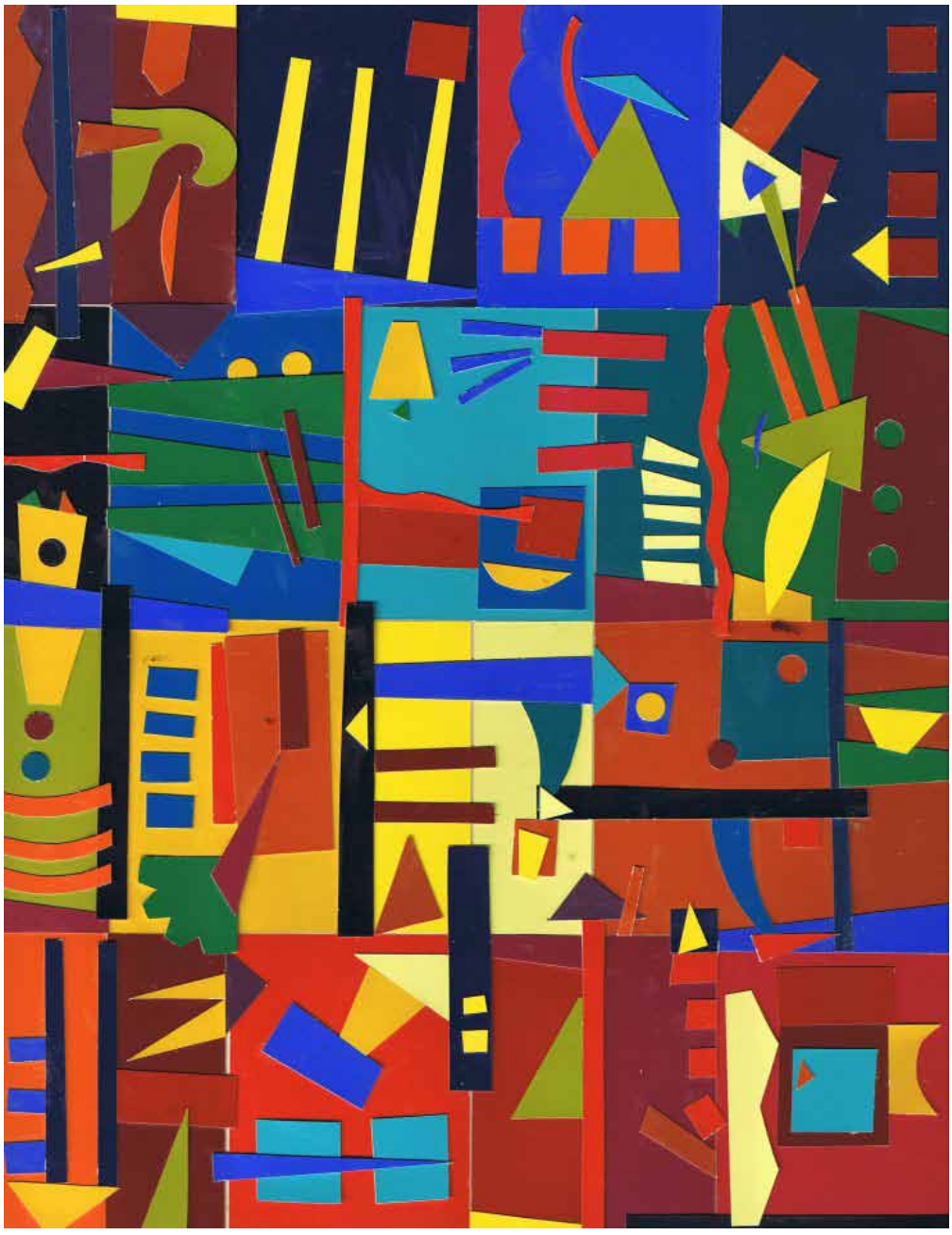
ARTS | CULTURE | EVENTS

fluent MAGAZINE

Sep–Oct 2012 | Vol 1 No 2



"Day 112" by Rebecca Grace Jones

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CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Mathews Amos is on the Board of Directors (and a Selector) of the American Conservation Film Festival. She has spent her career at the interface of environmental science and public policy as an analyst, advocate, consultant and now writer. She is completing her MA degree in writing at Johns Hopkins University and lives in Shepherdstown, WVa with her husband, John, and her cat, Phoebe.

Todd Coyle has performed in and around the Eastern Panhandle of WVa for over 25 years. He's worked in a wide variety of bands — folk, blues, pop, jazz and country — as a guitarist, bassist, singer, producer and sound man. Mostly, though, he's a singer/song writer who's comfortable in front of audiences large and small. Todd has released two CDs on his own label and is a member of the Songwriter's Association of Washington.

Tom Donlon lives in Shenandoah Junction, WVa. His poems have appeared in *Blue Collar Review*, *Commonweal*, *Folio*, *Kestrel*, *Poet Lore*, *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and other journals and anthologies. Recognition includes Pushcart Prize nominations and a fellowship from the WV Commission on the Arts.

Ginny Fite's poems have been published in *Glassworks*, *Apalachee Quarterly*, *Unicorn*, *Grub St. Wit*, and other small journals, and a chapbook of her work was published by the Charles Street Press. Fite has also published a humorous self-help book on aging and two books of poetry. She lives in Harpers Ferry, WVa.

Shepherd Ogden lives in Bakerton, WVa. He is the author of five non-fiction books, one novel–memoir and a book of poetry. His photos and collected poems are available online at justsopress.typepad.com/facing.

Bill Tchakirides has been a Broadway producer, commercial food photographer, justice of the peace, font designer and director of a nonprofit arts program. Now, he spends time posting in the blogosphere and hosting two programs on 89.7 WSHC, Shepherd University Radio.

Sheila Vertino is returning to her roots as a freelance writer and journalist, after a career as a magazine editor-in-chief and book and research publisher. Based in Shepherdstown, she describes herself as a culturally curious word nerd.

Ed Zahniser's poems have appeared in over 100 literary magazines in the U.S. and U.K., seven anthologies, three books and three chapbooks. He is co-editor of *In Good Company*, an anthology of area poets celebrating Shepherdstown's 250th anniversary.

About the Cover

On January 1, 2012, artist Rebecca Grace Jones began a project: to do an art assignment a day from Noah Scalin's *365: A Daily Creativity Journal: Make Something Every Day and Change Your Life!*

The project for Day 112 was to "Make something with paint swatch samples."

MAGAZINE fluent

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The Everywhere of Art

Sterling "Rip" Smith finds it inside a camera. Ginny Fite finds it in the keys on her laptop. Rebecca Grace Jones finds it in found objects and the remnants of nature. These are their tools for processing, creating and assembling what they *see* into art — their photographs, fiction, collage. They share their work in this issue of FLUENT.

Sheila Vertino writes about Jones in "Committed to Play: 365 Creative Projects." In an interesting twist, one artist featured in this issue interviews another — Ginny Fite writes about Rip Smith in "The Art of Seeing: Light, Shadow, Form and Texture." Tom Donlon shares past and upcoming Sotto Voce Poetry Festivals, a Shepherdstown tradition. Melissa Wright of the band Acoustic Burgoo and playwright Sean O'Leary both share insight into their work in interviews by Todd Coyle and Bill Tchakirides, respectively. Shepherd Ogden shares what makes a flower fragrant — and what doesn't — in "Scents & Sensibility." Amy Mathews Amos shares a personal perspective on the upcoming American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) — the 10th anniversary of this annual event — in "Film Fix: An Antidote for What Ails Us." And in "ACFF Turns Ten," she gives a brief history of ACFF and how the films are chosen, and shares a sneak preview of this year's films.

How artists choose what to include in their art — and how they limit "the everywhere" — is curious business. My Poetry 102 professor and mentor, Martha Eckman, wrote in a letter to me, "What is the single impact that you want each one [poem] to make on the reader?" She advised, "Go through ruthlessly and cut out whatever does not contribute to that single impact... and think at the same time of what form will best reflect an extension of the content."

The editing process surely differs for poets, photographers, painters, filmmakers, playwrights, musicians, composers. I suspect, though, that most artists edit their work in one sense or another. Perhaps the editing never stops from idea to finished piece or performance. As viewers and audiences, we, too, edit art, by choosing where to focus our eyes, what to read and what to listen to.

I hope you enjoy art, wherever you find it.

Nancy McKeithen
Editor & Publisher

Rebecca Grace Jones' completion of the Day 204 project from *365: A Daily Creativity Journal: Make Something Every Day and Change Your Life!* by Noah Scalin: "Ask a friend you haven't seen for a while for a suggestion of what to do and get her involved in the project."

Ears, Eyes & Soul

BY TODD COYLE

If the true test of a region's vitality is measured by the health of its music and arts scene, the Panhandle is thriving. Finding something here to satisfy the ears, eyes and soul is easy. The hard part is choosing from all that's happening.

Meet the Acoustic Burgoo, part of the Panhandle music scene since 2006. The Burgoo, as their true fans know them, are a group of young musicians just out of college who have a fire in their hearts for what they do like nothing I've ever seen. Not only do they have passion, they have a level of professionalism rarely seen in players their age, and amazing skill. Each member plays multiple instruments, sings and writes. This band is a joy to hear, a pleasure to see and sure to make your heart feel.

I spent some time talking with Acoustic Burgoo's Melissa Wright.

FLUENT: Where did the name "The Acoustic Burgoo" come from?
AB: It's from a cookbook called Stews, Bogs, and Burgoos, which was sitting on a shelf in the room where we practiced. I guess we were trying to think of a name, and saw the word burgoo and liked it... then we looked through the book and realized what it was and found that it fit us.

FLUENT: Tell us something about you that your fans don't know, like your warm-up habits or things you do before a show.
AB: Erik takes off his pants and wears his boxers around every chance he gets. Ben is ridiculously clumsy, and he usually knocks something over wherever we go. Rudy is a brainiac and can't refuse a building project. Erik and I fight like brother and sister, but it usually all pans out on stage. We're all passionate about good food and good music, so we love to make a meal together and jam out to our record collections.

FLUENT: Melissa, you sang with Alison Krauss recently. What was that like, and how did it come about?
AB: I graduated from Berkeley and had decided I wanted to sing in the commencement concert. The producers had heard me sing before in a couple other shows, so when I sent them an email saying, "I want to sing in commencement; I think I would rock it!" they couldn't refuse!

Initially, I was just on to sing a duet with Will Makar. (His claim to fame is making it high up in "American Idol" a couple seasons ago), and we were doing the Everly Brothers' song that Robert Plant and Alison Krauss had covered on Raising Sand, "Gone, Gone, Gone." But as the rehearsals went on, they asked if I would like to be a part of the gospel choir that sang behind her on "Down in the River to Pray."

It was amazing on stage, in a huge stadium. [I felt] like a lot of things had come full circle, since the movie and soundtrack from "Oh Brother" had played a big part in starting Burgoo. Another cool thing—all the Eagles were there, and I got to meet them all after the show!

FLUENT: Collectively, how many instruments do you all play and what is the weirdest?
AB: Collectively, we play about 27 instruments. The weirdest can always be credited to Erik. He owns a Peruvian charango, kind of a cross between a lute and a mandolin. Also, Erik is known for his "percussion on non-percussion instruments." One of the most memorable jams was where he played a couch. Sometimes he'll just hit his belly, but it works, and it grooves!

FLUENT: If you could share the stage with anyone, who would it be, and why?
AB: John Hartford. We all have a huge amount of respect for John Hartford. He has an intense energy that we strive for.

FLUENT: What is your favorite song?
AB: My favorite song to sing right now is Chuck Berry's "Together We'll Always Be." But we all listen to so much music that it is really impossible to just have one favorite.

FLUENT: The Burgoo hosts an annual event: What, when and where?
AB: We host a couple events: one on St. Patrick's Day, which we have been doing for about 5 years now, and another around July 4th called Unistock. Both events happen at Erik's family farm in Unison, Virginia.

FLUENT: What's your ideal breakfast? And where is your favorite place to eat it?
AB: Bacon and eggs at Fran's diner in Purcellville, Virginia.

FLUENT: What is your least favorite question in an interview?
AB: "What inspires you" or "What does the future hold for your band." Because I can only say "Uh... I don't know." We just started playing music—and we love it—so we're going to keep going as long as that lasts.

FLUENT: If you could ask the President of the Unites States one question, what would it be?
AB: Wanna grab a beer? fluent

Photo Sarah Huntington Photography

Acoustic Burgoo: Melissa Wright, Rudy Bzdyk, Erik Burnham, Ben Walters. Visit Acoustic Burgoo: www.theacousticburgoo.com.

On Stage

Georgia Lee McElhaney,
Shepherdstown Poet Laureate

A PUBLICATION PARTY FOR THE ANTHOLOGY OF AREA POETS celebrating Shepherdstown's 250th Anniversary goes on stage live at the Shepherdstown Opera House on Tuesday, October 16, 7:00 to 9:00 pm. At the publication party for *In Good Company*, Shepherdstown Mayor Jim Auxer will introduce the town's Poet Laureate, Georgia Lee McElhaney, who will give the official public reading of "Thomas Shepherd Walks at Midnight," her laureate poem for the town's 250th anniversary. The subject of her poem, Thomas Shepherd, is the the founder of Shepherdstown, originally named Mecklenburg.

Poets featured in the anthology are Patricia Carter, Tom Donlon, Anne Eden, the late Ethan Fischer, Ginny Fite, Michael Grady, Paul Grant, Sonja James, Christa Mastrangelo Joyce, the late Lynn Kernan, Sarah Kezman, David Lillard, Elizabeth (Lizzie) A. Lowe, Neal Delano Martineau, Georgia Lee McElhaney, Nancy McKeithen, Ilona Popper, Eric Quinn, Antrim Ross, Tim Ross, Sue Silver, Hope Maxwell Snyder, Claire Stuart, Stephen Willingham, John Yost, Amy Young and Ed Zahniser.

The anthology title "In Good Company" is the name poet Amy Young devised for the former *Shepherdstown Chronicle* poetry page. The popular page, drawn from the Bookend Poets workshops, was first edited by McElhaney and Young and later by McElhaney. The page ran monthly for 17 years.

The Bookend Poets workshop has met monthly since the mid-1970s, originally at Shepherdstown's Bookend Bookstore, hence the name. Today, the second-Thursdays workshop is hosted by Four Seasons Books. Shaharazade's Exotic Tea Room hosts a first-Sunday open reading series.

THE YEAR-LONG SHEPHERDSTOWN SEMIQUINCENTENNIAL CELEBRATION culminates with Coming Home Weekend, November 11–12. Sunday events include a Parade, Closing Ceremony and Community Receptions. For information, visit shepherdstown250.com. fluent

THE POETS GROUP MAKES SMALL TALK

Bob the dog, part Beagle but barely part,
makes our best critic. He naps frog style
four legs sprawled out after sniffing Paul's pants
for Paul's new cat of the new set breed
the Folded Scot. "It has a nice cat face
but its ears fold over forward. It can't go out
because my neighbor has a yellow cat
as big as a Buick with a personality like Libya."

We discuss ampersands and how we use them.
"Too many look like cloves on a ham," Paul says.
Patsy asks him if he writes to someone specific.
"I imagine my audience like I talk back to my TV,
stuff you could hear out on an American porch."
Ethan says his students write "spot on" in papers now:
"'The music was spot on.' Anything can be spot on,
something you only used to hear across the pond."

Patsy used to be a teacher. She queries Paul,
"What would you want on your tombstone, your epitaph?"
Paul shoots back: "But I digress."

Ed Zahniser
from *In Good Company*

A publication party for the anthology of area poets celebrating Shepherdstown's 250th Anniversary goes on stage live at the Shepherdstown Opera House on Tuesday, October 16. Doors open at 6:30 pm and the program starts at 7:00 pm. The publication party is free and all are invited.

The 80-page anthology will be available for purchase in the theater foyer. Anthology poets will be on hand to sign books and answer questions about "their craft and sullen art."

The program includes readings by the poets and live music by guitarist Don Oehser performing with vocalist Laura First.

ANTHOLOGY DESIGN Pernot and Tatlin
PRINTING HBP Inc. Hagerstown, MD

Committed to Play: 365 Creative Projects

Assignment: Complete one creative project today. Piece of cake, you say.

Now let's raise the bar a bit higher: You don't choose the subject. Instead, you are given a specific assignment, and left to figure out how to creatively express yourself. Um, OK. I guess.

... and higher: Complete 365 creative projects—one every day, for an entire year. Uh-oh. That might take more discipline than I have.

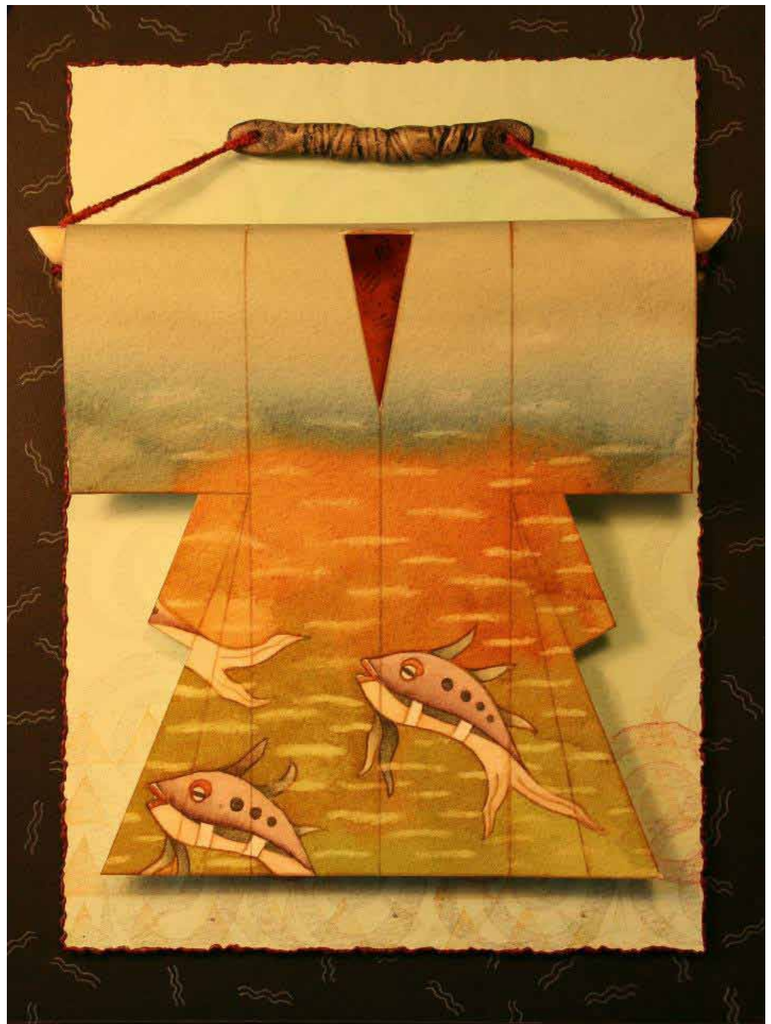
... and higher still: Post your creations daily on Facebook, and blog the details of your creative process to followers eagerly waiting to see what amazing thing you did today.

Day 158: Work with homonyms.

by Sheila Vertino

Pressure? More like play says Shepherdstown artist Rebecca Grace Jones, who recently passed the 200-day mark following Noah Scalin's *365: A Daily Creativity Journal: Make Something Every Day and Change Your Life!* book. "When I go into Four Seasons, I often look for books that might give me inspiration. I buy anything I find that might spur my creativity. Not to cannibalize or copy, but to trigger other ideas in me."

Day 212: Use the world of fish as inspiration.



Right from Day 1—"Make something that fits in the palm of your hand"—Jones had no problem with making the 365-day commitment. "I'm well suited to this project. I love assignments. I was an illustrator for many years and I thrived on assignments. Give me a project to do and let me show you my ideas!

"It's always fascinating to me [to see] what I come up with. When I'm not sure, I just start. Scribbling. Playing. Take whatever comes to me, and see where it takes me."

Each day, the book presents her with a specific challenge, but leaves the interpretation to Jones. "I'm very much into painting and drawing—2D work. I also love mixed media. And what I love most is combining my painting and drawing with texture, layers, different

PROJECT PHOTOS Rebecca Grace Jones

Day 224: Use dirt as an inspiration.

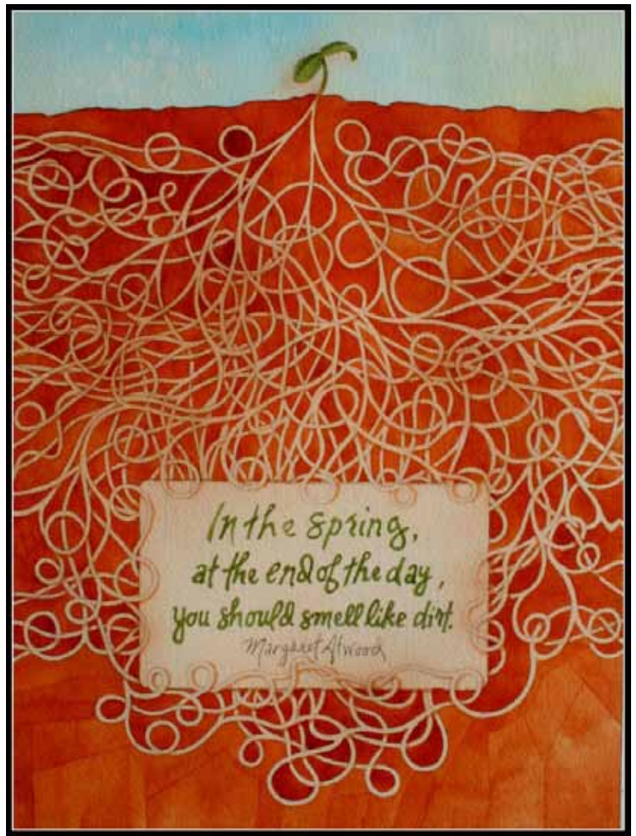


PHOTO Sheila Vertino

"Art enhances our lives, and brings us closer to what we believe in. It makes us think of beauty and our specialness. It's about joy, appreciation and getting out of ourselves. Art gives us symbols — avenues to seeing how beautiful life is already. When people look at what I do, I would hope they would laugh or think or be hopeful."

Rebecca Grace Jones, with Day #119 project: Make something out of wood.

materials. I don't see a barrier between fine art and fine craft. I see them as coming from the same well."

Some of Jones's completed projects lend themselves to further refinement and might find their way into the fine craft that Jones calls her "Work work." But she approaches the daily challenges as art for art's sake and the considerable time they take as a worthwhile investment. "It's enhancing my existence by pure play and pure creativity."

Day 57: Create something with a plastic grocery bag.

Day 133: Make something surreal.

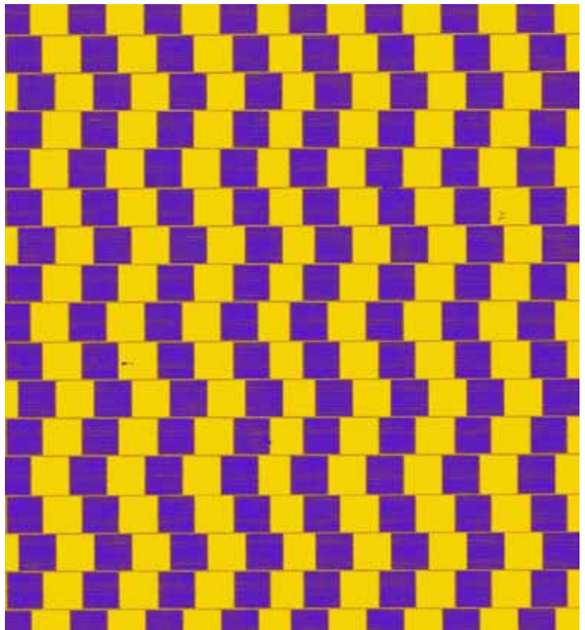
Jones's belief is that we give up play at our peril. "Play is necessary, important and valid. It tells you who you are."

Nothing is beyond Jones's imagination when it comes to art materials. For the 200+ completed projects that stretch along the walls and around the corners of her studio, Jones has commandeered materials as varied as aluminum foil, hair, sticks, paper bags, fabric, paw-paw leaves, old railroad model kits and rocks, in addition to more traditional ink, pencil and paint. Along the way, she became reacquainted with papier mache, crayon and mobiles that she intends to explore more in future projects.

Not all of the assignments demand an artistic final product. For example, Day 95's assignment was

Day 172: Make a book out of something other than paper.

Day 105: Create an optical illusion.



to "Go downtown and ask a stranger what to do today."

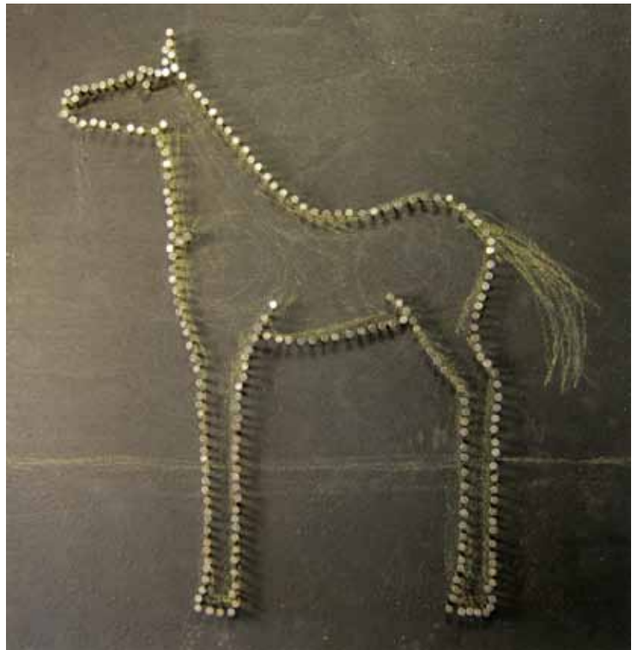
"I was very uncomfortable. The first person I talked to was a guy pushing a baby carriage. I explained the project. It didn't really go well. He didn't want to talk to me; he didn't have an idea." Undaunted, Jones pressed on. "I ended up spending a couple of hours, asking 12 people." She counts this as one of the most valuable projects because "the experience of talking to these people and explaining the project gave me confidence!"

Elaborating on what else she has learned from these daily creative projects, Jones explains, "It's a building up of vocabulary in terms of different approaches and materials. Practicing and exercising your 'creativity muscles' builds up your confidence and gets you more comfortable with the idea of play."

"I'm glad I'm only halfway done." fluent

Day 191: Make something with sugar.

Day 93: Make something with nails.



Places to Visit:

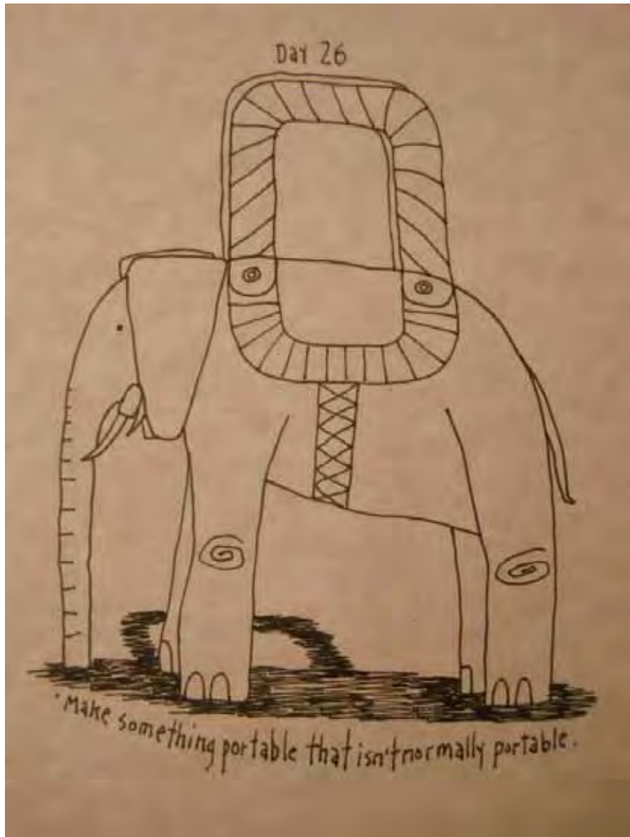
Rebecca's Blog

Rebecca's "Make Something Every Day" Facebook Page

Four Seasons Books

Over the Mountain Studio Tour—Rebecca will be at stop #1 (Doug Kinnett's studio) on the tour, November 10–11, 10:00 am–5:00 pm, in Jefferson County, West Virginia

Day 26: Make something portable that normally isn't.



The Art of Seeing: Light, Shadow, Form & Texture

Rip Smith is compelled by an impulse he cannot name to capture through a small aperture in a box images that gather to themselves the elements of light, form, shadow and texture, that compose themselves in ways that signal their perfection, and then share them with strangers. This process in which he engages will not make him rich, he knows. But it satisfies something in him enough to have done it for 50 years.

By Ginny Fite

Photos by Rip Smith
sterlingimages.com

Self-educated with a few workshops and master classes under his belt and a sense that he might not be comfortable in a classroom, Smith searches for images he wants to show other people, whether the way light hits a stairwell, illuminates a falling down house, creates abstract shapes in a body of water, or transforms a boy sitting on a tree stump playing a saxophone into an archetypal Orpheus lulling the gods with his music.

In 1962, he started making photographs for art's sake. One of those early images is exhibited in the Washington Street Artists' Cooperative (WSAC) gallery in Charles Town, WVa. Smith submitted that photo to a photography store competition and got honorable mention. Sometimes you only need a pat on the back to propel you forward.

"Anything I ever learned well or did well I taught myself," he says.

Smith is content that well-known photographer Tillman Crane told him that his work is technically good. But it's his self-assessment that matters: "I think I've learned my craft well."

If he needs external validation, it has come in the way of many exhibitions in many locales. Currently, his work is exhibited in the gallery of the WSAC, where he is a member, the Ice House in Berkeley Springs and Tamarack in Beckley, and has been on exhibit at the Delaplaine Visual Arts Education Center in Frederick, Md, the annual Cumberland Valley Photographic Salon at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown, Md and The Arts Centre in Martinsburg, among others.

Early in his career in visual communication, Smith worked in television and video production. He started in the control room back in the day when TV stations used real film, back when ads were 30-second spots spliced together on little rolls of film. He moved on to the production department, working as lighting director. Then, at Channel 20 WDCA in Washington, D.C., he started directing. Smith worked at that station for 17 years as producer, director and director of special projects. When he left there, he started a video company and produced and directed training videos and then interactive multimedia projects on CDs for instructional purposes. He moved to Martinsburg in 2002.

Once he had decided he wanted to do fine art photography, he focused on going out and making "artful images. My idea of what's artful is better defined after 50 years. I've always been interested in architectural objects, manmade structures. I've evolved from taking straight building pictures and now want to capture the total environment."

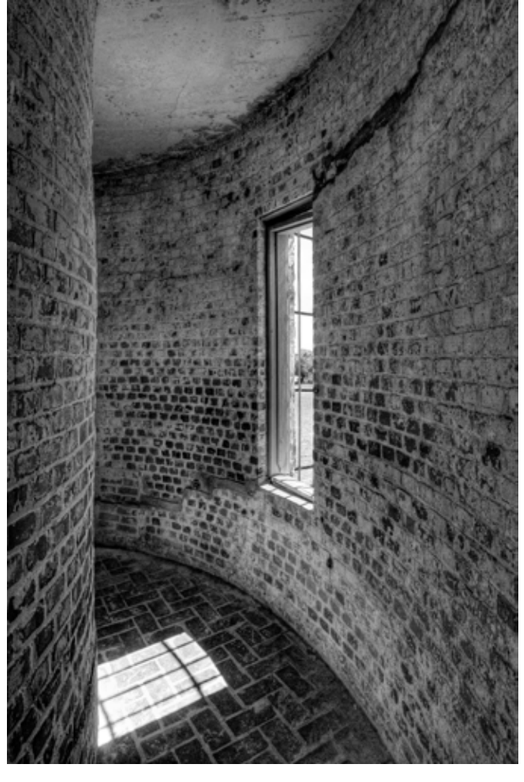
Saxophone Guy

His own development as a photographer may best be captured in his North Dakota project.

"North Dakota wasn't just taking pictures of a falling down house, but also capturing the context in which the house is falling down. The North Dakota project, 'Forgotten Places,' was a breakthrough for me—to take a series of photographs and assemble a coherent body of work on a subject."

This experience has changed his approach to his art. He will still take the "found" picture of autumn leaves lying on the ground with the light hitting in just that way that makes the human heart sing ("Autumn Reflections #3") or the one in which light and images reflect in a Shepherdstown shop window at dusk ("Pizza") in such a way that it creates a place you must visit, and print them to delight gallery goers who flip through his print bins. But he has moved on from the single image to the symphony, the four acts, the novel of making a collection.

continued



FAR LEFT "Curved Corridor"

LEFT "Pizza"

BELOW LEFT "Abandoned Farm and Clearing Storm: Rolette County, North Dakota

BELOW "Autumn Reflections"

Photographing the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum located in Weston, WVa, a National Historic Landmark also known as the Weston State Hospital, has given Smith the same sense of coherent purpose as his "Forgotten Places" project. Based on his work so far, Smith's finished photographs will not look like the staged, staid four-square photos that adorn the landmark's current website.

"If light, shadow, form and texture work together in a way that attracts my eyes, I think I have something," Smith explains. "I look for good detail. Good composition is what draws a viewer's eye to what you want them to see."

"Asylum" opens October 6 with a reception from 6:00–8:00 pm and runs through the end of October at the Fire Hall Gallery in the Washington Street Artists' Cooperative. The co-op and gallery are located at 108 N George St, Charles Town, WVa. The book that accompanies the exhibit will be available for purchase.

Wispy white cloud against a deep blue sky above the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum gives the impression of spirits rising from the clock tower.

Smith defines art as being the process of showing other people the things that you love, hate or want to share. Editing is a critical element of the work. "Out of 300 to 400 images, one could be magic."

Photography is an art and a craft, he says. If you don't "see" the image, no amount of craft, editing, or digital enhancement will make the photograph work, Smith says. He uses Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to do the traditional development of the images he's taken. But this art is all about the eye of the beholder.

"Every time I come up with an image I consider good enough to print and put in a gallery, that is a surprise. The satisfying shot, the one that is perfectly constructed, occurs in a moment. If you don't get it the first time, you're not likely to get it [in the digital darkroom]."

As with every artist, while the making of art may be a solitary pursuit, putting the work out there is as necessary as exhaling. When someone buys a print, that validates the work.

"One of the best compliments I ever got was at the Apple Harvest craft show," he says. "A woman flipping through my print bin said, 'Every time I look at a new picture, it's a surprise.'

"I'll take that." fluent

Above "Low Tide"

Below "Remembrance"

Powerful Words in a Soft Voice

By Tom Donlon

Shepherdstown resident and poet Hope Maxwell-Snyder established the Sotto Voce Poetry Festival in 2005, with the intent to add a missing element to this arts-rich area: a large-scale annual poetry event with free readings and inexpensive workshops. For people with full-time jobs, it's a chance to drop out of the stressful world of making a living and drop into a three-day weekend of poetry—lectures, readings, workshops, and casual conversation with well-known poets and writers: this year, Ellen Bryant Voigt, Andrew Hudgins, Michael Collier, Stanley Plumly, Peter Stitt and Hope Maxwell-Snyder. It's a chance to meet fellow writers who are just getting started or editors from journals where you would like to see your own work published—and to put lines on paper. I can promise this, because I attended the first Sotto Voce—Italian for "soft voice" or "under the voice"—Poetry Festival in 2005, and every one since.

Poets Ed Zahniser and Tom Donlon at Sotto Voce 2010

The Faculty of Sotto Voce 2012

Ellen Bryant Voigt, originally from Virginia, lives and teaches in Vermont, where she began the low-residency writing program at Goddard College and continues to teach writing. Ellen has a background in music (piano), and uses sound as a starting point for her poems. She earned an MFA from the University of Iowa.

Andrew Hudgins is the author of the Pulitzer-finalist *Saints and Strangers*, a book immersed in the South and one that speaks of sin and redemption in the voices of Southern Baptists.

Hope Maxwell-Snyder

PHOTOS Sotto Voce Poetry Festival

Michael Collier is a returning poet to Sotto Voce. A former Poet Laureate of Maryland, he heads the Breadloaf Conference in Vermont and teaches at the University of Maryland.

Stanley Plumly teaches at the University of Maryland and is a returning poet to Sotto Voce. Originally from Ohio, he has published books of poetry, with many poems informed by the death of his father from alcoholism. Plumly, Poet Laureate of Maryland, has taught at many institutions, including Columbia, LSU, Princeton, University of Iowa and University of Houston. His honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Hope Maxwell-Snyder, a poet and scholar, is originally from Colombia, South America. She holds graduate degrees from George Washington University and Johns Hopkins and a PhD in Spanish Medieval Literature from the University of Manchester, England. Hope is the author of books of poetry, short stories, a novel and a play. She taught for 10 years at Shepherd University before stopping to focus on writing.

Peter Stitt is the Editor of *The Gettysburg Review* and a full professor in the Department of English at Gettysburg College. He is a critic of contemporary literature and was the first recipient of the PEN/Nora Magid Award for Excellence in Editing.

Remembering Festivals Past

... sitting across the table at the Blue Moon Café talking poetry with Gerald Stern.

... having Grace Cavalieri and Andrea Hollander Budy comment on my work.

... listening to Shepherdstown legend Ethan Fischer introduce local poets at Stone Soup Bistro as they read their own poems to an audience that included poets Rick Campbell and Alice Friman.

... hearing Richard Garcia read a poem about a zapato.

... sitting with Amy Holman, who helped me restructure my manuscript.

... talking with Edward Hirsch about poems that reflect a Jewish tradition of expressing anger at God.

... discussing childhood domestic incidents with Terrance Hayes at a reception in Shepherdstown.

... listening to Natasha Tretheway—now U.S. Poet Laureate—read poems from *Native Guard* (winner of a Pulitzer) and describe a dramatic childhood as the daughter of a mixed marriage in Mississippi in 1966.

See you there this year. fluent

Events Open and Free to the Public

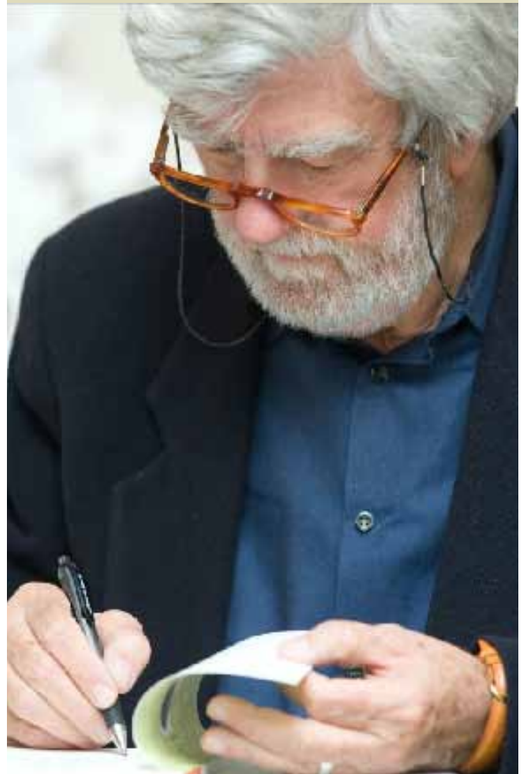
Friday, Oct 5, 8:30 pm (doors open at 8:00 pm)
Readings by Andrew Hudgins and Ellen Bryant Voigt
Erma Ora Byrd Auditorium, Shepherdstown

Saturday, Oct 6, 4:00 pm
"Out, Out..." Lecture on Robert Frost by Andrew Hudgins
Four Seasons Books, Shepherdstown

5:00–6:00 pm
Reception and book signing, Sotto Voce guest poets
Four Seasons Books

6:30–7:30 pm
Readings by Michael Collier and Stanley Plumly
Erma Ora Byrd Auditorium

www.sottovocepoetryfestival.com

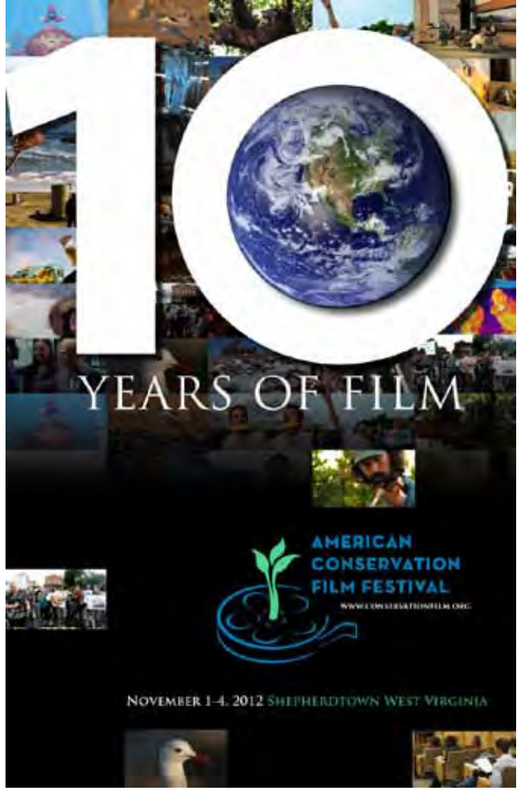


Stanley Plumly at Sotto Voce 2009 Book Signing

FILM FIX

An Antidote for What Ails Us

By Amy Mathews Amos



Program Cover Monica Larson

MY ADDICTION STARTED WHEN I WAS YOUNG. "Wild Kingdom" on Sunday nights. Jane Goodall in National Geographic documentaries. Jacques Cousteau in his underwater productions. Television documentaries of the 1960s and '70s were my gateway to the African Serengeti, the American wilderness and the Asian Steppes. There were lions stalking zebras, cheetahs chasing antelope, and hyenas scavenging the kill. They were my escape from the mundane pre-teen world of suburban strip malls and subdivisions; they delivered a high along with their glimpse of a wild, more exhilarating world far away. Somehow, amid the drama of chimp family life, the wonder of undersea dives and the excitement of Jim Fowler wrestling alligators, I learned that all was not well in that wild world. These amazing creatures weren't a given—they were at risk. I decided I was going to save the animals when I grew up.

But the world is a little more complicated than it appeared in those 40-year-old documentaries. We now know that our cars change the climate, our fertilizers asphyxiate fish, and our air conditioning destroys mountains. Every facet of our lives affects the environment around us and the creatures that live on the planet with us.

The wildlife biology degree I earned in college wouldn't solve those problems. So instead of studying the population dynamics of predators in Africa, I wound up walking the halls of government in Washington, working to change national environmental policies, with limited success. I realized that in D.C. complicated problems devolve into simplistic dualities and effective solutions drown in a tsunami of lobbying and politics. I fled to the sanity of Shepherdstown, WVa and unexpectedly rediscovered, if not a vehicle for immediate change, at least a satisfying source of inspiration. In Shepherdstown, I returned to my conservation roots: film.

Shepherdstown's American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) captures the complexity of the natural world and our relationship to it by screening dozens of the best conservation films of the year. Every November, audiences from the Eastern Panhandle and surrounding regions immerse themselves for four days in high-quality films covering every conservation topic imaginable. Some of the stories are humorous, others tragic. Most films are independently produced with limited distribution, and many take strong positions on controversial issues. But all of them are chosen to provoke thought and discussion.

This year, our 10th anniversary, we have films following activists in China as they protect their homes from dams (in "Waking the Green Tiger") and fishermen on the Gulf as they cope with the aftermath of the BP oil spill (in "Dirty Energy"). Our films explore how government regulations harm small farmers (in "Farmaggedon") and corporate profit-making drives planned obsolescence and waste (in "The Light Bulb Conspiracy"). They'll share the drama of reintroducing endangered ferrets onto the prairie (in "Return of the Prairie Bandit"), and the struggle of winter wildlife in the Alps (in "Journey to the End of Winter").

These films, like all good films, rely on two powerful tools with a long history of grabbing people's attention: imagery and storytelling. I was reminded of this on a recent vacation in Yellowstone when my 10-year old niece Anna mentioned her favorite television show. "It's about a man who saves animals," she said. (This show, her mother explained later, was about a man in Kentucky who removes nuisance animals for a living.) The conservation message may be muddled, but at a minimum Anna's favorite show clearly is tapping into her innate affinity for animals. She was as thrilled as I was to spy bighorn sheep high up on a cliff and hear bison munching on fresh grass alongside the road.

But that affinity doesn't translate easily into day-to-day decision-making. At every gift shop Anna wanted something new, and by the time we headed home her big Yellowstone shopping bag was overflowing with puppets, jewelry and dolls. It's hard to blame her. As this year's film "Stuff Everywhere" argues, in a well-off society where most of our needs are already met, capitalism no longer manufactures goods to meet our needs but rather manufactures needs to sell goods.

Which is where conservation film comes in. I think of ACFF as an antidote to the consumerist messages that typically dominate our hyper-connected world. It's an annual escape—for an hour or a weekend—into visual stories about how individually and as a society there are better ways to live if we want to protect the Earth. In our films, we meet inspiring people who fight for clean water, expose polluters, and find solutions. They live off the grid, eat off the farm and wave off the naysayers.

For Anna, the understanding that, in excess, her desire for stuff conflicts with her love of creatures will come later. At least if ACFF and her aunt have anything to say about it. fluent

ACFF Turns Ten

by Amy Mathews Amos

MARK MADISON AND STEVE CHASE aren't quite Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. But their founding of the American Conservation Film Festival (ACFF) in 2002 might remind film buffs of the "let's put on a show" mentality in those old MGM movies. As part of their work at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), Madison and Chase had been organizing a public-speaking series on conservation that typically included a film. Organizing an actual multiday film festival seemed like the next obvious step.

They turned to filmmaker John Grabowska of the National Park Service for help, and cobbled together whatever they could find for ACFF's first couple of years. "We ran films we could get for free," says Madison, who now serves as ACFF's Selection Committee chair. "We mined the best films of the past 10 years, and relied heavily on Park Service films because John had seen them and knew them." David Lillard and Thomas Harding soon joined the founding fathers and helped guide the festival forward.

ACFF is now an independent nonprofit organization that operates year-round, reviewing more than 100 films submitted each year from filmmakers around the world, and choosing the best of those for screening at its annual four-day festival. Its venues have expanded far beyond NCTC to include the historic Opera House in downtown Shepherdstown and multiple theatres at Shepherd University. It keeps the doors open through ticket sales and support from individual donors and charitable foundations, such as the Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment, the Nora Roberts Foundation and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

Some of the highlights of this year's 10th anniversary festival, to be held November 1–4, are listed below. Check out the website, www.conservationfilm.org, and visit ACFF on Facebook for up-to-the minute scheduling and other information.

FESTIVAL FILM DESCRIPTIONS

Bat City USA (filmmaker Laura Brooks) tells the story of how bat conservationist Merlin Tuttle convinced the city of Austin, Texas to embrace its bats instead of eradicate them. Each year, thousands of people enjoy a fascinating close-up glimpse of Mexican free-tailed bats living under the downtown Congress Avenue Bridge—the world's largest urban bat colony. This film shows how one person turned an entire community around and converted a perceived problem into an appreciated economic and environmental benefit. Ann Froschauer of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's White Nose Syndrome team will talk about the disease that is devastating mid-Atlantic bat populations after the film and will be joined by Leslie Sturgis with live bats from the Save Lucy Campaign.

Bidder 70 (filmmakers Beth Gage and George Gage) *Bidder 70* centers on an extraordinary act of civil disobedience by University of Utah economics student Tim DeChristopher. In 2008, DeChristopher participated in a federal auction for oil and gas leases on public lands with no intention of paying for the leases on which he bid. This award-winning film follows his story, from his obscurity as bidder number 70 during the auction, through his very public trial and sentencing. In *Bidder 70*, we learn why DeChristopher still considers his actions the only true patriotic choice, and civil disobedience vital for holding a morally bankrupt government accountable to the public interest. Filmmakers Beth and George Gage will answer questions after the film.

Cape Spin! An American Power Struggle (filmmakers John Kirby and Robbie Gemmel) is the surreal tragicomic tale of the battle over America's largest clean energy project. When energy entrepreneur Jim Gordon first proposed putting 130 wind turbines in fabled Nantucket Sound, he had no idea that a firestorm would erupt. This film tells the incredible tale of how America's first proposed offshore wind farm triggered a schism in this idyllic coastal region, pitting neighbor against neighbor and environmentalist against environmentalist. The filmmakers enjoyed unprecedented behind-the-scenes access to the key players on both sides of the controversy and frame the battle over Nantucket Sound as a microcosm of America's struggle toward energy sustainability. They manage to do so with balance and humor.

Dirty Energy (filmmaker Bryan D. Hopkins) When BP finally capped the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in August 2010, the TV cameras left. But Louisiana's fishermen remained. *Dirty Energy* tells their story, and their struggle to rebuild their lives amidst economic devastation and long-term health risks in the aftermath of the BP spill. Filmmaker Bryan D. Hopkins travels to Louisiana to hear directly from

BIDDER 70 (PHOTO Ryan Suffern)

fishermen, community leaders and environmentalists about what it's really like, how they really feel and what they really fear.

Drying for Freedom (filmmaker Steven Lake) Our planet's economic and environmental future hangs on an unlikely thread: the clothesline. British filmmaker Steven Lake crisscrosses the world to unravel how clotheslines were banished in favor of tumble dryers, and what that means for the planet.

Dying Green (filmmaker Ellen Tripler) Dr. Billy Campbell goes beyond living green: He's helping people die green as well. The only physician in the town of Westminster, South Carolina has slowly changed this community's thinking about burial. This film focuses on Dr. Campbell's vision to conserve a million acres of land through green burials without embalming and expensive coffins, and his revolutionary idea of using our own death to support land conservation efforts and preserve wildlife.

Eating Alabama (filmmaker Andrew Beck Grace) In search of a simpler life, a young couple returns

Drying for Freedom (Photo White Lantern Film)

home to Alabama, where they set out to eat the way their grandparents did—locally and seasonally. But as they navigate the agro-industrial gastronomical complex, they soon realize that nearly everything about the food system has changed since farmers once populated their family histories. A thoughtful and often funny essay on community, the South and sustainability, *Eating Alabama* is a story about why food matters.

Farmaggedon (filmmaker Kristin Canty) Filmmaker Kristin Canty's quest to find healthy food for her four

Eating Alabama (Photo Laura Shill)

Ocean Frontiers: The Dawn of a New Era in Ocean Stewardship (Photo Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary)

children turned into a journey of discovery about why access to these foods was threatened. What she found were policies that favor agribusiness and factory farms over small family-operated farms that sell fresh foods to their communities. She visits small farmers targeted by regulators, and tells their stories of perseverance amidst persecution.

Ocean Frontiers: The Dawn of a New Era in Ocean Stewardship (filmmaker Karen Anspacher-Meyer) Amidst tainted waters, dying reefs and failing fisheries, the myth of the boundless ocean has faded. From the troubled waters now rises a new wave of hope: a blossoming brand of stewardship from those closest to the sea. *Ocean Frontiers* takes us on an inspiring voyage to seaports and watersheds across the country to meet unlikely allies, of industrial shippers and whale biologists, pig farmers and wetland ecologists, sport fishers and reef snorkelers, all embarking on a new course of collaboration, in defense of the seas that sustain them. *Ocean Frontiers* screenwriter Will Stolzenburg will answer questions after the film.

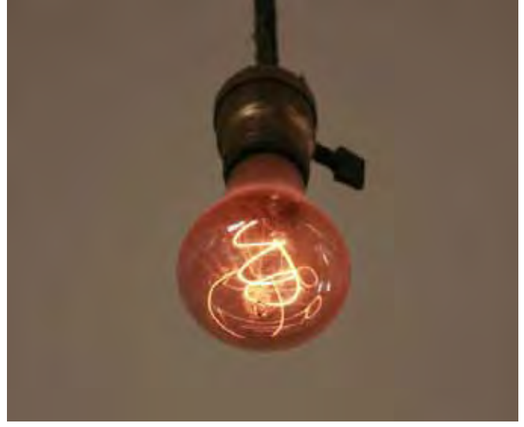
On Coal River (filmmakers Francine Cavanaugh and Adams Wood) The Coal River Valley in West Virginia is a community surrounded by lush mountains and a looming toxic threat: a coal waste facility poised above an elementary school. *On Coal River* follows the efforts of former miner Ed Wiley to protect his granddaughter and community from potential disaster. When his local government refuses to act, Ed embarks on a quest to have the school relocated to safer ground. With insider knowledge and a sharp sense of right and wrong, Ed confronts his local school board, state government, West Virginia's Governor and a notorious coal company—Massey Energy—for putting his granddaughter and community at risk.

Return of the Prairie Bandit (filmmaker Kenton Vaughan) Their habitat once stretched across the prairies. But when humans wiped out the one thing they eat—prairie dogs—the black footed ferret disappeared. The only native North American ferret, this mysterious animal became the most endangered species in the world. For many years, they survived only in zoos. Now, a fledgling project is attempting to bring the black footed ferret back to Saskatchewan. The dramatic story of the ferrets' reintroduction to the wild unfolds in *Return of the Prairie Bandit*. Shot over the course of one year, this film is a fascinating look at the ups and downs of reintroducing a species to the wild.

Semper Fi: Always Faithful (filmmakers Rachel Libert and Tony Hardmon) When Marine Corps drill instructor Jerry Ensminger's young daughter dies from a rare type of leukemia, he wants to know why. His search for answers leads to a shocking discovery: a Marine Corps coverup of one of the largest water contamination incidents in U.S. history. The drinking water at North Carolina's Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base was highly contaminated by toxic chemicals for 30 years, and when the Corps finally closed the wells, they never made the contamination public. This award-winning film unfolds like a detective novel tracking the discovery of the contamination and the subsequent coverup. It follows Jerry as he leads a coalition of former base residents—many of whom have lost children or are now sick—in a fight for justice. Jerry Ensminger will answer questions after the film.

Stuff Everywhere (filmmaker Astrid Willemsteijn) Things are handy, they make life easier and we think they will bring us joy. But at what point do they start controlling our lives instead of making them easier? Filmmaker Astrid Willemsteijn explores all the stuff in her life and examines our modern relationship with material things.

The Atomic States of America (filmmakers Sheena Joyce Don Argott) Kelly McMaster didn't realize anything was wrong with her hometown on Long Island until college, when a friend asked her why she was always going home for funerals. She soon found that



The Light Bulb Conspiracy (Photo RJ Aerial Photo)

Brookhaven National Laboratory, one of the federal government's leading nuclear research facilities, had been leaking deadly materials into her town's water supply for years. *The Atomic States of America* follows activists, such as McMaster and Eric Epstein—who grew up next door to Three Mile Island—as they blow the lid off baseless reassurances by officials and inadequate oversight by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The Dust Bowl (filmmakers Susan Shumaker, Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns) The dust bowl was the worst manmade ecological disaster in American history, a time in which the actions of farmers—encouraged by their government—resulted in a tragedy that nearly swept away the breadbasket of the nation. This two-part film chronicles this moment in American history with all its complexities and human drama. Associate Producer Susan Shumaker will answer questions after the film.

The Last Ice Man of Chimborazo (filmmaker Gabriela Lozada Pozo) Deep in the Chimborazo volcano of Ecuador is hidden a valuable resource that people attribute to healing and sacred powers. Baltazar is the last man on earth who knows how to find it.

The Light Bulb Conspiracy (filmmaker Cosima Dannprotzer) If things worked forever, no one would ever buy anything new. That's the theory behind planned obsolescence—the strategy first adopted in the 1920s to stimulate consumption and economic growth. *The Light Bulb Conspiracy* sheds light on how corporate bigwigs directed their engineers to reverse course: Instead of continually making products better and more durable, engineers began to design them for inevitable destruction. What started with the simple light bulb soon became standard operating procedure for modern life, for everything from women's hosiery to electronic gadgets, with the results piled up in landfills here and abroad.

Voyage au bout de l'Hiver (*Journey to the End of Winter*) (filmmakers Anne and Erik Lapied) French wildlife cinematographers Anne and Erik Lapied spend a winter in the heart of the Gran Paradiso National Park, high in the Italian Alps, in the hopes of photographing elusive animals—chamois, ibexes, hares, eagles, foxes, lammergeiers and others. This disarming story about their unusual, humbling winter in the mountains is pure and poetic, but the poetry becomes dangerous and the mountains turn sinister when a huge snowstorm dumps meters on their small hamlet. As avalanches crash down around them, they continue to capture images of nature and show how the animals cope—or perish—during a harsh winter.

Waking the Green Tiger (filmmaker Betsy Carson) Seen through the eyes of activists, farmers and journalists, *Waking the Green Tiger* follows an extraordinary campaign to stop a huge dam project on the Upper Yangtze river in southwestern China. Featuring archival footage never seen outside China and interviews with a government insider and witnesses, this film also tells the history of Chairman Mao's campaigns to conquer nature in the name of progress. When a new environmental law is passed, an environmental movement takes root: For the first time in China's history, ordinary citizens have the democratic right to speak out and take part in government decisions. This film won a 2012 Grantham Award for Special Merit for environmental journalism and illustrates how film and journalism can bring about environmental change. fluent

Waking the Green Tiger (Photo Face to Face Media)

Meet the Playwright. . . Sean O'Leary

INTERVIEW BY BILL TCHAKIRIDES

This month, playwright Sean O'Leary's new play, WALT WHITMAN'S SECRET, had its premiere full production at the Full Circle Theater in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Sean spent some time talking with FLUENT's Bill Tchakirides about the play.

FLUENT: Sean, I believe this is the third time one of your plays has been produced by Full Circle Theater.

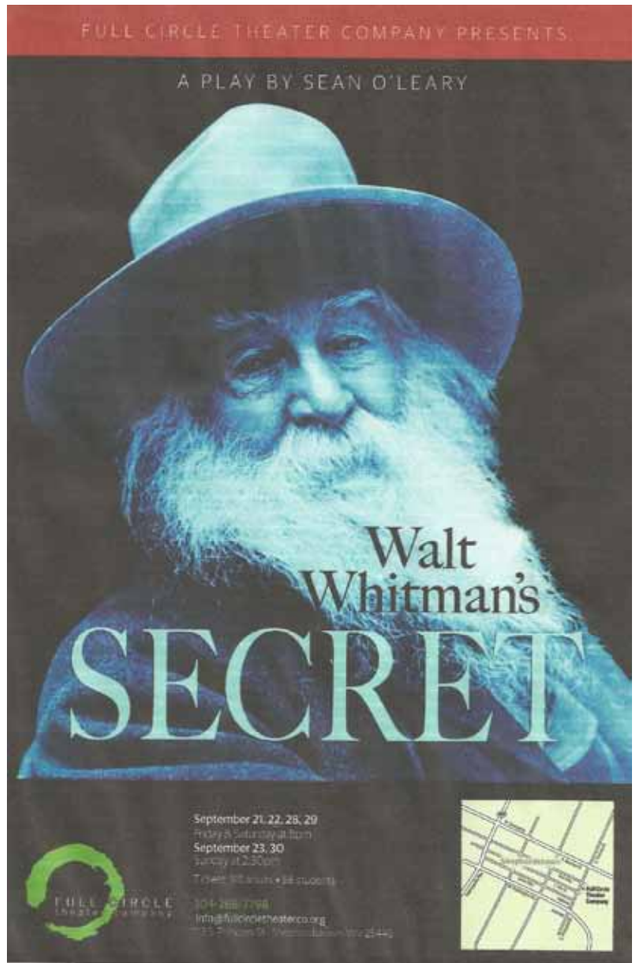
SEAN: Yes. Full Circle previously produced my play POUND, about the poet, Ezra Pound, and CLAUDIE HUKILL, a play set in the hollers of southern West Virginia. Both productions were very good... in fact, better than some the two plays have received from professional theaters. So, I was thrilled when the folks at Full Circle decided to take on WALT.

FLUENT: Can you give us a brief summary of the story of the play and what the audience can look forward to?

SEAN: The play, WALT WHITMAN'S SECRET, is based on the novel of the same name written by the Canadian novelist George Fetherling. The book rose to #6 on the Canadian best-seller list, but hasn't yet been published in the U.S. The play deals with many of the same themes, but also a few of its own, including the topic of love.

Walt Whitman wrote powerfully about love in all its manifestations. But, ironically, in his long life he never actually experienced what most of us would consider to be a fully realized love—one with a partner with whom he could be completely intimate, emotionally, physically and intellectually. The play, which is set near the end of Whitman's life, explores his struggle to come to terms with that disappointment as well as the growing realization that his creative powers had been in decline for sometime.

These issues are forced on Walt through his interaction with his personal assistant, the personal assistant's fiancé, and a past lover who is no longer physically present, but who keeps forcing his way into Whitman's mind. All four characters struggle in some degree with a problem I think many of us have grappled with: Is what I feel for this other person really love? Or do I just think what I feel is love and do I run the risk of mistakenly committing myself to a lifetime together and, by doing so, missing the chance to experience the real thing?



POSTER Peyton McMann

FLUENT: This play, like POUND, concerns an American writer. Is this a subject matter you like to return to?

SEAN: My knee-jerk response is to say no—the two plays have nothing to do with each other or with some fetish I might have about writers. But, then I consider that I've also written a play based on George Orwell, so maybe I do have a fascination with writers whether I want to admit it or not.

I suppose the thing I enjoy about writers as characters is that, because they write, perhaps they reflect more on life and its struggles than most of us do. It's as though they embody two characters—the people they would like to be or think of themselves as being and the people they actually are by virtue of their behavior. To me that's a profoundly interesting dichotomy that I suppose all of us exhibit. But, maybe it's a little more pronounced in writers.

FLUENT: While this is the first fully produced version of WALT WHITMAN, you had a staged reading in Somerset, NJ, last February. How did it go? Did it cause you to rewrite?

SEAN: I use readings of my plays specifically for the purpose of rewriting. One of the struggles of being a playwright as opposed to, say, a novelist, is that there are intermediaries—actors—between your work and the audience. And not surprisingly an actor's idea of the way in which characters should be portrayed often differs from my own. Of course, when I say it "differs" you have to understand that I'm trying to be polite and avoid saying what I really mean, which is that their interpretations are "wrong." Readings help me recognize flaws in the script that get in the way of actors and audiences being able to grasp the characters and plot.

FLUENT: There is so much Civil War history around this area. Do you think it will make a difference in the kind of audiences you get?

SEAN: It probably depends on whether people associate Whitman with the Civil War. As it happens, one of the play's primary plot twists involves a major event in the Civil War. I'll leave it at that because I don't want to give too much away.

Rehearsals for WALT WHITMAN'S SECRET at Full Circle Theater.

FLUENT: I always look forward to an evening of your plays. POUND and CLAUDIE HUKILL were both rewarding experiences. Is there anything that you are working on now that might be seen around here in the future?

SEAN: For those who haven't seen CLAUDIE HUKILL and don't mind driving an hour and a half, it will be produced by Venus Theater in Laurel, Maryland starting on the weekend following Thanksgiving and running until Christmas. Meanwhile, I'm just finishing a one-man play titled THE BOY IN THE BOX, which will receive a public reading this month at Towngate Theater in Wheeling.

THE BOY IN THE BOX is a pretty bizarre tale about a 102-year-old man who spent the first 15 years of his life confined by his mother in a box. Unfortunately, we won't be seeing it here anytime soon because Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, which is located in the southwest corner of the state, commissioned the script and holds the production rights. And they don't plan to produce it until 2014.

If I may, I'd also like to throw out a request to anyone who knows a theater that they think might like to produce a play that's set right here in Jefferson County. It's called VALU-MART, and it debuted to great reviews in 2010 at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater. I'd love to see it done locally, so if anyone has any pull with a theater in the neighborhood, please let me know. fluent

PHOTO John Bloomquist

Learning by Heart

BY GINNY FITE

I've always wanted to take long drives in the country on Sundays. I grew up in a city where grime was part of the landscape. I longed for clean, for space. The goal was to wind up at some quaint, out-of-the-way inn for an early dinner. Maybe catch a glimpse of cows and acres of plowed fields, spot an unusual house or drive through a town we've never seen before and stop to browse through its shops. It's probably a woman thing.

So now we do that. We've discovered towns named Clear Spring and Huyett and Flintstone, way out there in the country where you can't see homes from the highway without binoculars and the center of town is the local gas station–post office–general store all in one where two worn armchairs wait on the store porch for those slow times when no one is stopping by.

We drive past the Catoctin Mountains and out beyond Hagerstown. We drive where we don't know the names of things, certainly not the mountain ranges. We watch the valleys get deeper, and narrower as we go. We notice there's no dearth of trees. Lots of oxygen being made out there.

The mountains rise higher as we drive west, as if this part of the earth cut its teeth more fiercely, the rocky slabs of shale and sandstone jutting sharply upward to form the Appalachians. I wonder what this part of the earth looks like from the air, the tide of mountains frozen in the moment of crashing on the flat eastern coast like giant deep green waves.

We've taken this ride enough times now that my husband is starting to get into a rut. He likes ruts. Ruts are good, he says. We know where we're going to make a pit stop, where we can grab a quick soda to go, and where we're going to eat that early dinner just outside of Cumberland, five minutes from the destination of every week's drive.

If we stay on the highway, it takes us slightly more than two hours to get to the state-run Finan Center in Cumberland where the Jackson Unit is located. Our youngest son is there in the residential drug treatment program. We're allowed to see him once a weekend. We're allowed to call him one other time, for five minutes. He'll be there for 60 days.

On the day we're going out to see him, we just get up in the morning, get ready and get on the road. We don't talk much in the car, each of us lost in our own musings, trying to remember to say the right things to our kid, like: We love you, we think you're a good person who got confused, we want you to come home clean and sober.

But we don't know what will happen. We don't use the word relapse. We hold our breaths, clueless about the future. We're like the other parents who visit, groping for a lifeline to throw to our child so he can pull himself out of deep water.

I listen to our son talk. He's learning the treatment lingo. He's a quick study. I hope he's learning the words by heart. I am learning to listen with mine.

* * *

It began as subtly as light edging itself up over the horizon on a cloudless morning, the kind of light that bleaches the ocean to washed-out denim laid over the lumpy knees of the seabed. Those are hold-your-breath moments that even seagulls, crouched low in the sand, their white heads still tucked under a gray wing, respect. Seconds later, the first refracted rays of light will turn the sand and water pink and then the sun with surprising swiftness will wave its victorious morning flag across the sky and water.

In the first moments, it seems that anything can happen, really. It's only later that a sense of inexorability creeps in. The sun will rise higher, the sky will resume its variant of blue, the sea will turn viridian. Only cloud cover can transform this process to the colors of slate and dust. Yet beyond what the eye discerns, the sun and earth perform their clockwork ritual as predictably as they have for billions of years.

I have no proof, only this uncomfortable itching of my intuition.

It was like that when I found the first clue that something was wrong. That's how I put it to my husband. "Something is wrong," I said. "Something is not right."

It has been my mantra for five years.

This is not a good way to communicate with a man. They need information provided in a direct way, as, one plus one is two. Cassandra-like statements cause them great unease, as if sand had found its way into the very fabric of their skin as they sat on the beach. They squirm.

I know this, so I try to provide something concrete, something that will pass muster. "I think he's been in my room," I say. "I think he's been looking through my drawers. Things are slightly off."

It's not enough, not by a long shot. I have no proof, only this uncomfortable itching of my intuition. What was he looking for? That's the question in my mind.

I point to behavior I think is odd. He's in his room all the time. Why do we let him eat in there? I ask, knowing that I allow it, that long ago I lost the battle with our teenagers for family dinners, a time they think of as cursed, a covert war where politeness is stretched tight over teeth.

"He's staying home sick too often," I enumerate. "He doesn't do his homework. He's staying up too late and sleeping too late in the morning. His room is disgusting. It smells like something died in there." I go on and on until it sounds, even to me, as if I'm whining, as if I'm telling my husband he's to blame and should do something. I know I am banging away at the door to the cave when the "Do Not Disturb" sign is blinking crazily. I give up and walk away.

But this is the dawn, and we slept through it.

I examine telephone bills. They are too high, by hundreds of dollars. I notice that the same number is called over and over and over at one minute intervals late at night, the connection for one minute each time charged to us. I think, at first, the phone company's computer has a stutter. I point out the page after page of telephone data to my husband. "Whose number is this?" I ask. It's outside our area code, a long distance charge to the same number more than twenty-six times in one month. And it's not alone. There are other strings of calls to other out of area numbers, one after the other after the other.

My husband shrugs. "He's a kid. His friends are in the other areas."

He doesn't see anything eerie, obsessive, a compulsion to get in touch with someone, to find out something, and then to ask again, one minute later.

My proof has failed. But by now I know I can just wait. Something else will show up. As inexorable as this process is, just as inexorable is our awakening to it.

When our son was eleven, we used to joke that he was so desperate for a friend to sleep over, as our other sons so easily arranged, that come Friday night we would be trawling the neighborhood curbs looking for another kid who had nothing to do. Maybe we should have noticed then that something was wrong, should have paid attention to his desperation instead of making a joke out of it.

It seems to me the snooze alarm has been going off every ten minutes and we've just been slapping the bar to turn it off instead of waking up. When you wait until high noon to open your eyes, sometimes you can be blinded by the light.

* * *

We visited our youngest son last weekend. He seemed subdued. He avoids hugging us until he checks

out what snacks we've brought him. Then he tells us he is supposed to lead us through his "D'nA."

I wonder what he's talking about. I wonder if he means some genetic history. I wonder how he knows about this. Then he spells it out for me—parents can be so dumb.

He's talking about his drug and alcohol history, the complex double-helix of cause and effect, the twisted coil of genes, environment, experience, choices and outcomes that landed us in this in-patient treatment center. His D&A—the blueprint of his future unless that magical thing called healing happens.

He doesn't say any of this; it is what my mind, scurrying away from pain, distracts itself with.

We are escorted into a counseling room. I scan my surroundings and note the wallpaper border: fishing rods, tackle bags, lures. I wonder if the counselor likes to fish or does he think that this fishing theme is somehow relaxing? It is, at any rate, something to stare at when I cannot look at our earnest young son sitting next to me.

He starts to talk. He's calmly relating the first time he drank. He was seven. I feel my body go numb as it would if I were watching a tidal wave move in from the horizon. I am unable to move. I stare at the fishing rods on the wallpaper border.

I glance at my husband. He seems to be in the same state. We are waiting for the wall of grief to break over us. We say nothing. We saw the water move out, examined the barren coastline and ignored the inevitable.

We ask a few tentative questions, trying to test our memory against secrets we would rather not know, the "this-didn't-really-happen" questions. We ask questions, trying to get clarity on things we think we know. Some things we ask just to prevent him from telling us more than we want to know. We learn we are masters of denial.

But we feel anger also. We want to blame someone. I try to be civilized, but in my mind I am making a list of people to kill. I feel guilty. Where were we? Under what Everest-sized mountain of sand had we stuck our heads? No wonder we felt like we couldn't breathe.

In addiction, families imitate the three monkeys: Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. When you do that, evil wins. The only exorcism is to speak, to tell the truth.

It's like cancer treatment. You cut out the diseased part. You lay it under a microscope. You check for other places the rabid cells might have spread to.

Here, you lay the secrets out on the table, the secrets that are part of the disease, that feed it, spread it. You examine them.

We may have known this but somehow we didn't do it the right way before. We did it as blame, as "what on earth is wrong with you?"

Pain bundles in my chest like a sack of rocks the sharp edges of which have torn through the burlap.

I tell our son how I thought my job was to save him. How I tried to be vigilant, to figure out what he was doing and stop him before it happened, and how I failed, every time. Failed, big time. He was always way ahead of me, catapulting down painful pathways faster than I could reach out a hand.

Now, I tell him, I realize that I can't save him.

He looks at me, cautiously, out of the corners of his eyes, his head tilted downward. Emotion is a big risk. He looks down at his knees and back at me. Full in the face.

"I have to save myself," he tells me.

* * *

We made our last trip west to Cumberland last Sunday to pick up our son at the Jackson Unit.

We went early in the morning, and were on the road where fog, like rolled up bleached muslin batting, was stuffed between green mountain ridges.

As we passed each of the landmarks we'd discovered in the eight weeks of driving to the addiction treatment center for juveniles, we said, "That's the last time we'll see that place."

More hope than prophecy, it's an assertion that this treatment worked, that our son has made it through that dark fog of drugs and alcohol that ensnared him.

"We don't have to go down this road again," we said out loud, together, a magic formula like clicking the heels of our shoes and wishing for home.

We made a pit stop at Sideling Hill, the place where road construction ripped the cuticle off the earth's skin and exposed the raw flesh of eons long gone beneath.

The state has made it a tourist center, the destination of school trips about geology, a small park with wooden picnic tables that face a vista of lower mountain ridges. There were no other people. We gazed out at the verdant slopes poking up through a mist that looked like the white froth that tumbles up on a beach. We seemed to be the first man and woman in the time when trilobytes made their small impressions in the rock.

We were at the Finan Center by 8:30 a.m. Our son was already pacing the hallway, his bags packed, his goodbyes said. We had a last talk with his counselor—a man to whom I will always be indebted—and signed the contract made with our son that is intended to help him through the transition from the complete safety of the center to freedom, the place where dangers lurk.

In the car, driving down the long driveway away from the center, our son said it was odd, but he would miss that place. I heard the catch in his voice.

He talked to us about what he might do with his life, a conversation we've been yearning for, a plan that leads him out of childhood and into the adventure of his life. Like all parents, we're convinced he could do anything if he just worked at it. It seemed he didn't know that.

When we got him home he went straight to his room to make himself at home. Our other sons started checking in, in person or by phone. After each conversation with him they would tell me how changed he was, how engaging, how awake, how present. "Was he always this way and the drugs obscured it, or was he different?" they wanted to know. It had been so long, they couldn't remember.

A little of both, I thought, looking into his eyes, seeing how clear they were and discovering, with a start, that they were green, the green of spring moss, of new grass shoots, of the sturdy stems that hold up daffodils. They are his father's eyes.

At the dinner table eight people passed around the oval aluminum platter containing grilled steaks, the bowls of steamed yellow squash and corn on the cob, the basket of bread, the huge black salad bowl. Our youngest, always the first to dig in before, sat back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest.

"The blessing?" he mouthed to me.

I nodded yes, we would say the blessing. He asked if he could do it. His father, that catch now in his voice, said yes.

And our youngest son thanked God for helping him through his treatment and asked His blessing on all the people who had been there for him at JU, and then he paused, his voice a little quieter, a little less self-assured, and said, "and thank you, God, for allowing me to be back with my family."

* * *

We have a bumper sticker on our van.

OK, no big news for most folks. But for all these years we've avoided telling people we want to save whales, human beings or the planet, that we love our pets, chant OM for happiness, prefer peace (mine) or war (his), know Who's in the pilot's seat, or that we cherish the first amendment to the Constitution.

Our policy has been clear: No glue on the vehicle.

So what brings us to finally using the back of a car as our billboard on the world? What could we possibly be so passionate about that we'd break our own rule?

Our kid passed the written part of his driver's license test. Now he can get behind the steering wheel and put his foot down on the gas as long as an adult driver is in the car. The sticker says "Rookie Driver." It's yellow and black. You can read it from 50 feet away. And it's magnetic. We can put it on any vehicle he drives.

We love it. He hates it. We say it'll keep other drivers away. He says he doesn't want anyone to know he's a new driver. It's embarrassing. This is about face for him. For us, it's about safety. It's our car; we win.

He has already forgotten that driving is a privilege we withheld for two years, that allowing him to get this license is our way of walking out on the trust planks into the future.

Trusting him with a car is like putting money into a market where the value of stocks daily imitates a steep, and nauseating, roller coaster ride. You don't know if you're going to crash and burn or come up even. It leaves you breathless.

I try to imagine him on the road, signaling when he's supposed to, coming to slow stops, pulling out of intersections without squealing the tires or whiplashing his passengers, avoiding trees, electric poles, jersey barriers, pedestrians, obeying the law. It's an exercise of will, the kind of guided imagery coaches advise Olympic athletes to do, but second hand.

This is the deep breath all parents take and don't exhale for years. We're not alone in this. But there's an added edge for me. I won't know where he is. I won't know what he's doing. I won't know who he's with. I won't know if he's hooked in and hooked up and using again. Until it's too late.

I live on the boundaries of anxiety as if it were a town I never want to visit but can't help noticing is there. My path goes by it every day.

And if his exuberance is any clue, he's not thinking about what a huge responsibility driving is.

He's already zipped by the thank you part. He's zoomed on to figuring out how to check out his hair, turn up the quadra-sound, and sweet talk some unnamed girl all at the same time. I guess the other hand goes on the wheel.

Gives me the willies. The potential here for mother-upset is high. My fuse is short and his eagerness to get out on the road alone is enough friction to light the fire.

My husband reassures me that whatever vehicle — old, beat up, slow, I'm hoping — he buys for the kid, it'll be completely covered by insurance. Four older sons, nine used vehicles wiser, I know what needs to be protected is not our pocketbook. Buying another 10-year-old wreck is the easy part.

Once we — and the state — give him the seemingly unlimited freedom of access to the road to anywhere, how will he behave? Will he learn about responsibility the hard way, the way he does everything, or will the enormity of someone else's life at stake — another human being in the sights at the end of that petroleum-powered barrel — keep him awake at the wheel?

It's a question that isn't on the test.

* * *

I waited for our youngest son to relapse. This was either a failure of will or horrible prescience.

It's like waiting for hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, tidal waves. I don't want it to happen, I'm terrified in advance, I don't think it can be avoided. And I'm helpless to stop it.

If you live in the region where natural disasters occur, there's a reasonable expectation you're going to go through one. You buy hurricane lamps, reinforce the walls, buy insurance, but no amount of preparation can really make you ready for the moment when the wind growls and the roof lifts off your house.

You live on hope that when the flood moves through your town, rocks houses off their foundations, and leaves behind seven feet of silt and garbage in the living room, somehow you won't get hit.

But you know from experience that near misses don't happen to you.

My husband is more sanguine, or blind. He reads the lab reports and tells me there are no drugs in our kid's system. That is the fact. It is a momentary relief. Then I wonder whose urine he's using.

My husband tells me that if relapses were viewed as the end of life, no one would ever recover. I see his lips moving, I understand the words, but something in me wants to run and hide in the cellar.

The problem is, my expectation is that our son will slip back into the murky world of drug use where up means down and promises mean nothing.

In that world where addiction is stronger than any family tie, using dope, hooking up, is not a disease but a brotherhood and the disintegration of character and body is the flag of that alliance.

I live on the boundaries of anxiety as if it were a town I never want to visit but can't help noticing is

there. My path goes by it every day. "If you lived here," the sign reads, "you'd be home now." That's my fear.

I suspect everything. If a glass isn't where I left it, if the television clicker is in a different spot than I remember, if the blinds are closed in the dining room when I return home, I'm uneasy. I go looking for answers, the Sherlock Holmes of the mothers of drug addicted kids.

I ask questions. I try to be calm, not to leap to conclusions before I have some facts. I put information together, but I'm a great leaper. Connect a to b to c and I'm at the rest of the alphabet before you can say soup.

Something he says, the way his head is tilted when he says it, what his eyes are looking at — nothing, that middle distance where no one lives — cause me to remember the moment. Later, I put that moment together with another. I'm a collector of moments that trigger rushes of adrenalin. It is exhausting.

Our son rails against my not trusting him.

I don't. It will take a long time, I explain. Stick to our contract, I plead. The littlest wrong turn, the smallest infraction can provide excuses for larger betrayals. Don't go that way, I whisper.

He says I'm making a mountain out of a molehill. My husband sits there with his head in his hands. I feel like the bad guy, but I've been here before and I was right, every time.

"I will never be recovered," our youngest explains to me.

I wince. I don't want to believe this. I think of it as a way out of accountability for his actions. I have not been properly brainwashed: I don't think relapses are acceptable. I think of the harm they cause, the bewilderment, the confusion, the heartache. I cannot find a way to communicate this.

I watch the sky of our relationship for clues, check the shape and color of clouds, notice the height of tides. I have become a meteorologist of lies. I can tell by the way they move across my horizon that a storm is coming.

* * *

Remember when they used to put photographs of missing children on milk cartons? I haven't seen one in a long time because we buy our milk in those plastic jugs.

But I can see the image in my mind, the large dark eyes, the silky hair, the perfect skin of a child seven or younger imbedded in the wax of the milk carton.

Sometimes the photo would make me uncomfortable, as if that child were watching me as I ate my cereal, accusing me of apathy, and I would turn the carton around.

Sometimes I would read the description. Mary Ellen Rice, 7, it might say, disappeared from her Boise, Idaho home on Aug. 8, 1978. She was wearing a brown sweater, white t-shirt, jeans and red sneakers. Anyone seeing her, please call this number.

Except, I would realize with a start, that it was now 1990 and that seven year old would be 19 and look nothing like this photo. Maybe this was the last photo her mother had of her before she disappeared into thin air. Maybe this child would always be 7 for her mother, suspended for all time at the age of innocence.

Maybe, I would think, this was a last ditch effort to contact the child herself, to say come home, if you can, if you remember us. We, always, will remember you.

I'm thinking of this because our youngest son has disappeared. He took the 1988 silver Toyota Corolla his father bought him the week before, took the $100 in cash he earned for painting the shed light yellow, took his one-day-old driver's license, took his clothes, his bulletin board, his sheets and blankets, his television and stereo, and left us a note on the counter in the kitchen saying good-bye.

He was leaving to find his purpose, he said in the note.

We spent two days in shock.

We waited for a hospital to call, for a nurse to say, "We have your son here and need permission to treat him."

On the third day, my husband reported him missing. Then we waited for the police to call, to say, "We have your son here; we're charging him with possession."

We called relatives in California. We called our other sons. We talked to our preacher, to the elders in our church. We said to everyone, if he comes there, hold onto him, and call us.

No one called.

We moved from shock to anger. We are not allowing ourselves pain. We try to talk calmly about our options. It occurred to me a few days ago that we have none. I'm trying to think of this episode in our lives as a teaching tool. What, I ask myself, does God want me to learn? Maybe, that we have no control over anything.

Last night, I looked up the prodigal son story. It's a pretty good match, except for the ending, which we haven't had yet. I hope when the ending comes, I will have learned what I'm supposed to.

A few times last week, I thought I saw him out of the corner of my eye as I drove through town. I try to think what I would do if I found him. For sure, I can't just pick him up and put him in my car. He's not seven anymore.

I listened from the kitchen when my husband softly gave the police a description. Our son is five-foot, ten inches tall, about 185 pounds; he has short, black hair, hazel eyes. And perfect white teeth, I thought, and he likes to wear vests because he thinks that's stylin' and he has a gift for telling stories like you wouldn't believe.

If you see him, please call this number. fluent

Paintings by Ginny Fite

Scents & Sensibility

BY SHEPHERD OGDEN

Summer's End: Something about the decline of the season drives us to linger and look, to examine things we might otherwise simply accept, even rejoice in. For me, one of those things, especially in the soft cool evenings of late summer, is the fragrance of Moonflowers (*Ipomoea alba*). This night-blooming cousin of the Morning Glory unfurls its blossoms at dusk to call out to night foraging moths, which locate flowers more by scent than by color.

Yesterday, I was sitting in the garden arbor as night fell and the Moonflowers began to unfurl. But did I sit back and enjoy it? No. What occurred to me in a sudden bout of Baconian insolence was to determine the source of the prodigious fragrance. I plucked the blossom and touched it to the end of my nose. The fragrance was there, though less dense, less immersive than that floating on the dusk-risen breeze. I had expected the fragrance to be stronger up close, to overwhelm me the way chewing ten pieces of bubble gum used to when I was a kid. I was underwhelmed.

I thought about this as the evening deepened and the surrounding scent became stronger. Maybe when I sniffed it, I hadn't put the proper part of the flower to my nose. It was too dark to see clearly, so I picked a flower and reluctantly took it inside. I decided to be systematic: I ran my nose along the edge of the bloom, as far as possible from the throat. Once picked, it had begun to go limp. It was now cool to the touch and moist... and not at all fragrant.

That eliminated the petals as the source of the scent, so I removed them, exposing the anthers and the stamens. I pressed them close to my nose, but there was only the faintest fragrance. I went out to my shop and selected the thinnest Xacto knife, determined to locate, by dissection if necessary, the source of my pleasure. I sliced and diced the flower, like a physicist turning up the supercollider to cleave ever further into the heart of the universe, sure I would eventually find it.

No luck.

I surveyed the Moonflower's mangled corpse on the counter. I sniffed each of the parts again, more closely, more delicately. Where was it hiding? The only fragrance, now just beginning, was the light, rank odor of disintegration.

I went back to the arbor and sat quietly in the chair, giving my baffled mind a chance to relax. The scent of more opened Moonflowers settled in all around me. After a few moments, I rolled off the chair to my knees and followed the scent to one of the open blossoms. The fragrance was very strong all around, yet right at the throat it was, once again, a mere vapor.

I leaned back on my haunches and a new idea came to me: "there is no there there." That is, no part of the plant is the source of the fragrance. Scholars would call the fragrance of the Moonflower an "emergent phenomena" that occurs when the assemblage of parts (the necessary parts, and just the necessary parts) come together in the right place (my arbor) at just the right time (dusk), driven by what poets call "the green fuse" and philosophers term "conatus."

I would offer that culture, and the unique character of a place, are emergent properties of a particular time, a particular place and a particular past. We are immersed in it, but if we look too close, we lose what is essential to the experience of it. fluent

Photos Shepherd Ogden

Show, Don't Tell

BY GINNY FITE

What is a community? What does it look like? How would you know if you saw it? Can you answer these questions without saying a word?

For three years under the direction of local photographer Benita Keller, dozens of photographers have been answering those questions, capturing in hundreds of photographs the people, places, events and landscapes that are Jefferson County. They are participants in The Jefferson County Photography Project, supported by the Arts and Humanities Alliance of Jefferson County (AHA!) and the West Virginia Commission on the Arts.

A far cry from the shoot from the hip, digital phone approach, photographers in The Jefferson County Photography Project took their images using Kodak Tri-X black-and-white film and made silver prints in a traditional darkroom.

They took photos that interested them, in response to their own vision, in their own style. They saw the world around them in their own way and worked to interpret what they saw in front of them. The community they have depicted in the resulting photography collection is funny, warm-hearted, moving, connected, unique and breath-taking.

Beginning October 6 at The Bridge Gallery, The Jefferson County Photography Project will exhibit photos its members have taken of Shepherdstown, in honor of the town's 250th anniversary. Copies of the limited first-edition book *The Jefferson County Photography Project* will be available for the first time at the opening. The book has photographs representing photographers from Projects 1, 2 and 3.

Artists in the show include Krista Healy, Deborah Westphal, Carl Schultz, Stephan Schaefer, Sue Silver, Heidi Geraci, Kristian Thacker, Amanda Hamlin and Benita Keller. fluent

The Jefferson County Photography Project

The Bridge Gallery
8566 Shepherdstown Pike
Shepherdstown, WVa

Showing Oct 6–Oct 28

Opening Reception
Sat, Oct 6, 5:30–7:30 pm

"Hat and child" by Sue Silver

CODA

"It struck me as a beautiful thing to see on an otherwise cold surface in the city," said Andy Segrist, a Portland, Oregon resident, about the collection of photos he took with his iPhone. The poems — short lines of text 50 characters or less — are part of "Impressed Concrete," phase two of "Orange Lining," a public art project centered around the Portland–Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project under construction. The lines are stamped into freshly laid concrete sidewalks by the same masons who are building the streets and walkways along the 7.3-mile length of the light rail alignment, which has 121 proposed locations for poems. www.orangelining.net