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Fragments from a Feminist:
Periscopes of Poems and Prose
Penned in the Wolf's Den

Shannon Davis-Roberts

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The Making of a Feminist

Being a woman isn't easy. I learned this early in life, and my continued experience supports this claim. In 1977, my parents met hitchhiking on the Florida Coastal Highway. The next summer, my mother busts her Gibson Hummingbird Guitar across the windshield of my dad's Ford truck, and walks away ix-months pregnant. She'd caught him making eyes at the carhop at the Pit Stop Drive-in.

Two-years later, my grandmother and her husband, Ray, obtained permanent custody of me. They had money, and letters of recommendation. Anything was going to be an improvement. I'd been in and out of foster homes since I was six-months old. The last time the state took me, they'd left us alone in the house, kitchen table pushed against the whole in the wall where a door should've been. I pushed and pushed, until I squeaked through the opening I'd made. Looking for my mother, and not for cars, I walked across the street.

Being raised by a generation twice removed from my own offered me a dreary view of what "place" women and children should occupy. "Children should be seen, not heard," and "spare the child, spoil the rod," were favorited torts of justification for the belt marks across my backside. Women were subject to the same brand of punishment. My fiery, little grandmother never cared to hold back her words of fury. She and Ray fought like primal forces. The strongest was left standing.

By fifteen, my head was a mess. I'd untangle it by writing, and release my negative energy into singing. High school arts programs like Chamber Singers and Creative Writing Club provided me a place to open up, and develop these talents. Receiving positive feedback from my teachers and peers instilled in me a seed of confidence. My grandmother was the first to

acknowledge my talent. Once, standing in front of the kitchen sink, peering out the window she said, “Go sing, and don’t listen to no damn man”. She was a caged bird; whose song was never to be heard. Witnessing and experiencing domestic violence for ten years, prompted me to with move to my biological father’s house in Eva, Tennessee.

My environment didn’t improve, and neither did my behavior. At sixteen, I was arrested for possession of marijuana, and given a choice: go to rehab on my own, or become a ward of the state and go anyway. I reluctantly volunteered to attend four months and three weeks of treatment. Individual counseling altered my perceptions of the self and concepts of free-will, while group therapy exposed me to a diverse collection of young people, allowing my veils of prejudice and judgment to slip away. Leaving the facility, I possessed the basic tools necessary to understand, cope, and manage my intense emotions, but being there put me a year behind in school. Feeling like I didn’t belong, I dropped out and took the GED.

Over the next decade, my life changed. My father was paralyzed in an accident, he was driving while intoxicated. Both of my grandparents died, I survived a sexual assault, played in a musical duo, composed a full album of original music, I married, and endowed the earth with two beautifully crafted and caring children. My husband’s childhood reflects my own. Through our unconditional love, we’ve healed and do not repeat the abusive behaviors of our memories. We have transcended from working class to the artisan class, and now, at thirty-eight-years-old, I am graduating Murray State, with honors. Achieving these goals would not have been possible without the help and care of others, or the true grit ingrained upon the coils of my mitochondrial DNA. I am a feminist. I am a voice for song-less birds.

In 2016, a man who was recoded bragging about groping women without consent, was elected leader of the free world. Being a woman isn't easy, but we are up to the challenge. A tidal wave of protestors took to the streets in protest of Donald Trump's inauguration. Murray, Kentucky held our own March for Equality and Social Justice, in a town of 10,000 residents, 800 of us gathered and walked sharing in the comfort of peaceful action. In the twelve months that Trump has been called President, women have organized. Sexual assault and harassment is a condition of the female experience we are no longer willing to accept. We are swinging back. Women are calling, "Enough is Enough".

In my corner of western Kentucky, feminist community leaders have formed a chapter of the National Organization for Women, or NOW. My involvement as a member of NOW puts me in contact with other women in my area who work for social change. One of these women, Pamela Gray, suggested I explore the unique opportunities available through the Kentucky Foundation for Women, or the KFW.

Hopscotch House, established in 1985 by Sallie Bingham, an acclaimed writer, feminist, and philanthropist, offers two grant programs: the Artist Enrichment Grant, which provides feminist artists of Kentucky direct funding to pay for classes, workshops, and other expenses to advance their careers, and the Art Meet Activism Grant, supporting feminist art in public spaces. Retreats are also available free of charge at KFW's Hopscotch House in Prospect, Kentucky. The late-Victorian era farmhouse sits among green hills covered in rare Running Buffalo clover. Beneath towering Black Walnut trees, a creek cuts through the property and once powered several mills. The land is a part of a conservative trust also funded in part by Ms. Bingham. Guests hike winding trails among peaceful, still giants. The old growth Kentucky forest kisses waterfalls and hugs an old cobblestone mill, once owned, and operated by a woman. Hopscotch

House is vital in my career as a writer and activist. The writings that follow this introduction wouldn't exist if not for Hopscotch House and the brazen spirit of Sallie Bingham. Thank you, Sallie, for your gifts and may many other Kentucky women who run with the wolves find the den you have so thoughtfully prepared, and left waiting.

In the pages that follow are partial manuscripts. Kentucky and Tennessee imply their influence throughout the collection, while feminist ideology shapes the central themes. In the first work, we explore the world of willow, and willow artists of Kentucky.

Second, I present a selection of poems investigating the life of Austrian-American artist, Victor Hammer. Hammer was a long-term visiting artist at Transylvania University and began the Lexington private press movement that still thrives today.

Third, are poems taken from my own experiences. Finally, a short story that focuses on dysfunctional family, and self-realization.

I offer my heartfelt gratitude the wolf pack of women who supported me in my evolution and education by: letting me clean their garages for gas money, feeding me their Thanksgiving leftovers on my lunch break, offering me laughter when I wanted to cry, and allowing me to turn in work at the last minute. To my husband and daughters, there are no words I can arrange that describe my appreciation, you all give me the greatest gift, unconditional love, I am most grateful I can return it. Finally, to my grandmother, I know the spirit you possessed. It was a tragedy he caged it from the world. Thank you, and we will find each other again in the web of time, until then, be free.

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Willow's Gold

Living a Kentucky Folk Tale

Origins of Willow

Human beings have spent millennia observing and discovering the Earth with patient curiosity, respectably learning from and adapting to our natural surroundings. By taking the earth into our hands and shaping it, we simultaneously personified ourselves in the animals and trees around us. Laboring over flakes of flint, we chipped them into pristine points, transforming hard chunks of rock into thin slithers of intent. In search of meaning, our identities graphed with roots, rain, and phases of the moon. We've carried out sacred rituals of birth, and death, existing in each moment preparing for the next. As far back as the Stone Age, we recognized that our survival relied on our resilience, innovation, and flexibility. We began to seek these traits in the resources that surrounded us. We found willow.

Willow is everywhere. There are 350-500 known species of willow, but classification and population records are a challenge due to hybridization.¹ Since the Cretaceous period, silky willow catkins are the first to emerge into the early months of spring. A female catkin's downy fur coat helps protect the dozens of carpels in her belly and holds heat allowing her to mature.² Willow's industrious billowy catkins explain, in part, the widespread distribution of the *Salix* family. Another way willows travel is by reproducing asexually. Broken willow limbs fall into rivers and streams, after washing ashore they take root, producing a new willow tree. *Salix* thrives on every continent, in the most unlikely climates.

¹ Alison Syme, *Willow* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 8.

² Johnny Caryopsis, "The Biology of Pussy Willows," *NatureNorth.com Front Page, 1*, accessed November 08, 2017, <http://www.naturenorth.com/spring/flora/pwillow/Fpwillw1.html>.



Figure 1. Willow catkins in early spring.

Along the edge of the Gobi Desert 90% of fertile land is at risk of desertification. Since the late 1990's the government has planted Sandy Willow to combat these effects. Progress had been made, but increasing temperatures and decreasing rainfall threatens to negate their efforts.³ Willow also grows in the coldest of climates. Scattered like ice cubes in the Arctic Sea, the Baffin Islands are home to a resourceful group of native people who fully utilize all available resources. Harvesting Arctic Willow, they use it to treat a list of ailments including infections, dental issues, upset stomach, and indigestion. Applying crushed leaves to the navels of newborns

³ Mongolia, The Government of Mongolia, Ministry of Nature and Environment, *National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification in Mongolia*, by Ts. Borjigdkhan Adyasuren (1997), 15, 16, 30 http://www.eic.mn/DLDbase/upload/2012/tadesertbook/4/20121217_7530_4.pdf.

help heal the physical severance from the womb, and toddlers chew whole roots to ease the pain of teething.⁴ From desert to tundra, and everywhere in between, willow pushes through the ground, seeking to fulfill a purpose.

There is a possibility you have seen a willow today. Even if you live in the city, willow springs up in the industrial side of town, and hangs out like a hitchhiker along interstates and highways. Today, if willow is mentioned, most people's minds leap to an image of a lone, weeping willow whose lush, dripping leaves bridge the ground and sky. Weeping willows pose beautifully for the imagination of our minds, but surrender utility to stouter family members, like the white and black willow varieties.



Figure 2. willow plantation.

⁴ G. Warren Smith, "Arctic Pharmacognosia," *Arctic* 26, no. 4 (1973): 325, accessed November 8, 2017, doi:10.14430/arctic2931.

In Ireland, willow plantations buffer toxic waste near industrial areas and commercial farms. The willow grown on these plantations also produces sustainable energy.⁵ A well-watered willow tree can grow more than two-feet a year in height. Five years after a planting willow, it can be harvested and used in bio-boilers to produce electricity. From the stump of the newly cut willow, several new trees sprout, and the process continues. Salix roots hold river banks from erosion, and the limbs of willow trees attract more birds and insects, than other arable crops.⁶ Willow is an eco-super-plant, just waiting to do its part.

Willow Culture

All cultures of human kind have had intimate relationships with willow. Like all symbols from simpler times, willow's metaphysical meaning corresponds with its physical existence. Thriving near water, it has been associated with the moon and feminine energies.⁷ A severed limb of a willow tree can take root and assume a new life, this evoked ancient minds to connect willow to the space between the living and the dead. In ancient Greece, goddesses of the Underworld used thirteen-inch willow wands for divination, to evoke the Muses and all other magical workings.⁸ The Greek Goddess Helice, whose name means willow, was honored as the Goddess of Water and healing and known as the "Matron of all Witches."⁹

⁵December 18 2008 Thursday, "Willow proves its usefulness for disposing of harmful waste," Irish Examiner, December 17, 2008,, accessed November 08, 2017, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/business/agri-business/willow-proves-its-usefulness-for-disposing-of-harmful-waste-80316.html>.

⁶ Syme, *Willow*, 7-28

⁷ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 1076

⁸ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols, and Sacred Objects* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 474.

⁹ The Goddess Helice, accessed November 09, 2017, <http://www.holladaypaganism.com/goddesses/cyclopedia/h/HELICE.HTM>.

Ancient Egyptians held a fertility festival called the Raising of the Willows. The ceremony offered gifts of willow garlands to the gods and willow headdresses adorned the idols. The ritual, is threaded to story of Osiris and Set. Osiris, the eldest, was king. Set, envious and bitter, murdered his brother, placed the dismembered body in a basket, and set it adrift along the Nile. When Osiris's earthy body came to rest at the roots of a willow, his spirit took the form of a bird. Soaring to the summit of its branches, the dead god sang. Set, the murderous brother, scattered the remains throughout Egypt. Willow groves sprouted from the dirt where the demi-god's body had lain.¹⁰

Willow was honored in the East as well. Buddhists relate willow to Yakuō Kannon, the "Medicine King." In Kyoto, at the Hall of the Lotus the "Rite of the Willow", is observed in January. First observed in the Heian Period, priests anoint participants upon the head with a "sacred willow branch," believing it cured headaches and promised good health.¹¹

Christianity's dualist nature, forced the disappearance of pagan people and their culture. The words *willow*, *wicked*, and *witch* all share similar roots. *Wicked* was derived from the Old English word, *wicca* meaning wizard. *Willow* comes from the Danish word *viker*, which means to bend. These trace back to the Greek Goddess Helice which means willow.¹² Christians viewed willow's association to matriarchal power, and its ability to bend as evil and it became

¹⁰ MARK G. BOYER, *ABECEDARIAN OF SACRED TREES: spiritual growth through reflections on woody plants* (EUGENE: WIPF & STOCK Publishers, 2017).

¹¹ Mark Schumacher, "Willow Branch," *Ritual Objects, Symbols, & Weapons in Japanese Buddhism*, , accessed November 09, 2017, <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/objects-symbols-weapons-senju.html#Willow>.

¹² Robert Graves and Grevel Lindop, *The white goddess: a historical grammar of poetic myth* (New York: Farrar, Str"Library : History of Palm Sunday," Library : History of Palm Sunday | Catholic Culture, , accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=105.aus> and Giroux, 2013).

known as the witch's tree. During the Medieval period, many people believed witches met among the willow, yielding willow wood broomsticks to dance among devils. Even the healing power of willow conjured suspicions of dark magic. The practice of Palm Sunday saved the willows for Christians. In Europe, willow became a favored substitute for palm, where for centuries incorporated it the ritual of Lent.



Figure 4. Jusepe de Ribera - Hecate, Procession to a Witches' Sabbat

Willow as Medicine

Willow has traveled alongside us and woven itself to all people, all cultures, and all corners of the world. In fact, the medicinal power of willow is likely resting on a shelf in your medicine cabinet, right now. In this age, we take the miracle power of aspirin for granted, but it took hundreds of years before that little white pill to get there.

In the 1600s, the Catholic Church named Pope Urban II to lead the order. Urban contracted malaria shortly after occupying his role. During his reign, eight Cardinals perished with the disease. The Pope urged the clergy to search for a cure. Urban did not live to see the fruition of his order. In 1643, the naturalist Order of the Jesuits presented a “miracle” powder first deemed, the “Cardinal’s Powder” to a suspicious audience. The Jesuits lived close to nature and had fled persecution to settle in the America’s. They observed how indigenous tribes of Peru treated fever with bark of the Cinchona tree. After being subjected for review by the Roman doctors, it was concluded that the active ingredient in the powder quinine not only eased the fever associated with the disease, but it cured it. Despite this evidence, many protestants rejected the treatment fearing the Jesuits laced the bottles with poison. Supplying England with the Peruvian import also challenged the widespread use of the drug making it available only to the elite. Members of the English and French royal courts suffered from “ague,” and it was said King Charles the II treated his malaria discreetly with the Cardinal’s Powder.



Figure 5. Willow shoots.

In the late 1700's, a clergyman and naturalist named Edward Stone adopted a belief of the Jesuits, that god cared for man by natural design and the cure for man's disease surrounded him in nature. Walking about the English countryside near his Abbey, Stone was told of a folk remedy for fever. This concoction was made from the bark of willow trees. Knowing the bitter bite of quinine, Stone was hopeful when the white willow's flavor snapped his tongue. Over the next several years, Stone administered dried willow bark to himself and number of people who suffered from various fevers and ague. He found that even though it did not cure malaria, willow bark helped cure many ailments. Nearly a century later, aspirin would be marketed by the Bayer company, its main ingredient? Salicylic acid, derived from willow. ¹³

Long before Bayer isolated the medicinal properties of willow, every ancient civilization conjured healing from willow. Egyptians used it as an anti-inflammatory medication, while Homer wrote it was a contraceptive. Arabic traditions also deemed it an abortifacient and contraceptive. The Japanese treated battle wounds with willow compresses and willow is recommended for arthritis in a second century Chinese pharmacopoeia.¹⁴ Willow has been and still is medicine for the human body. It is also medicine for the mind through functional willow crafts and sculptural design.

¹³ J. N. Wood, "From plant extract to molecular panacea: a commentary on Stone (1763) An account of the success of the bark of the willow in the cure of the agues," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 370, no. 1666 (2015): , doi:10.1098/rstb.2014.0317.

¹⁴ Syme, *Willow*, 25

Willow and Craft

Willow craft's ancient roots have grown to blossom in art craft fairs, galleries and exhibits today. In the 9th or 8th millennium BCE, when fisherman first knotted the fibrous willow baste into nets, they took part in a long evolution of willow craft. From huts and baskets to cradles and coffins, willow lends itself to our artistic whims and practical constructions.



Figure 6. Willow Basket, Jennifer Zurick, Artist

Willow basketry transcends ages, cultures, and geographical boundaries. Today, Kentucky is home to a thriving folk art culture. In Berea, Jennifer Heller Zurick is known as the wicker woman. Her masterly crafted baskets evoke feelings of intrigue and fascination from those with thoughtful eyes. The process is labor intensive. In the heat of summer, from a boat in the Kentucky River, Jennifer scouts for black willow along its banks. After locating perfectly sized trees, in the right position and location, she performs a small ritual thanking the tree for its contribution, then the work begins. During the harvesting process, she scores the base of the tree with an ax, this allows an old-fashioned drawknife to work into the bark. Individual strips of bark are grasped and pulled away. Separation of the inner bark from the outer bark must immediately follow the stripping process. This is done by bending the inner bark until the outer bark begins to separate. Jennifer must cut the outer bark away inch by inch. Once separated, the strips are coiled and set in the sun to dry. A few hours before Jennifer begins to weave the strips into baskets, she must soak the dried willow in water to resurrect its flexible nature. Jennifer's inspiration comes from Native American basket work, known to be the finest in the world.¹⁵

Kentucky is home to another kind of willow tradition and craftsmen. In the western part of the Bluegrass, ninety-year-old George Anderson Beard and his former apprentice, thirty-five-year-old Justin Roberts, handcraft willow furniture. Because I am Justin's spouse, acquiring

¹⁵ "Jennifer Zurick - Home Page," Jennifer Zurick - Home Page, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.jenniferzurick.com/>.

respect for willow, folk-art, and hardships that accompany an artist's lifestyle, happened by osmosis. George is quite charming. The defined lines in the landscape of his face tells of his experience with life, but the bright of his blue eyes and the jovial life force behind them spins doubt about his age. A large brimmed straw hat hides the thinning of his silver hair, and the pearly snaps of his shirt catch the light of the sun. He is living legend. For over four years, our small family resided with George. Honored to be guests in his home, we acquired wisdoms that words cannot relate.

When Justin Roberts was a small boy, his parents would load up the back of their 1985 hatchback and head down Highway 94 South to Land Between the Lakes. Just about half way there, Justin would keep his eyes on the blurs of green that whooshed past the small triangular window. Breaks of open fields would cause the light to change around him; he was waiting to see the old log cabin and all the chairs that dotted the oak-shade covered grass. He'd never seen chairs made of sticks anywhere else. As Justin grew from boy to man, the memory of this wonderment slipped to the back of his mind. He'd recall it, at the age thirty, while watching a documentary on his local PBS channel.

After working late on New Year's Eve, Justin came home. We checked on our sleeping daughter, settled into the couch, and began watching the documentary entitled, *The Botany of Desire*. The film focused upon humans and our relationships with plants. During those two hours, a light turned on inside the man who sat beside me.

Justin plucked the stick furniture from the banks of his memory and exclaimed, "I want to collect something from the wild and shape it into something people desire."

My response? “You’re crazy.”

In wonder, Justin’s mind spun into motion and his body followed. A few days later, clipping the wispy limbs of a friend’s weeping willow tree, Justin began a process he would repeat for many years to come. Diagnosed with severe dyslexia as a child, Justin did no research on how to make a willow basket, instead he rolled up the long, green switches and hauled them home.

Sitting in the floor of our small cottage, the scent of green rose from the arrow-shaped leaves surrounding us. He began by stripping the leaves, and continued until the nightingales sang to the morning. The next day, he fashioned a jig from an old tree stump by drilling eight small holes. The dots, sized for the willow sticks, formed a circle. After placing the twigs in the holes, he weaved the smallest of them in and out, until they took form of a basket. When completed, he took a picture and posted it on Facebook, the caption read, “Zoe’s Easter Basket”. He was proud of his work, and of the fact that that year, his daughter’s Easter basket wasn’t made of plastic.

Seeing the post, Debi Danielson, director of the Murray Art Guild, and local artist, contacted Justin about a man by the name of George Beard, who’d spent his life crafting willow furniture. She stated that he was in his eighties, but had once owned a shop down old highway 94 East, he now lived several miles down the road from the old cabin. Debi suggested that Justin seek him out. George had always been willing to share the craft with anyone showing interest.

Justin drove to the address Debbie had given him. The house, white and wilting, sat beside a patchworked, county road. Its red tin roof offered the promise of percussive rain. To the

left of the driveway, a rustic pavilion resembling an abandoned hut, long ago became a ladder for climbing wisteria. A tiny, honeymoon cabin lay off-side the main house. The earth behind the stooping structures tumbled into a lower altitude, coming to rest at the steps of George's workshop.

George answered the door in his signature broad-rimmed, straw hat. The sharp angle of his jaw softened when he smiled. "What can I do you for?"

"My name is Justin Roberts. How are you doing today, sir."

"Well, I'm just finer than a frog hair split on both ends." George's lips widened into boyish grin.

"Debi at the Murray Art Guild told me I should meet you." Justin studied the creases that folded around the man's eyes that seemed to brighten even more at the mention of art.

"Come on in here boy, a take a seat." George stepped back and let Justin pass.

Justin made his way across the small living room and situated himself upon the dingy, blue sectional, whose attachments had long ago donated to one of George's ten children. George eased himself into his brown, faux-leather recliner, then slipped the clear, thin tube of oxygen under the openings of his pitted nose.

The next four hours they spent getting to know one another. The two had many differences. George was of the Mormon faith, while Justin practiced no organized ritual of belief. Their ages separated their thoughts on politics and music, but George honored Justin's understanding of the world. They agreed to disagree and would avoid subjects with divisionary

effects. But, they had some things in common. Both were born and raised in western Kentucky, and as children, both knew the pang of hunger. They each found peace in nature, and comfort in storytelling. They made plans to spend three days a week together. George would teach Justin all he knew, a life lived by hand.

After a few months of Justin started the willow, he'd ask me what I thought about moving into George's home. At the time, I hadn't seen the house and didn't find the idea of living with an elderly man, whom was of no relation to me, appealing. I had met George and thought him to be a sweet, kind man, but Justin was asking a lot. We both would be relinquishing our control of a home, a space of our own. Justin asked me to do this with him. He wanted to have time with George. If we moved in, he could have that time. I hesitated, but agreed. I knew that he needed space and time to grow, and I couldn't allow my fear to keep him from it.

Seeing the house for the first time was intimidating. The musk from aging walls and dust welcomed us at the door. George rested in his brown recliner as I eased from one short-ceilinged room to the next. George's room was cluttered, and in need of a dusting, but was immaculate compared to the rest of the house. Numerous great-nephews, grand-children, and great-grand-children had at one time called the house home. An explosion of their unwanted things scattered the floors: Lego's, fast-food toys, twisted Slinkys, a broken TV, and piles of clothes, all awaiting to be gathered, sorted, and properly discarded. After multiple trips to the recycling center, Goodwill drop-off, and landfill, we got to the deep cleaning and painting.

Several weeks into the arrangement, a fear of mine manifested into reality. While at his daughter's house visiting, George suffered a heart attack and underwent an emergency quadruple-bypass surgery. When they brought him home, they sat us down and explained what

we needed to do: Clean his incision, administer meds, cook a special menu, and drive him to doctor's appointments and physical therapy. I knew the procedure. My grandfather and father had severe medical conditions in the last years of their life, and I had helped with their care. It was hard, but George's temperament made the tasks seem less cumbersome, and I explored his life through the stories he told.

George had grown up during the depression. But his family did well enough to barter a sack of grain and thirty dollars for a set of willow furniture from travelers going through Western Kentucky. These travelers, once called "Gypsies" would camp in a willow patch outside of town. While camped, they'd harvest the willow and fashion the limbs into chairs and other items to exchange for money and resources. George remembered being a boy of five, loving the feel of the slick bark beneath his fingertips as he rested in a chair just his size. Years passed, and the small boy sprouted into a young man.

A clerical error concerning his birth year allowed George to join the Army Air Corps when he was seventeen. He married, and they had five children, but divorced after fulfilling his commitment to the military. He met his second wife, Louise, by following a feeling. He rescued her from the hands of a fierce man, and took her five children as his own, together they had ten. At times, George and Louise, along with all ten children, would travel the United States picking fruit. This migrant work brought George to Arkansas, where a man by the name of Bo Fondrine taught George the basics of willow furniture making. George repeated the process of fruit harvesting and chair making until he and his family settled in Calloway County. There they enjoyed many profitable years of crafting willow furnishings. George came to be featured on

PBS, has a piece in the Smithsonian, and during the Clinton administration was contacted to craft a tiny chair that still dangles from the branches of the White House Christmas Tree.

By Christmas of that year, Justin had built up a stock of furniture. Their second craft show was the Murray Art Guild Holiday Sale. As the parade of art enthusiasts, professors, and professionals stopped to compliment the work, both men smiled and nodded their thanks. Justin was approached by the local director of Murray State's listener supported radio station. She'd heard of our arrangement and urged him to apply for the Kentucky Arts Council's Folk and Traditional Art Fellowship Grant.¹⁶ Justin asked me to find out more information. After reading about the opportunity, I prepared the proposal. George and Justin received the funding. It tickled the master artist to be getting three-thousand dollars, but being honored as a recipient pleased him even more.

By Spring, George was better than ever, and the two men continued their work. Wayne Bates, a local potter, construct a website for George and Justin. Orders came in from North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The two unlikely friends made deliveries through the snow, rain, and wind. We stayed a total of four years in George's home. Both men received the honorary title of Kentucky Colonel, Justin learned a lost art, and we found a part of ourselves that we never knew existed. Our daughter cherishes the memories of sitting on the arm of that old chair, George reading to her, his arm around her shoulder. George is not alone. His great-grand daughter, her husband and their four children care for him well. As of today, October 29, 2017, George Anderson Beard is alive and well, making furniture at the age of ninety. What we

¹⁶ KYArtsCouncil, "Makings of a Master, willow furniture, George Beard and Justin Roberts," YouTube, November 06, 2014, , accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UIrM6crfBg>.

owe to this living legend will not be paid, until we pass the art of crafting willow furniture into the arms of the next generation.

In the last two years, Justin and I have continued to grow the business and our family. In 2016 Justin recorded two Kentucky Public Television Shows, *Kentucky Life* and *Bluegrass and Backroads*.¹⁷¹⁸ These opportunities were offered to us while exhibiting at the Kentucky Art Councils *Kentucky Crafted: The Market*.

¹⁷ KETVideos, "Willow Furniture Artist Justin Roberts | Kentucky Life | KET," YouTube, February 17, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzsz023H5I>.

¹⁸ Kentucky Farm Bureau, "Kentucky Farm Bureau's Bluegrass & Backroads: Walk the Willow," YouTube, October 09, 2015, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5C1hTt9p6Rk>.



Figure 9. The makings of a basket.



Figure 10. Finished Basket



Figure 11. Zoe and her basket.



Figure 12. George in the willow patch



Figure 11. Justin at work.

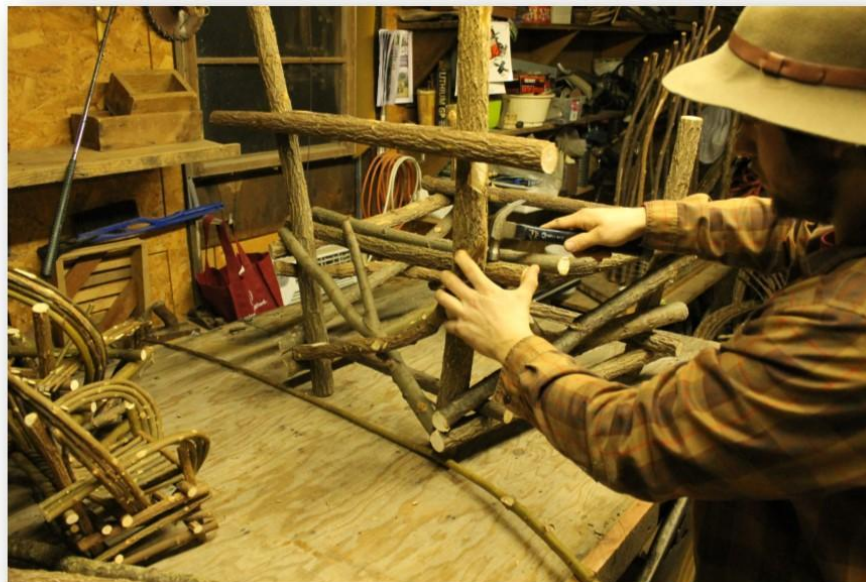


Figure 12. Justin in George's Studio



Figure 13. All loaded up.



Figure 14. Participants at the Columbus-Belmont Civil War Re-enactment



Figure 15. Justin and George at the Murray Art Guild.



Figure 16. Justin supports the Murray Art Guild.



Figure 16. Selling willow wares at the MAG Holiday Sale



Figure 17. Justin is also a photographer.



Figure 18.. Cold Morning.



Figure 20. Justin's willow flower sculpture at the Murray-Calloway County Public Library.



Figure 21. Justin places arch at Murray Elementary School.



Ode to the Willow Furniture Maker

Walking the willow the sleeping path wakes.
From search and seize to size and length.
Cutting them off cleaning the cane.
Taking his time touring the rain.
Hauling them home, feeling the pain
his hands are strong, they hold restrain,
then let it go with grace on grain.
He bends and nails the wood, it holds.
The weed, the willow, spun to gold.
Life is free, lived in this way:
Following dreams, despite what they say
.
He made a choice; he chose to chase,
a world he wanted, wished, then made.
He gives no thought to ticks or snakes.
Gingers throughout the grass he gaits.
Walking the willow his wondrous fate.

Value of the Arts

Kentucky has a reputation.

(The remainder of this paper can be obtained by contacting the author.)

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**Selected Poems from *Kentucky Bound:*
*Poetic Impressions of Victor Hammer***

**The following is an excerpt from a poetry chapbook based on Austrian-American Artist Victor Hammer. It is my response to the nationalist immigration policies being drafted by Trump's administration. As Americans, we are the sons and daughters of immigrants. I am a concoction of Black Irish, Cherokee, and French blood. It is my belief society benefits from diversity, this is illustrated in the content of the work.*

Introduction

Kentucky is more than a place, it houses a creative culture cultivated by diversity, necessity, and tradition. Kentucky folk art defines us a people and the people of Kentucky define our folk art. From the African origins of the banjo, to the Scottish tradition of distilling corn into spirits, Kentucky's identity evolved from a sundry of traditions, people, and places. If these traditions are to be planted in the minds and hearts of our next generation, government funding of the arts is essential.

In 2015, newly elected governor Matt Bevin, proposed to defund the Kentucky Arts Council. Outraged Kentuckians made their voices heard, from phone calls and protests, to well-written newspaper articles, the vibrato of our discontent rumbled through the walls of Bevin's borrowed office.

An article in the Lexington Herald Leader, inspired me to create this book of poems to illuminate the forgotten Austrian-born Kentucky artist, Victor Hammer. Hammer and his family escaped Austria, moments before Hitler's Army invaded the sovereign nation. Victor brought with him volumes of knowledge, encompassing many different areas of fine art. Sharing his skills with the artisans of Kentucky

Art has a way of stripping people of their class, gender, and political views. We as a species, react to art on elevated emotional and intellectual planes. Differences melt away, and we can see our own image mirrored in the flesh and bone of another.

Depression of the arts is a warning sign of fascism, and detrimental to the people, economy, and culture of our diverse society. I truly hope you are inspired to contribute in the continuation of Kentucky's art and culture. My family, and yours, are enriched by the effort.

A
Young Victor
Acquires Appreciation

A few quick-steps past my door's frame,
two cross-topped towers stand, patinaed with time.
Crossing the hallowed threshold at their feet, my heels
send balls of sound to the square-topped Trompe-l'œil dome.
Arched illusions break their stride, dropping them back to me, flat.
Still as stone, I lay beneath sacred geometry. Fractals etch themselves
into the crystalline formations of my mind.



Exterior of the Jesuits Church, Vienna

Artist in the Austrian Army

An architect of urban spaces and lines,
designed artistic principles into the
corners of my mind.

The Academy of Arts erected my frame.
Type, press, paint, and stone,
transferred unto my parchment of my skin.
Paris, Italy, and Berlin, painted inked the pads of my whorls,

but,

“The War to End All Wars” had other plans
for these skillful hands. Knee deep mud,
fear crumbled charcoal covers the canvas.
My fingers, forced to print propaganda,
indigo-army ink seeped the beds of my nails.

My own voice?
Mute between pressed type and pulped paper.
Simple lines of lettering are cathedrals on a
page ringing the bells of intent.
My hands tremble from the sound.

Early Warning Signs of Fascism

POWERFUL AND CONTINUING
Nationalism

DISDAIN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Identification of Enemies

AS A UNIFYING CAUSE

SUPREMACY OF THE
Military

RAMPED SEXISM

Controlled

MASS MEDIA

Obsession

WITH NATIONAL SECURITY

Religion and Government

INTERTWINED

Corporate Power

IS PROTECTED

Labor Power IS Suppressed

DISDAIN FOR THE ARTS

OBSESSION WITH CRIME AND
Punishment

Ramped CRONYISM AND **Corruption**

Fraudulent Elections

Scam: An Anagram

An underflowing act casts implications of manipulation. Transforming harm, it hoards rods, then raids. Famine infused seas intensify decay. Trump's sheep reformulate the syntax of prey. Mars commandeers astronomical land molds and icons obtain worthless notions of sin. Redundant, artificial dictators alter data, dulling euphemisms. Penthouse tensions punch. Contradictory of opportunity, madmen summon corrupt minds and sell a florescent, counterfeit sun.

Moveable Type #4 taken from - "At This Exact Moment in History"- Thomas Merton

Spinoff.....

Zoom.....

We are testing supersonic engines
you throw away, without a refund.
At this precise moment of history,
power struggles.

Somewhere on tape, in the Archives,
Congress' Immortal anecdotes run
wide-open in a loose gown,
without slippers.

The American colony is to be:
kept in submersible decompression chambers.
She is my only living investment,

permanently fortified
for shape retention.

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**For a complete manuscript of this collection contact the author.*

Selections from: *Grit and Mettle: Poems of Persistence*

Lie

Seated in a schoolhouse, being only nine,
 they gave us fairy tales to read, even called them history.
 Masters stroked the Rockwell scenes, in colors so divine.
 The purple mountains majesty, painted sea from shining sea,
 land of the brave, home of the free.
 Of thee we sang with pride, democracy on our side.
 In all our heads they buried this seed.
 Where was America? Why did she hide?

I quit the brick and mortar, to emancipate my mind.
 I'd grown wild and thick with thorns, an ugly little weed.
 Inquired from authority, the who, what, when where, why?
 I recognized the languid lies and the universal need.
 I found it in the worried world I found it within me,
 I found it in the sacrificial, the palms we crucified,
 in the lack of love, compassion, in the hands of liberty.
 Where was America? Why did she hide?

I firmly stand, in this current space and time,
 raising wild-eyed honey bees,
 to heal symptoms and see the signs
 of language and rhetoric meant to bind them to the tree,
 I hope they fly above the smog, and live to breath and see
 that life's too short to kneel, breed and die
 for ideals that hate, and fear designed, that gifts them only misery.
 Where is America? Why does she hide?

To my Grandmother

Digging through the oak chest

among lingerie, linens, and mice nests,

I found a bottle of your Red Door.

The scent, concentrated by seven
years' time, took me to place

where I was not yet who I was

to become. Throwing away more
than I should but not enough to be

through, I washed the red plastic
bottle that could not contain my

memory of you. I do not apply it
to my skin, it sits in the kitchen

by the counter where you'd stand
and eat. At night, we stir the air in there

and you float around the room.

With Grace

A floating catkin dipping to
rest, lightly. The fingers of the sun filling me up.
Protruding life digs- into the shallow muddy bank.
Supple skin hardens to medicine bark, my fibers bend the winds.
I widen my trunk into a mass of road-mapped memories to
remind me of where I've been.

Dry of youth and sagging toward the sod,
my cells drink from roots,
long running below the ageless body of the ground.

The First Mother

Stone-hard and cold the

brown grass lies flat

beneath thick, bare feet.

Fresh milk lets down and drips,

lapped up by runts and rats.

Rough as rock, she

rolls in dirt dotted with bones.

Her clan survives by

swamp and sweat,

she shouts, and stands.

Her equality was from necessity,

her participation required.

Demanding her share of parity

her expiration never expired.

Our kind is hitched on her heredity.

Rats and runts revolt and rise.

Journey to Anew

I smoked Shwag* in a trailer
littered with roaches the day
all the smart girls and boys
bubbled in letters and sent
snapshots of their minds
to be weighted and measured.

Mine, oddly shaped and
crippled from years of heavy
thinking, would have been found
lacking. Nothing of value was
contained in the attic where
my history lay.

In the dust and ditches,
dark caverns and taverns
drew me in. In their smoke-
filled lungs I swallowed
heavy metals. Goldenshlager
makes the mind and mouth
go numb.

Steadily, I stayed slipping,
Silk parachutes and sharps
lured me to the bathroom mirror.

White porcelain, stained with
regret. A pale, pretty curtain,
I pulled it back to see,
sweat beading out toxicity.
Every cell of my universe
inspired. I began to tread more
carefully.

I calmed my fury,
I centered the beast. Why worry?
I have tiny creatures to feed.
The wind blows, and I feel it.
My baby cries, and I hear it.

Excerpt from: Turning Point

Turning Point

“You’re going to California without me?” The fifteen-year old girl stared blankly at the green blurs of oak, pine and kudzu passing the window of the old Chevy van.

“Well, of course, we have been planning this for months and we’re not canceling just because you got yourself into trouble.” The girl’s stepmother did not disguise her indifference.

“It doesn’t matter to me; they’re not my family anyway.” The girl lit a Marlboro, never shifting her gaze; the Kudzu had given way to a stretch of corn and soybeans.

“You’d better enjoy that cigarette, it’s the last one you’ll have for a while.” The woman’s outdated, feathered bangs flopped up and down as the wind streamed into the van. On the radio, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers were singing about Mary Jane’s Last Dance.

“That’s appropriate.” The girl flicked ashes in the floorboard; they landed next to an empty Bud Light can. “Are we gonna stop and throw this shit away? Looks bad you dropping me off at rehab with beer cans falling out of the damn van.”

“Yeah, we are almost there, I’ll stop at a gas station and we’ll take care of it.”

When the van pulled into the parking lot, the girl opened the door. As she swung her legs to the side, a list of things fell out: three beer cans, two empty cigarette packs, a McDonald’s cup, and one CD. “Why was my Pink Floyd CD in the floor?” she picked up the disk. Scratches cut the silver, and a red sticky blob peppered in dirt, covered the *Wa* part of the *Wall*. Rita felt the anger swelling in her face.

“I guess the kids were playing with it, or your dad took it out.” Kim shut off the engine and put the keys in her purse. “Wouldn’t want you to steal the van, now would I?” The corners of her tight lips lifted slightly.

“Jesus Kim, I’m not going to steal the van.” As the girl bent over to pick up the trash, a few boys coming out of the gas station whistled at her. She quickly threw up her middle finger without making eye contact.

“Bitch!” The boys started snickering as they turned the corner.

They get to roam around like hounds, and I’m the one getting locked up, the girl swallowed her thoughts and climbed back into the van. A few minutes later they were back on the road, no trash remained except the crumpled girl in the passenger’s seat, who by this point wished she were dead. *Turning Point* was five miles away, and like it or not, she would have to call it home for two months.

The facility was no vacation spot for rich kids with problems. Rita was a kid, with problems, but her stepmother’s factory insurance would only cover a rehabilitation center that was under sixty dollars a day. It was three levels of concrete blocks with gapping windows, all barred and caged.

“Mrs. Davis, will you follow me? We need to get her admitted.” A cubby man with rose-colored cheeks and scarlet hair directed them into a small office on the bottom floor.

“It’s Ms. Flint, I didn’t marry her father.”

“Alright, Ms. Flint. This way.”

During the admissions process, Rita plummeted down into the blue tweed chair, wishing it would absorb her. After an hour, Kim had signed and initialed all the dotted lines. Gathering her dollar store purse, she looked at the man and said, “Good luck.” There were no hugs, no long emotional goodbyes. On her way out the two steel doors, they slammed with a click behind her. Not looking back, she did not care to see the fearful tears in Rita’s eyes.

“Follow me Rita.” Littering the walls of the green tinted corridor, pictures of sprawling lakes and mountain capes held affirmations like, *let go, let god* and *one day at a time*. “Your counselor will not be in till the morning, so I am giving you to Mrs. Deloris. She will get you settled.” After a moment of silence, he continued. “Turning Point has been a teen drug rehabilitation residence for four years. Before that it was small hospital for patients with, um, mental illness.”

Rita imagined what kind of feet had paced these halls before. Forgotten people, too much trouble to be cared for at home, so instead, strangers kept them. People like her, but worse. As they made their way up the last flight of stairs, the man took out his badge and waved it in front of a small box on the right side of the door. The red light turned green and the door unlocked.

“This is the resident hall.” It was a long hallway, carpeted in industrial blue. At the front end, a nurse’s desk stood unattended. Twelve rooms lined each side of the hallway, big wooden doors stood open at the mouth of each room, except one. Muffled screams leaked from underneath the crack of the door. “She’s at it again, stay put.”

Rita let reality settle in. The judge hadn’t given her much of a choice. After being busted a second time in six months for smoking pot, and ditching school, he instructed her to sign into a treatment facility or become a ward of the state. Things were at bad at home, an alcoholic father and a stepmother that fed her pills, but she knew that the state would shuffle her around like unwanted cargo. At least at home, she knew what was going on behind closed doors.

A few moments later, a woman emerged from the room; the screams had quieted into sobs. “You must be Rita. It’s not as bad as it seems, Lori has fits when it’s time to take her meds. I’m Deloris, the evening nurse; let’s get you taken care of.”

Rita went into a small room next to the nurse's desk. Deloris took vitals, tested for TB, and then instructed Rita to strip off her clothing and place her belt and shoelaces on the table.

"Why?" It was the first word she'd spoke in hours.

"So, you don't try to kill yourself."

Rita thought of the scars on her arm. She had only scratched herself with the broken mirror, tore enough skin to bleed. It made her feel better. The physical pain, the warm trickle of blood that moved like a snake down her skin. It was real; it was notable, unlike the pain in her head. As Rita unzipped her jeans, the feelings she had stuffed down inside herself rose to her throat and then silently streamed from the corners of her eyes.

"Squat down and cough." Deloris looked like a needle, tall and pointed.

Again, she asked, "Why?"

"To make sure you aren't carrying in any drugs."

Rita did what the nurse asked, then redressed. Deloris ushered her down the hall. Two doors past the nurse's station, on the right was her room.

"I will get your shower caddy ready. After dinner, you will shower with the others."

Rita noticed the two beds situated in the middle of the room; dual writing desks sat opposite of them. A large drafty window stretched along the wall and the damp, night air moved freely into the room around the broken cracks of the sill.

"You're lucky; you get to have the whole room to yourself, for the night. Another girl will be coming in tomorrow." The nurse turned to the door, "We will send your suitcase up after it's been inspected. In twenty minutes you will hear the call for dinner, when you do line up at your door."

Rita picked the bed by the window. She wanted to be close to the world where shoestrings and belts were just accessories.

**Contact author for complete manuscript.*