

Volume IX ~ January 2014

TORRID LITERATURE JOURNAL

New Ink

Anniversary Issue!

Special Interview:

Grant E. Fetters

Featured Poets:

Casmir Hodge | Evan Brennan | And Many More!

Must Read Fiction:

"Transfer" | By Jennifer Palmer



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FROM THE EDITORS

New Year New Ink

It feels like just yesterday we were preparing to unveil Volume I Rediscovering the Passion. Now, nine issues later, here we are celebrating our three-year anniversary with Volume IX New Ink. Change is the only thing in life guaranteed to remain constant. Moreover, over the past few years I can certainly admit that many changes have taken place where TL Publishing Group is concerned. The one thing that has not changed though is our love and passion for literature and all of its beautiful forms. In fact, I would go so far as to admit that our love has grown. We are constantly looking for new and creative platforms to use to help bring readers and writers closer together.

Whether written or spoken, there is something beautiful about a moment of time captured through a poem or story. We have concluded that this is attributed to the edifying fact that writers themselves are chefs. Chefs in the literary sense of creating appetizing dishes for everyone to feed on. Dishes that don't expire or grow old. Dishes that feed our imagination and provide us with the inspirational nutrients needed to sustain our mental, emotional, spiritual, and even physical state.

Life provides the ingredients, the experiences, the mishaps, the lack and the abundance thereof, which causes us to dream, to hope, to want to freeze and exist within a reality that is fading all too soon. As you will discover when you read this issue, these writers are far more than just writers. They are connoisseurs of words and expression and we are presented with the humble task of serving up these delectable dishes that will leave a lasting impression on your literary taste buds.

Furthermore, have you dug beneath the surface of a writer lately? We have and the results of our findings are available in an engaging interview with Grant E. Fetters, a writer from Tennessee. If you have ever wanted an inside look at the writer behind the words, then this is a must-read interview you don't want to miss. In addition, visit our blog throughout the year as we continue to announce special interviews that provide a behind the scenes look at the latest writers in the industry.

Our journal is not the only cause for celebration this month. January also marks the three-year anniversary of our open mic. Since 2012, we have successfully hosted eight open mic events with our ninth one scheduled to take place this month in our hometown of Tampa, Florida. We have been blessed to see such a large array of artists grace our stage over the years. People of all ages, across all genres, have shared their incredible talent with our audience members. We are eagerly looking forward to partaking in the experience all over again. If you are located in Tampa, or will be visiting us, be sure to look us up and join us. Our open mic events provide an inviting atmosphere for families to gather and enjoy the beautiful talent that Tampa and the surrounding area has to offer. Be sure to visit our website and fan page on Facebook for videos and photos of past performances.

The first quarter of 2014 is a busy one. In addition to a new journal release and an upcoming open mic, we are also wrapping up

voting for our Hall of Fame for literary excellence. We published the work of over 80 writers last year and we want to take the chance to give honor where it is due. Since October of last year, people have been casting their vote for their favorite writer whose work has appeared in one of our journals in 2013. Based on the votes received, eight writers will receive special recognition highlighting their literary excellence as we induct them into our Hall of Fame. If you have read any of our 2013 journals, please tell us which poem and/or story stood out the most by casting your vote. Voting will end next month in February. In Volume X of the Torrid Literature Journal, we will announce the official inductees for our Hall of Fame.

I also want to mention that the period for sending in votes for our Hall of Fame ends just in time for the start of our 3rd Annual Romancing the Craft of Poetry and Fiction Contest. Time is an interesting concept. It honestly feels like the second one just ended. However, here we are getting ready for the third one. Our contest is open to writers of all skill level, age, and location. We are humbly excited as our contests continue to grow in submissions and we expect to see the same results this year, if not even more so.

As a final point, please keep this in mind: a new year means new ink. The great thing about a new year is that it means you get to start over. It's time to move forward and focus on the new experiences that await you. You are starting with a blank sheet of paper and a fresh bottle of ink so to speak. To be more clear, your chapter is waiting to be written. This year is your year. Walk forward with the understanding that victory is already within your grasp. This year is about holding onto your success and expanding it. It is not about what did or did not happen in the year before because your past does not define you. Your responses and actions in this current moment of time define the true nature of your character. I say this because, as my pastor often states, how one sees the problem determines how one will solve the problem. Therefore, I encourage you to maintain a victory mindset as you step into 2014 and begin the journey that awaits you.

We've come a long way since Volume I Rediscovering the Passion and the growth would not be possible without readers like you who support our writers and our efforts to help the thriving culture of literature. We are looking forward to taking our goals to another level as our vision for our writers and the culture of literature continues to expand. We are just getting started. Happy New Year.

Be you. Be blessed. Be torrid.

Sincerely,

Alice Saunders

Follow me on Twitter:
@lyricaltempest

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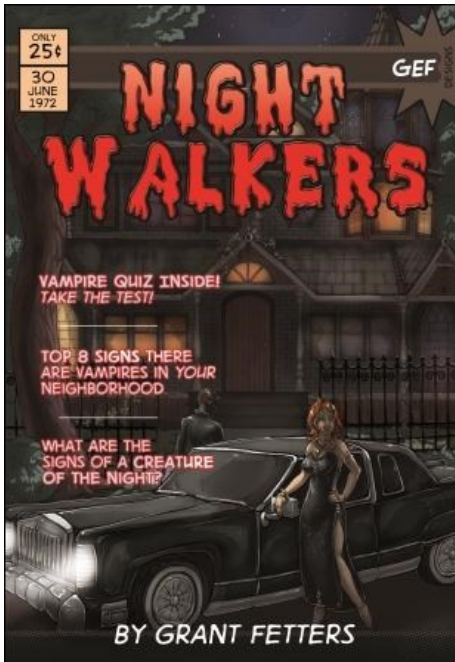
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1 ON 1: GRANT E. FETTERS

By Alice Saunders

Grant E. Feters is a relatively new writer to the world. His published works center on middle grade and YA fiction. Grant has also written non-fiction and young children's books. He lives with his wife in East Tennessee with their 4 cats. His day job is as a Mechanical Design Engineer.



Q. Let's start with your name and where you live.

A. I go by Grant E. Feters, I was born in Michigan quite a while ago, but I have lived in East Tennessee since 2001.

Q. You go by Grant E. Feters, would we know you by another name?

A. No, that's the name I was given so that's the one I use.

Q. What does the initial E. stand for?

A. Well that is a mystery. There are a lot of people that have asked me that question. I usually tell them E as in Edward, and they drop the questions about my middle name.

Q. Is Edward your middle name?

A. No.

Q. How did you get started writing?

A. That is an interesting story in its self. I had a horrible time in school because I am Dyslexic. English was the worst subject I had in school. I never read anything, I never wrote anything until I went to college. Then the lack of reading skills made college very difficult.

Not until I am in my early 40's did I

have a life changing event. My first book was a child's book that came to me in a reoccurring dream. *Horace the Hopper*. It is about a grasshopper that wants to see the world, but he does not know how to get there so he has to ask his friends how to be on his adventure. I told my wife about the grasshopper that kept coming back to me in my dreams. She thought it would make a great story to tell our first born child. 'I didn't have any children'. Well, she said, you will have soon.

Q. What do you write?

A. Mostly fiction, children's fiction, middle-grade fiction, adult story based fiction, some historical memoir, and lots of short stories.

Q. Where do you write?

A. I mostly write at work. I am a fixer at my day job, where I put out fires all day long. This person wants this, that person wants that. Although, when it came to lunchtime, the chaos is still there but for some reason I could just flip the switch and turn everything off and tune out everyone. I can get a good amount of writing done at my desk. The computer I compose on was the same computer I worked on all day long. I am comfortable there.

Q. When and where do you edit?

A. Writing is difficult for me, because I am Dyslexic. Not bad but it has its moments where I struggle with the jumbled mess of letters. I will typically edit a story at least 5 times before I hand it out to others to read. My Dyslexia affects my spelling and comprehension. The greatest invention the world has ever known is not sliced bread but Spell Check. I like to edit most of my writings at a local fast food restaurant. I am quiet, I typically don't bother anyone and they will refill my coffee.

Q. Why at such a loud and sometimes chaotic location?

A. It is because of that chaos. I can immediately shut it off and turn down the noise. I turn up the muse in my mind and get the job done. That is the easy part. You see I don't know anybody there, and they don't know me. The customers can see that I am busy and they don't talk to me. I can get refills of coffee and

continue to work on my manuscripts without distractions. At home there are thousands of distractions, and that does not even take into account my family.

If I knew anyone in the restaurant and they knew me they would feel free to come right up and talk to me. I can't talk and edit at the same time. I have to be in the moment and my characters have to talk only to me. He is only allowed to talk to me not some stranger in the room. I also have them talk very loud so that I can hear them over the ambient noise. My characters listen to the crowd of people coming and going all the time, but I don't hear a single person or their conversation. Sometimes there is a person with that strong voice that carries throughout the restaurant. When I can't tune them out at all and my characters can't speak over them. I start to take notes of what they're saying. If my muse can't drown them out then I guess I am supposed to pay attention to what they are saying. Sometimes that works positively in my favor.

Q. Can you elaborate on that?

A. I am sitting in the local Hardees, I had just finished my breakfast and in the middle of an editing session when a young boy was telling a joke he heard in school to his parents. They were so engaged, something told me to listen too. The joke turned out to be so good I added it to my story. It was the perfect little joke and it fit perfectly into my editing.

Q. Who is your favorite author?

A. Stephen King.

Q. You said that without any hesitation at all. OK, I'll bite. Most people say that name in a low tone at least. You, say Stephen King with a sense of excitement. Why is that?

A. I attribute Stephen King to unlocking the writer in me. My first SK book and just about the only book I owned at the time, it came to me from my wife as a birthday gift. Because I did not read (at all), I would not even read the newspaper. I hated reading with a passion. My wife gave me this book in an audio book.

Q. Which book?

A. *The Wastelands: The Dark Tower 3*, by Stephen King. Well I had never had an audio

book before. This was a new experience for me. Since I had an hour commute to and from work every day, I could start the very next day listening to my new book. Books were so foreign to me and now I am being read to by an author. That upper Maine accent was a little difficult to get past too. I drove and listened to the first tape but could not understand the plot of the story. If you are familiar with the style of Stephen King's work then you are also familiar with his style of getting tons of back story up front of the current book. Since I was starting with the third book in the series I was getting the lo-down of who begot who and what the previous books were all about.

I was lost...I could not follow the story at all and I put the book aside after just one tape, both sides. I did not know what the story was about and I could not get enough of the story in my mind to follow the train of thought of the book.

Q. Did you ever finish the book?

A. It took over a year before I picked up the set of tapes and tried again. Now I am determined to complete the book and I listened to that book over and over until I got the story. Each time I ended the book I started it over again from the beginning. I listened to that book maybe 5 times before I moved on to another audio book.

Q. Is that the only Stephen King book you have?

A. No, it's funny to look at my book shelf and think of how this all got started. I have just about every book Stephen King has on audio. There are a few of his books that are only in print therefore I don't have them, but I have nearly every audio book available.

Q. So you really like Stephen King books?

A. Yeah, I guess you could say that. I like the style of the story telling that I can identify with his books. I like that each of his audio books are unabridged. Like he says, He only allows fully unabridged versions to come out from his books. I am fully on board with that.

My second book was the *Wizard and Glass*, *Black Tower 4*, by Stephen King. I am on the last side of the last tape of 'The Wastelands' and I just know there is not going to be enough tape on that cassette to wrap up the story. I am getting worried. I've invested hours listening to this story and I am going to be pissed, if it just ends without a wrap up. Unbeknown to me I did not realize there was going to be another book to this story. So when the story ended and I was left holding the bag as far as how does the hero's get out of Blain the Mono. Does Roland continue on or what.

I was a mess. All I could think of was that I had to get the next book. I blew off work that day and drove directly to the bookstore to

find the next book in the series. I could not cope with the thought I might not know what happens. I drove to the closest bookstore and actually ran to the audio section and looked for the next book, *Wizard and Glass*. Thank God, it was there. I took the CD version and went to the checkout. I was talking to the clerk about how the *Wastelands* ended and how distraught I was over the ending. The clerk informed me that there was quite a break between the two books. There might have been a year or more between the two releases.

I know I would have died if the *Wizard and Glass* book had not been on that shelf when I went looking for it.

Q. Is it still like that with new releases?

A. No, I've calmed down plenty since then. I do look forward to the next new book coming out from an author I like but I am not crazy about it anymore.

Q. Who else do you read/listen to?

A. I love Ray Bradbury. I wish there were more on audio for him. I like Patterson and Grisham. I like the stories of H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke. But every book I get is only audio so that limits what I read or own. For a while, I went to local libraries and checked out every audio book they owned. I have not done that very much, now since I purchase many of the books from local bookstores or from the internet.

Q. Who is your favorite reader?

A. The voice I love to hear is James Earl Jones. I especially like to have the author read their own books. I feel the author knows the book and the story better than anyone could ever know.

Although, if the author works on their books as much as I do they must be sick and tired of the story and probably want to get just as far from the book as they can.

Q. Are you a pantsner or a plotter?

A. Fully a fly by the seat of my pants. I outline very little. I never plot out a story. Although, I have outlined some of my stories after the fact, kind-of.

I usually sit down with an idea in hand and see if there is anything in my mind that I can pull forward and develop the thought. If an idea flashes in my mind, I will sit at the computer and write down everything that is rolling around in my mind right then about that idea or thought. Sometimes it's a little and sometimes it's a lot. I will start off with a new template where I get the title on the page. That may be all that happens with that story.

One day I was sitting and thinking about the wonders of the universe when I was immediately flooded with ideas for stories, maybe 30-40 ideas. They just came flooding in so I wrote a new title page for each and went on to

the next. After I finished with the title pages I went back and read through them. A couple of them stood out to me so I took them up and wrote all I could about that story right then.

There are times when I have a longer story, and after I have 30 pages written I cannot keep track of the characters. Who they are, what they do, and how they are reacting to the other characters. I had to sit down and develop an outline of sorts so that I could keep each character in line.

I did a character page of each player and listed everything I could come up with about that character. I wrote down, who they were, what they did for a living, male / female, animal or mineral. I would tell everything I could think of about the location, real or fiction. Time frame is also important.

Most of the time, I simply mull over in my mind the idea of the story, sometimes for hours and others for years. When I think I have enough of the story captured in my mind I begin to write it down. Many times I will work on several stories at the same time. My muse will quiet down on one story then he wants to talk about a different story so I follow his lead. That also keeps me from getting bored with any one story.

Q. You mentioned a template. Could you explain that?

A. I do all of my writing in Microsoft Word. I know there are other programs out there but I have been working with MS Word for such a very long time and I will stay with it until I have to switch to a different program. Also many of the world of publishing is also tied to MS Word. A doc file so that is why I am too. Word will translate into many other formats now days.

My template is set up with the font I like to use, New Times Roman, 12 point. I have the margins set to what I like. The one and a half line spacing is set. At the top of the page is the title, Word count, Date last saved, my name, address and contact e-mail also phone. A few spaces and then the body of the story. I make sure the page numbering is turned on.

I will start the story out on this template then save-as to the file location and file name I want in the subdirectory I want. Everything is stored in two locations, a jump drive that is never away from my side and on my hard drive at home. I am very anal about never overwriting a previous file and I always date the latest save.

Motto: Save early, save often. I worked as a design engineer back in the day when the computer networks would fail often so in order to not lose very much of your work we had to save our work every 10-20 minutes. I also saved each time I got up from my desk. I could never rely on the network to be up and running when we got back to the desk. I guess that is old school. Some habits you just can't break.

Q. What other habits are there?

A. Do you mean like when I finish a MS. I smoke a cigarette or have a drink of wine. Something like that?

(Yes)

Well I don't think I have any of those rituals. Usually I print it off again and plan the next edit session in the weeks ahead. I will switch to another story and write on it for a while. I will let a story sit and mold in a drawer for a while. I am such a 'needy' writer I usually try to find someone to read it and give me some constructive criticism but that is harder to find than hen's teeth.

I don't have a ritual to perform after I finish a story. Maybe I need to develop one. I could always run around outside the house in my birthday suit screaming, "I'm done, I'm done." Look for pictures of this on the front page of the Daily Sun.

Q. How many stories do you work on each year?

A. I will write between 10-30 short stories each year. Books will be 3-4 a year but they usually come from one of my short stories. I will roll it around in my head even after I supposedly finished it earlier and expand the story and it just becomes the next book. Or because of a short story, it spawns off another new story.

There are times my friends say something in passing, a phrase, a word or they just come out and say, "You should write a book about 'this'..."

I have always been a student of human nature. I listen to the way people talk and what they are saying and why. One of my co-workers would always use the word 'awesome' and that drove me crazy. For a long time every time he would say that word I repeated it, awesome. Because, it is just such an awesome word. It is the most awesome word overly used ever. Cool!

I hired an editor to proof one of my MS and that word showed up in my new edits. That freaked me out so much I have never used that editor ever again. Cool!

Q. Are there many things that freak you out?

A. One thing that embarrasses me and freaks me out too is when I attend a writing group where we sit around and discuss the meeting's topic. Then one of the members will talk about a book they just finished reading, or they remember a book they read years ago and now they are reciting passages from that book. Only starting to read ANYTHING within the past ten years and honestly they have been primarily audio books and mostly Steven King novels. It is hard for me to relate to the books the others are talking about in the meetings. Most of the authors I know are not the ones they talk about. I've heard of Shakespeare but have no idea what or how he writes. *The Old Man and the Sea*, great movie, but have I read it, no. The comment, 'The book was much better than the movie'...I wouldn't know. I never read the book but I

can assure you, I saw the movie, and the movie was awesome.

Some great authors have a few phrases that stick with me that mean something to me. 'Write what you know.' I write from my past experiences and every story has at least a little bit from my past, what I know. 'The only way you can write, is to read a lot.' I have read very little in my life. I do not write in the style of Steven King but he is the one I will read/listen to most of the time. I see plenty of movies but I am not a screen writer. I write fiction. My biggest advantage is that I can tell a lie as well as the next guy. My imagination runs wild all the time and I am never at a loss for some crazy idea for a story.

I was a member of Toastmasters for many years and that organization helped me think on my feet. We were always asked to give a 2-3 minute speech. At work there are always oral reports to be given. Sometimes you have to be creative with the answer you give to your bosses. I have never had a problem getting up in front of a group big or small and tell a story. I can give a speech about any topic to any group, any time. That comes from my abundance of imagination and bullshit.

I came from a family that was so full of BS they sat around the kitchen table and tried to out lie each other. Who could tell the biggest whopper of the night and tell it like it is as true as anything you have ever told. 'I swear to God, this happened just like I said.' My uncle always told how he single handedly won the war in Germany, and if it had not been for him we would all be speaking German.

Q. What are you working on right now?

A. Actually a couple of projects; *The Magic Cape*, is an early teen book about a young boy that finds a magic cape mixed in with the family laundry. It is disguised to look like a common bath towel. Jeffery our hero finds out the towel has special powers and he can do almost anything.

Crazy is a novella that covers a design engineer that has everything anyone could ever want, the perfect family, the job of a lifetime with NASA, and a great life. All of that comes crashing down around him and places his life into chaos. Bob falls over the edge of sanity and his recovery involves a new life style and career. He will become a world famous author, but that does not turn out well either.

Among the book projects I am constantly writing short stories. Some children's stories that I like are *Cooties*, *Tabby and the King* and *Hunting the Wild Elusive Christmas Tree*.

Q. Of your own books, which is your favorite?

A. It was *Night Walkers*, But I think I like the newest book that will be out soon, *The Magic Cape*. It has that great story and imagination about it.

Q. Can you tell us about your worst review?

A. No, (sob, whimper, cry).

Q. OK how about your best review?

A. That came from a school where I went to read from my books and talked about the profession of writing. I read to a school third grade class. The teacher had each of the children write their own sequel to my story, (*Horace the Hopper*), and the best story came from a little girl that read her story to me. I was so proud of her and I cannot fully express the pride and admiration of her efforts in providing me the opportunity to hear her story. I was extremely touched. I still get a little heart tug, just thinking of how wonderful that made me feel.

Q. What advice do you have for new writers?

A. You must write a lot, as much as you possibly can. Join a good writing group. They will push you to write all the time and they will help you see any problems in your writing. Be careful that you are in a good group. Do not stay with a negative sounding group. If they are negative they will not see the good in your writing, only negative.

Write for yourself, don't try to fit into a mold and write like someone else. They already do that. Do it your way, no matter what.

If you want to write your story hanging upside down over a small tank of hungry sharks, while blood drips from your fingertips, I say go for it.

Q. What do you do when you're not writing?

A. Edit.

Q. Can you tell us where people can find you? Website, social media, blog, etc.

A. Facebook: Grant E. Fetters or Grant Fetters.

Website:

www.GrantsWords.homestead.com.

E-mail: GrantCAD@Gmail.com.

Q. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. What final thought and/or message would you like to leave with our readers?

A. Writing for me comes from the heart and the mind. You must be passionate about your writing. For those that want to write, I say, what are you waiting for?, But when you get stuck or think you're ready with the next Great American novel, join a writing group in your area and share with other writers with the same goals. A good writing group is invaluable.

Open Mic Night

Price: Free!

Tampa's family friendly open mic
With Special Guest Host
R.J. Kerker

When: Saturday, January 25, 2014
Time: 8:00 PM - 11:00 PM
Where: The Bunker (f.k.a. Tre Amici)
1907 N 19th St. | Tampa, FL 33605 | P (813) 247-6964
Contact: Tiffani Barner | tbarner@torridliterature.com

www.torridliterature.com
<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>

Join TL Publishing Group and the Tampa community as we celebrate poetry and the arts with our open mic event. Our open mic events are always family friendly and provide an open platform that welcomes all types of artists. In the past, numerous singers, musicians, bands, comedians, poets, spoken word artists, and storytellers have blessed our stage, leaving the microphone in flames.

At our upcoming event, we have R.J. Kerker as our special host for the evening. R.J. is a member of the American Song Box band and a long time supporter of the arts community in Tampa, Florida. He also co-hosted open mic night at Café Kili for several years before retiring to focus on other musical projects. Visit his band page to learn more:

<http://facebook.com/american-song-box>
<http://reverbnation.com/amersongbox>

Visit us during open mic night to learn more about the performers for the evening. There is no charge to attend this event. All performers, emerging and experienced artists, are encouraged to come out and participate. Sign up starts at 7:30 PM.

Please visit our website and like our fan page on Facebook to receive important updates regarding this upcoming event:

<http://www.facebook.com/tlopenmic>
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If you are interested in being a featured poet at one of our events, please contact Tiffani Barner at tbarner@torridliterature.com.

ODE TO LITERATURE

Lavender Luminosity

By Ami S. Pacini

Cozily curled up in my teal corduroy spherical chair
In my creative corner of silently secluded spaces
Ernest eyes glassily glance around this restful room in a daydreamy daze.

Lustrous lavender walls quietly whisper soft soliloquies
Sonorously singing like harmonious hymns
Of powerful praise and ardent adoration.

Captivatingly concentrating on the great modern poets
Passionately pouring from their compositional core
Reciting oratorical overtures of love, loss, loneliness, and liberation.

Visual vestibules unknowingly unlock the poetic pages
Of shadowed secrets and gothic gloom
Fluorescent fantasies and confessional clarity.

Reflectively ruminating through beauteous butterfly winged windows
Blissfully burgeoning into emerging enlightenment and luxuriating latitude
Where the ungodly universe cannot ignite injurious insults and infectious injustices.

For in this sacred sanctuary of literary learning and philosophical persuasion
Body and soul are calmly connected and conscientiously centered
Through tranquil thoughts, orbiting observations and panoramic perceptions.

Latent layers of imaginative impressions and abstract admissions
Artistically awaken a rousing realm of visionary veracity and effervescent essence
Palpably percolating within the whispering walls of lavender luminosity.

Amy S. Pacini a freelance writer from Land O Lakes, Florida. Pacini is the Poetry Editor for *Long Story Short* ezine and was previously a volunteer reader and editor for *Short Poem* ezine. She is the founder of Pasco Poets, and has held memberships in Poets Live, Brandon Poets & Artists Guild, the International Women's Writing Guild, and The Write Time. Her work has been published in *Torrid Literature Journal: Revolution*, *Kind Of A Hurricane Press: Mistletoe Madness Anthology*, *Making Waves Poetry Anthology*, *All Things Girl*, *Magnapoets*, *Hope Whispers*, *Hanging Moss Journal*, *Sand Literary Journal*, and many other publications. Pacini writes poetry, short stories, personal essays, and motivational quotes. She is the owner and operator of A.S.P. INK and its site www.amyspacini.com.

Sally Vogl teaches visually impaired kids in Fresno Unified School District. She is in the MFA program at California State University-Fresno. Her work has appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Comstock Review*, and in *Writers' Journal*.

LOOKING FOR MAMA

By Sally Vogl

After Stanley Kunitz

My brother and I circled the house
searching for Mama, for the folds
of her skirt. We screamed at Dad,
begging him to bring her home;
our cries, cut through the black
of night. He hid her paintings
and her photos, and I kept looking
for her face. Later, I learned
Mama's brain had hemorrhaged;
Dad cocooned her in an ambulance
and rushed her to a second hospital,
desperate for a cure. He couldn't forgive
her for dying. I found her paintings—
seagulls perching on rocks at sunrise,
waves ready to break—locked in a closet
all these years, the sun entombed.

Bethany Pauls is an eighteen-year-old Canadian student with an interest in writing in general and poetry in particular.

POSSIBILITY

By Bethany Pauls

Its universe wide and
Autumn leaf thin
A vapour we only half see
Only half understand
And try to contain
In things we call plans.

It's what could be
Warring with what is
Reconciling with what will be.
Dancing before us
And laughing at our constraints.

It sees the barriers
The fears, expectations, thoughts
That relegates it
To the label of *impossibility*
That keeps us here.

It says "You could do this"
And we shout "No!" without words.
So it calms, quiets, rests and
Lets us form our own realms of
Possibility.

Sophia Eldridge has two brothers, one younger, and the other older, and she lives on a farm. Her favorite pastimes include skateboarding, drawing, writing, and reading.

THIN LINE BETWEEN

By Sophia Eldridge

I hate you
and I love you,
but I hate you
more than I love you.
I mostly hate you for
the fact that I
love you more than I actually
hate you.
I guess,
what I'm trying to say is,
I hate you for loving
everything so much
that I'm beginning to feel
too much for you,
but so un-special towards you
at the same time.

Evan Brennan is an undergraduate student working towards a degree in anthropology. Writing fiction (mostly fantasy and sci-fi) and poetry is a dear hobby of his.

MECIUM MANE

By Evan Brennan

anything
in another language
sounds better
than your own

except for one phrase
in which death
is the only enemy,
a sufferer will speak:

stay with me

Amy S. Pacini is a freelance writer from Land O Lakes, Florida. Pacini is the Poetry Editor for *Long Story Short* ezine and was previously a volunteer reader and editor for *Short Poem* ezine. She is the founder of Pasco Poets, and has held memberships in Poets Live, Brandon Poets & Artists Guild, the International Women's Writing Guild, and The Write Time. Her work has been published in *Torrid Literature Journal: Revolution*, *Kind Of A Hurricane Press: Mistletoe Madness Anthology*, *Making Waves Poetry Anthology*, *All Things Girl*, *Magnapoets*, *Hope Whispers*, *Hanging Moss Journal*, *Sand Literary Journal*, and many other publications. Pacini writes poetry, short stories, personal essays, and motivational quotes. She is the owner and operator of A.S.P. INK and its site www.amyspacini.com.

BIOGRAPHICAL BLANKS

By Amy S. Pacini

Sometimes my mind fails to recollect
Life's intricate details and finest moments
Whether it's peoples' names, street signs, or telephone numbers
Book, movie or song titles
Restaurants dined at, shops browsed in or parks visited
Dates of first steps taken, lessons learned or successes achieved
Things that I once remembered mysteriously blur together
Like an abstract painting
As the years increase their inevitable pace.

Perhaps my mental psyche has become so cluttered
With information overload and technological progress
That the memories easily drift
To the hidden recesses of my mind
Like a gleaming midnight moon
Beneath a foggy obsidian sky.

I fear developing dementia
And the inability to fully recognize
The prominent people and momentous memories
Which have encompassed my life's prolific existence.

There are some who keep writing memoirs
As mementos of their life journey
Expressing felt emotions
Dreams desired
Goals attained
Chronicling significant events and milestones.

There are others who piece together
Beloved keepsakes and photographs
To form scrapbook stories and snapshot memories
Visually narrating various stages of their lives
From youth to adulthood.

But those of us who do not preserve the annals of age
May either have keen cognizance
Recalling days of yore with photographic clarity
Without a physical record of remembrance
Or they will stare at a blank screen of subconscious obscurity
Attempting to load a lifetime of memory chips
Without a cerebral collection of long-term data.

When my mind fails to recollect
Life's intricate details and finest moments
I ponder the importance of filling in the biographical blanks
Even when I don't believe I will forget them.

But even if I do
The mental memories of my life's era
Will forever dwell in my soul
Because they are born with no expiration date.

Clemencio Montecillo Bascar is a former Professor and Vice President for Corporate Affairs at Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga City. Bascar is a multi-awarded poet, songwriter, and playwright who writes columns, articles, and books. He is married to Melinda C. Dela Cruz and has three kids, namely; Jane, Lynnette, and Timothy James.

FAUSTIAN FLAME

By Clemencio Montecillo Bascar

By sheer ignorance
I towed a dream pigment
Toward the wrong side of dawn

It was my first dalliance
With despair

Unknowingly I crossed the threshold
Of childhood in the winter
Of innocence

Bitterly time wept
Like a hog-tied wind

Somehow there was
A consuming sense of torment
At the center of life; yet, a strange force
Was keeping every mangled piece in its place

And as I stared into the rimless void
I realized that the dream I was pushing across
A field of sunshine
Was the reality
Of my worst fear

Then the voyage into the heart of creation began

But what a misfortune
I was left behind to sustain a rim fire
For the darkest alley of eternity

Faustus
Grabbed it for a fleeting
Magic of the breaking
Day

Jaimie E. Miller is a graduate of Troy University and she is currently working on her Masters degree at the University of West Alabama. Miller is married with two beautiful children.

I'LL WALK

By Jaimie E. Miller

"Life is a shining moment that we take for granted at times.
It took awhile for the darkness to show it's signs.
You fell in whirlwind it seemed
But still held onto your dreams.
You promised to fight if we'd stand by you;
We promised that our love would be true,
That you'd make it out alright,
All you had to do was fight.
I'd stand by you every step of the way,
I'd walk every second come what may.

So I'll walk
To your hospital room everyday.
And I'll walk
And kneel by your bedside and pray.
If it takes forever,
Forever is what I'll do.
I'll walk
So you don't have to.

There were times it got too hard,
Times where you felt the pain sear and scar.
But still you walked on
Never losing sight of the dawn.
The storms sometimes ceased
Then rolled through again in full release.
And through it all
We walked and we ran and sometimes we crawled.
You did all that you could do;
Time can never erase you.

So I'll walk
When you can't anymore.
I'll walk
Now that you have wings to soar.
If it takes forever,
Forever is what I'll do.
I'll walk
In honor of you.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way,
Nobody ever thought they'd see this day.
Where walking down the hallway meant tears flowed
With feelings like our hearts would explode.
Where goodbyes were said
And tears were shed
And we walked together all dressed in black
Only wanting to have you back,

But we knew
We'd have to walk without you.

So I'll walk
I'll light a candle to remember you.
And I'll walk
As long as it takes to see you through.
If it takes forever,
Forever is what I'll do.
I'll walk
In memory of you..."

Jennifer G. Davis holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. When she's not writing fiction for her own personal endeavors, she writes freelance professionally from her home in Chattanooga, Tennessee. An avid scrapbooker, traveler, and lover of Victorian literature, she works tirelessly to write thought-provoking works that benefit her readers.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR

By Jennifer G. Davis

I lost you under the stairs one day,
like a ball point pen
rolling down into the couch cushions
you just slipped out of my hands,
snuggled right into the carpet,
avoiding vacuum cleaners and
fastidious spring cleaning for years
before deciding your hiatus
had run its course on the ground.

In my dreams (night as well as day)
I talked you into coming back. Against
the backdrop of endless
mountain ranges and sprawling fields—clichéd things,
you know the type—we talked
of love and hope and afterlife.

We never talked about the way roads always
seem to bend in the wrong places,
how dogs and children only bother
those who hate them,
how I never could understand the French language.

I once tried to argue
with you about heaven and hell, but to no avail.
As the evidence of things unseen,
you must have had some notion
of these places. I sometimes wished
you'd stayed hidden in the carpet collecting dust.

The sum of all my parts being whole,
I really had no use for you.

It's like this: sitting in a hammock on a fine summer day,
breezes just exactly right,
you came flying in as a mosquito.
No amount of swatting
did the trick, you just lingered there
until I got a bottle of poison
and forced you off the premises.
And after you went, I checked myself
to see if you'd invaded my space,

sure enough, a red spot
swelling at the speed of touch
appeared on my left arm.
Weeks later, outside the steps
of an ancient school hall
I rediscovered you lying
under a brown crackly leaf
and a piece of old gum.

The funny thing is, no one seemed to mind
as they trampled by, bits of you
clinging to their shoes.

The air shifted, dropped
a few degrees into the hands of fall,
and I was falling. In love,
out of it, back and forth.

My head dizzied at the sight of you,
like too much flu medication
and not enough solid food,
I was caught up in blankets, sweating
like hell and frozen at the core.

On February 7th the fever broke, chills
receding as the snow piled up.
Frost crept into the corners of old window panes
in a church two hours from home.

I tried to discuss the improbability
of the answer to life being forty-two,
but you kept insisting I find the right question.
At eighteen, the world
started to look a lot more grey,
owing nothing to the bleakness of the winter skies.

The culmination of being—lifeblood, sacrifice,
the eternal note of sadness being swept into the sea,
birth and life and baptism,
the clanging of swords and slashing of pens—
jumbled around thoughts of
more practical things like,
Where is the nearest bathroom? or

THE SUBSTANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR

By Jennifer G. Davis

Where should I go to college?

I found myself face down,
sinking farther into a carpet
filled with the secrets of the ages.

You’ve changed since then,
changed even more since first I lost you
under the stairs. No longer
the tiny voice whispering in my dreams,
the transitory figure shrugging sad shoulders.

At a glance: marbles being spun
into opposite directions, colliding
again when the time is right;
faces on children in backyards,
church picnics, fair fights and races;
the reunion of our coldest friend
to the planetary alignment;
never growing up;
the monster in Ness showing off for the paparazzi;
a mustard seed’s miraculous transformation;
a happily-ever-after.

WRINKLED

By Haylee Rethman

A wrinkled pile of skin
Sagging skin covering
Ancient calcium deficient bones
And steel plates where joints used to be

He lies on the hospital bed.
Shaking, quivering, groaning
Agony adds more lines to
His already crinkled face.

A youthful work of art
Skin supple and full of elasticity
Energy flowing freely in tangles of veins
And happiness beaming out of pores

The boy sits next to him,
Feet planted, knees bent, listening
Wonder fills his head,
And love his heart.

Something in his eyes tells
A tale of his past, seventy years ago
When he looked like
The boy sitting next to him

He sees that something
In the old man's eyes.
What was the world like back then?
And waits for the answer

*I used to love to swim
When I was your age.
It was my entire life
And I was pretty good.*

As he spoke,
A single teardrop slowly streamed
Down the crevices and creases
Of his wrinkled cheek.

Casmir Hodge is from Petersburg Virginia and is a sophomore high-school student at Appomattox Regional Governor's school for the arts and technology. Hodge majors in literary arts, and recently won first place in the Poetry Society of Virginia's statewide poetry contest.

SEEING DOUBLE

By Casmir Hodge

Be a silhouette	
And together we could be	Of you, of me
We can stand	Reflections.
While our shadows dance	On opposite sides of the mirror
Black and white imitations	On the walls.
Through slightly frowning smiles.	Of our silently screamed whispers
Thicker than helium	And when we fall through the floor,
Chalk outlines	We could be
	Of imagination.

Chang Shih Yen is from Malaysia, but currently lives in New Zealand. Shih Yen has a first class BA (Hons) degree in English and Linguistics, and a MA in Linguistics from Otago University in New Zealand.

AT THE AIRPORT

By Chang Shih Yen

Sad, lonely and all alone,
Forgotten and all forlorn.
I'm by myself while around me
Everyone has been picked up.
Is anyone coming for me?
Slightly battered, slightly bruised,
I have been used and abused.
I've been thrown around by life.
It's OK, I'm still alive.
Yes, it's true. I may be old,
I can still be of service.
Never too old to travel.
I'm a sad, single suitcase,
Going round the conveyer belt.

HOME

By Chang Shih Yen

H-O-M-E
How can one four-letter word be so confusing?
Where is my home?
Is it here?
Is it there?
Where is my home?
Is it where my heart is?
But where is my heart?
Home can't be in my rib cage.
Is home the place where I belong?
But where do I belong?
Is home a place or just a state of mind?
When xenophobes shout, 'Go home!'
I wish I knew where that is.
Somewhere where I can go and just be me...
At home.

Elizabeth Musselman lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and she is an author of short literary fiction, poetry, and autobiographical essays. Her ideas for fiction tend to come to her in the form of dreams, and she doesn't like to write anything that doesn't seem to strike a deep and reverberating chord within the reader; these chords may range from the tragic to the absurd. Musselman centers her essays, by and large, around her experiences living and interacting in an urban environment. As a poet, she prefers the medium of "graphic poetry" (using various fonts and collaging techniques to create poems- this process might be compared to gluing together a ransom letter to disguise handwriting, if she can compare it to anything at all). Musselman is also a musician, and she has been actively creating literature and music since the age of fourteen; it is virtually the only thing that makes her happy.

GUARD RAIL

By Elizabeth Musselman

The spoils of glorious misspent
youth,
so fierce that it galvanized the
very air surrounding you,

must have crept, little by little,
into your advancing years,
ticking and whirling,
a mad juggernaut;

and certainly you never knew
how or where to draw
the line
or even that such a line could exist.

Maybe the way that
the streetlights
elongated into livid
streaks of vivid
lightning
beneath your wheels, on the
wet pavement

transfixed you

that deadly night;

and you were
flying,
laughing like
a maniac

your lead foot pressing
the pedal down til
it could go no further.

Certainly death did not
haunt your thoughts as
you pounded down the
roadway that night;

your blood was
singing, your limbs loose
and cocky with booze,

only mysterious

deities now know

why you'd choose
the paths you'd choose;

the paths that merely
dead-ended, into

anguish and at last
the grave.

Forever silencing any
sage things you'd say,

leaving behind

merely your pale
countenance, to be
claimed atop a
steel slab

by someone who loved
you too much to beg

you to slow down.

How your myriad
wounds must haunt

them now;

as the only whispers
of you remain in the
tears freezing solid

upon their cheeks.

You died high, live
and flying,

and scattered them all
like autumnal leaves.

Jacob Erin-Cilberto, originally from Bronx, New York, now resides in Carbondale, Illinois. Erin-Cilberto has been writing and publishing poetry since 1970. He currently teaches at John A. Logan and Shawnee Community colleges in Southern Illinois. His work has appeared in numerous small magazines and journals including: *Café Review*, *Skyline Magazine*, *Hudson View*, *Wind Journal*, *Pegasus*, *Parnassus* and others. Erin-cilberto also writes reviews of poetry books for *Chiron Review*, *Skyline Review*, Birchbrook Press and others. He has reviewed books by B.Z Niditch, Michael Miller, Barry Wallenstein, Marcus Rome, musician Tom Maclear and others. *Intersection Blues* his lucky 13th book of poetry is available through Water Forest Press, Stormville, New York. His previous two books an *Abstract Waltz* and *Used Lanterns* are also available through Water Forest Press. His books are also available on Barnes and Noble.com and Amazon.com as well as Goodreads. Erin-cilberto has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2006-2007-2008 and again in 2010. He teaches poetry workshops for Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

VOICES IN THE ASYLUM

By Jacob Erin-Cilberto

a spoken word
metamorphosed into an almost penned line
a whisper inked to a page
barely audible but carrying weight

enough to transform the reader
into a mood swinging carrion
maggots mourn the poet
as they munch on his multiplicity

happy homonyms find sanctity
within the breast where the heart
lies safely hidden, until that line
is almost finished

the sappy synonyms stand at attention
as the reader devours the poet's tears
and then digests them with their own
creating an organic flow of festering phonetics

driving both mad
but in that world, sanity is the stranger
ink the blood that unites the writers
and unties their bond with normalcy

we hit Dickinson's plank in reason
and we break themes like hard bread
we eat the words dry, no jam
just jammed up minds that can only

unfurl when the flags of like minds
wave in the cave of creativity
in order to keep the spoken word
surviving until it finds a page

on which to take residence
in a place others fear
to get near.

Sandra Widner Burch won an Editor's Choice Award in 2008 for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry for her poem "No More Fears" and it is published in *Collected Whispers*. Her poem "Sixteen Candles" advanced to the semi-final round of the National Amateur Poetry Competition and is published in *Sunflowers & Seashells*. "He Bled for Me" was published in *Patience and Grace* in 2011. "A Mother's Prayer" inspired by her son, Casey, was a semi-finalist in an International Open Poetry Contest in 2012. Her love for writing and reading poetry keeps her striving to inspire others with her words.

SLOW DANCE

By Sandra Widner

Have you ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?
Or gazed at the sun as it fades into the night?
You should slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

Do you run through the day without looking up at the sky?
When someone asks how you are, do you hear the reply?
You should slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

Have you ever told a child that you will do it tomorrow?
And in your hurry, never see their sorrow.
You should slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

Have you ever let a friendship die?
Because you were too busy to call and say hi.
You should slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

When you go so fast to get somewhere,
You miss half of the fun of getting there.
Life is not a race. You should take it a little slower.
Hear the music before the song is over.

Gina Marie Mammano V. is a poet, teacher, spiritual director, and visual artist who resides on Whidbey Island in the state of Washington. The play of words, sounds, the pursuit of meaning-making, and the sometimes coincidental, sometimes intentional, sometimes unusual juxtapositions that tie them altogether are what drives her work. Her previously published works include: "Moon", *Target Earth Magazine*, 1998, "Truth Windows", *Melange*, 1999, "I Put My Palms," *The Other Side*, 2001, "Melon," *Zafusy*, 2007, "Cylindropuntia Wolfi", *Language and Culture*, 2007, "Grandma Wore", *The Dos Passos Review*, 2007, "Wedding Day", *The Apple Valley Review*, 2007, "I Cannot Go To The Blue Places", *Pilgrimage*, 2008, "Lenten Meditation", *Relief Journal*, 2008.

BLUENESS

By Gina Marie Mammano V.

Palor of skin in the moonlight. Cerulean flame in the desert sky. The unrealistic color of veins. My father's hair when it's not black.

I felt lost between the pages of a book. Couldn't find my way out.

The grey outside poured water in the shadows. The grass may smile when the rain comes, but the pavement mourns. I wanted to place my hand under the skin of the street. Smooth the earth underneath it like a bed sheet. Things tend to cry out when they're covered against their will. The pavement may smile, but it's guaranteed, the other things mourn.

I wish I were the color of rain today. Rain is clear. People mistake it for grey or blue. It is clear. There's always made mention of the dirt particle in the clear. I can live with a dirt particle. Clarity, however, I cannot live without.

Tammy Lynn grew up on a small farm with her grandparents. She started writing at the age of eight when a neighbor gave her a diary for her birthday. She is a mother of two children Ashley R and Michael A and a grandmother to Nicholas. She was the type of girl who could be found reading a Nancy Drew book in the field surrounded by the sounds of nature. She has two half-brothers. Lynn is a Military widow currently living in South Florida. She wants the world to see the beauty in photos she takes as well as feel something with her words.

LITTLE GIRL DREAMS

By Tammy Lynn

I use to lie awake at night
dreaming of the white knight and
shining castle the fantasy all of us have
but then reality would hit
as I watched with envy
those girls who had the father
saving them from the harm this world offers
I never knew my father
I guess its a part I longed for
that hand to hold telling me it will be alright
walking me down the aisle
being proud of my accomplishments
cheering me on when I needed it the most
I often wonder
would my father have been happy
at the way I turned out
my dreams of being the princess
well that never happened
but I did become the mommy
now the grandmother
I reached the stars in my writing
making others feel what I had experienced
I wonder what my Dad would say
at my choice of men
would he have given me advice
would I have listened
all these thoughts echo in my head
that seem to haunt me at times
the one thing I wanted the most
was my fathers love
something others take for granted
but I can dream of it
knowing he does love me
that he is proud of me
the woman I became
my little girl dreams
were not of the man of my dreams
but of the Dad I never knew
somewhere he knows
I love him
I know he loves me too

Talia Washington is a poet and spoken word artist from Peoria, Illinois. She plans to publish her book in late January titled *Picketing the Cotton Mills*.

WRITER'S BLOCK

By Talia Washington

in this secret journal, there are ink•blotches older
than my first born child,
if they could talk, they would certainly tell a story of
their own, but i insist that they tell mine,
there are different colors of ink in this secret journal,
it helps me keep track of the dates,
my favorite is the yellow,
some people say
that the
yellow
is
difficult
to see
on
white
paper,
maybe i don't want them to see...
i also like, dirty white, abomination brown,
puke orange, & pee green,
hmmm, which reminds me, i wonder
whats for dinner? skimming
through the pages of my
secret journal, i came across a journal
entry i wrote fifty some years ago,
titled:
addition or subtraction,
it was about my big announcement-
of me being pregnant to my
soon to be husband,
he wasn't so excited, & neither was i, i was hoping that
he would impregnate my mind
and let knowledge be conceived,
but he reeked at the idea,
& before long, my
soon to be husband,
was
my current ex fiance,
in this secret journal, the pinmanship is different
on every other page! who else could be contributing-
stories to my secret journal?
i've been the only one in this room for over twenty years,
i am bathed in this room, & clothed in this room,
& i am fed in this room, & to my knowledge, my secret
journal has never left this room,
i suppose, i am the one and only author of this book,
my secret journal is alive, it's veins are pulsating within
the blue horizontal lines, if you tell it your deepest thoughts,
it will consume you,
my secret journal has a lock attached to it, & only

DARKNESS

By Joseph Sobczak

Imagine trying to reach out for help and not one person will understand
Walking lost down a dirt road with no one there to hold your hand

Opening up the drapes every day but you never see the sun
To get away from your problems all you can think to do is run

No idea when this all started no idea when it will end
The only time you show true happiness is when you convince yourself to pretend

Endless hours alone staring at the ceiling asking yourself why
No knowing who you are anymore as a tear runs from your eye

You'd do anything in your power to free your mind from this madness
So maybe you could smile again and get a break from all the sadness

Not even your family can understand the pain inside that you feel
It's only when you hit rock bottom that you find who loves you for real

FIRST KISS

By Joseph Sobczak

As I look into your eyes and see the beauty that is you
If I could only get my body to cooperate with what my heart wants to do

I've dreamed of this moment for what feels like 100 years
I almost did it so many times but could never get over my fears

My palms are sweating my knees are shaking
I can feel it in my throat how fast my heart is racing

I have to do it now or forever I will regret
But what you did for me next I never will forget

You grabbed my hand and pulled me close as you looked right into my eyes
And told me you were nervous to which took me by surprise

You took away all my worries and put my mind at ease
I wrapped my arms around you and time began to freeze

As we both leaned in and our lips finally met my dream had just come true
I wanted to stand there forever in that moment together just holding you

From the time that I first saw you I hoped it would come to this
The innocence and the beauty of our first kiss

Sara Elliott is a student aspiring to be a great writer. Elliott leans towards the more macabre subject matter and she wants all of her poems to have some sort of message or meaning to them. She is a Kentucky native and hopes that her words can speak to many people all over the world.

Sea of Faces

By Sara Elliott

Every new day brings a tide of new faces
ripples of recollection, yet I've never seen them before.
Their well-known wetness creeping up to my ankles
as those faces soak my feet on an unfamiliar shore.

A swirl of forced smiles curving eyebrows in salt
lends me to leave the sand of my purgatory.
To wade through the eyes of pitiful glances
rinsing away remnants of a broken unloved story.

The paper shell I wear falls to pieces while submerged
leaving my disfigurement exposed to the judgmental deep.
The trickles of sympathy that once glistened as masks
replaced by faces reflecting grudges that they keep.

Caught in the undertow in schools of aggravated expression
I tumble, aware this new tide is not so forgiving.
My face joins the ocean and my lungs exhale confusion.
Drowning in the sea of faces I, too, am tired of living.

Saudia Moore was raised in the United States of America and has always held a passion for musical, written, and visual arts. Moore has been involved in all three since her earliest memories and has evolved into a very skilled writer, saxophonist, vocalist, and fashion coordinator. Moore's poetry reflects personal experience, reveals epiphanies and revelations, and she is moved by inspiration and imagery. Moore writes with the intent to entertain, enlighten, and educate.

BEFORE THE DAY IS OUT

By Saudia Moore

Unbelievable and unexplainable the way things play out
Observing life's game at a mental distance
Trying to reach the understanding before the day is out
Racing blind against time, carrying mercies and repentance
I desire to move higher so that I may reach life's ear
Perhaps I'd whisper all of my questions when I get near
Yet I rest on its shoulders trying to relocate before the day is out
I am entangled by its strong tresses which dangle
And here I remain, trying to find my way out

THE WATER

By Saudia Moore

There is not a worry in this water
There is not a part in this sea
As it flows connected and continuously
Rippling in reaction to the gusts of wind
But never ceasing nor coming to an end
Holding the sand, life and impurities
Holding mystery, holding history
The rain paints the surface of the water
As the water grows deeper and stronger
Nothing can evaporate the life of this body
Now dense with experience
Necessity to live longer.

Curtis R. Smith is a creative visionary - an award winning published poet/author and singer/songwriter. He released his first book of poetry, *Passion Marks Poetic Confessions* in 2006 and followed up with his debut R&B/Pop music album, *In This Moment* in 2010. He's currently finishing up his second poetry collection, *I, Poetic Confessions, II* and plans to return to the recording studio to begin work on his sophomore album in 2013.

...AT HELLO

By Curtis R. Smith

...hello
you're here and I didn't even know it
like a poet I imagined you
creatively I explored you
but didn't know you from hello.

...amazed
I'm amazed at the connection
like a reflection in my vision
our minds align in unison
and I'm satisfied, yet greatly amazed.

...intrigued
genuinely allowed to dig deeper
non-evasive, yet deeper we soul search
where our thoughts are free of judgment
our minds become more intrigued.

...tell me
do you like what you see?
for I see something good for me
something greater even
at the chance, won't you tell me?

...do we
just leave it at hello
and carry on no more
or give in to conversation
since you had me at hello...

Dennis Amadeus is a 25 year old poet and spoken word artist from Tampa, Florida. He has been seriously pursuing poetry for almost a year and a half now and could not be happier. Amadeus has competed in and won poetry slams both locally and nationally and was a member of the 2013 Sacred Sounds Slam team that represented Tampa Bay in the 2013 Southern Fried Regional Poetry Competition. He writes because it is his calling.

BUOYANCY

By Dennis Amadeus

She was like an angel when I first laid eyes on her,
a halo of positive energy surrounded her.
It almost seemed like she was floating,
fluttering her way into my heart
with butterfly elegance.

She was light personified:
bright,
warm,
inviting,
eyes wide with sunshine
and a smile that spreads across the horizon on the dawn of a new day
shining over an ocean of depth
in which I
was just getting my feet wet.

However,
a fear of drowning returned me to the shore.
I felt her sunshine on my back as I walked away.

I would return,
and even though I know that I cannot swim
the sparkling glimmer of her sun kissed skin drew me back again.
Waves of conversations enticing me in,
learning the flow of such a magnificent current
at least gave me a temporary boat.
But I want so much more than to just be a friend
yet I can barely keep my head afloat
and I'm scared to dive in.

So,
a fear of drowning returned me to the shore.
I felt her sunshine on my back as I walked away.
I would return,
to this oceans ways of creating beautiful things.
Little pieces of God forged in the salty depths of her soul,
dried by the passion of her glimmering light in the sky,
emerging as diamonds for the world to see,
repeatedly.
I sat in awe of her talent
and constant push to make her tides rise.
I realized why everybody loves the beach
they even pay her just for a piece,
but for me,
price drags me down in the deep.
These ankle weights don't come cheap

and once again,
a fear of drowning returned me to the shore.

I felt her sunshine on my back as I walked away.

I would return,
because, it would seem,
that this beautiful scene actually remembered me.
She reached out her rays.
If she only knew how much her beams brighten up my day
as they light up the words of my life written on a page
and it becomes clear,
we have a lot in common,
and even though her vastness is great
it's comforting to know that we both obey.
The all powerful moon controls her tides
just as it controls my days and nights
and we both pray for the same-
that we can help our God save lives.
but still I am ashamed,
because the world's gravity still grounds me
and I still can't swim.

A fear of drowning returned me to the shore.
I felt her sunshine on my back as I walked away.
This time it stings.
Sunburned
because I can't keep her feeling off my skin
and no matter how hard I keep trying to peel off dead layers
I can still feel the pain
forever lingering.

I wonder if she feels the same,
since it seems the only thing that can salve this fiery notion
is the calming depths of a wonderful ocean,
a beautiful smile spreading across the horizon,
the embrace of a butterfly's wings,
and a kiss from an angel with so much love to give,

I guess
It's time I learned how to swim.

Oren Korashvili is from Queens, New York. Korashvili's story is still being written, but he is an ambitious writer, inspired on a daily basis.

TO A MIND GROWN OLD

By Oren Korashvili

The flailing winds of fairgrounds deserted
Show not the spark of youth we exerted.
The tents are torn along with our dead hopes.
Hold on to your hearts.

This desolate picture embraced my mind.
My heart would never show this to the blind.
Though I live to see the day it rises,
My mind tells me no.

The boardwalk creeks a breath of it's despair,
For no one has possessed that child-like flare.
I see no reason to refrain from this;
Simply a carousel.

Yet, my head overcomes my heart's desire,
To reignite what is left in this fire.

Stephanie McCauley is a recent graduate of Southwestern University and soon-to-be MFA student at Eastern Washington University. She enjoys all things poetry-related, and am fascinated by ducks, religion, and the quiet company of cats.

CATULLUS PLEADS HIS CASE

By Stephanie McCauley

The bird that speaks is no bird. Don't trust his
burning word or the branch clutched in his beak.

Real birds twitter melodies,
then regurgitate mash for their babies.
This fellow
is a mere philosopher, plopping nonsense
syllables into your palms.

The bird that speaks is no bird. That cat that eats
knows this. Uncanny quivers ripple his throat.

Tabby retches up the imposter.
The bird (no bird) hops on unruffled. Beware.
Kiss him,
Lesbia, if you must, but kiss him goodbye.
He will only love you then lie.

Beth MacFarlane is a jack of all trades, master of some, finds happiness in making things. Now in her 5th decade, she has turned her creative energy towards words. She lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

ISAAC

By Beth MacFarlane

My Mother showed me a diary
she had found in a dust covered box,
in our musty smelling basement.
Somehow the diary didn't smell.

The cover was brown,
the pages lightly lined in blue.
It was small, but thick.

It was Isaac's diary,
my Mother's Great Grandfather.
He lived in Rhode Island.
The diary read

January 4 - Made nails, cold & light snow.

March 11 - Made nails.

May 18 - Made nails, Pa sick

July 25 - Made nails, hot & dry.

I pictured this man Isaac
rising each day and
walking somewhere to make nails.

Pounding iron into the shape of a nail.
I pictured him making nails all day.

September 2 - Made nails, Pa worse.

I pictured him sitting outside on a tree stump,
unpacking a lunch from a metal bucket.

November 9 - Made nails.

I wondered what he would write
when his Pa died and if he would
walk to work and make nails.

FICTION

THE DIARY OF A CLAUSTROPHOBIC MOUSE

By Leah Schwartz

Leah Schwartz is a 15-year-old Southern Californian who loves to read and write.

There are so many colors; Pink, orange, magenta, vertigo molasses. The halls are tall and narrow like my aunt Gilda's shoulders, yet low, crushingly low. I feel my breath coming in and out, a steady current. It twists and curls out of my mouth, slapping and flowing into oblivious passerby. I walk among them giving, taking; eating and sleeping, yet they do not notice me among their suede boots, molten running shoes, and immaculate oxfords.

Do they ever wonder who carefully cleans up their toxic spillage and chases the creature with the harmful mind? Do they ever wonder how one moment they had yet enough currency to buy one meager meal and the next a small pile of it awaits them around the corner? They have eyes yet they do not see.

A crumb of bread awaits me in the central café. It looks well enough, but I still need to check it. An old chap like me could be gone in an instant from the vile pellets they have begun to disperse throughout the crumbs left on the floor and in the cabinets. That is one reason many of my brethren have migrated to forested lands, away from metal contraptions, and death colored wind. They have given up on these creatures that have forgotten the ways of this world, but I have hope. When their world topples down I will be there to upright it, along with all the earth's guardians even if they have forgotten the sounds of the ground and the smell of moss and dirt.

I believed the bread to be safe and put a minute crumb on the tip of my tongue. I swallow. The bread tastes like sawdust and winter. I feel my throat constrict and tighten. The last thing that comes to my ears from this world is a womanly shriek followed by, "there's a dead mouse in the kitchen".

There, the tale of my unadventurous, inglorious demise.

My last and final hope is that one day they will remember what I know they have nestled safely, deep below the surface of their hearts. "Once we were one, now we are many, but still we are one".

FIRST TIMES

By Maureen Lincke

Maureen Lincke is a senior at Lakewood High School, born and raised in Colorado. The time she doesn't spend on homework she spends writing in her well-worn journal and attending her weekly creative writing class with Lighthouse Writers in Denver, Colorado. Her accomplishments include recognition from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards in 2011, receiving a certificate of merit for two poems.

The thing about first times is that they aren't first times until there's been a second, because until then it's the only time. You aren't nervous but your hands are sweaty and you can feel the slow effects of cognitive psychology as your brain reacts to an emotion that's not there. And you don't tell anyone, but the moment before the needle sharp injection comes your way you are thinking about your parents and how they met when your mother's hair was flowery and red and your dad's favorite T-shirt was still crisp and white and not yet sagging around his loose belly. And you remember that for their first date they tried heroin together because that's what you did and when there isn't anything to disprove something, it's automatically proven a good idea.

So this is okay, right? This is a casual idea that happened upon you and your friends and you won't die, you're still young, and anyway you don't easily get addicted to things. And you puncture your spongy soap skin with the shards of that sacrificial needle but you will yourself not to think about the mummified remains of dusty people and crusted teeth and boney rosaries that hang on thin collarbones and 80-year old rosaries of your grandmother. You are not sad, per say, because that would suggest depression and you love your life and you love yourself for the most part, but you would say that an early onset of mid-life crisis might be a fair diagnosis. And you didn't think a melancholy nature would lead to this and yet here you are with a needle hovering over your opaque skin.

What was it? Was it the stars in your eyes or the freckles on your wrists or was it the dissatisfaction of being young and restrained, infinite and ever-young. Was it the way your mother nodded and told you that school really isn't that bad—you're being melodramatic—or was it the way you looked at yourself in the mirror after she said that and told yourself that your sum turned out to be a lot smaller than you anticipated.

THE PIT
By Grant Fetters

Grant Fetters is a writer living in Madisonville, Tennessee. His work has appeared in *Backpacker Magazine*, *Newspapers in Michigan*, *Professional Photographer Magazine*, *Knoxville News*. His published works include: *Horace the Hopper*, *War Dream*, *False Prophets*, *Night Walkers*, *What would Grant do?*. Fetters holds memberships in the following: Knoxville Writers Guild (KWG), Children's Fiction Writers... With – KWG, Etowah Writers Group, and Chattanooga Writers Guild (CWG).

How do I describe the smell? That is a tough one. After opening the first door which is the pantry door, I step in. It hits me all at once. The smell of strong and pungent leftovers from past meals. I can smell the roast beef from last night's dinner. A sour tang of a pickled something or other. There is a smell of old fried food. It reminds me of an old bakery that has fried billions of doughnuts. There are also spices and baking supplies that have a scent of their own. Cinnamon and cloves, likely from the pickled peaches or the large crock of pickles at my feet.

At the end of the pantry is a large window that faces out onto the back yard. The pantry is always a bright room considering its small size. I walk across the wood floor covered with flour and dropped sugar, to the second door. This door has a much different feel to it. Just the thought of that door and what lie behind it gives me the creeps. The thought of having to open that door and pass through it, makes my skin crawl yet today. But, I have been set upon my task to go down to the cellar and retrieve some sauce for dinner.

"Oh God, help me!" I thought.

The cellar is the absolute worst thing. I hated the cellar and all things associated with it. It is dark and, it has a bad smell. Many, many times, there is water on the floor. That alone is extremely creepy because there is absolutely no way for a little kid to know how deep the water is.

Inside the door, still on the landing are items that never quite make their way down to the cellar. Extra cans of lard, mops, brooms and various other things I think belonged in different places. They just never got there. Extension cords, lengths of rope, wire and hoses. I think of these things as garage items, but since we don't have a garage exactly, the cellar landing is as good a location as any.

Flipping the light switch on, the single lonely bulb flickers. That one bulb throws just enough light in the cellar to see there is again, water standing on the cellar floor. That scares me more than the monster spiders that web their way across the stairwell every time I come down here. I cannot stand the webs that cling to my face and then to my hands. Hopefully I knock them down before I run into them. I just know there is a 10 inch killer clinging to the filaments wiping across my face. I am sure that I scream quite lucidly on more than one occasion. That might be why I am always sent to the cellar to retrieve items. I just know they are upstairs listening to my screams. I scream like a seven year old school-girl.

After the heebie-jeebies settled down, and I have screamed all I am going to, I still have to get the sauce or the potatoes or other canned food item. Standing on the last step, I looked out over a vast lake of water that completely covers the floor and everything on it. The house is supported by massive beams and posts that grow right up out of the water before me. The room is semi-dark and there is a bad smell from the standing water and the smell of decomposing potatoes or other root vegetables that are stacked up next to the wall. The crates have squash, apples, carrots, cabbage and other fall harvest staples set up on a platform. This keeps them out of any water that leached through the foundation and pooled up in the cellar.

At seven years old my imagination works overtime on the depths of the lake in the cellar. I am sure I see a wake of some sort, breaking the surface. A sea monster, rehydrated, is swimming in the pool at the bottom of the steps. One slip or a misplaced step and the creature will have me. "So long cruel world." I look around for the sauce that I am sent down here for. *"There's not much apple sauce left. I will have to go all the way to the back of the shelves."* It would be so simple, if there was no water to navigate through. With a dry floor I can simply step off the bottom step and walk across the floor to retrieve the jar. Then run as fast as I can up the steps and out of the cellar.

Today, I can't stand it any longer. *"I am going to find out, just how deep the water is."*

Back at the top of the stairs, on the landing is a bamboo stick. I snag it and I'm going to probe the water to find out for myself just how deep it really is. If I stir up the monster that lurks in the depths of the cellar then I will stab him in the mouth with the bamboo stick. *"I don't want to be any closer to the water than the bottom step, just in case the monster is in there."* I lean out and stick the tip of the stick in the water.

"That's strange. I don't remember a high spot in the floor way out there."

Tap, tap, tap. *"Is there a wall there? Is that what I'm feeling?"* Tap, tap, tap. Everywhere I tap with my bamboo stick it touches a raised wall just under the surface of the water. I am certain that if I step beyond that wall the bottom will be gone and I will fall into a bottomless pit and drown. I can't reach any further with my stick. *"I just know that is where the drop off is. I'm not going way out there. Forget that!"*

I look around in order to find an alternate way to get to the apple sauce. I see that if I climb up on the potato bin I can work my way around to the shelves where the canned foods are stocked. So I climb up on the bin and shimmy my way around to the shelves. I almost slip and fall into the pit, twice. I grab the jar of apple sauce, but think, *"If I grab two jars, I could avoid another trip down here."* Clinging to the shelves with my legs wrapped around the upright I have two jars in my hands. But now how do I get back to the stairs without using my hands? I need my hands to hold on to the shelves. I open my shirt and stuffed the two quart jars in. Hugging the shelves like it is a matter of life and death. I work my way back to the potato bin, then to the stairs. The jars clink and clack inside my shirt. At one point they clank so hard I think they will break. One jar almost fell out of my shirt and down to the pit. I catch it just as it is leaving my shirt. I tuck in my shirt a little tighter and finish my journey.

Once I return to the stairs I relax and take a rest. But then I remember the spiders, they are waiting for me to return up the stairs. *"This is crazy,"* I think. *"I risk my life dodging the pit from hell just to be taken out by a creepy eight-legger. I'm not doing this anymore. I'm just not that interested in sauce. I'll go without."*

Through the years I make countless additional trips to the cellar for Grandma. Every trip is full of anxiety and dread while I dodge the enormous spiders and the pit. Not until I am much older did my Grandma ask me; didn't I like any other fruit? Of course I did, but I did not realize that Grandma said sauce to mean fruit, any fruit. It is all the same to her. The canned fruit is meant to be a topper for the meal. The desert and end course of fruit will be the sauce of life, the cherry on top of the ice-cream Sunday and all I can think of is applesauce.

I love the canned peaches, or the berries, or the pickled anything. It is all good, but Grandma always asks me to get some sauce from the cellar. I want to please her and do as she asks, but I am short thinking. I do not use my imagination at all. I cannot see the forest for the trees. So I eat the apple-sauce and I am thankful. The only time I have any other fruit besides apple-sauce, is when my brother goes down to the cellar and he takes his chances over the pit.

OUR GROWING OLD

By M.C. Barnes

M.C. Barnes enjoys writing short stories. Barnes is a part-time graduate student in the Creative Writing program at Texas Tech University and works full-time as an Assistant Director for Financial Affairs at the university. Barnes is currently working on her first novel.

On either side of the Coffman Cemetery archway splays a broken chain-link fence that wraps around the perimeter to keep out unwanted visitors. The fence, however, is superfluous because most days the cemetery sits empty and not a single visitor passes through the archway. Today, though, two twin sisters with matching gray bobs and large sunglasses are wandering the cemetery lawn. Their soft, wrinkled hands linger over gravestones as they read inscriptions. They search leisurely, as though they do not know where to find the grave they are looking for. When they come upon it, there is a brief celebration. Then one of the sisters, Shirley, bends and sets down a bouquet of lilies, while the other sister, Jo, brings a camera to her eye.

“A little to the left.” Jo peeks from behind her Kodak and motions with her thumb.

“There?” Shirley looks over her shoulder at Jo, pushes her wind-blown hair from her forehead, and positions the bouquet of lilies with her other hand.

“Okay, that looks good.”

Shirley lays the bouquet carefully against the gravestone and backs away so Jo can get the picture. Jo takes several pictures, turning the camera horizontal and then vertical, bending in and then leaning back. Shirley stands next to her sister and nods in approval.

“Jo, this is so nice. Such a beautiful day. And, the flowers! Mother loved lilies.”

“I know, Shirley. She did.” Jo steps back and lets the camera dangle on her wrist by its strap.

“Our mother—”

“A lady of class. The lady of the community, you know. All of the baby showers, the wedding showers—mother hosted them all at our home.”

“A lady ahead of her time.”

“She really was.”

They speak a little longer, repeating stories that have already been told as though the deaf ears below them are eager to hear. Jo picks up her camera again and snaps a picture of Shirley as she bends over to trace the letters on the gravestone. Shirley straightens, wanders over to Jo, takes the camera, and with a flick of her wrist releases Jo of her duties.

Shirley is the better photographer, she has a real eye for documenting the moments when the air in the cemetery thickens and sadness falls on her sister's face. She has an entire album of photographs of Jo in cemeteries across the United States. Today, she puts the camera to her eye and captures Jo looking into the distance, her hand gently touching their mother's gravestone. *Perfect*, she thinks, *one of my best*. Although, in truth, no one except Shirley will know that it is Jo in the picture and not Shirley since the two elderly women roaming the cemetery are identical.

“Jo, let's walk around a bit.” Shirley points to a large willow tree in the distance.

“Yes, I wanted to get a picture of Aunt Emily's grave.”

“Oh, yes, we forgot last time. Didn't we?”

Shirley and Jo wander through the cemetery, the summer sun slowing their pace. They stand so close they almost blend together. *We are not the same person*, they would argue, *It's true that we both hate tofu and bowling and poodles, but we are not the same*.

The sisters reach the willow tree and search for Aunt Emily's plot. The tree's branches tickle their shoulders as they brush past and reach for their behinds as they bend to read gravestones. The sun is tucked behind a cloud and the wind has picked up. Shirley stands, stretches her lower back, and glances at her watch.

“Jo,” Shirley wraps her arm around her sister's, “Let's break for lunch. I'm famished.”

“Okay,” Jo turns and quickly scans the gravestones surrounding them.

“Don't worry, we'll come back for Aunt Emily.”

“And Mother. We must say good-bye. We don't come often enough.”

“True. What do we have on the schedule for next week?”

“Savannah. Uncle Richard.”

“Savannah—lovely cemetery. All that Spanish moss on the trees. Make sure I'm buried there,” Shirley nods.

“You say that every week.”

“I can't help it. There are so many good ones.”

Shirley and Jo wander through the cemetery, intertwined, until they reach Jo's silver Cadillac where they part reluctantly, if only for a moment.

Inside the car, it's blistering hot. Shirley rolls down her window and lets the wind blow the sweat off of her neck. Jo refuses to roll down her window and let the air destroy her perfectly coiffed hair, even though the time spent outside at the cemetery has already made her hair do wilt.

They drive into the town of Coffman—a one horse town. Coffman is relatively unfamiliar to them. The birthplace of their mother, her chosen place of burial, but nothing more. They know the town, like the others they visit, through relatives and scattered friends.

"Should we try the Café?" Jo turns the car down Jackson Street.

"What else?"

"I heard there was a new Mexican place down by the grocery. Beulah told me when she called last week."

"How's Beulah?"

"She's well. Not in her usual spirits, but she's adjusting now that John's gone."

"It is an adjustment."

Beulah was their first cousin—Aunt Emily's daughter.

"She won't join us for lunch?" Shirley rolls up her window.

"No. Said she had other plans."

"Doubtful. So sad when they get like that. I hope she'll rebound soon."

Jo parks the car outside George's Café. They walk inside to the raised eyebrows of three farmers sitting in the corner booth. They choose the booth closest to the farmers, although the rest of the Café is empty. Shirley thinks she recognizes one of the men, proceeds to introduce herself, but, no, the men aren't familiar with either of the sisters.

"Knew your mother," one of the men reflects. He is close to eighty years old and scratches his beard as he talks.

"You knew our mother!" Shirley exclaims.

The men are no longer strangers. Shirley pulls a small table next to the farmers' booth and settles in without being invited. Jo joins her sister, glad to meet someone who knew their mother, but wishing for the quiet lunch she had planned.

"Your mother Emmeline Baker?" asks the second farmer, who is wearing overalls. He looks even older than his friend with the beard.

"Yes, that is our mother." Jo smiles.

"Emmie Baker... moved away in grade school. I remember her though. I sure do," says the bearded man.

The third farmer is younger—mid-life—and thin. His expressionless eyes are watching Jo and Shirley. He clears his throat.

"This is my son, Ralph," nods the man with the beard. "He's not much for conversation."

Ralph blinks and slides his eyes from the sisters toward the window.

"I remember your mother, she could sing like an angel," say the farmer wearing overalls, "When she sang specials in church, I thought, I'm gonna marry that little piece of heaven. I was nine when she moved away. Never got the chance."

"Oh, yes. Mother had the most beautiful voice. She traveled with a band before she met our Daddy," Shirley says.

"She did? She never told me that," Jo shakes her head. "Are you sure?"

"It only lasted a couple of months, then she met Daddy. I can't believe you didn't know. I've got a picture of her singing. I'll show you when we get home."

Jo knits her brow and stares at her sister. She tries to process this bit of unknown information about her mother, tests it against all else she knows about the woman who raised her.

"I think I heard that Emmie was singing in a band," the bearded man nods to confirm Shirley and Jo feels offended that a stranger knows something about her mother that she did not.

"Ain't it time we get back to work?" Ralph mutters.

"I guess it is 'bout that time," the man with the overalls makes a motion to stand.

Jo and Shirley scoot their table away from the booth and allow the three men to slide out.

"So nice to meet you!"

Shirley shakes the hands of the two elderly gentlemen. Ralph is already at the door.

"Likewise."

They tip their hats at Jo and Shirley. The sisters watch the men leave and settle into the newly deserted booth. The restaurant's only waitress comes, cleans the leftover mess, and hands the women menus.

"That was wonderful. I'm so glad we ran into them," Shirley lays down her menu.

"Yes, me too," Jo looks out the window next to the booth and sighs as she watches the men drive away, "What are you having?"

"The chicken basket."

"Shall we split it?"

"Yes, let's do. Too much food for me, you know."

The waitress comes, takes their order, and brings them glasses of iced tea. Jo and Shirley sit in silence and watch as cars pass by the Café. These are the moments Jo enjoys most. She learns so much about the towns they travel to in the quiet moments when she watches the citizens. She enjoys their visits to the cemeteries, but she also loves to travel to new places and experience new things.

The waitress returns with their food and two plates. Inside the red plastic basket are four fried chicken strips and a layer of French fries. Shirley places two of the chicken strips on her plate and Jo does the same. They intermittently grab for French fries in between bites of chicken. When they are finished, the basket still contains half of the French fries and there is a partially eaten chicken strip left on Jo's plate.

Jo looks out the window again, watching as cars pass every few minutes. When she turns back to her sister, Shirley's head is dangling towards her chest and her breathing is heavy. *Able to sleep at the drop of a hat*, thinks Jo, *I wish it was so easy for me*. Jo has not slept well since Harold passed away two years ago. Shirley, though, hardly blinked an eye when Bill died last summer. She called Jo the week after the funeral to suggest they travel together.

"Every week, Jo, we can go to another cemetery. You see? We have so much family," Shirley had said.

"It would be nice to get out more," Jo had paused, "You know I love to travel."

“Yes, we should visit them all. We really should. It will be wonderful.”

The waitress brings the check, slides it towards Jo, and carries away the money Jo places atop the bill. Jo feels tired. Shirley’s rhythmic breathing is lulling her to sleep and she considers closing her eyes for just a moment before they return to the heat outside.

The bell above the entrance dings and Jo’s eyes flicker open. It is a woman with her daughter. The child is young with long brown hair and wide blue eyes. Her chubby hand is holding tightly to her mother’s hand as they approach the counter to speak with the waitress. The mother turns and smiles at Jo. *She looks like my mother*, thinks Jo, *I must be dreaming*. Jo settles further into her seat, feeling relaxed, and nods at the woman with a soft, sleepy smile. She hears the ding of the bell again, but her eyes are closed.

Shirley stirs at a sound. She looks around her, but can’t tell what woke her. *I must have been snoring*, she thinks. Jo is sleeping and the waitress is behind the counter on the phone. Outside the parking lot and the street are empty. The storefront windows across the street have all been covered with plywood and a “closed” sign hangs on the door. Shirley leaves Jo sleeping and goes to the bathroom. When she returns, she lightly touches her sister’s shoulder.

“Jo, wake up. Let’s go.”

Jo yawns. They reach for their handbags and Jo waves good-bye to the waitress. Half-awake, they walk together out of the Café and into the heat.

The cemetery road is blocked by a funeral procession, so Jo pulls her silver Cadillac onto a narrow dirt road on the outskirts of the cemetery that is used for maintenance workers. A family is gathered around the typical green burial tent and holding onto each other as a pastor speaks. There are only eleven people in total.

“Do you recognize any of them?” Shirley leans against her sister and whispers.

“No.”

“Who’s buried on that side?”

“The Williams family, I think. I’m not sure though.”

They pass the tent. Shirley looks back over her shoulder at the attendants trying to recognize anyone who might be the open door for a conversation. No one looks familiar so they continue looking for Aunt Emily’s grave. The area by the willow tree is searched and then the area by their mother’s grave.

“I think she must be over there,” Jo nods towards the funeral.

“Let’s go look then.”

“No, we better not. They are still in the middle of it.”

“We won’t bother them.”

“Of course we will. Let’s say good-bye to Mother and leave.”

Shirley opens her mouth to protest but recognizes the look in Jo’s eyes. In Shirley’s mind, a new friend or two could only be good for the solemn group under the green tent, but Jo thinks otherwise.

At their mother’s grave, Jo bends down and repositions the bouquet of lilies that has already been blown over by the wind. They stand together in silence staring at the gravestone and reading the words that sum up their mother to strangers who pass her grave. Jo intertwines her arm with her sister’s.

“I miss her terribly.”

“I remember the funeral, don’t you?” Shirley glances back towards the green tent across the cemetery.

“Yes, it was lovely,” Jo pauses, “It all happened so quickly.”

“The funeral?”

“Our growing old.”

They think about their mother, their husbands, their children and grandchildren. Shirley shifts and pokes her elbow into Jo’s ribs trying to be freed of the embrace. Shirley is sobbing and trying in vain to wipe the tears away before Jo notices.

“She is all alone. Why did she refuse to be buried next to Daddy?” Shirley wipes her eyes.

“She was a stubborn woman. She had her reasons I’m sure.”

“Who are these people beside her? I don’t even know.”

“Me either.”

Shirley blushes and rubs her eyes and Jo looks at the grass beneath her feet. Jo knows that her sister is mourning more than their mother. That these are the same tears that come to Jo the times she forgets that Harold has died and then suddenly remembers.

The people at the funeral filter out from beneath the green tent. Shirley looks up as the attendants begin to lower the casket and she catches her breath. Jo reaches out and holds her sister’s hand.

“You must bury me next to Bill,” Shirley coughs.

“Of course,” Jo squeezes her sister’s hand.

“Not in Savannah. I can’t stand Spanish moss.”

“I know.”

“What about our plots—the ones outside of Charleston?”

“Don’t worry about it. I knew that you would want to be buried with Bill. Of course you would want that,” Jo looks at her sister’s hand in hers and rubs her thumb across the soft, wrinkled back of Shirley’s hand.

Jo cashed out a certificate of deposit last week to pay for her plot in Charleston. She had sent the money to the cemetery director, who had called her only yesterday to tell her he had received the money and would be waiting for Shirley's portion. Ten thousand dollars, but Jo considered it money well spent. The sisters had planned to be buried next to each other just outside a tea plantation in Charleston. They had spent an entire day at their plots—sunrise to sunset—watching the world around them, soaking up what their lives would be like after their deaths, finding comfort in spending the afterlife side by side as they had always been.

TRANSFER

By Jennifer Palmer

Jennifer Palmer is a rising junior at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She is majoring in Creative and Professional Writing. Palmer has been published in Converse's literary magazine *Concept*, and recently won second place in Suffolk County Community College Creative Writing Award for College Writers in short fiction.

"What'd you do to your hair?"

Sarah's rising voice echoed in the basin of the dog park, seeming to bounce off the dead January grass and rattle between the chain-link fences surrounding the otherwise deserted space. At her feet, Sarah's Corgi Chester started to pant on his leash and strained forward toward a desert cottontail rabbit snuffling at the base of one of the trees in the complex. But Sarah kept her eyes on my face, or more precisely, the area right above my face where I had sliced off my bangs that morning.

"I was tired of it," I said, looking anywhere but her eyes. Beyond the chain-link fences, the low, gray buildings of Mesa, Arizona, sprawled around us. Mountains peered up from the edges of the horizons – Usery Mountain, Camelback Mountain, the Superstition Mountains, all names I remembered from Mrs. Colosanti's second grade class. Which made sense, given the school was named Red Mountain Elementary School after the dominating feature on the northern horizon. The other mountains just scraped the dusty sky from the Earth's corners, like the glint of curved glass at the bottom of a fish bowl.

Chester whined from his leash, but Sarah ignored him.

"But it worked for you, Jake," she said. "What if I said your hair was why I agreed to go out with you?"

Only then did I look her in the face.

"Really?" I asked. She smiled with half her mouth.

"No," she said and grasped my arm, clinging to it. "But I'm happy that that concerned you." She loosened my arm without releasing it and pecked me on the cheek.

"Well, it was part of the reason," she said, "but that was eleventh grade after all."

I blinked. Had it been three years already?

By now, Chester's whine had devolved into a rumbling moan, like he was in pain. Sarah rolled her eyes.

"Fine."

She bent down and unclipped the leash. Chester charged toward the rabbit, tiny legs flying over the ground. The rabbit jumped and bolted toward the fence, squeezing through a gap before Chester could even make it to the tree. Sarah laughed.

"You're never going to get it," she said as Chester walked back and forth along the fence, whining though the rabbit had disappeared. Sarah smirked.

"He'll be there for a while," she said and tucked her hands into her ASU sweatshirt. "So," she said. "One semester left. Have you filled out the application yet?"

I looked away from the dog. "I'm working on it," I said. I had opened the transfer application link on Arizona State University's website at least three times over winter break, but I hadn't started it yet. My mind kept wandering to the other tabs, the transfer application to Northern Arizona University, the school located a hundred and fifty miles north, and the email verifying the submission of my application for the Phi Theta Kappa transfer scholarship. But Sarah didn't know about those. All she knew was that I was transferring out of Mesa Community College for my junior year of college, or, as she would say, *our* junior year of college.

"But seriously," she said, "if you had to cut your hair, why didn't you at least go to a hair salon?" We started walking, but Chester kept sniffing at the fence. Sarah frowned, then whistled. After a moment, Chester returned to her side. I shrugged.

"Why pay someone when I have pair of scissors?" My wallet was thin enough already, and not because it was made in Italy like the Christmas present Sarah had received that she kept gushing about.

"Because that happens," she said, waving her hand at my face. "Let my sister fix it, please."

My mouth twitched, but I went with it. "Okay," I said.

Sarah smiled. "That's better."

"So I heard you had a hair incident," Connor said. He brought a pair of chopsticks to his mouth and slurped up some chow mein from his Panda Express box with the same flicking motion he'd used since fourth grade. The noise of the Superstition Springs Mall food court bustled around us, a mixture of overlapping voices, food frying, and the carousel's song repeating with each new cycle.

"It was terrible," Sarah said before I could. "Thank God Lisa managed to fix it."

I grunted. Last week, she and her sister spent almost fifteen minutes bickering about which way to part my hair. I had sat mutely in the kitchen chair, feeling the stares of old family photos watching me from the walls.

"It'll grow back soon enough," she said, running her fingers through my hair, trailing her nails across my scalp. "It'll be like it never happened."

The carousel started up again, playing the same tune as before. The same horses drifted by, the white one decked out with American flags and ribbons, the scaly hydra shining green and blue under the fluorescent lights, the white fairytale steed spotted with flowers. A row of parents lined the outside of the area. Their heads followed the movement of the carousel's spinning, simultaneously in and out of sync as the heads moved at the same rate while following the rides of different children.

"I can't wait for you to join me in the lab next year, man," Connor said. He slurped up the rest of his noodles, then a grin lit up his face. "Remember in, what was it, tenth grade? When you knocked over the hydrochloric acid?"

I nearly choked on my burger as I snorted.

"I almost forgot about that," I said, dropping the burger and wiping the moisture from my eyes.

"What happened?" Sarah asked.

"Mrs. Shah started yelling at him in Hindi," Connor said.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure she cussed me out," I added with a grin.

"I'm warning you though," Connor said, nabbing a piece of orange chicken with his chopsticks. "We have some late nights. I'm in the lab till two or three at least three times a week. You sure you can handle it?"

"I have gotten better since then, you know," I said. "I'm more worried about driving back home on 202. Someone dropped a freaking rock on my dad's windshield from an overpass last month. Shattered the windshield." I knew the ten minute drive from the campus to my parent's home well enough after visiting Connor and Sarah over the past year and a half, but I still didn't like driving it at night.

"Pff," Sarah snorted. I turned to look at her and she rubbed my shoulder.

"If everything goes right," she said, "I'll have an apartment next year. You can always crash with me." She squeezed my upper arm.

"Oh god," Connor said, turning his face away even as a goofy grin split his face in two.

I chuckled too, but looked away. The carousel came to a stop again. New children climbed on the horses as the old ones got off. The faded plastic of the horses gleamed dully under the light filtering through the ceiling-high windows as the carousel started once again.

A month later, I sat on the bench next to the basketball court in the park two blocks from my home in the Falcon Hill subdivision. The hill itself rose from the ground to the east in front of me like a scabbed pimple. It never lost its brown smudginess (least of all in February) even when the spindly bushes began to bud in the spring. The hill dominated the airspace, visible from any point in the neighborhood.

A group of children played on the playground. Mothers sat on the closest benches and cast an eye my way every once in a while as if to make sure I wasn't a coyote trying to catch one of their little lambs.

They probably attended one of the two Mormon churches, either the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on McKellips Road just north of Falcon Hill or the identically titled church on Brown Road to the south. The kids were probably the little brothers and sisters of the kids my age who never talked to me after my dad slammed the door in their parents' faces when they came by with church invitations.

Beyond the playground, Falcon Hill Elementary School sat on the other side of the hill, its stucco blending with the dusty sky. Eight years old and new to the neighborhood, I had met Connor walking there as we both went down 74th Place at some ungodly time between seven and eight in the morning. We had matching super hero backpacks loaded with pencils, crayons, and who knows how many other school supplies. Connor lived in the neighborhood too, but his parents were Catholic so he talked to me. After a few years of giggling from beneath the monkey bars, Sarah talked to me too.

A girl shrieked as she slid down a plastic yellow slide. How many times had Connor and I burned ourselves riding that plastic under the summer sun?

I looked north where I could just see the tip of Red Mountain's western peak. On the other side of the mountain, higher mountains climbed beyond, just out of sight. Mountains covered in evergreens, not cacti, and ground covered with living grass, not rocky sand.

The two acceptance emails had shown up within days of each other. Both Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University were delighted to accept me and eagerly awaited my deposit check. I waited too, though for the email about scholarship results.

At some point as the sun approached the western horizon, the mothers gathered their children and abandoned the playground. The faintest of breezes picked up, making the swing chains creak in the emptiness.

A dog barked from somewhere beyond the park. I wondered if it was Chester chasing some rogue rabbit before being stopped by the yard's concrete walls.

I took a deep breath, let my gaze linger over the wretched plastic slides once more, and began the walk home.

I glanced at my phone. Four thirty-five, the display read.

"I can't stay much longer," I said as we rounded the dog park's edge for the fourth time. "I need to stop by the bank before it closes."

"You'll be fine," Sarah said.

Her last word mingled with the gruff bark of a distant Rottweiler. Chester waddled a few paces ahead of us. When we started to pass him as he stopped to sniff a pile of dog poo, Sarah whistled and he caught back up.

"Have you heard from ASU?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said, putting my hands in my jean pockets. "I was accepted."

Sarah stopped and flipped her head toward me. "That's great!" Her voice ricocheted around the basin, momentarily drowning out the Rottweiler. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" She shoved my shoulder then wrapped her arms around me with a squeeze.

I took in the scent of her mint shampoo before opening my mouth. "I'm not going," I said into her hair.

Sarah released her embrace and dropped her hands down to my hips. "What?" she asked.

"I'm not going to ASU," I said.

"What do you mean you're not going?" Sarah's fingers found my jeans' belt loops and tightened around them. "We've been talking about this since we graduated."

I stiffened. "You have," I said.

Sarah's eyebrows shot up. She let go of my jeans, opened her mouth, closed it, then opened it again.

"So what are you going to do then?" she asked. "Drop out?"

"No," I said, leaning back on one foot. "I'm going to Northern Arizona."

Her eyebrows came back down furrowed across her forehead. "But..." The word lingered in the air, her mouth still wrapped around the t, refusing to release it. Then she shook her head.

"That's stupid," she said, "why-"

Chester gave a tremendous bark and raced away toward the entrance where a familiar Corgi was coming in with its owner.

"Chester, no!" Sarah yelled, and ran after him. I followed at a distance as the two dogs met and yipped at each other, tails wagging furiously. Sarah swooped on her half of the happy pair.

"Bad boy!" she said, and grabbed him by his collar. "Don't run off like that."

"Look, I really need to go," I said, opening the gate out to the parking lot. Sarah looked up from attaching Chester's leash. "I'll see you later," I said a little louder as I walked away.

"Not if you go there!" she called through the chain-link fence. Her last word blended with Chester's renewed barking and the chirp of my car as I hit the unlock button.

"So you're going to Northern Arizona?" Connor asked.

"Yep."

"Wow." He leaned back against the back window of his truck, facing the sunset. We were parked just north of 202 in a stretch of desert the developers hadn't reached yet. "Have you told Sarah?" he asked.

"Yep."

"How'd she take it?"

"She's pissed," I said. Connor snorted.

"I'm sure she is," he said. I glanced at him, but his gaze remained on the horizon.

"I thought you wouldn't be able to afford it," he said. "I mean, with paying for a room or apartment or whatever."

"I got a scholarship," I said. "I found out this morning."

The setting sun's light hit the Saguaro cactus blooms as they soaked in the remaining UV rays before closing for the night. The creamy white petals nested among the cactus spines.

"Well congrats, bro," he said. He peered at me out of the corner of his eye. "From Northern Arizona, or...?"

"Phi Theta Kappa," I said. "Through MCC." The academic advisor at Mesa Community College had nearly squealed when I told her about the scholarship award, but immediately followed the outburst with assurance that she always knew I would get it. Yes, I thought so too, but the letter made it official.

"Ah, gotcha," he said. He blinked, looked away, then looked back at me. "You know, with that money, you could just live on campus here."

"I know. Sarah said that too." She had called me less than five minutes after I left the dog park, and I listened to her stream of choice words until I made it to the bank teller. After making my deposit, I had called Connor to ask if he wanted to meet up in the old spot.

I looked southwest toward Phoenix, the smog-covered haze of buildings and lights just past Mesa.

"I thought about it," I said. Connor turned his head more toward me, but I turned my face to the right, toward Red Mountain on the northern horizon. Nothing stood between us but desert and the great expanse of sky and sand melded into one in the twilight.

"But no?" he asked.

I smiled. "No."

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

TL Publishing Group is always looking for submissions. We publish an issue during the first month of each quarter and each one is published online and in print. When it comes to reviewing a submission, we don't look for a particular theme. We look at the work itself, specifically its message and structure. We accept a variety of submissions including: poetry, fiction, artwork, and articles.

All submissions may be uploaded by visiting:

<http://torridliterature.submittable.com/submit>

We encourage everyone to become familiar with the Torrid Literature Journal first by reading previous editions. This will give writers a general idea of the type of content we look for. Our submission period for the Torrid Literature Journal is year round and our response time varies depending on the volume of submissions received.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alice Saunders at asaunders@torridliterature.com. We look forward to the reading experience.



Dear Reader,

When a new year rolls around people often take that time to think about their goals, plans, resolutions, and the like. Its human nature because an end is also a new beginning which means there's an opportunity to start over. It's the perfect chance for people to reevaluate their steps or current course of action. It's a chance for them to figure out if there is a need to alter their route, pause, reverse, speed up, or slow down.

However, whatever action you chose, just remember to write on. Jane Yolen said it best: "exercise the writing muscle every day, even if it is only a letter, notes, a title list, a character sketch, a journal entry. Writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without that exercise, the muscles seize up." So whatever your goals are for 2014, if you are a writer or want to become one, then make sure your plans for the year include a balanced regimen of reading and writing. Why not you? Why not now? There has never been a better time to dream big and dream boldly. That story idea you keep tossing around in your head - take things to the next level. Put plans in place to start writing your story. If you have already written a story, consider joining a critique group and look into participating in a writer's workshop. Locate an editor and look into getting your work published. If you're a poet, we want to encourage you to attend a poetry reading or an open mic event. Continue growing in your craft. Consider taking things to another level. Remember that growth brings growing pains. However, it is necessary that we step outside of our comfort zone in order to get to the next level. We can't afford to get too comfortable that our abilities become stagnant. When it comes to physical fitness, people are aware of the plateau effect where they realize it is time to shake things up because their current routine isn't working anymore. The same concept can be applied to writing. Our point is to keep pushing forward. Don't sell yourself short or undermine your abilities. Writers are powerful and influential people.

Writers have extra sensory perception because they realize that everything around them is a poem and/or story waiting to be written. Inspiration is everywhere so don't be afraid to draw on real life experiences. At the same time, don't be afraid to tap into your imagination. We hope this concept is one of the many things you walk away with. The poems and stories herein are diverse. They touch on a variety of topics from love, relationships and faith to family, life, and the topic of writing itself. Not only is the literature diverse but the writers themselves are unique as well, varying in age, location, and skill. Nevertheless, they all have one fact in common, to give readers an experience. An experience that will stay with the reader long after they finish a poem and/or story.

We hope Volume IX New Ink left you inspired and ready to tackle the year that lies ahead. Find your drive, the force fuels you and master the art of being you. As always, thank you for picking up our publication. Share your voice. Push for the best, expect the best, and accept nothing but the best from yourself. Until next time, see you in Volume X.

- Editorial Staff



TL Publishing Group kicks off the New Year with the release of the *Torrid Literature Journal - Volume IX New Ink*. This anniversary issue celebrates the power of the written word by presenting readers with an empowering selection of literary material. Supporters who have already fallen in love with this publication will experience a ripening in their passion for diverse literature. At the same time, readers who are new to this publication will inevitably become engrafted in the unique experience where artistry meets revelation. The place where moments of time, real or imagined, are captured and framed for viewing pleasure.

Volume IX *New Ink* exemplifies some of the most inspirational and profound voices that exist in the landscape of literature today. In continuing with their theme of providing attention-grabbing interviews, this ninth issue includes an all-new conversation with Grant E. Fetters, a writer from Tennessee. As with previous interviews, this one exposes the motivation and methods behind the artist. This is followed by a collection of over 25 poems and short stories that will renew the reader's passion for literature.

However, the excitement does not end this literary journal. TL Publishing Group is known for its work towards building and maintaining the vibrant culture of literature by providing several programs that serve as a universal platform where writers can be heard. With the release of this ninth issue, TL Publishing Group is wrapping up voting for their Hall of Fame for literary excellence, while simultaneously getting ready to launch their third literary contest. There has never been a better time to join in on this exploratory journey as TL Publishing Group works to discover and expose the strongest voices in literature, voices that remind us of the power of expression.

Contributors: Amy S. Pacini; Sally Vogl; Sophia Eldridge; Bethany Pauls; Evan Brenan; Clemencio Montecillo Bascar; Jaimie Miller; Jennifer G. Davis; Haylee Rethman; Casmir Hodge; Chang Shih Yen; Elizabeth Musselman; Jacob Erin-Cilberto; Sandra Widner; Gina Marie Mammano V.; Tammy Lynn; Talia Washington; Joseph Sobczak; Sara Elliott; Curtis R. Smith; Dennis Amadeus; Oren Korashvili; Stephanie McCauley; Beth MacFarlane; Grant E. Fetters; Leah Schwartz; Maureen Lincke; M.C. Barnes; Jennifer Palmer



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