Connections

Spring 2007 Literary Magazine
College of Southern Maryland

featuring

Wandering Souls

by Wayne Karlin

Connections

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Crow Morning *by Erica Weaver*

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To My Son in Afghanistan

Mary Duley Ellinger

Since you left for the war in Afghanistan,
night after night, I tuck images of you into my dreams
like I remember tucking you into bed at night as a child.

Some nights, I see you four years old again, tall for your age,
half asleep in the deep blue hues of night, you roam the hall
into my room, a rogue, a barefoot panda, teddy bear in hand;
and I scoop you up in my arms; tuck you into my soft cotton
sheets safe from scary sounds of night, ghosts in corners,
wild things you say creep into the corners of your room.

Some nights, I see you a teenager again, lean and
smooth like a gazelle, pockets stuffed full of string
and old nails, mouth full of Oreo cookies; a scavenger,
an athlete, you leap over fences, race the wind through
mud, briars and barrel around the bend on your bike.

Some nights, I roam the hall into your room, curl up with
your dog Bear; smell your shirts, musty copies of John Grisham,
Hardy Boys, magazines meshed with Frito bags, *Playboy,*
empty Coke cans stashed under your bed;
a sign on your door reads, “Mom, keep out.”

Other nights, I read the *Post*, fix dinner, stare at the news
channel, fall asleep to sounds of Kabul, the Taliban, screams
of night, bombs exploding; echoes of your voice swell the room,
envelop the stairs like smoke from a burning house.

And I see your face a thousand times in the faces of every
young soldier on television; a kaleidoscope of faces dressed
in brown fatigues, faces as real as the grass that grows
outside my window, sober faces of eighteen and thirty-one;
faces brave as ancient Greek warriors, chins up rifles drawn,
dizzy, stumbling, drunk on blood and terror that only old men,
bent crippled, sick on death beds should know.

And I pray over and over and over again that you will return,
that you will be safe.

Flower *by Michele Jones*

Justice for All

Nicole Geiger

My name is Birdie and I am a murderer. I am also a sister, daughter, and dancer. I can touch my nose with my tongue. I can flip a pancake a foot in the air and catch it with a sizzling skillet. When I was seven, I learned how to ride a unicycle and have since mastered the art of balancing teacups on my hands while gliding down the street. At the age of nineteen, I have accomplished many things. My high school transcript is so full of these ridiculous achievements that my parents bought me a car for graduation. They wanted me to know how proud they were that I had gotten into a prestigious school and had the ability to study anything. I was second in my class and was beaten by a boy who could turn anything into science. I lost because I turn everything into art.

But you don't care about any of those things. In fact, I'm sure all you noticed is that I am a murderer. In the end, all you will remember is that I, Meredith Elaine St. Claire, or Birdie, shot and killed one Patrick James Doyle. Patrick wasn't an awful person in comparison to everyone else in the world. If you were to ask anyone in our town what they thought of Patrick, their answers would be relatively the same. "He was a good guy, a little rough around the edges and missing a few screws, but, all in all, he was a good guy." He was a good guy. And he didn't stop being a good guy because I killed him. He stopped being a good guy three weeks before then. But very few people knew that and even more people will never know. I guess that's partly my doing. Ultimately, however, it was his.

We are all capable of making decisions and choices for ourselves. I wholeheartedly believe in taking responsibility for my actions and apply this notion to everyone else. Sure, we're bound to screw up once in awhile. I mean, we aren't perfect, right? All

I'm saying is, own up to it. When my brother was ten he managed to set both our Christmas tree and living room floor on fire. He had the brilliant idea of popping the popcorn string that was wrapped around the tree for a snack. I was eight at the time and sitting on the back stairs watching the whole scene. Within minutes, smoke filled the floor and David was swearing up a storm. Luckily, our neighbors were home and ended up calling the fire department. In a panic, my brother ran to his room and hid, dropping the lighter off at my feet. Everyone told me how foolish it was to play with fire and that I had caused serious damage. I never admitted to anything but I didn't deny it either. At the time I felt pretty guilty for not trying to stop David and I guess that's why I plead the fifth. David felt pretty guilty too and within days, admitted to being the irresponsible pyromaniac. He could have easily gotten away with what happened but did the right thing in time.

No matter how much time he was given, Patrick was never going to tell the truth. And maybe that's because he believed he had done nothing wrong. After all, the authorities chalked up what had happened to a game of he said, she said. They weren't going to press the matter because Patrick Doyle was "a good guy." When the accusations were first made, our little town went into an uproar. They couldn't believe that such a disgusting atrocity could occur in one of their homes. "These things," they said, "happen to poor women in dirty cities. They don't happen to our girls." In the beginning, there were just rumors about what had even happened and who it concerned. Parents and store clerks made guesses, placed bets, and shook their heads as if to say, "This is ridiculous." And I agree, it was ridiculous.

I have had the same best friend since before I can remember. We've lived on the same street since before our parents could remember. Our moms were high school cheerleaders, our dads college roommates. We were best friends before birth and honestly, didn't have any say in the matter. But she really is a great person. Growing up, I could never pronounce Theresa, so she was always just Tess to me.

The first time I experienced death was in the second grade; the class hamster died one night after school. We all stood around the cage, amazed at how still he could be, our eyes wide with curiosity. By the time our teacher got there, our class had managed to place little Hugo in his large blue ball and prodded it with our feet. "He's sleeping, Miss Johnson." She was stunned and frightened that we were playing with the dead corpse of our classroom mascot.

Miss Johnson was small, lean, and she spoke in a quiet tone when addressing the class. Her hair was always held together by a black pin, and it reminded me of rays from the sun, stretching down her back. And although I cannot recall much from those years, I will always remember Miss Johnson's hands. They were soft as snow and could bandage knees, play the piano, and remind us that there really was some good in the world.

Tess was the first person to cry after Miss Johnson explained to us that Hugo wasn't going to wake up. She sat us in a circle and calmly said that he had fallen into a big sleep and that's when Tess' eyes filled with tears. This was our first class together and though I had seen my best friend cry a hundred times before, this was different. I moved closer to her on the storytime mat and rubbed her arm. Tess cried that she knew what the big sleep was, that her grandfather went to sleep forever over the summer. Then the other students started to cry because they remembered their nanas and papas and sometimes aunts and uncles or siblings falling into the big sleep. I didn't know what to do and just sat there, dumbfounded because I hadn't lost a single person in my entire life. To be fair, I was only seven years old and it's not as if I had done a whole lot of living yet. But still, as everyone around me cried about his or her family members, I could only cry about the hamster.

I didn't cry when I pulled the trigger and shattered Patrick's skull into a thousand tiny pieces. I didn't cry when his body hit the cold, wet grass with a solidifying thud. I didn't cry when my mother begged the police to not arrest me. I didn't cry when my first cellmate smashed my face into the cinderblock wall, breaking my nose and lip. I don't cry while sitting in my new solitary confinement cell, even when hearing the screams of the girls who lost themselves in their own minds. And I know I won't cry when I stand trial. But I cried the night that Tess showed up at my bedroom window, shaking like a little rabbit, her clothing torn and arms bruised. We cried together when the word "rape" rolled off her tongue and into my ear, the loudest whisper I had ever heard.

I am a murderer because I love my best friend more than life itself. I am not a murderer because I sought revenge. I am a murderer because the amount of rage I had built up in my heart turned me numb, so numb that I couldn't even understand how cold Tess felt. I am not a murderer because she asked me to take a gun to Patrick. I am a murderer because nobody else seemed capable or willing to take responsibility for what happened. I am not a murderer because I physically killed Patrick, because as far as I am concerned, he was dead the second he pinned Tess to the filthy basement floor of his parents' house. I am a murderer because I let it happen in the first place. I am a murderer because that night, I became so angry with Tess for flirting with a mutual friend that I walked home alone. I am a murderer because I left Tess drunk and by herself in a house filled with teenaged boys who grope with more than their hands. I am a murderer because my best friend was raped while I sat home sulking.

I am a murderer. I don't cry because I followed Patrick home from a football game and shot him on his own lawn. I can't. I do, however, cry inside my head for having abandoned my best friend and her innocence over nothing but stubbornness.

My name is Birdie, I am nineteen years old, and I am a murderer.

The Cut

Susan Bennett

Once, when I was maybe seven or eight,
I took a pair of sharp silver scissors and cut a tiny slit
In the cottony folds of a dress hanging
On the back of a door in a darkened downstairs room.

The dress belonged to my mother.
Why it was there, hanging on that door, I'm not sure.
But I knew it was a special dress, singled out
On its way to or from a party, or the dry cleaners,
Or the cedar closet she'd had built in the attic.

It was not a premeditated act.
I was in the room.
I saw the long, silver sewing scissors lying on top of a dresser.
I picked them up and liked the way they felt in my hand,
Then moved to the dress with the kind of intention
That comes on slowly, deftly, in the coolness of a quiet space.

I fingered the fold of summer white weave and snipped,
And in that moment it was as if my hand
Belonged to someone else, as if my eyes
Could not see what I was doing, as if my mind
Had gone vacant, as dim and shadowy as the room.

There is something very satisfying about scissors and fabric
Coming together under the will of one's hand:
The crisp certainty of an action that can never be undone,
The sound and feel that become one

As cloth captured in the crosshairs of cold steel blades
Yields with a faint crunch of protest that shivers
Through thumb and forefinger, shuddering at the core
Of muscle and grip.

I knew it was wrong.
I never told anyone.
I don't remember hearing about it later.
I wonder what happened when my mother discovered it,
Or if she ever even noticed.

Snow

Kelly Buethe

I felt the snow as I stood staring—
stirring, searching towards the sky.
Continuous white on the black sky contradicted my heart.

I felt the snow—
It sank deep into my soul
I've been standing here a while
I'll probably catch a cold.

I heard the snow as I stood—crashing, crumbling, crying—
but coping.
Yes, I heard the snow—It pulsed my core.
Every flake, caught by my face, jolted my inner being.
"Speak to me, God, I'm listening."

I felt the snow.
It pleasantly pierced my flesh
And penetrated my soul.
I could stand here forever—
Even if I catch a cold.

***Winter Scene** by Deanna Zook*

A Lesson in Life Snapshot: The Sharecropper

William Allen Poe

1975

An old gray-haired black man
Sits alone on the front of his rickety white porch
Half dozing as his rocking chair slowly tips forward and then back again
His .22 rifle precariously resting across his knees
As the squirrels and rabbits play across the street in the barren cornfield
Not realizing their fate lies in the arms of the sleeping gray-haired gentleman.

A ten-year-old city transplant walks quietly in his sneakers
Down the center of an old tar and chip gravel road
With hands in his pockets silencing the jingling change he has saved
That would otherwise wake his sleeping friend.
They've played this game of cat and mouse many times before
And sometimes, when it appears the boy will quietly pass
The old man will awake
And detain him for hours in another old rocking chair alongside his
One reserved for company and strangers alike.
It is where the old man holds court for his subjects, like a king
Imparting upon them hard-earned wisdom and the tales of his past.

But sometimes when the man has had a long day and doesn't
feel like talking
He will let the boy pass, pretending not to hear him
Continuing to rock in the same steady motion.

This evening the boy successfully passes the old brick house
But loudly jingles his coins before the old man is too far away
from him to hear
Hoping tonight Henry will awake and summon him to sit
beside his throne.
But on this night, the chair has stopped rocking, and the man
sleeps deeply
And will go undisturbed at the boy's repeated attempts to arouse
him from his slumber
Unaware, the boy is, of the dark black soil of the freshly plowed
fields behind the old man's house
And of the man's years spent toiling, that come from being born
into a long line of sharecroppers.

2007

Her tiny fingers fit snugly in the palm of my hand
As she practices walking the imaginary yellow tightrope
Which equally divides the center of a long forgotten country
road.
Children skip rope where God's other creatures once scurried
over shredded cornhusks and broken stalks

And faceless facades sprout from the rich black soil where the last year's harvest of corn, many moons ago, has long been tilled underfoot
Amidst the changing landscape stands a sharecropper's castle, where long ago a country gentleman would survey the land before him, then tend the fields and chickens
And where a ten-year-old boy learned what it meant to be a man.

Hands *by William Allen Poe*

The Wasp

Mary Lohnes

Dorothy had been smoothing her hands over the seams of her silk dress when she heard the tapping of the wasp's wings against the milk glass fixture. Looking up, she watched as the gray-air wasp rose to within mere inches of the flute's edge before it sank down again.

Dorothy's neck tightened. She watched as the shadowy wings slowly paddled, producing a steady ticking sound against the glass. As she watched the desperate shadow, Dorothy imagined the waves of heat bouncing off of the wasp's sternum like ripples across a stern.

How is it, Dorothy thought as she repositioned her necklace, that they can find their way into the lamp but can never manage their way out?

Harold said the glass trapped the bugs. "Too slick," he'd say. But Dorothy had seen plenty of wasps, flies and ladybugs crawl across window panes, windshields and even tall glasses of sangria glittering with beads of condensation in the summer light.

"Perhaps the pads stick to the warm glass," another friend would invariably offer, and this reminded Dorothy of her youth and the warm, stickiness of dirty flip-flops being pulled by the gravity of hot asphalt.

The wasp flapped again, this time louder, more determined. "Who cares, you were going to kill it anyway," Liam would say, and then he would pull the back of his collar forward as if he were trying to keep it from escaping behind his head. And Dorothy would try to kill it. With newspapers, old phone books, an occasional tennis shoe, death came swift and unrelenting. Even a used fork could crush a wasp, their antennas sliding perfectly through the tines still coated with bits of potato salad and saliva.

Wasps were stupid, angry insects and you could tell this by the way they struggled to crawl out from under the silver tines. Never successful, they managed to free only their heads before the weight of the fork's four silver points snapped their neck from their torso in one quick motion.

So why was she feeling bad for the wasp, Dorothy thought, as she watched the shadow of its antenna writing an invisible SOS to its friends? Maybe she should get a chair and reach her fingers between the fixture and the bulb, to that zone where the low vibration of the hot bulb keeps the wasp entrapped. But then Dorothy imagined the way the wasp's wings would feel between her fingers, legs jerking in fright, and how it would arch its back in preparation for the sweet sting of revenge which would inflame her thumb or forefinger, and force the skin to rise in a bloated bubble.

As she tucked her hair forcefully behind her ears, the wasp's wings pelted the glass like slow raindrops and Dorothy blinked as the light from the fixture pierced her eyes. Maybe she should turn out the light. It was the light, after all, that had attracted the wasp to the globe. They are always seeking the light, Dorothy thought as she sat down on the edge of the tub and examined her fingernails. The manicurist had failed to push back half of the cuticles on her left hand. How is it that they are allowed to get away with such incompetence, Dorothy thought. Well, maybe no one had noticed.

She looked up at the glowing globes and tried to distinguish the hum of the bulb from the wasp's curses. Why hadn't she kissed him there beneath the streetlight, with the party they had walked away from still carrying on in the distance? She had meant to, wanted to. Dorothy had even planned it out. Hours before the party, she started staring at the pearl face of her watch and imagined, with each minute that passed, the progression of the evening. How Liam would stand, and pause, and look almost too casually in her direction.

The party guests had kept time with the watch. Like a metronome, the Bulova beat out the guests' entrances in the foyer. One, two, three, four, the door opens. Five, six, seven, eight, "it's been ages since I've seen you, so nine of you to come." Ten, another black dress to cover eleven and twelve heavy thighs.

Thirteen-year-old Brie smelling of her mother's Chanel and the sweater she nabbed from a boy. Fourteen through thirty-two, the smiles she faked as she introduced Harold to the wives of his business associates. Thirty-three, the number of seconds she held her breath as Jullian bent down to kiss her cheek. Thirty-four, the number of hors d'oeuvres the caterers stole. Thirty-five guests. Thirty-six peals of laughter from Jullian's insufferable wife Madine. Thirty-seven, the number of years it took Donald to come out. Thirty-eight but perhaps forty-two, the number of times someone in the room commented on the Abbasi painting. Forty-three, the number of people who blushed to see the "Two Lovers," locked in embrace with the man's hands pressing the woman's head back towards his mouth, as his other hand, sliding under her robe to caress her breast. Forty-four, the number of times the miniature painting she had bought for Harold caused him shame. Forty-five, the minute of the ninth hour in which she finally gave up on Liam's arrival.

She'd had five drinks in a row by then and felt as if she was half-dancing around the room as she made the rounds greeting guests and offered sour-faced Madine a hand in getting off of the chaise lounge. And for once, she didn't even mind all the gossips asking her in their auditorium voices, "Wasn't it nice of Harold to plan a Hampshire holiday?" No, they had been good enough to invite and generous enough to come and so she waited with them, sometimes through a second and even third screech for Harold to look up and into her cinnamon brown eyes, wrinkling the narrow crease of his lips before he turned back to his associates. And the ladies, even sour-faced Madine, would turn and tell her how "lucky" she was, "he positively beams when you're around," before excusing themselves across the room. And then there Liam was. Standing there, watching her, his collar stiff and his sleeves, in a sea of button downs, rolled haphazardly up. His hug was too long, too sincere, and too aware of Harold's potential gaze.

Maybe it was Liam's contempt of her life beyond him that kept Dorothy from kissing him, as they stood there beneath the street lamp discussing whether she would or would not go to New Hampshire. How was it that Liam, of all people, was unable to realize that the world is not as easy as "yes" or "no"? He was a man of science, and test tubes, and little bits of debris that "may turn out to be bits of stars, or evidence of the earliest phases of life on earth." Liam talked of stars and moons, and strings of space connecting all of us in a cosmic spool and he would twirl bits of her hair around his fingers and pull them in front of her face. And yet, while Liam could explain the importance of measuring cosmic dust, he didn't seem to realize that there are decisions in our lives that can cause huge gaps in our personal atmosphere. Life, as Dorothy knew it, wasn't as simple as taking someone's hand and one shouldn't pretend that it is. There are consequences to taking someone's hand and interlacing one's fingers like stars and galaxies in space. Taking someone's hand is the emotional equivalent of a black hole and one can easily get lost in the eternity of its repercussions. The thing is, men have always had different choices than women, Dorothy thought, and it had taken her years to come to terms with this. And she knew then, beneath the streetlight, that it would take Liam decades. What for him was just a question, no more difficult than poached or fried, was to her an entire lifetime of roads that would either open up or swallow her whole.

Something buzzed Dorothy's ear timidly and then more determinedly as if it was starved for attention. She threw her head to the side and looked around the room and its white, white fixtures and then there it was again, big and black and free of the radiant light. The wasp hovered within inches of her face and twitched its antennas accusingly before bouncing forward on the air as if about to strike. Dorothy leaned back with such a force that she nearly fell into the bathtub. As she regained her balance, the wasp flew past her, creating a black arc in the field of her vision.

Dorothy tried to stifle a scream as she dashed across the cold, gleaming ceramic tiles; the wasp flashed past her head and buzzed the hair curled under at the nape of her neck. Spinning around, she took a swipe at it with her hand, but instead of being knocked away, the wasp bounced off her fingertips and careened towards her face like one of Liam's comets stretching itself across a field of stars. Dorothy ducked, shielding her face with one hand as she reached for a hairbrush on the counter.

The wasp flew in victory, ricocheting around the room. It flew from the window to the picture frames, and then dove into the cold air of the sink before rising and repeating it all again. It flew a half dozen victory laps before it over-corrected and collided with itself in the mirror. Falling to the silver faucet below, the wasp shook out its wings and adjusted its legs like a jet pilot trying to fake his way across the shaky, post-crash tarmac. During this break in activity, Dorothy caught her breath and she reached instinctively for the door. The wasp caught sight of this and threw itself back out into the white bathroom air, but its angry fuel was no match for the exhaustion it felt. The wasp would fling its arrow-like black body towards Dorothy, getting within inches of her arm, her shiny walnut hair, the silk runway of her pinched shoulders, and it would fail. The wasp careened against cold windows and bounced off of wall plates, always a moment behind. In its blind approach, the wasp seemed determined to box Dorothy in even if it meant undermining its own safety.

Finally, the wasp crashed against a pile of towels and in the split-second it took to ponder its re-ejection, Dorothy hit it.

Once, twice, three times. Die you disgusting, unfeeling thing, she thought as she watched the wasp roll down each pillowed step. With each forceful blow of the brush against the stack of towels, the wasp seemed to crumble and plummet some more.

Now, it will die, Dorothy thought as she lowered the brush, her eyes resting on the hapless body. It was no more than a winged caterpillar curled up in sleep. She let out a sigh. Why? It is so small, so black, such a trifle when you consider it and yet it can undo you and rip away the façade.

The wasp's leg twitched and as Dorothy poised her chopstick-like fingers over its still warm, black body, it sprang up like a black phoenix, its skin glowing with reflected light. It went right for her powdered face and she screamed, "God damn it!" as she flung her arms in great waves through the air, blindly wishing the wasp to go away. Lunging forward, she ripped open the bathroom cabinet as the wasp prowled the outside of her ear. Dorothy could hear the menacing growl of the wasp's wings and fury, and she bobbed her head away from her attacker as she knocked out lotions and creams, pills and tweezers, a forgotten bandage, before she seized the hairspray and doused the wasp in mid-air. Dorothy's lungs filled with sticky watermelon sweetness as she pursued the wasp, who attempted to fly away in great heaves of failing determination. The wasp pumped its now heavily coated wings, once twice, down. Once, twice, thrice, down, until it landed on the toilet seat. Dorothy watched as the wasp writhed in agony. Its wings barely capable of lifting up even the slightest breeze; its antennas plastered to its head, which hung down ever so slightly as Dorothy slammed the pearl-handled brush against its body, once, twice, thrice. The brush handle shattered as the wasp slid backwards into the toilet.

Dorothy's hands shook as she quickly flushed the toilet and watched the wasp float slowly backwards in time, its death drone following the reflection of light downstream.

Dorothy took a deep breath before she began to pick up the brush shards and wipe the wasp's blood from the toilet seat. As she cleaned, she remembered the flurry of moths, beetles, and singing insects floating above Liam's head earlier that night. The insects had appeared like a halo of static and friction above his head. "Are you listening to me," he had said. "Yes, of course," she said as she pulled her glance back down to his face and the soft parting of his lips. "It's just that the bugs, the insects, they're distracting, all that noise." And she had looked up again, and watched as they danced within the long, champagne beam of light, hundreds of bugs spinning themselves out in ardor of the burning globe. "Come here then," Liam had whispered, taking first her arm and then her face in his hands, as he gently pulled her into the darkness.

And that is when she should have kissed Liam, Dorothy thought, as she smoothed her hair back behind her ears just the way Harold liked and brushed her fingers up across her cheeks to make them flush. Right then, when she could smell the white wine still dry on Liam's lips and could feel the heat of his cool blue eyes. That is when she should have kissed him, in that moment when the insects were pounding out their intricate song with their shadowy wings, before she glanced over Liam's shoulder and saw the false fluorescent moon.

Dune *by Paul Toscano*

Am I Too Old for This?

Faith Tydings

I've gone back to college,
After being out nearly a decade.
Am I too old for this?

I'm not going for my bachelor's degree,
Or even my master's.
No, I'm back for my associate's.
I am too old for this!

I sit in my class,
And I'm surrounded by children –
And not the kind I'm used to.
I am so old for this!

My English professor asks for an essay,
Done in MLA style.
What!?!
I am so old…but I can Google!

My Communications professor is awesome.
Thank God he's older than me!

They say there are no stupid questions,
Believe me – there are.
Maybe being old(er) is good.

I've survived almost thirty years of life,
I can survive this.
I am not too old!

Freedom *by Jannette Cassell*

College Music Audition

Ernie Wormwood

Her voice is so elegantly endearing
the walls of the music studio crumble
the piano cannot stop crying
the treble clef commits suicide
it leaps like a man atop a tall tower
right off her left lower abdomen

The terrible tile floor quivers quakes
the auditioners' hearts kneel then shake
as her Schubert's "Du bist die Ruh"
penetrates everyone and everything as
even the ladybug tries to save itself and smacks
against the warm winter window
all stricken because of a girl in a halo
singing at a college music audition.

I alone was saved, because I am her mother.

Embracing Yellow Lights

Dan Armitage

Dammit. 8:23 already. Late again. He glanced from the dashboard clock up to the traffic light as it turned from yellow to red. It was clear now that he wouldn't make it to the office on time. He knew that if he was late it didn't much matter how late, but he'd started the morning in "grab-the-coffee-and-your-briefcase, start-the-car, go-back-in-for-your-jacket, hope-you-get-ahead-of-that-school-bus" mode. Whenever the day started that way it was hard to downshift, even after it was clear that tardiness was inevitable. Instead of accepting the unavoidable he would fume at himself for hitting the snooze button one time too many. Or, more often, at other drivers for letting people into the flow of traffic, yielding away his chance at timeliness.

That's what he was doing now, silently cursing the driver ahead of him for not pushing to beat the yellow light. As his internal muttering subsided, he reached for his coffee and took a sip. Looking down, he was relieved to see that he had so far avoided spilling on his shirt. Placing the travel mug back in the cup holder, he covertly glanced to the right at the minivan in the next lane.

There sat a young mother who had apparently decided to delay her shower until after the morning school run. She stared vacantly ahead, her daughter in the back seat. The little girl looked to be about six, holding a cup with a top and a straw. At first he thought the girl was looking at him. Then he saw that she was staring at the glass of her window, not through it. As he watched, she moved her face closer to the window and exhaled, fogging the pane. She tentatively touched the template created by her breath, made a dot with her finger tip, and then scribbled away the whole patch. Now she was smiling.

The girl leaned toward the window again, exhaling repeatedly and making herself a larger place to work. This time she drew a happy face and was putting hair on it when the edges of her canvas began to vaporize and retreat, taking her art into the air. It was then that she saw him looking at her. When she smiled, he realized that he was smiling too, and he was glad he'd sent a friendly look her way even though it was accidental. Shyly, she looked down, took the top off her cup, put the straw back in and began to blow bubbles. Chocolate milk bubbles, spilling over the lip of the cup.

The light turned green and the van pulled forward, turning right. He resumed the trek to his office. 8:25 turned to 8:26 as he looked at the clock.

At the next crossing he had a clear shot at beating the yellow light. With nobody in front of him, he let his car drift to a stop and watched it turn red.

CONNECTIONS FEATURE

Wandering Souls

Wayne Karlin

***Photo** by Homer Steedly*

The following is an abridged version of an article presented by Wayne Karlin at a Connections literary program on March 2, 2007 at CSM's Leonardtown Campus.

To read the entire article, go to: www.wlajournal.com

To hear the Wandering Souls podcast: http://www.itc.csmd.edu/podcasting/

On the 18th of March, 1969, Homer Steedly, a young American infantry lieutenant, turned a bend in a trail in Kontum Province and came face to face with a North Vietnamese soldier, his weapon slung over his shoulder. The soldier, who Steedly first took for an enemy officer, was a 24-year-old medic named Hoang Ngoc Dam, from the village of Thai Giang, near Hai Phong—a fact the lieutenant would not discover for over thirty years. There was no time then for more than a quick glimpse of each other. As soon as Dam saw Homer, he snatched his weapon off his shoulder and brought it around.

For a time he stared in a daze at the body. The man he'd killed was young, his pith helmet clean, his uniform starched, and the SKS rifle clutched in his hands new, the greasy cosmoline used as an anti-rust still gooped on its bayonet hinge—someone new to the war, Homer concluded. He bent down and went through the dead man's pockets, drawing out a notebook with a colorful picture of a man and woman in what he took to be traditional or ancient Vietnamese dress on the front cover, and a daily and monthly calendar grid, labeled with the English word "schedule" on the back; a smaller black notebook, and a number of loose papers—letters, I.D. cards, some sort of certificates. The spine and corners of the first notebook had been neatly reinforced with black tape.

Thirty-five years later, as I handed that notebook to Dam's brother, I was struck again with the care Dam had taken in binding it up. He was a soldier in an army where nothing could be thrown away, nothing wasted, and I thought, not for the first time, of what the appearance of that book must have meant to Homer as he looked through it on that dark trail. Raised on a small, hardscrabble farm, Homer knew the preciousness of things that could not be replaced, knew how to shepherd them. The way he had shot Dam was unusual: a gunfighter duel in a war in which more often than not the enemy remained faceless to the Americans, only sudden flashes of fire from the jungle, targets to be annihilated. That invisibility was frustrating to the G.I.'s, but at least it allowed the comfort of dehumanizing the enemy, making him into ghost, demon, target. Now to see not only the face of the man he'd killed, but also the carefully re-bound covers, the force of will that the meticulous writing and drawings inside the book revealed, confronted Homer with a mirrored and valuable humanity. He tried not to think about it. There was scarcely the time anyway, and later that same day, he'd have one more encounter with a soldier who wanted to shoot him—this time, an American who the war had broken, who already had shot and killed another soldier. Homer was able to talk that man into laying down his weapon, and so that day he had taken a life and saved a life. He couldn't dwell on the former. It was, in any case, a killing justified by custom and law, by survival.

Homer sent the documents to the rear area, where he knew they'd be assessed and then burnt. But later that evening he changed his mind, contacted a friend in S-2 (Intelligence) and asked him to bring everything back. He couldn't bear to have the documents, the last evidence of the life he'd taken, destroyed. "I kept his personal documents and will send them home," he wrote to his mother. "Someday, perhaps, I will be able to contact his relatives." By refusing to let go of the notebooks he'd taken from Dam's body, Homer somehow understood, though he could not put it into words or coherent thoughts until years later, that he was hanging onto a grief that was the price of remaining human.

He sent the documents he'd taken from the body of the man he'd killed to his mother. She had lived through a war and its aftermath herself and she understood his need to preserve what he had taken and what had been taken from him. She carefully stored the documents in a box which she placed in the attic. They remained there for almost three decades, locked away in a space of contained darkness, a physical anamnesis of the memories of the war itself that Homer locked away inside his own mind. He had seen and done things that he knew the people around him did not want to know about or would not believe. His ears rang continuously—the result of a 105MM shell that had landed in his fighting position and splattered him with the blood of the two sergeants with him—a thin constant scream in the middle of his mind that never, to this day, went away. There were certain images burned into his brain, certain smells seared into his nostrils, certain tastes still on his tongue and he felt they composed a wall between himself and those who had not seen, felt, smelled, heard what he had. He was afraid that difference made him monstrous. He was afraid that he would turn anyone with whom he truly shared those tastes, those sounds, those sights, into himself, and there were some people he loved and he wanted to protect them, and so he remained silent.

Trauma, according to Dr. Judith Herman, in her seminal work, *Trauma and Recovery,* occurs when a horrible event or events cause a break in one's own life narrative. On the other side of that break, you can no longer see yourself in the same way. Recovery from trauma starts to occur when you are able to tell your story, in sensory detail, to people willing to listen without judgment and willing to be changed by what they hear—in other words, when you can be taken back into a community that is willing to be wounded itself, willing to break through a comforting shell of protective myths and learn what you have learned. If you can't do that, if they can't do that, you remain forever alienated, forever outside your community—you are what the Vietnamese call a wandering soul.

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That is what Hoang Ngoc Dam became to his family. In the Vietnamese belief, the spirits of those killed far from home, through violence or accident or war, wander the earth aimlessly, far from the family altar. There were one hundred and ninety-eight such from Dam's home village of Thai Giang, one of them his older brother, Hoang Ngoc Chi. They'd gone South, disappeared into the war as if they had stepped off the earth.

Dam and his brother had become two of the 300,000 wandering souls—the missing in action from the war—that still haunt Viet Nam. Without their remains being brought home and the proper ceremonies being followed, without, that is, commemoration, a physical knitting back into the community, they cannot find peace.

What were left, of course, were memories and family mythologies. Dam had been, they remembered, a bright, studious and very neat boy who, at 17, had taken very seriously the role of eldest brother. They remembered the tenderness with which he had bathed the youngest, best-beloved sister of the family, Tuoi. For the first years of her life, she had suffered from a skin condition, probably eczema, that marred her and caused her to be teased cruelly by the other children, and the adults, though they pretended to be indifferent to the ugly lesions, would often hesitate to touch her, hold her, pick her up. It was only Dam, his clothing always meticulously pressed and neat, his hands and face always scrubbed, who would hug her without hesitation, pick her up, kiss her, wash her, dress her. The same neatness that would later haunt Homer, who looking at Dam's clean, well-kept uniform, assumed he must have been an officer or a new guy, would become a family legend.

The family did have some inkling of where Dam was buried—and the circumstances of his death because of one of Dam's hometown friends, Pham Quang Huy, who had fought in the same area of operations in the Central Highlands.

Although the two were not in the same regiment, they tried to see each other periodically, exchange news and pass on letters. Huy found out about Dam's death from a nurse named Sinh, a month after it occurred. Dam had been in a unit that had been trying to overrun an American out-post (probably what the Americans called Fire Support Base 20—Homer's base). When they failed, he was attached to a small reconnaissance group whose mission was to scout out other attack routes. They were engaged in that activity when they had fallen into the ambush Homer's company had set up; it was in the pursuit after the ambush that Homer had come across Dam. Later, Huy had asked others in the unit about what had happened to the body, and was told that Dam had been buried by some local guerillas. After the war, his body and three others were excavated and reburied at the A Giun Pa military cemetery, in Gia Lai province. But the excavators had not properly identified any of them, and Dam's remains were now among the other unidentified bodies in that cemetery.

Huy and Dam's brother-in-law had hoped to find the body, bring it home to be placed among the family tombs. But all they could do was grieve for all the anonymous dead in that place. There were no remains, and no objects to be put on the family altar, to draw his soul back to the family hearth.

What happened to him was an issue Dam's parents did not live to see resolved. Both had passed away before we were able to return Dam's documents and allow the family and the rest of the village to finally understand exactly what the fortune teller had seen.

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For a number of years, I've been involved in projects with Vietnamese writers and film-makers, traveling at least once a year to that country where I had spent my own youth as a Marine. Early in 2005, I met another writer, Tom Lacombe, also a veteran, who asked me to use my contacts in Vietnam to help a man who was trying to return some documents he had taken from the body of an NVA soldier he'd killed.

Over the last decade, Homer's life had changed to the point where he had become ready to confront his past. In the late 70's, working towards a master's degree in sociology, he had become fascinated by the then-new field of computers, and had made himself an expert in the early days of information technology, finally securing a position as assistant director of the computer lab at the University of South Carolina's College of Liberal Arts. It was an occupation challenging enough to fill his time and his thoughts and kept him from dwelling too much on the past. It was also one that allowed him to be alone, a workaholic, until one day he met Tibby Dozier, a fellow employee who consulted him about some problems with her computer. He fixed it, they fell in love and were married in 1995. Tibby, the soft-spoken daughter of a World War Two general and Medal of Honor winner, understood the nightmares and secrets of soldiers. With her encouragement, Homer began to open up and find a measure of peace in his life. He stopped drinking, and reached a point, with Tibby's urging, where he needed and wanted to examine the war which in so many ways had formed him as a human being; he needed, in Herman's model, to tell his story in a way that would make his community listen and be changed by it.

Homer became what his given name called him to be: a battle singer, but he did so in his own terms—by creating a web site that provided photographs and detailed accounts of his time in the war. Now, ready to retire, assessing his past, he had come across Dam's documents, forgotten in his mother's attic.

Homer had spent hours scanning Dam's documents into his web site, and when I wrote to some friends in Viet Nam—Phan Thanh Hao, a journalist and director of a social agency, and the writer Ho Anh Thai—I sent along the scans as e-mail attachments.

Hao told me that the best solution was to bring the documents in May, when I was planning to come to Viet Nam anyway, and hand them over to the Vietnamese Veterans' Association. But to our surprise, a week later, I received an e-mail from Hao. She had written an article published, with photos of the documents, in the newspaper *Giao Duc & Thoi Dai (Education & Times)* and Ho Anh Thai had also gotten an article published in *Lao Dong (Labor)*, a major paper. The Hoang family had read the articles on the anniversary day of their mother's death, and had immediately called Hao. They were very excited. They wanted to get the documents back, and they wanted Homer to come himself, "to place them on the family altar." They had no bitterness or anger towards him, they said. It was war, and they understood war. All they felt now was gratitude.

On April 22, 2005, Homer e-mailed the following letter, through Hao, to the brother of the man he'd killed:

I am very touched that you have an altar that keeps Dam's memory alive. It makes me feel good to know that his brave soul is still honored in such a wonderful manner. It hurts to think of the hundreds of thousands on both sides of that tragic war, who still mourn the loss of their loved ones.

Sometimes the guilt of surviving can be overwhelming. What will I say, when I enter into eternity? Is there a little known footnote to the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill," that forgives killing in combat? Look what I did in the ignorance and folly of my youth. I thought I was a true patriot. So why doesn't that give me comfort at age 59?

Dam and I met by chance on a trail. He and I saw each other and both of us attempted to shoot the other. I lived. He died instantly. For over a quarter century I have carried the image of his young body lying there lifeless. It was my first kill. I wish I could say it was my last. Why did a medic die and I live? I don't know.

Maybe someday humanity will gain the wisdom to settle conflicts without sending its youth to kill strangers. People should know what our leaders are doing when they resort to armed conflict to solve political problems.

In my dying moment, Dam and many of his comrades will surely call to me. I am not afraid...only saddened. Perhaps we will meet again as friends.

Respectfully yours, Homer

"I just can't do it," Homer told me. He asked if I would bring them instead. A day later, the documents arrived by Express Mail to my house. He had let them go.

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We left for Dam's home village of Thai Giang, in Thai Binh province, at six in the morning on Saturday, the 28th of May, two days after I flew into Hanoi. Phan Thanh Hao, who had written the article that the Hoang family read, had made and received literally hundreds of telephone calls arranging the visit. The village is located deep in the countryside south of Hai Phong, and we rode out in a small van, past the new textile and clothing factories lining the Hanoi-Hai Phong highway, their products destined for Wal-Marts and Targets all over the territory of the old enemy. They were the incarnate forms reconciliation took on when it occurred between nations, and they were raising the standard of living here, we were told, but there was something bitter and mocking about them to me, about the unanswered question they evoked: What had all that killing been about? The reconciliation we were engaged in now was smaller, more personal; it was the only kind that could bring a true peace. We rode deep into the Vietnamese countryside, away from the new factories and into an older time.

With me were Hao, another writer named Y Ban, who is the editor-in-chief of Hao's paper, and George Evans and Daisy Zamora, two poets who had come on that trip to help interview Vietnamese writers for another project we were doing.

It took us more than three hours to get to Thai Giang. Some of the members of Dam's family had arranged to meet us at a bridge near the main road, where they would lead us to the village. We stopped the van at the top of the bridge and waited. After a few moments another car drove slowly past us, and then pulled in front of us and stopped. Dam's brother and sisters were wearing the white headbands that signify mourning. They were all weeping. They clutched my hand, the depth of their grief surprising me—it was as if Dam had died yesterday instead of so many years ago. They asked us to follow them in, but for me to keep the documents for now. As we drove through the lush green countryside, surrounded by rice fields, they would from time to time throw pieces of green and orange paper from their windows—Buddhist symbolic currency. They were leading Dam's soul back to his village.

Dam's sisters, Thi Dam, Tuoi and Tham, his brothers, Cat and Luong were all weeping, touching the book—as was a woman I found out later was his wife, Phan Thi Minh. "I know war," Phan Thi Minh would say later, "It was horrible—all the young people had to go. My biggest memory of that time was when we had ceremonies to see young people off to the front. Families and everybody would come see them off, and we all cried, even the officials. We did not have much hope that they would come back, and so it was as if we were parting, forever parting. The war ended more than 30 years ago, but I don't know when its consequences will end. The war still lingers, like blood trickling in our hearts."

Surrounded by a small sea of grieving people, we walked in procession to the community center; its veranda was ten deep with villagers. The small, hot hall was packed with men, women and children. Inside, on a stage, an altar had been set up; it contained incense and flowers and a large photo of Dam and was flanked by two Vietnamese veterans, standing at rigid attention, in dress white uniforms.

When the ceremonies were finished, we rose and walked through a soft rain to the Hoang family's compound.

At the house, dozens of people had crowded inside, and more were on a kind of patio area under some fruit trees outside, where tables and chairs had been set up for a huge feast. The family altar was against the wall; it contained photos of Dam, his other brother, killed in a prisoner of war camp, and their parents.

We ate with the family for about an hour, and spoke about simple things—our families, our homes, and the losses of war, the price of hatred. I was told many times that they wished Homer could come. They would always welcome him, they said—the village had even offered money to purchase a plane ticket for him. He was now a part of them.

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After I returned from the village, it was a few days before I could get myself to sit down and write to Homer. A day later I received two e-mails in return. One was from him:

… I have a huge lump in my throat. I am sure I would have been a basket case, if I had been there. I am still trying to comprehend the totality of your e-mail… I know it must have been difficult. Knowing that the family has the documents gives me great peace of mind…will get back in touch later, after I stop sobbing.

The other e-mail came from his wife, Tibby:

…When I asked Homer how he felt after reading your e-mail tonight, he said, "Complete."

Two months later, sitting in the Steedly's living room in western North Carolina, an area in some ways not unlike the Central Highlands, I told Homer again how eager the Hoang family was to have him visit them. The Steedly's dog, Dottie, pushed her forehead against my side, and I scratched her ears. Moments before Tibby had told me the story of how the small black and white dog had come into the family. Homer had noticed her cowering under a low bridge, starved, and from her reaction to his advances, obviously abused. He had sat with her for five hours, talking softly, and had finally stuck his hand out, and when she sank her teeth into his thumb, he had not reacted, just let her grip him until she understood he would not harm her, and then she had come out and become their dog. It was something, Tibby said, that she wanted to tell me.

I'll go there, Homer said to me. He was ready now.

Ghost *by Jaqualine Mendoza*

My Piece of the Sun

Rachel Heinhorst

Sunlight came
through my bedroom curtains
And landed
on one side of my face
I turned
squinting my eyes,
but the ray of light
followed me

I thought
How strange
it was to have this ray
land on my face
today
but I felt endearment
from the soft weightless light
that touched me

maybe
this morning
when it happened
was the first time
that I understood
the sun
wanted to share its light
with me

When I Was Very Small: The Ever-Changing Truths of Life

Alysa Younger

When I was very small, I didn't know very much, but what I knew was sure. Everything was just cold hard facts, and I didn't care what you told me. Pearl was supposed to be said pewel. It was a prettier word. There was a bomb in the bathroom, and one day it was going to kill us all. Kansas City was in Nebraska. There were only four colleges in the entire world. They were Oxford, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, and all of them were in England. England and Europe were synonymous, and all those different colored places in Europe were English states. Everyone in the world spoke English (except people who spoke Spanish), they just spoke it differently. The people in France, an English state, spoke Ingles, how you say, vith a French accènt. Ze peeple in Germany spoke ze English vit a German akzont. The people in Spain, well, they spoke Spanish. And Spain was in Mexico, because everyone who spoke Spanish lived in Mexico and had a really good tan. Queen Victoria was, of course, the Queen of England.

Over the years I had some startling epiphanies, as I'm sure you can imagine. In elementary and middle school, I learned a lot of facts about my immediate surroundings. Pearl was actually how you were supposed to say it; my dad was right. The bomb in the bathroom was the water heater in the hall closet. It was still going to explode one day and kill everyone, but at least it made my showers warm. Kansas City was in Missouri. I know because my granddad brought me a t-shirt from there. There were more than four colleges. There were five, and one was in the county, a community college. They gave swimming lessons, and sometimes sports summer camps. Not everyone spoke English; there were lots of other languages, and they were spoken in the places with similar names; French in France, German in Germany. Though I always thought it was a little strange since they were all part of England....

Some of my biggest shocks occurred in high school. I had the sudden discovery that there were hundreds of thousands of colleges, a good portion of which were recruiting me from my first SAT scores. I had found, at some point, that Harvard was in Massachusetts, but that was still acceptable, since Massachusetts was like England. They ate clam chowder and went skiing; they just thought they were better than everyone else. I also found that Yale was in Connecticut. Well, Connecticut was like Massachusetts' little brother or something, so that was all fine and dandy, too. Alas, woe was the day when I found that Kansas City was partially in Kansas. It just made too much sense!

Another group of distressing discoveries occurred during my first European history class. All those pretty colors in Europe, they weren't part of England! Most of them never had been. Moreover, England wasn't even connected to the main continent! Oh, no, England was that dinky little island off the coast of France. This did not live up to my expectations. I also found that not all English boarding school students study in castles, which was a greater disappointment. Queen Victoria, a most noble and grand leader, though I knew not why, had been dead for over a century. Even more strange was that Spain was, in fact, in Europe. They were pointedly not tan and did not like the way the people in their daughter countries spoke their language. Like all Europeans, they were quite full of themselves and their history.

After all these reckonings by which my childhood gospels were destroyed, I think the most terrifying and terrible realization I came to was that Princeton was not, and never had been, a college in England. I couldn't believe it, even after the evidence had been presented to me a dozen times or more; who in their right minds would put a college of merit in New Jersey?

Michael's Place *by Brenda Jones*

Roaring for Unity

Eve Taylor

Sitting upon the rocks, gazing into the mighty sea
The heavens opened unto me
As the waters tempest to and fro
The powerful currents of unattainable waves raging
Changing its direction with such fury and strength
Always being mystifying, mysterious and strong
As a familiar yet incomplete song
That throughout the spirit and deep within the heart a melody's
ringing out
With an ever passionate sound.
That's when I became illuminated to see we are as that raging sea,
Constantly being challenged changing our directions
Getting thrust into the ridged mountains
Cast upon the jagged rocks.
As the sun rises, many troubles and worries subside
The master of the wind penetrated our senses
The horizon is glowing in splendid covering
As we exhale in newness and become silent and reverent in
awesomeness
We've captured a glimpse of God's presence
As the moon takes its place
We stood still with respect and humility to change
Now our dreams, goals, and desires have become powerfully
exuberant
God's created a plan, a destiny, that keeps us motivated,
growing, and alive
We may be alone, but never hopeless or lonely

Just like the water of the sea
We will be roaring here and there
Preaching, teaching, learning
You can't stop us
Like the roar of the ocean after the storm
We'll roar for justice and equality
We all need to live in peace, tranquility, and harmony
We've all been made from the image of Almighty God
Let's never stop until we've reached the end
Constantly embracing all diversities
Being challenged in a call to unity
Let's create a rainbow after the storm
For all mankind to live as one
Singing that new, unsung song
Cleansing away prejudice pains
Through the only one substance that will eternally remain
The blessings God has for us, through acceptance and love
That's what keeps the waters of our soul to flow
Ever so deep, ever so strong, and still within, ever at peace
Living the unwritten script,
Singing the unsung song.

Happiness Comes from Something

Joanne Van Wie

happiness comes from something

inside I've heard.

a squash   comes from a seed.

from a yellow, rounded seed.

from something slippery.

happiness can come

from you.

I think. therefore I am

in love.

with a rounded happiness.

with something slippery.

Contributor Notes

DAN ARMITAGE practices law in St. Mary's County. He lives on the shores of the St. Mary's River with his wife, his daughter, and a dog named Hubble.

SUSAN BENNETT is an adjunct in English and reading at the College of Southern Maryland's Prince Frederick Campus.

KELLY BUETHE is a student at CSM. About her poem, she writes, "It's basically a poem about one's longing to escape depressed, dead emotions that have been felt for too long."

JANNETTE CASSELL is a first-year student at CSM. She is majoring in journalism. She hopes to one day write self-help books on working with children. In her spare time, she loves taking pictures of the world around her.

MARY DULEY ELLINGER is an adjunct professor at the College of Southern Maryland.

NICOLE GEIGER is a student at the College of Southern Maryland.

RACHEL HEINHORST is an alum of CSM and a graduate of St. Mary's College. She is a mother of three wonderful children and a poet when time lets her.

BRENDA JONES has worked for the College of Southern Maryland for almost 20 years helping to produce the college's publications. Her love of photography just recently developed after her marriage in July of 2006. Her husband says that she not only stole his heart, but his camera as well. She especially enjoys taking photographs of the tranquility of nature as well as capturing those special little moments in time of family and friends.

MICHELE JONES is a college student, currently attending the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. She is majoring in photography and hopes to make it as a photojournalist after receiving her bachelor's degree in 2010.

WAYNE KARLIN is a professor for the Languages and Literature Department at the College of Southern Maryland as well as the author of six novels and two memoirs. The recipient of the Paterson Prize in Fiction and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, he is also the American editor of the Curbstone Press *Voices From Viet Nam* series of translated fiction by Vietnamese authors.

MARY LOHNES is the media relations specialist and an occasional English instructor for the College of Southern Maryland. She is working on a collection of short stories about people who are not writers or artists or attempting to be any of the above. Currently, she can't decide whether her favorite quote is, "I feel like I am taking crazy pills!" or "A human can very well do what he wants, but cannot will what he wants."

JAQUALINE MENDOZA is a student at CSM. "Ghost" was taken with a pinhole camera when she was a senior in high school in Mr. Skinner's physics class.

WILLIAM ALLEN POE was born on May 30, 1965, in Washington, DC. Growing up in Calvert County, he enjoyed, as a child, the stories told to him by the folks in this once-flourishing farming community. He currently works as Calvert County's oral historian on the continuing "Tenant Farming Project." He is also a documentary filmmaker and photographer with his film *I Am Somebody* soon to be completed. Aside from his love of writing, he also hosts the new Sunday morning program *In the Stream* on Calvert County's local radio station, WMJS. He resides in Dunkirk, Maryland, with his wife and two children.

HOMER STEEDLY is a former assistant director of Computer Services at the Univ. of South Carolina and is a decorated combat veteran of the U.S. Army in Vietnam. He presently lives in North Carolina with his wife Tibby. More information about his military service can be found at www.swampfox.info.

EVE TAYLOR is a student at CSM. She recently read her poem, "Roaring for Unity," at one of CSM's community forums in March.

PAUL TOSCANO has been with CSM since 1980, working first as a counselor, then as distance learning coordinator.

FAITH TYDINGS is a student at CSM. When she was 19 years old she moved out of her parents' home, got married, and had her first child. Nearly a decade later, after three kids and five moves, she has returned to school. Her long-term goal is to get a degree in English with a minor in journalism.

JOANNE VAN WIE is a homeschooling mother of five in St. Mary's County.

ERICA WEAVER is a student at the College of Southern Maryland.

ERNIE WORMWOOD has been published in *The Antietam Review, Rhino, Perpetuum Mobile, Main Channel Voices, Creation Journal* and at *Innisfree Poetry* online. New work will be appearing at *Hotmetal Press* online. She was recently featured in Grace Cavalieri's *The Poet and the Poem* broadcast for the Library of Congress. She is grateful to the Squaw Valley Community of Writers and Southampton Writer's Conference for artistic support. A Washington, DC native, Ernie lives in Leonardtown, Maryland.

ALYSA YOUNGER is a senior at Lackey High School. She has been writing poetry since fifth grade, and short stories and personal essays since tenth grade. She is a member of Lackey's Creative Writing Club.

DEANNA ZOOK took her photograph during the snow in her neighborhood at the lake.