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The Writers Guild of Virginia is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the art of writing and photography. <https://www.writersguildva.com>.

Photographs

H. Scott Butler

We are so lucky to have Scott Butler who gets up early every morning (pretty much) and walks the byways of Blacksburg, Virginia with his wife Susan. He has been photographing their journeys, and he shares those beautiful images with us in this edition of *The Journal*.

You will find Scott's photos on pages 10, 11, 14, 15, 22, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, and 34.

If you would like to see more of his photographs, you can search H. Scott Butler on Facebook.

Bob Waldrop



Our cover photo is from Bob Waldrop, who graciously allowed us to use his work in this edition of *The Journal*.

Waldrop is a Virginia native who enjoys photography as a primary hobby. He currently resides in yhr City of Henrico and Middlesex County and is always looking for a photo. His unique style captures the beauty of nature and everyday life. Waldrop is also on Facebook and offers his photos to interested followers. His work is magnificent, and you can find more of it by visiting him on Facebook or his website at <https://www.momentntime.com>.

About the Cover: the photo name is *PURSUIT*. Pursuit is the type of race where the boats in front start earlier and the faster boats chase them down and pass them if they can. It was taken in the Chesapeake Bay near Deltaville on June 13, 2024.



Revival - Photo: David Reid Brown

Farewell, Revival

David Reid Brown

We met you as “Second Wind,” a sad, dilapidated structure,
covered in dust and pet dander with a lingering nicotine smell.
New flooring, plush carpets, and appliances were installed roundabout her.
When all the work was said and done, Inspiration named you “Revival.”

This quiet spot on the Outer Banks was the Lord’s to have and to hold.
A sanctuary by the sea, it was a most fitting retreat by design.
Our forever home as a family was leisure’s place to unfold,
hosting friends and the convalescing, even missionaries for a time.

Moments are just a fleeting pause we can barely hold in our hands.
Without notice, they evaporate or simply fly away.
Cherish them now for they will become memories’ shifting sands,
only to prove the poet was right: “nothing gold can stay.”

Farewell, dear Revival. We loved you, oh, so well.
God has a new season for you, a great, grand story to tell.

My Friend: 3AM

David Reid Brown

Awake
but barely fending off drowsy,
envious of all deep-sleep slumberers and
wake-the-dead snorers,
who still get to frolic in their
dreams.

My friend has me
up and at 'em at a time
too late be night
and too early to greet the dawn.
So, I strike a deal with
my sore feet and creaky knees
to plod their way downstairs.

“3”'s been waiting on me,
perched in the darkness
alongside his supporting cast:
stillness, the whirl of central air,
the occasional dump of
machine-squeezed ice cubes.

He offers no comment about the lived-in
disarray of items strewn across
the open floor plan.
We meet in a cathedral of dimness
illuminated by the vesper glow
of wall socket night lights.

“Click!”

The room gets smacked awake in brightness.
My friend knows what’s coming next
but still waits to see my same move:

I bow and pray.
God uses my friend like a red carpet
to welcome me into his presence.

Offload:
give thanks and share concerns,
confess, cry out, and worship.

Download:
“love” and everything
he packs into that one syllable
spoken into the silence of my heart.
Fantastic things nobody would believe.

He gives vision to see them before they happen.

Just as the meeting’s getting good,
“3” evaporates into time
due to earth spin
and the draw of grown-up responsibilities.

But I’ll be sure to pass on your “thank you”
for missing out on the mannerable monster
you’d experience with a much later rising.

It’s simple: you can’t know me as “Me”
unless I meet with my friend “3.”

Labor Day

(a prayer)

David Reid Brown

Gracious Lord, today was Labor Day: the end of summer, though Solstice and Equinox would disagree. Today's significance had almost been overlooked, or should we say, "O.B.E." ("Overcome by Events"), if not for this brief reminder.

Labor Day is normally a day at rest. But this time it had nothing to do with our own leisure. It was all about our labor making the lives of the dislocated and dispossessed more comfortable.

We are part of a grand puzzle of relief, our piece growing in coverage and responsibility with each passing day. We are beginning to understand that our labor is making a real difference, and we're hoping for the opportunity to experience more of it.

It was Labor Day today—summer's last sigh. We'd almost forgotten. But thank you, Lord, for the reminder and for taking care of other such details like sunrise and sunset, the provision of air and vast oceans, the suspension and dispersion of stars; the entire universe itself.

Amen.

Chaplain Brown delivered this prayer aboard the U.S.S. Bataan (LHD-5) off the coast of New Orleans on the evening of September 5, 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.



The Cicada

Kathy Kasunich



The cicada, small, unseen, shrouded in darkness
Emerging in perfect cadence into the light
Mystical, exotic, a rarity unveiled

One is barely heard
In unison their voices echo for miles
Loud, harmonious, persistent
Seeking their elusive mates

United, satiated, their journey complete
Onto another world, forsaking their bodies
Life's relentless rhythm persists



The Drifting Mind

James L. Garrett

Candlelight
burning bright
in the cold of the night,

through your light
I see the dark,
and darker still

those things that will,
in my eyes, fill
with images reflected

of things remembered.
But only fragments
in moments of charity

dancing airily,
though not merrily,
in your cold light's fading clarity.





The Drifting Mind II

James L. Garrett

In your cold light's fading clarity,
though not merrily,
dancing airily,

in moments of charity
only fragments
of things remembered.

With images reflected
in my eyes, fill
these things that will,

and darker still,
I see the dark
through your light

in the cold of the night
burning bright
candlelight.

Things I Didn't Notice but Should Have

James L. Garrett

I should have noticed
how a mockingbird sounded singing
in a pyracantha bush;
that one needs a little bit of Christmas
in one's life every day.

I should have noticed
the feeling of leaving behind friends
and moving to a new town alone;
how strawberry flavored lipstick
changes the taste of a cigarette
for the better;
that summer nights in Georgia
are liquescent.

I should have noticed
that I lost myself playing hide and seek
and am still seeking;
that a *Mr. Bill* t-shirt
doesn't fit the bill
as a three-month anniversary gift.

I should have noticed
that most of what we do in life
are trivial pursuits;
that a red lipstick-kissed mirror
leaves the impression of a rose petal
floating on still waters;
that not having enough quarters
to feed a cigarette machine has made
beggars of rich men.

I should have noticed
how winter's darkness falling
on a deserted playground
can make one lonely;
that raindrops falling on pavement
shatter like crystal thrown in anger;
that what we remember
and what was real
are not always the same.

I should have noticed
that too few friendships
are subjective, too many objective;
that it doesn't matter
that you can't carry a tune,
you can sing anyway;
that dancing with the moon
is no substitute for the real thing; and
that there are places you must come to,
and it matters not how you arrive.



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

Embracing Oldness

Sharon Canfield Dorsey



I celebrated my eighty-first birthday this week. I'm a little sad to be eighty-one but also happy that I reached that new plateau. Many of my friends weren't so fortunate. I've decided the worst part of getting older is not the gray hair or aching back. It's losing my friends—the people I went to school with, raised my children with, wandered through middle age with. The people who have *known* me and loved me anyway.

Whom will I reminisce with, when those old friends are gone? I remember my mother lamenting losing her girlfriends, and at the time, I sympathized, but I didn't truly understand until it started happening to me. Out of habit, I picked up the phone last night to call my friend, Jenny. We've been friends for over forty years and always chatted on the weekends. I teared up as it hit me all over again that she had died of a sudden heart attack two weeks ago.

I moved recently, which necessitated a lot of purging. An old trunk yielded photos, letters, and keepsakes, going all the way back to my school days. Why do we keep those things from so long ago? I think it's because it connects us to our roots, validates who we are, or were. As I looked at those young faces, some now nameless, I wondered what had happened to them. Did they grow up to marry and have kids of their own like me? Were they successful in their lives? Were they happy?

So many stories whose endings I can never know. I will have to be content with the memories of that time and place and let the endings go. As I placed those remnants of youth into the recycle bin, I knew I didn't need the *stuff* to keep the memories alive.

Embracing oldness is not just a matter of accepting my own elder status, but also that of my friends. I spent some time on the phone yesterday with Janie, my friend of fifty-plus years. We were single parents together, struggling to work, raise kids, and stay sane. Laughter saved us. It still does. Janie lives in the shadowy world of early Alzheimer's disease. She's still able to live on her own but had to give up driving. Her early memories are still there, so she recalls our connection and most of our history. But later in the day she won't remember that I called.

She is remarkably cheerful, living completely in the moment, enjoying whatever that moment brings, before it's gone. At first, I felt sad for Janie until I realized she delights in things the rest of us

take for granted or might not notice: a bird on the windowsill, daffodils coming up in her little garden space, the sun on her face when she sits on her porch. Tomorrow, those same experiences will be new to her again. Each day is a fresh start, and she's happy.

When I was in my late twenties, I became part of a Sweet Adeline barbershop chorus. It was the one thing in my life that was just for me, a break from being a stay-at-home mom with a two-year-old. The women in that group became my extended family. Janie was one of them. Two others, Judy and Jeannie (I know. What's with all the Js?) have remained best friends for over fifty years. We used to laugh about growing old together. We fantasized about getting a big house and singing our way through our senior years.

It was a good plan, but...reality, unfortunately, always intervenes. Jeannie now lives in Arizona. She and her husband, Jim, came to Williamsburg for a visit a couple of months ago and Janie joined us for a Sweet Adeline reunion. Jeannie had founded

the barbershop chorus. She was one of the most energetic people I'd ever known, always smiling, buzzing around much too fast in her sports car or flying off somewhere with Jim in their small plane. She was this tiny, fearless blonde pilot, skydiver... game to try anything. Over the years, health issues and worsening eye disease put an end to her flying and driving. I visited her in Arizona several times and was amazed at how well she had adapted as the eye problems worsened and darkness began to close in. She never complained and maintained her love of music, going to concerts and plays as she always had.

The Williamsburg visit was fun, with lots of jokes about our collective "oldness" challenges. Janie asked Jim to take a photo of us so she could remember the visit. Jeannie laughingly demanded it be enlarged enough that she could "kind of" see it. I loved the fact that no one took themselves or their problems very seriously, and we all felt as if we were thirty again.

One of the days we were all together at my house, we had planned to call Judy, who lives in Nashville with her daughter. Judy was the director of our chorus and led us to several regional championships. At one point, she was debating whether to move back to Nashville, where most of her family lived. We would have done almost anything to keep her in Williamsburg. So, we hatched a plan. Since she was unhappily single, we decided we would find her a husband. Sounds crazy, but one of our chorus members introduced Judy to her co-worker, Bill, and the rest is history. They fell in love, got engaged, and we all helped to plan the wedding. A member who was a talented seamstress made the dress. We catered the entire event. The plan worked. She continued to happily direct the chorus for many years.

We hoped Judy would be able come to Williamsburg for the reunion but, ironically, she, like Janie, has been diagnosed with early Alzheimer's, and is unable to travel alone. This getting old *thing* is really inconvenient! I talked to her daughter before bringing up the visit to Judy because I knew Whitney would have to bring her. Unfortunately, Whitney's work schedule kept that from happening. We found ourselves with a dilemma. Whitney felt

Judy would be devastated if she knew we were all together and she wasn't able to come. She thought the kindest thing was to keep it a secret.

Judy's battles with her disease have been very different from Janie's. Janie seems happy most of the time, but Judy has been extremely depressed and angry. I knew Whitney would pay a high price if her mom went into one of those deep funks. We decided to let the reunion invitation go and visit with her by phone, individually. Instead, we pulled out old scrapbooks and took a fun walk down memory lane – remembering the past but relishing our time together in the present as we made new memories.

I am fortunate to have lots of friends who have been in my life for many years. I treasure those people. We see each other and like each other for the people we've always been. When I'm with them, I still feel thirty or forty or fifty or whatever age we were when the friendship began. Our gray hair, canes, and sensible shoes are surface things, like costumes for a play. It is what it is. Beneath those surface changes, we still feel young at heart. We accept each other's frailties, embrace our limitations, and keep on keepin' on. Instead of goodbyes, we end our visits with hugs and our mantra, *Que sera, sera* (Whatever will be, will be).

Growing Old with Friends

Hickory, dickory, dock.
We can't turn back the clock.
No point worrying about our age.
Growing older is just a stage.

Now we'll complain about poor memory,
while soaking our feet and drinking green tea.
We'll go out shopping to buy a new hat,
look in the mirror and ask, "Who is that?"

We'll dine out early to get home by dark,
and never attempt to parallel park.
We'll ban healthy snacks as simply the worst,
and solemnly swear to eat dessert first.

We'll greet each new year with laughter and fun,
as we make our next trip 'round Mr. Sun.



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

I Love a Good Martini

By Jayne Ormerod

*“I love a good martini, two at the very most.
Three and I’m under the table, four and I’m under the host.”
- Dorothy Parker*

This is the most exciting thing in my whole life,” Colleen McIver gushed as we strolled down a grassy hill leading to a private sandy beach along the Chesapeake Bay.

Ignore Colleen. She was a drama queen of the worst sort. She’d wanted to attend this invitation-only party, and had begged, bribed, and down-on-one-knee pleaded for me to take her as my guest to Jeremy Hollingsworth’s Summer Solstice Partini.

Partini, for those of you unfamiliar with the term, was a mashup of the words party and martini.

Jeremy’s annual Partini was *the* social event of the year in our small bayside town. I’d held firm in my resolve to go solo to the event, until Colleen showed up at my desk with a case of my favorite Scott Kelly pinot noir in her arms. Every girl’s got her price. Who’d a thunk mine could be measured in hard-to-find wine.



“When I order my martini, I’ll be sure and ask for it ‘shaken, not stirred.’” Colleen could use some work on her James Bond imitation.

“I’m sure Jeremy’s never heard that before.” I rolled my eyes.

Colleen’s trilling laugh set my teeth on edge. Gawd, this was gonna be a long night.

We continued down the walkway toward the circus-sized canopy at the bottom of the slope, where over a hundred people had gathered. A steel-drum band played “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” amplified through God-only-knew how many speakers. The aroma of grilled burgers and Ballpark dawgs hung heavy in the air. Banquet tables laden with all kinds of summertime comfort food stood at either end of the tent. My mouth watered at the thought of a cold, juicy slice of watermelon.

Colleen grabbed my arm and pointed to a man handing around a tray of drinks to a gaggle of guests. “Is that Jeremy in the white fedora?”

“No.” The man didn’t remotely resemble Jeremy. My eyes rolled again. “That’s Mayor Cooke.” I waved at him.

He tipped his hat to me.

A quick survey of the attendees showed the usual assembly of local movers and shakers, familiar faces, all. I'd been attending the annual event since before I was of legal drinking age (you can thank my parents for that). It had become a case of the same ol' same ol' routine of tasting, toasting, and alcohol-fueled hookups. I'd often wondered how many children had been conceived during one of these Partinis. For all I knew, I could have been one of them. My parents and Jeremy went way back to high school, when the summer solstice parties began. They haven't missed one in all the years since. And then there was my name—Summer—even though I was born in March. I guess it could have been worse, they could have named me Partini.

Someone grabbed me by the elbow and spun me around.

"Bikini Martinis this year," Jeremy said, pushing a V-shaped glass into my hand, one filled with a tangerine-colored liquid and topped with a skewer of pineapple and maraschino cherries. "Coconut rum, pineapple juice, and vodka. A splash of grenadine gives it this divine color."

"No gin?"

"Get with the times, girlfriend! Gin is so last decade."

Jeremy had begun concocting new-style martinis about five years ago, and each year strayed further and further from tradition. Me? Give me a gin-heavy cocktail with a mouth-puckering stuffed olive resting at the bottom. Ah, the good old days.

I lifted the drink to my lips. *Blech*. These fancy fruity drinks were an abomination to all that serious martini drinkers held dear. I guess I should be grateful there wasn't a paper umbrella on top. That would be considered a felony in this town, punishable by six weeks in the slammer.

Jeremy kissed me on each cheek and then turned to Colleen. "So happy to have you as Summer's guest this evening." He pushed a martini glass into her hand, sloshing a bit on her fingers. "You look familiar. Have we met before?"

Colleen shook her head. "No. I'm Colleen McIver." She practically cooed the words while holding out her bejeweled hand to him. "I work at

the *Bayside Times* with Summer. Maybe our paths have crossed there?"

"Maybe." He took Colleen's hand in his, drew it to his mouth, and licked the spilled Bikini Martini from her fingers. That's Jeremy for you. Never one to waste a drop of alcohol.

Colleen trill-laughed again.

I made my escape. If those two didn't end up doing the hibbity-dibbity before midnight, then I would surrender my case of pinot noir to the sewer. That's also a felony around here, punishable by a few weeks in the hoosegow.

I wandered down to the beach where low-slung chairs were lined up like tiny colorful soldiers along the shore. Toes in the water, butt in the sand. Life was good. Or would be once I got my hands on a real martini.

"May I join you?"

I looked up. The charming and sophisticated Mayor Daniel Cooke in the flesh. He stood above me, offering a fresh Bikini Martini. "Of course." The mayor and I had a history, one that stretched back years. We'd both grown beyond the messy breakup and somehow had managed to remain friends. "How's life?"

"Brutal. I swear I'm gonna kill Jeremy if he doesn't get his act together."

"Do tell." I sipped my fruity drink. The first one had numbed my tongue, making this one not quite as offensive to my tastebuds. I took another sip to be sure there was plenty of rum in this one. Yes, there was.

"Totally off the record, right?" Dan said.

"Sure."

He glanced over his shoulder. "Jeremy's causing trouble again."

"Legal, financial, or romantical?"

"All of the above. He's got himself tangled up in the trifecta of trouble."

Just when we thought Jeremy was on the straight and narrow. He'd made his first million running cocaine up the coast to the New York City socialites. He'd blown that on fast boats, faster cars, and the

fastest women money could buy. Next few million he'd earned as a day trader. He'd spent that on fancy clothes, fancy cars, and fancy houses (a sign of maturity, don't you agree?) He earned his latest millions the old-fashioned way, by marrying into it. His wife had fallen off their yacht one murky spring evening. Official cause of death was drowning, but we all knew the contributing cause had been one cocktail too many. That was four years ago. The tragedy had seemed to have a calming effect on Jeremy.

"Seemed" being the operative word there.

Dan shifted in his seat and leaned in close to me. "Ponzi scheme. Both the law and the bankers are sniffing around. His partner in crime is none other than Caroline Washburn. And it's more than a business arrangement if you catch my drift."

Caroline Washburn. Famous for being famous. Our small town's version of a Kardashian. Also married to the meanest hombre in a forty-mile radius.

"And he's throwing my name around like I'm involved somehow. I'm not, but guilty by association."

"Holy –"

"Smile!" A camera flashed in front of our faces.

"What are you doing here, Cecil?" Cecil Oliver was one of the newspaper's hard-hitting photojournalists. Social functions were not his beat.

"Freelancing." He held his professional-grade camera up and snapped another photo before moving on to the next cluster of Partini people.

Mayor Dan tossed back the dregs of his drink and set the empty glass on the sand. "Jeremy is heading this way. I don't wanna talk to him right now." He took off at a pretty good clip toward the house.

I glanced over my shoulder. Jeremy was indeed heading my way, with Colleen stumbling beside him. She wore a sloppy-drunk smile, which I knew from experience would soon morph into maudlin-drunk tears as she spoke of her dead sister.

Mayor Dan had the right idea...get while the getting was good. I extracted myself from the beach chair and skedaddled back to the house. Maybe they

had real martinis there.

"Summer," a familiar voice called.

I detoured to the scattering of belly bars set up on the patio. "Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad." I gave each a hug. "What's shakin'?"

"Don't ask," my mom said, frowning. She tipped her full Bikini Martini glass to her lips and downed the entire contents in three gulps.

Dad slammed his hand on the table. "That damn Jeremy!"

Oh, no. Not more Jeremy trouble.

"I'd shoot the guy through the heart, but he's not worth the bullet." Dad spoke through clenched teeth.

A frisson of fear ran up my spine. Dare I ask what Jeremy had done to warrant such ire? Honestly, between you and me, I didn't think I wanted to know.

"Jeremy wrecked *Big Nauti*."

Big Nauti, an Alden 49 Express sailboat which was known for its sleek lines and ultra-plush interior, was my dad's pride and joy. "When?"

"Yesterday. T-boned the dock when he brought her back in. There's quite a bit of damage."

Oh. My. God. "Insurance?"

Mom sneered. "Can you insure against a broken heart?"

My father's head hung low as he stared into his martini glass. Yes, there were other boats, but he had twenty years of sweat equity, a goodly amount of money, and a butt-load of memories tied to *Big Nauti*. I doubted at his age he could repeat the process.

So why were my parents even here today? Curious, that.

The gong bonged, signaling ten minutes until sunset. Everyone recharged their drinks and made their way toward the shore. A hundred people huddled together in the heavy summer heat. My idea of hell. But it's a tradition. It wouldn't be summer without it.

Jeremy took his place on the stage, thanked

everyone for coming, and then offered up his martini for the traditional toast.

We all recited the Dorothy Parker poem, sipped our drinks, and watched the sun set across the bay. Hello, summer!

I ate my fair share of pineapple coleslaw and chunks of well-salted watermelon. I caught up with people whom I hadn't seen since last year and probably wouldn't see again until next. Belly full and martini buzz waning, it was time to find my host to thank him for his hospitality. Since I expected Colleen to still be hanging on his arm, I could also tell her to find her own ride back to the office to pick up her car.

The task was easier than I thought, as at that moment a half-dressed Colleen raced into the backyard. "Help! Help!" she screamed. "Oh my god. Somebody help! I think Jeremy is dead!"

#

A heart attack. At least that's what Doc Bruner proclaimed on scene.

When the tox report came back, it revealed a whole different story. Jeremy Hollingsworth had died of an overdose of ecstasy, as in the illegal party drug, not the fun time with Colleen. Enough of the drug coursing through his system to trigger a massive heart attack.

Here's where it gets interesting. Everyone who knew Jeremy knew he abhorred the use of illegal drugs. Excessive alcohol consumption? No problem there. But never, ever, any drugs. Call him a hypocrite (we often did), but he never even tossed back aspirin to help ease a raging hangover. The chance of a self-inflicted overdose of an illegal substance was slim.

Sheriff Landry launched a murder investigation. The posed theory was that someone had slipped a Mickey into Jeremy's Bikini Martini. No doubt in my mind that super sweet drink would overshadow any bitter taste contributed by the drugs.

The obvious question: who had a motive?

I knew of three people personally: Mayor Cooke; Caroline Washburn's crazy-mean husband Walt; and my own father.

That was a very difficult conversation with

Landry when I shared with him all I'd heard during the Partini.

Yes, there were tears. I mean, how could I not be upset when I told the sheriff about my father's stated intentions? Had I thought he'd actually done it? No, of course not.

That was three days ago.

Mom still isn't speaking to me.

#

Two weeks later, Cecil the staff photographer stopped by my desk. "Here," he said, handing me a thumb drive.

I took the black cartridge and studied the blood-red retraction slide. It was warm from being in Cecil's hand. An unpleasant, foreboding kind of warm. "What's this?"

"Photos of the party." Cecil shrugged. "Since the person who hired me is dead, I wasn't sure what to do with them."

"You got paid in advance, I hope." Jeremy Hollingsworth had a reputation for not honoring his debts in life. I didn't expect it to be much improved in death.

"I did."

"What do you want me to do with it?"

Cecil shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Unusual for a man generally so confident.

"You're scaring me, Cece. Is there something gruesome on there?" Or worse, proof that my dad had killed Jeremy. Is Cecil giving me a chance to warn my father? The repercussions didn't bear thinking about. My foot began wiggling of its own accord. A frenetic kind of wiggle that sent tremors up to my stomach.

"Nothing dreadful. Just something kind of suspicious, ya know?"

"Suspicious how?" My hands dug into layers of my sundress, wrapping themselves tightly in the loose gauzy material to still the tremors.

"There's a man lurking in Jeremy's shadow in many of the shots. Figured you might know him or could find out. And that might be helpful to the police. But then again," he paused, shuffled his

feet, “it could be a coincidence.” He ran his fingers through his spikey black hair. “Just take a look, will you? If you think it’s significant, let me know and I’ll turn it over to the sheriff. I don’t want to cause trouble if you think it’s nothing.” Cecil left the building before I could accept—or reject—his offer.

What if the lurker was my father? Or even Mayor Dan? What would I do? Turn them in? Burn the drive? Leave town and never look back?

I glanced at the clock on the wall. Ten-fourteen. Quittin’ time. At least for me today. I grabbed my purse, shoved the thumb drive in the side pocket and headed for the door. “I’m off to the races,” I called to the receptionist as I rushed toward the door. “Got a tip on Muddy River in the fourth.”

“Okay,” she called after me. “But the first race isn’t for another four hours.”

“I want a front-row seat.”

#

It took three traditional martinis, stirred not shaken (I’m a bit of a rebel that way), before I could work up the nerve to open the ominous files. I did so with shaky hands.

There was a man in the background in many of the pictures. Not my father. What a tremendous relief.

Not anyone I recognized. An equally huge relief.

I paused on a clear shot of the photo-bomber which showcased a tall, stocky, salt-and-pepper-haired man. If I had to slap a label on his expression, I would go with casual or disinterested. Not potential killer. But I’m no expert on murderous facial expressions.

I scanned the remaining photos. In every single shot of Jeremy stood Colleen, perched on his arm, staring adoringly at him.

Could she identify the stranger?

I hit “print” on half-a-dozen photos which offered the clearest shot of the unidentified man, then tucked them in a file folder, and set it next to my purse to review with Colleen tomorrow at work.

#

Colleen didn’t show up for work the next day, or the

day after. This was very much out of character. She hadn’t missed a day since she’d started.

Nor did she answer her phone, according to the office grapevine.

“Summer.” Terry, my editor, leaned over my desk. “I need you to go check on Colleen.” He handed me a coffee-stained scrap of paper on which he’d scribbled an address on the outskirts of town, an area I wasn’t familiar with.

“Will do.”

He turned to leave, paused, then turned back to face me. “Be careful out there.” He knocked twice on my desk and left.

I grabbed the photos of the Partini and left the building.

Twenty minutes later, I steered my Volkswagen Beetle down a slightly overgrown dirt lane that ended at an old hunting cabin which hadn’t seen the business end of a paint brush in decades. A NO TRESPASSING sign hung crookedly from the front post. A pot of dead petunias sat by the door.

Terry’s parting words echoed in my head. “Be careful out there.” Maybe he knew something I didn’t?

I parked next to Colleen’s aging Camry, climbed out of my Bug, and tiptoed toward the cabin. Anyone watching might think I was going to burgle the place, when really, I was just worried about what I might find. She could be sick (I don’t do sick well), or worse, she could be lying in a pool of her own blood (I don’t do blood all that well, either.) Maybe the mysterious man from the photos had gotten to her first and silenced her. Yeah, on my drive over I’d had too much time to play the mental game *What’s the Worst That Can Happen?*

I approached the front door, pausing between each step to listen for signs of trouble.

Through the open windows came a voice singing a rather throaty, deranged style of song.

The words made my blood turn cold in my veins.

“I love a good martini,” Colleen shrieked, while performing a wild, whirling-dervish dance. “Two at the very most. Three and I’m under the table. Four and I murder the host.” A maniacal laugh followed

each line of the ditty as she danced in circles.

A few iterations later, she stopped. “Don’t just stand there looking at me.” Colleen posed, hands on hips, acknowledging my presence.

But I did. Stand there, that is. Looking at her. Processing what I’d just heard her singing. *Four and I murder the host*. Had she killed Jeremy Hollingsworth? Surely not. “Did you do it?”

“Maybe.”

“I’m hoping more for a definitive ‘No.’”

“Sorry to disappoint.”

“Why would you kill Jeremy? I thought you were forming a romantic entanglement.”

Colleen threw back her head and laughed. “He raped my sister and got off Scott free. It was a he said/she said case, and the jury believed that lying sack of scum.”

I had heard something about that happening in New York City about six years ago, the details of which never made it as far south as our bayside town. Jeremy convinced us of his innocence. We’d tsk-tsked over the drama he’d had to endure and never spoke of it again.

“My sister killed herself after the trial. Couldn’t live with the shame.”

Oh, my. The dead sister she’d talked about when she was drunk.

“But certainly, there were other avenues for justice.”

“Not in my book.” Her expression, usually so happy and friendly, was now shadowed with pain and suffering. And crazed killer. She brushed spittle from her cheek. “Be sure to tell the police. And you can have the exclusive for the *Times*. Good byline for a struggling journalist.”

This girl needed to be locked up before she hurt herself. Or someone else. Like me.

“Colleen—”

“Shut up!” She raced in my direction, hands formed in the universal sign for I’m-gonna-strangle-you.

I ducked. This was not the way I planned to die.

“Stop it,” I yelled.

But she didn’t stop. Didn’t even pause. No, she continued right past me and out the front door.

The last I saw of Colleen McIver was the taillights of her Camry speeding down the dirt road.

The last I heard was her tortured scream after her car smashed into a tree.

#

Terry, my editor, called me at home. I’d turned in my story a few minutes ago. “Gone too soon,” he lamented over Colleen’s death. “You think it was suicide?” he asked.

“If I were a betting woman, I’d lay down every penny I owned.”

Silence stretched across the line while we each contemplated the life and death of our co-worker, Colleen.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Physically, yes. Emotionally, still a bit shaken.” I blew out a heavy breath.

“You got anything there to help take the edge off?”

“As a matter of fact, I do. As you know, I love a good martini.”



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

Thanks for Being a Friend

Peggy Newcomb

The papers signed,
I pushed up on the
chair arms to stand
and shuffled toward
the office door.

The gentleman rushed
around his desk in
time to open the door
for me as he reached
for my elbow.

“I’m sorry,” I say as he
steadies me.

Then he says one of the
nicest things:
“Don’t feel bad, Peggy.
We’re all headed in the
same direction.”

Empathy? Yes.
Understanding? Absolutely.
But more than that, it was
a verbal hug, a sweet
understanding that he shared
and touched my heart,
bringing tears to my eyes
even as I write this.

P.S. No one likes old age...but
it’s a part of life...if you’re
lucky enough to get there!
I guess that’s why we celebrate
every birthday!





Shirlee Whirlee

Peggy Newcomb

I find that my thoughts
turn off and on.
One minute I'm
enjoying the sunshine on
this brisk April morn...
the next I can feel tears
welling behind my eyes.

My heart feels sad...
my cousin passed this week.
Boy, will I miss her!
We'd have coffee together
at least three mornings
a week via the phone since
she lived in South Carolina
and I in Virginia.

She was an ardent supporter
and a fan of my writings.
Usually, she'd fill me in on
the joy that her great granddaughter
brought her. Then ask,
"What have you written lately?"

Since I tend to write about family,
there was usually something funny
that gave us a chuckle...or a belly laugh!
And we'd take a stroll down memory lane.

Wow! How lucky I have been!
No one else calls and asks
"What have you written today?"
Much less asks me to read it to them!

Shirlee always had a smile in her voice
and love in her heart. What a gift!
"Thanks 'Cuz' for sharing that with me."

I'll always love you!



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

Madame, We Have Borsht

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer

Warsaw 1981 under General Jaruzelski's martial law

“Good evening, Madame. We have borsht tonight!”
An elegant room in which to share a special
dinner with friends in their historic city.
Faded velvet warmed the walls,
violins wept of lost loves,
soft chimes of ice on crystal. Tuxedoed waiters
seated us in tapestried armchairs,
handing us heavy, leather-bound menus.
“Madame, we have borsht this evening.”
He moved on silently to another table.

We spoke of the boar and venison being
promised in hunter's sauce. Or perhaps, roasted
lamb would be nice. Salmon? Trout?
Maybe lemon and garlic chicken,
or the pork tenderloin with apricots.
Oh, what a difficult decision!
He returned smiling expectantly.
I hesitated, still undecided.
“Madame, we have borsht,” he offered proudly.
The gold rimmed bowls arrived
on matching china, steaming curls
of fragrance around the table.
The broth rather thin, the root vegetables
more plentiful than the bits of meat.
“Madame is your borsht the correct temperature?”

The musicians came tableside to offer a lively tune or two.
Guarded conversation of politics in this world capital,
travel, families and food supplies circled the room,
was absorbed into linen cloths, and china bowls,
as white as winter snow coming all too soon.
“Madame, did you enjoy the borsht?”

Road to Ronda

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer

The road to Ronda is not for the faint hearted,
like riding to the moon on a circuitous funicular,
climbing waterfall slides, narrow bridges,
no guardrails, wandering sheep, impudent goats, picture-stamp valleys.
The last curve unravels into this cliff-hanging village
crossing the awesome gorge on the new 1800s stone-arched bridge.

Swallows zoom like jets over quilted fields
and your corner room at the Parador.
After siesta, let's tour exquisite lace and linen shops,
needlework like cobwebs,
the historic bullring museum,
perhaps a *vaso de fino* on the breathtaking balcony.

The sunset paints gold and umber shadows across
stones, streets, graceful lampposts like
gorgeously gowned ladies just waiting for
gentlemen to light their cigarettes.
We have a date with Hemmingway
at his favorite: Don Pedro's restaurant.

Arm in arm, strolling homeward beneath
a silver sickle moon on the hip of night
to the refrain of Bizet's *Carmen*
wafting from her smuggled tobacco,
buried in the darkness of Ronda's deepening gorge.



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

The Bedspring Gate

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer

I served a marriage bed
when strong and new;
carted home in great anticipation,
played sweet music on shiny strings,
cradled five new bambinos,
absorbed soft sobs on stormy nights.
Now my frame rain-rusted,
no garden to guard,
potatoes all dug,
earth bed lying tumbled and unmade.

I was proud when wired closed,
straight and tall as the fence.
We worked well together, the fence and I:
open for the mule and plow,
closed private as lovers at night,
open again for the planters,
wired tight, left to sun and showers,
open again for man with hoe and hose,
locked against goats and dogs
as the young vegetables grew big and sweet
like the five bambinos.

Then came digging day!
Shovels, sacks, and singing,
chicken roasting over olive wood,
chopping and chattering and chuckling
deep into the soft shoulders of night.

Now my bedspring gate sags *albierto*,
wire tethers askew,
springs all sprung.





Yardsticks

Joyce Carr Stedelbauer

Split rails or pointed pickets,
straight boards or crisscrossed,
spaced and slotted or moss-chinked brick,
built for protection from wind-spun debris,
wandering dogs, bold deer, voracious bunnies.

Split rails, now lichen crusted, painted with rain,
hewn by sinuous arms hefting an axe
with precision born of necessity.
Then pierced and set straight
as rows of ripe corn or angled,
casting shadowy Xs on the orchard.

Pointed pickets properly placed,
white or cream with diamond,
flame, pineapple, or arrow tops
aimed to a cerulean sky.
Some pickets are doubled and tripled,
wide at the top and close at the bottom
like patterns of wooden lace.

Straight boards are preferred by
private people caring not to see
the other side, but sometimes edged
with a sharp slant, a large scallop,
or even a daring rickrack top.

Crisscrossed timbers, slotted and spaced,
balanced and braided for air and beauty
around the verdant pasture.

Beautiful bricks, handmade of native clay,
positioned by careful craftsmen
placing perfect rounded ones on top
like a good crust on hot bread.
Now a moss mosaic quilts
the walls in blue and green that
protect a quiet churchyard.

Split rails, pickets, boards and bricks –
yardsticks to hem the precious land.



Early Morning Walk in Southwest Virginia - Photo: Scott Butler

My Other Half is Me

Craig Wynne

Being single as an adult” were the words I typed into the Google search bar that humid Tuesday afternoon. I had recently been broken up with, yet again, and the anger radiated throughout my body. I was thirty-six, had completed my first year in a tenure-track position at a university, and had never married. Basically, there was something wrong with me. “You need to find someone.” “When are you getting married?” “Don’t you even have a dog?” As I reflect now, those comments had motivated me to get on Match.com, stick it out through bad dates, and stay in relationships that just didn’t fill my cup. And this one was no different – but I just *had* to be with someone. And I wasn’t. And it seemed like everybody else was. They were good, and I was bad. The academic year had just ended, so technically I had more “time” on my hands to brood about these things. This brooding led me to a Google search, which led me to an author named Bella DePaulo.

I saw articles like “Are Unmarrieds Singled Out for Discrimination?” “How Singles are Celebrated and Stereotyped and Shamed,” and “The Many Ways Singles Are Treated Unfairly at Work.” As I read about the privilege bestowed on people who “tie the knot” (i.e., Social Security benefits, higher salaries, and just general social acceptability), my brooding turned into a combination of righteous anger, solidarity, and the feeling of “being seen.”

My plans for reading articles about composition pedagogy and writing anxiety were thrown into the trunk as I spent much of the summer devouring the work of DePaulo, in particular, her 2006 book, *Singled Out: How Singles Are Stereotyped, Stigmatized, and Ignored, and Still Live Happily Ever After*, brought to my surface every slight and injustice I’d ever felt when I was single. Friends leave you when they get married or couple up. And, even if they invite you along, the couples make all the decisions. And there are the stereotypes perpetuated in the media: if you’re a woman, you’re a “crazy cat lady” or a “promiscuous slut.” If you’re a man, you suffer from “Peter Pan” syndrome, or you’re a slob who uses pizza boxes as furniture. Even if you do perform the celebratory act of being a parent, you’re “irresponsible” if you dare to do it as a single person. I marked up that book with notes and highlights, all the while thinking, “Yes. Yes. Yes.”

I started my second year on the tenure-track determined to combine my love of writing with my newfound love of what I’d come to learn was the developing field of Singles Studies. I started a blog, *Soldiering for Singles*, in which I wrote musings about single life. Examples included the unfairness of “solo supplements,” the hypocrisy of

“rules” around dating and romance, and, on a more positive note, the value of my platonic friendships. One thing I’ve also learned: “single” does not mean “alone.” Around the time I was experiencing this rebirth, Bella had started a Facebook group called Community of Single People (or CoSP for short), a group of single people “who want to live their single lives fully, joyfully, and free of stereotyping and stigma.” The first sentence on the page’s “About” section is “This group has nothing to do with dating.” I shared my blogs on that page, and they were met with “likes” and laudatory comments. I had found some likeminded folks.

On a spring break trip to Winnipeg to see a friend, I had the privilege of touring the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, where I learned about the injustices that face marginalized groups. I got the brainstorm: write a letter suggesting an exhibit devoted to the plight of singles, who face micro-levels of marginalization, such as exclusion from social events, and macro-levels, such as that Social Security law mentioned earlier. I never received a response from the museum, but I was able to use it as an example of how to write persuasively (even if it didn’t necessarily persuade the museum).

I continued writing, and with the encouragement of a department chair, I themed one of my courses around Singlehood and Marriage, during which students read *Singled Out*, along with some unfortunately written book that argued marriage was the only way of living (but we did have fun poking at the fallacies made by those authors. Students were more engaged in this class than they'd been in any other.

At the same time, I was developing a global network of friends and colleagues through CoSP. I'd published a series of articles in *Singular*, an online magazine published by one of its members. I had been teaching myself how to conduct Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which had led me to write an article breaking down the films *Crossing Delancey* and *Trainwreck*, both of which gave the "couplehood is the only way" argument. Through a friend I had made, I was able to publish this piece, "There Is No Wrong Romance Can't Right: Heteronormativity in Our Romantic Comedies," in a journal entitled *Feminista Revismos*. I'd also connected with *Spark: a 4C4 Equality Journal*, where I'd published another, which read "Awww, You're Not Married? Why We Need a Singles' Rights Movement," during which I interviewed a group of single academics to see how singlism affected their experiences.

My work grew toward writing books. One afternoon, a representative from Kendall-Hunt Publishing met with me and my department chair to discuss the possibility of a customized textbook for our first-year writing courses. During our conversation, I discussed my themed course on Singlehood and Marriage and mentioned an idea I'd been tinkering with: a book for men on how to be single and happy *without* searching for a partner. So many books had been written on this subject, but they were all for women. I was going to address the gap. And the representative was going to publish it. As that initial feeling of euphoria lapsed, I got up at 5:30 every morning to spend an hour writing. And, to me, the feeling of seeing my name on a published book was way better than placing a wedding ring on someone's finger.

That's not to say I haven't developed meaningful connections. During the pandemic, I had monthly

Zoom chats with Ketaki Chowkhani, a sociology professor from the Manipal Academy of Higher Education in India. Through our conversations, we developed the idea to facilitate the world's first ever Singles Studies conference: a virtual gathering of academics in different disciplines who study singlehood. And on October 10, 2020, I had the privilege of "meeting" writers whose work I'd studied and admired. Three years later, Ketaki and I released a collection of essays from these writers; we called it *Singular Selves: An Introduction to Singles Studies*.

This past August, I rode an Amtrak from Washington, DC to Philadelphia to meet with Elyakim Kislev, a noted Singles Studies scholar who wrote a book, *Happy Singlehood: The Rising Acceptance and Celebration of Solo Living*, which I used in a course I taught, "How to be Single and Happy." Our discourse lasted three hours and took place in the Philadelphia Convention Center and nearby Reading Terminal Market. At the end of our conversation, I walked away with an idea for a new project: a book in which I break down and analyze the tropes found in romantic movies and how they reflect couple-hood as a hegemonic force.

Becoming immersed in the advocacy of singlehood as a valid lifestyle choice has not only benefited me professionally, but personally as well. In 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I moved from Newport News, Virginia to Washington, DC; such a diverse city fits me way better than the rural environments in which I had spent time. As an introvert, I was one of those folks who, when they told us to stay home, I said "What's the catch?" I've always liked my space. Singles and couples had different benefits and challenges throughout lockdown; speaking strictly for myself, I would not have wanted to be stuck in a house with another person, no matter how amazing they might be.

Of course, I was ecstatic when things started opening up because I could finally develop the kind of social network we singles tend to cultivate. As Bella put it, "Married people have the one, single people have the ones." First, I joined our local childfree group, DMV Childfree. The organizer had enough space to allow me to host a childfree group

specifically for singles. The rules: 1) you must be single, legally and socially; 2) if you couple up, you can stay in the group, but please don't sign up for events; and 3) it is not a "meet market." If you meet someone you like in the group, great, but don't use it as a dating app. As of this presentation, the group has been active for one year, and I've made a few close, happily single friends in my local area. These friendships have meant more to me than a romance ever could.

The CoSP group has also been a recent source of friendship. I currently have separate monthly Zoom chats with Kevin and Kamran, two happily single men whom I've met through the page. We discuss a variety of topics, such as spirituality, philosophy, and classic movies. To me, this beats talking about lawn mowers, strollers, engagement rings, and juice boxes with the other married dads.

Washington, DC is known for its diverse population. One thing I always tell others is, "No matter who you are or what you're into, there's something for you here." On September 17, 2023, I got together with seven of my CoSP tribespeople for brunch at a restaurant called Medium Rare. As I enjoyed a meal of steak, poached eggs, and fries, we talked about being single. We talked about the freedom with which it comes. We talked about how policies that currently favor the married will more than likely become more equitable toward singles, as more and more people go the "singlehood route," whether by choice or by circumstance.

Three months later, Bella DePaulo came to Busboys and Poets in the Shaw neighborhood of Washington, DC to give a reading from her latest book, *Single at Heart: The Power, Freedom, and Heart-Filling Joy of Single Life*. I hosted a meetup around this event, during which other childfree singles would gather to hear her read and discuss these ideas with two other scholars before answering questions from the audience. Kevin drove down from Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, so he'd share the couch with my cat/son, Chester. And the other CoSPers would pack the room.

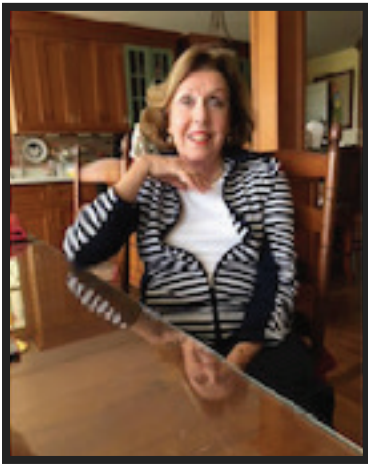
My Facebook moniker is "Chazz Pop," used so my students don't find me. "Chazz" is short for Chester, and "Pop" is Dad. Chester's Dad. And

once inside the reading, I kept getting the question, "Are you Chazz?" "Are you Chazz?" In addition to seeing friends, I had the privilege of meeting those on CoSP I only knew by post, as well as folks on the childfree group I'd never seen before. It was validating.

After the reading, about twenty of us took over the back room at nearby Shaw's Tavern. The conversation about singlehood, and even some non-singlehood related topics, like movies, what is a real Buffalo wing, and the places we've traveled to, flowed. For that night, in a world that privileges marriage and coupledness, the singles dominated, and the euphoria I felt lasted at least a week.

Current situation: after thirteen years of moving around the country to pursue that tenured professorship, I achieved it this past summer. And CoSP was the first place I went to announce; if I had been married with a child, for me, that would have been much more difficult to achieve. And I'm now in the place where I'm ready to "plant some roots" (as opposed to the matrimaniacal phrase, "settle down"). So, I'm venturing into the world of real estate. And the first place I went for advice was CoSP. After all, solo homebuying is different.

While I have considered myself a "lone wolf," I haven't been doing life alone. Again, "married people have the one, single people have the ones." The team of people I've built on my journey through singlehood has given my life way more meaning than a romantic partnership ever could. And I've had the pleasure of being part of others' teams, functioning as moral support on their journeys and even helping one friend move into her newly bought condo. And I date sporadically, although I don't approach or navigate it in a way that is societally accepted. It is my hope that as more and more people discover happy lives outside of what is considered "normal," our society, and laws, will reflect these trends.



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

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

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



Joyce Stedelbauer The intrigue of watching the printed word roll off the huge presses in her father's newspaper started Joyce's love of writing. She became the newspaper correspondent for her first grade class in Horace Mann School, Sedalia, Missouri. "Ink in her veins" flowed freely. In college, she was the literary editor of her school's prize-winning yearbook.

A member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, she has belonged to the National League of American Pen Women for more than forty years. She is also a charter member of the Williamsburg Poetry Guild. Joyce has authored seven books and a multitude of poems in all genres.

She has served as an inspirational conference speaker, continues to teach two weekly Bible studies, and is always involved in community and church work.

George and Joyce were sweethearts at Wheaton College, married on graduation weekend. Hand-in-hand they celebrated life and faced challenges for sixty-four years. They are blessed with a daughter and son, their wonderful spouses, five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter.



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

<https://www.sharoncanfielddorsey.com>

Jayne Ormerod is an author/screenwriter who writes coastal cozies with a splash of humor. She grew up in a small Ohio town and attended a small-town Ohio college. Upon earning her accountancy degree, she became a CIA (that's not a sexy spy thing, but a Certified Internal Auditor). She married a naval officer, and off they sailed to see the world. After nineteen moves, they, along with their two rescue dogs Tiller and Scout, settled in a cottage by the Chesapeake Bay. Jayne writes what she knows: small towns and coastal settings. The dead bodies are purely a figment of her imagination.

More info at <http://www/jayneowrites.com>



David Reid Brown is an artist, pastor, and retired Navy Chaplain. His first books, *Spirit Soundings: A Chaplain's Journal of Life at Sea* and *Lost Summer*, were born out of his global experiences in the chaplaincy, spanning twenty-one years of peace, war, and three overseas deployments. He is living out his God-given passion to "build people" through teaching high school government, history, and art at Grace Christian School in Mechanicsville, VA. David has been married to his beautiful wife, Rayna, for twenty-nine years. He earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from Virginia State University, a master of divinity degree from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, and a master of elementary education degree from Hawaii Pacific University. You can purchase any of David's books at: www.GetMyNewBook.com. 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



Kathy Kasunich hails from the snowy hills of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and now resides in the charming, sunny, historical town of Williamsburg, Virginia. Her debut novel, *Always Remembering*, a historical romance, was released in 2022. She is currently working on a new novel set in 18th-century Williamsburg, Virginia.

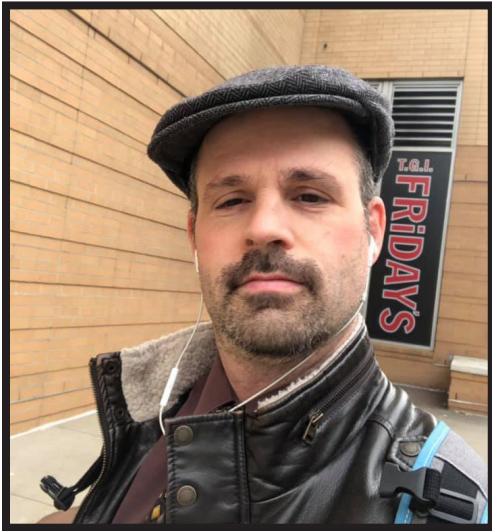
In addition to her writing, Kathy enjoys photography, spending time in nature, and listening to music, often combining all three activities to spur her creativity.





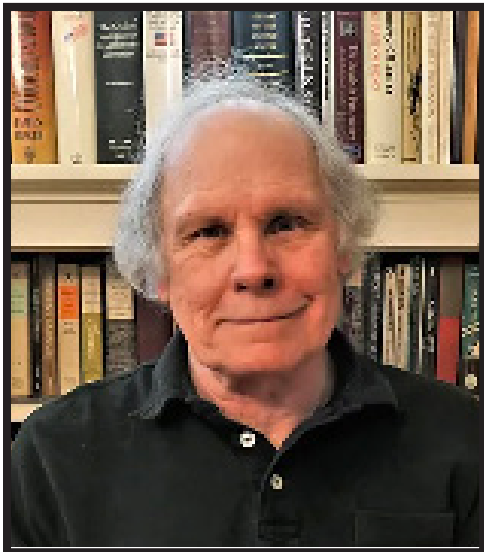
Jim Garrett, a retired English and AP teacher from Florida, lives in Williamsburg, Virginia. He is a member of the Poetry Society of Virginia, the Writers Guild of Virginia, and the James City Poets. Jim is a former U.S. Marine, a retired marathoner, and an avid reader. He has published two books of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

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



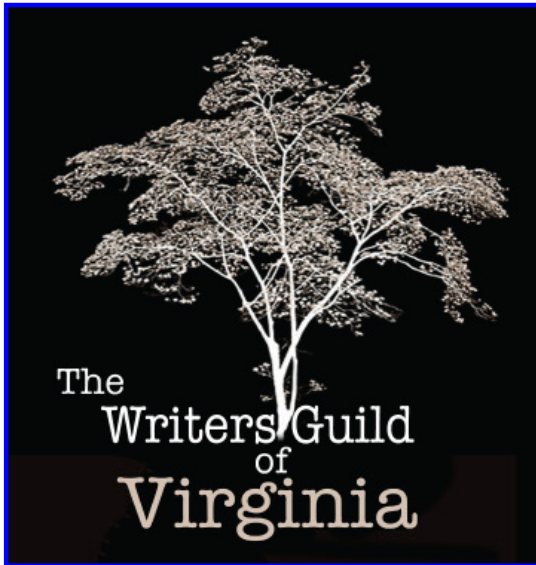
Craig Wynne - A former resident of Newport News, Virginia, Craig now lives in Washington, DC with his cat/son Chester. He's a recently tenured professor of English at the University of the District of Columbia; he received his Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition from the University of Texas at El Paso. He's published two books, *How to be a Happy Bachelor*, and *Singular Selves: An Introduction to Singles Studies*, as well as a number of articles in places like *Psychology Today* and *Writer's Digest*. He enjoys live music, hiking, running, bicycling, and analyzing movies.

You can find more of his work at <http://www.thehappybachelor.org>.



H. Scott Butler was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and attended LSU like his father. He later pursued a graduate English program at Duke University where he met his wife, Susan. After teaching English and literature at Virginia Peninsula Community College, he delved into fiction writing. Upon retiring, he started focusing on writing seriously and has since had three mystery novels published by High Tide Publications: *Night Journey*, *Voice from the Shadows*, and *Falcon*. These books follow the career of Detective Cynthia Westbrook, a plainclothes sheriff's investigator in Northern Virginia. Scott also wrote a collection of short novels and stories titled *Last Things*, which explore the unanswerable mysteries of existence. Three mystery novels and a collection of short novels and stories later, he retired and started photographing the beautiful landscapes in Blacksburg, Virginia. He now shares these photos on Facebook as a visual diary under the name H. Scott Butler. To see them, search for H. Scott Butler on Facebook.

Scott can be reached at email: hbutler192@aol.com



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.

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