

Kyle Writers Group
Anthology



Kyle Public Library
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Fall 2019

Kyle Public Library

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A story is like something you wind out of yourself. Like a spider, it is a web you weave, and you love your story like a child.

-Katherine Anne Porter 1890-1980

Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of our Anthology. We hope you enjoy it.

Between these covers you will find a small collection of stories, poems, memoirs, and photography, each a product of someone in the group called Kyle Writers, which was formed in July 2017. The group is sponsored and supported by the Kyle Public Library.

We welcome all types of writers who aspire to improve their writing and who are open to accepting and providing kind, considerate criticism. Individual goals may differ, but the collective effort of the group encourages each member to write, regardless of genre.

Our meetings are open to all; please join us. We utilize a workshop format where members share manuscripts and exchange feedback. We currently meet at the Kyle Public Library on the first and third Wednesday of each month (excluding holidays) at 6:00 p.m. If you cannot make it at 6:00, we welcome late arrivals.

Thank you for reading our first edition.

Nancy Davidson
Convener

Our group especially wants to express appreciation to Jesus Hernandez, Kyle Public Library librarian, for his unwavering support and for compiling this Anthology.

Lighthouse Love

By Eddie S.

Before I met you, I was lost. It felt as though I was in a vast ocean, lost in perpetual fog, not going anywhere in particular.

Until I met you, it was like a beacon beaming from a lighthouse, I finally found my direction and purpose in life and that purpose is us.

You're the one I truly love with all my heart.

But then I strayed from the beacon and lost myself again. I'm truly sorry for all that has happened.

I will never again stray into the dark.

Now, we find ourselves once again heading towards the beacon, the beacon that I call life and love. There's no more perpetual fog lingering around.

Instead, we see clear skies and a bright star hanging above the lighthouse.

We hold each other close the rest of the way.

We climb on the shore and turn around to see the moonlight glistening off the surface of the water. Rose petals start falling from the skies. Jesus offers his hand to us and we both take his hand.

We look at one another and then look back at the ocean.

Then we smile and say to one another, "We had the best life anyone could have ever wished for."

I will bask in the lighthouse love and will always love you.

Visiting Grandma Dillard

by Nancy Davidson

As a child of ten, we visited my father's mother, Grandma Dillard, twice a month on Sunday afternoon. After already sitting through Sunday School and church, this visit seemed like too much punishment for one day.

Since the visits I remember were in the summer, I don't think my grandmother lived there very long. But the trips were memorable for several reasons: first, because of the blistering Texas heat. I remember tooling down the long, straight Highway 67 from Dallas to Midlothian, Daddy at the wheel of his 1957 eggshell yellow Ford Fairlane sedan, left arm resting on the open window. In his right hand, a cigarette dangled so that he could reach the ashtray before ashes flew around the car. Momma droned on about conversations with friends at East Temple Baptist Church and whether the sermon was scriptural enough to suit her. My maternal grandmother, Grandma Howard, lived with us and often went with us on this visit. A sweet and accommodating grandma, she was gracious enough to sit in the middle of the back seat, which allowed my younger sister, Linda, and me to sit by the doors, very important in a car with no air conditioning. We rode with windows down and scorching air blasting all around us – not really an effective way to deal with heat, but it was what we had. I rested my folded arms and chin on the open window to catch as much air as possible and watched the dry brown ranch and farmland go by, scattered with low-growing and thinly-leaved mesquite, prevalent in this area. The hot ride seemed endless and gave me about 40 minutes not only to regret what I was missing – the freedom of play in a rural area at home with my cousins – but also to ponder the dread I was facing – a visit to what was then called an old-folks home. This was before the advent of nursing homes, and kindly folks (at least you hoped they were kindly) took into their homes those who were unable to care for themselves. The few residents shared communal meals but each had their own bedroom, cramped, hot rooms with the only air provided by a noisy Emerson fan sitting on the dresser.

I hadn't been around Grandma Dillard very much in my life, and she was not at all like our sweet Grandma Howard. Where Grandma Howard

was short, round, and jolly with a puff of gray hair on her head, Grandma Dillard was tall and bony, her thin hair pulled back in a severe bun at the nape of her neck and held by U-shaped hair pins. Her hair was still dark with very little grey even though she was older than Grandma Howard. In fact, I thought the word dark seemed to define her. Her room was dark with the shades always pulled down to mitigate the Texas sun. She always seemed to wear one of two dresses, long cotton shirtwaists with pearl buttons from the hem to the neck, either black or navy blue. Her complexion was swarthy, and her face had a couple of dark age spots. Her rimless eyeglasses were tinted like sunglasses and even her teeth were discolored from dipping snuff, a common practice since it was accepted and inexpensive. I watched with fascination as she took a large kitchen match, moistened the end of it in her mouth, and then separated the wet end with her thumbnail, making it into what looked like a small brush. She put this brush in her mouth, swirled it around and then dipped the wet match into a small tin container (hence, the term “dip snuff”). Last, she put the brush inside her check to remove the snuff powder and repeated until she had a sufficient amount. Beside her rocker, she kept an empty VandeCamp’s pork and beans can stuffed with toilet paper into which she occasionally expectorated globs of dark, thick saliva into this can as her spit can.

Linda and I sat and listened to the adults talk about any boring thing that happened since the last visit and news of the assorted kinfolks. If we were really fidgety and impatient, Momma might send us out to sit on the porch. And while I desperately wanted to extricate myself from that room, it was a choice between two undesirable options. It was either my grandmother’s oppressive room or the dreaded porch. Although the porch would seem imminently more desirable, it had its own anxiety for me in the form of a young woman in a wheelchair who had what Momma said was water on the brain (I now know it a hydrocephalus). She had a large hairless tumor growing out the back of her head. It was so large that her neck couldn’t support the weight of her head, so her wheelchair was adapted with a metal pole mounted on the back and a wide strap where the tumor rested. She couldn’t speak but always smiled widely when she saw me and reached out to hold my hand. It was unsettling for me to see a young woman in this condition; I was petrified and stunned into silence, not knowing what to do or say. But at least there was air, and by being released to the porch, I knew instinctively that the visit was nearing its end.

Even the end had its own trepidation for me: when called back into the room, it was expected that I would kiss Grandma Dillard goodbye. In order to avoid looking at her too much, I tried to focus on a cameo she always wore pinned at the top button of her dress.

Finally, we said good-bye. The much-anticipated departure brought the possibility of bliss. If we had been good girls, we usually stopped at Shorty's, a small roadside barbecue and ice cream stand in Cedar Hill for a thick and creamy vanilla custard. A \$.25 cone was full of this butterfat-laden delight. To prevent a mess in Daddy's Ford, we sat at a splintery wooden picnic table and furiously licked the cones to prevent them from melting down our hands. It was the best ice cream I ever tasted and saw me through the ride back home where I found my cousins playing and bounded out of the car, ever mindful that the same routine would likely be repeated all too soon.

Druid Worship at Summer Solstice

by Nancy Davidson



A Good Year for the Roses

by Rusty Haggard

Coach Casey Dawson stood outside the gate to the field. The chill in the air and the bright lights provided a dramatic backdrop to the packed stadium and the noise from the crowd. Bobby and Will, team captains, led the long line of Whitmer Wildcats, dressed in black and gold uniforms, through the gate where Casey stood. Suddenly, the team sprinted down the field. At the goal posts, they jumped up and down in a tight crowded mass. Some players leaped on the backs of others, trying to touch the helmets or shoulder pads of those in the center. The Whitmer crowd leaped to their feet, cheering wildly.

Casey glanced across the field. The Sweetwater Mustangs crowd, in red and white, was silent. All were sitting. Then they rose to their feet, still silent. Their players entered the field in pairs of two. They didn't sprint, they didn't jog. The Mustangs walked slowly down the sideline to their bench. They stared at the Wildcats players and coaches.

Casey had never seen a team walk onto a field. It was pure arrogance. Flush with anger, he leaned forward into his mass of players.

“Look at them!” he shouted. “They’d like nothing more than to spit on you. That’s how little they think of you. Now, every one of you knows how we play the game—with respect and sportsmanship. We’ll do that tonight. But here’s the one thing I want you to do: bust ’em. Hit them as hard as you can every chance you get. I mean hard.”

He put his right hand in the air and the team crushed around him, each player with his right hand extended toward Casey’s. “Wildcats! Win!” they shouted together.

The teams lined up in kickoff formations. Everyone in the stadium was on their feet. A Mustang near the goal line drifted under the kick that started the game, but stumbled and the ball squirted out to the five-yard line. A Wildcat player pounced on it.

“Our ball!” Assistant coach Tom Ross shouted.

Casey took Bobby aside and put one hand firmly on the quarterback's shoulder pads.

“Call 84 roll.”

Bobby nodded. Casey pushed him toward the field. In the huddle, Bobby looked first at Will and then at Charlie. “Let's get this started right, okay? Charlie, I'm throwing your way. 84 roll. 84 roll. On two. Break.”

With a unified clap of hands, the Wildcats broke from the huddle and lined up. Bobby took the snap and saw Charlie in the end zone waving frantically. Bobby fired the ball hard.

“Touchdown!” The PA announcer yelled. It echoed across the stadium.

“Let's keep this going,” Casey shouted to the kick-off team before they went onto the field. He watched as the ball again sailed down the field. This time the Mustang receiver handle it cleanly and headed up the left sideline almost to mid-field.

A couple of running plays produced nothing for the Mustangs, but on third and 10 their tall, lanky quarterback spotted his wide receiver and lofted up a long spiral. The speedy receiver caught it in stride and left the smaller Wildcat defender behind. After the extra point, Casey glanced at the scoreboard, 7-7.

“Hang in there. We're doing fine, guys,” Casey said.

On the next kick off, the Wildcats were pulled down at their own eight yard line. Casey grimaced as the Wildcats miscued on the first play. Sweetwater's big nose tackle, the one Casey had noted on his scouting report, crashed through and hit Bobby hard. The ball tumbled from Bobby's arms to the ground and rolled end over end toward the end zone. With the big nose tackle on top of him, Bobby watched helplessly. A Sweetwater player smothered the fumble in the end zone for a TD.

“Sweetwater 14, Whitmer 7.” The PA announcer's monotone reverberated across the stadium to a silent Whitmer crowd. The Sweetwater stands looked like a raging sea of red and white, the band played the fight song, and streamers flew everywhere.

Bobby, after several more hits from the big nose tackle from Sweetwater, limped to the sidelines shaking his head. “Coach, every time I drop back, I’ve got no time.”

Casey saw his big center, Charlie, near the bench, breathing hard. The starting running back, Will, sat next to him, helmet in hand, gulping a cup of water. Casey motioned to Tom Ross. “I know the half’s about over, and Charlie’s caught a TD pass, but we need to move him to center to stop that nose tackle. Maybe in the second half?”

Ross nodded. “We should,” he said. The buzzer from the scoreboard blared.

“Half-time.” The PA announcer’s voice echoed across the field. “Sweetwater 14, Whitmer 7.”

Inside the locker room, chaos ruled. Casey saw a triage in one corner. The student trainer, his horn-rimmed glasses askew, busily taped up an elbow. Another student trainer examined a cut under Will’s right eye. Assistant coach Lonnie Blanchard held Bobby’s throwing hand and looked for swelling.

“Everybody, listen up,” Casey said. All grew quiet. The team gathered around him.

“We’re in this thing. Don’t think we’re not. Sweetwater knows it too.” He looked around and let his words sink in. The players, sweating and silent, waited for his next words. “I’ve said before that we’ve come together this season as a family. We’ve taken care of each other. Now, we have one shot at something you’ll remember the rest of your lives.”

Cleats shuffled on the floor. Casey stood in the middle of the room.

“Every one of you has someone pulling for you tonight.” He looked from player to player. “Maybe they’re up in the stands, maybe they’re a long way off and can’t be here tonight, but every one of you has someone—some friend or family member—that wants you to do good tonight. Dedicate this game to them.”

Casey saw Will staring at the floor. So was Bobby. The kids were hurting. Hurting from the hard hits in the game, and hurting from the pain

of their lives at home. “Let’s keep focused. Remember what you’re supposed to do on every play. Stick together, guys. We’ve got one shot. Let’s go.”

He put his right hand up high. The players gathered in closer and reached for Casey’s hand, and in unison they shouted, louder than ever, “Wildcats! Win!”

The third quarter saw the Wildcats tie the game up 14-14, but now late in the fourth, time was running out. Casey paced along the sidelines, trying to remain calm. The clock at the end of the field ticked: 18, then 17 seconds. The Wildcats broke the huddle with a unified clap and trotted toward the Mustang defense. They stood waiting, hands on hips.

The crowd on both sides of the field rose as Charlie, as the center, put his big hands around the ball and settled over it, ready to snap it back at Bobby’s command. Eleven seconds remained in the game.

“Hut, hut,” Bobby barked. Charlie’s snap came back hard. The line surged. Charlie threw a shoulder into the nose tackle and then churned himself forward, taking his man to the ground. Bobby pitched the ball to Will, who took off around right end.

Casey sprinted excitedly down the sidelines watching his speedy ball carrier, hoping for a miracle. The Wildcat players ran with Casey, their excited yells matching those of the crowd.

Casey saw only one Mustang defender remained. Will, now a black and gold flash sprinting toward the goal line, found yet another burst of speed and dashed into the end zone. Time had run out. The game was over. The Wildcats had won 20-14.

The players at Casey’s side sprinted wildly toward the end zone. Will dropped the ball as his teammates stormed toward him. They all ended up in a pile. Whitmer fans jumped the fence and streamed toward the end zone. Casey and the coaches jogged to the jumbled mix of players and fans, smiling exuberantly.

Charlie and Will grabbed Casey’s legs and hoisted their coach onto their shoulders. Within seconds the crush of the crowd forced the two players to put Casey back down as everyone mobbed him. The crowd

cleared back and Jeb and Ginny ran toward their father, slamming into him and hugging him tightly.

Casey looked skyward for a second, the black sky rimmed with the light from the stadium. When he looked back down, he saw Kim through an opening in the crowd. She ran toward him, a long-stemmed rose extended in her right hand. He caught her in his arms in jubilation. Jeb and Ginny closed in around their parents.

“You’ve won more than just a game, Casey!” Kim screamed to be heard above the din. “Do you realize that?”

Casey nodded and pulled her close, holding on while he reached for Jeb and Ginny. The four of them headed off the field with the crowd following in the aftermath of the victory.

The Long Road Home

by Rusty Haggard



Untitled

by Corri Hubbard

The familiar handsome face from my past
The former heartthrob with the big blue eyes and freckles that I remember
The shy but charming sweetheart I ask to an art show
The nervous suitor who helps me frost a two-pound cupcake until three in
the morning
The admirer who brings me flowers when we have a small disagreement
My hero who swears that I can trust him
My boyfriend who I make future plans with
My one and only who confuses me with his mood swings
My companion that buries me with his tortured past
My significant other who disappears and doesn't return my calls or
messages
My beloved that makes me cry on my birthday
My dear one who calls me fat, mean and selfish
The antagonist who finds any reason to argue
The fraudulent partner who makes quiet phone calls when he thinks I'm
asleep
The adversary who ignites the bitch inside of me
The lover I'm unaware of sharing
The coward who drifts away with no explanation
The thief who steals my joy
The bastard who has replaced me before it was over
The deceiver I avoid
The stranger I pass as I walk down the street

Welcome to Austin

by Corri Hubbard

Welcome to Austin, Texas! You just moved here? Allow me to fill you in on some helpful suggestions to get you acclimated to your new life. Don't even try and say that you're just passing through, because the minute you entered the famous Austin city limits you've already racked up enough debt that you'll never be able to pay off. I don't know where it comes from but trust me that it's there. This is what's going to ensure you're a citizen of our beautiful city for many years to come.

Planning on visiting historic Sixth Street to see the thriving nightlife and the charming scene of police officers on horseback? Whoa there pardner! Better suit up in a bullet proof vest and swimming goggles and possibly something to cover your mouth what with the random gunshots from the citizenry and the police ready to show you how potent their pepper spray is.

Speaking of swimming goggles, make sure you bring a pair to any body of water you'd like to explore near the city, because lately it's become infested with a monstrosity called Zebra Mussels, along with scooters that have been angrily tossed into the lakes and rivers. Be prepared to stand in long lines the likes of which wouldn't be seen anywhere but popular nightclubs in New York City because the rules of most parks have become one in and one out due to the massive influx of new residents.

Interested in more long lines? We've got you covered, as there are numerous bbq places in town with such great reviews that people are willing to stand in lines for almost the length of time it would take you to complete a full day's work. I couldn't suggest any one of them but have heard tell that it's a fabulous tourist activity.

Not so much a line as it is the way into and around your new city is I35. You'll be spending most of your life on it, so familiarize yourself with ways to stay entertained while you spend twenty minutes to go two miles. Popular time killers are texting and honking at other drivers that are texting. The positive side of being stuck in this highway parking lot comprised of hundreds of out of state plates is that if you weren't able to eat

breakfast before you left home, you can take advantage of the 100+ degree weather that the sun provides by shining into your car whether your air conditioner is on or not! The hell fire-like heat gives you an opportunity to throw a pan of biscuits on the dashboard to bake while you fry eggs on the highway. Trust me, you'll have time to cook while you wait because there are at least two people changing tires on the side of the road or construction projects that require absolutely every driver to slow down to at least 15 miles an hour to observe this rare occurrence, and that easily brings traffic to a standstill every single day. Before you hit the road, make sure and grab an \$8 cup of coffee from one of the numerous Starbucks that have overrun the city like locusts.

Finally, once you've made it through traffic and settled in comfortably you might feel like donating to one of the many local charities in town. No need to do any research to see where to send your hard-earned money! One of the aggressive panhandlers at any stop light will be more than happy to take it if you mistakenly lock eyes with them.

A quick history lesson before I finish giving you more information on how to settle in. Back in the 70s there was a cult leader named Jim Jones. He and his disciples created a so-called Utopia that was unofficially called Jonestown. The people of Jonestown thought their lives were going to be one big happy family and were free to do whatever cult members do. All reports coming out of Jonestown highly praised this new society where there was nothing but love. People were supposedly living in a heaven on earth. Occasionally news of unrest and mistreatment would make its way out of Jonestown, but not enough to really raise any eyebrows. One day after a bunch of family members expressed concern about not being able to contact their loved ones that had moved to Jonestown there was an investigative trip made by a Congressman and a film crew. Although Jim Jones and his followers did their best to gaslight the visitors, it eventually fell apart in one apocalyptic suicide.

Strangely enough there are some eerie similarities between Austin and Jonestown. While we don't have our own charismatic Jim Jones convincing us that Austin is the epitome of happiness, we have the amalgamation of the City Council members to stand in as the leader we must blindly follow.

First off, do you like festivals? Trick question! Whether you're fan of them or not, get ready to be experiencing at least 6 established festivals a year celebrating ice cream, dogs, hot sauce, tattoos, cars and other various and sundry things.

Right before most of the festivals, almost surreptitiously the city begins to clean up small areas that usually go unnoticed because they're always dirty. To this, the city adds colorful artwork to buses, benches, and buildings that you wouldn't normally give a second glance.

SXSW is THE biggest festival in Austin and is THE most obvious smoke and mirrors game that's barely held together if you spend more than three days here after the festival is over. Two weeks before SXSW visitors from all over the world start to trickle into Austin, and it's so beautiful and welcoming that it doesn't seem real. No homeless people begging for change because they've all been transported to the outskirts of the city for a few weeks. There's no traffic because a lot of the city has left for spring break. The weather is pleasant because our winter has just wrapped up, leaving our parks and trails lush and green. Music pours from every open door and window, free drinks and food are provided everywhere you look, and there are friendly people as far as the eye can see.

After the smoke of SXSW clears, reality rears its ugly head and you quickly find out that not only is nothing free here, you're going to pay double for everything because you're basically paying for the privilege of saying you live in Austin. Like Jonestown, the picture that's presented to the rest of the world is that we're living in an oasis of Mexican food and nonstop bbq with Willie Nelson sightings every day. (Speaking of Willie Nelson, of whom I am a huge fan, god forbid you don't show a fervent admiration for him lest you be drummed out of town with bottles of Topo Chico, the carbonated plague that washed over our city about ten years ago.) During festivals the city pushes the shiniest cult members to the front to show how happy we all are. Meanwhile the rest of us are well aware of the dark underbelly of the so called Live Music Capital of the World that's been branded with the most annoying slogan ever 'Keep Austin Weird' which oddly enough started only a little over ten years ago, long after anything remotely strange in this town was torn down and replaced with condos. Longtime citizens attempting to send messages of distress to family and friends out of state via social media or phone calls are punished

by having their favorite restaurants closed and threatened with traffic plans that will be completed in the next decade if they're lucky.

So welcome to Austin! Like Jonestown it will one day collapse from the strain of trying to make everyone believe that it's the heaven on Earth the rest of the world seems to think it is, but instead of drinking the cyanide laced Kool-Aid the members of Jonestown drank at the end of their society, we'll be doing it with margaritas and queso.

The Fisherman

by Michael Kaufmann-Lynch

Lawrence, among
the rocks, his hands

foraging the cold for his boat. Breathing
in salt and his humming under the waves.

The air ashore, there are birds waiting.
The boat, their god of fish.

When his wife calls, or when he dines on clams,
his hands cradle his knife.

Lawrence, Man of Consequence

by Michael Kaufmann-Lynch

Known for his women. They touch the ground
he's buried in. He watches his hands
become velvet. Cracking him open,

they find his heart, himself
glazed on gravestones. His thoughts are gods
pressing down on him:
how their regret always exceeds his forgiveness,
how clean her dress looked. Down here,

unraveled. Hears, and he wanders
where there shouldn't be people.

Fleeing from what clammers out of her
grave before the dirt comes tumbling.

His hands on her shoulders,
his boots on her brass-shod box,
the scattering her after he burns, mixes her
features into his and disappears.

From Farmland Gazed Upon

by Michael Kaufmann-Lynch

To bee or buzz about, or bumble from
place to place in a daze
of fitful drizzling wonder, little left
in the cup of the honeysuckle.

What arrogance in a tumble of buzzards
amidst the clearing. A wing
flecks a blinked-at wreckage.

Hands that cut can cup—a fractured
stalk or settle rents in its working.

Bales of hay, or are there herons—
to burn before the night flies over
and lights the stars to dream toward.

The Wicked

by Elizabeth Martinez

Annabelle sat on the toilet lid in their apartment bathroom, admiring her beautiful mother. Her mother, Natasha, was curling her long golden brown hair. Natasha had a full mane of soft waves. Annabelle loved the way her mother's hair would flow as the wind would brush through it, on their walks around the neighborhood.

Madonna's "Take a Bow" was playing on the boom box. The notes of the song made six year old Annabelle smile every time it would play. Natasha began to sing the chorus as she applied the only makeup she ever used, brown eyeliner. Her angelic voice made Annabelle's heart jump for joy, her eyes glistened as she looked up to the woman in the mirror. Natasha turned to the right and looked down at her daughter, still singing. She cradled her daughter's face in her hand for a moment and then looked back to the mirror.

The mother reached for concealer and began to apply it under her eyes. She had not needed this before but today she had to hide the red freckles that had begun to accumulate. To Annabelle the redness, that threatened to overshadow her mother's radiance, still had no explanation. Annabelle only knew that her mother was different. Sick, as of late.

Jacob stopped by the doorway of the small bathroom, "Are you guys ready? Let's go."

Natasha finished touching up her face and asked Annabelle to go get her shoes on. Natasha took one more look at her face and produced a small smile, big enough to make her feel ready.

Annabelle was excited to go to her uncle's house with her parents. She always enjoyed seeing everyone and eating all the food. Her father worked long hours, the weekends were family time. She was jumping around and grabbing her dad's hand, "Let's go!"

They drove down Mannheim Road towards Melrose Park, a suburb of Chicago. Their brown station wagon drove passed old streets and aged

buildings. They passed by Annabelle's favorite store, Venture. The black and white stripes reminded her of a zebra.

They arrived at the uncle's home. Annabelle, as always, stood by her parents. This time, she did not ask her parents if she could run off and play with the other children. She stayed by her mother. Bodies moved about, crowding the small home. Greetings were going on all around, hugs and kisses.

The men made their place in the living room, scattering around the couches. The children ran and yelled, up and down the house. In the kitchen, the women sat at the table with their plates.

Natasha prepared a plate for Jacob and Annabelle. She then prepared her own plate of food and looked at the table, full of wives, to find a seat.

Chatter filled the stuffed air. The stifling humidity, of a Chicago summer day, was uncomfortable and the small fan at the corner of the kitchen did little to cool anyone down.

"That's all you are eating," a cold voice was directed at Natasha.

Natasha looked up from her plate of rice and beans and said, "Yes."

"Oh what, are you allergic to everything else," one of the wives asked in a condescending tone.

"I can't eat that meat," Natasha responded, once again shocked by the vicious ambush she was used to at these gatherings.

"I bet she can eat it, she probably just thinks she's too good for our meat," the uncle's wife added. "Yeah, I bet she just throws everything up," she joked while sticking a finger in her mouth. Wicked laughter filled the air. "Look at her, she looks tired."

This went on for some time and all the while, Annabelle sat next to her mother. The young child looked up her mother and could see the anguish setting in on her face. She then looked up at the women in confusion. How could they all be attacking her mother? Were these women not family?

Annabelle knew the feeling at the table was not a good one. She could feel the tension, the mean remarks were digging into her tiny soul.

Natasha tried hard to swallow her food and not let these women get to her. She was at a loss for words but the anger was building. She too was confused, why were they always so vicious towards her?

“That is not funny. I am sick, you ignorant fools. I do not have to explain myself. If you don’t believe me, frankly I do not care!” Natasha responded to the serpents. She responded only in her mind. “That is not funny, I am sick. I am not going to eat the food just because you want me to,” she told everyone. She grabbed her plate and her daughter and went in to the next room. The laughter guided them out.

Annabelle sat in the room with her mother, in silence. She felt useless, she was unable to keep her mother from hurting. This beautiful woman in front of her, was the kindest person in her life. She had just witnessed snakes spewing poisonous venom with the worst intent. Annabelle had no intention of ever speaking to the snakes again.

Natasha gathered herself and looked at her daughter. “I love you, don’t worry about anything. They are just mean girls. They do not know any better.” She felt better just by having her daughter near.

Annabelle felt her mother’s strength come through and they continued to sit in silence. She stared at her piece of meat on her plate and could not bring herself to eat it. She could not allow for this to happen again. Her mother was strong. Annabelle told herself to be stronger. She realized she could not trust anyone. There holding her spoon with her tiny fist she decided she would never trust anyone, again.

Black on White

by Carol Peters

Tablecloths and napkins
White as lambkins.
Ceiling and lamp globes
Barely noticed above the earlobes.

Walls and carpet
Black as shoe polish.
Chairs and light fixtures
Forming lines amid rafters.

Passengers awaiting;
(Bellboys) anticipating.
Conversations melding;
Personalities mingling.

Strangers sharing;
Friendships fuming.
Minds meandering;
Cultures clashing.

Entering hungry,
Assigning slyly.
White on black...
Black on white!

April 11, 2018

Newton

by Brooke Pillifant

It had been a tumultuous year. My grandmother had passed away. I'd finished my Master's in Sociology. And my boyfriend and I had moved to New Orleans for him to attend law school. I'd hoped to find an academic research position, but so far, no luck. So I found solace in two things I love: a great coffee house and card games. And that is how I met Newton.

Slightly taller than me, Newton had a defined physique, and his head was always freshly shaved. Along his left arm ran the word 'revolution'. We ended up partners in a game of spades. Together, we noticed how another player was cheating. Instead of busting him, we just enjoyed beating him even more.

One evening, Newton and I decided to take in a movie. As we headed to our seats, my phone rang. It was my mother calling with tragic news: my aunt had committed suicide.

I robotically turned and exited. Outside, I broke down, sobbing. I felt Newton's hand on my back, and then, he shared something equally as tragic. As members of a racist, militia group, his parents and uncle all died in a murder-suicide pact. "Everyone important to me, gone in an instant," Newton said, now crying also.

Our arms entwined. We embraced not only each other, but also, our collective sadness. After that, we were inseparable.

Newton helped me find a job. During undergrad, I'd learned how to weld. I'd always joked that welding was my fall back plan if academia didn't pan out. So Newton got me a job working on the same cash-paying construction crew he was on.

During breaks, we made up games – like trying to get the suits to turn around by saying outrageous things. I'd say: "I figured out I can fit 7 quarters in my nostril." Newton would say, "Even drunk, I did not expect to wake up naked next to my sister."

My favorite game, though, was *Armored Car Heist*. From the job site, we could see a bank – and the armored cars that delivered there. I’ve always been fascinated by perfectly executed criminal activity. So we watched and studied the drivers and guards, theorizing the perfect heist.

“Just walk up to the side of the car and jump in,” I said strategizing.

“No, you can’t just jump into the car,” Newton said. “What about the keys? The partner?”

“Chloroform? Knock him out?”

“And then? Dump him while driving? If he dies, charges are upped to murder.”

“Okay. When he wakes up, we appeal to his sense of loyalty to his family, and he’ll be thrilled when we drop him off, right?”

Newton laughed.

Six months after we met, Newton and his girlfriend broke up. Without money saved for a deposit, he had nowhere to go. Since my boyfriend and I had a spare room, we told him, “Come live with us.”

Turned out, Newton was the perfect roommate. Meticulously clean, he cooked dinner and was never loud. Out dogs adored him. I’d come home from work, and they’d all be snuggled on the couch together.

One day our neighbor’s house was robbed. Worried, I decided I’d better hide some diamonds I’d inherited from my grandmother. I was strategically placing the jewelry in an empty Pringles can, when Newton entered the kitchen.

“A chip can?” he laughed. “First place they’ll look!”

“I’m gonna put it on top of the cupboard,” I explained.

“That’s how they’ll know. Who puts chips up there?”

Snatching the can from my hand, he headed down the hallway to the bathroom. He kneeled, opened the cabinet, and pulled out my box of tampons.

“What are you doing with those?!” I asked.

“In a break-in, nobody’s gonna be messin’ with your tampons,” he said, stuffing the diamonds into the box.

And in that moment I knew: Newton was the smartest person I’d ever met.

For the holidays, I invited Newton to fly to Utah to join my family. He said he had to work – a lie – and that he’d stay for the dogs. I begged, but he refused.

During that year, we all rocked along in a state of bliss. Until one night, when I arrived home late from work, and a mutual friend phoned.

“Do you have today’s paper?” he said frantically.

“Uh, no.”

“Go get one. Call me back when you figure it out.”

I ran to the store, grabbed a paper, and back at home, flipped through the pages. There it was – a picture of Newton – Wanted – by the F-B-I. For Bank Robbery. My whole world tilted to the side. I felt like I might slip off.

In a state of shock, I called out friend back.

“Anything of his at your place?” he asked. “The FBI will be coming; they just left here.”

I bolted into Newton’s room and feverishly looked around – not a shred of him remained. I frantically searched the house. Nothing. It was like he never lived there, never existed.

I felt like I had lost my best friend in an instant. I realized I’d been holding my breath as I darted around the house. My arms were shaking and my legs felt as if they were about to give way. I sank to the floor in tears.

Everything clicked into place in one mad rushing flood –

He couldn’t get an apartment, because he couldn’t have a background check.

He couldn’t fly to Utah, because he couldn’t get an ID.

He worked a job for cash, because he couldn't open a bank account.

And he couldn't open a bank account, because he'd robbed a bank!

During the FBI interview, I learned his name was a lie. His age was a lie. His deceased family was a lie. Everything he said about where he came from was a lie. Was our entire friendship a lie too?

Then I remembered the diamonds. I ran to the bathroom and flung open the cabinet door. I ripped that tampon box from under the shelf and dug my hand inside. When my hand felt the jewels and pulled them out, I realized: they were all there. I hadn't lost diamonds or friendship. We all have pieces of ourselves that we don't share. Newton chose not to share the facts of his life, but he did share the true qualities of himself. Our friendship was real.

For a while, I thought Newton might get in touch. That in some clandestine meeting, he would divulge the details of his larceny. Never happened. Often I would see someone in a crowd and think it was him. Rushing over, I'd look their arm only to find no tattoo.

I later read on the internet that Newton was apprehended and went to prison. I considered writing him, but something stopped me. There didn't seem to be a need to reconnect; our friendship was full and finished. Not all friendships need to last a lifetime. In its own way, mine and Newton's – was perfect.

Trial of 1307

by Brooke Pillifant



Sitecah Red Haired People

by Canita Pro (Canita Prough)

Based on true story of Sitecah of Lovelock Cave which took place around the 1400's AD

During the Winter, we do not move very far from our fires, through the warmest part of the day the warriors will hunt food, but when the sun drops behind the horizon everyone returns to the safety and warmth of the fires. This is the time when the storyteller/narrow-gwe-nap tells the Winter stories. One of my favorite stories was of the red-haired people of the Lovelock Cave. Grandfather always started the story, by telling us that this happened in our 4th grandfather's time.

The people/Numa came to this land and living here were a tribe of people. They were tall, long-legged and had red-hair. At first, the Numa and the red-haired people lived in harmony by not bothering each other. We called the red-haired people the Sitecah/Si-Te-Cab, which means Tule-eater, for they used the Tule from the lake for building and eating. Eventually, we became friends, they taught us how to make duck decoys, to attract the ducks to the shores and we taught them which seeds to collect. We took some of Si-Te-Cab into our bands, some as children, some as husbands and wives. We had many struggles with Si-Te-Cab who came to live in our camps. The children would run away and some of the husbands and wives took their own lives, because they never learned to like themselves.

For a long time, we lived together and were happy. Then Mother Earth became angry. She stopped providing much of the food we ate and some of our waters were insulted when the Si-Te-Cab took their hair (water plants) for they did not respect the water as we do.

It takes a lot of food to feed a Si-Te-Cab. They could eat a bowl of Tule soup then finish off two or three rabbits all in one sitting. One season, two seasons, and we could not make Mother Earth happy. Our people were dying. Then one day, a warrior arrived in camp with the remains of a warrior that had been missing for several days. The only thing left were parts of his bones, his loin cloth, and bow and arrows which were laying close by. This

was how we knew it was his bones. His bones had been split and the inside had been eaten from them. We knew then that someone had begun to eat people like a beast. It was not many sleeps until we began to find big holes dug in our trails. They dug them in the cool of the day and hoped the people who travelled at night, which they did, would fall into the holes. One day not long after this a warrior came upon a cave that was empty and there he found where the Si-Te-Cab had eaten one of his own kind and the remains were there by the dead fire. The warrior returned to camp with the remains to show the counsel.

Then a war began between the Paiute and the Si-Te-Ca, for we would not allow the eating of people. We knew now why we could not make Mother Earth happy. She was unhappy because of the stolen hair and the Si-Te-Cab eating other people like a beast. This war, lasted for three years/three circles. They would kill one of our people. We would hunt down and kill one of their people. They would go and dig up the buried and eat them. Over the three circles, the Paiute killed a great number of Si-Te-Cab. Before the war there were ten, and ten, twenty-six times of their people. Now there were only ten, ten, ten, ten, and ten. We counseled together, all the Paiute bands, and decided we would get rid of the Si-Te-Cab for good. They were a brave people, for the stories are told how they would jump up and catch the arrow flying high over their heads and shoot the arrows back.

But fear ran deep among the Numa, for if someone was alone or travelled at night, they could be their next meal. Mother Earth was still mad and needed to be made happy. She did not like people acting like a beast.

We chased the last of them to a hot, dry, isolated cave where the warriors called out to them saying “Will you give up and be like men, and not eat people like beasts?”

“Will you give up. Say, so or you will die.” But there was no answer.

The Paiute warriors built a wall of sage brush over the opening to the cave, they called out once more, “Will you give up and be like men, and not eat people like beasts?” Still there was no answer.

The warriors filled the opening with sage brush, then shot arrows with wood blocks, that they had been lit with fire into the sage brush, setting

the opening on fire. Once again, they yelled, “Say, quick and we will put out the fire.” Still there was no answer.

After a time, a few of their people ran out of the entrance, they were killed as they came out, for they had not repented of their ways. Some of the warriors stayed behind to watch the entrance and to kill any who escape for ten sleeps.

At the end of ten sleeps, the Chief returned to the cave, and there was a great smell for the people had died. This cave is considered sacred and is not to be visited by anyone.

This was a terrible thing, a thing to be remembered with sadness. On special nights when, Princess Sarah Winnemucca, was in camp she will go and get her mourning dress, which had red threads running through it, and show us their red hair.

Our Lucky Life

by Christine Reid

“I do not want another dog.” I tried hard to keep my voice both pleasant and firm.

“Well, I really want to have a dog around again,” my husband replied, just as firmly. “I miss Sam.” Our Black Mouth Cur had died nine months earlier of old age. He was short haired and fawn colored and had a distinctive black muzzle and expressive drop-down ears. Most important, he was intelligent and sweet-natured. My husband continued, “There’s a puppy at the shelter who looks a lot like him.” He then stared at me, his blue eyes unblinking, knowing that would unnerve me.

I pressed on, regardless. “Puppies have accidents, they chew on everything. They whine, they need constant attention.” I was as logical as I knew how to be as I went down the list. “Besides, it’s unrealistic to think that this dog will be as good as Sam--we lucked out with him,” I added. Excellent point, I thought to myself. That’ll convince him!

Later, as my husband drove out of the animal shelter’s parking lot, I struggled to keep the long-legged, awkward puppy sitting in the back seat. The dog seemed both wildly fearful and deliriously happy at the same time. In fact, it had been an ordeal just to get him into the vehicle at all. I was puzzled; what dog doesn’t like riding in a truck? From the start, Sam had loved going on trips with us. On that hot August afternoon, this would be the first of many surprises.

At home, the dog darted around the house, madly sniffing. He spied my black Kindle on a chair. He opened his mouth full of teeth to grab it. I quickly snatched it up. Why would he want to chew on that? He seemed interested in attacking other black things--such as the coffee maker, a plant in a black, plastic pot, the cat. Oh, yes, our black and white Tuxedo cat. Nine-year-old Pepper, who was known for being cool and mellow, was now on the lunch menu, at least as far as the dog was concerned. I was actually quite impressed at how high the cat could climb when I saw him later that day, way up in the 35-foot-tall bur oak. Pepper glared down at me with a

look of utter contempt at my betrayal. “I’m sorry, fella,” I said softly. “This was not my idea, believe me.”

One of the first things we were anxious to find out was whether the newly named Lucky was house-trained. He appeared to enjoy exploring our fenced acre of land and, um, promptly made a deposit in the yard after we brought him home. So far, so good. Later that day, when we were in the house, I caught Lucky urinating on the living room floor--on our year old beige carpet that showed every stain. I shouted “NO!” and dragged him outside. I then quickly cleaned up the spot and treated it with white vinegar to discourage the dog from using that area again. Okay, I reasoned to myself, he’s still learning. Besides, using vinegar should do the trick. Turned out Lucky really liked the smell of vinegar. He also liked discovering new places to relieve his bladder: in front of the television, in the hallway, in our son’s room. In the first two weeks, he had 12 such mishaps in the house. Some evenings, I’d walk him for an hour outside and he wouldn’t go once. As soon as I brought him indoors and got distracted, I would later discover a new wet spot on the carpet. I would get very nervous watching him lap up lots of water from his bowl on the deck in the afternoon and evening.

Taking the dog to the veterinarian a few days later, I pressed the doctor for an estimate of his age. At that point, he weighed 41 pounds (in a month he would gain another 12). He seemed huge to me, yet the vet said he was only between four and six months old. I looked at his paws. To my eyes, they looked as big as saucers. What did my husband get us into? Let me rephrase that, what did he get ME into? Puppies are a lot like babies and toddlers. They make messes. They have accidents. They follow you around everywhere and drool all over you. I raised my babies. I’m done with all that. Or I thought I was.

Even though I didn’t want a new pet, there was one good reason to keep him: my husband really wanted a dog in his life again. He missed having a four-legged pal beside him as he worked in the garden or walked to the creek. My husband had done so much for the family over the years that it didn’t seem right to deny him this one thing. I tried hard to keep that thought in my mind.

Turned out, the dog was interested in gnawing on just about everything: clothes from the laundry basket, our son's belt, thumb drives, shoes, sticks, wires, the broom--and so on. Oh, and his favorite--rocks. The only advantage to getting a puppy (for me at least) was his mouthful of healthy, white teeth, yet he seemed bound and determined to crack and break every one of them by vigorously chewing on rocks. He didn't playfully mouth them--no, he chomped away like they would yield beef sirloin if he simply chewed on them hard enough. Whenever I'd catch him trying to eat a rock, I'd toss it back onto our long driveway covered in rocks and heave a sigh. It was going to be a hellish few months.

I knew puppies had lots of energy and would wholeheartedly play for awhile and then conk out and sleep for hours. Yes, that happened with Lucky. He'd play all night and sleep for large portions of the day. He needed to switch that schedule around, pronto! But when I'd try to engage him during the daylight hours, he was a like a very large slug. Nothing could get him to move. I'll admit that it made it easier for me to get things done without a puppy glued to my legs but then I'd pay dearly for that nice break later on. Later in the evening, Lucky's eyes would slowly open. I'd look on, horrified, knowing what that meant. He'd yawn big, showing off his crocodile teeth. Then he would start to playfully bite me. The dog training books all said to pay no attention to this as the dog would eventually stop. You try ignoring a mouthful of sharp teeth nipping at your arm! The books also advised owners to substitute a toy for flesh. Nope, nothing doing. Clearly, Lucky hadn't read the books.

The puppy days dragged on. In September, after being with us for a month, Lucky discovered the large brush pile on the side of our property and began pulling out hunks of gnarled tree roots, some as large as a human head, to munch on and slobber over on the deck. I'd often come out of the house to find the entire deck completely covered in dirt clumps. Out came the broom. Again and again. Alright, I thought, I can live with the occasional mess. The dog was calming down, I was sure of it.

Ah, yes, the gods were no doubt laughing at that observation a few days later when my husband went to check the weather on our computer. "The damn internet is out again," he grumbled. As I was about to call the number for cable maintenance and complain, my husband got a funny look on his face and suddenly went outside. He came right back in and said,

“Lucky chewed through the internet cable.” This was a new one to me but I’d long since given up trying to predict what the dog would do next. My husband resignedly went to the hardware store, got the things he needed to repair the cable and fixed it. Perhaps this would turn out to be a funny anecdote to laugh about. Someday. Far into the future. And then, somehow, the dog got at the cable and chewed through it again. So my husband fixed it, reburied the cable and covered that area with large rocks. A few days later, we let Lucky outdoors and soon thereafter, the internet cut off again. This time, we both quickly ran outside to check the cable. Lucky had somehow pushed the rocks away, dug up the cable and severed it once more. Was the cable bacon-flavored? Was he magnetically drawn to it? If the dog had been cooped up in a small yard for hours at a time, I’d understand him furiously digging and chewing everything in sight but he had an acre full of half-eaten dog toys and was seldom alone. No--once again, I reminded myself that I wasn’t going to try to figure him out. It couldn’t be done. We now have the most secure internet cable on the street. It involves wire threaded through pipes, protective covers, large boards and heavy weights.

It was early December and we were having a wet winter, with puddles all over the yard. Lucky wasn’t squeamish about doing his business in the rain, which was a relief. One night as he was happily bouncing around outdoors in the drizzle, I went in to clean the kitchen. About five minutes later, as I started to wash the dishes, the water merely trickled out of the faucet. Hmm. I put on my coat, picked up my flashlight and walked out to check our water meter. The sweep hand was spinning madly, meaning there was a break somewhere in the water line. It happens, but not often and usually only after a weather event, like a severe freeze, which we hadn’t had. Oh, well. I shut the meter off and we did without water until morning. It was in the pale light of dawn that my husband discovered the dog had tugged on a hose bibb in a ground box and had broken the water line. I wondered how many gallons of water would have gushed out during the night if we hadn’t discovered the break in the pipe until the next day. I also wondered if the shelter had a return policy.

One evening, a couple of weeks into the new year, I happened to glance out our front window. Lucky was sitting by a pretty Lacey oak tree and looked, I had to admit, almost majestic. Close to a year old, he had grown into a handsome dog. His head was slightly lifted and was gazing off into the horizon. The sun was setting and he was bathed in a golden light.

Just as I thought that maybe he would turn out to be a good dog after all, the kind that people miss when they're gone, Lucky slowly turned and began biting the trunk of the young Lacey oak. Frantic, I yanked open the front door and yelled, "NOOOOO!" I then ran outside and started chasing after the dog, who began darting around the yard, his large mouth gaping and his tail waving like a curly flag. Feeling discouraged, I stopped and simply said, "Oh, Lucky." Standing still, he watched me in curiosity, head tilted sideways, tail slowly wagging. He looked so comical that I felt a sudden, irrepressible urge to laugh at everything in our Lucky life. And so I did.

Adieu byc

by Franc J. Rodriguez

Sorrowful is the day of thy departure,
When I shall no longer see thy beauty,
And forc'd to accept a sudden cruelty,
Abating years of a wondrous adventure.
Hence, the whims of time shall prevail,
When drearisome melancholy surges,
O'er the lingering memories and urges,
That I cannot so easily erase or avail.
Therefore, my chagrin shall be visible,
And mine heart shall ponder the reasons,
With the weeks of the passing seasons,
Fading within the moments so divisible.
Now, thou shalt leave and be far away,
And I shall bid thee, a final adieu today.

Ode To Aidenn

by Franc J. Rodriguez

O thou art that beauteous garden
Of the sublime majesty I foresee;
A saintly abode of radiant angels,
And birth of the virginal maidens.

Thy divinity and thy sanctuary
Exuding for those immortals
Of ethereal miens of true bliss,
As their refulgent pinions soar.

The trumpets of magnificence
Sound o'er gates of labyrinths
Of the free spirits roaming nigh,
The bosom of the teeming rivers.

I shall stroll in the colourful valley
Of pleasant waterfalls and groves,
By the gushing fountains perfum'd,
In camphors and goblets of wines.

I shall be serenad'd by the paean
Of the glorious seraphim ashore,
And bath'd in the aromatic streams,
With that anoint'd Balm of Gilead.

Behold, the golden palace standing
Lofty with elegant pearls and rubies,
Along the side of the gentle voices,
Where I marvel and breathe Aidenn.

The Cardboard Castle

by Evan Nares

There lived a boy in a cardboard castle. Early in his life he met a little lady his age and they played together every day. They played pretend family and ran around the garden watching butterflies hatch and fly away. For a week they watched caterpillars creep up flower stems. One day the boy's ruler took him home, he never saw the little lady again. Sheltered by the countess, she said he would one day become a great knight who would slay dragons, if he did as he was told. Upon his ascension to the rank of Page the boy was excited to begin lessons on how to live in the world. He yearned for the years to come, and who he might become.

With loyalty and devotion, the page boy carried out his duties within the cardboard castle. He taped the frayed corners, cleaned the chamber pots, scrubbed the dust from the corners with a toothbrush and swept the floors all day. Five days of labor earned him fifteen minutes of sweet instruction from the countess. After each dinner of paper shreadings and wood chips he would retire, exhausted, resting on his cardboard bed that was years older than him. Its wood frame was broken despite excessive taping. When he was old enough to start developing muscle the countess promised more privilege for replacing the deteriorating halls and renewing the parapet with lumber.

Soon he noticed strange happenings in the castle. Sections of hall would become damaged quickly after repairs, the corners frayed faster than he could reach them, and he stopped passing inspection of his duties. He was experienced in his labor, but still the countess's scrutinizing eyes became sharper and her reprimands cut like paper in each instance. The life lessons she gave him, on worldly matters and knightly manners, reduced in quality and they diminished greatly to a tapered existence.

One day he petitioned the ruler. He had completed her tasks and learned everything she had taught him. He obeyed and served loyally. Now the time had come. Here he stood between the age of boy and the age of man. Now he asked that she bestow the earned rank of Squire and begin training for a future of slaying dragons outside of the castle. The boy stood relaxed and confident. His natural posture straight and tall, his chest up and

his shoulders back. He was amazed by his own growing body and saw whom he would become. Never would he have suspected the coming betrayal.

The countess gave a smoky snarl, her eyes burned with murderous plots. She cursed him to be forever a child, spat on the future in his thoughts. She bellowed, her breath a flammable fume that stung his eyes in a hot wind. The boy shouted against her, tried to exorcise the demon before him. She declared herself goddess, ordered the boy to bow his posture forever and bend the knee. He did so, but he would not forgive such blasphemy.

Shrinking to a hunch, for his natural posture was against the rules, he obeyed for several years. No longer a child yet unskilled in the ways of man, he did as she commanded. Wasting away in his endless work day, day after day. Whatever the countess touched broke and it was the page boy's job to fix everything. Dry cardboard gave him pink abrasions and sanguine cuts. When he wasn't doing his duties, the countess kept him in a little box replaced by a smaller one each year. Each morning she tore him from his sleep to work his life away in this cardboard keep. One day the page boy committed heresy, he stood up straight.

The first fight was like bathing in fire, so he learned how to become cold. He had to be a freezing rain, lest her flame catch his dried skin. Each time he fought her, the countess hit back harder, and her features turned ever more reptilian. At some point the page boy had given up fighting but the countess had tasted his blood and wanted more. She goaded him to fight on, pretending that he was the oppressor and that she was the victim fighting back with the full force of a beast bred for killing. The countess delighted in battle and enjoyed pain. In those humiliating moments, a discovery. For the first time he saw her for what she truly is. The Dragon of the Cardboard Castle.

Knights and nobles visited the castle each week, the countess's spell too strong for them to see the pretender dragon while she plundered their riches and ate them alive. The boy made talk with them whenever he could, but they never believed him. Still, he gathered as much information about the world as he could from them before they waltzed into death. The dragon plundered their riches and took their land. Yet somehow all the wealth the dragon stole had vanished quickly, and the castle could hardly afford food.

Weak and starved on his diet of dust, the boy continued to train in secret for several years until he was ready.

Fed up with the way things were, the page boy stormed into the smoke-filled throne room and was shocked to find the dragon enjoying life in luxury. Carpet covered the floor and her bed was made of finery and silk. The dragon dined on a sizzling steak and sanguine wine. Not a single thing in the room was made from cardboard.

She had a hoard. All these goods stolen from guests, yet she had claimed the castle was poor. The boy stood bolt upright, his cardboard sword ready. He called her a liar. The dragon called him a fool and slurred, taking a long sip from the thick, red liquid congealing in her wine glass. She chugged greedily at every last drip. In horror he lost his will to fight but not his anger. The only way to hurt her was to leave.

The castle shook as the dragon smashed through walls, flaming torrents filled the halls. Fury like never before, her weakness revealed. He ran, his sword a useless thing to wield. Out of a window and into the saltwater, he swam fast as a sea otter. He realized, only now, the castle stood on isolated land rather than a hill. Her wicked illusion undone by truth and only saltwater to swallow that pill.

From the water, he watched the dragon rage about the cardboard castle. She bellowed flame until the sandy foundation turned to glass. Landing, her misshapen feet crushed the shiny mirror surface causing shards to slice into ankles like a menagerie of vengeful animals. She attacked the supporting beams, bringing down the cardboard castle upon herself in a smothered heap. The boy was free at last, or so he thought.

He spent a long time floating in the ocean. Salt filled every wound. The waves threw him about in violent motion. His emotions locked inside, cocooned. He scraped across the sand, then crept up a tree wishing he could fly. Finally, on land, he discovered that everything the dragon had taught him was a lie. Existence was pain, but greater wounds were still to come.

His knightly manners of speaking were an awkward formality, he felt strangled by a thousand unspoken rules of normality. No man would teach him as would a father, after being forsaken in the castle he could not return to an altar. Women judged him and called him a creep, it was true

because they said it first and it made him weep. He tried to learn how to live, hour after hour. He wanted to change, he thought often back to that flower. He reached the age of manhood yet remained a child. He heard the dragon's last laugh, saw her serpent smile.

For years he struggled until he learned enough to get by with people, but it wouldn't last. Many called him pampered for he had grown up in a castle, most were unwilling to hear of his prisoner past. They denied the dragon's existence and called the page boy a slayer. Could he take credit for that? Though not by sword, he delivered the mortal wound, the moral wound, and without prayer. Some nights he walked and wept tears down to his feet, he vowed to never enter another cardboard keep.

In the cool breeze of the midnight glade, he watched butterflies dance along his cardboard blade. He sheathed his sword and stared into the night sky. He contemplated what to do with his second-hand life. Alone in the dark, he gazed upon the moon's regift of light from the sun. He had slain the dragon; the dragon had slain who he might have become.

About the Authors

Nancy Davidson

Nancy Davidson, a native of Dallas, lived in upstate New York for many years, but always planned to relocate to Texas upon retirement. She and her husband finally did retire and moved to Kyle three years ago. Having participated in an inspirational writing group in New York, she was instrumental, with others, in initiating Kyle Writers, which has been going strong – and growing for three years. Nancy writes memoirs of the lives of her parents and grandparents in the early 1900s and hopes to have a compilation for her grandchildren before she kicks.

Rusty Haggard

Rusty Haggard enjoyed a career of over 35 years as a writer and editor, with over 30 years at the University of Texas. He covered three different industries: aerospace, oil & gas, and project management. In retirement, he has turned to fiction writing. He earned a degree in journalism from UT-Austin. He and his wife, Cherie, live near Driftwood, Texas.

Corri Hubbard

Corri is a writer in Austin, Texas. She is documenting her various misadventures navigating her life as a retired legendary party girl. Deeply immersing herself in the rock and roll lifestyle led to her finally becoming a self-described crazy cat lady without the cats. You can figure things out with her at thedazeofwineandroses.com

Michael Kaufmann-Lynch

Michael was born in Dallas, Texas next to a lake. He got his Masters of Fine Arts in poetry at Texas State University. He may even be a grownup some day.

Elizabeth Martinez

Elizabeth Martinez has been writing since childhood. She has published pieces in her high school's literary magazine and was a staff writer for the school paper. She writes poetry, short stories and children's books.

Elizabeth is currently working on a poetry book and a children's book series. She loves traveling, science, and writing.

Carol Peters

Carol Peters began writing in the late 1990's after an incident that changed her life. After teaching English as a Second Language to teenagers in several different settings, she began a journal. She enjoys reading historical fiction, biographies, and 19th century American history. At age 72 she took her first poetry class and is now working on transcribing her journals.

Brooke Pillifant

After a miserable yet hilarious cross-country car trip, Brooke was propelled out of the world of teaching mathematics into the world of storytelling. She has performed across the country from San Diego to New York City. Brooke founded a nonprofit, Down South Word of Mouth, dedicated to promoting personal growth, social justice, and community connection in central Texas through the art of personal narrative storytelling. And when she isn't on stage, she occupies her time with four kids, shooting pool, roadside adventures, and welding.

Canita Prough

Canita Pro began her writing career in the Eighth Grade. She became the English Student of the Year that year for a short story called, The Life of a Toothpick. Since that time, she has had two poems published. The past five years have been researching and writing a book. She is currently living in Kyle, Texas with three female cats and teaching Third Grade in Austin, Texas.

Christine Reid

After earning a journalism degree from Texas State University, Christine Reid wrote for association newsletters and contributed free-lance articles to the Hays Free Press and the News-Dispatch. She combined her deep love of writing and gardening by editing a Master Gardener newsletter and producing a gardening column for All Around Hays as well as the Uhland Star.

Franc J. Rodriguez

Franc J. Rodriguez. is a poet, short-story writer, playwright and philosopher. He moved to the area from Europe.

Eddie S.

He is a self taught musician and song writer. He wrote this piece for a card that he made for his wedding anniversary.

Joanna Tychowski

Joanna is a former molecular biologist with half a Ph.D. She's a current zero (low)-waster and aspiring minimalist. You can find her digging through trash cans, drinking rain water, trying to grow her own vegetables, and doing an assortment of other things most people would consider too weird to do, all while trying to respect and value our planet. She started writing and speaking to empower people to improve their health and well-being by critically rethinking everything we've been taught about how to live on this planet. Remember, it's the only one we have.

Evan Nares

Evan Nares has lived in the City of Kyle for 4 years. He has always been interested in the personal stories people have and wants to write meaningful pieces about the nuance of life experience. He is working towards a BS in Psychology with a minor in Creative Writing & Anthropology from Texas State University.