



Tributaries

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## Tributaries

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### Mission Statement

*Tributaries* is a student-produced literary and arts journal published at Indiana University East that seeks to publish invigorating and multifaceted fiction, nonfiction, poetry, reviews, and art. Our modus operandi is to do two things: Showcase the talents of writers and artists whose work feeds into a universal body of creative genius while also paying tribute to the greats who have inspired us. We accept submissions on a rolling basis and publish on an annual schedule. Each edition is edited during the fall and winter months, which culminates with an awards ceremony and release party in the spring. Awards are given to the best pieces submitted in all categories. *Tributaries* is edited by undergraduate students at Indiana University East.

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# T. Tributaries

Fiction

Featuring work by:

Lloyd Mullins  
Garrett Jones  
Shyla Mahlerwein  
Chelsy Nichols

A Kentucky Courtship  
by Lloyd Mullins  
2015 Prize for Fiction

Romance is for the birds. That was my first thought after the bullet took my hat off. Well, not quite; my first thought was, “Shit!” My reflections on the nature of romance followed, just as soon as I’d found a suitable tree to hide behind. It was romance that had brought me to this pass, and not even my romance. My brother Elvin was hunkered down behind a log, one hand over his eye while the blood poured out. “God, please don’t let him die, I don’t want no feud with anybody this handy with a gun, or this free with ammunition,” I prayed.

\* \* \*

My name is Alvin Cross, and I was fourteen years old in the fall of 1919. The trouble had all started when my older brother Elvin had taken to courting Rose LeRoy, whose father had some good bottomland right next to our farm. Rose was pretty enough, but that acreage was really what Elvin was in love with. Elvin was already a prosperous man, but if he could add that land to his own, he’d be the biggest landowner in the county. Between that, the dry-goods store in town, and the four stills he had hidden away back in the hills, and Elvin would be a man to be reckoned with. A man with that kind of money could write his own ticket. (And by the way, if you think Elvin and Alvin sounds ridiculous, how do you think our sister Alvinia felt? Our folks were good people, but kind of unimaginative in the naming department.)

Unfortunately, Rose wasn’t in a hurry to get hitched. To tell the truth, I think she scared most of the young fellers to death. I know she scared me. She worked in the fields as hard as any man, and took no guff from anybody. She was tall and strong, and she had a fierce kind of personality that made her even more intimidating. She didn’t seem too impressed with Elvin’s flashy ways, and she was death on drinking, so him running so much ‘shine wasn’t making it any easier.

“Alvin,” Elvin told me, “I ain’t never seen a woman so down on a man making a living. Men are going to drink. At least the ‘shine I cook is good, and not that busthead swill that killed her brother.”

Then the war ended, and John Andrews came home. Rose and him had had an understanding, until he’d left for France with Pershing. She’d given him up when his rare letters stopped coming altogether, especially after the news about the Marne, and Belleau Wood. Everybody just assumed he was dead, right up until he stepped off the train in Cumberland. Rose was some put out with John, but when Elvin heard through the grapevine that John was going to call on her anyway, he sent me along to spy things out and make sure she was as mad as she seemed.

“Get up close enough you can hear, but don’t let them see you,” Elvin said.

“I ain’t looking to get on her bad side, but I want to know where things stand.” So that was how I come to be hiding in the bushes along the side of Rose’s daddy’s yard when John Andrews come to call. He come walking down the road in his uni

form, with a couple important-looking medals hanging off him, looking like Black Jack Pershing himself. He wasn't big, not more than half-again bigger than me, and I was scrawny in them days, but he seemed to take up an awful lot of space for such a little feller. He come sauntering along with a bunch of flowers in his hand.

Rose was sitting on the porch with her momma and daddy, and John walked right up to the bottom step.

"Evening Rose. Evening Mister and Missus LeRoy."

"Why, daddy, look who it is. If it isn't John Andrews the heroic Kentucky fighting man. We all thought you were dead, John. Either that, or taken up with one of those fancy French gals. Why else would you stop writing, and after all we'd said before you left?"

"Rose, darlin', I just didn't think there was any way I was going to survive. I felt like you was waiting on a ghost, and so I gave you up. But I'm back now, back and in one piece."

"Don't you 'Rose darling' me, John Andrews," said Rose, coming down off the porch like a scalded cat and stepping up nose-to-nose with him with her fists on her hips, "I'm not your 'darlin', not anymore, and it's your own fault. I'd have waited until hell froze over for you to come back, but you couldn't even bother to write, over there, having your big adventure. When you stopped writing, was it me you were thinking of, or was it those French maddymoselles?"

"Now you need to stop that line, before you make me mad," John said, as he took a step back.

"You know there ain't no woman for me but you, not then, not now, and not ever. I was too busy trying not to get shot or gassed or bayoneted, to have time to think about women."

"Well, I know one woman you should have taken time to think about!" she snapped, stepping right into him. Now everyone in those mountains knew that John Andrews was a hard man, but it was him that backed away. Like I said, Rose was an intimidating woman.

"You think you're going to waltz in here with a few medals on your chest, and I'm just going to come running, well you've got another think coming. You're not the only bull in these fields, you know." She kept right on walking into him, backing him up, right toward where I was hid out, so everything they said got clearer and clearer.

"Well now, what the hell are . . ."

"Don't you think that kind of salty language will work on me! That sort of thing may impress those half-wit friends of yours, but it carries no water with me!"

"Now Rose, I didn't mean . . ."

"I know what you meant, and I don't care. I cried myself to sleep for weeks over you. Well, I'm all cried out. Now I'm just mad, so you'd better get used to it, or stop coming around!"

I looked up toward the house to see how Rose's folks was taking this. They were drinking sweet tea and enjoying the show.

Out in the yard, Rose was still going after John like a hound after a coon, and

he was starting to look as eager to get away as that coon. As he backed away, he said, "Now Rose, don't go saying nothing you'll be sorry for later . . ."

"The only thing I'll be sorry about is that I'm too much of a lady to tell you what I really think."

Well, there's only so much abuse a man can take, and he'd had enough. He stepped forward and grabbed hold of her, and pulled her toward him to kiss her quiet, like I've seen them do in the pictures. The only thing he accomplished was to add velocity to the knee she fired like a mortar shell into his . . . well you get the point. John certainly did. He let out a high-pitched groan as his eyes rolled back in his head, and he changed from pulling her to him to clinging to her for support. Like I said, she took no guff from no one.

Despite myself, I let out a groan in sympathy, but they were so intent on each other that neither noticed. I didn't reckon he'd be much competition to Elvin, at least not for a while.

John had recovered himself enough to let go of Rose, and stood gagging and retching, hands on his knees.

"Good God Rose," he gasped. "If you hate me that much, couldn't you just shoot me?"

"I don't hate you John," she smiled, as she petted his back like he was her dog.

"I just don't want you thinking you can just waltz in here like Douglas Fairbanks and sweep me off my feet. If you want back in my good graces, you've got some work to do. You can start by walking me to church next Sunday."

So John Andrews staggered down the road and up the mountain to his cabin, those flowers wilting in his hand, and Rose LeRoy stood there watching him go. Then she turned and stared daggers at the brush where I was hiding. She didn't say nothing, but I tell you, that look made my blood run cold. I wanted no part in getting on the bad side of that woman. Eventually, she went off to work in the garden, humming to herself as she hoed weeds from the rows of corn.

Once the coast was clear, I slid out for a rondevoo with Elvin. He laughed and laughed when he heard about that kick.

"Hot damn, Alvin boy!" Elvin gloated. "You know who the big bull in these fields is, don't you? Old John Andrews better hunt himself up another heifer, or this bull's going to give him the horn. 'Course, from the sound of that kick, she may have done pulled his horns in for him already."

"They say he's a bad man to cross, Elvin."

Elvin rolled his eyes, "Hell, boy, you heard Rose. He ain't got nothing to offer but some army tinware, and she ain't impressed. She knows he ain't got a pot to piss in. I won't have to cross him. It's him should worry about crossing me."

I wasn't so sure. Elvin hadn't seen the way she looked at John when his back was turned, walking away.

When they walked into church together that next Sunday, Elvin couldn't believe his eyes.

"What's she doing here with him?"

I reckon, he'd been so busy gloating that he hadn't heard that part. Just to rub a

little salt in the wound, I leaned over and whispered, “Elvin, ain’t that your girl there with John Andrews?” I got a bony elbow in my ribs, and Elvin spent the entire service fuming and acting like he hadn’t even noticed.

Now, it was not at all unusual in those days for men to go armed. These mountains were full of dangers; panthers, bandits, trigger-happy moonshiners, and Government Revenuers, but it was also considered disrespectful to carry a gun into church. So we had a shade tree outside the church where them as went armed stacked or hung their guns so as not to upset the ladies. We called it the Gun Tree. It was also where the men would stand and visit after services while they waited for the women to finish gossiping inside. Well, when services were over, Elvin was ready to call John Andrews out, right up until he saw the hardware John was strapping on. He had a Colt’s Model 1911 on his hip, and was tucking a captured German Luger into a shoulder rig under his coat.

“Morning John,” was all Elvin said.

“Morning Elvin. Alvin.”

“Hidy John.”

We all just stood there looking at each other until Rose strolled up like she didn’t have a care in the world.

“Why look at you all, being all civilized.”

“Well sure Rose, why wouldn’t we be?” asked John.

“No reason I can think of,” added Elvin.

“Elvin, you’d think John was going back to the war instead of just walking a girl to church wouldn’t you?” she said, with a glint in her eye.

“Maybe he’s just scared of me.”

I couldn’t tell if that glint was amusement or meanness, so I kept my mouth shut and took a couple slow steps back.

“Don’t you start up on me again Rose,” said John, a little defensively.

“Where I’ve been, this wouldn’t even count as armed. I just like to be prepared.”

“I just don’t want people thinking I’m putting on airs, going around with an armed escort,” she said with a smile, her eyes twinkling like the sun on ripples in the water. She took his arm and looked at Elvin and me, “You boys have a nice day.”

As John and Rose strolled away, arm in arm, Elvin stood fuming, watching them go.

“Hey Elvin, ain’t that your girl walking off with John Andrews?” I asked.

“Looks like there may be a new boss bull hereabouts.” Some people just have no sense of humor. When Elvin got done reminding me I ought not to sass him, he picked me up and dusted me off.

“That bog-trotting Irish son-of-a-bitch ain’t going to beat me out,” he steamed.

“I done put in too much time on Rose to be undone by the likes of him.”

There was a fair amount of snickering from the other fellers standing around, but that dried up pretty quick when Elvin gave them the hairy eyeball.

For the next few weeks, Rose LeRoy's dance card was filled. If Elvin wasn't escorting her to the moving pictures in Cumberland, John was squiring her on long walks along the river. Elvin brought her candies and perfumes, John brought her wildflowers. The most entertaining part of the competition, to everybody else anyway, was Sunday mornings at church. Some Sundays, Elvin escorted Rose, while others it was John's honor. Elvin started singing louder, showing off his fine tenor singing voice, while John rasped away in his gravely baritone. Elvin took to tossing those big, heavy \$10 Golden Eagle coins into the plate, to make sure she heard it, and John kept the Ladies Benevolent Society supplied with venison to distribute to the county poor. After three months of this, the only clear winners in the competition for Rose's hand were the church, the choir, and the poor. Nobody could tell who was ahead, and Rose wasn't telling. She just smiled and went about her business. As for me, I just kept my head down and stayed out of it, other than aggravating Elvin about it every now and then.

One thing did change, John stopped carrying his guns all the time. I don't know whether it was because he got tired of Rose needling him about them, or if he was just getting used to not being shot at by the entire German army on a daily basis, but he mostly wore them now only if he had business back in them hollers after church.

Well, the more peaceable John looked, the more belligerent Elvin got. "It's time," he told me one day, "to end this. Next Sunday, we'll lay for him up on the mountain, and let him know to back off from my girl."

"What you going to do about all that artillery he carries?" I asked. I'd been enjoying the show as much as anyone, and had no desire to get shot in pursuit of someone else's woman.

"You let me worry about that. We'll pick a time when he ain't armed, and let him have it, when he ain't got no choice but to take it."

So we watched, and on a Sunday when he wasn't armed, we laid up in the brush alongside the game trail he took from Rose's house to his own. As John approached, we stepped out in front of him.

"Howdy, John."

"Howdy, Elvin. Alvin."

"Hidy, John."

"Can I help you boys with something?" John asked.

Elvin smiled. "It's what we can help you with that's brought us out here John."

"Elvin, I can't think of a thing that I need your help with."

"We're here to help you keep from ruining' your life John."

"How's that?"

"Being' a thief will ruin your life, John. You need to learn to leave things alone what belong to others."

"Elvin, you boys must be drunk. You go on home now, before somebody gets hurt."

Elvin made the first move, and got John's fist right between the eyes for his trouble. I leapt at John, who sidestepped, grabbed me by the throat and crotch,

and flung me right on down the mountain. I must've fell twenty feet before I hit the ground, and laid there stunned. It sounded like they were really stuck into it up there, and to tell the truth, I was in no hurry to get back into it. Besides, Elvin was damn near twice John's size, and tended to fight dirty, so I wasn't worried. Eventually, the sounds of battle slowed down, so I crawled and climbed back up to stop Elvin killing John. Once he got started, Elvin could be kind of hard to stop. Sure enough, when I got back up there, there was only one man standing, but it wasn't Elvin. John was some bruised and bloodied, but Elvin was sitting on the ground with several of his own teeth in his hand, looking like Sherman had marched his whole army over him.

John give me a look, and I held up both hands to let him know I was done. "I don't know what's got into you boys, but you'd best steer clear of me 'til you're in a better mood," he said. Next time you want trouble, look for it somewhere else. I've had enough trouble for one lifetime already." Then he turned and walked away on up the mountain.

After that, Elvin decided that a less direct tactic might be more effective. We kept watch on the Gun Tree, and whenever John escorted Rose unarmed, we would run on ahead up the mountain, and roll boulders down on John as he walked home from Rose's house. We weren't really trying to kill him, especially since he had a large and particularly unforgiving family, but Elvin figured that a couple close calls ought to do the trick. After all, John had beaten the odds and survived the war, why would he risk getting killed now, over a girl as mean and hard to get along with as Rose? Of course, I've often wondered why Elvin didn't back off either, for she didn't seem to like him none too well, but I figure it was more pride than any tender feelings for Rose. Well, pride and that land of her daddy's.

For John's part, he didn't seem worried, or even angry. I reckon he figured that if the Germans hadn't been able to kill him, and God knows they'd really tried, he didn't feel like us Crosses were anything to worry about.

Well, that last day, the one I was telling you about at the beginning of this, we hightailed it up the mountain after church, when we saw his guns weren't hanging on the Gun Tree. John walked Rose on home, and headed up the trail. When he heard the boulders start to roll, that crazy son-of-a-bitch pulled both guns, and blazed away like the fourth of July up the side of the mountain. The tricky bastard must've left his guns at Rose's house and picked them up when he got her home. Scared me to death, and ruined a damn fine hat.

When the shooting stopped, I left my tree and crawled over to where Elvin was screaming.

"He shot my eye out! The son-of-a-bitch shot my god-damned eye out! Oh sweet Jesus it hurts! Alvin, help me god-dammit!"

Blood was pouring out from under his hands, and I was panicking, this being my first time in a shooting scrape. I decided I didn't care for it at all, and I cared for it a lot less when I heard a magazine slam home behind me. I turned and saw John standing over us, reloaded guns in hand. I ain't too proud to say that my face went white, and my pants went dark at the same time. Pride was what got us into this

mess in the first place.

“Oh God, don’t kill us, John,” I pleaded.

“We didn’t mean no harm, please don’t kill us! We’re sorry, we’re so sorry, it was a mistake, please don’t kill us!”

John Andrews looked at the two of us disgustedly.

“Shut up Alvin, I ain’t going to kill you,” he sighed as he holstered his guns.

“Quit your hollering and let’s take a look at that eye, Elvin.”

He pried Elvin’s hands down and told me to hold them. He took out a bandana and wiped away the blood, and laughed.

“How the hell can you laugh?” asked Elvin. “What kind of devil are you?”

“I ain’t no devil, and your eye ain’t shot out, you stupid son-of-a-bitch. It looks like a splinter of something hit you right over the eye. It bled pretty bad, but your eye is fine. Now you tell me, what in hell’s this all about?”

“We was just trying to scare you off from Rose,” I whimpered. “Elvin was courtin’ her and about had her all sewn up until you came back.”

“Well, if this is how you scare off rivals, you boys need to find a new line. Now I’m going to tell you fellers, enough is enough. There ain’t going to be no more of this nonsense.” John sighed, “I know you got feelings for Rose, and I don’t hold it against you, but I’ll have no more of this shit from you. She’ll pick who she wants, when she wants. If you don’t like that, well, you’re free to back off, but I’m not. You understand me?” After that, he, made sure we had no more serious injuries, and went on home.

After that, Elvin seemed to be less and less available to escort Rose to church. His singing wasn’t quite so loud anymore, and his contribution to the offering was a lot more modest. Eventually, he caught Shirley Mae Ledbetter admiring the scar over his eye, and they started walking out together. Six months later, John Andrews presented them with a beautifully dressed deerskin at their wedding. They had a passel of young’uns, and Elvin prospered, just like he’d planned. He went on to serve 5 terms in the state legislature, which led to a term in the state penitentiary. Shirley Mae went back to her folks and divorced him, took everything he had. Well, everything he had that she know’d of anyways.

It took two more years, for John to finally get Rose to come around, and the hoops that woman put him through in those two years were something to behold, but once they was married, she settled right down, and the two of them were like a fine pair of matched plough-mules; in harness together for the rest of their lives. They raised up their own crop of young’uns and no one ever heard a harsh word from one about the other through 60 years of good and bad.

As for me, I’d learnt enough from all this to know it was the single life for me. I’ve steered clear of women (at least on any kind of permanent basis), and my caution has served me well. I took over the stills when Elvin left for the legislature, which led to more adventures with John Andrews, but that’s a story for another day, and another jug.

The Fairy Stone  
by Lloyd Mullins

John Jr. knew something was wrong when the little carved box their Daddy kept his “doodads” in got dumped on the kitchen table. He was breathing hard and coughing that phlegmy, gravelly way he did whenever he got worked up. His Mom, Rose watched as he pawed through the tie-tacks, old watches, and other totems, charms and odds-and-ends that he kept in the box. The boys called it “Daddy’s Medicine Box”, likening it to the medicine pouches that the Indians used to carry their personal magic in. Their Grandpa Daniel, whose own Daddy had fought Indians in the Army, had told the boys all about the Indians and their ways.

“Now John,” Rose said, “you just need to calm down. You’re making a mess, and flinging things everywhere. If it is in there, you’re likely to knock it under the table and really lose it.”

“Dammit Rose, it ain’t in here!” He looked around and saw John Jr. “Here, you kids been in my box?”

John Jr. spoke up.

“No Daddy, we ain’t been near it. We know we ain’t s’posed to fool with that.”

John glowered at him. “Ain’t supposed to, and ain’t done it are two different things. I find out you been messing around with this box, I’ll tan your hide for you.”

“Now John,” Rose broke in, “you know them boys haven’t been in it. You’ve just misplaced it is all.”

“What is it you’re looking for Daddy?” John Jr., who at eight was the oldest, asked. “I can help you look.”

“You don’t worry about it,” Rose said. “You go on and check on your sisters and get on back to your chores. This isn’t anything you need to worry about.”

John Jr. went out the door. His brother David, age 7, was just entering the yard, returning from an errand in town for Rose. “You go on and check the girls,” John Jr. said, “I’ll be along in a minute.” He watched to make sure David went, and then crept up to the kitchen window to listen. He’d been worried for the last couple of days. Ever since his Uncle Dan’s funeral, His mother had been worried something fierce about something, and his Daddy had been spending a lot of time going around asking questions. Yesterday, his Daddy had come home looking grim and cleaned his guns.

“Alright then, I’ll just go without it,” he heard his Daddy say.

“You’ll do no such thing,” Rose said. “It kept you safe through the war, and you’re not going looking for trouble without it.”

At least now John Jr. knew what his Daddy was looking for. It was his fairy stone. He’d seen his Daddy sitting at the table late one night, just sipping from a jar of ‘shine and staring at it by the light from a lamp with the wick turned down low. It didn’t look like much, just a small, smooth, round stone with a hole through it, hanging from a string.

"Mom sees you with that jar, she'll scalp you, Daddy," he'd said.

"She knows son, and she knows why."

"What's that, Daddy?"

"That, son, is your Great, Great-Granddaddy's fairy stone. He brung it over with him from Ireland. It was his good-luck charm. It kept him safe on his voyage, and through his war, and kept me safe."

John Jr. had looked at it closely. "Why'd he drill that hole through it?"

"He didn't. It was that way when he found it. The river had hollowed it out. He found it one day when he was fishing in the River Fergus, just before he left to come to America."

"Did it really keep you safe in the war?"

"I don't know. I do know that out of my whole company, I was the only one who came through without a scratch. I saw a lot of men killed; shot, gassed, blown to pieces. Good men, most of 'em, a lot of them better men than me, but they're dead, and I'm still all in one piece and here with you. Sure makes me think anyway. All right now, you go on back to bed before we wake the rest of the house."

John Jr. had left his Daddy sitting there, drinking and staring and thinking. Now trouble was brewing, and the fairy stone was gone. That couldn't be good. Inside the house, his folks were still jawing at each other.

"John, you need to leave this for the law. That man will get what's coming to him without any help from you."

"The law. The law around here couldn't find its ass with both hands and a mirror. That game's been floating around out there for months now. I've found out more in two days than the law has found in all that time, and I'm going to put a stop to it before anybody else gets hurt."

"Dan knew what he was getting himself into. You told him to stay away from that game, and so did I, but he wouldn't listen, and now he's gone. I've lost a brother to that bunch, I'm not about to lose a husband."

"Well then, help me find my stone."

John could hear them both rummaging through the house, searching and jawing, his Mom trying to calm John down, and John threatening dire retribution on whoever might have taken his stone. John left to help his brother and sisters finish the chores. He knew he'd be in for it if his folks caught him eavesdropping, but kept an eye on the house in case his Daddy left. He could grab his old .22 squirrel gun and follow along behind in case his Daddy needed help which, if he couldn't find his stone, was likely.

They finished the chores and went to the house. Rose was frying some ham and eggs for supper, and the house looked like Oliver Cromwell's men had been through looking for the silver. The whole place had been turned out, flipped over, and gone through, Rose's hair was a fright, and it looked like she might have been crying. That scared the kids more than even the black look on their Daddy's face. They'd all seen that black look of John's more times than they could remember, but none of them could remember ever seeing their momma cry. Not even at Uncle Dan's funeral, where she'd just looked mad enough to chew sheet metal and spit

out nails.

"You kids line up," John growled. When they had, he said, "I'm going to go through your rooms again, with a fine tooth comb, and if I find my stone in there, you're all going to catch hell. I don't care whose room I find it in, you're all going to get it." It was a tactic that had worked well for him in the past. By punishing them all, it ensured the guilty party would be further punished by the others later.

"If any of you have anything to say, say it now."

None of them had anything to say about it. John started in the girl's room. They could hear him rummaging about, muttering and cursing under his breath. He finished, and went into the boy's room, stamping and wheezing and coughing.

Finally, he came back into the kitchen.

"All right then, dammit, I'll just go without it."

He stomped to his and Rose's room, and they could hear him drag the footlocker his guns were kept in from under the bed.

"John Jr.," Rose said.

"What Mom?"

"I'm sorry son . . . Run."

"What . . ."

Rose raised her voice. "John Jr., you go get your Daddy's stone right this instant!"

"What?" came John's voice from the bedroom.

"Momma?" John Jr.'s eyes were like saucers.

Rose's eyes were full of sorrow. "Run son," she whispered. Louder, she yelled,

"You get back in here and give your Daddy his stone back!"

John Jr. didn't understand what was going on, but he understood what his Daddy's steps growing louder meant, and he was out the door like a shot, his cries of "I ain't got it, I ain't got it!" growing fainter as he ran.

"Boy, you come back here!" bellowed John as he headed out the door after his son while the rest stood and stared.

Fortunately, John Jr. was quick and nimble as a squirrel, and John's wind had been robbed by the black lung from years in the mines. There really wasn't much chance of John Jr. being caught as long as he didn't let himself get cornered. Even so, the chase went on until well past dark.

Eventually, Rose found John sitting on a stump, barely able to breathe.

". . . catch . . . breath . . . teach that . . . God-damned . . ." he gasped.

"You're in no condition to catch anything or teach anybody," she said, helping him to stand. "Come on, let's get you back in the house and lay down. You're not going anywhere else tonight."

It was a sign of how low he was laid that he made no objection. Rose got him into the house and settled him into bed. She took his boots with her.

"Just in case you decide you're feeling better," she said, and closed the door.

"Is Daddy alright, Momma?" asked Thelma, age 6.

"He's fine, just winded is all. You girls go on and play." She turned to David.

"Did you do what I told you?"

“Yes Momma.”

“Good boy. You go find John Jr. and tell him to lay up in the barn tonight. Tell him everything will be fine in the morning.”

The next morning, the sheriff’s car pulled into the yard. Rose, John Jr., and David walked out to meet it. John himself was still laid up from the night before.

“Morning Sheriff,” Rose said.

“Morning Miz Andrews,” said Sheriff Tomkins, a big man with three chins and a gut that looked like he would need a wheelbarrow to carry it. He didn’t even bother trying to unwedge himself from under the steering wheel, preferring to just speak through the window. “I wanted to let you know that I passed that message on to the State Troopers yesterday afternoon, and they got onto them boys was running that card game. Them card boys was loaded for bear, but it turned out they couldn’t shoot for shit, I beg your pardon, they couldn’t shoot worth a . . . they couldn’t shoot. Staties could though. They shot two of ‘em and the rest threwed down their guns and give up. That Jimmie Shadrow that shot your brother was one of them that got shot. He ain’t dead, but he ain’t happy, and he’ll be going to the gallows now.”

“I thank you for your trouble Sheriff,” Rose said.

“No trouble at all ma’am. John around?”

“He’s feeling poorly this morning.”

“Well, give him my regards. You all have a nice day.” He put the car into gear and drove away, the suspension creaking and groaning.

She led the boys into the house. “Momma, Daddy’s gonna kill me, and I didn’t take his stone,” said John Jr.

“I know it son, I’ll take care of it.”

She walked into the bedroom, reaching into the pocket of her dress as she went. “John, look what I found rolled up in one of your socks this morning,” the kids heard her say.

Melvin, 1963  
by Garrett Jones  
First Runner-Up, 2015 Prize for Fiction

Melvin closed the medicine cabinet, hardly looking his reflection in the eye. He looked instead at his hair, slicked back and shimmery on his head, raking through it once, maybe twice more with his pocket comb. He washed his hands up and wiped his face dry, having achieved a particularly clean shave, clean enough for no one but him to tell that the hair on his face grows only in a patchily dissatisfying way. His collar. His collar was aligned perfectly, his shirt ironed. He fastened the top button.

His neck...chin...mouth...nose...eyes. His eyes were tense and wide, his face gaunt and his expression pale and sickly. Even his own reflection delivered him unrest.

Weeks ago on a Sunday, Melvin made his way out of church, the gust of fresh air beyond the open doors like a sigh of relief. He descended into the daylight, but grasped the railing and halted when Reverend Keene blocked his exit.

The old man took Melvin's hands and said, "Son, you look into the face of too many ghosts."

Melvin thought about that while re-tying his bow-tie to his content.

Downstairs, the breakfast table was populated by an assemblage of noisy children, Melvin's brothers and sisters and a few of the neighbor kids devouring freezer pops. Evading the clambers of the children, he started for an alternate route to the Bird.

"Wait," said his mother. "Take these."

Nearly every afternoon Melvin's mother lost herself in her flowerbed, elbows deep in earth. But she managed to catch him now, extending him a picked bunch of lilacs. "For her."

Melvin's mother gave him a nervous feeling, like a knot being tied in his throat. When Melvin entered into his teenage years, he began to think often about girls, and often about naked girls. Really the only girl in his life at that time was his mother, and while he certainly wasn't imagining how his mother looked undressed, he always lamented a possibility that she saw the images of girls undressed inside his head, a possibility that made him fidget. And now that his teenage years had but two short ones left, the knot gave no slack- he still believed that Mother knew about the images in his head, and now about his actions with real naked girls. He fidgeted.

He accepted the lilacs from his mother with little reaction. He didn't want her to read in him the things that he had been up to. The lilacs meant that she knew too much already.

Melvin felt snug enough to nap behind the wheel of the Bird, having failed over the weekend to gain back the sleep he gave up on Friday night when he snuck out to the field with the boys. Over the past weeks, it had become customary to drift the Bird along Goose Road, turn its lights off and roll into the rear entrance on

school grounds around eleven o'clock, when everyone was sure to have gone home from that night's game. Still, the floodlights were only dimmed after the games, so the boys took care to be conspicuous, usually entering beneath the bleachers. And it was Chucky who brought the beers every Friday, along with one or two bottles of something special from his father's cabinet. He vainly attempted to sound like a sixteen-year-old connoisseur of alcohol, delivering some spiel over what they were drinking. The way Melvin figured, though, what they were drinking didn't really matter.

After he woke in the early hours of the next morning with his face in the turf, he toiled over the risk of his parents learning what happens there, unsure if he could stomach their perspective of him changing. Maybe these were the ghosts that Reverend Keene told him about.

But Mother didn't give him the lilacs to cure any hangovers. The lilacs were because Melvin had missed three calls from Ginny Boggs. Not that Mother was upset over Melvin missing calls from young ladies with the reputable likes of Ginny Boggs, but all young ladies are worthy of a gracious gesture. And Melvin certainly hadn't forgotten his night with Ginny, but the truth that attacked his conscience like prey was that he really didn't like her all that much.

The Bird spit a little and sputtered as Melvin turned onto Market Street and slowed to a stop in front of the bungalow with bluish-gray siding. He gathered the lilacs and the knot in his throat tightened as he hustled up the steps to the front porch.

On hot summer days, Dottie Boggs left her stifling living room to aerate through the screen door, and often sat in a rocking chair near the entrance to feel against her what breeze was merciful enough to breathe through the screen. As he approached, Melvin heard the squeal of the chair rocking on the floorboards screech, screech before he made out her silhouette from outside the door, noting how wildly the woman's hair reacted to the humidity. Through the mesh, Dottie's head of hair looked like a family of writhing serpents. He stood at the door and her figure tensed. They saw one another, but he knocked for the sake of politeness. The flimsy screen door rapped obnoxiously against the threshold; it didn't shut properly, a door abused by those passing through it.

"It's open," said Dottie with a fatigued drawl to her voice.

Melvin had not been inside before now, and this realization flushed through him wickedly. Dottie faced him directly from the chair, and on the wall behind her was an alarmingly large stain. Something had hit with ghastly impact, spattering the wall in spots surrounding some sizably sullied area that smeared downward. The stain was faded with a touch of rusty discoloration, but without mistake Melvin could see: it was red. The knot in his throat tightened.

Looking away from the stain, he locked eyes with Dottie, who glared at him beneath an ill-groomed brow resembling a pair of black woolly worms. She crossed a leg over her knee and rhythmically kicked her suspended foot, still swaying in the rocking chair. The screech, screech became piercingly loud, like nails against a

blackboard. In spite of the sweltering summer heat, thick knitted socks were pulled up Dottie's legs, worn under tattered loafers. Her dancing foot nearly knocked over a bottle of corn liquor planted dutifully on the floor beside her chair, next to an old walking cane.

Melvin noticed the bottle as he recognized the odor that permeated the room- it smelled sharply like whiskey and lightly like vomit, smells from Friday night and the field. He felt his stomach start to turn and the lilacs slip in his sweaty grip. Dottie nodded to the left.

Ginny sat on that side of the room, isolated from her mother and the grisly wall stain, scratching at her elbow. She wore a gentle olive-colored dress, a far cry from the loud white slacks that had fit so snugly weeks before. Her hair was modestly tied back, not ratted into raffish curls. Her lips were pale and lifeless instead of full and intensely painted. Their eyes met and Melvin smiled quietly, gesturing at her with the lilacs and madly searching the caverns of his mind for words.

"Cain."

Dottie said it, caressing the giant leather-bound Holy Bible in her lap. It was thick with bookmarks and tracts and pressed flowers. On the cover, "BOGGS" was inscribed in gold letters.

"Cain," she said to him for the second time.

Between Ginny's silent shiftiness and Dottie's indecipherable threat, Melvin's conscience suddenly flooded with awareness. He was in trouble, unsure if he could talk his way out of it. He tried in vain, as even he couldn't make sense of his stuttering rambles.

Dottie interrupted. "And Adam knew Eve his wife. She conceived and bore Cain...that's Genesis," matter-of-factly. She reached for the bottle and downed its contents. "Adam knew Eve...his wife!"

Like a reflexive cat, Melvin ducked for the bottle to shatter against the wall behind him in lieu of his face, but stumbled backward clumsily toward the door. Ginny stood, bracing herself, as if preparing for some object to come hurling in her direction.

Melvin turned to flee, but was knocked on his nose before he could run. He rolled over and cried, the metallic taste of blood on his tongue, dripping down from his nose like a leaking faucet. The Bible lay beside him, pages askew. Dottie straddled him and clutched his neck.

"His wife...to have...hold...in sickness and health. To love..." She removed her gnarled fingers from his neck, reaching into the folds of her gown.

Melvin couldn't see Ginny now, but felt her eyes on him. He held the lilacs across his chest, and the screech, screech of the rocking chair echoed in his ears from where the woman had leapt from it.

Dottie drew out a long-barreled revolver and aimed at his forehead.

"Do you love my girl?"

"Yes," Melvin pleaded.

"Do you?"

"Yes!"

“Hah!” She pressed the muzzle of the revolver to his temple. “What do you know about love?”

Melvin closed his eyes tight.

“No, you tell it! What you know about love!” She pressed the muzzle deeper.

“Love suffereth long!” He knew only to spout off memory from Sunday lessons to help him stay alive.

“Love is kind! It envies not and is not prideful! Love doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own...love thinketh no evil. Love rejoices always in truth...believeth all things...hopes...endures...”

Dottie laughed in his face, breathing out whiskey and filth. She pressed deeper.

“Love...”

Melvin gripped the lilacs and closed his eyes tight.

“...is as strong...”

Deeper.

*Screech, screech*

“...as death.”

The King in Disguise  
by Shyla Mahlerwein

Once, long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King. No one had seen the King, for he spent his days inside the castle, and if he ever did leave it was not often and he always dressed in disguise.

Since the boy rarely left the spot by the entry gate, he knew those who entered and left the courts. The boy thought that being a King was an honorable duty and he took it upon himself to ask all who would enter if he could polish their shoes.

"All who beg to be in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their feet," the boy would say.

Now there was one thing about the boy that went unnoticed by all who passed by...he was blind. The boy was made orphan from the time he could walk; seen as a disgrace by his family he was left near the courts of the King in hopes that he would be looked after by the guards who watched over the gates.

As the years passed, the boy grew to be a familiar face at the gates and all those who came to enter stopped so the boy could polish their shoes. One day, it just so happened that the King was not able to sneak past the boy like he had done for all of the nine years before and the boy stopped him.

"Excuse me, kind sir, but may I please polish your shoes, for those who beg to be in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their feet."

The King was taken aback by the gesture that the young boy offered in his honor and each day after that he would sneak out in his disguise just to see the boy. The boy didn't know that the man he spoke with was indeed, the King but he welcomed a friend with kindness and enthusiasm.

The King and the boy spent much time together and they talked and they laughed and dreamed.

"If I could be anything and I could see with my eyes," the boy said, "I'd be the brave guard who stands at the gate of the King and I would protect him."

Many times, the boy confided in the King and expressed his sadness that he could not see. The King always reassured him and told him the story of a boy who was like him.

"Once, long ago in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King. No one had seen the King, for he spent his days inside the castle; and if he ever did leave it was not often and he always dressed in disguise..." and the story continued but always stopped at the same place.

"Please tell me how the story ends!" the little orphan boy would beg but his friend in disguise always stopped at the part where the orphan boy longed to be the guard at the gate.

"I can't tell you how the story ends," the King would say but he never answered

why. He'd always remind the boy that no what his duty was that he should always persist on and work with pride and never wish to be in another's shoes.

Many more years passed and as the boy grew into a man he never grew tired of the King in disguise's company. He'd sit outside the gates from morning to night shining shoes until his friend would come and sit beside him. The King looked forward to their visits just as much as the boy for the two had become best friends. Every once in a while the King would mention the story that he used to tell but he'd always leave it at the same ending as all the years before and the two would laugh and laugh.

"I know, I know," the boy would say. "Never wish to be in another's shoes."

One particular day the King came to see the boy at the usual time but the boy wasn't there. The King was perplexed since the boy was always there so he waited for a quite some time. When the boy didn't show up, the King slipped through the gate and waited until morning to see if he returned.

The next morning, the boy was sitting there in the same place he had for all the years before. He polished shoes and at the end of the day he counted every coin that had been left for him. The boy was so well-known that he often received coins from all those who entered and exited the courts. For the first time ever, the boy began to think about leaving the gates and using the money collected to finally find a place to call home. Later that evening, he discussed his plans with the King in disguise. The King listened but offered no advice.

A few days later, while visiting the boy, the King made mention of the old story again.

"I think it's time I share the ending of the story with you, boy," said the King, and he began the story as he always did.

"Once, long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King.."

The King in disguise continued until he reached the point where he always stopped before; he paused and then continued.

"...the little orphan boy longed for many years to have the ability of sight so that he could one day have a chance to guard the gates that protected the King. He met a friend and over the years the friend came to see him at the setting of the sun each day. The friend was special but the little blind boy didn't know just how special he was; but he would soon find out. You see, the friend that the little boy confided in every night from the time he was a boy until he became a man was not just an ordinary man. He was a great King dressed in disguise. The King in disguise wanted to show the little blind boy his thanks for his kindness and willingness to offer himself to his service for so many years. But he had to wait until the right time."

At this time, the King stopped telling the story and he took the boy who was now a man, by the hand and he led him to the guard at the gate. At the King's command the guard opened the gate and the boy and the King in disguise entered into the King's court.

"For many years I watched you work, most days without much food and nowhere to sleep but the street, but you never complained. You worked out of the

kindness of your heart and although you longed for greater things you never wavered in your strength to persist. I thank you for all that you did for me and I offer you a place in my palace.”

With that, the boy accepted the invitation. The King removed his disguise but the blind boy couldn't see. He laughed and teased the King, “you may have been a King in disguise but I could not see.”

The King and the boy reigned together for many years and one day while the boy was returning from a visit to town, he was stopped by a voice at the gate.

“Excuse me, kind sir, but may I please polish your shoes? Those who beg to be in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their feet.”

The boy stopped.

“You can polish my shoes and while you polish them, I will tell you a story... Once, long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King.”

Gray Haven  
by Chelsy Nichols

I'm in an empty space. I can see the glow of a dim light seeping through my eyelids. There's an electric buzzing in my ear, like the white noise on a TV through amplified speakers. Laced into the noise are voices, sounds that are so familiar it's almost heartbreaking. My late mother's soothing voice; my dad's stern but loving tone; my older brother's voice, which is normally tough but still calm, is for some reason now as booming as the wind in a hurricane. And then, there are those little sounds, insignificant to anyone else: my mom's wind chimes that my dad left on the back porch; a bonfire cracking and popping in a fire pit; the hum of crickets in a distant field under the Smoky Mountains. They come and go quickly, but they're strong and important, as if my mind is trying to make sure I remember them.

As quickly as they came, they disappear back into the white noise, and then there's silence. I'm empty, numb. There's nothing to feel, except the desire to feel something.

\* \* \*

"It's about time."

I'm lying on my back on a hardwood floor. The air feels thick and heavy, but I can't recognize a temperature. It's not hot or cold. It's just sort of—there. I'm staring up at five kids I've never seen before in my life. They all look surprised at how suddenly I just opened my eyes.

I look around at each of them, trying to find something familiar: a girl with short black hair and round cheeks, a boy with broad shoulders and spiky blonde hair, and a small girl with long blonde curls sit to my left; and to my right, there is a tall older boy with stern brown eyes, and a girl about my age with long dark red hair, tan skin, and deep hazel eyes.

The girl smiles at me, and I notice that her smile reaches up to include her eyes. Something about her makes it seem like there's just a glimmer of explanation in whatever it is that's happening.

"Hey there," she says. "How are you feeling?"

None of these kids look like they're here to hurt me, but I'm still worried that they've somehow managed to kidnap me and keep me captive in this strange place. My first instinct is to scream and run away. But instead, I just ask the biggest question on my mind.

"Who are you guys?"

The younger boy smiles mischievously.

"Your worst nightmare."

The black-haired girl in front of him hits him in the chest and he starts laughing.

"It's not going to help if he's afraid of us," the girl says.

The older girl rolls her eyes. She points to each person, starting with the black-haired girl and going back.

"Sierra, Lucas, Mikayla, Shane." She pauses and then points to herself.

“And I’m Alexandria. And you are?”

I decide to use my nickname. “C.J.”

Alexandria nods, and the older boy—Shane, I think—squints his eyes at me, as if he’s taking mental notes.

“Where are you from?”

I’m suddenly aware that I’m not close to home, and that this may not be the first place I’ve been taken to. I provide him with a broad answer. “Tennessee.”

Alexandria touches a small silver necklace in the shape of the state of Tennessee around her neck. Shane nods to himself as he gets to his feet and walks away from the group. The little girl, Mikayla, follows him, but he pushes her away.

“Do you remember what happened to you?” Lucas, the younger boy, asks me.

I stay quiet for a moment, trying to recall my last memory. There are jumbled sounds, bits and pieces of my brother and my dad. There was pain, but I can’t remember the actual feeling. None of it fits together to paint a picture. I shake my head.

“No, not really.”

The three left hovering over me all nod, looking just the slightest bit disappointed. Sierra and Lucas then stand and walk over to where Shane is, leaving just me and Alexandria.

There is a long, awkward silence as we just look at each other, as if we’re both trying to find something in each other, some little thing that can help both of us navigate this unexplainable situation. I’m skeptical about her, yes, but I have this weird sense of trust in her, like I’m supposed to turn to her. It’s as if she’s the only one here who isn’t phased by whatever it is that’s happening, and she’s not nearly as interested in deciphering it as the rest of them are. Although the way she starts to look me up and down, I can see that she has just as many questions as I do.

I clear my throat, desperate to break the silence. “I’m gonna get up now.”

She nods quickly, getting up herself. Once I’m on my feet, she brushes off my shoulder just briefly, but I feel a rush of cold air through me at her touch. It doesn’t make me shiver, like I expect it to, but I can clearly feel it where we make contact. She gives me another smile, and I’m starting to think she’s just a little too happy, given the confusion we’re in.

I look around and realize we’re in an old log cabin similar to the ones I’m used to around Gatlinburg, except this one is much older and appears to have been abandoned for several years. It’s incredibly small, with the kitchen and a bedroom and bathroom down the hall all visible from where we stand in the living room. There is little furniture—just an old, worn out maroon couch, a small wood coffee table, and a bed back in the bedroom. There are two windows on each side of the door in front of me, but they look foggy and dusty, and I can’t see out of them to determine exactly where we are.

“We’ve been calling it Gray Haven,” Alexandria says, obviously watching me study the place.

“Gray what?”

“Gray Haven,” Lucas interjects before Alexandria can answer. He walks over to us, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet.

“We’re not on Earth, but we’re not in Heaven either. We’re stuck somewhere in the middle.”

I let out a laugh.

“How could we be stuck in between Heaven and Earth?”

Everyone stops, that awful, piercing quiet returning. I jump when Shane finally puts his hand on my shoulder.

“Based on some...experiences we’ve had...” the way he pauses after that reminds me of the cold I felt on Alexandria’s hand. “we have reason to believe that we are all, in fact, deceased.”

I want to laugh. I want to see something falter in his expression, something to tell me that this is all some messed up joke, and that it’s definitely gone far enough. But he doesn’t change. He’s very, very serious. I turn to Alexandria, trying to find the joke in her expression. She’s not changing either.

This isn’t a joke.

I step away from them, shaking my head back and forth as I run my hands through my hair.

“You—you all are out of your minds. We are not dead, okay? Whatever crazy story you’ve come up with for this, it’s—it’s ridiculous, okay? We are not dead.”

I hear the floor creak as someone steps forward, and I guess that it’s Alexandria even before she speaks.

“C.J., please just listen to us.”

Without turning back to them, I yell, “No! You guys are crazy!”

And then, I run.

I open the door, and I simply run outside, into a thick mess of trees and snow and emptiness. I don’t feel cold or breathless or anything that I should feel. I just feel the softness of the fresh snow beneath my shoes, hear the air brushing past me. I don’t get any further. I try to feel something normal, but there’s nowhere to turn. There’s no home to go to.

I am completely and utterly stuck.

\* \* \*

I’m running. I just keep running. The snow smashes softly beneath my shoes. The breeze brushes by me with a heavy pound, but I almost want it to be colder than it is. The air has that feeling of moisture, like it’s weighing down on me and the forest around me. I look behind me to make sure none of them are following me, and I see the fog growing thicker, looking like it’s trying to chase me down. I vow not to look back.

Everything is white or gray or just plain dull, and my head hurts as I try to adjust to the lack of color. I’m desperate to see something different, but all I see are trees and snow and that damn cabin. It gets harder to see through the fog, and my focus on navigating through the trees starts to distract me.

I want to feel some kind of pain or pressure in my lungs. I want to run as far away from here as I possibly can, but I want it to feel like I’m actually running.

I can't feel that rush of adrenaline that comes with so much movement. It scares me that I can't feel a normal sensation, but I also feel a little angry about it.

The sky is endless. It just stretches in every single direction. It's the palest gray I've ever seen, and though it looks like it wants to rain or snow, it's like there's some force prohibiting it. I can remember gray skies like this hanging over the mountains in Tennessee, but it's different somehow: This seems too close, threatening to crash down. I look around me as I press forward, squinting at the dullness that consumes me.

It feels like an incredibly long time that I'm running, though there's no way to tell without a sun or some shift in the strange world around me. I'm not tired. I'm not breathless or sore. I'm just here. And the simple fact that I want to be anywhere but here is what keeps pushing me to run. That, and the fact that I can't seem to get away from the broken-down cabin.

The cabin. When I look to my left, I realize that I'm at the front of the cabin—again. I've seen the blurred and cracked front windows, the chipped and aging wood panels, and the torn screen on the front door one too many times. I know I should have—and intended to—get much farther away from it. I continue running, keeping my eye on the house. I get through the trees and I can see that it is hidden far behind the thick of the forest, and I start to feel encouraged. I push harder, and soon I can't even see the cabin.

But then suddenly, I'm out front again. I see Alexandria in the window shaking her head.

My steps slow and I let out a long, slow breath, just for the sake of hearing it. Everything is endless, a circle of nothing. The silence is heavy. It's more quiet than I ever thought possible. It is only broken when a heavier breeze creeps in, coming from behind me and pushing against me with more force than any wind I've ever felt.

Suddenly, there are sounds. All around me there are far-away noises, as if from another time and place entirely. The wind carries the voices of my father, pleading with me and firmly reprimanding my brother; my brother himself, screaming unintelligible slurs in a forceful, booming tone; and my own voice, at first laced with terror and the onset of tears, and then broken and drifting until it's overridden. There's shattering glass and horrible thuds, everything falling apart.

I stagger backward in the snow. It's almost as if I can see bits and pieces of the scene: my brother and his overpowering glare and stature; the red stain of blood on the floor; and the haunting familiarity of my house. But it's not enough. I can't paint the full picture. All I can decipher is that something happened between me and my brother, but I can't even consider that he could have done this.

The sounds get louder. Everything is jumbled together, burying the sharpness of the voices deep within me. It's painful, but not a normal kind of pain. This feels hopeless. There's no escape, no explanation, and seemingly no reason to fight.

I back up against a tree, sliding down to the ground. I shake my head back and forth, as if that will get rid of the noises. I press my palms forcefully up against my ears. I want this to stop. I want to hear nothing, to feel nothing. But it just keeps

coming. It feels like everything is closing in. I press my hands harder to my head, squeezing my eyes shut. I hear Alexandria. It's as if she's trying to pull me back, like she knows what's happening. But as scary as this sudden force is, I don't want to go back to her and the other kids. I don't want to deal with them. I don't want to just come in to whatever crazy world they've created and pretend like I trust them. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I want somewhere to go, and something to be. But I have nothing. I open my mouth to let out a desperate scream.

Whether or not I make any sound at all, I can't even tell.

# T. Tributaries

Nonfiction

Featuring work by:

Ryan Wysong  
Lloyd Mullins  
Stephanie Beckner

It Doesn't Cry  
by Ryan Wysong  
2015 Prize for Nonfiction

The three of us ambled down the generic hallway. Egg shell walls with uninteresting paintings by unknown artists spaced every few feet. Sea of sorrows I thought, walking by a painting of a fishing trawler. Neither of us spoke. Nate simply tagged along slowly, hands clasped in ours. We slunk through a small waiting room, passing by the receptionist's desk. The young woman so polite to us when we arrived was pecking away on her key board, unaware of the thick cloud of despondency that went by with us. We exited into the vast colorful hallways of Riley's Children's hospital. People scrambled by heading here or there for a moment we stood lost like ghosts in a field, unsure how we had gotten here. Left to the elevator, I recalled out loud. As we snaked through the corridors, multicolored scrub clad workers passed us coming and going, busy with getting somewhere. We continued on not saying much. Which way? Oh this way, turn right here. Thoughts clang around my head clumsily. How will things change, can we handle this? Will he be able to go to regular school? Does he understand me when I say I love you? I concentrate hard on these thoughts, trying to "erase the tape," an often failed therapy tool I got from my counselor at the VA. I didn't notice we'd reached the elevator until I felt a tiny hand tugging on my index finger.

I select the first floor then stare at the ground. Lost in the fog of emotion and worry. The air is warm in here and I feel as if I may suffocate. Then the elevator slows and gives a cheerful ding. I spy the control panel, the number 3 illuminated. I naturally throw my arm in front of my boy to keep him from scurrying off on the wrong floor. I look up as the door slides open, my eyes meet with a pleasant looking Hispanic woman. She gives me a smile and a slight nod. We back up a few steps. She swings in the wheelchair she is pushing and the door slides closed again. She has short midnight black hair streaked with silver wisps. She looks older than I imagine she is, due to the furrowed lines of concern etched on her brow. I followed her small hands reaching down to the wheelchair's occupant. She begins stroking the curly hair of the child lovingly. A young girl, with cerebral palsy. She is a tiny thing with a square torso and thin arms. Her twisted legs covered by bright red pants looked like tangled licorice sticks. She wears the same open mouthed grin I have come to associate with her disease. The child looks up affectionately at her mother who continues to gently stroke her hair. I stand there still, taking in the scene, while emotions again begin to erupt inside me. Empathy for the mother, her beautiful child confined to such a terrible existence. Thankfulness that the girl has someone who loves her, which some normal children aren't fortunate enough to have. Then I felt an overwhelming relief wash over me. I didn't want to have the thought but it was there: At least he wasn't that bad. It wasn't the cold feeling of better you than me. I had that feeling many times while surveying the enemy dead and wounded during the war. No this was a warm feeling, a hug from your

grandmother, a morning kiss from your sweet heart. It said I love you, I'm sorry for your situation. Thank you for showing me what I have to be grateful for.

The door to the elevator abruptly opens and the mother and daughter are gone. I look at my wife, her pale blue eyes shining, tears nearly yielding to gravity. I see in her what I felt in myself, relief. Then what I thought would never happen again began to force itself upon me. A thin grin formed on my face and I felt strangely happy. The universe, or fate, or whatever placed this beautiful moment before us and I was gratified. It may have saved us. The comforting feelings continued to ferment over the next few minutes as we made our way to the car. We just received awful news, a diagnosis which would alter the course of my whole family's life. Yet all I felt was happiness and relief. So I clung to it. It was the first time in months that anxiety had relaxed its grip and the weight I had been dragging around fell away. Without the experience of the last few months though, this moment would not mean so much to me. You must first understand true pain in order to be able to learn the greatness of small moments such as these.

I can look back now and pinpoint certain events, moments in Nate's life. When if only I had been more aware, I could have picked on the differences. Unfortunately, denial is alluring. It pulls you in with empty promises. On Nate's third birthday we for once invited my side of the family. My two sisters, their combined four kids, my dad and stepmom all came over to celebrate with us. After two years of little to no contact, it was nice to be together again. Regretfully my pride wouldn't allow this for the majority of Nate's life to this point. That is a completely different tale, though. I was very excited to have everyone over, especially for Nate. He never was around other kids and I thought he would enjoy playing with his long lost cousins. I was a bit nervous about his lack of experience, but my sister's youngest daughter was the same age as Nate and I was hopeful they could become play mates. Maycee was exploding with personality. She has strawberry red hair and a smile that could talk you into anything. She knew how to use it to her advantage, she would flash that radiant smile, her soft freckled face glowing, and melt you into a puddle of compliance. She was outgoing and sought your attention at every moment.

"Uncle Ryan, look!" she said frantically, waving me over.

Something in her drove for attention, approval and applause. Her personality was a sharp contrast to Nate's, and it left me wondering how could they possibly be the same age? While she constantly looked for attention or approval, Nate seemed totally indifferent. She would purposefully jump to the forefront, while Nate seemed to prefer the background. Maycee tried to join in games with the older boys. Nate seemed to be unaware games were even going on. It was a stark difference and it left me feeling confused. How could she be so advanced in comparison? These thoughts pricked me with anxiety, which I am prone to. I was not the only one who saw this; everyone silently took notice. I could feel the discomfort emanating from my wife. Her forced smile never faded, but I could feel her worry intertwining with mine. It's like when you nearly wreck your car, a close call. Looking over at your passenger you know the same primal survival instincts are

raging inside them. For a moment you are two beings sharing one mind.

I don't think we mentioned the shared thought that night after the party. Neither of us slept well though. I tossed and turned, Kristina's face was illuminated in the still darkness by the soft glow of her iPhone, the shadows giving her delicate features a jagged, stone quality. She stayed up the whole night I think, prowling the vast knowledge of the internet for answers.

The next day, at some point she would show me what her search revealed. Her search, she said, was "why doesn't my 3 year old talk." The first link was to one of those mommy message boards. The question posed by another desperate mother was disheartening and eerily familiar. *My son does poor in social situations, has difficulty maintaining eye contact, barely talks.* You could feel her anguish flowing through every keystroke. Her son was a year older than Nate I believe. One of the first responses fell on us like a hammer. The possibility it proposed permanently fractured our picturesque lives in an instant. The third response down was our answer, in pixelated stone.

My first reaction, denial, was only to save my wife and myself from full blown panic attacks. Nate could talk, I told her. He gives hugs, he wants to play with us, and he gives eye contact I reassured. My mind meanwhile raced wildly. I tried to stay, but found myself drifting to a fifteen year old memory.

Sitting in my father's living room on his prized Big Lots recliner, my stepmom then worked as a special education assistant for the Nettle Creek School Corporation. Sometimes she would babysit some of her school kids for side money. I found myself back there sitting alone with this boy. Mel, my stepmom, had to run to the store and left me to watch him while she was on her quick trip. I don't recall the boy's name but I remember every other detail about him. He had shaggy brown hair with bushy bangs hanging down in his eyes. His skin was very pail nearly the color of buttermilk. He wore a light blue polo a size too long and khaki shorts. His white knee socks hung loosely around the ankles of his thin legs. He had a frantic look in his eyes, though he never looked directly at me, only seemingly through me. He couldn't speak, but made a low, constant, non-melodic hum. This was broken only by short pauses for breath or a high pitched whine. When you spoke to him, he would hesitate as if recalling a dream, then continue on forgetting it completely. To him I only existed as an apparition, there, but not really. The only thing that existed in the boy's reality were doors.

Screen doors, cabinet doors, microwave doors, car doors, he was obsessed by anything with a hinge. He spent all his time opening and closing doors. Or searching for a door to open and close. For long stretches of time, hours if you would allow, he would open and close his door. After a while, the screech and slam, screech and slam combined with his humming became maddening. For sanities sake I had to make him stop. I called to him but this did no good. Finally I got up to get his attention. Had I known what would happen, I would have just stayed in dad's rocker and stuck tissue paper in my ears. I reached out for the boy as he continued his humming and slamming. I gently squeezed his shoulder. He flew into a rampage. He threw himself violently to the ground and began to thrash. Limbs

flew in every direction smacking the walls and floor with bone splintering force. He spat and screamed in pain, or was it anger? He twisted around the floor clutching at his shirt and chest. I stepped back from him in shock and fear. As quickly as I set off this boy grenade, the tantrum stopped nearly as abruptly. He lay on the floor panting, then sat up. He stayed there for a moment, rocking and humming. Then he was up desperately roaming the house. He pushed a button on the microwave, the door popped open and he began his obsession over again.

This long forgotten memory leapt from the recesses, coming out to taunt me. Was this the sort of life my son would have? The thought filled my veins with ice water. My wife was just as pessimistic. She said to me in the coming days her horror vision of Nate's future. Him sitting Indian style in front of the TV, Wearing nothing but his underwear watching Mickey Mouse reruns. Losing all his ability to speak, just a lost mute. It was these images, these worst case fears that began to break us apart.

We had a torturous routine we practiced daily for the next few weeks. Go to work, smile, pretend nothing is wrong. Then come home and have two hour long conversations about generally the same thing. Standing in the kitchen, or lying in bed in the dark, raking over the same scabby wound. They went something like: he's met all his mile stones, but he has a lot of the symptoms. He won't look at us. Well, maybe he has ADHD. We need to make a doctor's appointment. When we weren't in conversation we were google scholars. Pouring over articles, research papers, and message boards. They all said one of two things: miracle cure or don't get your hopes up. The back and forth, the research, the thoughts, the symptom comparison consumed our existence. I would spend thirty minute intervals hiding in the bathroom at work, reading articles on diets and holistic healings. She suggested to me once we do the gluten free diet and heavy metal testing.

"If his levels were high, that could help him. There are procedures," she said.

I jumped to the conclusion of science experiments. Heated words turned into very few words over the next week. I turned into a wreck, I kept up an illusion of positivity. Whenever I was alone though, all I could do was cry.

When a child is born, the natural thoughts are of hopes and aspirations. You want more opportunities for them, a better life than you were able to manage. After my ex-wife remarried and was moving my daughter Emily to Texas, I thought my life was over. Kristina came along and was my salvation. She saved me from myself, the booze, and the nightmares of combat. I was on the short road to suicide either by bullet or the drink. She saved me, pulled me from the fire, she gave me hope. She gave me a reason to live. She gave me a second chance, Nate was that chance, another shot at being a father. They truly saved my life.

This redemption seemed as if it was being ripped away from me. The thought of how this would affect my son was devastating for me. All the things that he would miss out on, all the moments I thought we would miss out on together. I wanted to teach him to fish. Teach him to throw a curve ball. Teach him to drive a stick shift. I wanted to shake his hand on his wedding day. All those warm dreams seemed to be lost now, floating away like fire embers into the coldness of this dark

world I seemed thrown into.

So I cried, mostly alone; sometimes Kristina and I would lie in bed and cry together. The sadness seemed to be ever reaching over the horizon. Never ending? The hardest days were when Nate seemed most distant. Busy off in his own world. Days were not even a cookie would coax his attention.

Then came the first doctor's appointment. Sitting in the exam room I felt a deep helplessness. The nurse kept asking questions about Nate's development. For the first time there were more no's than yes's.

"Can he draw an X?" she asked.

"He used to be able to," Kristina responded.

"Here Nate, can you draw an X for me?"

Nate looking a bit perplexed willingly took the pen and began scribbling tall arches.

"Can you do a circle?" She drew a perfect representation next to the scribbles.

Again Nate accepted the pen and gave an enthusiastic repeat performance. The nurse's concerned look disemboweled me. There is nothing more difficult than watching your innocent child unknowingly fail simple tests. Nate just didn't understand what was being asked of him, so simple to some, yet difficult for him.

"Is he potty-trained?"

"No" I murmured.

"Can he put on his own clothes?"

A mundane task we all take for granted, yet a marker of my son's deficit.

"No, he can't," I said.

The nurse gave a pout. Too bad, the expression said. She began to fade back from him, writing him off as a person. Her face said it all, he is damaged, slow, and unintelligent. This simple look on her face hurt, and it hurt bad.

A few moments later we were taken to a different room to await the doctor. When he entered, we shoveled the last three months of concerns and observations on him. The desperation in the room was thick and stifling. He gave Nate a meager two minutes of attention. After a failure to communicate with my boy, he politely validated our concerns.

"What about ADHD?" I asked.

"No, that doesn't normally present with a speech delay," he said coldly.

He told us he would refer Nate to Riley's in Indianapolis for further examination. Sometime during his detached doctor speech, I began to weep. The last time I cried in public like this was when the ultra sound tech told us we were having a boy. Those tears were of happiness and hope. Now the pain and sadness that had been building trickled down my face. The doctor droned on about the implications. My wife, trying to be hopeful, was asking about possible vitamin deficiencies.

"You must understand, ma'am," he interrupted. "Autism is a lifelong disease, there is no cure."

I continued to cry, the doctor undeterred continued his practiced speech.

Then, when there was no pain left to be dealt, he turned and walked out of the room.

Two days later I was alone with Nate, Kristina at work. It was the weekend following the appointment. Before we had the referral to the specialist at Riley's. When there was still hope. I was trying to teach Nate to put his pants on himself and he was struggling. He would get both feet in one whole, or would get them on start to pull them up, only to kick them off defiantly. He just couldn't do it. I began to weep again, he just doesn't understand me, he doesn't understand anything. My weeps gave way to sobs. I buried my face in my hands and rubbed the salty tears from my eyes, but they kept coming. My poor boy, I thought, my hopes that this was a bad dream were gone. This nightmare was real, my son would never grow out of or snap out of this. I fell back on the couch and continued to cry. I felt so lost and hopeless, my chest felt like it was caving in. Then came a soft pressure on my neck, Nate's chic feather hair pressed gently on my cheek. He gave me a gentle squeeze. When I looked out from behind my hands, I met his blue eyed gaze. He looked at me with obvious concern on his face, something I never remembered him doing before.

"Oh daddy, it doesn't cry," he said softly. Then, pressing his face against mine once again, he said "Yes, I'm okay."

My son, though his difficulties and deficits are the source of my sadness, always has a way of lifting me up. He does this every day when I get home and he asks, "Where's my hug?" Or when he asks me to cuddle up at night before bed. He doesn't avoid these contacts, he seeks them out. He doesn't do things like most kids, he won't ask me to come play. Instead he will walk up to me randomly and say "Hi, Daddy!" excitedly. I know this means come look what I'm doing. My mother says the small things are what matters. The awesome thing about Nate is the small things, for him, are huge. A full sentence, a proper question, or bravery during a haircut are not monotonous. At our house they are great triumphs. Nate has difficulties, but he is always smiling. Autism does not define who he is. He is not a disease, nor a set of symptoms. He isn't a puzzle to be figured out in one's free time. He is a wonderful little person. With personality, with feelings, a sense of humor, and liveliness. He is the joy of my life. He makes me smile and laugh, he makes my world exponentially better. I realized that day alone with him that all the things the articles and doctors say are insignificant. My son, faced with a crying father did not simply walk away. Instead, sensing my pain he embraced me with love and offered me comfort. He gave me exactly what I needed.

## Ghosts in my iPod

Lloyd Mullins

I have always loved music. Any time I get in my car or truck, my iPod goes along. Classic rock, new rock, reggae, country, country-rock, folk, traditional Irish, Irish punk, blues, both old and new, cowpunk, progressive rock, old soul, and gospel. Really just about everything except rap and Top Forty. Music has always transported me, to other times and places, to other moods, to other people. It helps keep those nearest and dearest to me with me always.

\* \* \*

My wife, Jess, my granddaughter, Sharon, and I get in the car on Sunday morning and head to church. I hit play, and the car is filled with the rolling bass line of Yes' "Roundabout". Instantly, I'm nine years old, and singing along in the back seat of our '72 Gran Torino, Mom driving up and down the hills and around the curves on Porterfield Road. The music fits the road, and I'm filled with wonder, both at the intricacies of the music, and the beauty of the countryside. Plus, I've got the coolest Mom in the world. The song fills up the entire drive to church.

\* \* \*

"Sweet Thing" by Van Morrison is playing, and I think about a girl I loved years ago. I was in the throes of divorce, and she was on parole, trying to get her life back together. We were both the victims of pretty crippling, self-inflicted emotional wounds, and we provided each other with some much-needed happiness or at least diversion. When we got together, it was like the Big Bang, creating a whole new world for us. We burned hot and fast, and when we split, it was equally incendiary. It nearly destroyed our lives, but in the end, the good we did each other outweighed the damage. I looked her up a year later, and we got together a couple of times, and though the coals were still warm, the flames had gone out. We were just two old friends catching up, and then we went our separate ways.

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Peter Gabriel's hollow voice scratches out the lyrics to "Solsbury Hill", one of the most perfect rock songs ever written, by one of Progressive Rock's heroes. I think of the first two albums I ever owned, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer's *Trilogy*, and *Genesis Live*, both given to me by my brother Wayne. Wayne was my hero. Ten years older than me, and a musician, he introduced me to so many great bands and different types of music. He was a philosopher and a theologian, who challenged and questioned everything, and never stopped seeking truth. He showed me how to think, how to appreciate music, literature, and movies. He gave me my first copy of *The Once and Future King*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hobbit*. I wanted to be just like him when I grew up.

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I'm sitting at a stop sign in the middle of nowhere. Queen's "One Vision" comes on, and as the music builds to a crescendo, I'm back in the Air Force, in the cockpit of an F-16, taxiing for takeoff. When Brian May strikes that power chord,

I hit the gas, taking off in my truck like a jet leaving the ground, tear-assing through the countryside, and just for a few minutes, I'm free, untethered from the daily grind.

\* \* \*

Little Sharon, my 3 year old granddaughter, is asking, "What song is this, Grandpa?" I tell her it's "If I Ever Leave This World Alive" by Flogging Molly. I ask her if she likes it and she says she does. I'm pretty sure that if it weren't for me, she'd never hear anything like it. Her folks are more conventional in their tastes, preferring Bon Jovi or Metallica to anything good. I feel like it's my job to show the grandkids that there is so much more out there in the world than the Madison Avenue pinheads want them to know about. That for every Justin Bieber or Mariah Carey or flavor of the week boy band singing the pre-packaged, emotionally void, commercial tripe that passes for popular music, there's a Todd Snider, or Aretha Franklin, or a Son Volt making real music. Music that means something, that has something to say about life, about the world, about what it means to be human. Music that has some soul.

\* \* \*

John Cougar Mellencamp comes on - "Authority Song". It takes me back to when I talked my little brother into buying my old ghetto blaster for a hundred bucks, and letting me keep the power cord (which I needed, because my new one was missing its cord). I'm sometimes amazed that he'll even speak to me, I pulled so much shit like that on him. Of course, he didn't do himself any favors. He was easily the most gullible kid I've ever known. I used to tell him that he wasn't actually Mom and Dad's kid, that they'd found him in a ditch, living with skunks, and eating out of trash cans. He'd be bawling his eyes out until Mom told him that it wasn't true, and yelled at me for picking on him. Of course, he managed to go on to college, and became a popular minister, and is highly sought after for speaking engagements all over the country. When he first started out, I've been told, ninety percent of his sermons were based on me. It seems like he got a good career out of putting up with me all those years, so I guess he figures we're even.

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"Fisherman's Blues" by The Waterboys takes me back to Ireland. Jess and I laughing on our honeymoon because the bed and breakfast hosts keep pushing the full breakfast on us, eggs, beans, tomatoes and bacon. We've both got gas so bad that we can hardly stand to be near each other, but we're so crazy in love that we can't stand to not be touching.

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"The Wild Rover" by the Dubliners, keeps me in Ireland. Years after our honeymoon, my whole family went over there for a week of touring around and sight-seeing. Dad's family was from County Clare, and Jess and I as well as my brother Wayne had all been there before, and were always talking about it. That trip might have been the best time we'd ever had together. All of us guys getting drunk in the pub and trying to pull my sister Deb's wheelchair through ankle-deep gravel to get back to the cottage every night. Touring around the country during the day.

Driving up over Conor Pass, where my sister-in-law knocked the car out of gear and almost rolled backward off a cliff. The look on Mom's face when she saw her first castle, The Rock of Cashel. All of us posing, pretending to panic behind Deb in her wheelchair on an inclined escalator, like we'd let go of her. Using pinwheels held out the car windows to keep us all together through the roundabouts. That's the way I always want to remember them all, especially Mom and my sister Deb. Laughing, joking, playing cards, having fun. So much better than remembering how bad their last days were, watching them waste away from Alzheimers (Mom) and cancer (Deb).

\* \* \*

Christine McVee's sweet, sad voice sings Fleetwood Mac's "Songbird", and I think of my high school girlfriend. We must have listened to that album hundreds of times. I remember how sweet she was and how badly I treated her at the end, and I hope she's found somebody that would make her happy. Regardless, I'm sure she's happier than she'd be if we'd stayed together. In the long run, I'd have made her even more miserable. Sometimes, it's better to just walk away. I still feel like a jerk about it though.

\* \* \*

My foot gets heavier on the gas pedal as Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt's "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" blasts out of my speakers. I don't think there was ever a better driving song (at least not for a boy with roots in Kentucky). Every Saturday night when I was a kid, we could watch anything we wanted, as long as it was Porter Wagoner, followed by the Grand Old Opry, and then Hee Haw. Man, I loved Hee Haw when I was little. The corn-pone humor, all those hot chicks in their cut-off shorts, the great cast and guests; Roy Clark, Buck Owens, Jerry Reed, Willie Nelson, Grandpa Jones. Then I got older, just knew that it was the dumbest, corniest, most backward stuff ever recorded. It just wasn't cool. It couldn't be, my Dad liked it, and there's no way he was cool. All he ever did was work, and make me work. Just a tough, mean old hillbilly that I couldn't wait to get away from. Until he had a stroke at sixty-three while digging a tree, and fell over dead at my Mom's feet. I was stationed in Kansas when I got that call. I don't even remember how I got home that time, but I do remember the calling. I think everyone Dad had ever met came to pay their respects. My Uncle Dave, Dad's little brother, took me outside and told me, "When me and your Dad were fishing last month, we were out on the boat, and your dad started talking about you, and how proud he was of you, how you don't avoid making hard decisions. He said he was real proud of the man you've become." I had no idea how to respond to that. I just nodded, lit a cigarette, and choked on the smoke and the tears that I couldn't stop. The nicest thing he'd ever said to me personally was, "You did ok," and from him that was high praise. I turn the volume up and wish he was sitting next to me, enjoying the music and telling me I'm following too close.

\* \* \*

I've been driving for hours, my iPod set on random, just background music to the journey. Suddenly Mick Jagger sings, "So you're stretched out in room 10 09 /

with a smile on your face, and a teardrop in your eye,” and I’m driving across Wyoming ninety miles an hour in the rain. I can hardly see past the hood, and I’m not sure if it’s because of the rain pouring from the sky, or the tears pouring from my eyes. It’s late in the afternoon, and I’ve been driving for hours, from Salt Lake City, headed home for my brother’s funeral, rather than to my friend’s wedding as planned. I’d gotten the call from my uncle that morning, telling me Wayne had been killed in an accident. I’d been so hung-over from my friend’s bachelor party that he had to repeat it three times before I even understood the words he was saying. There’s no better (or worse) cure for a hangover than news like that.

Jess was a trooper. She bit her lip about my driving until I’d worn myself out sufficiently to listen to her. She also never said a word about me playing *Exile On Main Street* over and over and over, from Salt Lake to Richmond, even though she never liked the Stones. Thank God for her, and for Mick, Keith, and the boys. It took all of them to keep me together for that drive.

As Big Bill Broonzy picks out the chords of “The Glory of Love”, I reach over and take Jess’ hand. She is the sweetest thing I’ve ever known, and, next to my Mom, the strongest woman. She saved me from myself. God knows what she saw in me, but thank God she was looking. If it weren’t for her, I’d be dead, or worse. I fell in love with her the first time I saw her. I was walking past her dorm room. Her door was open and Bruce Springsteen was playing. I looked in and saw her, a smokin’ hot blonde, with legs that went all the way up, sitting on the floor, ironing her uniform. She was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen (and still is). I took one look at her, and thought, “That’s the one for me.” She took a great deal more convincing, but I am nothing if not persistent. Now, twenty years later, I’m as crazy about her as ever, and I’m a happy man, something I never thought I’d be.

As Bill plays, I think about my wife, and my life and I’m thankful. I’m thankful for the people in my life, and I’m thankful for the magic of music. It reminds me, not of what I’ve lost, but how much I’ve had, how much I’ve got. I give Jess’ hand a squeeze and tell her I love her. She and I and all my ghosts roll on down the road.

Cold Coffee, Snot, and Soggy Cheerios  
by Stephanie Beckner

This is dedicated to all of the stay at home moms who have ever hidden ice cream and eaten it after bedtime so you wouldn't have to share; to all of the moms who have ever just wanted to pee alone as their two year old lies in front of the toilet throwing a tantrum while they go; and this is to all of the moms who, while they prayed their child would grow up just enough to not need them so much, realized around eighteen years in that they would do almost anything to be needed that way again...this is for you. Trust that you are not in the trenches of mommyhood alone.

\* \* \*

Our house was loud, not just "Oh, honey could you turn down the TV" loud, I am talking about a dull roar at most given times. There was always some level of yelling, bickering, giggling, crying, whining, talking, singing, under arm farting...noise, always noise. I wasn't one of those little girls who dreamed of being a mommy. I dreamed of writing like Erma Bombeck or maybe going to law school. But I found myself marrying my high school sweetheart at an age only appropriate in the Appalachian region, and not long after, I wanted babies. And babies I had. Six beautiful bundles of joy within a little over eight years. I am not sure how my uterus survived the trauma. I have silently considered myself somewhat of a superhero for naturally birthing those babies with my (then) tiny 5'2" frame sans any form of pain medication with the exception of my first who made his entrance via emergency c-section, because even then he liked to get himself in a tangle. In hindsight I am not sure this decision was as much nobility as it was foolishness.

But there I was, the stay at home mommy to six young'uns. I adored the hugs and kisses; the homemade Mother's Day gifts every year complete with cards bearing colorful tiny handprints and "I love you, Mommy" written in big Crayola letters along with the droopy yet majestic purple and yellow violets left to survive in a Styrofoam cup on the kitchen counter; and the way they snuggled into bed with me during a thunderstorm. The first clap of thunder was sure to usher in at least two of the tribe and by the end of the night there would be seven of us in that little bed vying for position and blanket use. There were little sweaty hands and feet everywhere, but there was something peaceful and serene in that early morning chaos.

I had a harder time dealing with the level of snot and feces that six cherub faced little people can expel from their bodies with brute force. I discovered that if you do not wipe a green snotty nose immediately a child will lick said snot from their little chapped top lip. And a poopy diaper left unattended becomes inspiration for a child's new finger-painting masterpiece with the nearest wall being the canvas. And time, "me time" in particular became a scarce commodity. Occasionally, waiting for the opportune moment to literally tiptoe from their midst, I would sneak into the bathroom for a ten minute mommy time out and would savagely

shovel a Twix candy bar into my mouth so quickly that one time when I was trying to sneak out of the bathroom my almost three year old asked “Mommy, is that poop on your mouth?” And as shame washed over me I answered, “Yes, sweetheart” as I wiped my mouth on my sleeve because I would rather lie than admit I was stashing candy.

Reading and writing, one of my pre-mommyhood passions hadn’t altogether vanished from my life, but now instead of Lee, Twain, and Bombeck, I read Shel Silverstein and Dr. Suess, and “Good Night Moon” which in hindsight, wasn’t all that bad. Journaling was replaced by coloring and doodling. I would lie on the floor on my belly with the tribe and color Elmo and My Little Pony pictures for hours, working meticulously to stay in the thick black lines and I would doodle to my heart’s content while making phone calls during nap time each day. Yet another reminder that time and creativity was no longer my own. My favorite Dr. Suess of choice was “Oh, The Places You Will Go”. In fact, I looked forward to that one as much as the kids. It is far deeper than “Green Eggs and Ham” and “One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish”. Somehow in reading this book day after day, I found I was preparing the tribe for life in the real world in more ways than one.

But even in those quiet, sweet moments when they surrounded me, and we were all cuddled up together and life smelled fresh and new, like tear-free shampoo and rainbows, there was always trouble lurking in the distance waiting to pounce. I have faced the “Defcon 1” of stay at-home parenting. You see, there was a week some years ago when 5, of my 6 children, all simultaneously had the chicken pox. The only reason child number six didn’t have them was because, lucky for her, she was still safely tucked inside my womb in the germ free zone. Close your eyes and imagine five children covered with little blistering sores, whining, itching, cute little noses snorting, fevers, crying, scratching, and all needing something from mommy. It was mommy hell. I had two arms, they had ten. I was outmanned and outnumbered. It wasn’t pretty. There was more snot, vomit, pus and Children’s Tylenol that week in our house than I care to recall. I can tell you folks, it was bad.

My favorite times were when the spectators would stand and watch me with my gaggle of children trying to get through the checkout line at the grocery. There was inevitably always at least one child crying because they wanted candy, someone had to pee and someone had already peed. My unbrushed hair was now hanging out of my pony tail as I fumbled for cash and coupons, trying to smile while the newly weaned toddler was pulling my shirt down looking for a snack. People stopped and watched the madness unfold, the cashier stood, mouth agape, like she was watching the apes at the new zoo exhibit. And then they would attempt to offer words of condolence to me such as “Oh my, you have your hands full” or “At least you don’t have a job too, Dear”. Sometimes, if I were particularly exhausted and hormonal I would cry, but more often than not, I would smile and mutter “Moron” under my breath as we walked away from the bewildered onlookers and as we left the store one of the tribe would ask “Momma, who’s moron?”

I don’t know how many times over the years I heard the words “Oh, so you don’t work?” Don’t work?! I can’t tell you the number of times I have wished that

my right hand would become an oversized boxing glove on a spring, so that with the push of a button I could knock them out cold. Don't work?! When was the last time they did a twenty-four shift with four kids with the stomach flu? Have you ever tried to get six children into church on a Sunday morning, freshly bathed, no one with soggy cheerios stuck to their cheeks? My job is twenty four hours a day, no time clock, no paid vacation. I can't remember the last time I had lunch with a girlfriend without having barf on my shirt. I went on an eight year stretch without having a hot, straight from the pot cup of coffee. My life is soggy cereal and sticky lifesavers in the bottom of my bargain rack tote bag. I have been looked down on like I am lazy because I stay at home with my children. That is the irony of the "job". I was expected as a female to take care of my children, however, I wasn't valued for choosing that as my career. But any man in my position, making the same choice I did is hailed as a selfless saint for being willing to stay at home with his children. "What a great guy!" I would often hear about the dad at the PTA who stayed at home while his wife was finishing her medical residency. Someone once had the balls to say to me "How will your children learn the importance of working hard?" I have taught them not only the importance of working hard, but the importance of not giving up in the hard times. I have taught them that they have choices in this life, and just because someone chooses differently that doesn't make them any less valuable.

Those who think a stay at home mom has taken the easy road has clearly never attempted to care for children at home, day in and day out, with no end in sight. There is no time clock in my kitchen where I punch out at the end of a long day. There are no regular breaks or lunch hours, and no sick days. In fact, I went for about sixteen years without eating a hot meal in a seated position. Stay at home mommyhood wasn't a choice I made for the accolades that I would receive, in fact I had heard it could be a thankless job- my mother used to tell me all the time. But the #1 Mom magnet picture frames on the fridge make it pretty worth it.

So for those reading this who are sleep deprived and bone weary from the day in and day out ride through mommyhood, I promise that you too will survive. In fact, when the ride is over, and you exit the gate in your shirt that's stained with vomit, split ends that needed attention months ago, holding a cold cup of coffee that needs nuked for the third time, you will look back and you will wish the ride hadn't ended so quickly, and the tears you shed won't all be tears of joy. So hang in there, laugh more and enjoy...it's the ride of a lifetime!

## The Emotional Obituary of My Son: PTSD and the Scars of War

by Stephanie Beckner

Runner-up, 2015 Prize for Nonfiction

This summer I traveled to Kansas to be with my son as he prepared to leave for his second deployment in as many years. We spent a beautiful day out and about together. We shopped at Cabela's where he made plans to hunt when he returned to the States, we shared good food, we laughed and tried to absorb every second of togetherness that we could. Our last stop of the day was a large shopping mall with a Target where my daughter-in-law and I wanted to go. It had been a beautiful day, not too warm by Kansas' standards, and the sun was setting in the distance. We were just outside of Kansas City, directly across from the city's major sports stadium. When we got out of the car I heard the tell tale crack of the bat. Cheers erupted through the crowd and I was certain it must have been a homerun.

Then fireworks began to explode overhead, not just the mild, sparkly ones, but the kind that resemble the sonic boom created by the breaking of the sound barrier by fighter jets. Instantly and instinctively, my son hit the pavement. It happened so quickly, at first, I didn't realize where he had gone. Then I saw him, face down on the pavement, shaking violently from head to toe. The scene was surreal. In fact, it didn't at first register why he was on the ground. Had he been shot? Was that the sound I had heard? Life slipped into slow motion. I could hear the crowd cheering from across the highway; the sulfur from the fireworks was heavy in the air, burning my nostrils; I could see my daughter-in-law crouched next to him and I could hear laughter. The laughter didn't match the rest of the scenario. It was like one of those "find what's wrong with this picture" puzzles in the *Highlights* magazines my kids loved to read when they were still small. It seemed an eternity passed before my mind had fully registered what was transpiring in this parking lot. Just like that, everything returned to normal speed and without thought or hesitation I honed in on the source of the laughter. There was a couple in the car parked next to us and they were laughing hysterically at how startled my son had been at the explosion of the fireworks.

I shoved my head into their car through the open window and growled through tears and clenched teeth, quietly enough so that he wouldn't hear me say "He was in combat, you idiots." The man immediately grasped what I was telling them. In that moment, I saw the ugliness my son had been facing every day. Terror, humiliation, and suffering the death of the young man he once was inside. He was in tears, and unable to speak. It took my son minutes before he could compose himself enough to get completely back to his feet. He looked at me with such shame. With a weak voice and a quivering chin he said "Mom, I am so embarrassed. I am so sorry." He sounded like a terrified child in that moment.

My son Andrew is a handsome, blonde, All-American young man. He is 24, married, and will be a new father just after the coming New Year. Andrew is strong and thoughtful. He always has been even as a child. As Andrew's mom, I

knew early on he would be a soldier, a police officer or perhaps a fireman, because I knew Andrew would be a man who would serve and protect others. That is how Andrew was as a boy, always concerned about the underdog, rescuing the scrawny kid who had been stuffed into his locker. And in 2008, just one week after his high school graduation he left for boot camp. He enlisted in the United States Army, in the infantry. Our infantrymen are the nation's first line of defense in a combat zone, they are the front lines. These are the men and women who stand in the gap between us and those who threaten the peace of our once great nation. They are generally the first to fire their weapons and the first to take on enemy fire.

A soldier's return from war should be a joyous occasion, and initially it is. They are welcomed home in a hail of cheers, applause and tears of relief. The enormous American flag waved wildly as the soldiers came in first in orderly fashion, then running as "Red, White and Blue" by Toby Keith blared through the gymnasium speakers and those soldiers realized their families were in there waiting for them. We welcomed more than 300 soldiers home that blustery February day in Kansas. A military homecoming ceremony is an amazing experience. It is one I will never forget. I had prayed for this young man's safe return every day for 270 days. There he was back in my protective embrace.

His first words to me as I sobbed into his broad shoulder were "Mom, it's ok, I promised you I'd come back." Andrew came home to us after his first deployment nearly 18 months ago now. But just because he left the combat zone doesn't mean the war is over, not for Andrew and not for the thousands of other soldiers who return to US soil following their time spent at war.

Many soldiers struggle to re-enter their everyday lives. They must switch gears, quickly and drastically. The day my son deployed the first time, I fought an inward battle to make myself physically let him out of my arms to walk away. When soldiers are preparing to deploy, they have to put their affairs in order. Many of those in combat are fresh out of high school, and they are writing final letters to their loved ones, stating their preferred religions and who is to be the first notified in the event that they are killed in action. My 18 year old son was writing his last will and testament and deciding what the last words would be that he would speak to his mom. I can't begin to wrap my mind around what that was like for him.

I once heard a veteran speak about his experiences. He had been a highly decorated fighter pilot during the Vietnam War, but he walked away from that to become a chaplain who served in combat zones. He said that among all of the young soldiers he spoke with who were uttering their final words, the majority of them only wanted him to tell their mothers how much they loved them.

When Andrew left us, I feared physical death. I had nightmares frequently and would be startled from my sleep by the words "On behalf of a grateful nation". I prayed daily that we wouldn't be a family with a folded flag on the mantle. There were times I knew he was walking into battle. Andrew would email me and say "Mom, I'm heading out and we need extra prayers today". I bargained with God to just please let him come out alive. It never occurred to me that parts of Andrew would be dead and gone when he returned home. The young man who left my

arms that warm, sunny day was not the same man who would return the following winter. Andrew was visibly nervous riding in the car when we left his post that day to celebrate his return with his favorite, a steak dinner. His hands shook as he cut his steak and he couldn't handle the crowd and the noise in the restaurant. But he smiled, and hugged me over and over that day. His siblings blew up balloons for a party celebrating his return home with our extended families a few days later. The house was warm and filled with laughter and gratitude. His younger brother popped a balloon and Andrew instinctively turned and cowered away from the noise. Later that night, after everyone had left, we sat around our family room and talked about the days when everyone was still under the same roof. During a break in the conversation, Andrew, who was laying on his belly on the floor just like he did as a child started to talk. His voice was quiet. He said "I can't believe that I am really at home. I feel like I'm still there." A profound silence fell over the room. There were seven of us in the family room. I wanted to let Andrew share as much as he was able to so soon. He eventually continued.

"Last Friday, I watched friends die. We had five trucks heading down out of the mountains. We had finished our missions and three of us were heading for home at the first of the week. We were laughing; I had just put a dip in when two of the trucks in the front ran over the mine."

He stopped talking for several minutes. No one said anything. I could feel the sting of the tears on my cheeks.

I didn't want to move. His brother looked at the floor, his sisters cried.

"They were three days from the plane home and then they were dead," he said.

Then without looking up, he said, "I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset anyone".

I assured Andrew that home would always be a safe place for him. His little brother told him how proud he was before he went to bed.

Andrew and I stayed up half the night that night. He told me he thought his girlfriend, Brie, was "the one" and he wanted to know what I thought about that. We talked more about his time in Afghanistan. He told me that there were many things he didn't want to tell me, he didn't want to upset me.

"I'm tough," I said.

He needed that affirmation because he then told me a story about an Afghani mother and her two children, a young boy and girl that they watched walk into a land mine while they were on duty. He shared graphic details of how the mother and little girl died almost instantly, many of their limbs had been scattered over the street, their bodies mangled and faces disfigured. The little boy laid and cried, missing an arm and leg. He whimpered words in a foreign tongue; Andrew knew enough of the language to know the little boy was praying for mercy, he was praying to go where his mother and sister had gone. Andrew stayed with them as long as he could.

Andrew began to cry again, saying over and over again that they had tried to save them, but there was nothing they could do. He talked about the way burning flesh smells and how it lives in your nostrils for days and days.

This is what my son sees and hears when he closes his eyes. Andrew told me

once that he had done things he wasn't proud of, and I am certain he means taking someone's life. He can't say those words aloud because that makes the atrocities a reality. That was the last time Andrew talked about Afghanistan. Andrew is angry and struggles to deal with normal, daily stresses in life. Andrew is afraid of how this will affect his marriage and how he will be as a father.

In writing this, I consider that maybe emotional obituaries should be written for these young men and women that are returning home to the United States. Their physical bodies return, however, there is a part of them that is gone, forever.



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# T.

# Tributaries

Poetry

Featuring work by:

Jon Ratchford  
Katie Hollingsworth  
Shyla Mahlerwein  
Shore Crawford  
Lindsey Dirksen

Alone  
by Jon Ratchford

Alone, alone  
Is it self – imposed?  
Instinctually I rush  
to flee from love's touch.

Keeping love at bay.  
In the back of my mind.  
Whatever drives me  
keeps others away.

Don't let it be me!  
Don't let it be true!  
Turn this life's night to day!  
Turn this black into blue!

Can these clouds possibly part,  
letting love reach my heart?  
Or is this really me,  
and love just a dream?

Consume  
by Jon Ratchford

In the land of consumers,  
we are the ones being consumed.  
Consumed by the fires of  
passion and acquisition.

Materialism, Death's sister,  
lures us into the night  
singing sweet lullabies and lies.  
Promising the forbidden fruit  
but delivering only rotten apples.

Fuck my credit!  
Kill the bills!  
Set me free!  
Set me free!  
Free from desire or want!

Urbania  
by Jon Ratchford

Chain fences border  
This urban jungle of man  
We're all prisoners.

Stacks spew black bile  
Bruising what's left of blue skies  
Behind glass towers.

Those on high dictate  
Their concrete minds devour  
All sense of freedom.

Consuming us all  
Consuming what's left until  
The water runs dry.

Peer Pressure  
by Katie Hollingsworth  
First Runner-Up, 2015 Prize for Poetry

I started drinking,  
after realizing  
that boys would kiss me  
if I were holding a red cup.  
I thought perhaps,  
one might find me pretty  
with blurry vision.  
Perhaps,  
after seven beers  
and ten shots of vodka  
he might find me interesting.  
If I said something  
I didn't mean,  
I could blame it  
on the bottle in my hand,  
and he could do the same.  
I had nothing to lose,  
nothing to gain.  
So I began trying to kill my heart,  
one shot at a time.

To Go to Moca  
by Shyla Mahlerwein

To wake up in the morning and hear the heavy rain  
beating on the old tin roof

To admire the artistry of the gutters the allow rain  
to trickle beautifully down, down, down.

To smell the water through the gust of air  
and walk in the puddles down the same street again

To see all the people crowd around on the streets  
living their life right in front of me

And the sound of music always distant

To see accepting smiles and friendly faces  
to come to where you are without all the miles

To open my eyes and be where  
everything is green

To live there  
land of eternal spring

Too Many Spoken Words  
by Shore Crawford

aye baby, I love you, I swear it.

ya ya ya.

Is all I hear,

The depth of a relationship

la la la

Lacking, depth

Shallow as a puddle, as

A reflection of who

We'll become

ya ya ya

aye, I say

hold me tighter, closer and harder

aye, you say

la la la

We sing, doing our dance

Avoiding the ultimate question,

Will this last?

ya ya ya

I decide, maybe it won't

But lets have fun.

La la la,

fun is all we need

ya ya ya

aye, lets be nothing

i heard it lasts forever

la la la

XO (Huff)  
by Shore Crawford

Let's do it for the XO's, the  
thrill of love.  
Huff the X's and O's.

Breathe it deep  
you say, then huff  
and puff and blow it all out.  
All your fears,  
ambitions, empty the  
spirit, the rib-cage.  
Your being.

Inhale and exhale,  
my friend.  
Huff the X's and O's.

Let's suffocate our lungs,  
for love and pleasure.  
The smoke from our mouths,  
form XOs.  
They form sentences,  
throughout the air, stars and sky.

Take a hit,  
of love.  
Huff the X's and O's.  
It releases the mind,  
and imprisons the soul.  
Forget who you are,  
and become who you'll become.  
Practice your breathing,  
huff, puff.

Listen to your heart,  
let the love seep out.  
Let's do it for the X's and O's.

Live for,  
the thrills of love.  
Huff the X's and O's.

Our Seasonal Touch  
by Shore Crawford  
2015 Prize for Poetry

The new budding, of our lives, intertwined.  
A breath of air enters our lungs, bright, new  
Soft lilac, caresses our cheeks. Opened  
Into smiles, wide. A spring love, forever more.

Our hot, rash affection. Could never fade.  
We sure know how to run, free. Our hands grasp,  
The uncensored thoughts, rushing over us.  
Pull me onto the summer grass, darling.

Deep, red love can fall. Float away on wind,  
into soul, into spirit. The gathering.  
of memories, of love. Seems far, too far.  
The autumn of our love, breaks away, done.

Cold, and harsh words. Chip at the heart. Regret,  
Frosts at the mind. Our chapped lips, hold back speech.  
How can life seem so long ago, my dear?  
winter chill, breathes upon our love once more.

Oil Lamp  
by Lindsey Dirksen

Sitting blissfully atop a shelf  
Golden light creates one ball of illumination  
With the click of a quarter turned knob  
Oil heats a burning flame

Teardrop glass swoops  
Encasing the small flicker of red  
Centered moves electric blue  
Hot clarity above cool brass

A closed cylinder base is home  
For slick and slimy oil  
Steadily heating to encourage flames  
Dancing inside of the curved glass edge

Covered with brass assets  
Outturned and tuliped at each bend  
Pushing warmth and light out  
For those who need its time

Lace handle turns once more  
As darkness turns brass black  
Their ball of light is swept away  
Lost from its lamp and the world itself

# T.

# Tributaries

## Art

Featuring work by:

Kaly Reichter  
Megan Templeton  
Paula Woofleif  
Kellie Gransbury  
Liza Allen



© Paula Woodlief

*Arbor at IUE.* Paula Woodlief, 2014. Digital Photography.





*Mother Nature.* Megan Templeton, 2014. Sculpture.



*Pottery--Untitled 6.* Megan Templeton, 2014. Sculpture.



*Snip It.* Paula Woofleif, 2014. Photography. First Runner Up, 2015 Prize for Art.



*The New Economy.* Kaly Reichter, 2014. Photography.



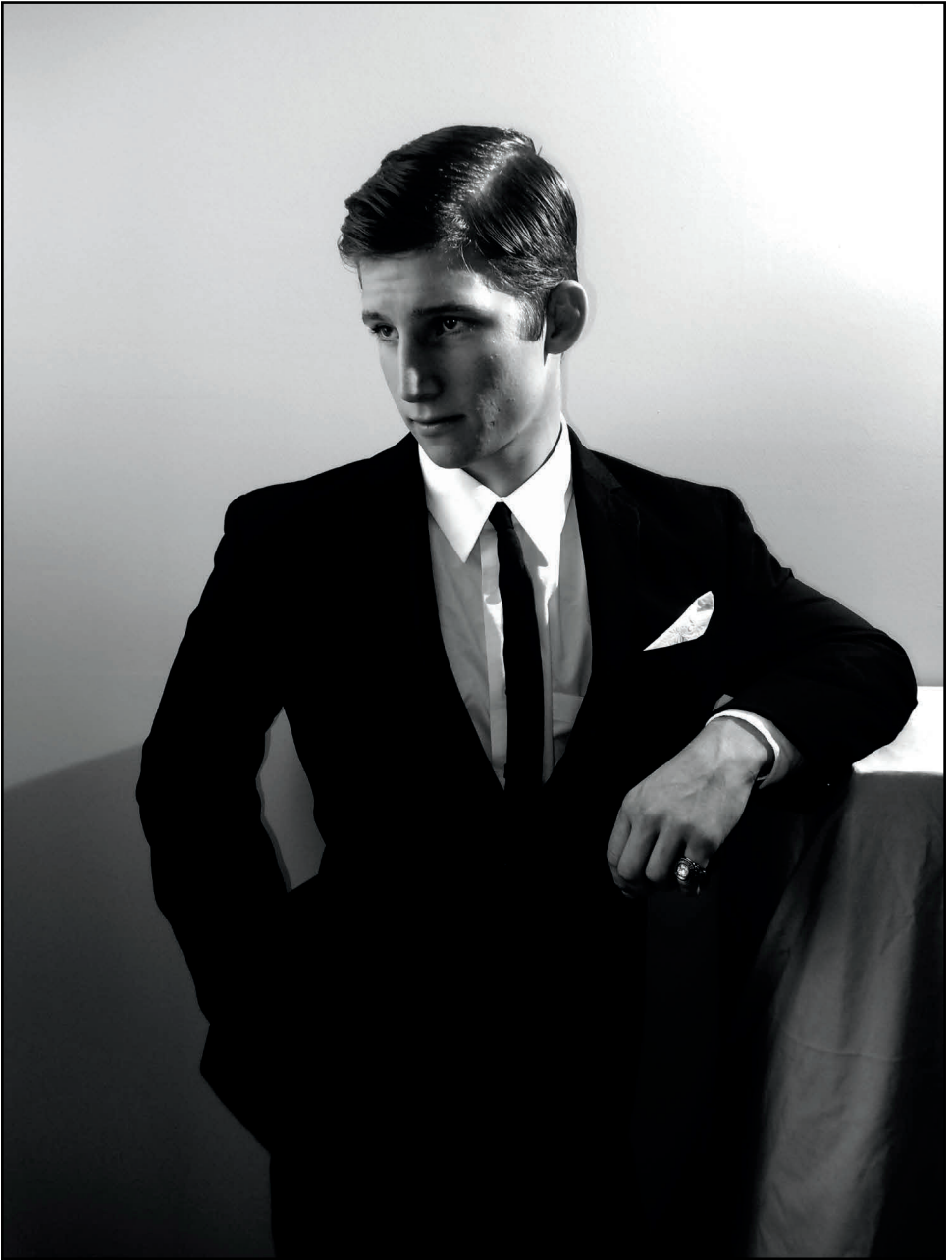
*Bipolar Lungs*. Kellie Gransbury, 2014. Sculpture. 2015 Prize for Art.



*Daisy.* Kaly Reichter, 2014. Photography.



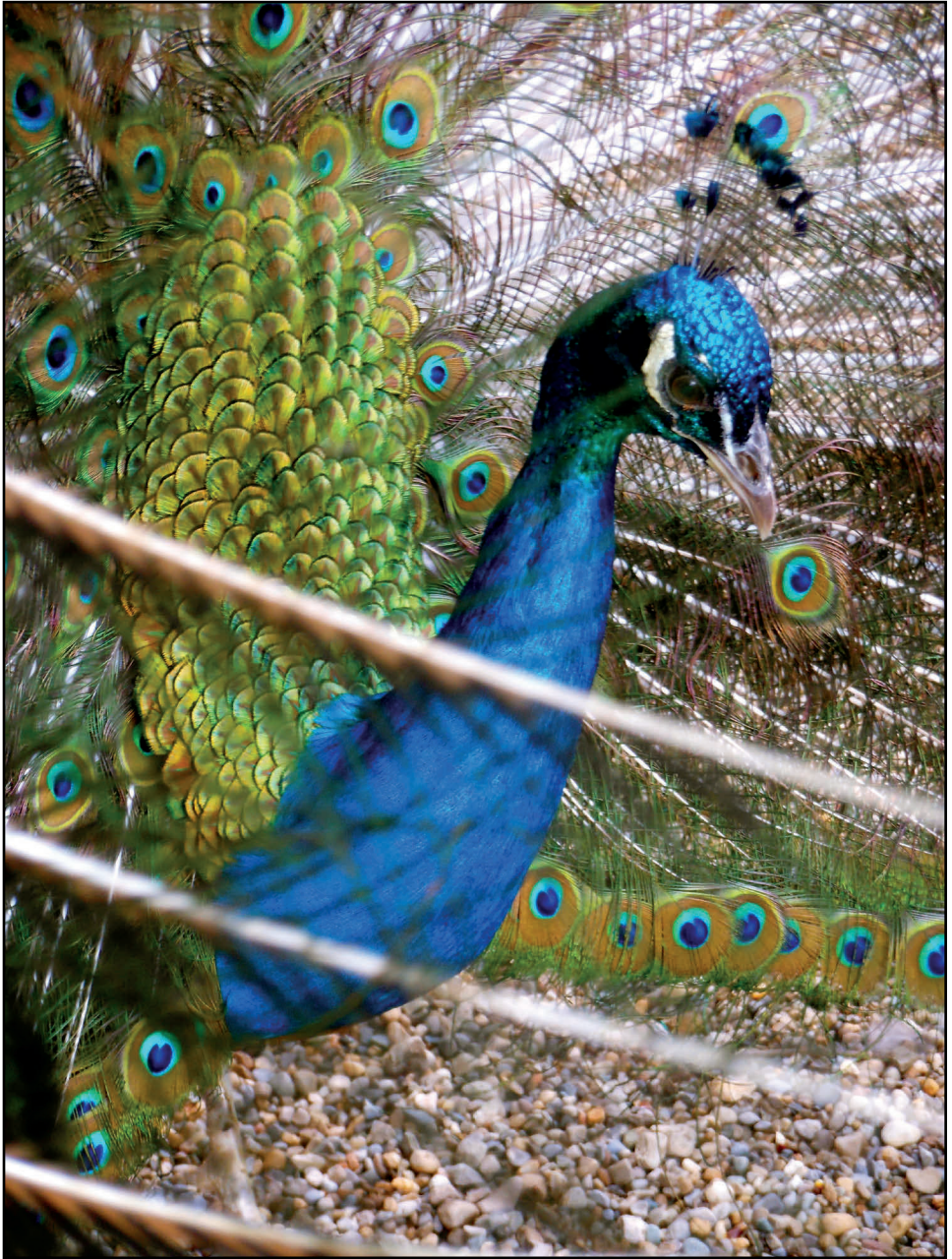
*Kaly x3*. Kaly Reichter, 2014. Photography.



*A Hurrell Recreation.* Liza Allen, 2014. Photography.



*Glitzy, Glittery & Twisty.* Liza Allen, 2014. Photography.



*Vanity.* Liza Allen, 2014. Photography.



*Jacksonville Blue.* Paula Woodleif, 2014. Photography.





# T.

# Tributaries

## Reviews

Featuring work by:

Daron Olson, Ph.D.  
Patty Glen

Karen V. Hansen. *Encounters on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890-1930*. Oxford University Press, 2013. 360 pp. Hardcover.

Reviewed by Daron Olson, Ph.D.

\* \* \*

Hansen has written a moving and poignant account of the relationship between Dakota Indians and Scandinavian immigrant homesteaders on the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation in North Dakota. The story has a personal touch as well for Hansen's grandmother arrived with her mother from Norway in 1905, staking a 160 acre claim on the reservation. A historical sociologist, Hansen observes the formative years when the Dakota were forced onto the reservation to begin a new way of life, which coincided with the arrival of the Scandinavians. She notes that "together Dakotas and Scandinavians forged an uneasy tolerance and mutual acceptance that grew out of living together through drought, economic depression, and the ebb and flow of daily life" (24-25).

Owing to the paucity of primary sources, Hansen relies on personal interviews with the descendants of the Dakota and original Scandinavian settlers. She bolsters these with additional sources such as plat maps, photographs, and the observations of other historians. Her first three chapters establish the historical context for the encounter. Chapter 1 traces the developments that set the two groups on a collision course; chapter 2 outlines the events that drove thousands of Scandinavians to leave their European homelands and seek land in North Dakota; and chapter 3 investigates U.S. government policy that aimed to assimilate Indians through private property and education.

In the final five chapters, Hansen's book really hits its stride as she analyzes the tricky and sometimes tense negotiation that ensued between Dakotas and Scandinavians. In chapter 4, she observes how white homesteaders began making farms and building commercial establishments. Through their activities of ploughing the land, constructing villages, churches, and public schools, and planting trees, Scandinavians transformed the reservation landscape. Hansen uses chapter 5 to view how the process of creating racial boundaries ensued. In one sense the white Scandinavians certainly benefited in ways the Dakota did not, yet she mentions that Anglo-American bigotry toward both groups led them to forge "a link created by a commonality of circumstance and off-reservation bigotry that lumped them together" (136). Over time, "reservation inhabitants began to intertwine their kinship networks through marriage and adoption" (136). The collective struggle against the encroaching "industrializing agricultural economy" also served to ally the two groups. Scandinavians relied on kin, community, and cooperative networks to agitate for political reform, while a small group of Dakota farmers sought redress through the Indian Office on the reservation. What is fascinating to this time period is that both groups attempted to preserve their culture, including non-English languages, against the assimilationist pressures from mainstream America.

In her final section, Hansen explores the different trajectories taken by the two

groups. The Dakota used the courts and the legal process to obtain their rights as U.S. citizens and their standing as a separate nation. Meanwhile, the Scandinavians took to the ballot box, with Norwegians in particular joining the Nonpartisan League to end corporate abuses of the farmers, supporting reforms such as a state-owned and run bank, a state mill and elevator, and state-operated cold storage plants, plus increased regulation of the railroads. As Hansen states about Spirit Lake, "Dakotas and Norwegians both utilized the combination of landownership and citizenship not simply to adapt to American society but also to retain their hold on the land, resist the dominant culture, speak a language other than English, and challenge the economy that privileged big banks and disadvantaged small producers" (189).

This process, though, had its dark side for Scandinavians served as the main agents of Dakota dispossession on the reservation. Hansen demonstrates that while the Dakota were initially the largest group of landowners, by 1929 they owned only one-quarter of reservation land. The U.S. government encouraged this land transfer through the sale of Indian lands, and Scandinavians owned 70,931 acres compared to 49,009 acres owned by the Dakota (their acreage had been cut in half in about 40 years, 28, 216-18). Hansen notes that this increase in Scandinavian ownership was brought about through consolidation and, in effect, fewer individual Scandinavians owned land than had before. Many of these "failures" left the reservation or became agricultural labor. The Dakota who were dispossessed remained on their land owing to their status as members of the Dakota nation, but they too suffered economic hardship, much like many of their Scandinavian neighbors. Allowing for this nefarious aspect, Hansen concludes her study with a sense of guarded optimism, adding that "despite state-engineered, legally codified racial stratification and clashing cultural logistics, these vastly different peoples achieved a degree of peaceable coexistence. Throughout their shared and separate history, the land on which they have coexisted has both defined the boundaries between them, and hold them together" (242).

Hansen's achievement in *Encounters on the Plains* is that she has brought together two strands of American history—the story of indigenous peoples and the story of the immigrants—showing the role played by immigrants in the dispossession of native peoples. She further notes that the unconscionable U.S. government treatment of Indian peoples through the process of state building and imperial expansion has not prompted current government leaders or individual land owners to make apologies. Likewise, Scandinavians past and present have eluded "the thorny past" by misremembering or living uncomfortably with it. On a personal level, she notes that while her own family members express moral quandaries, they did not become Native rights activists or abandon their Norwegian chauvinism.

A fine contribution to the transcultural intersection of American history, Hansen's study documents an important chapter in the dispossession of the Dakota people, while showing that outside forces such as state power and industrialized agriculture can create spaces where two different peoples—the Dakota and the Scandinavians—could find common ground through a shared struggle.

Amanda Sebring. *Father's Blood: Book One of the Bond of Kings Series*. CreateSpace, 2014. N.p. Ebook.

Reviewed by Patty Glen

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Many of us try to shop local, eat local, and try to support the economy of whatever town we happen to live in. My question is this: why don't we read local? We may not be a literature capital of the world, but Richmond is home to a number of authors, all of whom are worth consideration for your next reading choice. One great example is Amanda Sebring's debut novel *Father's Blood: Book One of the Bond of Kings Series*.

A Richmond native, Sebring has lived in Nevada, Ohio, and Illinois before returning to Indiana, where she lives with her husband. She is currently working on two more books: the sequel to *Father's Blood*, which will be called *Father's Voice*, and a steampunk novel titled *The Unmaking of Finnigan Blott*. I met Sebring when she had a book signing at my store. She is a cheerful, outgoing person, and her writing style reflects this: the novel never drags; the plot is fast paced and quickly draws the reader in.

The story takes place forty years after a devastating war between the kingdoms of Kutteridge and Helsbeth. Kutteridge won the war by constructing a magical, impassable barrier between the two lands, and is now enjoying prosperity under the reign of a good king, Errick, and his son, Prince Eathan. But, when a mage from Helsbeth, Kathrynne (or Rynne), crosses the border, the ways of life of both kingdoms are called into question.

The characters are believable and well fleshed out. King Errick is a good king, but more importantly a good man. He keenly feels the responsibilities of his position and the guilt of having disposed his father years ago. He is kindly, but stern; one gets the impression that he is haunted by some of his choices and a promise he made years ago involving his son, Prince Eathan who, at first glance, appears to be madcap. As the story unfolds, however, the reader sees that there is more to him than meets the eye. The heir to a truly dreadful curse as well as the throne of Kutteridge, Eathan walks a fine line between madness and responsibility, helped in no small way by the unique bond he shares with his father (as this bond is a major plot point, I won't go into detail about it, but it is an interesting factor in the book, with foreseen and unforeseen consequences, and something that I hope gets explored more in future novels in the series). Then there is Kathrynne, or Rynne, the sorceress. Strong willed and spunky, Rynne manages to escape from a land where her magic is outlawed to a land where she is in danger of being labeled an enemy spy, and where she makes an enemy of the court's resident sorceress. Rather than be constantly on the run, Rynne chooses to try living in Mallowthorne (capital of Kutteridge), right under the nose of the people looking for her.

Lovers of fantasy will feel right at home in this magical world. Sebring has put

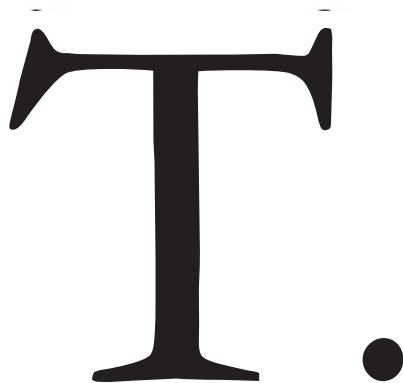
time and effort into building of it and it shows, as *Father's Blood* is a vivid story of sorcerers and warrior kings, of merchants and mages, taking the reader from the garden city of Mallowthorne to the wastelands of Helsbeth. There are hints at a much larger world with complicated politics, but they are not intrusive to the plot, unlike many fantasy novels where the reader is bogged down in political minutiae. Indeed, the nods to the world outside of the conflict between Helsbeth and Kutteridge serve as a pleasant addition and make the reader want to know more about the other lands beyond the borders.

For those of a more philosophical bent, the book is very much character driven, and themes such as the bond between fathers and sons (as the title indicates), mercy versus justice, the clashes between love and jealousy, the nature of leadership, and, of course, magic are all explored. As an example, though the King is a just and honorable man, he too has his flaws. He chooses to not fulfill an oath, thus sparking some of the actions of the main antagonist in the novel. When confronted with this choice, he has his own quite understandable reasons for doing so, but the reader is left wondering whether or not he did the right thing. That's all I'll say--the plot's themes are tied heavily to the events in the novel itself, and I do wish to avoid spoilers.

All in all, *Father's Blood* is a strong debut novel from a local author, ideal for the college age and up crowd.

*Patty Glen is a co-owner of the Two Sisters: Books & More in Richmond's Depot District. A part-time archaeologist, she holds degrees in Anthropology and Classical Studies from Purdue University.*



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# Tributaries

Prize Winner Biographies  
and Judges' Statements

## 2015 Prize Winner Biographies

### Fiction

First Place: "A Kentucky Courtship" by Lloyd Mullins

*Lloyd "Moon" Mullins is a U.S. Air Force veteran, world traveler, humorist, sexual icon, philosopher, bon vivant, raconteur, literary and film connoisseur, dog lover (platonically), husband (not platonically), father, grandfather, brother, uncle, cousin, son, grand-son, great- (well, you've got the idea), photographer, pizza-delivery expert, skid-builder extraordinaire, and lover of hyperbole and parenthesis. He learned to love story-telling listening to blood-curdling, hair-raising, frequently hilarious tales of life in early 20th Century Kentucky from his Grandparents, John and Rose Mullins, from whom he also learned never to let the truth get in the way of a good story.*

### Creative Nonfiction

First Place: "It Doesn't Cry" by Ryan Wysong

*Ryan Wysong is an aspiring author who holds a white belt in grammar. He earned a master's degree in Crew Served Weapons at the University of Sadr City. He is husband to a true angel and proud father of two. Ryan has an office job where he does most of his writing. Please don't tell his boss.*

### Poetry

First Place: "Our Seasonal Touch" by Shore Crawford

*Shore Crawford is a Junior at Indiana University East. He currently lives in Greenville, Ob. He is a Communications major, with a minor in Creative Writing. He is a member of the Student Government Association, and serves as the head of the Public Relations committee. When not in school, you can find Shore reading, writing, hiking, camping or jamming out to music. In writing, his biggest inspirations are J.R.R. Tolkien, H.P. Lovecraft, and Beyoncé.*

## Art

### First Place: “Bipolar Lungs” by Kellie Gransbury

*Kellie Gransbury was born in Ohio and grew up in the Richmond, Indiana area. After graduating from Northeastern High School in 1995, she received a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Purdue University. She has worked a variety of positions including veterinary assistant, environmental laboratory analyst and over-the-road truck driver as well as volunteer positions at Hayes Arboretum. Kellie has always enjoyed the medical profession and is now pursuing a second bachelor's degree in nursing. Between school, working as a Certified Nursing Assistant and caring for two young daughters, Kellie leads a busy life. Various forms of art have always been enjoyable to Kellie. When she took a ceramics course, she discovered a love of ceramics that she hopes to further. She also enjoys travel and previously participated in a five-month study abroad program in Sweden giving her the opportunity to travel throughout Europe. Other interests include cooking, reading, participating in Zumba and yoga classes and spending time with family.*

## Judges' Statements

### Literary Works

**Judge:** Sarah Beth Childers, writer in residence, Earlham College and author of *Shake Terribly the Earth: Stories from an Appalachian Family*. Ohio University Press, 2013.

#### What I Looked For

**Sense of Place.** One of my favorite books of poetry is Ted Kooser's *Winter Morning Walks*, which describes the daily walks Kooser took while he was recovering from cancer treatments. When I read Lloyd Mullins's "A Kentucky Courtship," I felt like I traveled to rural Kentucky after the First World War and stayed there, all the way through his charming last line, "That's a story for another day, and another jug."

**Voice.** A strong narrative voice can transport the reader into a different culture, time, and life experience. One of my favorite stories to teach is Jacquira Diaz's short story "Section 8," with a slangy narrative voice that allows me to empathize with the young people in a Miami Latino community. Ryan Wysong's matter-of-fact voice in "It Doesn't Cry" allows me to feel the heartbreak and unbreakable love of a father of a little boy with autism.

**Structure.** Reading Shore Crawford's poem "Our Seasonal Touch," I thought of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," where each lyric section gives readers a glimpse of a blackbird. In Crawford's poem, every section shows readers a different stage of a relationship, taking us from the "budding" springtime of a new love to the "chapped lips" and "winter chill" of a breakup, encouraging readers to contemplate the ways that human life mirrors nature.

**Character Development.** One of my favorite essays is David James Duncan's "The Mickey Mantle Koan," both for his honest contemplation of his grief after his brother John's death and for the way he portrays his beloved lost brother as a vain, uncoordinated, and misogynistic teenager. Similarly, I enjoyed Garrett Jones's short story "Melvin, 1963" for Jones's unapologetic portrayal of a flawed yet likable young man. Melvin fills his brain with naked

women and tries to pass himself off as a sixteen-year-old alcohol connoisseur.

**Emotional Honesty.** Reading Katie Hollingsworth's poem "Peer Pressure," I thought of the raw, confessional honesty of Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Hollingsworth's speaker unforgettably describes herself drinking alcohol as a means of attracting dysfunctional relationships with men.

**Cultural Relevance.** One of the most important hallmarks of a piece with the power to affect readers is cultural relevance. In 1955, James Baldwin published his essay collection *Notes of a Native Son*, talking openly about segregation and the portrayal of Blacks in the media. In her essay "The Emotional Obituary of My Son: PTSD and the Scars of War," Stephanie Beckner fearlessly calls attention to the plight of soldiers with PTSD and the new, unending battles soldiers face after they return home.

## **Visual Art**

### **Judges: Indiana University East Fine Arts Faculty**

When asked to pick the award winners for the visual art entries, we had quite a difficult decision to make. In the end, we chose "Bipolar Lungs" and "Snip It" as our top award winners. "Bipolar Lungs" displayed an impressive and visually engaging level of commitment to the process while "Snip It" had an intensely jarring juxtaposition of images and a stark composition that immediately drew in the viewer.

Both works display strong narrative qualities in which one reads like a slightly fantastical biography and the other a dark short story with an ambiguous ending, each leaving the viewer to ponder upon the work long after they see it.

