



MID RIVERS REVIEW 2016

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2016

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From the Editor

It is no small wonder that the events of the year elicited joy, retrospection, and grief. For me, 2016 was the year that the beige tile floors that I have run across many times to reach the open arms of my waiting family members were bloodied at Ataturk Airport in Istanbul, Turkey, when gunmen opened fire in a horrific attack. Then, a bombing cracked the asphalt of the streets outside a military base just down from where my children have played with their cousins on brighter days, days un-marred from this senselessness. On my nine-year-old son's birthday, March 13th, I protected him by keeping the television turned off so he would not learn that a suicide bomber had killed 37 people in his father's homeland, a country he considers one of his own. But I could protect neither him nor his sister from the disruption and anxiety of witnessing on television the failed coup against the Turkish government several months later. While they watched, they knew their aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandmother were somewhere amidst the flames and chaos. After we learned that our family was safe, we knew everything had just changed.

Also in 2016, my grandmother, Virginia Lee Payne, died. She was 88-years-old and was such a force that it was a surprise to most who knew her, especially me. However, what was not surprising was that in her writing desk, she left a poem –“Thanatopsis” –by William Cullen Bryant with a stanza marked. I knew what the poem meant to her, how she struggled to remember its name and its author's name. She penciled brackets around the last stanza:

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams. (Lines 73-81)

She left that poem where we could easily find it, and she told me where to find it. Up to the end, she was telling us what to do, as she typically did. And she was right, as she typically was. She prepared for death by living a remarkable life, and she left Bryant's words behind as a way of reminding those of us who loved her to do the same.

I read “Thanatopsis” at her funeral, and I didn’t cry. I didn’t unhinge until I sat down to review the submissions for Mid Rivers Review and recognized that the themes that emerged (as they always do for each issue I have edited) were grief, resilience, and renewal. Clearly, I was not the only one that had struggled and reflected in 2016.

Many of us waited in a line for Star Wars: The Force Awakens, and we also joyously turned to one another when those five familiar opening notes introduced The X-Files. NASA’s Juno spacecraft went into launch around the planet in July. (Perhaps these events were inspired by the flower that was grown in space aboard the International Space Station, or maybe because Scott Kelly and Mikhail Kornieko came home after living in space for just under a year.) Fifty people died in a mass shooting in Florida. The Mississippi River took parts of Memphis into itself, at least for a time. The presidential election elicited divides between families, friends, and lovers.

2016 was as “messy” as the speaker in Marissa Thomas’s “The Things She Left Behind.” 2016 was tragic in parts, yet we must remember that grief “calls us to things of this world,” as Sarah Hempelmann teaches us in “Crossword Puzzle.” And up from “dehydrated” land, bluebonnets bloom, “a season renewed” and shared by a grandmother and granddaughter in Kayla Kenshalo’s poem, “Bluebonnet.” 2016 Mid Rivers Review offers us a glimpse of a variety of expressions of grief and renewal.

A friend once told me that where there is joy, there will be suffering. Where there is love, there is loss. Many of us are covering our ears in the loudness of the losses of this year, yet we are not blind to the beauty of the process of healing and overcoming. And so, I will end this introduction by saying that grief and renewal are not linear processes – they swirl together like brightly colored leaves in a storm. In the aftermath, we will realize our landscape has changed and we will have the resilience to go from there. This book is a commemoration of the truths and losses of a markedly eventful year.

-Virginia Bunn Guneyli

Introduction, Lindsay Brand

It is impossible to write without an idea - but a stroke of inspiration is not enough, it's certainly the first step, but it's not the even half of the journey. You have to put pen to paper. Easier said than done. Some people opt for handwriting in a fuchsia pink Moleskin journal with lined pages and an extra fine Pilot pen in a darkened room in the most uncomfortable chair still in service to humankind, while others snag Remington SL3 typewriters from estate sales or eBay. You probably have a routine. An idea pops into your head. It's the middle of the night. Being a person who loves to sleep, you decide you'll remember it in the morning. You won't.

Then another brilliant idea pops into your head. You write it down. (Maybe in the Notes app on your smartphone, possibly on the back of a birthday card that's been lying on the nightstand by your bed because you don't know what to do with it. Your mom wrote that she loved you and you couldn't stand to throw it away.) But it's okay now, it became the vehicle that captured your brilliant idea.

Now the pain can truly begin. Only being able to write at 2 a.m., having to dictate everything into a recording device and then have to sit and listen to your own voice as you transcribe it, and not being able to read your own handwriting later. Laptops freeze and black out. Babies insist on being held. A lot of coffee but not so much that you dissolve in a puddle of nervous energy. Sometimes you must don headphones, type furiously and hope the music silences the shoulder demons (or shoulder editors). Where is the shoulder angel? Trust me, there's never one.

At some point, you will find yourself readying yourself to delete the entire Word document or torching the paper still in the Remington SL3 typewriter in a glorious act of destruction straight out of Office Space. Don't do that. I know what you'll say: It's not right. It's not what I wanted it to be. How can I get things from my head onto paper? Keep writing. It's times just like this when you need to pull up inspirational quotes from your writing heroes. Like Ernest Hemingway who penned the pithy "Writing is easy. You just sit down at your typewriter and bleed." Or perhaps, Margaret Atwood who stated "A word after a word after a word is power." What if I only have one word, Margaret?! But then you apologize because the woman churns out literary quality works at a pace that is generally unparalleled and she's exactly the type of person you want to be more like.

Finally, you finish it. You read it. You decide the idea doesn't work. [Relive paragraphs 2-4, perhaps multiple times. Then skip to paragraph 6.]

It's rough, but has potential. So you let people you trust read it. Maybe they like it. Maybe they pretend to like it. Someone gives you advice. It sucks. Someone else gives a helpful suggestion. You reread the piece. You can't believe you ever thought it was good. But Ernest Hemingway did say that "the first draft of anything is shit" so you persevere. And in the guide to writing *Bird By Bird*, novelist Anne Lamott admits that "for [her] and most of the other writers [she] knows, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way [she] can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts." So you don't give up. You revise it over and over again.

The truth is that writing is one of the more difficult tasks you'll complete in life. And you won't want to complete it. If it's still a work in progress, it's not finality. At some point, you do have to stop revising it over and over. It could finally be done? Now it's time to let someone you don't know read it. That's when you start looking for a home for it in literary journals and magazines.

The Mid Rivers Review is one of those literary journals you might have considered. As a member of the St. Charles Community College community, I am proud that we have this journal to collect the writings of our students, faculty, and community. It is extraordinary for a community college to be able to put out an annual literary journal of such merit. After all, it's more than just a book. It's the voice of the community.

Every year I look forward to hearing from familiar voices and welcoming new voices to the conversation. This year's collection is no different. Writer Isabel Allende says, "Write what should not be forgotten." Many of you have written down this throughout the pages of this publication.

Kayla Kenshalo transports me with just a few of the lines from "Bluebonnet":

I prefer roses set softly
on the table.

But my grandmother loves bluebonnets.

Her choice of pride.
Like wearing a flag on
the Fourth of July.
She takes me to fields and has me listen.

Then Dana Delibovi has some outstanding pieces in this issue, but a few lines from “The Moon Landing” just destroy me (in a really good way.)

They think I’m oblivious. They think
The hardness of my body, muscled these eons,
Draw upon draw of my bowstring, lifting the tides,
will tolerate this shock. But they are wrong.

Then there’s “Rift” by Dave Malone. These lines:

I can’t stand suffocating
inside heavy water of Norfolk Lake,
where just a day before,
we swam like ancient fish,
knowing nothing poison or the world.

and Sarah Jones in “Mexico, Missouri”

on streets trodden
by the worn heels
of those going to
whence he came.

Over and over. Throughout the pages of the 2016 Mid Rivers Review, I came across lines that should never be forgotten. I am glad they exist for us. And those to come later to the conversation that continues between writers across centuries, counties, and countries. So keep sweating and poring over your writings. You are a writer; it’s supposed to be hard. Those two things are inseparable. The reason it’s difficult comes down to what poet Anaïs Nin says, “The role of a writer is not to say what we can all say, but what we are unable to say.” Thank you for all you had to say this year.

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This book is dedicated to Virginia Lee Payne.

2016 Haba Award Winner

Kayla Kenshalo

Kayla Kenshalo

Bluebonnet

I prefer roses set softly
on the table.
Lingering in brisk air early in the morning.
The scent is attractive it whispers
in the wind.
Petals of silk dance on the stem.
The thorns that cut,
most ignore.
For the flower is beautiful,
it belongs,
it's adored.
But my grandmother loves bluebonnets.
Her choice of pride.
Like wearing a flag on
the Fourth of July.
She takes me to fields and has me listen.
The wildflowers serenade the dry soil.
She then caresses one in her hand.
Closing her eyes,
the bud a memory,
it gives her life.
Spring dances on the blossoms,
a season renewed.

All over Texas bluebonnets bloom,
Dehydrated land covered in blue.
For just one season, a few months at most,
until next year when the blue pride grows.

2016 Haba Award Winner



From the book *Old Age is No Place for Sissies*, Sue Wolf, 2016.

Kayla Kenshalo

This Message

I want to die before you.
Do you think my sins will keep us apart?
Maybe.
Plant me in the dirt
next to the rod iron swing.
Where memories of love came to be.
Rust and grit and grass will tangle in my bones
and my soul shall wonder til you are next to me.
We could lay together
as our son takes the home.
We could watch our grandchildren play on our graves of stone.
Hopefully we'll grow wildflowers,
from the depths of our veins.
Hopefully my death doesn't haunt you,
this message from the grave.

Escape

Time escapes me like a prisoner.
Ticking on the clock
Seconds, days, hours, years
Life flashes in words of sorrow and cheers.
One minute, two minute, three minute, four
If only I could find time for more.
Time can be made up for in smiles and laughs
Time can be forgotten in bottle bottoms and broken glass
Heavy hearts and empty hands
Hours to be measured in grains of sand

Girl in the Picture

She's beautiful.
The one in the picture,
with the messy hair
staring into the abyss.
Her necklace sways,
her face curious.
And the sunlight,
the sunlight pursues her,
It twinkles off her skin
as I watch her take her scenery in.
Her curiosity defines her.
Her spirit is free.
Free,
yet held within the
compass of her own spirit.
I want to know her, and why
the artist viewed her that way.
Why they thought she was,
Important.
Look at the details
of the girl that's free
the girl in the picture,
all along,
was me.

Kayla Kenshalo

Nonfiction

Love me as much as a writer
loves to imagine.
Teach me words
I won't find in a dictionary.
Touch my soul as gently as
a pen caressing paper.
Read me for who I am
Not for the fiction some say I've become.

Ode to Future Me

Never forget to wake
to see the sunrise.
You're beautiful, you know?
You see things others don't.
You go where others won't.
You are my hero,
Someone I look up to.
Never let the little things bring you down.
You're doing great.
You always push through the herd.
Remember to travel.
Remember to write.
It's the only way you'll make it through life.
And by the way,
Your messy hair looks fine to him,
he loves you anyway.

2016 Woodrell Award for Prose
Dawn Burgess

Dawn Burgess

Frog

This is not our webbed foot, leaping, insect eating friend, but a term used in knitting. The term came about by a play on words, “rip it, rip it,” sounding like a frog. So, let’s leap into the craft of knitting, learn more about frogging, and a couple other terms.

Frogging is the same as unraveling or ripping out rows of a project to correct a mistake. Yes, it is as horrible as it sounds. Imagine, glancing back over the progress made and realizing there is a mistake, and there is no other way to get to it other than ripping out several rows of work. So, as tears fall and unrepeatable words come out with each stitch pulled, frogging has commenced. But there is a silver lining to assist while frogging, a life-line, and not the one to help win a million dollars, which is accomplished by inserting yarn or a straight knitting needle in the row beneath the mistake. This is helpful so that too many rows are not frogged, stitches are not dropped causing additional damage, and it is easier to pick the stitches back up. So what if the mistake is in the same row that is being knitted? Instead of ripping out the stitches, work the stitches backwards. This is called tink, knit spelled backwards. Yes, I always thought that she was a hot headed fairy that flew with Peter Pan, too. But it’s working the stitches from the right needle to the left needle, undoing the stitches just done. When the error has been corrected, simply start following the pattern once more.

Now that we have some fixing terms down, let me give a little background on this wondrous craft. Knitting started as a male only occupation to make garments of fabric. During World War I, the American Red Cross had a poster to encourage people to knit for the troops that said, “Our boys need sox, knit your bit.” With the Great Depression, it was more cost effective to knit garments than to buy, and some hobbyists would knit to make extra money. Knitting is a worldwide craft and, at one point, was taught in schools because it was considered a useful trade, not just a hobby. Today, patterns, yarns, and needles can be purchased at stores and on the Internet. There are even social sites for knitters and crocheters to get help, search for patterns, and talk about other interests; like there are other

interests. I am a knitter, and while I may have several projects going at one time, it is a stress reliever for me. I submerge myself into a project, like a Calgon moment, and then with just one more row before putting it down, I can look at a situation from a different perspective. It's amazing to me that one can take two sticks and some string to make something that can keep someone warm and be fashionable.

What has been considered the grandmother craft is now being done by young and old. Vanna White has several lines of yarn and books through Lion Brand Yarns. Other celebrities such as Julia Roberts, Scarlett Johansson, and my favorite, Rapunzel, can be seen with needles and yarn in hand. Surprisingly, Cary Grant, David Arquette and Gary Cooper, are no strangers to knit one, purl two. So, don't allow the knitting needles to intimidate you, pick them up and create, even with frogging, a lot of frogging.

**2016 Woodrell Award
for Prose**

Dana Delibovi

The Moon Bombing

“NASA tomorrow will launch a spectacular mission to bomb the moon.”—
Scientific American, 10/8/2009

“The LCROSS impact will not be noticed by the moon...”—NASA website,
FAQs

They think I’m oblivious. They think
The hardness of my body, muscled these eons,
Draw upon draw of my bowstring, lifting the tides,
Will tolerate the shock. But they are wrong.

Tonight, as every night, the cloth will slip
From the smooth mirror of my shoulders, and
I’ll while away the night, awake and defending
The straggling sheep, the fishermen delayed,

And the teenagers walking the creekbanks,
Showing them the mossy stones that otherwise
Would do them in. I will tint the world’s lovers
In their confusion, conjure loves past.

Even if it’s cloudy, I will bulge the earth,
Even then, I may emerge with cloud wings
Blowing over the clearing night, perhaps near
A star obscured, then visible, to remind—

I’m pulling for you, people. I remain
Exquisitely sensitive, and taking a
Centaur rocket in my south pole
Will most certainly be noticed.

Tomorrow they will drop the creature—
Vile half man, half beast, at 5600 miles per hour
Into the dark, never-lighted recesses of my
Cabeus crater, to plumb for secret waters.

You race of men hate mystery now.
But mystery will own you once more,
As I limp on with a plug in my south
And the detritus of all your failures on my flank.

I pace my silvered rooms. Soon, I
Will wander the courtyard and tell my girls
To brace for impact at 7:30 EDT, like women do
In all the towns they bomb at morning's light,

In all the bleeding fields where women
Burn with babies or old people in their arms,
Found cradling even as their black husks
Smoke on the parapets or in pools of oil.

We'll feel the hit—so poets, I beg:
Turn in your graves tonight,
Whip up a centripetal voice, to knock
The blasphemous thing off cours

Dana Delibovi

Archeology of Southern Connecticut

No one is supposed to quit. So, in the ruins, dig down.
You might unearth a treasure vein, so dig down.

Ask the girl, the one who walks in the Puritans' graveyard,
what do you exhume, from under the mound, when you dig down?

I know this girl. I know, that with thrift in her words, she'll say:
"Anyone craving old clam shells and beer caps better dig down,

but anyone hunting for buckles from those crotchety stiff-necks,
just look around. They clank out the regional mood— you dig?—Down."

Down and depressed as linsey-woolsey full of lice, that's the legacy,
not the vein of ore, not Rumi's carnelian and gold. If you dig down,

there's only bent vinyl siding, headless Barbies, and this secret:
The girl—everyone really—stands in a hole, but can't stop digging down.



I Don't Want to Be Saved, Hannah Anderson, 2015.

**2016 Editor's Choice
Award for Visual Art**

Dana Delibovi

Strike

I worshipped all his trees so much,
that I ran barefoot through the mud
to see how lightning split the trunk
clear down to where the roots began.
It could have struck the thing it did:
Or what, by minutes, it had missed:
The tree that bore gold fruit each fall,
Or pruning limbs, my neighbor

Ruin

Now, the late-day sun slants across a field
that's gone to blue chicory and tasseled grass.
A tin-roofed barn slowly folds upon itself,
a wild grapevine twines between its planks.
Rusted rebar juts from gravel-flecked mound.
While two bony horses nose the pungent ground,
birds commence their twilight chatter, but dense
vegetation mutes their song. No brittle drought
shears the edges of air, this oddly cool
summer of our nation's last gasping.
In subdivisions up ahead, women are grasping
triggered bottles of Febreze, taking one last aim
at crumbling barns that stink of entropy,
or against defiant vines that threaten
to sunder us from our delusions.

Lindsay Brand

The Last of the Cyads

Our people are the world.

We eat, speak, procreate, and die with them. I've realized for years that I am the last of my people – a dying kind of people. Waiting for my own death is a long and monotonous process – I always thought death would be dramatic and emotional, but really it's the period at the end of an overextended, run-on sentence. It's a sigh of relief – a breath of air at the end of a long chorus.

A botanist came through my village, and selected me to take home. I don't know why he chose me – quiet, unassuming. Just a slender sapling in the spring of life.

So, I sit alone in a glass cage waiting. Waiting to die. Waiting for the end of my sentence without any idea of its length.

Lindsay Brand

The Lowest Price

They say Wal-Mart ruined America.

The superstore with its smiley, super prices devastated the country which had survived two world wars.

The US collapsed around the gaping hole in her heartland as the gangrenous wound spread from sea to shining sea.

The Wal-Mart employees - a starving, disunified collection of lost souls in blue, oversized vests covered with flair Jennifer Aniston would be proud of- pass through the aisles with lethargic, hungry faces. An army of blue.

Once, I knew a girl who joined their ranks.

She, like so many others bearing the blue vested corporate uniforms across the land, needed the money. She found the perfect deserted corner in the fitting rooms to hide out from her boss and the ever-searching eye of the security cameras to steal lip gloss.

She is a true patriotic hero.

Dave Malone

Awake

Our peeling birch
moves when stirred—
the stoic lover
holding on to past belief.

The western thunderstorm
rides a horse across Ozark plain.
Darkens the sun, thank god,
plunges the day into blood.

On a Sunday, you slide
fingers under bark to sail
the lonely ship to sumptuous earth.

Rift

I spend all morning dwelling inside
last night's conversation in the cramped car,
the stick shift a rift between us.
You can't stand a day without me.
I can't stand suffocating
inside heavy water of Norfolk Lake,
where just a day before,
we swam like ancient fish,
knowing nothing of poison or the world.

Dave Malone

What Is Lost

I'll never know that girl
The redhead with dimples—
Slender arms pushing
Her grandmother through

The coaster's waiting line.
Admission price of marriage
American-style. Lost,
I wait for the killed ride

To be resurrected.
Taut shouts of Clear!
By teen ambassadors
Guiding machinery of memory.

What Is Gained

Night's jowls
fling wide
and let the moon slip
into Ozark ditch—
the shimmer of highly-held
rain in burning August.

Not speaking,
we hold hands
across the blue abyss
of time, planets.
Against scent of damp earth,
screech of barn owl,
we troll the farm—
thin flames of light
ignored in the distance.





Auburn Winter, Lauren Bailey, 2016.

Julie Varwig

I Died for Paris

Pull the white sheet over my head.
Let me sleep.
I died for Paris, and now
many more will die remembering
my heart that stopped beating before
the bullet's strike,
my eyes that did not blink,
my legs that shook beneath my body
like an earthquake.

See, I Can't See You

A hospital gown sucked the strength
out of you. I saw tubes shoved down
your throat, fluids pulled from your
chest, your ghostlike skin too scary
to touch no matter how much I love
you.

Black. Light. Black. My knees, where
did they go? Who brought me the
chair and water? Dad, you couldn't
speak.

The pillow with the picture of a real
heart mocked me. They stopped
yours.
You still looked as if it wasn't working.

I had to leave, Dad, I'm sorry. I sat
in the chair, I couldn't stand anymore
just like you couldn't speak.

Megan Caldwell

At

One, I learned to crawl,
but I knew the feel of my cat's fur.

Two I learned to walk,
but I knew my sister's face.

Three, I learned to say short sentences,
but I knew my giant Tommy Pickles doll.

Four, I learned to say my ABC's,
but I always knew Special Teddy.

Five, I learned to read,
but I knew Po's smile.

Six, I learned to hide,
but I knew daddy's yelling.

Seven, I learned how to add,
but I could swing higher than my friends.

Eight, I learned how to pass notes in class,
but I knew Kaylee's trampoline.

Nine, I learned how to multiply,
but I knew how to lose myself in books.

Ten, I learned to write book reports,
but I knew chapel Tuesdays.

Eleven, I learned how to write poems,
but I knew Mrs. Cornwell's class.

Twelve, I learned to talk to boys,
but of all the ones I knew, I remember Jay.

Thirteen, I learned not to trust boys,
but I knew what it was to be raped.

Fourteen, I learned how to move,
but I knew how to cut myself.

Fifteen, I learned what love is,
but I knew how to keep secrets.

Sixteen, I learned I can trust boys,
but I knew I could be happy.

Seventeen, wait, maybe not...
but I learned how to be strong.

Eighteen, I learned that I am strong,
I know I can do this on my own.

Melissa Cook

Winter

Funneling back in the door

As snow falls outside

Empty pairs of shoes

Morning

Lavender skin

Curtains barely open

Staining your body with moonlight

A Poem About Me

There are a thousand little mes, a
million little mes,

All pressed together, chest to chest

And there's nothing in the cracks
either, nothing in between,

Just a million versions of myself
bleeding to the next

And I

Copy and paste I copy and paste

I copy and paste I copy and paste

I copy and paste I copy and paste I
copy and I



From the book *Welcome to Womanhood*, Hannah Anderson, 2016.

Hannah Rose Pipitone

Calling All Body Shamers

Hey! Look at me!
 Can you see me?
 Are you looking hard enough?
 What do you see?

An average girl about 5;4
 Who weighs about 140 pounds?
 Calling all body shamers!
 Do you see my positive attitude?
 With my pale skin and blemishes on my face,
 And my frizzy hair all in knots,
 Do you see them?

What about the girl who weighs about 180 pounds
 And a height to about 5;2?
 Do you see her? Do you see her curves?
 What about that smile on her face that shows her happiness?
 Can you tell?
 Calling all body shamers!

Do you see tha man? A small, 5'6" height
 And pretty skinny.
 Do you hear his laugh? Do you see that girl he is kissing?
 Calling all body shamers!
 Can yo utell how much confidence he has in himself?
 Does that mean he lacks masculinity?

What does beauty mean to you so called "professionals"?
 Do you have to clear skin in order to be pretty?
 Does that girl have to be the weight of 120 to be a model?
 Does he have to have muscles to be considered a man?
 What do you have?

Have you looked in the mirror?

I have one thing to say to all of you body shamers
And that is....
SHAME on you.

Hannah Rose Pipitone

(Im)perfections

Nail polish and tan skin
Thick hair, beautiful pins.
Big eyes and thick lips,
Plastic nose, beauty tips.
These are ideas of perfection.

Short nails and pale skin,
Frizzy hair, bobby pins.
Tired eyes and thin lips,
Tiny nose, life tips.
These are my beautiful imperfections.



From the book *Welcome to Womanhood*, Hannah Anderson, 2016.



Miracle Madison, Katie Crow, 2015.

Hunter Murphy

Sunset in Western Skies

Sun sets over the mountain hanging low
The orange glow sweeps through the valley beneath
Swallowing all the trees and streams below
Depriving the animals underneath

The animals run to the fading light
As the sun creeps over the mountain edge
Bringing end to the bountiful daylight
Adding danger to the rock covered ledge

This serene scene captured just before dark
Trapping the beauty of a good day's end
Opening its arms for a coming spark
An unfamiliar life and new friend

Stars mark the start of the long night ahead
By the morning time, I will be a dad



Impunity, Debra Crank-Lewis.

Callie Daniels

Badlands

I'm bound for South Dakota.
The Badlands keep callin' this bad girl home.
Mama, I didn't mean to do
All those bad things I done.

I can't say the devil made me do it.
No, there's no one left here to blame but me.
I'll admit this isn't at all
What I expected the good life to be.

See, I fell in with a band of outlaws
On my way to Sacramento.
I wanted all those shiny things
A good simple life doesn't offer.

Yes, I killed that man in Deadwood
And stole his horse and gun.
Got all the way to Reno
Before the money was gone.

Then did what any girl would do
Just to make it by.
But they didn't get the best of me
'Cause these swift hands can make a wallet light.

Well I had to hurry out of there
And now I'm on my way back home.
Lookin' for some true good times
In the Badlands of South Dakota.

Callie Daniels

French Creek Crossing #13 (a true story)

What is it about the number 13?
That on that crossing of French Creek
We met Tatanka the bully bull.
Silent and straight in our path he stood.

Jim, our fearless guide, said, "I'll handle this."
Then across French Creek, he and Gunner went.
Is he reaching for his gun?
No, mano a mano is the choice for this kind of fun.

Slowly and carefully, Jim and Gunner passed by.
Now it was Phyllis' turn, "Don't look him in the eyes."
Too late for that, she and Scott were locked on.
Tatanka snorted, pawed the earth, Karen's horse spun!

"Come this way!" Callie shouted to the others.
Straight down French Creek Janet and Blue trotted.
Barb and Casey shot through the cattails like a bullet from a gun.
Karen and Annie finally came along.

Phyllis had made it to the other side too.
No harm had come to our brave riding crew.
Down to French Creek Tatanka strutted
Thinking this is my park, you Missouri tourists.

In Memory of Louisa, Wife of Gottlieb Bayer

Encircled in wrought iron you rest
A mystery for me to ponder.
Who were you Louisa Bayer?
I cannot pass without stopping to wonder.

Here you are amidst family and friends
In this peaceful valley lo'.
The Great Missouri rushes past
Your ghost whispers soft and slow.

My sister speaks of 200 years
Waiting for eager ears to listen
To one whose story is sad, yet true.
Here I am, no judgement given.

For 76 years you walked this earth.
A voyage from a foreign land
Free spirited and full of spite
A woman's heart and working hands

Just plain Annie to your left
And Ernestine on your right
A lovely trio loyal and true
Until he came that fateful night.

He stole your girlish innocence
Your heart, your money, life.
Hey preyed upon your trusting nature
Within a week you were his wife.
10 years passed as if an eternity
He wore you down, emotions spent.
Until the triumvirate completed its plans.
That cold, dark night he didn't live to regret.
He disappeared amid speculation.
No one shed a tear, good riddance given.

Quietly victors celebrated
A second chance at life worth living.
Gottlieb Bayer met his match
Made one mistake too many.
Crossed a trio of courageous women
Asked for mercy, there wasn't any.

No looking back on decisions made
10 years was 9 ½ more than she could take.
And he's not here lying peaceful like the others
Only the Missouri knows his grave.

Seth McLaren

Untitled

Freshman year, I walked into science a meek little kid of 100 pounds
And you stalked in at 5'10, wearing a stupid sonic the hedgehog tshirt
With hair swooped across your brow
I thought you looked dumb
You showed up to my third period class as well, we sat next to each other
Sophomore year we were somehow best friends, though stark opposites
You tall, outspoken, musical, and me quiet, smart, and short
I wish I had the foresight to help you down a different path back then
When nothing could hurt us in the late afternoon hours
We would walk to your house and play videogames
I wish I knew what caused it
Junior year, I think what caused "It" came into being in the form of a girl
Her name was Summer, and you told me you loved her
As we sat in a coffee shop studying
I wish I could have showed you what dependency means
Because senior year, when you couldn't depend on the girl anymore
You started to depend on drugs
I wish I could have stopped the pain, the shame, the deep sickness
I wish I didn't lose you, at 11am on a rainy Sunday. Your mom collapsed
on the stairs,
Screaming your name, your little brother, confused, though he knew you
wouldn't wake up
Your drunk of a father finally broke that day, I think before then he wanted
to get better
Sometimes I wish I had picked a different second and third period class



Flashback, Hannah Anderson, 2016.

Seth McLaren**Untitled**

Porch lights hum, the last daylights leave
around them,
Chairs and old bones creak, facing the worn-out street
The lamps above flicker to life,
heralds of the night
Silver wind chimes tinkle through a cool breeze
While tired eyes pass through the holy screen door
Children follow,
they know the night is not for them
Worn old houses fall asleep along the dusty row
His seat on the porch step remains,
Empty
Empty,
like the dark pools threatening the perimeter
of the orange street-lamp light
Absence and presence don't contradict each other
One is seldom found without
the other.

Nathan Adkisson

The Boundless Wanderer

The winds of the earth bellow boundlessly
Across great plains and mountains
Leaving behind nothing but the unsettled remnants
Of places once traveled
Hear the rapid pitter patter of the rain
Brushed against structures of stone and steel
Forced in all directions by this momentous invisible wanderer
It knows no limits
Yet lost it becomes within four walls and a ceiling
In these rooms which we swell the wind becomes dormant
And list is the thunder of the wind's own voices

Drifter

On and on we sifter
Through this daunting driftwood fate.
Biting at our heels
Are dogs of undesired traits.

Aimless floating
Angst, oppression
Silent rivers unprotected.
Now as we become aggressive
Truth has grown so faint and desperate.

Driftwood goes as river flows
But makes not of its situations.
People like it drift on silent
And never get the chance to fight it.





New Day, Hannah Anderson, 2015.

Justin Henley

Million Dollar Question

“What the heck is this?” said Dan, stunned.

Stanley draws a pack of cigarettes from his front pocket and offers some to Dan. “Well, you might need one,” Stanley says after Daniel refuses the offer. “Hell, we might need more than this after tonight.”

“How’d it get down in the basement?”

“Million dollar question, Dan.” Both stare at the creature and slowly ease their way closer to it as they whisper among themselves.

“It stinks,” Daniel says, partially covering his mouth with his sleeve. “You think it’s dead?”

“Hell if I know.” Stanley distances himself a foot away and studies it. He gives it a gentle kick before deducing any medical conclusions. “Well, it’s either dead or knocked the hell out.”

“We gotta tell the news, Stan -”

“Stanley”

“Oh, uh - Stanley. I think we oughta tell the news. This is the fifth one this month! Man, won’t Joe be jealous when they find out we found an alien in my basement!”

“Quite, primitive in nature. Yeah they ain’t too smart tryna escape from them domes like that. Guess we oughta tell the sheriff.” He takes a couple steps back from the creature and reaches into his bag for a communicator.

“Aw man! You got you one of them fancy technos!”

“Shut up, Dan,” Stanley says as he begins to punch in the police phone number. “Hello!” he says. “Yeah this is Stanley Parcher from Sector 914-02. We found one of them aliens that escaped from those bio experimentin’ domes. Uh-huh. Well I don’t know how long it’s been down here, we just found em’ in our basement - looks like it’s either dead or knocked cold. Uh-huh. Ok. Alright. We’ll be here. I trust you can just find my location from this communicator?” Stanley throws a quick glance at Daniel, then subtly shakes his head. “Alright. Sounds good.” Moments later, Stanley takes the communicator from his ear and lets out a deep sigh.

“What they say?”

“They’ll be over here in 25 minutes or so. They’ll have to contact the military.”

“Oh wow! The military, comin’ to my house! This is unreal, Stanley.”

Stanley walks over to the creature and examines it once more. Looking at what the scientists call toes, fingers, eyes and hair. "Weak lookin' thing ain't it." Stanley glides a chair over from the corner of the basement and sits next to the alien.

"Awh, it ain't nothin' Stanley. It's just a human."

Stanley stares quietly at the human. "Ain't right for them to be out like this."



Nature's Eyes, Hannah Anderson, 2016.

Anna Schmid

A Psychotic Spiral

Gary never had much hair, a little thin mess atop his head and his face adorned a small rather pointy nose and small thin lips. Linda first met him at a library where he was checking out a cookbook. She remembered how he looked at the rows of books, a tense look that said choosing the right cookbook was the single most important thing in the world. She was turning to leave when she accidentally walked right into him. It was a slow relationship and Linda never had to second guess Gary. It was a peaceful, calm and from the very beginning it was clear that they were meant to be. Linda never felt safer than when she was with Gary.

Gary was a history major and worked at a museum preserving artifacts. At dinner he would drone on about the latest ancestor of beetle findings. Over the years Linda stopped listening at dinner. Gary never noticed his wife's loss of interest in him and that pushed Linda further away. She began dreading coming home to his small mouse-like face, exhausted by the sight and thought of him, the way his little hamster eyes watered as he talked.

Linda found ways to stay after work. She worked at a nursing home and volunteered to spend extra time with some of the residents or clean something that never got cleaned in over the 30 years since the home was first built. Those blinds on the 3rd floor were always coated with dust. No one could believe Linda's dedication to the home and its residents, she beamed at co-workers when they complimented her on her astonishing work effort. When Linda finally went home she found the house quiet with Gary sleeping away in bed. She undressed and crawled in gently next to him and drifted off to sleep. She started waking up in the middle of the night, a cold sweat clinging to her face. She would turn and look at Gary trying to find something in him to love again, but it only made her angry when she couldn't. 'What a pathetic excuse for a man' she thought. She stopped getting sleep and tried to sleep on the couch but would only lay awake for hours thinking of Gary and all the things she had begun to despise in him.

Linda's anger and annoyance started reflecting her work life. She was snapping at co-workers often and quickly became the gossip,

"She over works herself."

"I heard Gary and her were trying to have a baby and couldn't." After hearing about the gossip about her from a friend at work, she decided to let the talk fuel her, she couldn't believe Gary could drive a women insane like this. It was his fault, yes, always his fault. All those times he left the mayonnaise out after diner and she would wake up to its spoiling smell, poisoning the house. He was always getting in the way. How long had she never noticed? She stopped eating as much and going out, and calling off work became a regular thing. Still, Gary was oblivious.

Linda imagined him getting a parking ticket or being late for work. Then it turned into a car crash, or a tornado picked him up and she would never have to see him again or feel his warm body under her as they made love. This became a routine for Linda, waking up and imagining his dismiss. She couldn't fall asleep without an elaborately planned scenario and if she laid next to Gary it only made the scenarios better, clearer and more vivid. Some days he would catch her staring at him for an extended period of time, a vacant gleam in her eyes. She would snap out of it, realizing she had become immersed in picturing him drowning, his lips blue, and eyes lifeless. Or a swarm of rats eating him alive, ripping away at his retinas, cramming their sharp, jagged nails into his cornea as he screamed. She caught herself smiling.

The days began to feel shorter and shorter and every little thing made Linda want to rip her hair out. Gary and she were eating dinner one night, Linda was performing her usual head nods, when she saw a crow smack into the window, a streak of blood and feathers left behind. She screamed and jumped up in alarm "Did you see that?" she said her voice shaking.

Gary looked up slowly from his plate and looked around the room quickly,

before laying his eyes on Linda. "What are you talking about, Linda?" he said.

"What do you mean? How did you not see that, it was the most bizarre thing!"

He opened his worried mouth to say something but Linda had already run off to the bathroom, closing and locking the door behind her. She stood against the wall and bit her fist, trying to hold off the scream that was washing through her body.

Gary knocked on the door, "Honey, are you okay?"

"Everything's fine, I'm just not feeling well"

"Okay, do you need anything? Maybe some aspirin?" said Gary.

"No, it's fine, just head to bed I'll be out in a minute" She heard the creak of the stairs as Gary walked up them and breathed a sigh of relief.

What had happened? Was there really no bird and she was just seeing things or was Gary trying to play a trick on her? He was always trying to make a joke at the most inconvenient times. She thought of how if she went upstairs right now she would see Gary lying in bed smiling, saying he did see it. Linda felt her face flush, the anger in her was boiling over. After a few minutes she came out of the bathroom and laid on the couch, a cold washcloth on her forehead. She had to do something about Gary, he was a nuisance to everyone.

She waited until he had fell asleep and then crept into their room, a knife in her right hand. Once inside she walked over to where he laid, hovering over him she watched the rise and fall of his body. She held up the knife, her hands trembling. She had been waiting for this as long as she could remember.

All the sudden Gary's eyes flickered open and he stared up at her, his eyes quickly darting from the knife to her face and back. There was a brief pause, nobody moved nobody breathed. Then Gary leapt out of bed and

backed away from Linda. Too shocked to even scream, his eyes wide and his face made pale against the moonlight streaming through the window. Linda knew she had to do it now, she ran straight at him with the knife held high, but Gary held up his knee and hit Linda in the stomach making her stumble back. Gary took that chance and kicked her in the stomach, causing her to stumble backwards even more and trip over a pair of shoes at the foot of the bed before she landed in a heap on the floor. Linda was stunned at the nerve of Gary. He walked toward her and picked up the knife that had fallen out of her hands.

“This is what you want?” said Gary breathlessly.

Another moment of unbearable silence passed between them and there was a look not of sadness, or anger, but almost of pity in Gary’s eyes. Confused Linda watched as Gary lifted the knife up to his neck took a breath, then slit his own throat. His blood began pouring out like a waterfall all around him as he slumped to the floor. It was crimson and deep like she had always pictured. Linda still sat on the floor not moving or even daring to breathe. She never expected Gary to hold such a thing in him. She slowly moved her hand over the pool of blood around him, and then dipped her fingers into it gently. She stared at it staining her fingers. She fell in love with the look of it, the pale undertone from her skin against his red vibrant blood, it was a beautiful sight. Her clothes soaked in his blood, she was no longer shaking. She had never felt more awake in her life.

Linda walked downstairs, grabbed the car keys and drove to the local police station. The drive was silent and Linda was smiling the whole way. She felt like a hot air balloon that was let go and floating through a cloudless sky. When she arrived at the police station she walked to the front desk where two policemen, were laughing and sipping coffee and told them that she had just killed her husband.





From the book *Phantasmagoric*, Ethan Steller, 2016.

Alicia Toenjes

Stress

The tempest approaches, clutching demise
Looming above
No escape

Wind thrashes, clawing through
Tangled locks of hair
The sky roils
Threatening to vomit

Thunder groans
The clouds are consorting
Forewarning suffocation

Lightning aimlessly stabs downward in a
Show of power
It smiles with a ruthless grin
Greedy and ready to engulf
Dragging everything into its
Clammy claws

When it all but swallows everything in
Darkness
Water droplets begin to pelt tender flesh
In a comforting
Blanket of release



Wandering Alone, Ethan Stellar, 2015.

Reno Carmichael

He Knew

He knew I hated lavender,
The color and the smell,
He knew I had a weird dislike for the color red,
He knew I didn't like nuts,
He knew I was born a blue eyed June baby,
He knew I loved to get dirty,
He knew Lilo and Stitch was my favorite movie,
He knew my favorite songs and all the words to it,
He knew my favorite part of fishing was holding the fish then giving it the worm,
He knew Black 'N Tan a dark stuffed puppy who was my safety blanket,
He knew I couldn't sing but sang off key next to me,
He knew green was my favorite color,
He knew 12 was my favorite number,
He knew I loved my freckles he did too,
He knew I loved crafts and coloring,
He knew I wanted to own every Dr.Suess book,
He knew reading was my favorite,
He knew blue M&M's tasted better to me than the rest,
He knew I was scared of the dark,
He knew the reasons why,
I knew he loved me more than anything.

I Don't Hate You Justin

Your xbox addiction,
Your selfishness,
Your past,
Your excuses,
Your undeserved cockiness,
Your thought that you are God's gift to women,
Your way of treating me around friends,
Your way of making me love you,
Your family,
Your attitude about life,
Your thought process that makes you think the world owes you,
Your lack of sympathy,
Your demanding ways,
Your double standards,
Your cheapness,
I don't hate you Justin,
I hate the things that you do to me,
I hate that I allow it.

Winter

The snow blanketed the Earth,
Soft, untouched, beautiful,
A pure innocent white,
She could look at it all day,
The way it sparkled was her favorite,
Hot chocolate,
An oversized sweater,
They made it all so much better.
A crackling fire and the way it smelled,
Comforting and warm.

Weeks Later

The slush that was once called snow covered the Earth,
Stealing the green grass and killing everything around it,
It was cold out,
Extremely cold,
The kind of cold that hurts your face,
How did the cold reach her even in the ugly scratchy sweater?
Yes, the one she was forced to wear,
She took a sip of her cocoa,
Burning her tongue she began to scowl,
She couldn't stand the noises the fire made,
The smell was even worse,
Trapped in a tiny house surrounded by snow,
Why was it so cold?

Home

There is a big cream colored couch against a wall of windows. Blinds, white ones cover all of the windows. A cat bed is attached to one of the windows. It's on the window closest to the big stone fireplace. There is always a fat cat napping on this couch. Once a fat cat now he was withering away to nothing. This section he lounges on is bigger than the rest of the couch. It is big enough to curl up on and fall asleep. It is right by the fireplace too. A black cat lies on the window bed. She dreams of escaping, of birds, of fresh kill. To the right of the couch there is a small brown side table with a single drawer. A green and white lamp lives there. The large stone fireplace is feet away. A white mantel above it and above that hangs a large mirror with a white border. You can see the ceiling fan from the mirror. The mantel is covered in Halloween decorations. A fake black cat, Halloween lights, fake pumpkins, and a few other small decorations cover the mantel. It is organized and not too cluttered. The color is a clean cream color. Across from the couch sits a matching brown coffee table that goes with the side table.

On the opposite wall of the couch there is a huge T.V. It is a flat screen and

hangs over a big brown piece of furniture that is used to hold games and movies. Now this is impossible to describe. It isn't exactly an entertainment center. Inside of it there is a blu-ray player, an xbox one with multiple controllers, one is pink and Hello Kitty. There are dozens and dozens of movies. Dozens and dozens of games. Movies range from SpongeBob to christmas movies to Harry Potter. The games range from Grand Theft Auto to racing games. On the side of this odd piece of furniture there is a wicker like basket. It is brown. Inside it are dozens of dog toys.

A massive mastiff lays by it, protecting it from the world. Those must be his toys. He is a huge dog. A beautiful brindle color with big brown eyes. Across from him lays an older lab. The lab is sleeping in the middle of the living room. A deep sleep where he cares about nothing. He is white in some places, yellow in others. He is chunky but still very happy. If you were to wake him he would wag until he broke a hole through the floor.

This is Home. Four animals in one room isn't unusual. There are five cats alone. Two dogs.

Recently we changed around our living room. However, it is still home. It isn't about the material things in it. It is about the dogs, the cats, the family, the sense of belonging and the love.

Writer's Block

Pens scribbling annoyed on paper,
 Nail polish being picked off,
 Tapping feet,
 A swinging leg,
 Anxiety,
 Why does your thoughts travel a million miles per hour when you're busy?
 Stories fill your head and give you excitement and inspiration,
 Until the pen is on paper,
 Then it's like you've never written a single story,
 Never thought a single thought,
 It is one of the worst feelings.

Sarah Davis

Smoke

The cigarette dangled from his thin, pink lips. Smoke was trailing through the air in little rings as he remained leaning on the pole of the bus stop. He looked at me, smirked, chuckled and turned to look away down the street. A dark cloud hung over him, and because he was dressed in all black he felt like a bad dream. He turned his head back towards me, putting his fingers through his oily, thick, black hair. Shuddering, I took a sharp breath and wanted to ask “Why are you staring at me?” but I couldn’t find the words. I was speechless, drowning in his dark, mysterious eyes.

Deciding I should get home, I backed away telling myself to forget about taking the bus, and he took one step towards me. He was grinning big now, rather than the confident, threatening smirk from before. He was the kind of guy that when he looked at you, you felt like you were being violated in some way, but also as if you liked the attention.

Before I could turn away, the bus pulled up and he seemed like the type of guy to say “After you, baby,” as if it would mean nothing, but he didn’t say anything. I climbed the steps onto the bus, waving hello to the driver, and headed towards the back. He followed me, and once I was seated in the last row by a window, I heard him plop down next to me with a huff and a chuckle escaping from his mouth. I didn’t dare look to my left where he was sitting. I kept my gaze focused through the window watching a child playing in a front yard, giggling with pure happiness. The scene of this child playing was completely opposite from the dark man sitting next to me. This made me wonder whether this man had children of his own. I pictured the man standing at the bus stop, but this time he had a child dressed in bright colors with a big grin standing next to him. The bus then began to move, and I looked forward out of habit to watch the road, forgetting this image. I could smell the smoke waft past my face when he would exhale, and it felt like I was choking on his breath.

Finally, I looked at him, and I saw those thoughts once again illuminated in his dark brown eyes as if I was a mind-reader. Every nasty, repulsive thought was aimed right at me. I looked down to escape his gaze, and when I looked up again, he was gone, leaving the stench of cigarette smoke lingering in the air around me.

He didn't stop looking at me, and I didn't want him to. I liked the attention even if he was a little...intimidating; threatening.

Sarah Davis

Woman

Walking through town,
Looking around.
Watching people,
“People watching.”
Watch a woman
Wearing bright flowered leggings
Vibrant and bold
With red stilettos
A red coat to match her heels
Goes down to her knees
Made of wool
Costs \$300.00. At least.
A bright cashmere sweater
Covers the leggings
Looking heavy and warm,
But the color of an orange.
While talking on her phone
She’s bold and in control
Look up to her hair,
It’s purple?

Andrew Murphy

Every Night

Every night we propose a toast.
Every night we watch the twigs roast.
Every night we lay on the grass.
Every night we make each minute last.
Every night we count the stars.
Every night we hum some bars.
Every night we kiss.
Every night we reminisce.
Every night we close our eyes.
Every night we watch the skies.
Every night we profess our love.
Every night we give each other a playful shove.
Every night we cuddle.
Every night we huddle.
Every night we hold each other's hand.
Every night we take a stand.
Every night we enjoy our time together.
Every night we sleep in peaceful weather.
Every night we think, "What a bummer,"
For every night we approach the end of summer.

Marty Lavelle

Warzone

Troops fighting two rooms over,
The infantry has just entered the kitchen.
Bang! Bang!
Friendly's are firing and the enemies,
And the enemies and the friendlies,
The battle begins.
We are all on the same team,
But the war rages on and on,
Seeming like forever in the kitchen.
I sit quietly in bed,
Trying to ignore the fight.
Waiting so long for the combat to end.
You become used to it.
It feels like home.



Afternoon Sun, Katie Crow, 2015.

Taylor Burkemper

Fading Beauty

Today was her 90th birthday. Appearing in front of her was the cake, but this was no ordinary cake. On the cake laid a picture of her on her senior prom night, nearly 72 years ago. As she closed her eyes, she began to remember the image she saw of herself that night. Her hair was a shade of mahogany. It flowed like waves in a perfect ocean, complimenting her porcelain skin. A straight nose, full lips, covered in a soft shade of pink lipstick- it was a picture of perfection. Her legs long and lengthy to match her red high heels as she slid them on to her youthful feet. She stood up with such womanly posture as she handed out her right hand to her date for the high school dance. But as she started to walk, her youthfulness slowly disappeared. Before her eyes, the image she remembered of that perfect night faded. Her hair was no longer a shade of mahogany, just a dim shade of gray. It no longer flowed like waves in a perfect ocean, but stood still like a dead pond. Her glowing porcelain skin transformed as thin and white as parchment, followed by wrinkles and bags under her eyes. Her posture was no longer straight and statue like, but began to become more hunched over and crooked like.

She opened her eyes just in time to blow out her birthday candles. Slowly, a tear fell down her face.

“The deepest inscription will fade in time.” Her tear fell to the ground.

Samantha Dunlap

Far Away Mountains

Sometimes at sunset one can spot the Far Away Mountains. So tall and inviting one would wish to climb all the way to the top. Truly mesmerizing, changing colors and traveling. They look so sturdy, with grooves winding all the way up. Gazing at this wonder one would feel the strong urge to run to its base as quickly as possible to experience the exhilarating climb.

The Far Away Mountains look enchanting, imagining a new fantasy like species making its living or some kind of mystical kingdom living within the mountain's side.

But sadly the Far Away Mountains come and go as it please, staying only for a short time, giving only a sliver of a chance to explore its vast, uncharted land. It's very rare to climb the Far Away Mountains. The ones who succeed feel content on never returning to the life they had lived before.





Playing with Fire, Joey Beckwith, 2015.

Mary Horner

Sky Queen

“Can I have the birds?”

“Why?” Mom asked?

“I don’t know, I just want them.”

“They’re a sorry substitute for art, but be my guest.”

I kneeled on the old gray couch with the patchwork green and gold afghan spread out over the back. They had been flying toward the kitchen in a weird sort of sideways “V” since I was a little girl. Facing the wall, I tried to figure out how the birds were attached.

“The building super put them up one day while I was at work,” she said. “I marked the wall where I wanted them to go, but I have no idea how he did it. They just seem to float there.”

“I know. They fly forever and stay in the same place. Thanks, mom. I love them.”

“You love them? You know where they came from, don’t you?”

“Yeah, Grandma told me,” I said, as I ran my fingers over their smooth, glossy dark bodies.

“I got them out of the big trash bins behind the old Main Street Hardware Store.”

I knew the story. The two of them were looking for anything they could use to furnish her apartment after my parents’ divorce. Sometimes the store employees threw out items that had been returned, and the two women went dumpster diving one Saturday night in October, hoping to find an electric can opener, skillet or other piece of equipment she wouldn’t have to buy.

They had laughed when all they found were bags of trash from the bathrooms and three carved birds sitting on top, apparently in the same “V” pattern. There was nothing wrong with the birds except no one wanted them.

I realized now that my mother must have felt the same way, forced to move from her middle-class, ranch home to a third-floor apartment with no elevator. Now she was moving to an assisted-living facility, another unwanted move.

“Wooden birds are useless,” Mom said.

“No, they’re like you.”

“What, trash?”

“Not at all,” I said, turning toward her.

“When Aunt Barbara used to babysit me while you worked, we would make up stories about them,” I said. “My favorite was the one about an evil prince who forced them into the bins of eternity. As the sky queen, you tricked him into releasing them, forever earning your status as their hero.

“I used to lie on the couch and stare at them, pretending they flew to imaginary places I saw on TV. They could go anywhere, and I could go with them, but always come home. You were my sky queen, too.”

Mary Horner

Winter break

I broke my traditions and a piece
Of hard candy on a lie that I kept
Under the ice on the pond by my house.
I accidentally stepped on a part of the
Pond that wasn't frozen and by doing so
My boot got wet just a little and the lie
Slipped out just a little, but the impact was
Felt by everyone around because I complained
Of my wet boot in a manner that wasn't
Becoming a woman with secrets, like myself.

Winter break, Part 2

My ancestors live silently under my
Heavy sweaters and socks and boots,
Buried like all the other fish in the pond,
Alive but barely breathing, waiting for a
Warm breath to announce their presence
To the next generation of soldiers and saints
And burial plots with their names carved in stone.

The West Side Cowboy who lost his job to the High Line

Walk me slowly through the steps, and show me how to wait quietly
For the future that rises from another victim that isn't named, and then
leaves

Through a back door that no one knows is there.

A little older, and more resigned to the traffic and the falls
And the noise above which I try to do my job, and have some success
But they still ignore me, thinking they are faster and smarter than
What waits for them under the guise of progress and growth and success
A layer of concrete with strips of steel suffocating the dirt beneath
It calls out to anyone who will listen, come closer, let me help you be
Part of the bustle of Death Avenue, a name that will always attach itself
Because of those who couldn't wait to cross, and ran to the wheels of the
past.

Mary Horner

Night Terrors

Most nights,
I fall through the universe at
Startling speed as I pass
Everything I've ever known or loved
On my way to black emptiness in a
Moment of sheer terror that makes me
Scream myself awake, along with my husband.

Other nights, I fall off a cliff, or a
High balcony, but it's always a fall through
The emptiness of space and time and I feel
The hopelessness of gravity as I plummet
Forever toward a fate I can't control.

Last night, a stranger jumped from the
Top of an open staircase above me,
And I watched with horror as he dropped.
I was halfway up the stairs, and
I reached out for him, and he reached for me, and
We connected as he pulled me down with him.

On my journeys that have no end,
I'm not looking for answers, because there are none,
But maybe I'll try to
Look for clues in the far-away objects that
Don't know my name, but exist regardless
Of whether or not I agree with them.

After the staircase incident, I saw it again
In my mind, so before I replayed the entire
Scene I went to the office and got a motorcycle
Helmet, hoping to protect myself from
The damage that really wasn't there.
And thank God that the one time I needed a motorcycle
Helmet, there happened to be one where there
Wasn't one before. Ever.

Julie Sieber

Witch Doctor

Marigold had followed a butterfly away from the group walking down the cobblestone avenue. “Avenue? Ha!” her mother had said, “more like slum-street!” The McNabbs had been a prominent family until recently and still dressed the part. “We may not have two nickels to rub together, but we will still look like we do.” Her mother was a prideful woman who looked down on those in the murky street, even though they were no better off. As she checked on her mother and little sister, she noticed a man approaching them with a soiled brown cloak and a basket. She looked back at the butterfly- a stark contrast in yellow and blue to the browns and greys around her. Marigold checked one more time on her family to see her mother looking around before following the man down an alleyway. Curious, Marigold started heading toward the alley.

“Mari!” Her sister screamed—or was it cried? Marigold wasn’t sure but she rushed to find out. Just then a shot rang out from the alley. Her tiny slippered feet maneuvered around the crowd, bumping into ladies carrying baskets of vegetables that were days past their prime. She may have even knocked a basket to the ground, but she didn’t turn around to check.

At the entrance to the alley, she saw three men huddled about halfway down the side of the red brick-or what used to be under the soot- building.

“Mother!”

“No one’s mother here, miss. Just this old beggar who’s been killed.” The speaker took off his ratty top hat as a sign of respect.

“Good riddance,” said another man-this one in a bowler hat still firmly on his head, ‘one less of them roamin’ the streets and bringing down property values.”

The third man just shook his head.

Marigold knew better than to bring up her mother and sister. “Did anybody see anything?”

“Nah,’ said the second fellow,’ he probably just harassed the wrong person this time.”

The basket-where was it? Mari looked around and couldn’t find it. Maybe her mother took it with her. She followed the alleyway down further until she hit a brick wall. Her family had to be in this alley, she didn’t take her eyes off of it once she heard Poppy. Looking around, she searched for any inclination of their whereabouts. There was nothing- a few puddles, a shoe abandoned long ago, some scraps of scraps from a beggar’s meal-and a sign. It looked like an old poster for a show. There was a faded man riding a dragon, tipping his hat with a smile. The only words on the sign read: “Sometimes the only way to go is UP.”

Sarah Jones

Little Bighorn

Wind in the blood
nourished grasses
hush rattle-tails
as the placid sky clouds
over the sheep
river's bubbled
hills in cold breaths
our steps unsettle more
than snake bellies.

Mexico, MO

He made his way over rivers
ancient reefs, volcanic spills
southwestern dust yet in his hair
and fell asleep against a sign
that pointed homeward
he hoped a good omen
in dark corn winds
pink-lipped dolls
sashay gown-wrapped
on streets trodden
by the worn heels
of those going to
from whence he came.



From the book *No Evil*, Philip Padilla, 2016.

Sarah Hempelmann

Crossword Puzzle

24 across.

I sit silently in my room. The door opens.

Without a person behind it, I wrinkle my face in curiosity.

A captured moment falls from the frame. I see your face.

Where are you? Can you hear me?

9 down.

The phone rings, I answer it upside down.

We really are related.

A permanent reminder of your loving soul etched on my side.

Beloved, Friend. Mom. Grandma.

24 across, Jane.

9 down, Hopkins.

Puzzle completed and I see life; laid out in a way only you could decode.

(Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World)

Courtney Allen

Other People

Conversations with people happen when
I'm alone. Usually over a cup of Earl's Gray
and last well into the night.

These talks are with dreamers and schemers;
I make room on the bed for these new friends
and we decide their fates together.

Loves are swapped between two and a death
is for another. Sometimes they're slaughtered
over and over until its right.

There's usually mounds of paper smothering us
in this adventure we've created.

The cat stretches out his limbs on the sheets
along with his condolences when one of them
has to go. It's a shame when someone
is crumpled and thrown into the waste basket,
but it's better to get to know them now
instead of saying, "I'll remember you tomorrow."

By the time I've rolled over under the covers
they've vanished, the cats vibrating purrs
drowning out their pleas to stay.



Half the Story, Ethan Steller, 2015.

Jayme Novara

On the Passing of Scott Weiland

I was a kid the first time heard your growl
Snarling, sultry, but silken in my ears.
It disturbed and wakened a pubescence still
Unknown,
But that would soon follow, sometimes to the
Sound of your voice.

Marissa Thomas

The Things She Left Behind

She left things everywhere she went.

Sometimes on purpose, some by accident.

Things of hers left behind were meant to be reminders.

Whenever they were found, people would think of her.

A mug sits on the counter, unwashed, showing ring of black coffee.

Messy.

An open book on the kitchen counter explaining the scientific method.

Studious.

A car running in the driveway, blasting Cage the Elephant.

Adventurous.

A pair of earrings on his bedside table.

A purpose, a hope to see him again.

Contributors

Nathan Adkisson is 19-years-old. You could call him a college student, but he doesn't know what he wants to major in. He almost wants to drop out and go see the world (and by "the world" he means he wants to go to Cali). But this thing called common sense, along with the influence of his elders, always seems to hold him back. In the end, all there is to say is that he enjoys writing, and he hopes you enjoy it as well.

Courtney Allen is a poet, short nonfiction, and fiction writer; she is also a contributing writer to the website Life in 10 Minutes. Not to mention she has a book buying addiction, no surprise there.

Hannah Anderson grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis and is always looking for an adventure. As she matured she began to channel her free spirit into ways of expressing herself, through dance, body modification and creating art. It was then that her adoration for photography began. She uses photography as a way to narrate the steps in her journey. Her travels, as well as her beliefs, experiences, and outlook on life shine through in her artwork.

Lauren Bailey loves fashion and photography. She takes photos because she is naturally compelled by visual expression.

Joey Beckwith likes to experiment with his photography, trying new things to hopefully capture something beautiful.

Lindsay Brand lives in St. Charles, Missouri, and teaches English. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, eating mint chocolate chip ice cream, and secretly being an optimist. She has published previously in The Monarch Review and Foliate Oak Literary Magazine.

Dawn Burgess is a grandmother of two grandsons attending college for the first time, and her interest includes knitting, crocheting, jewelry making, and rubber stamping, to name a few.

Megan Caldwell is passionate about creative writing and literature.

Reno Carmichael is a 20 year old from O'Fallon. She enjoys anything that allows her to be creative from cake decorating to writing but her very favorite thing to do is sleep.

Melissa Cook is currently a student at SCC working towards her degree in early childhood education. Writing has always been a passion of Cook's, and she hopes to be able to use some of her abilities in the future as a teacher.

Debra Crank-Lewis grew up on a farm surrounded by a wonderful extended family. There are many teachers in her family tree so perhaps her calling was set early on. She has two wonderful children. Reading, travel, cooking, storytelling and now, perhaps photography are among her interests.

Katie Crow is passionate about photography and has been taking pictures for years. She is still looking for what the world has for her and taking pictures along the way.

Callie Daniels is a Professor of Mathematics at St. Charles Community College. She is a teacher and author who enjoys spending time shooting action photography, riding horses, and writing poetry.

Sarah Davis is a junior in college majoring in psychology. Creative writing has always been a passion of hers. She is overjoyed and honored to be published in this edition of Mid Rivers Review.

Dana Delibovi is a poet living in Lake Saint Louis, Missouri. Her work has appeared previously in Mid Rivers Review and other journals and on the St. Louis Metro as part of the Poetry in Motion project. She teaches philosophy at Lindenwood University.

Samantha Dunlap is a student at St. Charles Community College. She plans to attend Lindenwood and major in writing. She will become a famous writer no matter what. Nothing will stop her.

Sarah Hempelmann enjoys writing because she likes being able to express herself freely. Seeing the finished product is always satisfying. She feels a sense of accomplishment when she's done and people tell her they enjoyed reading her piece.

Justin Henley graduated from Fort Zumwalt West high school in 2013. With recently earning his Associate's degree from St. Charles Community College, he plans to focus on growing his career in film and being an author. He has

had a passion for writing since discovering his love for it in the sixth grade, and taking multiple writing classes has not only increased his love for his craft but has also helped him hone his skills. Justin draws his inspiration from his love for other arts as well as his personal experiences and hopes to influence and educate his future audience with love, understanding, and kindness.

Mary Horner is the author of *Strengthen Your Nonfiction* and blogs at wrtRteachr.blogspot.com. She is the former managing editor of the *Journal of the American Optometric Association* and earned writing/editing certification from the American Medical Writers Association. She earned her writing certificate from the University of Missouri St. Louis. She teaches communications at St. Louis and St. Charles Community Colleges.

Sarah Kuntz Jones lives among the red bricks of south St. Louis. Her prose has appeared in the *Midway Journal*, *The Summerset Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*, among other markets.

For Kayla Kenshalo, writing has always been something that I've felt incredibly passionate about. My hope is that readers feel a connection while reading my works.

Marty Lavelle says, "I am Marty Lavelle and I am a freshman in college. This is my work."

During his college days, Dave Malone vowed to write love poems that weren't clichéd or schmaltzy. You be the judge. He lives a charmed life in the lush Ozarks. His new book, *You Know the Ones*, is forthcoming in 2017 from Golden Antelope Press.

Seth McLaren is a full-time student, employee, and writer. He loves dogs and enjoys writing poetry, fiction, and prose. He owes almost all of his writing skills and command of language to Dan Hardebeck and Jamie Sullivan.

Andrew Murphy is a 20-year-old aspiring college student. His literary idols include Neil Gaiman, Douglas Adams, and HP Lovecraft. In his downtime, Andrew likes to relax at home with his two cats and dog.

Hunter Murphy is a student at Missouri State majoring in cell molecular biology.

Jayne Novarra is an English professor and music lover.

Philip Padilla is a St. Louis based photographer whose work explores the self-expression and self-perception of identity. He uses the camera to investigate and understand the world we live in and how we interact with it. Philip is currently pursuing a Certificate of Photography at St. Charles Community College.

Hannah Rose Pipitone has been at SCC for two years now and absolutely loves writing. Her goal is to become a well-known author. She wants her writing to be inspirational and insightful to others.

Anna Schmid is a creative writer and Honors College student at St. Charles Community College.

Julie Sieber is a 33-year-old writer from O'Fallon, Missouri. She is the creator of many things, including fiction, nonfiction, art of many mediums, culinary masterpieces, and a son. She is most proud of the son... on most days.

Ethan Stellar uses photography to understand what cannot be conveyed with words, but that which is most primal within us.

Marissa Thomas discovered her love of creative writing in Jacqueline Gray's class. Through poetry, she becomes more aware of her feelings and desires. After beginning her coursework at St. Charles Community College, not far from where she was raised, she transferred to University of Missouri, St. Louis.

Alicia Toenjes, 20, received her Associate of Arts degree from St. Charles Community College in the summer of 2016. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor's of Science degree in Psychology at Truman State University, with a minor in English. In her free time she enjoys napping and spending time with loved ones.

Julie Varwig is in her third year of studies at St. Charles Community

College and has enjoyed seeing her writing grow from the various creative writing courses offered there. Julie is pursuing an English degree with an emphasis in creative writing. Specifically, she loves to write in the genres of poetry and non-fiction. She loves to travel, spend time with her family and friends. She also has a passion for Christian missions.

Sue Wolf is a St. Louis native and St. Peters resident. She singles out her daughters for being her greatest joy in life. They have been strong supporters of their mother's photography, often helping to critique her work.

