



**THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF  
BIG SANDY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE**

# Cut-Thru Review

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James B. Goode

## In the Moment

I think Mamaw's brain has turned into a DVD of her life. She lies in her bed in the nursing home and randomly pushes the invisible buttons. The shiny wheel spins and locates a particular time, a particular place, with particular people. It is filled with people who were there.

"Go on up to the house and eat before you go home," she says as she raises her head from the cloud-like pillow, craning her neck to watch us disappear into the cavernous hallway.

A few weeks ago, Dr. Cornett told us to do exercises with Mamaw to stimulate and exercise her brain.

Her brain is getting plenty of exercise, I thought. The wheels are spinning and the gears are grinding constantly. But I am always open to suggestion. So, I bring a picture of her three sons standing under the Walnut tree at the home place. I show her the picture in the silver frame.

"Who are these people?" I ask.

She holds the frame tightly in her blue-veined, waxy hands. Her eyes tighten as she stares at the image.

"They know who they are!" she blurts out suddenly.

This takes me aback. There is no argument here. They do know who they are. Maybe she recalls. Maybe she doesn't. Maybe who they are has slipped away and is lost somewhere on a shiny disk and the laser light can't locate it. Maybe she will happen



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upon it and divulge it at some unexpected moment – that’s Ivan on the left, then Eddie in the middle . . . Danny is the baby, he’s next to the tree, she’ll say.

The nurse tells us to rub lotion on Mamaw’s skin.

“Her skin will dry out. Old people get these pressure sores from lying around,” she explains.

“Take this Jergen’s and massage her arms and hands, her face, her legs and feet . . .”

I come in one morning. “Good morning sweet Mamaw, how’s my Ma-maw today?” I ask.

She looks at me as if I am some rank stranger. It is a hollow look, as if she only knows that I am male, but doesn’t know my name or how I fit in this family.

“Do you want me to rub lotion on your hands today?” I ask.

A smile slowly moves across her thin lips – some memory appears on the screen – maybe a montage of memories. The image fades to black . . . another image . . . a dissolve to another, then disappears. In her eyes are clouds flying under the sun.

“Others have been there before,” she says, her eyes suddenly warm and focusing on my face.

I am her lover . . . come calling . . . I caress her hand as if we are sitting on the front porch courting in the swing. The silver disc keeps spinning and spinning.

“Others have been there before,” she repeats. I do not want to hear this. Some things you do not want to hear from your 80-year-old Mamaw.



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Mamaw is trying to die. She weighs 65 pounds. She looks like leather stretched over sticks and rocks. When she starts to slip away, the people in white rush into the room with their gurney and whisk her away to the hospital.

They hook her up to IVs of glucose and other mysterious liquids. The pink begins to chase away the ashen gray. She emerges from the fog—electricity restored after the storm.

“Honey, Honey, Honey . . . ain’t you got fat since I seen you last?” She says to me. At first, my feelings are hurt, but I have learned to be in Mamaw’s reality. Wherever Mamaw is, that’s where I am.

The nurse’s aides tell me stories about when Mamaw first came to the nursing home. Their favorite story is about her trying to court Mr. Turner who has a room across the way and down the hall. They tell of them walking up and down the corridors day-after-day holding hands and whispering in the shadows. They catch heads turned and exchange two-arm hugs and even kisses. Once they were even caught in bed together.

This came as no surprise to me. Mamaw likes men. She always has. Every time one comes in the room, she lights up like a Christmas tree. Her eyes never leave them. They follow the men as they move about her room. She flirts with her eyes and mouth. She ignores any women who are in the room. They might as well be fence posts.

They tell about her going down to see Mr. Turner one Sunday morning. When she came to the doorway, his wife, Ellen, was sitting in a chair next to his bed. She eyed Mamaw, forming a sneer by raising the left side of her upper lip. Mamaw froze in place. Mrs. Turner looked at Elijah and said, “Well, who is this Mr. Turner?”

He opened the drawer of the nightstand, removed his black plastic rimmed glasses and cocked them on his crooked nose.

“I’ve never seen her before in my life!” he exclaimed.



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This morning the phone rings. It's the nursing supervisor at the nursing home. They want me to come right away. I know what has happened. I tell them I will be there as soon as I can get dressed. Outside, the trees are beginning to turn. The wind scatters the dancing leaves across the yard. One tiny bird flicks and flutters in the swirl. I take my time getting dressed. I will go into the nursing home and do as I have done for the last twelve years. I will be in Mamaw's moment.

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**James B. Goode**, creative writer, essayist, photographer, and Appalachian scholar, has written about the Appalachian region since undergraduate school in the 1960s. He has authored four books of poetry and two technical books on coal mining, produced and directed two documentary films, published short stories in two major anthologies and several national magazines, published over 500 poems in national and international magazines, and written over two hundred columns for the Lexington Herald-Leader, Harlan Daily Enterprise, Coal County Extra and various other newspapers and magazines. His work has appeared in the Kentucky Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Encyclopedia of Appalachia, Encyclopedia of the Midwest, and anthologies such as Robert Higgs and Ambrose Manning's *Appalachia: Inside Out*, *The Blair Mountain Anthology*, *God's Plenty: Modern Kentucky Writers*, *Old Wounds, New Words*, *The Kentucky Book*, *Yearbook of Modern Poetry*, and *Forever Bear*.



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Kayla Price

## Beauty Is the Beast

I'd never given much thought to what would be prevalent in my personal history. Most people could say their grandma or an exciting basketball game, but none of that would fit into an account of my life. I have lived an average life in eastern Kentucky with a similar story to most 19-year-olds of this day and age. I was born and raised by a mom and dad. I have struggled with the awkward years that have only recently begun to fade. I learned to drive an automatic in an emerald green, Chevy S-10. I learned to drive a cable-clutch standard in my dad's candy-apple red, 1946 Jeep Willys. I graduated high school – Johnson Central High School, to be exact. I moved out of the nest and into an apartment, but only endured a year, and now I live in the nest anyway. I have no idea what or where I'm going to be in 20 years. I have a list of dreams – sure. I want to devote time to the Peace Corps. I want to hike the Appalachian Trail. I want someday to write an award-winning piece of fiction. Still, these average happenings and yet-to-happen dreams can't be held accountable for the person I am today. If there is one thing that has remained persistent from my childhood until present though, it is that I have always saved a hefty space in my heart for animals.

My love for animals goes beyond an unhealthy obsession for dressing small dogs in cute outfits or only getting my hamster out of the cage when I was bored. My earliest memories as a child are of my neighbor and me walking a short distance from my house to the Staffordsville Flea Market – better known as the stockyard. Every Saturday, we would walk to the stockyard with five dollars and every Saturday we would pilfer through everything from video games that could only be used on game systems that we didn't have to pirated VHS tapes – one dollar apiece. We would sift through junk for about an hour and then would make our way across Highway 172 and onto the “dog lot.” There was no pavement or gravel. There was only dirt, mud, animals, and guns. Every Saturday, I would walk laps around that lot until I found the animal that needed the most help. Every Saturday, I would come home with a new pet. I would take animals of all sorts under my wing – ducklings, chickens, kittens or dogs. In my eyes, I could



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provide a home for each one. Animals were orphans that I could legally tend to – so that is exactly what I did. Just because I brought them home, though, doesn't mean they were life-long pets. Like the all-too-familiar childhood pet story, I had a beagle that ran away. I found more fitting homes for an entire litter of calico kittens. Once, a stray died of parvo within a week of residing on Blanton Drive. Nonetheless, a few animals have come into my life and not only played a significant role but also were truly my best friends.

There are always pictures of children during major events in their lives – first days of school, birthdays, that without pictures, you wouldn't remember, sleepovers. I am no different, except that my childhood pictures may include an extra body – Dusty. He was the baby of the house before I came along on July 19, 1990. Some would probably describe him as a beast – 150 pounds and three times the size of an average six year old. I will always describe him as a gentle giant – a pit bull. Memories aren't as abundant with Dusty as they are with later pets, but some are unforgettable. Every time I let off fireworks for the Fourth of July, for example, I think of having sparklers as a kid and moving one through the air like a person might move her finger across the glass of a fish tank, and Dusty would watch. Things like dogs following my sparkler around made me laugh, and as a kid I was always looking for something to make me laugh. Dusty was my sidekick in cops and robbers. He may not have realized that he was part of the game, but he ran beside me anyway to be sure that the good guys would prevail. Being that I was an only child, it was vital that he functioned as a playmate and comrade. To this day, I am sure that no other could have provided me with more childhood affection.

It wasn't all laughing the day away, though. Dusty was my sleep partner if I had a bad dream. He guarded the foot of the bed and held down the fort under the covers. With a flashlight and a superb guard dog, I knew no monster could prevail. It would be defeated in only minutes and my bed would remain the symbol of safety, security, and shelter. I'll flash the light three times if I hear something. I recall that line being common on stormy nights or creepy hours after the scary movie had gone off. Simple things were important then, and that is what Dusty provided me – simple smiles and laughs all



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throughout the day and comfort when I needed it most. But, hey, isn't that what best friends are for?

In 1998, my parents and I and Dusty lived in Point View Trailer Court while our new house was being built. In February 1999, Dusty became ill with old age and died a few weeks shy of seeing the new house with his family. If I was looking at this with a strict time-line in my mind, I would just say, "Next we found Mary." Instead, I'm going to say that as Dusty passed, the option of taking Mary into our lives became a better and better choice. Mary is a full stock Boston terrier – hair lipped and no papers – but full stock. Like any other animal in my personal history, she was rescued. A Boston terrier breeder lived in the same trailer court as we did. At first, I knew Mary as the mean dog next door. She would chase my friends and me. She would snap at our ankles if we came too close to her. She was the definition of an aggressive dog. I just didn't understand that dogs could be bad, so I inched a little closer to her every day. My observations of the tiny dog continued for days. I learned that the breeder kept her outside and alone. She had characteristics that made her undesirable for profit breeding, so they treated her as if she did not matter. I swooped in. My mom and I waited until the night was quiet, took a package of Oscar Mayer bologna from the refrigerator and headed to Mary's box on the dark end of the porch. That night we led her to our home with pieces of sandwich meat. Of course, we didn't just leave the breeders in the dark about it. We sugar coated the truth and said that she had "wandered" onto our porch. They seemed to accept the story, but I believe indifference was the main factor. Without much thought, they gave us the dog that we had already stolen.

Although I had lived in that neighborhood my whole life (we built a house across the street from where the trailer used to set), it seemed as though all the adventures started over. I was older now. I wanted to go out further on my own. I never had any brothers or sisters, and cousins and distant relatives never lived very close so I was thankful – and I'll admit, amazed – that Mary could play hide-n-seek. I could hide anywhere in the house and sing, Mary! Come find me! She would search the house, behind doors, under beds – she would even scratch at closet doors until she triumphed. If I wanted to take a walk, I knew Mary would want to walk, too. When I decided to become a runner in



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high school, Mary ran right along beside me. She practiced with me every day until I ran well enough to place in the top five of the Cross Country Regionals my freshman year. If I was going to have a slice of pre-wrapped cheese, well, I never did that alone either.

Instead of being a comforter, Mary was an adventurer – young and full of life – like me. She's old and gray now. I tell people that she thinks she's human because she reminds you of a grandmother. She has a favorite chair, a designated naptime and special, softer food (she's missing most of her teeth now). Every time I look at her, though, I see her as that young pup. I see her as Mary, the crusader of the wilderness. I see her as Mary, the swimmer of Paintsville Lake. I see her as Mary, the fetcher of anything you could think to throw. It's hard for me to see her as anything else.

When I was 18, I moved out of the nest – kissed Mom and Dad (and Mary) good-bye. I decided apartment living was the kind of living that I wanted. I had roommates – at one point, I had five – but something still seemed to be missing. Then it hit me – I was missing a dog! I didn't want a dog in an apartment. I knew there wouldn't be much space, but when a stranger told me, "If we don't get rid of them, we're going to set them off," I didn't have a choice.

I am a rescuer – always have been, always will be. And so came Doc. He had a couple of different names before I settled on that one, but Doc is definitely the most fitting. Short, uncomplicated and undemanding. As a pup, he was all paws and no brain – a clumsy Black Lab. I think of Doc as my liberation. He is my partner, my cohort, my travel buddy. If you asked me five years ago if I ever thought I would drive a Toyota Matrix from Eastern Kentucky to Maine with nobody but an oversized dog named Doc, I would have laughed. However, that is exactly what I did. I had five days off work from a local gas station. It was summer break from school. I didn't have anything else to do except drive across nine states with my best friend. Maybe it's cliché, but I learn a lot about myself from Doc. With Doc, I never have a doubt that I can swim across any river, climb any mountain or walk any trail. Doc has brought me closer to nature than I ever conceived possible. Taking care of him has made me more confident as a provider.



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Each of these animals has played a role in providing me with a companion all throughout my years. I am indebted and appreciative. With them, I learned to love and care for life at a young age. I learned that stereotypes aren't true. I learned that beauty really is in the eye of the beholder. Finally, I learned that dogs can't help you find interstates, so you better pay attention on your own.

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**Kayla Price**, of Paintsville, is a second-year BSCTC student.



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Phyllis Puffer

## My Afternoon with the President of Guatemala

"The President is going to play ball with us! The President is going to play ball with us!"

The word went excitedly through the small group of US students. We were at a weekend picnic organized by our summer program at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City.

I looked carefully at the President of Guatemala, General Ydigoras Fuentes. I didn't think he was very impressive. He walked slowly and rather hesitantly toward us. I expected a general and president of a country, no less, to be more commanding and sure of himself. He wore a dark brown army uniform, even including the hat, which made him look hot, uncomfortable and out of place at a picnic on the tropical seacoast. He was a little larger than the other soldiers, who remained spread out behind him facing us. Even though he was large, he had thin limbs, making him look like a square block with arms, legs, and head.

It wasn't clear what kind of ball game we were going to play. The way people were standing made it look as if we would be playing volleyball. But the ball was not a volleyball. It was more like a soft ball. In contrast to the earlier enthusiasm of the announcement of this event, everybody appeared notably lethargic now. Not one person seemed to be alert and ready to engage in competitive physical activity.

The President held the ball tentatively in his hand. He languidly threw it toward one of the students. The student caught it and threw it back in a similarly dull manner. The President slowly threw it again to another student. The student held it as if wondering where to throw it next. Finally, he threw it back to the President who held it gingerly and looked around vaguely. He threw it again and turned away before it could be returned. Nobody seemed interested in the game. The students dispersed.



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I saw the President again sometime later. The scene was much more interesting but one I still don't understand.

I had wandered away from the picnic and was taking a little walk through the woods. The trees were not set very closely together and it was pleasant to walk among them. Suddenly I came upon them.

A luxurious, polished, black car was parked in a little clearing. The President of Guatemala in his brown uniform was in the right rear seat. The driver was not at his place behind the wheel, but some soldiers could be seen here and there in the woods, clearly on watch. The interesting thing was the woman. She was small and dark. She wore the Indian women's costume of skirt and blouse made of colorful, heavy, hand-woven cotton. The skirt was a long, wide, wrap-around, reaching to her ankles. The dominant pattern was stripes but a small design was woven into some of the stripes. The color scheme of the skirt was blue but of the blouse was red. Her glossy black hair was pulled back in a bun.

The Indian woman was leaning against the car right where the President sat. They were only inches apart. Her entire left side was plastered against the car while her right hand rested on the sill of the open car window. Her face was turned away from the President, and she was looking down, past her right hand to the ground. This hand had held a paper tightly folded into a small square perhaps two inches by three inches. The paper looked a little worn, as if she had been carrying it for some time. She was slowly, gently, persistently, and quietly tapping the paper against the car's windowsill. She was also talking. She talked continually in a very low, soft voice. No one would be able to hear what she was saying only a few feet away.

The President was inches from the woman as he sat leaning toward her against the inside wall of the car. He did not look at her. He said nothing. He looked ahead and slightly down. He appeared to be completely relaxed, not even thinking about important government matters. It was as if she were not there.



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Was the woman asking him for a favor? Did she want something for her village? A school or clinic perhaps. Maybe her son had gotten involved in political activity. He might be in jail and in serious trouble. At any rate, evidently she was not considered a threat or the soldiers would never have allowed her so near their leader. The soldiers didn't pay attention to me either as I came and then left.

I never saw either of them again. It was 1962, and the general was out of office the following year. Was there perhaps a connection? No. I don't think so. But you never know.

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**Phyllis Puffer** received her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and her Ph.D. from Michigan State University, all in sociology. She has traveled in over 40 countries, mostly in the Third World.



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Marvin Rowland

## I Believe in the Coffee Can

I believe in that old familiar coffee can, with its wonderful glory, sitting upon a dusty shelf, begging to be used. Sometimes it's full or maybe half-full, begging, pleading, wanting to be noticed. I await the day, the last moment, the final second when all the wonders of the coffee can are displayed before me. What will those glorious wonders be? What will be bestowed unto me?

Yes, oh yes, I believe in the coffee can. But no, not what you're thinking, not the coffee that was contained inside its metallic walls: Not the hot, bitter taste that the contents provided. That short, tubular container, no top or lid ...well, maybe a plastic lid, that vessel that once held two pounds of a brown, roughly ground powder, that old metallic repository is what I seek. I believe the life of a coffee can extends beyond the coffee. I believe that life exists further past a point of flavor, possibly to a point of rust and decay. I believe in all the treasures I may find when I am peering into an old beaten coffee can, way up, high, higher yet, unseen for years, atop that old shelf. Yes, here in this priceless receptacle is history, a time lost – items sorted and stored for later use.

Recounting all the years as a child, exploring my grandfather's workshop, my grandmother's storage room, or even the shelves in my dad's garage brings back to my mind all the items found but forgotten in all those coffee cans: Buttons, nuts and bolts, canning lids, fencing parts, spark plugs, hair ribbons and bows, corn seed, bean seed, sunflower seed, wire, phone cord, lamp parts, sewing machine bobbins, or any other item that needed storage.

I recall many times in my life when a coffee can came to my rescue. Once I couldn't find a gas can, so I grabbed an empty coffee can to do the job. I even kept lawnmower gas in a coffee can for a while. Hoping to give aid in starting a bonfire, I stored old, used oil in a coffee can. Recently I discovered an old red coffee can sitting on a shelf in the home I now live in. As I reached to grasp the can, raising it from its perch, I discovered,

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surprisingly, the bottom had rusted away. I was showered with a large assortment of nuts and bolts. I set the topless, bottomless sleeve aside, in a place to be seen as a reminder of what was and can no longer be... for, you see, the metal coffee can has been replaced by plastic in a plastic world. I believe in the coffee can, and for all the coffee cans that remain: May they hold history; May they hold hope; May they be there when needed.

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Born on the day before Thanksgiving in 1957, **Marvin Rowland** was raised in a suburb of Dayton, Ohio, in a community called Beavercreek. While growing up he spent a lot of time in Johnson County, at his grandparents' farm, learning the way of life in eastern Kentucky. He has three children and three grandchildren, all of whom he adores.



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Tommy Slone

## Ethic of Reciprocity

I'm gonna be honest: I don't actively believe in many things, really. My mind meanders too often; I don't subscribe to too many ideologies for too long. I've always held onto a pretty simple, timeless philosophy, though: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The "Golden Rule." The ethic of reciprocity, they call it. Everyone knows it but few bother with it.

A little kindness can get you a long way in this world. Life is both a blessing and a burden—it's an ongoing struggle for everyone who takes part. Sometimes a little common decency is all a person needs to feel better about his entire situation. I believe in being nice to people because I remember so many incidents when people were, shall we say, less-than-angelic, to me. I remember how those times made me feel, and I've never been keen to make someone else go through that. It seems so pointless. In fact, I believe in doing just the opposite. I like to make people feel good about life. No matter who they are—with the likely exception of, say, someone who would just punch me for trying—I like to make things better for people, if I can. Here's an example: I was searching for a school friend on MySpace a few years ago. I found someone else—same first name, same town, and a bizarrely similar face—and, thinking she was the kid I knew, I went to her profile. It wasn't who I thought but that stopped mattering to me the moment I noticed how sad she came across in her profile updates. Even though she didn't know me, I added her—again, I like being nice to people!—and began talking to her about her problems. We ultimately became great friends. A few months later, I found that that simple gesture of mine, extending a hand of friendship to somebody who seemed a bit down on her luck, had really helped her out. She'd been so depressed that she was seriously considering suicide but having someone to listen—such a little thing that most of us take for granted in our lives—had not only stopped her from doing it but also kept her from wanting to altogether. Like I said: a little kindness goes a long way. You never know what impact your words or actions may have on those around you. After I realized that and began to embrace it as a personal philosophy, I've



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been more content with life. I believe in treating people with as much respect as you would like to receive in turn because nobody deserves anything less than that.

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Tommy Slone is a first-year BSCTC student.



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Matthew Smith

## The Peasant Girl in the Tower

Do you remember the fairy tale you heard as a child about the peasant girl in the tower? To briefly sum up the story, there was a beautiful peasant girl who was held captive in a tower by an enraged queen. The queen held her captive because her husband, the king, coveted the young maiden and spoke of her daily. This caused the queen to become angry and exile the young girl to a lonely castle tower where she was forced to reside alone for the rest of her days.

The only view of the outside world came from a tiny window within the small tower chamber. The young peasant could only imagine what the outside world was like. It seemed unrealistic to consider any of her dreams of the outside world a reality, considering she was confined and controlled by her surroundings. This is the point in which I wish to make the story a bit more imaginative. What if the young maiden actually possessed a key in the pocket of her dress that would unlock the tower door? She never would have known this because her mind was consumed with dreaming about the world outside. She was also faced with the impossibilities of a different life due to the confinement the queen had created. The reality, in fact, is that the key was there the entire time – the young girl just never searched her pockets.

Many individuals find themselves locked away like the beautiful peasant girl. They are confined to a safe, mundane reality. The lustful king acts as an enticing, but temporary fix to the search for substance, while the jealous queen exemplifies local surroundings that seem to be inescapable. The queen also echoes the familiar expression that suggests that “this is all there is to life.”

“You need to finish law school!”

“Why aren’t you more like your brother?” and the ever so popular... “What will the neighbors think?”





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These demands and questions all serve the purpose of forcing the free, thinking individual into a position of conformity. The dreadful reality is that most humans die in this state of being, never knowing that they possessed the key the entire time! So what does the key unlock? This is the million-dollar question. The key unlocks different doors for all of us. We walk through doors of adventure, doors of empowerment, doors of danger, and doors of regret. Love can be found behind some doors... peace of mind behind others. Some doors lead to Colorado while others lead to central China. Some doors lead to flat tires in the desert ... One door leads to incomprehensible laughter.

So you're reaching in your pocket and you cannot find the key. You become convinced it isn't there. Don't be discouraged because the key you're looking for is the mind... and like with the peasant girl, the key has been there the entire time, and you just didn't know it. Sure, you use your brain to solve day-to-day problems, converse with friends and family, and make decisions about what to have for dinner. But the mind is something of a higher priority and when you learn to utilize its many facets it will work as a universal key that opens every door. Then you will be able to say with confidence "to hell with what the neighbors think."

Do not remain in the tower any longer. Do not live with unresolved questions about the direction your life could have taken. If you want to be something, do not let anyone tell you it is impossible. If you want to go somewhere, figure out how to do it and go. If you love someone tell him or her. If you need to say you're sorry, make sure you say it. Find the key and use it. Discover your potential. Leave comfort behind. Rise to the occasion. Laugh and experience the insanity of yourself before you die.

The tower is cold. The tower is sometimes lonely. Looking out the tower window raises a lot of questions about "what could be out there." But in the tower, you are fed... you have a place to sleep... you're aware of what the following day will hold. The comfort and security of the tower is enough for most...

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**Matthew Smith** received his B.S. and M.A. from East Tennessee State University. He teaches Sociology and serves as Coordinator of the Honors Program at BSCTC.



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Derek Whisman

## The Gas Masque

Another school year was already flying by when my fifth grade teacher, Mr. Staples, announced our class would be taking a field trip to Samsford Park the following day. I was immediately looking forward to chatting with my friends and playing sports at the park for a change instead of doing spelling words and math problems in a classroom.

I arrived early the next morning, eager to get a good seat on the bus. Unfortunately, my best friend, Jack, had made alternative plans. The moment he found me in the hall, he grabbed my arm and pulled me into the bathroom. That alone was pretty weird – usually one guy doesn't pull another guy into the potty – but it got even weirder when he slammed a black lunchbox onto the sink.

“Kind of a weird place for lunch, ain't it?” I said with a laugh.

Jack shook his head and pulled a tall thermos out of the box.

“Sorry, I didn't bring any food,” he replied. “But I've got something here that will really spice up the afternoon. See what you think about this!”

He untwisted the cap and I was immediately overwhelmed by the powerful odor of gasoline. The scent burned my nostrils with every breath I took.

“What'd you need this for?” I said, trying hard not to choke on the fumes as he held the container under my nose. “Afraid the bus will run out on the way or something?”

Jack's smile turned serious. He replaced the lid on the thermos. “C'mon, Evan. You're not that dumb, are you?”



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Before I could say anything in return, three of our classmates rushed into the bathroom. I expected Jack would try to hide the evidence of his plans, but instead he held up the container as if he were hoisting a trophy into the air. Instead of being surprised, the others cheered and high-fived one another. Apparently, I was the last one to know of this plan.

“So Evan,” John said. He playfully gave me a nudge. “You in or what?”

“In...what?”

“You didn’t tell him yet?” Andy screamed and shoved Jack. “Do I gotta do everything myself around here?”

Andy was the biggest of us all. In fact, you could say he towered above us. Typically, although Jack was the brains for the group, Andy usually was the one who gave the orders. And everybody listened.

“Alright, look Evan,” he said with a slight smirk, “we’re gonna sneak this here lunchbox onto the bus and when the teachers aren’t looking, we’re gonna get wasted!”

I felt my eyebrows shoot up my forehead like they were trying to escape to the other side of my hairline. Their plan sounded ridiculous to me. Anytime my parents filled up the car, the smell of gasoline through the windows made me sick. Now these guys wanted me to breathe it in on purpose? How did that make sense?

All eyes were on me. The gang waited to hear my approval of the plan.

“Well?” Andy leaned forward.

I searched the deepest recesses of my brain for an exit strategy. I had always considered myself quite resourceful, but now I found my sharp mind failing me when I needed it the most.



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I began to stammer. “I, uh...well...”

“All aboard who’s going aboard!” Mr. Staples’ voice boomed in the hallway. “We’re leaving in five minutes!”

Jack panicked and began trying to zip up the lunchbox, afraid Mr. Staples would enter the bathroom at any moment in an effort to round up his class. I turned and followed Andy quickly into the hallway, thankful to have temporarily avoided making any stupid decisions.

As a privilege, the fifth graders were given the right to sit in the very back section of the bus. A cooler was snugly positioned between the last two seats, allowing seven people to ride next to each other. Jack and I found ourselves smack dab in the middle of the cooler seat with Andy and Roger sitting on either side of us.

The trip had just begun when Jack opened the thermos. I watched as he placed his nose and mouth inside of the container and began to take deep, slow breaths. His eyes widened and glazed over. He pulled his head back and passed the tube across my lap to Andy.

“That was wicked,” Jack said, leaning his head back against the window. He motioned for Roger to turn up the volume on the boom box.

“Come on, Evan!” Jack said in a daze. The container was passed back to him. “You haven’t had a turn yet.”

The group nodded its agreement. I had no intention of “huffing” gas, but I didn’t want to seem like a loser either.

“No thanks, man,” I said. “I don’t wanna walk around smelling like gas all day. It’ll scare off the ladies!”



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“Come on ya big sissy!” Andy teased. “Why don’t you show us your dress while you’re at it?”

I felt the cold stares of my chemically altered friends fix upon my face. To make matters worse, the small group of four had now transformed into a much larger audience. For whatever reason, the other fifth graders viewed these guys as “cool” and anyone who dared tread against them was most likely shunned. In a small school where the same classmates were always together, reputation was everything. Before long, more kids were turning around in their seats asking if they could take a hit.

“Take it, Evan,” Jack said, nudging me with the thermos. “Go on before it’s all used up.” As my hands reached out to grasp the fuel container, a thought shot through my mind. Was I really going to do this? My fingers began to tighten around the thermos as I caught the attention of what felt like the entire fifth grade class. They were actually encouraging me! My hand took control of the canister and Jack slowly began to unscrew the cap. It was all I could do just to give off the appearance of remaining calm.

In what felt like a flash, the lid was open and the fumes hit my nostrils. I’m not quite sure if it was the fumes that made me dizzy or the fear that gripped me, but it wasn’t long before my head was pounding and my stomach began to twist into knots. I had to think of something fast.

I could either take my chances with the gasoline or with the mob of my peers watching anxiously to see if I was cool enough to hang out with them. It was then that I made a decision. I could just pretend to breathe in while really holding my breath. That would have to work! I began slowly lowering my head towards the dreaded fumes.

“We’re here!” Mr. Staples interrupted. The bus pulled to a stop. Jack jerked the thermos from my hand, sealing it and tucking it away in his lunchbox. In that moment, I made it a point to thank God for small miracles. At least, for now I was off the hook.



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The four companions stumbled off the bus and ran towards the picnic area, screaming hysterically. That's when I realized that no real miracle had occurred. Sure, I had escaped the crowd's gaze for now. But meanwhile, all I had to do was look at my classmates to feel something terrible was happening.

Their feeble attempt at playing baseball was particularly disheartening. One person would stand on the mound and throw the ball towards the outfield, while the batter swung at the air and claimed he had just hit a homerun. For a moment it felt as though I were watching some strange Indian tribal ritual unfold before my very eyes. The difference being instead of inhaling a peace pipe's smoke, they were actually breathing in the same harmful fumes that fueled my father's car. The sight of their actions was enough to convince me that I wanted no part in their "fun."

I didn't know a lot about the effects gasoline fumes could have on the human body, but then again I didn't need to in order to realize something was wrong with my classmates. Thus another struggle began in my mind. Should I remain loyal to my friends, or betray them for their own safety?

I knew well what I should do. I should find Mr. Staples and have him stop them before it was too late. But, sadly, I knew this was impossible. My friends would never let me forget that I had destroyed their trust. I decided, instead, to wait the trip out.

I must have really been lost in my dilemma because in what felt like an instant, our field trip was over. I had barely moved from my hiding spot behind the picnic tables all afternoon. Hoping the worst of it was over, I hurried back to the bus.

"Where have you been, man?" Jack stumbled into the seat beside me clutching his lunchbox.

"You know me," I said. "Carrie Thompson asked me to hang out with her behind the picnic tables so I couldn't refuse."



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“That’s what I’m talking about!” Jack tried pathetically to high-five me. But every time he tried to make contact with my hand, he somehow managed to miss. He and the others had obviously continued their huffing party throughout the day.

I continued to hold out hope that perhaps the gasoline had been used up already. Or maybe, just maybe, they would be too high to remember I had yet to take a huff. Unfortunately, my luck never quite held out that way. Within ten minutes of being back on the road, Andy began to nudge me with the gas container.

“No thanks, man,” I tried.

“Would you just take it already?” Andy said while handing me the thermos, more forcefully this time. I felt all eyes from the group on me.

“Look guys, I don’t really wanna--”

“Wanna what?” Andy cut me off. “You wanna wuss out? Alright, have it your way then, you big baby.”

He jerked the opened thermos from my hands so suddenly that my arm jerked forward along with it. The result was that the thermos dropped out into the aisle, coating the floor with the remaining contents. Before anyone could even process what had just happened, the scent of gasoline reached the bus driver’s nose.

“Does someone have gas on this bus?” the driver screamed. He slammed on his brakes.

Jack quickly picked up the thermos, shoved it into his lunch-box, and then tossed it all out the open window.

“Must be a gas leak!” Jack said.



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Suddenly, our driver pulled open the doors. “This bus runs on diesel. I know the smell.” He sprang to his feet and ran into the street behind us. When he returned, he carried in his hands the black box bearing Jack’s name.

It was at that very moment that I realized something: my clothes were soiled with the smell of gasoline! Jack and Andy had passed the thermos back and forth across my lap several times during the trip. The gas must have slowly dripped onto my clothes.

Mr. Staples immediately snatched the bottle from the driver’s hands and approached the five of us sitting in the back row. He observed each student as he passed, looking for signs that he, too, had partaken in the huff fest. My eyes began to widen as he came closer and closer to us.

Never in a million years would he believe that I was innocent. And why would he? My clothes smelled of gas, and I was surrounded by the very ones who had carried the container onto the bus in the first place. When finally he hovered over me, the look on his face told me I was done for.

Waiting in the principal’s office that evening was particularly disheartening. My parents had never been called to the school before, and I knew they wouldn’t take the call too pleasantly.

My mother slammed through the doors (my father was still at work, thank God), her face seeming to disappear behind fully open eyes. I had seen this look only once before in my life – the time I dropped Dad’s hammer on my toe and accidentally muttered a curse word. This time, however, the look was even worse.

“Evan Nathaniel!” she said. “What in God’s name has gotten into you!” If her face hadn’t already tipped me off, the fact that she used both my first and middle name clued me into the full extent of her anger. She pulled me aside from the group and then seemed composed, at least, for the moment.



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“I didn’t do anything, Mom!” I said. “I swear!”

She took a long, hard look at me before tilting her head sideways. Wrapping her hands around both of my shoulder blades, she pulled me close to her and began sniffing my clothes. From the moment I sensed her take the first whiff, I knew my testimony was worthless. She tightened her grip on my shoulders and pushed me to a clear glaring distance.

“What is all over your clothes?” she said. “You’re covered in the stench!”

“They spilt it on me! When they were passing it back and forth!”

She leaned in and tried to smell for fumes on my breath. After a moment, she pulled away from me and stood up. “You wait right here, young man,” she said. “I’ve got to go speak with your principal.”

Terrific. Those had to be the worst eight words a kid could ever hear – right behind

“You’re grounded” or “We ran out of candy.”

After what felt like an eternity, my mother emerged from the office with the principal at her side. I immediately felt a bit of relief because I recognized that look on her face. While it still displayed disappointment, it most certainly was not the “I’m going to kill you” look from earlier.

Thankfully, Jack had told the truth: that I had nothing to do with the huffing. While the principal had decided not to suspend me along with the others, he did say that my actions of not reporting their behavior could have jeopardized the lives of everyone on board the bus. One simple spark could have set in motion a fiery disaster. So I wasn’t too terribly upset when he sentenced me to a month of after school detention and a 20-page paper on the dangers of drugs.



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I learned two things that day: 1) that my friends were morons – I already suspected this from years of hanging out with them, but this trip certainly confirmed it – and, 2) that I should always trust my instincts. I knew something bad could have happened, but I ignored it so that my friends would think I was cool. But ultimately, who cares what they think? They're morons!

---

**Derek Whisman**, of Big Stone Gap, Virginia, is a former Instructor of English at BSCTC who currently teaches at Mountain Empire Community College.



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David Cazden  
**Bradford Pears,**

Bradford pears,

my wife says,  
are planted only for show,  
cracking in even the slightest storm.

In fall, their inedible fruit  
encrusts the curbs, the driveway and cars,  
in rinds so bitter even starlings

spit them out on the wing.  
Yet like all round things  
they desire only to shine, to fall

in a field, letting soft flesh slough away  
over black crescent seeds.  
We lose a few every year

to an ice storm or gale  
for something terrible always happens  
to the most fragile. In February

when starlings squawk,  
picking over the limbs,  
flapping raincoats over the snow

we forget how they'll turn –  
Near March, our anniversary,  
after my wife's



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read every gardening catalog  
full of exotic flowers,  
piled on the table, we're always surprised

when the trees explode into bloom.  
Though a step slower, I work  
in the yard. For one week

pears illuminate the neighborhood,  
petals swaying like lanterns, shining  
just under our skin.

(First published in *Redactions: Poetry and Poetics*)

---

**David Cazden** received an Al Smith Fellowship for poetry from the Kentucky Arts Council in 2008. He is the author of one book, *Moving Picture* (Word Press, 2005) and lives in Lexington.



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Randall Chandler

## Boundary Waters

fishing in the land  
that glaciers scarred  
the land of wolves  
bears and eagles  
air pure floating balm  
on fevered skin  
water clean and placid  
ancient and new  
wide winged birds  
soar with beauty  
with a silent eye  
for the meat below

tents under green giants  
grown eternal  
cook fires break the stillness of night  
men sit silent in the cathedral  
of nature attuned to the life force  
surrounding like fog

the resting time  
the healing time

---

**Randall Chandler** was born in 1941 in Lowmansville. He attended two years at Eastern Kentucky University, being an indifferent student at best. He joined the workforce, and at different times in his life has been a salesman, logger, small business owner, coal mine electrician, and long distance truck driver. He says, "Since retiring I try to do only those things that I enjoy."



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Melanie Culbertson

## Love Letter from Italy

The Roman ruins at night:  
time jagged, broken, and stacked  
upon itself.

A short, pot-bellied man serenading us,  
his head resting upon a barely-stringed instrument,  
as if it were a pillow.

Evening sun filtering through doors of the hilltop church  
overlooking Firenze, while two boys from Wales  
film the day dying below in slow, yellow time.

Floating among purple jellyfish in a Manarola  
cove and not getting stung.

Standing on a hidden rock in the middle  
of the Mediterranean against the wet chest  
of a new husband.

On a boat anchored next to a thin, rocky beach,  
a woman dancing a slow tango to only  
the sound of blue.

In medieval paintings, skeletons singing in hell  
and camels with many heads drinking blood  
pouring out of a woman's mouth.

Swimming by a gondola, a rat  
big as a cat.



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In St. Mark's Square, a fat woman  
cackling and screaming at the pigeon on her wrist  
alongside a hippy mocking the Charleston,  
knees knocking, to make his son laugh.

While we lounge on a terrace close to the sky,  
a woman calling her slippery rhythm through  
an open window, just before the bells  
of the village tower herald the silence  
of the night.

A short time later, an elderly couple below  
attacking the dirt in their little garden by the sea,  
at an hour I normally do not know.

---

**Melanie Culbertson**, a Salyersville native living in Louisville, is assistant professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College in Sellersburg, Indiana. She also teaches as an adjunct instructor at Spalding University in Louisville and formerly taught at the University of Evansville, Indiana. She earned an M.F.A. in creative writing at Indiana University and has published fiction in *The American Literary Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Louisville Review*, and others. She was nominated for two national Pushcart Prizes.



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Melanie Culbertson

## Yet Another Lullaby

*for David Kazez, musician and beloved friend (1959-2010)*

I wonder how your fingers that graced piano keys  
like wings of fragile birds could even touch a gun.

I wonder of your last view of Mash Fork,  
of the valley you held so dear. I wish for the sliver of a moon,  
deer running free across a field, like the last time  
I was there. I saw you too at church, sitting by yourself,  
lonesome, like you'd never looked before.

I wish I had hugged you and sat next to you just like I wish  
my husband and I had had coffee with you on your huge porch  
the last time you asked. Now there are no wishes left,  
only stars.

What if you had waited to see the morning? There could not  
have been mourning, never a more beautiful day than October 13,  
sun so low one could touch it and not burn, yet the world on fire,  
all red and gold. Didn't you see it? After all,  
surely you only were just asleep.

You are so much more than that body, with your genius gift  
of lullabies, who would not leave Mash Fork,  
who would run down the hill to make sure my father,  
your neighbor with heart trouble, was not working too hard in the heat,  
you who said few unkind words about anyone,  
even though it takes more than one to pull  
a trigger. Were we all lulled into thinking how easy  
it all was for you? How easy to be Dave and sing the days  
away. Did you ever get to dance at a wedding  
at which you sang?



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To forget that body, my mother burns the brush you cut  
in her chimney at night, the warm flames rising  
to where you are. She takes her solitary walk  
beside the hillside grave where you lie,  
still praying and singing because she can't cease and ah,  
that sunny day, rows of cars lined one side  
of that narrow country road, snaking around that hill  
like a groaning train, so many feet pressed against  
the earth above that hardly a blade of grass  
could be seen.

We are so much more than our bodies.  
Because of you, I pluck at my piano  
into the wee hours, drink from the cup of a friend,  
sit a spell next to one alone, if he looks lonesome.

You would. In this world and even  
on Mash Fork, plenty of elderly fathers working  
in the heat need tending to, if we only pay attention.

Maybe there are some "next times" left,  
a wish after all. Close our eyes  
tight enough, maybe even two.

I promise, beloved friend, to keep  
Mash Fork sweet, its creek across from  
your house, my old house flowing on, even if  
only a trickle. Sweet for my father still  
cute in his little boy cap and suspenders  
who forgets himself and looks up  
at your porch when getting his morning mail,  
expecting you to wave. Sweet for my mother



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humming by her chimney, who really burns the brush  
because you cut it with your own hands.

(Someday they will join you in the warm earth  
of the little hill, all good company.)

Sweet for a John David, who looks like his father.

On down the road: sweet for your mother, who will never  
scream that way again. Sweet for your father who still can't go  
where you lie, amber quiet now.

You are always the song, even still,  
so when he is ready, as he grows near,  
may his slow but firm steps,  
and echoes of the many others',  
sound to you not like grief  
but like a dance.

*Note: David Kazee directed music at both the Mountain Arts Center in Prestonsburg and the First Baptist Church in Salyersville. He built and ran single-handedly a music studio at his home on Mash Fork Road, in Salyersville, where he recorded music for people across the nation. He was a devout Christian who taught music to many young people, giving them positive things to strive for. His death is a loss to not only the region, but far beyond.*

---

**Melanie Culbertson**, a Salyersville native living in Louisville, is assistant professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College in Sellersburg, Indiana. She also teaches as an adjunct instructor at Spalding University in Louisville and formerly taught at the University of Evansville, Indiana. She earned an M.F.A. in creative writing at Indiana University and has published fiction in *The American Literary Review*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Louisville Review*, and others. She was nominated for two national Pushcart Prizes.



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Brittany Frasure

## A Southern Mourning

When Pap died,  
we ate fried chicken after the funeral.  
I sat and had a biscuit,  
wanting silence  
    and a shower  
to wash away the germs  
death had brought,  
cemetery dirt caked thick  
on the bottoms of my black-heeled shoes.  
It was January cold,  
and all I could do  
was freeze.

---

**Brittany Frasure**, of Paintsville, a BSCTC alumnus, is now a student at the University of Pikeville.



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Brittany Frasure

## Envelope

Maybe we've come from twelve steps away –  
the absence of cold hands and hearts  
to push us from that uppermost ledge:  
the leap is fatal.

The stay likewise deadly  
in its promise of always being.  
Maybe you and I are worth all the licks  
a white envelope can manage  
before the back starts to tarnish –  
maybe there can be a train, all that sappy jazz,  
and be a day for stopping.

Or maybe we're not.

Maybe we're only admirable  
as are the silent contents of a cold, hard, unlaminated drawer.  
There, forgotten, but fresh in every feature  
if remembered again.

---

Brittany Frasure, of Paintsville, a BSCTC alumnus, is now a student at the University of Pikeville.



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Brittany Frasure

## Sick

Sleeping with sick  
alters what's within grasp  
like valleys where trees grow in sand.  
Pillows of powder seep through  
the waters of my brain, and the effect  
is offensive, gritty,  
only a delay of already dwindling parts,  
which will come to carry  
my stride from its strain.  
Sometimes I wonder  
if life has really been worth  
all the breathing  
in and out.

---

**Brittany Frasure**, of Paintsville, a BSCTC alumnus, is now a student at the University of Pikeville.



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Ashton Johnson

## How We Are of the Trees

Running fingers down earth-worn bark,  
the edges and bumps smooth  
from years of rain and sun and snow,  
you can feel the age of the tree  
in your fingertips  
like the wrinkles of a man  
in the last throws of life.  
Memories are carved into the skin,  
every joy and sorrow etched  
into the body. Like a carpenter, time  
shapes us into something that bears  
the brunt of the years. Into something  
that is at once a tell-tale sign of what we are,  
where we've been, and what we could become.

---

**Ashton Johnson** writes, "It hasn't been until the last three years that I have found myself actually writing as I have been more into art all my life. As anyone who takes up a pen will know, the first few things he or she writes are always the hardest, but I've come to find my niche. I write about whatever inspires me at the time, be it a song, a painting, or anything in between."



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Ashton Johnson

## Past Remembered

I remember how cherished those times  
should have been, sun-filled days when I ran

through the ankle-high grass with dogs  
barking at my heels and made wishes

on dandelions. Nights with cats curling  
to sleep beside me in a cocoon of blankets

under a moon that was always rising.  
I wonder over times passed, a dream

that no longer makes any sense to me  
as the world moves ever, ever, ever on.

---

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William J. Loftus

## Of what one accepts if one wears it long enough

The forgiveness of empty bowls should have gone  
But the things were added and the heat applied  
Crucible remnants along the re-enactors trail

The smoke of colors  
The burnt sienna residue  
Shaped into a shadow  
Draping down the walls at sunset  
And running through the market streets

The vanilla folder  
Pacificaly sounding of dialect and spoke day by day  
Resonating with the bell chants of ideals  
Like prayer when one wears what one has fashioned

---

**William Loftus** is Professor of Psychology at Big Sandy Community & Technical College.



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Kalen Ousley  
**Grave Danger**

I am buried alive within these four walls,  
a one-bedroom tomb,  
drowning in a never-ending sea of blue static  
emitted from my television screen.  
I haven't felt anything in days  
except for the blessed narcotic caress  
of loving ethanol arms that wrap me  
up, safe from my own disaster.  
Upstairs a girl of thirteen is tap-dancing  
on my ceiling. She might as well be dancing  
on my grave.

---

BSCTC student **Kalen Ousley**, of Prestonsburg, names H. P. Lovecraft as a strong influence on his writing.



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Adam Preece

*Leased Night* (After dinner overlooking the waterfall)

No one knows us here.

I've wanted for a long time to find the right place –

the place to give all my secrets away  
without worries of what those around me think.

It's time to let it go.

I can finally be who I really am here  
with no critic who claims to be my friend:

Walking out the door felt beyond awesome.  
We accelerated down Everhard Road to our room.

It's ten minutes until midnight.  
You are the cure to this sickness.

I've never felt so good than when you smile –  
The windows are down, my heart is racing;

Girl, you work like a drug, running, kicking,  
screaming on the inside. I feel on top of the world

and this could be my last breath. We have the music  
up loud and the night is ours.

---

**Adam Preece** is currently a BSCTC student and plans to further his career in broadcasting.



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# Cut-Thru Review

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Darlene Profitt

## Blackberry Pickin'

Hot July sun beatin' down on our heads  
Salty sweat stingin' our eyes  
Hikin' to the top of the hill with ten-quart water buckets in tow  
The top of the hill where the sweetest and biggest berries grow

Dad Mom big sister and me trudgin'  
along the dusty road with a common goal:  
Pick our buckets full and hurry home.  
Big sister complaining every step of the way

Fingers throbbin' stained with berry juice  
Mingled with blood oozin'  
from tiny pricks by angry briars  
Without which the reward wouldn't be as sweet

Mouths dry from heat and thirst  
Quenched with water  
Warm as pee  
shared from a mason jar

Buckets finally full and bellies growlin'  
We begin the long walk home--steps quicken  
With thoughts of fresh blackberry jam,  
Butter newly-churned and hot, and cathead biscuits.

---

**Darlene Profitt** earned her Associate in Arts degree from Big Sandy. She has been married to her wonderful husband for 40 years and has four great children. She enjoys hiking, bowling, movies, and reading.



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David Profitt

## Sitting in the Yard

There is an assurance that comes with sitting in the yard  
Listening to the familiar sound of a lawn being mowed nearby.  
There is an assurance in the familiarity of sameness.  
Of being enveloped by the same hollowed hands of hallowed hills.  
Of knowing the history of a place,  
Of closing your eyes and remembering the faces of neighbors  
Who have slipped away quietly, almost unnoticed.  
There is an assurance in all that.

There is a great wealth that comes  
With the friendship of faithful dogs and the antics of young kittens  
And the sun – craving, eyes – closed stillness of old cats.  
There is a bond of solidarity with life and living and the earth and the sky  
And people and this place and all places and with God  
And with the parts within the whole that happens around us  
As the present fades into whatever the past is (or was).

Each moment brings a new perspective.  
No two moments are the same  
Just like flakes of snow or drops of rain or people or blades of grass.  
All I can see seems prepared to end well by fulfilling its purpose  
Of the assurance of sameness  
While I sit here in the yard.

---

**David Profitt**, retired from 35 years of service in the pastoral ministry, has taught Philosophy and Religion at Big Sandy since 2004. He has written poetry and essays for over 40 years. He and his wife Darlene have four children.



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Tim Skeen

**Aldo Ray** (for Ken Slone)

Here's my father's hero  
with Anne Bancroft in *Nightfall*,  
1957, battling the fierce blizzard,  
only to have the precious bag  
of stolen money taken from him  
by the night and the wind.

As I walk home from the revival theater  
in the sleet and rain, I imagine myself  
to be Ray. With my umbrella in hand,  
I tap every frozen car parked  
on the street because the past  
is like a bowling ball poised  
on the tip of a screwdriver.  
Some square noir tough guy's got  
to make it fall. I might as well try.

---

**Tim Skeen**, author of *Kentucky Swami*, teaches creative writing at California State University, Fresno.



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Tim Skeen

## This is the Picture

The flea market's set up  
in the Foodland parking lot.  
A woman reclines on a lawn

chair under a pickup tailgate.  
Her husband watches  
over a velvet Elvis, really,

which leans against a tire.  
In the background,  
the mountains are covered

with trees thick as hair on a  
squirrel's back. It's as if their house  
must be like a giant sifter,

moving back and forth,  
and all that settles  
in the basement is for sale.

---

**Tim Skeen**, author of *Kentucky Swami*, teaches creative writing at California State University, Fresno.



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# Cut-Thru Review

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Ken Slone

## God, Make Me a Jeep

If I were to return to Earth as a vehicle, I would ask God to let me be a Jeep.  
I would be at my best with my motor below 2,000 rpm's,  
Moving slowly as along a curving mountain state park road  
With a view of lake and sky to my right  
And woods and deer to my left.

My horn would blare,  
“Lord I want to do what You’d have me to do/  
Lord I want to be what You’d have me to be,”  
And my tires would sound like knobby tread bike tires  
Humming on blacktop.

That was when I was a child.  
As a Jeep I could be childlike again.  
I could climb hills as before  
Without a care about falling—  
About descending (I could lock in four-wheel drive and gear ‘er down.)

Or I could spin circles on pavement,  
Leaving black marks of rubber  
From all four tires.  
Someone would later come by to see my circles  
And to subconsciously store them away

For that night’s dream.  
You know, the way we record  
Subjects for our dreams  
There somewhere behind the more significant day’s events  
In an old curved-top trunk where they call, “Dream me, dream me,” after dark.



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In that dream I could provide  
A slow Jeep ride on a north/south seaside highway  
With a view of ocean waves, gulls, and eternity to the right  
And to the left a mountain view of lake, woods, deer, and immortal memories.  
After all, we're dreaming here; I am a Jeep for God's sake.

---

**Ken Slone's** poetry collection *At Home in the Mountains* was published in 2001 by the Jesse Stuart Foundation. *Mountain Teacher – An Eastern Kentucky Teacher Tells His Story*, an autobiography including stories about teaching nontraditional students, poems, and teaching methods, was published by JSF in 2005. His poems appeared in *Coal – A Poetry Anthology*. After earning his graduate degree from Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, he returned home to Johnson County, where he lives today with his wife, Debbie. A retired Professor of English at Big Sandy Community & Technical College, Ken received the Great Teacher Award in 1999 for teaching his students to take pride in their Appalachian heritage and to write from their hearts.



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Ken Slone

## Like an Old Guitar

Like an old guitar

Been played too long without the restringing

And bridge adjusting, saddle lowering

Setup needed.

Been uncased and rested on mahogany back

So that tuning keys have been

Knocked a kilter.

Have not been in tune for years now.

There is dust on my body and neck

Beneath strings that have no rust but no longer the brilliance of shine.

A thin crack is forming behind the bridge

And extending to the trim band near the electronics plug-in.

It is from the stress of amateur tuning

An octave above normal.

It is also from the dampening and drying of the seasons

Because it's been in the mountains

Where in woods there is high humidity in summer

Then the shock of dry air of winter

With no thought of humidification.

Been strummed with makeshift picks

By people indifferent

To learning to play well.

When asked whose music they like to read,

Or which NPR station they listen to, or whether they know Garrison,

They are without interest



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Because they are too starved for music  
To know that's what they are.  
Been picked up carelessly  
And strummed on by too many  
Who couldn't care less.

Would like to make it to the stage some day  
And to be tuned and played by one who knows the music by ear.  
When the show is over, no need for flamboyant guitar smashing,  
Would like to be gently placed in a purple plush hard-shell Martin case  
And taken to my new home.

---

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# Cut-Thru Review

THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF BIG SANDY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Matthew Smith

## America: Through the Eyes of a 23-Year-Old Boy

I.

Land of the free, home of the brave, valley of the oppressed.

We are America.

I am America.

We are shadows on the wall, desert casinos, and fire starters.

We are petroleum guzzlers, media magnets, and beach side carousels.

We are Hollywood phonies, Cape Cod cronies, and Malibu yuppies.

We are Chicago intellectuals, Detroit dope pushers, and cross dressin shims bragging and fagging around North Beach.

We are Wall Street bullies, Haight Street hippies, Seattle punks, and backwoods bible thumpers.

We are miles of mid-western wheat fields, with nothing but the creak of a lonely windmill.

We are north pacific showers that drowned out the sound of day.

We are fatherless children in Hell's Kitchen, sitting in the corner of our section eight world.

We are the country music singer, the Fifth Amendment pleader, and the small town drunk.

We live to rape the earth.

We are America.

I am America.

II.

We are social leftists, greedy pretenders, and free market pricks.

We are Massachusetts liberals, Texas conservatives, and Louisiana greens.

We are concrete columns, picket fences, and country churches.



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We are wealthy investors, middle class nobodies, and street bums, forced to roll the dice.

We are helpless single mothers, bipolar romantics, and space cadets that fill their veins with junk.

We are military personal that would spill their blood for freedom.

We are gothic yups that would drink the blood for pleasure.

We are the victors of two World Wars.

We have left many towns and souls in ruin.

We smile at this.

We are General Motors, General Electric, and General of the world's army.

We are John D. Rockefeller, Ray Kroc, and Henry Ford.

We are America.

I am America.

III.

We are the Upper Class, Corporate Class, Middle, Working and Lower Class.

We are the living, breathing, searching, dying melting pot of the world...

We are rebels, Yankees, and west coast pioneers searching for gold.

We are small business owners, disabled veterans, and laid off factory workers.

We breathe life into the world's economy and let it walk a tight rope our savings are gambled.

We choose freely our moral standards and then pay taxes and go to sleep.

We are both Jekyll and Hyde.

We unite and we divide.

We are endless books, endless homicides, and an endless contributor to the weight of this planet.

We are the six o'clock news, damp southern humidity, and the poor painter's wet dream.

We are Playboy, The Grapes of Wrath, and The New York Times.

We are America.

I am America.



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IV.

We are Christians... Fundamentalists, literalists, visionaries, and hypocrites.  
Catholicism, Calvinism, non-denominational sects, and old fashioned Martin Luther Protestants.

We are Zen lunatics, Jewish jackrabbits, and Muslims named Ali, Rahim, or Rahuf.

We are new age, scientology, and eastern world wannabees.

We raise our hands in church, use aroma therapy, and feed our hungry superstitions.

We worship in 21st century temples, on top of Mt. Shasta, and in double-wide trailers.

We are stone cold atheists, scared shitless agnostics, and philosophica gurus of another time and place.

We are simple minded children and troubled thinkers.

We are the wise and the foolish.

We are corporate bigots, county politicians, and intuitive surrealists that can connect both time and space.

We are death row inmates, guilt-stricken sexual deviants, and a stack of paperwork on the sheriff's desk.

We are living, breathing representations of the static human state.

We are America.

I am America.

V.

We are hungry consumers, television zombies, and pop culture puppets.

We are manipulated by the mainstream and controlled by the almighty dollar.

We fall in line as the god-forsaken gatekeepers tell us what is newsworthy.

We borrow great sums of money and carry the debt on our broken backs.

We are a product of prosperity, a tombstone with no name, and a symbol on a hill.

We are Rocky Mountain wind, warm Kentucky bourbon, and a pharmaceutical machine.

We are the skeletons that cancer leaves behind and the obesity that Jenny Craig pushes



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forward.

We are motivated by what we fear and those in whom we elect are aware of this.  
We sit in the dark watching reruns, eating chocolate, and praying for a soul mate.  
We are the Saviors of the Middle East, carrying the torch of democracy.  
By 2020 we will have forced freedom on you.  
We are America.  
I am America.

VI.

We are the George Washingtons, Abraham Lincolns, and Franklin Delano Roosevelts.  
We are the John Wilkes Booths, Charles Guiteaus, and Lee Harvey Oswalds.  
We are the Battle at Bunker Hill, the Boston Tea Party, and John Brown's Raid.  
We are the peace and hope of Martin Luther King, and we are the bitter sick mind of Ted Bundy.  
We are the humiliation at the Bay of Pigs, and we are the starving children of the 1930s.  
We are the charisma of Elvis Presley and we are the improvisation of Miles Davis.  
We are the Jim Crow laws and we are 1964.  
We are the uprooted Jack Kerouacs and we are the homebody Emily Dickinsons.  
We are the bread and the butter.  
We are the cornfields of Iowa.  
We are the Mississippi River.  
We are the foothills of the Appalachians.  
We are America.  
I am America.

VII.

As I reflect on what I've been given and what I've lost, I hold a weightless body close to me at night.  
She, too, is America.



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A body I could not forsake, serving a God I cannot deny.  
People describe America as a new nation, but this is inaccurate.  
America is ancient.  
America rested in the palm of the earth before the Pacific Ocean and before the  
dawning of man.  
As I lay sleeping I dream of nights in Brooklyn allies, and in San Francisco cafés.  
I can still hear the ruckus and smell the beer in North Carolina barrooms.  
This is my country.  
I am this country.  
As my mind changes, my skin changes, and my body changes.  
America changes as well, but she still sleeps in 1776.  
That is where I find her every morning.  
Beside me.  
Looking into my eyes, breathing on my face, and telling me  
to wake up and be somebody on this outstretched plank of life I call home.

---

**Matthew Smith** received his B.S. and M.A. from East Tennessee State University. He teaches Sociology and serves as Coordinator of the Honors Program at BSCTC.



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Matthew Smith

## Breaking Bread with Strangers

'Tis so sweet  
to break bread with strangers  
burning with a new light  
'twas never known before  
howling into the lost night  
and drinking from the vine  
we pass this bread so divine.  
We do not agree  
yet we do not argue.  
We simply learn from one another.  
Antagonists become friends.  
The dead become converts.  
Strangers become comrades  
as night dances into morning  
laughter climbs the walls at sunrise  
and I've learned to listen  
somehow discovering myself within myself.  
Making love to conversation  
and caressing the deep blue nothingness of it all.  
Where would I be tonight  
had I not broken bread with a stranger?

---

**Matthew Smith** received his B.S. and M.A. from East Tennessee State University. He teaches Sociology and serves as Coordinator of the Honors Program at BSCTC.



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Rebecca Smith

## Reflections of an Appalachian Neophyte

*A painted pastiche to be placed in the last Isle of Innisfree*

What style and grace be seen in a humble peace and tranquility.  
Free your mind to a lilac breeze and see my true hypocritical capacities.  
Known will be the vertigo of a bumblebee and how it would to be – just a bee.  
For E-pit-o-mE, this place my home, and in crevice, laments, made heart into stone,  
my Kentucky home. In crevice, laments, where the moss had grown.

Before the war, a winter's snow, fairies lived here once – you know.  
Seelie danced beneath the thumbnail, harvest moon and sang songs of labors ardor.  
Oh! What a celestial spring, voices in sync, but doves lay at rest in vacant hours;  
Do the mystic powers sleep? Father time does blow and has blown year's good-bye.  
Baby New Year had a submerged spirit with galvanized notions. There's no  
authenticity.

We are the current in the sea of synchronicities, causing ripples in the searching for  
something to make us happy. But the treasure trove has been locked since antiquity.  
and Mother Earth is still key, raped red from relinquished endowments at hands of  
idolatry.

My fellow Mysterions, adept to verities, inherent to The Sophia and Socrates;  
Redeem those who suffered for sanity. Futurists have an opposing psalm.

Those Argonauts are thought pure, but young blood, young blood will endure.  
Drink from a fountain of truth, and you will see. You are an-o-mie.  
For no apostate, laughing Gnostic can turn patina into the perfect hue of blue.

---

Rebecca Smith, of Hueysville, is a student at BSCTC.



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