




COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Connections

FALL 2023
LITERARY MAGAZINE



SPECIAL FEATURE
IN THIS ISSUE
EARLY COLLEGE
PROGRAM STUDENT
SHOWCASE

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Connections

COLLEGE of SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Fall 2023 Literary Magazine

volume 31 number 1



Haus, Mona Weber

Connections

*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 website
for submission guidelines at:*

www.csmd.edu/Connections

*The Connections Literary Series is sponsored by
CSM's Department of English, Communication, and Languages,
Department of Arts, Humanities, Social Science, and Education,
and, in part, by the Arts Council of Calvert County,
Charles County Arts Alliance, St. Mary's County Arts Council,
and Maryland State Arts Council.*



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Oh Death, Where is Your Sting?

Marie-Pearl Opoku

It was in my moment of affliction that I became aware of the societal hold on my emotions. This awareness helped shape my character.

Over the summer, my grandfather in Kumasi, Ghana, passed due to sickness. I had never met him nor seen him before. There were a few times that we spoke on the phone in Fante, but we never carried a real conversation past “*ɔtse den?* [how are you]” and “*bɔkɔɔ*, [fine].” As a result, I never connected to him, and therefore, I had great trouble grieving. I was sad, but not sad because my grandfather had died; rather, I was upset at the fact that my mother’s father had died. I sympathized with my mom, so it ruffled me in a way. Still, this troubled my family. They became irritated that I carried on with life instead of weeping and mourning alongside them. Some would emphasize the fact that he was my grandfather and accuse me of betraying my maternal side of the family. They told me that if it had been my paternal grandmother who had passed, I would have been traumatized.

Consequently, I felt guilty. For months, I constantly tried to force myself into feeling sorrowful. There were many times when I would drop on my knees, look up, and beg my grandfather to forgive me for not missing him. I had convinced myself his God-given title of “grandfather,” was owed tears and heartache from me. All this worsened when friends and other family members would try to comfort me for the sorrow that I lacked.

When my mom asked me to write a poem about how much I missed my grandfather, I felt like a fraud. I felt as though I was lying to the whole world because I did not want everyone to see me as the unfeeling monster I saw myself as. When I did

grieve, I was grieving the fact that I was doing a disservice to my family for not mourning the traditional way and dishonoring my grandfather's life by lying to people about my emotions. It was a very confusing set of months. Then I realized something:

In the play, "Fences" by August Wilson (Penguin, NY, 1986), Cory Maxson deals with a similar thing. His father, Troy, was abusive, so when he dies, Cory does not want to attend his funeral. Unfortunately, Cory’s mother, Rose, finds this to be very inappropriate. Even though Rose witnessed Troy’s abuse towards her son, she demands that Cory show respect to his father. Hence, Cory tries to explain himself to Rose when he says "Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighed on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore... I'm just saying I've got to find a way to get rid of that shadow, Mama" (2.5.81). Still, Rose insists that since Troy held the title of Cory’s father, Troy was deserving of Cory’s attendance regardless of his emotional, verbal, and physical abuse. When I realized the connection between Cory Maxson and myself, it changed my whole perspective between me, society, and death.

As I observed the world around me, I became aware of a pattern in people’s behavior toward death: As a society, we put on an unauthentic attitude toward the deceased. No matter what they did or did not do, no matter who the person was, we are all to act the same: bawl our eyes out, say the person was so close and that they will be greatly missed, and grieve for weeks. Society dismisses the complexity of a person once they are gone. It is unwelcomed to acknowledge the fact that the person meant something different to everyone. If the person who died was well liked or given a favorable title, society forbids people from addressing the negative aspects of the deceased. Society also chastises and invalidates the experiences and emotions of people who do not respond to a person’s death the way they are expected to.

Continued on next page

But as for me, I'll take the chastisement from society over diluting my life experiences just to make peace. Because there is no peace within me when I join in and invalidate myself along with society. The day I made this bittersweet decision is the day I got up from my begging knees, brushed the dust off my pants, and went about my day.

Understanding this helped shape who I am today in that I now take full responsibility for my emotions and actions rather than behaving a certain way to fit in. Instead of living and feeling in what societal norms deem acceptable, I've learned how to cope with my emotions to grasp a better hold of myself. I no longer feel uncomfortable when mentioning my grandfather's death, and I have abandoned the idea that I betrayed my family. I have taken back the power to choose how I grieve or not grieve at all.



Butterfly Kisses, *Lena Hancock*

Belly Wisdom

Jennifer Polhemus

To all those who live close
Who creep or crawl or slither
Belly to the earth
The serpents and the ants the spiders
Full of dust or mud or snow
I give thanks

With gratitude I turn to the West
Where mamma stands in her apron
Hand to her belly
Dinner and stories and womb
Bearer of children and morals and fruit pies
She brings wisdom

To all those who die far away
Who march or travel or swim
In the belly of the whale
The mystics and the gypsies and the soldiers
Full of light or lust or love
I give thanks

With a sacred heart I bow my head
To the Women of the Wheel
Bellies full of emptiness
Brimming and aching and soft
Tellers of truths and loss and abundance
She brings wisdom

To all those who have transcended into Awareness
who sit or breathe or question
The answers the air and the pillows
Eternity in their bellies
Full of mastery and mystery and magic
I give thanks



Fishin', *Michelle Brosco Christian*

Chaotic Middle Thoughts

Jadyn Riggs

I'm the favorite child.
Or so they say.
I have it together.
Or so they think.
I know no struggle.
Or so they know.
I am the middle child.
I am the middleman.
I am the outcast that is unwillingly brought in.
Into decision.
Into problem.
Into argument.
I am to be favorite.
I am to be perfection.
I am to be without flaw.
I must have it together.
I must show no break.
I must be whole.
I cannot know struggle.
I cannot seek help.
I cannot know pain.
As the middle I shall be without struggle, I will be together, I
am the favorite.
As the middle I know nothing of myself.
As the middle...
I am lost.

Sensations of Tasting the Sounds

Emma Sepulveda

Dear Music,

From the window of the car,

With the radio and wind so far,

I felt free with your melody,

And fell in love with you instantly

Your rhythm and harmony,

It can change my mood in an instant,

And relate to what I thought no one knew,

As I grew, I learned more about you

Different genres with true meanings,

Behind the screen, an emotion that's gleaming,

A theory that only one will see,

What is meant to be

Your joyful and sorrowful tunes,

Help me escape from this world of dunes,

The words that I hear,

It can take me away deep into my sphere

A good song fills me with emotion,

It reminds me that everything's going to be okay.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Early College Program Student Showcase

Calvert County's Early College students are not just dedicated to beginning their college careers with nothing but success and a bright future in mind, but it turns out they are talented writers, too!

Dual Enrollment and Early College programs at CSM are an exciting opportunity for Southern Maryland high school students to take college-level classes and earn college credit while in high school. Learn more at www.csmd.edu/EarlyCollege.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE
Early College Program Student Showcase

Stove Made of Bones

Kathleen Baldwin

Crunch, crunch, crunch
Hungry, munch, munch
I think it's time for lunch
Or maybe brunch?
Munch, munch, munch
I'm hungry for some
Something that satisfies
The hunger deep within
The thing that grumbles
Sounding like a room full of people
The crowd dispersed
The silence that echos
Bringing forth the monster within
The one that scares
The one that worries
The one that fears
The thing that grumbles within
Munch, munch, munch
Tastes wet, cold, slimy
The chills that wave across the skin
What is it
Peeling back the skin to feed the desire
Taking, pulling, grabbing, ripping
It stains the fingers to the bone
Tick
Oh! Time For Lunch

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Early College Program Student Showcase

Six Going on Sixty

Markala Pharr

"When was the first time you realized you were black?"

"When I was 6," I responded.

6, the age when I should've been playing with dolls and obsessing over cartoons.

6, when I was in the second half of kindergarten.

6, when I should have been just a kid.

At 6, I was educating my classmates on things their parents should be teaching them:

"Please don't put your hands in my hair without asking — it's mean."

"Please don't make fun of my name — it's mean."

"Please don't make fun of my accent — it's mean."

At 6, when everything was mean ... why was it mean?

At 6, when I didn't even understand — why does this hurt?

At 6, although not fully understanding what was going on, I still understood I needed to protect myself.

At 6, when my childhood experience was cut short.
Wondering, why is it my job to tell them right from wrong?

Thinking, why am I taking away from my childhood to better yours?

Why, why ... why?

"When was the first time you realized you were black?"

When did I ever get the chance to not realize that?

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Early College Program Student Showcase

Luna

Alex Kreutzer

There was a time when a little girl had a dream, a dream to have a dog of her own. She grew up around dogs, two Shelties constantly being around her, since she could have memories. So, the little girl dreamed and wished for a dog of her own, a fluffy pet she could hug when she was sad, a friend that would always be there for her, even if she had to move again and leave her human friends behind. Her family moved a lot; the Navy does that to families—it takes away stability, makes growing up lonely. The little girl hated being lonely, so she wanted a friend.

The little girl was about to turn five years old when she and her family drove into DC. The ride is short for her, only an hour, full of blurred brown and later white as snow began to fall. She gazed in wonder out the window. Watching as the small snowflakes landed on the ground, dissolving into water, her breath fogged up the window, blocking her view as the car slowed in front of a house. The family of four exited the car, walking towards the front door of a house full of dogs. The little girl felt a smile split her face as she saw all the dogs at the fence; she thought they looked like her dogs.

The family was let into the house smothering the young girl with the smell of wet dog and stale curtains. The old woman smiled gently as she spoke with the girl's mother, leading them to a back door. The family nudged the little girl through first, immediately spotting the puppies running around in a pen. She

giggled as she went towards the metal fencing, leaning over to pet the fluffy dogs, laughing as they licked her hand. There were three of them; two looked similar with white, grey, and black markings. One of them had two different eye colors, blue and brown. The third one was black, brown, and white. She smiled as she looked back at her family, who smiled back at her. She was happy, but still confused as to why they were there.

The little girl's mother looked at her, pointing to the little puppy with two different eyes: "That one's yours," she said and gently nudged the little girl forward, encouraging her to pick her up to take her inside. The little girl did not know how to react; she just went to the puppy, picked her up, all in a daze. She was sitting on the couch, the puppy in her lap, and she looked at the little thing. The puppy was gazing at her, lying on her lap, head down on her paws. The little girl cried, heaved sobs as she looked at the puppy, she smiled wide as she cried. Her dream came true, and she knew in that moment she would love and cherish the little puppy in her lap.

When her family asked what she would name her, she knew who it was, "Snowflake." She did not know a name better than that. The family laughed, happy that the little girl got her friend, the one she had been begging for so long to have. They went home that day, the two-eyed puppy in tow, the little girl happy to ride home with her in her lap. She held the puppy in her lap, looking out the window and muttering what she saw to her friend the whole way home.

The little girl cherished her friendship; she played dress up with Snowflake, always made sure to give her presents on her

Continued on next page

birthday and for Christmas, and she took her with her whenever she could. Snowflake was everything to the little girl; no matter where she moved, the puppy was there. Even when the Shelties she grew up with were no longer there, Snowflake stayed. The little girl could no longer imagine a world without her; then, there came a time when she had to.

The little girl, now 17, remembers those times. She looks back to the time she had with her puppy with a bittersweet shadow cast upon them. She still cries sometimes, when she is unable to block out the tough times, and sometimes, it is still hard to remember the good ones. So, she cries hard, curled up on the floor, even four years later. She mourns for a friend that was always there, that never judged her or brought her down.

The girl blinks back to the present, a nudge from her side; scaring her out of her sadness. She looks down beside her, to the small eyes of the little furry friend next to her, who is sitting, black and white fur every-which-way like a lion's mane, innocent brown eyes staring at her. Luna, the name she chose with so much thought, the name of the friend looking at her now, stands, nudging the girl again and licking her face and the salty tears still drying there. The girl laughs, tears still slipping out, her hands grasping the long black fur of Luna's back, and she kisses the top of her head. Luna licks her again, and the girl pushes her head away, smiling at the dog. She pets her head, scratching behind her ear.

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Flower of the Island, *Ava Wilson*

This flower is a frangipani, native to Puerto Rico and surrounding areas. This photo specially was taken in Secret Harbor in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Frangipani flowers are known for their white color with bright yellow center and a strong fragrance.

CONNECTIONS SPECIAL FEATURE

Early College Program Student Showcase

She was Tired

Rylee Becraft

Every day she woke up and repeated her days the same
She went to school in the morning
While she worked away every given night she had
With no room for anything else in her schedule
She was tired

She exhausted herself just to make minimum wage
Just to ensure that her bills would get paid
To lose all of her teen years
For a job that barely gave her what she needed
She was tired

Watching all of her friends out having fun
While she dealt with customers until the day was done
She came home to an empty house
Finally happy to lie down
She was tired

The first job wasn't enough
She needed more money
So she got another job
Working seven days a week just to provide for what she needed
She was tired

When she finally got a day off
They complained, told her it was unacceptable
For once though, she got to breathe
She went out to forget her problems
But still, she was tired.

Almost the Blue Moon

Kate Lassman

For days I anticipated going to see
the decades-rare blue supermoon
shine its extra-bright enchantment
over the sleep-filled world.
We ventured out, my husband and I,
but found cloud cover so deep and thick
that streetlights outshone the moon.
Back inside we went.

“Let’s try again tomorrow,” he said,
and so we did. The moon rose then
in clearer skies, almost blue, almost full,
emerging through a tree line gap
low near the horizon.
Round and brilliant it shone,
close enough to full to be photogenic,
close enough to blue to enchant.

80 steps

Kimberly Donnelly

Climbing up 80 steps
Tube hanging over shoulder
GenX heart pounding
Teenage son looking back
Grab a few breaths on the platform
Toss tube into tray
And slide away
For 90 seconds
Free to shriek
With delight, joy, freedom
And perhaps a teensy bit of fear
Utterly out of control
Until splashing out of
The water slide tube
Bliss
I’m going again; are you coming?

A Grave Robber's Lament

E.M. Waldow

A digging soul knows not the path its spade shall plumb. Life, that vital spirit, sinks unseeing along a nether course unknown, traversing into darkness and darkness more, blindly groping for passages ahead, and scooping away those of its own. And we, but vessels of this Lively Thing, born upon surface Earth and treaders of soil—We of the Above, how should it be possible for us to know that of the Below? What human might suppose truthfully on those hidden things, those catacombs that crawl through cavernous maws, those creeping creatures who play therein, those slithering secrets that have been forced to fossilize, and those gulfs deeper still, not worth damning a healthy mind to name—What person knows these things? Which breed of light can illumine the unilluminable?

O, dear reader, it is the Night that thrives underneath, immortal and profound! Have faith in this fact; none can attest to it better than myself...

At which point should I begin my tale; what pleasant way is there for me to tell you about my doings? I'm sure few would accept the truth that I acted out of necessity. Indeed, I had suffered destitution, surviving hour by hour, minute by minute, and sustaining myself largely through the insufficient alms of others. Yet saying this alone had inspired me toward my blasphemous course would be incorrect: no doubt, poverty was a catalyst, eventually giving me a need to steal; but why I came to occupy and fulfill myself in this way, I fear I must be blunt—I liked it.

How shameful, criminally corrupt! My covetous spirit wasn't one to be satisfied taking from the living and alive alone. Having by chance discovered the ease of merely digging for my fortune, a lust for wealth took me down ways none ought to tread,

twisting and winding ways that ended always with piles of bones. And yet how splendid was it all! Never was another activity so enlightening, so enjoyable—relaxing: Dirt and rot coated my body like a balm; my tools had the character of godly lightning bolts; the direction my body was fain to explore seemed to be down and always down. It didn't take long for my simple desire for fiscal security to vanish. I tasted blood and was made all the more hungry; an addiction to macabre robbery arrested me. My spade, a most loyal tool, quickly forgot what it meant to dig wholesome earth.

Beneath midnight clouds, I would lose myself: Making a selection of my cemetery quarry, I would tramp therein with all the hauteur of assured success. That which existed in me as humane or holy was lost in an avarice ocean; deftly did I burglarize those homes for the infinitely asleep, taking from they who see all but do naught. No two graves were the same, but all contained pleasantries brought from life. I was suddenly poor no longer; by rattling just a few skeletons, I could shake hands with the high aristocracy, laughing boldly alongside the magnificent—chuckling in my heart, too, knowing that the hand of mine they held was more familiar with the touch of conquering worms than breathing skin.

Yes, I was prosperous beyond measure; undoubtedly, there was never another man as capable as myself in this wretched work. If only you could have been there to see my execution, the sheer caution and skill with which I made my millions—I went undiscovered throughout my whole career! My eyes would stalk a potential grave for hours, days before an exhuming, just to know for certain how it should look when I was finished with it. Any spot that saw my besetting presence was left, in the end, exactly how it was found: not a rock was kept displaced, nor mound of dirt permitted to idle. And having shoveled my way to a coffin, even, I would exhibit supreme delicacy prying its lid—a

Continued on next page

suspicious soul would have to inspect its contents to know the box was tampered with at all! And the dead inside, if they were simply sleeping, would never have awoken. I took from their fingers and pockets and heads their gold and jewels as a surgeon removes the malformation.

O I could go on, relishing with majesty in my past exploits, recalling fondly my illimitable riches thus attained; yet to what purpose? Has not Lady Fortune, cruel mistress, brought me to the pass I toil in now—Misery and Misery unmatched! Woe! From the grand summit of Power, I came falling deep, deeper than the Poorness with which I was originally cursed, and deeper still with every passing moment.

Lo, here it began, and there I was, spending in my usual way the gloom of a gelid winter's eve, beating away the snow above my choice prey. This particular cemetery (I exclude naming it) was allotted to some of the wealthiest folk to have ever lived, and the casket I hoped to unearth belonged to no less a personage: Their tombstone was hewn from platinum, their site was decorated with myriad statues of saints and angels, and, even in the bitter cold, there thrived all around a stupendous array of perennial plants. I had half a mind not to disturb such a picturesque scene; still, if there existed this much above, then I could only imagine the splendor of what might be below. And so, I proceeded forthwith, tossing down my lantern, hacking away that icy surface, and fixing my claws into Earth.

The soil was made rigid on account of the freeze, but it was little challenge to overcome. My excitement had been positively boiling: I tore away the grass like a machine, viciously attacking the soil thereafter—my shovel had all the tenacity of a hound. Verily, as I went farther in, I began to slaver and shiver, riled mad in my flurry of thoughts; this grave, I quickly supposed, would be my most profitable yet. Across my mind's face flashed glorious diamonds, pearly rings inlaid with emerald, silken raiment gilded with gold dust; most of all, however, I saw myself finally attain

an insuperable throne, sitting soundly at the very top of the world, brought there by my pile of endless charnel treasure.

It was while exalting thus that I failed to perceive my folly: Soon enough, having burrowed many feet down, my light could no longer reach me, and began to die away. Continuing for some time more, though, I only just realized what was happening, looking toward the sky for but a moment as I watched fade the last orange glow. Seized by a sudden bout of panic, I flung my spade over to the surface and made every attempt to scramble out after it. I dug my hands into the soil, trying to scale the dirt and stony walls, but all to no use—I had gone too deep. Exhaustion, coupled with the onset of a more biting chill, rendered vain my striving; the most I could do was yelp piteously beneath the howling nighttime gales, crying to ears much too far away.

Eventually, though, as gnarling horror usurped my every faculty, I made a final struggle. Noticing, with the aid of scant moonlight, just the barest piece of my shovel's handle resting overhead, and realizing that it might be my salvation that I threw away, I geared myself to bound upward, jumping for it over and over again.

With a good leap, my fingers would come within mere inches of it. "Come on now!" ran my thoughts; "Just a little... higher... more."

Finally, after what seemed an eternity of bouncing, the spade came tumbling down—Alas! but for that which came falling after it, I should have escaped! The shovel, cascading into the hole, brought with it a typhoon of snow and soil, pouring from where I had so carelessly thrown it during my ravenous digging. And, worse still, among those sedimentary foes, were bits and pieces of jewels and gems! Had I only taken a moment to get my light into the pit, I would have seen that the grave itself was forged in riches! As it was, I was buried in an instant, suffocated and choked by magnitudes of rocks, ice, mud, clay—and wealth. I wasn't even spared a final scream.



The Getaway, Craig Powell

Dreams

Natalie A. Filbey

A dark-haired girl sits at a desk in a cramped, musty-smelling classroom, only-half listening to what is supposed to be a mathematics lecture. The girl is prone to daydreaming, but today, surprisingly, it is not her vivid imagination that distracts her. It is the sight of a drab-looking moth fluttering against the windowpane, blindly drawn to the world on the other side of the glass. The creature's peril goes unnoticed by the rows of pupils trained on the scribbles meandering across the blackboard, but to the girl, the small whisper of dull brown wings against the glass is a piercing cry for freedom.

She does not fully comprehend what she is doing until she herself is standing before the window, the hollow tap of her flats on the unfeeling wood floor the only noise in the room as the lecture stops abruptly. She manages to undo the window latch without difficulty, and, quite aware of the two dozen eyes burning on her back, hoists the pane of glass a half-inch above the sill. The moth dances away from the sudden draft of air that sweeps into the classroom, but then, sensing where it comes from, flies clumsily through the small gap. The girl lingers by the window as the moth navigates around the neglected lamppost standing sentry on the street corner, already dreaming about the places it could be going now that it has its freedom, the chance to meet the world on the other side of the glass.

“Ethel.”

The name is spoken so sternly that she hardly recognizes it as her own.

“You will spend all of this afternoon in detention for lecture disruption.”

The girl returns to her desk obediently.

Continued on next page

Hildegard Bowen has never given much weight to dreams. Prone to nightmares as a child, her sole comfort was derived from repeating to herself over and over that it was just a dream, just a dream, just a dream. But now the place, and the girl, that occupies her sleeping mind is anything but a dream. She has been asking for weeks, months, now, about the place she is brought to every night, describing it to anyone who will listen, and receiving only blank stares in return. The place is imaginary, it would seem. But if it is, why does it appear so real in her mind? The church steeple. The aged, heartless cobblestone beneath her feet. The decrepit lamppost, never lit. And the intersection of two streets, Wormwood and Barnaby. Yet when she recites those details to even the most knowledgeable city guides, those who claim to know each alleyway and sidestreet with the intimacy that one knows the creases on a loved one's face, they shake their heads. No such place. No two streets. Eventually, Hildegard Bowen stops asking. But the place does not leave her.

And, neither does the girl.

It is a drizzly, gray morning, bleak as the smog that rests like a suffocating blanket over the city. Hildegard is walking alone, as she does when she needs time to clear her head. It is too early in the day for anyone to wonder why a woman is out on her own, and for that, Hildegard is grateful.

She rounds a familiar corner, pacing down a stretch of muddy street that her boots have trod at least a thousand times. Occasionally, she thinks about changing her route, but on the mornings when her mind is swirling, having a familiar walking path gives her one less thing to devote conscious thought to.

Slouched against the side of a dilapidated building not three paces away from her is a figure, hair and beard overgrown, too—large coat draped around his gaunt frame. She almost does not see the man, there are so many like him in this part of the city that, to

her regret, they have simply become part of the scenery. As she passes him, his green-gray eyes flick upwards from the folds of his coat, catching hers briefly.

And that is when she sees it.

On his chest, just beneath his collarbone, the image of a moth tattooed into his papery skin.

The moth from her dream.

Hildegard stoops to the man's level, unconsciously allowing the hem of her skirt to drag through the grime. Her request is simple, yet to the point.

"Can you take me to the corner of Wormwood and Barnaby?"

The man gazes at her warily, asking with his haunting eyes what she will pay. Her own response, "anything."

He rights himself, extending his legs to reveal ruddy trousers and a pair of worn-through shoes in addition to his oversized coat. When he looks at her this time, his eyes ask why. She answers honestly.

"I'm looking for Etheldreda Hopkins."

When she sees the features on his face rearrange to form yet another question, she adds: "Please." The strain of desperation in her voice persuades the man, who, after stealing a glance at the road behind them, staggers across the street. Hildegard follows, and wonders briefly whether it is the man who is leading her to whatever mysterious place is to be found at the corner of Wormwood and Barnaby, or the dreams. Or, perhaps it is both.



Untitled, *Nature's Satellite Dish*

“ Me ”

Paul Toscano

“Let go and let God,”
my father often said.
“There but for the grace of God go I,”
my mother often said.
I have ridden on Wooden Escalators
in grand department stores.
I have ridden streetcars in DC
and subways in NYC.
I have seen many ride
their High Horses.
I have watched many fall
from their Ivory Towers.
I confessed my sins
to the sinful.
I sought forgiveness
from the unforgivable.
I gazed upon the moon and stars
and said, “There must be a God.”
I thought about pain and suffering
and said, “How can there be a God?”
I still believe in Angels.
I have seen Words hurt
more than Sticks and Stones.
I took cover in nuclear bomb drills.
I was a Boy Scout.
I was not Prepared.
I tossed pennies against school walls.
I played Toppies and Knock-Downs.
I watched my sister and her friends

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play Double Dutch on sidewalks.
I called Dibs.
I rode Shotgun.
I sold packs of seeds door to door.
I had a Lionel train set.
I like the B-side.
I like Holden Caulfield.
I have been invisible
among friends.
I was in a Black Room
with White Curtains
for two weeks
with the measles.
I had many Close Calls.
I stepped on too many sidewalk cracks.
I received a letter
from President Richard Nixon.
It started with "Greetings."
I still think of Drill Sergeant Rife
but I feared Sister Marie Frances more.
I was taught to follow my Informed Conscience.
I was taught about the Great Depression.
I witnessed the Great Hypocrisy.
I learned the opposite of Love is Indifference.
I feared going to the Poor House.
I had Pen Pals.
I wore Dog Tags.
I remember the Mess Hall
and the Church Hall
and Huntz Hall.
I have counted my Blessings
but lost count of my Sins.
I got a ticket in Denmark, South Carolina

for walking
on the wrong side of the road.
I took the Midnight Train
to Charlotte in '66.
I have seen Manhattan's Henge.
I have walked Brooklyn's Bridge.
I have taken the subway
to Coney Island.
I have seen the Parade of Mermaids.
I saw a surfer die on a beach.
I watched his father beat the sand
as he cried loudly among onlookers.
I drank too many glasses of beer
but never had one
with my father.
My quietness has troubled many.
I wish the Dodgers never left Brooklyn.
Omerta is Dead.
I saw Justice Undone.
I have seen the Just dismissed
and the Unjust retained.
I have seen the Indifference of the Rich
and the Compassion of the Poor.
I have seen neighbors keep up
with the Joneses.
I watched the Joneses
fall into despair.
I have seen doors close
and windows remain unopened.
I have cried many tears.
I have prayed many prayers.
My Novenas were not heard
but God works in mysterious ways

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so maybe they were.
I wish I had taken more risks.
There is no Sequel.
I don't believe in Purgatory
but I hope there is a Heaven.
Let go and let God.

Veteran Shadows

MSG Phillip Ball Jr.

As a middle-aged combat veteran,
I was doing my daily mindful walking
And noticed that I had two shadows.
While I was walking in my neighborhood,
One shadow was walking in front me.
A second shadow was walking on my right side.
Mindful walking helps me improve myself,
Feeling my body and having mindfulness awareness.
First, I recognized why I had two shadows.
Second, while keeping my mind active with my puzzles,
I stopped and paid closer attention to my neighborhood.
Everyone in the next neighborhood had U.S. flags
Hanging over their garage.
Suddenly, I realized the first shadow was my veteran shadow,
And the second shadow was my civilian shadow.
Once you become a soldier, you are a veteran for life.
Veterans have two shadows.
Veterans are always on alert.



Contributors

KATHLEEN BALDWIN is enrolled in the Early College Program at CSM and notes that we should "believe in the possibility of something."

MSG PHILLIP BALL JR is a 68-year-old retiree attending the College of Southern Maryland and has completed 31 courses. Going to college with Generation Z is a new and challenging experience in his life since he is a Baby Boomer. However, he prefers face-to-face classes for the opportunity to learn and be engaged in class discussions. He learned in the military to be disciplined and adapt to changes. His strengths are staying "Army Strong" with a cheerful outlook toward his goal to successfully complete his degree. He worked for the Washington Post in the mailroom in the 70s. His next step is to receive an associate degree in arts and sciences (AA).

RYLEE BECRAFT is enrolled in the Early College Program at CSM. Some things to know about her are that she does indeed work her life away. She loves dogs and the color pink. She loves to shop, and she used to write a lot in her free time and hasn't written in years, until now!

MICHELLE BROSCO CHRISTIAN is a professor of communication at CSM and sees interesting images almost everywhere she goes.

KIMBERLY DONNELLY is a professor at CSM, teaching developmental reading and writing.

NATALIE A. FILBEY is a dual-enrollment student who loves curling up with a book, going on a hike, trying new things, and being with the people she loves. She believes that everyone has a story to tell, and, through her writing, she hopes to tell that story for as many as she can.

LENA HANCOCK is a mom of two, Maryland native, and currently serves as the director of marketing at CSM. She considers herself an amateur "iPhonetographer" and enjoys taking pictures of anything and everything, although butterflies, sunsets, and her children are current favorites. She has been published in *Connections* previously.

ROBIN KARIS is a life-long resident of Maryland and enjoys writing, photography, reading, drawing, music, and milkshakes.

ALEX KREUTZER participates in the Early College Program at CSM. She has always been interested in writing and has been writing since she was in elementary school. Her favorite genre to write is either fantasy or horror. She also loves to write about meaningful experiences, which was her inspiration for her piece, "Luna."

KATE LASSMAN is an adjunct instructor of English composition and writing tutor at the CSM La Plata and Prince Frederick campuses. She holds an MFA in poetry from George Mason University and lives in Waldorf with her husband and three spoiled rotten felines named Joy, Grace, and Zany.

MARIE-PEARL OPOKU's favorite form of expression is writing. In the second grade, her teacher would let her read stories she wrote to the class. When Opoku was nine, she had her first hardcover published, "Snowy Snowman's Snow Trouble." In middle school and high school, her writing drifted to more serious tones and styles. In fact, "Oh Death, Where is Your Sting?" was initially written in her junior year of high school as a response to the death of her grandfather.

Shortly after graduating from CSM in 2023, Opoku began working in CSM's Division of Student Equity and Success. It brings her great joy to continue to use writing at work and it is

heartwarming to look back and see how her writing has evolved over many years.

MARKALA PHARR is a senior at Huntingtown High School and is enrolled in the Early College Program at CSM. This is her first time showing a more "personal" work.

JENNIFER POLHEMUS, an internationally published poet, lives in Central Pennsylvania in a concrete valley surrounded by verdant mountain ridges where she goes to escape metropolitan madness. She has been publishing her writing for almost 30 years and started offering editing and creative writing coaching services about 10 years ago. She was nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Her current projects include finding a publisher for "Hells and Heavens," a novella co-authored with her mentor and former high school history teacher and completing "Her Believing Heart," a multi-genre collection documenting a segment of a journey toward personal transformation.

CRAIG POWELL is a U.S. Navy veteran and 25-year resident of St. Mary's County who lives with his three canine companions. He enjoys traveling, fishing, rowing, kayaking, and scuba diving.

JADYN RIGGS is 17 years old and is enrolled in the Early College Program at CSM. She likes writing and feels that for her it is a hobby. It gives her a sense of peace when her world seems out of control. She supposes that this is why free writing comes natural to her. She loves to share what she writes because many people can find their own meanings in between the words she has written. Writing, she believes, is like painting. One can find personal abstract shapes and colors, just as one analyzes words and patterns to support individualized meanings.

EMMA SEPULVEDA Meet Emma Sepulveda, the master of emotions and body language! She's like a superhero, only without

the cape and the spandex. Sepulveda has an extraordinary ability to help people navigate difficult times, like a human GPS for the soul. Her friends describe her as a compassionate friend and a skilled therapist, but some think she's secretly a wizard in disguise. Her advice is like a magic potion that instantly makes anyone feel better, and her laughter is like an enchantment that can lift anyone's spirits. She's always eager to learn new things, especially if it involves holistic medicine remedies — she's convinced that lion's mane can cure anything! Sepulveda's dedication to her work and her passion for helping others makes her an exceptional therapist and a great friend.

PAUL TOSCANO worked for the College of Southern Maryland for 35 years. He is now enjoying his retirement. He has recently been reading poems of the Beat Generation and was inspired by Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "A Coney Island of the Mind."

E.M. WALDOW is a lifelong 20-year Maryland resident. He states that with his stories and poetry, he seeks to capture emotions of wonder regarding existence: of realizing one's place in the strange cosmos. He aims to inspire philosophical exploration among his readers while guiding their minds back into the ancient universe from where they came.

MONA WEBER feels that one should never stop taking a moment to look at nature to appreciate and enjoy its beauty.

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