It is my pleasure to introduce this third year edition of the Chestatee Review with poems and short stories written by students of Gainesville College. When reading this magazine, one can see not only the blooming of several fine new writers, but also one can find a lamp illuminating the soul of the reader. It is my hope that this magazine shows you the humanity behind the need for expression.

When I collected these works and saw their connections, this anthology took on a life of its own. It was my goal to arrange these works to illustrate creation through change. From disorder and depression, we seek inclusion and meaning. When at last we find our meaning and our place, expression and strength arise. All of the works in this magazine echo our need for belonging and exemplify the process of creation as dynamic and valuable.

I would like to thank all of the people involved in the production of this magazine. Without the efforts of both students and professors, this anthology would not exist. As a lover of the written word, I have enjoyed the experience of serving as editor more than I can express on one page. I would like to thank the College for this wonderful opportunity and I hope you enjoy these very special works of art.

As you read these offerings, keep in mind what the Latin poet Ovid once said about change in his poem Metamorphosis:

Remember this:
The heavens and all below them, earth and her creatures,
All change, and we, part of creation, also
Must suffer change. We are not bodies only,
But winged spirits...

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Leslie Erin Wright

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Perseverance

Matt Cantrell

He went to work
In a greasy shop
Every day of his life
Without fault

Even when
His hair turned gray
And his loving wife
Walked away,

He got up before dawn
Left his woes at the door
Only to drift to his old Chevy truck
Through a path of dead cornstalks,

Like an old man wobbling to a halt.
Bull Grits
Melissa Burns

Freshly starched homemaker’s aprons
Streaked with bull grits
Brown and bloody
Trapped in the complacency of the everyday
“more dinner, hon?”
Rhett was going to prove that he was a grown man if it was the last thing he did. He hadn’t been home in over two years. He’d called a few times only to have short, heated conversations with either his mother or father who’d long since decided that he was a black sheep, and two years ago, he probably was just that. He’d changed a lot since then -- more or less put away the booze, stopped hitting on every woman in the world, put away his electric guitar in favor of his acoustic, and for a while, he settled down in Atlanta singing folk music in a night club. Now he wanted his wife and son back.

As he sat at one of the oaken tables in The Broken Oar Tavern, an old hangout of his, a haggard waitress joined him. He recognized her immediately but didn’t want to talk. Her name was Pearl, and she was part of the reason for his divorce from Janie. She stared at him for a moment, trying to decide whether or not he was himself, but he said nothing other than he wanted a Mountain Dew. She gave him a cockeyed look, and then she returned and sat a glass in front of him.

“You’re Rhett Mueller,” she said, as if she’d had a revelation. “So?”

“Well I’ll be dog! I barely recognized you for all that hair. And what’s this crap about the Mountain Dew?”

“I don’t drink.”

“Th’ hell you don’t. — Where you been?”

“Here and there.”

“You got a divorce, and then I didn’t see you no more. Where’d ya run off to?”

“I had to get out of here for a while,” he said, taking a sip from the soap spotted glass. “Well, you and me sure had some good times. Look me up sometime.”

“Maybe,” he said coldly.
She eyed him for a moment and then walked off. He was glad she left. He needed to be alone and think a while, but as he sat
inhaling the thick cloud of smoke in the room and listening to Hank
Williams Junior whine about how all his rowdy friends have settled
down, he felt eyes tearing through the back of his neck. He didn’t
want to turn around.

Robby Lawson, his ex’s brother, sat down in front of him
holding a cue stick in his right hand and a sarcastic glint in his eyes.
He hadn’t changed much in the last two years. He was still as big as an
ox and as dumb-looking as a brick, and the same, crude goatee of red
hair circled his mouth like a mud stain.

“I was wond’rin’ when you was fin’ly gonna come draggin’
back in t’ town.” He glanced across the room to Pearl who was
propped up against the oaken bar glaring at Rhett.

“Still up t’ your old tricks.”

“I’m in no mood,” he growled.

“I heard you was up in some big bar in Atlanta singin’ folk
music. Me and Janie take your boy up t’ church ever Sunday. That
boy c’n sing too. I spend a lot of time with him. Hell, he thinks I’m
his Daddy. And Janie, you wouldn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell
with her now. She ain’t nothing like she used to be.”

“You son-of-a-bitch! Go finish playing with your balls before I
shove that cue stick . . .

“Yep, you ain’t changed at all — still drinkin’, still hittin’ on
whores, still pickin’ fights in bars . . . .”

“First, this is a Mountain Dew. Second, I blew her off. Third,
I don’t like you enough to kick your ass. Go find someone else to play
with, or better yet, go play with yourself.”

Robby tossed his cue stick down and jumped up.

Then!!!

Suddenly, everyone’s eyes were on the bartender who’d just
slammed a Louisville Slugger into the top of the bar.

“Break it up! And you with the long hair, pay up and get the
hell out.”

Rhett nodded and sighed.

“Hell, we ain’t done nothin’ but engage in a little friendly
correspondence,” Robby protested, grinning sarcastically.

Rhett glared at him.
“Cut it out! And Robby Lawson, go home and sober up.”
Rhett paid up and walked outside just in time to watch Robby spin out of the parking lot giving him the finger. Then he noticed it. There was a long, thin scratch down the driver’s side of his Aerostar. He cursed and kicked the tire, immediately realizing how juvenile he must have looked, and hated himself for it. He was going to have to do much better than that if he wanted his family back.

After deciding he’d made a big enough scene, he climbed back into his van and headed toward his parents’ house.

He arrived home at sunset. As the cold autumn wind hissed through the treetops, he stared vacantly across the white porch, past the narrow stretch of road that was the end of Grande Vista, and just past a steep hill, he could vaguely make out the forbidding iron bars that made the gates of Lakewood Village Cemetery.

Then he thought of Timmy, his son, and how he’d almost put him in that cemetery.

He shook his head and rang the doorbell. He heard rapid footfalls approaching the door — footfalls that he’d know anywhere. He once accused his mother of having bowling ball feet. She could always wake you in the morning simply by stomping around the house.

She swung the door open and glared at him impatiently as if he were a salesman. She’d aged. Her hair, once straight, lustrous, and the color of coffee, had turned wiry and gray, and thick laugh lines marked the skin around her eyes.

“I thought you were dead,” she growled. “You could have called.”

“I did call.”

“Yeah, to tell me and your father how terrible we were as parents.”

“Whatever it was, I didn’t mean it.”
She looked him over. “You need to cut that hair. You look like a thug.”

Rhett shook his head and looked at his feet.

“You can join us for dinner if you want.”

He nodded and walked through the door.
The house was different from what he remembered. He recalled antique white walls and bright green sculptured carpet, but
now it looked like the house of old people. There was a pastel flower-
laden border around the ceiling. The old carpet had been removed and
replaced with a rose carpet. Black and white pictures of his
grandparents and great-grandparents were stair-stepped in the foyer.
As he followed his mother to the dining room, he glanced over his
shoulder into the living room. The old furniture was gone. His
father’s old chair was replaced with a berry-colored Lay-Z-boy, and the
old tweed couch was gone -- in its place, a velvety one colored the
same as his father’s new chair. He wanted to grab his mother by the
arms and ask her what in the hell had gotten into her -- her
homemaker’s creativity was not what it was.

When he stepped into the den, his father glanced up from the
head of the mahogany table and then looked back down to his plate.
His hair was gray, but he had no wrinkles on his round face, and his
sunken blue eyes were still as piercing as ever.

“Howya doin’, Rhett,” he said casually. Rhett stared at him for
a moment not knowing how to respond to his father’s indifference.

His mother sat a plate full of mashed potatoes, creamed corn,
and cubed steak on the table, and Rhett sat down.

“Your brothers are doin’ good,” his father said after a while,
through a mouthful of steak.

“Really,” Rhett replied dully.

“Paul got a bachelor’s in theology and married ‘em a nice girl,”
Rhett’s father glanced at Rhett’s mother. “Show ‘em the picture,
Momma.”

His mother, who’d just sat down, stared wearily at his father.
Then she got up and walked toward the refrigerator.

“Yeah,” he went on with a smirk, “He just got ‘em a church
two weeks ago. A big church in Calvin County. Swananoa Baptist.”

“That’s nice.”

His mother passed him a 5x8 of Paul standing before an altar,
holding the hand of a homely redhead. A smirk found his face even
though he tried to restrain it.

“Trent finally finished up the engineering degree he’s been
working on since dirt was new and got ‘em a job in Detroit as a design
engineer for Ford Motor Company.”

“Really,” he said, brushing his hair back with his hand.

“He’s also engaged to a pretty girl. Her name’s Cassandra.”
“Yeah.”
“You dating anyone?” his father interrogated.
“Nope, I decided I haven’t done right by Janie. I’m going to
give it another shot.”
His father grunted and rolled his eyes.
After dinner, he and his father retreated to the porch for their
ritual after dinner man talk, an act which made him feel at home, no
matter how much he resented his father’s belittling remarks.
As he stood looking at the stars and listening to the sounds of
the crickets and bullfrogs, his father pulled a silver flask out of his coat,
screwed the lid off, and took a gut-bursting swig and offered it to
Rhett, saying, “Wanna snort of Wild Turkey?”
“Nah.”
“What, have you given up drinking?”
“Yeah. Clouds the head and screws up the judgement, and
things end up happening you regret. If I’d never drank, I’d still be
married.”
“Bullshit,” his father said, grinning sarcastically.
“Think whatever you want,” Rhett said, shrugging and looking
away.
His father lit his pipe and puffed out a cloud of sweet, blue
smoke.
“So what have you been doing?”
“Mostly just driving around and seeing the country, but for the
last six months, I’ve had a job in Atlanta singing folk music. I had an
apartment and lived like a decent human being ought to.”
“Folk music?” his father repeated giving him a cockeyed look.
Rhett nodded, and his father shook his head. “You know, we’ve been
real busy around the shop lately — especially the body shop.
Everyone wants to get out this time of year and look at the leaves. I
don’t know how long you’re planning on staying, but you were always
real good at doin’ bodywork. We sure could use an extra pair of hands
around the shop. I’d pay you enough to where you could get your own
place and live comfortable. You could settle down.”
“I’ll think about it.”
“Think about it hell! Tell you what, I’ll even throw you a bone.
You remember that ole trailer I rented to Travis Vermin?”
“The dump?”
“Yep. Travis got four months behind, and I kicked ‘em out. It’s just sittin’ now. Momma don’t have th’ time t’ clean it. If you think you c’n make it livable, I’ll give you th’ keys.”

“You can do better than that.”

“I will too. Soon as you show me that you mean business, I’ll sell you one of th’ lake trailers.”

“Deal.”

After the talk with his father, Rhett went upstairs to his old bedroom, picked up the phone, and dialed Janie’s phone number.

“Hello?”

“Bet you didn’t think you’d ever hear from me again.”

“Who’s this?” she demanded.

“You know who this is.”

There was a long uneasy silence. Rhett pictured her biting her lower lip as she always did when she was about to read someone the riot act.

“How’d you get this number?”

“You’re in the book.”

“What do you want?”

“I was wondering if we could get together tomorrow night and talk.”

“Fry in hell!”

“Don’t hang. . . .”

It was too late. She was gone. He’d just have to try something else.

The next morning, Rhett got up early, had breakfast with his mother, and hit the road. He had a lot to do.

He drove down to his father’s garage where his father eagerly re-introduced him to Ernie, his body shop manager, who told him he could start tomorrow.

Then he went to look at his trailer. It was falling apart. The mud pit of a lawn was filled with busted trash bags and debris. Its aluminum exterior walls, once white with a powder blue streak down its middle, had faded, and streaks of rust dribbled down the front of it from the roof. Inside, it smelled of pot, and a colorful array of old fast food wrappers, paper cups and dirty dishes lined the kitchen table and sink. There were holes in the walls and assorted porno magazines,
beer cans, and laundry dirty enough to burn completely covered its green shag carpet. A foul odor drifted through the hallway from the broken toilet in the bathroom, and the “spare” bedroom was so packed full of trash that he couldn’t even squeeze through the door.

“I’m gonna have to go to the hardware store tonight,” he decided aloud.

It was after lunch when he pulled into the parking lot of Dorsey’s Café. His hands quivered as he stepped out of his Aerostar and walked toward the front entrance. It was like everything from up until two months before he left Lakewood Village to now had been a strange and horrible dream, and he was walking into the café to talk with his wife.

The booths, lined with orange leather, were deserted as he walked in, and waitresses were cleaning the wooden tables and dumping the ashtrays in preparation for the dinner rush. Janie stood behind the counter staring at him contemptuously.

Her almond hair was pulled back and capped with an orange paper hat, and her uniform, white with vertical yellow pinstripes, was stained with catsup that had been hastily wiped off with a wet towel. She appeared dangerously skinny, and she had a cynical look in her eyes.

Rhett took a deep breath. “You look like a trampled wildflower, hun.”

She sneered. “What do you want?”

“I was just coming by to say I’m sorry.”

“You’re right,” she said, and she turned around, grabbed a blue tray of silverware, and moved it beside a tray of napkins to roll it.

“You are sorry.”

“Got a new place today.”

“Really?” she said dully.

“And a job too. Starting out at nine an hour.”

He touched her shoulder, and she spun around with a warning on her face.

“Do you want to come over for dinner tomorrow night?”

She gasped. “What’s th’ matter? Ain’t you gettin’ any? Is that it?”

“I don’t mess with cheap women anymore.”
“Yeah, and I bet you don’t drink no more either.”
“I don’t.”
“Shit,” she said, turning around to continue rolling the silverware.
“How’s Timmy?”
“What do you care?”
“He’s my son. You going to come tomorrow night or not?”
She turned around to face him. “I meant it when I divorced you. It’s over. Got it?”
She stared at him. He didn’t move.
“Why’re you still standin’ there? I told you what you wanted to know. I don’t have time to argue with you about it.”
“Look, I know I screwed everything up, but I’m not that way anymore. And I’ll show you that, if you’ll give me a chance.”
“Can you just leave? The dinner rush is about to start.”
Rhett nodded. “Yeah, well. I have to go home and clean up anyway. We’ll talk later.”
He turned and walked out of the café. It had gone better than he’d expected, but he still had a long way to go before he got her back.

He decided to go to the toy store where he bought Timmy a Millennium Falcon — an old Star Wars toy that had recently come back from the dead. He sent it on same day delivery. Then he set off to do something he really didn’t want to do.
“They ain’t gonna be no trouble today is there?” the bartender asked him as soon as he walked through the door of the Broken Oar Tavern.
“Absolutely not. I’m on a mission of good will.”
“You’d better be, or I’ll good will your tail outta here.”
Robby sat in a booth alone drinking a Pabst Blue Ribbon out of the can and watching two guys shoot pool on the billiards table beside him. Rhett walked over and sat down in the empty part of the booth.
“What’re you lookin’ at?” Robby growled.
“I didn’t come here to get into it; I just want to talk.”
“What do you want?” Pearl asked coldly.
“He don’t want nothin’. He was just leavin’.”
Rhett studied Robby. He wanted to slap the smirk off his face so badly he could taste it. He took a deep breath and released it.

"I'll have a Mountain Dew, Pearl."

She turned and walked off.

"Robby, I know you and I haven't been the best of friends in the past. — I married your sister, and you hated me. I got drunk one night and sucker punched you. You keyed my car — and now my van — and pissed in the gas tank. But I want to bury the hatchet."

"Eat the peanuts outta..."

"That's good, that's good. We're making progress. Listen, I know you don't like me, but I need to ask a favor of you. And in return, I'll do anything for you that you want."

"Good, then you can suck my..."

Rhett laughed, "That's really romantic, but you're not my type. Listen, I'm trying to get a date with your sister. I want to put our marriage back together and do right by her and my son, but as you know, she'd rather have the clap as to look at me. I need some advice."

"Advice. You want my advice. I'll give you my advice. Take a long walk off a short cliff. Go skydiving without a parachute."

"I'm serious. I'm asking for your help."

Pearl dropped the Mountain Dew in front of him and walked off.

"You mean to tell me, after constantly screwin' around on her, stayin' drunk all th' time, and then spongin' off of her, and then runnin' off and leavin' her with the tab for that little boy, you wanna get back with her?"

"I love her. She's the mother of my child, and I've done her wrong. And I want to make it right."

"You know what, you've caught me in a good mood. I'm gonna help you out, but if you ever hurt that girl again, so help me God, I will kill you."

"Fair enough."

"What do you wanna know?"

"What does she like to eat?"

"Salmon patties, green beans, and broccoli."

"Are you serious?"
“Yep, and cut that damn hair off. She hates men with long
hair, and she don’t like that crap music she used t’ listen to no more.
Since I took her to a Garth Brooks concert, country is all she’ll listen
to.”

“Good, I need you to do one more favor for me, and then I
won’t bother you with this again. I need you to put in a good word
with her for me.”

“Man, you’re pushin’ it.”

“You can ask me to do any favor for you that you like. You
scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”

“Alright. I’ll do it, but you better remember what I said.”

On his way back to the trailer, he stopped off at the florist and
sent Janie a dozen roses. Then he went to the office of Southern Bell
and had his phone turned on, and he stopped by his mother’s beauty
shop and got a haircut. Finally, he went by Lakewood Hardware,
bought some spackling compound, a birdbath, Rustoleum, and some
picket fencing for the yard.

He spent all evening cleaning the trailer up and putting up the
picket fence. When he’d finished, he looked at his hands. They were
scuffed, scratched and bleeding, and he was proud of that. — He was
doing the work of a husband. He turned away and walked to the
trailer to call Janie.

The phone only rang twice, and then she picked up.

“How’s your day been?” he asked breathlessly.

“Rhett, Rhett, Rhett,” she sighed. “Thanks for sending the toy
for Timmy, but he’s only four. The Millennium Falcon is for older
kids.”

“Damn, I guess I screwed that up too.”

“Well, you tried, I guess.”

“Did you like the roses?”

“Why’re you doin’ this? We were stupid kids when we got
married. It’s been two years, and we don’t know each other anymore.
Cain’t we just let sleeping dogs lie?”

“No I can’t, because I love you, and I did you wrong. And
now that I’m older and not stupid, I want to give it another shot. You
deserve a man, and I am a man. . . .”
He went on to count the ways, and finally Janie said, "What’s it gonna take for you to get off my back?"
"Come to dinner the day after tomorrow. You do that and still feel the same way, and I won’t bother you anymore."
There was a long silence. Rhett clinched his left hand into a fist. God, he wanted a beer.
"I’ll do it under one condition."
"Anything."
"That I bring Robby along."
"That’s fine. I don’t have a problem with that."
"Okay, well I’ll see you then."
He gave her his phone number and directions, and then he hung up. He was tired as hell and had a lot of work to do, but he felt like singing.

At work, the next day, he invited his mom and dad to his supper. His father accepted. After work, he bought groceries, cookware, cleaning supplies, and two Garth Brooks CDs. Then he spent the evening scrubbing, cleaning, vacuuming, hanging pictures over holes in the walls, fixing the plumbing, and putting up the picket fence. When he’d finished, he stood outside with his arms folded over his chest and his legs parted looking at the trailer.

He felt like a king. Although the front yard was nothing but a red mud pit, the trailer looked pretty good. He was ready for his dinner date.

When Janie and Robby arrived the next night, Rhett was playing “Friends in Low Places” on his new CD player.
"What are you listening to?" Janie asked, shaking her head.
"Garth Brooks."
"That sucks. Do you have anything by Nirvana?"
Rhett looked over Janie’s shoulder at Robby with an interrogative expression. Robby shook his head and waved confidently.
"Yeah, as a matter of fact, I prefer that myself. I was just in a strange mood tonight," he replied.
His parents walked through the door just as “Smells Like Teen Spirit” began blasting through the speakers.
“Is there a devil music convention goin’ on in here?” his father demanded.
Rhett grit his teeth and cut the CD player off.
“How’ve you been?” his mother asked Janie.
Janie smiled shyly. “Fine. Timmy’s about t’ kill me.”
“So Rhetti,” his father said cocking his fist playfully, “I’ve gotta go drain my lizard.”
“Dad,” Rhett said, eyeing his father sternly.
“What?”
“First door on the left,” he sighed.
His father nodded and walked past him.
“So Janie,” Rhett began, “where’s Timmy?”
She smiled maternally, looking away. “We left him at Momma’s. — He’s a good boy, but he can be hard to deal with when you go out.”

The door to the bathroom slammed shut and the picture on the wall to Rhett’s right fell off the wall. Janie looked at Robby rolling her eyes. Rhett glanced through the hole in the wall that the picture was intended to cover to see the back of his father’s head. The sound of his father urinating began to echo off the walls of the living room.
“Oh, that feels good,” his father moaned under his breath.
Rhett dropped to the floor and snatched the picture up, and he replaced it just as his father was punctuating it all with a hearty fart. He felt himself blushing. He looked at Janie, who was now frowning and shaking her head, and Robby was chuckling mischievously.
“Apparently, this place has a lot of problems that I haven’t had the time to fix yet,” he explained. “Sorry.”
“Sorry about what?” his father asked, rounding the corner.
Rhett rolled his eyes. “Never mind.”
“Let’s sit down,” his mother suggested.
They all took a seat -- his parents and Janie on the couch, Rhett and Robby in the two chairs by the old Zenith.
“So Daddy tells me that you’re doing real good at work,” his mother said.
“Yeah,” his father added. “Ole Ernie came up to me today and tole me he was afraid that you was gonna end up with his job before it was all over with.”
Rhett laced his fingers behind his head. “I didn’t think I was gonna like body work as much as I do, but it’s fun, especially when a car comes out real good.”

“What about your music?” Janie asked.

This was the chance he’d been waiting for; he leaned forward.

“Music’s fine. I love music. When I left town, I spent two years drifting from town to town and playing different bars. — I made a small name for myself too. I landed in Atlanta, got myself an apartment, and almost got a record deal. — It fell through, though, when Dale went solo. Dale and me wrote music together, and we worked the last three towns as a unit. Without him, the music just didn’t sound right. By then, I was ready to come back home anyway. I missed you and Timmy. I sold my old S-10 and bought the Aerostar. — Music’s a lot of fun, but it don’t support a family.”

Janie squirmed uncomfortably.

“That’s my boy,” his father said almost to himself. Rhett looked at him, and his jaw fell open as he read the bold faced title across the magazine at which his father gawked. “Hustler,” it read.

How could he have missed that?

He reached across the coffee table, snatched it out of his father’s hands and hid it behind his back. He felt sweat breaking out on his forehead.

“What was that?” Janie asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” he responded, grinning toothily.

“Is something burning?” his mother asked.

“Damn.”

He jumped out of his chair and was halfway in the kitchen when he heard Robby say, “Hey, this’s an issue I don’t have.”

He spun around and ripped the Hustler out of Robby’s hands, tossed it into a drawer in the kitchen and slammed the drawer shut.

Then he pulled the bread out of the oven and sat the it on the counter. It wasn’t burnt badly; he only had to scrape it off.

Then Janie walked into the kitchen. “Can I help you out here?”

“No,” he said smiling. “I’ve got it all under control.”

No sooner had the words come out of his mouth when the eye beneath a pot of boiling water on the stove burst into flames. Rhett nearly fried his hand moving the pot, and then he grabbed the baking
soda off the counter, ripped the top off, and dumped the entire box on
the eye. The fire went out immediately.

He turned to Janie and smiled confidently, and she laughed at
him.

He shrugged and opened the cabinet under the sink to throw
the empty box away, and an old Budweiser can fell on the floor.
She stared at the can and then back up at him. "I thought you
said you don’t drink anymore."

"I don’t," he assured her. "That was left here by whoever lived
here last."

"Uh-huh," she said, rolling her eyes and walking back into the
living room.

Rhett smacked his forehead. He decided that the best thing to
do was to move on fast. He set the table and called everyone in to eat.
Then he sat a plate full of salmon patties in the center, a bowl of
broccoli on the left, and bread on the right.

Janie stared at the food and then looked at Rhett. "You like
this stuff?"

Rhett ground his teeth and looked at Robby. "I thought you
liked salmon patties, green beans and broccoli."

Robby shrugged, but Rhett could see a smug look creeping
onto his face.

"Not really," Janie said.
"Good, then I’ll make hamburgers."
"No, that’s ok. Don’t waste it; I’ll eat it."
Rhett sat down across from Robby, and they filled their plates.

His father looked up to him.
"Your hair looks good, Rhett."

Janie looked at him and then back down to her food. "I liked
it better long. There’s this guy at the café (I dated him for a while), he
had great hair."

"Zat so?" Rhett growled, kicking Robby under the table. Rhett
wanted a beer, and then he wanted to beat Robby until he cried for his
mother.

"Something going on ‘tween you boys I should know about?"
Janie asked with foreboding.
"No," Rhett said, looking into Robby’s eyes.
“Well, you probably don’t do this, Rhett, but me and Janie are God-fearin’ folks, so if you don’t mind, someone needs to say th’ blessin’.”

Rhett couldn’t believe his ears. He looked at his parents for support, but they only stared dumbly. He looked back at Robby with his teeth clenched. “Dad, say the blessing.”

His father did; then they tore in.

“You’re a purdy good cook,” Robby observed after a moment. “Hell, you c’n even make salmon patties and broccoli taste good. You’ll make someone a good wife.”

Rhett chose to ignore him.

“I listened to that tape you sent us from Atlanta last night,” his mother broke in, thankfully. “There was some really good music on it.”

“Thanks. I have to take the credit for most of the music on that tape. By the time Dale and I did that one, he was already moving on.”

“Did you write that one called ‘Passion Is a Whisper?’” his father asked.

“Yeah. As a matter of fact, that’s one of my old songs.”

“‘Passion Is a Whisper,’” Robby said thoughtfully. “Isn’t that th’ song you wrote for Pearl down at The Broken Oar?”

Rhett’s head snapped up, and he glared at Robby. He felt all eyes upon him.

“It’s time for us t’ go, Momma,” he heard his father say, and they got up and headed for the door.

“What’s going on here?” Janie demanded.

Robby looked at Janie, “Mueller came down to The Broken Oar th’ other day t’ ask me some things about you, and I threw him an anchor.”

“What things?” she yelled — scowling at Rhett.

“What your favorite food was, what kind of music you like, what kind of guys you like. . . .”

“Is this true?” she asked Rhett.

“You said yourself that. . . .”

“Is it true?”

“Yeah,” he sighed.
“C’mon, Robby,” she said, standing. “I’ve had enough of this immature creep!”

Rhett stood. “But you don’t understand. I was only trying to make you happy.”

Robby stepped in front of him and stared into his eyes. “Leave her alone, Mueller.” Then he turned and walked out the door.

Rhett stood in the middle of the kitchen at a loss. He’d been had.

He turned and shot through the den and out the door, but it was too late. The last thing he saw of them was the taillights of Robby’s old Dodge disappearing through the trees.

He looked at the birdbath sitting lopsided in the middle of the mud-pit front yard and the picket fence surrounding it all. Then he looked at his scuffed hands with grease embedded beneath his fingernails — remembering how proud he’d been of everything he did — of how good he thought everything looked.

But it looked dumb. — He looked dumb. The only thing he’d never screwed up was music.

He turned slowly back into the house, grabbed his clothes and his Singer guitar. Then he got in his Aerostar and left — this time, for good.
Hyper sound orbits
around my head.
Platform shoes
precariously shuttle my body
around and around and around.

Glittered shoulders and bruised elbows
spinning bodies with twisting limbs
rolling and pirouetting on the dance floor.
We are human tornadoes
spinning around and around and around.

Perpetual rhythm
captures our young bodies.
Smoke twists masking the smiles
and distorting crooked faces that are
whirling around and around and around and around.
I wonder if they can see right through me
like a transparency --
great potential, but missing
the meat of the sandwich.

The vegetarian I am
with a crunch of sunflower seeds
squirt of tofu.
Sprinkle my algae
And channel my energy.
Ride my bike
and scuff my Doc Martens;

smooth legs are too much for me.
Upon Reading My Sister’s Poetry
Selena Johnson

I wish I had my sister’s hands
   Dainty white birds.
Flesh is supple,
    Braids and waves
       Words,
A thousand fluid parts—
Smothes them straight.

Instead I have my father’s hands;
My patterns blur,
    My threads tangle.
More suited, perhaps,
     To spade and sickle.

Graceless beasts,
    Dreadfully earthbound.
Clay Sculpture
Gabrielle de Gray
All messy and black grease
Hair unwashed.
No shaving for three weeks.
Face scratchy and resistant to
Guitar leaning on beige
Wall of time and stain.
Hands of callous & large
Smoke of leaf & fire--
Yellow are teeth and voice
Like dry sand.
When hand touches reluctant
Guitar
Sand becomes mud--
A wind blows and mud
Becomes gray, gray rain.
Lonely.
A posture unworthy.
A hand not taken.
Tears & stain’d face &
Skin so very soft.
Pink cheeks and brighter eyes
With burnt auburn’d hair
& sporadic jerk of milkn’d shoulders.
Hand on white fold of paper
& black written letters of love and hope.
The Dance
Melissa Burns

My body surges to the limits
Like a shaken-up can of Coke
Pressure building under its
Mask of calm.

My mind chases in circles
Like a dog its tail
Until it has flip-flopped
Like dirty laundry on my floor.

I want to lace myself up
As easily as I do my shoes
With a neat little bow
And dance down the street.
Waking up on December 21

Paul Buroe

A sliver of sun creeps in my room.
Slowly advancing like a ghost about to touch me.
It kisses my cheek, sweeping away dream sand with a broom,
Melting away my dreams, back in my subconscious' vast sea.
It slowly wakes me from my long deep sleep.
Always so gentle, it knows it will win.
Herding in a corral, my soft white sheep.
Announcing its arrival, warming my skin.
As I rise from my bed to a Winter Solstice day,
Rubbing my eyes of morning stars.
Thinking that my chance to be famous will come today.
Yawning, stretching, aching from the scars.
Thank you Sun for another beginning.
Starting again, picking up at the ending.
The halls buzzed with the early morning drone of pre-
teenagers, shoving, herding themselves to class before the two-minute late bell rang. The formica floors and beige concrete walls resounded like an echo chamber of pubescent noises and scents. Lockers clanged and feet stomped; voices carried and shoes squeaked. Jacob Hunt forced his way through the edges of this over-crowded melee, squeezing by middle school upperclassmen, eager to get his nervous self to the classroom.

Around the last corner which led directly through the eighth-
grade hall and to his sixth-grade classroom, his pointed-down-to-the-
floor head abruptly met with a familiar chest. Slowly, Hunt looked up at the terror before him: "The Wall" Lee, the most terrifying chunk of eighth grader known to man. Just the sight of Wall's sparse, greasy moustache always made Hunt cringe; Wall's sheer girth alone made Jacob want to vomit in fear. Hunt's eyes darted this way and that for some escape, some sheer and beautiful sign of hope from this terrible confrontation. He was to meet his friend Fort in an already specified rendezvous. Hunt sorely wished now that the rendezvous was on the other side of that last corner he took.

Wall Lee was on the football team, hunted every night with his town-drunk father, wrestled hogs just for fun, and was renowned in the underground middle school circles as the only third-time eighth grader to always keep a flask of DeWall's (hence the nickname, "The Wall" -- also an adolescent "look at me, I'm bigger'n your ass'll ever be" football playing reference) Whisky on him during school -- to help him fight - so Hunt heard. Supposedly, the blood of actual vicious badgers was mixed into the brew. That's what Wall said. His gran'pappy had told him that. Old man Stanford Whithertin, who also held in occupation an overweight moonshining apprentice by the name of "Beaver" Lee, who appeared as a much bulkier, and albeit, greasier, model from which his younger brother, "The Wall", sprang. And who was Hunt or any other eighth grader at Pine Vale Middle to argue with

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such a triumvirate of knowledgeable representatives on the homemade booze-making culture? Alas, there were just certain people in Hunt’s life he really had no interest in expressing disagreement with. And, especially, a two hundred-pound, sweaty, sixteen-year-old eighth grader with a receding hairline and ham-hocked white knuckles definitely made Hunt’s doubts escalate to dread. Wall’s real name was Francis Blaine Lee, but of course it meant death to whoever spoke it in his presence.

Hunt spoke in a sputtering stutter. “S-Sorry, W-Wall. I d-didn’t see you th-there.”

“Course you didn’t.” Wall barked when he spoke, and let loose some stagnant spittle collecting on a fat lower lip. “It must be hard with four eyes!” Hunt adjusted his thick glasses with his free hand. “You piece of shit little worm! You know you can’t get by without payin’ the eighth grade hall tax”! Wall almost seemed to growl as he drew his crater-dotted face closer to Hunt’s which began a soft perspiration as the thick glasses fogged from dip-reeking breath. “Whatcha got today?”

This had been going on for a few weeks now. Hunt always got to school late, so, in order to arrive in class on time, he had to go through the eighth grade hall. Wall caught him one day and, in exchange for particular goods such as lunch money, candy, comic books or the like, he would allow Hunt to pass — in one piece — sans the body bag.

Hunt felt his hands buzz and he felt his mouth dry out as the moisture left his mouth, and a chill crawled into the flesh on the back of his head. In the morning’s mass confusion just before school, he had left without something to give to Wall. He was already five minutes late. His mind flapped like shutters in a house surrounded by hurricanes.

“What’s in your coat pocket?” Wall indicated the object that rested in Hunt’s left side red sweater jacket pocket. His hand had been in that pocket all morning where shaky tension had caused him to fidget with the object the entire time. His eyes closed tightly, and he imagined Fort waiting at the rendezvous point watching with disconnected interest as a stretcher with a mangled deader’n-hell body roll by him, and he, not knowing it to be his rendezvous, wondering what in the sangria must be taking his partner so long. His eyes
opened, hoping to see Fort nearby—perhaps something forgotten in his locker he was coming back in order to retrieve? “Why couldn’t you have forgotten something in your locker?” he thought.

The said object happened to be a small .38 revolver which Hunt had swiped from his father’s closet early that morning. It was unloaded, yet its weight and impersonal coldness, and the pure fact that he had a gun on his school’s campus, kept his left hand on it at all times to obsessively make sure the safety stayed on and wouldn’t slide from his pocket.

“Uh, bd-uh, it’s a, uh,” his cognition clamored for a distinct thought, something to tell Wall so he wouldn’t be interested and leave him alone. Gum? A dialysis bag? A tampon for a science experiment with red Kool-aid? What could he possibly say? A gun?

“Oh... it’s a gun.” He gulped in quickly escaping breath.


“Duh, retard, you don’t even know what a gun looks like. Its probably a tampon or somethin’ you girly bitch.” A hammy fist began its clenching procedure.

Hunt’s wide eyes blinked once under his spectacles. He shook his head, perspiration beaded from his temples.

“It’s money.” His mouth just spit the phrase out as if divinely inspired. Hunt thought he saw the light and in it was a get out a “Get Out of Hell with only Slight Lacerations Card.” “Yeah, its money for my... brother to go out today and buy you a bottle,” Hunt paused, “no, a case of DeWall’s.”

“Your brother”? Wall looked perplexed.

“Yeah, my brother.” Hunt thought to himself for a moment – That is, if I had one.”

“Alright.” A furry black eyebrow was cocked on Wall’s brow. “Have it here tomorrow after school in the parking pit. I’ll let you go today. If it ain’t here tomorrow, you can kiss all of your fine motor-skills good-bye”!

Hunt blinked hard as Wall shoved him aside, careening him into a well-placed janitorial mop bucket. “Fine motor skills,” he
asked himself as he foraged the wet floor for his spectacles. "Is Wall attempting some sense of humor, that tub o' walrus lard?"

Hunt sighed and stared for a time at his cracked left lens. He walked to class.

The halls were empty as Hunt progressed slowly to his first period room. He noticed the clock at the end of the hall said it was already 8:40. Had that vicious encounter really taken that long? He approached the door close enough to glance inside. Ms. Newberry was spouting the periodic table at everyone in her usual drooling frenzy. If there were one person other than Wall that could make Hunt's britches soil, it would surely be Ms. Newberry. Even being a minute late to class caused her eyes to convulse wildly and glow and then roll back into her head while the very fires of Hell rose from the floor. *Thirty minutes!* Hunt recalled a popular story that a lot of the specimen bottles in her special "closet cavern of death" contain many sad, quite chronically (and some non-) unpunctual victims. He shivered and stepped away as she came deathly close to the door. She seemed to be spouting fire and brimstone demands at Cassidy Holston, the class blonde and richly officious prep. He gave people hell, too. Only a select few were rich enough for his friendship, yet he stabbed even them in the back when it suited him. He shrugged at Ms. Newberry and leaned back in his seat when his eyes caught Hunt's just outside the door. A vile smile spread over his tanned face.

Hunt swallowed all of his breath and almost his tongue in one gulp. He slammed his back against the wall next to the door as he heard a betraying voice and quick footsteps.

Hunt looked at the clock again. It was almost nine. The rendezvous time neared. He ran from the door just as it opened, his backpack banging from side to side on his back and his left hand wrapped tight around the gun.

The halls remained relatively sparse. His hummingbird brain groaned in sweaty apprehension. Thoughts of capture tore through his mind, the fact that he promised a case of whisky to a psychotic, halitotic maniac didn't help his sudden lack of breath and sweltering perspiration, either.

He made it out into the cold winter morning, breath condensing in short, hot bursts of smoke from his reverberating lungs.
Fortinbras Grey waited outside in a small gravelled area below the school’s main parking lot. He sat with his hands crammed between his legs for warmth. Every slight noise made his head dart from its position staring at the ground and shoot around at every possible angle around him. He checked his watch: 8:45. The tension built and built as his body continued shaking. His eyes slowly scanned the ground and led up to the baby blue Edsel parked next to him. The tag had been ripped off and a taillight was broken out. The windows were rolled down for they, too, were broken and could not roll back up. Rust began to grow under the doors and the tires were bald and splitting. The baby blue was chipping and bubbling at certain places. The rear view mirror was at such an angle that Fort could see his face reflected in it. His right eye was framed in a bluish black circle and his lower lip was cut and bruised. He looked anxious. Footsteps. Racing.

“Fort!” Fort’s head jolted around in turgid fear, “It’s me!”

Hunt skipped down the small hill to the pit with his hand still in his pocket.

“Hunt, shhhhh! D’ya want us to get caught?” Fort ran up to him.

“Ya get it?”

“Yeah, get it away from me.” Hunt pulled the revolver from his pocket. It was black and heavy.

“Wow. Good job. This’ll work great.” He looked up at Hunt who was shaking more than necessary for the weather. “What’s wrong? You look sick.”

“Nothing. I just -- I don’t know about this. I think Ms. Newberry might call my folks -- I didn’t make it to first period. Cassidy saw me and she came looking. She’ll find us out, surely.”

“Why didn’t you go to class?”

“I got caught by Wall again.”

“Did you give him the tax?”

“Not . . . exactly.” Hunt’s hole felt deeper. “We, uh, made a deal.”

Fort’s eyes slanted. “What kind of deal? You either give the tax or you’re dog meat.”

“I told him my brother would buy him a case of whisky.”
“You what? A case? Your brother?” Fort ran his hand across the blue toboggan on his head. “You don’t have a brother! You promised him a case? Are you mad?”

“What was I supposed to do? He almost caught on to the gun and I freaked!” Hunt paused as he finally got a good look at Fort’s face between paces. “Jeez! What happened”?

Fort’s eyes widened and he quickly looked away. His hand came up and gently dabbed at his lip. “Ass-ty Holston pushed Candy Freemont into a locker this morning, so I called him a dick. The next thing I see is a fist leaving my face. He ran off with his rich cronies and Candy came to see if I was okay.” A slight smile raised the corners of his chapped lips. “I was bleeding, and she was right beside me. It was cool.”


“Yeah.” Fort’s eyes wandered for a moment. He was remembering her knee beside him as he lay temporarily paralyzed. He felt her fingers touch his eye so softly, but it still hurt. It was a hurt, though, he never wished to part with. Her hands left his face as her brown hair fell from behind her ears. He shook his head back into reality. “Uh, anyway, we gotta get going. The shop opens soon and we need to get there before it gets busy.”

“Busy? With what, more smelly, alcoholic red-neckers”? Fort let go of a quick sigh, “Accept the fact, and move on.”

“Accepted”

“Good.”

“This is the car?” Hunt looked at the car with expectant anxiety.

“Yeah. The same one I told you about. Remember? My grandpa left it in the shed about a year ago. Dad found the keys yesterday and left ‘em on his dresser. I tried it right after he left this morning and it still runs! I couldn’t believe it! It doesn’t run too good, though, and it makes a loud gun-fire noise a lot and it smokes if you leave it on too long but it goes”! Fort stared at his catch with pride - a beaming father unaware of the defecation that will accompany any new baby.

Hunt looked at the car silently for a moment. A worried expression grew on his face. He looked at the gun in Fort’s hand and then at the car again. Slowly, he pulled his toboggan out of his pocket

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and pulled it over his head. "You know, I just want to kill Wall sometimes, you know? I just want to beat the living shit out of his face and kick his teeth through his skull and then use his ugly face to wipe off my bloody galoshes." He felt a pained tear well in the corner of his eye under his slightly fogged spectacles.

"Hey, it's okay. Look at me, I got the face full of holes. I'm the one that should be so upset - but I'm not. You know why? 'Cause I don't let 'em get to me. They're retards, Hunt. You and me, after today, we'll be superstars in this school. And no one's gonna mess with us anymore. But who cares? This will be another day seized, mon ami. We have the balls to do what we're about to do. They don't."

Hunt raised his red eyes to Fort. "I don't think I have the balls anymore."

"Shhh. Don't talk like that. People might hear you - then you'd definitely never get dates." Fort smiled. "Now, come on. We got work to do."

The car turned over after five attempts and much racket. Slowly, Fort inched the car out of the pit and onto the main road that led into town.

Faronville slid quickly by them. A left turn at the city limits led them down an old dirt road past trailers and barbed wire fences. Up on top of a small hill their destination loomed into view. Fort stopped the car just past the drive in front of some trees.

An old wooden sign above a log cabin's front porch said "Whithertin's General" in painted yellow letters. The road leading to the cabin was sunken on either side and very muddily rotted with tire tracks. The front porch had a swing on it, swaying in a slight breeze. A brown hound with its nose nuzzled in its front paws was chained to a front column of wood. A couple of trash cans lined the front of the driveway and smoke poured out of the cabin's chimney. Two cats bolted from the porch in a playful chase, and the old hound gave a blind yowl from below its wrinkled face. One of the cats ran into a trashcan and it tipped onto the ground in a loud clatter. Seconds later the front door opened, and an old man in red and white flannel tucked into suspendered baggy blue jeans stepped out of it and yelled something at the cats.
Hunt stared at the man through his thick, one-lens-cracked glasses. “Whithertin. I can’t believe we’re gonna try to steal from him. He’s a nutsack!”

“Didn’t your uncle run whisky with him?”

“Yeah, but that was years ago before they both did ten in the pen for moonshining and Whithertin did twenty more for freakin’ murder. Said it was self-defense. Uncle John stopped after they put him away. Now it’s all he can do to stay away from it. He still goes to rehab meetings every week. But I did hear that Whithertin still makes it and sells it in bulk. I just can’t believe we’re gonna try and steal some.” He shifted in the passenger seat. “I just hope Beaver isn’t there.”

“Beaver?” Fort snorted.

“Yeah. Wall’s older brother, man. Inbreeding, you know. This guy makes Wall look like a Q-tip. He used to be a Marine but they thought he was too psychotic or somethin’ so they kicked him out. Now he makes big shipments for his old grandad here and serves as bodyguard when things get hairy. My dad said once that Beaver broke a cop’s arm and shot another one in the foot during a bust. But the cops don’t come out here anymore because they’re either too scared or they get whisky shipments, too or somethin’. It’s all screwed up.”

Fort’s mouth held itself agape. “Uh, why do they call him ‘Beaver’?”

“Somethin’ like he either has really vicious buck teeth or he used to kill rabid beavers with his hands. One of the two. Maybe both. Either way he’s probably rabid. Inbreeding. Sure. Family tree without branches.” Hunt let out a self-satisfied chortle.

“Hm. Well, I’m sure he’s afraid of guns, though.” Fort pulled the revolver from the floor board. “No bullets, right?”

“Right. I threw them all out. Dad never uses it.”

“Great.” Fort took a deep breath and handed the gun to Hunt.

“You ready?”

Hunt adjusted his glasses, staring at the piece. “No.”

“Exactly what I wanted to hear. Let’s go.”

The pair stepped from the vehicle and slowly ascended the muddy drive never taking their eyes from the front door. The oafish
dog tied to the front raised its head and caught them in his gaze dead in their tracks. He began growling.

“Damn. I thought he went back to sleep.” Fort looked over to Hunt who shrugged.

“What now?”

“Uh, did you bring your lunch today?”

“Yeah. Ham sandwich.”

“Go get it. We’ll feed his mouth while we scoot up the steps.”

Hunt returned a moment later with the bait.

“Allright. Here poochy. Nice poochy.” Fort waved the sandwich in front of him as he got closer to the grumbling animal.

Fort tossed the sandwich in front of the dog where it was devoured quickly as they jumped lightly up to the porch staying out of sight of the windows. Another cat darted from under a couch on the porch and ran straight past the dog who laid out a horrendous bellow as he stretched his chain to tautness after the feline.

“Shit!” Fort whispered hard. He grabbed Hunt, and they bolted around the corner of the wrap-around porch and crouched against the wall. They heard the front screen door cry open and an old voice yell, “Shut the hell up, dog!” The two sat stiff on the floor holding their breath as tightly as possible. The screen door slammed shut.

They sat silent, waiting.

“Did you hear the other door close?” Fort asked softly.

“Uh, no. I don’t think so.”

They sat a few more minutes waiting.

“Is he gonna close it?” Fort whispered.

“He knows we’re here.”

“Shut up.”

“Sorry.”

Fort slid slowly to the corner and peeked around. “No one’s there.

Come on.”

They crawled up to the door and slowly peeked up over the wooden bottom panel through the screen. The light was low in the store. Short shelves were set up parallel in three rows that extended towards the back. A big black wood stove sat to the right against the wall, next to it lay a fire poker. Wood chips littered the floor with a
main trail leading to a door in the very back wall of the room. A slight hum came from it and echoes of some type of clanging. A cellar. Boxes were stacked to the right of this door. Maybe a cache of whisky? To the left of them, a big wooden counter adjoined the wall and an ancient cash register sat fat and tarnished on top of it. An ashtray held a cigar still lit and a small flask sat open next to it. Below the counter was a rack of newspapers quite out of date, obviously set up for aesthetic value. Tobacco products filled a rack hanging on the wall behind the counter above an old stool. The shelves looked extremely barren save for some Hostess cake products and older looking bread and pasta boxes. One aisle held some preserves or what seemed to be so. The last held dog and cat food bags and some horse grains and corn feed barrels.

"Do you see anybody"?

"No." Fort tugged at a tuft of auburn hair sticking from the back of his toboggan and thought for a moment as he peered in eyeslanted concentration. "He’s in that back room. I think it’s a cellar." He turned to Hunt who was crouching with his head between his legs. Fort sighed. "Now or never, buddy. The seizure of the day."

"Seizure being the operative word here." Hunt pulled his head up slowly and looked at Fort. "Do you remember in fourth grade when Rhesus Howell kicked me off the monkey bars and almost broke my arm?"

Fort’s eyes widened. "Yeah." He paused. "Why?"

"I did eventually find out why he came back to school two days later with a broken nose." He was watching Fort’s face intently. "Same with Pete Morgan in sixth. He trips me in the lunch line and the next week his eye got black. Jack Herndon, "Frenchy" Walters, Lou Cravish, they all messed with me in some form of messing - and somehow some kind of karmic turn happened to them. I thought I was some kinda freak with crazy ESP or somethin’. I thought maybe some kind of spirit or magic or somethin’ followed me around. Like - lucky, you know? Like maybe an angel was protecting me ‘cause I had important business to tend in my life - my life was goin’ to mean somethin’, and if someone hindered that, they would pay."

Fort slouched to the ground, his eyes drawn downward.

Hunt sniffed away a welling tear and smiled. "Yeah, an angel." He shifted his weight and stared down the muddy drive. "You never
told me that you were the one taking names, you know?” He looked at Fort. “Why?”

Fort raised his head and through some celestial act the sun broke and a light ray cast upon the porch in front of them. He looked at the illumination and stifled a laugh with aim at the irony. “I love you. You’re my bro, man. Plus, who else would look after your pussy-pad ass?” Fort had lost a brother almost a decade back. A big brother.

“You’re the pussy-pad, dip-hole.”

“Ah-I’ll kick your ass later.” Fort smiled. His eyes were rimmed in pink. “We’ve got work. Ready?” Hunt nodded. “Looks like our booty is near the cellar. You can stay up front and eye the happenings outside and in the front of the store. I’ll get the bottles and hustle.” He let out a huffed breath. “You got the gun?”

“Yeah, up until the point I gave it to you, Einstein.”

Fort’s eyes grew bright and he laughed. “Oh, yeah.”

Hunt smiled. “Have you ever heard of *carpe diem*?”

Fort took the gun from his pocket and held it close to his face with the barrel pointed skyward. “Man, what do you think gets me through the day?”

Fort stuffed the gun in his coat pocket and slowly opened the screen door. With every creak of its rusted hinges the two winced. It was a slow process. In their crouched positions they crept into the store and slowly stood straight as they surveyed their surroundings. The overbearing stench of raw tobacco and thickened rye choked the air underlain by burning hickory from the stove. It was very warm, almost cozy. A rhythmic clang came muffled from the back cellar door. Fort pointed towards it and nodded to Hunt who nodded back. He took the first step and was met with a resounding cacophonous creak and froze in his steps. He shot a glance to Hunt. Both of them began to experience jitters at this point and Hunt’s hands began wringing.

The next few moments were spent in tense concentration on Fort’s journey to the cellar door making as light a step as he possibly could though the wooden floor was riddled with mines and each one could blow at a breath.

Hunt fought the urge to pace on front watch duty. He knew the floor would ring with creaks, each one like the creaking of a casket over the both of them. A million caskets in this den of a million
deaths they would surely face. He shook the thoughts out of his head and watched Fort. The planned outcome kept turning over in his mind like a Rolodex or an old nickelodeon: Fort would get to the boxed stacks of the bottles next to the cellar and grab two of them. He would head back and out the awaiting front door protected by Hunt and his gun. If any opposition were met, Fort would ward them off with gun, or, if taken from the front, Hunt, himself, would be the warder— all heroic. Hunt fantasized about the idea for a moment. Then -- abruptly -- the fantasy ceased. Hunt felt himself grow pale. He thought a moment. “If Fort has the gun and two heavy cases of whisky and he gets caught, he can’t get the gun!” His palms were wet. “I can get it! No! Wait! Shit! Fort!” His mind raced and Fort faced away from him as he lifted the first case. He began waving his arms frantically whispering sharply, “Fort! Fort! Come back!” Hunt knew that he and Fort tended to misfire on cylinders at times but shit like this made the transmission plum drop!

“Fort! Fort! Dammit!” Hunt caught Fort’s attention just as the cellar doorknob turned and its door opened. An enormous ham-hocked hand pushed it further open to reveal a spitting image of Wall Lee, yet fatter and much more brutish. “What the hell?” he bellowed in a horrible, walrus sound that echoed Wall. Hunt was frozen.

Fort dropped the cases as Beaver swung the door at him and knocked them out of his hands. Fort struggled to get the gun, and then aimed it at Beaver who swatted it like a fly to the ground. Hunt watched helplessly as Beaver tackled Fort to the ground like a ton of cement blocks crushing a cockroach. Cans and jars crashed everywhere, and piles of whisky boxes exploded on the floor. Beaver picked Fort up like a rag and slammed him against the wall hard, his feet inches from the ground. He punched Fort in the stomach with a Mack truck fist and picked him back up again, slamming him against the wall once again.

“You stealin’ whisky, you piece a’ shit? You wanna die?” Beaver showered Fort with tobacco-colored saliva as he roared. “I’ll kill your damn pussy ass!” Another painful wrecking ball fist in the stomach and Fort coughed hard and went down to meet Beaver’s boot in the back.

During all of this, Hunt watched as Fort’s eyes told him the whole story.
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Fort raised his head and through some celestial act the sun broke and a light ray cast upon the porch in front of them. He looked at the illumination and stifled a laugh with aim at the irony. “I love you. You’re my bro, man. Plus, who else would look after your pussy-pad ass?” Fort had lost a brother almost a decade back. A big brother.

“You’re the pussy-pad, dip-hole.”

“Ah-I’ll kick your ass later.” Fort smiled. His eyes were rimmed in pink. “We’ve got work. Ready?” Hunt nodded. “Looks like our booty is near the cellar. You can stay up front and eye the happenings outside and in the front of the store. I’ll get the bottles and hustle.” He let out a huffed breath. “You got the gun?”

“Yeah, up until the point I gave it to you, Einstein.”

Fort’s eyes grew bright and he laughed. “Oh, yeah.”

Hunt smiled. “Have you ever heard of ‘cafe diem’?”

Fort took the gun from his pocket and held it close to his face with the barrel pointed skyward. “Man, what do you think gets me through the day?”

Fort stuffed the gun in his coat pocket and slowly opened the screen door. With every creak of its rusted hinges the two winced. It was a slow process. In their crouched positions they crept into the store and slowly stood straight as they surveyed their surroundings. The overbearing stench of raw tobacco and thickened rye choked the air underlain by burning hickory from the stove. It was very warm, almost cozy. A rhythmic clang came muffled from the back cellar door. Fort pointed towards it and nodded to Hunt who nodded back. He took the first step and was met with a resounding cacophonous creak and froze in his steps. He shot a glance to Hunt. Both of them began to experience jitters at this point and Hunt’s hands began wringing.

The next few moments were spent in tense concentration on Fort’s journey to the cellar door making as light a step as he possibly could though the wooden floor was riddled with mines and each one could blow at a breath.

Hunt fought the urge to pace on front watch duty. He knew the floor would ring with creaks, each one like the creaking of a casket over the both of them. A million caskets in this den of a million
deaths they would surely face. He shook the thoughts out of his head and watched Fort. The planned outcome kept turning over in his mind like a Rolodex or an old nickelodeon: Fort would get to the boxed stacks of the bottles next to the cellar and grab two of them. He would head back and out the awaiting front door protected by Hunt and his gun. If any opposition were met, Fort would ward them off with gun, or, if taken from the front, Hunt, himself, would be the warder—all heroic. Hunt fantasized about the idea for a moment.

Then--abruptly--the fantasy ceased. Hunt felt himself grow pale. He thought a moment. "If Fort has the gun and two heavy cases of whisky and he gets caught, he can’t get the gun!" His palms were wet.

"I can get it! No! Wait! Shit! Fort!" His mind raced and Fort faced away from him as he lifted the first case. He began waving his arms frantically whispering sharply, "Fort! Fort! Come back!" Hunt knew that he and Fort tended to misfire on cylinders at times but shit like this made the transmission plum drop!

"Fort! Fort! Dammit!" Hunt caught Fort’s attention just as the cellar doorknob turned and its door opened. An enormous ham-hocked hand pushed it further open to reveal a spitting image of Wall Lee, yet fatter and much more brutish. "What the hell?" he bellowed in a horrible, walrus sound that echoed Wall. Hunt was frozen.

Fort dropped the cases as Beaver swung the door at him and knocked them out of his hands. Fort struggled to get the gun, and then aimed it at Beaver who swatted it like a fly to the ground. Hunt watched helplessly as Beaver tackled Fort to the ground like a ton of cement blocks crushing a cockroach. Cans and jars crashed everywhere, and piles of whisky boxes exploded on the floor. Beaver picked Fort up like a rag and slammed him against the wall hard, his feet inches from the ground. He punched Fort in the stomach with a Mack truck fist and picked him back up again, slamming him against the wall once again.

"You stealin’ whisky, you piece a’ shit? You wanna die?" Beaver showered Fort with tobacco-colored saliva as he roared. "I’ll kill your damn pussy ass!" Another painful wrecking ball fist in the stomach and Fort coughed hard and went down to meet Beaver’s boot in the back.

During all of this, Hunt watched as Fort’s eyes told him the whole story.
Fort was in serious pain but would not scream out so as not to attract attention towards Hunt who, apparently, was not yet noticed. At various points in the melee, Hunt would lock eyes with those that begged - yet remained elatedly calm - from Fort’s face.

Fort hit the floor and the kicked away gun gleamed in Hunt’s eyes, yet he stood, rigid in a wet fear. An angel presided on his shoulder for many years now tackling any and all infection that would cause a rift in his tranquil valley of boyhood and that would carry him on into manhood. That angel was now being stripped of his wings right in front of Hunt’s face with much crap being kicked out of him, and all he could do was stand and stare. The gun shone in the light as a Christ-worthy beacon for sainthood, Hunt must now earn his wings. His whole body convulsed to a background of clamor and screaming and painful moaning. He closed his eyes and swallowed hard - time to step from the shelter and into the storm. “If seizing the day pulls you through every day, may you seize many more, my friend.” He whispered under his voice. He grabbed the gun in the swiftest move he thought he’d ever made and felt his blood rise as he leapt over the aisles in a fit of spurring adrenaline.

Fort fell to the floor again and the Beaver continued kicking -- until a cold-nosed barrel pressed against his sweaty temple.

“Get off of my brother now before I blow a hole the size of Texas into your head.” Hunt’s hands shook, yet his head remained clear. “Move your fat ass.”

Alas, then, Hunt felt something hard poke the back of his head and push it forward. An older, raspy voice spoke low and dangerously. “Turn around, boy.”

Hunt turned and viewed with frantic eyes the double barrel of a mean shot gun and behind it, Whithertin, in dirty overalls and gray hair, thin, above a darkened, weathered face. Yet, in some fit of religious anxiety, a gilded crucifix rested, then swung from a dull, yellowed chain around the old man’s wattled neck. Born again: liquor handmade in the name of the Lord. Reasonable justification in the construction of the Lord’s brew.

“Now, I do believe it to be a school day.”

Beaver stood up and got behind Whithertin, grinning foolishly, toothlessly.
Whithertin's pale blue eyes spit fire at the boys in light, licking flames, almost holy, stinging their cheeks. A ray change shone from this man's aura. 'Twas not an evil, cold, callow old man that the boys saw before them, but a Mad Hatter finding spiritual salvation long overdue on the inspirational backside of a Bicycle poker card. A double-edged Jesus!

"If needs to be, I can call proper authorities in on this matter," Whithertin smiled like Satan might have done just before his fall, though an almost pleasant warmth of recovery ensued. "Or I can unload some buckshot into two stringy little dip-shits like yourselves to prove a point."

Some previous thoughts faded.

The boys felt their bones ache. Beaver's eyes shone as if watching a drunken pig pickin' about to start. "But," Whithertin said, "I'd rather do neither."

Beaver's eyes quit shining - dejected as they were.

"You two got out of my store, get into that heap you must've stolen and go back to school. If'n I see your asses this way again, you better bet y'all spend some years in traction - y'all have to avoid sitting on any hard surface." Whithertin peered at them with an almost ginger reproach masking his old eyes. "I got nothin' to offer you." He squatted to their level, knees creaking like the floorboards would. "Nothin', 'cept my humble apology for not shootin' your asses off like you deserve." Fort tried to state defense. Whithertin resumed.

"Don't speak now, boy. Don't speak. And for allowin' you two to take a bottle each of my whisky." The boys' eyes blinked in successive flaps like an ostrich lackadaisically fluttering wings. "Now, get up." They sat without motion. Whithertin peered at them harder - a forceful kind of peer. "And hurry and get out before you miss lunch."

Hunt and Fort lifted themselves up and each took a bottle from either of Beaver's hands. He smiled at them like some raving rapist. They still shook doubtfully and nervously, though fortune provided. They looked at Whithertin. "Hurry, boys. My trigger finger is awfully twitchy, nowadays."

The two hurried out the door and down to the car which started right away. Fort took them down the graveled road and out onto the highway. Many moments of silence were observed. The pastures of Faronville sped by the car. Farms and acres scattered
through the country. Forests, fields, homes, trailer home encasements - all under the ever azure and rounded before-noon sky.

Fort stared straight ahead and Hunt watched the city pass through his reflection in the window. Hunt pulled his toboggan slowly off of his head, his hair matted by sweat and confusion.

"Man, it's a pretty day. I thought it would rain, but it's really nice."

Fort responded after many seconds. "Yeah."

"Yeah." Hunt echoed the response still staring through his reflection. "I think I've become too comfortable with wallowing in fear, Fort." Fort raised an eyebrow. "I've focused so much, lately, on complaints of the past and fear of the future, you know? The right here, right now has kind of been lost to me. I'm scared. I'm too damn scared to admit that maybe I am happy, and maybe I can be even more if I just quit starin' at my fears and just climb over them." He was envisioning great, dark mountains and some sunlight haloing behind the most ominous of clouds.

Fort's speaking was a bit labored, every breath hurt. "You mean, like, appreciating the moments you live in, making them better, because it is in your own power and no one else's, and not letting the past or the future's fears ruin the day that you live in now?"

Hunt turned to him, as if inspired by the fat and squatting Buddha himself; "Wow. Well, yeah. That's it."

"Duh, numb-nut. I've been telling you that forever. What's with you all of a sudden? You sound like an after-school special."

"No, not after-school. Skipping school. Or maybe the burning – school special. To me, that just packs more umph"! They both laughed and the silence shared from before crept back between conversational lines.

Candy Freemont came back into Fort's mind. His eyes slanted again as thoughts danced and drifted and he felt warm and happy. The black eye and the cut lip already suffered this morning were now long forgotten and the recent blisterings were quickly slipping away all the same. He remembered her touching him like a wispy willow branch would next to a windy, warm Southern beach. He thought about marrying that girl, though he was only in the eight-grade. But his hand ached to be holding hers. His fingers burned to touch her hair, her
face. Her face. Her independence. Her power. Her inherent possibility in her own beautiful world. Fort had it deep and heavy for this girl. But Cassidy, Cassidy had it for her, too. Except he was a bastard, Fort thought, and he would hurt her. A pissed-off, growling frown etched his lips as this thought occurred. They pulled back into the lower parking graveled area of the school and he turned off the car and sat a moment, pulling off his toboggan and looking at his face in the rear view, the bruises prominent and telling. Just let him try and hurt her, he thought. I will dine on his blood.

They sneaked around the loading dock of the school’s cafeteria and made it inside unseen. The bustle of midday feasting was large and quite underway at Pine Vale Middle, and no one seemed to even bat an eye at their reappearance or apparent disappearance from that morning. They sat at a secluded and empty back table and looked at each other smiling.

“You are beat up.” Hunt said, stating the obvious.

“I know, it’s invigorating.” Fort said, beaming through his cheeks, that “daddy complex” again. But then his beam dropped. Something caught his eye. Candy, sitting down next to some friends with a tray of food in her hand. “There she is.”

Hunt turned to look. “Go talk to her.”

“I am. In a minute.” His heart beat quickly, his eyes gleamed. “I just want to thank you first, for getting us out of that.” That was all Fort could say about it. His eyes told Hunt the rest. They told him that he had just passed the most crucial test of his young life and between the two of them, repayment was non-existent. Inevitable “backing up” of each other became the trademark, the blood, and the creed. Fort was about to get up and go pass another. They had initiated each other into a blood brotherhood. Regardless of whether or not Whithertin had come out, they knew they had the situation stacked. How high was another short story.

“Mention it not.” Hunt said, smiling. “You’d have done it for me.”

“Always.” Fort paused. “You told Beaver to get off your ‘brother.’” Hunt’s face widened. “Did you notice that?”

Hunt said that he hadn’t.

“You said it.” Fort got up from his seat and drew in a deep breath and looked in Candy’s direction. “Another day seized.”
Hunt sat a moment smiling, feeling alright about it all -- everything. He got up to get in the lunch line, his head fizzing with the morning’s occurrences. He caught Wall’s stench. Wall was lucky enough to project his own material rankness, following like an aura of yuck. He was bringing up an empty tray to the drop off area, and, as well, saw Hunt.

“Hey, horse’s-ass, why are you in here empty-handed?” His stench preceded him as he got closer to Hunt holding his tray.

Hunt spotted a tea glass on the floor next to his foot and nonchalantly proceeded to tap it forward with his foot, hoping to hit his mark, as he said, “You mean as opposed to your case, empty headed?” The tea glass slid under a fat Wall foot and brought the whole mess crashing to the ground complete with an enormous laugh track accompaniment from the whole lunchroom.

Smiling. Laughing. And then, under his breath, Hunt spoke, “Another day seized.” And with this, he bowed as if being showered with roses after a magnificent operatic performance, and took his exit, with a limping Wall laboriously unsuccessful in following behind, amidst a ruckus of cheers and adolescent admiration.
Coffee-bar Waitress
Selena Johnson

The roaster is a fortress overseeing
    Carpet that runs like an ocean
To froth and crash against the counters.
Stretched across their formica tops
    Are airpots— slick,
Standing like Stonehenge.

Beetle black beans are stacked in bags,
Waiting for the grinder to crush and chop them
    Into useful grains.
The backs of chairs thrust toward the ceiling like pinnacles.

This place exists outside of rat-races and speed bumps.
    It is a plane where
Spectators queue to see us,
    Our hips swaying under trays.
We are the natives, the gypsies.
To be seen and marveled at and forgotten

The slaves of the caffeine priesthood.
Paper Art
Ryan Tyrell
London in January
Selena Johnson

A face carved in stone,
    A pillar.
Its features rounded
The lips thrust outward and sneer,
Pulling the nose sharp.
The eyes—open over-wide—glare down.
The eyebrows draw together.
All rounding to smooth gray granite.
One more of a thousand I’ve seen.

But perched atop is
    A traffic cone.
Like a neon birthday hat.

And like my jaunty counterpart,
    I don’t belong here.
Dependence
Melissa Bums

Hospital doors swing on their hinges
sterile boot reflections shimmer
on the buffed floor.
Like the reflection, the doctor's voice booms distorted -
"So lucky to have her care for you."
Smiles bursting with bright blocks of teeth.
Mom's dependence on me

Against fragmented bark
she trembles like the leaves flaming above
asking for distance.
My dependence on her
Heaving sighs to the wind's caress,
my silence smooths
like indigo waves.

    I gaze across the ocean between us
And her face glows like sunlight.
Clay Sculpture
Gabrielle de Gray
Memories  
Melissa Burns

Trees hide owls in shady moss  
Green like grandmother’s bottomless closets  
Mothballs and memories  
Locked away  
In musty, dusty boxes.

Owl who-whos with a sharp eye  
Crumbly hard claws grasp and release the branch  
Aware, I see everything in all.

The tree is my friend.  
Ancient and wise,  
Her roots, her feet, her soul reach  
Deep, deep  
Penetrating the dark  
Moist  
Rich  
Flesh  
Of the earth.
Reply to Cassandra Concerning My Fiftieth Birthday

*Linda Henderson*

The first ten years of life are not your own--
A stroller, pushed where others want you.
Your teenage years are full of adult actions
A bright, shiny, new car hydroplaning and spinning senselessly.
Your twenties are the years for love and hate, pain and pleasure--
Climbing on a breath-taking roller coaster and trying to take control.
The thirties and forties are years of sowing, working, struggling,
running to
Finish tasks already begun, then resting like farm equipment when the
season is over.

One day you awake and realize that you will soon be fifty; life is calm.
You no longer have a passion to prove you are right,
You see how often you've been wrong and you float,
Peacefully downstream on your private raft.

Dear Cassandra, who said, "better you than me,"
I've earned all fifty years, and I agree.
Clinically Blank
Selena Johnson

White is like distaste,
   The color of your stare.
Soured milk.
Wan flesh belying the cancer beneath.
The steely gleam of a surgical lamp,
   Revealing every bloody crevice.
Like light that brings out pores, pimples,
   The yellow of teeth.
The ivory from poached carcasses bloating in the sun.
Quilted asylum walls,
   Straight-jackets, enunciating madness.
Like a canvas without paint, a page without words:
A shirt stretched across your shoulders,
   Walking away

Clinically blank.
I know where the master sleeps.  
I know where he goes at night  
    Always after mice. 
He likes to play, too.  
Pounce  
    And release. 
Listens to them squeak . . .  
    Breaks their necks and discards the rest. 

But he is not so graceful as I,  
    Not as quick or poised. 
He does not have my gaze,  
    My fur, my deadly Quiet.  

I know many hidden things,  
    And I know where the master sleeps.
Some of the Parts
Stephanie Reed

Scrubitize. Look at personal issues. Examine the fragments. Compare and contrast them. Identify one and study its opposite. Even pit one against the other.

In the struggle, in the chaos recognize a Shortcoming - a wrong doing. Remember an injustice from long ago or today.
The pain looms and dwarfs the small figure of
Good things- better things. The hurt and the
Confusion weigh more. They stay too long.

The persistent feelings challenge my mind.
Emotion demands dialogue. Look for a partner.
Set myself beside myself, to step aside and feel
objective. Find and equal. One on one with
Somebody- my lover, my self-daughter, mother,
Friend, God, my brother
Equilibrium, integrity, well being and victory.
Whole, the sum of parts.
I am thick string and pricking wire.
So tie up the packages
with brown paper
and leave them on the baseboard
where the bastard can find them.

Children come and grow too early.
Men never stay.
If only they left with suitcases,
taking with them stains on linen,
broken vases,
and pictures of Easter Sundays in which they stand like tin soldiers.

I am not a housecoat.
Little Things
Erin Wright

The truth you will not find
By gouging out the eyes,
But dressed in pretty ribbons
And a vintage dress of baby blue
She will walk to the store and buy tomatoes
Or a melon
That she will cut
Or you will cut
With the shiny dull knife
You bought last week
On Hudson Street
For a dollar ninety-nine.

You may find some philosophy
In the stores on Hudson Street
Or in those journals of science you keep
On your bookshelves,
But nothing like the little truth in her
As she walks through the city
To buy you tomatoes
Or a melon.
Ten Minutes at Boston Commons
Erin Wright

There have been times
When the sun shone
Just right
And left diamonds
On eyelashes.

Once in the park
When she was a leaf
And water
And the wooden bench she sat on
When she was one of the swans that could break a man’s arm
She noticed
The sun shining
Just right
And waited until it shifted
To walk to her subway train.
William Harrison Interview
By O’Neil Anderson and Heather Blair

November 1998

William Harrison has authored seven novels, two collections of short stories, and numerous screenplays including Mountains of the Moon, Rollerball, and A Shining Season. He has recently retired from the University of Arkansas where he was co-founder and director of the M.F.A. Creative Writing Program. His most recent book is The Buddha in Malibu, a collection of short stories. In November of 1998, Mr. Harrison was the guest writer on campus. He gave a reading, held Mr. Sauret’s writing workshop, and addressed the cinema classes. The following questions and responses about writing are the highlights of an interview with Chestatee Review staff members, O’Neil Anderson and Heather Blair.

Chestatee Review: When did you first realize your writing talent?

William Harrison: When I was in grade school. I loved to write stories. I was fortunate to have been raised in a somewhat creative household with intelligent parents. Your environment growing up can determine your abilities as an adult.

CR: Were there ever times in school when you were criticized or in conflict with one of your teachers over something you had written?

WH: Yes. There was a time I wouldn’t turn in a term paper [on baseball], because the rhythm of the last couple of sentences wasn’t right. I tried to explain it to my teacher, but she just didn’t understand what I meant by rhythm. Rhythm is the way words flow on paper. If someone doesn’t know what rhythm is, it can’t be explained.

CR: Do you believe that anyone can be taught to write well?

WH: If a person is determined to be a good writer, he or she can succeed. But before a person is taught how to write stories, he or she
must have a grasp of language and grammar.

CR: From whom do you get most support in your writing?

WH: I owe my support to my wife. She is my best critic, and her opinion matters more to me than anyone else's. She is my first and only reader before I send in a work for publishing. If I ask her what she thinks, she is honest and straightforward.

CR: In your latest collection of stories, South Africa is the predominant setting. What is the significance of the setting?

WH: I've traveled a lot, and I write based on experience. I have visited there several times and learned quite a bit about South African culture.

CR: How has your experience in Africa affected your views on American society?

WH: Unlike Africans, I think many Americans take the relative ease of their lives for granted. The standard of living is so much higher here. In South Africa, many people live with constant threats from the harsh environment and other Africans. There is a day-to-day struggle for survival there. It's a completely different feeling from the way things are here in America. Experience and travel have made me more aware and appreciative of where I live and what I have.

CR: Is racial tension as severe in South Africa as it is in the US?

WH: No, it doesn’t seem like it. Since apartheid, people are getting along well. The government seems almost surprised to see people getting along without their constant supervision.

CR: In your travels to Africa and other countries have you ever been afraid for your life?

WH: Sure, many times. Africa is another world. Once when I was on a safari, my guide warned me of a female lion approaching. She lingered in the grass a while watching us. Suddenly, she came trotting after us. We had to run like hell for the jeep. I barely escaped. That was a
frightening experience. Africa can be a very dangerous place.
CR: Are you planning to return to Africa?

WH: Yes, but not anytime soon.

CR: Another locale that you use is California. Tell us about that.

WH: Living in California for many years gave me insight on the lifestyle. I think California is an interesting place, and a good setting for my stories.

CR: Did the stories translate to film the way you thought they would?

WH: No. The directors changed them more than I would have liked. For instance, in Mountains of the Moon, Burton and Speke never confronted a lion. That was the director’s idea.

CR: Did you object to the changes in your stories while the movies were being made?

WH: I don’t have control of my story when the movie is being made. I have been paid for the story or screenplay only, not for my insight into how the movie should turn out. The writer is one member of a large committee that produces a film, and any number of things are beyond your control. A bad acting performance can spoil your best intentions. You’re only as good as your cinematography and if you have a bonehead director, your story is in the hands of directors and actors... just so he can put his signature on it.

CR: That doesn’t insult you as the writer?

WH: Sure. But I try to adjust to the fact I am one of several people trying to get by making a movie, which is the most expensive art form in the world. The average movie cost is 30 million dollars.

CR: How do you feel about the movies made from your stories?

WH: I don’t like any of them. I think they are despicable, but, as I said,
I try to be philosophical about it. They set me free as a writer. With the money I make on films, I can work on my other projects I really want to do. Write stories.

CR: So you aren’t writing anymore film scripts?

WH: Oh, no. I am working on a script with a former student. I’m always hopeful to see a good movie out of something I do.

CR: Do you feel fortunate as a writer doing what you enjoy?

WH: In writing, I’ve made a living. I live the way I feel comfortable, and I am able to travel when I want to. I don’t have a big audience. I can think of other authors to be jealous of. That’s ok.

CR: Do you feel comfortable with the audience size you have now?

WH: I am more anonymous than those “other” writers. I can still creep into people’s lives. I’ve done enough movie work and have been overpaid enough to allow mobility. I was talking to Margaret Drabble once in England, and she had written about a dozen scripts that had not been made into movies. She said it was the best thing that could have ever happened to her.

CR: When will you feel like a complete success?

WH: I think I’m over that. I don’t have to feel like a success. When you’re young, you say to yourself, “I’m writing, I’m writing. I’m publishing. I’m publishing.” But later on the work has to matter more than all of that. It’s the writing itself that matters.

CR: You seem to have found peace within yourself. Would you agree?

WH: I’m not really serene right now. I haven’t achieved the Buddhist moment. I am just older. When you are older, you quit all that self-speculation. I don’t spend any time thinking about my writing habits, who I am, or what I need. I just think about the story.
O'Neil Anderson is an English major at Gainesville College.

Heather Blair is a student at Gainesville College and a member of the English Club.

Paul Burce is a Gainesville College student with an interest in writing.

Melissa Burns attended Gainesville College in the winter and now attends the University of Georgia where she is majoring in Spanish.

Matt Cantrell is an English major who plans to change his major to Creative Writing. He is the Vice President of the English Club and was awarded first place in the Gainesville College Writing contest for his short story “Broken Oar Blues”.

Linda Henderson is a student at Gainesville College. She was awarded second place in the Gainesville College Writing Contest for her short story “Dose of Reality”.

Selena Johnson is a member of the English club, a talented writer, and a coffee bar waitress. She won second place for poetry in the Gainesville College Writing Contest with her poem “Feline Companion” and third place for her poem “Coffee-Bar Waitress”.

Jim Thurmond is a Theatre major at Gainesville College. He was awarded third place in the Gainesville College Writing contest for his short story “Hunt and Fort”.

Erin Wright is an English major at Gainesville College. She serves as the President of the English Club and was awarded first place for her poem “Good Housekeeping” in the Gainesville College Writing Contest.

JOHN HARRISON HOSCH LIB/LRC
Gainesville College
BOX 1358
Gainesville, GA 30503-1358

CONTRIBUTORS