MUSE
TWENTY FIFTEEN

A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff and alumni.
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"You
Don’t
See
The things I see.

Behind the glazed and foggy horizon of mundane sight hides the subtle sorcery of shadow, the paradise of the unhinged mind. There the high-minded songs of seraph wings mix with human beings inhuman hymns to beat out a trans-celestial boogie that sets hearts aflame and buries all other sound. A walk in this midway mad land will leave you stripped bare and gussied up. Pockets picked, itches scratched, and spirit spun thin as fairy floss. This is where the goblins hide, the monsters lurk, and snide elves in ironic tank tops drink cappuccino. Here is where you never go, but always are. The last hold of the invisible world. Seek it if you dare, find it if you can.

THE BEST TIME TO BE ALIVE
By: Sara Coble

It was a wonderful time to be alive.
I first raked the golden leaves
into a pile three feet high.
Then I gazed up at the bare trees
and let my face feel the nip of November air
while I contemplated the year almost gone.
Then as I felt the blustery wind whipping through my hair
I blinked and moved on
into the warm house where I found a good book,
some hot cocoa, and a cozy throw.
I curled up into my reading nook
until I looked out the window and saw the sun aglow.
The best time is late afternoon
as autumn closes and winter approaches soon.

“Nostalgia”
“Fishing on the Susquehanna in July”
“Directions”
**ETHEREAL**  
*By: Skye Spencer*

I looked to the sky and said,  
"Make me a cloud, heavy with rain  
only to disperse."  
I want to be ethereal  
Because Lady – I know  
Nothing in this life is permanent  

Isn’t that what you’ve been trying to teach me?  
What with the changing moon  
And the way even my self-inflicted scars  
faded over time  
With the way I have loved and lost  
With him and maybe him and definitely him

We were gonna get married, you know  
Spending the next sixty-odd years  
Playing each other’s heart strings like a concerto  
Make-believing we would be forever  
Like I used to make-believe  
I was a wizard or a superhero or a ninja  
I should have known nothing was permanent  
When not even make-believe lasted

Not even my melancholy lasted  
The rage of lost love tearing at my throat  
Howling like the wind  
Couldn’t stay forever  
Just like the scars and the clouds and the make-believe

Maybe my bones will last forever  
Serving as a warning sign that flashes loud:  
"Take a good look!  
This is what happens when you live!  
Nothing left behind but bones!  
Are you sure you wanna go down this path, love?"

What do bones do anyway?  
Aside from keeping you in shape  
I still remember  
The way my lovers have touched my ribs  
and kissed my jaw  
Maybe bones are good for something after all

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**NOT THE SAME**  
*By: Paige Lowery*

But I am not my bones  
And I know I can’t dwell forever  
In this place in my mind –  
in this state of being  
I am changeable like everything in this world  
Like the moon or a river  
reflecting every scene of life

Rip the permanence from my heart  
Batter it with my bones and the howling wind  
None of us are forever  
And that’s okay

That’s what you’ve been trying to teach me  
Isn’t it?
FOR JIM
By: Eric Mellen

Typefaces stylize
the tale of a poem, beginning
with mottled thoughts which then begin
to coagulate in form,
to reach an apex,
to peak in grace,
flowing from thought
to pen.

As words compound into
meaning, the poem is revealed into
the fragility of a cough,
out from the gut,
from critic to heart.

I never could truly tell
the own power of my words
as they drifted in wonder.
The aurora borealis which seemed
too powerful to be fake,
but too far to touch.

You always gave direction
begotten from the mouth
of gods and mortal specks.

CLIMATE CHANGE
By: Gary C. Walker

Climate change?

Snow and ice galore

But the Redbird says

“Nevermore”
ROLLER SKATES
By: Eric Mellen

I rode the streets
On my tarnished roller skates
Wondering why fat men
Never saw the glamour
In the sweat trickling
Down a furrowed brow,
Laboring only in thought.
Thoughts which crossed
The minds of the masses,
Like how that kid on his roller skates
Probably never worked a day in his life.

“How will we ever teach them how to live”
He thinks, as I roll along
Thinking on the pleasantness of the day,
My comrades at each side of my shoulders,
My zest for life.

“Never worked a day in my life.”
Because all of life was twisting in a spiral
Between my thumb and forefinger.

DANDELION
By: Ryan Wood

Flowered suitcases sit beside the door.
Mom says her goodbyes before she flies away from me to leave me here with dad and this scowl of a woman that has me call her someone she’s not.

Mom hugs my sister and I throw open the front door, burst from the house like Jack from his box, sprint down the street to a field full of wild dandelions.

I fall to my knees, pluck the perfect one. Hundreds of floret clustered on its flower head.
I make my wish and blow, but still half of them remain.
I pick another, try harder.
They float through the humid day, and it’s not nearly enough.

I pluck and pull, inhale and blow, make my wish, and try again.
Tears and sweat stream down my face.
Fill my lungs to bursting and blow the stubborn seeds.

The best I can do is all but three gone in a single breath.
I snatch handfuls and hurl them, slam my fists to the ground.
Scream. Sob into my hands.

I remain that way a while, covering my face, though there’s not a soul to see besides a bluejay taking wing.
It flies far across the field, and I think I’ll never see it again.
**BLACK**  
*By: Ryan Wood*

The dilated pupils surrounded by red veins. The bruises on your arms, and legs. The hair hanging in your face.

Cigarette ash and tarred lungs,  
The bible dad stuffed down your throat, charred black after you threw it in the flames.

The ink and the typewriter where your depression takes voice. The graphite used to sketch your anger.

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**INSOMNIA**  
*By: Chikunda Rawls*

The wing of the crow on your shoulder.  
The cloak, draped over bone.  
Here in this lightless closet with you.

Your favorite color.  
Lines drawn red with a black handled knife  
While mother’s screams echo down dark hallways.

Black, the procession, your casket,  
Black, your mother’s dress,  
Your father’s heart, your entire wasted life.
WINTER MEMORIES

By: Margaret J. Vann

The winter I was 4 or 5 on Third Street, we had a piano in the living room. I don’t know why, for none of us played.

Well, we children played bombing raid on the bass keys the drone and crash we had heard on the news reels

We could look down the street and see blue stars in most windows and sometimes a gold star and sometimes a blue star would turn gold

A blue star in our window too Why a piano in that winter of no snow at Christmas and no Daddy at home?

I have often wondered why a piano?

OLD FRIENDS

By: Jackie Segars

[Image of trees]
sink.
By: shawn C murdock

I hope you don't walk away too terribly terrified of me or have nightmares when your memory mimics my laugh and voice and scream because I still don't sleep.

Please remember my eyes as they feign a genuine S M I L E through this glassy blue vacuum as it drags me to the bottom because I don’t want you to walk away watching my hair and fingers flutter as I sink.
**DARK GREEN**

*By: Eric Mellen*

This is the mood of the story.
This is the mood of the story.

The ruffled green feather of a bird of paradise fell from the floor, out the desert, out the deserted sand floor ... swirled languidly out of the dark brown cabin, out of the dark brown cabin blown from windmills, thrown from windmills into, out of, down, down, down, off of a cliff.

This dirty green glob came over the floor, came from the moss covering the cabin. Mother told me not to go. Yesterday from dawn till dusk I remembered what she said. Never go. Never go.

But I went ... I saw ... and “wait” was gone; and went five thirsty days without her.

Tuesday was coming. Patches of thought, measures of color, sections of beauty came and went.

I typed a letter to my mother when I returned. It came and went and I walked to the attic to show her what death and rocking chairs brought to the picture.

If only she could talk now, I would have taken her advice.

I went to get a pitcher of water from the well drank it hard, and quenched it fast ... bite by bite I downed it into my stomach.

Thirsty men never have enough, I thought to myself before I also fell, down, down, down, from the attic, out the door, with the rocking chair, off the cliff.

I threw it into a dark green mass, a glob of green off the cabin floor, or off the cliff itself.

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**GLORY BOUND**

*By: Margaret J. Vann*

When my friends gather to wish me farewell, rousing music is what I want.
None of this solemn, serious stuff — no dirges for me.

Let there be
  head nodding
  hand clapping
  foot stomping
hallelujah music.

I want ‘em out of the pews dancing in the aisles.
I want ‘em rejoicing arms in the air.
Sisters, say amen!

Let them roll in the ecstasy of the Heaven bound ‘cause I’m gone to Glory.
No sleeping in the bosom of Abraham, but dancing in the straight path like no body’s looking.

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**SALAD**

*By: Judy Baggett*
FATHER
By: Darick Ray Powton

Every word you’ve ever said to me would not fill this page.

You disappeared when I was two, ducking under the doorframe without a look back.

Three years later, you sent a stranger to pick me up. She tore me, screaming, confused, from my mother’s arms.

I didn’t live my childhood. I was a bystander, watching my siblings live out theirs, a shell, emotionless, understanding nothing of life, and looking to another shell for direction.

I remember everything you said to me in all those years:

I looked at you before I walked out the door to go back to my mother. I waited for you to say something. Your eyes did not leave the television.

I watched friends hug their fathers, get a pat on the back, a reassuring word. Stitched baseball, leather glove; velcro flag and pigskin ball, rod and line; open night sky and roasting marshmallows.

I taught myself to shave, standing in front of the mirror, my sister’s cheap razor in unsure hands. The internet taught me to knot a tie. I paid a man to teach me to drive.

The brunette I didn’t know how to approach.

I wanted to ask you what to do, what to say. You showed up once when I worked at the BBQ place, surprised to see me there. You stared at your shoes when I told you it was my second year there. My boss said take lunch early. Join your father. The silence at the table, tangible as the checkered tablecloth.

I came to you for help, about to lose my one bedroom apartment. Quit school, you said. Focus on getting a job. The only advice you ever gave me.

Your two story house, backyard pool, new Mustang and Charger. You couldn’t afford to help.

I looked around, mortar board in hand after the ceremony. Silence on the phone when I told you about the Dean’s List. I didn’t bother to tell you when I began my career.

I know that I will never hear those words.

In the darkest corners of my mind, I think if death took you before I could have a memory, I could have imagined you differently.

I could let myself believe that if you lived, You would give a shit.

Opposite: EXPLORING MONTE SANO
By: Emily Quinn
I stand in a righteous room filled with the empty hearted, risen rabble. Patronizing kings of charities, angels of pity, saints of the down-nose look. Breathing deep their put on airs and moving, all hand and gesture, through these hollow halls of prudent excess. Giving just enough to say they did. Not time, not service, not even true empathy. They give, but just enough to show they care. That they’re involved, concerned, disturbed by the trends. Their gods of finance have allowed to transpire. They sacrifice so that they might be blessed. They are empty bodies. Souls consumed by high society. Hearts burned up long ago with the eternal envious blaze common to their ilk.  

Hear them laugh, echo of sincerity.  
See them smile, artifice of joy.  
Observe their tears, each drop a mockery of emotion.  
Vain empty things.....

....poor empty things, someone should help them out.

[Give Generously, Never too Much, Never too Little. You Can Help Restore Humanity] -- tax deductible
OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE
By: Sara Coble

I am not a star athlete, a natural-born musician, or a renowned artist. However, I have proven that academically I have the capability to excel. While training for a sport or practicing the piano soon bored me, I have always been interested in learning new information and having the satisfaction of being intellectually successful. During high school, I became determined to achieve an ACT scholarship when I graduated. In order to obtain it, I was required to have a composite score of twenty-seven or higher on the ACT. After two attempts and missing by one point each time, I was determined to succeed on my final opportunity. However, I had to refuse the idea of failure, prepare for the test, and accomplish my goal in order to receive the scholarship.

Although I had scored a twenty-six twice, I rejected the idea of failing to score the required twenty-seven or higher on my third try. I had always heard that anything worth having requires an effort, and I soon understood that this assertion would be true for my challenge as well. I was determined to not allow previous failure to keep me from obtaining something that was important to me. Helen Sanderson states in “Diving In” that “it’s not as though I’ve never failed before” (44). She then illustrates her statement by listing some situations in which she has failed. While I had failed at becoming a great pianist, a fast runner, or a skilled swimmer, I was determined that I would not allow myself to fail at obtaining this scholarship.

Once I resolved to not allow my earlier disappointments to keep me from trying again, I began preparing for the upcoming test. I first examined my previous score reports to pinpoint the areas where I was having trouble. These reports showed me that I needed to work on my math and reading comprehension skills. To improve my math score, I located my algebra and geometry textbooks and reviewed the concepts that I had forgotten. This included rereading the material and working out problems until I understood them. Then, because I knew my problem in reading comprehension was reading too slowly, I began reading in most of my spare time. I also took many practice tests from the ACT study guide to help me gauge where I was improving and which areas I still needed to develop. I also used the practice tests to improve my speed in taking the test.

After much preparation, it was time to accomplish my goal. When test day finally arrived, confidence was essential. I had to tell myself that I could do it; I could not accept the thought of failure. The preparation I had done gave me many helpful strategies that I applied, and I finished the test with a feeling that my efforts would be rewarded. Once I had taken the test, I began the application process. I started drafting the essay and filling out the application, hoping my results would be what I wanted. Finally, the day came when the results were to be posted. At midnight, I logged onto my ACT account and was exhilarated to learn that I had achieved a composite score of twenty-eight—one point higher than necessary to be accepted for the award.

My experience with obtaining the ACT scholarship taught me several valuable life lessons. I learned that refusing to accept failure, preparing for what is ahead, and accomplishing the goal is worth the feeling of success at the end. Overcoming this challenge has also boosted my self-confidence and driven me to accept new challenges. I now fully recognize that anything worth having only comes with an effort. This realization also drives my determination to succeed as a college student. Most importantly, fulfilling this ambition has taught me to set high goals for myself and never stop until they are achieved.

Work Cited
I recently went into a local retail store to order a cake for my parent’s 50th wedding anniversary. I chose a full sheet cake for the event. A full sheet cake is actually two, half sheet cakes side by side and iced. I asked the sales lady behind the counter if I could get one of the halves as chocolate and the other as vanilla. She told me “no” with no explanation. When I asked “Why not?” she went to the back and asked the department manager. Again, I got a “no” answer only this time with the explanation that they do not have a PLU # for this kind of purchase. I learned that the PLU # is the code that prints out the list of ingredients on a food item that is sold. So, I went to the main store manager and politely stated my problem. I asked if there was something that could be done about this. The manager escorted me back to the bakery where he went in and discussed the problem with the department manager and sales lady. They all returned to the counter, and the sales lady took my order.

Most people would have just accepted the first “no,” and left. Others might have taken it a little farther until the second “no,” but few people would have hunted down the main store manager and followed through to the end. This example validates my mother’s old saying, “The squeaky wheel gets the grease,” meaning that if you speak up for yourself or ask questions then you are more likely to get what you need or want. When faced with a “no” answer, most people usually accept it and walk away. They may be frustrated or angry, but still bow out.

Believe it or not, we have not always been this way. We are born into this world instinctively knowing how to get what we want. All we have to do is scream, and someone comes to the rescue. Parents, grandparents, or caregivers are completely absorbed in consoling a demanding baby. If this form of behavior produces results, we will, in the future, continue to scream that our demands be met. It’s only natural that this form of communication by infants and toddlers is acceptable because, after all, how else can they communicate. But as we grow and develop we begin to learn more acceptable ways to handle the situation. When we begin to talk, the word “please” will often get us satisfaction. When we are able to return services or goods for our wants, then we are ready to make deals. Interestingly though, as we become adults, something happens that causes us to just accept defeat if we don’t attain what we are after.

Most would say we have reached a level of maturity and realize that we don’t always get what we want. My response to that is, “SQUEAK, SQUEAK, SQUEAK!” Did you hear that? Most of us give way to a “no” answer because we don’t want to be uncomfortable, “rock the boat,” or “cause a scene.” Even though we do not like getting “no” for an answer we still quietly accept it.

I say, “No more” to “no.” I am tired of hearing others complain about not getting what they want when they have not taken any initiative to attain it. It doesn’t matter whether it is the check-out clerk, your mother, doctor, or yourself. Yes, I said, “yourself.” Sometimes we can be our own worst enemy when it comes to failure. We tell ourselves we want to achieve something but do nothing proactive to get it. When we reach a road block, we simply walk away defeated.

I offer a few solutions as an alternative to a “no” response. How about,

- “Could you help me understand this better?”
- “Is there someone else I could speak with?”
- “Does your policy have any room for flexibility?”
- “What am I doing that is not working?”
- “What can I do differently?”
- “Well, I can understand your initial reply, but…”

These examples are just a few of the many possibilities. If you take a little time to prepare before a confrontation and anticipate a “no,” you can be ready with a question or statement that will possibly help you come out on top of the situation. I do believe there comes a time when we should accept that we don’t always get what we want, but unfortunately we give up too easily before that time. Instead of walking away from a “no,” try being a “squeaky wheel.” How squeaky is up to you. Remember, the goal is to get a little grease, not to be removed and thrown away.
“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” an intricate short story, was written by world-renowned author Katherine Anne Porter. Written in the stream-of-consciousness technique, this story encompasses Granny Weatherall and her final thoughts in anticipation of her death. The story’s conflicts reveal that Granny Weatherall struggles with God, man, and herself. She struggles with God’s commandment to forgive one another. Being unwilling to forgive, she exposes her stubbornness. In stubbornness, she has undisclosed animosity for the man who jilted her. All of the animosity in combination with her pride keeps her from forgiving. Disobeying God and refusing to forgive, Granny Weatherall is discontent with herself and reveals her spiteful nature. Granny Weatherall deserves her fate because she is spiteful, prideful, and stubborn.

Granny Weatherall is spiteful. The golden rule states, “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.” Granny Weatherall ignores God’s word and is openly unkind towards Doctor Harry. Doctor Harry goes to check Granny Weatherall’s vitals, and she rudely “flicked her wrist” at him in the beginning of the story (286). She nastily comments, “You look like a saint, Doctor Harry, and I vow that’s as near as you’ll ever come to it” (292). During Granny Weatherall’s final hours, her thoughts expose her spiteful nature towards the man who jilted her. In her unspoken final request, Granny Weatherall ponders, “Find him and tell him I forgot him. I want him to know I had my husband just the same and my children and my house like any other woman” (291). Though he jilted her, she desires him to know she had a good life without him. She is spiteful in wanting revenge for being jilted.

Granny Weatherall is also a proud woman. She prides herself in being able to care for herself. She yells at Doctor Harry, “I pay my own bills, and I don’t throw my money away on nonsense” (287). She is alluding to her daughter, Cornelia, keeping Doctor Harry present, even though Granny Weatherall believes that she is “a well woman” (286). During the time she lived with Cornelia’s family, Granny Weatherall often thinks during “her day she had kept a better house and had got more work done” (286). Granny Weatherall prides herself in her accomplished work. Being proud in the amount of trust her children place in her, “[s]he wasn’t too old yet for Lydia to be driving eighty miles for advice when one of the children jumped the track, and Jimmy still dropped in and talked things over” (288). The Proverbs state, “Pride cometh before the fall.” From her children to her bills, Granny Weatherall takes pride in her own menial accomplishments and ignores the proverbial warnings.

Granny Weatherall is not only spiteful and proud, but she is also stubborn. She is so insistent in her decisions that it affects her body. Years before her death, “[w]hen she was sixty she had felt very old, finished, and went around making farewell trips to see her children and grandchildren, with a secret in her mind: This was the very last of your mother, children! Then she made her will and came down with a long fever” (288). She decides it is her time to die. She wills her body into thinking it is dying. By living through the fever, the thought of death is removed from her mind for the next twenty years. In the midst of her final moments, Granny Weatherall finds herself with “[a] gain no bridegroom” (294). During this moment of Granny Weatherall’s passing, she feels jilted by God and exclaims, “Oh no, there’s nothing more cruel than this—I’ll never forgive it” (294). She refuses to forgive God, proving herself to be extremely stubborn.

Granny Weatherall’s inner battle with guilt, man, and God uncovers the raw thoughts of her consciousness. God commands forgiveness; it is not optional. Granny Weatherall chooses not to forgive. If light symbolizes heaven, Granny Weatherall turns her back on heaven. She states, “Better turn over, hide from the light, sleeping in the light gave you nightmares” (290). Having heaven’s light shine on her guilt-ridden conscience, Granny Weatherall is restless in the night. She is agitated with nightmares spurned from the truth of a sin-filled life. Being spiteful and unwilling to forgive through her stubbornness, Granny Weatherall seals her fate of eternal punishment.

**Work Cited**

I don’t really remember how I came to know about my neighbor’s treasure hold, but at some point I became aware and so began the notion. No significant plan had evolved for the idea brewing in my six-year-old mind, but I knew I had to be sneaky. My neighbor’s house was located up the hill directly behind mine with no dividing fence to keep out juvenile delinquents. Our small, shingle-sided house located on Ross Street was situated on a dead end. A wooded area, which we dubbed Sherwood Forrest, lay beyond where my friends and I spent many days exploring its borderlands and enchantments. This environment was rich for discovery with its tall trees, hanging vines, and winding paths that led into the great unknown. It provided the perfect background for re-enacting our favorite childhood stories. Perhaps our vivid imaginations were hyper-stimulated the day we played Robin Hood, pretending to “rob the rich to feed the poor,” for the event that follows would have made ole’ Rob proud.

The warm, summer day was perfect when I donned my feather hat and led my company of thieves on an adventure to plunder the neighbor’s carport. I assembled my posse of two other six-year-olds and headed out. We became enthralled in our mischievousness with no regard to the consequence that lay ahead. As I recall, our wily band of robbers made off with a croquet set, hula-a-hoop, basketball, wagon, badminton set, folding ladder, Frisbee, various buckets, and an ashtray on a pedestal. Without being detected, we made multiple trips from the neighbor’s house to mine, transporting our booty in broad daylight. We were lucky the sheriff of Nottingham wasn’t on duty that day.

After the deed was done, one accomplice questioned, “So now what are we going to do with it?” As the leader of this reprobate group, I decided for the time being we should conceal our goods. I selected a huge evergreen bush positioned at the end of the driveway. I assembled my posse of two other six-year-olds and headed out. We became enthralled in our mischievousness with no regard to the consequence that lay ahead. As I recall, our wily band of robbers made off with a croquet set, hula-a-hoop, basketball, wagon, badminton set, folding ladder, Frisbee, various buckets, and an ashtray on a pedestal. Without being detected, we made multiple trips from the neighbor’s house to mine, transporting our booty in broad daylight. We were lucky the sheriff of Nottingham wasn’t on duty that day.

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After the deed was done, one accomplice questioned, “So now what are we going to do with it?” As the leader of this reprobate group, I decided for the time being we should conceal our goods. I selected a huge evergreen bush positioned at the end of the driveway. My partners in crime helped me cram all the items as far under the limbs as possible, but to no avail. The evidence remained visible from any direction. We soon grew weary of trying to solve this issue and hung up our hats. Racing Big Wheels up and down the street became our new focus. All memories of our ill-gotten gain were put on hold as we resumed the virtuous play of childhood.

However, my attention was quickly alerted when my dad’s car approached the driveway. As I remembered the loot stashed away, the overwhelming need to hide washed over me. I sprang from my Big Wheel, dashed to my room, and crawled under the bed. In a few minutes, I heard my father enter the house and call out to my mom. “Hon, where did all that stuff come from under the hedge out front?” After she expressed no knowledge of the “stuff,” I was called out of my hiding place. My parents wanted to know if I knew anything about it. Since I was caught, I thought I might as well confess. “Yes, I know where it came from. I found it in the woods.” Knowing this was a plausible answer, I was shocked when my dad said he didn’t believe me. I felt confident that my story was legitimate, so I stuck with it. Nevertheless, I was sent to my room to “think about it.” Our small, two bedroom, wood floor house made it very easy for me to hear my parents discussing the issue in the next room. To my horror, I heard my dad say, “I guess we need to call the police and find out where these things belong.” Well, that was it! The fear of God grabbed hold of me and flung me into the hall. I ran into my parents’ room screaming, “NO! NO! Don’t call the police! I don’t want to go to jail! I took it from the man’s house out back.” I cried and cried repeating, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Then my dad scooped me in his arms and reassured me everything would be all right. He accompanied me as my sentence was carried out with a face-to-face confrontation with my victim. I was terrified, but at the same time comforted with my father at my side. I tapped on the door with my little girl hand and waited. My heart was pounding with dread as the door opened, revealing a skinny man with wire-rimmed glasses. I was surprised that he didn’t look like the menacing Prince John as I had imagined. With chagrin and tears on my cheek, I confessed in a shaky voice, “I’m so sorry I stole your
things.” My neighbor responded by asking, “What things?” As my father relayed what I had done, a gradual smile spread across my neighbor’s face. Apparently, the items I had taken were irrelevant because he was not even aware anything was missing from his carport. He assured my father the police need not be involved and accepted my apology. After I returned his belongings, the neighbor patted my head and sent me on my way.

The real meaning of this encounter did not surface for years to come. Right then, I was content the event was over, and I had been pardoned. As an adult, I realized this had been a pivotal point from my infancy to childhood. For the first time, I understood right from wrong. From that day forward, I thought about consequences on a regular basis, which gradually became an influential factor in future decisions. More significantly and perhaps most importantly, I had my first encounter with humanity and was exhilarated to be forgiven.
Criminal or Victim?

By: Lydia McCarty

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the defendant, Othello, pleads not guilty by reason of insanity to the first degree murder of Desdemona. It is clear that when the murder occurred, Othello was not in his right mind. Could a crazy man, suffering from epileptic fits, plot a murder against his own wife without someone poisoning his mind? Othello would not have murdered the wife he loved so dearly if it were not for his alleged friend, Iago, who manipulated andfooled him to the point of insanity.”

“Othello was a noble man, and he was regarded to have the utmost character in Venice. The Duke himself will attest to this. I’d like to call the Duke to the witness stand.”

“Is it true that you considered Othello to be an honest and virtuous man?”

“Yes, it is true. I even told Brabantio, ‘If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black’ (1.1.286-87). Brabantio was upset because of the marriage between Desdemona and Othello, but at the time, I do not think she could have found a more worthy man.”

“Do you believe that Othello loved Desdemona?”

“Yes, without a doubt. When accused of tricking Desdemona into marrying him by using magic, he professed how they had grown to love one another. He said, ‘She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them’ (1.3.166-67).”

“Thank you. With that, I would like to call my next witness, Lodovico. Lodovico, is it safe to say that the people of Venice and even the Senate considered Othello a capable, honest, and worthy general?”

“Yes, they did.”

“When you went to Cyprus to tell Othello that he would have to return to Venice, did he seem like the same capable, honest man?”

“No, he did not. I am not even sure if he was capable of being a general at that point. I remember asking Iago about his sanity.”

“Do you remember what exactly you asked Iago?”

“Yes. I said:

‘Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate Call all-in-all sufficient? This is the nature Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue The shot of accident nor dart of chance Could neither graze nor pierce?’ (4.1.249-53).”

“What was Iago’s response?”

“Iago said that Othello had ‘much changed’ (4.1.254).”

“Thank you, Lodovico. I want to call Emilia to the witness stand, please.”

“Emilia, how do you know Othello?”

“I know Othello through my husband, Iago. I was also good friends with Desdemona, and I was around her and Othello often.”

“Did you begin to notice a change in Othello?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What was your response to Othello’s change?”

“I told Iago and Desdemona: ‘I will be hanged if some eternal villain, Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,  
Have not devised this slander. I’ll be hanged else’  
(4.2.130-33).”

“In your opinion, who did the villain turn out to be,  
Emilia?”

“Iago.”

“Did your husband ever say anything to you about his  
plan against Othello?”

“No, he never directly said anything to me.”

“Then how did you find out about his plot?”

“I found a journal of my husband’s revealing his darkest  
secrets and his hatred for Othello.”

“Emilia, would you mind reading some of the things Iago  
wrote in the journal?”

“Yes. The first journal entry is dated shortly after Cassio  
had been promoted, and before we went to Cyprus. Iago  
writes:

‘The Moor is of a free and open nature  
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
And will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are’ (1.3.379-82).”

“Does Iago say anything about Desdemona in his journal?”

“Yes. Iago says about Desdemona:

‘Now I do love her too,  
Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure  
I stand accountant for as great a sin,  
But partly led to diet my revenge’ (2.1.270-73).”

“Can you skip ahead to a few days before the murder of  
Desdemona? What did Iago write, Emilia?”

“Just a few days before the murder, Iago wrote about how  
in a fit of rage Othello said that he wanted to murder Desde-  
mona with poison. Iago said his response to Othello was, ‘Do  
it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, even the bed she  
hath contaminated’ (4.1.191-92).”

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you just heard Iago’s  
own wife testify against him. I hold in my hand a journal  
written by Iago that clearly states the hatred he has for Othello  
and of his plan to use Desdemona to get revenge. What proof  
do you have of Othello planning such a horrific deed? The  
only thing you have heard about Othello is how respected  
he was, how much he loved his wife, and how drastically he  
changed. In a moment, you are going to decide the fate of this  
man, but before you do, I want you to hear what he has to say.”

“Othello, do you have anything that you want to say to  
the jury before they decide the verdict?”

“Speak of me as I am, nothing extenuate, / Nor set  
down aught in malice. Then must you speak / Of one that  
loved not wisely but too well’ (5.2.341-343).”

“Othello is not a criminal. He loved his wife dearly, and  
he was respected by all the people of Venice. Ladies and  
gentlemen of the jury, I beg you to see this man for what he  
is, a poor victim driven to insanity by the most villainous of  
creatures, evil and manipulative, Iago.”

**Work Cited**


**FEELINGS**

*By: Pamela Phelps*
July 19, 2004 changed my life forever. “It’s time to go,” my husband said. He had been called to duty. I woke our four-year-old daughter and put her in the car. With a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes, I drove him to the airport. There I was, faced with the overwhelming fear that I would never see him again. The events of that day taught me the true meaning of fear, love, and strength.

“Come on, Mommy! Come get us!” Mackenzie shouted in between laughter. Jeff had chased her down the long hall of floor-to-ceiling windows and empty air terminals. I had slowed my pace as I tried to wrestle with the rollercoaster of emotions I felt. The gate we needed was just ahead. After taking a deep breath, I pushed my fear aside and gathered the strength to force a smile and spend the last few minutes I had with him not bursting into tears.

As I stood in front of him, all I managed to say was, “You’re not allowed to die. Promise me you’ll come back alive.” We kissed and wiped away each other’s tears. Then it was Mackenzie’s turn to say goodbye. Witnessing my daughter’s confusion was absolutely gut-wrenching. “Why are you leaving, Daddy? Don’t you love us anymore?” she asked through streaming tears. Jeff tried to be strong, but his torment showed on his face. I had to pull her out of his arms and assure her, “Daddy loves us very much. This is his job, and he has to go. We’ll see him soon, I promise.” I had hoped I would be able to keep that promise. With tears in my eyes and great pride in my heart, I watched my soldier as he walked to the airplane.

“See those small windows of the plane? If you wave to Daddy, he’ll be able to see you.” That is what I told her, but I doubted it was true. She still had the streaks on her face from crying. I sat on the floor beside her and stared out those huge windows, waiting for that airplane to take my soldier away from me. I thought, “How am I going to do this? Am I strong enough?”

After what seemed like a lifetime, the plane slowly started to move away from the terminal. That is when my strength was put to the ultimate test. Mackenzie had started pounding on the glass with her fists. She screamed at the top of her lungs, “Daddy! Daddy! Come back! I love you! I’ll be good, I promise!” I tried to comfort her, but she was inconsolable. I sat with her in my arms until Jeff’s plane was out of sight. The weather on the drive home matched my mood. The clouds were dark, and big, heavy raindrops were falling from them. Mackenzie was still crying when she suddenly shouted, “Look, Mommy, a rainbow!” Off in the distance, I saw the sun peeking out from behind a cloud, and a rainbow had formed. As upset as I was, I could not help but smile. That rainbow was a reminder that no matter how dreary things get, there is always light at the end of the tunnel.

Seeing the rainbow, I came to the conclusion that I was strong enough to handle Jeff’s deployment. I had been called to duty. My love and pride for my husband and daughter would not let me crumble or fail. My fear was like the dark clouds and big, heavy raindrops. But I knew, no matter how great my fear was, my love and strength would shine through like a rainbow. The events of that day changed my life forever because I learned the true meaning of fear, love, and strength.
THE AND-ONE FINGER ROLL

By: Hunter Shelton

It came down to one final possession in the semifinals of the regional tournament. The star player on our team rebounded the missed shot that the opposing team was forced to take, and he tossed the ball to me further down the court. I dribbled the basketball down the hardwood floor as fast as possible with the clock winding down to the last seconds in the fourth quarter. My team was down by two points, and we only needed one field goal to tie the game to make it to overtime or a three-point shot to win the game. “Five… four… three…” the home crowd chanted as I sprinted my way past the half court line. Between the goal and me was one of the opposing team’s players who was much taller than I, and he was backpedaling towards the goal. No other teammates were close behind, so I was frightened to make a decision. “Two… one…” the crowd roared. I made my way into the painted area right beside the goal and used the spin move that I had practiced countless times during practice and rolled the ball off of the tips of my fingers. I fell to the ground and turned to watch the ball as if it were in slow motion. Miraculously, I had put just enough spin on the ball for it to hit the top corner of the layup box and curve its way right into the center of the basket. The time had expired on the clock, and the eardrum popping buzzer sounded. Not only had I made the basket and tied the game, but I was also fouled during the shot.

I had always been a very athletic kid growing up in the suburbs of a mid-sized city. Anything that was competitive and required physical activity was what I would spend my hot summer days or cold muggy winter nights doing. I lived in a neighborhood full of hot-headed and over confident kids. Any sport that we played together as young adolescents was a very big deal to us. At times we would get into physical fights over the right or the wrong calls. The biggest issue I faced growing up with those boys was that I was the smallest one of them all. I was at least two to three inches smaller than most and as skinny as a twig. This was a major problem considering the sport I enjoyed the most was basketball.

My family moved to the neighborhood long before any of the other kids and their families arrived. My brother and I used to shoot basketball every day after school and during summer break. Being close to six years older than me, he held the clear advantage because he was much bigger than I was. I never let the disadvantage stop me from trying my hardest to beat him. Our mother used to always tell me that dynamite comes in small packages just to boost my confidence. Time after time my brother would beat me and continue to rub it in until I would break down and start crying. I learned at a very young age that if I was ever going to beat people who were bigger than me, I would have to change the way I play the sport.

My brother and I watched the Harlem Globetrotters every chance we got. I admired how crafty they were with the ball and how they made their opponents look foolish with their elite basketball handles. Being as small as I was then, dribbling the ball was extremely difficult and putting it between my legs seemed as close to impossible as it was to beat my brother. I practiced this nifty trick every day until I could finally perform it just once. The excitement it brought to me was unimaginable. It felt as if I had conquered the tallest mountain on Earth and explored the deepest seas. From there I continued to practice until I became very fluid with running while dribbling the ball and performing nifty tricks.

Everything became very competitive whenever the other kids arrived in our neighborhood. Now that I wasn’t focused on only beating my brother, I got to experience the team aspect of the game. Very quickly I learned that I could not win games by myself. It seemed evident that I would always get put on the bad teams when the teams were chosen. As many times as I tried to win games single handedly for my team, I never succeeded. Losing made me miserable, so I had to find out new ways to play the game. It was only when I decided to stop playing so selfishly that I learned how the game is supposed to be played. Soon enough, everyone wanted to play on my team because of how I would get every teammate involved. I began to pass the ball with free will, and I gained trust in the other players that were on my team. Often, I would pass out of a wide open shot just to give my fellow
teammates a chance to score. Ball movement and communication were the keys to finding my way out of the horrid pits of being a loser.

There I stood beside the free throw line with my hands on my knees gasping for air while beads of sweat poured down my body. My legs and arms were shaking from the exhaustion I had never experienced before. The home crowd was cheering me on as I approached the free throw line. The referee bounced the ball toward me and held his right arm in the air to signal that I could take my shot. I gathered in a few deep breaths to prepare myself for the biggest shot of my career. I dribbled the ball twice before I took it into my hands to get ready to shoot. The entire gym had become soundless to me by this point because I was concentrating entirely on making this one shot. I made sure my form was set properly as I took in one final deep breath. Using the flush movement beginning with my legs and ending with a smooth release off of my wrist that my coaches had taught me, I tossed up what could be the potential game-winning shot. The ball arched up as it had many times during free throw drills in practice. I thought to myself that I had just won the game for my team, and a small gratifying grin appeared on my face. I watched the ball come down and hit the front of the rim one time and bounce back towards me. I fell to my knees and covered my face in shame as I felt I let my team down. The hard fought game was going to continue for five excruciating minutes of overtime, and it was all my fault. All of a sudden I heard my mom call my name. “Hunter!” I uncovered my face and raised my head to turn back and look at her. “It’s time to come inside and eat!” I picked myself up off of the dirt-covered driveway and shamefully made my way inside of the house. I had let my imagination down once again. For the first time I realized it was time to grow up and stop picturing things the way I imagined and start pursuing what I wanted to make of myself.
There's not an inch of my boyhood home I haven't seen, not an outdoors inch at least. My brother, our next-door neighbors, Ethan and Garrett, and I explored and named every field and stream, unearthed every rock, and climbed every branch of every tree. From the hidden field to the land beyond, from the rock crusher to the dog-leg piece, that land was our kingdom. We would trace the shabby creek from where it entered our pasture, over by the curve on Rock Springs Road, to the culvert where it ran under our driveway, on down to the confluence, in Ethan and Garrett’s woods, where it joined the mighty No-Business Creek. We had a whole world's worth of fun within shouting distance of the dinner table. A choice spot to play was in the back section of our pasture, in a sort of peninsula of trees surrounded by a grassy, wind-blown ocean. Beneath the bent trunk of an oak, bent like an old Indian trail tree, sat a large, flat, triangular rock like nature's attempt at an isosceles. Alone, either of these peculiarities warranted investigation, but together as they were it was demanded. We decided the only thing to do was to dig up the rock.

“What do you think’s down there?” I asked.

“It might be the Ark of the Covenant,” Ethan said. “They lost it way back in the Old Testament, and nobody’s found it since.”

This seemed reasonable. I mean, it shouldn’t take three-thousand years to find a big gold box like that; I guess God didn’t want it found, so while people were looking all over the Middle East and Africa, He hid it in Alabama. That sounded clever enough for God to do.

“Why, just imagine what people will say when we come into church with the real ark. Well, I guess we’ll have to share it. So we’ll take it Sunday, and y’all can take it next week,” Ethan said.

As much as I liked the idea of showing off the Ten Commandments and taste testing some manna, I thought there was probably gold under there instead. I figured when the Indians heard Desoto was coming, they built a secret under-ground chamber to hide all the gold in the state and forget where they put it, and once we got this rock up, there would be a huge stone staircase leading to the vault plumb-full of Indian treasure.

So, we took picks and shovels and tried to dig around the rock, but there were too many tree roots for that. Then we tried using the shovels like pry bars, but only managed to make a few handleless spades. We were exhausted and near surrender, until Ethan had an idea.

“Let’s get rope and throw it over the tree, then hang it under the edge of the rock. We can pull it right up then.”

I knew this would work, of course, because I knew about pulleys and how they quintupled a man's strength. We retrieved a blue nylon rope from the garage, folded it in two, tossed the looped end over the tree, and secured the rope under the lip at the point of the rock. Then we pulled, and pulled, and pulled some more. The rope slid side to side hurling bits of bark from the tree, but the rock was unfazed; we climbed the rope to use all of our weight; then we just dangled. Science failed us. The power that held the rock down was too strong. If Indians buried their gold there, I guess it will stay buried, at least until we find the secret tree hollow keyhole or learn how to say “open sesame” in Cherokee.
Repetition
By: Allen Kaylor

I couldn’t even remember my own name…

“Hey kid, wake up!” I looked down at my beaten and scarred hands in bewilderment. I was standing on a cook’s line of a restaurant with two other men who stared back at me. How did I get here?

“Look. The new guy’s here,” a voice said from a few feet away.

“Where am I?” I asked in a puzzled tone. The short and stalky guy with a rather large knot on his head looked at his lanky companion in amusement, then looked back at me with a toothy grin.

“Hell, or the closest thing to it any way.” He responded.

He continued to flip random assortments of meat on the grill that reeked of mold and putrid flesh. I began to walk to the door to try and leave when the stalky man barked at me, “Don’t leave just yet! This is the busiest we’ve been all year!” The lanky man laughed at what appeared to be the stalky man’s version of a joke. I peeked through the door to find something strange, or at least, what I remembered to be strange. The place was packed, but not with living humans. Every seat in the house was taken by a corpse. The strange thing was, their faces looked almost familiar.

Outside of the window was nothing but endless desert and a long stretch of highway. I wasn’t sure where I was, but I knew I had to get out of that place. I bolted for the door, leaving behind the loud, belch-like laughter of the stalky man. I ran across the little patch of sand and rust-colored dirt to the highway and stopped in the road just to grab a sense of direction.

A loud horn roared as a Mack truck plowed through me. My mind began to race through memories in still frame pictures and partial clips. I saw my family laughing and playing games in our yard. I saw my darling wife in her polka dot dress baking brownies with the kids. The roaring in my ears grew louder and louder as the memories flooded my consciousness, but suddenly the memories began to rewind twice as fast as they came. I began to lose all the memories all together and felt my mind begin to rush away from me.

The swooshing sound began to fade. I looked around my surroundings to find myself standing on a cook’s line. “Where am I?” I questioned. A short stalky man with a rather large knot on his head looked over at me with a toothy grin and answered, “Hell, or the closest thing to it.”

Loss
By: Jo Petersen

I couldn’t even remember my own name…

“Where am I?” I asked in a puzzled tone. The short and stalky guy with a rather large knot on his head looked at his lanky companion in amusement, then looked back at me with a toothy grin.

“Hell, or the closest thing to it any way.” He responded.
A MOMENT TO REMEMBER  
*By: Bethany Boydstun*

It was a wistful autumn evening. The color of fall half clothed the trees. The wind danced in sensual sweeps, slowly seducing the slender limbs. All this in comfort, I observed beyond a window. The glass had not been cleaned in a while. I had been occupied with more important matters. One of these matters is currently asleep in my arms. The one month old breathed gently while wrapped in a pink fuzzy blanket. What a needy little thing! I did not comprehend the amount of attention, time, and care required for this bundle. I sat exhausted and sleep deprived. I couldn’t bring myself to move. How could I? She slept soundly. I’d rather watch this new child in her peaceful euphoria than escape into my own. Her cares are immediate. She has no concept of the future. If she did have worries, hers would not amount to mine. Suddenly, my choices are not my own, but will affect her life as well. How can I live with this child relying on me to make the right choices? I still second guess myself at stop signs! I will be held accountable for the both of us. I make the decision, and the consequences will be shared. As I looked on the face of this sleeping child, panic began to rise from the depths of my soul. That second at the point of no return, her lips spread thin between two chubby cheeks. The fibers of my being relaxed with a tranquility I have never known. My fears vanquished in the briefest of seconds by a smile.

BLUEBERRY STAINS  
*By: Brooke Alexander*
The speaker in Billy Collins’s poem “The Revenant” is a deceased dog castigating his owner from the afterlife. The following passage is a response to an assignment asking students to write from the point of view of an animal or an object addressing someone.

**THE PENCIL**

*By: Marnie Tabor*

Feeling appreciated is a rare thing these days. If you have ever been replaced by modern technology, then you can relate. You exist for hundreds of years serving a vital role to mankind. One in which you feel very secure. I mean, written communication is always going to be necessary. So, who would have imagined a world where something like me, your pencil, would become obsolete? First, someone had the bright idea that ink was better just because it was more durable. But do you really want something that is permanent so your mistakes cannot be undone? Next came this contraption you are using right now. Why? So that you can compose words faster with fewer mistakes? What is so great about a … what do you call it, a “back space”? Don’t you miss the old familiar feel of a wooden stick in your hand, the smell of fresh wood shavings and lead, and how about my dainty pink end that wiggles back and forth as you gracefully transcribe? What’s that you say? I gave you callouses? What do you mean that I had a habit of breaking apart? I really don’t see how my dwindling away to nothing is relevant. Well, maybe I do see your point. I couldn’t keep one, huh? Ha. Oh well, at least I’m not lonely here in the drawer. I have the company of all the other unused pencils that you have seemingly forgotten. We’ll just continue rolling around in here, reminiscing about the good ole days and patiently waiting for when we are reunited. Good day to you my friend. May your p.c. crash and your pens run dry.

**WINDY DUNES**

*By: Sallie Estes*
In August of 2014, Dr. Beck’s retirement was announced. We, the editors of The Muse, sat down with the President of Calhoun Community College, Dr. Marilyn Beck in November of 2014. As it was so close to the holiday of Thanksgiving, we asked President Beck what she was thankful for.

“Family, friends, the College. This College is my College. I hope you say the same thing. This great North Alabama region we live in, very thankful for that. Within the great region, we have the different communities, but we kind of run together. Because what’s good for one community is almost always good for the other community. I see the region in the future almost being as one.”

When asked to name her greatest achievement during her tenure here, she admitted that such a question is difficult to answer. To put it in her words, “People are the priority.” Indeed, throughout the interview Dr. Beck’s focal point was both students and faculty. There are, of course, new buildings, but in Dr. Beck’s opinion they are a far second to the students.

“When I talk about enrollment, I see people. I see faces. When we see a higher number of enrollments, we see a larger number of people who are here to make a better life for themselves and their families.”

Dr. Beck has some advice for the students of Calhoun Community College: Achieve your dreams because they are truly within your reach. Never fear asking other people to help you achieve those dreams.

We asked Dr. Beck what she hopes for Calhoun’s future. According to Dr. Beck, Calhoun Community College’s future is a positive one and one of growth and development. Dr. Beck hopes that Calhoun Community College will continue to expand programs to provide education and training to meet the workforce needs of the community. In addition, she spoke to the importance of continuing to offer quality education for Calhoun Community College’s students. “The students come here because we do...And they know they can transfer and be successful anywhere else. Stu-
Students who make A’s here tend to make A’s at other places.”

The Annual Writers’ Conference has brought many great literary artists to Calhoun Community College. When we asked Dr. Beck if she had a favorite, her response was quick. “Billy Collins, wasn’t he just a thrill?” Dr. Beck praised this year’s program as an undoubted success and commended the faculty and staff responsible.

To her successor, when asked to leave some advice, she encourages that he/she take time to know the people, the college, individual strengths and weaknesses, and create a plan to use the talent here at the college and in the community to take Calhoun to the next level.

Dr. Beck, a self-described “Type A” personality, plans to transition from her position, with no definite plans. She sees this change not as a retirement, but a chance to continue to be productive, work, enjoy life, and spend more time with her grandchildren.

Marilyn Beck Day

By: Andrew Terry

The event to memorialize the ground breaking for the new building on Calhoun’s Huntsville campus was also a chance to wish farewell to Calhoun’s long time president Dr. Marilyn Beck. Professors, public servants, and Dr. Beck’s friends and family filled the vast space of the converted entryway of the present Huntsville building to standing room only capacity. Beck was repeatedly praised for her contributions and commitment to Calhoun and the communities surrounding it, and for the previous expansions she oversaw in the refurbishment of the main campus and the Alabama Center for the Arts in downtown Decatur, a collaborative effort with Athens State University. Dr. Beck was presented with many honors, plaques, and awards from city and state officials. A scholarship bearing her name will now be permanently endowed. Marilyn Beck Day, as December 5th was declared by Huntsville Mayor Battle, proved to be a perfect tribute to the woman who has done so much in Calhoun’s past and laid the groundwork for its future.

Review: Martin Luther King, Jr. Chorale Performance

By: Victoria Grigsby

On Wednesday, January 21, I had the pleasure of sitting in on the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration program hosted by the Black Students’ Alliance. This event began with the Calhoun Community College choir singing two songs in remembrance of Dr. King. This was their first performance of the 2015 school year. The program began with a few opening remarks and then the singers, along with their director Mr. Granville Oldham, Jr., were welcomed onto the stage.

Some new faces could be seen among the forty or so students, but the majority were the same who had performed in the Christmas program the preceding semester. The singers stood confidently and patiently, waiting for their cue to begin. Then they lit up as soon as the song began with a chorus of four sections in diverse vocal ranges. Their first song, “I want Jesus to Walk with Me,” was performed with three soloists, a Bass and two Sopranos, while the rest of the choir sang in the background. This first song was reminiscent of the African American spirituals that helped shape the gospel, and even jazz music that we love today.

The last song they performed was entitled “Good News” and gave the feeling of a traditional gospel choir with the Tenor soloists adding the familiar element of a barbershop quartet. After singing the final notes of their last song, the choir left the stage, ending the performance. Though having only sung two songs, they left a lasting impression on the audience, contributing greatly to the program while respectfully remembering the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I am certainly looking forward to hearing more from our Calhoun Community College Chorale this Spring semester, and many more to come.
14th Annual Writers’ Conference
By: Francisca Cupido

The Writers’ Conference was well organized and artfully presented by two-time United States Poet Laureate Billy Collins, who is obviously a master of his craft. During the initial phase, the presenter poked fun at himself. This put the audience at ease. I was surprised by his humility and by his ability to integrate his life experiences with the stories he told. The audience applauded as he began and at several subsequent points as he proceeded. Judging from their gleeful responses, I would conclude that the presentation was enjoyed by all.

The moments of laughter and applause were ones which were appropriate to the material being presented. He held our attention, and his voice soothed us into relaxed attention, while he kept us laughing. While reading his poem “Lucky Cat,” his skill was demonstrated when he took something with which we are so familiar, the circle, and used two of them to represent the eyes of a black cat as it approached. As it receded, we were made to visualize the single circle just beneath its raised tail, as it attempted, in my estimation, to scent-mark the owner. The owner had become the “owned.” The point was keenly appreciated by all those who were paying attention.

When he read the now familiar poem “The Lanyard,” he succeeded in taking a lanyard, a mother and a son, and gave them importance, achieving a level of humor which was, for that audience, greater than the sum of the parts. It succeeded in communicating that there are some things that do not seem equivalent when we attempt to repay favors granted. Yet their importance in any exchange has more to do with the value the giver places on the thing being offered, than on matching the equivalent value of the original gift. Although the lanyard seemed to be a trivial gift, coming from a son to whom life had been given, to a mother, the life-giver, it was the greatest creation of his entire life so far. He was not just “making a contribution,” but in a sense “giving his all,” just as the pig had done in Howard Nemerov’s poem “Bacon and Eggs,” which Mr. Collins recited. The chicken contributes to breakfast, but the pig gives his all.

The part of the presentation that impressed me the most, because of its depth, had to do with the poem “The Dead.” According to the speaker, departed souls were thought of as looking down at us from above as they rowed eternally across the heavens. When we lay down to sleep, with our faces turned upwards, they stop rowing, look down through the glass ceiling of eternity’s endless ocean and wait for us to fall asleep so that they can begin to communicate with us. My periods of sleep have dramatically increased since attending the conference.

In the final phase, during which Mr. Collins was interviewed by Dr. Randy Cross, again the professionalism and the ease he had with himself and with his craft came through. When Dr. Cross was late getting to the stage, Mr. Collins did not make this a protracted awkward moment, but used this opportunity to create humor. He began to interview himself. Brilliant. It was more than I could have managed, given the same set of circumstances. I am still wondering if he was deeply serious, or seriously deep.
My Bonnie and Her Billy Collins
By: Bethany Boydstun

Applause filled the Princess Theatre of Decatur, Alabama, with an exuberant force. It was a long anticipated night. Slowly, the audience members fell into a line wrapping around corners and hallways to have their books signed by the former U. S. Poet Laureate. Only an hour ago, he stood before the crowd of three hundred and shared his famous musings.

Splendid, as they were, there was one audience member who was quite antsy to meet her “new friend.” Four-year-old Bonnie Mae memorized Billy Collins’s poem “Dancing Toward Bethlehem.” As Bonnie’s mother, I help her memorize Bible verses and nursery rhymes all the time. This poem was not difficult for her to learn. It was difficult to catch on camera. After much rehearsing, I finally caught it. Not long after that, I posted it on YouTube to show my fellow classmates.

The Writers’ Conference Committee at Calhoun Community College had been holding meetings and meetings and making calls on calls to set up this magnificent two-night event. A member of the board, Dr. Sheila Byrd, wished that Bonnie meet with Billy Collins during the conference. Dr. Byrd worked out a time. I told Bonnie about meeting the poet. She was star struck. “I get to meet my Billy Collins,” she told everyone we met. She could hardly sit still while Mr. Collins was on stage.

As the audience had migrated into a line, our little group was whisked away down a hall to a green room. Bonnie was finally getting to meet him. Once in the room, silence fell over us. There was Mr. Collins standing with Calhoun’s Dr. Rhea, Dr. Cross, and Dr. Byrd. Bonnie walked right up and said, “You are Billy Collins.”

Mr. Collins smiled. “Yes, I am. Who are you?”

“I am Bonnie Mae.”

Mr. Collins smiled again and offered her a seat. They sat down at a table and talked awhile. Bonnie’s shyness had dissipated.

In this moment, I was not myself. I forgot about everything except these two people in front of me. As they sat at this table, both were talking casually and easily like friends. I did not have my camera out. I did not think to take pictures. I was immersed in the moment.

Mr. Collins signed and gave Bonnie a poem. She was elated and thanked him. He stood up, as it was time to head over to the book signing table. He patted my shoulder and said, “Well done, Mom.” Those few, but encouraging words will come to mind every time Bonnie mentions “her” Billy Collins. Both Bonnie and I will never forget this night.

The 2014 Writers’ Conference was a lovely event. I appreciate all the time and energy the Calhoun’s Writers’ Conference Committee sacrificed to bring Billy Collins to Alabama. It was a tremendous feat. I applaud them. They made it possible for Bonnie to meet “her” Billy Collins.

REVIEW: Aquila Theatre Company’s The Tempest at the University of North Alabama
By: Stephen Sheffield

This March, members of Calhoun’s Sigma Kappa Delta chapter attended a presentation at the University of North Alabama of the Aquila Theatre Company’s production of William Shakespeare’s The Tempest. Prospero, played by James Lavender, appeared on stage before the play began. Pacing back and forth, he showed a troubled and toiling old man. When the curtain rose, Prospero became invigorated and jumped into his sorcery. Throughout the production, Lavender excelled in his depiction of both the kind father and the righteous mages. Duality was common, as the majority of the cast played two roles. Fool and king, Rupert Baldwin, was able to deftly swing between the grieving Alonso and the absurd Trinculo. Michael Ring played both the dark-hearted Antonio as well as the comical inebriate Stephano with gusto. Carys Lewis stood out in her portrayal of the loyal spirit Ariel more so than her Gonzalo, not only because of the role’s demand for her beautiful voice, but also because of her heartfelt exchanges with Prospero. Of all these dual performances, most interesting was that of Joseph Cappellazzi’s Caliban/Ferdinand. The idea of the same actor playing the monster Prospero protects his daughter from, as well as the young man he intends for her to marry seemed at first odd. However, when Caliban took the stage, with his crude and pitiable nature, it was as though another actor had entered the play. Tara Crabb, who also sang, was excellent as Miranda. Her interactions with Ferdinand were sincere and humorous. In addition to the fantastic work done by the cast, the stage, sound, and lighting contributed heavily to the quality of the performance. It was a marvelous spectacle of light and sound. It was all exquisitely lovely, with the exception of a few audience members. Perhaps we will all be so lucky as to one day encounter a “brave new world” without so many ringing cell phones.
As I walked towards Calhoun’s Black Box Theatre, I was mentally preparing myself to watch “The Comedy of Errors: The Musical.” Although it was a Shakespearean comedy, I did not have high expectations. I knew of a few student performers. I saw the interesting looking advertisements. Honestly, the idea of a musical had me cringing. Needless to say, I was truly expecting an amateur performance.

“The Comedy of Errors: The Musical” uses popular songs from Meghan Trainor, Colbie Caillat, and Fergie to assist in telling the story of Shakespeare’s shortest play. The story follows a loving couple, their twin sons, and their sons’ twin servants. Shakespeare twists our heart strings and has fate separate the family. Thus, many comical and lively events take place while one half of the family searches for the other half.

In the Calhoun’s Black Box, the theatre was shockingly unnatural. The stage ran the length of the theatre by cutting the audience in half. When facing away, their voices carried around the room. The actor, who played the merchant Egeon, Kyle Vel lacott-Ford’s voice was powerful and boisterous. Surprisingly, the sounds were harmoniously in sync with the delivered lines on stage.

The opening scene of the play assured me that these performers were well versed. Although the audience was in two, the performers spoke to each side in turn. When facing away, their voices carried around the room. The actor, who played the merchant Egeon, Kyle Vel lacott-Ford’s voice was powerful and boisterous. Surprisingly, the sounds were harmoniously in sync with the delivered lines on stage.

The music and singing were outstanding. The performers enunciated well and projected their voices. The songs were an interesting choice. The lyrical changes were perfect for the story line. The whole cast sounded excellent.

Calhoun’s Black Box Theatre is an intimate experience. Audience members are right in the midst of the action. The characters are close and real. Movements and facial expressions are only a few feet away. I found myself getting absorbed in the play.

Kai Alexander Ealy, the actor who played Dromio of Syracuse, would occasionally break the fourth wall. The fourth wall is defined as “the space that separates the performers from the audience.” Ealy would break the metaphorical wall and bring me back from my suspension of disbelief.

Against the Current:
Life-Changing Literature

By: Stephen Sheffield

Calhoun’s Sigma Kappa Delta President and Muse co-editor, Stephen Sheffield was selected as one of four students from across the nation to present at SKD’s 2014 National Convention in Savannah, Georgia. His delivery of the following presentation was both eloquent and insightful.

Wicked by Gregory McGuire, takes L. Frank Baum’s Land of Oz and twists it into a dark, mesmerizing world of political, theological, and ethical enchantment. Here the Wizard is the villain and the witch is the hero. While reading itself has and continues to change my life, this book in particular has changed my perspective. Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West, is wicked to the core. However, her wickedness is her best feature.

Elphaba, the green-skinned, sharp-featured and hydrophobic heroine of this story, spends her youth as a minister’s daughter. She eventually finds herself at Shiz University where she becomes roommates with Glinda, future Good Witch of the North, and begins a close, personal relationship with a Goat.

Dr. Dillamond, professor of Life Sciences at Shiz, is one of the many sentient Animals in Oz. Under the rule of the Wizard, Animals are losing their rights. After Dillamond is murdered, Elphaba steps away from her former life and becomes a revolutionary. Because she will not take part in a corrupt system that supports and implements discrimination, Elphaba is branded wicked. Here wickedness is closer related to disobedience and rebellion than evil.

This book has taught me that when one chooses to stand against the current, one runs the risk of being labeled as wicked. To King George III, the American colonists must have seemed very wicked indeed, but without their willingness to defy the establishment we would not have our country. Wicked has also taught me that to do good things, one does not need to be perceived as being good. Most importantly, Wicked has taught me that when it comes to judging goodness vs. wickedness it is not always black and white. Sometimes it is green.
Our Warhawks

By: Bethany Boydstun

On February 10, 2015, I had the opportunity to attend Calhoun’s Lady Warhawks’ softball game. Upon entering the stands, one could tell the overall calm was paced. The Lady Warhawks were focused. Today was a good day. The sky was clear, the field was fresh, and their opponent, Northeast Mississippi, was ready.

At the start of the game, I was shocked at the thunderous noise from our opponent’s dugout. It took me back to my younger years, when my softball friends would chant at opposing players. But this, this was a force to be reckoned. It was a constant chattering distraction. It struck me. This is not a little league or even a high school game. This is college. Those are rivals. This game is going to be good.

Later that week, my accomplice in crime, Dr. Rhea, gave out questionnaires to a handful of Calhoun’s athletes. I was not sure what to expect from this, but the response was wonderful! I really appreciate all our athletes who took time out of their busy schedules to respond to our prying inquiry.

Many of Calhoun’s athletes have had more than a decade of experience. The Lady Warhawks’, Shelby Miller (Third Baseman #14) wanted to be just like her older brother, so she got into the game when she was only four! Another young player, Raven Wade (Outfielder #2) stated, “I wanted to play every sport possible at the age of five.”

As a fulfilling and fast-paced game, softball and baseball are the right sports to play. William Woller (Second Baseman #2) stated, “[I] started with tee ball and haven’t stopped.” There is no argument. Calhoun’s athletes have spent a chunk of their lives on the field, between the bases, and in the dugout. That is a large amount of time to invest in anything, but not all the players started out the same way.

In fact, Morgan Bailey (Outfielder #7) started playing because her “mom played in high school and college.” Here at Calhoun, Morgan took the opportunity to follow in her mother’s footsteps. Another player with parental influence is Blakely Stephenson (Catcher #10). Blakely wrote, “My dad played and always wanted me to play, so he taught me and I fell in love with the game.” When Blakely’s father passed away, she kept playing “to keep his legacy” alive.

This season has not been easy for everyone. The Lady Warhawks’ Ashley Hart (Second Baseman #6), had shoulder surgery in November. Even though Ashley has not fully recovered, she is still incredibly involved. While not much fun and definitely one of her least favorite activities, Ashley perseveres through the bone chilling weather to take up ticket money for the games.

Throughout the season, there is not one rival to look forward to playing. Ashley will tell you, “All the teams in our conference are rivals to us.” It is not just a game to these players. It is their job to win. Calhoun’s athletes take their roles seriously. When preparing for a game, Ashley writes, “making sure your mental game is focused” is one of the hardest parts. Another difficulty, pointed out by Grant Warner (Pitcher #32) is the complexity to know the opponent. Not everyone gets too stressed out about game days, though. Drake Whitten’s hardest preparation for a game is “trying to decide what pre-game music” he wants to hear. Anxiety, some people just do not have it.

Warhawks’ pitcher #19, Tanner Reed’s hardest preparation is settling the nerves. Luckily, Tanner has a favorite pregame meal: chicken fingers! According to our questionnaires, chicken and Gatorade appear to be the ultimate pre-game meal.

The Lady Warhawks defeated Northeast Mississippi 10-4 that day. It was a great game. If you are looking for something to do on campus, I would highly recommend going to a game. All the sports’ events are on the Calhoun’s campus calendar. Come out and support our Warhawks!