

Prairie Ink

A Literary Annual



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

-Joan Halifax

From the Editor

Summer 2017

Dear Readers,

This issue of Prairie Ink is the first to have been created without the help of my dear friend and colleague, Teresa Johnson, who has moved on to other endeavors, launching her own on-line writing business.

To say that I will miss her council and collaboration doesn't adequately characterize my respect for her intellectual discernment and accomplishments. And to say that I do and will miss her daily friendship, wit, and goodwill doesn't adequately characterize the depth of my affection for her. So to say that I wish her all good luck, success in her future, and God speed will have to suffice to characterize my desire for her continued well-being.

-Jaime Oss

-Cover art by Patricia Clothier

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Contents

Where Do You Fly	
Anonymous.....	4
Wrapped In Tradition	
Vanessa Favela.....	6
The Search	
Esther Saylor.....	9
A Letter to a Dear Old Friend	
Walter Helms	15
the good in the suck	
Chloe Lawson.....	19
Look for the Bare Necessities, Life's Little Recipes	
Paul Brown.....	21
Three Poems	
Alisa J. Mahone Murphy.....	31
The Land of Ahhs	
Patrisha Reed.....	34
It's About Time	
Shon Mathwich.....	36

Where Do You Fly

-Anonymous

To where do you fly, birds?

To where do you fly?

Curling, soaring,
circling, churning,
swooping, seeking.

This moving form dancing as one
painting moments of fleeting pose.

Knowing not of the woe
that lies close below.

Do you fear – for your flock,
for your kin,
for your rise and fall?

Your aim is certain, the course you cut.
When any way through air you can
soar, how can you be so sure?

Is there a goal to which you aim,
a mark that points your way?

Is there a plan that shifts and flows
according to the choices this day
shows?

Will here be your home for a day
resting with the rest of earth?

Faith nods and shines through you
and sunrise flanks your flight.

Be earnest – we are each a part
of a divine orchestra of life.
It is impulsive and real,
cyclic and still,
scattered together.

To where do you fly, birds -
to where do you fly?

If the world on which some stand
is to break, where then will you land?

I do not have the wings you wear,
but see through eyes like yours.

Sight together can bind us, creatures,
your space merely drawn-out.

Through your journey you show
the faith we are called to know.

Hope midair shines through you
and sun rises with your flight.

Share not where you go, birds,
we need not know.

Yet still,
the small wonder to consider
within a mind's eye:

To where do you fly, birds,
To where do you fly?



Wrapped In Tradition

By Vanessa Favela

Seven years ago my dad and I moved to the United States. Afterwards, my mom and two siblings came alone. As of today, we have had six Christmases here in the United States. Although, we've had to make some adjustments with our move, today we hold to some of our Mexican culture in particular, cooking tamales during the Christmas Holidays. While some women bake cookies, my mom and I make tamales! For Christmas when I was a little girl, my mom and I would go to my abuela's house, we would spend the time by helping my abuela cook tamales.

We start the long process out by going to the a Mexican store and buying pork meat, masa (corn flour), chile ancho, and corn husks. The meat cooks overnight with salt and boiled water. Once the meat is cooked, we cut it into small pieces. The next morning we're up bright and early, ready to start. As a little girl making the masa was my favorite part because it requires getting messy. The dough oozes between my fingers like play dough. For the masa we use the same water my grandma used to cook the meat. My mom would add some salt, and pork fat. Once all the ingredients are together we use our strong hands and knead the masa until it's all smooth. Next, we blend the chile ancho in the blender with a little bit of salt and a cup of hot water. Then red salsa, afterwards, my mom adds the meat to the red chile. The meat cooks in the stove with the red salsa until it boils. When the meat and masa are prepared, we begin the rolling process. This usually takes a few hours.

We wash off and dry hundreds of corn husks, which are used to wrap the tamales while they are steaming. It is really important that we let the corn husks

be in the water for a little while since the husks are too dry and hard to work with. Then we get some spoons and start scooping and spreading the masa onto the corn husk! My grandma says not to put too much masa into the husk so they are not too big and make sure the masa is nicely spread out onto all the husk. Over the years I've improved on this part.

Next, when all the husks have the masa in them, my grandma pours a spoon full of the meat with the red salsa into the husk and wraps it up making little hot pockets. One thing that has been in our culture is that once a person starts filling up the husks and placing them inside the pot, no one else can do this or the tamales will not cook!

Finally, the tamales steam in the pot. Add some water and let it boil for a few hours until all the water on the bottom is gone. It has always been a family tradition to enjoy the first taste together!

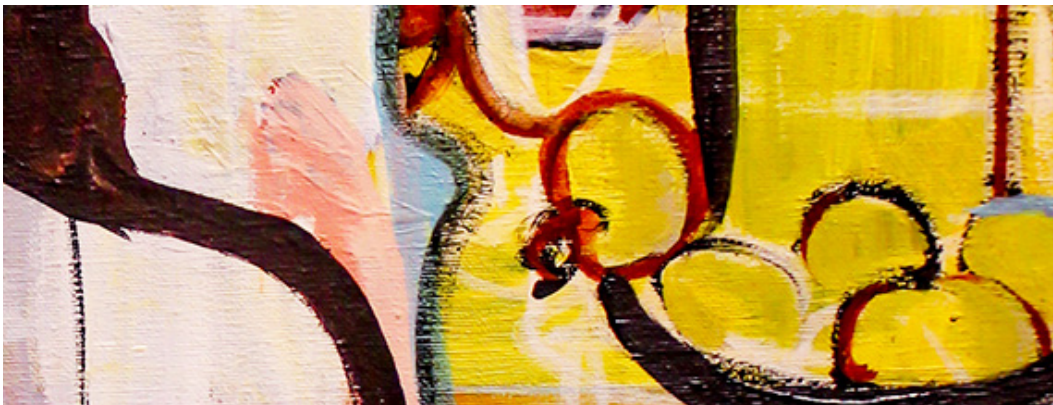
If you make tamales and they are not cooked all the way and have been boiling long enough on the stove, make sure no-one has touched the inside of the pot, besides you! All the portions of the chile ancho and the salt will be at your desire. Some people like more salt than others.

You can make your tamales by using either pork, beef, or chicken meat. It is your choice. If you are vegetarian you can make green tamales where the ingredients consist of jalapeños and cheese! You do the same process for the masa and just fill the husk with slices of jalapeños and some cheese. You can also enjoy your tamales with some rice and hot fresh salsa, or guacamole on the side.

Tamales are a magic thing, there's lots of choices hot, medium, or even sweet! Yes, sweet tamales. Sweet tamales are filled with fruits of your choice. The most common ones in Mexico are with strawberry, pineapple, or apple!

With this you will get your dinner and desert too!

To conclude, our extended family comes over to spend time together, bonding and making new memories, complete with a great dinner. It's a tradition to make tamales at this time of the year. In fact, I plan to carry on the tradition for generations to come. I hope you carry on this tradition too!



THE SEARCH

By Esther Sayler

When I was a kid, we often went to Grandma Deckert's for Sunday dinner after church. (Homemade noodles, pies, cakes, roast beef, a rich plum soup, and big, fat dill pickles....but I digress...). Since most of Grandma's eleven children and their families lived in Kansas, it was a large and crazy bunch. After filling up on an exceptional feast from Grandma and all The Aunts, we cousins proceeded to look for trouble, explore the 3-story house, barn, hay loft, basement- - or just get underfoot. The Uncles gathered in the parlor and began telling stories and jokes. There they lounged, beside the old pump organ and under the watchful eye of a colorful, stuffed pheasant. While it may not have looked like we were listening, we actually paid heed to what was going on. Meanwhile, The Uncles, also pretending we were not listening, would launch into their narratives. Some were tales about their daily lives, shared history, or present-day problems. As we became more pesky, some stories were simply designed to get us out of the room. The best was when they got to ruminating about "that can of quarters buried in the back yard." Then another Uncle would say, "Oh, yeah. It was ten paces from the old well." And a third Uncle might add how many quarters were in the can. Funny thing- -we all begged for a shovel and rushed to the back yard to begin pacing and digging. I suppose on some level we doubted we would ever find the can and perhaps even doubted its existence, but did we ever dig!

For more than 60 years now I have remembered and passed on these stories- -this oral history- - to children, grandchildren and friends. Buried in the tales (which we pretended not to hear) were lessons only realized now as I have reached the age of Rather Old. I learned that family is important; time together

is important. Good food is a joy. Serving God, loving country, responsibility for others, peaceful solutions to conflict, loyalty to work, and careful management of resources were buried there in the stories and actions of The Uncles. Art and music, laughter and shared grief, water witching, respect for others (and even taxidermy) were important.

In the kitchen, The Aunts tidied up and set out leftovers for an evening snack. At least one would gather up the younger kids and begin reading stories. Woven into the stories were beautiful princes, white horses, trolls, ogres and all manner of fantastic creatures. We, (The Cousins) would hear bits and pieces of the tales while racing up and down the stairs or sneaking a sugar cookie from Grandma's cookie jar.

Recall, if you will, some of your favorite fairy tales. *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and many others are frequented by lovely, young women, handsome, virile princes and true love. We still respond to that theme as in movies such as *Pretty Woman* or *The Sound of Music*. Some tales have lessons interspersed. *Goldilocks* and *Red Riding Hood* warn kids about the deep, dark woods and what happens when you don't obey your parents. Trolls can be defeated if you are a smart little goat or have a bigger brother (*Three Billy Goats Gruff*). Even if you get in trouble, wolves aren't very smart (*Goldilocks*, *Three Little Pigs*) and smartness or a stalwart woodsman can save the day. Perhaps the story dealt with what happens when you wish for something (*Pinocchio*) or wish for the wrong thing (a sausage on your nose). Most have some character or being with other-worldly powers. Perhaps it was a fairy godmother who could turn mice into horses or genie in a bottle.

I am now the age of those Deckert Uncles and Aunts. Today, I no longer

yearn for dancing until midnight in tiny crystal shoes or being whisked away on a white horse. I know better than to bite into a poisoned apple and I haven't seen any trolls or dwarfs lately. But I still love stories- - so here is a new one for your consideration. Is there a moral in it?

OLDIE LOCKS AND THE THREE AGING BEARS

Once upon a time, long ago, there lived a tiny, little old lady. Because she was so old, she had wonderful memories of times long past. While she remembered little of her present times, she prattled on and on about the events of her past to anyone who would listen (or to herself if no one would). This little old lady was the last of eleven brothers and sisters and had taken up residence in a Senior Living Center near the edge of a lovely forest. Every day she gathered together whatever audience she could of residents and staff and began to tell stories. Most began with "Once upon a time..." These tales were quite entertaining as they were inevitably frequented by all manner of beasts, magical figures and unusual creatures. They also contained accounts of a family of ornery boys, farm chores, dusty old barn lofts and wonderful feasts of hearty foods. Truth be told, the staff there usually had a great deal of trouble distinguishing fact from fiction in her narratives. This 100-year-old resident chose to call the staff "servants" and the home as her "castle." Thusly, the staff referred to her as "Oldie Locks" or "Your Highness" which delighted her greatly.

One lovely fall day, an inviting breeze blew in from the nearby forest and was so refreshing that the staff left the doors and windows open to enjoy the hints of meadow flowers and mossy paths that wafted their way. Oldie Locks, seeing an opportunity, grabbed her walker and a proper hat and 'escaped' slowly through the open door. The staff, being busy, did not notice for quite some time. When

they noticed her missing, they began the search. They were rather nervous about being in trouble for losing track of her, but set out bravely into the woods to find their Oldie Locks. None of them would admit it, but many looked surreptitiously into the treetops for a chance sighting of a fairy and listened carefully for sounds of lurking wolves or bears or trolls. When they finally found Oldie, she was sleeping on the porch of a ramshackle cottage near a little broken-down chair. They returned her to her turret in the 'castle,' themselves feeling rejuvenated and rather relishing their brief forest adventure.

“What happened?” The Servants asked their charge when she awoke in her just-right hospital bed. Whereupon, to everyone’s delight, Oldie began a most enchanting story about her time that afternoon.

“Once upon a time,” she began. “Once upon a time- -long ago- -I remembered a perfectly lovely walk I had as a child when my ten other brothers and sisters and I played Hide-and-Seek. While looking for the perfect hiding spot, I came upon a cottage with a wide-open door. Being curious and wondering if my brother, Adam, might be hiding there, I went right in. When I spied wonderful bowls of porridge on the table, I remembered I was hungry and helped myself. That was rude, of course, but then I was just a young girl at the time and (being the youngest) was a bit spoiled. That porridge was so good! I have remembered it to this day.”

“So, this afternoon,” she continued, “I decided I MUST find that wonderful porridge again. And, would you believe it, I found it! Although I forgot my glasses, I think it was the sparkling fairies in the tree tops who led me deep into the forest. I might have heard trolls growling and Billy Goats bleating, or wolves howling, but I had also forgotten by hearing aids so I just stayed on the path and made my way

safely to this cabin. Not only was there hot and cold porridge on the table, there was also homemade bread, jam, noodles, pies and even some sugar cookies in a little crock jar. I only tasted the porridge. One bowl was too hot; one was too cold and the other didn't taste like I remembered."

"I watched carefully for the bears because they had given me such a fright when I was a young girl. But, thankfully, the bears, who lived in that cottage, were gone this afternoon. Grandpa Bear had chosen to do what bears do in the woods." Oldie settled back upon her pillow in her best story-telling pose, and winked at the Handsome Aide. "And Grandma Bear was looking for her Baby Bear. I don't think she found him. He had been so traumatized in his youth by a little blonde girl who came to his cabin and made havoc that he had turned to a Dr. Grizzly for help. Dr. Grizzly hospitalized him briefly for a Bi-Polar Bear disorder."

And with that little play on words, Oldie winked again - -this time at the elderly Doctor scribing this jumbled story in her chart. He was thinking to himself, "For a feeble, old woman with poor memory, she *is* rather clever and certainly entertaining."

"Now before you Servants all leave me to set out your magical potions that cast magical spells on us royalty, let me finish my story. I didn't taste the other treats set out on the table."

"Now where was I in this story? Anyway- -the cabin looked a bit run-down and I never found my hiding brothers and sisters. But the woods *were* lovely, dark and deep and.... now I am tiredSo I believe I will nap for a bit. But set out my ruby red lipstick. A dreamy prince may come to awaken me."

And once again she winked at the Handsome Aide who was secretly pleased but just a bit embarrassed.

“What is the moral of your story?” Asked a curious Servant. “You forgot to tell us.”

But Oldie Locks was fast asleep, dreaming of bears and porridge and buried treasures. And in her peaceful 100-year sleep, she dreamed her ten other brothers and sisters came running up to her. “We have found you! Where have you been hiding? It’s time for supper and Grandma has made us porridge with plums.”

But she did not awaken.

“Maybe,” said the Handsome Aide, “The moral is: The Search is Important.”

“No,” said the Head Nurse, “The moral is: You can never recapture your youth.”

“I believe,” replied a Resident who was eating her dessert before her meal, “the moral is: There are treasures all around you. Don’t look for old joys and ignore the new ones just around the corner.”

The Doctor nodded wisely as he closed her chart and thought to himself. “That woman IS a treasure.”

The staff was still debating what the moral of the story might be that night as they headed home to their own 11 brothers and sisters or nieces and nephews. But they all listened for wolves in the distance as they sat down to supper of noodles and cookies and began (with a slight smile) to tell of a “can of quarters” buried somewhere nearby.



**A Letter to a Dear Old
Friend**

By Walter Helms

I write this to you,
my Dear Old Friend,

As I am gazing up at the
moon.

With colors and leaves dancing all
around me,

Orange and yellow,

Beautifully mixed with slight green in
the meadow.

A hint of spice and
pumpkin invades my
senses from the distance,

And parallel to a lifetime,
departs in an instant.

Others have asked me why
I seem so blue,

When they already know,

I am wondering and
pondering 'til the day I see you.

It seems like only
yesterday

The three months before,
The day that you slipped
away,
The pain, slowly
swallowing me,
Something I was forced to
ignore.
The waters of time, are
floating me astray,
And the waves of frailty,
crash into me
swallow my moments,
drown them,
And wash them away.
I remember seeing you for
the first time,
So long ago,
You in a blue dress,
While me in my Sunday best.
Seemed like out of a
movie,

With you, my lead role,
Me being your Prince
Charming,
Uniting our souls.
I gave you one look,
Then you stole my heart
perfectly,
Replacing it with yours,
Filling my hole.
We danced together,
I showed you a thing or
two,
I think that's how it goes,
wait....
Unfortunately, the
reminisce must be cut
short,
For my own body betrays
me,
Like a Thief in the night,

Taking my tales.
And leaving me in his trail
of greed,
I no longer can put up a
fight.
I am speechless and
confused,
Anxiety boxes me in,
“Who are you?”
Seems to be the
expression,
Replacing an affection,
I once knew.
Maybe this is how you felt,
Before you were stolen.
The blank stares that you
gave me,
Like all our stars had just
fallen,
I remember taking care of you,

Writing notes on our bed,
Begging the remedy would
prove sufficient
to guide you ahead.
A remedy all too well
known,
To a soul so alone.
Or maybe you also
remember too,
Hopefully heaven has done
that for you.
I only pray that you look
down,
And protect me as I enter a
new dawn,
And hopefully ask God to
guide me,
As the Thief forces me to
move on.
So, I am writing this letter to you,
My Dear Old Friend,

Before darkness envelopes
my new world,

And new moments
impatiently come to an end,

I want to say I'll never
forget you,

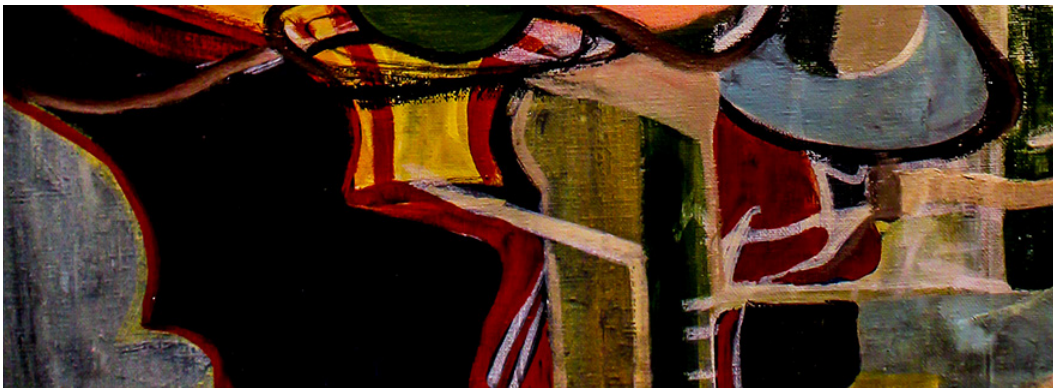
I love you and forever I do.

And now as I stand above
your resting place,

Watching the birth of my new
world,

My own predestined fate,

I say thank you, thank you
for the world I once knew.



the good in the suck

By Chloe Lawson

garage, garbage

x's, o's

your hand, my heart

life at the moment, is hard

couch surfing, head hurting

alcohol, cant sleep at all

concerts, my legs hurt

you're in my head, i don't want to be
dead

anymore

eating badly, smiling sadly

hugs from all, off the wall

i have no money, but i have you

honey

sleeping over, drinking wine

you're the only thing on my mind

it doesnt hurt, and i'm okay

i just don't want any of this

to go

away

so what's the catch?

i'm seeing stars

the sound of your voice, brings me to
mars

singing badly, sleeping in cars

way too young to be in bars

the x's on my hands, i still have a plan

yellow, green

you mean so much to me

i'm so okay, i can't complain

i get to see you in

18 days

blacking out, vomit in my hair

i can't believe all of these people care

about me

the suck is here but it won't always
stay

i'm seeing the good, i like it this way

"kansas girl takes on the world but is
an actual, tornado"

i know, do they know?

the suck is good

the suck is great

i need to stop staying up so late

paper bags, chai latte

please, fuck, just fucking stay

i'm here i'm here i'm far away

this poem isn't about one thing, two or
three

this poem sucks and so did he

i'm here, i'm safe,

and i'm happy

appreciate the suck, because it's not all
bad

call your mom and tell her you love her
& dad

smile more, sing in the grocery store

i'm vulnerable



Look for the Bare Necessities, Life's Little Recipes

By Paul Brown

“OK,” my wife said with some resignation, but her eyes showed anticipation of an adventure. I'd been talking to her about international work for many years, but I was resigned to wait until she was ready. I still remember feeling a bit resentful at how long it was taking and toyed with the idea of pushing this dramatic change in our lives, but a radio preacher changed my mind. He admonished his listeners to never enter the mission field unless one's spouse also felt the calling. I prayed for patience, and then something happened. Call it the move of the Holy Spirit or a change of heart or however you interpret these events, but my wife was ready.

Leaving my job of almost twenty years was a scary proposition for many reasons. However, we had become empty nesters, my wife, a bit older than myself, was in her mid 60's and had some chronic health problems which were still manageable, and I was burnt out on a job which carried many pressures from small town politics to personnel problems to rancor among two State associations to both of which I belonged and one of which I served on the Board and as President. The timing was right, and it was probably now or never.

As with any major life change, I was questioning how I ever ended up in Frisco, Kansas so many years ago. I was much younger then, ready for an adventure after managing my father's brokerage agency, and anxious to get back into my chosen profession, city management.

I was a late bloomer, got my Masters degree at age 31, and then gave five years to my father's business so he and my mother could take time as

missionaries in Asia. It wasn't an easy transition after serving in my father's firm. I didn't believe I had the credentials to be a city manager, and I applied for assistant city manager jobs. After several rejection letters, I contacted some of my old classmates. They counseled me to take the big step and apply for city manager jobs due to my age and experience.

An attractive, small, rural town of about 5,000 population invited me for an interview. In stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of Denver, the only traffic jam was when a large tractor-trailer truck had difficulty turning the sharp corner at the four way stop. This usually required the truck driver to veer into the oncoming lane and the oncoming drivers to back up to get out of the way. In the evening, about 7 PM most nights, the sidewalks are rolled up and there isn't a soul to be found on the main street. I arrived a day early, walked the town, and stuck my head in several doorways asking people what they thought of their City. The people were friendly, the economy was stable, and, as a full service city, I knew I would be challenged as a city manager. I really wanted this job.

During the interview with what is considered a large City Council – 6 members and a mayor, I was finally asked the standard question about salary. I gave them a figure which I hoped would entice them and show my strong interest in their town, a salary figure about \$20,000 less than what most managers were making at the time. My parting words were, "Consider taking a chance on me. If I don't perform the way you expect in one year's time, let me go. I won't fight you on it. However, if I meet your expectations, I would expect a bump in salary the second year." They did take a chance on me and I began my new job in 1995.

When in the public spotlight, a public official seems to acquire immediate supporters and immediate detractors. I was sitting in my office feeling pretty

good about the meet and greet public reception held for me which had just concluded, and in walks old Doc Benson. Doc Benson was no longer practicing medicine, but was still practicing politics having served on City Council for many years. He never greeted me nor introduced himself, but picked up the coffee mug on my desk and noted the inscription and picture about Acapulco. He gazed at the mug for a time and then turned, narrowed his eyes, and furrowed his brow, and spoke these words, “A previous city manager liked to travel, too, and he didn’t last long,” and out he walked. Turns out that Doc Benson led the charge to get rid of a previous city manager, and, after a long battle and an ensuing law suit, was successful. I knew I had to develop a thick skin if I was going to survive.

There was another older man, Mr. Hattery, who soon became my nemesis for the rest of my tenure with the City of Frisco. He had come from New York, married a woman from the area, and stayed. Now, I’m not about to suggest that all New Yorkers are like him especially since I have cousins out there, but he didn’t share the small town etiquette and manners of rural Kansas. He was more like a bull dog in a china closet and didn’t care if he was offensive. Three months after I arrived, he advertised and held what he billed as a town hall meeting to discuss what was wrong with City Hall – and with the City Manager. He had the integrity to invite me to speak, and I attended with the hope that this would be an educational moment for him and for anyone from the public who attended. It wasn’t a big gathering, only about 30 people, but the out of town press was there – big news for what is normally a politically sleepy, agricultural area.

Mr. Hattery must have eaten his Wheaties that morning because he was in rare form. He would berate Council decisions and policies and suggest that part of the problem was due to the poor management of the City, and then give

me a chance to respond. I never attacked him personally, but explained why certain decisions and policies made sense. For about an hour, he and I bounced up and down trading positions at the one microphone. He finally finished and the proceedings were closed.

A reporter from the neighboring and larger City of Grand Eddy cornered me and asked if she could take my picture. My guard was up, and I declined, not wanting to end up in the paper as front page fodder. She assured me that the picture was only for her file, and, gullible me, I believed her. The next day the City Clerk laid the Grand Eddy Tribune in front of me and simply said, "You made the front page."

Sure enough, there was a small picture of the older gentleman and one of myself in the upper left hand corner of the front page, much like they might show pictures for a boxing match. The headline read, "Local Man Tries to Wrestle Control Away from the Good Old Boys." The reporter quoted and reported my opponent's positions on the first and second page and finally got around to quoting and reporting my responses on page 11. I'd been had.

That evening I happened to be attending a welcoming reception for a new doctor. The hospital administrator, Mr. Vothan walked up to me, "Hi Paul, heard about your troubles with Mr. Hattery." He smiled and I knew some precious wisdom laced with his own political agenda was about to be shared, and I wasn't disappointed. "Mr. Hattery is one of those guys who, if you ordered a truckload of S.O.B.s and all they delivered was him, you'd be satisfied." That evening I appreciated his empathy and wit.

How does that old saying go? Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice,

shame on me. Call it a lack of experience, or a trusting soul, but I got fooled twice. It wasn't but a few months later that I received a call from a reporter with the Hastings Chronicle. He had picked up on some of the discussion during a City Council meeting about the smell and dust from the feed yards which were located up wind and plagued our town almost on a daily basis. Citizen complaints had sparked the discussion and many didn't buy the old adage, "the smell of money." I knew that the feed yards were important to the local, agricultural economy and employment base, and I wanted to be careful with what I said. The reporter assured me that everything I said would be off the record. Unfortunately, I took his declaration at face value and proceeded to make the following statement, "Around 9 PM when it cools down, the cattle get active and move around and stir up a cloud of dust. The dust is like a pea soup fog which rolls into Frisco most summer nights." Guess what ended up as the beginning lines of the article in this major newspaper?

The first meeting I had after publication was an unannounced visit early the next morning from one of the feedlot owners who lived in Frisco. He was fuming and came in to set this new City Manager straight. Although civil, he didn't mince words and proceeded to question who I thought I was and whether our town deserved the benefits of his business. I explained what had happened and apologized for not being experienced enough to know that there is no such thing as "off the record" when talking with a reporter. The owner finished saying what he had to say and left my office with the expectation that this would never happen again. I was very careful after that and required reporters to ask questions in writing and then I responded in writing. This practice served me well for the rest of my tenure. As for the pea soup fog, the feed yard went to considerable expense and trouble to install a sprinkler system covering their

cattle pens, and it is now a rare sight to see any dust coming from the feed yard.

I also developed a good relationship with the local reporter who got stuck with the municipal beat. I assured him that I would never ask him not to publish something for political reasons, but offered to review his articles simply wanting to be sure he got his facts straight. We became friends, and he would give me a copy of his article about a City Council meeting and I would check it for factual errors. At one point while he was out on sick leave, I wrote the newspaper articles about the Council meetings just to help keep the public informed and educated. A local paper in a small community is invaluable for communicating, educating, notifying, and instilling a sense of identity and belonging for its citizens, and it serves a more objective role than the rumor mill or old telephone party lines. Although on occasion, some letters to the editor served as a release for people angry about something.

There were two letters to the editor which easily come to mind. One, written by my nemesis, claimed I was being paid six figures and wasn't worth it. I have never made six figures as a city manager; and, when I asked the editor why he published the letter much less failed to check the facts, he simply shrugged. The other letter, which I half expected given the circumstances, said that the idiot who fired the much beloved and long tenured Health Director should be tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail. Unfortunately for me, personnel actions aren't up for public discussion and defending oneself is not an option.

Being the city manager of a small town, you wear many hats because the budget won't support the hiring of a personnel director, public works director, finance director, etc...

This kept my job interesting albeit extra busy just to keep up with new regulations handed down from the State and Federal layers of government.

One of the roles I played was to officiate condemnation proceedings for unsightly properties. The most memorable hearing involved a house where the roof had fallen in and which had been abandoned for many years. The owner drove in from Hastings to testify against condemnation. Mr. Jones was a character and looked the part with his fancy dress suit and wild looking hairdo. Although he was a Church minister in Hastings, he still claimed Frisco as his hometown, and this dilapidated old house was his families' homestead with all the memories of childhood. He must have been quite a preacher in his church, because he spoke very flamboyantly and was very animated during his testimony to keep the house from being razed. Part of having a thick skin is a willingness to enter the fray, give all the players their day in court, and in the end, make unpopular decisions supporting the greater good. Bottom line, he wasn't going to take care of the property nor secure it, so I condemned it. The house would be razed, the cost applied as a lien against the property, and without payment, would become the City's property. He stormed out of the proceeding, and I never expected to see him again.

It wasn't two days later and one of the police officers came into my office unannounced, asked if he could interrupt me, and handed me an official looking notice. The Officer said he had confronted a Mr. Jones who was out on the streets handing this notice to anyone who would take it. It read, "Mr. Paul Brown, City Manager, is a member of a drug and prostitution ring which operates in the County. The following persons are also members: Mayor Gary Marson, Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Senator Robert Dole." There were a few others

on the list along with legal verbiage calling for action on his complaint. Why the newspapers of the neighboring cities didn't pick this up for publication, I don't know. Actually I was a little disappointed having gotten used to their shark-like smell for blood. I did know that I was in good company in the writ of complaint. Free speech was alive and well in our small town. The next day, Mr. Jones was gone, and in two months the house was razed and the lot cleaned up. I never heard from him again. Rumor has it that one of his parishioners won the lottery and gave most of it to his Church.

Frisco has had its share of interesting characters. One of those was Mrs. Henderson. She was in her mid 60's and lived alone in a modest house. One day the City Clerk interrupted my morning and appeared to be exasperated. "She's done it again! Mrs. Henderson has a history of letting her utilities go unpaid, letting them get shut off, and living without as a way to save money. I contacted her daughter who was more than happy to pay the bill." "So what's the problem?" I said without looking up, engrossed in what I was working on. "Mrs. Henderson was just in and demanded that we not accept payment from her daughter and that she wanted the utilities shut off." "So, what's the problem?" I said again while thinking that older persons have the right to control their own lives. The Clerk just rolled her eyes. "Have you talked with the City Librarian lately? Mrs. Henderson spends all day at the library and bathes there." Not wanting to be bothered any further, I issued an order. "Turn on the utilities, keep the daughter's money, and tell Mrs. Henderson we have to do this for her own safety and health."

That afternoon I received a visit from Mrs. Henderson, and I began to wonder whether my "open door" policy for citizens is such a good thing. In she walked, plopped herself down while giving me an inquisitive look and said,

“Good Afternoon, my name is Julie Henderson. It is nice to finally meet you.” The kindness she showed at the beginning of her visit was so unexpected that I stared back for a moment thinking what a pleasant looking and amiable person. She immediately began to describe the events of the morning and finished with a demand that her utilities be shut off. “Mrs. Henderson, I sympathize with you, but without water for sanitation and without electricity for heat and light, you endanger yourself. In addition, the library is not an appropriate place for you to do what you normally would do at home. I cannot accommodate your request.” She seemed to accept that, and then launched into a history of her employment problems at the local hospital.

It became apparent that Mrs. Henderson’s issues with the hospital dated back 20 years to when the management and Board of Directors for the hospital had fired her from her job as an LPN. “Mrs. Henderson, I have no knowledge of your job and termination at the hospital and have no way of helping to resolve those issues. The men you just mentioned were Board members at the time but are no longer affiliated with the hospital. They are business leaders in our community.” She abruptly rose and left my office, and I thought the matters were resolved.

It wasn’t but an hour later and she was out in front of the City Offices marching back and forth and holding a sign which read: ‘Mr. Jack Williams, Mr. Lenny Moore, and Mr. Fred Thomas took advantage of me.’ I rushed out to confront Mrs. Henderson, and tried to explain that people would interpret her sign differently than she intended. “Mrs. Henderson, your sign suggests that these men harassed you sexually. Please end your picketing now.” She considered what I said and walked away without any hint of an objection. This

was too easy, and I was suspicious that I hadn't seen the last of her.

The next day I received a call from the Harrison newspaper located in a city about 60 miles away. Now, before I finish this story, you must understand that 20 years ago, the Harrison News had as their purpose in life to ferret out any wrong doing in neighboring cities and damn the facts even if what they wrote made a community look bad. At least that was our City's experience with them. They even paid for tips from the general public as they looked for dirt. Apparently Mrs. Henderson had given them a call.

The reporter said that she was writing a piece on how the Frisco City Hall had mistreated a poor and innocent older lady, Mrs. Henderson. I asked the reporter to submit her questions in writing and that I would respond in 24 hours. Needless to say, she didn't. Rather, she wrote that the City wouldn't comment, proceeded to quote Mrs. Henderson on how she had been wronged, and condemned the City for treating one of its citizens so poorly. When it comes to the media, sometimes you just can't win.

Funny how memories like these pop into a person's mind during a major life change. I knew I was not going to miss being the city manager, but maybe I would. I think it is a little like following wheat harvest as a custom cutter. By the end of the long summer season which starts in Oklahoma and ends up in Montana, custom cutters swear they'll never do it again. The long hours and working seven days per week takes a toll. But by the end of winter, most custom cutters can't wait to rejoin the nomadic life, climb back into the cab of a combine, and sail back out into the oceans of wheat. Yes, one day I'll return to city management.



It Takes Two

By Alisa J. Mahone Murphy

I am sorry I haven't written for so very
long.

You know how busy I can be.

It takes time you know,

I really must be me.

I can't control you and you wouldn't
me.

Now that I know just who I am,

Maybe later, it can be,

You and me.



Broken

By Alisa J. Mahone Murphy

A Mirror,

Fists pound,

Broken, shattered

Piece by piece

The Mirror,

falls to the floor.

I see my face in each fragment,

In each shard.

The Mirror is,

Broken,

hands bleeding.

Into so many pieces, broken is the
mirror,

like my heart.

Both shattered because of a lost love.



One Solitary Night

By Alisa J. Mahone Murphy

Alone, forgotten. Cast out! One among
many.

Lost! Unknown, uncared for

Life a knife, Slashing in the dark,

Jagged, tearing, cutting

A lie, a thought.

Hunger, disinterest, pain, despair.

Solitary, one

A thousand eyes in one mind

A heart with only one

Now I am blinded, our love is done.

Alone, waiting for you to love

Wanting love now, So I can finally know

Gentle and kind affections where true
love grows

Love me now while I still have breath

And wait not for the time I lay in repose
to

Carve your loving words on my grey
cold stone.



The Land of Ahhs...

By Patrisha Louise Reed

Sometimes in the midst of the daily routines, unseen forces all around us silently command us to stop and take notice of something of a peculiar importance or significance. In that moment, we are being spiritually prompted to witness a unique treasure in a series of collections from the gallery of creation. I have often wondered in awe about certain events and the mysteries that are implied by them.

If we don't consciously shift our focus to align ourselves, in harmony, with the horizon separating attention and perception, the rewards of these mysteries escape us. Here are some of my most meaningful observations and interpretations of those rewards:

* Glimpsing a sherbet sunrise peeking through a field of naked trees as the sky walked in to announce the sun to all the guests present in the room.

*Inhaling the sweet essence of Mother Earth after she has refreshed herself with a mid-summer's shower before my morning coffee.

*Attending an Acapella Choral performed just outside my bedroom window by spring Song Birds, whose soothing melodies echoed between the realms of Heaven and Earth while I frantically shushed my annoying alarm clock.

*Eavesdropping in a still small moment on a whispered conversation between the wind and the trees that made me feel as if I were transported from this place, to a place that could only be interpreted as eternity.

*Being transfixed by one perfect oak leaf descending upon the rear

window of my car, clinging perfectly centered above the white sticker that bears the name of “Yahweh”... while all the other leaves had taken refuge in piles upon the ground. Wondering if this was a 'divine' message for me to “leave everything to Yahweh?”

*Sharing a noontime car ride with a ladybug as she effortlessly clung to the side mirror of my car, only to cancel her lunch reservation by taking flight as I arrived at my destination. A quiet companion whose presence was made known without ever saying a single word and who departed the same way.

*Noticing an olive colored grasshopper who joined my tranquil stroll in a midday retreat from the noise of office machines and voices.

*Being confident enough to let my mind swim outside of the shallow waters of life, into oceans so deep, that others are drowned just by ‘wading’ in my presence.

§

There are an infinite number of fleeting moments and treasures throughout our day, which create multiple opportunities for us to benefit from the wisdom of the ‘awareness’ and the meditation upon them. During quiet times, I often wonder how many treasures I’ve missed in sum of all the brief journeys to wit I’ve embarked upon in the course of my life, thus far. So, each day, it is my quest to be more cognitive of every little thing around me, regardless of how trivial and insignificant it may appear to be on the surface.

The Land of Ahhhs if filled with priceless gems. Oh, if only we would dare to open the eyes of our souls to discover them.



It's About Time

By Shon Mathwich

The seconds lengthened into hours, and each individual heartbeat could be counted. I had never heard my own heart valves close before. The next shell exploded twenty feet to my left, and time sped up to an incredible pace for an instant. In a few seconds, I had run an entire football field, heading for the bunker. The last shell landed somewhere behind me, and time spun out again. The last few feet to the bunker stretched out to somewhere on the horizon. I tried to run faster, but the whole world was moving slower now. I tried to tense for the impact of shrapnel, but even my reflexes had slowed to almost nothing. As I crossed the line of relative safety, time resumed its usual pace again, each minute eating up sixty seconds of precious time.

The vernacular definition of a second is a small period of time; as in “Give me a second” or “It only takes a second.” Merriam-Webster defines the second as “1/86,400 part of the mean solar day.” The *Système international d'unités* (SI) names the second as the basic unit for the measurement of time, with a much more accurate standard, “The second is equal to the duration of 9,192,631,770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the cesium-133 atom.”

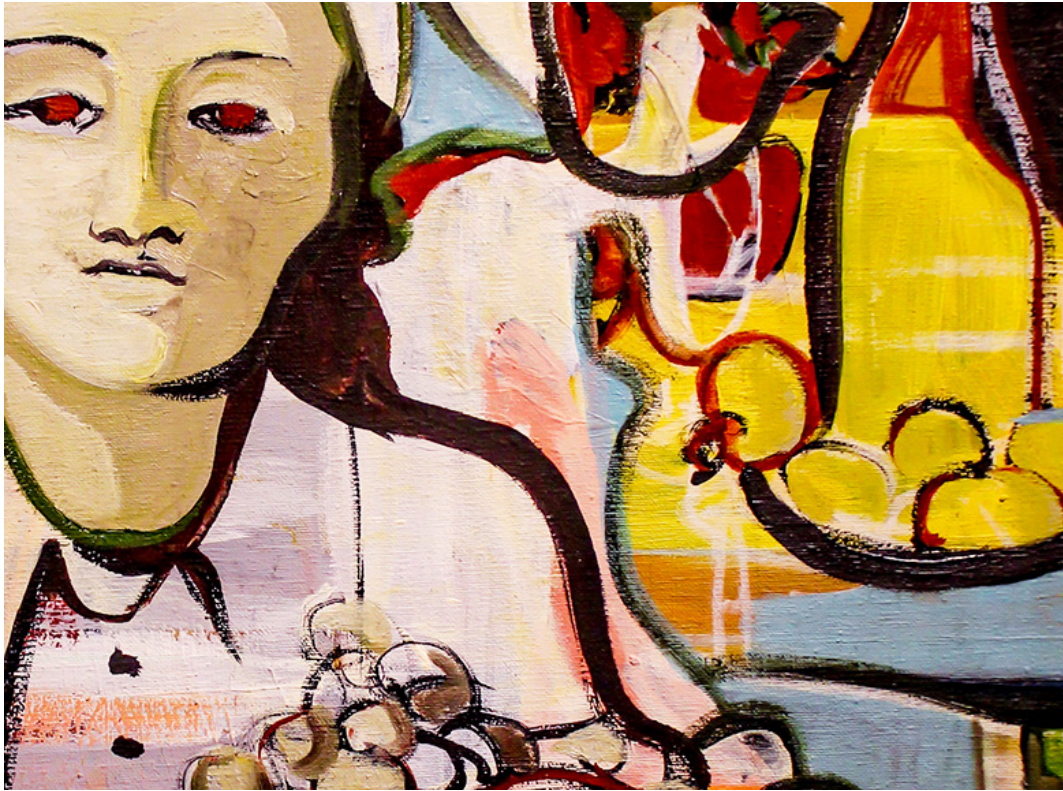
A second can be defined only as long as you are experiencing the definition of time. A few hours of a bright summer afternoon cannot compare to even ten minutes of an overcast winter evening, stuck outside and waiting for a blizzard. Time has an elasticity that cannot be proven or measured, but this elasticity exists nonetheless. The reason for this elasticity is that time is an abstract idea, something that must be experienced. It is a little like music, you can

show a sheet of music to a congenitally deaf person, and they will be able to see every note in a song, and measure intervals and see patterns in it, but cannot ever fully experience music.

Time's elasticity is harder to understand because time is unique to each individual. Time dilation was discovered by Albert Einstein in 1905, who theorized that time is relative. In 1971, two scientists and an atomic clock set off on a twice around the world trip. After the first flight around the world the clock on the plane was compared to the clock on the ground and they were off by the exact amount of time predicted by Einstein. Simply because it is proven that time moves slower relative to your speed, does not explain why "time flies when you are having fun" and slows to a crawl when the situation turns dire.

Whatever your personal experience with time is, time has a wonderful way of showing us what really matters.





Submission to Prairie Ink

We are a literary annual that welcomes fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, drama, literary criticism, and those graphic narratives that can be successfully reproduced into black and white photography.

We serve as a vehicle for emerging writers who attend Barton Community College or reside in one of the seven counties within Barton's service region.

The editor of *Prairie Ink* encourages submissions from Barton students, alumni, and community members from Barton's seven-county service area: Barton, Pawnee, Rice, Rush, Ellsworth, Russell, Stafford; and from students enrolled at the Barton Fort Riley Campus and Grandview Plaza Outreach location.

To check out submission guidelines or to submit your work, please email the editor at prairieink@bartonccc.edu

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**There is a way
to see inside**