

The background is a painting of a landscape at sunset or sunrise. A large, multi-arched bridge spans a body of water. The sky is filled with large, billowing clouds in shades of blue, orange, and yellow. A large, white, bird-like shape is visible in the upper right portion of the sky. The water reflects the colors of the sky. In the foreground, there are dark silhouettes of trees and bushes.

A COLLECTION OF WORKS BY CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

Muse 2021

Kathy Bunt



Rainy Day Morning *Sallie Estes*

*Sallie
Estes*

Contents

SHORT FICTION & POETRY

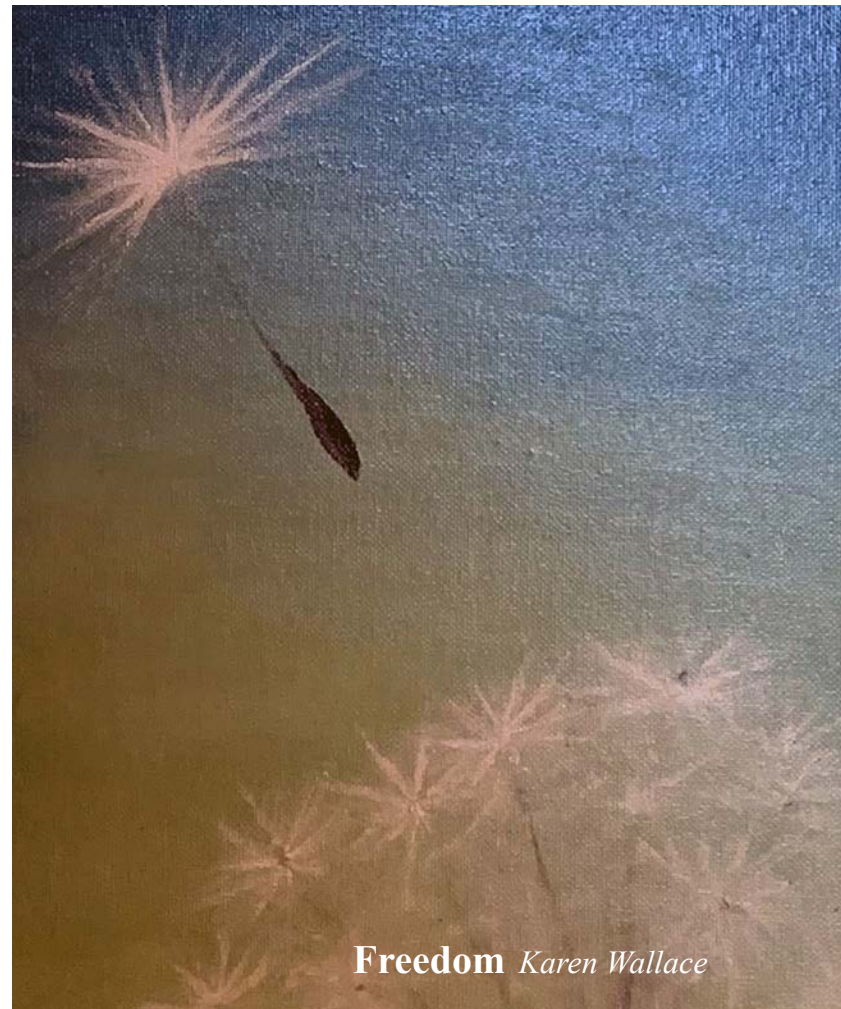
Back Then--I Logan Lindley	2
Youth Logan Lindley	2
Spring in the Classroom Carli Massey.....	2
Autumn Creek Leah Kolb	3
...sand... James Mueller	4
Body Tax Hayden Phillips	6
May 12, 2011 Ivy Wright	8

ESSAYS

True Freedom Brandy Ann Draughon	10
Circus Boy James Mueller	12
From Fright to Flight: How the Pandemic Gave Me Wings James Mueller.....	14
Moments of a Champion Tracy Kyle Davis	16
It Should Take Longer Than An Hour Brandy Ann Draughon	19
Pink Hair and Blue Swords James Mueller	20
I Am Not Alone Gary Gray	22
The Respected Mistress Gary Gray.....	22
The Fruits of Failure Logan Lindley	23
Little Men: Manhood in Alexander Pope's The Rape of the Lock James Mueller	24
The Evolution of Civilization and Wilderness across Medieval English Literature Tucker Constable.....	26

MUSEPAPER

An Interview with Interim Calhoun President Dr. Joe Burke Spencer Kress and Frankie Satterfield....	29
Calhoun's 19th Annual Writer's Conference	30
Calhoun's Evolving Esports Team Spencer Kress	31
One Night in Verona Tucker Constable.....	32
A Busy and Productive Year for Phi Theta Kappa ..	33
Making Mental Health Matter Frankie Satterfield ...	34
Celebrating Success with Sigma Kappa Delta	34
Celebrating Citizenship at Calhoun Spencer Kress..	35
Calhoun's Triple Threat of Success Frankie Satterfield ..	36



Freedom Karen Wallace

ART

Rainy Day Morning Sallie Estes	Inside Front Cover
Freedom Karen Wallace	1
Breath of Fate Amanda Williams	3
Accidental Beauty Sallie Estes	7
Circle of Life Karen Wallace	8
Pretty in Pink Deborah Kaufman	9
Johnnie's Oak Kim Pourcho	10
Family Deborah Kaufman	12
Brother Ray Gary A. Jones	18
Forest Magic Sallie Estes	20
Smooth Sailing Jackie Segars	21
Savannah Sparrow Melanie Calnan	23
Warfare Judy Baggett	27
Store Room Gary A. Jones	28
Microscape Leah Smith	37

On the Cover:

FRONT: River City Bridge Kathleen Bost

BACK: Sun Shine Iris Connie Finley

Short Fiction + Poetry

Back Then--I

By Logan Lindley

Were you made to taste like
The sunny November mornings of 2009?
Not a cloud in the cool sky,
No tears in my bright, young eyes.
Were you put here to remind me
Of the times when things were simpler?
Wake up, go to school, color some pictures,
Then go to bed, wiggling loose teeth till I doze off.

Youth

By Logan Lindley

We are so tender,
The fruit who offers resistance to enemy teeth
Minds and imagination ripe
Just a stage in the grand scheme
Still valuable, regardless of what others believe.

Spring in the Classroom

By Carli Massey

Elbows on online books, we daydreamed
Past Miss Rona, and lessons, and windows,
To catch all day glimpses and guesses of the looming destruction,
Its secrets and increases,
Its hidden nests and kind.
And what scared in us was no e-learning,
But the new disease murmuring,
Loosening like petals from bone sleep.
So spring surrounded the classroom, and we suffered to be kept indoors,
Droned through online lessons, cleaned when we could with Lysol
Removing our pulsing germs from the desks, and grew
Angry to be held so, with pity but beyond reason,
By Miss Rona, her eyes two viruses behind air,
Her contagiousness thick, her spread
In love with anyone and anything.

So it went — one terrible day lost after another
While we sat like captives and breathed the dangerous air
And the cases thickened and sick called
From the edge of the world — till it grew easy to hate,
To plot mutiny, even murder. Oh, we had her in chains,
We had her hanged and cold, in our longing to be gone!

And then one day, Miss Rona, we saw you
As we ran wild in our stay at home escape
Past the abandoned masks; you were leaning
All furry and blooming against the old brick wall
In the Chinese government's arms.



This parody, written for an assignment in Dr. Rhea's English Composition II class during the Spring 2020 semester, was inspired by Mary Oliver's poem "Spring in the Classroom" and COVID-19.



Autumn Creek

By Leah Kolb

I often question my childhood memories.

Hours spent wandering the field that to me was endless. It was like a dream, like the daydreams I constructed whilst staring out of the car window. The fence around the mysterious forest I never dared to enter. Coyotes lived there.

It was life but not reality. I hated reality ever so much before I even understood the word itself. An ice cream sandwich melting in my hand as I peered into the neighbor's backyard. They were up to something.

I played inside my mind, running around with my eyes closed. The rusty trampoline in the backyard, my second home. My crush, Tyler, with the pierced ears. Pill bottles in the ditch, the tornadoes, stolen pumpkins, the bike gang, sneaking into the construction lot. "Crybaby!" they mocked as they locked me in a classroom and switched off the lights. The taste of hot earl grey tea with too much sugar. The monarch butterfly I raised from a caterpillar whom I visited often in the garden.

Looking back, I am unsure if the neighborhood kids were really conspiring against me. If the woman in the house next door was really a vampire. If I could really talk to animals. If I could really see ghosts on Halloween. If my imaginary pet in the woods really ate the homemade salads I left it every once in a while.

Whether it was real or all in my head, I have always wished to go back to those days when life was a little less dull.

...sand...

By James Mueller


Equestrian mists by noble lashes parted
Half-smiles hide dances unfinished
While secret spells collide in keeping
Luna's tender shade above, and softly
A sigh, dipping through unseen - breaks
And shards choke what these lungs held in reverie

To her though many eyes bend loosely
Hearts that turn on prayers, crush and wilt
When tempered in her royal aura, crimson:
From pain's eternal basin drawn
For love had sought what sorrow found; still beating
That which daisies wove, fate in embers tried

Soft gestures of tender light below a curious lid
A flickering flame to warm the seer's stone
Gentle shadows cast aside, bow to Atlas' curve
Glimpsed when careless tosses hers
His with their faintest tilt belie: Aloft!
Ne'er falls what by love and tears is cradled high

Over cracked stone and floating dune she beckons
The golden winds with her a while to stay
For sweeter are melodies borne on sol's calmer winds
And deeper are smiles bathed in weary light
Distant gaze returns with gifts from troubled sands beyond:
Words unsaid and serendipitous, to steep the enamored heart

This wavering heart marooned by tempest gales
And desert sails, her grains of sand did count
And in the grieving echoes still no ashen flowers found
Nor rusted crowns: See! Living rivers flowing deep!
And glittering therein and gathered, in this battered soul's embrace
Athena's gems in amber clad and phoenix feather-coils



Alas, what fate had stopped in infant deed
No mortal dares in dream betray
For ships that pass in night's cold sting, to sight
And cheek are lost – and doomed new shores to seek
Yet to her – and her alone, this heart from foreign waves
Reaches still and out, through wisps of air and salt:

What is first lost is not restored by what is second found
Even the radiant garden must in season's lull her roots repair
Yet at times, in whispered wishes this wilted heart still drowns
And longs for careless footfalls, and carefully hidden smiles
And so to dare as mortals do, and face the threat of fate
This soul in deepest crevice harbors dreams for kinder skies than these:

Twilight skies alight o'er childish grins and somber eyes
These arms, to stretch her canvases were made, and dip
Pen and brush in beauty's uncorked flask – a balm
To heavy hearts bestowed, in measure with humming timbre strings
Weaving rings round starlit campfires, kitchen tables and lullabies
These tears to hold aloft in tune, and detain the aching waves

And yet the grains in silent mourning drop from heaven's hallowed glass
Dispersed upon this hour's dream, this soul and hers; alas
When fluttered lashes close upon this melancholy dream
And carry us o'er Elysian fields to meet new suns and seas
To find the one who glitters deep, and share the sand in which she wakes
There – where all the corners of the world shall meet – this aged soul will wait

*The following piece was written for an assignment in Dr. Byrd's World Literature II class.
After reading and discussing Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," students have the opportunity to write
their own satirical proposal addressing a contemporary problem.*

Body Tax

By Hayden Phillips

Very modestly, I propose that every year, the Federal government will charge everyone below a certain income level or amount of wealth with a body tax. If poor people cannot pay the fine, then cut off their right hand and gouge out their right eye. If one of those is already missing, then cut off of their body an equal amount (in weight) of flesh. After the first payment is missed, the taxpayer is to have this offense added to his or her records as a tax offender and their records made available for every potential employer to see, essentially blacklisting the taxpayer for life. Each additional failure to pay the body tax is to result in further confiscation of equal amounts of flesh to the taxpayer's hand and eye, in proportion to the taxpayer's original body. These additional missed payments will also result in additional tax offender charges on their record, further blacklisting them for committing Federal crimes. Prosthetics and replacement body-parts are prohibited in all but the following scenarios:

- The taxpayer now has an income of \$200,000 or more, and has had his or her petition for leniency co-signed by no less than fifty other high-level income earners (HLIE) who were born and raised as HLIE, which will have the additional benefit of un-blacklisting the taxpayer, who is now a HLIE instead of a taxpayer and who will no longer have to pay the body tax, being allowed now to have a full and healthy body. Having the appropriate income without the signatures will result in the petition being denied and possible Federal reprisal for lying to the government.
- Express permission from a higher power to do so momentarily.

Further, I propose that any offender caught with such contraband have to pay in flesh the amount of their body they were trying to illegally have and/or falsify.

Poverty is *only ever* caused by laziness, and *nothing else*. Thus, motivating poor people to get out of poverty and pull themselves up by their bootstraps by holding their bodies, self-esteem, career prospects, and social standing hostage is doing them a favor, and if that doesn't work, it just means they are too lazy and entitled to ever get out of poverty. Giving them handouts to help them will only make their situation worse because it will make them even lazier and more entitled, which will make them even poorer and cause them to commit more crimes, invade the suburbs from their jungles and deserts, invade our borders, be perverse, eat our children in Satanic ritual blood sacrifices, and violate our women! No, they need to be purified in the refiner's fire, the body tax, which will either cure them of their natural instincts or reveal them before all to see as lazy and entitled!

Rich people, on the other hand, are not lazy and entitled. Unlike poor people, they work hard, which is why they are rich, and *absolutely not* because wealth can be inherited and accumulate across generations. They do not need the body tax, but instead need full, healthy, and youthful bodies, as a reward for being virtuous and as an unofficial mark of rank. The Lord blesseth, and the Lord taketh away. He has certainly blessed these rich people for their piety, so the Federal government should bless them too!

I tell you, with complete honesty, that I have nothing to gain by implementing the body tax because I am only motivated by the good of the United States and *nothing else*. The body tax will employ freight to elevate some of the poor (they are the good ones), reveal the rest to be societal dregs who are just too lazy and entitled, and bestow prosperity upon those whom the Lord would bless, who just happen to be High Level Income Earners (HLIE). Let this, my extremely humble proposal, be a blessing to the nation. Amen.



Accidental Beauty *Sallie Estes*



Circle of Life *Karen Wallace*

May 12, 2011

By Ivy Wright

Today is my birthday, my eleventh birthday. But do you know where I am spending it? A hospital. Cullman Regional. Honestly, it is not that bad. There is this lullaby that keeps playing on and off. It sounds like “Rock-A-Bye Baby,” but since it’s kind of quiet, I can barely hear it. I finally find the courage to ask one of the nurses a question. My palms get sweaty, and I can feel my cheeks burning red.

“Hi, what’s the lullaby for?” I ask without making eye contact and pointing to the speaker on the hospital ceiling.

“That is the lullaby that plays every time a baby is born,” the nurse says softly.

That is a LOT of babies, I think to myself. I am sure she sees the look on my face because she then asks me my name and where my parents are.

Oh, I forgot to mention, I was in the lobby all alone! My little sister, D, is in school, and my mom, C, is in the hospital room with my older sister, K. That is right, we are in the labor and delivery ward at Cullman Regional. My sister, at the age of sixteen, is having her first baby. On MY eleventh birthday. Do not get me wrong, having my first nephew born on my birthday is awesome, but maybe sometimes... I just want it to be about me for once.

“My mom is in the room with my sister, and my dad went to get snacks,” I say very maturely, with my head held high, mainly because I can barely see over the nurses’ counter. “Today is my birthday, but not just any birthday, my eleventh birthday. This birthday is important because I am now considered a preteen! But here I am, stuck at the hospital!” *I sound selfish*, I think, *but I do not care because it is my official preteen birthday!!*

“Oh, well happy birthday...”

“Ivy, my name is Ivy Kristyn Jade Erklenz.”

“That’s a beautiful name to go with some beautiful eyes,” she says.

She sounds like she is talking to a six year old, and I am not six. I am eleven! I start to get annoyed then because the nurses all start talking about how pretty my eyes are, one thing I hate being complimented on, but that is another story, for another time.

My stepdad, S, finally walks through the double doors with two Dollar General bags full of snacks. He has my favorite, pickle chips!

A nurse walks up to my dad and tells him it is time.

Time for what? The baby? I am not ready.

She walks us to another set of double doors and presses the buzzer to let us in. Immediately, when the doors swing open, I feel a peace. Weirdly enough, I love being at the hospital. It feels safe. This peace is suddenly interrupted when we walk up to door 107 and I hear screaming. It is a terrible sound, a sound of pain and exhaustion. *Wow, that person must be hurting*, I think. *I wonder what's wrong with her?*

S knocks on the door with a quick triple tap. The door opens, but the screaming is louder. I start to get really worried. The nurse looks at me and then back at my dad. He shakes his head. *I am not sure what that means. Is K in trouble?* They start talking quietly to one another, and I can no longer hear them. S walks us back to the swinging doors, and we enter the waiting room.

"What's going on? Why can't we go inside her room? Is K ok? Is her ba—"

"Stop talking," my stepfather interrupts. He starts bouncing his leg and digging through his pockets, looking for something he probably cannot have right now.

"Shit," he whispers but not quietly enough because the people beside us give us a nasty glance.

Watching their facial expressions, I start becoming aware of myself. I am in two-day-old clothes and have not showered in five. I did not brush my hair this morning, and I cannot remember the last time I brushed my teeth. I am in a shirt that is way too small and flip flops that keep breaking. I usually cannot smell the cigarette smoke I am covered in, but in this moment I can. I stink! I get up and start walking to the bathroom. I walk in and lock the door behind me. I look in the mirror and what I see sickens me. My hair is a greasy mess, and I have dirt on my face. My shirt has sweat stains among other messes on it, and my shorts do not even match. My teeth are crooked and stained yellow. My knees are dark with dirt and whatever else, and my toes are almost black. My hands are filthy.

I start to cry. *Life is not supposed to be like this. I am not supposed to look like this. I am not even clean enough to belong in a hospital, let alone hold a newborn baby.* I can feel the judgement of everyone's stares now. The nurses when I first walked up to the counter, the receptionist when S and I walked through the sliding glass doors, and the families walking down the halls taking extra time to stare and whisper. It's breaking my heart and hurting so much. *I hate today!! I hate my life!!*

This is the first of many moments when I realize life is not supposed to look like this. I am heartbroken and devastated.



Johnnie's Oak (detail) *Kim Pourcho*

True Freedom

By Brandy Ann Draughon

In the spirit of Sojourner Truth, I will speak simply and, at times, painfully frank. The problem with essays conveying how literature affected someone's life is that people write the same cut and paste answers. For instance, you can only read so many essays about how Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" inspired someone to join a civil movement in hopes to change social or legal injustices. If you *really* want to talk about how literature this semester has genuinely affected my personal life, then you need to know about my life, messy bits and all. Nothing generic or cut and paste here.

For any of this to make sense, dear reader, you will need some background information. I grew up during the 1980s and graduated high school in 1990. My parents were one of the few couples left that were not divorced even though their marriage was quite tumultuous. My mother stayed at home with my sister and me while my father was the breadwinner of our family. I was brought up thinking that was how it worked. Obtaining a bachelor's degree was encouraged, but the whys and what-fors were never explained to me. When I went off to college, I wasn't thinking about the future, and I was certainly not thinking about my future self, as I should have been. I was uninterested in what I could gain from learning at the university, and honestly, I was just looking for "that someone," someone to love me and take care of me forever. But just as you surely know, and I know *now*, that's definitely not how it works.

Now I am in my late forties. I have two older sons in their twenties plus a severely autistic son who is nine. I have been defined as an Air Force wife and a stay-at-home mom. My husband and I have been married for almost thirty years, and it has never been easy. "Having all the industry, frugality, fertility, and skill in economy appertaining to a good wife's character," I have still put up with quite a lot (Franklin 324). And bluntly, what has kept me in this marriage is the fact that I cannot take care of myself and my young disabled son financially if I left. This past summer "I unhappily lost my honour by trusting his" (Franklin 324). Happy or unhappy, life as I have known it, came crashing down around me. I discovered that my reality was not reality at all, that the value I placed on my marriage was not shared. So what happens when the proverbial rug has been yanked from underneath your feet? I had no Plan B. No lifeboat. Not even a small flotation device.

Then I read the Transcendentalism unit, and Emerson spoke loud and clear to my hungry soul searching for answers. "Be self-reliant" and "[t]rust thyself" were the quick remedies, but what rang authentically and so reverently was Emerson's declaration that "[a] man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were

ostensible and ephemeral but he” (1335, 1336). My eyes clung to the page as “but he” turned to “but me.” I ruminated. I have been pretending and treating my life as though temporary by trusting someone else to provide for me. When you do not build your life relying only on yourself for everything, it is very easy for that sandcastle to be knocked down by anyone or anything. Emerson spells it out sagaciously, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself” (1350). Self-reliance is peace.

And self-reliance comes from education or so I learned in Module 5 from Frederick Douglass. Without an education, Douglass would not have been able to escape to freedom. His education was difficult to obtain and endure emotionally. Nonetheless, it eventually proved to end his subjugation. Douglass realized early on that “the pathway from slavery to freedom” was obtaining an education (1762). Ding, ding, ding, and the light comes on. The importance of education can never be stressed enough, no matter the person or situation. Education is essential to everyone. Just as in the times of slavery, education warrants freedom and guarantees self-dependence. One must arm herself with education as not to become dependent on others. Ah, my Plan B. Note to self: should have been Plan A all along.

How did this antiquated thinking perpetuate itself onto my life in the 20th century? Women in the 1800s would not have stood for this! I can feel the sting of Elizabeth Stanton’s slap across my face now. Everything for which she stood and fought, I carelessly took for granted. In her time, “all colleges ...were closed against her” (Stanton 1404). My parents unconditionally offered me a college education, yet I never valued education and, therefore, never really valued myself. I did not understand that by having a college education *you* were enabling *yourself* to be able to take care of *yourself*. By learning and furthering your abilities, you are setting your life up for success. Further, I also imagine that by being educated and self-reliant you can find a true partner to enjoy life. It allows you to be together with someone for all the right reasons and feel comfortable in knowing that you have the means to walk away from the relationship if disappointed. It empowers you to be truly satisfied with yourself and your entire life. I wonder if that is why my parents stayed together. My mother only had a high school diploma and would not have been able to take care of herself, let alone two children. Did she suffer? Was she unhappy? Did she regret a marriage that had imprisoned her for years? I don’t know if her situation was like mine, but I do know that I patterned my life after hers, and here I am, suffering, unhappy, and full of regret.

Through the literary selections this semester, I obtained a clear understanding that my past way of life was not worthwhile. They have prompted me to develop my own code of self-reliance and a plan of action to further my education. I finally see the importance of both and prefer to “live ever in a new day” (Emerson 1338). Elizabeth Stanton can return peacefully to her grave with a proud smile upon her face.

Those who have a college degree and a marketable skill are much more self-sufficient and can find financial security in themselves. Education also provides happiness through self-confidence and life fulfillment. Abraham Lincoln made many inspiring statements, but it was Edward Everett, the main speaker at the dedication ceremony of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, who declared befittingly that “education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army” (qtd. in Lincoln 1704). Education is everything. Education is *your* power. Education is your way in life to be able to do whatever you want to do. Only the educated are truly free.

Works Cited

Douglass, Frederick. “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.” Perkins, pp. 1748-98.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. “Self-Reliance.” Perkins, pp. 1334-50.

Franklin, Benjamin. “The Speech of Polly Baker.” Perkins, pp. 323-25.

Lincoln, Abraham. “Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery.” Perkins, pp. 1704-05.

Perkins, George and Barbara Perkins, editors. *The American Tradition in Literature*. 12th ed., vol. 1, McGraw Hill, 2009. 2 vols.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. “Declaration of Sentiments.” Perkins, pp. 1403-05.



Family *Deborah Kaufman*

The following work won third place in the 2021 Sigma Kappa Delta Personal Essay Writing Contest.

Circus Boy

By James Mueller

We stood in line for what felt like hours. It wasn't often that the circus came to our small town, and it seemed like every family in that small town had chosen this particular day to attend. Unfortunately, my family was no exception. I was twelve years old at the time and considered myself far too old and mature to be enjoying something as childish as a circus. My fear of being seen in that line (let alone with my parents and siblings) was an embarrassment that manifested itself both as a surly attitude and an impatience to get inside.

As we got within a few families of the tent entrance, I could see the ticket-master and a few circus staff members acting as greeters. I had been to circuses before, so this was nothing new. What was different about this greeting party was that one of its members was a small boy, perhaps only two or three years younger than I was.

He was dressed in fancy bright clothes, had a wispy of hair that covered his eyes, and for some reason, in between greeting each guest he would make the weirdest mouth movement I'd ever seen. He would purse his lips and then quickly pinch them over to each side of his mouth. He did this in one smooth back-and-forth motion, almost as if he had a bad itch he was trying to alleviate by crinkling his nose as vigorously and discreetly as possible.

But this odd feature was much less interesting and bothersome than the obvious conundrum at hand: Was this kid part of the staff? A kid with a job? In a circus? Impossible. Not only was this kid shorter than I was, but he was quite obviously younger too, which of course meant that he was indisputably inferior to me.

And yet while I spent most of my time sitting in miserable, friendless classrooms, he got to proudly invite guests into a circus tent! Apparently he was a celebrity in an authority position who probably got paid money too, which basically made him a grown-up. It wasn't fair, and I felt personally insulted.

This apparent crime against nature, coupled with my deep shame at having to attend a childish circus in the first place (with my parents and siblings no less), made me very sullen, and as we stepped up to get our tickets, I met the boy's timid smile with the sternest, most condescending look I could muster. He cowered instantly, stared at his feet, and did that weird lip thing. At least he knew his place in the pecking order.

I felt a little better.

Inside the tent we found our seats, and the circus performance began. The seating we had procured was such that we could see most of the bleachers that curved around the circus ring, and I marveled that the tent was much larger on the inside than it had appeared from the outside. The show was surprisingly good (for a small circus that is). What it lacked in exotic animals and howling motorcycles it made up for with hilarious clown acts, fantastic magic shows, and dizzying trapeze performances.

The darkness of the tent made the light effects all the

more brilliant, and every so often a spotlight would stray from the center to pan over the audience, revealing waves of amused faces. Despite being unhappy about my attendance, I appreciated the dark interior. That kid door-greeter couldn't see me in the dark, and certainly couldn't tell if I laughed or clapped, and as it turned out, the trapeze artists were so skilled in their acrobatic deceptions that I feared more for their lives than for my precious status in the boy-dominance hierarchy.

And so, with thoughts of the despised door-greeter (and his obviously undeserved position) momentarily banished by distraction, I gave myself permission to enjoy the show.

And what a show it was!

Each act was better than the last, and after an action-packed clown act ended in firecrackers and laughter, the lights dimmed in preparation for the next act, which was sure to outdo its predecessor. The balmy air hung in anticipation...

*If it hadn't been for Cotton-Eye Joe
I'd been married a long time ago
Where did you come from, where did you go?
Where did you come from, Cotton-Eye Joe?*

Suddenly the darkness was jolted to life by the song "Cotton-Eye Joe" by Rednex blasting out of invisible speakers. A golden spotlight cut through the sawdust to reveal a short cowboy with a wisp of hair covering his eyes, expertly wielding a lasso.

I watched in horror as this kid, sporting an oversized cowboy hat and chaps, began performing increasingly complex rope tricks to an increasingly enthusiastic audience. With a charisma and stage presence that befit a seasoned actor, he even had the audience clapping along to the heavy techno beat. My nearly forgotten, door-greeting nemesis was no ordinary door-greeter: he was a full-fledged circus performer.

I was mortified.

The circus had betrayed me. I tried to ignore the performance, but conspicuously looking away put me at risk of standing out to the rest of the audience. I decided to turn my judgment on his pathetic performance instead.

I scrutinized his every movement, looking for mistakes. I counted the seconds between each swing of the lasso as it looped across his boots for signs of fatigue. But I could find nothing to criticize.

What a show-off.

I rolled my eyes and tried to hide the overwhelming sense of stage fright that should have been his and not mine. I did not join in the crowd's punctuated claps. Hell no! I kept my arms folded and from my distant bleacher seat refused to reward him with even a smile of appreciation.

But then something strange happened: the music stopped, but the boy didn't.

The cowboy lasso routine was apparently longer than the "Cotton-Eye Joe" track that had been selected as its accompaniment. As the last note of the song faded, so did the energy of the tent. The spell broke, and electricity gave

way to sudden and eerie silence.

Time seemed to slow as I turned to look at the audience, rows of glowing profiles, each one a blank mask. Silent. Unmoving. I followed their collective stare to the sandpit in which the boy danced, held in motion by the glare of the spotlight, surrounded by a perpetually rising cloud of dust. Not a sound from the bleachers, not even a rustle in the air... nothing but the mechanical slapping of the rope against the sand.

For his sake, I held my breath. I could feel the dead weight of the audience pressing down on him... feel the moment stretch further and further... reaching for that curtain of volume that had been lifted and now refused to fall.

It was torture.

*If it hadn't been for Cotton-Eye Joe
I'd been married a long time ago
Where did you come from, where did you go?
Where did you come from, Cotton-Eye Joe?"*

As quickly as it had stopped, "Cotton-Eye Joe" began playing again. Time returned to its normal pace, and the energy returned to the tent, where it eventually climaxed in applause.

Amidst the ovation, I glared at the young cowboy who bowed awkwardly before jogging offstage, but I couldn't bring myself to see him as an entitled jerk anymore.

Something had changed. I still could not clap for him, but I no longer hated him either.

During what remained of the circus, I contemplated this boy, this rope-tricking cowboy with the wisp of hair covering his eyes. I was filled with a sense of remorse and decided, as a feeble act of penance, to give him something truly valuable for his trouble—a smile from a superior, older boy.

Once again, I found myself waiting in line.

The boy stood at the exit, still dressed in his cowboy costume (minus the hat), with a smile and a thank-you for each departing guest. He saw me coming though, and the smile that was meant for me fell just as it had before, and he cowered in the face of a smile that was meant for him.

But exit lines always move faster than entrance lines and leave little time for acts of atonement. I resisted the urge to linger, but for my conscience's sake, I did indulge in one final look back as I trailed behind my parents toward the parking lot.

There he was, smiling timidly and thanking the guests and, in between each thank-you, the same weird lip thing. On the ride home, I tried to imitate that weird lip motion, but found that I could only successfully do it to the right side of my mouth. With practice I was able to master both sides, and it would take many more months to break the habit all together.

The following work was selected for presentation at the 2021 Sigma Tau Delta/Sigma Kappa Delta International Convention. James is a recent Calhoun student who now attends the University of Alabama in Huntsville as a mechanical engineering major. Following James's presentation, Jeff Hawes, an English instructor at Northeast Alabama Community College, observed, "James, if you're as good at engineering as you are at writing, you will certainly be a success!"

From Fright to Flight: How the Pandemic Gave Me Wings

By James Mueller

There was no particular grandeur or enlightenment that accompanied my experiences during the COVID-19 epidemic. In truth, my experiences have been rather unremarkable in light of the global health crisis, though no less impactful to me. What made my mandatory furlough from work during the spring of 2020 life-changing were circumstances that, though they were not caused by the shutdown, were very much exacerbated by it. A few weeks before COVID, I lost my brother very suddenly. He fell through the ice of a frozen river. He was my best friend. Two drunken days later, my girlfriend left me. Apparently, she had never signed up to deal with a grieving boyfriend. Thus began my isolation, at a time when isolation was perhaps the last thing I needed. I spoke with few people during the months I was furloughed – sequestered inside my tiny one-bedroom apartment. In fact, I spoke with almost no one. But as much as I needed to cry, as much as I needed to bare my soul to someone who cared, as much as I needed to feel the warm body of someone next to me at night who loved me despite my brokenness, those luxuries just weren't in the cards for me.

So instead of crying, I studied, and instead of speaking, I read. To escape grief, I poured myself into my classes and hid away anything that reminded me of my brother. I filled the remainder of my loneliness with books. As the days and weeks passed, I decided to try and make the most of my sentence into social exile. First, I put myself on a weight-loss diet. I had gained a few pounds during my last relationship. Cooking romantic dinners, eating out in restaurants, drinking wine, getting ice cream, all these things add up to a less-than-healthy diet. It goes without saying that bedsheets filled with her scent, text threads filled with heart emojis, and secret wish lists filled with things she would like have a way of making one feel content, happy, and fulfilled, which inevitably leads to weight gain as well. Since all contentment, happiness, and fulfillment were now forever behind me, losing a few pounds seemed like the right thing to do. I also quit drinking alcohol. But this had nothing to do with my weight. Consuming copious amounts of alcohol has the tendency of luring the barrel of my 9mm to my temple. Having just lost my brother, and my girlfriend who was my only emotional support, I knew that a glass of wine to ease the despair of a lonely night could quickly lead to scotch, and scotch, unfortunately, has a copious amount of love for me. I couldn't afford to risk copious indulgence.

But I used my time for more than just suicide prevention. I began painting in earnest during those lonely months. I spent time improving my guitar skills and took to teaching myself dip pen calligraphy. None of these activities were intended for my own present well-being, though. They were intended to aid in the well-being of future me, the future me who would have survived all this and finally found solace and belonging. My guitar, my calligraphy pen, my books, all became embodiments of a better future. They were the fragments of hope that I clung to like talismans.

It was into this world of quiet suffering that I started my online summer class, World Literature II. I had gained access to the reading list early and found myself reading works I would otherwise never have read. I generally consider fiction to be a waste of time and beneath me, yet it was in works of fiction and poetry, written by authors long since passed, that I found shards of the authors' hearts, shards that mirrored my own. In William Wordsworth, I discovered a gentle soul whose "still sad music of humanity" and "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," resonated with my muted emotions ("Lines" line 91; "Ode" line 203). As Wordsworth poured out his soul in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," it was as if I'd found a small window into the soul of my brother, too. Time and again through the barren months of 2020, it was Wordsworth, whose lessons drawn from nature challenged me not to abandon the spring to spite the winter:

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind. (179-85)

So I continued, borne by my daily investments into a future spring, and on those days when my tiny fragments of hope were no longer enough to carry me, it was Coleridge, whose dejected eyes looked for relief to the moon only to say, “I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within” to remind me that hope is something to look for in the stillness of my own heart, not in some grand force outside of it (45-46). Within the turmoil of my despair and suicidal thoughts, Wordsworth and Coleridge provided a dim light of hope that life wouldn’t always be this way.

During my reading sessions, sitting in my car in the campus parking lot, I found myself gradually drawn out of the mire of self-pity. There, in the broken whispers of a dying Ivan Ilych, I felt a profound despair in such striking contrast to my brooding melancholy that I found my haze of despair somewhat lifted. Still, the world had already begun to pass me by. When I found I could no longer stomach Facebook’s vomit of plastic smiles and non-stop trivialities, it was James Joyce who showed me that, even amid bustling merriment, a human heart pierced by a forgotten song might still know the meaning of pity and remember to weep for the dead. I started to believe that the world was not entirely cold, even if my world felt frozen. Still, I longed for warmth. As I fruitlessly poured my unemployment checks into dating sites and gradually adopted a mask of cynicism to hide a broken heart, then again Joyce, who this time pointed to the slumped shoulders of a little boy standing all alone in a town called Araby, reminded me that love is not a gift of joy, but a coin whose sides are hope and grief. I had enjoyed the hope that love promises. Now it was time to experience the other side.

In that literature class I found the crystalized dreams and despairs of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Joyce, and Tolstoy, who seemed to reach me when there was no one else. My immersion into these old authors connected my broken soul to theirs, and separated by time, paper, and ink, we shed a few tears together. So my solitude continued, albeit with more resolve. This was my personal COVID crisis: a crisis of alienation and despair, weathered with a grimace and a bowed head. Mine is a tired old story of resilience and determination, maintained only because the alternative would have left too much of a mess in the bathtub. It’s a story of resignation and repetition, of living one day at a time. It’s an unfashionable and profoundly ugly story. Most people just call it survival. I don’t know if it classifies as a story of fright to flight. I was never afraid, and I wouldn’t say I really flew either. I wandered, and I waited. I stumbled, and I limped. But I survived. I don’t know when I will fly, or if I ever will. Solitude is mine still, and I have locked away my grief for a future in which I am not alone. But it has not left me. It is still there. I know because I sometimes cry in my dreams. But it’s been a while since I enjoyed the comfort of a cold barrel against my head. I think that means I’m doing better. Maybe it means I’m stronger.

I have indeed found a thread of strength. I found it in that rebellious spirit that rises to face a world that has rejected it, that spirit that curses the entire world and, in defiance to its indifference, refuses to remove itself from it, as if to sharpen the curse. I have found belonging in those eyes that stare back at me through the mirror, dark though they are with grief and tinged though they are with hate. I know that someday those eyes will be lifted out of this cursed exile and find a place of warmth and belonging. All I must do is endure. Wordsworth is there should I forget about immortality, and Tolstoy too should I forget death’s voice. My story of fright to flight is ongoing. I curse where I have been and so strive to leave it behind. While I have yet to soar through bright skies, I have been to other places along the way, and even though these darker skies hang over the ashen remains of a broken heart and mind, nevertheless, they are my skies. Through these skies, I am indeed soaring.

Works Cited

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “Dejection: An Ode.” *Poetry Foundation*, 2021,

[poetryfoundation.org/poems/43973/dejection-an-ode](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43973/dejection-an-ode).

Wordsworth, William. “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the

Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798.” *Poetry Foundation*, 2021, [poetryfoundation.org/poems/45527/lines-composed-a-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey-on-revisiting-the-banks-of-the-wye-during-a-tour-july-13-1798](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45527/lines-composed-a-few-miles-above-tintern-abbey-on-revisiting-the-banks-of-the-wye-during-a-tour-july-13-1798).

---. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” *Poetry Foundation*, 2021, [poetryfoundation.org/poems/45536/ode-intimations-of-immortality-from-recollections-of-early-childhood](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45536/ode-intimations-of-immortality-from-recollections-of-early-childhood).

Moments of a Champion

By Tracy Kyle Davis

The sum of a person's life can be traced back to a few specific moments, such as choosing to ask a girl out who later agrees to get married, deciding to move to a new location, or quitting a job. For the past ten years, I have had the privilege of treating hundreds of geriatric patients as an Occupational Therapist Assistant. Each patient is unique. I have treated people from many backgrounds of life, from a homeless man to project directors in charge of the moon mission to the wives and descendants of the Nazis of Operation Paperclip. Regardless of the individual's differences, our conversations eventually lead to a similar topic. Their defining life moments, whether the outcome was favorable or not. Realizing that their time on this earth is fast expiring, they rarely care what they acquired in their life or how well liked they are. They instead prefer to reminisce on their life-defining moments. My interactions with these individuals have led me to seek out my next moment and focus on life's great journey and the experience I have rather than focus on where I might end up. I have been fortunate to have experienced several significant moments throughout my life, all of which have taught me to take away a vital life lesson to shape the man I am and possibly help me with my next life-altering moment.

When facing a critical life experience, my first lesson was to believe in myself, even if no one else did. On February 6, 2009, I stood on the edges of the Von Braun Civic Center's arena in nearly pitch-black darkness. The only light source in the entire stadium was a single spotlight illuminating a single wrestling mat in the building's center. I reflected on all the events that had led me here; I had begun wrestling as a freshman after moving to Alabama and had performed reasonably well, placing in the top four in the state every year of my high school career. I always seemed satisfied with where I finished because I knew there was still next year, but this was my senior year and my last chance. Shortly before my match, my grandfather found me to give me words of encouragement. I understood how important this day was to him. I later realized he assumed it was one of my life's moments and would be vital to me in the future. I knew he was proud regardless of the outcome, but I could sense that he didn't expect me to win. My opponent was the returning state champion and easily beat me in our previous matches that season. But for me, this match was something different, and it had little to do with the championship. My opponent was a junior, so he still had next year. I understood that after this match I would likely never wrestle again; all the hours of continually pushing myself during practice while my friends socialized all accumulated to the next six minutes. With the sound of premature defeat in my grandfather's voice, I gritted my teeth and decided then that nothing would keep me from winning this match. I knew it in my soul before the first whistle blew. I would win. Even if my most significant supporters doubted me, I trusted myself, and I knew I

would find a way. Six minutes that seemed an eternity later, my opponent picked me up over his head, initiating what would have been the winning points for him. When the final whistle blew, I had become the 2009 State Champion with a victory of eleven to ten. Had there been one more second on the clock, my opponent would have finished his maneuver, causing me to lose by one point. I quickly realized that although being a unique story to tell, a state wrestling championship is a relatively insignificant achievement. There are hundreds of state champions every year all over the country. What I had learned was far more essential. If I genuinely think I can do it and leave no room for doubt, I will do it. When I have felt down on my luck throughout my life, I recall those six minutes and think quietly to myself, "You are the champ, and you will do this."

When faced with life's essential moments, my second lesson was to appreciate the experiences that led me to it and the turmoil endured to get there. Fast forward five years into my life, I was now a young man of twenty-three. I had graduated from college and begun a career as an Occupational Therapist Assistant. My early adult life had several challenges: family struggles, divorce, back surgeries, and bankruptcy. Through it all, I did my best to remember what I had learned from those six minutes. The sum of my experiences had made me who I was. My wife and I were expecting our first child in October. To say we were excited would have been a vast understatement. Due to past medical conditions, my wife feared that she would not bear children, and I had never wanted anything more than to be a father. The fact that she was expecting a boy increased my enthusiasm tremendously. As my wife and I worked to prepare our son's nursery, my wife's water broke in mid-July. After we rushed to the hospital, our doctor delivered devastating news: if she was forced to deliver our son at twenty-seven weeks, he faced a forty percent survival rate, but if his birth could be prevented for one more week, his survival rate increased to fifty percent and his chances would continue to grow with each passing week. We lived in a small room to postpone his birth if possible.

Within one week, our doctor was convinced that our son would not wait any longer. The medical staff rushed my wife into surgery and had me quickly change into sterile surgical equipment as they explained the seriousness of the situation. They would allow me to accompany my wife into surgery with the understanding that I would do as told and not interfere. The doctor also explained that it was not uncommon at this stage of pregnancy for the child to be stillborn or that they may have to rush into action to try to resuscitate him. If he was not breathing, I was to stay where I was and allow them to do all they could. If he did survive, he would still likely remain in the hospital for several months. His birth would be the first step towards his struggle to survive. A few moments later, I was sitting next to my wife when the doctors entered. The surgeon began to cut the C-section. My heart dropped with fear but was quickly replaced with what I could only describe as the most intense feeling of every positive emotion a person could feel as the doctor removed Brantley. In that single moment, any heartache,

struggle, or regret I had ever experienced was worth it. I would not change one second. If any part of my past were to be altered in the slightest, I may have never known my firstborn or witnessed him being removed from his mother's womb. At only two pounds and eleven ounces, he was screaming at the top of his lungs with one tiny hand wrapped around the doctor's thumb and with his other hand repeatedly punching the doctor's hand as hard as he could. I knew he was a fighter and would be fine. Brantley quickly met all of his milestones to his nurse's aggravation. She had to replace his oxygen tubes continuously since he kept pulling them out. After fifty-four days in the NICU, Brantley was released from the hospital and will enjoy his sixth birthday in less than a week. Brantley experiences no health issues due to his premature birth, and to the dismay of my wife and me, he continues to display the same fight and stubbornness that he expressed in the moment of his birth.

This leads me to the most critical lesson life's journey has taught me: I must always seek life's next big moment. Following the birth of my son, the next five years of my life were successful. I was promoted to the director of therapy at the skilled nursing facility where I worked. My wife and I were blessed with a second pregnancy that went full term. I had recently achieved my life's dream of starting a small farm. My life was beginning to take shape exactly as I had always hoped. I was overall pleased with my current situation, but if I am honest, I had started experiencing complacency and boredom with my never-changing routine. I have always enjoyed the change and the feeling of discomfort that comes with new experiences. I was searching for the next great moment. Unfortunately, my next defining moment found me in a way that I would never have predicted.

In late September of 2019, I told my wife, Brantley, and our four-month-old son goodbye as I left for work. The day started like any other day with my routine. Around lunch, my regional manager came to our facility. He regularly made unannounced visits, so I had no reason for alarm. He called me into my office to explain that Medicare would be changing in the upcoming months, so my services were no longer needed. Devastated does not describe the emotions I felt as I made the hour drive home rehearsing how I would explain to my wife that I had just lost my job months after our youngest was born and only weeks after moving into a new home. For the first time in my life, I no longer felt like the champ. I spent the following weeks calling every facility and therapist, begging for a job or any work to no avail.

Depression and hopelessness started settling in. I had no idea where I should turn until my wife had finally had enough. She pulled me outside away from our kids as if I was one of her children. In her best mom's voice, she explained that it was time to pick myself up and do something. She had given me more than enough time to wallow in my self-pity. Her words stay with me: "You're the champ, and it's time you start acting like it." The memory of my grandfather's tone of premature defeat rushed back and reminded me that I could do anything. After many discussions about our options and after realizing that the prospect of finding a therapy job with the recent Medicare

changes was improbable, my wife developed an idea.

During the previous several years of working with so many retired engineers and hearing stories of all the amazing things they had created, I developed a love for building and experimenting with new mediums. It is a hobby that my oldest son and I enjoy together. My father was a carpenter, so we had begun with woodworking. Together, we eventually had built a full-size fully functional arcade cabinet with thousands of games that we had programmed and wired ourselves using the Internet. I had often fantasized about how much I would have enjoyed a career as an engineer but never intended to pursue a new career as I was already almost thirty with a family. My wife felt that I had lost my job so I could pursue a career I had become passionate about in my free time, one I had shown no interest in as a teenager or even as a young adult. My wife found a job to help with finances while I attended college, and our close friends and family were more than willing to help with our sons. I found a job at a steel factory where I made only a quarter of my salary as a therapist. They agreed to work around my college schedule. I was employed at the steel factory for several months before receiving the opportunity for a therapy position. I decided to take the job with the condition I could continue to attend college by changing my off days during the week. My family's financial situation is much less than it had previously been. Still, we are happier than ever as we pursue our next moment together in life's adventure.

No two life adventures will be the same, which will inevitably make our decisive moments differ, whether our moments arise from luck, inconvenience, or design. Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" gives readers advice on significantly increasing the odds that they receive their desired outcomes: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, your contemporaries' society, and the events' connection." How will you respond to your next decisive moment? Will you recognize it as it happens? Will you seek it out or avoid it out of fear or contentment for your current life? Only you can decide how to respond to your great moment. Above all, focus on the experience you will have on life's journey because, if we live long enough, the ending will be the same for us all. As we realize our time is coming to an end and reminisce on all of our important moments, we write the story of our life's adventure.

Work Cited

Emerson, Ralph W. "Self-Reliance." *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. <http://www.rwe.org/complete-works/ii---essays-ii-self-reliance>, Accessed 17 July 2020.

Brother Ray Gary A. Jones



It Should Take Longer Than an Hour

By Brandy Ann Draughon

When your heart has been filleted open and your soul has been made small, you see and hear yourself and your own life's situation in every word of a story or every lyric of a song. It is hard to escape, but an effort must be made to save yourself from insanity. The heart just aches for what is lost, for what could have been, for things that will never be again. The heart. It just aches. The problem is with the brain. For the brain will perpetuate the hell. The hell may not be of your own making, but the brain, as a foe that takes you to your lowest of lows, will continue this purgatory through the direction of its own thoughts. But after some time when the misery has been enough, the brain will lead the heart out of the abyss by the hand, like a friend, directing your thoughts into a new, merciful direction.

The very first line of Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" seized my attention as I, too, am "afflicted with heart trouble." I read this short story many, many years ago, before the infection, before the open-heart surgeries, before the valve replacements. Like those valves clicking inside my chest, time also ticks on, changing my perspectives. I now wonder about young Mrs. Mallard in a new way, a more mature way, a more experienced way only gained through living life. Most readers gloss over the sorrow at her husband's death and gravitate toward her finding joy and "freedom." But when one is experiencing the agony of loss, the "storm of grief" resonates. Mrs. Mallard suffers the weight of mourning as I have also, "pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul" (539). Similarly, her eyes are like mine, "a dull stare" and with "not a glance of reflection, but rather ... a suspension of intelligent thought." She and I are not truly seeing "those patches of blue sky" and clouds (539). Nor can we tolerate the presence of others and only wish for solitude. The initial intense sobbing has subsided, but nonetheless fat, hot tears still leak out silently and unnoticed upon the cushions of our chairs. The brain is quiet. Still. It blocks the train wreck of our thoughts. At this time, Mrs. Mallard and I just exist.

Yet the "the notes of a distant song which some one was singing" seep through. Does Mrs. Mallard hear the lyrics, as I do? Do the memories of her husband fracture her very spirit? In our state of protection, our heavenly catalepsy, how does the knife still cut even deeper? Soon, Mrs. Mallard feels her brain begin to churn. She knows no fears, the revival of her mind. At first, she wants to "beat it back with her will," but she cannot escape (539). Mrs. Mallard liberates herself out of her own anguish by seeing "beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely" (540). Her brain has ended her torment and helped her find the light. Oh, what sweet bliss this shall be! When my brain, at last, turns from foe to friend.

As I long for peace of my own and reconciliation with an upside-down world, I hope that it does not take a turn as with Mrs. Mallard. There just wasn't enough time for her recent serenity to take root, for when her husband returns, she is quickly and violently pushed back into the bowels of her newly acquired worst nightmare. Did she damn herself when "she breathed a quick prayer that life might be long" (540)? Was she punished simply because her pain was too quick to revert to joy? Maybe my grasp in the dimmer world shall remain tight for a while longer to safely make sure. I also desire eyes that are "keen and bright" with "a clear and exalted perception," but thankfully my brain is not yet ready (539). Is there a reason to rush this healing? Can hastening this process lead to one's doom? I will remain patient and participate in all of my own heart's healing emotions. When the time is right, my brain, too, will release my heart from its tender cage. However, unlike Mrs. Mallard and her short-lived happiness, I will then possess a renewed, healthy heart filled with "feverish triumph" and walk as a "goddess of Victory" forever (540).

Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *The American Tradition of Literature*, edited by George Perkins and Barbara Perkins, vol. 2, 12th ed., McGraw Hill, 2009, pp. 539-540.



The following work was awarded first place in the 2021 Sigma Kappa Delta Personal Essay Writing Contest.

Pink Hair and Blue Swords

By James Mueller

This past weekend I went to Concerts on the Dock to read. (I know it's weird, but I'm trying to blend in with the local community so, you know.) Anyway, I'm perched atop a stool, sipping ginger ale and enjoying my book when this kid (probably eight or nine) waltzes up and unhesitatingly plants herself on the stool next to mine...and starts spinning. It bears mentioning that although my stool is also capable of spinning, I am not spinning.

Now, as a frequent "public reader," I am used to being interrupted, so it's really no big deal. Being the warm gentleman that I am, I take a moment to glance up from my book...and deliver a deliberate one-second cold stare across the top edge of the page before dropping my eyes and finding my place again. This communications burst catches her mid-spin, and I'm worried she's missed it and won't understand that even though I'm ignoring her, I really wish she would just leave.

"What book are you reading?"

Dammit. As I insert my bookmark (slowly, for emphasis), I begin to describe the thesis in as few and simple terms as possible.

What follows is a conversation about Harry Potter, someone named Percy Jackson, mythological heroes wielding magic swords, video games, toy swords, real swords and, at this point, I'm wondering if maybe I should try my stare again. My new friend (her words - not mine) explains that much like many others at Lowe Mill, she too is an aspiring artist. She runs off, but before I even have a chance to sneak a longing look towards my book, she returns with her art supplies. It's a large kit containing oil pastels, watercolors, colored pencils, felt markers... in short, the works.

Apparently, it's a hand-me-down from her older brother, and upon close inspection, it's obvious this kit has seen better days. Several of the colored pencils are worn down to short nubs. The eraser is missing. And what's left of the watercolors is cracked and crumbling. My new artist friend informs me that she is currently putting together her portfolio and hopes to share studio space with an established artist once she has enough work to put on display. She has apparently already sold drawings to her friends at 25 cents apiece.

You might say I have a soft spot for struggling artists, so when she asks if I'd like to buy art from her, I smile, and say, "I don't have any cash, sorry."

Turns out this one's pro bono, and I get to choose what she draws me. What a kid. I suggest she draw me something from that dumb fantasy novel she wouldn't shut up about earlier (I didn't use those words exactly), and she gets right to work. While she labors over a new creation, I step aside to acquire some cash.



As a new art investor, and her first sponsor, I figure I can do better than 25 cents. After all, it's important to support local artists, and she really needs new supplies. (It's for her portfolio after all).

After overcoming some minor obstacles along the way (that missing eraser turned out to be a real problem), I am presented with a stunning still-life pencil drawing of a sword with blue sharpie flames. As she removes her newly minted masterpiece from its college-ruled, spiral-bound canvas, I surprise her with not one but three crisp one-dollar bills.

"This is for new art supplies," I tell her with a smile, but just sternly enough to let her know I'm counting on her to work hard, apply herself, and make her dream of becoming an artist a reality. (Of course, it went without saying that I had purchased her work at twelve times the going rate and expected some return on investment.) Well... someday. "Someday this will be worth lots of money," I tell her. We grin at each other. She's happy. I steal an anticipatory glance towards my book. I'm happy, too. We shake hands as up-and-coming professionals and their altruistic supporters often do and bid one another farewell.

Fast-forward ten minutes.

I'm roused from my book by the swirling of pink hair above a spinning stool. It's none other than my young artist friend.

"Hey, you're back," I say, but before I can ask her how her portfolio is coming along, she holds up a small zip-lock bag for me to inspect.

"This one's amethyst, and this one's rose quartz," she says excitedly, and I do my best to match her enthusiasm. A true polymath, this one. She tells me the story of how she just got them from a vendor down the hall. How they sell all different kinds. How they only cost three dollars.

The word "crestfallen" gets thrown around a lot these days.

I hide my disappointment by nodding silently to everything she's telling me, but I don't really hear what she's saying anymore. I'm a fool. This is what I get for thinking with my heart. For doing something kind. This is why you don't give kids money. Because they don't understand the value of saving and just end up blowing it on the first shiny piece of junk that catches—

"Want to buy more of my art?"

I look at her expectant face. We both laugh. It's a strange mix—the mirthless chuckling of a man who's just been hoodwinked by childhood innocence and the cautious giggling of a four-and-a-half-foot mineralogist who isn't sure why we're laughing.

I'm suddenly aware of the odd sight this kid and I are no doubt presenting to bystanders. After I tell her that it was nice meeting her and that someone is probably looking for her, I send her on her merry way.

The future is still open to this kid with all the occupations she would no doubt excel at, from artist... to con artist. All I know for sure is that my cold stare needs work. And if anyone is interested in original, local art, I can point you in the right direction.

The following works were written in response to an assignment in Dr. Rhea's Honors English 102 course. The assignment asked students to explore the importance and relevance of reading, discussing, and writing about literature.

I Am Not Alone

By Gary Gray

In "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art," American poet and human rights advocate, Carolyn Forché explains that "language is a life-form, marked by human experience, and is also itself material evidence of *that-which-occurred*. This evidence continues to mark human consciousness." While Forché makes these comments in the context of "extremity," the concept is applicable outside the extreme woundedness that produced the language she is speaking of. Experiences and occurrences that mark people, once written and then read by *the other*, live on and carry the potential to mark the reader. These writings produce an experience in the right reader, the Other, that to a degree enables the Other to participate and carry on its message or record.

Reading "The Guest" by Albert Camus produced this effect in me. Knowing the author faced an identity dilemma not unlike that of the protagonist in the story, I saw Camus trying to communicate in a way that would bring me into the world he wrote about. What would I do if I were Daru, the story's protagonist? Through reading, I was educated and brought into an empathetic relation to the Daru role. Additionally, I see how such a character as Daru and other literary characters with identity issues could benefit readers.

Having grown up with an identity complex, I could to a degree, relate to the character. My mom is Mexican, and my dad is white. I was never fully received by either whites or Mexicans as a youth. My dad was my stepdad, and my bio-dad was missing in action. I saw my stepdad's affections and blood devotion more evident upon my half-sister than myself. These things produced an identity confusion for me. Was I white, Mexican, a bastard, or an unwanted son? The sense of ostracism and stigma was overwhelming, probably exaggerated inside of me as compared to reality. I met it with various façades or simply by social avoidance. Either way, I walked around and existed with a constant abiding discomfort and lack of confidence as to whom I was. Such a lack of identity confidence spills over into a general lack of confidence altogether.

Some of the many benefits literature produces are affirmation, validation, and consolation. I have something in common with the people Daru represents. I am not alone. The common threads and experiences of humanity, once known, can produce a comfort and remove or soothe stigmas. Shared experience, through time, by the written word, Forché's "living archive," enriches lives and creates a sense of connectedness with people from other times and places. As Forché observes, our own experience is augmented by the experience of others through the written page; we share, so I am not alone.

The Respected Mistress

Her demure posture is deceiving at first. She is just someone over there, unassuming, even unattractive from a distance. Hand bent forward at the wrist that rests against her breast, she beckons with a finger and coquettish gaze, "Walk with me just a little further." But she is not an easy bed. She is a demanding and rewarding mistress requiring times of single-eyed, undistracted devotion. Along the walk of never-ending courtship are the rest stops of mind-blowing and blissful consummations. Courtship and consummation, courtship and consummation, down the never-ending path of twists and turns through worlds of fascinations and sorrows, exhilarating discoveries, irresistible mysteries, formal dining, and respites of peace and leisure. She exists in all times and places, and she will take you there. She is everyone, and she will let you meet them, even be them. She is rich and poor but never exhausted nor spent. She engenders a respect that can only come from her demand of the work and dedication that uncovers her manifold treasures and worlds. She never bugs nor clings. She is not needy, nor does she overstay her welcome. If you want her, fine. Engage in courtship, and she will reward you beyond measure. If not, she is still secure in who she is and what she has to offer. Just someone over there decorously waiting to pour upon the one who seeks her out and gives her the courtship she requires, mind-blowing intercourse. This intercourse produces respect upon adoration after the consummation that is even greater than that which was required in the courtship. Those who discard her never bothered to discover her, and she does not mind because she is who she is. She is Literature.

Savannah Sparrow *Melanie Calnan*



The Fruits of Failure

By Logan Lindley

Everybody is a failure. In the traditional sense of the word, failure is wrong, shameful, negative, and must be avoided. This narrow perception excludes the numerous benefits the act of failing can bring and overpowers the liberation a more neutral view brings. Failure is an integral and natural part of human development and history.

Failure is a necessary and formative part of life. Humans are designed to learn from their mistakes. Author Jon Carroll describes “first-time failure” as “the natural order of things” in his essay “Failure Is a Good Thing.” Children fall hundreds of times before they ever learn to walk. Babies babble thousands of noises before they ever speak a word. Failure is completely neutral and natural to a baby. Humans are meant to fail, and they are not meant to be discouraged by it. Carroll shares an African saying in which a talented cook is described as “she who has broken many pots.” It is typically regarded as a bad thing to fail, but there is nothing inherently wrong about it— in fact, it is the basis of growth. It is human nature to get up and try again when faced with a setback, just like a determined toddler does. Even people with natural gifts and talents must work to cultivate and improve their skills. If people gave up when they were challenged, think of how regressed or primitive society, technology, and science would still be. Consider the Wright brothers, pioneers of flying and modern engineering. They tried to build a flying vehicle many times and in many different ways, and most failed. Even the ones that could fly were still not very stable. Even though they faced many failures, the Wright brothers persisted and left the world with groundbreaking

engineering and technology. They are a shining example of why it is important to fail, and their achievements perfectly illustrate the fruits of failure.

Society’s view of failure must change. Humans are born with the instinct to fail. With age, perceptions of what it means to fail often change dramatically based upon how an individual grows up. Babies, unlike most adults, do not judge or shame themselves for failing. They merely try again. Failure is not good or bad, and it is not something to be judged. It just *is*. Carroll relays a memory of a dinner where a group of chefs compared cooking burns, highlighting their understanding of the “credibility their failures gave them.” These numerous small failures prime them for future successes. Moving away from a traditional view of failure frees individuals from disappointment and shame. Failing is not a defect in character, but those with a fixed mindset may interpret it that way. Maria Popova describes the fixed mindset in her article “Fixed vs. Growth: The Two Basic Mindsets That Shape Our Lives,” defining it as a line of thinking that “assumes that our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens which we can’t change in any meaningful way, and success is the affirmation of that inherent intelligence.” People with a fixed mindset believe failure is an issue within themselves and their abilities, making them unlikely to try again since they believe their skills are not naturally good enough to succeed at the task at hand. People who follow this line of thinking are more likely to be unhappy with themselves and often end up feeling inept in the face of a challenge. There is another group of people who embrace failure, those with the growth mindset. Popova describes the growth mindset “not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities.” Those with a more optimistic view of failure are more resilient, happier, and successful. The benefits of a fresh perspective are clear and undeniable. Every instance of failure is a teachable moment. Failure is a starting place, not a personal shortcoming.

Overall, failure is what one makes of it. With a more optimistic view comes liberation and a higher likelihood to try again and eventually succeed. Accepting that failure is natural and a necessary part of every human life can help ease any potential feelings of shame or self-consciousness that the experience of failing may bring. As Jon Carroll says, failure is “not the end of the world. Indeed, with luck, it is the beginning.”

Works Cited

Carroll, Jon. “Failure Is a Good Thing.” *National Public*

Radio, Oct 9, 2005.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6196795>.

Popova, Maria. “Fixed vs. Growth: The Two Basic Mindsets

That Shape Our Lives.” *Brain Pickings*,

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/29/carroll-dweck-mindset>. Accessed 5 Dec. 2020.

The following paper, originally written for Dr. Byrd's World Literature II course, won first place in the 2021 Sigma Kappa Delta National Literary Analysis Writing Contest.

Little Men: Manhood in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*

By James Mueller

Alexander Pope's notorious masterpiece *The Rape of the Lock* is perhaps the most well-known and most studied mock epic in undergraduate academia. Both informative as a critical satire and entertaining as a humorous poem, Pope's classic presents a wide range of subject matter replete with thematic elements ripe for exposition and analysis. Beyond the simple tale of a girl who loses her favorite lock of hair to a scandalous admirer, there are deeper subtexts waiting to be explored. It is the purpose of this essay to examine one of these elusive undertones, namely, the concept of manhood. Using only the source material, I intend to shed light on an emergent portrait of this idea as it exists in the epic, as well as to demonstrate that this portrait, though deplorable, is intentionally farcical.

To give a brief summary of the mock epic, *The Rape of the Lock* tells the story of Belinda, an adolescent girl of the aristocracy, who suffers a hazardous encounter while attending a court ball. She is, as a matter of course, constantly attended to by a host of small, invisible fairies who serve as her intuitive notions, her inconspicuous servants, and her guardian angels. On this fateful day, her chief fairy is made aware of an unknown, yet dire, threat to her and so gathers an army of fairies to watch over her while she attends the ball. Belinda arrives at the court, where she engages in harmless diversions such as gossiping, coffee and tea drinking, and card playing. She catches the eye of a young baron whose infatuation with her prompts him to discreetly cut off a lock of her hair. She discovers the theft and demands he return the trophy, but he refuses. She then implores a nearby gentleman, a Sir Plume, to retrieve it for her, yet his entreaties to the baron are likewise met with refusal. At this, Belinda becomes enraged, thereby calling her celestial hosts to arms, and physically attacks the baron with a hairpin. In the midst of the ensuing chaos, the lock is lost, never to be found.

Despite a relatively sparse aggregate of male characters in the poem, there are sufficient references and allusions to the male demographic in general to derive a latent, yet coherent concept of manhood. This derivation is achieved by analyzing and incorporating not only the descriptions and behaviors of the baron and Sir Plume characters, but also the frequent instances in which Pope casually and implicitly conflates manhood with definitive traits, by way of correlation. This essay intends to show that Pope's conception of manhood in the epic is restricted to caricature, one that is dim-witted, easily controlled, expendable, and threatening to female virtue.

The first aspect of Pope's concept of manhood is dim-wittedness. Both the baron and Sir Plume exhibit meager intelligence and thoughtfulness despite their social standing. In Canto II, the reader learns very early of the baron's sad collection of cheap romance novels and his acquired trophies from past flings—"three garters, half a pair of gloves"—which serve to illustrate both his obsession with fake love and his failure at the real thing (line 39). Clearly, the baron is not well informed in the ways of romance or women. This does not bother him though,

and he passes up his opportunity to behave gentlemanly towards Belinda by returning her lock, preferring instead to "burn in Cupid's flames - but burn alive" (V.102). The manner in which the baron rejoices when his juvenile scheme is successful, while triumphantly displaying his stolen trophy, is still further evidence exposing him as a fool. Sir Plume, who by all accounts imagines himself a distinguished gentleman, is equally foolish. Not only is he preoccupied with his fancy snuffbox while sporting the "nice conduct of a clouded cane," but he is also described by Pope as having a "round unthinking face" (IV.124, 125). His speech leaves even more to be desired. When compared to the eloquent speeches of previous characters, his entreaty to the baron is filled with slang and coarse language including "what the devil, / Zounds, damn the lock! 'fore Gad, ... / Plague on't! ... prithee pox," making him sound more like a slum-roaming schoolboy than a royal court guest (IV.127-29). Pope further increases this irony when, following said speech, the baron remarks on how Sir Plume "speaks so well" (IV.132). This unthinking nature can be found in the baron as well when, after Belinda's lament at her loss, "the pitying audience melt[s] in tears / But Fate and Jove had stopp'd the Baron's ears" (V.1-2). But perhaps even more damning to male wit than the baron's or Sir Plume's conduct are two isolated verses that cast an intentionally dim light on manhood. In the first, the god Jupiter, in proper epic form, lowers a scale into the heat of battle to determine the outcome. But instead of weighing resolve or faith or strength of force, Pope makes a joke at the expense of the two men when their combined wit is outweighed by Belinda's hairs:

Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air,
Weighs the Men's wits against the Lady's hair;
The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside. (V.71-74)

The second instance can be found near the very end of the poem, where it is suggested that Belinda's lost lock may have mounted to that place where all lost things reside. Among the apparent oddities found in this strange place, one finds the wits of heroes kept in vases so that these rare curiosities might be pondered, as well as the wits of young men in love, which are so small as to be kept in "snuffboxes and tweezer-cases" (V.116). Using the baron and Sir Plume characters, as well as these other references, Pope depicts men as dimwitted and manifestly foolish creatures.

The second factor in the poem's notion of manhood is that men are easily controlled, the obvious implication being that men are easily controlled by women. Both the baron and Sir Plume are examples of men utterly at the mercy of feminine charm. The baron veritably worships his idea of women and has even built an altar to this effect before which he "prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes" (II.43). This image of a slave at the feet of a master is used once more in the epic when mankind is described as being enslaved by female beauty to their own destruction:

Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
And beauty draws us with a single hair. (II.23-28)

But it is not only that men are swayed by feminine beauty. According to the mock epic, they are also controllable by women in a more general sense. When Belinda springs at the baron, the contrast of apparent to actual control is highlighted when "this bold Lord with manly strength endu'd, / She with one finger and a thumb subdu[es]" (V.79-80). This marionette caricature of men

is illustrated perfectly by Sir Plume during the altercation:

When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down,
Chloe stepp'd in, and kill'd him with a frown;
She smil'd to see the doughty hero slain,
But, at her smile, the Beau reviv'd again. (V.67-70)

Once again, the boldness of these men is no match for their weak and controllable nature pitted against a woman. Belinda is herself the archetypal feminine beauty, and it is against this archetype that mankind and manhood are juxtaposed in *The Rape of the Lock*. She is all but addressed as such, and her power over the male gender is openly referenced: "thus address'd the pow'r: 'Hail, wayward Queen! / Who rule the sex to fifty from fifteen'" (IV.57-58), leaving men, as the baron poetically puts it, to "submit to fate" (III.172). Pope is not shy about this piece of the puzzle. According to the epic, men may be bold and adventurous, but in the end, they are little more than slaves and oblivious puppets in the hands of women.

The third element in the story's depiction of men is their expendability. On two separate occasions men are reduced to being on equal footing with pets: "Not louder shrieks to pitying heav'n are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last" and "Sooner let earth, air, sea, to Chaos fall, / Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish all" (III.157-58, IV.119-20). Just like the small dogs that serve as living accessories for wealthy women of status, so too are men expendable items of décor. But Pope's conception of man's inferiority is not limited to his function as female arm candy. The intrinsic worth of men is questioned on two other occasions in the epic. The first is implicated when it is revealed in Canto V that an ornament cherished by Belinda's great-great-grandfather had been melted down and repurposed, first as a whistle for her grandmother and then as a hairpin for her mother. The second instance of low evaluation of male worth occurs towards the end of the poem and is one of the peculiarities included in the list of lost items. In this case, it is the prayers of sick men. It would seem from a close reading of *The Rape of the Lock* that men are mere objects of fashion, expendable and, at best, repurposed and of so little worth that their very dying prayers are overlooked and lost to oblivion.

The final, and perhaps most important, element of Pope's theory of manhood is that of man as a threat to female virtue. On several occasions in the poem, Belinda is not only instructed to be wary of men for her heart's sake, but her piety is suggested as being at stake as well: "Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware! / This to disclose is all thy guardian can: / Beware of all, but most beware of Man" (I.112-14). Even Belinda draws the conclusion that men run in opposition to the pious life: "What mov'd my mind with youthful lords to roam? / Oh, had I stay'd, and said my pray'rs at home" (IV.159-60). Men are repeatedly painted as evil tempters, contrasted against the virtuous and chaste woman, whose honorable duty it is to reject them: "What tender maid but must a victim fall / To one man's treat, but for another's ball?" and "Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste / Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac'd" (I.95-96, 57-58). This juxtaposition can likewise be inferred from the descriptors used. On one side, the maid is described as tender, pious, fair, chaste, and a victim, while conversely the male is described as a foe who resorts to roaming, lurking, rapaciousness, cruelty, and sacrilege. The baron, therefore, is not merely a devious young male looking for affection and intimacy; he is in fact an enemy of Christian virtue, reminiscent of the serpent in Genesis. In fact, it is not the perseverance of the baron that succeeds in overpowering Belinda's heavenly host, but her sin of secretly

harboring feelings for a man, which strips her protector, Ariel, of his power:

[Ariel] watch'd th' Ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,
An earthly Lover lurking at her heart.
Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd. (III.142-46)

In this way, the entire tragedy that befalls Belinda is more akin to a fall from grace than to a theft of innocence. She is a portrait of feminine beauty and piety who falls victim to the temptations of male wickedness. An analysis of Pope's conception of manhood, therefore, would not be complete without acknowledging the intrinsic role that mankind plays as a threat to female virtue.

Manhood is a complex idea, but in *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope draws it rather simply and provides reasonable evidence to support an implicit concept of manhood that can be reduced to a dimwitted fool who is both easily manipulated and expendable but who is, nevertheless, a dire threat to womanly virtue. As deplorable as this characterization is, it is important to remember that Pope does not use it to condemn men or manhood outright. On several occasions, he refers to men in general as heroes, a term of highest praise, and counts those men as wise whose passions are the deeper qualities of women. It should also be noted that several of Belinda's fairies are described as male, including her chief guardian, whose gentle kindness inspires him to manifest for her in a dream "a Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau / (That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow)" (I.123-24). These elements, scarce though they are, discourage a misandrist reading of Pope's epic. In fact, to ignore these positive representations of men would be to miss the hidden counterweight against which Pope's entire characterization is set. It is this very inclusion that suggests a more judicious view than is apparent, namely, that men are not intrinsically corrupt and that manhood is not a vice as such. Taken together with the overall comedic nature of the poem, Pope's concept of manhood, therefore, must be understood not as a condemnation but as a farcical caricature, a comedic element that serves its function in the mock epic rather brilliantly.

The Rape of the Lock is foremostly a criticism of the trivialities of aristocratic life. But in a more subtle way, it is also a criticism of manhood. The portrait of man that Alexander Pope creates in his mock epic is a caricature intended to draw attention to what are perhaps some of the worst elements of manhood in society, such as thoughtlessness, self-importance, the pursuit of grandeur, and the idolization of women. The satirical concept of mankind that he uses in the poem is a humorous, albeit deeply honest, criticism of faulty social conventions and behavior. Pope's man, therefore, is not every man, but a man poor in character, albeit rich in breeding. The most appropriate title for Pope's man then is perhaps the title that Pope himself employs at the very beginning of his mock epic: "In tasks so bold, can little men engage" (I.11). The men described in *The Rape of the Lock* are just that, little men.

Work Cited

Pope, Alexander, and Martin Price. *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*. New American Library Classics, 2012, pp. 44-70.

The Evolution of Civilization and Wilderness across Medieval English Literature

By Tucker Constable

“Location, location, location!” Every real estate agent will tell anyone who will listen that location is the key to finding a good property. Any author will say that location, specifically civilization and wilderness, can also be the key to unlocking a character’s deeper motivations and a text’s themes and undertones. Across *Beowulf*, *Lanval*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the ways civilization or wilderness function develop from a theme of exclusion and fearing the unknown to one of acceptance, reminiscent of today’s progressive ideals.

In *Beowulf*, the hero himself is representative of the ideal male hero of that time. He possesses “awesome strength” (line 418). His name is “known for courage” (340). In fact, before he is ever named in the poem, he is introduced as “The Hero.” His father, Ecgtheow, was a well-respected warrior. It does not take long for Beowulf to be accepted and to flourish within the Heorot civilization, thanks in large part to these attributes. He even becomes a well-respected and high-ranking warrior himself. Beowulf’s experience with the representation of wilderness in the poem contrasts with that of the character Grendel. Grendel is also described through his lineage. He is a descendant of Cain, the first murderer. He is a creature who stalks the night alone, and the only company he has for himself is that of his mother, all stark contrasts to Beowulf’s powerful lineage and the great love and admiration he receives.

These differences culminate when Grendel, representative of wilderness, faces off with Beowulf, the savior of civilization, in the banquet hall, the social center of Heorot. It is a place of great sanctity, believed to be indestructible. When it is destroyed in battle, it is blamed on Grendel, further villainizing the wilderness. When Beowulf slays him, he is not only slaying the monster, but he is also slaying the wilderness, the unknown. The historical context of *Beowulf* is important to know here. The epic was told orally in the 500s, composed in the 700s, and written down in the 900s. This was long before 1066, the year when cultures collided and allowed the literature we read today to exist. The civilization of Heorot is one rooted in tradition just like this. It is a culture not open to outsiders such as Grendel. There are no gray areas. There are only heroes and villains. Beowulf is the dashing hero destined for greatness, and Grendel is the low-life villain destined to be slain by the hero, nothing else.

While *Beowulf*’s portrayal of wilderness and civilization is rooted in a pre-1066 sense of tradition, Marie de France’s *Lanval*, likely written in 1180, challenges the norm. Written after the Anglo-Saxons began blending with the outside French, the poem’s narrative has a more accepting tone than *Beowulf*. It is about not being afraid to accept oneself and go against the societal norm. Beowulf finds comfort with the people of his civilization. However, Lanval finds comfort when he is troubled by “[riding] out

of town” to a “meadow all alone” (lines 43 and 45). He encounters two maidens that lead him to a mysterious tent fit for royalty. The lady inside is quite mysterious herself and equally beautiful. Lanval and the Damsel come to an agreement: if Lanval vows not to tell anyone about their arrangement, he can have her. The agreement is carried out for a period, but unfortunately, during a heated argument with Queen Guinevere, Lanval lets their secret be known. Guinevere attempts to seduce Lanval, but due to his loyalty to King Arthur, he turns down her advances. Queen Guinevere has Lanval put on trial for treason and accused of homosexual activity. It is up to the Damsel to save the knight, Lanval.

In Marie De France’s romance, the wilderness is more appealing than civilization. In civilization, Lanval seems trapped in a silly game of sorts. In the opening of the poem, Lanval feels “disturbed...pensive...and sorrowful” (33-34). He feels like a “foreigner in a foreign place” (37). It is not until he enters the realm of the unknown, represented by the wilderness, that he gains some peace of mind and, in turn, receives some social acceptance. The people of Camelot see Lanval as one of them, and he is accepted within their circle. However, the shallowness of civilization is revealed when the Queen has him put on trial for treason. If Lanval had only conformed and accepted the Queen’s advances, he would have never ended up in this situation. The Queen, noticing Lanval’s nonconforming nature, attempts to isolate him further by falsely accusing him of homosexual activity. *Lanval* is already a fractured medieval romance, so to end things, the Damsel rides in on her white horse and saves Lanval the knight. As she is riding away, Lanval accepts who he is, jumps onto the Damsel’s horse, and rides off into the sunset, he having become the damsel in distress. *Lanval* not only challenges the social and gender norms of that time, but it also uses wilderness to critique the shallow nature of civilization. Compared to the conformity theme found in *Beowulf*, *Lanval* is much freer spirited. It shows that nonconformity is not a bad thing. While it is a little silly that the big, strong, civilized knight jumps onto the wild Damsel’s horse at the end of the poem, it is a strong message of accepting and having peace with oneself, even though it may not be the status quo.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the civilization of Camelot is portrayed even more progressively. The titular character, Gawain, is not a popular warrior like Beowulf, yet he is not a loner like Lanval. He gets along fine with the people around him. He is a little different, but he is never seen as an outsider. During the kingdom’s Christmas festivities, the Green Knight challenges any man to strike him. After the strike, there will be twelve months and one day of peace. But once time has run out, the dealer of the strike must meet with the Green Knight and receive his answering blow. At first King Arthur steps up to take on the knight’s challenge. In a genuine show of loyalty, Gawain stands before the court and states that he is “weakest” and “feeblest of wit” (line 334). His “life would be least lamented” (335). It is a statement of great humility, but one of great strength as well. Gawain accepts the Knight’s challenge and deals the blow. Due to his pure actions,



Warfare Judy Baggett

Gawain becomes a highly respected individual.

Wilderness, represented in this text by the Green Knight, is also given a different perspective. Instead of a snarling, monstrous symbol of evil, such as Grendel in *Beowulf*, the Green Knight is a deeper, more thoughtful character. Instead of a duel to the death, the two simply speak to one another. In fact, the Green Knight teaches Gawain a valuable lesson. Gawain is not fatally wounded by the Green Knight, as originally stated in the agreement. Instead, the challenge was simply a test of Camelot's famed courage and courtesy. According to the Green Knight, Sir Gawain is the ideal representative of his people due to his loyalty, humility, and courage, and despite using the green girdle as protection against the blow, the knight states that Sir Gawain simply loves life. Therefore, he cuts him slightly rather than fatally wounding him. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, wilderness and civilization are portrayed with equal amounts of depth as opposed to the one-sided pro-civilization and pro-wilderness arguments seen in *Beowulf* and *Lanval*, respectively.

At the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Sir Gawain returns to Camelot with the scar dealt to him by the Green Knight and the useless green girdle. Sir Gawain sees the scar and girdle as signs of his failure. However, the people of Camelot hear Sir Gawain's tale and see these two items as examples of his strongest attributes. They see them as examples of his love of life and his loyalty. In honor of Sir Gawain, the knights all wear green sashes

as a show of respect. Camelot accepts Sir Gawain in his victories and in his losses. In this Camelot, a person is not given a high social rank simply for his lineage or whether he fits in. In this Camelot, a person of pure heart is the most respected.

Each of these texts has a unique identity, and they all come together to create a road map to the popular entertainment that we have come to know. *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* feel almost like today's action-adventure films. It is easy to see Indiana Jones or Captain America in the place of these characters, while *Lanval* is indicative of the cheesy, romantic comedies seen on *Lifetime*. These poems also form a timeline of the more accepting culture that we have become. Across these three works, the depictions of civilization and wilderness evolve from a theme of exclusion to one of inclusion and acceptance.

Works Cited

- Anonymous. *Beowulf*. Greenblatt, pp. 42-109.
- De France, Marie. *Lanval*. Greenblatt, pp. 117-131.
- Greenblatt, Stephen, editor. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Major Authors*, 10th ed., vol. 2, Norton, 2019. 2 vols.
- Pearl Poet. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Greenblatt, pp.143-195.

Store Room *(detail)*
Gary A. Jones



AN INTERVIEW WITH

Interim Calhoun President Dr. Joe Burke

By Spencer Kress and Frankie Satterfield, Student Editors – The Muse

**Q: How has Calhoun thrived during the pandemic?**

A: Calhoun has thrived because students have also thrived. The students have been able to adapt to the online format and do well in these odd times. Of course, it is not without its struggles, trying to learn a whole new way to manage time and to have self-motivation to do well in their classes. Prior to COVID-19, the online program was already well on its way, since most instructors have taught an online course and most students have taken an online class. While these have been difficult times, Calhoun has become the better for it. The only disconnect is that there is really no personal relationship. It is much tougher to interact with fellow classmates since there is a screen between everyone now.

Q: What has the pandemic brought to light on the administration side that students might be unaware of?

A: Throughout the past year, there have been a lot of entertaining ideas about how to adapt to the ever-evolving situation of the pandemic. There is a copious amount of planning

and discussing as to how to move forward to continue making Calhoun the best it can be for students. It is a day-by-day process, as information continues to come in on how to deal with the pandemic.

Q: What do you think should be the first order of business for the next permanent president of Calhoun?

A: I think a person has to learn the people – faculty and staff, the students, the region, the culture. The next permanent president will have an opportunity in meeting growth needs of industry in the area for skilled workers, which is urgent for these new industries. The best way to learn is to get out in the community, to go to the Chamber of Commerce meetings and the economic development agency meetings. It is important to listen to and learn from those who have been around to better serve Calhoun.

Q: In what ways has being the president of Calhoun changed your life?

A: The biggest change has been forcing me out of my comfort zone. I was employed at another college for most of my career, specifically in an administrative position for the last ten years. I had become comfortable – probably too comfortable. Coming here has changed me. I have learned about what's going on in the region, from touring the GE plant where they produce a million refrigerators per year and the Polaris facility where they build those little hot rods. These experiences have been eye-opening and have allowed me to grow professionally.

Q: Are there any upcoming or new Calhoun programs that you want to get the word out about?

A: There are new Cross Country teams starting in the fall 2021 semester. Athletics in general can be a big part of the college experience, and it creates another connection to the Calhoun community itself. The Esports program had also started last fall and was created as a way to bring a new form of community to Calhoun. (Dr. Burke had stumbled upon articles mentioning other colleges creating Esports teams, and it is fitting for Calhoun to have one given all the technology here in north Alabama.) The college is also working on ways to finance a basketball program. There is also a new non-athletic related program known as Systems Engineering Technology, and the idea is to work towards getting students into careers faster utilizing an associate's degree, as opposed to the typical master's program for engineering.

(Continued on next page)

BURKE (Continued from previous page)

Q: Do you think gap years are beneficial to students?

A: It depends on the individual. I would worry about taking that gap year off, getting involved with other stuff, and not going back to school. It seems easier to move from high school to college and to stay on that pathway rather than to take a year off. I can see where a year can contribute to a person's maturity. Using that time to explore career options could be beneficial. From my experience, going to community college straight out of high school was necessary. I would have not survived going to a university. I needed that two years at community college to mature before I transferred to the University of Alabama.

Q: How would you encourage people to enroll at Calhoun or at any community college?

A: One advantage to attending community college is that it is so much less expensive than a university. Community college students get more attention with their academics because instructors care that students learn. My belief is that everybody should go to community college for two years before attending university.

Q: What advice do you have for students who juggle a full-time job while attending college?

A: It is imperative to have the time management skills to balance a job and college. The idea is to know every day where to be in a certain period of time, whether it be a year or ten years. It is all about balancing time and having enough motivation to push forward and get everything done. Always have a goal in mind to strive for.

Q: Are there any series, whether books or TV shows, that you have been going through?

A: I am more a fan of reading as opposed to watching television and enjoy books that are a way to learn more about how to improve experiences for Calhoun and its students, as well as self-improvement. Specifically, author John Maxwell is one of my favorites.

Q: Do you have a favorite word?

A: "Others." I read something a while back about someone on their deathbed and their last word was "others." In all religions there's some form of a golden rule. That's why we're living, to help others in some form or fashion.



Calhoun's 19th Annual Writers' Conference

On September 10, 2020, Calhoun proudly hosted another successful Writers' Conference featuring return speaker and U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins. The audience included the college's students, faculty, staff, and administrators as well as community members and students and faculty from Northeast Alabama Community College. With his usual insight, grace, and humor, Mr. Collins once again enthralled the audience with poems from his latest collection *Whale Day* and graciously answered questions posed by Calhoun faculty member Dr. Allen Berry. Mr. Collins adapted to the limitations imposed by the pandemic and continues to host regular readings on Facebook.



Calhoun's Evolving Esports Team

By Spencer Kress

Esports is an expanding interest among college students, especially those who have grown up playing competitive video games. Calhoun's president Dr. Burke recognized the popularity of the online gaming and the attraction it holds for recruiting and retaining students. He approached Casey Knighten, a multimedia audio and video technician at the college, and Dr. John Gaines, history instructor, about forming the program. They were quickly at the forefront in researching and formulating a plan for the Calhoun teams.

In an interview, Dr. Gaines noted that the goal from the beginning was to build community for students, a concept he already understood as co-sponsor for the tabletop gaming club. The Esports team is a community of people who play video games and participate in highly competitive events, while also creating relationships outside of those competition settings. Mr. Knighten also emphasized the responsibility necessary to compete since the students are on the same level as any other professional athletic sport. As with any team, the program is a way of learning how to work together in

order to improve as players as well as people.

While the program has not had any trouble with training for Esports events during the pandemic, given the virtual nature of gaming, the team has faced difficulty spreading the word about the program. Not having face-to-face contact has made recruiting a challenge, but Dr. Gaines and Mr. Knighten plan to have on-campus events once the pandemic ends. Typically, players assume specific roles within games; however, the Esports teams are organized by meshing players together to allow accessibility into the program. The goal is for players to find out what they are good at and to follow through with that role. As long as players can devote time for training, they can participate and join with other team members without issue. Currently, the college has enough equipment for multiple teams on every game.

Dr. Gaines and Mr. Knighten both believe in motivating and encouraging players, as their players are able to re-evaluate plays made to determine strategies for improvement. If a play—or even an entire match—goes wrong, the goal is to build the team's morale and give them the confidence to compete once again. Being in the program is more about being able

to enjoy a game with a team and to compete on a high level than getting worked up over competition. Dr. Gaines's philosophy is that overall, it is "just a game," not the end of the world. In fact, if players lose interest in one game and want to change to another, the program can interchange students without any problems. The ongoing teams can accommodate the loss or gain of a player, as some students already play multiple games for the program. Mr. Knighten wants to add *Call of Duty* to the roster in various team size game modes. The plan is to add more titles as more students join the program, rather than removing any games from the current roster. At the end of the interview, when asked about their personal favorites, Mr. Knighten mentioned *Rainbow Six Siege*, while Dr. Gaines is a fan of *Rocket League*.

If you are interested in finding out more information, please contact either of the sponsors at the following email addresses: casey.knighten@calhoun.edu or john.gaines@calhoun.edu. You may also find more information by searching esports on the college's website or by selecting Athletics in the Menu options on the homepage.



One Night in Verona

By Tucker Constable

On the evening of February 26, 2021, I attended Calhoun Theatre's production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona: The Musical*. It was an experience that I will not soon forget. Along for the ride with me were some dear high school theatre allies. For all of us, this was our first time seeing a play in a black box setting, and what a show to begin with!

The sheer movement and energy of the show is what makes the black box format ideal for this play. The score, composed by Galt MacDermot, is mostly comprised of up-tempo R&B, rock, and pop numbers. The music is great. In fact, I will probably be bumping the soundtrack on my Spotify account for the next couple of weeks. My friends and I, however, were seated directly in front of the band, and while it was really neat being so close to the music, I sometimes had difficulty understanding the lyrics written by John Guare and performed by the actors on stage. This appears though to be simply a technical issue. Despite this challenge, the band, led by Newt Johnson, performed brilliantly.

As for the play itself, I was impressed by the fact that the actors made the dialogue feel so modern. Some of this has to do with John Guare and Mel Shapiro's musical adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy. During the intermission, I had the opportunity to speak to house manager, Kristalla Henley, and she said that everyone had worked incredibly hard on the production, which was definitely on display that night! One thing that made this performance unique is the breathtaking aerial work conducted by Erica Bailey, who just so happens to be a member of the French circus! (That is something I want on my résumé.) This acrobatic element adds a new dimension to the production.

The comic elements not only made Shakespeare accessible for a general audience but also engaged the audience's enthusiasm. Much of the show's energy came from the comedy duo of Valentine, played by Tim Ernst, and Proteus, played by Calhoun theatre major William Jenkins. Their romantic mishaps with Julia, played by Calhoun voice major and theatre minor Madi Rost, and Silvia, played by Calhoun child development major and theatre minor Katrina Henley, held the audience's attention as they betrayed one another in the name of love before reuniting in friendship for the final dance number.

The pandemic may have slowed down theatre productions, but it could not stop them. Audience members happily donned their masks and made space for others in order to enjoy a rousing performance. And who better to see than Shakespeare? As Stephen Greenblatt points out in *The New Yorker* article "What Shakespeare Actually Wrote about the Plague," Shakespeare "lived his entire life in the shadow of bubonic plague."





A Busy and Productive Year for Phi Theta Kappa

Each year, Calhoun's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), the academic honor society for community colleges, serves the campus and community through its "Honors in Action" and "College Project" events. This year's need for virtual communications created opportunities for reaching a different audience and for learning new skills.

For the chapter's "Honors in Action" project, PTK members focused on mental health, a crucial component of general well-being, but a topic whose stigma leads many individuals to neglect treatment. The members' research question was "How have changing attitudes toward mental health contributed to the evolution of humane and effective treatment methods?" They reviewed twelve academic sources, primarily peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved from databases on the college's library website. The research revealed that as societal attitudes toward mental health have changed over time, so have treatment methods. Historically, mental illness acted as a ticket to being ostracized from normal socialization due to stigma and lack of adequate care. Horrific treatments, such as lobotomies and shock therapy, were at one time viewed as acceptable and even sophisticated. Over time, however, research showed that these treatments were unlikely to have significant benefits to patients. Although they have since fallen out of favor, these previous approaches have had long-lasting effects on mental health treatment by perpetuating an atmosphere of fear and stigma around mental illness in pop culture. The research suggests that as mental health practices improve and practitioners engage in more strategies to improve a patient's comfort and level of personal acceptance and happiness, the treatment yields better results. Finally, opening a conversation about mental health within communities can help combat damaging stigmas and provide community members with much needed resources. Progress is made when treatments emphasize patient comfort and compassion, not only from providers but from their community as a whole. This means that mental health is a public health concern and that everyone has a duty to help facilitate effective care, even if it just means changing the way that they communicate with others about the topic.

Having learned about the impact that changing attitudes and treatments have had on the role of mental health care for individuals and communities, Calhoun's PTK members set out to accomplish two objectives: 1) Learn more about the impact of this evolution from current mental health practitioners, and 2) share the opportunity to learn with the college's community. To accomplish these objectives, members hosted a virtual panel discussion with mental health practitioners in the community and in a neighboring state. Panelists included a psychiatrist, psychiatric nurse practitioner, a college psychology instructor, and a psychiatric intake specialist from a local hospital. Thirty-nine people from the college and community attended the event. Education and awareness of these issues can create communities that are more hospitable to addressing the unique needs of individuals dealing with mental health issues.

PTK's "College Project" began when the college administration asked the chapter to help students succeed in online classes and promote the college's tutoring center. Since most courses at the college were held online for Fall 2020 due to COVID-19, the administration emphasized student success in online courses. To accomplish these goals, members created a student-to-student online class coaching program. The chapter recruited students with a record of success in pre-COVID-19 online classes to serve as coaches. Students who were interested in being coached signed up through an online form and met with their coaches periodically through Zoom, Facetime, text message, or email. During these coaching sessions, coaches answered questions regarding online classes, provided tips for success, and directed students to college resources. The chapter also set up an Instagram account called Calhoun PASS (Promoting All Students' Success) that promoted the college tutoring center by spotlighting individual tutors to increase student awareness of tutoring and make them more likely to use it by giving students a more personal connection to tutors.

The College Project chair met with coaches on Zoom to evaluate the program's progress, answer questions, and problem-solve. During the midterm, the College Project committee created and sent out questionnaires on Google Forms for both coaches and students enrolled in the program to ask about their experiences. The project included twenty-eight student coaches and eighty-four student learners.

Making Mental Health Matter

By Frankie Satterfield

Calhoun's counselor Shannon Wildharber-Arnold has been practicing social work since 2007 and therapy since 2009. After serving ten years in the military, she pursued a career in counseling having noticed how it benefits people in crisis. In an online interview, Ms. Wildharber-Arnold offered general advice for community college students struggling with mental health crises, especially during a pandemic.

Q: What advice would you give students struggling with anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders to motivate them to complete online assignments?

A: First, I want students to know that it is completely normal and understandable particularly given the last year. Second, I recommend students work with a peer or peer group to help with accountability as well as to provide peer support during classes and hopefully moving forward. Third, I would do everything possible to help them understand that there are ways to manage these feelings and that they are showing their resilience and strength simply by being where they are.

Q: What advice do you have that could help any students at any age with their stresses about online school?

A: First, remember to breathe, deep cleansing breaths to try and reduce the internal stress. Second, contact the STARS Institute for assistance with tutoring and online classes. Third, establish an outlet for communication.

Q: Do you have any tips to ease the anxiety students face when reaching out to their instructors?

A: Always ask; ask questions until you feel like you understand the information. Be honest with yourself and with the instructor.

Q: During the pandemic, what specific things have you noticed that students have improved or discovered because of online learning?

A: Students are far more resilient, capable, and tenacious than they tend to give themselves credit for. They are making progress during a time when life as they have known it all but stops.

Q: Do you think the pandemic has helped to improve students' mental health?

A: No, not in a traditional sense. I think it has given students a reason to focus on mental health more and maybe get help for the first time. Humans are social by nature, so when everything is taken away, we must find new ways to connect. For some, it was incredibly difficult to create those connections. I think most people need some sort of accountability for themselves and their goals. Being isolated made that incredibly difficult to almost impossible for many people.

Celebrating Success with Sigma Kappa Delta

Each spring, Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD), the English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, partners with Sigma Tau Delta to host an international convention. As with most events during the pandemic, this year's planning committee faced the challenges of creating a virtual event that would live up to the networking experience of a face-to-face convention. In preparation for the event, members and sponsors of Calhoun's SKD chapter, Theta Beta, held weekly book discussions with members and sponsors of Epsilon Alpha, Northeast Alabama Community College's chapter. Karen Auvinen and Michael Branch, the two featured writers, adapted to the virtual environment and the Sigma Tau Delta members who led the Q&A session made the event feel almost as intimate as the live experience. As a matter of fact, Michael Branch's presentation was so compelling that Calhoun English faculty members are discussing the possibility of hosting him as the featured speaker for Calhoun's Annual Writers' Conference.

At the 2021 convention, Calhoun found many reasons to celebrate. Muse, Calhoun's literary and art journal sponsored by SKD, won first place in the National Literary Magazine Contest. But more importantly, James Mueller, former Calhoun student and current UAH mechanical engineering major, was selected to present on the SKD student panel, "From Fright to Flight: How the Pandemic Gave Me Wings." The raw honesty and beauty of his well-crafted presentation had audience members in tears. But not for long. His work "Pink Hair and Blue Swords" won first place in the National Essay Writing Contest, while his essay "Circus Boy" won third place and his essay "Little Men" won first place in the National Literary Analysis Contest. The Calhoun community should certainly be proud of his accomplishments!

Q: Do you have any advice for non-traditional students who may have difficulty with their online learning and with their children's?

A: Ask for help, for yourselves and for your children and keep asking until you get what you need. There are all kinds of groups, boards, and services available for education assistance and tutoring.

Q: Has the pandemic made students more independent or improved their time management skills? How so?

A: I would say students are independent for sure, but I don't know that time management skills have improved. I think most of us find that when we are at home we are more easily distracted; there is an art and discipline to working from home or taking classes from home. With the pandemic, I imagine most people were able to create structure and balance after a while, but since everyone was in uncharted territory with no idea what to expect or what the timeframes would be, creating solid plans may have taken longer.

Q: What have you learned as a counselor or about yourself during the pandemic?

A: One, we all need support, no matter what side of the desk a person is on. Two, I enjoy working from home in my pajamas, but I miss seeing my clients, friends, and family in person.

Q: With the switch to online learning, do you think students feel more comfortable speaking in "class," if their class has a Collaborate or Zoom session? If not, what advice would you give to students to speak up?

A: For me professionally, technology in the classroom setting can be a double-edged sword. There is so much that tends to get lost in translation; people do not have the same sense of humor, the same background, or the same history, so things can be easily misunderstood without context or visual cues. Another difficulty is that professors and most of their students are of different generations, so today's students are more comfortable with technology than their teachers. As a result, there has been a learning curve that would not have been so noticeable and difficult had everyone been in the classroom. Regardless of the forum, I hope that students feel comfortable interacting with their peers and faculty. If they do not, working directly with the professor via email before engaging in other methods would be my first suggestion. If the student doesn't feel comfortable emailing the professor, maybe the student could start with a friend in class or contact me to discuss ways to reduce anxieties.

Whether you are struggling with ongoing mental health concerns or wondering how to balance your personal life and academic responsibilities, you can contact Calhoun's Student Disability / ADA office (Decatur: 256-306-2630 and Huntsville: 256-890-4756) to schedule an appointment.

Celebrating Citizenship at Calhoun

By Spencer Kress

Calhoun Community College creates a video annually discussing the citizenship process, and this year's production featured communications instructor Dr. Ray Bell. Originally from England, Dr. Bell married a US citizen, and upon returning to the States after having lived in England for some years, he sought citizenship as his family grew. The path can be a straightforward endeavor for some, such as Dr. Bell and others who are able to obtain jobs while living here. Being a citizen of the United States is not just a title. It is a responsibility to participate in the democracy of America. It offers benefits that are completely unavailable to those living here illegally. The citizenship process, however, can take months and even years, which brings up another issue that occurs often in the United States and is brought up in political debate. Some families who come here illegally are not able to fully obtain the so-called "American Dream," despite possibly fleeing from countries under the siege of chaos. Calhoun has done well with this video showing how the process can go well, but we must also remember that it is a scenario many people are not fortunate enough to experience.

12TH ANNUAL STUDENT SUCCESS SYMPOSIUM

The Road to Student Success



CALHOUN STUDENT

**LEXANDRA
LUTZ**



CALHOUN ALUMNA

**TRISH
DILULLO**



CALHOUN STAFF

**LOGAN
SMITH**

Calhoun's Triple Threat of Success

By Frankie Satterfield

The Student Success Symposium is Calhoun's mission statement put in action: "Calhoun Community College promotes student success and community development through quality education, cultural enrichment, and workforce training."

At this year's symposium, Lexandra Lutz, a current Calhoun student, shared her story as an infant born prematurely. Her doctors assumed her survival rate was low, but she kept passing each seemingly unreachable milestone. At the age of five, she was placed in foster care. Lexandra has faced hurdle after hurdle, but with education from Calhoun and her perseverance, she is pursuing an advanced tech degree as well as a job with Toyota.

Following Lexandra's story of perseverance was Trish DiLullo, a Calhoun alumna and a single mother of three. She started her journey at Calhoun in the Dental Assisting program but quickly discovered it was not her desired field. She then took a psychology class that redirected both her academic and her personal lives. When she was due to take a test, she had an emotional breakdown, and the instructor took time out of his day to counsel her. Trish said she couldn't imagine going to other schools and having a faculty member spend that time with a student. She was at a low point in her life while attending Calhoun, but because of the faculty and courses, she found her direction. She has received an associate's degree in Law and Pre-law along with a Bachelor's of Science degree in behavioral science from Athens State University (ASU) and an Master's of Science in post-secondary education from Troy University. She is now at ASU as the testing center coordinator.

Logan Smith, Trish DiLullo's daughter as well as a Calhoun alumni and academic advisor, closed the symposium by sharing her story of survival. While attending college classes as a high school student, Logan found herself in an abusive relationship, which added to her mental health struggles. At Calhoun, she found the proper tools and people to help guide her. She never felt like a burden and even calls the college her "Safe Space." Because of the college and its staff, she invested in her future and now volunteers at the Crisis Center of North Alabama.

With Calhoun Community College's commitment to education, students like Lexandra, Trish, and Logan have not only fulfilled the college's mission statement, but they have also found purpose in life while following their dreams.

Microscape *Leah Smith*



MUSE

/myuz/ v. To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder. N. (Greek mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 3. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 4. (Archaic) A poet.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Dr. Allen Berry
Dr. Christie Lamon-Burney
Dr. Sheila Byrd
Ms. Joy Laws
Mr. Bill Provin
Dr. Leigh Ann Rhea

STUDENT EDITORS

Spencer Kress
Frankie Satterfield

Layout and Design by Mr. Taylor Burton, Public Relations
Printing by Mr. Jay Gibson, Calhoun Printing Services

Published by the Department of Language and Literature
and Sigma Kappa Delta

Calhoun Community College is committed to equal opportunity in employment and education. The College does not discriminate in any program or activity on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, age, national origin, disability, marital status or any other protected class.

Calhoun Community College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate degrees. Questions about the accreditation of Calhoun Community College may be directed in writing to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, GA 30033-4097, by calling (404) 679-4500, or by using information available on SACSCOC's website (www.sacscoc.org)

Member of American Association of Community Colleges
Alabama Community College System

Calhoun Community College is a tobacco-free college

