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# Connections

fall 2008 literary magazine  
college of southern maryland

volume 16    number 1



**Trip to NC** cover photo by *Emma Grimes*

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*Connections* is published at the  
College of Southern Maryland in December and May.  
Opinions expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect  
the official views of the College of Southern Maryland.

*Please see the College of Southern Maryland web site  
for submission guidelines at:*

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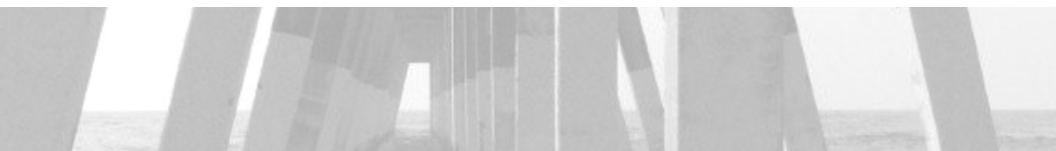
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# At Tuesday Morning

*Caitlin Rizzo*

There are wives in the aisles sweeping by  
Silently waves cresting on the isles of their own lonely lives  
And there among them is my mother and her volcanic heart.

She stares at her empty cart and wants to buy it all up  
The ceramic finches, the crystal bowls covered in dust,  
a hundred folded sheets. She needs it all.

Finally she rests her hands on a strangely alluring glass iguana,  
she says it reminds her of Darwin and of life, but she doesn't  
quite believe in either.

Suddenly, I can see her heart pouring through,  
a little molten puddle on the tiled floor.  
Carefully, she unhinges the body and opens it to find  
silently, the secret of life sleeping in the ashy aftermath.  
Forty-seven years of searching and here in Tuesday Morning  
only ten minutes north of home, she has found it.

Others try to peer into her tiny discovery,  
but they see nothing and leave. She puts back the finch,  
the bowls, the bedding. Delicately she places the tiny  
iguana into her cart and strokes the top.

Next week she will come again  
trying to rediscover what has been lost, but it is in the coming  
that I love her, in the searching and losing of life that I find her  
hidden deep in the aisles again.

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## Residue of Dreams

*Jennifer Polhemus*

We met when honeysuckle  
bled from its vine in the sweaty air  
of a June night.

When apple walnut muffins waited  
in a kudzu and reed basket  
I wove between the tears,  
before our voices  
spilled over into memories.

I found you  
as an open hand hell bent  
on caressing my face  
and back handing my heart  
until I fell back,  
weightless,  
voluntarily consumed  
into the knowing of you.

You waited for me  
at an Exxon station  
sitting on a curb  
in the parking lot,  
chain smoking,  
contemplating the moral differences  
between spontaneity  
and impulsiveness.

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Which of us knew  
that rising each morning  
would be our greatest challenge  
or sleeping together  
beneath the night  
with only the residue of dreams,  
a triumph?

Dreams that haunt us  
compel us  
save as they destroy us,  
birth us into oblivion  
pull us back  
and throw us in  
fill our heads with pictures  
unfit to keep for their sake  
and wash our hearts  
with blood and fire  
and moonbeams.

This is how we met  
and this is how we live;  
in a desperate dream,  
a gentle undoing  
of our senses.



**Forgotten**, by *Angela Lucier*



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# Of What Remains

*Dixon Hearne*

“There ain’t much to tell about the DuPrees, sir. Nothin’ much to tell at all – ‘cept they was all crazy. Ever’ last one of them.” The man wiped the tobacco juice on his forearm then wiped his forearm on the side of his filthy shirt – slowly, thoughtfully, like an artist blending colors on a canvas. He withdrew a few steps, and then a good ten feet from the flaking pillar, which placed him squarely beneath the balcony off the master suite. Here, he leaned against another of the ancient columns that stood the perimeter like sentries guarding its inhabitants from the outside world. He surveyed the mansion with a critical eye, a structure he judged as fading with malcontent and clinging to its last echoes, the end of an era with one last ruler holding firm against the clock.

Miss Camilla DuPree was not about to be hurried off her land and out of her family home of over a hundred and fifty years. The DuPrees bought and paid for Belle Chase generations before, and she, being the last of the line, was not about to turn it over to the government or preservationists who turn beauty into sideshows. She would burn it to the ground first. From the balcony she had heard Elroy Pilsner just now. Heard every word he was saying about her family: about them all being crazy and her being the craziest of the bunch; how the DuPrees made their fortune working their lessers to death on the land; how his own people went to early graves working and caring for the DuPrees and the Calhouns. “A pack of lies,” she muttered to herself, “hateful histrionics. And aimed at whom? A curious visitor with no more interest in me or my family than the cheap gossip it might generate for the afternoon paper?” This was the last straw.

“You, sir, get off of my property!” she yells from the balcony. “And take this unclean heathen of a groundskeeper with you.”

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“Now, Miss Camilla, don’t go gittin’ yerself in a huff. I’m just jawin’ with a man from that college over in Monroe.” By now he had backed out onto the front walkway and was staring piously up at his employer. “He ain’t the least bit interested in yer’ family. He’s just here to look around at yer’ property.” The man paused here, testing her for some response. She had the DuPree temper. “Ain’t no need gittin’ all riled up. Just a vis’tor here, ma’am. That’s all.”

A voice shot back. “Does the visitor have a name?”

“Yessum!” Clearly the foreman wanted to keep the conversation short. “This here is Mr. Chapwell Bailey.” Yelled up to her in a slurred drawl, his words were incomprehensible to the woman.

“It’s Mr. Bailey, ma’am,” the visitor spoke up. “Mr. Chapwell Bailey – from the university. I don’t mean to disturb you. It’s just that I am intrigued by artifacts of the antebellum South.”

“Artifacts! Is that what we are?” The man’s words struck a deep and private chord. “How dare you mock us? The ground you’re standing on was bought with the sweat and tears of my ancestors – rest their souls. Six generations of DuPrees! We do not think of ourselves in the past tense, sir.”

“I meant no offense, ma’am,” the stranger explained. “It’s a term we use in our research, not meant in any way as a value judgment. I meant no...” He was stopped dead in mid-sentence once again. Camilla DuPree had no use for long-winded apologies or explanations. He was told to leave and hadn’t moved a muscle – that was the material point.

“I know what it means. What I don’t know is what business it is of yours. And why you think you can come prowling around uninvited.”

By now the man had removed his hat – a gesture of respect – and was mopping his forehead with a wet handkerchief. The hottest day of summer so far, even under the spreading oaks that speckled the great edifice with heavy patches of shade.

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“Tell me ma’am, would it be possible to make an appointment? To look around your magnificent grounds and gardens, that is? Nothing more.”

No response.

“It’s just that I’ve always had this deep and abiding love for the gracious lifestyle reflected in southern mansions. The pageantry and grandeur they represent, I suppose. Can you understand that?”

“Do you think I’m illiterate?” The woman’s temper flared again. “Is that what you think? An ignorant spinster kept away in the attic till the last male died and left me with it?” At this point she craned her neck and head emphatically, eyeing the man squarely. “I was educated at Radcliffe, sir! And later at Tulane. And just for your information, Gertrude Stein wasn’t the only American resident on the Left Bank in our day, thank you very much! And what I know about the world is not confined to fanciful tales set in the deep recesses of a decadent South – or steeped with Gothic lore that seems to characterize every mansion south of St. Louis.” Her face lightened a bit and her head retracted. “Can you understand that?” There was no immediate response from the man below.

The groundskeeper had sidled off in the direction of the servants’ house, without any announcement of his departure. Mr. Bailey was left to his own stratagems.

“I meant no disrespect, ma’am. I only meant to satisfy a childlike curiosity about this place. The symmetry of its spreading oaks; the camellia and azalea gardens that trace the gated cemetery over there. And the carriage house and the servants’ quarters – a gracious assemblage indeed. And my being here right now – like being part of something lasting and wise...” The man stopped abruptly, his eyes darting back to the balcony. Lost in his own romantic meandering, he did not notice the woman had retreated from sight.

“It was my brother’s doing,” a voice announced. There in the doorway, not ten feet away, stood the woman he had been addressing up above, a statuesque and graceful figure in a flowing silk caftan.

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“His reckless ways and expensive habits took him before he was able to sell it all off.” She sidled forward, adjusting her sash as she moved. “But I suppose you already know that.”

For a suspended moment, neither person spoke. Their thoughts were conveyed intuitively. She had returned from abroad years before to live out her days in the peace and comfort of Belle Chase, the only corner of her scattered life where she felt truly secure. Intellectual and socially prominent, she sought to recreate a microcosm of the learned, avant-garde world she had reluctantly left in New York and Paris. Inside these columns, she had entertained royalty: Gertrude Stein, Charles Chaplin, Dorothy Parker, Gloria Grahame, William Randolph Hearst – rich and powerful persons whose lives more closely aligned her own world views. And all these thoughts came upon her sudden and euphoric and held her suspended for a lengthy moment before returning her to consciousness and awkward awareness of the man’s presence once again.

*A dignified gentleman*, she thought to herself, upon closer inspection. His hat still in hand, he moved cautiously in her direction, his other hand extended in amiable greeting. His manners she could not ignore, for most callers she had greeted in recent years exhibited an appalling lack. *Genteel*, she thought. *A man of integrity and good breeding. Not from wealth and privilege, but something deeper, something inherent and abiding.* Her thoughts held firm as she stretched her delicate hand to meet his. But there was more than mere greeting to be sure. For the first time in ages, she felt in her soul a kindred spirit, like minds set loose had found their own.

“My deepest appreciation, ma’am,” the man said at length. “I did not mean to inconvenience you in any way.” Characteristically nervous around new people, he was calm and collected, in control of his thoughts and emotions. He could attribute it to nothing more than the gentility of his environs and effortless ease in the woman’s demeanor. Leaning forward he added, “This truly is a splendid world in which you live. I would think you’d never wish to leave it.”

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Pulling her delicate limbs closer to her frame, the woman thanked him for his admiration and kindness. “I suppose Belle Chase *could* hold interest beyond its history and architecture for some. It’s a world unto itself, you know. It takes more than a critical eye to study the ethereal. Do you have such abilities, sir? Can you feel its spirit?” Her eyes surveyed the surroundings with an almost sinful pride. She did not wait for his response; she supposed it to be the one she desired. In a single grand gesture, she parted the double doors and pulled the man gently across the threshold.

“You wish to see things from the inside out, sir? Mirror images? You must indeed. The researcher examines a thing as it appears. The scholar studies its aura, that which cannot be observed directly. Which are you, sir?” The inquiry ended appropriately at the drawing room, where she motioned Mr. Bailey to be seated. Once settled, he responded with cautionary aplomb.

“I cannot tell you, Miss DuPree – may I call you Miss DuPree? I am paid to teach about antebellum history – not the thing itself. How could one?” Shifting, crossing his legs, the man searched for his next sentence, some sensible thought. “You pose it as a philosophical consideration. Perhaps I’m neither scholar nor philosopher, but I do know your meaning.” It ended there for a reflective moment. In the next, his hostess dispatched a maid to another room for a fresh pitcher of iced tea. She drew an ivory cigarette holder from a side table, which brought the man to his feet in search of a cigarette and lighter. There on the same table sat a matching lighter and leather case at the ready. There was not a cigarette butt or the faintest smell of smoke in the room, but clearly this was her favorite perch. The massive coffee table held neatly folded editions of newspapers from New York, Paris, London, and of course the *Times Picayune* – all sent up from New Orleans. She had also been reading or re-reading yellowed columns clipped from 1930s society sections. A copy of Stein’s collected works lay open to a passage marked with a faint pencil stroke. It stood like a room within a room. A space exclusively her own, not shared by

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other relations who stared from the four surrounding walls, generations of mute inhabitants. It was her world, a world tinged with bohemian sensibility and unaffected by years and distance.

The immensity of the interior was mesmerizing, rooms unfolding in every direction, all seemingly joined by the grand staircase that wound slowly and gracefully to the upper floors. And though he could not judge beyond his eye's purview, his imagination colored in the rest. A repository of carefully selected and hand-crafted furnishings, from the Tiffany mantel clock to the Tudor throne chairs, each with its own story wanting to be told. Two enormous tapestries assigned to opposing walls in the study depicted the "Fall of Man" and the "Birth of Christianity," medieval in their world view and artistry. The man's eyes were drawn almost immediately to them upon entering the house, for he had not seen such magnificent displays outside the Louvre.

The two spent an enchanted afternoon together. Conversation ebbed and flowed at will, and not in the least bit unfavorable to either party, fascinating conversation replete with ideas and views that seemed to meld intellect and conscience – *felt thoughts*. For Mr. Bailey, history was more passion than pursuit, and it pleased him that its place among the Humanities was held in high esteem by the lady as well. "A mural," she called it. "But a broad-stroke, one-dimensional picture of human behavior at its proper best," she asserted. "History is not a mirror image of human actions, sir. Nor their thoughts. It is, in the final analysis, nothing more than what one – *anyone* – perceives it to have been. Like art, its meaning is negotiable."

*A profound statement*, the man thought to himself, and yet she stopped short of example. But he'd no doubt she could deliver a pearl upon request. Eventually, talk returned to the present, to the ever-present present. It was here they must live, not vicariously through some romantic era resurrected in material reflections of itself. The conversation continued its seamless flow from thought to assertion to ambition. With no more than an afternoon's acquaintance, they had forged an unerring attachment, an affinity stoked by lively discourse and lingering chats in the many days and months ahead.

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Now, three years hence, she had leased a townhouse in New York to reconnect with what remained of her cultural enclave – *one last hurrah*. The two maintain close contact by lengthy letter – Miss DuPree’s communication of choice – witty and informative. Less and less as the days and years lengthen, until at last Mr. Bailey receives an elegant note card embossed simply with the initials “CD,” announcing the passing of Miss Camilla Dupree. Until this very moment, the man had never truly appreciated the artistry of dance – the dance of life, as he imagined her waning days to be. And though she drew her last breath in the bohemian shadows of Manhattan, he knew her soul was winging its way south.

In time, a family would move in and assume the role of landed gentry, and though there is every attempt to mute its historical origins, it would forever bear the mark of DuPree. And on this particular day, as he drives past the gated world he must now and forever hold at a distance, his mind is stirred by echoes of Miss Camilla’s voice, like notes carried upon the soft summer wind, asking once more: *Can you feel its spirit?*



**Beach,** by *Cara Adcock*



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# The Wrong Picture

*Erin R. Trondson*

A walk along the lake  
on squishy grass  
after a deep rain,  
mint ice-cream  
drips on to my pregnant belly.

I see a woman picnicking with her husband  
their baby asleep in the carriage,  
red gingham tablecloth, iced chardonnay,  
yes, the whole thing.

He is animated, standing, telling a story,  
the water sparkles from behind her,  
she wears a wide brimmed hat,  
her knees folded beneath her.

You never feel  
that you are the pretty mother  
nursing a baby  
in a white nightgown  
with the sun filling the fabric from behind.

I will sleep while I can  
with the crumbs on the counter,  
and let myself  
cry into the baby's hair.

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# Rainy Days

*Garrett N. James*

I wish the rain  
That washed away my momma's flowers  
Would also wash away her tears  
From the pain of the constant headache  
She gets from the constant ringing of the phone  
Because the bill collectors just won't stop calling  
Because they want the money that she owes them  
From the credit cards she maxed out  
From getting me what I needed for school  
And putting food on the table  
So I would have something good to eat  
So I could concentrate on getting good grades  
And focus on my homework and projects  
And not the empty turning of my stomach  
So now I feel guilty  
And I wish the rain  
That washed away my momma's flowers  
Would wash me away  
But that would only bring her more tears...

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On Reading Anna Svir's  
"I Starve My Belly  
for a Sublime Purpose"

*Ernie Wormwood*

I ask my belly to dance  
but it says it wants to go swimming.  
I say what about after swimming  
and it says after swimming, it wants to eat  
strawberry rhubarb pie. I say  
what about after the strawberry rhubarb pie  
and it says no, after the pie,  
it has an appointment at the tanning salon.  
Swimming, strawberry rhubarb pie, tanning salon –  
Comrade, bellies have changed and the sun  
is a tortured orb. Among us there is little  
sublimity or shame, and dancing is often  
forgotten, but suffering is doing fine  
in its relentless pursuit of the body.

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# Agony in the Garden

*Mary Anne Etzel*

Spring.  
Gentle rains and warming sun.  
Fresh plowed land  
Undulating across the fields.  
Seeds planted with hope.

The seedlings peek out of the ground.  
The rains gently wash their bright green leaves.  
The warm sun encourages their growth.  
Corn is growing straight and tall.  
“Knee high by Fourth of July”  
the farmers tell themselves.  
And it is so; everyone rejoices.

July marches on.  
The land begins to dry out.  
No rain today or today or today.  
The cloudless blue sky has  
no rain to share.

The corn turns its green leaves  
in on itself. They curl closer and closer  
each passing day.  
The bright green begins to fade.

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August shows up dry and dusty.  
There has been no rain for weeks.  
The farmers sigh and worry.  
Their crops will not produce this year.  
The corn turns brown from the ground up.  
The green tops a mockery of what might have been.

The dying of the corn is complete.  
Dry stalks stand forlornly in the fields.

The forecast is for rain and so it does.  
A fierce thunderstorm dumps lots of rain.  
Then rainy days follow – one, two, three.

The dead corn stands drenched in water.  
Where there should have been ears there are  
Only tears of rain sliding down the stalks.

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# Like Biting Into Peaches

*Brittany Hailer*

Like biting into peaches  
and letting the juice drip down your chin  
Keeping the fragrance on your fingertips  
and the taste resting in your mouth

Enjoying every burst of flavor  
every texture  
every minute  
of natural pleasure

Your love,  
is like biting into peaches.



**Reflections**, by *Robin Karis*

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## - in the photo I have -

*Darren W. Longley*

in the photo I have  
...you're smiling  
and I can see your hand resting on mine  
I think I have my arm around you  
but I don't have x-ray vision  
and it was so long ago  
so I'm not sure  
in the photo I have  
I'm smiling too  
you're pressed up tight against me  
your left breast pushed against my chest  
but I wonder what I was thinking...  
becuz...well, you know  
we weren't that happy  
even your smile looks a little forced  
and I can see the strain around my eyes  
as a matter of fact –  
your hand looks ready to explode off mine  
and your breast is burning a hole  
in my sweater

in the photo I have  
...we're smiling

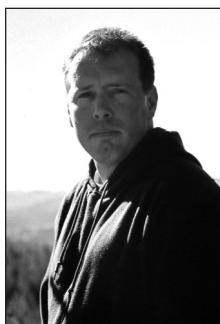


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CONNECTIONS FEATURE

An Interview With  
Iraq War Veteran  
and Poet  
Brian Turner

*Mary Lohnes*



*On November 14, 2008, the College of Southern Maryland's Connections Literary Series hosted Iraq War Veteran and Poet Brian Turner. Turner participated in a student seminar focusing on his collection of poems, **Here, Bullet**, and read from this award-winning book later that evening.*

*The following interview, written by **Connections** literary magazine contributor, Mary Lohnes, was conducted in preparation of Turner's visit to the college.*

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**CSM:** In the *NY Times Book Review* discussion of your book, the reviewer mentions a moon walk and his father’s professor saying, “Someday they’ll send a poet and we will find out what it is really like.” Do you think poets have a greater ability to distill the human experience?

**Turner:** Not necessarily, I think poetry is one tool towards it. The idea of the lyric and trying to freeze a moment in time is similar to what a photographer, a filmmaker or other artists are trying to get at, but since poetry is a portable art that we carry inside of us, if we can freeze a moment in time, encapsulate it, and share it with each other then in our own way it lives inside our bodies and inside our minds and we can react to it. It is unique in that you can carry it with you.

Reporters and journalists are witnessing from a distance and I don’t think it is possible for them to capture all of the emotions and stories that are being lived around them, but they do try. I am not trying to knock what journalists do because I think it is very necessary and needed but unfortunately not enough of the stories that could make a difference get through. I often think the poet’s job is to bring the emotional context to the moment and that is the key element that is missing, or has to be read into, most journalistic reports.

**CSM:** In the poem, “Night in Blue” there is a line “I have no words to speak of war” and then you list all of the experiences you haven’t had as a soldier. Why do soldiers downplay their experience? Is this a coping mechanism and if so could you talk about it and other things that soldiers do to “maintain their sanity?”

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**Turner:** I don't know if that line serves as a coping mechanism but I think it is an acknowledgement that I didn't see things that I think were much more difficult to deal with. I didn't lose a limb so I haven't had to deal with that level of loss and destruction to myself. I'm not a parent who has lost a child to war. There are people who have experienced things that are far more traumatic than the things I lived and I have to acknowledge that the book is very incomplete because there is so much left to say about this war, and every war in general than what is gathered here. There are several poems in the book entitled observation posts and they each have a number, though not the ones that I gave in the book, and I was hoping that readers would find themselves wondering about the observation posts that didn't make it into the book. I want them to realize that this story is not complete. So when I say "I have no words to speak of war" [what I am saying is] there is so much more to be said.

In terms of coping mechanisms, I think down the road I will be able to look at Sergeant Brian Turner and be able to evaluate whether speaking about these events and issues had a psychological, health benefit to me. I am a very mellow guy and the people who served with me and my friends etc. were all very surprised that I served. Someone recently told me, and I kind of agree with this, that when you are over there you have to develop a hairpin reaction to things, so now I still kind of have that trigger without even realizing it. When simple, even mundane things happen, I don't have a very good graduated response. Often that trigger inside, instantly goes to ten when it should probably go to two. I am able to check it. I am not getting thrown into jail or fighting people or anything like that, but the experience changed my trigger setting and that has been one of the hurdles that I am working on.

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**CSM:** Did it affect you that you were so much older than the other soldiers?

**Turner:** I think it helped in a lot of ways. It was a hard-working environment. Sometimes because I was older, I wasn't quite one of them. They were younger and had other concerns. But I think it helped because if I had been 19, just knowing me at that age, I think I would have come back more tragically shattered. I wouldn't have had the tools to cope with what I experienced. Being older, I had certain expectations of what I was going to experience and it gave me a bit more perspective. I was much more conscious of what was happening around me than I would have been when I was younger. At 19, I would have gotten more caught up in the rush of adrenaline. Not to say that I didn't get adrenaline rushes while I was there, but that I didn't get addicted to it. Some people get addicted to adrenaline, and where are they going to get their rush when they get back home? Pumping gas, working at a convenience store? This is how a lot of these guys fall into trouble when they return.

**CSM:** I heard you say on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* that you were very disappointed in American's understanding and interest in the war in Iraq. What is the one thing you wished people knew about the war and the soldiers that are fighting there?

**Turner:** Two things. The soldiers that make it back are assimilated back into society. They won't be wearing uniforms so you won't see them all the time but that doesn't mean that our nation doesn't have decades of work ahead of us to welcome these people back and help them on their on their journey to being individuals with happy, healthy lives. For many soldiers, it is going to take a lot of work. They have experienced things that might be very difficult for them to deal with and many of them won't have the tools to do it, so they will struggle. There will be more homeless veterans or individuals that just can't make their marriages or relationships

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work. They may be good workers but they may never be able to settle into one job for very long and these are the subtle veterans. The ones that lost limbs or have brain injuries are more visible in their struggle.

But bigger than that, and not to minimize any of our veterans, we have buried so many Iraqi people in the earth and I find it very disturbing that America knows very little about them. I thought it was very brave when Ted Koppel went on *Nightline* and read the names of all the American soldiers who had died up to that point. At some point, when are we going to read the names of the Iraqi people who have died? And when are we going to acknowledge who they are? Our country is now tied with [the Iraqi people]. We share a mutual history. I fear that it is too easy for America to ignore this and move on to the next big hurdle in history. But the people in Iraq will remember us whether we do or not. We can't have justice for the lives that were lost without also remembering them. I can hear the critics out there saying "Oh they are terrorists and Al Qaeda and stuff like that," but the vast majority of the people who died are just civilians. And even if we don't know it, we are connected to them.

**CSM:** What is the duty or obligation of the writer/poet in a time of war?

**Turner:** I don't like to have maxims or rules but I think they have to be honest. They have to act as a witness. I remember learning about poetry as a form of witness in grad school, and I understood it as a theory because we witness our lives as poets but I guess I never considered myself as being in events that were far greater [than me]. So then I found myself in that position, even though I wasn't writing at the time consciously thinking "Oh I am writing as a witness," but I was writing and filling that role.

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We can learn from writers and I don't think it has to be right at that moment. I think the people who are coming out of this war will turn to different art forms as a release. Most of these "veterans" will be 18-22 years old, a lot of them will have the talent but will have to learn the craft skills of the art form they choose to explore. So many of them will go to colleges or learn about art on their own and I think seven, eight, ten years from now we will benefit from this gift of amazing art that we can learn from. They will be witnesses to their own lives but also the lives and events that happened around them. It is unfortunate that we will lose so many of those threads of history and stories, because each person, even the Iraqis, has their own interesting story to tell. Hopefully we will get some of those voices coming back to help us make sense of what is really happening there. It is happening here too but we are removed from the forces that can make inroads to "What is the Iraq war?" "What is the war in Afghanistan?"

**CSM:** With the success of *Here, Bullet*, and with your next book being on similar topic, do you worry about being pigeonholed as a war poet or a war writer?

**Turner:** Doug Anderson, the poet of the "Moon Reflected Fire," says that sometimes war poets tend to be ghettoized into that role. I thought about it and I was concerned but I had written seven other manuscripts, one about Bosnia and my time there, and then the rest were on a wide variety of other subjects; and this is how I would like for the rest of my career to go. It seems to me that there isn't a problem finding something to write about, the problem is choosing what one to write about because there are so many things, such a broad palette. I worried but the war is still ongoing and I keep getting these e-mails from Bosch and others who are over there and it still seems as if the war isn't happening here in the U.S., especially here in Fresno today. And yet, it is still happening overseas, percolating up through these different forces and it made

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me think. I recently read this essay and the last sentence reads “this war will never end.” I don’t agree with it but I understand the sentiment. Sadly, I think this war will be forgotten in the next generation, or maybe remembered by only a few historians but it will basically be forgotten by this part of the world. It may be remembered more in the Middle East but there is a chance that it might get lost in the tangle of bigger wars. Or maybe not. In either case, I felt it was important to write for the living so people know and maybe have a better connection to the war that is here if we just stop to realize and acknowledge it.



**Bridge at Smallwood State Park, *by Paul Toscano***



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## Am I Missing Something?

*John J. Ronan*

Del's leaning against the paddock fence, foot up on the rail, wearing jeans and one of those long-sleeved cotton shirts he wears no matter what. I'm next to him, in jeans, foot up. So far, it's a flat Thursday afternoon, mid-July. Hot of course, which you know about, if you've ever been in Maryland in July. An average sort of day, with a small crowd, almost every face one of the regulars. Like I say, flat. Not a surprise in sight.

"I believe I'll play this race," Del says, real innocent, no hints at all. I don't suspect a thing, because of that poker face he wears, real calm. He's watching the horses walk before the fifth, an allowance race with a nice purse, \$7000, but not much in it. Still, he's looking hard at the horses, with those x-ray eyes of his, the way he always does. Maybe a minute or two earlier than usual, he stands up, folds the Telegraph under his arm, and says, "The gelding."

"MyMajority?" It's one of those names they're always cooking up down at the clubhouse end of the stands. Majority of what, I'm wondering?

"That's the one. Five horse, fifth race." Then he winks. Or maybe it's the cigar smoke.

Winking, or blinking maybe, the way Dad would do, with those Chesterfields. I remember him smiling always, through the smoke.

"He's been out five times this year, Del. Never on the board." How could a body root for this horse? Can you imagine yelling "Go MyMajority"?

"I know."

"Laid off since April."

"I know."

"And Sanchez pulled him up in that race."

"I know."

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I figure Del's serious, because he's partial to geldings – says they're steady horses, focused. So, I'm looking at the Telegraph again. Am I missing something? Del's an old guy, must be forty, but he's okay and he knows a lot. The thing is, this horse didn't just go on vacation back in April: he was vanned off. And he's only been on dirt once before.

The morning line is 10-1 and going south real fast. None of which is good. I know it's not good. I know it from Del.

"I don't know about this horse," I say, kind of quiet, sheepish you might say. Del's been real square with me, treats me like a son almost. We talk and I ask him about horses. Sometimes we talk about baseball or school or politics. A few times I asked him about Korea and he told me a little, not much, doesn't really want to talk about how it was over there. I asked him if he was ever near Imjin River and he said no.

"Might win, Danny."

So, we got some suspense going here, this flat Thursday. An impossible horse and Del, the best handicapper I know, leaving the paddock rail, not even waiting to see them saddle up, headed to the windows. I follow close, staring at the paper as we walk along, waiting for a new, secret angle to jump out. Del finds Lou Pascal's window and gives him five deuces - ten bucks, number five, on the nose. Al looks at him funny, but Del doesn't waver. The ticket's real and no spoofing. Del loses sometimes, but Del does not bet on losers, if that makes any sense. Suspense, like I say.

But it's not so much suspense whether the five horse, this MyMajority, is going to win. Not yet. The real suspense is whether I'm going to break every rule Del's ever taught me and play this horse. Go against Del, you see? He kind of lingers at the window, waiting for me to play and I pretend to be lingering, too, but lingering isn't the right word. I'm too jumpy for lingering. More like fidgeting, jumpy about what to do. Then Del finally moves off, calm as ever, toward the stands, smoke curling back around his head as he goes. I don't play, not then. I get a soda and follow him

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back to the seats, way down at the end of the grandstand, where no ladies will bother him about the cigar. I open the Telegraph, start looking at the five horse again, this MyMajority. What am I missing?

What I see is that the layoff and the move off turf aren't half of the problems. Number five hops some of his starts, gets off slow. Stays slow. Second worst speed numbers in the field. He's got the inside lane, okay, and he'll save a little ground not having to rush for the rail into the turn, but that lane's been deep and slow all meet, and it stays heavy forever after a rain, which is what we had two nights back. The track's listed as fast, but it's not. I don't mention any of this to Del, of course. He knows.

The five horse is not going to win. The Telegraph's pretty direct: "Out of his element – distance, surface, class. Toss." But here's Del, sitting next to me with that ten-dollar ticket in his hand.

"You playing the fifth?" Del asks, not looking up. He's finished handicapping for the day, reading a regular paper, this time the Sun, which he often brings, looks like an article about the war.

"He's 20-1," I point out, quiet like before. You see, Mom likes Del, too, except for the smoking. She's not ready to go out yet, I don't mean that, but she likes me spending some time with Del, especially since that trouble with Jimmy and Les at school. But never mind about that. What I'm saying is, it isn't just the racetrack. Del's just a good guy who happens to like horses. Also, did I mention this? He wins. I'm thinking that if I don't play this horse I will look ungrateful and also stupid, which happens plenty without me looking for it.

"30-1."

"I know."

I'm lathered up. I've never been this tense over any race, any head-to-head stretch run on the track. The horses aren't on the track yet, but the bugler is already down there, toward the quality seats, talking to someone. Dad always said, think for yourself. Del says the same. So, I'm thinking, thinking, thinking...did I miss

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something? But, you know what? I haven't. I can't bet this horse. Even if it means going against Del.

"You going to play?" Del asks again.

"No." The word's out there without me even planning it. I mean, I was thinking, sure, but I didn't decide to open my mouth, move my lips, say the word no - if that makes any sense. The sound just escapes into the air. And it seems to hang there forever, through a long silence, me waiting for a reaction.

"Danny?"

"Yes, Del?"

"You did the right thing."

I stop sweating! No fun, going against Del, on a real ten-dollar bet. This is a first for me. But to tell the truth, I'm feeling okay, kind of proud, especially because the horse just went to 35-1. I don't feel "against," if you know what I mean? I feel like I'm doing what Del taught me. Just without Del. I can't say it exactly because I don't know how to think it.

"I'm proud of you, Danny," Del says, and then he winks, this time for sure, the suspense over. Not the surprise, no sir. Not by a longshot.

"Take this," Del says. And he hands me the ticket. Just pushes it into my palm.

"What?" My mouth opens and it's not going to shut any time soon. Dell plays a horse that's good not to play and now he gives me the ticket? Definitely, I am missing something.

"I want you to have it."

"Look at the odds, Del." Meaning at first, like I meant before, that the crowd knows the horse hasn't got a chance. But there's a new suspense seeping into my bones, coming on real quick, and it sure is taking up the slack: I could be rich! Buy a car, take Del and Mom out for dinner, buy Mom a dress. I'm already picturing the race: Sanchez swings MyMajority off the rail, gets out of that heavy footing, saves the horse down the backstretch as the favorites start to tire... I'm lathered up again, I'll say. "He'll go off at 40-1!"

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“I know.”

“This ticket could be worth eight hundred!”

“Could.”

I see sunlight skating off the bell of the bugle and then I hear the notes. The outrider comes out to start the post parade, down there among the better seats. The field will turn back toward the clubhouse before getting up our way, but I can see them fine: one, with the bright red saddle cloth, the white two, number three a navy blue... Del calls them the Old Glory group. Then the yellow and then my green guy comes out, old MyMajority, and already I've got hope! He's wearing a shadow roll.

The race is a mile and an eighth, so the gate's right in front of the stands, and they break clean. No jumping, no bumping. Sanchez is riding smart. He uses the lane into the turn, then quick comes a wide, off that wet concrete. MyMajority looks a little rank, but Sanchez settles him down, and I'm into the race, like always, seeing the horses huge and beautiful. That's the real draw at the track, the only draw, when you get down to it, the horses. Not the odds or the money or crowds. Horses. The heart they show, and the form, watching them, even hearing them, inhale the wind, hearing the sound of the hoof beats, the flanks bright in the sunlight, the jockeys jawing. Horses. And heart. Half way down the backstretch Sanchez has MyMajority stalking two lengths off the lead, looking strong, the whole field of nine packed in pretty good, ten lengths nose to tail. I'm yelling for the lead horse, the favorite, to start coming back. And he hears me, because that second he starts losing ground! Then the horse running second starts to tire. MyMajority takes the lead! They're into the far turn and I'm standing up and screaming and thinking about hundred dollar bills and what restaurant to go to and won't Mom be happy!

You know what percent of the time a 40-1 horse wins? I'll tell you: one. MyMajority holds the lead for forty, fifty, then sixty yards. And I get my wish about the favorites: they back up like they've never gone more than four furlongs in their lives. But there

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is no touching MyMajority when it came to running backwards. He's the best. Thirty lengths out, dead last, first horse in the next race.

"Del?"

"Yeah, Danny?"

"I was right."

"I know."

"He never had a chance."

"I know."

"I don't get it, Del."

"What's that, Danny?"

"Why'd you play him?" I ask, needing to find out whatever it is I missed. Del takes a long time thinking over his answer, puffing one of those cigars he's about to give up. My mouth's still hanging open, the way it's been through the warm ups, through the race, making me look dim. I'm in shock, you see? Happy and sad and confused all at once, but beginning to think maybe this whole thing is bigger than just the horse.

"To tell the truth, Danny," Del says finally, real slow, looking at me serious and paying attention, not calm and casual like before. "I liked the name." Then he winks. Or maybe it's the smoke. I can't tell for sure this time, but he's smiling and he looks proud. My mouth is closed for the first time in a while because I'm smiling, too, couldn't tell you why exactly. But I'm wondering, sitting there in the stands that summer afternoon, I'm wondering if him and Dad might have met over there in Korea one time, just for a second, maybe said hello. I bet they did.



*Shed, by Rachel K. Smyth*

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# Blue Swirls

*Adam Childress*

Figures swirling in and out of the ocean.  
Shattered glass flowing through the waves.  
Forever reaching for that sky bending thirst.  
Falling deeper into the blue abyss.

Swirls, swimming through the cold.  
Drifting, in solitude.  
Shifting, forward.

My Requiems light the way to a new beginning.  
Rebirthed to a new time.  
Digging through the surface.

Floating through the sky.  
This feels imperfect.  
Omnipresent.  
Isolated  
Solace, is just a dream.

Rebirth of a new dawn.  
Abstract.

Swirling spirals of color.  
Wake.  
Open your eyes.  
Everything is alright.



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Feel the cold kiss your cheek.  
Lie numb.  
Lose Control.  
Lose yourself.  
Dreams of azure skies.

Falling infinitely.  
Slow motion.  
Startled gaze.  
The water pours from your hands.  
Darkest Canvas.  
Spilling drops.  
Feel safe in my arms.

Truth lies.  
Static sound.  
Beautiful Noise.

Wake me up.  
Bring me back.  
This was...just a dream.

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## It's Simple...?

*Jamilliah Thomas*

From the temple  
It's Simple  
But from lips  
Slip  
Sweet and salty cravings  
On the tip of my tongue  
My mind says more  
I open the door  
To treats  
Galore  
Stacked up high  
Piled on wide  
Super size  
My fries  
Add extra cheese  
Lubrication  
For jeans I squeeze  
Cover thoughts  
Of thighs and  
Pies  
Pecan and potato  
I pass on tomato  
But double my burger  
Add bacon please  
Suppress the friction  
Between my knees  
One mile two miles  
Three miles four  
Once or twice

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But consistency's nice  
I like my slice  
Sausage and onion  
Dreams of running  
And I never tire  
Slim and fit  
Muscular and tone  
No fat covers  
My skin and bone  
My body  
My mental  
My temple  
Simple  
Right?



**Untitled**, by *Brittany Hailer*

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## Trailer Trash

*Dee Sydnor*

“Out again,” I muttered under my breath as I unlocked the door and entered the living room of my Fleetwood double-wide. I had been so proud of it when I bought it – I actually owned a home. And there he was, adorning my couch as though he were a one of those body pillows I had looked at getting. I swear his body sweat had left permanent stains on those cushions – they used to be blue, but now it was this faded greenish brown color in the middle of the cushions where his body had soiled it. I couldn’t live like this. The sofa had been a find at the yard sale over in the Oakwood community in Thurmont. I knew I was in luck when I saw it, and the little old lady who sold it to me really just wanted to have someone get rid of it for her. I was glad to oblige, and she sold it to me for just 20 bucks. How did he end up on it?

I met Ben three or four years ago, when we were both working at Walmart. He was working in Sporting Goods, and I was working in Jewelry. He seemed like such a good salesman, and he seemed to have such a way with the customers. I was so impressed – I thought this guy was really going places. He called himself “Big Ben” then, and pretty much everyone else called him that too. I had asked him once about the nickname and he just laughed, his hearty belly-laugh that sounded like someone who should be doing a beer commercial, and said his first wife, Sue, had given him that name, and it just kinda stuck. He said they were real happy together at first. I guess I figured out why. And then maybe I figured out why the honeymoon was over only a year later.

Since then, we’d moved in together, the Walmart shut down because there was a new Super Walmart in Cherryville, and we both found ourselves without jobs, looking for something better. I finally found a job with a really nice specialty jewelry shop on

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Maple Street, and the owner seemed to really like me. She had been divorced for a few years, and she seemed to be married to her shop. She was giving me more and more responsibilities, letting me lock up in the evenings, and teaching me how to craft some of the jewelry. I learned that I had a knack for making jewelry – I never knew I had a creative bone in my body, but here I was making pieces for all these ladies that were selling faster than I could create them. Needless to say, the owner was thrilled with my “talent,” and she gave me a big bonus and a raise because she said she wanted to make sure I stuck around. I don’t know where she thought I might be going, but I was happy for the extra money anyway.

“Big” Ben never did find a job – he looked around for something, but it seemed to really steam him up that I had found such a good job and he still didn’t have anything. He’d spend the whole day out by the lake with his fishing rod trying to catch fish, and he was actually bringing in a pretty good supply at first. But when the fish stopped biting, he kind of gave up on that along with the idea of looking for a job. He was perfectly content to let me take care of him. I began working longer hours – anything to keep from having to come home and find him lying on that couch. I can’t believe it used to be blue. I was actually becoming somewhat of a celebrity. Our shop had ladies calling on the phone from other states ordering my pieces. I was just glad to have something to keep my hands busy that paid so well. And it sure did make me feel good that other people thought I was talented at something.

My time at home was getting pretty slim – I came home in time to go to bed, and I got up early in the morning and left out. The household chores were pretty much being left undone, since I just couldn’t stand to be around there anymore. Ben was drinking more and more too. Each evening when I got home, he was pretty well lit, and I just went to my room and closed the door. This seemed to make him angry, especially since he was good and drunk by that time. I didn’t care anymore – I just wanted him out of my life and off my couch.

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I started confiding in my boss, Suzanne, about Ben and the problems I was having with him. When I had finished telling her the whole story, she was shocked. She told me she had been in a relationship with a guy like that once, too. Apparently, I hadn't even told her there was a man in my life. My evenings grew more and more isolated as I avoided Ben, waiting until I was sure he was asleep before I even got home. Suzanne was overjoyed with the amount of time I was spending at work, and with the productivity I was able to accomplish each day. She seemed to be so worried about my relationship with Ben, and she told me I was more than welcome to hang out at the shop as much as I wanted to.

This scene went on for a while, probably a month or two, and then – I can remember it clear as a bell – it was a Thursday, and I was trying to finish up the pieces I wanted to get in the mail on Friday. Suzanne left out early that day and said she might even be late in the morning, since she had a hot date with some guy she had met. I put the finishing touches on the bracelet, and I was so pleased with my work. I had used sapphires and white gold, and the bracelet and necklace were so beautiful I fell in love with them myself. It was kind of like giving up something precious to me, like a piece of my soul, when I'd put pieces like that in the mail. I put them in two of the blue satin-lined lavender jewelry boxes Suzanne had gotten specially for my work and packed them in a Priority Mail box to go out the next day.

I drove home, trying not to think about what would be waiting when I got there, and I found the door open. This unnerved me right off, because Ben almost never even leaves the house, unless it's to go buy more Jack, and by this time of evening he was always way too trashed to be going anywhere. I went in slowly, and as I walked through the house everything seemed to be in place – nothing seemed to have been stolen. But there in the living room, where the sofa had been, there were just four little dents in the carpet where the legs had been. The couch and Ben were gone. I thought it was

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strange, but thought maybe he had finally come to his senses and gotten out. So, I went on to bed, locking up the house first and making sure all the blinds were closed.

I got up early in the morning, since that had become my routine, got showered and dressed and locked the door behind me as I went out to get in my car. I added a mental note to have the locks changed today, just in case Ben decided to come back. I remembered that it was Friday, trash day, and I had forgotten to set my bags out back. So, I went back into the house, got the bags of trash, and walked out back to the alley to put them in the dumpster. The stench from the dumpster hit me as soon as I hit the alley. Funny thing was, the dumpster was full of those big lawn and leaf bags, and my old blue sofa was sitting there beside it.

“Best place for it,” I thought, and I got in my car and drove to the shop. Suzanne was there waiting for me when I got to work. I asked her how her date had gone, and she said she didn’t think she’d ever see him again. I went on to tell her about all the strange happenings at the trailer, and I told her how glad I was that Ben had left. She just said that she knew I’d feel that way, and she poured me a cup of coffee.



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## Contributor Notes

### **CARA ADCOCK**

**ADAM CHILDRESS** has lived in Southern Maryland for most of his life. He has a strong passion for music and writing. He is 19 years old, and working towards an associate's degree at CSM.

**MARY ANNE ETZEL** is 78 years old and lives in St. Leonard with her husband, Jack, and two cats. On *Agony in the Garden*, Mary writes, "In the summer of 2007, as I drove around Calvert County, I became very aware of how dry everything had become and my heart went out to the farmers who had planted their crops with so much hope. This poem is a result of what I witnessed as the summer wore on."

**EMMA GRIMES** is a journalism student at CSM.

**BRITTANY HAILER** is a freshman at CSM.

**DIXON HEARNE** grew up along the levees and cotton fields of Louisiana. His work includes stories in recent issues of *Mature Living*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Cream City Review*, *Big Muddy*, *Louisiana Review* and *Roanoke Review* and forthcoming in the *Rocking Chair Reader* book series and *Humor for the Boomer's Heart*. Dixon is co-editor of a new anthology of Mississippi tales, and his short story collection, *Plantatia: Hightone and Lowdown Stories of the South*, is forthcoming from a university press. Another story collection, *Touchstones and Threads of Change*, is also in press. He has won numerous short fiction awards.

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**GARRETT N. JAMES**, a native of North Carolina, has been living in Southern Maryland since 2003 and works at the Patuxent River Navy Base. He has been freelance writing since 2001 and has worked for the St. Mary's County *Enterprise* newspaper. For the last five years, he has been using poetry as a way to connect with others and initiate change. He believes that poetry allows us a vehicle to express emotions that would otherwise be difficult to convey.

**ROBIN KARIS** has lived in Charles County since 1982 and enjoys photography, writing, and *Andy Griffith Show* re-runs.

**MARY LOHNES** was a media relations specialist and an occasional English instructor for the College of Southern Maryland, until just this past year, when she and her husband moved away from the Southern Maryland area.

**DARREN W. LONGLEY** is a CSM student from Leonardtown. On "*in the photo I have*," Darren says, "I write to remember..."

**ANGELA LUCIER** is currently studying art at CSM, with an emphasis on photography. She enjoys shooting landscapes, urban and rural scenes, and things in their natural environment. She also shoots concert photography and event photography in her spare time.

**JENNIFER POLHEMUS** lives in Central Pennsylvania with her partner of nearly ten years. She is a graduate of CSM and has been published in *Connections* several times.

**CAITLIN RIZZO** is a student at Marymount University. She currently lives in Waldorf, and divides her time between writing and going to school full time.

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**JOHN J. RONAN** is a professor, poet, movie producer, and playwright. His new comedy, *The Yeats Game*, ran at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre March 26 - 30, 2008. John is also the founder of American Storyboard, a documentary production company, which recently premiered an exciting new movie, *Women in American Horse Racing*.

**RACHEL K. SMYTH**

**DEE SYDNOR** is a student at CSM. She has four children, has been married to her husband, Dave, for 27 years, and she works for a local contractor.

**JAMILLIAH THOMAS** is a Department of Defense contractor and a long-time resident of St. Mary's County. Favorite pastimes include attending football games with her son, Jeremiah, singing with her band, Posse 4 Christ, and writing poetry.

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

**ERIN R. TRONDSON** lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her husband and daughters. She is a poet and a graduate of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She continues to study creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison at the master's level.

**ERNIE WORMWOOD** lives in Leonardtown. New poems are in the anthology *Poem, Revised* from Marion Street Press and in *Poetic Voices Without Borders 2* from Gival Press. She recently appeared on Grace Cavalieri's program for the Library of Congress.