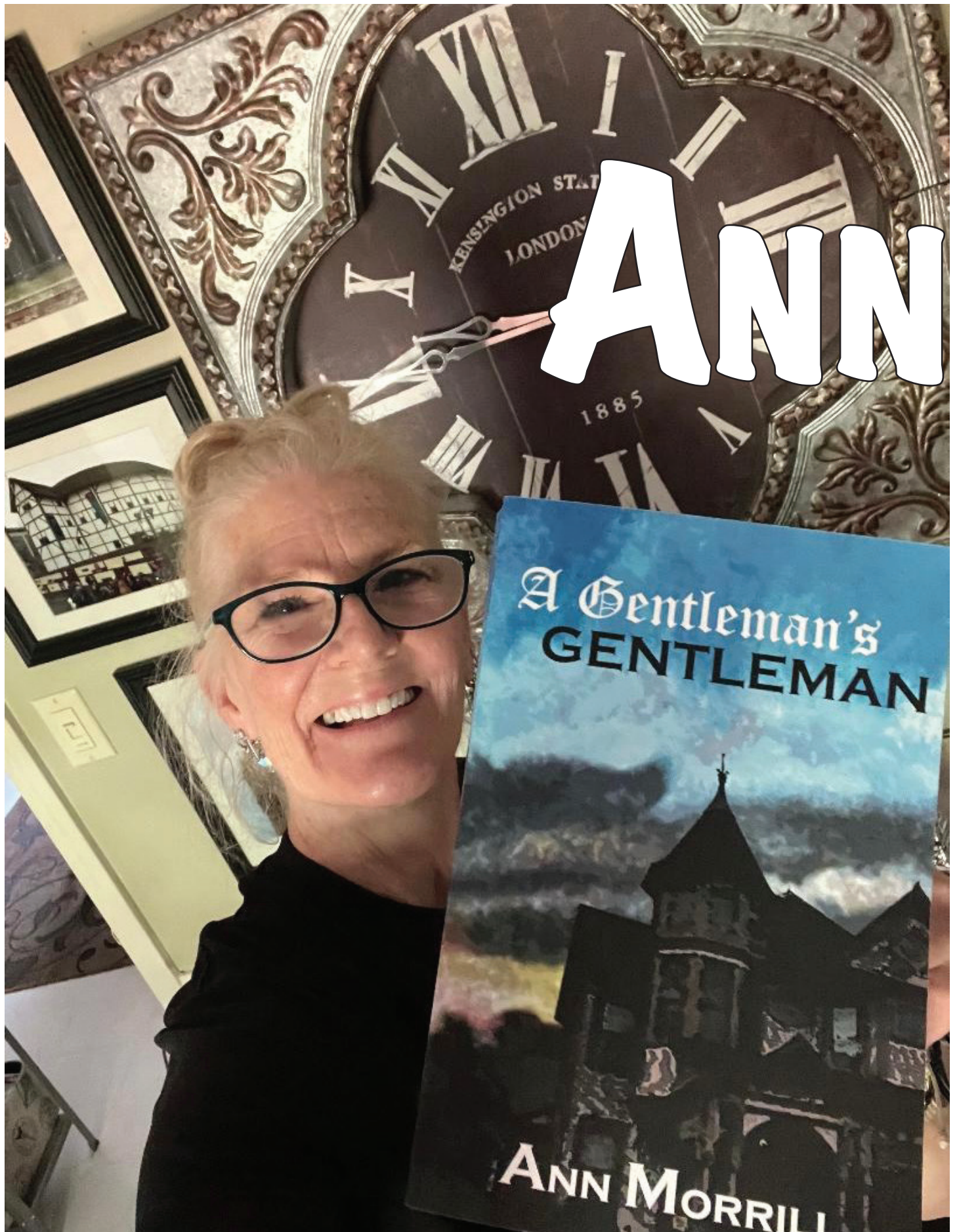


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I work hard to create fascinating characters and weave them through compelling plots.

MORRILL

I want to be the love song Your voice will choose to sing,
I want to be the crisp notes of the bell You choose to ring.
I want to be the colors You paint against the night,
I want to be each syllable in the words You choose to write.
I want to be in the play You compose and take the starring part.
I pray, my Lord, You always hold Your workshop in my heart.

*By Ann Morrill Efimetz
From her play "In My Memory"*

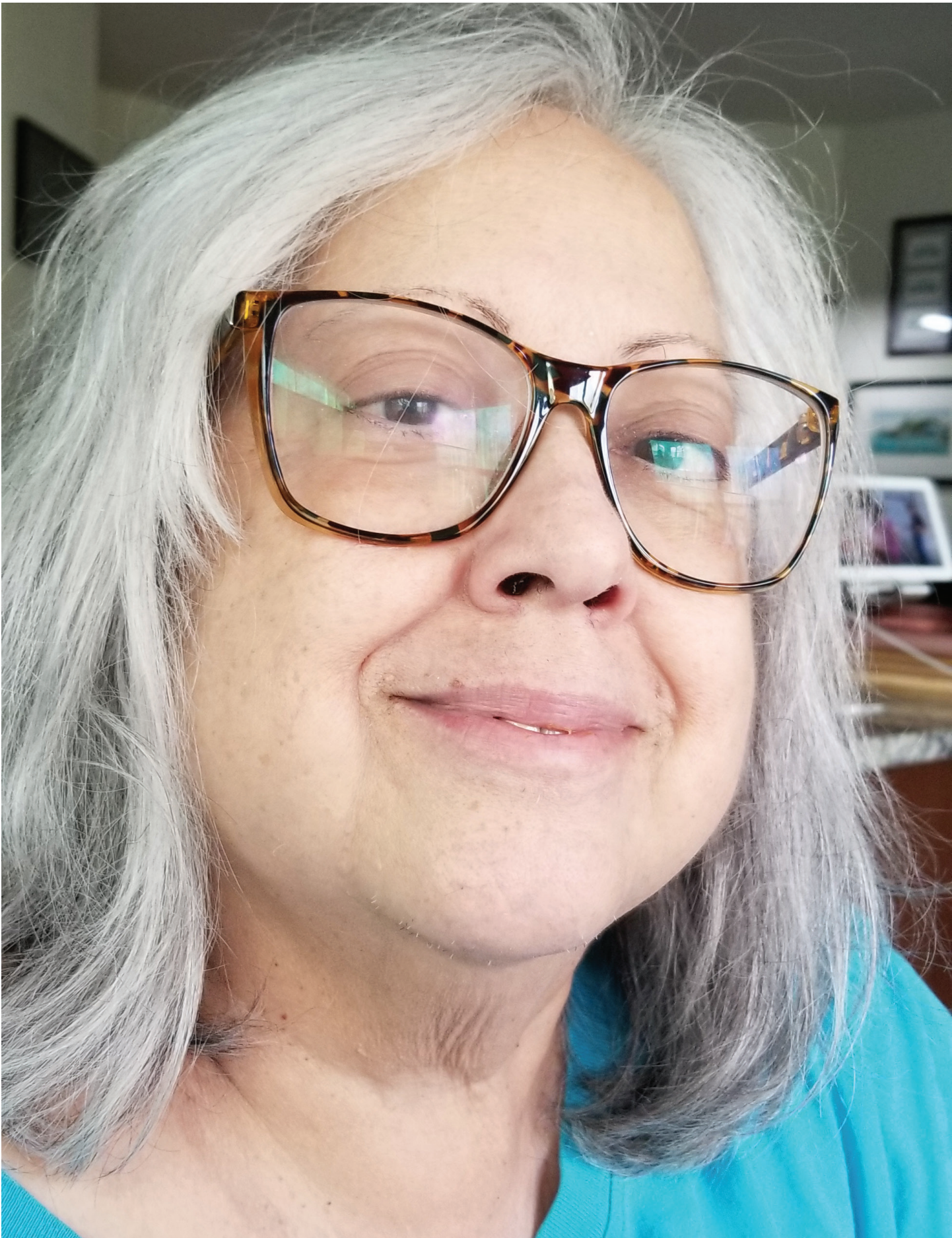
Ann Morrill has been writing since childhood. She has penned several novels, most of which are set in England during various time periods. She has twenty-five years of writing experience as a journalist for a bi-weekly newspaper in Virginia. In her future novels, she will continue creating fascinating characters and weaving them through compelling plots.

*I am honing my craft in Williamsburg -
my home since 2016*

NORMA COFRESI

Norma Cofresí is a native New Yorker, born to a Puerto Rican family and raised both in New York and Puerto Rico. She is a retired psychologist and psychoanalyst. Williamsburg, Virginia has been her home since 2016. She enjoys walks with her husband of thirty years, running around after her grandchildren, and creating and caring for a fledgling garden to attract hummingbirds and other pollinators. Norma belongs to the Williamsburg City Writers group, where she is honing her writing craft.

You can reach Norma at nuyorikanpoet@gmail.com.



Innocent as Sugar

Norma Cofresi

We were always afraid.
Our parents oblivious
to the real dangers of the streets.
Stepping an inch too close to a ratty, yellow coat
or a torn-up bookbag left draped on the playground asphalt
was a dare, a double dare, a triple dare to fight for turf.
Tricks for the scared, for the olive-skinned or brown children.
They called us Spics—for we didn't spic English.

I talked you into going to the library with me. Eleven blocks away.
It was early winter, already dark and chilly. No hats, no gloves.
You were a skinny boy with light brown hair and golden skin.
A target for sure. Four older boys came our way, bigger and tougher.
They punched you in the stomach, broke my glasses,
took our money, our bookbags, threw me on the ground.
We arrived home eating snot from so much crying.
Eleven blocks away, another continent.

Like now, when people die by the thousands every day.
Because empty shadows of men make poor decisions and then
blame somebody else. Not in another continent. Here!
Mysterious virus, like the virus of hate. Safety in numbers, no more.
Step on a crack, and you break your mother's back.
Fearful isolation. Stay away from neighbors, family, and friends.
Run fast past the adults who will trick you into hating.
Fear like bile chugging up your stomach. Best to run, to avoid.

It's the story of our lives. We run scared all the time.
Papa Dios. Santa Madre. Keep us safe in our time of need.
Watch over our brothers, our sisters, our healers—
people who, out of love, duty, and no real choice,
nurse the sick to health or escort them to peaceful deaths.
One more time, let us embrace loved ones, even as they die.
Please, dear God, don't let anyone step on a yellow coat,
an exploding bookbag, or send children alone to the library.

Family Legacy

Norma Cofresi

All winter, my voice lies fallow
choked by vines of despair.
In a dream, fertile spider plants grow.
Through a steel-gated window,
sunlight spills diamonds on the floor.
In an ombre haze, I follow family portraits
down a long, dank hall moldy from disuse.
Memories fly at me from graffiti on the wall.

I walk backward and re-visit fading
photographs of family and friends.
My dad grins at me as he takes
a winning shot on a billiards table.
My mom finishes my wedding dress
and shoos me out the door.
My abuelo buys me shiny red shoes. Illiterate,
he follows along as I practice my letters.

Grieving and raging, my grandmother
sits by the window of a fourth-floor walk-up
in the not yet coveted Hell's Kitchen.
Born in 1892, she was six the year the US
invaded Puerto Rico. At eighty-eight,
she's outlived husbands, sons, and daughters.
On rough days, she shakes her fist
at the heavens, angry that she is still alive.

In the remnant of the dream, a spark
reminds me of stories still to tell.
The crazy one who went to war,
the one who loved once and not again.
The what that happened, to whom, and
the where, and the why.
For those I love and those still to come,
my voice, my only legacy sings.



SHARON CANFIELD DORSEY

*Writing is like breathing for me - necessary
for survival.*

Sharon Canfield Dorsey 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.*

<https://www.sharoncanfielddorsey.com>

Skeletons of houses-past line the two-lane road. Weeds invade porches where rocking chairs once sat. Shattered windows stare blankly at the blazing June sun. Here and there, a brick chimney rises resolutely from flattened debris. Entire blocks of houses have disappeared as if swept up by alien invaders.

The real invader was water--a one-hundred-year flood--triggered by days of pounding rain that turned tranquil rivers and creeks into roaring predators carrying away everything in their paths. As powerful as the ocean, the water lifted houses off foundations and deposited them in the middle of highways, leaving the occupants to be discovered in the wreckage as the water receded, looking like broken dolls, arms and legs askew.

Aerial photos showed the entire business district of Rainelle, West Virginia, under eight feet of water, roofs barely visible. Eight miles away in the neighboring town of Rupert, houses, vehicles, and bodies floated in the streets, a heart-rending stew of devastation.

The stories were difficult to hear. An elderly couple climbed into the attic to escape. As the water reached them, the husband laid his head on his wife's shoulder and passed away. When rescuers finally arrived, she was still holding his body. A father tied his three children to himself and tried to walk them out of the flooded area. The rope came loose, and one daughter washed away, her body found days later, miles downstream.

As we travel along Route 60, my brother, Carl, maintains a continuing commentary, showing me where familiar roads have disappeared as the paths of streams changed and bridges washed away. I am visiting my hometown on the one-year anniversary of the storm that changed

so many lives forever, a storm that was a three-

minute *blip* on the national news, then forgotten by the outside world.

For the residents of this rural coal mining area, however, it has been an unforgettable year of grieving and trying to move on. The scars are everywhere--in the debris of demolished homes and the big, yellow "D" on buildings still awaiting FEMA's bulldozers. My birthplace is one of those slated for demolition. As we continue our journey, Carl points out encouraging signs of new life emerging from destruction: tiny box-like houses on stilts creating a patchwork landscape along the highway, new grass and flowers in freshly planted yards, and flourishing vegetable gardens.

Our destination is the West Virginia State Fairground, where a concert will commemorate the lives lost one year before. The event will recognize all those who worked so hard to save

their towns and help their neighbors rebuild: National Guard members who braved flood waters to do search-

and-rescue, churches and civic clubs who fed and clothed the homeless, and members of local Mennonite communities who came and stayed for weeks to clear out salvageable homes and help re-build, walking the talk of "It takes a village..."

As we near the fairground, I search for familiar landmarks:

- The wooden barns that housed cows, sheep, and pigs, where we held our noses against the stench to pet the rabbits;
- The rickety grandstand, where, as children, we sprawled on the sun-warmed bleachers, trying desperately to stay awake till dark to watch the fireworks.

It wasn't easy to keep weary eyes open because fair days were long days. We always arrived early, so we could get a good parking spot in the free grassy field adjoining the closer graveled, paid

On the way to the *Greatest State Fair on Earth*

parking lot.

The fifty cents we saved on parking would buy ten ride tickets for the Ferris wheel, the Tilt-a-Whirl, or the carousel. My brothers and I saved our chore allowance and birthday money all year to spend at the fair. Our parents gave us each a dollar to buy food for all day--corn dogs on sticks for fifteen cents, french fries in paper cups for a dime, and cotton candy or candied apples for a nickel.

We wandered through the food booths, looking at everything, pricing everything, and deciding where we could get the most goodies for our buck. They were hard decisions. The aroma of buttered popcorn mingled with the scent of batter sizzling in hot fat, just waiting to be coated with powdered sugar and devoured. Cotton candy floated up from stainless steel vats and was wound onto paper cones, coating our noses and mouths with sticky goo. By day's end, abandoned cotton candy goo also coated the clean, fresh straw that covered the dirt walkway around the carnival and stuck to our tennis shoes.

Our parents marched us past the side-show tents, never allowing us to go in to see the Bearded Lady or the Man with Two Heads or the Siamese Twins joined at the chest. They ignored the barker's cries of "Come in! See the five-hundred-pound lady!" and dragged us away from the brightly painted posters, but not before we stole a peep through a small slit in the tent.

The carnival rides required more decisions. We each received fifteen tickets to last all day, so we had to choose carefully. Should we use up three tickets on the roller-coaster or ride the merry-go-round three times? Tough choices! I would spread out my ride tickets during the day, but my brothers would quickly run from ride to ride and then beg for my tickets. I didn't share.

By evening and fireworks time, we were like tired puppies, sometimes with aching tummies from all the greasy food and sweets. As we waited

in the grandstand, the *oom-pa-pa* of the calliope, combined with the barker's cries and shouts of "Bingo!" in the Games of Chance tent, all melded together in a mesmerizing muddle of voices and music that lulled us to sleep. But when the crash, bang of the fireworks started, we were wide awake and thrilled by the spectacle of dazzling starbursts and spinning rockets that illuminated the night sky.

Tired feet dragged as we joined the crowds searching for their cars. I clutched my doll-on-a-stick that I had spent my last twenty-five cents on. Holding a sparkling silver cane, she was so pretty in her feather dress, matching pink headband, and tiny high heels. We all tumbled into Dad's old Oldsmobile and fell fast asleep before the car had inched its way out of the packed parking lot.

Now, approaching what used to be the grassy parking area behind the barns, nothing was recognizable. Carl explained that all of the old wooden fair buildings, including the grandstand, had been inundated with water, leveled, and replaced with steel structures joined by concrete paths. Nothing remained, not even the blinking red, white, and blue neon sign that could be seen for blocks, welcoming visitors to THE GREATEST STATE FAIR ON EARTH!

When I closed my eyes, I could still see that sign, smell the hay from the barns, taste the sweetness of cotton candy, and feel the *oom-pa-pa* beat of the calliope pulsing through my heart.



JAMES

Technology

Technology. Okay. To be honest,
from my introduction
to my first computer,
I've been techy, irritable, cranky, and cross,
sarcastic, churlish, peevish, and out of sorts.

Technology is the application of science,
especially to commercial objectives.
One of these is for the literal-minded
to harass the figurative-minded
because the literal doesn't understand
metaphors, sarcasm, irony,
synecdoche, or metonymy.

Technology is electronic or digital
products and systems considered
as a group.
A store specializing in, say,
cell phones,
where sales associates
take great pleasure
in making the customer feel inadequate.

Technology is the application
of knowledge for practical ends.
One such is to subjugate
adults by children.

Technology is the methods and tools –
smart phones and watches and such –
that society has developed in order to
facilitate
the solution of practical problems.
One of these problems is
better communication.
We now better communicate
with one another
using our cell phones while standing/sitting
next to the person
with whom we are communicating.

So there! Take it or leave it.
Right now, I'm a little too querulous
to care.
I bought a new cell phone.
My hearing-aid program didn't transfer!

GARRETT

Solitude

Five or six cows were standing
in the shade
of a lone persimmon tree,
heads lazily turning to watch
the solitary trespasser
as he strode by.
A wisp of red dust trailed him
down a narrow cow path.

He approached the lake
from the west
picking his way to the tree line.
His old campsite, overgrown
with bushes and brambles,
sat, awaiting his return.
He stomped down a sizable spot
to camp the night
and view the morning's sunrise.

The next day
he continued his journey
up a wooded hillside.
From the crest, he looked down
on a deserted house
trying to remember it
as it had been when he left.

Weeds had taken over
the lily bed.
He spoke the names of those
that had grown there.
His favorite had been
"Rhythm & Hues,"
soft lavender petals
with a violet and chartreuse throat.

He remembered the baskets
of Portulaca that had hung
around the porch.
The confederate jasmine had climbed
from its trellis to the roof,
the fragrance almost cloying.

He climbed the steps
to the porch, sat in the swing.
"It's just me now,"
speaking to the house.
"If solitude were tangible,
I'd give it a hug and a kiss...
if solitude were enough."

What He Left Behind

Lately, he had been spending hours recalling what he had left behind and had come to realize these memories were mostly unkind.

He had left a set of Harvard Classics he'd purchased book by book. He thought they had been packed, so hadn't taken another look.

He had left behind his campsite on the west side of the lake where he watched the sunrise; remembering made his heart ache.

He had left behind his Zebco Zee Bee Model 202 spinning reel; tossed into the lake's calm waters because he ceased to care or feel.

He had left behind two white horses sitting on a bookcase shelf, along with a rainbow dream and a picture of himself.

He had left behind the lightning bugs he'd confined to Mason jars; night after night spent capturing them; enough to match the evening stars.

He had left behind his sunshine on a cloudy summer day. Now he sat brooding on things he couldn't unsay.

James Garrett is a retired high school English teacher. He and his wife, Suzanne, moved to Williamsburg three years ago. He enjoys reading, writing, and watching the birds in his backyard.

MARJORIE GOWDY



*My work is informed by the tumbled Virginia mountains
as well as my time on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and
along the coasts of Virginia and North Carolina.*

Papilio

Lemon-brushed, she has a final trip to make
across pastureland to the wild cherry tree.
Last meal on a frivolous zinnia, torn chiffon at her wings' end
amber and black turn to bisque on grey *appalachiensis*.

She shares the feast with me. I peer just beyond her proboscis
as gleefully she sips late summer's bounty.
Breeze tickles tired thinning locks,
lifts her to the next flower.

At the wild cherry when steel circles sift vale-ward
she will place her last transparent orbs
and sleep.
Days pass as cracked acorns in swift cold wind. Dew's meadow fades

Marjorie Gowdy writes at home in the Blue Ridge mountains. Gowdy was Founding Executive Director of the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, MS, which she led for eighteen years. Now retired, she has worked in other fields that fed her love of writing, including as a grants writer. Her poetry has been published in *Friends Journal*, *Artemis Journal*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *Valley Voices* (Mississippi Valley State University), *Indolent Books*, *Clinch River Review*, *Visitant-Lit*, *RockPaperPoem*, the book *Quilted Poems*, with art in the spring 2022 issue of *Orange Peel Magazine* and the 2021-22 *Gallerium: Extinction* catalog. Her essays are included in *Katrina: Mississippi Women Remember* (2007). Gowdy also paints, with recent works accepted by the Virginia Beach Artists' Center, illustrations published in *Floyd County Moonshine* and in *Artemis Journal* (a visual poem). Her painting "Night Swim," is the cover art for the Spring 2022 issue of *Barely South*. Gowdy is a summa cum laude graduate of Virginia Tech and has a master's degree in liberal studies from University of North Carolina-Greensboro. She is currently newsletter editor for the Poetry Society of Virginia. Gowdy lives in Callaway, VA, USA. marjie01@gmail.com, Blueridgehome.blogspot.com

Fibonacci's Flowers

In July's steaming sunlight, look closely at the rose.

Fibonacci knew roses, ambling along a stone wall in 1202

A century after the tower began to lean
his *Libra abaci* explained

The whirl of petals
one, one, two, three, five, eight, thirteen
a game

The golden ratio,
the gods' attempt at new math.
The nautilus, a snail,
a hurricane, the galaxies,
our fingers, and yours.

Lily, sunflower, buttercup
nine hundred years once when he sat on a bench
facing Liguria
birdsong, azure skies, air like a crystal ball,
dizzying rows to infinity.
A cell precisely in threes, fives, eights
in circles predetermined
in silks woven one upon another in layers endless.
Planning, precision whipped into cream.

Burst chaos

Landing in neat order

If the gods could do this, if Fibonacci would tell us,
why are we destroying the spirals now?

My Cold, Dead Hands


The harvest of a riverbed begins
as water recedes, leaving a soft clay
to harden in the sun.

Unless,
Unless leaves, roots, and seeds insert themselves
into the fray.

Decay turns dirt, red remnants freshening;
seasoned layers through frost, baking, relentless rain.
Horses trot through the mud, bees burrow in its folds.
Stirred,
Stirred at each turn of a clock wound by Her.
Spores push stubbornly through calloused soil.

They say the bodies were like liquid as cascades
of bullets riddled in torrents and cries.
Blood of babies flowed into scarlet puddles.
Torn.
Torn to pieces and from their mothers.
Rivers crease the floor where sneakers once ran.

Calloused men buy more guns. Cynical folk, fools.
Hardened surface decades gone. Her keening ignored.
It's cruel to compare carnage to a river.
Yet.
Yet, babies' dreams tossed as grains toward a waiting riverbed
stir stubbornly, ready to rent the cruel, baked clay.



“I’m a mature gentleman with a wealth of experiences who is emerging with a new perspective on familiar topics.”

BRADLEY HARPER



My life before becoming an author was as a board-certified Army Pathologist. I have performed over 200 autopsies during my 37 years of active duty as a pathologist, and my clinical years are interwoven with four stints as the commanding officer of various medical units. I was an Infantry officer before medical school, worked in the Pentagon, and learned to speak five languages. Yet, I also happily play Santa each Christmas (with my loving wife as Mrs. Claus). It is this juxtaposition of exploring the body, mind, and humanity that allows me share universal truths with my readers.

<https://bharperauthor.com>

Isaiah
Journal of Father Thomas Adler
September 10, 1945
Luxembourg

I bent slowly to kiss his ring. “Thank you for seeing me, Bishop Herrmann,” I said.

“I’m honored to meet with such a hero of the faith, Father Adler,” he said. “You said you needed to seek my counsel, so I assume you don’t require a confessional?”

“No, Bishop. My story is best when told face to face, not whispered through a grill.” I took a deep breath before beginning my tale. And after? Would I be defrocked for blasphemy or canonized?

Let the story tell itself, I told myself. Trust in God one final time.

“I was part of an *Arbeits Kommando* in Auschwitz, a twenty-man detachment that pulled a wagon around the compound. Even if it was a single box weighing ten kilos, the Germans had all of us pull the wagon.” I shrugged. “It was easier to keep track of us that way.”

“It’s a blessing the Germans weren’t as efficient as they pretended to be,” the bishop said dryly.

“They were efficient enough, Your Excellency.”

The bishop looked at the tattoo on my forearm. “My apologies. Please, continue.”

“One of the guards, *Feldwebel*, or Sergeant Muller, was responsible for us. One day, he approached as we stood like horses in the traces of the wagon and told me he’d gotten a request for a single prisoner for a ‘special’ detail.

“‘Come, Father,’ he said, grinning. ‘Perhaps someone needs absolution before they are shot. If I’m lucky, you won’t be coming back.’”

“You can imagine my fear as I followed this man to an unknown destination and fate. His wish was nearly granted, for I saw him only once more. To my surprise, he led me to the home of a senior German officer. A stern young soldier took me from Muller, and I heard the sergeant whistling as

he sauntered away.

“The soldier escorted me to the basement. I half-expected to see corpses on the floor, but, to my amazement, he handed me a shovel and explained my only job for the next twelve hours was to keep the furnace running. He gave me a bucket with a lid for a toilet, a half-loaf of bread, and a flask of water, and ordered me to remain there until someone escorted me back to the barracks.

“I quickly learned that ten minutes of shoveling was enough to sustain the fire for an hour, allowing me to rest for twenty minutes. Periodically, I would push coal from one corner to another, so those overhead would hear some activity. Then I would tend the fire for ten minutes and rest again. It was as close to Heaven as possible in that forsaken place.

“One week later I heard the door above open and close, then footsteps came down the stairs. I immediately went to work heaving coal into an already full furnace when I heard something that froze me like a wax figurine: a child giggling.

“‘The fire’s already full, silly,’ a little girl’s voice said.

“In the dim light, I saw a pair of small feet, nothing more, as the wall blocked my view of the young visitor.

“I was terrified, fearful her parents would hear us talking and have me shot. I didn’t respond, though I did stop shoveling as the child was right; the furnace couldn’t take any more.

“I stood still, praying she would leave, but she remained there in the darkness, as silent as I, two companionable shadows in a corner of Hell.

“Finally, she said, ‘Are you afraid of me, Father Adler?’

“That she would know my name only

heightened my fear. Was she a pawn in some amusement of her parents' devising?

"How do you know my name?"

"I heard the guard speaking with the cook. He thinks it's funny."

"Yes, I suppose he would," I said. "Is there anything else I should know?"

"Yes, Father. The Allies are coming."

"I know, child. Their bombers fly over every night now."

"But American soldiers are very near. One hundred kilometers, I heard the commandant say. He's departing today before they arrive. He's leaving his deputy in charge because he knows the man will carry out the order they received today."

"I knew what that order must be if it could drive a senior officer from his post, but I asked, anyway."

"Is that order to kill all the prisoners and burn the bodies before the Americans arrive?"

"The small voice sighed. 'Yes, Father. It is. I think at most you have three days.'"

"Then I must escape. Tonight, if possible."

"Then what? How long will you survive on your own?"

"I wouldn't leave to save my life," I said, "but to find the Americans and guide them here, hopefully in time."

"There was another long pause, and, if I couldn't have seen her feet, I'd have thought she'd left when she sighed. 'I must go. God be with you, Father Adler.'"

"Before she left, I called out, 'What is your name, my child? How old are you?'"

"You can call me Sera, Father. My age doesn't matter. I'll be praying for you and your mission. Have faith."

"Her feet disappeared, and I heard nothing more. No footsteps, no door open or close, but I felt her absence all the same. After returning to the barracks, I told my fellows what I'd learned."

"You're willing to take the word of an unseen

child?' Father Blomquist asked. 'If you're caught escaping, you'll be shot and if the guards suspect we helped, they'll kill us all!'"

"Look around, Father," I said. "Does it look like they want any of us to get out alive? The fewer witnesses left, the easier to craft their own story without anyone to say otherwise."

"Bishop Piguet, a French bishop imprisoned with us, asked, 'You said the girl's name was Sera?'"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"He pursed his lips. 'You received a summons, and you answered. I believe you need to keep your word.' When the murmurs of the other priests rose, he raised his hands, and they quieted immediately."

"The guards have grown lax with the approach of the Allies. It will be easy for one of us to hide your absence, and Father Bauer looks enough like you that he can follow the guard to the house tomorrow."

"Then he ordered me to kneel before him as he bestowed his benediction, followed by every priest within our barracks."

"Father Stanislaus will go with you as far as the wire," the bishop said. "There's a missing strand on the bottom directly beneath the guard tower. It will be difficult to reach, but it's the best place to slip through. Go with God, Father!"

"Father Stanislaus was the perfect choice as my lookout. Quick and bold, he knew the guards' routines better than they did."

"You're filthy, Father," he said, grinning. "Good. The coal dust will hide you in the dark."

"We were fifty meters from the tower when we paused for the searchlight's beam to pass before I made my final rush."

"You have nine seconds to make it to the tower before the light sweeps the area again," he said, and when the beam passed he slapped me on the shoulder, whispering "Go!"

"Nine seconds. I didn't bother to hunch over, needing to breathe as well as possible. The guard either noted the movement or did not. I was in

God's hands now.

"I sprang forward, but my legs were weak from starvation, and I nearly lost my balance. Then I imagined I was in harness pulling the wagon and righted myself. I reached the tower with a second to spare...only to find someone there already.

"*Feldwebel* Muller was lying down beside the gap in the wire, dressed in civilian clothes and I understood my-our-situation perfectly. He was deserting.

"*Guten Abend, Herr Feldwebel,*' I whispered, as I struggled to catch my breath. 'Out for a stroll?'

"'Quiet, you fool!' he hissed, 'or we'll both be shot!'

"This beast of a man was now at my mercy. I hated him, no, *detested* him more than anyone I'd ever known and had often confessed it to my fellow priests. I could have him killed but loved my fellow prisoners more than I hated him, so I let go of my hatred forever.

"'I'll be quiet,' I said, 'if I go first. I don't fancy you waiting for me in the dark. Give me three minutes. Agreed?'

"He nodded once. 'Anything to be rid of this place and you.'

"I only knew the Americans were somewhere to the southwest, so I followed the instructions Napoleon had once given his cavalry. 'Go to the sound of gunfire.'

"I walked until the sky hinted of dawn then found a barn to hide within. Oh, I confess to the sin of theft, Your Excellency, for I stole three eggs that morning and ate them raw. Luckily the farmer's wife just shrugged when she noted the empty nests and returned to the house after collecting from the others.

The bishop smiled at my confession and said, "*Ergo te absolvo*, Father. Please, continue."

"The next night, the sky was just turning pink when a man rose from the dark and pointed his rifle at me.

"'Halt!' he said. Then, in English, 'Who are

you and what are you doing here?'

"'I am Father Adler,' I said, answering in his language. 'I'm a priest and escaped prisoner. I must speak with your superiors. The guards have orders to kill everyone at the camp before you arrive. We have perhaps one day to stop it.'

"As the light was strengthening, I noticed the soldier had a dark brown complexion, and the insignia on his shoulder was the image of a large bird. I thought it was an eagle but was later told it's called a Thunderbird, the emblem for the Oklahoma National Guard.

"A junior officer was summoned, and I stared at his nametag. It read, 'Bushyhead.' I'd been captured by American Indians, and for a moment feared I was about to be tortured for information. The young man removed his helmet in respect after I introduced myself, and I relaxed. Whatever calamity awaited me, it appeared scalping wasn't one of them.

"His face grew grave as I explained my situation, and he showed me a map, asking me to mark where the camp lay and describe any enemy forces between Auschwitz and us. I told him the Germans now mostly consisted of control points along road intersections."

"'How many prisoners are left?' he asked."

"'I'd think ten thousand prisoners and around two-hundred guards.'"

"He nodded. 'Care to be our guide and interpreter?'

"I looked around. Besides the lieutenant, I counted twenty soldiers. A reconnaissance force.

"'Do you think you can capture ten times your numbers with what I see here?'

"He nodded toward his jeep with a long antenna. 'As long as I can talk to my brigade, we've got all the help we need.'

"He gestured to the backseat. 'Get in, if you're going.'

"A journey that took me two nights was covered in two hours. We encountered one control point,

but the Germans took one look at the brown, burly Americans advancing toward them before fleeing. I began to understand the American officer's confidence in confronting a German contingent that dwarfed his own.

"We halted when the gates drew into sight."

"'Hold here,' the lieutenant said, before saying something to his driver I didn't understand and dismounting. The driver nodded and turned on the radio as I got out. I was surprised to see an officer, even one as junior as him, carry a rifle, but he carried it easily, and I suspected he'd used one long before the war. As we drew near the gate, he tied a white handkerchief to the barrel and walked slowly until the guards ordered us to stop."

"'Translate this at the top of your voice. I want all the soldiers in range to hear this,' he instructed, and I repeated his words and tone of voice with pleasure.

"'I am an American officer. Behind me is the full force of the 45th Infantry Division. I order your immediate and complete surrender, or we will attack. This priest told me what kind of camp this is, and we will not take prisoners if you resist. You have five minutes to comply.'"

"The lieutenant consulted his watch. 'I hope the radioman got through.'"

"'You are a brave man,' I said, 'whatever happens next.'

"He spat on the ground. 'These guards aren't real soldiers. They've never faced someone who could fight back.' Just then a single artillery shell burst one kilometer behind the rear of the camp.

"Three minutes later the gates opened, and guards streamed out with their hands up even as a senior officer screamed at them to return to their posts. The Nazi raised his pistol, aiming at the back of a man walking past him when the lieutenant's rifle fired once. The German fell backward and was still.

"After that, the others couldn't surrender quickly enough. Once order was established, I

went to the house where the little girl had warned me.

"The German officer was in custody, but his wife was sitting in the kitchen, dazed.

"'Where is she?' I asked. 'Where's Sera?'"

"'Excuse me, *Mein Herr*, who?'"

"'Sera, the little girl? Don't worry, I just want to thank her.'

"The woman shook her head. 'My son died on the Eastern Front...I had no other children.'"

"I didn't believe her, so I went throughout the house but found no dollhouse, no small bed, no little girl's clothes. No evidence a child had ever lived there."

I turned to Bishop Herrmann.

"And there lies my problem, Your Excellency. The little girl. The little girl I never saw, the one who warned me in time to save thousands of lives. Was she a messenger from God, or a hallucination?"

The bishop sat still for a moment, then rose and limped to his desk where he opened his bible, turning to the book of Isaiah.

"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I; send me.'"

He turned to me. "Did you wonder why Bishop Piguet asked you the girl's name?"

"No," I said. "In the rush of things, I forgot."

"The verse before this one describes one of the seraphim touching the prophet's lips with coal to make his voice a pure instrument of the Lord's will. Seraph, Sera? I cannot say, Father, what manner of being you conversed with, but that it was inspired by God is clear. That should be enough for his servants, whether priest or pope, wouldn't you say?"

"But it would not strain my faith to believe a messenger from Heaven could go anywhere," he added, glancing again at my tattooed arm, "even to a basement in Hell."



REYN KINZEY

In all my poems, I try to tell stories, and as Joan Didion famously said, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live. At least for a while."

The Highlands

*Gray clouds devour the crests of mountains,
cascade into the valleys and villages
bringing cold rain
and wind that bends everything
except, perhaps, the Scots themselves.*

The Highlands beckon us. Some of us are drawn by the tragic history of a valiant people doomed by the superior numbers of the English – William Wallace, Mary Queen of Scots, Culloden. Some of us get the romanticized version: *Highlander, Brave Heart, Outlander*, but that's no matter. The stories tell the truth. But the real reason to go to the Highlands is the beauty of the place: the mountains, the valleys, the flowers, and most of all, the places where the land and the sea meet.

This is why Becky and I booked a kayaking trip in the Highlands, with a group aptly called Wilderness Scotland. We booked it just before the pandemic, and the tours were canceled two years in a row. We had some reservations about going even this spring when tours resumed, but we had already paid for the trip, and, God love them, once the Scots have your money, you're not getting it back. So, we went.

No one goes to the Highlands for the weather; you go despite it. I'm used to the constant rains of Ireland, but the rain in Scotland is nothing like that (well, maybe Derry). The rain comes down sideways, driven by twenty-five to thirty-five-mile-an-hour winds. You have to always be ready for the storm.

We landed in Edinburgh, for most Americans, the gateway to Scotland. We actually had good weather for two days, and that gave us some time to adjust to Scotland.

Not that Edinburgh is anything like the Highlands. The Highlands are currently the least densely populated place in Europe. Edinburgh, hemmed in by the gorge and the river, was the first place in Europe to start building high-rise buildings, ie. people living on top of one another, throwing their waste out of the windows to the streets below.

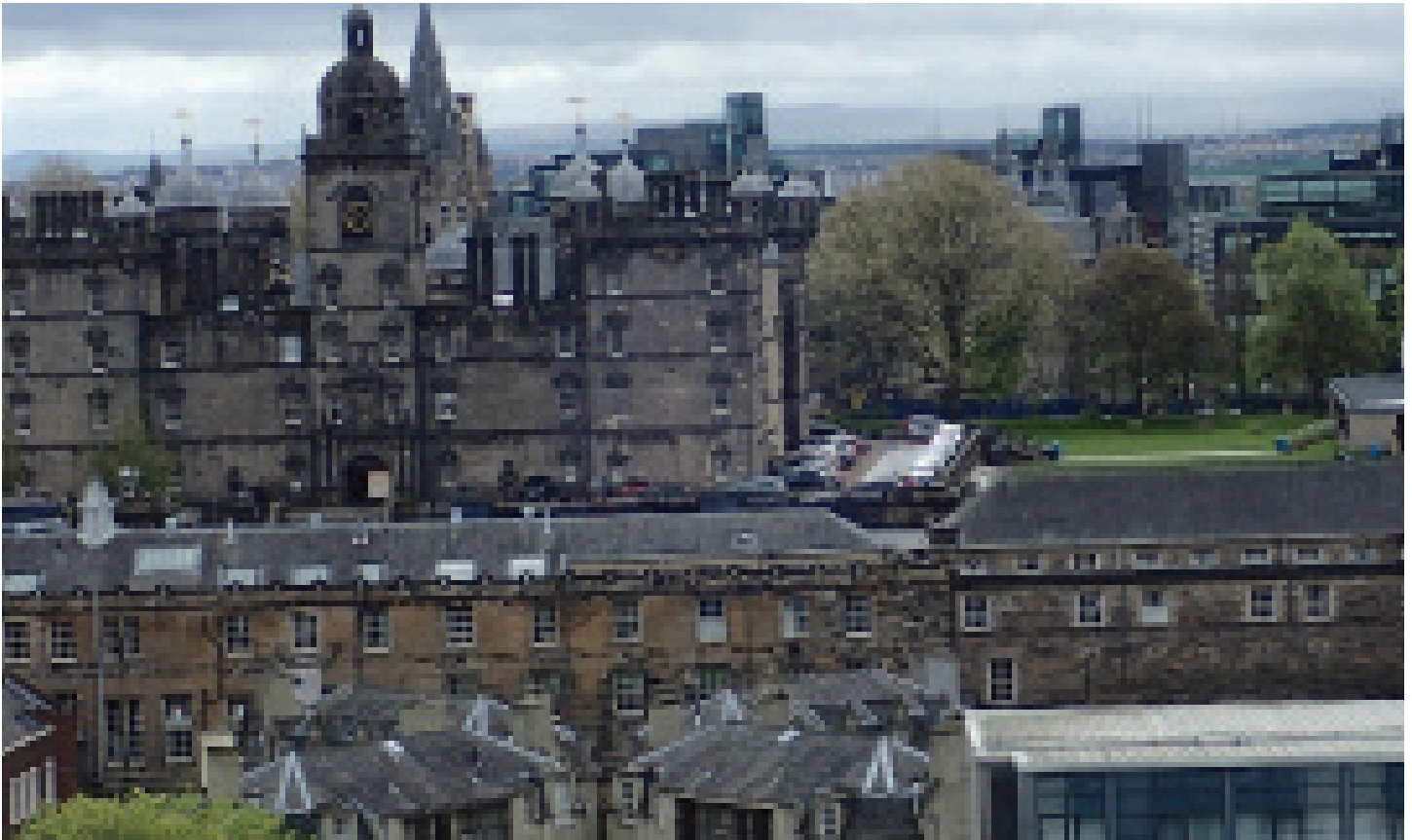
Edinburgh Castle is the landmark of the city. It's built on a prehistoric volcanic rock. In theory, it's impossible to attack. But that's a theory. In reality, the castle changed hands many times. The history of Scotland is bloody. And yet our favorite part of the castle was the chapel of Saint Margaret, a Queen of Scotland who has been canonized by the Catholic Church. It's a holy spot in the midst of a castle devoted to war.

The castle sits at one end of the Royal Mile. At the other end is Holyrood Palace, the official residence of the Queen, when she's in town. England still rules Scotland, despite *Braveheart*. My nephew and I called the Queen once, when we were all in town, to see if she would join us for a pizza. She never got back to us.

In between the castle and the palace, there are historic homes, shops, and, of course, pubs. Does everyone know that Scots like to drink?

Near the castle is a church that has fallen out of use, but is still referred to as the Highland Cathedral. Many of the Highlanders were forced off their small farms when they were evicted because their landlords discovered that raising sheep was more profitable than renting land to farmers. They moved to Edinburgh to look for work and went to the cathedral which offered

Between the cathedral and the castle is the Witchery, probably Edinburgh's best-known restaurant. It's a little touristy, I guess, and it's certainly expensive, but worth the splurge (ask to be seated in the Secret Garden room, lit only by candles). On the way in, we noticed a homeless man under a makeshift shelter, by the cathedral, which is now home to a fish and chips truck. He had his dog with him. The Scots love their dogs, particularly retrievers, and their retrievers are prettier than what we have in the US.



View of Edinburgh from the castle

Photo: Rebecca Day

services in Gaelic. Much the same fate befell Irish-speaking small farmers in the nineteenth century. Scottish Gaelic derives from Old Irish, and is still much like Irish, with a few differences. I'm told that speakers of the two dialects can still understand each other. I have to take other people's word for that since my Irish is almost non-existent, and my Gaelic is totally non-existent, although I know the word *faillte* means "welcome" in both Ireland and Scotland.

Anyway, in the Witchery, we ordered Chateaubriand for two, and couldn't finish it. I asked for a "doggie bag." The server looked at me like I was an uncouth American. He said he didn't know if the Witchery had doggie bags. Actually, they do – *branded* doggie boxes with the restaurant's logo emblazoned upon them, in anticipation of the money of uncouth Americans.

When I got back to the homeless man, someone had bought him a box of fish and chips,

but his dog didn't have anything. I gave the man the Chateaubriand and told him it was for his dog. But last I saw him, he was weighing the fish and chips in one hand and the Chateaubriand in the other. I hope the dog likes fish and chips.

From Edinburgh, we took the train to Inverness. If Edinburgh is the gateway to Scotland, then Inverness is the gateway to the Highlands – literally, the gateway if you follow that *Outlander* series, in which Claire, a twentieth-century English woman, is transported back to the eighteenth-century Highlands. There is a nice bit of irony in the casting: Caitriona Balfe,

scorecard to keep the players straight over there.

Whatever, Inverness is a wonderful town, built on the River Ness, which flows out of Loch Ness, renowned for a certain monster who inhabits the loch but hasn't been seen for a while.

We stayed at the Kingsmill Hotel, a lovely resort-style hotel. People from the Highlands, sometimes come to Inverness just to go to the movies. Again, the Highlands are sparsely populated, and many towns don't have movie theaters or even grocery stores.

In Inverness, we met our tour guides, Paul and Malcolm. Paul later revealed that he was



A Rare Sunny Day

Photo: Rebecca Day

who plays the English woman, is actually from the north of Ireland. Jamie, the Scottish romantic male lead, insists on calling Claire *Sassenach*, which he translates as “outlander,” a term without derogatory implications, but I’m wondering if that term isn’t linguistically related to the Irish *Sasana*, translated as “England,” sometimes with derogatory implications. You really need a

a lapsed Catholic from the north of Ireland, while Malcolm was somewhat reserved about his origins, although he now considers himself a Highlander. Again, you need a scorecard.

Our tour included four women, all English, aged twenty-nine to fifty-nine, all much younger than Becky and me, something that would cause us problems once we began to kayak.

We drove into the Highlands in a van that carried eight, with a trailer that carried nine boats. Many of the roads were barely two lanes, forcing Paul or Malcolm, whoever was driving, to pull off if a car approached from the opposite direction. An inconvenience for them, but for us tourists, the views were spectacular, with mountains, clouds, Scottish deer, and sheep. The ewes had just given birth, and lambs followed their mothers around the fields which were covered with yellow bushes called *gorse*.

We ate lunch at the Gorse Bush restaurant, where the British recounted their experience with

kayaks. The kayaks were good, if longer, sturdier, and heavier than what we are used to. That turned out to be a good thing since we were about to paddle in weather in which we would never kayak at home in Gloucester.

They provided us with hooded jackets, rainproof, waterproof, and warm, made for forty-eight-degree rainy days with twenty-five to thirty-five-mile-per-hour winds.

The quick shake-down paddle was around an island off Shieldaig. We got used to the boats with hand-controlled rudders, which helped in the wind.



Rainy Day in Scotland

Photo: Rebecca Day

the pandemic. Many had been locked down in their villages and weren't allowed to travel even to the next village. I told them that could never have happened in the US, and they looked at me like I was an uncouth American, from a land that didn't care about the common good. They were right.

We stayed in the Tigh an Eilean Hotel in Shieldaig and had a shake-down cruise with our

After the first day, we paddled for five to six hours a day, with breaks to provide coffee and tea, served by Paul with a tea towel. Courteous people, the Highlanders, eh, north Irishers, whatever. The shores were treacherous, rocky, and slippery, and the water was cold, yet surprisingly clear, almost like the Caribbean. And seals followed us in the water.

To be honest, Becky and I found it hard to keep up with the young women. However, they were very gracious to the “old folks,” helping us carry our boats and helping us with our spray skirts (in the US, we only use spray skirts for white water, but with twenty-five to thirty-five-mile-per-hour winds, it’s always white water in the Highlands).

to Plockton it was, you guessed it, already raining with thirty-five to forty-five-mile-per-hour winds. Becky and I decided to pass on the paddling, as did one of the English women.

We went to the pub, instead. I think I mentioned the Scots like to drink. I had my only single malt of the trip in that pub, and it was unbelievable, but I’m mostly a gin drinker. To my good luck (the luck of the Irish!) the Scots are rapidly becoming gin makers. Not that they are turning away from whiskey, but in Scotland, the law requires you to age your scotch for ten to twelve years before you sell it. Gin you can sell as fast as a new distillery can crank it out.

Edinburgh Gin is a fine brand, but our favorite was Harris Gin, which comes in beautiful bottles that are blue at the bottom, swirling up to a clear white at the top, like the waters of a Scottish loch. Why would we ever kayak?



Plockton

Photo: Rebecca Day

The hotel had a “drying room,” like a dry sauna, where we could hang up our wet clothes (and they were always wet). They would be dry the next morning, so we could kayak and get them wet again.

From Shieldaig, we drove over a mountain to Plockton. We stayed at the Plockton Inn, a snug little hotel divided into two buildings, one of which used to be home to Sorley McLean, a teacher and Scottish language poet. When we got

The next day the weather was even worse, so we informed our guides that we were pretty much done with kayaking, as wonderful as our three days had been.

They suggested a nice hike around the Plockton area, over a bridge, up a hill, and on to a castle outside of town. We had a nice hike, but when we got to the top of the hill, the castle was on the opposite side of the river. We had taken a wrong turn, but no matter. A kind woman told us that if

Reyn Kinzey was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He went to UVA, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. Having no idea what he was going to do with his life, he hung around and got an MA, and M. Ed. and even finished the course work for a Ph.D. But he never finished his dissertation. “Actually,” he says “I never started one: my attention span isn’t that long.” Still not knowing what he wanted to do with his life, he took a job teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he taught for twenty years, both full time and in the night school.

<https://www.ReynKinzey.com>

we simply walked up the next hill, we would have a fine view of the area. Well, the walking finally meant crawling up wet rocks on our hands and knees, risking broken ankles. We never got to the view, but we saw beautiful flowers and even palm trees. And we did make it back to the pub safely.

On our last day in the Highlands, the group paddled, in the rain, around the Eilean Donan castle, the one that the clan McCloud marches out of in the movie *Highlander*. We chose to tour the castle instead. The castle is impressive from the outside but surprisingly small on the inside. I'm not sure where all those Highlanders who marched out of the castle in the movie came from, but that's the magic of film.

Paul and Malcolm got us back to Inverness right on time. We spent another night in the Kingsmill Hotel, with me once again trying to explain to the Scots how to make a gin martini (it's still a new thing there). We had a noon train back to Edinburgh to catch a plane home the next day.

That's when things got a little anxiety-creating. Our train should have gotten us into Edinburgh in plenty of time to make a 6:00 PM appointment to get the required COVID-19 test to get us back into the US. The government has recently relaxed the testing requirement, but in May, if we tested positive, we would have been required to wait another ten days before flying home. At this point, we loved Scotland, but we couldn't really afford another ten days in hotels.

Anyway, we were comfortably seated on our train when departure time came. But the train did not move. And it didn't move. We could see conductors coming and going, shaking their heads. They finally announced that our train had been canceled. We had some time to wait in the bar, but they got us on the next train to Glasgow, with a connection to Edinburgh.

All that was well and good, but we wouldn't get into Edinburgh until after 8:00 PM, long

after the testing center at the airport had closed. I had to cancel the 6:00 appointment and make another one for 5:00 AM the next day because our flight was at 8:30, and the test could take up to three hours to get results.

So, after a nap at an airport hotel, we got to the testing center at 5:00 AM, only to stand in line behind other people who had gotten there before 5:00 AM.

We explained our time crunch to the people at the testing center, and they promised to try to rush our test through as quickly as possible, but they couldn't guarantee anything.

Fortunately, our check-in area was right next to the testing area. Aer Lingus announced that they would be closing the flight at 7:40 AM. At 7:20, I received negative results on my phone, but nothing for Becky. We went back to the testing center where they printed out her negative results, and we checked in with ten minutes to spare.

We were relieved to have made the flight and relieved that we wouldn't have to spend ten days in quarantine in Scotland. Only we wouldn't have had to quarantine: the US government would have made us wait ten days to fly, but Becky's negative test result informed us that if we tested positive, the English government (again, the English still rule Scotland, but hopefully that will change soon), would only require us to "use our own proper judgment." In other words, we could have partied, like Boris Johnson, for another ten days in Scotland.

We could have brought on the Harris gin and Chateaubriand again!

I guess we'll have to go back.

Photos: Rebecca Day



LACROY
"ATLAS"
NIXON

*I hope to inspire people to be the best versions
of themselves.*

The Anatomy of a Dreamer

By Lacroy "Atlas" Nixon

Dreamer

look at your hands

Notice the way your lines trailblaze through the valley of your palms without regard for their origin

Think of the way your fingertips subtly dance to the orchestra of your capillaries

as if your phalanges are filled with the in-synched syncopations of the rhythm that ricochet off the walls of your aorta

Dreamer

as I look into your eyes

I see the color of inspiration coming alive in the cosmos of your retinas

Your breath carries the reverberations of unspoken greatness screaming to escape the cage of your ribs

The average human emits roughly 100 watts of electricity at rest

That doesn't account for your electric personality that could shock brainstormers into thinking twice about raining on you

It's not your fault that you're restless

Your nerve endings are proof that lightning strikes the same place twice because the sparks in your synapses show that even nature has relapses

Even your action potential energy is kinetic

But Dreamer

sometimes

the scoliosis of your back bends in cursive under the weight of generational curses but your destiny is deeper than your DNA

Anyone who has ever dared to walk has fallen at least once

Dreamer

missteps don't make you any less of a masterpiece

The Achilles of your feet are made to stand atop mountains

Dreamer

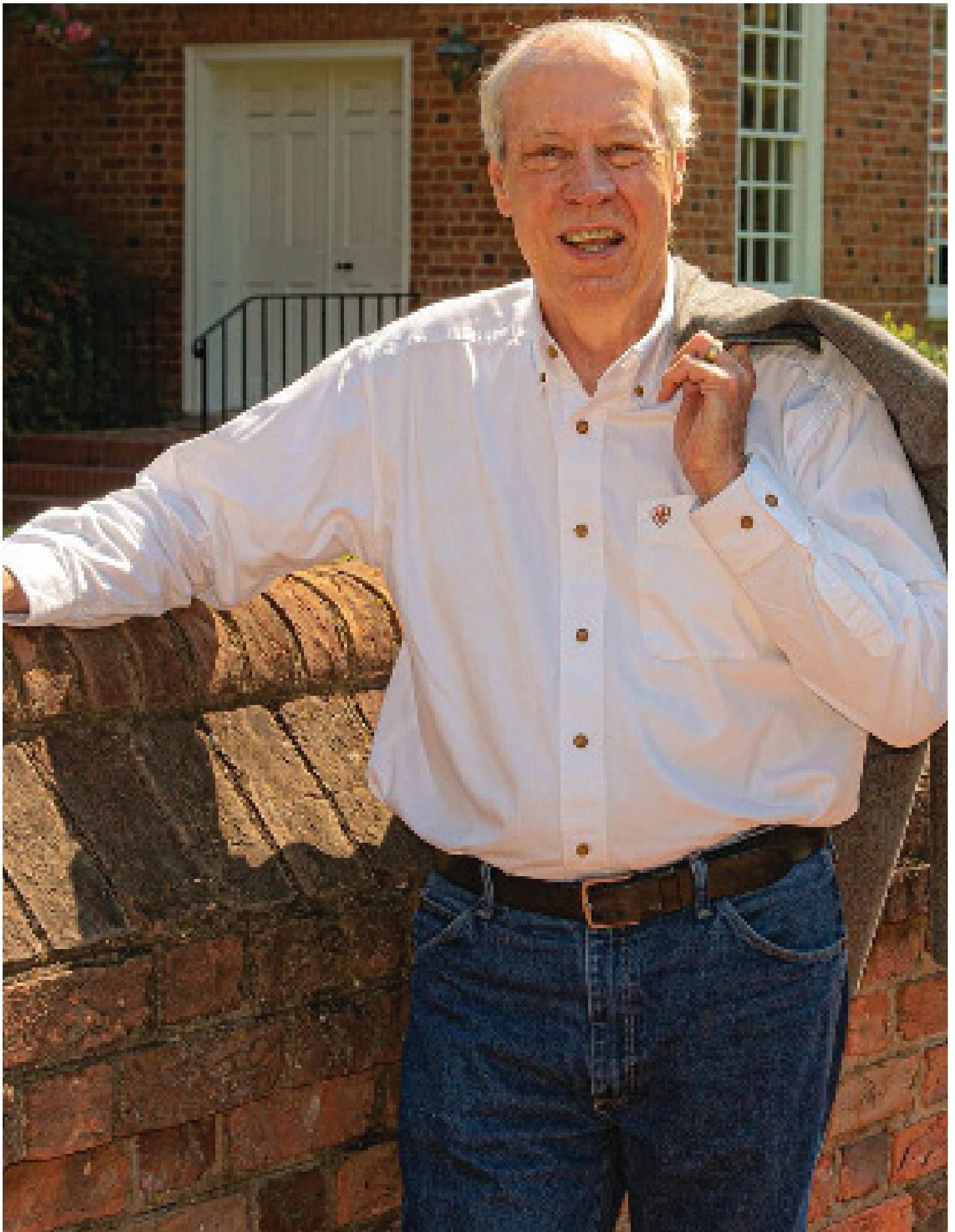
you are the fire of ideas that ignites your blood flow

You are a cerebrum in the clouds never watered down

You are fresh air to empty pockets full of wealth waiting to be realized

You are earth-shattering defiance because your spine simply said otherwise
You house the natural elements of greatness
so I dare you to rumble as an earthquake does
because Dreamer
If we x-rayed you
we would see wings sprouting from your agitated shoulder blades
It's not your fault that simple-minded people couldn't comprehend including
you
You are the song the caged bird sings
It's not your fault that as grounded as you are, the ground has never suited
you
You are the layers of Saturn's rings
They told you not to throw rocks at the sun
not realizing that you were just playing catch
The sun had to get its shine from somewhere
and every time you catch negativity falling faster than gravity-captured
asteroids
Dreamer
look at your hands
Notice how the subtle bends form collections of constellations
Notice the nebula of your fingers that form pillars of creation
There's something stellar about the way your veins orbit the galaxy of your
tendons
because you're not afraid to fail
You're just afraid that your super powers stop at the alarm clock

Lacroy "Atlas" Nixon was born in Charlotte, NC and raised in Williamsburg, VA. He earned his bachelor's degree in graphic design from Liberty University and has been writing and performing spoken word poetry for seven years. He currently is on the executive board for the Poetry Society of Virginia and the Writers Guild of Virginia, has a book available entitled *God and His Humor*, and is an artist with the Hope Booth Project (A world-changing initiative that debuted in London, UK in October 2021). Lacroy recently founded Slam Connection, a slam poetry-based organization in Williamsburg created to help people of all ages express themselves through slam poetry while also connecting them to the community. He was an educator through the Child Defense Fund Freedom School program for two years as a servant leader intern and site coordinator. He loves Jesus and hopes to inspire people to be the best versions of themselves.



LYNN
UNDERWOOD

I write because there are characters in my head who seem to want their stories told. Sometimes they won't leave me alone.

Presence

for Glenda

You said, "I am with you."
Did you mean you are here with me?
Did you mean you are inside me?
Around me? What did you mean?

Your presence meant so much to me.
It meant more than I knew
until you were gone;
but not gone...with me...but how?

My tears of loneliness fall;
my own selfish desire
to have that companion
that I'll never have again.

Your presence meant so much to me,
and yet you say you're with me.
How? How are you with me?
How? How am I with you?

Selfish, inward, ego-driven fear
of being alone and without.
Without you, without your love,
without your presence.

Your presence meant so much to me.
I look for you...everywhere...everywhere but
you're not here. Yet you say,
"I am here. Here with you."

Are we together on some astral plane?
Am I dreaming a dream of being alone?
Are we walking together on a beach?
A beach on Enceladus, Saturn's moon?

Your presence meant so much to me.
Am I really still we? Am I really with you?
Holding hands and walking,
humming a tune together?

Where are you? Where are we?
Are we everywhere? Everything?
Am I living the illusion of
being myself...myself alone?

Your presence means so much to me.
Waves splashing, crashing,
we walk away from the shore.
We embrace...a hug I will never forget.

Lynn Underwood was a building official until recent retirement. He worked in the building safety profession and building code development for thirty-five 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 Vietnam with the 1st Marine Division. He was awarded several medals including a Purple Heart and Navy Commendation, and a Meritorious Combat promotion. <https://lynnunderwoodauthor.com>



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