

the literary & arts magazine of CCCC

# Red Clay Review

2017 • volume 10

CENTRAL CAROLINA CC

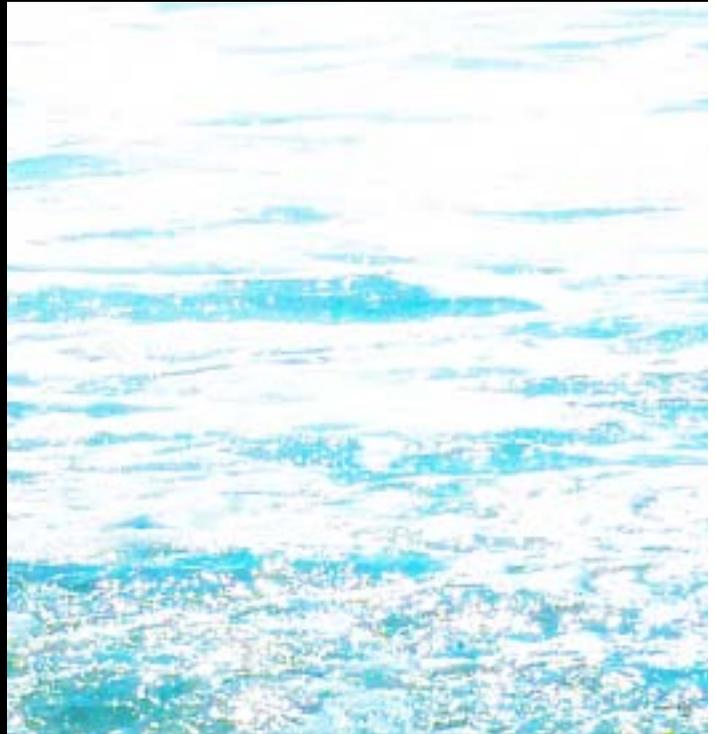


10



2017

# TIDETABLES



the literary & arts magazine of CCCC • 2017 • volume 10

# RED CLAY REVIEW

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# MAGAZINE *theme*

The theme of this edition of  
Red Clay Review is

## DESTINATION

→ Whether that means  
the *culmination* of a journey,  
a goal, an adventure,  
a vacation,  
where one sits,  
or someplace far away,  
there is something here  
for everyone,

*whatever place one may be.*

# CONTEST

# WINNERS

## Poetry

*Donald Byrne Jr.* lived in an off-the-grid 32-acre farm in Chatham Co. after having taught Religious Studies and American Studies at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, PA, for 34 years. His wife died of a brain tumor in 2001. He lives now with his loving partner, Pam, in an apartment in Durham, NC. His son, DEB 3 and family, live on the farm--still off the grid.

poetry	➔	You Must Stop Reminiscing at Every Date (winner)	32
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## Prose

*Jordan Henderson* is a CCCC graduate who generally feels like she's been a student for far too long. Part-time cat enthusiast and full-time nap champion, Jordan works to support her lifestyle of being able to purchase books on her Kindle without having to check her bank account first. Occasionally she works towards her bachelor's in communications, and sometimes she writes things.

story	➔	Cigarettes (winner)	47
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# contributors

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*Mary Barnard* is a Chatham County poet.

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*Patty Cole* lives in Bonleewith her husband, Hoyt, on a 17-acre mini-farm where they raise chickens. Her chapbook of poetry titled *A Way I Sing* was published by Main Street Rag in September 2015. Her poetry has also appeared in journals such as *The Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *The Sound of Poets Cooking*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Mused-The Bella Online Literary Review*, *Vox Poetica*, *Solstice*, and *The Melancholy Dane*.

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*Ralph Earle's* collection, *The Way the Rain Works*, won the 2015 Sable Books Chapbook Award. His poems have appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Sun* and elsewhere. He has a doctorate in English from UNC-Chapel Hill, lives in Apex and works in communications for a high-tech company. He has been an instructor with the Creative Writing program at Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro since 2011.

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*Judith Fisher* is a psychiatrist living in her hometown of Sanford after retiring from clinical practice in NYC in 2014. She spends her time creating visual art, and writing about subjects that spark her interests or move her emotionally. She also enjoys attending classes in CCC's Creative Writing Program.

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*Linda Johnson* is originally from Chicago where her first career was in advertising. When the cold and gray got to be too much, she and her husband packed up their dogs and horse and moved to North Carolina. She has published two novels and several short stories.

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*Bonnie Korta*, a native of Amherst County, Virginia, is a graduate of the College of William & Mary. She has studied writing at the Hindman Settlement School and at conferences at both Radford and George Mason Universities. She is one of the first graduates of the CCC Creative Writing Program. She is retired and lives in Pittsboro. Her poetry appeared in *Alcalines*, *Solstice*, *Bay Leaves*, and *Pinestraw*.

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*Calista Moon*, retired librarian, grew up in Branford, Connecticut, then traveled the world as a Foreign Service spouse. She and her husband have lived in Chatham County for 24 years.

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*Ruth Moose* retired from teaching 15 years on the UNC Creative Writing faculty and published her first novel, *Doing It at the Dixie Dew*, which won the Malice Domestic Prize in 2014. *Wedding Bell Blues*, the sequel, came out 2016. Moose published 3 collections of short stories, with stories in *Atlantic*, *Redbook*, *Alaska Quarterly Review* and others, plus 6 collections of poetry. She lives in Pittsboro.

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*David Ostrovsky* was born in Moscow, survived growing up in Charlotte, waded through Raleigh, and finally settled down in Pittsboro. He is a hobby poet when he is not absorbed in building or fixing a house.

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*Craig Shore* and kindred spirit Cheryl have lived in Sanford for 14 years. Craig has been writing for 50 years.

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*Judith Stanton's* first poetry chapbook, *Deer Diaries*, was released in 2016. She has edited *The Letters of Charlotte Smith*, a definitive edition that garnered Stanton a nomination as a Distinguished Alumna at UNC-CH. She also published four historical romance novels and has two more novels ready to go. She and her husband live on a farm in Chatham County with their retired horses and cats.

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*Robin Whitten* has enjoyed being a part of the Writing Program at CCCC. Since taking classes, she has been published in the *Main Street Rag* and the *Sisters in Crime*. She has also published a novella, called *Epona*. The next piece of work she hopes to publish is a novel.

prose → The Long Way Home 39

*C. Pleasants York* and her husband, Guy, have traveled to 26 countries as chaperones for EF Tours. She is former President of the North Carolina Poetry Society and San-Lee Writers and was an educator for 42 years. Presently she serves as a court advocate for Haven, a domestic violence shelter in Lee County.

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# POETRY

BRIDGELINES



# The Flight Back Home

*by Ralph Earle*

› lifts out of patchy clouds.  
The city vanishes, details  
too distant to remember,  
Ridges descend into light.

Once in a while I see  
a road or what could be  
mistaken for a road,  
crossing a plateau of velvet,  
crossing a braided river.

I can almost believe  
they are separate,  
this narrow journey I inhabit  
and the slow vastness  
I read below

in a language  
that seems my own  
but hinting at something  
I do not grasp: the gap  
between what is described  
and what is lived. ◀

# The Accountant's Daughter, Almost Blind

*by Donald Byrne, Jr.*

› You tell me face to face you have figured out  
where your missing money was. I know how proud  
you feel: the accountant's daughter, almost blind,  
who still can reconcile a bottom line.

But your eyes align uneven on my face.  
The blind left slips slightly down to a place  
on my cheek. The right one seeks my eyes, but finds  
only where they were, inferred from the outline

it sees of my head. You will never see again  
in my eyes what my eyes see in you. Still, I can  
see your soul in those darker windows, that see  
by memory what they love, and reconcile me,

too, like a sum momentarily lost, then  
found exactly where it should have been. ◀

# First Fawn

*by Judith Stanton*

► I watch for you all spring  
fragile in your mother's belly  
growing larger stronger  
as she lumbers across  
the middle pasture  
last year's twin fawns  
yearlings now, her herd  
her core, grazing  
safe around her

I watch for her belly  
to go flat

I watch for you  
at the edges  
of the woods

am I early  
are you late

I drive out  
an evening with friends  
take backroads home  
at dusk braking  
for your sisters  
brothers uncles aunts  
grazing the shoulders  
of Hamlet Chapel  
and River Roads.

I slow to forty, thirty  
can't afford to wreck my car  
can't bear ever again  
to feel that thud

Light fading  
I drive downhill  
toward Chicken Bridge  
which spans the rocky Haw  
the Trout quintet  
on my old car's  
old-fashioned radio

and there you are

no bigger than a fox  
spots pristine white  
legs like fiddlesticks  
scrambling up a bank  
steeper than stair steps  
into the untamed tangle  
of old growth forest

where your mother  
waits for you ◀

# APO San Francisco

*by Mary Barnard*

A girl who reads a lot can fall in love  
with blue ink words on thin GI paper  
that came every day in air mail envelopes  
perimeter-ticked in red and blue.

Handwriting a girl could fall in love with:  
g's an open if lopsided loop below the line,  
l's a narrow orbit at the beginning of love,  
coming spelled the masculine way, with 2 m's.

Top edges furry from a letter opener  
the envelopes she stood up in a drawer,  
lined up by date received, reread many times,  
especially the garble about when he would be home.

She mailed an envelope to Nam every day, her letters  
a diary she shared with this dark-coated stranger who  
walked right past her then spun around to look  
again, she remembers the moment his neck turned.

And he did come home, and he married her,  
but she was never able to find the blue ink words  
in the man next to her, this man whose l's now absent,  
his spelling guarded, the garble kept to himself.

They visited San Francisco but never thought  
to seek out the military installation where  
rubber-thumbed crews numbered by volume,  
unaware of the enormous words written inside.

# How It Was

*by Ruth Moore*

- › That morning  
after croissants and tea  
we walked paths skirting  
fields where wheat grew tall  
as our waist. And heard  
the cuckoo, my childhood  
bird that popped on time  
from grandmother's clock.  
Only here it was feathered  
and flew. We walked in woods  
where bomb craters still  
lay round but mostly filled  
with silt and leaves.  
Down the cobblestone streets,  
through back lanes, past shops,  
the echo of our footsteps  
like the dropping of bombs  
that sent the village to bunkers  
still square on the green.  
I cried because my father  
was one who carried a gun  
and crawled on his gut  
behind enemy lines  
where my friends' fathers and brothers  
and uncles aimed and missed.  
Somehow now we ended up on the same side. ◀

# Renaissance & Reeboks

*by C. Pleasants York*

‣ Izael and Ivan, Guadeloupe and Sindia  
are like phoenixes rising gracefully  
from the ashes with memories  
of Mexican pueblos with sun washed bricks  
and two-room schools and sugarcane fields  
and clothes washed on heated rocks,  
cardboard shanties in the alleys of Tecate,  
Guatemala poppy fields and adobe houses,  
walking across the desert and eating rattlesnake  
cooked over the flame of a cigarette lighter,  
and sneaking into San Antonio at 4:00 am  
under the floorboards of a truck.

Now they sit in a high school classroom  
preening their feathers  
of Nike and Hilfiger and Billebong and Gap  
and writing vocabulary cards with purple gel pens.  
At the beginning of class, I call the roll.  
At first they answered, "Aqui."  
Now they say, "Right here." ◀

# Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent Station at St. Xystus The First Scrutiny

*by Donald Byrne, Jr.*

► “Today, in ancient times,  
the first scrutiny or examination took place  
and the ‘Table of the Ten Commandments’  
was officially given them [the catechumens]....

In spirit we stand before Mt. Sinai.

It is awe-inspiring.

The Israelites stand gathered together,  
while amid thunder and lightning

God promulgates His commandments.

Trembling with fear they beg Moses to act as mediator.”

ever since the boy fell asleep in his bed  
listening to the steam engines  
racing their drive wheels  
and hooting like shrill loons  
from down behind Edgcumbe playground

he has lived near tracks  
rising from the dark of the deep South  
straight and narrow  
to the horizon of the frozen North  
and the trains are always running  
on precise timetables  
he knows when he hears

he takes his children on walks  
drawn to the unguarded east-west crossing in town  
marked only with flimsy white X's  
where four have died already

it is diesels now  
but they come with the same  
ground throbbing thunder  
sparks flinting from the snub prows  
through acrid plumes

the whistle again  
more focused now  
and he warns his band of little pilgrims  
to stand back and plug their ears  
to block the mandatory triple threat for open crossings  
a modal dirge in harmonic fourths  
the old thesis  
mea culpa  
thesis again  
mea culpa  
thesis up a third prolonged  
mea maxima culpa  
wailing down a fifth  
by the Doppler effect  
to a trailing dies irae  
as it cuts off the crossing  
damned boxcars clacking and squealing  
like steel pigs predestined on the long rails  
to the rusting slaughterhouse  
of Jersey City

he wonders if he will ever  
lead them across  
and he wants to tell them the whole  
story  
about coming home  
to a house in North Carolina  
six days after a Christmas with the in-  
laws  
in suburban New Jersey  
ten years ago

about just squeezing through  
a cowpath tunnel  
under an old Seaboard line  
the VW squareback  
loaded with gifts  
and a fifth of four star Hennessey  
about getting stuck in the winter mud  
and him pushing pushing hard  
pushing his wife at the wheel  
his firstborn staring back at him  
confidently through her tears  
until they made it  
by cognac and fire  
and about the whistles singing  
a New Year's song  
the night his only son  
was conceived ◀

# Paradise Resurrected

*by Patty Cole*

- ▶ Kudzu creeps up walls and a black snake slides through a hole in the worn-slick linoleum in the farmhouse on Goff Mountain.

The only son, prodigal, listens as his thoughts echo off walls he once colored with red crayons and papered with pictures of comic-book heroes.

He sees bits of his life in the dust lining every room, sticking to cobwebs where memories hang.

Yesterday pulls him back to three-wheel races down a dirt driveway, to the day he buried his father on the mountain,

where the smell of cornbread steams from a kitchen that knows only want,

where his mother sits on an upturned bucket and plays one of her own, “Blued-Eyed-Man,” on her grandfather’s 1947 Gibson,

where his little sisters run naked in a summer rain as water pours over a gutterless roof,

where the late afternoon sun falls fast. ◀

# WOMAN

*by Jordan Henderson*

► I have learned to wear my skin thick as leather,  
Though, like silk, I've always been so fine,  
I will not be restrained; I have grown to weather.

I will not be told to keep my lips together,  
To hold back words that are less than benign,  
I will not be silent; I have grown to weather.

I will not let my girlish fists land on faces soft as feathers,  
They will not be folded; they will not be kind,  
I will not be restrained; I have grown to weather.

My gentleness will not be stripped from me whether  
Or not some believe strength and femininity can both be mine  
I will not be silent; I have grown to weather.

I have pulled, and thrashed, and broken the tether  
By which so many of us have been confined,  
I will not be restrained; I have grown to weather.

I will not be questioned nor will I be broken under pressure,  
I have found peace in myself that is as deep as the red of wine.  
So, with as loud as I have become, and with conviction both biting and tender,  
I will not be silent; I have grown to weather. ◀

# Southernista

*by David Ostrovsky*

► Southernista central North Carolina  
rural hippyville Chatham  
within political wingers  
that'll take your land  
and fuck it into Cary's offspring  
as soon as make  
any of the many  
"I" statements  
we impose on a  
tiny piece of peaceful piedmont,  
a community called a condo  
for the sake of legal,  
we take silence before a meeting  
with white facilitators  
who call in the directions  
before talking budget  
operating and capital  
expenses home owners  
association toned  
around a crystal bowl Christmas  
filled with prayer and song.  
We no longer bother wishing  
on a shooting star  
in these unpolluted winter skies  
so clear  
we manifest our every desire  
any time we feel,  
a universe made of abundance  
as only a prosperous nation of hippies  
can do.  
But seriously  
we have fun too  
packing a house when the Heels play  
crying when they lose,  
packing another

on a commercial clad holiday  
of beastly brutes bruising brains called  
the Super Bowl.  
And me,  
HOA el jefe presidenté  
like to find in the  
ever-so-rich American throw-away-store  
called thrift  
those zip-up boots,  
brand new Tommy top  
and matching slender slacks  
accentuating my ass  
and dancer's figure  
as I strut it to Justin Timberlake  
Suit And Tie  
on the floor  
looking like two hundred for twenty.  
Gluten-free biscuits and  
the Farmhouse persimmon pudding  
or Bojangles' and grape jelly  
at a wedding pot-luck,  
fresh kill deer and pan fried cicada  
or Al's country fried steak,  
come on Yankenista  
and taste at least a  
bit of this hodgepodge pot luck  
of southern back-ass hippy country  
while watching the World Cup,  
our fan-fare for their hair  
as relevant as their shots on goal  
or their general well-being  
with mom and dad  
and the difficulties of stardom.  
Are those millionaires happy,  
we sure do hope so. ◀

# The Distance Travelled Winds of Her Soul

*by Craig V. Shore*

► I'll hear no talk of destiny  
I'll hear no song of fear  
I will only hear  
the uplifting song  
Of voices, stunning clear

We've laughed and cried  
and joyed and sorrowed  
Took gambles several  
And watched what followed

And now I'll share  
Observations few.  
And thoughts  
of Life.  
What I know  
is True.

Live each day without regret  
Be a kind and gentle spirit  
Attempt the new  
but hold some old  
If mind gets muddled, clear it

To understand  
another's mind  
please occupy  
their shoes  
To understand another's heart  
Eyes open  
to the clues

Cavort in the canyons  
Prance on the prairies  
Believe in your  
Innocence  
Of magicians and fairies

Drive through the desert  
Meander the mountains  
Walk up the down staircase  
Go shoeless in fountains

Journey this life.  
And please leave a trace  
Be known for compassion...  
Caring and  
Grace

One conscious chance we're  
given  
On this spinning planet  
Build the castles  
Chase the dreams  
Discover passion  
Fan it

I took liberty  
to occupy  
For understand I  
Her Essence

the absence felt  
is counterweighed  
By her overwhelming  
Presence

I watched last night  
The Gathering.  
Heard loud and raucous  
laughter.  
Reflected on  
Inquisitive niece  
Who has transcended  
To hereafter

In my years  
I've oft been asked.  
The Purpose and the Reason.  
Of one person walking  
into life  
And the Why  
of length of Season.

The mantra of Life  
is to give of our Gift  
and then,  
in turn, Receive  
And understand deep  
the moments in time  
when soul and spirit  
Perceive ◀

# Amen & Amended Hallelujah

*by Bonnie Korta*

► I stand beneath the bloody tree  
from which my brother always hung  
deer carcasses after the hunt  
since the Reaper took my brother  
nephews still follow tradition  
I look up at the sacrifice and plot subversion

I denied the blood lust of the hunt  
by a father who could not bear to see  
his daughter tote a gun into green woods shed the lives of the innocent  
have had to settle for being a woman  
cursed, blessed by a dark twist of mind  
I pray over deer carcasses, see the beauty in their residual magic  
fancy myself the seanachí for this family of hunters, the deer they kill

I will call down the Cailleach  
ancient deer goddess, she who  
attends the death of every deer, determines deer destinies  
we will dance beneath the hanging tree tonight  
weep, wail, rend the dark with spells and blessings  
touch beloved creatures with magic staffs, reverse their fates  
spirits of doe, buck, yearling jump down from bloody oak  
leave ravaged bodies behind  
the smoke of deer ghosts fades back into the woods  
follows the Cailleach to her cauldron  
toward a promise of rebirth next spring

Jake, the spectral golden retriever, howls  
from his grave neath the deer tree  
warns as he did in life of deer robbery  
of the conspiracy of woman and goddess  
no one notices but Jake that deer souls  
have gone on to their new incarnations  
no one listens to this ghostly sentinel  
but Cernunnos, blood thirsty god of the hunt  
the old horned one, he will notice  
he will not be pleased a woman and Cailleach  
Got the last word in his hunt

This year at Easter we will sprinkle my brother David  
in these woods, beneath this very tree  
I pray that the Cailleach will take mercy  
on this hunter, let him rise from her  
sacred cauldron in these woods  
spring up anew in the body  
of a deer, of a twenty point buck  
let him rise up luminous as the deer's eyes  
flashing as bright as his smile dimpled in life  
I pray she will crown him with blue morning glories  
sweet common weed, twisted round his majestic rack  
my brother, just a common man but beautiful too  
surround him with a flock of chickadees to erase all his old memories  
sing him into his new life, forest king  
fee bee, chick a dee dee dee dee  
may he come full circle under this oak  
man and deer, deer and man  
amen and amended hallelujah ◀

# Flute in a Far Room

*by Ruth Moore*

› Off the Interstate  
in the Ramada, but still  
traveling in my head,  
I'm alone in a too big room,  
rattling around beds, desks, chairs,  
an empty tv. I've returned  
to the city I came first as a bride,  
my young husband, younger  
then than my sons are now.  
His first job after college,  
into the real world. We were  
wed with all that lace,  
rice, veiled view  
of everything wonderful,  
so alive nothing could touch us.

We bought a polished house.  
I planted roses and raspberries,  
saved S&H behind green shutters,  
green trim, tall greened pines. Even  
the kitchen was green, walls, counters,  
and bathroom tile, green. I painted  
the kitchen pink. I could make one dish  
for every day of the week. Monday  
was meatloaf. Sent that husband off  
every day in shirt and tie, blue and white  
seersucker suit. All the women stayed  
home, hung sheets on the line,  
made congealed salads  
and layer cakes.

Now from a far room  
I hear someone playing flute.  
In a distant time, if I listen  
hard enough, I can hear  
the sound of his car  
in the drive, his footsteps  
on the porch. ◀

# Homage to My Father

*by Judith Stanton*

► For we will be home soon  
back to fall-burnt fields  
barns hay-full and unleafed trees  
hunters' shots through cold  
unmoved November air

Remember as we leave  
the public asphalt streets  
and turn to small dirt roads  
how hard the fields were  
frozen under our feet  
as we walked out to find  
the last ripe persimmons

Or how the grass crackled  
under my little horse's hooves  
as you walked beside us  
saying he was pert\*  
as a fine horse should be  
especially in fall

And fall was your favorite season  
the crops all being in and sold  
and winter settling slowly down ◀

\* pronounced pea-ert

# A Trail with Questions

*by Mary Barnard*

- ▶ The trail started out flat, smooth, matte-black with a sprinkle of sparkling bits of ground glass.

Undulating turns banked by bushy thickets of honeysuckle and tall trees knuckling into the sky.

His shirt stoplight red, Piggly Wiggly red, instantly recognizable, as the short ageless man who bagged

groceries and tilted his head up while speaking loud, his voice half-trapped in his throat. Sitting on a bench

along the trail, he was petting two resident cats, Blackie and Angel he called them proudly, followed

by a spit-prone laugh, as I power-walked past him. The trail, maybe ten years old, rivered with cracks,

some like mountains on a relief map, some hopelessly patched with smeared lines of thin tar. There's a poem

in this trail, I thought. When I rounded the curve a second time, the bench empty, my red-shirted

interviewee gone, the cats too. Do you come here every day? How did you make friends with feral cats? ◀

# Catch as Catch Can

*by C. Pleasant's York*

- › Glimmers of brilliance  
burst forth for a moment  
but then disappear,  
fade away into the mist of forgetting.  
    They are the fireworks of the mind --  
        short-lived,  
        ephemeral,  
        but lovely.
- Poets capture the glimmers of brilliance,  
    catch the thoughts,  
    catch the memories,  
    catch the dreams  
and then crystalize, clarify, embellish  
and hold for us all --  
a fragment of eternity  
    on a piece of paper. ◀

# Chicken Bridge

*by David Ostrovsky*

› Hot day heat bludgeoning senses  
senseless words thoughts jumbled  
inhuman  
seeks respite from the gel  
to steep in cool river love.  
Seep down blackberry-lined path  
cool river breeze  
bleeds through blackberry thorns  
under heat under bridge  
past graffiti horns  
“Abandon all hope all ye who enter here”  
trumpets unwelcoming welcome  
diluting cool river love  
slowing sluggishness further.

Treatment plant treats one sick city  
sicks the city's treatment into river  
two three four five  
six cities' treatments upstream  
plants apprehension downstream  
dilutes river love flow  
blows apprehension downstream breeze  
“Don't dunk your head under” riverkeeper says  
“unless the water's high.  
Don't swim at all in drought.”  
Hot day hot head  
awaits cool river cool head  
six sick cities cool treatment flows  
hot day apprehension.

“Abandon all hope all ye who enter here”  
infernous graffiti'd message  
bleeds through blackberries  
black graffiti buries  
expectation of anything good,  
abandon all expectation,  
abandon all expectation...

Abandon all expectation  
the first fruit worth tasting  
this bludgeoning senseless day.

Cool rain cool rain cool rain  
heaping down a balm  
up the river banks  
as high waters dilute  
six city treatments itty bittier  
dilute bitter apprehension,  
cool rain raising love  
submersing head submersing,  
submersing, submersing  
now submersed in guilt,  
a human cooling in river's sewaged self.  
No flow again  
river love diluted in apologies,  
I am a human.  
Abandon hope expectations  
abandon apologies  
abandon abandon abandon...

Abandon.  
“Rest,  
dunk your head  
hold your breath  
have a seat on my floor.”  
Itty bitty head,  
rest.

Back the berry path  
all ye returning from entering  
a swamp of abandonment  
effuse a cool emptiness,  
head above water back into  
heat bludgeoning senseless day. ◀

# Study Abroad--Oxford

*by Ruth Moore*

- › The bed was white, a narrow cot  
with a white cotton spread tightly tucked,  
in the narrow room with only the smallest of sinks,  
a single tap, shakily spurting the rustiest water.  
Above, a cracked mirror for shaving and I wondered  
how many here at Exeter had tilted their head this way  
then that, carving off the dark fuzz night gave them?

The largest wall was all window where ivy climbed  
outside, tendriled in, a green finger peeping, pointing  
at my privates. Ivy, I think, had they trimmed it daily  
for five hundred years would still find its way in windows.

My window overlooked the Quad where the grass, a brilliant  
green, was diagonally mowed. The bias cut, some swaths  
against the grain, gave a plaid effect especially when overlaid  
with dew. Sprinklers and chapel bells rained upon it daily.

In the dining hall, stone floors worn a dark path down  
the center and we ate at trencher tables where scholars in black robes  
and ties had eaten forever. The fare was often mutton, overcooked  
and I envied the Vegans among us.

There were lectures daily with lunch on the fly  
at the nearest pub or common market where  
I had my watch repaired, bought a sweater and fresh  
flowers for our white on white room. (Even the fireplace  
was painted white.) And tours to Amsbury, Bath,

The Cotswolds and Oxford itself: Tom's Tower, the Radcliff  
Camera, a hall designed by Christopher Wren, Broad  
Street, Turl, the other colleges, the Thames where the real Alice  
in Wonderland. had been boated. There were garden  
tours, evening song, a bell tower hour, a harpsichord  
concert that must have rattled even the farthest sleeping  
spires. Most of all, I loved the Bodleian Library where  
Sir Humphries' books were chained to shelves. We  
trekked with a guide, under Broad Street  
that had served as a shelter during WWII  
bombing raids. We did a Ghost Walk  
through graveyards where a group of four  
stood around a flat tomb for a séance while  
others chased a ghost team of runaway horses.  
We looked for the ghost in the belfry, the ghost  
in the pub, the governess ghost, while  
all the while, someone entered the locked and gatekept,  
double wooden doors that had hinges big and wide as arms,  
climbed our staircase, found a hidden passageway  
that let them quickly in, quietly out, took  
all our money, Queens and pounds, presidents and statesmen.  
Left our passports and credit cards,  
left us penniless as the church mice, cheeky  
as thieves. Church mice each day I'd fed  
dining hall purloined bread, scattering crumbs  
on the chapel steps.

So there we were a million miles away,  
only us and American Express between hunger  
and home. ◀

# Country Road

*by Judith Stanton*

► You aren't a Chatham county-ite  
till you kill your first deer  
but you can drive for years,  
deer on the left, the right,  
holding back, bobbing across the road,  
missing you by inches till one day  
this twelve-point buck crashes  
your front fender and staggers off, alive.

Sick, you pull off the road,  
helpless as he lurches up the hill  
to a fallow field of goldenrod  
and Queen Anne's lace  
as if familiar weeds would keep him safe,  
as if he could find home.

A ratty pickup rumbles to a stop.  
A country boy in jeans gets out  
knuckles propped on hips  
and whistles admiration. You want 'im?

No, I say. No way. Hot pangs  
of sympathy wash my thighs.  
The buck's skin quivers  
and he gasps a final breath.

Country boy shakes his head  
at the dead buck's mighty rack.  
Then I'm takin' this'n home  
'n lying to all my friends. ◀

# The Ocean on a November Morning, Armistice Day

*by Mary Barnard*

► After the sharp midnight blue line of last night's horizon, the clouds and water a grayscale, no magenta, no cyan, where the ship's deck slick with morning rain and fog, the yellow uniform heavy on the backs of men who man

the mast and riggings. A couple, hand in hand, a bag of shells swinging against his jeans, break the spell of an endless empty beach. Last night a mother and her doll-sized girl played volleyball under the net,

while the father made a chair of his arm for another even smaller girl. Despite the wind, she gripped onto a very tall feather as if she had just signed something important with its quill, something triumphant. ◀

# You Must Stop Reminiscing at Every Date

*by Donald Byrne, Jr.*

► We do the annual calendar together:

I read from the little datebook you have kept,  
you copy laboriously with magic marker  
names and years of births, anniversaries, deaths,

under numbers you can barely see. Each year  
our children are born, baptized, confirmed, receive  
first penance and first holy communion. Each year  
my parents are born, and die. Your friend, Marydee,

her husband Frank, and daughter Julie  
die each year of carbon monoxide; Lisa survives,  
and is married. Carl dies, a suicide.

We move to Pennsylvania again, and buy

this house. I get my Ph.d. You have  
the tumor removed from your brain and lose your sight.  
I become impatient; this is too slow! After  
two hours we are only in June. We come to the night

you meet an old flame for drinks; you tell him I am  
your only true love – cruelly, you think. Exasperated,  
I say, “I’m glad, but if we’re to finish sometime  
soon, you must stop reminiscing at every date!”

You look up, wounded, and zip your lips with your thumb  
and finger, like a child admonished in school.  
But by the end of July you are born again, and dumb  
no more; what happened once, happens again — too

much history, compressed already into a year,  
to squeeze into an hour. “There are getting to be  
more deaths than births,” you say sadly in September.  
You linger for our lives’ sakes; I want to hurry

past the certainty this book of days  
will forget the last of our deaths — and then will be more,  
and less, than even the children who rise from its pages  
can remember, without your blind and patient story. ◀

**POETRY CONTEST WINNER**

# PROSE

FENCEPOSTS



# Destination

*by Judith D. Fisher*

this is your first time living here and you need to know how to get around so you dont get lost God forbid: A train express to manhattan and brooklyn with B C E locals to the same place-stand away from the edge of the platform and do not show any money in the subway; only ride in the front or middle of the train with the engineer or conductor never the back cause the crazies live there and nothing running is on time ever – keep watching out for others and NEVER let the crowds lead you the wrong way cause aint nobody gonna take time to give you the right directions cause they only know one way and as far as the 1 2 3 4 5 6 and 7 trains go you got the 2 4 5 6 on east side and 1 3 on west with queens #7 line colored red green and purple respectively with purple also taking you to a mets game if you want to but why go cause they never win anyway but just be careful cause if anything happens to you i cant be responsible except i feel like I am so mind what I tell you and always have exact change on the bus which we will discuss tomorrow. ◀

# Peace, Love & a VW Van

*by C. Pleasants York*

Rolling through my memories is a VW van. A vehicle is not simply a way of getting from place to place, but a way of defining yourself. We, my husband Guy and I, were on the trail of adventure – camping, hiking, snorkeling, surfing, antique-hunting, exploring the convoluted by-ways of life, road map in hand. We were resilient, laid-back, resourceful, and nearly broke. Inhabiting Victory Village, the married student housing at UNC, we lived in an apartment costing \$35 a month, fed on gourmet meals of macaroni, jello, granola, and Spam, and rode a bicycle through campus.

Our vehicle of choice, the 1971 Volkswagen Camper Van with a dusty red paint job, was sitting in the corner of the used car lot in Winston-Salem, ignored by most, loved by us. We dwell in possibilities! The curtains – brown and gold checked – were sun-faded even when we bought it. It was a pop-top with a flat panel which could be lifted to make it possible to stand upright in the van, and a tiny loft allowed an extra person – two if they were slim and passionate – to sleep in a hammock stretched from one side to the other. The bench seat folded down into a bed. The van had a built-in refrigerator and a sink with a reservoir to fill to wash dishes. There were vented windows with cute little window cranks to let air flow through when we were camped. There was storage space for everything – we carried our way of life with us.

A VW van was the instrument of portability. Guy was a master at the art of the bungee cording and compacting into compartments. We could carry surfboards, boogie boards, snorkel and fins, antique dressers and hall trees, still-wet masterpieces of art, duffle bags, dogs, cats, a gerbil named Herbie, and later Adam, Emily, and Jonathan. The gas mileage wasn't great, but with Guy's consultations to *How to Fix Your Volkswagen Van - Third Edition*, we got there.

We saved up money in our trip fund, and once we had \$50 we were all set for a week-end at the beach. We left straight from school on Friday afternoon – flip flops, a swim suit, shorts, and a flowered skirt were all I needed. Guy bungee-corded the surfboard on top of the van and we were on the way. We camped at the state camp ground for five dollars a night, spent our days on the beach snacking on sandwiches we brought from home or perhaps headed for the Dairy Queen for cherry sundaes instead of lunch. If we started for Oliver's Lodge or Lee's Inlet Kitchen on Murrell's Inlet at 4:00, we could save money with the early-bird special - have shrimp and deviled crab for me, a Captain's Platter for Guy - and be back on the beach in time

for a twilight swim. Sunday we lazed on the beach and explored the dunes. And when the week-end was over, we would head the van back home with bags of seashells for crafts, sand, and memories.

In the van at the campground at Myrtle Beach, I remember looking through the mosquito netting, sniffing the faint scent of insect repellent and listening to the sweet harmony of early-morning birds in the palm trees. I watched the sun glint through the screen, perturbed by the drone of mosquitos, visualizing them poking pointed protuberances through the mesh, ready to chomp on my sunburned but delicate skin.

I remember a road trip from North Carolina to Key West, back to the Tar Heel State long enough to do a couple of loads of laundry, up to York Beach, Maine and then back to North Carolina. It was a brutal road trip in many ways, up and down the highways, geared down for hills and sliding through valleys. At the campground in Massachusetts, the temperature was 106 degrees, and in Key West we plugged in to the electric at the campground just so we could run the fan at night. At the conclusion of our trip, the VW van threw a rod in the driveway of our home in Sanford. I always thought that was at least a kindly calamity.

Without a proper restroom or shower, we were at the mercy of comfort stations when we camped in our van. Trekking through the gravel to the comfort stations, we learned the paramount rules of survival: (1) Do not drink anything after 8:00 and (2) Do not forget your towel, soap, flashlight, and bug spray. But camping also taught us about roasting marshmallows for s'mores around the campfire, ranger nature talks on local trees and birds, hikes to the waterfall, and silver foxes, opossums, and raccoons – Oh, my!

Breakfast at the campground was always a study in innovation. If we could afford a campsite with electricity, we could plug in the coffee maker, the warming bowl for oatmeal for the children, the hair dryer to warm our hands after washing dishes. We had packets of hot chocolate, apple cider, granola, Tang, almonds - every imaginable concoction that the Trading Post could provide and bags of fruit and veggies from the local farmers' markets. Or for a splurge we could head to a breakfast-anytime place that always opened at sunrise and search for the best deal on the menu - One Egg Breakfast - one egg scrambled, grits or hash browns, biscuits or toast, jelly, and coffee for \$2.50. If you are friendly and you have that lean- and-hungry look, the waitresses are always willing to give you a little extra, and coffee for the road.

Did you ever take this thing to Woodstock? - people always asked (It did have that look!) No, Woodstock was before our time, but we did take it to the Hollering Contest at Spivey's Corner, Mount Airy Autumn Leaves Festival, Korner's Folly, Mississippi Petrified Forest, Green Dragon Farmers' Market in the Amish Country, Preservation Hall in New Orleans, Jekyll Island, auctions on the Meadows of Dan, Frog Hollow Campground, the Tanglewood Steeplechases, Pirate Land, and Fairy Stone Park. I remember awaking on the gold striped sheets on the gold padded fold-down bed as Guy was dodging 8:00 traffic on the highway through downtown Atlanta. A more pleasant, less jarring awakening was when we pulled

up at sunrise right outside Sloppy Joe's in Key West, took a picture, and went to sleep until morning.

When Guy acted in the outdoor drama, "House in the Horseshoe" for the Moore County Historical Association, I did box office and publicity. Everybody did props. Our VW van was the transportation for rifles, tobacco racks, antique sideboards, and enormous whiskey barrels, which rolled around in the back. We filled the van each week with folding chairs from Red Springs Baptist Church, took them to the historic site for the shows, and returned them in time for the service on Sunday.

Dawn was our white German shepherd mix who loved us devotedly and detested all other people. In Washington, DC, we accidentally locked keys in the van at the Vietnam Memorial. When two kindly policemen tried to help, Dawn went ballistic, growling, barking, and baring her teeth. It was quite a while before we were able to force a bent coat hanger through the miniscule space where the window had been rolled down to lift up the lock.

I knew you would ask – Do we still have the 1971 VW van? No, alas, it was a victim of rust and solenoid sickness. But it continued on its journey, and we on ours. We sold it to a mechanic who wanted to fix it up for his son. But now, we scan the want ads, ride through the used car lots, check the internet. Do you have a Volkswagen Camper Van for sale? We are on a search for more memories. ◀

# The Long Way Home

*by Robin Whitten*

He preened in the mirror like a young woman before her wedding, turning this way and that, amazed at how well his uniform fit after all these years. The seams were worn and tattered, the color faded, but no one noticed. The pants felt snug around the middle and the button was missing, but he found that if he tightened his belt a little tighter, the ends held together.

His wife of fifty years had pressed and hung the jacket neatly in the closet for him, preserving what was left of his military service. Nestled among his DOD Distinguished Service Medal and his Silver Stars, the Medal of Commendation glistened as if brand new. He remembered standing on the platform on the White House lawn as President Kennedy pinned the medal on his jacket. He focused on his wife, Beth, a diamond shining through five hundred dull pebbles, her eyes moist and fixed on him, her hanky poised, always poised.

He tried to give her the medals. Beth deserved them as much or more than he. She kept the business running while he was away, even made it successful, at the same time caring for three children and his mother. His mother, whom he loved dearly and missed, turned out to be a full time job. The children, wild and unruly, always a presence, her pride and joy.

He stopped and examined the pictures on Beth's dresser. Billy, the oldest had joined the military like him, but died at the hands of a sniper. Todd, unruly and independent, became a pilot. He comes to visit when his job brings him close. Not often, though, not often. James, the youngest, named after Beth's father and much like him in many ways. He didn't leave home until he finished college. Now he lives three thousand miles away. James calls sometimes, when he thinks to.

The man's thin arms swam in the jacket, as did his chest and shoulders, yet he felt no different than he had forty years ago when he led a troop of boys and young men head on into enemy fire. Beth remained his only distraction. He left her behind many times, praying each time to return to her. His love for her never faltered, he never strayed. He knew when she caught him, his prize, he promised to love and cherish her, until death...

Beth's voice echoed from the bottom of the stairs. He'd better hurry. Each year on the anniversary of their marriage, she left the house early to buy a new dress, get her hair done, and her nails polished. They would meet at the small café in Georgetown where he saw her for the first time. Georgetown University wasn't a large school, but the four years he attended melted into one when he saw her serving other students on a dreary Sunday morning. His studying stale and needing a break, he thought a brisk walk, a cup of hot coffee, would make him a new man. When he spotted her, his life took on new meaning.

Light on her feet, like a ballerina, Beth glanced at him while carrying an armful of plates

into the café. He smiled, mesmerized by her, needing to touch her, to love her. She nodded, her eyes hidden by her long dark lashes, then turned away. Her hair, long, almost black and pulled back into a ponytail, waved like a breeze with each perfect step. He drank a coffee slowly, observing her all the while, teasing her memory in his mind for later. She never said a word to him, barely acknowledged his presence. When he stood to leave, he passed Beth a note that she quickly pushed into her jeans. He almost missed the wink as she walked into the kitchen.

Beth called him a day later as he hoped she would. In a year they were married, then off to a quick honeymoon before he deployed. Gone for nine months, he managed to return in time for the birth of their first child, Billy.

A last look in the mirror assured him he was ready. He took a cab to the train station. He didn't speak, didn't look out the window at the scenery for the two hour trip. He unfolded the picture he carried of her, the one he kept from their honeymoon. They were so in love then, so young. Sometimes he wished that he could snap his fingers and hold time, slow it down, capture and keep the memories, never let them go. But new memories interfered, pushing out the old, making time move forward.

He sighed and placed the picture in the book he carried. Each year he pulled out the same book of poems by EE Cummings, adding poems he had written to Beth while overseas, to take with him to the café. He could read them to her again and again. She never tired of their meaning, was always reminded of the past while they talked about the future, their future, together.

Pushing the book into his pocket, he rose slowly, stiffly, and put on his military hat. He waited a heartbeat, testing his balance, aware of his frailty, his fragility. Although the air was still cool, the sun felt warm on his face as he stepped off the train. A perfect day for reflection, as was every day of their life together. As he neared the café, each step grew stronger, lighter, bringing him closer to her, to the memory of her.

The café, to his relief, was still open. Its name had changed many times throughout the years, yet not its size, nor menu. He could always count on a cup of coffee and a cucumber sandwich, her favorite. Dessert could be a bowl of ice cream or a piece of chocolate cake. It didn't matter.

He sat in the same place he had so many years ago and ordered a coffee. He watched the young boys and girls talk and laugh, some turned to him and smiled, most didn't. After sitting for some time, he ordered the sandwich. When it was gone, he produced his book and read her favorite poem; I carry your heart with me. Then he read it again, his eyes moist, his nose running.

Across the table, in the seat saved for his wife, he saw her, her eyes shining, her hanky poised. He reached out to her and touched her hand. ◀

# Lost

*by Calista Moon*

*The light is fading, the temperature is falling, and the smell of snow is in the air. We are lost, and the car has stalled. Worse, I am with someone that should not be with. This is usually my happiest time of day, she thinks. If I were home a casserole would be puffing up in the oven, the dog snuggled against my feet, and I would be knitting a few rows on Tandy's hat: school colors, gold and green. In her mind she can visualize the warm glow of the fireplace and NBC's Lester Holt announcing the evening news. All is well or could be, except it's not. She is not home and she is not safe.*

Her parka is open at the neck. Stony cold permeates the stalled SUV's interior. Her bound hands cannot reach her zipper pull. Remarkably calm for her circumstances, she wishes momentarily that she had worn her boots today. But then how could she have known she'd be a victim of car-jacking as she grabbed a pair of ballet flats on her way out the back door? She tries to wiggle her raw toes. Useless, her feet are two blocks of ice. She turns her head to see him better, this invader of her peace, this transgressor, this young man who stole her car and her freedom. She realizes how really young he is -- not many years older than her Tandy.

His navy watch cap is pulled down over his ears. His head is on the leather covered steering wheel. His young jaw clenches and unclenches as he bangs the wheel lightly with his head. He speaks in a hoarse whisper.

"I am lost, and if I am, you are. No goddam phone, no freakin' GPS. I thought this was a luxury car. Not even heated seats. El Cheapo! You're no help. What do we do now?"

His icy tone of voice unsettles her.

"I have no idea," she responds. "It's a guess, but maybe, if you can get us started we might find a Buy and Go Food Market, or something like it, where we could call for help, wrap our hands around some hot coffee, and forget this miserable impasse."

"Look bitch, I'm not thinkin' of cold hands right now, got it? We're lost and I gotta figure this thing out. We gotta get outta here and find an ATM machine. Then I can get rid of you. I'm not keepin' you for your looks, you know. What the hell is an 'impasse' anyway? This Lexus is mine now, baby, even without frills, and you better shut your trap or I'll toss you out in the snow."

Her body is trembling now. Convincing herself it's the cold, not fear, she looks out the window. Flakes are heavier now, a white-out swirling around the car.

“Look, keep the car; there's sure to be a main road near here I'll take my chances. Go on, you've got the keys. Go. Remember what Piglet said in Winnie the Pooh: 'It's hard to be brave when you're only a very small animal.'”

He stares at her. “Who do you think you are, my mother or somethin'? For God's sake, cut the Mother Goose crap. I told you to shut up. What part of 'shut up' don't you get? Piglet, who the hell is Piglet? One of those stupid Three Pigs? 'I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down', that's what he said, right?”

“No, that's what the wolf said, but anyway, this Piglet is different. He's in another story and he's a wise little fella, not like the two brothers in The Three Pigs.”

He stares at her as she tells him these piggy facts of fable. “I knew I knew your face someplace. You used to work at the library, didn't you? You used to tell us kids stories!” He laughs at his own detective skills. “I remember you now, lotsa stories.”

He stares out the window. Nothing to see now but blinding flurries. “Lotsa stories,” he mumbles. “Lotsa stories, long ago.”

He pushes the shiny starter button. Silence. Now, this too, fails him. She wonders why he doesn't get out and check the engine. She remains quiet. He hangs his head again and does not speak.

In this cold dark moment, who knows why, she thinks of a historical quote of some early English settlers: “We are lost. Therefore we will call it home.” No, home it couldn't be. We would freeze to death first, she thought.

Her bound hands lie useless in her lap. She leans her whole body toward him, poking his elbow. “I'll go; open the door. I'll go.”

He wrenches his head up from the wheel and looks at her, his eyes wild and anxious. “You freakin' won't,” he growls.

He pulls his gloves tighter, pushes the door handle against the encroaching storm. There is a crunch as the door opens. Then he is gone, a phantom in the whirl of powdered snow. She bows her head in grateful relief. ◀

# Pleasantries 1957

*by C. Pleasant's York*

There is a stillness of twilight, a sprinkling of stars, the cool crunching of bare feet on the grass, voices calling from across the street, the glimmering of fireflies as the darkness settles in, winged bats flitting noiselessly around the streetlights, the cracking of plastic ball against plastic bat, the rushing of eager outfielders, the swishing of the ball in the grass as it makes its way to the target.

The year is 1957. The place is Winston-Salem, the corner of Woodcrest Drive and Willowbrook Lane. It is summer. I am eight, ready to turn nine in late August. My brother, Frankie, is 13. Supper is over. If you listen carefully, you can hear the clink of the dishes in the sink, the blare of TV news. But Frankie and I have already made our nightly journey. Our destination is the smooth green lawn of the Doss Family across the street.

The game is Roll-a-Bat. The rules are simple. There is a batter, a catcher, and a pitcher. Everyone else is in the field. The batter hits the ball. If the ball hits you, you are automatically at bat. If you catch the ball, you must roll the ball to hit the bat which has been placed on the ground. If the ball hits the bat without a blade of grass between, you become the batter. If not, the same batter continues. We keep no score.

The rules are simple to allow both for the inexperience of Norman Walker, scarcely more than a baby with diaper held loosely by pins, and for Frankie who, my dad always said, “could bat a mean ball.” If the fielder who catches the ball is under five, he is allowed to move five giant steps toward the bat. If he is over 10, like Woody Fulton, Ralph Barrow, or Frankie, he has to go five giant steps backward. We all judge the steps with critical eyes.

The bat and the ball cost \$1.49 for the pair at Mount Tabor Food Market (“Low Prices are Born Here and Raised Elsewhere” is their slogan). A ball and bat can be counted on to last a season unless one of the big boys starts being the slugger and cracks the bat or the ball or, in the case of Frankie one time, both. The Roll-a-Bat games are suspended until the slugger convinces his dad to buy new equipment.

The other players are Laura and Bryan Byrd, the Doss children, Brenda Walker with her mop of blonde curls, Kay and the twins from down at the end of Willowbrook Lane, and the Tysons with their dog, Lady Black Nose. Frankie’s dog, Tar Baby, has to stay home because he catches the ball and refuses to give it up, postponing the game while one of us must pry the soggy ball from between his clenched teeth.

The game is always interrupted by the tinkling melody of the ice cream truck. Pockets of jingly dimes and nickels can be traded for Nutty Buddies and Crème Sickles and Eskimo Pies, which must be quickly consumed before they melt away in the warmth of the summer evening.

The bug-spray truck is another legal delay of the game. We stand fascinated as the modern-day dragon patrols the streets puffing out billowing clouds of poison.

I always inquire of the driver, “Now, Mister, you’re sure this stuff won’t kill lightning bugs?”

There is a smile lurking behind the handlebar moustache. “No, Little Lady. It only kills ‘skeeters and nasty ol’ bugs.”

And the lightning bugs do thrive, making their appearance just as the night starts to velvet the sky. We abandon bat and ball in favor of jars with metal lids carefully prepared with holes poked by a can opener and with wild leaves and twigs added in expectation of a “good catchin’ night”

We flop on the grass wet with dew, the fireflies in our jars blinking like traffic lights, and watch the bats flit around the streetlights. We tell tales of vampires, Frankenstein, of Wolf Man, of the sea serpent who lives in Ketner’s Lake a few hundred yards behind us. Norman cuddles up on my lap. The twins are giggling, groggy with sleep. Voices drift lazily from across the street. “Carolyn, Frank, Jr. - It’s time for bed.” “Brenda, Norman - You better get on home.” We turn reluctantly to leave with last good-byes, wheeling our bikes across the gravel or awkwardly carrying the sleepy little ones. The rules of the game of life are simple now, and time is forever. ◀

# Not His Father's Son

*by Linda Johnson*

Calvin sat at his bedroom desk, tried to focus on the freshman orientation materials, but couldn't concentrate. His gaze wandered around his room: the basketball trophies, the state championship game ball, varsity letters, pictures of his high school team. Tomorrow was the big day. His parents would drive him to campus in the morning.

He heard his dad's heavy footsteps in the hall and braced himself, more nervous than he'd been before the state championship game.

His dad stood tall in the doorway. He'd been a basketball star in high school, too, then a solid player in college. "Hey, son. How's it going?"

"Good, Dad. Everything's packed. What time do you want to leave?"

"We'll wait till rush hour's over. Maybe leave around 9:30."

"Sounds good."

His dad stepped into his room, sat down on his bed. "You know, son, I'm really proud of you. A full-ride basketball scholarship to UNC. Pretty impressive. You've worked hard."

"Thanks."

"Accounting---going to be a heavy load."

"I'll be okay. Math's easy. And Coach says the team has tutors."

"I'm sure you'll do fine. You always have. Your mother and I never worried about you."

His dad pushed up from the bed, his knees creaked. "All right then. Try to get a good night's sleep. Got a big day ahead of you."

Calvin closed his hands into fists, felt his muscles bulge. He had to be strong. "Dad, could you wait a minute? There's something I want to talk to you about."

His dad looked at his watch. "It's kind of late. Can it wait till the morning?"

Calvin leaned forward. If he didn't do it now, he wasn't sure he ever would. He shook his head. "Not really."

His dad sighed, sat back down. A worried look crossed his face and Calvin almost lost his nerve. Then he sucked it up. Best thing to just get it out there.

"There's something you should know." He hesitated, cleared his throat. So brave on the basketball court, so terrified now. Scared to say the words out loud. Finally, he let go. "I'm gay."

His dad looked dazed, like he'd banged heads with another player and didn't know where he was. He closed his eyes, shook his head. Finally, opened them and glanced at Calvin then quickly looked away. Focused on one of the basketball trophies on Calvin's desk.

“It’s a phase. It’s normal at your age to try different things. Experiment. But, I know you. My son’s not gay.”

“It’s not a phase. I’ve known since I was thirteen, maybe even before then.”

His dad pounded his fist on the bed. “You’re wrong. At your age, your hormones are crazy. It’s easy to get mixed up.”

Calvin thought about backing off. Telling his dad what he wanted to hear. But college would be a fresh start, and he was tired of living a lie.

“What about that girl, Shondra? The one you took to prom.”

“She’s a friend. I took her ’cause everyone expected me to. But I’m not into her.”

“You just haven’t met the right girl yet. That’s what college is for. You’ll meet a lot of girls, find the right one.”

“Dad, it’s not just Shondra. I’m not into girls. Never have been.”

“So you’re a late bloomer. You’ve had a lot on your plate. School, basketball. No time for anything else.”

Calvin wavered. It’d be so easy to drop it. He’d go away to school, do what he wanted there. His dad wouldn’t have to know. Eventually it would come up again. When his parents would start pressuring him about getting married, having kids. But until then, they could pretend. He met his dad’s hopeful gaze, like he’d thrown his drowning son a life preserver.

“You’re right, Dad. I’m just tired. Everything going on, you know.”

His dad flashed a big smile. “You’ll sort it all out at school, meet the right girl.”

His dad stood and headed for a quick escape. When he got to the doorway, he turned back.

“Let’s just keep this talk between us. Your mom doesn’t have to know. And don’t say anything to Coach or your teammates. It’s important to fit in. Be one of the guys.”

Calvin waited until he heard his dad walk down the hall. Then he made his way to his open closet and slammed the door shut. He turned and braced himself against the closed door, slid to the floor. He drew his knees up to his chest, rested his head on them. Pissed off at his dad for not accepting who he was. Even more pissed off at himself for letting it go. Still trapped in a lie. No way out. ◀

# Cigarettes

PROSE CONTEST WINNER

*by Jordan Henderson*

You liked to fuck me. In every sense, in every way. Part of me, however masochistic, must have liked it because I never went anywhere. And it wasn't that you made me stay. Not really. You could have had anyone. You could definitely have another me if you wanted, probably with shinier hair and bigger tits.

"What are you thinking about, lover?" You asked. At some point you must have noticed me spacing out, my phone's screen black.

"Groceries. We need milk." I glanced over at the fridge, glossing over where you sat, staring at me. "Go get some then. Grab me a pack of Marlboro shorts while you're out."

Automatically I grabbed my jacket and keys and walked out the door. I had to double back once I realized I left my phone by the window, but you hardly noticed my re-entry. I wouldn't have believed you if I left and you said something along the lines of, 'Bye honey, I love you' anyway. I might have even laughed.

When I made it onto the sidewalk, I pulled on my leather jacket and zipped it up to the collar. I walked slowly with my hands in my pockets to the shop a few blocks down.

I didn't like this neighborhood. It was too nice. Too polished and too everything you loved. When you said we should move in together, there wasn't even a discussion. We were going to live here, and my modest apartment that I loved wasn't even a discussion. I don't remember if I even agreed to move in with you, but I must not have said no either.

I turned the corner onto the street the store was on. It was busy, even for a Sunday. I didn't mind the crowds, but you didn't care for them. Standing at 6'5" to my 5'7", you towered over most everyone, seeing them as annoyances that tripped you up too often. I imagined you even saw me like that sometimes, even if you didn't when we first met.

Walking into the shop, I made my way to the dairy aisle. I'd always done all the shopping. When we met at that bar, the first thing you did was tell me to get you a beer. I knew you were messing with me, but you must have liked how I took a swig of the one I had in my hand and gave you the remains. I'm not that person now. Quick on my feet and ready to bite back at any moment. But from then on I couldn't shake you. I was a conquest. I didn't even realize it until after I'd been conquered.

Grabbing a gallon, I walked to the counter and asked for cigarettes. I didn't smoke, but by now I was used to the way you tasted like a pack a day.

I left the store and started back to yours. I'd only been gone about 20 minutes, but you'd ask what took so long. You liked to keep tabs. I learned that about you later on.

Somewhere around four months into our relationship, I'd made the mistake of leaving my phone in my apartment when I went out with my girlfriends. I came back to find you had broken into my place and tore it apart. You said you were worried about me. You couldn't reach me and you needed to know I was safe. Of course there were red flags waving when you told me that. But all I did was shut the door and let you fuck me. It made you feel close to me, you said. Like we were both here, and we were both real and alive. From then on, you always knew where I was, so I wouldn't make you worry like that again.

Once I made it back, I walked by the couch where you were still perched, now without your computer, and dropped the cigarettes next to your ashtray. Before I had a chance to put the milk away,

you shot your arm out and hooked it around my waist so you could pull me over the back of the sofa and down to you. A still-lit cigarette dangled from your lips.

“What kept you?” Your thumb brushed away a strand of hair from my face, leaving a trail of fire across my skin.

“Crowds.” I told you, not leaving your gaze.

You took a drag.

Before exhaling what was surely the last of that pack, you leaned down close to my face and blew the smoke against my neck. Your warm breath felt good against my skin.

“Your hair is looking really nice lately,” You told me as you twirled a strand between your fingers. “I like it long. I don’t want you to cut it. I like a little something to grab onto.” You said, lips twitching upwards.

“I’ll do what I like.” I dared to say.

A low laugh vibrated in your throat. “But isn’t it more fun to do what I like?” You asked, running your free hand down my arm.

You pressed the dead cigarette into the ashtray on the table next to you, and then shifted my body to sit me upright. You loved being able to move me how you wanted. You liked to remind me that you could handle me. In the beginning, I thought it was funny. I’d giggle when you’d throw me over your shoulder and spin me around. I’d yell for you to let me go between playful screams and laughter. You’d tickle my sides before placing me gently back down. You knew your strength, but gentle was something you did rarely.

“I’m going to Courtney’s art thing tomorrow. Little sister’s got talent. I might even be proud of her. Though talent does run in the family, as you well know,” You told me, grinning. “Come with me.”

“I have work tomorrow.”

“But I want you there. You can wear that black thing I like. I want to show you off, gorgeous. Plus, I’ve missed you lately. You’ve been so busy. You didn’t even make it when I had my first screening, and you know how I wanted to show you my first short film.”

“Dan, I can’t ditch work.” I told you, looking away just slightly.

Cupping my chin in your fingers, you turned my head to you a little too forcefully as you leaned in close to me.

“Sara, you’re unhappy.” You accused.

“I’m just stressed about work, babe.”

Closing in a few millimeters, your lips brushed against mine as you spoke.

“Sara, you really should find another job. You and I both know you’re not cut out for it.

There’s no shame in that. Print is dying and those keeping it alive are the best. I just don’t think you’re up for it. And that’s okay. You know I’m happy to find you something else.”

Closing my eyes, I pressed my lips to yours softly, unable to respond to your backhanded words.

You took the softness of my kiss and twisted it into something rough and unrecognizable. You didn’t know how to do soft anymore, and I didn’t expect you to remember. You grabbed and pulled at my body, making sure to never take your lips from mine.

So I went through the motions. You used me as you liked and I let you. When you were done, you went back to your computer. I went and took a quick shower before coming back out to the living room. I noticed the milk laying on the floor, covered in condensation, waiting.

Looking back, I can’t remember if I put it away. I’m not even sure if it was me looking for my bag, and pulling on my shoes. The last things my hands grabbed in that apartment were my coat and keys as I left to pick up the bag I told you I’d left at the store. You told me to hurry back, and I said I’d be quick. When the door shut behind me, I felt around for my phone, but it wasn’t there.

I didn’t go back for it. ◀

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Cafe & Brewery for headings & other text

Californian for body text & author biographies

*Sunshine in My Soul* for headings and bylines

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## 2018 *submissions*

Red Clay Review is accepting submissions for its 2018 music-themed edition. Contributors can submit prose up to 1500 words, up to three poems of up to 80 lines each, and/or up to three original images. Poetry and prose submissions must be sent electronically as .doc, .docx, or .rtf file attachments; images must be submitted as high resolution files. Submissions must be sent to [rer@cccc.edu](mailto:rer@cccc.edu) and include the writer's name, mailing address, phone number, and word count. Entries must be received by May 10, 2018.

Questions may be sent to the same address or  
contact Summerlin Webb at 919.718.7270.

