



# TEACH. WRITE.

A Writing Teachers' Literary Journal  
Spring/Summer 2020

Edited by Katie Winkler

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Katie Winkler~Editor

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## From the Editor

I must be honest.

Most of my students don't love writing. Many of them only barely tolerate it and some loathe it, but as a writing teacher with thirty years experience under my belt, I've come to expect that.

Sympathize even.

Thing is, my colleagues don't do much creative writing either. And I get it. I know how hard it is to drum up some enthusiasm for one's own writing after analyzing other people's work all day long.

That is why I am especially pleased to offer this edition of *Teach. Write.*, featuring the work of two students who have learned to love writing as well as the poetry of two esteemed colleagues who have made time to write. Thank you so much, Jennifer and Sam, not only for your contribution to this passion project, but also for listening to my rants and helping me be a better writing teacher, a better person.

I curated all the works presented here before the school and business closures, before moving to all online classes, before all the disruptions to teachers, students, and writers this crazy spring of 2020. None of us suspected as we wrote how changed our lives would be now.

And yet.

Somehow, as I collected and edited these diverse works, everything seemed to fall in place, just as this strange season, trying so desperately to drive us apart, is bringing us closer instead.

Katie Winkler  
Editor



## Editor's Note:

The following short stories were inspired by assignments in two freshman English composition classes:

Danielle Flewelling wrote her story, "Grunt Goes to College" in response to an assignment asking her to write an analysis considering the causes and effects of attending our community college. Students had to interview fellow students in the class and were not allowed to use first-person pronouns except when quoting. She asked permission to do something "a little bit different," and I'm glad I said, "Yes!"

I broke with tradition in the fall of 2019 and added a narrative/descriptive essay assignment after the big research paper in my composition classes. The intent was to give students a break from the intensity of a high stakes essay. I gave the option of writing a short story for the assignment, and Hunter Wrenn was one of the few students who took on the challenge. I'm glad he did because he wrote, "Getting Colder."

# Danielle Flewelling

## Grunt Goes to College

College is a valuable opportunity to transform the life of anyone willing and dedicated. There are classes for artists, philosophers, environmentalists, computer programmers, welders, future teachers, and any other person willing to learn. Blue Ridge Community College is a small-town college located in Flat Rock, North Carolina. Granted, community colleges aren't prestigious four-year universities. Many students who attend prestigious colleges started at a small-town community college. Students who apply do so with a common goal in mind, the desire to build a better life for themselves by becoming more desirable to employers. Graduates seek work specialized in their field of study which brings a sense of accomplishment, increased income, and extend their longevity in the workforce.

An operator was at work one day. Realizing they wouldn't make it to retirement working as a "grunt" in machining, they decided to go to college. The decision to go to was based on the facts that they're intelligent, patient, and dedicated. The student realized there would be a tremendous amount of financial debt and knew community colleges are cheaper than four-year colleges. Not only was it expensive, but what degree felt right? What program sparked interest and a need to learn more? A few days of soul searching returned the thought, "Machines and robots!" After tiresome research, Grunt discovered that Blue Ridge Community College had the oldest Mechatronics Engineering program for three counties proving stability of the program, up-to-date teaching methods, ability to train on extremely expensive equipment, and it was local.

Grunt thought, "Awesome! I've got a chance to be somebody! Now, how in the world do I pay for it?!" Looking at the college webpage with a pained expression, she began to search how to pay for college. The amount of forms required was insane! It was worse than a job application. That thought alone gave Grunt a fire in her soul to fill out however many forms and signatures it took until her hand fell off. If it meant she didn't have to be a grunt the rest of her life, then it was worth it.

Several hand cramps later, an advisor meeting, and schedule in hand, Grunt was going to college.

Grunt's first semester was met with great enthusiasm! It was like a hive of bees on the first warm spring day. Students and teachers hustled from building to building like bees from flower to flower, gathering materials to create the possibility for their future. Students gathered with the peers they hadn't seen on vacation to catch up; teachers gathered to discuss the coming semester; shy students silently observed while walking to the bookstore and gathering their materials, attempting to leave unnoticed.

Grunt was among the shy students. There was no shyness when it came to books though. Warmth, joy, and excitement filled her to the brim. When she got her books and supplies, there was a deep desire to smell the newness of the books and look at all that she would soon know. Everything was set. Now to tackle the first day of the rest of her life.

Grunt went to each of her classes, holding onto everything the teachers said, rushed home to start her homework, and fell into a nice rhythm. The first semester was a breeze! Making the Dean's list with straight A's was the reward!

The next two semesters came with complications as the classes became more challenging, and Grunt's personal life interfered. By the third semester, Grunt felt severely out of place walking the campus alone all the time. The issues from her relationship at home, the difficulty understanding some concepts in class, and feeling alone started dragging her down into a deep dark well of depression. While sitting down in English class, another student noticed that Grunt was troubled as it showed on her face in a frown, the slump in her shoulders, and eyes cast down.

"Is this seat taken," Laura asked.

Grunt, startled that someone was talking to her, looked up, swallowed, and said, "No Ma'am. It's not."

"May I sit here?"

"Yes Ma'am." Laura sat down.

Stumped, Grunt asked, "Laura, why did you choose to sit next to me?"

A soft smile came across Laura's face and she simply replied, "I think you could use a friend, and I'd like to be that friend."

Grunt was floored. So many emotions hit her. Tears of joy and sadness sat behind her eyes as she fought the urge to cry like a child. She felt upset with herself that her feelings had shown through, yet she was



elated that someone cared enough to show kindness. After several seconds, she gathered herself together and simply said, "Thank you."

"Good morning," her instructor Mrs. K. said, smiling as she entered the room.

Indeed, it was.

Things smoothed out for Grunt in the following semesters. She decided her education was too important to sacrifice, so she chose to live alone until she finished college. She'd made a few friends.

And that was okay.

As Grunt neared the end of her journey with Blue Ridge Community College, several companies petitioned her to work for them. She had maintained a 3.8 GPA and had several full-ride scholarships to prestigious four-year schools. What to do after graduation became a beckoning question that deserved an answer. There were so many options and directions that could be taken, but which one was right?

Grunt couldn't decide until the rush of accomplishment, pure joy, and happiness flooded her soul as she walked the stage at her graduation. She chose a part-time job maintaining farm equipment while pursuing a bachelor's degree at NC State University. She began working full-time at Linamar and pursued a master's degree at night.

Thirty-five years passed. Grunt looked around her office seeing her associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees hanging on the wall behind her desk. Decorating bookshelves were awards she had won along the way. On her desk were pictures of her children, two boys and three girls she had adopted. She gazed at pictures of her grandchildren, from as old as high school graduates to as young as daycare daydreamers. With a smile of satisfaction on her face and a tear in her eye she shut out the light and shut the door.

She drove home to the one floor mansion with three of her children, several grandchildren, and she wouldn't have it any other way. Closing the door, she was greeted by young ones rushing to her with smiles and open arms saying, "Grandma! Grandma's home!" Grunt dropped her briefcase by the door, stooped, and embraced her little ones with pure happiness and all the love a grandmother could give. With her grandchildren embracing her and her children coming to watch the excitement, she knew this moment and this joy was made possible by her decision to go to Blue Ridge Community College thirty-seven years before.

Grunt had a dream, followed it, and knew without a doubt, she was no longer a grunt. She was Samantha.



# Hunter Wrenn

## Getting Colder

*You stupid fucking fuck* was the first thing that came to mind. *It didn't work.* It took a moment for the pain to start registering. Unable to move, staring up at the sky, it was difficult to know how many of the white dots were snowflakes or just spots caused by the unbearable sensations being felt. *Is everything broken?* It sure seemed that way. Arms and legs couldn't move, and they felt twisted and unnatural. It was difficult to breathe. With each inhale and exhale, it felt like bubbling as if blowing air into a drink with a straw. Something in his lungs wasn't supposed to be there. *What went wrong?*

*Everything, that's what.* His life's perfect storm of shit and circumstance and poor decision making brought him down in so many ways. For so long he had heard how he should have done things and been made to feel that he wasn't good enough. People would surely find fault in this, but it would be the last time he did something they disapproved of.

Stepping off was the final let down and no one was around to see it happen. Not that it would have mattered. No one could have talked him down from his perch or stopped him from spinning on his heel and becoming weightless.

It had seemed like enough. The ledge had been eight- no, nine stories up. Falling backward seemed like flying. Like a final freedom. Like giving up control of everything. No concerns, troubles, or worries.

Not anymore. Everything had seemed so far away. Everyone that been a contributing factor to that moment wouldn't be burdened anymore. As his body fell from the ledge so would the weight of taking care of and looking after such a pathetic person. *The ugliest dying fish deserved more sympathy he thought on the way up to the roof.*

The impact had brought unconsciousness with it but now there was regret too. Had it really been that bad? It can't have been as bad as this. A change of mind and heart. *What a stupid thing to do.* More feelings registering now but different. He had never felt this way before. Something bubbling up from the back of his mouth tasted metallic. From

his throat. It had to be blood. The same blood leaking from his nose and down his cheeks creating tear-like streams, if tears were bright crimson. The concrete at the back of his head started to feel warm and cold at the same time. It was harder to see with tinges of red creeping into his field of vision.

It was difficult to hear too. Things sounded far away. Like hearing them through a wall or when submerged underwater. A slow, constant drip trickled down his ear and added to the blood that was matting his hair and freezing it in place on the snowy sidewalk.

*Try getting up. Roll over. Nothing. Still can't move. This is it, isn't it?* The fall should have been fatal but for some reason it didn't happen that way. One last chance to think about the choices that led here. To this exact patch of concrete. Everyone had turned away because they couldn't handle it anymore. It was too much for them and it finally had become too much for him as well.

Still no one around, it seemed. Sleeping peacefully in their perfect beds in their perfect apartments with their perfect lives, they never heard the flesh and bone hitting concrete. *Probably for the best.* No one to offer pity or scorn. He would be cold and long expired when someone would finally come along, probably.

It was getting more difficult to think but at least it didn't seem as cold anymore. Patchy, incoherent thoughts. There were no blinding lights or any of the stuff he had heard about from movies or television specials. Just the streetlamps that weren't even buzzing anymore. *Can't hear anything.*

Something wet had made its way down to his fingertips. Warm but quickly cooling. He wondered how much blood had pooled around him. *Not much longer now.* This was the desired outcome, right? *Not anymore.* If only there had been more hesitation up on that ledge. That ledge so far away.

*Maybe this is how it's supposed to be.* He had more regret coming through, but in brief waves. They barely registered as thoughts, just brief snippets. *Failure. Can't even do this right. Just like everything else. Can't even stay committed to dying. Pathetic. Too late now.*

There was no sound anymore. His eyesight was going too. Everything looked cloudy and was only getting darker. He could only feel. He felt the gurgling and shortness of breath. He was drowning from the blood in his lungs. Gaspings, struggling. Nothing to think about anymore. Nothing except how this shouldn't have happened. *Shouldn't have done it.* And then---

Sherre Vernon

## Speaking of Teaching

I wouldn't recommend upending a chair with a student in it. Even if he's holding a roll of duct tape over his head and out of your reach. Even if he's been Velcroing that role of tape, open-and-close, open-and-close, over your voice the entire morning. Take my word on this one.

\*

There are all these social media posts about how a professor holds a student's baby so that (usually *he*) can come to class and study, and I want to tell you: this is No New Thing. We've been holding babies our whole lives and sitting with them until 9:17pm. We stay until someone remembers to pick them up from the dance or the field trip. We stay when they tell us they're too pregnant and too scared to go home. We order a pizza while we wait. We pass the time by showing them how to graph functions, and when that's exhausted, how to do proper citations in MLA or APA, you know, depending.<sup>1</sup>

\*

In the twelfth grade I wrote a lyric essay (it wasn't a genre then) on Antigone's rebellion, which was, after all, only the wish to bury her dead. I was convinced that my argument was best supported by a similar defiance of an antiquated form (read: the thesis). The teacher handed it back to me, told me to re-write it, and gave the A to the girl in the front row whose essay you could build a bridge by. And when she won the senior award in writing, he called her to the stage by her six-digit student ID number and praised her for being a "model prisoner."

\*

The saying goes, "Don't smile until December," the argument being that emotion, in a teacher, encourages disobedience in students. In contrast, *Discipline with Dignity* (Curwin, et.al.) offers that every now and then you need to "throw a good old-fashioned tantrum."<sup>2</sup> I'm telling you this because it's the truest thing I know: you have to be human. Just not the human you are on the bathroom floor crying: crying because you remember what it was like to lose your own brother too young, and this is tearing your heart out, and your teaching partner is watching both

<sup>1</sup> Expect neither here. See discussion of Antigone.

<sup>2</sup> Page 161 in the third edition paperback. He does<sup>13</sup> recommend upending empty chairs.

classes from the door between the rooms, and you have to go back and work them through the Oxford comma, and what you want to say is everything is contextual, even lists like milk, eggs and bread.

\*

Teachers train their bladders to hold their pee for seven to nine hours, rarely take lunch breaks, and don't accumulate vacation days. We get the requisite number of state-mandated sick days, which in California is three. We lie and use these days to go to weddings and to the dentist, to sit in coffee shops and marathon-grade 122 essays on books like *You Don't Know Me*. We save our fevers until Friday, December 21, and our UTIs until Ash Wednesday, when, with antibiotics, we know we can make it until the end of the week. Yes, we contemplate death and resurrection.

\*

Thank God for John McWhorter, whose *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English* offers descriptive linguistics, and justifies, after some application of the transitive property, the complete rejection of Jane Schaffer and the five-paragraph essay. Except, what's more beautiful than watertight arguments and unsuspecting turns in mathematical proofs – and I want you to love them, too! I did this thing once in an essay about Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, where my three-pronged thesis was more like the bridge in a song than prose, and I kept it under 500 words.

\*

When we get to poetry, I will emphasize concision and concrete images. I'm going to put a list on the board that goes something like this: puppies, drugs, love, rainbows, end rhyme, death, exclamation points, etc. etc. And then I'm going to cross it out and tell them: Not today, Not this class. The reading list will include, among other things, "My Papa's Waltz" and a famous Dylan Thomas villanelle.

\*

Stop talking. Make eye contact and hold it. Hold it. Hold it. And when he looks back, blink slowly one time. Nod your head slightly to the left, follow the nod with your eyes, to indicate an empty seat, but move nothing else. And when he sits down, offer a half-smile. Say nothing. Wait a beat. Continue with the lesson.

\*

If this fails, set the children to complete a timed writing on the difference between how Pharrell Williams and Simon Cowell, notable judges on contemporary talent competitions, respond to struggling per-

formers, and to what extent their approaches to interacting with vulnerability is shaped by privilege. While the students write, read Frank Herbert's *Dune*, analyze the Bene Gesserit use of The Voice to engender obedience, and believe, like you have never believed anything before, that one word from you is enough to shape the next Messiah. Continue.

\*

I take that back. Stop teaching. No, I don't mean quit the profession (though there's a reason why the armed forces and the Peace Corps have short commitments). What I mean is, who cares what you have to say about Atwood's use of invented Latin in *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>3</sup> when you can't even get them to look at you. What I really mean is: back up. Don't start there. In *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry says that you must "sit down a little distance from [them and] say nothing" while expecting the side-eye. Moreover, he encourages you to stay the course and sit a little closer every day. Note that he does warn that this sort of work may change you, irreparably.

\*

I know a man<sup>4</sup> who says that if you can get the kids to clap at the same time, without a countdown – if you can orchestrate a moment of collective mastery, you can get them to believe in their own infinite capacity. Do this. Additionally, prompt them, before a difficult task like a test, or a performance, or walking out the school gates for the very last time, to picture the face of someone who loves them unconditionally, who sees in them only light. End this activity with these exact words: "And if you can think of no one else, you can think of me."

<sup>3</sup> But maybe we should care now, about the bastards trying to grind us down.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Provisor [www.circleways.org](http://www.circleways.org)





# Wayne Rapp

## A Tribute to Teachers

In one of my favorite movies, *The Natural*, manager Pop Fisher (Wilford Brimley) is stomping around the dugout as he hollers at his sorry baseball team. He pauses, apparently tired of chewing out players on the field, and grouses to his coach (Richard Farnsworth), “Red, I shoulda been a farmer.” That kind of regret might come to many of us as we take a close look at the direction our lives have taken.

It happened to Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) in the 1954 classic film *On the Waterfront*. “I coulda had class; I coulda been a contender,” he says. He is talking to his brother, Charley, played by Rod Steiger. It's one of the most famous movie quotes of all time. The main character in the film laments the decisions that were made that affected the rest of his life. He resents the impact of his brother making him take a dive in a boxing match as he adds, “I coulda been somebody.”

Well, I never wanted to be a farmer, and unlike Brando, I don't bemoan where my life has taken me, or, rather, where I have taken my life. I think I am somebody, and I'm happy with the way things turned out, but, somewhere in a tiny corner in the back of my mind hovers the question, “What if?”

If I tried to express the words, they would come out sounding a lot like Brando's. But, instead of saying, “I coulda had class; I coulda been a contender,” they would say, “I could have had a classroom; I could have been a teacher.”

The idea of being a teacher didn't develop early. I went to a Catholic grade school staffed by nuns who wore head-to-toe habits and lived on the premises. While they did instill in me a desire to learn, I'm not sure how much of it was motivated by fear. These were dedicated, hard-working women, but not the type that inspired a young boy to think about teaching as a profession.

I think it was my Dad who first planted the teacher seed in me. He very much respected teachers and what they stood for. Part of this admiration didn't come from his perception of their intelligence or dedication, though. In reality, he thought teaching was the ideal profession.

He spent his entire working years in the copper mines, a dirty and dangerous profession. For many years, he worked shifts, and during times when he worked as a fill-in for others who were sick or had a day off, he could work all three shifts in a single week. He went through strikes, layoffs, and reduced work weeks when the price of copper dropped on world markets, and, as a result, the copper company he worked for reduced production. Through all of his work hardships, he watched teachers going to work on regular schedules, neatly dressed, and seemingly in control of their lives. To him, he was a working man; teachers were professionals and with that station in life, came advantages that led to a more comfortable and secure lifestyle. Whether it was true or not, that was certainly his perception of the teaching profession.

When it was time for me to leave home to go to college, my Dad was pleased to learn that I had decided to study to become a teacher/coach. I had been very much influenced by a football coach during my high school years and really thought I wanted to follow in his footsteps. Something changed my mind, though — I don't know what — and when it came time to sign up for classes, I registered, instead, in the College of Business and Public Administration. My Dad seemed a bit disappointed, but he could identify with my choice. Any education that would lead me to a profession that would keep me out of the mines was fine with him.

I would change my mind again. After three semesters of Business, I needed to re-evaluate my major. I was not enjoying my courses, for the most part, and was spending all my electives taking English courses that emphasized writing and Speech courses devoted to television production.

I had a teacher to blame or credit for this decision. My high school teacher in senior English had challenged me to take my writing seriously. Our final senior theme was dedicated to exploring a job or profession. She had to approve our choices. When I met with her to discuss my choice, I had to admit I didn't have one. She asked what I enjoyed doing, and when I said reading and writing, she said that writing should be my topic. I had never thought of writing as being a profession, but now I had to. As I got ready to leave the meeting, my teacher added a requirement. As part of my theme, she requested I also write a short story. I felt put upon with this extra assignment, but I did it and got an A+ for my effort.

With the acceptance of nine credits of economics from my business studies, I was able to transfer to the College of Liberal Arts without losing any time. When I told my Dad I was transferring and becoming an

English major, I could see his excitement. “So you're going to be a teacher after all,” he said. I told him no, that I would have to transfer to the College of Education to become a teacher. He was confused. “So, what are you going to do with an English major if you're not going to be a teacher?” he wanted to know. I didn't have an answer.

The decision was a good one, at least in terms of allowing me to build a career as a film/video producer-writer-director, one who traveled and worked in most of the United States and more than a dozen foreign countries. And after a lengthy corporate career, I started a new career as a freelance writer-producer, working on contract for business clients but also writing and publishing fiction and nonfiction in books, magazines, and journals.

So, what does this have to do with teaching and my expressed longing for exploring the profession? I really found out what teaching was all about when I married a teacher. I was quickly introduced to what teachers do in the evening. While I kicked back most nights from my corporate job, my wife graded papers and worked on lesson plans. Then there were the parent-teacher meetings. She had to give up her evenings to be there even when the parents sometimes didn't show. Need some supplies for tomorrow's art project? She dug in her purse for cash or pulled out her check book. There was no process for reimbursement. She probably wouldn't have pursued it if there was. As for all that time off during the summer, most of those we knew in the teaching profession had to find other jobs or were busy pursuing college courses for required advanced degrees. Their summers were full. Her reward for all her hard work? Her students loved her; her principal gave her increased responsibility, and she was chosen “Outstanding New Teacher” in her district, a very large one in Southern California.

My wife's family is loaded with teachers across several generations. Many of our friends over the years have been teachers. We just like hanging out with interesting people. Regardless of stories one might hear from time to time to the contrary, I can honestly say I have met few teachers that I didn't think were completely devoted to their students. Most of you have put your students first. I am never surprised when I hear of or read about teachers who put their lives on the line when their students were in danger. It is a natural response from the teachers I have known in my life.

I have heard many of your stories — the funny ones as well as the heartrending ones — and in your giggles and the choke in your voices, I have heard your love for your students. I have always admired that, and I

think it contributes to my regret in not being part of something so important to so many.

Henry Adams, grandson of John Quincy Adams, said, “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” And, of course, we all know that “she” and “her” belong in that quote as well, even more so than the male reference.

So, for all you teachers, I salute you and I thank you. I thank you for teaching me and my children. But most of all, I thank you for teaching all the nameless students over the years, the ones that needed someone to care about them, to give them a hand, to point them in the right direction, to give them the tools to build a life. I envy the generosity of your spirit. Would that it had been mine.



## Jim Courter

### Numbers, Letters, Grades

A couple of years ago, the university where I had, by then, been teaching freshman composition for over two decades adopted a plus/minus grading system. That was good news for those of us among the faculty who chafed at having to give, say, a B to students who had earned a high B and those who had earned a low B.

There were plenty of us who felt that way. At least three colleagues of mine, frustrated that they couldn't make finer distinctions than the old system allowed, had been reporting semester grades to the registrar with plusses and minuses on them, knowing that they would be ignored.

One of those colleagues put it this way: "I couldn't quite bring myself to give the same grade to a student who had earned a C+ and one who had earned a C. Even though I knew the registrar would ignore the distinction, it just made me feel better."

Another said, "I remember believing that the traditional A-F scale was rather crude when one had devoted a lot of work to making distinctions between, say, a high B and a low one, with a solid B in between. The same holds for each grade given to essay assignments. My grade book by the end of a semester would be a cornucopia of plusses and minuses and solids. I can even recall on occasion having assigned a double plus or minus to papers that seemed to exceed even the usual distinctions and thus to require a further shade of evaluation."

After enough faculty members raised similar concerns, the administration took up the question. More than a year of debate ensued, some of it acrimonious, resulting, finally, in the adoption of the plus/minus system, with specific values assigned to the plusses and minuses. A plus added a third of a point to a grade; a minus subtracted a third of a point. A grade of B had a numeric value of 3; a B+, 3.33; an A-, 3.67. But, of course, faculty didn't assign those numbers; that was left to the registrar, who then added up all the numbers and divided, yielding the all-important (to the student) grade point average.

At some point in the debate, the administration polled the faculty on the subject. I responded that I couldn't shake the feeling that something was lost, or gained, in all that translation back and forth between

letters and numbers; that a plus/minus system, while more precise, would still ignore some distinctions that I'd like to be able to make. If the goal was greater precision, why not let us report numbers, preferably to two decimal places?

For example, suppose I had a student whose grades in the class, after being converted to numbers then added and averaged, came to 3.51. That's .18 over the 3.33 that a B+ would represent and almost the same numerical distance from an A-. Instead of having to decide whether that was a B+ or an A-, either of which, for the sake of calculating the student's GPA, would eventually be retranslated into a number that is off the mark from the original one I arrived at, I'd prefer to report a grade of 3.51.

I never received a reply, and my suggestion never found its way into the public debate. The impression I came away with was that letter grades were as sacred as the words of wisdom and inspiration one sometimes finds chiseled into the lintels above entrances to campus buildings. I suspect, too, that some faculty, especially those in the arts wing of the college of Arts and Sciences, might have objected that such a system would turn us all into number-crunching accountants.

A colleague of mine once lamented that when all's said and done, no matter how high-flown the content of a course, we end up crunching numbers to arrive at a grade. I shared his feelings, but if there's no getting around it, I'd just as soon do it with as much precision as possible. The plus/minus system is a step in the right direction, but in terms of arriving at the kind of precision I'd prefer, it comes up short. As reforms go, I'd give it a B-.

# Leigh Ann Whittle

## Teaching the Teacher

First day of school jitters are not limited to students.

The alarm went off that fateful first day of school. I proceeded through my daily routine before shuffling to the kitchen for breakfast, fully knowing whatever I ate would only enrage my unsettled stomach. My books remained in my bag, although the number of times I nervously checked them would make one think the books had legs and were eager to run about the room. I tried to rehearse room numbers and class start times but instantly forgot them.

The roads were empty as I began my commute. I got lost the first time I visited the campus. And the second time. Hoping the third time would be the cliched charm, I followed my GPS perfectly, all the while wide-eyed and gripping the steering wheel for dear life.

“Why am I so nervous?” I mused as my legs battled my trembling knees to carry me down the sidewalk in the steamy late-summer morning sun. “Wasn’t a teaching job what I longed for?”

Armed with a brand-new master’s degree and a position teaching first-year writing at the community college, I felt a civic duty to teach. I had the subject matter knowledge and experience and had been admitted into a competitive year-long experiential learning faculty training cohort, yet I still felt woefully unprepared for the great responsibility of being a teacher. I would in part be responsible for the academic success of about fifty students. If I did not teach them properly, I could set them up for future failure. Quite a cross to bear for an educator.

The knots in my stomach grew larger and larger as I approached the classroom, my brain and legs operating on different agendas. My legs wanted to carry me to class and closer to fulfilling my dreams. My brain wanted me to run. Run home. Run to my mom. Run and hide. Run away. Run to the bathroom. It did not matter where — just run away.

Once inside the classroom, I took out my desk copy of the course’ required text and set it to my left. To my right. Pulled the wrong class roster out of my bag. Exchanged it for the correct one. Set the roster on the podium. Set it beside the podium. Back on the podium. Printed my name on the board. Erased it. Wrote it again. Wrote the course section number. Noticed the writing slanted upward and considered erasing it again. Talked myself out of huddling in the corner and weeping.

The students filed in silently, giving me and each other sidelong glances as they selected their chairs. I smiled nervously at them. They frowned back.

Promptly at ten o'clock, I closed the door. Taking a deep breath, I walked to the front of the room, twenty-five pairs of eyes watching my every move. When I looked at each of those eyes, I saw the very same fear my eyes were wearing.

It was their first day of class too.

Reward is not gained without risk, and risk is inextricably linked to fear and the unknown. Like me, my students had no idea what to expect. Together, we learned and grew over the next few months, and at the end of the semester when I revealed to them it was my first semester teaching, they were amazed. My first-day fears had disappeared, replaced by a plethora of successes and failures that I and my students chose to call life lessons. One such lesson that I learned and continue to carry with me with each passing semester is this: Fear may be less of an indication of our perceived ineptitude and more of a motivator to fight harder and achieve the success we desire.





# Marjory E. Leposky

## Through Words\*

When I was in pre-school, my teachers caught on to the fact that I wasn't learning my numbers and colors like my classmates. Back in the late 1970s, many children with learning disabilities weren't diagnosed until high school or college, if ever. I was one of the lucky ones to be diagnosed so young, and my mother was my activist until I was old enough to take over for myself.

In elementary school, despite my disability, I fell in love with reading. Through books, I was able to travel and meet new people. Other children were so cruel with bullying. The minute they found out that I was not good at something simple, like spelling, they held it over me. Even today, some people don't understand. They think it is dyslexia or some other catchy new medical term.

At the end of high school, I started to deal with my test-taking issues. I found that reading a novel before a test was a great way for me to prepare calmly. I graduated and was accepted to Miami Dade College (formerly Miami-Dade Community College).

I applied to MDC because they would work with me to provide note takers, tutoring, extended time on tests, and a quiet room in which I could use a computer to type essays. It was the early 90s and the Americans with Disabilities Act had only recently gone into effect. Other colleges I explored still had not complied with the Act and told me to go away.

College took me five years – not so bad for a person with learning disabilities. Because I had read so much in high school, reading was one of the classes I didn't have to take on a remedial level and MDC placed me in a college-level reading class. Later I transferred to Florida State University, another school adhering to the Americans with Disabilities Act, where I majored in Communications - Media Production and minored in Business.

After graduation, I went to Los Angeles for an internship and immediately ran into walls related to my learning disabilities. I had the right personality for the job, but I had message-taking issues. (The next time you leave a message with a human or on voicemail, remember to speak slowly and clearly when reciting your name and phone number.)

Luckily I found work in the film industry and spent two years in Los Angeles working on sets for TV/film production, which was a lot easier than working in an office.

When I returned to Miami, I went back to MDC and took a few film classes. One was a scriptwriting class. Yes, me, writing scripts, with all my writing and spelling issues – but it happened with the help of script-writing program *Final Draft*. The program has a feature that reads everything back to you, helping you to catch your misspelled words, using one word when you meant to use another, leaving out suffix and gerund endings, and more.

In 2009 a stray kitten appeared in my family's front yard. I spent most of that spring trying to catch him, and eventually succeeded. Because he is mostly black, my mother named him Guy Noir after a character from the radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*.

With my new screenwriting skills, I wrote an animation script about the kitten. It needed a creative name. Since Guy Noir grumbles when he eats, sleeps, plays, and purrs, I gave him the nickname Mr. Grumbles. I have since turned the script into a children's book.

I want to use *Mr. Grumbles* to help children with their literacy and reading skills, while also helping kittens and cats get new homes by pairing readings with adoption events.

I have come a long way from elementary school. I am a woman working and living with learning disabilities, but more importantly, I am a woman succeeding with learning disabilities. After a life-long struggle with the vagaries of the English language and the literary world, I have written a book and a publisher has accepted my work. The book *Mr. Grumbles* will be published soon.

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# Jennifer Parrack-Rogers

## GGB

My best friend teaches the gospel  
from a greenhouse,  
over coffee, near the red Camilla  
over houseplants gathered  
on a baking rack.

A houseplant's energy, she says, is  
always spent  
either healing or growing.

We care for our plants.

We prune, coax, admire,  
root them.

We pluck, cut, place  
all their parts  
in rich, black earth,  
in cool, clear water.

A new friend, in a new  
brick house  
asks the favor of watching over her precious plants (her  
babies).

"Neglect them like I do.

Most kill them with over-  
watering."

She gifts me cuttings  
from her husband's  
great great grandmother's  
begonia,

an elegant snake winding  
up my brick wall.

Rooting in a Ball jar,  
it's trimmed with a circle of white lace.

Our thoughts can be cared for,  
watched over,  
like houseplants.  
Like houseplants,  
thoughts grow, heal, or die.  
Tendrils insist their way into being.  
Thoughts over-grown, in need of tending,  
choke themselves to death.  
Other thoughts,  
over-watered like a Philodendron,  
yellow,  
and linger on.

I pluck my thoughts  
faster than I pluck leaves.  
I shear my conscience,  
pinch off the dead weight.

Sam Sonnier

## Neo-Platonism

We are born failing embers,  
a stoked fire  
wheezing to find enough  
air to last.

Our lives are smoke, captured  
in a glass-  
cased memory, figments  
of a life.

## Life at Sea Level

Something about growing up  
in Louisiana made me  
not trust roots. It wasn't the trees  
themselves: I saw oaks wide  
as summer days flourish  
in the old part of my hometown.  
It was the shallow soil, maybe, and  
thunderstorms that swamped  
us in seconds. We were a good gust  
from spilling into the Gulf  
with the rain.

It might be why  
I see solace in the random.  
I'm off the hook for the slough,  
my sloppy, wasted moments.  
The chaos lets thin living  
wash away with the rainwater.

## Traveling Light

Driving cross-country high  
is the only way.  
Greenery makes the scenery,  
as they say.

Each state brings a  
new enigma in signage.  
Why is Virginia for Lovers?  
Why are Kentucky,  
Illinois and Indiana  
fighting over Lincoln?  
What, exactly, is Missouri  
trying to show me?

The landscape changes magically  
when you're stoned.  
Rolling hills suddenly  
pop up like pimples,  
trees go from plump  
to waifish in an instant.  
Is that really  
ditch weed in Iowa?



And yet, you feel the  
America of it all.  
Every Circle K,  
Flying J, Kum N Go or Kwik Trip  
has Dr. Pepper and Doritos.  
That's really  
the tie that binds.

# Pat Tompkins

G Is for . . .

*Gnomon*, showing the way to the time of day, the sundial's pointer, interpreter of light, useless at night, related to *gnome* as in aphorism, not dwarf, nothing to do with *gnats*, those nasty, tiny biters congregating in clouds, or other *gnawers* that use their *gnathic* tools to *gnarl*, and unrelated to *gneiss*, sparking a metamorphic stone resembling a feldspar-like plutonic\* rock. And all on its own: *gnu*, which is the plural, too. What would the *Gnostics* say?

Why begin words with an unpronounced, superfluous *g*? The rhyme and reason for spelling in English are difficult to know, if not fraught with doubt; indeed, they could lead to psychosis. Join the queue of cross-eyed writers.

February sloughs

though a cache of caramel

softens the rough route

\*Not to be confused with *platonian*, plutonic, derived from Pluto (god of the underworld), refers to crystals formed by solidified magma from the Earth's core. Note how it leads us back to the ancient Greeks again, as so many words do (and notice the "art" within *Earth*).

## The Lady with the Dirt

As files downloaded, she noticed her grubby keyboard, as dingy as her oldest underwear. Clean or write? What would Chekhov do?

He would write. And she was no Chekhov, but it was good to spire. And even

better to write. Best of all, to have written. And you couldn't get there without

putting in serious chair time alone.

Each time she sat down to write, myriad diversions arose: brewing tea, trimming fingernails, stretching her cranky back. Phone calls, social media,

Internet access were verboten. She knew writer's block was a pathetic myth.

Her most effective rule was simple: She could write or clean. Since she viewed

most cleaning as a futile endeavor, she published a handful of short stories.

And on her desk, she wrote her initials in the dust.

future and past

present at the same time

burden or freedom?

a small white moth pollinates

the Joshua tree

## Radical

In a university museum built by a famous capitalist, artifacts commemorate the centennial of the October 1917 Russian revolution. Red shouts, the primary color in posters declaiming change. I studied Russian and its history and literature in college decades ago, having forgotten most of the language now. Funny how the transliteration of the word for “year” is “god”; odd that “mir” means both “peace” and “world.” Among the New Left pamphlets is an alphabet book for soldiers of the Red Guard. Literacy rates were very low then, one reason posters were often used to convey messages. Similar to stained glass windows in Gothic cathedrals.

root cellar

surviving winter

with bags of beets



# Thomas Davison

## Prison Ethics 101 (or) How an Old Teacher Got Schooled

I am an adjunct business instructor at Marion Technical College for the Business Prison Program. For the past three years I have been teaching college-level business coursework at North Central Corrections, and the Marion Correctional Institute. These are all male prisons in Northern Ohio. Since working at the prisons my life has been overflowed with astounding “life moments.” I have felt driven to write a story about a recent incident.

Yes – this is a prison-themed short story, but it is also a human story. A felon, by committing their crime, surrenders their rights (temporarily) to be a member of our society – this is something I understand. However, just because a man makes a mistake (or several mistakes) doesn’t mean he ceases to be a member of humanity. Trust me when I say to you: despite their surroundings and the burdens they bear - there is much good that persists in these places. I have learned more about the potential for greatness in the human spirit from working with my incarcerated students during the past three years than twenty years of my teaching of traditional students.

When I lecture in my prison classes, I enjoy discussing the importance of perspective with my students, that they should strive to see things from the other man’s point-of-view. Since my wife is half-Cherokee, and she constantly wears moccasins, I have always been strongly drawn to the quote accredited to several different people, interchanging the words shoes and moccasins. “*To understand the man, you must first walk a mile in his moccasins.*” I was recently teaching a class on a popular subject on the inside. A subject that we all will take home with us when re-entering back to society. Right and wrong, good and evil, morality, philosophy (and of course), the Big E - ETHICS.

I need to share this true story about an incident that occurred when I was teaching an ethics class in one of the prisons (Marion Correctional Institute). I couldn’t ethically write about this incident without first obtaining permission from the student involved. I told him for the purposes of this story I would use an anonymous name when referring to him. He insisted on selecting the name. With his typical sense of humor - he wanted to be called prisoner Malcolm X. I always refer to my students by the prefix of Mr. – followed by their surname. This means that he would be Mr. X in the story. My students refer to me as Dr. D. This is a

true story I am sharing with you the reading audience about Mr. X, Dr. D, in the Big E class. You just can't make this stuff up - can you?

On this day I was teaching a class on Business Ethics and Mr. X was a part of the class where approximately 50% of the students had worked hard for months or years to achieve their GED. They were finally taking college level coursework. I usually thoroughly enjoyed these sessions with newer students. Exploring their personal belief system and exposing them to the thoughts of great men such as Kant, Descartes, and Nietzsche.

I would follow my usual steps of utilizing creative ethical dilemma questions such as *"If you could go back in time – would you kill Hitler as a baby knowing how he would turn out?"* I would play the numbers games of philosophy. *"Would you kill one old business instructor (me) to save a million lives? Would you trade one life for the life of someone who would later cure cancer and save millions of others?"* My readers - you have probably heard them all. However, they do the job of provoking good discussions. Until it was Mr. X's turn to be grilled. No matter how ridiculously creative the scenarios I created became – he completely and utterly refused to 'take' the imaginary life! He was unshakable in his responses – no never take a life – no matter how impactful it became in my imaginary ethical scenarios.

Becoming a little frustrated I said to Mr. X, "Hey Mr. X remember our class rule to always be truthful. Are you following the rule?"

He quietly replied to me (and the entire class), "Yes sir Dr. D - I am being truthful. No matter what awful scenario you come up with - you can never convince me that it is okay to take a human life. Nothing you can say will get me to change my mind."

Now I was really becoming intrigued.

I was remembering my first class with Mr. X, which had been Introduction to Marketing. I had been asking a series of pointed questions of the class to try and determine the extent of marketing experience. Mr. X had stated flat out that he had 'zero' experience with marketing and that marketing might as well be Greek for all he could make of it.

Further questioning revealed that Mr. X had never held down a real nine to five job in his life. The only work he had any actual experience with was selling product. So - for the next 15-20 minutes I peppered him with questions such as: "How did you determine your target market for your product? What was their demographic? Did you rely strictly on word-of-mouth or did you use other marketing strategies? How did you

differentiate your product from your competitions? How did you establish pricing?”

You have probably figured out how this went. By the time class was over Mr. X was readily admitting that just maybe he had been mistaken, and he knew more about marketing than he may have given himself credit for.

Recalling our previous encounter in marketing class, I was feeling confident (perhaps a little cocky). Once Mr. X truly understood my philosophical ‘what if’ questions – and my purpose for asking them – all would be well. I knew success was eluding me – and was simply a couple of well-constructed ethical dilemma questions away! So here we go again back into that morality breach. “Okay Mr. X explain for my benefit and the benefit of your classmates why you can state so adamantly that you will never take a human life?” I asked (somewhat smugly). “Mr. X never is a very strong word – are you sure you meant to say never?”

Mr. Malcolm X slowly stood to face me and the rest of the class. He was a tall (six foot four) lean muscled, and he moved like a cat. I have never felt frightened of the overly big-muscled, weightlifting types you find throughout the prison system. However, I have found that prisoners like Mr. X are far more physically intimidating.

He began to speak. I immediately realized that this was going to be a moment. Whenever I was a part of a moment – I would feel the hairs on the back of my neck tingle and begin to stand up. I was listening on the edge of my chair and soaking up each-and-every word. I could feel this moment would burn into me - like the others.

Mr. X raised his head and looked the class straight in their eyes. He reminded me of a superbly confident young lion surveying his kingdom. “Well sir - the reason I can speak with absolute certainty that I will never-ever agree to take a human life - is because I have taken a life before - in fact that is why I am here in this place.”

I heard some mental and actual gasps in the room. Mr. X was entering the usually unspoken territory of ‘what was my crime that put me here.’

He continued in a voice that trembled with pent up emotion and yet somehow remained powerful. “A close friend of mine from childhood – worked for me moving product – yes I mean drugs.” He paused for a moment to survey his captive audience. “I had received word that some product was missing – and that my childhood friend was stealing from me.”



When he next spoke - there was a touch of fire in his speech. "Friend or not - he was taking from me - from my family - and I had to make an example of him." Now he pleaded with us via his tone and demeanor. "I had to - if not - others who worked for me - or were my competitors - would believe I was soft."

At this point Mr. X looked downward at the top of his scuffed prison-worn shoes and his voice softened again. When he next looked back up at us - his warm brown eyes were filled with tears. As he struggled to speak (at this point the class was so quiet that I understood that old saying 'you could have heard a pin drop') he finally managed to speak in a quiet but firm voice. "We went for a walk - a walk away from everyone else. I knew that my best friend was planning to kill me - kill me and take my place as the boss. We looked at each other - and we both knew - so we began to fight."

Mr. X looked downward for a second time. Not at his shoes this time - but at his scarred yet powerful-looking hands. When he looked back up at his hypnotized classmates (and teacher) he raised those well-muscled hands and displayed them to us all. "I beat my friend to death with my bare hands" he pronounced in a quivering voice.

Now he turned and looked directly at me with burning eyes. "Do you know what it feels like to kill a man with your bare hands Dr. D - with these hands?" He raised the offending items to my eye level. "Well sir, that is why I can answer your ethics and morality questions all day long - and tell you never - never again - will I take a human life." As he finished speaking, he slipped lithely back into his seat.

I clumsily cleared my tightened throat and began speaking "Well umm- thanks for being so open - and honest - and sharing your story with us - Mr. X." It was obvious to all in the classroom - that I was taken aback and searching for my words. "Okay class - so let's talk about the dangers of this 'numbers philosophy' why a smaller number of lives should have less 'value' than a larger number of lives, or should we feel that way?" I cleared my throat for what I hoped was the final time. "Umm - okay class - has anyone heard of a Japanese city called Hiroshima?"

As the hands flew up around the room, I snuck a quick look at Mr. X. He was sitting quietly at his desk with his powerful hands folded in his lap. He was staring intently at his hands as if he was waiting to receive a deep philosophical message from them. I thought to myself for perhaps the umpteenth time - Tom you always seem to learn more from these felons than you teach them in return. Mr. X looked up directly into

my eyes and smiled tentatively at me. I smiled back – both of us happy - because all remained good between us.

I realize that an old teacher like myself can still be schooled. I also realize that an old teacher like myself can still be right once every now and again. It is all about perspective. So, I am urging you, ladies and gentlemen of my reading audience, to not judge a man (or woman) without first striving to see things from their perspective. I am turning off this computer now and going to sleep. Walking a mile in a felon's moccasins has really worn me out.



## Taking a walk in my Yard this morning

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning. My Yard isn't anything like your yard.

My Yard has no trees or flowers – only an occasional greenish-brown stain of trampled grass.

The early morning sun exposes the points of the barbwire that surround my Yard.

It glitters – yet somehow looks beautiful - which terrifies me.

My Yard is two football fields squared – and I share it this morning with 800 other men.

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning - where I have acquired a unique gift.

The ability to perceive all the men in my Yard - from 360 degrees.

I can sense who is following me without turning my head.

Approaching from my left is the Con-Man.

His pockets bulging - full of broken promises and unfulfillable schemes.

His eyes darting from face-to-face - never still - just like his mouth.

He makes me feel drained and weary.

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning – approaching from my right is the Strong-Man.

The one who never ceases lifting things.

He is forever pushing, pulling, and twisting his muscles.

Struggling to exercise away his demons.

But no matter how huge his muscles become - it doesn't alter the fact - he is still inside.

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning -approaching too fast from behind me is the Baby-Man.

He hasn't discovered the rhythm of my Yard yet - he was delivered here direct from Juvey.

He strains to be a tough guy – but his eyes give him away.

I can smell the fear on him – he wears it like a strong cologne.

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning – and there is a swelling crowd.  
Striding on the blacktop and the concrete pathways alongside and all around me.

Like a stream of angry ants in blue denim - they are all present now.  
I can sense them, the Always-Angry-Man, the Fighting-Man, the Stoned-Man, the I-Am  
Innocent-Man, the Religious-Man - and all the others.

Taking a walk in my Yard this morning – I utilize my special ability.  
I can feel him now - he is coming slowly - straight at me - the one they call the Old-Man.

Also known as the Lifer-Man - shuffling his feet – rarely gazing upward.  
Instead staring downward at the top of his scruffy shoes.  
Mumbling to himself continuously about the poor decisions that brought him here.

He is so near to me now – coming closer and closer - with each step I take.

He matches my pace – step for step - he should break away – he is too close.

Now he is just inches from my face – I could reach out and touch him.  
No wait – it is only my reflection in the glass.



# David Rogers

## Innocent

If I say I was innocent of the crime for which I was convicted and sentenced, you might perhaps be more readily persuaded, if not to excuse my subsequent actions, at least to see why I felt as I did. Then again, how many villains have claimed innocence? You will have to decide for yourself if I did the right thing. Or where I went wrong. If you are feeling honest--and courageously introspective--you can ask yourself what you would have done in my shoes, and if your path would have been better.

Night was the best time in prison, at least in Cell Block 9. Even before I met Audrey, lights-out and locked doors meant peace, quiet, and relative safety. For a few hours, anyway.

Half past one quiet midnight, a couple of months into my stay, boots sounded in the corridor outside my cell. It was not time for guards to make rounds. You would think they'd at least vary the schedule of the head count, but no. Apparently most geniuses do not gravitate toward careers in what is euphemistically called "the corrections system."

I was still awake because I have always tended to be a night-owl, and also because it gave me time to contemplate the Riemann Hypothesis. It's one of those famous math problems that nobody except a few nerds like me cares about, or even understands the question. And why should they, when they can go to the park and watch beautiful sunbathers? Not that I would ever solve it. I was good enough with numbers to program computers in binary code, but not good enough to solve the Riemann. Unless I got really lucky, for a change.

"You're not asleep," she said.

I sat up. There were no female guards. None I'd seen, anyway.

"They didn't tell you, did they?" She was only a dark outline, silhouetted by the dim light from the corridor. I could not see her face.

"Tell me what?"

"Right. They never do. Stupid rule." She shifted her weight to the other foot, faint stripes of light shone through bars somewhere and rippled across her thighs.

"Who are you?" She was no guard. None of their uniforms included dresses that fell to mid-thigh. It was red velvet, I would later see, but in the dim light it looked almost black.

"The world will end soon," she said, seeming to ignore my question.

“Oh, you’re one of them.” She must be a self-appointed evangelist. The Bible-pushers couldn’t resist preaching to a captive audience. “How did you get in here after lights out?”

“There will be a door. It will be made of shadow and spider web. Go through it. Do not hesitate. It will not be unlocked for long.”

“What group are you with, anyway? Jehovah’s Witnesses?”

“Tomorrow. Around three. Between two and four. No later than 4:15, for sure. Sorry I can’t be more specific about the time. I complain, but it never helps.” She started to walk away.

“Wait, what’s your name?” I didn’t really care much about the answer, but her voice was sweet, like melted vanilla ice cream and hot fudge. And I didn’t get that many visitors. None, in fact. Even crazy ones.

“Audrey,” she said, over her shoulder, still walking away. A scent of honeysuckle drifted through the bars of my cell. “Audrey Hepburn.” The dress swished around those thighs in a way to make me dream dreams.

“Like the actor,” I said. “Your parents were fans?”

“No. She was named after me. I’ve been around a lot longer than her.” Then she was gone.

The world did not end for everyone. Probably just the ones who thought they were ready for it. I don’t think I’ve ever felt ready for anything important. Except morning coffee.

Audrey was right about the time. At three minutes past three, I was in the yard. Exercise time. The whole prison and the ground beneath it began to shake, and the demons came up and started taking people. Or maybe they were angels. Or just monsters. Whatever they were, they were gigantic. Much taller than the fence and walls. One of them smashed a fist on top of the guard tower, splintering it like a child’s diorama.

When the shaking slowed for a moment, I looked at the prisoner beside me, a tall guy named Anthony, who was doing ten years for his second bank robbery.

But it wasn’t Anthony. It was Audrey, this time wearing an orange prison jumpsuit. “Your door is over there. You’d better take it.” She pointed at the wall behind the bleachers by the basketball court.

Sure enough, I saw a dark, cobwebby opening the size of an ordinary door. Nobody else seemed to notice. “What about you?” I said. “Aren’t you coming?”

“I’ll meet you outside. The door is only for you.”

Out in the yard, a piebald giant, maybe fifty feet tall, was stuffing prisoners and guards into a sack. Others were demolishing walls and ripping up sections of roofs.

“Are these angels, or demons, or what?” I asked Audrey. She shrugged, walking with confidence between their feet. It didn’t look safe there, but nowhere else did, either.

“An angel by any other name is just as deadly,” she said. “Call them what you will but stay clear.”

“Clear? Where’s that?” The giants were everywhere.

“Follow me,” she said. I followed. Soon we were walking down the road that led away from the prison, in the direction of the interstate highway. I got a good look at her for the first time. She had red hair, pulled back in a ponytail, and blue eyes. Tall, an inch more than me. Lean but not thin. The prison jumpsuit had been replaced by denim, pants and jacket, faded, with a white tee-shirt. I still wore orange, of course.

I asked, “Who are you?”

“I told you. My name is Audrey.”

“Okay, I’ll rephrase. What are you?”

“A messenger. And sometimes, a guide, when there’s an apocalypse.”

“So you’re like an angel?”

“I said ‘messenger,’ and ‘guide.’ I did not say ‘angel.’”

That seemed to be that on the topic of her nature. We kept walking.

As we walked, I told her the story. She didn’t ask to hear it, but she nodded at the appropriate places. It felt good to tell it. “Ron and I were best friends, once,” I said. “Or I thought we were. Then we met this woman. We were both in love with her. That’s a whole long story. Suffice it to say, she ended up with me. A hundred percent her choice. It’s not like I twisted her arm or anything. But she chose me over him. Her name was Tracie. Ron never forgave me. When Tracie and I got engaged, he vowed revenge.

“That, of course, is another long story. It ended with a significant quantity of methamphetamine being stashed in my car without my knowledge, but somehow the cops knew just where to look. I never touched the stuff, and neither did Ron, as far as I knew, but for sending an innocent man to prison, it sure got the job done. I was sentenced to five years.”

The mayhem lessened as we went farther from the prison. A couple of miles out, she stopped and took a bottle of water and a bag of something



crunchy and salty from her backpack. She offered me the bag. I didn't recognize the food, but I was hungry. I ate. The chips, as I decided to call them, were not terrible, but I was glad of water to wash them down.

Audrey sat on a large rock in the shade of big oak. "Room for two," she said, patting the flat top of the boulder. "Rest your feet. We have a long way to go yet."

I sat.

"Figured out what you're going to wish for?" she asked.

I looked at her stupidly. "Wish for? Well, getting out of prison would have been high on the list an hour ago. Or not going back to prison. Except I guess there's not much prison to go back to, now."

"So what's your new choice?"

I continued to stare at her stupidly. I was getting good at that. It's easy when the world gets suddenly strange beyond comprehension. Her blue eyes seemed more jade-colored in the shade.

"Choice?" I said, finally.

She sighed. "They really didn't explain anything to you, did they?"

"They? Explain?"

"Repeating everything I say does little to advance a conversation," she said.

"Well, then, it's a nice day for the end of the world," I said, by way of conversation.

"Ones like you always get a wish. It's another rule. I don't make the rules. I just follow them."

"I would say 'Ones like me?' but that would not advance the conversation, either. So I guess I'll just wait quietly until you explain why I get wishes."

"Wish. Singular. One each for certain survivors. As for why, I don't make those decisions. My guess is because you're an innocent."

"Well, it's nice to hear someone else say that for a change."

"Don't get excited. Innocence goes hand in hand with ignorance. I didn't say you were innocent. I said you were an innocent. Maybe. Innocence is generally overrated. Adam and Eve were so innocent they believed the serpent. Or so the story goes. But again, it's not my call who's guilty or innocent. I guess you don't even know why you alone, of all the prisoners in that particular prison, were given a door."

"Because I'm innocent?"

Audrey shrugged. "An innocent. And like I said, that's not my call. But if I had to guess, I'd say you have a part to play in this apocalypse."

"Whose call is it, then? Besides judges and juries?"

“Somebody else’s.” she pointed skyward. “Up there. So, what are you going to wish for?”

“Well, that’s easy. Revenge.”

“Not wealth, or long life, or happiness?”

“Revenge will make me happy.”

“No peace on Earth? Not even a harem of beautiful women--or men, whatever’s your taste, and a bottomless whiskey barrel?”

“The man who put me in prison for a thing I did not do--he has to pay.”

“Well, it’s your wish” She shrugged. “Just take one piece of advice--wait a bit to make your wish. Fools rush in. We’d better move. It’ll be dark soon.”

The giants seemed to have quieted down or moved on, at least near our big rock, but if Audrey said we should go, I was taking her word for it. This was my first apocalypse, but she seemed to know what she was doing.

Not until much later did I remember what she said about my still having a part to play in the apocalypse. Self-absorbed with my own guilt or innocence, I ignored the far more important question: what part?

So we moved. I asked where we were going. She said, “To a safe place. To shelter from the apocalypse.” She didn’t say more, and I was too glad to be out and on the move to question too much.

The safe place turned out to a cabin at the end of a gravel road. And yes, it was in the woods. But it was the farthest thing from haunted, or beset by ghouls, or equipped with a basement full of dark secrets. There were squirrels and raccoons and one skunk, but they did not seem to enjoy the company of humans. Or whatever species of being, natural or supernatural, Audrey was. It was just a cabin. A very cozy, comfortable one, too.

When we arrived, it was almost midnight, according to the tall clock that ticked in the main room. I wondered who wound it. No one seemed to have been there in a while. We pulled dusty plastic sheets off the furniture by candlelight and went to bed soon--me in the narrow bed in the open loft that above half the main cabin, Audrey on the couch by the cold fireplace.

The ticking of the clock was soothing. It made for contemplation and self-reflection. I finally admitted to myself that I am not a vengeful per-

son. At least, not in the long run. Yes, it would feel momentarily good to take my revenge on Ron, but sooner or later--probably soon--I would feel bad about what I had done. It doesn't matter what someone else does, people's choices are always a reflection of who they are. I was not a person who caused unnecessary pain and suffering to others, not even ones who might deserve it. I wasn't even a person who wanted to judge what other people deserved. Too many slippery slopes there.

In the morning, Audrey said, "So about that wish. Time to get it done. I have other clients, you know."

"That was good advice you gave me, about waiting. I wish for everyone who was ever unjustly imprisoned to be set free," I said.

She looked straight into my eyes for five seconds. "Are you sure about this? Considered the consequences? You get one wish. No back-sies."

"Considering consequences is why I'm wishing for this. And freeing the innocent is a good thing, so what possible negative consequences could it have?"

"I'm just the messenger, not a prophet. I don't make predictions."

"Okay then. That's my wish. For all the innocents everywhere to be freed."

"One more chance to change your mind. Your sincere wish is really that all the innocents everywhere should be freed?"

"Yes, that is my sincere wish."

"Very well. Your wish, sincerely wished, will be granted," she said, just before the giant's fist smashed through the roof of the cabin, splintering beams like kindling, flattening Audrey beyond recognition.

I, of course, acted sensibly, and ran away screaming.

I ran for quite a way. I don't remember exactly how far. The gravel road from the cabin branched into a lonely country road. The only signs of the giants here were uprooted trees and craters in the cracked asphalt. Trunks lay across the road. Too tired to run now, I skirted craters, climbed over trunks and under branches, and kept going.

I soon came to a church, a modest white wooden building with an unassuming steeple. A cemetery of about half an acre spread out behind the church. A curious noise came from that direction.

At first I looked around frantically, thinking of giants. But no, it was

more a buzz than the thunder of giants' steps. The noise sounded like a swarm of bees. I stepped to the grass on the edge of the cemetery and heard groans and screams, and realized the buzz was more like scratching.

The sound of skeletal fingers scraping the lids of coffins.

The grass in front of the nearest gravestone began to heave, and a bony hand emerged, followed by an arm that pulled its way up toward freedom. The skull emerged, pulled the brown earth from its eyeless sockets, and grinned at me.

I turned aside and threw up, fiercely and thoroughly.

Gasping, wiping drool from my chin, I looked around the cemetery, where the same ghastly resurrection was repeated. The innocent--including the dead--were being freed. And what prison does anyone long to escape more than the final one--the grave?

In a flash of new horror, I knew it was my fault. I had asked for all the innocent prisoners to be freed, with no further thought of consequences. I was too proud of my virtue in not taking vengeance on my double-crossing former friend.

Like a thin red tongue, an earthworm squirmed its blind way out of the skull's mouth and dropped to the grass.

I had thought I was finished being sick. I was not. Not even close.



# Ana Gardner

## Chai and Goat's Milk

An unlikely mix  
Unless you live in the Balkan foothills  
Off the main road, up the cliffs  
In a two-room log cabin hidden by juniper trees

Chai substantiates into clay pitchers on the kitchen table  
Like the holy flame on Easter midnight  
You don't ask where it came from; it just is

In the mornings when the brass kettle whistles  
The sky outside is close and crisp  
And dew sticks to your woolen socks

Cold and hunger prickle as you  
Breathe in the sunrise  
That smells like wet earth and deer afterbirth

Chai and fresh goat's milk wait on the table  
Both warm, and menacingly unpasteurized

A chunk of steaming bread completes the holy trinity.

Goat's milk and chai:

Sounds like a hipster soap  
Unless you're an old grandfather born in the age of transhumance  
Born to a womb of earth and wheat  
Into skin painted by sun and scythe scars

Chai kept sunstroke at bay out in the pasture  
Packed in a leather bag by a mother  
Who spoke her love in spices and warm dough

The milk of eighteen goats marks your passage.  
The eighteenth finds you, stooped in the same stable  
While another young *dochka* greets the morning

The sun writes lines into a new skin  
And the mountaintop breeze punctuates it with goosebumps.

You bring the fresh goat's milk into the kitchen  
Next to the clay chai pot that's never cracked.

Together, they measure out our generations.

Leave

They said

If he raises a hand, or he threatens to raise a hand  
If he even thinks about raising a hand,

Leave,

If he raises his voice or calls your bad names  
(*everyone says things in anger*)

(*smile*)

(*women end fights*)

If he swears at you and screams and breaks things,

Run

Leave if he's violent or he does drugs,

If he gets drunk or cheats or gambles,

Run

(*all men cheat, it's their nature*)

(*take care of your looks and don't let him go out alone*)

And if he doesn't want to meet your family,

Or he's rude to your family

Or he keeps you from your family,

Just go

They said

These are The Bad Things

Bruises and vodka breath and broken glass.

The logic followed:

A Good Thing is the absence of slaps and drunken fights

The lack of illicit lovers and crippling financial debt.

So find yourself a good man

(*he's so obliging to your parents*)

(*he must really love you*)

and take care to keep him.

Leave

(*but don't leave him alone to go out with friends*)

Run from the bad men

(*men will be men*)



But they never said **listen to yourself**,

Take care of yourself,

Believe yourself.

No one said the Bad Things can be a loving hand squeezing too tight,

Flowers and wine every Friday with the proposal to dine in,

Every time

A smile that doesn't hear your words.

*(don't be so forceful in your opinions)*

They never said to run from pain, only from flesh wounds.

Leave if he doesn't love you, but never **leave if he doesn't love himself**,

Their warnings listed angry fists, not angry silence

Blood, but not blame

And no one said to run from the 'I'm sorry but's'

The 'you should like this' and the 'but why not's'.

I know now,

**Run**

If you can

If you hurt

If you can't breathe,

You can't say no,

Can't win.

Leave, when your stomach starts to flip at the sight of flowers,

*(maybe you're being too selfish)*

**Go.**

Be mean. Be angry. Leave

If you want to

If you can

**Leave.**

You're allowed.



# Mandy Brown

## How to Drink Coffee, Instructions for a Recovering Mormon

The first cup is a covenant, and for once, you promise with intention, so make the first cup hallowed:

Buy fair-trade, organic.  
Find a farmers' market morning  
and buy local.

You can because it's not a habit, not addiction  
you have to have as cheaply as possible.

Open the bag,  
trace the beans.  
Smell all the B&Bs

you slept in as a child, recall all the breakfasts with  
distant relatives in which you sat, peculiar and apart,  
unwilling to join them.

Break the bean open,  
watch the specks of soil  
line your palm,

a prayer between fingertips. Your hands prepare  
this cup with a press you sink into chocolating waters.

Pour it into a vessel,  
share and sip and  
Bless and Sanctify  
all those who drink it.

## A Trail for Hands

I trace the beaded scales of snakes  
and skinks, the wet leather of  
stingrays and sharks.

You poke my shoulder and point  
The aquarium sign reads: *Use two  
fingers to pet the animals.*

But all day long, my mind has been  
undressing space on my body,  
breadcrumbs for you.

So I press my hungry hands  
across the world, sucking on  
salt-water taffy. *Follow me.*

John L. Stanizzi

12.3.18

12.56 p.m.

56 degrees

↪ for Belle, the border collie next door, and who looks more like a fawn....

Prancing from behind her split-rail fence, oblivious to the order to *stay in the yard!*, she runs until she is standing next to me, tennis ball in her mouth, and it doesn't occur to me to think about the pond or the temperature.



12.9.18

8.13 a.m.

14 degrees

Pacification of stillness. One cardinal calls *what cheer, cheer, cheer!* Obligato section of the seasons. But I say, always, that I neither love it nor look forward to it. Of course, it arrives nonetheless, deepening the pond's silver to a burnished gray sculpture of itself.



12.11.18

12.27 p.m.

22 degrees

Pitiless, windless, these days before the solstice,  
occurring this year in concert with the full cold moon,  
never to happen again until 2094. I  
don't see a single reason to plan for it.

## The Book That Shows You Everything How

Terry was already at Brent's house when Mitchell and Granby phoned, one after the other, to say things had come up: they'd have to give this week a pass. Brent's wife and daughter had gone to a movie, and Terry thought it would be pretty pathetic to leave Brent alone by himself.

They sat in the Brent's rec room, popping beers and shuffling cards after first Mike then Granby called. It had been ages since either of them had played anything other than poker. They didn't know any games for two.

Terry started to wander around Brent's rec room, clutching his beer bottle and belching from time to time. When all four were there, they'd concentrated on playing cards. They didn't get up except to take a leak, and they didn't wander around when they did.

Brent's rec room was not very different from Terry's, from Mitchell's, from Granby's. All of them were more lived-in than clean. A woman's touch, a properly folded checked-wool blanket, covered the arm of the easy chair. Mabel had done that before she had left for the movie. She had told Brent to tidy his bookshelf.

Brent's wrestling trophy stood out a little more prominently after dusting. He had won the trophy in tenth grade, more because he was the right weight at the right time than because of wrestling skill. Every other year, he had been wiped out early.

"Yeah", Terry said, then: "What's that?" Pulling down the trophy had revealed a framed gold medal.

Brent was about four inches shorter than Terry, but still quite muscular. He had to reach up to grab the medal. He blew some dust off it and turned it over, as if the back might tell him the answer. He polished the dark wood of the frame on his sleeve with a hint of feminine delicacy, and placed it back on the shelf. The writing was clearer, now.

"Poetry contest?"

"Yeah. Grade Eight."



Terry was too bored to think up anything snide. He took down the medal, and placed the wrestling trophy in its spot. The script was old-fashioned and ornate.

"What kind of poem?"

"I think it was about the war," Brent said, though he knew exactly what it was about. "My English teacher said I should enter it. Yeah, it was probably like the wrestling. Being at the right spot at the right time."

Terry replaced the medal. He hefted his bottle once but continued to gaze at the bookshelf.

"You ever write anything now?"

Brent grinned. He looked at his shoes. "I do some, a little. Mostly make up stories for my kid."

Terry nodded. He looked down at the lip of his beer. "Yeah, I do that too," he said, even though he and Alice didn't have any kids.

Brent glanced up. A gleam of hope had become lodged in his eye.

"Hey, Terry. You used to write, too."

"Me? Nah."

"You wrote for the school paper. I remember your name in it."

Terry belched.

"They were pretty good, your articles. I clipped them. Hey, you ever read any *Merchant Hawk*?" A strip of paperbacks lined the rack below the trophy. "I got the whole series."

Terry ran his index finger over the books. Many of the spines had been bent round. None had dust on them. He whistled. "Not a bad collection," he said. He twisted his head to read the titles. "I've only got *Raid at Dawn*."

"You don't like his stuff?"

"He's okay," Terry said. He slid out one of the books. Someone had written in the margins, a curious, tight scrawl. "I kinda like Jack Dane better, though. And the ones about that congressman..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah--the guy is a CIA agent on the side. What's his name?"

They both stumbled in silence. Terry took another swig of his beer.

"Yeah, he's good," Brent said. He paused for a moment and then stared at his books. "They make tons of money."

Terry slid out another *Merchant Hawk* book. An embossed gold medallion took up a third of its cover. "'Over one million copies sold.' Yeah, they make dough."

"And that's just the book. Don't forget you got movie rights. And

serialization. And they get bigger the more things you write."

"Yeah," Terry said. He took another swig of his beer, and hefted the book in his free hand.

"Listen," Brent said. "Lookie here." He pulled out a well-thumbed paperback from the shelf closest in level to the easy chair. Its cover had been torn off. "I got this at a yard sale. Take a look. See?" He pointed a stubby wrestler's finger at the title. *You Can Write a Bestseller*. It shows you everything how."

Terry passed his beer to Brent, in exchange for the book. Like the *Merchant Hawk* paperback, every spare space had been crammed full of a tight scrawl.

"Hey, you know what," Brent said, as if the idea had just come to him. "We could write one of those too, you and me."

Terry didn't respond. He was too busy flipping back and forth in the paperback, and turning the book sideways to read the notes. Finally, he glanced up at Brent. "We? We can't write."

"That's the beauty of it," Brent whispered. "You don't have to know how to write." He lifted the book off Terry's hands with a delicate motion. "This baby shows you everything how."



# Holly Day

## Waiting Only for Spring

We point out all the different birds to each other  
like teenagers naming constellations:  
anhinga, gold finch, chickadee  
tiny juncos  
entranced by the influx of new life along the river  
summoned by the melting ice.

The air is filled with their tiny songs of joy  
as clouds of insects rise from thawing mud  
as though they had been frozen in just that spot  
dormant and sleeping all winter long.

## When They Go

I open my arms and call my children to me, remind them that nothing bad ever happens so long as I'm holding them.

My daughter wrinkles her nose at me and rolls her eyes, my son just ignores me and walks away. I am no longer regarded as sanctuary a bulwark against precocious misery and frustration, they don't need me at all.

I close my arms, wrap myself in an empty embrace

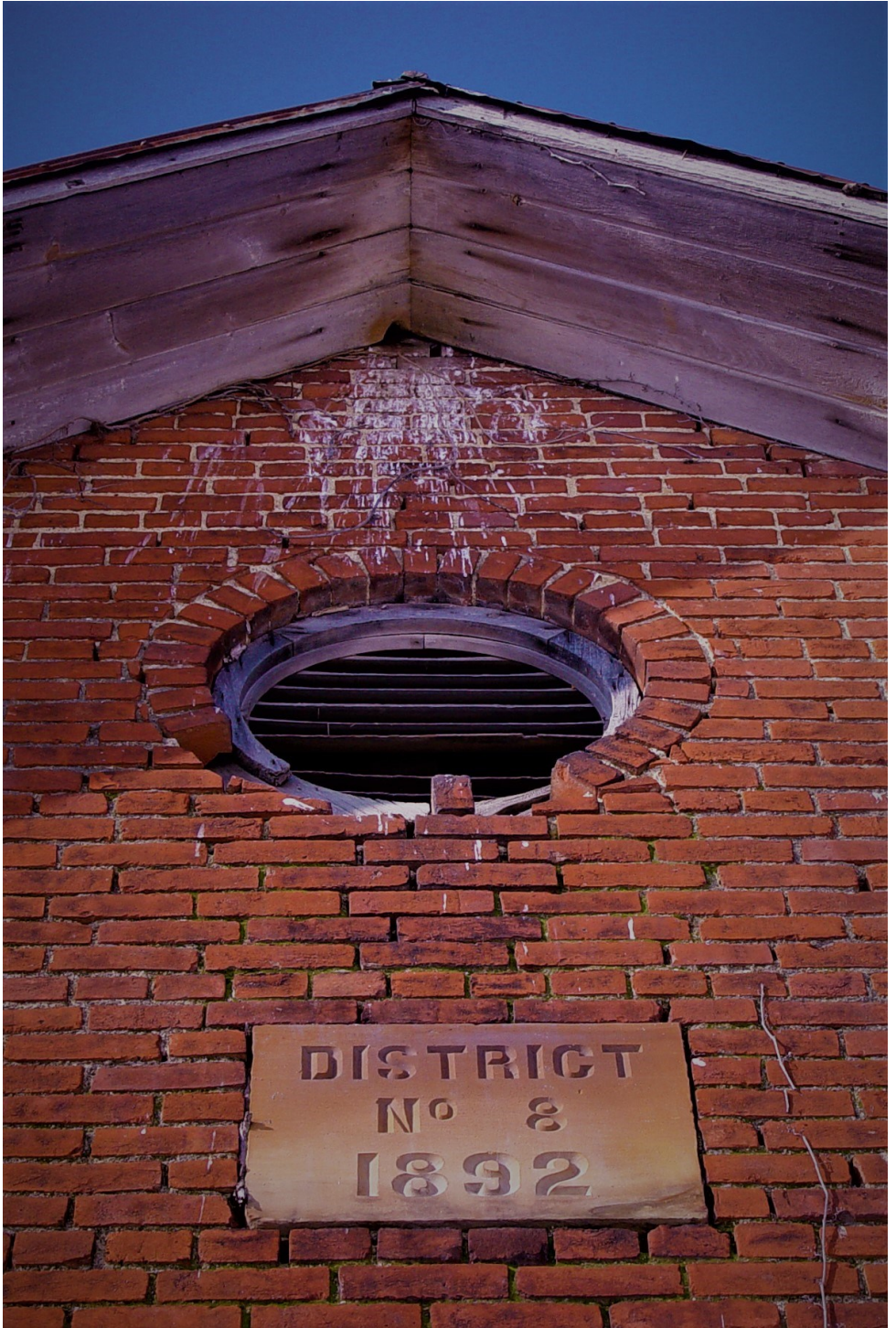
dream of being the sort of mother children flock to unquestioningly  
a fish mother who opens her maw to engulf hordes of trusting fry  
a scorpion mother carrying her ravenous children across the hot desert  
a snake mother nested in a knot of wriggling coils of tiny tails and teeth  
all of these things but what I am: incomplete without a tiny hand in mine  
a sweaty head pressed against my chest, constant and unending need.

## Regrets

I feel I have failed my children  
Because they've never been on safari  
I've never taken them to the ocean  
They've barely left this state. I comfort myself

With thoughts of children crying in airplanes  
Getting seasick, carsick, memories  
Of how poorly I traveled when I was a child.  
I'm saving them from having these memories themselves.

Years from now, they'll hate me  
For not introducing them to elephants  
Or whales, or seals in their natural habitat  
Never get to see herds of giraffes or horses or antelopes  
Loping across far-off arid plains.



# James Kowalczyk

## Ascension

I miss Dave. I don't know where he is. I'm not sure he's anywhere he can be found.

As independent researchers we'd been lucky to get funding for our project. We were to fly to Canvey Island, England to explore the 1954 story of a priest finding a four-foot fish with feet that had washed up on the shore. Dave drove the research forward as he was a true believer in all things unseen- that is, of course, as a scientist, he could explode the myth.

"Why would a priest lie?" He'd repeat this refrain that often ended a debate with others.

We were in the security line for our flight at JFK airport and Dave was still going on about his dream. "You don't get it, in my dream I lose my Saint Anthony necklace and then I'm gone, poof, everything turns black," he said as he removed his shoes.

"Well, Saint Anthony is the patron saint of lost things," I remarked, placing my keys and watch in a bin.

Looking over his shoulder, he said: "That's not funny. You know that medal was my father's. He said it was blessed by Pope John Paul II when my folks went to Warsaw back in 2005. He handed it to me on his deathbed and told me never to lose it. And that it would guide me home."

"Home? Where's that?"

"Don't know, but that's what he said."

We finally got to the metal detector and Dave beeped. They asked him to take off his Saint Anthony necklace, but he refused. After several minutes of hand wringing, the head of security decided to let Dave through.

"I don't know why you have to do that every time we travel."

We boarded our flight on time and Dave was happy-for a minute. He fidgeted and complained about having to sit in the middle, so I gave him my window seat. Then he blurted out: "There are more things in heaven and earth, buddy, than are in your philosophy," paraphrasing Shakespeare as he was wont to do when frustrated with me.

Having the last word mollified his angst and he drifted into a nap. I glanced through some of our files about the Canvey Island monster and noticed that in an interview<sup>72</sup> the priest had a quote about how



religion and science aren't mutually exclusive. Exasperated, I downed the rest of my drink and made my way to the bathroom.

As I waited in line, I thought about what Dave had said about there being more things in heaven and earth than we could possibly study.

As I returned to my seat I noticed Dave's was empty. I asked the flight attendant if she had seen him. She frowned.

"He was just here. I heard him mumbling, talking in his sleep."

"Could you understand any of it?" She thought for a second and frowned.

"Yes, he said he wanted to go home."



## Amirah Al Wassif

### When I met the devil

Last night,  
I met the devil.  
He was in his wheelchair  
moving through  
the shelves of my library.  
I kept silent  
to watch him.  
He hadn't tusks  
nor claws.  
Only a powerful  
motivator  
to absorb my diary.  
I heard him  
Repeating my words,  
Saying them  
In excitement.  
The first line  
of my diary  
Made him sing  
With cheeks flushed red.  
The second line  
forced him  
To fly in craze.  
I kept watching him  
On my knees  
If he paid attention  
To me,  
He would hear  
The cracking  
Of my bones.  
The devil ate  
my words  
Stoned by  
its deliciousness.

He continued  
Orbiting around  
My moments  
In amazement  
Until his eyes  
Caught my last  
Line  
He sank in  
Eternal sadness.  
It was my first time  
to see a Devil  
Cries.  
The devil  
kept reading  
My diary in awe  
His strong tone  
Changed to  
Mourns.  
I still remember  
how terrific  
His looking was  
when he witnessed  
my written griefs.  
I also recall how  
the salt rained down  
from his eyes  
while breathing  
our tragedy  
As humans.  
I met the devil once  
Since then,  
I still wonder  
Do our petty diaries  
Have that ability  
To turn the devil's  
Hair from black  
To white!?.



# Gale Acuff

Writ

*If I should die before I wake, wake me  
up before I die* I teased Miss Hooker  
after Sunday School class, I'm just having fun  
with her but she frowns and scowls and points her  
finger at me (is it loaded?) and says  
*Get thee behind me, Satan!* which is Thor  
in the comic book - no, it's Shakespeare - no,  
it's Judge Judy - no, it's part of some song  
- no, it's from the Bible, someone said it,  
I knew that I knew it all the time, my  
money's on God or Jesus, say Jesus  
maybe because in my Bible His words

and sentences and paragraphs are all  
in blood, or at least they're red, if I was  
a vampire I could suck 'em, I wonder  
what Miss Hooker would do if I said *that*,  
anyway I was quick to say *Sorry*  
to her and then I turned to leave but she  
called me back and I didn't even hear  
her voice but when I said *Yes ma'am?* she said  
*I'm sorry, Gale, but you mustn't make fun  
of the Holy Word* - she means the Good Book.  
What's *good* about it is at last it ends.  
I don't say that, neither - one day she'll learn.



Jim Ross

## English Composition (Scribner's, 1891)

My two-and-a-half-year-old grandson walked into my study, pulled a book off the shelf of books on reading and writing, and said, "Read me." The book was *English Composition* by Barrett Wendell (Scribner's, 1891). Over and over, I'd placed this book on the discard pile and then pulled it back and placed it in the shelf slot it has occupied for over 25 years. This time, however, I opened it.

Inside the front cover I noticed the handwritten name "W.R. Castle, Jr." followed by an address. I knew the Castles had been connected to my wife's family during the 1890s and early 1900s as Hawaii evolved from a monarchy to a republic to a territory of the United States. No doubt, this book was somehow spirited from the Castle's library to my wife's great grandfathers or directly to her grandmothers. I was sure it came to us immediately from the grandmother, who was the family archivist and book collector. Indeed, her diary from the 1910s and 1920s repeatedly reports her excitement over the arrival of long-awaited books.

I looked into the matter further. It turns out that W.R. Castle's mentor at Harvard was Barrett Wendell, the book's author. Moreover, after graduation, W.R. stayed at Harvard to work alongside Wendell as an English composition instructor and assistant dean. Upon leaving nine years later, W.R. wrote several books before starting a State Department career at the advanced age of 41. Thanks to family connections, he ascended rapidly to the highest ranks. He persistently urged our government to avoid conflict with Japan, claiming heightened tensions would elicit harsh reprisals against his homeland, Hawaii.

I won't be disposing of *English Composition* because I don't want it to become landfill, but where does it belong? Is an 1891 book on composition still relevant? Am I keeping it because I inherited the role of family archivist? Would Harvard like it? What about you?

# Bill Camp

## A Perfect Rainbow

A Good rainbow is hard to find,  
A perfect rainbow nearly impossible.  
I saw one once;  
A dark storm behind, bright sun in front  
The rainbow's arc a perfect curve,  
Its spectrum distinct.  
Roy G. Biv never appeared so majestic,  
So vivid, so distinct.  
Both ends reached fully to the ground.  
In a moment, it vanished  
Because perfection is fleeting.





## Contributors

**Gale Acuff** is the youngest son of former principals, teachers, and writers. Two of his siblings were also teachers. Gale has taught in university writing programs at several university English departments in the US, China, and Palestine. Gale has had hundreds of poems published in journals in several countries and has authored three books of poetry.

**Amirah Al Wassif's** poems have appeared in several print and online publications including *South Florida Poetry*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Hawaii Review*, *The Meniscus*, *The Chiron Review*, *The Hunger*, *Writers Resist*, *Right Now*, and others. Amirah also has a poetry collection, *For Those Who Don't Know Chocolate* (Poetic Justice Books & Arts, 2019), and a children's book, *The Cocoa Boy and Other Stories*.

**Mandy Brown** is a queer Central Texas poet, a 2019 Poetry Half-Marathon winner, and the 2013 recipient of A Room of Her Own Foundation's Tillie Olsen Fellowship. Her poetry has been published in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *Extract(s)*, *Eunoia Review*, and more. Mandy's 7th grade writing teacher said she looked forward to reading Mandy's first book, which set in motion working toward an English degree and writing her first book. Mandy currently teaches writing and history at an alternative school for high-risk students and loves it! Read more at [mandyalysbrown.weebly.com](http://mandyalysbrown.weebly.com).

**Bill Camp's** writing credits include a literary short story and poem in previous issues of *Teach. Write.*, a dark comedy in *Page and Spine*, a science fiction paranormal romance short story in *parAbnormal Digest*, and poetry in *New Author's Journal* and *Lite Lit One*. He currently teaches college composition courses at Tidewater Community College and Norfolk State University. Additionally, he is the recipient of the 2018 Horror Writers Association Rocky Wood Memorial Scholarship in Non-Fiction Writing for a research project on the history of Frankenstein in film and is a current member of the Horror Writers Association.

**Jim Courter** taught freshman writing for nearly thirty years at Western Illinois University before retiring in 2012. All that time, he was writing and publishing fiction and non-fiction, and found that the two experiences functioned as an enriching symbiotic relationship. His fiction and essays have appeared in a variety of publications in the U.S., Canada, and England, including in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. His first novel, *Rhymes with Fool* was published in the spring of 2019 by Peasantry Press.

**Thomas Davison** has been teaching entrepreneur focused business coursework as an adjunct instructor at MTC (Marion Technical College) for the past four years. He is currently teaching at two prison facilities in Marion Ohio. Dr. Davison has been deeply moved by his personal observations and interactions with his incarcerated students. While teaching in the Ohio prison system, he has been motivated to create poems and short stories about the day-to-day lives and experiences of these students.

**Holly Day's** poetry has recently appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Grain*, and *The Tampa Review*. Her newest poetry collections are *In This Place*, *She Is Her Own* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), *A Wall to Protect Your Eyes* (Pski's Porch Publishing), *Folios of Dried Flowers and Pressed Birds* (Cyberwit.net), *Where We Went Wrong* (Clare Songbirds Publishing), *Into the Cracks* (Golden Antelope Press), and *Cross Referencing a Book of Summer* (Silver Bow Publishing).

**Danielle Flewelling** is a 33 year old student at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, North Carolina. She's pursuing a Mechatronics Engineering Associate in Applied Science degree. The inspiration for the story came from looking within herself and her fellow classmates. A future worth dreaming of and one day possibly achieving—it truly did start with deciding to go to college.

**Ana Gardner** taught writing to inner city school students in New Jersey for three years, before moving away to New England. She now (occasionally) works as a teaching consultant, and employs many of her writing course tips & strategies to help teachers make their material more accessible to diverse student needs. Her work has appeared most recently in *TERSE*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Corvid Queen*, and others.

**D. M. Kerr** teaches composition—just not English composition. He teaches introductory programming, where he uses concrete poetry to help students understand a well-written program is one that is a joy to read as well as efficient in its task. He has been inspired by many composition teachers in the past, including Mrs. Selmer, who came to his house during vacation time (when one goes to a boarding school, this is a big thing!) to teach him how to round his letters properly.

**James Kowalczyk** was born and raised in Brooklyn but now lives in Northern California. He is continually amazed at the level of creativity his high school students exhibit. "Words are our friends, choose them carefully" is his favorite quote.

**Marjory E. Leposky** is a filmmaker and children's chapter book author with more than ten years of production experience on a broad spectrum of projects that include TV commercials, music videos for local artists, and feature film productions. Marjory earned degrees in television and media production from Miami Dade College formally Miami-Dade Community College and Florida State University. She says, "Despite my struggles with learning disabilities in school, I am now an author and filmmaker."

**Jennifer Parrack-Rogers** teaches composition and literature at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, NC. Twenty years an instructor, from sea to mountains, JPR began her career at Cape Fear CC, scared to believe she belonged in academia. It is her life's work to welcome her students to feel at home, genuine, in their various voices. Once thought to be more reader than writer, but inspired by students' courage and colleagues' fearlessness, she has recently begun to share her poems.

**Wayne Rapp** has written two books, as well as numerous short stories, essays, and nonfiction pieces for publication. A collection of short stories, *Burnt Siena*, was a finalist for the Miguel Mármol Award. A short story, "In the Time of Marvel and Confusion," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His creative writing has twice been honored with Individual Artist Excellence Awards from the Ohio Arts Council. About his essay, "A Tribute to Teachers," he says, "My wife was a teacher, and there were quite a few teachers in her family. I wrote this originally to salute all of them for their dedication."

**David Rogers'** poems, stories, and articles have appeared in various print and electronic publications, including *The Comstock Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Sky and Telescope*, and *Astronomy* magazine. His latest work is *Roots of the Dark Tower: The Long Quest and Many Lives of Roland*, available from Amazon. More of his work can be read at [Davidrogersbooks.wordpress.com](http://Davidrogersbooks.wordpress.com).

**Jim Ross** resumed creative pursuits in early 2015 after leaving a long career in public health research. He's since published nonfiction, poetry, and photography in over 100 journals and anthologies in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Publications include *Lunch Ticket*, *Kestrel*, *MAKE*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Manchester Review*. His most widely read piece published in *Columbia Journal* describes his experience teaching composition in middle and high schools as a substitute teacher. Jim and his wife—parents of two health professionals and grandparents of four wee ones—split their time between Maryland and West Virginia.

**Sam Sonnier** has had a vagabond career in which he has been a freelance writer, sports journalist, and for the last nine years, an English instructor at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, NC. He earned an M.A. from McNeese State University where he was fortunate to also study in the McNeese State University MFA program under Robert Olen Butler and John A. Wood. Sam and his wife Claire live just outside Asheville in Horse Shoe, NC, where they enjoy hiking, sampling the local culinary and malted delights, and waiting hand-and-foot on their cat, Mookie.

**John L. Stanizzi** is author of numerous collections, his most recent newest, *Sundowning*, just out with Main Street Rag. His poems and creative non-fiction have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *American Life in Poetry*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Stone Cast Review*, and many others. He is also a teaching artist for the national recitation contest, *Poetry Out Loud*. John taught high school English for 25 years and is a former New England Poet of the Year. Currently, teaches literature at Manchester Community College in Manchester, CT where he lives with his wife, Carol, in Coventry. <http://www.johnlstanizzi.com>

**Pat Tompkins** is an editor in northern California. Her poems have appeared in *Plainsongs*, *KYSO Flash*, *Thema*, and other publications. Probably the greatest influence on her writing has been reading, learning what to do and not to do from classics like *The Elements of Style* and poorly written mystery novels.

**Sherre Vernon** has taught composition in grades 6-university and across academic disciplines. She is a believer in a dynamic grammar that allows nouns and verbs to interchange themselves at will and that holds no one prisoner to the Oxford comma. She is a 2019 recipient of the Parent-Writer Fellowship to Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing and has written two award-winning chapbooks: *Green Ink Wings* and *The Name is Perilous*. To Sherre, writing, and the teaching of writing, are tools for connecting us more deeply with ourselves and with each other.

**Leigh Ann Whittle** teaches because she wants to help students discover the power of their words. She holds a B.A. in Communication/Journalism (Elon University); a M.A. in English (East Carolina University); and a M.Ed. in Adult Education (North Carolina State University). Leigh Ann has published in various media and genres both nationally and locally, edited work for second-language academics, and has won writing awards in Alamance County, N.C., where she resides with her husband and two children.

**Hunter Wrenn** is husband to an amazing wife, daddy to three wonderful children, and an aspiring engineering student. This short story started as a class assignment but quickly became a brief tale of someone's final thoughts and moments after being unable to deal with their own struggles in life. He encourages people to talk about their own problems and seek help, should they need it.

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