

GULF COAST WRITERS ASSOCIATION

The

Magnolia Quarterly

A MAGAZINE FOR CREATIVE WRITERS

Featured Writers:

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Mary Ann Gavin
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Frank Moore
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Linda Amos
Claire Forrest
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Cover Photo Courtesy of Sylvia Skrmetta

*"Gulf Coast Writers Association's
mission is to support and promote writers.
We're doing it well!"*

Philip Levin

Guest Poet:

Constance Rowell Mastores

www.gcwriters.org \$3.00 Summer 2011

Letter from the President
Philip L. Levin, Editor

Southern Summers!



It's stifling hot – hurricane brewing temperatures. Tornadoes strike the central and east, June blizzards surprise the northwest, floods erupt along the Mississippi, severe droughts devastate the farmlands. Forest fires in Arizona drive thousands from their homes. Tsunamis wreak havoc in Japan. E. Coli epidemics in Germany kill dozens. When people tell me they don't have anything to write about I have to wonder which planet they're living in! Not that disaster writing is necessarily fun reading (my least favorite genre is post-apocalyptic America), but it does lead to good plot possibilities.

Promoting yourself on the Internet is supposedly the way of the future. A short interview will appear about me in the e-mag *Southern Writers Magazine* (www.southernwritersmagazine.com) next month. The publicist for the magazine urged me to start Tweeting. I gave it a try, and within a week gathered a handful of fellow followers. With my life so diverse what with my writing, travel, missionary work, photography, medicine, and family, I figured I'd have plenty to tweet about. The basic concept is egotistical, thinking that people might care enough about what I have to say to want to receive occasional, or even frequent, 140 character messages. I mean, is this "writing?" After the week I decided it wasn't worth the time and effort and the need to have daily (or even hourly updates) about personal life flooding my way. However, it does have great potential and clearly works for many people – and it's free and easy to set up. Check out www.twitter.com.

Fitting one's writing into such a limited area brings to mind how weird English is as a language (weird ... 'i' before 'e' ... wait a minute). One could certainly write thousands of words about the variances of spelling, the confusion of homonyms, the vagrancies of pronunciation, and misuse of terms such as anxious vs. eager. Even punctuation is problematic, such as why do we insist on putting our punctuation INSIDE the quotations? In the paragraph above, wouldn't it make more sense to have "writing" instead of "writing?" And sentence structure; why do we have our adjectives before our nouns? The Germans say "tree green tall" instead of starting off with all the string of adjectives and making the listener keep track until the noun arrives. Hebrew does it the German way, though Swahili incorporates the adjectives into the concept of the word/ phrases and Chinese uses variations in the pronunciation to indicate gender and effect. Hmm. Maybe English isn't so weird after all.

Summertime is weekend fair season. There are several members in our group, for example Connie, Terry, and Linda, who set up booths every single Saturday in the month, hawking their books. Though all three have written in several genres, they all report that their best sellers are cookbooks. Being a bachelor whose recipe list runs to about three, this isn't my expertise, but more power to them! Connie brought homemade Cajun fudge to a couple of the booths we shared. What a great selling idea; taste the fudge, buy the recipe! Creative marketing!

My newest book, *Ndovu the Elephant – an African Tale*, (www.NdovuTheElephant.com) has its grand debut August 20. Taking a cue from GCWA member Frank Wilhem who debuted his book 'The Key' (an excellent read btw) at a series of local restaurants, I'm debuting at a local gallery, Negrottos in Biloxi. Ndovu is a collection of 36 wild animal photos I snapped on safari in Kenya and put together in a story about a baby elephant lost on the Serengeti. The problem with working through a bookstore, or in this case a gallery, is the cut. They want me to cover all the expenses and STILL give them 40% of each sale. Hmm. No wonder it's so hard to make a living as a writer!

I'll be traveling back to Africa this summer, July 20 – August 10. Last year I lived in a little mud hut without electricity, water, or toilets. This year may be similar, so if I don't have access to Internet, my GCWA friends may not be getting the usual slew of emails, but I will send the occasional update missive. Meanwhile, enjoy your own summer vacation; perhaps out by the pool with your laptop, punching away your latest adventure about the dog days and how they affect you!

www.doctorsdreams.net

Philip

Fiction

Washing Dishes is Good for the Soul

Joyce Burns – Tupelo, MS

Years ago we always had people dropping by our small house unannounced. This was especially true in the evenings. I'm not exactly sure what the fascination was for late night chat or if it was just that we were the only people in the neighborhood that stayed up until the wee hours of the morning, but we were proverbial night owls. While I always loved having visitors, there were a couple of people that came to be what my grandmother termed "plain ole pests." These were the type of people who would never say anything good about anyone, always took the negative approach to everything and always, always, showed up at dinnertime.

It was strange, but one person in particular, no matter what time I fixed food, always heard a dinner bell ring. While I love to have people over to eat, and I love to entertain, this person came to eat every single night, even when my budget was strapped. He never offered a dime to help pay for the food, and ate enough for three people. It wasn't that he couldn't afford to pitch in. The term "so cheap he squeaked" still comes to mind.

One particular night I had thrown together a small but nice dinner of beef stroganoff, salad and fresh baked bread. I had barely enough food for the four people at my table and we had just sat down to eat, when the door swung open and in walked my vexation. He would stroll in if we hadn't locked the door, and sure enough, he was back to stake his claim.

Being Southern, my mother had always instilled the "Be a gracious hostess" trait. So soon he was sitting at my table and by the time I got to sit down to eat I got what few scraps were left of the meal. I was pretty ticked off as I was really hungry and felt they could have saved me a little of the meal I had cooked. I was feeling a little sorry for myself, but was compensated by the thought of the coming pie.

I had a black, fuzzy, part Labrador puppy named Uppie who sometimes could read my mind. When he was hungry he would go to the lower cabinets, open the door, grab a can of dog food in his mouth, and bring it to me to open.

That night the devil sat on me as I walked over and placed all the dishes in the sink. Instead of running water in the sink I called my four-legged helper over. While company was still sitting at the table watching, I took a plate, held it down so the dog could reach it, let Uppie lick it sparkling clean, and then placed that dish in the dish drainer. I noticed I got a strange look from the pest still parked at my table, so one by one I took each dish and let Uppie wash it for me until all were done, pots and pans too, and placed them neatly in the drainer. No one said a word!

I then asked if anyone wanted some pie. Amazingly, I didn't have any takers for pie that night. When I was alone I laughed until I nearly cried. Of course I cleaned the dishes thoroughly and later let my other friends in on the joke. The next night when dinner time came around, for the first time in a long time our pest was nowhere to be seen. Oh, he still came around from time to time, but the gravy train stopped. Several times after that he was known to bring a burger and fries with him.

I never let 'him' know that Uppie was not my permanent dishwasher.

Welcome to the Summer 2011 issue of
The Magnolia Quarterly
the magazine of the Gulf Coast Writers Association
published seasonally.

Gulf Coast Writers Association Members receive issues as part of their membership. Extra copies are available at a nominal charge. Members only may provide e-mail submissions in .doc format as attachments to writerpllevin@gmail.com. We appreciate submissions between 500-1500 words. MQ requests single publication rights after which all rights revert back to the author. No payment is provided. Extra copies are available to members at \$4 for one or \$3 each for multiple copies including postage.

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Summer Issue Winners: Meg Peresich, Claire Forrest, Sue Monkress, and

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MQ STAFF

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The Natchez Garden Club
Robert Shows, MD – Natchez, MS

Hi, y'all. Yockanookany Ned here.

A few words about Southern culture and the Natchez Garden Club, but first... I love history. I have always loved history, especially Southern history. To me, Natchez is the city that embodies and reflects history more than any other city in the State of Mississippi. The story I've always heard (true or not) is that in the early 1800's there were twenty millionaires in the United States, eight of whom lived in Natchez — all cotton planters and speculators. In the early nineteenth century the Natchez-New Orleans connection was the cotton exporting capital of the world and made the cotton barons of Natchez extremely wealthy men as demonstrated by their majestic houses.

Those days are gone. Natchez no longer claims the title of 'King' of the world of cotton. What remains is history and a glimpse of an era, a way of life immortalized in *Gone With the Wind*. Left are the magnificent houses of Natchez – and The Natchez Garden Club. And if there is anything more stately than a Natchez ante-bellum mansion, it would be a Natchez Garden Club matron.

The Natchez Garden Club sponsors a Pilgrimage every spring when the palatial homes of Natchez are opened to the public. A few homes are exclusively owned by the Club and can be toured year round, but most of the homes on the Pilgrimage are private residences and are only accessible to the public during the Spring Tour. The word 'pilgrimage' has a connotation of travel to a mystic and holy place. To Natchezians, that place of pilgrimage (mystic and holy) would be no other than Natchez (Mecca being a distant second) and the name 'pilgrimage' is, by Natchez standards, more than an appropriate name. However, the words 'Spring Pilgrimage' are an aphoristic title for a deluge of tourists, some even bused in, just like at Disney World. But in Natchez they are all called 'guests.'

In our younger years, my wife and I would visit Natchez during the Pilgrimage. We haven't been back in quite some time, but I vividly remember the day the bus deposited a wandering herd of LOBHLYs (Little Old Blue Haired Yankee Ladies) in front of Montaigne—one of my favorite houses. They (and we) were met with Southern hospitality at its finest and Southern contempt at its worst. (The problem is the two are almost indistinguishable. It is very difficult to separate the paradoxical pair. It takes a keen ear, for the words of contempt are strikingly identical to the words of hospitality, and the mannerism of their delivery is almost indistinct. Only the slightest of voice inflections and body language separates the two, and one must always consider the context of the conversation.)

Case in point: The Natchez Garden Club hostess and matron greeted us most reverently at the front door of Montaigne, proceeded to give a brief history of the house, and to gloriously laud the Club for making this and other homes available to the masses. Not to be left out, and in her closing remarks, the matron issued a coded Southern message, stating in the finest of Southern accents: “One needs to be on their best behavior when visiting our homes... here... in Natchez.” Translation: “Don’t touch anything or risk verbal torture and humiliation.”

Never was there a day of such impudence, as when the leader of the clutch of LOBHLYs, after a short conference with some of the more important and influential members of the touring group and their thinking the Natchez Garden Club was similar to an AAA membership or a subscription to *Good Housekeeping*, asked aloud, “How does one become a member of the Natchez Garden Club? Can we join?”

What horror. My wife and I shrank in disbelief as we waited for the retort. Southern mouths gaped open. Southern eyes dilated. I can still see the Club matron dressed in her flowing pink and white antebellum gown with hooped petticoats, a white top with a huge pink rose centering her abdomen, an adorning set of pink earrings and a matching necklace, along with a look on her face as if she had been slapped with an open palm. She bowed ever so slightly and irreverently toward the Yankee invaders, defiantly raised her chin, closed her eyes to avoid any contact with such corruptness, and slowly, gracefully shook her head in the horizontal plane — all gestures of incredulity. She then folded her right hand over her heart, arched her shoulders forward, and gave her verbally camouflaged sarcastic, euphemistic, and deeply accented reply: “Well... my dear... one is BORN into the Natchez Garden Club. Really... I do declare. I mean... bless your heart.” She then stood erect, opened her eyes, gazed at some distant vista seen only by her, promptly smiled, and unfolded her right arm toward the inside of the house.

Translation of her reply: *I don’t believe it. What a stupid question. End of conversation. I’m certainly not talking to you people anymore. No further questions entertained. Get in the house and don’t touch anything.*

We did.

I believe the LOBHLYs are still struggling with the response.

Bye, y’all.

* BORN - for you non-Southerners, phonetically pronounced BOAHN – one syllable.

Bang
Meg Peresich – Ocean Springs, MS

It turns out the end of the world is a noisy affair. It's the trembling of the earth beneath the old foundation of their home that wakes them, sticky limbs wrapped tight around each other's bodies. But it's Joanna's screams that get them out of bed and into their clothing before either can blink. Laura is at her side in an instant, arms reaching to comfort as Joanna throws herself at her mother. Lights flash outside their windows, and there's more commotion out in the streets, plastered across the news when Jack flicks on the television. People are crying, looting, dropping to their knees in the streets, arms stretched to the sky. Hysteria runs rampant as people wail things like *Armageddon* and *Revelations* and Jack finds himself standing with a hand in his hair, bare feet shifting nervously against the wooden floor, brain working frantically to process the information his heart isn't willing to accept.

He's on the front porch before Laura can tell him no, eyes to the midnight sky, watching as lights flicker above the thick layer of clouds. Shapes move beyond his sight, but he doesn't need to see because he can *feel* them up there. His breath stutters from his lungs when a hand grabs his, tugs hard, tries to bring him back into the supposed safety of their home, but Jack can't move. He stands, riveted, and watches his world fall apart, watches until the power is cut and the street lamps blink out one by one.

The sun rises to find evidence of the chaos from the night before. Fires burn unchecked, broken glass and broken bodies litter the streets. Laura won't let Joanna near the windows, not that she'd go anyway. Jack stands guard by the door.

The water shuts off on the fourth day. Laura had anticipated this and filled every bucket and bowl, every tub and glass and vase and pot available. It won't last. But it's something, and it keeps Joanna busy.

They take turns watching the street, Jack and Laura, standing guard in six-hour shifts. Between them they have one gun and ten rounds. Not enough to fight back a hoard of invaders, but maybe enough to scare off a looter or two.

Food runs low. They break into the old beans stashed in the back of the pantry that no one likes, cans of dried pears and jars of peanut butter that had been forgotten or misplaced. They brush the dust off their supplies and Laura makes a list, tries to ration out what they have. It won't keep them fed long, and Jack knows he'll have to venture out soon, out into this new world that isn't even theirs anymore.

They can hear the screams at night, when the sun dips beyond the horizon and the stars twinkle faintly behind the film of gray that stains the sky nowadays. Joanna huddles close to her mother, taking what comfort she can from Laura's presence, and Laura holds her tight, brushes limp bangs from her face with gentle fingers. She watches Joanna as she falls asleep and dreams, watches as the dreams slowly turn to nightmares, holds her when she wakes with a cry and offers her a shoulder on which to dry her tears.

Screams rise up in the distance, never quite from the same place, and Jack knows what it is, knows Laura knows without having to say anything. Systematic searching. He doesn't know how much time they have, but it's not enough. Jack looks over his shoulder, eyes catching Laura's as she comforts their daughter. There never was enough time, not for them, but Jack had hoped... His throat tightens. He'd hoped at least for one lifetime.

Laura sighs and looks away, hand smoothing over Joanna's head.

There's a man in their front yard. He's bloodied, eyes wide and wild. He teeters unsteadily on his feet. Laura watches him through the glass and screen and thick humid air hanging between them. The man doesn't do anything, doesn't move. He just stands there, and it's unnerving.

Jack does a sweep of the house, gun held close to his hip, as he checks the other doors, checks the windows, checks the basement and backyard. The man standing so still out front smells like a decoy, and Jack's not taking any chances for an ambush. They have food, they have water, they have a roof, and those are precious commodities in these last days. But there's nothing else, just a lonely man crazed with fear and hunger.

Hours pass, and when the sun begins to sink the man starts to scream. His cries burble up out of his chest slowly, whimpers turning into sobs turning into shrieks as the light slips away. They can't afford the noise, especially during the night. It will draw the wrong kind of attention, though any attention now is bad. The decision is made to bring him inside, maybe feed him a little, see if they can't get him to shut up and move on in the morning. But he doesn't stop screaming.

He just won't *stop*, and the sun is setting and the night is coming and he's so loud and there's nothing else to do. Jack shoves the man down into the basement, slams the door behind him. Laura takes Joanna upstairs to her room, holds a pillow over her head and whispers to her through the soft fabric. They barely hear the shot when it comes.

Dinner is a somber affair, and Jack is grateful that no one mentions the tear tracks streaking his face.

They're moving closer each night. Jack isn't sure why he still clings to the hope that they won't be discovered. He imagines everyone is discovered eventually.

Laura and dawn find Jack at his post, staring out into their empty yard, empty street, empty neighborhood. It takes both hands on his face and an insistent body pressing against his own to tear Jack's eyes from the road, to focus them on something else for a moment. The two move together, hands holding on too tight, breathing the same stale air.

They don't share any kisses, nothing so pleasant as that. They lean against each other, the rough scrape of fabric warming their blood, the pain and pleasure a stark reminder that they're *alive*. They're still here.

Water is running low. They're to the point of scavenging what little is left in the tanks and bowls of the toilets. Jack considers venturing out, seeing what he can find, but he knows it's a futile effort.

It won't be much longer now.

When the end comes there's no one to blame, not really. It's not Jack's fault for not guarding the door better. It's not Laura's fault for not hiding them sooner. It's not Joanna's fault for screaming.

It is what it is. It's the end. And if they can't have forever, or even just one lifetime, at least they have this. This last moment, together.

Baker Hill

Sylvia Skrmetta – Saucier, MS

Baker Hill is nothing more than a large mound of dried-hard yellow dirt. On top of the hill sits an old rundown singlewide trailer belonging to the reigning family member, surrounded by equally dilapidated trailers. There's no activity on the Baker Plantation this particular afternoon. Perhaps everyone's taking a nap after a busy week of "tryin' to make ends meet."

I expect to see a couple of barefoot and half-naked children running around in the dirt while Grandma Baker sits under the shade of the old oak tree sipping her sweet tea. Now everyone knows Grandma is a bad diabetic and isn't supposed to be drinking sweet tea, but I feel sure she has told all her kin to "mind yer own damn business," as she reaches for a piece of store bought pecan pie. Grandma already lost one leg from infection, but doesn't mind it so much cause nobody asks her to "do much of nothin'" since the amputation.

On Saturday night some Bakers pile into their old trucks, Chevys or Fords (no decent Southern would own anything but American-made) and head down to the casino to win the "big one" at the penny machines. Others hang out in one of the trailers and watch college football. It wouldn't take long for a singlewide to get chockfull of cigarette smoke to add to the smell of stale beer spilled in the shag green carpet during last week's gathering. Of course, most of the time individuals cater to drinkin' hard liquor, but since kinfolk are present, they'd feel obligated to share their "good stuff"—so beer it is.

The absence of a dog or dogs lying around the Baker place is a puzzle. Dogs and trailers are sort of a given. Usually there's a big, lazy, yeller dog or two doing much of nothing—just lying in the shade and occasionally opening one eye to make sure none of the rambunctious children sneak up on him to smack him on the head with an old tree limb. Sometimes, just for the hell of it, the old hound barks at something—this only to earn his keep. He rarely, if ever, actually chases something—not even the pesky grey squirrel that brazenly runs two feet from his keen nose.

I'm hoping all the singlewides have people residing in them, and that none of them are being used for concocting meth. I only say that because these parts are famous for amateur chemists. The old wooden shed seems rather odd sitting way back in the woods may be housing truckloads of fertilizer, drainer cleaners, brake fluids and a couple hundred boxes of pseudoephedrine...and only God knows what else. Perhaps the entire "Baker Hill" facade is just that—a smokescreen! Yes, that would explain why no one is around on such a beautiful cool fall day. Either everyone is dead from inhaling toxic fumes or it's only occupied at night by the local chemists. I just hope the children get out safely.

Then Baker Hill fades from my view, but thoughts pertaining to the small commune swirl in my head. I should be emptying my brain, enjoying the cool wind in my face, feeling the closeness of my husband as he races our motorcycle through the countryside. Instead, I think of the possibilities of Baker Hill.

Dear Bubba

Thomas Lynn – Lawrenceville, GA

Dear Bubba,

I gotta tell you that Jackson never looked as good as it did when I got back from a trip up north. I spent a whole week in Chicago visiting my outlaw in-laws. Most of the time I was dodging taxi cabs and smoke-belching buses just trying to cross Halsted Street. Trains up there run on tracks high overhead. I think they're trying to imitate the subways in New York City but don't have enough room under the ground.

I noticed other strange things during my trip up there. For instance, folks don't smile when they pass each other on the street. They just stare straight ahead like a muley cow going to its water hole. They don't even nod.

Why would anyone want to live up there while here at home we not only smile, but we have been known to stop and pass an entire day with complete strangers while exchanging photos of the family and giving out invitations to come and visit a spell?

Signed

Junior Mosley

Dear Jr.

Well naturally our Southern trains run on level ground like the good Lord intended. But you only found the tip of the iceberg. There're other differences between them and us.

Take funerals for instance. Folks up north hardly pause to glance at a funeral procession enroute to a graveyard. They keep on driving, staring straight ahead and paying no notice. But down here we pull over to the side of the road to let the deceased and accompanying mourners pass. Never mind any delay it might cause because some day we might be riding high and mighty in that long black limousine and this may be our only chance to get some respect in this lifetime.

Northerners have more peculiarities such as calling their mama and daddy by first names. Their voices are flat, loud and irritating, and they wave sissy hankies at sporting events. Summer usually comes on the Fourth of July and leaves the next day. They never heard of kudzu, Spanish moss, fire ants, or out-houses. They call supper dinner while their dinner is lunch, and they eat boiled foods instead of fried.

Yankees claim that everything is better up north, and yet they break their necks to move south the first chance they get. In spite of these differences, we always extend a hearty welcome and allow them to live among us as long as they observe certain rules and traditions. Such as – not wearing overalls unless they're picking cotton, never sprinkle sugar on grits, always stand whenever Dixie is played, learn to hug folks they've just met, and understand the difference between a hissy and a conniption fit.

Catversation

Judy Davies – Gautier, MS

Spring hadn't come too soon to Mama's back porch. Seeing the yard come to life after the long, dormant winter was exhilarating. Little Fluff sat purrfectly attired in her red harness, feet delicately tucked, intently observing a dove. In her feathery plumage, she perched beneath the eaves atop the brick corner post, cooing softly to her mate from her nest. Little Fluff paid careful attention. Soon her gray furry companion joined her on the porch. Little Fluff hushed him with a glance. She didn't want to miss a word of the doves' conversation.

It had been very thoughtful of Papa to screen in the porch last year. He and Mama spent many peaceful hours there, rocking chairs intoning familiar squeaks on the uneven plank floor beneath. They were at church now, so Little Fluff and Darius Meow had the porch mostly to themselves, except for Papa's old hound, Kelly, who slept soundly in a shaded corner. Darius hunched up to make a run at old Kelly; he wanted to play.

"Don't you dare," meowed Little Fluff. "Let's just enjoy the peaceful surroundings. Kelly will wake up as soon as a fire truck goes by. He thinks it's his invitation to sing."

"Well, okay," mewed Darius, with a whiskery nod, "I guess you're right." Instead, he busied himself trying to catch his own tail.

"Aren't the spring flowers delightful?" whispered Little Fluff. "I saw a butterfly just a few moments ago on my favorite daffodil. The rose bushes have such a wonderful fragrance, too, just don't get too close to those thorns."

"Actually," crooned Darius, his bright green eyes dancing with anticipation. "I am more taken with that silky golden feline that crosses our yard occasionally. Have you seen that catty walk? That small patch of white on her chest? Why, she's just purrfect. I'd like to take her on a walk near my best fishing spot. It always has some choice leftovers."

"Speaking of food, I just heard the car door and I'm sure I smell chicken in the oven. Mama must be making a Sunday feast. Let's go in and wash our faces and paws. Dinner should be ready soon," purred Little Fluff.

"Is food all you think about?" asked Darius, deftly smoothing a spot of unruly fur on his more-than-ample backside.

"Of course not. A soft blanket for a snooze or resting on papa's jeans ranks right up there, but Mama's chicken is always top notch," answered Little Fluff, being careful not to disturb Kelly's corner. "You don't exactly miss many meals yourself," she observed of her nearly 20-pound companion.

"Who me?" meowed Darius as he rolled and stretched full length before getting up to follow Little Fluff into the house. Looking back at his tail, swinging it from side to side, occasionally stopping to paw at his fur and shift his royal purple harness, his solid gray coat was smooth and full. Nonetheless, he lacked the petite package of cultured refinement that was Little Fluff.

"What in the world are you doing, Darius Meow?"

"Just making sure I look my best. I want to make a favorable impression on that sweet little fur ball I mentioned. I saw her eying me the other day as she sauntered across our yard. Do you think she might be interested in me?"

"Isn't that just like a male!" remarked Little Fluff knowingly.

"Darius Meow," she said, shaking her whiskered head gently. "You are one curious cat!"

Autumn 2011 Cover Photo Contest:
Topic: Downtown
Winner Receives \$20 plus publication.

We're looking for a Color or b & w cover photo for the issue. E-mail your photo as an attachment to cindylamb@cableone.net in .jpeg file with title "Autumn Cover Photo Contest." E-mail deadline September 1, 2011.

Rules: No entry fee. Only GCWA members may enter. Cindy Lamb, Publisher of MQ, will be the judge. All entrants must agree to allow publication in the MQ along with their name or pseudonym. Prize paid at publication. MQ requires one-time publishing rights only; afterwards all rights revert to the photographer.

Membership Form:

Gulf Coast Writers Association
P.O. Box 10294
Gulfport, MS 39505

Your membership entitles you to contribute your own work to our quarterly magazine, Magnolia Quarterly. You will receive the next four issues. Also you will be added to our email list, which includes announcements of markets, contests, meetings, and events. If you have book publications you may have your book listed on our website and in our magazine. GCWA charges only 2\$ on each sale on items sold through our listing, and no listing fees. We also feature your book on our website in a very attractive display. We have an annual contest called 'Let's Write' each spring. We will be happy to announce any book signings you might be planning on our website and also notify all our members via email of your events.

Membership for one year is only \$30. Please send a check to the above address with this form or information on a separate sheet.

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Non-Fiction

Messages from the Universe

Mary Ellen Gavin -- Rancho Cucamonga, CA

I have long wondered and now believe we are Children of the Stars, made from the dust that brings about life in the universe. We are Star Creatures, who enjoy celestial connectivity. Enlightenment and empowerment stream in from *out there*. And when we pray, or meditate, or settle into quiet mode, we can sense the flow.

These off-planet communiqués offer inspiration and instruction. Fluttering soft like butterfly wings, they soothe and support our psyches. And yet, there are times when we mortals are out of focus, off kilter and out of touch. We do not pay attention to the writing on the wall, or on the billboard, or on the tiny slip of paper in our fortune cookie. We do not hear whispering from the breeze, or screaming from the surf, or lyrics in birdsong.

Still, universal messages keep coming. Jumbled ideas pop into our heads and pile up. Errant thoughts out of nowhere march across our minds and blurt out inappropriately. Friends watching us cringe; they look worried. These oddities gain energy. Dishes jump off shelves, photos fall from walls, every gizmo breaks down. Plans fall apart. We get lost and run late.

The Irish blame the wee ones. Star Gazers call it retrograde. We feel antsy as if under attack. Somehow we begin to understand the truth and admit we have gotten derailed, pushed off track and we are out of synch with the universe.

Which is why periodically we have to visit our favorite Reader. This gifted person could be your minister, priest, favorite aunt or a person for hire. It must be someone who can stand back and pick up the universal messages sent specifically for you.

Let me tell you about my experiences. My British grandmother, a very religious woman, read my tea leaves as far back as I can remember. She had been taught by her Irish mother and told me about the strange things she saw at the bottom of my cup. And while my friends said she only wanted to scare me, my parents never scoffed at her. They only asked that I take what she, or any reader, said with a *grain of salt*.

As an adult, when things turned topsy-turvy and the need for a reading became clear to me, I knew it was time to listen. Finding clairvoyants who possessed the gift of interpretation and could honestly read my life came easily for me.

Alice, also a tea reader, was the woman my girlfriends took me to see when I was confused about marrying my one-and-only boyfriend. Were there warning signs? What were my friends not telling me?

Alice's first words were, *do not marry this fella*. She had picked up on the far-away messages that I had worked so hard to ignore. Still, I argued how he would change once he took his vows. Alice's parting words, *break it off now or it will be ugly in the end*.

A few years later, now a single parent, I was roaming a psychic fair and stopped to read Gloria's table sign. She advertised the gift of touch, *able to read any object put into her hand*. I took off a gold necklace and waited to learn about my current love interest. Her fingers rubbed the golden charm. *Feels cold...this man does not possess deep feelings*. Not long after, I realized that Gloria's reading was correct.

In the winter of 2005 I flew to Georgetown to visit a suicidal friend who was heartsick over a lost love affair. Out walking in a snow storm, we spotted a sign: Jessica-Psychic Reader. After convincing my friend that a reading would be good for her, we climbed the stairs. A young woman answered the door in jeans and a tee. She talked with a New Jersey accent and acted excited to see us.

I explained that it was my friend who needed her. Jessica dismissed my friend to another room and made me sit down and listen. She whispered low how *the winds of change swirl all around. You will be moving soon!*

I laughed, *No Way*, as I waved off her crazy prediction. I had just settled into my lovely Louisiana home after moving from Virginia. Jessica repeated her words, insisting that she was *getting it right*.

Where do you see me moving?

Her eyes rolled back and from deep inside she blurted out, *California!*

My friend and I laughed all the way back to a warm fire and a nice bottle of wine.

The following August 29th, Katrina forced us all to evacuate. Crazy, and through a twist of circumstances, I did land in California and lived there for five years.

And now? Everyone wants Jessica's number.

Notes for Therapy: “Dear Old Dad”

Bob Strother – Greenville, SC

I was told that my father went AWOL from his training at Keesler Field and somehow made it home to see me shortly after my mother and I arrived home from the hospital. The story tells how he stood over my crib and sang *Oh Danny Boy* while I lay there sleeping. It was the only time he, my mother, and I ever spent together as a family.

It was July 1944, fourteen months before the end of World War II. The Andrews Sisters were on the radio singing *Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree*. Two of my uncles were fighting overseas and my father was undergoing training at the Army Air Corps flight school in Biloxi, Mississippi. After their marriage my mother and father had moved in with his parents in a house on Chamberlain Avenue in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Two of my aunts had moved in with my mother's parents and their youngest daughter until their husbands came home from the war.

While there were still concerns over how the war was going – even more anxiety about the fates of sons and husbands – the event of the first grandchild's birth had provided a respite from worry and cause for celebration among the Strother and Kelly families.

.....

Born in 1922, my father grew up an only child, adored by his parents and extended family. In his youth, he sold newspapers on the street corner. At age eight, he was forced from his corner by an older newsboy who coveted that more heavily-traveled location. As legend has it, my father strode immediately to the second-floor office of “Squire” Lawrence, a well-respected local attorney, to plead his case and ask for help. Amused by my father's pluck and persistence, the good Squire accompanied him back to the corner and dispatched the older boy under threat of legal action should this heinous offense recur.

In high school my father was handsome and charming, arrogantly confident, and popular with the girls. He and his best friend, John, started calling themselves “Flash” Strother and “Ace” Lanham, and painted their newly-adopted sobriquets on a car they purchased together.

My parents began dating during their third year of high school and married shortly after graduation. For a year or so they enjoyed their youthful romance and relative lack of responsibility. His enlistment in the Army Air Corps, however, and his acceptance for fighter pilot training were the beginning of the end for the happy couple.

My father looked really good in his uniform, and judging from the number of photographs he had taken, was well aware of it. I suppose the combination of his physical appeal, the uniform, the fact that he was almost a fighter pilot, and that he was far from home, wife, and family, afforded temptations too great for him to resist. Biloxi bars and Biloxi babes wreaked havoc on the marriage and, ultimately, with his parents – my grandmother in particular.

The first inkling that something was amiss took the form of a notice that he had been briefly suspended from training to undergo treatment for a venereal disease. In those days, people really believed you could contract such maladies from dirty toilet seats, so the family, my mother included, gave him the benefit of the doubt. While they were concerned and most likely suspicious, his denials of philandering were accepted – at least for the time being.

As he spent more time away from home, the relationship between him and my mother continued to unravel. Her letters went unanswered. Telephone calls became more infrequent. Then he stopped sending part of his paycheck home. When telephone calls and empty promises brought no relief, my mother and grandmother collaborated on a letter to his commanding officer, asking that he be forced to provide reasonable support for his wife and child. The letter produced results. My father did resume sending money home. He was angry, though, that he had been made to look bad to his commanding officer. By then, I think, he simply wanted to be free of his marriage and home-related responsibilities. Ultimately, he asked for a divorce. My mother filed, and less than a year after my birth, the divorce was granted.

Until the day she died, my grandmother never forgave her son for his abandonment of my mother and me. She still loved him, but it was not without prejudice. My grandfather was a more forgiving soul, and although troubled and saddened by my parents' breakup, still held a reverence for his boy. I would often ask Pop about my father. He might look away, gazing into the distance while he recalled some warmly remembered scene or event. When he spoke of my father, you could hear the love and pride in his voice.

.....

My father never flew a combat mission and was still in Biloxi when the war ended in September of 1945. He came back to Chattanooga after his discharge from the military, found a house, a job, and another wife. He had two other children when, at age six, I saw him again.

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Spiders and Snakes

Mary Ann Sharp – Bush, LA

I don't quite remember how it all came about; but think I was four years old when I saw a snake for the first time. Perhaps it was Mama's screaming that embedded fear of the slithering creatures within me. I listened to more than an adequate number of incriminating tales about them and hung onto every word until I could actually visualize the movement of a stick.

Growing up in the country I was always aware there were an abundance of blackberry bushes in the wooded area close by our house. When harvest time came, we went in search for them and always filled our pail in anticipation of a hot cobbler later that day. For some reason I didn't go with Mama, my sisters, and brothers one day; but when they came home, Mama said, "That snake stood straight up; like it was daring me to reach for those berries. It must have been waist high."

"What color was it?" Daddy asked.

"Black."

"Sounds like a coach whip. They won't hurt you, but they'll chase you all over the place."

Well, that did it for me. I never wanted to go again! "I'll stay home and cook for y'all, I'll even wash the dishes; but p-l-e-a-s-e don't make me go blackberry picking."

Years later my husband, Ray, and I bought property in an undeveloped wooded area. Even after it was cleared for building it was still next to a thicket of underbrush, trees, and huckleberry bushes. Although the dog days of summer rekindled my nightmarish memories of snakes I did manage to pick a few berries while keeping my guard up. The scrumptious pies made it all worthwhile.

I remember one summer day long ago when my sons, Kevin and Donnie, called me at work. The tones of their voices were sheer pandemonium, and I feared for what I was about to hear. "Mama, there's a snake in the house!"

"How did . . . don't let it out of your sight! You have to get it back outside."

"We're watching it."

"Okay, where is it?"

"Oh no, it just went under the dishwasher!"

Although they finally got the snake out of the house I couldn't get him out of the corridors of my mind. I had to check the sofa before I sat down, look on the floor before I stepped out of bed, and check the toilet — ophidiophobia! On the other hand, I have no problem with a lizard, frog, mouse, or even a spider as long as it knows its place, and stays there.

The boys and their friends became snake hunters after that with absolutely no fear whatsoever. As a mother I was always concerned, especially the day I came home and opened the door to the freezer section of the refrigerator only to find, you guessed it, a snake! They had killed it and put it in a quart jar. They always wanted a pet snake to put in an aquarium in their room . . . in my house! It may come as no surprise that my answer was always, "NO!"

Many years and many snakes have passed by, bringing me up to this point in time. Ray and I still reside on our same country road in our same country house. Now we are blessed to have twin granddaughters, Sadie and Sarah, who live walking distance from us. Having raised them from babies and loving them so much I will admit to being overly protective in almost every aspect.

I've had a glass top table on my porch for many years. Every spring I'd replace the silk flowers in the basket that sits on table before a mother wren made her nest in it. It was delightful to watch the baby birds learning to fly about. One Sunday morning, a couple of years ago, the girls and I stepped out of the door to go to church. Coiled up on top of my table lay a snake. We didn't know if it was real or if Ray was playing a trick on us. It lay still while we slowly stepped safely away from the table.

"If it's gone when we come home, then we'll know it was real," I said.

When we returned home the snake was gone. We asked Ray about it, but he thought that we were playing a joke on him. After convincing him otherwise we went out to further investigate. Ray picked up the basket, which seemed heavier than usual. He turned it over and out fell the now fattened snake.

Being country girls Sadie and Sarah have had horses, dogs, and cats. They raise show pigs every winter for 4-H projects. These redneck girls have been driving their daddy's huge four-wheeler since they were seven years old. Sometimes I fear because they have no fear, that is, almost no fear. Sarah will go into hysterics if a bug flies toward her. Yet she will pick up a worm! If there's a spider in the house you'd better clear a path because she's coming through, screaming every step of the way.

Last spring Sarah wanted some baby chicks to raise. She had heard through the grapevine that there is money to be made in selling fresh eggs. The sweet talking entrepreneur convinced her Pawpaw, Ray, to build a very nice chicken coop with an ample number of nests for the comfort and convenience of her employees. After months and months of patiently waiting, her business is now thriving. However, each of the sixteen chickens wants to lay her eggs in the same nest.

Pawpaw checks on the chickens every day to make sure they are getting enough feed and water. Sometimes he gathers the eggs as well. Just recently he came home and said, "You'll never guess what I found in the nest where the chickens lay."

"Probably not, so just tell me."

"A snake was just lying up in there on top of the eggs. He stuck his head up when I went to get the eggs."

"What kind of snake is it?"

"It's just a common king snake."

"Well you have to get it out of there. It'll scare Sarah to death if she looks into the nest and finds a snake looking back at her."

"I'm not going to kill him because a king snake kills rats."

"I'd rather see a rat than a snake!"

When the girls came home from school Pawpaw told them all about the snake.

"Can we catch it and take it to school? Miss Susie said we could have a snake."

"How are you going to catch it?" I asked.

Sarah was quick to reply, "With my hands."

The Nutritious Snack

Grace B. Lebo – Gulfport, MS

“Thank goodness it’s sunny at last,” I thought, sitting comfortably in the old rocker while nursing our new daughter. For most of the morning, rain had pounded the large layer of block-top that covered the ground in the mobile home park.

A military family, we had decided that living in our large, very nice mobile home was best for our children because they would be comfortable in their own home no matter where we were transferred as long as we remained state-side. We had never before lived in a mobile home court completely covered in tarmac, but this assignment was supposed to last only a year, and this had been the only court with a vacancy when we reached the northern California town.

The rain had ceased a short time ago, and our two little boys had gone out to play in the puddles beside our mobile home, happy to be outside where they could run and stomp in the water.

My contented rocking ceased when I heard 3-year old Randy screaming, “Those are my fwiends! Stop it! Stop it! Mo-ooo-om! He won’t stop!”

Putting the baby to my shoulder with one arm while closing my blouse with the other hand, I rose from the rocking chair and stepped over to the door, hearing the mild panic in my youngster’s voice but knowing better than to become too alarmed at a child’s loud cry. I had panicked often with the first young son but had learned rather quickly that a little one’s yells very seldom meant real disaster.

Hearing the door open, Randy turned to me, tears running down his little face as he stood in a small puddle crying and pointing to his older brother Ernest. The 5-year old stood looking at me with his hands on his hips and a large glowing smile on his face.

“Ernest, what in the world is going on?” I stood in the doorway looking around but saw nothing that would cause tears or be in any way harmful to the smaller boy. As Ernest continued to stand there smirking, I motioned to Randy who stepped out of the puddle and came over to me while rubbing tears from his face with one hand, the other hand stuffed in a pocket of his little jeans.

I knelt on the floor, putting an arm around my little one in damp and slightly muddy clothes. “Randy, tell Mama what happened. What made you cry? Are you hurt?”

He shook his head and blubbered through still flowing tears, “Mama, he wouldn’t stop.”

“Wouldn’t stop what, Randy?”

He twisted around in my arm to stare at his older brother and announce accusingly, “He wouldn’t stop taking my fwiends!” He pulled his hand from his pocket to show me three or four wriggling green worms. “These are my fwiends, Mama, and Ernest wouldn’t stop taking them.” His tears increased, as I looked out at other green worms wriggling around on the tarmac. I guess they needed air -- or freedom from all the rainwater collecting under the black-top.

Telling Ernest to leave Randy’s worms alone, I sensed my husband behind me, having left his paper on the couch to join us.

“Okay, Randy, Ernest will leave your friends alone now and there are lots more on the ground,” I said as I ruffled his hair then brushed a little mud from his jeans.

“But, Mo-oom, those aren’t my fwiends! He TOOK my fwiends, and he ... and he...” The tears flowed anew as Randy buried his face against my knees while struggling to get out the words.

Pulling Randy closer, I looked again at my older son still grinning from ear to ear. “What did you do, Ernest?” But he just continued to smirk.

Randy suddenly became more angry than upset and, pulling away from me, he blurted out, “He took my fwiends, Mama, and he ... and he EATED them!”

Before the shock could wear off, before I could soothe one child while berating the other, my husband’s voice broke through.

“Well,” he stood there grinning, and I knew he would turn this into a joke. He always managed to turn incidents into jokes. “Well,” he continued, “at least you know Ernest is getting his protein today.” And, unperturbed at the thought of his son snacking on wriggly green worms, he calmly lifted the baby from my arms and turned back toward the couch and his newspaper.

Ode to Summer

Stanley Hastings – Gulfport, MS

“The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm-of-Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily.”

The above lines were delivered by Ralph Waldo Emerson to the senior class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday evening, July 15, 1838, and are quoted here to help describe the beauty and joy of summer.

Today we can read Emerson’s eloquent words and not only agree with them, but also give thanks for the modern technology that makes summer more enjoyable; the air conditioned automobile, the power boat, and the fast trains and air-planes.

But it’s also interesting that some of the most natural, original forms of summer time pleasure are at an all-time high in popularity; jogging, walking, bicycling, sailing, and picnics outdoors under the trees, surrounded by God’s wonderful, bright and beautiful creation.

In many ways we truly appreciate life in the summer. What could taste better after mowing the lawn than a tall cup of fresh water, the best way of quenching thirst? What could taste better than a big scoop of cold ice cream, in or out of a cone? And have you ever noticed how more powerful the taste buds are when you dine outside on fried chicken, hamburgers, corn on the cob, or barbeque ribs and potato salad? I get hungry just thinking about it.

The visual senses are also in full bloom in summertime. What could be more appealing than the bathing beauties on the beach? What looks healthier than people eagerly doing yard work, or painting houses or fences? These are scenes of summer that most of us go through, and this will continue through all sorts of modern technology.

Summer is a time for vacations, for R and R, for catching up on relationships, study, and self-improvement. It’s also a time for cleaning our houses, washing and waxing our cars, improving our wardrobes, and giving thanks for that hot day in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, over two hundred years ago, when a dedicated group of common men signed a declaration of independence. To those men we owe eternal gratitude for making us a free people during all seasons.

School Days

Crotty, Doug – Gainesville, FL

My eighth grade football coach called me a wussy one day at football practice when I stopped running laps. I walked off the field and drank a bunch of water, then accidentally threw up all over the equipment manager. That was when I knew I was probably not going to be an athlete.

I didn't care, though, because athletes didn't really talk much anyway, and they always wanted to eat a lot, or yell real loud and pound things, mostly bodies.

I wanted to be a master of words and I often just talked to myself in my room at night. When I got older I started studying that way, as if I were teaching a fictitious class. That helped me learn; yet I didn't want to be a teacher. I had a hard enough time just talking to other students let alone teaching them.

In high school things were definitely different. Competing to be part of the In Crowd was a daily exercise of "who likes me today" and "who's mad at me." I didn't get it and that's probably how and why I got through. I'd hear girls talking in the hall and wonder why they chose to spend their time nervously chattering about something that probably wasn't going to happen anyway, at least not to them.

I was not the normal student, nor did I want to be. The In Crowd guys were mostly glorified momma's boys who sucked up to the teachers, or mono-focused muscle heads who didn't have any skills outside of their jock straps and cleats. The In Crowd girls were either little brats with too much of daddy's money who'd play with guys' minds, or porcelain-faced pretenders who didn't even deserve to be afforded a kiss, let alone given any degree of sexual pleasure.

I, on the other hand, dated girls who shunned the "pay for friends" cronyism and we did our own thing. It still bothered me that the others thought what they were doing was right. I think they were the misfits, not us.

In the fall of my senior year I was comfortably moving within my circle of shunning friends, totally oblivious to Crusader Pride, and if we'd win the football championship again that season. The concessions were selling out of stock before halftime, and there was great concern about getting more volunteers and local merchant donations for the program. They hired two more policemen for traffic control near the stadium.

We never went to any of those games. We just enjoyed being ourselves.

After graduation, I never saw any of my shunning friends again.

We all became individuals somewhere.

Mastores' Poetry

Guest Poet and Commentary by John Freeman (4 pages)

Guest Poet Review: John Freeman presents a guest poet's work and commentary. This month's poet is Constance Rowell Mastores from Oakland CA. Here is her bio and five of her poems, followed by John Freeman's commentary.

BIO: Constance Rowell Mastores was professor of French at University of California-Berkeley. In addition to winning many awards, among them the Blue Unicorn Harold Witt Memorial Award and the Lyric Roberts Memorial Prize, her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, among them The Atlanta Review, Blue Unicorn, The Eclectic Muse, The Lyric, and Rattapallax.

FORMALITY AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

They have all joined in, the jakes and the sultans,
have shuddered their fans and thrummed;
puffed themselves up with the pomp of death;
displayed their wattles and snoods
to the feeding hens that appear
unmoved by the fanfare and bluster—
eyes turned not to the dance, the display,
the formal parade, nor the slow turn
brought to an end with a stamp
of wings and release of air; but to
the seeded earth and bugs below,
as the gobblers move, superb and aloof
among their chattering, dismissive harem.

And then, one day, after weeks of refusal,
my oldest and fondest—who chased
from her feed the antlered deer
and curious cats—walked meekly forward
and placed her head against the chest
of the ugliest tom and most grotesque.
I breathed a sigh, then held my breath.
The day was pure and still.
I thought of Mallarmé's white page;
the holy sonnets of John Donne.

WILLOW SONG AMONG THE LEONIDS

Already the burning Pleiades descend into the ocean
and night becomes itself.

From a grove of black poplars,
the huge sigh and shift of wings;

and soon the Leonids will streak across the sky
and flare in a burst of showers;

susurrations and brilliance among the leaves,
a glint of the end folded into the beginning—

Give us, love, another kiss—

as birds fly down from dark branches
and by a pool a willow trembles,
then a strange and terrible knocking—

*Undo my hair, I pray you,
the weeping willow shall be my garland,
this bed my marriage grave—*

as the funeral song unveils itself, petal
upon petal, until the words arrive
at the core, a woman
at prayer kneeling on silken folds,
a mere quivering;
the end burned into the beginning and then out,
peony unburdening its heavy flower until
 each pale petal drops;
and the night grown terrible again
with orchestrated flowers,
perfume, rising, like a sickness
amid the ruthlessness of love and even language;
and then the song re-opened, petal upon petal—

O let me live a moment longer—

Give us, love, another kiss—

*The weeping willow shall be my garland
and from dark branches birds shall fly
into the emptiness of my song—*

the wind knocking at the door, at the whole sky,
owl gone from the grove of black poplars,
a few last streaks from November's fading showers.

*from Verdi's *Otello*

Mastores' Poetry

SONG

The astronomer
Cornelius Gustaf Jiménez
has heard
the sound
of a black hole
singing
singing in B flat
but a B flat
fifty-seven octaves
lower
than middle C
Cornelius Gustaf Jiménez is
a musician also
He plays the cello
and likes Beethoven's *Late String Quartets*
In particular
the *Quartet in B-flat Major*
that expresses
what he can not express
A torment
of tenderness
that knows no bound
A suffering that offers
its own redemption
(the word *anguished**
written over a passage
of ghostly beauty)
Darkness
that illuminates
the lowest note transposed
Immensity
of love
singing
on the shores
of a great silence
**beklemmt*

OXYMORON

for Henry Vaughn

I would like to believe in the everyness
of things. In the universe and fiery stars.
In the warp-worlds. In the greater possibility
of that impossibility. In the huge seductiveness
burning outside my window. Every night
it winks at me. Every night, at odds, I stare at it
and write strange sentences on yellow tablets
that create their own kind of haphazard universe
upon the table. I read them like a Rorschach test.
I see windmills. I tilt at them. I tilt at the universe
burning outside my window, dare it to make me
believe, to walk right up to me and announce
itself—shake me by the shoulder. *There is
in God, some say, a deep but dazzling darkness.*

Poetry Commentary

John Freeman – Harvey, LA

The literary term “allusion” refers to mentioning or using a passage from a previous, usually well-known, work. Allusion is a device used by many poets throughout history because it adds a new level of experience or meaning to the current situation of the poem. It is a device most often employed by poets with a broad cultural education, particularly in the arts, and is appreciated by readers with similar knowledge.

Until the last two lines, “Formality and Its Associations” seems to be a straightforward, literal descriptive scene. But the reference to the two poets raises the entire poem to the metaphorical level. Like many poets before and after him, Mallarmè dreaded the empty page. Often the most difficult part of writing a poem is getting started--putting something down on the blank page. In his Holy Sonnets, Donne often used sexual imagery to describe God’s love. The Mallarme allusion becomes a metaphor for the sexual (and creative) emptiness of the first stanza, just as the Donne allusion is a metaphor for the union about to occur in the second stanza. Since the process of artistic creation has also often been depicted in sexual terms, these allusions transform the entire poem into an extended metaphor for writing poetry. There is a fallow period before the inspiration comes, and no matter how we try to attract the muse, she must come to us in her own time.

A far more complex allusion occurs in “Willow Song Among the Leonids.” The speaker has gone outside to watch the meteor shower while listening to Otello (either via i-pod or open window), when she becomes aware that the birds in a nearby willow correspond to lines in the song. This unleashes a three-layered metaphor in which the meteorites’ movement through brightness to death, and the flight of birds from the tree (birds have often symbolized the human soul or spirit), represent the impending death of Desdemona.

Neither of these poems could have achieved their effects so dramatically without these allusions. Because of space limitation, I can’t discuss the allusions in “Song” and “Oxymoron.” A good exercise would be to see whether you can locate them and figure out what they add to the poems.

Tangled

Linda Amos – York, PA

...had she ever
given herself permission
to become a quivering
mass of raw need
tangled with reckless green
beneath her bed sheets,
it would be with him,
and him, only.

Mixed Up

Linda Amos – York, PA

She had to admit
He was the only man
Who had confused her heart
When she was 16
And all-the-way up to today.

She was, and probably
Always would be
Mixed-up about him!
Because only he
Could confuse her heart!

Heart's Obsession!

Linda Amos – York, PA

He was the one obsession
In her life
That would not
That could not
Be denied or exorcised!

Silver Horizon

Jerry Lee Murrell – Gulfport, MS

Constant watching hurts. Hurts.
Above mocks. Above jabs.
Chinese water torture.
Drop, drop, drop. Drop, drop,
drop.
Look, stare, peer. Look, stare,
peer.
Inconsiderate fiend.
Through walls, through the trite
skull.
Odd, alien stare. Space
Looking through this minute
Particle. All around,
Forever denouncing
This granule it
Shelters. An enemy
More large than physical
Foes. Having the knowledge;
Wreck spirit, wrinkle skin.

Life

Frank Moore – Brandon, MS

I'll not go this way again
nor find this single path
that way I go will follow me
and be the parts that make me mine

Choices made as I go forward
become the lesson learned or denied
Forgotten and repeated
or grown from and built upon

For God gives us opportunities
to squander or to choose
To make us better in the offering
or worse in the denial

But the fullest meaning
Is not the path we choose
But what others choose
Long after us because we lived.

Heat Wave - August 6

Brenda Brown Finnegan – Ocean Springs, MS

Urging life into the sandy soil,
her bamboo-handled hoe
hacked the crusty ground
while behind her bent back
Hiroshima Bay gleamed in the rising sun.
The undulating drone of planes
at first did not arouse her
nor the whistling of a little boy nearby,
though thoughts of a gunner grandson
rippled through her mind.

She leaned on the hoe,
and covering yellowed eyes
with a parchment hand looked upward.
The sun was hot, but more intense
the wave of heat that hit,
sweeping her from the garden.

Raining onto the flattened
blackened plot the following day
were ashes,
as scattered from a cremation urn.

Niagara Falls in Summer

Sheila Grieco – Ocean Springs, MS

We leaned over a rail in frothy mist
peering down to see a perfect rainbow.
We're awed by the river's deafening gush.
An effervescent gray-green falling spill
that pools far down below in roiling water
capped with bubbling white turbulent foam.
Nearby an active, yet secluded isle
that busy, nesting seabirds call their home.
Weeping willows dip their arms into cool waters
Chartreuse new leaves bursting forth among
Flowered trees of white and puffs of pale pink blossoms.

Mississippi Heart

Joyce Burns – Tupelo, MS

Dragonflies and fire-flies glide softly on the breeze;
listening to the willows sing that Southern siren dream.
Down where life is simple, sunbeams dancing through the trees,
eagles soar above and fishes dance into the deep.
Dusty cotton fields that roll, into those red clay hills,
and people warm and gentle in a place where time stands still.
This place is Mississippi. Her name makes our thoughts run deep.
She's seen her share of sorrows, and some ghosts still haunt our dreams.
But those of us that know her feel a stir deep in our hearts.
Some leave her for a time but nothing heals that empty heart.
They long to smell the freshness, from a slow and drenching rain;
and watch as flowers lift their heads to God's amazing grace.
Pink lightening in the summer brings a swelter to the heat.
But cooling breezes come and soon the air is sweet with peace.
There's something that's pure magic in my Mississippi home.
As I sit and watch the evening slide into my tired soul.
I watch the moon rise slowly, dripping diamonds as she goes.
And soon my head is fuzzy and it's off to bed I go.
Above the sky is twinkling, turning daytime into night,
as I await the new day that will bring the morning light.

Ron of the Poet's Path

Barbara Tate – Winchester, TN

You walk a poet's path
Between trees the color of McIntosh apples
In your black turtleneck and tight fitting jeans.
Sixty-two winters have gone since genes
Combined giving you to the world.
Ron of the black turtleneck. Ron of the black beard.
Ron of Ye Olde Bookstore.
Ron of the poet's path.

Down the lane of rain washed air and blue sky mornings
Trying to walk out of your shadow into imperfect time travel,
Where do you think you're going
Ron of the black turtleneck
Ron of the laughing eyes
Ron on a poet's path?

The Helplessness of Man

Bruce Wayne Sullivan – Mendenhall, MS

Who will comfort his lonely soul
When there is no one else left to hold?
And at the end of life
Who will give a gentle touch
To calm his inner strife?
When his parents have passed
And all else dear to him has parted at last
How will he once again capture
Those youthful feelings of rapture?
And when entropy has done its deed
How will he find to plant another seed?
Who will protect him from all the memories
Of his loved ones that uninvitingly, like swaying trees
Move his thoughts effortlessly?
Who will cry for him in his despair
When there is no one around with any time to care?
Should his fate be a nursing home
Who will come visit when he is all alone?
And when he misses the tender touch of his mother
How will this longing be filled by any other?
And the love for his woman of long ago
Who left before he
She is a phantom that sometimes he sees
Alas! Man!
In all his glory
He ends with a sad story.

Other Things Can Wait

Barbara Tate -- Winchester, TN

Do you listen to the quiet,
To the stillness? It's not that quiet
And it's not that still. Like a churchyard at dawn
After a dark dreamless midnight,
No, it's not that quiet.

The daffodils thrive
Under a rising buttercup sun,
Liquid gold pouring itself over the morning,
A wick of pure white lights itself,
No, it's not that still.

It's not that quiet.
Listen.
Other things can wait.

Delight In Flight

Kaylor Austin – Bay St. Louis, MS

Hummingbirds,
Ruby throats by name,
eastern side of U.S.
is there summertime claim
until migration
is where they remain.
Nectar,
is primary food,
also what's fed
to their nesting brood.
One part sugar,
four parts water to fix,
you'll find it much cheaper
if you do the mix.
Red food color,
an attraction for eye,
when the feeder is found
you can leave out the dye.
Hibiscus, Wisteria,
nectar filled flowering plants,
bid welcome Hummers,
a plea to advance.
Territorial feeders,
their entrée in sight,
ready to fend off
a scrounger in flight.
Your first impressions
of creatures so small,
would be a reaction of fear
to all they recall.
Nothing farther
from the truth you will see,
when protecting their food source
from an enemy.

Invasions by wasps,
lizards or a fat bumblebee,
larger birds when confronted
also will flee!
You'll find great pleasure
in the numbers alright,
just before roosting
when they leave for the night,
you will always remember that spiraling flight,
those protecting their food source
with all of their might.
When the colder months
of the year come our way,
put the feeders up
send them all on their way
to Mexico and South America
where they must stay,
to be welcomed back next year
when the colds gone away.

Vocabulary,
won't provide
necessary words,
for the best description
of these great little birds,
who can continually, hover in flight
and in the twinkling of an eye
disappear out of sight.

Little Boy's Perfect Day

Judy Davies – Gautier, MS

Morning summer breezes fuel little boy wishes
of vibrant kites in a cloudless sky.
Running through grass, kite tail trailing after
lighting his face with little boy laughter.
A visit to the zoo prompts little boy wonder
of nature's gifts he's never seen.
McDonald's mini-farm opens animal lands
with petting zoo friendly to little boy hands.
Ice cream cones fill craving for little boy sweets
in a cone dripping with chocolate delight.
The midday snack quells little boy hunger,
at least until he arrives home tonight.
Afternoon at the beach builds little boy pride
while shaping sandcastles at a beach-side bay.
Holes for castle windows, roads for his trucks,
creating magic in sand on this sun-drenched day.
A car ride home just in time for supper
allows time for sharing little boy play.
Stories in mom's lap invite little boy snuggles
and time to re-live his busy fun day.
Footed jammies, favorite stuffed bear,
happily recounting all he has seen,
carried up to bed in the arms of daddy,
as bedtime sleepiness welcomes little boy dreams.

Black Roses Surround This Bed Where I Lay

Clark W. Cooper – Homer Glen, IL

Curious to the thought of a wasted amend
trapped in a rope, quivering to the thought of an end
placed before the sign of love, trickling down a vine of death
we call the deeds as their own, the stars now align to the site of red
slightly amused, stuttering whispers that create a coolness in your veins
while only one voice may shade the stillness of a drowning beat
capturing each moment that once held a thought
stressing each emotion where only heartache had been brought
a halo now seeks out a fault, arises to a new prey
casting a demon out, shaken to realize the meaning
a purpose, such as one's own, brought to attention so subtle, yet crazed
black roses now surround a sorrowful bed, only pain is now kept in this bed I may lay

Summer Rain

Brenda Brown Finnegan – Ocean Springs, MS

The sudden rainfall is unexpected,
this late summer morning,
falling from a blue sky filled with sunshine.

The flowers on my patio drink hungrily
bowing their heads to the gentle drops.

Impatiens are impatient for the welcome water,
roses rise to the occasion,
red hibiscus drink in the drizzle,
petulant petunias preen in the shower.

Then, as suddenly as it began,
it stops, and the earth glistens
and breathes.

Unspoken

Richard Sponaugle – Alexandria, VA

Beth shuffles blindly in the black alley,
Of a crime ridden town at midnight.
Some drunk warbles ‘99 Bottles of Beer,’
While Beth inhales the nine whiskeys he’s had.
Winter’s whipping winds sail a Frisbee,
Disguised as a plastic trash can lid,
Whooshing past her withered face.
Beth stumbles over a sliver of ice,
Black as the night and her mood.
She falls face first on the frozen ground,
Then gets up slow and painfully.
Beth starts her short trip home,
Hoping to return here at noon,
Though last week’s sunshine
Made her cry like rain clouds.
That’s when teens laughed at Beth,
At rock and roll concert decibel levels,
While parents ‘whispered’ in a microphone,
That Beth was drunk or retarded.
Beth’s always sober and smart,
But lately she’s slurred three letter words,
Let alone her rare 13 letter disease.

2011 “Let’s Write” Winners List

Check the website to read the entries.

http://www.gcwriters.org/winners_lw11.htm

Poetry:

1st Place “Diamondback” by Sally Clark of Fredericksburg, TX

2nd Place “On Likuri” by Sherry B. Hanson of Brunswick, ME

3rd Place “Morning Waltz” by Kat Kennedy of Mobile, AL

HM “Winter Fruit” by Barbara Olic-Hamilton of Boise, ID

Non-Fiction:

1st Place “Oh, Boy!” by Kim Hackett, Oldsmar, FL

2nd Place “A Chance to Say Goodbye” by Claire Forrest, Arlington MA

3rd Place “I Don’t Want to Live in a Motel” by Michael Groetsch, LA

HM “Just Add Water” by Murry Edwards, Clyde, TX

Fiction:

1st Place “Uncle Eb and the Frog-Water” by Richard Perreault, GA

2nd Place “Japanese Heart” by Sam Irwin, Baton Rouge, LA

3rd Place “The Moon Sees You” by Linda Sands, Lawrenceville, GA

HM “Change of Heart” by Sheila Grieco, Ocean Springs, MS

Youth:

Non-fiction: “Luck in a Bottle” by Mikhail Smith, South Webster, OH

Poetry: “A Wedding” by Erica Glover, Morris, AL

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Southern Expressions

GCWA Authors Conference

October 14th 6 PM – Cocktail Party; featuring Curtis Wilkie,
author of the best selling exposé: “The Fall of the House of Zeus”

IP Casino, Resort and Spa – Biloxi, MS

October 15th 8 AM–5:30 PM; 30 Teaching Sessions
Literary Agents, Publishers, Editors, Poets, Storytellers, Authors

Luncheon Speaker: George Thatcher, poet and reporter

Mary C. O’Keefe Cultural Center – Ocean Springs, MS

October 16th 9 AM–11 AM; “Meet the Author” Brunch

IP Casino, Resort & Spa – Biloxi, MS

October 16th 1 PM–4 PM: Loren Niemi Storyteller Workshop

Walter Anderson Museum of Art – Ocean Springs, MS

**Registration and Information:
www.gcwriters.org/se11.html**



Call for Submissions 4th Anthology

Gulf Coast Writers Association seeks submissions for our fourth print anthology of short fiction and poetry, "Rocking Chairs and Afternoon Tales." We will consider most genres, except pornography, erotica, graphic violence/horror, excessive profanity, or anything racial or biased toward any religious or moral preference.

Accepting submissions between June 1, 2011 and September 1, 2011

THEME: Stories and poems must be set in Mississippi and clearly capture a Southern tone. We are looking for original stories and poems, either unpublished or published.

Please send no more than TWO items, any combination of stories and poems.

Manuscripts must be saved as a .doc or .docx file (Microsoft Word) Double-space the entire manuscript. Poetry may be single or double-spaced.

Submit work in 12 pt. script.

Submit stories of no more than 3,000 words.

Submissions must be accompanied by a Cover Letter with the Title, Word Count, Author's name, address, e-mail, phone number, and whether the story has been previously published. Stories MAY have been previously published.

Do not include a bio note in the cover letter. We will request this information later from selected authors.

Send entries as attachments to writerpllevin@gmail.com

There is no entry fee. GCWA will pay \$25.00 and One Copy **or** Five Free Copies to contributors whose work is selected for one-time publication rights -- all rights revert to authors upon publication.

Enter!

Magnolia Quarterly's

250 word Autumn 2011 Writing Contest:

“New Friends”

Non-fiction, fiction, poetry, humor, or free style

First Prize	\$20	Second Prize	\$15
Third Prize	\$10	Special Prizes	\$5

E-mail all entries to writerpllevin@gmail.com with title “Summer Contest Entry.”

OR: Mail your entry to: “Autumn Contest Entry, GCWA, PO BOX 10294, Gulfport, MS 39505”.

No entries will be returned. E-mail and Postmark deadline September 1, 2011.

Rules: No entry fee. Entries must be 250 Words or less, excluding title. Only GCWA members may enter. Philip L. Levin, editor of MQ will be the judge. All entrants must agree to allow publication in the MQ along with their names or pseudonym. Prizes paid at publication. MQ requires one-time publishing rights only; afterwards all rights revert to the authors.

Summer Issue Contest Topic: Flowers

First Prize:	Meg Peresich
Second Prize:	Claire Forrest
Third Prize:	Sue Monkress
Special Prize:	Grace Lebo

Here are the winning entries.

The Winners!

1st Place

Shadow in the Bush

Meg Peresich – Ocean Springs, MS

The tinkling of glass caught David's attention, and he glanced down the street. It was early. It was possible no one had seen him.

Squeezing the handle brakes, David coasted to a stop, balancing himself with a foot on the slick pavement. Looking over his shoulder he spotted the broken window. Tossing his bike onto the sidewalk, David dumped the rest of his papers beside it before jogging up to the front door and knocking once.

He bit his lip while he waited. He knocked again.

Sighing, he tromped across the lawn and through the bushes lining the front of the house. He peered past the broken pane into the dark room. "Hello?"

A television was toppled over. A small table was smashed. Papers and wood splinters were scattered across the carpet.

A man lay crumpled on the floor, dark stains crawling out from beneath his body.

David's gasp caught in his throat, mixing with bile and fear, and he jerked away from the window, tripping and tumbling onto the grass. The bushes continued to tremble. A shadow moved, and David's wide eyes caught the glint of metal between the green leaves.

Scrabbling away from the plants, David hauled himself to his feet and dashed across the lawn. He grabbed his bike from where he'd dropped it and threw himself onto the seat, peddling furiously, determined to put as much distance between himself and the dark room with its shadows and stains.

The abandoned papers fluttered in the gentle breeze.

The Winners!

2nd Place

The Last Ride

Claire Forrest – Arlington, MA

I took my dad out for a bike ride. He fit perfectly in the black waste paper basket we'd tied on the front, rope strung round and round the handlebars. The box they'd put him in was heavier than I imagined. It was just black and kinda plain, but that's what we'd chosen just a few days before. I'm the youngest, so I don't really know why I was the one heading up the funeral procession; I guess I volunteered but I don't really remember.

I was the first to take him out on a ride, down Howard Avenue. The weather wasn't too hot or anything, and there was this real light breeze carrying me along. I didn't feel like I needed to pedal. Kevin took the bike next. He was like a kid again, speeding and turning real quick like he was gonna fall. Mom got all nervous cuz she didn't want dad spilling everywhere. We thought Kevin was gonna give mom a heart attack.

When we got home I took the bike round back and opened the shed door. Inside, it seemed like he was coming right back from a trip to Lowes or something, it even smelled a little like him in there. I closed the shed and locked it up for good. No one else was needing to go in there anytime soon; no one else was gonna be riding that bike. That had been it, the last bike ride.

The Winners!

3rd Place

Bicycle Adventures!

Sue Monkress – Gulfport, MS

As a kid I never owned a bike, but my folks bought one for my brothers. I learned to lean it toward me, throw my left leg over the bar, scoot my right foot until in rhythm with the momentum, then quickly straighten the bike and peddle furiously! I sport scars from many juvenile attempts at appeasing the speed gods. Yes, spills smarted mightily at the time, but never prevented me from returning to my escapist thrills -- the wind in my hair; ah ... the freedom!

One summer day a sweet guy down the block invited me and two friends on a steep escapade. He was a big boy of thirteen; I must have been about eight. I perched on the handlebars, another girl on the bar, and the third clinging to the seat behind him. We knew kids ‘wiped out’ at the bottom of that road, but that didn’t deter us! We took off, flying down the hill, the other girls screaming bloody murder! Me? Well, remember above: the wind in my hair, yada, yada – I’m in ecstasy! At least, until our male peddler attempted to turn the corner at the bottom of the hill (so we wouldn’t crash into Bird Creek). Suddenly, I felt déjà vu: sliding, scraping, oozing, stinging, right into that gravel. We picked ourselves up and limped that bike back up the hill for first aid.

Any regrets? Nope. If not for the menace of osteoporosis, I’d do it all again!

Honorable Mention

Memories of My Blue Bicycle

Grace B. Lebo – Gulfport, MS

It was long ago when I rode my beloved blue bicycle. Our eldest great-grandson, proud of his bike without training wheels today, wouldn't understand the luxury of my blue bicycle.

Before supermarkets, Wall-Marts, and many types of bicycles from which to choose, my parents ran a neighborhood grocery that had been a Standard Oil service station. The Standard Oil sign still stands on the corner today. Daddy bought the building, renovated it single handed, and Blackmarr's Grocery became "the" store in our neighborhood.

Back then homemakers called in "orders" to have groceries delivered to their back doors. I still remember the phone number, 481. That's it, only three digits. It was a long time ago!

And I remember my blue bicycle -- with a comfortable seat, a silver bell, and two large baskets. One was attached to the handlebars over the front tire. Daddy had installed a little platform over the back fender upon which he attached another large basket.

I'd deliver a grocery order then ride back along Beach Drive watching seagulls flying, waves splashing on the seawall and maybe a dolphin or two playing in the Gulf. There was no sand beach back then and little traffic compared with today's.

My youngest sister liked to ride in the back basket which, at various times, carried my books, balls and bats, or my embroidery necessities.

That beautiful blue bike served me well until I was 15, when Granddad gave me his green 1930 Chrysler.

But that's another story.

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