Right at Home

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a living document of short pieces by local writers

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Write In Louisa (WIL) is a writers group designed for writers and aspiring writers ages 18+ with any level of experience, from any background. From published authors to those simply interested in exploring different forms of self-expression, all are encouraged to join our open, friendly group to read, and if desired, receive helpful feedback.

We meet the first Wednesday of the month from 2 to 3:30 p.m. (unless otherwise specified) in the Purcell Gallery at Louisa Arts Center. Donation is $5 + associated fees. All donations support Louisa Arts Center, a nonprofit providing opportunities for the community to explore and enjoy the arts.

A Fable of the Links

Some Non-Inspirational poetry from the Bard of Tanyard,
recalling prehistoric days of the Tanyard Golf Course in Louisa,
when Pamunkey Indians resided nearby and homes were lit by whale oil lamps

Larry Kavanagh

The Tanyard Duffer snarled and hurled the hated club to earth.
His golfing partner stepped aside and tried to hide his mirth.
The groundhog raised his head, but wisely slipped back in his hole;
The songbird ceased to sing, as golfing duffing choked his soul.
Now, who would think a golf ball, teed one summer afternoon,
Would ricochet from tree to tree, and land in yon spittoon,
Then shatter 'toon to shreds, and roll out free as me or you,
Straight out to Beaver Creek, atop Pamunkey hide canoe,
And nestle in the folds of all the shiny groundhog hides
Pamunk had tanned for trade and paddled downstream for the tribe.
Down Beaver Creek, South Anna, York, and on to Chesapeake,
The ball and hides and 'Munk traversed. It took about a week.
And then a storm arose and drove the whole thing out to sea,
Where wind and heavy rain destroyed the hide-boat utterly.
But ere the golf ball sank below, 'twas swallowed by a whale,
And whale in turn harpooned by passing Pequod under sail.
Thence on to nearest cannery, and stuffed into a can,
A bit of blubber bland and bile, all tallowish and tan;
Then sold as fuel for oil lamps to the prudent groundkeep crew,
Who warmed their hands by blubber fire in the early morning dew.
Then opened at the golf course on the night they needed oil
To light the lamps of whale oil for the golfers' weary toil,
Duffing home around the back nine after sun had sunken low
And they needed light around the greens to give the cups a glow.
But look! The tallowed golf ball falls from whale-can with a roll,
On course that takes it straight away to drop into the hole!
"An ace!" the Tanyard Duffer cried, for how could he forget
That yonder ball was HIS, though months had passed and yet
That selfsame ball, untouched by man, to cup at last did fly,
And, Lordy, what a lie, a lie, a lie, a lie, a lie!

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Badlands Balloon Ride

Randy Holladay

What provoked them to set up balloon rides over a place called ‘Badlands’? There had to be a reason, maybe a ride, would not be so bad.

The release of the ropes, the sudden whooosh skyward was the shocker. The earth began to shrink..and expand. There was so much more earth. The rolling badlands, rounded, without trees or stark definition began to change. They stretched off, farther and farther into the distance, the pale, bland colors at the surface began to change, separating into distinct bands, distinct but matching distance bands.

The sound of the burner, constantly adding the hot air to keep us aloft began to be a less noticeable drone..even though it was the only sound. Our personal ooohs and aaahs heard only in our own heads. And, then the burner was off and the sudden silence shocked us almost as much as the blast from the burning propane.

There was a hint of wind but, we moved with the wind so there was really just the silence. Now, the delight we all felt and had been expressing could be heard, yet no one really dared break the silence.

We drifted over the ‘badlands’, they looked much less bad. The dirt and rock, so lifeless from below didn’t come alive but it was now able to tell a greater story. Millenia in the making, unseen by any human.

Based on the writing prompt “balloon ride” provided by Larry Kavanagh

A Christmas Story

Larry Kavanagh

Santa Claus 🎅 had had enough of this North Pole residency.

Christmas Eve, December 24, was essentially the same day as the winter solstice. On this, his busiest workday of the year, there was no daylight, not even the faintest glimmer of the sun, and it was the coldest of all four seasons. It made sense to move.

So, Santa moved to the South Pole. December 24 was summer down there. It was warmer, the sun was up 24 hours a day, and the penguins were fun to watch. Why hadn't he made this move a long time ago? All of Santa's staff were happy at this new pole. The elves even started developing a southern drawl and eating grits for breakfast.

All were happy, that is, except Rudolph. His shiny red nose was no longer needed. He was not needed. All of the other reindeer started laughing and calling him names again. Rudolph fell into depression.

But then, a cure came along. It was spectacular. It made Rudolph a new person. All was well, even better than before.

What was the cure? I could tell you, but I only had 10 minutes for this writing exercise, and time is up.

WAIT A MINUTE! WE JUST GOT A FIVE-MINUTE EXTENSION. HERE'S THE CURE: Rudolph discovered that a red nose actually gives off heat. It does essentially what a red heating lamp does. So, since Santa was becoming rapidly enamored with his new Southern comforts, he was actually getting too cold every time his sleigh ventured into the northern hemisphere to deliver presents. He invited Rudolph to sit next to him on every annual trip, and Rudolph's nose kept Santa comfortable and warm. This gave Rudolph the place of honor, and all eight of the other reindeer turned bright green with envy. Every family who looked into the sky to spot Santa on the magic evening saw a sleigh that had both red and green colors, and this gave all observers a warm, fuzzy, Christmas-color feeling. Happiness all around.

Ten-minute open writing, December 2024

Ugly

David Reid Brown

No one would like trees if they grew upside down.
The unsightliness would most certainly bubble-blister your soul.
Consensus would move the masses to burn them all to the ground.
Pinch your nose and say, “Welcome!”, to the cinders and charcoal.

The exposure of roots was too awful but God’s mercy hid them well.
He placed them below the crust so they could only mate with the dirt.
Even winter’s barren limbs have more charm than one could tell.
Signaling the birth of a new season while keeping our eyes from needless hurt.

Go pluck a bloom of wildflowers, each of one of you of every kind!
Pen clever rhyming platitudes about their radiance instead.
Ms. Dickenson would agree, so, I’m sure she would not mind,
the beauty of timbers overlooked for affirming words to be read.

The wretched bronchial crookedness of a tree’s mooring system,
provides its life, leaf, and fruit and conspicuous definition.

A Write In Louisa Local Authors Book Expo showcased author

A Role Model for the Revolution

Jesse Fowler-Malone (AKA Squid)

Get up and yell at the sun.
Shake and preen, my siblings. Shake and preen.
Sharpen your spurs.
Throw your head back and be heard.

Loud. Proud. Golden.
Desired.
Desire Incarnate, even.

Fly anyway and be good at it, despite your haters.
Just know
you can be like him.

No one but you
can ruffle some feathers like a rooster crowing at 6 a.m.

Ekphrasis on Carol Cullinan's pastel drawing, Cock of the Walk
MidAtlantic Pastel Society November 2024 exhibit
Louisa Arts Center, Louisa VA

"Steam Tractor Being Belted Up to Sawmill"

Dick Harris

When these machines were in their heyday around 1900, they were state-of-the-art made possible by advances in knowledge of how to make high strength steel parts. They were large and heavy machines and moved slowly and were primarily used to power rotating machines , such as sawmills and grain threshing machines by a long flat leather belt.

In the central part of the country, they were used to pull large plows, called "sodbusters," to break up virgin sod, where the fields are a 1 mile square.

They were expensive, and only well off people could afford to buy one. They took 2 people to operate when used to pull something. One person to keep up the fire and one to drive the machine.

They were dangerous to people around them, in that they could explode without warning. If you were not killed by the explosion, the steam and hot water would cause severe burns, which would cause a horrible slow death.

The main plus they had is that they were very powerful and the benefits of this power is that they allowed man to produce things in great quantity with his work. Take for instance the sawmill. Before steam power, the sawmill was powered by water turning the rotary saw. This meant that logs had to be moved to where the water was. When the sawmill could be set up deep into the forest, much more timber could be turned into lumber for houses and other uses.

They were one of the steps that man went through to where we are today. If you wish to see a real one, go to the steam and gas show in Somerset, Virginia every first week in September. There they run a sawmill and cut lumber and also pull a large plow in the field.

They were made obsolete by the internal combustion engine. Steam power did not exist until man learned how to make metal strong enough that it could be safely used to contain the pressure of steam. It was not possible to make these machines until it was discovered how to turn cast iron into steel. This was discovery happened by accident, but that is a whole another story.

All of man's progress has been in steps of discoveries that have occurred in the past. The computers and smartphones we use today are only made possible by what we call "Chips" that have come about in my lifetime. What will our world be like 100 years from now? Stay tuned.

Based on "Steam Tractor Being Belted Up to Sawmill"
MidAtlantic Pastel Society November 2024 exhibit
Louisa Arts Center, Louisa VA

State of the Fair

Katherine Mercurio Gotthardt

See, right there,
at the 4H milkshake truck painted like a cow,
there's a girl snapping selfies at the serving window,
makeup shrink wrapping her brow, her lip line, her boredom,
left hand, French manicured, casual on a counter sticky with tradition,
right positioning the lens like an inexperienced lover. She shakes
corn silk from her hair, releases with her thumb pad a digital shutter,
catches threads of field and fake laughter in a daylight so shocking,
it's hard to tell even with a squint if the truck's splotches are bovine
or eye floaters, art, or a melting innocence, mixed media,
or tricks of a naked, middle-aged eye.

Inspired by "Milkshakes" by Michael McGurk, MidAtlantic Pastel Society November 2024 exhibit, Louisa Arts Center, Louisa VA

teaching yoga while intoxicated

Valerie Forde-Galvin

we sit at tables under palm trees
our liberated feet luxuriating in the sand it was a long flight from Boston
and now this waiter offers two-for-one so we order up our margaritas
and cool piña coladas
frugal New Englanders thinking we could share but no we didn't understand
we each got two what could we do
but shed our cloistered upbringing
and give ourselves over to tropical breezes mariachi singing
and warm brown eyes
if there's a distinction in the tropics between bliss and intoxication
we couldn't know because we're on vacation
I come to my senses all too soon
I have brought them here for yoga and not a drunken afternoon
a nap
a siesta
and before long we are sober
at least enough to climb to our palapa to lie on mats
observed by curious iguanas
and focus on our breath and movement caught up in our yoga postures
we almost miss the twilight special
a sensual ballet choreographed by sun and moon crimson languishes across the Caribbean sky
above a radiance of clouds
shimmering gold and copper and eventually surrenders
to the sultry warmth of violet and mauve
time moves more slowly in this garden of delights so breathlessly we watch as day flows into
night beauty that's almost too much to bear
and we are truly here
as we have never been before and never will be quite again

Shared during critique session, based on teaching yoga at a retreat

Chiara

Larry Kavanagh

The
Mid Atlantic Pastel Society
 says
Hello Chiara
 receives
A Blue Ribbon
 but
There's nothing blue about Chiara
 except
Her Background

Based on "Hello Chiara" by Nanette Catigbe
MidAtlantic Pastel Society November 2024 exhibit
Louisa Arts Center, Louisa VA

sire

David Reid Brown

Women *can't* resist
a good scoundrel,
the envy of
"Last Place Finishers"
like me.

Shade to Prince Charming

David Reid Brown

Girl, look at you!
Trying to give "Darth Vader"
a peck on the cheek,
hoping it will create a kinder villain.

You'd have better luck
kissing a frog
and using a whole stick of Lysol lip balm
when you're done.

Al Jabr

David Reid Brown

Middle School Math
was a hardcore hitman
and I've got all
the red ink, wrong-answer,
blood spatter to prove it.

Is That My Brother?

C. S. Ellison

A few days ago I saw a young man walking across a parking lot. I count my lucky stars I was not driving, it was all I could do not to jump out the car and run to him, find out–are you my brother?

My mind went entirely off the rails at that moment as I starred at him with every part of who I was and with a hunger for an answer that could never be true. While I was taking in what I saw I knew in that moment what I was seeing would be too fleeting and more meaningful to me than anything I expected when I woke up that morning. It was also more devastating than anything I expected to encounter when I woke up that morning. I'm still there in my mind as I write this and I don't foresee the memory will ever leave me.

Since that time, I have thought long and hard about seeing that young man crossing the parking lot of my favorite restaurant. If only I could have talked to him, maybe my senses would have been restored, even though it most likely would have been the strangest conversation either of us would have ever had. I also question had the stranger looked up and saw me starring at him, what would he have thought as I tried to bore holes into his soul with a stare of longing for someone I missed with all my heart. I remember looking for him after we passed him in the car and it was as if he had vanished into the thin hot air of an ordinary day. Since then my mind has moved off the rails even more. Was what I saw a spirit passing by to let me know what he would have looked like as a young healthy man not riddled with the worlds array of addictions that plagued him most of his life?

I've meet people before who've reminded me of Ted, people I've taken my time talking to just for the opportunity to feel that he was there with me, but then I've had to turn away so they could not see the tears in my eyes or the sadness engulfing me. There was always some mannerism or something the person said that reminded me of Ted, but never ever have I run into someone that looked so much like him.

The part that blew up my world the most and still does is that the young man in the parking lot looked like my brother would have looked…

Before he shot drugs and it rattled him with desire for the rest of his life

Before he drank himself to sleep so many nights

Before he smoked himself out of breath for the last time

That man could have been my brother in another dimension, clear skinned, confident, nothing standing in his way. It was as if the person I saw was a version of my brother had he...

Never used drugs for the first time

Never picked up a drink and couldn't stop

Never inhaled smoke into his lungs to feel a rush

Had his childhood never turned into the many addictions that ravished his body and soul

Had whatever led him to hide from himself and ruled his world with escapism never owned him

My mind, back on the rails, tells me the guy was a stranger and if I talked to him, reality would really return me to my senses. I'm not even sure I want that scenario. Instead I'd rather believe the off the rail thought that I saw the spirit of my brother in physical form three years and two days after he died, because he personally wanted me to know he is entirely renewed and the world that ravaged him so unmercifully is no longer his existence.

Ambush Monday Morning

David Reid Brown

I insist on a fair chance at a weekend do-over,
so I can secretly set a trap for a time yet to come.
I'm wed to the soothing warmth of my squishy flannel cover,
in total dread of engaging another Monday morning.

Common sense suggests, "Get up! Get a jump on the day!"
Your present self will gladly thank your past one's work.
Only you make the choice to let diligence have its way,
and fend off Sunday's inevitable procrastinating shirk.

Who knew that coffee could keep your mind sane and stable?
That first hot sip hits better than a clutch buzzer-beater!
Caffeine can adjust your attitude in a way that's quite remarkable.
Keeping your displayed "Dr. Jekyll" from that other unbearable creature.

Ugh! I'm up and life's sucker punch has landed to my chagrin.
But this time I made sure it's me–not Monday–for the win.

Oliver the Opossum

Larry Kavanagh

Oliver was an opossum who loved to sleep in the woods in a delightfully warm place where he could soak in the warm water of the swamps.

Pedro was a penguin who lived at the South Pole, but he hated the cold weather. It embarrassed the other penguins that Pedro had such a bad image about the cold. They would cringe when he spoke to tourists in Antarctica about how bad the cold was.

Even though Pedro wore a bow tie, as any well-dressed penguin should, it didn't keep him warm. Pedro kept a stove in his icy igloo, and he always kept the fuel tank full of kerosene.

Oliver, on the other hand, loved the quiet of his swamp, but he thought it was too hot. A an aside, Oliver also had a giddy love of eating strudel. He was miserly about sharing his strudel with anybody. He was greedy; he wanted to eat it all.

Eventually, Pedro took a vacation to the swamp, using a zero gravity rocket ship to get there. The zero gravity made the trip pleasant, because otherwise he would have surrendered to the backache pain of a long trip. However, because of the zero gravity, he had to glue himself to his seat to keep from flying around.

In the end, Oliver and Pedro decided to change places, but it didn't work out because there's no place like home.

Based on June meeting prompt: Write a very short story in fifteen minutes or less which using specified words

Survival

Valerie Forde-Galvin

Clouds are streaks of vomit spewed across a bloated August sky, the crescent moon retreating from tomorrow's sun.
The night is still and, in the absence of a breeze,
a thrashing in the thicket indicates a kill.
Slashing talons quickly end the rodent's cry
and once again the heavy air hangs still.
The bird who hunts at night will feed her young.
I lie awake in fouled and sweat stained sheets
in this bed no longer shared.
He too hunts at night – the occasional convenience store,
the unguarded wallet in a crowd.
He won't be back; I changed the locks.
At least I get to keep the kids,
two souls dreamless, dead asleep.
Wings disturb the fetid air; the owl is on the hunt once more, her need more urgent with the coming dawn.
The weak must die so that the strong can thrive.
I have no talons. Will my young survive?

First Snowfall

Valerie Forde-Galvin

Silent flakes of snow begin around the time when there should have been a sunset. But it seems that earth and sky have conspired and together they have conjured up a softer way to turn day into night. All we can see out there is white.

We watch in wonder from our upstairs window. Hypnotized by snow crystals lazily floating by, we lose our sense of direction. Up and down is undefined. Whirling snow commands the sky.

On the ground below, the snow has made its presence known. We see the cityscape is changing. And so we put on boots and hooded parkas and go out into the night where we are surprised to find that darkness has been banished. There is no need for flashlights. Without the moon, we are guided by an otherworldly radiance. Could it be that snow is phosphorescent?

The snow is everywhere. We look up and open our arms to the falling snow. Its touch is light and delicate. Snowflakes tickle our eyelashes, melt on our tongues, and evade capture as they drift through our fingers. We stand as still as statues and enjoy the playfulness of snow.

When has the city ever been this quiet? There is no sound; the snow absorbs the urban clamor and we are cloaked in silence. We wonder if the earth has shut down all activity in reverence for this event.

There is no proof that we are here; the falling snow covers up our tracks as if our earthly presence is a myth. We think the earth and sky have formed a plan to transform the world. “Let the snow erase all evidence of human error,” they scheme. “Blank out everything and start anew.”

We understand the earth is tired. It's time for a do-over. We're fine with that.

Although weightless in flight, the fallen snow has substance. It continues relentlessly and, throughout the night, efficiently covers up our neighborhood. The projects are blanketed in snow.

City streets are meadows extending to an infinite horizon where the veil between heaven and earth has been lifted. We wonder if we have been transported to a softer, cleaner world because our feet no longer touch the pavement. Perhaps we are suspended in a halfway state between two worlds.

But then we see the lamp posts. They still stand as beacons to the neighborhood we know. In the alleyways between tenements, snow clad trash cans create a pleasing geometry, lined up along pristine powdered paths. Snow has softened the city.

This weekend in the suburbs, kids like us will try out their new sleds on some nearby hill, returning home to sip hot cocoa by a fireplace while a golden retriever lies sleeping at their feet.

This weekend in the projects, a great deal of alcohol will be consumed but gun shots will be muffled and rats will be disinclined to bite.

Foodie

Katherine Mercurio Gotthardt

It arrives on the fingertips of elegance: smattering
of crisp lardons on bone china. Chilled Crème Fraîche,
organic chives, sourced locally. Textural yet smooth
mouthfeel, masterpiece of some culinary artist
of advertised origin, who screeches in pedigree
at a sallow sous chef. The dish has been reviewed
by three major food writers in New York City, all Italian,
or semblances of Mediterranean (because a good dinner
is not just a metabolic recharge). Go ahead, see for yourself—
adjust the refined linen on your lap, flip the garnish
with a sterling fork, and relish the impermanence. Chew
deliberately, swallowing next week's paycheck. Sumptuous
and earthy, isn't it? With notes of cultured butter?
What a lovely baked potato.

After readings from Rattle *and* East to West, Pole to Pole *by Larry Kavanagh; collage poem based on Write In Louisa workshop, method by Mike Maggio.*