MUSE 2010

A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff, and alumni.
Foreword:

Welcome to this year’s Muse, a unique combination of literary journal and student newspaper.

The first part of this publication celebrates poetry, essays, short stories, artwork, and photography by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The second part, which we call The Musepaper, includes articles by our students about life around our campuses during the 2009-2010 school year.

Our editorial staff, composed of faculty from the Decatur and Huntsville campuses, hopes that you will be inspired by our creative efforts and stimulated by accounts of our campus events. Here is a time capsule from us to you. Enjoy!

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Chief Editor/Language & Literature Faculty

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The Swan Child
by Samuel Anderson

A voice called out from the ocean, off the coast of the Irish Sea: “My father my king where are you now? Do you even remember me?”

Her voice broke like the waves of the ocean, as she strained to reach the sand: “An evil wind blows me back,” she cried, “I will never touch the land.”

“Three hundred years I have mourned, three hundred years off Ireland’s shore... Where gray faced clouds look down in scorn, and thundering storm-giants war...

I see the land and it seems so close, so I fly until I can fly no more... But these feathers are not the human clothes that I shed so many years before...

So I will stay in the wind and storms, from brow to wingtips beaten sore... Where no hands can comfort and no fire warms, and no prayer can match this ocean’s roar...

Lost from my father, a servant to the weathers; On the sea with my brothers, tucked beneath my feathers...

Home in my dreams, awake on the sea; Without walls or shackles, but never free...

Storms to the North Rain in the South, Fed on the fish from the ocean’s mouth...

Alba to the East, Banba to the West, Forever wandering from crest to crest.”

Over the Edge
Illustration by Chris Wade
The Big Picture
by Dan Byford

I do not know
how many angels can dance
on the head of a pin
but I imagine it would be as many
as the Big Kahuna said on any given day
and that with the pointy end
just as many demons could be skewered
as they sat around cracking smoke and sniggering.

I wonder if you get a job in heaven
or if it, too, suffers unemployment at times
and you have to just sit around blissfully
watching the stars come and go
or visiting with dead relatives and friends
or playing with all your former dogs and cats
and that pony you rode when you were a kid.

I wish I could reach into the past someday,
maybe through my mirror
so I could slap myself awake right now.
And that I could ask God for a favor or two about wisdom
and splitting the baby between time and money.

And how about that expanding universe?
Lights floating across an ocean of nothing?
And where did that entire nothing zero in from anyway?

And if I am one way the cosmos can see itself
I sure wish it would take time
to bang out a nice, neat self portrait.
My Mother Goes Deep-Sea Diving
by Dan Byford

Every night my mother goes deep-sea diving.
She dons her sleepsuit, her heavy socks, slips on her mask,
straightens her airline, and climbs onto her platform
for another freefall into that unfathom ed realm.
Often she descends the beautiful reefs of happy memory
or drifts aimlessly with unschooled metaphors in the submerged delta.
Sometimes she plucks a childhood relic,
kaleidoscoping it up toward ghostly moonlight,
or she nets an heirloom feeling or spears half-buried broached subjects.
Sometimes the dark current gives up only an old tennis shoe
or a rusty, crumpled license plate from Michigan.
Or maybe she goggles a giant clam-of-plenty filled with people
from the present all mixed up in the swirling, implacable yesteryears.
Occasionally she sees my dead father wandering the depths
but he is usually working hard on something,
like staggering a huge tumbleball of seaweed up a vast scree
or plundering dark bottles heaped in a pirate chest,
so she doesn’t want to bother him as he passes.
Her plunges are mostly pleasant, buoy of life stuff.
But they can be work. Tiresome. Just another night at the bottom of the ocean.
I worry sometimes when she doesn’t come up on time. I watch for the bubbles.
I listen for signs. Once or twice I felt icy fingers reaching for her from the abyss.
And I called down for her. Come up, mama. Come on, rise and shine.
But I know again tonight she will say, well, time to suit up again.
Swan
by Maria Lofgren Coble

Writing,
I am a swan,
Stepping awkwardly
Through the weeds in my brain
In search of a bit of bread,
A morsel to nourish my story,
Something solid to build details on.

A swan,
Skimming on the surface of life
Observing the water
Not yet diving deep,
Watching,
Waiting,
Floating,
My movement seems effortless
But beneath,
Paddling like crazy.
Moving, moving the water
Seeking, always seeking
That well of inspiration.

A swan:
Diving deep
Immersing myself.
Darting fast,
Chasing the muse of fish.
Quick,
He’ll get away!
Must go deeper,
Deep into the mud of memory
Seeking through the weeds of life
For that lively one,
To capture as my own.
What will I catch today?

A swan
Soaring on creativity when it blows.
Swooping in metaphor,
Fighting against the winds of emotion
Typing through the rain of tears
Far above my problems.
Perspective when removed
The paper of sky giving me distance,
Flying on the wings of words,
Soon I must land
But oh, the ride!

A writer:
A swan.

Photo by LaKota Hutto (Nature by Love of the Passion series)

Linda’s Gift
Illustration by Mary Nelle Black
8x8 oil
A Thumpin’ House Mix for DJ Prufrock
by William R. Hargrove
(With thanks and apologies to T.S. Eliot)

I went roaming coastal low rent dives
When the evening was darkening the sky
While wanting more and feeling less alive.
Logan’s restaurants with peanut shells
Clubs and bars with empty drinks to sell

Yet here there was a crowd growing amid the streets
And I could hear the thumping beats.
That led me to ask “What is it?”
Perhaps I should go pay a visit.

And as all these women come and go
Twittering each other of this new Michelangelo

Weary of the things that held me back,
I went and heard the fresh sounds of wicked tracks.
Spinning by a DJ who lived a life unleashed.
There was a musical dervish madman on the beach.

Onwards into the party lights and din,
I made my way through this throng and sin.
And I stood before the wild DJ man with mad skills.
His pulsing rhythm choices were all chill.

Dozens of babes longed to be next
He would stop his rhymes and play backbeats
Long enough to taste that peach treat
That threw herself on his turntable
Taking body shots from her navel.

Just then I wished I could be such a man
Who could grab Life by the hand
And say, “Hey, Sweet Thang, tonight we just gonna’
Dance and dance and dance…”

Amazed I stood and looked at him
Although he was maybe five foot ten
He was lean and muscular and tan
Defined by rolled cuff white linen pants.

And as all these women come and go
Twittering each other of this new Michelangelo

His proud bald head caught the lights
Reflecting colorful strobes into that party night
Then his eyes met mine and he grinned
A wide wolfish grin.

He smoothly flipped another piece of wax
And laid down some funky tracks,
With a whirl he spins and leaps
Landing smoothly at my feet
“C’mon, man, and take a walk with me.”
His Brit accent did dismay as my own fears did delay me
From my next and fateful step.

“Time is not your friend, mate.” He clapped my shoulder hard
“Follow me.” As he made motion to afar.
My movement was unsure
As we moved in unison
And his grace outmatched my uncertainties.

We stepped away from the merrymaking crowd
The DJ made an exaggerated bow
Making promises to return adoring fans saluted back a rebel’s howl.

The cheers and laughter grew dim
As I walked away with him
Wondering next what this night would reveal
This DJ had a secret he did tell.

J.A. Prufrock was his name
He said he understood my pain
And he saw the look in my eyes
That he once wore my guise
But now all that had changed
He said, “Once I was trapped a pompous clown
By the spoonfuls of emo sadness I was drown.
Sea-girls in seaweed brown and red
Did come to mourn me as a thing dead.”

“The laughing eternal Footman then came near
And asked me in his twisted cheer
Did I have any last requests?
Or want to have over any guests?
Before I took my one last long goodbye.”

“Then it hit square and true
I had put off life and what I wanted to do
Held back by kid fears and silly creeds
Kept me from greatness and daring deeds.”

“So I told The Footman you will have to wait my friend
For all will see you in the end
But Life calls me back from your dark domain
And doubt if I shall ever be the same.”

“So now I play upon the sands
Dare the sea and shore in white pants
Taste the peaches sweet and deep
In wild abandon and divine release.”

“I shaved my balding head and cast vanity aside
Then gave up on foolish pride
Where an attendant lord once I mistook
Now stands a Prince of his own storybook.”

“Yet I do still grow older with age
There is much more to do before I end my time on the page
And have other places I want to see and things to be.
So I have a question for you.
Will you now DJ for me?”

“Throw off those things that hold you back
Lighten your load and relinquish your worrying pack
Cares of other’s thoughts and tiny fears
Can build a strong cage as they layer upon the years.”

“Now that cage door is open wide
Cross the threshold to the other side
What is on the other side of fear?
The answer is you, simple and clear.”

How could I dare to do what this DJ Prufrock did do?
Yet I could hear the music playing as if from another room
Taking a step forward was a pace away from my subtle doom.
Crossing past my fear then my own words came to me and I would play them loud and free.

I strode the sand and shook his hand
Relishing this strength shared, man to man.
J.A. Prufrock the DJ, at last understand.

We set each other free that night
Newborn friends trying to get Life right.
He is now the Prince upon his stage
And my humble words dance upon the page.

So any night you might find me now
Plying my talent to a crowd.
Spinning words and crafting rhymes
Even if they aren’t yet in perfect time.

And Life...
It’s what you make of it
Just make sure fear doesn’t make you quit.

Future Ahead
Illustration by Lynn H. Weatherford
16x20 oil
Fertile Expectations
by Mildred Keel

Fat leaves hang heavily on swollen trees gorged on Autumn rain

Red, yellow, orange, and green towering ominously above the fertile black ground

Like pregnant women lined up in rows along the highways and hills

October bellies burst with colors so vibrant they labor in due time

The year sheds its lush life dropping Spring’s nourishment

March will till it under for April to dampen and see May blush again.
Grandmother’s Mimosa
by Mildred Keel

I had never seen helicopter leaves, as we used to call them, fallen from the tree still green. When we would stand courageously atop Grandmother’s Mimosa tree and drop them two by two to the moist Spring ground below, the helicopter leaves were always brown dried and ready to begin their flight of fertilization.

When we were young, green like the leaves, now laying heavy on the black dirt, we did not understand why these transparent leaves, a seed on one end, an angel wing on the other, were created as they were. We audaciously thought God had made them only for our enjoyment.

Years later
I wonder
do the green ones fall
as gracefully as the brown?
I stop and stare
my feet daring to climb
atop the steps
grasping a handful of the green foliage and watch as they fall flittering, floating
down to the ground below.

Instead
I freeze
for a moment
consider my childhood
those days so long ago
and I walk away
to complete the adult tasks
I feel are so much more important than helicopter leaves on wet Spring dirt.

Becoming Classic
Bailey Lovell

I want to be an intellectual great like Atticus Finch, an educated man devoting my life to reform, all the while inspiring those I love with my character and heart.

I want to stop my life at a single point like Miss Havisham. Avoiding future heartbreak, I will cease living, choosing instead to only exist. No one can hurt me if I refuse to live.

I will become simplistic and bright, A Huckleberry Finn of modern times. Running away on a riverbend, Discovering that others have emotions, thoughts, and fears, Like me.

Jane Austen will overcome me, the best and worst overly romantic thinkers of our times. She will love me and I will love her. Together, we will be appreciated.

The song of the nightingale will become my own personal infinity. I will enter its world and dance in the breezes of Heaven.

These worlds—
These people—
These stories—
A part of me. They reside in my heart, my mind, my spirit. Like them, I will live forever in the hearts of those whom I have loved and who have loved me.

Illustration by Shanna Wren
The Lying Table
by Amanda Ringer

A new display at the bookstore announces you can improve your mental health and mind’s longevity by buying their books of crosswords, games, and puzzles. These are guaranteed, promised, to prevent the dreaded disease, dementia. They can prevent the decline, help delay decay. You can buy their books, believing, hoping, that the lie may be true, that the “results not typical” does not apply to you. Or, you can decide to deny. To pretend that you are still who you have always been. That you can still do all that you once did. And that was so much. So much. But not anymore. Now you are confused, beautiful, but empty inside like the shells you collect and then tell me about over and over and over again.

The table sits there in the bookstore, in all its wisdom, and asks us to believe a lie. But I know better, even if you don’t remember. You did that crossword, the very hardest one, every single goddammed day of your life, and now you do not even know where we are. I feel the tears of rage rising. I want to throw the table, scatter its lies, and leave it lying there, still lying.

2 Men with the Blues
Margaret Vann

She lay languid
the voice of Willie caressing her bare body
as Winton blew out her mind
She quivered in delight
and anticipation
while Willie washed over her
Winton filled her

As the music drew to a close
She shivered—such pleasure
modern Prometheus
Margaret Vann

patchwork man
assembled in pride
stolen

assembled: torso here attached to uneven legs, basic feet
    brawny arms, work-worn hands
    laid out in man shape
    were all the man parts included?
    of course, a phallus, someone’s family jewels...
    did the plumbing work?
wherefore came the heart?
    was it embroidered in place?
was there room for the padding of desire and a stomach for pain?

was the brain too ripe for rational thought?
    or having tasted death
was it ill-fitted for its revival?
    jaded? angry at being awakened?

O, patchwork man
quilted together with pride

Were you unbound & let go?
What fire did your assemblage bring to earth?

Paradelle
Margaret Vann

shadows replay in memory soon to be dissolved

Beneath a midsummer moon
beneath a midsummer moon
    a mockingbird sings its joy
a mockingbird sings its joy
Beneath a mockingbird moon—
midsummer sings its joy

Moonlight casts harlequin shadows over two lovers
moonlight casts harlequin shadows over two lovers
    masks in black & white
    masks in black & white
Moonlight masks in shadows casts
over harlequin lovers—two in black & white

Shadow lies in tangles,
Shadow lies in tangles,
    a loom of spider webs
    a loom of spider webs
Spider webs shadow tangles
in a loom of lies

Harlequin lovers—
a mockingbird moon—
Moonlight in midsummer masks
beneath spider webs cast over two
    shadows in black & white sing joy
its shadow tangles in a loom of lies

Photo by LaKota Hutto (Nature by Love of the Passion series)

Photo by LaKota Hutto
Proud
by Melinda Allison

Sometimes I just wish I knew what he would think about me now. I want to be able to walk up to him and question him. I would like to spend a day sitting and talking. Is he proud of me? Have I grown up to be what he thought I would be?

He was my biggest supporter when I decided to take violin lessons. I’m sure listening to the screech of the violin as I practiced was sometimes nerve wracking. But he was always willing to listen. He would push me to practice even though I really did not want to. “You have to practice to get good at things” he would say and get me in trouble when I didn’t practice like I should have. He came to every recital and found new teachers for me when the ones before just didn’t work out like we thought it would. One of the most special moments was when he decided it was time for me to have a violin of my own and bought me one for Christmas.

He was the one to push me in school. When his cancer had nearly brought his life to a close, he called me in his room. It was dark in the room so that he could rest and be as comfortable as possible. A maroon sheet, fixed to the top of the window frame by yellow thumb tacks, turned the hot Tennessee summer sun to a shadowy red hue. He had me perch on the edge of the bed as I always did when it was time for a talk. As I sat there trying to block out unpleasant thoughts of the future, he had other things in mind. His illness slurried his words first, but he kept on trying to ask me about what was on his mind. He would get frustrated with himself because he could not communicate to me what he was thinking. Finally, I was able to understand. He wanted to know how I was doing in the math I was working on over the summer. I felt such guilt. He was sick, and that is what he was worrying about, and I had not been doing my work diligently. I will never know how I probably disappointed him at that moment. His frailness quickly sapped his strength, cutting our conversation short.

Even in his own pain, he was still being Dad. I hope that now I am making my daddy proud in what I am doing with my life. I want him to look down from his reward and be proud to say I am his daughter. The poem by Seamus Heaney “Digging” really made me go back and think about what my father would think of me now.
Over the course of my life, I have felt much too “adult” on a few occasions, but more like a scared, unprepared child on most of the others. The oldest of five children growing up in the small-town South of the 1950’s and ‘60’s, I was naturally in a position to help care for my younger brothers and sisters to give my harried parents even a brief respite. Neighbors thought I was so mature, dependable, and trustworthy that they began asking me to take care of their children, too, by the time I was 12. Although my so-called “maturity” was the guise of a shy, insecure, awkward pre-teen with braces, I began earning my own money (50 cents an hour!) and learning how to stretch it as far as possible while I spent it all on records, makeup, movies, and cheap clothes and accessories at the local Big-K and Rose’s discount stores.

My mother and father were the best parents they knew how to be and provided adequately for our physical and educational needs. Despite somehow producing five offspring, however, they seemed almost incapable of expressing affection in any way, to each other or to us. Rarely relaxed enough to play with us, they certainly never discussed anything of a personal nature with me or my siblings. Daddy was reserved, conservative, undemonstrative, and Mama was preoccupied with social conformity and “appearances”. That they expected us to excel in all our undertakings was understood, but how to go about this was never explained. We grew up being afraid to tell either of our parents about anything we’d done wrong, since such admissions implied that we were flawed, as individuals and as a family unit. Our fears resulted in never being able to discuss problems with them, and so we never discussed problem solving either. I often wondered whether they loved, valued, or truly understood anything about me at all. For the first few decades of my life, this is how I thought grownups behaved.

By the second grade, I had begun to daydream about getting through school, leaving home, living alone (privacy!) in my own tiny apartment, and leading the completely glamorous life afforded by the salary of either a teacher or a secretary in rural Kingsport, Tennessee. In my fantasy grownup life, my chubby seven-year-old body would be transformed into a slim but curvaceous figure and I would have long, thick, wavy, auburn hair, wear chic dresses, stockings, and high heels, live on coffee, cigarettes, and a few saltine crackers to stay thin, and be a younger version of one of my mother’s more beautiful and exotic-looking friends (the local insurance agent’s wife). I promised myself I would never be as miserable as Mama and Daddy seemed most of the time. But my confused, less than fabulous reality saw me finally leaving home to go to college with self-imposed demands for personal perfection, self-denial, and stoicism, and all the anxiety and disappointment accompanying such burdens, alive and thriving within me.

Oddly, I had a sense that I lived a charmed life, protected from the true harshness of the world by some invisible guardian, and that nothing really bad would ever happen to me. This delusion, largely fostered by my doting grandmother who was convinced that, among other evidences of superior breeding, we were “third cousins” to Queen Elizabeth II, ended abruptly when I was 28 years old. I had been having intercourse without using any form of contraception beyond the very unreliable “rhythm” method. One day I realized something was different. My periods had been on schedule, I thought, but my breasts had begun to feel full and tender and I was strangely nauseated most of the time. It occurred to me that I might be pregnant, although I knew this was foolishness on my part. Nothing unplanned or unpleasant could happen to me, after all. I was without prospects for anything approaching a stable relationship, and much too busy working toward a career as a healthcare provider to have a baby, for crying out loud! Nevertheless, I bought a pregnancy test and it was positive; my breasts had been on schedule, I thought, but my breasts had begun to feel full and tender and I was strangely nauseated most of the time. It occurred to me that I might be pregnant, although I knew this was foolishness on my part. Nothing unplanned or unpleasant could happen to me, after all. I was without prospects for anything approaching a stable relationship, and much too busy working toward a career as a healthcare provider to have a baby, for crying out loud! Nevertheless, I bought a pregnancy test and it was positive; I ran to the bathroom and vomited. Now I could no longer deny that I could really make a mess of things just like anybody else. I was forced to admit I had carelessly and stupidly made a serious mistake, and had to, for once in my life, take responsibility for its resolution. This was certainly “different” for me, too.

After having a miscarriage and then completing my degree in Atlanta at age 29, I took a position with a medical oncologist in a small northwest Georgia town. Many of our patients did well with their treatments and were felt to be in remission or cured. Others were not so fortunate. I helped care for many of these patients for years as they struggled against recurrent illness, and a lot of them became very dear to me. Sometimes I was with them and their family members at the hospital when they died. Before knowing these people, I had not thought much about my own demise, except at times of melodramatic self-pity when I thought I’d “show” somebody who had hurt my feelings by disappearing forever via some sort of suicide. Being in
the company of those who were actually living their last months, weeks, or days prompted me to examine the options for the rest of my own life as well as its end. I watched other people approach death and began to decide whether I wanted to leave this world with unresolved anger, bitterness, and despair, or with the great comfort of knowing I had had a long, eventful, and fortunate life here on earth that eventually had to come to a close.

At age 32, I very fortunately met and married a nurturing, affectionate, indulgent man who knows my faults better than anyone, tolerates most of them most of the time, and doesn’t mind if I’m not always “grown-up”. I also had a nurturing, indulgent, affectionate, younger sister who was my favorite friend and playmate for 50 years, and a mother who was only too happy for me to remain her “baby girl” as long as we both lived. Within the last year and a half I have lost both my sister and my mother to advanced cancers, and my 95-year-old grandmother to a preventable infection. My father died 17 years ago of heart disease. The loss of grandparents and parents seems to be the final hurdle for many people in truly accepting adulthood, especially if they have children of their own. Lacking human children, my husband and I have found great happiness in caring for the many dogs and cats we have rescued during our 23 years together. We do, however, have a dozen nieces and nephews, as well as numerous young second cousins. Not being especially grown-up is a helpful quality when interacting with both pets and young people. It is also particularly valuable and gratifying when one enjoys traveling, as it is much more thrilling to be told by your 19 year old whirlwind of a niece while on a visit to Paris that you are wearing her out with your energy and stamina than vice versa.

In my early 40’s, a mentor shared an idea his mother had passed along: “If you can be right or be kind, be kind.” Years later my sister had only this advice to help me face living without her: “You just have to decide what kind of person you want to be.” These simple, mantra-like phrases instructed me in what their vision of maturity was and led me to further consider my own. I am painfully aware of having attained only a shadow of understanding of this quality much later in life than many, but these days I struggle to find patience and tolerance instead of having the last word, empathy instead of demanding or expecting, generosity instead of withholding or denying, support instead of criticism, and appreciation for the differences in people instead of expecting everyone to be just like me.

Since my sister’s malignancy was diagnosed nearly four years ago, I can no longer deny that none of our futures are fully predictable. Now I try to do things sooner rather than waiting until a later which may never come, and be more receptive to the pleasures brought by surprises and spontaneity. I want my family and friends to have fond memories of the time we have spent together here and have no doubt that I care for them deeply. If those closest to me leave me behind someday for another realm, I might have to get a hold on myself, take a few deep breaths, and finally succumb to that fearful thing called grownup-hood. But since I’ve begun to at last accept and enjoy the person I’ve become after all these years, and more fully appreciate my experiences and relationships – silliness, imperfections, eccentricities, and all – don’t bet on it!

Candy Cane Pile Up
Illustration by Lynn H. Weatherford
12x12 oil
Things had suddenly turned from bad to worse, cliché be damned as this was the best description for our situation. Our squad had been split apart during the ambush. We were lured in like amateurs as our self-sure pride went before our certain fall. Gunfire raged. As the voices over my headset went silent, I felt suddenly alone while I huddled behind what remained of a concrete barricade.

Another staccato blast broke my thoughts. Nothing was left, but useless, desperate tactics. I huffed heavily at the sheer annoyance of it all.

Then, my headset’s earpiece crackled to life. English words wearing a heavy Italian accent shook my awareness, “Saint….you still live?”

“Fra Diavolo…?” Relief shook my voice as I confirmed, “Now it’s good to know I won’t die alone.” I chuckled, and the voice carried over wireless distances responded with its laughter. Fra Diavolo, or brother devil, and I had met a few weeks ago, and became fast friends under fire. He was originally from Milan, Italy; I was from Alabama. He spoke English as a second language; we had this in common.

“I just hope you have not used up that divine favor of yours, Saint…” The familiar sound of his voice seemed on the verge of panic amid the static and hiss, “…I am down.”

My reality was jarred by another interruption of rapid fire rattling. Again, I huffed and almost swore aloud.

“My voice was near anger as I moved from cover, “I got ya brother devil. Help is on the way. Hold tight.”

Then, in that final staccato stab, it was over. With a vigorous rush of noise, my distraction was complete.

Three steps away from aiding my fallen comrade, the enemy’s bullets stopped short my flight. There would be no miracle today. The Saint and Brother Devil had lost the match. It was then I sighed and chuckled. Dino, half a world away laughed and said, “No problem. Next time, we win again.” I said my goodbyes and good game platitudes to the winners, removed my headset, and then, powered down my console.

Another scurrying rattle, hard and fast, came from behind me once more. I turned at last to face this distraction that may have cost me a match. Whatever remained of my over-competitive anger vanished at the sight.

Sandals kicked off beneath the computer’s chair lay in different directions, one right side up, the other upside down. Bare feet hung inches from the floor, and swung back and forth to rock the chair upon its swivel. Wide eyes glued to the monitor as it glowed softly. A word processor displayed upon its screen, which to this day, has found no more noble use than that moment. With a final whirl, she spun towards me, “Like my song lyrics, daddy?”

I found myself reliving the moment I described above as I read “The Writer” by Richard Wilbur. His poem was a quiet reverie as I journeyed with the poet. It was a hushed moment like entering a church late, and while lingering in the foyer waiting for the chance to enter, someone within spoke the rare heartfelt prayer. You drop your head in simple awe, as a silent witness to something you had intruded upon, and then, had been blessed to witness the wonder. This poem shook me with its comparison between the poet, his daughter, and their shared talent, and how I had been an onlooker who had experienced the same. To continue the comparison as Wilbur expresses from his viewpoint:

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:
I wish her a lucky passage. (Lines 7-9)

My daughter, being ever inventive, is forever pushing the creative envelope into new shapes with her works. She tries her wings within the safety of our nest. Here, there is boldness to her courage and a gleam within her eye. Now is not the time of harsh critics and jealous peers. Now is not the time to test true talent’s strength. Here and now is the time of testing, exploring, and seeking where the wind lifts against downy wings. My pride is that of a father, and my hopes are that of a father, as I try to find careful words to balance praise and advice. She returns my fumbling words with a great smile and goes back to the hurried pace of typing that she can muster. Making more noise than words while typing, she hums, pauses thoughtfully, and then, returns to that pace her creation demands. This is something Wilbur captures in understated beauty from his own experience:

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greatens, in which
The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent. (10-15)

I watch her as I pretend to be distracted by my own work, so not to distract her. I know from my own experience that my Muse is both elusive and rewarding. There was a time when the work-a-day world silenced my voice, and I continued
stifled my Muse. I had written before, but never dared anything beyond. As an adult, I lack my daughter’s innocence to talent (or lack thereof) so I am cautious and guarded. There is something that exposes the soul when one writes. Something of oneself is now revealed never to be secret again when written upon the page. Both creator and creation stand exposed.

I see a dual parallel as if Richard Wilbur is speaking of his daughter and his work:

And iridescent creature
  Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
  To the hard floor, or the desk-top,
  And wait then, humped and bloody,
  For the wits to try it again. (22-26)

This “iridescent creature”, the writer’s creation, struggles as the writer struggles to find his way into the world. During the process of creation, it batters against the mind, and the talent, and the skill of the writer as well as the very world about it. There is something to be said of this struggle as anything worth having has a cost. Most often things that come cheaply or easily are valued as such. “Humped and bloody” (25) teaches lessons that cannot be bought by “lucky passage” (9). It teaches us the way to fly to freedom. Once again the poet’s words express this struggle’s end:

And how our spirits
  Rose when suddenly sure,
  It lifted off from the chair back,
  Beating a smooth course for the right window
  And clearing the sill of the world. (26-30)

I hope for myself to nurture this ability and hone this rough talent. I wish it double for my own child if that becomes her heart’s desire. Yet, I understand the time I spent and the time yet to spend being “humped and bloody” (25) as part of it all. When one is given the opportunity to share something of oneself and to release that creation, perhaps, it is an act of ongoing inspiration. Like a phoenix being continually reborn, so might one’s forged words give rise to another as this poet’s words accomplished for me.
New Overalls
Illustration by Lynn H. Weatherford (11x14 oil)

Crybaby Hollow
Photo by Laura Alexander

Mermaid
Illustration by Pamela Wang

Special Treat
Illustration by Lynn H. Weatherford
18x24 oil

Veggie Tray
Illustration by Lynn H. Weatherford
8x16 oil

Photo by LaKota Hutto (Nature by Love of the Passion series)
What Makes Us Human?
by Maria Lofgren Coble

We said good-bye to our humanity a little more each hour. For, what truly makes us human, more than just another clever ape or trained dog? Is it our beliefs, our reasoning ability, our ability to learn, to love, to hope, to plan, to read, to learn, to dream? So much of that we lost those years in the concentration camp.

It was hard to believe since we were unable to practice our faith or even to understand why God was allowing his Chosen nation to suffer yet again, seemingly abandoned by His miraculous Hand. Where was God in Auschwitz? I couldn’t see Him in the meager meals or the random violence that was always as close as your next stumble from hunger or the never-ending tiredness of the hopeless malnourished.

The only God that I could see, in that living hell, the only God there, must have lived in my sister, Beth. I would not have lived had we been separated. She held my hand in that train so crowded, in which we all stood for days, unable to fit any other way. When we finally got out, she steadied me before I lost my mind in horror at how many of our fellow passengers had become corpses, still standing until the train emptied for there was no room for even the dead to fall. Even in death, no rest for us Jews.

When the Nazis sorted us into lines at the camps, I almost followed the shower line, fully aware of what awaited but unable to bear any more of this callous cruelty. If I was to be treated as an animal, let me die as one, the sooner the better! But Beth kept my hand as we were granted the reprieve to die slowly, through the hot son and cruel work, aiding the very enemies who killed our children, our hopes and our futures.

I never would have made it without Beth. Prone to discouragement at the worst of times, now I dreamed only of food, not the delicacies of the parties of our youth but of meat, plain, unsalted, just to eat something substantial and perhaps become clean, the shower with the stares and crude comments of the Nazis...I just wanted to be human once again.

Some of us went insane. Some could not stand the overwhelming loss, the sense that this living death would never end for we were barely kept alive and yet kept, to suffer another day, to yet again remember those we’d never see again.

I don’t know how Beth kept her heart. She trusted God, I know that, and somehow her purity of heart wasn’t erased even when forced to dig the mass graves for our friends. How she stood it, I’ll never know. But I know how I survived. Beth was my strength, my sister, my friend, the only one I ever heard singing in our barracks. Beth was the only one who ever found the sunlight cheerful instead of viewing it as one more thing to dry out our tongues and cause us to faint, leading to more being struck down.

The memory I keep by choice isn’t a pleasant one. But I can never give it away, though still tears come to my eyes after all these years. Her persistent cough got worse and worse that winter, but somehow Beth would always smile after coughing left her breathless. “I sound like a cat with a hairball, don’t I?” she’d faintly wheeze and somehow I’d smile too. But that day, in roll call, the coughing didn’t end and the guard ordered her to report to the infirmary. I saw her walk away, hit with a rifle to her slender back, stumbling, coughing...I thought we’d meet at evening call, her lining next to me, whispering of the sour medicine, slipping her cold hand into mine, like the last time she’d reported sick.

Evening call over, yet her bunk above mine was still empty. I wish I could say I stayed up all night but the unending labor and inadequate food usually ensured sleep at least, sleep our only escape, the only dreams left to us, the ones in the night.

I asked about her for days, nearly bringing about my own death, I am sure. That particular guard grew so annoyed by me, I think she only answered in hopes of bringing even more pain.

“Number 5167812? Dead, of course, last Tuesday it was. Now stop asking!” The gun barrel that split my lip didn’t hurt as much as the arrow that pierced my long unfeeling heart.

Beth...gone. I had never said goodbye. I knew it useless to ask of graves for when we died, our bodies were thrown, jumbled together like so much rubbish, once stripped of anything valuable. I wonder if they got all three of her gold fillings. I wondered how long she had suffered. I wondered
what God choose to take her light instead of mine, her happy heart instead of me who often longed for the grave. I decided she somehow earned the reward of death while bitter, hardened me must suffer on even without the light of Beth, my sister, my love, the last tender bit of my heart.

Somehow I lived on. We were liberated three weeks later and all I could think as we left was: I was leaving without her, the only reason I had lasted as long as I did.

So now, I greet each sunrise, the beauty: a memory of her shining eyes which found delight even in our life of suffering. I taste all food, my mind playing what she would say, still finding joy in her words though she lies beneath the ground. And each sunset, I whisper a good-bye to Beth, that she could somehow hear my words and know, for all I gave up: my health, my comfort, my dreams, some nights I would, yes, even return to the concentration camp if I could tell her, my sister, of my love. Life is full of words unsaid and the darkest days are my brightest memories. Now I know what made me human: it was Beth.
This is not a football game. I’ve been to football, in Santiago even, and this is not it. Futbol is a game of grace and finesse, something that this crowd does not seem to understand. They want to see blunt force and brute strength. Still, I am told that this is a major part of the culture here, the university culture even, and I’ve been waiting long enough to experience that that I am willing to do whatever it takes. I am honestly still amazed that I am here, that Mama allowed me to go to school so far away. When Raul went to university in Santiago, she said she thought her heart would break that morning. Then it did, so maybe she is not so protective now that I could come to Norteamericana for university.

Some planes fly over, military planes. I stiffen, even though I know better. An announcement comes over that this is a reminder of the tragedy of September 11th. We have that in my country, too. But it’s different here. Here, when their tragedy happened, it seemed to be just to one city, and then just to the military itself. At home, the tragedy was to us all, to every family. I saw a sign a few weeks ago that made no sense to me at first. I had to ask. It said “The United States is not at war. The Marines are at war. The United States is at the mall.” My roommate explained to me that the Marines are a unit of the military and that the mall is a large market, and that the meaning of the sign is that the military is at war but no one else in the country is. Not the people. This confused me, too. Of course, they said that we were not at war, not our people, and not our military, but we were at war with one another. The military and the people. And it was all of us, every family. All of us had someone. That is what my roommate said is different here - not everyone has someone who is involved, so a lot of people do not care.

Of course, my Mama thought that a lot of people at home did not seem to care either. When she first did not hear from Raul, and then when no one, no one at the university or the government, would answer her questions. I grew up thinking that everyone was always asking questions, but that there were never any answers. I did not ask any, except to her the old stories about Raul. Those she would tell me, and there would be a light in her eyes. But then she would get to the part about when he went to university, and the light was gone, and then she would fall silent. If I kept asking then, she would get angry. But time went on, and as I got older, it seemed it was just my Mama who was asking questions. But then we eventually found more people, more and more, who were asking questions like we were. Every family. I wonder if some of lasenoras here, with the children at the war, feel the way that my Mama did. But I cannot ask. These people, I see, they do not care.

I go to the stall where they sell food. I choose a soda and almost choke on all the ice in the cup. It is hot, and so the ice will melt soon. I try to move some of it out of the cup with my hand, and when I do, I realize that I have on accident walked into a line of people waiting for el bano. One line in, one line out. It is the one for women, so I am very embarrassed, and try to move away quickly, and I, again by accident, run into some girls coming out. I spill a little bit of my soda, but they do not notice. They are excited and waving their hands quickly in front of the faces and laughing and speaking quickly, so I move away from the line and let them go by.

Raul used to go to the Futbol games at the university and he would write about them. I have read the letters many times - it sounds so exciting! I had hoped that this game would be like this, but so far, I am still disappointed. Mama has saved his letters, and the other things, the things that we found later, in a box at the house. It is large and made of wood and I have thought before that it is long and flat enough to be a coffin. Maybe it is. I can always tell the letters, though, because Raul had a strange handwriting. He was supposed to write with his left hand, but at primary school, the nuns had made him use his right hand. But when he played games, like baseball, he threw the ball with his left hand, and this hand was probably always better. I grew up hearing the stories about my brother, and how good he was at all the sports. I wanted to be like him, for Mama. I thought it would make her happy. But I was only smart. But, that is how I got to go to university here, and maybe that is a good thing.

There is another play on the field. I don’t understand what is going on at all. The play stops, and someone does not move from the field. I wait for a yellow or a red card, but
there is not one. Earlier in the game there was a yellow thing for something, so I do not understand again. The man on the field does not move. A video comes over the big screen at the end of the field, showing the last play, showing how his leg moved as God did not design, how everything inside must have gone “snap”. I think I am going to be sick. I feel the sick coming up from my stomach, and I try to move to the outside, where the people are with the cigarettes. I hold on to the railing and look down over the edge.

The man on the field will begin the long night that he did not think would happen. It will be a night of pain that he did not imagine. It will be the start of a journey he did not mean to take. But there is no way to take it back now.

One of the men with the cigarettes has been looking at the big screen, and he says something about “the courage of that kid”.

I think about Raul in the stadium.

I remember the letter that I think was the last one that Raul wrote to our parents. When we were looking, after they opened the files, after too many people had asked questions for too long and there were finally going to be answers, we found the diary first. My mother knew the writing. The spidery crawl that bent the wrong way. The letter was harder. The writing is not the same; it is better almost. But not like Raul. And the ink is smudged, and the address had been partially covered. So we did not know, at first. But we saw the name of our street, and just barely, the name of my papa. My Mama had always held out hope that Raul had escaped, that he would come home, that he did not disappear. But then we realized that it was his letter. And he is writing about what is going on in the stadium. About the people who are being dragged away, about the screaming, about the people who are lined up at el bano, one line in, one line out, and about the awful, awful, noise inside, and about how the students and people come out with hands shaped like stars, every finger pointed in a different direction.

The man on the field is up now, and all the people around me are clapping. They cheer for him as the little cart takes him off the field.

No one cheered for my brother when he left the stadium.

I will never understand here.

Night Flight
Illustration by Mary Nelle Black
8x10 oil
Letter to Miss Wilder
by Sarah Jane Shaw

My Dear Miss Gwendolyn Wilder,

It is my duty to regretfully inform you of the passing of your dear aunt, Lady Cecilia Hoffspower Stanton-Grant. I have set out to pen this letter many a time but found it difficult to find words to describe the events of that night. One never wants to relive an event such as I witnessed. Seeing the words written down in ink make them feel so much more real. I know that I should get on with it; you should know the truth from my mouth rather than read or hear about it from those who seek only to gain from another’s pain.

It was the night of the grand Brookston’s Ball. Your aunt looked lovely as always. She wore an exquisite gown of deep red with gold embellishments; you know that she always had a flair for fashion and elegance. The color set off her ebony hair wonderfully and the delicate masquerade mask brought out the green in her eyes. It covered only the area around her eyes though there were quite a few guests who wore masks that covered the whole of their face. You know your aunt; she would have wanted all to know that it was she under her mask, and she who could afford such lovely things. I do not, of course, mean this as an insult, it was simply her way.

I had often wondered what it was about her that drew the gentlemen in. At twenty-five summers she should have been considered an old maid by today’s standards! Perhaps it was the scandal of her previous marriage that caused the intrigue. Nothing heightens popularity more than a good scandal and when her late husband, your uncle, died so suddenly of influenza the town certainly began to buzz! You were gone by that time, of course, so you will know nothing of the rumors that began to circulate following that tragedy. I did my best to dispel them, please believe me. You cannot imagine how dreadful my cousin, your aunt, felt. I could hardly get her out of the bed, which was now far too large and empty for one woman. That is neither here nor there, I am afraid. I suppose that I am simply putting off telling you the terrible news.

It does make me ill to think that my own personal tragedy brings life and joy to the members of Society. My popularity among them has grown tenfold in the week since your aunt’s untimely death.

Please forgive me, Gwendolyn, I shall continue. Cecilia had many dances that evening. She accepted each with good graces and that charming smile she so often wore. I am sure that every gentleman fancied himself quite dashing in the glow of her smile. Is it a wonder that she married so young and in her first Season?

The night was drawing to a close when I saw her approached by yet another suitor. We had been separated by a few Ladies at Court, and I cannot say what it was that caused me to look over.

She was in the arms of a man. At the time I was thinking of the impropriety of a lady being so close to a man with whom she was not married, or in the very least engaged. I am sure that he was whispering in her ear because not a moment after the head had bent to reach her ear, then her eyes grew wide. Was it fear or wonder in those dazzling green eyes? Of that I cannot say. Then, as suddenly as he had appeared, the suitor had gone.

Cecilia looked stricken. I could see her face over the shoulders of the dancers and it worried me to see tears there. I went to her side at once, treading on the toes of a lady or two as I went.


“I do not feel well, Arthur,” she said as though she had just run a great distance. She was quite out of breath and this made my brow furrow in some confusion; she had not taken a dance in nearly a quarter of an hour.

It was then that I took her hands from where she had clamped them upon her abdomen. I sought merely to comfort her, with my hand in hers. Though when I did manage to take her warm hands, my stomach lurched. They were wet with red, and at first I did not recognized that it was blood staining her hands and my own silk gloves. Then it was another beat before I realized that the blood was coming from my dear cousin, herself. The red was seeping out and drenching the front of her beautiful gown.

“Oh my God,” there was nothing more that I could say.

She collapsed against me and Alice Harding screamed. “Bar all of the exits!” I called supporting all of Cecilia’s weight.
Constable Smithson reacted at once, seeing that my orders were obeyed. He is a commanding man, I am sure that you remember, even when he is away from his badge. It is an air that he has worked long and hard to cultivate.

I lowered Cecilia to the ground, cradling her head. My hands were shaking and stained with blood, but I tried so hard not to think on that. “Cecilia, who has done this?” I asked right at her ear.

She tried to speak. Her mouth made words but no sound came from her lips. Then she was still in my arms. I said her name, tried to revive her, but she was gone.

I laid her down gently and folded her arms over her chest. I then got to my feet, just at that moment having remembered that there was a whole room staring, gawking at the scene before them. There lay Cecilia, a legend and a wonderful woman among a sea of foolish fopperies, dead at their feet. And there I stood as well, a stain of blood on my gloves and jacket, and a stain of furry upon my face.

“Who has done this?” I called out. The room’s fifty some odd guests were silent and still as though I were addressing a hall of statues.

Had I expected the murderer to stand and say that is was he who had pulled a knife on a gentle woman, such as my cousin? No, of course not. Perhaps it was the yelling that made me feel some release. It was certainly better than surrendering to the sting of salt in my eyes.

It was then that Constable Smithson reappeared. He looked down on the sleeping Cecilia for a moment and then back up at me. He stepped between the body and myself as though he could somehow protect me.

“What did you see, Arthur?” he asked calmly. This was not the first poor woman he had seen broken upon the floor. This was not the first man he had questioned. I wonder if he felt differently about the situation having been familiar with both myself and Cecilia.

“I will tell you what I bloody saw, James,” I said between my teeth, “I saw the bastard that did this!” I made a motion around his large frame to the body of my cousin. I was remembering when I had cradled her in my arms the evening of her birth, and I myself was only fifteen summers.

“Try and watch your language, Arthur,” Smithson said lowly, “Remember that you are in the company of ladies both young and old.”

I started to say something to that when Smithson put up a white gloved hand, “Arthur I am trying to help you and Cecilia,” he told me sincerely. I bit my tongue and allowed him to continue, “Now, what did he look like?”

This was the obvious, and simplest question and one that I should have expected, even so I could not help my hands clenching into fists at my sides. “He wore all black, not that that will do a damn bit of good as you yourself are wearing black, as am I,” I said.

The Constable bristled at my continued use of foul words in the presence of Society, but I did not give him leeway to lecture me further. “He wore a mask,” I told him, “it covered the whole of his face, as I understand that is the fashion of the day.” I made a nod towards some of the other patrons of the ball, many of whom had removed their masks by this point.

My attention was again drawn to Cecilia on the ground staring blindly at the ceiling. I looked away covering my mouth. I had to repress the urge to vomit. “For God’s sake, will some one cover her up?” I asked having just had the thought that Cecilia’s eyes looked as though they were pleading for help.

Someone went and fetched a cloth from one of the long tables to drape over the figure upon the floor. It was then that Sir Rohnan Charles called, “Look there, beneath the skirt of that table!”

Constable Smithson pushed me to the side and behind himself to look after the man’s words. It would seem that in his haste, the killer had tossed away the bloody knife. It lay now on the marble floor beneath the table. Smithson withdrew a white handkerchief and wrapped his hand in it before gingerly fetching it out by the handle. He turned it over a time or two narrowing his eyes against the glare of the candelabra. After a time he shook his head saying, “This is no good, Arthur.”

I did not understand what he possibly could have meant; the knife was there, was it not. When Smithson angled the knife, my heart sank to see a family crest engraved there.

“That is the Brookstanton crest, Arthur,” he said shaking his head and placing the knife down on the now bare table. “I am afraid that proves nothing as we are, at present, in their home.”

I was already searching the faces for Lord and Lady Brookstanton. When finally I saw them, the Lord with his arm around his wife’s willowy frame, I took a step their way. “What have you to say about all of this?” I asked acidly.

Lady Brookstanton looked dignified and distressed with her hand over her heart. Lord Brookstanton, too, looked upset but he puffed out his already wide chest. It was very like a cornered animal who attempts to make itself appear large to frighten off a threat of some kind.

“Arthur,” he said in that deep tone of his, “I know that you are not accusing me or my wife of anything.”

It was clear by his tone and his stance that he and I both
heard the accusation in my question. He was indignant when I refused to say another word on the matter. “We are quite as upset over this ordeal as you!” he shook his head impressively. “To think, it happened under our very roof. My wife will not sleep for ages.”

At the mention of Lady Brookstanton, I turned my gaze away from her husband catching her eye. “You had no qualms with Lady Stanton-Grant?” I asked.

Lady Brookstanton’s hand flew to her mouth in utter shock. My words were easy enough but the implications behind them were as clear as if I had yelled them at the top of my voice.

Lord Brookstanton look appalled and offended, “What, pray tell, are you suggesting, Arthur?” he asked taking an involuntary step closer to his wife.

“I wanted to ask nothing of you, my lord,” I assured him with the curtest of bows. “My lady,” I began and Lady Brookstanton’s eyes flicked between myself and the floor. I went on, “You have no words then?”

She looked nervous as they searched the crowd of people who all had their eyes upon her. She was breathing shallowly as she said in a rush and quietly, “It is a cursed thing to speak ill of the dead.”

“Please,” I invited genially, “I would be most honored to hear your motive.”

Smithson gasped behind me, “Arthur,” he scolded as Lady Brookstanton’s mouth fell agape in a most unladylike manner.

Over my shoulder I shot, “I am sorry, James, it is just that the woman before me has been the source of many a rumor about Lady Stanton-Grant.”

The murmurs around the room supported what I had said. It was well known that Lady Brookstanton has a mouth that is nearly as wide as her voluminous bottom. She still said nothing; she only looked indignant and slightly afraid.

I grew tired of her impertinence. “What say you, Madame?” I asked with some measure of force.

“I never spoke a cross word against Cecilia,” she defended. The eyes that burned into her, pressing for answers, seemed to be unsteadying to her. It struck me as nearly comical that this would be the case, as she so often yearns for the spotlight. Now, however, she looked simply flustered. “Cecilia was a dear friend of mine!”

When the eyes of the crowd did not soften towards her, she finally admitted, “I did, however, see dear Cecilia arguing with the Viscountess Armando.”

There was a clearly audible gasp from somewhere across the room. Every stupid foppery in the room followed the sound to where the Viscountess stood. You will remember that the Viscountess had always been a short woman. Well, in the years following her wedding and child bearing, she has become just as wide.

As I approached her she shrank back. I know that my looks often intimidate. At nearly forty summers, tall and with grey eyes to match the ever expanding peppering of the same upon my head, I am well respected. In cases such as these, I am glad of it.

The Viscountess, a widow herself, stood quite still in her many, voluminous, purple skirts. Beside her stood her long time friend, Mrs. Gertrude Leavenworth. Do you remember the woman? She is not one to be easily forgotten, of course. One cannot help taking notice of Mrs. Leavenworth and her two daughters. It is a shame, for them, that what draws everyone’s eye is not astounding beauty of face or dress. Surely you remember how tall the three women are? I have often thought that if they were more pleasant of face they would resemble the Amazons of Greek mythology.

As I say, the Leavenworth ladies were standing near the Viscountess and making her look remarkably small by comparison. It did not help her, the Viscountess, that she seemed to be shrinking in on herself.

“Viscountess,” I began, “did you argue with Lady Stanton-Grant this evening?”

“No!” she answered much too quickly. Even her friend, Mrs. Leavenworth, rolled her eyes.

I raised my eyebrows at her and cocked my head to the side. She pursed her lips and inhaled deeply. “Yes, alright,” she admitted. “It was nothing really. Just a bit of silliness,” she explained.

I did not speak at once. I watched and waited as she became more and more uncomfortable. This did not take a terribly long time. “You know how we ladies can be,” she said attempting to smile. “I quarreled with her for buying the gown that I had had my eye on for weeks.”

“I hardly believe that,” I scoffed. The Viscountess looked surprised. I went on, “My cousin’s figure was much more handsome than your own. The idea of you even glancing at a gown that would have fit her is laughable.”

“Lord Stanton!” Mrs. Leavenworth yelped as the Viscountess gasped.
Many of the other ladies had gasped as well or else covered their mouths in silent horror at my indecency. A few of the men were caught with the corners of their mouth’s twitching into grins, though they composed their faces before it went noticed. Insulting a lady of such standing as the Viscountess is so far out of the norm that no one knew quite what to do.

Mrs. Leavenworth recovered first. She touched her friend’s shoulder and glared at me murderously. “Why you are tormenting the Viscountess, I cannot imagine!” she spat. “You said yourself that Cecilia was attacked by a gentleman. Should you not be, perhaps, looking to one of Cecilia’s many...many suitors?”

I caught her tone and did not appreciate what she was insinuating. I drew breath to tell her just what I thought of her, but Constable Smithson sought to extinguish that kindling fire. “She is right, Arthur. You are not acting yourself, my friend. Let us look to more realistic possibilities,” he suggested.

“I have heard that Cecilia spent more than enough time in the company of the Marquis Harlan,” Mrs. Leavenworth offered.

I was growing weary of rounding upon potential suspects. I was growing weary of the passing of guilt. I was growing weary of this room full of honest Iagos. The reality of my dear Cecilia’s death was suddenly upon me. I sank into one of the nearest chairs, my face in my hands.

“Lord Stanton,” a voice said from above my head.

Slowly, I looked up after blinking the sting from my eyes. The Marquis Harlan stood before me. His eyes were rimmed with red, and he seemed to be having difficulty in speaking.

“It is true sir,” he said, barely able to steady his voice. “Cecily and I have been in one another’s company for many months now.”

I watched him draw a long and shaky breath. He seemed to be waiting for me to say something. When I did not, he went on. “I never would have harmed her, Lord Stanton,” he assured me. “I loved her, but she is-was still in love with her late husband. Her heart was permanently written upon by that man, and mine will forever be written on by my Cecily.”

I bowed my head again. Finally, here was a man who could testify to my cousin’s faithfulness to her husband. Never again shall one of those foul mouthed blackguards speak ill of Cecilia. Here also was a man who loved Cecilia and never could have harmed her. After coming to this conclusion, I stood to face the Marquis.

His face does not betray a hint of his age. His jaw was set and his eyes were trained on mine as though begging in silence for me to see the truth there.

“Please believe me,” he said in earnest, refusing to back away from me where other men would have. Slowly I nodded. “I do, Harlan,” I said.

Smithson appeared at my shoulder. “Arthur, everyone is tired,” he said softly. “You need rest, we all do. We know everyone who was here tonight, we will find him.”

“And she will be just as dead in the morning,” one of the Leavenworth girls muttered. I pretended not to hear.

I gave the Constable a curt nod. I clapped the Marquis on the shoulder; he did not seem to have words. He merely nodded at me and turned for the door.

The room began to clear, everyone giving the shrouded figure of Cecilia a wide berth. I did not care anything for the idyll conversations. The goodbyes, the goodnights, and the sentiments of “how dreadful,” they all seemed to be coming at me from a world away.

I myself went to kneel by the body of my cousin. Guilt spread strongly over my body as I watched the passing skirts and trousers as the guests headed for the doors. It was as though Cecilia had called me to her side. It was as though she had bid me bend down so that I could see what only she would be able. The respectable members of our city were not lingering long on the scene, and I could not see a one of them above the knee.

That was when I saw something that made my stomach leap in excitement and then crash back with the weight of my shock. A woman’s dress lifted, not enough to be disreputable, but enough for me to see the bottoms of men’s trousers hidden beneath the hem.

“Stop!” I called to the room at large. Everyone who heard turned to me in shock or annoyance.

“What is it, Arthur?” Constable Smithson asked from behind me. He had not joined the throng, waiting for the room to clear completely. I also saw the Marquis making his way back to where I stood.

I ignored my friend and stepped to the small group of women. “I have found our murderer,” I said with venom tainting my every word.

The women looked shocked, so did the Marquis. Constable Smithson said, “What are you on about, Arthur?”

“This,” I said grabbing a handful of blue-grey fabric. There were gasps, of course. How dare a man yank up a woman’s skirt? I could have been arrested on the spot.

“My God,” Smithson muttered when I revealed the man’s clothing hidden beneath the skirts of none other than Mrs. Leavenworth.

There was no where for her to run. I was inches from her face with Smithson beside me and the Marquis was at her back. She looked from me to Smithson with terror in her eyes.
Letter to Miss Wilder, cont.

"Why?" was all that I could manage to say. Why would anyone want to hurt my cousin?

Mrs. Leavenworth tossed her hair out of her face. "It was not fair," she said with contempt. "It was not fair that a woman of her advanced age attracted the young and unwed men when there are young ladies patiently waiting for their husbands. I have worked very hard to get my girls into Society and I would not have that foul, false martyr of a woman ruin the future for my girls." She was plainly mad; I wonder how long it took for her to take leave of her senses entirely.

"You have done well at that yourself, Madame. What man with a lick of sense would marry the daughter of a black-hearted killer?" I said, the life slowly draining out of my voice.

Smithson came then and took Mrs. Leavenworth away leaving her daughters and the Viscountess looking as though they had been hit full in the face with something rather hard. The younger of the girls started to cry, but my sympathies were not wasted on her.

I remember the Marquis thanking me and telling me to call on him if ever I needed anything. The Baron and Baroness gave their sympathies with good graces seeming to have forgotten that I first accused them. Things became blurry after that.

They have stayed foggy ever since. I miss your aunt terribly; she was as a sister to me. I am enclosing the gloves of hers that you always admired. She would have wanted you to have them. I do hope that you know how much she loved you and how much it would mean to her to see you with them at your own wedding this March. Every bride needs something old.

I wish that there was something more I could say. I wish that there were words to describe how sorry I am for the loss we are sharing. There are no such words, I have come to realize. Just know that I love and miss you very much. Also take comfort in knowing that your aunt and uncle are rejoicing at their reunion. Knowing them as I did, they are still as in love in death as they were in life.

My love and sincerest condolences,

Arthur D’Henri Stanton

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Altered Perception
by Alexandria Stone

My name is Catherine, and I was in college for a degree in Psychology. I was, until everything collapsed around me. I see things, details that other people normally do not notice. Let me walk backward with you...

"Cat!" a voice calls out, deep and masculine but with a hint of surprise – like he did not expect me to be here.

I turn and find Marshall, one of my classmates and my closest friend, waving at me from the other side of the room. Lifting my hand, I tentatively return his wave as I wonder, not for the first time within the past hour, what in the world I am doing here? Already, I know the answer to my question: Curiosity. At the end of my psyche class earlier in the day, I overheard a classmate tell her girlfriends about a “psychologist meet-and-greet” that was to be held here at Ashcroft Asylum, 6:30 P.M. As Marshall pushes his way through the crowd to where I stand, I glance around the room, taking note of the faces of the people around me. There were a couple of people here and there that I recognize from my class but, for the most part, everyone else was a stranger to me.

I return my gaze to Marshall and a small smile touches the corners of my lips as I say softly with a hint of laughter in my voice, “A psychologist get-together at an asylum, Marshall? This was a joke, right?”

Marshall chuckles and shakes his head. “This is no joke, Cat. We are all here and we are going to have our chance to speak to one of the residents here. Field work for our degrees, you could call it.”

A mixture of shock and excitement jolts through my veins as what Marshall said forms a puzzle and fuses together in my mind. My mind reeling with the questions I want to ask, I wander through the gathered crowd and exchange greetings with those who offer them.

Thirty minutes later, I sit in front of a young adult male, no older than eighteen. Jason, he said his name was, though if it is true, I cannot tell. He has a small frame for his size, his cheekbones in sharp contrast with the rest of his facial features. He is severely underweight, though it does not seem to affect him. It is almost as though he does not notice how skinny he is. His loose white pants and clinical-style white shirt hang off of him, adding to his underweight appearance, and contrasting starkly with his short but curly black hair and vivid...
ice blue eyes. He speaks rationally as he answers my questions but inside he is hurting and wanting to escape. I can see his longing to escape as if it were a tangible cloak sheltering him from the reality of where he is residing. I lean forward in my chair and ask in a soft voice, “Jason, why did your family bring you here?”

Jason goes very still. It appears almost as if he is not breathing, which sends fear slithering up my spine. The slight tremor that had touched his hands moments ago was gone. The blue of his eyes are a slender ring around his dilated pupils. His hair glistens as if he just stepped out of a shower prior to coming to this room. He speaks slowly, his voice no more than a soft whisper that had me straining my ears to catch: “My family never existed, Miss Catherine. I dreamt them. Here.” He brings a hand up and taps his forehead. Once. Twice. A third time.

My brow creases as I try to figure out what he just said. A few moments later, I see what he meant. Sudden images flood into my head, scattering my train of thought. His father is an older carbon copy of Jason, his mother, a feminine carbon copy of him, and his faceless younger sister... The sister that he never met. I mentally shake myself to get rid of the images as I do nothing but stare at the boy in front of me.

Jason, his eyes focused on absolutely nothing that I can physically see, has a smile on his face that would have given the Joker reason to pause. I tilt my head to the side as confusion flares to life and slides it’s chilling fingers along my veins. I find myself un-focusing my gaze. Now I can see what I had not been able to moments before.

Behind Jason stood the exact images of his father, mother, and little sister that had invaded my mind a few minutes earlier. They shimmer slightly as though they are struggling to maintain a hold on the reality that Jason has envisioned for them. “Jason,” I whisper to the nonresponsive boy in front of me. “Your mind is your home, isn’t it? You do not see these walls... These people.” He absently shakes his head as reality slips back into place around me.

My hands shake as I pull myself out of the chair I was sitting in and turn to leave the room. Nurses silently move past me, intent on their task of taking care of the young man named Jason. The young man who did not see the world through normal eyes but, like me, sees in shades of grey, white, and black. A young man who sees with his mind the things that no one could truly say were there...Again, like me. A few days later, I type my impressions of Jason and send my written details to my Professor. By this time, I had already discussed my time with Jason with Marshall and a few of my other classmates. I let my mind slip back to Carol’s sympathetic response. “You sympathize with him because you can relate with him. That doesn’t bode well for you in the future.” The screen on my computer flashes with a response from my professor and pulls my attention from my thoughts. I focus on the message with my heart hammering in my chest and fear once again curls its icy fingers down my spine: “You would have done well in this profession. I am sorry.”

It was not until much later that I would realize that talking to my fellow classmates would prove a fatal blow for my degree and, inevitably, the remainder of my sanity...

My name is Catherine, and I currently reside in a white, but softly cushioned, walled room at Ashcroft Asylum. I have been here for two years, or so the nurses tell me. Shifting my position on the hard but comfortable bed bolted to the northern wall, I glance through the small glass square offering the only glimpse of anything outside of my homely room and a smile pulls at the corners of my lips. In the distance, Jason returns the smile knowingly.
by Erin Waits

Calhoun Community College is undergoing many changes, outwardly, academically, and numerically. After talking to several students about their opinion of the changes being made to our campus, it became clear the woman who has made it all happen is Calhoun’s president, Dr. Marilyn C. Beck. Dr. Beck graciously allowed us an interview to describe her opinion of the progress being made.

The evolution began with the construction of the Math and Science Building. Since then, several other buildings have been renovated, including the Wallace Building and Harris Hall. The projects that are presently underway are the new signs, landscaping, and most apparently the building of the Robotics complex located across Highway 31 from Calhoun’s Decatur campus. Dr. Beck smiled and said that she is very pleased. As a result of cooperative contractors and hard workers, she says that Calhoun has been so fortunate with the satisfactory progress accomplished. The campus is more than she had ever expected. “The students are much more proud of attending Calhoun Community College because of the new appearance. Everything looks so nice. We look like a real college,” Dr. Beck explained. Perhaps what Dr. Beck is most proud of are the walkways spanning from one end of the campus to the other, allowing students to safely navigate from building to building. She is also pleased with the improved parking at the back of the campus, more classroom space, and nicer facilities for learning.

Although many improvements have been completed, there are more to come. The next projects will include renovating the Performing Arts building and installing new elevators in Harris Hall and the Fine Arts Building. More parking and more classroom space will also be added to facilitate Calhoun’s visible growth on the Decatur and Huntsville campuses. At the Huntsville campus, new parking, a student center, and a bookstore will be completed soon. Also, by this summer, solar panels will be removed on the Huntsville campus to allow the construction of more parking and better lighting.

Not only has Calhoun Community College undergone many outward changes with the above-mentioned projects, enrollment has sky-rocketed. In the Fall 2009 semester alone, 1,600 new students were added in enrollment. Dr. Beck expressed her appreciation for the faculty and staff who have so graciously facilitated this enormous growth: “They have truly gone far and beyond.” Dr. Beck is pleased with the cooperation of faculty and staff for accommodating the added pressure of an increase in students and the campus’s ability to withstand this growth. A proposal for an increase in tuition that becomes effective in the spring semester of 2010 has also been enacted because of this exceptional growth. Although tuition will increase, Dr. Beck wants to stress the great need for more funding to facilitate Calhoun’s growing enrollment. Calhoun has sustained recurrent tuition costs for as long as possible. To continue growing in size and quality, Calhoun Community College’s administrators must be assisted with a small tuition increase.

On the topic of numerical growth, I posed the question of the possibility of dorms being added. However, Dr. Beck explains that no plans have been made for dorms because of the majority of local students in attendance at Calhoun. Also, peo-
people have discussed the possibility of Calhoun becoming a four-year university or beginning to offer four-year degree programs. On this issue, Dr. Beck does not believe that Calhoun becoming a four-year university is inevitable. “There are plenty of outstanding four-year institutions around the valley including Calhoun’s sister school — Athens State University, the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the University of North Alabama, and many private universities as well,” Dr. Beck states. She also adds, “Plus, we are very good at what we do.”

“Being good at what we do,” as Dr. Beck says, is also one of many reasons more and more students are choosing to attend a two-year college like Calhoun before transferring to a larger four-year university. “A high quality type of instruction is offered here at Calhoun.” By attending Calhoun the two years instead of plunging straight in to a four-year university, students can save money by being able to stay at home and maintain a part-time job while attending. A two-year college like Calhoun is also beneficial in getting students accustomed to the college atmosphere while being surrounded by a familiar environment with less distraction. Lastly, at a community college, students can get their general study classes under their belt in a less stressful environment.

In the near future, Calhoun will continue the journey to becoming a more successful, effective, and larger community college. Students should keep an eye on the construction of the Robotics Park that will be completed by this fall. As a result of the completion of the Robotics Park, new Robotics classes will be offered in the areas of assembly and operation. Also, interestingly, there has been talk of adding/enhancing courses in President Barack Obama’s “green technology” in the areas of maintenance and even short term training of alternative energy systems, allowing the possibility for more job opportunities. Dr. Beck definitely has hope for the future with her eyes set on the final product.

### Calhoun Student Wins NISOD Student Essay Contest

Mindy Birdwell, a student in the Machine Tool Technology program at Calhoun Community College, has been named first place winner of the Community College Week/NISOD (National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development) Student Essay Contest. Mindy’s essay won first place from the more than 700 essays submitted from community college students nationwide.

Entitled “A Hero in an Unlikely Place,” Mindy’s essay speaks about the impact her instructor, Mike Blizzard, has made on her life after coming to Calhoun as an older student.

A Hero in an Unlikely Place
by Mindy S. Birdwell

My life became seriously unmanageable when my youngest left for college. I had always heard of the empty nest syndrome but I did not believe in it. My four children were well on their way to realizing their goals and I was devastated. I felt alone and abandoned, and I was not sure what to do. My response was initially to drown my sorrows and self-medicate my depression with alcohol, but that only made my life worse. I had worked as a housekeeper to help support my children but I could no longer perform in that capacity. I had always been interested in any kind of mechanical work but my husband did not allow me to pursue a job in any male dominated field. After my youngest left for school my husband left too. All of a sudden the door was open for me to work where I wanted, so I took a temp position in a machine shop in my town.

The machine shop is a truly unique place; it is a place where average people do extraordinary things! I loved it but I wanted to know more about machining so I was sent to see Mike Blizzard at Calhoun Community College. Much to my surprise I was welcomed into this male dominated world and I thrived there. Mike Blizzard opened up a whole new world to me and in his own way he mentored me through my first two years at Calhoun. I had left high school at the age of fifteen to marry and I’d spent my whole life raising children, so I had a lot of catching up to do. If I had not started out in the Machine Tool Technology field, I do not know if I would have made it in college. I needed so much patience and understanding; not just academically but emotionally. Mike Blizzard not only taught me how to be a pretty good machinist; but he also helped me get my self-esteem and self-confidence back that I had lost during an abusive 27 year marriage. I will never be able to repay him for the encouragement and compassion shown to me during my first two years at Calhoun.

As I finish up my time at Calhoun Community College and prepare to go on to a four year school, I have every intention of reaching my goal of becoming an Industrial and Systems Engineer. I still see Mike Blizzard every day. I have been his work-study student for three years and he still keeps me in line! The instructors in the Machine Tool Technology departments in community colleges all over this great country deserve some recognition. I know my instructor does. After all I’ve learned from Mike Blizzard, I may change my major and become a Machine Tool Technology instructor too!
The largest political debate of 2009 has been health care and health insurance reform. When health care costs account for the majority of bankruptcies in America, almost 50 million people lack health insurance, and people are dying from pre-existing condition denials, it is clear that our health insurance system needs reform. But between the Democratic and Republican bickering in Congress, something has been lost in this debate: The American people. How much of the fight is based on facts? Are congress(wo)men fighting for us or for the health insurance lobbyists who are filling their campaign funds? This debate has lasted a long time and will go on until a bill is passed or the entire idea of reform is defeated.

Barack Obama’s voters listed health care as their number two priority after voting him into office in 2008. One of the largest and most talked about Democratic issues over the last two decades has been health care. The biggest reason for this is the number of uninsured Americans and the problems those who do have health insurance face from their insurers. There are 47 million uninsured citizens in one of the most industrialized nations in the world. Millions of people are discriminated against every year because of pre-existing conditions. These discriminations range from denial of claims, denying coverage of a particular condition, denial of prescription coverage, denying an application for coverage, or dropping a customer’s coverage completely. Surely, these statistics are often used and seem meaningless to some. One gets tired of hearing them after a while. But having been one of the millions of uninsured for five years, these numbers are very real to me. America spends 16% of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on health care each year, more than any other country in the world. Health care costs account for 62% of all bankruptcies in America. This is nearly unheard of in all other countries. Insurance premiums and health care costs are rising faster than both wages and inflation. These numbers are expected to continue their upward trends if something is not done to solve these problems.

For many years, part of the Democratic platform has been the implementation of a Universal Health care system. As the only industrialized nation in the world that does not provide its citizens Universal Health care, we are ranked 37 in overall health care performance, just above Slovenia. Our life expectancy is 38th in the world, and we are 16th in infant mortality. Progressives have been screaming for Universal Health care for many years, and Barack Obama said in 2006 that he supported a single payer system. Single Payer is a system used in England, France, Italy, Germany, Ireland, Canada, and many other countries. In his first of many gestures of bipartisanship, President Obama came out with his compromise right from the start of the debate, saying that single payer was off the table and that he wanted a public option instead. This is equivalent to giving the highest price you are willing to pay for a used car as your first offer.

Since the President introduced it, the Public Option has become the center of the debate. The compromise from the beginning put the debate right in the middle, and the only place it could swing from there was to the right. The Public Option has been called a new “government bureaucracy”. It has been called a socialist program, taken straight from the book of Marxism. They have said that the government will “come between you and your doctor” and make decisions about what treatment one could receive (as though the health insurance companies aren’t already doing that). What the Public Option actually is, is a government run, non-profit health insurance option that would compete with private insurance. It would charge premiums so that it can remain viable but, because it has no profit incentive, its premiums would be lower than private insurance, causing premiums overall to go down. It would not decide what treatment you could or could not have. The Public Option wouldn’t care if you sliced your finger off, got malaria, became pregnant, or got cancer. It wouldn’t care if you had a preexisting condition; it would cover you no matter what. The Public Option started out with the support of 70 percent of the American population. After the Republican fear and smear tactics, and the weak, unconvincing rebuttals from Democrats, it has lost momentum.

The debate has been degraded by a slew of mudslinging from Republicans in Congress, on TV, in their governorships, their state legislative bodies, and prominent Republicans not currently affiliated with the government. They have called our President socialist, Marxist, fascist, communist, and more derogatory terms I’d rather not even list. Sarah Palin said on her “Twitter” page that she was afraid of Barack Obama’s “Death Panels.” This caused even more mudslinging...
from the right and a TV debate about “Death Panels” which lasted for agonizing weeks. The whole thing was started by a provision in H.R. 3200 which allowed Medicare to cover end-of-life care. This means that when patients sit down with their doctor to talk about what types of care they will accept or reject at the end of their life, the conversation is covered under Medicaid. Furthermore, the measure was introduced by a Republican representative. The biggest straw man the Republicans like to pull out is the current Budget Deficit. However, I don’t remember the Republicans complaining about the Deficit when it came to funding a misguided war in Iraq. I don’t remember them complaining about the Deficit for the largest tax cut in the history of this country (the only tax cut to be passed during war time). Republicans have falsely claimed the bill will cover illegal immigrants, abortions, institute euthanasia (government encouraged suicide), and many other ridiculous claims meant to obstruct debate, not further it. Why? The Republicans are in a huge minority, and they want this bill to be watered down so much with Democratic compromises that it will not work once implemented. Then they can turn around and blame the problems on the Democrats.

But why does the Health Insurance Reform Bill need Republican support at all? There are sixty Democratic senators and that means they have a filibuster proof majority. A filibuster is a means of obstruction in which a senator will use the floor and debate time to talk about anything they want for as long as they want, delaying or preventing a vote on legislation. Democrats had to overcome a Republican filibuster on the Civil Rights Act. The problem, then, is not necessarily the Republicans. Each and every Republican in the Senate has taken hundreds of thousands of dollars from health insurance companies and the pharmaceutical industry. They are bought and sold, and no matter how much compromise the Democrats try, they will not get a single Republican vote. No, the problem is not the Republicans but the few Democrats who are, sadly, bought as well. Those Democrats have promised to join a Republican filibuster and kill the legislation. However, those Democrats who are willing to join a filibuster are small in number. Health care legislation could still be passed with a majority through “reconciliation”. Reconciliation can be used for all votes dealing with the budget and does not allow a filibuster. Some see this as an impolite method of passing a bill, but the Republicans did it all the time during the Bush administration. In fact, they used reconciliation to pass Bush’s tax cuts, turning the Country’s largest surplus in history into its largest deficit.

Because the Democrats are weak and won’t pass health care in reconciliation, we must compromise... again. One option is a trigger, meaning if the insurance companies don’t start to behave in the next five years or so, the public option will be set up. But since we couldn’t get Joe Lieberman (who has taken hundreds of thousands from the health insurance companies) to vote for it, we had to compromise again. The next idea is to allow people 55 and older to buy into Medicare and let the private industry run a non-profit health insurance organization. It is unknown whether or not this will pass, but if the past Democratic compromises are any indication, who knows how watered down this bill will become before it passes.

What Health Care Crisis?
by Chris Hooie

We see it in the media every day. Huge headlines reading “Healthcare crisis grips country,” or “No relief in sight for sufferers of Healthcare Crisis.” Well, my friends, there is no Health Care crisis. The system of health care in our country is fine. We have plenty of doctors, nurses, surgeons, specialists, and other healthcare employees. We have unlimited access to healthcare. We have hospitals in almost every city, minutes away for the average American. The real issue is not care; it is about who is going to pay for it.

Many would have us believe it is the responsibility of the government to provide for those who do not have health-care insurance or the ability to pay. Who is the government? In theory, we all are, in reality it is a group of politicians who make decisions for us. People say, “it’s only government money.” My friends, that money was taken by the government from someone, basically at gunpoint. Why do we think it is someone else’s responsibility to take care of others? The fact they are wealthy? What makes them more responsible than you or me? Please do not misunderstand, I am a firm believer in so-called “safety nets,” but every single “safety net” the government has created is now a “fishing net.” Our country has spent trillions of dollars on the war on poverty, yet there are many more poor Americans each generation than the last. The current system of “safety nets” is a system by which politicians are simply buying votes with our tax dollars!

The current proposals in our legislative bodies would cost our country approximately a trillion dollars, spread over ten years or so. These proposals would not even provide coverage to most of the Americans it is designed for until about the fourth year of the program. This means that the taxes raised in the first four years will be taken from taxpayers and businesses and placed into the

continued
general fund, where they will be available for politicians to spend. There are no “lockboxes” in our government. People often ask about social security, “Where did the money go?” It went into the government coffers where it was spent on everything from food stamps to stealth bombers. The current proposals would cover somewhere between ten and twenty percent of the residents of the country-- once the program was fully funded and operational. To extend this coverage to everyone, a “single payer” system would therefore increase the cost to approximately a trillion dollars or so, per year. My friends, we are already spending one and a half trillion dollars more per year than we take in taxes. Where will this money come from? “The top one percent,” the politicians say. Well, the average person in this tax class (the top 1%) makes about $650,000 per year. There are about 2 million such individuals in the country. A trillion dollars is a million million dollars. If we tax the top one percent at one hundred percent of their income, we would generate 1.3 trillion per year and we can pay for single payers. However, if YOU were being taxed at one hundred percent, would you continue to work? In addition, most of the dollars spent on our government programs comes from this same tax class. What will happen to these programs? These numbers are figured on Americans only, not including illegal immigrants. “Wait a minute,” the politicians say, “illegal immigrants will not be covered.” The congress has already attempted to grant amnesty to these individuals. Who is to say that they won’t attempt to do so again? If an amnesty law passes, then those individuals will not be “illegal” anymore, and wouldn’t that make them eligible for the program? There are over 30 million of these people, as many or more than Americans who are already uninsured. Illegal immigrants are already straining our welfare programs; why should we allow them to “break the bank” once they are allowed into this “health insurance” system?

We must also consider our health choices. We are the unhealthiest country in the industrialized world. We eat too much, smoke too much, drink too much, and we do not exercise. If the government runs healthcare and health insurance, wouldn’t they eventually have to mandate that we must change this behavior? Wouldn’t they have to do so to control costs? In effect, wouldn’t they have to tell us how to live our lives?

My friends, there are simply more questions than answers. No, I do not believe either party has the answer. Personally, I believe we should have a public insurance option available, but it must be limited in scope and cost. People should be allowed to buy-in at their expense, with subsidies for those who cannot afford it. Those among us who can work but are not should be allowed in temporarily, until they find employment. Once employed, these individuals should have the opportunity to continue this coverage at their expense, with a small overcharge to pay back what was subsidized by the government. We must start making wise choices to combat bad behavior and reduce our expenses as a country. We must quit thinking that it is someone else that must be responsible for taking care of us.

**Tech News**

By: Mindy Birdwell

When you walk into the Aerospace, Machine Tool, and Industrial Technology buildings, you are walking into a branch of Calhoun Community College that is known to only a small percentage of our growing school- but is a big part of what Calhoun is to our community. These departments connect Calhoun to the real world, the world where our parents, husbands/wives, friends, and for some of us, ourselves, go to work every day. Many students at Calhoun have never seen the inside of these buildings, and they have no idea what goes on within them. However, these are magical places where ordinary students do extraordinary things!

Imagine putting a hunk of metal into a machine, pushing a few buttons, and that machine turning that hunk of metal into anything you tell it to! Tad Montgomery in the Machine Tool department would say this is a simple way of explaining CNC machining but somewhat accurate. The CNC stands for Computer Numerical Control- the method of controlling machines by the use of digital electronic computers and circuitry. Machine movements are controlled by cams, gears, levers, or screws in manual machines, but machine movements are directed by computers and digital circuitry in Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machines. Mike Blizzard, the technology department head, teaches students the basics of manual machining, then turns them over to Tad for CNC machining in the aerospace building... If you’ve never seen these machines in action, you should check it out! It’s amazing!

Do you want to know how to fix an air conditioner, wire a socket, weld a pipe together, or do a variety of things that most people can’t do? If so, go see John
Blessings and Curses of Life at Calhoun by Daniela Saracutu

Life as a college student can be described from many different points of views, about twelve thousand of them, at Calhoun Community College, Decatur/Huntsville, Alabama.

I am very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to come to the States from southeast Europe, and to channel my efforts towards a career of my choice. Becoming a student at Calhoun Community College is a dream come true for me. I have been welcomed by kind and supportive professors and staff members alike. It didn't take long for me to make lots of new friends, to fall in love with my student life, and most importantly, to find a mentor. Dr. Sheila Byrd acknowledged my individuality from the beginning and made sure that I had access to all that I need in order to succeed. It feels good to know that every single professor I have met in or outside class at Calhoun Community College cares about my future and understands the significance of my goals.

I am equally impressed with the vast array of student clubs and organizations and their sponsors. Students have been offered much more than just study material at this college. Our creativeness and abilities as caring human beings have been encouraged and unconditionally supported by all the Calhoun Community College family members. I personally have learned to appreciate, on an international scale of comparison, the opportunities that have been presented to me. I love being a student in the States, and I can undoubtedly say that I feel better about my chance to succeed in life with every day I spend at Calhoun Community College. My fellow students and I are encouraged to apply the knowledge acquired during the many hours of study into our own personal life-long prospects and to discipline ourselves so that we may learn to make the right decisions.

Discipline starts with always being on time, just like in the example that our professors set for us. It is my greatest wish as a Calhoun Community College student that I begin showing my respect and appreciation for my professors by being on time for class. No one should have to be unfairly disturbed by my tardiness. At the same time, I wish I wouldn't lose focus on the important things when I realize that my plans for the day are being vanquished by a mad game of “Musical Parking Places.” Many of us work before class. We literally cannot afford to come to Calhoun hours in advance just so we can find a safe and legal place to park.

The need for better parking arrangements must be recognized before all that has been so beautifully built into the image Calhoun Community College has in the community today starts declining.

Photo by Lanita Parker
Huntsville Meets Tragedy...Twice
by Roland Deschain

On a cold, dreary Friday afternoon, students filled the halls of Discovery Middle School as they made their way from one class to the next. It was February 5th and for 9th grader, Todd T. Brown, it would be his last day alive. Another ninth grader (who, as of this writing, has still remained un-named) walked calmly toward him, pulled a gun out of his jacket pocket, and shot him in the back of the head. As Brown fell to the ground, the shooter, just as calmly, put the gun back into his jacket pocket, and walked away. Students screamed and panicked. It was the second school shooting in Huntsville, Alabama, in seven days. It was the second school shooting in Tennesssee Valley’s schools will be safe in the future. After all, if you cannot feel safe at school, where can you?

The Chadwick’s Gift From China
by Ryan Wood

Dave Chadwick came to the United States from England on a three-year work visa with Intergraph. He and Jill May Wood met at a restaurant in Huntsville and soon started dating. Jill had two kids when she met Dave and was a single mother, working full time at Calhoun as an English teacher for over ten years. After dating for three months, Dave took her to England to meet his family and proposed on the coast of Dartmouth. They married six months later. After the marriage, Dave dearly wanted the experience of raising a child from infancy. However, it became apparent that this would not happen by natural means, so Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick decided to adopt.

Around this time, a friend and colleague of Mrs. Chadwick, Vicki Earnest, sent her an email announcing the adoption of their daughter from China. Jill forwarded the email to her husband, who loved the idea and was overjoyed at the prospect. They brought up the idea to their two children, Heath and Cody, who were 13 and 10 at the time, and they were equally excited. After processing tons of paperwork, the usual routine of an adoption ensued, including a visit from a social worker and the wait for a referral, which they received while on vacation at Disneyland. The referral packet came with a simple description of the baby as well as a few pictures.

The Chadwicks arrived in China on October 5th, 2000, with nine other families from CCAI, their adoption agency. They were taken to a hotel in Changsha, where the nannies arrived just a few hours later with ten babies. The exchange took place in the lobby of the hotel, in front of the elevators. The nannies read out the names of the adoptive parents, and each couple came forward to receive their child. When Dave Chadwick saw the baby, he recognized her immediately because he had been staring at her picture for so long. When the nanny handed the baby to Mrs. Chadwick, she said it was “comparable to when the doctors handed me my other two children except that I felt a lot better because I had not gone through hours of labor.” When asked if she had the feeling that she had rescued the baby from life in an orphanage for many years, Mrs. Chadwick said, “No, it wasn’t like that at all.” In fact, she felt that she and her husband were the lucky ones. The family agreed together on the baby’s first name, Katelyn. For her middle name, Mrs. Chadwick
wished to tie Katelyn to her side of the family, while at the same time keeping part of her Chinese heritage. The new addition to the Chadwick family became Katelyn Mei-Ling Chadwick. The week after the Chadwicks picked up Katelyn (October 9th, 2000) was her first birthday.

Over the years, Jill Chadwick has become so well accustomed to her daughter’s Chinese heritage that she sometimes forgets that she is adopted. Katelyn’s doctor once told Mrs. Chadwick that the nose bleeds Katelyn had are sometimes hereditary. “Oh, no,” said Mrs. Chadwick. “Neither I nor Dave have had this problem.” Sometimes people ask odd questions like “What is her father?” She usually gives a bit of a cheeky response like, “He is a man, and he is from England.” When Katelyn asks her mom about her birth parents, Mrs. Chadwick tells her about the one child limit in China. She says that her mother probably already had one child and had to give her up for adoption. She doesn’t want to put the idea in her head that she might have been abandoned because she was female.

In China today, there are over 1.3 billion people compared to America’s population of only 300 million. Because of this growing problem of overpopulation, China’s government has imposed a one child limit; many Chinese opt to have a male child to carry on the family name and because they feel a male child is more likely to take care of them when they are too old to care for themselves. This causes a highly disproportionate number of females to males because the Chinese often put up female babies for adoption.

Because Katelyn is now the same age as Mrs. Chadwick’s other two children when she was adopted, I asked Mrs. Chadwick how it has been different raising Katelyn. Her first response was that it had been different raising Katelyn because she is a girl and her other two children are both boys. Her second response was that it was easier because she had Dave to help raise her, whereas she had been a single mother during most of Heath and Cody’s childhoods.

Mrs. Chadwick is modest and does not acknowledge it, but what she did is surely a beautiful thing. Katelyn has grown up in a loving American home and attends American schools. She has unlimited opportunities available to her and most importantly, she has not spent most of her life in an orphanage. She has been cared for and loved since the start of her second year. As of the publication of this article Katelyn is 10. She is an excellent baton twirler, soccer player, animal lover, and friend. She also enjoys Chinese lessons and doing anything outside. As Katelyn once said herself, when only 2 years old, she’s “just a little bit of perfection.”

It’s All in Black and White
by Erin Waits

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in schools and public facilities was unconstitutional according to the 14th Amendment which “guarantees all citizens equal protection under the law.” As a result of this controversial ruling, unrest became inevitable around the entire United States, especially in southern states. Occurrences such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the use of federal troops in Little Rock, Arkansas, echoed the voices of thousands to eliminate racial segregation. One of the most well-known, violent occurrences transpired between local lawmen and a group of civil rights marchers that walked from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in hopes of obtaining voting rights for African Americans. However, integration wasn’t a violent transition everywhere in the South. In north Alabama and southern Tennessee, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) had begun integrating in the 1930s by hiring black workers and extending to them the same benefits that whites possessed. TVA had set the standards high, and because of this, many residents of the Tennessee Valley were more accepting of legal integration in the 1950s and 1960s. To gain a better understanding of the process of integration in the South and the response of Southerners to this explosive issue, I interviewed two of Calhoun’s professors with contrasting experiences of integration.

Dr. Randy Cross, a professor of English, grew up in this very area of the South where integration wasn’t as controversial. Growing up in St. Joseph, Tennessee, a small town on the Alabama-Tennessee state line, Dr. Cross’s community was predominantly white. Because of this, there were no major issues during this period of time because simply there were no black students to integrate. Dr. Cross attended Loretta High School when his first memory of integration occurred. The morning his high school became integrated, the principal of Loretta High called all of the students to the gym. “The principal came in and stood in the middle of the gym floor and told us that there would be a bus arriving at school that morning bringing black students and that there would be no problems,” he explains “and there weren’t.” When the bus arrived at the school, Dr. Cross says that he remembers his English teacher having them stand up and look out the window because history was being made before their eyes. He attended Loretta High School from 1964 to 1968, and he credits the teachers for the smooth transition because of their control over the students. By the time Dr. Cross reached the University of North Alabama, people were becoming more accustomed to integration, and the college was completely integrated. One of his earliest memories of segregation includes his weekly family outing to Sears in Florence, Alabama, on Saturdays. He remembers there being two water fountains, one for
“colored” people and one for white people, and also four bathrooms, two “colored” men and women bathrooms and two bathrooms for white people. When Dr. Cross first heard of Barack Obama’s campaign, he thought back on that particular memory: “I realized that a man who couldn’t have drunk out of the same water fountain as I did was being elected as President. That’s how far we’ve come.”

In contrast, Dr. Hameed El-Amin, a professor of Psychology, witnessed at very close range tumultuous times. Dr. El-Amin grew up in Tuskegee, Alabama. Living with his grandmother, his brother, and several of his cousins, he witnessed history in the making at a young age, as well. His grandmother’s house was situated on 102 North Court Street in the heart of Tuskegee, across the street from Butler's Chapel AME Zion Church where civil rights activists gathered for meetings regularly. Dr. El-Amin’s earliest memory of integration was the Montgomery Bus Boycott, occurring in 1955, because Butler’s Chapel AME Zion Church was the meeting place for many of the civil rights activists involved in the boycott. He remembers hearing the chants and songs of boycotters inside the church from his seat on his grandmother’s porch. Although Dr. El-Amin attended elementary school in Tuskegee, he began high school in Florence where his parents lived. His father was the principal of Burrell-Slater High School, which was converted to a technical applications school in 1975, and his mother was the first black teacher employed at Sheffield High School in 1955. Both of his parents were also members of a race relations committee in Florence, along with many other African American, white, and Jewish people as well. After high school, Dr. El-Amin attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, during the peak years of civil rights reform by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many other civil rights activists. Morehouse College is the same university that Martin Luther King, Jr. attended. At the same time, Atlanta was becoming a desegregated city, and that was one of his most memorable experiences. Dr. El-Amin also remembers campaigning for one of the first black politicians, who was a Republican and former dentist. Dr. El-Amin jokes, “When you’re that age (in college), you just want to be doing something.” He also recalls visiting local eateries in Atlanta and being within only a few feet of civil rights workers and civil rights organizations’ founders.

On a different note, when asked about the election of Barack Obama, Dr. El-Amin only smiled and gave this simple explanation of his feelings at that moment: “Socially and psychologically, as a community and as a nation, President Obama’s election, to me, symbolically signifies that that period of turmoil is gone.”

Dr. Hameed El-Amin began teaching Psychology at Calhoun in 1983. He is also a writer and was a guest speaker, along with Miller Williams, at one of Calhoun’s Writer’s Conferences. Dr. El-Amin has written a great deal of poetry, but this poem perhaps perfectly embodies his experience with integration:

**Mass Meetings 1955**
by Dr. Hameed El-Amin

Along the way of God-given trusts
My father spilled his speedy bike
Little brother clinging to his waist
Down the wide way….
Where the tired feet of Mother Parks
Put quiet courage in downtrodden men….
Working their trust
Bowing their knees before God…..
Down “Dexter Avenue”
My father spilled his speedy bike
Where the baptizing spirit of Vernon Johns,
Adam Powell, Benny Mays… and Malcolm….
Strode with Martin, and steadfast multitudes….
Holding hands to secure their faith
Against the sure death….. of martyrs….
Along the road from 1955
Men met themselves…..
Laying scattered… and strewn!

For spooking the certainty…. of other men
Abusing the trust… given their hands by God
Along the road to promised land
Pious spirits rest…. at fixed places of prayer
Reposing in fields of beaming dandelions
Listening to the lifting breeze…
Humming Amazing Grace
Through the graveyard…. of neglected bones…..

Along the road from Wetumpka,
To my uncles humble grace….
Men met themselves,
And the spirit of other men
Bowing their heads before men….
Bowing their knees before God!

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama stood beside his wife, Michelle, and his two children, Malia and Sasha, along with Vice President Joe Biden, to become the 44th president of the United States of America. During and after President Obama’s inaugural speech, thousands were left with tears in their eyes and smiles on their faces, not only because of his perfectly-crafted speech but because of the realization of what his election stood for. His speech included one sentence that beautifully embodies this article: “And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.” America has overcome and emerged from times when turmoil was routine and issues like segregation and the integration of schools and public places were subjects that people refrained from talking about. However, as American citizens, we can not only look back to our past times of inequality but look forward to our future in hopes that “old hatreds” will pass throughout our country and even some places in our world with the election of an African American president.
St. Louis: Gateway to Experiences
by Erin Waits

“Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’
Gleams that untravell’d world”
- “Ulysses” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The 2010 Sigma Tau Delta National Conference was to be held in St. Louis, Missouri, and when I realized I would be in attendance, my anticipation began to build. From the moment of the first meeting to discuss the trip to the last e-mail confirming plane tickets and baggage expenses, my excitement was an ever-existing emotion that surrounded me whenever the Gateway to the West was mentioned. It would be a trip of firsts and beginnings. Other Sigma Kappa Delta members told me of the importance of conference; however, I never realized the intensity that would exist during March 18th-21st, 2010.

Our flight from Huntsville International Airport to Atlanta would be my first flying experience. As I drove to Calhoun Community College to meet the other students who would be riding together to the airport, anxiety began to grip my chest, causing my heart to race and perspiration to build on my brow. Four SKD students rode with one of our sponsors, Ms. Leigh Ann Rhea, to Huntsville. When we arrived at the airport, I began to encounter nerves; however, there were many friendly faces there to calm me. Among those friendly faces were Bailey Lovell, Clay Austin, Colin Montgomery, Blake Bivens, Brandon Olson, Matthew Rodriguez, Kelsey Prater, Ana Brito, Ashley Clem, Laura Meadows, Morgan Griffin, Vita Schiavone, Sandra Taunton, and Maggie Thomas. As I had my first encounter with security and boarded the plane, I realized that flight was upon me. The plane began to taxi to the runway, and as the small passenger plane began to accelerate and then slowly leave the ground, my fear was replaced by curiosity, fascination, and excitement.

Our plane arrived in St. Louis, Missouri, at 1:45 PM on Thursday, March 18th, 2010. It would be the first day of four that would change many things in my life. I was surrounded by a dozen people who interested and intrigued me, but most of all, who I would share this experience with. As our SKD chapter Theta Beta arrived all together at the Hyatt Regency at the Arch, everyone immediately dropped their bags and walked out the lobby doors to see the one thing that captured my attention throughout the entire trip. It was the Arch, gleaming all silvery white in the sun, casting a shadow on the green grass below, and creating a sense of awe and wonder in all of our hearts. The Arch would be a symbol for me, a symbol of self-discovery, a symbol of a new beginning, and a symbol of the unknown that lay ahead of me, waiting to be discovered.

Greeting me and two of the other Theta Beta girls was a fortunate mishap in booking. Our sponsor, Mrs. Jill Chadwick, pulled us aside while giving room assignments, and with a composed and seemingly concerned face, told us that we would have to suffer in a suite for the duration of the trip. A couple squeals escaped our throats as we agreed to be responsible and follow the “Betty rule” diligently. Providential events such as this seemed to follow us throughout our stay in St. Louis.

Theta Beta was introduced to many new and familiar faces alike at the Meet and Greet held at Calceo’s Bar and Grill where we enjoyed delicious pizza and played literary games to get to know one another. Calhoun’s Theta Beta chapter was the largest Sigma Kappa Delta group in attendance at the conference. Thursday night, Chris Abani spoke about the life of a refugee and the ability of language to span the distance between cultures. Everyone was taken by his humor and compassion, and many of us purchased his book Song for Night. (At least one of us even managed to purchase and read his book while on the trip.) To end the first day of our trip, a few of us gathered in our suite to conclude the perfect day with a perfect ending of cards, music, and conversation before retreating to cozy beds with pleasant pillows.

On Friday morning, Calhoun’s own Dr. Randy Cross and Ms. Leigh Ann Rhea were accompanied by a couple others on a panel to discuss student stories from Sigma Kappa Delta. Laughter erupted from the room of all in attendance. For lunch, the Sigma Kappa Delta chapters in attendance attended an awards luncheon at The Old Spaghetti Factory. Surrounded by beautiful chandeliers and an elegant environment, delicious Italian food was served as awards and scholarships were given to SKD members. Many students and sponsors enjoyed the beautiful weather on Friday after the luncheon, walked by the Mississippi River, and admired the Arch and the beautiful city of St. Louis. That afternoon, a panel was held by Joan Reeves...
that included several students from Calhoun Community College and Northeast Alabama Community College. The panel discussed family myths, legends, and stories. I was included on the panel and enjoyed talking about my grandfather and a story he shares with me every time I visit him. The importance of storytelling that existed as the theme for the conference echoed throughout this panel especially. After walking for what seemed like days, our group made our way back to the hotel where we all gathered in our suite to relax before the Red and Black Gala to be held that night. The Red and Black Gala was an elegant affair, and everyone in attendance looked extraordinarily nice. Catered with just as elegant h’orderves and beautiful desserts, the event was a unique and entertaining experience.

Saturday night was bitter sweet for all of us. Many of the Theta Beta members dreaded leaving the city and regretted that we would not get to spend more time in St. Louis. To end the night, once more, we gathered in the suite for casual conversation and a movie. Many of us retreated early to prepare for the day ahead when we would be leaving our stunning temporary home for our permanent homes in North Alabama and South Tennessee. However, many of us decided to stay up and enjoy the city lights from a wide window seat overlooking the Courthouse and streets below. On Sunday morning, we gathered bright and early in the Hyatt’s lobby to bid farewell to St. Louis and make our way to the airport to retreat home.

While at the 2010 Sigma Tau Delta National Conference, I was intrigued by unique speakers, experienced the city of St. Louis, met dozens of new and exciting people, and created friendships with many people who were in my own group. I arrived home with an outlook that experiences like the one I had just been given did not come often enough, and in the following week of Spring Break, I made decisions that would enable me to live life to the fullest of my ability. I am thankful that Sigma Tau Delta allows Sigma Kappa Delta to be involved in their conference every year because if they had not, I would not have gotten to fall in love with a new city or build relationships with the many special people I did.
Calhoun Community College Warhawks Baseball
By Erin Waits

2010 Roster

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Head Coach
Mike Burns

Assistant Coaches
Corey Looney
Gary Knotts

2010 Overall Record
23-10-0

Conference Record
6-6-0

2010 Conference Standings
ACCC North

1. Shelton State 10-2-0
2. Marion Military Institute 9-3-0
3. Bevill State 8-4-0
4. Wallace State - Hanceville 7-5-0
5. Calhoun 6-6-0
6. Northwest Shoals 6-6-0
7. Gadsden State 6-6-0
8. Snead State 5-7-0
9. Lawson State 3-9-0
10. Jefferson State 0-12-0

Updated: 3/30/2010
Calhoun Community College Lady Warhawks Softball

By Erin Waits

2010 Roster

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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Head Coach
Nancy Keenum

Assistant Coaches
Gil Loeser
Robert Slack

2010 Overall Record
27-6-1

Conference Record
3-1-0

2010 Conference Standings
ACCC North

1. Wallace State - Hanceville 2-0-0
2. Calhoun CC 3-1-0
3. Bevill State 3-1-0
4. Gadsden State 4-2-0
5. Northwest Shoals 1-3-0
6. Snead State 1-7-0

Updated: 3/27/2010
Foreword:

Welcome to this year’s Muse, a unique combination of literary journal and student newspaper.

The first part of this publication celebrates poetry, essays, short stories, artwork, and photography by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The second part, which we call The Musepaper, includes articles by our students about life around our campuses during the 2009-2010 school year.

Our editorial staff, composed of faculty from the Decatur and Huntsville campuses, hopes that you will be inspired by our creative efforts and stimulated by accounts of our campus events. Here is a time capsule from us to you. Enjoy!

Jill Chadwick
Chief Editor/Language & Literature Faculty

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Symmetris Gohanna
Joy Laws
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Your Community. Your College. Your Future.

Published by the Department of Language and Literature and Sigma Kappa Delta.
MUSE 2010

A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff and alumni.