

Volume 57, Issue 1 (April 2026)

Arkansas Review Volume 57, #1

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(formerly Kansas Quarterly)

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Contributors

Eudora A. is a lifelong Arkansan with a BA in Creative Writing and an MFA on the way at the University of Central Arkansas. She is a Poetry Reader and the Script Editor for Arkana. She has previously been published in the *Vortex Magazine of Literature and Fine Art*. She loves alliteration and writing on queer experiences, growing up in the south, the majestically mundane, and the wildly weird.

Norma Barksdale is a writer from Oxford, Mississippi. She has her MFA from the University of Montana, and her fiction has been published in the *Ekphrastic Review*.

Maudie Bryant is a poet and multidisciplinary artist whose work explores memory, identity, and the disquiet beneath the surface of human experience. A graduate of the University of Louisiana

Monroe (MA English), her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Statement Magazine*, *Trampoline*, and *3Elements Review*. She lives in Shreveport, Louisiana, where she balances full-time work, motherhood, and her creative practice.

Russell K. Cardwell is a retired newspaper editor and reporter who worked at five daily newspapers over a thirty-five-year career. He wrote news stories, features, music and book reviews, and covered the Atlanta Braves and Falcons for three years. He was 2009 Employee of the Year at the *Tampa Tribune* for writing the first feature on a local atheist group in the 135-year history of the newspaper. His short story, "Buddy's Diary," was published in *Killer Nashville* in 2024.

Vincent A. Cellucci wrote *Absence Like Sun* (Lavender Ink, 2019) and *An Easy Place / To Die* (CityLit P, 2011). He edited *Fuck Poems an exceptional anthology* (Lavender Ink, 2012). He also has three collaborative titles: *come back river* (Finishing Line P, 2014); *a ship on the line* (Unlikely Books, 2014), which was a finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award; and the most recently released *getting away with everything* (Unlikely Books, 2021). Vincent performed *Diamonds in Dystopia*, an interactive poetry web app at SXSW in 2017, and the poem was anthologized in *Best American Experimental Writing* 2018. He works at the TU Delft Library and combines technology and poetry at Leiden University.

Stasha Cole is a PhD candidate in the department of English and Creative Writing at The University of Tulsa. She is Editorial Assistant for *Nimrod International Journal* and a fellow at The Oklahoma Center for the Humanities. Her poetry and photography can be found in venues such as *Thimble*, *Indefinite Space*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Poetry South*, and elsewhere.

Floyd Collins holds an MFA in Creative Writing and a PhD in Twentieth-Century Literature from the University of Arkansas. He has authored several volumes of poetry, including *My Back Pages: The Teresa Poems* (2022). *The Living Artifact*, a selection of his essay-reviews, appeared in 2021. Most recently *Waking Past Midnight: Selected Poems*, a career retrospective, was published by Stephen F. Austin State UP in 2023.

Margo Davis is elated her new collection, *Uncoupling*, is now in print. Prior poems have appeared in *Notes of Light and Dark*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Synkroniciti*, and *equinox*. In spring 2026 Margo was awarded a fellowship in Washington, just south of Olympic National Park.

LC Gutierrez is an erstwhile academic and product of many places in the deep, southern USA and the Caribbean. He lives, writes, teaches, and plays trombone in Madrid, Spain. His work is published or forthcoming in many fine journals, including *Notre Dame Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Tampa Review*, *Hobart*, *Delta Poetry Review*, and *Trampset*. He reads poetry for *West Trade Review*.

Matthew Hand is a writer from Cumming, Georgia, whose fiction explores the quiet negotiations of belonging. His work has been nominated for the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers and is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Additionally, he was longlisted for the 2025 CRAFT Short Fiction Prize. His work appears in *Bull: Men's Fiction*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, and *Susurrus*, among others.

Gregory Hansen is Professor of Folklore and English at Arkansas State University where he also teaches in the Heritage Studies PhD Program. He recently co-edited *Sustaining Support for Intangible Cultural Heritage* and he has published on roots music, public folklore, and a range of topics. He recently was inducted as a Fellow of the American Folklore Society.

William Hawkins has been published in *Granta*, *ZZYZYVA* and *TriQuarterly*, among others. Originally from Louisiana, he currently lives in Los Angeles where he is at work on a novel. Read more of his writing at oncetherewas.substack.com.

Guy Lancaster currently is the editor of the online *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, a project of the Central Arkansas Library System (CALs) and the author of a number of books on race and violence, including *American Atrocity: The Types of Violence in Lynching* (U of Arkansas P, 2021).

Susan Isaak Lolis was shortlisted in the William Wisdom-William Faulkner novel contest. Her story "Vivien's Sister" won the James Knudsen Prize for Fiction and is published in *Bayou Magazine*. Her work has appeared in *New Madrid*, *Yemassee*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in fiction from the University of Miami, where she was a James Michener fellow. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Justin McKee was previously the co-founder/editor-in-chief/general dogsbody for the offbeat New Orleans literary journal *The Raffish*, as well as a busker in Naples, a deckhand in Punta Del Diablo, a bellhop in San Francisco, and a vegetablemonger in Queens. For additional information, please visit justinmckee.com.

Dixie L. Partridge grew up in the rural Mountain West; lived most of her adult life along the Columbia River. Her poetry and essays have won national and regional awards and have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry Magazine*, *The Georgia Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and most recently *Kaliedescope*, *Dialogue*, *MacGuffin*, and *Healing Muse*. Her two published books are *Deer in the Haystacks* (Ahsakta Press, Poetry of the West series) and *Watermark*, recipient of the national Eileen Barnes award. Personal impact of landscape is often at the root of her writing.

Samuel Prestridge, a post-aspirational man, lives and works in Athens, Georgia. His book *A Dog's Job of Work* is available from Sligo Creek Publishing. He is currently an Associate Professor of English at the University of North Georgia. His children concede that he is, generally, an adequate father.

Kodi Roberts is Associate Professor of History at Louisiana State University. He was awarded a BA in History and Religious Studies from LSU, an MA in History from University of New Orleans, and a PhD in History from University of Chicago. His work focuses on intersections of race and religion in African American History. His current research project is on education in prison.

Drew Rollins is a poet and translator based currently in Sofia, Bulgaria. His work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Hayden's Ferry*, *Witness*, *Body Literature*, and *Rattle*. A recent graduate of Boston University's MFA Program in Poetry, he is cobbling together his first collection, which has to do with faith, human nature, and also regular nature.

Kalina Smith is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet and high school English teacher. Her work appears in *ONE ART*, *Tulsa Review*, *FLARE: The Flagler Review*, and others. She is the author of *Scorpio Season* (Kelsay Books). Instagram: @kalinasmithpoetry.

Caris Ușoară is a queer, crip artist, scholar, and emerging poet who rests on and creates from ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Dakota homelands (Dakota county, Minnesota) and grew up on ancestral and traditional Osage and Quapaw lands (Sharp and Fulton counties, Arkansas). You can read Caris's poetry in *BarBar Lit Mag*, *Louisville Review*, *the St. Paul Almanac*, and *Midway Journal*.

Allison Wiltshire is Assistant Professor of English at Mississippi Valley State University. She studies African diaspora literature, her recent work analyzing African and African American representations of twins and the Mississippi Delta. Most recently, her work has appeared in *Valley Voices: A Literary Review* and *North of Oxford*.

Arkansas Review 57.1 (April 2026)

How to Bleed Quietly in Public

By Matthew Hand

They knew the rules in their bones. Not memorized—absorbed, like mildew in baseboards. There was no guidebook, no whispered cheat code passed down by older boys. Just soft rules: inherited, rehearsed, quietly enforced. The sidewalks of Terrytown did the teaching. Still slick from the storm the night before, humming with secrets passed through telephone wires and clouds of mosquitoes, they carried knowledge that children hadn't found language for yet.

The town itself spoke in mildew and jasmine. Sprinklers hissed across crabgrass lawns. Televisions murmured behind cheap blinds. Somewhere, a grill exhaled sweet onion smoke into the thick air. Nothing was truly silent—it was just listening.

Terrytown didn't need to say much. Its silences were fluent. And if you were the kind of boy who walked a little differently, who talked out of rhythm, who wore Toughskins from Sears and knew every lyric to *Like a Virgin*—you learned to hear what that silence was saying.

This is a guide for boys like that. Boys like him. Boys who hadn't yet learned that walking home could mean something else entirely. Who didn't know that, in certain neighborhoods, getting hit wasn't a punishment. It was an introduction. If you're reading this, you're late. But don't worry—it's been waiting.

It started with a worksheet. Something forgettable—long division or the Bill of Rights. Matthew didn't remember. He rarely finished assignments, too caught up in daydreams, drifting between book plots and FM radio lyrics, or wondering if Alice would let him carry her books again.

So: detention. Thirty minutes of fluorescent quiet, interrupted only by the tapping of someone else's pencil and the low-frequency hum of his own anxiety.

By the time they let him out, the hallways were empty. No Alice. No Brooke, with his allergic sneezes that sounded like curse words. No Gary Wayne. No Patrick. The herd had moved on. And with it, his insulation.

What remained were two boys he didn't know well, but knew well enough to tread lightly around: Alton and Keith.

Alton stood taller than most of them, with the kind of ease that suggested early confidence. A few dark hairs were beginning to shadow his upper lip. He laughed often and without concern—at jokes or at people, it didn't matter. His jeans weren't from Sears. They looked chosen.

Keith—called ET—was named not for his strangeness, but for his neck. He never corrected anyone. Names stuck easily in Terrytown.

Matthew walked with them because they were walking his way. That was enough to make the decision. They didn't tell him to leave, so he didn't. Sometimes, especially for boys, proximity is permission.

The afternoon sun pressed down with a bloated kind of heat, the air thick with jasmine and sunbaked plastic. A red wasp circled above a rusted mailbox. Matthew focused on keeping his flinch tucked inside.

Conversation was light. He said something dumb—probably a TV reference nobody liked. Alton laughed. And for a brief, hopeful moment, Matthew believed he was safe. That being funny could be enough.

Matthew had made Alton laugh before. Not real laughter—not the kind that bent a person double—but enough. Enough that Alton didn't call him names, didn't shove him into lockers, didn't mimic the way he walked or spread rumors that he liked boys, just because he knew the plot twists on **Days of Our Lives**. That was worth something. Laughter passed for currency back then, and Matthew thought he was paid up.

So when the older boys appeared—shirtless, their sneakers untied in that careless, threatening way—he didn't flinch. Not right away. One had a mouth made for sneering. Another wore a towel around his neck like a prizefighter who'd never fought. The third wore a smirk that said he never got in trouble because he made cruelty look like charisma.

They looked at Alton. Then at Matthew.

"Why you walking with that?"

No one asked who "that" was.

Alton didn't hesitate. "He's not my friend."

He dropped his backpack.

Matthew understood. Laughter wasn't safety. It was bait.

There was no insult, no warning. Just the thud of a book bag on pavement, final and impersonal. Then a fist to the cheek. Left side. Open hand? Fist? It didn't matter.

The next hit landed on his collarbone. Then his side—maybe a rib. The geography of it blurred, but the message didn't. He was being redefined. Rebranded. As something to distance from.

There was no anger in Alton's face—only the practiced, dispassionate clarity of a kid making a statement. Not about Matthew, exactly, but about himself. About the danger of proximity.

Keith—ET—stood nearby, arms crossed, watching like a boy might watch a moth in a bug zapper: fascinated, detached, slightly amused. The others—whatever their names were—circled around. Some barked. Some laughed. Some just stared. It wasn't a street corner anymore. It was a stage. And the show was called: *Don't Be a Fag*.

Matthew didn't swing back. Didn't run. His body folded in on itself like parchment under flame—shrinking, trying not to be read. It wasn't strategy. Wasn't protest. Just instinct. A cellular-level prayer: If I don't give them more, maybe they won't take more.

He already knew who'd won. Spoiler: not him.

Across the street stood his mother. Hand raised to her brow, shielding her eyes from the sun like a woman scanning the horizon for land after a long, strange voyage. Except the ocean was a front lawn, and the wreckage was her son.

She didn't run. Didn't shout. Didn't move. Just stood there—still, confused. Like her eyes were buffering.

Then came Aunt Jane. Closer. Louder. Cajun-blooded. Voice blown out like a busted PA, one volume: confrontation.

"Hit back, Matthew!"

"BEAT HIS ASS, MATTHEW!"

She hovered like a drunk football coach yelling at a backup quarterback. Matthew was the quarterback. Also the ball. Also the field.

But it wasn't the punches he remembered. It was the audience. The sound of his name—not in comfort, but in command. Jane's face. The sweat on her lip. Her stance—not worried about the boy, but about the optics of defeat.

And then came the thought. Not before the first punch. Not after the last. During. Quietly. Shamefully. Like it knew it didn't belong.

If I hit him back, he might not be my friend anymore.

Absurd. Pathetic. Unbearably human.

He wasn't calculating survival. He was negotiating the price of belonging. And deciding, somehow, that silence was cheaper.

Because if he fought back, the script would change. He wouldn't be the soft boy. He'd be a co-star in the violence.

And maybe—just maybe—Alton would hate him for that.

So he folded. Took the hits. Curled like a letter no one wanted to read.

No one talked about it. Not his mom, who stood on the curb like a confused bystander at a parade she didn't remember joining. Not Aunt Jane, who treated the whole thing like a rerun—uninspired, unimpressed. Not Alton, who probably doesn't remember it at all. Why would he? The performance ended. The audience clapped. Curtain down. On to the next episode.

And Matthew? He went home. Did his homework, probably. Ate dinner. Watched TV. Pretended his face didn't ache when it met the pillow. No lectures. No life lessons. No "What happened out there?" Just the usual Tuesday silence—thick as mayonnaise, settling over the house like bad wallpaper.

A few weeks later, his mom pulled him from school. Said it wasn't "challenging" him. That he wasn't being "nurtured." Which might've been true. But also: maybe you don't leave a kid in a place where the math doesn't add up anymore—where the price of friendship is bruises, and the reward is silence.

So he stayed home. And Terrytown rolled on. Unconcerned. Another ritual complete.

Because here, boys got hit. And if they didn't hit back, they learned to make themselves smaller. That was the tax for being soft in a place that rewarded hardness.

It wasn't a scandal. It wasn't a story. It was a fact. Another boy. Another bruise. Another thing you're not supposed to talk about.

So Matthew didn't. He absorbed it. Like Terrytown taught him.

Here's what a boy like him would want you to know—in case it happens to you:

When the herd leaves you behind, don't run. Running makes it worse. Walk steady. Eyes down. Don't speak first.

If they ask why you're walking with someone like you—don't answer. They've already decided.

If you get hit, take quiet inventory. Face? Gut? Ego? Don't cry. Don't explain. Don't expect apology. This isn't that kind of place.

You'll go home and eat like nothing happened. You'll laugh when someone calls it "just boys being boys." And if you bleed quietly enough—if you fold small enough—they might let you stay.

Because when no one teaches you how to be loved, you start to think being tolerated is enough. And if tolerance requires pain, you'll learn to offer it freely.

You'll become useful. The one who absorbs it. Who makes others feel better by being the one who gets hit.

You won't call it trauma. You'll call it middle school.

And years later, when you try to explain, someone will shrug and say, "That's just how it was back then."

And Matthew will nod.

Because it was.

And also—because even now, he's still afraid that if he disagrees . . . they might not be his friend anymore.

How to Bleed Quietly in Public (test)

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