



# **Connecticut Writing Project Staff**

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**Teacher-Consultant  
Writing Contest  
2018 Winners**



## *Poetry Winner*

### **Farmer's Almanac, an excerpt**

by Joan Muller (SI 10)

In March the mare's laddered ribs  
lie beneath last November's obliging coat  
like the furrows in her pasture  
unimagined under February's piled snow.  
If your numb fingers  
burrow deep along her flank for solace  
they will find heat there  
at the touch of her skin,  
though shedding will thin more than mercy  
during the six blizzards coming  
before ground thaw in May.  
Come July not all winter-ruched things  
will fatten with grass,  
yet chestnut tail hairs  
caught by the sharp diaries  
of barbed wire  
will have been collected by birds  
after mating in April.  
By August seed-flushed grass is baled for hay  
leaving shorn fields which hawks  
hunt earnestly  
for the mower's wounded prey.

If you go walking there in late October  
after a gale-filled night,  
search in front of your feet  
where you may find something that fits lightly  
in the cupped palm of your upturned hand,  
woven from ravels of timothy  
and horsehair strands  
whose beginnings and ends  
are indecipherable  
from the whole.  
Your thumb will worry into the hollow at its  
center  
and feel that place as loss.  
Still, this wind-tossed bowl was once a nest  
warmed by songbird hatchlings  
fledged skyward last June  
who though now lost to sight,  
like your September buried mare  
beat their wings as memory  
inside your emptied rib cage  
perched there like a familiar tune.



## *Fiction Winner*

### **Ouroboros**

by Sophie Buckner (SI 18)

I want to be honest with you, Marigold. I know you heard what the pastor said this morning about people destroying the temples God made for them. I know you're worried your mama's going to hell. But I tell you, I was already there.

It was a month after you were born. I felt like a tree cut down and hollowed out. I was angry. I was bored. I wanted to carve my pain into my body but was too scared to do it with a knife. I decided I could turn my maiming into art and became obsessed with finding a design that symbolized everything I felt.

I lugged you into the tattoo parlor and set your carrier in front of the chair while a man with a rose on his neck got the needle ready. It was a clean parlor, not one of those dumps you find downtown. White walls held framed photos of skin marked with ink: a skeleton in a kimono, a wolf, a willow, lots of roses.

The man tilted my head with gloved hands and swabbed the place behind my ear. He asked if I was ready, and as I replied *yes*, I didn't look away from you, your well-water eyes shielded by eyelids still puffy from the birth canal.

When I heard the quiet buzzing, I remembered the rattlesnake I tripped over when I hiked in Zion's Park as a teenager. The tan writhing body had blended into the dusty trail. I flicked my eyes toward the tattoo artist. The needle in his hand quivered in a way that made it look like a hologram. My knuckles went white and I watched the needle until it escaped my line of sight. And I thought right then how I was going to tell you about this day. I knew I would tell. As the needle touched skin, I thought I heard a hiss and I rehearsed how I would confess that I didn't love you. The needle burned ink into my flesh and I thought how you tore through my flesh to gasp air and let out a wail. I would tell you I resented you for screaming in the night and groping with your lips for my chapped nipple. How I felt like you were consuming me, gulping me down. How I looked into your bottomless eyes and fear seared through my body, cutting down into my bowels. And I saw that snake spitting and baring fangs. *It's more scared of you than you are of it.* So I didn't smash its head with the boulder I had instinctively grabbed. I just watched it lunge and sink those needle fangs into my ankle.



## *Nonfiction Winner*

### **Beyond Words**

by Ann Policelli Cronin (SI 83)

I looked around the Italian restaurant as waiters were vacuuming and putting the tables and chairs back in order. Other diners had left, and our waiter had long ago stopped asking, “Is there anything else?”

We had never been to this restaurant but were following the usual pattern. The restaurant was closing, and Bill and I, having arrived at 7:00, were still sitting there talking.

We had met more than two years before that dinner when I was giving a talk at a retreat. I had been asked to speak about prayer but didn’t feel I had anything to say about that. I tried to get out of speaking altogether. When that didn’t work, I asked the organizer if, instead of traditional prayer, I could speak about how words from literature, music, and liturgies added up to be like a prayer for me, a prayer which led me through a terrible grief.

Bill was in the audience. I went up to him, as people were gathering, because I learned his wife had died several months before and wanted to tell him about the switch in topic. I suggested that he might rather leave than listen to the story of someone else’s grief. I knew very well how grief can sneak up on those with recent losses and wash over them when they least expect it. He said, “Don’t worry. Nothing you say could make me feel any worse than I already feel.”

So the conversations between Bill and me began.

We continued talking on Sundays in the church parking lot for so long that cars for the next service would begin arriving all around us and talking on the phone longer than the batteries stayed charged.

Our conversations were mostly about coping with grief. Bill’s wife had suffered from colon cancer and died of liver cancer. Three years before I spoke at that retreat, my husband had died of a sudden heart attack as he left work at Yale on a hot August day. I was told when our youngest child, packing for his first year of college, answered the phone and handed it to me. An ER doctor from Yale-New Haven Hospital introduced himself, saying, “I regret to inform you that your husband has expired.” The nature of the deaths differed; the losses were the same.

After more than a year of parking lot conversations in the heat of summer and cold of winter, Bill and I started meeting for dinner for all kinds of reasons: to discuss marketing an innovative program I was trying to save from budget cuts in my school district or to strategize about a save-the-world effort in which we were each involved or to mark events in our lives, such as the deaths of my mother and his father, or to celebrate one of our birthdays or to talk about his four adult children and my three adult children or just because grief needed a respite. We had many four-hour dinners, but never, for a minute, considered them dates.

And now, two and a half years after meeting each other, we were out to dinner to celebrate my new job. I had just decided to move to a new position as a school district curriculum leader for English, this time in a distant part of the state. I was leaving the school district where I had worked for 25 years, where I lived minutes from my office, and where I had colleagues I loved.



Bill, who headed an advertising agency and had extensive business experience, had been a sounding board as I tried to find my way through the morass that occurs when ethics and power collide in the workplace. I had known for some time that, to avoid that destructive collision, I should move on but had been dragging my feet. Then, much to Bill's surprise, the prior week, I accepted the new job on the spot during the final interview. I accepted it for only one reason: It felt like life.

After discussing details of my new job, Bill became quiet. He leaned across the table, cleared his throat and said, "Ann, there's something I have to tell you."

He paused then began to speak with words that seemed well rehearsed, "Ann, I love you. There is no one I would rather talk with, no one I would rather be with, no one who challenges me more. But I am not in love with you."

He then reached out and put his hand over mine, a first-time intimacy, as if he expected me to cry.

But I didn't. I felt an overwhelming lightness. We were in a place new to us in our friendship of more than two years. We were talking about love.

For days, I held the thought: Bill and I talked about love. Love. Not grief. Not work. Not making the world a better place. Not our kids. Not politics. Not books. But love.

It wasn't until the following Thursday morning that it came to me: "Wait just a minute. He said the word NOT. He is NOT in love with me."

I, who pay more attention to the words on cards than the accompanying gifts, who live by insights words give me, and who spend my professional life working with words, had missed a word, a huge word, an earthshaking word: NOT.

I emailed Bill, explaining that I had a question to ask him when he had a chance. I didn't tell him that I was confused about what we really were to each other, about how he thought the words "love" and "not" fit together.

Late that Thursday afternoon, a young English teacher came into my office to talk about the daylong workshop for teachers I had just conducted. I said I had a question to ask him: I asked what he thought the difference was between loving and being in love. With a look of panic in his eyes, he began backing out the door saying, "I don't know about such things. I am not a normal male. I am more sensitive than most. We have a Jewish word *kaynahora*, which means if you talk too much about something, you wreck it. Gotta go. See ya."

The phone was ringing as I walked into the house from work. It was Bill. He asked me what my question was. I could hear the sound of my daughter, visiting for the Easter holiday, clicking away on the computer nearby as she was writing her final paper for law school.

I said, "I can't talk right now."

He hesitated and then said, "Let's go out for an early dinner tomorrow. We'll not make it a big deal, keep it simple, just get a quick bite."

The next night, taking Bill at his word, I dressed casually and told my daughter I'd be home soon. Bill arrived, looking very handsome, dressed more formally than usual—wearing a sport coat, dress shirt, and tie—not at all dressed for a "quick bite".



Long after the waiter had given up on us, leaving us in the then empty downstairs room, we talked *around*, rather than *about*, my question. We talked about being more than the “grief buddies” we had begun as but didn’t talk at all about what we had become.

I noticed that during the whole evening, Bill’s face was full of life. Maybe he was relieved that, after his pronouncement about not being in love with me on the past Saturday, our friendship was still intact. Maybe, having spoken those words, he felt free of analyzing our relationship. I didn’t think about any of that. I just was struck by how happy and energized he seemed.

I did notice that he said a word over and over again: WE. WE would go sailing. WE would try a new restaurant. WE.....

As we left the restaurant at closing time, I was surprised to see the leader of a local band sitting outside at a patio table. I had heard the band recently and loved their rock music of the 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s. I told the bandleader I had been trying to find their schedule so I could hear them again. He said they’d be appearing nearby the following weekend. I told him I would be there.

Bill, who doesn’t like to dance and never heard of the band, amazed me by saying to the bandleader, “I know what I’ll be doing next Saturday night.”

That added up to another WE.

Bill drove me home. As we pulled into my driveway, I suddenly felt ill at ease. Everything about the evening had been easy and warm. Yet I felt a tension, a lack of resolution. Something was different from other dinners. Now I had questions.

I turned to him and said, “For all of the talking we’ve done tonight, it seems that maybe, somehow, in some way, we’ve missed something ...”

He, mystified, replied, “What is it? What’s missing?”

I haltingly answered, “I’m not sure ...”

There was absolutely nothing in my brain. No thoughts. No words.

He said, “Don’t worry about it. You can tell me when you think of it.”

I struggled to find words, “No ... I’m trying to get to it now.”

Then I, an analyzer, an over-thinker, a total word person, gave up on words. A sense of Bill and me being connected in some way that I intuitively knew but couldn’t articulate took over. I couldn’t figure out my feelings, much less articulate them.

Words gone, I hesitated then blurted out, “I think you should kiss me.”

He did.

My world changed.



Later, in the house, I stopped to check on my daughter, still hunched over the computer, intent on wrapping up her paper. Without looking up she said, “It’s late. You two sure spend a lot of time talking. Too bad that’s all it is.”

I walked past her. And smiled ...

Seven months later on a sunny November day, Bill and I expressed our love with words – the words of vows we wrote, speeches we gave, poems and song lyrics we chose – words expressing the limitless possibilities of life and love. The words at our wedding.



## **Honorable Mentions**

## *Poetry Honorable Mentions*

### **Everdene Incubating**

by Sophie Buckner (SI 18)

Tangled bank entangles me, swallows  
Hardy, Woolf, and Summertime. Passing quaint  
houses and wondering if I'll ever  
have a real kitchen. The swamp is a womb to incubate a broken  
being. How will I emerge? Poison and  
peril when the sun rises, and I'm in the hollow of a rotting tree. Lost my voice, my sex.  
Gain ... gain what?

### **Foliage in the Dusk**

by Kaylee Thurlow (SI 18)

It's hard to focus on the highway  
When the foliage is so beautiful  
Death can be beautiful, right?

The trees sway and I can see the  
Almost barren branches crackle  
The resonance of trees fighting  
Against the screech of the wind.

Beyond the wall of trees  
Is the frozen lake,  
I shiver to think of the body  
Icing over

As the blue-green veins  
Dance  
Just below the solid membrane.



**Passage**  
by Kaylee Thurlow (SI 18)

Pin picks on ice.  
Legs  
aching yet numb.

Coarse glove swipes aside matted hair.  
Feet stumble the iced street,  
onto the snow-packed sidewalks.

A hushed light  
falls on the bleached earth.  
The roads are slick but clear and there is cracked  
pavement with spray painted circles  
cautioning.

Surrounded by the dunes,  
the beach grass grew higher than her,  
now rigid and blue as a corpse  
freed from the dry ground  
only to freeze.

Untouched sand,  
but the walk continues.  
Her feet squeeze for sand now mud and ice.  
Seems like just yesterday  
she could stick her feet  
in the scorching sand and spread the warmth  
through her body.

On ocean's rocks  
covered in snow, she sits.  
The waves thrash, fighting the freeze  
jaggedly, in thrusts.



## A Fall Conversation

by Kim Kraner (SI 14)

Bicycling. We're in a tunnel of trees; on the path, luminescence in slices. Through segments of sunlight, each downstroke's a counterstroke's answering. Rhythm inveigles we ride in a sun dream. I glance at your silhouette, blinkered by bike helmet straps. About thirty-odd years we've been riding in tandem. It still seems unclear how we got so damn old. "Do you want one?" you ask me then, starting me out of my reverie, "Bike built for two?" Down the bike path a couple's astride one, both wearing red bike jerseys: pedaling, synchronized, working together efficiently. "Maybe," I say, but it's only in service to humor's demands. On our left spreads the reservoir, glinting through tree trunks; the water's soft smell is still lingering. Meadowsweet, campion, milkweed and goldenrod, weeds sporting summer's last blooms "What the hell?" again jolted, avoiding a squirrel, I swerve like a madwoman, gracelessly fall. For a moment's time, surely no longer, I lie with my eyelids closed, stinging with gravel embedded in knees. When I open my eyes, you are standing above me: face shadowed, unwavering.



## Flight

by Amy Nocton (SI 14)

I.

I drive under the burnished belly of the hawk.  
Hunt cry punctures sky, paints nightingale indigo  
bunting. The raven's feathers are splashed with fuchsia  
and the blue heron's marshes merge with the rippled  
clouds. Thoughts arrow plumed peregrine falcon nose-dive,  
climb, brazen Icarus challenging Apollo's  
incandescence. Tumble earth bound. Some are not  
meant to soar.

II.

It's a dilly dally running late fall into  
the rain day and my stomach seizes as I slip,  
fast slam car door windshield wipers hypnotic move  
and so it goes. Backlit by dusty sun he gnaws  
on fowl, crunching chicken bones as he talks about the  
mute girl, his wife, bitten by a wolf and I feel the  
hand over my mouth silencing my voice twenty  
years ago.

III.

The sound sends me hurtling into the pitch, heart  
sinks into the bile, message conveys dislocation  
shoulder temporarily removed from place, split  
eyebrow wishbone scarred, knee cap cutting flesh, blood  
freezing in the frigid night air and the sirens  
wail in the recess of my half-awake head now  
puzzling it all together as I wonder  
how these accidents will shape the plot line we were  
writing once.

IV.

Fingertips brush skin, feathers soft skimming surface.  
There is nothing more to feel. With deliberate  
pause, concentration, foot arcs over ant, sparing  
life. A woman is wheeled away. We tell lies,  
and the sun bears witness to poignant exchanges.  
In the field so many periscopes among new  
grass. Geese huddle, insular, observing us all.  
Steps in motion, chemicals delivered, diagnoses  
given. And we offer oranges to scarlet  
tanagers flash, a selfish attempt to somehow  
thwart what waits.



## *Fiction Honorable Mention*

### **Keeper**

by Stephanie White (SI 18)

It wasn't meant to be her, for it was too soon. A mother should never have to outlive her daughter, but for many, that is too often the case. And in this instance, it really wasn't meant to be: the mare's days were numbered and the little filly to whom she just gave birth was the bright sun, the shining beacon of hope. Besides, we had already mourned the loss of the mare before she was even gone. Yet, I can see my neighbor and her long silver hair, draping down her back like beautiful curtains that if you were to part them just right, might reveal a glimpse of her soul. I watch my neighbor as her gaze travels out of the farmhouse window and onto her homestead. Her eyes and mine both come to rest on the same sight: the lone mare in the field, tail blowing in the wind as if in some strange synchronized dance with the blades of tall summer grass rippling around her like waves on the sea. She: a lone ship on the horizon, floating, bobbing; head down for grass, up to assess and down again. This repeats itself over and over until I realize I have been lost in this moment for I don't know how long.

*Life is never what you expect.*

I remember months back when the mare first arrived. She had been carrying the extra 120 pounds of weight on her dainty, dehydrated, and quickly deteriorating hooves for months: 300 days to be precise. The baby was killing her from within: her leg bones were pushing down through the bottoms of her hooves as they turned soft from rot. As the days grew long and the baby dropped, marking the final stretch of her gestation, the weight bore down on her more, pulling the skin taut about her ribs. And yet, if it wasn't for this small life inside of her, she wouldn't have been pulled off the trailer that was days from reaching the border where she would have been brought to the slaughterhouse. *Does she know this? They say horses are intuitive creatures. Does her intuition go that far?*

When the filly was born, she was perfect. Full of life and joy, a foil to the mare's waning days. And she was a sight to behold. Enough to bring a smile and a feeling of contentment with the world to even the most pessimistic of men. There was something in her exuberance, how she bounded about the field with new life, one could not help but wax poetic when witnessing her unadulterated wonder as each new discovery of the world revealed itself to her. Even the birds seemed to sing and dance in joy for this baby. The barn swallows would swoop to and fro above her paddock at dawn and dusk, catching the bugs that take flight in those moments when the sun is low. It seemed that they too came to celebrate the new life. And it was in those moments that I would see the silver hair blowing in the wind. My neighbor cast under the spell as all new moms are of their newborns.

And now months after the filly's death I see the silver hair as my neighbor makes her way out into the sunset, it blows in the wind and parts, revealing that her and the mare are not all that unlike.



## *Nonfiction Honorable Mentions*

### **Fresh Cut Grass**

by Jane Cook (SI 07)

The smell of fresh cut grass always takes me back to my childhood. Really for me, it triggers the smell of new mown hay after the first cutting. My dad would start early in the morning, right after milking and before the heat of the day was bearing down. He'd attach the different haying machines to his old John Deere tractor in the order of the tasks he needed to accomplish. First there was the mower whose job was to cut the hay, as short as it could to create as much of the prime first cutting as possible, while still leaving the roots intact so they could begin growing the second cutting hay. Next came the rake that gathered the hay, not into piles that resembled Monet's Haystacks, but into neat windrows, fluffing it dry in long, well-ordered lines around the field. After that came the baling machine that gobbled the freshly raked hay up into its giant mouth and excreted it as neat rectangular bales dropped in evenly spaced intervals around the field. Finally, my mom would drive the hay truck slowly through the field so that the farmhands could toss the bales onto the truck bed for deposit later in the hay loft in the barn.

I laugh when I think of my mom driving a big farm truck. Mom never got her license even though as a young woman she went to a driving school. Unfortunately, during one class she got her Irish up. You didn't want to be around Mom when her Irish was up. Apparently, she argued so vehemently with her driving instructor that he expelled her. Her pride was stronger than her desire to drive so she never went back. Then she met Dad who loved to drive and wanted to take care of her, so she never needed to drive on the road. But he did need her to drive that hay truck and drive it she did, for first cutting, second cutting, and if the weather cooperated, third cutting for the first few years on the farm. By the time I was old enough to witness the haying, Mom was pregnant with her fourth child and her truck driving days were over, but the story remains a family legend to this day.

Growing up on a farm was the best life a child could have. There were animals wherever I turned—cows, chickens, dogs, and cats—and I loved every one of them. During the summer, I'd play outside with my sisters and our neighborhood friends from right after waking until bedtime, stopping reluctantly only for meals. There was no worrying about "stranger danger," because there were no strangers out in the country. This was back in the day when everyone watched out for everyone else's kids. The lead watcher was the mother whose yard the kids chose to play in on any given day. When the cow bell rang at dusk, that was my mom's signal to the neighborhood that it was time for us to go to our respective homes, take our baths, and go to bed so we would be ready for whatever new adventures the next day would bring.

The smell of new mown hay makes me think of summer, but summer is closely followed by fall and then winter. As my mind drifts to winter, a vivid memory pops into my head. This took place many years ago, when my twin sister and I were about five years old. There was no kindergarten in our town back then, so we were free to play all day long, winter and summer. One chilly winter day, Mom dressed us both in our snowsuits and sent us to play outside so she could get some work done. She wanted the house to be in order for our family doctor who was making a house call to check on her pregnancy with her fourth child.

Patty and I headed outside, all bundled up and ready for an adventure. My dad was outside working around the barn and keeping a not so close eye on us. It had just snowed and the thought of sledding on this fresh snow was so exciting that we could hardly contain ourselves. We went into the barn and brought out our sled and then looked for the biggest hill we could find. Much of the farm was pastureland for the cows, so it was flat and inappropriate for sledding. A great deal of the rest of the go acres was woodland, also unsuitable for sledding. About half of the farm's land was across the street

and we were not allowed there without an adult, so our options were limited. Dad was far too busy to take time out for hill finding.

We searched and searched, hoping to find the perfect hill but to no avail. Suddenly, we both spied an enormous hill right next to the barn, covered in freshly fallen snow. We looked at each other wondering why we had never noticed it before. Maybe it was the bright new snow that attracted our attention. Side by side, we pulled our Flexible Flyer with the old red runners up the steep hill. At the top, we aimed the sled downhill, anticipating a smooth run, the first run of the winter on this hill. We started gaining speed as we headed downhill until we hit a place about halfway down when the sled stopped dead and toppled us off. As it began to sink into the hillside, so did we. When we were up to our knees in snow and whatever was under the snow, we started calling out for help.

Apparently, we raised enough ruckus that we attracted Mom's attention from inside the house before Dad even knew anything was wrong. By the time Mom got outside, we were waist deep. She called to Dad who put boards across the lower end of the manure pile to distribute his weight so as not to end up in the same condition as his twin daughters. He grabbed me under one arm and Patty under his other arm and sucked us up and out.

"Take them right downstairs to the shower. Don't even take off their snowsuits!" Mom yelled to Dad.

Dad, chagrined, did as he was told because Mom's Irish was up. She berated him for his lack of attention to the twins as he rushed down into the basement before she could turn her wrath on us.

As she turned to go back into the kitchen, Dr. Connery's car pulled into the circular driveway. She walked into the kitchen, trying to compose herself with the doctor following close behind. He could see that something was up, so he made her sit down and took her blood pressure. It was through the roof.

"Mary, you've got to calm down or else you're going to have this baby right now," Dr. Connery said in his calm, soothing, old time country doctor voice. Dad carried us upstairs soaking wet, still in our snowsuits, and the cause of Mom's upset became obvious.

Our sister, Sue, was born three months later, strong and healthy, showing no ill effects from her twin sisters' winter escapade. It goes without saying that Patty and I were not allowed to go sledding alone for the rest of our childhood.

## The Salesman and the Number Six

*In honor of my father, Alan Paul Englart*

by Mindi Englart (SI o5)

### ONE

I'm thinking of playing the lottery. With just one number – the number six.

### TWO

I talked to my dad just about every day of my adult life. I talked about college, relationships, career goals, my marriage, my baby, my divorce. In return, I'd hear about shoes and boots. Speed traps on the highway. Gas prices.

Before I had a child, each conversation started with, "How's the car doing?" Then it was, "How's Lily?"

By the end it was all about poop. As his disease progressed, not a conversation with my father went by that didn't start with an update about his elimination processes.

"It's been four days."

"Today, it looked like corn flakes. Corn flakes!"

"I'm literally full of shit," he told the nurse. And then he told me (and anyone who would listen).

And then, one of his greatest poop achievements, the number six. He was giddy as he told me, "It's a good day. I went. And it was curved and it looked like the number 6! I've never seen anything like it." For a time, he was so happy with the joys of the human body. His frail, declining human body.

When you have a parent with a long-term degenerative disease you have to get pretty comfortable talking about taboo subjects. And when you have a parent with a disease like Parkinson's, things progress in ways both you and he can't imagine, can't predict, and can't accept. Until you have to.

### THREE

I'm so glad I wasn't born to be a waitress in a New Jersey diner. I would have seen the worst of my dad. The bossiness. The entitlement. The white male privilege. The expectation of perfection. The "I'm paying for this" and "The customer is always right."

Luckily, I was born as his first child. He'd always wanted kids and he loved us. He was never too tired to have a kitchen-table talk about my worries. He was never too poor to take us out for ice cream or to the amusement park or a movie. He never complained. He gave me his old Dodge Diplomat when I turned 17 and he paid for my undergraduate college education, even though I switched from marketing to fine arts. This man who had never been to a museum, at my mother's urging, paid his hard-earned money for me to get a degree in something that would not make money as far as he could see.

My dad was a salesman. He knew a lot of people. He sold a lot of shoes. He drove a lot. The average for his demographic was about 15,000 to 18,000 miles; I believe Dad drove 75,000. I don't think he ever had a car accident – certainly not one that was his fault. I think he got one speeding ticket. And fought it. And won. My dad is a driving legend. At least to his family and friends.

Unlike Willie Loman, my dad achieved his American Dream. He was well-liked. People he sold to knew and loved him. He attended holidays at their houses, the weddings of their children. They were at his funeral.

### FOUR

My dad had high expectations and few needs. He was competent, confident, utterly responsible, and funny – really, really funny. Though he rarely smiled, much less laughed. Straight-faced. Deadpan. That was my dad. And an exaggerator like my dad you never saw. (See what I did there?) He was a master hyperbolizer. "We had to wait three hours to get a ride back home." I would later hear from my brother, who was with my dad on the wait, that it was ten minutes.



As I say, we talked just about every day. If I didn't pick up, he'd leave a message. "Hi Min," he'd say. He always started with the time. And after more than 50 years, even though my mom had died more than a year before, he always used "we."

He was a simple man. A kosher man. He never had a drink of alcohol. Never had coffee or a glass of milk. Never ate ice cream or cake or cookies till the very end. And even then, sparingly. Never had even a bite of shellfish or bacon.

He rarely spent money on himself. He wore the same raggedy white Hanes t-shirts and briefs. He never wore a tie that I can remember. Or a long sleeve shirt or a sweater.

In the end, oddly, as his body and mind gave way, he stopped biting his nails, stopped needing glasses, stopped needing blood pressure meds. I guess his body let him go on the little things; it was dealing with life or death now.

As the disease progressed, as he weakened, he needed more. Eventually even air had to be provided.

In the end, there was a small apartment, an aide, a hospital bed, a commode, three wheelchairs (electric, regular, and portable), an oxygen tank.

I remember the first time he had an aide wash him. "No one has ever seen me naked except your mother." Eventually he was completely unabashed.

Life will change you. Like it or not.

## FIVE

I've always saved things. I saved all my maternity clothes, knowing that I would want to make something out of them for my daughter. I saved the lock that I changed out the day after my ex-husband left me and the papers from my divorce so I could make art out of them.

I save things, not as a hoarder or a collector, but as an artist, a semiotician. So that these things can have a second life of meaning. Like some people rescue dogs or cats, I rescue meaning. At least I try to. But one thing you can't save is time.

To this end, I saved a set of voicemail messages from my dad. I stopped deleting his messages a few months before he died, knowing that he would be gone soon. And that, hard as it would be, I would want to keep hearing his voice, even if he spoke from the vortex of a visual hallucination, until voicemail cut him off.

I listened to his messages, as I'd done when he was living, attentively and with gratitude.

I listen to my dad's voice on my phone. Captured until the phone, too, meets its maker. The last message I hear:

## SIX

"Hi Min, It's just after six. We had a long, crazy ride, and we just got home."



# **2018 Summer Institute Fellows Contributions**

## Painted Walls

by Makenzie Aitchison (SI 18)

I sat cross-legged in the corner of an empty bedroom—my bedroom—allowing myself to fall in and out of a sense of time. I felt as if I lay within a papier-mâché molding. An exterior of splattered paint, dried blood from forgotten scrapes, and disorientation consumed me. I do not live here—or I didn't. Now I sat on the floor of a vacant room, within a clouded sense of being. No furniture, not even a bed. Just a few boxes stacked in the master bathroom shower. My gaze followed the vaulted ceilings bordered by opened windows and dark cherry oak wood flooring, inspecting every corner of the 150 square-foot space.

There was something so mesmerizing about composing the gentle, rhythmic counter-clockwise motions, swirling vibrant hues of reds and yellows and whites into a juiced tangerine sunset inside a Behr paint can. On my last trip to Home Depot to get painter's tape and new angle brushes, I bought two cans of Dragon Fire Orange. It felt right. It felt powerful. It felt invigorating. I wanted to become it. I was not going to test it—I knew it felt right.

Snatching me out of my entrancement were remnants of my mother's admonishment, hissing to pull my slumped shoulders back and lift my chin achingly. The position felt awkward and uncomfortable. Stiff. *Slouching is unbecoming of a lady.*

I could almost feel her finely manicured fingernail poking into the center point between my shoulder blades, just as she had done when I walked up to receive my diploma, as I faded down the aisle on my wedding day, and on the courthouse steps the day the divorce was finalized. This was her “posture button,” where she could dig her pointer in between the C7 and T1 vertebrae, flooding a shivering sensation throughout my veins.

I picked myself up out of my rigor mortis and surveyed the room for what seemed to be the hundredth time that evening. I spent the entire day painting square sections of Firefly Yellow, Irish Folklore Green, and Garden Fairy Blue on each wall, watching how the sun hit it, analyzing how it felt from every vantage point, watching its transformation throughout the day. It was a desperate attempt to rule out every other sensible color before brandishing the Dragon Fire Orange across the walls of what was to be my new home. *My* home. A reflection of my true self.

~

Around one o'clock that afternoon, I gave up and answered Alex's phone call. I had successfully sidestepped all interactions with any of my friends for the past week. Conversation had only become more irritating in the past few months.

“I'm coming over.”

Alex and her husband were close friends of Wes and me. They had moved into the raised ranch across the street from the cape that Wes and I bought just weeks before our fifth anniversary. Our friendship consisted of double dates and group outings that always seemed to result in aggravation and banter. When Alex and I were together, we always seemed to complain about our husbands. It almost became competitive.

A year before Wes and I filed for divorce, Alex and I bled into our woes and sorrows while waiting for Wes and Brian to return with our takeout.

“I was just too young to make any decisions for myself. How old were you when you met Brian?”

“Twenty-three.”

“Do you ever regret it?”

“There are moments when I wonder where I would be had I not gotten married, but—you know—with the kids.”

Alex outlined the diamonds wrapped around her left ring finger entrancingly, seeming to drift back into memories of the life she had constructed with her brute of a husband. Meanwhile, I had felt



as if my relationship had been an out of body experience that had faded in my memory, buried by every cold glance received and harsh undertone returned.

"I just feel as if I've lost a part of myself."

At that moment, I found myself wondering whether there was still time to change course.

~

"It's definitely ... bold," Alex finally muttered through a twisted confusion. Her hand precariously lifted the wooden stirrer an inch out of the can, only to expose a small amount of the glow beneath the surface before she released her grip, dropping the stirring stick with a sense of disgust. "Do you think you're going to be able to decorate around it? Will you even like it in a few weeks? It's kind of rough, Ruthie."

"I like it."

"You should really come to this spin class with me this Saturday. You would absolutely love the instructor. She is so inspiring. She just lifts any negativity out of your spirit and "

"With all this work I'm doing here I don't even need to go to a gym. You wouldn't believe it."

"That's because you never leave this place. You need to get out more often. Get out of this funk you're in."

I seethed under her blanket of pity and condescension and feigned a grimace in response. Alex's idea of getting out usually included a heavy tab of vodka sodas and a pounding headache the following day. "I actually stopped into the new textile shop next to Home Depot and bought my own material for the couch cushions. I've always wanted to get back into upholstery." My mind drifted gleefully to the image of the teal and gold patterning laid out in the basement below us.

"Make your own couch cushions? You've gone wild, Ruthie. I hope the color of those will at least be less... alarming," she trailed off as she looked back down, still somewhat bewildered at the paint sitting on the floor in between where we stood.

~

My mother would have scoffed at the orange, too, calling it the color of a hippie bodega. *The color you choose shows who you are.* She would have liked the Garden Fairy Blue or Firefly Yellow neutral, passive colors are much easier on the eyes, softer tones mimicking the Better Homes and Gardens aesthetic. The Pantone experts would never approve of the overbearingly orange, with energy surging through its radiance. Its fresh and dewy glow too harsh and abrasive for their pastel palette.

When I told my mother that I was thinking about filing for divorce she sighed and hung up the phone. The weeks following that, she sent me flyers for marriage counseling and articles on improving a failing marriage. After the divorce was filed, our communications were reduced to minor check-ins on holidays and birthdays.

~

Now I sat alone with the can of Dragon Fire woven between my legs and I questioned every choice I had ever made. To buy this paint with no prior testing, to buy this tattered one bedroom lake house with a renovation plan and no money, to sign the divorce papers with no sense of a future, and, the first domino to fall, to marry a man I only tolerated with the idea that love could grow.

~

There were times throughout our relationship where I questioned my true intentions—who was I becoming? I felt an innermost resentment towards his being around me. I remember sitting in a sinister bliss as he enjoyed his five-day-old sushi, dug out from the rear habitat of the fridge. I had contemplated throwing it out that day and the day before that, but I left it. Was it intentional? I couldn't tell you. But I can tell you how difficult it was to muddle my laughter when he echoed from behind the bathroom door, "How old was that sushi?"

"Five days."

"And you didn't say anything when you saw me eating it?"



I kept laughing from the other side of the door. I was tearing up and my ribs were contracting; I hadn't laughed like that in years. I mean that. Years. I didn't laugh often during those eight years. I suppose I was too tense all the time, too closed off, too immobile to feel the flows of humor.

~

I must have spent over three hours pacing up and down the hallways, drinking Merlot out of a pale blue ceramic mug, and stirring the paint with force and empowerment. How did I get to this moment? How would I refigure my world? Without thought, led by intuition, I watched my hand plunge beneath the surface of the paint and lifted the Dragon Fire Orange, rising to the surface with the weight of an added layer. I watched my wine-stained hand stretch before me, releasing the vulnerability, the apprehension, the fear. I spread my hand against the bare white wall and pressed it flat, dragging my hand downward until the paint ran dry off my palm. I reached back into the can, then cupping my hand and pulling out a handful of paint. Pouring the Dragon's Fire out the side of my hand and through the spaces between my fingers, watching the orange stain the wall unforgivingly, I felt my soul begin to stir.



## A Song to See

by Dawn Brooks (SI 18)

See ...

shiny black curls  
a half grin carves a deep dimple  
on the right side of your beauty  
waiting to be filled with  
a sea of kisses

See ...

your hopeful eyes peer through the stars  
into a mirror of an empty landscape  
your reflection swirls melodic sounds of sweetness  
into the air  
restoring the light of dawn

See ...

the rolling thunder of your tiny force  
awakening a broken spirit  
with rumbles of joy and a promise of love and loyalty

See ...

a constellation of anticipation  
guided a shooting star to the moon  
your delicate hand united two dancing spirits  
until they were free and home again.



## Paradelle on Grading

by Sophie Buckner (SI 18)

I'm grading my freshmen's papers  
I'm grading my freshmen's papers  
And I feel I'm in a rut  
And I feel I'm in a rut  
Grading in a rut, and my freshmen's papers don't feel

The same words about the innocence of childhood or the drill of work  
The same words about the innocence of childhood or the drill of work  
Haven't I read this one already?  
Haven't I read this one already?  
Same drill: words, childhood, work, innocence. I *have* read this already.

How do I teach my kids to feel?  
How do I teach my kids to feel?  
If I get another 5-paragraph essay, I will die  
If I get another 5-paragraph essay, I will die  
If I teach my kids to kill the 5-paragraph, what kind of essay will I get?

My freshmen in a rut. The drill of the 5-paragraph essay teaches them to kill  
words, childhood, innocence. I have to work to get an essay I haven't read already.



## Five Cantos

by Dave Desrosiers (SI 18)

*with annotated commentary from the poet himself*

*The first canto, in which the poet lays out his thesis with two supporting details and a counterclaim, vigorously argues that all language is an act of prostitution.*

*To bolster his argument, the poet points out how words are frequently used in self-aggrandizing schemes to seek praise from others. He proposes that all writing is to elicit the attention of others for the purposes of manipulation.*

*The poet introduces his second supporting detail, advancing the notion that language is used to deliberately shift off the onus of responsibility from the transgressor to the harmed.*

### Canto I

Words are whores,  
traded and used for our own ends,  
With which we purchase praise  
each one a debased solicitation  
of desire;  
each one an imposition upon  
an other;  
some may think them beautiful and  
blossoming,  
yet

words are whores; and pages brothels.

### Canto II

To fill our hollow essence,  
that vast and empty shell,  
we set them down on paper  
a voyeuristic spell.  
Tell them that we're clever!  
Tell them we've got heart!  
We've paid for you in writing  
an inkéd and awful art.

Words are whores; the pen's a bottom bitch.

### Canto III

We warp the loom of language  
to transform a villain's crime;  
from vandal's violation to  
victim's voiced volition.  
What assists such awful augment?  
That book upon the shelf!  
A seraglio of syllables  
serves our purpose well.

Words are whores; the dictionary is a stable.



*Here, the poet addresses supporters of the notion that words and language are beautiful. He reminds them that they are no more than customers who use and discard language for their own purposes and pleasures and are therefore diseased.*

*Canto V succinctly restates the thesis and details, concluding with a damning implication of the poet's own complicity.*

## Canto IV

Their Johns defend them with  
romantic platitudes,  
yet demand ecstatic service  
from their chorus of concubines.  
Such pulchritudes perverse  
shall fail us in the end,  
we leave them bent and broken  
a screeching violin.

Words are whores; spreading auto-alphabetic  
deficiency syndrome.

## Canto V

These odalisques, these slatterns  
upon them we do prey;  
to fill our lives with meaning  
in existential play;  
We force ourselves upon them  
then leave them for the others;  
We've had these sluts ten times before  
and shall a dozen more!

Words are whores; and I'm their pompous  
pimp.



## A Hopeful Hypothesis

by John Martin (SI 18)

I have an awful confession to make. I played with matches the week after my house caught fire.

Let me backtrack. Yeah ... my house caught on fire. Now before you get all startled, it wasn't like I was homeless or anything, we didn't even lose a roof, just a first floor that needed to be gutted and smoke and water damage that was wall-to-wall like the best carpet. I know that doesn't make the fact that I was playing with matches inside the house a week afterwards at all socially acceptable. I know that should make me some sort of deviant, but what's past is past.

I knew something was up when my mom's red Ford Explorer with the dent in the side was there at the end of the street. She was never there to pick me up from the bus. "Johnny, now don't freak out, but the house is on fire."

All I could get out was an indiscernible "umm ..." as she sped over every bump and divot of the ice-covered dirt road. I saw dark smoke rising amongst the trees, the fire searching for air, to breathe. Able-bodied men in heavy suits, spraying what they could save, ruining everything with soaking water in their path. The lifeless clothes dryer lying on the front lawn, blackened with soot, too old to function, but we were too poor to replace; a relic, the culprit, a mistake.

When I sat at that metal desk a week later and opened the box of matches, I knew a lot of things about fire.

I knew how fire changed my life. The construction workers proved it, removing walls of the bathroom where that criminal appliance once stood, throwing out memories that couldn't be salvaged or cleaned in my bedroom upstairs, forced to be okay with childhood keepsakes forever stained and engrained with smoke.

I knew how fire affected my family. Huddled together, strangers within our own house: four people in one unfinished basement. Air mattresses, real mattresses that still smelled of smoke and ash, of turmoil and tragedy strewn on raw concrete floors.

But I wanted to see how fire would change other things. A pencil (the yellow paint burns first), a matchbook (ember after ember explodes in little spectacles, a 4th of July in Mid-February), handwritten notes I was always too scared to pass in school (God forbid the teacher read them out loud. God forbid the recipients read them in private). It left each scarred, unusable, broken.

I did this for days before my father screamed. He found my burnt pencil carcasses on the desk. He shook me.

"Are you serious? Do you want to start another fire here? Do you want the house to burn down? Do you know what that would do to this family?"

I said nothing, just stood in silence, my eyes fixed on the crack in the concrete flooring that stood between us.



What I was too afraid to tell him was that I wasn't trying to start fires. I just wanted to see if anything burnt could ever come back. It was an experiment in reincarnation. I wanted my family, our dreams, to be the outlier but my preliminary evidence didn't support it and never would.

But research concluded that while things don't return, they can be rebuilt. The house was reconstructed, new walls and flooring installed, new mattresses bought or donated, old memories cleaned until you could only smell the remnants of prior tragedies if you tried real hard.

Life in the end is a canvas splashed like the greatest Pollock. Memories young and old, painted over mishaps with new triumphs, each layer a story and sure, some layers are singed and blackened, but all art needs contrast in the end.



## Naughty John-John and the Tire Swing

by Jordyn Meyenberg (SI 18)

“That tree is dead!” Heidi’s glasses bounced off the bridge of her nose, her hands on her hips, as she shouted up towards John-John.

“Nu-uh!” He tied his final looped knot, monkeying down the tree with ease.

“Yessiree! It’s deader than dead.”

“*My big sister is such a party pooper,*” thought Little Tori, as she yanked on the rope with all her might. “*Why can’t Heidi just have fun every once in a while?*”

John-John took three steps back, admiring his masterpiece. Before him hung a tire: a bit flattened and mud-splattered. But, to John-John, the apple of his eye: a source of unlimited amusement.

“Me first. Pleeese,” Tori begged gently, her blonde pigtails swirling around her cheeks.

“I built it. I test it,” John-John reminded her.

“If you dare go on that swing, I’m telling Mom!” Heidi stomped her foot on the ground; she meant business. Heidi also known as “The Informant.” Nothing got by her, so nothing got by Mom.

John-John rolled his eyes, stepping into the tire. He curled up inside, his hands gripping the sides. “Come on, Tori! Push me!”

Tori skipped over and took a deep breath. She pressed her hands against the tire.

The swing tottered at first. Then rocked.

“Come on! Faster, Slowpoke” John-John whined.

With each shove, the swing flew higher and higher.

“Yeah! That’s what I’m talkin’ about!” John-John whooped. His fingers skimmed the branches of a neighboring maple.

Tori, unable to wait her turn any longer, caught the tire and hung off the bottom. The tire dragged her across the dirt for ten feet before coming to a halt. “That was wicked, John-John! My turn, pleeeeeease!”

John-John relented, climbing out of the tire, and Tori hopped in immediately.

“Push me, Heidi! Push me!”

Heidi kept her distance, vigorously taking notes in her “Tattletale Journal.”

“I’ll do it, i-Rot,” John-John assured her.

“Yay! Thanks, John-John! But don’t call me that!”

John-John sprinted towards the swing for an Under-Dog. Tori soared into the air, a wide smile crinkling her eyes.



Heidi stared up at Tori. Her writing slowed ... and eventually stopped. She tapped her purple fountain pen on the tip of her chin.

“Ummm, John-John?” said Heidi, rocking her shoulders from side to side and eyeing the dirt beneath her.

“What do you want *now*, Heidi?”

“John-John. I think maybe I should have a turn.”

“Well, well, well. Look who came crawling back to *me*! I’ll let you have a turn, on one condition: you can’t tell Mom. You are either with us or against us. Right, Tori?”

“Right!” Tori’s voice echoed from inside the tire. She played it cool, secretly elated that her older sister was *finally* going to join in.

Tori and Heidi traded places, and Heidi reminded her siblings, “Slow and steady, or else.”

John-John and Tori worked together, as Heidi was the most “solid” child in the Meyenberg clan. Side by side, they approached the tire.

One. Two. Three!

The swing flew higher than Heidi, John, or Tori ever expected.

“Ahhhhh too high!” Heidi screamed.

*Crack!*

The blackened branch plummeted towards the ground, Heidi plummeting with it. The tire bounced off the ground and began to roll.

And roll and roll and roll. Faster and faster and faster.

Heidi yelled. And yelled. And yelled.

John-John looked over at Tori with horror. The second their eyes met, they sprinted after the rolling Heidi.

*Whack!* The tire thudded against a giant oak. The broken swing toppled onto its side.

John and Tori took another twenty seconds to catch up to Heidi, huffing and puffing upon their arrival.

Heidi’s body oozed out of the tire from pure exhaustion. When she saw John-John and Tori standing over her, she sprang to her feet.

Heidi’s glasses looked like a lopsided seesaw her hair a pile of leaves. She adjusted her shorts. Then, she tucked in her shirt. Then, she took her pointer finger, shoving into John-John’s chest. And, at the top of her lungs, Heidi yelled:

“I TOLD YOU THAT TREE WAS DEAD!”



# Cascading Melancholies

by Chelsea Morrison (SI 18)

Did you feel that?

The rhythm of rain.  
Pu pu pulsating raptures:  
Kindling for the perfect storm.

Ominous shadows,  
dancing on the dewy haze  
To the crooning winds.  
An intoxicating lullaby.

Did you feel that?

A twinkle and a shiver.  
A split second

Frozen in time;

When time  
*Slips*

Away

Like rain from a cloud.

D  
R  
I  
P

D  
R  
I  
P

D  
R  
I  
P

I watched and waited

...

Nothing ... And I didn't Feel

A

Single

D  
R  
O  
P



They hovered in the void,  
Arrested in space.

A space.

The space  
Between truth  
And fancy

Fancies thwarted  
By fate.  
Fates throttled  
By Storm's fury.

Its jeers forever  
Echoing in the mind's eye ... mind's eye ... mind's eye ..... not I ..... not I ..... not I

A fading memory  
And a craving for melancholies.  
To feel anything is good,

Any feeling is a good feeling.



## Perceptions

by Megan Murphy (SI 18)

The messages light up your phone,  
as the great anxiety of reading his message  
Crashes in waves over you.

You meet him on that warm spring day,  
The same waves crash over you,  
Your breathing turns shallow,  
His face blurs into view,  
twenty feet away,  
fifteen,  
ten,  
five,  
he's here.

Your stomach twists  
eyes longing to caress his face,  
Feeling the bony structures  
the curves of his cheeks.

His eyes meet yours,  
your stomach flips  
Your hands become  
Valleys for the water to wash through.

Tears well up in your eyes  
you imagine your life  
Tears of happiness,  
You have finally found the one.  
Tears of sadness,  
Today is the last time you will see him.



## Fresh Cut Grass and Garden Days

by Kaylee Thurlow (SI 18)

The fresh cut grass splashed up like an unruly wave when Grampy mowed over a particularly high point. I squealed and tightened my pudgy fingers on the steering wheel while he tightened his left arm around me, and his right hand on the wheel.

He followed the lines up and down, creating an organized masterpiece, until I asked him for a zebra-striped lawn. He obliged and added diagonal strips in the already trimmed lawn. When he finished the left side, he veered right to check on his vegetable garden, probably trying to distract me from asking him to ruin the rest of his nicely manicured lawn.

The sun was out, but the clouds splatted across the sky, shading the full extent of the sun's rays. Grampy opened up the gate to his garden and picked up his watering can. I followed him through the garden, past the sunflower-colored squash and blood-red tomatoes.

I watched him water each patch of the garden with care until we arrived at my favorite part. The sugar snap peas were the color of the freshly watered grass. The stalks were taller than me, and I reached up to gather one from the tallest point. Grampy took one for himself and snapped the skin with an audible crack. I snapped mine, careful not to break the fragile peas inside and put my nose close to the freshly peeled skin.

The sugar-snap pea is what spring smells like, and we ate in silence, with only the crunch of the peas and their shell breaking the quiet.

## Peace of Mind

by Carly Tutolo (SI 18)

Tiny trinkets of unresolved fragility  
Keep them.  
Cherish them.  
You'll never know when you might need them.  
Lost within drawers, behind dressers, beneath bed frames  
Are letters left in envelopes half-shredded  
Holding your flimsy memories within their bent corners.  
Lost are the deflated mylar balloons folded into 6th grade yearbooks,  
Leaving a sense of eeriness behind its shiny stagnation.  
Lost is a shell from the beach that you needed to remember,  
For reasons you've already forgotten.  
Lost are the broken chargers, used batteries, abandoned Blackberrys ...  
All suffocating beneath the weight of Grandma's diamond earrings  
Caressed within the top left drawer of the jewelry box  
Why do we put things where we put them?  
You might need them.  
You should keep them.  
They might work ...  
Someday.

Yet people are not items.  
They are not treasures designed to be saved,  
nor are they trash that's subject to a weekly disposal.  
People are invaluable,  
yet endlessly expendable ...  
They say that you don't need them if they don't want you,  
But to take them off your shelf  
To remove them from your bedside table  
To unearth them from that small wooden box  
Is a means of shattering your control.  
"She's been your friend since you were 6"  
"He gave you nothing" but every first you've ever had  
"They're your parents, you don't need to like them  
You just need to respect them."  
But they don't define you, you can just move on.

But to move on is to shift your demons,  
The emotions you've placed so cautiously around  
The parameters of your mind.  
It means that people will find out  
How human you really are,  
And what a shame that would be.

Who released Despair from his confines, encouraging him to spread his infectious disease?  
Who allowed Vengeance to surface from the suffocating tomb you placed her in?  
Who failed to notice that Delight was slipping out the door,  
stepping on creaky floorboards along his path?  
You did.  
It was your job to keep an eye on them.  
You're in charge,  
After all.



## Controlled Burns

by Stephanie White (SI 18)

He does controlled burns ... Sparking Conflagration after conflagration to prevent conflagration. His beard matching the wildfires he set blazing red, wild and out of control. A similar blazing wildness was in his cool blue eyes. The same eyes that matched his twin, but who lived worlds away.

The sparking of the fire was constant it continued from day into cool dark night the spark of a match struck against the cardboard strip on the side of the matchbox that he held steadily to the blunt.

Woaaaaoff went the flames ... tsss hissed the blunt.

His world was filled with smoke. The stifling, choking smoke as limber pine after limber pine engulfed into flames ... feeding off of the land, and the calming smoke at home under the cover of dark in his cabin, horizontal on the couch, in a wool sweater from Goodwill.

The two controlled burns went hand in hand starting the forest fires fed his wild soul and burning the weed soothed his nerves.

It continued this way for many years. A man of the mountain, wild and untamed a transplant to Waterton from the states, with no plan for the future and no plan to return.

She was a different kind of fire. She shared the same wildness in her eyes also cool and blue, but more settled wild with curiosity and love, rather than unbridled passion. She was beautiful and eccentric. Every day she wore an orange knit wool hat with flaps over the ears and strings that hung down on the sides and hiking boots with tall wool socks. This came in handy during her weekend backpacking expeditions in the Canadian Rockies, when there was snow at the higher elevations late into the summer. She too was a woman of the mountains. She spent her days knee-deep in wild weeds, brackish water and brambles, seeking out the elusive Gray Wolf.

She was also a transplant to Waterton, arriving via British Columbia. She came to Waterton with the purpose of studying the breeding habits of the rare Gray Wolf for her work as a field biologist. Day after day, hunting her prey...hoping for even the briefest of encounters to document in her journal. She knew that the breeding wolves had to be out there forever on their scent, following fresh tracks in the mud, new scat on the ground, but never in their presence. She carried her journal waiting to be meticulously written in. And in one of her more idiosyncratic ways she carried with her a copy of *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* on hand at all times.

At night, she went home to a small cabin shared with a few other young biologists and curled up by the fire and read out of her book until she fell asleep.

Aside from sharing blue eyes that matched the crystal waters of Waterton Lake, the two people had seemingly little in common.

The burning continued and the stalking of the elusive went on ... separately, independently. Until one day when the two crossed paths. The two wild hearts that belonged to the woods, and the mountains, the lake, and the fire, the wolves, but not yet each other, found themselves in town on the same day. They came into town for the same purpose: seeking provisions at the general store on their one day off.



As the man with the untamed red beard exited the essentials in hand: six-pack of beer, some bread, eggs, and jerky he held the door for the most mesmerizing creature he had set eyes on. A small woman, wearing an orange knit hat with straw colored hair spilling out from underneath, and wild blue eyes that returned his gaze. She said “thank you” and walked in. He said “you’re welcome” and walked off.

She picked up a basket and walked over to the produce section, smiled to herself and let out a barely audible little laugh...there was something about the way the man with the blazing beard and the blue eyes at the door made her feel. She pulled off her orange cap and let her yellow hair tumble down her back.

As the man walked down the street, he fingered a joint in his pocket, rolled it around between his fingers with his remaining free hand. He brought it up to his lips, but did not inhale. With a flick of his fingers, he tossed it to the sidewalk and thought to himself *mmm how nice*.



**Teacher-As-Writer Workshops  
and Writers Retreat  
Contributions**



## My Home on Wheels

by Julia Kneeland

My earliest memories include mobile homes. There's a picture of me as a baby being held by my parents in front of their eight-foot-wide trailer that was parked down near the beach in Narragansett, Rhode Island. My dad had just graduated from Zion Bible Institute in Providence, Rhode Island, the spring that I was born. He worked as a car salesman while attending school in Providence and enjoyed selling and was good at it. I'm not really sure how we ended up moving to Connecticut, but both of my parents were hired by a large successful mobile home dealership called Jensen's.

At that time, we lived in a nearby small apartment in West Hartford. I was about three years old. I remember we walked to the local park and to church. I stayed with sitters when both my parents worked. My grandmother, my mom's mother, and my aunt, who was only four years older than me, also lived in a mobile home not too far away. My grandmother was a single older mom, and her life was especially difficult in those days. She managed a small mobile home park in which they lived. I would sometimes stay with them. I remember my grandmother drank lots of coffee and would always say, "I'm going to pull my hair out by the roots," meaning that the park tenants drove her crazy! She never did pull her hair out though.

After a few years of selling experience at Jensen's, my parents decided to venture out on their own. They bought a small mobile home business from a man ready to retire. That was in East Windsor, Connecticut, along the Connecticut River Valley, in tobacco and farm country. Even though it was in the country, the business was in a good location, right on a major route connecting Springfield, Massachusetts, with East Hartford, Connecticut. All this was prior to the time when Route 91 was built.

There was a mobile home park next door to the business and a smaller one located across the street. The property the business was located on was owned by a sweet elderly lady named Mrs. Robb. Her home was toward the back and was actually her summer cottage. Mrs. Robb's yard was like a park garden. Her house was separated from the business by a beautiful hedge of red rose bushes extending the entire length of the property. She tended her garden lovingly. It was full of apple trees, lilac and mountain laurel bushes, and a wide variety of flowers including lilies of the valley and Irises.

At that time, we lived in a mobile home parked in front of Mrs. Robb's home. We did have some privacy from the busy road because there was a mobile home parked perpendicular to ours and we had a small yard with a white picket fence and a swing set.

Eventually the business grew to the point that my parents needed more room to display the mobile homes, so they decided to rent the neighbor's adjoining cornfield. At the peak of their business, there were more than twelve mobile homes parked in two long straight lines, new units out in front and used ones taken in trade in the back. My dad did most of the selling, with my mom's assistance. She mainly took care of all the book work, including checking credit and typing the bank papers. I also became involved throughout the years as I grew older. I mowed "the field" as we called the neighbor's cornfield. Also, whenever a used mobile home was taken in trade, it had to be cleaned. I enjoyed participating in the business and my parents would pay me a little money for my help.

I viewed my parents' mobile homes as large play houses on wheels. My friends and I had many styles to choose from. Early on, the models were mostly simple eight to ten-foot-wide ranging in lengths from forty to fifty-five feet. They typically had one to three bedrooms with a choice of front kitchens, front living rooms or bedrooms. I think my favorite was the 1959 Pace Maker tri-level model. I always was impressed that a mobile home could have an upstairs just like a regular house. In 1964, the American came out with a twelve-foot-wide mobile home. Because of their width, special permits had to be obtained in order to move them to parks. In 1973, an Aetna mobile home sold for \$3995 with lot rent as low as \$35 making the investment affordable for the average working person.



Selling was second nature to my dad. He was enthusiastic and persuasive, and he had the ability to show a genuine interest in his customers' lives. He would always shake their hands, make eye contact, and smile. He usually wore suits including a tie, no matter how hot in the summer.

My dad would expound on the advantages of owning your own place. Many of the customers rented tenement apartments in Hartford or local cities and towns. Another plus for the customers was that these homes came fully furnished. My dad would say, "All you have to do is move in." With low heating and electricity costs, many people purchased their first homes. Naturally my friends and I would try to encourage the customers to buy. We would be inside the mobile home spying on my dad with his customers and we would hide inside closets. As they came through looking at all the fine features we would jump out and yell, "Surprise!" Then my dad would laugh and say we were also included in the price. Most of the customers took this well.

One major part of the business was finding spots in mobile home parks. Unfortunately, some parks would not accept any children and if they did it would be only two. Parks would not usually allow dogs, but cats were fine. I remember going on deliveries with my dad. I would help him as he backed the truck up to the hitch of the mobile home. I would beckon him back then give him a signal when he was close enough. He always seemed to appreciate my help. I also assisted him when he would be picking up a unit from a park that he was taking in trade. He would have me go inside with a big roll of masking tape and tape up the doors and drawers including the stove and refrigerator.

Sometimes I would find little kitties wandering around the park. I would pick them up and cuddle them but knew he probably would not allow me to take one home. So I quickly and quietly would hide the kitty under my shirt and slip inside the mobile home. Then I would put the kitty in a drawer, shut it, and tape it up. Assuring my dad that I had done my job completely, we would head for home. Once we got there I would "discover" the kitty, acting truly surprised that it had just wandered into the mobile home on its own and delighted that it was there. After several failed attempts to capture the kitties from the parks, my dad got in the habit of double checking my work.

For my parents, by the late 1970s the demand for mobile home living had changed. Customers also changed. Before people would do business based on reputation and trust. Later people were more critical and would often back out of deals at the last minute, threatening to sue if not allowed to get their deposits returned. The peak had definitely passed. So what began as an answer to housing shortages after World War II declined into a dinosaur during the latter part of the twentieth century. My dad was a proud veteran of World War II and was also part of the growth of the mobile home industry. He and my mom worked hard and provided me with many fine memories.



## **Contributor Bios**

**Makenzie Aitchison** (SI 18) is an English teacher at E.O. Smith High School in Storrs, CT. In 2017, she received Bachelor's degrees in both English and Secondary Education from the University of Rhode Island. She enjoys writing with her students and believes in the hidden power of all types of writing.

**Dawn Brooks** (SI 18) is an Assistant Principal in Middletown who previously taught Spanish at the middle and high school levels for 25 years. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership at the University of Bridgeport. Dawn is an emerging creative writer with a special interest in creative nonfiction.

**Sophie Buckner** (SI 18) is a graduate student at UConn and teaches First-Year Writing there. She is interested in how writing helps to understand and evolve identity and how different forms of writing create new identities for writers.

**Jane Cook** (SI '07) has been working as an educator for over 40 years and as a Literacy and Technology Coach for over 30 years. Since 2007, Jane has served as a Teacher-Consultant for CWP, serving in various capacities including Co-facilitator of the CWP Summer Institute, CWP Technology Program Leader, and CWP Grants Program Leader. Currently, she works as an Educational Consultant providing workshops and support in curriculum, literacy, and technology. Jane began writing for her high school newspaper and has never stopped.

**Ann Policelli Cronin** is a consultant in English education for school districts. Ann has taught middle and high school English and been a district-level administrator who designed English programs, conducted staff development, and supervised middle and high school teachers. She served as Assistant Director of the Connecticut Writing Project and was coordinator of the CWP Summer Institute. Ann received awards as Connecticut Outstanding English Teacher of the Year and Outstanding Teacher Advocate (CSDE) and for creating a National Center of Excellence for the Teaching of Writing (NCTE) and a National Blue Ribbon Middle School. Ann advocates for education at: [reallearningct.com](http://reallearningct.com).

**Mindi Englart** (SI 05) has taught creative writing at Cooperative Arts & Humanities Magnet High School in New Haven for more than 15 years. She was the founding editor of Etcetera Literary Magazine, a 2010 Surdna Grant recipient, and is the author of twelve books of nonfiction for children, as well as poems, stories, and academic publications.

**Julia Kneeland** is a recently retired teacher from Connecticut public schools. She enjoyed teaching language arts and social studies in fifth grade in Tolland for many years. She has participated in the Teacher-as-Writer Workshops at UConn. She often shared her writing with her students. Currently she is working on writing a biography about Connecticut's founder Thomas Hooker.

**Kim Kraner** (SI 14) is a high school English teacher in Avon, CT. She lives in Granby, CT with her family. She attended the CWP Summer Institute in 2014. She is currently finishing her Masters in English for Teachers at UConn.

**John Martin** (SI 18) is an English teacher at Wethersfield High School where he teaches Journalism, American Literature, and Public Speaking. While John's first passion is his work in the classroom, he also enjoys fitness, sports, and music.

**Jordyn Meyenberg** (SI 18) is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut pursuing her Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. She is currently co-teaching at Sports and Medical Sciences Academy (SMSA) in Hartford. She is beyond excited to start her career next year, inspiring students to tell their stories through writing.



**Chelsea Morrison** (SI 18) teaches 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Saint Christopher School in East Hartford. She's excited to see where her renewed enthusiasm for writing takes her and is grateful for the knowledge, skills, confidence, and friendships she gained as a participant in the 2018 Summer Institute.

**Joan Muller** (SI 10) recently retired after twenty-two years teaching Visual Arts and an interdisciplinary enrichment program called Designing Minds which she developed in her district. She now works part-time for Museum Education at Old Sturbridge Village as a Learning Through Experience teacher at its EL charter school, Old Sturbridge Academy. Joan's academic background includes The Hartford Art School of the University of Hartford (BFA); RISD, UNH (post-grad Master's equivalent); and many other courses of study and mentorships including the Connecticut Writing Project in 2010. Joan's most significant learning has been literally "in the field" as a forty year on-farm/off-grid horsekeeper balancing sustainable living with a creative arts and writing life.

**Megan Murphy** (SI 18) is currently a special education teacher at Enfield High School in Enfield, CT. She has held a love for reading and writing since a young age, so spending a summer with the Connecticut Writing Project was an easy decision to make! She continues to write in her free time for the passion behind it!

**Amy Nocton** (SI 14) has taught high school Spanish and/or Italian for twenty-five years. She currently works at E.O. Smith High School in Storrs. She lives with her spirited family off a dirt road in the land trust protected forest surrounded by great neighbors and woodland creatures. She is grateful to her family and her writing group friends (Bob, Kim, Danielle, Jason, and Matt) for their creativity and support always. She has been previously published in *Inti: Revista de literatura hispánica*, *The Bookends Review*, *The Pangolin Press*, *Moonchild Magazine*, and has poems pending publication in the *Peacock Journal*.

**Kaylee Thurlow** (SI 18) is currently studying Curriculum and Instruction in her Master's year in UConn's Neag School of Education and enjoys learning about literature and composition in secondary education classrooms. She graduated from UConn in 2018 with Bachelor's degrees in English and Secondary English Education with a concentration in Creative Writing. When she's not reading or writing, you can find Kaylee walking in her hometown.

**Carly Tutolo** (SI 18) is a high school English teacher with degrees in Secondary English Education and Creative Writing from the University of Hartford. She will earn her MA in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Saint Joseph in March of 2019. While she enjoys all types of creative writing, she considers herself a poet above all other forms.

**Stephanie White** (SI 18) is an outdoor enthusiast, life-long equestrian, and amateur artist. She works as a high school English teacher at Windham High School. She is driven to write about places and spaces, and how humans come to understand the environment we inhabit and its impact on us in return.



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