



photo: Fall Snow Elizabeth Hoyer



The Beacon is dedicated to publishing creative works by ETBU students in all disciplines.

The Literary Magazine for East Texas Baptist University 2014-2015

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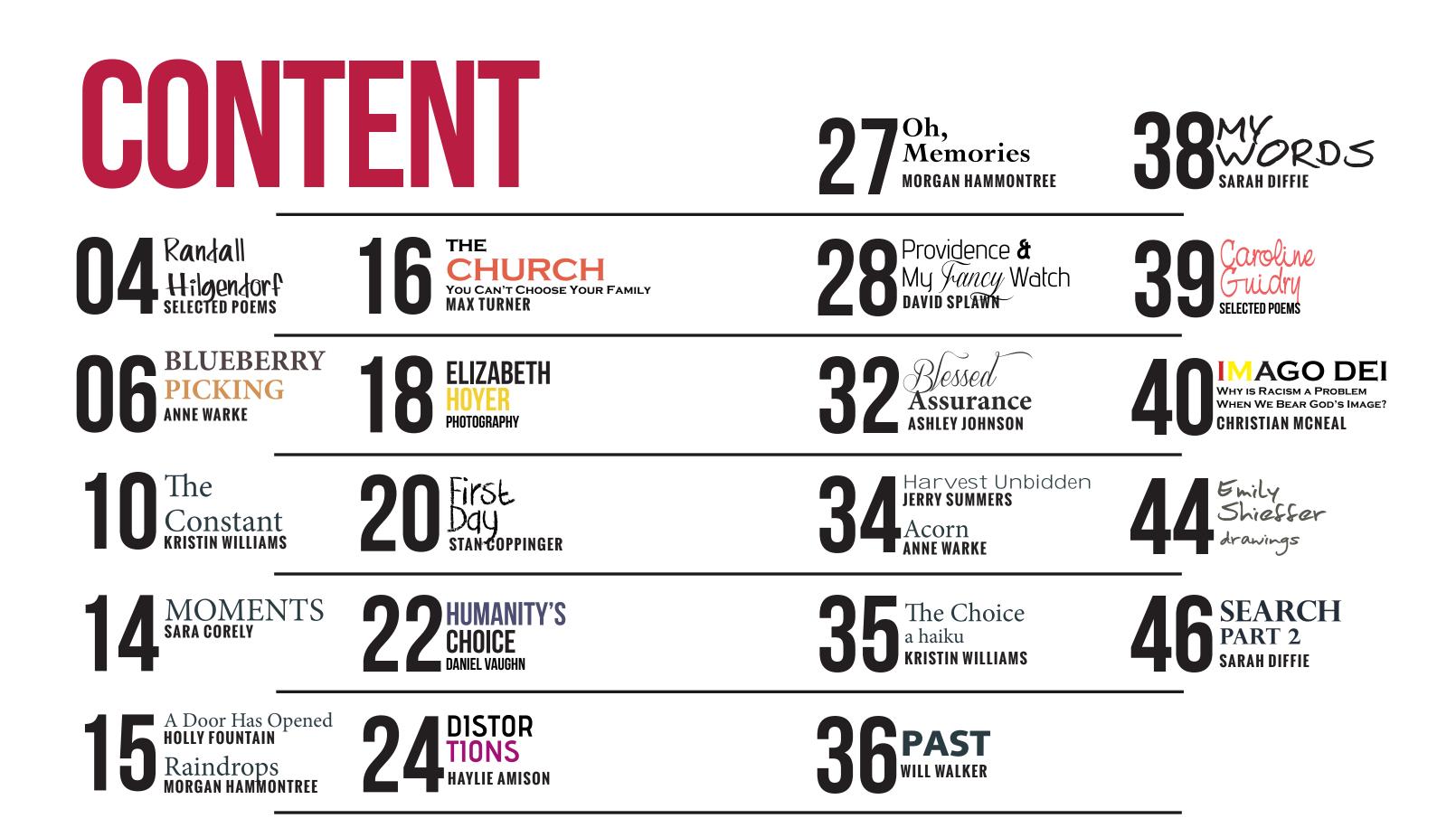
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The Beacon

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Randall Hilgendorf

WORRY CIRCLES

It goes forward, it comes back. It goes back, it comes forward. Starts again at the ending. Ends again at the starting. Chases its own tail round. Round chases its own tail. Worry circles like a vulture. Like a vulture worry circles. Hell is repetition, hell is repetition. Repetition is hell, repetition is hell. Repetition is hell, repetition is hell. Hell is repetition, hell is repetition. Like a vulture worry circles. Worry circles like a vulture. Round chases its own tail. Chases its own tail round. Ends again at the starting. Starts again at the ending. It goes back, it comes forward. It comes forward, it goes back. *Era Miller Contest Winner, first place in poetry*

FALLING

I heard someone say today, "Falling in love is like falling asleep, It happens slowly and it happens all at once."

So when I lay my head down tonight, I will also lay down my heart. Before I drift away I will pray, That you might fall with me.

{selected poems}

the **BEACON**

MAN'S LAMENT

I am alone.

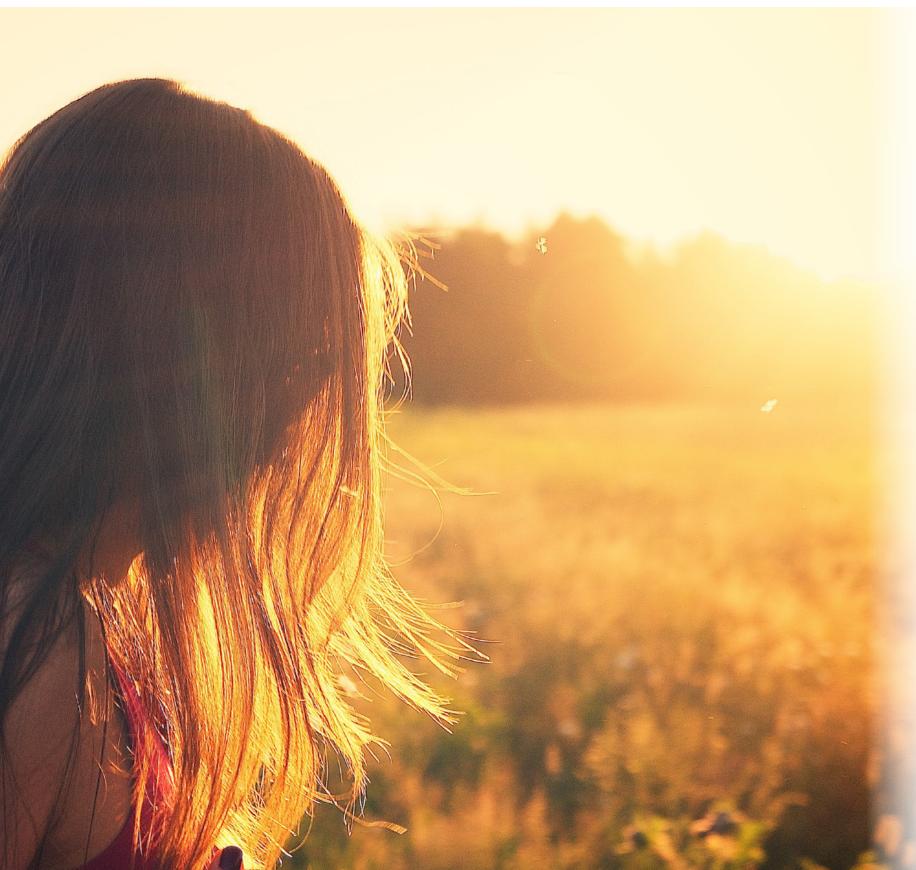
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In a world that once lay at my feet, Where the wind whispered promises, And all the animals feared my predation, I am alone.

Where once there was such a future before me, A road paved by my own strength and will, That stretched to the sky and to glory. I am alone.

People were there to help or be overcome, They flocked to my side or ran cowering, I was a leader of men, once, but in the end, I am alone.





BLUEBERRY PICKING ANNE WARKE

"I haven't picked blueberries in a long time, Abigail," she said, looking through the rear-view mirror to meet her daughter's eyes. The road swam past, a few objects standing out for a split second—a tree, a mile marker—before fading into the sea of continuing. "Not since I was your age. Back then we got paid to pick blueberries, not the other way around." Her eyes drifted back and forth from road to child, making sure she was safe on both fronts.

"Why haven't you picked in so long, "Boy, are you a cute one," the woman said Mama?" The girl's deep blue eyes popped out of enthusiastically as she reached down for two her young face, lips small, cheeks thin. She stared buckets, eyes still focused on the young child. with such intensity at her mother that Stephanie "I've got a couple o' dresses that could just fit you, had to draw in another deep breath. When Abigail sweetie." A touch of wistfulness, a tiny sigh, a rub of the arm, eyes too shiny, the way she bent too low blinked, the whole world vanished, and it only appeared again when she chose to open her eyes. for the buckets, too fast, and stayed bent, stuck, "You know why, Abby. Mommy hasn't frozen, unsure if she could get up, babbling on been well for...for a long time." She sighed once about her daughter, her granddaughter, how hard more. That's how it was with Stephanie—she it is getting old, bending, straightening, rubbing, had to squeeze the words out like peanut butter give me the buckets, get out, get out, give me the from a syringe. Words were mud, like pebbles on buckets a shore—it's only when you turned them over that "Y'know, them dresses're right back here you found out they were shells. in the house, I coul—"

"Y'all can get yer buckets here!" shouted an old "No thank you," Stephanie said, snatched woman, arms thick and stretched in her aged the buckets, clutched Abigail's hand, swiftly floral dress. Bending over the table to peer at the walked off, gasped for air, the old woman reached newcomers, she said, a little too loudly, "Ohh, what out, tried to grab words.

a pretty girl!" Abby stepped back and clung to her mother's rolled-up jeans that were loose in odd places. "My dau—my granddaughter's not much bigger'n you, baby."

"I'm eight," Abigail countered, a little lines and shapes. She took a deep breath before offended, gripping her mother tighter, who stroked her golden hair lightly. Stephanie took a deep breath and began murmuring a familiar song. The sun was hot on her back but she refused to give it attention.

Stephanie breathed deeply, the scent of blueberries thick in the air, bringing back fond memories of picking with her mother, grabbing thick handfuls of ripe berries and dumping them into the big bucket her mother carried. She closed her eyes, remembering the pale blue skirt her mother wore, the smile in hereyes when witnessing her daughter's enthusiasm, the chuckle and like it was a secret that Daddy could never know. from the searing pain in her heart, in her hands,

Reaching forward, Stephanie shook a branch softly and heard the delicate plopping pounded like it narrowing, brows furrowing, of what she knew were the deepest blue berries landing into her bucket. "The dark blue

to look down at her beautiful daughter, who had no gualms about plucking entire branches bare of berries in every shade of azure, and even some her tiny bucket.

could bear it.

seemed to be winning, wheezing in and coughing out as guickly as possible. Her hand was jittering uncontrollably, unable to hold the branch above her, unable to hold anything. Her heart pounded like it wished to be heard. Voices began running through her head, whispering words that dare not be repeated. Some about her daughter. Where was she? Where was Abigail? Find her find her. She looked back to where her daughter had been

and saw nothing but blueberries. Blueberries everywhere, consuming all, devouring the earth in their fury. Song lyrics came into mind, screaming at her, "All delighted people raise their hands" and she felt her hands rising in obedience, all delighted people raise their hands raise your hands raise them obey obey—ALL DELIGHTED PEOPLE RAISE THEIR HANDS. And suddenly she was there, raising bending her soft knees and whispering "I love you" her hands into the sky, crying from the effort,

> in her eyes, pain turning into "...Her heart tears, people looking, eyes wished to be heard..." and the voices laughed jovially, crying out in satisfaction that this once-sane woman was

ones are riper, Abigail," she said, opening her eyes brought to such an end, such a cruel end.

She tried to fight. She thought of her daughter, blonde hair running down her cheeks, framing her face like a portrait. She thought of her emerald, as if she were collecting jewels to put in daughter at the first day of school, saying, "I can do this all by myself, Mama!" She thought of her boss The sun was still bright. But Stephanie saying it's okay to take personal days, it's okay, but not to overuse them, as she took her daughter out Then everything fell out of focus, the of school for her birthday. She thought of how sun searing into Stephanie's back like tiny knives soon her daughter would start liking boys, how stabbing thickly. She battled with air, and it she would leave her and never come back one of these days, and she'd be all alone, living in her room, alone alone alone alone where was she-

> She thought of her own mother, pulling her up into warm arms and squeezing her tight and tickling her until she giggled and giggled. But the giggles turned into laughter and the laughter turned angry and bitter and cruel and she saw herself next to her mother's grave at the age of 12, wondering what would have inspired her to kill



herself when she was in the prime of her life and was it her fault it was her fault and one day that would be her and Abigail would be Stephanie and all would be complete and orderly and it would continue throughout the generations until there were no more daughters—

She was sobbing now. She had fallen over, lying on the ground, on her hands. Her arms ached from all the delighted people. She had been heaving, stomach twisted in a giant knot, spitting up, but now she could breathe, and air flowed down her throat like a river. Tears swirled into the dirt, making her hands muddy. She sighed.

She got up. She sat on her knees, rocking back and forth, rubbing her hands on her thighs, over and over, rubbing in the dirt, breathing deeply, wiping her eyes. She looked at the bucket of blueberries. She put her hands in it, letting the blueberries run up to her elbows, and she picked them up and squeezed them and smeared them onto her face. It felt good, cool to the touch, to the pores. She reveled in the blueberries. She even ate some. And she saw them everywhere. She looked up to see people around her and in their eyes were

blueberries. The blueberries smiled. She nodded to the guestions they asked her. She was at peace with the blueberries. The sun stroked her cheek playfully. She giggled.

"Mama?" a voice called out from the crowd and Stephanie stood up and ran to her child and picked her up and spun her. She cradled her and laughed and laughed and laughed. She held her daughter's hand and bent down so their eyes were level and whispered, "Don't you ever leave me again," her smile shining. Abigail made a reply but Stephanie wasn't listening. She went back, picked up her bucket, and walked toward the old woman, who was patiently waiting, arms crossed.

"Two buckets," she said. She set them on the table. She was grinning. The woman poured the blueberries into two bags and weighed them. The woman gave her a total and she reached in her pocket and found some money and gave the money to the woman. Then she took the bags in one hand and Abigail's hand in the other and walked to the car. She opened the door for Abigail to get in and then shut the door and opened her own and sat down. Looking through the rear-view mirror to meet her daughter's eyes, she said, "Next time, we'll pick blackberries."

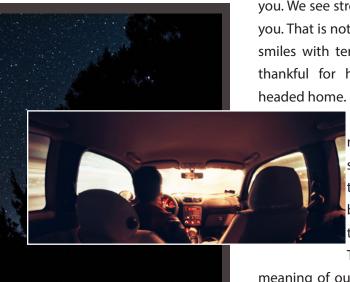
Era Miller Contest winner, third place in prose

The Constant

Kristin Williams

join. I chose the couch for comfort. My efforts apathy and complacency. Lost in the mystery, I were futile. I sat stiffened, unable to disengage. When the time came to leave, I was relieved. I stepped out into the cold air and exhaled. My two closest friends and I had planned a night and that means something. Ada and I love you just for us; finally, an escape.

"I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds." (PSalm 77:11-12)



Frustrated, I gave in. I stood up from my desk, shoved the chair in, and kicked my backpack to the side. I changed into sweatpants. I made a steaming cup of Earl Grey Tea. I put on the children's film, Horton Hears a Who, sank into the couch under my heating blanket with the lights dimmed, and faded into mindlessness. My two roommates walked in wearing confused expressions-

"Don't you have homework?"

"I do," I answered with a sarcastic laugh, "but if I have to produce one more intellectually stimulating thought, I will implode."

With giggles of agreement, they joined me.

The lengthening homework assignments, the layering financial complications, the thickening familial hardships, and the mounting spiritual questions put me in a haze I couldn't navigate. I am not naturally confrontational, so withdrawal comes inherently. I tried to neglect depth. However, immersed in an environment of challenged viewpoints and encouraged exploration, I felt suffocated. The following Sunday, at the weekly Honors Program Coffee Hour, I bounced between conversations trying to find one safe enough to We drove together, laughing effortlessly. We saw Interstellar at the theatre – a three hour endeavor. Afterwards, we stopped for holiday warm, dimly lit café as we analyzed aspects of the film. Our conversation progressively led to the wonder of creation. Elise voiced spiritual questions she'd recently been wrestling with- mainly the character of God and our overall purpose. At first, Ada and I tried to answer her. Gradually, though, I understood her perspective and even joined her. I had



comforted Elise with the only truth I could claim at that moment, "You have purpose. I may not know the extent, but I know that you are loved deeply and we are profoundly encouraged by you. We see strength, wisdom, and kindness in you. That is not for nothing!" Our tears met our smiles with tender sincerity. We linked arms, thankful for honesty and acceptance, and

> After that evening, my mind raced. I made no effort to steady my thoughts. Eventually, the debate of God's character became doubt. My wonder of he unknown became worry. The freedom to explore the

meaning of our existence became frustrating. Hostility hosted my curiosity. One afternoon, I was completing a reading assignment before work. If my thoughts had been audible, the calmness of the office would've dissipated abruptly. However, with one guote my mind went mute. "All great Christian leaders are simple thinkers" (Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz). A few moments later, my professor stood at the lattes at Starbucks. We reclined, relaxing in the doorframe. Apparently, my astonishment was evident. He asked for my input on the chapter. I read the quote, concluding with a confounded expression. "I am not a simple thinker. Faith, for me, is complex. Is it wrong to question humanity's significance? Is it sinful to dwell on God's relevance?" His smirk insinuated he related, but he answered simply. "Karl Barth, a well-known theologian, was asked by a student been oversimplifying and generalizing out of to summarize his life's work. He responded



"HEAVEN IS REALITY ITSELF"

with, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so...".

Inquiring is biblical. Books are dedicated as 'Wisdom Writings' in Scripture. James tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). Job, when he underwent suffering, repetitively asked God, "Why?" The Lord did not accuse Job of sinning. Scripture even honors his perseverance - his attitude and mindset throughout his trials. "... You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (James 5:11). However, the Lord challenged Job with a humbling reality, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion's belt?" (Job 38:31). God declared his omnipotence and benevolence. If God had left Job without a response, Job's questions would've continued to bedevil him. God answered because he knew Job would have dwelt

in his anguish. Job's continual pondering would've gradually led to separation from the Lord. Therefore, the Father redirects Job's attention

from pain to purpose. God, in his grace, confronts the danger in the dwellings of humanity. C.S. Lewis depicts the concept in The Great Divorce, "Hell is a state of mind – ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind – is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakeable remains."

We cannot reach Heaven on our own. We cannot think our way to holiness. Spirituality is not about logicality. The reality is that we are not meant to understand it all. If we could grasp God, he would not be who he claims to be. Scripture would be errant. Human intellect can only catch glimpses of divine knowledge. We cannot rely on our own comprehensions, because our perspective, on its own, is not heavenly. Simultaneously, though,

reason is encouraged biblically. Scripture is clear about believers receiving the mind of Christ. "... Take every thought captive to obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5b) To obey God is to love and be loved by God.

At the beginning of the semester, was talking with a close friend. He asked why I studied English. Excitedly, I explained, "Curiosity, inquisitiveness, and imagination are enjoyable. I delight in theorizing - in discussing ideas, analyzing concepts, exploring interpretations." Typically, I take pleasure in thorough, academic thought. However, I am only able to wander through thought when I have a compass of constant directing. I can only face the ambiguity of spirituality while holding onto the certainty of spirituality. Ideas fluctuate, interpretations are relative, but the love of the Lord is fixed irrevocable and unconditional. His attributes, his ways, his thoughts are of love, mercy, and grace. The overall narrative of Scripture is God's pursuit of his people. The gospel itself is the provision of restored relationship. When I find myself losing track, I can always come back to who he is and what he has done. There is splendor in wonder; there is beauty in ruminating with admiration. "... Whateveristrue, whateveris honorable, whateveris just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8). Thinking complexly is not inherently sinful. However, our dwellings must center on and end with faith. Our aim is set our mind's attention and heart's affection on the Lord."I don't think there is any better worship than wonder" (Miller).

Era Miller Contest winner, second place in prose

"The Gospel itself is the provision of restored relationship

Moments

Sara Corley

There are moments We get to step Away from pain.

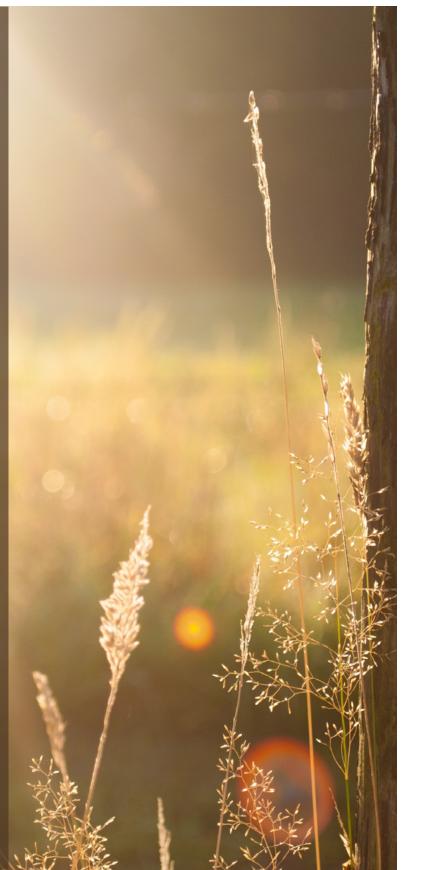
We are allowed sweet, Momentary peace. Pretending hurt Doesn't exist.

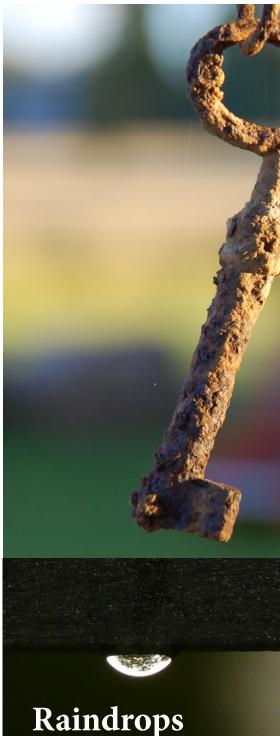
You were those moments.

You were the drink Drowning out life, The heroine Making me forget Reality and Remember dreams.

You did not fill The aching void, Nonexistent The void became When you were there.

I hope to pay Forward my gift Of smiles and hope You gave to me. I hope to someday be The sun and rain That you were to me.





Morgan Hammontree

As the raindrops fall I feel safe and warm inside Their sound comforts me

A Door Has Been Opened

Holly Fountain

At a time I wrote: "Many doors in your hall, take the key that opens them all." How foolish I was. Now, a door has been opened and I wish I dared not peer inside. A room full of skeletons, death and demise. Some doors are meant to not only be locked, But Dead bolted, sealed up and walled-in. I wish I could throw away the key But It's too late now, My eyes now see.

Era Miller Contest winner, third place in poetry



THE YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR FAMILY **IAX TURNER**

I hate to worry. Some worries are large and needed like performing spinal surgery, whereas some are Genesis Church. This was a radical church plant small like making a good grade on a test. Regardless in Spring, TX. My conservative Baptist upbringing of the magnitude, everybody worries. I am a realistic rivaled Genesis' views on just about everything person, borderline pessimist. I do not worry about – theology, ministries, worship, even tithing. my clothing style, if the person two seats down Everything seemed to be different at Genesis, appreciated my joke, or the fact that I have twenty especially me. There were seven other families in dollars in my bank account. I do my best not to their thirties with babies, two older couples in their worry- I have discovered it's impossible though. late fifties, some homeless people, and me. Early I do have worries - big ones. My most significant in our church my cousin Patrick, the pastor, had a worry, possibly deepest fear, is losing my family. Not dream of reaching the homeless in our community. physically, but emotionally – distancing themselves Eventually, we grouped under a bridge in North by choice because of what I've done. As if I was Houston to have a tailgating party with the homeless expired, chunky milk they accidently took a swig on Tuesday nights. I was a little uncomfortable. of, tasting so nasty they chose never to drink milk My past trained me to distrust and question their again. My family rejecting me because of my actions motives, but also to give them a gospel track from worries me.

In the spring of 2011 I invested myself at my window at a stoplight if we made eye contact.





family. I realized the same worry I had about my family rejecting me might also be the way Pops felt about his family rejecting him. Except Pops' immediate family was us, Genesis Church. After the revelation I tried to love Pops with all I could and let him know rejection was not possible in the Genesis family. Getting closer to Pops, I realized how great Regardless, I made an effort to be open-minded. A of a person he was. Kind, funny, caring, and fun, he flood of homeless people into our church was the became a great witness out on the streets. I took a result of our Tuesday night homeless tailgate parties group of high school students to the streets to feed - which is a good thing, at least that's what Patrick and witness to the homeless. I could tell they were said. That is when I met Pops. uncomfortable - I knew that feeling. I saw Pops was "That's disgusting," I thought as I watched there and he ran over excited to see us. He spent the Pops pick up used cigarettes off the ground. next thirty minutes taking us to people he specifically Everything about this man screamed homeless knew needed water, food and most importantly the addict. He was super thin, long-stringy unkempt gospel. I remembered this was the same man I saw hair, and his yellow fingernails could pass as blades. picking up cigarettes at church. I would've missed Our church was meeting in a wedding/reception this opportunity to serve with Pops if I had acted on hall; therefore, the left over cigarettes were from the my initial judgment. However, God's grace is good Saturday night before. and He did not allow that to happen. God revealed "Should we tell him to stop," I asked Patrick. the beauty of the spiritual family to me versus the physical family.

"Stop what?" Patrick replied.

"He's picking up the cigarettes and re-using them here at church!"

We became friends in spite of his addictions because that's what families do, and Patrick was there to Patrick asked, "Do you want him to stop because of encourage more love instead of letting me reject. his health or because you think he can't worship here This event changed my view on the church. We are with day old cigarette butts?" This question shocked a family that didn't choose to be together but get the me; how could Patrick be happy with this? opportunity to love each other and worship the true Patrick had one of those wise pastor moments after God as one group. Love is not telling someone to the question then he said, "Pops is our family now, stop something I don't approve of; it's choosing to you don't get to choose who your family is, but you love in spite of their flaws. I accepted the reality that can love them regardless of their flaws. Don't reject everybody worries, and most of the people coming Pops from this family because you don't agree with into Genesis worry about family rejection just like his actions." me, and I want to do everything I can to give them Family rejection, what I never wanted to peace.

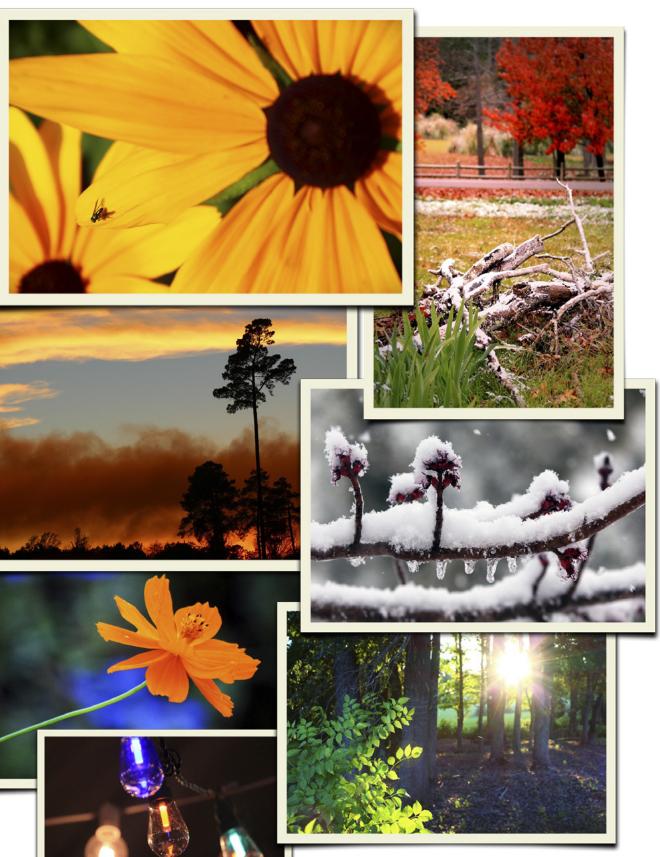
happen, I was now initiating. Patrick, unknowingly, captured my greatest worry to explain our church

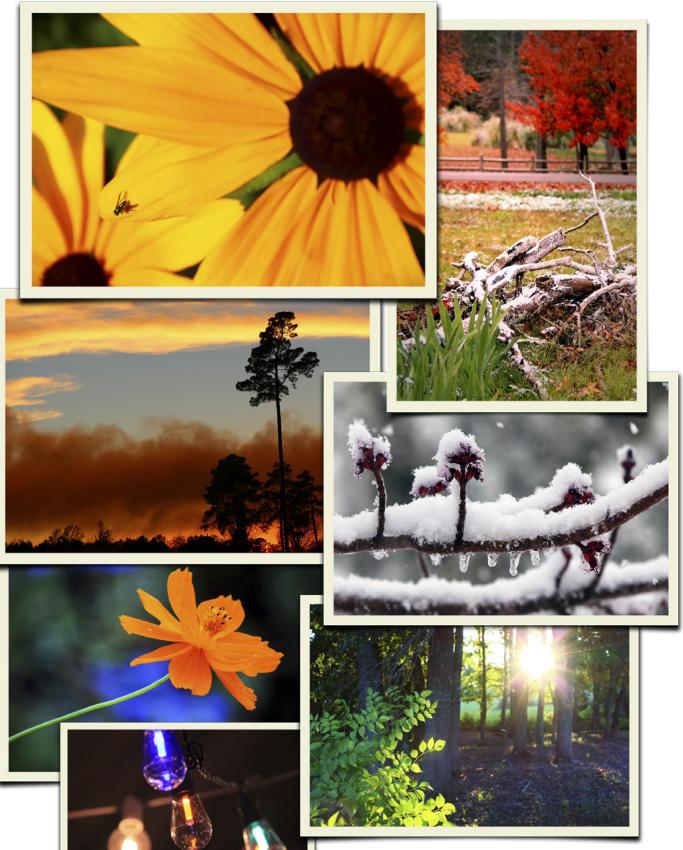
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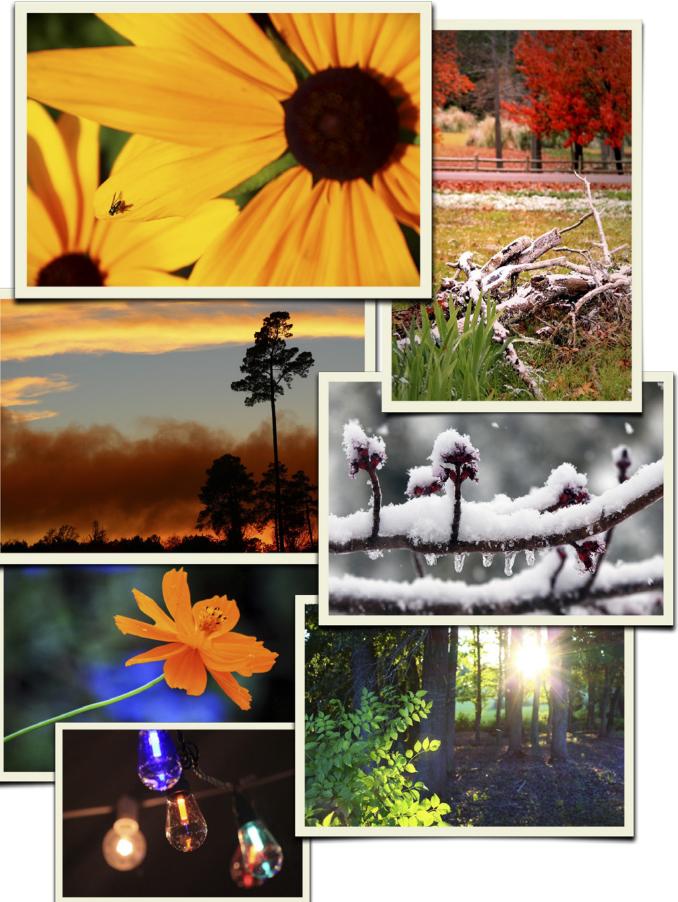


a literary magazine ::: 2015

ELIZABETHHOYER **PHOTOGRAPHY**







a literary magazine ::: 2015



appears in The Intersection by the Center for Excellence in Christian Scholarship (CECS) Fall 2013

He raised his hand.

desk.

It was the first day of class—my first day ever to myself some time. teach. And just ten minutes earlier, I had climbed the creaking staircase to the second floor of the science building. As I walked down the narrow room. hallway that smelled of formaldehyde, I checked classroom numbers. When I found mine, I stood outside the door and tried to catch my breath.

I leaned my back against the hall wall and wondered what I'd been thinking. Me, a teacher? I hadn't even taken the required speech class in college because the idea of standing in front of a semester. It read, classroom paralyzed me with fear. And now here I was, starting a career doing just that.

They began to arrive. One by one. I managed a smile for each student. And when the bell rang, I I walked to the back of the classroom toward his asked God for a miracle and walked into the room. My voice guavered as lintroduced myself. I passed out a bio sheet for my students to fill out. Buying

And then I saw his hand—near the back of the

"I don't have a pen," he said. And so I gave him mine.

At the end of the semester, I got my first student thank you note. He put it in my hand as he walked out of the classroom on the final day of the

Dear Dr. C. I will never forget the day we met. Your class was So I raised my hand.

I was scared. But when I told you, you smiled and reached into your pocket and gave me yours. I couldn't And, as teachers we have a choice to make. We *believe a college teacher would do that. Thanks for* can be harsh. Or we can be kind. Some might being so kind to me. I will always remember that. say that students have to learn accountability or else they'll think they can get by with anything. His first day. My first day. Both scared. Both I get that. But perhaps a little compassion and hoping to make a good impression. A student flexibility along the way might make an impact we and a teacher. Both so different. But with so much could never imagine.

in common.

Funny thing. I had a campus meeting this summer. Now, after 25 years, I no longer hyperventilate And I was scheduled to give a presentation. wanted to get to campus early. But things didn't go when I walk into a classroom. I'm no longer terrified. No longer frozen with fear. as planned. Traffic was heavy. Stop lights weren't friendly. And by the time I got to the campus, I was But they are. Many of them anyway. And I often stressed. I managed to get to the meeting on time. forget that. Some of them are first generation But as the session began and the first speaker was college students. Some of them have never heard introduced, I reached for my pen—and I realized, of a syllabus. Some of them have no idea how to in my haste, I had forgotten mine.

write an essay for an academic audience. They don't know what a fragment is. Or how a writing And so I took a deep breath . . . and raised my process works. Some of them are worried about hand.... money and about the girlfriend or boyfriend back home. Some of them already dislike their roommate. Some of them are homesick and wondering what they were thinking when they said yes to college. They are scared, just like I was 25 years ago.

Easy for me to forget. Easy for me to say, "If you don't have a pen, then borrow one from someone else or go back to your room and get one. This is college. You have to be prepared."

my first-ever college course. I was so nervous. And But I know that students can absolutely think when you gave us an assignment sheet to fill out at they have things under control, and it can still go the beginning of class, I realized I didn't have a pen. wrong. The computer crashes. The printer runs out of ink. The power goes out.

Creator said, let us make Humanity curious and artistic. Let Humanity paint with nature's colors, considering our beauty on earth. Let Humanity observe skies, naming stars, telling tales of constellations.

> carefully crafting each limb. This is good.

> > Creator said, Let us make Humanity progressive, innovative. Let Humanity produce machines, swimming as fish, flying as birds, finding us in all places. Let Humanity experience mountains, clouds, seas, always telling of our work.

Like a child roaming streets at dusk, when called home Humanity replied, by Daniel Vaughn Not yet.

Era Miller Contest winner, third place in poetry

a literary magazine ::: 2015

Like a child building sandcastles, Creator formed dirt into flesh,

Like a child sculpting clay,

Creator molded the mind, giving thought and action. This is good.

> Creator said, let us breathe life into Humanity. Let Humanity live walking on grass, rolling down hills, seeing us in the sun's warm rays. Humanity, open your eyes, come to us, embrace us, know us.



Donald Miller explains this feeling of admiring a father. The tension between what you want what you should see—and what is really there. He describes it as "the blended composite of love and fear that exists only in a boy's notion of his father...".

If a son has a notion for the ideal father, then a daughter certainly has these notions, too.

I had these...Have

them. I have a handful of memories—just slivers of glimpses that I cup in my hand. They are jagged and do not add up to much. I just have a handful of them. They are strangely innocent and pure-with sharp edges of anxious bewilderment. I can't piece the slivers together. At angles you see Daddy's little girl....but just at angles. What the pieces do reflect—no matter how pure they seem—are painful realities of who my dad truly

was...is.

I throw these slivers onto the ever growing pile of disappointed hopes.

After checking the mail in "down town" Marietta, Dad would let me sit on his lap and steer

"...a daughter certainly has these notions too."

on the way home. Driving around that sharp curve is the moment I remember the most. That 90 degree curve around Audrey's house. This was the most difficult part of

the drive for me—the only apparent obstacle. He had to help. This is the moment I remember. Not the moment after we got the mail when he said "you can drive home!" Not even the part after the curve...where you coast down a hill only to have a straight shot to the house. But the curve. Why?

There was a time one early morning we were by his truck under the catawba tree. He picked me up and said "your mom is so beautiful." I remember this not because he said it, but because I was surprised he said it. It is the one and only time I can pull back to where there was a feeling of intimacy between them. The one time I can remember him saying something kind about my mom. I think about this moment and I don't know why.

Standing, at a distance, I remember watching him pluck feathers from a duck in our living room; he had just returned from hunting. I remember the smell. The bucket below. The

oil secreting out of that thing. This is one of the few moments I can place him at home—in our living room. He had been hunting like a dad and had returned home with his kill. I remember watching with admiration



but being disgusted all at the same time. Why o remember this? I don't know. These memories...

Have I held onto certain details because I am

trying to form my dad into the ideal father? Li the notion we have of a father?

I can't shake it. I can ignore things. I can have I often wonder how it hasn't affected my view of God or my relationship with God the peace about aspects of that relationship; I can even come to a place where I realize my dad isn't Father. How do I not have an example of a father my dad and I don't care for him to try now. But... and yet trust God as my true Father? But I have there is still a twinge. seen the unconditional and selfless Christ-like love These slivers still cut. through my mom. Through my grandfather. And We hold onto ideas that really never were. through my brothers and sisters in Christ. I see it The dad that teaches me how to drive. there. I can grasp it. That slight grasp is what holds The dad that admires the mother and wife. onto me...and He meets me there and says "I've The dad who hunts. The dad that provides. got you." That is my comfort.

Where do we get these ideals? These "perfect" Is something missing? Yes. There will characterizations? always be something missing. I wish I could change this. There isn't much I wish I could These glimpses that have somehow hidden

in the corners of my mind illustrate false moments of security. I replayed them for years as moments where Dad was a dad. When I hit the wall of "you have no father"...and... "you don't have a father that loves, provides, teaches"... I am reminded in some form of my Heavenly father. And yes that may be a tired or cliché phrase. I feel like I am telling a person who is hurting deeply, "Oh.... God has a plan." But that is it. I have a perfect Father in Heaven. Can I always understand this idea? No. I also have no way of comprehending His incredible

> creation of the world. And when I think about it, often times, when I wrestle with not being fulfilled by my Heavenly Father, I think it comes down to me and where I am at, not Him. He is always there. It is

do I	difficult to always be fulfilled with God the Father,
	especially when we don't have a tangible example
	here on earth of a worthy father. Donald Miller
	called it a bad PR move on God's part to give
ke	himself that name of father when the earth has
	little to no example of it.

change. I have made huge mistakes.... And I don't want to change those. I don't even want to change the fact that my parents divorced. That's not it. A marriage doesn't make a dad. I wish I could change the experiences with my dad. I wish he knew how to be one. I wish I didn't have this hole, because it will be something I carry for the rest of my life. It is something that I always have to be conscious of... this missing thing...this ache that I forget is there. It is something I wish I didn't have to bring into other relationships. It is dangerous baggage, and I know it.

These slivers I hold in my hand. I want to cup them... curve my hands around them protectively in order to see the reflections of angles that I wish to see. I wish reality didn't come. I wish the slivers weren't sharp. Then I could have these pure memories. I would like to tell him just let me be. That would make it easier...easier to let the good moments be good and that's it. Just let me have those. Don't ruin them for me. But I have slivers...

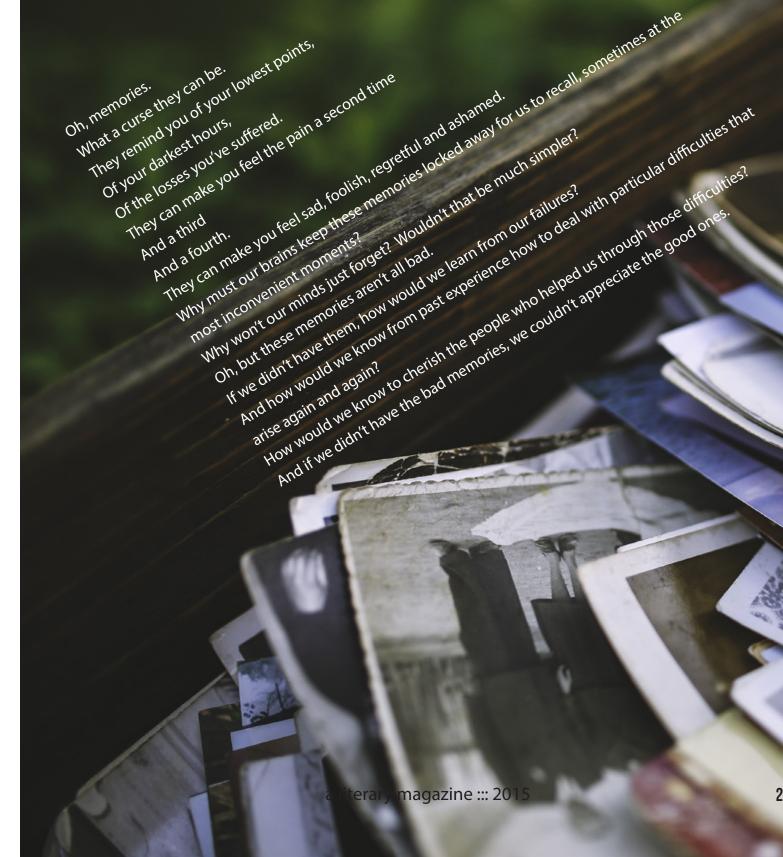
I have a dad who is there when I am coasting down the hill (never the dangerous curves). I have a dad who has never known the beauty of his wife.

I have a dad who hunts for himself.

Era Miller Contest winner, first place in prose

the **BEACON**





OH, MEMORIES Morgan Hammontree

magazine ::: 20

H B Providence & My Janey Watch **DAVID SPLAWN**

the **BEACON**

At an early age I was taught about the provid of God. One of the first verses my mother had memorize was Romans 8:28-"And we know in all things God works for good of those love him, who have been called according t purpose" (NIV). Knowing that God has good for our lives is one of the simple aspects of we begin to teach our children.

So, when did I forget the simple, yet ol important, concept of providence? At what during my "grown-up" time on planet earth stop believing that God has a good plan fo

life, that he cares about all the little day-to-day things that concern my attention?

I am not sure, but I did forget.

I became aware of this fact this past August my wife and I moved to Marshall. It all began day I lost my watch.

Now, the watch in question is not your ord Timex from Target. It is valuable. It is val because of its price—more than I have ever on a watch, or would ever spend on a wat and because of its origin-it was a gift from in-laws on the day I graduated with my docto

It is the kind of watch that I have always was but would never buy for myself. It is the kin watch that says that I am a real grown-up, se about keeping time. It is the kind of watch I seemed ridiculous to me.

dence	imagine passing down to my son (Which one of
ad me	the three? I haven't decided.).
w that	
e who	So, sometime during the dark hours of our first
to his	night in our new home, my watch was quietly
d plan	removed from the console of my unlocked car
f faith	in our driveway. I was devastated. I knew that it
	would be a long time before I could afford another
	watch like it. I knew that, more than its monetary
oh-so-	value, I could also never replace its significance as
point	a gift. I admit, a number of choice words came to
n did I	mind about the person who took it. I also admit
or my	that it shook me to the core; I not only felt that it

"At what point during my 'grown-up' time on planet earth did I stop believing that God has a good plan for my life."

	further confirmed my doubt in humanity, but it
	discredited my personal assurance in God's plan.
when	
an the	My wife and I did all the things you are supposed
	to do when you are robbed—called the police,
	asked the neighbors if they saw anything, visited
dinary	pawn shops, reported the theft to the insurance
luable	company—and there seemed to be no hope that
spent	I would ever see that watch again. After word got
tch—	around to the neighbors, my colleagues at work,
m my	and my family members I remember repeatedly
orate.	hearing the same phrase from several people,
	"Oh, I am so sorry; I will pray that you find it."
anted,	
ind of	That phrase, even though I am a God-fearing,
erious	Jesus-following, Providence-believing Christian,
atch I	soomed ridiculous to me

gone, either sold for easy cash or it had become a permanent part of the wardrobe of the thief that took it. How would prayer miraculously bring the watch back to me? The possibility that God would convince the thief to bring it back or somehow keep it safe in the pawn shop until I arrived to get it was not just unlikely; it seemed an impossibility At the very instance in which we finally found to me.

concern himself with all the troubles in the world starvation in North Korea, wars in the Middle East, poverty in the city where I live, or the plight of small children suffering under unimaginable oppression with a stolen watch.

My educated, grown-up mind told me that it was spent the better part of two years trying to find God's plan for our lives. As I neared the completion of my doctoral degree we sought out God's will for us on a daily basis, constantly fretting about where I would get a permanent job, where we would settle the family.

a job and a home, I lost the watch. I was not just It also seemed absurd to think that God, who must convinced that I would not find the watch; I also convinced myself that the location of the watch was too small a thing for God to be concerned with. The lost watch represented my own doubts about the nature of God's plan for my life. Does and abuse—would be concerned in the least bit God really care about a plan for my life? Does he even care about the little things, like a lost watch? If

"I was just certain that sometimes bad things happen; we move on."

will find it" phrase from one individual that I did it. I told her that I would not pray and ask God to my life? bring my watch back.

But, I prayed it nonetheless. The watch means a great deal to me, and I wanted it back.

What is ironic is the timing of the missing watch (No pun intended). You see, my wife and I had

he doesn't care about the little things, something that was seemingly insignificant, but important to me nonetheless, does he really care about me?

I told my wife after hearing the "I will pray you This lost watch was a synecdoche for my lost soul. (That's a fancy word we English professors use not want God to give one thought to my watch. when a small part of something stands in for or It seemed downright selfish to even imagine represents the whole.) If I really believe that God that God should care about one silly watch, just did not care about my watch, then how could I because it meant a lot to me and I asked him for believe that God did care about the direction of

> Eventually, I was calmly resigned to the fact that the watch was lost forever. I was not mad at God. I was just certain that sometimes bad things happen; we move on. It wasn't God's fault because it really shouldn't be any of his concern. But, my quiet doubts about God's providence remained.



the watch to me. She had found it just inside a bush in front of her house less than a block away from our home. It seems that the thief had a change of heart for whatever reason and tossed the watch away. It lay there gathering dust for months, not a scratch on it. In that time, it was mowed passed and overlooked in plain sight.

I have spent a lot of time trying to answer the guestions that come to mind when I think about the loss and miraculous return of my fancy watch. Why was it taken? Why did the thief not keep it? Why did several months pass before I found it?

I can't help but imagine all the tiny little events that happened to ensure that the watch was returned safely to me. If the thief had understood its true value or completed his/her malevolent plans, it would never have been left behind. If it had fallen any further outside the bush, it could have been gobbled up by a lawn implement or found by someone else. If my neighbor had not been one of those people who said, "I will pray you get your watch back," she might not have remembered that it belonged to me.

But, none of those things happened. What did happen is that God saw fit to return the watch to me. And I am grateful. The best thing about the return of the watch, though, is not how well it tells time, or the fact that it was lost and then found. The best thing is that when I check the time on my watch, I not only find an indication of

- Well, as you can see from the picture, that is not the temporal moment, but I am reminded of the the end of the story. One evening, several months eternal moment. I am reminded that God does later a neighbor came to our house and brought indeed care about my life, even the little things.

"It's okay to not be okay." The words hit my ears I'm meant to go in a dense veil of uncertainty. Then I thank God for friends who are real.

many decisions. I can't even read without my mind drifting to my ever-present, overbearing future. I tell her

about the near panic attacks I have when I sit on breaths are shallow and I begin to think about comforter is like my life—consuming me. I tell her school, we work—for what?

like calming rain. I think about my reading from I feel my throat closing—it's itchy and my breaths that morning: Hosea 6. About how the Lord would are slow and shallow, like when my terrier lies on come as the spring showers that bring new life. my chest. I feel like I've just eaten a yogurt barthe kind with honey that I'm pretty sure I'm slightly I tell her about my last few days. How every time I sit allergic to. When I eat them, my throat feels small down to attempt any kind of work, anxiety seizes and scratchy. Which is weird because I've always me like the beginnings of the flu. This week—this loved honey. I can have it in my tea and it has no month, actually—has overwhelmed me. I have too effect. But one bite of the yogurt bars and my

> body freaks out. Same with the hard candy made with honey my dad buys all the time... My throat is closing and my

the too-big comforter that swallows my bed. The the meaninglessness of life. We're born, we go to

that I'm stressing. And then I stress about that Sometimes I think about the way we live and our stressing, because I don't normally stress, and that's traditions, and reflect on how utterly strange we simply stressful. She asks what I'm stressing about. are. We pay to attend universities that are far from "Life," I answer candidly. "My heart is heavy and I home so we can gain a piece of paper stating we want it not to be," I tell her. Fear of complacency know something. I could be teaching in India and lack of purpose settle over me like a heavy fog, right now. Sharing Jesus and a love for language hiding the sunlight of joy and concealing where with people completely different from me: that's

meaningful.

What is my purpose?

okay to question. That's how we learn to trust—by being afraid. By not knowing what lies ahead. It's with it now: hence the panic attacks.

I think back to my eight-year-old self and the fear always came back. Always.

of abandonment. Even with my fear of the final bell and being left I remember the tension rising in my stomach. I alone, I knew when that last bell rang, my mom remember the panic overtaking me. I don't know would be waiting for me in the squeaky blue pickwhat it is or why I feel this way—I am definitely too up, just as she had for the last two years. Actually, old for it—I just know I do. And it frightens me. In she was almost always the first in that long line of five minutes the bell will ring signaling the end cars. I had no reason not to trust her. But in the very of another school day and I fear being left alone. depths of me there was still that coldness—still Fighting to hold back hot tears, I lay my head on that feeling that somehow I would be left utterly my desk. It doesn't work. Tears trickle down my alone—abandoned—by everyone l loved. warm cheeks anyway. My ears grow scarlet as That discomforting uncertainty has me stressed I feel thirty-two eyes staring. "What's wrong?" I now. It's painful to feel unsure of the guiding hand hear my best friend murmur. She's worried. And that is meant to bring peace. But, it's through this embarrassed. I can hear it in her voice. I don't know pain and fear that I learn to wholly trust in God. what's wrong. That's the problem. I can't articulate Learning to trust is a tricky business. It's when I it. I'm remembering. can say, "I don't know what to do, so I'm just gonna "Ashley, Nana is gone." I don't understand the lean into you."

gravity of the statement. I continue spinning in the office chair. My mom hands me a brightly colored



"It's okay to NOT be okay."

Assurance **ASHLEY JOHNSON**

plastic headband—it looks like it's from the 70s. "She wanted you to have this," she whispers. I'm But it's fine. Because it's okay to not be okay. It's beginning to feel nauseous, yet I'm still spinning. My feet are working like the oars my dad and I use to propel our little flat-bottom.

how I will learn once again to trust the Creator's Gone. The word denotes finality. I didn't understand plan, because I'm apparently having a hard time such conclusiveness at eight years old. I had never experienced death before. No one was gone. They

HARVEST UNBIDDEN **JERRY SUMMERS**

Downhill from the house, in the creek bottom next to the walking trail, the wild persimmon lives from ground level upward, trunk-to-trunk with the oak. Their branches and leaves intermingle. The hard persimmons on the tree's north side hold tightly to their stems, waiting for their process from tannic tartness to fruity sweetness. Softer, most of the fruit on the south side have almost arrived. A few have released their hold and made twilight snacks for returning coyotes and deer whose signature tracks remain. The deer-and at least one human passerby-have also plucked the sweeter, low-hanging fruit. It is the season of waiting, ripening, and the harvest's first-fruits. By mid-November persimmons throughout East Texas will lie rotting among fallen leaves, their sugary, alcoholic aroma proof of abundance, more than deer, coyotes, and others need. Yet that is no waste, but evidence of a superabundant, normal order of providence beyond mere reason. What intoxicating extravagance!

It fell From a dizzying height to me. was it to me? I received it --I picked it up and cradled it. I saw its imperfection but I kept it. It is with me. Is it for me? *Era Miller Contest winner, second place in poetry*





the **BEACON**

To willfully choose, In recognition of flaws, To love without cause.

a literary magazine ::: 2015

Will Walker PAST

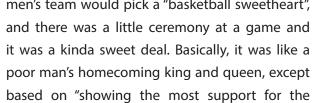
In May 2013, as I was getting into my car to go to men's team would pick a "basketball sweetheart", work, my key chain broke. This normally would not be all that significant of an event; trinkets like it was a kinda sweet deal. Basically, it was like a a mere key chain break all of the time.

However, this was personally significant for me. (I feel like this is the point that I should lay down on a couch to tell you the rest of this story.)

My sophomore year in high school, I still felt very socially outcast, and while I tried to be

kind and helpful to people, I rarely felt as if that affection was reciprocated. Now given, it probably was, but I was not as confident as I am (or feign) now so I probably just didn't pick up on it.

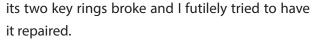
So anyway, every year the women's basketball team





basketball team of the opposite sex." So, we get to the game in which this award is given, and shockingly, I received it. For one of the first times as a teenager, I felt genuine acceptance from a group of my peers. It also helped my confidence that it was girls that did the voting.

As part of the award, I got a really nice key chain engraved "AHS BEAU". For 16 years (fully half of my life) that was the key chain that I used for all of my keys; only my wife really ever realized it, and probably only then because a couple of years ago at Avinger would pick a "basketball beau" and the the mechanical latch that allowed you to separate



On that day in May 2013, the key chain itself just broke, with the metal holding the ring itself simply falling off from wear. There was no going back. For the first 30 minutes or so of my day, I was really bummed out.

Then something interesting happened: I sat down to manipulate keys on the two "plain" key rings that were left, and I discovered that the keys now fit better. It turns out that over the previous several weeks my keys had been stabbing me in the leg, and I'd actually examined how I could lessen the number of keys themselves. While all of the keys were deemed essential and I continued on with things jabbing into my leg, I'd never once thought for a split second that removing the "AHS BEAU" keychain could ease my burden, but it did.

I was so blindly holding onto this little thing from the past that I was unable to realize that it was actually what was causing all of my pain.

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." 1 Corinthians 13:11

Today's blog is about the past.

Sometimes the past is full of triumphs, adventures, and great lessons that we can use to drive our future.

At the same time, sometimes the tiny things from our past that we cling to are the very things that are the source of our troubles. I see this each semester





in students that cannot escape some element of their past experiences, and instead they are forever dragged down by things that can never be changed (short of building a time machine).

As professors and advisors, we must help our students identify those things from the past worth remembering and celebrating, while at the same time working to identify those things from the past that serve only to pull them down, restricting them from reaching God's ultimate purposes for their lives.

MY WORDS

My words get boggled in some odd order Tumbled and jumbled I know not which way They zoom, bounce, and fly and they ricochet Off my mind's walls, breaking all the mortar Which tried to keep all my thoughts together

After looking at the things I've written 1 Seel like I need reconstruction My mind gears up with sledgehammer and wrench Manning cranes and knocking obstruction To find and fix each pesky malfunction In the hopes that my words will mesh and cinch And be more than just pretty confection While other folks works have my mind smitten

1 sit on edge trying not to compare The beauty that they all conjure from their Illustrious minds, it just isn't fair That I work so hard and pull out my hair In the attempt to catch up and even dare To enter the race and jump on the mare Coaxing her onwards. The sweat that we share Dribbles down, showing proof of the affair Which makes us work, and toil without care 'Til at last I'm done; I've climbed the last stair.

My words don't come out just any old way. I let them fall into lines on a page, Then I sweep them up, and do it again.

the **BEACON**

40

Sarah Diffie

Caroline Guidry (Selected Doems)



From the Journal of **Neville Longbottom**



Stick to us long enough For us to hear you Stay with us for enough time that we can feel The burden of you Scald us with the ashes of our betrayal Sink into our skin your memories of eternal fire Become – Speak – Our foreheads are holy altars We offer to you.

strains.

Minor notes played in tune,

Scintillating, incandescent blue,

Your minor cacophony is written,

A little universal orchestra of minor

And you, played soft and sweet.

Not even bothering to fade away until

II.

From the Journal of Neville Longbottom

I didn't mean to be in Gryffindor. In the brave house. The confrontational house. The house that gave us Dumbledore! Maybe I'll amount to something, Since I'm in Gryffindor. Gran says I need to be more like my dad. We went to visit him and mum before I came here Since we were in London and we can never be sure They've read my letters. I told them the news -I'm magic enough to come to Hogwarts! I wonder if they'll read the letter I wrote them today. "I'm in Gryffindor!" I said. "The brave house."

A Lyric Concerning Depression

Without obtrusion or delay The 'verse in pieces little lay But while you wander and implore That poem still says nevermore.

III. Crushing grapes Inside your eyes Makes it sticky But no wine.

IMAGO DEI

WHY IS RACISM A PROBLEM WHEN WE BEAR GOD'S IMAGE?

CHRISTIAN MCNEAL

Introduction

Racism plagues every facet of the culture within which it dwells. No one person, family, organization, or institution can escape its infectious grasp. In America, this disease is all too rampant. In the land of the free, citizens are still enslaved by the prejudices established by their forefathers' dealings in slavery some 250 years ago. Wouldn't prejudices based on such heinous acts have dissipated by now? Shouldn't America have moved on? How did racism become so fixed in our culture? In this essay, I endeavor to provide a cohesive solution to racism by incorporating the following: a historical background of racism, ineffective solutions, and lastly, effective solutions.

Historical Background

When exploring new lands, Europeans recorded their observations of the land and peoples they encountered. In order to make distinctions, the travelers would use obvious markers to do so: body proportion, skin tone, facial features or hair quality. According to Michael Adas, "like differences in culture, physical variations were usually linked to environmental influences rather than seen as innate products of reproduction and biological inheritance." But by the 17th century, it was widely held by those involved in the slave trade that Africans were indeed innately inferior, and to some, "a separate species from the rest of mankind" (Adas). The degradation of a people by slavery for so long logically leads the master to esteem himself as greater qualitatively. Such is the environment in which generations were reared and taught to emulate. Years and years of bigotry and bias are not easily deconstructed.

In order to transcend a discriminatory idea or tradition imbedded so deeply within one's culture, that culture must first comprehend the negative nature of said idea. For instance, Christian southerners in America justified slavery as necessary to their way of life and even contorted The Bible to fit their economic agenda – they did not see their actions as immoral. Fortunately, not all Christians held to this slaveholding Christianity. Instead they led the way in the effort to abolish slavery – they saw all humans as children of God – the Imago Dei – created in His image. Today, likeminded Christians and individuals must allow their perception of human equality to champion the fight against racism; implementing programs and non-profit organizations, holding rallies and support groups in hopes to help nurture those affected and renew the minds of those fixed on affecting.

Ineffective Solutions

However, amidst the positive actions taken to stop racism in its tracks, there are those who, although sharing the same mind, have assumed the passive-aggressive role as their contribution to the cause. According to psychologists Helen A. Neville and Germine H. Awad, "many people in American society want to 'do the right thing' and they abhor racism," but "denying the racial realities in our society or not talking about race or racism does not and will not help end these disparities..." In fact, "[t]his observation is supported by the growing research linking greater denial of race and racism to increased racial intolerance, endorsement of White privilege, [and] fear of people of color..." Resolution lies in admitting the problem. As John Piper puts it, "[the] majority people don't think of themselves in terms of race, none of our dysfunctions is viewed as a racial dysfunction. When you are the majority ethnicity, nothing you do is ethnic... [w]hen you are a minority, everything you do has color" (gtd. inDenison 67). Caucasians must become aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both their racial disposition and the minorities', bridging the dichotomy in our society. The wrong solution is to turn a blind-eye to the issue; adopting a color-blind racial ideology (CBRI),

optimistically hoping racism to run away in due time, but in the meantime, whilst progressive minds take a break, harmful hands are at work, tearing down little by little that which has been accomplished. If taking a break solves nothing, and ignoring race entirely (as if America has already obtained a post-racial society) accomplishes zilch, then "we must work hard to see why [race] matters and begin to root out the source of the problem" (Neville, Awad).

Dr. Martin Luther King realized the implications of a stagnant society when he posed this question to social scientists at his APA address in 1967: "Are we moving away, not from integration, but from the society which made it a problem in the first place?" Here Dr. King is challenging psychologists to seek out the heart of the issue (Neville, Awad). Today his words stand firm, hardly having budged since he spoke them five decades ago, stirring the same guestion within America to surface: Do we desire only the gap between modern-day and the past to be lengthened, further enabling our CBRI approach to the matter? Or do our hearts and minds yearn to see justice and reform run wild through the streets of racial inequality now, banishing the "Jim-Crow" (separate but equal) mentality forever to the pages of history?

Effective Solutions

If America is misguided in its approach to the [W]e have realized that serving the poor cause, then mental and dynamic reconstruction cannot be an agenda or project. It means living must occur. Practically, what can the average alongside the forgotten, and remembering citizen do? Jim Denison of Denison Forum their name. It means embracing a generation of references two writers, Paula Harris and Doug fatherless kids by opening the trampoline in my Schaupp, co-authors of Being White: Finding backyard... From my children's perspectives, Our Place in a Multiethnic World, who provides 'the poor' is not an idea or concept that we'll answers. In this work they advocate four steps: one day sit down and teach them about. For [E]ncounter, friendship, displacement and them, 'the poor' is their schoolmate... [They] white identity. First, we initiate encounters with are our neighbors. [They] are our friends. (106) people of different races. Second, we enter into Conclusion friendships built on commonalities. Third, we leave our comfort zone and build long-term lvey, like many others, engages ethnic difference with his life. Therein lies the key to conquering racism in America - to permeate one's life with those lives estranged by cultural bigotry; shunned to the margins of society by the ignorant majority. To see the desired change,

relationships, perhaps moving into a particular neighborhood or joining a gym across town. Fourth, as we become immersed in multiethnic community, we understand our racial identity, the challenges other ethnicities face, and begin working for justice. one must explore ethnicity by immersion, not solely by sprinkling tolerance about to and Aaron Ivey, lead worship pastor of Austin Stone fro, and praying the problem away. America Community Church and co-author of Doxology must become the "home of the brave," with and Theology: How the Gospel Forms the individuals boldly seeking opportunities to Worship Leader, comprehends the gravity of bridge the racial gap. If justice is executed the issue, penning an entire chapter on the painstakingly and sought selflessly, racism will importance of pioneering justice within one's slowly but surely settle into its place in the social context. Ivey, on uprooting his family out bowels of history. of comfort to cultivate compact friendships in an impoverished area known as the St.

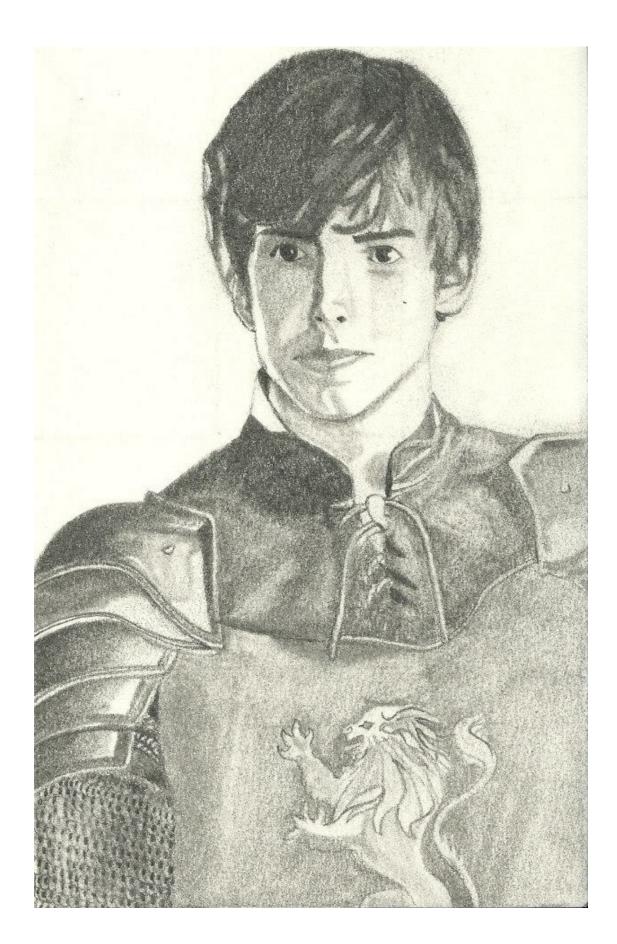
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John community, expresses ethnic justice as something bleakly challenging:

Emily Shieffer drawings





a literary magazine ::: 2015



All my solids became every other possible form of matter. They became liquid, gaseous, and plasma; elusive, hazy, and vague. Things used to be set in stone. My certainties were unshakeable. My steps were confident and deliberate.

Everything was stable until I took my first walk in the University Parks of Oxford University in England. I remember that first day in the Wycliffe Hall common room. Geoff, our Junior Dean told us, "I need two or three minions to help me

cook spaghetti!" The volunteers left with Geoff while five or six of us decided to go for a walk before dinner. Our party headed out the back door, down the sidewalk, past the bikes looped around the lampposts, across the street, and through your life, what would it be?" black iron gate of the park. We followed the dirt

and gravel path for a few feet and then ventured onto the grass making our way towards the trees. As we walked, we talked about the beauty of the park and the wonderful sunny weather which was apparently a rarity in the UK. I walked with a girl wearing a loose flannel shirt, a slouched knit hat,

"if you could have one substance coming out of your belly button for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

ragged black shorts, and shoes that seemed to be made up of more holes than the original canvas material. We exchanged the names of ourselves and our schools. Her name was Aly and she was from Seattle Pacific University. The brief

introduction lasted for about ten strides and then she asked me a guestion that I had never heard before, "Sarah, if you could have one substance coming out of your belly button for the rest of I analyzed the various aspects of this question and thought to myself: This is an Oxford Scholars Program. This person must be extremely intelligent or else she would not be here in the first place. Surely this is a normal type of thing to ask. Maybe she's one of those great geniuses taking too long to answer and she probably thinks I'm stupid. I confusedly fumble my words at her, "Well, indefinitely, okay, perhaps something solid wouldn't work. Maybe there be other conditions, or maybe I'm over-thinking it. It's such an odd question. I have no idea." She drew in her lips a little, shook her head in disappointment, then turned to another girl and asked, "Roberta, if you could have one substance coming out of your belly button for the rest of your life, what would it be?" Roberta, like me, did not have a ready answer, but instead replied with another guestion, "Well, tree.

Aly, what would you choose?" Aly smilingly and So many questions kept popping up within me determinedly pronounced, "Bubbles!" as she broke that I often felt overwhelmed with ignorance. I into a run and hoisted herself up into the nearest realized that the "stability" in my faith was more of a constraint, not a thing of triumph. I never wanted to ask such questions before because it Not everyone in the program was like Aly, but they was never encouraged. However, that semester, I had no fear of asking questions, especially when it learned that the only way to truly learn anything came to matters of faith, politics, and academia. Our was to have a question. At Oxford, they stressed nightly study breaks often consisted of conversing the format of developing the essay around a about such topics around the communal kettle question, not a thesis. After writing the ten or and making tea. I remember one night when it eleven pages of research and analysis one could was Kyle, Aly, Sam, and I around the kettle and the finally determine a thesis at the end as an answer topic of homosexuality came up. to the question. Even at church, the hymns would feature questions such as in "And Can It Be, That I Aly and Sam were both from SPU and mentioned Should Gain?" Even the title itself is a question.

that there was a new organization called Haven for students who were bullied or mistreated due "And can it be that I should gain to their sexual orientation; it was a safe zone to An int'rest in the Savior's blood? be oneself without persecution. Sam spoke of its Died He for me, who caused His pain?



progress and how he helped out with it before he left. Aly praised his efforts and asked me where I stood regarding homosexuality. I responded with, "I don't really know. I've been taught that it's a sin, but I don't really have a definite opinion." Kyle responded with similar remarks. Sam looked at me that come off as overly eccentric. Great, now I'm and asked, "You do know that I'm gay, right?"

> That was a major event in which I felt that God did not have a straight forward answer for me. My thoughts were so jumbled: How could it be so wrong? Sam is one of the nicest and most intelligent human beings on the face of this planet and yet he's living the wrong life? What is a "wrong" life anyway? I know for sure that Sam loves the Lord, but how can he still claim to be a Christian and a gay man at the same time? I hope what I said didn't hurt his feelings.

For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! how can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me?"

This hymn became my favorite while I attended the morning services at St. Ebbe's, an Anglican church that was right next to my favorite grocery store. It was very different from the usual Baptist church. It was not considered "high," but it was still traditional in the hymns and responsive readings. on the sung or spoken words as I participated in the liturgy of the church and sang those traditional hymns. There was time for exploration of meaning and interpretation as we read from our service pamphlets in unison.

much, I joined a bible study group within St. Ebbe's called Focus that met on Thursday nights. My family was not. She was very close with her mother,

two group leaders were Elisabeth and Rosie, both Oxford graduates. As the girls of Table Two, we met for dinner

and went over the passage for the evening. For for her mother and her family that they might reading it and taking the leaders' words as the final say. Rosie and Elisabeth always shared something insightful and encouraged us to find something new or different in the scriptural application to our lives.

Each of the girls at Table Two had uniquely

individual lives that were very different from one another, yet we all still managed to find sustenance from the same passages. I never experienced the versatility of scripture in that way before. Natalia shared how she found strength and encouragement in the verses as she came from a strictly Catholic family in Slovakia. It was difficult for her to be a Protestant Christian around her parents because they were very unsupportive of anything outside their Slovakian culture and tradition. She I found myself better able to meditate and reflect asked us for prayer in the hopes that her family would someday foster a living relationship with God. Jemima always had roommate issues as they often came back to the hall at all hours of the night obnoxiously drunk. Her sister was also in a lesbian relationship and it was causing much tension in her family. She asked in prayer for wisdom and Since I liked the feel of the morning services so discernment in dealing with her roommates and sister. Nicola was a new Christian but the rest of her

"I have the power to ask questions and seek answers"

she found but the relationship strained at times because of new differences in faith. She asked for prayer

that Michaelmas Term, we went through the book come to know Christ as she does. These girls taught of Romans. Every verse had something to offer me so much, even when I just sat with them and and each person had something to add in its listened. Even now, I remember each of these girls interpretation. No one was ever content with just and their prayer requests in the hopes that they remember me; that silly little American who often talked nonsense and loved every moment of her time in their fellowship.

> These girls at St. Ebbe's changed my life, as did my semester in Oxford as a whole. The people I met and my newly adapted way of life was so wonderful, it

made the return to Texas one of the most diff ordeals of my life. Not only was I so relucta leave the UK, but it was also such a hassle. I m my taxi and had to walk the 1.3 miles to Gloud Green station with my suitcase and my flight clad cello. It was cold that December mo when I left Wycliffe Hall on foot, huffing puffing while heaving my load. It gave me ti think. I wondered how life would be without hall-mates here as we departed to return to homes and then separate schools in the sp As I walked the old streets past the colleges shops, I thought of all the happy jokes cracked conversations had just days prior. My room for the time here at Oxford became my very friend and I dearly loved all the rest of the fo the program. As I pulled my belongings along my nostalgic thoughts, I smiled. I was guite when I finally arrived at the bus station, and just from physical exertion.

I returned to ETBU in the spring and it felt different, just as I anticipated. I was back place where people only wanted stability in lives and their solids exempt from any so metamorphosis. It was difficult adjusting to a place where questions were not as o encouraged. In Oxford, I was urged to divergently and constantly seek new and and explanations. I knew that if this question posed, "If you could have one substance co out of your belly button for the rest of you what would it be?" my answer would be Jel realized that I cannot help but ask questions revel in the wonderful instability of the world fears of the unknown are eradicated now know I have the power to ask guestions and answers. Just as Charles Wesley wrote of free

ifficult	in his hymns, so am I free from the "stable" chains of
ant to	the dungeon and my heart and mind are capable
nissed	of greater veracity than before.
cester	
t-case	"Long my imprisoned spirit lay
orning	Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
g and	Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
ime to	I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
ut my	My chains fell off, my heart was free;
to our	I rose, went forth and followed Thee."
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