SONGWRITING AND MOVING PAST THE PAST

A MARINE LOOKS BACK AT WAR

LOVING VIP KIDS
The ancient Greek mathematician Pappus observed that in making their hives hexagonal, “the bees have wisely selected for their structure that which contains the most angles, suspecting indeed that it could hold more honey…” How much wiser was God when he created our inward parts, our soul – deep and wide enough to hold His life and ours in one place where we commune together.

Psalm 139 suggests that the care God takes in shaping this interior space is estimable: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.” Because we know God through Christ, we can know ourselves. Left to our own devices, our inner being can be buried beneath our busyness, our obsession with technology, and our own sin. Christ comes to us, finds us, His Word “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow.” (Hebrews 4:12) We may not know ourselves, but as we look to God in Christ, we can say, “my frame was not hidden from you.”

In this issue of The Meeting House our writers and artists show us around their souls. They show us souls that are cross-shaped. The motivation and love which guide their lives — whether in the schoolhouse (Isaac and Megan) or in their homes and churches (Jessica, Phil, Jim, Mike) — come from the work Christ has done in the church, but even before that, in the sanctuary of their souls. In the stillness and the quiet of their souls, as in ours, God tells us who He is and who we are.

As I quoted in the first issue of this magazine, historian Joseph B. Walker described the meeting house as serving the triple purpose of “sanctuary, schoolhouse, and town hall” — a place to worship, learn, and interact with others at the foot of the cross. Through the cross, we who live today continue to discover our personal identities as we walk with Christ through our failures and our successes. Or to borrow from Antonio Machado, God turns our failures into honey.

A person grounded in the love God showed at the cross, and in a community or “meeting house” founded there, will hold a lot of honey indeed.
Message from the Editor

“With the Grain” Mike Winkles

“Move Past Your Past” Isaac Thomas

“Calling and Collage” Jessica Konker

“Thoughts Difficult to Share” Phil White

“More Alike than Different” Megan Stewart

“Sweet Honey from My Old Failures” Christen Mattix

Artists’ Statements

“Little Jim, Storyteller” Jim Mittelstadt

CONTENTS

MANDARINPRES.COM/MEETINGHOUSE

Fall 2017 correction: Back cover photo is by David Grachek, photographer.

The Meeting House Magazine is a publication of Mandarin Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, Florida, which seeks to provide Christians a platform for telling stories about the world. We hope to connect individual voices to kindred spirits, and create a curiosity about our world which inspires the Church to be of greater service.

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Wooden hand crosses are among my favorite gifts to give. It began when I gave my own hand cross to my mother who was about to speak at her sister’s funeral — just something for her to hold while she stood up and spoke during a very emotional time, something to remind her that God was with her.

Now I order them online, and they arrive on my doorstep in a few days. When I unbox the crosses, they look, well . . . they look okay. Like many things in life, they’re decent, but with a little bit of care and attention they could be great.

The chunks of wood are in the shape of a cross but the surface isn’t very smooth. The corners are sharp, the grain is rough, and the crosses are not pleasant to hold. I could head out to the garage and grab the electric sander or pull out a saw and get to work, but if I’m not careful, I could gouge the wood, make it rougher, or even change the original shape. Instead I start slowly, beginning with sandpaper, devoting myself to sit down at times during my day to gently work on them. It feels more personal this way.

I’ll sand the edges and round the corners, smooth out the grain texture, and address some knots or cracks, grabbing a finer grit sandpaper only when the cross is ready for it. Working on the wood takes time, but eventually sanding will turn into polishing, and a wooden cross will begin to feel like it belongs in my hand rather than like a rough foreign object. I’ll work “with the grain” of the wood and sometimes “against the grain” to keep progress moving forward.

The plan is to improve this object, to make it better for wherever it is destined to be, but change for the better takes a commitment. It takes caring for what I’m working on. It takes understanding the object and its potential. With the right work, the cross can become something others can see and use as a reminder that God is with us. Every moment. As He said to His disciples, “I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.” Matthew (28:20)

I was once a rough chunk of wood. Sharp corners and all. Not very pleasing. As I sand and perfect each cross I’m reminded that Christ was a carpenter…and I kind of think that he still is.
MAN, WE’VE GOT TO MOVE PAST THE PAST

My motivation to write this song stemmed from my mother. She has an annual banquet that celebrates the success of Fill My Cup Ministries which is a nonprofit organization that goes to different communities in Jacksonville and encourages literacy and the importance of reading during each month of the year. The first thing I did before writing was ask God, “If you want me to do music, help me write a decent song.” I did not just want to talk about my past because everyone has a past so I had to think about things that do not directly affect me but have affected others around me.

I weighed one pound and 14 ounces. Growing up, I’d hear “Oh, you’re too small to do this.” After high school, I thought, “I’m going to do what I’m going to do.” I attended college out of Jacksonville for a year, but came back to refocus. I struggled with avoidance tactics. Self-medication. When I was writing the song I was feeling like I had wasted a lot of time living the college lifestyle to the fullest. I didn’t know where I was going. My song was really for those people who tend to get side-tracked in life and not make any real progress.

“I’m sitting here thinking why it’s so hard to pass the past. Probably because I passed on some stuff in my past. Or maybe I’m afraid that some stuff from my past like the times I was finessing people out of their cash and if it wasn’t their cash then it was out of their gas. Sometimes even the potatoes they mashed or the times that I was wilding playing tuck tuck stash or puff puff dash. But that’s in the past now. I got my foot on the gas. And I gave the wheel to the Lord so I know I won’t crash.

We got to move past our past. What moves you? Past every chance I get. At community picnics. On a log at a Christian retreat. For my mom. With Travius. As I continued to perform and discuss the song it has helped me realize that everyone has something that they need to move past.

This is how my art helps me move forward. Past the past. What moves you? Man, we got to move past the past. I’m past my past. The past has passed.
On my office desk sits a collage that I made at one of the women's retreats at Mandarin Presbyterian Church. I love to look at it during my day while I am working because it reminds me of God's presence with me at my job.

When I made this piece of art, I was looking through pictures for the collage when several caught my eye. I believe the Holy Spirit guides in the creative process and as I was putting the images together I really felt God speaking to me about my vocation.

I love working in ministry as a pastor and on most days I consider it one of the greatest joys of my life. But there are days when I do forget I am working for the Lord. Amidst e-mails, pressures, and "to-do lists" sometimes I can get bogged down and find my ministerial duties becoming disconnected from my relationship with God. It is at these moments that I love to look at this collage on my desk.

This picture features a woman and a person sitting at an office desk. These represent me at the church office where I often spend time sitting at my desk. In my work I often feel fear of performance, wondering if I am doing a good job. I don’t have those feelings every day, but it is easy for me to find that my motivation in work and ministry disintegrates—from love for God and the good news of God it becomes merely performing tasks.

The other images I chose for the collage serve as reminders to help me:

In the upper middle section is a tan shape that is similar to a dove. This reminds me of the Holy Spirit's presence with me.

In the upper left hand corner are the words "Do not Fear," faintly written. The Holy Spirit is the one who reminds me that my identity is not in what I do, but in my position as a beloved child of God. This is why you and I "do not have to fear." No matter what profession we do, these truths are a wonderful comfort to know.

In the lower middle where the woman looks up, to the left of her are the words "It's all about...". She reminds me not to just look down to do my work like the person at the desk is doing, but to look up to the Lord and to rely on Him. In whatever field you or I labor, we are called to not just look down, but to look up to God and seek his wisdom and guidance.

The purpose of my role at church, the sum of all my duties, is to express God's love and to love others. Although I know many people work in fields other than church ministry, I think the three reminders can apply anywhere. Each one of us needs to remember our identity is in God and that as we work, we are not alone. God's Holy Spirit is with us. No matter what profession we are in we are all called to minister to those around us because of who we are in Christ. Martin Luther pointed out the equal spiritual status and equal call upon us no matter where we are or what we do:

"It is pure invention [fiction] that Pope, bishops, priests, and monks are called the 'spiritual estate' while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the 'temporal estate.' This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except by office...We are all consecrated priests by baptism, as St. Peter says: "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm' (1 Pet.2:9)."

Pastor and author Tim Keller wrote in his book, Every Great Endeavor, "Christians should be aware of this revolutionary understanding of the purpose of their work in the world. We are not to choose jobs and conduct our duties to fulfill ourselves and accrue power, because being called by God to serve Him and our neighbor is empowering enough. Our jobs, in whatever field, are a means of serving Him."

The question regarding our choice of vocation is no longer, "What will make me the most money and give me the most status?" The question must now be, "How with my existing abilities and opportunities can I be of greatest service to other people, based on what I know about God’s will and the needs of others?" I’m thankful for this piece of art on my desk reminding me to see beyond the busyness of the tasks I need to do to the God who loves me, and to remember the revolutionary purpose of my life and work.
A few things happened to me in the last half of the last century, and at the time I believed I did not have a safe harbor. Little did I know.

I turned 21 on the side of a mountain in a state called California, at a Marine Corps base named Camp Pendleton, waiting to catch a taxpayer funded ride on TWA (they don’t exist anymore) to a taxpayer funded base in the middle of the ocean called Guam, to wait for a ride on a taxpayer funded C-130, to a place that didn’t have a gram of USA soil. The place was Da Nang. The country was of course Vietnam, and the year was 1969. The Tet Offensive was over but the USMC was still active in I Corps.

I got another ride to a quaint place called Quang Tri. That place was about 12 clicks south of the DMZ, and the war still raged.

I served with a helicopter squadron named HMM-163. We had evil eyes painted on the noses of our CH-46Ds, and we had YP—Yankee Papa, on our tails. My primary job “in country” as we called it was working on the avionics parts of the chopper—which usually meant changing $5,000 electronic components with other $5,000 components until something worked. My other job was standing behind a 50-caliber machine gun on sorties. The sorties we flew were varied—sometimes it was bringing ammo to grunts in the jungle, sometimes a pallet of beer—maybe some water too, sometimes delivering blood, sometimes bringing back bloody warriors, sometimes bringing back warriors whose hearts no longer pumped blood, and often dropping off squads of Marines so they could do what they do best—kill the enemy. We returned more often than not with holes in the bird that weren’t there when we lifted off. The L2s were usually under fire and flying low and slow made us a fat target. There were no love songs or flowers in that theatre. Nope, no Woodstock either.

Sometime around the middle of my tour our chopper took ground fire. A lot of fire. We lost our starboard engine, half of our electronics, and our co-pilot. Mercifully he died quickly. We went down hard, and the fellows that caused us to go down were in the neighborhood. We put rounds in the crypto gear, grabbed the 50s, the ammo, and the fallen officer. Marines don’t leave their own. The enemy reminded us throughout the night they were there, and we reminded them we were too.

I’m not sure what passed through the minds of the others beside me that night, but mine involved conversations with my Father upstairs. I can’t recall the exact request but I imagine it was something along the lines of: “Sir, if you get me out of this then I promise I will do this and that, and never do this or that again.” I imagine God was present behind the sights of my 50-caliber and I suspect His soothing voice was amid the clatter of helicopter blades, although I couldn’t hear Him. After an exceptionally long night the day came and something with evil eyes on...
its nose and Yankee Papa on the tail coming to get its own. My promises to God lasted almost as long as the flight back to base.

My four-year promise to the Corps ended and that was enough for me. Don’t get me wrong. The USMC had been a good way out of town after I graduated from high school and got booted out of the house. I learned discipline, I was the honor man in my platoon (all 5’4” of me) and I learned how to really trust another man. Yes, I learned how to love another gnarly, smelly, cussing, drinking, fist-fighting man as my brother.

I got out but Vietnam followed me home. I came back with PTSD: crowds bother me and loud noises make me want to hit the deck. Ironically, later in life I worked for a company named Diamond Shamrock which made a substance called Agent Orange, the defoliant used in Vietnam. I discovered a decade or so ago that Agent Orange would become part of my present life—this old man has bladder cancer as a result of exposure to this toxin. I am fine. Really.

Thirty years after that night in Nam I started keeping the promises I made to our Father. I was an empty man, and I realized the only way to sate my hunger and fill my emptiness was truly accepting, and truly following, as best as this fellow could, the words of our Father. I’m now as old as the last two digits of the year I went “in country.”

Like Paul, I have a few thorns, but God has never given me more than I can bear. I would not change a thing in my life. I know God has been with me every step, and every misstep. He was with me in Nam and in business, in my joy and in my pain, as I laughed and as I wept. He is with me now as He was then.

When asked how I’m doing, I honestly reply “I’m better than I deserve.” True words.

God is my safe harbor. What could be better than that?

May God bless you, as He has me.

Phil White

Sergeant USMC

1967-1971

A GLOSSARY

By Phil White

C-130: A military combat transport. A quad engine turboprop. It was first built in 1954 and is still in service today. A workhorse for the Marines.

CLICK: 12 clicks equal 12 kilometers. 12 kilometers are just under 7.5 miles.

CRYPTO GEAR: Equipment used to scramble radio communications. Transmissions are scrambled on one end, and then unscrambled on the other.

DMZ: The demilitarization zone. The dividing line between North and South Vietnam. It was essentially imaginary.


LZ: A helicopter landing zone - usually just a small patch of semi-cleared land. If “hot” you didn’t stay there long.

QUANG TRI: A USMC combat base 8 kilometers north of the former imperial capital of Huế. Not a nice place.

SORTIES: Missions. Each flight from Point A to Point B was a sortie. One calendar day might see a dozen or more sorties. A normal “working” day was 18 hours for the crew.

TET OFFENSIVE: Tet is the Vietnamese new year. The lunar new year. The Tet Offensive began in 1968.

TWA: Trans World Airlines. TWA was acquired by American Airlines in 2001 after 9/11.
I see her coming down the hall toward me and a smile instantly comes across my face. As we get closer, I greet her. “Hi Marianna! Are you having a good day?” Her body tenses in excitement and her back arches away from the seat-back of her wheelchair. While she squeals a happy greeting, her eyes move upward, looking toward the ceiling. I know that this eye movement means “yes” and I’m happy to see it, instead of seeing her look straight ahead, which would have meant “no.”

Although this interaction happened many times during my friendship with Marianna, I never tired of it. Marianna was diagnosed with a medical condition that manifested in her body similar to cerebral palsy. The muscles in her body would often tense, making it difficult to control her body movements consistently, including the movements of her mouth. But she could control her eyes. Despite her limitation, the joy and love for life that Marianna shared with everyone was palpable and contagious. Even though she couldn’t “speak” as you and I do, her communication was very clear.

“I want to drum fast,” says another young friend, Imani, as she looks at her teacher, smiles and laughs. She grabs my hand and her teacher’s hand to join in the drumming. This may seem like a simple sentence and interaction that has little importance; however, I will not forget the day my friend Imani spoke this sentence for the first time through her communication device. Imani is a first grader and has autism, which makes verbal communication and social interaction difficult for her. Prior to this year, Imani was not able to fully communicate her wants, needs, thoughts, or opinions. It was very difficult to gain her attention or to engage in social interactions with her. If she looked in your general direction, she would often look past you, or seemingly through you, without making a connection with you.

It was difficult to determine what Imani knew, thought, wanted, or felt. She wasn’t able to tell us. With her communication device and access to a large vocabulary, all of us who know Imani are learning that she has a lot more to say than we could have ever imagined. She is full of all the sass and attitude as any other first grade girl has. She loves all things pink and purple and glittery, and it is so fun to watch her express herself and to see her personality come shining through.

There are many “Mariannas” and “Imanis” in this world, those who are unable to speak or walk independently. They are usually referred to as people with “special needs” or “disabled” and often require the assistance of some form of modern technology to help them navigate the world we live in. Many times, when we encounter special needs people in the community, our gut reaction is to feel sorry for them because they are not able to do those things that we, so often, take for granted. I challenge you to shift your thinking.

Why do we assume that someone with a physical or intellectual limitation is unhappy with his or her life and would benefit from our pity? In my experience working with children with disabilities, this couldn’t be further from the truth.
truth. More often than not, they are the happiest, most joyful people I know, not because of their disability but in spite of it. They are not miserable—they are content.

I constantly strive for contentment, yet the majority of my students with special needs have this quality innately. They know more about contentment than you and I and they are excellent teachers; I have become their student. I glean from them how to rest, breathe and just “be” in the present. What is in their hearts is God-given and does not result from money, fame, recognition, objects, or abilities. They confirm for me that true happiness comes from the inside.

The majority of the students I work with are non-verbal, yet their prayers are clearly spoken and heard. They may be able to vocalize some sounds, and although the meaning of or intent behind these sounds is not always clear, each of their “voices” is unique and a familiar listener is easily able to determine whose voice belongs to whom. When we pray, God is the listener.

In Romans 8:26, we are told that the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We all have our weaknesses—some are outward, while others are inward. The Spirit intercedes for all of us, picks us up when we feel weak, and gives us strength and guidance. The ambiguous voices of my students remind me how those of us who can speak fluidly sometimes grope for words during prayer. When we cannot easily express our petitions, when we don’t know what to say, the Spirit intercedes on our behalf and takes the cries of our heart to God. I am sure this same intercession occurs for those who cannot “speak” and, although unclear to our human ears, all their thoughts, wants, needs, praise, and thanks are clear to God.

God created all of us for a specific purpose in this world, with disability or without. I challenge us all to remember this when we see or interact with those within the community who have special needs.

“...you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made…”

Psalm 139:13-14

Look beyond their outward differences and look for the inward similarities. If you take the time to get to know someone with a disability, I think you will be happily surprised, both with what you learn from them as well as what you learn about yourself. I believe you will see and agree that we are all more alike than we are different.

The Free respite program is designed to give caregivers of kids with special needs (VIP KIDS) a break from their ongoing care-giving responsibilities. Each VIP kid and sibling(s) is paired up with an individual BUDDY friend for one-on-one attention as everyone has fun playing games, hearing and seeing great children’s stories, videos, music, and more... and the caregivers get a much needed break!

BUDDY BREAK is held from 1-4pm on the 3rd Saturday of each month.

For more information about this program, to learn more about volunteer opportunities, or to make a reservation, contact: buddybreak@mandarinpres.com

To learn more about this national program, check out www.Nathanielshope.org
What a long, strange trip it’s been! A debt I could not pay, mercy, and honey bees all rolled into three days. This weekend has left me feeling baffled, angry and deeply grateful all at the same time.

Friday I got hired at my dream job, an art framing gig that is walking distance from my apartment in downtown Bellingham, Washington. After the interview, I felt both relief and exhaustion from the past couple of weeks spent applying for a job at various businesses including a flower shop, a shoe store, and a soap making company. By 5 p.m. I was exhausted and ready to go to bed early but my mother called to invite me to spend time with my brother who was about to return to Oregon. He’d been in a funk and I wanted to give him some big sister love and attention.

We had dinner and I was relieved that he seemed to be doing better. I drove home exhausted and bleary eyed, parking across the street from my apartment. It felt like a miracle that a spot was available on a Friday night because my street consists of a brewery, a dance club, and a bunch of restaurants open all hours of the night.

That night I slept fitfully and in the early hours before dawn my elderly cat Iris decided to let loose her most mournful, operatic meows. I lay in bed hating my beloved cat. However, I could have taken her meows as a warning. After all she is my spiritual weathervane. Whenever I am going through a hard time or about to go through a rough patch, she cries. When my life is on the uptick, she throws her glitter ball, cuddles and purrs.

I got up and put the rough night behind me, reminding myself about the exciting workshop I was going to take called Poetry and the Spiritual Path. My friend texted to say she couldn’t give me a ride after all. No problem, I thought. I’ll drive. Suddenly, my heart sank as I realized I’d parked last night in the area reserved for the Saturday Farmer’s Market. I went out to look for my car, and it was gone so I called the towing company listed on the sign. Sure enough, they had impounded my car but I got the address, caught the bus, and hoped I could retrieve my car in time to arrive near the start of the workshop.

I rode the bus with a Vietnam Veteran whose blue eyes stared in opposite directions, a bit disconcerting. He said he was a “fighting Irish” and would go back to serve in a war at a moment’s notice if need be. He’d fallen on his head once and gotten up and walked away unscathed. I thought to myself, I’m part Irish – maybe this mess with my car is happening to test my grit. I determined to take it as gracefully as possible.

I got off the bus and walked the half mile to the towing company only to discover they were closed weekends. I called the dispatcher and asked if I could get my car so I could make it to class on time. She said I would have to pay an extra $85 to get my car out on the weekend. The cost of getting my impounded car was already over $300 so I said I would wait until Monday.

I decided to walk the 3.5 miles to the Poetry and the Spiritual Path workshop since it was outside the area covered by the bus system and I really, really wanted to
attend it. Chuckling ruefully at the irony, I set out to walk to the workshop thinking about today’s experiences as a mirror of my spiritual path—lonely, beautiful and incomprehensible. I wanted to be as present as possible to the landscape around me in the hopes that I would get a great poem for my pains—especially if I was going to be late and miss most of the class.

I walked past fields of sparkling grass. An ancient red barn with broken windows. Electric power lines that crackled and snapped. I stopped to eat a sour blackberry and shake a piece of gravel out of my shoe. I passed a house with plastic flamingo windmills spinning their legs idly in the breeze. As I walked, I held my thumb out hoping a passing driver would take pity on me and give me a lift.

Since they continued to speed past, I decided to try facing the next approaching driver. I waved, then put my hands together in prayer posture. A truck driver slowed down and pulled over in front of me.

“I just want you to know I never stop for hitchhikers,” the bearded driver said as he rolled down his window, “but you look harmless. Climb on in. Where are you headed?”

I told him I was going to a workshop just a couple of miles down Noon Road on Huntley Drive. He said he had plenty of time and would take me the whole way. I arrived just a half hour late for the workshop, my heart swelling with gratitude as I joined the poetry circle.

The instructor led us in an extended meditation on a poem by Antonio Machado, a poem that moved me to create a sculpture a few years ago in response to this stanza:

“Last night as I was sleeping, I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.”

Marvelous error! I couldn’t get the phrase out of my mind. Could the Divine make honey out of this day’s particularly abject failure? A stupid, totally avoidable parking misadventure that was draining precious resources out of my already shrinking bank account? It’s hard enough to spend money on my needs—a new clutch for my car, the studio rent. Paying for my car to be impounded because I-was-too-tired-to-think-straight-last-night-when-I-parked was a little hard to take.

But what if the whole Universe is a marvelous error, an aberration from No-thing? What if my mistakes and failures exist to give the Queen Bee something to do? The great triumph of turning my abject, helpless existence into something sweet? What if my life is both poetic text and spiritual path?

The instructor pointed out that writing poetry and cultivating one’s spiritual path are useless activities from a pragmatic standpoint. You don’t make money from either. That said, I don’t think the Divine calculated the gross national product or made a business plan before creating the cosmos. We humans have it all wrong. Utility can’t measure the value of human existence. Humans and human artifacts like poems and paintings don’t exist to be necessary. They exist to be loved, treasured and enjoyed along with this immense and extravagantly unnecessary universe.

While at the workshop I did not create a masterpiece from my failures. I wrote a gloomy pantoum, a Malaysian style of poetry, about my miles-long hike from home. Rocks in shoes and blackberries not tasting sweet.

Sunday I attended Sacred Heart Church. After mass I prayed in front of the icon of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I gazed at the thorns encircling his blazing heart and begged him to remove the thorns that constricted mine, thorns of worry about money and the future. Suddenly a friend tapped me on the shoulder and asked how I was doing.

“You’re stressed out, aren’t you?” she said.

I told her about my car getting impounded and burst into tears.

“How much was it?” she asked.

“$300,” I said. She started crying with me.

“How about if I pay it?” she said. Later she dropped off a card with $300 in cash inside and a note that said, Trust, trust, trust in the mercy of God.

I tried to give her a painting that she liked worth at least $300 to express my gratitude, and quite frankly, repay my debt.

“It’s not apples and apples, darling,” she told me. “You keep your painting.”

“Pathway”
Artist: Vicki Allen
Mixed Medium
“Pathway” is an expression of the difficulty to move beyond the past. It represents the struggle that takes place in the spiritual self to release burdens, worries and memories.

In this rendering, we see a group of individuals blocked by a brick wall representing their past, while they gaze at a calming sunrise breaking through the trees of a forest. The view from behind the wall offers inspiration to change.

Isaac Thomas
Isaac has made two Extended Play (EP) albums under the name “Young Sensei.” You can find his music at soundcloud.com under ‘yng sensei’

“Beguile IV”
Way of Bee-ing Series
Artist: Jo Sinclair
5 ½” x 5 ½” x ¾”
Mixed-media encaustic painting (beeswax, resin, pigment, mixed-media) ©2016 Jo Sinclair

Encaustics is the ancient art of painting with beeswax and pigments. Its origin dates back to around 100 to 200 A.D in Roman Egypt, used to create the famous Fayum mummy portraits. From the first moment heating the luscious beeswax and pigment on the surface of a painting, watching it glisten as I fuse the layers, I have been curious with the process between hot and cold, liquid and solid, and control and act of letting go within the medium and process, I will continue to find the sweet spots, making art, playing and BEE-ing in the flow.

“In the Garden of Bee-ing III”
Way of Bee-ing Series
Artist: Jo Sinclair
12” x 12” x 1”
Mixed-media encaustic painting (beeswax, resin, pigment, mixed-media) ©2016 Jo Sinclair

This is an image that I created that represents the need to experience and look to God especially in the midst of the work that we are doing. We must keep our gaze up and remember God’s Holy Spirit is present with us reminding us “Do not Fear,” and “It’s all about God’s glory.”

“Lovestruck”
Artist: Christen Mattix
Stitched Coffee Filters and meditation stool
Lovestruck is an abstract wall installation evoking an experience of transcendence. The repeated pattern of the coffee filters suggests meditative practices while conjuring natural phenomenon such as ocean waves and flower petals.

Christen Mattix is an artist and art educator living in Bellingham, WA, and the author of Skein: The Heartbreaks and Triumphs of a Long-Distance Knitter

“Self Portrait – Vietnam Veteran”
Artist: Jerome Domask
Vietnam War Veteran (U.S. Army, retired), is the creator of Self Portrait - Vietnam Veteran. After finishing college in fine art studies, Jerry had a military career in the U.S. Army; he has now returned to painting. As part of his work with veterans, Jerry has organized an upcoming National Veterans Art Exhibit to be held at the University of North Florida (UNF) 29 October - December, 2018. The exhibit features the art of veterans from across the country. Jerry’s website is JeromeDomaskFineArt.com.

“Look Up”
Artist: Jessica Konker
Collage and mixed media

My assignment was to render this sweet child’s image in watercolor. Because the only reference available was faded and slightly out of focus, the details are soft. But the expression is crystal clear. Pure Joy. I used delicate colors to portray her physical challenges but high key hues to suggest her happiness.

“Marianna”
Artist: Ann Manry Kenyon
Watercolor

Hand crosses are a form of “usable art” something people can use to remember Christ and His constant presence with us. Each cross I shape is one of a kind because I do all my work by hand, prayerfully keeping the future owner in mind. I’m grateful for the opportunity to reach so many people with such a personal item.
I’ve always felt blessed having grown up in a small farming community. The peaceful nature of that setting offered a tone of fellowship and love among its members that was so very calming. As children we would test the norms of appropriate behavior but would be quickly reminded to desist. All adults served the role of parenting for all of the children. It was difficult to be a rascal!

The town’s name was Blue Earth due to the blue clay resting along the banks of the river that flowed through the community. It was located in the valley of the Jolly Green Giant and the world’s largest statue of the giant stood proudly near the edge of town. The term ‘giant’ was revered during my childhood years and that became a personal challenge for me. Being born two months early in the late 30s I was given the nickname of Little Jim from the doctor and others. It remains my nickname during my visits to Blue Earth, although now I truly enjoy such an identity in this elder season of life.

Being that the town was so small and safe, my mother would allow me to walk to Aunt Martha’s home for visits. Part of my motive was to have one of her chocolate chip cookies, but the main reason was I dearly loved her. Upon arrival, I would step onto the wooden porch and knock on the door. Then I would wait, and wait and wait some more. Waiting was always fun! I would go to the edge of the porch and place a few insects on top of the water in her rain barrel to see what they would do. Some would swim over to the edge and then walk down the outside. Others would start sinking so I would save them and let them walk off the porch. A few walked on the water before walking away. I had heard of Jesus being able to walk on water so I wasn’t surprised.

If Martha still hadn’t opened the door I would spend time staring into the reflections on the water in the barrel. It was interesting to see not only the clouds skirt past being pushed by the prairie winds but also my own reflection. The only mirror in our home was in the bathroom and being so short I could never see myself. A large oak tree on Martha’s lawn would also appear in that water. A white dove must have made his home in that tree for he appeared frequently in the reflections. On certain days I would adjust my position so that the dove would rest upon my shoulder. It was then that I first learned that if you stand in the right position, you may walk with Jesus.

I am a joy filled storyteller, the most cherished role I’ve ever had in my life. In my 80 years I have been, amongst other things, a choir member, a Sunday school superintendent, an educator, and the rear end of a donkey (in a Christmas play of course) but no experience measures up to this role. I cannot give it up.

My childhood upbringing exposed me to the power and beauty of Story. In the seven different meeting homes where our family worshiped we listened to members share the events of their lives, paths filled with faith and service to God. If you had attended you might have thought we’d fallen asleep during the stories but no, we weren’t napping. We had learned to listen with reverence and hearts so open to truth that we lingered in the silence after the telling. We took time to bask in the revelations Story opened to us.

I have heard that Story serves as a seed. The storyteller is the gardener, our place of worship is a garden, and we listeners are the sun and seasons. I love the idea that we serve as the light and seasons for helping to create and share God’s blessings. I see Story as an art form of life events. Facts without Story have little meaning, but with Story they help create meaning and purpose.

In worship communities the focus is always on the journey toward the ultimate loving truth of God’s love. In the serene meeting houses of my youth, stories helped me learn the loving truth that our life doesn’t have to be perfect to be wonderful. For a boy named Little Jim growing up with a 55-foot green giant in the small town of Blue Earth, Minnesota, the wonder of storytelling got off to a good start.