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Backbone Mountain Review (BMR) is an annual literary journal showcasing the creative talents and cultural diversity of the people and places within the Appalachian Mid-Atlantic. The 2016 edition of BMR is published by the Allegany Arts Council, the Allegany County Library System, and the Frostburg Center for Literary Arts, with assistance from Frostburg State University, the Community Trust Foundation, and NewPage Corporation. All rights reserved.

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COMMUNITY TRUST FOUNDATION
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VERS"
In October, the Center for Literary Arts hosted the ninth annual Western Maryland Indie Lit Festival: some 175 writers, readers, editors, and publishers (among them, this journal and its staff) came out from some seven states, emphasizing the dynamism and liveliness of the literary community in Mountain Maryland and its neighbors. This area, with its urban, suburban, and rural landscapes; with its mountains and valleys; its rivers and its hint of the Atlantic shoreline is diverse, beautiful, and compelling. Just today I was watching the sunset go vermillion along the mountains, the light looking like it had been spilled, the clouds back lit, the trees as if dipped, momentarily in wax.

The writing of this area is equally diverse, as equally compelling, as equally beautiful and engaging. Picking up any issue of Backbone Mountain Review will remind us of this, but this latest issue is particularly good, and a strong reminder of how vibrant our literary community is.

What’s truly gratifying for a literary arts activist and teacher like myself is the sheer number of names I recognize from literary programming who come from Allegany County (Jonathan Treece, Sharon Yoder, M.C. Pratt, and Nina Forsythe), others who were (or still are) students of mine at Frostburg State University (Kestra Forest, Alec Peer, and Candace Meredith), others who are thriving members of the greater literary community who give back through their own work as publishers and literary arts promoters (Sid Gold, Laura Treacey Bentley, Gary Ciocco, and Alan Britt); people from further afield who join us here because they recognize and appreciate how robust it is (Denise Clemons, Sue Ann Simar, and Liz Dolan), and more importantly, people whose work I didn’t know until I was prepping the writing of this introduction (Tracy Seffers, Kevin Stoy, Anthony Mangos among many). They’ve come together here, in our pages,

So this literary journal is like a community center, a (literary) arts center as it were, where people come together and meet up. Old friends and new acquaintances. That’s what Backbone Mountain Review is for—to participate in a conversation through poetry and prose about what concerns those of us who live in or have lived in, or visit often this breathtaking region. Now the readers get to listen in to what we’ve been talking about, and maybe they’ll try to join the conversation next year.

More to the point though, this issue of BMR reminds us of how vibrant and diverse this region of writers is. It’s a scenic overlook of only some of the literati living in this area, but its enough to reassure us that we’re in beautiful country.

Gerry LaFemina

Associate Professor of English, Frostburg State University
Director, Frostburg Center for Literary Arts
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2016 Allegany County Poetry Prize Winner

All Photography by Michael Hunter Thompson

Front Cover – Superposition #6
Things fall away: parent, child, the shabby green cloak of late summer, mountains, and the dreams of mountains.

What remains: the bones of things laid bare, stark sycamore-white limbs of trees, the ridgeline breathing deeply, the river beneath;

and beneath it all, all that has fallen down, fallen away, heaped up in sweet decay of winter, some other life begins to flow.
It was useful then to be small, the smallest of our seven, 
back in midsummer when mulberries ripened, 
big purple-black thumbprints against the wide green leaves.

My brother and I—incorrigible climbers we were— 
scampered up into the mulberry’s arms, 
our mother peering up at us with one hand propped on her hip,

the other shading her eyes. She turned then and handed 
a stack of berry sheets to our older sisters, and began their work— 
spreading the gloriously blotched sheets beneath the tree,

close around the trunk, lapping edge over edge, spreading 
sheet after sheet all the way out to the edge of shadow, 
the furthest reaches of its canopy, and beyond.

A glance around to see that the bowls were ready, then a signal— 
the cue to begin our dance. Gripping branches overhead, we dipped, 
pushing and shaking each limb—gently at first, always gently—

then with greater confidence as we sensed the tree’s response. 
Berries pattered below on the sheets—gently at first, always gently—
then a steady rain. “Stop, stop!” as our sisters’ bowls had filled 
to overflowing, and time to stop and eat a few ourselves. The dance 
continued until the rain slowed and mother satisfied. My brother 
was off, then, to find some new adventure. But I would always linger

there in the cool arms of the tree, brushed by the breeze always stirring, 
languidly plucking another berry here, another there, sucking my fingers, 
thinking with pleasure of the pies and cobblers to come. An invitation 
there, too, to help her in the kitchen: dusting the board with flour, 
measuring and sifting carefully—these were things my small hands could do, 
as important, really, as the dance that shook all the sweetness down.

Each year the old woman marks her calendar 
when fireflies first candle the dark, 
when a veil of starlings 
fold and unfold across the September sky, 
when the mountain waterfall 
finally surrenders its motion to ice, 
and redbud blooms again 
beside the wild dogwood.
The refrigerator hummed, a clock ticked, and time unspooled into decades, but from a distance,

the kitchen window still glimmered like a star as if nothing had changed at all.

I looked out the window at distance and a darkening sky and thought of you,

gazing down on this river town, scanning rooftops for the duplex where we both grew up.

Downstairs, mother pin-curl her hair each night, fried eggs and bacon before work, washed and ironed our clothes all Sunday afternoon. Upstairs, grandmother played her baby grand, singing The Hills of Home until the good china trembled with vibrato.

The canary warbled along, and our scotty dog barked like a maniac in the back yard.

Your grade school is gone now, but memories fly up from a dusty street corner where grandfather waited to walk you home.

Some nights after the canary’s cage was covered and the dog finally slept, we stayed up late telling midnight stories around the kitchen table scarred with an old cigarette burn.
At sunrise the old man
shuffles through the sand

into the icy ocean.
Beyond the breakers,

he swims a flawless backstroke.
After a few minutes he retraces his steps,

returns with two chairs and one daffodil,
stares at the ocean, and waits.
THE APPLE IN HER OUTSTRETCHED HAND

There are places where an apple is only an apple.
In a lunchbox perhaps or in a bowl on a table.
And then, there is the apple from Eden.
A woman pretends to know its name.
She is trying to learn so many names.

The first bite is this very moment.
Can you taste delicious?

The flesh of the apple colliding with
the flesh of
the tongue.
Her only god does not share.

Naked Adam out of sight, the second bite
not yet part of the story.

SUE ANN SIMAR

TWENTY-ONE

Coptic Christians, Libya

Breath after breath, a congregation.
As it is, as I try not to feel.
One head, two heads, twenty-one.
Too incredible for indifference.

It’s hard to focus on happiness
when you turn on the news.
I wonder if God is a bit like me—
hidden behind a remote control.

This day is beautiful in itself.
The abstractions of life continue.
It is as it is, as I try not to think.

Taught as a child,
God never blinks.

SUE ANN SIMAR
MIKE MURPHY

SCRAP

In a corner of Pennsylvania’s sagging underbelly that hardens poor boys early, I go with Tommy wide-eyed to watch a scrap metal yard become a hell’s cauldron of sparks. Tommy’s old man—one of Patton’s tankers, two fingers left somewhere in the frozen Ardennes years before—is perched above the corrugated warehouse like a turret gunner, swinging his angry wrecking ball, eyeing the broken things: Wire. Rebar. Busted motors and cracked camshafts. We watch as welds are cut and ground down, mashed up in giant bins, the roar so loud we have to cover our ears to keep from going insane. Steel-pounding presses. Machines that shred and crush. Debris turned to neat cubes shipped out on barges headed up the muddy river to be melted down, to be made whole again. Tommy tells me he dreams of pretty things that can’t be found in scrap yards. The old man never speaks a word to the boy who tends toward his mother and wears his father’s G.I.-issue Hamilton on his slender wrist, always shaking it in a nervous tic, keeping the automatic gears wound tight. On New Year’s Eve, with the river frozen over, Tommy shook his wrist and walked into that darkened yard to grind his sharp edges down among the wreckage, to make himself shiny and new again. They’d been working on him for fifteen years when the gears finally quit.

SUE ANN SIMAR

DEVOUT IRRELEVANCE

either perpetual rest or the chance of immortality
—Christopher Hitchens

I will rest beneath the clouds or I will live forever as a cloud. Do you see my wings or do you see my earthbound soles? Perpetual God, undoing god, my doubt has many narratives. No cohesion till I close my eyes. Always circling, the clouds.

The doctor says he is oh, so sorry to be the bearer of my death warrant, that this is the hardest part of his job, that there are times he wishes he had never become a physician, that he wishes there were something he could do, but he can’t, so he stands and stretches out his hand and says he wishes he could wish us a nice day but what can he say?

You do not get up from your chair. You do not shake his hand. You only look at him, and the look on his face tells me that he sees what you mean. He lowers his hand. His smile recedes. His shoulders move up and back. He dismisses us with an empty offer of something resembling a decent desk-side manner.

We leave. We get into the car. You drive and drive and drive until we are at Springfield Lake; we are down at the dock uncovering the boat. You zoom us away, the whole length of the long lake. A few cars hum by on the distant highway, but we see no other boats, no other people. You shut off the motor, and we drift, the silence a warm blanket around us, the breeze a fleecy breath on our cheeks, the light on the water twinkling secrets.

The sun is high. You stand behind the console of the boat and pull off your white t-shirt. You kick off your sneakers, stand in the sunlight like a radical statue. You come forward toward me. You take my hand, and I look deep into your endless eyes. My feet slide out of my flip-flops. I am thankful that you do not ask me to shed clothes, for I am a sag bag compared to your carved beauty. We climb together to the bow of the boat, and, neither of us having spoken a word since the doctor’s decree, we dive together into the lake. I do not feel the weight of my jeans and shirt. I feel only your hand.

Three fish scatter through the sun-mottled water. An old turtle paddles toward shore. We see a tangled fishing line, sunken tree branches and, dangling from one of those branches, a lifejacket that once was orange. We cannot see the bottom. We go deeper, deeper.

I realize that we are breathing. It’s no trouble at all. We are breathing, and we hold hands, and we keep swimming. You look over at me, there, underneath, your eyes open, your sea-weedy hair streaming, your mouth smiling that sad, sweet smile. I smile back, feeling young and beautiful and loved by you even as you are loved by me.

Oh, boy, I will be your mother. I will be your father. I will be your nun confessor, your crossing guard. I will be whatever you need me to be. You are all I will ever need.

The meeting ends, and we all go home, all of us who heard your words, all of us who have more important things on our minds—like fixing dinner and folding the laundry and changing the oil in our cars.

Oh, son—for I am old enough to be your mother, your aging aunt, yes, your grandmother, I want to make it all up to you, provide answers, give you a home, hold you, feed you T-bone steaks and baked potatoes and homemade apple pie.

I want to buy you a new pair of jeans and a Packers sweatshirt. Air Nikes. A Chrysler Crossfire. An Element if you prefer. See—I’m not too old to like hot cars.

I want to take you to the golf course and show you the hoof prints of deer on the seventh green. I want to take you to Springfield Lake and teach you how to start the motor on a speed boat, how to paddle a kayak into the narrowest cove, how to remove the hook from a sunny’s mouth and throw that beautiful fish back to enjoy one more day.

I want to see your response—the sadness in your dark eyes slowly fading, your fine white teeth lighting up a little more of a smile each day, your long, curly hair growing longer, shinier. I can see you moving daily a little closer, using my name a little more often, letting down your guard inch by inch, like an open drawbridge with the two sides finally meeting, until you sit beside me to watch Survivor and tell me whom you want to win—not the slick-toned female lawyer, not the English teacher from Trenton, New Jersey, not the thick-muscled boxer who intimidates the leaves right off the trees. You choose the dark-skinned construction worker from San Bernadino who cannot possibly prevail, and when I ask you why you have chosen him, you tell me he has been a loser long enough.
AUGUST IN THE MOUNTAINS

It’s hot—

The rocks steaming,
The hillside perspiring,
The trees crouching to find their own shade.

My dog pants on the welcome mat.
My old Ford ticks in protest.
The pages of my book stick to my fingers.

I set aside a cup of coffee
That smells like molten tar,
The handle thick and slippery.

There is no hint of atmospheric compassion,
No touch of coolness in the whole known world.
I lean back in the sweating porch swing

And think snow.
**Ode to Winter**

Once a year the sun has its fun killing off nature for a few months. Turning warmth away to allow for a little introspection.

To avoid solitude roads dusted white with chemical salt, black asphalt fights through—at best opaque.

Snow flood windshield view lost in space, headlights turn flakes to magnified stars caught in trance of their dancing.

Perfect cold for any masochist or spiritualist searching out God through suffering. Each step a quick little death forcing us mammals inside to face ourselves in quiet. Certain animals incapable retreat to tropical weather. While the hardy wait patiently, remembering the first warm breeze of spring, the gratitude deprivation brings.

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**Thirty-One and Counting**

“I wish I had more kids, and cheaper furniture.”

—Customer to bank teller, circa 1995, Washington County, PA

One of my kids broke her arm jumping on and off furniture. At a party. With many kids who were not mine. I only have two. And if we had more, we would have to have even cheaper furniture than we already seem to have. Cheapness is relative, and some of my relatives are cheap. You learn a lot doling out cash. How to count your dimes, your twenties, your kids, your years. I was young then. My accident-prone daughter had just been born, my son an introverted rail-thin angel of four. And I was a male teller in a frenzied, female world. But we all counted on each other. It was quantitative, sure, but could have the quality of zen. I never received a written koan over the counter but did get, daily, the residue of ripped couches, filthy wicker and frayed rugs, digesting or imagining the stories behind them, well beyond the counting.
GARY CIOCCO

FROM HERE AND THERE

I am not from Pittsburgh but a small town, sturdy evergreens surrounding hills of solid still lives. Cemeteries, in eternal motion, augment like bellies of bearded big men, dripping with emotion.

I am not from Pittsburgh, river city, but a one-creek town that we sandbagged in the seventies and bumped down to bone-dry this time. Urban steps rise from corners I am not from, dark with age, rank with nostalgia.

In my mountain mecca earth and industry still rot to perfection, men named Tony still chomp cigars, cheat death and taxes, love and curse with the same gyrating hands.

I am not from Pittsburgh but a highland town of infinite freezes and thaws. Potholes and losses are always everywhere. I can still feel the life force in my high school halls.

ALAN BRITT

I HAVE A MINUTE, SO I DRIFT BACK

Well, I was former dog to the diplomat who was former high school sweetheart to the school’s most popular dropout, now the proud owner of RV rentals.

The trail got dark, generations passed & I wouldn’t know a prom queen if you placed her in the heated passenger seat of my mildly bruised, mother-of-pearl with killer sound system RX 300.

The prom queen’s seen better days & so have I.
ROOSTERS

Restless by daybreak, the rooster struts & pecks a path through barnyard dust like a martinet. Preening, he jabs his beak under a glossy wing & ignores me standing shirtless on the porch, his squinting brain half considering sky, dried corn white-feathered hens as I sputter awake like a roadside flare.

One quick twist of my wrist could stifle his morning song like a faucet, his puffed breast a ripe fruit in my palm. In a few hours, a tumescent sun will pan-fry all who dare move beneath it, its grease our humid breath stolen in the night by sleepless hens.

LOCUSTS

Given time, every conversation ceases: perhaps someone has grasped the inevitable lurking beyond

the reach of our words. Rocking gently, our heads nodding like branches burdened with fruit, we practice

waiting for a reply. In the fields the locusts grind on, sharpening the small knives they’re made of.
THE MAIL

Out here
in the sticks, a letter
seems something precious,
like rose petals pressed in a book,
the moments after a cooling rain,

My garden patch is 40 by 40;
my hands, root-stained claws.
Everything ripens at once.

Your last note read
like the quick pricks
of nettles brushed in passing.
Grudges are like homemade wine
become vinegar overnight.

Fold this page
into an origami bird.
When you toss it
it may catch the breeze & flutter
after you down the path.

Think of my words
as a stolen kiss repaid.
JONATHAN TREECE

A DREAM OF BREAD AND ROSES

I am the dictator
of a third-world heart
where she brings revolution
to my famished country.

JONATHAN TREECE

RUN

Thrust forward into being,
the heat drenches us

on a warm day, mid-October.
We move as prayer in motion,

not supplicants but fevered revelers
seeking splashes of sun

amid the trees that blush against the
shadow of encroaching winter.

Blood flows through muscles,
pushed hard with every stride,

pistons of flesh and bone,
as we run to catch our breath.
Sods, that they were glacial remnants left over from the last ice age. She seemed mildly impressed.

At one point in the conversation, I mentioned a woman back home who committed suicide by eating lawn fertilizer but that I couldn't vouch for it. It felt awkward.

After a second glass of wine, she asked where I was staying. I told her the Hotel St. George on Henry Street, Brooklyn Heights. She said she knew the place. I suggested we go and have a nightcap. She looked around the room and I guessed she was running the calculations in her head before she agreed.

We caught a cab near NYU and made small talk all the way to the hotel, then headed for the bar. She ordered a cranberry vodka and I surmised it wasn't just blueberries with her. I told her about the history of the hotel … about how it had once been the largest in the city, the salt-water swimming pool that Truman Capote used to swim in, that Sinatra would stay here when he was in town, the part in The Godfather they filmed here, that even F. Scott Fitzgerald once got drunk on gin in this very bar. It was a long time ago, I said. She said she used to wish she was Audrey Hepburn. It felt confessional in a melancholy way.

It was after midnight when the bar closed. We took our drinks and walked around the hotel to search for the ghost of it. We came on a room with French doors, the remnants of a vaulted ceiling. I told her it used to be the Grand Ballroom, that they had called it the “room of a million moods” and you could fit three thousand people in there. She said it sounded poetic, that she'd like to have a similar room in her house to change her moods when the mood struck her.

We turned another corner and found what was left of the old swimming pool. They'd turned it into a fitness center with rows of ellipticals and weight machines, put drywall up over the mirrored ceiling. There was only a small lap pool left but they'd kept the soaring chartreuse-tiled columns and the seascape mosaics in place on the wall. I said I could see why Capote must have liked it here. It made you feel like you were someplace else.

She said something about Roethke dying in a swimming pool, that the owners had filled it in, planted a garden on top. I wanted to ask if there were blueberries, but didn't. I said that must be a bad way to go, instead. She took my hand, looked into my eyes, and said the only thing worse is to be found in the shallow end.
NINA FORSYTHE

IF KISSES WERE HORSES

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.
—Nursery Rhyme
“We kiss ugly people all the time.”
—Overheard, Odessa, age 8

They keep coming to us with their glass slippers and kissable lips, and we keep jumping up behind them and riding off to their castles, only to awake the next morning in a pond next to a frog or, worse, a skeevy gent in his faux-leather, mirrored imaginarium.

Still, we always fall for the smooth line, the promise of a coronation, an elevation to the finer life we think we are owed, and we’re distracted by the flourish of the right hand offering all that glitters, while the left hand insinuates itself.

But we always end back on the ash heap, in the scullery or corner bar, chastened and vowing to earn our own crowns, build our own castles, until the air is a virtual construction site of the preposterous, atop which we teeter, lowering ropes of artificial hair or negligees, believing they’re for escape.

NINA FORSYTHE

MRS. RANKIN’S DILEMMA

The mothers of Dunstan Towers are an emotional sort, loud and liable to yank a pigtail or smack a sassy mouth. One can hardly approve of their short tempers or peremptory demands to straighten up and fly right.

The mothers of Fieldstone Acres, on the other hand, are calm, sweet-voiced, and rational. They value their children’s opinions and patiently explain why they ought, really, to share or say thank you.

The Dunstan Towers children run around like wild things, yelling until stopped short by a sharp command, while the Fieldstone Acres children are more subdued and sly, sticking out an opportune foot, whispering their imprecations.

Mrs. Rankin is a rational sort, a believer in patient instruction. So why, she wonders, does she have the urge to pull those Fieldstone children’s hair and smack their smarmy mouths?
I DIG BRANDO

I dig Brando in The Last Tango.

Hopped the metro at Coney Island, got off at Bir-Hakeim.

Gotta feel it in your bones, driving down the city.

Tower straight up pushes glass. Radio fades in tunnel real fast.

Arch of the signals, hang over street.

Heart beats fast. Trip on the cracks.

Sink into the cave, while a band takes stage

The vinyl won’t melt, but her stockings will.

She’ll take you down. Come up in Pigalle.

Won’t speak French, ‘cause she’s from L.A.

I like domestic … but maybe I don’t.

I’ve stumbled through Cleveland, with a hamburger and a Stones ticket.

And soul ice is so nice, somewhere north of Pittsburgh.

Unless you’re strolling the Seine with a French hot dog, or the Thames, with a noodle from Soho.

Keep moving. Tease the mice below.

If the band plays a good set, stick with it.

Cabs run all night … and so do my thoughts.

Imagining the girl from Margate, flowers in hand and talkin’ Berlin.

Sure, I dig Brando.

Maybe it was just the lighting.

Isn’t that enough?
At two in the morning, windows are charcoal rubbings of you and a gaunt waitress.

You watch steam rise from your eggs while music cries in two coffee cups.

Any movement would be milk pouring in a perfect black brew.

Your eggs grow cold, the waitress wastes away.

Music finds no partner in its grief.
I WISH DOWNTOWN WAS LITTERED LIKE THIS

To walk downtown and find gutters
littered with silver gum wrapper
origami swans and boats,

scrap paper decorated
with scenes from the greats:
Hopper, Rockwell, and Wyeth,

benches replace by abstracts,
the beauty of sitting on something
not truly real,

wind chimes on parking meters
taking the sting out of tickets
missed by two minutes—

Downtown would be much happier
if people put some thought
into how they deface it.

INVERTEBRATES

Nylon sheathe,
or a golden crinkle, a hue
of metallic, reflective,
turquoise—brittle
as the dust off bone.

An elk died there.
The beetle, sheltered in
its carcass, an inch deep
between the coolness of mud
and the hot, dry, shell

of the beetles. It’s home.
It’s May—the heat still
permeates the dry, naked
bone. The beetles don’t
know the difference.

They do fly, the beetles.
But clumsily, and haphazard
as the elk had been when
he, perhaps she, waded across
the water, clumsily and broke
its leg. A lone beetle,
and then the rest came.
REUNIONS

There are your dead
in the bodies of trees.
Grandfather stands with bent back,
arm uplifted, waving farewell.
Mother, reaching for the clothesline
both arms outstretched, straining toward heaven
with wet fabric,
sheets caught in branches and tangled by wind.
Father kneels down to welcome a child
with work-strong arms open near the earth.
There is a joyous friend, moving in willowy sways
to the breezes of eternity
and Grandmother, sitting squatly
and forever solid in her love, round and firm.
Children from younger days play circle games, running
lightly into a new season.
There are comrades who once struggled with you,
back to back in a good fight, and now
brandish sinewy limbs to ward off other foes.
Enemies, too, with arms akimbo,
swords held high, impotent warriors.
There are the awkward movements
you made as a child
and the graceful sweeps with which you met
the dance of life.
There are the gnarled fingers you see before you now,
the crooked knowing lines
that form against an evening sky,
your own silhouette
now joining the rest.
All is recalled, forgiven, repented.
Reunion.

HOME

Like smoke from a stone
or dust on the river,
shadow houses loom
across the marsh.

Sunlight blares
and bites my eyes
like a wild dog
until the mirage fades.
Mary Lucille DeBerry

Digging In Our Earth


Displaced trillium, bloodroot, spring beauty blossoms. Potentially a black-plastic-lined shallow pond for toxic fracking fluid, draining of Crystal Lake, continuous roar of drilling rigs. Friction between neighbors: those who sold leasing rights and those who refused to disturb their land.

“Wave of the future,” politicians say. Others, reminded of mountain-top coal removal, are not so certain, are not so sure, especially when they see Floyd Hodge pass by them in a green pickup truck with bed piled high: filled with forty-two bushels of Pendleton County ramps.
BETH KONKOSKI

BABY OF A FRIEND

There are no cars in Paula's driveway and this surprises me. I had pictured aunts making tea and sturdy uncles or cousins standing about looking awkward, their presence a comforting barricade. On the floor of my van rests a carrot cake and a large stainless steel pan filled with lasagna, three cheeses, sausage, hamburger, tomatoes from my garden. I balance my way toward the porch with this offering. Early October rain falls in calm streaks of cold that paint the gravel driveway, the collapsed heads of lilies, my arms in their red windbreaker.

I knock with my elbow, intentionally too quiet to hear. The thought of putting the food on the steps and racing to my car almost overpowers me. But then a crack of warm air and her eyes in the open slot. “Paula I came as soon ...” She has turned away and I talk to empty space. I push the door open and enter. Inside it looks like the bottom of a lake, a filtered, sifting dark. Not a light or an open window anywhere, and the floor has toys, clothes, empty shoes, piled like small anthills down the hall and into the living room. A quiet ticking rises to my ears and I look at my watch; its hand swishes away seconds while nothing else stirs. In the kitchen I place my pans on the counter, still stepping over the strange, planted piles. Everything else appears spotless, untouched, not a spoon or coffee cup or dishtowel to be seen.

I have no idea where Paula is and it feels improper to stand in her kitchen while she hides somewhere in the house. But what is the right thing? What would I need someone to ... I cannot simply leave, so I move back down the hallway and into the living room, my feet clunky in the delicate silence. She sits in front of the television, in a wooden rocker with tied-on cushions. The chair is only a few feet from the screen, but she does not face it.

“Where's Ed?”

She creaks a bit and turns to me.

“I don’t know.”

Wearing a bathrobe, shapeless as empty grocery bags, her body sinks in the chair. Her hands flutter out from beneath her, caressing senseless space. A baby's bassinet sits in view, white, strangled lace haunting the room.

“Are you ... Can I ...” But her hands have grown still, all of her now hunched within the room's shadows, part of the shadows. Out the window I see orange maple leaves in the breeze, realize that the wind still blows, my car still sits in her driveway, the minutes on my watch still tick away. In a few months snow will cover the ground and she will have to face Christmas. I begin to shake then, to feel the tears opening, my mouth gagging on a moan. Nothing in the room seems to notice me leave, and I am halfway home before I think of January.
the 15th, not so long after Christmas. Noah would have been one. I call my mother from the road.

“Complications from the flu.”
“Nobody really dies of the flu.”
“Don’t you watch the news?”
“Not someone we know.”
“Didn’t Nana’s father die of the flu?” She only sighs, but I can hear the tears in her throat.
“Well, I just dropped food at the house and she … He died of something.”
“Can you and Bob come for dinner Sunday?” I almost press this conversation back to her, punctuate the moment with the grief I need to taste. But my son is her only grandchild.
“I’ll check and see.”

KESTRA FOREST

KINTSKUROI

Sunset after the storm: cumulus like footprints abandoned in the God’s ballrooms. Our thick backyard woods black against patches of dusty pinks & apricots. We all see it arching across the coast, & fastening us together like resin transforms broken pottery.

The tools are laid out: mixing the gold dust with the lacquer & plaster, so our limbs are shoulder to shoulder like teenagers lusty with superglue. The evening sky is an engagement with our closest neighbors. We lay on the grass, spiraled, & like an eye peering through the clouds to a Mars sunset (the red ballroom) all blue dust & cool gray light until dark. We feel the thunder in our corneas. Shoulder to shoulder. Golden dust, lacquered eye looking.
LIZ DOLAN

GRACE

The mother leans into her young son,
six feet tall, dressed in black tee and jeans,
strapped into a wheelchair,
spoons tapioca into his mouth,
her fingers extended
as if she is creating a morning sky.
Could I have her patience?
Short smooth strokes master quick-drying paint:
alizarin crimson, viridian, Prussian blue,
the sun soars above the stark white sails of a red boat.
KEVIN STOY

WHAT RESTORES

The knife’s first delicate slice through the banana peeling in my hands is always cathartic, as are the blood-red blotches the blackberries leave on my palm. This morning, I want nothing more dramatic: fruit cut and dropped with water, greens, peanut butter and yogurt into a plastic cup I flip after securing the blade. The machine screams alive—what a loud, controlled catastrophe! I drink the drink. My body sings.

But in Queens today my brother is sick and about to break down or through. I never know, except that he didn’t pick this disease and disorder, their self-destructive cycle. Who would? And when will those who can, offer more, mom choking back tears again on the end of the line? At least language lets me try my best. I give thanks. I wake each morning loving what restores like this arugula for the crisp spice its lobes pack, how their taste survives.

ANN E. MICHAEL

ROUTE 81

It’s the route I take, between the Appalachians and the Massanutten, first south and then northward/homeward, to see you, daughter in the humid hills where the cows graze—(you don’t like cows) though you love sheep, pigs, and donkeys, the domesticated others, cats, dogs, goats, and most of all horses that run in pastures in these mountains.

Ten hours. And always, I tire at Bushong Farm where the 257 Virginia cadets pursued their late victory against General Sigel’s Union troops and lost their shoes in the muddy fields. The town’s called New Market. I never pass the exit. I stop, exhausted, and often walk the weedy path even when it’s raining, inhale the past, dwell on losses. I think of mothers and sisters and lovers. I think of you.

A house that stands, witness. If I could I would be that structure for you: a history of love and continuation. Nevertheless, I know the nature of memory. I know that we forget. More likely, it’s the highway I resemble, a conduit and a route you travel to a future I’ll share mostly through cartography. Infrastructure, commerce, passage—the mother’s purpose. Between two ancient ranges, a place to remember and to rest.
SHARON YODER

APPLE TREE MORNING

First light swaddled in mist,
one apple tree, white blossoms,
three horses, and spring grass
dotted with dandelions.

May I graze like the horses graze
finding full pleasure in greenness.

May I stand like the tree stands,
offering branches of light,
and scents of hope.

May I rest like the morning rests,
allowing mist to soften
my coming and going.

May I live like the grass lives,
providing a springboard for leaping,
a color for nourishment,
a path for wandering,

And a way that knows giving
with no questions, no regrets.
Laura Treacy Bentley, author of the psychological thriller *The Silver Tattoo, Night Terrors: A Short Story Prequel*, and *Lake Effect* (poetry), has been published widely in the United States and Ireland, including *Poetry Daily*, *O Magazine*, and *Poetry Ireland*. She divides her time between Huntington, West Virginia, and Garrett County, Maryland. For more information, visit lauratreacybentley.com.

In August 2015, Alan Britt was invited by the Ecuadorian House of Culture Benjamín Carrión in Quito, Ecuador, for the first cultural exchange of poets between Ecuador and the United States. During his visit, he did interviews, read poetry, and gave presentations in Quito, Otavalo, Ambato, Guayaquil, Guaranda, and Babahoyo.

Gary Ciocco teaches and tries to do philosophy at various colleges in Pennsylvania. He resides in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where he co-hosts the Ragged Edge Coffeehouse First Friday Poetry Series. He and his cohorts often travel to the rich array of regional poetry venues within their intrepid reach. He has had poems published in several journals, on paper and online.

Denise Clemons earned a BA in Biopsychology from Vassar College and an MA in Writing from Johns Hopkins University. She lives in Lewes, Delaware, where she writes a weekly cooking column for the Cape Gazette newspaper. Denise’s poetry has been published in journals, chapbooks, and anthologies.

Mary Lucille DeBerry is a native of the “Mountain State” and worked many years in Morgantown as a producer/director for West Virginia Public Television. Her poems have appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Appalachian Journal, Now & Then*, and in two collections: *Bertha Butcher’s Coat* (2009) and *Alice Saw the Beauty* (2014).


Liz Dolan’s first poetry collection, *They Abide*, was nominated for The Robert McGovern Prize, Ashland University. Her second, *A Secret of Long Life*, nominated for a Pushcart, has been published by Cave Moon Press. An eight-time Pushcart nominee and winner of Best of the Web, she was a finalist for Best of the Net 2014. She won The Nassau Prize for Nonfiction, 2011, and the same prize for fiction, 2015.

Originally from New Jersey, Kestra Forest is a creative writing student at FSU, has performed her poems in various venues, and has served as an editor of *Ars Poetica* and *Bittersweet*.

Nina Forsythe has an MFA from Bennington. Her poems, translations, and reviews have appeared in *Nimrod, 5 AM, Kestrel, Chiron Review, Taproot, Puerto del Sol*, and the anthology *Knocking on the Door*, among others. She’s a four-time winner of the *Backbone Mountain Review* Poetry Prize. She lives in Frostburg, Maryland, where she writes, hosts a monthly *Coffee with a Writer*, conducts creative writing workshops, gardens, and knits.

Sid Gold is the author of three collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *Good with Oranges* (Broadkill River Press, 2015). He is a two-time recipient of a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award for Poetry and has had poems published in journals such as *Poet Lore, the Southern Poetry Review,* and *Tar River Poetry*. A native of New York City, he has lived for over thirty years in Hyattsville, Maryland.

Beth Konkoski lives, teaches, and writes from suburban Northern Virginia but feeds her Adirondack Mountain roots as often as possible. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in journals such as: *Story, Mid-American Review, The Baltimore Review* and *Gargoyle*. She was a Best of the Net nominee in 2014. Her chapbook of poetry, *Noticing the Splash*, was published by BoneWorld Press in 2010.

Anthony Mangos resides in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. His passions are traveling, experiencing different cultures, and jazz clubs. He contributes to various film publications, including *Classic Images*. He is an arts and entertainment reviewer at *People’s World* online. When not writing, he works as a rural mail carrier in Bedford, Pennsylvania.


Candace Meredith earned her Bachelor of Science degree in English Creative Writing from Frostburg State University in 2008. Her fiction and photography have appeared in *Bittersweet*, and her poetry has appeared in *Backbone Mountain Review*. She earned her Master of Science degree in Integrated Marketing and Communications from West Virginia University.

Ann E. Michael resides in Pennsylvania, where she is writing coordinator at DeSales University. Her poems appear in many anthologies and in print and online journals. She is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Water-Rites, The Capable Heart,* and *Small Things Rise & Go*. Her website is www.annemichael.com.

Mike Murphy is a writer in Baltimore where he lives with his wife Stacie and two cats Daisy and Zelda. He attended West Virginia University and the University of Virginia before leaving the mountains to become an urban dweller. His work has appeared previously in *CoBalt Review, Seltzer*, and *Smile, Hon, You’re in Baltimore*.

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M.C. Pratt is an artist, writer, and teacher whose imagery most frequently reflects a closeness to the earth, conjuring her transitory nature. Pratt directs the Environmental Arts Education Program for the Evergreen Heritage Center Foundation. She writes, paints, and teaches in Maryland and North Carolina.

Tracy Seffers lives with her family on the banks of the Shenandoah River, under the shadow of the Blue Ridge. Her poetry has been published in the Bluestone Review, Backbone Mountain Review, Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel, the Anthology of Appalachian Writers, and in online journals, including Still: The Journal and Assisi: an Online Journal of Arts and Letters. She attended the 2013 Appalachian Writer’s Workshop at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky.

Sue Ann Simar works in health care and lives in Morgantown, West Virginia. She is a member of Madwomen in the Attic, which is affiliated with Carlow College. Simar publishes irregularly in small press. This is her third consecutive year appearing in BMR and she appreciates the encouragement.

Barbara Smith, MA, Litt.D, is the author of over a dozen books, the latest being Fifty Years of Crime, Barbour County, West Virginia, 1843-1893, and she has published over 300 poems, short stories, and journal articles. She is also a community and church activist and a sports nut.

Kevin Stoy is a teacher and administrator in the Honors College at George Mason University, where he also earned an MFA in Creative Writing. His poems have most recently appeared in the Cobalt Review, Southern Poetry Review, and Boxcar Poetry Review.

Michael Hunter Thompson resides near downtown Cumberland, Maryland. His passion for art and technology led to his love for digital photography and manipulation. Michael draws upon his background in drawing and painting to continuously discover new possibilities for his work to grow and flourish, such as digital fragmenting, reflecting, and texturing in his recent photography. Michael was a recipient of an Individual Artist Award in Visual Arts: Photography in 2015 from the Maryland State Arts Council for his "Superposition" Series.

Jonathan Treece is an award-winning editor, poet, and playwright. He has been published in Backbone Mountain Review, Allegany College’s Expressions, and Apeiron Review. He lives with his wife in Cumberland, enjoying a life among the mountains.

Sharon Yoder, a native of Garrett County, lives in Allegany County where she teaches at Allegany College of Maryland. She likes to immerse herself in the beauty each season brings to the mountains, and occasionally to capture a breath of that beauty in her poetry.
We are proud to support Backbone Mountain Review, an annual literary journal showcasing the creative talents and cultural diversity within Allegany County and throughout the Appalachian Mid-Atlantic.

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Backbone Mountain Review (BMR) is an annual literary journal showcasing the creative talents and cultural diversity of the people and places within the Appalachian Mid-Atlantic. Thus, writers should reside in or have close personal ties to the geographical region. Writers with no ties to the area may also submit, provided their poetry or prose features the people or places within the BMR community:


GUIDELINES:
1. Writers are invited to submit up to five (5) pages of poetry (no more than one poem per page), or up to ten (10) pages of fiction, creative nonfiction or short plays. We request that writers submitting in more than one genre not exceed the ten (10) page limit. Submissions in excess of these quantities will not be considered by the editors.

2. All submissions must be previously unpublished, original works by the submitting author. Submission conveys first publication rights to BMR, including the right to digitally archive the entire issue for post-publication download from the Allegany County Library System and the BMR website’s archives, after which rights revert to the author.

3. All entries must be emailed to backbonemountainreview@gmail.com by the Thursday, June 30, 2016 deadline.
   - All entries must be submitted as email attachments formatted as MS Word or RTF (rich text format) documents.
   - DO NOT include your name on ANY of the attached submission.
   - In the body of your email, include your name, address, phone number, title(s) of work submitted, and your regional affiliation (whether you’re living in, connected to, or submitting writing about the BMR community).

4. Writers with work selected for inclusion will be notified via email by September 20th. Contributors will have two weeks, until October 4th, to proof galleys and/or provide bios by return email.

For guidelines and deadlines, visit: backbonemountainreview.wordpress.com
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