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# Feather Memory

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# **FEATHER MEMORY**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English and Philosophy  
Murray State University  
Murray, KY

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

by Taylor Grizzard Emery  
May 2018

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank Allen Wier and Josh Adair, readers on my thesis committee.

I also want to thank Carrie Jerrell, Ann Neelon, Betsy Puckett, Nita King, and Keith Winkler who made the residencies manageable, bearable, and enjoyable.

Thank you, Danielle Nielsen for answering all my thesis questions. Thank you, Jacque Day for help on *New Madrid*.

I would like to express my gratitude to all my former writing instructors, especially Tommy Hays and Julia Watts.

Many, many thanks to my friends and colleagues, Jeannie Randal, Mike Schnell, and Dave Till for believing in me when I wasn't sure I believed. You will never truly know the appreciation and gratitude I have for each of you.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to Christina Olson, my thesis director, who came into my life and provided me a life-saver at a time in my writing career when I needed someone to rescue me.

Last, but not least, thanks Chuck.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Curiosity and passion are invaluable if you want to grow as a writer and push your writing to where it doesn’t just sit on the page waiting to be read, but seems somehow to literally jump off the page, *demanding* that the reader sit up and pay attention” (Moore, *Truth* 7).

I wasn’t one who wrote diaries and journals while I was growing up. That’s not to say I didn’t attempt to write, but whether it was my horrible spelling or the fact that my parents read my thoughts, I never consistently continued. Journal writing was for teenage angst; I never imagined creative nonfiction to be associated since the word was not in my vocabulary. Also, writers were dead white men who lived in different centuries.

But, I knew I could write, or at least I knew I could write essays needed for school. My grades in English classes were high. When I finally went back to college, I discovered I could write scholarly essays. In the English program I was in, students were required to write substantial essays, and some instructors suggested that undergrads and graduate students attend and present at academic conferences as part of the course grade. In my master’s program, I was fortunate enough to have two professors who felt this was imperative. In addition to our course work, we were expected to attend a state conference, such as the Tennessee or Kentucky Philological Association annual gatherings. These conferences didn’t have creative nonfiction as an area. At one of the Kentucky Philological Association’s annual conference, I presented an essay, “Trees and a Sense of Place in Caroline Gordon’s *Penhally* and *The Women on the Porch*,” that I’d written for a

seminar on Clarksville Renaissance Writers. A few months later, I was surprised to receive an email stating that my essay had won the Kentucky Prize that year, which meant my essay would be published in the Association's annual journal. Since the announcement came via email and not a formal letter, I thought the notification was a joke being played on me and didn't tell anyone about my supposed success. When I saw my essay in print at the next year's conference, I had two epiphanies. First, the email was true, and second, I could write well enough that someone, other than my professors, decided my writing had merit. Some of my other scholarly essays have been published since that first one, but I wanted to try writing something different.

If I could write academic pieces, could I transfer my skill to a genre I was beginning to hear about, creative nonfiction? The genre was explained to me by my graduate mentor when creative nonfiction was in its infancy. I'd thought the genre was a cross between scholarly essays and those written by Mark Twain and Molly Ivins. That wasn't the explanation I was given, and, in fact, the information was so convoluted that I thought I was being steered away from any attempts to learn about this writing style.

When I read Julia Reed's *My House on First Street*, and Rheta Grimsley Johnson's *Poor Man's Provence* and *Enchanted Evening Barbie and the Second Coming*, another writing epiphany happened. I'd found the type of writing I wanted to try. The creative nonfiction bubble kept floating in my head, occasionally causing synapses to break the surface of my consciousness. Plus, I knew I wanted a quote, terminal degree, unquote. I'm not sure when or how I found the Murray State University Low Residency MFA program. However, I was disappointed that that I'd missed the application deadline to begin the program, and I almost waited too long for the next application deadline. I'd

submitted everything but letters of references. I kept putting off asking anyone for a recommendation. What if I asked the individuals I had in mind to write letters, and then I failed—both them and myself? What then? I was surprised at the belief these folks, who wrote my letters of references, had in me and my abilities. Once the requests had been made, and everything was in place, I couldn't turn back.

Mistakes were made when I came into the program. Originally, I wanted to write a creative nonfiction book about a woman from my hometown; however, during our first orientation, we students were discouraged from attempting to write 'The Great American Novel' while working on our MFAs. My situation had to be reevaluated. The second mistake I made was with the material I sent in as my first workshop pieces. Students were told to send in up to twenty-five pages. In for a penny, in for a pound became my mantra for this. Having never participated in a creative writing workshop, I sent two academic pieces I'd given at conferences, all twenty-two plus pages. Fortunately, Tommy Hays was my first mentor. He didn't throw me out or chastise my selections. He did offer constructive criticism of my work: my sentences were too long, but I had great research skills. My confused cohorts that semester, five fiction students and one other creative nonfiction student in the class, didn't really know what to make of my workshop pieces. I know only three, and one was Tommy Hays, read every sentence in my submissions. To those who suffered through my enthusiastic but misguided expository efforts, they will never fully realize I much I appreciated their attempts to get me on the correct track.

Tommy Hays suggested readings for my annotated bibliographies that encouraged me while providing definitions of what creative nonfiction was and is. Our text, Alice LaPlante's *The Making of a Story*, was geared to fiction writers, but LaPlante included a

chapter or two on creative nonfiction. Tommy Hays had us to use quotes from LaPlante's book we thought were significant to our writing to explain our annotations. "Paying attention to concrete sensory details does not just fall into the domain of fiction. Rather, thinking small and particularly is just as critical with creative nonfiction" (LaPlante 119) resonated with me, and one I used for an annotation assignment of Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. For both fiction and creative nonfiction, 'concrete sensory details' are imperative for setting, which is not a literary element I associated with creative nonfiction. Lamott uses the analogy of set designs from drama. She wants writers to think of the rooms and all the sensory details found there: "Every room is about memory. Every room gives us layers of information about our past and present and who we are, our shrines and quirks and hopes and sorrows, our attempt to prove that we are more or less okay" (Lamott 74). Sensory details are something that I didn't always include in my writings, and I've tried to incorporate more of these sets and rooms, which then adds more depth to my writings since those initial workshop submissions. I also attempt to keep this concept in mind each time I begin a new piece.

Lamott, along with Dinty Moore, also maintains that writers have a duty and a responsibility to tell the truth. However, Lamott asserts that "telling the truth turns out to be about as easy and pleasurable as bathing a cat" (3). Sometimes, in creative nonfiction, telling the truth involves a bit of fiction, or to paraphrase Emily Dickinson, creative nonfiction writers tell the truth but at a slant. In David Sedaris' story "Us and Them," he recounts how he hears his mother talking with a neighbor about a boat trailer while he's in his bedroom, behind a closed door, deciding which Halloween candy to give up. His sole focus is his candy, not his mother's conversation, which he's presumably unaware

of, yet readers find the entire scene believable because of the layers of sensory details. He's telling the truth of his situation whether the words he maintains his mother said are the absolute truth. "Everything we need to tell our stories in a reasonable and exciting way already exists inside each of us" Lamott maintains (181).

Additionally, "one of the hallmarks of creative nonfiction is precisely that: That it infuses a subject with openness, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs of the writer" (LaPlante 626) was a concept that I slowly learned through my semesters. My second semester was disastrous for me. I couldn't connect with my mentor or my writing. In fact, I was so depressed and discouraged, I considered giving up the program. Almost. But I'd been awarded the Jesse Stuart Fellowship, and I'm stubborn. I decided no matter what, I was not stopping. My perseverance was rewarded: I revised "Bird on the Road," discovered flash nonfiction through *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Flash Creative Nonfiction*, the connectivity of essays and poetry by reading Donald Hall's work for a genre seminar, and worked with Allen Wier on the creative nonfiction selections for *New Madrid*. In reading other creative nonfiction for *New Madrid* consideration, Allen Wier allowed me to voice my opinions on the writing I thought had merit or didn't. We sometimes had minor email disagreements, but those viral conversations were always civil and cordial, and I began to understand the art of discernment from him. All of this was a bit weird for me; during this time, we had never met. Meeting Allen Wier after the completion of the Spring issue of *New Madrid* reassured me that he was the kind and generous person I'd first been introduced to via email.

If Allen Wier unknowingly threw a lifeline, Christina Olson became my floatation device. Christina Olson served as my mentor for my third semester, and eventually, my

thesis director. I can unequivocally say that my third semester in the MFA program was the best and most productive. The stars aligned for the four students in the class: two poetry and two creative nonfiction writers. The class was equally divided between the two genres, and we were encouraged to incorporate elements from the other genre into our particular writing genres. When I failed miserably at writing a borrowed form, or hermit crab essay, Christina Olson only laughed and told me to file the piece away. Some pieces throughout the semester were to be filed far, far away, such as my attempt to change one of my essays into a poem, but I never felt that my failures were treated negatively, but rather with gentle humor.

After Eugene Gloria's craft lecture, Christina Olson had us work on revising a failed piece. "Music World: Nine Tracks" is the result of revisiting and reworking one of my failed pieces. The original was begun as a typical, short narrative essay. The bones were there. Structurally, the piece needed revising. Trimming, cutting, and getting to the essence of the work resulted in a much tighter, cohesive piece that is in this collection.

The same week as Eugene Gloria's lecture, Sybil Baker gave a craft lecture which focused on what she termed the defamiliarization of travel writing. Travel writing was a form I was interested in even though I'm like George Bailey from *It's a Wonderful Life* and haven't traveled a great deal. Sybil Baker discussed the fact that travel writing occurs not only on a horizontal plane but also exists on the vertical. Travel writing turns out to be more than travel journals or guide books; using defamiliarization, travel writing becomes writing with movement. With the vertical axis concept, writers are less focused on distance, but more about place, relationships, types of travel, and sometimes research. After hearing Sybil Baker's explanation of this different form of travel writing, I wanted

to try to write a travel essay. Additionally, Eugene Gloria had mentioned the *haibun*, a hybrid of prose and poetry, especially the haiku. He also referenced *duende*, which he explained as writers allowing themselves to go where they might not want to go in their writing, and as a place where writing becomes a sixth sense. I was so intrigued by these concepts that I had to attempt a mash-up of the styles. What resulted when I practiced *duende* was “Urban Legends,” a piece on the legends and facts concerning the time Jimi Hendrix spent in and around Clarksville, Tennessee. Writing on the vertical axis allowed me to look at what had occurred in my hometown and at places that I travel by daily. Because the subject was a musical icon, I wanted to include haikus in the piece to reflect song lyrics.

Writing poetry is not my genre but attempting to write haikus is a form I enjoy playing with. Each August, in Nashville, at the Tomato Festival, an annual tomato haiku contest is held. I continue to enter, but not win. However, last year’s failures resulted in a flash creative nonfiction essay. As an afterthought, I’d included the tomato haikus in one of the writing packets sent to Christina Olson. She humorously told me to file them, but then added that maybe I should try writing a flash piece from the haiku about Godzilla. I’d discovered flash creative nonfiction when I’d read *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, edited by Dinty Moore, and had become mesmerized by the fact a complete essay could be written using less than two thousand words, and some less than 750 words. A fellow creative nonfiction student who first told me about these said he couldn’t write one, and he was scheduled to finish the program before I was. Moore’s book was one I annotated during my second semester, but nothing came from that. I took Christina’s suggestion as a challenge of sorts. I’d assigned the “This I Believe” essays of

a limited length of 750 words and “The Fifty-five Word” short stories to my composition students, so I needed to try this new form. I also needed to remember Moore’s analogy of fire in writing flash nonfiction: It “needs to be hot from the first sentence, and the heat must remain the entire time...with a burning urgency of some sort” (xxiii). Poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil, one of the authors who contributed a chapter to Moore’s anthology, spoke at the university where I work. In her chapter in the anthology, she notes that lists sustained her in writing prose:

I find that writing flash nonfiction by making lists of knowledge or observation gives a sheen and a surprising depth to the subject that would otherwise take pages and pages of description to cover.

I like to think of writing flash nonfiction in this way as a kind of almanac keeping. Almanacs are used to record occurrences in the natural world (tides, frost dates, rainfall, sunsets and sunrises, etc.) so one can prepare for the future...There are no long, drawn-out descriptions of tornados or hurricanes, only when and where they occurred. No sensuous musings on moon-glow. Only that the moon did, in fact, wax and wane. Of course, writing flash nonfiction *too* much like an almanac would make for a rather sterile and tedious essay. But that’s where you—the creative writer—step in. (Nezhukumatathil 113-114)

Nezhukumatathil read her found poem that was made up of a list of “One Star Reviews of the Taj Mahal.” I tried imitating this with fortune cookie fortunes I’d saved. The flash nonfiction has the title “Fortunate Ones Get Their Wisdom from the Cookie,” which is almost all of the essay itself. I kept the second person references contained in the fortunes

as the essay's point of view since that made the writing more universal. At her reading, Nezhukumatathil advised anyone interested in writing flash nonfiction to pay attention to diction, why words are chosen, pauses, and white spaces. I had the opportunity to talk with Nezhukumatathil later, and she also explained that an awareness of the lyrical essay was a component as well, and sometimes to consider changing point of view. Ironically, she thought a three-page essay was daunting compared to writing poetry.

I changed the point of view again in the flash creative nonfiction essay, "Godzilla in Tomato, Arkansas," when I began revising the original haiku into a flash piece. Parts of my feeble and failed attempts at writing haiku were kept, and the piece was edited several times to its current 302-word length. I'd written short pieces before, but never like this; this essay scared me because it was the closest I'd come to writing a Lia Purpura-esque essay. In Lia Purpura's chapter in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, she compares the "shortness of prose" with miniatures, and contends that "the miniature is mysterious" and that "miniatures are the familiar, reduced to unfamiliarity" (1). Subconsciously, I'd taken something familiar, Godzilla, and reduced the concept of Godzilla to something unfamiliar. If I could only bottle this, my writing career would be established. Instead, I again realized that my writing improves not only when I listen to others' suggestions but also when I take risks. Eugene Gloria's advice that failure can move writers to a different position in their writings proved true, and I've learned to embrace the challenges of my failures.

Another found piece found me. Hearing Aimee Nezhukumatathil talk about the found form and Christina Olson discussing the same, I became attuned to things that might work for this style of writing. Working at the local Friends of the Library sales and

buying used books whenever possible to save money affords the opportunity to find weird, unusual, and forgotten items stuck between the pages. These finds, and hearing Sean Brock discuss finding old recipes stuck in books, became the impetus for “Between the Pages.” The essay began as the standard narrative essay that recounted the finds made during book sales, purchases, and with my own discovery of some family history. Since the topic was books and what can be hidden in them, it made sense to format the essay as book chapters in the revision. In attempting to find the correct order for the chapters, I literally cut the printed chapters apart and then pasted (taped) them back together in the new order. The arrangement was then numbered for easier movement on the computer page. The essay was twice found; first, the information used to compose the essay was found, and second, the ordering of the written information had to be found by deconstructing the chapters.

The fourth semester of residency brought more challenges since I was rapidly approaching my thesis, and I was developing more awareness of the possibilities of writing in my chosen genre of creative nonfiction. Another shift came in my writing when I wrote “The Task,” originally titled “Planning” as a workshop piece. I’d heard Amy Wright read when she first came to Austin Peay State University. The essay that still resonates with me is one in which she used her entire name as though she were writing about another person. I tried to do this with a short remembrance of an elderly friend who’d recently died, but the writing didn’t work the way I had envisioned. Later, I wrote about attending a funeral and what decisions must be made for the service and the dead. The piece was workshopped during my fourth semester with mentor Julia Watts, and she had encouraged me to revise the piece since it had humorous aspects to a tragic

and often devastating situation. Christina suggested using my name instead of the first-person references in the original. “The Task” evolves from these two mentors’ advice.

In T.J. Jarrett’s craft talk she had us looking at newspaper articles for inspiration. She had used personal ads from the 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers to create many of her poetic pieces, and she wanted us to have a taste of that experience. Eula Bliss equated the history of telephone poles with lynchings in her essay “Time and Distance Overcome” included in *Notes from No Man’s Land*. The experiment T.J. Jarrett suggested we do made sense having read Bliss’ essay. The newspaper articles were to be distilled down to five sentences, each less than ten words long. Then those sentences were to be combined into poetic prose forms. During this session, we worked in groups on our creations, so it would be many months later, at another workshop, before I could incorporate T.J. Jarrett’s lessons for writing into my own work.

Reinforcing the use of historical facts in writing resulted in one of the most compelling and enigmatic discussions that came from Josh Adair’s genre seminars where all the students, no matter their genres, came together to discuss the use of historical artifacts in writings. The books used for the discussions were Carol Ann Duffy’s *The World’s Wife* (poetry) and Emma Donoghue’s *The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* (fiction). Donoghue’s first sentence stopped me in my tracks, so much so that I turned to the back cover to reassure myself I was about to read fiction: “*The Woman Who Gave Birth to Rabbits* is a book of fictions, but they are also true” (“Preface” np). I wrote a question in the margin that I wanted to ask about this statement: ‘Isn’t this CNF?’ Donoghue continued to explain that her stories came from bits and pieces of historical facts she’d stumbled across, which was the basis for Josh Adair’s seminar. At the same

time, Julia Watts had us pick one story from *The Best American Short Stories of 2016* to lead a class discussion. My choice was Ted Chiang's "The Great Silence." When I chose Chiang's piece, I had no idea that it, too, was based on facts. Once I made the discovery and did a quick bit of research, my questions for both discussions became why are these pieces considered fiction? Another question arose when Chiang described his work as a fable, which is not normally based in fact, yet his tale is. A suitable conclusion or consensus was never reached for me, but I did realize that a fine line exists between the genres of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Some stories may be published as one genre, when in fact it could be argued the works belong to another, different genre. I need to remind myself of this as I write, especially with the use of historical artifacts or individuals. "Godzilla in Tomato, Arkansas," "Feather Memory," and "Urban Legends" are three that I think might fall into the fiction genre, depending on who read them.

In addition to this conundrum, the shorter form of flash nonfiction was reiterated in the craft talks that semester. Talking with Sarah Einstein, after she gave her craft talk on the hermit crab essay, I mentioned my interest in flash nonfiction. She asked me if I'd read Abigail Thomas' works. I hadn't, and Sarah Einstein directed me to find Abigail Thomas' books, *Safekeeping* and *A Three Dog Life*, as soon as possible if I had an interest in what could be done with flash creative nonfiction memoir. I devoured these books as soon as I could, and then Thomas' newest *What Comes Next and How to Like It*. Thomas, through her writings, showed me new way of looking a memoir.

With this new demonstration of flash nonfiction memoir, I came across the concept of micro-memoir writing and attended a workshop given by Beth Ann Fennelly in Nashville. She equated micro-memoir essays with hummingbirds. Hummingbirds can

fly forward, backward, upside down, and hover. Micro-memoirs can do everything that longer pieces can even in their short form. Micro-memoir essays are less than 200 words and retain some components of poetry. I used a flash piece I'd previously written as the jumping off point for the micro-memoir I wrote for the workshop. When I included the pared down version with a group of revised works, Christina agreed it should be included here even though she didn't consider the original flash writing the quality of my other writings. "I Refused to Acknowledge" is one of the shortest writing included here, with a word count of only 153 words, which is slightly longer than the found piece, "Fortunate Ones Get Their Wisdom from the Cookie," which is a mere 113 words. In writing "I Refused to Acknowledge," I was able to use anaphora, the poetic device of repeating words, phrases, or sentences that T.J. Jarrett encouraged in her craft lecture on using historical ephemera.

I'd inadvertently come close to writing a micro-memoir when I first composed "The Watch" that came out of an assignment using the first line, "I don't know why I remember," and was written as a one paragraph response to that query. At the time I wasn't aware of flash nonfiction, so I didn't realize I had composed my first flash nonfiction essay. This short essay was always one that I knew would be included in my thesis. The version here is shorter than the original. After I discovered micro-memoir, I edited "The Watch" to fit the less than 200-word length requirement of micro-memoirs. The edited version still epitomizes the loss of my grandmother and her gift a few days later.

"Bird on the Road" and "An MLK Day Remembrance: My Good Dog Story" are the longest and the most standard, typical narrative essays in this collection. Both are

remembrance pieces. “Bird on the Road” was written to remember a biology instructor and a particular woodpecker, along with other encounters with nature. “An MLK Day Remembrance” is my attempt to write a good dog story like the ones I’d read in *Garden and Gun* magazine. In each edition, the magazine publishes a dog story. Some are humorous, others poignant, but all are interesting in the differing aspects of man’s best friend. I read these stories first when an issue arrives and have a secret longing to be published in this magazine. My good dog story is homage to one of my favorite companions.

One of my pastimes is knitting. “Knit Purls” originated as part of a much longer piece about unrelated conversations. When the distillation process of revising began, the knitting sections came to the surface. The sections on knitting language were written as another essay, which I sent to Christina. The second knitting essay focused on the metaphors of knitting language, and how knitters read patterns to decipher the structure of the piece. As a knitter, that ability translated to writing in developing the essay’s configuration. Even though we both thought “Knit Purls” was almost complete, she suggested combining the two, and the result is here. Knitting, like writing, can be mindless or can require total concentration from the individual.

Along with knitting, growing plants is another mode of relaxation for me. As I wrote at the beginning of the essay, I’m drawn to unusual plants, and some are still growing after many years. They’ve become stationary pets; I talk to them and treat them as part of the family. The plants from the same genus are as different as any creative nonfiction essays and are as individual as the essays in this thesis. Having several species of Japanese Maples, the next logical step seemed the purchase of a bonsai. When I

purchased the miniature plant and learned of its daily care, I decided to chronicle our relationship, not knowing if this would lead to an essay. The essay here is complete, but the actual story is longer, and I could write more. I decided to leave the ending where it is by telling it with a slant of truth.

Telling stories at a creative nonfiction slant came after reading the two craft books edited by Dinty Moore and his travel memoir *The Accidental Buddhist*. I also read his essay “Son of Mr. Green Jeans” in Judith Kitchen’s anthology *Short Takes*. The form of the essay is Abecedarian, and once I realized what was happening in the essay, I wanted to imitate what he’d done and create my own. I’ve been watching what is occurring with the Nashville, Tennessee, building boom, and what people want in their homes today. Having never lived in a house of my choosing, the question of what constitutes ‘affordable housing’ at all levels was the core subject behind “ABCDEFGHHOME.”

Observation is one key to good writing. “Lost Aerial Highways” and “I’ll Take You There” were both written as observations of events I’d experienced and what people gain or lose from those events. “I’ll Take You There” offers an explanation of my avoidance of elevators, especially one. I tried, although, to make the setting a location that could be anywhere, and to explain the blind trust humans have in machines and what is given up for convenience. Convenience was also the initial observation behind “Lost Aerial Highways,” and what we sacrifice daily under the guise of having modern conveniences without interruption. Julia Watts pointed out that “Lost Aerial Highways” has no first-person references, which was a subconscious attempt to adhere to my thesis director’s advice to limit first person references in my writings.

Food writing has become some of the most commercial styles lately. I, too, have a desire to write a foodie essay. “Barbeque Goats” began from that desire and was a much longer piece than the final incarnation found here. My mentor categorized the original as a feature piece for a magazine or newspaper, and suggested editing and revising. After much whittling, the shorter essay here is the result.

No one would assume “Feather Memory” began from an assignment to write a food piece. When a feather fell on the book I was reading in the Murray State quad outside the Pogue Library, the genesis of the story came. I thought of my friend Tom, who had an aversion to the different foods on his plate touching, and I began the food piece on cooking for someone with that phobia. Additions, deletions, revisions abounded before the final version here. Although, Tom’s food aversions are mentioned, the focus of the writing changed from a food essay to one about a dear friend, a gift, and unexpected loss. With the revisions, “Feather Memory” reminds me, in a way, of what Lia Purpura asked in “Memo Re: Beach Glass,” “*When is a piece cured?*” (138). “Feather Memory” also harkens to her assertion that any writing can seem as if it were

pulled as it is out of thin air, pulled from the place where that-which-we-didn’t-know-we-knew abides. Where so much gathers in a rich miasma until called forth by luck, ...an impulse to sketch, itchiness for form, abundance of love for an object, a drive to give small things their due, or the weight of a personal collection piling up, asserting its presence...the bright uselessness of joyful endeavors. (Purpura 139)

Through curiosity, failure, and investigation, Christina Olson allowed me to experiment with my writing, and I now have no fear of trying new or different styles.

Being allowed and encouraged to experiment and fail is rather freeing and not any aspect I ever thought of doing when I first enrolled in the program. Creative nonfiction, to me, consisted of traditional length and styles of essay writing. Having the exposure to different varieties and formats has provided a better understanding of the creative nonfiction genre, and what is possible writing in that genre. Not all great writings come from dead white men living in a different century.

Thematically I didn't set out to write about places or environment or family, but much like my first published essay, all the works here have a sense of place and what being in that place means. Whether that notion involves family, or lack thereof, and how family is defined or that we are all connected to the world around us, especially for those of us who live in the South, I've tried to explore the connectivity in this world, the imagined world, and beyond. I've also tried to delve into original and unique ways to express ideas in my chosen genre of creative nonfiction. I was surprised by what essays I thought I would include here and which ones are. I don't have a bulletin or white board next to my work space; I have a door that is covered in index cards. The cards have deadlines, affirmations, and lists of essays. The essay names on the various three by five cards vary depending on length, issues, and what I thought had merit: in, on the fence, major revisions, maybe. As my fourth and thesis semesters progressed, the number of cards increased. Essays moved. Each essay had its own card with more detailed info: complete, revise beginning, wait until others are done, trim, condense, work on ending, more lyrical, etc. Essays I knew would appear in my thesis dropped to the bottom of the door and out of thesis consideration. With these choices, I realized which needed more work, and I learned to trust myself with these self-imposed edits.

This last semester, I have wished that I could extend my time in the program in order to take more classes in creative nonfiction, especially now that I've had the exposure to the different styles of writing that comprise the genre. That's not possible; I need to cut the lifelines and find my own way. Hopefully, I will find some venues that will publish my writings, and I'd like to investigate chapbooks as one publishing option. I also realize failure will happen, but it's not a deterrent to my writing abilities. As long as I maintain my curiosity, any experience will help make me a better writer.

## **I Refused to Acknowledge**

the existence of the car, a '65 baby blue Mustang convertible, my father offered. He didn't dangle the keys, but the fact that the car sat, waiting, in his driveway was enough. I refused his offer. At the time I owned a British Racing Green MGB, leaky roof no one would slit. My father offered to pay for a new top. I refused that offer as well. When his friend, Howard, stopped in the record shop where I worked, cajoling me to accept the Mustang, I refused to listen. The car remained in my father's driveway. He refused to sell what he had purchased for me. The annual rust never refused its part, and I couldn't refuse my father's funeral. I refused to acknowledge my sister's reminder of the car's location. I refused to salvage it and the relationship my father tried to reestablish without my mother's knowledge.

## The Watch

My grandmother's gift was the pocket watch with an engraved train. To know the time, I pushed the winding stem; the cover flipped open, revealing the two hands' placement. When was the last time I saw the watch hanging by its chain from the nail on my orange bedroom wall next to my second-hand wooden desk? The unusual chain, comprised of one circular link separated by an embossed rectangular link, provided strength for the watch pulled from its cloth location. My uniform pocket was large, offering no resistance when I drew the watch out. Calculating patients' pulses was part of my nurse's aide job at the local hospital. The watch fascinated or calmed patients, depending on their ages. One older man volunteered to clean the watch for me. I didn't trust the watch's return and refused his offer. Long after I stopped summer work for college, the watch—silent, unwound, unaware of passing time—remained behind, unseen in my uniform pocket. The day my grandmother died, I retrieved the watch, wound it, hung it on that nail on that orange wall in remembrance of her. Then it vanished. No one confessed.

### **Knit Purls: A Knitted Language**

Even in the unusual seventy-degree temperatures, I wore the ubiquitous pink pussy hat of the Women's March. I had knitted it, along with two others mailed before Christmas to the Pussy Hats Project in Reston, Virginia, for some unknown recipients to wear in Washington, DC, on the same day other marchers everywhere donned theirs. Knitting three hats is a small number compared to what others made.

Knitting the three hats helped but knitting anything larger or more complicated became an uncertainty; I wasn't sure I could maintain the correct tension needed when knitting. Too much tension existed in my life, like most lives, to attempt bigger projects.

That day, I didn't knit. That day I walked up 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, chanting "This is what democracy looks like!" in response to "What does democracy look like?" on an unusually warm January day in Nashville, Tennessee. As the chanting faded, a young man next to me, who appeared barely out of his teens, nodded greetings, and then said, "I like your hat. Did you make it?"

I replied that I had.

Granny had knitted socks for the soldiers during World War I, or was it II? Her future husband marched in a kilt across Europe as a member of the Argyll and Southern Highlanders during World War I. Her two sons served during the Second World War: the older in the Air Force, flying fighters; the younger aboard a naval vessel. And she was an alien in this country at a different time in our history, but an alien nonetheless, who knitted.

“Cool. I wish I could knit. I’ve always wanted to learn,” the young man walking beside me said. I wasn’t sure if he was sincere or simply making conversation. Still, I tried encouragement.

“You can. Anyone can. You only need to know two stitches.”

My granny knitted a red cardigan for me every year that I attended grammar school. As I outgrew one, it was passed on to the cousin, sister, or friend to take the chill off. Each year Granny and I rode the bus to our dime store destination and purchased skeins of Red Heart brand yarn she needed. I watched her sit on the couch, close to the fire, fingers flicking the yarn over her needles, the knitted fabric slowly growing beneath her two hands and the needle pair. I wanted to knit and create something as she did. She taught me to knit, to manipulate the yarn on the needles in the most rudimentary way. Eventually, I wanted to know more. By that time, I’d lost my mentor and learned knitting involved more than what I originally learned.

Knitting has a language all its own. Reading a knitted pattern is like reading a foreign language within English. Familiar letters and numbers are there, but in strange configurations. Of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, knitting uses a few of the known letters as abbreviations for stitches the knitter makes: K (knit) and P (purl); sometimes numbers precede or follow the letters. How knitters execute these two stitches determines their final product. K1P1 is different from K2P2 and radically different when the letter S (for slip K or P) is inserted into the equation: K1 S1 P1. Reading this wooly shorthand not only provides the directions for the individual rows the knitter should complete, it also provides a map of how a simple string will transform into a three-dimensional garment, if the knitter is advanced enough to translate the language of knitting.

Most knitters begin, like I did, with basic patterns before progressing to more complicated ones involving cables. These basic stitches are sometimes referred to as mindless knitting. Once knitters achieve muscle memory for the stitches, this type of knitting requires little thought to follow a pattern. The two most common are garter stitch and stockinette stitch. In garter, all the rows are made up of knit (K) stitches. The pattern might read: CO (cast on) 54 st (stitches). K (knit) all rows until piece measures 54 inches. Then BO (bind off) all st. The other easy pattern is the stockinette stitch (St st), in which the knitted rows alternate: one row is K; the next is P (Purl, or backward K). Most manufactured garments are constructed in this way. Sometimes, reversed stockinette is used. The purl side becomes the front of the fabric, and the knit side the back or inside. Apparel cuffs, brims, and hems are made using the same two stitches, but in a different pattern, either K1P1 or K2P2. This combination of stitches makes a ribbed fabric that is slightly tighter but stretchier than the garter stitch or stockinette stitch.

Advanced knitting patterns become more complicated although the same two stitches are used. The manipulation of those stitches creates the different designs, and without introducing any color. Monochromatic designs are as beautiful as those with color. Cable patterns can run vertically or horizontally on the knitted piece. Some designs form outlines of animals or trees. A complicated cable design in ecru speaks more if knitters know how to read the stitches that create the design, much like a simply knitted pink hat tells anyone who sees it what the wearer believes. Some cable designs tell others where the wearer is from; others carry covert messages. I learned this not from reading patterns but from reading *about* the patterns. With this discovery, I wondered if my

granny knitted any of these designs or if her only espionage was knitting love into red cardigans.

Modern knitters ply their craft wherever they can: soccer practice, baseball games, doctors' offices, carpool lanes, coffee shops, lectures, wherever snatched moments of time occur. One row or two, the project moves slowly toward completion. Uncomplicated patterns allow for focus on other aspects than what is happening with the yarn and needles. The knitters enter a Zen-like mindless state, where they can concentrate on other things. George Singleton complained to me one time about a woman in the audience who knitted throughout his talk at the Southern Festival of Books. He didn't think she was paying attention to him. How can anyone *not* pay attention to George when he's talking? I assured him that the woman was listening; she was knitting socks, which most knitters consider 'mindless knitting.' The knitting is so repetitive that once the garment is going, knitters don't refer to or read the pattern, which frees the mind to concentrate on other things, like listening to someone interesting. "Oh, okay," was George's response as he fished his cigarettes out of his jacket pocket and lit one. His practiced mindless motion was the same as those who knitted without thinking.

The next year at the Southern Festival of Books, I didn't notice anyone knitting during George's session. I pointed this out to him afterwards. I'd brought my knitting but arrived too late to get a seat. Standing isn't conducive to knitting. Although some people can, I can't.

"Ha-ha. Good thing," George responded later.

Although knitting is comprised of two stitches, it has many styles and shapes. The pink hat silhouette reminds people of cats' heads. The design emphasizes the symbolism of

resistance, feminism, and women's rights based on the euphemism of a female's genitals. One of my favorite design styles is Aran. Aran sweaters are most associated with cable work, but designs go deeper. Like most garments, Aran sweaters were created out of necessity, to protect the wearer from the elements on the Irish Islands. Protection was only one aspect, providing information was another. The designs formed by the stitch combinations

can impart vast amounts of information to those who know how to interpret them. Aran sweaters were, and remain, a reflection of the lives of the knitters, and their families. These Aran sweaters were often used to help identify bodies of fishermen washed up on the beach following an accident at sea. An official register of these historic patterns has been compiled, and can be seen in the Aran Sweater Market on the Aran Islands. ("History")

The dichotomy of knitting a garment to protect a loved one, while knowing the same garment could be used as identification in the event of a tragedy couldn't have been easy for the knitter.

Knitting Aran sweaters is not for the faint of heart since a sweater "contains approximately 100,000 carefully constructed stitches and can take the knitter up to sixty days to complete." The familiar designs of Aran knits are symbolic. Fisherman's ropes are the cable stitches, with hopes for good fishing. The island's small fields are represented in the diamond stitch, which are sometimes filled with moss stitches, depicting seaweed fertilizer. Zig-zag stitches are the "twisting cliff paths on the islands." One of the oldest and most important is the Tree of Life, which represents the clans and

their totality in Irish society (“History”). Symbolic knitted designs morphed from the complicated Aran cables into the simplistic pink hats of resistance. The color, in all its varying shades, along with the shape of the hats, signaled what the wearers believe. Pink hats aren’t for identifying bodies, or at least, everyone hopes not.

A week after the Women’s March, I was again in Nashville in my favorite yarn shop spending more money than needed on more yarn that wasn’t. In one of the shop’s front areas, a class was going on, and I was close enough to hear a female voice declare: “Melania Trump knits.”

A distinct and audible silence occurred in the class area following the statement. Counting the seconds that passed after the declaration, I waited with the class members for someone to offer a response, or at least ask if the statement was factual. Another few seconds passed before a different female voice simply said, “She doesn’t look like a knitter.” A chorus of indistinguishable voices joined in, their individual sentences unintelligible.

What do knitters look like? The customers in the shop were from all walks of life and all genders. Knitters are Christians, Jews, Muslims, gay or lesbian, college students, retirees, transgender. Whites, blacks, men, women, Hispanics, Asians, tourists from across the country and from other countries had been in this shop when I’d been there, and I don’t make the one-hundred-mile round trip that often. Wealthy, middle class, lower income? I’m certainly not in the same income bracket as some based on the store’s zip code.

Leaving the knit shop, I repeated the overheard comments to Chuck. Driving to the record store to pick up a ukulele album reserved earlier, Chuck simply said, “I think Melania Trump is an abused wife.”

“Really?” and the discussion turned to her idiotic husband.

These women, their knitting and their lives swirled in my mind as I continued up Second Avenue’s hill under a sky the color of heavenly azure. The chanting subsided. I told the young man knitting wasn’t difficult, and he could knit if he wanted. After being reassured how easy knitting was, the young man asked, “Have you marched before?” I nodded. “Do you mind me asking when?” he questioned.

I smiled, “Oh a long time ago...before you were born.” I’m not sure what he thought, but for me, thinking back that far was uncomfortable. Those days were dark, and I hoped that as a nation, we would never go to that place again. But here everyone was— clad in simple knitted pink hats, marching in protest on a bright, beautiful, warm, sunny day in January. The chanting began again, eliminating further conversation. The young man walked ahead, swallowed by the sea of knitted pink hats.

### **Godzilla in Tomato, Arkansas**

I'd tear through boxes of Big Boys, pop baskets of Sun-Golds, and consume bushels of Cherokees, stuffing my insatiable greed for tomatoes. That addictive appetite might be squelched finally in this town. Crates of the red, yellow, green, and purple orbs shine like rubies, topaz, emeralds, and amethysts in my massive hands, but they won't have that mineral crunch between my molars. Pop, squish, and the rainbow juice runs from each side of my reptilian grin of delight. No hiding the satisfaction of consummation, the addiction satisfied. Those morsels will not succumb to Bloody Marys. No need for Duke's Mayonnaise; a sandwich won't stop these cravings. Cornmeal is a satisfying addition, and I'm patient. Fried green tomatoes have their own characteristics that come with cast iron heat. However, the best way to eat tomatoes is right off the vine. Splat, splat, splat. The citizens of Tomato, Arkansas, thought they could run me out of town by throwing their commodity. The results were unexpected. I stopped, but only to lick and pick the tomato goblets from my face and leathery chest. A flat tomato is better than no tomato, and everyone knows nothing tastes like a homegrown one. Some people think I frightened the Tomato townsfolks so badly that they abandoned their island town. I didn't intentionally scare the farmers from their fields and markets the day I came to Tomato, Arkansas. When I stepped into the Mississippi, I splashed excitedly and accidentally flooded the town. Too eager for those vegetable-fruit orbs. People misunderstood my exuberance and thought the flooding might occur again without warning. Their town died

like a tomato with blossom-end rot. Forgive me, I mean no harm but can't help myself.

Tomatoes are my opioids. I'm in the middle of a crisis and cold weather's coming.

## Feather Memory

A feather silently drifted onto the page of my book. Not a large feather from a wing or a tail, but a downy feather from the bird's breast or belly. In the fallen silence, Tom Malone said hello.

I put the feather between the pages of my book. When I get home, I'll place the feather among the others Tom collected, and I've added to over the years. Tom's feather sculpture will never be complete.

Good Friday, 1998: our friend Tom died of a brain aneurism.

I don't see Tom anymore, but I see or hear parts of him daily in every room of our home. When Chuck plays the guitar Tom crafted from the Gibson Guitar Factory dumpster after Chuck's '56 Les Paul was stolen, or when Tom's own music plays. Black and white cats sit in a tree as I come down the hall; the astronaut from the tobacco barn weeps when it's hot in the kitchen; the man and the women picnic in the living room, along with the feather sculpture

These feathers of Tom's don't overlap as they did on the bird before coming loose. In his sculpture, they pile against one another randomly. Tom's feathers and colors of his paintings, mix and swim into one another, but not his foods.

Diane—or was it Lisa—I can't recall which incarnation of girlfriend needed Tom fed while she was out-of-town. Friday would be good for breaking bread. He tended to forget to eat if he was involved in a project. Lisa, I think, reminded us that Tom would eat almost any food as long as the choices never touched one another. I'd heard of people

with this phobia, but never realized or noticed Tom was one—I'd never had to think about foods touching or not. Peas and carrots were definitely not part of the menu. Mac and cheese were questionable. Pizza? I wasn't sure.

What we cooked that good Friday night Tom came to dinner isn't in my memory. I do remember putting each serving of vegetables in individual ramekins and placing them on his plate, cafeteria style, next to the meat. When I sat down, Tom sheepishly grinned, "Lisa must've told you." I nodded. Tom smiled again and pulled something from his denim jacket pocket, performing a magician's trick.

He handed me a four-ounce paper Dixie cup, the type found in bathroom dispensers. Inside, I found a Kleenex, enclosing something. Gingerly, I removed the parcel and carefully unwrapped the hidden item. In the layers of Kleenex, a minute, wooden fish, no larger than a lima bean, swimming between seaweed formed from spiral wood shavings, emerged. Tom had carved other wooden fish, but none this size. My delight embarrassed him, the sculptor, painter, musician, video photographer, former adult bookstore manager, VW repairer, and not-yet-dead dear friend.

That unremarkable Friday night we began to eat, the tiny fish atop the upended Dixie cup in the middle of the round, oak dining table. The black and white cats played in their tree at Tom's house; the man and the woman had not begun to picnic; the molting feather sculpture only started; the tobacco barn astronaut had not begun weeping in the kitchen that good Friday night.

### **A MLK Day Remembrance: My Good Dog Story**

Rufus appeared on this MLK Day, just like she always did on the third Monday of the new year. This year was different, though. Maybe because the day was so cold. But it's sunny, I thought, not snowy. Maybe I saw her because I was off—literally had the day off, but also off physically and mentally. Whatever the reason, she was there in all her brindled beauty.

Rufus, our Great Dane, from Animal Control: AKA the pound. We didn't adopt her; we inherited her. My mother rescued Rufus from the pound. Literally. Rufus' time left was down to four hours when my mother signed the papers.

"Isn't she a bit large for you?" I asked my mother, who'd never owned a dog weighing more than twenty-five pounds.

A slow, drawn out "Nooo," was her reply. Mother arranged to have the dog checked out and spayed the next day. After Rufus came home, we discovered she had no concept of commands, especially "Come here" or "stay." She did what she wanted. Watching my mother attempt to walk a dog who weighed almost as much as she did was comical and worrisome. She wanted the dog. She'd have to figure out the situation.

Two weeks later, my mother was on a plane to Boston to see one cousin's wedding and to visit my aunt, her sister, and leaving me and Chuck watching her house and taking care of Rufus. We soon realized she wouldn't listen to us either. Chuck decided to walk her without using a leash. The dog could run, fast. She thought we were

playing a game of Tag, and she was ‘It’. She was it, but not in the way she thought; this wasn’t a game. One vision I have of that day is of Chuck chasing Rufus, silhouetted against the afternoon sky, looking like Japanese shadow puppets.

When my mother returned, she decided two things: Rufus was too big for her and Chuck had bonded with the dog. We loaded her, her leash, and the bag of dogfood into the back of my yellow, ’78 VW convertible bug, and drove the 10 miles to our house in the county. We lived in a 900-square foot, shotgun house that sat on three quarters of an acre of land at the edge of the Stack’s, our closest neighbors, two-thousand-acre farm. Our yard was triangular, similar to the *Star Trek* logo design on the characters’ uniforms. The driveway bordered the Brown’s cattle farm, and across the road was the Brown’s soybean field. The Stacks lived across the pasture, but other than them, we had no human neighbors. This would be a better place for Rufus than my mother’s 1960s style subdivision.

Rufus was a small Great Dane, almost eighty pounds, brindled red, and all legs. Standing on her back legs, with her front paws on my shoulders, she was about five and a half feet. The vet guessed her to be one and half to two years old. Her tail cleared the coffee table with one wag, and nothing left on the kitchen table was safe. She chewed Chuck’s Boston Red Sox baseball cap, my straw hat, and several pairs of shoes. Whenever she became excited, she had a habit of rocking back and forth, from her front feet to her back feet, looking like a rocking horse. If she was tied to anything, she’d bark and rock—continuously. But, she had a gentle soul that belied her size. She became my protector, although she’d lick someone rather than attack them. Gandy, a three-pound Pekingese, was our other dog at the time Rufus joined the family. Rufus and Gandy

became inseparable. Gandy sometimes thought he was Rufus' size, but Rufus was always careful around her tiny companion. They'd sleep together on the couch; Rufus stretched out with Gandy on her hip.

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Other than being tied, two things upset Rufus. She was deathly afraid of thunderstorms. She was also completely housebroken, and feared not getting let out. If she did relieve herself in the house, she looked guilty and remorseful, and became almost inconsolable.

One summer evening we came home to find Rufus outside. Even with the small size of our house, she was seldom left out. My heart sank. I knew a robbery had occurred, and the vandals had let her out as they stole our meager possessions. That wasn't the case. Both the front and back doors were locked. No one had been inside. The window in the dining room, the highest window in the house, was broken out, not in. Shards of glass lay outside on the grass, not inside on the floor. Rufus needed to be let out, waited as long as she could, and then let herself out, through the window. We checked her thoroughly for cuts but found none. She didn't limp, she'd obviously nailed her landing after her vault through the window.

Although she was housebroken, she didn't want to stay out if she heard a crack of lightening or a rumble of thunder. Storms frightened her more than anything we knew of. In the spring and summer, we made sure she was always inside if the forecast mentioned thunderstorms within a hundred-mile radius of the house. In the South, thunderstorms can arrive unexpectedly—one minute sunny, the next, blam.

The sun was bright on that July Sunday as we left to visit Chuck's grandparents during their short stay in town. Not long after we arrived, clouds rolled in. No storms were forecast.

"Do you think we should go let Rufus in?" I asked.

Chuck thought it might be a brief rain so there was no need. His grandfather made fun of me worrying about a dog in the rain. Moments later, a terrific summer thunderstorm began—thunder, lightning, heavy rain pelted the asphalt outside the apartment. I looked at Chuck. As the storm subsided, but not so soon as to be obvious we were leaving because of a frightened dog, we said our goodbyes.

When we pulled into the driveway, no Rufus came running. We parked, opened the back door, and Rufus greeted us with a low, slowly swishing tail.

"How you doing, girl?" I asked. "How'd you get in?"

The answer was, of course, through the locked front door, which now stood open. The storm door was closed, but the storm door window was half way down because of the missing screen. The floor was wet from the incoming rains. Rufus somehow managed to squeeze her body through the half-opened storm door window and kick or push the front door open. She would never reveal exactly how she performed her magic trick. She did, however, remind us that she didn't like thunderstorms in the only way she knew how in her own dog way.

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Music filled our house. If the radio wasn't on, records were on the turntable. CDs later became the norm. Chuck also played guitar; on many nights, the music came from him. Rufus was also a music critic. We discovered her ability by accident.

Every night we watched the ten o'clock news. Every night, about half way through the broadcast, Rufus went berserk. She would be asleep; then suddenly, she was awake, hair on end, barking as if an alien spaceship had landed in our small yard. Nothing would satisfy her but to be let out. She dove off the porch and into the darkness beyond the porch light, after whatever she thought was attacking. Before the news ended, she'd be back at the door, wanting in. Once in, she'd stretch out; all was calm. We investigated each time she did this but found nothing. Her behavior continued for weeks.

One day, I put Herbie Mann's *Push Push* on the turntable. The recording had become my clean-the-house album. With Herbie Mann's rhythmic, driving flute playing, all mundane tasks became bearable. I'd played the album before, but Rufus hadn't been inside while it played. That day she was.

As soon as the music started, she began acting the same as she did during the late news. At first, I thought she'd heard something outside and let her out. She came back in as I flipped the record. As soon as the needle caught the groove and the music began, Rufus began her tirade. I lifted the needle from the record. She was still anxious but calmer. I put the needle down. Barking ensued. Needle up. Barking stopped. "Oh my gosh," I thought, "She doesn't like Herbie Mann."

That evening, when Chuck came home, I described the discovery. He thought that maybe the frequency of the flute hurt her ears. We agreed: no Herbie Mann, no Jethro Tull, no *William Tell Overture*, no flute music while Rufus was in.

Later, during the ten-p.m. news, Rufus again reacted as if we were being invaded. After putting her out, Chuck said, "She does that every time that waterbed commercial comes on."

“What?” I asked.

“Haven’t you noticed that commercial for waterbeds comes on about the same time every night, the same time Rufus starts barking?”

“What about it?”

“There’s flute music in the background.”

“You think that’s what she hears?”

The next night, we tried an experiment for Chuck’s theory. Anticipating when the offending commercial would come on, we turned down the television sound. She slept peacefully through the commercial and the rest of the news. Finally, the answer about what she heard. Aliens weren’t invading, Rufus was trying to kill the flutes.

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Rufus and I both despised snakes. I’ve never been able to tell a poisonous one from a non-poisonous. Snake! Any time I encountered one, I’d grab the hoe, rake, shovel, whatever’s handy, and chop. Chuck, on the other hand, has always looked and usually left the snakes. Rufus was like me. She’d grab the snake, shake it, drop it, grab, and shake until it stopped moving. Her method of annihilation worked well. If we’d see her, we’d try to stop her or at least find out what type of snake had met its doom.

After several days of late spring rains. Rufus and I were clearing the iris beds early one Saturday morning when she made a bee-line for the mimosa tree. A few feet short of the base, she stopped, titled her head in the way dogs do when they’re trying to figure something out, and then pounced. She came up swinging a snake that looked different from the usual black or garden snakes that became her victims.

This one had an unusual design that reflected the morning sun. Even I knew this might be poisonous. I screamed Chuck's name, and he came to the door. "What?"

"Rufus's got a snake. I think it's poisonous. Do something!"

He came out the door and down the steps. "Give me your hoe," he said before yelling, "Rufus! No!"

Rufus was shaking the patterned snake. She'd picked up the snake close to its middle. The snake's head curled back upon itself, trying to get at the thing that had it.

"Rufus! No!" Chuck repeated. "Drop it!" He was close behind her now. Rufus, thinking she had done something wrong, did as she was told—for once.

Whack! Chuck brought the hoe down across the snake. I was shocked by Chuck's reaction since he'd never reacted to a snake like that. He'd always been a live-and-let-live person, especially with reptiles and snakes.

"Did the snake bite her?" he asked.

"I don't think so. I don't know."

"Ru, come here," he said.

Rufus, surprised as I was by Chuck's actions, had backed away from him and her dead prey. She came slowly. Chuck rubbed her head, and then began checking for any puncture marks. Fortunately, he didn't find any.

I watched. "What's wrong?"

"That was a copperhead she had."

"Wow. Where'd that come from?"

“Probably came up from the creek in all this rain.” The creek ran from the woods bordering the Brown’s cattle pasture and filled the pond there. “That snake could’ve done some harm.”

The dead snake’s patterned body was beautiful. I was sorry it was dead but glad Rufus escaped harm.

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We had treated ourselves to a half gallon of Breyer’s deepest, darkest chocolate ice cream. This brand and flavor was a favorite, but we hadn’t had any in months because of the refrigerator. The refrigerator section worked fine; the freezer didn’t freeze, so we couldn’t indulge in ice cream at home. For the next few nights, the weather forecast had temps in the low 20s. Ice cream, in its carton could be left outside if we’d consume it before the temps increased.

Returning from the grocery, we left the sacred block of frozen chocolate delight on top of the outdoor grill, while we hauled the rest of the groceries in and let out the dogs. Gandy, the Pekingese, and Rufus, the Great Dane, stayed out until the groceries disappeared in the cabinets and refrigerator and dinner begun. A few hours later, dessert time arrived.

Chuck disappeared out the back door to retrieve the frozen chocolate decadence while I readied the bowls, spoons, and ice cream scoop. As he came back, I turned to see a face of dejection. Instead of carrying an ice cream carton, he held a flat piece of cardboard that was once a container. Now it looked like ones on the factory conveyor belts, waiting to be filled with half gallons of frozen delights, then closed, tabs tucked in, sealed. And it was clean. Pristine as when it was first printed with the brand and contents.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Not ice cream.”

We both looked at Rufus, who wagged her tail. She began rocking from her front feet to her back feet. She even smiled.

“No,” I shook my head and held the ice cream scoop.

“I found it just like this beside the grill,” Chuck said. “I hope she enjoyed it.”

Rufus licked her lips in anticipation of getting more, the empty bowls waiting on the counter.

“But chocolate’s bad for dogs,” I said.

“Does she look sick?” Chuck asked.

She didn’t. She looked happy. I could only imagine the ice cream brain freeze she’d had while she consumed the entire half gallon. What I couldn’t figure out was how she opened the carton without a rip or tear.

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Before we had the yard fenced, Rufus liked to take walks with our neighbors, the Stacks, an elderly couple who owned the farm that bordered our meager three-quarters-of-an-acre yard. They would walk down the rural road we lived on until they came to the end of their farm, then return across the pastures to their home. Other days, they walked the route in reverse. Usually Rufus returned with them, but some days she didn’t. Those days our search began. One day, she was at a house on the opposite side of the Stacks’ farm, visiting another dog, whose owner informed us of this fact. The woman was certain that the dogs were talking. Her own dog had been fixed she said; Rufus had been spayed. She smiled. “Then they were just talking.”

Another time Rufus disappeared, she followed a man who lived behind the soybean field across the road in front of our house. When she was abandoned at a trailer park by whoever owned her, the manager had tied her outside his office, thinking her previous owners would return. She stayed there for days before he realized no one was coming and called animal control. Rufus hated being tied. She constantly barked and rocked from her front to back legs until she was released. The neighbor knew who we were, but instead of calling us, he tied her up. We thought we could hear her. Chuck went to find out since he was fearful of what I would say to the man if Rufus was indeed there.

Another time we received a phone call from a woman who had traced the phone number from Rufus' rabies tag. We were not surprised when she told us Rufus was on her deck but were surprised when she told us her house was about three miles from ours, down busy State Highway 12, where no one does the fifty-five mile an hour speed limit. We thanked the woman, got directions, and went to retrieve Rufus.

The most confusing trek Rufus ever had occurred one morning when we couldn't locate her before leaving for work. With all her adventures, we were worried. We called her, drove down the road and back, calling her name, and asked the neighbors. The Stacks hadn't seen her. She wasn't visiting with the neighboring dog, and no barking sounded. Chuck assured me he'd look for her as soon as he could manage time from work. Two agonizing hours later, he called.

Chuck had returned home, but no Rufus. He drove around our rural area; still no Rufus. After almost two hours of traveling the rural roads around the house, he'd given up the search. As he came back into town on Highway 12 and then Old Ashland City Road, he turned left on to Madison Street, heading out of town and back toward our

house. On Madison Street, in front of Barksdale School, across the street from McDonald's, Rufus trotted down the sidewalk as if she knew where she was going. Her location was about seven miles from where we lived. Chuck pulled to the side of the five-lane street. He opened the passenger-side door of his pickup and called her name. Rufus knew his truck, so she had already turned around. Chuck was fearful that she'd run into the traffic, but she jumped in, and looked as if to say, "Well, there you are—been looking for you."

How she got there unscathed was anyone's guess.

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She did hurt herself from time to time. One morning she came to the back door with the skin on her rear left leg open from her hip to her ankle. The cut was so clean it looked surgical—no blood, no loose tendons, just the skin split and separated as if she tried skinning her own leg. She had caught herself on the barbed-wire fence separating our yard from the cow pasture. She came in, and I looked at Chuck. He was queasy around anything needing medical attention.

"Look," I said. "I need your help. I need to get Rufus to the vet's, and I can't drive and watch her, too. Can you help? Just don't look at it. You'll be fine."

He nodded. I grabbed my wallet, Rufus' collar, and opened the door to my VW convertible bug. I pushed the seat forward, and Rufus jumped in the back. A Great Dane in a bug. I got in the driver's seat while Chuck slid into the passenger seat. "Don't look at it. I can't handle Rufus and you at the same time." I needed his help, so I talked to them both as I shifted and drove the six miles to the vet's office.

When we went in, the receptionist asked what we needed. I pointed to Rufus' leg. "Oh" was all she said. We didn't wait long before Dr. Long saw us. The cut was clean, but they needed to anesthetize Rufus to close the wound. We had to leave her but could get her later that day.

When we returned, she had fifteen wire sutures, numerous internal ones, and a drainage tube. She didn't have a collar of shame, but she was woozy from the anesthesia. She was comical—a drunk Great Dane. She staggered out of the office and into the car; first the front feet, then the back. At home, we struggled to get her out of the car—front feet, back feet, wobbly Dane. Inside, she lay in the kitchen. As the anesthesia wore off, Rufus moved her head from side to side. This wasn't particularly funny. What had us laughing out loud was her tongue hanging out, sweeping the floor, making a clean arc as she moved her head from left to right, right to left. She was oblivious.

Rufus was supposed to return in ten days to have the drainage tube and wire sutures removed. The internal ones dissolved. Five days later, she pulled the drainage tube out. Thankfully, the antibiotics worked, so no damage was done with the early removal of the tube. When I called Dr. Long, he told me I could cut the wire sutures and pull them out with needle-nosed pliers in five days, if I was willing. To save a trip to the vet's, I could do it. All the sutures came out with Rufus' helpful assistance.

The second time Rufus tangled with the barbed-wire fence almost cost her life. One Saturday night as Rufus came in, I noticed her paw bleeding. She'd rubbed parts of her pads off before, so I thought that was the problem. This time was different. The blood came from between her first and second toes. I examined the area closely and found a small cut. I cleaned it, packed some gauze between her toes, and wrapped more gauze

around her foot. All this done with her licking my fingers and face. An hour later, the blood had seeped through, and she wasn't helping. She kept worrying with the makeshift bandage. I thought I hadn't secured the bandage well enough and found more tape for the second attempt at curbing the blood. Two hours later, the bandage was again bloody, and Rufus wouldn't leave it alone. I needed to repeat the process, but this time, after reapplying the bandage, I wrapped her foot in a plastic bag. She wouldn't be able to get to the bandage. Plus, it was almost midnight.

The next morning when we woke, the inside of the house looked like the set of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. Blood was everywhere—floors, couch, front door, anywhere the dog walked during the night. The bag and bandage were off. Rufus was limping on a bloody paw, leaving bloody paw prints. The cut was not that large, but the amount of blood wasn't normal. At 8 AM on Sunday morning, I called Dr. Long, and left a message with his answering service.

When he called back, I explained the size of the cut, what I'd done, and the amount of blood. I was scared. He asked if we could come to the office at eleven. He and his family were on their way to church.

“I guess three hours won't make a difference since I waited all night,” I said.

Three agonizing hours. I bandaged Rufus' foot, and we put plastic bags over her foot several times. Everyone finally loaded in the VW. We waited in the vet's parking lot, watching the newest plastic bag filling with blood. When Dr. Long arrived, minus his family, Chuck carried Rufus in and onto the examination table. He was beginning to turn green at the amount of blood he saw.

Dr Long asked him, “You all right? I don’t want to have to call the ambulance for you.”

I didn’t like his tone. I urged Chuck to sit in the waiting room.

“How about you?” he asked me.

“Never had a problem with blood.” I wanted him to concentrate on Rufus. I couldn’t understand why the small cut was still bleeding; it wasn’t that large.

Dr. Long began examining Rufus’ paw.

“Here, can you hold this for me? Just like this?” he asked.

I nodded and took her paw with her first and second toes spread. The bright light of the exam room confirmed what I’d seen. The cut was no larger than a half an inch, but it kept bleeding.

“You sure you’re okay?”

He was beginning to anger me. I’d told him blood didn’t bother me, so why keep asking?

“I’m fine,” I said again. “I’m just worried about Rufus.”

Thirteen stitches later, the bleeding stopped. The cut was only small, three stitches small, across the surface, but it was deep—ten stitches deep. No anesthesia this time.

Chuck returned from the waiting room and lifted Rufus down, and we walked back to the reception area. Dr. Long told me how much the Sunday morning small surgery cost. I had the checkbook out when he asked, “You want to wash your hands?”

Tired and still angry over the three-hour wait and his tone with Chuck, I said, “No thanks,” writing the check and leaving bloody fingerprints on its surface.

“The tetanus shot and the antibiotics should stop any infections, but if you have any concerns, just call. I’m glad you didn’t wait till Monday. With a cut that deep, she probably would’ve bled to death if you had. Her gums were showing a tinge of white today. Oh, and those sutures will dissolve.”

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The last time I saw Rufus was on MLK Day in 1998. She had refused to eat for almost a week. No dog food, no tuna, no chocolate ice cream, nothing. Chuck had taken her to the vet. The diagnosis was not good. The only recourse was to put her down. I couldn’t process the information of the loss.

We both had that Monday off because of the MLK holiday. The day was cold and snowy. The only way I could cope with the horrific reality of her last day was to dig her grave. I choose a spot by the hostas. I dug spadesful of cold earth and cried. The tears refused to run down my cheeks. The scarf wound round my face against the bitter cold caught them. My nose ran. My fingers became numb against the shovel’s wooden handle. A few cars passed, but none stopped. Didn’t those people know what was happening in my life? I was losing one of my best friends and protectors. The painful process continued. I dug until Chuck returned from his awful trip.

Rufus was in the back of his pickup, covered with her blanket. I couldn’t look at him or her. I went inside, cold and numb. Gandy barked. He had gotten out as I stumbled through the door and was at the back of Chuck’s truck. He was too little to jump in, but he knew Rufus was there. He barked at her like he always did when he wanted her to play, trying to entice her to get up and join him. I knew what Gandy didn’t.

## Between the Pages

### Chapter One

Sean Brock, the celebrated Southern chef, author, and owner of *Husk* restaurants in Charleston, South Carolina, and Nashville, Tennessee, posts, on social media, photographs of old and unusual recipes he finds tucked in the pages of the second-hand cookbooks he collects.

### Chapter Two

Cleaning out my father's house after my sister died, I found a facsimile of the 1895 *The National Trade Review*, Clarksville, Tennessee, edition, containing advertisements for business of the time, a short history of the town, buildings, and people. The copy belonged to my paternal grandmother. No recipes, cards, or photographs hid between the pages. Instead, marginalia appeared at intervals, providing me with previously unknown information about my father's family.

### Chapter Three

What's found inside used books is often confounding. The Friends group at the local public library holds a biannual book sale for library funds. For years, I sorted books for the sales. Volunteers discovered notes, bookmarks, cards, and photographs between the pages. We gave bookmarks to children. Found photographs were hung on a wall during the sales, in the hope someone would recognize the individuals. An undeniable sadness comes in not knowing who they are and why their photographs were forgotten

among the books' pages. Sometimes they were claimed, often not. We kept the unclaimed ones for another reunion attempt at the next sale.

#### Chapter Four

Thumbing through *The National Trade Review*, I stopped at an ad for Mrs. W. Rosenfield, Clarksville's leading millinery and dressmaking establishment, along with a drawing of the building. A squiggly drawn arrow pointed from the building to a written comment at the bottom of the page: "Mother Grizzard worked here as a hat maker." Great-grandmother a haberdasher, an explanation of her great-granddaughter's love of hats.

#### Chapter Five

Great-grandmother lost everything when her house burned. The owner of N.V. Gerhart and Sons, a dry goods store, helped her. "This man gave my mother her pot & pans & dishes when her house burned." Kindness demonstrated during stressful times knows no era.

#### Chapter Six

Someone told me about a woman who had died in the early 1960s. Her husband hired a cook/housekeeper to help with the children. Later, when the hired woman was asked how she managed to prepare meals the family liked to eat, she said she looked in the late wife's cookbooks. The pages with the grease splatters, smudges, and drips were the ones she used. The marred pages revealed, in residual evidence, the family's favorites.

## Chapter Seven

From *The Writing Life* by Annie Dillard, a greeting card fell half way out when I was reading in bed. The card's appearance was a surprise as I relaxed into pillow and book. Gone unnoticed between pages 56 and 57 when reading began, it now rested on my right forearm. I pulled out a belated birthday card. A cartoonish crazy woman in a purple turtleneck declared: "Sorry I missed your birthday, but I have an excuse." Inside she finished: "I'm brain dead." A handwritten explanation offered more: "That is not far from the truth...I'm in therapy & soon I'll know how to dial the phone. Hope you had a pleasant (after 30 they ar [sic] pleasant not happy!) Birthday—Love Sherry."

Did something occur that stopped the recipient between pages 56 and 57 where Dillard writes about the relationship "between the writer and the work itself?" (56). Opposite, her explanation of how she writes continues: "Now the thing is no longer a vision; It is a paper. Words lead to other words and down the garden path" (57).

## Chapter Eight

"Kenneth, Sr. ask [sic] me to marry him while we were sitting on this monument." My paternal grandfather proposed to my grandmother in the center of Greenwood Cemetery at the largest monument commemorating the veterans of the Civil War. Why would any man consider a cemetery or a Confederate monument as an appropriate place to ask a woman to marry him and expect an affirmative response? Who's crazier: the questioner or the woman who said yes?

## Chapter Nine

Recently, I purchased a used copy of Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings* to replace the one that couldn't be located. A hard copy arrived, book jacket still intact.

Only a slight tear in the right hand marred the cover. Stay at home, the flaps serve as book marks; travel with book, the jacket comes off.

The removal revealed an inscription in the upper left corner of the book's front cover. "Dear Penny, May this year be a happy & healthy one. All my love, Lisa. Mar 1984" written in red ballpoint ink. Why was Lisa wishing a healthy and happy year to Penny in March, three months into the new year? Was 1983 not particularly good for either? *1984*. 1984 portends improvement? Ask George Orwell. Penny sold the gift of lectures.

### Chapter Ten

When Aunt Jean sends books, items purposely stuck between the pages. Once, an unexpected Shaker cookbook arrived with twenty-five two-dollar bills bookmarking the pages. Try that with a digital book.

### Chapter Eleven

Beside the photograph of the Public School Building in *The National Trade Review* my grandmother wrote, "Howell School. We all started school here—Kenneth, Sr., Western, Lucille, Kenneth, Jr., Judy—" Paternal grandfather, great-uncle, grandmother, father, and his sister belong to those names. Uncle Tommy's name was missing. Too young to attend, or not yet born. I didn't know. Years later, I became another family student before the building mysteriously burned after a complete restoration from the 1999 tornado damage. No investigation.

### Chapter Twelve

Not all Grandmother's comments were about family. "I remember this" next to a photograph of a building, or "I remember him" appeared beside an individual's picture.

By one building's photograph, a penned editorial: "I remember this well—now a p. lot." Some comments were tragic. "I knew him. He was killed on a tractor" written about the grandchild of a prominent colonel. Another: "He and his daughter drank themselves to death," but she offered no more explanation. Was the daughter's problem a result of her father dying, or vice-versa? No one to ask.

### Chapter Thirteen

Sometimes, when used books are donated or sold, the previous owner tears out the first blank page. Something was there, but now it's gone. Others, knowing the book is leaving their possession, will line through the names and inscriptions with a black permanent marker. They've redacted their life from the book. Those individuals are more curious than the ones who forget inscriptions, cards, bookmarks, or photographs. Theirs is an intentional erasure of their lives.

### The Task

After attending a funeral, Taylor Emery began thinking about what type of service she wanted. No children were available for the task. She did consider ‘service’ an odd word since it implies a dead body is a vehicle that needs attention. In some aspect, after death, bodies do need servicing, since the previous owners are unable take care of them, so to speak. She stopped; she digressed from her plans. She began again.

Send invitations: Taylor Emery requests a celebration, New Orleans style. Supposedly, the dead have arrived at a better place. Their pain (whatever type) has been alleviated; they become glorious in death. Taylor Emery could finally be a goddess, or at least an angel. That’s what eulogists remind mourners.

Music. Taylor Emery loves music, even if she does hum off-key. If recorded music must be played, then The Beatles’ “In My Life” tops her list. The McCreary Sisters’ “Amazing Grace” and Dr. John’s “When the Saints Go Marching In” are no-brainers. Van Morrison’s version of “Old Black Joe” is another. Maybe that song’s not politically correct. Taylor Emery shrugs, about the song’s correctness or death in general, she’s not sure. But as everyone knows, Taylor Emery seldom intentionally ruffled feathers, but she wishes she had more often. She hopes no one will be offended. If they are, will they shun her? Talk about her? Taylor Emery thinks, *of course they will.*

For her bodily remains, cremation. A grave site isn’t a necessity with no one to bring flowers or trinkets on birthdays or Mother’s Day or Christmas. She doesn’t think

anyone would mourn after the initial period, although she'd recently been named 'the cool aunt' by a great niece's newly-minted-mother-in-law.

Scatter the ashes in the Gulf or in the garden. Just don't let them remain in the box—she shuddered—sitting on the child's chair in the unused bedroom (sister) or stashed under the counter of a wet-bar at a friend's home (like Sandy's parents). Janet keeps her dogs' remains in boxes on the hearth, so her dogs can participate in family gatherings, so to speak.

Or sell her ashes. Taylor Emery thinks that's legal; isn't that what happened with Truman Capote's after his sugar mama, Joanna Carson died? If taxidermy baby chicks can be sold and displayed in restaurants, maybe Taylor Emery's ashes could be used as stuffing instead of sawdust. Be creative, but don't flush any amount down the toilet as Renee did with her ex-husband's ashes, declaring that's what he deserved. Maybe he did, but Taylor Emery doesn't think she'd done anything that would warrant that response—but she isn't dead, yet.

Taylor Emery wants to watch her celebration of life, but what happens if death is the big sleep? Everyone dreams, but nobody is promised those wonderful dreams that no one wants to wake from. Taylor Emery remembers the desire to return to sleep and recreate whatever wondrousness was going on in the subconscious before that infernal alarm clock kept up its incessant buzzing. Her dogs don't understand any more than the alarm clock when they continually lick her sleep-wanting face until the reality of another day sets in with another lost dream with wakefulness.

Will death's big sleep afford no wakefulness? Once death knocks, the sleepy and alert must answer the door. What happens if she can't wake up to watch the revelry and sadness of her mourners? She wants to watch, but will she be busy in her new locale?

Whether there's a heaven or a hell is unknown, although Taylor Emery feels assured that some would say that after the 2016 election, America entered Dante's Tenth Ring of Hell. Maybe, she thinks, there's simply a place for all the departed souls to gather, except, of course, murderers, rapists, politicians, and other degenerates. Taylor Emery sighs, if there is such a place, maybe she'll get to hear all the musicians she missed in life: John and George, Stevie Ray, Janis, and Tom Petty.

Then Taylor Emery gets excited: do political confabs continue in the after-life? Molly Ivins and Tim Russert, along with Walter Cronkite and Huntley and Brinkley, oh my. Those astute, world observers will divulge what they think of the American political scene to Taylor Emery, if she can find the nerve to ask. She feels confident no lying is allowed in this sacred space, no pussyfooting around the issues. The truth can't hurt the dead; the truth sets people free as if death isn't freeing enough. Their responses won't be the namby-pamby yammerings of current talking-heads. If nothing else, questions of the universe will be answered, she thinks. Unfortunately, the replies will have to remain where they're found. Death provides the answers, but Taylor Emery realizes she won't be able to share with her earthly friends.

Sticking to the task at hand, Taylor Emery does wonder what to do about her pets and plants. Cats have a noted longevity, and her dogs are codependent. If they're still around, who will care for them once she's dead? Should she leave notes on their behalf, explaining each animal's quirkiest? Or leave her meager estate to the animals like those

cats in New York City? Taylor Emery can't imagine a life without dogs and knows she needs them with her to the bitter end. To survive the last days of her life without a dog is out of the question. And the plants. They're pets of sorts; they get talked to when they're watered, fed, repotted, or trimmed. "What am I going to do with my philodendra?"

Katherine Hepburn asked in *Desk Set*. Who will move Taylor Emery's plants in and out as seasons change, and marvel at the blooms and offspring produced? Her Japanese maples, hostas, night blooming cereus, and of course, her baby bonsai, Taylor Emery smiles.

The tasks list grows. But Taylor Emery's celebration of life will be grand. Embrace the unknown. She knows she wants everyone to be loud. Play music. Dance and drink and laugh. Don't be sad. Enjoy one another's company—or don't. At this point in her life, or death, Taylor Emery won't give a damn whether anyone gets along with everyone at the funeral celebration or not. That'll be the revelers' decisions. No more decision making for Taylor Emery; her life will be over. Remember, that's why everyone will come. Or maybe it's the food and booze.

Or maybe it will be the music. Taylor Emery prefers live music—the invitations could stipulate that everyone who plays an instrument bring theirs to her celebration. If they don't, or won't, they should be able to find suitable substitutes in the house. The piano will still be out of tune, along with the violin. Taylor Emery owns a couple of guitars, and enough ukuleles to form a band, not to mention a kalimba, ocarina, and digeridoos for those more esoteric musicians who come. Somewhere is a bagpipe flute, but no drones or bag. Plenty of spoons are in the drawer. If all else fails, the human voice,

along with hand claps and foot stomps, works nicely. Make music people. Celebrate.  
Remember, this is Taylor Emery's celebration of life, and she might be watching.

## Urban Legends

I saw Jimi Hendrix once—by accident. My father drove me, and Yvonne’s father, our neighbors, drove Yvonne and her friend Cathy to Memphis to see The Monkees. This trip was a sad substitute for my mother’s denial years earlier of a chance to see The Beatles with my much older cousin; it’s one of her refusals I’ve never forgiven. A young black guitarist opened for the teen heart-throbs. He was as out of place in the vanilla crowd as blackheads on prepubescent noses. Females hadn’t come to hear this individual. Who was this crazy person? I didn’t jeer like others did; I was taught better during classroom trips to hear the symphony. Even if we didn’t like what was being performed, be polite. And besides this music was interesting—and loud. These weren’t the guitar and ukulele sounds I’d heard watching beach movies with my cousin. My father later said he thought he’d made a mistake by agreeing to take me to this show when the ‘Negro’ appeared. He thought it was also a mistake to see Alfred Hitchcock’s *Torn Curtain*, and another made with *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Fantasies begin;

dreams of possibilities

No social nods come.

Little did anyone realize the opening act that night in Memphis would eclipse the stars, and the crowd would make history in their disapproval. Little did I know then that this guitarist spent time in Clarksville, Tennessee.

Parachute jumpers  
Screaming Eagles; duty calls  
unknown to Jimi.

“Hey Joe, where you going with that gun in your hand?” (Hendrix “Hey Joe”).  
Jimi Hendrix didn’t volunteer for his stint in the United States Army, and he wasn’t drafted. In 1961, after numerous juvenile arrests, he was given a choice: serve time or serve Uncle Sam. He picked his uncle’s service.

One O First service  
Army integrated, still  
no place for Jimi.

The legend of Jimi Hendrix leaving the Army, the 101<sup>st</sup> Screaming Eagles housed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was due to an ankle injury sustained during at parachute jump. Jimi did jump, but records show that’s not the reason he and Uncle Sam parted ways.

Musician foremost;  
even then would rather play ax  
than clean latrine.

Hendrix came to Fort Campbell in November 1961 and was assigned to the Repair Parts Section as a Supply Clerk. Six months later, he was such a problem that his immediate release was in the works. He was so inattentive to his duties and supervisors that he was tested for drug use. The test came back negative. Some of his lackadaisicalness was based on the rumor that Hendrix played guitar at night in the clubs along the Fort Campbell strip. One superior noted that “Pvt Hendrix plays a musical

instrument during his off duty hours, or so he says. This is one of his faults, because his mind apparently cannot function while performing duties and thinking about his guitar” (“Jimi’s Private Parts”).

The January 21, 1999, tornado blew away much of downtown Clarksville. In the aftermath and cleanup, all that was left were memories and sunflowers that sprouted along the corner of Franklin and Hiter Streets from Ely’s Feed Store. “The wind cried Mary...” (Hendrix “The Wind Cries Mary”). The last photograph on the roll of film shot a few weeks later showed a lone sunflower standing tall across the street from the Episcopal Church, its roof gone but walls still intact. A copy of the photograph was left on D.T.’s desk: church member, university professor, poet, Alan Ginsberg fan, and mentor.

Collins’ Music Store was around the corner from Ely’s. Collins was one of two music stores in Clarksville, where the hip, cool musicians in town bought, traded, sold, took music lessons, and swapped stories and licks. No myth that Jimi Hendrix was one of the many GIs who visited the store. Sam Collins, the owner, sold Hendrix a guitar when he was stationed at Fort Campbell. Hendrix couldn’t afford the guitar on his salary, so he made monthly payments. Sam kept the contract that Hendrix signed in the shop, but Collins’ Music Store didn’t fare any better than Ely’s Feed Store.

Tornadoes swirled  
from Southside past Austin Peay  
Jimi’s name blew far

Billy Cox, fellow Fort Campbell GI and Band of Gypsy bassist, once told us that Hendrix’s pawned guitar *might* still be in Clarksville, or maybe Nashville. He surmised

that whoever had it didn't realize what they had. When Cox discovered that Jimi had pawned his guitar, and then lost it because he failed to redeem the ticket for his guitar, Cox tried to find the instrument to get it back for Jimi and himself since he'd cosigned for the purchase. His attempts were unsuccessful.

Billy Cox came back to Clarksville to play a concert again sometime in the 1980s. This time it wasn't a beer joint or strip club but the local hotel's ballroom. Thirty-five people showed up but sounded like thirty-five hundred. Billy Cox and his band performed as if there were that many.

Pink Poodle had more;  
 one of many clubs played  
 AMVETS, Little Officers

Another urban legend wasn't a myth. At the time Hendrix was in and out of the military at Fort Campbell, local schools weren't integrated. African-American students went to Burt School and High School. The school's most famous graduate was Wilma Rudolph, Olympic track star and gold medalist. The high school was also known for its outstanding marching band, the highlight of any community event: parades. The high school also sponsored dances, and not just the homecoming proms the white schools had. At many of the dances, a 'house band' was supplied for the main act. There in yearbooks, are photos of the unmistakable smiling left-handed guitarist. He might have shirked military authority, but he fell into the ranks of the other musicians and wore the standard performance uniform: suit, tie, and polished shoes.

Years ago, in a local record shop, a surprised teenager came in, carrying a Burt High yearbook he'd found at his uncle's. His index finger hooked the page he wanted us

to see. Opening the book to the place he carefully held, he pointed at the figure in the background of one of the typical yearbook photos. That is Jimi Hendrix he asked—or stated, his voice a combination of the two, although he knew the answer. Then he told the story of the discovery, of how he and his uncle were sitting around after dinner, watching the game. He'd pulled the book from the shelf and began thumbing through it, partly from boredom, partly from curiosity. He saw the photo and began questioning his uncle, curiosity replacing boredom. Yeah man, the dude used to play all the time. They all did when we had a dance. I guess he was good. Heck no we didn't know who he was. He wasn't anybody, just another guitar player. Said he'd been in the army or had just gotten out. Heading to Nashville. Hoping to make it big. I guess he did. Never know who you're going to meet.

Degrees of Bacon:

Two degrees separation

musicians believe.

Burt School, long segregated middle school, was spared by the tornado and its aftermath. The university suffered major damage to several buildings, and the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System graciously offered some of Burt School's unused class rooms for university faculty offices. D.T. managed to secure an office and scare the bejesus out of a grade schooler, on the way to the restroom as D.T. was coming to his temporary office. Scared the little fucker was how D.T. related the encounter. Did white men with long hair and beards frighten Hendrix, or was he abnormally shy at a time when his teenage behavior wasn't completely understood? Did he feel more at ease on the stage of an all-black high school than he did in an integrated

military installation? Was Hendrix a rebellious teenager who might have been shot today for his same crimes and misdemeanors of the sixties?

“Crosstown traffic, all you do is slow me down / and I’m trying to get on the other side of town” (Hendrix “Crosstown Traffic”). The intersection of Riverside Drive, Kraft Street, North Second, and New Providence Boulevard is the fifth most traveled in the state of Tennessee. Going north on New Providence Boulevard (41A North), toward Fort Campbell, Kentucky, (most of the installation is in Tennessee, but the post office is located just inside the Kentucky state line), the first hill rises from the bridge over the Red River before the river merges, a few feet away, with the Cumberland. That hill is still known as Boot Hill even though the Acme Boot Factory Outlet closed its doors decades ago. The twenty-foot-tall boot that remained atop the building long after the closing disappeared in the structure’s renovation a few years ago. About five miles north of the intersection and the missing boot is a non-descript bar, now painted a garish red. In its heyday, it was The Palms. A neon palm tree adorned the sign advertising the bands that regularly played the club. Another palm swayed atop the landlocked building. A competitor was on the opposite side of 41A North, now Fort Campbell Boulevard, almost at Ringgold Creek Bridge where Ringgold Mill sat, grinding out flour and cornmeal, and providing a great swimming place, albeit illegal.

The Palms’ ceiling was so low that anyone on stage could touch it. ““Cuse me while I kiss the sky...” (Hendrix “Purple Haze”). Urban legend has it that one night, while playing The Palms with Billy Cox, Hendrix signed or carved his name on the ceiling, like musicians write their names on the walls of venues they play today. Whether this myth is true or not, no one can confirm. The building has changed managers and

owners numerous times and is no longer called The Palms. Would anyone have believed the signature real when the ceiling needed repainting?

This north side of town, New Providence, was just that: north of Clarksville and not part of the city. Clarksville would annex first New Providence and then St. Bethlehem so that the city limits run to the Kentucky border. When the clubs were hopping on the strip, people tried to figure out the name the Pickle Wig Factory, which had nothing to do with pickles or wigs; the Moonlit Drive-In shows could be seen from the road; Jo-Jo's Garage was towing cars from accidents, and the Piggy House served barbecue at the top of Boot Hill. Aunt Jean made a U-turn on the busy, then two-lane, highway, with her sister, four children, and a niece in the Ford station wagon when she drove past the place, on the way to satisfy her pork hankering, but never a beer.

This north side of the river was akin to the other side of the tracks. The clientele were GIs, civilian workers from the military installation, and barbeque searchers. The only place the people of Clarksville would actively admit going to was Charlie's Steakhouse, just over the state line.

Charlie's served the best steaks anywhere around and offered mixed drinks; people drove for miles to eat there. In addition to the food, a woman played organ in the back corner. For a dollar tip, anyone could request songs, and she seemed to know them all.

The steakhouse and organ  
sat in roaring fire consumed,  
burned long horned steer.

Twice to three times a week, my drive along Kraft Street or North Second Street takes me northward, along New Providence Boulevard before it becomes Fort Campbell Boulevard at some unnoticed point, to the Fort Campbell military base. Along the way, the bars and nightclubs that once blasted live music have morphed into karaoke venues or have closed all together.

### Imagination

conjures what it might have been like  
when Jimi played.

Occasionally, I travel across the state line and past Oak Grove, Kentucky, where all that remains of the famous Charlie's Steakhouse are the rock outlines on the concrete pedestal where the restaurant stood with two giant cows in v-formation atop the building with *Charlie's* in script across their glorious flanks for everyone to see. Where The Pink Poodle was is lost in memory since I was never old enough to frequent those places, except in my imagination.

## Music World: Nine Tracks

### 1

Once we thought we'd found a cure for warped records. Not the slightly warped, but the ones whose undulations lift the tone arm off the surface at regular intervals, rendering the record unplayable. We read somewhere, *Billboard* maybe, that if the damaged disc was sandwiched between two pieces of plate glass and left flat in the sun for an undetermined length of time, gradually the sun's heat would relax the wavy warp under the weight of the plate glass.

Sometimes the process worked. Not being an exact science—the sun's strength is not the same each day; clouds interfere; “seasons changed and so did I. You need not wonder why” the results weren't worth the effort.

### 2

They, the proverbial they, said that vinyl was dead, long after “video killed the radio star.”

### 3

Compact and portable, CDs revolutionized the music world.

Then, Steve Jobs invented the iPod, something Edison never, in his wildest dreams, envisioned. No need for shellac cylinders or vinyl records, CDs, or other tangible container of sound—we simply download our tunes from Apple. We all bit the fruit.

**4**

Simple isn't always good. Sometimes you need to slow down: no rapid "click this" or "click that." Return to pops, clicks, hisses, and god-forbid-a-skip world of vinyl, or LPs, or 45s, or records. Diction depends on your birth decade.

**5**

"Slow down, you move too fast...feeling groovy..."

Don't rush records. Handle them carefully; slide from the sleeves—outer and inner—and carefully hold with fingers on the center label, thumb balancing the edge. No fingerprints need mar the sound's black plane as it's placed on the turntable. Lower the tonearm to the surface as gently as Houston lands the Mars Rover. If you're nervous, the needle will bounce into the music, not catching the rotating groove with finesse. If maneuvered correctly, the needle catches, then wobbles to float through the concentric, spiral groove of each side, magically translating those microscopic waves into sounds, conveying us to another place in time and space.

**6**

How many grooves does a record have?

**7**

No zeros or ones here, just the stylus traveling through the vinyl hills and dales, pulling us along on that magical mystery tour. When the first half journey ends, someone must return to the turntable; there's the other side to play. If you look closely before flipping the record to the B-side, you'll read the run-out area graffiti, if the mastering engineer was cool, proud of his work, and decided to leave a message in addition to the record's catalog number.

**8**

Music is human; records are too. Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) is the vinyl in vinyl records. This synthetic, man-made material is comprised of 43% ethylene (crude oil) and 57% chloride (regular salt), and is long-lasting and recyclable. Record pressing plants today mostly use 220-gram virgin vinyl in various colors; multi-colored records are made from recycled shavings cut from the overflow of vinyl when records are pressed. Imagine a glob of hot vinyl poured, like batter in a waffle press, only not with little squares, but concentric, spiral grooves.

**9**

Two, one per side.

## Barbeque Goats

Chattanooga: I-24, exit 181A, turn left, then right at the light. Up ahead, on a hill in East Ridge, sits a barbeque mecca.

The discovery of Sugar's Ribs made after an academic conference in Cleveland, Tennessee. Not eating before "giving a paper" doesn't always work in unfamiliar places. An early Saturday morning presentation at the conference's end proved that. The afternoon approached; hunger growled. Barbeque suggestion made based on the billboard seen while passing through Chattanooga two days earlier.

"What exit? How do you know it's good?"

"Dunno. The sign announced, 'Voted Best Bar-B-Que in Chattanooga.' On a hill. If the place doesn't look good, Cracker Barrel's down the road."

Found the sign, correct exit, parking lot. Got out, stretched, and sniffed. The large neon sign with the smiling woman offered further invitation. Walking up the restaurant's steps, blooming rosemary bushes beckoned a brushing of their tops, adding more fragrance to the grilling aromas.

At Sugar's, orders placed at the counter right inside the door, are paid, given drink cups, instructed to find a table. Five or six people in line signaled goodness. The usual fare: barbeque pork, brisket, chicken, and ribs; baked beans, slaw, potato salad, corn on the cob, grilled onions, and wood-fired okra and onions rounded out menu. Could be anywhere, except for dessert: banana pudding or Moon Pies; this is The South.

Our turn: "What do you recommend? What's your specialty?"

Lady behind the counter smiled, “We’re Sugar’s *Ribs*,” emphasis on the word ribs.

Ribs it is.

Several folks from the conference, barbeque aficionados too, were already eating. They knew Sugar’s and stopped whenever in Chattanooga. Assurances made: the food was worth the stop.

Atop a hill, top of the building, Sugar’s slogan: “Que with a view.” Outside a balcony, unblocked views of the mountains and the city. We ventured out to take tourist photos of Lookout Mountain and the scenery. Turning around, the goats were seen.

A fenced area contained numerous goats and kids. Some stood or reclined on various wooden platforms. Others dotted the hillside, roaming freely within the enclosed perimeter that extended down the hill to the sidewalk. No goat on the menu, so why were goats living outside a barbeque restaurant? The waitress brought the food and the answer.

Adam’s rib may have birthed civilization, but couldn’t have been tastier than these hot, meaty, juicy, and smoky ones. The sides tasted like grandma knew you were coming and fixed your favorites.

The goats were not for eating, but for mowing. The hillside was too steep for human grass cutting, plus goats eat leftovers. While we ate and had our questions answered, the goats became more entertaining than burlesque as they wandered, played, and grazed, oblivious to the fast-paced interstate world beyond their work environment.

### **Fortunate Ones Get Their Wisdom from the Cookie**

Today is the ideal time to water your personal garden. Your investment in time will lead to an amazing fortune. You will find what you lost but first you must remember where you left it. Your abilities will shortly bring you to fame. You are born with the 'sixth sense' and superb insight. You will soon be reminded that love is everything. A small donation is called for. It's the right thing to do. The luck that is ordained for you will be coveted by others. Your talents will soon be recognized and suitably rewarded. You will know what to do. Everything serves to further.

### **Baby Bonsai: An Eight-Month Plant Tale**

Odd plants call my name. Not weird, carnivorous plants, but normal, unusual ones like small Japanese Maples with variegated leaves, scented geraniums, miniature iris in striking colors, miniature hostas, with names like ‘Curly Fries’ or ‘Mouse Ears.’ Air plants: stick them anywhere, they’ll grow and thrive. They grow soilless, and other than daily misting or weekly soaks, they survive even the most neglectful individuals. Or they’re supposed to survive—air plant number three just died.

Bonsai, on the other hand, are complicated. They have daily and monthly schedules. Growing bonsai intrigued me, but those little suckers are expensive. More expensive than air plants and too expensive for plant failures I’d experienced. Since I’d no success with the simplest of plants, why not tempt fate? Last week, at a garden show, the temptation appeared when a bonsai called my name.

The first one that spoke was regal, dominant, and \$275. I told it to be quiet and ignored its mutterings. I don’t pay half that for shoes or jeans or much of anything else, except those Paul McCartney tickets. Two little trees spoke softly, so softly that I couldn’t decide between the two, but both could *not* come home with me. Finally, the diminutive pomegranate bonsai’s murmurings persuaded me that we should live together.

As I wrote a check to the Sweet Valley Bonsai Nursery, the elderly Asia man provided directions for keeping my new acquisition alive and healthy. And for my well-being and sanity.

The new acquisition made demands: Position pomegranate bonsai in full sun, with light shade in the summer. I have a few months before the shade issue. Indoor bonsai need a well-lit location all year but shaded from the scorching sun. Again, scorching sun isn't an issue yet, but the well-lit location might be. The tiny tree needs water daily throughout the summer—don't we all, but again nothing to worry with yet. Soil constantly moist and check indoor bonsai daily. High humidity is essential. The little guy, he's about eight inches tall, needs plant food monthly during the winter and bi-weekly during the summer. Next month, he'll get fed. He should get a haircut during the growing season; his new shoots should have one or two pairs of leaves. Repotting and propagation directions were provided. Until we've been together for two years, he won't need larger living quarters; he'll be fine in his three by four-inch pot. He's not old enough for propagation, so I'm not concerned about that until he's at least in his teens.

After reading all this, I feel like those high school students who must take care of a fake baby for their Home Ec class. Their faux baby needs care like a real one—bottle feedings at three in the morning, diaper changing, attention, togetherness, bonding, everything that comes with parental responsibilities. If faux baby doesn't survive, the students will fail the class. My pomegranate bonsai became my fake baby, only unlike faux baby, my bonsai is a living, breathing creature. And a needy one if I want it alive and healthy. At least, baby bonsai came with care instructions.

I reread the instructions. Pomegranate bonsai prefer temperatures over 55 degrees and high humidity. To keep the humidity high, I purchased a small ceramic tray that matched its pot. I filled the tray with white gravel, poured water in, and set p. bonsai in the tray. Instant humidity.

Sunshine is a must for survival; in fact, the more the better. Don't want SADS occurring for either of us. But not too much sun for the little guy. A south window is preferable. That'd be fine except my iPhone compass says that south is at the exact location of the back corner of my house. The closest I can get is about 148 degrees southeast or approximately 232 degrees southwest. Side window? Back window? I can't decide, and I need a shelf for his tray. He currently resides on top of the stove under the constantly-on fluorescent light. He moves to the counter when I cook.

Notice, the plant has become a he instead of a she. Everyone knows men are more trouble.

So far, in one week, he's lost a few leaves and all his buds. I might have lost more if I'd traveled across the country from California, in a box, spent a day and a half in an agricultural building at the Tennessee State Fairgrounds, been ogled by hundreds of people, had plastic wrapped around my extremities, and then taken an hour car ride in the front floorboard before being unwrapped and placed on a cool stovetop under fake lights. Oh, the humanity!

The only aspect of bonsai rearing I didn't consider was my travel. I threatened Chuck while I was gone for ten days during the summer and made daily calls to check on baby bonsai. No contingency plans existed for when we both left. When preparations for a six-day fall trip began, the pet sitters were called. We've used the mom-and-pop operation for our critters' care for a few years. Usually Mom Pet Sitter comes to go over things, but this time Pop Pet Sitter arrived, reacquainted with the dogs, and double-checked instructions, including those for baby bonsai. Could he water and talk to baby

bonsai each day we were gone, or did I need to take him with us? Pop Pet Sitter assured us he'd manage the small plant during one of the twice daily pet visits.

Four days into the trip when Chuck received the daily doggie update from Mom Pet Sitter while she visited the dogs, something snapped. Her husband reminded her about the miniature tree on the stove, right? She watered baby bonsai, hadn't she? I heard one word emanate from the cell phone, and then Chuck repeated to Mom Pet Sitter what we explained to Pop Pet Sitter a week earlier. My heart sank. For something with daily water needs, four days without signaled a death knell.

Two days later when we returned, I watched the last two remaining leaves quiver and fall from baby bonsai's skeletal form. Depression, hopelessness, and a sense of loss permeated my being. I blamed myself for the miniature plant's demise. I should have taken baby bonsai with us, I should have taken him to a nursery, I should have, I should have. I should have, but I didn't, and now my hope of growing a bonsai died with baby bonsai's lifeless, leafless form. Every time I entered the kitchen and saw the stark silhouette, depression overcame me. To quell my anger at my stupidity, I moved baby bonsai's remains outside, deposited him and his tray on the wrought-iron patio table. I wondered, "Should I raise the umbrella? Does he need shade?" Then I questioned myself, "What was I protecting him from?"

I occasionally glanced his way for the next three weeks. The October weather changed. Most afternoons became too chilly for sitting outside. The gulf coast winds carried hurricane rains northward, through land-locked states. The cacti and tropicals needed their biannual moves inside for the winter months. I put this off as long as possible since I knew the plants thrived better outdoors than in dry indoor conditions. The

night temps fell into the forties before the television weathercasters warned of wide spread frost and showed freeze warning outlines on the state map. Move the plants or lose them.

As I passed the patio table to retrieve a cactus and a *hoya*, I glanced at the forlorn baby bonsai submerged in rain water, its skeleton shivering in wind-chilled temperatures. I stopped and peered closely at the minute bare branches. "It's alive!"

"No, it can't be," I argued with myself.

Very quietly, very softly, the same voice I first heard eight months ago in the agricultural building at the state fairgrounds pleaded, "Take me back inside, please."

I carefully carried baby bonsai inside to the stovetop, still not believing the growth I thought I saw on his limbs. They didn't exist, these miniscule leaves were figments of my imagination.

A week later a few leaves appeared. I wanted to whisper, "Grow baby grow," but instead I held my breath. The old Southern adage came to mind: It's not the heat, it's the humidity. The hurricane rains provided the antidote baby bonsai needed, long with his name: Lazarus.

## Lost Aerial Highways

The squirrels' aerial highway is gone. They can no longer travel from one side of the property to the other without touching *terra firma*. Freddie, the rescue terrier, no longer bounces on all fours, looking skyward, begging the squirrels to come down from their leafy heights and play with him as he's not equipped to climb trees or tightrope walk the branches. He promises no harm, really.

The nuthatch family's tree is also gone. The next generation needs to find another tree to teach their offspring clinging and flying lessons, along with the upside-down navigation of the bark.

The electric company decided several trees in the yard a nuisance to their power lines. To hell with what animals need, people need uninterrupted convenience of cable, internet, hot water, and bright lights, no matter what Mother Nature conjures. And linesmen can stay warm and dry in their beds a little longer whether the critters have abodes or not.

Two days was all the workmen took to undo what had taken the trees years to accomplish. One cutter stashed a two-inch slab of trunk, thirty-six inches across, inside his truck. Would the salvaged piece become a clock face, table top, or gewgaw to tell tall tales about?

Shortly after these nuisance trees were removed, Mother Nature decided one of the twin eighty-foot oaks at the property's very back edge was done. Its life ended a few years ago for unexplained reasons, its twin still stood, holding a leafy canopy over a

small wilderness in the middle of civilization, guarding graves, wildflowers, and woodpeckers. The dead oak crashed alone, without human awareness, taking some of the pine boughs to cradle its fall. A six or seven-foot snag is all that's left of the majesty held for decades. Woodpeckers' hammer tracks visible in the remains. Eventually, the huge, lumbering trunk will be cut into moveable pieces; the tree's snag left for the woodpeckers. Until then, the birds, squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, and invisible creatures can cavort among the fallen ruins and uncrushed hellebores. The remaining twin oak stands watch over its sibling's decay.

The sonic boom of thunder shook the house, waking the dead and the dogs. They, and the window panes, trembled as the following cosmic flash pierced the night sky.

Comprehension came on the weekend.

Seen from the breakfast table, the other eighty-foot oak in the very back of the yard, whose dead twin had toppled a month ago, was missing bark. Venturing outside, a closer examination revealed a crack running vertically from the absent bark section on the tree seen from the house. A walk around the massive tree base displayed more damage on the opposite side: another chunk of bark was gone, and the crack spiraled above the second fork, some thirty feet higher.

The descending crack ended in a hairline about ten feet up. The mark looked much like an open-heart surgery scar seen on surviving patients. Only this scar had no sutures or staples to pull the bark together over the tree's cambium, jeopardizing the heartwood. The cut of the lightning bolt was visible for all to mourn.

The tree might last this summer, but with this injury, its lifeline was moving to nothingness like the tracing in this new scar. Another two, perhaps three years before this oak would succumb to the same fate as its twin this past spring.

Where will the woodpeckers and the crows and the nuthatches and the squirrels find shelter and food? The acorn shaped birdhouse was blown off in the strike. Remnants of a nest jostled inside before the house landed face down some ten feet away. Whether the nest was new or last years was unknown. No eggs, but the construction was complete. The acorn birdhouse was salvaged, but the loss of the squirrels' aerial highway is unmeasurable for them and humans.

## ABCDEFHOME

A house, a home; my kingdom for a house! How many people have owned their dream home or settled for a house, driven by necessity and costs? I've never owned a house I wanted, including the present one.

\*\*\*

Barn wood is being reclaimed and reused in houses today. Good Wood in Nashville takes old barns apart piece by piece, salvaging as much useable wood as possible. The wood is then recycled for a variety of projects from floors to furniture to walls. The store came about because the owner wanted to repair the floors in his Victorian home. One plank leads to another.

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Community and the sense of belonging are what home ownership is about. Yet many Americans can't afford one. Some say that aspect of the American Dream is now priced out of reach of those who most need to feel they belong.

\*\*\*

Dishwashers are overrated. Of course, that statement is made by someone who doesn't own one. Sure, having one would mean no dirty dishes stacked in the sink, waiting. But with such a modern convenience, what is lost? With a handy dishwasher, looking out the kitchen window over the sink, while handwashing the dirty plates, spoons, forks, knives, and other accoutrements of feeding would become obsolete. Would the deer traversing the far backyard go by unnoticed? Or will the hummingbirds' annual arrival be

acknowledged as quickly? Would the first blooms of spring or the first snowflakes of winter occur without comment? Would random thoughts still happen? “When you wash the dishes, wash the dishes” is a bad paraphrase of a Buddhist saying. Mindfulness forced? Conveniences are wonderful for hiding the dirty glasses and the lonely spoon, but what would be lost in the quick process? The fork ran away with the spoon.

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Everything in its place, and a place for everything is attributed to Benjamin Franklin. However, the expression “*mise-en-place*”, or, literally, "put in place" is a French phrase that means to gather and arrange the ingredients and tools needed for cooking... Some chefs say that *mise-en-place* is nothing more than a kitchen version of good old-fashioned military discipline... But practiced at its highest level, *mise-en-place* says that time is precious. Resources are precious. Space is precious. Your self-respect and the respect of others are precious. Use them wisely.” Dan Charnas explained the idea in an August 11, 2014 piece for NPR’s *Morning Edition*.

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Fireplaces: not just for indoor heat or atmosphere any longer, they have moved outside to the patio or pool area, along with refrigerators, stove tops, ceramic charcoal grills, and other household items once regulated to indoor life.

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Greenhouses aren’t actually green.

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Hardwood floors are preferred over carpet, so says Bill Gassett in a 2014 article. Except, of course, in the bedroom and bath, where carpet and tile are floor coverings of choice. If someone has carpet and wants to sell, the advice is “Rip it up.”

\*\*\*

“I’ll never be hungry again,” declared Scarlett O’Hara when she returned to her beloved *Tara*. Her sanctuary was standing but offered no respite from the weary world as homes are supposed to do for their occupants. Fire had consumed *Twelve Oaks*, where Scarlett’s beloved Ashley and his wife, Melanie, were to live after the war.

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Just think, for people of certain ages, Dick Tracy’s wristwatch and *The Jetson’s* kitchen don’t seem so far-fetched.

\*\*\*

Kitchens today, still the heart of the home, have come a long way from our grandmother’s. Ice boxes morphed into refrigerators that keep an inventory of what’s inside, and can keep the contents at different temperatures in the same area. Dishwashers know what’s inside and clean those items accordingly. Stove tops have no eyes and heat instantaneously. Ovens can keep things cold until programmed to begin cooking the foods inside, and dinner will be ready when the homeowner arrives. Dishes can’t be served, find their way to the dishwasher when dirty, or put themselves away when cleaned. Friends insist that’s what children are for.

\*\*\*

Lottery winnings provide the ability of choice, to live anywhere. A beach house on the Gulf of Mexico; Devon, England; the Isle of Skye; the Italian or French coast. Or own an

island like Johnny Depp, and all the techy appliances desired, with or without the availability of children.

\*\*\*

Median home value in Tennessee is \$138,000. Tennessee home values have gone up 7.1% over the past year and Zillow predicts they will rise 3.8% within the next year. The median list price per square foot in Tennessee is \$104. The median price of homes currently listed in Tennessee is \$174,000. The median rent price in Tennessee is \$1,195, according to Zillow.

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Nashville's median home value is \$219,900. Nashville home values have gone up 13.5% over the past year and Zillow predicts they will rise 4.9% within the next year. The median list price per square foot in Nashville is \$177, which is higher than the Nashville Metro average of \$137. The median price of homes currently listed in Nashville is \$308,000. The median rent price in Nashville is \$1,595, which is higher than the Nashville Metro median of \$1,550, again from Zillow.

\*\*\*

Outdoor showers abound along the Gulf Coast. In Fort Morgan, Alabama, friends explained the necessity for this feature: water charges are based on the amount of usage coming into the house and going out. With outdoor showers, water amounts only accumulate coming in. Plus, there's something decadent about showering outdoors.

\*\*\*

Porches are a necessity in the South. The importance of southern porches was the main purpose of the first annual Conference on the Front Porch held in Taylor, Mississippi, on

October 2016. Another is planned for 2017. Topics discussed included porches' histories along with the decline and resurgence of porches, and porches' place in society and how they help build a sense of community. *Southern Living* and *Garden and Gun* have published articles on this ubiquitous element of southern homes. Granny's home had four porches; two upstairs and two below. One upstairs opened off mother and aunt's childhood bedroom, which was connected to the older uncle's bedroom. It also had a door that opened to the upstairs hallway on one side of the house. Below was the screened porch, where the family sat when it rained or when company came. The other upstairs porch connected to another hallway, and the younger uncle's and the grandparents' bedroom windows opened to this porch. Below this porch was the open-air porch where everyone gathered after dinner during warmer months.

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Quit claim deed is needed if someone wishes to transfer ownership of a piece of property to someone else. This document states that individuals are giving up their claims on a piece of land, a house, or another type of property and handing it over to someone else. Fill out the form, have it signed by both parties, and get the form notarized and recorded in the county recorder's office explains [wikehow](#).

\*\*\*

Rameses the Great's last home was vandalized and burglarized, proving the adage, you really can't take it with you. Or remember the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Thou shall not steal. Fearing the theft of the king's remains, priests moved his body from his original tomb twice. He eventually came home to the Cairo Museum, where he still rests. Not in Memphis, as some believe.

\*\*\*

Septic tanks are a topic I never thought I'd know much or really anything about. Never thought I'd peer into the bowels of one, but I have. Septic tanks are only found in yards of county houses, or so I thought. Moving into the city limits would provide entrance into a new century of sewer systems, or so I thought. Who knew houses within those confines could still have septic tanks in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? "Not I," said the Little Red Hen.

\*\*\*

Two by fours are no longer two inches by four inches. They now measure one and half by three and half inches. Drying and planing of the wood causes the discrepancies. He huffed and puffed and blew the house down.

\*\*\*

Underground bunkers or bomb shelters were in the backyards of some homes in the 50s. Stocked with canned food, water, radios, and other necessities, they were optional additions that would, hopefully, protect the occupants in the event of nuclear attacks. One house in our neighborhood had one. I didn't like to go down its steps, and somehow knew I wouldn't be let in if a real attack occurred.

\*\*\*

Virtual shopping for houses is a new way to purchase a home. Whether the home comes with a media room is something discovered electronically.

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Wine cellars are found in upscale homes. Why go to the liquor store when one can have one's selections delivered and stored? Or better yet, one can bid on exquisite and

expensive wines. Just remember the fable “The Fox and the Grapes” and don’t covet wines or wine cellars. No one likes sour grapes.

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X marks the spot for buried treasure or for building sites.

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Yellow striped wallpaper drives the narrator crazy in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s story.

“[It’s] the color of sunflowers and daffodils, egg yolks and lemons, canaries and bees...and signs that alert us to danger or caution. It’s the color of happiness, and optimism, of enlightenment and creativity... [It has a] dark side: cowardice, betrayal, egoism, and madness...and physical illness (jaundice, malaria, and pestilence)... [Colors come from] toxic metals - cadmium, lead, and chrome - and urine.” Granny’s dining room was pale yellow, glowing with sunlight coming in the two almost floor to ceiling windows.

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Zebras, with cows, in the local lawyer’s pasture had Clarksville Writers’ Conference tour participants gawking. The tour took them to Guthrie, Kentucky, to visit Robert Penn Warren’s home after spending time at Ben Folly, Caroline Gordon and Alan Tate’s home; Woodstock, Dorothy Dix’s home; and Merrymont, Caroline Gordon’s childhood home. Zebras were an unexpected sight on this tour of Black Patch authors’ homes.

## Bird on the Road

When Dr. Snyder died, several members of our university had bluebird nesting boxes placed around campus. After all, he'd been head of the Biology Department and an avid birder. What better way to honor him? Nesting boxes helped the birds with habitation, and each time we passed the boxes, we'd remember him. University grounds keepers located one nesting box outside the building that houses my office. I was, and still am, able to see the bluebirds using it, and recall Dr. Snyder's love of teaching. I don't always see bluebirds and Dr. Snyder whenever I pass by. Instead, what my mind sees is a Pileated Woodpecker on the bluebird box.

*The Eastern Bluebird is considered a thrush because of its young having spotted breasts. The adult males are the only birds in the Eastern United States with a chestnut brown breast. The females and juveniles are much duller in color. Bluebirds may be attracted to nesting boxes with 1 ½ inch holes (Zim and Gabelson 85).*

Bluebirds are some of the first birds that birders learn to identify. Along with watching birds, I can't remember not having a bird as a pet—until now. My grandparents, particularly my maternal grandfather, always had canaries. His small, egg yolk colored birds lived in cages throughout their home. We changed cage locations depending on the time of year. During the summers, the birds in their cages, resided on the downstairs, screened sleeping porch. As fall approached, we moved the birds and cages, and they wintered in either a corner of the kitchen or dining room as these areas were the two warmest rooms in a house with no electric heat. The canaries seemed content with this

arrangement. The males sang continuously during the day until Granny covered their cages with linen tea towels at night. I learned how to change their water and feed containers, which hung at opposite ends of the cages, and how to replace the soiled newspaper that lined the cage bottom. The solid cage bottom slid out, revealing an additional wire one beneath it. This extra piece kept the birds from falling through or flying out while the paper was replaced. I cut fresh newspaper to size and sprinkled bird grit or gravel over the clean sheets before I slid the bottom back into place. The feeding could be precarious since the cage door was opened, and the job needed accomplishing without letting the birds escape. The birds instinctively knew what was happening, but I always explained the process to them as if to alleviate their fears, and mine.

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One day, while visiting one of the first shopping malls in our area, my mother, sister, and I found red canaries for sale in, of all places, the local five-and-dime. We'd never seen anything like these birds, with their bright reddish-orange feathers. And they sang gloriously. We fell in love with them and their unusual colors and bought two—one for my mother and one for my grandparents. My grandparents loved the bird and had theirs for quite some time. Ours—my mother's—didn't fare as well. One day, my sister's job included cleaning and feeding the bird. Not only was she reminded of her chore, she was also told to put her Siamese cat out before she began her task, just in case the bird escaped.

The next time my mother saw her red canary, it was on the bottom of its cage, feet skyward. When my mother questioned my sister about the bird's demise, my sister explained that she'd fed the bird and cleaned the cage, and the bird was fine. When she

came back later, she noticed the bird on the bottom of the cage, where it still lay, dead. She continued her story, saying that the bird had escaped while she was changing the food and water. She tried to catch it. After numerous attempts, the bird flew into the glass storm door, fell to the ground, where the cat, who was still inside, pounced. My sister removed the canary from the cat's jaws. Surprisingly, it was still breathing. My sister then returned the bird to its cage and let the cat out. When she returned to check on the bird, it was lifeless. My mother sensed her story didn't ring true. After my mother's interrogation, my sister finally confessed and admitted the bird *had* escaped while she was changing the food and water. My sister *had* tried to catch it. The bird *did* fly into the glass storm door, and the quick cat *did* pounce. Horrified by the thought of the guilt trip our mother could take her on, my sister pulled the now dead canary from the cat's jaws and returned it to the cage. She then had enough time to conjure a story she thought our mother might believe. The scene was incredulous. I don't think Mother ever forgave my sister for the loss of this unusual bird.

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In addition to these inside birds, we watched the outdoor birds. My grandparents' dining room had three huge windows, two on the back wall of the room and one on the front wall that looked out onto the porch and yard. Out of these windows, we watched all types of wildlife, squirrels, rabbits, groundhogs, deer, but our favorites were birds. My grandfather built a large birdfeeder that fit inside one of the windows. When it was installed, the window was pulled down to the feeder's top, holding it securely in place. The back of the feeder consisted of two sliding glass panels that allowed us to watch the birds eat. Moving one of the glass panels to the side, we could refill the feeder without

going outside. In my child's mind, it was magical. We'd spend hours watching the birds, or if we were busy with chores, we'd stop for a moment as we passed the window feeder to see which species had come. Northern Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, White-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, Goldfinches, Tufted Titmouse, Blue Jays, and Downy and Ladder-back Woodpeckers were some I learned to identify. My biggest disappointment was that the feeder was in place only during the fall and winter.

When Granny began her spring cleaning, the birdfeeder was returned to its storage shelf in the pump house. Then, we watched the birds from the front porches during the warmer months. Those visitors included Eastern Bluebirds, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, American Robins, and the elusive Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Scarlet Tanagers, whose short-term visits delighted us. Quail emerged from the adjoining field, skittering across the hard-packed driveway to the shelter of daffodils and lilacs bordering the drive.

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When I started working during high school, schoolmates and fellow employees were always bringing lost or abandoned animals to me. Possums, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, even unwanted tropical fish from failed aquariums were some of the critters that found their way home with me. We rescued and released all that we could. But I wasn't the one who could speak to animals. My grandfather had a way with them. Squirrels trusted him enough to take seeds, apple quarters, almost anything from his hand. One year, when he was checking for damage after a horrendous thunderstorm, he found, beside a downed tree, a baby hawk, whose nest the storm destroyed. The Red-tail Hawk fledgling was still alive, but too young to survive on its own. When he returned to the

house with the hawk, my grandfather called me. He wanted to know if I would help him nurse the bird. I don't recall all the details, but I do remember that once she—we named her Twiggy—grew too large for the cage we kept her in, we made perches from broken tree limbs and put her on the screened sleeping porch, with its high ceilings. There, she could test her wings in the large, but contained space. I also remember her feedings became small balls of raw hamburger after we donned leather gardening gloves which protected our hands from her talons and beak. Eventually, she grew too large for the porch area, and we decided to give her the freedom she needed, and we knew she deserved.

After her release, she never flew out of the vicinity of my grandparents' three-acre yard. With an adjoining five-acre undeveloped field that bordered the driveway, and the golf course catty-corned across the street, Twiggy, the hawk, had enough area to hunt. Sometimes we'd hear her call before we spotted her. The last time I remember seeing her sky spiral was late one July day when I wandered, lost, after my grandfather's funeral.

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I've tried to create backyard wildlife environments wherever I lived. This helps with the loss of habitat all animals sustain. Even in doing this, situations arise. I've accidentally run over snakes while cutting the grass, but I've only intentionally killed a snake once. My belief is live and let live. Except for one time after we'd constructed two bluebird nesting boxes. We mounted these homes on old, unused volleyball net poles made from discarded car wheels and PVC pipes. These structures were easily moved to cut the grass around them, especially when the birds weren't using the nesting boxes. We hoped a pair would discover one or the other, or both, and take up residency.

Not long after the boxes were in place, a pair of bluebirds discovered the one at the end of the garden and started moving in. Once I noticed the new residents, I began keeping an eye on their activities. Each day, they'd bring twigs, which they maneuvered through the one-and-a-half-inch hole to the interior. They completed their nest, and we waited. I hadn't noticed as much movement as earlier, so I checked. Using my flashlight to illuminate the box's interior, I saw three blue eggs. I didn't want to scare the parents away, so I kept my distance, watching the box from the garden gate. Although the desire to know when the birds hatched overwhelmed me, I waited.

Finally, I saw the parents removing egg shell bits from the box. When both bluebirds were absent, I peered in, again using my flashlight to see inside. Three mouths attached to feather balls greeted me. All the eggs had hatched. By now, the hatchlings' parents discovered my proximity to their new ones and swooped overhead, circling me and the box. "Okay, okay. I'm leaving," I told the anxious parents. But each day I continued to watch from the distance of the garden gate, where I'd lean over and listen for chirping. Each day I heard life growing stronger. Eventually, I'd see eyes peering and mouths poking from the entrance. I decided I could approach the box again without the parents' assaults. The young birds' eyes would disappear, and their chirping would cease. If I wiggled my fingers in front of the entrance, heads would pop up and chirping returned with increased volume. This became a game we played. If I heard silence, I'd waved my hand in front of their home.

One morning, approaching the gate, I heard the adult bluebirds loudly chattering and repeatedly flying over the box and back to the trees, bordering the garden. Something was wrong. As I unlatched the gate, came through and closed it, the birds seemed

oblivious to my approach. I walked slowly, but the birds made no movement toward me. I looked at the bluebird home and could see something through the hole, but what I was seeing wasn't a mouth or feathers. I took a moment to process exactly that I was seeing a snake skin since the idea was so foreign. And the snake skin was moving, but not going anywhere. "No-no-no-no" I shouted as I veered away from the scene and ran to the shed. I wanted my screwdriver and my hoe. Finding these two items, I quickly returned to the garden, the bluebirds, and their terror.

I flipped the box to the ground without thinking of the consequences. It hit with a deadening thud. I needed to reach the top. With angry fingers, I loosened the screw that secured the top on the box. Once I had the screw removed, I yanked the top off to reveal the garden snake and its carnage. The snake couldn't get out of the box the way it had come in, through the hole. It was too engorged with the three bluebird babies it'd consumed to even move inside the bluebird box, now a coffin. To hell with the laws of nature. We'd built these nesting boxes to help the bluebird population, not to breed captive food for snakes. "You son-of-a-bitch" I screamed and banged the box. I grabbed the hoe and wedged it between one of the snake's coils and pulled. The snake uncoiled at my feet, three lumps visible in its narrow tube body. When its head appeared, I swung the hoe downward. "You bastard. You ate the bluebirds. You're gonna pay." I struck three times, one for each hatchling, although I'm sure the first blow was fatal. Then, I lifted the snake with the hoe and draped the carcass over a tree branch at the garden's edge. I don't know if I meant this gesture as a warning to other snakes or if I wanted the carrion to consume it. I left the chattering bluebird parents still calling to silent offspring, the overturned empty nesting box, and the murdering reptile. For a week, the box stayed

where it landed before I overcame my dismay and cleaned it, replaced the lid, and stood it upright in the hope that bluebirds had short memories. I don't remember when the snake's remains disappeared.

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Anyone who's lived out in the country knows you see animals along the road. Turkey vultures, groundhogs, snakes, armadillos, and other species. Some are still living; some are dead, some hover between. Chuck and I don't use the term 'road-kill,' we usually refer to them as 'slow.' With squirrels, we say 'confused.' Skunks announce their deaths with an unmistakable odor that clings to the air. We've been known to sing parts of Laudon Wainwright's "Dead Skunk" whenever we see raccoons, or possums, or any other dead mammals in the road. When I see a dead deer, I comment: "Oh, dear" or "Oh, deer." I've never quite decided which word choice I really mean. Once, coming home from southern Kentucky, I saw a dead raccoon on the side of the road looking as if he was sun-bathing. Another time, a hawk and its last meal lay together on Highway 68. I try not to hit or run over any already dead animals, it's bad juju. I know they're dead, and I can't help them, but I'm not going to add another injury.

Turtles are another matter. Depending on how much traffic a road has, we're known to stop the car or pull over on the side of the highway, get out of the car, pick up the turtle, and move said reptile off the road in whatever direction it happened to be travelling. The one time we didn't stop was on Highway 12. Cresting the hill before Excel Grocery & Barbeque, our favorite barbeque place, we'd merged to the right so the pickup truck behind us could pass. A large snapping turtle (Chuck knows turtles) lumbered on the shoulder of the road, heading to the safety of the grass. We didn't stop to

help the snapping turtle since the reptile was completely off the gravel shoulder. He'd made it across—or so we thought.

As I looked in our truck's side-view mirror, I realized the driver of the pickup decided not to pass us on the left, but instead he swerved right, off the road, off the shoulder, and into the grass, flattening the turtle. We couldn't believe what just happened. I unfastened my seatbelt, turned around in the seat, slid open the truck's rear window, and began screaming like a banshee. I called the turtle assailant names I don't normally use. All to no avail. He just laughed, flipped us off as he passed, gunning his engine. Chuck returned his one-fingered salute and tried to calm me down. I still have no words to explain that driver's senseless and insensitive act. I'll never understand people like him.

After the incident with the snapping turtle, we stopped for almost any animal we saw. Several years later, a wounded, young Pileated Woodpecker was on the side of Highway 12. The bird wasn't dead, but it was obviously in distress; it flopped and stopped, flopped and stopped, unable to gain lift-off. The truck tires crunched into the gravel parking area of a long-abandoned barbecue joint, as we pulled off the road's smooth asphalt, a few yards past the bird. Between flops, it noticed us, and stilled. We eased out of the truck, warily approaching the injured bird. We didn't want to scare it into any oncoming traffic, but trying to pick up a large, wounded woodpecker isn't easy.

*Pileated Woodpeckers are some of the largest, most striking forest birds. It's the size of a crow, about 18" in length. The birds are black with bold white stripes down the neck; males have a red stripe on their cheeks and a flaming-red crest. Their bills are long, about 2.5", and chisel-like. In flight, extensive white underwings and small white*

*crescents on the upper sides can be seen. Their wingspan is 29". They are most similar to the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, which is considered extinct ("All about Birds").*

Standing on the side of the road next to this large bird should've drawn some attention; it didn't. No cars stopped or offered assistance as Chuck stood by the bird, and I frantically looked in the back of the truck for something, anything useable to help the bird. We knew we had to get it off the road and to someone who could help. I found a discarded hat, a dirty towel, and a large cardboard box. Chuck hollered to bring his work gloves from his toolbox. I set the other items close to the bird as I handed Chuck his gloves. I enjoy birds but have difficulty touching them, especially a large, frightened one with a menacing beak. We covered the bird's upper torso with the hat I'd found. Then, as it quieted, I wrapped the towel gently around the woodpecker's body and wings after Chuck gingerly picked it up and held it out. We placed the swaddled bird in the empty box. Then we put the box containing the secured bird behind the truck's seats.

"What now?" Chuck asked, removing his gloves.

"I don't know, but we couldn't just leave him."

"I know, but what are we going to do with him?"

"The Bird Lady who used to live on Main isn't there anymore. The house has been for sale." Years ago, I'd taken a Northern Flicker to her with, what I thought, was a broken wing.

*Northern Flickers are large, brown birds about 11 1/2 inches in length. They are easily identified by their bobbing flight, white rump, black breast band, and golden or salmon wing and tail linings. This species often goes to the ground to eat ants (Zim and Gabrielson 63).*

That day, a flicker hopped about, trailing its right wing in the backyard. After watching the bird for a few moments, I knew something was wrong and approached it. When the bird didn't attempt to fly, I knew it was injured. Without my intervention, the neighborhood dogs or cats would kill it. Leaving the bird, I went inside to get what I thought I'd need to help the injured bird: gloves, towel, box, wallet and car keys. When I returned, the flicker had moved only a few feet. Wearing my gardening gloves, I covered it with a light towel, picked it up, placed it in a cardboard box, and drove with it to the Bird Lady, who lived on Main Street.

I parked my blue VW Bug in front of the house, got out, flipped the driver's seat forward, and took the bird box from the back seat. I closed the door with my hip, and climbed the slightly u-shaped wooden steps to the porch. As I balanced the box under my arm on one hip, I knocked on the wooden screen door. The inner door opened, and the Bird Lady said, "Yes?"

"I found this bird. I think its wing is broken," and held out the box to her.

She took it, opened the door wider, and invited me in. By the time I'd closed the front door, she'd placed the box on the floor in front of her as she settled on the floral couch. She opened the box and lifted the bird from the darkness, focusing on it, ignoring me as I found a chair. After gently talking to the bird and feeling every inch of its body, she'd diagnosed the bird's injury as a cleanly broken wing. She'd assured me that it would make a full recovery. She also promised to call me so I could see the bird once she had splinted its wing. I left relieved that I'd done the correct thing. The Bird Lady did call a few days later, and I saw the flicker, with its splinted wing, and again, felt relief. She called once more, so I could come back when she released it. Seeing the flicker fly off, I

knew I'd been right to interfere with nature. The forgotten scene returned to my mind as we stood on Highway 12. But I'd lost contact—it's not every day I needed a bird-whisperer.

“Why don't you try the vet?” I said.

“First, I need to get you to work. Then, I'll go to the vet.”

“You'll let me know what he says, right?”

Chuck nodded as we returned to the truck and left the abandoned parking lot.

This event occurred before cell phones were the norm. I had to wait for my lunch break to find out the bird's fate.

At lunch, I tried calling Chuck but couldn't reach him. Three hours later, at my afternoon break, I'd tried again. When Chuck answered, I immediately began asking questions: What had the vet said? Did he help the bird? Was it a broken wing? Did he have anything else wrong?

“Um, no. Dr. Long couldn't help him.”

“What? What d'you mean, he couldn't help? He's a vet.”

Chuck sighed. “Hold on a minute, Hon. I said, ‘Dr. Long couldn't help.’ The bird did have a broken wing, but Dr. Long isn't set up to work ornithology cases. However, he suggested that I take the bird to Dr. Snyder at the university. I had to do something; the bird was getting over the shock of getting hit.”

“Dr. Snyder, of course.” I said as I palm-smacked my forehead. “Why didn't I think of him?”

Dr. Snyder was the head of the Biology Department at the university. He was also involved with the local chapter of the Audubon Society. I'd known Dr. Snyder for a long

time. Even though his daughter, Diane, and I went to school together growing up, he was always getting me mixed up with someone else. We teased him about being an absent-minded professor. I saw him occasionally at the local Audubon Society's meeting because we were both members. Birds were his specialty; he'd know how to treat the bird's injury. The anxiety I felt since we'd found the bird was leaving me like an eagle taking flight. I let out my breath.

“So you took the bird to Dr. Snyder?” I asked.

“Yeah, I did.”

“Well, could he help? Did he set the bird's wing?”

“Not exactly.” I was looking at the bulletin board reminders on the wall next to the phone. I nodded to people as they passed. Chuck's tone was off as he explained finding Dr. Snyder's office. After reminding Dr. Snyder that they'd met, Chuck then related how we'd found the bird, that we didn't think the injury was severe, but the woodpecker might be in shock, and that Dr. Long suggested Dr. Snyder's expertise. Chuck told Dr. Snyder we didn't know if there was anything else wrong with the bird. Chuck then hesitated in his monologue. We'd been together long enough that I'd developed a sixth sense with him. Something snapped.

“So, Dr. Snyder set the bird's wing?”

“Not exactly.”

“What do you mean ‘not exactly’?”

“Dr. Snyder told me the biology department didn't have a Pileated Woodpecker specimen in their collection.”

My ears were ringing. I rescued animals to help them, not for them to become biology department specimens. I wanted to drop the phone, run to my car, drive like a mad woman to Dr. Snyder's university office, and save this woodpecker for a second time. But I knew the idea was too absurd.

“Dr. Snyder said it would be painless. He uses carbon monoxide.”

These words made no sense. I gasped. I couldn't breathe. We worked so hard to save the woodpecker for a life, not a lifeless specimen. If we hadn't stopped, hadn't interfered, hadn't sought help, the majestic creature might still be alive.

Every time I passed the bluebird boxes on campus, I saw a Pileated Woodpecker and thought of our intentions.

## I'll Take You There

—for Mary, Eric, and Anne

Overall, people, visitors, students or faculty, and even elevator maintenance men make the choice daily, hourly, willingly—to enter the moving tomb to negotiate the seven floors of the building. Chances taken each time. Two doors sliding together as, again, desires chosen by the push of a button. Ascending to lofty heights or is the determination to reenact Dante's Circles of Hell by moving downward? Whatever the day, the time, the weather, decisions made, and the ride begins.

Not here, but in other locations, the occupants watch the path to their selection move by as they rise or fall, taking in the various views they didn't make.

When the chosen destination arrives, the doors slide open for riders to face their fates.

Some exit warily; others happily; still others unconsciously. Most begin the next phase of their journey, however long or short.

Control abates once people choose, faith surrenders to machines. Humans are more intelligent; humans invented machines; they will do as asked.

Today, the moving tomb tired of pronouncements made, changed roles and made choices for four who entered together, going to the same lecture, but ukuleles and coffee called.

Although all pushed the same desire, the moveable container had other ideas.

It went places no one wanted, or had picked.

None left given the opportunity, setting up the unexpected capture. Boxy parameters became a hostage location, hidden in full view.

One minute, two—the call for help pushed but none of the four could explain the exact location, all talking at once.

No numbers appeared. The shuddering stop provided no compass point of reference. Both transporter and rescuers put the hostages on hold.

Three, four minutes. Now five. How long is eternity?

Confined within its tomb-like space the unwitting captives paid an unknown ransom.

This moving tomb groaned, beginning its journey again.

Stop.

Open doors.

Correct or not, the building's travelers accepted the choice.

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