PEN IN HAND

The Biannual Literary Journal of the Maryland Writers’ Association

July 2018

Editor: Dr. Tapendu K. Basu

(Gandharva raja)
Copyright 2018 by Maryland Writers’ Association

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the author.

*Pen In Hand*  [PIH] is the official literary and art publication of the Maryland Writers’ Association, to be published biannually in January and July. Maryland Writers’ Association is dedicated to the art, business and craft of writing. Founded in 1988, MWA is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

Maryland Writers’ Association  
3 Church Circle, No. 165  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Donations are tax-deductible.

**Editor:** Dr. Tapendu K. Basu

**Design:** Eileen Haavik McIntire
CONTENTS

Message from the Editor, 8
The President’s Message, 11
Conversation with Aaron Henkin, 13
Poetry, 18
  Eden, 18
  chimborazo v. everest, 19
  Nevermore, 21
  Sandpiper’s Dance, 22
  Shining the Bricks, 23
  Sensory Seashore, 25
  The Hunter, 26
  Bedtime Stories, 28
  Loving Me is Like..., 30
Short Stories / Flash Fiction, 32
  Maggie, 32
  How Not to Plan a Murder? 36
  Flashback, 39
Memoirs / Personal Essays, 47
  The Escape, 47
  License to Drive, 50
  Closing the Door, 55
  The Value of Pie, 58
  The Harrowing Yet Moving Baseball Narrative, 60
Page 6

Young Adult: Flash Fiction, 71
  Fresh Off the Boat, 71
Young Adult: Poetry, 74
  Ode to Writers, 74
Art / Photographs, 76
Drama, 77
  Hat Hair, 77
*Pen In Hand* is the official literary and art publication of the Maryland Writers’ Association. It is published biannually in January and July.

Submission deadline for the next issue of *Pen In Hand* is November 30, 2018. MWA members and young writers are encouraged to submit poetry, sci-fi, flash fiction, short stories, drama, memoirs, creative non-fiction, and personal essays. Submit to peninhand@marylandwriters.org or tkbasu@verizon.net

Please follow the following submission guidelines:

- Use black type only
- Submit only in Times New Roman font
- Use font size 12 for the manuscript
- Leave 1 inch margin on top, bottom, left and right
- Place title of ‘story’ three double spaces below top of page.
- Center title
- One space below your title place your name at the right corner
- Indent first line of each paragraph 1/2” inch
- Single space between period and new sentence
- In general, dialog should be double spaced and in quotation marks.
- Insert approximate word count at the end of your manuscript (except poetry).
- One double space below the end of your manuscript, include a brief Bio. The Bio should be limited to your literary works and interest, publication and awards.
Message from the Editor

Let There Be Light…Once upon a time, not too long ago, there burnt a light upon the hill, so bright it could be seen from pole to pole. The light guided the world to ‘a city upon a hill’ where a just society was being built on the foundations of liberty, equality, law and order. Attracted by the beacon, masses came by land and by sea, for the opportunity to achieve equality.

Poets/writers eulogized this guiding light:

In a chariot of light, from the regions of day,  
the goddess of liberty came (Thomas Paine, 1737-1809)

And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!  
See the bright beams of heaven’s revolving light (Phillis Wheatley, 1753-1784)

She tore the azure robe of night,  
And set the stars of glory there (Joseph Rodman Drake, 1795-1820)

Beautiful evermore, and with rays  
Of morn on the white Shields of Expectation! (James Russell Lowell, 1819-1891)
Upon a cradle of promise, rocked and washed in the waters of two oceans—a child is born—freedom’s child, liberty’s chrysalis (Gandharva/ Hoofbeats 2001)

As we celebrate Independence Day 2018, does the world see the light burning as bright? I recall reading, though arguably in a different context:

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night!—O moody tearful night!
O great star disappeared...
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul (Walt Whitman, 1819-1892)

The harsh clouds over America’s soul has cast a shadow over the ‘city upon a hill’. As I have said before, I am an eternal optimist:

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me (Woody Guthrie, 1912-1967)

The beacon will burn bright again. A thousand points of light will turn the night sky into a celebration of love, liberty and justice for all.

For I’m the one who left dark Ireland’s shore,
And Poland’s plain, and England’s grassy lea
And torn from Black Africa’s strand I came
To build a “homeland of the free” (Langston Hughes, 1902-1967)

I shout it out “Let America Be America Again.”
I express my gratitude to Penny Knobel-Besa for permitting me to use her extraordinary photograph which I dubbed ‘Let there be Light’ as the July 2018 Pen-In-Hand cover photo. I thank Eileen McIntyre for assistance with layout design; and the MWA Board for their support of Maryland Writers.

Members of MWA: Through writing find the secret of life; in life find fulfillment.

Dr. Tapendu K. Basu
The President’s Message:
Let There Be Light

“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

The quote from Albert Schweitzer aligns with this issue’s theme and is particularly apt for an organization like the Maryland Writers’ Association. A recluse at the computer (or typewriter for the old guard), sitting alone in a bare attic with a bottle of whiskey is a popular notion of a writer’s life. How wrong it is.

Acknowledgements in many novels, including my own, cite the family, friends, readers, editors, organizations, libraries and resources that inspired, corrected, advised, supported, and otherwise helped the writer succeed. The Maryland Writers’ Association is certainly near the top of the list. How many of us regained the spark to write after an MWA meeting or conference? Think of the benefits that MWA offers all of us writers, no matter the genre.

Chapters: MWA has seven local chapters that provide monthly programs and connections to ignite that spark within. The chapters are Annapolis, Baltimore, Charles County, Howard County, Carroll County, Montgomery County, and Lower Eastern Shore. If your area doesn’t have a chapter, contact MWA’s chapter liaison to find out how to form one.

Annual Conference: This annual meeting offers well-known
authors, agents, or others as keynote speakers, a plethora of workshops and panel discussions, opportunities to pitch agents and editors, acknowledgement of contest winners, information exchange, and networking. Multiple sparks possible here.

Contests: MWA’s annual contest honors writers chosen by their peers as the winners in the genre selected for that year. Here’s where others see the spark that caught fire.

Critique Groups: These small groups provide honest feedback to its members from other writers. There are many around the state, but if none are convenient for you, MWA can help you form a new one.

Pen in Hand: MWA’s biannual literary journal, gives you a place where you can see your work published. It’s available free at marylandwriters.org and in print on Amazon for a minimal cost.

The Newsletter: Your announcements, news, helpful tips, and other information are published in the quarterly newsletter and distributed to members.

Quick Notes: This monthly update of MWA activities also includes opportunities for writers.

Anthologies: MWA currently has two published anthologies featuring the work of MWA members.

Cooperative Booths at Book Fairs: Members can display and sell their books at MWA’s booth at the Baltimore Book Fest and other book fairs.

A writer who chooses solitude to write in darkness stunts his growth and potential. The Maryland Writers’ Association opens doors and lets in the light.

- Eileen Haavik McIntire
Conversation with Aaron Henkin, Producer, WYPR

Editor: As a prelude, let me say that *Pen-In Hand* is the Biannual Literary Journal of MWA. I have been its editor since 2016. In each issue I interview a notable Baltimore personality. Aaron Henkin, as Producer of *Out of the Block*, a local superhit, you are a notable Baltimore icon. You are also the creator of *The Signal* and *The Tapesty of the Times*. I thank you on behalf of MWA for agreeing to this interview.

Aaron Henkin

Ed: You are a very accomplished individual, Aaron. You are my favorite radio personality. I am sure you had many career choices. How did you get into radio?

Aaron: That’s a great question. After my B.A. in English, I put it to good use by waiting at tables. I was a NPR junkie. I began as a volunteer at WYPR. The year Marc Steiner left, they chose me to fill in the vacancy. I really lucked into it.
Ed: Sometimes radio is more visual than Television. Your show, Block by Block is predominantly about Baltimore neighborhoods. But you have ventured out of Baltimore to the partly gutted Morningside neighborhood in Detroit and Chinatown in Seattle. Is the story of Baltimore the story of large city, USA or is it unique?

Aaron: Radio is ironically the most visual media. There are many interesting lines of comparisons and contrasts in various large US cities. I also went out to St. Louis and Atlanta. I heard echoes of the Baltimore story in St. Louis—racial segregation, home foreclosures—they are human stories no matter where they are.

Ed: Human beings are human beings no matter where they are or where they are from.

I am curious—what was the genesis of the documentary series Block by Block?

Aaron: It was not a light bulb moment but the product of several years of research and formulation. I read the yellow pages for names from cover to cover, I interviewed writers, including you, Dr. Basu. I said, what if I went to a city block and made it a mission to interview everyone on the block? We tried it in 3300 Greenmont Ave.

Ed: You found material for your documentary everywhere. If you have the mindset you can find a story on your coffee break. Let me ask you, who inspires you? Who is your mentor?

Aaron: There are many mentors. I learn from everybody including the people I meet on the blocks. I admire Terry Gross, co-producer of Fresh Air. She is an example of an excellent interviewer for whoever they happen to be.
Ed: Do you pick the blocks at random or is there a method to the madness?

Aaron: Wendel and I spent a lot of time walking and driving around the city to expand the collage—see the “ballet of the urban sidewalks” as the sociologist Jane Jacobs characterized.

Ed: To find the extraordinary in the ordinary—that is the mark of a master. In the voices of people you meet, do you hear hope and celebration? How has the present situation in Baltimore impacted your show?

Aaron: You are good at asking big questions, Dr. Basu. Having worked on the Series for some time now—in the immediate aftermath of the death of Freddie Gray and the unrest—Baltimore is changing in the same way as other postindustrial cities. Limited opportunities lead to health problems, drug abuse—there is a snowball effect placing the family and the cities under stress.

Ed: And hope?

Aaron: I met a woman at Monument Street pleading to people to learn about the use of Naloxone, the antidote. Her son and nephew had both died recently from Fentanyl overdose within two weeks of each other. Also, Station North is a wonderful example of hope and creativity. It is the hot-spot for art north of downtown. I love to hear the voices of young artists spreading their wings. Then there is Alexander, the florist and his pet macaw who mimics everything you say. He has built a wonderful world around himself.

Ed: Yes you captured that admirably—a spectrum of stories exploring the creative impulse: from an emcee, a sculptor, a muralist, a florist, and others in Baltimore’s Station
North neighborhood.

Here is something else that aroused my curiosity. I read from your story. “There are a surprisingly high number of grandparents raising grandchildren here in Baltimore City. What persistent societal problems have contributed to the rise of this family situation, and what unique challenges do grandparent guardians face? In Baltimore, 20% of older adults are living below or at poverty level, and in communities of color that number is doubled.”

Here is the question: Grandparents, that adorable generation, having to raise grandchildren… a rerun of the role they played a generation earlier. The numbers are astounding! Is this an isolated phenomenon? Or is that the wave of the future for the American family?

Aaron: These are very important questions. These stories are too real to be ignored. Folks are getting their grandchildren left at their doorsteps. In some cases the grandparents do not qualify as appropriate guardians and the children go to foster homes. I say, thank goodness for grandparents!

Ed: As someone who has seen Baltimore block by block, is Baltimore changing? What is the city’s future?

Aaron: Baltimore is changing the same way as other big cities. Perhaps it is not changing as fast as we would like. We have seen many historical moments over the last several years. As the clergyman in Detroit told me “things that are not tested are things not to be trusted.” Policy questions always baffle me.

Ed: Thank you, Aaron. You not only look at things minutely through your camera—you open your heart to the people you meet in the blocks. Baltimore is richer because of you and your shows. I really mean that. I thank you on behalf of my friends at
Maryland Writers’ Association for the time you have given me. I know they will enjoy your show, and value your opinions.

Aaron: You honor me with those words. I never take it for granted when someone takes the time to listen to me. I feel validated. When we listen to each other we make each other matter. “Listening is an act of love”.

Dr. Tapendu K. Basu, Monday, June 25, 2018
I live in an artificial land of strip malls, car dealerships, densely packed neighborhoods, interwoven roads with endless streams of cars, and summer air so gritty it must be sucked into lungs.

But on a triangle of forest wedged between housing developments, two half-grown fawns stare impassively at the road while woodpeckers beat out rhythms against the aging trees, hawks stare down from branches, squirrels chatter overhead, and rabbits and foxes dart through underbrush.

This land too is densely populated, but commuters rush by, focused solely on their destination, oblivious to our miniature Eden.

**BIO: Edna Troiano**, a retired professor, authored textbooks, edited a literary anthology, and wrote articles on education. In
retirement, she switched from academic writing to writing magazine articles, essays, book reviews, and creative nonfiction. Her book on the underground hero, *Josiah Henson*, will be published by the History Press in early 1919. Troiano, a member of the Charles County Chapter, lives in Waldorf.

**chimborazo v. everest**

*by Cliff Lynn*

mount everest is magnificent, and tall?
sweet georgia brown, is she ever!
29,029 feet from sea level
a towering sideways palindrome
and considered by many
the prominentest point on the planet

everest is no joke

ecuador’s chimborazo, meanwhile, is ranked
a yawn-inducing 17th in altitude at 20, 564 feet
but her peak is the farthest earthly point from our planet’s center
and the closest point to the moon
as an added bonus, chimborazo is a volcano
eat that, everest!

sergeant heilman, United States marine corps
entered a bloodless cage match
v. corporal arroyo, United States army
in jalalabad, afghanistan
over which should be considered the highest point on earth
heilman utilized science; arroyo, the passion of a ghost pepper
(and the volcano)
plus, he kept breaking into spanish
which none of us savvied
in my book, it was all arroyo

there will come a day when one’s stature is measured
not by feet and inches, or centimeters from the ground—boring!
but by our proximity to the lunar surface
little people will pound their little chests in pride
as their numbers soar

my six feet of altitude
will become 238,899 miles, 5274 feet
arroyo is five feet, 7 ¾ inches today
tomorrow will awaken 238, 899 miles, 5274 feet, 4 1/2 inches
forget sea level, the people want the moon

the people want—chimborazo.

**Bio: Cliff Lynn** is a reject from the Gong Show and the Editor-in-Chief of *TEXTure Magazine* out of Annapolis, MD. Poet Laureate of Tuscarora High School in Frederick, MD. Co-hosts the Evil Grin Poetry Series with Rocky Jones. Mount Hope, Scribble, Grub Street and others published about fifty of Cliff’s poems and short stories. Once, he belted out a Talking Heads song at a rock’n’roll revue as a member of the Bert Harbinson Trio pick-up band.
Nevermore
by Andrew McDowell

Last time we met
I felt deeply hurt
By you all as a whole
And I blamed myself
Having sunk so low
Results from rage

Questioning myself
I felt I was nothing
Unappreciated
No results from me
Writer’s block hurts
I’m no Superman

Writing a novel story
Draft not good enough
Restarted all over again
But still not finished
Editing going real slow
I’ve accomplished nothing

Asperger’s syndrome
Prone to fits and outbursts
Raging temper a problem
Despite improvement
Working on social skills
Frustration still exists

I am to blame
For what I have done
Can I rise upward?
Be the pathfinder?
Like Joan of Arc?
Sometimes I think no

World Peace
Peace at home
We all must strive
To accomplish it
Including myself
Collaboration, respect

Perhaps I’m just crazy
Be the pathfinder?
Where to turn?
How to steer fog?
I don’t know…
I do not know…

Bio: Andrew McDowell is the author of the YA fantasy novel *Mystical Greenwood* and has also written poetry and creative non-fiction. He won second place in the creative nonfiction category of the Maryland Writers’ Association Literary Contest in 2015 for
his essay about his experiences with Asperger syndrome. To learn more about his work, visit andrewmcdowellauthor.com.

Sandpiper’s Dance

by James D. Fielder

I watched the sandpiper
run to the ocean’s edge.
On the edge of the world
he danced lightly and back.

He danced a song,
A song of hope and joy,
as his wave-running feet
pressed laughter into the wet sand.

With eyes fixed, he darts
as if to explain
he has but a moment
to dance on the edge of the world.

God laughs with
the sandpiper’s dance
as he pipes his dream
to the rhythm of waves on sand.

BIO: James D Fielder, Secretary of Education, Maryland, has recently published a chapbook Unspoken Reflections.
I must continue to shine the bricks
They are so dull
And red
And even though I think
No
I know
These bricks were not designed
For shine
But still
I must continue to shine the bricks

So while others are out
Drinking in noisy smoke-filled bars
Listening to loud rhythmic music
Under the mistaken notion
That they are having fun
And play
At home
I stay
Shining the bricks.
But one day
Friends will visit
And they’ll say
“How did you ever get bricks
To shine that way?”
I’ll just shrug
But with pride.
So until that day
I’ll just shine away
While you never seem to cease
To laugh and play
But
Your bricks will never be
A conversation piece
Your bricks will never be
As shine
As mine.

**BIO: Michael Irving Phillips** was born in Jamaica. He graduated from Howard University, Washington DC, where he received MA (Education) and BS (Chemistry) degrees. This poem is from his poetry book, *Poems for Husbands and Other Underdogs*. He has also authored two non-fiction books: *Leave the Rat Race to the Rats* and *Boycott Money And Save Your Soul – Launching the Goodwill Revolution*. Michael is a member of the Howard County Chapter.

**Sensory Seashore**

*by Katie Brewster*

One must have a mind of summer
to see the shimmer of heat over pavement
like hot waves above a grill.
To smell the salt laden breeze
as the bridge comes into view
knowing the island, shore and ocean, lie just beyond.

To hear the foamy splash
slap onto the beach
chilling ankles, making toes pruney.

To feel the prickle of gooseflesh
upon arms and shoulders
as the swells recede.

To taste the salty spray,
when waves break over your head
running down your face into your laughing mouth.

Bio: Katie Spivey Brewster was raised in Wilmington, NC, and learned to body surf at Wrightsville Beach. Married to Jim Brewster of Slingerlands, NY, she raised and home educated five children. She is the author of *Feast of Memories* and of *Aunt Louise Comes to Visit*—a story in rhyme.

The Hunter
*by Cary Camarat*

Autumn blood upon the leaf
flames among the burnished gold,
ascends to an azure heaven tossing
wisps of cloud on the water’s face.
A feathered hunter plies the current,  
paddles to the beat of a warrior’s drum  
that he alone is able to hear,  
that softly echoes between heart and hand.

Now, again in the circle of time,  
the sacred hunting ground will rise  
above the riverbank, its treasures  
promised for spring and the journey home—  

  a hunter’s wealth of meat and skins  
  promised for the journey home.

*  

Winter’s solitary snows  
to fold about the hunter’s camp,  
awaken longings for a companion  
against the dark and icy cold.

Suddenly magic comes to dwell—  
beside a gentle smoldering fire  
an unexpected gift, at close  
of day, to please the tired hunter.

Supper in the bowl, garnished with love,  
meat hung to dry and skins set for tanning.  
Yet nowhere in the clean-swept lodge  
is there a soul to thank for kindness—  

  all prepared and served, cleaned and swept,  
  but not a soul to thank.

*
Still memories prey on the hunter’s mind—
a smile that has never been seen or exchanged,
a memory of silence never felt, never shared,
a touch recalled, but never bestowed.
Six days of magic, till on the seventh
animal tracks have been pressed in the snow,
where a trail tells the passing of the gentlest doe
and a feeling of loss that has returned to the woods.

Standing, eyes transfixed the trail,
the hunter looks on as bright colors fade,
until eyes and ears are reborn to change,
and all that remains are the deepest traces
of a great stag running after his doe.
And the bravest of hunters has vanished.

Bio: Cary Kamarat, a native of Chicago and graduate of Northwestern University’s School of Communication, has taught at Evergreen State College in Washington State and NATO Defense College in Rome. He has published two collections of poetry/photography, Travelwalk and Out of Delmarva. A third volume, American Legends, will be completed in 2018. His work has appeared in The Tulane Review, The Federal Poet, Poets on the Fringe, The District Lines Anthology, First People: Poems and Prayers, Prospectus, and has been aired as podcasts on Israel National Radio and Saltwater Media. He continues to reach a broad international audience at www.travelwalk.blogspot.com.
Most assuredly, there is a monster under your bed.  
Starving, appetite yowling, yearning,  
nails scrape into the hardwood floor  
and strands of sticky drool drip down a leathery chin.  
Such beasts roam the night,  
 eternal villains… fatigued by solitude.  
They wish for the same as all, the same as you:  
a friendly nod or warm glance with that exaggerated blink  
that hints I love you.  
Monsters such as the one under your bed  
aren’t crouching to attack, haunches spring-loaded  
on bony ankles, unkempt wiry hair bristled.  
In this time below your boxspring.  
He sifted through the old family photos,  
recognizes your Aunt Jo and all those cousins.  
Nightly he examines a discarded menu from China Panda,  
wonders if they really serve dragon, because he knows a few…  
That random yellow sock you misplaced last spring  
is his regular companion  
as he flicks at dust bunnies with pointy claws.  
Your monster waits for a tap against the side of the mattress,  
calling him to climb up and burrow into the blankets.  
Couldn’t you make room by the wall,  
and let him arch against your back?  
Your monster hungers for nearness and compassion,  
a snuggle. Just scratch behind his floppy ears.
He longs to know you see past fangs into
a soul that dreams of sharing the sofa on movie night,
a handful of popcorn to cherish,
and a goodnight kiss after bedtime stories.

**Bio: Rissa Miller** is a member of the Howard County MWA chapter. Several Maryland theaters have produced her plays and she can be found regularly reading poems at Open Mic nights.

**“Loving Me Is Like…”**

*by Nelson E. Brown*

Loving me is like looking in the mirror or accepting flaws for what they are,
Loving me is like trying to stay humble when people try too hard to tell me that you’re a shining star,
Loving me is like excluding magazines that showcase society’s standards of male beauty,
Loving me is like learning from new mistakes and making them apart of my new discovery,
Loving me is like forgetting about being perfect or feeling perfect, but reaching my full potential,
Loving me is like not wishing I resembled people like The Rock, Brad, or Denzel,
Loving me is like using my gifts to help others who is missing what I missed in the past,
Loving me is like making memories with the people I love so they can last,
Loving me is like something that’s still a struggle,
Loving me is like a bottle of emotions I try to juggle,
Loving me is like what I do on my weakest days to become stronger,
Loving me is like something I do all the time to make it last longer,
That’s what loving me is like

**Bio:** Nelson E. Brown is an Environmental Science student at the Community College of Baltimore County in Catonsville, Maryland, where he serves as one of the writers, artists, and editors of the school’s literary magazine, and a participant in the Project Sparks program. He serves as a member of three ministries at the church he has been attending since the age of 3. He is currently in the process of publishing his debut book, *The Beauty In Us—Our Reality*. He currently resides in Randallstown, Maryland.
“They’re wrong, y’know.” Maggie leaned back against the sun-warmed rock looming behind her. She lazily scratched the belly of the hound lying on its back next to her. “People around here all think I moved here ‘cause of some big trauma in my life. I mean, why else would somebody like me move to the back of beyond and live by herself? In a small cabin no less?”

The dog obligingly snorted, rolling around on her back, her eyes closed in bliss. Sweet Pea was an ugly critter, no way around it. Her body was sort of hound shaped, but she had ears like a Bassett hound, and a short stubby tail. Her fur was … well, it was every color fur could be. All mixed up, no rhyme or reason. At least her soulful brown eyes seemed normal … until you realized they were crossed. For all her physical flaws, Sweet Pea was smart as a whip and had a heart of gold. And she was a sucker for a good belly rub!

Maggie remembered how she’d come by Sweet Pea just
a month after moving to her mountain. She’d gone down the
mountain to the tiny building that served as a post office, general
store, and de facto community center for those who lived back
in the woods. “Needham’s General Store” said the sign over the
door, but the jovial proprietor was named Buck Fuller. He like to
joke, “No Mr. Needham here, just people needin’ ham.”

When he realized that Maggie was living up on her mountain
all by herself, he insisted that she take a puppy from the litter
in his barn. When she refused, politely but firmly, he just shook
his head at her. After she paid up, Buck loaded the boxes con-
taining her supplies into the back of her ratty old Jeep. It wasn’t
until she was halfway back up the mountain that she heard the
puppy bark and realized she’d been had. She stopped, opened
the smallest of the boxes, and gathered up the small motley ball
of fur inside it. After a joyful face washing, the puppy rode the
rest of the way home on Maggie’s lap. Two years later, Sweet
Pea was no longer small by any means, but she had become a
welcome companion.

“Wonder if they’d understand why I love it here. I need this
quiet, this peace,” and Maggie gestured at the vista in front of
her. Rows of lumpy mountains marched off into the distance,
mostly covered with trees in varied shades of green. “I need the
quiet here so I can write. No noise, no distractions … just the qui-
et for my brain to tiptoe around in. well, at least it’s quiet when
you’re not chasing squirrels,” she added with a laugh. “Come on,
girl. I need to get back. Stories don’t write themselves, y’know.”
Maggie stood, stretched, and headed back up the hill toward the
cabin. Sweet Pea rolled over, did a perfect imitation of a down-
ward-facing dog yoga pose, and reluctantly followed.
Out in the bigger world, Maggie had been an accountant. For seven years she had worked for a medium sized company near Hagerstown. One morning as she dragged herself out of bed, she realized that it was not fun anymore. Before he passed, her father, smart man that he was, had told her that’s when you need to step back and assess your life. So she called in sick, made a pot of tea, and curled up on the couch to decide what to do with the rest of her life. Should she quit where she was, find a new job in accounting someplace else, or try something completely new? Should she move or stay where she was?

An hour later she was no closer to a decision. In disgust she grabbed the top book on the stack she’d gotten at the library the day before. Escaping into a book seemed like a great idea as answers eluded her.

“Garbage!” Maggie yelled a short while later as she flung the book across the room. She had always held a secret fondness for “bodice-ripping” historical romances. They were her favorite escape reading. “How did that ever get published? Poor grammar, lousy plot, insipid dialog. The duke is an idiot, and the heroine is even dumber. I can do better than that!”

And just like that, Maggie knew what she wanted to do with herself. She scrambled off the couch, rummaged in the desk for a notebook and a couple of pens, and plopped back down on the couch to begin writing. After ten minutes of staring at the blank page of the notebook, Maggie remembered a trick one of her English teachers had taught her many moons ago - start with ‘Once Upon a Time …’ and then cross that out later.

That day was three years ago. Her first book, The Earl’s Milkmaid, was successfully published, and she had sent the
second, The Milkmaid’s Duke, off to her agent just before she moved to the mountains. She wasn’t making buckets of money, hence her part-time job at the bookstore in Dalton, but she was so much happier now. She didn’t miss the ledger sheets and columns of numbers, not at all. Now a-days, she would get up with the sun and work for a few hours on whatever current writing project she had going. Then it was off to the bookshop in town, or off on a long hike with Sweet Pea. A slower pace to be true, but she was never bored. It suited her.

Maggie wrote until shortly after noon, pitting her rakish, but crafty, duke against a black-hearted pirate. Once the duke had successfully captured the pirate, with the able assistance of the earl’s daughter, it was time for a break.

“Come on, Sweet Pea.” Stretching, Maggie rose from the small kitchen table where she’d been writing. “Time for some fresh air. You get to pick which direction we go today, OK?” Sweet Pea whined and danced by the cabin door, while Maggie laced up her boots and filled a canteen. She grabbed her favorite walking stick from by the door, and they were off.

Several trails led off from the clearing around the cabin into the woods, and Sweet Pea charged off down the left-most one. “Hey mutt – slow down. I only have two legs,” and laughing, Maggie paced after the dog. She was amused and amazed that she, a city girl from birth, would find so much contentment living as she did. She had peace and quiet, time for writing, and Sweet Pea for company. It didn’t get much better than that.

**BIO: Karen D McIntyre** lives in La Plata with her husband, Lew. Retired after 28 years of teaching middle and high
schools, she devotes her time to writing, and singing at the Chesapeake Choral Arts Society. pumamamd@gmail.com

How Not to Plan a Murder?
by Barbara Pengelly

THAT CHEATING S.O.B.!
This time, at least, the wife isn’t the last to know. Thank God I got a look at his VISA bill! My God—that expensive jewelry! And four nights in that fancy hotel!

It’s Tuesday morning. I’m sitting at the computer planning the murder in Chapter Three when I hear the front door open. My heart starts to race.

“It’s just me again,” calls my husband. “The mail’s early today. I’m putting it here on the counter.”

At the sound of his voice, I relax. And Judge Justin Farrell leaves for court for the second time today.

Moments later, my phone rings. It’s Cassie, one of my neighbors. I’ve asked her not to call me before noon, but I guess I’ll have to tell her again. I like to write undisturbed during the morning.

“Hi, Cassie,” I say. “Can I call you back? I’m busy deciding how to murder a guy. No, Glen isn’t here. Oh, the book club lunch…Yes, I’ll see you there...”

Later, I discover Cassie wants me to go shopping with her after book club. I make my excuses, however, and go to the library instead. I’m thinking of killing my next victim in a faked hunting accident. I seem to remember reading about a similar case a few months back; that story’s probably in the newspaper files.
I’M FURIOUS! I WANT REVENGE!

But we have a pre-nup. Divorce isn’t an option. Maybe I’ll cut off his favorite body part. No, I’d get caught. I really want to kill the bum! I must be careful though. This is going to take serious planning.

“I’m home, Sondra!” calls Justin as the evening news is coming on. “Let’s eat! I’ve brought home that Thai takeout you wanted.”

He looks so tired. After dinner, I’m going to suggest he take some time off—maybe a hunting or fishing trip.

We sit and eat, and we talk for a long time. Later, he works on rescheduling some upcoming court cases. Then, it’s bedtime. Justin and I recently decided on separate rooms. He’s had a lot of trouble sleeping lately.

FINALLY! FINALLY! FINALLY!

I’m getting my revenge! He’ll be charged with Murder One, and his precious he-man reputation will be ruined. I still don’t know the name of the woman involved, but I’ll find out! And I’ll take care of HER later.

I’m in the living room quietly sobbing. They found Justin’s body yesterday on land belonging to the Sportsman’s Club. At first, the police told me it was a hunting accident, but now it’s been ruled a homicide. Cassie was here with me for a while, but she’s just so nosy! I finally told her I’d be all right and to go home.

The detectives have been all over our house searching for clues. They’ve taken both computers to examine and both of our cell phones. Of course they also found the draft of my unfinished
book—the one where I kill off my victim in a fake hunting accident. I protest vehemently!

“Mrs. Farrell,” Detective Poe remarks, “As a mystery writer, you must know that in murder cases, we investigate the spouse first and then look at neighbors and friends. I also need to see the judge’s life insurance policies. But first, I want you to look at this note. It arrived at our office in this morning’s mail. Is this the judge’s handwriting?”

Detective Poe hands it to me. It’s written to Glen, Cassie’s husband, and it’s from Justin! Who would send this to the police? In it, my husband appears to be breaking up a gay love affair with Glen.

Justin…gay? Never! Not possible! Something’s wrong here.

I think a moment and then say, “Detective, ‘neither Glen nor I murdered my husband. Justin was already dying. Read the autopsy report. You’ll find he had an inoperable brain tumor. We’ve kept this very quiet. My husband had decided he didn’t want to go through chemo and all the side effects. He wanted only to enjoy the time he had left.”

Seconds later, I add, “This note is a forgery!”

Then I take a deep breath. The local gossip will be unbearable!

“Glen isn’t gay, Detective. He’s my lover!”

**BIO: Barbara Pengelly** has had three very different careers—first, as an Artist selling in the Mid-Atlantic states, then as Communications Director for a Software Company and finally as a Forensic Document Specialist. Now retired, she refuses to act her age (80). Although yet unpublished in fiction, she has
been busy creating short stories used for local Reader’s Theatre shows and is working on a mystery novel.

Flashback

by CB Anslie

I remember stepping over his legs, crossing the cold concrete floor in my bare feet, and then slowly climbing the wooden steps, which creaked, still clinging tightly to Teddy. I’m scared. The stairs open into the kitchen. It’s small, square with ruddy tile flooring and countertops. On one side, against the wall, is a yellow chrome and Formica table with three matching chairs. On the far wall, next to the refrigerator, is the phone. A fourth chair sits in a corner of the room.

After laying Teddy on the corner chair, I drag it over to the phone, pick up Teddy and climb up, and then grab the receiver. As I hold the receiver, my fingers press each button with deliberation: 9-1-1. A crisp female voice snaps over the line: “911, what is your emergency?”

“They won’t get up. I can’t wake Mommy, and Daddy’s head is bleeding. He needs a band aid. A big one, please.”

After a brief pause, I hear: “Why won’t Mommy get up? What happened to Daddy’s head, Sweetie?”

I shudder, panic rising inside as I repeat, “Bleeding.” My voice cracks.

“Honey, can you tell me your name?”

“Mazel.”
“Mazel, where are you?”
“At my house.”

When I drop the receiver, it bounces against the wall making a thudding sound, twisting as it dangles on its cord. I shrink into a sitting position.

2010

Moaning, I roll over in bed while pulling my long legs up into a fetal position. Shit, cramps again! My lower back aches so badly I’m nauseous. Running a hand through my hair, I try to smooth black-coffee strands away from my face. The painful scream that erupts from my throat surprises even me. Merely moving feels as if my head is being struck repeatedly like a giant gong. Migraine! This very thought threatens to split my head open, as I clutch it with both hands.

Luckily, Annie hears me. She comes to my rescue thrusting a small glass of Coke and Midol at me. “Here.” The sound of her voice penetrates the pounding in my head like an explosion. I swallow the pills and down the soda. Annie sets a small trash can by my bed side. “In case you have to toss your cookies,” she says. I cringe and collapse back onto the pillow. Closing my eyes, I wrap my arms about my head and try not to let a single sound, smell, or thought register. Eventually, I sleep.

Blinking, I stare at myself in the mirror and then back at the faded photo Annie gave me when I was nine—a picture of my parents on their wedding day. I don’t look like Mom, except for my dark hair and deep gold-toned skin. My features are more like my Dad’s: oval face, rounded chin, doe eyes, straight nose, and a small mouth with a generous lower lip. While I am look-
ing at the picture, apprehension sprouts in my chest and twists its way through my veins, spreading anxiety to every fiber of my being. At 14, puberty has set in with a vengeance, my figure taking shape in what seems to be weeks rather than months. I have squared hips, a slender waist, lean shoulders and a narrow back. My large breasts seem too heavy for my shoulders to support, drooping slightly.

Annie catches me. She teases, “You may have been a bit of a late bloomer, but you’re coming along nicely.” Annie’s warm and endearing laugh rumbles, deep and throaty, gradually beating back my fears until I can’t help but join in. We end up hugging each other. That’s the way it is between us, Annie and me—fun and love in equal measure.

I was orphaned at four. Annie explained it all to me when I wanted to know why I don’t call her “mom”. I remember her sighing heavily as she said, “That’s how you came to be mine, Mazel Ivy.” She quickly added, “Ivy was your mom’s name. She didn’t have any siblings. I’m your dad’s cousin. Your dad had a brother, but he couldn’t take care of you. I could! I always wanted a daughter just like you!” Her smile filled the room.

As a child, recurring nightmares wakened me from sound sleep, but I seldom remembered my dreams. Instead, at the really scary parts, I’d wake up crying. By middle school, my nightmares had progressed to flashbacks.

In high school, the flashbacks became more intense. Like that day in gym, when one of the girls in my class fell off the uneven bars and broke her collar bone, our gym teacher ordered me to open the outside doors leading to the ball fields. As a gust of cold air blew in, sirens from the ambulance assaulted my ears.
I jumped back and began screaming and crying, suddenly falling onto the floor and curling up into a ball. Eventually, I ended up on my way to the hospital too, in the same ambulance, after being sedated and tied down to the stretcher. That’s when I knew what one of my triggers was—cold gusts of air coupled with sirens.

2016

Our modest three-story townhouse is on a quiet court in Laurel. It’s our home, mine and Annie’s. This snowy late January morning, in the parking lot right in front of the door, I struggle to clean off my recently purchased Hyundai. Although I’ve had my license since I was sixteen, I’ve been driving Annie’s old Saturn. She traded it in for a new Kia last month and has grown tired of me putting more miles on her new car than she does. So, she gave me a little help with the down payment, as a birthday present, and co-signed the loan.

I’m so psyched about my car. It makes me feel ‘normal’ when I pay for it. That thought brings a smile to my face. I’m working—my first job—as a part-time dispatcher for a local road services company. It’s been hard to live normally, knowing I can be caught up in the middle of a flashback, looking crazy to anyone who witnesses it, like when it used to happen at school. People got scared. Hell! I got scared. Other kids avoided me; even parents and teachers avoided me. So, it hasn’t been a normal life. I’ve grown up “at a slower pace” as Annie delicately puts it. Today, however, I feel like I’m making progress. I’ve started paying for insurance and gas, and my phone bill too. Even if I have to rely on Annie for everything else, I’m contributing.
Annie emerges from the house, her slightly plump figure wrapped in a fluffy pink robe. She struggles with a sack of salt and sand. Standing on the steps she hollers, “Put some of this behind your wheels!” A blast of icy air stings the bare skin of my face. Sirens blaring in the distance grow closer. I sniff the air, breathing in the crisp freshness of frozen flakes that dance and swirl around me. I smile at her.

My cell rings. “Mazel, I need you in here ASAP! How soon can you get here?” my boss snaps.

“Our court needs plowing. I’m stuck.”

“Dwyer’s not there yet? I sent him to dig you out about twenty minutes ago. Let me know when he gets there.”

Just then, a bright orange snow plow with “Franklin Road Services, Inc.” etched in bold black letters across the side turns onto the court.

“Hey, Jack.”

“Yeah?”

“Reed’s here, just pulling in.”

“Good! Call me when you make it to the shop.”

“Where are you?”

“Where else? Out on a call.”

“Gotcha.”

I slip my phone back into my ski jacket pocket and watch Reed Dwyer expertly plow the court. Reed, my man, you’re too damn cute! He stops the truck behind my car, lowers his window and calls, “Get in!” I grin at him, trudge over to the passenger side, yank open the door, and hoist myself into the cab. Reed barely waits for me to fasten my seatbelt before driving away. I turn and wave at Annie, who’s now standing at
the front window of the townhouse. The sack of salt and sand still rests against the front door.

The cab radio is tuned to a country western station. I stare vacantly out the side window listening to the truck’s engine chug along. Then for some unfathomable reason, it happens. Impulsively, I grab the door handle, my body jolting. In the side mirror, a glimpse of Reed glancing over at me then back at the road registers in my brain. I stiffen. Not here, not now! I’m filled with terror, as I am transported to a kitchen in a house long ago...overcome by the smell of blood: thick, syrupy, and metallic. My pulse races; my heart pounds louder than a drum:

I sit in the kitchen. My frightened eyes peer through the dark doorway, just off the kitchen, leading down into an abyss. I shudder, growing numb, almost to the point of paralysis.

Still in my night-gown, I stare down at my feet, which are covered with blood. My teeth chatter. Goose bumps pop up on my arms and legs. I hug myself. “Make the blood go away!” I straighten my legs and begin to swing them; slowly at first, then faster, until their rhythm moves my entire upper body. “Get the blood off!” Air whooshes across bare skin, up underneath the folds of my gown; a fog forms in my head. Minutes crawl by. I swipe at huge wet droplets rolling down my cheeks with the back of my hand. I try to swallow, but clutch my throat instead, as the sensation of expanding cotton chokes me. My mouth feels dry. My stomach is queasy. My palms sweat. I look down at my feet again and retch. Outside, sirens blare, flashing lights revolve, and I hear voices coming closer....
It’s so quiet I can almost hear the snowflakes falling. There’s no hint of an engine or radio. I’m back. Reed studies me. We’re stopped by the side of the road. “What are you on?” he demands, his voice low and stern.

“Nothing, I’m not on anything! Why?”

“You’re trembling and sweating; your face matches the snow on the ground. You’re sobbing so hard your makeup is smeared. You didn’t answer me when I called your name. You kept saying, “Make the blood go away!” and “Get the blood off!” Mazel, you’re having kinda withdrawal symptoms or something. What’d you take? How deep are you in?”

“LOOK!” I wait a beat, lowering my voice, forcing control. “I’m not taking anything. I’m just a little upset, okay? Just upset, that’s all. Don’t make a big deal outta this.”

His firmly set jaw and tough expression signal his doubts. “Jack’s big on being clean; lost one of his kids to drugs a few years back—a girl ‘bout your age.”

“I’m not doing drugs! There’s nothing to come clean about. You don’t need to say anything to Jack.”

Hazel eyes pierce me, “Yeah...right!”

We sit for a few minutes, considering each other. No ring, so he’s probably single, mid-twenties maybe, tall and broad-shouldered, the pointed nose and chin give his face a sort of symmetry. WTF! What the hell am I thinking? GOD! I’m so messed up. Nobody wants a psycho for a friend. I grouse, “Fine! Go ahead, tell Jack.” More meekly, “Please, just not today, okay?”

Reed rubs his cheek with gloved fingers. Short strands of sandy brown hair peek out from underneath a black ski cap; he wiggles his nose and sniffs as he turns in his seat to face me.
“Please, tell me what’s wrong. I’ll keep it to myself, if I can.” He waits. We sit there while the snow piles up on the windshield wipers, weighing them down.

He’s serious. We’re not going anywhere until I give him an answer. I shiver. After a long pause, I blurt, “PTSD”. More resentment in my voice than I intended. Why the hell did I just admit it to him? “You understand?” I mutter.

He nods his head, “What happened to you?”

“Does it matter? I see a doctor and take meds for it. Just sometimes, not often, it happens anyway.”

I feel the tension in the air ease a bit. He’s thoughtful. Then sighing, he says, “Right, okay then.”

“I’m fine,” I murmur as the engine starts and the truck pulls back onto the road. We ride along in silence—me holding my breath. Oh God, what now? I shouldn’t have told him. Annie’s always telling me to open up. Gotta let somebody in, sometime, right?

Once we reach the shop, Reed cuts the engine and stares at the steering wheel in front of him. He half whispers, “Thanks.”

“For what?” I ask.

“Trusting me.”

**BIO: Carol Baldwin** , pen name CB Anslie, has written non-fiction her entire career. She is currently an academic writing tutor at Howard Community College. In her spare time, she dabbles in fiction. Several of her poems and short stories have appeared in *The Muse*, the literary & arts journal of Howard Community College.
MEMOIRS/PERSONAL ESSAYS

The Escape
by Victoria Clarkson

I have been alone in my strange prepping beliefs for a very long time, but when Ready.gov was introduced by the US Government, to educate and empower Americans to be prepared during an emergency; I held my head a little higher. A wood stove, a garden, and being prepared for a Canadian invasion wasn’t so far-fetched after all.

A “bug out bag” is a bag an individual packs ahead of time in preparation for the unexpected. If you have to leave town fast, you “Bug Out of town” and your bag is ready. I had a “Bug out Bag” before it was popular, I was a mom. Whenever and wherever we traveled, I carried a bag with everything we could possibly need from baby wipes, extra clothes, tweezers, crayons, and enough food in the cooler to feed a half a dozen hungry cattle. My friends laughed at me and would ask me for arbitrary items just to see if I had them. Sure enough, I could pull a pair of needle nose pliers, and fishing hooks from my bag. I believed in being prepared.

I wanted to have the “Let’s be Prepared” discussion with my children. I wanted them to think ahead and be prepared for the unexpected. I asked each child to name something they would
put in their overnight bag (aka bug out bag) besides the obvious change of clothes, toothpaste, etc. I was interested to hear their perspectives.

My teenage daughter blurted out, “Journal” and her little brother said, “Game Boy”. Another yelled “Extra batteries”.

When I asked, “What if we had to hunt for food?” My three boy scouts jumped at the opportunity to tell mom how it is done; “We are going to need that sling shot you confiscated”.
“You will have to buy that BB gun I have been asking for!”
“We can build a snare trap!”
“I have a plant identification book!”
“We will need salad dressing, if I have to eat weeds!” My teenage daughter said sarcastically.

“What if we had to use water from a river?” I asked expecting similar answers of preparedness they had learned in scouting. However, this got the attention of my four-year-old. With a huge smile, she waved enthusiastically to add her ideas.

I have to tell you first that harnesses were invented with children like her in mind. You could not turn your back on her, you didn’t take your eyes off of her and if it was quiet, there was trouble.

She spent her formative years strapped into some type of apparatus, the high chair, the grocery cart, and her car seat. She was always tied down and always struggling to escape. Once she escaped, she would be run like mad, laughing until we caught her.

When she was two years old, I had to use the sofa to block the front door to keep her from getting out of the house. Eventually, one day she worked up her strength, slid the sofa away
from the door and ran down the street laughing before I caught up with her two blocks away.

At three years of age; she managed to escape my grasp in a busy grocery store parking lot. Horrified, I chased after her, screaming her name repeatedly. She laughed running as fast as she could, dodging cars and shopping carts. A nightmare, as motorists slammed on their breaks and strangers looked at me as though I was not only a neglectful mom, but a screaming, crazy mom as well.

I finally tackled her. Relieved she was not hurt, I caught my breath, held up my chin and marched passed all of the Food Lion shoppers with my little girl in a headlock. Back to where I had left my groceries, purse and five other children who are shaking their heads in embarrassment.

I was anxious to hear what this child had to say about emergency preparedness.

“We will need floaties if we go into the river mommy”.

Oh Lord, I could see her now; going down the river in an inner-tube; smiling and waving goodbye as the current provides her with a means to escape.

I was so proud of her. She was now pre-planning her escape and beach toys would be in her preferred Bug Out vehicle. So simple and compact, floaties can be a part of anyone’s Bug Out bag.

**BIO: Victoria Clarkson** has written her small-town stories with poignant humor for newspapers and magazines for almost 30 years. Currently, she has a blog “Confessions of a Prepper Gal”. She is writing a humorous novel, *Cheap French Bubble*
Bath, of how an historical artifact turns a small town upside down. She is a member of the Annapolis Chapter.

License to Drive

by Eric W. Shoemaker

I think one of the gifts of age is clarity. We often miss the real lessons of life while engaged in acts of experiencing it. Only in retrospect are we able to look past the filters of youthful arrogance, bias, or just raging hormones. I have found looking into life’s rear-view mirror to be insightful when contemplating how those filters obscured the formation of what I and many of my generation are today.

Conversations at a recent mini-reunion with many of my high school classmates gave me a good starting point for this story: 1963. In 1963 we were high school “juniors” set to graduate in the spring of 1965. We were filled with a sense of accomplishment, anticipation and a sprinkling of arrogance, with so much yet to learn.

Most of our recollections associated with coming of age were similar to those depicted in movies like American Graffiti and pop music. My peer group did not share the affluence as depicted in sequences from the film. There were no parades of custom cars filled with teenage boys chasing girls up and down Main Street. “Souped up” cars or convertibles were more a west coast movie thing. They cost money we didn’t have. This was rural Pennsylvania. Remembering, this was the mid-1960s and with very few exceptions, the cars we drove were borrowed
from our parents, those “people” politicians like to characterize as blue-collar fly-over people.

Mine was a 5-year-old Chevrolet station wagon with a three-speed manual transmission operated from the steering column. It belonged to my father. It got him to work when it was his turn to drive in the car pool. It was our ride to hunt and fish. But on many Friday nights, it became my magic carpet ride to my friends, and that especially included girls. That old station wagon later became a venue for awkward “making out” and long good-nights flavored with more awkward wet kisses.

Although not quite life imitating art, growing up in our little town did, however, resemble the quest for social recognition. Like many of my classmates it wasn’t until after getting a driver’s license upon turning 16, and, being adjudged relatively sane and skilled as a driver by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and our parents we got our driver’s license. With it we were permitted to venture out unsupervised after dark, to meet with friends, and more importantly, members of the opposite sex. 1963 was not selected randomly. During the late fall, that license meant independent access to part time jobs, sports, and most assuredly access to mixing bowls of hormones and youthful energy with our friends.

Though we thought we were cool at the time, today we would be considered nerds. Before possession of that coveted license to drive, after supper we gathered with our families around black and white television sets to watch Ed Sullivan, The Andy Griffith Show, The Flintstones, and Mister Ed. This occupied our lives until the messages of naive love came to us by way of rock and roll lyrics and changes within. From 1963 onward, these
were the years that defined our music taste and perhaps what we expected in relationships that in many ways have stayed with us until this day. We bought, traded, and coveted vinyl singles and albums produced by American artists such as Roy Orbison, James Brown, Buddy Holly, The Drifters and the wonderful groups of Motown. Maybe the music reflected our limited world view, or conversely, maybe our limited world views were reflected in the music we listened to on the radio or the vinyl records we bought.

American rock and roll music enriched by the beat music tunes brought by the “British Invasion” of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Searchers, and many more forever shaped our souls. For decades these “oldies” still conjure up memories of simpler times, of adolescent crushes, new and lost love. It was in our little patch of Pennsylvania along the West Branch of the Susquehanna River that teenagers from the working class outposts gathered each Friday evening at a special place, one of those hormonal mixing bowls called “Night Train.”

“Night Train” during the week was a Volunteer Fire Department, and just like other area volunteer fire departments, the venue was dominated by large buildings to house parking bays filled with firefighting trucks and other equipment. Each Friday night the trucks were rolled out into the parking lot behind the cavernous metal building and vehicle bays were transformed into a dance hall with a disc jockey playing all the latest American and British rock and roll hits. The ingenious undertaking was in the end, a fundraiser for the fire department and a safe place for teenagers to gather as they played out their “Kabuki dances” of young love. Volunteer fighters chaperoned the event,
with the ladies’ auxiliary operating a snack shop serving soft drinks, chips, and other snacks.

I never really understood the origin of the name “Night Train” until much later. Night Train was the name of a song that had been recorded by various artists since the 1950’s. The Kingsmen of Louie Louie and Shout fame recorded it in 1963 as an instrumental, and, it was this early hit that resonated with and drew teenagers to the place. Recalling lost memories, after hearing the recording as an adult, I recognized the Kingsmen instrumental as the opening song at “Night Train” each Friday.

In making the life transition from everything family oriented with lives wrapped around activities with parents and siblings to that of hormone dominated exploration of life mysteries, it was at this place called “Night Train” that cultivated our growth as young adults. There we would meet our friends, potential boyfriends or girlfriends and generally were free to make fools of ourselves and or misbehave. Here, the cool kids, the 11th and 12th graders did not have to put up with the distractions suffered at the hands of what was thought to be very “un-cool” underclassmen or elementary school types. For the “real cool” kids, the first stringers in team sports or cheer leading, “Night Train” offered a place for them to exploit their celebrity status among their fans. When all was said and done, it was the Pennsylvania driver’s license that made attendance at “Night Train” possible.

The site where the Volunteer Fire Department was located, where our “Night Train” lived has been torn down and now is a Mongolian buffet restaurant. It sits in a made over neighborhood of fast food restaurants, auto parts stores, and discount super stores. It is gone from us. The actual fire department lives on in
another place, but the magical place that gave social birth to a
generation of working class kids is gone. Sometimes I wonder if
a 21st century “night train” would thrive as ours did. I have of-
ten wondered whether our present pretense of sophistication has
kept us away for seeking a place that offers enjoyment of simple
things, the things we could truthfully, after maybe leaving just a
few things out, could have reported to our parents?

In contemplating this, perhaps our small sample of young
men and woman growing up was not particularly unique. It is
more than likely others of successive generations had a “Night
Train” in their lives. This is not to say their versions were dupli-
cates of our fire department turned dance hall but was someplace
special where special memories were made, and most of all life
lessons learned. All our lives are shaped by the road or roads
we take on the journey through life. It is also a matter of choice,
and the road we choose often can have many starting points. As
part of this, it is what we take with us for the journey over those
often bumpy roads that define how well prepared we are for the
challenges experienced along the way.

For those of us who had a “Night Train” or a similar place
as one of our starting points, unknown to us we packed away
and carried with us the positive messages of relationships which
helped us develop needed social skills. Those little things shaped
our world view, one that would be repeatedly challenged by the
journey yet to come. Although it may not be universally true,
these views and skills cultivated at that little dance hall, for
many, softened the blows of lost love, promises broken, career
changes, disappointment, or just plain life drama.

That was then and this is now. It would be an understatement
to say we live in a different world than the one we grew up. The lyrics of those songs of the 1960’s seem so goofy and naïve today. Maybe we have become too cynical to trust our hearts as we did then, living behind mental walls built by perceived worldly failures or lack of trust. Perhaps we need another “Night Train” in our complicated lives. Maybe not a physical place, but still a “place” to experience wide eyed wonder, joy, and rest. The magic carpet still awaits; it can always be Friday night and it’s all ours to hop on and ride.

**BIO: Eric Shoemaker** writes historical fiction and fantasy. He self-published a fantasy/vampire novel called *The Emperor of Carysfort Reef* in 2013. In the fall of 2017 *The Blue Tractor* was published in *Connections* magazine. While in the military and later at the Defense Intelligence Agency, Eric specialized in North East Asia. He published over 20 public safety-related periodical articles; book reviews; conference presentations; and monographs. He taught at American Military University and Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, VA. Eric is a member of the Charles County Chapter.

**Closing the Door**

*by Barbara Mischke*

Have you ever considered the art of closing a door? I’m not referring to closing the door to a job, or relationship, or other times when you decide to move on. I’m writing about the physical closing of a door.
First, there is the slamming of the door that speaks volumes to those nearby, especially to those with whom you have been disagreeing. SLAM! It’s like a giant exclamation point! It leaves no doubts.

Then there is the quietest of all door closings…the one you practiced as a teenager… secretly sneaking in or out. This one is accomplished with a look over the shoulder and a prayer. Tip toe lightly. Ahhh….it worked.

A familiar one is the delayed closing: the grandmother standing in the doorway; her apron flapping in the breeze…waving until the car containing her son, his little family disappears down the winding road. She finally turns, closes the door, and enters the empty house ready to sweep up the crumbs and adjust the pillows on the sofa.

Then there is the door ajar while the last kiss is enjoyed…. and one more. This door closing is full of sweet promises. This is best enjoyed in the spring with honeysuckle in the air, although it happens all year round…and generation after generation.

Next is the hit-the-wall door opening…and then kick-the-door closing. This usually happens when one is carrying groceries or baby equipment or moving in. It seems like you need several more arms, and you wonder why you are doing this alone. It happens in a rush…and you hope the doorknob has not made an ugly dent in the wall. And you feel accomplished when it is over; when the door is shut…closing in whatever it was you needed to move.

There are happy door closings; the times when the relative stayed one or two days too long. This might be called the-life-
goes-back-to-normal door closing. Now no one is asking questions about the white flaky things in the salad and wondering if you might possibly have a softer pillow. Plus you can have second helpings without that look. You congratulate yourself for being a good host, but you relish the fact that now you can return to your comfortable pre-visit lifestyle.

Then there is the sad door closing, the one when your eldest child props the door open and joyfully carries his few belongings out to his friend’s van. His father, your husband, equally as happy, is helping him carry a desk and chair. You feel like you are in the midst of an out of the body experience as you soberly stand at the front window. You have the strong urge to step in the doorway…and in your best John Wayne imitation…stop the parade of CDs and over flowing boxes of shoes and T-shirts. But out the door they go…never to return. The hurried hugs are followed by the waving arms and hands…the van is gone, the door closes, and you immediately miss your son. In the future you will stand at the window, waiting for him to open the door again.

**BIO: Barbara Mischke**, a member of the Baltimore Chapter, enjoys creating short fiction and making observations on everyday life. She was a finalist in the 2017 Baltimore County Silver Pen Writing Contest.
The Value of Pie

by Karen Bennett

Our seventh grade math teacher turned her back to the class and wrote on the board in caps, THE VALUE OF PI. My head snapped up. She had my full attention. She turned to us and mumbled something about “three-point-one-four.” What the heck? Pie? Plus, she misspelled the word. What was she talking about?

There I was, suffering through a class in Math, basically a foreign language, and lo, the woman breaks into a lecture about dessert! Pie, ahhh, pie. The subject whooshed me back to my home’s square kitchen table, me swinging my feet, waiting for the pie to be cut and delivered to my waiting hands. My fork was on the folded napkin. I was sitting straight. Was I alone, or celebrating with other family members and company? Bottom line was one or two pies were on the table and they were being sliced.

My mother’s crusts were legendary. She fashioned a ruffled rim, fluted with neat regularly spaced peaks with an imprint of her fingernail in each pinch. The buttery, cinnamony Macintosh apples, wilted in the baking process, making them easily yield to the fork. Because we were Pennsylvania Dutch we frequently had Shoo-fly Pie, a confection of brown sugar crumbs over a molasses base. Ohhh, so delicious—and so necessary. And what about pumpkin pies, a subject onto themselves, where the words ginger and cinnamon are added to the story?

When I was about eight and attending a summertime party, I’d stationed myself near the hostess, not to miss the dessert. In time I was handed my first piece of pecan pie, symmetrically
placed on a china plate. My eyes opened wide. God smiled down. One never knows when a beatific gift will present itself. This was it. The amber syrup bubbles glistened like jewels, and I knew I stood on holy ground. The sweetness of the dessert threatened to kill me, but I realized at that moment that all previously eaten pies up to that point were simply practice for this glorious piece of pecan pie.

I directed my attention back to the teacher and concentrated to see, what was the business of those numerals? Sure enough she had drawn a pie wedge, its tip in the middle of a circle, with a right sided parenthesis curling around the central point of the pie. I was confused.

Three-point-one-four? Okay, so this was math class after all. The measure around the pie is 360 degrees, and I knew the distance of cutting straight across was 180 degrees, right? Such small numbers for pie. Based on my pie eating expertise I knew we couldn’t be talking about calories, because pie’s numbers were way up there. The calorie count would soar into the many hundreds with the addition of squirted-on whipped cream—non-dairy or full creamy, served with a spoon. I was stumped. So I’m sitting there, all transcendental like, and it comes to me.

The Value of Pie is the tartness of the lemon filling topped by the visual joy of beads of sunlight perched on the toasted meringue. Or, the real Value of Pie could be a single person, licking the coconut flakes folded into the white creamy pudding from the fork, in the privacy of the bedroom. Now, that’s the value of Pie.

About the words, “three-point-one-four.” Oh, the teacher was probably saying, “Free pie—want more?”

The Harrowing Yet Moving Baseball Narrative

by Farrell Levine

The symmetrical white orb, sewn together by a meandering series of red stitches, rose higher and higher in the night sky until after a moment of hesitation, began a gravitational downward flight. As the object fell back towards the earth with increasing speed, its descent ended not on a tract of grass or a stretch of dirt but, with a small thud, inside the pocket of a well-maintained leather glove positioned about seven feet above the ground.

“Way to go, Brian,” yelled Zachary from his location at shortstop. “Way to field your position.”

Ergo, the impact of this just completed feat was monumental. First, it generated the changing of the numeral one to a two in all spaces adjacent to the word “outs” within the playing arena. Secondly, the accomplishment measurably dampened the collective spirits of a vast multitude while creating the opposite effect
for a select few. However, the event wasn’t over. Grippingly, the tension had become as thick as freshly tapped molasses on a cold northeastern day.

“Just one more out Ben,” cried the second baseman, Enrique Ramirez. “You can do it!”

The basis for such high intrigue was a current enactment of what would become another grand moment in the chronicles of the “Great American Pastime.” In front of tens of thousands of spectators and many more via television, a team representing the city of Juniper needed to retire just one more opposing batter without a run scoring to lay claim to their first Western Division championship in almost a decade. Just one more ousted hitter stood between them and major triumph, an achievement that seemed so implausible at the beginning of the season and many times throughout. Critics had been plentiful and vociferous. Even after their good start, more than a few harshly predicted the team would fold once the pressure became intense. One particular member of the media was so derisive that in an editorial written during the all-star break and following a losing road trip, dubbed the team with the appellation, “Aesop, Anderson & Grimm.” It was an unkind reference to three prominent writers of fable and fairy tales and hence a shrewd way of declaring his personal opinion on the team’s postseason chances. Hardly any sports writers believed that the Unicorns would make it to the playoffs, much less the division and league championships and unthinkably the World Series. Now only one more out was needed to jump over the second hurdle in proving these detractors wrong!

After requesting and receiving a time-out, Ray Murray walked with purpose towards the mound, his catcher’s gear
making a whooshing noise with each step. He lifted his catcher’s mask once he came within a few yards of the pitcher, Ben Nash so that it rested flat upon his crown. The backstop could see beads of sweat upon the hurler’s forehead, perspiration arising from a combination of the night’s humidity and the gravity of the situation.

“Hell of a night for a baseball game,” Ray uttered in an attempt to lighten the tension. He paused for a moment, hoping for the crowd noise to die down. Realizing that wouldn’t be anytime soon, he spoke again, this time in a raised voice.

“I have a beer with my name on it, waiting for me in the clubhouse. Why don’t we get this next batter so I can go and enjoy it. I’ll even split it with you.”

A tight smile emerged on Ben’s face.

“That’s mighty generous of you considering how much you like your brewski. All right, let’s end this thing!”

An expeditious study of the scoreboard and playing field defined the setting. The well-played contest had entered the bottom of the ninth inning. There were now two outs, and Juniper was clinging to a slim 4 to 3 lead. The hometown opposition, the Collingsworth Dragons, had the tying run on first base. Victories in this playoff series were knotted at two apiece in a best of five. Borrowing an old cliché, there would be no tomorrow for one of these participants.

After Ray returned to his crouch behind home plate, the next Dragon hitter stepped in, capable Sammy Abrams who had doubled home a run earlier. Ben Nash peered in. A rapid succession of finger signals conveyed the pitch selection. Ben nodded in accordance and attempted to throw a slider towards the position
of the catcher’s mitt. The ball failed to find its mark, ending up further outside than planned. The batter wisely failed to swing. Ball one!

Two of the next three tosses also failed in its quest of finding the strike zone, so Ben unfavorably found himself behind in the count at 3 and 1. He realized the necessity of getting the next pitch and any thereafter in this sequence over the plate. Ball four would put the winning run on base and the tying run in scoring position. The hurler elected to come in with a fastball. Ben’s effort to hit Ray’s target, the outside corner, went for naught as the ball came in chest high, flat and over the heart of the plate, a hitter’s delight. Abrams obliged his newfound fortune by lining the sphere, at a faster speed than its arrival, up the middle of the field for a single. To add further jeopardy, both runner and batter were able to move up an extra ninety feet when center fielder, Clay Mowrey, misplayed the tricky hop and allowed the ball to get by him. By the time the horsehide safety reached the infield, the runners were perched on second and third. The home crowd clamored in appreciation.

Dan Messenger, Juniper’s highly regarded long-serving manager, immediately called time and slowly walked out to the mound to appraise the situation. There was no one warming up in the bullpen, so the game’s outcome was in Ben’s hands. The next Dragon batter, Ralph Dobbins, was a highly respectable hitter who already had one base knock today, a rope single. His past success against Ben was good. He would be no easy task.

Raymond Murray was already conversing with Ben when Dan arrived. Shortstop Zachary Stovall and second baseman Enrique Ramirez had come in also, in case there was any un-
beknown strategy for the infielders to adhere to. The five stood cloistered in a huddle since the din arising from the stands was making anything other than close conversation very difficult.

“How do you feel Ben?” came the skipper’s first words.

“Good, really good,” asserted the pitcher.

Further dialogue was temporarily halted by the excessive honking from a flock of geese overhead, nocturnally flying southward. During the brief pause, Messenger looked over his right shoulder towards the opponent’s on-deck circle. The batter scheduled to follow Ralph Dobbins, should it befall, would be Tony “Wolfgang” Mozar, the Dragons’ best hitter. However, as a disparity, “Wolfgang” had a less than stellar degree of success against Mr. Nash. His lifetime track record was only two harmless singles in thirteen at-bats. Since first base was open, Dan’s decision on whom to pitch to was quite a dilemma. He wanted input.

“Think it might be better if we intentionally walked Dobbins?” Messenger candidly asked his pitcher. “Mozar hasn’t hit the ball out of the infield in his last three at-bats against you.”

Ben contemplated the option, then voiced his reasons against the maneuver.

“He might be due against me, plus the bases would then be loaded, and there would be less margin for error. He’s also hit well this series. I’d rather try to get Dobbins out. I’ll keep everything low and away. If I do end up walking him, no serious damage has been done.”

Dan weighed the assessment.

“Okay, he approved. “Don’t give Dobbins anything he can possibly drive. All infielders, play a step back and do whatever you must to keep any ground ball from getting through. Zachary
and Enrique, don’t let Abrams get too big of a lead off second. Alright gang, let’s go and get this last batter.”

Messenger ended the deliberation with an energetic hand clap before walking back to the dugout. Reactively, Raymond lowered his mask and returned to his spot behind home plate. Zachary and Enrique went back to their respective positions but not before informing the other two infielders the contents of their tactical discussion. Dobbins, looking very sinister and intimidating with his poignant stare, aided by the devilish goatee he had perfected, entered the batter’s box.

More beads of perspiration materialized on the pitcher’s forehead, and several took the liberty of running down into his eyes. With his sight impeded by the fluid’s salinity, Ben was compelled to step off the rubber and clear his vision. Dobbins then strategically called time and stepped out of the batter’s box once Ben returned to the mound. The confrontation had transformed into a game of cat and mouse.

Finally, action on the ball field recommenced, and Ben proceeded into his windup. True to his earlier pledge, the resulting pitch was low and outside. However, its path was well off the plate. Dobbins’ bat didn’t move from his shoulders. Ball one!

Once again, Nash fell behind in the count at 3 and 1, but this time, with first base open, it wasn’t as imperative that he get the next pitch within the strike zone. Ben’s subsequent attempt was supposed to traverse the inside corner; however, the orb, like before, missed its mark badly. As the horsehide made its misguided way towards the central part of the plate, Dobbins unleashed a potent swing and connected. The result was a high line drive into the left-center field gap.
Before the start of the season, the Unicorns’ front office had traded for center fielder Clay Mowrey in the belief that his fleetness of foot would allow him to track down many more fly balls than his predecessors. The transaction, so far, had failed to live up to expectations. Hampered by hamstring pulls and an assortment of other injuries, this anticipated speed advantage had turned negligible and Clay’s maiden season was hugely considered a disappointment. So much so, that for the past several months, there were widely circulating rumors that the center fielder would be sent packing to another club during the winter negotiations. The error he’d just made on the previous play had certainly not escaped the Unicorn brass in attendance and perhaps sealed that crestfallen fate.

Many in the crowd rose at the crack of the bat as they monitored the path of the sphere. Dobbins’ wallop was carrying well. If not caught, the ball would touch down near the warning track, plenty deep enough for both Dragon runners to score and end the game. The only hope was for Clay or left fielder Chester Yates to make a sensational catch. From the ball’s line of trajectory and his faster legs, Clay had the better but still remote chance.

The center fielder turned and instinctively raced towards the area where he thought the ball could be catchable. As he quickly approached the sector, he glanced up. To his dismay, Clay saw that the sphere was still outside his normal reach. The only action he could take was to dive headlong and hope.

Like a superhero, he flew through the nighttime air, concentrating solely on the white globe which now seemed unusually small. Stretching his six-foot frame every possible nanometer, Clay reached up towards the target. Miraculously, the ball land-
ed with authority in the glove’s webbing, just moments before his body impacted solidly with the ground, jarring muscle and bone. For an instant, everything went black. Then, as sensation slowly returned, Clay heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Teammates? Probably. Were they coming because he had held on to the ball for the final out or to assist him to his feet as the baseball, dislodged by his crash landing, lied somberly on the ground a distance away?

Chester Yates was the first to reach him. He stopped just a few feet shy of the human figure sprawled out on the grass.

“Man, that was one incredible catch you just made! Thank you, Clay, thank you, thank you, thank you!” ecstatically cried the left fielder.

Soon, nearly the entire team was upon him bestowing their heartfelt gratitude. Enrique was so happy that he offered up either of his two single sisters for marriage. As Jake Donaldson, the burly first baseman helped Clay to a standing position; the center fielder looked into his glove. There was the baseball, stuck right in the middle. It would be a sight and souvenir he would treasure forever.

However, there would be a price for his heroics as Clay would soon discover. While walking towards the dugout with his teammates, he felt a throbbing in his right shoulder. As he tried to lift his right arm, a pulsating pain ensued. It was evident that something was wrong. By the time the group neared the dugout’s front step, Clay was clutching the top of his upper arm, a look of anguish spread across his face.

Juniper’s top trainer, Clyde Perkins, hastened out to the injured player and performed a quick diagnosis. Clay winced
twice and yelled once as the medical expert squeezed several segments of the hurt area.

“Could be a fracture. Won’t know until further tests,” Perkins gravely opined.

This deflating conceivability instantly put a slight damper on the pending celebration. Clay, however, quickly assured everyone within earshot not to worry and instead eat, drink and be merry, especially since he wasn’t about to let the possible injury curtail him from doing so. The self-declaration circulated a reverse uplifting effect. After a moment of prayer, the players joyously departed for the locker room where they would be greeted by hordes of reporters and cameramen, a scene which would be televised live across the country.

As expected, the locker room had transformed into a carnivalesque madhouse. Prominent members of the media had set up camp, awaiting to interview the victors. Team dignitaries dotted the surroundings with broad smiles and hearty laughter. To help commemorate the triumph, a number of bottles of champagne were uncorked, part of their shaken contents sprayed every which way. The remaining liquid was then imbibed or poured over the heads of the happy winners.

Over the course of the next half hour, several of the Unicorn players, led by “star of the hour,” Clay Mowrey, got interviewed center stage by renowned commentator Icarus Sines. The newscaster, who had been in the business for over two decades, was well known for his dressy ensembles. True to form, he appeared quite dapper in a well-tailored navy-blue blazer and forty dollars golden silk tie.
The various player responses lauded much praise for all those involved. Finally, after the awarding of the league championship trophy to Unicorns’ owner, Phil Steiner and the presentation of the series MVP plaque (which went to shortstop Zachary Stovall), the session cut to a final commercial, signifying its end.

After the gala and hoopla had subsided and things returned to a semblance of normality, Dan Messenger called for a brief team meeting once the players had showered and dressed. For their arduous play, several tables of cheeses, fruits, deli meats, salads, various bread, and drinks had been arranged and placed against the compartment’s back wall. Its orderly setup would not stay that way for long as many a hearty appetite would soon take advantage of those delectable offerings once the meeting was over.

As the team members convened, Manager Messenger silently surveyed the scene. It had been quite a while since he was part of such a glorious moment. A Juniper legend and a lock for the Unicorns’ and possibly the Major League Hall of Fame, Dan had been part of the organization for over twenty years, thirteen as an elite second baseman and ten as the Juniper skipper. The past road until now had been rough. This was the first time in five years that the team had participated in the postseason, a lengthy nine campaigns since they won the honor to play for the league championship. From the agony and hardships endured during the journey back, Dan knew this was a time to cherish.

Once all of the players were seated in an array of chairs, Dan banged a wooden gavel upon the dais he was standing behind to gain everyone’s attention. The room grew quiet, all eyes riveted upon their flamboyant leader. Messenger cleared his throat before beginning a congratulatory address.
“Before we continue in our celebration, I would just like to say how proud the entire Juniper organization is of each one of you. Getting to this point was truly a team effort. At the beginning of the year, we were written off as also-rans by practically everyone. “The Baseball Beat” had the audacity to pick us to finish last in the division. Almost no one believed in us except for the personnel sitting in this room. You made it happen with your hustle and determination. Winning the division championship is an achievement that can’t be taken away from us no matter what happens in the upcoming future. But as great as this attainment is, let’s be anything but complacent. Instead, let’s have two more team meetings like this one over the next few weeks, the first for winning the league championship and the second one for becoming baseball’s new WORLD CHAMPIONS!”

This last statement drew a loud and sustained roar from the players, a reflection of the same gung-ho attitude that had characterized the team all year. Then, perhaps as a small indicator of their dedication to the ultimate goal, the players remained quietly seated until Dan gave them the okay to begin eating from the buffet behind them.

**BIO: Farrell Levine** has written several articles, mostly humorous, for work publications in the past. He has a B.S. degree in psychology from the University of Maryland. His hobbies, include sports and karaoke. This excerpt is Chapter One from his novel entitled *The Harrowing Yet Moving Baseball Narrative*. He belongs to the Howard County Chapter.
As the ferry pulled up to the dock, people clamored down the stairs towards their cars, eager to get off and begin their magical adventure. One by one, the vehicles rolled off the huge ship and drove out of the parking lot. The town sat up at the top of the hill, overlooking the dock. Luggage in hand, walk-on passengers made their way down the ramp and waved down taxis. To the left of the dock, people stood in line to get on the departing boat, and idle cars sat in rows like soldiers anticipating a war.

Seagulls stalked pedestrians unaware that their ice cream could be snatched away. Fresh air mixed with sea salt rustled through the couples and families milling around. Seafood and hints of sweet flavors wafted under the noses of those fresh off of the boat, electrifying their senses. Everyone seemed to understand the sacred beauty of this magical place. Its relaxing atmosphere reflected in the easy smiles on sunburned faces purportedly signaled that everyone here was welcome. It seemed that people of all backgrounds and current circum-
stances were embraced.

But as my family rode off of the boat, heads turned and stared. Strangers noticeably shook their heads, indicating that we were not welcome.

“Mami, why are they looking at us like that?” Andrés whined. Though only seven years old, he clearly understood the universal facial expression for revulsion.

Although we paid the same price to board the ferry and to rent our house as had others, this was irrelevant upon arrival. Apparently, Paradise is only for white people. The color of our skin has erected a wall around us, daring us to try and scale it, only to shove us back down to the ground as soon as we reach the top. At this point, we can’t go back home. When we escaped, there was nothing left except for rubble and heartbreak. This was our last chance. Our car remained at full stop in the middle of the parking lot. All at once, a forlorn wail shook us. My mother’s lamentation of hopeless grief froze us. Cars behind us began to honk in exasperation and people started to crowd around us. My dad snapped out of his horror-struck daze and steered the car around in a U-turn back toward the boat. The vehicle jolted forward as he put all of his weight on the gas pedal and aimed toward the ferry, which was still boarding cars and people.

In a matter of seconds, four deafening bangs rang out. I ducked. My eyes began to burn as a cloud of smoke diffused throughout the interior of the car. Then I realized that my shirt and hands were splattered with blood that didn’t come from my own body. To my left, Andrés was slumped against the window. A single hole in his chest left a cherry red stain that was spreading across his torso. In front of me, my mom was slumped, sus-
pered by her seatbelt. In the driver’s seat, my dad’s face was pressed against the steering wheel. A combination of mustard yellow flesh and plum red fluid were splattered everywhere.

Terror raced through my veins. Quickly, I unbuckled my seatbelt and wrenched the door open. I bolted toward the ferry, which was pulling away. While my legs wheeled under me, my brain remained fixated on one thing: getting onto that boat. When I reached the dock’s edge, the massive ship was at least 200 hundred feet away—choppy water, twisting and churning behind it from its propellers. I turned and saw a pack of snarling men with shotguns chasing me.

Time ticked slowly. It felt as if I was running through molasses. What happened? Why was I running? Confusion froze my steps. I turned to face the angry pack with the shotguns leveled at me. I spread my arms out, shouting something at the hungry group. An invisible push impelled me backwards, and I crashed down onto the ground. I felt a liquid pour out of me the way the death-eater sucks the life out of Sirius Black. Ruddy, bearded faces blocked my vision of the clear blue sky, their mouths turned up into ugly smiles. With a painful wheezing breath, I managed one last utterance. “We would have loved you and your island.” As my body gave its final shudder, I caught a final glimpse of their faces, where loathing transformed into shock.

**BIO:** Nina A. McCormack, a rising junior at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., is a 16-year-old resident of Silver Spring, MD. Nina, a lacrosse player, enjoys reading and, in her spare time, writing. She has published works in *The Quarterly,*
Sidwell Friends School’s literary magazine. Nina is a 2017 attendee of Sarah Lawrence College’s Summer Writing Camp in New York. In 2018, she attended a writers’ workshop at the Tel- ing Room in Portland, Maine.

**Poetry**

**Ode to Writers**

*By Julia Q. McCormack*

Calling all writers to the table
Come let’s indite a new fable

We’ve got things to write
‘Cause fantasy is always right

Bring out the inkwell and quill
There’s paper plenty to fill

Explore your creation
Without regard for citation

Let the creek of expression flow
Don’t listen to the small-minded crow

Take the time to make it prime
For writers there is no overtime
Show the gem of your spirit with pride
Let it express who you are inside

For as Tobias Wolff said, a true piece of writing is a dangerous thing, it can change your life.
Just remember the product of your mind is worth all of the strife!

**BIO: Julia Q. McCormack**, a freshman at Sidwell Friends in Washington, D.C., is a 14-year-old from Silver Spring. In her spare time, Julia is an avid reader and writes flash science fiction and complex riddles. She enjoys cryptography and Greek Mythology. Julia is the author of *The Felicity Code, Dots and Slots* pictorial codes based on numbers. Julia hopes to one day be a professor of classical literature.
ART/PHOTOGRAPHY

Photo by Penny Knobel-Besa: The Message

BIO: Penny Knobel-Besa, a theatre graduate of Towson University, Master from University of Baltimore, did post graduate theatre studies at Yale University and writing courses at Johns Hopkins. As a playwright/director, she founded Maryland Theatre Arts Company in 1978; and in 1993 she produced a children’s musical, for Off-Broadway. Later she established a theatre arts academy in Cumberland, Maryland. She has written and filmed several short independent films. She has been honored as “MD Photographer of the Year” in the past and continues to exhibit in Europe and eastern region of US. She is member of the Baltimore Chapter.
(The den is furnished sparsely with a settee to the left, a coffee-table in front of it, and a writing desk against the wall to the right. A computer sits on the desk. On the far side of the wall next to the desk is a large floor length mirror; on the other side hangs a framed photo of two teenage boys. Donna and Drew, a middle-aged couple, enter through the door in the back wall, each carrying a bag holding sundry items. After they set their bags by the coffee-table, Donna pulls out a sequined dress with a red “On Sale” tag from her bag, and stands in front of the mirror, admiring her purchase. Drew takes off his hat to reveal his balding head. He turns to face Donna.)

**Drew:** Do I have hat hair?

**Donna:** You had a hat on. You have no hair.

**Drew:** No hair! Nowhere, Donna?

**Donna:** Nowhere to go but grow.

**Drew:** Grow out of the confining hat. Why does not our heads get larger as we age?

**Donna:** So we can age and forget what we forgot.
Drew: Ah, the learn – unlearn sequence.

Donna: (showing off her new dress. She holds on to the sequin dress throughout the play) Sequins? Do you love my sequins, Drew?

Drew: You are getting ahead of me. I was thinking of my skull and what is inside it. I pray it does not wither like the wig I was born with.

Donna: So it is. Mitosis. We need brain cell mitosis.

Drew: Might corrupts, and lack of mitosis corrupts absolutely. Mitosis in my wallet will corrupt me mightily. But a bit of cell division outside this pretty skull is welcome too. (rubbing a bald spot) A handful of Pennington to cover the hide.

Donna: Well, well Drew! At least we have a place to hide. (assumes the ‘attitude derriere’ of a ballet dancer to exude gratitude that they have a place to live in, small though it is)

Drew: Hide and blame our troubles on Countywide.

Donna: Where did that Mazz guy hide?

Drew: Behind a load of big Bills, I venture to guess.

Donna: Or he buys a presidential pardon. Do we have money to buy a pardon?

Drew: (sings) Goodnight la-la, goodnight la-la. Now me and money are parted. Goodnight la-la, la-la goodnight…

Donna: (pretends she is going to drop the dress to the ground) Perhaps we shouldn’t have splurged on a sequin dress for Irene. (then clutching the dress with feigned fear) Bank of America won’t come after my sequins, will it?
Drew: Here is the sequence! They come to grab the dress. We try to hit ’em back. They come with a team and hit us hard. In the process we drop our wallets. The Mazz guy and his friends run with them, promising us 99% to wait our turn till 2066 when we will be paid back in Yuan if Beijing will allow the pittance to trickle down the Yellow River to be loaded onto a Russian Tanker that will drop off the assorted shipment in Alaska under Sarah’s watchful eye to be distributed to the lower 99% by Ross Trading after deducting his due commission.

Donna: That bad, huh? Are we knee deep in debt?

Drew: Twenty-one trillion! That’s twenty-one followed by twelve zeroes. Not all of that is mine.

Donna: We are over our heads in debt. (seeing Drew grimace) Not you, the nation! Is date healthier than resin?

Drew: Not if you are trying to raise dough.

Donna: Turn on the money spreadsheet, Drew. Let’s see how much bread we can afford.

Drew: (turns the computer on, clicks on the Money icon) Holy breadsticks! We are bamboozled. The margin account did us in.

Donna: Margin! Dickens! Why in hell did you borrow Broker’s money to trade?

Drew: Because I had none. It is very American.

Donna: Thank America that we held on to our jobs! Otherwise we would be working for McDonalds.

Drew: Our kids would be rolling dough at Mac University and roasting chicken tenders.

Donna: MU not UM.

Drew: MU is snacking on my wallet.
Donna: The flip side of the coin.
Drew: It’s called Bitcoin. We need a good hoard of it.
Donna: Imagine raising two American kids on bitcoins at thirty grands apiece!
Drew: Hairpiece, did you say? I can’t afford it.

BIO: Gandharva raja, aka Dr. Tapendu K Basu, is a member of the American Academy of poets. He is the author of August 29: How Kabir H. Jain Became a Deity; Epic Mahabharata: A Twentieth Century Retelling; and Hoofbeats: A Poetic History of the United States. His novel The Nisha Trilogy was produced as a Bengali movie Tadanto [investigation] in Tollywood. He is a member of the Baltimore Chapter and Editor of Pen In Hand… gandharvaraja.com