

The Outlet

Spring 2014 Issue 5

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Members of the Blue Ridge Residential Writers Group
wish to thank all of the talented writers and artists
who submitted the creative works included in this fifth
edition of *The Outlet*.

Special thanks go to members of the Cultural Events Committee
for serving as this year's poetry, fiction/non-fiction and art contest judges.

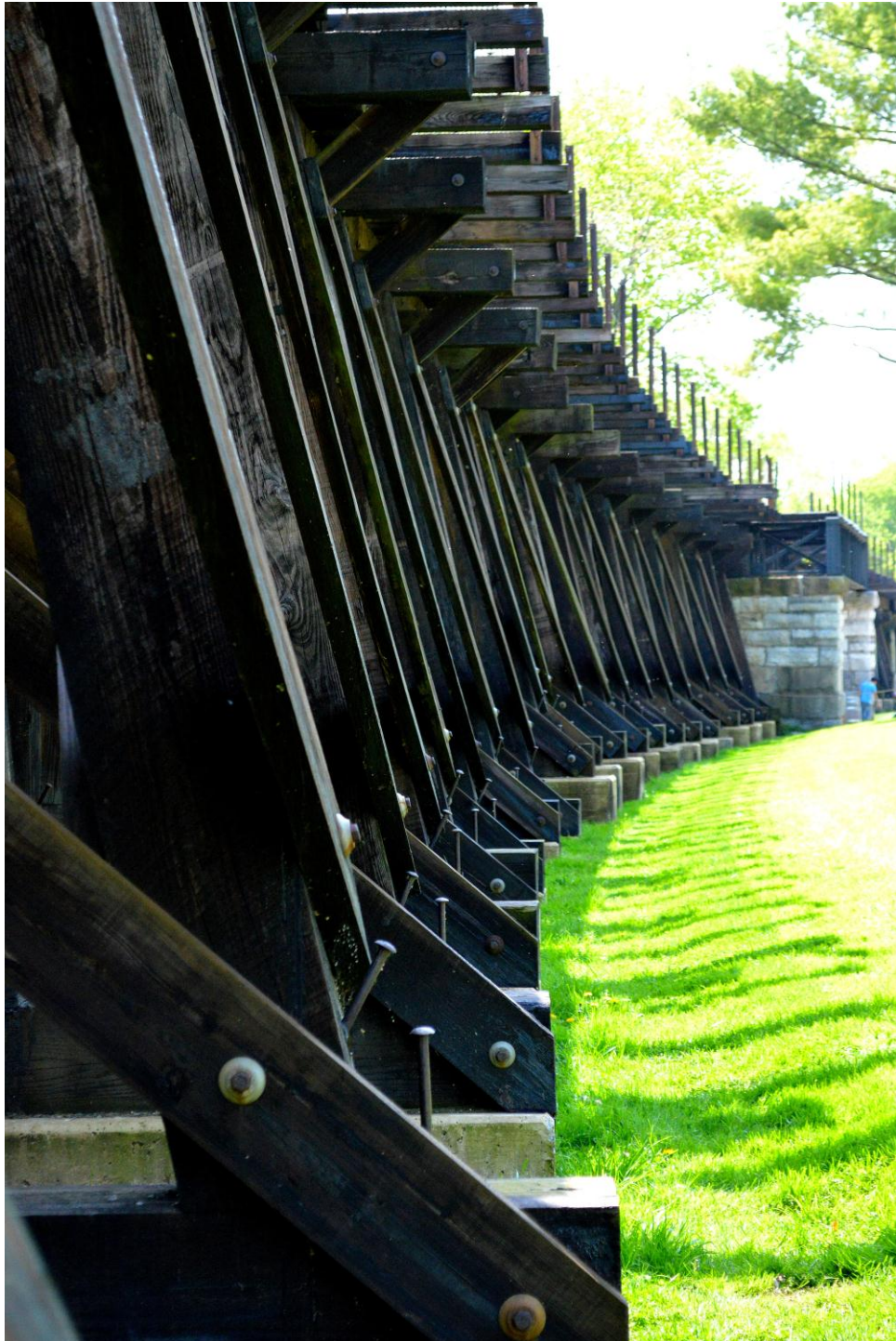
Art

1st Place Entry

Harmony

by

Jacqueline Riffey



2nd Place Entry

Iced Cone

by

Jennifer Madison



3rd Place Entry

A Touch of Sun Bliss!

by

Tinadawn Stratton



Fiction/Nonfiction

1st Place Entry

\$5.99

by

Lisa Wood

The movie went off and cycled back to the main screen, burning the stationary main page into the plasma screen more and more with every passing second. Carla had fallen asleep in front of the television as she had most nights since she got the DVD, unable to pull herself away from the screen to make it to bed. That really wasn't true though. She hadn't made it to bed because she didn't want to go to bed. She was right where she wanted to be.

Her sister thought she was crazy. Not literally, but she would have if she knew – if she *believed*. It wasn't like Carla hadn't tried to tell her, hadn't tried to share him with her... once... in the beginning. But Carla's sister didn't see it. He didn't speak to Tami the way he spoke to Carla. It was only right, really. He was Carla's after all.

There wasn't anything special about the DVD, just a b-level movie with a cast that you think you might have seen before, but if you did, you can't remember where. Carla got it out of one of the bins full of surplus movies, discounted to \$5.99.

But that wasn't all it was. Not to Carla.

The storyline was slow-paced and didn't really go anywhere, but Carla wasn't listening to the lines. The actors either never really "made it", were over the hill has-beens, or were newbies, but Carla recognized one of them. She should. She had seen him in her dreams for years.

Well, not him specifically, and not in the dreams like the ones you have when you're sleeping. But in her fantasies, in her daydreams, he was always there. He looked like a combination of her first love, a guy she knew from work, and the last guy she slept with. Such an odd mix, with unkempt hair, deep, penetrating eyes, the most sensuous lips. Carla could hardly tear her eyes away from the screen when he was in a scene and found herself reaching for the remote to fast-forward to his next one.

After the second time watching the movie all the way through, he started talking to her.

At first it was just a look – he would look at the screen, seemingly at her, when he should have been looking at the actor opposite him. Carla was sure he had been looking at that actor the first time she watched it, but couldn't be sure. The first look was just a peek, just a glance, but his second look was so much more meaningful. His third look was downright obscene, the way he licked those luscious lips of his and lowered his eyelids. It gave Carla chills. The good kind.

Twenty minutes into the movie he spoke to her.

“Carla.”

She felt as though she was waking from a dream when she heard her name called. She turned to the screen to see him looking at her again, full on, shoulders squared to the screen – watching her. He was smiling just enough for her to see a hint of white from his teeth. She felt herself respond though she knew she shouldn't. He didn't have lines in the movie, was nothing more than a glorified extra, yet he had spoken her name as clearly as if he was sitting in the room whispering it to her. Carla spun her head around, looking in all corners of the room to be sure that he – that someone – wasn't there making fun of her, laughing at her expense. But she was alone.

With him.

She watched the movie three more times that day and more that weekend, blowing off shopping with her sister, a date with a guy she had been interested in for months, sleeping in her bed, and eating. With every viewing he said more to her, sometimes telling her how beautiful she was, pouting his lips as he spoke, letting her see all the curves and contortions they go through as they formed words, other times asking her to remove garments so he could see more. She felt silly and excited at the same time. It was weird, strange, all of those things, but it was the best fantasy she'd ever had.

As Carla snored, catching her first reluctant winks in 36 hours, the screen flickered and blinked before finally catching again on the beginning of the movie. For a second, gone faster than Carla's eyes could have cleared to see if she had woken up, the roiling sea of red bubbled to the

surface, washing Carla's face in blood as a tentacle reached out to stroke her cheek.

2nd Place Entry

The Fisherman's Tale

by

Vickie Lynn Owens

A Foreword

The following quotes are from the autobiographical work, “The Hungry Ocean: A Swordboat Captain's Journey” by Captain Linda Greenlaw, (who was portrayed in the movie, The Perfect Storm), in reference to a woman using the term, “fisherman.”

In regards to gender, Captain Greenlaw argues that it “is only a problem if it’s allowed to be.”

Captain Greenlaw refers to herself as a fisherman — not fisherwoman, as she carefully explains. “I hate the term, and can never understand why people think I would be offended to be called a fisherman... Fisherwoman isn’t even a word. A fisherman is defined as “one whose employment is to catch fish.”

It is for this reason that I refer to myself as a ‘fisherman’, not necessarily because I made my living that way, although during the difficult struggle I had as a disabled woman, it certainly at the very least, was a way to feed my family. I believe a term defines the position, profession or task, and not the sexual identity of the person doing it.

This is a tiny little fisherman's tale, of smaller feat than all you've surely been told before. I was a fisherman and that is true enough, but the fish I set my hooks upon were mere bass, sunnies and blue gills. My story is not of the ocean. There are grander tales of seafaring folk, with all the sit-on-the-edge-of-your-seat type of danger as the fishermen spend their days and nights, fighting the hazards of the sea. My heart was driven to smaller banks and safer shores, but the lure was the same to me. For years, I fished the banks of that forever-rolling water known as Virginia's Shenandoah River. One can visualize the river's hunger in its churning, and can imagine all the variety of life it supports.

I have childhood memories of Daddy going fishing, and although he's been gone for many years, the enticement of the outdoors lingers. This day was one hot August morning in the latter 70's. The air was a sultry mix of heat and lazy summer that seduced me all weekend long on a quiet spot down river. The water was calmer there, and occasionally looked less like mud and more like the sparkling water of an artist's dream. Today was such a day and, arriving early, I angled my line into the cool water. I caught more than my share of small-mouthed bass and bright, fat sunnies to fill my dinner plate, and more than a few to store in the freezer for future meals.

At eventide, my campfire provided a nice touch of warmth in the chilly night air. Smoke gently floated from the embers, which discouraged the annoying insects that inflamed my skin with itching, and buzzed in my ears until all sound became numbed by "*white noise*." Fish were frying and after I ate, my blankets bathed me in sleepy dreams.

The morning air was calm and low in humidity, which was rare in the hot August days of Virginia. The sun, though warm, did not overpower me and although the fishing seemed to be as lazy as I, the day was worth the waiting.

Today's fishermen left the banks when their hooks remained empty to match their bellies. Yesterday's fishermen, being satisfied to leave these sparkling shores, were now moving on to other Sunday ventures. I, too, thought of leaving and it was true enough that I had plenty of fish

and really needed no more. Perhaps, it was the enticement of the warm summer breeze and the blissful sloshing sounds of water against the bank that compelled me to stay.

I baited my hook with a vanilla dough ball hoping for a lazy large-mouth bass that might snatch my bait in the growing evening hours. More than that, I suppose I thought, "I'll catch just one more fish," and that would be enough to pry me away from the shores of the Shenandoah and send me home to the softness of my bed. Maybe our hearts are always greedy enough to want...just one more.

I tossed in my line and begged the water's pardon for disturbing its stillness. Silence, but for the low, deep grumbling of men on a dissatisfied day, I waited. The dusk turned mahogany and made way for the black of night. I waited for just one more fish. The stars, one then two, twinkled and dimmed as gentle clouds rolled by on the whisper of the wind. I waited. Darkness had fallen; several men on the opposite shore were now more concerned with prying the caps off their beer and opening bags of chips, too defeated to move in what had become a bleak and forlorn quest. It was a collective sigh of resignation, a way of punishing one-self. *I will not go home and eat a grander meal because I did not catch a fish.* Chips, candy bars, soda and beer were the exceptions since none of these options could be considered real food.

The crackling of the fire had all but died when I heard a shriek I could not immediately identify as more than a muffled cry. As the sound grew closer to my hearing, the words became more distinguishable and when those nearer to me screamed the words, "*A FISH, YOU'RE CAUGHT A FISH,*" I nearly leapt out of my 501 Blues. I turned to see who on the bank had hold of a pole bearing fish, but saw that everyone on the bank was staring at me. A small gentleman tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the right. It was where I had set my Zebco down on a y-stick, and to my great surprise, it was bent all the way down with the current of the river.

Quickly I ran to get my hands on it, fearing the pull would send my rod and reel down river to the Chesapeake Bay. Still in disbelief, and all the while thinking to myself, '*It's just a turtle or worse, debris,*' I still, nevertheless, grabbed hold in order to save my equipment.

The tug was long and slow, heavy like a turtle. There was no crisp chop, chop, chop of the line as it does when a sunny or bluegill has it. I thought that my line had been snagged by a broken limb and was being dragged by the weight of it. My rod was growing heavier every moment and I had to anchor myself by digging my heels into the red clay mud in order to secure my position. Then, with a firm hold, I began pulling steady and firm, slow pull, and then reel it slowly down. This was certainly no debris, as debris does not pull back. This was a monster of a turtle; the kind lavish soups are made from, if one has the tenacity to figure out how to harvest it.

By this time, thirty to forty minutes passed, and all the men on my side of the river had come to cheer me on. It was a wonderful feeling of camaraderie. All were sharing in, what was fast becoming a communal catch. I was tiring and the men knew it. A couple of them offered to reel it in for a while, but I stubbornly said, "No." This sucker was mine, head, tail, turtle shell and all. I suppose what we crave more than the catch is the fight, itself. It is a matter of honor. Another twenty minutes passed and my legs felt heavy as lead sinkers and my body was feeling the strain. The small holes I made in the dirt for my heels were now a foot deep, and slid down closer to the water's edge. Several men spent their time keeping my fire ablaze, and another held a can of soda to my parched lips. My arms ached as my line grew heavier, but at least I could tell it was growing ever nearer to me. Still, in the coal blackness of water and night, we could not see what it was. They might actually have been placing bets behind my back, that it was a tree, an eel, or an old toilet seat. I was only barely conscious of what went on surrounding me.

Half an hour more and there in the water, I could finally see what had been tormenting me for so long. There, from the murky depths, was the head of a fish nearly six inches wide. I pulled its weight and it would budge no more. I gripped it hard and held tight while I willed my feet to walk up the forested hill. Back I pulled, and step by aching step, I gradually dragged it ashore. To my horror and surprise, it opened its wide catfish lips and cursed me up one side and down the other. Absolutely despising catfish I started to scream, "I don't want it! I don't want it!" I peered down at that huge ugly face and one of the men measured its length as twenty-six inches. I refused

to take it off the hook, remembering those three deadly needles they possess. The guy that had been the first to help me, now offered to cut my line. I said, "You can cut my line and keep the fish. I Hate Catfish!" He looked up the hill at me, wide-eyed with disbelief, "You mean you'll let me keep it?"

The fish still garbled out its threatening catfish language, "Yes sir, if you want that cranky fish, you can have it."

Most everyone was laughing so hard, two or three of the men fell into the edge of the cold river. The others helped to catch and carry this prize of mine. My work being done, I was an exhausted heap, and dragged my heavy legs to my truck. I laughed to myself on the drive home, and thought, I bet that man tells his wife he caught that fish himself.

3rd Place Entry

The Thanksgiving Dinner Fiasco

by

Joanna Johansen

The Thanksgiving Dinner Fiasco

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, and the breeze was cool and crisp. The trees were almost done shedding their leaves. At the top of a rolling hill sat a stone fortress. Inside, a family was sitting along a dining table that stretched the length of the enormous dining hall. Food lined the table. Potatoes, stuffing, cranberry sauce, corn, all circling around a large, golden brown turkey, filling the air with wonderful scents. The fair man at the end of the table stood and motioned the hungry people silent.

“We have a lot to thank for this Thanksgiving,” he announced. “I thank God for this food and for the family and friends that can be here today.”

A round of applause followed his statement. He waited until it was quiet again to continue.

“I also thank the Lord for giving my wife and me a child.”

The man’s wife rubbed her extended stomach.

“And finally, of course, our huge turkey that we share with you today-”

Suddenly, a beam of light appeared next to the man. The guests watched in awe and fear as three dark blue aliens came forth from the center of the light.

“Greetings Earthlings,” the one in front said, his fingers spread apart to form a “V”. “I am Zimnass, leader of planet Earth...2! That is an awesome turkey. We wish to take it and enjoy its awesomeness.”

Before the husband could object, a team of three ninja-leprechauns jumped down from the ceiling.

“Not so fast laddies,” the leader said in an Irish accent. “We’ll be taking that turkey off yer hands.”

“No way, we were here first,” the blue humanoid argued.

“We’ll trade ya some coke.”

“Whoa!” the husband objected, “no drugs in my house!”

“Relax, it’s Coca Cola,” the little green ninja replied.

Just then, Chuck Norris walked in the room with a furry animal in his arms.

“That is my turkey,” he stated. “Joey and I are taking it with us.”

“Who’s Joey?” one of the family members asked.

“My pet wombat,” he explained, gesturing to the fur ball.

With no warning, the wife vomited on her plate, causing all eyes to fall on her.

“Sorry, that’s normal when you’re pregnant,” she reassured, sparking the huge argument again.

“This is insane!” the husband shouted, raking his hair with his fingers.

Suddenly, the ceiling collapsed to reveal a furry dragon with wolf ears and fangs.

“What is that monster?” one of the ninjas asked.

“Scanners show that is a ware-dragon,” an alien stated.

The dragon roared, threw its head down the hole it made, and went for the turkey. Chuck Norris dropped Joey and dove in between the gaping mouth and roasted poultry. The beast swallowed him whole, thinking he was the cooked bird.

“NOOOO!” Joey squealed.

“Guess I spoke too soon,” the husband muttered. “This can’t get any worse.”

As if his statement was jinxed, the Pittsburgh Steelers burst through the back wall, sounding their war growls.

“We’re gonna take that turkey! Who-wa!” they shouted in unison.

“Woo! Go Stillars!” one of the guests stood and shouted.

Everyone gave him a questionable look and he slowly sat down. The creatures and football team began to fight over the turkey. In the midst of their quarrel, a bright light flashed above the

table. When the light vanished, four horsemen appeared in its place. Their horses were jet black with red eyes. The knights themselves were wearing black, spiked, shining armor. Their presence filled the air with evil. One of the horses was grunting with annoyance. The rider looked down and saw that it stepped in the wife's puke.

"That's disgusting," the rider muttered.

"We are the Four Horsemen, bringers of death and destruction," the one in front stated, his voice making everyone tremble.

Another horseman pointed his sword at the husband's throat.

"Surrender the turkey, or else," he commanded.

"I've never even heard of you guys!" the husband objected.

"Then here," a black knight replied, tossing a book to him. "Read that hymnal and you shall know of our role in this world."

"You're 'role' doesn't involve that turkey 'cause it's ours!" a Steeler shouted.

Suddenly, Chuck Norris burst out from the ware-dragon's stomach. The beast gave a cry of pain. He landed on the table, covered in dragon saliva and other bodily fluids. Joey crawled onto his shoulder. Everyone began to argue again.

"Silence!" the head horsemen boomed. "This futile squabble has gone on long enough. We shall send you all to oblivion, freeing this planet of the curse you brought to it!"

They unsheathed their swords and held them high in the air. The blades glowed with an ominous black light. A mighty wind swept through the room.

"FOR GOD'S SAKE!" the husband yelled, stopping the knights short. "JUST TAKE THE FREAKIN' TURKEY AND GET OUT!"

The ninja-leprechauns calmly picked up the turkey and walked out through the hole in the wall. All the uninvited visitors followed suit. The ware-dragon moaned in disappointment and flew away. The room was quiet again. The food on the table was scattered about, totally inedible. The husband sighed at the mess and despair filled the room.

“Well, we still have cake,” he assured.

The guests cheered at the notion. They brought in the huge cake and placed it on the table. Right as the husband was about to cut it, one of the Steelers popped his head through the hole in the wall.

“Hey,” he yelled over his shoulder, “they got cake!”

The End?

Poetry

1st Place Entry

The Ghettos

by

Julie A. Trudgen

I have a new tattoo,
sharp lines, bright colors
placed scandalously,
on the lowest part of my back.

He had an old tattoo,
in blue ink, only numbers
placed grotesquely,
on his forearm.

I have fond memories of camp,
skipping stones, making crafts
the smell of campfires while canoodling with boys.

He had no fond memories of camp,
only gravel and bone fragments
under his cold bare feet
and the sickening smell of the ovens

I speak of my future plans,
present situations, and
past accomplishments.

He spoke of before, and after
but never during.

2nd Place Entry

Object

by

Katie S. Smith

Treat me with respect
and my interest will grow.
It grows with every word you speak.
You're so good with words
and that's what has me.

I tell you what I like
and you tell me yours.
My body feels warm when we talk.
You squeeze my thigh.
Flattery could get you anywhere.

I meet you in the dark, in the cold.
I call out for more.
You hold me down
and put your hand over my mouth.
Don't let me get away.

3rd Place Entry (Tie)

The Soul is Ocean-Wide

by

Kathy Cox

The soul is ocean-wide and little known
In life. She waits until we pass away
To move into the whole beyond the stone.

While mourners feel the loss in tears and moan
At how their loved one was the month of May,
The soul is ocean-wide and little known.

The soul I know the best is not my own.
I borrow her abundance one bright day
To move into the whole beyond the stone.

She lives where seeds of dandelions are blown
Along a breeze into a distant bay.
The soul is ocean-wide and little known.

I hold her to me thinking she has grown
A long-limbed child and me. But she won't stay
To move into the whole beyond the stone.

A person clings to soul like flesh to bone,
But few can see her working with our clay.
The soul is ocean-wide and little known
To move into the hole beyond the stone.

3rd Place Entry (Tie)

The Spoken Word is Fatter Than the Written

by

Kathy Cox

The spoken word is fatter than the written.

I've known it strong and round as women's thighs,
No shaking frame which frosty thoughts have bitten,

Looking it over like some pack of lies.

The spoken word goes straight from heart to heart
And moves through shining eyes as warm as sun,

To tell the pressing news, the hidden part,

And swear without offending anyone.

So why the hell won't you talk straight with me,

Instead of faxing letters, wound like chains.

Just tell me how you'd like our love to be.

Don't send me sonnets with clichéd refrains.

In your soft voice, I feel love dance anew

And see her leap or lie, and know she's true.