

Word Worth®

World Magazine of Ideas and the Arts™ — July & August 2015. Volume XV, 'Kumug'6

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Front Page

Welcome to July and August's **Word Worth® Magazine**. Our [Editorial](#) this month is Anna Seymour's *Favorites*; our [Column](#) is *Nightfall* by Michael J. Cahill. In the [Arts](#) section, we pleased to again have Poetry by Lisa Wiley.

If we cannot discuss rationally and respectfully the issues concerning our governance, this democracy will not last.

—M H Perry

Archives — Our archives are stored at www.wordworth.org

Word Worth's mission is to publish Editorials and Columns on subjects as diverse as xeriscaping, travel, archaeology, and many others, and to present fine poetry, stories, novels, and photography in the Arts section. The opinions presented are those of the individual writers, and not necessarily those of *Word Worth*. We do not shy away from controversial subjects, but we believe in dealing with them respectfully and rationally. In one of his relatively more recent concerts, Arlo Guthrie said that over the years he had made friends that he might not have expected to make initially. He concluded that there are two kinds of people: those who care and those who don't. He came to realize that you can find both of those kinds on every side of every issue. We concur with that sentiment, and hope to present ideas in the spirit of enlightened searching.

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Editorials

Favorites

Anna Seymour

"...he's my favorite. Every parent has a favorite. The ones who say they don't have favorites are lying to themselves." —father of fraternal twin boys

Every parent probably plays favorites at one time or another, but good parents try not to because it damages both children—or all of the children in the family. Psychologists who study family interaction say that the favorites change from time to time and a favorite during childhood may be different from the one most appreciated in adulthood. That doesn't, however, prevent scarring of the *unfavored*, who, in extreme cases may be abused or neglected as revealed in Christina Crawford's *Mommy Dearest*. "How could you do that to your own mother!" one of the favored accused about Christina's writing the book. Of course. She benefitted.

Those who are favored often participate in the "*unfavoritism*" (or worse) because they intuit that if it isn't their sibling at the bottom of the pecking order, it's likely to be them.

A friend of mine used to play with several other children who would be out in the yard doing nothing wrong, when the favored would run in and tattler on them. That resulted in the rest of the children taunting the tattler with a nasty little rhyme and shunning her until reaching adolescence when the tattler seemed to move beyond that kind of spitefulness. But because the tattler was rewarded in childhood, rather than rebuked, the behavior resurfaced later in life when the unprovoked hostility took the form of things like taking charge of guest lists and manipulating them for spite. Gradually, the tattler is starting to be shunned again.

There was a family of seven children in my neighborhood in which one child was blatantly *unfavored* among the lot. One time, she was standing by their storm door where the front door was opened, and a sibling came by and slammed the heavy front door on her causing her to fall into the storm door and shatter it. Instead of punishing the culprit, the parents punished the victim for breaking the storm door.

In another family of three children, the father believed that physical fighting among children was

normal. Therefore, the boy could beat up the year and a half younger girl with impunity. If the girl cried, she got into trouble for tattling—which was verboten. Yet when the girl was made to sit at the table until she finished a large pile of hated cooked carrots, she shoved them onto the floor behind the radiator. The boy saw them on the floor and immediately tattled. The girl was severely punished, and the tattler not at all.

The *unfavored* may well fare better than the favored if they are able to overcome the handicap of knowing that they will be dealt injustice in any conflict, and knowing that their own parents are perfectly willing to sacrifice their psychological well being and justice for parental convenience. Generally, however, the *unfavored* learn that in any interpersonal conflicts, no matter how just and wise their position, they are likely to lose. This is a huge handicap in the workplace and makes excelling in professions and careers much harder than it otherwise would be.

The advantage that favorites have is that they move into adulthood secure in their own success. They tend to have little self doubt and are confident in their belief that they deserve any good fortune that comes to them. This tends to lead, on the other hand, to a tendency to lack appreciation for favors done for them, and an inability to be grateful for a helping hand in their careers and in life at large. They fare better than *unfavorites*, but they are also harmed. In extreme cases in which the *unfavored* are mistreated, the favored are likely to have severe feelings of guilt or denial of things happening around them leading to an inability to see the world as it is.

The least of the disadvantages of refusing to fight against playing favorites is that the children will not want to have much to do with each other as adults: the favorites from guilt and fear that the tables will be turned; the *unfavorites* from being through with enduring hostility.

No human being is perfect, and since parenthood is very complicated, you have imperfection squared. In reasonably healthy families, children will often grumble that another is favorite or crow that “Momma loves me best”. When this is not extreme, as in the cases cited above, it’s simply the pull and tug of normal human relationships.

A student of mine once told me of an incident that still confounds me. She and her sister were arguing over which of them was their mother’s favorite. That’s not unusual, “You’re the favorite, no fair!” or “I should get to do it because I’m the favorite!” What was unusual is that each of them was sincerely and deeply convinced that she was her mother’s favorite. They decided to settle the fight by asking their mother—who, of course, said that she loved them both equally as much.

My student then realized that her mother had to say that, or her sister would feel bad. She was still firmly convinced that she was her mother’s favorite and her sister was as well.

The mother should have written a book about raising children.

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Columns

Nightfall

Michael J. Cahill

Darkness takes on many forms.

Because of its mysterious grip on our imagination, we often fear the dark. Not just as children but throughout our lives because darkness represents all manner of things that intend us harm. The less we can see of them, the more profound is our dread.

Doubt is a common culprit, ever lurking in the gloom. Pride too. Illness is forever fighting obscurity, while addictions are most at home in the shadows. Their powers reside in their ability to intimidate from a place of hiding.

To Shakespeare's lament that 'there is no darkness but ignorance', I cry "Comrade!" However, to the popular boast that "ignorance is bliss" I may concede it's true — but *only* for the ignorant. For any intelligent soul, an ignorant person is anything but bliss.

Philosophy and scripture are brimming with references to light and dark. It is our most commonly identifiable analogy for health and sickness, trust and betrayal, good and evil.

All mystical connotations aside, the core purpose of gloom is to cloak that which we most ought to recognize. As Thomas Merton wrote, "We stumble and fall constantly even when we are most enlightened. But when we are in true spiritual darkness, we do not even know that we have fallen."

However, darkness has also gotten a bad rap. Much of the time we are too quick to dismiss its benefits since it provides a powerful frame of reference. Without darkness would we not recognize the value of light?

In painting and photography the playing together of light and shadow are everything. In our greatest tragedies and comedies, the fractious interplay between white hats and black hats is the only reason we remain engaged. Their powers to fascinate and entertain are shining examples of what a delightfully wicked mess it is to be human.

When great evil is visited upon us, we readily equate it with the darkest abyss — the utter absence of compassion. And we struggle against this insidious void through art, understanding, and tolerance to fight our way back to a sunny place. No good or worthwhile thing is ever easy. But darkness will always be the standard against which we measure our best ideals and most admirable behaviors.

I love that the singer Reba McEntire advocates the singing of sad songs because, “It gets the hurt out in the open into the light, out of the darkness.”

I never deny the inclination to grieve because it is there that our finest healing must take place.

When I think of the coming of darkness and whatever time I may have left in this world I’m often reminded of Og Mandino’s wisdom: “I will love the light for it shows me the way, yet I will endure the darkness because it shows me the stars.”

When night falls, we should always choose to light a candle.

In my search for that one special someone to step out of the darkness and change my life, it may be worth considering that that person could be me.

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Arts

We are pleased to again present poetry by Lisa Wiley who is an English instructor at Erie Community College, North campus where she co-hosts the Just Buffalo Literary Cafe. She is also the author of *Chamber Music*, a chapbook of 21 villanelles (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and has just come out with a new collection, *My Daughter Wears Her Evil Eye to School* (The Writer's Den, 2015) Her work has appeared in *Earth's Daughters*, *The Healing Muse*, *Medical Journal of Australia*, *Rockhurst Review*, and *Yale Journal for Humanities in Medicine*.

Click on the name of the poem to get to that page:

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MY DAUGHTER WEARS HER EVIL EYE TO SCHOOL

It stares at me —
white dots on smooth cobalt,
a foreign ladybug.

She pulls back her silky hair
while I clasp the sterling silver chain,
dangling pearl-size *mati*.

We're not Greek, Turkish or Lebanese —
yet Oma thought to bring my daughter
this charm from Tarpon Springs,

scenic shore of her sponge-dive trip.
I wonder why she removes it
from her white-shell box this morning.

Does it match her ruffled skirt
or does she crave extra protection?
Last time she sat next to Jordan,

she wrote *Please change my seat*
at the bottom of her spelling test.
Her voice gathers like a restless wind,

stronger than mine, making more
of her own choices every day.
Unassuming accessory or fierce shield,

my surrogate eye deflects
whatever weighs her down,
catches the light under her chin.

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IN THE JUNK DRAWER

— after Charles Simic

A little red spool
full of thread
for a ladybug costume
forgotten long ago.

I unwind the plastic cylinder
to feel those autumn days
coil around my finger.
The little girl's spinning feet.

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WHY MY MOTHER WON'T ATTEND MY POETRY READING

She declines every invitation,
thinks it's too quiet, like church.
Someone might hear her cough or swallow.
What if her cell phone pierced the air?

She wonders why I wasn't clever enough
to equate her love to a lanyard.
She sent me to a fine college after all.
Didn't I learn how to write beautiful metaphors?

She's afraid someone might allude to sex,
body parts better left to the imagination.
She doesn't want to be privy to what occurs
between other people's wrinkled sheets.

She's been told someone in a beret might mention
"fireflies," ask for her phone number,
someone who wouldn't mind
if she brought my father along for a hot dog.

She'd rather read my love songs on the page,
listen to my pig-tailed daughter recite her stories,
understanding I could never repay all her love.
Besides, she knows Billy Collins won't show.

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MAKING SPLIT PEA SOUP

— for my grandmother

I lift the lid; you return suddenly, urgently
as steam rises from the bubbling mass.
It's my turn to hear the clicking of peas,
organic split peas, crowding the ham,
simmering for hours.

A clearly acquired taste — you either savor
or dismiss — nothing in between.
Yours so thick and hearty. I hear
your soft whisper escape the steam,
You can add mehr Wasser, Kinder,
presenting the verdant, bountiful bowlfuls.

Offering no other message, you appear
so I could clasp your gentle presence
before I hit exactly the right consistency,
a ball knocked out of the park.
I drop my wooden spoon, rounding
the kitchen island chairs,

bases in my American game.
Cheering to whomever's home to listen.
But you were The Sultan of Soup.
A real cook, you always knew
just what to do in front of the stove.
An unassuming grin would suffice.

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DIM SUN AT THE YANK SING

Carts clatter fast and furious
to our table of twelve —
crab claws, dumplings,
green beans with sauce,
peanut chicken on skewers —
all in rapid fire, no menu in sight.
The linen cloth covered with delectables.
I keep waiting for the *dim sun* —

which flying dish is it?
This ancient method of sampling
delicacies *to touch your heart*
they tell me, is the *dim sun*.
Magnolia tea softens
generations and conversations.
*Do arguments hurt more in your
native tongue or second language?*

What will your son study?
Chinese doesn't penetrate his heart.
Twelve yellow suns of egg tarts
announce dessert too soon.
We're sojourners content and warm.
The boys swirl chopsticks into swords,
breaking this spell of easy chatter.
Reluctant, we nod. *It's time to go.*

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FEATHER EXTENSION

My daughter begs
a feather
extension.
She combs it
through her hair
so soft and fine,
ensuring it's
fastened with
some tension.

Bird-like, beyond
my
comprehension,
she smiles in the
mirror and thinks
divine.
My daughter
wears a feather
extension.

As long as she
doesn't earn
detention,
she can be in
charge of her own
design,
ensuring it's
fastened with
some tension.

She likes to show
off this new
dimension,
her growing wing
span will soon
eclipse mine.
My daughter
wears a fuchsia
extension —

looks kinda kooky,
but I won't
mention.
(The berry doesn't
fall far from the

vine.)
She makes sure
it's fastened with
some tension.

The color alone
will grab
attention:
a true peacock
knows better than
to whine.
My daughter is my
feathery
extension;
we're fastened
with a gentle tug
of tension.

— From *Chamber Music* (Finishing Line Press, 2013)

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