

Connections

Spring 2011 Literary Magazine

*INSIDE: An interview with
writer Barbara Hurd
by CSM President, Brad Gottfried*

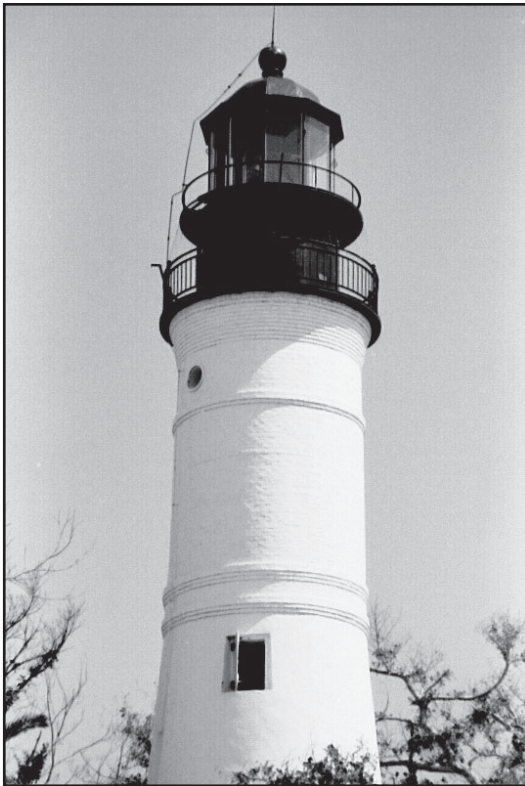


COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

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Spring 2011 Literary Magazine

volume 18 number 2



House of Light *by Joyce Vincent*

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~DEDICATION~

This issue of *Connections* is dedicated
to our friend and colleague,
JOHN LAMIMAN.

Last summer, John suffered a debilitating spinal cord injury
which has left him paralyzed.

To send a donation, please go to
<http://www.itc.csmd.edu/lan/johnl/donations.htm>.

Mom at the Movies

Joany Nazdin

Going to see that movie with my mother was the hardest thing I have ever done. We were celebrating Mothers Day, and she had picked out a romantic comedy. Sneaking glances at the movie, it seemed to be about a happy couple searching for a way to complete their family unit by attaching a baby. I couldn't actually tell you what it was about; I was trying really hard NOT to watch.

I mean, wrong movie to pick when you are one day post abortion. Like I said, it was Mothers Day, and I didn't pick it. Baby-killers don't ever get to celebrate on that day or pick anything special just because they are baby-killers. No Baby-Killer Day on any calendar I ever saw. The dead baby on my mind that particular day was number six or eight, not sure how many it had been, just like I am not sure how many men and boys I have cycled (and in some cases re-cycled) through my life.

Anyways, I would sneak glances over at my mom as I tried really hard not to burst out in sobs or tears or hiccups (or shrieks). I watched her smiling and chuckling, and as she grew happier and more into the movie, I grew crazier and sadder until it was almost scary. I mean, keeping it normal that day was really hard work, you have no idea. Blame it on the hormones. I didn't want to ruin her day, so I just sat there and tried not to watch the show, but instead my own private movie kept scrolling through my brain.

I think getting rid of this baby was the hardest, because this one was the only one that I had even imagined keeping. I had to do one of those late-term abortions, and I thought it would be hard to find a doctor that would swear that I was less than three months pregnant when really I was almost five. Actually, it

wasn't hard at all. Nope, that wasn't the hard part. I could have told the doctor I was pregnant with twin elephants, and as long as I had the money, it was all okay with him.

When I found the doc and made the appointment, I asked my girlfriend Kate to take me. She did, but of course the ride came with the lecture. She started talking to me as calm as you please.

“You're married,” Kate said. “You can have this baby.”

I mean, she said all this just like she was schooling me on A plus B equals C, but when A is an abusive husband and B is a battered wife, then C should not always equal children.

Kate actually did have a good point. This was my first time being married, usually I would just hang out with a guy or live with him or have him live with me until it just wasn't working, and then we would just break up or drift away or whatever. But being older meant thinking a little different and trying different things, so I thought I would check out this marriage-club and see what all the fuss was about. Plus, what girl doesn't imagine herself a princess-bride in a white dress?

I remember how much fun planning the wedding was. I don't know for the life of me (and the life of all my unborn babies) why I thought at that time that spending thousands of dollars on a dress I would NEVER wear again and inviting relatives that I would NEVER see again was such a wise career move. I mean, I remember searching for hours in those big glossy magazines for the perfect everything, until one day I realized that I was searching for tips on how to cover bruises on your wedding day, and being disappointed that the closest thing that I could find that was helpful was an article on how to cover bikini lines.

That should have been my first clue.

Like I said, I don't know why I got married. I wasn't such a hot catch as a bride. I guess I must have been a mouthy one, because all the men in my life from my dad to boyfriends and

husband used to just try to shut me up. I remember my dad one time choking me so hard I passed out, and I remember thinking that strangling really wasn't such a bad way to go, it doesn't hurt (much) and you just kind of fade out, and while being choked you can multi-task and plan what to wear to school the next day if you do survive.

One thing this beating and choking stuff did was make me realize that my survival instinct was stronger than my maternal instinct. No child was going to slow down any escape-planning that I may have to do. No plan B for me. Always, always, leaving was my first (and only) option. For everything. But not today. Trapped at the movies with Mom that day, I couldn't escape. I was just trying to keep from shrieking or sobbing or choking or a combination of all three. I kept trying to swallow emotions which kept bubbling to the surface, and soon I felt like I was standing on the stage at a pie-eating contest and was slamming my 14th pie down and trying to keep it down, all while tears were running down my face and it was just getting harder and harder to breath, and that is when my mom turned to me.

“Good movie,” Mom said.

That was it. I lost it, and a big tsunami of emotion went up my throat just as I stuffed another wave of heartbreak back down. The two met in the middle, somewhere around my chest and not only was I unable to breath; my mouth could not form words. I remember thinking that just sitting next to my mom was all it took to do the one thing that all the men in life wished for years they could do.

It finally shut me up.



Self Portrait *by Juliette Seymour*

The Red Lady

Maria A. Perry

Out of the seven the red one is my weakness.
Gluttony is also on the top of my list.
The Red Lady seduces me with her eyes.
She says, “Look at him,” and I try to run away.
The Red Lady says, “Look at him,” I refuse.
Her presence makes my body ache with urgency...I want to look.
She knows I am weak.
The Red Lady says once again, “Look at him,” and I can’t refuse.
I don’t have the strength to fight.
I am filled with an appetite that I cannot control.
I am her slave.
I am starving and too weak to reject her.
I plead with her to set me free from her bondage.
But she smiles and says, “You are me and I am you silly girl.”
I look at him.

Chasing Bears

Rachel Heinhorst

My father will die soon
and he will take with him the inside
of the motel room he lives in
the shirt he folds at 2:00 a.m.

Tired is not a word for him anymore.
He has let that go, replacing it with stories
he likes to tell his grandchildren, about a man who worked hard
came out of the hills of West Virginia wearing a scuffed face
holding a bloody knife, chasing bears.

Threnody

Christopher Wilkins

The river bends itself into a blue
ribbon one morning by surprise.

Surprise! You ache, mourn a palpable absence,
life itself graven in copper or zinc,

and what the acid leaves behind
washes away as well in a sudden rain.

The water as it glistens takes nothing
from the sky but a light it could not reach

even if it tried, and it does not try.
Surprise: the river greys

under a lowering cloud,
draws a blank look.

Whiffle-peak waves smooth to lines,
limn the shore, trace the wind.

Though it took no light, dark takes it
anyway, leaves it hungry for the bridge

piers as the wind sighs at their dry edge
still in the half-light under clouds.

What made this place, or brought
eyes to it to sigh and see?

So Tell Me

Judy Angelheart

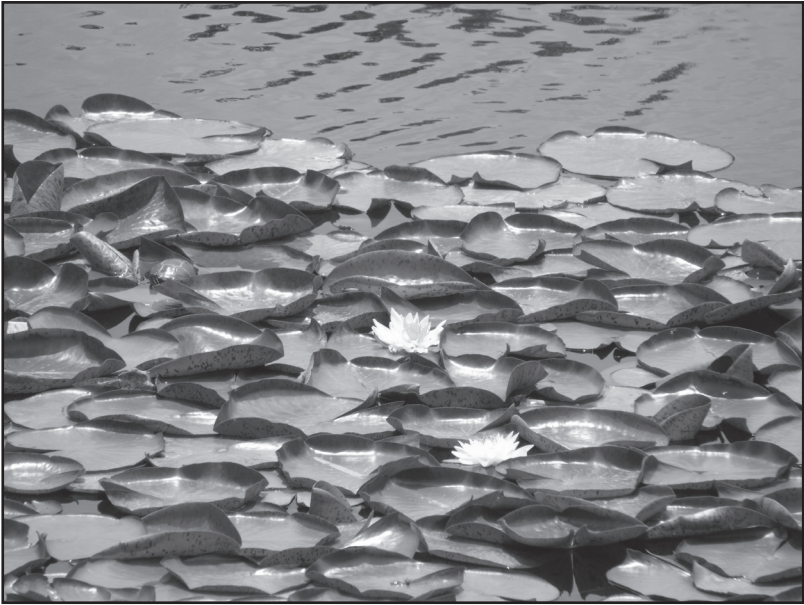
Why do we put birds in cages
Fish on land
And dogs at sea

They'll adapt soon enough
That's Darwin's theory
Give them some time
Throw some money at it

So we all stood around
Waiting for
The bird to learn to give up its wings
The fish to breathe
And the dog to swim

We just stood there
Not doing a thing
Not lifting a hand

The dog drowned
The fish died
And it was ruled a suicide
Only the bird survived
He held onto his wings
Sang his song
And one day when our backs were turned
He opened his cage
And flew away



Turtle Maze by *Robin Karis*

CONNECTIONS FEATURE



An Interview With **Barbara Hurd**

By Brad Gottfried, President, College of Southern Maryland

Barbara Hurd, who teaches creative writing at Frostburg State University in Western Maryland and in the Stonecoast MFA program at the University of Southern Maine, is the author of five books beginning with *Objects in the Mirror* written in 1994 and, most recently, *Walking the Wrack Line*, completed in 2008.

In preparation for the Connections reading, Hurd was interviewed by CSM President Dr. Brad Gottfried as part of the weekly radio program, “Southern Maryland Perspectives.” To hear the complete interview, visit www.csmd.edu/Connections.

Gottfried: What got you started as an author?

Hurd: Probably like most writers, I as a kid loved to read. It was the thing I was voracious about from the time I was probably 9 or 10. My mother used to take me to the local library—we lived outside of Philadelphia at that point—and I would come home with stacks and stacks of books. I have a twin sister who was not a reader at all and who used to hide my books so that I would play with her. The deal was always if I would play with her for 10 minutes she'd tell me where she'd hidden my book... most writers begin as great readers at some point.

Gottfried: As an author of three books of prose and two books of poems, do you have a favorite?

Hurd: Oh gosh, probably the favorite is the most recently finished one. Or it's the one I'm working on. *Stirring the Mud* is probably close to my heart because it was a kind of breakthrough for me. That's the first prose book that came out in 2001.

I started off as a poet and was doing a lot of that and teaching, of course. What I remember happening was a decision at some point to try what we might call the lyric essay.

When I tried that—this was maybe 10 years ago, 11 years ago—it was enormously freeing for me. I felt like the form of the lyric essay suited my imagination better than did the form of most poems, and so I began quite crazily writing these lyric essays on swamps and bogs. It's those essays that became the first collection called *Stirring the Mud*.

Gottfried: What precisely is a lyric essay and how does it compare with poetry?

Hurd: That's a large question, just as creative non-fiction, what is that? Also a large question. I think of the lyric essay as a prose piece that is borrowing heavily from poetic traditions. So there's great attention to prose rhythms, to all kinds of matters of sound: whether it is alliterations, consonance, assonance kinds of things. It's also an essay that is probably trying to investigate a reaction, an emotional reaction to it, to an event or a time or a place, less argumentative than say a traditional expository essay.

In form it's not lineated, so it looks on the page like a prose paragraph...I've had a lot of people at readings tell me afterwards, they thought I was reading poems because I do pay close attention to prose rhythms, so just the sound of it, if they hadn't seen it on the page and they're simply listening to that language in the air, a lot of people think it is poetry. And I'm fine with that. That suits me quite nicely.

Gottfried: You started off as a poet and later on in your professional career went into prose and lyric essay. Do you go back and forth, or are you primarily now doing the prose? And are there certain themes in your writing that link everything together, or is it just how you're feeling in that particular time in your life?

Hurd: I'm primarily doing the prose. Every once in a while I start working on a poem. But I'm so much more stimulated by the form of the essay that I seem to end up investigating more interesting things in that form than I do in a poem.

I would say that I, probably like most writers, have my obsessions. There are some themes—vaguely, I'd guess I'd say—that seem to crop up over and over again. I'm very interested in the “in between.” What's happening between this and that? What's happening in that kind of gray shadowy area that we're probably not looking closely at because we're looking more intently at either “a” or “b.” But I want to know what's going on in between those.

So I would say that sense of investigating the “in between” is a major obsession. I would say that maybe this is related: investigating things that seem to spend most of their times in the margin. And I mean that perhaps physically and emotionally, too. The things like swamps and bogs that are not at the center of most people's minds when you say, “Name a gorgeous landscape.” Not too many people say, “Oh, a swamp.” So in terms of the aesthetics of a landscape, swamps and bogs I think are on the edge of that. Things, too, that are small, I'm interested ... and in the minutia—that's probably another theme that crops up over and over.

Gottfried: Now your most recent book, *Walking the Wrack Line*, what is a “wrack line?”

Hurd: That's the stuff that's left behind when the high tide recedes. So it's the kind of seaweed and shells and bottles and whatever else that high tide might have brought up with it and then deposited on the shore as it receded.

Gottfried: In *Walking the Wrack Line*, there are 19, I don't know, if you call them, essays? But each one seems to center around some aspect of something you've found whether it's a bottle and a feather, worms, jellyfish, pebbles. Did that make it easier for you to organize your thoughts?

Hurd: It’s actually the way I decided to write the book, and this was unusual for me in that I made a clear decision to—that I wanted to see what would happen if I could—write a single essay on a single object that had been washed up by the tides whether those were natural objects or man-made. So each chapter does begin with an object that has been washed ashore.

What I didn’t know was going to happen was that in my trying to spin off of those objects, I found myself over and over thinking about the differences between the ways my parents saw the world. They would have been, I suppose, my strong initial influences in terms of “how do we see the world?” They were so utterly different from one another, that that question seems to crop up over and over again in those essays. It was not my intention to do anything with them at all, but finally I found that kind of interesting, so that here would be an object washed up on the shore, and I would think, now what would my father’s response to this be and what would my mother’s response? and to see so clearly how incompatible those responses might have been. And, what does that do to the child who’s standing there in the middle between the two of them?

Gottfried: Were some of these easier to write than others? Did the emotions, the idea of what you wanted to explore, come easier on some of these essays than others?

Hurd: What I want to explore I’m never sure of until I’m in the essay itself, other than here’s this object that is probably by now sitting on my desk and not back on the Jersey shore. And so almost all of those essays in draft form probably began with a very physical description of the object itself. What I’m always watching when I’m doing that is being alert to language that resonates on more than one level. So even if I’m physically describing the aperture of some snail shell, I’m hearing something else at the same time.

That's what I'm writing myself toward, I'm writing to get into where the language starts resonating with concerns that are larger than the object itself, and then that gives me my clue about where this might go. But the direction of those essays, none of those gets planned out ahead of time. That's not how I work. I have to wait and see what the language is doing, and where it's pointing me.

Gottfried: Some would call you a nature writer. I suspect you're going to cringe at that but what impresses me—and I have a background in zoology—is the detail when you begin each of these essays, where you really do understand the science and you explain what happens so well. It's beautifully written but also in very nice detail so the reader understands the dynamic of that organism. I'm thinking about, for instance, the moon snail and its interaction with clams. But how do you feel about it, if someone were to call you a nature writer?

Hurd: Well, you're right; it's a term I cringe at a little bit. I think because the reputation of a nature writer is somebody who's only writing about gorgeous sunsets and, you know, magnificent forests. I'm really to the point where—this will be the first I've said this in any public way—but I almost think we've got too much reverence in the nature writing tradition right now, and that's preventing us from investigating something else other than the beauty out there.

So I cringe only that it seems to carry certain connotations with it. People seem to pigeon-hole a nature writer, and I don't wish to be pigeon-holed like that.

I think of myself as an essayist more than anything else. So if somebody has to label me, that's the label I would rather hear, rather than nature writer.

Gottfried: You've talked about your parents and the influence they had on this particular volume. Do they influence you in your other works? Do you have other major influences in your professional career?

Hurd: Well, certainly other writers, I would say. Both my parents are deceased now, but, my mother was certainly very tuned to the aesthetics of all kinds of things and I think I've absorbed some of that. And my father—and here's the dichotomy—my father had no interest in such things, but was a real adventurous spirit and a practical problem-solver. So just in terms of my makeup and what I tend to pay attention to and how I respond to things, they're both certainly highly influential, [but] in terms of the writing itself: no. I think they probably read my books, but they weren't particularly literary people. So, the literary influences for me have been those writers who raised the bar for me, and when I first discovered them, excited me tremendously and made me want to be a writer.

Gottfried: Who would be your top two writers that had the greatest influence on you?

Hurd: The first one was Annie Dillard. In 1974, she published a book called *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, and in 1975, I rather haphazardly pulled that book off of a bookshelf in the local library. I'd never heard of her; I'd never heard of the book, though it had just won the Pulitzer.

I had a baby, at the time, who was two or three months old. I remember just thumbing through that book and realizing I could not take the chance of reading it at this point in my life because I had just had a baby and my life had changed radically enough with the birth of my daughter and I couldn't allow it to be changed radically by reading this book, which I knew it

would do. So I didn't read it then. I waited eight or nine years, I guess, and then read it and was astounded by the sentence-making in that book. That became a book that was one of those held out as something to reach for.

The other writer I would say is Loren Eiseley, who was trained as an archeologist and anthropologist, taught at Penn for many, many years and was one of the first people to take his academic knowledge and turn it into gorgeous essays for the layperson. [He] got a lot of criticism for doing that, but his essays are just wonderfully melancholic and descriptive and, again, he's a superb sentence-maker.

Those two, I would say, remain still after 30 years at the top of my list.

Gottfried: You were a faculty member and you still teach in Maine as well as at Frostburg. What are some of things you tell aspiring writers?

Hurd: Probably the first piece of advice is read, read, read. I don't know how many students when I would say that, say they don't want to be influenced by somebody else. And I would say, "Please be influenced." I mean, that notion that I want to develop my own unique voice uninfluenced by anybody else is a death knell for a writer.

I think as writers we've got to read as much as we can. We have to learn what's been done. We have to see the way people have broken the rules, and finally at some point, perhaps, to break a few ourselves, but not until we know what we're doing. So reading, reading all kinds of things—and not just in your own genre or not even in whatever the canon might be that's part of the curriculum—but I would say, read everything that

interests you and even some stuff that doesn't interest you. Figure out why.

The other thing I would say to aspiring writers is . . . figure out a way to bear those horrible questions that we ask in writing workshops, which are “So what? Who cares?” Nobody likes to hear those questions about work that has been produced, but they are invaluable questions. And they are questions that make you think about “what do I need to do with this material to transform it so that it's interesting to somebody else?”

So many writers think that their own lives are inherently interesting. The bad news is they're wrong about that. They might be interesting to friends and family, of course. If you're really trying for an audience out there who knows nothing about you, then it's your obligation as the writer to do something with that material so that it engages them.



Airstream: A Writer's Cabin by *William Poe*

I Stayed in the Darkness with You

Ginny Phalen

My heart's a heavy burden,
And it weighed my lover down.
He carried me for miles on end,
My feet dragged along the ground.

My love wears shoes of concrete,
And irons tied about its waist.
My love is by no means petite,
And it moves with little haste.

My lover has a stubborn way,
My love is hard to bear.
And yet he carried me away,
Until my heart began to care.

But he took my heart into the dark,
And then he left it there.
His heartbeat faded like a spark,
In the darkness of despair.

And in the silence, my heart wept,
To have what it once knew.
A heavy heart I've always kept,
But now it's split in two.

The darkness was so dank and cold,
There was no dawn, no day.
But my heart has always been bold,
So darkness it became.

Then in the dark, I heard a sound,
Your heart was weeping, too.
I followed your heartbeat all around,
And stayed in the dark with you.

somewhere

Joanne Van Wie

somewhere

willows take in a shallow breath

they pause in their weeping

but look away-

under golden-ripe leaves they are

stubborn still

it is always fall here

and the trees are always listening

to the leaf-litter scattering

shattering open

oh- this is your trail to tell

lately I am finding it everywhere

the same sounds the sighing wind

the shrugging shoulders

I am shaking them

under golden-ripe leaves

it is always fall

and the path is always leading to somewhere

who waits.

A Place Where Anyone Could Sit

Preston Ford

Most of the people who watched him walk in would have called the old man a bum to his face. The squat, aged person who shambled through the doors went without stopping to the bar at the end of the dining room. From where I stood clearing dishes and wiping down tables, I could see that he had a wild mop of gray hair and a full gray beard that hid most of his face. He wore a ratty fatigue jacket left over from the Vietnam War and stooped beneath a bulging canvas satchel that was swung over his right shoulder. It too was Army green and badly faded, worn through in places, and held together with swatches of duct tape.

In the budding community of Cole's Bay, a college town of moderate means that (like a geeky and introverted teenage boy) imagined itself to be noteworthy and influential, people gazed with longing at the affluent suburbs further north and wished for more of everything. There was a place, however, for people of his sort, and they were tolerated as long as they didn't stray from it. The bus station was all right, as were the downtown side streets. As long as they kept away from the pristine *Mall at Pheasant Hills* and steered well clear of the Christ-almighty *Shoppes at Willow Lake* no one bothered them. In fact, they were invisible until a worn-out shoe trod the Chem-Lawn treated grass around the newer public buildings. If his kind did whatever they did someplace else—anyplace else—the world ignored them and went on turning.

La Caf e de Rosaire was one yuppie's attempt to raise the town's level of sophistication and re-make it in the image of places people dreamed about when they watched the Travel Channel. *La Rosaire* was a pricey bistro that offered an array of

exotic sandwiches and light fare alongside American restaurant cuisine and overpriced coffee and drinks. The French-sounding name was a simple-minded sales ploy, for, beyond the neon sign above the door—a cursive logo with an erudite accent mark—the place was no more French than the college students who brewed the coffee, or the displaced grownups, like me, who had lost real jobs in the recession and now worked wherever we could trying to make ends meet.

I tossed my rag into the plastic bin that rattled with plates and silverware, then I hefted it and started toward the kitchen.

The old man had shuffled past the hostess stand and the sign that said “Please Wait to Be Seated” as if he had not seen them, or as if he had not been able to read the words. At the end of the bar, he stopped beside a plush leather stool and lowered his burden to the floor.

He did not sit down.

It was early Tuesday evening, and the dinnertime rush was getting underway. The beautiful people basking in the elegance of Rosie’s Cafeteria, their ties still knotted and their makeup freshened, looked sideways at the man, and made comments across the tables with their eyes. I ignored them all and carried my load to the back.

When I came out to the bar minutes later with a clean load of glasses to put away, the man was waiting in silence for Ashley (the drop-dead gorgeous bartender) to turn away from the cash register where she checked numbers on a roll of paper against those on the device’s touch screen.

I took my time putting away the glasses and then turned to go back to the kitchen.

When I stood up, the man had placed one hand on the bar and stuffed the other into his pocket.

He waited.

I stepped over to Ashley and tapped her on the shoulder.

“Customer.”

She grunted without turning.

I walked over to where he stood and said, “She’ll be with you in a second.”

He smiled and nodded his head.

The odor of poverty hung in the air around him, the dank smell of mold and rotting fibers clinging to him and wafting from his clothing. His eyes met mine, and I saw a trace of far-removed dignity in them. His was an acquired patience; one that came from often being forced to wait, and from sometimes waiting, and then being turned away anyhow.

Going back to the kitchen, I stopped inside the door and turned to look out at him through the circle of Plexiglas. When Ashley put down the ribbon of paper and looked over her shoulder, I caught the look of disgust that flitted across her face. She took a single step in his direction and spoke to him from where she stood.

I leaned against the doorjamb and watched.

The man said something, and Ashley reached for a dishtowel. She fiddled with it, folding and re-folding it as if buying time before making some catastrophic decision. Finally, she took one of the fancy ceramic mugs from a rack beneath the bar and placed it in front of him. She stepped out of sight and came back with a steaming carafe of Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee, a top-of-the-line imported blend, and the very best the bistro offered. As she filled the cup, the man’s demeanor brightened. He became buoyant, his spirit rising, it seemed, on the aroma of coffee flowing from the spout. Ashley filled the cup and turned away without a word.

The old guy rubbed his hands together and leaned against the bar, resting them on either side of the cup. Curling a grimy index finger through the handle, he lifted it carefully and brought it to his nose. Staring into its dark depths, he grinned and nodded his head before touching the cup to his lips.

As if I had never had a cup of coffee, or as if I had not seen people drinking coffee all my life, I watched him savor that cup sip-by-sip until it was gone. From time to time, he would glance over his shoulder and look around the place, smiling even though his teeth had been eroded by age and lack of care. It seemed he hoped someone would speak to him, call out “Hey! How ‘bout that Jamaican Blue?” No one did, of course. So, propped against the bar, he went on enjoying his coffee, relishing it to the last drop as one old commercial might have said. He even turned the cup upside down and gave it a shake when it was empty.

The kitchen door swung open, and Megan, the owner, breezed across the threshold, stopping short when she saw me leaning.

She was tall to begin with, and the heels she had on lifted her a full two inches above my height, forcing her to look down at me. Our eyes locked, then she turned and followed my line of sight out to the bar.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

Pause.

“Twenty-nine just opened up,” she said and walked away toward the storeroom. The others in the kitchen looked at me, and I turned again to look out at the man who was still smiling to himself.

I went out to table twenty-nine and gathered the dishes and cups. When I got back to the kitchen door, he was picking coins out of a large jumble in the palm of his hand and placing them side-by-side on the bar. After loading the dishes into a rack that would carry them through the wash, I hurried back to the kitchen door and resumed my post in time to see Ashley plucking the coins from the countertop as if they burned her hands.

The man had turned away.

He hefted the battered satchel and placed it on his back with the help of an old belt that was looped through the handles. As he crossed to the entrance, he nodded his head again, affirming whatever thoughts now circled inside it, and, when he reached the glass doors, he pushed the left one open and shambled out into the twilight.

Ashley chucked the jangling mass of coins into the register, hardly bothering to separate them by denomination. She slammed the drawer then went back to the bar, where she grasped the handle of the polluted mug between her thumb and forefinger. In a fluid motion, she bent down and tossed it into a wastebasket, straightened, and turned to wash her hands at the sink. She then came to the kitchen door and thrust it open with the heel of her hand, sauntering past me without a word.

I went out to the bar and pulled the wastebasket from its cubbyhole. The mug rested amid damp paper towels, citrus peels, and plastic stirrers.

I looked at it.

What germ did she think would survive the blistering, bleach-laden jets of water and detergent waiting in the kitchen's industrial dishwasher? And who the hell knew what Petri-dish horrors were crawling inside these other pretentious yokels—these would-be sophisticates stupid enough to pay twelve dollars for a bowl of soup? Who knew where their mouths had been?

I reached in and grabbed the mug by its handle. Standing, I slid the basket back into place and turned to see Ashley and Megan watching me from the kitchen door.

"It's okay," Megan said, "leave it there."

Wordless, I walked to the door and maneuvered past the two of them. I took the mug to a wash rack and placed it in with a half-dozen others. Then I put my hand on the START

button and held it down. There was a pinprick of satisfaction when the belt lurched forward, carrying dishes, utensils, and coffee mugs into the scalding hurricane that rose up and lashed the machine's interior.

I knew suddenly that I would not be able to stomach this place or these people for one more day. A place where anyone could sit down and relax sounded like the far side of heaven compared to here, where, in order to feel superior, one only had to belong to that group of people whose lives were not yet shorn of their minuscule frills. The most valuable things I still owned were inside of me, and looking out over the precipice of my life, I didn't see room to fall much farther than I had already. Without a word, I took off my cap, tossed it into the nearest trashcan, and walked out the back door.



Binding Love by *Diane Payne*



Underwater Shopping *by Diane Payne*

It is okay to not comment

Martin Harrell

It is okay to not comment
Society will still accept you
(even more so actually.)
A room without windows is still a room.
Pry yourself away from your crutches.
Even if they were broken
You would still attach yourself
To the pieces,
Draining every emotion.
Leech,
Draining
Every
Emotion.
On crutches ten feet tall
Confined to your windowless room
Draining
Every
Emotion.
Drain every single emotion
And sense of being.
Guilty sidwalks
Accomplices to your wretched steps
Unstable, filthy, molding.

Leaping obstacle of fear

Martin Harrell

Leaping obstacle of fear and
Outrunning anxieties competing
In their race for control.
The air courses through my body,
A hallucinogenic gas that created
This illusion of life.
Breathing is a side effect that
Aids in the foolery.
Be fooled not!
From here it is only downward;
When the smile appears that is
When the lie begins.
I smile upward towards the sky,
As degrading and greedy as can be.
Suddenly boisterous waves of
Thunder and murderous gashes of lightning appear
Blocking the sun with black and purple
Barricades.
My poison is contagious.
It is making the sky ill.
I scream as loudly as possible at the sky
Agony and frustration rush outward;
I have poisoned the sky.

These great natural features

Martin Harrell

These great natural features
Warmth, sunlight, trees, sky, ocean
Surround me.
They try to relate and take me in,
Truth is I am poisonous to them.
Yet, they still try.
I am a
Heavy
Iron
Ball
Weighing me down, imprinting and
Destroying the earth.
How selfish to take it for granted;
It allows me to sleep here
Supporting me with its stability.
The sun laughs in my face,
Breathing its hot breath;
It lingers, pains, and stains my skin with
Its fiery stingers.
Nevertheless,
Cold and porous am I, secluded.
It takes a while but eventually
Indifference arises.
I do not feel anything at this point.
I am anchored helplessly
Roaming the depths and innards
Of my mind.

- I wrote words -

Darren W. Longley

after supper...
when dishes were done
when sun's fire cooled
to shadows and
you sang your
body sang I wrote
words to the melody
of your breathing

your reflection in
stereo glass naked
me watching you naked
on your back the
hassock and we naked
me watching...
your body danced
with fire's reflection

and light couldn't
touch you the sun
an ember above you
sang sang you sang
your body sang and
I wrote words to
your melody



Ocean City, Maryland by *Paul Toscano*



Alone by Paul Toscano

we buried you. I remember—

Meg Eden

we buried you. I remember—

I was on the swing, surrounded by stuffed animal mourners, and behind, Mother sobbed as Dad lowered your corpse into the ground. But you have come back. Your body, a grizzly Tim Burton fragmentation skeleton with half-decayed patches of fur, and your red collar, dirtied but still intact. It did not bother any of us. we were too desperate for you. you had your same grin, enhanced canines. we accepted you, petted the naked yellowed ribs, I held your body to my body. you breathed, cold—the stuffed animals could not suffice this.

but you were fragile, reluctant, you no longer threw your kamikaze body through the electric fence, expecting to be retrieved. no, you had learned better than this. your movements were slow...

and hesitant...

like your prevailing arthritis, like an old woman, not a bitch, nor a dignified rebel like yourself. But we kept our traditions: Mom fed you from a bowl of milk, which dripped down your jaw like drool, from between your rib cavities, a pool of white on the linoleum tile.

Dad unwrapped rolos, each one by one, threw them to your mouth but you did not catch. this is not how your story is supposed to end. no, this was not God's intention. His intention was for you to return, and for me to learn how to walk again.

I have never gotten an e-harmony account

Meg Eden

I have never gotten an e-harmony account
because I told myself I wasn't that desperate,
that I was a woman, I could do my own
thing until a man came out of nowhere, on a horse
like the old spice man, man.
and now here I am, single,
writing bad love poems.

I've considered becoming amish so I can use
the amish dating site, so I can ride
a horse and wear bonnets and there are no
strip clubs in middle-of-nowhere, Pennsylvania. I can know
I will be the only one he gets.

I made an advertisement for the penny saver,
craig's list, ebay, the grocery store bulletin board.

It reads:

wanted. single Christian man for potential relationship.
Asians preferred. must be able to tolerate
rants and crying. is not interested in extended periods
of distance, unlike her ex.
interested candidates should respond via email.

I did not post it anywhere, except this poem,
which perhaps he will find, perhaps he will
find crazy writer women sexually
attractive, and it will be destiny, it will be
sleeping beauty, the woman
who slowly emerges.

Miami, Untelevised

David Robinson

In this Miami there are no Lamborghinis.

A stooped woman
bags groceries in Cuban at Publix.
She glances at an old tin watch:
I should be retired by now.

Outside, beyond the greenish fluorescence,
the carcinogenic sun
erodes crumbling pink stucco
with its relentlessly beating waves.

Palms propped in walkers along Unity Boulevard,
braced against the next storm.
Their fronds hang like
the bristly moustaches
of dictators.
(They, too, are foreigners here.)

The City that Narcissus Built:
Cocaine towers
gaze upon the waters of Biscayne Bay,
see only their own reflection.

Beneath their foundation lies
the muck of the Everglades,
the amphibian slither of the river,
the incessant sawing of the sawgrass.

Contributor Notes

JUDY ANGELHEART is rarely at a loss for words, but she has run out of things to say about herself. She loves to write, do Angel Art and readings, take photos, and post to her blog (www.whisperofangels.wordpress.com), where the angels are given their space to speak. She invites you to visit and enjoy their (collective) words.

MEG EDEN has been published in various magazines and anthologies, including *The Claremont Review*, *The Science Creative Quarterly*, *The Rune*, and *Crucible*. She has won various writing awards, including Columbia Scholastic Press Association's Gold Circle Award CM, Scholastic Writing and Arts' Gold Key Award, and Blue Mountain Arts' Poetry Contest. She is currently working with a literary agent with the hopes of publishing novel works.

PRESTON FORD is an adjunct faculty member and is currently teaching writing at the Prince Frederick Campus and the Waldorf Center for Higher Education.

BRAD GOTTFRIED is the president of the College of Southern Maryland. He also hosts the weekly radio program, "Southern Maryland Perspectives," a half-hour talk show that features local issues and guests.

MARTIN HARRELL has been writing off and on since 2002 and plans on writing more. Nature, the way people react to situations, and human nature, in general, inspire him.

RACHEL HEINHORST is a graduate student—attending Goddard College in Vermont for an MFA in creative writing—an instructor for CSM, and a mother of three super intelligent children who are currently writing the world.

ROBIN KARIS lives in Maryland and enjoys photography and writing. She also enjoys working on her family tree, in the hopes that she'll find a relative who lives in a land far, far away, who maybe has a castle she can visit.

DARREN W. LONGLEY is being published in *Connections* for the first time.

JOANY NAZDIN is a registered nurse who is presently living in St. Mary's County.

DIANE PAYNE is a photography student at CSM. She takes photos for CSM and for her own freelance work, Rising Star Photos. This is her first submission to *Connections*. She has studied photography for about four years under the instruction of George Bedell, Ben Lourie, and Valerie Nyce. Diane says that it's amazing as a photographer, how many times she has pushed the shutter button. With each click, she tries to catch life's memorable moments. She would like to thank her family, friends, and instructors for helping her pursue her career; they give her the strength and courage to follow her dream.

MARIA A. PERRY was born in Los Angeles, California. She is a first-generation American and has served her country proudly. She has lived most of her life in Yuma, Arizona, and loves the desert! She is completing her associate's degree through CSM and wants to be a writer.

GINNY PHALEN is currently a student at Chopticon High School and is taking English classes at CSM.

WILLIAM POE is a Maryland home improvement contractor and part-time oral historian for Calvert County. In 2009, he was awarded the Calvert County Public Education Award for his book, *African-Americans of Calvert County*. He is the creator of "Voices of Calvert County," a local cable program which shares the stories of local African-Americans. He also directed and produced the documentary film, *The Life and Death of Sharecropper Enoch Tyler*. He has published essays, poetry, and photographs in local magazines and periodicals.

DAVID ROBINSON teaches English at CSM. He holds an MFA in creative writing from Colorado State University. His fiction has appeared in such publications as *Per Contra*, *Aethlon*, and *Inkwell*.

JULIETTE SEYMOUR is a young aspiring photojournalist. She is 19 years old and lives in Calvert County. Photography became a fairly recent obsession of hers during her junior and senior years of high school. She is currently working towards her AA in Journalism. Afterwards, she intends to take some time off school to do volunteer work in other countries. From there, she supposes that she'll just see where the world takes her.

PAUL TOSCANO has been on the staff of CSM since 1980. As a certified professional counselor, he looks for the human element and emotion in his photography. His photographs have been published in *Southern Maryland: This is Living, Agora*, and previous editions of *Connections*.

JOANNE VAN WIE is a homeschooler and mother of seven children living in Mechanicsville, Maryland.

JOYCE VINCENT is a CSM student due to graduate May 2011 with an AA degree in Media Studies, Journalism, and Speech Communications. She is a mother of four children (ages 19, 21, 22, and 23) and has two granddaughters (ages one and three). She lives in Waldorf with her fiancé, Steve McGee, and her one-year-old German Shepherd, Lexi.

CHRISTOPHER WILKINS is a faculty member teaching English and communication at CSM, an Episcopal priest, and wears hats.

