

Writing the Darkness Away

by Margaret D. Bauer, Editor

In her nonfiction book *Dimestore*, Lee Smith writes, "Writing cannot bring our loved ones back, but it can sometimes fix them in our fleeting memories as they were in life, and it can always help us make it through the night." This passage resonated with me when I first read it, about the time I was coming out of the writer's block I'd suffered since the death of my father. I was turning my own writing from literary scholarship to memoir, a genre that allowed me to visit not only with my father but with other members of my family who have seemed far away in these years of so much division within the country. Thank you to Lee Smith, who is always inspiring, for her letter-writing exchange with George Hovis that opens this issue with a candid interview about how writing has helped her find her way through grief. And thank you to George for his service to *NCLR* over the years with substantive essays and interviews like this one.

When we announced the theme of writing toward healing for *NCLR's* thirtieth print issue, that's exactly what I was doing almost nightly: writing (and reading others' writing) toward healing, as I sought to understand the political hate-mongering and consequential violence against various "others" erupting throughout the country and the apathetic response of so many to the environmental crisis that portends a much poorer quality of life for future generations of humans throughout the world. By the time we began work on the content of this issue, the sociological and environmental crises had merged as Americans responded along political lines to a global pandemic. One member of my found family here in North Carolina, James W. Clark, recipient of the 2020 Caldwell Award for the Humanities and a mentor of many, including myself, often shares with his many "students" the phrase used by North Carolina playwright Paul Green to describe how he and fellow writer James Boyd had spent many a long night

"talking the darkness away." And in her talk at Jim's virtual Caldwell Award ceremony, Christie Hinson Norris reminded us that we can also *teach* the darkness away. I appreciate her willingness to adapt her remarks into an essay so that we could share her – and Jim's – hope-inspiring directive with our readers.

As I mentioned in the introduction to the 2021 online issue, this year's theme was set long before any of us could have imagined a pandemic would require physical separation from loved ones. During the North Carolina Writers' Network's 2018 fall conference, I sat down with Laura Hope-Gill to unwind after an energizing day, and she told me about her work teaching medical practitioners to write and read poetry, to tell stories, and to listen for them from their patients. We talked about how we might bring the concept of writing as a tool in healing to *NCLR* and invite writers of various vocations and avocations, who write in various genres. Then Laura also helped to solicit submissions, and two essays by former students of hers, unbeknownst to both of us, were recommended for publication by *NCLR* editorial staff. I thank Laura for encouraging "her" writers, as she calls them, to submit, and I hope more will do so for future issues. One of those essays, by Carol Scott-Conner, whom Laura mentions in her essay about Narrative Medicine, is in *NCLR Online 2021*; the other, by Daniel Waters, precedes Laura's essay in this issue. I am particularly appreciative of Laura, too, for her willingness to redirect what she was writing for us toward narrating the history of the Narrative Healthcare writing program she developed at Lenoir-Rhyne University, from her own initial spark of – or perhaps, enflamed would be more accurate – interest upon first hearing that such a practice existed, to its continuous evolution as she is continuously reignited by new studies and practitioners. It turns out that the community of writers that North Carolina is known for is as extensive as I suspected, as the medical community members who write with Laura are as generous in sharing their practices as I've found of most writers in this state.



NORTH CAROLINA

Writing toward Healing

Producing the annual print issue is a complicated process in the best of times. Doing so remotely, including training new student staff members who have one screen in front of them, not three, as I have set up in the NASA-looking corner of my home workspace. I congratulate and thank these students, listed in the masthead, for their work ethic – and their patience with me – as well as for planning and hosting virtual readings throughout the 2020–21 year to celebrate the writers appearing in these pages and to promote our creative writing competitions. And I thank the various co-hosts for these events: North Carolina Humanities, the North Carolina Writers' Network, the ECU Alumni Association, and Press 53 of Winston-Salem. Once again, collaborating with others across the state, who value the Humanities and the Arts as much as we do, has been a pleasure.

Remembering how libraries were sending their staff home and closing just as we were finalizing the 2020 issue last year, I'm grateful to the library staffs who have been quick to respond to our image requests this year, particularly, Pack Memorial Library in Asheville and Hunter Library at Western Carolina University. And the artists – thank you all for sharing your gift with our readers, some who've done so before and many new artists. To those who appreciate the amazing art that our Art Editor Diane Rodman selects to complement the writing we publish, please take time to explore these artists' websites. And gift yourself or a loved one with art. Also, I would welcome a conversation with an individual or a group with the means to set up or raise an artist honoraria fund for NCLR.

Lee Smith interviewer George Hovis comments that her last novel suggests that "what is required for healing is community, whether in an institution or in a hometown." Anyone who works with the literary community of North Carolina can attest to the strong nature of community among the writers and readers and librarians, and I am so fortunate to get to work within this warm community. ■

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