



THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF  
BIG SANDY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

# Cut-Thru Review

THE LITERARY JOURNAL OF BIG SANDY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Kelly Baldrige

## I Am Well Trained

I am often asked if I have kids, to which I always reply, “No, I have cats.”

Jack and Xanadu, my two black cats, are the proud owners of a 34-year-old woman—me. Being owned by cats isn’t too bad. They do keep me on a short leash, but the perks are great. I never have to worry about an alarm clock because, as they say, a hungry cat has no snooze button. I know where I will be every evening about 7 p.m.—in the kitchen for dinner preparation.

My cats are a constant source of stability. I know when they hear me pull in the driveway, they will go to the window and watch as I come to the door. Once I’m inside the songs of *meows* begin as if they are telling me about their adventures since they last saw me. I know this sounds crazy but it is as if they pause, cock their heads to the side, almost in unison, as if to say, “Well, how was your day?” They are loyal to a fault and never discriminate. They possess a kindness that does not waver and a love seemingly unconditional. Though I provide them with the most basic of provisions, I am asked no questions, given complete trust and treated with the greatest respect. My past transgressions or achievements are not considered. And in the true spirit of a cat or a child, if they are told “NO,” pouting occurs and grudges are held, and that’s just part of it.

Somehow animals have a way of understanding human emotion. I can count on Xanadu to lend a friendly paw when I am down or Jack to run and slide through the hall to make me laugh. When I am feeling lonely or sleepy (I think they get these confused), I will always have a furry friend to keep me company. A wet nose against my hand, a purring rub against my leg, or a snoozing kitty in my lap: cats effectively communicate what is important without verbal language.

I sometimes wonder which would be easier: cats or kids. Most mornings, after giving insulin shots and cleaning litter boxes, I am not sure. My kids are getting old and my



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heart breaks daily as I watch them: once agile, graceful creatures now, clumsy, awkward and tired. Jack is my oldest, plagued by arthritis and gum disease; he reminds me of a grumpy old man. He is 18 years old, 17 of those years he has spent with me. Xanadu, named after an Olivia Newton John song and who also answers to “Sissy,” is 14. I have had the privilege of caring for her since she was about four weeks old. She is now an arthritic diabetic who still has the sweetest brown eyes on the planet. Both were rescue cats, and I thank them daily for allowing me to be their loyal servant. I believe, as the saying goes, my cats are not spoiled; I am well trained.

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**Kelly Baldrige**, of Prestonsburg, is a BSCTC student. She plans to earn her bachelor’s degree in Human Services.



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Janie Beverley

## No More Babies

Appalachian Days Writing Contest

**First Place**

There wasn't much Andi wouldn't do to get a smile from her mother. It wasn't that her mother didn't smile; it was more likely that she didn't smile at Andi. Andi pressed close to her mother as she loaded jeans into the wringer washer. She could smell Noxzema on her mother's freshly scrubbed skin and the faintest hint of her mother's second cup of morning coffee. Andi tried to get closer. There was nothing more comforting to her than the smell and presence of her mother, but her mother slid her body along the rim of the enamel tub to the farthest point of the semi-circle between them, reminding Andi of the half-moon she had prayed to the night before. "Please let my mother love me," she prayed. Andi saw the outline of her mother's baby-filled body as she moved toward the sunlit door leading outside to the yard where the clothes line stretched over the pink peonies her sister Gail had planted in rows around their rented white frame house. Andi stepped off the river stone step into the noon day sun and asked if her mother needed help with hanging the heavy jeans that Andi remembered could stand alone as if someone were in them when she helped her mother carry the frozen denim legs inside to thaw and dry during the cold winter months. She wished her mother had a clothes dryer, especially with another baby on the way. She wondered if her mother would love this baby.

"Andi," her mother yelled. "Go get your sister," and then holding her abdomen, she dropped to the grass just missing the clothes line pole that held the sagging row of wet, heavy denim.

Andi ran to the porch where her sister was rocking her baby brother. "Mama needs help. Come on. Mama's sick. I think the baby's comin."



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Andi's older sister Gail jumped up and ran with her baby brother clutching her shoulder with his hands and her waist with his tiny fat legs in an attempt to stay connected to his jolting, wobbly sister running without shoes toward her mother who had collapsed.

Blood soaked her mother's pants, and she lay lifeless as flies landed on the beads of sweat across her forehead. Gail handed her baby brother off to Andi and started yelling at her mother to wake up, to speak to them, and then she started to sob when she couldn't get her mother to answer. Andi looked at Gail and asked, "Is she dead? Is Mama dead?" Gail felt with her freckled hand for her mother's pulse.

"I am afraid she isn't going to make it, Joe. She's lost way too much blood." The doctor pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose with an arthritic hand that had delivered all but two of the babies in Willow Cove, and those two babies had come into the world faster than Doc Silver's horse Madam could run. Andi's father walked the floor in front of the window that led to the porch where Andi and Gail sat crying and peering in every so often to check the status of their mother's health.

"I think the baby can make it though, if we go ahead and take her now," Doc Silver said in a sad low tone barely audible to his window audience. Andi announced to her sister whose eyes were swollen and red from the steady tears of a girl about to lose her mother what she had just heard from pressing her ear so hard against the glass that it cracked the seal around the pane. "She will be my baby," Andi announced to Gail. "I will take care of her and love her and she will know she is loved. She will have a chance, Gailie. Don't you see. Mama didn't want her, but I do and I am gonna make sure she knows it, too. I am gonna take good care of her and when she grows up she is gonna leave here and she won't have to have babies she doesn't want."

About the time Andi's sister realized what her sister had just declared, Doc Silver asked if they wanted to see their baby sister. Andi tiptoed across the wooden floor and peered into the cradle at the wrinkled face of someone she called "Marcy" after a lady she had read about in the *Ladies Journal* who sold grapes for making wine from her own vineyard up North.



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Andi lifted her baby sister up and pressed her soft baby face to her own cheek. “I love you, Marcy,” whispered. “I will always love you. From this point on, you belong to me, and I will take care of you always.” She turned and looked at her mother’s lifeless body and felt nothing but relief for her. “No more babies, Mama,” she said as she touched her mother’s icy hand. The ebony mantle clock struck three, and at that moment Andi thought she saw her mother floating out of the room in a long flowing red gown dancing like a little girl set free.

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**Janie Beverley** is presently the director of Office for Disability Support Services at BSCTC. She continues to work on her first book, *In Silent Protest: Stories from a Quiet Revolution*, a compilation recounting her days as a domestic violence advocate during the late 70s and early 80s.



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Sheldon Compton

## All Full Up

His last address was easy to remember. But in a year living on the outskirts of downtown Eatonville, Ben still confused Front Street with Back Street about every other time. Maybe that's what happened with his last letter.

Confusion was a state he'd yet to master. At eighty-six years of age, Ben Walker could remember what was in his lunch box the day the Number 2 tippie burned on Shelby Creek, but he couldn't remember Front from Back to save Daddy's life.

As the post office lady pulled to his mailbox, he got up from his porch swing and started toward her. She cradled a large box in her arms. Written on the side were flowery words reading Thirty-One.

Not for him, no sir.

When he sent the contents of his chest to his daughter in Indiana, Ben half expected Kristy to send them back. That's what family on the outs did these days. He figured it was a show of good faith on his part. Figured he'd been getting them back in no time. Knowing now, three weeks later, that Kristy might take a notion to keep them, he was seriously regretting sending the love letters he had written Susan, tucked at the bottom of the chest.

Before Ben could make it to the edge of his yard, the lady shook her head and hunched her shoulders. She then hopped into her truck and zoomed off, late for real packages to everyone in the hollow but him probably.

There wasn't much in the chest, not like you'd expect from a package sent to a daughter from a father who was barely there most of the time. One would expect a whole spread of things trying to make up for lost time. But Ben knew that wasn't possible. And there was nothing of any real value in the chest. All the same, three weeks and no response.



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He had to have mixed up Front and Back again. It was the only thing that made sense. It happened the last time he sent Kristy a card for her wedding anniversary. She told him so when he finally got her on the phone a couple months later.

When Kristy was ten they sent her to stay for a month with Susan's brother in Indiana. Ben was never sure what happened there, but something did. She came back different. Susan's brother, Paul, drove cross-country delivering RVs, hauling his Chevy along and driving it back from every state you could think of and some you couldn't.

Ben was against it, but Susan said it would do her good to visit family and get her nose out of books, play like a normal girl, quit worrying about skinning her knees and get a little dirty. It had a lot to do with Ben not taken to Paul from the start. He drank, played cards with drunks, fought with his wife, Nora, night and day. Paul and Nora had three daughters. Striped snakes were more kind, easier to get along with on account that their parents mostly left them alone. Kids left alone and bored were going to find the time to head in bad directions.

Paul's girls – Melanie, Sara and Brit – were all older than Kristy. This added to Ben's worries, which he kept to himself and thought about all the possibilities after Susan slept easily two feet away from him in bed. Those hours, watching shadows of branches cast from the moon glow appear and disappear along the walls of the bedroom. In those black forms he saw Kristy being bullied, shunned, yelled at, ignored, lonely with no books, no solitude. For others, maybe not a big problem. For his Kristy, it was a straightjacket, a metal pan slopped with a fist-sized chunk of wadded meat and no yard time, no sunlight, no hope.

Susan snored. Ben could not imagine what she dreamed of, a smile clear even in the gloom.

Turned out Susan thought the trip would toughen Kristy up. Instead she came back telling of how she woke each morning and watched deer scatter across the yard and sprint toward the pond at the back of the house. She cried the way an adult would cry, no expression, just tears dropping every few seconds from the corners of her eyes, saying



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how one morning a big dog, a German Shepherd maybe, chased one down and killed it on the spot. She remembered how the steam lifted off the torn apart flaps of the deer belly.

The trip was a failure, on all levels, and the weeks and months and years that followed were picked apart like silk by voiceless crows to remove the husks and leave everything inside bare and useless, picked to the core.

Ben woke early as usual the next morning and went to the porch with his coffee. Post lady would be here in an hour or so. He watched the sun coming up and searched for whatever sort of inspiration or glory people seemed to find there, but all he ever saw was that color of bright washed pink, like a nosebleed from a cloud. That sort of bitterness ate at him most days now. It was a new feeling, and one he didn't welcome. Keep moving along, bitterness. We're all full up here.

He sipped his coffee, already cooled from the milk he added, and fought off those old bedtime thoughts, fought at them until he heard the rumble of the post lady. He watched her place a letter in his box, struggle to close the latch and then finally leave it hanging. She waved and he waved back. When she marched to the truck, she stopped and slapped her thigh, bent and grabbed a chest, his chest. Turning, she held it up and smiled at him. Ben didn't move from the swing. He motioned for her to sit it down outside the fence, and she did. The sun was bleeding yellow now, the color of ripe corn.

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**Sheldon Lee Compton** is the author of the collection, *The Same Terrible Storm*, recently nominated for the Chaffin Award. His work has been published widely and been four times nominated for the Pushcart Prize, as well. He was a judge's selection winner in 2012 for the Still: Journal Fiction Award. He survives in eastern Kentucky. To find out more, visit him online at [sheldonleecompton.net](http://sheldonleecompton.net).



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Jarrid Deaton

## Haze

It was a four-wheeler that took out Hasil Adkins in Boone County, West Virginia. Of all the death-dealing things in the world, all of the alcohol poured down his throat, the depression, the raw meat for meals, it was a kid on a machine that brought an end to the Haze.

Just like D-Ray White's tapping still bounces off the mountains if the right person is listening, Hasil's hoots and howls are trapped in record wax like a blood-drunk mosquito in amber. The boy who hit Hasil knows this. He knows that sound keeps Hasil around.

Somewhere, somebody is spinning one of Hasil's records, and the manic singing drifts for miles on the West Virginia wind, insane phrases and energy breaking apart but maintaining the course straight for the boy's ears. Hasil's voice and the banging of his drum and guitar burrows deep, something more than music, and fills the boy's brain with dreams of living commodity meat stalking him through the woods, severed heads nailed to walls, hot dogs fired like missiles, and he can't run in the dream world of Hasil's music, he can't get away, because his feet get caught in the four-wheeler tracks he made, deep groves filled with blood and mud. Every night, he's trapped, and he knows that nothing ever really goes away in Boone County.

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**Jarrid Deaton** lives on the Pike/Letcher line with his wife, April. His fiction has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.



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Lisa Jones

## Show Me Your Heart

Appalachian Days Writing Contest

### Honorable Mention

Katura Ann Jonas drove the backroads home. It was the long and difficult way around. It had been awhile since she had traveled the familiar, winding, crooked as a snake's hindleg entrance to her family's mountain place. Two months and 37 days, her mamaw frequently reminded her. Too long. Maybe not long enough. In her new life, away at college, Katura Ann became Kat, the cool writer from down Eastern Kentucky way. Kat would have to shed her citified airs before she made a rather late appearance to the unexpected wake of her Papaw Diamond.

The news of his passing was still too hurtful to think about. The drive, three and a half hours, gave Katura too much time to remember. She was determined to hold up, especially in front of the women folk. Crying was not in her nature, at least not in public.

But Papaw Diamond was no ordinary man and no ordinary grandfather. He was a father of 10, grandfather of 22 and by his own admission father of "many lost young'uns who cain't find their way in this devil's world."

As a small child Katura worshipped him as much as any Greek sees Hercules as a power unmatched, undefeatable, ageless.

When Katura's mother left her with her grandparents, she was only seven. Her mother, strung out on the dregs of life and the ways of the devil, left only a patchwork remembrance of the bond.

Their relationship was a quilt made of old rags and hand-me-down memories, threadbare and coming apart. Katura's only clear recollection of the departure was the movement of her mother's white-laced peasant skirt swishing across the worn porch



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planks while Papaw Diamond's booming preacher-voice demanded she give her family their due. She peeked between Papaw Diamond's legs and watched the white skirt swishing back and forth as her mother paced along with flowing words that boiled down to the fact she couldn't raise this child and had to go. The skirt stopped once and paused and then Katura watched it flow down the worn wooden steps, out past the creek-rock sidewalk, her mother's steps calm, focused and on a clear path into eternity. There was never a face with the skirt except in pictures, faded, obscured. Never face to face. That was the first and only time Katura saw Papaw Diamond cry. His large leathered hands, stained from years of tobacco and coal, shook as he scooped her up in his powerful arms and covered her face from the scene of a mother leaving a child. He raised himself to his full measure, 6'5 and 250 pounds and delivered the ancient curse through a mixture of anger and sorrow: "The feet of them who buried your husband will carry you out!"

Two days later she was found dead at the head of a holler near the base of Black Mountain.

Mamaw Etta had predicted it. She felt the cold chills that morning and awakened to see a raven, building a nest on the porch. "O death is coming. Yes, Lord. Have mercy on this house. Put a candle in the window and do it right quick." Mamaw Etta always said such things with that shake in her voice that meant devotion to God. She used the same tone to let Katura know that she was "gettin' above her raisin" since she'd put on airs from that city school so far away. Katura never saw a likeness of herself in her own grandmother. Often she wondered if Mamaw Etta was a reflection of who her mother would have been, had she lived long enough to be holy and "covered by the blood."

Papaw Diamond was a coal miner, part-time tobacco farmer and full-time preacher. Katura thought all men and preachers smelled like sweat, coal dust, Old Spice and gasoline. Even now she could see him on a hazy summer evening, walking in from a long day busting coal and hoeing acres of burley. He was a silhouette against a star-flung mountain sky, singing "I'll Fly Away" to the hoot owls and an eight year old in bare feet with lightning bugs in a mason jar. His overlarge hands could move thousand-



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year-old minerals and turn delicate as a fairy's wing, able to tie loose ribbons on a fly-away ponytail. They said he was something else in his younger days. He proclaimed he was "more of something else" in his old days. Katura often heard the old men gathered at the feed mill joking that Papaw Diamond could lay track for the rail faster than any man alive, carrying two rails at a time on his back, along with the maul and the makings for 100 gallons of corn mash.

When Papaw was old, two of the Melungeon boys tried to break into the homeplace at the dark of the moon. Most old timers kept their cash money in a flour sack or tobacco tin for safekeeping and this was generally in the kitchen above the corn meal grinder.

The two boys slowly raised the ancient windowsills, white paint flaking with each movement and eased down to the yellow and white linoleum floor determined to find at least a hundred dollars. Papaw pretended he was swinging the backer knife at two cut worms but it was only his bare hands against teenaged angst and reckless choice. Half-grown boys sound much like hands of burley when they fall, Papaw said.

When the two awoke the next morning, their first image was of Mamaw Etta stirring sawmill gravy and pouring jet black coffee for the man at the table whittling two brand new hoe handles. The boys found themselves tied at the legs with old leg irons that Papaw sometimes used as props in church for explaining our redemption from slavery and sin. And the morning and the evening was their first day of enlightenment. The boys hoed two acres of tobacco, tied together while Papaw supplied them with sweet tea and water and his best sermons delivered while punctuating the air between the rows with his favorite verses about the evils of riches and "where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be son!" Between those tobacco rows, endless rows of waving green like the riches of a beckoning world, Papaw preached on:

"Amen, glory...Hallelujah to Jesus!" My treasure is in heaven, son. You've got to give your heart to someone, might as well give it to Him! Praise God! Give it all to Him now.. blessed Lord. Show me your heart, son. . . . Show me your heart."



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They say one of those boys went on to become a lawyer and still stops by to see Papaw when he comes to the old homeplace. The other one died in a getaway car from a deal gone bad. Papaw said his chains are real now.

Katura felt his absence as she pulled up to the house. No wood shavings scattered the porch. No workboots removed at the door. The tobacco knife stood forlornly by the swing. She could see the covered mirror through the screen door and candles were lit in the windows. Neighbors were bringing food and Mamaw Etta was standing at the old screen door waving her in and cooling herself with a wood-handled fan from the funeral home.

“They found him on top of the mountain at Lookout Rock,” Mamaw said. “Strange thing is when they found him, he was clutching this.” Mamaw Etta handed over a silver chain with a small coin cut in half and an inscription on one side.

“I think that’s a bible verse, honey. He was always thinking about his Lord. Someone in town thought they heard him hollering last night across the way to Old man Turner’s place. You know his old Mamaw got the dementia right before she died, too.”

Katura read the partial inscription faded and rubbed almost bare in places, “The Lord watch between me ...” The other half was missing.

“The coin looks old, Katura, as if it were cut in half on the tracks as teenagers are wont to do. I never did see it in all my 60 years with your Papaw. He must have traded one of his hen and roosters for it.”

Katura ran her hands over the soft metal and tried not to feel the anger of loss. Papaw said he prayed for her every day and she felt the absence of those prayers now, even if she wasn’t sure she believed.

What good is it to love someone. It never lasts. Someone always leaves.



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The funeral home was nearly empty. Katura sat on the front row waiting for the signal that six men she barely knew would take away the only person who made her feel loved.

She closed her eyes and heard him singing:

*Everybody I met seemed to be a rank stranger  
No mother or dad not a friend could I see  
They knew not my name And I knew not their faces  
I found they were all rank strangers to me*

She was the rank stranger now.

From the back, a slight woman, wearing her white hair in a long braid down her back made her way slowly to the casket. She had been beautiful once and graceful. Now she was frail and as she closed in on Papaw Diamond's face she pulled a white lace handkerchief from her watchband. Folded neatly inside was a silver chain with half an old worn coin and an inscription that said "and thee when we are absent one from another."

The old woman gently wound it around those ancient clasped hands and kissed them, wiping tears away with her braid. Katura saw the glint of the metal, saw the heaving sobs trying to escape, saw her turn and face her with the pain of love. Katura's doubts on love and the Almighty began to die, burning off like spring fog on a Kentucky mountain. The problem was not that love didn't last. The problem was... that it did. To her astonishment she saw a reflection of herself in the eyes of the old woman. And then, the woman looked her in the eyes and spoke: "Show me your heart."

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**Lisa Jones**, Director of Educational Technology at Berea College, and former English Instructor at BSCTC, writes, "I love the Appalachian people, the old way of life that is rapidly disappearing and the rich tradition of storytelling, handed down through generations. I hope to write more on the stories I have heard all my life from family and community members."



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William J. Loftus

## The Last Time An Angel Visited Me

Many years ago when I lived in the country, a stray, black, beautiful dog came to live in our out-building. He seemed just to wander around a lot by himself and caused no one any problems, so we gave him a box and a blanket and fed him, figuring that eventually his master would come looking for him. He continued to stay with us and was soon named Been, not Ben, but Been, because he had “been” around our home for some time.

He loved his box and blanket and each of us, as we fell in love with him. Been never wanted to come inside the house; he liked living in the out-building in the box with his blanket. As time passed, we noticed that he had developed some sores around in his underbelly, so we took him to the vet who removed what she called the larvae of wolf worms. These, she said, could have come from sleeping on a garbage pile. The larvae would have continued to grow and eventually would have burrowed out of Been to continue their life cycle.



Been

When Been was brought home, he was weak and tired, and only stayed in his box with his blanket. We visited him and tried to comfort him by just talking about anything and everything. Been loved to listen and he loved to be petted on. It was after these interactions that he began to tap his front paw, which we came to know as “yes.” As Been repaired and grew stronger, he started talking with his paw more and more. He would come to the back door, bark and then tap his front paw once – answering “yes” when we would ask if he wanted to take a walk. He soon began tapping his paw twice, which came to be understood as “walk.” If you asked “walk?” just to be sure, he would tap his paw once to indicate “yes.” And so he healed and we continued our



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walks with him. He enjoyed the exercise and all the many conversations. We knew that he was fully healed when he added the third paw tap, which meant “run.” As we would walk with Been at our side, he would stop, and I would tap one foot to signal “yes?” and he would tap his paw three times in response.

His run was such a wondrous thing to see. He would begin with a slow, lopping stride and then run faster and faster, until he seemed to go into an over-drive. It was perfection in motion. One night, something magical seemed to take over him during his run. He literally vanished into thin air, with only his breath and a whooshing sound being heard – here and there, and then in the distance and then right next to us. The magic continued, and sometimes he would reappear out of thin air, slowing down so gracefully until he was again walking right beside us. These walk-runs became a daily event.

It was a Thursday when he came to the door and tapped once again for a walk. Off we went. Somewhere along the walk, I tapped “yes” and he tapped once, then twice, and then a third time, and then looking right into my eyes, he seemed to smile and tapped a fourth time. I smiled back and tapped my foot softly once. Tears began to roll down my cheeks. I knew that four times was meant as a “goodbye.” I reached down and petted Been for what I knew was the last time. He turned and began his magical flight until I thought I saw his wings lift him up toward heaven. It was then that I knew for sure that he was not a black dog named Been, but an angel that needed his strength returned for his wings to work again. We were simply the family that he found to help him in this recovery. We were so fortunate to have been given the gift of Been, and to this day, I have never “been” taught so much by a dog.

We still talk of Been every now and then, knowing that we were blessed with his friendship. After a bad day, I often find myself lifting my foot and tapping three times, and I find that my troubles seem to fly away, as it is on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

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



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Aleisha W. McCarty

## Problem Solved

My uncle, he's like a second father to me. He picks on me and jokes with me but always makes sure I'm safe and happy. He is a tall man with a beer gut, reeking of Bud Light and Marlboro cigarettes. His bald head and rusty red beard are his trademarks – along with his face full of freckles and a smile that warms your heart. He always wears overalls on top of a red or blue plaid button-up, and when we hear a four-wheeler pulling up, you can bet twenty dollars it's him. His name is Jeff, and I would take a bullet for him, but what life shows us is that people are not always as they may seem. Back in June of 2010, Jeff let his true character show. I always saw him as a friendly man, someone who would never cause harm to anyone or anything. A man who would take up for someone when need be but never in a rude or hurtful manner. Needless to say, I was more than shocked by his actions that June. I always knew that he would do anything for his sisters, but I never knew he could take it that far.

Let me take you back to when this situation began, when my aunt Brenda was furious with a woman named Wilma. The reason behind her fury is still to this day unknown. We were all aware of this ongoing argument between the two; Brenda made no effort to conceal it. My normally quiet, reserved aunt was going around with hatred in her eyes, and rage in her voice. The worst part of it all is that Wilma had to come up our hollow every day to feed the chickens my other aunt Dora was housing for her. Of course, Brenda became extremely agitated as soon as Wilma's 1998 navy-blue Chevy Silverado came up the road. Jeff finally decided he could no longer see his sister in this condition, so he took action.

That warm June day began like any other; we all woke up and did our morning routines. I made my way down the road to Dora's house where things seemed perfectly normal. We were sitting on the porch drinking iced tea when Jeff pulled into the driveway. A serious expression was on his face; however, I ignored it. He started on his way out toward the garden, with just a mere "hello" as he passed by. That's when I knew something was wrong. Jeff isn't the type of person to give you a simple one word



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greeting; he's quite the talker. That very moment is when I knew that the day was not going to have a joyful ending.

Fifteen minutes passed by before we saw Jeff again. The front door swung open and I nearly jumped off the couch. The only thing he said was "Can I have a trash bag?" Dora handed him two and the door slammed shut as quickly as you could blink. We all knew he was up to something, but we went about our day. Dora assumed it was another one of the quirky projects he takes on. I knew it was much more than that. Jeff is never so secretive or hasty in the things he does. I was ready and waiting for the drama to hit, and sure enough, it did.

Come to find out, when Jeff was supposed to be in the garden, he was at the barn. The barn is where Wilma's ten chickens were staying for the time being. Jeff decided to take matters into his own hands and get Wilma off the hollow for good, hoping it would help solve Brenda's new-found anger issues. He wrung the neck of each one of her chickens!

Then he stuffed them all into the garbage bag and loaded them onto his four-wheeler. Not only did he kill them, he had the nerve to take them to Wilma's house, knock on her door, and say "Here's ya chickens." After that was over he came back up the hollow, stopped at Brenda's house and said with a nod "Problem solved."

"He killed my chickens, they're dead!" Wilma cried.

She called Dora as soon as Jeff pulled out of her driveway. Dora and I sat speechless on the couch listening to Wilma tell us details of the evening. I couldn't believe what I was hearing; my uncle had become a cold-blooded chicken murderer! Wilma was frightened at the time. She sobbed to us for what seemed like two hours, when suddenly there was a quick knock at the door. A very distinct knock, one used only by Brenda. Dora rushed off the phone and said with a sweet tone "Come in." Brenda waltzed in with a smile. All to say, Wilma has never returned to the hollow.



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This situation changed every opinion I ever had of Jeff. He was no longer the friendly man who could do no harm; he was rude and cruel. How could someone I thought I knew really be hiding who he truly was? But as time passes I find more humor than hurt in this story, but it really goes to show, you don't always know people the way you think you do.

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**Aleisha Williams McCarty**, 19, was born and raised in Salyersville. Recently she became a mother to a handsome baby boy. She aspires to be a registered nurse.



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Thomas Matijasic

## Watch Tower Ministries

Appalachian Days Writing Contest

### Honorable Mention

The church was impressive. Watch Tower Ministries was housed in what must have been one of the most impressive buildings in Nike, Ohio during the 1970s. Two decades earlier, Nike's tire factories were a place of economic refuge for thousands of Appalachian residents who fled the coal fields looking for work. They received something less than the warm welcome they had anticipated. Often belittled as "hillbillies" or "rednecks," they crowded into neighborhoods on the east side of the city as earlier groups departed for the suburbs. Often homesick and sometimes a bit alienated, they searched for the familiar. Country music bars and weekend journeys back home help ease the transition for some, but others needed more. A spiritual longing remained, and the Reverend Mr. Alvin D. Prophecy rose up to fill the void.

Born on a hard-scrapple farm in Beriah County, Kentucky, Prophecy's parents had eked out a living as best they could tilling the earth, harvesting the timber in the forest, and running a small country store. He never much liked his birth name of Manfred Lockney.

What kind of name is Manfred for a boy anyway? He always told his friends to call him Manny. Even though his folks never had much, the Lockney family had it better than most along Badseed Creek and Manny knew it. Manny also knew he was made for more important things than scrapping along running a country store or trying to go under the earth to dig out black gold with a continuous miner. He did well at sports in high school and managed to keep a respectable grade point average in the process. He had only two reliable windows to the outside world – talking with family who had returned from the North to visit and listening to the radio.



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The radio was magical. It literally brought the sounds of the world to you. He heard music in church. The sounds of the congregation singing the standard Baptist hymns had always given him comfort and security. Family gatherings were also enlivened by amateur musicians playing and singing what outsiders called Bluegrass music. But on the radio, Manny could hear new “country” tunes recorded in Nashville and the pounding rhythms of rock-and-roll on WZZK in Cincinnati. He liked rock-and-roll, especially after stealing and drinking a few beers from the cooler that his father kept in the storeroom in the back. He wasn’t supposed to know about the cooler, but he did. When he had a little alcohol and turned up Jerry Lee Lewis or Johnny Cash on the radio, it was like his brain had been set on fire. It made him want to dance. It made him want to fight. It made him want to do immoral things with his sweetheart. Truth be known, it made him want to do all of those things at the same time and he didn’t know why.

But he knew those feelings were wrong.

He also liked listening to the radio preachers. They weren’t like his pastor. They had fire in their bellies and the spirit moved them to eloquence. Manny could picture them in his mind’s eye as they moved about exhorting their congregations. God’s message was not one to be delivered in a monotone by good men who lacked inspiration. It was a message that needed to reach a man’s soul by grabbing his imagination and focusing his attention on salvation and the possibility of damnation. So Manny turned away from the temptations of beer and rock-and-roll, and he turned his attention to the future, his future and that of all mankind. He would be a preacher, a radio preacher, who would send out the word over these magical waves to the lonely and the desperate and anyone else who would listen. But he knew that he could never be a famous radio preacher if he continued to live along Badseed Creek, so after graduating high school, he followed his Uncle Jake to Nike and took a job at National Tire.

Manny read his Bible every night and took classes at the Holiness Bible College on Saturdays in order to prepare himself for the ministry, but his Uncle Sam had other plans for him. An induction notice, a physical examination, and some basic training



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prepared him to be a soldier, slogging through the rice paddies and swamps of Vietnam. As a boy, he had been washed in the blood of the Lamb. As a young man, he would experience a different type of baptism – one much more frightening and transformative. If he survived – if he survived the mined footpaths and bullets of the Viet Cong, if he survived the Saigon prostitutes and the foul water – he would take up his cross and fulfill his destiny.

He returned from his tour of duty a man with the wisdom of the eternal, a man people could believe in, a man who could not be denied. Watch Tower Church started in a small storefront in a depressed neighborhood. Manny ministered to the most humble of God’s people. After a year in the vineyard, he received his first radio contract from a small A.M. country-music station in Nike. They would broadcast his Sunday morning service, but the station manager suggested a more appealing name for the young pastor. “You’re an exciting preacher, Manny, but a name like Manfred Lockney isn’t going to attract many followers. They’ve got to turn on to our station before you can reach them.” Several possible names were discussed, but they finally settled on Alvin Divine Prophecy. It proved to be a winner and what started as a Sunday morning broadcast soon became a syndicated two-hour-long program of worship and prayer heard in 31 states and five foreign nations. I had to see and listen to this divine prophet for myself.

The interior of the church was very modern and unconventional for the day. The seats were arranged in layers of semicircles, with the “stage” at the lowest level of the church.

On the stage was a simple glass podium and above it, suspended from the ceiling, was an enormous cross. A radio microphone was attached to the front on the podium. The assembled congregation numbered about a thousand people, each wearing the best clothing a J.C. Penny’s sale had to offer. When the Reverend Prophecy entered from behind a curtain at the rear of the stage, the audience fell silent.

“Let us be in prayer,” intoned the husky voice of the minister. “Let us not ask God to give us what we want but help to guide us in doing His will.”

A few hearty “amens” were spontaneously vocalized by the faithful.



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“Brothers and sisters in Christ, as I look upon you, I don’t see a group of sinners and saints gathered together because we are all sinners who through the grace of God have the potential to become saints.” Several people nodded their heads in agreement. “I don’t see a gulf, a divide between the richest of us and the poorest because that divide does not exist in heaven. I don’t see men who are black or white because God is color blind and He gave His only son to save us all!”

“Then what do I see?” Pointing to his left he shouted, “Over there, I see a woman grieving for the loss of her only child and she wants to know why he was taken from her.” Pointing to his right he whispered, “And over there is a man who was just laid off from his job and he has a wife and three children to feed.” Gesturing toward the center of the church, he calmly reported, “And there sits a brave soul, quietly battling cancer, death staring her in the face and wondering if she is going to make it through this ordeal.”

“I don’t know why bad things happen to good people or why seemingly bad people have good fortune here on earth. No man was meant to have such knowledge. And I am just a man, as wretched as the poorest beggar in the streets. But I can tell you this: God has a plan for each and every one of us. You might feel abandoned, but you are not abandoned. You may feel as if you are being crushed by the weight of the world, but He will give you strength. You may feel as if you do not have a friend left in this world, but I can assure you that you do have one friend left. He is a friend that will never leave you.

He is a friend who voluntarily suffered to save you. He is a friend who died so that you might have eternal life in heaven. Be open to Him and He will open the door for you.”

For those in the Watch Tower and for the hundreds listening at home, Brother Alvin’s words were like the cool waters of an oasis to a people walking through a desert.

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**Thomas D. Matijasic** is a native of Youngstown, Ohio. He earned a B.A. from Youngstown State University, a M.A. from Kent State University, and a Ph.D. in History from Miami University. He



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has taught at Big Sandy Community & Technical College since January 1, 1983. Dr. Matijasic has received four BSCTC Great Teacher Awards, five NISOD awards for teaching excellence, and the 2006 Acorn Award. He served as President of the Kentucky Association of Teachers of History (1994) and served three terms on the Kentucky Heritage Council (1994-2006). Dr. Matijasic has published more than 20 articles and 30 book reviews, the most recent entitled, "It's Personal: Nixon, Liberia and the Development of U.S. African Policy (1957-1974)," WHITE HOUSE STUDIES (2011).



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Steve Minix

## The Creek Bank

The small creek that ran by my childhood home was where I experienced many of life's first lessons. When I was younger, around the age of six, I frequently spent most of my time there – learning to fish, catching crawdads, and sometimes even riding my bicycle into it. The creek was rather small and about three feet deep in spots. Sharp jagged white stones were common, peeking out above the cool clear water almost looking like a large white glacier of ice. Least, that's what it seemed to me as a young boy. I remember going to the creek to reach and grab crawdads before they would scamper off under the heavier stones I could not lift. At the age I was, finding small crawdads were like spotting Bigfoot or the ever elusive Loch Ness Monster. My grandfather taught me how to fish in that stream and after I caught my first fish I was spending almost every day on that creek bank, which was full of lush grass. How often I sat there hoping to catch Moby Dick!

I was at the age when a young child learns to ride a bicycle and remember riding my small bicycle through the stream – the water splashing up from my toes to my knees.

My family always knew where to find me. One evening, I recall, my grandfather had to come retrieve me from the bank to take me home as it was growing close to dark.

As I have grown older, the creek has also grown with me, so to speak. The gentle rolling banks have gone due to construction on a new bridge, the banks are now covered with rock, and it is significantly deeper to more than five feet. While I have grown from a child, I still recall the creek bank, how it was, for me, a calm spot to get away to and disappear.

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Steven R. Minix, of Salyersville, is a BSCTC student. He plans to major in English.



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Shawn Porter

## I Believe in the Microwave

I believe the microwave is an underappreciated tool in modern day society, and I couldn't survive without mine. Could mankind live without it? We can live without a breath mint, but remember how pleasant your last conversation with someone who really needed one was? It's said that dog is man's best friend. Not to take anything away from my beloved pooch, but he has never melted my cheese to be enjoyed with some chips or saved me from another cold bowl of cereal.

I survived the first month of living thanks to the microwave. The first meal I had was none other than an iconic TV dinner. My traditional cooking skills were nonexistent. There was no mother to fix food for me, and I didn't have the cash for a pizza delivery every day. Hot grilled chicken, mashed potatoes and carrots were a far better sounding choice than an unfulfilling cold bologna sandwich. In fact, my first grocery store trip alone included several microwavable dinners and pop. Every store I've been in that sells food has aisles of frozen dinners, seemingly begging to be taken home to pay homage to the nourishment-enhancing "nuke" box. There's almost no food now that you can't pull out of a box, poke a few holes in the plastic and enjoy in minutes. The instructions always start with microwave and then the oven, as if, especially for me, it's just an option.

Kids with parents who can't cook are especially thankful that a meal can be prepared with a few presses of a button. My father is the only person I know with cooking skills possibly worse than mine – the man can barely boil water. If not for the microwave making me those delicious fish stick meals, dinner time would have been a sad thing indeed. They even came with desert! One day when my kids are old enough to know the difference, I'm sure they will say a little thank you to the microwave after they attempt to eat one of my cooking disasters. Whether you're too busy to fix a traditional meal, you're in a hurry or want something warm at three in the morning while cramming for a psychology midterm, turn to the microwave. Almost like parent of the

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year, it always warms our food, never asks for anything in return and doesn't care what time it is. So when you're hungry remember, you can always "nuke it."

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**Shawn Porter**, 29, is a nontraditional BSCTC student. He writes, "When others say you're too old, not smart enough or waited too long to achieve your dreams, push harder."



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Phyllis Puffer  
**Senior Love**

*Zimbabwe, Summer 2012*

Hello? Hello?  
Hello?

Nobody answered.

A large portion of white cloth, clearly clothing, and similar patch of black showed through the landscaping of the beautiful house set in beautiful gardens. The gardener perhaps?

The gate in the wall around the house was open, showing a clearly upper class dwelling in this upper class suburb of Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. The research institute, where I was working for the summer, was located in the neighborhood, and I was on the prowl.

The quest was for wealth to photograph to balance the scenes of poverty, war, and destitution which form the world's image of African countries. The poverty, war, and destitution are certainly true, but not everywhere, and this was one part of the "not everywhere."

The walkway, the house and a large area in front of the one story, red-tile roofed house were of brick. A sign over a paved open area across from the house said, "Visitor Parking." I looked around for a sign saying, "Visitors please report to the principal's office." It seemed that the establishment might be a private pre-school or day care center.

A large man came slowly down the brick path. He was not a gardener. He was an Indian Muslim, of which there were many in this city. He wore the long white robe and long black vest common among men in that community as well as a flat-topped,



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round cap. His middle had expanded with age and prosperity. His brown beard was long and curly.

“Good morning. I would like to take a photograph of your beautiful house and garden.”

“I’m just here for the wedding of my niece. I’ve just come up from Durban.”

Durban is in South Africa on the coast by the ocean and quite a distance away. I had seen before that the ties between the Zimbabwean and South African Muslim communities were close.

“Let’s go ask my sister. She’s having her hair colored.”

Sister was sitting on a straight-back, wooden chair outside in the midst of yet more beautifully landscaped garden. A young black African girl was there, clearly the beautician, but she left almost immediately. A half-grown, grey and white striped cat sat in front of the scene, but it walked quietly away when I bent down to pet it.

Sister also was middle aged. She was wearing a long gown, covered with a beauty parlor shoulder cape, her long, wavy, black hair extending wetly down her back. She was a calm person, rather detached, and apparently unconcerned that a beauty secret was revealed.

Sister readily gave her consent to photograph the house. She didn’t seem impressed, flattered, or even interested. Both of them forbade me to photograph the people. I was embarrassed to have asked. I had temporarily forgotten that many Muslims do not permit photographs or paintings of humans as being too close to the practice of idolatry.

I photographed busily around the establishment accompanied by the brother/uncle who commented at length on the plants and house and life’s events. He showed me a word painted on the wall of the house above the house number. He said it meant, “Welcome,” in Arabic.



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“My niece married a man from London.”

Another example of a close-knit yet far flung community.

“I was married 41 years. My wife died suddenly from a heart attack.”

We had gotten to the gate and I started to photograph the landscaping outside the wall.

The brother/uncle showed me the sign on the gate, “Honey Cinnamon Garden.”

“My sister is a wonderful cook. She can cook anything.”

The sign had not made any sense to me before and only a little more now but it explained the visitor’s parking and might partly explain the extraordinary quality of the gardens as an asset to a catering company.

“I was in plastics manufacturing, but I don’t do that anymore.”

I thought that might mean that he was retired.

“My son is in pots and pans. He has \_\_\_\_\_.”

I don’t remember the name of the son’s company but the father became very enthusiastic as he explained the science behind the superiority of his son’s products.

There was something about different layers of metal put together making the pots heat slowly with need for only a little cooking oil. Food doesn’t burn. He emphasized that this was healthy cooking. Whoever thought anyone would be passionate about cookware. I found myself becoming interested.

He stopped himself and returned to his personal life.

“My wife died. I was so sad all the time. They said at the mosque, ‘You are always crying.’”



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You need another wife.”

“We’ve been married three years. I married a widow. She was married 21 years. She never had children. My children love her. My grandchildren love her. She loves the grandchildren.

Married 21 years and no children. We’ve been married three years. She wanted a religious man. No smoking.”

The way the man spoke about his marriage belied to an outsider the complicated, exciting and deadly serious processes which would have been put in motion within the community to bring about this union. The men, and probably even more so the women, would have been mobilized in match making. The man’s own mosque community would have activated personal contacts with other mosque communities in Durban, with other mosques in South Africa, and even Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, on farther north and east to the edges of the African continent and the Middle East. Also to Europe, Asia, the Americas. A man would have a cousin here, whose wife or sister would know an eligible woman. Another man would have an uncle there whose wife or sister or mother could verify character. There would have been much discussion of age, interests, personalities, backgrounds, and yes, money, also compatibilities of culture, language, temperament, education, and on and on and on. How excited the community would have been. After a short time, or a long time, or somewhere in between, the contacts would have been made. There would have been introductions and discussions. Then, great joy, a wedding. A relationship would begin. Love would develop and grow.

The sharp, strong, African morning sun made tiny points of light on the little curls in my friend’s dark brown beard. Here was a happy man.

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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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Steve Russo

## Here in a hotel room in Louisville, KY

Sitting here in a hotel room in Louisville, Kentucky, I find it is hard to get my thoughts together. I was at the State Fair yesterday afternoon, when one of my staff sent me a text saying that Neil Armstrong had died. The rest of the day, and maybe even the rest of my life, changed. The tears began to flow.

Those of us in the planetarium field knew him personally, even though most of us never met him. But weekly, and sometimes daily, we spoke about the Moon landings, and Neil Armstrong. Even those planetarians who were not born until after the Apollo 11 mission still knew him. But for those of us old timers, who were born before the Mercury missions lifted off, we grew up with the space program and all the Astronauts that made history.

I always felt somewhat sad that most of the teachers over the years to whom I taught astronomy never saw the Moon landing when it happened. They were all in their mid twenties or so, and to them, Neil Armstrong was just a page in a history book, like Christopher Columbus and George Washington. But to me, he was real and a “personal friend,” even though I never met the man.

The public and all of us in the planetarium field “elevated” him to hero status. Neil never looked at himself that way. He was always the first to say that landing on the Moon was done by over 500,000 people and that the credit went to all of them and not him.

Yesterday at the Kentucky State Fair, there was an exhibition of things made with balloons – the Wright Flyer, Curiosity, the Space Shuttle, and a few other objects related to aviation.

But the one that caught my eye was the Lunar Lander and Neil Armstrong coming down the ladder. A few minutes later, I was informed that Neil Armstrong had died.



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Most people at the fair didn't know, and the few people that I told seemed to be shocked.

We all get old and die; not a pleasant thought, but I think that Neil seemed to be immortal, kind of like a super hero, and I thought he would be here forever. Well, he can be. It is up to us planetarians to keep his memory alive in our teachings. We can never let the generations of students and teachers who come to our domes forget the mission of Apollo 11 and how it changed the World forever.

I remember it like it was yesterday: July 20th, 1969. I was 14 at the time, sitting in front of the TV set, with my Revell Saturn V rocket and LM, "acting out" everything that was happening on the screen. Then there was Walter Cronkite saying: "Neil Armstrong, 38-year-old American, standing on the surface of the Moon." Then the words that we all remember from Neil: "That's one small step for [a] man. One giant leap for mankind."

The world and my life was changed forever. Although since the age of five, I wanted to work in the planetarium field, seeing Armstrong on the Moon solidified that quest for the career that

I have had for the past four decades. And today, upon hearing about the passing of this true American Hero, the world and my life has been changed again.

Like Tom Hanks said in the movie *Apollo 13*: "From now on we live in a world where man has walked on the Moon." And now unfortunately, from now on we live in a world, where the first man on the Moon is no longer with us.

Rest in peace, Neil Armstrong.

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**Steve Russo** is the Director of the East Kentucky Science Center and Planetarium at BSCTC. He has 39 years of teaching experience in the subject area of Astronomy and Space Science. He also spent 15 years as a broadcast Meteorologist on TV and Radio in the Finger Lakes Region of New York state. A native of Brooklyn, Steve and his wife, Jan, reside in Prestonsburg.



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Michaela Stepp

## I Believe in Getting a Little Dirty Sometimes

Since the beginning of life, depending on your beliefs, dirt has always been there. As a Christian I believe that we were made of the earth and clay, like it says in the Book of Genesis. It's second nature to us, it's older than us, and it's one of the very first things we discovered as a baby.

Dirt is good for the soul. No matter where you go, dirt will always be there. As an only child growing up, I discovered that the dirt was my best friend. Making mud pies and rabbit stew were my favorite things to do. I bonded with nature and nature was a comforting presence to me. It allowed me to think and have an open mind about everything with which I was faced. Should I dig with a big spoon or small spoon to dig? Ultimately, I chose both. As a child I didn't believe in computers or video games because everything that was fun happened outside with the dirt. That's where Fancy takes flight.

Although imagination can take place anywhere and at any time you want it to, it happened to me the most when I was outside. The little twigs and branches resembled flags for a fort and rocks served as a moat so that the evil squirrels couldn't take over.

For an adult, a little bit of dirt can resemble a hard day of work, and for a hyper child it can resemble a hard day of play. I remember as a child seeing my father walk through the doorway with dirt on his clothes and thinking to myself, Why is he having this much fun without me? Only later to find out, that yard work isn't at all what I expected it to be.

However, the majority of my life was spent outdoors either helping my father with yard work or burying marbles in the dirt for me to look for 10 years later. To this day, I've found three of the seven marbles I buried. It's as if I've given myself a scavenger hunt, but I already know what I'm looking for. As I grow older and the days pass by, I still find myself returning to the back yard where at one point in time my imagination went wild.

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Now, it's more of a relaxing place where I go to think and occasionally dig in the dirt again. After all, once our lives on this earth are over, we are going to be buried in the ground with the dirt as our final resting place. I know that I'll be comfortable there since I'm going back to that from which I was made. I believe in the power of dirt.

---

**Michaela Stepp**, 18, has a love for writing. She plans on pursuing her passion for meteorology in Oklahoma where she will continue her education along with chasing storms.



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Troy Williamson

## Go Your Own Way

I believe in the flow of the universe and that we each have our own place within it. I believe that we as human beings are all connected in a sense deeper than what we know or understand. We are constantly crossing streams and exchanging pieces of ourselves with everyone around us. We often hold on to the pieces that are sent to us and at this moment they help define who we are: a mix of individuality and everyone we have ever met. It is when we realize this that we can begin to search for our stream, our identity.

Most of our childhoods are spent in mimicry. We learn how to walk, talk and live by watching the world through innocent eyes. Most of us grow up with a “monkey see, monkey do” attitude. It is these moments of influence that partially define who we are to become. We do not see ourselves as individuals until our lives are seasoned with experiences. Even then, we do not always accept our individuality. I believe that part of discovering our place in life is coming to terms with it. However, the moment that we do, our lives truly begin.

For me, this moment was the old near death cliché. The front end of my car decided to have an intimate relationship with a concrete wall. It wasn't until the airbags had temporarily deafened me that I realized how ungrateful I was with the world. I found my place in this silence. The universe had given me the gift of music, but I had placed it in the backseat alongside shattered pieces of what once was my windshield. The sign was clear. Music was the fish that flowed in my stream; I was just the fisherman.

The journey to find ourselves is one that lasts a lifetime. People are constantly growing and changing into who we're meant to be. The universe presents us with a path; I believe it is our job to follow it. There may be forks in the road, but there are plenty of signs along the way. I believe in who I am.

---

**Troy Williamson** is a full-time student at Big Sandy's Prestonsburg campus. As well, he is an avid touring musician. “The world is my metronome, and I breathe to its beat,” he writes.



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Avram McCarty

## It Was Then

I miss those days where sharing crayons was our pyramid  
of trust, where proving you were not chicken was imperative.  
We poured out our imagination onto the sidewalks with chalk  
We saw darkness as rest, a period of delusion for the insane.  
We saw happiness pour down onto us like the transcending rain.  
We were so big, yet the world appeared as something small.

Now it seems like there is nothing in this world for me.  
Once there was something carved into the bark of a tree.  
I do believe it was something complex yet paltry  
like “home is where the heart lies.” Looking back on that  
I see something meager yet ambiguous like “it’s also where it dies.”

Because it was then when I felt so alive, so translucent and so free.  
Childhood is not a matter of how or why, but when we see  
The simplest of things in life – no glory, power or prestige  
But the friends we have and the memories of our siege.  
Our siege of happiness, our goal of pleasure amongst the breeze,  
to feel lively, real, and to find the blessing behind the sneeze.

If we ever forget the simple things, modernity will engulf us all.  
We will forget how in a world so big, it’s always important to feel tall.  
It was then I rested diligently upon pillows of carpet and of blocks,  
blocks I used to build the world around me; everything else was in chalk.  
Mostly everything can be erased, except the memories that hold.  
You cannot separate the home from the kid, you can only bid adieu.  
So what we carve on our trees, the trees our blank canvas of life,  
should be written carefully so when we read, we also speak and write.



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It was then I was a child so careful and so free  
But the story isn't fully written. It's still waiting to be.

---

**Avram McCarty**, a BSCTC Honors student, currently serves as Student Government President and is an avid Phi Theta Kappa public relations officer.



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Helen Faith

## Man

After the decades-long night, Helios yet hides,  
Superseded by a maternal, embracing fog  
Blessing all – save me!  
O Mother, baptize me, rebirth me,  
Envelope my soul with thine.  
Show me once more  
The essential perfection of life,  
Of natural life,  
Created by breath, not fire!  
Is man a machine, a thing of bolts,  
Measured, quantified, known?  
If all were understood, every cell,  
Every systemic function,  
One infinite corpuscle still blossoms, shines:  
A mysterious portion of the beyond,  
Whose whisper is of the breath –  
Not the fire!  
The fog will burn away,  
And now my mechanical breath  
Carries me to a hopeless day  
Where shadows are.

*This poem was written in response to Victor Frankenstein's mad dash from his laboratory after having created his monster. He heads to the hills, throwing himself into the arms of Mother Nature, whom he seems to have rejected in his unnatural experiment. It is difficult, or impossible, for him to enjoy the environment as he had in the past, but in his agony it seems his only escape.*



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Helen Faith  
**There But**

A breath,  
And I am connected  
To the spider's web,  
To the shriveled prey:  
Five days from now,  
Another dies;  
Today, unaware, on the breeze,  
Seeking food,  
Singing.

---

**Helen B. Faith**, who grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has enjoyed creative writing for most of her life. In addition to her poetry, she has written rough drafts for two novels and one play, and she encourages fellow writers to investigate National Novel Writing Month for a fun challenge. Grateful for the educational opportunity, Helen plans to continue her studies toward a degree in speech pathology.



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Jonathan May

## The Fiery Release

I keep my back to the sun.  
My eyes know shades of pink.  
It's the twilight near its ending &  
a mind begins to think.

A smoking fire burning wonder  
kindled at my feet.  
The light of night accompanies man  
in a stillness to be beat.

A smoking pipe tended at lip  
emitting sweetness through the air-  
the one personal belonging  
helping this loner have no care.

Crickets chirp - a resounding tone-  
fireflies bask in pheromone.  
Seems a fella is not all alone;  
He's at the top with nature, his own.

Secular thought takes a mean case of rot.  
Within burning shadows, it's easy to spot  
an outline with a mind seeming only to find  
that dear earth holds vast knowledge  
one-of-a-kind.

Signed,  
A man left to reason when so many are blind.



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Jonathan May

## Recurring

Dead in the barn lies the mare of a man  
too proud to let sorrow settle.

And when he puts down his bottle,  
do you think he'll recall  
how far he has come  
in falling short of things?

With owed respect  
was the equine perplexed  
with how master justified her passing?

Memories lost are just a drink away,  
so make it stiff as a horse.  
A horse, you know,  
of course, come morning.

Grain ferments in mangers or barrels.  
Grasp any connection you can  
while it's cold out there  
and she can keep on lying before she swells.

Could you ever swell with pride again?

---

**Jonathan May**, a BSCTC Honors student, writes, "The part of me that answers to no one is Appalachian. Even deeper than that notion, my undeniable self is empowered by nature, for she nurtures me. I gain most of my inspiration amongst her splendors and hope to provoke thoughtfulness toward her upon my career path. I believe Appalachia puts characteristic songs in the hearts of her people, and I want those sounds and lyrics to ring loudly forever, beyond even her natural erosion."



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# Cut-Thru Review

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Ken Slone

## If You Notice Sunsets...

If you notice sunsets,  
If your attention stays  
For more than a moment,  
It could be that you are from mountains,  
Where sunsets are wintertime precious few.

Winter in the mountains is coffee  
With cream for sky,  
Billowing on the surface  
Like freshly poured creamer,  
Turning coffee to frosty ambient cold.

Clouds of cream are fog-poured upward,  
Swirled with wind stirring straws  
Where they sky settle,  
Forming the skin of milk,  
Curdled not by the warmth of sun but by the passage of time.

But you may notice sunsets  
Because they were the favorite color of a hero of yours  
Or a parent too real for hero status.  
Sunset idolatry can be passed  
Down through generations, you know.

Your grandmother feared storms  
But venerated sunsets.  
She longed to see one by the sea  
But did not drive  
And was never driven there.



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Oh, she read about ocean sunsets,  
But only the best writing evokes sight,  
And even then the colors described lack accurate depth of contrast  
and brilliance,  
So she settled for the encouragement of sunsets  
By drinking her coffee black.

---

Professor of English Ken Slone received the Great Teacher Award in 1999 for teaching his students to take pride in their Appalachian heritage and to write from their hearts. His book of poetry, *At Home in the Mountains*, was published in 2001. His book, *Mountain Teacher – An Eastern Kentucky Teacher Tells His Story* was published in 2005. After earning his graduate degree from Xavier University, Ken returned to his home county of Johnson. He is retired from Big Sandy Community & Technical College after a 36-year teaching career. He does freelance writing for SLS Consulting, Pasadena, CA, and he and his wife Debbie spend winter months on the beach at North Myrtle Beach, SC.



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Ken Slone

## Holdout

Mountains is the last to change leaf color this late  
November. In fact, from its center outward all is  
Green until one foot from its branches'  
Tips where there is traditional color change from yellow to orange.

I don't know all my  
Trees, just one of the myriad  
Things I have failed to learn along the  
Way, like why oak leaves turn pale burnt  
Brown early but then cling to their branches for months before letting go.

I should have asked an  
Artist. I'm betting Russell May would have known each  
Vein of leaf and by heart how  
Each leaf names its tree by shape, texture, and  
Time of color change.

My holdout-against-change  
Tree reminds me of the last  
Rainbow I saw in dirty, industrial Ashland.  
Behind a smoking coke plant, it spanned the sky from ground to  
Ground with a depth and width of spectrum colors that I had never seen before.

Like that rainbow this  
Tree is beauty in contrast to the  
Ugliness of barren limbs before the first  
Snowfall – beauty made more  
Beautiful in the absence of same.



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I like things that are resistant to  
Change – my old boots I'd like to be buried in that never show sole wear and my old  
Leather coat that I bought for less than sticker from a  
Store manager who did not know leather and so could be convinced  
Flaws were present that made the coat worth less.

Had a student one semester who graduated from  
High school with me in '71 and had seen  
Service in the military, even claiming to have met  
Nixon so that he knew Nixon's favorite  
Drink – bourbon and branch water.

He said to me one day after  
Class, "You know, you are just like your were in high school,"  
And that I took as the best compliment I had ever received  
Because I want my children young again, and just like that tree I intend  
to find the name for,  
I have always disliked change.

---

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Ken Slone

## The Best Christmas Gifts

The best Christmas gifts are anonymously given;  
From shadowy givers  
Given, they are existent but from hidden places and nondescript time:  
Sunshine  
On the day of my father's interment,

A pearl red cardinal darting to and from the blue spruce outside  
my window,  
A wading bird  
Who followed me from one lake to the downstream area  
Of an older another,  
A great blue heron, fisher of trout and of men,

A downpour rain  
And the resulting fill up of nearby mountain stream,  
The sound of its flow early summer subdued by cicadas' songs  
Fell silent during the prolonged drought  
Of a long, troubled late summer and fall,

The soothing sound of that stream reborn,  
Fed anew from  
Rain gorged spring,  
Winds, sounding like a train  
As they moan through forest canopy on the high tops of the mountains,

The flutter of wings  
From an angel who stands statue guard,  
Facing a cemetery at the entrance of Oaklawn.



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In its hands it holds a red bird that I touch when I go there to visit  
Or to open my Christmas gifts.

---

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Matthew Smith

## The Dead Shall Never Walk Among the Living

Tradition places hands in the fire by twos.  
There is no room for the old amongst the new.  
Friends cast their lots and walk away.  
Sacrifice was a word for yesterday.  
Children are special because eyes are fresh.  
They change the light bulbs in heaven.  
They sweep the floors and do not complain.  
Children grow old and forever change.  
The magic is forced to rearrange.  
And the dead shall never walk among the living.

Contemplation seeks a form, holy and real.  
All tides rise and break the chill.  
Arms grow tighter around the waist.  
Love leaves a familiar aftertaste.  
A man will never understand a woman's mind  
because she holds riddles securely in a rose  
and the rose can't bloom in the company of men.  
Mystery changes the world we know.  
Men are forced to walk below.  
And the dead shall never walk among the living.

Pride strikes the soul when the work is through.  
Twelve hour days and the laborers are few.  
It's never too late to change the day  
until midnight turns the heart away.  
Apologies will not alter the past.  
Wine won't fill the dark remains.  
Yet all the earths glow comes from the sun.



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Hell cuts through the muck and washes clean  
as the drought-ridden fields all turn green.  
And the dead shall never walk among the living.

Warm empty beds in every American city  
Cold streets are crowded with all the pity.  
Dogs are barking in the hollow night  
and memories die as they gain first sight.  
You can't hold an angel in your hands  
for all that is good outgrows your form  
and all that is bad will shrink like stars in the sky.  
Reasons for these truths remain unknown  
but this is the time you can call your own.  
And the dead shall never walk among the living.

---

**Matthew Smith** received his B.S. and M.A. from East Tennessee State University. He teaches Sociology at Big Sandy and is coordinator of the BSCTC Honors Program. In his spare time, he enjoys international travel, spending time with family, and debating world politics with his dachshund, Jack.



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Navrin Madras

## My City

Before I had drawn a week's breath,  
Arms brought me into your embrace.  
New, your sights filled my eyes; your sounds  
Grew into my heartbeat.  
Amid your bustling streets, I  
Learned to cross happy ways.  
Often I think of you as I  
Reside thousands of miles away now,  
Ever wishing you enveloped me again.

Navrin Madras

## *Lingua domum* (The Language of Home)

I saw you in a book long ago.  
Nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs,  
Your cells differentiated and labeled.  
Clauses, phrases, idioms, expressions,  
Your organs dissected, tissues identified.  
It helped me see you sharply,  
Like a well-focused photograph,  
Stimulating the rods and cones in my retina.  
But how do I sense you today?  
In smiles I haven't seen in years,  
Heartbeats that sounded in silence,  
Laughter that filled every space,  
Touches that warmed my skin,  
Hugs that filled my arms.



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Familiar places that I visit without ever leaving.  
I open my mouth,  
You take me home.

---

**Navin Madras** teaches Computer Science at Elizabethtown CTC. His favorite writers include Martin Cruz Smith, P. G. Wodehouse, and W. Somerset Maugham.



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Wendi Williams

## Christmas Angel

It is soothing enough to maintain  
a family Christmas tradition.

Christmas is my life jacket this night,  
for tradition demands a hand-made card.

This obligation rescues me  
with purpose and diversion.

It is soothing enough to hear easy chatter  
in the distance. Tragedy delayed one more day.

I sit outside our door ajar,  
an ear alert to fitful stirring within.

Christmas images dance unwillingly,  
slow to congeal in my brooding thoughts.

My knife bites into linoleum, creates an outline.  
A word slowly rises. The letter A. Then N.

G-E-L. So appropriate,  
so frighteningly appropriate.

Inside, he stirs, deeply breathes sterile air.  
Please don't give my baby wings just yet!

I carve with care! I carve with gentleness.  
I carve health for my baby.

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The uneasy calm is pierced by sudden  
terror next door.

A flurry of nurses, a doctor, a jangling cart of  
desperate medicines scream down the hall to my neighbor.

I retreat to the safety of my softly breathing child.  
Darkness a haven, his mere breath my refuge.

A Christmas angel flutters and spreads its wings beside us.

---

An older KCTCS student, **Wendi Williams**, of Louisville, finds inspiration, joy and anguish in her four children, music and nature.



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Wendi Williams

## Dandelion

This dandelion, my friend, my foe,  
Intrudes upon my plot.  
Her golden mop sings out her will  
To prove her right to stay.

She grows with vigor,  
Her leaves grow long.  
She puts my plants to shame.  
She puts down roots  
With stubborn pluck,  
She will not give up easily.

But wait! In aging yet another  
Fragile beauty appears.  
Summer gold fades to gossamer grey  
Eagerly bearing seeds.

She waits only for a gentle breeze  
To disperse future generations.  
She will not give up easily;  
She proves her right to stay.

---

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Wendi Williams  
**A Jazz Tribute**

Duke and Billy, of one melodic spirit.  
Each kindling for the other's soul,  
Together spinning jazz phrases,  
Weaving them into success.

Duke spoke this of Billy,  
"My brain waves in his head,  
And his in mine."  
Their notes bound in tight unity.

But cancer came knocking,  
Billy fought best he could.  
His last song called "Blood Count,"  
He confronted death with jazz.

A tribute recorded, the session complete,  
Duke's fingers caress the keyboard, alone.  
His hands sing emptiness and grief;  
Sorrow, phrased in exquisite tones.

The recorder, unstopped,  
Captures Duke's tender keen.  
A private moment so intense, so sad,  
The language of anguish in song.

---

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