

# Prairie Ink

A literary Annual



Issue Six 

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## From the Editors

“There is a way to see inside by looking directly through to seed or marrow.”

-Joan Halifax

Change is a good thing. It sharpens our senses, alters our perspective, and invites a new response. With the change in our format, we too are hoping to surprise and delight those of you who open our pages to discover what’s inside.

-Jaime Clothier Oss and Teresa Johnson



Cover Art: Bob Joy

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# Three Gifts

By George Martin



It was all very different and unexpected. Joseph was a good man and all, and the trip to Nazareth was not unduly hard; but now he wanted to go to Egypt, and that just added to the strangeness and mystery of what had happened so far.

I know the three who visited last night told him something which frightened him; it must have involved the baby—Joseph held him so closely afterward. And now I must ready myself and all of our things, and the boy child, and be ready to leave when Joseph returns with provisions. I don't know where we will rest tonight.

The three must have been important. I did hear they had spoken to Herod. Not everyone gets to talk to Herod. He is the King, you know. They also left these expensive gifts, so I think they were very rich. Maybe they were rich kings, too. They left a gold coin, I had never seen one before, and sweet smelling Frankincense. That is very suitable for an offering at the temple. But, the temple is in Jerusalem, and we are going to Egypt; I will have to keep it until we return. The prize which makes me wonder most is the gift of the one who said his name was Balthazar. He gave a gift of Myrrh. Myrrh is used for funerals and burials; and this was a happy birth, and my son is alive and sweet... And, I have to put these three gifts away where they will be safe on the long journey. I think I will sew them into the hem of my coat. No one will look there.

It was spring and all of us in the community had gone to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. In fact we were all walking toward our home when I noticed Jesus was not where I thought he was. He was not among the friends and neighbors walking with us. I told Joseph and we both looked and asked, and that boy was nowhere to be found. Twelve year olds can be so difficult sometimes. But he is a good boy, and I thought, he might still be at the Temple. So I told my husband. He agreed we should go there and check, and if he wasn't there we could retrace our steps and look for him again along the way. Joseph muttered something about how the boy would have to do some extra hewing of wood to make up for this delay; and we turned and walked toward Jerusalem. I went ahead of Joseph; he was older now and his steps were not as fast.

When we arrived we noticed many

of the people who had been there two days earlier had left and gone their way home, so the temple was not as crowded, and I saw immediately Jesus sitting with a group of scholars; and he was talking with them, and they seemed very interested in what he had to offer.

I was so mad, and so happy at the same time I blurted out many things: Where have you been? We have been looking for you for two days. Wait till your father gets here... , and then Thank God I found you. Joseph entered about then and Jesus looked at both of us and said, "Did you not know I must be about my father's business?"

I was too happy to have my son back, and I just hugged him. Joseph was already anxious to leave, but I begged him to give me a moment, told him and the boy to wait outside, and I would be there in a minute. As they turned and left I tore open the hem of my coat and found the Frankincense, still there after all this time. I went to the

incense altar and, as I lit the gift given by Melchior, I thanked God for the gift of my son; then I hurried to find my men, young and old, and we began our journey home.

The boy grew, and sometimes as he became a man he went off on journeys. At times I would go with him. I just wanted to be sure he would eat right. The fishermen he traveled with were not ones to eat a balanced diet, and I, and the other wives and mothers, the other women, could suggest and add foods to keep them healthy.

Jesus always drew a crowd wherever he went. He would preach to them about God and the coming of the Kingdom, and they liked what he said, even though some did not understand. After he heard something Cephas, who he called Peter, said, he mentioned it was time to go to Jerusalem. If that was the case I thought I had better go, also. So, I grabbed my old coat and walked with the women. I had not been to

the temple for 21 years, and I thought this would be a good time to visit there again.

I cannot begin to explain all that was happening along the way, Jesus was doing marvelous things; and what he said and did astonished everyone. Even the Pharisees and temple people watched and questioned; and they began to look at him with great suspicion. But again, it was spring, and the Passover feast was approaching, and some of the women were anxious about where they could have a Seder meal, and I became involved in that preparation.

It was a good thing I had grabbed my older coat because in the hem was the gold coin I had kept all of those years. I removed it and gave to the women and instructed them, "Find a room where table can be set, buy some unleavened bread and decent wine, and when the time comes there can be Seder." They did as I suggested.

I cannot tell you all that has happened. I will leave that to the men. Go and ask them. John is with me and my grief is enormous. Yesterday on a hill nearby I watched as they took my son and killed him on a cross. Nothing I said made any difference. None of the tears that poured from my eyes swayed their determination to pound those nails into his hands and feet. None of my sobbing stopped them from hastening his death by sticking a spear into his side. None of the rags I wore gave them the idea that I might want his clothing. No! Instead they rolled the stones to see which one of them would keep his cloak; and John took me away when it was done.

But now I must swallow my grief and take to the women who will wash his body for burial this last lump in the hem of my coat. I will give them the myrrh to use. It is all I have left of what was given me as a gift some thirty years ago, on that wonderful night in Nazareth. The Frankincense, the Gold, the Myrrh, and now my son; all gone.

**“MY GOD WILL I NEVER SEE MY SON AGAIN.”**





## **Please Don't Ask Me What I Do**

Tom Rues

The other day, out of the blue, my daughter asked me if I really was in the gifted program when I was in school. She said, "I don't like to think of you as being in the gifted program." I wasn't sure what she was thinking or what made her say this, so I told her I was in the gifted program, and I asked her why she thought that. She replied that she didn't like to think of me as gifted. If I was gifted shouldn't I be doing more? For example, why wasn't I out finding a cure for Ebola?

Kate is in the gifted program and has a very bright mind. She is in middle school and this is her fourth year in SPARK. As bright as she is, she hasn't had enough life experiences to understand that a person can be gifted and not an expert in every field. I have never been particularly good at Science, nor do I have much interest in medical research.

This conversation did, however, get me thinking about my life, more specifically, the paradox of this life I live. My greatest joy and accomplishment (although I am not entirely comfortable with the term accomplishment) are my children. There is nothing I would rather be than their mom. They are outstanding kids. They are kind, funny, bright, athletic, artistic, and talented people. I am fully aware they might have been all these things had I had a full time career, but I just didn't feel like I could do both.

When I was in college I had a professor tell me you couldn't have both:

a successful career and be a successful parent. It made me mad when she said this. It was the 80s and I had big plans to be a successful business woman. I knew I wanted to be a mom, too. I wanted it all, and didn't appreciate someone telling me I couldn't have it all.

I graduated and landed a great job as the head of the office division of a headhunter/temporary employment firm. While working there, I went through a divorce and moved to another state to get my Master's degree. I started teaching on a college level in grad school and this was the beginning of my college teaching career. Then I had my new baby daughter with my second husband and I could barely go back to teaching. I worked it out where all the classes I taught could be on two days so I wouldn't have to be away from her for long.

When she was one, my husband and I made the decision to move 4 hours away from our family and friends to raise

our children in a small town rural setting. I had a ten-year-old and an almost two-year-old, and I was pregnant with my third child. It wasn't until the third time I had traveled to a larger town to run errands that I realized that every time I went to this town, I was looking for a job. I just couldn't help myself. My husband pointed out what I was doing. I felt conflicted. I am a hard worker and I like to feel successful. Being a mom doesn't feel like work. Let me rephrase that, it's a lot of work to be a parent. I just don't think of it as a job. I don't like the term "stay-at-home-mom" nor do I like the term "full-time-mom." Moms are moms and they all work hard. They are full time moms however they spend their day.

Here's why I feel like my life is a paradox: The life I love and the work I am doing is sometimes hard for me to define, put value on, and accept. How do I explain to my daughter that I was in the gifted program, I am bright, talented, and

successful? How do I explain that perhaps I can have it all, just not all at the same time. Even after we moved I did work part-time at various times. I taught evening college classes for a local community college, substitute taught K-12, and did some tutoring. I just didn't feel I could make the leap to full time employment, even when offers came. At this point in my life though, with one child in grade school, one in middle school, and one in high school, I don't want to take anything on unless it can be done around their schedules.

Will my daughter understand that for me, at this time in my life, being their mom and doing all that I do for them, is what I feel I should, and want to do? I am available almost all the time. I can take them to school, pick them up, go to all their activities, run them here, there, and everywhere! Cook them breakfast in the morning, have a snack waiting for them after school. I am just there for them. I am available.

It's probably my ego, vanity, and competitive nature that causes me to pause and feel uncomfortable when someone asks me what I do, or when I look at the blank line with the word occupation under it, and I don't know what to write. Someday I would like to be a full-time writer or possibly have a career doing something I've never done before. But for today, I am living my life and being true to myself. And, in my book, that's setting a good example for my daughter.



Anonymous is a former soldier who wrote these poems after the first of two tours of duty and a couple of detachments in Algeria and Africa as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The editors have been glad to know him and work with him in the English department as he brings an always interesting and diverse view to any discussion.

## **PAIN**

Anonymous

Nights go by one by one always blurred,

My movements slow, my speech always slurred.

Pain that resides inside me extends far,

Forgotten only during that time at the bar.

Now that I am sober, the pain is greater than ever.

Too many nights with wrong solution; now the pain will last forever.

Alone I go through the day and night,

Pushing everyone away, which isn't right.

I can't let anyone close; it's my daily chore,

My heart so full of pain now; I can't take anymore.

When will the pain that's inside ever die,

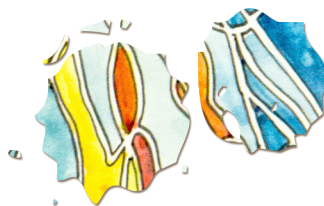
Every night I think I'll give the bottle one more try.

I am not looking for a solution,

So maybe the answer is that potion.

I should drink to ease the pain nightly;

At least the pain will subside slightly.



# **At the Bottom**

Anonymous

You and I, of the same blood, descended from the same beast,  
Share our dreams, but also share what we desire least.

Lost, drifting alone, searching for answers, looking for a light,  
Swallowing our sorrows, drowning desires, trying for one more  
night.

Fighting a fight against an impossible foe,  
The demons inside continue to grow.

I've learned from the past and through days I have been  
That the bottle you hold cannot help you to win.

Question yourself, find the strength your accustom,  
Because the answer you seek is not at the bottom.



# Leafdancer

H. Ellixys

The sprite chased after the younger children, weaving in and out of spring green branches and leaves and dodging the sticky silk of spiders' webs. "Hey, wait for me!" She called, and buzzed forward, a flash of iridescent blue amongst the trees. Leafdancer could hear their giggles and cries of delight far ahead of her, and she struggled to keep up with them, her wings beating furiously. Soon, they faded into the distance, and she could hear them no more. "Hey!" she yelled again, but only the forest's silence greeted her.

Dejectedly, she landed amidst the debris littering the ground and picked her way through the twigs and dead leaves from seasons past. "I'm too old to be chasing them anyway," she muttered in an attempt to make herself feel better. Leafdancer headed west, to her home. If she could not keep pace with the other spritelings, she would just ask if anyone needed help around the village.

The other fairy folk poked fun at her for her habit of walking, rather than flying, from place to place. They perceived it as inefficient and silly; what they did not know was that Leafdancer did it to be alone with the forest and her thoughts. She found solace in its paradoxical stillness. The sting of being left behind by the younger sprites disappeared as her mood lifted.

A pair of electric blue dragonflies passed over Leafdancer's head, their delicate

wings humming as they played, zipping around each other. She felt their laughter, a faint vibration in the air that lasted until she lost sight of them amongst the emerald leaves. It warmed her, and she smiled as she continued her walk home, whistling any tune that popped into her head.

When she reached the dead oak, split down the middle by a past summer lightning strike, Leafdancer knew the fairy village lay only ten minutes away by foot, two by wing. Still she chose to continue walking.

As she brushed her hand against the bark of the lifeless giant, inwardly bemoaning its lack of beautiful leaves, the sprite heard screams behind her. Whirling around, she stumbled and fell, knocked over by Stardusk, a spriteling who always flew too low to the ground. The other fairy children sped over them.

“What is it?” Leafdancer asked,

seeing the terror in Stardusk’s eyes. The others had fled so quickly that she could not see any of them now.

The spriteling sprung into the air, and without looking back, cried, “Mossrover!” Less than a second later she was just a purple speck in the distance.

Leafdancer felt the fear set in as she turned around. The presence of a mossrover meant that one member of the fairy folk would not live to see the end of the day, unless everyone managed to hide in time. The entity, an evil forest spirit that took the form of a ball of moss with rows upon rows of teeth like razors, lay dormant until some unfortunate fairy came near it. Then the mossrover, awoken by the scent of its prey, would give chase until it devoured the soul of one fairy, leaving behind only a petrified shell of the unfortunate sprite. If the creature found no one to claim, it would find its way back into the depths of the forest to sleep until another meal came along.



Leafdancer held her breath, waiting for the monster to appear. She had to make sure the children weren't just playing one of their trivial little games before she made a fool of herself by bolting back to the village to hide. The forest around her grew quiet. Even the dryads inhabiting the living trees ceased their murmurings. After what seemed like an eternity, a green mass appeared, hovering through the air, secreting some sort of slime as it did. The sprite could hear clacking noises. Its teeth. She cowered against the oak, knowing that if she chose to make a move now, it may be her last.

"Why, oh, why didn't I just fly back earlier?" Leafdancer chided herself. She tried to slow her breathing so it wouldn't be so loud. Her heart beat wildly, as if it were trying to burst out of her chest and run away on its own. She wanted to close her eyes but knew she mustn't.

The mossrover drew closer and

closer until it floated just six feet above her. The chattering of its teeth unnerved her and set her limbs to trembling. In painfully slow movements the creature descended.

Five and a half feet.

Five feet.

Four and a half feet.

Four feet.

Minutes passed. Leafdancer thought she might faint. Beads of perspiration trickled down her face, arms, back, and legs.

Then she heard its awful shriek, a sound that combined a serpent's hiss, a rabbit's scream, and a wolf's howl. She clenched her jaw as the cry resonated in her skull and brought tears to her eyes. Her nose began to bleed. Leafdancer knew the mossrover sensed her now, and she seized the opportunity to run. She darted around the tree and took off,

building up momentum before taking flight. The sprite only made it a short distance before something sticky hit her wings, sending her spinning through the air until she collided with the trunk of another tree. The rough bark scraped her skin and her wings as she slid down it and slumped to the ground. Leafdancer wiped the blood off on the back of her hand, then sat up with a whimper and attempted to stand. Using the tree for support, she succeeded in getting up halfway only to fall over. The mossrover's slime that coated her wings congealed and hardened, making further flight impossible. Even if she could get to her feet, running with the dead weight on her back would be difficult.

As she struggled to rid her wings of their cumbersome shell, the mossrover drifted towards her, the click of its teeth growing louder every second. When it hung in the air merely inches away, she finally managed to break off several large chunks of the translucent green substance.

Her whole body protested at every movement after hitting the tree; nonetheless, she at last sprang to her feet and ran, using every ounce of strength she had in an effort to put distance between herself and the spirit. Leafdancer hightailed it to the village, more bits of the slime falling off as she went. Every time she glanced over her shoulder, the mossrover lay not too far behind, in close pursuit.

Finally, she reached the outskirts, catching sight of the first few houses. The purple one closest to the border of the hamlet was hers. If she could just reach the door in time, she would be secure behind those walls. A mossrover couldn't enter a dwelling. The unspoken laws of the forest forbid it from doing so, allowing fairy folk a safe haven within the boundary of the trees.

A figure appeared at the back window, and seconds later her parents ran out, yelling and waving their arms

like fairies gone mad. Leafdancer's heart skipped a beat, and she yelled, "No, get back inside!" They ignored this and flew at her. In less than a minute they reached her. Each grabbed one of her arms and hoisted her up before heading towards the house again.

Leafdancer heard the sharp snapping of the mossrover's fangs, and knew that it was close. The next instant her parents lurched and she found herself falling once again. They all tumbled to the ground. Leafdancer moaned. Fairies' delicate bodies weren't meant to take a beating such as this. She pushed herself up and looked at her parents. Leafdancer was the furthest from the abode, while her father had rolled up against the side of the house, and her mother lay not too far from him. The green ooze seeped down their wings, soaking into their hair and running down their faces and arms and legs, rendering them immobile. She could see traces of it on the violet petals that

made up the siding of her home as well. Leafdancer checked her own wings, but all that remained on them were tiny pieces from the earlier attack. With her hand she brushed them off easily and got to her feet. Then she became as stiff as a statue.

Inches in front of her lay the mossrover. Instead of flying, it now crawled along in the dirt, perfectly resembling a slow-moving piece of moss.

Leafdancer couldn't breathe, couldn't move. A minute ticked by, and still the monster had not devoured her. She realized that it was taunting her, playing with her, seeing if she would run and make things more interesting than they already had been. The sprite knew she could run, but not to safety, because then it would just go after one or both of her parents. If she ran, it would have to be back into the trees. And so she did.

And with this decision, she sealed her fate.

reaches the appropriate destination in a timely manner, Miss Leafdancer.”

“Stop, I don’t want to see the rest!” A voice cries, and the moving picture flickers to a halt. It stops on a frame that shows the sprite’s parents begging their daughter to come back, the agony fixed on their faces.

The sprite nods at the spirit and looks at the frozen faces of her parents one last time before she turns away and leaves, knowing she made the right choice.

The one speaking gets up and blocks the light from the projector, casting a shadow across the screen. “Thank you. That’s enough.”



Someone else clears their throat before protesting, “The rules require you to watch until the very end.”

The lights come up, and the one interrupting the viewing turns their back to the screen. “I already know how it ends. I’m leaving now.”

The projectionist coughs and steps aside, allowing the other person to pass. “Before you came here, you received your instructions, correct? Make sure you follow them through, to ensure your soul

# **The Fight for Life**

Anita Watkins

As a child, I stood on the beach of the Pacific Ocean, and watched the foamy waves wash ashore. The ocean seemed calm, harmless, and a joy to play in. Yet, just beneath the surface, the ocean appeared mysterious, cold, dark, and vast. The subtle knowledge that it could be dangerous, with the potential to cause death, lay in the back of my mind. When a friend introduced me to drugs and alcohol as a teenager, they too, seemed calm, harmless, and fun to play with. It was not until later that the understanding they could be dangerous, dark, and potentially fatal became apparent. Drugs, like the ocean, lead people to believe the addiction is harmless, is controllable. Only after I was in over my head, did I realize there were dangerous consequences that could have cost me my life.

My first journey to the ocean as a small child was an exciting experience. I did not venture far into the water, just far enough for the water to wash over my feet and ankles. Feeling the sand squish between my toes, I caught the scent of salt and fish. I ran as fast and as hard as I could at the water's edge and adrenaline raced through my body. When I finally stopped running, my heart was pounding, my legs were shaking so badly I could hardly stand, and I was gasping for breath. My laughter filled the air, I felt

as free as a bird. Similarly, my first experience with drugs was an exciting experience. The drug itself caused adrenaline to rush through my body. When I stood up my legs were shaking, my heart was racing, and my breathing labored as if I had just run a mile. For a few hours I felt as free as a bird, I had broken the law and gotten away with it. That in itself had its own adrenaline rush.

Another trip to the ocean, I was older and more confident in my abilities as a swimmer; I ventured further out into the water and felt I did not need a life vest. I was floating on my back; the water rocked me back and forth and side to side. I was unaware it was pulling me farther from the shore. Swimming back to shore, I became tired from the pull of the current; I was scared, afraid I would not make it back to shore. Waves would wash over my head and pushing me under the water. Water went up my nose and into my mouth. When I became too tired to swim, I would tread water until I had enough energy to swim again. Drug addiction, is very similar to the feeling of drowning. The longer I used drugs, the more control drugs had over me. When I was high, I thought I had the world by the balls. However, what goes up must come down. It was a feeling of being sucked down into dark, cold, watery depths, and I was drowning, I could not breathe, and I thought I was going to die. I would claw my way to the surface only to face the desire, the need to soar to the sky again, only to end up back down into the dark watery whirlpool of despair.

My last trip to the ocean was during Christmas, and I wanted to go. From the moment I climbed out of the car, I knew it was not going to be a pleasant experience. The wind was fierce and extremely cold. As I approached the edge of the surf, the waves came crashing over my feet and legs, soaking my shoes and clothes, the force of the waves almost knocked me down. I had a sense of foreboding, something dangerous

lurking to pull me out to sea. Pulling myself to my feet I stood looking at the horizon, it was dark and ominous. I knew and understood the ocean could be dangerous and fatal. It could and would kill me if I did not show the respect it commanded. It would suck me down in its cold, dark, watery depths and never let me surface. I did not venture out into its waters. Likewise, drug addiction is exactly the same danger. It will suck me down into its dark cold depths, like a whirlpool spinning me around and around, deeper and deeper in its control until I would have no strength to fight. Drug addiction would control my life and all my decisions would revolve around my need to be high. Drug addiction would take everything I loved and cherished away. Drug addiction would destroy; demolish not just myself but my entire family. Drug addiction would show no mercy when it killed me.

The ocean might have appeared calm and harmless when I first saw it, however, it definitely showed me I had better respect its power if I was going to play in it, or be prepared to pay the consequence. Drug addiction, has ultimate power for the unsuspecting victim. Drug addiction pretends to be harmless in the beginning then it methodically destroys lives with the ability to be fatal. In the end, I chose to live and fought for my life.



## Close to the Flame

Rachel Schloctermeier

The candle warmth flickered in your eyes  
as they met mine.

The fortress of ice around my heart fought  
to keep out your fire, yet it melted at my  
feet.

With your match, the words of an angel,  
you ignited my soul.

Then with the inferno of a demon you tore  
it apart.

You took my hand, and we danced an  
eternity around your fire,  
fueled by poison love.

Your searing touch scorched my heart, my

mouth, my eyes and my thoughts.

And still your puppet, I danced.

I danced with blackened legs.

I danced with breath choked.

I danced with eyes teared by the burning  
sky of the world you'd built.

Blinded, I thought you still danced with  
your hand in mine.

So close to your flame, I realized too late  
that you could not burn.





# **Live With Honor**

Abbey Juarez

Many people think that honor is earned by gaining financial, social, or professional status in society, but real honor is earned differently. According to Dictionary.com, “honor” is honesty, fairness, or integrity in beliefs and actions. This is only one of the various definitions given, but the best definition anyone could find is given by the U.S. Army. According to their definition, honor is living up to all the army values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, integrity, and personal courage. Living up to the Army’s values is not always easy, but when each value is accomplished it is the best feeling in the world and that is what makes a person honorable. True honor does not envy others’ successes, it does not wish others’ failure, and it does not let others down. What makes someone honorable is that even though they know they are doing something not many do and might not be acknowledged for it they are still willing to do it.

Many people may be seen as honorable, but the truth is that very few people have true honor. Honor should not be given due to position, or a role in society. Honor should be given to those that earn it with hard work and dedication. An example of honor given to someone with a high role in society is the president of the United States. Not all the U.S. Presidents have been good leaders, but they are still given respect and honor for the position they hold. A person with true honor does not work toward a title that will give them power, they will work toward a goal that may be almost impossible and they

will achieve the goal because of their dedication. Sadly, not many people today have the dedication and ambition to reach life goals that are close to impossible.

Honor is one of the most prestigious U.S. Army Values. This is the most important Army value of the seven because as mentioned before, the Army's definition of honor is living up to all the Army values. Loyalty means being loyal to the nation and its heritage. Duty is fulfilling your obligations. Respect is relying upon the golden rule. Selfless Service is putting the welfare of the nation, the Army, and your subordinates before your own. Integrity is doing what is right, both legally and morally. Personal Courage is having the ability to face fear, danger, or adversity, both physical and moral courage. These definitions mentioned above are given by the U.S. Army and could have not been worded any better. The other six values are also important because they each have their

own special characteristic, but together they make honor the best trait to live up to because that means you have all six values instilled in you. The definition to each value is inspiring and motivational and this is why when a person lives up to each value they can say they also live with honor.

When someone does something that is truly honorable they do not do it with the intention that they will be recognized for it. People who have been recognized with honor have done something that not many people will do. The fact that people are willing even to lose their life to help someone is motivation enough to be a better person. Honor holds no grudges from the past, it doesn't have anger toward others, it doesn't mean for others harm. Honor does wish everyone to succeed in life and wants everyone to feel involved. Honor cares for others and their personal safety. These characteristics that make honor are not always found with

common everyday people, and that is why honor is that much harder to accomplish.

If one goes to the Internet and looks up stories of how many people have been awarded with the Medal of Honor, highest military honor award, one will see that not many people have been awarded with it. This proves that honor is a trait and a value that not many people have or live up to. People that live with honor in their life are probably some of the best role models there are. Everyone should look up to honorable individuals and strive to be like them, this doesn't mean a person should lose their individuality to be exactly like the honorable person. What is meant when saying "strive to be like them" is to try ones best and dedicate oneself to be honorable even though one might not be recognized for it. An inspirational quote by Calvin Coolidge describes what honor is: "No person was ever honored by what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."



# Promised Splendor

Jennifer Wortham

White hot lightening whips across that black sky as dawn peeks  
over the horizon.

Angry strikes trail silver streams across the dark,  
ricocheting the resounding boom,

Yet the orange yellow radiance seeps  
over everything the light touches,

Shaded only by the billowing purple clouds softly  
filtering the tangerine light.

One side of the road lightly warms the new day,  
the other side explosively petulant.

Two realms collide in a kaleidoscope show of wondrous color and  
light.

That promised rainbow stretches above it all,  
as if everything else is insignificant

As if no matter what perseverance and strength  
above all adversary.

Almost before the rain stops, the rainbow  
appears with its light transitioning colors

As if to boast its ever remembered promised splendor.

Even within the lightening a fiercely frightening  
magnificence takes your breath away

Within the daunting uncertainty hovering those  
emotions that are shakily terrifying.

Even within the warmth infused love, you've always known the  
future is unknown.

Ultimate beauty when taking the steps into the  
unknown, that path not yet taken

Boldly courageousness, bravely self-assured,

Stand tall within your ideals, within dreams of tomorrow.

Vision blurs with every rough step

along that path to get there.

It's too hard, I can't do it. I can't make it.

That little quitter inside your head repeating it  
as if on a broken loop.

Cleanse your mind with only those positive thoughts,  
silence your inner quitter.

When you quit because it's too hard, just too hard,  
you let failure win.

Your thoughts on a constant mantra  
sabotaging yourself

As if a lifetime away from your goals,  
as if almost impossible.

Yet if you look again  
with an attitude of hard work and determination,  
You'll see the path clearer,  
sharper in focus than before as if it were hidden behind.

Your doubtful lazy excuses  
and your attitude of procrastination.

Beyond your difficulties, beyond your self-doubt,  
beyond your justifications

There is a world open for those who work hard enough to achieve it,

Those that refuse to let failure win,  
those who refuse to quit.

No matter what it takes,  
no matter how hard it's going to be,

You're not a quitter, you're a winner.

Be fierce like white hot lightning.



# Descending Hell

A Monologue

Joshua Fredricks

*Spotlight upper left table.*

I was in Kuwait in '92. Shot three times. Twice in the leg, once in the chest. When I got back I decided to help others like me adjust to life. Help them re enter normalcy. I can't tell them that it doesn't get better. Ever. *Go to dark.*

*Spotlight down right table.*

The great depression wrecked any chance of a job I could have gotten. So I started hanging out in the bars. Around that time I started to notice signs asking for young people to enlist. So I did. If I had known what it would do to me, I would have taken my chances back in the States. *Drinks from Mason jar.* That and invested in corn.

*Go to dark.*

*Spotlight down left table*

20,000,000 gallons. 6542 sprayings. 400,000 deaths. I only did nine missions. That amounts to over 500 people that I alone have killed. Men, women, children. Only a tenth of which I was ordered to. I don't know how to sleep some nights. I see 500 screaming bodies. Faceless, but they're there you know? Then a friend showed me this




*hold up weed* It helps me endure. *Go to dark.*

*Spotlight upper right table.*

When the war finally came around here, I gladly enlisted. I wanted my chance to kill those bastards. The thing is, I only got six of them. Wasn't enough, and I still had a need for blood. I was discharged, but I still wanted more. I was promised the chance to kill some people, and I hadn't had my fill yet. So I went home, found a girl, and started on her. *Go to dark*

*Spotlight center table.*

So much blood. Even a year later, it's just a blur. I was on watch duty at our camp. I saw a woman in black walking slowly up the hill. I got out my binoculars to get a better look. I saw a long barrel, poking out from beneath her arms. I woke up a friend just to double check what I saw. He told me to take it. I aimed for her chest, and I didn't miss. A year later, I wish that I had. The bullet went straight through her six month olds head, and into her chest. As soon as I got home they told me that it would go away. I've put the barrel of a gun in my mouth what seems like a thousand times. I never can pull the trigger though. I'm not sure if that makes me a coward, or a hero. That feeling. After you kill someone so young. It never goes away. Ever. *Stands up. Taps plays.* Well I have to go see some friends now. *Go to dark. Walk off stage. Gunshot* 

# September Pear

Jaime Oss

A Rubin's shape, you drop 'mong woodland bush.

Firm skin belies the yielding flesh yet hid.

Pale hue of spring beneath warm summer's blush.

No stricture can unnerve my lover's bid.

Your flesh melts in my mouth like Zephrus' wine.

All soft, all subtle pleased heart's delight.

Your juice outflows my mouth drips down my chin.

Your scent, your taste, your touch all sense excite.

And yet, when o'er, no slice of you remains.

No form, no pleasing aspect keeps me near.

Just stem and seeds bear witness to my pains.

Greedy! My unwanted testifiers jeer.

But still my mouth desires the tender flesh.

And I conjure sweet remembrance afresh.



# Acknowledgments

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