

The Blotter

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The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

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“Oh, the possibilities”

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I enjoy a good story. I particularly like to be regaled with a story when I’m sitting around, waiting for the clock to tick so that I can do whatever it is I’m supposed to do next. In earlier times – as a stay-at-home Dad – I got to sit on aluminum chairs with a book in one hand and, maybe if I was lucky, a paper-cup latte in the other. And the person I was sitting next to, another waiting parent, might lean over and start talking. Some people don’t like that. They are in their own space, their private world, and consider the shattering of that to be an invasion. I suppose I understand, but it was often nice to just have someone to talk to. Hey, is that your daughter? How long have you been coming to...(pick one: Gymnastics, Bouncy Gym, Karate class. Dance academy.)

One thing always leads to another. After a few classes I remember to bring a couple of croissants, not just one. Share. Talk finally moves on from “what are you doing here?” to “what do you do?” I stop talking about what I used to do before I began doing this – sitting and talking and caring and writing and reading and listening. And that’s when the magic happens. People tell on themselves. Wild tales, full of truth, shocking plot arcs, with fantastic and mysterious denouements.

And I have these stories in my head, as we speak. Because here’s the thing: I cannot tell you any of them. They’re not mine to tell. They’re these brilliant gems I cannot share. Repeat: they’re not my stories. Oh, how I wish I could just pitch them, twenty seconds in an elevator, because I’m certain that you would say oh, yes, let’s get that on the front burner of the next publication cycle. And to me, the writer, the idea of even being on a second-hand receiving end of such a comment is deeply satisfying. And not to be able to be in on that moment is a bit frustrating.

Makes me sound jealous, which is not my intention. Which makes me sound like a liar, which I kind of am. Because I am jealous, but only because they are great stories that I wish I could tell. Mostly I wish the owners of those stories would tell them. But here’s a thing – you can’t make

someone a writer. You cannot, cannot, get them to start, follow through, finish a draft, rewrite, rewrite again, murder their darlings, polish and submit. (You can try, but if they don't want to go there, they won't. Which doesn't mean you shouldn't be supportive. Of course, let them talk with you, whine, kick and scream about what a pain this WIP is.) Writing is a bitch, and not everyone is interested in taking that sort of beating. Which is why I love doing it, love talking about it, am always happy to listen and help if I can, and I think I know my limitations, although I could be wrong.

But I still think about shoulda-coulda. I can't help myself. What if I could just get someone to sit down and hammer out the story in their skull, everything on the tip of their tongue. Why won't they understand how incredible it is to release a tale into the wild?

All of which brings me to this lovely idea that crossed my radar recently. I think it was on social media, although which tool it was I couldn't say. And with that lapse, because I have no idea who originated this thing or if it was a plethora of someones considering it and therefore fairly public domain, I don't mind mentioning it myself. The idea was that the summer of 1969 was amazing, but think of what might have been, with just a little hindsight. What if the event that defines the '60s – Woodstock – was just a wee bit more than it actually was. What if all the groups and individuals invited to perform who didn't come for one reason or another had actually gotten there. What if they had said, "sure, we're on our way." For me, a twelve year old kid from New Jersey, it's imagining that the Rascals and Tommy James and the Shondells were there, singing the 45s that my neighbor spun on his Melovox, hanging it out the bedroom window for us. Groovin'! Crystal Blue Persuasion! Imagine the show's producers somehow find space on the docket for Iron Butterfly and The Byrds. Then, after Joan Baez's soothing voice on Saturday, a nascent Led Zeppelin brings a whole lotta love to blow the doors off people thinking they're about to get a little shut-eye? Speaking of which,

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

a Sunday afternoon doing any

“A Funeral to Remember”

by Jimmy Blakemore

Martha Bishop, eighty-six years old, who'd been keeping the local gossip fresh for decades, died on a cool April morning. Her death wasn't surprising. No. Not really. She'd been threatening it for years, like a librarian hounding for an overdue library book. But when she finally keeled over in her garden, pruning shears in one hand and a rose with three fewer thorns in the other, people said it was peaceful. Peaceful. As though Martha Bishop had ever done anything peacefully in her life. She'd been born loud, married louder, and had spent the intervening years ensuring that no one within earshot of Millhaven County ever forgot her name, her opinions, or the precise dimensions of their failures.

The turnout was impressive, if you understood that half the people there had come to confirm it. There was Patty Krell from the garden club, who had once been publicly accused by Martha of overwatering her begonias. There was old Douglas Hatch, who owed Martha forty dollars from a 1987 bet about whether the Henderson boy would amount to anything—he hadn't, and Douglas had been ducking her ever since. There was Gerald Pitney, who had fixed Martha's furnace three times in 1994 and had never been thanked once, a fact he had apparently come to accept with the resignation of a man who understood the furnace would need fixing again regardless. There was a row of women from the First Meth-

odist who Martha had run out of the choir in 2003, claiming their sopranos were flat as week-old Pepsi. They sat together, dry-eyed and prim, like a jury that had already reached a verdict. A few people Martha had genuinely liked also showed up. There weren't many, but they were there, and they looked the most rattled of all.

Her service was standard—black suits and dresses, handkerchiefs half-dabbing at eyes that weren't really crying, and that distant smell of lilies going bad in the sun. The funeral home had done what they could with Martha, but the viewing the evening prior had been unsettling; even horizontal and powdered, she looked like she was about to say something cutting. Father Caleb worked through his prepared remarks the way a man shovels a neighbor's walk in February—dutiful, steady, not quite present. And Martha's grandson, Billy, tried not to giggle every time Father Caleb said “the dearly departed,” like it was the title of some sitcom. Billy was seventeen and had been Martha's favorite, possibly because he was the only person who'd ever talked back to her and lived to tell about it.

Vernon stood apart from the others, the way he always had. Fifty years of marriage to Martha had given him the particular posture of a man who had long ago made his peace with things. He was short, soft-spoken, and wore a hearing aid he strategically turned down whenever Martha got going.

He had chosen the coffin himself, which in retrospect, anyone who knew Martha might have flagged as a risk.

The pallbearers lowered Martha into the ground, the winch creaking like an old man getting out of bed. Father Caleb finished his remarks, reached for the shovel. Then just as he tossed the first shovelful of dirt on the coffin, the earth shook and bubbled, and there was a grinding, scraping noise, followed by a crack—sharp and clean like a snapped bone.

Rumble-rumble-WHAM.

Knocking?

Yes, knocking. Sharp and deliberate, like someone locked in a closet beneath the stairs hoping someone will hear them. Only the closet was six feet under.

“Vernon, you cheapskate!”

Martha’s voice. The way it used to sound after her third pack of Virginia Slims of the day — hoarse and authoritative and carrying farther than it had any right to.

Father Caleb twisted back, nearly tumbling into the grave himself, his Bible spinning into the hole like a clay pigeon. Billy dropped his phone and then dropped himself, out cold, knocking over the rank lilies on his way to the ground. Patty Krell screamed something that wasn’t a word in any language and bolted for the parking lot on the far side of Millhaven Road—she almost made it, too, before the Silverado clipped her and sent her purse skyward in a long, magnificent arc and she landed on the shoulder and rolled and got up and kept running, because that is what Patty Krell did, and also because the alternative

was still back there in the ground. Douglas Hatch, perhaps fearing the forty dollars, was already in his Electra with the engine turning over. The Methodist choir women scattered like startled pigeons, their collective dignity evaporating in under four seconds. And Gerald Pitney—three furnace repairs, not one thank-you—ran straight out into Millhaven Road without looking, and the Dodge Caravan that collected him launched him in a brief, terrible arc against the April sky, briefly magnificent in the way that only the very unlucky ever get to be, and when he came down he did not get up again, which somehow seemed less surprising than what was going on in the ground.

Wide-eyed. Slack-jawed. Real tears this time. The kind Martha had never managed to produce from anyone when she was alive.

Only Vernon remained. He stood at the edge of the grave, hands folded in front of him, looking down into the dark, listening to the knocking with the expression of a man who had heard far worse and survived it. He exhaled slowly through his nose.

Three more knocks. Patient. Unhurried. Certain of a reply.

“Pine? I said rosewood, you dimwit.”

Vernon stood there a moment longer in the April quiet—the overturned lilies, the scattered programs, the distant sound of Patty Krell’s sneakers still going somewhere on the asphalt. Then he reached up and turned his hearing aid down.

Some habits, after fifty years, were harder to break than others. ❖

“Misremembering”

by Jane McAdams

The obituary, written by the best friend of the deceased, described him in such glowing terms that Juniper felt guilty for not having recognized his greatness in college. He'd been a friend of a friend, and Juniper couldn't remember ever having spoken to him alone. He was only a hazy memory, another guest at a party, a third person in a conversation, someone sitting in front of her at a college choral concert. She couldn't bring him into focus, couldn't remember details.

Everywhere he went, people flocked to him. Everyone thought of him as their best friend, even if they'd only just met him.

Juniper remembered another girl laughing at something he had once said, but she couldn't remember what had been so funny. She couldn't remember laughing.

He'd had red hair, and he'd worn a green barn jacket in the winter. It seemed like he might have had a plaid scarf. But maybe that was someone else. Juniper suddenly recalled always feeling dismayed when he appeared—like everything had been happy until he had arrived. But she couldn't remember anything particularly disappointing that he'd said.

People always talk about someone

being the life of the party, but my friend really was. It was like the fun didn't really start until he got there.

He was glib, Juniper remembered. He didn't seem to like silence. He was always the first to respond, speaking quickly and cleverly—but slickly. He was slippery, in a way. Juniper remembering feeling a beat behind, like she had never responded, because his words skittered smoothly away before she could really grasp them. But he hadn't ever wanted her to respond, anyway. He was always talking to someone else.

And he was dazzlingly witty. For him, conversation was brilliant repartee. And like every clever conversationalist, he was more interested in everyone else than he was in himself.

He'd cheated on his kind-hearted, wholesome girlfriend, Juniper remembered. Juniper couldn't recall having seen him much after that. Perhaps she'd avoided him. She'd felt bad for his girlfriend and had hoped she would find somebody kinder.

He was more loyal than anyone I ever met. Once you were his friend, you were a friend for life. His

roommates from freshman year in college were still his best friends decades later. He remembered everyone's birthday and loved them all fiercely.

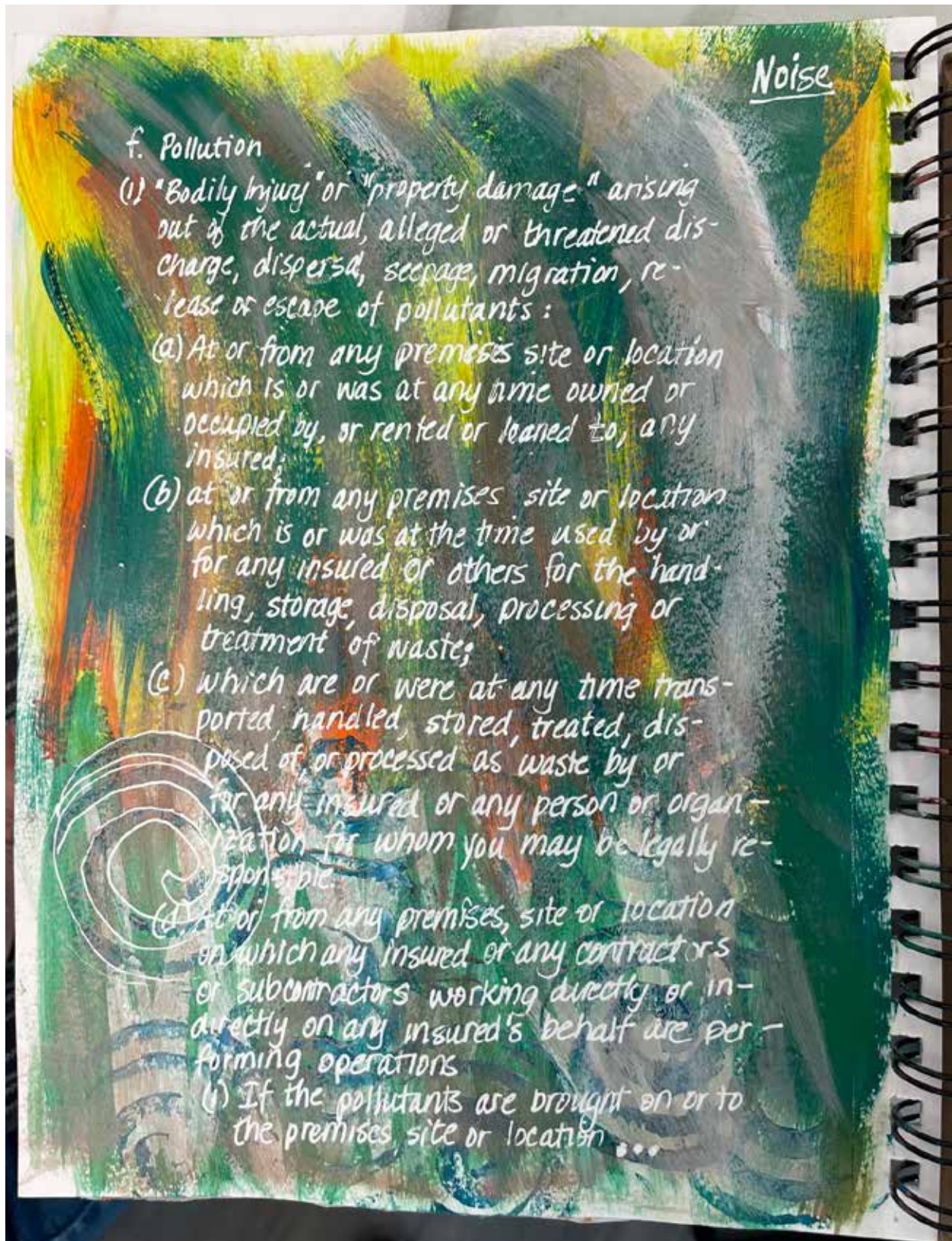
Juniper remembered that he'd had a blue car—old, but expensive. People seemed to think he was clever, clattering around in a battered Mercedes. Or was it a Volvo? Had Juniper ever ridden in it? She couldn't imagine why she would have, but maybe she'd been trapped into accepting a ride when she'd been out with others. She had a vague memory of being crushed against the door of a car, with her cheek against the wintry window, eager to burst out as quickly as she could. Had that been his car?

Nobody ever forgot a second they spent with him. He was the most memorable person I ever knew—a bright spot in everyone's recollection, a warm feeling in everyone's heart.

Juniper wondered if she'd completely misinterpreted him, all those years before. Maybe she'd misunderstood his wit and generosity and overlooked his charm. She couldn't be sure, though. His shadow lurked at the periphery of her memory. She couldn't remember his voice.

I'll never forget him. None of us will. He made life better for everyone who met him, even if just for a moment.





The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird
Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.
If nothing else, we'd love to read them.
We won't publish your whole name.

It's the same old thing. I just need to get over there. I've been running a lot, wind in my hair, light on my feet. But suddenly it's all up hill. Still trying to run, but either heavy or unbalanced, like I might topple over. Every step miserable. Why? I cannot explain. I hate it when this happens. I know there's something wrong, but I can't do a thing about it. Where were you? they ask me. I was coming as quickly as I could. Didn't you know how important it was?

Where am I? A third storey of a rental property, a beach house a block away from the ocean. Something from my childhood, I think. Many windows, wood floors, lots of stairways, up and down to different rooms full of partygoers.

No, I did not know how important this was, until just now, the moment when the question was asked. I feel badly about it, but I am not sure why. Is this a graduation, a retirement, or a beach weekend? A birthday or a wake? I don't know.

Did you ever try to find a room in a house that you know is there, but you keep taking wrong steps, entering the wrong places, until you just give up? Of course not. We don't do that IRL. Only in strange dreams. I'm on the wrong floor, and take the stairs down one level, only to find that I am outside in back, on a patio. There's a canal on the edge of the patio, but I cannot find the bridge to the other side. Why I would want to? I'm trying to get to the kitchen. Then I'm across the bridge I couldn't find, and looking down at the canal, and over to the house.

I just need to get back over there.

VT- cyberspace

"Memento Mori"

by Bartholomew Barker

To smell the blossoms from the inside
as I clamber up the dogwood's low limbs
earthy odor fills my skull
seeps into my bones

To rest in a crook of branches
on an early summer afternoon
halfway to heaven with a pocket
paperback as petals drop

To look down on the grass
and sidewalks and humans
with metal wristwatches
and pointless places to be

Lulled to sleep by the leaves
this is what I remember

"Jungle Time"

by Bart Edelman

In your parallel universe—
Zoned for dark harmony—
The yellow monkey is king,
Swinging, vine to vine,
Keeping whatever jungle time
Tickles the crackerjack hour.
He serves his beloved queen
A pineapple dream,
Before they bed down
To sounds of Tommy Dorsey—
One trombone away
From the next embrace.

“WHAT IF THE NIGHT COULD TELL A TALE”

by J. C. Herrera

What if the moon had ships that sailed-
Or the night could tell a tale-

No doubt it would tell of a most secret world, into which both man and animal are
simultaneously hurled, where truth and fantasy are mercilessly swirled.

What if the moon had ships that sailed-
Or the night could tell a tale-

No doubt it would speak of dreams broken down, screamed by lovers in words without
sounds, from dark garden corners where hidden pathways are found.

What if the moon had ships that sailed-
Or the night could tell a tale-

No doubt no human would ever be spared, for all of us have for someone cared,
and by their rejection discovered despair.

What if the moon had ships that sailed-
Or the night could tell a tale-

No doubt it would speak of my sorrows from birth, devoid of expression or passion or
mirth, as I sail the moon's oceans by the light of the earth.

"Rage, rage"

It bores me to say
the time will come when -
and here I pause to insist that anything following
this fragment of a sentence
is the stillborn child of my tedium -
food loses its taste? Really?
Is that the high water horror show
that everyone makes it out to be?
That old age will make me miss a meal
or two? Or that I can no longer drive
or mow a lawn or climb a ladder
or carry a tune or safely carve a turkey.
Yes. Get over it, and find an available seat
out in the common area of wherever.
Ask yourself who sat here before you
and where are they now? Maybe they just got up
to take a phone call from a family member
that never calls, or are they somewhere further
along, a place from which you don't come back
to this seat, this chair with its uncomfortable cushions.
But here you are, now. You get to listen to the prattle and jabber
of people whose names you cannot recall
and if you will only smile so will they
because it's something you do. Pretend
that you don't mind the television turned on
all of the time, to programs you cannot abide
and that you appreciate the lack of variety
and the meager portions. And the repetition. And the gray.
The bland, endless march to the sea.
Old is old. Take a breath and consider how you got here:
did you plant a seed? Did you make a move?
Submit an idea? Lean back and reflect.
And if there is nothing in the mirror
worthy of consideration,
no value, no foundation upon which you stand,
or in this case, sit, comfortably or otherwise -
but then again who am I to preach
to anyone about making a point
a splash, an argument, taking a position -
I will sit beside you and say and do nothing, too.

here come the Doors breaking on through to the other side, instead of Country Joe on Saturday afternoon, (don't worry, he and the Fish still perform on Sunday evening. After all, one, two, three, what are we fighting for?)

Bob Dylan swoops in by helicopter and takes the stage in prime time on Saturday right between Canned Heat and Mountain. Joni Mitchell breaks her contract with the gig she was going to attend and is out there with him. (And so, when she writes one of her greatest works about the concert, it is from first-hand experience. Half a million strong...) A guitars-and-horns band out of the midwest, fresh off touring as an opener for Hendrix, with their first album a double disk, and recently changing their name so they don't get sued by an Illinois mass-transit company for trademark infringement, gets a prime spot on Monday morning, followed by Hendrix, of course, and the show closes out with the little group from Liverpool playing a few new songs from an album named for a street in Westminster that they're going to release in September, despite creative (and other) differences cracking them into pieces, the Nixon administration really not liking the idea, and the lads not having toured since '66.

Hey, all you need is love. No one leaves early Monday, trying to find their beater and beat the traffic. Muddy, wet clothes be damned. The last of the food - a couple of apples or a ham sandwich stowed away just in case - is shared. No one dares to miss a thing. How would that have altered three days of peace and music? Or just possibly, the world.

In amazing ways, I think.

Garry - mermaidblotter@gmail.com

Contributors

Jimmy Blakemore is an author of horror and suspense, literary scholar, and the founder and publisher of Dark Harbor Press. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Southern New Hampshire University, and a BA in Creative Writing and English, summa cum laude. He is currently pursuing a PhD in English at Liberty University. He serves as Publisher of *Macabre Magazine*, where authors published under his editorial oversight have been recognized by Tenebrous Press's Brave New Weird anthology series. He lives and writes in Cabarrus County, North Carolina.

Jane McAdams writes, "I have published stories in various literary magazines, including *The Blotter*, ("Pedestrian," April 2015), *Inwood Indiana* and *The Wagon Magazine* ("Double Heaven, January and July 2018), *Licking River Review* ("Jungle," Fall 2016), *Avalon Literary Review* ("Women at the Beach," Spring 2016), *Exit 7* ("Underwater," Spring 2016), *Wisconsin Review* ("Hypoxia and the Imaginary Mountaineer," Fall 2015), *Bengal Lights* ("Pedestrian," Summer 2015), *Inkwell* ("Sleeping," Spring 2010), *Foliate Oak* ("Psychic Hotline," March 2012), *Forge* ("Terra Firma," April 2012), *Perceptions* ("Drowning," May 2014) and *Ladybug magazine* ("The Shark Kite," March 2009)"

Anne DiBella is currently an Adjunct Professor at UNC in the Institute of Risk Management and Insurance Innovation, after a long career in the property/casualty insurance industry. She recently began collage classes at the Art Center in Carrboro. The class was painting over an old insurance policy, which inspired Anne to use the words from a standard liability pollution exclusion as part of a collage, combining her two very different worlds.

Bartholomew Barker is an organizer of Living Poetry, where he has hosted a monthly feedback workshop for more than decade. His first poetry collection, *Wednesday Night Regular*, written in and about strip clubs, was published in 2013. His second, *Milkshakes and Chilidogs*, a chapbook of food inspired poetry was served in 2017. He was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2021 & 2025 as well as the Best of the Net Anthology in 2024. His work has appeared in *The Lake*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, *Panoply*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *the Gyroscope Review* and *the Naugatuck River Review* among others. www.bartbarkerpoet.com

Bart Edelman's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack*, *Under Damaris' Dress*, *The Alphabet of Love*, *The Gentle Man*, *The Last Mojito*, *The Geographer's Wife*, *Whistling to Trick the Wind*, and *This Body Is Never at Rest: New and Selected Poems 1993 – 2023*. He has taught at Glendale College, where he edited *Eclipse*, a literary journal, and, most recently, in the MFA program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. His work has been anthologized in textbooks published by City Lights Books, Etruscan Press, Harcourt Brace, Longman, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, the University of Iowa Press, Wadsworth, and others. He lives in Pasadena, California.

J. C. Herrera writes, "I am not a professional and have no credentials in writing. But from childhood I have enjoyed writing. I enjoy writing poetry. I have a novel and a short story floating around up there too, but have only managed to write a few short stories. I found your magazine in a coffee shop in my home town, Athens, GA."

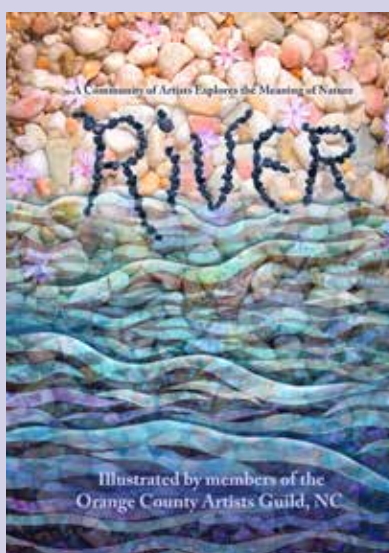


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