



Ginseng

2021/2022



Ginseng
(*Panax quinquefolius*)

Annie Smice



2021/2022



Thank you to Mosser Meadow Nurseries for sponsoring this year's publication.

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Ginseng is the Garrett County Art's Council's annual literary publication showcasing the work of local, Garrett County authors. The publication includes poems, short stories, play scripts and nonfiction. For more information about Ginseng, please email us at info@garrettarts.org.

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Poetry about Poetry

By Patsy Newell

Poetry about poetry makes me uneasy
My stomach gets queasy
and I have to stop the reading.

Rising from my metal chair
A brief hand coursing through my hair,
I have to say "I do not care."

Poetry about poetry is not, I say, sublime.
as if the answers lie in rhyme,
and the parsing of each line.

My poetry, of late, has been constipated,
Crammed full of the overstated,
condensation of the antiquated.

Form precludes the message I wish to convey,
That the poet at the lectern must say:
Poetry about poetry is ever so passé.

Good Friend

By Lori Stoll

“My good friend is coming,”
said the man who led twenty cars
around the bend, past head stones,
to the place where good friend will lie.

Farther on, work-capped and teed,
the men prepare the vault
where good friend will descend
and soon lay down to sleep.

Words caught in the cyclist’s throat
as tears unstuck and trickled down,
side-by-side with beads of sweat,
much-deserved in the sweltering heat.

The Flower Girl

By Bob Newman

She stood smiling in the rain underneath a big yellow and white striped umbrella. Long brown hair fell onto the shoulders of a pale green sundress that stopped just short of her bare knees, white strappy sandals coiled around her soaked feet. She stared off into the distance, maybe looking for the first glimpse of a very important someone far down the street, or maybe looking at nothing at all as her mind focused on something at work or at home. I hoped for the latter, that she wasn't anticipating seeing a face familiar in any kind of intimate way, a husband or a child or an overbearing mother arriving for lunch, where she'd lecture or harangue or otherwise pollute her young life with nonsensical advice of how she should live it. Because it appeared to me that she was living her life quite well. Well dressed, a poised half-smile on a friendly face, confidently waiting alone in the rain late on a dreary Thursday while the afternoon rush rushed past her, everyone on their way home, or maybe to a bar to drink their dinner. But she waited patiently, moving slightly back and forth as if swaying to music heard only by her.

And behind her ear a flower, small, yellow petals around a white center, carelessly poised as if hastily put there and then forgotten. I couldn't stop wondering about the flower, about how it got there, who other than her might've put it there, was it a symbol (love), an affectation (conceit), or just a flower, absent-mindedly pushed there and forgotten.

Before I knew it I was walking towards her, no idea what I was going to say, only that I was going to say something. I hoped that she would be kind, would see that I usually don't do this sort of thing and grace me with a smile and a few words of her own. Whether it would be more than that I had no idea, but I was powerless to stop myself. She was the kind of girl that you met rarely, and when you did you risked everything, knowing that it might be your only chance. I threaded my way across the sidewalk crammed with people, most of them head up but eyes down, staring at their phones or their feet or just lost in their own thoughts. As I approached her from behind I circled to my right a little so as to not pop up out of nowhere at her shoulder, which would probably earn me not a smile but a sharp rebuke, or possibly a sharp elbow in the ribs.

Six feet away I heard a soft trill and saw her reach into a small pocket on the side of her purse and pull out her cell. Not wanting to intrude I stopped off to the side and pulled out my own, tapping the blank screen and staring at it like it held the secret to some long-lost treasure. And as I kept my eyes on my sleeping phone I eavesdropped as she made plans for a delivery the following morning.

Her voice was different than I expected, low and strong, like she was used to dealing with recalcitrant delivery drivers and uncooperative clerks. Thirty seconds later she ended the call politely but with authority, dropped her phone back into its little hidey-hole and recentered the umbrella over her shoul-

ders, her eyes moving back to the street where belching buses lumbered by and car horns shouted at each other while the drivers gestured and mouthed words not suitable for polite conversation.

I fake-tapped my dormant phone and dropped it back into the inside pocket of my raincoat, then turned to see her looking at me. Brilliant green eyes below heavy but shaped brows, a petite nose, her mouth turned up at each corner, she appraised me coolly, like an unsightly bug she was about to squash with her boot. I floundered for a second, thought about turning and running like the chickenshit that I usually am around woman, but then asked myself, what did I have to lose?

She (probably) wasn't going to ridicule or ignore me (she sounded kind even when she was admonishing whoever was on the other end of the phone conversation). And even if the conversation was short and sweet, a quick but kind demurrer, it would be no worse than not approaching her at all, which would be a certain denial.

I took two tentative steps and stopped just off her right shoulder, pulling my sodden hat from head. Without hesitation she moved the umbrella so its shelter encompassed me, then smiled.

"Hello."

My heart and my mind raced as I tried to formulate a quick and witty response, something I probably should have done before approaching her. In the end I jammed my hat into the pocket of my coat and ran a hand back through my unruly hair. "Hello."

"What brings you out into the rain today?"

I shook my head and tried another smile, this one a little less tentative. "I saw you and thought ..."

"... now there's a woman who must be an idiot, standing in the rain without a coat," she said, smiling as she finished my sentence.

I patted the top of my head, attempting to flatten what I was sure was spikes and peaks in my overgrown thatch. "You certainly don't look like an idiot."

"Well, I feel like an idiot, they predicted rain this afternoon, I heard it on the radio as I was brushing my teeth this morning, but did I think ahead like you and wear a raincoat?" She asked as she reached out with her free hand and lightly grazed my lapel with a fingertip.

I shook my head. "I'd like to accept the compliment, but the only reason I'm wearing this is because I forgot it at the office the last time they predicted rain and it didn't."

She shifted her weight to the other foot, cutting the distance between us by six inches, her umbrella now covering my shoulders along with my head.

"So; serendipity."

"I guess, if you define 'serendipity' as forgetfulness and dumb luck."

The right corner of her mouth twitched a fraction of an inch higher. "I believe we make our own luck."

My eyes roamed her face and settled on the flower tucked behind her

ear. "I really like your flower, behind your ear."

Her eyes danced as she smiled. "As opposed to the one sticking out of my nose?"

I felt my shy smile rise to my eyes. "You could start a whole new trend, wearing flowers in unconventional places; your nose, sticking straight out of your ear, maybe carry one around in your mouth." Rain trickled out of my hair and across my forehead, and I swiped at it. "A different flower for every orifice." Her head tilted half an inch to the side, her smile split her face and I felt my insides turn to jelly.

"Like, say, out of my butt?"

I felt the blush explode across my face, but I forced my eyes to stay locked on hers. "Okay, maybe I didn't think that one all the way through."

She pulled a fingertip across her brow. "Whew. Don't even want to think about how I'd manage to get it in there, let alone what I'd have to wear so people could see it."

"Not to mention having to worry about frostbite in the winter," I said as the blush began to fade.

"So, maybe not the new trend that we thought it might be just a few seconds ago."

"I guess not." Over her shoulder I saw a bus turn the corner two blocks down and knew that it was now or never. "I just wanted to say hello." I moved until I was directly in front of her. "You seem like the kind of person that needed to be said 'hello' to."

"And I'm glad that you did." She reached up and pulled the flower from above her ear, holding it to out to me. "For you."

I stared into her eyes, my smile faltering and then shifting from nervous to genuine. I glanced down at my hand, seeing the flower between my fingers but unable to remember her putting it there, then I slowly reached up and started to replace it behind her ear. "But I couldn't." She stopped my hand, slowly guiding it down to my waist and giving it a small squeeze before pulling hers away.

"To remember me by."

"You're being very kind to a man who's not very good at this." I struggled to work the stem through the buttonhole of my jacket, and when I finished she reached out and straightened it, lightly patting my lapel flat.

The bus slowed and squealed to a stop beside us, people pouring out of the overcrowded shelter to wait for the door to open. I glanced at it, the number in the little window over the windshield familiar, then back at her.

"My bus."

She peeked at the same window, then turned and stood beside me in the midst of the throng. "Mine, too," she said, laughter in her voice. Her hand came up and lightly rested in the crook of my arm, and from a foot away her smile was like warm summer sunlight on my face.

"Serendipity," she whispered in my ear, and then we stepped forward as one.

COLD WAIT for HOT BUCK

By Jack Spencer

Nimrod waiting, anticipating, *Boone and Crocket* trail-cam rating,
ten-point crown, big buck bound, fickle weathered western town.
Skulking shadow, mountain side, howling lobo, hungry-eyed, white, icy-fanged,
a metaphor, cold-hearted arctic carnivore.

Bird feet frozen, sleeted trees, grounded grouse, woodcock freeze,
canceled flights; gobblers' plight, stiff-winged gargoyles' frigid fright.
Beavers denned, bears indoor, buried snakes, frogs that snore,
glass-topped lakes, streams stop running, fishes flushing indoor plumbing.

No boats afloat, canoes or rafts, no casts for bass, no sheltered grass,
no strikes for pikes, no striper bites, no bow-caught carp, no catfish fights.
Old Indian summer, teeming, coming, a respite of sun, a seasonal cunning, but
I've got nothing leisurely stunning, twixt fall fishing and whitetail gunning.

Life Ruts

By Tom Dabney

We go through our days
Replaying the same activities
Wishing we had done something else.
Habit controls us and drives the tires of our lives
In comfortable ruts on the road of apathy and status quo
Sometimes
We glance to the side of the road and see
Another life and
for a moment think of turning the wheel hard to the right
But the tires feel comfortable and resist
And we miss that exit.

Bahia de Cochinos

By David D. Moran

“In Cuba all girls are called ‘Maria,’ and the boys are all ‘Jesus,’ she laughed at me that first evening, “but you must say it in Cuban, not like a Castellano,” she scolded. Maria planned to go to Radcliffe. She dreamed of diplomacy, national service, political leadership, of equity, honesty, truth.

We were the close to the same age. “Our eyes are the same color,” she paused, looking into my face. But her hair was darker, long and black. Her smile was spectacular. Maria and her brother were born to be Cuba’s freedom fighters.

Together we met each evening and assembled a corps of volunteers to send to Guatemala and Guantanamo. For me, our meeting was the destiny of my fraternal calling, a calling I had only inherited, never sought. For her, it was passion driving her forward. In my lingering memory she is always a young woman charging a barricade, freedom’s banner streaming, her face wild, open mouthed, shouting for liberty, challenging all to follow.

We organized our cadre of volunteers in sorry dark basements of Back Bay apartments. We ate fried tortillas and black beans and drank from bottles of warm rum.

Days we would meet in Harvard Square over Turkish kafa, grading lists of prospects, sometimes strolling through the Radcliffe Quad, or visiting Elsie’s for an afternoon Napoleon. We planned and we schemed through the cryptic documents I conveyed from stolid institutions to our fervent new friends, united under their own private flag of destiny. Many came to contribute and stayed to join. Others retired confused and disheartened. Few were rejected. All the men were ‘Jesus.’

Time consumed this passion through Boston’s Nor’easters and hard winter snows. When it ended that year in April, I returned lonely and morose to my neglected university studies in Cambridge.

The others ... they had gone south to the islands. But Jesus did not come back.

And Maria never attended Radcliffe. Her spirit is still in Cuba.

Hospital Elevator

By Abby Arthur Johnson

I pushed the wrong button
And stepped into a new world
Where they were fashioning names.
She was pressing for Andrea;
He was protesting about vowel sounds.

We later crossed in passage,
She and her baby exiting at the first floor,
I bound for the fourth.
wanted to shout,
“What about Andrea?”
“What about the sound of a name?”

But I remained silent.
I was headed for another country
With another vocabulary: osteomyelitis.
I was concerned not about sounds
But about the shape of an ankle,
The contour of a young lad’s future.
A mother in transit, I could say nothing.

Silence

By Hannah Frazee

In the springtime, birds and blossoms emerged into the world, victorious over the winter months. Summer came alive with the smells of juicy strawberries and blackberries. Fall brought its share of color to the world, and winter was marked by the trails of deer, rabbits, and squirrels meandering through the snow. Season melted into season in a harmony of color and life, and Stella saw all of it.

I never quite knew where she came from, or how it was that she was brought to our house. From what I could gather, she must have lived with her parents until their subsequent deaths, and when she found herself without a home, kind friends of the family took turns keeping her until a more permanent situation could be found. She didn't seem to have the mental resources to manage her own affairs.

My mother heard about her situation from the pastor's wife, took pity on the "poor, sweet soul", and made Stella a temporary part of the family. My older brother and sister were both indignant over this. Lauren, now an "adult" of seventeen, felt that life was just too unfair. How would she have boys over with Stella always in the way? And James, thirteen-year-old mischief-maker that he was, declared that he would have a good time, whether anyone liked it or not. I was happy with the plan though, because my perpetual loneliness would likely be improved by the addition of a new family member.

From the day that she moved her tiny carrying case into the spare bedroom, none of us were able to get a word out of her. She cheerfully did all of her chores each morning, ate breakfast, and then disappeared into the large tract of woods behind our house until suppertime came.

We often wondered what she did there all day. Lauren thought that she was being lazy, running away to sleep so that she wouldn't have to help with extra work around the house. James had a million different conjectures, everything from "I'll bet she's catching squirrels with her bare hands and roasting them over a fire" to "She's probably a witch. I'll bet she goes back there every day to make her wacky potions with toad warts and fish fins."

There was very little activity to occupy my time that spring, and the days dragged on so slowly that I yearned for novelty. It was in this state of boredom that I determined to find out for myself what Stella did when she left the house every day.

One sunny morning I followed her, in the stealthiest manner that a nine-year-old could. For a long while we walked, until I thought that we must be near to reaching the other end of the woods. We didn't; but as we went along, I began to notice that her movement became irregular and bouncy- she was skipping. And as she skipped, she began to whistle all manner of strange noises, which I found must be bird calls, for the birds began to whistle back.

She stopped at the stream; and then, taking off her shoes and pulling

up her skirt, she splashed around, laughing all the while. Her face was lit up with the most beautiful smile. She seemed like an entirely different person from the somber creature she was at home, and I loved her for it.

The remainder of the day she spent admiring the crayfish, feeding the ducks and squirrels, and collecting little sticks to build dams in the stream. I watched her for hours, enthralled by her sheer delight.

After that day, I gained a new sense of respect for her. When I saw her slipping out the back door each morning, I pictured all of the fun that she would have with her sweet animal friends; when Lauren and James began a rude discussion about her, I left the room with a determination to be nicer to Stella than ever.

Springtime melted into summer, and with summer came the announcement of another new addition into our household.

His name was Charlie, and he was the son of my mother's closest friend. He was to stay with us on the farm as a sort of vacation, because his family had moved to the city a couple of years previously, and his health had been questionable ever since. His mother thought that he might be refreshed by a long stay in the country.

Despite the fact that he was nearly twenty-two years old, he built a strong connection with James at the beginning, and the two of them spent much of their time in sports, fishing, and other manly pursuits.

When he first came to our home, I found that Stella exited the house each morning even earlier than usual, applying extra speed to accomplish her chores quickly. Yet as the weeks passed, she began to stay at home later and later, until some days she never visited the woods at all. I noticed that those were often the days that James and Charlie stayed near the house.

Charlie was kind to Stella; he was naturally polite. However, I believe that he was also fascinated by her strange condition, and his curiosity to know more was very strong. Many times, he would walk up to her and attempt to start a conversation about all sorts of subjects. And though he was never successful in getting her to respond, I saw that on several occasions she came away from those encounters with a glowing smile on her face.

But I was not the only one who saw this change happening; Lauren had also begun to hang around the house more often than normal. She was not blind to Charlie's attempts at conversation with Stella, and a feeling of jealousy began to rise within her. She liked him; he was handsome, strong, and rich. He was exactly the type of man that she was looking for, and no witless charity girl was going to steal him away.

Her addresses were bold and assuming, and Charlie couldn't help but notice. After all, Lauren was an eligible girl. She was young, somewhat wealthy, beautiful, witty, fun-loving, and intelligent. Through her pointed addresses, she soon gained an ardent admirer.

It was during this period of time that a camp-out was suggested for the evening of July 4th. We would go to the nearby park, where fireworks were to be set off, and then the five of us younger people would camp in tents. I was most

excited for this trip, and I could tell that Stella was as well.

On the night of the outing, we were assembled around the campfire after fireworks, when Stella became the subject of conversation. It began with a sly comment from Lauren:

“Why, Stella, you must be right at home out here. After all, you spend every waking moment out of doors.”

Stella glanced at her timidly in response, and James, who couldn’t refrain from being the center of conversation, added his two cents’ worth:

“I think that she would live out in the woods and sleep in a tree like a wild woman if they would let her. Imagine how funny it would be to see her howling with the wolves, and her hair nothing but a pile of tangles.”

James, Lauren, and Charlie flew into a fit of laughter at this, and Charlie added, “Well, maybe that’s why she never talks. Perhaps she grew up in a pack of wolves, and all she knows how to do is howl at the moon.”

Another chorus of laughter followed this, to which Lauren added, “I, for one, think that Stella becoming a wild woman isn’t a bad idea. Perhaps then she wouldn’t have to leach food and clothes and a bed off of people who are kind enough to offer their charity.”

The conversation reached a halt after this. Lauren and James were perfectly satisfied with everything that they had said, albeit a little embarrassed about the fact that they had said it to her face. Charlie seemed to have some degree of remorse that the conversation had gone so far. I sat in stunned silence, mouth open and fists clenched. And Stella... she remained in her seat, stone still and looking from one to the other of them in silence. I could see that her eyes were brimming with tears threatening to overflow, but she smiled nevertheless, and then rushed away to the tent that she would be sharing with Lauren and myself.

Charlie went after her, and with apologies and compliments, he felt that he had resolved the situation in a decent manner. When I left the campfire, I found Stella tightly wrapped in her sleeping bag, and Lauren nowhere to be seen. James told me the following morning that Charlie had also been missing from his tent until very late into the night.

Things were not the same after we went home. I distanced myself from the shameful three more than ever, and they grew close with each other over a mutual bond of apathy toward me and laughter directed at Stella. She took care never to spend a spare minute at home with them, and it was probably best that she didn’t hear the things that they said about her. No human would bear them well.

It was on one sunny morning, less than three weeks from the date of the camp-out, that we woke up to find Charlie and Lauren missing. There was a note left, saying that they had determined to elope and travel to the city, since Lauren’s eighteenth birthday had been only a week before. There was much sadness from my parents and James over the loss, but I found myself with no thoughts but those of happiness and relief.

Stella was told of it at the breakfast table, after the rest of us had made

the discovery. She immediately dismissed herself with a nod, before the tears could have a chance to fall down her cheeks.

I couldn't keep from shedding a few tears of my own, not because Charlie and Lauren had left, but because I knew that Stella must be in such grief. Despite his cruel words and false attentions, she still loved Charlie; she was willing to believe that he was a good person.

After breakfast, I decided to go out and look for her. Up the path, through the bushes, and to the stream I went, just as Stella had so many times. I could see her footprints in the soft earth.

I burst through the bushes to find her sitting on a mossy log and gazing into the stream. She heard my approach, and took a moment to glance up at me with a sorrowful face and tear-filled eyes. She didn't appear to be upset about my presence, and I took this as an invitation to join her.

We sat on that log for what must have been an hour, or maybe more. The silver fish swam past us in little schools, the frogs lounged lazily on sunny rocks, and the water skimmers raced across the gleaming surface of the water. Neither of us said anything; neither of us looked at the other. But finally, I felt that I must break the silence, even if only with a whisper.

"I am so sorry, Stella."

She turned to me and looked intently into my face, as though seeing me for the first time. Then, she reached out to take my hand, and for the first time, she spoke. It was only one word:

"Gone."

But in it, I heard a thousand unuttered cries of sadness, pain, and heart-break.

We spent the rest of the day there, crying, watching the fish, and connecting on a deep and meaningful level through the silence that we both maintained.

She continued to spend every day in the woods, whistling at the birds, petting the chipmunks, feeding the fish, and building dams for the beavers. And occasionally, I would hear a peal of laughter echoing through the trees like a string of bells, and it sent a thrill of happiness through me. Though she never spoke another word to any of us for the short remainder of time that she stayed, I no longer struggled to hear her; because her beautiful spirit rang loud and clear to me, and I never looked at the silence the same way again.

I Listen to the Stormy Night

By Savannah Jenkins

I listen to the stormy night
That knocks outside my window pane
Lighting sprints its scattered light
Thunder oceans roll again.
The howling wind, and crying rain,
Rap
tap,
taps,
outside my window pane.

I listen to the stormy night,
That beats behind my sober wall.
Ghostly fear of pale, of white,
Threatens in my mind to fall.
The howling wind, and crying rain,

Rap
tap,
taps,
outside my window pane.

I listen to the stormy night
That pounds beyond my knowing scope
The tempo rasping loud and right
Pacing in the changing slope.
The howling wind, and crying rain,

Rap
tap,
taps,
outside my widow pane.

I listen to the stormy night
That lulls my heavy drowsy eyes
I slowly drift away, asleep
Midst the night of stormy cries
The howling wind, and crying rain,
Rap
tap,
taps,
outside my window pane.

The Ceiling

By Ron Krug

I'm staring at my bedroom ceiling again. I do it routinely. Days, weeks, months of wasting perfectly good time looking at a ceiling. My Sistine Chapel, minus the Michelangelo and Raphael. Now and then I'll notice something I haven't seen before. A slight crack running diagonally from the upper left corner, ending just above an old oak flea market table fading with time, use and, now, neglect. A spider walking along doing whatever spiders do. Mercurial shadows cast by the setting sun on a late fall afternoon. But most of the time I'm just looking at a blank ceiling. Nothing more.

Okay, I've spent enough time with the ceiling. I'm going to get up and have some lunch. A sandwich maybe, or leftovers from last night that I barely touched because they didn't have much flavor. Any flavor, really, at least to me. Oh, man, it's tiring being out of bed, but I'm finally a little hungry. Hmm, no leftovers to nuke. It's going to take a lot of work to make a sandwich. Then, God forbid, I'll have dishes to wash. Maybe a plate and a couple utensils. I hate the thought, but a sandwich it is.

Ham and provolone on standard issue whole wheat bread. The price of the bread is on the wrapper. \$2.99. No need to look at the little tab you use for closing the bread. Nope. Printed right on the wrapper itself. A sure sign of bread bought with economy in mind.

The sandwich is pretty tasty, actually, to the extent I can taste it. I'm getting better that way, at tasting food. Now all I need to do is wash a plate and a knife and fork and I can get back to my womb. Damn, I'm too tired to wash the dishes. I'll just go back to the womb and wash them later before Cherie gets home from work. She won't be home until 4:30, maybe 5:00. Until then the dishes can sit in the sink. Hell, I'll soak the plate. That will do some good. See, it's better to wait until later, anyway.

I can't forget to wash those dishes before Cherie gets home. She hates seeing dirty dishes piling up. For that matter, she hates to see a single dish, or a knife or fork. One dish left in the sink begins a cascade of squalor. It invites other dishes, glasses, silverware and who knows what else to join it in its sinister attempt to make the kitchen unsightly. Good rule Cherie has. Wash the stuff as you use it.

I'm going to break the rule just a little bit. Nothing else will join the plate, knife and fork already unwashed in the sink. Then I'll wash them before Cherie gets home. I'm too tired now. Time for bed. The womb. The cocoon. The ceiling looks the same. White. There is a ceiling fan set squarely in the middle, but I stopped noticing it weeks ago. The bed feels so good, and so safe. My fatigue is more tolerable if I'm lying in bed. Nothing will hurt me here. I won't die today in this bed. I'll rest. And I can nap.

Crap. Crap, crap, crap!! It's going to be one of those days where my mind runs through the unseemly events that got me here. I hate having this loop

continuously running in my head that goes over and over and over the bad stuff. Fortunately, the loop isn't always running. At its best, my mind wanders to bucolic, peaceful settings with cherished people that I love, usually Cherie, the most wonderful of all. These thoughts are relegated to the past, with precise locations and people. Precious thoughts don't reside in the present, not mine anyway, nor do abstract visions of a sublime future. So, it was Nova Scotia for our honeymoon. Paris. Various National Parks. Our beloved Martha's Vineyard.

But now I'm rerunning the bleak path to where I am today, which started not very long ago. Constant stomach aches. An incorrect diagnosis of a duodenal ulcer. Waiting for weeks for the meds to kick in to save me from my pain. My pain continuing. A visit to a hospital emergency room. A doctor with an ashen face informing me that I had a problem with my pancreas, not an ulcer, with nothing they could do for me. The trip to another hospital in an ambulance. Being told by an oncologist there that they couldn't help me, either.

Being rushed to another hospital by ambulance. A lonely CT Scan at midnight with no one around to hug. Being informed that I had Stage III pancreatic cancer, but that before receiving treatment I needed emergency surgery because the tumor was blocking my digestive tract. Having the surgery, which required removing 30% of my stomach and attaching a different part of my stomach to my small intestine. Recovering in the hospital for two weeks.

Watching my surgical team fretting over whether my digestive system appeared to be working in its strange new configuration. Wondering what would happen if it didn't. Using a feeding tube, followed by a liquid diet (chicken broth again, yum!), then advancing to a semi-liquid diet. (I never knew Jello came in so many flavors!) Then home, with a feeding tube stuck in my belly and Cherie justifiably concerned about how my body would react to the full diet she was to prepare. Chemotherapy. A concoction known as 5-FU, with the FU part being a very appropriate name for the toxin. Nausea. Vomiting. Dizziness. Complete loss of appetite, followed by a loss of taste. A double whammy. Down to 127 pounds. How can you hold onto your weight when you literally detest the thought of eating and can't taste the food anyway?

And the fatigue, the endless side effect. The most misunderstood by others, as well. "What's a little tiredness? Hell, I'm tired all the time. The other day I had to split some logs and then I had to go right to bed. If fatigue is the worst of it, you're in good shape." No sir or ma'am, not with this fatigue. It's often debilitating. Getting out of bed to use the bathroom can be like running a marathon, but without the comfort of knowing that if you really wanted to you could stop the activity and eliminate the discomfort.

Which reminds me. I'm going to need to get up eventually to wash that dish and the silverware. I'll be thinking about that until I finally find some energy to do it.

Well, this will all end. My surgeon, who is as good as they get, says I'll make it. I'll be able to have the Whipple surgery that is needed to survive pancreatic cancer. I believe him. Funny name, Whipple surgery. I guess it's named after the inventor. Either that or the sourpuss that used to tell us not to squeeze

the Charmin. I'm surprised I haven't already looked up the origin of the name. I look up stuff all the time. For some reason I didn't research pancreatic cancer until recently. I wish I never did. Sometimes ignorance really is bliss. The lowest five-year survival rate of all major cancers? Are you kidding me? I know all cancer is truly terrible, but the very lowest? None worse? Seven percent for all stages combined? Three percent for stage III, which is what I have? Yikes! Well, the doc says I'm gonna make it, and I will. I haven't for a moment thought I was going to die from this, and I'm not going to start now.

Yeah, I'll make it, and I'll be better than ever. And some day I'll feel well, too. The pain will subside, and I'll have the energy to do whatever I want. Precious energy. A challenging hike? Bring it on. Working around the yard? Piece of cake. Swimming in a chicken suit? Yeah, if I'm so inclined.

But first things first, and for a while yet. I have a ceiling to stare at.

Toxic Storm

By Maureen Sheaffer

Standing at the gate, her good arm twitches
Tonights storm moves in quickly from the west
In vain she hopes the direction switches
Returned from the last storm, no chance for rest
She feels each muscle tighten in her chest
The bile rises in her throat and catches
She looks behind her as the bolt latches
Her knuckles frozen over the pickets
In self preservation she detaches
The wind stops and all one hears are crickets

The Lovely Dancing Tree

By Rose Gordy

The towering evergreen
dressed in stunning white
outside my window
is dancing in the wind
of this snowy
Winter morning.
As I watch it,
I remember the times
as a child
I danced in the snow
under the trees
of my hometown
in Western PA.
Today I wonder
what lively music
I would play
for the Winter Tree Dance.
Perhaps a Czardas,
The slow then fast
traditional folk
and courting dance
of my Hungarian heritage.
The Tree dances with me.

in praise of today's ordinary

By Rhoda Trooboff

flutter and whirl of electric cord retracting into vacuum cleaner
sliss of sharp paring knife cutting thin slices of cucumber
pinch of salt and spritz of oil added to pot of water
hisses of steam when iron touches old linen napkins
rice carefully measured and ready
table set for four
two friends join us for dinner
at last

IN SEARCH OF: A CRUISING/LIFE MATE

By Linda Herdering

My backyard is a fairway. As with most liveaboards who reside in marinas, I don't see grass and hedges, but instead look over ducks, fish and sunlit boat reflections to see my backyard neighbors. It seems that one never really knows the value of a neighbor until a crisis looms, and very valuable they thus become when their assistance saves lives and property. Valuable too when just lending an ear or catching lines to help dock a boat. But what about our other needs? Sure, many a neighbor has been the perfect party guest and can always lend the right tool. But would you ever think of one of your neighbors as prime marrying material for your hypothetical daughter? Let's see, do you have a neighbor who would make a suitable mate for yourself? Most of us want more... more this and more that. Neighbors don't seem to make the grade either because of their familiarity or because their potential is plain overlooked.

When I was in the market for a cruising mate/husband, I thought an ad in the *"In Search Of"* personals column of the print version of the *Washingtonian* magazine would be the answer—the perfect way to find the perfect mate. Three months later my phone started to ring. "So you want to go cruising," the stranger half-asked, half-stated. This voice on the phone was trying to get to know me.

"Yes I do, very much so, absolutely!" I had dreamed of extensive cruising for 25 years. The dreams turned into practical thoughts about six years ago. One year ago it had become an inescapable passion. I would go, no matter how, no matter what.

ETA the cruising dream? I told him I was ready. Ready financially and psychologically. But as it stood now, I was looking for a good sailboat and a good partner-in-love and sailing to share it with. I continued: "Perhaps it could be you. But you already know all about me; tell me more about yourself."

Later that evening I relived his call during our dock-friend gossip hour. As usual, my liveaboard neighbors were all ears and advice. We had a great marina community in the heart of Washington, DC— some couples and many single women and men who owned boats and shared everything from fenders to meals. There was a friendly interest and amusement in my quest to find a suitable mate who also longed to cruise. A few of us had the same dilemma. Where are they? Where are all the commitment-minded single sailors of the world? I'm a good-looking, physically fit, intelligent woman of 33, sound of mind, body and soul, boatowner and business owner, navigator/cook/bottom sander, with sea legs and a passion for sailing. Where's my mate?

Many of my male dock friends were similarly frustrated. The typical complaint was that seagoing women were like gold. "Mike-the-Marine," a neighbor who had a boat directly across the fairway from mine, often commiserated with me. He joked how his dates always turned out to be "deck lizards," sunning themselves on the foredeck or nonexistent when out of sight of land.

The caller turned out to be a dud. Too bad, but not to worry, for another exciting prospect was on the line. He was a southern chap who had already crossed the Atlantic on his own vessel a few times. Impressed by my sincerity, he came to spend a few days with me on my boat. He stayed. He left. We were mutually enamored. I went south to spend a week with him and when on his boat the surprises came. Worrying for his precious baby's bilges, he demanded: "You must cut your hair and fingernails short. Yes, now." I flew home on day two.

I answered ads, I placed ads, I continuously searched, keeping an eye open everywhere for that special guy. As always, there were lots of potential emporiums. Hang around marinas in the nearby sailing capital of the states, Annapolis? Hours worth. Sail/race on the Chesapeake? Tons. Exhibit my photography at boat shows? You bet. But all the mates were either landlovers, strict racers or taken. I must admit it was a pleasure looking, and a few 'maybes' were a joy to pursue. My feet were wet and my patience was becoming less and less of a virtue. I wondered if I should look for the perfect solo boat.

A little taste of cruising, it seemed, might appease me. So I put my business on hold, leased my boat to a liveaboard renter and found a full-time job as paid crew on a 110-foot, privately owned yacht heading to the Caribbean and Mediterranean. A year would do it for now, I thought.

On the way to the islands, I spent a few days in Florida to look up some old friends. One friend was my old backyard neighbor 'Mike-the-Marine,' whom the USMC had stationed there years before. We met for a meal. Over drinks we told our tales and updates of dock news. Over dinner we realized that we no longer had the reserve of neighborhood friendships ruling our behavior. (I didn't date marina neighbors... already had an ex walking around!) Over dessert we fell in love. Over coffee we decided to marry, buy a sailboat and cruise at his retirement. Overall, we were flabbergasted to have been so naïve as to not realize the full potential in a dock friend before.

How It Used to Be

By Lori Stoll

When I was a child
snow banks big enough to hollow out
formed forts or igloos
where a little tyke's snow pants
provided some defense against the cold.
Spring sunshine melted snow and ice
into torrents along the curb.
I liked to crunch the edges
into tiny icebergs
that disappeared beneath the ledge
and popped up again down the block.
The ice was gray
like chunks of faded asphalt
much in need of repair.

Three Essays on Being

By Mary Sincell McEwen

Aware

I love the taste of an orange that I peel with practiced fingers. I love the fragrance of coffee and flavor of almond. I love the sight of woodpeckers on the suet with their red heads and crisp black and white stripes. I love the feel of my cat bumping my leg and the sound of his vibrating purr. I love how bright the sun is against white snow. I love breathing in, deep breaths, and studying how that rejuvenates my whole body. I love the sounds of music, that mystic and amazing art that is so beautifully human. I love walking on a snowy path and inspecting every footprint of every creature that went there before me. I love my evenings with my love, sharing a meal and watching Jeopardy, like two old curmudgeons. I love the scent of him, familiar and full of long-lived symbiosis. I cherish the three humans that came from me through my love with him. They are dear men who love me, and laughing and talking with them heals me. I love how blue the sky can be, and I love the rain pummeling the Earth with a “pap, pap, pap” on hard dirt. I love the sound, sight, and smell of rushing water bumping over rocks and moss and crawdads, with errant leaves floating along. I love being awake, aware, and cognizant of this strange and mysterious journey, right alongside all of you, right this minute. I love being human. As hard as it is, I love it.

What We Know

We know our nests — our most comforting chairs, our beds with favored comforters and quilts, our coffee stores rich with fragrance, our piles of mail and papers and receipts that bring on reminders of tasks undone or of weary guilt and flummoxed thoughts to push back, our shoe collection near the door with dry dirt and former snow, our yard where a bush grows and trees drape their branches about. We know our people — our life partners and their behaviors, their voices, their scents, their eyes. We know our families with all the braided tethers of good and bad, of love, of frustration, of comfort, of preconceived ideas from childhood that are rarely shaken away entirely. We know our animals with whom we have chosen to pass time — our companions covered in fur with whom we can never exchange a word but with whom we certainly communicate. We know our weather and what to do with it, be it sunshine or drops of rain falling from so great a height, or snow that seems magic as it stacks up into white dunes. We know our sustenance — our peanut butter and apples tart or sweet, our popcorn bathed in butter, our cheese sliced onto crackers that shatter in our teeth. We know our needed draughts of water cold and iced gushing over our tongues and down our insides to cool and appease our living tissue. We are but organic beings with organic needs. But we put faces and feelings and personality on it all. We paint our familiarities together into a work of art, a work of life, a work of humanity. We are unique in how we can imagine, in how

we can ache, in how we can fear. We fear what we don't know, like how others feel about us really, how things will turn out, and how death will come upon us and what will it be. We are walking miracles, able to pull on our socks and drive our cars while harboring a depth of thought on all that we just don't know. We are a mysterious and fascinating lot.

Choices

The turns to take are so many. We step forward every second into newness. Where do we step? We smile at the child leaning over his mother's shoulder. Or we don't. We stop to gaze upon a branch where a bird of blazing red sits, not even knowing he is magnificent. Or we don't. We opt to answer a question with calm even if we are angry or frustrated or misunderstood. Or we bite. Hard. We muster up the courage and the empathy to meet the eyes of another and listen to what they have to say. Really listen. Or... we don't. We make things important and work to keep them so, to force their importance into our hours, to carry heavy responsibility and expectation and want. Or we let them go. Every minute, every second we choose. It's so hard. This life. We are beset with choices constantly, through which we build a path of mortar and stone, so hard to drag in a different direction even when we learn it is necessary. But resiliency is ours, too. And adaptation and growth. We comprehend and learn and adjust. How lucky that is. Our mystic journey seems common but is utterly rare. Our choices make our trail easy or rough, or both. How convenient it would be to have the view of a bird, sitting above, seeing all.

Enough

By Maureen Sheaffer

I
Am
Enough
Even though
My body still aches
Each time I turn to say goodnight
and when a million thoughts race through my head wondering
Was I present with her today
And she looks up then
And blows a
Quick kiss
To
Me

A Single Act of Kindness...

By Mercedes M Pellet

We all arrive into the world as blank pages to be filled by people whose lives will be changed forever: parents, relatives, and friends. They all look upon the newborn as a tabula rasa — a blank slate — which may allow them to make a difference, not only for the infant but for all those whom the birth may touch. Sadly, for some parents, the job of childrearing may be genuinely beyond their ability to cope; for others, the child may seem either a chance to recreate their childhood or make it infinitely better than their own.

As children, we cannot fully grasp what it means to be a child and what is our ultimate goal. We are taught to walk, talk, and play, and we learn manners, hygiene, self-discipline, and humility when reprimanded. Sadly, some of us become permanently damaged by overpampering, and others know to conceal their weaknesses with drugs, liquor, or bad company. Even for those children whose lives are blessed by wealthy or intelligent parenting, becoming an adult may turn out to be a solitary and challenging voyage.

As the child of two highly incompatible adults, my journey into adulthood was a complicated one. I was born in Bogota, Colombia, as the Second World War ended in 1945. My father was 22 years old, and my mother was 20. Neither one was prepared to raise a child. As a result of their ignorance and lack of funds, I contracted measles, pneumonia, jaundice, chickenpox, typhoid fever, and smallpox before my fifth birthday. My brother was born in 1948, and due to my father's mistreatment, my mother took the two of us and left the marriage a year later. Separation with the blessing of the Catholic church was her only option. When my brother was two years old, my father sent two detectives to where my mother was hiding, and they took my brother. We did not see him again until he was 23 years old.

While in Colombia, I spent most of my childhood in boarding schools to avoid being kidnapped as my brother had been. I was six years old when I arrived at my first boarding school, Our Lady of Consolation, managed and operated by Spanish nuns whose black and white outfits made them appear alien and forbidding. I hated every aspect of that school: the dormitory, the food, the freezing showers twice a week, and going to mass every morning at 6 a.m., praying the rosary at night, and learning to write endless cards to the Virgin Mary. It was a highly regulated schedule, particularly for students who could not go home during weekends or vacations. After the strict routine of the boarding school, the yearly boarders were allowed to go home and return the following January.

This story is about what happened during that Christmas vacation and how it changed me. Although I had turned seven years old at school, I still believed in the generosity of the Baby Jesus, who would come on December 24th carrying presents to all the children of the world. Unfortunately, my mother was out of the country, and I had to stay with my Aunt Marta and her husband and four children. After the highly disciplined routine of our school, I was thrilled

to spend the time with my cousins but apprehensive about my aunt, a very strict disciplinarian who was even scarier than the nuns. In Colombia at that time, it was the custom to create an elaborate Nativity Scene, with detailed miniature reproductions of Bethlehem, including animals, houses, and miniature dolls. The three kings' arrival with their gifts for the newborn Savior was most exciting to us children: their "arrival" at the manger signaled that we would be getting our gifts. Before midnight, we were all ordered to bed to ensure that the Child Jesus would leave our presents at the foot of the bed.

My cousins and I did as we were told and giggled our way to bed, excitedly looking forward to the miracle that we would be experiencing as soon as we woke up. Since I had been an unexpected guest, I slept with my great-aunt Rosa, whom we all called "Tiita," after cautioning her not to crush my gift. I had asked Baby Jesus for a doll that drank water and wet her diaper, similar to the one my oldest cousin had requested and we had all seen in an American magazine.

I woke up when it was barely daylight and searched the foot of the bed, under the bed, and all over the bedroom. Barely holding back tears, I woke Tiita and asked her why the Baby Jesus had not come for me. Tiita looked at me with a sad face and said, "Don't give up hope, my child! Baby Jesus will not forget you." Her words were little comfort on December 25th, when I was the only one without a present.

However, the next day I discovered a plastic doll wrapped in a little flannel blanket at the foot of the bed. She was beautiful! She was different from the one that my cousin had received, but she was my very own baby doll, and I was determined to protect her! When it was time to return to school, against all regulations, I put my little doll at the bottom of my dormitory trunk and went to say goodbye to Tiita. I gave her a big hug and then started to cry. I did not know enough words to explain to her how grateful I was for her gift – not only for the doll itself but for making me feel that I, too, mattered. We both knew who had really brought the doll for me and who had left me out of the gift-giving.

Five years later, when my mother and I were leaving Colombia to come to the United States, we went to say goodbye to all our relatives. When we visited Tiita, I spent the afternoon with her and talked about how scared I was about leaving and whether I would ever learn to speak English, among many other things. Since I had always been curious about why my Aunt Marta had not given me a gift – and I was now much older – I asked Tiita why. She sighed and said, "there was no real reason, except that your mother had not sent any money to buy you a gift. Your aunt is very unforgiving."

My mother and I were the first members of our family to emigrate to the United States. In time, the rest of the family joined us, including Tiita and my grandmother and my Aunt Marta, along with her husband and children. The younger generation grew up, became American citizens, created new lives, leaving many of our sad stories in Colombia. When I had my first child at twenty, Tiita volunteered to be his caretaker while I worked as an executive secretary.

She was neither an educated woman nor a demanding one; she was a very humble person who always willingly put the needs of others above her own.

Before we came to the States, she lived for a while with my Aunt Marta, helping her take care of the children and the house, where she ultimately was relegated to the role of a maid. Although I never knew why, I heard through my mother that Tiita had moved in with her sister, my grandmother.

With the short attention span of youth, I became involved in other matters and lost the close contact I used to have with Tiita. That is, until the wedding day of one of our cousins. Unlike me, this cousin had been born in the U.S. and was marrying a handsome young attorney. When my husband and I arrived at the church, we found Tiita sitting by herself in one of the pews. We hugged her and sat down in the same pew. We began a conversation about what she had been doing and how happy we were to see her. Two of our cousins and my Aunt Marta sat in the pew behind us. Since I was talking quietly with Tiita, I did not look back to say hello. When I heard them laughing, complaining of the smell, I realized that they were mocking Tiita and – with my aunt's compliance – had refused to share the pew with her. There was no smell, just cruelty – a flaw that brought to mind other cruelties at other times. I hugged Tiita and told her how happy I was to have her sit with us and how long it had been since I had seen her. She, as always, was accepting of the misbehavior of others and the unkindness. However, this time, I could see the glint of tears in her old eyes, which sharply brought to mind the long-ago time when I had been the target of the same malice.

Without anything being said, I stood up and invited Tiita to join me in finding better seats. We moved to the back of the church and sat through the ceremony without comment. We left soon afterward, took Tiita for a brief stop at the reception, and then drove her home. We talked of many things on the way, but the one that stayed with me was when Tiita told me how much she wanted to visit Colombia before she died.

And so it was that my mother and my cousin joined me to take Tiita to her native city, Cartagena on the Colombian coast, to bid farewell to all distant relatives and friends, and to remember how it felt to be there. When we left to return to the U.S., she was full of joy and, as always, ready to forgive anyone who may have hurt her feelings.

This time, I let my tears come unbidden, for I, who knew what a hard life Tiita had when she was with my Aunt Marta, who had heard the insults and humiliations she had borne, knew that she had forgiven all. I never forgot that long-ago day when she bought me the plastic doll with the very little money that she had. Tiita Rosa, by her actions and goodness, had taught me a very important lesson, captured here in the words of Amelia Earhart: "A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees."

Tiita died in 2007 at 96 years old. She left me as the family custodian of her precious inheritance: kindness. It was her gift to me and many others.

A MOMENT OF TRANQUILITY

By Tom Dabney

The night was a new one for the year
The air was cool
The breeze lightly brushed across my face
Like a gentle wind
On the beach facing the rolling surf
With the scent of the ocean
And the feel of endless time.

Standing there breathing it in
With closed eyes exhilarating in the calm of the night
The breeze wisping against my eyelids and cheeks
Delighting in the night stillness.

I opened my eyes and turned them upwards
At the dark sky with glistening diamonds
Vibrating in the ethereal firmament of endless space
Creating a feeling of smallness within the vastness of time

It lasted until I started into the house
Leaving tranquility behind.

Two Rooms with a View

By Bob Newman

The world becomes very small when you're ninety-two.

Sixty-one years in a home Doris and her husband Bob built, roomy then but considered just a starter now. Escaping the family farm and building a business, the chaos of raising two kids, the quiet of becoming empty nesters, finally the freedom of retirement, then, after Bob's death, on her own for the first time since she was a teenager. Family close, children and grandchildren, but still alone every night in a house full of memories.

Eventually it got to be too much, her memory not what it used to be, her health not far behind. So one fall morning her extended family showed up with trucks and trailers and boxes, and four hours later her living room and bedroom had been transported and reassembled in two rooms of our house, right down to the pictures on the wall and her cat asleep at the foot of her bed.

You don't take it personally when she doesn't remember your name; we solved that problem by hanging our wedding picture where she could see it when she walked out of her bedroom every morning. I look pretty much the same, other than a cascade of wrinkles around my eyes and the subtraction of my mid-eighties' porn-star mustache (we're just going to ignore the gray hair). We smile and say "Good morning" when we first catch sight of each other every day, she compliments me on my cooking while admitting that she never really liked to do it herself, and I try to not feel abusive when I have to use a decibel level usually reserved for screaming obscenities at the football game on TV any time we try to have a conversation.

She spends her days reading but not being able to remember what was on the page, or sitting in her rocker watching the birds at the feeders, deer and turkey and cats and the occasional bear wandering by to amuse her. She wants to contribute, but her achy back and arthritic hands prevent her from doing much. On cold and cloudy days her energy and enthusiasm flags, some days not bothering to change out her pajamas (not that there's anything wrong with that, if it was up to me we'd all spend our days in oversized t-shirts and elastic-waisted apartment pants).

After growing up on a farm she moved away and went to work in a plastics factory while wondering if her brother would survive World War Two, then met the love of her life and chose to marry a poor farmer over her other marriage proposals. They moved through a succession of apartments and small rental houses with one, then two small children in tow, then finally built the home of their dreams. And now her life has contracted to two rooms, less than four hundred square feet, with a bath down the hall and a daughter and son-in-law at the other end of the house.

I think the transition went smoothly, but, really, what in the hell do I know? My biggest challenge was cooking for three instead of two, which is nothing. Kathy did all the heavy lifting, making sure that Doris took her pills,

working together for hours putting puzzles together, then sitting through Judge Judy five afternoons a week while I hid from the judge's entertaining but abusive screaming in our bedroom. We'd sit down to dinner at the dining room table every night, another new thing (we were couch eaters for more than thirty years) and talk about our day, what's on the calendar for tomorrow, what's the weather going to be like. She comments on the same birds in the same tree, where do we think the women in the picture hanging on the dining room wall are going as they walk across a field in their fancy dresses, whether her beloved cat is in or out, and how cold we keep our house, even though we cranked the heat up when she moved in. And we smile and try to keep everything light so as to not add to the stress of a woman two years into her tenth decade with a bad back and lousy hearing and a memory that more often than not fails to dredge up the name of her great-granddaughter.

There were the expected hiccups along the way, occasional flashes of fear or doubt, anger or pessimism, usually at the end of the day when fatigue gets the best of her. But a quick nap or a change of subject was usually all that's needed, and before you know it her smile and her laugh were back.

As the months pass she slows, mentally and physically, unsteadiness and confusion progressing until the inevitable falls begin. The first is scary but inconsequential, just a bump on the head to go with the embarrassment of wondering how she ended up on the floor. But then it's bigger bruises and cuts until, in the middle of the night we hear a noise and find her on the kitchen floor with a broken hip. And as the EMTs wheel her out to the ambulance we hug and both think silently that, given COVID restrictions and her overall deterioration, this might be the last time that we see her alive. But by the end of the following day she has a new hip and, improbably, a week later we meet her at the front door of the hospital and bring her home.

We make one of her favorites for dinner, eating at the table as she talks about the birds in the trees and what's new since she left a week ago, and then Kathy helps her back to her bed to rest. And that's the last time that she will leave her bedroom.

With a loss of appetite and an almost complete loss of memory, she spends her days dozing in bed, talking to Kathy and watching the birds at the feeders in her brief waking moments. A few days later we bring in Hospice and, a week later, on a quiet snowy Christmas morning, her chest rises and falls for the last time.

Born at the tail end of the Roaring Twenties, she was one of six kids raised on a farm during the Depression. She welcomed her brother back from the war, then married a Merchant Marine who'd spent his time in the service as an oiler in the bowels of a Liberty ship. Raised two kids while her husband worked two jobs, then helped him start and run a successful contracting company. Lived in her dream home for sixty-one years, then gave it to her grandson to raise his family in. Endured the loss of the love of her life in what became a preview of what the end of her life would ultimately be. And then came to live with us in her final years, in the rooms we designed just for her.

It was a life well lived.

Top Sheet

By Melodee Hill

The top sheet is rumpled, wrinkled and pinkish in the dim reading lamp light. His arm stretches out on top of the sheet, though most of him is covered, relaxing in the late, last hour before sleep. It is a thin arm although with strength from years of work and more years of strumming strings and coaxing chords from his guitar. Sinewy and sun-mottled, the arm rests in repose except for two or three fingers which tap and drum a silent, private tattoo. Is it impatience, meditation, or musical muscle-memories? Softly, I turn the page of my book in rhythm with him as he slowly turns on his side, sinking into sleep.

ODE TO A TOAD LILY

By Jack Spencer

On display in cellar hospice, flaxen rayed through a dusty pane,
her ashen roots invite decay, her withered spine has curved with age,
and though sleek, lavender-haired, leaf-clad beauties are still the rage,
her suitors won't clamor to a Cimmerian stage,
nor chase after glamor in shadows to date. For shrouded in amber,
unable to flirt, she can't be enamored while lying in state,
reposed in a bedding of sepulcher dirt.

Once velvety skinned and freckle tipped, her scarves of flaming violet,
served as beaconed landing strips for local, pollen-laden pilots,
but in a symbolled twist of fate, when Eros came to procreate,
her purpled, pristine pedals were plucked and pressed away.

Tucked inside a coffer drawer,
aside four kindred neighbors: a naughty nightie never worn, a letter torn,
a ring no longer favored, and like an unknown soldier mourned,
whose deeds are fraught to savor, there lies a cellphone
number saved on a frayed and faded, sadness-stained, slip of paper.

Once Around the Block

By Michael McEwen

"Now, don't be fiddling with that," Elick said, swatting his grandson's hand away from the windchimes that buzzed as they rang. "This ain't our house."

Marshall glanced around for something else to do on the porch as Elick checked his watch and knocked again. He hopped into the wicker chair and stretched a hand out to each armrest, swinging his legs. He coughed without covering his mouth. Elick watched him. "You're gonna be a good boy today, ain't you? What, you need your inhaler?"

Marshall shook his head. The sun was up, and the wind was easy, as if it might catch Marshall's calves and sweep him off the chair and up into the stirring pine trees that lined the back of the house. March was teasing Marshall into thinking it was summer.

A voice said something from beyond the door.

"You in there? It's me," Elick said.

"It's open!" the voice called again as Mary Stover stepped into view behind the glass door. She leaned on her cane which stuck out at an angle, giving her twisted posture balance and authority. "Oh," she said, turning the lock, "Well, no it isn't. Come on in, there's coffee."

"I've already had my two," Elick said, "Unless the rascal wants a cup."

Realizing they were speaking about him, Marshall put a finger to his chin a moment, then nodded. Both adults laughed.

"I bet you do," Elick said. "Mama, you ready to walk around the block?"

"Suppose so," Mary said, and sighed. "It's nice to see you Marshall. Your birthday's coming up soon, isn't that right?" Marshall nodded. "So's mine," she said, then held out her arms, weakly. "Uh, I'll be 82. Isn't that old? How old will you be?"

Elick, leaning on a column, asked if he could get Mary her coat, who obliged and pointed, but he knew where. He slipped into the house. Mary looked at Marshall expectantly.

"I'll be six," Marshall said, "I mean seven."

Mary crouched down on her cane and said in a fake whisper, "And I heard you're going somewhere pretty special."

Marshall felt heat in his T-shirt as he heard cardinals and finches chirping up in the trees. "We're going to Storybook Forest. Me and Poppa are going to Storybook Forest."

"That's right!" Mary said as Elick emerged. He shook the coat right, then fed her arms through the sleeves, careful not to twist her.

As they crossed the mossy lawn, Marshall yanked a long strand of grass up and stuck the end between his teeth to suck on. Their feet squished near the bottom of the hill and Marshall spat the grass out after no one seemed to notice it.

"The Brolins are just about moved out," Mary said, nodding to the next-door neighbor's house, a wide white ranch style home that seemed precariously set on a sloping hill.

"Now, what the hell are they moving to Florida for?"

"David wants to. They're Catholic. What's Betty gonna do? She doesn't want to go."

"Good god," Elick said. Marshall clung to his forearm and Elick lifted the boy as he walked. "Buddy if you ever treat a woman like that, I'll wake up out my grave and come smack you upside the head." Marshall laughed, lost his grip, jumped for the trunk of an arm again.

"Hannah Tweedy's still in that house, there," Mary said.

"Who's that?"

"Shane Tweedy's mother."

"Shame Greedy," Elick said, then, to Marshall, "Same goes if you ever become an accountant."

"She's about as old and used up as me," Mary said, pausing to rest a moment on her cane, "Though she hasn't got any sons to look after her. The one pickled his liver and her daughter moved off to California. She hasn't been home in ages."

The curve in Mary's spine made her list already, and strong winds pulled her further. A dog howled at them from a porch across a street—the same dog that howled every time they walked this way, setting off other dogs behind other doors in this otherwise empty mountain town, still drowsy in the call of the mourning doves moaning, "Who?"

They passed the Crawfords, who would talk your ear off about their new hot tub or a new truck, or plans for their next visit to Italy, the Fosters with the yappy dogs, the Yoders, whose son was the one all set to go backpacking in Canada until they found him stumbling drunk on the railroad tracks, all his gear missing. In this house, Elick had put in a ramp for Martha Ann's wheelchair. In that one, Mary had been over for dinner one evening when a boy came running down the stairs to tell his parents he'd set the curtains on fire in the attic and couldn't put them out. Before he had said any of that, however, he hiccupped once and vomited from all the excitement.

Marshall didn't know all the house stories yet, but he did know when bad ones were coming. He felt it like hot water down in his gut when he recognized a porch swing or a wrought iron gate for a house with an ugly story. Children in a gas fire. A mean man who disappeared for six months before they knew what happened to him. Marshall picked up rotten pinecones in front of the Sanders' house, the same place Elick had learned to swim. Most people in the community learned to swim there until the summer a boy drowned. A fence was erected and now the only people to swim there were the three Sanders boys a few times a summer.

"This one is Poppa," Marshall said, holding up a full pinecone. "This one is you, this is Mommy, and this is me." He presented each of them like dolls.

Mary studied them, nodding.

"Great," Elick said, "Mine's balding, is it? Is that what you think, you punk?"

Marshall squealed and then got very serious as he told Mary that only he and Poppa could go to Storybook forest. He coughed with his mouth open, the tip of his tongue peeking out. Elick pointed out the playground ahead of them. The boy's head whipped around one second before he took off toward the swing set. He paused to set his pinecones down neatly in the woodchips.

Mary eased herself onto a wooden bench. She perched the cane upright in front of her. "Lean it behind me, would you."

"Mama, you can do that, can't you?" She looked at him, her pupils milky and still. He sighed as he flipped the cane around the back of the bench and then slid himself down. He pulled his baseball cap off and scratched the top of his head with the bill.

"Aging hurts," she said, "I don't think God figured it out quite right. Should be you just fall over dead one day."

"Yeah, yeah," Elick said. He looked past her to the treetops flipping over in the wind. The pines hushed like waves. "I know what you're trying to say."

"I'm too old, Elick. I'm too old for that boy."

"I wouldn't ask you to raise him," Elick said. He stared at his hands, lightly touching his rough fingertips together. He took a breath. "It would be for the summer only. I'd be down weekends and holidays."

"You want me to believe that," she said, shaking her head.

"Mama, I can't take him up to Pennsylvania. What's he gonna do all day? Huh? Am I gonna put him to work? Get him a hard hat? Look at him."

"And you don't have any idea where she is?"

"No." Mary watched him bite skin from his lip. He didn't meet her eyes. "I've called hospitals, I put things on Facebook. She barely answered calls when she was a teenager. I don't know what I do next, so I'm making 'what if' plans."

They both leaned back on the bench as the sun came around a cloud, bathing the park in white midday light. Marshall pulled his chest forward on the swing with a rower's steady and grueling endurance. He sailed up until his chains were nearly parallel with the Earth, until the moment of weightlessness gave some slack to the chain and inside that second, he was free. As he fell back toward the ground, the chains locked tight again, sending a jolt up his spine as he swung the other way.

"He'll have big muscles if that asthma keeps up," Mary said. "That's just how you coughed all the time growing up. When you were wee little, first coming by the Sanders' pool, you took your shirt off and Charlie said to me 'Mom, that boy is buff.'"

"Mama."

She adjusted the sleeves of her jacket. "Don't you think it's time to come home, Elick?" He looked at her without expression. "How many times is she gonna put you through this mess? She's plenty old enough to know better. Come work on houses in Terra Alta again and that boy will never wonder where his home is." A chill swept the bench again as the sun receded. The painted mon-

key bars, the miniature log cabin, and the metal slides all faded to cooler colors, showing their rust like bruises. Creaking swing set chains became the only sound. "This summer, he'll spend days with me and you'll fetch him after work in the evenings," she said. Then added, "That's what I can do."

Elick held his fingertips together, holding his breath. He started to speak twice, but let it fall away. Marshall came running back with his pinecones, which he carefully placed on the bench before climbing up into Elick's lap, straddling him. He poked Elick on the nose, making his grandfather say "Ope!" with puffed up cheeks and giant eyes.

"You're silly," Marshall decided.

"I'm silly?" Elick said, "Who's got pinecones growing out his ears?"

Elick blew a raspberry as he drew one of the pinecones under Marshall's earlobe.

"We're going to Storybook Forest," Marshall said, nodding.

"That's right."

"Mommy can't come. And you can't come," he said to Mary. "Just me and Poppa."

"Ha! Yeah buddy, no girls allowed, ain't that right?"

When Marshall said he was hungry, the three of them shared a baggy of sesame sticks and dried cranberries that Mary had brought with her. Elick pointed to the houses on either side of the park telling Marshall their story again: they had identical floor plans. They shared the same wide kitchen, same sliding windows in the bathrooms, and the same awkward basement steps because both were built out of the same Sears catalogue in the 1940s. Mama Mary said the two families were so excited to host one another for dinner as new neighbors until the first family went to the second's house and realized they could give themselves the tour. The houses were identical down to the trim.

"The one looks so different because your Poppa built the addition," Mary said. "Isn't that something?"

"That's right," Elick said, "That's right, I did. Damn near by myself, too."

When they left the park, Marshall discarded his pinecones in favor of a stick. He copied Mary, wielding his stick like a cane and tapping it down between his steps to steady him as they took their walk around the neighborhood.

Elick pointed out houses with shoddy flashing and bowing porch roofs. He held his chin, calculating where a faulty gutter had let in water, staining a white wall dark. He was becoming a surveyor. There was a yellow one he'd seen the back of, how the foundation all rested on a fireplace so fractured even he wouldn't touch it.

"And this here was my bus stop," Elick said. "Shoot, I probably tell you that every time we come by here, don't I Marshall?"

Marshall looked over his shoulder before saying, "Yeah." He held his stick tight. The feeling was coming up. There was a strange house near here.

They came upon a dark gray Victorian with maroon trim. Plywood filled one of the windows. The glass in the other windows had gone wavy with time, like frozen panes of water, and they distorted what was in the house.

Through one, Marshall saw yellow mattresses and box springs stacked up against one another. Through another, a room empty, save for an upturned sink and a rocking chair. Trees in front of the house made the sunlight come down scattered and flickering.

Neither Elick nor Mary said anything, though Marshall was certain his Poppa knew this place. It wasn't one that he had repaired, but something bigger. It fluttered on the edge of Marshall's memory. Maybe this was a family member's house, or maybe this was even where his Poppa grew up. That thought was just under the surface, like all the old house stories. It couldn't be clear to him until someone said it, and then it would snap into place like a dream remembered in the middle of the morning.

But he didn't ask to hear this story. A patch of white wall—a garage—crept between tree shadows behind the house. It spilled that hot feeling in his stomach again. That's where the ugliness was. That's where a story was hidden. This house was one of his Poppa's, but he suddenly felt that he wasn't supposed to talk about it. The worst part was the feeling that someone—someone who knew Marshall—might still live there. He willed to remember as their footsteps crackling on the gravel grew loud. Marshall traded places with Mary and walked closest to the middle of the road, holding his stick with both hands. Elick paused, but said nothing, and they walked on.

As they rounded the corner, Mary's yard came back into view. Marshall was visibly resisting the urge to run until Mary said, "Go on, see if you can beat us." He darted away. When Mary wobbled, Elick put his burly arm under hers to keep her walking.

"You know, he doesn't know you any different," Elick said, "To him, you really are his great grandmother. He'd be good to you this summer."

"Elick," she sighed, "You're as much a one of mine as any of the kids." She grunted from the pain in her shins. "Quit the contractors in Pittsburgh."

"I know." He shivered in the wind. "I'm too old to be a parent again. And I was too young the first time." He made himself smile and looked at her. "I don't know what I learned."

"Wherever your daughter is, when she wants to come home, I'll buy her plane ticket."

Elick nodded. They climbed the lawn slowly as Marshall did his cartwheels that looked more like somersaults. At the door, Elick hugged and kissed Mama Stover, who said "Love ya, honey," and left them at the door.

Elick turned out to the yard, where Marshall came stumbling up and buried his sleepy eyes in his grandfather's hip. "You ready to go home, bud?" Marshall nodded, and with that, Elick lifted him up and marched the two of them back to his truck.

Tracings

By Abby Arthur Johnson

The body remembers in the wash of years
That blur the detail, the straight line,
The body retains patterns fixed
Into the soft bones and flexible muscles
Of childhood. So that decades later,
When she retrieved her violin and played
“Cavatina,” her vibrato still had that hitch,
That stutter caused by haste in practice.
So that three children later, when she again
Traced the waltz jump on ice,
She swung her leg in the wide arc
That had brought her early success.

So that mid-life, when she returned to the
Ancestral cottage and ran barefoot
The hills of girlhood, she took the same
Twenty-nine steps from the beach to the cabin.
From the bared root of the great white pine
To the cool edge of the gray boulder
To the base of the shining birch, her feet
Knew the textures, the spaces, the tempos.
Awash in the years that smooth and round,
Her body moved in the old ways,
Remembered the path up the hill,
Kept patterns that gave her form.

Dad's Jack Knife

By Lori Stoll

Dad's pocket always held the tool
To slice an apple to the core,
Or clean a fish,
Or trim his nails,
Or cut a switch to poke the fire.

Beneath the sheath, the sharpened blade –
Ten quick swipes on either side
Upon the spit
Upon the stone –
Back in his pocket it would go.

Then one day we found my toad
Struggling half-squished on the floor,
Could not wiggle,
Could not shimmy,
Toad was trapped, his dinner spared.

Dad took the toad out back somewhere.
(And I cried, eyes overflowed.)
Took his jack knife,
Took the toadie,
Did the deed, then sliced a pear.

Emotional Dancing

By Tom Dabney

Emotions need words.

We feel them but cannot express them

Without words.

Emotions expressed, have form, shape, and meaning.

Is an unexpressed emotion real?

Or simply imagined?

Expression is like a dancer

In search of a partner.

Does the partner merely listen?

Or step on to the floor

And move with your emotion?

Does one whisper or shout an emotion?

Whispering can mean sincerity, yet

Shouting can mean urgency.

A partner can always ask to hear it again or

Simply feint and turn.

Do you then pursue with fewer words to explain?

Or simply add more words to keep the dance going?

Goodbye

By Savannah Jenkins

Wind of sunset, in it blew,
Rosette leaves set high,
Against the dusty orange hue,
Soft and silent sigh,
Pale and fainted baby blue,
Evening sunset sky.

Yet, wind too sure to never last,
Away to farther height.
Rosette leaves are fading fast,
Simple paling light.
Dusty orange pulsing past,
Drown'ed by the night.

Drip and drain beyond the sky,
Below horizon's view,
Night was crawling, drawing nigh,
Wind away far blew.
Night set in, and said good bye,
Whilom wind, adieu.

A Moment of Solitude

By Lori Stoll

It's quiet now.

The roar of the furnace and fridge

And myriad other motors all silent –

For a time.

If I sit still even the creaks of my aging bones

And arthritic hands disappear,

Quelled like the incessant tick of the clock

I used to hide in the glove box

Or smother in a pillow

To stop the constant tick-tick-tick-tick.

It's quiet now.

No phones ringing or drums beating out rhythms

That sear through my brain

With beat-beat-beat-beat

Interrupting all synapses

And logical thought and speech.

Some like it, I grant you that.

But it's quiet now.

No tap-tap-tapping of the woodpecker

Or drip-drip-dripping of a leaky faucet.

No sirens or horns hooting with impatience.

No hordes of people chanting for rights

However right they are to chant.

Just peaceful quiet abounding with light

And warmth and emptiness.

You are here with me,

Here in the quiet,

Quietly gazing upon all that is and
Soaking in the heavenly solace
Of soundlessness.
Oh, I'm not deaf.
I hear the muted voices
And distant rumble of traffic,
The housefly knocking against the glass
As it tries in vain to escape,
And the scritch of the pen and crinkle of paper
As each line issues forth.
But if I close my eyes
And tip back my head
Until the vertebrae click into place,
I can rest in a moment of solitude,
Here, where it's quiet now.

Untitled Poem

By Patsy Newell

The teaberry leaves we chewed and spat on the ground,

“Don’t eat them,” you said,

And did not explain why.

The taste brought memories of hard, thin wafers of gum,

Silver foil and drugstore counters seen at eye level.

The smooth scarlet of black gum leaves,

Startling in our hands.

We’d driven miles looking for the perfect tree.

Weeks later, withered and dry,

We tossed the leaves on to the highway,

The piles of sawdust,

Left by the newly sharpened Farmboss,

That ran like butter through the tree you had chosen,

Your small, warm hand resting on the bark,

A reverence as you murmured, *Quercus rubra*.

The honey pot of mushrooms we found,

The autumn sun casting shadows,

Horizontal through the trees.

I left them on the porch too long, they rotted,

And I tossed them in the creek.

These gifts are returned to the earth,

Our brief observances accepted,

The order of things,

As leaf, spore and dust decay back into the O horizon.

You taught me this:

The taste and scent and feel of the world

Is ours to discover, and to nurture

Our next steps of this adventure.

In spring I'll find borage in the garden,

My mouth is hungry for the memory.

Snapshot

By Rhoda Trooboff

Where
were we in that photograph
friends smiling
into the camera?

Who
have we become
in this time of troubles?

What
trace is there
of our smiles today
with or without our masks?

How
will we mend our friendship?

When
will we unite again
as one people?

Why
can't we
we just lean in now
toward each other
smiling?

The Tree in Autumn

By Savannah Jenkins

There, it stands, steadfast in its rightful place,

Full blaze of scarlet, golden flare of face,

Its flame alighted for the autumn days,

This is the torch of fall.

Like the setting sun upon a grounded rod,

Kindled resin glares upon the browning sod,

Like the warmth of tender morning rays,

This is the torch of fall.

Then comes the blast of cold winter air,

Away, away the sparks are flying and falling fair,

Against the brutal hands, relentless here to fight,

This is the torch of fall.

The gusty heavy hammers pummel and pound,

Choke, this flaming foliage, gasp without a sound,

It shutters... it stalls, growing soft and slight,

This is the torch of fall.

Till the last coal is snuffed, winter buffets blow,

Now but a flicker... now but a spark... smoldering low,

The flame cannot last the full longevity,

This is the torch of fall.

Skeletal fingers, bare-boned, scanty in debris,

Yet still, in it's rightful place, still standing steadily,

Brown and barren stand the Autumn tree,

This is the torch of fall.

A State of Being

By Tom Dabney

Bright sunlight cast on the fresh snow
No clouds in any direction
The air is calm
Lungs slowly breath in the cold air
Chilled to 15 degrees.

There is silence, quiet that, at first,
Begs for the noise you left behind.

The trees stand tall
with naked branches reaching for the sky
They resemble a forest army spread out
Across the undulating landscape
Tree trunks covered against the cold
Snow glued to their sides from the wind
During the last snow fall

The only sound you hear
Comes when a breeze crosses the treetops
Causing the trees to bend with the wind giving off a sound
Like a mast of a sailing ship.

The beauty and grandeur of this only
Penetrates the psyche when you stand

Totally still

And allow it to enter you as your breath
Does the cold air,
Slowly and deliberately.
All of a sudden it is within you and
You are afraid to move
That it might escape and leave you.

Hole in the Wall

By Patsy Newell

The coffee was cold. She put the mug in the microwave and stood, forehead pressed against the painted steel cabinet, waiting. The kitchen was in the sort of disarray she treasured. No one to come in and judge her, a reprieve from being seen. Projects were being started, dirty pans from last night stood soaking in the sink. There were several dish towels lying damply on the floor. And she held the sweet sense of having made a beautiful meal, just for herself. All the windows were open and the pressure of afternoon heat pressed into the rooms. Still cool in the house, but heavy hot outside. If she looked out there she'd be lost. She had to keep her focus inside. If she went into the yard, she'd get caught up in the chores that didn't really need to be done, but were still there, waiting. And she wasn't going to do that today. Today she wanted to cook, and dance to music and just create the next thing that came to mind.

She had braised a 4-pound leg of mutton, the last piece of meat from Joseph, the five-year-old ram Carlene had off loaded on her last spring. It had been lurking in the freezer. Like a bad thought. So, she had browned the hell out of it, (setting off the smoke alarm as usual, which meant huddling with the dog to make him feel safe) and then used the fresh seeds she'd gathered from the coriander and dill harvest, added some crappy red wine and old apple cider from last fall, a large bouquet of cut herbs, a cinnamon stick and the garlic and onions she'd brought up from the basement and then she'd thrown the whole thing in the oven to cook overnight.

Her children were coming home in two days. All three of them. But right now she was alone. Her husband gone -- a four-day trip to see art and music in New York. His mother lived there, and he'd needed a break from the farm. There were a dozen duck eggs, listing on the counter. Their shells luminous with afternoon light, the opacity of the shells made it so easy to tell them apart from the chicken eggs. The ceramic bowl reflected shades of blue. She measured the sugar and splashed the vanilla into the bowl, and beat the yolks, one at a time. The slippery heft of the yolks had detached easily from the whites through her fingers. The shells were so hard, she was afraid she'd break the yolks, there was always a brief moment of panic when she whacked them against the rim, but they all fell into the bowl, one after the other, in perfect globs of rich, glorious orange. She put the whites in a glass container for later. She'd make the pecan muffins that she always made when she used duck eggs for creme brulee. The ducks were finally laying in one spot, so she could find the eggs. Too often the dogs discovered them first and they would eat them, evidenced by shells scattered on the ground, or they'd bring them onto the porch, cracked and leaking. Once, miraculously, she'd found an intact egg, delivered like a newspaper, leaning against the front door.

The music had shifted, she was now streaming a radio station out of New Orleans, and the long slow wail of saxophone, laid against the simple ca-

dence of bass and drums, had settled into her bones. She'd been dancing to Little Feat, rock'n'roll from her childhood, but now the afternoon sun and old-time blues had ensnared the kitchen in the constraint of sluggish heat and a 3/4 beat. The dog was lying in the kennel where he was kept at night, he didn't love loud music, and he felt safe on his pillow in there. She sat at the table, the creme brulee cooling on the counter. She had steeped earl grey tea into the custard before baking, she was very interested in how it would taste.

The last time all her children had been together there had been a lot of tense, barely concealed anger seething in the air. Everyone had tried to be polite, which she had really appreciated. There had been a genuine effort, unspoken between them, that they would see how it was to be all together. She had made the classic dinner everyone loved: spaghetti with meatballs--because Sarah was vegetarian and could skip the meat. She had mixed ground lamb from their first slaughter, with beef from the CSA two miles down the road. And the sauce had been grown entirely on the farm. Lots of basil. They all joked that if only they could grow olive trees to make oil, and had milk cows for parmesan, the meal would be 100% farm raised. Her husband had spent hours making a huge batch of egg noodles. Her chickens had been producing a lot of eggs, so they had to use them up.

After the meal, her younger daughter Ellie had been telling a story about her job working as a bouncer at a bar. She'd been animated and anxious, wanting everyone's attention, as usual. It was a funny story, and they'd all been laughing. Except her son Jack. He thought Ellie had acted badly; taking advantage of a misogynistic drunk guy, who kept buying her beers, but treating her like shit.

"You don't know what it's like, Jack--you just have no fucking idea," Ellie had been tense, anger barely repressed beneath her laughing narrative.

"You're surrounded by music and alcohol and everyone's buying drinks and trying to get laid, and you can buy anything you want, cuz your legal and it's all just there, for the taking." Ellie had kept hammering her point.

"You don't know how women feel in that environment." Sarah had chimed in, "We're always having to manage guy's trying to hit on us." Her voice had been shrill, her fists clenched on the table, leaning in towards her brother.

Her husband had sat, helpless at the table. They had both known things would get dicey with all three kids home together. They'd discussed strategies. She had insisted on keeping out of it--that's what her therapist had kept telling her: stay out of it. And really, what could they do? These grown children had so much anger and history to sort out. There was no going back and fixing things, they had to wade through this and get to new ground. New history. But first, this. This need her daughters had to punish their brother for the years of his abuse. There had been events neither she nor her husband had had any clue about. Nights when Jack would do things that horrified her. Her son had put cigarettes out on her daughter's arm, had punched her in the stomach, in front of his friends. The list of his past drunken and drug infused behavior seemed endless. He had done these things, and she had had no idea. Her beautiful, goofy

son had gone off the rails, and she had not known. Her own guilt for this was overwhelming. She thought she had been keeping everyone safe, but she had failed. Her husband sat, hands in his lap, avoiding eye contact, waiting for it to be over, to move on. But their children were just getting started.

They had forced Jack to go to rehab his freshman year in college. She had been in California, attending the funeral for one of her oldest friends, when Jack had called her. He was crying, and she had to step out of the church in order to hear him. He was hiding in the bushes from the cops. And he was calling her for help. He wanted advice. His voice was a slurry of words, and she had to press the phone against her ear, looking back at the church entrance, aching to be inside, feeling guilty for not wanting to be on the phone with her drunk son. It seemed so unfair that she had to miss the eulogy about her friend.

"Mom, Mom, my friend got caught, but I'm ok, they can't see me. Mom, I don't think they can see me. What should I do?"

And just as she had gathered words together, the line went dead. She called him back twice, both times it went to voicemail. It was hours later, at the post funeral gathering that he'd called from the police station. He was in custody, caught with weed and Molly. And that had started the whole process. On his 21st birthday Jack celebrated two years of sobriety. Ellie was right, of course, Jack had never drunk socially in a public setting. And here they were, in the kitchen together for the first time in four years, and her daughters were entirely focused on educating their brother on what he had missed while being in rehab.

Earlier that day Jack had been telling everyone that he had friends who were staunchly conservative. One friend had two handguns he liked to show off. Jack felt that he was more in touch with people who felt disenfranchised. His buddies from rehab came from lower- and middle-class families. Her daughters had been attending private colleges, liberal colleges, colleges that had divested from South Africa when that was the cool thing to do. He'd been working 30-hour weeks, while living in a half-way house filled with ex-heroin addicts twice his age. He felt he'd had an education that no one in his family could fathom. Her daughters had been exposed to civil rights causes, gender identification, the police brutality issue, while Jack had been working third shift at an all-night restaurant. After he'd been in Florida for two years, managing on his long board and using the buses, they'd given him his grandmother's car. He'd gotten a reputation for being good at working with new AA members, he'd taken a lot of pride in driving other residents to meetings, making it fun. Keeping the music going.

The rehab they had chosen, the one covered by insurance, had a strict policy of forcing its residents to become self-sufficient. It was hammered into their heads that for years they'd all been taking advantage of their parents, (financially and emotionally) and that now, having chosen to be sober, they had to become independent. Her son had loved it. She had heard the slow creep of self-confidence return to his voice over the phone during their once-a-week phone calls. He'd been humiliated after the bust. afraid to speak about his behav-

ior, but slowly he had come to admit and face his addiction.

But Ellie and Sarah hadn't been talking with him on the phone. They'd been too angry and scared to reach out to him. They had, all of them really, been so relieved that he was gone, far away, to some place safe, where they didn't have to deal with him.

She knew some of the family dynamics were her fault. She was close with her daughters, they had similar interests, while her son had been obsessed with computers, skateboarding and that strange, electronic music that sounded so alien to her. From the very beginning he had been fiercely independent. Even as a baby she had sensed this otherness, how his maleness set him apart. He had always held an impenetrable shell around him. He was impervious where her daughters were malleable, and she had loved how fierce he could be. Even the time she'd come home to find him, 8 years old, sitting on the couch with a kitchen knife clutched in his hands. He'd been crying: "Mom. I just want to be left alone." She'd been horrified, of course, but a small part of her had admired this ability to defend himself. She'd wondered if she should have called someone, she had no idea who to call, but maybe she should have figured out how to get professional help, but all she'd done was taken the knife from him and held him. Her daughters had claimed he was dangerous, but he hadn't threatened them, he'd simply taken the knife and sat on the couch, waiting for help. Thinking back on it, she ached for that little boy. His sisters had been so mean to him that he'd resorted to finding a weapon, such a basic masculine response.

She'd never claimed to be a hero, to know how to raise children, especially so many all at once. Sarah had been born with the same genetic disorder that she had, a cleft palate and sunken chest, born only 21 months before Jack and Ellie, twins who had arrived two months early. It had been a crazy hard time. Sarah had had two surgeries before her third birthday. It was a time she almost couldn't remember, but the interior of the '63 Cutlass they owned then, a grey four door hard top, always came to mind when she thought back. The twice daily trips over the bridge to the hospital during the two months the twins were in intensive care, surrounded by the spacious retro interior of the car, the wide advance of her exhausted body through traffic. Looking cool, she thought, in her bleary state, but Jesus, so tired. She tried to remember where she'd been in the world. Bush as president. Iran. The Gulf War. Packing the kids up to go march at the White House. All the diapers and paraphernalia involved and yet still mobilizing and getting out. It had been such a microcosm of child rearing within the larger issues. Now, living up in the mountains, away from DC, it all looked so useless and childish. She had become jaded, and some days (she had the luxury) to remain paralyzed under the covers--what she was witnessing in her country was harder even than raising these kids.

She had tossed the pasta with parmesan and egg yolks, before splaying it out on the large ceramic platter. The rich tomato sauce had been bright against the glistening tangle of noodles.

"But you don't have the right to abuse him, just cuz he wants to make a point," Jack had kept saying this. He needed to be heard, but for so long he had

been ignored. She saw that he had no clue what her girls were trying to explain, but she kept her mouth shut, wishing she could leave the table, go check on the horses, feed the dogs, anything to get away. It was so hard not to jump in and facilitate. Especially when the girls looked to her for support. She kept her head down, rolling the edge of the tablecloth, between her fingers, taking cues from her husband for once in her life.

Jack had always been a child prone to tears, an attribute he hated, and bursts of anger he could not control. Frustration at being ignored, fury at being patronized, Jack kept aggravating Ellie and Sarah with his inability to step back and listen. She saw that her daughters were entrenched in their newfound comradery around feminist issues. It had always been the twins vs Sarah, but roles were shifting, and Jack was now on the outside. She thought back to her oceanography class in high school, seeing the diagrams of continental shifts, how earthquakes on the ocean floor formed tsunamis above. She felt like she was clawing up the sweep of titanic waves, grasping for air, seeking a steady surge.

She watched her children, praying they would not capsize the slender boat of family that sat upon this raging sea. She idly twisted a noodle on her fork, too full to eat anymore.

Stay out of it. Stay out of it. She held this phrase, a clunky tool, in her hands. But it was too late, or too early, who could say? Jack refused to back down, and her daughters were too delighted with their unified argument about how to control men in bars, that they did not see, or care, that Jack had begun to boil over with rage.

"You can't accept free drinks from some guy you despise." he was shouting now.

"You don't know, Jack, you just don't know," this fact was the one thing the girls kept clutching, like it proved Jack's inability to have an opinion.

"I know! I know you've been partying in bars. I know I haven't, but you just can't abuse some guy like that."

"Fuck you! You do not know!" Sarah was screeching.

She looked to her husband, a sidelong glance, his shoulders hunched up to his ears, he was bent towards their children. "Come on guys, settle down," but no one heard him.

Jack stood from the table, fists pounding the table, all control lost. The inability of anyone to come to his rescue, his parents' ineffectual beseeching a mere background noise to the fury inside him. This lack of support or understanding overwhelming his senses, he stormed from the room. As he ascended the stairs they heard a loud thud and gasp of pain. Ellie rushed to the stairs, "He punched a hole in the wall. Holy fucking shit! He's crazy."

She sat at the table, her fingers gripping the rolled edge of the tablecloth, this texture somehow keeping her anchored in her seat. Sarah had glared at her parents and followed Ellie out of the house. Her husband had jumped from his place, the chair shoved back, and then stood there, immobilized. Like a set for a play, she had thought. Exit right.

That night she'd been woken by an alarm shrilling through the house.

It went silent as she blearily got out of bed, she figured it was the glitchy carbon monoxide alarm that was in the kitchen. It was prone to going off at random times. As she entered the kitchen she saw Ellie stepping down from a chair, her hand on Jack's shoulder for support, the smoke alarm in her hand.

Sarah was nestled around the dog who was shivering with fright. They had all known the dog would freak out, stuck in his kennel, they knew how much he hated loud noises. They had come together to rescue him. In the sudden calm of the quiet, the murmurs from Sarah could be heard, soothing the dog, who had slowly become still. Awkwardly Ellie removed her hand from Jack's shoulder and as she had turned to leave the room, Jack had reached out his arm to touch her. She had hesitated in her step, and then slowly kept moving. The dog trotted over to smell Jack's feet, tail wagging, he was always so happy to see the kids. Sarah and Jack had looked at each other, and in unison, murmured, "Good dog."

The hole, a perfect, fist sized break in the drywall, was shaped like a heart. Weeks after they all left, she had taken a small, framed watercolor her cousin had done from the stash of unused art they kept in the attic, removed the image, and hung the empty brass frame around the hole. She had thought it was funny.

Cool to her heat, the pressure just enough to relieve the pain starting to throb at her temples, the metal cabinet door gave slightly under the weight of her forehead. A moment. She needed a moment, to be still, and quiet, listening to the hum of the machine, smelling the coffee heating up inside. She spooned two heaps of sugar into the hot mug and held it against her chest, she looked around the kitchen, perusing her options.

The kids were coming home, maybe spaghetti and meatballs?

Charred Remains

By Lori Stoll

After the shootings in Gilroy, El Paso,
and Dayton...

I stopped for lunch
at a youth campsite
among tall trees
near waterfalls and trails
where hunters aim for
bears, not people.

When I was young
we camped in woods
and dodged trees
that stood in the way
of a tossed frisbee
or whiffle ball.

But here the empty site
seems a metaphor
for our lost youth,
lives shattered.

The charred remains
of femur-like logs
that might have
stopped a stray bullet
lie scattered
in the fire pit
and silent trunks lean
among empty shadows
of lost lives.

Sometimes Gray

By Melodee Hill

I want to be a wild woman
in the days that I have left
some neon colors interwoven
among the warp and weft
of black and white and
sometimes gray that speaks
of wrong and right.

The loom is set the Fates
will cut the thread when
they are ready. My only hope
a tangled weave and scissors
quite unsteady will leave
a wild and ragged hole
wherein my heart shall
juxtapose, a most unruly soul.

Bastion

By Patsy Newell

A satellite crosses the night sky,
(milky with stars),
I lay in my bed,
gazing out the open window.
The dot dot dot of light
disappears over the mountain.

I pull my blanket of primordial thinking
over my shoulders.

Somewhere someone has made Styrofoam
out of mushroom spores,
another is sleeping, pitched up in a mammoth redwood,
saving an ancient life,
In El Paso a friend finds housing in warehouses
for the children who cannot gain asylum.

When I look directly at the pulsing light
I lose sight of it.
I only see it at the slant.
My little stronghold is too primitive
for this groundswell of truth,
upended.
Too minute for close inspection.

In the morning, I will wake to the hungry ache of my horses,
waiting for hay and grain.

Morning chores,
The texture of chestnut boards smooth beneath my hands,
I will pull open the barn door,
And inhale the familiar reek of urine and sawdust
and cold stone foundations.

But as I lie still,
I cannot seem to drown out
the imagined beep beep beep
of these satellites that cross my heavens.
The millions of ideas, mistakes,
the decisions and motions
of human hands,
that made the thing above me.

I am too small of a thing,
alone in my landscape,
to know of launch pads and inventions
that might save us all.

I put on my glasses,
the smudge of galaxies
brought suddenly sharp,
Another dot dot dot
And I imagine the space station,
it's tiny citadel of defense.
Not of soil and water and seed,
but of technology and hubris.
And it dawns on me that maybe
My endeavors are enough.

Although I am never sure,
or furious
enough,
to say.

Jasmine of the Night

By Savannah Jenkins

Here- this delicate thrives,
When all the time is right,
In the graving silver silence,
When the milky moon is bright.

It blooms-
When the katydids are singing,
And the starry sea is springing,

It blooms-
in the solitude of the night.

September Sky

By Abby Arthur Johnson

The mountains ringing round held
The Tromso sound as in
A vast cupped hand. From ages gone
The passage there had been

Protected from the northern sea.
And so that day as on
All days, the fishing boats sailed by.
It seemed to everyone

That nothing was unusual,
Except perhaps that sheer
And open sky. "So fine," they said,
"For this time of the year."

And then right at the midday meal,
So silent and remote
Across the sound, dark flames burst out
From someone's fishing boat.

A rescue boat came into view
And then the smoke and flames were gone,
The sound swept clean of all debris.
The Arctic sun shone on.

Haiku 2

By Maureen Sheaffer

Sweet smell of wet moss
Green pillows sprawled before me
I perched at the edge

The Call

By Abby Arthur Johnson

He married them—two by two—
Long ago in those shimmering, golden days.
And now he buries them—one-by-one—
Uncle, sister, brother, amidst the gathered kin.
He is the one to summarize all the dear lives
To remember the children, whom he baptized and married,
The words said at the large anniversaries,
The times at summer cottages, glimmering lakes,
The shared jokes, the confidences in a quiet hour.
He must round it all to the final period.

Tough assignment, thinks the pastor's daughter,
Hardest task of all, she thinks about her father,
Who could not have imagined these days at ordination,
Who must now, grieving himself, find the words,
Say farewell time and again for the entire clan
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
“Retired”—the word has no meaning. The pastor
Signed on for life, although it was hard
Then to know the terms. He has family as parish
Now, in the fullness of his own time.

FALL COMING LATE IN THE MOUNTAINS

By Tom Dabney

The trees and leaves have finally reached a compromise:

They will proceed with fall, at last,

In the middle of November.

Running through the woods these past weeks

Has caused a sense of hindered time

That must be rectified.

It is not right to be running with green leaves on trees

And winter threatening on the edges.

The compromise proceeds a pace.

Driven now by cooler winds and driving rains

The wet pavement is now covered

With rain soaked pale green, rust red, burnt orange and yellow

Glued to the wet pavement glistening for a moment.

This roadway palette will soon be muted along the roadside

By the wind and passing cars

The leaves now stirred together with the leaves of other years.

Song of the Female Squash Blossom

By Rhoda Trooboff

Hello, my golden love. You are quite near,
Beyond a sun-drench'd leaf at break of day,
Yet atop your sturdy stem so far away.
An equal gold, I long to have you here
Beside me, but by noon you'll fade, I fear,
Your petals curl, your pollen soon decay,
While I stay empty, bare, bereft – afraid
My fecund glory will disappear.

Look! An insect on your sun-warm'd stamen
Twirls in your life-giving dust, then flies
In my direction! This heaven-sent bee
Finds my pistil, my ecstatic haven,
And leaves on its stigma a welcome prize:
At last! Harmonious fertility!

Haiku 3

By Maureen Sheaffer

Cold eyes tracking me
My hands remained at my side
I flinched as she pounced

The Raven and I

By Savannah Jenkins

A raven flies against the wind,

A solo echelon.

The wind against his wavering wing,

And yet he struggles on,

Fighting on, to fly

I ride against the dusty cloud,

Conflicted, helpless heap.

The wind against my stumbling step-

We both our struggle keep,

The raven bird and I.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tom Dabney

Tom has practiced law in Garrett County for more than 40 years. He has three daughters and three grandchildren. He loves Garrett County because of its beauty and its people. Tom enjoys running, cycling, motorcycling, cross country skiing, gardening, and writing. His material comes from going about the county. It is a constant source of inspiration. He is now working with a group of amazing women to start and operate a non-profit women's recovery house for substance use disorders in the country. Reflection House will be a long term treatment facility.

Hannah Frazee

Hannah Frazee has resided in Garrett County for her entire life. She works through AmeriCorps for the UMD Extension Service, and is actively involved in the Country Explorers 4-H club as president. At age 16, she began pursuing her Bachelor's of Science in Nursing through Liberty University, where she is an honors student. Hannah grew up with a deep love for vocabulary and reading, specifically old literature from the 18th through 20th centuries. She began to write at a young age, and has created many short stories and two novels within the past year. Creepy stories, mysteries, sci-fi, and stories of human emotion are her favorites, and she prioritizes experimentation with different styles of writing. In 2021, she competed in and won NaNoWriMo, with a novel of over 50,000 words written in one month. Hannah has been singing and playing keyboard at Chestnut Ridge Church in Morgantown, WV for the past six years, and in her spare time, she enjoys creating various forms of art and wearing eccentric fashion. She also loves to spend time with her family, friends, five cats, and pet goat.

Rose Gordy

Rose Gordy spent thirteen years of her early life as a nun effectively cut off from the world. In spite of the conditions within the Church, she managed to leave and make a life for herself including getting married and having children. Through her experiences in the convent as well as decades of teaching in the classroom, she has woven compelling stories and poems honoring the lives lost and changed forever by adversity. These days she composes her stories at her residence in Deep Creek Lake, Maryland.

Rose Gordy is also a veteran secondary English teacher, speech and debate coach, dream workshop facilitator, and published poet, essayist and short story writer. She earned a Masters Degree in English and French from the University of Notre Dame and has been writing and teaching for most of her life.

Linda Herdering

Linda Lee Herdering grew up in upstate NY and Silver Spring, but experienced her REAL growing-up while living solo on her fixer-upper boats in downtown Washington, DC throughout the 80s. Linda cruised and worked on her boats while running her own photography business, using “old fashioned film.” Delivering yachts and working as a temporary crew member rounded out her life and fulfilled her water passion. In her 30’s Linda married a career US Marine officer, Mike-- subsequently spending many years accompanying him to several duty stations around the world. Moving every year or two, she enjoyed a variety of employment opportunities--from government positions to English teacher to white-water rafting guide service. Upon Mike’s retirement in 2002, they both apprenticed at two large northern dog sledding kennels to learn mushing skills. Afterwards they settled back in Linda’s home state of MD (Garrett County) to develop and open a dog sledding tour business, “Husky Power Dogsledding.” After 13 successful years of hosting thousands of guests mushing on sleds and wheeled sleds (without snow), they finally retired to peruse other passions. Linda has been a contributing member (photography and mixed media) of the Garrett Arts Gallery in Oakland for over a decade.

Melodee Hill

I have lived in Garrett County since we moved here in 1984, with a 4 year hiatus in Ocean City. My husband and I moved back to GC in 2021. Writing has been a hobby of mine since I started scribbling verses on scrap paper when I was a teenager. My interest in artistic endeavors led me to being involved in the beginnings and continuing promotion of the Garrett County Arts Council, The Wednesday Writers Guild, Our Town Theatre, and Ginseng.

Savannah Jenkins

My name is Savannah Jenkins. I was born near the gorgeous Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina. My family moved to a small farm in Pleasant Valley when I was thirteen. We’ve lived here for about six years. I’ve always enjoyed the woods and mountains and silent beauty of the country, and much of what I write is inspired from it. The other bit I write comes from all the wild ideas inside my head. I hope someday, that all these ideas would bring glory to God, the Author of my days.

Abby Arthur Johnson

Abby Arthur Johnson is a retired professor from Georgetown University and currently owns a second home in Sky Valley. She came to Garrett County in the fall of 1999 and has so enjoyed spending a good part of every year up here. As an academic, she taught courses in literature and cultural studies. At the same time, however, she wrote and published

poetry based on her experiences as a daughter, wife, mother, traveler, and times spent living abroad. Her selected Ginseng submissions reflect some of her memories of having fulfilled all those roles.

Ron Krug

Ron Krug has been a business professor for 37 years. He has taught at SUNY-Oneonta, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, and now Allegany College of Maryland. He and his wife Cherie live in McHenry. Ron became interested in writing creative nonfiction while taking a workshop in Mt. Lake Park in summer 2021. This is his first attempt at creative writing in several decades and his first attempt to have creative work published.

Mary Sincell McEwen

Mary Sincell McEwen, a native of Mountain Lake Park and resident of Oakland, is the coordinator of the Grantsville and Oakland Arts & Entertainment Districts. Prior to this position, she was a writer for The Republican newspaper for 37 years. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, with an emphasis on playwriting, from West Virginia University. She keeps a blog at marysmcewenwrites.com and invites you visit.

Michael McEwen

Michael McEwen is a writer from Oakland, MD. He earned his MFA at the University of Kentucky in 2021. His writing has appeared in Yemassee, and his stories have been finalists for the Raymond Carver Short Story Contest and the Robert Day Award for Fiction.

David Moran

David Moran is Professor (Adjunct) at WVU, and the former Publisher of “American Scientist” and “Chronicle of the New Researcher” for the Scientific Research Society. He has also served as Professor, USNA; and Professor (Adjunct) George Washington University.

He was educated at MIT, Harvard, and the Federal Executive Institute, and is the author of three books: “Fifty Years of Hydraulic Research,” © Iowa Press; “All Mountaineers Are Libertarians,” © McClain Press; and “Voices from the Cosmos,” © Cosmos, Washington, D.C.

Patsy Newell

I moved to Garrett County 8 years ago after raising three astonishing children in DC. My husband teaches in the art department at Frostburg State University. We bought a 48 acre farm and we grow vegetables, raise chickens for eggs, duck for meat and we have horses, a donkey, 3 dogs and 3 cats. I manage the farm, and I'm extremely grateful to live here.

Bob Newman

I started out writing typical teenage angst crap, thought better of it for thirty years, then came back to writing in my fifties. I write mostly long form, but enjoy short stories and essays for the rush of instant gratification, plus to remind myself to get to the damn point. Kathy and I live in Swanton, where we are enjoying our new house with a small menagerie of cats.

Mercedes Pellet

My husband and I moved to Garrett County in 2004 when I enrolled at Pierpont Technical College to become a Registered Veterinary Technician. I joined an animal welfare organization, HART for Animals, Inc., in 2006 and began to raise funds to build an animal rescue facility. After eight years of fundraising five million dollars, my husband designed the building, and we hired an architect. The building was completed in 2014, and we both recently retired from being full-time volunteers. By profession, I am a translator and simultaneous interpreter, as well as a published writer in English and Spanish. My mother and I emigrated to the United States in 1957, where we became American Citizens. I am 77 years old, born in the mountains of Colombia. I found my retirement paradise in the mountains of Garrett County. This is my third contribution to *Ginseng*.

Maureen Sheaffer

Maureen Sheaffer is an architectural designer, writer and podcaster living in Grantsville with her husband Tom and daughter Amelia. She has a Master of Architecture from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Maureen grew up coming to Garrett County with her family to their small cabin in McHenry. They skied in the winter, enjoyed the lake in the summer and the vibrant leaves through the fall. After her parents retired here in 2007 she was lucky enough to call Garrett County home for a few years while finishing school, and moved to the area full time in 2012. She has been inspired by the natural beauty of this area since she was young, and has found endless creative inspiration in the last 10 years as a resident of the county. She is currently a commissioner on the Garrett County Commission for Women, and is a founding board member of the Deep Creek Farmers Market.

Jack Spencer

Jack has worked and lived in Garrett County for over 20 years. Although he has never been an actual “writer,” he sometimes writes pieces that make people wonder what his mental problem is...just after they read his work, get irritated, and then tear it up and throw it away.

Lori Stoll

A resident of Deep Creek Lake in Garrett County since 2007, Lori is an active member of the Garrett County Arts Council (GCAC), Garrett Lakes Arts Festival (GLAF), and Our Town Theatre (OTT). Seven of her poems were published in GCAC’s *Ginseng* 2018 and 2019-2020 publications and her play “Nothin’ but a Muffin” was read aloud at the Oakland A&E District’s *Play Bake* event in June 2021.

Lori retired from a career in engineering business development in 2017 and now volunteers her time at OTT’s Backstage Costume Shop and for GCAC, GLAF, and other organizations. In 2021 she volunteered with the Garrett County unit of Maryland Responds Medical Reserve Corps assisting with COVID-19 testing and vaccination clinics. She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Chemical Engineering and an MBA in global business management.

Rhoda Trooboff

Rhoda Trooboff is an author, poet, and retired high school English teacher who with her family has divided her time since the mid-1970s between homes in Washington DC and at Deep Creek Lake. She is also an amateur pianist, an avid reader, organic vegetable gardener and cook, a grandmother of five terrific kids, for whom she has written children’s books, and the author of one novel for adults (“Correspondence Course: The Bathsua Project”).

Annie Simcoe, Cover Art

Annie Simcoe is a paper artist working and living in western Maryland with her husband and two dogs. Annie Simcoe hand crafts all of her papers from plants such as cornhusks, iris leaves, rye grass and banana peels. Once the papers are dry she pieces them together and stitches them using free-motion quilting techniques. The inspiration for Annie's work comes from her background as a geologist, life events, and the landscape of rural Maryland and West Virginia.

*The Garrett County Arts Council (GCAC) was pleased to purchase Annie Simcoe's original artwork, **American Ginseng**, for the cover of this year's Ginseng publication.*

American Ginseng, 11" x 14", ramp paper, cornhusk paper, and stitching

American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is native to eastern North America. It is an herb commonly used in traditional medicine. Ginseng has been harvested as a cash crop for at least 200 years. State laws regulate the harvest of Ginseng. Digging on state forest land is prohibited. The plant must have at least three prongs and no fewer than 15 leaflets. The berries of the plant must be red, indicating the plant is mature. Roots may only be harvested from September 1st through November 30th and diggers must have roots weigh-receipted at a Division of Forestry weigh station.

American Ginseng is part of Annie Simcoe's [Still] Life on the Allegheny Front collection.