire rims, huaraches,
and long tresses, twirls like a dervish
stoned on sensimilla, and I realize
what enticed me thirty years before
to be excited by the music of the Dead –
that dream of peace, of endless sex,

deep mystery, and samsara, of living
without ever having to suffer. Tonight,
in Reeboks and spring jacket, I'm feeling
awkward, old, unhip, envying the easy love
everywhere around me, the ecstasy I sought
for years one way or another but never
quite discovered.

When the band slips
into "Easy Wind," Garcia bespectacled
and stout as a kindly math professor,
mingled with the music I hear the cries
of some who didn't make it – casualties
who came to concerts stoned or drunk
or both not so many years ago it seems,
with a dream of ending poverty and war,
racism and hatred, of living together
closer to the earth in harmony and peace,
but learned too soon they'd have to suffer,
brought down by drinking, suicide, or drugs,
by making a living or pursuing a career,
choices these kids too will have to make.
Knowing the pain to come might prove more
than can be borne by many of the dancers,
I watch the multi-colored spotlights swirl
in perfect rhythm with the music projecting
huge mandalas on the unsuspecting crowd,
wanting to believe more tonight than ever
that love can somehow change the world.

.....
*Founder and editor of Birmingham Poetry Review, Robert Collins teaches creative
writing and American literature at University of Alabama at Birmingham.*
.....

“History...is nothing other than a collection
of the lives of people, some of them great,
some of them ordinary...nothing other than
a collection of what people have done in
challenging circumstances and how they
have risen to those circumstances.”

--Artur Davis

POEM BY JOACHIM RINGELNATZ (1883-1934)

translated by Ernest A. Seemann

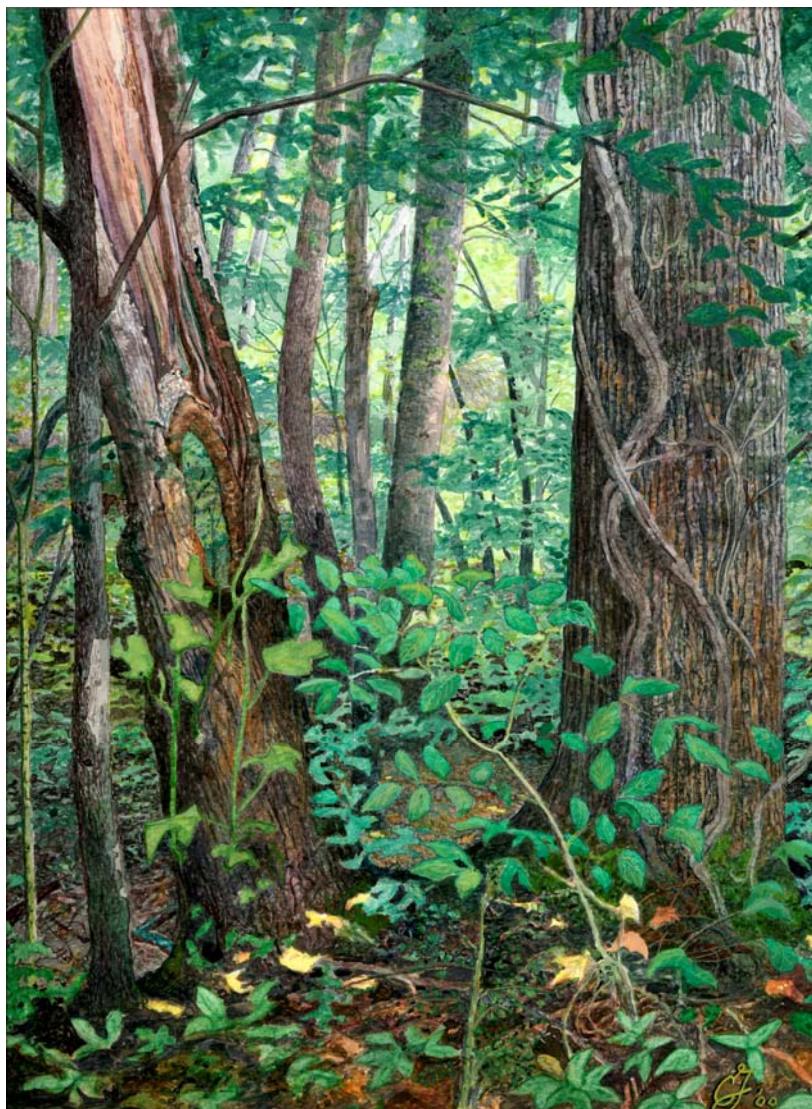
Die Ameisen

In Hamburg lebten zwei Ameisen
die wolten nach Australien reisen.
Bie Altona auf der Chaussee
Da taten ihnen die Beine weh.
Und da verzichteten sie weise
Dann auf den letzten Teil der Reise.

The Ants [as a limerick]

There once were two ants in Westphalia
Who wanted to go to Australia.
But cursing their feet
In a Belgian street
They gave up their trip as a failya.

.....
*A resident of Madison, Alabama, Ernest A. Seemann has just completed a bilingual
manuscript entitled 435 German Epigrams and Aphorisms from the 11th to
the 20th Century. It contains quotes from the wisest (and sometimes, funny,
irreverent) utterings of the famous in the German language.*
.....



GENERATIONS

Craig Gallaway

Craig is a painter whose works have been exhibited at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, the Wiregrass Museum of Art in Dothan, Alabama, the University of Texas at Arlington, Samford University, the Birmingham Public Library, and other public venues, art shows, and competitions. The Gallaways are the proud parents of three fine sons (Benjamin – 26, Christopher – 23, and Zachary – 13). They live in Birmingham, Alabama, with their dog, Abbie.

GOOIEST CAKE IN THE WORLD

Jill Conner Browne

Another of Mother's specialties was this yummy cake. You start with 1 yellow cake mix (not the pudding kind), mixed up with 3 eggs, 1/4 cup water, 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1 20-ounce can crushed pineapple. Bake it however the cake mix says to and then ice it with this: Melt together 2 sticks butter and mix it with 1 cup evaporated milk and 1 1/2 cups sugar, then add 1 small can (7-ounce) Angel Flake Coconut. Poke holes in the cake and pour this stuff over it. As soon as it cools off just the slightest bit, put your face in it.

.....
Jill Conner Browne is the self-proclaimed Sweet Potato Queen of Jackson Mississippi, and author of several books in the Sweet Potato Queen series. This piece is printed with her blessings.
.....

"Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade, just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself."

--Truman Capote

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