

# Beautiful Truth

A Gathering of Voices  
from Charlotte, NC

Part of Charlotte Lit's 2019 Beautiful Truth Initiative

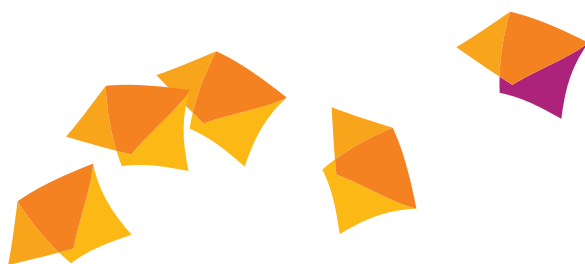
Foreword by Kathie Collins  
Edited by Tamela Rich

CHARLOTTE  
LIT



## *Beautiful Truth: A Gathering of Voices from Charlotte, NC*

Produced by Charlotte Center for Literary Arts, Inc., with funding from the North Carolina Arts Council, The Plain Language Group, and Brooke & Justin Lehmann; and with additional support from Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library and The Light Factory.



# CHARLOTTE **LIT**



North  
Carolina  
Arts  
Council  
*Fifty years  
of leadership*

Brooke & Justin Lehmann



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# Introduction: These Beautiful Truths

## Kathie Collins

Charlotte Lit Co-Founder & Co-Director  
Creator of “Beautiful Truth” Initiative

**I**n January 2019, nearly two hundred community members joined Charlotte Lit at eleven different branches of the Charlotte Mecklenburg library for a program geared toward sharing our personal stories—stories about identity, community, and, particularly, stories about living in Charlotte, the community we all call home.

We called this program “Beautiful Truth” and took it beyond our doors as a way of bringing new voices into a conversation that’s been going on at Charlotte Lit since we opened in 2016: What role can literature and writing play in healing the cultural divides within the greater Charlotte community?

The “Beautiful Truth” initiative is an intentional response to some of the not so beautiful truths in our community. We wanted to acknowledge that despite real desire for and

a great deal of work towards healing our community, disparity and division remain—divisions like:

- A school system that was once a national model for successful school integration that has gradually re-segregated, creating a huge disparity in educational outcomes among our city’s children;
- The civil unrest after the killing of Keith Lamont Scott that awakened us to the fact that many Charlotteans continue to live under the oppression of racist attitudes, prejudices that others of us thought we’d left behind years ago; protests that showed us how many of our community members live in fear;
- A 2017 ranking which placed Charlotte 50th among the fifty largest U.S. cities for upward mobility of its poorest citizens.

We decided to create a forum, a space in which people from all over



the area could come together to write and share their personal experiences of life in community.

You might ask: Why write? Why not just get together to talk, just tell each other our stories?

This is what I know about writing. Writing enables us to think more clearly, to reflect more deeply, to discern the difference between superficial facts or opinions and our own beautiful truths. Sometimes I don't know what I think until I write it out. Or I find that what I thought I knew was just a little something on the way to something else, something more real. Writing enables me to move through the sludge so I can discover what matters most.

I also know that when I read my writing aloud, others seem to hear me better. And, when others read aloud their own beautiful truths, I'm a better listener.

The stories we listened to in the library workshops confirmed the hunch that community members were

aching to share their experiences and their voices with others. We learned so much from each other, we decided to keep the conversation going by publishing the writings of library workshop participants who took the time to polish and edit their stories and poems during Charlotte Lit's revision workshops.

Many thanks to each of you who share your work in the following pages. Your voices matter. To write is to bare your heart. It takes enormous courage to submit work for publication and we're grateful for your willingness to share it with the Charlotte Lit community.

We hope you'll read and find some point of connection with each of the writings in this journal. We also hope you'll find a way to keep this conversation going among the members of your own families, friend groups, clubs, and faith communities. Together, we'll transform our community—one beautiful truth at a time.



**Kathie Collins, Ph.D.**, co-founder of Charlotte Center for Literary Arts, earned her graduate degree in Mythological Studies with an emphasis in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, where she is currently an adjunct professor. A poet and lifelong student of Jungian psychology, Kathie thrives in the in-between space from which dreams and creativity emerge. She's happiest when she can share that space with others and one of her great passions is bringing words and people together for transformative conversations. Kathie's poetry has appeared

in *Immanence*, *Kakalak*, *BibleWorkbench*, and *Between*. Her chapbook *Jubilee* was published by Main Street Rag in 2011. To reach her: [kathie@charlottelit.org](mailto:kathie@charlottelit.org).



# THANK YOU!

This program couldn't have taken off without the expertise of Charlotte Lit member and teacher Patrice Gopo and Charlotte Lit co-founder Paul Reali. Patrice created the “Beautiful Truth” curriculum and selected the accompanying readings. And, Paul, using his stellar tech skills, turned those word documents into beautiful kits. Thank you, Patrice and Paul.

Charlotte Lit's *Beautiful Truth* initiative was made possible in part with generous grants from North Carolina Arts Council, The Plain Language Group, and Brooke and Justin Lehmann. We were pleased to be able to partner with Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and The Light Factory, who provided their just-right venues for some of the *Beautiful Truth* events.

Thanks also to the following volunteers: Tamela Rich for taking this publishing idea and turning it into an actual publication; Pam Turner, Chantez Neymoss, Sally Deason, and all the other fabulous library personnel who welcomed us into their branches; Cathia Friou for coordinating our facilitators; and our cadre of Charlotte Lit “Beautiful Truth” facilitators—Ed Williams, Surabhi Kaushik, Lisa Zerkle, Janice Davin, Cheri Lovell, Kathryn Schwiller, Ana Thorne, Cathy Pickens, Rick Pryll, Helen Kimbrough, Kathy Izard, Bruce McIntyre, Anshu Gupta, Barbara Conrad, Karon Luddy, Maureen Mischinski, Nancy Dorrier, David Poston, Malia Kline, Patrice Gopo, Kristin Sherman, Jennifer Parker, Paul Reali, and Tamela Rich. — KC



Kathie Collins (with Ed Williams, not pictured) leads the first Beautiful Truth writing workshop, at Scaleybark Branch Library.



# A Home Away From Home

Surabhi Kaushik

Charlotte has been my home for three years now. It's the city that I have lived in for the longest time, after I moved from my home country, India.

I still remember my first day here, the Uber driver driving me from the train station to my apartment complex. In the short drive, she narrated the story of why Charlotte is called the Queen City and the reason for downtown being called Uptown. I was fascinated by the ease with which she held the conversation and the sparkle in her eyes, indicative of her fresh and light-hearted spirit.

I thought there was no better way to be welcomed into the Queen city.

In my initial days of settling into Charlotte, I struggled to understand the Southern accent and was faced with the daunting task of making friends out of unfamiliar faces. But on the upside, I fell in love with the gorgeous weather and friendly people. I found my way easily walking around Uptown, allowing myself to be swept in the sea of office



goers dressed in business suits, wearing serious faces and buried into their phones. Sometimes my smile was returned by far more beautiful ones and at other times, people walked past me as though I did not exist. Romare Bearden Park was my favorite spot for pictures, short walks admiring the lush greenery or sitting by the waterfall.

Being a writer, it was no surprise that, during the first week in Charlotte, I walked into the library. I happily drowned myself in the world of books, writing groups and workshops, within and outside of the library. I discovered things that helped me to write better, met amazing writers who challenged and supported my



writing in ways that I had never imagined. Within the first few months of being here, I became part of a rich, diverse, warm and welcoming writing community.

Now, three years later, I have learned a lot about this city but still love the same things about it. Skyscrapers glowing in fancy colors, bringing the night alive; cakes and pastries from Amelie's which never disappoints; taking pictures with the sparkly bird at the Bechtler; admiring the animals carved from stone at First Ward Park; watching trees create rainbows from the blooms in Spring; meeting

nice people with hearts of gold, to whom kindness comes naturally; and the writing community that has given me a sense of belonging are some of many reasons to love Charlotte.

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*Surabhi Kaushik enjoys writing fiction, personal essays and poetry. When she is not writing, she conducts writing workshops in public libraries across Charlotte. You can find her published work at [surabhiwritersmind.blogspot.com](http://surabhiwritersmind.blogspot.com).*

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# Reunion

## Donna Morris

This summer the Garinger Wildcats class of '69 will celebrate our 50th reunion. Out of a class of close to 600 graduates, approximately 80 have passed.

In the Sixties the city and county schools were not consolidated as they are now. The county line ran between our home and Garinger, where my father coached football, and my mother taught typing and shorthand. We could even see the school through the pine trees from our back yard.

The library, situated in the center of campus, was featured in an article of

*National Geographic* because it resembled a carousel. In high school I spent countless hours in that library researching projects and flirting with potential boyfriends. Years later, it was torn down to make room for a larger, nondescript classroom building.

My husband Jimmy also attended Garinger, played sports, and was elected senior class president. We never dated in high school. However, we did go parking in residential construction sites with our respective dates, Jimmy in the front seat and me in the back. Today you would nev-



er dare do that for fear of being mugged or worse.

I admired the larger, more opulent homes in Myers Park and eventually moved there as an adult. But East Charlotte was my home for the majority of my formative years—and it was enough. It was also safe—safe enough for me to walk home from school or to the local grocery for a loaf of bread or bag of sugar for my mother. Most Garinger students came from middle class homes, with the exception of a pocket of affluent families living around Charlotte Country Club, and the school maintained a reputation of academic excellence. That too would change.

Part of the reunion celebration includes a tour of the campus conducted by the ROTC. It includes the school's Vietnam Memorial. Strangely enough, while diversity was in short supply in Charlotte during the '60s, the area is now sprinkled with Asian markets and Vietnamese restaurants.

Recently I and two other members of the reunion committee met with the assistant principal to discuss details concerning the tour. Before the meeting we observed a young man, accompanied by two police officers, being led out of the building in handcuffs. But there was good news, too. The assistant principal shared with us that a Garinger social studies teacher had been named CMS Teacher of the Year. Test scores had recently been higher than anticipated. And, for the first



time in years the school would have a golf team this spring. Before leaving I ran into Allison, a former colleague and excellent teacher, who had left another more prestigious high school to come to Garinger. This spoke of promise.

In August during the tour not only will we realize the changes to the school and the neighborhood but also the changes of the alums who gather for the occasion. It's not just buildings that change.

---

*Donna Morris has lived in Charlotte since childhood in several neighborhoods and is currently in Lansdowne. Her essay is inspired by her upcoming fiftieth year high school reunion. She is pictured here with her daughter Katie and grandson Everett.*



# Growing Tender

Lisa Zerkle

**W**e moved to Charlotte just over 20 years ago, and soon after bought a tidy brick ranch in Cotswold—a neighborhood built in the early 1950s amid one of Charlotte’s first suburban booms. Now that our kids are grown, we’ve downsized. Friends ask if I miss the house and I don’t. It’s just a building, one now freshly painted in in-offensive neutrals. The land, however, is a different story.

It’s hard for me to believe that I walked that half acre for decades. Following children or dogs around the house, rolling trash to the curb, stooping for sticks after a storm. The earth turned in its seasons and I looped around too, marking time by clues. The forsythia budding into spring’s earliest bloom. The spiraling showers of willow oak leaves in fall.

That old oak in the front yard stood over our home like a sentry. During storms, I’d check how fiercely its branches swayed to determine the severity of weather. Our kids swung from its rope swing, and after they outgrew it, the dog used the rope as a pull toy. Once, digging a hole to plant a flowering *Itea* underneath, I



unearthed a horseshoe. A historian friend told me our property had been part of a dairy farm before it was subdivided into half-acre parcels for 3/2 ranches.

I planted other things. In the front yard, I tucked starflower bulbs in the lawn hoping for their snowy show in spring. I ripped English ivy from the trees and pulled up autumn olive seeded at the fence



line by passing birds. I added goldenrod, milkweed, and mountain mint to welcome pollinators. Brushing aside the leaf litter in early spring, I learned to spot their green unfurlings.

I'll miss heavy summer mornings when I'd search for the smallest caterpillars on undersides of milkweed leaves—Monarch butterflies to be. And summer afternoons when the blooming mountain mint shimmered with more sizes and shapes of bees that I'd ever seen or could count.

At the side yard under one of the winterberries, Goldeen the goldfish and Hammie Tilling the hamster lie in eternal rest in their shoe box coffins filled with tender tokens (a Pokemon card, an unchewed toilet paper tube) and memorial tidings drawn in crayon on construction paper.

At the bird feeder, we'd watch for one homely male Cardinal who, despite having faded feathers and lacking a top knot, returned year after year with his mate. We trained a 'Tangerine Beauty' crossvine to twine across the top of the small garage because it's a favorite of migrating hummingbirds. But it also came to be a choice nesting spot for generations

of house finches. They lined their nests with tidbits gathered from our yard—pine needles, bits of plastic, shedded tufts of our dogs' soft undercoats. The squirrels and chipmunks must not miss the daily chase back into burrows or up into the trees that left our dogs happy and panting each morning as they mostly failed to catch their quarries.

Our yard wasn't anything special, but I learned and, in some ways, shaped its personality. What I didn't realize was how it shaped mine.

---

*Lisa Zerkle's poems have appeared in The Collagist, Comstock Review, Southern Poetry Anthology, Broad River Review, Tar River Poetry, Nimrod, Sixfold, poem-memoirstory, Crucible, and Main Street Rag, among others. Author of the chapbook, Heart of the Light, she has served as President of the North Carolina Poetry Society, community columnist for The Charlotte Observer, and editor of Kaka-lak. She is the curator of Charlotte Lit's 4X4CLT, a public art and poetry series.*

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# In Charlotte

## Pam Turner

My brother the poet sleeps in a jail cell, caught  
just down the road from my sister's tent  
solidly anchored to a parking lot fence  
trying to sleep through the ruckus.

Through the ruckus, a street preacher calls "Jesus Saves"  
while righteous folks feed the unwashed, uncounted  
who wander, sleep, collect, observe, are observed  
living in public, known and yet not known at all.

What kind of world have we got when we cannot  
feed the hungry out of the excess we waste?  
How can my conscience allow men to sort rancid garbage  
and sleep in crowded shelters because we won't  
pay them enough to live in a room with some comfort?

My sister furnishes her tent with blankets from strangers  
left behind objects, packets of tuna. She cares for people  
who ignore her in their rush, singing, praying for someone  
to open their eyes to the truth right in front of them.

Right in front of them my uncle studies Hebrew scripture,  
shares his love of learning with any who will listen  
booming bass tones preach peace while living nowhere.  
shalom aleichem, peace be unto you.





Peace be unto you when you walk these city streets.  
We are not who we appear to be, prisoners of our own  
perception or lack of perception of the wonder around us  
caught in the web we have spun.

---

*Pam Turner has lived in Steele Creek, SW Charlotte for over 20 years. Her poem reflects the family of people she meets working in uptown Charlotte at Main Library.*

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# Land of Many Colors

**Patricia A. Blair**

I am from a land of scents and solar song.  
Satiating sights for hearts bellowing sun.  
Nina and Pinta expunged to bodies boarding Carnival.  
My chromosome stems are fete and bacchanal.

I am from a pot of pours unseen.  
Dowry paid to Spaniards and queens.  
Dasheen and plantain bubbling in blood.  
Corn meal dumplings deceiving tongues.

I am from the land of mango, tamarind, and cane.  
Ornamented windows with iron brochette.  
Black steel wardens guard buildings sprung.  
Replace the meter of souls unsung.

Born of those dismayed by my difference.  
Robert Marley brought voice for healing conscience.  
The world is round, one man set out to discover.  
A circumference shamefully denouncing, not loving another.



---

*Patricia A. Blair currently resides on Lake Norman, North Carolina. This work is inspired by visions of the past and present.*



# Trees

Janna Miller

Weekends were for alligators, black tannic water, and snakes that swam head up, glistening body behind. Avoiding small cypress knees that could twist an ankle, we carried the canoe across land that was not ours to makeshift launches in the river.

As we walked, just off solid ground, we passed the wetter places where old washing machines, tires, and ovens lay half submerged. They seemed to watch us as we passed, these abandoned pieces that crouched like gargoyles. I tried not to look at them in case they accused us for their disuse.

Other discoveries were exciting, like an old rusted car almost completely hidden, the trees growing up through faded red upholstery and springs. The tree house too, that was built at partial angles with sagging plywood. You could tell it had once been painted red and blue. The wooden steps that had been nailed into the tree were gone, like Rapunzel's tower. It was inaccessible and beautiful.

An only child then, I liked to imagine the kids that played there before me,



swinging from the now rotted rope and bouncing on the old car's seats. They rowed shallow boats on the river and looked out for cottonmouths and copperheads. They wore shoes so the mussels wouldn't cut them.

They were part of a different wild Florida, before they grew up and were replaced by the gargoyles and their memory in my imagination. Before the land was sold and bought and two-story houses with pools and screened in porches were built. The cypress knees somehow turned into a green Bermuda grass lawn.

Before the houses came and we had to drive the canoe to the county dock instead of walk it across the street, my dad dug up an oak sapling from there. It



was the child of a massive, centuries-old one dripping with Spanish Moss, that did not survive the waterfront bulldozer.

We planted it in our backyard where it grew with large spreading branches, blessing us with shadows so that we would not burn our feet.

Now 400 miles and 30 years away, but still connected by a tree, a different oak grows in the yard and peeks over the top of my roofline. It shadows the front porch and my own children's feet as they rush inside on blistering days. Their local wild is limited to the possum that lives in our Mulberry tree and eats the cat food, and the small brown De Kay snakes we can catch in the layered rock wall. Tame, by old Florida standards.

Even so, neighborhood stories still circulate of foxes that used to roam the streets by night, traveling from one patch

of buffer trees to another. And deer that run at dawn and twilight, their territory now pulled into vertical lines that follow the greenway across roads. More so now that the old farms gone fallow are growing "urban farmhouses."

Weekends now are filled with honeysuckle and the wild blackberries that sprout by the air-conditioner. The clicking sound of a Stag beetle crawling out of our porch's support beam and wild rabbits that find a feast in crimson clover. Lunch on stone benches by the lake. Baseball games in the lawn seats. How quickly a child grows taller.

Under an oak tree.

---

*Janna Miller has lived in a neighborhood off Margaret Wallace for 16 years. Her story draws from her childhood in a developing North Florida city.*

## A FEW WORDS ABOUT CHARLOTTE LIT

Human beings are storytellers. The impulse to find meaning in and weave narrative from life experience is the foundation of all art. It's the way we understand ourselves and one another, and a vibrant literary arts community increases that capacity to engage and understand.

Charlotte Lit is our community's center for engaging with and studying the literary arts. We provide a physical space—our Plaza Midwood studio—where people gather, teach, learn, and create. And we are a virtual community hub where people can discover local literary events and connect with literature and each other.

Our Mission: Engagement. Education. Elevation. We equip community members to more deeply engage with literature in all its forms. We educate through classes, labs, and explorations. And we elevate the literary arts in Charlotte's arts landscape by bringing community members together to celebrate the written word.

Engage with us at [charlottelit.org](http://charlottelit.org), or through social media: Twitter & Facebook: @CLtLit, Instagram: @CharlotteLit.



# Something a Little Different

Patrice Gopo

In the familiar photograph, my mother leans back into the corner of a floral couch, my baby body resting in her lap, and my head tucked in the crook of her arm. Her face is tilted down toward mine, and perhaps she croons a made-up lullaby formed from parts of my name. “Tricie, Tricie,” she sings, lulling me to sleep.

My mother told me she liked the name Patricia, the way it sounds with the three syllables offered to the air. “But I wanted something a little different,” she explained as she relayed to me the story of my name. She dropped the final syllable along with the “sh” sound, a wisp of breath close to the slight noise one makes to hush a small child. Not Patricia. Instead, Patrice—along with all the family nicknames that would come. P.T. and T.C. Tricie and Trice.

I think my mother knew that while she might want to hold her baby close and rock her into a full night of sleep, she didn’t want to hush the woman I would become. I like to imagine she dropped the “sh” sound because she knew there would be too many places where I would need to raise my voice and make my presence



known. My mother gave me a name with a twist. Now I walk through this life and say, *I will defy your expectations. I will not be silenced.* I am one who can move and shift and change.

---

*Patrice Gopo is the author of All the Colors We Will See: Reflections on Barriers, Brokenness, and Finding Our Way, an essay collection about race, immigration, and belonging. Her essays have appeared in Gulf Coast, Full Grown People, Creative Nonfiction, and online in The New York Times and The Washington Post. She lives with her family in Charlotte.*



# Waking Up to Whiteness: My Beautiful Truth

Sarah Henderson

**I**t wasn't until recently that I became aware of my whiteness. I was raised in an overwhelmingly white small town in Colorado. In my entire high school, there were two black children. One lived with her white father, the other with her adoptive white parents. Here, the colorblind thing seemed to really work.

Growing up in the 80s, we were taught to be colorblind. In Sunday school, we sang, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight..."

How I loved that song! I envisioned Jesus surrounded by kids of every color, including me. This Jesus was, of course, white, blue-eyed with blondish-brown hair, just like all the children's bibles depicted.

I moved to Charlotte shortly after college. I had always heard how segregated and racist the South was. And yet, it was my job in Charlotte that gave me my first opportunity to work with a black person.



I was shocked at the way that different races easily interacted in society. I tried not to notice, knowing I was supposed to be colorblind, just like Jesus wanted.

Twenty years here revealed this was not a magical place where racial integration and equality had materialized like my naive, post-college self-thought. Working in social services showed me an underbelly, a legacy of racial oppression, a city that ranks dead last for upward mobility. I began to understand systemic racism, and how socioeconomics maintain



a culture of disparity, especially in this city, my beloved adopted home.

I also realized that Jesus was a Middle Eastern Jewish man. Not white, not blonde after all.

I, like many, thought Americans were making amazing progress with the presidency of Barack Obama. Yes, we still had a long way to go. But we were on the right track, closer to a more just society.

On November 9, 2016, I awoke in a very different America than I had gone to sleep in the night before. Throughout the campaign, I had heard words like “white nationalism” and “Neo-Nazism,” seen rage against Black Lives Matter and justification for extra-judicial killings of black citizens. But I was so sure that enough Americans believed people had inherent dignity, no matter the color of their skin. That day post-election, it became necessary to learn what I didn’t know...about power, privilege, race, and politics.

I think about my childhood Jesus, encircled by children of various skin

tones. I see now my opportunity to stand with Jesus in solidarity with all God’s beloveds—even when it means setting aside my own privilege—as we move not to a colorblind culture, but towards one where all are valued for their inherent goodness.

So I am learning. About institutional whiteness, systemic oppression, legacies of slavery and genocide, how I am unintentionally racist and commit microaggressions, how I participate in political, economic, and social benefits whiteness gives. I commit to learning. I have a lifetime of learning to undo.

---

*Sarah Henderson is an adaptive yoga teacher living in the tree-canopied Cotswold neighborhood. Her passion for inclusion of all kinds of bodies in shared space motivated her essay.*

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# All Their Hopes and Dreams

Angela M. Haigler

**M**y mother loved to section my sandy, brownish-black hair in three large braids that often came loose. There's a picture of me in the Florence Morning News with just that hairstyle, sitting on the floor next to a little white girl. Boards across our laps, papers on top and pencils in hand, we're smiling. I'm wearing a ribbed striped shirt, one of my favorites. The caption as I recall, mentions how well we two first graders were getting along while integration swirled around us.

After the article appeared, everyone was so proud. I remember feeling happy, too. I was on the front page of the local paper. I had no idea at the time just how ground-breaking that innocent photo was. I was making history.

We were the hopes and dreams of our parents and others like them who had fought for Civil Rights, happy to have lived to see the result of their efforts. That photo was proof.

Reflecting, I wonder if Ashley's parents had wanted the same for her. Had they



been intentional in their decision to allow Ashley to attend the newly integrated Timrod Elementary? How did they feel about the photo? There was their daughter sharing a classroom, the rug and the front page with a black girl, a “Negro” as some called us back then.

White parents had choices, I later learned. They could choose to ignore *Brown v Board of Education* and “opt out” of integration. This ad from a September 1970s Morning News confirmed how: “Quit worrying about which public school your child may be compelled to attend next year. Let us explain how you can get a first class private education at



a modest cost: Stonewall Jackson Academy.”

I was stunned when I found the ad by doing a simple Google search. So much became clearer to me from that time, like seeing the rush of white faces on the private school playground as I peered out from the bus window. They must be rich, I thought to myself, since they paid to go to school.

Recalling those years, I don’t remember feeling unsafe, discriminated against or treated poorly in any way. That would come later and not in the South.

The 70s seemed so carefree, so much fun, but I can imagine now what my parents must have been going through, fear mixed with fulfillment as my sister and I stepped onto the bus to Timrod.

My mother had marched on her Morgan State College campus, protesting

against discrimination in the early sixties. My father entered the military as an officer, a safe field for a college-educated black man. Two years later I would be born and in three years, my sister.

“What was it all for?” Mom asks during one of our frequent phone calls, a mixture of anger and disbelief in her voice as the latest newscast blares in the background.

Things were supposed to be different. Thurgood Marshall had fought and won.

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*Angela M. Haigler is a proud East Charlotte resident. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing at Queens University and has been teaching creative writing for over 15 years. Learn more at [www.angelamhaigler.com](http://www.angelamhaigler.com)*

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## Charlotte Lit's AUTHORS LAB

### What is Authors Lab?

Charlotte Lit's Authors Lab program helps you to get that book out of your head and onto paper. Our model: Craft Classes + Cohort Community + Customized Coaching = Creative Success.

**Craft Classes.** From January to December, you'll take classes to help develop your craft, from some of the area's most respected writers and writing teachers. These include 12 monthly workshops with your cohort, and 12 hours of electives from the Charlotte Lit catalog.

**Customized Coaching.** You will work with a writing coach selected to fit you and your genre, approximately two hours each month as you work through your draft. All along the way, the coaching process is tailored entirely to where you are and what you need to advance your work.

**Cohort Community.** A cornerstone of Authors Lab is making the journey with a cohort of writers who support and encourage each other, teach and learn from each other, and help keep each other on track toward their goals. You will attend classes and socials together, create accountability and critique groups, and participate in a private online forum. Learn more at [charlottelit.org/authorslab](http://charlottelit.org/authorslab).





# Miss Pronounced

Cara Evanson

I've been hearing my name mispronounced my whole life. Looking at my name tag or an attendance sheet, people are just as likely to say "Car-a" (the first syllable like the vehicle in your garage) as the correct way, "Care-a."

It's hard to blame them because I mispronounced my own name for roughly the first third of my life. I was eight years old when adults around me first realized that the way I sounded my Rs, like Ws, was not just an adorable child-like way of talking. My diagnoses provided me with the answer to a few questions I'd had up until that point, like why no matter how many times I repeated my name to some people they would still say it wrong. I had been assuming they were the ones with pronunciation issues, and was surprised to find out it was actually me. My name had always sounded exactly right when it came out of my own mouth.

After the discovery of my speech impairment I began attending an early-morning education class at my school so specialists could work with me to help solve the issue. There were a variety of exercises my speech teachers did with me,



but the one I remember most is having to look into a mirror at the way my tongue was positioned in my mouth as I said words with "Rs" in them. Rabbit, Road, Rainbow, Rake, Run. My speech teachers urged me to bring my tongue farther back in my mouth and to push the sides of it out against my upper teeth. I was being endlessly asked to write new lists of "R" words to practice. Some that began with "R", and some that had the letter further down the line-up. Paragraph, Wrist, Circle, Grade, Cara.

Cara. My own name was always the easiest "R word that doesn't begin with an R" for me to think of, so I spent many mornings of my elementary school years holding a small round mirror to my face and saying my name, slowly, over and



over again. Cara, Cara, Cara. I began to hear the difference between my mouth making an “R” sound and making a “W” one, and eventually mastered the pronunciation of “R” in my life. Now, the only “R” word I ever consciously think about pronouncing before I say it is Aurora.

Another name, a beautiful one. And I’m thankful it’s not mine.

---

*Cara Evanson lives in Davidson and works as a research librarian. She is sharing reflections on her name and the memories associated with its pronunciation.*

---

# Me, Myself, and I

## Leslie Edmond

I am from Love.

I am from Caring.

I am from Understanding.

I am from struggles, confusion, misunderstandings,  
and life can change in one single instant.

I am from Healing.

I am from Growth.

I am from Compassion.

I am from not this time, better luck next time, and really; that’s what you thought.

I am from Spirit.

I am from the Heart!



---

*Leslie Edmond is a third generation native of Charlotte. She enjoys poetry, jazz music, yoga, and walking.*



# Divine Guidance

Linda Shannon

In 1995 in the state of Texas, our son was born beautiful in every way. When we brought him home from the hospital, I noticed his sensitivity to light and being touched. I became aware of the sensors God implanted in my heart to alert me of his needs.

At the age of one, on two occasions he became extremely angry without any visible reason, held his breath and almost passed out. I spoke with his doctor and he dismissed the conduct as a tantrum. No explanation was provided to explain the cause for his behavior. I felt uneasy and uncomfortable with the doctor's response. My sensors signaled there was something that triggered the behavior. I prayed, searched for a new doctor, assimilated the facts and continued to monitor him.

At the age of three he stopped talking. We were devastated, but did not panic. We prayed for Brandon to talk. Daily I sat him directly across from me in the family room and asked him questions. Then I moved to his side of the room to answer my questions for him. This lasted for a year. Suddenly he said, "I want some



juice." I think he spoke out of frustration with me pretending to know his thoughts.

His sensitivity to the environment increased. His sentences contained many verbs to describe how he felt. I asked the Lord, "What is going on?" His new pediatrician diagnosed Sensory Integration Disorder. I was relieved to have a name to apply to some of his behaviors, but I knew there was more to uncover. I made appointments for two additional pediatric physicians to examine him. Both diagnosed ADD. My sensors blazed bright



red. I knew there was more to discover and experience about our beautiful child.

When Brandon was six years old, we were frustrated and hungry for help regarding this amazing child. We prayed for wisdom, direction and guidance. We received the following words, “*Everything Brandon needs is in Charlotte.*” We were shocked and questioned if we heard the right thing. We continued to seek answers in God’s word and asked our family to pray. After a few days we felt peace about moving and stepped into action by putting our home on the market for sale and trusting God to do the rest. After six days we received two offers for our home. We accepted the second offer, packed our things and moved to Charlotte.

In Charlotte Brandon received a diagnosis of Autism, Sensory Integration

Disorder and ADD. We found the right doctors, therapists, church, school, friends and organizations.

We recognized Brandon’s peerless hand eye coordination, stunning aptitude to play basketball and shoot repeatedly ten feet from the half court line. Brandon received a one-day contract with the Charlotte Hornets and was invited to participate in the NBA’s new Sensory Inclusion Program in this extraordinary city. Praise God for His faithfulness because everything Brandon needs is in Charlotte!

---

*Linda Shannon has lived in Charlotte for 17 years. She’s sharing reflections on increased faith in God and victories for her son being directly connected to moving to Charlotte.*

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# Another White Girl

**Lisa Dudzik**

I was eight years old, the first time I realized my skin had a color at my best friend, A’Lisa’s birthday party. We spent hours after school playing pretend and warding off neighborhood bullies. She laughed often and always had my back; I loved everything about her.

My favorite doll looked like A’Lisa. My parents asked, “Are you sure you

want that one?” Years later I learned that well-trained white girls pick white dolls.

I was clutching that pretty little mocha doll when I arrived at the slumber party. “Who’s the white girl?” one of her cousin’s asked. I pointed to myself, questioning her without responding.

“Hush,” A’Lisa’s mom said. “That’s A’Lisa’s friend from school.” Her youngest



cousin spent the entire evening by my side. She played with my hair and asked me if I tasted like vanilla. We licked the back of each other's hands laughing; we tasted the same.

We spent the evening playing games, watching movies and eating popcorn. Late into the night we talked and laughed about everything. Though I had a wonderful time, I went home the next morning a little sad. A'Lisa and I were best friends, but there was so much that I was not a part of (nor aware of) in her life.

Eventually my parents were stationed to the Midwest. A'Lisa and I were pen pals until middle school. When we were teenagers, I discovered she attended the same high school as my cousin. I was overjoyed at the prospect of seeing her on my next visit to Maryland.

The happy reunion I was expecting did not happen. When her friend asked, "You know this white girl?" she seemed embarrassed.

Blankly, A'Lisa responded, "We knew each other when we was kids." They continued to talk between themselves. I apologized for interrupting and backed away.

Her experiences as a young black woman developed her understanding of race, while I continued to be unaware of my privilege in our white supremacist culture. She was continually reminded that she was black, while I could pretend that race didn't affect me. I believed I



wasn't racist, even though I did nothing to dismantle white supremacy.

Since moving to Charlotte, I have sought opportunities to be a white woman in spaces dominated by people of color discussing white supremacy. Slowly I am learning to listen and be a better abolitionist. I am working to dismantle the matrix of oppression in my community—gathering the courage to step up rather than step back. I endeavor to be the adult version of young A'Lisa's best friend, not just another white girl.

---

*Lisa Dudzik and her family recently relocated from Illinois to Charlotte. She shares personal essays and random musings on her blog [Becoming Charlottean](http://BecomingCharlottean.com). [www.patreon.com/BecomingCharlottean](http://www.patreon.com/BecomingCharlottean).*



# Two Poems

David E. Poston

## Fresco

As the artist labors on his scaffold,  
solemn patrons clamber up to be near  
the work. They scuff their Florsheims stumbling down,  
dwarfed by Christ who kneels on the naked rock.  
As Judas in the distance earns his silver,  
his simpler brethren sleep, spread beneath them

in Gethsemane like the street people  
hiding under bushes from the July heat,  
scattered around the shell of the burnt-out church  
just blocks away. Christ and Judas tender  
our fate, as the patrons worship the artist  
bonding eternity to a cool wall  
in the shade of the financial towers  
and the good men sleep. Yet before

the plaster dries, the artist sees his Christ  
break free, step down those aisles and out into  
the hot Carolina streets, across  
the matted grass among the worn, tumbled  
marble of Settlers' Cemetery,  
through the grimy alleys where his apostles  
lie waiting, uncalled yet.



Previously published in *The Charlotte Poetry Review* and in the chapbook *My Father Reading Greek*



# Where I'm From

*with thanks to Sherman Alexie for the opening line*

I am from fried bologna with four little cuts so it will lie flat in the pan  
I am from sandspurs in my bare feet  
I am from Louisville, Kentucky, where my father carried me  
on his shoulders  
    to a rowboat in the flood  
I am from Apex, North Carolina, where Mr. Pearson caught me  
and my cousins throwing dirt clods at each other  
all over his just-planted cornfield  
and I was the only one who didn't run away  
I am from Pendleton, North Carolina, where I chopped cotton and peanuts  
    in the summer on Mr. Joe Horne's farm  
and squirmed in his wife Ann's  
    Sunday School class each Sunday  
I am from Moore County, North Carolina, where Billy Dunlap and I raced  
    down the fire road side by side and jumped over a black snake  
in unison without missing a stride  
where we dammed up the creek to make a swimming hole  
where they couldn't find us one night when the church service  
    started because we were walking among the tombstones  
    talking with our heads bowed like two little old men  
I am from vinyl records & eight-tracks & cassettes & AM/FM radio & CDs  
    & mp3 & I-tunes & Pandora, and I've listened to  
    "My Generation" on every one  
I am from Momma pinching me in church to shush me  
    and my sisters tattling on me and  
    sharing a room with my little brother  
        who is now a big-time corporate ex-eck-you-tive and  
        I cherish any time I get to spend with him  
I am from Baptists don't dance, but we can still tap our feet

---

*David E. Poston taught in public schools, at UNC Charlotte, and at Charlotte's Young Writers' Workshop. Now retired, he volunteers extensively, edits a poetry column for the Friends of the Gaston County Public Library newsletter, and teaches occasional writing workshops for Hospice and other venues. His poetry collections are My Father Reading Greek, Postmodern Bourgeois Poetaster Blues, and Slow of Study, and his work has appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies.*



# By a Different Name

Judi Sielaff

Today my name is Judith Ann Sielaff—Judi to my close friends—but throughout my life my name has undergone multiple changes. My parents were worried that the long Greek name on my birth certificate would be too difficult for a little girl to write, so they legally changed our last name just before I entered kindergarten.

They did not realize that to the world at large changing Sakorraphos to Saks would change not only my name, but also my ethnicity and religion. In the days when such comments were not considered politically incorrect, teachers would ask why I was in attendance on High Holy Days. When I was a college freshman a young man, searching for someone to date, called to ask if I were a “Shiksa.”

I would like to say I was named after the biblical Judith who saved her people by luring Holofernes, leader of the Assyrians, to her bedroom and once there severing his head. I have often visited a painting of that Judith at the Detroit Institute of Art by Artemisia Gentileschi. My namesake is not quite so grand. My mother named me after a character in



her favorite book, *Daddy Long Legs*, the tale of an orphan with a secret benefactor who showered her with gifts and letters of encouragement. He rescued her from a lonely, institutional, parentless world. This was my mother’s fantasy, not her reality. She was an orphan who suffered hurt, humiliation and rejection throughout her young life until she left the orphanage, un-adopted, at the age of sixteen.



Fortunately, in naming me my mother chose to copy only the nickname, Judy, and not the character's proper name, Jerusha. While in high school, I decided to start writing my name Judi instead of Judy. An attempt, I suppose, at individualism. My parents had constructed our new surname name by extracting letters from the center. It made sense to me to just lop off a couple letters from the end of Judith to create my adolescent identity.

While in college I added a husband and another name. When I dropped that husband, I dropped that name as well. Later I added a second husband and yet another name. I have kept that husband and that name for nearly fifty years.

Names change as life changes. Daughter, wife, mother, grandmother. When I was teaching, my young students would slip up from time to time and call me "mom" instead of "Mrs. Sielaff." I knew

it was time to retire when those slips-of-tongue turned from "mom" to "grandma."

Judith now seems to be the name of my old age. When work and mailings required signatures, Judith was necessary and somehow became what people called me. Now, even though I call myself Judi it seems others don't think that fits. I have aged into Judith. The upside of this morphing is that I can easily identify from which chapter of my life I know a particular person.

Judy, Judi, Judith, Sakorrapphos, Saks, Cintron, Sielaff. All of these are me.

---

*Judi Sielaff was her official first naming at baptism, 1947. She is now a happily retired old lady living in Ballantyne Community of Charlotte.*

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# Memories are Made of This

## Maxine (Mickee) Goodson

I had just spent three hours at the West Boulevard Library where I was assigned to encourage citizens to vote. People were there to decide a number of seats in the North Carolina House and Senate, Judges of the Superior and Appellate Courts were being voted on

as well as a number of other state and local officials.

I have volunteered over the years since becoming aware of the importance of voting for elective office. It became evident to me when, as a young woman, I heard many stories about the injustices



perpetrated in this country especially in the South against our people. We were in need of someone who had the fortitude and spirit to rally the people to action. That person arrived in Hampton, Connecticut, on the Hampton Institute campus, in the person of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was there to address the student body about the Montgomery Bus Boycott and other pertinent issues of the time. He explained how we could take action to make change happen. We were invited to plan and hold non-violent sit-ins at restaurants at segregated venues. As a result, interested students were trained to hold sit-ins at the Woolworth store in downtown Hampton.

It was my sophomore year in college. There was no violence that day, and eventually we were allowed to eat at the lunch counter. I did not have an ongoing involvement in politics when I lived in Connecticut. But I always voted and was a poll captain a number of times.

Politics have always been an interest of mine. When my husband and I relocated here from Connecticut after we retired in 2001 my political life did a 180-degree turn. It has expanded my knowledge for how one builds the political landscapes.

As a result I have given many hours to a number of campaigns here in North Carolina.

There was a big difference between here and in Connecticut. I have learned of the ways residents from child to adult have a footprint in local and national politics.

Kid Voting was something new to me in Charlotte. We did not have early voting



or mock voting for kids in Connecticut. Here in Charlotte children have a natural inkling to get involved, whereas in Connecticut, we did not have meetings or groups which taught us what we were voting about; we just went to the polls without much background information.

Just last Sunday, a group of high school students joined in a discussion at a neighborhood forum about school safety. Much of their focus was on running for office when they become adults and their expectation of having the ability to have a say in the way laws are made and carried out. Organizing the community for action is a tool Charlotte uses to gather the community to unite for a cause.

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*Maxine (Mickey) Goodson has lived in Charlotte for nearly eighteen years, currently in the Bahama Park neighborhood. Her long interest in volunteering for political candidates inspired this essay.*



# Acceptance

## Nancy Ann Story

**M**y name is Nancy Ann and where that name comes from depends on whom I ask. I might have been named for my brother's second-grade girlfriend, Nancy, and my seven-year old cousin's best friend, Ann. My mother says she let my brother and cousin choose my name because the name she would have liked to call me was already taken by my older sister, Margaret, who died being born.

My father says I was named for my great aunt Annie who was a nurse in WWI. She took in a stray dog during her time in France and called him Patriot. When she came back home to Savannah, she brought him with her. He was her partner until he died at 17; she never replaced him. My mother was suspect of Aunt Annie who never married and only had women friends. Mom said, "I would never have named you for your great-aunt Annie; your father is confused."

Dad told me, "I didn't know she had named your sister. If I had, we would have put the name Margaret instead of Baby Girl on her tombstone in Bonaventure cemetery."



I like to think I was named for Aunt Annie because that is a family connection, whereas being named for second-grade friends of my brother and cousin seems trivial. When I mentioned my naming to them, neither could remember the incident.

In any case, my name is Nancy Ann. Both names mean "grace," so in my head,



I call myself “Double-Grace,” to spite my possible namesakes.

I knew I was different from my family in some significant ways, so part of me went into hiding. I learned to save my actual thoughts and ways of expression for “appropriate” times and situations. One of those places was my doctor’s office. Dr. Fuller said he was impressed by my way of thinking and speaking that was beyond my age. One day I noticed his medical school diploma in a fancy wooden frame hanging on his office wall. I asked him what it was. He explained that it was his paper that proved he had completed medical school and was a doctor. The diploma had the name of a university on it along with a gold star. I knew then that I had to have one of those someday. It became my secret dream.

In high school, we were encouraged to apply to attend college. I knew my parents

would object because it would make me even more different from them and might take me away from home and our community. I also understood that my parents loved me more than anything in the world, in their own way, and that it was alright that it was not my way. We were still, and always would be, family no matter how educated I became or how much I changed over the years. I had finally found positive words to describe myself, strong and independent, but I would always be Nancy Ann, Double-Grace, and that was fine with me.

---

*Nancy Ann Story lives in Matthews, North Carolina. She holds and MA in English from UNC Chapel Hill. She is sharing reflections on her name and her family of origin.*

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# Origins

## Tami M. Gosselin

I am from Waterbury, in the State of Connecticut,  
Top of Hill Street, first left after the school,  
On the corner of Greenwood, Longview, and Cross.

Big family, I am second born of four daughters and a son,  
Dad’s French-Canadian words, repeating, not bending,  
Raised working Colts Farm in Farmington, with seven siblings,  
4am milk the cows, feed the chickens, walked to school, but only to eighth grade,  
Protected by the shepherd collie Rusty.





Disabled by the time we were his,  
He did the nightly cooking for us,  
Ate quickly, and retired to his recliner for a cigarette,  
In the days when indoor smoking was in vogue.

Mom, from the city of New Britain,  
Where she moved from place to place,  
Always losing more than she kept.  
Parents hard workers, but Dad addicted,  
Her Italian hands flying, along with her words, constantly going.

Those tiny hands, banging on the dinner table,  
Exasperated, Dad won't stay at the table, after her long-days' work,  
To watch her push food around her plate,  
Making the silverware jump,  
And the kids jump,  
The rest of my life a nervous eater.

Weeknights at the Girls Club,  
Chuck E. Cheese on Friday night,  
Saturday mornings at the library.

Catholic church on Sunday morning, front pew,  
Dad always sang loud and deep,  
Loved God passionately,  
Weeping as the hymns moved his soul,  
I would know joy as I sang,  
Would welcome tears as they came,  
Seeking this divine connection.

We celebrated each and every birthday  
The record we played started off,  
“A party, a party, we're gonna have a party, a party, a party, it's party time today...”  
It was special with cake and ice cream,  
The only time allowed to drink soda.

Summer time, riding bikes,  
Croquet, Badminton, Hopscotch with Grandma,



Growing vegetables,  
Dad daring my brother to eat hot peppers,  
Brother drinking a gallon of water after the hot peppers,  
When we were older,  
Swimming in the back-yard pool.

July Mom and Dad's Anniversary party  
Fresh grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, swordfish, and corn on the cob,  
Huge salads with Italian vinaigrette, bacon bits, and shredded cheese,  
Chips, with creamy cheese clam dip,  
Ice cream cake at oldest sister's birthday party.

Family vacations where we drove for days  
To California to visit family, and Mickey.  
My first flight, in that 10-person plane,  
Flying into the Grand Canyon,  
The smell when my brother got sick in the plane!  
Driving home through the Salt flats, which, at one point,  
Was a lake, and an amusement park, was now all underground.

The time we drove to Florida on Spring Break,  
And saw our Neighbors at Epcot center,  
It's a small world after all,  
And Space Mountain, at Disney.

Our pilgrimage to Saint Anne de baupré in Quebec, Canada  
Magnificent candle-light procession, life-sized stations of the cross,  
A place where joy visited me, weeping freely, in the presence of the statue of St. Anne,  
I wasn't even singing this time,  
Others stood there in silence,  
As if nothing extraordinary happened.

---

*Tami Gosselin lives in Mooresville. Origins is inspired by her hardworking immigrant grandparents, her dad, who had sustained a brain injury, and mom who worked hard to support her family.*



# Have You Ever Entered the House Where Risk Lives?

Bernice Mar

Take heed!  
Indeed.

Do not compare, lest unabated despair.

Call forth pure heart and courage true  
to bid false obstacles adieu!

Trepidation.  
Intimidation.  
Exhilaration.



This is but one iteration of The Gate Keepers Three,  
offering a chance to pass, to play... or flee.

White chocolate. Dark chocolate. CHOOSE!

Step boldly. Sprint gingerly.  
Maneuver squeamishly... or, in good faith.

It matters *not*;  
for what follows is yet Unknown.

Do you wish to visit the House where Risk lives? Then...



Hush....

Rush...

and...

C-r-rush!

Hush....

....to hear the unsung lyrics dangling – always just a smidge out of reach.

Rush....

....to capture the last sliver of Light – seconds before it morphs into Night.

Crush...

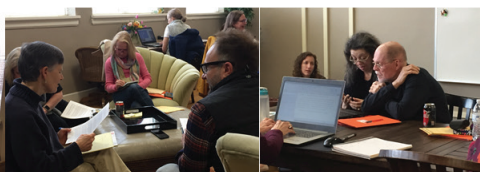
....the ever widening gap between your biggest fears and your deepest hopes.

This, my friend, is the unbeaten path to the House where Risk lives.

You have arrived. Welcome!

---

*Bernice Bar is a creative change agent / bridge builder in Charlotte, NC. “The goal of my artistic expressions is to illuminate the human spirit – individually and collectively. Change requires risk.”*



## INTRODUCING STUDIO TWO

- A new space for classes and social events
- Daily Open Studio hours for Charlotte Lit members
- Accessible first floor room with a no-stairs entrance
- Comfortable and inviting: tables, sofas, a selection of chairs, and lots of natural light



# Iconz

## Hazel Foster

**W**e moved to Texas to escape Michigan, and we moved to Gastonia to escape Texas, and though escape has been the leading cause of relocation in our early adult lives, we are not planning to escape again, having tethered ourselves to a mortgage.

Developed in the 1960s, years that forced the South to reconfigure, our neighborhood's single loop of road circles back to trails that connect to the caring, progressive school where I now teach, the reason for our move to this particular area. The school uses the trails for cross country, for haunted attractions at Halloween, for dipping into streams to study biodiversity. I use the trails to teach my juniors about observation, Thoreau at Walden, and living on the outside. On the trails, in the woods, they pick up fungus-covered sticks and marvel at weaver spiders that have taken gaps between trees. When they look up, they talk of how it's a place they had not thought to look before.

It is one of these juniors who tells me, the Northerner, that the school was founded at the advent of desegregation, a



private school for the privileged to escape the newly integrated public schools. Our school celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, and presenters spoke to the student body about the excitement of those first days, lamenting that only three things remain: a metal trashcan, folding chairs, and the tiled floor in a storage closet. Everything else from that time has been erased.

Not long after my student tells me origins of the school, I learn that most private schools in the South came from these roots. And I see that we are surrounded by robust, progressive schools resting on a



history uncommon to someone who grew up in Michigan.

Another such school in Gastonia, our main rival in fact, stands across from Iconz, the first watering hole we attempted while still fresh and blooming from our move to the area. We wanted to find somewhere with cheap drinks and pool, and Iconz has both. The bar didn't fill up until one a.m. when the Hooters closed—only so many choices in Gastonia—and by then the place swelled. At the bar top, two men in drag drank beer, and a cluster of women fresh from work lamented their lack of time off. One of our new friends disappeared with a bottle-blond grandmother, and the other told us about his

kids and his girlfriend and his mother. On the patio, people placed bets on cornhole, a single guitar player strumming bluegrass and folk in the background. From the patio, surrounded by the microcosm of today's Gastonia, drinking, hollering, escaping their daily lives together, I could see the campus of this other school, a school which, like so many others in the South, wants to escape what brought it into being.

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*Hazel Foster received her MFA in Creative Writing from Hollins University. She is at work on a novel and a collection of stories both set in Michigan.*

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# Thank You Paul McCartney

Michele Arnone

Wouldn't it be nice to have a simple name like Sue Smith? Michele Nicole is for a fashion designer or sexy supermodel, not an introverted girl who just wanted to fit in. The misnomer started at birth. My parents expected a boy and intended to name him Michael, after my father. When I came out of the womb, they had to gender-bend the name.

My whole life I've borne the silent agony of an unsuitable name. But, it could have been worse. My father owned a speed shop where they customized cars. He thought it would be clever to name me Corvette or Michelin. One conjured up the image of a seductive siren, and the other the stench of rubber. Dad, what were you thinking? Eighteen months later, my sister was born and given the sweet and simple name of Lisa Marie. No



over-thinking. No clever ideas. My father later abandoned us, leaving me with the shame of carrying his neutered name.

Michele was an uncommon name in the Sixties. Were it not for the Beatles, no one would have heard of it. To this day, people still sing a few bars of really bad French when they meet me. I smile, but inside I wish that Paul McCartney had fallen in love with another girl. And Paul, did you have to spell her name with two “L”s? How would you like to spend your life saying, “No, it’s Paul with one ‘L’”?

The gender mix-up was humiliating during my school years. The first day of school brought the dreaded roll call. The teacher would bellow, “Michael!”, only to hear a timid voice from the last row, “It’s Michele”. My classmates burst into laughter because Michael, was in fact, a girl. Thanks Dad. The safety of the back row was short-lived because my last name began with “A”. Moved front and center,

the teachers made me go first when reading aloud and writing on the blackboard.

In retrospect, all I ever wanted was to be part of the crowd, in the middle of the pack, invisible. I hate being first, I hate re-stating and re-spelling my name, and most of all, I hate the Beatles! But now that I’m older, and there’s less time left than already lived, it’s too much trouble to change my name. Modifying documents and opening new accounts is enough incentive to engrave Michele Nicole on my designer tombstone. But every so often, my authentic self gets the urge to introduce herself to the world as Sue Smith... just to see what happens.

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*Michele Arnone moved to Charlotte in 2005 and currently lives near the Arbo-retum in South Charlotte. Her essay was inspired by the first writing prompt in the Beautiful Truth Initiative workshop.*

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# So Many Signs

## Sheila Meador

By the age of twelve, I had been told by several doctors that I was losing my hearing. Throughout high school, I voluntarily asked for preferential seating and had no problems. Choir, band, and cheerleading kept me active like my classmates. I studied hard to excel in school and was successful. I

began to wear hearing aids and graduated eighth in my class. I was living the life of a normal teenager.

In my twenties, I taught Sunday school for children and teens, led a ladies’ Bible study, and organized a mothers’ morning out program at church. My hearing impairment was becoming more noticeable,



and I willingly let others know that it helped if I could read their lips. I learned to keep my eyes open when someone prayed so I would know when the prayer ended. At family dinners, my five-year-old son would kick me under the table when he heard “amen”.

It was as a young wife and mother at church functions that I began to feel set apart. I was hearing impaired and not like the other wives. I dropped out of the adult choir because it was difficult to follow the music. Participation in discussions became difficult, and I began to withdraw. I had always been an extrovert, but I was beginning to feel different. I was the only person at church with a severe hearing loss, and my family and friends had normal hearing.

My husband and I attended a couples’ social at our teacher’s home. His wife led us downstairs to the den and explained the seating arrangement. The chairs lined the walls of the rectangular room. The hostess told me she would put a chair in the middle of the room for me so I could read everyone’s lips. I did not tell her how I felt but declined the offer. She was trying to help. I wanted to blend in that night with my husband and not be a spectacle.

Through my Bible study group, I shared my frustration over hearing loss and desire to learn sign language. A lady introduced me to her deaf neighbor who taught me 3500 signs in nine months. I began teaching what I had learned to a few teens after school. They connected me with their former school teacher, and I refreshed her knowledge of signing. She



got a job teaching the hearing impaired in a public school and hired me as her assistant.

I prayed to find a sign language interpreter so I could follow the pastor’s sermons. Someone told me the school bus driver for our deaf students was looking for a church to interpret in. I met her, and we had an instant connection. She not only interpreted worship services for me, but together we taught Sunday School for hearing impaired children.

I wasn’t the only hearing-impaired person anymore. Everything happened the way it was supposed to as God put the pieces of my puzzle together.

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*Sheila Meador is a native Atlantan who has lived in the East Forest area of Charlotte for four years. She is sharing about being categorized as a hearing-impaired person.*



# From This Height

Alan Wilson

Our party invitations permit us access to the top floor of the building nicknamed “the jukebox,” forty plus stories up. Our commitment to corporate values brought us to this gathering with higher-ups and others like us who embody honesty, integrity, and inclusion.

First a stern black guard who greets us at the elevator bank must nod us through – a bouncer, in a blue blazer, red tie, comfortable black shoes with rubber soles. We shuffle in expectantly. The doors close and we breathe in excitedly preparing for our ascent into rarefied air

The bell chimes and we enter all things atrium, brilliant sunlight and blue sky, where windows soar ever upward. The glass is clean, pristine, inviting, and daylight floods in. We hurriedly approach them like children at the zoo’s penguin exhibit, careful our hands and noses don’t besmirk the glass. From this lofty height we can see only South and West. Tree-tops cover the earth, interrupted only with painted steeples here and there. A shadowy mountain is barely visible to our right.



The building is strategically placed. Walls do not permit us to look behind or to the left. There the steeples are smaller, the trees replaced by strip malls, pawn shops, blighted neighborhoods. We are not one city. You may call us by one name, after our Queen Charlotte, but we resist. We are divided along lines, seemingly arbitrary. Wendover crosses Independence and becomes Eastway. East Boulevard becomes West, and we lock our car doors as we pass. Our school names divide, Harding and Myers Park, Garinger and Providence. Our churches, First United and United House. And our grocery stores, Harris Teeter and Food Lion. We say “Hey,” a two-syllable sound. Smiles on our faces, lilts to our voices—sweet, like our tea, provided you are like me. Otherwise our gazes are vacant, distant.



Our smiles replaced with masks betraying nothing.

Freedom Park is barely visible in the distance. Free for whom, freedom from what? Open to all and yet we cluster, as if some cosmic force poured us on the ground and placed us here and there sorting us as a child sorts toys to order their environment.

From this height, where much is muted and blurry, I see that there may not be as many choices as we assume or presume. I sense that our mobility, economic and otherwise, is as stilted as our conversation about it. We are not a community under the canopy of the treetops. They serve simply to cover what we might not wish

to see, that which lies beneath, pulsing. I understand that we have farther to go than I thought, much farther than the horizon I view from the top floor atrium windows.

I return to the lobby and cannot meet the eyes of the guard, standing where I left him. I wonder if he has been permitted to take the elevator to the top, and passing him by I mutter, “Good night.”

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*Alan Wilson lives in SouthPark. Memories of rising to the top of a Charlotte skyscraper brought this piece together. Alan is a banker by day.*

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# The Oil Lady

## Florence West

I’m English. After I moved to America however, I became “British” and “European.” Either way I’m now foreign and my legal status is “Alien.” England had never felt like a big part of my identity until I wasn’t there anymore. Once I was the odd one out, I realised how much it made me stand out. I was just The British Girl once I moved to the states.

My English-ness is obvious as soon as I speak. Everyone likes to make me explain why I sound like this and then have opinions about who I am and what





I like based purely on my accent. Until I moved here, I'd never been called "fancy." An accent reminds you where you are and where you're not. Being surrounded by American accents was a constant reminder that I wasn't home and then as soon as I spoke, I was reminded that I was different. I wanted to embrace the change but I felt lost and overwhelmed.

Then I found NASCAR. There aren't many British girls in the world of NASCAR but it has accepted me as one of its own. Being thrust into what could be called the "deep end" of America was surprisingly gentle. We're all on the same team. My job in the sport has given me the sense of belonging that I was missing. I spend most of my days with oil and I'm

pretty sure it's becoming my signature scent. I am now The Oil Lady.

Turns out I don't mind being the Alien in the room. I'm lucky to have a team of coworkers I can proudly call my friends. They helped me to accept that my differences aren't a negative and my accent, rather than making me miss England, now fondly reminds me of home.

But I'm sorry, Charlotte, Lizzie II will always be my favourite queen.

---

*Florence West moved from England to Charlotte in 2016. In her piece she shares how finding a new passion helped Charlotte become home after struggling with feeling alone.*

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# Dear Charlotte

Cathia Friou

U<sup>nicorn</sup>:

1. a mythical creature resembling a horse, with a single horn in the center of its forehead
2. a relatively new company that is valued at \$1 billion or more by investors
3. a native Charlottean

In 1967, rumored to be the last year Mercy Hospital delivered babies, I arrived on the scene of a tiny, little town called Charlotte. What would later reach top-20 status of the most populous cities in the country, Charlotte continues to feel like a big small town to me.

Some folks are frustrated by the multiple use of the same name for different roads, like the Sharon series. But it doesn't bother me one bit that there is a Queens Road not to be confused with Queens Road West not to be confused with Queen Road East, and that Queens University is not situated on any of them but very close to all of them.

As for the part of town that houses the Hornets, I am in the proud camp



of natives who patently refuses to call downtown Charlotte “Uptown” or the cringe-worthy “Center City.” When my children try to use the U-word, I correct them as readily as those who require their kids to answer with “yes ma’am.” *Show a little respect, please.*

Unicorns of a certain age will recall relics like Myers Park Hardware, that smelled of birdseed and housed a tiny post office in the back. And the Town House Restaurant, where my parents met in the late 50’s and I later worked as a hostess when it went white-tablecloth



chic in the 80s. Those plus the A&P were razed, eventually bringing us the mammoth Harris Teeter with two stories and a wine bar. Cheers?

I can still see, as if looking through the backseat window of my mom's Country Squire, the actual Hugh McManaway directing traffic with his signature white towel long before anyone could have imagined a gold statue in his honor at the corner of Queens and Providence. I wonder what Hugh would make of his intersection now.

Waxing nostalgic about things like the Charlotte Symphony playing concerts in the bandshell at Freedom Park, ice skating at Eastland Mall, where I got my ears pierced when I was ten, seeing *Purple Rain* with my high school buddies at SouthPark Cinemas, working for the "green team" after college when there

were only two banks in town, and my daughters walking the same halls I did at Myers Park Traditional School make me feel like the middle-ager that I am. And an indebted one.

Thank you, dear Charlotte, for welcoming me home with generous arms each time I left you for greener pastures that were never as warm in any sense of the word. There is no better balm, especially after living in Manhattan, than to land gently back in bough of the Queen City. But I'll never call it Uptown.

---

*Cathia Friou is the author of the memoir Rock Paper Scissors: Scenes from a Charmed Divorce, and The Art of Co-Parenting. A Charlotte native, she is the proud mama of two daughters. Website: [cathiafriou.com](http://cathiafriou.com).*

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# No Gift Too Small

Florence West

Just three days before Christmas, on a Saturday, I went shopping for a gift for my daughter, something more than the wool socks I give her every year. She had finally dropped a hint that tiny star earrings would be just the thing since she had new piercings in her ears. With so few shopping days left and jewelry counters stark bare in the discount stores, I wondered if I would find anything in time.

A small tree was stuffed into the back of my Subaru, so I wasn't inclined to go driving all over town in search of the desired earrings, not to mention finding them at an affordable price. With a glimmer of hope, I stopped at Donald Haack Diamonds, a long-time local jewelry store, on my way home. Though the location has changed since I first visited in 1999, the memories flooded back, like another life time almost twenty years ago.

At that time, my husband-to-be and I carpooled to work, and we passed the store each day as we drove on Sharon Road. One morning, my fiancée casually mentioned as we were driving to work that we would be stopping there on the way

back to pick out an engagement ring. It must have been after five o'clock because when we entered, the place was quiet and near empty. A distinguished-looking gentleman greeted us and when we told him our purpose, he led us to an office where we were seated in two chairs across from him.

Now this may not be the typical way a couple goes about choosing an engagement ring, at the end of the day in business attire, disheveled and tired. But the gentleman, who was none other than the store owner himself, was very gracious, and kindly asked my fiancée how much he wished to spend on the ring. When he heard the amount, he quickly glanced at me, possibly to note any disappointment on my part. But there I was simply smiling, for this was the first time ever that I was getting to choose a diamond, of any price, let alone a Donald Haack diamond.

When he asked what type of diamonds I would like to see, I mentioned my preference for the square shaped ones. After opening several small drawers of diamonds, Mr. Haack selected for me the most beautiful little emerald-cut diamond



I had ever seen. It was like a dream that we two, simple and unsophisticated as we were, were treated most kindly and generously by the founder of a Charlotte institution such as this one.

Charlotte has changed a good deal over the years, fewer book stores, more traffic, the genteel quality and slow pace giving way to a newer and perhaps more hip ambiance. Yet, all these years later, there is still that special magic, of personal attention and service, in that store. They had the perfect tiny star-like earrings (actually snowflakes but close enough)

that I could afford with the help of the holiday coupon and my daughter was surprised and delighted by the beautifully wrapped special little gift on Christmas.

---

*Leah Tewari is a painter and part-time writer. She has lived in Charlotte since 1998. Her essay is inspired by her two shopping experiences at Donald Haack Diamonds, a long-established Charlotte business.*

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# My Rocking Chair

**Deloris Washington**

**H**ere in my room sits a beautiful rocking chair.

It is almost fifty years old. It is silent and still.

But my rocking chair, is a reminder of fond childhood memories growing up in the mountains of West Virginia.

We lived in the family home of my great grandmother, Savannah. Fondly known by her friends as Sophie. But to me she was just mama.

The rocking chairs of my childhood were somewhat like the ones you see at Cracker Barrel, very heavy, made of solid oak, with tightly-woven wicker backs.

The rocking chair was huge to a tiny little girl like me, a struggle to climb into. Oh the joy when I finally made onto the that soft cushioned seat.

The next task was getting into the rocking motion.

Sometimes Mama would help me.

I loved sense of comfort, the gentle rocking motion, and the soft summer breezes on my face.

Sometimes a treat was shared like a fresh bowl of fruit, or a cool drink of sweet Kool-Aid, a cup of coffee for Mama, as she gently poured the coffee into a



saucer and sipped from it. (Most older ladies did it that way.)

We'd enjoy the beauty and fragrances of various flowers, blooming in the front yard. The birds, butterflies and bees, darting from flower to flower. And the peaceful quietness.

No cars, television, telephones. Just the sweet music of song birds and the continual buzz of bees. No worries or cares. Just pure serenity.

The rocking chair offered this serenity by its gentle sway. A sense of happiness, well-being and peace, that soothed the very soul.

As I grew older, I'd rocked my younger siblings to sleep, while my mother completed chores.

They also enjoyed the soothing motion of the rocking chair.

I always dreamed of getting married and having six children, and be like my mother. At eighteen, the rocking chair is old now and the wicker needs repair.

I was happily married, living in New York now. The years rolled by, no children!!

The dream of six children seem to be a dream that would never come true! Years later...good news! I was going to be a mama!

The first thought in preparation, for our firstborn, was a rocking chair! We found just what I wanted. Black lacquer with soft gold trim. Perfect!



Rocking our firstborn, I was mentally on the front porch of my past.

Today in my twilight years, the rocking chair is a constant reminder of past joys and serenity.

I have rocked three of my babies, six grandchildren. Enjoyed the precious softness of babies nestled on my breast, felt them surrender to the soothing warmth of love, and peace, falling asleep to the gentle magic that only a rocking chair can give.

---

*Deloris Washington, known as "Mountain Mamma," shares West Virginia living with her new neighbors in Charlotte.*



# I Love Charlotte!

## Grazia Walker

Every time I come back from a trip, I say, “I am home!” I cannot say I am *from* Charlotte—my unusual accent gives away I am not a Southerner. I am an adopted Charlottean for the past six years and Charlotte is MY chosen hometown.

I was born in Italy and came to the States in 1964 with a fellowship by the Science Foundation. I married a fellow student, Haskel, from Arkansas. Haskel taught mathematics at the high school and I taught biology and nutrition to the soldiers at US military bases in Japan, Australia, Guam, Philippines, Diego Garcia, Kwajalein Atoll, Korea, Germany, and England.

*I love Charlotte!*

The people of Charlotte are very friendly; they always greet me with a smile. A few days after moving to the city I signed up for a Gala at the Bechtler Museum. As soon as I entered the party, I saw a nice couple sitting at a table sipping glasses of wine. I walked over, introduced myself and said, “I am new in Charlotte. I do not know anybody.”



Immediately Rhonda said, “You know us now and we will introduce you to our friends.” Indeed, they did, and by the end of the evening I had arranged a noodle-making party at my place for the following day. Berhan, whom I met at the Bechtler Gala, came to my party and we immediately clicked.

*Women in Charlotte like to dress up!*

Berhan—now my best friend—introduced me to the world of fashion here in Charlotte and I participated in few fashion shows. Berhan coached me how to walk on the runway, how to pose for the photographers, and how to carry a bag or a scarf. My self-confidence grew so much



that I now wear outlandish clothes and die my hair red, blue, purple—depending on the mood.

Talking about self-confidence, I got so encouraged by my Charlotte friends that I now teach cooking classes. I make the BEST egg noodles, I make the BEST potato gnocchi, I make the BEST ravioli! Ask me for the secrets! I teach at my tiny apartment in the Inspire Building, in the gorgeous kitchen of the club house, and at Alessandra's elegant and very modern house.

*I love Charlotte!*

Would I stay in Charlotte forever? Probably, but not in the same apartment

I am in now. I am a gypsy. I like to move every few years to a brand-new apartment. Moving is so exciting—new place, new amenities, new people. Charlotte has many luxury apartment buildings under construction! So many choices! So much fun!

---

Grazia Walker is a marine biologist who has lived and traveled throughout the world. She is pictured with her new children's book, *Gregorina the Horseshoe Crab*.



# What I Knew as a Child

Adrian Calabrese

I knew as a child, as soon as I could reason, that I was Italian, and that meant something. I knew I was a member of a tribe specific to us. Soon I realized there were other tribes, when I met my best friend, Patty Kelly. Irish? That was an eye-opener for an Italian kid whose grandparents barely spoke English.

There were so many other tribes in the New York neighborhood—Jewish kids, black kids, Indian kids, Puerto Rican kids, German kids, and on and on. But it was always clear to me where I came from. I mean *really* came from. To Italian-Americans, that meant the part of Italy from which your mother's and father's families originated. Coming from *my* Italian-American family brought with it certain obligations. There are no-no's that became the norm. Nobody does for us. We do for us, and that's that. We take care of our own. We don't ask for help, even if we desperately need it. We take on more responsibilities we can handle. We give until we can't anymore.

Which brings me to my current state of mind, and my physical landing place: Charlotte, and how I got here. In 2009,



while still living in the Bronx, my dad passed away, and my mom slowly drifted into dementia. By that time, most of the big, loving family I had known had disappeared, through death, relocation, and outright warfare (my Italian family was great at holding a grudge). And so, as was our family “rule,” her welfare became my sole focus for the next seven years. That was expected. I complied, even at the cost of my own health, career, and joy.



When it all got to be too much to handle alone, I was rescued by four friends who had previously moved to Charlotte, via New York and Connecticut. Appealing to my sense of adventure (I had been a wanderer for many years), they offered to help me care for Mom, if we were willing to move south. Contrary to my upbringing, I jumped at the chance. Mom did, too.

You see, Mom wasn't your typical Italian old lady, demure, hunched over, draped in black lace. She defied the stereotype. My favorite image of her is her elbow resting on her hip, a cigarette in that hand, a Scotch on the rocks in the other. This sojourn to the South appealed to the wild woman in her. It was her first real adventure (except for an occasional trip to Las Vegas. She loved those slots!)

I schlepped my 91 year-old mom to North Carolina. I am so grateful I did. Our friends became my strongest support

system, helping with unpacking, settling in, chores, and visits. They were a constant loving presence in our lives, which we so badly needed and appreciated. Mom was very happy in Charlotte, too, for the short time she lived here. She was glad we moved, and enjoyed it until the day she said "ciao" to the world.

Charlotte has been the place of my rebirth, my newly found adolescence, my young adulthood, and my crone-hood, all wrapped up in one tidy package. Here, I can start again, and find my new tribe.

---

*Adrian Calabrese, Ph.D. moved to Charlotte's South Park four years ago. She shares reflections on growing up Italian in the Bronx, New York, and how Charlotte redeemed her.*

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# A Note From the Editor

Tamela Rich

What a delight it's been working with Charlotte area writers on this project!

Charlotte is home to more newcomers than natives, and the collected works in the *Beautiful Truth Magazine* reflect that diversity and many others. As I worked with the contributors to shape their pieces, I felt their longings for a sense of community—one that embraced their unique experiences and contributions to society. Unity in diversity, as I've heard it phrased. Our political and social discourses too often obscure this basic human need.

Charlotte Lit's commitment to building community through the literary arts is expressed throughout the region in a number of free programs and initiatives, including our weekly "Pen to Paper" writing classes; our monthly Wednesdays@Lit series, which offers a wide variety of lit-based events such as readings, talks, and facilitated conversations; and our quarterly 4X4CLT poetry+art poster series, which you can see county-wide in more than 100 public locations. For our members, we offer an open writing studio where writers can work in community.



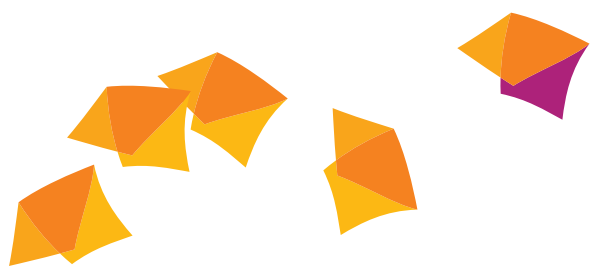
We are committed also to the development of area writers and the engagement of all who love literature, through a calendar of more than 40 classes offered between September and May.

I hope to see Beautiful Truth Magazine contributors and readers at one of Charlotte Lit's many events, now and for years to come.

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*When Tamela isn't working on special projects at Charlotte Lit, she's likely working on her third book, a novel of historical fiction. An avid traveler, Tamela's other books are a travel memoir and a guide to solo motorcycle touring for women. Find her online at [TamelaRich.com](http://TamelaRich.com).*





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