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Fall Path 2013

Stone Path Review

AN ARTISTIC JOURNAL OF PATHS THROUGH IMAGES AND WORDS



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Stone Path Review

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The Sound of Dissolution

by A.J. Huffman

seeps from the center of midnight's ceiling.
It ticks like an unwound clock, going nowhere
fast. I follow its spastic lead, trip
over my own intentions, slide backwards
into a pillowed abyss that has no eyelids.
It is a strange Hell, almost comforting. I lie
back, and let absence swallow me.

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published six collections of poetry, available on Amazon.com. She has published her work in numerous national and international literary journals. She is currently the editor for Kind of a Hurricane Press literary journals www.kindofahurricanepress.com

Wish

by Ryan Bermuda

Who is counting
all the wishes
blown past candles
for the fathers
to come home
from sand, soil
and from stone?

J Ryan Bermuda lives in Redlands, California, where people panic if it rains. After touring nationally for 10 years with his band Sleeping Giant, he is now focusing on writing. Bermuda has been previously published in local journals such as The 2012 Sand Canyon Review out of Yucaipa, California, and the upcoming issue of Southern California's Tin Cannon Review.

Ghost Wind

by Bradley Hamlin

In Sacramento
October creeps in
with the best weather

finally not hot anymore
and not yet too cold

orange & white
pumpkins laughing
against your door

red, brown, yellow leaves
crisp
crunch under
rake

giving way to the chill
that's coming

you've got your coat on again,
feels fine to have that force field
as the autumn brings
the urgency

of other people's thoughts
the whispers
inside your ear canals
and it's okay

you know
it's all right, you're haunted,
but you've always
been that way.



Bradley Mason Hamlin is an American writer, veteran of the United States Navy, and alumni of the University of California, where poet Gary Snyder dubbed Hamlin "The Road Warrior of Poetry!" Hamlin was born in Los Angeles and currently lives in Sacramento, California with his wife, Nicky Christine, and their tribe of suburban children and wild cats. He is the editor of Zero Percent Magazine and his latest book of poems, California Blonde, is available from Black Shark Press.



A Maple Tree in Winter

by Craig Steele

*Don't grieve. Anything you lose
comes round in another form.*

- Rumi

Mourning, without a single leaf
to save its modesty, until

a single crow wings in,
settles, and while

celebrating its arrival,
draws in its murder mates, until

every limb shudders, tickled
by the heft of ebon leaves.

Craig W. Steele's poetry has been appearing in children's magazines and anthologies since 2009 and in literary magazines and anthologies since 2010. To date, he has had over 200 poems published in print and online journals, the majority in the United States, but nearly half in Australia, Canada, Ireland, Sweden, Taiwan, Japan and the United Kingdom.



Waves Ease the Shore

by Don Cellini

Waves ease
the shore.

Moon invades
my house

after rain.
You sleep

blind
to this noise

miles away
dread and deep –

oaks cover you
with a shroud

of leaves.
Your shadow

and whisper
follow me.

The horizon
is an

arching
constellation.

The waves are
memory;

the oaks, pain;
this rain,

your shadow;
the moon, longing.

Don Cellini is a poet, translator and photographer. He is the author of *Approximations/Aproximaciones* (2005) and *Inkblots* (2008) both collections of bilingual poems published by March Street Press. His book of prose poems, *Translate into English* was released in 2010 by Mayapple Press. His book of translations, *Elas Nandino: Selected Poems* (2010 McFarland Publishers) is the first book-length translation of the Mexican poet. He is a recipient of fellowships from the King Juan Carlos Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He teaches at Adrian College in Michigan.

www.DonCellini.com

The Final Pestilence of Pandora

by James Valvis

Some endured much and emerged sane.
 Others endured little and went mad.
 It takes no genius to understand why:
 some are born knowing victory
 is a farce, and others spend their lives
 chasing it until it wears them down.
 My poor father was such a man.
 He never understood his misery,
 but the equation is simple:
 happiness is the exact difference
 of reality minus expectation.
 Anyone who can lower his hopes
 can abide almost any reality.
 This is why I'm a survivor.
 This is why my father, so snazzy
 in his dark suits, so prepared
 for triumph, was such a tragedy.
 Oh, good people are fooled so often:
 hope, not despair, delivers men to drink,
 turns them to turn away, to hang themselves.
 The final pestilence of Pandora
 is the one that triggers all the others.
 We all know this, but it still tempts.
 Even I, practiced in this hidden wisdom,
 hope yet my father will learn this,
 dead now these ten years.



James Valvis is the author of *HOW TO SAY GOODBYE* (Aortic Books, 2011). His poems or stories have appeared in journals such as *Anderbo*, *Arts & Letters*, *Barrow Street*, *Baltimore Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *LA Review*, *Nimrod*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, *Vestal Review*, and many others. His poetry has been featured in *Verse Daily* and the *Best American Poetry* website. His fiction was chosen for the 2013 *Sundress Best of the Net*. A former US Army soldier, he lives near Seattle.



Botany

by Kevin Zepper (featured artist)

After our quiet cups of early morning coffee, you prepare yourself for work at the jewelry store. We kiss at the back sliding door; you're gone. I collect the cups still warm from the deep-brown Kona and see the bright red print on the white rim, the lines of an autumn grape leaf. Its faint twin rests thinly, smudged inside the interior where coffee has melted away the leaf impression. I examine this perfect print, red on white, like a botanist before clearing the dishes from the bamboo table.

Kevin Zepper, MFA teaches writing of all kinds at Minnesota State University Moorhead. He is the author of four chapbooks. He is currently circulating his first book length manuscript, *ghostworlds*. He was recently awarded a writing residency at Starry Night Artist Retreat in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. He resides in Moorhead, Minnesota with his wife, boys and Bichons.



Wrestling With the Void

by Milton P. Ehrlich

I am earth, and you are fire.

In a shared awakening,
we fly above the crowd.

We trust the breath.

Mindful breathing shows us
how to harmonize our attention
with what is.

Detached from passing thoughts
we develop equanimity.

In a haven of meditation
we see the light in everything.

With transformative awareness,
we tolerate impermanence.

We unmask our selves
and glimpse liberation.

Embracing nothingness,
we have everything.

Milton P. Ehrlich is an 80 year old psychologist who has published numerous poems in periodicals such as the *Wisconsin Review*, *Toronto Quarterly Review*, *Antigonish Review*, *Shofar Literary Journal*, *Dream Fantasy International*, *Pegasus*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Parnassus Literary Journal*, *Xanadu*, *Mobius*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *New York Times*.



Africa

by Melodie Corringall

She will never see Africa. She knows that now. She will never foray out from the trees onto the Savannah. Never follow the Nile. Never. Not in a few years. Not when the children are older. Not when she has saved enough money. Never.

She is here, her feet not planted in the soft sand of possibilities but rooted to the living room floor. The celebrant faces clustered around her seal her fate.

“So birthday girl,” jovial voice, “What do you say?”

The crowd expects a response, and quickly.

Marion shrugs; her smile spreads like honey across her friends’ whole-wheat faces. “Good food,” she mugs; exotic food now her only adventure.

“That, we do well,” her sister confesses proudly.

“And drink,” her husband David chirps, “Speaking of which...” The exuberant host retrieves his wife’s glass and fades to the kitchen.

Her husband has played every role he can imagine. He is no traveler.

Image courtesy of www.WorldMapsOnline.com

* * *

Standing by the window, the last of the pale sunlight seeping through the glass, Marion is pulled back to her other kingdom. She returns there often now, thanks, in part, to the medication. There she is wakened by the sun’s warmth, early morning eyes blink at cracks of space, hints of openness seen through the pattern of enclosing branches.

There, through hours dense as foliage, she scurries through the house of trees, scrambling up and down the rough trunks, swinging from perch to perch. Her eyes lured beyond the shelter to the flat open expanse.

Hesitantly, she moves forward. Swinging rhythmically from tree to tree then stops abruptly at the edge of her knowledge, the last tree. Her head cocked, she spies a shadow scampering across the yellow sky.

The shadow is here, in her living room, she is back to the voices.

"To the next 50," a voice roars.

"And the next."

"Who knows," David speculates, "The way things are changing."

A chorus of groans, "Here we go."

"Who brought the professor?"

Affectionately overcome, David raises his hand.

"I accept defeat. I appreciate when a crowd wants circuses."

"I know 30 first-year students who'd argue that point," his colleague says. Scattered laughter and shuffling feet: the herd drifts towards the canaps and shoptalk.

* * *

Marion remains near the window. The first time, even the shadow flickering across the mind would be as terrifying as the scrape of rat's claws. But a powerful curiosity, a painful longing pulls. Her crouched body cradled in the familiar womb of branches slowly moves from her mother. The hot connecting chord trembles to protect the vulnerable flesh. The membrane peels to separate them like an adhesive bandage from a wound.

The other animals carelessly chirping and jostling are unaware that a sister considers venturing beyond their tree cradle. Reaching forward, the sharp sun-knives pierce the flesh, burning the eyes. Marion turns away, digs in, back to the cool afternoon.

* * *

"Just ten years to go then, eh? Or are you planning an early retirement?"

"We haven't decided," David smiles. "Looking at options."

"Like winning the lottery?"

"Something like that."

"What you need is a rich old aunt."

"Don't we all?"

* * *

Someone went first. Someone who was young, curious, incautious, pulled roughly away from her mother's nipple. Some she scrambled down. Seeing a bird perhaps, or scampering animal, the adventurer ran to catch a shadow. And once across the line: exposed. The small naked body impaled on the sun's blade.

Visible from above. Visible from below. Visible.

* * *

"David said they offered you a promotion?"

Marion's friend says.

"It's been suggested," she replies.

"Is that good news or bad?"

"I don't know."

"Marion hasn't decided what she wants to be when she grows up," her husband says.

"Worse still, I haven't decided to grow up."

"You're too grown up, that's your problem," her friend rallies.

"It's David's influence."

On hearing his name, the kindly man moves to his wife's side and squeezes her to his ribs.

"What am I being accused of now?"

"Making me grow up."

"I thought Mother Nature did that."

"No, she just makes us grow old."

"Up, old, what's the difference?"

* * *

The eyes fold shut sealed by the heat of the day, the sun hot, but she still cradled in her tree's

womb. (Behind her the music of family, friends, chattering, voices rising, laughing and chiding.) The lids slowly unpeel. She is here on the edge, hairy back pressed against the familiar rough trunk, chest exposed to the open space. The air shimmers, waves of heat, yellow, insistent.

Move.

Skeleton fingers grip her face; a taunt wire caught in her chest, winding ever tighter, pulls her forward. Her stiff legs snap untangled. Her body is awkward, uncontrolled. Clutching the trunk, she shimmies to the ground. Hooked to the sun wheel the wire of curiosity draws her to the edge. The body splits. Behind: cool, hesitant, comforting repose. In front: hands outstretched, legs bent, she cautiously moves out and pushes ahead. She crosses the line. Contact.

Embraced in heat, within the waves, the furnace, she fumbles headfirst on mechanical legs, below the stiff grass prickles the flesh. Still advancing from the familiar, her breath held, expectantly; the sound of those safely nestled behind her now memory, subdued. She leans towards the unfamiliar open horizon.

* * *

“David said you have a chance to take some time off.”

“Yes I do,” Marion replies.

“Escaping our rain drenched Island?”

“There’s a problem with the kids,” she says.

“Take them.”

“David will be on his own.”

“He’s of age.”

“Where are you going?” her sister calls from behind the metal tray.

“I don’t know. Africa?”

“Be serious.”

“Maybe you and David, but the kids?”

“No way city boy will go.”

* * *

There, at last. Exposed to the sky. Unprotected. No enclosing tree, no shadows, no branches, nothing. She a vulnerable insect scuttling across the celebrant’s table: the hostess unforgiving. When she turns to summon the others, they call her back.

“Marion, Marion.”

“Spaceship to Marion.”

“Hey, birthday girl.”

Slowly focusing her eyes, Marion warms to the circle of faces, round and golden, every smile beaming at her. Can she tell them of her journey? Explain the frisson of the unknown, the alien risk of this otherworld far from the comfort of the warm nest, where they remain contentedly entangled with family and friends. Would they join her?

David’s warm bony hand encircles her fingers. “Come back,” he says softly. She will, she will come home but she will not leave anything behind.

Melodie Corrigan is a Canadian writer whose stories have appeared in *Bartleby Snopes*, *Toasted Cheese*, *The November 3rd Club*, *FreeFall*, *Six Minute Magazine*, *Subtle Fiction* and *Switchback*
<http://melodiecorrigan.wordpress.com>



My Grandmother's Bible

by Tabitha Holcombe

Silence drives me crazy. The guy across from me bounces his leg up and down furiously. Why is he here at the counselor's office? What is his problem? I pick up the issue of People magazine from the chair beside me with the intention of reading it as a distraction. I want to look normal. It smells like laundry detergent and antibacterial soap in this waiting room. As I turn the thin pages, I see a headline about Shania Twain's "new lease on love."

I must have been five or six when my grandmother

would have all of us cousins over to spend the night. I try to repress the memory of us, standing in front of her television dancing, our mouths moving to Shania Twain's "I Feel Like a Woman" as she sat laughing in her crimson recliner. Even more, I try not to remember how she looked: her brown eyes squinting happily under her glasses, her soft hands placed on her cheeks as she smiled, and her stringy hair curled to her scalp with a new perm. I say a mental thank you to Shania for the sweet memory she gave me and try to forget it for now. Silence forces me to remember, and I don't want to. I want to be ordinary again.

"Tabitha," he says from the hallway, "you can come in now."

I place the magazine down on the table next to me and walk past him in the hallway. His room smells stale, like a trashcan full of a week's worth of take-out food. When is the last time I ate? It's been a few days, I know that much. He has a square rug that covers the first half of his office and extends to a big beige chair he has in the right corner near a window placed high on the wall for privacy. The rug looks expensive and even a little excessive. On a dark oak shelf adjacent to the squared chair sits a brass elephant and a dim lamp. I sit down, getting choked up already; I remind myself that it's okay, but maybe I shouldn't cry as much this time. He closes the door before he sits at his small wooden desk. He begins to rummage through yellow legal pads.

"Ah," he says, picking one of them out of the pile. He leans back carefully, propping an ankle on the opposite knee. He starts to scribble things down, muttering words like "tornado," "grandmother," and "boyfriend." He looks at me through big square glasses that sit low on his cheekbones before he begins, "So, I'm just going to look over some of my notes from the last time we met, but you can go ahead and start talking if you'd like. What is it that you want to talk about today?"

"It was just so much at once," I say blinking fast so that I don't have to wipe tears from my eyes yet.

"Yes, it was, wasn't it?"

The clock ticks, ticks, ticks and I realize that it actually started ticking long before I realized the countdown.

During the launch of an Orbiter (OV), at T-minus 16 seconds, the massive Sound Suppression System (SPS) drenches the Mobile Launcher

Platform (MLP) and Solid Rocket Booster (SRB) channels with almost 300,000 gallons of water to protect the launch stack from harm that can be caused by reflected acoustical energy and heat during lift off. April 21, 2011. It was T-minus six days before the tornado would barrel through Tuscaloosa creating a 5.9 mile path of destruction. I was sitting in the library when Mom called me back. It was too late. My grandmother had passed away before she could make it to the nursing home. My helplessness hung heavy in the air between her sobs and my forced library silence. I stared at the computer screen. I had been watching videos of Challenger and Columbia violently fading into the atmosphere in a plume of smoke, the mothers, sons, brothers, wives and students of the astronauts watching in horror at the sudden disintegration of the launch stack. I watched with them as bodies turned to ash and mixed with chunks of Reinforced Carbon-Carbon (RCC). I imagined what it must have been like to be there, inhaling it into the heavy capillaries of my lungs. Guilt flooded my heart, pumping gallons over the surface like the SPS soaking the MLP. I had watched the last documented seconds of Columbia's crew in a film that had been recovered on the side of the road after the disaster, but I had missed my grandmother's. She was alone, no cameras around to capture her last moments so that I could watch them over and over. She's gone like them. I wonder if she passed by them on her way out and what they must have said to her from deep inside the computer screen. I sat frozen, an hour and a half away from family. I had an engineering exam in two hours. Do I stay and take it or do I go home? I knew I'd have to go home for the funeral and I knew they wouldn't let me see her before then. But I wanted to see her one last

time, her heart still full of blood, her lungs full of air, and her palms facing the ceiling waving goodbye. Will you call your brother for me? my mother had asked.

I walked to the staircase, my face dry. My grandmother had taken my tears with her when she left and I couldn't wrap my mind around that fact, much less how I was going to call Dillon and break the news to him. I walked outside onto the steps of the library overlooking campus. The brightness of the sun hit my eyes like the overhead lamp of a dentist's office turning everything white.

Hello, he said into the ear piece, ignorant of the circumstances. Dillon, you know how Mom was going to see Mimi? I ask. Yeah, he mumbles. And then it hit me. I would never hear her soft voice say Tabitha ever again. The sound of her voice echoed around my brain and I couldn't catch it. I remember the last time I saw her, sitting in her wheelchair at the nursing home, her hands snug under a tiny red blanket; she was crying as we left because she didn't want to be there. I remember how I played "Yea Alabama" on my clarinet for her during the visit and she smiled at me in awe and love. Before now she had just passed away, passed somewhere above the clouds, but now she was dead. And dead settled down in my heart. I couldn't say it. But I didn't have to—he already knew.

I used to wonder why people often referred to the tragic events of Challenger and Columbia as disasters instead of accidents. I would soon learn how to distinguish between the two. An accident is something that can be fixed. Like the time I dropped my bowl of egg-drop soup in the Chinese restaurant, or the time someone ran into the back of my car, or when someone spilled beer on me at the bar. But a disaster happens so suddenly that you can't possibly know how to react. A disaster inspires incomprehensible shock in its victims. And

while the general public was shocked when Challenger and Columbia disintegrated, NASA followed specific procedures for the vehicle losses. It's like a tornado; you know what to do if it happens, even though you think it never will. The contingency plans were stringent. No one was allowed to leave Mission Control and no one was allowed to enter. No calls in and no calls out. All attention was immediately focused on preserving the data in front of you. It must have felt like being in middle school all over again, sitting quietly at your desk, copying equations from the board as fast as you can keep up, not being able to talk and having to raise your hand to ask if you may use the bathroom. At some point the engineers had to realize that what they were doing was far more important than copying down numbers. They were copying down all the reasons the astronauts died, what went wrong and how close they were to actually living. Here I was so concerned with studying for my engineering exam, learning the process of the problems, copying formulas onto a blank sheet. But it wasn't going to get me any closer to understanding what had really happened. I would never understand why she died or how close she was to living.

* * *

Silence.

"It's just difficult having to go through all the boxes," I say to the counselor.

"Last time we talked about disassociation. How has that technique been working for you?" the counselor asks, staring at me with a hand on his chin.

I glance out the high window beside me. The tree is green and her leaves move with the wind, her limbs outstretched like big brown arms. "Okay, I guess. I still have to go through what's left. It's hard not to focus on what happened, you know?"

No. He doesn't know. He doesn't know what it's like to lose your grandmother and bury her on Easter Sunday as your boyfriend sits beside you texting the girl that he is cheating on you with, and then go through an EF4 tornado several days later as your mother has plastic surgery. I blame her and him. She thinks I'm here because of the breakup, not the fact I barely survived a natural disaster. I'm so angry and hurt. I can get over Thomas, but I really just need Mom right now.

I haven't been this mad with her since my senior year of high school. I remember plastering the walls she had worked so hard to paint pink with black posters of Guns N' Roses, Kiss and Motley Crue. I listened to Guns N' Roses just to make her mad because she didn't like Axl Rose. Now she's recovering from surgery, the death of Mimi and a bad marriage. I feel guilty for being so angry at her. I told her that she shouldn't go through with the plastic surgery; just like I told her she should spend more time with me in high school. I need her. Sitting in a strange blank apartment going through boxes littered with more debris than belongings is worse when you're alone.

"Do you think it's possible to wait 'til you don't get upset to go through all of that?"

No, I think silently to myself. My best chance of moving on is to create something similar to what I had. To go through everything so that I know what I have and what I lost - to start creating home again. This is the ninth time I've put these things in a box since I started college. Charleston Square was the closest I had gotten in the past few years to having what I considered home. But I am still scared to unpack. Scared because I know things are missing. Why didn't I grab it - the maroon book with my name engraved in gold in the bottom corner, the words "I love you" on the first page in her handwriting followed by "Mimi". What if I can't

find it?

"Maybe I should wait before I go through all of it. But it's not just the tornado. I don't know what makes me upset the most. I think it's everything at once. My mother says I should be stronger," I say.

"Well, there is no such thing as strong and weak," he replies. "Maybe we should talk about being more like a palm tree. You ever wonder how the palm tree always makes it through the hurricane but the oak tree doesn't?"

His voice trails off and I try as best I can to follow it. It's my life line, something to cling to. It keeps me from the silence.

* * *

At T-minus 6.6 seconds, the three Space Shuttle Main Engines (SSME) ignite in sequence 120 milliseconds apart. They are required to reach ninety percent of maximum thrust in a minimum of three seconds before the gimbal to complete the launch configuration. Before Thomas, I couldn't wait to start my job as an Aviation Challenge Camp Counselor at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center for the summer of 2010. But after spending the month of April together, I didn't want to leave Tuscaloosa. I jettisoned into love giving zero thought to what kind of shockwaves would appear because of it, much less how hard it would hurt when gravity kicked in after all the fuel had been burnt off. One early morning in June, I graduated my first group of Mach 1's. The nine-to-eleven-year-olds hustled me around afterwards, the effects of Dip N' Dots running through their frail veins, saying Maestro, come meet my parents! Then they begged me to play one last game of four-square, no cherry bombs. When I waved bye to them as they pulled their small bodies up into their parents' cars, I was genuinely sad. I helped the other counselors clean

up the graduation setup under The Bubble and went into Gabreski Bay to pack a bag for Tuscaloosa. I walked by the Tomcat featured on the carrier in the movie Top Gun and through the gate to my truck. That summer was especially hot and I had no air conditioning. I drove, windows down, Orianthi's Believe album streaming loud through the tape player, in the red and white-striped truck.

I knocked on the green door of his one-bedroom apartment in Alberta City on the outskirts of Tuscaloosa. I heard him unlock the door and waited for him to open it, sweat rolling down my back. I opened it frustrated, and there he stood with a dozen roses. A smile appeared fast across my lips. He had a putrid smell that followed him everywhere, and it bombarded my face as he hugged me. Don't ask me what I found attractive about him, the list was short, but even he knew that. Over the past two and half months I had learned to love him for his humor (even though I hated his coughing laugh), his baby blue eyes and the fact that he could appreciate my intense passion for all things glam metal and space (or at least tolerate it). He had spent the past year and half pining for me, asking me to the movies and trying to get my number. I don't know what made things change so drastically that I gave in. I remember sitting on my bed before we started dating talking about our parents' divorce. I finally had someone that could understand the kinds of struggles I had been through. But giving up hours at the Space and Rocket Center for him that summer, after the way he would treat me sometimes, left a sour taste in my mouth that I would eventually spit out—not once but twice.

Fast-forward almost a year to April 27, 2011. I was standing in front of Hardaway Hall, between physics and thermodynamics, sure and unsure. We

made brief eye contact as he walked towards me. I always hated his awkward gait. And those ugly black shoes. He held the key to my apartment in his hand as he stood there, his eyes dancing. He looked down at it, rubbing the brass finish between his fingers. Rain had fallen hours before and the ground was wet with puddles.

It's over for good if you give me that back, I said nodding towards the key. He didn't say anything; he just looked down at it, nervously tapping it on his right hand. So do you want to be with me or not? I asked firmly but even he caught the desperation in my voice. He continued to look down at the key, heaving out a sigh. This is not fair, I started, I deserve an answer, even if the answer is no.

How can you not know whether or not you want to be with someone? We've spent a year together, our thoughts entangled, our bodies mashed against one another sideways, our laughter (or coughing) finding its way to the other's ear. I'm so mad at him, but I can't get past the frustration that I have with myself. I still want to be with him, but I want to be strong enough to leave, because I know that's what I should do. Why do you still want to be with him? Why are you willing to be the only one trying in this relationship? He texted a girl from class during your grandmother's funeral several days ago! But I love him and we can work this out. Right? These thoughts raced across my brain like the ticker at the bottom of the screen when the news is on. I didn't want to read them anymore so I grabbed the key from his hand, turned around and entered the building for aerospace engineers. Tears gathered thickly in the corners of my eyes as I stormed up the steps. This kind of hurt was new to me. I had never been in a relationship before him and, now that it was ending, I wasn't

sure that it was supposed to hurt this bad. My hand swiped under my eyes. I hoped that only I could tell the difference between the cold raindrops and the warm tears that collected on my heated cheeks. I would give anything to talk to Mom at this moment. I hope her surgery is going okay. I can't believe she actually went through with it.

* * *

The computers onboard the OV accounted for the twang, or oscillation of the launch stack caused by the intense throttle up of the SSME's, and when the stack had pitched back to vertical position the two SRB's were ignited by the computers. Since the SRB's contained solid fuel, once they were ignited they could not be turned off. So when the cameras spotted black plumes spewing from the joint of the right SRB during the launch of Challenger mission STS-51-L, there was nothing they could do but wait and watch. And soon I would be waiting and watching, helpless, as clouds twisted and turned into something I couldn't turn off.

At 3:00pm on April 27, 2011, I finished my statics class and walked to the parking lot by Coleman Coliseum. I sat on the red bench seat of my truck. I need new windshield wipers. Fat raindrops plopped onto the glass. I parked in front of my bedroom window at Charleston Square and ran through the small hallway leading to my door. When I opened the cream-colored door with the numbers 39 nailed to it, I took my cold feet out of the houndstooth rubber rain boots. It didn't smell like I had remembered home to be, but it was close enough. As I walked toward my bedroom, I read a portion of my Facebook newsfeed from my phone. James Spann's status told me that there had been several confirmed tornados in

Alabama alone. I sat on the new red polka dotted comforter that my mother had recently bought me as I waited for Thomas to come get his things for the last time. She said I needed new sheets after the first time I broke up with him. I decided to turn on the TV and check the local weather. My ears heard Jerry Tracey talking about Tuscaloosa, but my mind was on everything else. It flipped between my grandmother, Mom and Thomas like channels with no sound. Several minutes later, Thomas propped himself on the white doorframe beside my favorite Nikki Sixx poster. I could see him out of the corner of my eye but I didn't want to look at him. Our eyes played a game of chicken, trying to decide who would make contact first.

The weather is really bad, I said. Yeah, I don't have to go to work anymore, he replied, there's a tornado warning. I soon realized that Tuscaloosa County was red. A tornado warning? I asked. He nodded his head and walked over beside my bed. Daddy lit up the screen of my phone so I answered it.

Tabitha, there's a tornado headed for downtown Tuscaloosa, he had yelled into the crackling speaker. I didn't have time to say anything before he hung up. I don't believe him, I thought. A tornado in Tuscaloosa? Thomas sat on the bed next to me. I felt obligated to say something when he turned his soft blue-eyed focus from the television to me. It was my dad, I said. He had said there's a tornado headed toward the downtown area. Tuscaloosa, take cover, mimicked Jerry Tracey from the television screen. I soon recognized the little yellow circle hovering over a street near me. I gazed over my shoulder, past Thomas, out the window facing my bed. No trace of the sun, and it seemed awfully dark at 5:00 in the evening. The clouds looked a

strange dark black and beckoned me to the window. Look how dark it is, I remarked, getting up from my bed. Wanna go weather watch outside? I asked.

I stood against the window, nose fogging up the glass looking outside; I could feel his breath on my neck. It was sensation I'd never felt before. Both hot and cold, inviting and distant, true and false. That's a tornado, he said extending his hand to my face to point out the window. I tried to find it, tilting my head here and there. A faint rotation hung just above the trees.

Where? I asked. Tabitha, we have to get in the bathtub, he demanded. He stomped to the bathroom. I stood frozen, trying to make sense of the grey clouds just past the trees. I looked down at the desk sitting under the window. A thought crossed my mind. What if this is real? What if we are really never going to be together again and what if that really is a tornado?

He yelled at me from the bathroom, adding, I know what to do; I've done this before. How tired I had grown of hearing him say that. My eyes floated from the clouds to the police officer that rushed down the road with his sirens on. Why is he outside? Back up to the grey clouds. My head turned quickly, my eyes searching for the television. I needed reassurance that this couldn't be real. It had to be a dream. Black and white dots powdered the screen as the sound of static got louder. I looked at the large rotation in the clouds one more time. Like my grandmother's unexpected death a few days ago, I couldn't stop this. A ripple of panic rumbled through my body. My hands were shaking uncontrollably and I didn't know what would happen. I didn't know if Mom's cosmetic surgery was still in process or had been completed. I didn't know what was happening between me and Thomas at that moment. I didn't know what was

about to happen. Helpless. What matters to me? What do I need to grab?

I ran to the bathroom, closed the door, and slid down into the bathtub. I'm going to look like an idiot when I find out this isn't real. Okay, brain, now would be a good time to wake me up. He looked at me, his face wrought in fear under the dim yellow light of my bathroom. Do I look as scared as him?

As I sat there in the bathtub, my legs crossed, hands in my lap, waiting to see what would happen in a few seconds, my eyes caught his. For the first time in weeks, I saw his resolve of acceptance. He had already let me go. But his powder blue eyes were home to me, the porch light on, inviting me in. And I had been so ready to leave, searching selfishly for strength in my ability to leave him behind. The light above us hummed. The wind sucked violently at the outside of the walls. The distance between us multiplied with every labored breath of my helplessness. The light flickered on and off as electricity surged. Fear floated down the river of my arteries and veins, sticking in my heart. When the light blinked off, the darkness took me as his own. Nothing seemed to matter in that small little area of space void of light.

The tips of my fingers flung to the ivory marble that cupped us. The smell of dirt thrown into the air hit my nostrils, the wind pushing and pulling on everything around me. My heart sank to my right hand, anchoring itself with every atom of my being to the sturdy rock of my bathroom. I closed my eyes, fighting the grey wind. Blood and fear rushed from my chest, rolling through the tenseness of my body. I felt Thomas' hands on my back as he pushed me down. For the first time since my grandmother's funeral, I thought of God. She doesn't even look the same, lying

there lifeless in the casket. Mom had asked me to play "Amazing Grace" on my clarinet. How can I be expected to play, when I can't even breathe, I had thought.

It felt false to play "Amazing Grace" for her when I didn't believe it. I was lost, but no one could find me. I didn't consider myself an atheist, but I didn't consider myself a Christian either. I thought doubt meant that I didn't have faith. If I didn't have faith, how could I believe in God? I reasoned that if I only believe in God because I'm too scared to go to Hell, then maybe that's not true faith. But I was scared of being an atheist and scared of being a bad Christian. I didn't tell anyone; no one would understand. I wrote witty essays entitled "The Three F-Words of Religion: Fear, Faith and Free Will" inspired by Ralph W. Emerson. But I never shared them. I thought myself a modern transcendentalist; spiritual, but unwilling to follow traditional religious doctrine. When my grandmother died, I searched my heart for Him; all I found was more doubt. How could He leave me when I need Him most? Between seconds of fear, confusion and pale wind came a profound clarity. I've spent more time searching for reasons to leave than reasons to stay. Doubt is natural. But believing despite the doubt? That's faith.

The bathroom door flung open and in a gleam of light I saw bricks being thrown through the door. I wanted to believe again. I wanted to believe His love endures forever, even in the swirling grey wind. I wanted to believe that it's not over, that the story doesn't end with me in the storm. I wanted to believe that He's fighting for me even when I'm not fighting for Him. Rocks were reduced to sand as they found impact. The building creaked and moaned as the wind pushed everything out of the way. The second floor was torn apart as the tornado crossed the corner of Charleston Square,

but I didn't know at the time. After a few seconds, the wind fell silent. It was the quietest silence I have ever heard in my life. It was so quiet that my ears tingled, trying to calculate the air. It was over. Everything was over. Dead.

I opened the door of my apartment, though it felt useless, considering it was missing all the windows. How did this happen? Our courtyard was littered with debris. For weeks I had watched them in the process of fixing our pool, pouring new concrete and scrubbing the old. Whole chunks of rock were missing from the new granite. Trees lay uprooted, plucked from Earth, and the other half of Charleston Square was flattened like a tree into a piece of thin paper. I saw a police officer walking in our direction. Are you okay? he asked. Yeah, I'm okay, I said, but these words lingered strangely in my mouth as my mind tried to make sense of what happened. You gotta find somewhere to go; this is unstable, he said as he passed, waving an arm through the air. Somewhere to go? The banner returned across my brain, thoughts ticking across faster than I could read them. Where do I go? This is all I have to go to. My Dad is an hour and a half away, my Mom is in surgery and she doesn't even know what's happened. She doesn't know. I just want my Mom! I looked around. Tears rushed behind my eyes trying to fill the helplessness. Everything had changed to the point that I couldn't even recognize where I was. All I knew was that this wasn't home anymore. This is how they must have felt, the astronauts, as the Orbiter broke apart and everything they once knew disintegrated into ashes before their very eyes. This is not an accident. This is what disaster feels like.

The United States Congress requested the construction of Endeavour in 1987 after the

Challenger Disaster. When my best friend and previous roommate Hannah called me a few days after my 21st birthday, May 9, 2011, and asked if I wanted to go to the last launch of Endeavour with her and her mom, I couldn't say no. I went through enough of my tornado boxes to find a few of my NASA t-shirts to wear and on May 15 we left for Coco Beach, FL. Early the next morning we got up and went to Kennedy Space Center (KSC). I spent the early part of the morning learning about the jobs of the engineers, touring the science racks in the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) and talking to people that helped with the OV. As we walked to the front of the VAB several minutes before launch at 08:56 EDT, I said prayers of thankfulness and safety. It was everything I hoped it wouldn't be—there were no malfunctions. When the ground shook in fury as Endeavour made its way to space, I closed my eyes and tried to imagine what the lives of the astronauts would be like in several minutes. After the launch, Hannah's mother drove us to Launch Complex 39, Pad B (LC-39B). The first launch stack to ever clear this tower ended with the Challenger disaster. Several years later, Endeavour would be waiting patiently as other OV's launched from LC-39A, prepared to rescue astronauts if anything happened. Endeavour was the rescue ship. I wanted to stand there forever staring at the launch pad that had seen almost as much disaster as I had in the past month. When Orbiter Atlantis rolled out the next day, we went back to KSC to take pictures with her. Her final mission was coming up and the engineers were about to mate her with the External Tank (ET) and SRB's. I inspected all the tiles on the underside as if I was already a real engineer, trying to ensure the safety of the vehicle passengers. On July 8, 2011 I watched NASA TV as she launched for the last time, retiring the entire shuttle fleet for good.

It was the last time I would juxtapose my life with the United States Space Shuttle. At the end of our journey to KSC, Hannah's mom gave me the mission patch for STS-134, the last flight of Orbiter Endeavour and the second to last Space Shuttle flight, signed by all the astronauts. She also gave me an American flag that was flown in space on one of the earlier missions. Words will never be able to express the gratitude I have for those things.

Silence.

"It follows me everywhere," I admit, still fighting the tears as best I can. "I had a dream last night that I watched someone die because I was unable to get help. Everyone was busy."

"I'm going to refer you to one of my colleagues at the Betty Shirley Clinic. She should be able to give you something to help with that, okay? Have you ever heard of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?"

I stop looking out the window and nod my head yes. I am an ordinary person with an ordinary life, I repeat to myself. But a part of me feels that this is no longer a true assessment. The astronauts of Challenger and Columbia were ordinary once too. Like the three hundred and twenty five other astronauts, few people knew their names, much less the mission they flew on. But because they experienced disaster, people know them. They are regarded as heroes, slipping the surly bounds of Earth to touch the face of God. They have songs made in honor of them, schools and streets named, documentaries and books made. They are famous in their own right. But I will never view Earth from the window of an Orbiter. I will never know what it's like to go through years of difficult training to become an astronaut. But I have an understanding of what it's like to train hard in wilderness survival, flight simulators and the centrifuge. I know what it's like

to be separated from the person you love because you have a strong passion for flight and space. And more, I have seen life turn to ashes, breathing it deep into my lungs as people around me hunkered down in fear from the wrath of Earth. But, despite all this, I will always be an ordinary person where few know my name. Yet, somehow, I have become like the astronauts of Challenger and Columbia. Because my life is not ordinary. I have seen the face of God.

Tabitha Holcombe is currently a student at the University of Alabama. Tabitha “adores” physics, astronomy and the word *sultry*. Before changing her major to English, she was an Aerospace Engineer for four years with hopes of working as a rocket scientist. This experience plays heavily on the way she perceives the world and gives her a unique voice.

Tabitha has been published in Scars Publications for a fiction story, “Red Binaries”.



Hawaii 1

by Susan Sweetland Garay

Born and raised in Portland Oregon, Susan Sweetland Garay received a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Brigham Young University, spent some years in the Ohio Appalachians and currently lives in the Willamette Valley with her husband where she works in the Vineyard industry. She spends her free time writing, growing plants and making art. She has had poetry and photography published in a variety of journals, on line and in print, such as Silver Birch Press, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, The Front Porch Review, Electric Windmill Press, Outside In Literary Journal, Mad Swirl, Eunoia Review, Leaves of Ink, and the Camel Saloon. She is also a founding editor of The Blue Hour Literary Magazine and Press, <http://thebluehourmagazine.com/> and has been a freelance editor for 10 years.



Hawaii 2

by Susan Sweetland Garay



Untitled

by Susan Sweetland Garay



The Path

by Susan Sweetland Garay



Fall in the North

by John J. Sikkila

John J Sikkila has been photographing nature and wildlife scenes for about 10 years, of mushrooms on the dark forest floor to Great Gray owls in winter to fish while flyfishing. John feels blessed to be living in Minnesota's North Country where he is still learning and striving for that "perfect photo".



Foggy

by John J. Sikkila

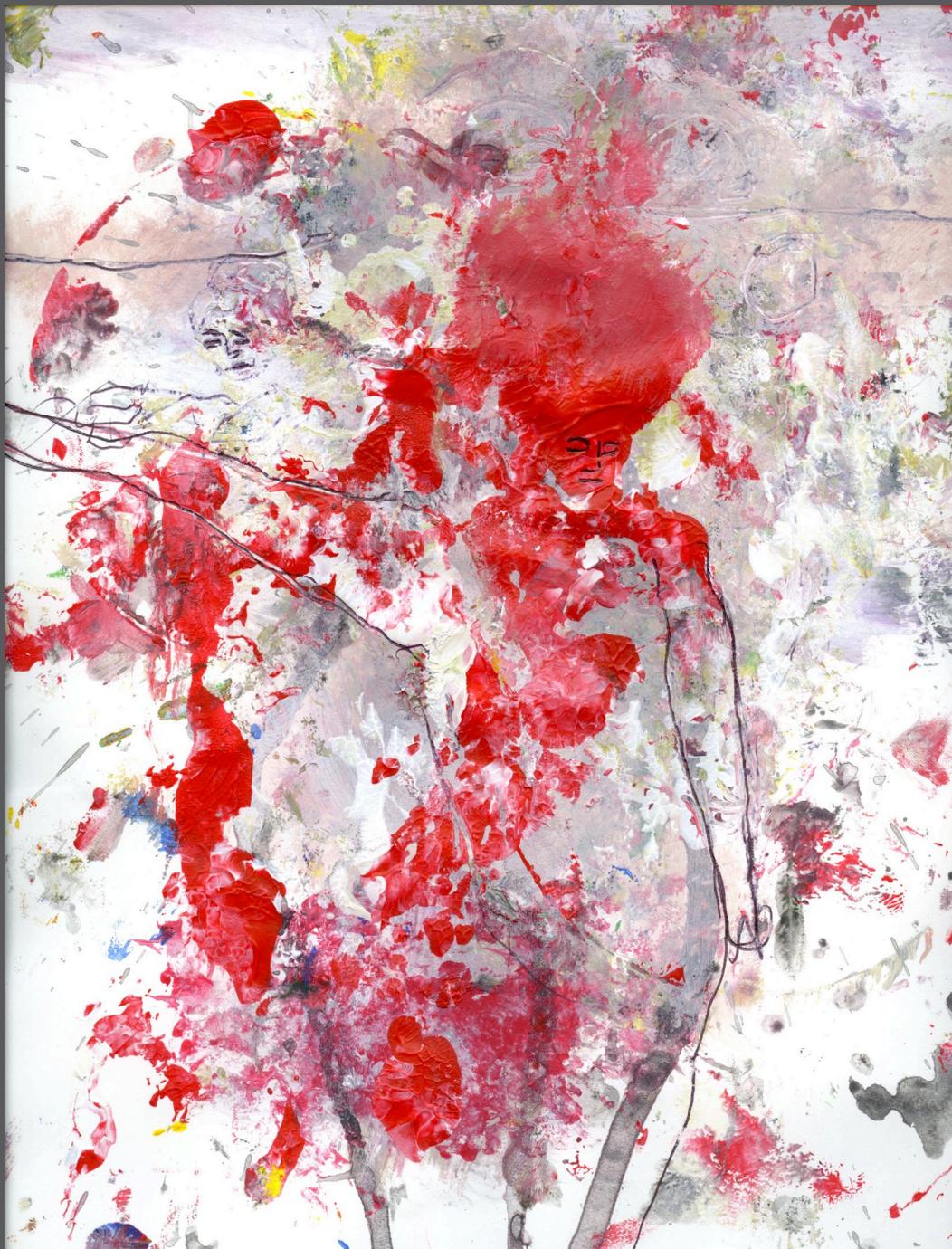


America's Fighters

Watercolor and Sketch

by Dr. Ernest Williamson III

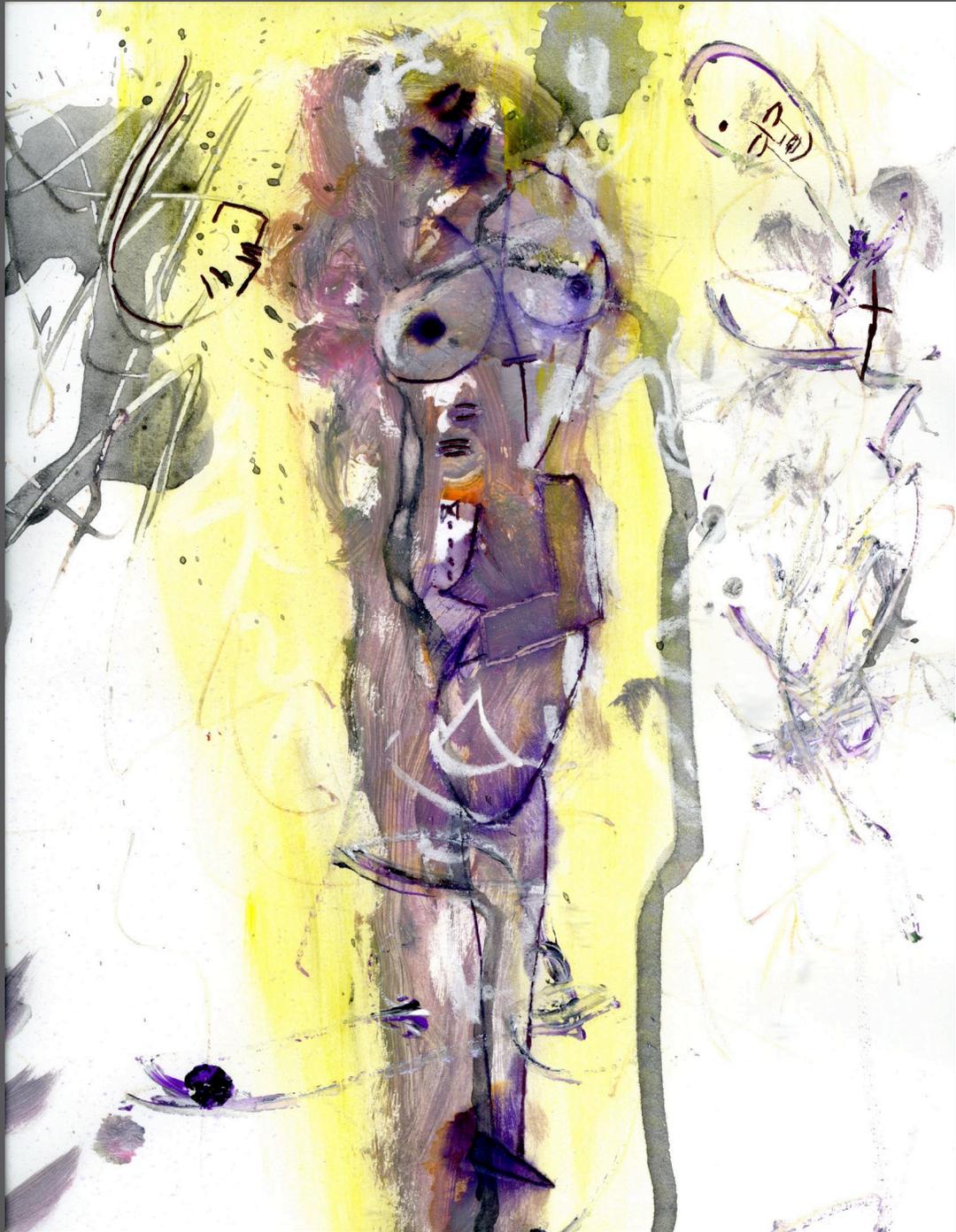
Dr. Ernest Williamson has published poetry and visual art in over 400 print and online journals.



America's Boundaries

Watercolor and Sketch

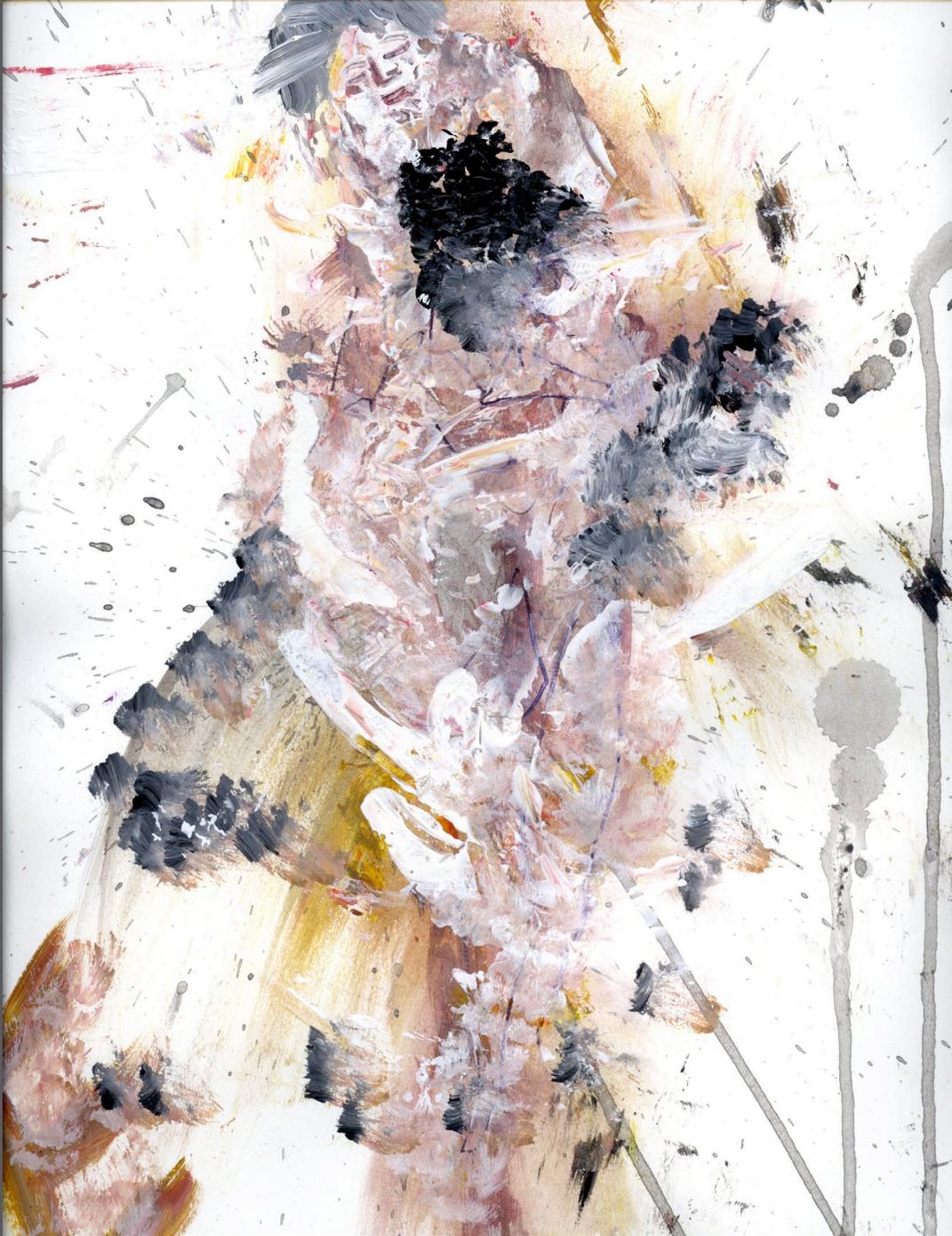
by Dr. Ernest Williamson III



A Moment of Ideas

Watercolor and Sketch

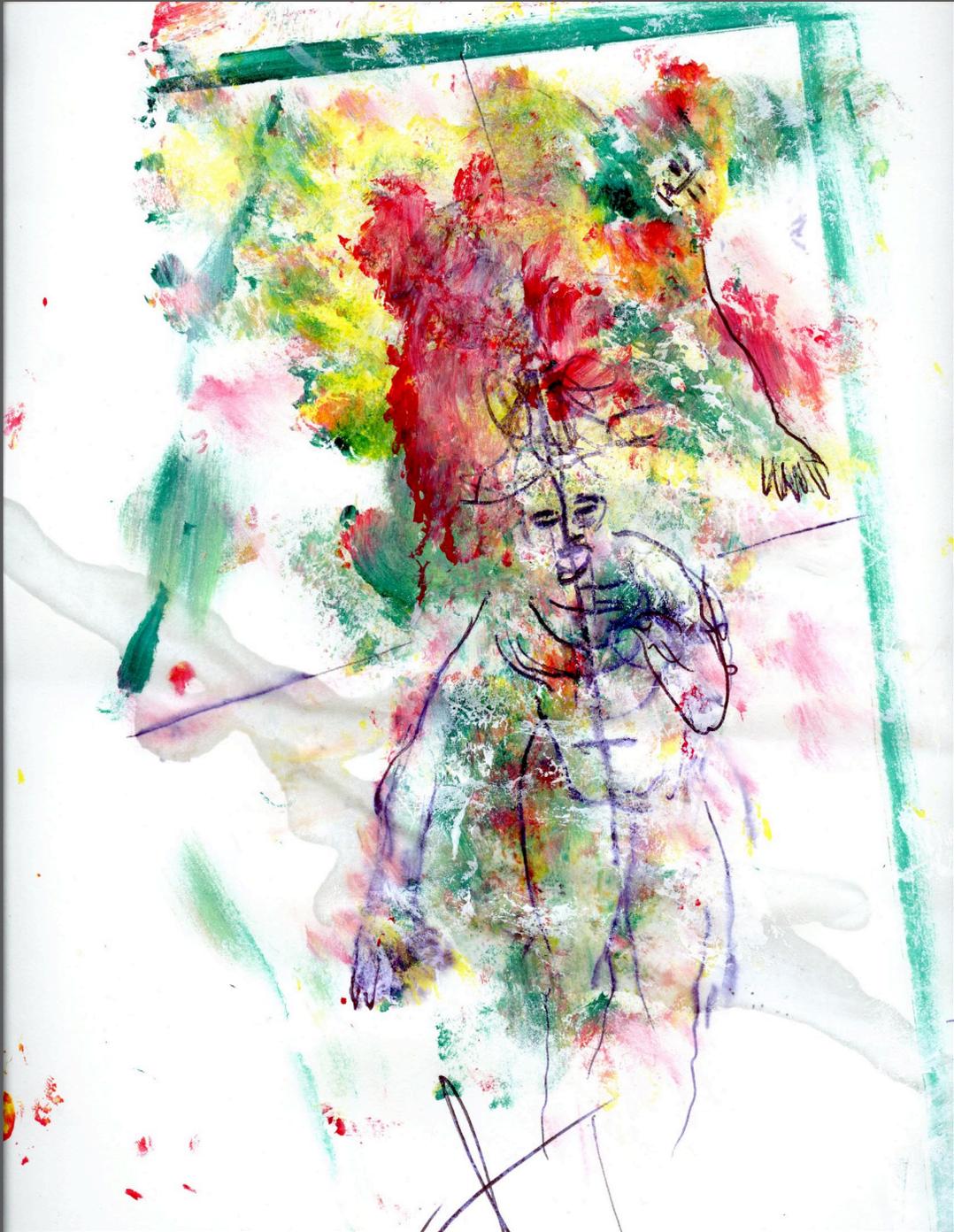
by Dr. Ernest Williamson III



Bard With the Black Rose

Watercolor and Sketch

by Dr. Ernest Williamson III



The Window Charmer

Watercolor and Sketch

by Dr. Ernest Williamson III



Cover Photo

by Aaron Bowen

Kevin Zepper

as interviewed
by William Ricci

SPR: You recently spent some time in New Mexico. Tell us about any goals you had with this retreat.

KZ: From July 1st through July 14th, I stayed at the Starry Night Artists Retreat in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. My creative goal was to generate more drafts for another book length manuscript. I have visited New Mexico yearly for rest, retreat, or vacation. It is a place I draw inspiration from and spiritual nourishment.

SPR: Where did you grow up? Were there any moments or memories in particular from your childhood that had a lasting impression on you?

KZ: Moorhead, Minnesota is where I grew up. I spent short periods of my life in Florida and California. I always liked going to the lakes. When I was a small child, I would literally spend the day in the water at the shore. Sun up to sun down, that's where you'd find me.

SPR: How has your childhood influenced your writing style or subjects?

KZ: My childhood was a blessing. My parents both read to me, the Bookmobile was like an ice cream truck, and visits to the library were like Christmas! I still get excited going to the library.

I guess I write about things that "strike me as funny," whether humorous or not. Poet Ted Kooser said, "If you can awaken in the familiar and discover it new, you never need leave home." I remind myself of this statement constantly. The prose poem has been my favorite form to work with. There is a sense of freedom on the page with prose poetry.

SPR: When you write, how much is influenced by your roots or what you identify as home?

KZ: Tough one. My roots began here, in Northern Minnesota. At the risk of sounding a bit dodgy, my home is where my family is. It's Moorhead for now anyway. However, New Mexico feels more like home, a place to transplant old roots in new ground.

SPR: How do you feel about or what is your gut reaction to this statement: "Write what you know". Do you feel it is too limiting or unforgiving of someone's work? Related to this, poetry as a part of culture, timeless in its creation and purpose, is becoming a lost form of art. How do you feel about this and what can artists do?

KZ: I believe "write what you know" is sound advice for beginning writers. At some point I think we write about what we don't know, or write about what we didn't know what we knew already. I guess it is limiting, but it is a great way to ground a piece before exploring the "unknown."

Poetry has had its peaks and valleys. Fact is, it's everywhere. You pick up a few people here and there who enjoy poetry after going to a reading, slam, or performance poetry event. Poetry in flux, kind of mirrors the world right now.

As basic as this sounds, writers need to be open to create opportunities for poetry. Maybe it's spray-painted on a wall, or it's read with music, or read aloud in unison, or the poem is "dance." The more it appears in the everyday, the more people will connect with the metaphor.

SPR: Do you have a daily routine when it comes to writing?

KZ: I try to write something every day. I haven't lately because I'm still reflecting over my experiences in New Mexico. Usually I try to write something on Facebook or jot something down in a journal just to keep the wheels moving. Morning is the best time for me to write, and at the kitchen table.

SPR: Was there a moment when you decided "I am a writer" and the rest became history, or did you fall into it over time?

KZ: I guess I'm just a person who writes. I think it's an evolving process. There are moments when I've felt a connection with something. Writer? I did know I wanted to write in the second grade, or become a writer. I am still becoming a writer!

SPR: Any current projects you would like to share with Stone Path Review?

KZ: Currently, I am working with a colleague of mine at MSUM, a talented pianist, Professor Terrie Manno. We are putting together poetry and music for a kind of performance. She has actually scored my poems as if they were music. It is amazing. Our goal is to put together a show of 45 minutes to an hour. I am shopping around a book-length manuscript of prose poetry and working on a second. There are other ideas in the early stages, nothing definite yet.

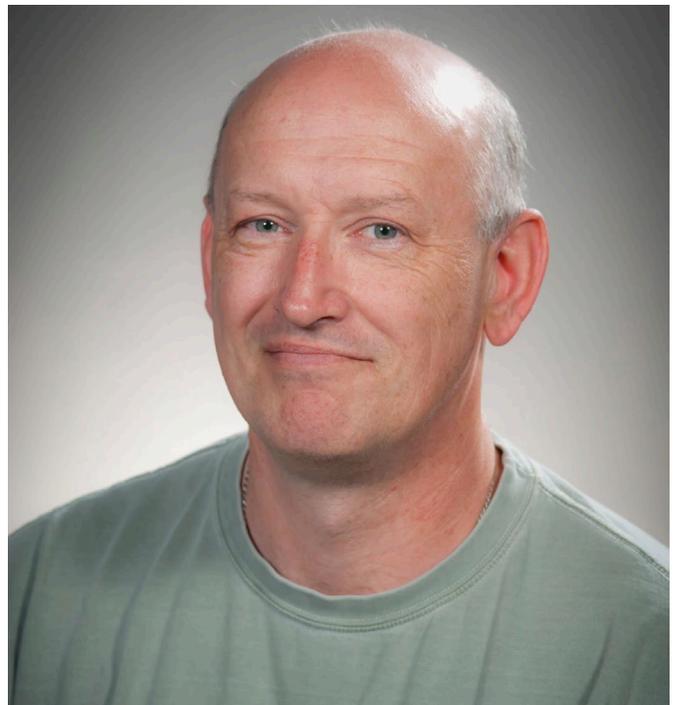
SPR: Any words of wisdom or advice for struggling writers?

KZ: Give yourself permission to write badly. Man, I know this one for a fact! If you don't, you simply won't write. It takes a lot of sifting through ore before you hit gold.

SPR: Who are a few of your favorite writers? Is there someone not well-known that you feel is undervalued in their contribution to

literature?

KZ: Ray Bradbury, Jack Kerouac, Ruth L. Schwartz, Anne Waldman, Issa, Jim Carroll, Patti Smith, Hafiz, and many others. I believe there are so many authors who deserve some kind of recognition. Good writing is not limited to large cities or art collectives. There's so much wonderful work coming from voices off the beaten path, miles from the next town and interstate. It's fortunate to read their work, or hear it. To me, communities like Bemidji, Fergus Falls, and Evansville all have potent



Kevin Zepper, MFA teaches writing of all kinds at Minnesota State University Moorhead. He is the author of four chapbooks. He is currently circulating his first book length manuscript, *ghostworlds*. He was recently awarded a writing residency at Starry Night Artist Retreat in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. He resides in Moorhead, Minnesota with his wife, boys and Bichons.

Stone Path Review

AN ARTISTIC JOURNAL OF PATHS THROUGH IMAGES AND WORDS

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