

Bluegrass Accolade

BCTC Literary Journal - Issue No. 7



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2014

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The *Bluegrass Accolade* is a project of the Literary Arts Subcommittee of the Bluegrass Community and Technical College's Arts in Focus Committee. Our thanks go out to all who helped make this project possible, including the writers, poets, and artists who contributed their work, and the committee members who contributed their time and effort to the production of this issue.

2013-2014 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

Chair: Maureen Cropper **Members:** Nancy Bronner, Nathan Congleton, Barbara Elzey, Mary Gammon, Kevin Jensen, Danny Mayer, and Deb Vantreese

E. KAYLA BIDDLE

Still Life

I don't think
I've ever seen you in a dress
Never in anything
Other than gnarled old jeans and college sweatshirts
It seems strange now
Seeing you in pure, clean white
You look so delicate—yet I know you were anything but
You'd have had it covered in crap by now
If you weren't. . .you know
(Stopped up in a casket)

You used to be so
Alive
Bursting at the seams with it
Now you're cold
So cold (stiff)
All your bones
They're locked in place
I'll never feel them around me
Not ever again

That's not you in that box
That's just a still life
Not you
You were always on the move
Never still

The preacher says you're in a better place
But how could it be better if you're all alone?
No one you know
Is going to meet you at the gate

Papa's in the nursing home
Granny left for the afterlife
before you were even born

Daddy's parents only came to see you once
(in the hospital, when you caught pneumonia)
And our parents are still here, sitting in the front
Momma's gone through two boxes of Kleenex
Dad looks like he's lost his faith
And I'm here in the back,
Where no one can see me
No one but you, little sister

Is it selfish for me to want you to still be here,
not in a better place?

Yes.
Yes, I know it is.

But that doesn't keep me from wanting it.

Momma tells me things will be better
That we'll be all right
I can't help but shake my head
And (inside) I'm thinking something I don't dare say
You know, I'd agree with you
But then we'd both be wrong

DON BOES

In Praise of Your Gold Earrings

They tease me from across the table.
Hammered ornaments from the earth.
No reason for the luxury, or regret.
I like to find them in the dark,
my fingers fascinated by skin
and then touching the odd
rightness of metal. You never
take them out or buy another pair.
So you don't need my latest gift—
a box for your treasure,
your initials carved in the soft wood.

NATHANIEL ELLIS

Black Gum

A wonderful elegance
Shaped by time.
She has such a calming presence;
Even as she heads past her prime.

Surviving when it is dry,
Living where it is wet.
Her branches say hi;
As the cold air sets.

Her fruit draws
Animals from all around.
She is the cause
Of that lovely, rustling sound

The red of her dress,
Shines more vibrant than all.
And though she leaves a mess
She gives her all during the fall.

MARY GAMMON

Your Words

Dedicated to my J002 class

I

I can't forget your words.

You were right!

Just by writing them on paper and then handing them in to me,
they haunt me.

You wrote them.

I read them.

And now I am writing words that YOU released.

Not just words but songs, (spirit) from within

Like a key that unlocks a box or a cage

Fluttering, furies of word that yearned to be released on paper in pencil

Words that kept coming from every direction

from so many words and images (that) you created.

Words that made me smile and laugh and made me cry.

Words that held truth from your world that I might never had known,
were it not for the words on the paper you wrote.

II

Ice fishing circles and cherry blossom sprays

Basketball fitness and cheerleading routines

Hawaiian spears and family fun days

Heartbreaking sorrows with gallant tomorrows

Snowboarding frolics, Olympian glory

Transatlantic journey, tiny hands holding the hand of his daddy,

Thoroughbred lover—

Each face holds the key to words that unlock and words that release
scores and dozens and dozens of lives never known

Were it not for the words that you wrote

JAMES B.GOODER

The Meaning of Design at Seagrove Beach

A long, curving, blue line
Is drawn in an arching boomerang
From west to east.
My eye travels like an old wind-up view camera
Panning from left to right
These ancient lines
Emerging
Horizontal, white water feathers
Sailing across
Dark blue, to aqua, to green
Absorbed by white sand
The sea oats, a miracle
The code whispered in their ears
Whispered by the wind,
Itself a marvel
Under blue umbrellas,
Spectators,
Wait
For the orange ball
To slide down the slick sky
Diving behind the long, blue line

JAMES B. GOODE

Stirring the Gravy (For Aunt Mary Helen)

It's just the little things
A certain look
A touch
A recounting of the day
Conversation spoken in whispers
Pillow talk
The kids
Work
Something that seemed funny at the time
Her knowing smile
His adoring gaze
Eyes cast over the edge of a coffee cup
Watching her behind wiggling
From the way she stirred the gravy.

BILL MCCANN

Trains

Near Corinth they sit,
sometimes for days,
on the siding beneath
the newly constructed railroad bridge
deciding

“Where to go?”

“What to do?”

In Cynthiana
Trains go roaring through:
Past stores, churches, homes,
3M and Bullard
Charging past
Lexington and Corbin,
through Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta
And finally to Pass Christian—
where they come up against the Gulf of Mexico
and
finally,
must
stop.

SARITA MUNSEY

No Man Left Behind

Dedicated to my father, a Vietnam War veteran

Vietnam by force
Spit on by choice
Unaware of the man
Inside out stripped of a dream
Stripped of a plan
Drinking unimaginable agony
From rusting bullet grazed cans
Clothes soaked in sweat, mud, and blood
As bombs like fire flying
Comrades are dismembered
Continuously dying
So as the American flag is rising
My knees hit the ground quaking
As blue eyes flood in remembrance aching
As I lift my head praising
GOD BLESS MY VIETNAM VETERAN MAN!
THAT MAN
Who adopted me
THAT MAN
Who saved the girl who was left to die
THAT MAN
Who was spit on with wounds unending
THAT MAN
Who still SCREAMS in the middle of the night
Terrors that have changed even MY life
THAT MAN
Trying to run and cover
As he carries his friends body unable to recover
THAT MAN
Who still lives with the frame of mind
That NO MAN
Is left behind

MIKAYLA SAUNDERS

Fabric Hate

Turn on. Tune In. Drop out. Assume your place.
Go out at night. Start Fights. Do Drugs. Drink booze.
Are you a faceless name, or nameless face?
To fill the Prime Time slot on Fox 5 News

The kids these days are checkerboard and spikes
And everyone is just "Here for the ride"
I'll call them out before they get their strikes.
My house is made of glass. . . Please come inside?

Are you a punk? Are you a redneck hick?
For people fabricate what they can't see
Inquire why I didn't just use brick
I'll tell you it's so you can look at me.

So who am I? No thanks, I think I'll pass.
I'm just the man whose house is made of glass.

JAMES B. GOODE

Slipping Away

Mother's been sitting in the driver's seat of her Mercury Marquis for the last 30 minutes with her arm around a mop head leaned against the headrest with its handle wedged beneath the glove compartment and stuck into the plush gray carpet of the floorboard. She's talking to it. Whispering secrets into its imagined ear.

"Did you enjoy your trip to the Indianapolis 500?" she asks. "I'm sorry I couldn't go with you this year. As you know, I haven't felt well lately. Besides, it's my month to prepare the communion for church—get the Welch's grape juice in all those teeny tiny glasses and the stale midget cracker squares into the silver plates. I can't understand for the life of me why they can't get fresher crackers to represent the body of the Lord Jesus Christ."

I'm standing just outside the open window with my hands on my hips, patting my right foot on the hot pavement of the driveway. Her eyes are avoiding me, like a child who is trying to change the subject without saying anything. I've been at this for two weeks. Took off work from my job as a sales account executive in Louisville to come all the way to eastern Kentucky to look after her.

"Mother, why don't you come inside and have your coffee?" I say. "It's beginning to heat up out here. I'm afraid you'll have a stroke." She finally turns her head and casts her left eye toward me.

"People of YOUR generation have no idea how to deal with heat. Why, there was no air conditioning when I was growing up. Best thing we could muster was a funeral home fan or a folded newspaper. You don't know what hot is until you've prepared a meal for a dozen people in a kitchen with a coal cook stove in the middle of August," she says. "Besides, your dad refuses to get out of the car, even though his hair smells soured and needs washing. I'm sure neither he nor his brother Leonard took a bath while they were at the race. I can't just leave him out here. He's probably upset that I didn't go with him this year." At this, her voice lowers into a raspy whisper. "He's getting temperamental, you know. It comes with age, you know," she says. She has her head leaned against the stringy mop head, with her left hand stroking the thick dishwater colored cotton strands.

After I get Mother back into the house and settled in her chair in the living room, I go into the kitchen, pick up the telephone and dial my brother James' number. He works the third shift at Ford Motor Company in Detroit. I glance at my watch while the phone is ringing. It's 10 a.m. and I know he's probably just getting home from his long night. Someone picks up the phone.

"James? Is that you?" I ask.

"No, this is Charles," a voice says. James' teenage son Charles sounds just like James. "Dad's right here. He just sat down to read the *Free Press*. 'I'll get him.'" The receiver bangs against the counter. I can hear muffled voices in the background, then quick footsteps coming toward the phone.

"Hello baby sister! What can I do you for?" James says.

He has a signature way of twisting words, I think.

"You can bring me a pistol down here so I can blow my brains out," I say. "I can't take this anymore. She's making me crazier than an outhouse rat." That is an old Appalachian expression James and I share, going back to before we got an indoor bathroom and had a path out back that led to a two-seater outdoor toilet. The old folks use to say that any rat that lived in an outhouse had to be crazy. That explained why they would run toward you. Sometimes, right up your leg.

"What's she done now?" James asks.

"Mother got me up at 3 a.m.," I say.

"What the hell for?" he asks.

"She said I stopped up the commode."

James tries to suppress a laugh. "Food that bad?" he says.

"No, it wasn't that," I say in disgust. "She stood there with her hair sticking up like 'Boo Radley' and said, 'I've told you not to pour food down the commode. Now look what you've done. Stopped it up tighter than Dick's hatband.'"

"By the way, who was Dick? And why was his hatband so tight?" James asks, trying for a little comic relief.

"Can't you focus for more than a couple of minutes?" I say. "I told *Boo* mother, 'I didn't pour food down the commode. I'm thirty years old and I know better than to pour food down a commode.'"

"Yes you did. I can see black olives floating around in there," she said. "She had that voice she gets when she thinks she's right and everyone else is as stupid as a doorknob."

"Boy do we all know that voice," James says.

I told her that I'd been here for three weeks and hadn't eaten a single black olive.

"Well, they are in there and the commode is stopped up," she insisted.

"Mother, we've eaten no black olives," I said.

"She looks at me like some redheaded stepchild and in a voice like Linda Blair in the *Exorcist* says, 'Well, there's only two of us here and I sure didn't put them in there. So that just leaves you.' She poked me in the chest her long, boney right index finger and bit down hard on the fist of her left hand. So we went into the bathroom and there was water all over the place. I looked down into that glorious pink porcelain hole right out of the 1960s and I could plainly see a *Depends* adult diaper sticking out like half a soggy softball. So I got a metal coat hanger and straightened it out, leaving the hook intact and started fishing around in the mess, ripping the adult diaper apart, pulling pieces out and slinging them into the trash can. You can't imagine how gross a job that was. It looked like an elephant had dumped in there."

I can hear Jerry trying to suppress his *Precious Pup* laugh, but little bursts of chuckles erupted like bubbles in a pot of chili.

"Are you laughing?" I ask. "Because, if you are, you can just get your butt in the car and come on down here. I don't find this the least bit funny."

"I'm sorry Judy, but it is funny if you think about it," James says.

"It's not funny if you're the one here having to put up with all her hatefulness," I say.

"Let me finish telling you about this. It gets even worse."

"She wandered off into the kitchen while I was trying to extract the godawful mess. She yells from the kitchen, 'I'm calling my plumber Jerry Cornett right now. I'm getting him to come down here right now to fix what my dumbass daughter has torn up.' I could hear her rummaging around trying to find her cell phone. Mind you I've tried to get her to keep the cell phone in the fanny pack I bought her, but she doesn't wear it. Half the time she can't find the damn phone. It's buried in the mountains of unopened mail sitting on every counter or has fallen into the cracks between couch cushions or is up in some weird place like the condiment cabinet. I could hear her blow out a long breath when she found it. Then I heard her drop it to the floor. She let out a couple of *old Lordys* and *Ah Gods* as she bent to pick it up. Then, after she retrieved it, expelled another long venomous breath into the air inside a house already toxic from loads of them."

"Jerry?" I could hear her yelling into the phone like Jerry is in California or somewhere.

"Is that you Jerry? My dumb-ass city slicker daughter has come down here and flushed food down the commode and stopped it up. She's put her fat ass on the toilet seat and squirmed around until she busted the seal. There's water all over the bathroom floor."

“I am mortified. As you know, Jerry was one of my high school classmates. I went to the Sophomore Hop with him. I just couldn’t imagine how big he thought my ass was after she told him that.”

I can’t help it. I start crying again. I feel like I’m on the verge of stripping off naked and running into the woods. Nobody seems to understand what it’s like, taking care of an eighty-eight year old Mother who can be about the most difficult person in the entire universe. Reminds me of that old song about how the old battle-axe wife died, went to hell, but she was so mean the devils brought her back. I’m just saying she could populate an entire insane asylum by herself. She’ll push you until you do something totally irrational. Like the time I lost my temper with her and slammed my fist down on her 1940s porcelain cast iron sink, breaking three bones in my hand.

I’m not very stable anyway. A few months ago I made a sharp exit from the world and took myself hostage. Held off the Louisville police for over two hours with a Colt Peacemaker revolver. They eventually came through the upstairs window, grabbed me from behind and wrestled me to the floor. But the situation turned into one of those cop shows with a theme like “Bad Boys, Bad Boys whatcha gonna do when they come for you . . .” when the perpetrator suddenly becomes like an alien from outer space who has developed incredible strength and kicks every cops’ ass in the room. Only this turned into “Bad Girls, Bad Girls . . .” when I morphed into a character like Storm in X-Men and bit one of the cops in the nuts, spat on another, and kicked a third one square in the forehead. They finally got me zip-tied and carted off in nothing but a bra and a pair of panties and threw me into an isolation cell but not before they inflicted bruises and lacerations all up and down my spine and backs of my legs.

“All I want is for our mother to tell me she loves me and that she appreciates everything I’ve done for her in the past three weeks—that I put my life on hold to come down and take care of her,” I say between sniffles.

“You’re looking for a mother that never existed,” James says. “Mother has never had a maternal bone in her body. She’s never going to say thank you or say that she loves anyone. So just get over it.”

“But I have helped get her car fixed, taken her to get her ear wax surgically removed, gotten her fitted for hearing aids and taken her back and forth to Kingsport five times because she wasn’t satisfied with them. I’ve cleaned all the scatter rugs, mopped and waxed the floors . . .”

“Everything you have done is good. But if you did all this because you thought you were going to be hugged or thanked, you did it for the wrong reasons. Just know inside that you did what you were supposed to do to take care of our aging mother—a mother who is in the early stages of dementia.”

I start to cry even harder. “You just don’t know,” I say. “You have no idea. She has nearly killed me since I’ve been here. The other day she wanted to get ice cream from the Tastee Freeze, so she insisted on driving us down there. She poked along in that big Mercury Marquis, going about three miles per hour and weaving over into the other lane--with the signal light on all the way to Cumberland. When we got there, she didn’t want to go inside and she didn’t want to eat the soft-serve in the car. She wanted to drive five miles back home while I’m

holding the cones and having them melt and run down my arms. She's over there in the driver's seat screwing with the gear shift, ramming it back and forth so hard I thought she was going to snap it off even with the column. She says, 'I knew that man didn't really fix this car. He charged me \$500 to fix it, but he didn't do anything. I can't even get this car in gear now. I could get it in gear *before* he *fixed* it.' Meanwhile, I have to pad my elbows with napkins to keep the sticky stuff off my clothes and away from the Marquis' coffin-like velvet seats when I look over and the damned car is not even started. She hasn't even turned on the key. So I say, 'You have to start the car before it will go into gear.' She looks at me like I'm the devil incarnate and tells me she reckons she knows when a car is running and when it is not. So then she starts the car, slams it into gear with the accelerator depressed and it suddenly lurches backward like we've been hit in a demolition derby--right into a damned telephone pole. But no, she doesn't pay any attention to that. She just pulls out, screaming the tires onto the main road. She doesn't even look. I look over and see the largest Dodge Ram hood ornament I've ever seen. A dually driven by the biggest Hank Williams, Jr. looking redneck I've ever seen is bowed up in the middle of the highway. There's a red light coming up and I begin to scream 'Red Light, red light, stop!' But she just keeps going. By this time I'm completely hoarse from all the screaming."

"I don't know what you expect me to do. "We're working full blast right now. You could call Susie and see if she can come help," James says. "Maybe her overeducated butt

would have a solution to all this. Right now, I'm so tired from having worked a sixteen hour shift; I'm going to have to go to bed. I've got another shift to pull in about eight hours."

Susie is the oldest sister . . . a real Ph.D. drama queen married to a corporate attorney. Rich beyond belief. She has taken to not answering the phone when Mother calls. Just for meanness, Mother called up there recently and told her she had cut her artery with a butcher knife and was bleeding to death. Not only did she not pick up the phone, but didn't talk to her for another two weeks.

After James hangs up, I sit staring into what seems like a deep hollow filled with soupy fog. Monkeys are running wildly around in my head. I hear thumping, banging, and clomping. They screech and fuss at each other—a perpetual disagreement. Susie is standing there watching them bounce around in my head.

"Careful not to walk alone at night," she says. "You don't want to be thrown to the ground and kissed by a monkey do you? Nothing is worse than monkey spit," she says.

More than anything, I do not want to end up like Mother—sifted down to a pile of meanness. A body wracked with pain . . . two hips replaced, stints, eye surgery for cataracts that went terribly wrong and put a permanent halo around the moon, arthritis in every joint and a back like an s-curve on an eastern Kentucky mountain road. Ankles collapsed so she hobbles on the sides of her feet. Knees so creaky you can hear them both, making their dissonant sounds as she gingerly pushes her way to a wobbling stance, rotating in circles, first

clockwise, then counter clockwise. When she stands, everyone in the room is on the precipice of their seats like they are watching a wreck at a dirt track.

Simon and Garfunkel crawl into my head like I am still in the 1960s smoking dope. The monkeys and I are lined up, seated in rows of folding chairs, listening to them sing: *Slip sliding away, slip sliding away/You know the nearer your destination, the more you slip sliding away . . . Whoah God only knows, God makes his plan/The information's unavailable to the mortal man/We're workin' our jobs, collect our pay/Believe we're gliding down the highway, when in fact we're slip sliding away.* I look out the window of the kitchen. The mop head is leaned against the driver's side window of the Mercury Marquis. It is staring off in the distance toward the darkening, upswept ridges.

ROGER L. GUFFEY

A Voice Heard in Ramah

The hinges of the oak door to the County Judge Executive's office squeaked softly as Steve Wallace entered the room where Joann Burton sat typing at her secretary's desk. She ceased her tapping on the keys of her computer to swivel around in her chair to peer over her glasses at him as she asked, "May I help you?"

Wallace smiled and approached her desk. "Yes, you can. I would like to speak with Judge Steele, if I may. Is he in?"

"He is not in right now. I think he went to the poolroom for a hamburger. I can call over there and see if he can come back now. Whom should I say is asking for him?"

Wallace extended his arm and replied, "Thank you, Steve Wallace. And you are Ms. Burton? I really appreciate your help."

"Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Wallace. And what is your business with Judge Steele?"

"I am from the University of New York at Stony Brook. I am working on my dissertation on the sociology and culture of people from the southern mountains. I thought I could interview Mr. Steele and get some ideas on how best to meet and talk to people in the area as I figured the county judge executive would know more about them than anyone else."

"Probably. Judge Steele is very popular and well-liked. He really gets out in the county and tries to help people with their problems."

"Problems like."

"Mostly road maintenance, bridge repair, things like that. Have a seat, Mr. Wallace and I will call over there."

Wallace sat down in a Naugahyde upholstered wing-backed chair where he could enjoy the cool breeze of the oscillating fan sputtering through its cycle. He took a white handkerchief from his back pocket to wipe the beads of perspiration from his forehead and wondered how Joann could look so crisp in the summer heat.

Joann dialed the phone and answered when it rang in the poolroom. "Hello, George? Is Wendell there? He is? Please tell him there is someone here from New York to see him. He's on the way out? Good. Thanks, George, and tell Betty hello for me."

She returned to her typing as she reported to Wallace, "He is on the way back now. He should be here in a few minutes unless someone who needs his help waylays him. He is so good about that. Would you like a glass of water or a cup of coffee?"

"As hot as it is, a cup of coffee would be nice. It is always easier to talk over coffee."

"Let me make a fresh pot. That's been there since this morning. It ruins on the burner. The judge always wants a fresh cup after lunch. Just make yourself comfortable."

She pulled the glass carafe from the Mr. Coffee machine and stepped into the bathroom to fill the pot. She hummed softly as she threw out the old grounds and spooned four measures of Folger's into the filter-lined basket. She poured the water into the back of the pot, flipped the switch and returned to her work as the fresh coffee trickled into the carafe.

The door creaked as Steele entered. He placed a grease-stained brown bag on her desk.

“Diet or no diet, I brought you a burger. You gotta eat something.”

“Wendell, you know I can’t resist these things. Judge Steele, this is Mr. Steve Wallace from New York.

Steele walked over to greet Wallace who rose from his seat to shake hands. “Glad to meet you, Judge Steele.”

“Likewise, Mr. Wallace. What can I do for you?”

“I am doing some research on the sociological and cultural aspects of the people from the mountains.”

“Well, we are not exactly Appalachia, but we do have mountains here in Wayne County. Help yourself to a cup of coffee and come into my office. You need cream or sugar?”

“No, thanks, I take it black.”

“Well sir, you are off to a great start. Most people around here don’t trust a man who adulterates his coffee with cream or sugar. Too citified. Come in and tell me what I can do for you.”

Wallace grasped the Styrofoam cup gingerly and slipped into the inner office lined with old-fashioned wooden filing cabinets and a large oak desk. Well-worn legal volumes filled rows of shelves and another oscillating fan hummed along on the main desk. Steele rolled a squeaky wooden chair from under the desk and motioned for Wallace to sit down.

“Now, what brings a New York Yankee down to these parts?”

"I am working on a doctoral dissertation that will explore the roots of the strong feelings of attachment people have to their home place."

Steele stiffened in his chair. "So you are one of them fellers that wants to make fun of us hillbillies."

Wallace realized that the conversation was taking a bad turn and hurried to interrupt. "Oh, no! No sir. I am not making fun of anyone. I have noticed that the sense of belonging to their home places is especially strong among people from the southern mountains. I want to know why that emotional bond does not seem to lessen even after these folks have lived for most of their adult lives away from their place of birth."

"So how is that any different from anywhere else?"

"Well, I guess it is difficult to explain. It has been my experience that most people from away from here don't use the word 'home' for their birthplace, especially after their parents have died. They identify home with their spouses and children; but that is not true for people from here."

Steele leaned back in his chair. "Oh, I think, I see what you are saying. In your mind, home is where you live, not where you are from. I think you will find most people around here will see it the other way around. Still, I guess it would be interesting to see if that theory holds water. So how can I help you with your project?"

"I am pretty sure that people around here would be more willing to talk about

themselves if they knew you were willing to vouch for me. Maybe you can write me a letter of introduction that I can show people so they will feel more comfortable with me.”

“So how are these folks going to know that you are not spying for the revenuers? There is a lot of drug traffic—like pot—and an occasional still to be found. Frankly, I think you would be ill advised to venture off into these hills and hollers by yourself. In fact, I am not too keen on going along with you with just the two of us. Tell you what. Give me a day or so to contact some people in some of the more remote places and maybe I can talk some of them into going along with us. It would be a lot safer, I imagine.”

“That does sound better than just letting me traipse off alone. Is there a hotel in town I can stay in?”

“There’s the Tiffany Inn just off the bypass on ninety above town. They have a good buffet too. Here, wait a minute. I have a couple of books you might want to look at until I can arrange some trips.”

He rose from his chair and pulled two thick spiral bound paperback volumes from the shelves. One was titled *Historical Wayne County* and the other *The Good Old Days in Wayne County*.

“The local paper and the historical society put these together several years ago. Ran an ad in the paper asking for old photographs and got an unbelievable response. I think you will find them very useful.”

“Thank you, Mr. Steele . . . I.”

“Call me Wendell. Now to get to the hotel: take the main street here up to the bypass and turn right. You will pass by a KFC and McDonald’s on the way. I think you will find more variety of food at the buffet, but you can do as you please. Stop back in about lunch tomorrow and I will have something lined up.”

Wallace stood and shook hands as he said, “Thank you for your help. I’m looking forward to meeting the folks around here. I’ll see you tomorrow around ten.”

Wallace grinned and nodded his approval. He drove to the hotel, registered, and left his bags in the room. Then he took the books with him to eat dinner at the buffet. He helped himself to the simple country fare of beef stew, mashed potatoes, green beans, and coffee and blackberry cobbler.

II

After breakfast the next morning, Wallace drove back to the courthouse to meet Steele. Steele’s office door was ajar, so Wallace knocked gently even as he pushed the door open to find Steele hastily signing some paperwork.

“Good morning, Mr. Steele. I am here to pick up that list of names.”

“Come on in. I was just approving some road work up Catron Holler. I tried to think of people who still live on their original home-places that you could get to easily. So far, I think the first ones you need to see is the Hoover family up in Tuggle Holler. The road there is a bit

rough in places, but you should still have no problem getting there. I didn't know how many people you expect to see in a day so I just have one name. Shelby Hoover."

Wallace jotted the name down in a small memo book.

Steele continued, "As I recall he is the fourth generation to live on that plot of ground. Not much of a farm. Maybe ten acres. They used to raise about two-tenths of an acre of tobacco back before the government cut the subsidy."

"Will he be expecting me?"

"Yep, already called him. Let me draw you a map. It ain't hard to get there."

He took out a piece of paper and sketched out narrow lines that he labeled with highway numbers. He accompanied his map with verbal instructions. "Head south on Main Street until you get to a big fork in the road. You want to veer left onto Kentucky 200. You stay on that road for about twenty miles. You'll pass Shearer Valley, Hidalgo, and Powersburg School. You'll see Hancock Store on the left side of the road. There is a county road called Tuggle Hollow Road coming off on the right side of the road. Take that road all the way up to the head of the holler. There are some narrow places in the road and you will have to ford the creek twice. The Hoover place is there where the road ends. Park in front of a big gate. Shelby told me to tell you to be sure to lock the gate back when you come through so his cattle don't get out."

"Cattle? Is there a bull in the field?"

“Nah, just a few Hereford cattle. They won’t bother you. Now, Shelby will talk your ear off. He can tell you all about his family and everyone else in the holler.”

Steele laughed before continuing, “Hell, he can tell you about all the people in any holler thereabouts. Now the weather says there storms heading this way. Don’t get caught up there too long. That creek might get high. Depends on the storm.”

Wallace thanked him, “Thank you for all your help. Probably one person on the first day is enough.”

Steele pursed his lips. “Well, there are other people up in the holler you might run into. Maybe not with that storm coming. Just be careful on the road.”

Wallace nodded and said, “Will do. If I get back before your office closes I will stop by. Otherwise, I’ll stop in tomorrow morning.”

III

Wallace had no trouble following the directions. At Hancock’s Store, he turned right onto the narrow blacktopped road labeled with a Tuggle Hollow Road sign. As Steele had warned, in places the road became a thin ribbon clinging precipitously to the wooded mountainside. A creek ran parallel to the road for long stretches, occasionally cutting a course that was thirty feet below the road. Twice it crossed the road, and had to be forded.

After much trepidation, he emerged into an open space just outside Hoover’s place. He parked the SUV to one side of the road and stepped out to view the five red and white

Herefords apprehensively. He unhooked the chain holding the gate in place and entered the pasture. The cattle ignored him and he walked toward the large grayish house where he could see a man standing on the porch motioning him to come up.

The man shouted, "Come on up, young man. The cows won't bother you. Just don't step in cow shit."

Wallace nodded and picked up his pace until he reached the wooden steps leading up to the porch.

"Good morning, Mr. Hoover. I'm Steve Wallace. I think Judge Steele called you about me coming to visit."

Hoover nodded, "Yep. Call me Shelby. Have a seat."

He pushed an old homemade rocking chair toward him.

"I just made a pot of coffee. Would you like a cup? Black?"

Wallace grinned, "Is there any other way?"

Hoover laughed before he entered the house and returned with a white ceramic mug filled with strong coffee.

"The old lady went to town with our neighbor down the road so we won't have any interruptions. Coffee okay?"

Wallace sipped the coffee and nodded. "It's fine. Thank you."

"Now what can I do for you, Mr. Wallace?"

Wallace shifted himself in the chair. Call me Steve. I am doing research on the reasons why people in the south, particularly the mountains, maintain such strong ties to their birthplace. And would you mind if I recorded our conversation. I always take notes but it is nice to have a backup.

“That’s fine. Well, that certainly is true for a lot of people. Some people leave to find work somewhere but a lot of them come back after they retire. My brothers and sister are doing that. I have lived my whole life here. My dad did the same. So did my grandpa.”

Wallace listened intently, scribbling notes as Hoover talked.

“So your family has lived here for four generations? Your great grandpa settled here? When?”

Hoover laughed aloud, “You might say settled. Grandpa Jacob got drunk with some of his pals one night and he won this place in a poker game. All ten acres of it.”

“Really? That must have been quite a poker game.”

“The man he won it from, Wheeler Bertram, didn’t have much use for it. Too hilly and rocky to grow much. Too little pasture for livestock. I guess he figured he wouldn’t have to pay taxes on it.”

“I hadn’t thought about that.”

“Grandpa Wheeler and his brothers built a little log cabin here—in 1888, I think. He and Granny Ather moved in and raised a family of four.”

“Log cabin?”

"Well, after a few years, they added a room at the back and cased the house in poplar clapboard. Gave it a more modern look. Still pretty damned drafty. No insulation."

"Really? I bet that made it hard to heat."

"Originally, they had a fireplace. Then they got a pot-bellied stove. My granddad Chester put in some insulation and new drywall and wired the house about 1930."

"So you still heat with wood?"

"Mostly. We have some space heaters we use in the winter. Mallie, that's my wife, took the wood cook stove out so she could have an electric one. A lot less work. No ashes and not as much wood to split and tote in."

Wallace wrote furiously. "So how big is the house?"

"There's four rooms down stairs and three upstairs. We had a bathroom put in about forty years ago. The trip to the outhouse got cold when there was snow up to your ass."

Wallace chuckled. "I bet. So some family members have lived here since it was built?"

"Yep. Some of the kids of course had to buy their own places when they got married. Mostly whoever took care of the old folks got the place."

"So you looked after your folks?"

"Yep. Dad and Mom died thirty four years ago. We got the place when they died."

"Do you have any children who will get the place?"

"We only have two kids, William and Pat. Pat lives in Louisville, but William still lives up at Chestnut Grove. He checks on us every day and takes us places. He will get the place when we die. I don't know if he will keep it or not."

"So why do you think this hold on people is so strong?"

Hoover smiled. "Take a look out there at those mountains. Ain't they beautiful? Like big arms hugging you. You don't get that in the flatlands. Here, let's go for a walk. Let me get my stick."

He shuffled into the house and returned with a gnarly walking stick. He gestured toward the right of the house. "Let's head up this way."

They left the porch and walked across the pasture until they got to the edge of the woods.

Hoover motioned in a wide swinging arc, "We own to the top of the mountain. They cut the timber for the logs for the cabin from this part. Now it has mostly grown back. A man who owns a sawmill asked me about buying the timber but I turned him down. I like gallivanting over them woods looking for ginseng or dry land fish. It gets me out of the house and a little exercise."

"Ginseng and dry land fish?"

"Well, ginseng is a plant used in medicine. Hard to find, but it brings a good price. I don't need the money so I don't dig it. It lets me know if someone has been poking around up

here. Dry land fish is a mushroom you can find only in April. The cap is like a sponge. They are really good and taste like fish. I hear they are very expensive."

"Oh, I think you mean morels. Yes, they are very expensive because they cannot be cultivated. So you don't sell them?"

"They're too good to sell. Roll them in flour and fry them up. Too good to sell. Here, let me show you something."

Hoover bent over, raked the leaf litter away and scooped up a handful of the rich moist dirt. He presented it to Wallace who held in his cupped hand.

"Now squeeze it real hard." Hoover said.

Wallace squeezed the dirt into a small blackish mass.

"Now you can't do that with sand. The harder you squeeze sand the faster it squirts out of your hand. People today are like sand. They got nothing to hold onto. Always moving around. A lot of them have no kids because they don't want to be bothered or had rather spend the money on themselves. And when they get old they got no roots. Look here."

Hoover folded his fingers back over his palm so the nails were visible. Thin black traces of dirt lay under the edges of the nails.

"Living here is different. See how the dirt collects under your nails? That is what it is like here. That dirt that was here for thousands of years and supported your folks for a long time sorta collects in your soul too. You can't get it out too easy."

Wallace eyed the dirt before tossing it to the ground. "That's an interesting way of describing it. I guess it means something that I don't have dirt under my nails."

You didn't dig it out of the ground. You just let me hand it to you. Ain't the same. When your life depends on that dirt it means something."

Wallace, replied, "I think I see what you mean. So can you tell me more about this place?"

Hoover nodded and they spent the next couple of hours walking around while he told stories to Wallace and his tape recorder, since it was hard to take notes while they were walking. Hoover recounted tales of the other people who lived in the hollow and what life was like for people living in such a remote place.

Dark clouds had started to roll in from the west and a breeze began to sway the trees. Hoover advised, "You had better get going. There's a storm heading this way. The creek might rise."

Even as he talked a few large raindrops splattered onto the ground around them. They walked quickly back to the house. By the time they got there, the rain had become a steady drizzle

Wallace said, "Mr. Hoover, I mean Shelby, you have been very helpful. This is exactly what I am looking for. I really can't thank you enough. But you're right. I need to head out before the storm gets too bad."

“No problem, glad to help. Now be careful going out. There’s a place or two that can get slick in a rain. Come back any time.”

Wallace shook his hand before getting into his SUV and heading back the way he came, leaving Hoover waving from the porch.

IV

Wallace had scarcely got out of sight of the house when the storm erupted with full fury and jagged lightning streaked across the dark sky. He turned on the headlights and crept along the muddy road. Suddenly, a lightning bolt struck a tree above the road and the flash blinded and startled him so much that he yanked the steering wheel to the right violently. The SUV slid off the road over a slight embankment before hitting a tree beside another narrow road. He had neglected to put on his seat belt, so the sudden stop slammed his head into the windshield so hard he blacked out.

By the time he came to, the rain had stopped and the sun was trickling in between the trees. He was still groggy and so disoriented that he started down the narrow lane he had landed instead of returning to the main road.

After a few yards, he emerged into a clearing where a house stood reflecting the sunlight off its wet roof. He had not seen the house as he had come up so he thought he should make sure he was not lost. He pulled the SUV into the grassy yard and got out, carrying his recorder and notebook.

He walked up to the door and knocked. A short middle-aged woman answered. "Can I help you?" she asked.

Still woozy, Wallace explained, "I am doing some research. I was talking to Mr. Hoover and was heading home. I'm a little fuzzy. I crashed my car and bumped my head. I think I'm lost. Is this the main road?"

"No, this is the road to Denney Hollow. Why don't you come in and clear your head? Maybe a drink of water."

"That would be great. I'm Wallace Stevens."

The woman extended her hand and replied, "I'm Maggie Denney. Glad to meet you. Here have a seat and I'll get you a drink."

She returned from the kitchen with a glass of water. "What brings you to these parts?"

"I'm working on a project exploring why people have such a strong attachment to their home places."

He looked around the neat room. "Mrs. Denney, do you live here by yourself?"

"Oh no, my husband Ernest is at work and the boys are out traipsing through the woods. We have three boys, Willie, Ollie and Allan."

The water helped calm Wallace settle his nerves. He looked at his watch and asked, "Say, I have some time. Would you mind talking to me about your life here? Would you mind if I record our conversation?"

"Why no. There ain't much to tell. We're just plain folks."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Well, when Ernest and me got married, we moved here. He bought the place from Arlene Hatfield. Her husband Herbie got killed in a logwoods and they never had no kids. As she got older she figured she wasn't able to tend to the place so she moved closer to town. Poor thing died a few months after she moved. She never did get over Herbie dying."

"So what happened to Herbie?"

"They was cutting some trees to sell for lumber. They was cutting a big red oak tree and as it fell, it kicked back and ran a big splinter right through his heart. It was awful."

Wallace shuddered as he thought of the image she had described. "Sounds pretty gruesome."

"Oh it was bad. People talked about it for years. Logging is dangerous work. Lots of people killed or crippled doing it.

"So tell me about your boys. How old are your sons?"

"Willie is twelve, Ollie is eleven and Allan is ten. We had them close together. All boys. I wanted at least one girl but that didn't happen. Still, I'm happy with the boys."

"Do you farm much here?"

"Not much. Too steep and rocky. We grow a little garden and some tobakky. We have a few chickens and a pig and a cow."

"I didn't see them when I came up."

“Oh, we just let them run free so they wander around the woods and fields. Every once in a while, a fox’ll catch a hen, so Ernest will have to hunt him down and kill him. Mostly though, not much exciting happens around here.”

“Well, that’s all interesting. Can you tell me more about your family and life here?”

Hattie nodded and scooted her chair closer to speak into the microphone. Over the next hour, she told Wallace dozens of stories about their lives. Before he knew it, the sun had started to slip behind the treetops and he realized that he needed to get back to town.

“Oh my, I need to get back. I really appreciate your talking with me. I bet you have to get supper ready, so I will leave you to your work. How do I get back to the main road?”

“Just go back out this road and turn right and it’ll take you to the highway. It was nice to meet you, but I do have to get supper going.”

Wallace returned to his SUV and followed her directions until he got to the highway. Back in town, he stopped at the McDonald’s for supper before he went back to his room. There he fell exhausted into bed without even taking off his clothes.

V

The next morning he felt refreshed and anxious to get back to work. He stopped at McDonalds for an Egg McMuffin and coffee and went back to Steele’s office. Steele was already there working.

Wallace rapped lightly on the door. “Are you busy?”

Steele looked up, "Not too. How was your visit with Hoover? Did he talk your ears off?"

Wallace smiled, "He is a talker, but that's what I like! He had a lot to tell me. I sort of had a little crash on the way out and took a wrong road. But it worked out fine. I got to meet Mrs. Denney and interview her."

Steele leaned over his desk. "Did you? How was that?"

"She gave me a drink of water and told me about her family."

Steele smiled and repeated, "Did she?"

"Told me her husband's name was Ernest and her boys names were Willie, Ollie and Allan. They were all out playing in the woods."

"So you never met them, huh? They're an interesting family. You really should meet them. Tell you what. Why don't we go back up there and see if we can catch them at home?"

Wallace really wanted to go elsewhere, but he agreed. They left the building, got into the SUV, and started back up the road. Along the way Steele told him about some of the people living by the road and occasionally described some landmarks as they rode. Wallace turned right onto the road up Tuggle Hollow and wound his way along until they got to the Denney Hollow road.

Steele motioned, "Turn here up this little road."

Wallace veered left onto the road and crept along until he reached the opening. The house was nowhere to be found.

Steele asked, "So this is where you were yesterday? You sure?"

"I'm positive, but I don't understand where the house is.

Steele said, "Let's get out and walk around."

They got out of the car and meandered around the open field until they came upon some large limestone foundation stones among clumps of orange daylilies splattered across the field.

Steele turned to Wallace. "This is where you were, ain't it?"

"I think so, but I don't see the house."

"Well, this is the old house place. You can always tell by them daylilies. Anytime you are out in the woods here and find daylilies you are at an old home place. They'll grow for years after the house is gone."

"But what happened to the house?"

"This house burned down a long time ago. Here; let me show you something."

Steele led Wallace around the scattered stones to a small cemetery at the edge of the woods. He grinned and pointed to four small weatherworn tombstones inscribed with names and dates:

Willie Denney Born March 2, 1902 Died March 2, 1902

Ollie Denney Born April 22, 1903, Died April 23, 1903

Allan Denney Born April 4, 1904 Died April 6, 1904

Ernest Denney Born June 7, 1875, Died April 10, 1904

Wallace felt the hair on the back of his neck shiver. "She told me they were out playing in the woods."

"But you never saw them did you? You never even heard them. Now did you meet her husband, Ernest?"

"Well, no, she told me he was at work."

"Let me guess. She told you about Herbie Hatfield getting killed in a logging accident?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"It wasn't Herbie, it was Ernest. He was killed by that tree two days after they buried their third child."

"So . . ."

"So what happened to Hattie? Nobody knows. There was a big storm that night. People came to check on her the day after Ernest was buried but she was nowhere to be found. The door was open but there was nobody home. The fire had gone out in the stove, but there was no sign of Hattie."

"Wallace shivered. "Did they look for her?"

"They searched everywhere for her. Nothing. Nada. Somebody found what looked like her footprints heading up to the woods, but then they lost them in the leaves. I think someone found a broken branch on a pawpaw tree, but that was it."

"So I guess you are telling me I saw a ghost or I was still hallucinating from bumping my head."

“No, I’m not telling you anything. You ain’t the first person to see Hattie and the house. I doubt you’ll be the last.”

“Well, Mr. Steele, I don’t believe in ghosts. I must have hit my head harder than I thought.”

“Maybe yes, maybe no. Like I said, a lot of other people have seen her. Most usually around a storm. Nobody can explain it so we quit trying to.”

Steele pointed to the tombstones. “You see, Wallace, there’s something outsiders don’t get. You can come down here with your tape recorders and questionnaires and questions and so on but you will never understand life here. You see, she had three boys a year apart and they all died the same day or a day or so later. Now you think about that. They were on a first name basis with death and yet they didn’t give up. I am pretty sure that if Ernest had not got killed they would have kept trying until they got one to live.”

Wallace felt himself quaking. “That is really tragic.”

Steele bent over and dug out a large handful of dirt that he squeezed into a moist longish lump.

“You see, Wallace, I’m sure Shelby showed you this. Here when you squeeze a handful of dirt it just gets into a tighter clump. The dirt gets under your fingernails and it’s hard to get out. Well, that’s the way it is with death around here. Sure, you folks from away from here have people die. You have a funeral, you have a wake, bury them, and go on. Oh, you probably

visit their graves for the first few years, but as time goes by you stop doing even that. Oh, you might tell a story in some reminiscence, but you move on.

Wallace pursed his lips. "Maybe you're right."

"Well it's different here. Like Hattie, the spirits of the dead get lost in these woods, but you can't find them. Nobody comes to visit these graves or a lot of others like them scattered around these hills and hollers, and nobody puts flowers on them. But in the spring, them little pink flowers pop up and cover these plots. I think they are called spring beauties."

"Yes, that's right. Spring beauties.

"Well, like I said, outsiders will never really understand us. You have no connection to this place. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But this ain't your ashes and it ain't your dust. People around here never lose sight of the fact that they are made of this dirt, and they know they will return to it. A pine box rots in time, and the bones and flesh go back to the dirt. But some small bit of that person's soul lingers here I guess until Judgment Day, when all the souls are called up in the resurrection. No matter how hard you try, you can never get your head around living that close to death. For you folks, death is a single event in time. Here it is a constant stream that never stops. You just can't understand it."

Wallace stood reflecting on Steele's words. He spoke softly, "You're right. I really don't get it."

“Oh, from time to time, people have seen Hattie and even spoken to her like you did. Around here, we don’t give it no mind. We don’t even talk about it much. It is like an open secret. We just accept it.”

As they stood looking at the stones, a tiger swallowtail butterfly floated over the field before settling on one of the daylily flowers to sip nectar. She flitted between three flowers before drifting on a languid breeze to disappear into the nearby woods.

Steele smiled and turned to face Wallace. “So what do you think? You think that was Hattie?”

ADA KNOX

A Home I Never Knew

A small mountainside called Gritter's Ridge: that was the place my daddy called home. Had he still been alive, I may have been able to call it my home, also. I would have been proud to have known it better, to know every hillside and every stream the way that he did. But, it's been a long time since I've driven these back roads. And, had I known as much about this place, I'd be saddened today to see how much it's changed. Even so, it still takes me back.

It takes me back to a time when my daddy, mom, sister, and I would stay with my Aunt Evalee for the weekend. I was just a small child, then. I remember very well being crammed in a bed between my mom and daddy, and thinking it couldn't possibly get any hotter. We'd awaken to fresh breakfast, made with love by the women of the house. I can see the kitchen table: simply an old wooden picnic table, slathered with a layer of white paint and brought inside to accompany us at mealtimes. Aunt Evalee always had goodies for me. Be it a Dum Dum pop or Big League Chew, I always appreciated the gesture. Once, she gave me two empty bubble bath bottles in the shape of Disney's Beauty and the Beast. What child could find joy in empty bubble bath bottles?! They were precious to me, anyway. I wish I still had them. Well, her house is still there, but she isn't in it, and hasn't been for some time. She lived very well by herself until she began to lose touch with reality and was taken away to live in a mental health facility. Daddy always said she lived a very rough life and it made her crazy. I can't help but

wonder if the floor still swims under your feet like it used to so long ago, like an uneven, funhouse floor. It doesn't even look like the same place. It isn't dusty enough, nor cluttered enough with whimsical things. It's too clean and looks as if the happiness and joy has left the building.

Just keep driving. I'm happy to see that the mountain spigot is still there and flowing, just the same as I remember. And, like every other time, I stop and drink the cool, clear fluid. Anyone else would think it unsanitary to stop on the side of the road to drink water from a spigot, drilled into the hillside, but it's wildly refreshing. If only I could count the many times I drank from this very spout, out of any empty can or bottle my daddy had laying in the back of his truck. Such memories!

At last, we're here: Gritter's Ridge Road. I make the right turn onto the dusty, gravel path, going up the steep, steep hill. Wooded slopes flank either side of the long and narrow road. When my daddy was a small boy, he played all over these woods. His family has owned this land since before his time. As a child, he'd take tin cans, with the top and bottom cut out, and bury them in the earth to make tunnels for his toy cars. There must be hundreds of tin cans all along this piece of ground. What a joy it would be to find one, still buried in the soil, after all this time!

Another mile or two up the path, the road begins to level, just for a bit. Winding through, further along, we come to the barn. That age-old barn, which my grandmother had

built, still stands, tall and majestic. The craftsmanship is spectacular. The fact that it is still in good, standing condition, baffles me. But, the van is gone. Behind the barn, there was once a pastel blue and white van that at one time belonged to my daddy. It used to put me in the mind of *The Mystery Machine*. The weeds were grown up, over and through it, the last time I had seen it. The poor van had been parked there in the seventies, never to be driven again. It isn't there anymore. I remember now, my uncle Otis had said that the van gave him bad memories, and that one day, he'd have it removed from the mountain. I guess that day has come and gone. How can he have gone through such lengths to have just one van removed, when the whole place is filled with memories? He may as well have just demolished the whole mountainside. I am bitter and feel as if it should not have been touched. But, it can't be helped, now.

Up ahead, daddy's cabin should be in the clearing. That's only if it was spared for a lack of bad memories. It still stands. His things are still inside. The pastel pink (yes, pink) stove is overturned on the floor, just as I remember it. How it got that way, I'll never know. It's been like this since before I was born. I doubt anyone even comes here, anymore. Papers, broken dishes, and random things still grace the floor in the one, big room. I am fearful that, in a few more, weathered years, this place may not endure. I am surprised it still stands.

There's just one more place to see. At the end of the road, the family cemetery awaits. It looks as if a new picnic area has been constructed. Other than that, it remains the same. It's exactly the same, with the exception of a couple of extra mounds of earth, here and there. Dad is in the center, surrounded by family and adorned with floral arrangements. It looks as if I was

the last to get here for Father's Day. I place my yellow cross made of roses, deep into the earth and look around. The tree stump is still there beside him. It was once such a big, beautiful tree. But, like everything else, it stumbled and fell. Whether it was old and weak or it blew over in a terrible storm, I can't remember.

Off into the distance, there was once a cave. Betsey Cave: that's what my daddy called it. We used to go and play at the wide opening, ever mindful not to go in too far. I'm sure that he used to explore the depths of that cave as a child. I could go and explore now, if I wanted to. The path is grown over, and I'm not wearing the right shoes, so I think I'll leave it as it is. So many things haven't changed much, but other things have changed far too drastically for my satisfaction. I would rather leave the Betsey Cave as I remember it, so I think I'll be heading back down the mountain, instead.

Upon my departure, I feel as if I am leaving the home I never knew. Maybe you don't have to remain in one place for your lifetime, to be able to call it your home. Memories, not residencies, are the foundation. I've not even made it down the gravel road yet, but I'm already planning my next trip home. Veteran's Day would be a nice time to return, with all the beautiful, autumn leaves. With everything, I hope that the leaves are the only things to change until then.

CHRISTY B. MILLER

Elizabeth, Called Lizzy

She wasn't at all what she appeared and yet she was everything she appeared. She looked relaxed and at ease in her own skin. She seemed to hardly notice the other passengers on the bus and yet seemed to completely be a part of it all at the same time. She caught your attention and yet she was unassuming. The toddler screaming in his mother's arms even stopped momentarily when his teary eyes met hers. I observed her and knew she knew I was observing her. She was and always had been an amazing woman to me.

Aunt Lizzy came from the backwoods of Kentucky. Where people lived up hollers and that coincidentally was the way they addressed neighbors, by hollering or yelling. Aunt Lizzy had no children of her own but she had took me and my three siblings in when our daddy was killed in a coal mining accident in Lovely, Kentucky, which was anything but lovely. She lived about four hollers over from us but as soon as news spread that daddy was one of the miners killed, she walked to get us. I was the oldest and the only girl and she was a life saver to me. Mama had left us all when Hubert, the baby, was two. She went to the store and left me watching Hubert, Floyd and Ernest. She never came back. Daddy came in the next morning to find the boys asleep and me still weeping, softly, so as not to wake the boys. He just looked at me as I tried to explain about mama not coming home and said, "You gotta fix breakfast, Sarah, and stop that crying. I talked to your mama and she ain't comin' back." That was the end of it.

Then almost three years to the day, daddy was killed and I was almost thirteen years old and I felt like I was a hundred.

Aunt Lizzy was daddy's youngest sister and the only one of the family besides daddy that hadn't married off and moved to Ohio to work in the steel mills. I always admired her. She could sew anything. She lived in a two bedroom shack much like ours that had a loft space. She had curtains up to every window of her house, which made her different than most of us. She had little thin pillows on her chairs so they wouldn't feel scratchy when you sat in them. She took us in and right away started schooling us. We didn't get to go to public school much anyway after mama left and we hadn't really cared about it or missed it at all. But Aunt Lizzy was determined we were going to be civilized. She made us bath three times a week and on Sundays we had to walk to the First Methodist Church and we had to bow our heads and pray when everybody else did. She would always ask us who we prayed for and little Hubert answered the same for a year, "I prayed for mama to be okay" but after about a year, he started saying he prayed "for mama and daddy to be in Heaven together." Whatever Hubert said he prayed for always made me cry. I always prayed to be able to go to college and leave Kentucky.

Today, on this bus, I am headed to Lexington, Kentucky to sign up for college. I have on a blue pinstripe suit that Aunt Lizzie made me from a picture in a Sears and Roebuck catalog. It fits me perfectly and the skirt is just below my knees. I have on real pantyhose and I am not afraid. As I look at Aunt Lizzy, I want to call her Aunt Elizabeth. Lizzy doesn't seem to suit her at all. She has sewn for people, took in laundry, babysitting, housecleaning and finally she

started cooking and making up lunch bags and taking them to the mining camp and selling them to the miners. Her money jar would fill up and she'd take it to the bank. She got paid sometimes with chickens, pigs and even pies, but the miners paid good money for her lunches. She was graceful, poised and she had been a mother to me and my brothers for the past eight years.

I am twenty-one years old and I am not leaving Kentucky. I am going to the University of Kentucky to become a doctor. Aunt Lizzy didn't just inspire me; she has paid dues and filed the paperwork required for grants. She lives what she says. Her favorite comment is, "You can pray to Jesus but you have to put actions to faith." She wants me to come back home and help the miners and their families. "They work hard Sarah, harder than anyone I've ever met. They just need someone to help them and to care." I had to disagree with her. I think Aunt Lizzy worked harder than anyone I ever met. She was always up when I went to bed and I was always dog tired. She was up before I opened my eyes each morning and she was always neat, organized and clean. She kept Ernest, Floyd and Hubert under control and never raised her voice but she did keep a switch by the back door, which she used sparingly. She fed us, clothed us and never complained. She cried at my daddy's funeral and it was the only time I ever saw her seem weak. It was two years after daddy died, that it just hit me one day; Aunt Lizzy lost her brother and gained all of us in the same day.

Aunt Lizzy is as graceful as a willow and as tough as a miner's hammer. She is as dedicated and loyal as anyone I ever saw and as I look at her now, I realize she loves me so

much she is giving me the key to freedom. But somehow she knows I will use it to come home again and I realize too, that is what I will do. I will come home again and I hope Aunt Lizzy is there waiting for me.

TIM SPARKS

The Bleeding Stars

The sky was dark with night and covered with clouds. No stars were visible, nothing but the empty blanket that separated us from the beautiful abyss beyond.

She sat on the couch in the sunroom that opened up to the patio. Tight curly red hair hung by her shoulders, which helped conceal her face as her head hung. There must have been a chill to the air for she wore her leather jacket with the gray sleeves, the one I got for her this past Christmas.

Oh how those eyes lit up when she pulled it over her arms, her whole body bouncing with excitement as she tugged it tight. She looked at me, those deep, ocean blue eyes set atop high cheek bones making my skin sizzle as they reflected the twinkling Christmas lights. Like stars. I would see the future there, the past. The moment we were in stretched for eternity in that endless blue.

She looks past me now, and the way she pulls the sleeves looks as if it's to keep from falling apart.

The first time she looked past me was so painful. I remember feeling my still heart contract so tightly and powerfully that I thought I had passed again. Her eyes were gray; everything that once was there had been cried away. It sent me reeling, my impossible being so

hurt that I brought my blood-covered hand to my face, fighting the urge to sink to the floor and lay for eternity in a tearless cry . . .

I suddenly became overwhelmed as I leaned up against the doorway, watching her. I let my head fall against the wood. There was a faint thud, but no feeling came. It must have been enough for her to hear.

She looked, her eyes darting from the kitchen to my left then the front door through the hall directly behind me. Her sunken face was set against a gentle frenzy of smoldering fire, yet water puddled and streaked down the sweet, sloping features of her face. The two contradicted each other harmoniously. It was a saddening beauty that shouldn't exist.

It was too painful to look at it. I let my eyes fall.

I've been here for a little while. I mean, I can't really remember when I came to be in this loft of existence. All I remember is the rain. It had been pounding and pelting the already soggy earth for hours. The drive home wasn't that long, but something went wrong that night.

Through the haze, wisps and ghost-like fragments of what was left flashed before me again. The rain, the road, the steering wheel in my hands; I knew what was coming, and it came with a bright flash of lightning, a crack of thunder.

The glass exploded. Our world Tumbling . . .

Screams. Hers. Mine.

I reached out for her, but I clutched nothing but the rushing air. I hit the pavement hard, feeling my head explode with pain, my back and neck splintering and cracking. Again, again,

and again until I came to rest on the solid double lines, eyes to the sky, my hands and arms still trying with the fading life they had left to wrap themselves around her. My soul tethered to her, waiting for an absolution.

Then, as if flipping a channel, it was just *my* world, and I was floating in oblivion, fading.

It was a lonely feeling. It's how I feel when her eyes miss me, like I'm out there and alone on the cold and wet slab of concrete again, the cold rain prickling my skin and washing my life away into the dirt.

For days, I stood there and cursed every car that passed.

For nights, I walked that lonely stretch of dark highway, asking what anyone and everyone would.

Why . . . Why me?

Then, right before the sun came up on the fifth day after I passed, I felt something tighten around me. I went from resting my head on my knees to standing in a blink of an eye. It took me by surprise . . . I hadn't felt anything that strong since the accident. My feet began to move, and they didn't stop.

I found myself here, standing on the front steps of the home we built together. It was hallow, the darkness within a sickening reminder of my fate. The door was slightly ajar, like a ghost had slipped inside.

How ironic, I thought as I slid my hand in the space.

The same mysterious gravity navigated me again. As I went, I traced the walls with my fingers as if I were reliving every memory of us they witnessed. It was impossible, but I dove deep within the layers of paint there, trying hard to find something. A single piece of frayed time would have been enough for me. Memories wouldn't save me now, I knew that. But I still couldn't help but feel broken when a cold surface was all the answered.

The third door at the end of the hallway was the end of the line. I could sense it.

Again, my feet moved involuntarily. One by one they went, my fingers still tracing, searching.

That's when I found her. I came to a stop, my hands went still.

My eyes fell upon her bare skin lying crumpled on a canvas of maroon. Her cries were muffled by the comforter until she rolled onto her back, sitting up in what looked like an attempt to catch air. She wrapped herself with weak arms and rocked, my name beginning to caress her lips followed by a string of words lost in hysteria.

The internal pull released. I nearly collapsed to my knees as it lifted from within and floated away like smoke.

My face drew in, my throat swelled.

Her lips were moving slowly, a stream of air barely giving voice to that string of words they formed. The pattern looked familiar... I strained against the ringing in my ears to hear.

"I love . . ." she began.

My crimson colored hands came to my chest as it began to scream. I knew the end of the statement. I had said it many times myself.

“I *love* you . . . with all my soul,” she finished.

I slid to the floor, agony taking over me again. It hit me then why I had come here, why this stealth force overtook and moved me so.

I’ve always told her that true love doesn’t come from the heart. Never could something so easily broken and insignificant be the source of something so powerful, so full of beauty.

No. The passion within resonates from the soul, for without a soul, a body cannot love. There is no better place for an undeniable, unshakable force than those mysterious dimensions within our chests.

They are infinite. We are infinite.

“I love you, with *all* my soul.”

She had been tethering to me too . . .

Memories were easy to get lost in, even though I tried to stay away from them. Again, they *wouldn’t* save me. They just made coming back to the present so much harder, yet their glorious hue of gold was irresistible.

We were suddenly, almost painfully slammed into the present by the ringing cordless. I straightened abruptly, a gasp, and then a shaky sigh parting her lips. Chirps echoed through the house again, carrying out through the door to us.

I watched distantly as she clutched the arm of the sofa and slowly stood on a thickly booted leg.

“Uhn,” she moaned, freezing. I took a step forward to help her. Then, I scowled myself. There was nothing I could possibly do. A thick barrier separated our bodies and kept us from touching. It was persistent, but I fought it hard, even now.

As she hobbled past me after the phone, now on its third ring, my eyes caught on something that her body obscured from view. It was a small piece of paper that I had drawn on before the accident, flicking in the gentle breeze

I began across the deck, the details etched there clearing.

The ink dotted the page with black, and a crescent shape guarded the corner. Without the lines, it would have been a meaningless night sky. But this corner of the universe was hers. I stared into that constellation, and, just like her eyes, I saw eternity.

I smiled.

“Hello?” Her weak voice came from the house. “Just sittin’ on the patio.”

I turned, moving back towards the door as distant thunder rolled.

“I’m doing okay, I guess. I feel like it’s getting better.”

It was a lie. I knew it the moment it came from her mouth. She wasn’t very good at lying. Usually she would crack a smile and deny it when questioned. No one was here to question her tonight.

"Well, today I cleaned the house. I made our bed, did my laundry, and attempted to clean the fridge out," she chuckled, walking around the dark kitchen.

Lies. She snuggled into our sheets and cried. She took one sniff of my clothes and cried. And the fridge . . . she refused to throw away a pitcher of tea that I made before it happened.

"It's rough." She was suddenly serious. Her change of tone made me stop. "He was here. And now . . . he's not . . . ? It's . . . not something I'm used to yet," her voice dropped at the end.

I watched her shoulders sink, then looked to the floor.

"I haven't been out to see him in a while," she pulled the phone away, shaking her head as she continued to pace.

If only you knew, I thought.

"To be honest, I don't like going out there. It's . . . quiet," she paused. "He wasn't quiet. That's what bothers me the most," she continued. "A cemetery is supposed to give you some kind of closure. It hasn't."

What she said next made my eyes snap to her.

"He's with me," she whimpered. In the window out looking the backyard, I saw her reflection perfectly. Her face scrunched in pain, but she was smiling. "I can *feel* him."

My chin quivered like it had the night when I found her for the first time.

"I . . . can *feel* him with me . . . *in* me," she whispered.

I moved across the small space separating us, reaching for her. I put my hands on her hips, begging for her to sense me there, and pressed my chest against her shoulder blades.

I'm right here, I'm right here . . .

"He's been with me since then," she cried now. "Always. He *never* left. *Never . . .*"

My chest began to scream again, the lines of physical and emotional pain broken. I looked down and saw her hand barely tapping her chest, right where her soul was.

She was hysterical then. The phone clattered to the ground, and she supported herself against the counter top. I placed my hands on top of hers, hoping that she felt me.

Suddenly, she jerked herself away from me. I watched her go, feeling my eyes ache in their sockets.

Hey! I screamed, my voice echoing in my head. *Hey!*

She stopped.

Please... I cried out. *Don't go . . .* I choked out. *Just look at me, babe. Just look at me. I'm right here, like you said . . . I never left. Please see me. Please!* I could feel a chink in that barrier, and I was pushing with all my might. I brought my fists down on my skull, feeling the brink *there.*

She shook her head, but it almost looked like she was looking around.

Was she looking for me?

Please! Please—Please—PLEASE! I collapsed at the midsection. *I'm here. I'm right here . . .*

It all became too much, and that was all I could manage.

There was a bang, and then a gust of wind swept through the kitchen.

“No, no no,” she screamed out through her tears, hobble-running back to the patio. I picked myself up, taking off after her.

The weather had taken a turn for the worse. The wind was howling now, and the first droplets of rain were beginning to pelt the earth.

Just like that night.

“No, no, no,” she said again. It looked as if she were fighting the air until I realized what she was after.

My drawing.

The door leading to the deck outside the patio opened and slammed, opened and slammed. Her reckless steps were taking her towards it.

No! STOP!

Then before I could stop her, she plunged through it.

Her body landed hard causing the glass in the picnic table to rattle ominously. My drawing hit the cold rain, and it fell to the wood like a swatted fly.

I jumped down the three steps until I was next to her and crouched, checking for new wounds that I caused. There weren't any, but she sure was howling like there were. I wasn't sure why until I noticed she was reaching for something.

I followed her extended hand and saw the drawing. The ink was running, the stars were bleeding.

I laid my body down next to her as she drew her hand back and closed her eyes, screams still echoing off the house and yard.

I closed my eyes, feeling the brink there again.

Look at me, look at me! I placed my hands on her shoulders, trying to show her I was there.

Please. I love you with all my soul. I love you with all my soul . . .

Her cries grew quiet.

I pushed against the brink. I pushed, and pushed . . . I pushed so hard my skin began to tingle. The sensation grew and my nerves were beginning to fire. I reached deep inside myself, found the tether and pulled.

She gasped.

I kept my eyes closed, and pulled again.

My name came from her lips.

I pulled as hard as I possibly could.

That's when I felt the rain. It was cold, and it the blood on my hands began to run, my life washing away into the dirt.

"I love you with all my soul," I said, my voice no longer within the confines of my head.

Her eyes flew open, taking me in.

"I love you with all my soul," I repeated, this time I yelled. Her hands found my cheek, and she smiled as lightning struck and thunder rolled.

"I," she began, "love you . . . with all of my soul," she screamed back, tears still rolling from her shimmering eyes. Like stars. I burned this image of her in my mind, hoping that even after I left, it would still be there.

This wouldn't last I knew it. Even then as she repeated me, I felt myself slipping away, back into the abyss.

But in that moment, we were whole again. We were infinite.

And we shined. Through the darkness, we shined.

This couldn't be real . . .

It was him.

"I love you with all my soul," he said to me. I felt my insides glow again, like this was the first time he had said it.

I felt my cheeks grow a shade of red.

"I love you with all my soul," he had screamed, almost triumphantly.

I giggled, then screamed it back.

"I," a quick gasp, "Love you with all my soul!" I closed my eyes, feeling this entire moment radiate through my being. I never wanted it to end.

But it did.

I opened my eyes, and he was gone.

I let my hand fall to the deck where it soaked in a puddle of water. This may have been the end, but our story would stretch for infinity.

Infinity . . .

I rolled over to my back, feeling the sweet, cool air enter my lungs. I opened my eyes and there, among a small break in the clouds, was a twinkling, green star.

Infinity.

TRAVIS WARNKEN

Fear

Fear is a hell of a motivator. It managed to get me all the way from Montana to this sailboat tied to a buoy bobbing 30 yards off the beach of a deserted island. I'm somewhere on the Pacific side of Costa Rica, it's the middle of the night. Now I need it to get me to shore.

It's a beautiful night. The boat gently rocks with the rolling of the pacific, while the light from the moon and stars give the shoreline the look of one of those black and white postcards I used to stare at in truck stops as a kid. But the real show is going on below me. The water is alive with fire plankton. They trace the outline of everything that swims by in a blue-green fluorescent fire. That is what is causing my current dilemma. There are sharks in these waters; tigers, black-tips, and hammerheads to name a few, and they all come close to shore at night to feed, and from what I can see they are all swimming around my little island waiting to do just that.

I was so relieved that I had even managed to get the boat back here. My cousin Cliff and I have been in Costa Rica for about five months and the last couple of weeks we had spent pulling guard duty on this island, in exchange for a free place to stay. We've been waiting until we could get some money sent to us from the sale of my car stateside, so we could head back home. When word came that the money had arrived, I drew the short straw and Cliff was the lucky one who would get to go to the capital to pick it up. I was to remain on the island until

he made it back with the money and our replacement, guard slash combination caretaker. Cliff getting to the capital necessitated us making our way by boat from our little island to the ferry landing across from Puntarenas. This was a journey of about 10 miles each way. Once there I would drop him off and sail back to the island and wait for him to return, hopefully in three or four days.

The trip back was a nightmare. I hardly knew what I was doing and darkness was closing in much too fast. I tried to hug the shoreline where I could and I kept hoping that I didn't miss my mark, when I took my shot at reaching the island and end up lost at sea. I was scared to death and those ten miles seemed to be closer to a thousand when I finally caught sight of my destination. I think I may have cried a little. But there was no one to see me and at this point it felt like there might not be anyone else on the planet. I'd made it. Now I just had to tie this little sailboat up to the buoy and swim to shore.

So now here I sit an hour later, watching what I am sure are ten and twelve foot sharks swimming all around me. Just waiting for me to make my sure to be ill-fated attempt to swim to shore. I think about just sailing the boat onto the beach. But it's too big for me to drag far enough out of the water to keep the tide from stealing it. I also can't quite convince myself to sleep here and wait for the sun to swim to shore. I watched *Jaws*, and I know even boats aren't safe.

I have to look like a fool sitting here grinning at myself in the moonlight, trying to find my last little bit of courage for that dive and long swim to shore. I just can't find it yet. The

only thing I can locate is fear. Fear is what got me here, fear of ending up like everyone I knew, fear of punching a time clock at the same mill, in the same little town, with all the same people that I grew up with, like my father did before me. That fear managed to get Cliff and me on a bus in the middle of the night and ride it all the way from Montana to Miami, and it managed to get us to Costa Rica in search of adventure, adventure found. But I'm not sure how it is going to get me from this boat to the shore.

I find the closest point on the beach and wait for an opening in the shark tank. There it is. I take as big a breath as I can hold, grit my teeth and dive. I pull myself through the water as far as I can. I don't want to surface. *Jaws* again, splashing attracts sharks. Finally I can't take it anymore, I rise to the surface and gulp air and swim, (thrash) my way to shore, waiting for the feel of teeth on my flesh. Suddenly my feet touch the sandy bottom and I'm running through the surf, chest heaving, I lurch out of the ocean and collapse on the sand, gulping for air and feeling exhausted. I think I'll just lie here for the rest of the night. Suddenly, a roar like a lion erupts out of the pitch black jungle. I scramble over to my knees and dart to the little hut we have called home for the last couple of weeks, trying to remember where the candles and lighter are. Damn howler monkey nearly scared me to death.

Four days later Cliff finally shows up with our relief and money. We can go home. I think he is a little impressed I'm still alive. If he asks, I've decided to tell him everything went just fine. It was just a little boring out here by myself. No reason to mention howler monkeys or sharks.



Love at First Sight ALICIA BURRUS



Orange Burst ALICIA BURRUS



Old Chevy Truck ELIZA GOODLETT



Red Oak Leaf *ROGER L. GUFFEY*



Pink Rose ROGER L. GUFFEY



Untitled TARAH KETRON



Coffee Shot ANTHONY MACE



Bridge T.J. MCDUFFEY



Justina à l'Arboretum WILLIAM RIGNEY



Untitled GRACE VAUGHN

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

E Kayla Biddle is an aspiring poet and author, born and raised in the Bluegrass State. She enjoys reading, painting, horse racing, and, of course, writing. At age sixteen, she won a spot in a competitive, grant-funded young women writers' project. She also edited a high school literary magazine, serving as a contributing editor for two years, and then as editor-in-chief. She attended an internationally recognized academic program for two summers, studying writing and world literature. During her junior year of high school, another program named her as an alternate for creative writing.

Don Boes teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. His poetry appears in two recent anthologies: *What Comes Down To Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets* published by University of Kentucky Press and *Bigger Than They Appear: Very Short Poems* published by Accents Publishing. His other books include *The Eighth Continent* and *Railroad Crossing: Poems*. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council.

Alicia Burrus was born and raised in Kentucky. Her love of photography came from her father. Family reunions, vacations, holidays--everywhere her dad went, his camera was glued to his side. Now, Alicia carries on that family tradition of photography with her own daughter. Nature photography is Alicia's favorite type of photography. Growing up in the country, she fell in love with nature's peaceful beauty. Someday, she wants to work for *National Geographic*.

Nathaniel Ellis is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, and he grew up in Lexington. He loves to write and hopes to become a writer one day.

Mary Gammon has been a BCTC Developmental English adjunct since the spring of 2013. Prior to that, she taught Spanish at BCTC's (then known as LCC) Winchester Campus beginning in 1990-2005, and elementary Spanish at St Agatha Academy and Seton Catholic School, 2006-2013. She resides in Lexington with her husband Kevin; 3 kids, Ben 27, Jacob 25, and Katie 21; and two cats, Cocoa and Ladybird. She loves languages, reading fiction, the arts, music and historic homes.

James B. Goode is a Professor of English at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays since the 1960s. He is a creative writer, essayist, photographer, and Appalachian scholar, who has written about the Appalachian region for many years. He has authored several books of poetry and two technical books on coal mining, produced and directed two documentary films, published short stories in two major

anthologies, published over 500 poems in national and international magazines, and written over two hundred columns for the *New York Times*, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, *Coal County Extra*, and various other newspapers and magazines.

Eliza Goodlett enjoys taking pictures of nature and animals. She lives in Harrodsburg, Kentucky. She spends her free time reading and playing with her two cats. Whenever she can she tries to snap a picture. She has been interested in photography since she was 14 years old.

Roger L. Guffey is an adjunct faculty member at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has taught math at the college for over 24 years. He also has taught full time at Lafayette High School. He enjoys writing fiction and is currently working on a collection of short stories. He also does a lot of photography.

Tarah Ketron loves to paint on rainy days and paint of the beautiful sunshine and outdoors. She's lived in Lexington, Kentucky her whole life and loves the country and city mix of the city. She is inspired by the many people and places she sees in her everyday life.

Ada Knox is a full time student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She hopes to obtain her associate in science degree and then transfer to a university, which she hasn't decided upon at this time. One day, she hopes to work in a veterinary setting. She also enjoys writing very much.

Anthony Mace is a 57 year old veteran attending BCTC through the VRAP program. He is studying graphic art and design, in which he has always had an interest. He is originally from eastern Kentucky and has been involved in printing, publishing, and advertising for more than twenty years. He owned a small business that specialized in publishing promotional calendars. His interests also include photography, guitar, and mountaineering. He lives in Lexington with his daughter, mother, and their cat, Blackie. He has been semi-retired for several years but hope to change that with the training he's receiving at BCTC.

William (Bill) H. McCann, Jr. is a playwright and poet who teaches at BCTC. He lived in Lexington most of his life before moving to Corinth in May 2012.

T.J. McDuffey is a resident of Winchester. He enjoys photography as a source of relaxation and getting back to nature. When the opportunity arises for him to travel, he always takes his camera. His work includes images from the mountains of Montana to the oceanfront of South Carolina.

Christy B. Miller lives in Garrard County, Kentucky. Originally born in Jessamine County, she has written poetry and short stories for her children and grandchildren since 1975. She has had a few poems published but with ten grandchildren she doesn't have much time to write anymore. Even so, her imagination is always working and the grandchildren benefit from her original tales that change as the children grow older or their interests change. Her greatest inspirations came from her 7th and 8th grade teacher, Mrs. Beulah Bowman at Chrisman Mill School in Jessamine County and her love for the hills of Kentucky.

Sarita Munsey enjoys writing poetry, art, and animals. She currently lives in Frankfort, Kentucky with her lop rabbits Cinnamon and Sugar, as well as her cat, Sapphire. Sarita is continuing her education at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. Her plan is to pursue her lifelong dream of being a zoologist, and eventually owning the world's largest animal sanctuary for the endangered species.

William Rigney is a humanities and natural sciences major at BCTC's Cooper Campus, and he lives in Georgetown, Scott County.

Mikayla Saunders enjoys writing poetry in the English sonnet form.

Tim Sparks is a student at the Lawrenceburg Campus where he is currently studying meteorology. In his spare time, Tim teaches color guard at Boyle County High School, and is a sales associate at Aeropostale. He is also working on his first novel, entitled *Bolt*.

Grace Vaughn enjoys taking photos, and her favorite form is up-close nature photography. She is originally from Circleville, Ohio and has been taking photography since she was 14 years old. She lives on forty-three acres of land in Salvisa with her family and animals.

Travis Warnken is a married father of two boys who started writing while serving aboard the USS-Ford during the first Gulf War. He is currently working as an exercise rider at Winstar Farm while attending BCTC.

