

Preliminary: ROUGH DRAFT

The Adanta Anthology

"...strength for the fire/purified wine...."-- Blood for Drowning



from Jazz Notes in the Misty Blue
[<http://acountryrag.org/mbencore.html>]

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1. Travelogue: A Windie Town

Over a three-day weekend, our first annual Windiefest filled some buildings and streets of Jonesborough with music, talk, and food -- most particularly chocolate. A ticket for Choccolatta Joie de Vivre entitled its bearer to discounts at venues from Earth and Sky Confections to i fancy foods to our favorite hangout, The Cranberry Thistle, and many others along Main Street and its side avenues. While savoring a homemade truffle, one could drop by the latter shop's commodious back room to hear and see regional favorites actress Rema Keen, psycho-social worker and entrepreneur Kim Bushore-Maki, prolific author/playright Jo Carson, and founder of Smart Women Julie Hellwich discuss their experiences and then answer questions in an informal dialogue. Might as well pick up a discounted dark chocolate praline decadence topped with whipped cream and chocolate bits while there also.

Smart Women Venerable and venerated speaker Jo Carson described her experiences dealing with complete loss of hearing, unremediated by any mechanical aids employed and accompanied by tinititis, and later stomach cancer surgery and healing treatments, including chemotherapy, for that. She described how the unsought but welcome appearance at her home of friends from over many years and places for various helpful

durations had made the difference between determined survival and incapable demise. When asked if she felt vibrations, for instance from music, Jo said that only those of drums affected her and were actually healthful for her heart.

Of three workshop offerings Saturday afternoon, I chose drumming on the second floor -- actually contiguous to its three-acre backyard garden park grounds -- of our artfully and comfortably designed Storytelling Center. Jessie Lehmann of Asheville NC's Boom Chix (earlier Chix with Stix), an all-woman drummer band, had arranged unfolded chairs with cushioned seats in a generous circle central to the large-windowed front room. An awesome display of drums in all sizes, shapes and colors were gathered toward a corner for our choosing. She explained briefly the differences in sound and technique expected for each type and her professional background over twelve years or so, including five months altogether in Western Africa playing with native drummers there. During some of that time she was also studying for and earning her bachelor's degree in Philosophy and now owns and directs a private company she created that presents interrelational therapies for corporate divisions and their personnel -- at least when she isn't playing with one of three Asheville bands, including also African and Samba/Salsa-style.

Susan Lachman, WindieFest founder/organizer -- Click for more info The room fills slowly with women, and one man, from teens to retirees, who each choose a drum for themselves, sticks if necessary, and find a seat. Jessie describes and demonstrates each series of beats we will follow and practice together. In some cases, as the combinations intended or remembered become more complicated, she explains them with entertaining aural sounds and hand gestures that are worthy of a video all in themselves. There's talk of her returning for lessons here monthly also. Toward the end, Susan Lachmann joins our now-full and resplendant in sound circle with a kind of native marachas composed of large nuts perhaps and we repeat a series of changing taps and beats on and on and on until it becomes at once interesting and hypnotic in a rising, self-perpetuating insistence of tonal movement that seems like its message might cross the boundaries of states and oceans and nations. Two couples join at the last with their small, pink-dressed daughters held up in their arms to enjoy it all also.

I've bought a caringly-used djembe from Jessie toward the beginning of the workshop, played it throughout, and now have it to carry several blocks down Main Street to where my car is parked. This requires some stopping at benches to just relax and recall and think about it all, while tapping lightly off and on on the djembe. One woman passerby stops staring and finally notes that she'd been a marching band drummer all through grade and

high schools and college. She still has a set at home and is teaching her six-year-old son, now at her side more or less. Another young boy races and hops by imparting to me excitedly that the Easter Bunny at festivities in the park had red eyes. I'm appropriately impressed and awed. An older woman asks the price of the djembe, eyes wide at the response, and declares I've gotten a very good deal indeed.

Sunday's noon brunch featuring the event's creator/coordinator as speaker is moved from Old Quarters to Main Street Cafe where gourmet foods are displayed on a long armoire against the back wall and we seat ourselves at cozy round tables, joining old friends and meeting new ones. I'm lucky to sit with, amongst others cordially communicative, Kim Bushore-Maki who entertains us with well-told stories of trips, encounters and characters met, over the years with her husband to various parts of Italy -- including Sicily, Rome, Venice and the provinces, which were her favorites -- where she has relatives. Perhaps my favorite is of their first visit when she was five months' pregnant. Where that situation is greeted, she said, without special notice or rearrangement in the United States and its outposts overseas, the Italians felt and behaved very, very differently. Leaving their temporary countryside residence for city dining via taxi, for instance, in Italy the restaurant owner and their waiter insisted, after the meal was finished, that they wait, appropriately entertained and feted, until all the rest of the diners had finished and vacated so they could be safely driven back home by restaurant personnel. Kim has worked for ETSU as a counselor and professor for nine years until recently resigning to start her own business in downtown Johnson City of "alternative" healing approaches to psychological and social maladies in particular.

Following a few trips to the buffet bar and clearing of our tables, Susan stands comfortably toward the front and slides into her reminiscences. There are stories and insights from her experiences as a long-time resident, community activist, entrepreneur, musician, educator, family member and mother. Perhaps her most notable prior organizational success was the series of Good Goddess exhibits ranging from Johnson City to Jonesborough of art by women; however, she's also been an outstanding creative force in educational and therapeutic programs for children. And, of course, she's best known as being the beloved host for 14 years of public radio's "Women On Air" -- a show introducing innovative and traditional female musicians and enlightening interviews with them on their backgrounds, observations, techniques and inspirations in the course of their careers. She takes questions at the end and is finally asked by one participant to sing for us, which she does a capella (although she plays guitar, dulcimer and drums in particular and professionally). She chooses a song with which I'm unfamiliar by a Canadian songstress/musician and with a very clear and strong, perfectly-tuned voice conveys these words from "Testimony" by

Ferron

There's godlike

And warlike

And strong

Like only some show

And there's sad like

And madlike

And had

Like we know

But by my life be I spirit

And by my heart be I woman

And by my eyes be I open

And by my hands be I whole

They say slowly

Brings the least shock

But no matter how slow I walk

There are traces

Empty spaces

And doors and doors of locks

But by my life be I spirit

And by my heart be I woman

And by my eyes be I open

And by my hands be I whole

You young ones

You're the next ones

And I hope you choose it well

Though you try hard

You may fall prey

To the jaded jewel

But by your lives be you spirit

And by your hearts be you women

And by your eyes be you open

And by your hands be you whole

Listen, there are waters

Hidden from us

In the maze we find them still

We'll take you to them

You take your young ones

May they take their own in turn

But by your lives be you spirit

And by your hearts be you women

And by your eyes be you open

And by your hands be you whole

Following that folk/country aria, Susan set up her small laptop in a back cove so we could

record our impressions and comments on the very First Annual Windiefest also. Earlier she had introduced Paula Giovanetti, a young family friend and ETSU art design student, who'd created out of Windiefest's wondrously lovely logo handmade hammered-copper jewelry, earrings and necklaces in their own handmade copper-mesh bags to sell, partly for fundraising. The logo and other event festival graphics were contributed by Susan's also-talented sister Jean. photo of Susan Lachmann In a later e-mail discussion with Windiefest's creator/originator, Susan wrote in explication: "To sing that song in that space for all those reasons was a pinnacle moment for me. I have met Ferron on several occasions; in person and phone interview [through her WETS 'Women On Air' series]. She has been at the Down Home, is a Mother now and I assume still living in Washington state. Native of Canada. Kind of broody. The song, 'Testimony,' stands as an anthem for its time in the women's music movement. The story of its composition is quite compelling also.... [Ferron] is a different sort of character. Pensive, introspective. Once in an interview I commented to this effect and asked if it was her intention. She answered, 'I'm Canadian,' which I took to be some reference to the landscape of chilly, grey, brooding -- all reflected in her delivery. I heard her live concert in Lexington KY back around '78; it was produced by AmberMoon Productions. There was a cricket in one of the stage plants. I heard her also at the Orange Peel in Asheville five or six years ago and sold product for her and her band after the show. Another band member, Jamie Sieber, plays electric cello. And I was backstage for her show in Charlottesville VA. At that time, Ferron's first child was just learning to walk. For awhile, Ferron was even promoted as a 'humorist'! In regard to myself, I am first a vocalist. Performing as a folk singer began at age 13. There is nothing I love like I love singing." And we are so blessed to have that vocal brilliance and instrumental facility, felicity right here in our midst. I've enjoyed seeing and hearing Susan play in quite a varied assortment of stands -- from the Reece Museum to the Cranberry Thistle to Music on the Square. If you're lucky you might catch her voice and fingers "doin' their thing" here somewhere, announced or not.

2. Essay: Bateaus

Shifting cotillions of vessels explore the ribbons and coves of the river and test its hidden currents. Always, there are canoes. Commercial ones joust and plunge in a bright parade of reds, greens, blues and yellows. Kayaks, exuberantly isolated and small, dip and dart against the white water. Flat-bottomed boats, air motors whirring against warm summer winds, whirl upstream against the rapids, sputter and catch in the shallows of razored ledges. Tubes, commercial orange and truck-sized black private ones, bounce into the waves. Inflatable rafts bulge and buckle in shades of grey and red. Balanced and calmed by

a wide midsection, private canoes of sonorous grey or green-brown camouflage slide regally amidst the Shenandoah's gawky play.

Once on a magic sunny afternoon, where Indians through a millenia scraped and shaped stone tools and strung from bank to bank their V-shaped traps of mounded rock and boulders, a coterie of eighteenth-century bateaus passed us by. Long and raft-like, toward the front rose a covered porch-like construction; toward the end, high on a pole, waved a torn multi-colored flag. A few men stood, wending long poles, straining against the river, guiding the barges downstream. Children ran and splashed their legs in cooling waters; adults chatted and waved as bankside bystanders gazed entranced.

Like the bateau people, many river travellers share their boating trips with dogs. Sometimes the animals sit quietly curious and intent in their transport. Others paddle, heads sinking and rising through the riffles, or they race along the shoreline and dash into rock-ringed pools.

At the old ferry crossing, three commodious twentieth-century wooden rafts, homemade with railings and motors, float on salvaged and secured 55-gallon drums. Perhaps a dozen adults and children, in the company of a few large and well-trained dogs, comfortably sun and fish from the floating decks that drift and churn on deep water channels.

Near dawn, a few river-locked workers still pole and paddle to the eastern bank, catching their rides to city commerce, returning to the river at dusk.

Over the years, we have had many boats. First, there was an aluminum canoe, then a flat-bottomed, square-ended vessel. Many variations have followed. A great, one-hundred year flood unleashed and battered one; more earthly boatmarauders took another. Once we rented our watercraft to passers-through who returned it, gaping and gashed, after a sideways shipwreck against unforgiving river shoals.

Today, we keep dry-docked by the house a beaten and peeling green fiberglass canoe and a shiny aluminum fishing boat. Chained to a large sycamore at the river's edge lies a water-worn rowboat of molded wooden planks. Beached by the low water of drier months,

it serves for storage and seating, as we absorb the river's summer processional. Later, when days cool and contract, the river rises and the rowboat floats, straining downriver, circling on its chain.

3. *Micro-Fiction Fable: Creation*

In the beginning there was an amoeba, and it said:

I want to be bigger.

So it thought and figured and thought and puzzled and finally figured what to do.

It ate and ate to capacity until it stressed and stretched and grew.

Then it ate and ate to capacity again until it grew some more.

Finally the amoeba was a very large, kind of squishy, sort of round thingamajig.

And the ocean said:

What is THAT?

So the amoeba thought and figured and puzzled and finally thought what to do.

It rolled and rolled in seashell bits on the ocean floor that stuck to its gelatin coating like glue.

And the ocean said:

HEY, what are you?

So the amoeba puzzled and figured and thought and bounced on the ocean floor until it puzzled what to do.

It rammed and rammed one end of its gluey gelatinous goo over and over into the ocean floor.

And the ocean floor said:

Ouch, what are you trying to do?

The amoeba opened the hole it had rammed into one end of its gooey gelatinous glue and hissed:

The heck with this, I'm leaving you.

The ocean rolled its belly in waters of laughter that flooded something later called land and roared:

How, you floating goo?

So the amoeba collapsed into the sand, and it thought and puzzled and figured till it knew exactly what to do.

It found twin rocks on the ocean floor to cuddle up next to, ate some mud and threw up glue, and attached the tandem stones. Then it snorted:

Step aside, I'm walking through.

So the waves parted for something that might be puzzle and figure and thought someday become someone that might be called a man living on something that might be called the land.

And the ocean bowed and provided him food because only it knew what roiling cells had given birth to.

And the amoeba said:

I feel better now.

4. Poetry: Curvature

the pioneer spirit

yearns for an undefined space

to explore and call home,

needs a place all its own
to name, map and share or not --
that soul journey toward a sole spot
unmarked yet by human hands or thought
to claim as its God-right alone.

5. Sci-Fi Micro-Fiction: Galapagos 7xn-1

Amazerqs kept knocking hir off course.

As they took control of Techne Mythos in a vicious attack that slayed and enslaved, Trismes set sail for the peaceful sound and jeweled caves of Adha Pateeg where rain falls in sparkling ribbons, curtains of gold. The Valhalla of hir galaxy drew like a magnet. Trismes needed no compass but hir heart.

Suddenly, Amazerqs forced Trismes to their gravity with a staccato burst of sword fire. Shrapnel hit hir legs and skull, sent messages of cut-and-burn screaming, stampeding through hir system. Trismes howled, fell to hir knees and gripped the wheel tighter.

“Let me take over for awhile.” Arga came to hir side and, with consent, they exchanged bodies.

“Aaaoooww!”

“Thanks,” Trismes grinned. “I’ll get back in real soon. Just give me a mezu or two.”

E stretched Arga's arms hard toward the cosmos, reached for Io, hir favorite of Jupiter's moons, and hurled the orb toward Haraita, a launching pad of the Amazerqs.

"How does my heart feel?" Trismes asked, worriedly.

"Like a stone. A large one."

"We're off-beam. You shouldn't be able to feel it at all. Is it beating?"

"Like a Zulu tom-tom."

"We're visible," Trismes warned. "It should be completely still."

Arga began to panic. "Which way should I steer?"

"Turn the wheel till my heart feels calm and light," Trismes instructed from the warmth of hir temporary digs.

Trismes' legs were becoming a torment for Arga. The piercing pricks of metal in hir skull sent brain cells fleeing, zigzagging through Trismes' whole body. E saw them start to work when they reached the knees, mending nerve and flesh, spinning white corpuscles out to withered surface skin.

Tracers glared to their left. The ship had turned in its ocean of space.

"How does my heart feel now?" Feeding on Arga, Trismes' strength had returned. "Shall I go back?"

Failing, Arga flung himself weakly back into his body and shimmered with content.

“Home is where the heart is,” e laughed.

Trismes bent his head, turned an ear up toward the chimes. “I can hear the triangula of Adha Pateeg,” e sighed in relief.

Trismes held out his hand and, with the ship, they vanished on course.

6. Sci-Fi MicroFiction: Transmission from Arga

Note: Translation, particularly of complex imagery and concept, from one communicative form to another is deflative, circumscribed by profound grammatic parameters. Sadly, much is lost of the original transpiration from instant to written word.

They come from X!ph= and I don't understand their language. Actually, I can't really hear them but the import of their message seeps into my consciousness and I recognize the source. Their natural home is, of course, far away in distance as we measure it, but quite close by locomotive means of 'X!ph a-, a wave for which we have no name as yet being unevolved to perceive it.

Altho tactile in their entirety, I can see but small portions of a X1ph+. In fact, they are not -- and this is difficult to explain -- separate from other in the sense that we recognize Jane as distinct physically, etc. from Jack and Jack from Jake the poodle and Jake or Jack or Jane from Jessie the fish.

In play and for defense, a +X'ph may impart to earth objects -- stone or leaf, for instance -- its life force. Together, X'ph1 may move suns or skip a feather to particulate seas in

galaxies beyond our dimensions.

Being of pure energy not matter as we understand it, X!ph1 react in movement and discovery without emotion, pain or expression.

=X!ph'1 reproduce outside our proscribed sense of self, universe and communicative causation. As well as I can describe in earth terms, they are self-created and have no, or many, genders. Both eternal and non-existent, they experience our constructive edifice as awkward, chaotic and enervating.

In attraction, elements of a '+Xph=ian spark photochromically.

A 1X=ph' instructed this pen. Although I meant to say more and thought I did, the emanation is gone, not on the page. I cannot relate or draw it from my cellular level and -- oh! -- the X!ph= is gone.

Suddenly I am earth, female, I am ravenous for apple pie and I want to braid my hair. I have no interest in writing.

7. Poetry: Shine

Straight, slim rays

tapdancing on teardrop glass,

alien wings point and pull

within the lavender haze.

Dawn in aqua,

milky dunes round mystery moons,
reveal clusters sparkling,
diaphanous with new worlds.

To a lyric beat
the shape of grace
implodes, injects
blinding light.

8. Short Story: *Dust to Dust*

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

-- Genesis 2:7

I scraped my foot in the dirt. It spoke back. I listened as it circled my feet in swirling layers of dust and grime. The dirt said, "Leave me alone. I belong with the rest of the ground." I scruffed my foot against it again. "Ah," it said, "a rebel without a cause, are you?" It clung to the legs of my jeans and insinuated itself into the skin between them and my socks. "I'll get you," said the dirt. "You won't do this again." I leaned over to brush it from the hairs on my legs where it had stuck and hung. I didn't really care if more dirt covered me. I liked it. The dirt is my friend. I drug my left foot again and kicked some of it toward the hill. Dust (fire and ice) 2, digitized acrylic by Jeannette Harris "Hey," it said, "I don't belong here." I listened with amusement. "Dirt," I told it, "belongs everywhere. See my arms," I called, holding them out so the dirt could see cousins that covered me in a thin film from under my nails to the rim of my shirt. "And see this," I said, craning my neck so it could see how its fellows lay in the folds there. "You and I are the same in the end," I said. "Soon you'll see. You don't belong to me, but I belong to you. I'll just be grime and dust and dirt

in the end."

The dirt settled in. I walked over and kicked it again. "Wake up," I said. "Dirt needs to move. It needs to slide and slither over the face of the earth. It needs to cover man and beast." "You're crazy," said the dirt as it waved in the air and settled around my feet. "You are not dirt. I am dirt. You are man." "In the end," I insisted, "we're the same. You are brethren to me from times long lost. You're a cousin, an uncle, a great-grandfather I didn't know I had." The dirt mulled over what I said and agreed. "You're right," it said. "You and I are the same in the end. And when will you come back to me?" "Soon," I answered, bending my beaten old body over to smooth the dirt back in. "Soon I'll be with you, as once I was before." "What are you?" it asked. "I'm old," I said. "Older than dirt," it laughed. "Nearly older than dirt," I agreed. "I'll be looking for you then, old man," the dirt called, as I walked back toward my home. "I'll be there soon," I answered, looking back over my shoulder and then closing the door. "Soon I'll be dirt and dust and grime," I said, consoling myself for the ache in my back and the pains in my legs.

I put my foot on the stoop, so the split board sagged as it always did, and opened the back door. The house hadn't been painted in so many years that it was really just weathered board. Wind and cold crept in the cracks and the windows had thin panes. They didn't fit in the holes I'd made for them anymore. I crumpled up some newspaper and the print spoke back. "Hey, I don't want to go up in flames." "Tough luck, you'll just be dirt too soon," I answered it. I put some small pieces of wood from one of the upstairs bedrooms in and got a little fire going just to keep off the chill. I don't heat none of the rooms no more except just these three: the kitchen and living room and bathroom. All the rest is closed off. It ain't no good anyway. The sills and baseboard are cruded up with grime and there's a film of dust over the gray overstuffed couch and chairs and tables everywhere. The floor creaks when I walk. It says, "I'm turning to dirt right here," and I tell it I am too.

"He's just a bum," said Ted. "That old man don't clean himself or nothin'." Ted was proud of his brick house, its neatness and cleanliness. He treasured the electric heat they used, instead of the wood stove they had used in their younger days. The furniture was all new every year from Oshina's Warehouse Bargains. He and his wife shopped at Weinerholtz and Q-Mania for their clothes. They bought fine cuts of meat and fresh vegetables. Flowers grew where once had been a vegetable garden. Their lawn was manicured and mowed regularly. The trees were pruned and in winter they built small

fires just for the beauty of it in their fireplace.

His wife pulled back white hairs from her face to behind her ears and off of her forehead. She stood before the hall mirror smoothing anti-wrinkle cream into her face. Her bathrobe was made of soft blue terry cloth. Her slippers were brass-colored with small heels. A thick gold necklace with a cross pendant circled her neck. Around her right wrist she wore three gold bangle bracelets embedded with rubies, her birthstone. "He can't help it," Reba answered. "He's really, really old and sick and poor. He can't hardly take care of himself no more."

Ted watched his wife's routine with interest, as ever. He appreciated her efforts to stay looking young and well. He was proud of her figure, still girlish after the years. She did not have those heavy breasts of most country girls and her legs were well-turned. She applied a base makeup as Ted announced, "Well, someone ought to do something about it."

"How about you?" Reba reached into her makeup case and found the purple eye shadow. She applied it with care to the outside of her eyelids and lined the lashes with dark brown. Her blush was a pale rose and her lipstick bright red. Finally, she added black mascara to her eyelashes and turned to Ted. "How do I look?" she asked, as usual.

"Beautiful. He ain't my problem," Ted protested, following his own train of thought. "I got you," he teased, as she entered the living room.

His wife sat down on a carefully upholstered chair and picked up her cup of coffee to sip it slowly. "Maybe we ought to get him into Grisham's Home," Reba suggested. "They'd probably take him."

"Would you fix me some breakfast?" Ted wheedled. "He don't want to go," her husband pointed out, as Reba stood up again. "He probably wouldn't let them take him."

She walked toward the kitchen. "What do you want? Eggs and bacon and toast?" she asked and added, "Social services can force him to go. He can't take care of himself

anymore."

"Yeah, that would be fine," Ted agreed. "Well, I don't know. He eats and he bathes occasionally and he works in his garden now and then."

"Did you see him talking to himself out there just now?" Reba asked, putting a shiny skillet on their new stove. "He ain't right in the head." She pulled bacon from the freezer and placed the eggs on the counter. From a wooden container, she took out four pieces of bread. Reba set the table with brightly colored table mats and their best silverware as the bacon sizzled. She put a jar of Penny's Homemade Blackberry Jam next to the china butter dish.

"Well, call them and ask if they'll come over to see him then," Ted finally agreed.

"Breakfast is nearly ready," she said, filling two crystal glasses with orange juice and turning the bacon to brown as bread popped from the toaster.

Mrs. Hickham from the social services board showed up at my house a week or so later. She was a middle-aged, tall and thin woman. Her light brown hair was tied back in a bun. The heels of her black shoes were low and a bit worn. Her dress was a nondescript color with what looked like a pattern of faded roses trailing down on the skirt. Her jacket was a dull linen black.

"Mr. Whister?" she asked.

"I am," I answered, armed with hostility. "Who are you, young lady?" I held the screen door closed. "What are you doing here?"

"My name is Tonya Hickham, Mr. Whister. I'm here to see you from the Paken County Social Services Board. May I come in, please?" she said in a friendly voice.

"No, you may not come in." I leaned, glowering down toward her. "I ain't lettin' no women in here no ways. Not never agin."

"Maybe we could just sit here on the porch for a minute, then," Mrs. Hickham suggested. "I need to talk with you a little. Your neighbors are worried about you."

"I reckon that would be okay," I agreed after a pause. "Have a seat here. I'll just get my jacket and be right out." I told the dirt to be quiet while I went outside.

She was sitting on my old blue rocking chair. I saw Mrs. Hickham examine the rotten boards on my porch and the rickety chairs, when I came back out. She noticed the grime around my collar and on my hands and feet. I saw her grimace with distaste. "I need to fill out a short form, is that all right, Mr. Whister?"

I sat down on the bench and folded my hands over my knees. "What you got to do that for, lady?" I said.

"It's just a survey, to keep track of our citizens here in Packer County, Mr. Whister. Let me see. We need to know first how long you've lived in this house."

"This fallin' apart old piece of a shack was built by me over sixty years ago," I said with well-earned pride. "I cut and nailed every board myself."

"It's a fine place," Mrs. Hickham said condescendingly. I could tell her skin itched vaguely from the dirt and dust surrounding her. She scratched and shifted in her chair. I told it to leave her alone there.

"It's a shack," I said firmly. "A fallin' apart old piece of a shack," I repeated. "But once it was a nice place. I just can't work on it no more. My bones ain't good and my blood is

bad."

"What do you mean, Mr. Whister?" Mrs. Hickham asked, taking notes as she spoke.

"I mean, I'm older than dirt, lady, and everything I got is falling apart, including me."

"How would you feel, Mr. Whister," Mrs. Hickham broached, "about moving to a nicer place like Grisham's Home, where someone could take care of you?"

I snorted right away and my eyes widened, I felt, with a low angry red glow.. "I ain't goin' to no Grisham's Home. Is that why you come out here today?" I nearly yelled. "I ain't goin' nowhere. I'm stayin' here till I die."

Mrs. Hickham looked down at her note pad. She could force my removal by having the house condemned and have me declared incompetent to handle myself and my affairs. Me and my belongings were obviously in bad shape. Us old farmers, though, we can fool you. Rusty down the road hired a lawyer and fought her until he died as he wanted, on the land of his folks, in yet another falling apart house.

"Would you like someone to come once a week maybe, then, and check on you? Bring some hot food and maybe some clean clothes by?"

I thought about her suggestion. No one really checked on me anymore, especially since I had the telephone disconnected. "Who would that be?" I asked with some caution mixed with curiosity.

"Well, it might be me," Mrs. Hickham offered, "or it might be an associate of mine. Her name is Gladys."

"Don't you have no men workin' in social services?" I asked and spit in disgust. I didn't want no women fussing around me and my house and my land.

"No," Mrs. Hickham answered after a brief pause. "We don't have any home workers that are men right now."

"You send a boy over here with food and clothes once in a while. I'll let him in," I said, trying to be agreeable.

"We don't have any boys," Mrs. Hickham repeated with a frown. "Won't you let Gladys come over until we do?" she pleaded with me. The dirt was quiet and she looked very small and sad.

I thought about what she said for a while. "I don't like women futzing around in my house," I explained to her finally.

"Well, you don't have to let her in," Mrs. Hickham said. "Just sit on the porch with her like we are and talk for awhile and eat your hot dinner and take the clothes she brings."

I sighed and the dust swirled around a bit. I wondered if she could hear it. I looked out of the corner of my eye but she was still taking notes. In the end I agreed. I knew what happened to other neighbors over the years and that social services would probably intervene in the long run. Still, I fought as well as I could to stay free. "She can come over but I ain't goin' to no home," I said, while she gathered her notes to leave.

As Mrs. Hickham drove away, I knew I wouldn't wear the new clothes. Why put new clothes on a dirty, old body, I thought, as I ran a wet rag over my arms at the kitchen sink and swabbed my face and neck. Mrs. Hickham probably knew I wouldn't cooperate with Gladys in any way that would make me healthy from her point of view. She'd have me removed. She thought I was cracked in the head. Every account she had probably told her that and that I couldn't take care for myself. She'd tell her supervisors about the layers of grime caught in the folds of my neck and the back of my hands. It's a shame, she'd think,

what's become of me. "They're just dirt," her supervisor would undoubtedly say. "Poor old dirt that can't take care of itself. Don't get personally involved," he'd advise her because that's what those suits say.

A few weeks later, Harry Whister said goodbye to his home and the dirt said it was as he chose: dust to dust in the end.

9. Children's Micro-Fiction: Frickie Frak

Frickie the Frog opened his mouth for his first croak and said, "Burp!"

His mother looked down in consternation at seven babies to see where that came from. "Burp?" she said. "Frickie, was that you?"

His brothers and sisters were all croaking contentedly under or near her soft belly. Frickie sat to one side off-balance and nearly toppled as he answered her dutifully, "Burp!"

Stella, his mother, peered closely into his eyes and said clearly, "Croak." Frickie studied her as she repeated slowly, "C-r-oa-k."

Frickie drew in his stomach, puffed out his chest, stretched his large back feet securely on the rock and said, "b-b-b-Burp."

"No!" Stella said so loudly and suddenly that he lost his balance and ended up on his back with his feet in the air, toes wiggling distractedly. "C-r-oa-k."

"k-k-k- -Burp." Frickie foamed a little toward the treetops as he struggled to right himself.

His sister Hattie seemed both disgusted and amused. "Croak," she said. "Croak. Croak. Croak."

Soon her brothers and sisters joined in, teasing and mocking him. Croak." C-r-roa-k."

" b-b-b-b-Burp, bubby," little Mack (being the smallest) called out from the safe side of his mother. "b-b-b-b-Burp," he intoned in a singsong tone hopping from one back foot to another in baby frog jig.

Soon the others took him up on it, ringing around Frickie, dancing from one foot to another, and singing in mockery, "b-b-b-b-Burp, b-b-b-b-baby, b-b-burp" as Frickie hopped further and further away.

Finally, he dove into the water and disappeared in a widening circle of froth and green algae, until they believed he might have gotten away. And then they heard it from a distance. "Burp!" "b-Burp!" "Burp!"

Stella and the babies turned their heads this way and that and finally located the source of the sound. It came from behind a large and broken off tree trunk nearly moulded to the ground.

"b-b-k-Burp!" the trunk said.

"croak." "croak." "croak," all the siblings shouted back as Stella rose to her height and demanded angrily, "Croak!"

A longer and longer silence enveloped the cove. Nobody spoke. A frog crisis had developed as they waited for a sign.

"burp."

Stella strode and swam over to the beach where her son had hidden and splashed fresh water over him with the back of her large foot. "Say it again," she demanded. "I dare you."

Frickie sunk as well he could into the wedge between the sand and bark. 'k-k-k-k-k-k-k.'

Stella relaxed and licked him on the top of his head. "Okay," she said. "It's a start. You can come back with the rest of us now."

"b-b-b-burp, b-b-b-baby," Mack hissed softly as Frickie snuggled up under his mother's left foot. "k-k-k-rrrrrrRR," Frickie responded, spitting a bit in the process toward little Mack's general direction. "Croak," Stella murmured softly to her babies as they drifted off for their afternoon naps. "C-rrrrrr-oa-k, cr-rrrrrrrrrrrr-oa-k."

As they snored slightly, daddy Olaf appeared out of the water with a large and splendid splash.

"Cr-rrrrrr-oa-k?" Stella asked.

"Br-rrrrrr-r-rk," Olaf assured her as he flicked a small gnat from her eye.

10. Poetry: Haley's Dreams

I'm the angel on your shoulder.

Pushing the other ones aside, I whisper
spinning tales of magic mystery in your ear.

Swirling, stretching, diving sheening
colors through your mind,
I smooth away the darkness
and the catacombs of pain.

When you feel a soft caress
Slow sliding on your skin,
There I am.

That tickling tingle in your toes?
I'm playing with you now.
That's not the wind!
I'm running, dancing in your hair.

Stay awhile. Rest with me.
There's music everywhere.
Time for love, time for peace
for the covenant of
souls.

11. Short Story: Hell Will Wait

Pammy lay in her hospital bed and looked up at the ceiling with interest. It had a large crack that ran nearly the length of the room. Morphine eased her pain. The television blared, but she paid no attention to the programming. She watched the colors on it, the people moving around. Whatever they did, whatever they said made no sense at all to her. Her arm was carefully bandaged, as was her forehead. The crash could have been worse, they told her. She remembered very little of it -- a blur of bodies and screams and horns and lights. She remembered the trip in the ambulance to the emergency room. She remembered the needles. She remembered lying in the operating room before a mask descended on her face.

"Are you ready for breakfast, Pammy?" the nurse asked with her usual cheer.

"Sure." Pammy pulled herself up slightly so the tray could rest on her stomach. She stared at the ample food placed before her. She had no appetite at all. She drifted off for a moment.

"Are you hungry?" the nurse asked, noticing Pammy pushing her food around on the plate without interest.

"Not really."

"Well, try to eat just a little bit, maybe some cereal and juice, if nothing else." The plate held eggs and bacon and toast as well.

"All right," Pammy said agreeably. She picked up a spoon and spilled as much cereal on the front of her gown as made it into her mouth. Her eyes closed.

"Would you like some help?" the nurse asked, solicitously.

"No, I'm fine." Pammy opened her eyes and laughed. The sight of food dribbling down her seemed funny.

"You have some company waiting to visit with you for awhile," the nurse noted.

Pammy's head nodded heavily. "Who is it?"

"A gentleman named Earnest Crawson and a lady named Ulna Wyenski."

"Oh, good."

"They are very concerned about the accident and how you are doing."

"Tell them I'm doing fine. I'll be out soon, won't I?" Pammy turned her head on the pillow and snored for a minute.

"Yes. Within the next few days," the nurse assured her.

"That's all I can eat," Pammy declared, pushing the tray down toward her knees. Food was not appealing to her at all.

"Okay, I'll just clean this up and you can have your company in then."

The nurse swabbed the front of Pammy's hospital gown with a damp cloth and took the tray out the door with her. In a few minutes, Earnest and Ulna showed up at the door. They peered in and Pammy gestured weakly for them to come over to her bedside.

"Are you feeling better today?" Ulna asked.

Pammy closed and opened her eyes. "Yes indeed."

"I'm so sorry."

She pulled herself up a bit in the bed. "It wasn't your fault, was it?"

"No. Still, I'm awfully sorry. I'm the one that talked you into going out at all."

Pammy's head rolled. "Nobody knows what'll happen when they say or do something. It's just luck of the draw."

"Bad luck this time."

She turned to face Ulna. "I'll be all right. The nurse and the doctor said so."

"Is it too awful to be here?" Earnest asked, having never been hospitalized.

Pammy willed herself to be more alert and awake. "No. It's actually a very nice place. There are plenty of nurses, the food is good, and the morphine is amazing."

"You're on morphine?" Ulna asked, astonished.

"Yes."

"What's it like?"

"Very blurry." Pammy giggled uncontrollably.

"What's funny?"

"It's just everything, what I see. It's all wavy." Pammy nodded off to sleep briefly.

"Do you think we should leave?" Ulna asked Earnest as Pammy snored softly.

"Yes. We can tiptoe out. We'll stop by again tomorrow."

"That morphine must be some very strong stuff," Ulna noted with interest.

"I think she's getting it intravenously. That's why she keeps nodding off like that."

When Pammy was released, the doctor prescribed a strong pain killer for her. Over the next few months, her friends noticed that if she didn't take it her mood changed for the worse precipitously.

"Is it the pain?" Ulna asked, considerately. "Can I do anything to help?"

"No. I just need the pain killers. Dr. Hinton doesn't like to give them to me, but I can't make it without them. My arm and head hurt too much."

"What's the problem?"

"He gave me something different. It doesn't work at all."

"Well, call him."

"I did."

"What did he say?"

"To try to stand it until those pain killers kick in."

"It isn't working?"

Pammy held her head in her hands. "No, it isn't working at all."

"Do you want to go for a drive? Say, to Dillard's Department Store? We could look through the dresses and try on makeup." That was one of Pammy's favorite activities before the accident.

"No. I just want to stay here and watch television and feel better. I'm so tired."

"I'm really sorry this happened to you."

"I know." Pammy patted Ulna's hand. "It isn't your fault," she reiterated for what seemed like the hundredth time. "It was just bad luck." The bottle of pain pills lay on their side on the table. Pammy opened it and took another one out for herself.

12. Poetry: *Cenantua*

There's a rush, a rumbling in the wind

as we stumble on this old trail.

Greening branches thicken over us.

They crosshatch our path.

In leafy folds, winged creatures watch.

Through pools of moss, snakes writhe.

When tumbling rocks crash like our dreams,

we'll pick up a shard

and fashion a brazier for warmth and rest.

The air is cool and gentle at the crest

and the land cascades in startled wonder

from the sky.

13. Creative Non-Fiction Micro-Story: *Idyll*

Intro: This literary exploration is a somewhat fictionalized account of a typical hour or so in the later life of a now-deceased, well-known and beloved Valley neighbor, Caroline Keyser, whose family once spanned out to settle and farm a curve in the south branch of the Shenandoah River land known as Burner's Bottom (for low-lying, fertile and partly flood plain and prone fields bordered by flowing waters). Widowed for many years, Caroline shared her self, home and 100 or so acre farm -- stretching from bank cove up into reaches of the Massanutten mountain chain -- with day trippers, campers, family, friends and domestic animal companions generously and memorably throughout her seven-plus decades amongst us here. All of her extended family have moved out and on,

replaced by mostly urban immigrants owning generally smaller, subdivided tracts on which have been erected modified trailers, "double-wides," cabins and more modernly designed and constructed houses, while the few remaining older homes became seasonal short-term vacation rental properties. Somewhat larger-scale farming for stock feed and commercial sale died with the passing of Elmer, another neighbor and contemporary cousin to Caroline, in the late 1990s. Like too many others he carried the digital, in another sense of that word, symbol of older days and ways to the grave with him -- a space on one hand where a finger had been lost to farming machinery in the process of fall pig butchering.

It's cool in the kitchen. Jessie bends to slide open the damper on her porcelain and cast iron cook stove. Warmth from her gas furnace in the old dining room, piled now with clothes and papers and a box for kitty cat's next litter, never drifts through the doorway, around the corner to the kitchen table. She loves this room more now than all the rest of her two-storied family home, more than the closed-off high-ceilinged company rooms in their faded and falling wallpaper, more than the barren bedrooms upstairs, their windows chattering to the wind, more than the circling, softening, paint-peeling blue porches, more than her stone-walled root cellar with its teetering wire drying racks and musty shelves ajumble in dirt-streaked canning jars. Her fingers, brown and crispy wrinkled, smooth out creases in the green-checked oil cloth that covers a long plank table Gary carpentered for her so long ago, cutting the oak tree from their mountain wood, sawing the boards with their mill. Jessie scrapes her three-legged stool across the curling linoleum and sits to study her paper. First, as always, she checks the date and day. Wednesday. Her son Richard will be by in two days, hauling sacks of corn for the chickens, cutting wood for her pile near the grape arbor. Maybe he'll ride a friend down, too. Maybe some of the new part-time people will stop up.

Jess squinches her nose and grimaces. Strands of white hair stray out from their high knot as her head shakes vehemently side to side. Living alone'll kill ya', she mutters. Once the kitchen benches were full of sons and friends and borders and passers-through. Miss Agers, the teacher for the log school building they'd put up on a rocky field Uncle Yancey never pastured, had stayed for a few years in the bedroom over the parlor. She'd always sat next to the stove, quiet and busy, alone amidst the cacaphony of voices and footsteps and animals calling and babies crying. Gary sat by the back stairs and she, by the door. Neighbors stopped by to chat or borrow or bring or help. Dogs curled into corners on the porch. Cats hissed and hunted in the yard. There were jokes and laughter, gossip and fights, accidents and illness. Her young sister Lily, with consumption, had stayed on the side porch by the living room. Gary had put windows where screens had been so the sun

would warm and ease her. Back then, Jessie thinks, everything was called t.b. that couldn't be called something else. Her neighbor's son, Jewell, had died of it, too, whatever it was.

It occurs to her that the chickens may be laying. The air is warming up, at least during the day, and the fields are turning a thick deep green. Yesterday, she saw a butterfly and buds on the cottonwood trees. Richard craves fertilized eggs with their large orange yolks. Jessie sees him for a moment in her mind's picture show, a small dark-headed and round little feller, fording the river with her to trade their large brown eggs for flour and sugar at the store by the church. When there was extra money, they'd have a treat like candy or store-bought bread. Jessie laughs and, pushing the paper aside, gets up from the table.

Where did I leave my stick, she wonders, and ties the new large-brimmed, red-flowered bonnet under her chin. As he'd done for so many years, Hal brought it from Pennsylvania on his last trip up to hunt and visit. The bonnets are always handmade and hard to come by, as only Amish women seem to wear them anymore. Jess hasn't sewn for years. I've always been an outdoor girl, she thinks, and with a bonnet on the world feels safer, cozier, and less glare-y. Jess smiles. For some reason, that reminds her that she wants to talk with Richard about putting a few cows in the upper pasture again. They always had cows, sometimes hogs, sometimes pheasants or quail and turkeys. Many years ago, they'd had work horses, gleaming black, toughly muscled, sure-footed Tennessee Walkers. It seems lonely, too quiet around the house with only a few chickens, a dog, some tiger cats. And the duck. Jess grins. Once the duck strayed off toward the river, but they chased it back home, penned it up for a month. Now it follows her everywhere.

Spying her walking stick leaned up against the freezer, Jess calls for Hotdog and finds him by her feet. She pushes open the graying wood screen door and together they walk toward the hen house, a large white duck waddling and quacking behind.

14. *Fantasy Micro- Fiction Short Story: Instant*

Main Street sucked in its collective gut and held its communal breath whenever "Dead Eye" Johnson had been spotted near town. With his Grandpa Jimmy James' beat up Gibson strung on bailing twine over one shoulder haunched usually toward Flowerpin Dry

Run, the felt brim of his daddy's aged brown bowler pulled sideways toward one good eye, and a crumpled red white and blue bandana with tattered gold stars tied loosely under his chin, clefted rawhide boots folding up toward his knees, "Dead Eye" set out an aura that made backalley toms head for the sewers yeowling. Staking out his place this evening on the long open porch of warped and peeling Hotel Boone Vista, he lifted his left foot to rest on its gaunt railing and balanced Ole Doober on his thigh. The towns folk sighed aloud to hear what he'd rhyme and warble next about their goings on, hoping that Nashville wouldn't be so interested this time around.

"Dead Eye" knew the temper of a room or ring just by breathing it in, bent it to his need and whim. He knew just how and what to play, but even "Dead Eye" knew it best not to test a queen-high straight or to flush a full-house of aces over kings. To amuse a crowd he'd make deuces wild as long as he was the dealer where every house was his, their decks warm to his thumbing. Cheating to win wasn't a survivable option then.

It didn't help them at all that as Granny Lopez on her street corner bench murmured, shaking her head over corn stalk dolls she made for sale to passersby always in the lap spread of her ankle-length birdprint skirts from the pile of shucks in the weathered hand-woven basket by her feet, "'Dead Eye' could make a guitar cry." The sound from those strings sent electricity coursing through wires strung over their sidewalks to businesses from the Hicksters' Produce Market and Canned Goods Store to Mr. and Mrs. Mulrooney's Home Care Apartments for the Retired over Foodlatte's Omnibus Department Store with its displays behind tall glass of pale-skinned mannequins sporting trendy bonnets and fancy footwear. One, a dapper male with slicked-back black pompadour wearing pinstripes, always posed leaning back observantly cross-legged on the bench of a light oak spinet piano placed katy-corner toward the rear of the carefully and colorfully attired window panoply.

"Did he really just sing that?" Little Celt Clive queried in astonishment.

"Yep," Boss Bess confirmed. "He riddled and fiddled to rhyme that time that the store dolls got to jiving to his tune by the last Harvest Moon and dared the town to prove it isn't true."

In the way of small towns, lively imaginations rumored that "Dead Eye" had once been a neglected begonia on Ed Rudicill's back kitchen window sill.

Although the children begged Sallie Rose to tell that story, she was busy composing her magnum opus, *The Evolution of Ferns Through Cro-Magnon Man to Ex-Governor Sarah Palin*.

On pressing the digital f9 button and not receiving forthwith her Amana stove, Sallie Rose attempted to forego those literary efforts, but the haunting lines of "Dead Eye"'s songs returned to move her fingers and her mind.

It's not how the wind blows,
But how the carousel goes
And winds,
Whining in its circling.
Anyone can see baubles and toes.
Only you see the unicorn bobbing.

15. Short Story: Introduction to Ganesh

Ganesh: Hindu God who removes obstacles and grants success

"When it's over," she said, "we'll light the candle, the golden pear."

Karen died at 2:23 a.m. in her sleep. Darden found her. He solicited notes from everyone

who'd ever known her.

The question for Dar was, "Who was Karen?" They lived together in their early sixties for over three years. That left decades and lives separate and unaccounted for.

She'd been ill the whole time he knew her. What was a healthy Karen? A young one?

Ken S. -- Karen was hot. I mean hot, man. It just exuded from her. It hit you across the street. Which is how I met her. Hips swaying and some lost look in her eye. You knew you should say, "Hi" -- take her home or somewhere like a puppy, feed and pet her, hold her, dance with her. I couldn't get enough of the feel of her.

Sarah D. -- Karen was my best friend for fifty years -- basically all our adult lives. I can't talk about her or tell you who she was. Not now anyway. You should know. You were taking care of her.

Jennie O. -- I met Karen when we worked at Crosby's. She managed housewares and I worked in accounting. She was excellent. And great fun. We went out a lot -- lunch, movies, drinks. Both of us were single then, and we picked up men just for kicks. Threw 'em back before it got serious. She was a knockout. I felt dowdy sometimes but her company was ... infectious. You couldn't feel bad about yourself long around her. She loved people. A people person. That's what made her a good manager. And a soft touch sometimes. She had a real naive streak, and sometimes I or my boss would have to swoop in. Save her from herself, so to speak. She wouldn't get it if someone was after her job, talking behind her back and being nice to her face. We missed her when Gregg combined housewares with personals and she moved to Marlborough. She didn't want that much pressure though. Her job was just a job. She did it well, professionally, but ... Karen liked the night life, as the saying goes.

Trevard W. -- Karen was a straight arrow. Simple, clean, said what she thought, didn't walk over anyone or let anyone walk over her. You couldn't get close to her though. There

was always this distance she kept. We worked in pharmaceuticals together for seven years. She never dated that I knew and wouldn't hear of it from me either. I don't know. Maybe she was gay. She had a roommate but in all those years I never met her. Talked with her on the phone. Kind of gruff voice, now that I think of it. I liked Karen. Hell, everyone liked Karen. Can't believe she died like that. A blessing maybe.

Gary L. -- We went to co-ed summer camp and met when Karen got a spider bite on her lip sleeping in our tents. She was a good sport but scared about the swelling. She was young and afraid somehow a spider had scarred her face for life. It turned out to be one of those longterm irrational fears. She'd had nightmares about being cut or burned and thought she'd been delivered an omen that finally happened. A week later her clear, smooth skin and lips reappeared but she hated the tents. That led her to apply for and get a counselor's assistant job where she could stay in the cabin bunks. She was good with the kids but stand-offish with other workers. It must have been a bad summer for her. I've heard most people liked her but she had a lot of personality conflicts that year and was not invited back.

Cora C. -- Karen was picky. About her clothes, friends, jobs. She was nice about it. No one ever felt put down. She just distanced herself from what she didn't like. Smiled and said, "No, thank you," you know. And she kept her personal life completely separate from her professional one. It gave her space, breathing room she needed. We were roommates for awhile after I quit Gibbons, but no one there even knew it. Well, I didn't like those people anyway. What business was it of theirs?

Jeremy R. -- We flew to Bermuda together. That's our relationship, man. Funkiest chick I ever met. Walked over to me one day in housewares and said, "How about flying to the islands with me this weekend?" I thought ... you know. But she really meant it. No strings attached. Well, one. I couldn't tell anyone at Crosby's. She'd gotten an extra ticket somehow and just ... wanted a male escort, I guess. We stayed in the same suite. Right on the beach. Beautiful. Beautiful chick. Look but don't touch. I got her drunk, of course, and ... we never spoke of it. Not the next morning. Not ever. Not to anybody. It got to be a matter of honor with me. Weird, huh? She won't mind now though, will she? Man. I'm sorry, man.

Stella T. -- I was locked up with Karen at Fettering for six months. She had a thing with

numbers. I was "Girl Number Three." Warren was "Boy Number Five." She named us by the order she met us. Whatever medication they gave her zonked her out after that. She called me Stella by the time she left. Her story was she'd gone to finishing school. It was a joke we shared. "Do you miss finishing school?" she'd ask. "It was great," I'd say, "but I'm finished." Karen had a great sense of humor once you got to know her. People who didn't understand her thought some of what she said was offensive. I did at first. "Stella," I'd reply emphatically, and she'd go right on calling me "Girl Number Three." Fettering was "Institution Number Two." There was "Nurse Number Three" who'd never correct her. There was "Head Number One," and she called days after flowers. Mondays were Petunias, I think. Fridays were Pansies. Saturday was Lavender and Sunday Violet. Wednesday was Horehound. For "hump day." Karen was wild. Her room was covered with pictures and postcards. "Welcome to my mountain," she'd say. Nothing and nobody were what they were in her world. We enjoyed it once we caught on, most of us anyway. "Head Number One" took it very seriously of course until a room was a room and every thing and person had its right name. She whispered, "It's Lavender, isn't it?" the day she left and we laughed. Lavender. Saturday. What day did she die? Oh, Violet. Early Violet.

John D. -- Karen was like a kid. You couldn't keep her clothes on her or her out of bed. She lived in it, surrounded by books and magazines, piles of clothes, everything she owned. I used to tease her that she didn't want kids because she'd have to wear clothes at home. She was a hoot. Always into something. A lot of somethings. She started a garden club here and it still exists. Started Sisters of the Veil which was a sorority and a joke -- women who believed in nudity and if they wore anything it would be a veil. Of course, they did dress in the streets. She wouldn't say what their meetings were about or what they did. Those were the days of women's lib when they were exploring themselves -- and each other maybe. It was a turn on. "What are you doing, Karen?" I'd ask. "Put on a veil and I'll tell you," she'd say. The girls there -- boy, she'd hate that -- the women were good friends and they didn't let me in on their secrets. She drifted away. I think she liked women better than men. She tolerated men -- me anyway -- but didn't really like us that well. And she spent money like there was an endless supply. Her Daddy made her like that. She was Daddy's girl. When he left -- died -- she didn't know how to handle it.

Joan F. -- Aunt Karen? She was Aunt Karen to everyone here. We only knew her the last few years. She moved into Ludbough's old house. Fixed it up real nice. Gave everyone flowers from her gardens. She didn't seem like an older person. Real curious about everybody, but not intrusive you know. Just friendly. Remembered the cats' and dogs' and kids' names. Asked about them, petted them, made a fuss in a good way. She gave out candy. Always had a jar. On Fourth of July she gave the children little flags and her

neighbors sprays of red, white and blue. She took an awful lot of pills every day. I don't know how she kept them straight.

Jane T. -- Karen was my least favorite neighbor. She was a snob and rarely even spoke to anyone outside her circle. Not even a "hello." I remember her walking head down, frowning, by our house. She wouldn't look over for anything. My little brother Jerry threw eggs and stuff at her, in her direction. He hated her too. Her whole family was a mess. No one really liked the Carmichaels. They were loud, noisy, except for Karen who was too quiet. They moved when she was in eighth grade across town, and she went to a different high school, so we didn't see her much after that, unless her school had some event with ours. She grew out of being super, almost sickly thin in eleventh grade or so. All of a sudden, haha, my little brother thought she was a hot item. But she hadn't changed inside and hadn't anything to do with him. I don't know. He went to their reunion and said they laughed about the eggs.

Mike R. -- When Karen got pregnant, I drove her to the clinic. They had protestors out there, you know. Ugly scene. She made it in and out. That was Crossonstown, right out of Dolboro. Nice suburb. She'd flown in from Marlborough the night before. Later, she was never sure. It bothered her. She'd have been happier if she'd found the right man and settled down to married life, I think. I don't know. She loved her freedom though and something scared her. Must have been some marriage she had when she was a kid. No one should go by that. She did though. And her parents divorced too. I'd have married her but she wanted to move around. Just when you thought she was settled, she moved again, got another job, another house or apartment. Sometimes I wanted to say, "What are you looking for?" but I never did. Somehow you knew some topics were off-bounds. If you didn't, you got a cold blank look and the subject changed or she found something to do. Once I asked something -- can't remember what -- she didn't like. Didn't hear from or see her for months. She could just disappear when she didn't want your company.

Sheila T. -- Karen's been my best friend for over two decades. We were both in management, at least until she got sick. She had so much energy and expertise. We worked in different cities most of the time, but conferences brought us together. And vacations. She loved the beach. Islands. We went to Bimini and some others. I'll talk more about it when I'm used to that she's gone. It's a shock, friend. A real shock.

Crystal D. -- Karen was always in a hurry. She was the busiest kid I ever knew -- joined every school group, nearly, volunteered for every event. You couldn't catch up with her. She exuded life and wanted life to exude from her. "Why don't you come with us?" That's what I remember her saying most. It didn't have to do with a trip necessarily. Anything. "Why don't you come with us?" She was very thin growing up, very serious. Maybe because of her parents. They were legendary. Even stray dogs knew to stay away from the Fighting Carmichaels. Her brother took the mother's side when they separated. Karen was her father's pet, "Little Karen," all his life. He died, of course, years ago. She, her mother and brother were never close. The archetypical "house divided against itself" that finally couldn't stand. I suppose her "busyness" helped her to forget, get away from it, and she excelled. Left home as soon as she could to marry Hugh. And that was a disaster. Almost repeating the family pattern. Fights and tears and leavings and reconcilings until one night she just stayed at Ned's. Never went back. Other people got what they could of her stuff for her. It was sad at the time but she got that good job at Crosby's in Irionville. We missed her. I didn't recognize her -- or a lot of others really -- at the reunion. She'd gained weight over the years and her hair was different. Red. What got into her to dye it red in her sixties? It stood out, that's for sure. Well, she liked doing things for a kick. Set people talking, brighten things up. Nothing harmful, of course. Except maybe to her hair. Never thought, occurred to me, she'd get that kind of ill. She seemed indestructible when we were kids. And I couldn't see behind the red hair, of course, to what was going on inside. Karen was close-mouthed about personal things. She never talked about her parents -- her brother and mother particularly. You just couldn't bring up the subject and get anywhere about her family. I don't really know what happened with Hugh either. Must have been bad that she never married again. He just swore about her, used a lot of names. I never liked the guy anyway. He didn't make the reunion. Someone said he'd got cancer and died out in Utah a few years ago.

Jess T. -- When Karen fell cleaning the eaves, I took her to the hospital. She came around the corner with her right arm at this weird angle, crying and holding her elbow. It healed really well but she couldn't work for awhile of course. She hated not working. Bitched and moaned. Drove everyone half nuts. We tried to keep her busy, took care of her. She was grateful but bitchy. No one did anything right. Including her. She blamed herself. It was just an accident. She leaned too far over and the ladder kicked. Then she had falling nightmares. Woke me up in the middle of the night just to talk, she said. Finally she talked about the 'mares. Falling from towers, planes, roofs, anything. She'd wake herself up, she said, before she hit ground or -- here's an old wives' tale -- she'd die in her sleep. Then she had to talk until she dared to go back to sleep. I miss her. Booty, that's what we called her. She brought booty -- good stuff -- to the 'hood.

Hugh S. -- I was crazy about Karen. Always asked about her after she moved away, hoped she'd come back. But she was never satisfied. I gave her everything I could. Took care of her and that blasted little foreign car she loved. We fought over her keeping it. It wasn't safe, buddy, but you couldn't convince her. Everything was a plot to deprive her of what she really wanted. I didn't want her to work. "Stay home, Karen," I'd say. "Enjoy yourself and the house." But she was full of vinegar. Didn't like sex either. At least you practically had to wrestle her into the bed. Then she'd laugh, say, "You got me again." But she'd hop right up, even in the middle of the night, take a shower and start on a project. She laid new wood floors in the house. Mostly at 3 a.m. I wanted her to calm down, be a normal wife, have some kids. We got dogs and cats instead. They had to have everything. Hell, we couldn't afford kids when she got through collecting and caring for them all. Sugar was her favorite. One day Sugar disappeared and Karen looked for days. Sugar never showed up -- he was a full-breed blue tick -- and Karen searched and mourned for weeks, months maybe. She cared way more for those animals than she did me, or anyone else. She left them behind though. We fought about that too. She fell for some bum -- Ned was his name, I think. Gave up everything and then left him too.

Woman Judy R. -- We lived out in the country together in a rented house for awhile during college. Karen wasn't real thrilled about country and complained about all the bugs constantly. She was afraid of spiders. Shrieked at critters that appeared suddenly, like roaches in our cabinets. She thought it was disgusting and swore to have a bug-free city apartment fourteen stories up from all the horrors on the ground. She got it too. Worked her way into a big city job finally. We kept in touch, at Christmas mostly, over the years. You know how it is. We wrote often at first and then less. To begin with we couldn't afford to visit. Years later she flew back, rented a car and wanted to see our old haunts including Roach Ranch. "Roaches are funnier in retrospect," she said, while we walked around the overgrown weeds. That house had been abandoned and left to fall down. All broken windows and vandalized of nearly everything inside. She remembered some good times there -- parties, staying up all night talking and studying together -- and asked about old friends who'd moved on too. I didn't know it'd be the last time I saw her of course. She could be fun when she let go, let down her hair so to speak. Mostly she was very intent on her goals, including leaving any roach ranch behind permanently. One of the things I remember physically about her is her hair. She fussed about it constantly -- putting it up, taking it down, braiding it, curling it, straightening it, coloring it, and worrying it to death. It was nice hair. Light brown with natural soft curls, but she didn't like the look. Didn't want to be seen as vulnerable. Sometimes she pulled it so straight and tight it nearly seemed her eyes would pull back too. She was very modest back then. Later she actually went to a nudist farm for a retreat. Said she hated it though. It was an effort to free herself from something -- her separateness and the self-conscious way she'd built a public image.

Everyone saw her as strong, busy, but I saw her cryings and insecurities. Roommates do. People terrified her. She'd have stayed in a small office adding numbers if she could. That was her college job -- bookkeeper for the Phys Ed Department. They loved her because she was totally reliable. Never missed a day or a figure. Well, maybe a few but ... compared to most people, students particularly then, she was almost a little old lady. Couldn't have cared less about dating, partying, and had to be dragged into it. She'd say she had a good time and then still say she hated it. Her marriage between high school and college must have been hell on earth. Had a real bad effect. She just wanted to stay in that little office, study and go to class. Actually she didn't even like class because she wasn't comfortable with people. She barely tolerated me and others that lived off and on at the Roach Ranch. Except those rare times when she actually got into a party. Her family life had been as abysmal as her marriage to hear her tell it. If it weren't for bugs, she'd say, I'd live on top of my own mountain and keep the world forever away. It made her a good worker and student though. She graduated way up there in the stratosphere while I was struggling along in the middle. She never acted smarter though. Just quiet and reserved, you know. And she was fooling with her hair right to the end -- dying it red and putting it up with those chopstick kind of things. How dramatic she must have looked. Well, people change over that many years. I heard off and on she even became "a party girl." I'll always remember her though with soft curling brown hair sitting in that little office bent over books of numbers and totally absorbed.

Josh R. -- She was a kinky broad, bro'. One of my best friends for many many years. We used to bar-hop after school. Ended up working in the same town for awhile. She'd talk with bartenders for hours. You never

Steven found the manuscript -- all 578 pages -- in that carton box with a tin of ashes, old concert and airline tickets, some magazines with Karen's graphic art, letters, the remains of a wide yellow candle.

Dar's inscription read: "I wanted to know Karen, every woman, Karen, every woman, Karen before I died."

16. Poetry: journey folk

hangin together
whatever the weather
brings,
we sing mute praises to
our God and King,
ruler and maker
of all we strum and play
during every night,
through each day,
the architect of what we say
and do to pray,
the lay of our
ministering.

17. Poetry: kol isha (voice of a woman)

Note: The allegorical poem below was written following a particularly harrowing trip back from Asheville NC with Carolyn Moore, ACR's Contributing Editor and later Vice President, to visit her niece and family there. Snow turned into sleet and ice as we climbed up through the roller coaster of mountains that lead down to flats eventually and home in Tri-Cities TN. Cars and trucks skidded helpless into ditches beside us as Carolyn determined on the road ahead. There were no formal pull-offs or side roads to the safety of an overnight hotel for us to

choose, so it was go-ahead or spend the evening somehow stopped, chilled and car-bound. She focused on the task that wound us somehow blessedly into the warmth of the kitchen of John Steele -- retired chair of ETSU's Art Department, and her companion for quite a few years in travel and amusement, entertainments -- who fed us warmth, wine and amazement at the recent travails and triumph before we wound our weary way finally into Jonesborough and a restful night in our own beds.

My body is a chant

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and in the hour of our death

Wrecks. Snow-laced trees

and fields. Ice

up our noses, in our ears.

Tap on the glass

and slush.

You give us Robert Frost

and a lost New England

storm, carriages and

warmly distant friends.

Our end. Buddha, and rain.

How to relate

what we've survived,
the curtained vision
of another side --
a biding sign of love,
high in wilderness climes
on this determined ride

we do not die

18. Poetry: Mae Flowers

Allure her in restrained delight --
white candles on crystal,
cheeses and croissants,
the gleam of antique silver
and mystic caul
of heirloom jewels,
rainbowed blooms
arranged in golden glass
on fields of porcelain grass.

19. Travelogue: Messin' With the Best

Waiting in line on Sunday, it's my turn at the autograph table to choose from four CDs. I pick up finally "Beau-ti-ful" and "Sidewinder" to hand over. "Jeannette," Chic Street Man looks up, smiles to my laughter, and spells my name right. "You probably know this," I comment as he's writing, "but you're the most extraordinarily excellent blues musician I've ever heard." "I hope some of it reached you." "It did." The crowd murmurs approval and agreement. "And human being, of course," I add. Everyone laughs and he answers in detail my question about a reference he's made the evening before on stage about the difficulty and expense of creating original CDs that maintain an artist's real vision, vitality, message and talents with a general explanation and specific anecdote of mayhem and madness in producing one during an L.A. week's studio time with a phalanx of other musicians and sound engineers. author and Chic Street Man on Jobo's Main Street Jackhammers outside doom one day's work, two more are mangled by company equipment malfunctions, and four days are left to do the best they all can, which is very, very good. My absolute favorites of his unique tunes are "She Moves" and his version and lyrics to John Lee Hooker's "Sidewinder," but all are expressively sublime, including the one dedicated with sentiment and affection to a then near-death 9-year-old girl paralyzed by birth trauma and honored with an evocative French belly-dancing ceremony by her peers and caregivers in that country. One of his outstanding stories entailed being treated first as a serviceman in our Air Force via hypnosis and later of several virulent illnesses by that and by light. On leaving I mention feeling that I could easily fall asleep listening to him speak French, in whose country he's spent over a year traveling and working to end up most spectacularly in Paris. He responds with a fluently soft sentence or two unintelligible to me, but sounding like a soothing lullaby. I drift toward the checkout counter and out into ISC's little park where morning crowds are massing to plan their last day's storytelling assault.

There have been 24 storytellers and teller/musicians equally divided between those two categories and by gender over the three days in performances ranging from 15 minutes to over an hour and a half. In between I've sandwiched four hours of volunteer time at the popular Friends of the Library fundraising food booth, where we've stumbled and tumbled into each other waiting on passing audiences from behind the u-shaped tables.

African-American locals Robin and her granddaughter, Rebecca who's 11 years old and a potential ballerina, helped in the Friends booth along with Roland and Maryanne, retired here from upstate New York twenty years ago or so, and Library Director Pat Beard, who was also in charge of props for a stint of "The Philadelphia Story" being directed by her son and acted in by her husband and daughter-in-law at downtown Johnson City's Blue Moon Dinner Theatre beginning this weekend. We seem to have garnered a good amount of money -- around \$3,000 altogether at closing -- for supplies and programs ahead and

also share some of the pop and home-baked goodies during our "down times." Members of the Jonesborough Novelty Band, along with others including a sound man, have manned the shuttle carts for transporting the elderly and disabled from somewhat dispersed venues of large white tents with their oriental peaks and folding chairs. The band also plays during the dinner hours. There are colorful African turbans, muslim hijabs, cowboy hats, a waist-length braided and beaded beard and babies in strollers to be seen and heard on the historic hilly streets of Jonesborough. Intrepid visitors from the nation and the world hike briskly by informal food booths set up on adjacent lawns.

A friend being led down Main Street by his dog stops and chats for awhile. Another tells me Kathryn Windham is her complete favorite, and I'm lucky enough to catch one performance by this wonderfully warm lady who's nearly seen and lived a century of change in America and most particularly smalltown Alabama. Bill Lepp is about the most hilarious teller, or human, I've ever experienced. A one-time West Virginia preacher, his ... well, it could be a tall tale or a whopping white lie ... of encountering a chipmunk and a mountain lion soon after entering a California public forest preserve -- in which he "saves" the lion, among other things -- has everyone in the audience nearly rolling in the aisles and also earns thunderous applause. Chuna McIntyre sings and dances the ways of native Yup'ik -- who call themselves The Real People -- from his tiny Alaskan village for us, preceded by traditional "streamers of welcome" to establish respect between performer and audience, and Baba Jamal Koram weaves mysteries of myth, fantasy and spirituality from the Americas back to Africa in a sonorous low voice accented by his drumming. We're hypnotized as birds fly and tribes walk on and through waters. Bill Harley strums through the horrors of childhood homework trauma recalled, and Syd Lieberman shares anecdotes for nearly two hours during "Abraham and Isaac: Sacrifice at Gettysburg" for an overflowing, serious and appreciative crowd. The husband-and-wife team of the Storycrafters are the most unusual rappers I've ever heard, she being of Russian Jewish heritage and he being an anglophile "from Joisey." The Rev. Robert Jones tells and sings and plays as audience members fill in an enthusiastically harmonious chorus. The Lollipop Shop has overflowed out onto the sidewalk. The food vendors and restaurants along Main Street have also been busy, as have the various shops from imports to antiques to Christmas trees and ornaments.

Like all publically commercial town events, the National Storytelling Festival is organized and enabled by volunteers, mostly local ones, but last year I worked in the sales tent with Lucindia, a tween from Knoxville whose whole family had also arranged to swap a few hours of labor for free attendance. The consequence of that beneficent trade in endeavor-for-entertainment is more operating revenue for the community and wholesome

involvement, understanding and interactional fun for volunteers who've become increasingly proficient at putting on a comfortably outstanding show all around.

On my last trip up hill by the International Storytelling Center, I pass Steve Cook -- creative director of MOTS, musician, craftsman and co-owner of Jonesborough Art Glass Gallery. "Did you have a good weekend?" He smiles and nods. "We did okay."

Friday evening I've not been able to resist my monthly visit to Johnson City's "First Friday" arts and music events, most particularly at the Arts Council and the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery. At the former, I pick up some hors d'oeuvres and study abstracts by an Asheville woman. A voice behind me suddenly comments, "They're colorful. I don't understand art very well, but I'm learning." I turn to see a sandy-haired man around my age, and we begin discussing that before turning more enthusiastically toward music, since he comments that he's a professional pianist, most recently for Russo's Cajun-Creole restaurant and cafe next door. Robert S. Kostreva -- whose business card says "Sounds Good! Music That Works Producer Arranger Pianist" -- has studied at the New England Conservatory of Music, lived and performed out West, and met Ahmad Jamal, known to his childhood friends particularly as "Petie." Robert mentions Third Stream musical theory and some others unfamiliar to me, along with the observation that pianists are at the mercy of lead guitar players in terms of notes and notations. He occasionally has the accompaniment of a bass player instead. photo of pen and ink drawing by Katya from Johnson City's Russian Orthodox church community On my way upstreet, I spot Russian Orthodox immigrant Katya in a bright red and black punky wig which she explains with a grin belongs to her son and his Hallowe'en costume. She has a new display of intricate pen-and-ink drawings along with her usual decorative garden tiles and knitted accoutrements for sale. Katya smiles as we talk for awhile before I finally chose just one of her fascinating and reasonably-priced oeuvres d'art. The Nelson, crowded with babies in strollers to the elderly and infirm, is also peopled this month by roaming scantily-clad models in decoratively different and colorful body paints amongst hugely enlarged closeup photographs of nudes in various poses, and more abstract paintings along with its standard displays by artists like photographer Bill Lea and multi-media Val Lyle. Having sampled the punch and sated my remaining appetite from cake and assorted baked entrees, I sit with Val's cousin John Lyle for awhile discussing Jonesborough personalities and events as another man eventually places himself with us. A model walks by and I comment, "We are breakin' outta this joint." That man throws his head back laughing and says, "We are breakin' outta here."

Some time later, I drop by the local quick-stop where the usual young pale-skinned male clerk is joined behind the checkout counter by a somewhat heavy young Afro woman with a bouffant "do," and a very tall, thin, deep-voiced and grinning young man of cropped blonde hair streaked in front with bright pink. He is wearing jeans, a tight black scoop-necked jersey shirt with a black cross and another necklace hanging on his chest, heavy blue eyeshadow, pink lipstick and other less lavish makeup on his attractive face. We all converse as I make a purchase and disappear smiling into our near-dawning night. Dusty.

20. Poetry: What's A Poem?

the skein wound through generations

turning words round a radiant mean

ancient as psyche and speech

melding days of sound and rhythm

arraigned on a sudden afternoon

imagining trails toward tomorrow

echoed in evening's recall

a muse by our side when angels fail

21. Short Story: Movin' On

Ally surveyed the damage. Piles of cartons and garbage bags. Dustballs. Knicked furniture. The story of her life wrapped up in things. Things to be moved again. Briefly she contemplated again simply offering what was saleable, salvaging pieces for the Salvation Army, and ditching the rest. The allure of starting completely new ever-existed, beyond her horizons. No, she needed what she had and the little reminders in knickknacks and forget-me-nots of former lives.

"Good grief!" Lois exclaimed, knocking mud off her boots onto the doormat. "What a mess."

"Ah, yes. But it's my mess." Ally glanced out the window at snow threatening to engulf her car.

"Get rid of it."

"Nope. It's staying with me." Ally frowned. A light drizzle had been falling since early morning, compromising a good beginning to her trip.

"How many times have you moved this caravan?"

"Don't."

"Seriously."

"Not one too many, apparently."

"You'll smother." Lois swiped dust off a chair with her right palm.

"Smothering pieces."

"What?"

"It's a saying of a friend. Means something like, I'd smother unless you offered me so much for them."

"How much?"

"More than anyone wants to pay." Ally piled her remaining folded clothes into a near-empty carton, closed its top, and fastened the edges with tape.

**Lois tripped over a bag on her way around the corner to assess the bedroom condition.
"Ouch."**

"Sorry. They'll all be gone soon." Ally leaned to secure a loose bag top with twine.

"Anything left to eat?"

"Bread and tuna fish, I think."

"Okay."

Lois slammed the refrigerator door. "It's like a morgue." All the cabinets were empty and the dishes gone. "You packed canned goods?"

"Gave them to Chris." Panting softly, she dragged a large box toward the front door. "The

death of Ally," she continued, "in Appalachia."

"Are you sure about this?"

"It's too late not to be. Anyway, I'm not sure about anything. Ever. Until it exists anyway. Then I'm sure it exists." Ally pulled off her shirt and jogging pants and threw them into an open bag.

"Like you soon in California?"

"Right." Lois looked away as Ally pulled off her underwear and snuggled into a blue terry cloth bathrobe.

"I can't picture it."

"Why not?"

"It just isn't your personality." Lois stood munching her sandwich and with one foot propped on a bag.

"Well, it isn't my personality now. It will be soon."

She ran her fingers through short gray hair and fluffed it self-consciously. "What makes you think you'll fit in okay?"

"Everyone fits in in California, one way or another."

"How do you know?"

Ally headed toward the bathroom. "Devon says it's like the Israel of America. Refugees from the rest of the country."

"That sounds like hyperbole."

"Good word." "Ever consider just throwing some bags out randomly?"

"Yeah. Actually, I did that once."

"Really?" Lois stood outside the closed door, leaning against the wall.

"Boxes. I got tired of messing with them, moving them, and just gave some without opening to see what was inside to Good Will."

"Wow." Lois contemplated that briefly. "Did you miss anything later?"

"I don't think so. Occasionally I wonder where something went that I'd forgotten about but... it could be anything or anywhere." Ally dropped shampoo, towel, wet washcloth and soap, finally the shower curtain into a bag and tied it shut.

"Like what?"

"I don't know. There was a flowered porcelain bread plate I particularly liked. It's disappeared. I just remembered it a few days ago."

"How long has it been missing?" Lois followed her back into the living room.

"That's when you last used it?"

"More or less. Do you want this?"

"What is it?"

"Oh, four or five years, I suppose."

> "I don't know. A figurine."

"You don't want it."

"No."

"Sure," Lois held out her left hand, "I'll take it. You never noticed it was gone before?" she continued.

"Nope."

"Busy life."

"Well, I've been distracted."

"Yeah. By Devon."

"You don't really like him, do you?" Ally disappeared into the bedroom.

"He's okay."

"What is it?"

"I don't know. He plays you, I think. Strings you along, wears you out with questions and ramblings and what-ifs and so on."

"A lot of it is the distance," she explained, carrying a beaten brown leather suitcase back into the room, "and not communicating in person."

"Think so?"

"Yeah. It makes a difference."

"Well, there's always phone sex. What's in the suitcase?"

"Things for the overnight motels. That isn't what I mean."

"That's what he means."

"He's more multi-faceted than that."

"Uh-huh. What weather did you pack for?"

Ally scraped artificial flowers into a bag.

"Why in the world do you keep them?"

"They're pretty. Any season, sort of."

"They're old. Throw them out and buy new ones when you get there."

"No. They remind me of something."

"What?"

"Oh, shopping when I first got here. The stores on Creighton Drive. Julia." Ally opened the suitcase. "See?"

"You like Julia?"

"She's a character. I wouldn't want to forget her."

Lois surveyed the contents. "Neat. Too bad about the shop."

"Well, she's getting on. It was probably too much for her anyway, or nearly so."

"I don't know why it's so hard for some of these stores to make it."

Ally closed and locked the suitcase. "Too little. Too high overhead. Creighton Drive's gotten trendy while the old folk just kept on doing business in the same old way."

"Abacus?"

She chuckled. "Just about."

"What's this?" Lois held up a piece of lace.

"It's an antique shawl." Ally picked up a crystal vase and put it in a large open carton.

"Where did it come from?"

"Also Julia's." She pulled the box toward the center of the room and sat heavily on her sofa.

"She did have some neat things."

"You wouldn't throw that away?"

"Uh-uh." Lois rested in an armchair, propped her feet up on a bag.

"Well," Ally sighed. "It's almost time."

"Looks like you're ready."

"Ready as I'll ever be." She dialed Christopher's line. "Are you ready?... Oh. Okay. Yeah, I'll be here. Thanks, Chris."

"What? How do you get old boyfriends to do that?" Lois shifted in her chair.

"He says he has an errand to do and then he'll get the truck. I'm nice. And I pay him."

"What a haul."

Ally turned and lay back on the couch. "It'll be an adventure."

"Are you going to call Devon?"

"Yeah. After the truck's packed and we're ready to hit the road."

Lois rubbed her eyes and pushed hair back off her forehead. "I can't believe you're leaving. Does Devon know about Christopher?"

"He knows he's a friend." She lifted her head and ruffed up her hair to help it dry. "It's been real."

"It has. I'll miss you."

Ally turned slightly toward the chair. "Stop it."

"Never say goodbye?"

"It's too sad."

Lois leaned forward. "Well, it's exciting too, isn't it?"

"I guess. Now it's just a bit nerve-wracking and exhausting."

"You'll be okay."

"I know. It's just a lot. A lot to take in and think about."

"Don't think." Lois leaned back.

"Want some wine?"

"Sure. One for the road."

"Long road," Ally noted as she disappeared through the kitchen door.

"For you. Better just have one."

"We can do that."

"Yes, we can."

Ally returned with two large jelly glasses half full. "Here's to new beginnings."

She held out her glass and Lois touched it to hers. "In with the old and out with the new."

"What?"

"Okay," Lois giggled. "In with the new and the old."

Ally laughed heartily. "Is that a reference to the flowers?"

"And the shawl."

"To friends?"

"To friends."

"Let's not say goodbye."

Lois put down her jelly glass on a box and went over to hug Ally briefly. "Okay," she agreed, returning to her chair. "See you in the hereafter."

"Oh, that's worse." Ally rose to tape the last box closed.

"I mean the hereafter of you in California and me here, visiting each other sometime in the next year."

"Great idea. You can fly out."

"I hate to fly."

Ally and Lois bantered back and forth, sipping their wine as snow flurries passed by the windows, waiting for Christopher's knock on the door.

22. Essay: *Mud and Red Clay*

In the Valley, and particularly in Page County, the past year was one of the wettest on record with nearly twice as much "precipitation" as is average for the area. We had three floods, including one "one-hundred-year-flood." That means, not that we will have one every hundred years, but that there is a one in 100 chance of our having one in any given year. In the past ten years, for instance, we've had two. So, perhaps, we won't have another for two hundred years. In this century we've had, I believe, five one-hundred-year floods. So, actually, we might not have another one for five hundred years. I love statistics.

riverfront bottomland fields--click for 'Dream Catcher'

The soil around our house is damp and muddy down to two feet right now and the bottomland between the house and the river just finally surface-dried a few weeks ago. For the first time in twenty years, we owned a creek down there for a year. I always wanted to own a creek. The river is still very high, above all the rocks and ledges. What's left of our riverbank after September's river rampage is God-sized scoops of sand, celestial spoonfuls of barren dirt. With every flood, the river trowels out long ditches as wide as twenty feet, up to ten feet deep, trying to make an island where our riverside garden once flourished. My spouse, at odds with the forces of nature in this instance, hauls in and fortifies the old bank annually with truckloads of large stones. Despite my logical appeals that this

laborious effort is useless, doomed to failure against the inevitable dynamics of geology, the river has been diverted, covering the rock fortifications with sand and soil where grass and weeds have taken root. We will not own an island in my lifetime. I wanted to own an island.

Mountain land is acidic and the top soil is very thin. Dig down an inch or two and you're at "hardpan," very tough stuff, sort of like black concrete. Rainfall hitting the mountains has little to sink into and ends up ... in our creek. Riverfront soil, on the other hand, is absorbent, alkaline and the top soil may be as deep as two feet. I discovered all this years ago by lovingly, carefully digging up mountain laurel and various high-altitude wildflowers, transplanting them around the house, and watching them wither and fade. "What's wrong here?" I asked plaintively. "Aaaaaaaaak," they replied. "Limestone! Yich!" Acid fertilizer didn't help much, probably because its regular application requires more gardening organization than I'm capable of mustering. "Don't worry, honey. I just put that stuff on the rhododendron." "That was FIVE WEEKS AGO! They're practically dead." Whoops. "I'd better water the peas. It hasn't rained for nearly a week." "You've said that nearly every day. They all have root rot." Oh.

Sliding on ever-wet grass and ground toward a likely spot, you never know exactly what you'll run into when you dig down, say, to plant a bush around here. It may be a plan-altering limestone boulder that stretches, it turns out, ten feet in each direction. Maybe red clay, clumped and plant-intolerant (except for sweet potatoes). With a little luck, though, it will be nearly black, soft and sifted, seemingly bottomless topsoil. Whatever it is, right now you can pretty much count on it being ... wet.

23. Poetry: Memorium

the day Dillard died,
we repeated the same old lies
while Belinda tried to cry,
rasping with a sigh
and naked dry eyes
that she didn't care
for the plastic tableware

or the straw flowers everywhere.
We worked not to stare
at the bald spots in her hair
and the blood left under his fingernails.
We bowed our heads
to each ahmen,
counted the steps to our cars
under still winking and wondering stars.

24. Short Story: Namaste

"Thank you for allowing me this time to speak." Mark's chair squeaks against fake tiles as he pulls it toward the green metal table and sits down. Straightening his notes into a more orderly pile, he leans an elbow onto them and runs dry fingers through sparse, whitening curls. As he turns briefly to the gallery rows, Haley catches his eye, giving him an encouraging thumbs-up. He smiles and turns back toward the suited array of county supervisors.

Patricia Inglewood stands, surveying the rough, weather-worn country faces before her, and frowns.

"Although we appreciate the gentleman's views on this subject, he is completely misinformed. Obviously he hasn't done much research and we'd look like fools if we followed him down that path."

Pat pauses and clears her throat.

"Unfortunately, a few well-meaning but totally misguided citizens have stirred things up by becoming very vocal and involving the local media in all of this."

She turns to give Mark a hard look and finds his expression unreadable. Patricia picks up a plastic-encased notebook and again addresses the gallery.

"We need to calm down and pay attention to the committee's report. The committee conducted extensive studies and reached a reasonable and informed conclusion. Their work was partially funded by the very generous industries that undergird and support our area economy. That economy, after years of stagnation, is finally beginning to grow and thrive. As detailed in their report, the committee's recommendations are ..."

Stretched and baking in the afternoon heat, Haley lies back against the front seat of their gliding flat-bottomed canoe. Airy auburn rings escape onto the cozy jumble of towels under her head. A wide-rimmed straw hat covers variegated freckles and a silvery sty in the changing theatre of her blue-gray eyes. He dips and holds a paddle lazily against the river's flow, smoothing the natural sway of its course with sure chestnut-muscled guidance. Sliding the damp wood against Haley's ever-rosey skin, he reaches into the cooler, searching for a bottle amidst the hollowed, milky rounds afloat in waves of icy water. Haley stirs and lifts an arm, grasping with delicate, slender fingers into the leaf-tossed breeze of shoreside willows and sycamores. He senses Haley's smile from under the hat as her hand circles a beer. Amber sparkling, sundrops like rambling dew, she pulls it in under the fading brim, upending a bittersweet cascade of bubbles luminescent in their prism of gold. He grabs another near-freezing bottle, rests it briefly against the arch of her foot. From under the hat a muffled laugh expands against the mysterious whisper of dragonfly wings and the waterborne crawl of scattering, swarming beetles that ride the taunting river crescents. He slides down from the boat's woven seat into its soothing fiberglass cradle, rests the tense sinews of long, browning legs against the warm comfort of Haley's wondrous dreams. "Namaste," she whispers through the woven sassafras grains. Eyes closing, he feels

Haley, himself, the planet atomize, dissemble, dissolve into the haunting call of pairing waterfowl, the slithery coolness of shoreland soil, the winding sighs and sun-searing current in silken summer air. "Namaste," he reflects, drifting through a world beyond words into an unending and timeless dispersion.

"We will table the resolution until the next meeting. Thank you all very much for coming." Pat closes the notebook firmly, indicating there will be no questions, that the assembly is over. She turns to the supervisor on her right and begins to converse animatedly in low tones. Gallery chairs screech to a shuffle of papers and feet and voices.

"Mark! What should we do now?"

"Aren't you FURIOUS?"

"What a pile of ..."

"You were great, man."

"Those jokers ..."

"I need a copy of your speech. At least we can get it in the papers."

"How do you stay so cool?"

Mark gathers his notes, shaking hands, nodding, heading for the bench where Haley waits.

fishing-pole "I wasn't there," he says later, as she sculpts herself alongside him and into the perfect hollow of his shoulder.

"I was in a canoe."

25. Creative Non-fiction Essay: Never Name Something You Might Have To Eat

Author's Note: This now-subdivided hollow, designated by the National Geologic Survey as "Burner's Bottom" after European settlers and their ancestral farming and flood land, was called "The Garden of Eden" or "The Promised Land" by early travellers and residents. Modern plows working riverside fields still turn indigenous tools from ancient and fertile Senedo burial ground.

If you've never seen tree frogs, they don't seem real. They're tiny little things that chirp and get in your house in the summer, when you leave a door open. As they hop and hide in the rug and under furniture, they aren't easy to catch either. Cats think they're interesting, too. Toads like the garden and hang out around the front door. Particularly at night, you have to watch where you walk. Feeling one jump from under an oncoming bare foot is a shock of the cold, wet and slimy sort. I don't believe the wart thing, tho. We don't bother them because they eat the bugs that bother us. Lizards do, too. The ones around here are green with shiny, iridescent stripes. They're good for bait.

A fair number of people here eat frogs' legs. As a matter of fact, a lot of gourmet foods live here, but people just mostly think of it as seasonal staples: bass, trout, catfish, perch, crappie, snapping turtles, frogs' legs, and garden fresh vegetables in warmer months; deer,

bear, rabbit, squirrels, turkeys, ducks, geese, quail and grouse in the cool seasons. I'd never heard of eating squirrel before living here, and thought I'd misunderstood the first couple of times someone mentioned it. How could there be enough meat on a squirrel worth eating anyway? Actually, it's very good tasting and what people do, really, is make squirrel gravy so one squirrel per person makes a meal. The most common game staples in our house are catfish in the summer and deer meat in the winter. They get supplemented, mostly, with bass and rabbit. We went through a few years where we loved squirrel, but now its mostly rabbit.

Oddly enough, we both like rabbits, personally, and have one huge black and white one, Hubie, as a pet. We had a wild one for years in a coop, because her mother lost her somehow. She was so little at first she could get through chicken wire and we had to keep her in a wooden box in an old outhouse until she grew bigger. We knew it was a female, because she made nests every spring. We also raised rabbit dogs (beagles) for years and would never shoot the rabbits because, well, then what would the dogs have to do?

We don't see black bears very often. A few years ago, there was one about 20 yards from the house, apparently trying to figure out what a goat was. "Git!" doesn't work with a bear, but it ambled off and we never saw it again. One of our neighbors way up in the mountains has constant trouble with them, because he has a lot of seed feeders for the wild birds, and it turns out bears like wild bird seed. A lot. They open the cannisters he stores it in and get up on his porch in the middle of the night. Not so many people hunt bear and those that do use dogs for tracking. The most beautifully unusual hunting dogs I've ever seen are blue tick coon dogs. I don't think any two look alike. They don't look anywhere blue to me, but neither do the "blue" ridges of the Appalachians here. We've been given some bear meat during past hunting seasons. It's rich.

It doesn't make a lot of sense that people eat animals they like, but most of us have been doing it throughout the eons. I think it's part of the reason we say grace before we eat.

26. Poetry: Once when I was dreaming

there was a perfect couple

that loved each other very much,

very thoroughly.

He was smart, a little rough,
and he kept some things aside.

She was gentle, accomplished,
and took his flaws in stride.

They helped each other
and showed kindness to their friends.

Their home was kinda clean,
kinda cluttered with interests
from all their days and quiet nights.

They travelled some and
when their time was done,
they drifted to the sun.

27. Adult Fable: Once Up On A Time

Gianno was a sickly boy. His skin was white parchment, small rounded scales on a ground of delicate pink and maroon twining branches. His body was thin and his hair cropped straight. It hung scarcely over his ears and into his eyes. Sierra mostly remembered him tossing back his head to see without a curtain of blond-white strands. From kindergarten through fourth grade they studied in the same class. With his continued weakness then, the school removed him for home tutoring.

Despite his fragility, Gianno was funny in a clear, whimsical way. His voice was low and his skin cool to the touch. Other children didn't bother him much, liked him in a distant way, and chattered separately about a secret treasure, more rumored than seen. It was a chest, they said, small but full of the most fabulous of unknown things. In the way of children and

adults, those who knew wouldn't say. The chest had power and the knowing of it had power too.

"Why don't you go visit him, dear? He's lonely," her father said.

Sierra picked at the stubbles of her plaid woolen dress. She didn't like sick people.

"Go on. It'll be good for you." Father held out a fleece-lined coat and pushed her toward the door.

Sierra dragged her feet on the sidewalk, listed briefly toward shouts and laughter from their playground down the block, then turned with reluctant obedience.

"I came to see Gianni," she explained to a lithe figure shadowed in the doorway.

"You're a classmate of his?"

"Uh-huh."

"He's in his room. Come, follow me."

The woman headed toward an old oak staircase with square bannisters painted white and with a runner of Persian reds and blues. Her house smelled of dust and medicine, herbal teas.

"Gianno. Gianno! There's someone here to see you!"

They reached a darkened hall lit only by a narrow tall window at its end. The woman knocked, opened the first door on her left into a dim room. He was folded back onto gray-spiralled covers, lank hair and pale head crushed within layers of pillows. A cotton crocheted afgan warmed his legs. On the side table an electrified gas lamp glowed over the gigantic book in his hands.

"What is it?" Sierra asked before she could stop herself.

"What? Oh, the book? Art," Gianno revealed deferently, "paintings by the Old Masters."

His mother turned unnoticed and walked toward the door.

"Can I see it?"

"Sure. Here." He turned the volume sideways for Sierra, pulled now by curiosity to the side of his bed.

Accustomed to her mother's decorations of Early American watercolors and display cases of milkglass cherubs and painted porcelain angels, Sierra was astonished.

"It's beautiful," she breathed.

"It's the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel," he explained.

Sierra turned a page.

"Did you want to stay for dinner, child?"

From the braided rug where she and Gianni sat cross-legged, bent excitedly over bright sheets of wonder, Sierra looked up in surprise. "No, I don't think so." Flustered, she realized by the dusky window that the afternoon had gone. "My mother'll be expecting me home."

Sierra stood and smiled toward Gianni. "Thanks. That was fun."

"Are you coming back?" he asked.

"Yes. Next Tuesday."

Gianni looked back toward the book. "Okay," he murmured. "Next Tuesday."

"What are you reading?"

"Aurora Leigh." He laid the tan leather-jacketed volume aside.

"Do you feel well today?"

Gianni was sitting sideways, feet propped up, swinging on the plank loveseat that hung from his mother's porch ceiling by steel chains.

"Yes. It's the sun I think."

It was midsummer, but clear, dry and warm.

"Well enough to walk up the mountain a ways?" Sierra knew a secluded clearing and she wanted to show him its hidden colors and softnesses.

"Yes. I'll try it." Gianni slipped into rubber-soled moccasins and stood. "Shall I bring the chest?" he asked.

She looked up and smiled in surprise.

"Yes. Will you?"

"I'll get it now. Come with me."

Sierra followed him up the stairs and watched as he slid sideways the false top of a mahogany dresser. Gianni lifted out an ebony chest the size of a shoe box and outlined with old brass.

"What's in it?" she whispered.

"You'll see when we get to the mountain."

"Is it heavy?"

"No."

"Okay."

Sierra walked slowly by Gianni's side, pulling him by the hand as their trail came too steep for his shallow, laboring breath. When finally they arrived at the glen, he sank gracefully onto the earth and lay back, covering his stark eyes with frail, sheer skin.

"The chest?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yes," he said. "Open it."

During Gianni's evening funeral, Sierra ran on brown, crackling leaves, opened the kitchen door of her brother's home to climb its back stairs on stockinged feet and retrieve the ebony box. Under a blessing of stars, she clambored up the path to their mountain ridge and set down the chest. Sierra opened it once more and ran her fingers through Gianni's rainbows, filigreed hieroglyphics of gold, tiger's eye dates and jars of pomegranate, Indian icons set in silver lace, amethyst vials of Alcasian perfume, celandine from China, fringed streamers from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. For a moment the moon refracted on windchimes of cut crystal and pears of hand-blown sapphirine glass. Sierra closed the brass-bound top and cozied the chest deep into a groundhog hole. Kneeling on grass, she covered it quickly with loose stones, bramble, and dirt till all that remained was a warm bare circle of ground where moss and wildflowers soon would grow.

28. Travelogue: Overlooking One Real Thing

August 21, 2001 -- A few days ago, Sylva NC's City Lights Bookstore held a reception for its founder, Gary Carden, in honor of his *Mason Jars in the Flood* receiving AWA's Book of the Year Award. The perfect excuse, I think, for an "altitude adjustment" and what better place than the Smokies. For all their problems with air pollution and assaults on habitat, there is nothing like winding through the top of the world with mountains and mist forever, or so it seems. The traffic is light except around major cities like Asheville, and "rivers run through it."

Amidst a warren of rooms and shelves to the ceiling and less, with books new and old, a back reception area offers buffet-style specialties, as Gary attends that names and interests are shared and conversation flows with the wine. Sculptress Collene Karcher discusses a sample of her work on display. North Carolina Poet Laureate Kay Byer comments on experiences in publishing and promotion. Recently retired author John Quinnett shares haikus and recent explorations on the West Coast. A note on one table reads: "Since Gary is hearing impaired, you may wish to write him a note," inviting visitors to leave personal messages in a box of colored papers.

Gratefully I accept an offer to spend some time on Gary's three- acre homestead of gardens and forest break. Again he is piling me with books and quotes and photos and "Don't you know....?" Jack, an incorrigible (according to three trainers) replacement companion for the departed Teddie, eats (the left) one of my two favorite black suede high heel shoes. The ones with the cute little strap in the back which he enjoyed particularly if destruction is a measure. The corner of a book. A CD. We are continuing the course on Appalachia, consciousness, psychic life as thunder and lightning rage on the side porch now covered helpfully with a screen tent. Jack likes coffee and I cover mine with a hand before it goes the way of my shoe. Breakfast at a local hangout by the river is continued disultory and literary dissection, including on a local article reviewing Gary's work.

Some time later, I find myself driving the Main Street of Cherokee, Qualla Boundary -- past Western Steer, brightly dyed red feathers, Pizza Hut, Best Western and Hardee's -- looking for one real thing. The first night's motel room has a window on the river; the second night's is less expensive and perfect -- sliding doors to a balcony by chortling ruffles and a man casting and catching trout all evening from the next balcony over.

I leaf through my addiction, piles of pamphlets and newspapers and brochures picked up along my travels. The sliding glass doors stay open. Stars drift in. Checking out, I nod to the tattooed fisherman and his blonde companion. "Do you eat the fish?" "I'd love to," he

says, “but there’s nowhere to cook it.”

There must be a non-franchise restaurant somewhere. I’ve become obsessed with the search and finally settle on one that specializes in cinnamon buns. In questioning the manager on duty as to the freshness and variety of breakfast offerings, I learn the cafe is a Canadian franchise. I buy that morning’s specialty, a creme-filled croissant, and allow it to dribble down my blouse as I sit on a tastefully-constructed front deck overlooking the four-lane highway.

The night before, awaiting takeout from Pizza Hut, I’d stumbled across a shuttered, privately-owned Heritage Museum of the Cherokee and head in the direction of Saunooke Village. Dr. and Mrs. Abrams have a collection that would cover 50,000 square feet if that were available. The shop and gallery’s 2,000 hold indescribable beauty -- paintings, sculptures, artifacts whose history is explained by the self-guided tour’s audio. I believe I will stay forever, but nicotine (Tahoe is the locally-produced brand) calls and I have a visit to the Casino planned.

There’s a shuttle from the generous public parking area to the slots and a tall, luxurious hotel is going up beside them. My only experience with one-armed bandits being from movies, I expect glazed and crazed fanatics mindlessly pulling levers amidst flashing lights and yells and fights and smoke rising everywhere.

This is not the East Coast. The Cherokee Casino is a friendly, relatively quiet place, at least on a weekday afternoon. Slots flash decorously and I feel that their attendees are local people on break from work, as well as visitors, families and single folk. Having discovered years ago that I enjoy the watching part of gambling much more than the losing part, I wander and sit unobtrusively through the rows and rows of cloverleaves and apples and other inventive cryptographs whirring and popping up. Each machine has a lot of buttons and looks like it might be more complicated than my computer. There is a learning slot at the front but I never get around to it.

Eating I don’t have a learning curve on and the Fresh Market buffets beckon. There are chef’s specialties from Italy, Mexico, China, America Southern, America not-Southern, salads, breads. Sampling each, I discover near the checkout counter an unforgiveable

dessert bar of artistically displayed and decorated pastries, baked or boiled, as well as gourmet ice cream with choice of toppings.

I will have just one small cake. And then I will have just one more small other piece, with a tiny scoop of butter pecan ice cream on top, and a spoonful of strawberries, and a few chopped nuts. And I will just have a stomach ache but will not double over and will walk straight, knowing that I saved meal money for the next day or so of the trip, past all the blinking slots begging for quarters, for the shuttle bus to my car, where I may throw up.

Qualla Boundary is as confusing to exit for me as Asheville. Detours and wrong roads are interesting though and after several forays in the wrong direction I find a back road to Bryson City, a town name recognizable as being in the general direction of Junaluska where Gary is conducting elderhostels this week. It turns out later that I've driven the wrong way off the main highway and, despite meticulously drawn directions, end up at the Performing Arts Center in Waynesville, which is closed.

I do know the way to Asheville though.

Days Inn has a fifth floor room with balcony overlooking a monumental scarlet-colored sculpture. Malaprops has espresso and scones, chapbooks, magazines, newspapers, unusual greeting cards, volumes of good and different literature, and little tables on the sidewalk to listen and watch the City in the Sky's gabbing polyglot. Blue Spiral displays a magnificent retrospective of Will Henry Stevens and the most extraordinary animal construction embedded of glistening found silver and gold objets d'arts.

Abandoning Biltmore and Greenville plans, I drive home. I want to start a collection of silver and gold to make a dog that won't tear or eat or bark.

Forgiving, Gary pronounces it "astounding" that I missed a place so well marked. I promise to find Junaluska on my next trip up.

29. Travelogue: Quick Vacations

It's a dreary day, rainy and gray, and I've done my errands and work and still have time to play. Suddenly I remember a friend telling me of an exhibit in Greeneville at the General Morgan Inn. Members of the community have recreated carefully gowns of all the First Ladies. That is some enticement for one not overly interested in couture, unless it's something unusual like dresses made of cranberries or something really unique, but the General Morgan.... That's something else.

It's a very old hotel, built in the late 1700s and restored well, with very high ceilings handpainted in flowers and wall-to-wall rugs that look like inlay. The walls and molding are inset and carved elaborately. There are chandeliers and halls with art, including a large mosaic that on close examination turns out, marvellously, to be crewelwork.

The drive from Jonesborough on Route 11E is peace-inducing, a four-lane with low traffic and fields and mountain ranges on either side. Today clouds hover on the distant shades of their blue and purple peaks. It's about half an hour to the crush of familiar fast food restaurants and chain stores and then an easy-to-miss left onto a two-lane toward the old downtown.

As ever, I am soon lost, on the wrong lane for a left turn and heading toward suburbia. It's possible I was meant today to dine and shop in an outer edge designer mall instead, but there's a turn for downtown too and, it turns out, a downtown mall. I note the Mexican restaurant there but opt for Main Street galleries, and maybe a cafe, first.

It turns out only the General Morgan is available for food, but not at this hour, so I just amble through its lobbies and backyard patio. The dress exhibit has closed last week and there is none in its place. I aim after all for the Mexican restaurant, peering briefly through shop windows at paintings and antiques. It's only a three-block walk.

From outside the Monterrey Restaurante Mexicano appears clean and somewhat uninspiring, just plain tables and no particularly special decor. Once inside, it turns out the

decor is the human ambiance and the food. This restaurant is truly Mexican. There is no translator so the waiters and I good-naturedly make do.

The menu is basically in American English. The televisions, three that I saw, are tuned to a Spanish cable people's court kind of show. I decide to learn Spanish, based on the three years of Latin I took years ago, by watching expressions and putting together announcements that appear now and then. A woman in an interesting maroon-beaded kind of hat is obviously upset and the judge seems to be very mad. He bangs his gavel and tells her where to go, or something like that.

I am sitting at the bar and have negotiated requesting a marguerita. There are quite a few kinds and qualities of tequila, it turns out, and I examine the bottles as they're held up to choose the best by the prettiest label on the most interestingly shaped vessel. Do I want chips and salsa with the quesadilla spinach? Are they extra, I ask. There follows a great deal of confusion and a man comes out of the kitchen to straighten that out. No, they are not extra. They go with the quesadilla if you want them. Okay, I say. I want anything, almost, that's free.

The marguerita is perfect, frozen with a little straw and its cap still on and a lime cut to sit on the rim. I pick it up to squeeze and instead drop it in. That's what I meant to do. The quesadilla arrives, all fresh sauteed vegetables and melted cheese in a soft, on-the-premise kitchen-made taco. I use a fork and knife to cut a piece and wonder as I swallow if I'm supposed to pick it up with my hands instead. No, it's a little too wander-y for that, and it tastes sublime. Especially with the marguerita which is Texas-sized.

That's what it's called. Marguerita, regular or Texan, which means extra-large. I think. You can ask them, or try to, as I did, when you stop by. It might be that both are the same size but they're made with different quality brands because there's a dollar-and-a-half difference. When I ordered finally the Texan they asked if I wanted regular or large, and we never quite straightened that out on the menu but I chose the glass I wanted and all three waiters seemed relieved and I felt satisfied with what I got, whether it was regular or large, Texan or otherwise.

Thinking about it now and the total of the bill,... I'm still not sure, but it was a lovely place,

like a trip to Mexico, and I pretty much forgot about roads or cars or traffic or even Jonesborough for maybe an hour or so. That's a good quick vacation, and I'm looking forward to trying the spinach fajitas next time I decide to go to the town next west of home.

At the checkout, I asked the waiter if they had an internet connection. He looked at me suspiciously and said no, no internet. It didn't seem to be a good or interesting thing to him, and perhaps it isn't compared to the restaurant. I don't know, or if I'll remember to tell them that, cybernetically speaking, they are there now too. But I wouldn't miss the real thing for anything in the world.

30. Children's Short Story: Rabbits and Rosebuds

"There are monsters under the bed," Malcolm cried as he jumped from the rug into the covers.

"No, there aren't," Grandma assured him.

"There are," he insisted, having seen them.

Grandma sighed. "Do you want to hear a story?"

Malcolm nestled under blankets, pulled pillows close around his head.

"Yes," he said, mollified.

Huffy, Fluffy and Puffy conferred with great seriousness in the shade of their favorite rose bush.

"What are we going to eat?" wailed Fluffy.

Puffy looked at her with scorn. She always fell apart in a crisis.

Huffy hopped to the nearest decimated cabbage round and examined its leaves dolefully. As the oldest, and the only male, it was up to him to protect his sisters, to figure out what was wrong and how to fix it.

"Oh!" Puffy exclaimed. "Look at the wonderful butterflies!"

They were everywhere, swarming through the garden, resting on cabbage, flexing their angelic white wings.

Fluffy sighed in delight as one landed on her shoulder. "It's whispering in my ear," she shared, grinning.

Huffy harrumphed in a tone that meant: We have business to do here.

"Something is sneaking in and stealing our food," he summarized. "We need to set up a watch. Fluffy, you have the seven to three shift. Puffy, you take three to eleven. I'll do the midnight shift."

Huffy had learned from his father how to hide from hunting gray foxes, although it took alertness and daring that woke every nerve to the tips of his whiskers and hair.

Fluffy pouted and whined. She hated getting up early. "Puffy, will you switch with me? Please?"

Puffy hopped down the middle cabbage row toward their burrow. "Uh-uh," she voiced contentedly. "I love afternoon sun and the evening show as it lands and falls beneath our hills."

"Marauders," Huffy reminded curtly. "We're looking for thieves, not balls of fire. Or," he added, turning to Fluffy, "flying white angels."

Fluffy looked studiously at her front paws and pulled out a stray strand of grass with her teeth.

"Well," Huffy asked as they gathered a few days later by the rose bush, "did you see anything?"

Puffy shook her head, puzzled. The few cabbages left were disappearing rapidly. "Maybe we'll have to move," she opined despondently.

Fluffy's eyes opened wide in fear. "I don't want to leave home," she cried. "I love it here."

"What did you see?" Huffy demanded sternly.

"Just butterflies," Fluffy reported. "They're so lovely. They court on the wind and leave their greenish-black new babies in rainpockets of our cabbage leaves."

Huffy looked interested. "Then what?" he encouraged her.

"Then what?" Fluffy repeated, trying to remember the odyssey that entranced and hypnotized her.

"Green worms," Puffy offered. "The babies grow to tiny green worms."

"And then?" Huffy asked, excitedly.

"They get bigger," Puffy said flatly.

"What are they doing as they get bigger?" Huffy felt he was finally on the trail of something important.

Puffy thought back carefully, brought up the image of one green worm she'd watched and so liked that she'd given it a name. "It crawled slowly over the leaves and they seemed to disappear under its belly just as it moved along. When it got very fat, it jumped in the air, curled into a circle and fell to the ground where it right away went to sleep."

Huffy wasn't sure he believed all that. His sisters had lively imaginations and couldn't always be counted on to tell the difference between fantastic mind creations and what their eyes really saw.

Huffy concentrated on what appeared to be the only cogent fact, if indeed it was even a true observation. "The leaves disappear under their bellies?" he asked Fluffy for corroboration.

"Uh-huh," she answered idly, listening to songs of monarch butterfly wings as they drifted by her ear on the green chord of a thin morning breeze.

"Fluffy!"

"What?"

"Pay attention! The leaves disappear under the worms' bellies?"

Her eyes widened and her ears dropped down. "The babies are eating our cabbages?" she queried despondently.

"Yes!" Huffy exclaimed in triumph. "We've found our thieves!"

Fluffy and Puffy looked at their large back feet and conferred quickly in undertones.

"Let's move," Fluffy suggested uncharacteristically.

"We can't let him kill all the baby angels," Puffy agreed.

They both looked up.

"We want to move," they said in unison. "We don't like it here anymore."

Huffy laughed and hugged his sisters. He knew them well. They hopped sideways to avoid crushing a centipede, for heaven's sake.

"We'll spray the cabbages with ground pokeweed. Butterflies don't like that and the white angels will leave their babies to grow in rainpockets of other plants. Our cabbage will be safe."

Fluffy and Puffy sighed in relief and rolled back joyfully onto fallen leaves and rosebuds.

"And," Huffy noted mostly to himself, "so will we three."

Or so Grandma said, as she tucked a sleepy child safely into his bed.

31. Poetry: Read all about it

**what's going on
will not be
in the vacancies of meter and rhyme
in this afternoon's headlines.
we may find a wisp of it
in the speech and nod
of street vagrants,
the mood and move of bodies
on the bridge,
the call and answer of
wildlife up on Pintail Ridge,
not in scantily-measured spoonfuls
from the powerful and rich
they've thrown again into their refuse ditch
of tired, but still saleable myths**

in the calligraphy of usury and commerce
we continue to mislabel life and events,
neglecting to frequent the sphere of our own --
the scent in the air,
notes on the wind,
the feel of cotton growing in our hands,
divine doodles in clouds and sand,
the hieroglyphic of birds soaring,
designs of pebbles cuddling on the lands,
mourning and warning in our waters' roar
that cannot subside and desist or be ignored

32. Children's Short Story: Rule the Sky

Once upon a time there was a prince. He was very tall, very blond, very good, very handsome. (Well, he had a large chin really but nobody noticed unless they'd known him a long time.) His name was Frederick; friends called him Free. Free charmed the old folks and children with song. He danced in village streets with strangers and gave gifts for no reason. He climbed the castle walls just for fun on sunny days, planted pansies in neighbors' yards when no one was looking, left trinkets wrapped with red paper hearts in the mailboxes of young girls, hid gilt-edged swords in the saddles of horses the young men rode to distant cities in search of trade.

Then one day Julia came to town in a white carriage drawn by two gleaming-black quarter horses. The surry was decked and draped with garlands of yellow daisies. The doors handles were made of gold, and roses, white and red, edged the open windows. Jewel (that's what everyone called her) held the reins gently, talked with her steeds, Rola and Piet, in a low murmur as their hooves tapped in sync on cobblestones that led past the butcher's, the baker's, and the candy store. They stopped, as she asked, by the creek that lay low in the

bank of Queen Anne's Lace and a creamy profusion of violet hearts. Jewel opened the right door and stepped carefully, holding layers of satin skirts over her knees until she was safely on the grass. She kicked off silk slippers and buried her toes in green warmed to moist coolness on this early spring day. Pulling her dress like a fan, she sank down by sweet running water, watching for tadpoles and minnows. Rola and Piet nibbled on lace and violets. From the weeping arms of a willow, bluebirds and robins fed on early leaves.

Free had heard the horses' bells and stood now on the East balcony wondering which young villager hid beneath the curving brim of a straw-and-ribbon hat nodding ever so slowly by Solitude Run. He whistled to the horses, hoping she and they would look up, but none did, absorbed in their musings and meals. He frowned and turned to the door. Maybe he'd just walk down, wander by, check the steeds for shoeing, leave a trinket on the carriage seat.

"What are the horses' names?" Free wore leather soleless boots and she hadn't heard him approach.

Jewel turned slightly and looked up. Then up further.

"Oh," her eyes widened, then her gaze receded to a faraway place. "Rola and Piet."

"Ah. What does that mean?"

"Rola is for my father. His name was Roland. Piet is for prayer."

Free stroked Piet, scratched behind his ear, as the horse whinnied and gentled to the touch in a widening silence.

"And what happened to your father?" Free asked finally.

"He was killed," Jewel answered softly. She ran fingers of her left hand through the carpet of purple and white ground covers. "It was an accident."

'Has it been long?' Free questioned carefully.

"No."

"The carriage is new." Free remarked.

"It's a present from my aunt. For my eighteenth birthday."

"And when was that?" Free smiled.

"Yesterday." Jewel grinned. "I'm allowed to travel alone now. But not too far."

"Where are you from?"

"Scaliae, over the mountain."

Suddenly, Free put the story together. Not many young women had carriages, even less ones as ornate, or horses as proud.

"Your uncle is regent?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"We've met. I'm Frederick, Prince of Shiilre."

Jewel smiled and picked a violet to taste a spice of spring.

"And you're Julia?"

She nodded, as Free recalled her father's death. Perhaps it had not been long ago, but Jewel had been three, four at most, when Roland fell, screaming to stars and tumbling through sky from an invention he'd believed with his diehard inventor's heart would fly from castle to castle, borne on winds, held by hope high between earth and a canopy of clouds and light.

"His soul still flies." Julia heard Free's thoughts. "He's not here, but he is not gone."

Free remembered the search for broken piles of bone and flesh, shreds of a dreamer streaming on limbs, gravity-bound, found in a dusky plain south of Scaliae, near the sea. They buried Roland there, where salt breezes cooled the ground, listened for the sound of spirits winding visions for wandering minds -- new ways to see, new waves to ride.

"Your father was a fine man."

"I think someday we will fly."

33. Travelogue: That Home Town Taste

Note: This article first appeared in *The New Jonesborough Emancipator* (Publisher: Jim Austin), Jonesborough Artisan and Antique Dealer a hardcopy revival of the

Tennessee Town's original abolitionist newspaper created in 1820 by Elihu Embree, who stated his publishing motivation as follows: "It is not to produce, nor hasten this epoch [the abolition of slavery], that I have been induced to publish this paper, but to do my part, in this my day, to avert the impending storm."

The Appalachian region is blessed with many and varied homes that have opened some rooms to the public. The National Storytelling Festival, held October 1-3 this year, draws national and international visitors to the small Town of Jonesborough, Tennessee's oldest, the state's original capitol. (It was also capitol of the State of Franklin but that's another story.) "That Home Town Taste" explores history and attractions of a few representative bed-and-breakfast lodgings.

Graphic: Drawing by Charles Dyer

October, 1999

The Town's business of renting a room and serving a morning meal to out-of-town visitors began with the original Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast, a College Street booking agency which took reservations and located amenable citizens who owned historic homes. For a reasonable commission, the agency handled bookkeeping and tax records until transferring ownership and location to the Bledsoes, current owners of Woodrow Avenue's Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast. As interest and demand for this type of lodging grew, the Town's innkeepers, including the Bledsoes, established separate business enterprises and the Visitors Center became one of several centralized sources for information on booking and reservations.

The concept of letting out rooms within private homes, particularly in more rural areas and especially for fairs and festivals, became formalized throughout America over the past several decades with the licensed establishment of "bed and breakfast" inns. Their unique appeal to travelers is local ambiance -- immersion, however brief, in the real flavor and folklore which distinguish one town and region from the next, this family's talents and ancestral traditions from another. Like the many gourmet varieties of coffee available now, each of the Jonesborough bed-and-breakfast inns has a fascinating personality all its own, a memorable zeitgeist that causes the prospective visitor to linger over an enticing array of choices before choosing just one.

Bugaboo Bed & Breakfast offers the world-weary guest 15 acres of secluded, wooded privacy just over a mile from the historic streets of downtown Jonesborough. Well-behaved children are welcome to enjoy with others the homey comfort and cheer offered for nearly a decade by innkeepers Lee and Nancy Hallberg. View north between Jonesborough and Greeneville TN Their Old English contemporary home features a second floor of two bedrooms, each with private bath, and a sitting hall overlooking the living area with its woodstove and a large original stained glass by area artisan Kit Monger. Restoration furniture by Curtis Buchanan enlivens bright and spacious rooms which afford a view of cows and horses pastured in neighboring fields. Cut under the sheltering canopy of tall native trees, hiking paths clear a trail from mountain vistas to secluded benches and a pond. For relaxing under Appalachian stars, a hot tub on Bugaboo's deck eases sore muscles and tired feet from a day's adventure in nearby towns. Morning meal service includes fresh produce, fruit and vegetable, from house gardens; the variety of "fixings from scratch" depend on seasonal availability.

The antique elegance and gourmet service of Blair-Moore House overlay its foundation of friendly convenience for Town visitors. A two-room street-level suite with private bath, and accommodating up to three persons, allows easy access to sidewalk treats of Jonesborough for handicapped guests. Two upstairs rooms complete accommodations, all of which include separate porches and unique decor, including clawfoot bathtubs, pedestal commodes and European-style showers. The educated, enthusiastic interest of innkeepers Jack and Tami Moore in displaying collections of unusual antiques is evident in formal service for visitors to their home and in the decoration of each room. In fact, the Moores labored in plaster and paint for nearly six years to restore architectural integrity to a building originally constructed in the 1830s and its 20th century additions. During some of that time, its downstairs west wing, now the suite, served as their antique shop. An unusual plantation pie, or milk, safe finds practical purpose at the turn of the 21st century in Blair-Moore's dining room. National Storytelling Festival 1998, Jonesborough TN Three-course epicurean breakfasts served there and afternoon teas in the parlor reveal Tami's years of expertise in her family's catering business and have become a source of complimentary astonishment and referral, as has the Moore's attention to luxury detail in entertaining visitors to their home.

The Old Yellow Vic earned its name from an early and frequent guest. Jimmy Lewis, a Southern gentleman referred by the Town's original booking agency, College Street's Jonesborough Bed & Breakfast, became a repeat visitor and a personal acquaintance of the

Stacy family, who commemorated their friendship when licensing the house as a bed-and-breakfast business. Victorian linens, crystal, china and artwork fascinate travelers resting in the comfort of innkeeper Sonya Stacy's home. Entering the Old Yellow Vic from its circling front porch, guests may check their slips, or shoes, in the low mirror of a "petticoat table," one of numerous unusual antique furnishings. In addition to period pieces, each room displays an extraordinary aspect of the innkeeper's family flair for art and personal creativity. A three-panel screen in one of three upstairs guest bedrooms was painted entrancingly in oil years ago by her father, Jerry Ross. Professional chalk sketches of his profile and of her mother's, before marriage and family and at the time her parents attended college in Indiana, adorn an upstairs hall. "Unmade Bed," a sketch by the innkeeper, decorates another bedroom wall. Recent award-winning needlework, and the dining room's formal painting and original oil wall border, showcase her mother's varied and current talent. Sonya Stacy creates full formal breakfasts, including unusual foods and accommodating special tastes, for guests in her home. In addition, she owns Pig 'N Slipper, a popular Main Street shop of antique vendor spaces, including her own Victorian Splendor.

A two-story porch running the breadth of Rees-Hawley House affords its visitors an inviting view from the hill of historic streets and steeples. Built in the late 1700s, the log-and-stone structure itself sits on Lot #1 of the Town's original plat, enabled by an act of the North Carolina Assembly in 1779. In May 1793, Solicitor for Washington County James Rees began construction of the ground floor kitchen and second floor parlor. In the 19th century, an east side addition doubled the size of the original house. Extensive restorations and careful remodeling in this century include addition of a new kitchen and three guest bedrooms, each with separate bath, by current innkeepers R.I.C. and Marcy Hawley. Their personal touch in service and furnishings compliments the museum-quality age and renovation of Jonesborough's oldest extant building. Its distinctive features have attracted coverage in Southern Living, Blue Ridge Country, USA Today, and many other regional and national publications. Music at the Courthouse, Jonesborough TN Interior designer Marcy Hawley also supervised period restoration of several local structures, including Jonesborough's Chester Inn. The Hawleys serve a full candlelit breakfast to suit the time and taste of guests in their spacious 19th century dining room. For visitors intrigued by the legends of Town ghosts, it is noted occasionally over the years by male guests that women can be heard giggling and laughing at night in the hallways of Rees-Hawley House.

No article or photograph will convey the cumulative wealth of items and personalities that altogether make up Jonesborough's unique lodgings. Each bed-and-breakfast inn contains

numerous details of interest and enchantment. Current innkeepers maintain an educated care for their homes and public rooms, adjusting service and menus to accommodate the special needs of individual guests. They share knowledge of local history and provide assistance in exploring the treasures of Tennessee's Tri-Cities region. All request advance reservations to provide the best of traveler experience. Additional information, including brochures and rates, is available from each bed-and-breakfast inn and at the Jonesborough Visitors Center.

34. Short Story: That Unspeakable God

Tess straightened her skirt and back. The table glittered with decorations, plates of imported crackers and cheeses, pates. A silver tureen of red wine with floating slices of orange. Sirens screamed on Main Street. Another fire? Her mind wandered. A face appeared. Real? It came into focus, familiar. Name? Connection? Some familiar panic rose from her hips, or thereabouts. Maybe it was her feet. She felt herself leaving again.

“Tess?” Gary questioned, tentatively.

She smiled. “What’s up?” The connection clicked. “Have you a piece in the show?”

He frowned, irritated, impatient. “I’m one of the exhibitors.”

“Mmmmmm,” Tess inhaled. I knew I wasn’t here, she thought hopelessly.

“Are you ever here?” Gary demanded gruffly, and turned to see who else more interesting had walked through the door recently.

Her eyes widened and cleared. “I’m here, just distracted. Which pieces are yours?”

He waved toward the tureen. "That wall. You've seen most of them. What's the distraction?" Gary peered suddenly intense.

"A friend's ill."

He didn't care much about illness. "Anyone I know?" His voice was indifferent, flat.

"No." It was really. The energy in Tess flagged lower.

He pushed her back toward the wall gently. "Look at this new piece I've done."

Tess examined it with full, open attention, let everything else inside her slip away. All of her was the art. Let it take over her soul, all her consciousness, let there be nothing but this in the universe for awhile. It was breathtaking, detailed, intricate, complex and simple, a message of the universe or a person or all of life and a new way of seeing, a trip to a place she'd want to know and stay, at least until -- reality hitting -- hunger or money intervened. Ugh, feed the beast she thought suddenly. It's probably low on something.

"Jeez. I've got to get something to eat. It's wonderful though." Her delight was contagious.

"There's dark chocolate homemade bonbons over on the side table.

She laughed at the temptation. "No, I think I need vegetables or fruit or meat or..."
Chocolate. "Yes, bonbons and then ..."

Gary held a bonbon eye-high. Tess tilted and stretched her head back, giggling at the obvious.

“Okay,” she uttered from someplace at the back of her spine. “I’m getting serious here,” and turned for the buffet.

Heda laughed behind her. “Is that what you call a well-balanced meal today?”

Tess studied the plate. Two pieces of layered strawberry cake with a hard chocolate coating, lemon-coconut jello, an assortment of cheeses.

“I’m doing an experiment in body chemistry. Yesterday I just ate meat. The day before that just vegetables. The day before that just fruit juices and nothing solid at all.”

“Seriously?”

“No.” Tess laughed.

“Not exactly?”

“It isn’t a well-controlled experiment.”

“I like the outfit.” Heda designed her own clothes, sold them at fairs and crafts shows and on consignment in small shops here and there in the region and sometimes other places as clients moved or visited, passed by on their way to areas considered generally more chic. Her creations mixed fabrics in one-of-a-kind crazy quilts that draped a head or shoulder or hip in ways it had never thought to be accoutered, whimsically and with a bit of humor at the idea of clothing at all. Tess loved them.

“It’s another comment on why clothes at least in warm weather.”

Heda kissed her suddenly on the mouth. "You're it, girl."

"Yeah, I'm it," Tess murmured a little tiredly. "Or," she brightened up, "you are."

Energy flowed. "Right," Heda said cheerily, dancing a little step to show off her outfit and ending with a right leg out. "I'm goddess today."

"Oh, good." Tess felt truly relieved and relaxed for the first time that day. "I'm going to play." Tension returned. There were too many people, too gay for moods underlaying this silk overthrow and multi-colored pants of leather and velvet. I can't live up to my clothes today, Tess reflected mournfully. Karen's disease overwhelmed her again. It can't be, she thought recklessly. Screaming at heaven No! again. Not Karen, she yelled at God. Or whoever, she thought, angrily. What fate is that? No! But it had become a dreary, dragging acceptance. Yes, Karen, me, anyone. What's next? a disgusted soul said to a body walking toward the back door through acquaintances in an accepting, roiling, quieting ocean, a sea of dreams and lost hopes and conquests ebbing and rising. There doesn't seem to be a plan here, she grumbled to a divinity that might run through it or have left or never been there at all. Is there a point? her shadow self shook a fist at this force and flow that did, she admitted confusedly, exist. Just life, she reminded herself. Let it go, let it be. And, damnit George H. died. Her favorite, if she had one. Meditative, spiritual, on his own track, more in the flow than against it, overriding it. A sudden image of the last five years. Why? she wondered again. What does it mean? It never made sense, didn't add up logically as other years had seemed to. Or maybe they didn't, she thought. Maybe it was the structure I imposed to define them -- ones I inherited or read or learned. She'd seen them fall, crack and separate without clear boundaries or shapes exactly. Imposed new ones arbitrarily. Does any one work? Is any one right? It's like physics theory, she considered suddenly. Discerning and ordering a universe, or a person, or a group to cope with it but it doesn't really exist like that at its source. Undefineable and unspeakable like the God of Israel, ancient tribes. She saw them dancing to primitive energies.

"How's Atlantis today?" that cackling warm voice asked suddenly.

"You saw me there?"

“I followed you.”

“Ah, company.” Tess shook her head, smiling, from that interior center of the world and history she knew, that lived in her cells and their memory. Racial memory, the hers and his she might have been and remembered if at all dimly. Or her imagination made it up, Rose had said sternly. This is the real world with tables and chairs and balanced meals. Grow up and act like a normal adult, her sister demanded argumentatively. It’s exasperating to deal with you, she nearly yelled.

Tess focused. “I’m going to talk with the bums again. They’re interesting,” she enticed.

“What bums?”

“You’ll see. Let’s go.”

The fenced and gated park behind the gallery had no lighting of its own. A disordered glow from shops and street lamps lit a tree or a man.

“What do you think of the war today, kid?” Jack brushed by her, brisk as ever.

“Just great. Love it.”

“Sure you do.”

“And you?”

“Time of my life.”

“Thought that was Ben Yua.”

“Topped it.”

“The streams of refugees?”

“And the prostitutes.”

“Veils are erotic.”

“You’re both sick.” Wanja intervened.

“War makes us sick,” Tess explained, suddenly soft, apologetic. “Sorry.”

Jack grumbled something obscene from his chest and groin.

Tess opened the gate.

“Is this safe?”

“Sure. We’re right in town and they’re okay,” Tess reassured her. “They’re mostly old vets. Burnt out.” Like me, she thought from that tired place in her soul off and on. Auto-pilot or a new captain please. She laughed suddenly out loud.

“What?”

“The thing is you just sit down and light a cigarette and they’ll talk to you. I’ll watch.”

“Okay, let’s go over there,” Wanja nodded toward an empty iron bench.

“Naw. We have to separate. I’ll just sit on the ground.”

Tess sunk to grass that was only slightly damp and leaned her back against a marble stone. Cold, her body said through the silk blouse. Where is your coat?

“Hey,” she got up, “I’m going to get my coat out of the car.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No,” Tess said firmly. “I’ll be right back.”

Wanja looked a bit panicked, eyes wide and body went stiff suddenly. Tess felt it rather than saw it.

“No, it’s okay. I’ll be right back.”

Wanja relaxed and sat on the marble Tess had vacated. Cold, sensitive thighs said. I’ll get used to it, she thought. I’m not moving now. Wanja lit a cigarette and surveyed the men calmly, unobtrusively, along with the landscaped garden with its artificial stream. A longing for real country came over her again. Some day, she thought determinedly, I am buying that piece of land at the top of the highest mountain here and building, getting built she corrected herself a bit morosely, a hut where I’ll write music all day about everything I saw and knew and didn’t understand as I was going through because I was too busy and

pressured and worried and sick and worn out to say why washing dishes every day for five kids wasn't fulfilling and not for the reasons that Ben understood because it wasn't that structured. It just wiped her out, she thought. Annihilated the her that never existed really, never bloomed, or grew, never met the world unaccustomed by Ben, George, Janice, Orrin, Patty and Madeline, the one body they were sometimes defined by the no of Ben and his directions in everything and shifting definitions of her that were not the core of her separate, unique existence. Or did she have one anymore? Did it still exist in there somewhere. She looked inside for it, for the child that became an adult circumscribed by her sex and procreation, her dependence on Ben, his rules, his economies, his everything. Everything was his, according to his soul. At the profoundest level and except for escapes he didn't know, it was his world, a magnetic force she resisted and gave into because her strength failed. She didn't exist then. A body with nothing of her own. Not even her body really. Children and dogs climbing over it, Ben nudging it unwelcome in the night when she was too exhausted to participate as the girl he knew twenty-some years ago. Where was that girl? Did she grow up in a consciousness that lay parallel, untapped? That's what Wanja believed, waited for the full days and months and years, she'd meet that person. She had questions to ask of that shadow that never had had a chance to talk and think and remember at leisure, freely and unencumbered. It might be frightening, she thought. Behind the seeming robot and the structure of her seen and known, dependable and compliant, self-effacing and ruled, was there a person and was it one she'd like? No, like isn't the right word. Accept might be.

"Do you have a cigarette?" The reverie broke. Shadows and leaves and a mottled scarf appeared. Wanja looked up, regaining the world.

"Sure." She reached in her pocket and pulled a loose one out. "Here you go." She wasn't sure of the next direction.

"Mind if I sit here a minute."

"Of course not." Wanja slid over on the marble and noticed her thighs weren't protesting anymore. Accommodation, she thought. It's a good body, basically. Like a car I take to the show, however it's been laid out on any particular day. It felt strange, like it wasn't totally hers. Ben's body belonged to himself and the company he worked for, including weekends frequently, she thought suddenly. Not to her. It wasn't at her command or her children's.

It was off limits in some way. She felt exasperated by it, its aloofness and separateness. Why wasn't it hers despite the children and the years?

"Come here often?"

"No," Wanja laughed. "I've never been here before."

"It's a great place. The city's good to keep it. Clean and safe."

"You sleep here?"

"Not always."

"Where else?" Wanja felt a wave of depression passing and struggled that it not show.

"Under the highway bridges sometimes. They're safe too because of the lights and cops passing by."

"They don't bother you?"

"No. They're okay. Sometimes they bring blankets. One's a friend. His wife sends hot meals, biscuits some nights."

"Really?" She brightened up. "That's cool."

"Yeah. Some of them are vets too. Brothers."

“Are there women?” Wanja volunteered at a local pantry occasionally and most of their clients were mothers and much older women. She wondered where the men went and concluded they were too proud to come through regularly, fended for themselves.

“A few. They’re pretty confused.”

“Do you bother them?”

He laughed. “Not unless they want me to.”

“Really?”

“Sometimes someone does. We get rid of them.”

“It’s a clan, kind of?” Wanja wanted to understand that world, at least a little, since she’d found her nerve and was there. She noticed she didn’t feel threatened, just curious and a little sad. The poor ye have always with ye? Why? Who said so? Oh, you can’t question sources like that. Just accept it, do the best you can.

“What’s your name?”

“Ruth. What’s yours?”

“Clement.”

“Were you in Vietnam?”

“No.”

She felt confused. He seemed that age.

“I couldn’t go.” Clement pulled a disfigured hand from the right pocket of his army coat.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s congenital. I’m used to it.”

“How did you happen to be on the street?”

“My buddies are here.”

Perplexion.

“Guys from school.”

“High school?”

“Groader.”

“Where is that?”

“Hightower Ridge.”

Half way up the mountain to Jolden where the native crafts festival was held every year.

“Are you Cherokee?”

“No. Mountain bred, mountain dead.”

“What?”

“Kin all up and down that mountain, in the graves and in the schools.”

“What do you do all day?”

“Travel around. Write poetry.”

“Really? Cool.” Wanja cheered again. “Do you have any with you? I love poetry.”

Clement grinned slantwise. It wasn't a leer exactly but from a male force that knew something she didn't, couldn't except as it would be revealed on its own.

“You want to hear one?” She heard the “little girl” implied in his tone. Her consciousness focused on her high-heeled boots and rings as her back stiffened again.

“Yes.”

“Ah! You don’t.”

“Say it.”

“Another time.” Clement threw the butt under his foot and stood up, crushing it. “Take care of yourself, gal. I gotta go.”

“Okay. Nice talking to you.”

Clement waved slightly and turned on the bricks toward a sculptured stand of trees and bushes.

“What did he say?”

“That was good timing.”

“Forgot my keys. Had to go back in the gallery for my pocketbook.” Tess grimaced in the fur coat that cushioned her sitting on marble now.

“He said I wouldn’t understand.”

Tess laughed. “You might.”

“It’s like a masonic order or something. Secret handshakes and codes.”

“Yeah.”

“They’d let me in if I came back often enough. Got to know some of them.”

“Most likely. I don’t know.” How do you touch a soul? she wondered. And how to do you say what or if the path is? Or if I have one, you do too. No, it isn’t that way. Just some souls touch and others don’t and nobody knows why or where they’ll go. Is there a plan or is it all random? No. Is this a time to impose Tess? When does she melt and let go?

“Do you know any of them?”

“I know Clement.” She’d seen him go.

“Do you like him?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“He’s creative and sticks with his friends.”

“Have you heard his poetry?”

“Some.”

“What’s it like?”

“A lot of it is funny.”

“Funny?” That wasn’t what Wanja expected.

“It’s meant to amuse, lighten the load, say. And it’s insightful in kind of a cheery way.”

“Cheery?” Wanja saw the scuffed, misfit shoes.

“Everybody has problems.”

“What?”

“He has a masters degree in biochemistry.”

“He has a masters degree in biochemistry. Why is he on the street?”

“Looking for something more profoundly true, I guess.”

“He worked.”

“He was professor, associate, somewhere.”

“What happened?”

“I’m not sure. He may have gotten pushed out or he may have just gone.”

“You don’t know.”

“It isn’t very clear from what he says or writes except that it might be both.”

“Does he have to live on the street?”

“I don’t think so. I think he has a cabin somewhere.”

“Another not clear signal from anywhere?”

“I can’t tell if it belongs to him or someone else.”

“Why is it all so,” Wanja scanned for a word, “nebulous?”

“I don’t know. It’s like he’s more of a physic.”

“Can’t you pin him down a bit to a real specific?”

“No. He doesn’t want to exist like that.”

“He did and got tired of it.”

“I guess. He didn’t say except maybe in a poem or two. Makes sense anyway.”

“He’s defined by being a bum.”

“Only to someone who doesn’t talk with him, get to know him.”

“I like it.”

“Me, too.”

“What’s next?”

“I’m going home.”

“Where is it now?”

“The new house is on Grainger.”

“Do you like it?”

“I took it as it is, completely furnished, and it’s small enough to keep easily and heat.” And cool, the marble said through her coat. “And cool.”

“I’m going back to the gallery for a little bit. Anyway, I need to talk with Hen about Patty’s lessons.”

“How’s she doing?”

“I think she’s got real talent.”

“Yeah! More young women in the arts.”

“She’s got something.”

“I’ll look forward to watching it reveal itself.”

“It’s an interesting process.”

“Never done.”

“Some days it looks like it’s at a dead end.”

“Why?”

“She gets discouraged, doesn’t like anything she does despite what anyone else says, particularly me of course.”

“Why? Oh, you’re her mother and of course you’d say that.”

“It isn’t true really. I criticize some places she goes.”

“What happens?”

“She takes it as a sign that’s the right direction, I think. A lot of the time I don’t say anything except ‘uh-huh interesting’.”

Tess stood and leaned over to hug her, pressed her head against the befuddled mother in Wanja at that minute.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“See ya in the movies.”

Wanja leaned back again and lit another cigarette as Tess opened the gate.

This is a strange spot to be, a place in her whispered. The artificial stream chuckled under its oriental-style bridge. Wanja crossed the leather-bound feet over each other. I’ll just see what comes next, she decided. It’s my night out and I have plenty of time left. Nobody’s watching me and no one has to know unless I just feel like telling them. A little thrill of freedom, followed by anxiety and anticipation came over her. It’s all mine for this moment. And God’s, she added, respectful and wary. Let go and we’ ll fly to something new. You’ll live or die. It’s the ride. Wanja began to snap her fingers to an inner beat and tune. Here she is, Wanja thought. She’s coming out again.

35. Youth Micro-Fiction: The Reservation

Once upon a time there was a snail. It was very slow and it wasn't very pretty. It left a kind of ooze behind wherever it would go. Little children cried, "Ooooooo, yich!" as it passed them by. Little girls ran the other way, and little boys stomped on it. It kept coming back.

One day, as the snail lay low beneath a clump of grass under a shady tree, a cat came along and curled up beside it unknowingly.

"What is that damp spot?" the cat thought and turned to lick its fur dry by the side of the snail.

"Ooooooo!" said the snail as the cat's rough tongue rolled it over on the dirt.

Ooze oozed and the cat said, "Darn!" and licked some more as the snail wound round and round.

"Something is definitely wrong," the cat thought as dampness spread down toward its leg and it stretched to lick its limb.

"What in the world is wrong with him?" thought the snail as it tumbled by and by.

"That's it!" thought the cat as slime covered its back.

The cat rolled over and the snail squished.

"Oh no!" said the cat as it slid down the hill. "What happened here?"

And the snail said, "Oh dear. I've made a mess again."

The cat shook herself off at the foot of the hill and gazed back up at him. "Please stop that," it said, wearily licking its skin, "I'm running out of spit."

The snail regrouped and sat benignly by the tree. "I'll try not to ooze if you'll try not to step on me."

"I didn't step on you," the cat replied indignantly. "That was my tongue."

"The heck you say! You rolled over on me."

"I couldn't help it," the cat responded penitently. "It bothered me."

"Maybe you could live at the bottom of the hill and I could live at the top," the snail said thoughtfully. "I think I see a tree down there."

The cat turned hopefully. "Okay," it purred. "You can have the penthouse and I'll have the basement floor."

So the snail and the cat lived happily, until one day a little boy came along.

"Ooooooooo! A snail," he cried and stomped it viciously.

Ooze ran down and the cat frowned and meowed piteously.

"Ooooooooo! A cat," he cried and ran down to grab it by the tail and swirled it round and round.

As the cat fell dizzily into the ooze and twirled on the ground helplessly, a little girl came down.

"Ooooooo! What you are doing to the snail and the cat?" she cried. "They were living so happily."

The little boy turned and walked away, thinking of the braids and the ribbons in her hair, then suddenly turned and ran up the hill.

"Ooooooo!" she cried and ran away.

And the little boy chased her, and the snail and the cat sighed, and the ooze dried, at least for that day.

And the clump of grass thought, "I just have absolutely nothing to say," and the tree said, "I hope they all go away."

36. Creative Non-fiction Essay: The Under-The-Railroad Gang

Years ago in a small southern town weed-grown signs announced a pink three-bedroom house for rent. Although modern and clean, the structure enticed few inquiries due to locomotives passing overhead. But to a college couple looking for quick shelter its price was right.

On one side lay the highway with its trucks and streaming cars. On the other, uphill somewhat, a trailer anchored on the edge of a narrow lot. Resident Tom announced preferences and epithets in designer tattoos wedged from biker boots to bald head. Tom was fond of wrestling too.

Jody and Gil discovered they could hear jeers and thuds from any study room they chose while trains ricketed above and jolted the ceilings and floors. Meanwhile, there was rarely a day Pink Glory's couches and bedrooms weren't full. Guests talked as trains clacked and wrestlers thwacked. Visitors left or stayed and others arrived.

Once settled, Gil decided that during a war the best thing to do was not to pray but buy colorful clothes. So on Saturday before that holiday, and after Country Joe had played again for their breakfast of beans, Jody drove to the mountain he called home. There they cornered the lot on a thrift store shop: a full-length beaver coat, oriental shoes, purple velveteen bellbottom pants, a tophat and of course leather gloves. It's necessary, he said, to meet a war well-dressed. And they did. Their yellow bug was full to the brim when they returned with odds and ends and bric-a-brac. Soon, with some creative welds and mends, their house was full with the artiest of things and men.

Some of this isn't true, by the way. At least not in the world we tend to accept every day.

It wasn't long before Glory had five major players, you might call them: friends that generally stayed. Two played in a band: horns and blues harp (harmonicas). Another was the livingroom genius. He sat cross-legged and serious, reading encyclopaedias for casual fun and awaiting consultation on whatever question might arise from anyone.

The other two were girls, whom some said looked alike, learning to be women through daisy-chains of unusual days and nights. One was a politico and the other was a poet. Or perhaps it was the reverse. It's difficult to know because they laughed a lot, switching places, and sharing what they'd got. Both played piano and a little bit of strings. And everything they learned, they told and taught the other, so they grew entwined like sister beings. Most of all they loved freedom and kept each other safe and close, not just then but through all the wandering strange decades to follow.

Glory's frequent visitors included a fair-haired waify-seeming fellow who drew caricatures especially and was so slight in every way he rose from the couch like an angel if you glanced away.

And then one night, they looked beyond too long and he was gone.

Another was an ex-marine who'd done ground-service as a medic. They called him Downtime Ben because, although he knew about various things and could be fun on some days, he grumbled and swore a lot. Still, he had a good heart and could be depended upon to be there, or where they were, doing ground-and-down-time when current scenes got too hot for the enchanted to handle in their particular soft and wifty way.

But Downtime Ben has gone away. And so has Mensa, and others that drifted through.

One's still in Wisconsin, another in Massachusetts, a few down south and on the eastern Coast. Others just disappeared. And then there's Tennessee holding to the feet of volunteer folk and bringing them back for reunion days.

Myths die and myths grow. The Under-The-Railroad Gang comes and goes. In a circle of heaven they sit by the fire where shapes of ones still here inspire songs and dreams they share and memories of long ago.

Now Downtime Ben is saying again: Reality, dear. Reality.

They weren't hippies, you know, or yippies or beatniks or bums. They were people, like you and me. They worked at jobs, some earned degrees, built or bought houses and babies they raised did as they pleased. A few went to jail, some got sick. Others ran businesses, two went to war.

But they all come back for this mental field to find the latest score: who's up, who's down, and who's waiting behind that answer door.

37. Humor Travelogue Essay: Travelin'

Within two days, I learned:

Ten states border Tennessee

The Smoky Mountains are not on the way from Nashville to Johnson City

Neither is Alabama

Just say no to unidentified roads

After 30 miles of unmarked pavement, any route sign is comforting, even if it's wrong

Binary probability theory doesn't work in choosing a correct exit lane

The pretty symbol over route designations isn't a gift from the State Art Council; it means "scenic," defined as "original one-and-a-half lane mountain byway with unmarked killer curves and six-inch high pre-civil-war stone guard rails"

If it seems like the wrong road, turning off it arbitrarily will probably not be right either

Never drive into a setting sun, especially if you're traveling East

If you're higher than 2,000 feet in the dark, stop

Unless one finds interstates boring, the eighteen-hour, two-day trip including an overnight stay atop the Appalachians between Nashville and Johnson City will take approximately six hours.

Wiser now.

38. Travelogue: Travelin' Mercies

July 25 -- Asheville's Bele Chere (believed to mean "beautiful living" in an ancient Scottish dialect) is similar to many other Appalachian three-day festivals except larger. Tents are set up wall-to-wall on streets and sidewalks with vendors displaying their wares and there are stages for live performances by local and regional bands. The trip south on Route 26 from Jonesborough is uneventful until I hit downtown Asheville traffic and its blocked-off thoroughfares. Navigating around deadends I discover that my usual multi-storied parking place is full, and so is the \$5 one when I rediscover it a few minutes later. Disregarding the one for \$15, I find a space which may be legal downhill from Patton Avenue and walk up toward the festival, stopping to ask two policemen where I might find an event guide. They confer, shaking their heads, and then one points me toward a small purple stand which turns out to have map and schedule handouts.

Passing by quite a few tents, I stop at one sponsored by the Greek Orthodox Church and buy four small spanikopita for \$5 from one of their heavily-accented counter people. Turning toward Grove Arcade, I come across a tall young man completely painted head to toe as a copper statue standing near the sidewalk. He really doesn't change expression or move, except to breathe ever so slightly, no matter what you say to him until you put money in the tin before his feet. Then he suddenly breaks into a wide smile, bows toward you while pulling a few pieces of candy from the bowl in his hand, and hands them to you with a grin.

Browsing through more tents, I end up at my favorite "stomping ground," Malaprops Bookstore/Cafe (Signature Drink combinations of espresso and flavorings: Choccolachino, Anais Nin, Isabel Allende, Robert Frost, Rita Mae Brown, White Rabbit, Gail Godwin, Deepak Chopra, Tom Robbins, Walt Whitman, Goddess Steamer) for imported coffee and

a 20-minute internet exploration for \$3 at one of their three cyber stations at the window overlooking activities on the sidewalks and street. An informal band has set up on one corner and another is tuning and rehearsing on a stage at the end of that street. I can hear them from inside and as a woman begins to sing. Back on the street, I walk past more tents and down side streets to the Used Bookstore, where I chose three free used books, a few magazines and newspapers, and purchase the glossy international ARTnews for \$6 from its many, many enticing worldwide offerings. They don't sell posters and I'm looking for one of the known universe, so they direct me to Instant Karma across the street. That shop doesn't have one either but they do have rosemary incense on sale for 50 cents and a great postcard for \$1 that I just have to have. A few shops down is another store that looks like it might have posters, so I venture in. It turns out to be a music store and I end up with three CDs for \$4 each: Mariah Carey "The Emancipation of Mimi," Jewel "Pieces of You," and U2 "One," plus more free literature.

There's a band setting up with a woman lead guitar player in a dress and heavy black boots at the end of the street, but I'm getting tired and have quite a bit to carry with me now in the midday sun's heat. Walking back toward Patton Avenue, I pass a little boy with longish dark curly hair sitting alone at a table with a sign that says, "Cold drinks \$1," so I have to buy a ginger ale from him. He grabs the dollar bill and stuffs it quickly into his cardboard box with the others, then hands me my aluminum can from the cooler by his right side. I sit in a little walled off brick courtyard on a cement railing drinking that, smoking a cigarette, and watching the company. There's a South American couple with a tiny daughter in halter top and shorts who's clapping her hands and smiling at me. I smile back and clap a hand against the side of my ginger ale can. Her father comes over from a corner and whistles at her, then leans down and gives her a big hug before the three of them walk back smiling toward the street.

Getting up again, I pass tents begging mercy for animals and selling fund-raising raffle tickets for preventing violence against women for a Cherokee, NC organization. I buy one of those and sign a petition to be kind of animals. Another tent is soliciting help and signatures for saving an architectural landmark, The Basilica of St. Lawrence, for a park rather than demolition. The "Obama 08" stand is manned by an enthusiastic young man and woman who give me a car decal and advise that his Berlin speech can be seen on YouTube that day. I stop at the Art tent area, speaking with one wonderful woman artist from Atlanta GA and another from Raleigh NC, and then, since there are no vendors selling anything for \$1, all I have left out of over \$30, I make my way downhill toward my car with only two heavy grocery bags full of goodies purchased and free.

One bag has started to break and I offer my remaining dollar bill to a vendor for an empty bag to put the tearing one in. He doesn't have one, refuses the money with a shake of his head, and leads me instead to his old SUV where he rummages around and comes up, shaking his head again sadly, with nothing usable for that purpose. The contents of the breaking bag, including a small cup of free couscous, have splattered out over the hood of his car, so I sweep all that up, tie the bag securely at the top and carry it the rest of the way cradled in an arm upside down, thanking him of course for his trouble before leaving. Personnel at the Asheville AM news radio station tent give me a free car decal, magnetized to-do list, and cap. As I near the bottom of the hill, it turns out my car has not been towed away for being in an illegal spot, nor on closer examination does it display an illegal parking ticket on its windshield.

Getting out of Asheville toward Johnson City TN has always been a little tricky for me. One time I ended up on the Blue Ridge Parkway, going north fortunately. With all the festival auto jams and blocked-off roads I'm leery, but make it to Route 26 West, just barely without a scratch, and into Friday evening rush hour traffic headed toward Weaverville. Since I tend to be writing notes off and on as I'm driving, it all reminds me a little of bumper cars at amusement parks, except I don't hit anyone and, thankfully, they don't hit me either. I'm onto the highway's trick of changing the speed limit from 70 mph on a flat to 55 mph going down a long and softly bending grade, catch just in time the exit sign for Jonesborough, and wind my way past the Nolichucky River and through an edge of Cherokee National Forest to arrive home safely with all my booty.

The Official Festival Guide notes amongst "three decades of change in the Bele Chere city": "1979 First Bele Chere festival is held with a \$5,000 budget and a paltry six weeks of planning. At least one attendee enjoys it enough to return the following year with a friend.... 1982 Stalwart independent bookseller Malaprop's Bookstore opens at 61 Haywood St. Berets, clove cigarettes and lesser known works by Kafka become popular accessories in town.... 1987 U. S. Post Office opens on Coxe Avenue. The song, '(I Just) Died In Your Arms' by Cutting Crew is heard emanating from at least one customer's parked car as they lick their stamps.... 1990 Chocolate Fetish (40 Haywood St.) is first listed in the city directory. Short-lived truffle-smuggling ring is brought to justice.... 1994 Fifth National Poetry Slam is held in Asheville. A winning entry goes something like this: Bele Chere, Bele Chere, thousand-winged woman of light. Revolution simmers in the still, heated air. Pass that corn-dog, OK?... 1997 Jack of the Wood brew pub and restaurant opens at 95 Patton Ave. Men in kilts come out of the closet.... 2004 Condominions open at 37 Hiawasee St. at

the site of the former Interstate Motel. In the following weeks, three streetwalkers apply for unemployment benefits.... 2008 Bele Chere celebrates 30 years. At least one attendee returns wearing a threadbare 'Bele Chere 1979' T-shirt."

The Guide also notes "Today, Bele Chere is the largest free festival in the Southeast, featuring six stages of live music, whole blocks of merchants and artists and a food court to rival that of any festival in the country. While many of the region's outdoor festivals have come and gone, Bele Chere has thrived. Some 10,000 people braved the fledgling fest in 1979, but recent years have seen attendance regularly veer toward 400,000. And as Bele Chere has grown, so has the city -- at this point, it's hard to tell which gives the other the bigger boost."

July 27 -- This time I get to the festival early enough to find a great parking space in my usual public garage off Haywood Street. It's charging \$5, whereas usually it's either free or very little, but it's worth it to be that much closer to the action, as they say. Secret Agent 23 Skidoo, kid-hop, is playing on the stage as I turn the corner toward Malaprops. Mothers are holding their babies and small children while dancing to the beat. Little kids are jumping and swaying with each other in the street, and some are held up on their parents' shoulders so they can see. Everyone seems to be smiling and happy. It's a very mixed crowd in age, couture and ethnicity. At Malaprops I read the usual unusual graffiti in their Women's Room stall ("Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen -- Hebrews 11:1"; "Tremble a little upon the threshold. Today you have been born out of abysmal sorrow and useless knowledge, words, devices, instruments of calculation and dysfunction; out of hates and holocausts, ghosts and gruesome facts, crimes, visions and disasters -- and despair, now a friend and helpful."; "I think I'm in love with my boyfriend.") before ordering a coffee and piece of blueberry crumb cake to enjoy in the air conditioning while checking the festival guide for this day.

There's an Asheville soul band, Jar-E, playing at Mountain Xpress Lexington Avenue stage, so I end up wandering back down there by Instant Karma and the Used Bookstore again. Jar-E turns out to be so great, kind of unique and original jazz to my ears really, that I break my usual prohibition and pay full price for a CD, "War Songs and The Muse," which they sell for a very reasonable independent band price of \$10. There's the lead electric piano player and singer/songwriter, electric bass, drums, trumpet and saxophone, all male with an African-American on electric guitar. On the street people are dancing again. It's a small crowd and one young, shortish and thin man is catching everyone's attention. He's the best dancer I've seen in years, just very natural and into the music

completely, with moves to the ground and around and his hands eloquently here and there. He seems very professional and is obviously enjoying it all. He catches my eye a few times and after the performance thanks me. I think I was dancing and laughing a little bit too, in sync so to speak. It was just soooo good. I tell the woman manning their table about Jonesborough's Music On The Square and that perhaps the band might like to perform there. They're interested, so I leave the address and contact information on a sheet of paper for them with encouragement to explore that possibility. One table is giving out stick-attached largish blue circles that say, "I am an Obama 08 fan," and I soon spy a blonde-headed little boy waving one before his face to create a breeze for himself in the mid-day heat.

Onto Pack Square and down Biltmore Avenue, after purchasing a small white ceramic jewelry ornament with blue Chinese writing and Buddhist symbols that nobody in the booth understands or can interpret, I discover that Blue Spiral 1 gallery is closed but the Haen is open, cooled and with new contemporary paintings and sculptures. The owner says he believes the Johnson City area will be the next arts and music place developed and populated more extensively, as Asheville has been over the past few decades. I say, "Oh, no!" because I like it all just the way it is, and he laughs as I walk out on and down the street again. Behind the stage on the sidewalk a young woman fiddler is playing with her case in front of her for pocket change. I throw in a dollar and start talking with her. Maisie looks French with her facial features and light brown hair wound on the top of her head, but it turns out she's from Maine and has a classical violin education. She makes her living partly from a farm she owns up there and teaches strings and world travel stories to grade schoolers as a volunteer, but travels around the world yearly also to play in the streets and meet the people. She mentions Italy, Turkey and North Africa as being the most surprisingly friendly. Italy loves the classical music and when she plays folk, they think she's a gypsy. Most prefer the violin and look down on fiddle-playing. Her parents are both musicians and she studied classical before dropping out in favor of travel instead. First she hiked the Appalachian Trail from Georgia home. I asked if her parents "freaked" at her hitchhiking and nomadism, but she said no, after the Trail they believed she could handle just about anything. The worst thing about hitching, she said, was the music some people played on their radios which she had to listen to until her stop, gratefully, came up. A male friend built his own boat and has traveled the world by sea for a year, returning unexpectedly just last month. I tell her about Jonesborough and its street musicians during events like Jonesborough Days, and she sounds very interested, says "It sounds like my kind of place." I say I hope to see her there and move off toward Battery Park where a Southern Rock band is toward the end of their gig.

Web Wilder & The Beatnecks are in their 50s and 60s it appears and full of energy and verve. They're playing "She's A Mojo Worker" with a great beat and sound, as I walk up and sit on the curb next to "Nana" singing and dancing with her little blonde-haired and pouty, wide-eyed grandson. The band is drums, electric rhythm and lead guitar and bass, the latter with shoulder-length gray-white hair he waves occasionally in the air. They're great fun and, when they're done, I walk into Grove Arcade where it's cool and I can get another coffee and dessert, strawberry rhubarb pie this time. Stopping on my way out at Stall Market, which turns out to be closed, and The Fresh Quarter next door, which isn't, I discover they have fresh figs grown locally and from California on display. The owner and I converse about the fig situation internationally, finally agreeing that the dearth of canned ones in syrup particularly and their general scarcity may be due to Middle Eastern wars and upheavals, since that's their Biblical growing place and seasonal comfiture. He says that in ten years there won't be any bananas available either because they're cloned rather than from seed and a blight is killing them all. I leave with a small baggie of assorted dried forest mushrooms for \$1 and concern over the fig and banana problem, which is very serious and deserves more media and research attention.

The bottoms of my feet hurt, it's hot and humid, and I'm getting tired, so I head back toward my car, stopping at the WNCW 88.7 FM alternative music and news radio booth for one of their bumper stickers and another one from NARAL Planned Parenthood ("... advocates for public policies that make birth control and education more accessible. In doing so, unwanted pregnancies become less prevalent and abortions become less necessary... We provide birth control services to prevent unwanted pregnancies and distribute condoms to also prevent sexually transmitted infections. We test for diseases and viruses, including HIV, to limit further infection among partners and the community. We also provide treatment for infections that can cause serious health effects, including infertility. We offer immunizations to protect from contagions and from cancers. We also provide screenings for breast and cervical cancers.... When parents speak openly and often about sexuality, their children are far less likely to engage in risky sexual activity at a young age. Their children learn to speak comfortably about sex so they can forthrightly refuse sexual advances or else talk openly with a partner about using a condom.... education programs help parents, children and families communicate about sex in order to lead healthy lives.... We promote abstinence and provide medically accurate information regarding birth control and disease protection.... We seek to develop healthy relationships predicated on mutual respect and communication -- between partners, with parents, within families and among peer groups.... [Programs include] 'Teens taking action,' 'Are you an askable parent,' and 'Adolescent parenting program'." -- Preparing the next generation, 2007 Annual Report [Total Liabilities and Equity 7,618,383], Planned Parenthood WV-VA-NC-GA-SC) in the tent next to that one, and passing more babies in strollers

passed out on their backs from the colorful, sometimes raucous busy-ness and mid-afternoon sun. Painter John Charles from Kingsport TN suddenly appears before me as I begin to cross Haywood Street again with his arms open and saying, "Jeannette! We meet in the strangest places!" We hug and he introduces me to a commercial painter friend from Elizabethton. That man tells me that he served in the Army and was twice ordered and dressed in line for the Korean War, but his sargent liked him and pulled him out each time. We laugh about his good fortune. He studied art in Cleveland OH for three years and is a successful muralist and realist in style. John returns from a booth with a bumper sticker about loving dogs and tells his friend, as he tends to repeat, "She has more creativity in her...." He pauses and I offer helpfully, "Navel?" He continues, ".... tip of her little finger," holding one of his up demonstrating, "than most people have in their whole bodies." I laugh and invite them both over to see my Christmas tree, explaining that it's now so crowded with ornaments it's difficult to find a new, free branch to hang one from and the floor around it has gotten quite crowded with an amazing assortment of stuffed animals in all colors and shapes and sizes. My latest favorite is a black manicured poodle sitting on a red heart-shaped silk pillow and with a red silk heart hanging from his mouth that says, "Kiss Me," and the very large brown dog stretched out in exhaustion beside the tree now has a small dalmation sprawled across the top of his head and onto one of his floppy ears. I'm also fond of the two new penguins, especially the one wearing a red bow tie and santa hat.

Parting from them, I stop at the stage where fun folk Billy Jonas on guitar and vocals and his band of a fiddler in military hat, woman singer, and man on bongos are set up. They're performing the upbeat "God Is 'In'," followed by "Coup D'etats" with examples of random good luck in natural balance to Murphy's Law that what can go wrong will also, and winding into "Pharoah, pharoah, pharoah! Oh, baby. Let my people go!" with a great, rousing beat. People in the street are, as ever, dancing and clapping. He invites five or six children on stage to play bongo, tamborine and various shakers with the band and ends with "Love is a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. I'll be a sanctuary for you. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you." It's a lovely, sweet song and the crowd drifts off in different directions with me reclaiming my car and finding my way toward the TN Tri-Cities with no trouble at all.

Walking toward my apartment, I meet a disabled neighbor walking Gypsy, a little wire-haired terrier. She wags her tail and trots toward me with her luminous eyes wide open and lovingly trusting to be petted and talked with. When I ask her background, my neighbor relates that Gypsy was abandoned to the wilds, including much larger mating males, by the original caretakers and rescued unable to walk and with thistles ground into

her matted hair. Cleaned up and adored, Gypsy recovered completely with no signs a year or less later of hostility or psychoses from her childhood traumas and ordeals. I tell my neighbor about marrying the love of my life ("He's gorgeous") and she's happy, says she's looking forward to meeting him, and we go our ways, both smiling.

Takin' It To The Streets

The Johnson City Arts Council has moved to much smaller quarters down Main Street in the King Center and I find it, sliding quietly through the front door, with its program already in progress. Out of the blue, retired professor John Lysle says my name so loudly on spying me there that it interrupts the speaker and everyone, or so it seems, turns to look at me. Grabbing him firmly by an arm and dragging him back out of the circle of onlookers and listeners, I whisper, "Shhhhhh!" as a woman regroups and continues to announce background and awards for student entries on display in a competitive show. Later, we enjoy a few hors d'oeuvres while viewing the artwork and then amble down the block to the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery where two musicians are just setting up. Inside, there are three tables in the back of gourmet goodies, including salmon fillet surrounded by cream cheese rounds topped with capers, pieces of chocolate-on-chocolate truffle cake, open-faced cucumber sandwiches, and very thin slices of prosciutto with cantaloupe on the side. There's red and white wine and punch also. The artwork is varied in substance and style, including sculpture and photography as well as acrylics and oils and watercolors from traditional to wild.

Taking a smoke break, I wander back onto the sidewalk where "Gray Wolf" are playing. They are two middle-aged men on electric guitar and bass, excellent musicians, who play and sing while I'm there "Rock Me, Mama" and "Desperado" by the Eagles and Clapton's "Layla." Thoroughly enjoyable, they say, "Thank you, baby," to women clapping and, "Thanks, big man," to the men.

Back inside and in discussion with a friend of past experiences, he comments suddenly in an awed tone, "You went to Steele's parties? How did you get an invitation?" I mention Carolyn Moore, Margaret Gregg and a few other friends who were and are close companions of the well-known regional artist and retired department chair. In the midst of that, a man introduces himself as Stephen Lawhon, a regional promoter of worthwhile events and one of several current coordinators of a new project to honor native heritage

with a building and annual festivities beginning March 15, 2009. He also turns out to have a private practice in clinical psychology, in which he has a PhD, and to be one-eighth Cherokee. I tell him about my "Cherokee passkey," and he tells me about a public meeting this coming week of regional writers to listen to an author speak about saving Appalachian mountains.

Down the street again at the next corner another band is playing composed of five men, one an African-American on rhythm guitar. The drummer is a young man with a short black ponytail who's as crazy in movement and expression as the jazz player for the Blue Plum Festival was on his piano a month or so earlier. He's definitely carrying the group of rock-blues-jazz musicians, along with the lead guitarist who picks and slides his way through a dizzying variety of notes and sounds. But it's humid and I'm getting tired, so I head back toward my car and pass on the corner at the parking area side of the archway a young banjo player wearing glasses who looks up and smiles while strumming a bluegrass tune.

Bringin' It All Home

The Virginia Center for the Ballet Arts offered, as part of Abingdon's Highlands Festival, a free performance preceded by delicious hors d'oeuvres on Thursday evening, August 6th, beginning at 7 p.m. In a tribute to Center excellence, some of their troupes were chosen to perform in Williamsburg for Britain's Queen Elizabeth II when she last visited this country. Eight dancers, who had only two weeks previous to learn their routines, presented with appropriate costume change classical, "on point," and then modern, with regular ballet shoes, choreographies to music from Gershwin to Pink Floyd. The latter, and last, was just totally outstanding -- very unusual, original in rhythm and import. They danced separately, in pairs, threes, and ensemble with the least accomplished allowing glimpses of "spotting" themselves -- finding a mark to turn or leap against in balance and direction, but the most professional were flawlessly miraculous and graceful. Altogether they complimented each other beautifully in cooperation and friendly competition during their solos. In between routines, you could see them catching their breaths and working to regain energy and new direction. To give them a break once, four were announced by name and brief background. One had just garnered her driver's license and we were all warned to be careful on the roads, dancers having a somewhat unique perception of motion, balance and gravity. ("One wheel on the pavement's enough, isn't it? Actually....") The oldest, a University senior and awesome expert in seemingly effortless form, is planning to leave for New York after graduation to pursue her career.

The Center accommodations are less than inspiring as the Center's upholstered lobby chairs are somewhat threadbare and the ballerinas presented their expertise in a bare studio room lined with exercise bars, a wall-to-ceiling mirror at one end, and audience folding chairs set up in about ten rows. Walls are intriguingly decorated with Degas' ballerina prints and photos of students practicing. There is also an interactive display of photos available for purchasing. A surprising number of children, including some boys, were in attendance and most of them sat cross-legged on the floor. Three young teenage girls were later brought up and introduced as pupils who practiced bravely with the older students. Unfortunately, on leaving it turned out that three ginny emsnibbits had completely blocked in five cars, including mine, wrecking the sceance, ambience, magic and moment of the final, kind of space-agey performance with disruptive consternation as we waited and attempted to locate them with the no-doubt startling advice and revelation that other people live in the world too. Swearing to myself at that ugly crack in message and feeling meant to be left with the ballet audience, I drove back gratefully over the state line again, saying to myself, "Tennessee!!! Home, home, home again, safe and free!" Although this state's Welcome Center seems to be open 24/7, or close to it, Virginia's turned out to be closed, at 5:30, when I stopped earlier on my way north. Foregoing Tennessee's this time on returning, I arrived again gratefully back in Jonesborough around 9:30.

Just One Of Those Nights...

Johnson City Tennessee's Unity Festival is called Umoja and features mostly native African-American performers and crafts. Among my favorite tents was Manding Imports of Africa with its friendly and informative Atlanta Georgia owner manning the tables and piles and racks and boards of fascinatingly original handmade articles. Stopping by the tent selling goods to raise funds for the Democratic Party Presidential candidate, I purchased a dark green t-shirt imprinted with the sayings "We are the ones we have been waiting for" and "We have a dream" for \$10, pretty reasonable as prices go these days as I've come across some going for \$25 to \$30 each. Another religiously-affiliated booth sold many with interesting motifs and messages; I chose the one imprinted, "No weapon formed against me shall prosper Isaiah 54:17," also for \$10. The major attraction out of bands and storytellers and humorists was the celebrated and fabulous Plunky and Oneness from Richmond Virginia, a band composed of Plunky on sax, two electric pianos, guitar, drums, and a woman singer. The woman pianist also sang often, as did Plunky on every tune with lyrics. Go out and buy the CDs! they're great! and have been around in various configurations for quite a few decades. At Music on the Square on a subsequent evening, the bluegrass band Tomahawk played as folks in the large crowd smiled and danced, talked and laughed and clapped their hands. During an interval, the band leader asked, as

do many groups, that service veterans in the audience raise their hands. We were then reminded that we owed our freedom to their sacrifices, asked to applaud them, which we all did, and then a song was played for them which had to do with coming home from foreign lands. On a following Friday, Ras Alan and The Lions entertained with regional reggae music, which is somewhat unusual and was very much enjoyed.

On another evening, as I walk into Asheville North Carolina's Pack Square, there's a quartet of young men playing. One's on tuba, another drums, one of which he juggles regularly in the air. When I laugh in delight, it disconcerts him and he drops the next one, laughs and picks it up to continue syncopatedly. One plays accordian and then a harmonica with an abbreviated keyboard, which I've never seen before or knew existed anywhere. The fourth plays guitar, a regular harmonica, and also sings. A short-haired, bright-colored young redhead walks by with her guitar and winks at the musicians as she looks on to find a personal space for playing. I drop some money in the open guitar case and walk on toward the Haen Gallery for their exhibit and reception featuring an on-site experience of the artist himself.

West Virginian Lynn Boggess will knock you out with his innovative talent and personal affability. He's a treasure and the gallery owner said she owned five of his pieces. I congratulated her on her good fortune and that of her husband, another amiable attendant who startled me by pushing me out toward the room as I walked by an artwork hanging. He apologized for frightening me as I stared with lack of comprehension and explained that the paint was still wet and he was a little worried about it. I assured him an abiding love of art and that I would never damage a piece in any way, except very accidentally. He smiled and we reintroduced ourselves to each other before I aimed for the buffet, which had quite a few delicious delicacies to munch on with white wine poured by a young woman server. Another asked if she could take my plate when I was done and I assured her that I loved being waited upon, as we both laughed and she assured me that tips were not expected or accepted there. A young couple played banjo and guitar as the friendly, reasonably-sized crowd chatted and viewed the displays which included other extraordinary artists too. For an example, one was priced at \$15,000. Excellent, original art rarely comes cheap, but the viewing at least is free and worthwhile.

The Boggess paintings are wild. I felt like I could look at them close up forever, with their multitudinously varied textures and color combinations of outdoor scenes. Because of unusual three-dimensional qualities, his work doesn't translate as effectively to photographs, which provide just a hint of extraordinary dexterity and reality. When I

asked how he handled the very much larger canvases, he responded to my surprise that he's made a humongous easel for them and takes that with him along with the canvas to the mountains he calls home. When asked about the bugs, he said that bees and hummingbirds often mistake his representations for the real thing and he's very likely to go home reporting to his wife that he's been buzzed three times or so that day. To quote Marian Hollinger, Curator of James David Brooks Memorial Gallery at Fairmont State College WV, "Nature has been acknowledged in his work and accepted for what it has to offer in the way of healing and beauty.... Boggess' work cuts through ... specious queries to a plainer truth: that beauty simply is -- an unavoidable irrefutable fact of the natural world. In their unhedging presentation of this fact, Boggess' paintings offer solace and respite, even to the most casual of viewers, just as do the original locations in Nature which were his impetus.... Because Boggess has chosen to paint Nature directly, and because he sees it as beautiful and endangered, he draws us into his fierce political vision. Because that vision is so disciplined that the artist presents it for us, without commentary, we may choose for ourselves which memory to recall; which path to take." Boggess comments to me that residents of his state are becoming more militant in insisting upon preservation of resources there, a fact to which we both express agreement and celebration with mutual smiles and hope for the future of legendary mountains, rivers and streams, and plateaus in "wild and wonderful" West Virginia.

On my way back toward the car, a young man with longish red hair is singing, playing folk guitar and jumping up and down in the air. I sit on the end of a bench in front of him and a Vietnam Marine vet sits down very shortly beside me. As we talk, he mentions my birthdays, says, "It's the end of August, isn't it?" I correct him that, no, it's the end of this month and I'll turn 64. He looks surprised and comments that I don't look like it. I thank him, saying that I don't usually feel it either. After a minute or so, he asks permission to play "Happy Birthday" for me on his harmonica, to which I agree readily with the assurance it will be a thrill and a pleasant remembrance. He's part Irish and looks it, an artisan who also plays guitar and a writer. Familiar with Jonesborough, he's been invited to play there but never made it that far. As I get ready to leave, he makes a birthday present for me -- a baby blue balloon poodle complete with black ink eyes and a smiling mouth -- as I watch it transform curiously, wondering what it's going to become. Another vet, known to the crowd, also sits down and asks for a cigarette, which I give him. He's facially disfigured, has difficulty speaking. A Cherokee who is homeless except for his home on Asheville streets and company there. I walk off with a little regret as it's getting dark outside and go through the streets with my blue poodle waving. The hors d'oeuvres at the Haen have been wonderful and dinner in Grove Arcade at my favorite organic cafe with its conversationally friendly and enlightening personnel and reading material ain't been bad neither. I buy a small petrified wood that looks like blue and brown stone in one of its

shops and head for home, thanking God again for my deliverance to the Mountain Empire with its irrepressibly and irreplaceably great people and places. It's true too that there's no place like Asheville on a Saturday night, my companions and I completely agreed upon that.

... And One Of Those Days

The Appalachian State Fair, held for a week in Gray TN, offered Thursday as Seniors Day, when a day's pass ticket was only \$4, so that's the afternoon I chose for my first-time visit there. Aside from many carnival rides on the grounds to the left, there were quite a few buildings and craft tents to the right. That's the direction I headed, perusing tent offerings first and ending up with one bracelet from a Native American man and the many enticements from jewelry to clothing that his booth offered for sale from \$5 to \$40 or so. Checking out the commercial buildings, I picked up my share, and maybe more, of free hard candies from counters and tables and got by the Republican Party booth in my green and black Barack Obama t-shirt without incident. Two black women at the Crafts building, which was stupendous, saw it and started talking with me as I passed by, sharing information about a Unity Festival scheduled later in the month for Elizabethton and giving me a free plastic tote bag. A nice man in the last commercial building had given me a green cloth one to hold free goodies I'd gather together too. The wildlife exhibit in that building was great too. And the domestic animal one in the next building over was also. The VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) Tri-Cities chapter gave out free refrigerator magnets imprinted with "If you enjoy your freedom, thank a Vet" and "Vietnam War Veteran," both of which I picked up gratefully for home along with two well-written and informative booklets about post-traumatic stress syndrome, a common disorder amongst service people returning to and dealing with everyday life and interactions with those who've not had wartime experiences.

First place for open show art in one category went to a colorful oil of an old guy with a long white beard, straw hat and bibs sitting in a front porch chair and playing the fiddle. There were a few outstanding paintings, excellent pencil drawings, and a *lot* of outstanding handcrafts like quilts and collages and stuff like that. In another building there was timber rattlesnake, a white bass (never saw that before), and an Eastern Spiny Softshell, which is a wild-looking hard-shelled round thing about 2" in circumference with a weird triangular-shaped head sticking out. Also a waterfall and pond with mallards swimming. The domestic animals had one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Baby ducks with an aluminum slide about four feet long from a platform into a pool and a little rising where

they could waddle back up again. They loved it and kept going round and round, falling sideways and upside down as well as forwards in a good-sized groups. It was totally adorable and entertained everyone who passed by. They were also selling them for \$5 each, chicks for \$3, guinea pigs for \$15. There was a pinto horse, alpaca, two white and gray donkeys, a bovide (don't ask me, it looked like a small cow) llama, parakeets blue and green, Lady Amherst male pheasant with red white blue and gold feathers, Sika deer which are very sweet, gentle and beautiful looking only 2-1/2 feet tall, fainting goats and one lamancha goat whose pupils were round not straight across, pigs, and a miniature horse. Feed cost 25 cents from boxes but I didn't buy any. In some other buildings there were *lotsa* cows including quite a few with large, full udders and kids being pushed in strollers.

39. Ecology Essay: Walk The Land

People who don't spend much time amidst the natural world by choice, time or location tend to think of it as pretty static, like a landscape painting or a snapshot. In fact, to the contrary it's ever-changing in myriad ways and on tiny to grand scales. Scents in the air blown by blooms and animals on the soft waves of warm breeze to fierce wind raging in from storm arriving or past meander and weave through each other. Leaves and grasses are not green but shades in between brown and near-blue of form straightly slender to mottled and chunky. They're seldom still, perhaps line dancing in some semblance of symmetry, brushed by birds or ground and tree fur, dewed by the moon, chilled by night.

Waters in pools rarely left stagnant, creeks in the narrow thrush and rush of travel to widening rivers, rivulets running and meeting to join with the sea change similarly in shape, shade and temperance, fed by our sky canopy of dynamic currents calmly colliding or conflicting to sudden stark cracks of electrons mid-air to ground, zigzagged and intermittent unpredictably. Earth and her waters resound, rebound to all, resplendently shining or drowned temporarily, as do her creatures caught or hidden in sense of tumult unbidden on every hand. Beings fortunate to live or visit lands unmarred marvel and delight where her mysteries abound, bright and fog-strewn, for wondrous knowing to be shared or not as secrets may be with those who choose more seemingly safe, reliable and sedentary modes of leisure and life. But you have to be there, open to her whispers and chants, shouts and gleamings to glean the full meaning personally. She speaks differently to each one from the lull of early evening to the sun's mighty roar at rising. From small sheltered park to daunting wilderness vastly, any of us of any age and ability can grasp a

glimpse at least of her mildness, her fury, her wildness, her messaging. Snow and ice can't stop or delay her movings and mournings, her moments of heaving, churning, and her creatures burrowed or borne away by ancient instinct till the alluring array and cheer of spring.

We are made by our Creator to walk on the land and know it as well as the divine hand, however we're able and can. Visit a tree or a brook on some lonely, abandoned stand and you'll hear The Word in a spray of foam from rock, the breeze that leaves too suddenly, a hint of eternal home, and maybe the cookie-crumble path leading and leaning to it, how to survive the gales and wails on our way that fit us for the journey. Because it's true: Only the fittest survive to find and stay in New Jerusalem spiritually and spatially. We're not natural beasts but God's own: wo/men with sentient minds, hearts, spirits and souls -- and free will to choose in our time here which way we will go.

40. Micro-fiction Fable: When there were none

Pig Waller Holler had been overrun by wild hogs "since Kingdom Come," on the word of one field bum who knew well the scent and the scene there from when and where he were welped. It helped some that Lefty McCrumb made hunting them one by one a game for guests to play. On this great day, he'd gotten his way as the last of the giant pigs lay splayed on the hill 'cross his porch.

"Look, look!" Lefty yelled for the town to pull its steeple bell that folk show to run and view the reckoning to get a taste of the roasting to be by the river of song through their valley resounding. Under a beaming, steaming sun settling toward the mountain Lefty heated his kettle drum spun from a pole strung over the evening fire molten from those sky sparks loosed like lightning into the trampled ground, sparkling and crackling in chill air 'round his home there. The pig groaned his last snorting grunt before the skewer awaiting him.

Grasses rejoiced to be free of their razing. Flowerheads sprung into the night to beat the day for playing, commenced the stardance they'd been planning. Children gleamed in

moon beams where infants dreamed of feathered daisies and polka-dot dahlias, petunias pensively waiting their calling, their turn on the stage of space and place, the doll and dawn dimension.

41. Short Story: Whom the gods would destroy...

Steven banged his fist down on a disordered table. The clear yellow handle of a screwdriver bounced and cracked, rolled and free-fell to the floor. Steve threw his saw against the wall with a growling yelp. Its blade splintered a jagged design into old pine panelling. The saw landed, scratched and jarred, on his shag heap.

"Why doesn't anything WORK RIGHT?" Steve screamed. He took a swing into indifferent space. His knuckles landed in a jumbled section of the nail bin.

"Ouch," he muttered, watching a line turn pale, open, bubble and run red from the wide joint of his index finger. His composure fixed on the rusty nail. No tetanus shots. He calculated his odds, head down, walking thoughtfully, scowling at the pulsing digit. Forty-three steps from the workshop to the house.

"MaryEl. MaryEl! Where's the blasted iodine? Peroxide? Something!" Steve shouted. Noisily, he shoved bottles and metal cans around in the medicine cabinet. Steve opened the door under the sink with a force that sent it banging, clattering against the bathroom wall.

"What is it? What are you looking for? What happened?"

Steve held up the dripping finger. "Rusty nail," he explained brusquely.

MaryEllen nudged him aside, knelt and reached in the cupboard for peroxide, cotton

swabs and a box of bandaids.

"It won't help for lock jaw," she admonished, dabbing the cut and wrapping it securely.
"Do you want to go to the doctor?"

"No," Steve grumbled, mollified by her gentleness, attention.

"Sure?" MaryEl asked brightly. "I'll drive."

"Naw, it'll be fine." Steve was calm now.

"Okay, let me know if you need anything." MaryEllen turned away.

"Thanks." Steve reached for her hand and missed.

Turning round the doorframe, MaryEl disappeared. Steve sat on the toilet seat, staring at his finger. Life? Death? Lockjaw? Hiding, secret from him, in a blind flying jab to the universe and its quarter-inch deep uppercut return, all the questions, paradoxes, mysteries of his existence. Lives and years concentrated, contained, answered within a second and a tiny puncture to one small, point-five percent part of his anatomy. Steve shook his head.

"What was I doing?" he mumbled. "Oh, yeah, building a shelf."

"Dinner'll be ready in half an hour or so," MaryEl called.

"Okay. I'm just out in the shed." Steve pushed the screen behind him.

Evening mists sifted over the mountain ruffles. Their peaks arched, crested through smoke-and-white veils. A settling shadowglow of orange winked and teased through wondering, thunderful clouds.

Steve bent toward his broken saw. "Whom the gods would destroy," warned the voice of his father, "they first make mad."

Working quietly at the bench, undoing small screws, removing bent plates, he felt the storm approach. Tree branches scraped on the roof. The wind whined against loose panes. Steve reached to close a window as the workshop door blew shut.

42. Short Story: You Oughta Write A Journal

"Hey there, Vincent, how ya doin' today?" Nancy calls out this morning. She's wearing tight slacks and some kind of brown over-blouse. Her hair is loose and blowing a bit in the breeze. For some reason, she's got bright red lipstick on and it's smeared some on her cheeks.

I look up from the magazine I'm reading. "Just fine. How 'bout you?"

"It's chilly this morning, isn't it?" she comes up the stairs and leans against the porch railings.

I can't remember when I first met her, but Nancy's come to be a friend. She is warm and huggable, middle-aged, medium height with large breasts and hips. Her legs are surprisingly small for her bulk. Her waist has pretty much disappeared. She has ivory-colored hair, which she professes to like. She wears dangling earrings and necklaces to match it. On most days, she doesn't use makeup. Nancy loves working in her garden and has many tips for mine. They generally are good ones too. I think she checks on me nearly daily because I live alone and she worries about that. Of course, I've been by myself since Dorie passed on and I've been okay, but I enjoy Nancy coming around.

"Calling for rain, I heard."

"I can't wait for spring." She sits down on the wicker chair close by and pulls it a little closer to me.

"Want some coffee?" I ask.

She nearly always has a cup with me before the day really gets to a start. "I'd love it."

I pour some from the thermos beside me.

"You'll sit out on this porch in nearly any weather, won't you?" she laughs.

I squirm a little on the sofa bench and pull my sweater around me tighter. "Ah, it toughens me up."

"So, what are you going to do today?" Nancy asks.

"A bunch of catalogues came yesterday. I'm going to go over them, see what I want to order for the garden." I gesture toward the pile on the side table and run my hand through a few.

She smiles. "You've got spring fever already."

"Sure do." I run a hand over my bald head. "How's David doing?"

Nancy sighs and her expression changes. Her eyes drop to her hands. "As well as can be expected, I guess."

"Is he irritable still?" The last time I saw David he was in one hell of a mood and you couldn't hardly get along with him or get more than a few words out of him at a time.

"Yup. He just can't stand sitting around. I wish he liked reading and watching TV more but, you know, he's always been an active kind of man, sports and all."

"What did the doctor say yesterday?"

Nancy plays with a red and silver ring on her index finger. "Said it would be another four weeks before the casts could come off."

I'm pretty shocked. "That's a long time."

"Yeah, he was hoping it would be sooner, but the x-rays showed the bones weren't healing as quickly as they thought."

"Any special reason?"

"Just age, I guess."

I sip on my coffee and think about David. He'd had one of those freak accidents where his car ran over him while he was under it working. Slipped out of gear or something. I never quite got the story straight in all the commotion. Anyway, it broke one of his legs and his back. He was okay about it at first, probably because of all the pain medication, but as time wore on his attitude got much worse.

"Is he worrying about being able to walk normally again?"

"Oh, I'm sure he is. You know how men are. He doesn't really say much about it. If I ask him, he says for me to not worry, that he'll be just fine."

"Want some donuts?" I ask to change the subject.

"Sure."

I get up and go to the kitchen. Out of the dry groceries piled on the table, I pull out sweets and bring them back onto the porch. For the sake of my girth, I don't really need any more this morning. Nevertheless they look tempting and I take a small one out of the box.

"Here you go," I say, handing the small cardboard carton to Nancy.

"Thanks."

"So," I ask, sitting down again and hitching my brown pants up a bit, "does he think he'll be able to go back to work at all?"

Nancy is nibbling on her donut and her chin is getting covered in white sugar powder. "No. I think he's thinking he'll have to do something different but he doesn't really know what."

"Has he mentioned anything yet?"

She swallows and hesitates. "He's talked about opening a store here, selling used furniture

maybe."

"Well, that might be good. He could sit down a lot then, probably."

"Yeah, and I could help him out too." She rubs her knees and her voice is low. "I'd have to quit my job."

"Would you like that?"

"I don't know. We've talked about it off and on for years. I think I would." She pushes some stray hairs out of her eyes. "Sometimes we joke that we'd get on each other's nerves working together and being together so much. And it would have to be right here in Reebanston where rents are cheaper. I don't know...." Her voice trails off.

I reach over and squeeze her thigh lightly to encourage her. "Sounds like it could be a winner."

"Yeah." She doesn't sound like she is too sure about that. "Well, thanks for the donut and coffee. I've got to get back."

"Okay. Thanks for stopping by, Nancy."

I sit with my legs stretched out and watch the passersby. My porch is right on Main Street so not much escapes my eyes.

Sandra is putting her twin girls in the car to take them to day care. I wave as they drive out of sight. There's Linda wearing that bright blue outfit flirting with Tony again. He's got his arm lightly around her. She's looking around now to make sure Peter isn't anywhere in sight before she stands on her toes to give Tony a peck on the cheek. Those two are going to

get in real trouble one of these days. They're really asking for it, doing it right there out on the sidewalk like that. Must get them excited in some way. It makes us all co-conspirators here, which I don't really like.

"Hey, Mr. Tispon! How are you doing today?" Tony asks, when he sees me watching them.

"Come on over here, boy," I call. Tony drags his feet a bit, probably because he knows what I'm going to say. He stands at the foot of the stairs. "You're asking for a heap of sorrow there one of these days."

"Aw," he says. "I'll be okay." Tony sprawls one lanky arm over the railing and leans on it.

I feel like scolding him with my finger but I don't. "She ain't leaving Peter for you, son. I guarantee you that."

"Why not?" he demands and his chest puffs up a bit. "I'm as good as any man, Mr. Tispon."

"McLeighton's kid," I explain. "She's just having fun with you on the side."

Tony waves his free arm in disdain. "It ain't like that."

I feel sorry for him. He's too young. "It is, Tony."

He tilts his head to one side like a gawky rooster getting ready to lose its head. "What if I told you Linda says she loves me?"

I put my left arm on the side rest with the fist on my cheek and wipe my lips. "I'd say she

says that to Peter too, but she means it more than when she says it to you."

Tony looks down at his feet. "I gotta go to class now, Mr. Tispon. Don't you worry about me. Linda and me will be just fine."

"Okay. If that's what you say." I lean back on the sofa seat and shrug my shoulders. What difference does it make to me? "Get on with you."

"See you later, Mr. Tispon."

Tony bangs down the street with his bookbag slung over his shoulder and that look of determination in his eyes. He's setting himself up to be a fool, or worse, but I can't convince him otherwise. I sigh and realize again what an old man I am.

There's Gladys now bringing back another flowering pot from Pieter's All-In-One. That old woman must have a hundred plants in her home. You can see some through the windows. She's got them hanging everywhere, on tables, on their own stands. At least the air must be real healthy in there with all that carbon dioxide being taken up and oxygen put back in.

"Whatcha got there this time, Gladys?" I ask as she starts to walk by. She turns and comes up the steps, sits down where Nancy was.

"It's geraniums, Vincent. You can see that." She grimaces and I know she's irritated that I asked.

I wink at her, trying to redeem myself. "They're very pretty. How many pots have you got inside now?"

Flower Fall 2, digitized acrylic by Jeannette Harris Gladys titters in that weird way she has when she's embarrassed about something. "Oh, there aren't that many."

She's fun to tease on a good day. "Bet it takes you near half a day to water them all."

"No, it doesn't."

"Bet it does."

She sits up straight. "Well, I don't know really. I don't water them all at once. For one thing, some need more than others, you know."

"How's Yancey doing down there in Atlanta?" That's her grandson. He's just left to go off to college and she's been worried about him being away from his family and hometown.

"He sounds like he's doing real well. Says he likes his apartment and most of the people he's met."

"That's good, Gladys. What's he taking anyway?"

"Oh, he has to take english and history and social sciences. I think he chose sociology."

"Are his grades okay?"

"Well, I think he's partying some because he's not doing as well as he did at Reebanston High."

"He isn't flunking anything, is he?"

"I think he's having a lot of trouble with college algebra right now. He might be flunking." Gladys frowns and plays with the collar of that bulky gray shirt she wears a lot of the time. "It's kind of hard to tell. He says he'll make it up on the next few tests."

I think about that as I sip on what's left of my coffee. Gladys just drinks tea so I don't offer her any. "He never was really good at numbers, was he?"

Looking down, she smooths the creases out of her black wool skirt. "Well, they weren't his strongest suit. He's best in english and history. Not science or math."

"He has to take those courses though?"

"Yes. He has to pass them with a 'C' to get on."

She's looking worried so I lean forward and pat her on the arm. "Aw, he'll be okay."

"I hope so. I think he will be. Well," she says, getting up with an effort out of the chair, "I better be moseying along. Good to see you, Vincent. You look good today, by the way."

"Yeah. That was one cold I had last week, wasn't it?"

"I thought it was the flu maybe." She looks me hard in the eyes. "If you hadn't gotten better, I'd have made you go to the hospital pretty soon."

"I feel fine now, thank you. Good to see you now, Gladys. You take care of that plant." She makes a face and then she's down the stairs, walking fast toward her house as if it will wilt

before she gets there.

I sip on the dregs of my coffee, grounds and all, and notice Earnest going by on his bicycle. He rides it every morning to keep in shape. I've forgotten how much money he spent on that thing but I remember when a good bike cost thirty bucks or something. His cost hundreds. Way up there. It has all kinds of special bells and whistles on it, and it is a pretty thing.

"Earnest," I yell and he stops with a jerk. "How much did you say that thing cost?"

"Three hundred and sixty-four dollars and some cents, Mr. Tispon."

"You gotta be crazy to spend money like that."

He laughs. "It's worth it. It's a real good bike."

"Well, go on with you now then," I call.

He speeds on by. Lyla's turning the key on the door of her clothing shop now. It opens later than some of the others and closes early, but then she keeps it open longer on weekends. Lyla's worked so hard to make a go of that place. She's had trouble keeping help too because she can't pay much of anything, just minimum wage.

"Hey, Lyla," I call. "Come on over here for a minute. I want to see that new dress up close."

She smiles, indulging me, and locks the shop door again. Her skirt blows up a little as she crosses the street, so I can see more of those curvy legs. Lyla is in her early 30s and single. She's messed around with some of the men in town but never found one of them to her

liking, at least for the long run. Her hair comes down to her shoulders in brown curls and her neck is long. She's wearing some kind of pink frock with lace on the collar.

"Here I am."

"Well, turn around. Let me see it from the back." Lyla swirls around. "Very pretty. Did you make it yourself?"

"No, this one I bought from Fran's down in the city. You think it looks fine?"

"It does."

"All the stitching is by hand. See all this along the hem," she holds it up a bit, "and the sleeves? Hand-done," she repeats for emphasis.

"That really is fine." I know everything's done by machine now. Lyla tries to stock as much merchandise as possible that is made by local people.

"Good embroidery is hard to find."

"I bet it is."

"Well, Mr. Tispon. I gotta go open the shop now."

"Okay, Lyla. Thanks for coming over and modeling for me." I smile and she laughs as she crosses the street again.

Rob is coming out of The Kitchen Kettle now. He'll be late to work, that's for sure, but he doesn't really care anymore since Janice died. I never saw a man mourn any more than he has. It's really sad and I feel for him when he walks down the street with his head bowed. He won't hardly even look anyone in the eyes anymore. Doesn't want them to see the pain, I guess.

"Hi Rob," I say, as he walks by. He keeps his shaven head down and mumbles something that sounds like it might be "good morning. "How 'bout coming up and having some coffee with me today?"

Rob looks over my way but his gaze rests on the thermos, not me. "Sure. I guess I could have another cup of coffee," he finally says. He climbs the stairs like he's an old man, holding onto the rails, with those long arms that match his height. I notice his pants and shirt are wrinkled as if he doesn't care how he looks anymore.

"Have a seat right there while I go and fetch some fresh for us." I go into the kitchen for a clean cup and fill the thermos up.

"So, what have you been doing lately, Vincent?" he asks, as I settle back down into the sofa seat.

"Oh, what old folk do, I guess, Rob -- listening to the radio and watching TV, waiting for spring so I can plant my garden again, reading and writing now and then."

"I can't stay long. I've got to get down to Potter's Farm."

"They change your hours? Here, have a donut." I reach to give him his coffee cup and gesture toward the box of sweets.

"No, thanks. I just had breakfast. Well, sort of. They say they don't mind if I'm late as long

as I pull in eight hours."

"Hey, that's great. So what have you been doing there?"

"Just working in the greenhouses, keeping everything alive if I can."

"They just built a new one, didn't they?"

"Yup."

"That place is really growing." I'm about to ask how he's doing alone.

"It's a lot of work. Well, look, " he says, putting his cup down, "I gotta be going."

"Okay," I say. "See you around, Rob." I think, as he goes down the stairs, that he never did once look me in the eyes.

I get up and put the donuts away. The house is too empty and my footsteps echo uncomfortably in it. I come back outside on the porch again. Tom McLeighton's coming out of the barber shop with his ears raised, as they say, and walking down the street toward me. He's gotten a lot whiter in the past few years. You wouldn't notice it so much if he hadn't decided to grow a beard in his old age. He's skinnier too. Tom's the mayor, a part-time job that doesn't pay anything, and he doesn't do much for it. That must be the way folks like it because they keep voting for him each election year.

"Hey, Vince. Takin' it all in, are you?" he says as he gets to the stoop.

I never really liked Tom that much, but he stops by nearly every day and I can't very well

not talk to him, can I? So I say, "Yup. Same as ever." I stand up to go back inside.

"You ought to keep a journal." He's always impressed that I'm a writer and have some old books published under my name.

"Of what goes on in Reebanston?" I ask as I'm opening the door.

"Sure. Why not?" He probably hopes it might bring some money and jobs into the town.

I turn around to look at him. "Kind of an 'Our Town' kind of thing?"

"What?" he asks, fiddling with the watch he attaches to a pant's loop with some affected idea that's how officials should look.

"Never mind, Tom," I say.

"Well, you're always sitting here watching and talking with everyone."

"Yeah. I might do something like that one day."

[1-42: ~40,272 words]

c. Jeannette Harris, Jonesborough TN. July 2013.