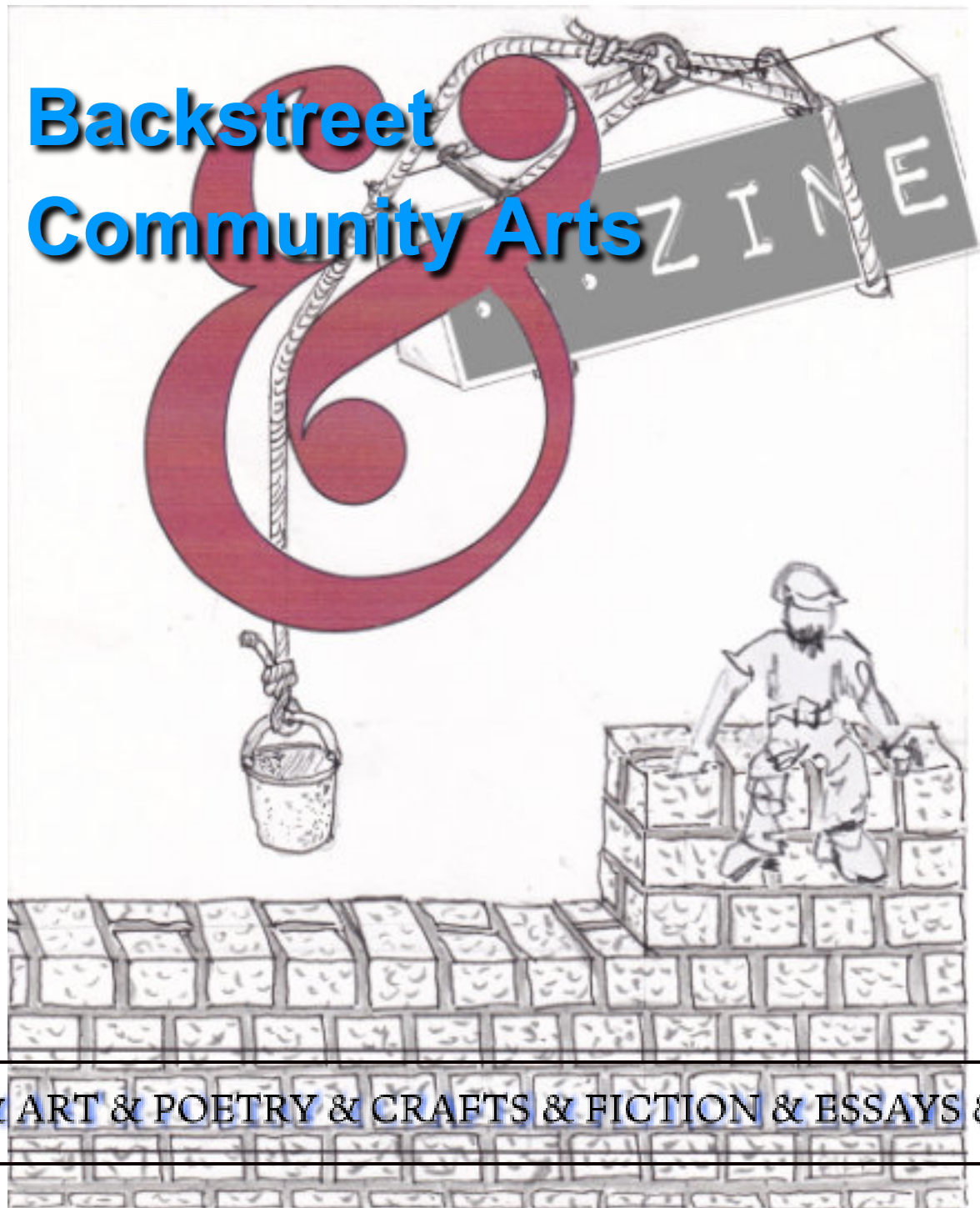


Backstreet Community Arts



& ART & POETRY & CRAFTS & FICTION & ESSAYS &

CONTRIBUTORS

WRITERS

Stan McMichael is an retired educator trying to discover how the world works through writing.

Corbyn Niece is a writer, dancer, and visual artist originally from Ohio. She works in aviation and spends her time exploring movement, travel, and creative expression.

Sara Pace volunteers at Backstreet, leading classes in fiber arts and collage. Photography is her first love!

Robert Thompson is a singer, actor, and now embracing poetry. Still a gen. x kid at heart with gray hair. He still dreams of Broadway and is trying to decide what to be when he grows up.

ARTISTS

Faith Farrell spends her time at Backstreet Arts and Newnan Theatre Company. Her column "Getting Frank With Faith" can be read in Coweta Magazine.

Dale Lyles is the coach of the Backstreet Writers and the editor of the *&...Zine*. He blogs at Lichtenbergianism.com about the creative process.

K. Parr is a regular person who enjoys lots of different kinds of art, just like you.

Brendan Stevenson is a 34-year-old autistic local artist pursuing his bachelor's in behavior analysis. He channels his love for fungi and resilience through depression into vibrant mushroom illustrations in "Nature is a Work in Progress."

Michael Stillman is an oil painter who grew up in Fayetteville, GA. He is a veteran and also does leatherwork, teaches ukulele, and acts in live productions.

Wren is a neurodivergent mixed-media artist drawn to texture, color, and emotional expression. Leatherworking offered a new way to explore growth, persistence, and creative confidence.

THE BACKSTREET &... ZINE: VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 JUN 2026

& POETRY

5 A Letter to Myself
SARA PACE

7 Grocery Store Breakdown
ROBERT THOMPSON

9 To My Waiter, Across
Lifetimes
CORBYN NIECE

& ART

4 Quotes from Non-Famous
People
FAITH FARRELL

6 Nature is a Work in
Progress
BRENDAN STEVENSON

8 Progress
K. PARR

19 The Curing Barn
MIKE STILLMAN

& FICTION

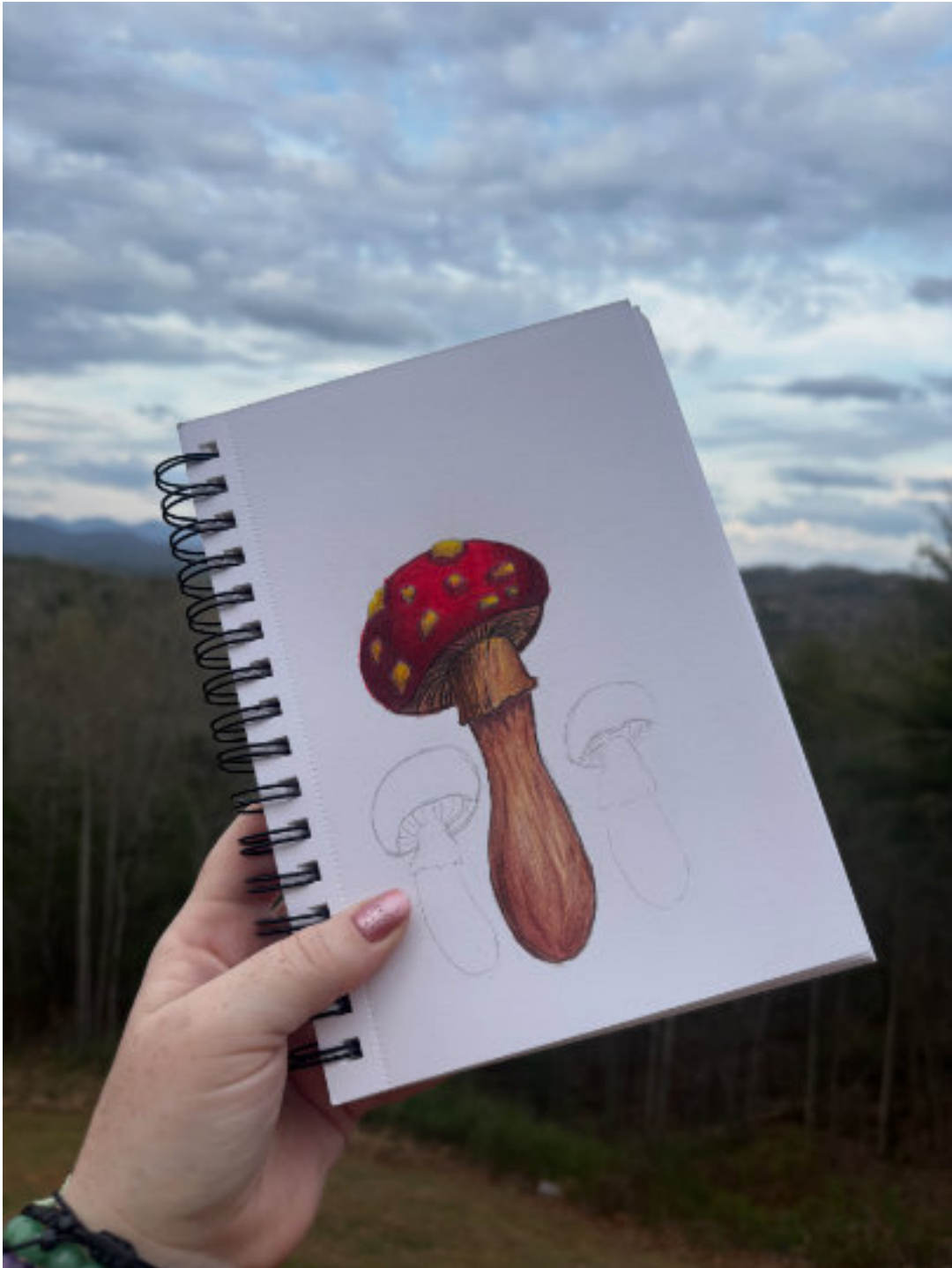
12 Whammo
STAN McMICHAEL

& CRAFTS

11 Untitled
WREN

The *Backstreet &... Zine* publishes four times a year. The theme of this issue is **PROGRESS**; many submissions this issue reflect this theme.

The theme of the September issue will be **STILLNESS**.



Nature Is a Work in Progress — Brendan Stevenson

Grocery Store Meltdown

Sweating...
Do I have my paper?
I check my pockets good.
There they are.
I have my orders.
I
Know I do.
I wrote them myself.
Research was done.
Headings are set
Coordinates are clear.
The mission is set.
Sweating...
I'm in the trenches.
My squad is down to two.
We are in the trenches deep.

My soldier is old, tired, and
Shell-shocked.
The walking wounded.
I can't take much more
We are trying to get out.
I have to load
The cost too high
I've saved nothing
The lights too bright
My eyes are burning
It's too loud...
Rumbles in my ears.
I have to reload.
I'm
Sweating...
I have to unload.
I
Still have to un-load

— ROBERT THOMPSON



To my Waiter, Across Lifetimes

To the waiter at the Asian tea house in the Ferry Building in San Francisco:

I think we know each other.

Not in this lifetime, of course.

In this lifetime, I'm engaged to a handsome man.

We have a home in Georgia and share a beautiful life together.

And in this lifetime, you are a waiter in San Francisco—
at my favorite place to get tea and dumplings when I'm in town.

We don't know each other here, not by name.

But I recognize your soul.

We have a loving relationship in another lifetime.

We've crossed paths enough to recognize the pattern.

Maybe you were a beloved family friend.

Maybe my child.

Or your favorite teacher.

I'm not sure.

But I am sure we loved each other.

Maybe I was your childhood best friend.

Or just your mailman.

A one-night stand.

Husband and wife.

Or maybe—maybe—all of them.

Maybe we've learned to love each other in every way humans can.

And maybe I was the one who caused you so much pain,
you were ready to break the love cycle forever.

Or maybe you forgave me—

and we got to love each other even more in the next lifetime.

But in this lifetime,

you are my waiter.

And we can't think of anything to say to each other

other than to smile—
and just be grateful
to have crossed paths again.
In this lifetime and every lifetime,
I am the student,
and you are my teacher—
who continues to teach me how to love.

— CORBYN NIECE



Whammo

Most mornings on my drive to work, I call my parents. Living in the city of traffic, Atlanta, you need other things to do because a 30-minute drive can turn into two hours.

My mom answered her cell phone as usual and started asking questions before I was finished saying good morning. Silence was my cue to answer, but it never came this morning because she began explaining why she was going to the doctor. As she was talking, all I could hear was my dad in the background yelling at people or yelling at cars; I wasn't sure.

"Mom, where are you?"

"Son, your father decided to drive me to Northside Hospital."

"What? You didn't say your doctor was in Atlanta."

My mind froze; my parents do not live in the city, and they do not drive in the city. My dad is more comfortable driving mules than a car in the city.

"Son, your father wants to talk to you."

My Dad said, "Huey, can you give me some information about the white cars where people appear to drive from the back seat? They don't even appear to be paying attention. These white cars have devices that spin like weather stations all over them."

"Son," he continued, "there is one next to me and one behind me driving down Peachtree street, and if I were a mule, I would be standing still in the middle of the road. If you aren't familiar with mules, when confused, they will not move or freeze."

At this point, I thought he was asking me about Waymo, but I wasn't sure how to explain self-driving cars to my dad. My dad fixes things that are broken. He makes new things from old and doesn't believe in technology that he doesn't understand. Fire, a wheel, making a block of iron into an ax, or making a combustion engine work are things he can do. His curiosity

about the unknown can be overwhelming at times. If I explain Waymo, he may just stop the car and get out to take a look.

I could hear the discussion in the car; my mom was berating my dad for not being on time to her appointment, and now he had taken the wrong exit. I knew my dad wasn't listening, and Mom was getting madder by the minute.

Dad spoke again. "Huey, do you know anything about these cars?"

Before I could answer Dad, I thought I should quiz Mom about this appointment. "Mom, why didn't you tell me about this appointment? You know I would have driven you."

Now I could hear Mom really getting loud with Dad. "Leon!" Mom yelled. "Leon, there is a lot of traffic, and I think you got off on the wrong exit. You know I do not want to be late for my appointment."

I could hear unfamiliar voices yelling now! "Mom, who is yelling? Mom, get Dad on the phone so I can explain the car—it's a Waymo."

"Leon, Huey said the car is called Wamm-o."

Dad said, "He's right, because that guy is surely giving it a Wamm-o!"

Mom asked Dad, "Why is that man hitting the car with a bat?"

"What? What is Dad doing?" I asked. I could hear Dad getting out of the car. My mind started squirreling the possibilities that awaited him on Peachtree Street!

"Son, your dad is out of the car." I could hear Mom yelling at him, "Leon, my appointment!"

My parents are pushing 85 and live in the woods. They are what you call rural. They believe the city is for crazy people. I grew up helping my dad fix our washing machine or fixing our neighbors' cars. We picked baskets of vegetables and took them to friends. We lived a very different life than Grubhub, Netflix, and credit cards. Life was slow but filled with new

experiences and all types of people. Today, you can hide behind social media, work at home, and buy from Amazon and never have a face-to-face conversation with anyone.

I didn't know what a stranger was until high school. Everyone I met was a friend or became a friend, but no one was a stranger. My dad would stop and help anyone on the side of the road, no matter what: the good Samaritan parable stuck with him. The city sucked the soul out of people for the benefit of someone you didn't know, my dad said. A robot car wasn't going to sit well with him.

Mom spoke. "He's pointing his gun in the air."

"What?"

Then I hear Mom yell, "Leon, you better not make me late for my appointment!" Then I hear the gun go off.

"Huey, don't worry, he just shot in the air because these hooded guys were harassing the car in front of us. One is beating it with a bat, and the others are spray painting it."

"Mom, that is a self-driving car called Waymo, not Wammo! It's a taxi or Uber."

"A self-driving what?"

"Mom, are there people in the car?"

Mom said, "Yes, and they look like they are very upset. Huey, these Wammo cars have traffic stopped, and people are upset, me included. Son, your father is talking to the hooded masked men; maybe they are ICE agents trying to help with traffic."

At this point, I started to panic! I asked AI about Waymo attacks, and sure enough, it's been a problem in San Francisco. Waymo cars will not move if someone is standing next to them. People have tagged them with people inside, others screamed about supporting robots that are taking our jobs, so

I wasn't crazy. At this point, I had to pull over on the side of 285 to try to talk sense into my parents.

"Mom, what's going on?"

"Dad seems to have made friends with the men, and they are trying to get the screaming people out of the trapped car by breaking the windows. Huey, do you think I should call 911?"

"Mom, they may arrest Dad if you do."

Mom said, "Why? He's trying to help."

My dad is a craftsman. He creates expensive fine furniture. But what people don't know is that he finds trees like Alabama white oak, Magnolia, Southern Pecan, and Hickory and plots them on a map so he can cut them down later. Dad sneaks into the woods with a team of mules—hard to believe—and chops the tree with an ax. He then mills the tree with a portable sawmill he built.

"Mom, what's going on?"

Mom said, "Your dad has his gun out again. I can see the face of the passengers in the car. They are crying now, and I can hear them screaming when I roll down the window. I'm rolling down the window to yell at Leon to get back in the car so that he can get me to my appointment. Leon, if I have to get out of this car..."

"Mom, can you FaceTime? You know, press the button where you can see me." I heard the door open and the phone disconnected.

My mind went to a time when I didn't have a phone. Something like this would be a story I would tell when I got home. No one would have known anything while it was happening, and possibly I could keep the story to myself. But now I'm sure whatever my dad and mom are doing on Peachtree street is being broadcast live across someone's feed. I'm sure the Waymo cameras are using AI to identify who is attacking the car. This could go viral in someone's feed on social media. Talking to them, I felt helpless, but now I was in a state of shock.

The phone rang! It was my sister, Gloria.

"Do you know why Mom isn't answering the phone?" I didn't know what to say. "Huey? What aren't you telling me?"

My sister had another incoming call that she took. "It's Mom, thank the lord." She put us on a three-way call. "Mom, why aren't you—"

Mom interrupted, "Honey, can you call me a taxi or one of those Ubers? I'm trying to get to my doctor's appointment, and no one seems to want to help me. Your father is standing in the road with his gun pointed at a car, and your brother keeps asking me questions."

Silence. I could imagine Gloria's mouth hanging wide open.

"Gloria, do you hear me! This is your mom speaking! Gloria, I can always count on you."

"Gloria!" I cut in.

"Mom, it's on the way, but—"

Mom said, "How do you know where I am?"

"I just used your phone location." Gloria started trying to explain the situation.

"Look," Mom said, "it appears that everyone in Atlanta drives a white car from the back seat these days. Your father is really upset about it, and maybe someone is trapped in one, but he has forgotten about my appointment."

I'm just completely silent now, sitting on the side of Interstate 285 on a three-way call with my mom and sister.

"Gloria, are you going to do something? Time is ticking!" Mom said.

In unison with my sister, I said, "Mom, a car is on the way!" I decided to pinch myself real hard to make sure I wasn't dreaming.

Mom broke in, "Honey, don't bother yourself. I need to get to my doctor's appointment!"

"What appointment? One of us always goes with—"

"Honey, where is this car because I'm going to be late?" Mom asked. "Huey, your father appears to be shooting at the white Wamm-o car."

Gloria said, "Mom, it's Waymo, and he did what?"

"He's yelling about how the robots are going to take over the world if we don't stop them. He just said everyone just needs to ride horses again. If I'm late, he's getting no dessert for the rest of the month." We can hear Mom yelling at Dad, "Leon, come on!"

My dad has been a tree thief his whole life. After every storm, he would check the map and find the best tree. Everyone thought he was helping out because he told them it had been blown over in the storm. No one ever questioned him.

My sister started talking to Mom. "Mom, there is a white car on the street for you."

"Honey, there are about twenty white cars."

"Just walk up to the one next to you going the opposite direction." My sister had called a Waymo for Mom, and I couldn't stop laughing. She didn't know what was going on. She was getting in a Waymo as my dad was destroying one a block away.

"Gloria, there is no one to drive the car!"

"Yes, Mom, it's self-driving."

"What? I can't ride without a driver."

"Mom, sit back and relax because I'm going to get you to your appointment on time."

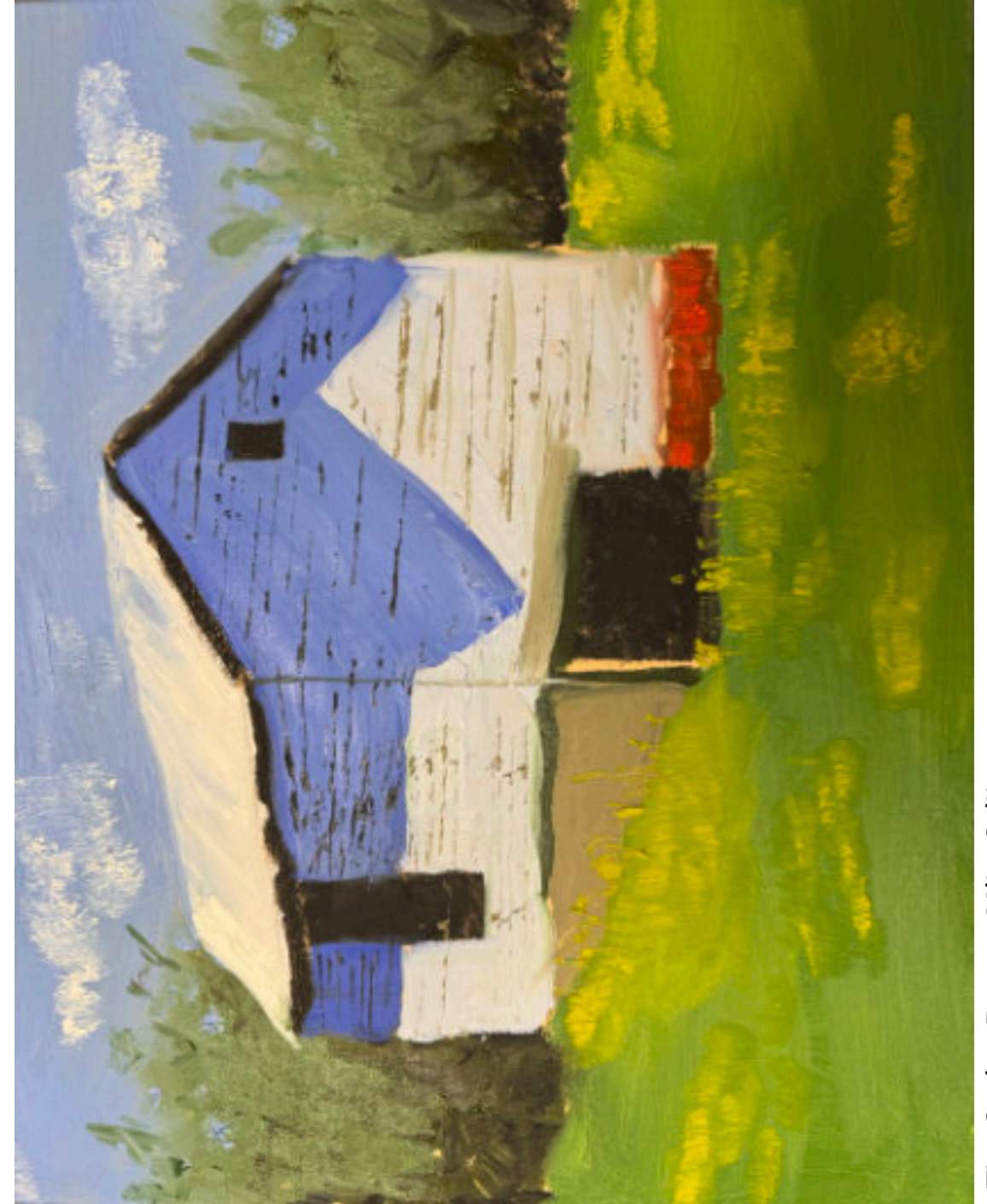
Mom said, "That's what I expect, Gloria! Wait, who do I pay?"

"Mom, this is Huey. Where is Dad?"

"Huey, there is a white car coming right at me with busted windows and two flat tires; the riders have their heads out the windows, screaming for help, and your father and five other men are on scooters, chasing the Wamm-o car." I could hear Mom yelling, "Leon, get over here and help me to my appointment!"

Finally, Mom spoke again. "Gloria, as usual, you are the best child. You got me to my appointment with five minutes to spare. Your father is out of breath and will not hush about the evils of these self-driving cars. Well, I don't think your dad is going to be able to meet the doctor with me because the police have him on the floor in this nice waiting room, and they have free snacks. I guess they finally found out he was stealing those trees."

— STAN MCMICHAEL



The Curing Barn — Mike Stillman



BACKSTREET

COMMUNITY ARTS

Backstreet Community Arts exists to provide a safe, welcoming, creative environment to anyone who may benefit from the healing power of art and community.

Study after study proves that Art has a positive effect on the mind, body and soul.

Backstreet Arts reaches out to adults who may not be aware of or have access to the proven healing power of art: those who have experienced trauma, illness, or grief; veterans; homeless and limited-income individuals who cannot afford art classes, and anyone who wants to practice art in a comfortable, non-intimidating, inclusive atmosphere.

Backstreet is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. We believe that Art Saves Lives...because it saved ours.

19B First Ave, Newnan, GA (behind Bridging the Gap)

<https://backstreetart.org>

on the cover: Working, by Dale Lyles