Advisors/Editors

Annette Beamesderfer
Brett Stumpfy
Deb Lovett

No material in this journal may be reproduced or copied in any form without written permission from the author.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Create It Too</td>
<td>Hanna Tayler</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighthouse Siren</td>
<td>Justin Peiffer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold</td>
<td>Crystal Hower</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgotten Words</td>
<td>Myra Kitchen</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Koan</td>
<td>Gloria Guardiola</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My 18th Birthday</td>
<td>Hannah Garman</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run, Run, Run</td>
<td>Gloria Guardiola</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edified</td>
<td>Benjamin Ludwig</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stippled Window and Flowers</td>
<td>Katelyn Cooper</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prom at Coleman’s Chapel</td>
<td>Katelyn Cooper</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Berries</td>
<td>Katelyn Cooper</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A River’s Journey</td>
<td>Henry Miller</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophisticated</td>
<td>Gloria Guardiola</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Bedroom</td>
<td>Joan Weaver</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Little Girl</td>
<td>Kelly Hatch</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Walker</td>
<td>Hanna Tayler</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape</td>
<td>Ashley Coldren</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silk Brocade Boxes</td>
<td>Min Martin</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditto</td>
<td>April Andersen</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I Create It Too

Hanna Tayler

A friend once asked me how it was
That I’d never lived a lie;
How could I still be me
When everyone wanted me to comply?
How could I stay the same
When originals were copied and sold everyday;
Told what to do and how to dress, but also to be different in their way.
How could I, my dear friend asked, like you,
Stay the way I am
When we’re told to do this or that
And end up becoming a sham;
Not the way we were meant to be
But how they wanted us to turn out.
Tell me, please, I need to know
What’s your secret all about?
I told my friend the secret
That I kept, the truth:
I don’t just march to my own drum’s beat;
I create it too.
Lighthouse Siren

Justin Peiffer

Deep, defiant and delicate, does thy bow pierce the fog of uncertainty - of wonder?

Conscientious capsize, sentimental submersion - all lifeboats lost down under.

Regard, overboard! Control, overboard! Promise, overboard! All care, left asunder!

Imprudence to the helm! Trust to the sails! Love’s allegiance, tied to our blunder!

Confidence has walked the plank, whilst ye steered me blindly into thunder.

Shipwrecked in solace, upon a salvaged hull...all fortitude (your) heart did plunder.
Threshold

Crystal Hower

Here I was again, on the long monotonous drive, wondering if we should stop and eat on the way or wait till afterward as usual. My younger siblings had probably snacked after school. Observing them on one of the few days I had off from work during a school day, they behaved like vultures attacking a dead animal as they rummaged through the munchies cupboard.

Too late now to worry about dinner, as I realized that we were almost there. The daily forty-five minute drive through obscure small towns gave me time to prepare myself for the impending visit. By now my sisters, ages 16 and 13, had finished debating the day’s events, and even my 8-year-old twin brothers’ energetic chatter had turned to quiet, as if they all felt the same as I....what would we find tonight?

Hurrying across the partially cleared parking lot, our breath formed small puffs in the brisk March air. I had made this painful journey many times, but tonight seemed different. Our steps were calculated, left turn, right turn, down the hospital hallways as if in our sleep. There was an apprehensive heaviness in the air as we turned the last corner to my mother’s room.

There she was, her dark hair framing her drawn face, her eyes closed, unaware of the machines monitoring her existence. She looked peaceful, maybe knowing that her fight with cancer would soon be over. As we walked in, my father stood up, looking exhausted, his recently graying hair ruffled. Previously the doctor had told my father that it was very unlikely that my mother was aware of the surroundings; her children standing around her, each telling her how much we loved her and wanted her to pull through.

I held her thin, pale hand for the last time, telling her how much I loved her, how proud I was of her for the valiant fight she gave and that she’d always be my hero. Whether she understood, or my imagination wanted me to think she did, she squeezed my hand, making me feel she acknowledged my words and was trying to convey her love back to me.

Not wanting to leave her side but knowing that it was late and that I had to get the kids home, I gathered my siblings and hugged my father. He informed me that he was not coming home that night, rather staying at the hospital with Mom. The sound of our footsteps in the otherwise empty corridor echoed as we shuffled along the speckled tile floor.
We crossed the parking area, our skin stinging from the effect of the cold night air against our tear-stained cheeks. The drive home was quiet and reflective, almost as if we were on autopilot. No one asked to stop to eat, no one complained about going to bed; the night had drained us all.

Waking the next morning to the buzz of my alarm I wondered how I had even slept; my endless prayers begging God for a miracle had kept me awake for hours. Turning on my mother’s stereo in the living room, I made my way to my sisters’ and brothers’ room to wake them for school. The telephone rang, startling me. I quickly ran to the kitchen phone, an ominous feeling washing over me. I lifted the beige receiver as I glanced at the clock on the wall. Six forty-five. I will never forget that time...the exact time my father made the dreaded call to say that our Mom had died. As if knowing a phone call that early could only be bad news, the kids curiously joined me in the kitchen. With tears rolling down my face I stretched out my arms to encompass each one. Words were not necessary, emotion spoke for itself.

I had phone calls to make. I eventually pulled away. As I did, my grandparents came in. My father had called them a few minutes before, informing them that their only child was gone. After making some calls, I rejoined the family in the living room. The perky radio announcer was telling everyone what a beautiful day it was for the first full day of spring...temperatures were cold, the wind was brisk, but the sky was a magnificent blue.

My brother Kerry, youngest of the family at age 8, asked, “How can it be beautiful when your mom has just died?” All of the emotions I had tried controlling in order to be strong for the rest finally broke loose.

As I hugged Kerry and sobbed, my Aunt Mae entered the house. Realizing no coffee had been made, she moved to the kitchen to start a pot. Though I wasn’t a coffee drinker, the aromatic smell of that coffee seemed to wake my senses as my aunt carried a steaming mug in to me.

“A coffee with a little cream and sugar is just what you need to relax,” advised Aunt Mae. And as I took her advice and sipped the java, I knew that it was what I needed at that time. With only a few sips, I felt calmness take over, and even though I knew, with only 18 years of life experience myself, that it wouldn’t be easy, I knew God would provide me with the courage and strength I would need to help my younger siblings through the next few days, the most difficult days of our lives.
Forgotten Words

Myra Kitchen

Have we forgotten how to show respect to one another? Whatever happened to “please,” “thank you,” “you’re welcome,” “I am sorry” and other common courtesies that people extend to each other?

When requesting something, we should always say “please.” When someone gives us something, we should always say “thank you.” If we have done something that has been hurtful or offends someone, we should apologize.

When I was a child, we were always taught to express our manners or show that we had some home training. The way we present ourselves to others is an indication of who we are and how we were raised.

Just the other day a co-worker asked me why I was so annoyed with the word “what?” when someone is responding to his name. I said that I felt that the way it is said indicated to me one of two things: the person is trying to be smart or he just doesn’t want to be bothered. When my kids were growing up, I couldn’t tolerate for them to respond to me in that manner. If they answered “what?” when I called them, it was an instant alarm to me. They were called on the carpet and corrected. The proper response should be “yes.” It is a courteous and respectful way to answer.

Voice inflections do indicate the person being annoyed with being called. Let me give you an example: a husband phones his wife and as soon as she hears his voice, she always answers “what?” This is the same as saying “what do you want?” “what now?” “why are you calling me?”

Here is the same situation with a different response: a husband called his wife and she answers “yes” as if to say “It is OK for you to call me now,” “I am fine, how about you?” “What can I do to help you?”

How about letting others out in traffic? Acknowledge that you appreciate the gesture by a wave or blowing your horn. How about when someone sneezes? “God bless you.” If you step on someone’s foot you should say “excuse me.”

I don’t want to discriminate against men, but the appropriate way to impress a woman and show her respect is to open the car door for her, hold the door open for her, and pull out her chair at dinner.

Now we have cell phone etiquette. Cell phone use has taken the country by storm. There are also rules for usage, such as switching it off during meetings, movies, and worship; not disturbing others; being brief when in the company of others; being polite; and not talking while driving.

Have we become so senseless to others that we only care about our-
selves  Are we so uncaring because we are the only ones who exist in our small minds?  Is this a reflection of our character?  
Let’s stop acting like we don’t have any home training!

A Koan

Gloria Guardiola
My 18th Birthday

Hannah Garman

Heat swarmed around me like bees in their hive. Every time they touched my face, it warped into beads of sweat that ran onto an array of white linens. I opened my eyes and saw the white lace that encompassed me, the same thing that I saw every morning while I was in this inferno, and which rendered me sleepless nights from claustrophobia. A single white sheet draped over me. Only one sheet was offered upon the bed, and one sheet was more than sufficient. I opened up the slit of my lacy cage and slid out, into a blue walled sea. It seemed frigid, probably 20 degrees of a temperature drop even though our room was still nearly 90 degrees.

The door to the bathroom of our hotel room burst open. “Huffy Buffet!,” my best friend, Chelsea, said with white foam encompassing a toothbrush which protruded from her mouth. My perplexed half conscious self watched her turn and spit, “Happy Birthday.” I worked up a smile and thanked her. I could really drink a coffee, a frozen latte, with extra caffeine and extra ice. However, being more than 3,000 miles away from everything comfortable, I very much doubted I would get that frozen piece of heaven, as much as I doubted my day being anything worth remembering. Why were the blessings of Willis Carrier not expanded into the dimension of the universe where I was standing at that present moment?

I pulled out a tooth brush from my luggage, shuffled into the miniscule dimensions of our bathroom, and poured bottled water over it, another inconvenience of the life we were living. The tap water was contaminated, at least to the digestive systems of those who lived in the United States. As if we were going to disintegrate from the inside out if we digested it.
girls were dubious of the claim’s credibility, but none of the guys in the group were willing to sacrifice their well being for it, despite our urging.

Finishing with the daily bathroom routine, I dressed and descended the stairs, taking note of the gecko in the stairwell who we dubbed our protector of all things relating to bugs. It was in the stair well where I became fully aware of where I truly was. Bustling noises of old truck horns and rusty bike bells. Yells and hollers coming from the streets, through the open doors of the dining room where more people were chattering away. This was where the cultural clash hit the hardest. Spanish and English, thrown against each other across the breakfast table, seemed almost like a scheduled food fight three times a day.

I sat down to a chorus of nearly good vocalists singing to me to as my birthday breakfast was placed in front of me by one of the hotel staff. I had a flashback to my favorite meal of the day on so many birthdays. It was whatever I preferred, eggs and bacon, French toast, or pancakes. Maybe complimented with hot maple syrup, butter, or jam. This was the best meal of the day, the most important meal. But today it was rice and plantains. Again.

I had to admit, I was sick of it. Yet I continued to willingly let it sink into my stomach. Something about it was still intriguing to me, though it was continuously bland. The only thing I learned to look forward to was the juice of the day. Each day was some different kind of flavor. Whatever fruit you could think of was pulverized into a liquid and spilled into cups. Today’s was the best - excluding watermelon - passion fruit juice.

After we consumed our food in a reluctant but grateful manner, we piled into our own vans, like clowns into their cars, and headed to our job sites. It was our last day in that city, and we were putting the final touches on our projects. My crew was dropped off at the elementary school where we built a one-meter-high fence and played with the children, and where I was continuously bombarded by beautiful little devils and water balloons.

We retired our machetes for paintbrushes and buckets of yellow, blue, or green paint. The school students swarmed to us, an ebb and flow of black hair and matching eyed children. I greeted each one of them with as much love as I could give. The one thing I knew I would not conjugate incorrectly or mispronounce. I picked up my brush and repetitively stroked the cane, failing to notice the diminishing number of children running around me, asking me how to say things in English, wondering if they can help, and many, many other things.

“Ana!” (Because of their lack of pronunciation when it came to the letter ‘H’, that was what they called me.)

“Sí Wendy? Qué pasa?” I put down my brush. She wanted me to play basketball with her.

I wholeheartedly loathe basketball. Contrary to my feelings towards the sport, I rose and brushed the dust off of me from sitting on the parched
ground.

“Dondé esta una pelota?” I sluggishly, and yet willingly, jogged over to her.

“Allí,” She ran for it.

Unbeknownst to me, as we played the children slowly faded away. In a fraction of a second, I was confronted by those children who had vaporized without my realization. I immediately saw the evil in their eyes, as they raced towards me. The children grinned maliciously with their hands behind their backs. There was one exception to this pattern. One boy, in the front, was holding in his precious little hands, what was to them a grenade, and what was to me, an orange overloaded water balloon. In that moment my mind was parallel to that of Hugh Hudson when he created his famous opening scene in *Chariots of Fire*. To me, these little children were like miniature Ecuadorian versions of Harold Abrahams, Eric Liddell, Lord Andrew Lindsay, and Aubrey Montague as they raced across the beach. However the children were attacking me with water balloons.

My hopes and dreams of remaining dry that day were shattered in a “sorpresa de los globos agua,” also known as, “hit Hannah with as many water balloons as you can while shrieking ‘Happy Birthday’ in Spanish, as loud as your lungs can handle.”

It took me all day to dry.

During the course of the day I was showered with gifts. Everything that I was given was given with excitement. I opened each package carefully, loved each gift, and looked into their wide, bright eyes filled with pride and excitement as I accepted them. Their lovely, beautiful gifts that they had given to me. Now in my possession is a very small jewelry box, a worn and dirty Eeyore, an old singing Christmas card with laryngitis, and a bracelet that had a few beads missing from its elastic. But what I saw was not the gift itself, but the thought and love with which it was given. The junk I received they loved and cherished because it was their best. These things they gave to me were the things that kept them from the harsh reality they lived in. With all my heart I wanted them to keep these things, but I could never refuse them. I knew then that this was going to be the best worst birthday ever, and I knew it was the beginning of motley emotions which were yet to follow.

After we finished, we once more acted upon our clownish nature and piled back into the vans. There was something that one of the other groups wanted to show us and it apparently meant a lot to them. but if it was important to them, then as a team it was important to us as well.
The road on the outskirts of town seemed forlorn until finally we reached a small building, a high school. Next to the school was a fire truck (the one we sat on as we paraded around the town), and on the other side of the fire truck, a huge, smoldering heap of ashes. There were many men running around the truck, donning the fire equipment we had given to them. But that was not the excitement which truly caught my eye. Three of my friends, Nolan, Eric, and Nathaniel, stood between me and the ashes, watching the last of the fire be squelched by lack of wood to burn. Then I watched them turn, and I saw them saddened by the building’s existence and completely satisfied with their actions. The house which loomed over them for the week was finally burned to the ground, unsalvageable, and with it the stories of gay men who pleasured themselves within. No more would that house cast shameful shadows on the school.

Then out of the corner of my eye I saw “her,” as Eric had so cruelly and yet correctly put it. She raced up to him and eventually chased him into the sanctuary of the van I was in, where he reassured my assumptions that she was the one who thought they were betrothed. This scene quickly changed the mood and eased the sobriety of the situation. We laughed as we continued on our journey back into the center of Tosagua, the town we were staying in.

That evening in the small Ecuadoran town gathered all the people who we met and aided and they threw a party for us. Although we were still sweaty and painted and longing for showers, we enjoyed the program they presented to us with much enjoyment. Afterwards we were able to socialize and mingle. We were celebrities in the town and people from across the state of Manabi came to see us.

I reflected on all the people who were there as we went back to the hotel late that night. Merly, her mother, and father were there. They were the lucky ones; they were a true family unit, a rarity in this place. They taught me perseverance. Merly herself taught me trust as she grew heavy in my arms when sleep overcame her as the party progressed. Gabriella and Raquel, girls my age who told me I was their new best friend, reminded me that it did not matter who a person was, everyone needs a friend. Sofia was six years old. She told me that the hug I had given her was the first hug that she had ever gotten in her life. She gave me a pink ribbon that just made it around my wrist. This was her pride and joy for so long. She taught me what it meant to sacrifice out of love. Then there was Rosita, the town prostitute, who opened my eyes to unconditional love, and how no one could ever fall short of God’s love.

Later that night when I undressed for my twelfth cold shower of the mission trip, I peeled the socks off of my tired feet. They were still wet from the water balloons. Afterwards, I crashed into the plethora of white in the blue walled sea, pulled the bug net back over me, closed my eyes, and once again noted the heat swarm around me, like bees in their hive.
Run, Run, Run

Gloria Guardiola
I had plans for that coming Friday night. I heard the news as I was coming up on mile seven on the treadmill at the base gym Wednesday evening. I never was the kind of person who enjoyed any sort of cold weather; the temperature outside that night was unbearable. It was here that I saw the bad news scroll across the bottom of the CNN screen. It had been a particularly bloody week for the boys and girls fighting terrorism overseas. It was going on two years since the war had started that fateful March of 2003, and as I looked up at the screen in front of my treadmill, I saw the ticker at the bottom announce additional casualties. For most, this is tragic news to read about, but some moments later it fades out of mind. For me, it meant my weekend would be spent on the flight line performing the distinguished transfers of all the human remains coming home for their last time, via the Dover Port Mortuary. It was the first week of my bimonthly honor guard rotation and one that I would never forget.

I had found myself on the Honor Guard team in somewhat odd circumstances. In my early twenties, I spent a lot of my free time being very unconstructive. I have a tendency to pour everything I have into whatever it is I find occupying my time, good or bad. After a while, I found myself in the unfavorable gaze of my First Sergeant. The man knew exactly how to
‘rehabilitate’ a ‘well enough liked’ airman who still had potential. My ‘rehabilitation’ involved numerous avenues of motivation accentuated by a 30-day stint in a military correctional custody program that closely resembled Hell. After the 30 days, I returned to Dover, where I was strongly encouraged to participate in the base honor guard. The honor guard usually attracted the kind of person I found irritating, brown-nosers and the like, so I was not too thrilled with having to be in their company during my rotations once every six weeks. I had no inclination as to what I would experience; I was very naive.

I drove on base around midnight, showed my I.D. at the gate and parked my car in front of the Honor Guard building. By no means was I tired. I was a night person by nature and, no matter what, found myself more alert and awake at night than in the morning. On this particular night, I was somewhat upset. The unofficial count on the inbound 747’s manifest was 47 human remains. This alone was upsetting on a couple of levels. It was tremendously gut wrenching to read the individual I.D. tags on the side of the transfer cases and see birth dates of 1982, 1983, 84, 85, and so on; kids younger than I. In addition, the more flag-draped transfer cases you see on an aircraft, the more the reality of what is taking place hits your stomach like a wrecking ball, 47 is a lot to take in. Lastly, after having seen so many of the fallen return home, the whole process becomes a routine and you lose grasp of the cold reality of the situation and what is taking place. At the same time, it’s this very state of mind that enables us to do what we do on a routine basis.

Until that night, the most transfer cases I had ever handled in a single ceremony were 27 on a summer evening, and it took two and a half hours of standing on the flight line to finish. This may not sound like an arduous task, but standing still at the position of attention for even 15 minutes is not easy. The reason for my indignant mood was that, on top of all the tragic realities of the job at hand and my selfish want to spend a Friday night full of debauchery and foolishness with my friends, the temperature outside was in the low, bitter single digits. The cold wind, sweeping off the northern Atlantic a few hundred meters from where we stood, was relentlessly forcing its way across the flight line like death coming to collect on any individual fool enough to be out in it at the moment.

As I walked into the small room crammed with wall lockers that took up most of the space, I looked at the uniform I was going to wear that night. Pulling out my pants and blouse, I started ironing each garment again for the millionth time, all the while thinking of the menacing cold that awaited us outside. Now, it is standard policy to never ever wash your honor guard BDU uniform because you would rid it of the five bottles of concentrated starch that had long since turned every fiber into a material similar to paper. Instead, you just ironed out all the wrinkles and sweat and made it flat again. The overall effect, however, was impressive; the creases
in the sleeves and pants were sharp, crisp, and, when put together, looked very imposing. My head was devoid of any hair, which meant my body warmth would escape much easier. Finally, due to budget cuts, I had not received the black Lycra thermal tops and bottoms that were worn under our uniforms. So, I wore a T-shirt with my paper-thin blouse on top, along with my paper-thin pants, boots with a nylon mesh body, my Gore-Tex jacket and a pair of white cotton gloves that would provide no warmth. I did a quick search around the locker room, seeing if I could borrow somebody else’s gear, but to no avail.

When we were all dressed, we fell-in in the drill room to go over the various commands and movements we would be using for the ceremony. This was basically an exercise in ‘too many chiefs, not enough Indians’; it entailed a lot of repetition, carrying a casket around in circles while people complained someone else wasn’t doing it right, wasn’t in step or had forgotten to wear deodorant, again. I was savoring the sweaty warmth I was working up, not thinking of how that would feel in a couple of minutes when we fell-out outside to march to the pax (passenger) terminal. Upon stepping out into the night air, I was abruptly and cruelly slapped in the face by the coldest blast of wind I had ever felt in my short life. As we started marching at ease, I turned to the guy next to me and said "This is going to hurt man," "No shit," he grumbled. I guess he didn’t have thermal underwear on either.

We came up to the door of terminal ‘A’, halted, did an about-face and fell out into the room with a sense of urgency. The Marine Honor Guard was punctual as usual and off in its own little group. The Navy Honor Guard came in a few moments after us and piled into the seats on the opposite end of the room from where we sat. Finally, the Army guard came shuffling in, followed by the General. Having all four guard teams present, with the addition of all the VIP’s, officers, and various enlisted ranks, made the big room feel congested and loud. When the Major called the room to attention for the General, the effect of sudden and absolute silence was a stark contrast and quite impressive. At the front and center of the room, the Major gave a more detailed and thorough briefing than she usually gave. I listened attentively for a few moments, but my attention was quickly lost. A shiver ran down the back of my spine as I stared out of a nearby window at the night.

There was going to be a family witnessing its son come off the plane. This was a rare occasion. Having family there was hard to take in. I was glad that I wouldn’t have to see them off to the side as we moved case after case forward, but you couldn’t escape the sounds of their heart aching anguish. The sound of a mother’s or widow’s sorrow made me feel like the wind had been knocked out of me. We all got up again for the General and followed him out for the ceremony, each of us savoring the last bit of warmth we were going to feel for quite some time.
The 747 normally parked facing north on the ramp, and this night was no exception. The orange glow of the ramp lights washed over everything and contributed an additional level of melancholy. The aircraft’s auxiliary power unit was running. The roar of the small engine drowned out the noise of the maintenance activities that never ceased. The whole ceremony required the use of five very different kinds of vehicles. First and foremost was the 747 herself. On the left side of the fuselage, just behind the wing, was a cargo door that opened out and up, leaving an opening 15' by 15'. The second vehicle used was nicknamed a ‘K-loader’, which is basically a big rectangular platform mounted on a very powerful hydraulic scissor lift that can drive to and from the freight docks and airplanes and can be raised to any level. On the ground, 100' from the aircraft’s cargo door, were two big utility trucks parked perpendicular to the plane and backwards. In the gap created between the backs of the trucks and the end of the K-loader mated to the aircraft, the ground teams stood in position facing inward, making a corridor of servicemen for the movement of the transfer cases. The enclosed back compartments of the modified ‘hearses’ were able to carry six transfer cases from the flight line to the port mortuary led by the fifth vehicle, a security forces escort car.

The guards fell-in in their respective spots right outside the terminal. We were reluctant to leave, and as before, I was met by the savage assault of the brutal and unforgiving cold. The Army always marched out first followed closely by the Navy, Marines, and the Air Force always brought up the rear. This always resulted in an odd performance of our march out because the Army guard marched off at a good clip, while the Marines in front of us, not compromising their tradition, marched slowly and methodically, a march that was indeed stately but slow. So inevitably, the four groups separated and a gap grew in between our formation. As the first three teams veered off to their respective places in between the K-loader and the hearse trucks, the Air Force team proceeded to the stair truck leading up to the forward door of the massive 747.

In single file, we went up the stairs to fall in on the first transfer case of the night. I cannot begin to explain what it was like to come through the door of the plane and see 50 bodies, 50 flags covering the boys and girls you see every day on the news. The distinct smell of death was in the cabin air, making the entire cargo hold feel like a coffin itself. I marched down the side of the cargo compartment, glancing at the numerous cases with human remains, and fell in on the first transfer case at the opening on the side of the plane with the K-loader in place. It was an eight man/woman team, four on each side. Every fiber of my being shouted out at once in a tumultuous voice in my head, “God, I do not want to be here!” By the time we started to move the first case, I had lost feeling in my fingers, toes and face.

After the chaplain had finished his prayer, we carried the first case all
the way out to the end of the K-loader. We then placed it down and slid it
forward so the teams on the ground could pull it off and carry it from the K-
loader to the trucks, once the platform was lowered with the first ten cases.
At any point in time, when any transfer case is being moved during the
ceremony, everyone salutes. The General, flanked by the Admiral, Air Force
Colonel and Marine Colonel, called ‘present arms’ for everybody. It took my
team half an hour to move the first 10 cases into two tight and uncomfort-
able rows straight down the center of the K-loader platform. We subse-
quently rode the platform down to ground level at ease, with our hands
crossed in front of ourselves. Once it had come to a stop we snapped back
to attention and waited for the first two teams to come up and move the
first two cases. One by one, the teams carried the bodies over the flight line
tarmac to the trucks, passing through a cordon of uniforms and salutes
from fellow servicemen and women, welcoming them home for the last
time.

The wind felt like sandpaper as it whipped by my face and my vision
started to blur again as soon as I blinked away the water running out of my
eyes from just a moment ago. The back doors of the hearse trucks were
shut with 10 cases in each. As the remains were driven off, the ground
teams marched behind and then veered off toward the warm inviting glow
of the terminal. My team remained on the airplane, awaiting the return of
the trucks and other teams. It had been over an hour since we had started,
and only ten transfer cases had been moved.

We did this four more times. I could do nothing but stand erect and
motionless with my gaze fixed straight ahead, ignoring my own thoughts of
angry protest to the weather. It takes a lot of discipline to bear something
so painful for so long, but I’d had a lot of training in pushing my threshold
for pain for the sake of the mission at hand. We all had. I was glad it was
dark; I was shaking uncontrollably underneath my ‘non-insulated’ jacket,
but somehow, I was able to keep my composure. I tried to hunch my
shoulders up so I could cover my mouth, ears and nose with the top of my
jacket, but this made no difference, and after an hour, I gave up and let the
snot and tears go. Gradually the numbness spread over me, making me
feel the harsh cold less and less.

Each time I picked up a transfer case, I was filled with an immense
sense of gratitude that I was able to move again, not that I could feel the
handles of the cases, or the 500 lbs. of ice, human remains and whatever
else was on the individual when he died. It was exceptionally heartbreaking
to bend down and pick up a transfer case that weighed less than 200 lbs. It
was a grim reminder of the fact that sometimes only a small part of you
comes home, and the rest is lost in some Godforsaken war.

As I watched the last transfer case slide into the back of the truck, I
couldn’t feel anything except the burning sensation that being too cold for
too long will give you. The commands that were being shouted out over the
noise of other airplanes, engines and power units up and down the flight line had become inaudible and distant. As the ceremony went along, I forgot about what I had wanted to do that night. As though through trial by fire, I had contemplated what it must be like inside the flag-draped cases. It was a cold and dark place death inhabited, much like the ramp was that night.

All the teams including the official party of VIP's and bystanders followed the final truck until passed by the terminal. As we marched up to what looked like the ethereal glow of some paradise, I took another look at the flight line and the stoic stance of the 747 on which we had just been. The orange glow of the night floodlights made the whole ramp seem surreal. It was in that moment I came to realize how beautiful life is and how fragile it can be. It was a realization of exactly how each and every one of us out there that night was truly blessed to be there, in that place and time, to honor the tremendous self-sacrifice others had made for the multitudes who would never fully realize what was given them and the cost of it. As I stepped over the threshold into the terminal, the water streaming across my face was no longer a result of the icy winds.

My honor guard team marched back to our little building a few blocks away in silence. We were all too tired and frozen to do much else but shuffle along the street in step. I changed back into my civilian clothes slowly as my fingers were still adjusting to the warm. The chatter that had been so prevalent earlier that night was no longer there. After our briefing about the human remains coming in the very next night, we all went home. I got in my car and lit a cigarette while I let the engine warm up. My apartment would no doubt have my roommate and our four close friends still up, drinking and carrying on, but that was the last thing I cared about. There wasn’t anything particular on my mind as I drove home; I was in one of those states where you stare off into space with that blankness in your mind that brings a kind of peace which lets you feel, not know, that it’s good to be alive. In turn, this makes you completely content with yourself, your life, the world around you, and the position you’ve been given in it.

Much of a person’s life is dictated by the circumstances one is given and how he/she reacts to them. We either learn and prevail, or spurn and fail. From January of 2004 until April of 2006, when I left Dover AFB for Lajes Field in the Azores to finish out my 6-year enlistment, I performed hundreds of flight line ceremonies and carried more than a thousand of our men and women who had made the ultimate sacrifice. I have buried hundreds of retired vets from WWII and beyond. I’ve had the honor of presenting the colors in five different states and meeting a number of high ranking individuals. Admittedly, I wasn’t very happy when my plans were so consistently ruined by short-notice details. I missed being able to drive to see my girlfriend in another state, going to all the parties my roommate attended, missing dates with beautiful girls, snowboarding trips, beach va-
cations and so on. Nevertheless, the memories of all the ceremonies in which I participated and all the honors bestowed therein infinitely outweigh the trivial things I thought were so important. Words cannot begin to describe how thankful I am for the opportunity I had to be part of a hero’s last journey home, the honor of presenting a folded flag to weeping family members who had just lost their reason for living, or being able to stand at attention in my full ceremonial service dress and salute the colors of a nation worthy of the sacrifice given as the national anthem plays.

I still have my honor guard uniforms, and to this day, I will from time to time pull them out of the closet. And I remember.
Stippled Window
And Flowers

Katelyn Cooper
Prom at Coleman’s Chapel

Katelyn Cooper
Winter Berries

Katelyn Cooper
A River’s Journey

Henry Miller

A river flows soft and gently
Sunlight gleaming off its crystal sheen
Peacefully meandering on a warm spring day
Birds sing brightly songs of life
The river is at peace
Calm prevails as it rolls gently along its banks
Suddenly the banks become narrow
Rocks impede its gentle progress
The river become agitated
Anger grows as the river’s progress is blocked
White foaming rapids form
The river screams in turbulent fury
It is searching for a way out
Violence grows as the rapids become angrier
Faster and faster the rapids flow
But narrower and rockier the path becomes
Twists and turns add to its fury
The river screams in anguished pain
But there is not a solitary soul to hear
Faster and more violent the river rages
Its foaming rapids crashing painfully
on jagged rocks
Where can the river go
Its pain is relentless
Agonizing shrieks of pain rage deep in its soul
Aching to be heard
But there is not a soul to hear
The river can’t go on
Its pain too much to bear
Tearing the fabric of its soul
Darkness sets around its existence
Loneliness and isolation are its
only companions
“Press on” whispers a soft warming voice
“You are nearing the end”
“Just a bit further to rest”
The river is pressed like a vice
Its banks are too narrow
Its rapids crashing in painful roars
   It can’t go on, it seems
Gradually the banks begin to widen
   Light becomes brighter
   Rocks become gentle silt
   The river’s pain is releasing
       Its pain is easing
Isolation becomes “sweet freedom”
Rapids are calming as the choking
grip is being released.
   “Just a bit more,” the voice whispers
   The river looks to its path
A wide open vastness in the distance
   A new strength grows within
Hope springs from an unknown source
   Slowly the river presses on
   Exhausted, it sees its destination
       Closer and closer it nears
At long last, with no more strength
   The journey is successful
       A wide open lake appears
Sunlight gleaming off its crystal sheen
Peacefully meandering on a spring day
   Birds sing brightly songs of life
       Serenity fills the river’s soul
Sophisticated

Gloria Guardiola
Blue Bedroom

Joan Weaver

She must have done these hems by feel,
White hem thread in white sheer panels.
Some of these needles I threaded for her
    and stuck like quills into the faded orange
tomatoes of old pincushions.
Hard enough for me, my vision clear through bifocals.
How long, with her wrecked sight, must this have taken?
Why spend so long on such a tedious task?
I’d have taken her to buy new sheers
    anytime, she could have spared the price.

How do curtain hems come out,
    I ask John. The cat? But there’d be shreds.
How old must curtains be
    before the hems dissolve?
And why
    do I now sit on this
blue carpet, freshly steamed,
as it never was in her life.
pushing this needle through sheer white
    for the next owner to take down
and throw away.
His Little Girl

Kelly Hatch

He never showed a smile
When she came home from school.
His little girl, with a few bruises
That no one ever know.
No one ever asked, when she smiled
As her eyes were red,
And they just looked past
The two cuts on her forehead.
You see, she was scared
She didn’t know he was wrong
No one told her
No one asked what was going on.
She had a friend, a little boy,
Who was the only one who knew.
He understood
Because it was happening to him too.
She would pray ever night
Asking the Lord, "When will it end?
He tells me he loves me,
But why does he hurt me again and again?"
His little girl;
Eight year old, never made it to nine.
He got drunk one night,
Threw a beer bottle at her spine.
Now she can’t voice her story
That’s why I’m sharing it with you.
Actions speak loud,
But if you never ask, you'll never know
What words can do.

Shadow Walker

Hanna Tayler

Shadow walker, follow me sure
With me, do you stir?
Maybe little, maybe long and tall,
Gliding silent over brick wall.
Shadow walker, do you care
To follow me as I walk here to there?
Is it hard to be on time with the sun?
Do you get tired when I run?
When day wanes, where do you go?
Do you get lost if the dark moves slow?
Shadow walker, silent steps echo mine
It keep the beat, you keep in time.
I like this friendship that we’ve made
Could it be you who’s walking and I the shade?
Escape

Ashley Coldren

Leaves swirling on a windy ride
Colors of wonder show surprise
A breeze so light freely blows
A plethora of beauty shows
Rays of light show the way
Down a path darkened yesterday
Leading toward ripples in the sand
Raindrops fall and gently land
Waves hit shore as they seek
Creating art so unique
Majestic meadows bloom for miles
Discover rainbows so worthwhile
Showing the beauty of true nature
Deepened footprints that marked adventure
Discovering the fantasies that never seemed real
But the dreams of heart can warmly feel
Open up what’s been hidden inside
Take a step and breathe for the first time.
Silk Brocade Boxes

Min Martin

We never know when we meet someone whether he or she may come back into our life again. We do our best to be friendly, and helpful if appropriate; but in our rushed world, personal pursuits, family relationships, community involvement and employment naturally take precedence. Many glide into and out of our circle so quickly that they are easily forgotten. Interspersed through life are those rare few who will not be forgotten. To bring you to a place where I can present one of them, I will share what led up to that time.

In 1990, a member of the Lebanon Valley Council on the Arts invited me to become involved with the organization. With the waning summer sun setting behind me, I trudged in semi-darkness up a narrow set of slanting steps clad in treacherous, cracked linoleum, circa the forties. My destination was a “second story home over-a-shop” in downtown Lebanon. As I entered the rooms, my eyes slowly adjusted to low light conditions exacerbated by heavy drapes obscuring two narrow, tall windows.

A menagerie of worn chairs representing different periods and styles were established in opposing formation on either side of the long, narrow area. An oscillating floor fan, clearly a relic from an era preceding safety grills, directed a current of warmish stale air into the colorful characters who packed the small area. The fluid, familiar tone of conversation that wove in and out of the group gave evidence to the fact that this small cadre of hobby-level and semi-professional artists had attended many a function together. Warm hands and hopeful countenances grasped at mine as I navigated my way in from the hallway.

At the insistent urging of the host, I moved to sample one of the hors d’oeuvres stacked on an ornate silver platter lined with wrinkled paper doilies. Looking dubiously at the small triangular sandwiches, crusts removed, containing a thin layer of pale pink filling, I overheard softly exhaled words “New Blood.” I snapped my head upright and suddenly realized not only that I was the youngest one present, but also that all eyes were focused directly on me.

The snowy-haired woman “in charge” brought the meeting to order. She sighed a welcome, and then specifically took a moment to introduce me. It became urgently necessary at that moment for me to squelch a rising urge to rise from my chair and flee the room.

With slow deliberation, aiming at a look of casual composure, I set my flimsy paper dish aside on a round mahogany table with an exquisite lattice carved wooden edge. My hands sought one another like lovers in the dark,
locking into a tight, clammy embrace. The room, devoid of air conditioning, grew moister as the temperature rose in the assembly. I unclenched my hands and tucked each beneath a thigh; silently vowing not to check my watch.

During the meeting, growing suspicion evolved into full comprehension; I made a hasty evaluation that would prove uncannily correct. Membership had been dropping steadily over the years. LVCA was struggling, not just for recognition in the community, but for their very survival. This close-knit group was profoundly discouraged by the inability, or the unwillingness, of the surrounding community to embrace its creative core, and support the Arts Council the way other communities had championed theirs.

The challenges of LVCA intrigued me. Although my plate was full with obligations and the needs of a rambunctious family, I believed my eclectic talents might make a difference to this organization. Somewhat hesitantly, I stepped up to the plate and volunteered.

As a right-brain, left-brain dichotomy: as much as I was an artist, I also had an affinity for personal computers. In 1990, home-based PC’s were quite rare. The Council entrusted me with an old Amstrad and years of handwritten records, to develop a database of members. The LVCA list was incorporated into other lists, acquired with finagling (and sometimes outright begging), from other Art Associations. When LVCA was approached by the owners of the local mall to present a show, I developed a competition brochure; and, with the newborn database, broadcasted the call to exhibit for a National, juried, Fine Arts show.

The mall would provide financial backing and advertising and coordinate from their end; LVCA was to host the effort and coordinate from our end. The goal of the anchor department store sponsoring this extravaganza was not altogether altruistic; mall businesses would benefit by increased traffic generated through attendance at Festival of the Arts. LVCA’s nobler cause was to build itself back up by exposing the community to a concentrated sampling of the Arts over the course of one week. If the people would not come to the Arts – then the Arts would go to the people.

The Fine Arts Show, splayed out atop the mall in the spacious, well-lit community room, would be complete with hushed atmosphere, strains of classical music, and monetary awards. As co-chair, I arranged for the judge: none other than internationally recognized Bruce Johnson. Every triumphant detail like this was like a dose of Ephedra to the Council.

Painters, sculptors, sketch artists, weavers, potters, ballet dancers, ensemble and solo musicians, singers, martial artists, comics, and even a one-act play performed by the local theater group would fill the spaces around and between mall stores on the lower level. All were entreated to showcase their talents to the populace and provide live demonstrations wherever possible.

Planning the Festival absorbed a tremendous amount of time and en-
ergy. It proved well worth our effort and sacrifice: the excitement at monthly meetings while assembling this extravaganza was invigorating and reviving the group. People on the roster who had not attended in years resurrected; everyone assumed an all-hands-on-deck attitude.

My intense involvement provided an outlet for my own talents even as I was enjoying the camaraderie and talents of the other artists. We experienced a sense of regeneration and accomplishment; plus hope that our efforts would make a difference. During this same time, I became the author and publisher of the Council’s monthly newsletter. One of the ideas I supported and promoted was the Council’s tradition of an Annual Christmas Dinner.

On the evening before the Christmas dinner, I received a call from an unusually soft-spoken woman, who introduced herself only as Diane. She had not been to a meeting in a very long time, she told me, providing no explanation. We talked at length as kindred spirits about our love of art until the phone receiver in my hand was hot. She asked, at the end, if it was too late to attend the Christmas dinner with her husband. Certain that accommodating two more diners would present no insurmountable problem, I told her LVCA would love to have them.

On the rain soaked December evening of the affair, my husband and I arrived at the banquet hall damp and chilly. By the time we found a parking place in the puddle-ridden lot, and dashed through the drizzle under a broken blue and white golf umbrella, there was little time to recoup. Worker bees were at a premium this night; I hit the ground running as soon as we set foot in the door.

Somehow, although acquainted only with her voice, I immediately recognized the all-too-slim woman in the long grey wool dress, floating gracefully in a door on the opposite side of the dining room. Diane, our last minute invitee, appeared weary, her face caught in the expression of one resigned; her husband, garbed in a grey pinstripe suit, mirrored her, worn and reticent. They paused. I navigated quickly toward them across the polished floor and extended my hand. It was only then that I noticed: she wore a dark wig, too large for her frame and face, and had a small naso-gastric tube clipped to her nose. My eyes traveled quickly, (I hoped, not perceptively) along the clear green tube to a small tank of oxygen; then immediately back to her wan face and soulful eyes. Maintaining a smile, I softly caught her gloved, skeletal hand in my own and drew her into the room. Then I devoted my attention to introducing her and her husband to newer members, and to seating them comfortably at our lively table of ten.

Everyone eventually found his or her seating. They chatted amicably, the way people will at a holiday event where they are not intimate friends, but, in the spirit of the season, are determined to make merry. Each table held a fascinating and colorful assortment of faces and frames and voices.
and clothing, as varied as the art they collectively produced.

Talk of art in general flitted about the room and got caught up here and there at each table. The major buzz focused on the pending Festival of the Arts. I was pleased to note Diane begin to relax, to brighten, and become mildly animated. Her husband seemed grateful and relaxed into her enjoyment of the affair. By unspoken agreement, thankfully, everyone was sensitive - despite it being a normal topic of conversation otherwise with our aging membership at gatherings - no one broached health issues at this happy table tonight.

Conversation remained dynamic and pleasant through dinner. By the time our servers brought dessert, I saw that Diane had visibly paled, and the crisp sparkle that danced in her soft dark eyes during dinner had diminished. With little parting comment, she rose slowly with the aid of her husband, and they melted through the door into the darkness. There was no indication that this night was both the first time, and the last time, I would ever see Diane.

Two months dissipated in a fog. I was completely absorbed in Festival mania, and continuing to bring new members to our Council. The phone rang incessantly. My girls teasingly answered “Council of the Arts” in a secretarial, lilting voice. As I sat late into the night in my studio addressing and affixing postage to newsletters, I came to Diane, reflecting on her. What exactly was her illness, I wondered, and how was she faring? Though we had not received her annual dues when the December deadline passed, I continued to send a complimentary newsletter. After all, I reasoned, a few sheets of paper and a stamp or two would keep her in the loop. I often sent newsletters to long-missing council members, hoping “festival fever” would inspire them and bring them back into the ranks, as it sometimes did.

The Arts Festival came and went in a tidal wave of frenetic activity, and with no outgoing fanfare, was history. After several months of complimentary newsletters, I received a call from Diane’s husband. His tone was wooden, subdued, and strangely matter of fact. Yet I could detect a hint of abject despair in his voice as he told me: Diane had passed away. He said he called because he wanted to tell me Diane enjoyed the newsletters, which made her feel she was still part of LVCA. He told me that she had achieved a tiny flame of fame at our local hospital, which displayed some of her work on the hospital corridor devoted to this purpose.

Although genuinely happy for his wife’s success, I found myself unable to say much during the call. I apologized for missing the obituary. [Awkward silence.] If he had called to let us know, we would have attended her service, I told him. [Awkward silence.] On behalf of the Council and myself, I expressed deep sadness, wished him well, and offered the pat “If there is anything I can do, please let me know.” I could never adequately detail to anyone why I felt devastated by the loss of this woman I met only
briefly, at the end of her time on the earth. For a long time after we hung up, I sat numbly pondering my own humanity.

Months later, the Festival was now a rapidly fading memory, and my studio and family life settled back to normal. The phone jangled, interrupting bubbly discussion during dinner. I jumped up to field what I thought was a telemarketer, as they have a penchant for dinnertime solicitations. It was instead Diane’s husband, although he did not give his name. In contrast to his previous demeanor, this time, he was agitated and curt. My entire family transmitted alarm at my facial expression. I retreated to my studio to take the call privately.

He wanted me to come to “his” home, to remove her “artist things.” Those two words, laced with vehemence, made me sit upright in my chair. He wanted me to come immediately to “get the things out of here.” As he could not stand looking at them any longer, I was to try to sell them, or give them away, but he wanted them “out” as quickly as possible.

I gently suggested Diane’s family members would probably like to have her things. He was adamant: they would not get them. He repeated his demand; more softly this time, a plea. His anger at being deserted; his life irretrievably altered by his wife’s protracted illness and death, these were now superseding his sorrow. He was demanding my services. It was an awkward, stilted conversation.

Why did Diane’s husband choose me to take care of this? She had not been a close friend. Though I try never to refuse a request for help, I was supremely uncomfortable with this; I simply did not want to go. As a representative of LVCA, I knew a response was mandatory, and lamely offered the President’s phone number. He refused it. I said I would call back after I checked my schedule, stalling in having him force me to select a date. He called again twice, so I set a time and day, but I dreaded the arrival of that day.

It was time. On the way to their home, I drove slowly, warily, wondering again why he chose me to take Diane’s things; clueless how I would handle it gracefully. As it turned out, their home, in a quiet development, was less than fifteen minutes from my own.

On the ground next to the driveway sat a large rock, blasted from its earthy cloak to make way for the building. Glued to the gray and white granite were numerous small, colorful animal figures. I paused and touched one, or two, I cannot recall, then approached the entrance and gingerly rapped on the door. He yanked it open abruptly; he had seen me through the window. I was gestured into the living room with a brisk thank-you-for-coming.

A faint odor I could not mentally assign to anything I knew pervaded the mundane living room, where several paintings identified by signature as Diane’s graced the walls. All but one struck me as completely unremarkable; but I made a positive comment on this painting, which, her husband
told me, had been her favorite. He added that it seemed to be everyone else’s favorite as well.

The tall, simple, narrow frame held a single large lily. She painted it in somber soft grays, muted purples, and soft white. It was clearly her Death Flower: her emotion at being forced to evacuate the earth early was captured and brushed onto canvas for all to see. The painting did not catch my breath with drama; it clutched at my heart on a much deeper level. Less amateurish and more painterly than the others I had been shown; close to the end of her working time as an emerging artist, Diane had, in my humble opinion, in this painting, begun to produce work of reasonable quality.

Diane’s husband reiterated to me, perhaps forgetting he had told me, that in her last month of life, she achieved some recognition from those at the hospital where she was treated, and even sold a few paintings. I thought about how welcome and affirming those accolades must have been to her. Any artist is empowered and validated to achieve such recognition. Yet to her husband, having Diane draw further into solitude, producing art when she was ill and fighting for her life was too much to bear. She may have pulled away mentally, physically, and emotionally in order to paint.

I found there was simply nothing I could manufacture to comfort Diane’s husband during this conversation. He spoke in a monotone so quietly I strained to catch his words. It had been a long battle for Diane, but he took it personally. He was angry, hurt, lost – overwhelmed. With a tear threatening to drop from the canthus of his eye, he bristled anew, and told me it was time. Time to “remove” the things that reminded him of Diane’s affair-like late life love.

In order to enter the partially finished basement that once served as Diane’s studio, it was necessary to pass a staircase that led to the family room. Boldly progressing up the wall just beneath the wooden hand railing were children’s handprints, repeating one above the other: blue, then red but a smaller hand, then blue again, then red again, right up to the landing. Diane had left little ones behind? Her husband had never mentioned children. I began to falter. Somewhere along her tragic journey, this artist had decided to stop chiding her children for leaving their fingerprints on the walls, and had spent precious time not only allowing, but helping them, gleefully hand paint their way up the steps.

As a mother and artist, I knew instantaneously: Diane knowing she was leaving her children must have been one of the worst things for her to bear; then, leaving painting when she was becoming accomplished, almost as much so. It might have been harder for her to accept the loss of those two integral facets of her personality than all the doctors, the tests, the treatments, and her cruelly condensed time on earth. I found myself hoping she had someone sensitive and selfless to talk things out with during the last leg of her journey.

My eyes were drawn once again to the contrast of the bold hand-
prints against the cream wall, and they flooded. I tilted my head to restrain the warm liquid from tumbling over my lower lashes, and avoided her husband’s gaze as we passed through to the kitchen. I saw her personality everywhere: in the wallpaper print, in the grow-a-patch quilt she had hung at the patio door for a curtain, in the little glass bottles on the shelf above the sink similar to my own collection at home.

As I walked into the family room, I saw them. Two wisps of boys in corduroy pants and striped knit shirts playing with cars on the floor. They appeared to be perhaps four and five years old, with shocks of thick, unruly dark hair. They were subdued; working hard at behaving. They looked up and directly into my eyes. In their dark, hollow ones, there was pain and fear of the unknown, more than little ones should have to feel. A motherly smile creased my face, and I consciously altered my eyes to mask the tearful posture of a moment ago. Their father ordered them to say “Hello.” Obligatory hellos obediently offered, they lowered their eyes and their chins to their chests.

My stomach knotted, and felt as if it were sinking right through my groin. This visceral reaction moved me to immediate action. I moved quickly past red and blue handprints, away from the boys and the quilt and the bottles. The strength of emotion I was experiencing made me feel too vulnerable. It suddenly became imperative that I accomplish my task and depart before I lost my composure right there in Diane’s home, in front of her husband and children.

It did not take long to move the small box of her things to my van. My lungs gulped in fresh air as we exited the side door. As I opened the van, warmth and new plastic wafted into my nostrils; a familiar fragrance, comforting. As I maneuvered it behind the front seat, I glanced inside the box, filled with fairly common “must have” artist tools and supplies. Every artist I knew possessed his or her own treasure trove. I suddenly felt a presence behind me. He stood holding up a scaled-down easel - a child’s easel - pushing it towards the van. I gently refused, once, then again, to take it away. At first, he insisted. When I told him that Diane would want her boys to continue to draw and paint, he frowned but nodded acceptance.

We spoke a brief farewell, and I backed quickly out of the drive. In my rearview mirror I saw a forlorn, dejected, halved, bitter single parent, framed in the doorway to his home. I drove less than two blocks before I was compelled to pull off the road, unable to see, sobbing. A multitude of tears streamed relentlessly down my face and onto my jacket; I was powerless to stem the tide – it had been a long time coming.

Diane’s unfair passing, her sad boys, her “lost” widower, my frustration at not knowing how to better handle such situations, and then, surprisingly, anger bubbled up through. Anger at myself for not being more tuned in to her, instead of fussing for months on end with a Festival of the Arts she did not get to see. Anger at myself for taking time away from my own
young family, anger at the sleep deprivation and the disappointments, it somehow all formed a tornado that blew me away that day.

I had choice words for the Creator. Quite a bit of indignation spilled out right there on the berm of the road; about why mothers are taken from their children like Diane had been, and why the whole world is full of pain and people wrapped up in themselves so deeply because, they simply cannot face the reality of it all. All the way home, for days afterward, and still, today, I flashback on the stark image of little red and blue handprints, and the painting of her lily.

Diane’s used art supplies did not sell. They sat off to the side in my studio, a constant reminder. Finally, I selected two small Oriental brocade covered boxes, mailed a check to her husband for fifty dollars, and donated everything remaining to the small private school where I had developed an arts curriculum and taught classes to junior and senior high students.

One of the brocade-covered boxes held hard black sumi-e painting ink and a water well, a wispy brush, and a tiny water spoon. In the other nestled a delicately painted blue and white porcelain covered dish. About the size of a tablespoon, it contained waxy scarlet rouge for an artists “chop,” a signature stamp used on Oriental prints.

For the next fourteen years, on a side table in our living room, the two boxes covered in delicate silk brocade blended with oriental vases in our decor. While I initially considered it a possibility when I purchased them, I finally decided never to use Diane’s boxes for other than visual triggers. Producing art from those would have propagated too much angst – and I was replete.

For years, every time I looked at the brocade boxes, I thought of and spoke of Diane and her boys. The boxes were dusted, gently opened, and the contents pondered from time to time. My daughters got into many things through the years; but they respected and understood the importance of not handling or damaging Diane’s boxes. The boxes reminded me to pray for two growing boys, and to thank God daily for my own health and that of my family. The boxes moved with us from our old house to a new house, where they were set right back into their place on the side table.

Expenses grew as our girls did. I had been emotionally and physically unable to paint for some time. Perhaps too distracted, too many demands on my time, too much stress, too much emotion and energy poured into daily living to have enough power left to create. Regardless of the recipe, the elements had combined to place my painting urges firmly on the back burner.

Taking an outside job, I buried myself and my talents into helping another non-profit organization survive and grow. Much in the same way I had poured energy out to grow a little bit of life into the LVCA, I immersed myself into the development of a museum. Most of my efforts and thoughts were devoted to that cause, almost zealously so, but the organization had
outgrown my ability to maintain the status quo. I told the Board of Directors that I needed an assistant.

As the organization had no funding for an assistant, a board member suggested I schedule internships with students. A nearby school provided educational opportunities for those who have not started life on a level playing field. Many of the students have family problems, and some have compromised faculties. I contacted the school, guarded but optimistic as the time of the summer internships arrived. For the summer, Neil, a senior, would come to help for six weeks; to transfer records of artifacts and memorabilia from notebooks into a computer database. For this effort, he would receive minimum wage from his school, and the final credit needed to graduate. If he graduated, he would receive four years of completely paid attendance at the college of his choice.

On day one, Neil, accompanied by several members of his support team, was sullen and uncommunicative. He looked at me suspiciously out of one eye, face turned to the side, cheek tucked into his shoulder. He was mildly intimidating, but I sensed, harmless. He wore a dark, gothic looking overcoat over his jeans, a dark tee shirt, and a black felt commando hat. He came with two backpacks each day, one of which he would not remove. Despite the intense summer heat, he wore his “protective” garb the entire eight hours he was in my office.

His support team informed me quietly that Neil had autism. They said he would not talk much, if at all. Yet Neil began to talk to me, hesitantly, but candidly and revealingly. As the weeks passed, he talked almost non-stop. The offices were quiet and there was little traffic to deter this interaction. Clear and understandable speech was a profound struggle for him at times; this, incidentally, had led some people to form erroneous conclusions about his intelligence quotient. Neil proved himself bright, thoughtful, competent, and very talkative. His handlers would have been amazed, but he “clammed up” every time they called or stopped by to observe.

Neil shared a torrent of pent up discourse that was long overdue for release. He told me that he had a salad for lunch almost every single day to control his weight. He told me he liked gummy bears. He was into history and computers. He was into elegant weaponry, such as swords and throwing stars. I learned about his roommate, his house parents, his housemates, his student friends, his brother, his father, and his favorite school subjects. He never mentioned his mother, and I did not pry.

Neil eventually felt comfortable enough with me that he left the protective overcoat behind, then the hat, and finally, one of the twin backpacks. I was convinced his diagnosis of autism was not fully justified. As he talked more each day, I discovered Neil enjoyed being on the stage crew for high school productions, but had never tried out for a speaking part, or even a silent part. It became important to me to encourage and support his efforts.
Our discussions kept me from my work. To assure Neil would graduate, I stayed late at the office after the school van picked up Neil, and I took work home so that I would not fall behind on the many projects I was juggling. The six weeks that I had expected to drag by breezed by lightning fast.

Toward the end of his internship, it appeared Neil might not complete his assigned project, and I wanted very much for him to be successful. If he did not complete his senior project, he would be required to repeat the year. Neil had told me point-blank that he could not “stand” another year at the school, and that he would drop out. This would mean he would lose his college scholarship.

I found myself to be a woman on a mission to nurture the underdog who towered over me, to gently badger him daily until he completed his assignment. Daily admonishments, constant prodding, teasing, bags of gummy worms, whatever I could find to motivate him became tools for his success. Finally, I resorted to outright bribery - if he would finish the project, I would get him together for pizza with my teen daughters, who he had met several weeks prior, and on whom, I knew, he had a slight crush.

These efforts kept him focused and on task. He brought me miniscule Ninja fighters he acquired from gumball machines to harbor in my desk drawer, and even a slice of Key Lime pie from his school cafeteria. He was amazingly sensitive to formulating what people said they enjoyed into tangible results.

This teen, labeled autistic, called me at home one evening to tell me he decided to audition for, and had won, a speaking role in his high school play. He would bring to life Boo Radley in “To Kill a Mockingbird”.

Toward the middle of his final week, Neil somehow felt comfortable blurting out something most eighteen-year-old male teens would avoid like the plague - he told me that the walls of his room at home were still decorated with little trains that had been painted by his Mother.

“She was an artist, he said softly, but, she died when I was small.” A cool rush traveled up my spine, lingering at the nape of my neck before fully encompassing my skull. “Neil”, I asked him very slowly, “are there red and blue handprints going up the stairs in your house”? His eyes flew open, and our eyes locked, both of us open-mouthed in surprise. Then I told him exactly how I knew about the handprints on the wall, and how I briefly knew his mother, when he was four years old.

Mentally calculating the chances of all of this occurring the way it had left us astounded. The odds were staggering. It could not be an accident. Although I was not sure why the little boy grown to a troubled teen crossed my path again to become my co-worker, I knew it was for a rarer, higher purpose than a simple museum cataloguing project. The Creator’s care for us, and His careful planning for our lives, is both thought provoking and humbling, as is the gravity of what might have happened if I had refused
the help of an internship.

As a reward for completing his senior internship successfully, Neil, son of deceased artist Diane Kulevich, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, came to my home on the final Friday of his internship. We had pizza with the girls as promised, and they helped him to brainstorm the written portion of his Internship project that night before we left the house to see a movie.

"Neil," I said, "come into the living room a minute, please." I walked to the side table, and handed him two small silk brocade boxes. He turned them over in his hands. "These were your mother’s," I said, "and she would want you to have them." Fourteen years after I acquired them, the two small brocade boxes I had lovingly kept on my table found their way home.

I lost touch with Neil after he graduated. However, I am certain that his life is in good hands. The very best of hands.
Ditto

April Andersen
We hope you have enjoyed reading this year’s Literary Journal. Thanks to all the students who submitted their works.

The journal is published each spring and welcomes 2010 submissions.

If you are interested in submitting an essay, memoir, story, photograph, or sketch, please contact Deb Lovett in the Pushnik Library. Art work should not be larger than 8½ x 11 inches. Photographs should be submitted electronically. All other entries should be submitted in paper and must include your name, address, phone number, email address, and the title of the work submitted. We will accept no more than three entries from any one person. You can enter any time prior to March 1, 2010.

Once accepted, poetry and essays must be emailed to the editor prior to publication. You will be contacted when your work has been selected for the journal.