

**The Journal  
Summer 2021  
Writers Guild of  
Virginia**



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# The Walk - A Photo Essay

Scott Butler

Before the pandemic, I was in the habit of going on early morning walks to our little downtown, about a mile from our house. The downtown, however, is adjacent to Virginia Tech, and caters to it, and when the students began coming back in late summer, I was wary of passing near them as they walked unmasked to the breakfast places. So I looked for another, more solitary route of similar length and finally settled on one that crossed the main street and zig-zagged mostly upward to the Blacksburg municipal golf course. Behind the course there is a meadow bordered by mountains, and I began stopping to watch the often spectacularly lovely sunrises over them, and then to take pictures and post some of these on Facebook.



This essay is the result of generosity and tragedy. Years ago my sister Susan Witt gave my wife Susan and me a digital camera, which she called a starter camera, to help move us into the digital age--a continuing and heroic project of hers. We learned how to use it and download files and so on. But we never moved on from it. Then two

years ago our friend David Elder, whose broad-ranging interests include photography and all things computer-technical, gave us his digital camera out of the blue, saying he relied mainly on his smartphone these days. Because of my sister's gift, we were able to use David's more advanced camera right away, and for a while Susan, the



self-appointed recorder of our life, did most of the picture taking.

But then the pandemic happened, setting off a chain of events that led me to start taking pictures too. I was in the habit of going on early morning walks to our little downtown, about a mile from our house. The downtown, however, is adjacent to a university, and caters to it, and I was wary of passing near students as they walked unmasked to the breakfast places. So I looked for another route of similar length and finally settled on one that crossed the main street and zig-zagged mostly upward--our town is in the mountains of Southwest Virginia--to the city golf course.

For a few mornings I just walked, getting more exercise than I was used to on the climb up. But at the back of the golf-course parking lot there is a break in the tree line, occupied partly by a gazebo, from which you can look down into a meadow bordered by mountains, and I began stopping there to watch the sunrises.

They were so lovely and striking that I took our camera--essentially Susan's camera, courtesy of David--to record one. By my amateur's standards, the photograph turned out well enough to share on Facebook, and the positive response it received encouraged me to keep taking and posting pictures from my walks.

Although I am constitutionally a hermit, the isolation of the pandemic had been getting even to me, and sharing these pictures, usually right after I returned, was a way of bringing others into my life. It was also for me, and I hope for these friends, a little respite from the tensions and fears of the times. As many of us did, I knew people who'd gotten covid, and I followed the news reports of hospitals nearing capacity and refrigerated trucks used as morgues. I was also worried about our daughter, pregnant with her first child in faraway Los Angeles. We'd canceled our April trip there because of the pandemic, and then made the painful decision not to go in



mid-summer when Lily, our grandchild, was born. But at the top of my walks, watching the dawn brighten over the mountains, I forgot my worries for a few moments. Without realizing it, I was doing something that psychologists have begun to recommend--having an experience of awe, of something grand and extraordinary that takes you out of yourself.

Over the next few weeks my photographic enterprise evolved. At the gazebo, the drop into meadow is steep, and though it becomes less steep nearer the road, thick undergrowth and in places the standing remnants of a wire fence discourage climbing down it. But there is one spot on the gentler slope where an uprooted tree has flattened the fence and made a little clearing, and soon I was cautiously picking my way around rocks and roots, or using them as footholds, to enter the meadow. I would arrive early enough to see the sky in first light, which was sometimes more beautiful than the sky in the moments before sunrise. Depending on the cloud cover, the earlier view might be the only show, like a feathered

chorus line that dances on stage to introduce the star performer, who never appears. Also, if something caught my eye in the golf course or the horse farm across the road from it, I'd take a picture of that too on the way up or back. It was all part of the same story, repeated every morning, of the beginning of a new day.

And at some point I resolved to make a daily record of the sunrises, weather permitting, though foolishly I didn't always let the weather stop me, either. In the winter I slipped and fell twice on icy sidewalks (no harm done), and once accidentally tobogganed, without a toboggan, down the snow-crusted slope into the meadow.

At first I thought of my self-appointed mission as recording something permanent under varying conditions. But after a while, I gave more weight to the varying conditions. No two mornings were ever entirely alike. Each sunrise, and each moment of each sunrise, was unique and unrepeatable. This is true of every moment, as we both know and don't know, with a diminishing ability to not





know as we age. Anyone who lives long enough witnesses the passing away of previous generations and the shape-shifting of the culture like a wind-buffed cloud. Having reached my 70s, and living at the moment in a pandemic, I wasn't exactly unaware that change was the heart of existence, but the sunrises brought it home. They were like the intricate and lovely mandalas that Buddhist monks painstakingly create out of colored bits of sand or stone, and then ritualistically destroy in acknowledgement of the transitory nature of things--but with the difference that the morning's visions contained no symbolism of deities I could interpret, and they disappeared almost as quickly as they formed, sometimes before I had a chance to capture them. So I came to think of myself as a preservationist of fleeting, otherwise unremembered beauty.

Then late in winter my sense of purpose underwent a further revision. The final upward stretch of road leads to an intact length of fence with a chained gate, and a sign that says

"ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING," which I'd been ignoring with various rationales. One of these, the flimsiest, was that where the fence had fallen the sign was no longer in force. Another was that I was doing no harm, or not much: the meadow grass, once trampled, remained that way, so I stuck to the few trails I'd made. And drawing on my background as a student of American literature, I agreed with Emerson that "there is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts." Which made me a spiritual owner of the landscape. Nevertheless, a couple of times when a man showed up in a rusty pickup and unchained the gate to walk his two dogs on the rutted road that wound through the meadow, I stayed in the parking lot, assuming he was the non-spiritual owner. But one morning as I arrived in the lot, he was just climbing out of his truck, and I asked him if the meadow was his. The man--white mustache, military-style sun hat--said it wasn't, but he knew the owner and had permission



to walk in it. “Nice bit of meadow,” I said, understating my appreciation. He nodded. “They just sold it. Houses will be going up there soon.” The news shocked me. At some level I’d known this was a possibility, but the meadow had been there forever, and I’d allowed myself to think of it as no less enduring than the mountains. “That’s a shame,” I said. Perhaps out of loyalty to his friend, the man replied, “There’s no more places to live around here. We’re running out of room.” So in the near future, the meadow will have become one of those lost beauties that my pictures preserve. The sky and the mountains will remain, of course, but the view of them will include rooftops and telephone wires--as is true of the mountains visible from the streets in my neighborhood, which was once a meadow too. Despite the hypocrisy of my lament, I share Thoreau’s sentiment: “I should be glad if all the meadows on the earth were left in a wild state.”

This essay, then, is a double stay against impermanence. It begins in early autumn, after

I’d established my routine, and ends in late summer (with two summer breaks, during which we visited our grandchild). Inevitably, I ended up taking pictures of the same things, but borne along on time’s river they were never completely the same; they had had a freshness and even a novelty that made me want to photograph them again. I think of them as recurring motifs in a modest symphony of praise: the mountains and tall grass as seen in different lights; the rising sun marching across the ridges and back again through the seasons; the moon following its less straightforward schedule; the horses in their meadow; the small herd of deer in their meadow; the birds and rabbits; certain trees; and on some mornings the contrails of military jets embroidering the cloud show. These are the momentary splendors of my covid mornings, preserved at least for a little while. I invite you to enjoy them with me. As Robert Frost says at the end of his poem “The Pasture,” You come too.





*Happiness is not  
being pained  
in body  
or  
troubled in mind.*

*-Thomas Jefferson*

## **Happiness in the Time of COVID**

**Terry Cox-Joseph**

It's been said that happiness is as simple as subtracting expectations from reality. So I don't expect perfection of my friends, my body, my cooking, my house. I should be ecstatic. After all, I've exhausted expectations: my scratched car, canceled doctor appointments, piled laundry, online groceries, or clipping my cousin's curled, yellow toenails (small blessings—no family allowed inside). My expectation is to someday fall sick, to thrash and heave my drenched body against the sheets, to ache as though I've fallen from a cliff. And then, to recover.

In other words, happiness is as basic as resolutely dropping my expectations of luck and immunity, of forever fleeing this bat-demon, twisted protein RNA. Now is my time for painting at midnight, because something has to give, so why not sleep? I will sleep and sleep when I'm forced by this freak of nature, this medieval-modern plague, forced to cry. Pain and trouble are to subtract reality from expectations, exhaust ecstasy.

# Dear Loved One

Terry Cox-Joseph

Words? Am I to pen only words  
to write of the color of moss  
on brick shadowed behind  
the house just before sunrise?  
How to describe the texture  
that mimics your flesh, the play  
of shadow receding with each note  
of the whippoorwill? The rising music  
of mockingbirds just before the light  
rolls upward through damp dawn  
like your hand upon the inside  
of my thigh? Which words  
describe my skyward-surging  
gasp in morning's joy?

Words? Only words to describe  
the urge and swell and quench  
of my need, clinging olive grove  
canted on hillside, Kalamata oil  
and salt wheeling across my tongue,  
begging to drown in the smolder  
and smoke of merlot? How you sate  
my thirst with the warmth  
of raspberries and tobacco.

Oh, Dearest Love, how am I to write  
of the flavor of thunder, the sound  
of tears, touch of crimson? How to shape  
language in the form of my bones, your flesh,  
our vision, entwined like seaweed that waltzes  
with the current, forever paired  
like words  
on a page?

# Footprints

Terry Cox-Joseph

Like a lover caressing a spine,  
I glide my finger along migratory  
patterns dashed in blue. Ethiopia  
north across Bering Strait. M2,  
pulsating line of DNA: Russia, Poland,  
Germany, Denmark, Ireland. Constructs,  
semaphores, umlauts and emphasis  
from hard palate to velvety trill.

Ninety-nine dollars and swab  
of saliva lift footprints from the dead.  
Ursa Major and Cassiopeia yet unnamed  
charted course for what must be done,  
barefoot, brave. For some, dark curls  
lingered, newborns' smooth flesh faded  
to peach. Sheepskin fastened with dried  
ligaments warded off frostbitten toes.

Walk, M2.

Feet clad in flat cowhide boots—  
Great-great-grandfather banished  
from Britain for stealing a horse.  
Leather galoshes with side snap  
marched to infamy—Great Uncle  
Miess, from celebrated sheriff to  
skulking shadow. Leather wingtips

hugged narrow feet of father and son,  
salesmen, door-to-door. Smokes on the  
porch. Aproned mother in laced flats  
spooned spätzle in the kitchen. Pitzen,  
McCarthy, Cox, Tautges, Lichtenheld  
heaved obstinate soil with calloused  
grips, levered boulders with crude metals,  
sweat veiling vision, mosquitoes feasting  
on sun-blistered flesh. New World offered  
new life, not perfection. Their toils cascade  
about my shoulders like tumbling cherry  
blossoms. I slide soft soil with palms bare  
and healthy, sprinkle store-bought nutrients,  
tilt beribboned sunhat, soothe scented lotion  
on knuckles. From the belly of my soul  
I breathe thanks. I am M2. I am here.

# There You Lie

E. Compton Lee

There you lie beneath your blanket of snow. Unseen, unfound, unaware of the endless mornings your parents face; the blessed unconsciousness sliding into a moment of amnesia then the shattering knowledge that they have another day to live through.

The knock on the door. The words. The image of my son's face. Though I was not there it stays with me forever, a shade that stalks, follows me down a grocery aisle, hands me, with an obscene leer, a can of soup, dances in front, clear and bright steel eviscerating but too cruel to kill me outright.

My son's face with the ready smile, quick wit and optimism, always that optimism, gone, crumbling slowly now from the creased brow, the eyes closing never to shine with innocence again, his beautiful generous mouth cracking, opening in horror.

I miss you sweet boy. But I miss my son's unfettered happiness just as much. The golden one, luck raining down on him, pouring over him, bringing everything this world deems important, mocking what is considered fair. Then--in the same terrible storm that brings happiness--the knock on the door. Those words. Irrefutable. You can't have one without the other. Joy is the other side of sorrow.

Did you know what would follow?

No. No way. You were never cruel. The opposite. Too tender for the fray, seeking silence to cover your despair, a slow sweet smile that hid you from us. Two days before you left, you came home to say goodbye, though your parents didn't understand. It wouldn't have mattered if they had. Nothing could sway you from your quest to free yourself of life's heartless grip.

And so, there you lie beneath your blanket of snow. Unseen, unfound. Gone. Leaving your father to grapple with his collapsing self. Forcing one foot in front of the other. Marshaling all that is good and brave to carry on and look after the rest of his family. Your mother, slowly starving. You were her sustenance, her happiness, her focus for being. Your dear, dear, sister with her exquisite sad face wondering what you would be doing now had you lived, remembering your kindnesses. Your brother, stoic and hard on the outside, raging with pain on the inside.

You will come to us again but not as the beautiful boy we knew. The eyes of a homeless child, a circling hawk, fierce and unafraid, the loving smile of an ancient. Will we recognize you? Will we find you in that gentle breeze that moves across our skin? I want to think yes but cannot muster the hope. Not yet.

There you lie beneath your blanket of snow, unseen, unfound, carried into the universe on life's journeying wave, leaving behind those who love you, who wait without knowing for God's amazing grace.

# Meditation

Bradley Harper

Breathe out the weight of memories

Inhale a fresh new day

My mind is clear, balance secure

The past just slips away

Ghosts no longer touch me

They weigh nothing, anyhow

As I recite my mantra

I am here, and this is now

Future worries stalk me

Listing things that I should fear

Painting pictures of disasters

Robbing me of what is dear

They would steal away this moment

Add wrinkles to my brow

'Til I deflect their power

For I am here, and this is now

I turn and hear you breathing

Just before the morning's call

Wrap my arms around you

And warm you like a shawl

I marvel at this moment

That came to me, somehow

And say once more, with all my heart

You are here, and we are now

# The Deer and Me

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

I live with a herd of twenty-three deer.  
They wander our streets and backyards  
as if they own the neighborhood  
because they do. They were here first.

When I moved here, I declared war and  
supremacy over the marauders, vowing  
to save my flowers and vegetables  
inside wire cages and behind fences.

It took a couple of summers to succumb  
to their superior skill and determination.  
Tomatoes and petunias disappeared, wire  
cages no match for hungry bucks with horns.

That winter, we had days of snow and ice.  
When the snow melted, I discovered the ivy  
beds around my deck had been eaten bare.  
I rationalized leaves would return in spring.

They did and one day, I discovered a newborn  
fawn, sleeping peacefully in the ivy bed, while  
the new mom trustingly nibbled nearby.  
We exchanged gazes and I surrendered.

# The Lunch Bunch

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

Hundreds of black flashes swoop past my window  
and dive-bomb into the bare field beyond my deck.  
Their shrill chatter drowns out the mid-day news,  
sends me running to document the fluttering wings.

The acre field that is my backyard is a sea of black.  
Before I can raise my phone and click the button,  
they rise, as one, to some unseen, unheard signal  
and fill the tall pines that line my property.

Pine boughs sway and sigh under their weight.  
Then, as quickly as they came, they are gone,  
a dark blanket rising into the clear, blue sky,  
soaring off to places known only to them.

# Together Again

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

Come and sit on the porch with me.  
The tea is cold; the friendship free.  
Our quarantine comes to an end.  
Spirits, bodies begin to mend.

I've missed your hugs, in-person talks;  
look forward to our mask-less walks.

Our world reopens; I can't wait  
for our first restaurant luncheon date.

Will we be anxious on that day,  
or just relieved to run and play?

What have we learned as Covid ends?  
Important things are family, friends.





# Jamestown Musings

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer

What if I had touched my toes on this New World seashore  
after four months of heart thudding waves---  
my hopes rising and falling on endless water  
and the mood of the sky?

The clouds rolled back, opening windows of blue.

An anemic sun washed the sand.

I gasped for air sweetened with honeysuckle.

The trees so tall they swept memory of mist-iced  
winging ropes, creaking wood, slippery decks,  
monotonous food, frightful sanitation.

What if I had a hungry infant searching  
for strength I did not have to give?

Finally, ashore, we are assigned a hut  
vacated by death, the pioneer couple  
succumbed to the sorrows of their first winter.

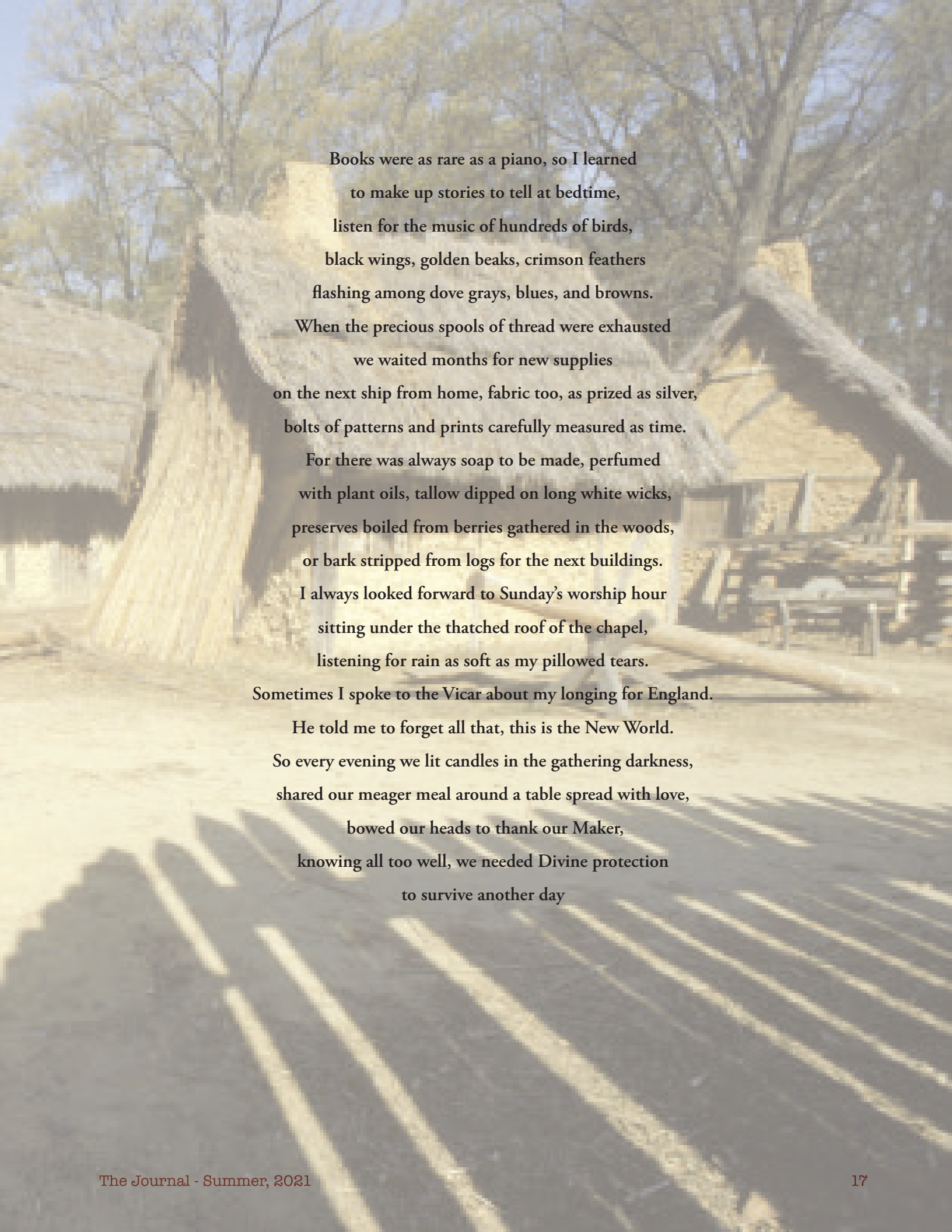
Early in the mornings the women tied up  
their skirts and hair in favor of hoes and rakes  
before the swelling sun sucked us dry.

Then the boiled laundry was ready to be hung,  
swinging like pale ghosts of yesterday,  
on ropes strung between the trees,

An iron pot of broth swung over a voracious fire,  
eating sticks gathered by skinny children.

I pared the vegetables today, potatoes  
onions, carrots, a few precious beans.

Would I have been allowed  
to paint a forest scene or write a journal  
sew a pinafore or doze on my sagging cot  
in the sticky heat of afternoon?



Books were as rare as a piano, so I learned  
to make up stories to tell at bedtime,  
listen for the music of hundreds of birds,  
black wings, golden beaks, crimson feathers  
flashing among dove grays, blues, and browns.  
When the precious spools of thread were exhausted  
we waited months for new supplies  
on the next ship from home, fabric too, as prized as silver,  
bolts of patterns and prints carefully measured as time.  
For there was always soap to be made, perfumed  
with plant oils, tallow dipped on long white wicks,  
preserves boiled from berries gathered in the woods,  
or bark stripped from logs for the next buildings.  
I always looked forward to Sunday's worship hour  
sitting under the thatched roof of the chapel,  
listening for rain as soft as my pillowed tears.  
Sometimes I spoke to the Vicar about my longing for England.  
He told me to forget all that, this is the New World.  
So every evening we lit candles in the gathering darkness,  
shared our meager meal around a table spread with love,  
bowed our heads to thank our Maker,  
knowing all too well, we needed Divine protection  
to survive another day

# Catrina

**Bradley Harper**

September 1991, San Antonio, Texas. It was a familiar story: an elderly widow in a retirement community whose mail was stacking up, and who hadn't been seen for three days. I was on my medical examiner rotation in the final months of pathology residency and was accompanying staff from the ME's office to observe death-scene investigations. Death was no stranger to me, but before, it had always come freshly gowned from the wards or Emergency Room. This time I was to see death au naturel.

The super's knock at her door was answered by silence, and I took a deep breath as he let us in. The sweet smell of decay hit us as we entered, the odor declaring we were at the right address. I was grateful the apartment was air-conditioned. We found her in the bedroom propped up against the headboard, her gray face mottled. There was a small, blood-ringed hole through her frilly, pink nightgown over the left breast. The .38 revolver lying beside her told us all we needed to know to complete our investigation, or so I thought.

Then I noticed her recently permed hair, with every blue strand in place. Looking closer I saw her lipstick and makeup were also perfect. At first I thought she just wanted to look good for her funeral...until I followed her gaze.

Facing her was a small vanity with a faded, colorized portrait of a young man, proud in his airman's uniform. The photograph was posed so that it would have been the last thing she saw. I imagined her making herself up as she prepared for her final date. I wondered if she talked to the photograph as she applied her cosmetics, recounting the first time they met.

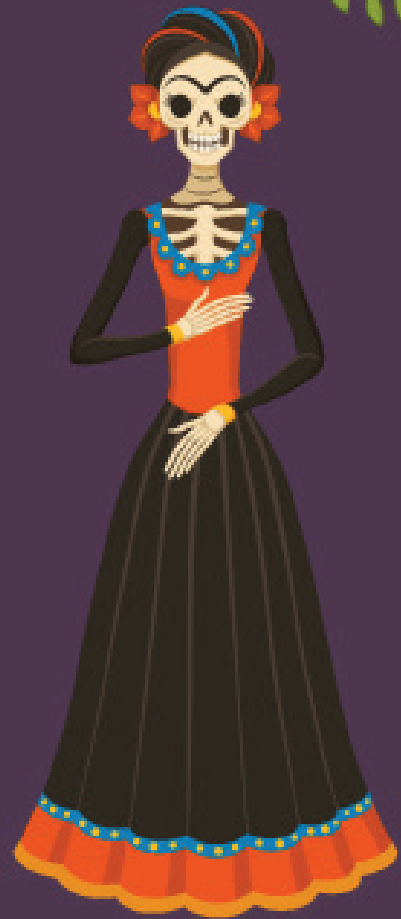
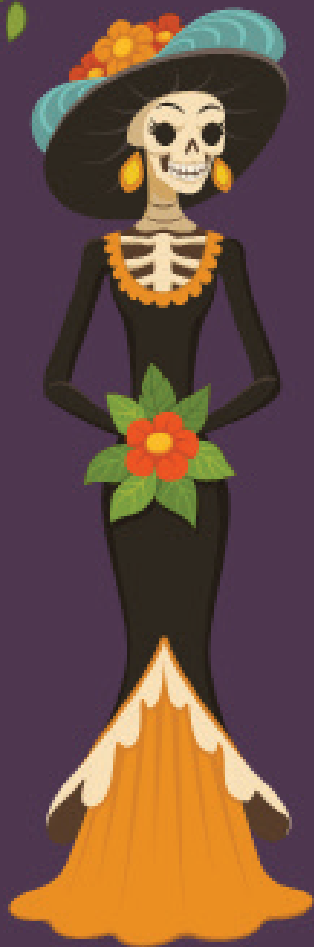
In Mexico, Death is often portrayed as a skeletal woman dressed elegantly and elaborately made

up, named Katrina. As I absorbed the scene before me, I felt as if I had met my own version of The Lady.

In forensic medicine, we make various determinations on the death certificate listing cause of death, mechanism of death, and manner of death. In this case, under "mechanism of death," I described the damaged chambers of her heart. Manner of death I ascribed to suicide. Under "cause of death" however, I had to lie and say gunshot wound to the chest, when I really knew it was something else.

It was loneliness.

*La Catrina*



DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

# Travel Writing, Hiking in Utah's National Parks

Mary Montague Sikes

For many years before I published my first novel, I was a travel writer. I enjoyed our trips to Europe, the Caribbean, Canada, and all over the United States. It was fun to write about our adventures and to later see my stories appear in a variety of newspapers and magazines, like the *Miami Herald* and *BWIA Sunjet*. The following story is the first of a series I am writing about our trips to National Parks.

It was a hot July day, and I had no idea what I was getting into. Our daughter, Allison, planned an amazing trip for us to visit several of the beautiful National Parks in Utah. Zion was the first, and someone suggested the hike to Angel's Landing as an activity.

I loved the name, Angel's Landing, so I said, "Let's do it."

It was already early afternoon when we began our trek. The climb was scorching and dusty. Since I couldn't keep up, our daughters went on ahead. I was thankful for the trekking stick that gave me more confidence for the hike.

Many people passed me along the way-- young couples, families, rugged-looking hikers going it alone. They all headed with confidence toward Angel's Landing. But then there were others, coming back from the direction of our destination. Some dragged along, disappointment evident from their gait. Others appeared happier, more upbeat. Someone stopped to tell me about the chains in use for the final, most dangerous sections of the climb.

With my fear of heights and lack of hiking boots, I wondered if I could make it to the top.

It began to feel unlikely, especially after I saw a sign warning of dangers I had not expected. It was

hazardous during thunderstorms and darkness, of course, and it was also dangerous for those who got dizzy because of heights. There were lots more reasons for turning back. People died hiking this trail.

Naively, I thought I actually might hike up to the top. I went as far as I felt safe walking and climbing but soon discovered my expectations were too high. For a few minutes, I stood on the edge of rugged beauty and marveled at those who had crossed our country by covered wagon and survived. It took tremendous courage to battle the elements and the craggy landscape to reach a little-known far-away destination.

On the return hike to the luxury of the lodge, I heard a flop, flop sound. When I looked down, I discovered that the soles of my tennis shoes had disintegrated along the way. Thankfully, I was not higher up toward Angel's Landing when that happened.

During our trip, we found easier hiking trails, all with glorious scenery. We enjoyed Bryce Canyon National Park, and many more. I never reached the top of Angel's Landing and neither did our daughters, but they made it much farther than I did.



# The Face of God

Lynn Underwood

My brother has always been my spiritual mentor. Since he is eleven years my senior, I have looked up to him since childhood. I remember it started when I was in Sunday school. I had come home one day telling him what we had studied there. His response was dismissive. He began by asking me if I thought Adam and Eve were the only family on Earth at the beginning of creation. I said, “Yes” (I was eight years old).

“Next Sunday,” he said, “if you want to see them in a quandary, ask them who Seth married when he went off to the land of Nod.”

I got in trouble for that one. But it started me thinking about what I was reading.

My brother taught me the importance of critical thinking at a very young age. Then, a few years ago he challenged me again.

We were at his ex-wife’s home in the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico. The occasion was the Annual Corn Dance. The Indians from her pueblo would dance all day, and tourists were invited to come and watch. We had a center front-row seat from Tessie’s porch. Each year, it was a big deal for the residents who would host anyone who came with a home-cooked meal. Tessie and her sisters--and everyone else in the village--would work for days preparing for the event. Of course there were lots of things tourists could buy from the Santa Clara residents, but the big event was the dance.

The local Native Americans would dress in traditional costumes and perform rehearsed dances that had been passed down from generations of ancestors. I remember there was a character in costume that Tessie called The Joker. He was said to be the disruptor in the affairs of life...one who was always present and easy to blame for otherwise unexplained circumstances,

a general disruptor of human affairs with good intentions. Maybe we would call him entropy in modern parlance.

The Joker even came into Tessie’s home during one dance, drank a glass of cold water then promptly left after blessing the house with his Aya, a rattle made of a dried gourd filled with corn.

He went back to the dance, and in a little while, my brother, with enthusiastic astonishment, grabbed me, pointed at The Joker, and said, “Lynn! Look there’s God! Right there. Look! He’s dancing. See him? Look...look there he is!”

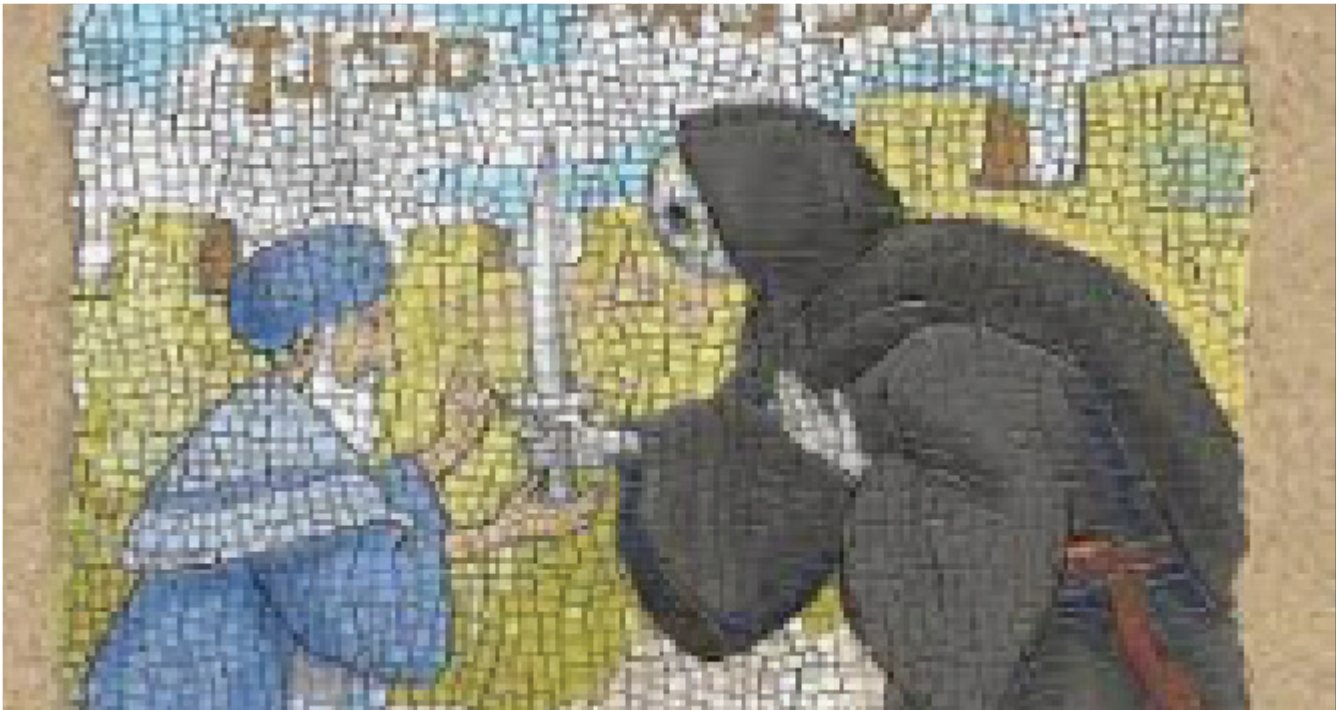
At this point I finally got the message. God was there...in the flesh. I had seen him in the house. He had walked right up to me and shaken his Aya at me.

My brother’s point was that God is everywhere and in everyone...if we just look! If we simply acknowledge the truth that was told to us 3000 years ago by Moses.

He didn’t have to tell me that the Bible affirmed this message. I knew it well.

Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”





Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi and the Angel of Death

In the Old Testament there are more references to humans being created in the image of God. Genesis 5:1 says, “This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in His own likeness,” and Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man his blood will be shed; for in His own image God has made mankind.”

New Testament references include Ephesians 4:24 “...and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,” and Colossians 3:10 “...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Such scriptures prompted the Latin term *Imago Dei*, the Image of God. This theological term was applied uniquely to humans, which denotes a symbiotic relationship between God and humanity. The passage does not imply that God is in human form but rather that humans are created in the image of God in their moral, spiritual and intellectual nature. Thus humans mirror God’s divinity in their ability to actualize

the unique qualities with which they have been endowed. These are the characteristics making them different from other creatures. According to Father Michael Marsh, an Episcopal Priest who has written extensively on the subject, these qualities include: rational thinking, complete centeredness, creative freedom, the possibility of self-actualization, and the possibility of self-transcendence.

Now let’s shift to around the year 325 AD in the land of Israel and visit with Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi. He was an Amora--one of a group of traditional rabbis who preserved the oral *Torah* by repeating it for the people. He was a scholar of the *Talmud* who lived in the town of Lod. Rabbi Ben Levi is the source of one of my favorite quotes: “Behold a procession of angels passes before each person and heralds go before them saying, ‘Make way for the image of God.’”

Imagine that! Wherever we go, a noisy crowd goes in front of us shouting, playing music, and proclaiming our arrival. We are never alone. A

procession of angels precedes us and announces our arrival...like a king or a president. We are royalty!

The quote, "All are made in the Image of God" is sometimes placed next to or even on a mirror. Most people read this quote and think, *Well, of course, I have been made in the image of God.* But they will likely not think the same of the next person who looks into that mirror.

At a spiritual formation class I attended a few years ago, we were discussing Richard Rohr's book, *Everything Belongs*. The discussion gravitated to everything and everyone being sacred and God dwelling within each of us. Later, during the church service, a homeless man came in and caused a stir when he stood to put something in the offering plate but wanted change back. The pastor and ushers were respectful and patient. At that point, I leaned forward and whispered to the couple in front of us who had been part of our class, "Look Bobbi, there's God! Do you see him? Look, he's right there." This homeless man reminded me of the lesson we had learned in our Sunday school class, the lesson I had learned from my brother all those years ago: If God is everywhere, then God is in each of us and in every person we meet!

Another author I dearly love is Ram Dass who is famously quoted as saying, "Treat everyone like God in drag."

Everyone? What about our darkest enemies, our political foes, those with an alternative gender identification, the poor and homeless, those of a different color, race, ethnicity, religion or any other distinction from ours? Are they all made in the Image of God?

According to Ben Levi, Dass, and my wise brother, image and likeness are not about physical features but rather a reflection of our attitude

and behavior, about how we interact with others, how we treat others. John Wooden and others are famously quoted as saying, "The true test of your character is what you do when no one is looking."

I think the real lesson of Rabbi Ben Levi is to treat everyone as we would treat God in the flesh. It compels me to consider what that noisy band of angels announces about me.

39

The right time is right  
now to do the right thing  
for the right reason and  
you are the right person;  
be right.

*Cyrus M Cornier*

## Mrs. Cutbush

Life in England was everything I had hoped it would be—and more. I had taken the overseas assignment because of my desire to travel and live abroad. Some of my colleagues cautioned me against taking the position because promotions are made at the home office, not overseas.

Nevertheless, my thirst for travel was just too great to turn down the opportunity. And, my wife, Janice, was in full agreement with the move.

Our nearly three years in England were wonderful. The people were friendly, we lived in a beautiful country home, we went to plays and museums in London and toured historical sites. All in all, life was good.

Even when it came to getting a babysitter for our three sons, life was great. Our babysitter was an eighteen-year-old girl who lived in the house next door.

It was too good to last.

Twelve months into our tour, the news came—our babysitter was going off to college and we would have to find a replacement.

“Not to worry,” Janice said, “I will check around the village and find someone.

Sure enough, within twenty-four hours she had a name, Mrs. Cutbush. And just in time too. We had gotten an invitation to dinner Saturday evening from one of my co-workers.

Janice told me the good news when I got home from work. She had talked to Mrs. Cutbush on the phone and was impressed. Mrs. Cutbush was a widow with no children, who lived in a council housing project in the center of the village. For those of you not familiar with “council housing,” that is the name given to apartment buildings that are subsidized for low income families and

retirees. The English have a wonderful policy in building “council housing” in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods as not only equalizing society, but giving children of these housing projects a chance at a good education.

I was to pick up Mrs. Cutbush so she could meet us and our boys and familiarize herself with the house.

Off I went.

When I drove up, a heavyset matron in a house dress and Oxford shoes was waiting. She looked like everyone’s ideal grandmother.

I got out of the car and held out my hand. “Mrs. Cutbush?” I asked.

“*Ja*, I am *Frau* Cutbush.”

“Nice to meet you. I am Dave Cariens.”

“*Gut* to meet you. I am Hiltmutti Cutbush.”

*Hmm, that is not only an unusual name, even by German standards, but is also unnervingly Teutonic,* I thought.

“It is nice to meet you. Please get in. I am anxious for you to meet Janice and the boys.”

“*Ja*” came the response.

I could not resist. Drawing on my high school and college German, as bad as it was (and still is), I told Mrs. Cutbush I had studied German language and history fifty years ago—“*Ich habe Deutsche geschichte studiert vor fünfzehn jahre.*”

“*Wunder schon,*” she said. Slightly squinting in something of a German interrogation look, she asked, “Zo, you studied German history and language? Why did you do zat?” she continued with precision and a slightly piercing tone.

I said I had studied German in high school and became interested in the country’s history. I did not want to tell her I was looking for an answer to why a whole nation could succumb to a madman. Germany had given the world so much in the arts and sciences and yet it had fallen prey to a monster who orchestrated the murder of millions.

Janice met us at the door.

“Let me show you the house before you meet the boys, Mrs. Cutbush. Then we can sit down and chat.”

Off the two went into the kitchen, then the dining room, and finally upstairs to the bedrooms.

I went into the living room and sat to wait. In a few minutes the two reappeared.

“Mrs. Cutbush met the boys. They were playing in Richard’s room.”

“*Ja, very nice jungen.*”

“Please sit down and make yourself comfortable, Mrs. Cutbush,” Janice said.

“*Ja, zank you.*”

“Would you like some coffee or tea?”

“No, zanks,” came the guttural reply.

“Tell me a little about yourself,” Janice said.

“Vell, I met Mr. Cutbush after ze war. He was a British soldier. Ve fell in love und married. He brought me to England ven his tour ended and I have lived here

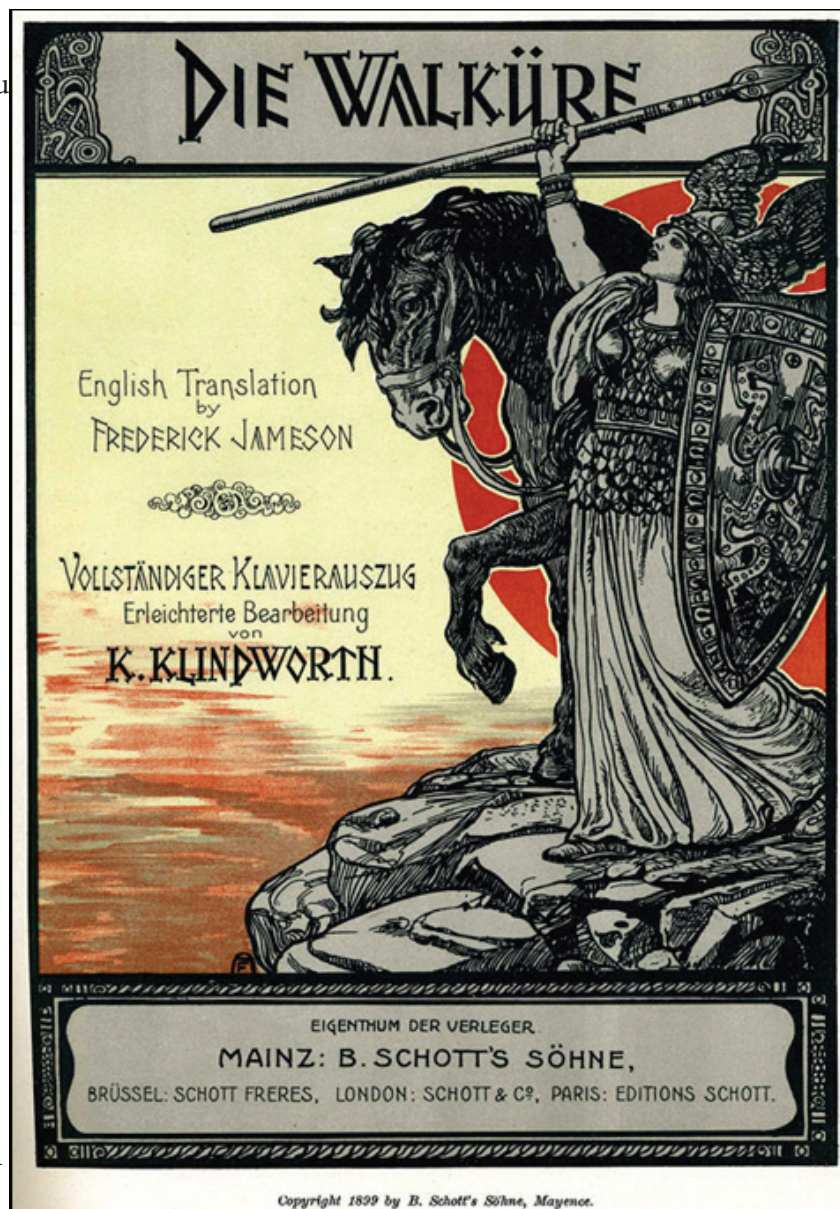
ever zince. Poor Mr. Cutbush died several years ago.”

“What did you do before that?” I asked, not sure I wanted to hear the answer.

“Vell, I was an opera zinger. Ja, it vaz a vonderbar life. In the 1930s I traveled all over za world with my friend, Alfreda.”

“That sounds interesting,” Janice said.

*Good, some culture,* I thought but then I had visions of Hiltmutti belting out Wagner’s *Walkure*, replete with iron bra, horned helmet, shield, and spear. I felt a little uneasy.



“Ja, I remember once we were in Buenos Aires at the ambassador’s house for dinner. We ended up dancing on the dining room table drinking champagne. *Auch du lieber*, what a night.”

Before I could comment, Mrs. Cutbush plowed ahead, “Mine *freund* Alfreda was something else. You know,” she said in a hushed tone as if to tell some deep secret. “Alfreda had to have a man every day. I am not kidding. If she didn’t have a man, she would get physically ill. And you did not want Alfreda to be ill or in a bad mood.”

“Well, are you free Saturday evening to watch the boys?” Janice asked apparently unconcerned about Mrs. Cutbush’s tales of her past bacchanalian lifestyle.

“Maybe Mrs. Cutbush wants to think about Saturday and check her calendar,” I said, trying to slow down what I perceived as a train wreck in the making.

“No, that is fine. I would be happy to watch the boys. Could I ask one other thing? I don’t like to cook. Could you have a little something for me to eat? Just a little morsel.”

“Of course. I would be happy to have something here for you,” Janice replied with a smile.

With that the deal was settled.

When I returned from taking Mrs. Cutbush home, I asked Janice, “Shouldn’t we have discussed this?”

“This what?”

“This what? This Mrs. Cutbush, of course.”

“I think she is sweet. I think she will be just fine.”

“Are you sure? You noticed she didn’t say what she did during the war. Maybe she ran a camp. And you heard her talk about her friend Alfreda. I think she and Alfreda shared a common lifestyle.

“Really, Dave. You are exaggerating,” Janice said. “Come help me set the table for dinner.”

Following Janice into the dining room, I said, “I’ll bet I know what Mrs. Cutbush’s war effort was to support the fighting men; I’ll bet she screwed half the Luftwaffe and Alfreda the other half.”

“Very funny. You are really funny. Stop it. She is a darling lady.”

“Okay, there is nothing I can do about it now. But I feel we may have just hired the Gestapo to watch the boys.”

“Nonsense.”

“Well, on Sunday morning if I ask the boys how they liked Mrs. Cutbush, and one of them says, ‘Just fine, she taught us a new game called *Occupy Poland*, she’s history, she’s out.’”

Janice just laughed.

I did follow up and after Mrs. Cutbush babysat, I asked the boys how they liked her. To my delight there was no mention of goose-stepping.

“All she did was sit and eat and watch TV,” my youngest son said, much to my relief.

She had passed the test. We did keep Mrs. Cutbush as our babysitter the rest of our time in England. I never picked up any hints or signs she attempted to turn the boys into *übermenschen*.

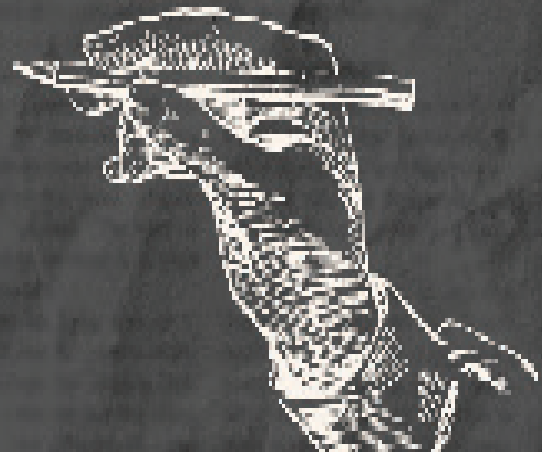
My concern had been unfounded—but nevertheless, every morning after Mrs. Cutbush had watched the boys, I asked them to tell me, in detail, about the night before.

“

Compassion - show it  
Kindness - give it  
Gratitude - have it  
Forgiveness - do it  
Service - offer it  
Wealth - share it  
Legacy - create it  
Family - cherish it  
Love - magnify it  
You - be it

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Cyrus M Cormier



# Summertime and the Livin' Was Easy

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

In the small West Virginia coal mining town where I grew up, money was scarce and vacations were either visits to my grandparents in the western part of the state or camping trips. The coal mines closed for two weeks in July. Miners' families would pack up and head for the Greenbrier River. There were great parks on the river but we couldn't afford the daily camping fee, so we camped in the wilderness. My dad would go a week early and put up the tents to stake out our campsite in the woods before all the other families converged on the same area.

My mom worked for two weeks ahead of time, packing and cooking to prepare for our week away. Our tents didn't have floors, but she put tarps on the ground, then added throw rugs on top of them. Since all five of us had cots with blankets and pillows, you can imagine how packed the car was by the time we added a camp stove, fold-up tables, cooking utensils, water buckets, ice chests and food. Added to that were innertubes for floating in the river and extra shoes for wading because the river bottom was covered with sharp rocks. The last thing stuffed into the car was the first aid kit for cuts, bruises and snake bites. Yes, there were snakes in the woods, in the river, and on several occasions, in our tent.

It took a full day to set up camp. Dad had to stretch rain tarps over the table where Mom would cook and we would all eat. There was another table with a water bucket and dipper plus a pan for hand washing. With no toilets, a space had to be set up inside a small tent for a slop jar. It was emptied twice a day into a trench Dad dug several yards from the campsite.

I would awaken in the mornings to the mouth-watering aroma of bacon sizzling in the big iron skillet. We would toast slices of bread over the campfire to dip into soft-cooked eggs. Lunch was bologna and mustard or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Dinner was grilled hamburgers or hot dogs seared over the fire, served in buns with Mom's homemade chili and baked beans.

It seemed like she was always cooking, when she wasn't keeping an eye on us while we floated or swam in the clear, icy river. Usually, she went into the water with us, swimming alongside or teaching my younger brothers to swim. Dad was always fishing. When he was successful, dinner was fried fish with fried potatoes and fresh corn, roasted in the coals of the campfire.

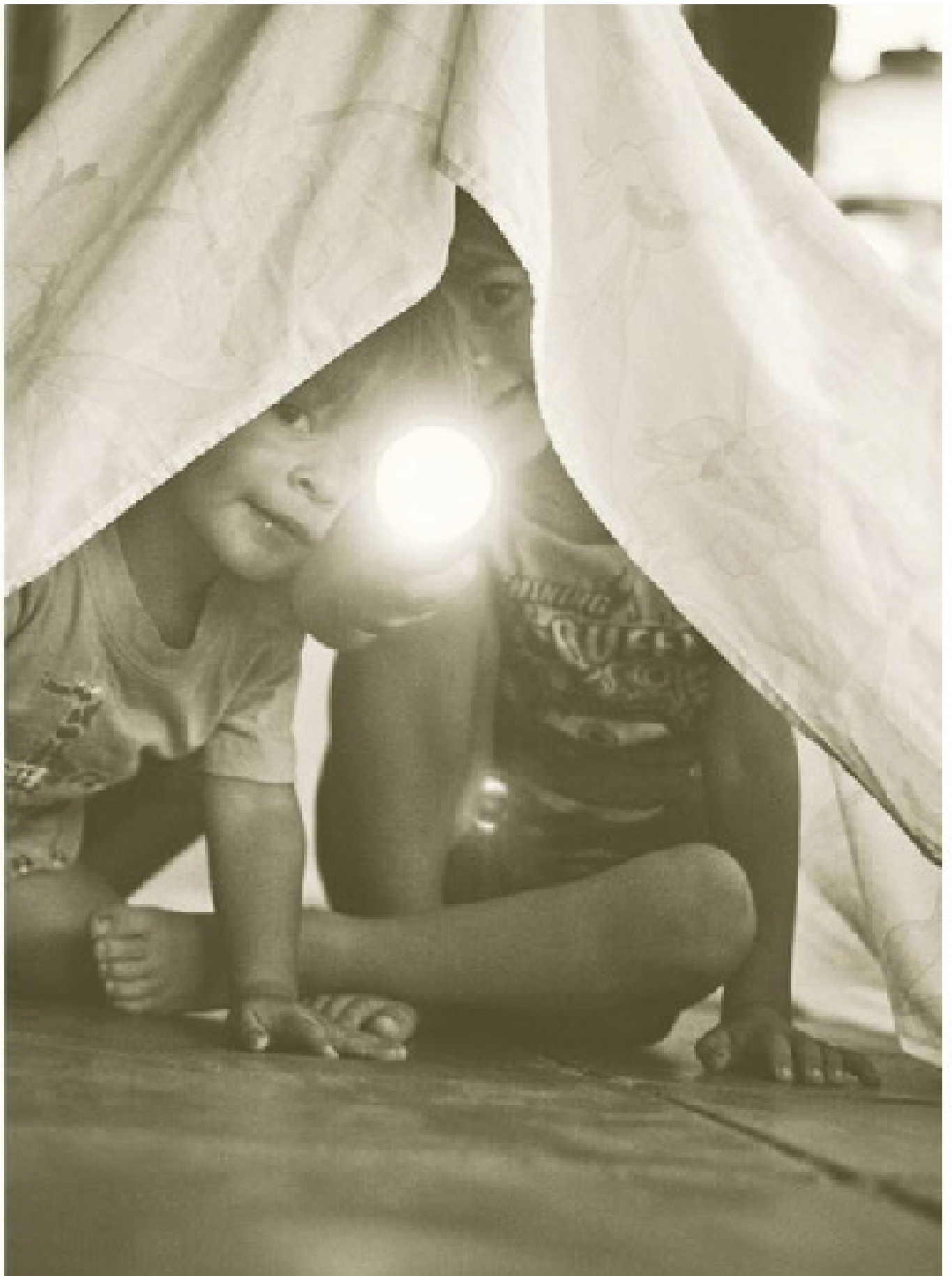
At night, we lit the kerosene lanterns to keep the bugs away. We'd play cards or Monopoly and toast marshmallows over the campfire. My dad loved telling ghost stories, complete with sound effects which would send my youngest brother running into the tent to hide under his covers.

Other families, including relatives, camped in the same area. There were always cousins and other kids to play with and the moms switched off guard duty. I made friends during those summers with kids who are still my friends today.

Over time, our family graduated to better tents with zippers and floors, but the routine was still basically the same – my mom always working. As I grew old enough to appreciate all she did, I asked if she had ever felt taken advantage of on those summer trips. She was genuinely surprised at the question.

Her response, "Those are some of my fondest family memories, all of us in a crowded tent, the three of you still giggling as we all fell asleep."







### **H. Scott Butler**

Scott Butler grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He graduated from LSU, went on to earn a doctorate in English at Duke University, and taught literature and film at a community college in eastern Virginia for many years. Since his early retirement he has devoted his time to writing and to participating in a grassroots effort to preserve Fort Monroe, a former Army post of deep historic significance. He and his wife, Susan, live in Blacksburg, Virginia.

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### **David Cariens**

David Cariens is a retired CIA officer--31-year career. Most of his time at the Agency was spent as a political analyst dealing with Eastern Europe. In this capacity he wrote for all levels of the U.S. government—from the President to the working level analysts and policymakers. Cariens is a victims' rights advocate; he takes no money for his work on behalf of school shooting victims and their families. He is a director and one of the founding members of the Writers Guild of Virginia.

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### **Cyrus Cormier**

Cyrus Cormier is both a student and teacher in the principles of leadership. He retired after a 41-year career as an executive in corporate America. As an author, his focus is authoring the areas of legacy, social justice, religion, and poetry. Cyrus graduated from New Mexico State University and the executive education program at Vanderbilt University. His foundation, *The Twelve Plus One Heart Foundation*, awards need-based college scholarships and a variety of other community service initiatives.

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### **Terry Cox-Joseph**

Award-winning poet Terry Cox-Joseph is president of the Poetry Society of Virginia. She is a member of the National League of Penwomen, and is a former newspaper reporter and editor. She is a member of the Virginia Watercolor Society, Yorktown Arts (On The Hill Gallery), Hampton Arts League and the Peninsula Watermedia Society. Her children, pets and the waterfront provide constant resources for her writing and art. She often works long into the night with only chocolate to sustain her.

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## Sharon Canfield Dorsey

Sharon is an award-winning poet and author. She has written four children's books, a memoir, two books of poetry, an anthology, and a travel memoir. *Writing is like breathing for me – necessary for survival. It's the first thing I want to do in the morning and the last thing I want to do at night. I have been honored to have my work published in many anthologies and prestigious magazines like The Pen Woman, the publication of the National League of American Pen Women, alongside the work of such icons as Maya Angelou.*

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## Cindy L. Freeman, Editor of The Journal

*Writing is one of my passions, along with singing, teaching, playing the piano, and choral conducting. My publisher calls me a “literary late bloomer” because I didn’t get around to writing my first novel until after retiring from a long career in music education and music ministry. I write about women who find the strength to overcome adversity. My novels tackle challenging social issues like child abuse, domestic abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness. But really my novels are about hope, help and healing.*

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## Bradley Harper

Bradley Harper is a retired US Army Colonel and pathologist with extensive experience in autopsies and forensic investigation. Along with clinical experience, he had four commands, and is the only non-Italian to ever receive the Knights of Malta award for his support of the Italian Army. A life-long fan of Sherlock Holmes, upon retirement he received his Associates in Creative Writing from Full Sail University, to help him write the book—*A Knife in the Fog*—that he'd always wanted to read.

<https://www.bharperauthor.com>



## Gwen Keane

Born and raised in the Northern Neck of Virginia, Gwen Keane graduated magna cum laude from Georgetown University with a Masters in Public Administration. She retired from the Naval Sea Systems Command as the Deputy Inspector General. She serves on the board of the non-profit organization, N2Health, providing health care for all residents in the Northern Neck, and the Northern Neck Partners and Pets, a non-profit organization dedicated to building a no-kill animal shelter.

<http://www.gwenkeane.com/>





### **E. Compton Lee**

*I am the daughter of an English teacher and my parents filled me with the beauty of the written word from the cradle onward. My work as a therapist has been extremely helpful since my tales are mainly about people in all their exquisite forms of good and evil, courage and cowardice and heart rending humanness. I live in Tidewater Virginia where life takes on a different hue: unhurried, level, circumspect. My children and grandchildren live not too far away, which is more than I could ask for.*

<https://www.ecomptonlee.com>



### **Mary Montague Sikes**

An award winning artist, Mary Montague Sikes grew up near the bloody Civil War battlefields of Central Virginia where thousands died. Those early years in a landscape where tears still flowed sparked her interest in the psychic and the paranormal that carries over into her writing today. Sikes loves to travel, especially to the Caribbean and Jamaica where she discovered the legend of the White Witch of Rose Hall Great House that inspired her first novel, *Hearts Across Forever*.

<https://www.montisikes.com/>



### **Joyce Carr Stedelbauer**

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer is a member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, and has belonged to the National League of American Pen Women for more than forty years. She is also a charter member of the Williamsburg Poetry Guild. She is an inspirational conference speaker and has authored seven books. Her latest book, *Batteries Not Included; Some Assembly Required*, is her personal account of encouraging others who are learning to live again after the death of a loved one.

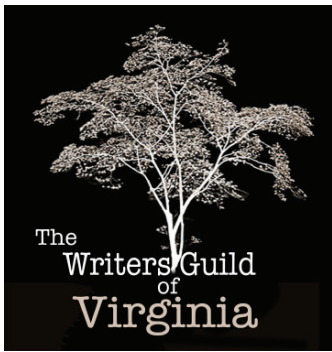
<https://www.JoyceCarrStedelbauer.com>



### **Lynn Underwood**

Lynn Underwood has been a Building Official until recent retirement. He has worked in the building safety profession and building code development for 35 years. He led a team of inspectors to El Salvador on behalf of the CASA Corps (ICC Ad Hoc Group) to inspect restoration work performed by USAID projects. Before college, Lynn enlisted in the USMC and served in Viet Nam with the 1st Marine Division. He was awarded several medals including a Purple Heart and Navy Commendation, and a Meritorious Combat promotion.

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### About the Writers Guild of Virginia

The Writers Guild of Virginia is a 501(c)3 organization. Our mission is to nurture writers of all abilities in the craft of writing, publishing and marketing of their work. We offer a series of tuition based and free half and full-day workshops and multi-week courses throughout the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and Williamsburg areas.

We hope you will visit us on our website to learn more about us and join us at one of our events.

Thank you for your support!

#### How to Reach Us

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First Edition 2021

Compiled and Edited by Cindy L. Freeman

Published by High Tide Publications, Inc.

Deltaville, Virginia

Graphic Arts: Firebelliedfrog.com

www.HighTidePublications.com

Printed in the United States of America.

### Front Cover

Glenda E. White retired from the College of William and Mary in 2016. An avid nature buff, she became certified as a Master Naturalist in 2018. She enjoys walking on Sun Valley Drive near Elkton, Virginia where the picture was taken. The winding road crosses Hawksbill Creek with seven bridges near the cabin she built with husband Lynn Underwood.



### Art

**Page 7 -  
Psychedelic**

**Page 8 -  
Pebbles and Shells**

**Back Cover -  
Sailing Moon on Deep Creek**

**Terry Cox-Joseph**