

TEACH. WRITE.

A WRITING TEACHERS' LITERARY JOURNAL



FALL~WINTER 2021

EDITED BY

KATIE WINKLER

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A Writing Teachers' Literary Journal

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Powder Blue Peterbilt by Paul Lewellan	4
Community College 101	12
Drug Store Paperbacks	14
Fact Similies by Ted Millar	15
Cormac McCarthy in Thailand	16
A Neo-Odyssey of Oddities: Cormac McCarthy's <i>The Counselor</i> by Joshua Pumsuk Kim	18
Marbles by Gale Acuff	22
desiderium by Molly Nichol	25
Elusive Happiness	31
My father's grave	32
Utopia by Colin Ian Jeffery	33
The Unintended Lessons of Homework by Jim Ross	34
A Job Well Done by Andre Audette	38
Freshman Comp (As in Composition) by Jim Courter	40
the quiet of a room by Chase D. Spruiell	42
Snapdragons by Yenny Leung	44
"After the Storm, Clouds Will Rise" by Bill Camp	45
Glass Beads	46
Cashmere by Jack Donahue	48
Prescience	49
Clinging To	50
Snail by Holly Day	51
September Promenade at Point Defiance	52
With Hugo in Montana	53
Picasso's Woman with a Book by George Thomas	54
Immutable	56
October Day in Tallahatchie, Mississippi	58
Life in Winter by Wil Michael Wrenn	59
CAMPUS: Chapter One by Katie Winkler	60
Contributors' Page	68
Photo Credits	69

Paul Lewellan

Powder Blue Peterbilt

Second Period Honors English I was lecturing on the role of the Chorus in Greek tragedies when Cheyenne Resnik burst in. “Mr. B, you’ve got to get me out of American Lit before I hurt somebody.” I’d left my classroom door open, and so I wasn’t surprised.

“What’s the problem?”

“Mrs. Schertz is loopy. I mean, part of it is the class.... American Lit? Please, where do they get this stuff? Thomas Paine? Who cares? Twain’s all right and Poe. I love Whitman, but the selections from *Leave of Grass* in the textbook are horrible. Mrs. Schertz said we’re going to act out *Our Town*. *Our Town*? Yuck! Why don’t we read *Wit* or *Dinner with Friends*? That would give us something to talk about. Maybe *Death of a Salesman*...? I’ve always wanted to play Willy Loman.”

“You’d need a wardrobe change,” Flip Burberry called out from the back row. Cheyenne was wearing leopard skin stretch pants and a black tank top with the word *Resist* in silver glitter on the front.

Cheyenne feigned surprise. “Oh, you’re in class, Mr. B?” She scanned the room as if seeing the students for the first time, her eyes settling on Flip. “Honors English?” she asked him. He nodded. “I flunked this class.” He groaned. “It wasn’t Mr. B’s fault. He’s an awesome teacher. I wasn’t much of a student my sophomore year. No focus. Don’t make the same mistake.” Cheyenne turned back to me. “So, are you going to get me out of American Lit or not?”

“Nope.”

“Bummer.” She turned to address my students. “Do you know why Mr. B teaches *Oedipus the King*?” Cheyenne asked rhetorically. “It’s because of the tragic flaw stuff.” That amused me. “Aristotle said a tragic hero was a good person with a weakness that ruins him.” Flip looked impressed. “*Oedipus* is a cautionary tale. The message is, ‘Watch out if you’ve got a mon-go ego.’”

I picked up on Cheyenne's line. "Remember the opening scene when our tragic hero greets the people of Thebes by saying, 'It is I, world-famous Oedipus'?"

"That's a great opening, Mr. B," Flip suggested. "You should try it tomorrow." He modulated his voice to resemble mine. "'It is I, world-famous Beiderman.'"

"Well done," Cheyenne applauded and flashed Flip a smile. "You know I'd love to discuss this further, but I need to get back to class. Mrs. Schertz has asked me to explain Thoreau's stance on civil disobedience, but she wanted to say a few words about Emerson first." She shrugged. "I'm not a fan of Emerson." She raised a warning finger in my direction. "You're not the king, but that doesn't mean ego isn't a problem. Be careful." She waved good-bye to the class.

I made mental notes. *Work on humility. Close the classroom door.*

Flip Burberry was a transfer student, lanky, six-feet-four-inches tall, gregarious. He gravitated to the back corner where he could stretch out his legs. The coaches at Fillmore High tried to recruit him to play basketball but he'd joined my debate team instead. "I'm more the cerebral type," he told me.

Flip raised his hand, something he rarely did, but started speaking before I could call on him. "Who was that strange girl?"

"That's Cheyenne Resnik. She's a senior."

"Did she really flunk your class?"

"Yes, her sophomore year. Last year she retook it and aced it."

"What made the difference?"

"You'd need to ask her."

"Maybe I will" was all he said.

Two days later Cheyenne reappeared during Honors English. "Did you know we have to memorize poetry?"

“What?” I asked, startled by her sudden entrance. I’d forgotten to close the door again.

“American Lit,” she spit out, as if I couldn’t keep my mind on the conversation. Cheyenne wore a suede skirt, tank top, and black calfskin boots that climbed above her knees.

She surveyed my students. “What do you think? Should a person be required to memorize two-hundred lines of poetry to get a passing grade?” They hesitated. They assumed it was a trick question. Cheyenne heaved a huge sigh.

“I’d hate that,” Flip finally called out.

“Wrong answer.” She smirked. “I love poetry. I read it all the time. It’s a pleasure to memorize it, but it surprised me Mrs. Schertz might feel the same way.”

I became impatient. “So, Cheyenne, what’s the problem?”

“We’ve got a substitute teacher today. I think she’s seriously bi-polar. She wanted me to take today’s test. I told her I was gone Wednesday when we reviewed. She said I couldn’t stay in the room while they were testing because I was too disruptive.”

“Go figure....”

“I asked where she wanted me to go. She said anywhere, but in her room. That’s why I came here. I’ve got her permission, as if I ever needed it.”

“I’m not exactly sure that was the substitute’s intent....”

“Well, she did mention the principal’s office, but I didn’t want to ruin Mr. Powder’s Day. There was a fight in the North Lot just before the first bell and I don’t think he’s had a chance to finish his second cup of coffee.”

“You seem to know a lot about his morning routine...,” Flip offered from the back.

“It comes from countless morning detentions and in-school suspensions. He’s not a bad guy after he’s had his morning Danish.”

As if on command, Mr. Powder appeared at my door. “Cheyenne, aren’t you supposed to be on your way to my office?”

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, humor me . . ."

"Mr. Powder?" I asked, impulsively.

"Yes, Mr. Beiderman?"

"Is there any chance Cheyenne will be in detention this evening?"

"I think she should plan on it."

Before Cheyenne could protest I asked, "Would it be possible for her to check out to my debate meeting instead? I'd hate to have her get behind in her work for the team."

Powder turned to Cheyenne. "You're in debate now?" She put on her most innocent smile, which actually did look pretty innocent if you ignored the tank top and boots.

"Would Mr. B lie?"

And, of course, the answer to that question was, "yes," but Dick Powder wasn't about to say that in front of my students. "I'll sign Cheyenne out to your room, but she'll need to bring a note saying she spent the whole time here."

"No problem. I'm going to partner her with Flip." He waved at Powder from the back of the room. "There's no way he'll let her leave early." Flip grinned.

Cheyenne left with Mr. Powder, but not without first waving good-bye. She mouthed the word, "Thanks."

After she left Vanessa Walters raised her hand. "Yes, Vanessa?"

"Mr. Beiderman, doesn't this school have a dress code?"

"It does."

"Am I wrong, or did that girl violate multiple sections of it?"

"At least five," Flip offered.

"What?"

"I saw Cheyenne walking on 18th Street this morning and offered her a ride to school," Flip explained. "When I commented on what she was wearing,

she informed me that it was her civic duty to disobey any rule she believes is unjust. Today's outfit is her private protest against the school dress code."

"You're joking, right?" Vanessa asked.

"Actually, I don't think she is." I explained, "Cheyenne has read Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* about fifteen times. She takes the concept very serious."

"But...?"

I cut her off. "Let's save this discussion for when we read Anouilh's *Antigone*. Right now, we need to finish *Oedipus*."

Fifteen minutes into the afternoon debate class, I was explaining inherency. Cheyenne again appeared at my door. This time she apologized for interrupting. There was no irony in the apology.

"I can't believe I have to take both American Lit and British Lit in order to graduate." She'd flunked British Lit twice already.

"Cheyenne," I told her, "you need to control your impulses. I'm worried about you."

"My impulses are fine. Control isn't everything."

Flip Burberry whispered to Eric Loft, "Cheyenne's going to be my debate partner."

"You need to do what it takes to graduate," I told her. "That means passing two lit classes. That means control."

"With my GPA, what college will take me?"

"Go to community college," Eric suggested. "They'll take almost anyone."

"Thanks a lot."

"Eric is right," I said. "Just because you trashed your grade point doesn't mean you don't belong in college. Go to Union Valley Community College. Use the two years to get some money together. Bring up your grade point. Then find someone who's willing to write a recommendation telling how you've gotten your life together."

“Oh, I know what you’d write. ‘Cheyenne slept through her sophomore year but woke up last week.’”

“Yes, something like that.”

“I’ll let you know,” she told me, glancing back to Flip. “Now I have to get back to *Beowulf*. English Lit really blows.”

Three weeks later the door to the teacher workroom opened, and Cheyenne Resnik appeared carrying a black backpack slung over her right shoulder. Students were instructed to knock before entering. The new security policy banned backpacks. I didn’t mention either detail to her. “How are things?” I asked.

“Things aren’t so good.” Cheyenne wore black stretch pants that made her legs look like overstuffed sausages. A bare expanse of belly revealed a belly button ring. Her black sports bra was marginally covered by an unbuttoned man’s oxford shirt with its sleeves rolled up and the tails tied right below her bust. Last week I’d seen Flip wearing the same shirt.

Her face was flushed. I wanted to touch her forehead to see if she had a fever. If I had been a female teacher I might have.

“How was Homecoming?”

“Flip was a perfect gentleman, even when I called the photographer a Nazi because he didn’t like my poses.” Cheyenne had issues. “I’m pissed at my dad.”

“Why is that?”

“He stopped by last night to show me his new truck.”

“Did he let you drive?”

“Oh, right. Like he’d ever trust me behind the wheel....”

“Aren’t you a good driver.”

“He’d never know.” She lifted the heavy backpack off her shoulder and rested it on the floor beside her, clutching the straps. “I’ve had a license for two years; he’s never let me drive.”

“Was that the problem?”

“No. I can accept his evaluation of women drivers.” Cheyenne toyed with the backpack strap. She seemed ready to lift it to her shoulder again. “It was his attitude.”

I shook my head. “Explain it to me.”

"He's a trucker. I haven't seen him in five weeks. I thought he might ask me to ride with him this summer like I used to. Or maybe he wanted to meet Flip. But he only wanted to show off his new powder blue Peterbilt."

"Shouldn't he be excited about his truck?"

"Whatever . . ." She looked down at the floor. "Hey, Mr. B, we don't need to talk about this. I know you've got stuff to do."

"I think this is about more than a truck." I motioned for her to sit. "What's wrong?" I handed her a Kleenex box.

"Thanks." She pulled out tissue and blew her nose.

Cheyenne once talked about her father when my class discussed Grace Paley's story, "Wants." The main character's ex-husband wanted a sailboat. He accused her of never wanting anything because she valued family over possessions. *"That's like my dad,"* she told the class. *"He wants all these material things and can't understand why I just want time with him."*

"Before the divorce my dad and I were close. He took me on short hauls. We went to Six Flags with a load of paper products. We got in free and rode all the roller coasters." She grabbed another tissue. "He took me to Gamblers Anonymous meetings."

"Was gambling the reason for the divorce?"

"No. It was Mom's religion. She used to be a lot of fun, especially after a few tequila shots. Dad called her 'One Wild Indian.' Her father is pure Cheyenne, and her mother is Welsh. Then Mom became a Jehovah's Witness. She didn't drink or party anymore, and she didn't want him to either." Cheyenne's lips barely moved as she spoke. "He started taking long haul jobs to 'let off steam.'"

"So, the long hauls ended the marriage?"

"Yes. My dad got a girlfriend at a truck plaza outside of Cleveland and another one at a casino in Reno. He crisscrosses the country because he can't decide between them." Cheyenne's mascara started running. "My mom is always praying or knocking on doors to witness." She looked up at me. "I want one parent, Mr. B, just one. It could be my mom, or it could be my dad. It doesn't matter." Cheyenne wiped her cheek off with the used Kleenex. "Flip's

parents are divorced, but they go on vacation as a family for a week each year. How cool is that?"

"I'm sure your parents love me."

Cheyenne shook her head. "Mom says she loves me because I'm 'a child of God.' Just once I'd like her to tell me she loves me because I'm her daughter." She opened her backpack and started rooting in it. She pulled out an envelope. "Why can't she look at my Homecoming pictures and tell me how pretty I am?"

"That should be easy enough. Let me see them." She pushed the pictures over to me. "Consider it practice for the actual event with your mother." I took them out of the envelope. Cheyenne wore a pale blue strapless gown. Flip had his arm around her waist and a goofy smile on his lips. "Your mother should be proud of these pictures."

Cheyenne grabbed them from me and started stuffing them in her backpack again. "My mother would tear them up and ground me for a month. She thinks I was working a late shift at Pizza Haven Saturday night. I had to steal from my college fund to buy a dress at Goodwill. My mother says dancing is sinful, and dating is sinful, and strapless gowns are sinful. She danced in a topless bar after high school, but I can't go to the Homecoming dance because I'll go to hell if I do. How fair is that?"

"What did your dad think of the pictures?"

"Dad? He wanted to know what I thought of the truck, and he wanted to borrow twenty bucks for gas money. The subject of my life never came up." She picked up her backpack. "I'd better get going. Mr. Powder says if I'm late for Algebra one more time, he'll drop me from the class."

"Don't forget debate practice tonight."

"Not a chance," she said as she opened the office door.

"You looked beautiful in that dress, Cheyenne."

"Life still sucks, Mr. B. Beauty just isn't enough."

Ted Millar

Community College 101

Anika arrived eight minutes
into this week's reading quiz.
I'm sure she would have preferred
to change out of her scrubs,
but she once informed me the dentist's
office where she works is forty
minutes from campus.

Never missing a class,
Jeremiah is always in his seat,
near the front in his paramedic
uniform before I arrive.

Will's face is grimy
as the "Freddy's Foreign Auto Repair
T-shirt he wears each week.
He sits next to Charles,
who wrote his personal narrative
about a younger brother who O.D.'d
three years ago.

There's Lorraine, who gave up
a lucrative medical office
administrator position to enroll
in classes with her kids;
Jackie, who aspires to work
with special-needs students;
and Shannon, who got “woke”
in 2016 and sees herself
as the next Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

I haven't seen Jason the past
three or four classes, however,
nor Sabrina, Donnie, or Cameron.
Perhaps they assume I don't take
attendance like some other professors,
or maybe it was something I said.

I hope whatever alternatives
they are pursuing lead to the conclusions
I envisioned when crafting my course
objectives. Not even those
work out the way I plan sometimes.

Drug Store Paperbacks

What if the novel I wrote
after college made the cut only
to languish here among the Harlequin
romances and zombies?

I can't imagine these books fly off
the wire display next to stale
cookies, power steering fluid,
and generic batteries.

Thankfully I'm not "P.A. Angler,"
"Sharon Fortesque," or "Lily Geranium,"
sitting at a laptop in an air-conditioned
Starbucks cranking out such sublime

literary treasures as *The Perfect Pool Boy*
or *Undead for Eternity*.

I'd be a tad reluctant to tap the customer
in front of me on the shoulder

and say, "Why don't you spend
an extra buck on *this*? It took
me most of a week to write."

Fact Similes

You really are like a boar
when you're like this.

I know I can be like that
too at times. It seems like
all we do is nit-pick, as if
our skin is too thin for thought.

Compared to everyone else,
though, we're normal.

They're all running out
filing for divorces
like Hollywood celebrities;

we're already like that old
prime-time couple watching them
over silent TV dinner trays.

Just once, I'd like a little
metaphor, and you know

Cormac McCarthy in Thailand

“Through him, I got to know Cormac McCarthy.”

Jaws dropped. Silence. I was perturbed. Did I say something wrong? (The sensation of having done so passed through me before I could put words to it.)

I had been speaking with a professor and a graduate student about my reading habits. The usual names passed my lips: Robert Musil, Toni Morrison, Haruki Murakami, Jorge Luis Borges, Don DeLillo, among others. Soon after, I explained how I had come to know them. Some I met on my own, some I was introduced to by professors. With others, I had heard of them before, their names uttered by professors and students alike, and I simply wanted to make their acquaintance. The annual Nobel Prize in Literature helped too. (I was heartbroken, truly, when the 2018 prize was canceled.) Anyhow, I eventually arrived at how I had come to know Cormac McCarthy through one of my undergraduate faculty mentors, an Americanist who specialized in works by Ralph Ellison, Philip Roth, Willa Cather, Thomas Pynchon and, of course, Cormac McCarthy. Reality split.

“Wait. You’re telling me you know Cormac McCarthy?” the professor asked, absolutely astounded. The graduate student remained silent.

I now understood.

“No, no. I don’t actually know Cormac McCarthy. I meant I had gotten to know him by reading his novels and by studying his work for class. My faculty mentor introduced me to him.”

If only I really knew him. I wished to retain this façade. Yes. Yes, I know him. I know Cormac McCarthy. We’ve met and chatted on occasion. As difficult as it was to arrange these meetings, with his being a recluse and all at the Sante Fe Institute where he spends his days talking with mathematicians and scientists as he continues working on his next novel, entitled *The Passenger*, which has been in-progress for about 40 years and is, according to reports, a 600–700-page behemoth of a novel investigating the inherent beauty of mathematical equations and, more generally, the intersection between the arts and mathematics. Sadly, this only belonged to the realm of dreams.

Once, Cormac and I sat down in an office (in the Southwest somewhere, I think), and he read the manuscript of his unreleased novel. I listened intently, and I think he gave me a few pages to put in my pocket. Of course, when I woke up, my pockets were empty. I had forgotten everything he had said. The heartbreak continued a few weeks later. Cormac visited Thailand, where I had been staying at the time. A Thai teacher I had befriended offered to take a picture of us. I ran quickly to hand her my phone and ran back to Cormac. We posed, smiled, and I whispered to him that he was my favorite novelist. Of course, with Cormac being Cormac, he didn't care very much about what I had to say (he doesn't even care if people don't read his books), and when I offered my hand for a handshake before he departed (though it was really I who was to depart soon), he ignored it (or maybe he didn't notice it?) and walked off somewhere into the bright lights of an office building lobby that was, I assume, in Bangkok.

An audible "Ohhhhhhh" followed by an "I see."

It's always been an odd wish of mine to be on a first-name basis with my favorite writers which, hopefully one day, will encompass all writers. (If only there were enough time.) Toni Morrison would be Toni, W.G. Sebald would be W.G., and Olga Tokarczuk would be Olga. Imagine: My friends call. They're going out to the movies for the first time in a while because everyone's been so busy with work, and they ask me if I would like to join. "Sorry, I can't. I have an appointment with Toni." "Sorry, I can't make it. I have to spend time with Ocean or Haruki or William (which one?) or one of the Roths (Philip, Henry, or Joseph?).

Recently, I read Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and some of its source materials, pieces by Montaigne and William Strachey, respectively. The archaic language, the inaccessible distance, the resolve to read as one would read a dream . . .

A Neo-Odyssey of Oddities: Cormac McCarthy's *The Counselor*

Cormac McCarthy's screenplay for *The Counselor*, a 2013 film directed by Ridley Scott, is somewhat of an oddity. It is one of the very few screenplays McCarthy has written (the others being *The Gardner's Son* and *Whales and Men*, which remains unpublished). Moreover, *The Counselor* followed several years of silence from McCarthy, after he had published *No Country for Old Men*, *The Sunset Limited*, and *The Road* in rapid succession in 2005-2006. Additionally, the film stars a splashy cast of Hollywood A-listers—Michael Fassbender ("the Counselor"), Brad Pitt (Westray), Penélope Cruz (Laura), Cameron Diaz (Malkina), and Javier Bardem (Reiner)—somewhat at odds with the image of the reclusive writer who routinely refuses interviews and other public events.

The world depicted in *The Counselor* is somewhat surreal. Pet cheetahs roam the deserts of the American southwest, a landscape beautiful yet like a mirage, and their caretaker, Malkina, watches with sexual glee as they hunt rabbits. Bardem's Reiner (Malkina's boyfriend) looks like a "neo" mad scientist, his hair pointed skyward as though he's been electrocuted, with a peculiar sense of fashion, with his flamboyantly colorful shirts and rose-tinted sunglasses. In another scene, Malkina pleasures herself atop Reiner's Ferrari. And another character is killed by a fictional "mechanical device" termed a "bolito." Reiner explains: "it has this small electric motor with this rather incredible compound gear that retrieves a steel cable . . . The cable is made out of some unholy alloy, almost impossible to cut it, and it's in a loop, and you can come up behind the guy and drop it over his head and pull the free end of the cable tight and walk away . . . Pulling the cable activates the motor and the noose starts to tighten and it continues to tighten until it goes to zero" (36). Indeed, the world of *The Counselor* is a strange one.

And yet it is this strangeness that accentuates the possible in all its horrific, previously unfathomable, manifestations—snuff films, a beheading by way of a steel cable strung across a highway, a death-by-bolito, etc. That the truth of the barbarity of the world may persist beyond one's worst imaginings

and find expression, almost creatively, as if an artistic enterprise unto itself, is even more damning. One is reminded of a line from poet Carolyn Forché's "The Visitor": "There is nothing one man will not do to another" (15). Such is the world in which "the Counselor" finds himself after a drug deal he partakes in, with Reiner and Westray, goes wrong. He is a tragic figure, as McCarthy notes in a rare interview: "He's a classical figure in tragedy. He's a decent guy who gets up one morning and decides to do something wrong. And that's all it takes. And many tragedies in literature are just that. You only have to do one thing wrong. Whereas other people can lead hideous lives and do everything wrong and die peacefully in their beds at the age of a hundred and two. But the counselor's not one of them" (McCarthy, *Commentary*).

The Counselor, the lawyer, a representative figure of "law and order," the one who usually does the counseling, after competing drug cartel factions learn of his potential culpability when a package of cocaine has gone missing, is left unmoored and helpless. The Counselor seeks counsel to keep his fiancée Laura and himself alive. The Counselor now yearns to be counseled. However, to continue McCarthy's allusions to classical literature, there is no advice or strategy that may offer the Counselor an Odyssean homecoming to a world prior to his participation in the drug trade. As the aptly named "Jefe" (played by Rubén Blades) tells him, "life will not take you back" (150). Indeed, "Jefe" serves as a type of boss or leader of the text. He speaks to the Counselor in philosophical monologues, as if explaining the world of the Counselor as he rightly perceives it. "Jefe" claims:

At some point you must acknowledge that this new world is at last the world itself. There is not some other world . . . I would urge you to see the truth of your situation, Counselor. That is my advice. It is not for me to say what you should have done. Or not done. I only know that the world in which you seek to undo your mistakes is not the world in which they were made. You are at a cross in the road and here you think to choose. But here there is no choosing. There is only accepting. The choosing was done long ago. (146-7)

There is no escape for the Counselor, "Jefe" says, for there is no other world but the one he has made and thus finds himself in. Such remarks seem to suddenly ground the otherwise odd, otherworldly, even surreal air that pervades

both McCarthy's screenplay and Scott's film. The question arises: is the world of the film any different from the world of its spectators, its witnesses? "There is not some other world," "Jefe" says (146).

Perhaps, in this sense, *The Counselor* is a return to form for McCarthy. After all, it marks a return to the United States-Mexico border so prominent in works that make up the "Border Trilogy" and *Blood Meridian*. More importantly, it makes more legible the possibility of a post-apocalyptic world "the man" and "the child" are forced to inhabit in *The Road*. In other words, while *The Road* precedes *The Counselor* in terms of its publication date, the story of *The Counselor* portrays a world lurching ever closer to a post-apocalyptic ruin. As Malkina, the sole survivor untouched by the failed drug deal, says near the conclusion, as she dines in a refined "penthouse restaurant in a major city" above "the lights of the city spread out below," "I suspect that we are ill-formed for the path we have chosen. Ill-formed and ill-prepared. We would like to draw a veil over all that blood and terror. That have brought us to this place. It is our faintness of heart that would close our eyes to all of that, but in so doing it makes of it our destiny . . . the slaughter to come is probably beyond our imagining. Should we think about ordering? I'm famished" (176, 183-4).

The world of *The Counselor* is headed for the world of *The Road*. We too are a part of it, and what is stranger than, say, pet cheetahs, Reiner's fashion, or Malkina's having sex with a Ferrari, is our unfailing ability to "close our eyes to all . . . the slaughter to come" (184). Someone out there is "famished" and wanting more. We best keep our eyes open. Again, as "Jefe" says, "[t]here is not some other world" (146).

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Gale Acuff

Marbles

At school they try to teach me how to write
but I don't catch on too fast. I go on
to fail the first grade but that's success
because I make twice as many friends as
I had before, plus I know what's coming
in class every day, even though they
stick me with a different teacher. Last
year it was Old Lady Cantrell and now
it's Old Lady Neeley. I don't study
very hard because I already know
it, writing sentences and doing sums.
It's true that I can't really do either
well, but what are they going to do, flunk
me three years in a row? By then I'll be
a big boy of 8, going on 9--if
I get mean, that's bad news for the new kids.
But I'm a good boy--Hell, I go to church
--I'm just not too bright, sort of a dim bulb,
or a car with four wheels but just three tires,
or someone who'd plant ice to grow icebergs
or someone who'd plant eggs to grow eggplant..

Why did the chicken cross the road? Who cares?
Which came first, the chicken or the egg? It
was the shell, of course. So I'm not stupid,
I admit it. Just ignorant. Not *that*,
either--I'm just being nice to myself.
I'm glad that Sally, Dick, and Jane have fun,
and ditto Spot and Puff, but I don't want
to read about 'em. When I was little
I'd see an airplane buzzing overhead
and think, *When I grow up, that's what I want*

to be. I didn't know that somebody
had to fly it--I cut out the middle
-man. That's not stupid, nor ignorant--that's

truth. If John has five marbles and Mary
takes three, how many marbles are left? Left
where? I hope that it was okay with John

that Mary lost his marbles. Or took 'em
where? Just what did she do with 'em? And did
John cry when he counted his marbles and
there were three missing? And did he count 'em
again and then again? Maybe they weren't
his marbles--maybe she just took what
was hers all along. I don't have enough

information to answer the question.

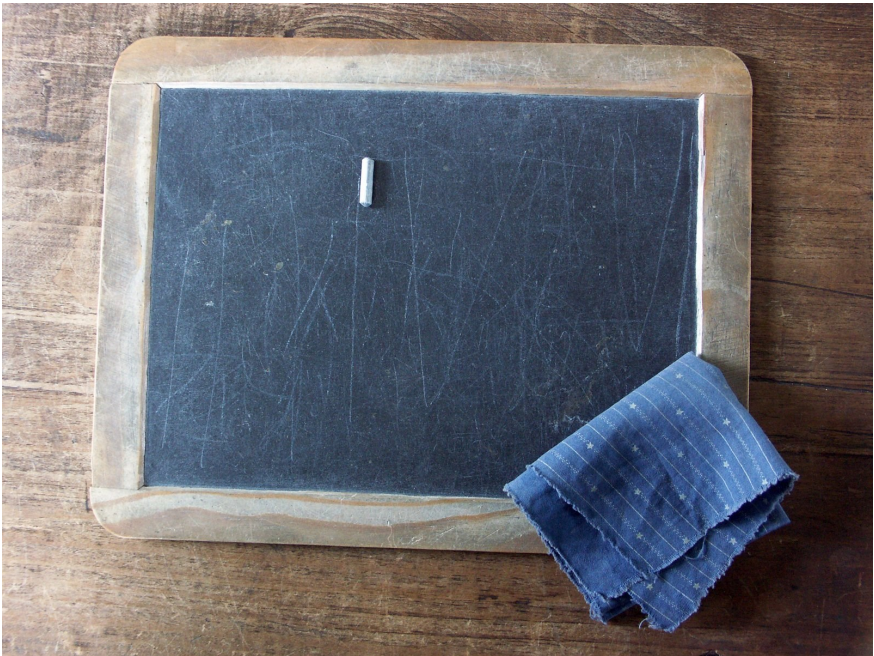
I raised my hand when Teacher asked it and
said *If John's that careless with all his toys
he ought to be locked in the closet and
then be sent to bed without his supper
and then pounded-but-good by his father
and then put to bed and I mean under
the covers, like I am when I mess up.*

But it was the wrong answer--Old Lady
Neeley just stood there with her mouth open,

and during recess some of my classmates
asked me to jump rope and kick ball and chew
some gum. One of the girls came up to me,
crying. *You poor little boy*, she said. *You
take that back, you damned old devil*, I said.
She ran off screaming and I got sent to

the principal, who's a nice guy even
if he did expel me and I caught it
when I got home. Now I'm in the closet
again. Father will be back soon. Darker
than a blackboard in here. When he opens
the door it will be like the Revelation
to John, or that time when the light knocked
Saul off his horse and he had to change names.
Or Lazarus from the tomb. Only worse.

It is written, and I guess I wrote it.



Molly Nichol

desiderium

now

Red seeps over the horizon. Orange follows, and yellow, fuchsia, lavender—and a baby pink that makes an image of a crib flash across her mind.

She clutches her purse tighter to her chest, the chill stinging her skin through the lace of the dress. The concrete bites into the worn soles of her flats, and with every step, her bones smash against each other, joints jarring and aching.

She ignores her reflection in each passing store window, and the occupants don't even glance up from their laptop screens or animated conversations to notice a woman in a wedding dress hurry past, her blazing red hair blowing in the wind.

The bell tinkles, and warm air hits her, enclosing her in a hug. A teenage boy wanders from a back room, a smile plastered on his face. "What can I do for you today?" His eyes flit to her dress and then up to her eyes.

"I'll just look around." It's the first time in a while that her voice has resembled anything like normal.

"Of course." He disappears into shelves displaying children's toys.

Shoes muffled on the carpet, she drifts from steel rack to steel rack, her hand caressing the cloths hanging, the tiny garments soft to her skin.

She thinks of mornings buttoning these outfits and looking into a smiling face. Alexander coming in, already dressed, coffee in an outstretched hand. Taking the warm mug, feeling him wrap his arm around her waist, hearing the deep rumble of his voice as he coos. The See you when I get home, baby, and the footsteps resonating from the room, into the hallway, and out the door.

Out of her life.

She thinks of mornings she'll never get. The peace, the happiness, the normalcy.

The catalyst of this entire nightmare was a morning. A morning of happiness.

—

two weeks earlier, morning

She sat on the closed lid of the toilet, breathing in, breathing out. In, out, in, out.

Everything she's wanted for the past few years was about to come true—no, everything they've both wanted.

She forced herself to stamp out the hope rising in her chest.

Those five minutes were the longest of her life. But seeing those two little pink lines inside the little white window was worth it.

—

now

She glances out the window, watching a father push a double stroller past and point at something in the distance to his children. One of them is ginger. Like hers might have been.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" The teenage boy appears behind her, closer this time—she can see the individual acne scars on his face. He should probably get those treated.

"Actually," she says, digging through her purse. "I was wondering if you had this baby mobile. Same color and brand and everything."

He looks at her phone screen. "Yeah, I'll bring it up to the front desk."

She wanders to the cash register, picking at a stray thread on her dress as the boy sets the mobile on the counter and punches in the items.

"So are you expecting?" His words hold no genuine interest, and he doesn't even bother with eye contact.

"Yeah." She hopes her voice is convincing, thinking of an alternate universe where she doesn't have to lie.

He glances at her flat stomach. "So, you're having a girl?"

"No, I don't know yet." She taps her foot, watching light catch on a hair bow embedded with plastic stones. Thinking about how that used to happen on the diamonds of her ring.

"Oh." A few more clicks. "I just assumed 'cause the mobile's pink."

"Oh, yes." She fiddles in her purse for her wallet, not looking at him. "Actually, it is a girl."

He shoots her an odd look but tells her the total without any other questions. Bag in one hand and receipt in the other, she sits on a bench outside a coffee shop.

She had paid without really noticing the amount, and her eyebrows shoot up when she looks at the receipt. Dread—a feeling that has become much more familiar to her lately—twists around her.

—
one week earlier, night

She scanned the document, her eyes skipping to the number at the bottom. Her heart dropped at the massive figure. But it's all gonna be worth it.

"Why are you all dressed up?" Behind her, the refrigerator door snapped open, and Alexander popped the top off a beer.

She could feel his eyes on the back of her green chiffon dress. "Uh, I just wanted to."

"You and the green." He didn't sound amused by it, just annoyed.

She picked at the shiny fabric, letting the material flow through her fingers. Green was her signature color—it complemented her red hair so well. Alexander used to crack jokes about how she treated every day as if it were St. Patrick's Day. What, are you scared of being pinched?

"So what did you want to talk to me about?" The couch dipped as Alexander settled into it. He leaned back, beer in hand, and raised it to his lips.

"I have some news." Her voice trembled slightly. She threw the paper back on the coffee table, but continued to stare at it.

"Good news?"

She hesitated, then nodded, closing her eyes but still seeing the number behind her eyelids.

Alexander breathed a sigh of relief. "I could use some good news."

She looked up then, and studied him, placing her hand over her stomach absentmindedly. Dark bags and wrinkles covered his face, and she was sure those hadn't been there before—but before what? Had she been so caught up in wanting a carbon copy of Alexander that she hadn't been paying attention to the original?

This wasn't going at all how she dreamed of it. She wanted a happy doctor's visit and an extravagant reveal, something she could post on social media and get likes and comments.

"I'm pregnant."

The words fell between them, landing in the half-foot space he'd left on the couch. He was close enough to her that she could lean over and wrap her arms around him, but she didn't.

His brow furrowed, the wrinkles in his forehead deepening.

"What?" she asked. She hadn't even told him the bad news yet.

He closed his eyes and sighed, as if her question was stupid. "I have something to tell you." He told her how he'd hooked up with some girl, but

only because he was stressed about paying for the treatments, and it was only supposed to be one night and it was a mistake, and it hadn't meant to go on for months, and Baby, I hope we can move on from this.

"And did she have an STD?"

His head snapped up. "I—uh, I don't think so."

"Really?" Sarcasm colored her voice. Her eyes bore into his, but she made no other sign of anger, of betrayal. "'Cause I have one."

She remembered the vice that had wrapped itself around her heart when she found out.

Alexander stared at her deadly calm. "I'm sorry."

"You know that STDs cause miscarriages." It wasn't a question—it was an accusation. Nothing that would hold up in court, but an accusation, nonetheless.

The wrinkles folded into themselves even deeper, as if they were trying to hide from the shame, the guilt.

He'd always said there wasn't anything worse than watching her cry, so she didn't hold back, imagining each tear as a knife stabbing his heart. She allowed her wails to fill the room. After a few minutes, there were no more tears left to cry, and no words left to say.

Yet—"I'm sorry," Alexander whispered.

And she was out the door.

—

now, night

The door closes with a click. She flings her shoes onto the antique rug her mother-in-law gave them for their sixth-year anniversary. At their party, an uncle made some remark about a seven year itch, and she and Alexander laughed.

"Where are we now?" she asks, flipping the lights on. She shakes her head, letting her voice get louder and louder. "There's no us anymore. You ran off with her and—"

She clamps a hand over her mouth, remembering the complaints the other tenants filed. "Shh, you have to be quiet."

She giggles, flinging her purse onto the couch, where it collides with an empty pizza box. The metal of the straps clink on a wine bottle that she picks up. There are a few gulps left, but alcohol is a no-no for pregnant women.

She sets the glass on the coffee table.

Holding the baby mobile she assembled on the walk here, she tiptoes into the hallway, careful not to wake her sleeping husband.

He has to get up early tomorrow.

She passes the doorway to their bedroom, the crisp, empty sheets taunting her. It's been a long time since anything more than dust mites touched those sheets, much less the long nights of passion and twisted limbs.

Passing the mirror around the corner is always jarring, no matter how much Alexander told her she'll get used to it. She hates being scared by her own reflection, watching it pop up out of nowhere. Alexander liked the mirror, a family heirloom, but she always thought it was too gaudy and way too large.

They kept the mirror.

Alexander wanted a motion light in the hallway too. She reminded him of how awful he was at forgetting to change batteries, how he swore at them—they don't make things like they used to—but he insisted about the light. She was surprised at how good he was at remembering to change them, never even letting a curse word slip.

But lately, she's been the one who changed the batteries.

She passes the mirror, and the light comes on. She snaps her eyes shut for one, two, three . . . fourteen, fifteen seconds. The light's refractory period was Alexander's compromise.

When she opens her eyes, the hallway's dark again. But her eyes have adjusted to the lack of light, and she can see her double in the mirror—the white of her dress glowing eerily in the dark, the flaming hair adding a burst of color to the dress like a pool of blood around an angel's wings.

She looks away.

Down the hallway, the next door is open. Moonlight cascades through the window, illuminating streams of paint that ran from the walls over the baseboard. Empty wine bottles and crumpled soda cans litter the floor. A hastily built crib slumps against one corner, and a battered dresser occupies the wall near the window, chips missing from when she rescued it.

"I got you more decorations," she coos, flipping the lights on.

The room looks even worse in the light, but she doesn't notice. Walking over to the crib, she kicks aside a mattress covered with a blanket, revealing a dark spot of red crusted in the carpet.

"Just a little something," she says. Carrying the baby mobile, she knocks a wooden box in front of the crib. She steps on it to hang the mobile

from the ceiling, stretching up and wrapping her hand around the railing for support.

Snap. The crib crumples, and the entire world crashes beneath her.



Elusive happiness

Happiness is elusive like the wind blowing free
Soul soaring mountain high, eagle free
Coming and going like migrating birds
Sounds of echoing peals of church bells
Sighs of old people for what they have lost
Now but memories of throes of youthful passion
Never rejoiced again with blood running hot
With road ahead short, straight and true.
We never know when we are truly happy
Until it has passed leaving heart grieving.
Oh, how I would keep happiness safe and strong
Never lost amid furies of purple storms.
Once, I was royal without fear of passing time
And through folly have lost all to loneliness.

My father's grave

My father's grave is my Sunday morning visit
Where I kneel at his tombstone remembering
The joyful things he did to make me happy
And how he was proud to call me his son.
An hour with him, so close, with memories he inspires
The strength of love he gave without reserve or rebuke
Always supporting, encouraging, gentle and understanding.
Because of him I stand tall reaching for the stars
Treating peoples of the world as one great family
Not divided by religion, race or colour.
Fresh flowers for my father with tears, and a prayer
Thanking my father for teaching me right from wrong
And about a man who walked on water
Was crucified so those who believe will see God.

Utopia

Once upon a time I dreamt of a world, Utopia
Where love and peace were supreme
With no more hatred and war, people united
Lives joyful without pain, misery, and despair
No one cursed or despised for race or creed
All free and equal without evil crush of tranny
Hearts true, bold and resolute, only truth spoken
Doors unlocked, neighbours giving support.
Wildlife protected and safe from extinction
Rivers flowing clean without pollution
Brotherhood of man united, spirits joyful
Stewards of the flourishing green planet
Giving all life a bright future full of promise
Global warming and war memories of long ago.

The Unintended Lessons of Homework

When our featherweight son Alex was the youngest member of his fifth-grade class, my wife routinely left for work long before dawn. Seeing Alex to the bus every morning was my job. I typically roused him 40 minutes before the bus's pickup time. That gave him 10 minutes to reach the breakfast table followed by 30 minutes to down his breakfast, tie up any loose ends on homework, gather whatever he may have misplaced, move himself and his belongings to the car, and get dropped off at the bus stop.

One early March morning, as Alex was finishing his Cocoa Crispies, I asked what I thought was an innocent question: "You ready for school?"

His mouth dropped open. "I forgot."

"You forgot what?" I asked.

"The newspaper," he said.

"What about the newspaper?"

"I have to write about an article."

"For what class?"

"Social studies."

"Don't worry," I said, "It's not too late. What article did you read?"

"I didn't."

"What article were you *supposed* to read?"

"I'm supposed to pick an article and write about it," he said.

"Did you pick it?"

"No."

"That's okay," I said. "You can still get it done."

"I don't have time," he insisted.

"Sure you do," I said. "I'll drive you to school instead of dropping you at the bus stop. That gives you an extra 30 minutes. What do you have to do first?"

"I can't," he shook his head.

"Trust me, you have time. Now, what's your first step?"

"Pick a story?"

"Good place to start. You've got, say, 10 minutes. It's 7:45. You have until 7:55 to pick," I said, handing him the local news section.

I returned at 7:55. "What did you pick?"

"A trip to jail is only a stone's throw away."

"How's the article?" I asked.

"I picked. I didn't read it yet."

"How long you need?"

"Ten minutes?"

"Then get to work. I'll be back at 8:10."

At 8:10 I returned. "Tell me about it."

"A homeless man has nowhere to go. It's freezing. He's by himself. So, he throws a rock through a glass door."

"Why?" I ask.

"So he can get arrested and go to jail."

"What do you think of that?"

"Nobody should have to live out in the cold."

"What else?"

"People shouldn't throw rocks through windows."

"How're you going to write about it?"

"I'm supposed to summarize then I give my opinion."

"Okay, it's 8:15. You have 20 minutes. I'll be back at 8:35. Holler if you need me."

When I returned, Alex was finishing up.

"Can I read it?"

"If you want," he said, sliding it over.

This is what he wrote:

"A homeless man who didn't work was cold. He threw a rock at the glass door of the drugstore and it went through. He knew an alarm would go off and he'd get arrested. But the alarm didn't go off. He waited for twenty minutes after smashing the door. When he realized nobody was coming, he walked a mile to the police station. The police said he had to pay \$500. When he said he didn't have \$500, they said pay \$100. When he said, "I don't have any money," they told him he would have to go to jail. That's where he is now, where it's warm."

"My opinion is, it's good he has a place to stay warm, but it wasn't right for him to break the glass door. He should have asked a policeman if he could stay at the police station for a little bit. And then, if he asked for a blanket and a place to lie down, he would have been better off than in the jail cage."

"I like it a lot," I said. "One question: you think there are other ways for homeless people to stay warm?"

"That gives me an idea," he said. To his conclusion, he added:

"Maybe there are better ways for homeless people to stay warm when it's cold. Maybe we could help them get jobs and their own homes. Jail isn't a home."

"I really like it," I said.

Looking up he said, "We did it!"

"*You* did it," I said.

"I can't believe it."

"Believe it," I said. "Come on, we better get rolling."

We didn't talk in the car. Alex wore a self-satisfied smile all the way to school.

After dinner I asked, "What did you learn this morning?"

He shot me a blank look. "About what?"

"The newspaper?" I hinted.

"Oh," he said, "I learned you can *always* wait until the last minute and you can *still* get things done."

That was a teachable moment. Some people said I should have let Alex fail so he'd learn *not* to wait until the last minute. Instead, I demonstrated how to manage time so being faced with a deadline wouldn't shut him down. He took that even further than I intended by concluding, "you can *always* wait until the last minute and you can *still* get things done."

Eight years later he said, "Learning that got me through high school."

Four years after that Alex said, "Knowing I could wait until the last minute and still get things done smoothed my way through college."

"I use that every day as a nurse," he told me five years later.

After another decade Alex said, "As a researcher, knowing I can always get things done even as a deadline approaches gives me a sense of confidence and control."

I asked Alex why he drew that conclusion from our exercise in fifth grade. He said, "You taught me what you *do* best: getting organized, pacing yourself, holding it together, and sinking the winning three-pointer right at the buzzer."

"When do you plan on letting Henry in on the secret?" I asked. Henry is Alex's three-and-a-half-year-old son.

Alex answered, "I was planning to tell Henry when he turned four, but he's been watching me and already figured it out."

Andre Audette

A Job Well Done

The start of a new year.

The thrill.

The excitement.

The...

Nerves.

The faces of new students, eager to learn, or to meet new friends, or to survive their first day of class.

The feeling of passion being back at it again.

Sparking curiosity.

Rocking the first day.

Sharing your love for the subject, the teaching, and the students.

It pays off in the first several weeks.

Students growing.

Knowledge making.

Motivation for learning: steady!

But with it comes the frustration and pain.

Assignments late.

Unlearned concepts cropping up.

Digging deep for courage to defeat the midterm slump.

Anxiety, unhealthy behaviors, lives lost too soon – worst of all, seeing students hurt.

Teaching is accompaniment.

Learning both ways.

Reaching beyond the classroom.

Always trying to finish strong.

The work is harder than you remember.

April's days running out.

The end is near.

Suddenly even the scaffolded plan ceases so soon.

Final projects, presentations, parties.

Students go on their way, some never to be heard from again, but
some becoming more like friends.

All better people for having met.

Building lives with semester blocks.

Academic years with "summers off."

Was it a year or was it a career?

A career or a choice?

Making authentic choices of love.

Sometimes observed in syllabi and stacks of books and lesson plans
now packed up and ready to go.

Reflecting back on a year, or two, or several past.

The satisfaction of a job well done.

Indeed, it was a job well done.

Jim Courter

Freshman Comp (As in Composition)

For most of the twenty-five years I taught freshman composition, *comp* as it's commonly called. I was fairly seriously into photography. I took my camera almost everywhere and for a variety of purposes. I experimented with color and black and white, art shots, landscapes, portraits. I enrolled in a couple of photography classes and read books on the subject. For a few years I worked as a feature writer for a local newspaper and took pictures to accompany stories. I even placed in a couple of local photography contests and had some of my work on display at the university's art gallery.

Among the topics covered in those photography classes and in the books I studied was composition, the arrangement of elements in a photograph for esthetic-artistic effect. In my teaching, *composition* was a term I didn't think about very much, maybe because I almost always referred to it as "comp", but at some point I started seeing a correspondence in how the term was applied in both disciplines. I was especially struck by the fact that some of the terms I encountered in my study of composition in photography were the same ones I used in discussing writing with my classes, especially *zoom* and *focus*. I taught basic writing, with emphasis on personal reflections and narratives, and often stressed the importance of staying focused on a main idea without straying from the topic and zooming in for detail to bring the story to life and give it texture.

Since photography is an experience common to virtually everyone—actively as a photographer or passively as a subject, or both—I thought the use of it as a metaphor for writing might resonate with my students.

I brought my camera to class, a 50 millimeter single lens reflex with a combination macro and zoom lens. (This was before smart phones became the default camera of choice.) I gave it to the students to pass around and told them to look through the eyepiece and to pan and zoom in and out, and noted that in doing so they were engaged in the act of composition. In other words, they were deciding what to include in the picture and what to leave out, how to frame it and where and how closely to zoom in for detail. I also brought in pictures I had taken of the same subject, but with varying degrees of expansiveness and tightness, for example a closeup of a face or that same face as one of a group. And those, I suggested, were exactly the kinds of decisions they had to make when writing a narrative or a reflective piece of the kind they wrote for the class.

I suggested that the trick in writing, as in photography, is to frame the piece properly and to find right balance between too much and too little detail. Too little and the piece is abstract and vague, in a word, *boring*; too much can distract from the main idea. Think of someone telling you a story in which the teller goes into every conceivable detail on every conceivable backstory of every character. (Don't we all have an uncle or a brother-in-law who does this?)

I can't say how much this helped my students in composing their essays, because I never polled them on it, though now I wish I had. But I sense that it did. What I do know is that I found it gratifying, as a writing coach, to use a metaphor from one creative area and apply it to another in an enlightening way.



Chase D. Spruiell

the quiet of a room

my nightmare has always been
a quiet room

not having the energy for Aristotle

removing the mask of civility
from conversations with
strangers and acquaintances

what lurks idly in the center

one must keep the body moving
and the mind occupied to avoid
the terror of the self

Milan does it well
keeps me still

but it becomes unbearable
to lift the light with nothing left to hold
in my hands

when the book is through
I must travel far and forever
to delay the self

yes, Milan,
a person who longs to leave the place
where he lives is an unhappy person

but a man who loves his nightmares
has no fear

and he doesn't exist

Yenny Leung

Snapdragons

One, a delicate and gorgeous flower in need of some love.
For it to thrive, its leaves must be glistening with dew
as light and clear like jelly beads on a bright and beautiful morning
A fearsome winged beast needs not such trivial demands,
gold and treasure, fire and flames, and maybe a human for the road.
A gentle flower would never think of this.
It sits patiently sipping the soft sunlight,
Perhaps a bee will visit today.
A dragon of that kind of strength would think bigger,
Unfazed by the fact that it could trample anything that opposes the
monster.
Armed with greed and blaze, it can take and leave whatever it wishes.
Perhaps one day when it is slain, or its wings or head can no longer
taste the whisking winds.
It can return to being with kind flowers once again.



Snapdragon by Yenny Leung

Bill Camp

“After the Storm, Clouds Will Rise”

After the storm, clouds will rise.

After the rain,

And the thunder and the lightning,

Broken limbs fallen,

Whole trees downed,

Other debris on the roads,

After the worst the storm has to offer,

The sun shines brightly,

Heating the ground.

The steam from rivers and lakes,

And the groundwater

Evaporates into the sky

And creates new clouds to form new storms.

Jack Donahue

Glass Beads

For Sweet Lorraine P.

You still carry the heavy bags
of a failed marriage,
filled with the necks of bottles broken
over your skull, the shards of glass
embedded in your skin
when kicked down the stairwell.

Each time you climbed back
before he could harm your daughters,
your glass-beaded arms
folded over their freckled faces,
a protective hen at war
with a drunken red rooster.
You stepped over him
when he ran out of punches
and never let him wake up
in his own stink
but tucked him into bed each night
and each morning he asked you
about those bright red gems
decorating your bruised flesh.

While all this was going on, you took time to visit me
in the place they oddly called a home,
each time loaded with Wonder bread
and jam jars of my favorite Concord grape.

Together we laughed at the Sunday funnies,
scenes from another world
filled with the color of comedy.

Sweet Lorraine, love still flows out of you
into my spirit, wondering why
you never got the man you deserved
and remembering the day I asked you
if I could be your son
so I could give you real jewelry
on Mother's Day.

Cashmere

For Mrs. K, MSW

When the authorities short-sheeted me
you covered my body with the cashmere softness
of the kindest words ever heard
within these prison walls.

We spent so little time together.
They sent you on your way
as if the bed here was better
than the one I did not have at home.

They sent you back to the file folder mountain
with notes piled high on your desk,
reports about other boys like me
as if your sole gift was paperwork.

After they abused me
I wanted to die in your arms.
Forever, your kindness is curated without tabs.
Love steps ahead of you as you walk
into the empty spaces of our hearts.

Holly Day

Prescience

I find the little cache of dog food and sunflower seeds
carefully tucked into the insulation of the attic
brought up from two whole floors below, and I wonder
if the mouse or rat who brought all of this food so far up here
knows something I don't, is tapped into some cosmic channel
that warns only rodents of coming ice ages or cataclysmic meteor
strikes.

I watch the squirrels out the window as they
get fatter and fatter as the trees give up and drop their leaves
wonder if they know something about the upcoming winter that I
don't
if I'm doomed to be trapped in my own house without food
eventually find myself in the frozen tundra of the yard
searching frantically for the acorns these same squirrels have left be-
hind.

Clinging To

We all want to leave a ghost behind, to believe
that our passing from this world will leave such a vacuum
that some remnant of what we were had to stay behind
that the walls and the floors of our house
take enough interest in our activities
to hold the energy of our traumas to replay
for future audiences.

There have to be ghosts, because we are so important
to ourselves and the people we surround ourselves with
there had to be at least some tiny flicker left behind
or some imposing force that lets you know
somebody else once lived in this house
someone who's no longer here.

Snail

She screams and I
curl up a little more, a little tighter
hiding from the tantrums building
outside. The older one starts yelling
and I am in my shell
I can't hear a thing.

Inside me is a thin, glamorous woman
dying to get out
to go to parties with other glamorous adults
talk about beautiful things.

It's bedtime and she's not asleep
the screaming follows me around the house
my husband glares at me and snarls
can't you do something? I
feel myself growing round and smooth
pearling around the pit in my stomach.

Inside me is a rational woman
dying to go do rational things.
This angry, unkempt thing digging holes in her palms
is not me.

George Thomas

September Promenade at Point Defiance

During a sunless promenade at Point Defiance,
way out, a gray puzzle on the stones. "What's that?"
"Bubby sea lion," a stroller walking his poodle says.
"Do you think it's dying?" someone asks.
"Dun know," he replies. The ignorant poodle
leads his master up the walk.

Eyes rolled up, flippers rigid,
the baby sea lion gasps and tries to roll.
Is that imagination or life out there?
Hands-in-pockets, all gawk and gape.
The tide is either going out
or coming in at Point Defiance.
On the wind, a single gull is screaming.

With Hugo in Montana

The road this engine eats tastes deeply of despair.
Washington, Idaho, Montana—take 90 east,
drive into the unfettered sky until you come
where anger and alcohol mix on crumbling ranches.
There, stand conspiratorial groups, gray with ghosts,
hunched against the world. Stop all future, they say,
and check your motives, carry guns, peer
over your shoulder, make a distance with strangers.

Missoula, Butte, Bozeman skirted with new plats,
facades sweet as wine ads in California picture books.
Sanitary as national chain motel toilet seats,
new, street cut bedroom communities lie on stone.
On I-90, the roar of combustion burns down the wind,
roadside trees twist silently like electrocuted men.
Their roots want to tear out of fouled soil,
crawl across rock to hide their heads in mountains.

Even mountains there huddle to stay warm.
You should be reminded as you cross the river
you keep crossing, murmuring an old eastern story—
Clark Fork, Clark Fork, Clark Fork—an anthem
that twists beneath the heart and stays underfoot.
Even heaven runs out of paradise on this road.

Hugo helps a little. Pack him around with you
like a stiff shot and steal him blind. His ghost
chuckles off of I-90 in a derelict saloon.
A poem of his can be a mountain in your soul,
but stand too close, a plat will hide a mountain.
Militias graying in exhaust fumes reveal he's gone.

Picasso's Woman with a Book

Is that a hand from another world?
And is that thumb a thumb to turn a page with?
That book the leaves are flying from?
Is it science or another fiction? She's

distracted, glancing from the flying pages
to some temptation beyond the frame.
Is there a light she sees by we can't see?
Is someone in the room with her,
hungering for her bright red nipples?

She's about to make a judgment,
perhaps about to speak. The yes or no
her will's rough compass. We don't
know what she sees, only that she exists,
sensual in peignoir, is willing to choose,
will choose. Behind her choice, all's barren
as canvass under Picasso's colors.



Wil Michael Wrenn

Immutable

I've heard it said
the only constant is change,
but here at Enid Lake,
time almost seems to stand still,
although the life around the lake
is always changing:
The seasons come and go
just like clockwork,
and the geese, gulls, and pelicans
that sojourn here
also come and go with the seasons.
The deer, foxes, and raccoons
give birth, live, and die
with the cycles of nature.
The grasses and flowers
come alive, grow, die,
and are reborn with the seasons.
The trees change color
from spring to fall,
shed their leaves in winter,
and turn to green again in spring.
Through all this change,
all this death and rebirth,
the lake remains immutable.

Someday I will die
and leave, never to return,
but this lake will remain;
it will endure;
it will continue to exist here
throughout the seasons,
throughout the years.
As life changes all around Enid Lake,
the lake itself will always remain
constant, steadfast,
immutable.

October Day in Tallahatchie, Mississippi

Traveling from Cowart
toward Charleston on this stretch
of Highway 32 East,
the Loess Bluffs are
looming in the distance.
On both sides of the road,
fertile fields of cotton grow
like a white blanket
rolled out to the horizon.
The sky is a deep blue,
like only October can bring.
The sun is warm and glowing;
a gentle breeze is blowing.
As I ride along,
I can't help but wish
I could capture this moment,
this near-perfect day,
keep it just as it is
right here and right now,
and never let it go.

Life in Winter

I look out my window
on a cold, cloudy December day.
The trees are bare, and the grass is dead.
I hear a voice behind me
say in passing,
"What a bleak, gray day,
barren and empty."
But I see a beauty in this day,
a beauty that could not be
seen in Summer
with all the tall grass, kudzu,
and green leaves on the green trees
everywhere, in abundance.
But these are gone now,
and the open spaces surrounding my home
stand out
like they never could in Summer --
the old barn on the distant ridge,
uncovered now,
the lake beyond the field
reflecting gray of the winter day,
the barn and lake that could not be
seen in Summer.
A woodpecker flies over my roof
and alights in a tall tree across the hollow,
his red crown and black feathers
visible across the distance
as he perches in the naked tree top --
a sight that could not be
seen in Summer.
December day,
so cold and gray --
but life goes on in Winter.
It does not cease; it merely changes...
with the changing of the season.

Katie Winkler

Campus: A Novel That Wants to Be a Musical Chapter One

I am the narrator.

But enough about me.

Much more important is that I'm here to tell you the story of Melody (It's not totally about Melody; it's only partly about her, and she is important, but...never mind, more about that later). When our story begins, we see Melody, a teacher, an English teacher, as she is about to embark on her first job--wide-eyed, naive, believing that every student can and will learn, that they want to learn, that every word out of her lips will be like honey on their tongues, that they will come to her prepared for the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy—ready to analyze and synthesize—ready to create.

Melody is her name,

(Music starts up briefly again)

and she believes.

(Music stops abruptly)

Foolish girl.

No, I'm not being too harsh. I am only speaking the truth that I know because I have lived it, right along beside her.

But I am the narrator—enough about me.

(Music starts back up and runs underneath)

So that beautiful mountain morning, she stepped on the stage of her educating life—onto the campus.

(Music plays briefly and fades)

You need to know that this girl, this young woman, was not beautiful. She was not unattractive. She was who she was and content to be so—normal height, as far as gnomes go, with medium length brown hair, streaked with blond from the Appalachian sun, and wavy. She was not short or tall. Not thin, not fat, for a gnome. She was the first in her family to finish college, and because of what her teachers had done for her, she wanted to give back to them, and there she was, standing at the edge of the quad, ready to give, ready to teach.

(Lyrical break)

She had come early this late summer day, before anyone else. The sun just peeping over the hills of the campus. She walked again onto the enchanted campus, walking across the green grass of the quad, surrounded by poplars, oaks, and cedars. She had always known she belonged here. Could feel it. Then, passing by the legendary oak that had stood in that spot for 500 years, she saw him, a white squirrel with a pale gray stripe running down his spine and gray points on his tiny ears. He scampered up the trunk then stopped, splaying his body against the dark wood. She stood as still as she could and watched him. He didn't move for almost a minute before squeaking and scampering on up into the canopy.

(Sound of scampering)

It was a sign, thought Melody. Perhaps it was.

Now, in the early morning, before the late summer day turned too warm, she walked around the campus. It was not a residential campus, but a community college for the special residents of this isolated Carolina mountain town. They had warned her, I had warned her, that it was a strange place, but she didn't care. She loved it already. She passed by the oak and could picture the secret pride of the mountains, the young mountain men and women, the elves and dwarfs and boojums and moon-faced people gathering to learn together in this special place

She thought as she walked on about the campus that it was like Brigadoon, magically appearing like it did that day she was visiting campuses with her parents. She and her mother stood in the center of the quad, right by the mighty, and turned around 360 degrees, their mouths hanging open, taking in the student center, the library, the little rose garden. Yes, this school had a rose garden. Students volunteered to prune the bushes and pull the dead rose heads off the stems, and mulch and weed and water.

She wanted to be a student here, wanted to do that. Her mother wanted her to do it too. She had always wanted to go to school, but she was a gnome, and gnomes didn't go to school. They went to work in the toy factory in Dog Hobble,

(Some sound effects here)

whistling gee-haw whimmydiddles and flipperdingers, assembling corn husk dolls and testing dancing Limberjacks, making the little wooden men dance on their paddles, clicking and clacking.

(Sound effects fade)

They had walked through the quiet library, empty except for one or two students flipping the pages of old musty books and two scribes who sat in the back dipping their quills in thick black ink, drawing the letters.

(Sound effect of pages turning and quills scratching)

Hunched over their ornately carved wooden desks, the scribes didn't look up when Melody and her family passed by with the other potential students and their families. They just dipped and drew, looping the ink, forming the letters in one fluid motion. It was art. But they were frowning and grunting, mumbling to themselves. Occasionally one would stroke his long beard. Melody held her hand out as she passed and brushed one of their red robes. The scribe looked up with a snarl. "Watch where you're going" it said.

Melody pulled her hand back. "I'm so sorry," she said.

The scribe pulled the robe back into place with his gnarled hand. "Humph," it said, and Melody scampered after her mother.

It was Father in the end who forbade her from going to CAMPUS. He said she had to go to a school in the real world. She would go to the university in Asheville, or she wouldn't go at all. Her father thought Asheville was the New York of Appalachia, where his girl would receive a proper education and get a real job. She would be an accountant.

She was forced to disappoint him. She had no head for numbers. She thought he knew that. He didn't. So, he was a bit surprised when his little girl became...

(MUSICAL FLOURISH)

A teacher.

An English teacher.

But, her father thought, the world would always need English teachers. People would always need to know how to write and communicate, wouldn't they?

"I know how to compromise," he said.

(MUSICAL INTERLUDE)

To please her father, he really was very sweet despite his gnomish grumbling, she went to UNC-Asheville and then to Western Carolina. Now, on this summer day, only three short months after graduating with her masters in English Education, she was back here on the Campus, soon to teach her first class. She was excited.

(MUSIC ABRUPTLY STOPS)

And terrified.

(MUSICAL INTERLUDE)

She stood again in the center of the quad and made her 360 degrees turn, right next to the oak where she and her mother stood five years before the plague that took her away from them. Her father couldn't bear the loss and spent his days deep in the rhododendron grove at the foot of Bearwallow Mountain in the hut they had built together and had raised their only child. Melody tried to get him to come with her for Club Rush/Registration/Advising Day, but he just shook his head. "I'm sorry, Sugar. I just can't."

She understood, but it would have been good if he could have been there, to hold her hand.

She faced the main building, graced with the name of the first great philanthropist of the region who inherited and then donated the land, Mrs. Josephine Campbell Smith. Neo--Georgian--red brick with large windows, white accents, and columns, it had been the original classroom building before "the capital campaign," when the venerable brick edifice was repurposed to house administration.

Quite a sight to behold.

(MUSICAL INTERLUDE)

Other buildings around the quad were less impressive. They were, she had been told, of the High Modernism style, but, she had researched, as was her way, and found that the style of the huge modern buildings made of concrete in awkward shapes were better called Brutalist buildings.

I didn't know that. I'm not surprised, though.

Melody left the quad and found a bench that was dedicated by Mr. And Mrs. Timothy Anderson in memory of their beloved son Jonathan, who loved teaching and loved his students. How sweet, she thought. She sat and opened her breakfast sandwich she had picked up on her way in this morning. She had been told that the cafeteria was closed to college students now since there had been a little trouble between the Early College high school students and the traditional college age students. Seems it involved food, especially Jell-O, and whipped cream, and cookies, and mustard. She wasn't very clear on what happened, but it seems it was quite messy, and the facilities coordinator had said, "If you kids can't behave yourselves, then we're just shutting the damn place down." And that's what he did, but then he found out that it was

against the law for the high school kids to go without a lunchroom, so now high school kids can go eat there, but not faculty, staff, or college students.

Okay, this is not Melody thinking. This is me, the narrator, thinking, and I guess you figured out that even though this isn't supposed to be about me, it is. And you also have no doubt figured out that I am a teacher here at this college as well, and that I am perhaps a bit burnt out, and, hell, yeah, I am. And this whole lunchroom unfairness really pisses me off.

Okay,

Got that off my chest.

But Melody doesn't care about all these things. She is still new. Still fresh. Not jaded like this old teacher.

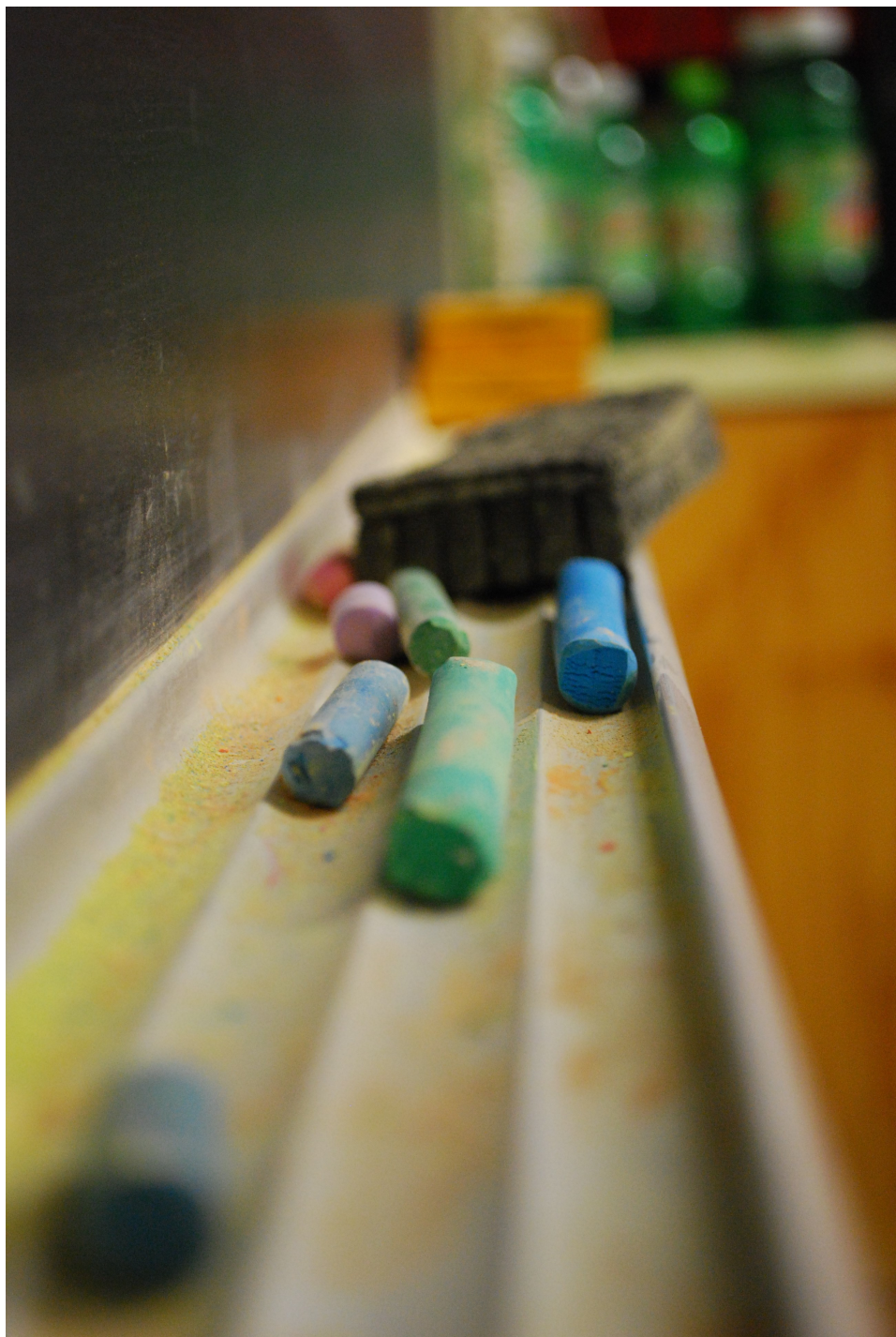
Okay. I'm not that old. Only 59, but I feel old. This place has made me old. In spirit.

Anyway, I saw Melody that day, walking around the campus. I was there early, too, because I had to get some papers ready for registration.

She seemed so happy. So full of purpose. I wondered how long it would last. But, then again, I'm the narrator.

Enough about me.

Author's Note: I am podcasting this novel and have about twelve episodes so far. My podel, as I call it, can be found at Anchor. com, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms. Hope you will check it out!



Contributors

Gale Acuff is the youngest son of former principals and teachers and writers. Two of his siblings were also teachers. He has taught in university writing programs at several university English departments in the US, China, and Palestine. Gale has had hundreds of poems published in journals in several countries and has authored three books of poetry. His poem "Writ" appeared in the 2020 Spring/Summer edition of *Teach. Write.*

Andre P. Audette is a political scientist at Monmouth College. Thanks to many great teachers along the way, he also appreciates and dabbles in other types of writing. This poem was written on the occasion of a friend's retirement from a teaching career.

Bill Camp teaches college writing courses at Paul D. Camp Community College in rural Franklin, Virginia, and Norfolk State University, a traditionally Black university in downtown Norfolk, which has grown his understanding of both urban and rural issues. His poetry has previously appeared in *Teach. Write.* and *Lite Lit One.*

Jim Courter is a writer and *emeritus* writing instructor at Western Illinois University. His short stories and essays have appeared in the United States, Canada, and England. His mystery novel, *Rhymes with Fool*, was published in 2018 by Peasantry Press.

Holly Day has been an instructor at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis since 2000. Her writing has recently appeared in, and *Hubbub*, *Grain*, *Third Wednesday*, and her newest books are *The Tooth is the Largest Organ in the Human Body*, *Book of Beasts*, *Bound in Ice*, and *Music Composition for Dummies*. (hollylday.blogspot.com)

Jack Donahue has published in journals such as *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Laldy*, *Stand*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Armarolla*, *Blindweed*, *Opossum* and others throughout North America, Asia, and Europe. He gives credit to two people in his life who had the most profound influence on his writing, a college professor who became a mentor, and his wife, an elementary school teacher when they first met, who loved poetry and encouraged him to write his first works—love poems, of course.

Colin Ian Jeffery is an established English poet and novelist with a world-wide reputation. His books can be purchased from Amazon and all good bookshops. He was seven, a choirboy, when he became entranced by poetry after hearing the vicar read the twenty-third psalm. The beauty of the words struck his soul like lightning and his Muse began to sing. He then found poetry was being read on the BBC radio Home Service and would listen in awe and delight to such poets as Dylan Thomas, John Betjeman, and Ted Hughes. He taught English literature at St Thomas Moore Catholic school, then wrote novels and poetry.

Joshua Pumsuk Kim is a graduate student at Georgetown University. He is a teaching assistant for the Center for Multicultural Equity and Access and for freshman composition courses. He's written on Cormac McCarthy and Toni Morrison. He recently completed his thesis under the supervision of poet and memoirist Carolyn Forché.

Yenny Leung is a creative writing student at San Mateo college. She's a graphic design major and likes to draw and create characters in her spare time. Writing has always been a struggle for her, but right now, she is just writing for fun! *Editor's Note: Yenny Leung created the illustration for her poem "Snapdragon."*

Paul Lewellan, when teaching high school, posted his rejection slips on the classroom bulletin board for the creative writing students to read. (This was back when writers mailed paper copies and a SASE.) His students found the rejections more interesting than the acceptances. After retirement, Paul moved to a cottage overlooking the Mississippi River in Davenport, Iowa. He shares the space with his wife Pamela, an annoying little Shi Tzu named Man-nie, and Sunny, the ginger tabby. Paul's short stories have recently been anthologized in *Down the Rabbit Hole* and *Lost and Found: Tales of Things Gone Missing*.

Ted Millar teaches English at Mahopac High School. His work has appeared or will appear in *Warp 10*, *Fictional Cafe*, *Little Somethings Press*, *Grand Little Things*, *Words and Whispers*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Straight Forward Poetry*, *Reflecting Pool: Poets and the Creative Process* (Codhill Press, 2018), *Crossways*, *Caesura*, *Circle Show*, *The Broke Bohemian*, *The Voices Project*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tiny Poetry: Macropoetics*, *Scintilla*, *GFT Press*, *Inklette*, *The Grief Diaries*, *Cactus Heart*, *Aji*, *Wordpool Press*, *The Artistic Muse*, *Chronogram*, *Brickplight* and *Inkwell*.

Molly Nichol is a current high school student in southern Illinois. Her English teacher, Mrs. Savage, has encouraged her to pursue her love of writing. Thanks to Mrs. Savage's uplifting comments on Molly's writing assignments, Molly has escaped a writing slump and rediscovered her creativity and passion.

Jim Ross taught composition, among other subjects, while substitute teaching for four years throughout grad school. After becoming a school-focused researcher, he continued trying to teach composition to fellow researchers who hadn't learned in school. His essay is about the integral role of teaching composition in parenting.

Chase D. Spruiell was born in Denton, TX. His mother was an AP high school English teacher for most of his life. Her impact was large, as she piqued his interest in books at a young age, which eventually led to his interest in writing. Chase currently lives in Austin, TX where he writes for his three bands: Half Man & The Whole Band, Eisner, and big loser.

George Thomas taught composition as a replacement for a professor on sabbatical, also at a Catholic university, and an art school connected to a major art museum in a Midwestern city. Most impacting statement overheard by a distraught student: "I'm no dummy. I want to learn." He has an MFA.

Katie Winkler is the editor and publisher of *Teach. Write.: A Writing Teachers' Literary Journal*. She has been teaching English composition for over thirty years while dozens of her short stories, theater reviews, feature articles, and essays have appeared in numerous print and online publications over that time. Also a playwright, she has had three full-length plays produced at the community college where she teaches.

Wil Michael Wrenn is a poet/songwriter living in rural north Mississippi. He has an MFA from Lindenwood University and is a songwriter/publisher member of ASCAP. He has published three books of poems -- *Songs of Solitude*, *Seasons of a Sojourner*, and *Enid Lake Mosaic*. Wil Michael's experience with the writing instruction he received in courses at Lindenwood University was, in his words, transformational and inspiring -- it helped him to be a better writer and to write in other genres in addition to poetry and songs.

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