muse
2018
A collection of works by Calhoun Community College students, faculty, staff and alumni.
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Just Add Water
(With apologies to HM and BS)
by Dr. Mitch Summerlin

Ahab’s Wish
To find the fish
That gnawed his shin
Takes Ishmael in.
Blue Rose  
by Chloe Minor

From that glow of love  
Mother made me a new floral friend  
Blue as sapphire  
Fresh as early May  
Her petals swing and sway in the gentle breeze  
Not knowing they’d soon bring me great dismay  
Her roots had been sprouted in darkness  
From where they remained  
Look in the river  
See your blue beauty I once knew  
Not the wretchedness that has devoured you  
Leave this obscene scene and cast away your thorns  
You do not have to feel forlorn  
Do not banish me from Mother’s garden  
You are the one who makes the lilacs lonely  
The hydrangeas consume hatred  
Even your vines claw at the innocent seedlings  
But despite it all, I still want to be your friend  
Even though it appears like the end  
Never and I mean ever will you transform me  
Because I will always be this, a little weed
The Echo of Rain

by Heather Congo

I have never caught the rain sliding from a banana leaf in the forest
But the sweat dropping from your chin onto my arched back should do.
I have never felt the grip of an anchor cutting into rage-salt
cutting into the captain’s palms
cutting the storm of a bow
all stinging mist of dusk on the sea
But the pressing of your fingers on the pulse of my wrist should do.
I give way to the sheets, all heavy-eyed, all misty-eyed
trying to slow the quick rise.
And I gather you
doing the same.
Rising and falling the same
as we contemplate our heart rates
things that are typical and things that are not.
You teach me of pressure
and what typically causes a vessel to burst.
Typical and lovely things.
I teach you what it feels like to own a lover’s green-eyed stare
a star-gazing gaze.
Then the banana leaf falls. Then the rain and anchor plummet.
As does the sweat, gathering with salt-mist.
And I catch myself echoing them.
Pro Life
By Morrison Hayden

Pro life without parole
The Ten Commandments
Plastered to the wall
Behind the judge’s throne.
Thou shalt not bear false witness.
Man with man, no.
Woman with woman, never.
Marriage is between one woman and one man
and a couple of teenage girls.
I Am

By Alexandria Berzett

This poem was inspired by an assignment given by my English instructor, Ms. Heather Congo.

I am from poverty,
bare-foot and hand-me-downs.
A child of endeavor; a wretch.
I am from the old, weary weeping willow,
whose branches still sway against the wind.

I am from the pews and the altar,
the kneeling of prayer and longing for His word.
I am from that dilapidated playhouse,
that withered away like my father’s soul
the rotted steps where I used to play
where many memories would unfold.

I am from isolation and desperation,
clinging to my mother’s love.
The tear-stained pillow on which I slept,
where many restless nights were spent.

I am from new beginnings,
built from the ground up.
Like newly rooted trees reaching toward the Heavens.
I am from privilege and opportunity,
from blood, sweat, and sacrifice of my elders.

I am from sorrow no more.
Precipice
By Kimberly T. Fellows Gaines

I’m standing on a precipice
On the edge of a mad rush
Of feelings that are trying
To push me over.

If I fall, I go headlong
Into a canyon
Like Wile E. Coyote
But since I’m not animated,

The question is, will I
Fall to my death or
Fall to a new life?

So, what do I do?
Stand here and keep resisting?
Turn around and fight my way
Back to sanity
Or jump?

I don’t have much
To lose if I jump
But if I jump, I cannot
Recover

If I fight my way back to
Sanity
I’ll have to leave
Love
And go on with
Life
Mary Wollstonecraft and Feminism
By Emily Bryant

Though Mary Wollstonecraft’s literary works are not as liberal as modern feminist ideologies, she began the movement for gender equality, primarily within education. She identifies the problem of prejudice in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, disclosing that society views women as inferior. Prior to the publication of this work, the tremendously conservative traditions restricted ideologies such as that which Wollstonecraft proposed. The primary difference between Wollstonecraft’s arguments regarding gender roles and modern feminist beliefs, however, is the fact that she never explicitly states that she views males and females as entirely equal.

Wollstonecraft identified the distinct gender division by stating that men view females as “women rather than human creatures” (214). Women had been deprived of education, making them seem as if they were incapable of rationality. In reality, they were simply never exposed to it. Her main purpose in writing was to obtain educational rights for women in order to diminish the idea that they are merely ornaments to society or possessions by marriage. Though there was a “constant struggle for equilibrium,“ Wollstonecraft believed that balance could be established because “intellect will always govern” (217). Though it was difficult to establish equality, educational rights for both sexes would assist in creating this equilibrium.

In 1792, the year of publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the only way for a woman to “rise in the world” was by marriage rather than intellect (216). The objectification of women within society was mostly due to the inferiority led by the lack of educational rights for women. Harsh societal standards made it difficult for women to be vocal. Wollstonecraft did not adhere to those standards and spoke out against the injustices, making her one of the earliest advocates within the feminist movement. Her comments, at the time, were considered exceedingly liberal even though they would not be viewed as reformist concepts by today’s standards.

Mary Wollstonecraft and modern feminist ideologies differ because she never clearly stated that men and women were completely equal. Instead, she claimed that she did not want to “invert the order of things” because she believed that “virtues should differ [between the sexes] in respect to their nature” (223). She desires change within gender roles in some aspects, such as education and morality, yet she does not long for an absolute societal transformation. The key concept of modern feminism is complete equality, while Wollstonecraft was simply inching towards a level of equality that had not yet been voiced.

Wollstonecraft played an important role within the feminist movement, though her ideology differed from more modern concepts. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, she discusses the obvious gender inequality and proposes that these issues can be resolved, primarily though educational rights for women. Though she advocates for women’s rights, she has no desire to entirely eliminate gender roles. She opened the minds of society by publishing one of the first works about women’s rights. Through her publication, she provided the first stepping stone on the path to more widespread gender equality.

WORKS CITED
Below: Sam’s Cat by Samatha Whitaker
The short story “Paul’s Case” by Willa Cather pieces together the story of a boy who is anxious, addicted to euphoria, and apathetic. While longer than most short stories, this work pries only briefly into the troubled mind of the main character. From an omniscient point of view, Paul is seen warring between the reality he lives in and the one he creates. No less than a troublemaker, he is a boy who seems to be more pitiable than likeable. However, in a series of increasingly unfortunate events, Paul’s story spins into a tumultuous train wreck.

Ever a self-satisfying creature, Paul crawls through each day of proclaimed bleakness with his vices as weapons. He lives in Pittsburgh, a city defined by industrialization. The role model Paul’s father motivates him to imitate is a young man who is a pawn to that steel giant. The narrator notes, “He was clerk to one of the magnates of a great steel corporation, and was looked upon in Cordelia Street as a young man with a future” (253). To Paul, this is a shining example of the inescapable life of Pittsburgh. He is resigned to think that is the only path his life can take, unless he carves another, more precarious way. Always appearing as nervous to passersby, the protagonist battles without ceasing against his anxiety, anxiety born from his impending doom. The only way he finds to truly protect himself from that is by exclusively dwelling on the few things he enjoys.
This behavior creates an addiction in Paul. For every moment he spends reveling in his safe havens, he grows more and more dependent. Yet these are the moments he lives for. Whether a Venetian scene in the picture gallery or a bold composition performed in the concert hall, Paul truly comes alive when he’s surrounded by any facet of the coveted life of grandeur. These connections to a life above money ignite his self-described spark. According to the narrator, “It was not that symphonies, as such, meant anything in particular to Paul, but the first sight of the instruments seemed to free some hilarious spirit within him; something that struggled there like the Genie in the bottle found by the Arab fisherman. He felt a sudden zest of life; the lights danced before his eyes and the concert hall blazed into unimaginable splendor” (250). As evident in this excerpt, Paul truly doesn’t care for fame, glory, or the work required to achieve them. It’s merely the high he gets when injected with euphoria.

These two qualities combine to make Paul a truly apathetic creature. His apathy can be seen as a leading factor of why he is viewed with such distaste, why he is whittled down to a selfish, troubled child. From the impact his actions can have on others to his harsh judgement of the common man, Paul cares for naught, only his every whim. The narrator reports, “After each of these orgies of living, he experienced all the physical depression which follows a debauch; the loathing of respectable beds, of common food, of a house permeated by kitchen odors; a shuddering repulsion for the flavorless, colorless mass of everyday existence; a morbid desire for cool things and soft lights and fresh flowers” (251). Apathy is a sour personality trait, and Paul possesses it without qualms.

Riddled with iniquities, Paul is a character who may be advised to be taken with a grain of salt. However, it can be said that the best cure for apathy in another is sympathy for that other. “Paul’s Case” tells a tragic tale, and like with a spoonful of garbage in a barrel full of wine, the positives of the opus are often disregarded for the negatives. Perhaps Paul is an anxious, apathetic troublemaker with addictive behaviors, but he possesses the unique ability to see beauty outside of normalcy.

WORKS CITED

Belarus is a former nation of the Soviet Union that has not strayed very far from its roots. Despite gaining its official independence in 1991, the former Soviet nation has failed to establish a truly free and independent government comparable to the United States of America and its break from the British in 1776. Belarus was a democratic hopeful after gaining its independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. However, the year 1994 saw Belarus’s first president, Alexander Lukashenko, begin his subtle transfer back to the country’s former condition. Lukashenko is still in power to this day, keeping strong ties to Russia. Due to its dependency on Russia, it is within reasonable doubt that the country could not stand alone, but Russia is now asking for more accountability from Lukashenko. There is a stark difference in leadership styles between the United States of America and Belarus.

Political leadership in the United States is generally viewed by its citizens as temporary but powerful. Because the USA is the single most powerful country in the world at the moment, each leadership position in the U.S. capitol carries more weight than any other political position. Ideally, the United States is a perfect democracy. While the U.S. may not be a perfect democracy in practice, many flock to its shores for a better life under the flag of freedom of expression. This vision of democracy has been the main idea behind the U.S. from the beginning. The founders of America knew what it was like to be oppressed by a large government under King George III’s regime. These founders ensured that oppression was nonexistent in the United States by putting safeguards in place via the United States Constitution.
Another idea of leadership in the United States is that no one knows everything. While that idea may be debatable depending on who is in office, it is a recurring theme in democratic Western society. Just because someone is put into office, said person does not know everything; there must be others employed in their respective fields as advisors or to entirely different jobs. In spite of this idea, some leaders—be they politicians or CEOs—see themselves as above others and try to take hold of more things than they should. This attitude leaves no room for new ideas that could make or break a country or company. At times having inconsistent leadership in a country can be detrimental; this can easily be seen in the past few years with the political pendulum swinging from right with the Bush Administration, to left with the Obamas and right again with the Trump administration. These frequent changes of office create a centrist that does not inspire universal agreement but keeps civil unrest from becoming the defining feature of the United States. This centrism contrasts with countries overseas whose dictators keep conditions in the same morally questionable state for too long and suddenly there is an attempt at overthrowing a government.

Having no democratic constitution, Belarus can be whatever it wants to be without ratifying the country’s governing document. As a former Soviet state, Belarus still retains an ideology close to the Soviet Union even today. While officially an independent state, Belarus relies heavily on Russian influence to combat the country’s own insecurities regarding stability. Good indicators of the country’s lack of confidence are the instances of suppressing free speech and trying to eliminate any political opposition to the current administration. Another example of this insecurity was Belarus’s primary aim in their one-year outlook for 2016 to simply secure internal stability (“Country” 2). The government needs foreign investment to survive, as Belarus is quickly depleting its own natural resources, and the country is hardly receiving any outside natural resources. The most assistance they are receiving is from Russia, making their independence from that country a formality rather than a reality. According to IHS’s country report on Belarus, the communist party currently holds 108 seats in the House of Representatives, while the opposition party holds two (“Country”). This ratio of representatives leaves the political pendulum tied up in one spot, as it has been since 1994.

The freeze in politics from 1994 to present day can be attributed to Belarus’s president, Alexander Lukashenko. He is almost singlehandedly responsible for Belarus’s economic crisis and the disbandment of any political opposition. He has been called “Europe’s last dictator” and rightfully so. Much of his political career has consisted of making sure the political opposition has no basis or ground to stand on. An example of this is “widespread surveillance by security forces, as well as suppression of free speech and independent protest, restricting the opposition’s ability to communicate with voters, and leaving its message unclear to most Belarusians” (“Country” 2). Suppression in this form causes misinformation to be part of the status quo in Belarus. The misinformation and misguidance contribute significantly to the indifference of the citizens of Belarus. The political side that largely buys into these lies keeps getting Lukashenko re-elected with no foreseeable future without him as the president of Belarus. Lukashenko’s abuse of power became especially evident when he extended the presidential term in a 1996 referendum overriding the upcoming 1999 election. Lukashenko did something similar again with a referendum in 2004 which completely ended presidential terms (“Belarus”).

Strangely enough, after Belarus gained its independence in 1991, most citizens of the country remained “indifferent to their national idea, [looked] upon themselves as part of the large Soviet-Russian entity and the independence declared in 1991 was perceived as a consequence of the political games and a national disaster” (Popov 23). Lukashenko belonged to the sector of the population that was more critical of those who brought down the Soviet Union rather than the sector of indifference. He appealed to this sector of the population by playing the role of a “persecuted man of the people fighting for justice” (Popov 24). This populist attitude made him wildly popular with the public and changed many citizens’ indifference into bias, which played a large role in the election of Lukashenko in 1994. Lukashenko’s nomination by the democratic party also brought an easy win for him as the Russian conservative majority, with their heavy influence on Belarus politics, endorsed him.
The “leadership tactics” used by Lukashenko are vastly different from those used in the United States. While the integrity of many U.S. politicians can be debated, a direct comparison between any one U.S. politician and Lukashenko leaves any domestic politician looking like a saint. The number of obvious blatant lies and corruption by Lukashenko begs the question as to why he has not been forced out of office yet. Just as many of Putin’s political opposers and critics have been silenced in one way or another, Belarus is on the same track with some influence from Russia. On top of Russian interference, “the Belarusians still looked upon Lukashenko as a guarantor against the uncertainty that democracy is usually bound up with and were able to waive such advantages as democratic freedoms” (Popov 25). This attitude is actually similar to that of the American people who would be up in arms if a politician were to suggest Communism as a viable alternative to democracy. However, any U.S. politician cannot be silenced for challenging the status quo, whereas anyone who suggests democracy in opposition to Lukashenko’s administration will most likely either be ignored or silenced. Silencing opposition is a major contributor to Lukashenko currently being in office.

To this day, Lukashenko holds power through manipulation and misguidance of the population. Igor Popov provides a clear explanation of a couple of myths perpetuated by the Belarusian government:

Besides ‘economic stability,’ another widespread myth generated by Lukashenko was that of guaranteed public order and preventing the emergence of big ‘oligarchs’ similar to those which also appeared in the democratic Russia. In fact, the absence of such oligarchic groups in Belarus is a disputable question. (Popov 26)

Belarus is also beginning to have some political accountability per Russia in exchange for economic assistance. With the Belarusian economy close to collapse, Lukashenko has no choice but to comply with Putin’s demands. With a GDP of only $172 billion, they lack decent purchasing power (“Belarus”). A telltale sign of this poor purchasing power is that Belarus purchased its crude oil from Russia far below world market price (Popov 29). Another example of their collapsing economy is the rate of hyperinflation. In 2010, one U.S. dollar equaled about 3,000 rubles; just four years later, one dollar equated to 10,224.1 rubles (“Belarus”). Due to the rapid decline of the economy, if something is not done about the leadership status soon, the country will be economically uninhabitable, and increasingly unable to comply with Russian demands. All Belarusians can hope for is for another country to step in and take the country over, or a drastic change in leadership must be made in the coming election—assuming Lukashenko does not get to the opposition first.

WORKS CITED


Below: The Claw by Jackie Segars
A Catharsis for a Shattered Mind
By Brandon Wilcoxson

I would like to begin by saying that my experience in college and more specifically the literature I have read have equipped me to give voice to something I rarely ever want to nor actually do give voice to. I'm speaking of my mental illness. Half a dozen psychiatrists have given half a dozen names for it, and in the interest of providing context, these range among schizophrenia, schizoaffective, schizotypal, bipolar etc. But as all of these different diagnoses suggest, it’s not a thing so clearly defined. Rather the nature of it almost completely eludes me at times. Perhaps that’s why I have chosen writing, another thing so difficult to define, to try and convey what, or more so how, my mental illness is. With that being said, I have divided my thoughts into three sections: Catalyst, Decay, and Stagnation.

The best place for me to start would be with the day which by storytelling standards is just short of mundane, but nothing short of earth-shattering by my perception. I call this day the Catalyst as it would dictate all that followed. I recall the day in almost perfect clarity. This clarity comes as a strange phenomenon given how cloudy all memories are since the metamorphosis. It was July of 2002, and He was fifteen years old when it happened. I recall Him being at the mall with a friend, playing pool on a display table in Sears to pass the time until their female interests made their arrival. The best way I can describe what He felt is this: it was as if someone reached down in an instant and plucked out His mind’s eye and replaced it with one of another being entirely. It was in this moment in which the pearl, white marble floor that was all the logic, understanding, and reason on which His mind was built began to crumble as a flourish of projectiles without form or definition lay siege to all the Ground the world had laid. Everything around me seemed suddenly alien but still familiar. Nothing around me just made sense by default as it always had. My understanding of His reality, which I had thought I understood for so long, had in a microsecond become something of a mystery to me. The way He felt leaps to my memory with such clarity that in this very moment I feel again detached from this world. An immediate sense of disconnection from all around Him drowned His senses as if the dam holding back all of the madness just suddenly broke and with that swell came individual insanities like demons dormant beneath the river contained to usher in the death of that mind I can barely recall anymore.

Until I began truly delving into literature at college, I hadn’t words to do justice to what I felt as time passed. It’s a marvelous thing what images and ideas precise words can create. So I title this paragraph Decay not just to describe a long affair with madness, but the lasting damage that will continue to corrode my thoughts until I’m gone. That day when He changed, His mind, or rather what once was mine, died and gave way to a grey area between perfect clarity and utter madness. It had given way to my purgatory. The only problem with calling it purgatory is that there were demons to torment me, to strip the only solace I could find within a mind without form or substance: peace. These demons took the shape of every single
insanity I could concoct. Any maladjusted mind I had seen in movies or on TV or had heard about became primers for what I might turn into. Therefore, I analyzed each one hoping to get back some Ground, some measure of the Ground I had lost. The goal in this was to assure myself that I wasn’t truly mad, or at least the type of madness I had become tethered to at the time. However, these countermeasures were short lived as another demon would replace the one just repelled to be analyzed all over again, and that Ground would elude me without fail time and again. I recall envying those truly mad men I would see in film, thinking they weren’t burdened with self-awareness of their insanity. I still wonder which is worse. My perception had become one without sense either drowning in constructed madness or just merely finding brief moments of reprieve. And as each new insanity lined itself in proper, chronological fashion in front of the remnant of what was once a mind firmly rooted in this world, I found my entire world was becoming increasingly hard to see as I fell into what seemed an infinitely deep void, and with each new madness came exponentially increasing corrosion, a corrosion waiting for the next new demon I would so desperately pin the future of my sanity on, guaranteeing Decay across the chasms of my mind that could never reform.

So I come to my last chapter in a story I can already see the ending to. This spiral into the dark continued unabated for six years as I didn’t leave my home and the pull was an increasing constant. This isn’t to say that a rehabilitated version wouldn’t ever appear as I am writing this essay right now for a college English course, but I am saying that whomever I was before that day in Sears has disintegrated into the void which encompasses my mind now. I could talk about all my accomplishments and how far I have come through rehabilitation, but as time passes I realize I’m still losing. I’m losing just a little bit more than what I’m gaining, and eventually, the equation will balance. I sense every day the Stagnation of my state. No matter how hard I try to convince myself, I will never be free of this thing in my head. I can never just simply understand the reality I’m given. I am rooted in my insanity now, and no matter how much I adjust, that man, the one who sees the world within acceptable understanding, was laid to rest at a Sears in Peoria, Illinois. I am the remnant of him, a warped shadow grasping at moments of clarity as if they were light.

At the end of this, I just needed a way to vent this thing that has dominated my life for so long in a way that did not involve mental health professionals or standardized evaluations so desperately trying to easily categorize me. I needed a way to passionately convey how it felt to have the Ground fall out from under me, to have my mind die and give away to Corrosion. I needed to be able to really explain how it feels to plunge into darkness, but I also needed to admit to my Stagnation if only for myself. I wanted to write a little bit of my real self, the one who doesn’t understand the world he was given but sometimes is content with the fact it exists, the part of me that still clings to this reality, I suppose. This isn’t so much an essay as it is my catharsis. Or, perhaps, it’s a requiem for myself and Him.
Below: Santuaire de Pierre by Alice Radcliffe
16 Years Later
By Jacob Woodlee

I had stayed home from school that day. Waking up late and wandering into the den, I saw my par-
ents watching CNN with a look of shock and disbelief on their faces. Only the first plane had hit at this point,
and the only conversation from that day I remember was between me and my Dad when I walked in the
room.

“Son, we’ve been attacked.”

“It was probably the Chinese.”

“I don’t think so” was all he could manage to reply.

I had just turned ten the month before, and my mom had just given birth to my youngest brother the
month before that. We had moved to Huntsville earlier that year, another relocation in the big blur of moves
that was mine and my sibling’s childhood.

I was too young to understand the implications at the time, what it meant for attacks to be carried
out on American civilians in such a way as happened on 9/11, and sixteen years later I am shameful of the
fact that I was unhappy about having to go to church that night. It was a Tuesday after all, and we had to
go to church the following Wednesday evening. As I have grown over the years and look back on the short
amount of time that has lapsed, even though I have moved on from my parents’ religion and even though
I don’t share their views, I am glad that I have the memory of that prayer service on a Tuesday night sixteen
years ago.

The country was in extreme disarray, and even though I lived in the narcissistic bubble that is youth, I
could tell that something was wrong. Every adult I came across was scared and heartbroken. A heaviness
could be seen in everyone’s eyes and felt in their attitudes and movements. Huntsville was on high alert. I
would learn in the years that followed that Redstone Arsenal made the city a potential target for terrorists.
Muslim extremists, they called them. These words and phrases became part of the American lexicon: hijack-
ers, terrorism, the militant Islamic State, fear, and later “axis of evil.”

One of my passions and one of the few things I could relate to at that age was sports, specifically the
New York Yankees. Their roster that year was filled with names like Derek Jeter, Jorge Posada, Bernie Williams,
and Mariano Rivera, future hall of famers and Yankee legends, but it was a relatively unknown third baseman
who would provide one of the most dramatic plays not only for that year but also in postseason history. In
game seven of the ALCS in the bottom of the tenth against the Boston Red Sox, that third baseman, Aaron
Boone, hit what would later become known as the Aaron “Bleeping” Boone homerun. (The term “Bleeping”
is actually used, and not the assumed expletive.) That hit won the Yankees the game and the series and sent
them to the World Series. For the first time in their long, illustrious history, the most hated team in all of profes-
sional sports held one title they never had before and haven’t had since, America’s Team.

I had been sent to bed that October night because of school the next morning, but remember lis-
tening to the game on an old tape player that picked up AM radio. I recall the feelings of mania that come
when a favorite team wins in dramatic fashion. Since my entire family is Atlanta Braves fans, it was a little
strange to witness them cheering on the Yankees in the World Series that year, but even with my family and
an entire nation pulling for them, the Yankees lost to the Diamondbacks in seven games. The heartbreak I felt
(continued)
over my favorite team losing was nothing compared to the heartbreak people carried with them for the loss of their loved ones and the loss of security and faith in their country. Everyone still remembered.

As a high school senior in September 2009, I, along with some fellow classmates, visited New York City for three days. I fulfilled one of my lifelong dreams of watching the Yankees play against the Red Sox at Yankee Stadium. The Yankees won and went on to win the World Series that year, their second appearance since losing in seven games in 2001.

We also went to Ground Zero. There was no monument at the time, and only a chain link fence separated us from the site of the most pivotal moment in modern American history. One only needs to watch any movie filmed before 9/11 containing a scene inside an airport terminal to see the contrast between the pre- and post-9/11 worlds.

My classmates and I entered a building that overlooked Ground Zero and allowed us to peer down inside that chain link fence. Directly across from us, an advertisement on a building read, “‘Fall’ into fashion.” New York City, the Great Melting Pot and the birthplace of the American Dream for countless immigrants and migrants. Ground Zero, the site that served as the cemetery for thousands of those dreams on a Tuesday in September in the foul year of our Lord 2001. That day turned thousands of families’ American Dreams into American Nightmares, and I was surprised how quickly everyone was forgetting.

One of the phrases that people old enough to remember 9/11 use to describe it is “that event brought everyone together” or some version of such. That cannot be overstated. According to the standard of the time, the country had just undergone a controversial election; Bush had won the electoral college but lost the popular vote, and recounts in Florida had the American public questioning who really won the Presidency. The days that followed 9/11 brought with them the feeling that a person’s race, creed, political persuasion, or sexual orientation didn’t matter so much anymore. The only thing that mattered was that Americans had been murdered in cold blood and that somebody was going to have to pay. Hatred is what really brought us together. Our mutual hatred of anyone who thought they could f*** with us and get away with it. In this country, Democrats and Republicans hate each other. Atheists and Christians go at it. The poor are envious of the rich. The aged think the youth have rocks in their heads. But the one thing we all have in common is we are all Americans, and we reserve our God-given right to hate each other’s guts around here. Bless your little heart, as we say in the South, if you think you can just walk into our country, murder thousands of our citizens, and get away with it. Bless your heart, indeed.

On the sixteenth anniversary of 9/11, I woke up to the TV tuned to NBC. Hurricane Irma was dominating the news coverage. It was about 4 a.m., the start of the news cycle, and I was expecting that after maybe an hour of hurricane coverage the news anchors would at least mention, in passing, the fact that it was sixteen years later. But not until 9 a.m. did NBC finally take a break from covering a hurricane that most people had already evacuated from and were warned about a week in advance. A special report cut to footage of a gathering outside the Pentagon. A military chaplain led a prayer, and after some official gave a speech, the President spoke. The whole thing lasted about fifteen minutes, and then it was back to the hurricane. I understand that it was a large storm in which many people died or lost their homes. Hurricane Harvey had just done the same thing to Houston, so understandably, people in the news business would want to cover a major storm like that, but since NBC headquarters is located in New York City, it is difficult to imagine that its employees did not have 9/11 on their minds that day. Some of those employees probably had family members in the Twin Towers that morning, but all the network could manage that morning was fifteen minutes? NBC was silent about 9/11 for the rest of the day until the world news at 5:30 that evening, and then it was only a 60-second block in the secondary news stories of the day. There was not mention of United 93, either.
I started thinking about United Flight 93 the next day. The passengers found out the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon had been struck, so what made them decide to go down fighting? I do not know. What was going through their minds? Human beings are hardwired to survive and doing anything to the contrary goes against a person’s very nature. They had to be thinking that maybe it would be different for them, maybe they would be saved, maybe they would live through the crash, maybe. Maybe leave the possibility of survival open. I do not know who did it, who stood up and said, “Let’s fight back,” dismissing the denial they had to be experiencing and, therefore, bring every other passenger on that plane to grips with the reality that they were going to die that day.

What I do know is that person and every person who helped on that plane are the true heroes. In this country, we get caught up on what makes someone a hero: the soldiers who give their lives for their brothers and sisters in arms, the police and firefighters who die in the line of duty, teachers, athletes, and doctors. The difference between the passengers of United 93 and all the rest is this: those passengers did not sign up to make a difference. They did not want the responsibility. They simply wanted to live and do all the things people do in life: fall in love with someone, start a family, go to college, read, watch movies, play video games, have fun, laugh, goof off, piddle, and be a human being. Fate, however, had different plans for them and put them in a situation where they had to decide to make a difference, no planning or training or advanced warning. They were ordinary people, traveling for business, back home, or to visit loved ones. They all had problems, I’m sure, and dreams. They all had failed before, but they all decided that day to fight back and save lives in the process. Everything they had accomplished up to that point would be it for them. The last thing they ate would be their last meal, and they had hugged their mothers, fathers, children, and pets for the last time. No more goals to set and reach, no more walks around the block before dinner, no more lazy Saturday mornings sleeping in and lounging around the house. No more maybes.

People born on September 11, 2001, are old enough to get their driver’s licenses now. In two more years, they will be able to vote and die for their country. An entire generation will grow up with no memory of 9/11 but will only understand it as a line of text in their history books. Pearl Harbor is the same way. All I know about it is what the books tell me. For the sixteenth anniversary of 9/11, the History Channel showed footage New Yorkers made with their home video cameras. It was spliced together to show in real time how everything played out. After the first plane hit, thousands of people were in the streets, shocked and scarred from the eerie sight of smoke billowing out of the World Trade Center Towers. One woman stated that the Pearl Harbor attack was the same way, hitting “early in the morning while everyone was still waking up.”

I am ashamed that I relate baseball to 9/11 and that I can name countless baseball players and statistics but not the name of a single first responder or victim of the 9/11 attacks. All I can remember about that time, with any clarity, is what was happening in baseball. But that is life, I suppose. We are only able to express how an event seemed in our world and how it affected us. That is not a good excuse though, and I am still ashamed.

Sixteen years, two wars, and two Presidents have come and gone. No matter how anyone feels about the direction of the country, who or what really caused 9/11, or any other controversial topic, there is one thing we all seem to have forgotten in sixteen years: we are supposed to honor our dead by remembering them. I guess writing this has been my way of honoring them. It is not much, a little over 2,000 words, not even a word for every life lost that day, but it is more than I saw on the news.
This abstract was selected for Anna to expand for a student panel presentation at the 2018 Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Literacy = Freedom**

By Anna Mitchell

Walking down the aisles in the grocery store is exhausting. Checking off the grocery list is easy, but the mental list of things to do seems never-ending. I wonder what side will go well with the lemon pepper chicken, while also contemplating swapping over the laundry as soon as I get home, or should I water the plants first? Also, I better not forget to sign that permission slip or go to that doctor’s appointment tomorrow. As the day gets deeper into the evening, the checklist becomes shorter. The house is still as I put my child to bed. Just he and I can occasionally become lonely, so staying occupied is crucial to avoid becoming gregarious, especially at night. Consuming negativity on the news and social media can be dampening after a productive or oppressive day. Instead, I grab my fleece blanket, turn on the lamp, and open my book. With every book, I have the freedom to become consumed by feelings of mystery and suspense from a science fiction novel or by wonder and hope from a romance novel. The thoughts of the day dissipate as I live vicariously through the fictional characters in a book. To experience traveling to the bottom of the icy ocean for a life-prolonging enzyme, fearful of death, all while curled up in my chair under my warm blanket is a majestic means of escape. In the transient moments spent reading, my imagination has the ability to take the reins and become engulfed by stories, eras, places, people, situations, and much more.
Abusive Gender Roles: Gender Non-Conformity in the Eyes of Psychology

By Greg Lucero

By the time children are old enough to speak, they understand the role differences between boys and girls. They recognize that boys should be strong and dominant whereas girls should be soft and emotional. These specific gender roles are taught by their parents or from different people from social interactions outside of home. In today’s society, people are beginning to observe that more children and young adults are not conforming to their specific gender roles. When children do not conform, they are subject to discipline by their parents or possibly bullying from peers at their school. This could potentially have a negative impact on children’s lives, especially if conforming to their gender is not who they are. This discipline can be verbally abusive, causing changes in their psychodynamic and sociocultural perspectives of life, or it can be physically abusive to a point where living or finding psychological help is not the answer anymore. Gender conformity has a negative impact on the mental processes of children and young adults.

Although it is important to understand these differences, people still oppose the idea of gender non-conformity. Some parents consider that young people should conform to their gender because they believe that their children will have to face discrimination or, for example, a boss will not hire them because they are too feminine to be a male or too masculine to be a female. In a more transparent term, the parents are trying to protect their child and they want their children to live happy lives. Others look at gender conformity through the biological perspective. Allan Johnson, author of “Why Do We Make So Much of Gender?” (2016), discusses biological factors drawn from patriarchal societies and the limitations of that opposition. He states that it causes problems by “making it seem as though sex isn’t any way social, but rather exists as a concrete biological reality that we’re simply naming in an objective way” (p.545). Most people look at the ideas of gender conformity through religious factors. Those people believe that all biological and social differences were established by God. They believe that if these God-given rules are broken, that person will not be accepted into Heaven. All of these factors are relevant in viewing the character traits of other people; however, it overlooks the thoughts and feelings of children at the individual level. It also overlooks the fact that the rate of children being extruded from their homes and the rate of suicide in children is increasing, which cannot be easily fixed by something as vague as religion.

Even before children are born, they are faced with gender roles. People usually associate the color blue with boys and the color pink with girls. Generally, if the baby is a boy, the parents prepare a room full of blue toys, blue beds or even blue wallpaper. The same concept also goes for girls, a room prepared full of pink. Even something as subtle as putting gender into colored categories can create future problems. The risk of abuse for children who do not conform to gender roles starts from the household. Michelle Healy (2012), author from USA Today, researches abuse from gender non-conformity at home. She says, “One in 10 kids display gender non-conformity before age 11 and, on average, are more likely to experience physical and psychological abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder by early adulthood” (p.1). This statistic was gathered from the online journal Pediatric and shows that gender non-conformity starts when children are young and still living with parents. She also quotes lead study author and research associate at Harvard School of Public Health Andrea Roberts who says, “The abuse was perpetrated mostly by parents or other adults in the home” (p.1). This abuse can cause many problems in the psychosocial development of children. This could impact the Trust versus Mistrust stage of development spanning from birth to age one, according to psychologist Erik Erikson (Carpenter and Huffman p.265). In this stage, infants learn to trust or mistrust their caregivers and the world based on whether or not their needs, such as food, affection, and
safety are met (Carpenter and Huffman p.265). Abuse from gender non-conformity will potentially affect the affection and safety of children. If these essential needs are not met, this will directly affect the development of a coherent and stable self-definition as well as the desire and formation of lasting and meaningful relationships through adulthood.

Every child has a different understanding of gender conformity. When children are in public schools with a few hundred other children with a few hundred different understandings of gender roles, it is not uncommon to see bullying among those children. Some of those parents establish, to their children, that gender non-conformity is wrong and is unacceptable. Those children will take that information into play at school when they see other children not conforming to their gender and will bully those children because it is what is, to them, established as wrong and unacceptable. This poses a problem because it neglects the concept of individuality. The children who are bullied are being deprived of their self-esteem because they think that who they really are is wrong and is not acceptable; therefore, those children will try to conform to a different identity in order to save themselves from condescending remarks from other people. According to Katie Lucibella (2003), Teen Ink author, “[I]ndividuality is endangered” (p.44). This dysphoria and bullying can reoccur from elementary schools to high school. For example, C.J. Pascoe (2016), author of “Dude, You’re a Fag,” researches a common term that is used among students in high school and what that word really signifies. Pascoe observed people’s social behaviors through different social groups at the high school in California. She quotes one of the students who said, “Since you were little boys you’ve been told, ‘Hey, don’t be a little faggot’” (p.577). This establishes the fact that gender roles start at home from parents and are brought into the world of high school. Pascoe then interviews multiple people who said, “[T]o call someone gay or fag is like the lowest thing you can call someone. Because that’s like saying that you’re nothing” (p.577). With this information, it can be concluded that the word “fag” is not particularly a term used to insult homosexual men, but it is a term used to make fun of things or other people that deprive someone of their masculinity. In other words, it is making fun of people since they are not conforming to their specific gender roles because it is different from what is taught to them by their parents.

Making fun of someone for gender non-conformity can eventually lead to role confusion. Psychologist Erik Erikson expands this concept in his fifth stage of psychological development. Children will want to conform to a different identity in order to stop gender-typed bullying. According to the cognitive-developmental theory, this willingness to want to conform is called a gender schema, a mental image of how someone should act based on internal rules that govern correct behaviors for boys versus girls (Carpenter and Huffman p.269). The cognitive-developmental theory states that social learning plus active cognitive processing of gender role information creates and builds these mental images which results in gender-typed behaviors such as boys playing with trucks and girls playing with dolls. However, this does not show the child’s true feelings about gender schematics. These gender schemas are only self-defense mechanisms, not the child’s true feelings and true character traits. This causes a problem with the development of a stable self-identity, which spans back to infancy and gender-related abuse from parents. This abuse is a type of parenting style known as authoritarian, where parents are rigid and punitive, while also being low on warmth and responsiveness (Carpenter and Huffman p.261). This type of parenting has a negative effect on children. According to Siri Carpenter and Katie Huffman (2014), children with these types of parents tend to be easily upset, moody, aggressive, and often fail to learn good communication skills (p.261). This is when future problems such as gender dysphoria (the condition of feeling one’s emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one’s biological sex), failure to establish meaningful relationships, and even teen suicide rates start to arise. The goal of lifespan development is to live a successful and happy life, but authoritarian parenting prevents children from developing proper lifetime skills, which is becoming more of an imminent problem.

(continued)
Gender is one of the easiest and most manageable ways to classify psychological and biological differences among humans, but it is not the only way. It is wrong to think that people act certain ways or dress certain ways because they have certain body parts and a few more biological differences. These characteristics create and establish the sex of that person, not particularly the gender. On the subject of religion, people say that God created people this way and should be happy with how he made them. The complication with this idea is that it is not going to change the way people feel about themselves. For example, a boy who feels like his personality does not correlate to the stereotyped male identity is not going to change the way he is simply because another person says, “God created you this way and he did it for a reason so you should not want to act like a girl.” Instead, that boy is going to feel that he is worthless, which could lead to isolation and depression and, eventually, to suicide. These views of gender-non conformity are pertinent, but fail to reach out to the true feelings that children have about themselves.

Parents or other people who have experienced a child being abused or bullied need to become advocates for the safety and protection of gender non-conforming children. Parents also should raise awareness to other parents who have disciplined their children for doing something that is not specific to their gender and have noticed differences in their child’s mood. It is imperative that people understand the diversity among young people in order to empathize with the many problems these people face. It is also not fair that these children have to face a life of self-hatred and isolation because people never realized the disparity in the way other people process their thoughts and emotions. If people could open their minds to these differences, there will be a decrease in the instances of bullying in school, a decrease in the number of domestic abuse cases, and a decrease in the teen suicide rate.

WORKS CITED


The Food Here
By Jacob Woodlee

Ask some of the ol’ timers around here, and they will tell you that the food has gotten better over the years, the meat patties, at least, when they still fed us those. The Department of Corrections has not served those ever since the meat patty plant’s roof was condemned. Rumors fly around prisons the same way they do around sewing circles, and the legend of the meat patty was that workers fed a mystery substance (rumored to be cow hearts, dog meat, or something cooked up in a test tube) into a processor, a metallic beast that could rip a man’s entire arm off if he got too careless. The box of the mystery substance read, “NOT FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION” in bold red letters.

Of course, this was a lie. Well, not so much a lie as a myth, a harmless lie designed to give bored people something to talk about, and as is the case with myths, the reality is much less interesting: the mystery substance was soy, which was processed with protein pellets. The chuck wagon steak, chicken, and meat patty (yes, that was a flavor) were all made this way. The only difference was the flavor of the seasoning used at the end of the process. The part about the roof being condemned was true though.

I hear horror stories sometimes about the liver patties. These patties were made from stringy arteries that gave it the same consistency as chewing gum, but it was the smell that was the worst part. Not the smell of the patty, but the smell that was expelled from a man after he ate five of them. If he ate one, he ate five; anyone who could stomach a single putrid liver patty was sure to find four other people who could not and fill his belly with their unwanted food. The gas was so bad it could wake a man from a dead sleep and cause knives to be pulled. Not surprisingly really, people have been stabbed for less.

People think prison food is just like what they see in the movies; gray, cold slop slung on metal trays as convicts move down a line while asking with a British accent, “Please, sir, can I have more?” The trays are not metal. They are made from plastic, and depending on the meal, it might not be gray slop but yellowish noodles mixed with chicken bones and fat. Add a greenish snot tint for taste, and bingo, good old-fashioned prison slop. Of course, there is fried chicken Sunday once a month, chicken that tastes like wet cardboard, but only when it is fully cooked.

Any good meals, you ask? The tuna is alright. Well, the word “tuna” is misleading. “Tuna-like” would be a better word. I think it’s made from chicken because it has the same wet cardboard taste. The goulash and bologna are not bad. I like to fry the bologna in the microwave sometimes; you would be amazed at the versatility of a microwave. I have watched someone turn ramen and a Coca-Cola into Chinese food with the help of one.
Below: Blue Saxophone by Sandra Massengill
The Tomb
By Christian McCarley

The tomb feels like the breath you take, moments before you go under water, with no idea of when you’ll surface again. It feels like Atlas, the weight of the sky crushing him into cinders. It feels like the rancid cloying of death, its persistence to force you into a submission of the unknown. The terror that grips you, wailing against your mind, as you panic at the threshold of something you don’t understand. That’s what the tomb feels like. Not six feet beneath the ground, but miles.

A cacophonous boom cracks the air as I sit in wait, a doomed man. The slightest inkling of light leaks in, torturing my unaccustomed eyes. I hear a rustle as the men make their way down the steps to my cell, their fury evident in their labored breaths. With pained movements, I peer through the bars at the creatures who’ve come to take me. They look back at me, with hatred in their eyes.

“You, you, take him. Let’s end this,” says the man in front, the one who thinks himself worthy enough, hard enough, to look me in the eyes.

Two men step around him and yank the cell door open, pouring in like wolves at the close of a kill. I have no strength left in my bones, so I yield to their vicious paws; they snatch me up like a satchel of rot. Both of them, hulking beasts, stink so loudly that I can taste the flavor of their sweat, onions.

“Come,” says the worthy man.

I fight down the urge to vomit, the hunger gnawing at my insides, and the three of them drag me up the steps to the damnable light. It isn’t long before I am thrust out into the cold touch of early morning. And they continue.
The men say it’s ten thousand steps. The climb to the top of the Great Mountain is ten thousand and one steps. For some, it’s the journey of victory and, for some, the ascent to renewal. For me it is a climb of death. These men and their king have taken everything from me. Everything that I have ever held dear. Love and memories. My wife, family, and hearth. I have no strength left in me. I cannot face the agony. The wise men look at me and tell me to pick myself up out of the dirt, to fight. But I have not the wherewithal. I have not the gumption to face down this wicked demon.

A red-hot poker lances through my chest; excruciating images invade my mind. I see my boy, his body strewn just out of reach of his mother’s. Her hand stuck out like a claw, yeaming for his. My little girl in her crib, arm around her doll and face stricken with horror. Bile crawls up my throat, and my vision turns to red.

These men expect me to die a coward. They expect to execute me, holding in their hands everything I have claimed to honor, professed to love. But I will not die a coward. I refuse. I will not be snuffed out, only a shell of what I was. When they cut me, I will look them in the eyes and seethe with rage.

“Quickly,” says the worthy man.

The other two drag me over the precipice, thrust me into the rising sun. Dawn has come, and the light burns me to the core. I step into its vicious laceration, every bit of darkness in me finally exhumed. Every iniquity, every failure, every demon that has plagued my existence. There is peace in the castigation.

I smile.

I remember the day I broke bread with my brother; sipped the wine with my father. My mother had danced with the girls, laughter written on their faces. There was beauty in their hearts, brought to life with every frosted plume of breath.

I also remember the day I was married. My wife had stood on a crag of rock overlooking the endless sea, the holy man tying the cloth around her arms. She had looked every bit the beauty I had exalted her to be to the village. And that smile of hers had tethered me to the gravity of the world like no dream ever could. A purpose had been bestowed me that day.

The memory of the day the midwife drew out my first child finds me, and I force back the tears. Being a father had been a better blessing than I had ever deserved. A father never ceases. He haunts the enemies of his children even unto death. I will haunt these men and their king. I will destroy their peace with my eternity.

I guess this is the fable of old, my life flashing before my eyes. Every beautiful moment brushes its feathers across my heart, filling me with bliss in the face of my end. I can’t seem to recall the failures, or the pain. Not even the death of my family. They’re waiting for me on the far side, and their song washes away the stains of my life.

“I hereby sentence you to die,” says the worthy man.

I open my eyes and stare into the horizon, painted a thousand hues. The light is no longer so cutting; it only gives me hope.

I feel the sharp bite of the blade, and I sigh.

Never a coward.
**Family Planning**  
*By Glenda Ratliff*

Sheila sat at the table below the stage, watching as the ten men paraded the runway in front of her, one by one. This was her eighth year judging this contest as Supreme Commissioner, and she would rather pass the dubious honor off to someone else, but the tradition was hers alone, just like pardoning the Thanksgiving turkey. Besides, one of these men on that stage tonight would be the father of all the children conceived in her district for the next year, and she had an interest in that. Sheila had two daughters already, both in elite private schools, preparing to take their places alongside their mother and aunts as their country’s leaders. She wanted to add another girl child to her family, but none of the ten potential breeders brought in from the provinces last year had had the look she wanted.

She had studied all of their profiles carefully this year. They had low education levels, of course. That was to be expected. What really mattered were good genes and an amenable nature. The contestants were all obedient, well-trained workers, and all were very pretty and very healthy. The men would have already been cut if they weren’t. The selection committee tried for as much diversity as possible, with multiple ethnic and racial groups included. There were intentional variations in facial features, since each year’s children were designed to look different than the ones in surrounding years, much like the striation in rock layers.

Sheila watched the strutting group and then announced the five finalists. So far, the process had been based purely on form and beauty. Now the men were given interview questions to measure their intelligence, or lack thereof. Three of the men passed, but two were eliminated when they couldn’t answer their questions. One of the job requirements was that he perform under pressure. Any choice in the selection process from this point on was up to Sheila. Her personal taste determined which man got the job, as it should, since she would have to work with him, at least temporarily.

She had to think of her duty, not just herself. He had to please all of them, since his DNA would live forever, even though he would only live one year. But it would be a good year, the best, really. He would be pampered, put on a pedestal, treated like a king! Who could ask for more? Especially after the committee had rescued him from a life with no future. Obviously, he couldn’t return to that after a year as “The Breeder.” Better that he be put down humanely, as had always been done. She already knew which face and body she wanted, but she didn’t commit until after the interviews. Tom, was that his name? Thank goodness, he seemed to be of normal intelligence. What more could one ask for? Well, he could smile more. She would tell him that after the crowning.
An Interview with Dr. James Klauber

By: Emily Bryant and Emily Jacklin

The Muse Emilys sat down with Calhoun Community College’s President, Dr. James Klauber, on February 7, 2018, to discuss many new developments at the college, as well as some of his own personal interests.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I would say that my leadership style is pretty participative. I want to make sure that we have a broad base of the college community that participates in making decisions. One of the most important things that has changed since my arrival at Calhoun is that we now delegate responsibilities to where each department head manages their particular field of study. This leadership style has been very effective.

In your opinion, what sets Calhoun apart from other institutions?

I think what really sets us apart from other institutions is that we put students first. Advisors are assigned on an individual basis and tutoring is available at the STAR Institute to further the opportunities for student success. Students are also able to get one-on-one assistance from professors, unlike most universities.

How has the development of the student success center helped increase graduation rates?

It has helped enormously.

How do you think students will benefit from the honors program?

This is our first year with the honors program. The idea is to give students the opportunity for enhanced leadership and rigorous courses to challenge them. The main objective is for students to transfer into an honors program at a university upon their completion of the program here at Calhoun.

We noticed the construction behind the Fine Arts building. What’s going on there?

That is going to be our new automotive technology lab. When I was growing up, anybody could work on a car, but today automobiles are so sophisticated and it’s a different world. The complexity of these vehicles will require an up-to-date workforce, and our new lab will help students prepare for the future. Construction for this $7,000,000 project will begin in the summer of 2018 and will be finished the following year. However, classes in this field will be available to take fall of 2018 at the Madison County Career Center.

What led you to the initial decision of cutting the athletics programs, and what caused you to reverse the decision?

Athletics cost about $600,000 annually while only benefitting approximately eighty students. We wanted to put that money towards student success and academics that will benefit thousands of students as opposed to eighty. State legislators were interested in maintaining the athletic programs, and they offered funds to hire someone to assist in fundraising for these programs. The athletes also assisted in the fundraising process and were able to obtain a significant amount of money to save the program for the following year.

Do you think a study abroad program would be possible for Calhoun in the future?

Yes! I would absolutely love for that to happen. We’ve been looking into partnering with local universities to make that happen. It would be a great opportunity for students to pick up credit hours while also traveling to a new place.

What is your favorite vacation spot? What is your dream vacation?

My family and I go to Lynchburg Beach in South Carolina every year for a week. I would say that it’s my favorite because it’s always a good time with my wife and children. After I retire, I’d like to rent a house overlooking the Adriatic Sea on the Italian coast and spend at least a month there traveling throughout Italy.

We know you are a big Star Wars fan. What were your thoughts on the most recent movie, Star Wars: The Last Jedi?

It was really good, but it definitely wasn’t the best. My biggest complaint is that Luke was portrayed as such a dark character. I enjoyed the scenes between Kylo Ren and Rey, and I’m ready to see what happens in Episode 9. Rey will either kill him or have a baby with him.

What are you currently reading and what drew you to that book?

A profile on Winston Churchill by William Manchester. It is a series of very in-depth biographies of Churchill’s life. The book is excellent; it carries Churchill from 1940 to when he becomes Prime Minister to his death in 1965. Winston Churchill had his flaws like everyone else, but he saved democracy. The world would be a much darker place without him. People followed him because he was a natural leader.
Shining STARs

By: Valerie Cox

Studies have shown that attending tutoring sessions positively affects the success of students in their coursework. The administration, faculty, and staff at Calhoun wanted to create a space where students feel comfortable asking questions and getting the help they need. That is how the STAR Institute was born.

The STAR Institute is the Student Tutoring and Academic Resource Institute. We opened our doors on the Decatur campus in Spring 2017. We have now expanded and opened a location on the Huntsville campus as well. We provide FREE one-on-one tutoring and success seminars throughout each semester. Student success is our number one priority at Calhoun Community College. Every effort is made to provide students with programs and services that can assist them in obtaining and reaching their academic goals.

Tutoring is provided in various subjects: Accounting, Biology, Computer Information, Economics, English, History, Math, and Statistics. We recently implemented the TutorTrac Program, which allows students to login through their MyCalhoun Portal and make appointments with a tutor. In the Spring of 2018, we will implement our Student Alert and Group Event (SAGE) Program. This program allows faculty members to make student referrals on students that may need more planning, advising, or assistance outside of the classroom environment.

Exciting things are happening at the STAR Institute. We are open Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and on Fridays from 8:00 a.m. until 11:45 a.m. We are currently located in the Chasteen Student Center 230 on the Decatur campus and in the Sparkman Building 133B on the Huntsville campus. Plans are in place to move the Decatur Institute to the Wallace building during the Spring 2018 semester while the Chasteen Student Center undergoes renovations. Come by and become STARSTRUCK!

Fall Festival 2017

By: Michelle Serrato

The Student Activities office and the Student Government Association (SGA) encouraged more student and club participation this year, making both festivals a success. Fall Fest took place on the Decatur campus on October 31, 2017, behind the Math and Science Building and on October 30, 2017 in the quad area outside on the Huntsville campus.

The highlight of both festivals included the Chili Cook-Off. For anyone who did not already know that the festivals were taking place, the smell of home-cooked chili in the air enticed them to join in the fun. Clubs were encouraged to bring a crock-pot of chili for the Chili Cook-Off. The winner at the Decatur campus was Willie Alexander from Baptist Campus Ministry (BCM). The winner at the Huntsville campus was Anna Mitchell from Phi Theta Kappa (PTK). Both winners received a gift card.

The Costume Contest student winners for the Decatur campus were Jaden Bush as the clown from It in first place, Daniel Wallace as Galaxy Fox came in second, and third was Michael Morgan as the Man-at-Arms. In Huntsville, the Costume Contest student winners were Areli Rendon in first as Day of the Dead, Amber Kyle as Fallen Angel in second, and Miriam Russell as Vampire in third. First place winners received $100, and second place received $50, while third place received $25.

The Costume Contest faculty/staff winners for the Decatur campus were Ronda Kelly, Lana Powers, Chealsie Finley, Carla Swinney, Kelly Hovater, and Tina Cooper as characters from Grease. There was no faculty/staff entry for the Huntsville campus Costume Contest.

Community participation included Coke supplying free soda and bottled water, while the National Guard provided a rock wall. To liven up the atmosphere and encourage participation, a DJ played music during the event. All went well, and everyone enjoyed a day of food, fun, and music!
Calhoun’s 17th Annual Writers’ Conference

By: Emily Bryant

A multitude of both students and community members gathered to hear the former Poet Laureate of the United States Billy Collins speak at Calhoun’s 17th annual Writers’ Conference. The event took place at both the Jackson Center in Huntsville on November 29, 2017, and the Princess Theatre in downtown Decatur the following day. Mr. Collins captivated the audience as he read his lighthearted poems, such as “The Lanyard,” “Forgetfulness,” and “The Revenant.” Laughter echoed throughout the building as he continued to read the humorous poems, and then silenced as he switched to a more serious tone.

Mr. Collins began to emphasize that there is a distinct difference between himself and the speaker within his poems. He described the speaker as a “better version of [himself] that lives within a poem.” The created persona, according to Collins, is more sensitive and transparent than he is in real life.

Mr. Collins refers to poetry as “a form of travel writing,” which is prominent throughout his work. The poems he read from his book The Rain in Portugal contain vivid descriptions of various countries and cities that he had never seen firsthand. Through poetry, readers are able to escape reality and go anywhere they want. He concluded by telling the audience that poetry begins with the familiar but then moves to the fantastical or, as he more poetically stated, “Good poetry starts in Kansas and ends in Oz.”

Mr. Collins lived up to the title of “The Most Popular Poet in America” given to him by The New York Times. His talent is shown through his ability to craft any common experience into a compelling story that leaves listeners and readers alike clinging to every word.
**Books Behind Bars**

By: Hannah Campbell

We take books for granted; they are readily available, and most of us read them when they are assigned or attached to a grade. I learned their true value when I organized a collaboration between Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD) and Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) to donate books to inmates at the Limestone Correctional Facility, who are also Calhoun students.

Calhoun’s PTK chapter centered their College Project around inviting eligible inmates to join the honor society. Realizing that the required fees would be an issue for them, members sought and received donations to cover 100% of all fifty inmates’ memberships from the college employees and students.

When we visited the prison campus to deliver their invitations and information about PTK and our projects, one inmate mentioned their need for books. From this conversation, their own “college project” was born. Our chapter would lead a book drive for the inmate PTK members!

I led the effort and encouraged both PTK and SKD members to donate books. Through this partnership, over 1,000 books were donated, 300 of which were from my own collection. After the books were collected, we had to catalog book titles and authors into an Excel spreadsheet. Additionally, we surveyed each inmate to determine his favorite book or author so we could provide those as Christmas presents. The difference we made with this project reached far beyond providing books to inmates; it was evident that someone cared enough to work on their behalf.

Unfortunately, no viable action was found. Action is an essential part of this project; thus, our officer team had to regroup and return to research. President Trump’s campaign rally in Huntsville and the media frenzy regarding “fake news” caught our attention, so we began to research this phenomenon in the light of the Honors Program Topic “Myth and Reality.” The action component of this project was focused on educating others; however, in the sharing of this information, we learned the importance of thinking critically about world issues and how they are perceived.

The chapter decided to evaluate the public’s ability to spot “fake news” through a survey, then provide tips for refining these skills, and resurvey to test for improvement. Over 839 responses were collected; however, little improvement was shown due to a question we determined to be an outlier. As educated consumers, we should always seek to challenge others to be willing not to take headlines at face value but to drive towards finding facts, evaluating data, making informed decisions, and developing educated opinions. Overall, there were many lessons learned, and our project was a success.

**Phi Theta Kappa 2017-2018**

By: Ragan Chastain

The year began with an officer training retreat and a rafting trip down the Ocoee. We all safely made it down the river and were excited to start planning for the upcoming year. Recently, the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) bylaws were revised to allow incarcerated students to join our organization. There was no doubt this would play a significant part in our College Project plan. In fact, we decided “Membership Makes a Difference” for all students, so that would be our focus this year. These efforts resulted in over 200 new members in 2017. Our chapter is revising the officer responsibilities to align with prison restrictions while allowing leadership opportunities. We will conduct one monthly meeting at the Limestone Correctional Facility to discuss the Honors Study Topic and the implementation of a “prison” College Project, which may include their request for re-entry resources. Our chapter commits to provide funds that allow these students to become a part of our PTK family.

Like the trip down the Ocoee, our plans for Honors in Action were a little rockier. Many hours went into researching a specific theme, “Rights and Responsibilities.” I was driven to work passionately on this effort because it hits close to home. My father was in prison for years, so he expressed to me the poor conditions that inmates experience. He regretted his actions and always stressed to me that one stupid mistake could affect a person’s entire life.

This awareness inspired me and made me sympathetic to those imprisoned. My mom told me that something as little as one book would mean so much to someone in prison and that when my father was in prison he had little to do but read and those books provided a mental escape.

Prior to the PTK induction ceremony, I made congratulation letters. I also spoke at the ceremony, explaining the symbolism of the flame and the white rose. Over fifty college, PTK, and corrections department guests attended, and the experience was meaningful for all. At least fifteen inmates came to PTK members, shook our hands, and thanked us for the ceremony. They were thankful, polite, humble people. One inmate asked, “Why would you guys want to come here?” I shared my father’s story and explained that everyone deserves a second chance. Another inmate who expressed to me the poor conditions that inmates experience. He regretted his actions and always stressed to me that one stupid mistake could affect a person’s entire life. Another inmate who hit close to home. My father was in prison for years, so he expressed to me the poor conditions that inmates experience. He regretted his actions and always stressed to me that one stupid mistake could affect a person’s entire life.

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Calhoun’s Black Students’ Alliance

As with every year, the Black Students’ Alliance (BSA) was busy hosting special events and guest speakers to encourage camaraderie among Calhoun students, to discuss and resolve questions or issues pertaining to Black students, to respond to campus and community concerns, and generally to enjoy college life together.

BSA advisors and members began the fall 2017 Semester with Breast Cancer Awareness programs on the Decatur campus on Tuesday, October 17, and on the Huntsville campus on Wednesday, October 18. The organization continued their mission of bringing students, faculty, and staff together by hosting the Soul Food Fest on the Huntsville campus on Tuesday, November 7.

The organization kicked off the spring 2018 semester with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. program on Tuesday, January 23, on the Decatur campus. Entitled “His Legacy: Past and Present,” the program featured guest speaker Rev. Dr. Julius R. Scruggs, author of Meditations on the Church, Baptist Preachers with Social Consciousness: A Comparative Study of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Harry Fosdick, God Is Faithful, and How to Study and Teach the Bible.

BSA continued to honor the lives and legacies of African Americans by hosting several events during Black History Month. Calhoun’s community of students, faculty, and staff had the honor of hearing Civil Rights legend James Meredith on the Huntsville campus on Monday, February 12. Mr. Meredith defied the injunctions of segregation by becoming the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi in 1962 after the federal government intervened. This incredible opportunity for Calhoun students was followed that same week by a poetry reading and book signing that featured Dr. Derrick Harriell, poet and Director of the Masters of Fine Arts Program at the University of Mississippi.

In addition to these wonderful speakers, BSA also hosted a “Historical Films of 2017” festival with a screening of one outstanding film each Wednesday in February, including Straight Outta Compton, Hidden Figures, Fences, and I Am Not Your Negro. The organization concluded the month’s events with a unique and creative experience—a Black History Month Paint Party—on the Decatur campus.
Comic Potential Surpassed
By: Emily Bryant and Emily Jacklin

Comic Potential, Calhoun’s 2017 fall theatre production, surpassed its potential by being both humorous and entertaining. The writer of the play, Sir Alan Ayckbourn, is behind Shakespeare in being the most produced playwright in the world. His 53rd play, Comic Potential, used humor and romance to explore what separates the human race from other creatures. The play proposes several important questions: Do humans need humor? Is it essential to a successful romantic relationship? Does laughter lead to romance? The director’s notes state, “In Comic Potential, the first flicker of humanity is laughter, which grows into love, which in turn proves so confusing and illogical that it sets off a chain reaction of emotions that would short-circuit any brain, mechanical or human.”

This production was staged at the Alabama Center for the Arts in downtown Decatur. The intimate setting allured the audience to feel deeply engaged in the play. Set designer, Bubba Godsey, comments on the significance of the space used: “It can feel as if the audience is on stage with the actors, and this connection enriches the artistic experience for both.” Each member of the audience was able to see the facial expressions of the actors, regardless of the distance from the stage. He also pointed out the challenges that this proposed for the actors but emphasized that they successfully utilized the space given.

This science fiction comedy is set in a futuristic television studio, where modern-day actors are replaced by actoids, human-like robots controlled by programmers. Comic Potential uses both humor and romance to portray the idea that the ability to laugh and the ability to fall in love are both characteristics that distinguish humans from other creatures. The play opens as a hospital soap opera is being filmed. Adam Trainsmith enters the studio and watches the programmers attempt to control the android actors, known in the play as actoids, as one malfunctions. Adam is the nephew of the soap opera’s producer and an aspiring director himself who admires the show’s director, who was once popular but is now an alcoholic deadbeat. This opening scene depicts the separation between humans and the android actors. Adam begins to converse with Jaycee Triplethree, the nurse actoid named by her serial number JC333. He finds that not only can she carry on a conversation, but due to what she refers to as a fault in her programming, she also has a creative imagination that allows her to laugh and feel emotion. Arika Richards, a current Calhoun student, calls attention to the fact that humans are not uniform like actoids, yet “we often become paranoid of our differences, despite everyone having them.” Jaycee’s innocent humor and eagerness to experience life, according to Calhoun student, Hannah Broyles, makes her “such an endearing character.” Throughout the play, Jaycee continues to reveal humanistic dispositions that separate her from the other actoids. As the play develops, Adam finds himself falling in love with her, despite the fact that she is merely an actoid.

Among many scenes, play director, William Provín’s favorite scene is at the end of Act 1, when Jaycee and Adam are dancing to show she is becoming more human. Another crowd favorite tended to be the bow dance at the very end where the whole cast came together to celebrate their comic achievement with the audience.

Calhoun’s Theatre’s production of Comic Potential was an intimate gathering that succeeded at being both humorous and romantic. The student actors went above and beyond to do Sir Alan Ayckbourn’s play justice.
Student Success Symposium

By: Emily Bryant

Chattering among students ceased when Bret McGill, Dean for Health Sciences, took the stage at the well-attended 9th Annual Student Success Symposium. As Dean McGill introduced the three guest speakers, students became eager to hear the stories of their success and the obstacles that they overcame in order to reach their educational goals.

Anaya Hines, a current Calhoun student, started the program by saying that success is “not about how you start, it’s about how you finish.” Hines told of her academic struggles but stressed that utilizing the resources at Calhoun, such as the Fast Track Program and the STARS program, rewarded her with “much more confidence” as she became more involved with the college and as her grades improved.

The second speaker, Ricuarte Solis, a Calhoun alumnus, explained the importance of hard work. He encouraged current students to rely on the resources at Calhoun, as he did, and reminded them that the benefits would be rewarding.

Lastly, Mark Branon, the Huntsville campus director, revealed the difficult journey he experienced as a first-generation college student. Branon spent the entirety of his academic career working various jobs in order to pay for classes. He encouraged students that any goal can be achieved with persistence. His final statement was “the most motivational and encouraging,” according to Chris Townsend, a current Calhoun student. Branon exclaimed, “If the door won’t open, keep knocking because your persistence will determine the goals that you achieve.”

Students were reminded at the symposium that everyone here has a different success story, but that we all have one thing in common: Calhoun Community College is a part of our journey towards success.

What an Honor

The revitalization of an honors program at Calhoun was a busy year in the making. Many years ago, it served the college, its students, and its faculty well, and more recent years had seen the discussion of starting the program anew. The current administration was, however, more amenable to encouraging the formulation and implementation of a program as part of the college’s strategic plan. Several instructors and administrators spent many hours researching honors programs at other two- and four-year institutions and discussing the logistics of bringing a program to fruition.

As with all faculty, staff, and administrators at Calhoun, the initial group members are committed to providing students an exceptional learning experience, focusing on the areas of critical thinking, communication, diversity of thought, and civic engagement and leadership, so they built their vision of Calhoun Community College’s Presidential Honors Program around those principles. By having well-defined program outcomes as a guide, courses are positioned to implement and assess quality educational experiences. These outcomes also support the institutional learning goals, further strengthening the connection to overall student learning. Benefits of this program include scholarship opportunities, smaller class sizes (a 15:1 student faculty ratio), academic and social interaction with other highly motivated and successful students and faculty, innovative experiences in, and outside of, the classroom, priority registration, dedicated honors program advising, mentoring by college and community leaders, honors distinction on transcripts and diploma leading to enhanced transfer opportunities, honors study lounge, travel opportunities, field trips, job shadowing, internships, conference and presentation opportunities, and more. To be considered for Calhoun’s Honor’s Program, students must have a GPA of 3.5 or higher and an ACT score of 24 or higher.

The fall semester of 2017 saw the first group of Presidential Honors students on both the Decatur and the Huntsville campuses. Mrs. Phyllis Brewer and Ms. Necia Nicholas served as co-coordinators for the program in the fall semester. The Phi Theta Kappa leadership course, English 101, and Speech 106 initiated the students into college life. They continued their journeys into the spring semester with English 102, an additional leadership course, and Biology 104. In the spring semester, Mrs. Brewer continued to grow the program by recruiting area high school students at college preview nights, reaching out to honors program directors at surrounding universities, and coordinating with colleagues and college committees to discuss recruitment strategies and curriculum development for the 2018-2019 academic year.
**Calhoun’s Clubs in 2017-2018**

**Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD)** kicked off the spring 2017 semester with members Skye Boyd, Colton Hicks, and J.D. Armstrong traveling to Louisville, Kentucky, with sponsor Julie Sneed for the Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta National Convention. Skye Boyd was selected to participate on the SKD roundtable “Literature as (Re)Creation” with other SKD members from across the country.

During the summer, members Jessica Baker, Melissa Brown, Hannah Campbell, and Mattheus Episcopo traveled to the Birmingham Museum of Art with Dr. Sheila Byrd and sponsor Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea. Everyone enjoyed seeing, learning about, and discussing the outstanding works in the museum’s permanent collection.

The SKD highlight for the fall 2017 semester was the SouthWord Festival in Chattanooga on November 3 and 4. Emily Bryant, Hannah Campbell, Amber Flanagan, Anna Mitchell, and Michelle Serrato attended sessions with Drs. Byrd and Rhea and sponsor Rick Seibert. Speakers included renowned writers, such as Wendell Berry, discussing topics related to southern literature, like the session “Stories of the Southern Wilderness” during which the speakers explored “the interplay between literature, advocacy, and environmental consciousness.”

SKD celebrated Valentine’s Day this year with supplies for creating one-of-a-kind literary love notes on both campuses. The group on the Huntsville campus also took advantage of the opportunity to collect pet supplies to donate to local shelters and rescue programs. During the spring semester, SKD members traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, for the Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta Convention. Anna Mitchell was selected to serve as a panelist on the SKD panel “Literacy = Freedom,” and Brandon Wilcoxson’s essay “A Catharsis for a Shattered Mind” was selected by Sigma Tau Delta for presentation at the convention. His essay also won the Best Sigma Kappa Delta Convention Paper Award.

**The Broadcasting and Photography Club** is a great opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience with television studio equipment. During the spring semester, the Skills USA team prepared for the Skills USA Broadcasting Competition by learning how to properly do all studio operations, such as running studio cameras and teleprompters, mastering lighting techniques, and speaking confidently on camera. The club also went on a field trip to WAFF 48 News where students were able to meet local on-air personalities and ask them about their careers. They also did several on-location reports around the campus where they interviewed students and made short films.

**The International Club** serves as a means of promoting unity, success and involvement for students. Calhoun’s employee and student population is composed of people from over 60 different countries. Celebrating this diversity, the club’s largest event, the Inaugural International Festival, was held on the Huntsville Campus on March 17, 2018. The event included international cuisine, exhibitions featuring various countries, and live music.

**The Entrepreneurs Club** serves to promote entrepreneurship on Calhoun’s campuses by gathering like-minded students and immersing them in experiences that develop their skill sets and enhance their abilities to start their own businesses. Members participated in various campus events, such as the Fall Festival, to promote their club. The main purpose of the organization is to provide members with the opportunity to network with those in the club and community.

**The Bass Fishing Club** has competed in numerous competitions against both four-year universities and community colleges from all over the U.S. The team has finished in the top 10 in 3 of our last 4 tournaments.
More Than a Game

By: Dakota McCurley

Calhoun Community College is the largest community college in the state of Alabama. According to the website, Calhoun serves over 10,000 college students. On July 14, 2017, President of Calhoun Dr. James Klauber announced that he had made the decision to suspend all athletics at Calhoun after the Spring of 2018 due to major budget cuts. What did that mean for students? Eighty to 120 students would be stripped of a scholarship they had worked their whole lives to earn.

I am a high school student athlete who graduated in the top five of my class. I am a current student athlete at Calhoun and maintain a 3.9 GPA. I have played softball for over fourteen years and am passionate about the sport that has given so much to me. I had to find a way to pay for my schooling because it was my only option. I received an academic scholarship that paid for some of school the first year. I knew I had to earn an athletic scholarship, so I had to work hard in the classroom and on the field.

As a student athlete, juggling practice and schoolwork can be difficult at times. Athletes at Calhoun are required by the coaches to attend study hall several times a week, which means sitting down and doing homework. However, an article published on the Athnet recruitment site points out, “Due to their grueling schedule, student-athletes develop excellent time management skills and are probably the most efficient and productive people on campus.” Student athletes must maintain a 2.5 GPA, which may not seem like a high standard except taking 16+ credit hours each semester while also trying to balance practice is demanding. Despite the fact that most days start early and end late, the graduation rate of athletes here at Calhoun is substantially higher than of those who are not athletes. According to Calhoun’s website, the athletic programs in the 2016-2017 year graduated 84% of their student athletes, compared to 13% overall for that year.

Calhoun needs sports because they offer financial support for student athletes who look forward to playing ball on the next level. According to the College Sports Scholarships website, the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) estimates that 45,300 student athletes compete at the junior college level. Calhoun is a part of the Alabama Community College Conference (ACCC). According to the conference’s website, the ACCC is composed of over 1600 student athletes in the state of Alabama. Many of those athletes, including the players at Calhoun, are driven to do well in sports, so they can earn a scholarship to pay for their educations.

Athletes must also do their part to promote the program among their peers. They need to make faculty and students at Calhoun aware when games are scheduled, and they should encourage support for the program from all who are invested in Calhoun’s success. Sports are more than just games. They are what so many athletes have worked for in their lives. This game has given so much to me. Help me spread the message that sports matter here at Calhoun so that girls like me can have the same opportunities to live their dreams.

REFERENCES

About_the_ACCC


muse /myuz/ v. To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder. N. (Greek mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 3. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 4. (Archaic) A poet.