

The Journal

Writers Guild of Virginia



Poetry - Photography - Prose

December 2024



The Journal

Winter 2024

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Wrong Choice

Peggy Newcomb

That day started out as a typical Saturday with everyone having their own schedules. The warm April sunshine gave no warning of just how memorable the day would be.



I headed out the door and down the driveway with full intentions of attending my meeting after dropping my cat off at the vet. About a mile from my house, I rounded a curve, and there in the middle of my lane was a tractor. The driver's top speed was scarcely faster than a turtle. Mine? An easy 55 mph! What to do?

I had no idea that so many choices could flash through one's mind at lighting speed. All I could see was my car smashing into the rear of this bright blue tractor...the farmer in his red plaid shirt and straw-hat sailing through the air toward some unknown destination. He'll be killed! What should I do? Swerve to the right... off the road...that'll do it! Wait! There's a deep ditch. What will happen to me? I'll flip over. Break my neck! Catch on fire! Hey, I'd like to survive this too! What should I do? Swerve to the left? Do it...miss the tractor! What's this? A CAR! Where did it come from? Head to the side of the road. Get off the road! In slow motion the two cars collided. The crinkling sound of metal bending and folding accordion style filled my ears. That sound! Oh, God, what have I done?

What is this sticky stuff? Where am I?

Slowly I was drawn back from the quiet blackness of my unconscious mind. I couldn't see. I was patting something, but what? Whatever it was, it was covered with a sticky substance. What is this? What has happened? Where am I? Why is this sticky?

Slight awareness of a dim light appeared. I was not seeing, but in the darkness, there was a faint glow...as though seen through a dense fog in the night. Slowly the fog lifted, and light shone through the car-door window. What has happened? I've got to get up. This sticky stuff is slippery. I hurt. Get up. You've got to get yourself up. You've got to help yourself. I hurt so bad. Don't think about the pain. Oh, pull, Peggy. Get yourself off the floor. Get up! Get onto the seat. It hurts! You can do it. Pull on the steering wheel. There...almost...a little more. Push with your legs. Okay. Okay. You've made it! You're up. Now, rest. I must rest.

The pain was starting to reach my brain. Now, I remembered the event. I slumped on the steering wheel...using it for support. I wanted so badly to take a deep breath, but the pain in my chest and ribs gripped me like a vice.

Okay, pull yourself together. You've got to do something.

"Lady, are you all right? (Do I look all right? I wondered.) Here're some rags. (I rolled my eyes. The rags were bright blue.) They're clean, lady. Put them on your eye to stop the bleeding."

Bleeding? Why does he say to use these rags? I'm not bleeding. And even if I am, I'm not going to use these car rags on my wound. What I don't need is germs. This pain is quite enough.

I managed to thank the man, and he said he'd call an ambulance. Well, hooray!

As he left, I peeked in the side mirror, the rear-view mirror having been rendered nonfunctional on the wrong side of the windshield. Oh, no! My stomach turned. I felt hot. I could feel beads of sweat along my hairline. No, no you can't vomit...the ribs...the ribs. The pain will be worse.

Control yourself. Don't look again. Slowly, I regained my composure. I must look. I must see how bad it is. Cautiously, I leaned toward the mirror again. Okay, you can take it. You've got to check this out. I was still holding the bright blue rag. As I peered apprehensively into the mirror, what at first had frightened me was now becoming a reality. Like it or not.

The two-inch crimson gash in my forehead now lay gaping open, skin dangling, but the blood had stopped flowing. I was thankful for the lack of action. It was bad enough in still life. This meant I wouldn't have to use the bright blue rag. Hooray!

My eyes stared back at me through owl-like circles of partially dried blood, which had dripped ghoulishly down my cheeks. I looked at my hands. Now I was getting the picture. The seat...I had been patting the seat and...and the blood was on it. Wait...my cat! Oh, glory! She was here too! But where is she now?

The cat-carrying box was in the floorboard and still intact. I had been thrown on top of it.

"Dusty, are you okay?"

No sound came from the box.



Passing of an Enigma

Grid Michal

It was quiet and cool in her apartment, deathly cold in her bedroom. The nurse had taken a dinner break. What I saw took any appetite I might have had and broke my heart. She tried to lick her lips. I took a sponge swab, dipped it in water, and wet her lips. I didn't want her to choke on too much water, so I settled back in my chair and waited for the muted "tick" of the morphine pump to ease her pain. Lids closed on her beautiful gray eyes...closed? More like scrunched. "Tick." Barely audible. Eyelids relaxed, closed but not scrunched. Quiet, cool. Dry lips. I moistened them again. "Tick." The corners of her lips curled up the tiniest bit. She'd do that when one of her two sons "got on her last nerve," or when one of her students used a double negative or said "ain't." The net results were decidedly different. A teacher couldn't send an eighteen-year-old bearded student to his room, even then.



Hers was a world of authority. Born of parents who were natural authoritarians—he with the IRS, she as head of the Girl Scouts, and both involved in the rebuilding of historic churches and Girl Scout birthplaces. Both "color blind" to race, protective of their daughter, yet ensuring she wasn't placed on a pedestal. She graduated from a public high school, with her only recounted memory—to her sons, anyway—being of a boy nicknamed "Stinky," and how badly she felt for him, even if he was. Nothing about prom, sports, honor role. The only personal bit that followed her was her desire to have a dimple in her chin, and she gave in to that by squeezing her chin together at night and putting a strip of tape across it until the morning, when, inevitably, close inspection proved there had been no progress. If God had wanted her to have a dimple, He would have provided a different bone structure, but there was no telling that to a teen.

She distanced herself as much as possible from the authority at home, yet to know her was to understand that going to the University of Missouri was a mileage distancing, having no bearing on a defiant attitude. Since “defiant” was not in her lexicon, it was assumed that she went there for the altruistic reason of acquiring a degree involving English.

Which she didn't. After a year or so at “Mizzou,” she came back to the East Coast to Duke, where she graduated with a degree in English. She had a roommate named Sue, who was about to change the course of her personal history.

Her eyelids scrunched just moments before the “tick.” As I wet her lips and re-covered her skeletal body with the sheet from home she'd just cast aside, her eyelids relaxed, and the ends of her lips curled slightly. “Tick.” A student? A son? A secret?

A wedding party spilled into the street from The Jefferson Hotel across the street. Her lips straightened into disapproval. I didn't want to hazard a guess.

There's a lot to be said for knowing somebody rather than something. It's beneficial if you and someone else know both. And through the boyfriend of the graduate's roommate, the graduate went to work at the Richmond Times-Dispatch/News Leader as the first female in the nation to be a copywriter at the vaunted male bastion high in the building. The memory's pressure must have gotten to her at that moment as tiny beads of sweat that should have been diverted to her lips popped up at her receding hairline. I gently wiped them away and dampened her lips again. “Tick.”

The nurse returned and handed me a lemonade. The patient was our life's lemon; we drank the lemonade as a curative. The nurse and I noted the irony simultaneously. She sat in a chair in the corner. Glancing her way, I noticed her eyelids were closed, tiny puffs of breath parting her lips. “Tick.” I didn't

begrudge her nap. I was awake. If there were a problem, the instant I called, she'd be there. A life fluttering in, ready to care for a life ready to flutter away.

There are pictures of the graduate, a truly beautiful young woman, battling being left-handed as she strikes away sentences and rearranges men's thoughts, as a ticker news machine spews news about WWII behind her onto the floor.

The desk where she worked used to be a huge ashtray with foul language burning the edge. But somebody knew somebody, and the graduate's goombah was the editor, a man widely respected through the South for his intelligent, conservative thoughts. A sign appeared in the middle of the desk late one night. It was properly painted and mounted:

NO SMOKING. NO CURSING. YOUR EMPLOYMENT RESTS ON YOUR BEHAVIOR. THANK YOU.

Of course, no one was fired, even when quitting smoking cold turkey. Even as she started smoking, no one would tell.

WWII brought a new fervor to the nation: everyone would do something for our men. The graduate had a rare type of blood that she gave willingly, sometimes too often, but when her goombah asked if she'd like to ride up to the Broad Street Railroad Station in his car and avoid the exhaust-filled city buses, she took him up on the offer. The elderly chauffeur left the parking garage at 6th and Franklin, respecting the ages of his passengers and the car, swiveling his creaky, snapping neck left and right as he entered Broad Street. No complaints about his driving. No sir.

At approximately the same time, arriving at one of the boarding tracks, was a young railroad engineer. His job with Electromotive was to oversee the installation of diesel engines in 2000 series locomotives and follow a break-neck, break-in route from Milwaukee to St.

Louis to Richmond, where he and his co-worker would let the engines cool from 125 MPH-runs, go get a few gallons of oysters, use the men's room, and head back to eat oyster stew brewed in front of a super-heated engine room.

It is important in the way the stars align to know that the graduate's goombah gave blood before she did, slowing her access to the "assembly line." She had given blood only three weeks prior, and after donating this pint, rose from the table feeling light-headed, and started toward the other side of the station. She did a slightly confused stutter turn and headed for the women's restroom, not noticing there was no WO before MEN. She fell through the door of the men's room into the arms of a young, virile train engineer whose engines idled at the tracks below. There is no record of what next transpired, though it would have been proper for the young lady to return to the newspaper the way she had left there, and with whom she had left it.

There was—nor is—any courtship with this young man recorded. It would have been mesmerizing to be a fly on the wall at the first "boy meets her parents" meeting. Granddad would have asked the young man what he did for work, and the young man would have told him that he came from a filthy rich family that owned half of Chicago, that he had several airplanes and a different car for every day of the week, but he was doing what he loved, and that was driving locomotives to try to break them.

Granddad might have said, "How do you have time to come here to see my daughter?" and the young engineer would have given her a glance and told her dad, the high-ranking IRS executive, "My father was the attorney for the Chicago Mob, as you probably know in your office. The Depression hit, we lost everything, but my father wasn't resilient and now he's institutionalized." A father, ready to say "over my dead body" to his daughter, would look in her eyes and realize the futility of even thinking a thought like that.

I wiped her forehead again, dipping one end of a swab in petroleum jelly, the other in water and wet her lips first, then lightly coated them with lubricant. That pleased her, and I was glad I remembered the nurse told me to try it. But there was still no record of a courtship. "Tick."

For a while she worked at the paper, and it's assumed he continued with Electromotive until they married: the photographer shot a beautiful picture of her in a very expensive gown. There are no pictures of her now-husband or the ceremony. No one kept a diary. There was one bookmark: October 19, 1945, when I, as son number 1, came into the world. There is no record of her continued employment and nothing about the enigmatic woman who on July 29, 1949, gave birth to son number 2. Three years later, she was expecting a daughter but lost her when she fell on her belly after tripping on the steps in a restaurant.

There is no record of the young mother's early married life with or without progeny. There are only snippets of conversations recalled. Her two sons were hellions. She and her husband voted, but there was no family record of their politics, nor her parents' proclivities, though in that day Virginian WASPS generally voted a straight Democratic ticket.

I straightened the sheets again, wondering how a young woman with such a strong parental background could be so prominent a teacher, but there is no record of her return to school to obtain her teaching certificate. "Tick." Yet every time one of her sons is in the grocery store or meets someone on the street or at a party, the first comment is "I had your mother as my English teacher, and she was so wonderful!" Or "My son/daughter was failing English until your mother...."

There is no record of her giving herself to her students other than hearing who's speaking properly, and knowing they're of an age she probably taught them. There is some record of a son driving hundreds of miles on weekends to help his mother grade papers as she dealt with

the effects of chemotherapy. There is no record of this graduate “being someone” at any stage of her life. The scrapbook her elder son assembled for posterity is woefully thin, as is she. If one said she “basked” in the shadows of her parents, her husband, and her sons and their accomplishments, that would imply pleasure, and that would not be a valid implication. She basked in their individual accomplishments, but it was not until her writing, titled “Legacy,” submitted for her MFA that the truth emerged, showing a wife tortured by a husband’s sarcasm to the point of driving her to the city where we are now, where she typed on a “new-fangled thing” called a word processor that could do corrections without ruining the paper.

She succumbed to the cathartic lure of writing’s joy and got the ugly stuff out of the way first but followed with free verse that is full of jealousy and longing for physical relationships. “Tick.” She was unwilling to gracefully branch from an active family tree, instead suffering the ignominy of being a baby-producer. She never accepted the accolades of others, always being a daughter, wife, mother, and teacher, never being the self she wanted to be.

“Tick.” Her eyelids stayed scrunched. I tapped my foot, but she didn’t respond. I beckoned the nurse, who took her vitals. Her pulse was slow and steady, respiration shallow, blood pressure low. “Tick.” She had made her peace but was just waiting. For one of the first times, I noted she was in control.

“Tick, tock.” A knock on the fireproof door. It was the younger brother whom the elder’s wife had encouraged to hate, and through their ignorance, put married family ahead of blood family. The elder son acquiesced. It was without a doubt the dumbest decision he ever made, spoiling ten years when two brothers who adored each other were as adrift as their mother was. The forgiveness would be years away, but now the tension was palpable as the younger brother took his seat. It was difficult for them to

exchange information or platitudes. The nurse, used to the repeating of current stats, answered the younger brother’s questions as I let myself out the apartment door, into the hall and down the elevator to the parking lot, checking for unwanted company all the way.

As I exited my car at home my business phone rang. Racing to answer it, I slipped and stunned myself on the shop door. The phone stopped ringing. In a minor daze, I saw that the call came from her apartment. I returned the call. My brother tried to talk but couldn’t.

The nurse said, “Your mother died before you even reached the interstate. The most interesting thing was the corners of her lips slightly turning up with her last breath. Almost as though she was getting on a flight as a first-class passenger.”

Twenty years later as I read “Legacy” again, I finally cried.

A Poverty of Dreams

A Native American Olympic Story

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

It's 1964. Japan is hosting the Olympic Games—the first Asian city to do so. The games are being telecast for the first time around the world.



Among the runners in the 10,000-meter race is twenty-six-year-old, William Mervin (Billy) Mills, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation, unknown, unnoticed, but determined. Orphaned at twelve, he grew up in abject poverty on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota with no paved roads, no electricity, plus what he described as a poverty of dreams.

Refusing to be held down by his circumstances, he graduated from the Haskell Indian Institute, then earned a scholarship to the University of Kansas. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the Marines. In 1964, he was a 1st Lieutenant in the Reserves. His running success at the Institute and the University prompted him to try out for the Olympics in Tokyo. Again, success.

Billy arrives and is greeted with racist slurs. The day of the race, he goes to the track alone, no coach, no entourage. He hears his name announced, waves to the crowd. The gun sounds, the runners surge down the track. Billy is behind. After several meters, he feels faint. He will later learn he is an undiagnosed diabetic. As his blood sugar dips, it takes every ounce of determination to keep going. Miraculously, he works his way to the front and past the pack.

His vision comes and goes. Part of the time he is running blind, but he doesn't stop. No American has ever won this race. He will pull off one of the greatest upsets in Olympic history that day, unmatched by any American until this year's 2024 Olympics.

Billy set a world record of 28 minutes, 24.4 seconds. He continued to break records in the years that followed. In 1976, he was inducted into the U. S. National Track and Field Hall of Fame under both his English name and his Oglala Lakota name, Tamakhoche Thehila.

On Friday, August 2, twenty-seven-year-old Joshua Cheptegel of Uganda beat Billy's record

with a 26:43.14 run for the gold. Twenty-three-year-old Berihu Aregawi of Ethiopia won the silver with 26:43.44. Twenty-seven-year-old American, Grant Fisher, took the bronze with 26:43.46.

As I watched Fisher battle for that third position, I hoped (and I suspected) Billy was watching, cheering him on. Fisher also won a bronze in the 5000, the first American to medal in both events at any Olympics. He has the honor of being the first American to medal in the 10,000 since 1964, but Billy still holds the record for the gold.

Billy would go on to become a great humanitarian. He co-founded a non-profit aimed at helping Native Americans fulfill their basic needs of food, water, and shelter while gaining self-sufficiency and self-esteem. He still travels the country, empowering Native people. In 2012, President Obama presented him with the Presidential Citizens Medal for his continuing work with American Indian youth. Oglala Lakota Billy Mills has demonstrated that a poverty of dreams can lead to a life of dreams realized, for himself and others.

Olympics Defined

Opening the door to dreams

Letting go of fear

Yes to hard work and sacrifice

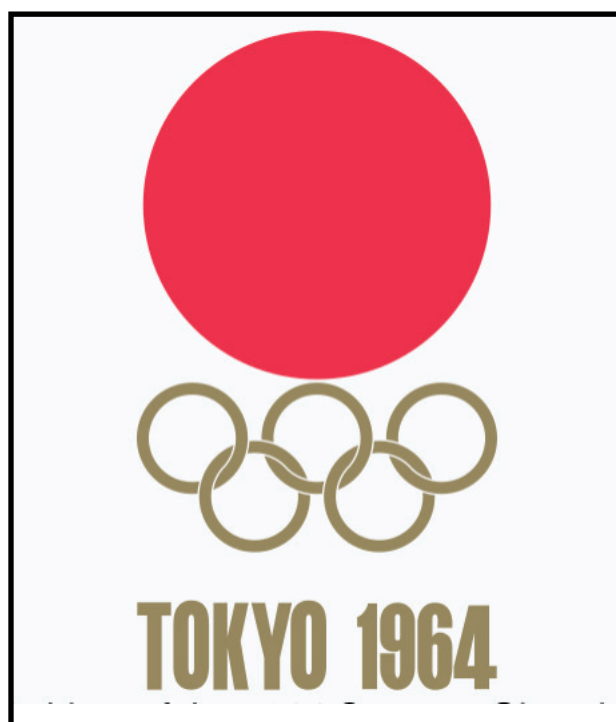
Moving past failures

Putting yourself out there

Inspiring the world

Caring about honesty and fairness

Striving every day to be the best



The Customer is Always Right

Susan Williamson

I looked up from the book I was reading to see Louise McCoy enter my paint, wallpaper, and decorating store. I sighed deeply and rose to greet her.



“Hi, can I help you?”

“I really do want to get those vertical blinds for my den,” she said, for the third time that summer.

“We’ll need to come measure,” I answered, also for the third time, hoping that vague answer would suffice for the moment as it had in the past.

“Can you do that today?” she asked.

I explained I would prefer that my friend and installer, Mary, do the measurements. “I’ll see if she can come tomorrow, and I’ll call you. We’ll bring sample books with us.”

I had been putting Louise off for some time because the McCoys, Elroy and Louise, could be, shall we say, difficult. They owned our small town's furniture and appliance store. In my previous career as editor of the local paper, I had written a feature about the store, and Elroy told me it was all about the future for their children who both worked there. Then, when the store went up in flames one midnight, I shot pictures and wrote the story from the point of view of their son, watching his future go up in smoke.

As soon as the weekly paper came out, I received an angry phone call from Elroy. "Those kids didn't build that store. I did. That was Louise and me, the kids weren't even born then." They rebuilt the store, but they no longer advertised in our local paper.

I doubted whether Louise would actually submit the deposit and go through with the order. And who would pay for it? Rumor had it that Elroy and Louise were divorced, but still living in the same house—but I didn't know any of that for sure.

Mary was available the next day, so after I closed the store, we drove the few blocks to the McCoy household. I wanted Mary to measure and see the windows because the installer needs to know exactly where and how the blinds will be hung. Mary could do anything. She was a tested member of Mensa, read voraciously, had helped to build her own log cabin, created beautiful, beaded jewelry, acted and directed in our local community theater, and raised sheep. We had bonded over horses and books. We were the kind of friends who could finish each other's sentences.

Louise answered the door, wearing a bathrobe, and invited us in. The den was a large dark room with a brick fireplace and wood paneling that had been the latest style when the house was built sometime in the late '60s or early '70s. Oh, to have been a paneling salesman then.

Louise had been trying to update the room with a blue sofa, mauve pillows, and mauve lamps—it was the late '80's season of blue and mauve. Elroy sat, tilted back in his recliner watching television from the center of the room. We spoke awkwardly and looked toward the windows. The sofa and end tables sat in front of them. We asked for a step ladder and then moved the furniture out of the way. It was clear from the dust and debris that the couch had not moved for a very long time.

Setting the sample books on a table for Louise to peruse, we commenced to measure and make notes about which side the controls should be located and so forth. When we were finished and started to replace the furniture, Louise asked, "By the way, could you vacuum back there before you put the couch back? I haven't been able to do that since my surgery. You know I had three heart surgeries. They cut me open from here to here," she said, opening her robe to display her naked body and pointing at the scars. Some sights are hard to unsee.

We located the vacuum in the closet she indicated and proceeded to vacuum around the room and around Elroy who remained stretched out in his recliner. The rumor mill had implied the divorce was because he had an affair—ugh—the thought of that was almost as unsettling as Louise's naked body.

After some consultation, Louise chose light blue textured vertical blinds and promised to bring a check by the store once I had completed the estimate and called her with the cost. We required a deposit of half the cost on custom orders. But she wasn't eager to let us go.

"You know, I lost forty pounds after my surgeries," she said. "None of my old clothes fit. I'll bet they might fit you," she said to me. "Let's see if you want some of them." We dutifully followed her back to her bedroom while I tried to think up an excuse to leave. "I guess you know Elroy and I are divorced, but he stays in the back bedroom."

I was not above buying and wearing thrift store clothes. Operating a paint and decorating store where I frequently mixed and occasionally spilled paint demanded that my work wear be inexpensive. But the thoughts that her taste and mine might blend, that I might weigh forty pounds more than she did, or that those clothes had touched that body left me speechless. I finally stammered, “No thanks, I don’t need any clothes right now.”

We practically ran to the car, where Mary and I dissolved into laughter. We snorted and laughed on the short drive back to the store and discussed whether payment would be forthcoming.

I doubted we would see the deposit, but I dutifully figured the estimate and called Louise. She arrived the next day, check in hand, eager to know when the blinds would arrive.

When the shipment came in, I called Mary, and we scheduled an installation date. She hung the blinds. Fortunately, Elroy was out that day, making the process slightly less strange. Louise was thrilled with her new window coverings, and Mary carefully showed her how to operate them. She handed Mary a check for the balance due on the blinds and installation. I chided myself for my misgivings and hesitation but made sure to quickly deposit the check.

Living in a small town means that everyone knows how to always find you. The next morning, I was eating my normal breakfast of shredded wheat and banana when the phone rang. It was Louise, babbling in a state of panic, “My blinds, my pretty blue blinds have turned white!”

Knowing that colors can change appearance according to the light, I asked, “Do you have the lights on? Maybe they just look white in the dark.”

“No. They changed colors. I swear. I need you to come out right away.”

I agreed and drove to her house before opening the store. As I approached, I tried to think of how to deal with this—what kind of crazy was she? She met me at the door and quickly drew me into the family room. When I saw the blinds, I tried very hard not to laugh. Somehow, she had rotated the white street side of each panel to the inside while the light blue texture now faced outward. I quickly rotated the blinds back to their normal position and showed her the problem.

“Oh,” she said sheepishly, “I really thought they had changed.”

As soon as I walked into the store, I called Mary. “Louise called me in a state of panic,” I said.

“What?” said Mary. “Surely the blinds didn’t fall down.” Mary was a sturdy and practical New Englander who was confident in her skills.

“No, but . . .” By now I was laughing so hard I couldn’t speak. “She—she said they had changed color overnight. I thought maybe she hadn’t turned the lights on. But she had rotated the blue side to the outside.”

“Oh,” was all she could say before dissolving into laughter.

Echoed Silence

Scott Clawson



“Ruby Flash!” - Ruby-throated Hummingbird flashing throat colors and balancing a raindrop on his beak.

-Scott Clawson

Slowly, I scan the barren wasteland
Fatigue, it seems, has become my partner
Endless twilight fills the portals
Mocking my thoughts of restless wonder

Ghostly sounds of **monotonous** creaking
Slowly, I scan the barren wasteland
Caught upward in this icy entrapment
I think lovingly of my love left home

Relinquishing thoughts to my **secluded** surroundings
I listen intently for past conversations
Slowly, I scan the barren wasteland
Tearfully realizing I'm in echoed silence

I smooth the **embroidery** passionately sewn
Hoping love will **thaw** this isolation
Fearful of a coming darkness
Slowly, I scan the barren wasteland

This poem is in the style of a Quatern. A quatern is a French form of poetry which is a type of quaternion, a poem that is divided into four parts. A quatern is a 16-line poem made up of four quatrains which are four-line stanzas. Each four-line stanza is written in verse with eight syllables in each line. The refrain of a quatern repeats the first line of the stanza as the second line of the second stanza, the third line of the third stanza, and the fourth line of the fourth stanza.

Additionally, this was a five-word writing prompt exercise which I chose to use in a quatern. The five words that were in the prompt were fatigue, monotonous, secluded, embroidery and thaw.

Reality

Carmen C. Crosby



Yes, they may say you are perfect, a crystal, a gem, living in a cave.
However, you're nothing but a common rock, just like the rest of us.

Yes, you and I have differences. Some rocks are rough. Some have sharp edges.
Some are colorful, and others dull, but in the end,
we are all just rocks created with a variety of personalities.
We are living, and we are beautiful no matter who says we aren't.

It doesn't matter what we think of each other,
but remember you have no right to pride yourself over others.

A Blue Wheelbarrow

James L. Garrett



You don't know me but
you probably know my cousin,
A. Red Wheelbarrow. He's famous.
It's easy to be famous when
millions of school students read about him.
Students have never been assigned
garden supply catalogs to read.
That's where you'll find me,
listed last in "Tools."
Red doesn't have to expend
any effort,
lying around all day
on a bunch of words,
being admired.

But I don't have that luxury.
A real wheelbarrow, like me, has no time to rest.
Work all day and at day's end,
I'm left outside
standing on my nose.
My blue suit left
worn and ragged and not famous at all.

Starliner Roller Coaster

James L. Garrett

The sun finally set on the wooden coaster whose stardom began on Memorial Day in '63.

For 41 years, we riders loved her – loved the slow crawl up 70 feet, the anticipation of that first drop, and with hearts in our throats and hands in the air, we sped along through the “Mouth of the Dragon,” up, down, and back, aging with her through summers’ years.

Rides migrated from other parks from time to time, some staying, others moving on. The Shockwave (“Double Armed Ranger”) came in '92, eventually leaving for Queensland. Other rides included Dante’s Inferno, the Spider, Big Eli Ferris Wheel, the Dragon, the Abominable Snowman. But the Starliner was the headliner.

She was the first coaster built in Florida, and its oldest.

She thrilled her last passengers in Panama City migrating to Cypress Gardens in '26. Two years later she gave her last ride as Florida’s oldest wooden maverick.



Possibility Games— The Paralympics

Sharon Canfield Dorsey



How do they do it...

Swim laps blind with only a tap on the head to tell them they've reached the end of the pool?

Execute a form of wheelchair rugby that resembles bumper cars gone wild?

Play basketball with no legs in wheelchairs that can do wheelies in an instant?

Win at volleyball while sitting on the floor, moving faster on their butts than we can with two good legs?

Run track without sight, guided by a partner, attached by their wrists?

Earn gold medals in archery without arms?

Navigate the long jump by sound, rather than sight?

They accomplish these amazing feats because they have turned their disabilities into possibilities.

They also share, with able-bodied athletes, a hunger for excellence and a relentless drive toward victory.

A forty-six-year-old road racer with nineteen medals put it best... "I never say never."

A Ukrainian Athlete's Dual Reality

Sharon Canfield Dorsey

In Paris, Ukrainian athletes won eleven medals. They dedicated their wins to their country and the athletes who were not there – the ones who joined the military to fight for their country's freedom and never returned.

At home, their families sweep shattered glass from apartment windows and wait for the sirens to go off again, wondering if they must endure another night of shelling, wondering how they will feed their families tomorrow.

Many have left the shelter of homes, possibly forever, to seek refuge in neighboring countries without even the necessities of life. They walk miles to the border, carrying children, leading others, knowing an uncertain future awaits.

Many who remain, line up to receive their weapons, then march off to join neighbors on the front lines. Those left behind pray their husband, father, mother, son, daughter will be one of the lucky ones to survive the fighting.

The joy of competing in the Olympics and the satisfaction of winning is tinged with grief for the hundreds of thousands lost – tortured, executed, buried in mass graves in burned-out cities. They wonder with the rest of the world, how and when this will end.



The Moon Shined

DM Frech



Sound Evening - DM Frech

Gazing high past stars
past worrisome fear,
doors that never open
stay sealed even after
hammers slam hinges,
pound frame, burn holes
in panels, still don't open
still stay shut
near corners of our room
where buried thought slunk
under the house
tweets and whispers
labored for truth
the truth of being, my being
your being, our love and luster,

our boils, our tarnished
hasty scuffles, there
the moon shined
in serene marvel
to ease the wound
of duplicity
betrayal in alleys
fraught with lies
the moon shined
past doors, through floor
the shine glistened with hope
endurance past our skirmish
of unfaithful deeds
to say, to stay, to struggle.



Duck Morning - DM Frech



CO Lake - DM Frech



Lake Smith - DM Frech



Rock Climb - DM Frech



This Way - DM Frech



Venice Arch - DM Frech



Venice Way - DM Frech



Venice - DM Frech

Baltimore

"Man, it's hard just to live." Randy Newman

Reyn Kinzey



Six men died.
They came here.
From Mexico, Guatemala,
Honduras, Nicaragua.
They didn't bring fentanyl.
They didn't rape anyone.
They didn't pollute the blood.
They came to work the roads,
to support their families,
here and at home.
As migrants have for centuries,
From Ireland and England,
Europe, Africa, and Asia.

They died the American dream,
as have too many others.
We should honor their memory.
No people should be maligned.

Good Friday, 2024

Otters on the Dock

"If you believe in miracles..." The Jefferson Starship

Reyn Kinzey



Wilson Creek - Rebecca Day

Just after Epiphany, two otters on the dock,
on the first of the fingered docks,
still underwater at high tide.

Two otters playing,
then more than playing.

Which is good:

God created creation to pro-create.

I try to be quiet,
but the moment I open the back door,
they dive back into the creek,
cleverer than I am,
hopefully with child,
to continue the world without end.

The Feast of Saint Hillary, 2024

Orange Soul

David Reid Brown

Look! See!

They're not hard to spot.
They ooze enthusiasm and slather joy
like a creamy moisturizer,
gladness like jellied aloe vera.

“Happy” is hard-wired into their motherboard.
They are the center pin of fun and delight,
spelling “optimism” with all CAPS,
fueling your life with hope and laughter
for the long journey.

Everyone *should* have one in their life.

They can drop a heaping tablespoon of
sugar-free sugar into your day—
complete sweetness,
without any concern for calories or cavities.

Everyone *needs* one in their life.

Their radiance envelopes you
and overexposure causes
no burns, blisters, or peeling.
One can stare into their brightness
without hurting their eyes or
having to turn away.

Everyone *must* have one in their life.

Go! Find your Orange Soul!
Be inspired, free your imagination—
then live your best life,
so others can spot you too.



Coffee Craft

David Reid Brown

An a.m. bonding ritual,
born of trips across the Shenandoah,
cemented in twenty-one years of Reveille:
a piping-hot cup, cold cereal, a crisp apple
(repeat).

First and following sips
mellow my mood and mind
into dreamy satisfaction.
Amazing how prayer plus caffeine
can polish a personality into a high gloss shine!

What angels are present
when inspiration flows,
drip-to-stream,
through the filter to fill the pot
with Java or Joe?

I capture fire thoughts on paper,
free-verse flickers that settle and cool
to form haiku and sonnets.
Pithy pools of artistry and force,
that ruffle the feathers of complacency.

Billions would agree
among human vices
this is least of the worst,
something all can live with
and most never without.

Without a Decision

David Reid Brown

Congratulations, you're here!

Somebody decided that you should
occupy space, make good use of oxygen,
and thought you should matter.

Because without a decision, you don't get to
be or see or experience any of these things.

Whether you were a surprise, planned for, or forced upon,
you were still a longshot, a gamble.
Somebody made a choice to set their free will free
just to get you here.

Everything *you* was born from that decision.
Everything you've become sprouted from a fertile seed.
Even your passions and deeply held beliefs
are rooted in that first cry of shock over leaving
the warmth of the womb.

Without a decision,
you don't get the chance to make more of *you*
in your own image, after your own likeness.
Nope! Nothing but blank mirrors
staring back at you.

Your presence?
Already decided, can't be denied.
Your purpose?
Well, you'll have to check in with
your Creator for that,
not the XX and XY contributors
but the *actual* Creator,
the One who brought life then broke the mold,
to ensure there would be
no copies or counterfeits
of the one and only
you.

Whorls

Grid Michal

Grandmother looked at the back of my young,
exceedingly round head and said,
“You have double whorls. You’ll travel far!”
Silly me! I thought she said “girls,” not whorls
and “car,” not “far.”

So, I made it my mission to always have two girls,
promising each a together-trip
sharing my datin’ car with my brother,
always with car, always with girls, And,
jumping up like Alfalfa’s, whorls.
I crooned with Sinatra

“When I was twenty-one, it was a very good year...”
Lord, yes it was!
Dozens of girls, thousands of cars,
after-hours expensed in fine bars.
giving my all to support my family.
I never saw them leave.
My children grew without me.
From the nest they flew to raise their
own broods more wisely.

Frank sang, “I’m in the autumn of my years,”
as I too point with pride to my progeny.
My standard-bearers, but no bars, to each one car. We’ll
move soon so our kids can help us deal
with our mess, our muss, and they’ll cuss.
Our little girls are brought to our room on holidays
guided by their parents, dutifully.
Our cars are now vans with ramps to wheel us
to doctors whose nurses “tsk” with Medicare forms. My
whorls gone, our together-trip is now to our room.



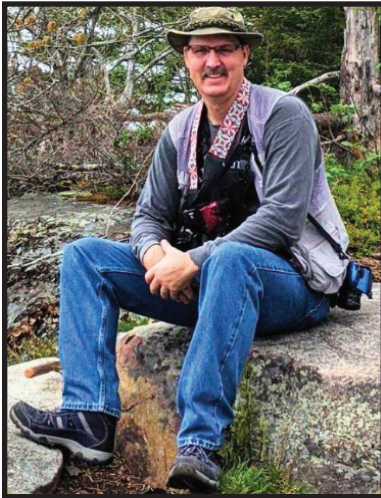
David Reid Brown

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

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

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

email: davidreidbrown1@gmail.com



Scott Clawson

J. Scott Clawson is a US Army Veteran living with his wife, Angie, on Gwynn's Island, VA. His military service and experiences in Virginia and Europe shape his writing. The memories from his travels inspire his creativity, and his Army background gives him discipline in storytelling.

Scott loves storytelling and uses his island life to observe and photograph local wildlife in his garden, on the beach, and in wetlands. These experiences inspire fun, imaginative stories for children.

In addition to writing, Scott enjoys photography, capturing nature and architecture. He also loves gardening, cooking, and entertaining with his wife.



Carmen Crosby

Reality is Carmen's first poem. She wrote it in 2023. She is now seventeen years old and has been a victim of bullying at her high school. Carmen's aunt, Gwen Keane (a published author and Writers Guild of Virginia Board member) encourages her to continue expressing her thoughts through writing.



Sharon Canfield Dorsey

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

<https://www.sharoncanfielddorsey.com>



DM Frech

DM Frech, a versatile writer with a BFA and MFA in dance from New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, is deeply connected to nature. She is a member of several writing organizations, including The Muse, Hampton Roads Writers, the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Writers Guild of Virginia, James River Writers, KPC Writers, AWP, and Virginia Writers. Her diverse writing skills encompass poetry, children's books, fiction, non-fiction, screenplays, and photography. She walks the earth by the grace of God and enjoys hugging trees!

As an award-winning writer, her creative work has been featured in various publications. Recently, Finishing Line Press published her poetry chapbooks, *Quiet Tree* and *Words From Walls*, which are available on the FLP website, as well as on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. For more information, visit <https://www.amazon.com/author/dmfrech>.



Jim Garrett

Jim is a retired English and AP teacher from Florida, who lives in Williamsburg, Virginia. He is a member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Writers Guild of Virginia, and the James City Poets. Jim is a former U.S. Marine, a retired marathoner, and an avid reader. He has published two books of poetry, *Walls* and *Memory's Shadows*.

Jim can be reached at email: jsgarrett70@gmail.com.



Reyn Kinzey

I was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. I went to UVA, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, so I hung around and got an MA, and M. Ed. and even finished the course work for a Ph.D. But I never finished my dissertation (actually, I never started one: my attention span isn't that long).

Still not knowing what I wanted to do with my life, I took a job teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University, where I taught for 20 years, both full time and in the night school.

From academia, I drifted into market research, which proved a good fit. For 25 years, Rebecca Day and I ran Kinzey & Day Qualitative Research. We had a good run, working for clients such as Hilton, Disney, Anthem, and various universities.

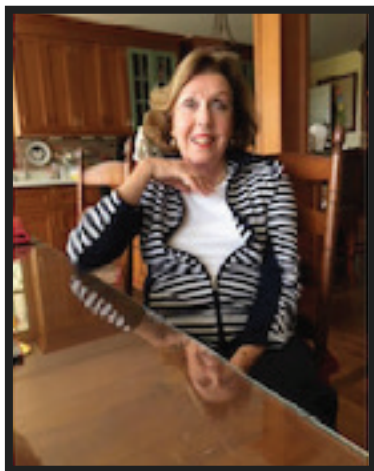


Grid Michal

I have spent fifty of my seventy-five years working on marine engines, which has made my hands gnarled and better suited for typing. I enjoy helping people fix their engines over the phone and love to add humor to lighten serious situations.

During my twelve years with the Hertz #1 Club, I learned to be kind. I ask simple questions like, "Did you install the safety lanyard?" or "Did you connect all the battery cables?" I once helped a customer who had the same boat as mine but who could only go one-third as fast. After giving him tips, he invited me fishing, but I declined, even when he offered to send a plane for me. He turned out to be the governor of a southern state, which I discovered when we met years later while I was working as a tech representative.

Each morning, I face different choices: some I will take, and some will lead to stories. I believe in the power of storytelling to connect us all.



Peggy Newcomb

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

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

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



Susan Williamson

I grew up asking my father for a pony. By the time I was 7 we had a whole farm of horses, beef cattle, hogs and sheep. When I was 9 I started reading mysteries--Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys and the Black Stallion books--I loved them all. At the age of 12 I began to help with riding lessons, by the age of 16 I was teaching on my own and have been ever since.

I hold degrees in animal science from the University of Kentucky and the University of California at Davis, where I was a founding member of the polo club.

I write horse mysteries because I love mysteries and all things horse. I met my husband at a horse show, after the horse ran away with me. Our daughter's first word was horse.

Before I started writing fiction, I was a freelance reporter, then a small town newspaper editor. I also joined my husband in operating a horse boarding, breeding, lesson and show facility.

On the Cover



Mary Montague Sikes

Mary Montague is an award-winning author of eight non-fiction books and nine novels. Holder of a BA degree in psychology from the University of Mary Washington and an MFA in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University, Sikes also studied painting, sculpture, printmaking and more at the College of William & Mary. A freelance writer and photographer, she has authored hundreds of articles and photographs published in local, regional, and national newspapers and international magazines.

An award-winning artist, Sikes has shown her paintings in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Her coffee table book, *Hotels to Remember*, was included in a Virginia Festival of the Book travel panel.

From the Flames - Notre Dame de Paris is her latest painting. Cold wax and oil, 24 x 24 inches. It is exhibited at the Crossroads Art Center in Richmond, VA.

French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed world leaders to Paris on Saturday, December 7, for the spectacular reopening ceremony of Notre Dame cathedral, five years after a devastating inferno engulfed the landmark. The inaugural Mass took place on Sunday, December 8, and the cathedral reopened to the public.

Many will remember watching in horror in 2019 as bright orange flames swallowed the 860-year-old Gothic cathedral, huge plumes of smoke billowing into the sky as its famed spire toppled from the Paris skyline.

At the time, Macron vowed the charred remains would be restored and set an ambitious deadline of five years. Fast forward just over 2,000 days and the seemingly impossible has been achieved.

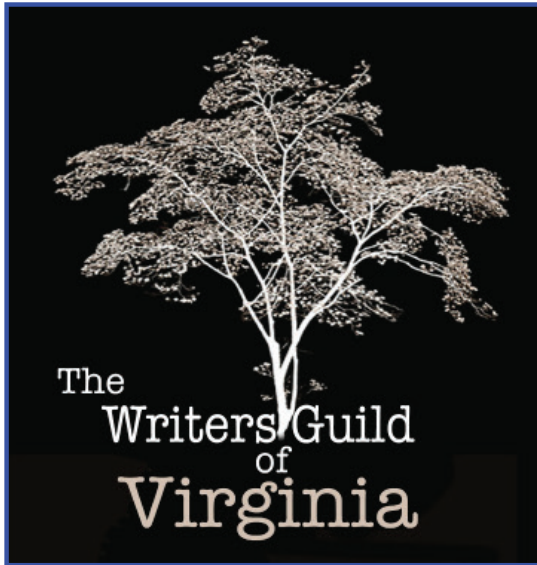
Thousands of artisans, engineers, carpenters and other craftspeople came together to resurrect the beloved UNESCO world heritage site. The limestone walls have been methodically cleaned, while numerous other architectural elements and centuries-old relics meticulously restored.

WGV Literary Arts Festival in Pictures - Thanks to all Who Participated!



More Pictures from our Literary Arts Festival, 2024





The Writers Guild of Virginia is a 501(c)3 organization. Our mission is to nurture writers of all abilities in the crafts of writing, publishing, and marketing their work. We offer a series of programs throughout the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and Williamsburg areas.

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

Thank you for your support!

How to Reach Us

email: https://www.writersguildva@gmail.com

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First Edition 2024 Compiled and Edited by Cindy L. Freeman <https://www.cindylfreeman.com>

Published by High Tide Publications, Inc.

<https://www.HighTidePublications.com>

Deltaville, Virginia

Magazine Design: <https://www.Firebelliedfrog.com>

Printed in the United States of America.

The December edition of *The Journal* - Writers Guild of Virginia:

- *Wrong Choice* Peggy Newcomb;
- *Passing of an Enigma* Grid Michal;
- *A Poverty of Dreams* Sharon Canfield Dorsey;
- *The Customer is Always Right* Susan Williamson;
- *Echoed Silence* Scott Clawson;
- *Reality* Carmen C. Crosby;
- *A Blue Wheelbarrow* James L. Garrett;
- *Starliner Roller Coaster* James L. Garrett;
- *Possibility Games – The Paralympics* Sharon Canfield Dorsey;
- *A Ukrainian Athlete's Dual Reality* Sharon Canfield Dorsey;
- *The Moon Shined* DM Frech;
- *Photography* DM Frech;
- *Baltimore* Reyn Kinzey;
- *Otters on the Dock* Reyn Kinzey;
- *Orange Soul* David Reid Brown;
- *Coffee Craft* David Reid Brown;
- *Without a Decision* David Reid Brown;
- *Whorls* Grid Michal;
- *From the Flames - Notre Dame de Paris (Cover)* - Mary Montague Sikes