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# A Trip to the Mall

Peggy Newcomb

A trip to the mall. Now that sounds like a normal everyday event, right? Well, that's what I thought when I called my daughter and asked her to bring the stroller along when she dropped off the baby on her way to work.

I had it all planned. I would seatbelt two-year-old Kyle in the stroller, zip into the mall, pick up the bathing suit I had promised to daughter-number-three for her birthday, and try on two dresses I had spotted the evening before.

Everything was moving along according to plan. The baby even liked the stroller. He hadn't seen it in so long that it was a new thrill for him, especially when Nana yelled, "Hold tight!" and broke into a trot.

We got some curious looks, but my theory is if you're moving fast enough, the kid:

1. is afraid to climb out and
2. can't focus enough to grab stuff and throw it on the floor.

Of course, at this speed, I can't focus either, so I must always know my destination ahead of time.

My grandson seemed to think "Froggie's Wild Ride" through the department store was wonderful. We made it to my preselected spot. I found the bathing suit and dresses. The young clerk smartly showed us to the largest dressing room, complete with wall-to-wall mirrors and a stage. Entertainment galore, I thought as I wedged the stroller into the doorway.

Now, Kyle was standing and ready to get out, but trying on the

first two dresses went smoothly. He entertained himself by dancing in front of the mirrors and jumping off the stage. I even got an "Oh, pretty, Nana!" as I slipped into a red frock.

The next round of entertainment consisted of Kyle running into the other dressing rooms, slamming the doors, and announcing in a loud voice, "I go pee-pee in big potty, Nana!" Bam! Another door slam, another announcement. I knew he was still in diapers, but did the other customers? Well, at least I was able to change my dress, while I knew where he was and what he was doing.

"Now, now...don't come in here. Just go on back. I'm dressing!" I heard a lady exclaim in a voice on the verge of panic. How could a two-year-old cause panic? I pondered. And if he did

see someone undressed, would he know what he was looking at?

"I'll get him!" I shouted as I dashed down the hallway of the inner sanctum, clad only in my bra and panties. Since Kyle had slammed all the doors when he was playing "potty," I had no idea where he was or where she was. After a few frustrating tries, I found him lying on his belly in one of the dressing rooms looking up into the adjacent one.

Grabbing his feet, I dragged him to the safety zone, apologizing all the while and explaining that he was only two. Pulling the screaming toddler, I made my way to the semi-privacy of my dressing room. Remember, the stroller was blocking the doorway...sort of. Now, I thought, I'll try on this dress the clerk has brought me.



As all mothers and grandmothers know, when it comes to toddlers, silence means trouble, but somehow when silence first begins one doesn't notice it. It slips on comfortably like a favorite sweatshirt...soft and snuggly. You're enjoying the quiet, not struggling to think, when suddenly you're jolted to reality like a tea kettle whistle going off in your head! You know something's wrong. Reality check! Silence is bad. Noise is good. Noise means you know where the baby is. The baby!

"Where's the baby?" I yelled at the clerk, who gave me a blank stare.

What sort of idiot do we have here? I wondered as I grabbed a dress and held it in front of myself. I dashed to the door of the dressing room.

"Did you see the baby? Did he slip out?" I shouted as a feeling of panic moved over me. Should I look in the stalls again or out on the main floor? The headlines of the morning paper flashed across my mind: "Grandmother Streaks in Downtown Mall." No one will believe this! I must find the baby at all costs. "Kyle!" I yelled. "Kyle!" I glimpsed him running through racks of clothes near the entrance to the dressing rooms.

"Get the baby!" I commanded the clerk. "I don't have any clothes on!" She stood there looking at

him. Obviously, she had no idea how quickly a two-year-old could disappear. "Get the baby!" I shouted again.

"Kyle! Kyle! Come here!"

"Huh?" was all I heard as he charged by again on his way to a rack of clothes even farther from the dressing rooms.

I was convinced my fifteen minutes of fame, like it or not, were about to begin. Especially since the clerk's feet had obviously been set in concrete earlier that day.

"Kyle!" I called again.

This time the clerk spoke. "Would you like a toy?"

Hearing the word toy, Kyle froze, turned, and looked at the one-hundred-pound shadow of a girl and said, "Huh?"

"I'll find you a toy. Go on in there with your grandmother."

Fat chance, I thought.

Do you believe in miracles? Well, if you've ever raised a two-year-old, you'll recognize a miracle when I tell you what happened next. Kyle walked into the dressing room. The clerk pulled her feet from the concrete and went off in search of a toy...or so I thought. I wasted no time putting on my shorts and shirt. I grabbed the bathing suit and two dresses and my VISA card, expecting the clerk to hasten my purchase. But no... upon her return to the check-out desk, she slowly changed the dresses from one coat hanger to another, covered my purchase with plastic, slowly wrote out not one but two tickets...one for the bathing suit and one for the dresses. All the while the baby was standing in the stroller shouting repeatedly, "I want to get down, Nana!" She never did produce a toy.

My only revenge was the foul odor wafting from my grandson's diaper. Do you think she noticed?



# Why Have We Turned to Hate

Peggy Newcomb

One drop of blood.  
Just enough to make men hate.  
What's that they're saying?  
Sounds like gibberish to me.  
They look a little too brown.

Worship my God, not yours.  
There's only one, you say.  
That may be so...but isn't  
God known by different names?

What happened to "Love your  
neighbor as yourself?"  
Whose idea is it to  
kill the Negro, the Indian, the Asian, the Jew?  
Don't forget the infidel...kill him too.

What about deportation?  
Who cares that little children are  
split from their parents?  
Is the whole world going crazy?

Why have we turned to hate?  
Remember the teachers,  
the students, and the little children  
who have died.

Sell more guns to the mentally ill.  
Shoot your neighbor in the face.  
Make the world a better place.

Why have we turned to hate?



# Canned Ravioli

Patti Gaustad Procopi

I can't think about my brother William without cringing from guilt. What a terrible childhood he had. None of us loved him or tried to make him part of the family. He was just someone who shared space with us, which was a tragedy. For him.

I think Dad loved him. Once I caught him in William's room slowly rocking him back and forth and telling him what a good boy he was. Dad was saying he was sorry William's mommy didn't love him, but it wasn't his fault. William, for once, was not screaming or crying but just looking up at Dad with the most serious expression. It makes me want to cry when I remember how few times like that William had. And then Dad walked out forever when William was just three years old.

Mom could never forgive William for being a boy. She had wanted a baby girl. A baby girl to replace her baby that died. She fell into a deep depression when she found out she had a boy baby. She never really recovered.

It's not good for anyone to be a replacement child, who doesn't quite live up to the role he was destined for.

First. He was a boy.

Second. He was a crabby, disagreeable child.

Third. He really didn't talk much or interact with any of us. No surprise since no one ever tried to interact with him.

Well, that's not completely true. When he was little, my older sister Ivy and I would sometimes involve him in our games, but mostly, I am embarrassed to admit, in a mean way.

We would dress him up as a baby girl and stuff him in a baby carriage and wheel him around calling him Fern, which was the name he would have been given if he had been the baby girl he was supposed to be.

He would cry and fuss, and one day he yelled, "My name is Willum not Fwern." But we just snickered at that, ignoring him. We even told him stories saying he was adopted, or we had found him by the side of the road and had been forced to take him in.

Like I said before, if he had grown up to be a complete psychopath it would not have been shocking. And, as he grew up, it was no surprise that he spent most of his time in his room, when he wasn't at school. He didn't even have any friends. He mostly stayed in his room listening to music. Alone.

When he was in third grade, Mom asked me to pick him up after school one day. He had missed the bus for some

reason. I pulled up to the front of the school, and he wasn't there. I was angry because I had to park and go look for him. I looked in the lobby. No William. I walked around the side of the school. Nothing. Then I walked to the athletic field and saw him leaning against the fence. A bunch of boys were playing baseball. He looked so sad.

"William," I called out, "come on. We've got to go." He turned and walked to the car with his head down.

"Do you like baseball?" I asked when we got in the car. He shrugged.

"Would you like to play?" He shrugged again.

I tried one last time. "Looks like fun."

"Yeah. Maybe," he said quietly.

When we got home, I went to find Mom. "I think you should sign William up for baseball," I said.

"Why on earth do you think that?" she replied.

"Well, because I think he would enjoy it, and sports are good for kids. You know they say that all the time. Gives them exercise, teaches them teamwork, you know all that good stuff."

She looked uninterested. "Someone would have to pick him up every day. I don't have time."

I seriously wanted to slap her. I wanted to scream, "You don't have the time? You have nothing *but* time. You do nothing."

But I just shook my head and went up to my room. Poor William. He needed someone who cared. He needed a father.

I often wonder if things would have turned out differently for him if I had somehow managed to convince Mom to sign him up for baseball. But to my everlasting regret, I did nothing. I didn't even volunteer to pick him up. I burn with shame from the memory.

He was seven when I started high school, and we had absolutely nothing in common. We ate dinner together. That was about it. When I left for college, he was only ten. When I returned, he was on the cusp of adolescence and had gotten shaggier, quieter, and more distant.

After I graduated from college, I moved back home to save money. In the two years that I lived there, William was more like a boarder in the house than a member of the household. Mom and I hardly ever saw him. He got himself up for school and left before Mom was awake. He had a part-time job at the local food market, where he went right after school each day and on weekends too. He didn't come home for dinner. Sometimes the only evidence that he had even been home was an empty can of ravioli in the trash the next day.

"How can he eat that crap?" I asked Mom one day.

"It's all he wants. As long as I don't run out of canned ravioli, he's happy." She laughed. "The only time I hear

from him is when we are getting low. Though he usually just leaves a note on the counter. He writes 'ravioli.' Doesn't even sign it."

"Mom, it's not like you don't know who's writing the note," I said.

"True enough. But he could at least sign his name."

After I moved out, I came home only once a week for dinner. Sunday night. Mom liked to pretend we were a happy normal family. It was the least I could do, and I was happy to do the least.

When William was halfway through his senior year of high school, he got arrested for drug possession. It was only marijuana, but back in the day marijuana was treated like it was as dangerous as heroin, and you could go to jail for years for simple possession.

Mom called me at work. She knew not to call me at work, so when the secretary brought me the note, I knew it was serious. As soon as I could, I called her.

"Thank God you called, Rose." She sounded completely hysterical. "Your brother has been arrested!"

"Arrested?" Arrested for what?" William seemed like such a benign person I couldn't imagine him committing any kind of crime. Drug use did not occur to me, though thinking back, it should have. It went with his personality. Maybe he was trying to fit in or make himself feel better.

"For drugs!" Mom yelled. "Drugs. I will never be able to hold my head up in the neighborhood again when people find out my son is a drug addict."

I couldn't believe that once again Mom was making this all about her. "Mom, first things first. Where is William right now?"

"In jail. In the local jail. I have a child in jail! This is the most humiliating moment of my life."

I sighed inwardly and closed my eyes. "Have you gone to see him?" I tried to speak calmly hoping she would calm down.

"No, I haven't gone to see him. Do you think I want to walk into jail and admit I have a child who is in jail because he is a criminal and a junkie?"

"We have to do something, Mom. Maybe he's innocent. We need to hear his side of the story."

"You go. That's why I called you. You are so much stronger than I am. I can't deal with this." And she hung up.

So, I went to the jail since Mom was too worried about what the neighbors might think. I'm sure the neighbors had their own problems and couldn't have cared less. Besides, Mom had no friends that I knew of, so who was she worried about finding out? My grandmother, Meemee, thank goodness, was no longer with us, so we didn't have to worry about her showing up and telling us once again how bad we all were.

William looked small and pathetic when they brought him out to see me.

"What happened?" I asked.

"I got busted," he shrugged, looking down at the table.

"I know. But can I get some details?"

He wouldn't look me in the eye. "Jim and I were down by the river, sitting in his car, smoking some weed, and suddenly a cop like jumped out of the bushes and was waving his badge and screaming at us. We tried to throw the joints away, but there were a couple more in the car. So, we were arrested and now I'm in jail. Plus, they're claiming we had enough to be charged with dealing. It's crap."

she comes here."

*If you go to Hell for lying, I'm well on my way.*

William gave me a weak smile, thanked me, and then a guard led him back to his cell.

I drove to Mom's house and told her I had seen William, and we had to get a lawyer.

"How am I going to afford a lawyer?" She cried. "I am barely making ends meet now!"

"I'll take care of it, Mom. We have to do something. Do you want him to go to prison?"

"No, of course not. I just don't know what to do. I'm so glad you can take care of it."



I think it was the longest speech William had ever said to me in his life. I hardly recognized his voice. He must have gone through puberty at some point because his voice had deepened. I totally missed that.

"Sounds like they got you pretty good. I'll have to hire a lawyer and see what can be done."

William finally looked at me. There were tears in his eyes. "Thanks, Rose. Where's Mom? Is she coming to see me?"

I winced. What could I say? *No William. Mom only cares about what the neighbors think not what you are going through.*

I reached across the table and took his hand. It was probably the first time I had touched him since he was a toddler. "No William. She's just so distressed this has happened to you, she's afraid she'll only upset you more if

The next day at work I was talking to my colleagues about what had happened and asked if anyone knew a good cheap lawyer.

One of them gave me a name, and I called to make an appointment.

I met with the lawyer and told him William's sad story.

"Has he ever been in trouble before?" he asked.

"No. He's really a good kid. Goes to school. Has a part-time job." I was trying to emphasize the positive.

"Well, since he hasn't been in any trouble before, I could probably get the charges tossed if he agrees to join the army."

"Really? But he's only seventeen and hasn't even graduated from high school. Not to mention the fact that there's a war going on."



"That's his choice. Prison or the army."

What a choice!

And so, that's how William, at the age of seventeen, quit high school, joined the army, and basically disappeared from our lives.

His court appearance was almost comical. The judge kept calling him "boy" and telling him they were offering him a chance to turn his life around. "Boy, no one ever made anything of himself by using drugs. The army will make a man of you. You should thank the DA for giving you this wonderful opportunity."

Wonderful opportunity to come home in a casket or maimed, I thought. But I said nothing. It was the old frying-pan-versus-the-fire dilemma. Jail or the army? Hard to decide which was worse, except jail would mark him for life. And maybe the judge was right. It wasn't like William was really going anywhere with his life. What would he do after graduation? Continue to work at the market, live with mom, and eat canned ravioli? I convinced myself this might be a good thing.

Mom and I drove him to the recruiting station where all the new recruits would be picked up by bus and taken to an army post for basic training. They all looked so pitifully young with pimples and long hair. None of them looked old enough to drive, let alone join the military.

"I guess a lot of these boys ended up here the same way William did," I said to Mom.

She tut-tutted the idea. She was over the horror and shame of having a drug fiend for a son. Now she was all proud she had a son serving his country.

"They'll make a man out of him," she said. "Just like the judge told him. This is such a wonderful opportunity for William. I hope he makes the best of it."

"Yeah, such a wonderful opportunity. Not like he had a choice – join the army or go to jail," I replied.

She gave me a dirty look. "You are always so negative, Rose. It's completely exhausting."

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. *Negative or realistic?* I wanted to ask but didn't bother.

When it was William's turn to board the bus, he turned away and started walking without so much as a goodbye.

Mom, of course, was acting like the loving devoted mother, so she ran after him and gave him a big hug. It was probably the only time in his life she had ever hugged him.

"My dear boy," she said through her tears. "I am so proud of you. Don't forget to write and tell us all about your adventures."

William, to his credit, hugged Mom back and nodded at me. I waved to him as the bus pulled out of the parking lot. Why didn't I hug him? Life is full of regrets.

Mom stood there until the bus was out of sight, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue. "My dear boy," she kept saying.

I wanted to punch her in the face.

We received a couple of cards from William. In his first note, he talked about getting his head shaved and how hard basic training was and how much they yelled at everyone. He did say the food was good. I guessed he discovered there were other things to eat besides canned ravioli.

It was no surprise when he ended up getting sent to Vietnam right after basic training. He sent us a postcard with a photo of an elephant and a water buffalo. He wrote "Hot." Still a man of few words.

After his first tour was over, he reenlisted. I was shocked. Who would want to stay in a war zone? During his second tour, we got a letter saying he had been awarded the Purple Heart. Mom seemed disinterested.

"That means he's been wounded, Mom. In battle. Like shot." Mom didn't respond. It occurred to me that she would probably be happy if William came home in a body bag. Well, happy is not the right word. Content? No. That's not it either. I just think she would love playing the role of the grieving mother, clutching the folded American flag as his body was slowly lowered into the grave. Mom loved drama. What is more dramatic than a military funeral complete with a twenty-one-gun salute and "Taps" being played on a bugle. Then she could put the flag on display and feel sorry for herself. She wouldn't think about feeling sorry for William.

After two tours in Vietnam, he enlisted again and was sent to Alaska. We only found out by an official letter the army sent to Mom. There was one postcard from him with a grizzly bear eating a salmon. On the other side he had written "Alaska." He didn't even sign his name. It reminded me of those single word notes he would leave with just the word "ravioli" on them.

"I guess he's staying in the army for a while," I said.

"That's good. Good place for him. What else was he going to do with his life?" Mom said, sounding frazzled. She was over William.

When William was twenty-five, we got a card saying he had left the army and was staying in Alaska. He liked it up there. It was large and empty of humanity. There was no return address on the card.

He had picked the farthest spot from us he could find in North America. It was the last time we ever heard from him.





# Little Green Man Meets Green Acres

Susan Williamson

I had thrown the last bale of hay from the loft onto the truck bed and climbed down the ladder, hoping to beat the storm thundering in the distance. I jumped in the truck and shifted to reverse, giving it a little gas so I wouldn't spin in the muddy patch outside the barn. The truck stopped suddenly, throwing me against the seatbelt to the sound of bending metal and breaking glass. I threw open the door and ran to the back to see...

Nothing, there was nothing there, except my bent bumper and broken taillights. What the hell?

"Oh, I guess you earthling humans can't see that color. So sorry, my bad." A small man encased in tan coveralls was standing on the far side of, of something—

I was so stressed that the absurdity of the situation had not yet registered. "What the heck are you doing in the middle of my barnyard in the dark in a storm with your non-earthly invisible vehicle? Can you move it out of the way? I have to get this out to the horses before all hell breaks loose."

Sanity or something was returning. Did I just run into a UFO? Was I talking to an alien-alien? I mean as opposed to a Syrian refugee or Mexican illegal. And where did he get the corny language?

“Actually, I’m on a mission, but I had a mishap and decided to stop here when I saw your lights. Forgot you couldn’t see me. I meant to land a bit farther away, but I slid when I hit the mud. It looks as though you’ve bent my stabilizer, but if you’ll pull forward, I might be able to move out of your way.”

I climbed back in the truck and put it in first. With a wrenching noise of disconnection, the truck lurched toward the barn. A light flashed, then nothing. Nothing and no one. I jumped out and slowly walked behind the truck with my hands in front of me. I was crunching broken taillights under foot, but there was only air in my path.

Returning to the cab, I backed away from the barn very cautiously and headed toward the pasture. When I came alongside the fence, the horses were whinnying and circling, demanding their hay, but also nervous. Had they seen or sensed the UFO? And where did it go? If I didn’t have damage to the rear of my truck, I would have begun to think I had fallen and passed out and this was a dream.



I hoisted myself into the truck bed and began cutting strings and tossing sections of hay over the fence. Lightning lit up the sky, blinding me. I reached for the last bale of hay or where I thought it was. It wasn't. I heard a thump as a bale flew over my head and landed somewhere beyond the horses.

“Can they open it themselves?” I jumped when a voice came from behind me.

Holy shit! “You’ve got to quit sneaking up on me. And, yes, they can pull out the hay, but there’s a danger they’ll eat the strings or get tangled in them.”

A light flashed, and a laser sizzled the strings off the hay before igniting the entire bale. “Oh, you didn’t tell me it was flammable.”

The horses snorted and took off into the darkness. “You didn’t ask, did you?” I was beginning to think that despite the common language there was a bit of confusion in our intergalactic communication. Was this how it worked at the UN? When a horrendous boom of thunder shook the truck, I clambered for the safety of the cab. Mr. Alien was already ensconced in the passenger seat.

“I really don’t care for rain, and I can’t work on my craft during electrical disturbances.”

“And that’s my problem, why?”

“I expected rural residents to be more helpful. Are you inviting me to dine with you?”

“Only if you eat peanut butter and jelly.”

My hair stood on end before the lightning hit.

*When a horrendous boom of thunder shook the truck, I clambered for the safety of the cab. Mr. Alien was already ensconced in the passenger seat.*

With a loud crack, a tree crashed onto the rear of my truck bed. I dove to the floor. The rain was easing up when I came to. I was shaking all over but unhurt except for a small bump on my head where I must have hit the steering wheel.

My passenger seat was empty.



# Justice

Bradley Harper



The old man sat quietly beside the bank, his pole at his feet. There was a fish on the line but the arrow exiting his chest said it would get away.

"As you see, Magistrate," Master Wu said. "My uncle was obviously murdered by someone. The feather pattern on the arrow is that of our clan rivals, the Loos."

"Why would they murder an old man beside a stream?" I asked.

"He was our clan chief for many years. Revenge, I suppose. Revenge is a liquor that only grows more potent as it ages."

"Ah, so you are a philosopher as well as a politician?" I said. "How useful."

"True words, My Lord. In politics one suffers losses daily. A man with a strong philosophy is not easily undone by circumstance. You must learn to shape circumstance or be its victim."

I nodded as I approached the body. "Then let us see what circumstances I find here."

Revenge. Aye, Revenge is one reason to take a man's life, but in my experience, it tended to cool over time. Old slights diminish with the acquisition of new ones. I considered other reasons. Lust. I've seen plenty of blood spilled over the desire of a woman, but the dead man's days as a lover were far in the past.

Greed? Perhaps. I'd need to investigate the disposition of his effects to see who might benefit the most from his passing.

When I pulled the body back to get a better look at the arrow's exit, I noted something odd. His tunic was clean. No blood at all.

I kept my head down as I continued my examination.

"Assuming I rule the Loos are responsible, what fitting punishment do you recommend?"

"There is a boundary dispute between our lands, My Lord. A ruling in our favor would greatly distress them and teach them not to murder harmless old men."

I looked into the dead man's eyes and noticed the white glaze covering his pupils. Cataracts. The man must have been totally blind at the end.

Then I noticed the redness on the back of his right hand, and the swelling, and when I examined the dust around the body, I saw what I'd expected.

"How long has it been since you found his body?" I asked.

"No more than an hour, Magistrate."

"So, your uncle was here fishing just before sunrise?"

"As was his custom. What is night to a blind man?"

"And it was you who found him?"

"Aye, My Lord. Have you determined the guilt in this case?"

"I have, though I can exact no punishment upon the killer."

"What! Where is justice when an honored old man is struck down without retribution?"

"Because the killer," and here I raised up the dead man's right hand, and showed the viper bite, "is beyond my jurisdiction."

I turned then, dropped the hand, and stared fully into the now downward gaze of his 'grieving' nephew.

"But the man who feigned murder to settle a clan dispute, that man is well within my power to judge and punish."



# Panama City Beach, 1965

James L. Garrett

He thought how small and alone  
they were, lying across the float  
they had rescued as it drifted  
off shore.

After swimming out – far out –  
they reached the float.

As they turned it back toward shore  
he saw the pier as a fallen tree  
jutting out into a large lake;  
its brown trunk barely touching the shoreline.  
On shore, the sunbathers were nothing but ants  
crawling across the sand around their bed.  
Beach umbrellas were pieces of yard matter  
and blades of grass punching up  
above the sand.

It felt to him that  
they and the float were the centerpiece  
of a photo study captured  
by a large space observatory telescope  
from another universe.

Studied as they moved in slow motion,  
their arms and legs propelling the float  
ever closer to the shore,  
like an insect fallen into a water puddle  
desperately trying to reach another day.



# Growing Grief

James L. Garrett

He walks into the filling station. It's early evening.  
He intends to buy a pack of smokes but is clean  
out of quarters, borrows three, blushing.  
He walks into the filling station. It's early evening.

He glances thru the streaked window of the station.  
He sees her and Luke coming out of The Canteen,  
holding hands, kissing. He feels the devastation.  
He glances thru the streaked window of the station.

That sight, as he feeds the slot with quivering hand, he's trying to deny.  
The last pack tumbles from the vending machine.  
He tries to understand. Asks himself why.  
That sight, as he feeds the slot with quivering hand, he's trying to deny.

She wears a blue dress, eyes sparking in the twilight.  
The tight dress leaves no hint of the child who, to his chagrin,  
should have been theirs. His chest is tight.  
She wears a blue dress, eyes sparkling in the twilight.

He steps outside, and their eyes collide.  
He feels her disdain; something he hadn't foreseen.  
He turns away, hiding his fear inside.  
He steps outside, and their eyes collide.

He pulls the tab, opening his smokes. Feels her apathy.  
the fabric of his life unraveling like the cellophaned pack between  
his fingers, not believing this agony.  
He pulls the tab, opening his smokes. Feels her apathy.

He lights a cig, feels its sting as he inhales his grief.  
In his pocket, a ring, a green  
pack of smokes, and his growing disbelief.  
He lights a cig, feels its sting as he inhales his grief.

He walks into the filling station. It's evening.  
He glances thru the streaked window of the station.  
That sight, as he feeds the slot with quivering hand, he's trying to deny.  
She wears a blue dress, eyes sparkling in the twilight.  
He steps outside, and their eyes collide.  
He pulls the tab, opening his smokes. Feels her apathy.  
He lights a cig, feels its sting as he inhales his grief.

*Note: The form is borrowed from James Dickey's poem, "On the Hill Below the Lighthouse."*

# Easter Surprise

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

There once was a little green frog,  
who lived in a woodsy bog.  
Feeling lonely, one sunny day,  
he decided to hip-hop away.

As he hopped 'neath the trees,  
through the warm spring breeze,  
he heard voices ahead.  
“Sounds like fun!” he said.

He hopped and hopped with all his might,  
and saw before him, a wondrous sight.

The grass was sprinkled with purple and blue,  
and yellow and green and bright pink too.  
He saw eggs of all colors in baskets and bins  
and bright colored water in saucers and tins.

He hopped in the water and jumped cup to cup.  
He wriggled down in, and then he jumped up.  
His legs were purple, his mouth, bright blue.  
His back was speckled with yellow goo.

The sun was toasty; he needed a nap.  
So, he hopped in a basket -- zippity zap!

When the children returned from their hike to the bog,  
they cheered in surprise, “It’s the Easter Frog!”

# Home

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

What is *home*?  
Is it a place, a memory;  
or is it a person who makes  
us feel safe, secure, loved?

*Where* is home?  
Is it our birthplace,  
where we grew up,  
where we still return?

My brother and I refer  
to our hometown as *home*,  
but our actual childhood  
home no longer exists.

Recently, I drove past the house  
where I raised my children.  
It wears its twenty-five years  
of growing-up chaos well.

On the outside, there's no evidence  
of the birthday-party sleepovers,  
the *Star Wars* popcorn nights,  
the heart-broken teenage tears.

When I moved from that house, I  
wondered if my children would be sad  
to never return to their childhood home.  
Their response answers the first question.

"Home will always be where *you* are."

# Technology is Personal

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

My first realization that technology was important involved a silent black-and-white television brought back to life by a repairman in a black suit, with a suitcase full of tubes, who revived the talking box.

As a teenager, I appreciated the sexy lights and sounds of the jukebox at the local hangout. It gave teenage boys and girls legitimate reasons to snuggle up on the dance floor to the crooning of Elvis and the Everly Brothers.

When computers became cheap enough for everyone—even poorly paid secretaries like me—I discovered the delight of no more carbon paper or correction tape and no more misbehaving typewriter ribbons to untangle.

For this writer, technology opened the world of Google research and closed the pages of our encyclopedias forever. It also meant I could write my first children's book on a tiny island in the British Virgin Islands.

When COVID shut down the world, the technology of my iPhone kept me connected to my children and grandchildren. I couldn't hug them, but we could talk and laugh together. We all worked at home and loved it.

There are still frustrations when the technology that orchestrates our lives occasionally goes down. I'm still impatient, just like that six-year-old me, who was waiting for the repairman to resurrect our magic black box.

# Victory in Numbers

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

A chickadee pauses for a second on the iron railing,  
then darts to the feeder, snatches a seed, and quickly  
retreats to the shelter of the holly bush as a blue jay  
swoops in, rattling the feeder, claiming it for his own.

He takes his time, sorting through the seeds, eating  
some, sending others to the ground where squirrels  
wait expectantly. Meanwhile, three more chickadees  
have convened on the railing, watching, waiting.

The jay, finally satisfied, soars up and into a tall pine.  
Instantly the three chickadees gather around the feeder.  
The lone chickadee joins them. They cover the feeder  
on all four sides, chattering, eating, but keeping watch.

The jay emits a shrill cry and flies toward the feeder.  
The four chickadees stand their ground, chattering  
loudly. The jay retreats to the railing, then to the sky.  
I celebrate the victory with my own happy dance.

Sometimes, sometimes, the little guys actually win!





# Paradox

*For Laura*

Ann Eichenmuller

I was struggling to grow in the madness  
Rising and falling like the pitch of a scream  
I sliced the air only to break its pattern  
I was raging heat and burning ice  
Thunder and dead silence of an August storm

She was all gray constant unchanging  
No break in the pattern, she never felt the need  
To dye her hair or look for the razor blades  
It never crossed her mind  
Like breathing and Sunday church they did themselves  
Effortlessly  
No emotion involved

It is an art to exist  
Without touching walls  
In the narrow in-between  
But from behind the glass  
Removed  
She liked to watch the rain

She believed in God and truth making free  
Reality was never a barrier  
I believed in magazines, new morality, sex  
*Cosmopolitan*, some sadistic man's invention  
Wrote my lifestyle in their May issue  
When I was seventeen

The ones with the fire  
Are the ones to burn out early  
Now watching her, I am Valium cold to the depths  
I am sea glass long after the tempest has ravaged me

She is a stone rolling faster and faster  
Downhill to land hard and late in the sticky tar  
Of a sun-beaten thirsty road.

# Jamestown

*“to live and die in Dixie”*

Reyn Kinzey

They came here,  
my mother's people,  
in inappropriate woolen clothes,  
to settle the swamps of Jamestown.  
What were they hoping for?  
Friendly Indians?  
Abundant game?  
Fertile land?  
Tobacco.  
They got all that  
and more.

Sunrises over the bay.  
sunsets over the Blue Ridge,  
years away.  
An ocean from the fog of London.

A land they could have made free.  
Except for the slavery thing.  
No one is perfect,  
and not they.

Still, they built a country,  
for better or worse,  
out of the swamps of Jamestown.

*The Dedication of Saint John, Lateran, 2023*

# The Great Migration

*"for the sky there are no fences facing"*  
- Dylan

Reyn Kinzey

Fourteen egrets gathered  
in the tenement tree across the creek.  
Usually, we're lucky to see two in a two-hour paddle,  
sometimes none at all. But they're preparing  
for the great fall migration to Florida.

We've all been caught up in great migrations.  
From Bantry Bay to America,  
in coffin ships,  
the Potato Famine, *an Gorta mor*.  
Economic stagnation in the '30s.

The African American forced migration  
in slave ships, from Africa.  
The second migration north to Detroit  
to union jobs, middle class life.

The great migration, south to north,  
from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador.  
For better jobs, a better way of life.

Like the egrets, following our instincts,  
hoping for better life,  
migrating ever onward.

*The Feast of Saint Eustice and His Companions*





*Egret on Assateague - Rebecca Day*

# The Fog at Chincoteague

Reyn Kinzey

Early morning, we couldn't see,  
across a narrow spit of water,  
the highway that connects us to the mainland.  
By noon, it had burned off in town.  
But it lingered on the beach at Assateague,  
where the English first settled.

The native Americans never lived there.  
They'd come to hunt and fish,  
but the weather was too uncertain for them.  
The English were used to fog and foul weather.

The famous Spanish ponies arrived later,  
when the wreck of a Spanish galleon  
ended their migration  
and freed them to live on the island.

Now Chincoteague is a tourist town,  
Assateague a National Park,  
but the ponies live free  
and mostly try to stay out of sight.

*The Conversion of Saint Paul, 2024*





*Fog on Assateague - Rebecca Day*

# Barabbas 2.0

David Reid Brown

The First was a true convict, that much was as plain as day.  
The spectacle of a trial defied all logic and comprehension.  
The shouting throng of people demanded to have their way.  
Pilate washed his hands of it all in a quick exoneration.

The New One has yet to be tried, his fate remains unsure.  
Innocence must be presumed because our laws make it so.  
Still adored and followed equally by the rich and the poor,  
could his popularity, too, eclipse Good Friday's humble hero?

Much can happen in life over the course of seven days' time.  
a joyous parade, a gruesome death, and yet, He's alive!  
Grace is God's goodwill offer to all who are so inclined,  
but we cause the drama that keeps us stuck on Day Five.

History has already spoken, and we must repeat it aloud,  
declare it now in unison: "It's not the criminal, but the crowd."

# Easter Rising

(a prayer)

David Reid Brown

Lord of the Evening,  
we acknowledge our fatigue before you.  
Please excuse the friction or folly it has caused.  
Let your peace come to us  
like the encroaching cover of dusk.

Lord of Midnight,  
peer through the darkness that surrounds us.  
Sprinkle our lives with stars to remind us  
that any depth of gloom cannot extinguish  
the promise of your light.

Lord of the Dawn,  
awaken us to new hope.  
Let the scintillating warmth of your presence  
revive and refresh  
mind, body, and soul.

Lord of All,  
Easter is rising  
in the hearts of the faithful.  
Let it rise...let it  
rise.

Amen.



**Peggy Newcomb** was born and raised in Chester, Virginia. She graduated from Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia (UVA) with a BS degree in Chemistry. At the time of her graduation, women were not allowed to attend UVA unless you were in the nursing program. She taught Chemistry and Science at York High School, Yorktown, Virginia.

She wrote for several newspapers and has been published in numerous venues including *The Poet's Domain*. She was awarded first place in non-fiction by the Chesapeake Bay Writers. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women and the James City Poets.

A portrait artist, her art has been displayed in several local galleries including Arts on Main in Gloucester, Virginia and The Bay School in Mathews, Virginia. She has published two books - *I Used to Wear Shoes Like That* and *The Curtis Letters - A Cat's Eye View of Life*.



**Reyn Kinzey** was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He went to UVA, and having no idea what he was going to do with his life, he hung around and got an MA, an M. Ed., and even finished the course work for a PhD. But he never finished his dissertation.

Still not knowing what he wanted to do with his life, he took a job at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he taught for twenty years, both full time and in the night school.

Kinzey also started a rugby career of playing and coaching for over twenty-five years. "I wasn't much good, but I loved the game."

From academia, he drifted into market research, which proved a good fit. For twenty-five years, he and Rebecca Day ran Kinzey & Day Qualitative Research. They had a good run, working for clients such as Hilton, McDonalds, Anthem, and various hospitals and universities.

Reyn is the author of three books: *Chasing the Dragon - Selected Poems*, *Sleeping Dragons - Selected Poems*, and *Due North*.

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**Ann Eichenmuller** is a marine and travel journalist whose articles have earned four Boating Writers International Awards. She is the author of the *Kind Lies* nautical mystery series, *Foo's Way Home* (a children's book), and *The Writing Rx*, a researched guide to the beneficial effects of creative writing. She is also the author of *There When Needed - A History of Smith Point Sea Rescue*. Ann is also a recipient of the Washington Post Agnes Meyer Award for her work in education.

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**Jim Garrett** is a retired high school English teacher from Florida. He is a member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Writers Guild of Virginia, and the James City Poets. Jim is a former U.S. Marine and a retired marathoner. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, writing, and walking with his wife Suzanne.

Jim can be reached at [jsgarrett70@gmail.com](mailto:jsgarrett70@gmail.com).



**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." She has been honored to have her 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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**Susan Williamson** has been a newspaper editor, a freelance writer, an extension agent, a decorating store owner, college adjunct and she continues to work as a riding instructor. She is a graduate of the University of Kentucky with a graduate degree from the University of California at Davis.

Although her major was animal science/biology, she wrote and continues to write—from her high school newspaper to her graduate research paper to a 4-H project book to her online course content to newspaper articles, magazine articles, four novels and a children's book.

In different locations, at various times in her life, she has been able to find writing gigs that helped to pay the bills. Currently she is a contributor to *Next Door Neighbors* magazine, *Horses and People, Australia* and an editorial assistant to a retired college professor.

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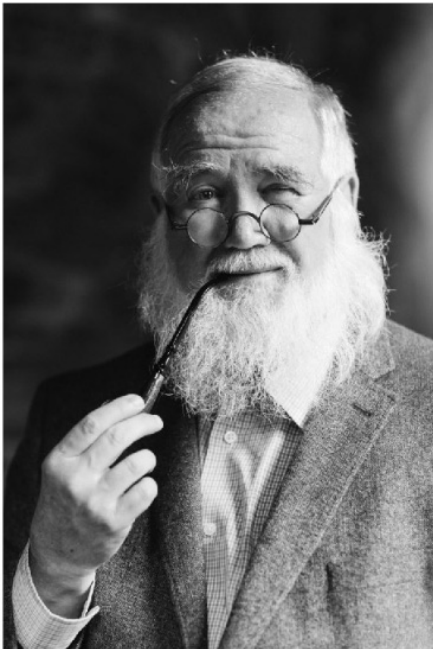


**David Reid Brown** is an artist, pastor, and retired Navy Chaplain. His first books, *Spirit Soundings: A Chaplain's Journal of Life at Sea* and *Lost Summer*, were born out of his global experiences in the chaplaincy, spanning twenty-one years of peace, war, and three overseas deployments. He is living out his God-given passion to “build people” through teaching high school government, history, and art at Grace Christian School in Mechanicsville, VA.

David has been married to his beautiful wife, Rayna, for twenty-nine years. He earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from Virginia State University, a master of divinity degree from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, and a master of elementary education degree from Hawaii Pacific University.

You can purchase any of David's books at: [www.GetMyNewBook.com](http://www.GetMyNewBook.com). You can follow all social media posts at the following: Facebook: *Spirit Soundings* - @SpiritSoundings3vols; *Lost Summer* - @LossandRecovery; *Psalms from the Sea* - @PsalmsFromTheSea

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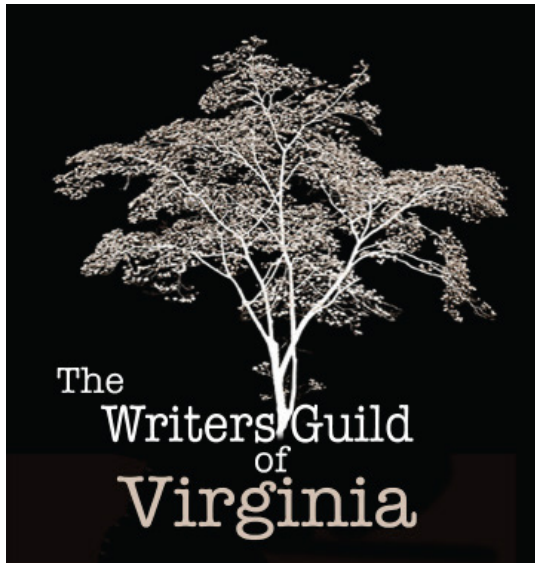


**Bradley Harper** is a retired US Army Colonel and pathologist with extensive experience in autopsies and forensic investigation. Along with clinical experience, he had four commands, and is the only non-Italian to ever receive the Knights of Malta award for his support of the Italian Army.

A life-long fan of Sherlock Holmes, upon retirement Brad received his Associates in Creative Writing from Full Sail University, to help him write his first book—*A Knife in the Fog*—a book that he'd always wanted to read.

Brad's life before becoming an author was as a board-certified Army Pathologist. Brad has performed over 200 autopsies during his 37 years of active duty as a pathologist, and his clinical years are interwoven with four stints as the commanding officer of various medical units. Brad was an Infantry officer before medical school, worked in the Pentagon, and learned to speak five languages. Yet, he also happily plays Santa each Christmas (with his loving wife as Mrs. Claus). It is this juxtaposition of exploring the body, mind, and humanity that allows Brad to share universal truths with his readers—on the page, or through book talks.

**<https://www.bharperauthor.com>**



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