



Writing
from the Center

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Vol. 2



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Writing from the Center is the official literary journal of Kansas Authors Club, the oldest Writing Club in Kansas.

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Volume 2 Theme: Friendship

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Table of Contents

An Imperfect Fit	Tammy Hader	3
Pete's Best Friend	Curtis Becker	6
[what is love...]	Kevin Rabas	9
[for Words Save Lives]	Kevin Rabas	10
Bosom Friends	Julie A. Sellers	11
Love, Agnes	Julie A. Sellers	12
Mutual Orbit	Roni Fent	13
Kansas City Barbecue Tour	Chuck Warner	14
A Cavalaire	Julie A. Selllers	16
Friends	Barbara Waterman-Peters	17
Friday Night Fix It	Beth Gulley	18
Saving You	Julie Ann Baker Brin	19
Irene with Cello at Peabody...	Kevin Rabas	20
Friends Like These	Lindsey Bartlett	21
Grocery Stories	Roger Heineken	23
Little Cowboys	F. C. Appelhanz	28
Old Friends	Julie A. Sellers	29
Forgotton Paths	Julie A. Sellers	30
Dog at the Front Door	Julie A. Sellers	31
The Card Players	Barbara Waterman-Peters	32
[another chance]	Kevin Rabas	33
[friend sketches]	Kevin Rabas	34
[friend sketches, again]	Kevin Rabas	35
[the clothes]	Kevin Rabas	36
Anamilia Homage	Barbara Waterman-Peters	37
The Building	Margaret McKay	38
Words on the Wind	Julie A. Sellers	40
Light Among the Ruins	Arlice W. Davenport	43
My Strength	Fred C. Appelhanz	44
Clouded	Julie Ann Baker Brin	45
To Work or Rest	Arlice W. Davenport	46
Canine Companions	Julie Ann Baker Brin	47
Julie's Passion	Debra A. Irsik	48
Forever a Memory	Debra A. Irsik	50
Fizzle	Julie Ann Baker Brin	52
Frenemy	Julie Ann Baker Brin	53
Land Escape	Julie Ann Baker Brin	54
Subtracting Division	Roni Fent	55
A Prarie Ride	Sandra Lou Taylor	56
bat & armadillo	Ashley Clayton Kay	61
To Ann	Brenda White	62
Only Child on a Teeter Totter	Boyd Bauman	64
Jackie	Debra A. Irsik	66
Talking and Listening	Madeline Male	67
Riding' Tall	Mark Sheel	68
Party in the Pasture	Linda Ahrens Brown	70

Haiku	Linda Ahrens Brown	73
Bluegrass Heaven	Linda Ahrens Brown	74
The Event Planners	Barbara Waterman-Peters	75
Writing Friends are a Blessing	Nancy Julian Kopp	76

Friendship

An Imperfect Fit

Tammy Hader

Creative Nonfiction

I heard from Sarah today. She says she wouldn't miss my upcoming book signing. We'll see if Facebook comments turn into reality. Stamping the label of friendship on what Sarah and I were to each other was complicated. Leaning against the kitchen counter, I pondered our imperfect fit and watched the can opener's blade slice through the top of the circling can of green beans. The steady whir drowned out the mundane task of dinner prep and the evening news report. Too bad I hadn't asked Sarah's mom for her green bean recipe. It had been over forty years since I had eaten dinner there. I could still picture it, a bowl of green beans mingling with diced tomatoes, but my tongue couldn't remember the exact flavors. My God, had it really been over forty years? I double checked the math.

Sarah and I started high school together after our families moved to Udall in the summer of 1978. We had little else in common, except that we both had straight hair. Hers was black, mine was reddish-brown. Sarah lived on a few acres out in the country with her parents, one brother, and some horses. I don't know how many horses she had. At least two, because she invited me out to ride once. Sarah was stronger than me. I don't mean she could do more pushups in gym class than me. Okay, she could do more pushups than me. Saddling up horses and tossing around hay bales developed Sarah's muscles; turning pages in a book and playing the piano had no impact on my biceps. What I mean is she felt no need to apologize for who she was.

Sarah and I were both soft spoken. That was another item for the Things in Common list. Fear didn't motivate Sarah's quietness like it did mine. I guess that would make it more of a Things Almost in Common. Determination to conquer my fears drew me to strong people like Sarah. Our

paths crossed many times in the school's single hallway lined with red metal lockers. By the time sophomore year started, we had found our place among opposite groups of peers. We admitted our differences, but what little we had in common was enough to create a subtle bond.

"Do you want to come over to my house this weekend and ride horses with me?" Sarah asked amid the hum of teenage conversations and the sporadic clang of locker doors.

"I've never ridden a horse before. Are you sure you want me to ride with you?" I liked to warn people of my shortcomings.

"I can teach you how to ride. It's easy, and it's fun. You should come out and try it."

"Okay, sure. Why not." Trust wasn't easy for me, but my gut told me Sarah would take care of me. Besides, it couldn't be harder than learning how to water ski. I had semi-conquered my fear of the water world during the previous summer.

I hoped sitting on a horse wouldn't feel like perching on the edge of Uncle Charles' boat in Cheney Lake as the whitecaps slapped against the hull and rocked us in a way not rhythmic enough to be soothing. Everyone in the boat, except for Uncle Charles, reassured me that the water would only be cold when I first jumped in, and then my body would adapt. They misunderstood my fear. The water and creatures living in the water freaked me out, not the temperature. I hid my fears well and focused on Uncle Charles. He hid fears well, too. I knew Uncle Charles survived a prisoner of war camp in World War II, but I didn't know the depth of what that meant. None of us did. Uncle Charles never, and I mean never, talked about the horrible experience that forged his steely demeanor. His soft-spoken voice commanded attention as if what he had to say held life in the balance, and I trusted every syllable. He told me what was necessary to complete the mission. The temperature of the water did not come up.

I held a deep breath and slid into the unknown. I positioned my skis like Uncle Charles said to do and grabbed the rope. He watched me wobble about as I got acquainted with the water's resistance against the skis. When he decided I was ready, the boat accelerated. I popped out of the water and glided on top of my fears. Sweet relief! After repeating the popping up and falling down scenario a few times, I climbed into the boat for pats on the back. Everyone told me I was a natural borne skier except Uncle Charles. We looked at each other and understood success came from the desire to overcome unspoken fear.

Like I said, there was no way horseback riding could be scarier than jumping into murky water that housed God knows what. I trusted Sarah and drove out to her house on Saturday morning. At school, Sarah was free spirited, not a fan of organizations or structure. My high school resume included captain of the drill team, charter member of the National Honor Society, Future Homemakers of America council member, and medal winner at the annual statewide math relays. Sarah's involvement in school did not extend beyond the classroom. Horses required a discipline contradictory to the Sarah I knew. During my riding lesson, she explained and performed her responsibilities to perfection. Her respect for equine rules lifted a weight I didn't even know I carried.

I learned how to saddle up the horse and use the stirrup and the horn to pull myself up to the seat. Next was a lesson on proper positioning of the reins and the basics of communicating between horse and rider. How to start walking, turn left then right, and how to stop. Trotting came next. I told Sarah the pounding gait of trotting must be what it feels like to get kicked in the nuts. She laughed and moved on to running. How do I describe running? Terrifying, exhilarating, less painful than trotting, soaring on top of the water ... freedom.

"That was amazing!" I proclaimed through quickened breaths and a racing pulse.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it. See, I told you it would be fun. Let's walk them back to the barn and I'll show you what we do after a ride."

"Yeah, okay." I had no idea what that part of the horse-riding manual looked like, but I fol-

lowed Sarah's lead without question.

Sarah never came to my house. I didn't have anything cool to do like riding horses. I don't know why I never went back to her house, other than the gap between us widened during our junior year. I became more entrenched in school activities that looked good on college applications and Sarah's interests grew in the opposite direction. We talked in the hallways and in classrooms. If she came to football or basketball games, I would sit and chat with her before my shift at the concession stand or until time to perform in the halftime show.

One afternoon, I saw Sarah in front of the school and waved to her as my friends and I walked back from lunch at the cafegymitorium. She waved back, motioned for her friends to go on without her, and waited for me to cross the street. I stopped and my friends continued without me. "Hey, I'm going over behind the church with some friends for the rest of the lunch break. Do you want to come with me?" She asked.

I shook my head. "No thanks. I'm going to hangout with some people inside. You're welcome to join us if you like."

"I don't think so, but thanks for asking. I'll catch you later."

I didn't know exactly what happened behind the church, but rumor had it that her friends dabbled in cigarettes and drugs. I didn't see the benefit of either. I fancied myself a positive role model for Sarah. How arrogant of me to think my path was better than hers. I wanted her to turn away from the back alley and come with me, but if she had then she wouldn't have been Sarah.

Junior year was our last together. Sarah transferred to a school for troubled teens, and we lost touch for a while. I gave the valedictorian speech for the Class of 1982 and moved on to college life. I didn't worry about Sarah. She walked a path different from mine, but she would be fine. She was stronger than me and I had no doubt she knew what she was doing. Eventually she went to junior college, got a job, married a great guy, and raised cats, dogs, and horses. I've never asked how many horses she has.

Decades passed and we reconnected on Facebook. Sarah was still Sarah with her straight dark

hair and confident smile. I suspected she could still do more pushups than me. We met for drinks at a downtown pub, and I penciled craft beer into the Things We Have in Common list. Caring for aging parents landed there as well. I thought about adding maturity, but that seemed presumptuous.

“Hey, do you remember the time I came out to your house, and you taught me how to ride a horse?”

“Of course, I remember that.”

“Your mom fixed lunch for us that day and I loved her green beans. They had tomatoes and some kind of seasoning. Do you know what I’m talking about?” I crossed my fingers she would grant me access to a special family recipe.

“I don’t remember the green beans. Sorry. I didn’t pay much attention to Mom’s cooking back then.” She shook her head and laughed at my unexpected line of questioning.

“That’s okay.” I shrugged off the memory and took another sip of amber ale.

Sarah and I didn’t make plans to go shopping or suggest vacationing together. We didn’t exchange phone numbers with the intention of calling or texting on a regular basis. Our commonalities did not meet the standard requirements for BFFs. We shared a few laughs and finished our beers. It was good to see her again. I walked away with ease, content with Sarah staying true to Sarah, and me staying true to me. We had respected that distinction from teenage acne to the precipice of age spots. That was the way it should be.

A few years later, I sat at my book signing table in the local library. I hoped someone besides Mom and my husband would show up. A couple of patrons walked by without stopping. Then I saw a woman with straight, dark hair open the library door and I recognized Sarah’s gait. She carried my book in the crook of her arm and waved.

“There’s my famous author friend! Would you mind signing my book? I’ve enjoyed reading it. I had no idea you were so deep.” She smiled and chuckled.

“I had no idea you were such a comedian either. Hand it over.” I signed the book and gave it back to her. We talked as if years hadn’t gone by.

“I appreciate you taking time out of your day for me.”

“No problem. I’m happy to be here.” Her kind gesture didn’t surprise me. I trusted her to take care of me.

I hoped I would see her again, but I knew there were no guarantees. I packed up my books at the end of the event and carried the box to my car. I walked a little taller knowing I had semi-conquered my fear of book signings. I closed the trunk and decided I would see Sarah again. Our subtle bond has always connected us no matter our differences. That is the way it should be. When I get home, I should Google seasoned green beans with diced tomatoes.

I call my relationship with Sarah a friendship though the label has an imperfect fit.

Pete's Best Friend

Curtis Becker

Fiction

I didn't really have time to think about it; we were flying down the road in the blinding sun before I even buckled my seat belt or caught my breath. The air rushing in from the open window felt good as it cooled me down and dried my sweat-soaked hair. I had been jogging down the sidewalk at Washburn University where I went to school. I was majoring in English and wanted to be an author; another paper was due tomorrow. The life of an English major.

Pete pulled up in his baby, his 1970 Monte Carlo SS 454, painted a brilliant, non-stock orange and yelled, "get in! I need you!"

You shouldn't even question your best friend if he does this, because he's your best friend. I must admit I did. Pete and I had never really been the types to share a lot of words or feelings. We mostly used actions to let the other know that we were best friends. He was loyal to me, and I would be loyal to him. That was the reason I went. I didn't even ask where we were going; perhaps, I should have. We drove north on McVicar from campus and were soon on I-70 heading west into the sunset. I still remember the first day I met him. I thought his car was super cool, but soon found he was even cooler.

Pete was always super cool and confident in my eyes, but that's really not how we become best friends. Living together in the dorm during freshman year had a bit to do with it, too. Two years ago, 1992, we both arrived on campus not sure what we were supposed to be doing and were randomly assigned to the same room. It was during this time that I got to know the real Pete. Behind the façade he projected, Pete was actually a bit shy and scared. I learned this early on in the fall when he was dealing with a financial aid problem.

"You should just go over and talk to them." I was not afraid to tell him what to do, even back

then.

"Maybe I should wait and see if it shows up." Pete hesitated, "In my account."

"If you go over and talk to them, you can stop pacing around here with your jaw clenched." I didn't have to say more; Pete was ready to go. I tagged along for moral support.

The blinding sun soon gave way to darkness. As always, Pete didn't have much to say. My attempts to figure out what we were doing were met with "just trust me."

I did manage to get him to admit that we were going to be gone for a couple of days, but he wouldn't say where we were going. I wish he had given me a chance to pack a bag; I felt fairly gross in the clothes I wore for my run. When Pete stopped to pee at a rest stop, I used the pay phone to call my current roommate, Tommy, and let him know I'd be gone for a couple of days. Tommy promised to feed my cat Oscar until I returned. After Pete, Oscar was probably my best friend.

I stood by the car waiting for Pete and watched the people coming and going. The air was turning crisp, and I was wishing I had a jacket. Pete's hand was on my shoulder before I knew it, and he shared even more details. His mom was in some sort of trouble, and he needed me to come with him to help her. I couldn't see his face, but somehow, I could sense the hot tears that had been welling up under his sunglasses all day. I suspected he had been in the bathroom wiping his eyes. Pete was a guy who rarely showed emotion, and I was worried. I probably should have demanded to know more or for us to turn around, but it was Pete, my Pete, my best friend. I kind of suspected the part about his mom was a bit of a lie; I don't know why, but maybe it was his body language or tone of voice. Regardless, something was wrong. This was not the first time we had gone off on some kind of crazy adventure without much notice. One time, Pete decided he wanted to go to

Oklahoma, because we had never been there.

After a few miles on the interstate, Pete shouted, "Let's take back roads!"

He was already on State Highway 99 before I could register an objection. That trip was fun and not full of the tension of mystery I was feeling from our current trip.

After the break at the rest stop and my call to Tommy, I slept. It was easy as the sound of the tires lulled me to sleep. I woke up chilled and Pete loaned me a jacket from his back seat that I was able to use as a blanket. The next thing I knew, the sun had made a triumphant return and was once again shining in my eyes. I rubbed the sleep out of them and tried to get my bearings. The car was parked in the parking lot of a McDonald's in a truck stop sort of a town somewhere on the high plains of Colorado. I figured out the Colorado part later; however, there wasn't a mountain in sight. Pete returned to the car with a sack of food and coffee. I don't know which smelled better, the coffee or the food. He had also found me some toiletries and a fresh shirt that said, "My friends went to Colorado, and all they brought me was this lousy T-Shirt." The unmistakably sweet smell of my favorite, a sausage McGiddle and hash brown grabbed my nose and pulled my hand into the sack of food. I attacked his offering of food ravenously. The coffee burned the roof of my mouth; I usually use lots of cream and sugar, but Pete hadn't grabbed any of that. It honestly tasted like dirt, but the scalding nature and horrible flavor were waking me up. My stiff neck was protesting the sleep I had enjoyed in the front seat.

Early on in our friendship, I realized that this man of few words was a kind, sweet soul. He projected an image of this cool, confident guy that was a bit of an act. We planned to go on a double date during the first month we were in school. We met Mandi and Michelle at Skinny's the week before. When I woke up sick, I reluctantly broke my date with Michelle and told Pete. It was not too long after that, Pete showed up at the door to my room with soup, crackers, oranges, Kleenexes, and Nyquil.

"This is what my mom does when I'm sick." Is all he said before he walked out.

After that, I talked to Pete's mom on the phone

a few times, but we had never met in person. She was just this disembodied voice that was somewhere in Nebraska.

After breakfast in the car, Pete and I headed north; shortly after lunch we were in Pete's childhood home, down a gravel road, somewhere in the Nebraska panhandle.

Pete's mom was almost as cool as her son. She called me James instead of my preferred Jim but that actually seemed ok. That's what my mom did. She fussed over Pete's friend and fed me well. I tried to be formal in my address of her, but she insisted I call her Carol or mom. She gushed over meeting Pete's best friend in the flesh. By 2:00 I had showered and was wearing my new shirt and some of Pete's old clothes while mine were tumbling in the washing machine.

It was Pete's turn in the shower, and Carol and I had a chance to talk alone. I was just blunt and asked Carol why we were here. She seemed horrified that I didn't know and started talking in hushed tones. She was even more embarrassed when she found out that her son had tried to lead me to believe we were there to help her. I was glad that she wasn't sick or anything and didn't need anything. It was actually Pete that needed something. She explained everything through tears, blessed me for being there, and hugged me several times.

I completely understood what Pete was going through, but I was a bit annoyed at the spontaneous nature of our trip. I would have liked the opportunity to have at least brought my toothbrush and some clean underwear.

"So, your mom is ok?" I hit him with that as he was walking out of the bathroom. He hesitated. "Yes, but I really needed you. I didn't think you would come."

"You practically kidnapped me and just to come put your dog down?"

I was quite irritated and raising my voice; some might even say yelling. "I missed class for this!"

Pete tried to move past me, but the narrow hallway made that difficult. I shifted to block his path. He used my shoulders to push me into the wall and disappeared into his room.

"This isn't over, Pete!"

I waited for a moment for him to reemerge, but the door remained closed. Finally, I barged in to see him sitting on the bed holding a picture of his dog, Duke, a beautiful golden retriever. He was crying. I instantly felt horrible and apologized. He did, too.

I went back into the kitchen to give him some space. I looked at Carol.

“Ok, I’m going. Do you want to drive or ride with us?”

She smiled. “It’s so nice of you to think about including me, but I said my “goodbyes” yesterday when we took Duke to the vet. The only reason we didn’t put him to sleep then is that we wanted to give Pete a chance to get here to say ‘goodbye.’ After all, Duke was his best friend.”

I considered what she said, but didn’t know what to say.

“Duke has an aggressive form of cancer; when we decided it was time to put him to sleep, Peter wasn’t going to come. Then yesterday he changed his mind and asked us to postpone for twenty-four hours.” She paused and continued in almost a whisper “The mantle is now passing to you; Peter needs a new best friend. You’re a good boy, James. Thank you.”

She kissed me lightly on the cheek.

After we changed back into the clothes we showed up in, we headed out. Carol waved as we kicked up dust and disappeared down the road headed for a town called Scottsbluff. It was in town that we were to do what we drove all of this way for.

When we walked in to the vet’s clinic, Sarah at the front desk, a pretty girl with lots of lipstick, dark black hair, and green scrubs, immediately recognized Pete and ushered him back to a patient room. I was hoping to stay in the waiting room, but he grabbed my arm. The room was cold and sterile with light green tiles on the wall and large white tiles with flecks on the floor. Duke was there on a table; his respiration seemed labored. He appeared to have no energy. Pete let go of my arm and sprinted the last few feet to his friend.

Pete spoke lovingly to Duke, petted and hugged him. He gave him kisses on the top of his head. When it was time for the procedure, Pete held him. I felt so awkward and out of place, but I put my hand on Pete’s shoulder so he would know I

was there. Pete was bawling, and I was having a hard time staying stoic. We stayed that way until Duke crossed over the Rainbow Bridge. Pete kissed him one last time on the top of the head, and we headed back to Kansas. On that drive we didn’t talk about what happened; After about an hour, Pete was acting like his old self. I was sure he was still hurting inside, but I think he was relieved to have been able to make the trip. I am certainly glad I went.

When I got home, I held Oscar, my cat, a bit tightert, much to his dismay. Somehow, without talking about it, Pete and I knew we were even closer than we had ever been. He completely transitioned from his first best friend to his second in that room in the vet’s office in Nebraska, and that was just fine by me.

[What is love...]

Kevin Rabas

for Lisa

What is love,
but trust, the hand
within the hand, how we hold
each other as we go
over ice, the city sidewalk long
and sometimes steep, but we
are together, like children
toddling or like
the shuffling old—how
we hold
at the beginning
and the end: a place
in heaven: together,
children, friends.

[for Words Save Lives]

Kevin Rabas

He brought his guitar, 12, a friend of my son's,
over for a sleepover, and asked me to play
blues with him, Johnny Cash. I knew how,
showed him a rhythm or two,
how they worked, how
one sounds like a train,
coming, going, by 13
he was gone,
ended his song, but he didn't leave
silence: birdsong and bugsong
above a smooth stone.

Bosom Friends

Julie A. Sellers

for Lesley

The house echoes
with the laughter of
bosom friends,
together again
after many years
and miles
and lives.
We still find humor
in shared moments,
present and past,
our own scrapes
playing Green Gables.
Time stands still,
condensed in the magic
of bosom friendship.
And when she leaves,
my husband says
there was so much laughter
he thought there were
two more with us.
“There were,” I say.
“Their names were Diana and Anne.”

Love, Agnes

Julie A. Sellers

in memory of Agnes Farley

By chance,
I discover your old letter
tucked between the pages of a book.
The Cedar Point postmark,
faded by decades,
is a portal to bygone
dreams for the future,
now long since slipped through the hourglass,
and shared laughter
and conversation
and pie.
Drives and talks
in your baby blue
Ford Fairmont
with four on the floor
all materialize
between these lines.
My friend with
“the red hair that ain’t just for show, kid,”
somewhere more than my parents’
and less than my grandparents’ age.
You made a space for me
and listened
and wrote
and prayed
for my future,
now the past.
And when you signed your letter with love,
I knew you really meant it,
and that somewhere,
you still do.

Mutual Orbit

Roni Fent



Kansas City Barbecue Tour

Chuck Warner

Creative Nonfiction

It all began in 2012, when I clicked on the send button and emailed four friends from college suggesting we get together for lunch on a regular basis. We were all retired, attended the University of Kansas back in the 1960s, belonged to the same pledge class of our fraternity, and lived in or around Kansas City. I proposed a barbecue theme for our lunches after being recently inspired by Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations* television episode where he visited restaurants in Kansas City, mostly well-known barbecue places. As it turns out, that email launched what I euphemistically call our "Kansas City Barbeque Tour." Our very first destination was on June 1, 2012. We went to Oklahoma Joe's BBQ in a former filling station on 47th and Mission Road. That place was renamed a few years later to Joe's of Kansas City, which better respects K.C.'s long tradition of smoked meats slathered in sweet red sauce.

Early in our tour, I asked my college friends to suggest their favorite barbecue, however there was no real consensus. It was as if once they discovered a barbecue they liked, probably one nearby where they lived, they lost interest in trying other barbecue restaurants. However, for me that was a wasted opportunity. As a quasi-foodie (meaning I like to eat), I wanted to sample as much Kansas City barbecue as possible and suggested visiting a different one each time.

Because there were around a hundred barbecue restaurants in Kansas City, I decided to avoid duplicate locations of the same barbecue franchise and elected the original one, thinking it would have a thicker layer of grease and smoke, thus offering a more traditional "joint" vibe. Still, we had over eighty to choose from. To manage that daunting task, I even created a spreadsheet to make certain we didn't miss any and keep track of where we had been and to avoid repetition.

My initial vision for our barbecue tour was to remain very informal. I just wanted our lunches to be organic and everyone should attend because they enjoyed seeing one another. As time went on, the original fivesome grew by word of mouth and eventually included fraternity members who were both younger and older, but all still in the fraternity house when we were there. Today that list has grown to around fifty, but only around a dozen, who all live within less than an hour's drive, show up regularly. Many of the entire list live outside the Kansas City area and seldom show up unless they were traveling in the area. The only exception was a loyal contingent from Ft. Scott, Kansas, who seldom miss the fellowship and BBQ. As for the other out of area members, since they never ask to be unsubscribed from the BBQ tour list, I assumed they just enjoyed keeping in touch with those from many decades ago, as well as the smarmy back and forth banter that sometimes bubbled up on those email thread.

Whenever I discuss our barbecue tour with someone outside our group, invariably they ask me which BBQ is the best. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer. For some, it's all about meat and others it is about the barbecue sauce. Does the meat fall off the bone or does it come off gently when you bite into it? Some rave about the classic sides like macaroni cheese and others are mostly swayed by the cost. And then there are the beef brisket burnt ends, which separate those who abhor fatty meat and those who love it. As a result, we can't agree about which barbecue is best, however, there was agreement as to the worst. Sometime in 2013 we visited a long running establishment in Kansas City, Kansas. Two of us ordered pork spareribs and when they came, we weren't sure what animal they came from. Generally disappointed with the food, as we exited, we noticed a sign taped on the glass of the front door. Type on white copy paper was the message, "We don't

guarantee you will like our food, so don't ask for your money back." At least that place gave us a lasting memory.

Given our age, health issues and deaths have become a reality. As a result, my email list has morphed into a sort of "Caring Bridge." I often share funeral notices and let everyone know when someone is ill. One such example occurred in 2021 when a member of our group was recuperating in an area nursing home from a heavy dose of chemotherapy. After checking with his daughter, I learned our friend was having "good" days, so I emailed the BBQ list that we could visit him. On a brisk sunny March afternoon, nearly a dozen of us assembled on the lawn outside the window of his room (remember the isolation requirement related to that COVID thingee?) and serenaded him with some of his favorite fraternity songs. Fortunately, he was having such a good day that he sang louder than the rest of us.

When we began the tour almost twelve years ago, my decision of which barbecue place to visit was primarily predicated on a quest for the best barbecue. However, now that we have visited every well-known BBQ joint in the area, it seems obvious that my romantic notion of searching for the perfect barbecue was misguided. As I look back, I also realize that it was all about being with old friends and the camaraderie. As a result, the primary consideration for where we go now depends on them having enough handicap parking and the right acoustics so we can hear one another.

A Cavalaire

Julie A. Sellers

My friend Michel
sends me videos
from Cavalaire, France,
to share his working vacation—
a real one, at the beach,
à la plage.
Here at my desk,
il fait chaud
while outside
il pleut.
I sit with pen in hand,
sans inspiration,
wishing I were there,
à Cavalaire,
just being.
And in a way,
I am,
thanks to my 21st century pen pal,
the miracle of WhatsApp,
my imagination.
And in a few days,
a postcard will arrive,
une carte postale
to prove the truth
of that faraway place,
and words written
à la plage.

Friends

Barbara Waterman-Peters

Reflected in their eyes,
I see myself and feel known,
appreciated, cared about.
In turn, they occupy a space in my eyes,
along with so many others.
Each has a special place on the surface of
those orbs. Friends for different reasons
and in different times and eras. Yet each has
made a place that is theirs alone,
reflected in my eyes.

Friday Night Fix It

Beth Gulley

I stand in mosquitoes
as you look at my car.
I've interrupted band practice again
with my windshield wiper problem.

Annie, the dog, perches
in the driver's seat
while your bandmates
hold court in a semicircle.

The neighbors come out
to help, to make introductions.
We find out my coworker
is their family friend.

In thirty minutes
and forty mosquito bites later,
my car is fixed, the new neighbors
made some friends

and you have once again
shown that love doesn't have
to buy dinner and a movie,
sometimes it simply stops everything

to help solve my problem
and build a community
all in a Friday night
band practice break.

Saving You

Julie Ann Baker-Brin

I want to take the things
you said and place them
in careful bubble wrap, deliver
them to myself—a surprise
to find on my porch

I want to take the things
you did and preserve them
in sugared mason jars, select
from them in my pantry
during the lean years

I want to take the things
you felt and burn them
onto sparking digital media, archive
them in my own private
fragile library

I want to take the things
you thought and fold them
in wet chemical cloth, mummify
them to delight my soul
in the afterlife

Irene with Cello at Peabody Music Festival

Kevin Rabas



Friends Like These

Lindsey Bartlett

Creative Nonfiction

“If you only talk to people like you, you’ll never learn anything new.” -Albert Einstein

It was the last Saturday in April, and unable to sleep past the time I usually had to get up for work, I was lazing in bed. I picked up my phone and started scrolling through Facebook. The first two posts that popped up in my newsfeed were from two of my writers group friends about Independent Bookstore Day, and that everyone should make a point to visit an Independent Bookstore.

I was contemplating making a trip to the nearest bookstore when a Facebook message popped up. It was Cheryl,

“I’m feeling a desire to support an independent bookstore today. Are you interested in/available for a road trip today” she asks.

I smile to myself and quickly respond back with “Yes!”

A couple hours later we were off to Topeka to eat and buy books, and it was a day I will remember forever. Despite our many commonalities, growing up in small towns, sharing a love of writing and books, Cheryl and I are an unlikely friendship duo. An almost thirty-year age difference separates us or to put it more bluntly, Cheryl is old enough to be my mom. Despite the age difference, Cheryl is one of my favorite people to spend time with.

According to an AARP survey, nearly four in ten adults have a close friend who is at least 15 years older or younger than them. While those statistics may make it seem like having friends that span generations are common, that is an incorrect assumption. I am sure we all know someone who sticks to their immediate peers for friendships, never branching out. Maybe these folks want to be friends with those outside of their peer group, but don’t know how to make the connection. They

may ask themselves what do I have in common with someone who is twenty or thirty years older or younger than me? What possible commonalities could we have? However, research suggests that it isn’t so much about what commonalities we have, but that we find a couple of commonalities. For people like Cheryl and myself, it is our shared love of the written word that has helped to cement our friendship.

It is common, and often more comfortable, for people to form friendships with those who are similar in age and experience to them. However, I have never been one to stick to the status quo. In elementary school, I was the kid hanging out with my teachers. In many circumstances, as a child, I was looking for a mother figure, who would fill the gaps for me that my own mother could not provide. As a teenager, when so many things felt like life-or-death circumstances, having someone like my high school band director, who provided the reality check I needed throughout the four seeming never ending years of high school was vital. Now as an adult pushing forty, I am no longer in search of mother figures, but rather friends.

In an article, author Wibke Brueggemann, writes that she believes what is “ailing society today is that people are still not managing to communicate across the boundaries they are trying to eradicate. And the intergenerational dialogue is part of that.” As the seasons of my life change, I have had to find new and sometimes creative ways to make friends. I have lived in the same town I went to college in for almost twenty years, and as those whom I went to school with have moved away or we have fallen out of touch, I have had to go in search of those often outside of my peer group for friendship.

In other countries older and younger folks mix together without a second thought, as there are often multiple generations living together under one roof. That is not really the case in the United

States outside of the workplace. The infrastructure of western culture—with its institutionalization of school, career and social life—has created generational silos, what the Norwegian sociologist GO Hagestad calls “vertically deprived” communities.

Maybe it is because I am an only child or just an old soul, but from a very young age I have found it far easier to bond with those outside of my immediate peer group. If you were to put me in a room mixed with people, my own age and those older than me. It is highly likely I will gravitate to those whose ages differ from mine by ten or more years. In fact, I find it easier to get along with those outside of immediate peer group. There is less pressure to fit in or feel like I have to do something I am not interested in doing to be part of the group—please note I am not trying to insult anyone in my peer group. Additionally, I find I more easily relate to those whose ages differ from mine. This isn’t just me, in fact, research has shown that trust can be deeper between non-kin intergenerational friends. With different primary social groups, people may be less worried about their own secrets being shared; gone too is the envy and competition that can bloom among those on the same steps of the life ladder.

Some of my closest friendships in recent years have been formed when I became an active member of our local writers group. It is in this group that I have found the kind of community that I didn’t know I needed, and now I can’t imagine life without them. Among these friends, I feel supported and seen. They have listened to me rant, cry, celebrated, and mourned with me in ways that other past friend groups have not.

We send each other handwritten cards through mail and take day trips to bookstores and other literary events. We support each other in not just our writing, but also when it comes to everyday aspects of life. In having friends that are older than me, I have learned from their past experiences. From their success and heartbreaks. Having friends who are older helps to guide my path, and I appreciate that more than they will ever know. I just hope that I am able to offer them something in return.

If I could give one piece of advice to this next

generation, it would be to step outside of the comfort and familiarity of friends in your peer group and make friends with those who are older than you. It may seem silly or scary or even weird, but it can be so rewarding.

Grocery Stories

Roger Heineken

Fiction

Author's Note: This is a fact-based work of fiction incorporating true details and anecdotes told by real people regarding the retail food business in Emporia, Kansas. Some story elements were personally observed or experienced by the author. Other details were drawn from newspaper articles and other research.

Charlie carefully stepped onto the area rug that covered most of the hardwood floor in his cozy sitting room. Sport followed as he moved from the kitchen to answer the landline on the table beside his favorite chair. He switched on the table lamp and took his seat before answering. Charlie was expecting this call. "Hello."

"Hi...Mr. Davis. This is Bill Rogers. Today is your oral history day."

"Yes, good afternoon, Bill. I've been looking forward to it."

"I'm glad we were able to meet in person before this pandemic social-distancing thing. It helped me prepare. Doing oral histories is a new hobby I've taken up since I recently retired. I did a lot of background research in the newspaper archives. With the shutdown, Ellen and I have been spending most of our time here at Lake Kahola."

Bill surveyed the large living area of his open-plan lake house. It was comfortably furnished with castoffs from his house in town. The two sleeper sofas helped the Rogers accommodate all the grandkids during summer get togethers at the lake. Their lake house would never make *Architectural Digest*, but Bill didn't care. The large bank of windows frames the stunning view through the covered deck out across the lake. On a stool at the kitchen island, Bill was excited to start his very first oral history project, materials spread out at the ready.

"I'm calling from the lake and would like to conduct our interview by phone if it is alright

with you, Mr. Davis. Hope you can hear me okay."

"Yes. I'm ready if you are. Evelyn and I used to go fishing at Kahola when we had time. We enjoyed being out in nature. Beautiful place, great memories."

"Mr. Davis, after this pandemic, I'd like to have you out to our lake house. You can bring your pole and fish from our dock. Ellen and I will cook out. Let's plan on it."

"I'd like that, Bill. Haven't been out there in years. Probably lots of changes."

"As I explained, I'll be recording this interview to assure the accuracy of the final transcript. The county archive needs this kind of information on our local retail food business. We appreciate your time to help us collect your experiences and insights."

"Since we met, Bill, I've done a lot of reminiscing and made notes. Got it all right here on the table and I think I'm ready."

"Okay, the recorder is on. Let's begin. Tell me your full name and life story."

"Charles Landis Davis. My friends call me Charlie. I was born at home on Congress Street in 1928. I was the youngest of three brothers. This October I'll be 94. I'm part Welsh, English, and German."

"What more can you share?"

Charlie paused for a few seconds before answering.

"Well... The Depression was hard on my family. It was hard for so many. I was just a baby at the start of the Depression. My dad was a painter and wallpaper hanger. People were not redecorating for years after the crash. He did some WPA work for a time. Mother was a homemaker and took in ironing and did alteration jobs for the people in town who could afford it."

Charlie scanned the array of framed family photos hanging on the facing wall above Evelyn's spinet.

“As soon as Andy, Everett, and I were old enough to do odd jobs, we found them. All of us had a newspaper route at one time or another. I began working at the grocery store after school, giving up my paper route because I could make more money. I think I was 14 when I started working for the Rosens.

Andrew and Everett were several years older and enlisted as soon as they could after Pearl Harbor. We were fortunate to all finish high school. Andy decided to make the military his career. He retired from the Navy and settled on the West Coast near Monterey. Andy died in 2004. Rachel died in 2006. They are buried here. Everett came home after the war but died in a car accident in 1947. He survived the war only to leave us here back home. Our folks were never quite the same after we lost Everett. It was so sad, and I still miss him.”

Charlie paused again before continuing.

“Anyway... I worked at the grocery store throughout the war. As I grew older, I was given greater responsibilities. I liked the job and the social nature of it all. It was a great place to work and, as young as I was, I felt valued and part of the Rosen’s business.”

“I have a note that the food business was different before the war. What can you share about that?”

“Yes, very different. When the last neighborhood grocery store closed in the 1980s, I believe the newspaper story said there had been 54 little groceries all over town. I knew of about six of them from when I carried papers. Some families had cars back then, but why get the car out? People just walked a block or two to the neighborhood store. These groceries were quite small and only stocked the basics. Most carried cold cuts and some meat. Everyone did scratch cooking and baking back then. All of them had penny candy for the neighborhood kids.

There were storefront butcher shops and bakeries downtown. Dairy products were delivered to most homes in glass bottles. Ice was still delivered for iceboxes. Not all people had electric refrigeration back then. We had many area truck farmers who sold seasonal produce door to door to regular customers. They also supplied the vari-

ous neighborhood groceries.”

“We’ll get back to this. I shouldn’t have asked about the business yet. Tell me more about you. You served in the Army. Tell me about it, Mr. Davis.”

“Call me Charlie, Bill. Yes. The war had ended by then. I was finishing high school and working part-time. I felt I needed to follow in my brothers’ footsteps, so I enlisted in the Army. I served in Europe during the post-war operations. I was told my job at the grocery would be waiting for me when I got home...and it was.”

“Tell me about your return home.”

“My folks were so happy when I returned. Everett was gone. They needed me to be close, and I was glad to be back. Andy was over occupying Japan that year.

I took a week off to see my friends, then started back at the grocery full-time. So much had changed. Rationing was over. The economy was coming back. The town population was growing. The store stocked so much more than before I left. While I was gone, the Rosens expanded into the south storefront. We had been one of those small stores, but unlike most, we were on main street, not tucked away in a neighborhood. It made sense to grow bigger. People wanted greater variety and were willing to drive across town since gas rationing had ended.”

“You married.”

“Yes. Finally, I had a steady full-time income. Evelyn Wheeler from high school and I began to get serious. We married in June of 1951. We had two children, and they gave us five grandkids. Our kids are retired now, and both are in good health living in the Kansas City area.

Charlie focused on their golden anniversary photo hanging above his bowling trophy on the piano. After Evelyn’s passing, Charlie moved his prized trophy out of the bedroom into the sitting room where he could see it.

Charlie continued; eyes moist.

“Evelyn died twelve years ago after 57 years of marriage. I miss her. It is just me and Sport now, but we get by. I can still live independently and for that I am grateful. My neighbors, Josh and Angela, are good to check in on me, especially with this pandemic. And Sport likes all the attention I give

him.”

“You received a promotion. Tell me about that, Charlie.”

“Yes. I think it was July 1954 when Abe Schmidt retired. He managed the produce. I was offered his position and was happy to get it. Things were booming back then. We moved into a much larger building, a former auto showroom, farther north on main. We became a supermarket in a better location. We doubled my produce section. The Rosens added a kitchen to offer carry-out hot foods and a deli. Bigger and better was the trend happening all over America, Bill. Veterans were starting families. Refrigerated and frozen foods exploded. Remember the TV dinners? There were more and more pre-packaged foods. Homemakers wanted convenience. Families had more leisure time and backyard cookouts became popular. All of this was so different than during the Depression and war.

As you know, the Rosens built a brand-new building in the late 1970s with its own off-street parking lot across the alley from the old auto showroom building. It was state-of-the-art and energy efficient with new refrigeration and freezer units. Customer service was expanded to pay utility bills and some postal functions”.

“When we first met, Charlie, you talked about seasonal foods being available most of the year. Tell me more about that.”

“Being the produce manager, I saw many changes by the time I retired. Demand changed the food business in America. First refrigerated railcars, then trucks and the developing interstate highway system, brought produce from greater distances, places with different seasons. Now, produce comes in from other counties. You can have most produce year-round. There are still a few orchards around, but we don’t have all the truck farmers like we did before 1940. In the spring, we would get vegetable and bedding plants from area nurseries. We didn’t handle plants before the 1960s. People had to go to the local greenhouses. Today, you can get star fruit and jicama...fresh herbs, things never available earlier in my career.

“Another question I should have waited to ask. I’m new at this. Sorry. Tell me more about your retirement.”

“I retired at the end of the 1993 Christmas season. The store was hopping, and I agreed to run-out the year. Every other year, Evelyn and I would take vacation on the train out to California to visit Andy and Rachel for a few days. After retirement, we went every year and stayed longer taking side trips along the West Coast. It was fun but we were always glad to get back home. California is too big, too many people. Oh... remind me to tell you about citrus when the time is right, Bill.

For several years after I retired, I would fill-in to cover staff vacations. I was glad to step back into the job I enjoyed. I think Evelyn enjoyed having me out of the house for a week or two. I miss the people today as much as back then, Bill.”

“Who followed you?”

“Tom Cooper became the produce manager when I retired. He came on about two weeks before my last day to learn how I did things. Technology started to change things in the last ten or so years before I retired. Bar codes and scan technology was coming on and most ordering was done on the computer by then. I’m sure it has changed a lot since I retired.

Tom is gone now. Not sure who followed him. I don’t get to the store now as much as I did, and with this coronavirus, my neighbors, Angie and Josh, are kind to shop for me and leave the bags on my porch. They are wonderful neighbors.

The Rosens sold the store in 2007, I believe it was. There was a big story in the paper. All the people I knew have changed now. There were no new Rosens who lived here to take over the management of the family business which was started in 1903.

I mostly read, watch a little TV, and take Sport for a walk.”

“What were some of your favorite things about the grocery business?”

“I mentioned the people, both staff and customers. It was a place where people connected and stayed current on gossip. Regular customers became your friends. People trusted us and we could give better service.

I have to say sweetcorn season was a favorite. When we sourced locally from the truck farmers, the first sweetcorn created a real frenzy in

the store. Same with the first tomatoes and melons. Another favorite time was pickle time. Most households had a small backyard garden and grew cucumbers to eat fresh and to put up. I always carried bundles of fresh dill for pickling. The aroma filled the store. I can smell it now.

Bill, Sport is telling me he needs to go out. Can you give me a few minutes?"

"Sure. Let's take a break. I'll call back in a half hour. I want to get into the business now... about rationing during the war and credit issues during the Depression. Also, the evolution of soda and beer sales. I have a whole list from our first meeting. The tornado take-covers and the mental hospitals closure. Also, when crashing into the storefront. The JFK assassination and when your supermarket had an in-store Santa. I guess this was before shopping centers. Oh...and the boa constrictor story.

I'll call back at 3 o'clock and we'll start session two if you are up to it."

* * *

"Hey, Charlie. I'm back. Sorry to be a little late. The UPS driver delivered a package out here, and we got to talking. A little human interaction. Ready to continue?"

"Bill, I thought of another story while I was letting Sport do his business. Want to hear it?"

"Yes. Of course, Charlie. You are doing great."

"Okay. Many hippy college students had pet dogs. Seems like this happened in 1969 or 70. Most didn't follow leash laws, if we had them back then...don't remember. The dogs would follow the students to school and hang out on campus until classes were dismissed. As you know, my store wasn't far from campus.

Well, one time this dog in heat was being chased all around by a pack of four or five dogs in all shapes and sizes. Our supermarket had automated doors, the floormat kind. You guessed it... The pack of dogs shot past a customer exiting through the door. We had dogs barking and running through the aisles, weaving around carts and customers. It took the manager, me, and several stock boys to get the pack back out the door. It makes me laugh now thinking about the chaos

it caused. There was never a dull moment at the Rosen's Supermarket, Bill!"

Bill and Charlie continued the oral history project by phone through eleven sessions over several months producing a 142-page transcript. Bill developed new questions and Charlie kept remembering additional details and anecdotes.

Bill remembered to ask Charlie about citrus and learned that early in the 20th century the Rosens didn't carry citrus year-round. Charlie said they ordered in oranges, lemons, tangerines, grapefruit, and sometimes kumquats for the winter months and holidays. Oranges were a bit pricey and therefore a luxury for most families. Children often got an orange in their stocking as a Christmas treat. Some of the holiday recipes called for orange peel or citrus juice. Many families kept a mixed-fruit bowl out during that time of year. Frozen orange juice concentrate came about after WWII. The Rosens always stocked lemons and limes through the summer. In the days before air conditioning, almost everyone had a pitcher of lemonade or iced tea in the icebox. After the war, citrus was available year-round.

Talking about citrus made Charlie think about bananas. Before the war, bananas were shipped green on the stock which could weight up to 80 pounds. In back, the bananas would be portioned out into hands of six to eight fingers. "Hands" and "fingers" was the terminology of the day. At room temperature the bananas ripened to the right stage, then were moved out to the produce aisle. Occasionally banana spiders and other tropical bugs hiding and dormant from the refrigeration would become active. Charlie said they always kept a flyswatter handy in back to "whack" the critters. After WWII, maybe it was in the 50s, green bananas came boxed in pre-portioned hands.

The project bogged down in June when Bill contracted COVID-19 spending several days getting back to normal while quarantined at the lake. Ellen became his careful caregiver. Bill felt he contracted the bug when he was in running errands in town.

When Bill and Charlie reconnected on the project, Charlie got sidetracked sharing what his parents told him about the 1918-19 flu pandem-

ic. Bill decided to capture Charlie's family stories about the Spanish Influenza in the county for a separate, short oral history.

Bill learned so much from Charlie that he never knew or thought about. Before the tornado sirens were installed, the public had no warnings to take cover. When the Rosens built the new store, a take-cover protocol was established for staff to usher remaining customers into the walk-in coolers in back. When sirens sounded, most customers raced home to ensure the family was safely in the basement.

Charlie explained how store hours changed through his time working. Blue Laws which banned Sunday business ended around 1934. Even so, the Rosens were closed on Sundays until they moved into the auto showroom building. As more industries came to town following WWII, some opened second and third shifts. Store hours expanded to better accommodate the public.

Charlie remembered Rosen's closing once for the televised funeral of President Kennedy on a Monday. Rosen's never closed when FDR died, but then the war was still on. From Friday, November, 22 through Thanksgiving following the funeral, the supermarket was a somber place, unlike any other time in his memory. Rosen's was running specials and people were shopping but there was no joy then. Friends and neighbors connected at the store but spoke in hushed tones almost always focused on JFK and what would become of America. Normally at that time of year, talk was happy and would center on who was visiting for the holiday dinner.

Another unusual situation for the Rosens was when the state hospitals closed with patients returning home. Some had little or no supervision and would wander the town. On a couple of occasions, they would find the grocery. Some would open bags of cookies or chips and munch on them in the store aisles. One was removing items from a customer's cart and throwing the packages and cans on the floor. It was a delicate problem to manage for a short time, then it went away.

Then, there was the time in the early 1970s. Mable Spenser was cashiering when she let out a blood-curdling scream and nearly passed out, a major panic attack. It was a winter month. Appar-

ently it was a fad among some college students who had small pet snakes, boa constrictors and the like, to wear the snakes around their necks like mufflers or chokers. The snakes are cold blooded and, in the winter, stay put on the warm neck of the owner. When the student reached for his wallet, his winter coat splayed open at the neckline revealing the snake causing Mable to react as she did. When Mable retired years later, the story told at her reception got quite a laugh.

It took a while for Bill to carefully transcribe the phone recordings. With things opening back up after the vaccination roll-out, Bill had hoped to drive Charlie and Sport out to Kahola for a meal and to present the two transcripts for Charlie to take home to read through and approve. Over the months of this remote oral history project, Bill had come to know Charlie and appreciated his new friend.

It could not be. In September Bill learned that Charlie had died. As it turned out, Charlie's neighbor heard Sport's incessant barking. When she checked in on him, Angela found Charlie had passed away sitting in his favorite easy chair by the phone. His death was determined to be of natural causes.

Charles Landis Davis, at 93, joined Evelyn, his parents, Andrew, Rachel, and Everett out at the cemetery. Bill and Ellen attended Charlie's graveside service with military honors. They met his extended family and his neighbors. Josh and Angela adopted Charlie's beloved Sport.

Charlie Davis knew his produce and the retail food business, and for the archive, shared many engaging anecdotes and incisive grocery stories.

Little Cowboys

F. C. Appelhanz

Riding our imaginary horses
across the barren plains,
keeping the Indians at bay-
we were tough little cowboys in the rain.

With our six-shooters in hand,
bad guys would shake with fear.
We sang "Home on the Range,"
our voices swelling with words so clear.

Occasionally, we suffered wounds.
An arrow to the shoulder or gun-shot to the hand.
Our courage never wavered,
we always made a last stand.

Little brother was my side-kick
and we fought many battles.
Keeping the world safe and fair,
with holsters, boots and guns,
cowboy hats and yodels.

One went on to live the cowboy way,
fulfilling his destiny and dreams.
One hung up his spurs and hat,
love still connecting our little cowboy team.

Old Friends

Julie A. Sellers

finish the sentences
of the last conversation
we had years ago,
pick up the thread
of laughter
where we last left it
and weave today's song,
sew their tears
along with ours
at word of loss or joy,
wrap us in an embrace
made richer by
the passage of time

Forgotten Paths

Julie A. Sellers

The scent of lilacs and cookies
mingles on the April afternoon breeze.
One would not be here
without the other.
It's all thanks to Jerry,
up the street.
"Pick yourself a bouquet,"
he said, when he saw me
stop to smell his lilacs,
eyes closed, face upturned, enraptured.
Jerry is retired,
a skilled gardener.
I am neither.
And so, I took him at his word
and traveled many a forgotten path
on this perfume that carried me
to abandoned gardens
of years gone by.
Later, when I knocked on his door
with the plate of homemade cookies
as my way of thanks,
I saw a kindred light on Jerry's face.
He took a bite, and
eyes closed, face upturned, enraptured,
he traveled a forgotten path of his own.

Dog at the Front Door

Julie A. Sellers

From your self-appointed post,
you watch the hours and people
and seasons
pass.
From my desk,
I watch you
grow another breath closer
to me,
to an inevitable separation
after which I will be watching
at the door
alone
for you.

The Card Players

Barbara Waterman-Peters



[another chance]

Kevin Rabas

Chad's father was funny. Chad became a weekend comedian when he grew up. He tended bar days in Florida, at resorts, and at night he retried his jokes. People paid to see them. One night, he opened for Screech from *SAVED BY THE BELL*, a show back in Kansas. He invited his old friends, and everyone was there. After the show, after some drinking, a woman hugged Chad a little too long. She just held and held. Everyone could tell she missed him, had lost a chance and wanted it back.

[friend sketches]

Kevin Rabas

He and his friends went to the river, to dip in.

Marching band. Do it, and you'll have 200 instant friends.

Spring and again
people are friendly.

In your late 40s, you have to just let some things go: your lawn, childhood friends.

Those aren't your friends. Those are people you work with.

He had wanted friends once. When he had them, he thought: what is this?

They played that gig because they were friends and because the places they played no one ever told them to stop or turn the volume knob down.

Her friends were cool. Most of his were not, though he was older and had had more time. (He liked it quiet. Didn't mind being at home, alone.)

It ends with them
as friends.

In every room, a hum,
our friends, our pets:
the machines.

[friend sketches, again]

Kevin Rabas

He now had friends
who phoned, who told
them their days. For years,
he didn't.

It is different when you have talented friends.

If you can catch coffee with a friend, do. One day, they'll
be gone: he or she or you.

His friends talk
about politics.
You can't win.

God does not
bring coffee.
(A friend did.)

My friends like to talk. I listen.

She says she's going out
with friends, and is.

[the clothes]

Kevin Rabas

“Two who keep on putting on their clothes and putting things away” from Gwendolyn Brooks’s “The Bean Eaters”

I was up at two
with those other tenants who
keep the music on almost all night, keep
a secret green plant in a closet, the lights always on,
putting away and taking away clothes, shoes, a few
cheap thrift store things to put on,
like it is the end of the world
or a day
and putting on
and taking off clothes is the putting
on of a new mask or life, full of things,
neat and new,
and my girlfriend breaks up with me
and I leave my clothes
in her apartment quarter washer, and exit,
am away.

Anamalia Homage

Barbara Waterman-Peters



The Building

Margaret McKay

Creative Nonfiction

Today, I finally drove by the building where T died. His given name was William, but he was T when I met him and, to me, he was and always will be T. I had not intended to take that drive. It was six degrees and I never take drives. Really, I never do that. T and I never did it. But, despite the cold, for some reason not entirely clear to me, I decided to get in the car and go for a drive.

I didn't go far. I drove west on the main street near my house and then south and through the shopping center on the street I'd been avoiding. I drove the entire length of the shopping center from west to east, and realized when I reached the east end that I was just yards from the building where T died after two days in hospice care. When I realized how close I was, I decided it was finally time to get closer. I had been avoiding even driving by the building since the night he died more than two years before.

I didn't plan on anything other than driving around the circular driveway and out again. But I decided to park for a few minutes. I wanted to face the building, but all the spaces were taken. The only spot close to where I remember parking during those short days faced away from the building, so I pulled in. I left the engine idling because of the cold and because I didn't intend to stay long.

Then, on impulse, I began speaking aloud to T, reciting a litany of things that happened in that building over the last two days of his life. I told him about his plain but functional room. I described the tiny tranquil courtyard that was visible just outside his window. I explained how he was weak but could talk that first afternoon. I described how I later learned about the phenomenon known by hospice nurses as "the rally" and told him that I believe he experienced it in the late afternoon that first day after one of the staff

performed the most personal of services a person can do for another. She washed his body, trimmed his beard, brushed his teeth, shampooed, dried, and combed his hair. I told him how when I saw him immediately after she finished that he was a changed person and that I thought his change was because of what the woman had done for him. But "the rally" has little, if anything, to do with patients receiving the most basic kindness. Hospice nurses observe some of them reverting to their former selves. They are critically ill and close to death, but they can converse, make jokes, and act the way they acted when they were well.

I described to him how by late afternoon of that first day, friends and relatives began to arrive. He recognized and greeted them all by name. He joked and laughed with them. I told him this is a common occurrence among people experiencing "the rally" in their last hours or days. By early evening everyone was gone. I told him how glad I was that "the rally" happened when it did so he could say goodbye to so many people.

I told him how the next day, his last, I called the mortuary to let them know my need for them was approaching. How I had lunch in the cafeteria among the rehab patients who were part of the residents at the facility and how, barring some calamity, those people would recover enough to go home and back to everyday life. Little did they know that one room held a man knowingly experiencing the end of his own life.

Then, I had to tell him how much weaker he became. I told him that his last words to me came in mid-afternoon when he said "I love you" despite the nurse saying minutes before that she thought he might be unconscious. And there was the death rattle that started in late evening and went on for hours. There was how I held his hand as his breaths came further and further apart, all the way down to five per minute. And then, the moment when the hospice nurse finally

said, "He's gone." How my forehead touched our clasped hands. Then, my last kiss on his forehead. I was sobbing when I finished my recitation to the man I loved, my husband and best friend, now dead for more than two years. After a few minutes I was able to compose myself. I left and drove home. I have read there are things that grieving people avoid because they know those things will cause them great pain. But there comes a time when they need to overcome the reluctance and do the things they've been avoiding. This was one of those things for me. I was drawn to take that drive, to do something I never do and, though I still think about T every time I drive by the building, I can now do it without fear. Overcoming my fear that afternoon didn't alleviate my grief, nor did it feel like a positive experience but I'm glad I did it. It has become part of the never-ending journey that is my grief.

Words on the Wind

Julie A. Sellers

Fiction

Mary Lu Harms never forgot the way her words took flight on that long-ago day in 1980. Her name and address, written in her eight-year-old penciled block letters, soared heavenward, one among the specks of bobbing colors dotting the April sky above the elementary school. She released her blue balloon with a hope and a dream and a prayer for a pen pal. Her eyes remained trained upon that bobbling speck of blue against the shifting hues of the afternoon sky until it disappeared from sight, blown along on a Kansas spring wind.

None of Mary Lu's classmates seemed overly concerned as the days and weeks passed and not one single child received a letter from a far-off land. But Mary Lu held out hope, and each day as she stepped off the school bus at the end of the long laneway, she eagerly opened the mailbox. She knew that somewhere there had to be another little girl just like her who loved words and wanted to exchange them. She never doubted that her balloon would make it to the right hands.

School had ended and wheat harvest was in full swing on the farm when an envelope arrived with Mary Lu's name written in perfectly spaced letters. She was trembling with anticipation as she read the return address of Chicago, Illinois. Inside, she met a nine-year-old named Aubrey Rose Somerset who lived in that distant city.

"I found your balloon when we went on vacation," Aubrey Rose explained. "We stopped to have a picnic, and there it was!"

Mary Lu poured over the letter written on thick stationery the color of cream, her eyes devouring every detail.

"Isn't Aubrey Rose a beautiful name?" she gushed to her family over dinner. "She goes by her first and middle name, just like I do. And she takes piano lessons and riding lessons and loves to

read. She goes to a school with nuns but doesn't live there like some of the girls."

"Sounds like a rich brat," said her older brother Bob.

"Probably a snob," her sister Karen added.

Mary Lu glowered. "Aubrey Rose doesn't have any brothers or sisters."

"Kids," her father said in that tone. He leaned closer to the radio to listen to the markets.

Mary Lu turned to her mother. "Mama, can I use some of your pretty paper to write back?"

"Your tablet paper will do just fine," Mama replied. "Now hush up and finish your dinner."

Mary Lu was disappointed, but she could imagine she was writing on pretty stationary. She sat down after dinner and filled two full pages with details about her life on the farm in the Kansas Flint Hills, her cats and dog, her family, and especially, about her love of books and writing. She had two flower stickers she'd saved from a sheet she'd won in the library reading contest. They were beautiful, and she'd kept them in her treasure box for a year. Now, she unselfishly adorned her letter with them as a gift for Aubrey Rose.

The next letter from Chicago came with decorated with hand-drawn musical notes and accompanied by a school picture. Mary Lu stared in awe at the shy smile and green eyes shining out from behind a pair of dark-framed glasses, the pale face framed by a mane of wavy, chestnut brown hair. This was the face of her new pen friend, the girl who wrote of books and music and walks in the park. Aubrey Rose was real, she existed in that distant land of Chicago, and she had so much more in common with Mary Lu than any of her family or classmates in her rural school. Mary Lu felt a rush of sheer joy as she sat down with her tablet and replied. She enclosed her school picture from the year before, no longer embarrassed by her own glasses, shy smile, or the smattering of

freckles across her nose and cheeks. Aubrey Rose was a kindred spirit, of that there was no doubt, and glasses and freckles were of no consequence among true friends.

The letters flew regularly, back and forth between rural Kansas and Chicago. Mary Lu accepted extra chores around the house and farm to pay for stamps, counting every job as worth it to be able to write to her best friend. Each time she deposited a letter in the large, white mailbox at the end of the laneway and raised the red flag, she felt just as she had when she'd released her blue balloon into the sky. She imagined her words flying across the miles to land in Aubrey Rose's hands, right where they were meant to be. Whenever she held one of her friend's letters, Mary Lu felt the miles those words had crossed just to make it to her, their rightful destination.

The years passed in letters and small gifts, with Christmas and birthday phone calls placed and received on the black rotary phone in the Kansas farmhouse. They called each other Lulu and Rosie, although no one else was allowed such familiarity, and rued the fact they lived so far apart. They wrote of favorite classes and books, the challenges of growing up, and dreams for the future. Aubrey Rose left for performing arts school, and Mary Lu, encouraged by her best friend, spent her senior year applying for the scholarships that allowed her to attend Kansas State University as the first in her family to go to college.

Still, their letters flew across the miles between Manhattan, Kansas, and New York. They told of new friends, challenging classes, first loves, broken hearts, and soon, plans following graduation. Aubrey Rose's first solo concerts were acclaimed, and they carried her across the country and around the world to places from which she sent bright postcards. Mary Lu wrote of her graduate studies in English, her first short novel, her first teaching job, and her engagement. They met in person for the first time when Aubrey Rose came to be maid of honor at Mary Lu's wedding. They had been writing for eighteen years.

Another twenty years would pass, full of stories of work and travel and children, before they saw each other in person again. Aubrey Rose's letter came from her New York apartment following

her European spring tour. "Bad news, Lulu," she wrote. "It's cancer."

Mary Lu had packed and was at the airport before Don was even home from work. He urged her to go, and their teenage children texted their love to Aunt Rosie. Mary Lu was in the cab from the airport before she realized she hadn't even told Aubrey Rose she was coming, but when her friend came to the door, she saw no surprise on that beloved face. They wrapped each other in a tight embrace and stood at the threshold and wept.

That night, Aubrey Rose brought out the boxes of letters, and they sat on the balcony, sipping tea and reliving the friendship of a lifetime.

"What luck it was I found your balloon," said Aubrey Rose. She took her friend's hand.

"It wasn't luck. It was destiny."

"If these treatments don't work..."

"They'll work."

"But if they don't, promise me you'll keep sending your words out to the world, just like you always sent them to me. I know you're busy teaching and with your family, but don't stop writing. Promise?"

Mary Lu smiled through her tears. "I promise."

Aubrey Rose squeezed her hand. "I have an idea." She stepped inside to the bouquet of flowers Don and the kids had sent, complete with a blue balloon. She slipped the balloon free and pulled Mary Lu's first collection of poetry from her shelf. She leafed through it and tore out a page, a poem entitled "Words on the Wind," dedicated by the poet to her.

"Let share our story with someone else, Lulu," she said.

"What a beautiful idea, Rosie," Mary Lu agreed.

They each signed their name on the page, then slipped it inside a plastic baggie and attached it to the balloon. They held the balloon between them and stood silently on the balcony.

"To my forever friend," Mary Lu said at last.

"Across the miles and years."

"And even across eternity," Aubrey Rose whispered.

"Even there."

Together, they let the balloon fly. It rose and

tripped across the first dusky threads of the evening sky. They watched it soar, dodging buildings and wires and all manner of obstacles until it disappeared into the distance, carrying their words of a lifelong friendship on the wind.

Light Among the Ruins

Arlice W. Davenport

No one has lived here long.
The stone walls crumble.
Rubble blankets the floor.
Windows open onto woods.
I touch the missing sill of the sun
and imagine where I belong.

From the beginning, you are here.
I would scrape our initials on the wall,
but the surface cuts my hand.
How I wish the ancestors spoke
in clear, prophetic voices.
How I long for the comfort of home.

This life doubles another.
I grasp the papers on the bench.
Your handwriting spills past the edges.
I read a message from before we were.
Love infiltrates all emotion and thought.
The light of my poems lengthens near dusk.

My Strength

Fred C. Appelhanz

Give to him my affection;
it remains constant.
His caring and humor I cherish.

Incremental moments of
childhood memories resonate;
fantasies cuddled by his compassion.

I went to the mountain top
to visit my hero;
he was there smiling.

With the strength of integrity,
I was shown goodness;
lessons for a lifetime.

The most precious gift,
he gave unconditionally;
the heartfelt gift of time.

Encouragement- his language,
spoken fluidly;
giving me enlightenment.

My life became mended
because of his love.
Give to him my affection.

Clouded

Julie Ann Baker Brin

Some days it takes a while
to notice that the clouds
are even moving
They'll startle you
like a loved one's photograph
you find in an old box
You reminisce and lose
yourself then look up and find
they have moved on

To Work or Rest

Arlice W. Davenport

we look back
along the road
to immortality
ravines and rivers
block our way
an ankle turns
a knee goes out
we smear balm
on aging bones
nightingales sing
the rains begin
one more step
and our goal recedes
to walk or rest
is all the same

Canine Companions

Julie Ann Baker Brin



Julie's Passion

Debra A. Irsik

Fiction

It is a bitter, cold winter night in the heart of Minnesota. Smoke curls from the chimney of a white salt box at the top of Alderman Hill. Through the frosted windowpane, a dark apparition emerges. Force meeting force; neither cowering. The sharp wind buffets the figure. With dogged determination, the form continues forward meeting the challenge. They do not tuck their head down or cower from the icy fingers, kicking at the snow and stomping onward. The gait is undeterred and the rigid posture shows anger, but there is a softness as well. They shelter something under the coat. It is apparent that the figure is a girl. She is careful to hold what she is sheltering still. Occasionally whispering as if to calm whatever is tucked safely next to her breast.

Julie Alderman stomped up to the door, cursing the cold as her breath turned to ice on the scarf covering her face. She burst into the warmth of the mud porch, stomping the snow off her boots and swearing. "This damn weather's not fit for man nor beast. I hope Bess put the cows in while I was out chasing her dog because I'm not likely to go out there again!" She gently put the miniature collie down on the floor and tried to brush the ice and snow from its coat. Sam escapes and runs around her feet, shaking and barking. "Bess should have had Sam in two hours ago. Just look at her. She's practically frozen."

Far looked over the top of his glasses with brows barely raised and remarked calmly, "Bess is young and I have reminded her of her responsibility. You'd best watch your language and go help your mother." Julie looked sharply toward her father, then thought better of the retort burning on her tongue. She turned and stalked through the hall to the kitchen.

Mon was busy stirring a pot on the stove and

looked up with a weary smile.

"Thanks for going after Sam, Jules. Bess is up in her room, beside herself with thinking that poor Sam is dead. Would you mind taking him up and letting her know he is okay?" Jules glanced at her mother and felt guilty for getting so worked up.

Mon was six months pregnant and didn't need her stomping around growling at her little sister. As she turned away, Mon said, "Go easy on her, Jules."

"I'm sorry Mon, I'll try."

Julie patted her thigh and Sam followed her up the narrow steps to Bess's room. She was lying face down on the pillow, sobbing. Julie sat the dog next to her sister, and he playfully dug at her hair and tried to lick her face. Bess turned and squealed; hugging Sam close. "Oh, thank you Jules. You saved him. I thought sure he was out there frozen to death and I would never have forgiven myself for leaving him outside. You're right, I don't deserve a pet. I'm too self-centered and awful to have Sam."

Julie realized that she may have been too harsh. She had been steamed when Far had sent her out to find the dog and might have said more than she should have.

"It's okay Bess. Sam's fine and he didn't get too far. I shouldn't have yelled at you. I remember when I was seven and forgot to feed Corker, my goldfish. I thought he would die, but sometimes things happen so we can learn from them. I bet you will never forget to bring Sam in again and I never forgot to feed Corker again."

"Oh, I won't Jules, I promise. I put the cows in right after you left so you wouldn't have to go back out. You're the best sister in the world, Jules."

"Thanks Bess, I know you're a good kid and you're learning. Let's go help Mon. She looks really tired."

Julie walked into Whittier Rural High School. She went through the motions, smiling and nudging friends but her mind was already skipping to 3rd. hour. Petitioning to be the first girl allowed to become a member of the all-boys FFA. organization was all she could think about. Future Farmers of America was going to be a big part of her future and she knew she had to present a convincing argument.

In 1965 FFA merged with New Farmers of America, which was a huge effort for desegregation. The New Farmers were primarily African. The time for women had come and Julie was determined to be a part of it.

She ran over her words in her head, "Women have always been an integral part of farming. The future of farming depends on women as much as men. With the war looming and the threat of young men being called up at any moment, women need to be informed. We can bring so much to the table with our perspectives first hand, instead of behind the scenes and heard only through the words of our husbands and fathers. I, along with many other young girls and women am prepared to go all the way to Kansas to the National Convention to get our voices heard. I have letters of support from our State Senators to the Governor." Julie was bumped out of her reverie, "Hi Jules, I just saw Colin and he was sooo cute. He smiled at me and I couldn't even talk. Are you gonna ask him to the Sadie Hawkins dance?"

"I can't think about that now Laura. I'm scheduled to give my speech at the FFA. meeting in two hours and I have to be focused."

"You've got to be kidding." Laura was dumbfounded. "What if someone else asks him? You might not have a date to the dance. If Colin even looked my way I would die and all you can think about is farming? Girl you are certifiable."

"Laura, I know you don't understand but this is more important than a dance. This could shape my future. I might have a chance to make history; to give the women of America a voice in agriculture. I can't think about Colin right now. If he can't wait...well then, I guess he just won't be part of my future right now. He knows that this is really important to me."

Laura just shook her head and walked away.

"See ya later Jules. Knock'em dead. I know this means a lot to you and honestly, I admire you. My parents would die and go to heaven if I was half as motivated."

"Thanks Laura, that means a lot to me." Julie, watched as Laura walked away. Jules loved Laura like a sister but she just didn't understand her passion for the land. She wanted to be a part of the farm community as an independent woman. Sure, she hoped to marry someday but it would be a man who understood that she would be actively involved in the operations of the farm. She wouldn't be just cooking meals and giving him support. She wanted to get her hands in the daily operations of running the farm and improving production and yields.

Oh well. I guess they don't have to get me, Julie thought. I'm not just the nerdy farm girl that thinks she can make a difference. I'm more like Scarlet when her father says, "Land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, worth dying for, because it's the only thing that lasts."

With that thought Julie turns and slams right into Colin. "Woah, Jules, if that's the opener for asking me to the dance you didn't have to smack me." He nudges her with his shoulder. "You were going to ask me, weren't you?" He glanced sideways at her and grinned. "You nervous about the petition?"

Jules, smiles. "Yes, and yes. Will you go to the dance with me? And I am nervous but determined to make them see this is the way of the future." Colin raises his hands in surrender. "You have my vote." and they stride down the polished hall. Two hours later Julie confidently enters the Industrial Arts classroom. She is armed with the letters of recommendation from the national branch of the FFA and letters of support, from political officials. *Well, it's now or never*, she thinks and puts on her brightest smile.

The room is packed and Colin and Laura are standing in front of half of the student body with posters, waving and chanting Julie, Julie. Jules, blinks back tears. *Wow, maybe they do get me.* She raises her chin and goes to the podium.

Forever a Memory

Debra A. Irsik

Graduation
An ending
A beginning
New experiences
Friendship's loom
Relationships
Forged for twelve-years
Soon connected by a thread
Life is a collage
Of collected moments
Friendships that weather
Distance and time
Should be treasured
But
We didn't know
Those early friendships
Would set a precedent
For future relationships
Some recognized
As shallow and self-serving
Some worthy of more
Than we gave

We hear the warning
In your lifetime
you will have one or two genuine friends
We don't grasp its meaning
Until we live life
It's that connection
With the friend you might see
Every few years
And pick up right
Where you left off
Sharing secrets-joys-sorrows
Disappointments-love

Accomplishments and victories
Knowing only they
Would understand
I wish I had nurtured that friendship
Held it in higher esteem
I should have been
More present in her life
Celebrating her moments
Before she became
Forever a memory

Frizzle

Julie Ann Baker Brin

“Once my lover, now my friend ... what a cruel thing to pretend.”

—Fiona Apple, ‘Shadowboxer,’ Tidal

A flashing star, a firework:
so fresh in the moment, no way
to catch it. You’re always going
to be out there, a residue, lost
in space, no way to fall
to the outstretched arms below.
You leave me to wonder
If I’ve missed something:
an ache, a mistake, a near
miscommunication. Something
blatant, obvious as a meteor
shower, crash and crackle into
the atmosphere, sparking
lust, shunning passion, a geometric
pattern. I should have looked
through the silence, should have
respected it, created it.
Listened. Learned. Burned.

Frenemy

Julie Ann Baker Brin

Long before I knew the word I learned
the concept, the hard way, on the sixth
grade playground. She* punched me
at recess—punched me in the face! In front
of teachers and other friends and everyone.

Even though I saw it coming, I was so
bewildered I stood there and took
the punch. Then moments were lost,
probably something else, too. I was down
on the ground, surrounded by faces and stars.

We were at the edge of the big, green, south
lawn, where the big kids were trusted
to spend time. Under the grove of honeylocust
trees: so breezy, so refreshing, so peaceful,
until you discovered their thorns.

All for a boy who was mine. He kissed me
at the 4-H Fair, behind the cowbarn, a precious
Rockwell tableau. His name* was on my notebooks,
his face in so many innocent childhood dreams,
his number memorized. Mine. Mine!

But, so, too, she was mine—my friend. My
trusted friend! We lived on the same road,
took the same bus route, had sleepovers and trips
to the mall (even sneaked to the back
of the bookstores to look at “those” magazines).

We were in the same 4-H group, too. Well, she can
have him. But it turns out neither of us wanted
him for long. That was years ago, but she’s still on
her family farm. We each have different partners
now, but at least I took the girl out of the country.

Land Escape

Julie Ann Baker Brin

we look back
along the road
to immortality
ravines and rivers
block our way
an ankle turns
a knee goes out
we smear balm
on aging bones
nightingales sing
the rains begin
one more step
and our goal recedes
to walk or rest
is all the same

Subtracting Division

Roni Fent



A Prarie Ride

Sandra Lou Taylor

Fiction

October 14, 1856

Kansas prairie west of Lawrence

Joshua could hardly sit still on the wagon bench as they crested the hill overlooking the Davis farm. He hadn't seen his good friend Harry for several weeks because Blacks couldn't travel in the open on the main trails. The violence this spring and summer along the eastern side of Kansas Territory resulted in danger for anyone opposed to slavery. Border ruffians attacked freight wagons hauling goods to and from Kansas City. So, it surprised Joshua when Father had allowed him to travel with Uncle James west to the remote Davis compound, even though the pro-slavery vigilantes didn't normally venture that far. Harry's pa and the fugitives he protected provided hay, feed, and vegetables for Uncle James' businesses in Lawrence.

As they scanned the farmstead in the valley below, women scurried about, grabbing children. Men took defensive positions.

"Looks like they're skittish. Bet they've had trouble." Uncle James surveyed the horizon, then urged the team to the homestead.

Joshua couldn't contain himself. While still a thousand feet from the house, he waved and hollered.

Within seconds, Harry ran out of the cowshed, with Skeeter barking at his side. The two boys slapped each other on their backs.

"Pa," said Harry, "cans we ride down to the crick at Cut-off Crossing?"

A deep rumble came from Sam Davis's chest. "Go along. Be back in an hour for lunch."

When they returned, the boys joined the community of fugitives and freedmen who shared meals. Joshua knew many of them would travel to

Canada when they'd regained their health and a guide became available. His father and mother hid escaped slaves in Lawrence, and Father secreted them north whenever possible.

After lunch, most of the compound men and women returned to their chores. Uncle James and Sam picked their teeth under the lone tree and discussed the farm and the cargo to be packed for sale in Lawrence. Harry politely stood beside his pa, prancing from one foot to the other because Harry and Joshua had a plan that needed permission. Pa laid his hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Something's on your mind, son. Out with it."

"Well, Joshua and me, we wants to go for a ride in the pasture. If you gives us permission. I promise we'll be careful. Please, Pa."

The men burst into laughter. Uncle James spoke first. "Do you promise to keep your eyes peeled for trouble?"

Joshua smiled broadly then took on a serious face, because he knew he must act mature. "We'll be watchful."

Sam pointed his finger at Harry. "You may go, but keep the compound in sight and take my Sharps in case you sees a deer. I'm hankering for venison steak."

Joshua followed Harry to the corral.

"We has to ride bareback 'cause Pa doesn't want us racing." Harry put a halter on Sugar and handed the reins to Joshua. "But that's fine. We cans pretend we're Indians on a hunt." He fit a halter over Fancy's ears. After adjusting the Sharps rifle across his back, he mounted the horse.

They trotted to the southeast, following the creek for a while. When they veered off through a narrow valley, a doe bolted from a small stand of trees.

“Look at that.” Joshua pointed. “Let’s see where she’s going.”

The boys followed the doe up the hill. She jumped into a small ravine and bounded toward the shelter of bushes.

“We’ll not get close enough for a shot.” Joshua pointed south. “Let’s ride to the top of that hill and take a look around. Maybe we’ll see another one.” On the way to the crest, they flushed a covey of quail.

With their focus on tracking game, they forgot to watch for the most dangerous creatures. Humans. By the time they noticed the two men on the ridge to their left, avoiding contact wasn’t possible. Joshua and Harry exchanged concerned looks while the men slowly rode toward them.

Joshua suddenly realized they’d not been in sight of the homestead for at least a half hour. The approaching men looked scruffy, like they’d been on the trail for days. His heart pounded.

The two men grinned menacingly as they stopped, one on each side of the boys. They grabbed Sugar’s and Fancy’s reins, making escape impossible.

Harry’s eyes widened. His head jerked toward Joshua, then back at the strangers. Joshua tried to talk, but nothing came out.

“You’re coming with us.” The men roughly tied the boys’ hands behind their backs.

It all happened so fast. One moment they found joy in watching the covey of quail fly. The next they were prisoners.

Joshua’s heart thundered. He blinked back tears during the first couple of miles of being a captive. When he turned his head to see how Harry fared, the scar-faced man holding Sugar’s reins growled, “Keep your eyes forward, you little fiend.”

Joshua recognized the clump of bushes he and Harry had passed this morning. The evil men kept riding south. He mentally noted a rocky ridge. As they topped the hill overlooking the Santa Fe Trail, he frantically looked around, hoping someone would be traveling the rutted road today. No one in either direction. He knew a trading station along the Santa Fe Trail was located a couple of miles west. He’d made a freight run with Uncle James last spring. For a second, he considered urg-

ing Sugar into a run toward the trading station. But he realized, with his hands tied, he’d probably bounce off the horse’s back. What did these men plan to do with them? His breaths came in shallow gasps.

The man in the floppy hat hollered at his partner. “Let’s camp north of Middle Creek. Don’t want to go into that group of houses with this property and have ta’ answer questions.” He grimaced at the boys.

Joshua suddenly realized they were prisoners of bounty hunters. These men planned to take Harry to Missouri and sell him. What will they do with me? I’m a witness. They’ll probably kill me. His stomach knotted.

Joshua could see a settlement in the distance. Scar-face jerked Sugar to the left. They descended into a ravine with a small outcropping of trees. Why were they going to a secluded place? This change of direction dashed his hope of encountering a traveler. His heart thudded.

“Get down,” growled Scar-face.

Joshua wondered how he expected that to happen.

“Get down... Both of you.” Then Floppy-hat roughly pushed Harry, who landed hard, rolled, and ended up sprawled out with grass clinging to his hair.

Hoping to avoid such rough treatment, Joshua leaned forward and swung his right leg over Sugar’s back. He landed on his left foot, lost his balance, and found himself sitting on the ground. Scar-face jerked him up and shoved him toward a tree where Floppy-hat roughly tied Harry’s hands and feet. Harry’s jaw tightened as his captors snugged the ropes.

“Tie this one up too. I’ll water the horses.” Scar-face strode toward the four horses.

After tying Joshua’s hands behind his back, Floppy-hat opened his saddlebags and pulled out a flask, took a swig, and wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve.

Joshua desperately studied their surroundings for any means of escape. When Floppy-hat walked several feet down the gully gathering firewood, Harry whispered, barely moving his lips. “We can’t appear to be talking. I’m lookin’ for a way to get away. I’ve been prayin’ the whole time that

God'll give us a means to escape. They wants to keep me alive 'cause of the money I'll fetch. I'm afraid they'll kill you."

Joshua nodded. "We're both in a peck of danger." He glanced at their captors. "Your pa and my uncle will have missed us by now. But we're so far from the farm that searching for us will be like trying to find a copper penny at the bottom of the crick."

Harry let his head sag. "Act like you're fallin' asleep. They're watchin' us."

It seemed like hours before the men laid out their bedrolls. Joshua and Harry had listened carefully to them discuss their plans as they took gulps from the flask. The longer they drank, the louder they talked. Finally, snores interrupted the distant coyote howls.

Harry raised his head. "Do you have a plan?" "No, but I've been able to loosen the ropes some. I think I have it almost to the point I can slip my hands free."

Harry shifted his position. "They tied mine so tight the ropes dig into my skin." He peered at the shadows as the last of the campfire flames became coals. "They tethered the horses off to our left. As soon as you get free, release the horses. Jump on Sugar's back and ride off as fast as you can to the north. Shoo the others along with you. Give Sugar her head. She'll take you home. Doubt we can trust the people in the settlement down the road."

"I'll not leave you."

"You must. It's the only hope we has. Get help."

Joshua removed the ropes securing his hands and legs, then inched forward. He crept toward the horses and removed the tethers on Sugar and Fancy. As he reached for a bridle, he smelled whiskey breath.

"Whats you doing? You little imp!" Scar-face lunged toward him. "Leave them horses be."

Joshua instinctively slapped the rumps of Sugar and Fancy, yelled, and waved his arms. Scar-face punched him in the chest. Joshua stumbled gasping for breath.

"You'll be walking now, if I allow you to live." Scar-face turned on Floppy-hat. "You buffoon. Can't even tie a knot good enough to control a kid. I doubt if the horses'll go far. We'll catch them at

sunrise." He grabbed Joshua's arm and dragged him to a tree several feet from Harry.

Joshua gritted his teeth to keep from crying out when Scar-face tightened the knots which secured his hands to his feet. He couldn't move and he hurt. Lord, Harry and I need a miracle.

October 15, 1856

Uncle James stood in his stirrups. The last time they'd seen the boys was eighteen hours ago. They searched last night until the moon set. Where can they be? I can't return to Lawrence without Joshua. He used a telescope to scan the horizon to the west. Nothing.

He heard a rifle signal from the east. On the top of the ridge, he saw Sam's silhouette and two horses.

Uncle James and the rest of the search party galloped toward Sam. Skeeter sniffed the ground and yipped as if saying, "Follow Me."

"Found Sugar and Fancy grazing." Sam pointed. "It appears they came from the south, and Skeeter wants us to follow him." Sam peered into the distance. "The Santa Fe Trail is only a short way. I've been eyeing the horizon and sees nothing. Either those boys is hurt or kidnapped. Have your revolvers ready and your rifles 'cross your laps." He walked his horse toward Skeeter, who took off running, pausing occasionally to sniff the ground.

After riding several miles, they came upon a campsite. Skeeter sniffed the bases of two trees. Next to one, scratched in the dirt, was the single word "HELP"

Sam studied the ground around the abandoned campsite. "Looks like a kidnapping. They still has two horses. A scuffle took place over there. The campfire's cold, so they's been gone awhile."

Uncle James pointed toward the southeast. "This trail is used by travelers from southern Missouri to hook up to the Santa Fe Trail. About a mile that way is Middle Creek. A nasty battle between pro-slavery thugs and abolitionists took place there back in August. One or two were killed. My guess is whoever has the boys would rather not go close to any settlements. They'll probably skirt

around homesteads, too, but otherwise follow the trail.”

“So will we.” Sam urged his horse forward in a walk. “A white man and three of our color traveling with rifles and revolvers. Well, we don’t needs to draw attention. Once we’re around Middle Creek, we’ll move to the trail. Keeps your eyes open for trouble.”

Sam placed Skeeter on Sugar’s back. The dog’s tongue lolled. “Never thought I’d be happy to have a horse-riding dog. Harry taught these two pets of his some tricks.”

They topped a hill. About a half mile in front of them, the boys walked alongside two men riding horses.

The search party concealed themselves behind some bushes. Uncle James peered from the edge of their hiding place. He studied the situation and massaged his temples. “We need a plan. Do you have any ideas?”

“Go down and beat them to death is what I wants to do.” Sam’s jaw set and eyes squinted. “But I suspect that’s not my best idea.”

Uncle James rubbed his jaw. “I can ride up on them and engage them in conversation. With a couple of stern looks, I think I can warn the boys to not let on they know me.”

Sam nodded. “We others can work our way between the boys and those men. Then we’ll show our revolvers.”

Uncle James laid his hand on Sam’s shoulder. “I know it’ll be nigh impossible, but I need you to stay out of sight. Give me some time. I want to get the boys back without bloodshed if we can. Only show yourself if I’m in trouble.”

Sam hesitated. “I don’t know if I can keep back. But I’ll do as you say.” He surveyed the area and pointed to a ridge with tall grass and an outcropping of trees in the shallow ravine. “We’ll tie the horses where we can get to them quick like. I’ll put a rope on Skeeter so I can keep him with me until you need his help.

A strong wind out of the south muffled the sound of the horses’ hooves, so Uncle James came within a hundred feet of the men and boys before they realized anyone was about. The men stopped abruptly and surveyed the horizon. They moved the horses between Uncle James and the boys.

The one in a floppy hat shook a finger at them. Joshua peered around the horse’s rump. Uncle James caught Joshua’s eye, moved his hand to his chin, and ducked his head. Joshua gave a slight nod.

Uncle James rode within a few feet of the men who used their horses to obscure the boys. “Howdy, gentlemen. I rarely overtake men on this part of the trail. Where you heading?”

“None of your business,” said the one with a huge scar running down his cheek.

Uncle James feigned a startled look. “No offense intended. Just being neighborly. You aren’t from these parts, are you?”

Floppy-hat adjusted his position in his saddle. “Nope. Where we’re from ain’t none of your business. All you need to know is we came off the Santa Fe Trail to this here cutoff toward Missouri. Now, leave us be?”

Uncle James eased his horse to the left and stood in his stirrups. “I see you have two youngsters tied up on the other side of your horses. Seems odd to travel to Missouri with tied-up boys walking alongside you.”

“Ain’t none of your affair,” growled Scar-face. Uncle James put his hand on his revolver. “I repeat. What are you doing with two boys tied up?” Floppy-hat cleared his throat. “Well... you see... we caught these two trying to steal our horses. We don’t take to horse thieves. Thought we’d deliver them to the next sheriff we meet.”

With their attention focused on Uncle James, the bounty hunters failed to notice Sam and his companions sneak behind the bushes only feet away.

“Don’t much like thieves myself.” Uncle James tipped his head toward Joshua. “That one looks like my neighbor’s boy. The other is his slave. Wouldn’t do for you to be guilty of kidnapping and slave theft, now, would it?”

Uncle James aimed his revolver at the chest of Floppy-hat. Scar-face’s eyes widened when Sam stepped out from behind the bushes and pointed a gun at him.

“Seems to me,” said Uncle James in a cold, hard voice, “you two are in a peck of trouble.” He nodded to the others in their search party. “Release the boys, and we’ll tie up these thieves. Kid-

napping, slave stealing, and horse theft are hangable offenses in these parts.”

“Hold on,” said Floppy-hat in a squeaky voice. “These horses is ours.”

Uncle James tipped his head toward the boys.

“His pa told me this morning that he had two horses disappear yesterday.”

Scar-face kicked his horse into a run. Floppy-hat took off after him. Uncle James aimed a shot to their left.

Sam yelled at the top of his lungs. “And don’t come back if you know what’s good for you.”

Seconds later, Skeeter was licking Harry’s face. Joshua hiccuped as tears flowed. Sam pulled Harry to his chest. Uncle James hugged Joshua.

Harry looked into his pa’s eyes. “I’m sorry. We didn’t mean to ride so far from home. We was following a deer and weren’t expecting to run into anyone.”

“Son,” said Sam, “as a fugitive, you can never let down your guard, even on the wide-open prairie. You may not always have a man like James who’ll lie to protect you.”

Joshua threw himself into his uncle’s arms. “I promise to be more careful next time.”

Uncle James patted his back. “If there is a next time. Your mother may not let you out of her sight until you’re eighteen.”

Sam assumed a serious expression. “Son, you’re confined to the yard.” He shook his head. “I don’t know how you did it, but setting Sugar and Fancy loose saved your lives. They headed our direction. I found them grazing on the top of a hill halfway home. Then Skeeter sniffed out the trail.” Harry hugged Skeeter. He took Fancy’s reins and patted the horse’s neck. Uncle James handed Sugar’s reins to Joshua, whose tummy rumbled loud enough for all to hear. “Harry, do you think your ma will have a piece of apple pie for us when we get back?”

bat & armadillo

Ashley Clayton Kay

I am a bat & you an armadillo.
Look at this wood-spotted prairie
where we love where we live!
Shall we follow trails together? Maybe
we are all right alone, you rolling away
& me flying off into my dark morning
to taste the air in search of snacks,
asking after you and your day,
which is to me my night asleep
in the eaves of the old wood barn
you think looks like you by its shape,
& that has made me smile,
my dear friend, for my entire life
because somewhere in your heart
you must know you are my barn
no matter how far afield you are.

To Ann

Brenda White

From her shipping clerk position,
my friend is a prison guard now,
Black belt in Tae Kwan Do,
former Marine.

She leaps off cliffs with parachutes
and ropes to rappel back up
or reach across the chasm,
facing her new reality with
shoulders straight.

I witness this two feet
from the edge;
I'm so afraid of heights.
All I can see are prisoners
with shivs behind her back
aiming for her heart.
Riots, burning mattresses,
the tv blaring with a
hostage situation.

She waves from the other side
and tells me not to worry.
She's closed on a property
thirty minutes from the Big House,
will move in a few weeks.
The pay is nearly twice
what she was making.

I want to build her a Kevlar shield
with all my good intentions,
my thoughts and prayers.
I want her safe from
her adventures, the future,
from my imagination.

Instead, I embrace her tightly,
whisper in her ear
“Take care of yourself.”

And she hugs me back.
“I will,” she says.

Only Child on a Teeter Totter

Boyd Bauman

Solitaire is the obvious one,
but I could modify most any game
for a match against myself:
Rebound, Twizzle, Boggle,...

For outside, they got me a pitchback,
simple net connected by bungees to a metal frame,
angle adjustable so your partner throws it back
just the way you want it.

Sometimes I still preferred a 59 cent Pinky ball
off the wide surface of a garage or shed or barn:
500 points for catching it off the wall in the air,
400 off one bounce, and so on.
Like Dan Quisenberry, I could coax a ground ball
when needed, and though the rocky driveway
produced an inordinate number of bad bounces,
I usually managed to fire to first
for the last out in the Series.

It probably goes without saying that I was
uncomfortable
on the few public playgrounds I frequented,
though if I could come across one that was empty,
on a day too frosty or unbearably humid for the
masses,

I could enjoy a good swing,
the singular physics of the lean and leg pump.
The slide was also tailor-made for one,
without the shoving in queue for the ladder,
sans scrambling at the bottom away from the
reckless.

The merry-go-round turned at my speed of choice
without the sadistic shouts of the older boys
spinning the voiceless at nauseating speeds.

Granted, the teeter totter was trickiest,
but with the right self control,
I could achieve equilibrium there, as well.

Balance I'm still working on,
as I've been told in every relationship from the first,
though it's admirable how satisfied I am
left to my own devices,
I could use help learning
to play well with others.

Jackie

Debra A. Irsik

When I think of you, I see a blue Mustang
your ready smile, a sprinkle of freckles.
Going back to the first time, the school bell rang,
that fifth-grade year of braids, boys, and giggles.

We shared forty-fives, dancing to the Beatles,
whispering our deepest, darkest secrets.
Lives intertwined like sewing needles.
Sharing our hopes, dreams, our deepest regrets.

But with that gaited Pomp and Circumstance
stepped,
you to be a nurse, me in Beauty School,
then Marriage and family; the distance crept.
Our words sprinkled in cards and baby drool.

Life sometimes battered us,
you, my friend, have gone to rest,
but you never complained or raised a fuss.
those precious years were the best.

Talking & Listening

Madeline Male



Ridin' Tall

Mark Sheel

Creative Nonfiction

I first met Glen Enloe in the early 1990's when his poetry appeared in *Potpourri: A Magazine of the Literary Arts*, and my friend Paul Goldman suggested we invite him to participate in our literary critique group, *The 5th Street Irregulars*. He accepted our invitation, began meeting with us and providing perspicacious input. Glen had an MFA in creative writing from Wichita State University, worked as a copy writer for a rural real estate magazine and had published a chapbook of poetry that had received high praise.

He exhibited a bulky frame, rounded facial features with ruddy cheeks and a modest mustache (which eventually morphed into a full handlebar), and when he spoke, it was softly, making every word count, just how he composed his poetry. And like his favorite poet, Hart Crane, he employed those words in fresh and surprising ways. I was polishing my story and poetry collection *A Backward View* at the time and Glen offered some substantial suggestions for revisions in the wording and the sequence of compositions. When *The 5th Street Irregulars* began sponsoring poetry readings now and again around the Kansas City region, Glen was always onboard. And when the group selected *A Backward View* for co-op publication with Leathers Publishing, Glen provided a stellar review in his company's magazine. With the passage of time, he and I in particular established a strong mutual respect and a solid friendship.

Glen confided to me that when a young graduate student, he had been politically of a typical campus liberal persuasion. However, like the acclaimed author John Dos Passos's change of heart, that perspective altered with the passing of years, and he came to adopt a freedom-loving conservative view. He listened to talk radio. Read *Cigar Aficionado* magazine. Discovered the cowboy poet

Baxter Black. And intriguingly he began to see his philosophic stance about life symbolically manifest in the mythological Wild West cowboy and his lore. Then, of all things, he abandoned penning academically-inspired verse in favor of composing cowboy poetry! And, he developed a real knack for it, later on attending various cowboy poetry gatherings and, while dressed in Wild West garb, reciting his verse to the crowds.

With the coming of the internet and email, the critique group ceased to meet in person regularly and instead conducted feedback to the members' compositions online. Before long, Glen had his first collection of cowboy poetry published, *When Cowboys Rode Away*, and I wrote a review for him. He continued to critique my poetry, fiction and essays and offer helpful insights for improvement. And as I was assembling poetry selections for my manuscript *Star Chaser*, Glen contributed a glowing foreword in which he appropriately observed, "Thus, having formed a misfit poetic credo with a band of like-minded poets and writers outside the existing perimeters of the established local 'literati' by way of a group loosely known as *The 5th Street Irregulars*, I and the author have, like the goddess he alludes to in his book, made a light of [our] own...." Eventually, amusingly so, we began emailing each other weekly missives in "cowboyese" lingo, using the nicknames of "Garlick Glen" for him and "Mesquite" for me.

On one occasion, I wrote, in a dialect only the initiated would appreciate or fully comprehend: "Dern, ifn the arthritry ain't kickin' up with this har kolt an' wet weather. Anyhow I still done an' went ta communion at Olt Mission, an' the last blamed readin' at Ratters Place an' then caught a little of Cheepers game an' then Mass with ma dear Dee...Seems lak everbody is sick or dyin' of late. Or seein' the state of the world, wish they was. Ol' Garlick, keep yer pot'a chili hot on the

stove an' yer hoss outa' the wind in the shed."

He'd keep up his end of the dialogue with "Garlick ranch news" such as this excerpted health and welfare report: "Well, been restin' my toe up from my last whittlin' session with the footsy doctor. Seems ta be healin' better so far than the previous blister & thar ain't no second wound ta leak any transmission fluid from this time, so that's gud. Shore am gittin' tared of all this feets drama... Had ta cancel horseshoes last Thursday cause of my toe sos they had ta pitch blind agin my average."

After I had joined the editorial staff of *Kansas City Voices* magazine, I invited Glen to submit an essay on the art of cowboy poetry and he did.

Not content to limit himself to poetry, the next thing Glen launched into—besides pitching horseshoes and tooling leather—was the Western novel genre. And, again, he did a splendid job. I was particularly taken with his third novel, *Dead Men Don't Ride*, and wrote a 5-star review about it in which I stated, "Like the best Western writers before him, Enloe has studied his craft and the time period thoroughly and brings the setting, characters and dialogue alive with authenticity." So, it was a shock and a great sense of loss when I learned of Glen's untimely and unexpected passing. I'd lost a rare friend and I certainly felt bereaved. Yet imbued, too, with a sense of gratitude for the literary relationship we'd maintained for so many years. Glen was the embodiment of the credo that writers need to support and celebrate one another. And he taught me a vital lesson about the act of writing and attitude. Write because you love doing it, he'd declare, and write about what gives you joy. Never mind the elitist critics; let them carp at and bury one another. Share what you have with those who'll appreciate it. And above all, have fun doing it!

If I were to pen one last missive to Glen in cowboyese, well, here's what I'd say. "Ol' pard Garlick. Youse took that sunset ride way too soon. Gall dang it, I miss ourn communicatin'. But I reckon youse is ridin' tall in them beautiful prairies an' valleys and streams beyond. Yes sir, no more achin' bones er tared feets. An', ifn youse don't mind, Garlick, I'd like ta ask jest one small favor. Ma own time ain't too far off, I'm thinkin',

an' I'd be ever so dern grateful, ifn when it arrives, youse would saddle up an' come meet me at the pass, sos I don't git masef lost in some box canyon in the clouds. I'd shore be much obliged. Thanks, pard. I'll see ya down the trail. Signed, Mesquite."

Party in the Pasture

Linda Ahrens Brower

Jack brings the wieners
and Teddy brings the beans,
Shelly brings the music
and Gary brings the beer.

The pasture belongs to Mike,
passed down through generations
of farmers and ranchers
with more determination than dreams.

We pull up in our old farm trucks,
dented, rusted, and patched together,
pull out our rifles and shoot
tin cans off fence posts.

Kate outshoots all the men.

We gather around the fire
and tell tall tales and
laugh so hard we cry,
dust off our boots and
take off our hats
before we touch the food.

And we always thank
the good Lord above
for all he has given us -

even when times are hard,
money's tight and
life "just don't make sense."

The sun always rises
on "yonder hill,"
good friends gather
to help us through
and life is filled with
more than we need,
more happiness than we deserve
and more blessings than we know.

Jeb strums the guitar,
his cowboy hat pulled down low on his brow,

and we all sing a little too loud,
maybe a little off-key,
and we snuggle a little closer
to the ones we cherish most.

Right by My Side

Madeline Male

We hike through the woods, both of us panting,
with tall trees and long shadows, it feels so enchanting.

Now we go boating, towards the open sea we race,
you practically yelp in joy as water hits your face.

On the beach, we play games in our very own way,
you run after the ball whenever it goes astray.

On the mountain, you jokingly bury my glove in snow,
we frolic all day, until the sun sinks low.

Oh, despite the many miles we've trekked,
I've found my greatest inspiration where I might not expect:

Right by my side, I look down to see
you—my tail wagging best friend, who's always there for me.

Haiku

Madeline Male

We carve our own path
in the earth, as we journey
up Friendship Mountain.

Bluegrass Heaven

Linda Ahrens Brower

I know there's a bluegrass heaven
where friends still gather around
and the band still picks and sings,
where the crowd's a-stamping, the hands
 a-clapping,
The fingers a-flying, the feet a-tapping.

I know there's a bluegrass heaven.
I feel it in my soul.

Here in this bluegrass heaven
where we sing the songs of old,
there's pure joy in the making, the strumming of
 the strings,
peace in the moment, and the joy the melody
 brings.

Here in this bluegrass heaven
the soul of the song never dies.

The Event Planners

Barbara Waterman-Peters



Writer Friends are a Blessing

Nancy Julian Kopp

Creative Nonfiction

I recently saw a cartoon drawing of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Goofy with the caption “Friends are the Sunshine of Life.” It reminded me of a major benefit my writing world has brought to me. More friends than I’d ever imagined.

We have friends from our childhood, high school and college years, friends in the places we’ve lived and live now. But I can add an entire other group. I’ve been writing for about thirty years now, and the number of people who have crossed my path with respect to my writing world would make a very long line if they stood shoulder to shoulder.

Of those people, a very good percentage are ones I consider as a writing friend. Definitely one of the blessings in my life.

How did they become part of my writing world? For one thing, we all have a common interest. We were brought together through writing conferences, chance online meetings, critique groups and word of mouth by other writer friends.

When I first started writing, I knew that having a writing buddy would be helpful to me. I heard a casual remark one afternoon about a woman who wrote picture books. I wrote down her name and then pursued finding her phone number. I called her and introduced myself as a newbie writer looking for someone to trade critiques with.

“Would you be interested?” I asked.

I sensed a hesitation on the other end of the line, and why wouldn’t there be when a perfect stranger calls and asks to become part of your life? Finally, she responded that she’d meet with me and talk about it but then went on to tell me how busy a person she was. I knew it was a good out if she felt she needed it.

We met one afternoon, we clicked, and we spent the next 3 years critiquing each other’s

work. I learned a great deal from her. We kept in touch after I moved away, less and less as the years go by, but I still consider her an important writing friend.

I have made many writing friends through my state authors organization when attending the district and state meetings. The state authors website has helped to re-enforce those friendships.

The people in my online International Women’s Critique group have become solid friends, especially those whom I’ve met in person at our conferences. We are in touch through our group website on a continuous basis and I interact with many of them in one-to-one emails.

They are always there for me when I need advice or a shoulder to lean on when rejection letters abound, and they’re cheerleaders whenever a success happens related to writing. I happily do the same for them.

I’ve met more writer friends through the anthologies that I’ve written for. We commiserate or rejoice together online, whichever the need might be.

Meet one writer and somehow you end up meeting other writer friends of hers, too. Not to leave out the men.

I have made friends with many male writers over the years, too. And I do consider them real friends. One of them did something for me once that was so kind and unexpected that I cried like a little kid over it.

I’ve made friends with writers who are readers of my blog. We’ve never met face to face but they are good friends, people whom I care about. We became friends because they took the time to make comments about a post now and then. I replied, they continued—it’s how friendships take seed and grow.

Never take friendship for granted. They’re a true treasure, something to be savored, even cher-

ished.

I've found that to have a friend, you must be a friend. Also, that friendships die unless they are nourished. It's up to you to do that.

Biographies

Living on 30 acres gives **Fred C. (F.C.) Appelhantz** many wonderful opportunities to witness the beauty of Nature. Having traveled extensively, in the western U.S. he looks forward to the next adventure.

By day, **Julie Ann Baker Brin** works for public broadcasting...not behind a mic, but behind red tape. By night, she prefers to use the other side of her brain. Where she falls on a variety of spectrums depends on the hour; let's just enjoy the mystery. Julie is grateful to have been named 2023 Kansas Authors Club Poet of the Year, and her portfolio is at juliebrin.org (or dot-com, but she's a dot-org kinda gal). Her work has been published by Meadowlark Press, Flying Ketchup, Mikrokosmos, and several journals throughout the Great Plains where she makes her home.

Lindsey Bartlett teaches composition and literature at Emporia State University. An Emporian by choice, she lives in the Flint Hills region of Kansas where she spends her days writing in various coffee shops, holed up at home with a good book, or driving the countryside for photo opportunities. Bartlett has published one poetry collection, *Vacant Childhood* and in 2023, a chapbook, "Between Belonging and Brokenness." Her writing has appeared in *The Milk House: A Rural Writing Collective*, *The Write Bridge*, *Flint Hills Review*, and *105 Meadowlark Reader*. Her essay, "Reframing My Rural Past" was nominated for "Best of the Net."

Boyd Bauman grew up on a small ranch south of Bern, Kansas, his dad the storyteller and mom the family scribe. His books of poetry are *Cleave* and *Scheherazade Plays the Chestnut Tree Café*, and his children's book is *The Heights of Love*. After stints in New York, Colorado, Alaska, Japan, and Vietnam, Boyd now is a librarian and writer in Kansas City. Visit at boydbauman.weebly.com.

Curtis Becker lives in Topeka and teaches English at Washburn University. He started writing comic books with his cousins and friends in grade school and eventually decided he'd like to tell stories as an adult. His writing has appeared in midwestern literary journals and magazines. He has two Chapbooks and a published collection of Fiction and Poetry, *He Watched and Took Note* (2018). Becker earned a Masters in English and Fiction Writing and is currently working on an MFA in Fiction Writing at the University of Nebraska, Omaha.

Linda Ahrens Brower worked many years as a nurse in hospitals and pediatric home care before rediscovering her true love, writing. She has won many awards for her poetry and prose and has published in *Flint Hills Review*, *Southern Arizona Press* and in anthologies. She has lived in various cities and now, once again, calls western Kansas home.

Arlice W. Davenport is the author of four collections of poems, *Setting the Waves on Fire*, *Everlasting: Poems*, *Kind of Blue: New Poems*, and *In Search of the Sublime*, published, respectively, by Meadowlark Press (2020) and Meadowlark Poetry Press (2021, 2022, and 2023). He is the retired Books editor and Travel editor for *The Wichita Eagle* newspaper.

Native Kansan **Roni Fent** has led an eclectic life. A KU alum, Roni has won awards for songwriting and photography. A former news and feature writer for various newspapers, Roni was producer/writer/ DP and editor of the documentary series *That Seventies Storm*. Roni is also a Wiccan who chases tornadoes. Many first-hand experiences shaped the upcoming, fantastical yet earth-bound novel *Santa's Wake*.

Beth Gulley is a Kansas City based poet who has published three chapbooks and four full-length collections of poetry. Her most recent books include *Picking Fights in Book Club* (Bottlecap Editions) and *Frog Joy* (Anamcara). She teaches English at Johnson County Community College. Beth serves on the Riverfront Reading Committee and the Writers Place board. Most people recognize her from her coffee addiction and messy hair. More information can be found on her blog at <https://timeeasesallthings.wordpress.com/>.

Debra A. Irsik is a Kansas girl who shares her life with her husband Mike, and children John and Emily. She is a member of The Kansas Authors Club and Emporia Writers Group. Deb self-published a three-book YA series, *Heroes by Design* in 2019 and 2020. Her book of poetry, *Sunshine in the Weeds*, was published by Anamcara Press in 2024. She has been featured in *The Write Bridge*, *105 Meadowlark Reader*, and *Inscape*. Deb can be found online at: www.facebook.com/D.A.IrsikAuthor Web: www.dairsik.com

Ashley Clayton Kay is a writer and counselor from Kansas. She received first-place poetry awards in the 2023 Kansas Authors Club Annual Theme Competition and in Japanese Forms. She also received an Honorable Mention in Short Story for the 2021-2022 Pen Parentis Writing Fellowship. Find her on Instagram at @ashleyclaytonkay.

Tammy Hader is the author of *Walking Old Roads: A Memoir of Kindness Rediscovered* and is a contributing author in *A Daily Gift of Gratitude* and *A Daily Gift of Hope*. Tammy writes a monthly article for *Inspirations for Better Living* online magazine and is an essay writer for *WebMD*, *BizCatalyst360*, and *Medium*. You can find her essays and information on how to buy her books at www.tammyhader.com.

Roger Heineken is a first-year member of the Kansas Authors Club, though he has submitted pieces to the KAC contests for the last several years. He writes mostly creative nonfiction and fact-based fiction. Heineken grew up in Atchison County and is retired from a career in the Student Affairs Division of Emporia State University. He lives in Emporia.

Nancy Julien Kopp lives and writes in Manhattan, KS. She is published in 24 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthologies, magazines, ezines, and other anthologies. She has been a member of KAC since 1999. Her blog offers tips and encouragement for writers. Read it at www.writergrannysworld.blogspot.com

Madeline Male writes in a variety of poetic forms, from rhyme and free verse to haiku and limerick. Her works have been featured in publications such as *Stone Soup*, *Writing from the Center*, and *Poetry Soup's* anthology. She is the 2023 Kansas Authors Club Bajaj Youth Writer of the Year. Madeline also enjoys reading, dancing, and photography. Much of the inspiration for her work comes from observing the natural world.

Margaret McKay, a native Kansan, grew up on a farm near Salina. She earned a BA in education and an MBA from Wichita State. Despite her love of teaching, she eventually ended up working as a procurement agent for Boeing. After her husband died following a long battle with cancer, she began writing about her memories. She explores her grief with compassion, gratitude and hope. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and baking as well as spending time with her family. She still calls Wichita home.

Past Poet Laureate of Kansas (2017-2019) **Kevin Rabas** teaches at Emporia State University, where he leads the poetry and playwriting tracks. He has sixteen books, including *Lisa's Flying Electric Piano*, a Kansas Notable Book and Nelson Poetry Book Award winner. He is also a photographer and cinematographer. His films have shown in Kansas, Missouri, and Iowa, and his photographic art has been featured in literary journals across the Midwest.

Julie A. Sellers is the author of the novel, *Ann of Sunflower Lane* (Meadowlark, 2022), a 2023 High Plains Book Award Finalist and a KNEA Reading Circle Commission Recommended Title. Her book *Kindred Verse: Poems Inspired by Anne of Green Gables* (Blue Cedar Press) was released in 2021. Julie's creative work has appeared in publications such as *Cagibi*, *Wanderlust*, *Unlost*, *The Write Launch*, and *105 Meadowlark Reader*. She was the Kansas Authors Club Prose Writer of the Year (2020, 2022, 2023), and the Overall Winner in Poetry (2022) and Prose (2017, 2019) in the Kansas Voices Contest.

Mark Scheel has served overseas with the American Red Cross, taught at Emporia State University, was a public library information specialist and helped edit *Kansas City Voices* magazine. He co-authored the book *Of Youth and the River* and his collection of stories and poems, *A Backward View*, was awarded the 1998 J. Donald Coffin Memorial Book Award. More recent works include the blog collection *The Pebble: Life, Love, Politics and Geezer Wisdom*, the fiction collection *And Eve Said Yes*, the poetry collection *Star Chaser* and the novel *The Potter's Wheel*. He is represented by the Metamorphosis Literary Agency.


A Kansan through and through, **Sandra Lou Taylor** celebrates everything rural. Her favorite writing topic for nonfiction and fiction is Kansas and Kansas history. The turmoil of the mid-1800s in the Lawrence area is the subject of her Hadley family series. She plans to launch the first book in late 2024. Relaxing on her porch with her two border collies laying by her feet and watching cattle graze on the hillside is where you'll often find Sandra. From that porch she can observe the homestead where her family has lived since 1925.

Chuck Warner grew up in Wichita and has lived in Lawrence since the 1960s. After earning business and law degrees from KU, he had a nearly forty-year career in business and banking. After he retired, he wrote *Birds, Bones, and Beetles: The Improbable Career and Remarkable Legacy of University of Kansas Naturalist Charles D. Bunker* (University Press of Kansas). The book earned a 2020 Kansas Notable Book, the best Kansas history and book layout by the Kansas Authors Club, and finalist in the High Plains Book Awards. His essays have been published in *105 Meadowlark Reader* and *The Write Bridge*.

Barbara Waterman-Peters writes about artists for *Topeka* and *Kansas!* creates book cover paintings such as Marcia Cebulski's *Watching Men Dance*, and collaborates with poets, *Two Ponders: A Collaboration* with Dennis Etzel, Jr. Co-owner of Pen & Brush Press with Glendyn Buckley, she illustrated their children's books, *The Fish's Wishes*, and *Bird*. She co-wrote and illustrated their third book, *TING & the Caterbury Tales*. She illustrated *A Packrat Named Orange* for Cathy Callen. A fiction piece, "The Critique," appeared in *The Pen Woman*. Her creative non-fiction and poetry are in *105 Meadowlark Reader*, *The Write Bridge*, and *The Writers Place Yearbook*.

Brenda L. White is a native Emporian whose heart resides on acreage of the family farm in Morris county. An ex-opera student and cloth dollmaker, she is prone to talking to herself, to animals, and the occasional inanimate object. Her hobbies are daydreaming and watching snails. Brenda is a graduate of Emporia State University. Her work has appeared in *Quivera*, *The Flint Hills Review*, *The Write Bridge*, and *105 Meadowlark Reader*.

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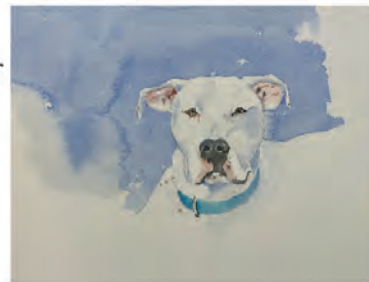
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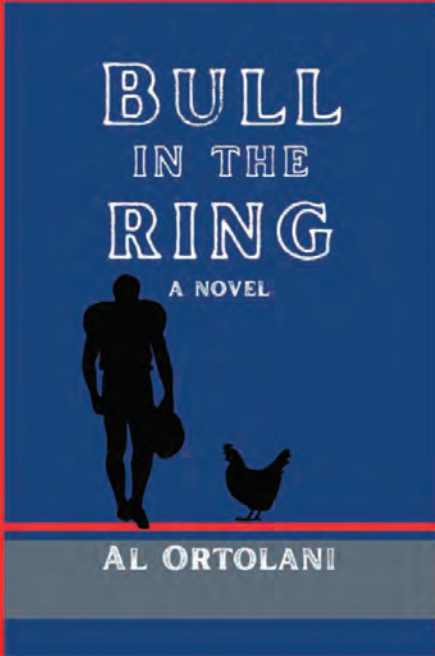
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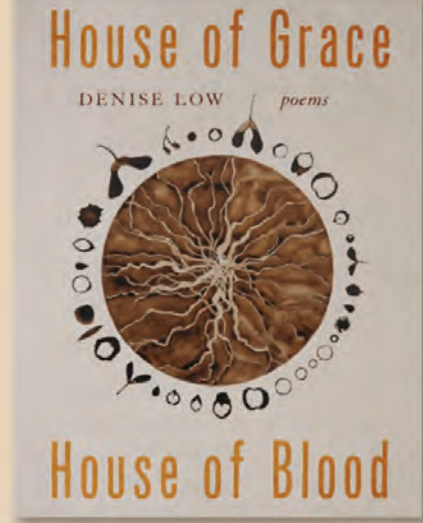


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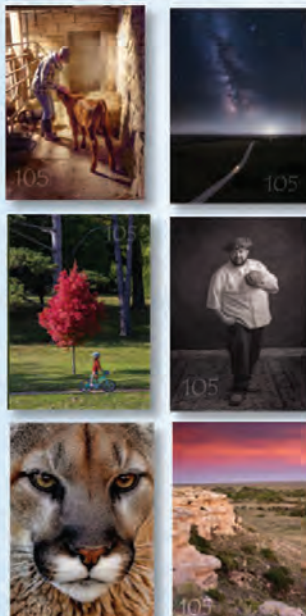
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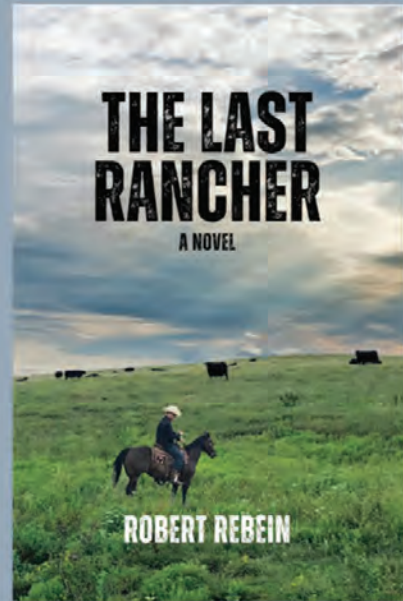
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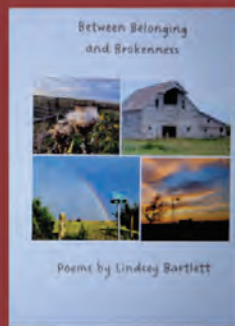
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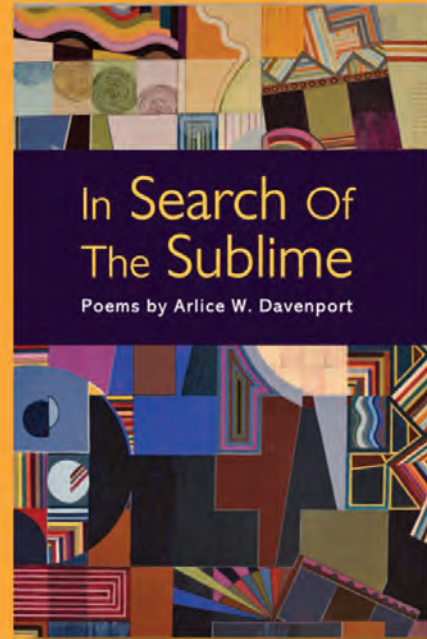
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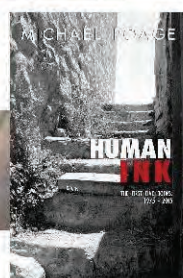
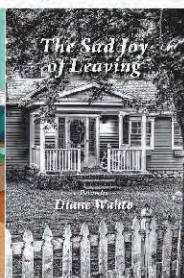
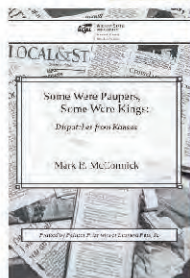
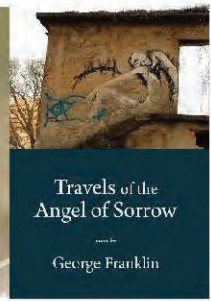
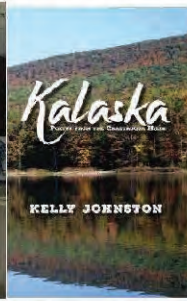


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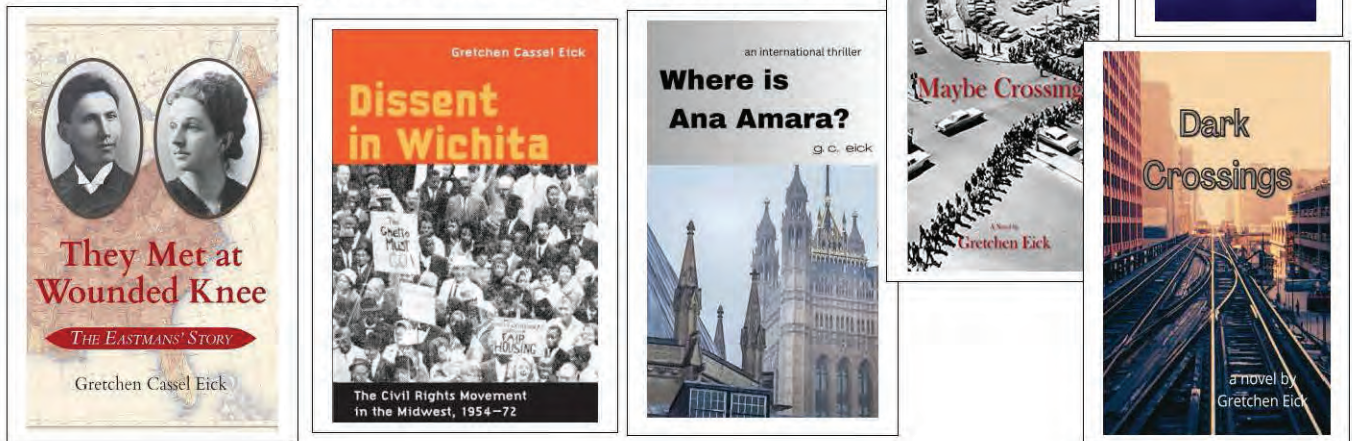
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Writing from the Center, the zine of Kansas Authors Club is an opportunity for members and non-members of Kansas Authors Club to share their creativity with the world. The expected publication date of Volume 3 is fall 2025 with the zine to be launched at the 2025 convention.

Open for Submissions: March 1 - April 30, 2025

2025 Theme: Balance

We are accepting

Poetry (up to 6 poems)

Fiction (1 entry, up to 3500 words)

Creative Nonfiction (1 entry, up to 3500 words)

Visual Art (up to 3 pieces)

Please submit each individual piece on a separate document with the title of the piece as the name of the file. If you submit poetry, please put each piece on its own document. Please submit written work using a DOC or DOCX file. The author's name or any identifying text should not appear anywhere in the document. Please submit visual art as a JPG file.

Please include a biography of 50-100 words, written in 3rd person. There will be a space on the submission form to type this or paste it.

We will not be accepting previous KAC winners through Submittable.

Eligible Writers/Artists: Any current member of Kansas Authors Club may submit at no cost. Students enrolled in secondary or post-secondary schools in Kansas may also submit at no cost. Non-members who are not students must pay a \$5 reading fee for their work to be considered.

By entering, you grant *Writing from the Center* permission to print in the next edition. You attest that your entry is your original work. Unpublished work is preferred. By submitting previously published work, you are signifying that you can assign *Writing from the Center* permission to print. Please disclose the publication status when submitting.

Note that work submitted to the zine in 2025 is also eligible for the 2025 Kansas Authors Club writing contest, as the zine will not be publicly available until the organization's fall event. It is also true that pieces published in the zine in 2025, would not be eligible for the contest in 2026.

