

ESCOM Journal

The Literary and Visual Arts Journal of the Emeritus Students College of Marin

November/December 2025



Laura Milholland

IN THIS ISSUE: *Bird People, Paper Cranes, Penguins, Pumpkins and Turkeys. Happy Holidays!*



Alexander Brebner

A Legendary Game
January 22, 2022

Icy grime carpets the Frozen Tundra. Kickoff temp reads eight below. Cutthroat wind howls sideways, dumping razor sleet onto our cobbled quarterback: shoulder sprain still shooting pain, ripped up thumb in agony. Injuries aside, our Jimmy G. leads his men to face the hometown team.

Three red-zone visits yield as many flags and groans from ‘niner fans--*faithful’s*--venturing from a gently wintered town, into this Green Bay blizzard. Stoic they stand, witness to a major playoff game. Silent in sorrow, as Deebo’s bag of tricks stays sealed, no shedding tackles, making plays. No Kittle, no Aiyuk, catching pigskins out of nowhere into swanlike end-zone dives—seems all our stars are ossified by Lambau’s winter freeze.

Stadium clock ticks off final minutes of this ice-bound show when, out of nowhere, like a Saturday matinee, white-hat heroes, come to the rescue: ends and safeties, guards and gunners; gridiron journeymen, living in far out reaches of field—and fame. Defensive end, Jordie Willis, extends his broad left hand, blocking the Packer’s punt, caught by Island-bred safety, Talanoa Hufanga, who runs it in the end zone. With double zeros on the clock trusty kicker, Robbie Gould, drives the ball through the posts. Final score: 49ers 13, Packers 10.

lynn arias bornstein

One Thousand Paper Cranes

*in memory of Sadako Sasaki;
Hiroshima, August 6, 1945*

In the years after the bomb fell
on a child of two, one thousand cranes
rose from her hands, each a fragile song
against silence, until she passed away at twelve.
All these years later, voices of youth rise in chorus.
A thousand golden cranes flame up against the sky.
Let us join the harmony of hope. No more blood,
no more deaths, only the embrace of love and peace.

~Ray Fay

Editor’s note: Dr. Fay’s two books of poetry, *Interesting Times* (August 2025) and *Harmonizing Mind and Body: Poems on Chronic Pain* (October 2025), are available for purchase on Amazon. Congratulations Ray!



Alexander Brebner

Bird People

My connection with birds stretches back generations. Mom's grandmother, Lillar, was a Native American of Cherokee heritage. Lillar once net birds for Audubon in the west Texas rangelands.

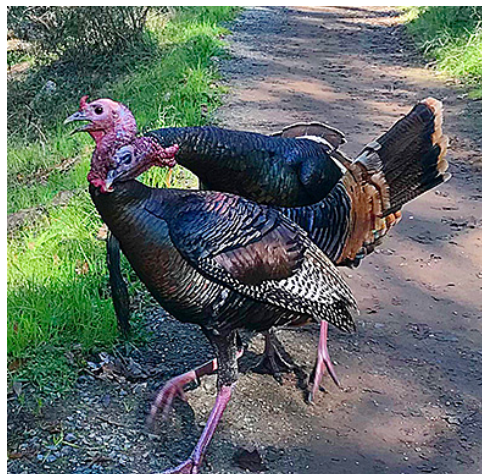
My uncle James Peacock was a master wood carver specializing in transforming inanimate blocks of wood into lifelike birds, mainly waterfowl and shorebirds.

When a traumatic brain injury landed me in a wheelchair with left-sided paralysis it came as no surprise to me that my emotional savior would be a tiny bird. One of the brutal side effects of my flavor of brain damage was uncontrolled, inconsolable crying and sobbing.

I was well into 30 consecutive days of wretched daily sobbing, dark days for me and mine. On one sunny day I took my lunch on the wooden deck attached to the front of my house. This rectangular space is 40 feet long and 15 feet wide, which allowed me ample room to navigate the space in my wheelchair. Once outside I immediately felt a relief, tranquility and calmness that only being out of doors can I offer. While sitting basking in a sunbeam, I heard the most wonderful sound. One that would change my way of perceiving my new condition and provide me a way back to the outdoors I love.

Describing birdsong with words is akin to slicing bread with a hatchet; ineffective, awkward and inaccurate. Often, we're left with some simple clunky phonetic onomatopoeia. That does nothing to convey the musical beauty and sense of peace that listening to birdsong brings. The bird song I heard immediately calmed me down and eased the cobwebs of confusion that had been dominating my thoughts since I first awoke in a hospital bed. Emotionally speaking this song gently guided my tears away.

My healing bird warbled a most melodic whimsical song, whirling fanciful soft musical notes wafting through the air as delicate as snowflakes. Each time I heard this birdsong my emotional state settled into calmness. I had yet to identify this bird. I caught a brief glimpse of it deep in the thick foliage of a towering Laurel tree. It was covered by shadow, and I could not discern any specific colors other than it looked dark. I could see it was about six inches, stout, had an angular head, and a deep fork in its tail feathers. I became a person obsessed with identifying my whimsy bird. It became my white whale. Every day for two weeks I kept vigil with a guidebook and a pair of binoculars. Each time I heard my bird I would hurriedly wheel about the deck trying to find a better spot in which I could see my bird.



Marilyn Bagshaw

Then I decided to get more serious, and I placed a birdfeeder in my yard. The changes were amazing with a food source in place. Songbirds started raining down into my front yard and I worked on honing my bird identification skills. Many of the birds I saw at the feeder had the easily recognizable physical characteristics of Jays, Juncos and Cedar Waxwings, that made finding them in the guide straightforward. But another week passed with no sighting of my mystery bird.

Early one morning, I heard its warble -- and boom! There it was, high up in the tree bathed in bright sunlight sat my mystery feathered biped. It wasn't dark at all. No, it was almost an iridescent purple with streaks under the tail drop covert and along the back and head. With this new information I voraciously searched my guide and there it was hiding in plain sight on the page: the Purple Finch.

Various indigenous cultures of North America hold that the finch is symbolic of joy and happiness, and a harbinger good fortune. Certainly, two of three of these symbolic traits came through for me. This little purple bird brought me immense joy and happiness as well as got me hooked on birdwatching.

My new adventures have taken me out into my neighborhood to inventory the number of unique species living nearby and I am now coordinating with a venerable local conservation organization and helping with their annual shorebird count.

That purple finch positively impacted my mental well-being and has given me the courage to continue spending time thinking about and observing birds. Despite my limitations I have discovered that I belong with birds.

Scott McMorrow



Marilyn Bagshaw

Together in Time

Come, rejoice, let's all join together.
Our bonds will survive through all kinds of weather.
Each life is a cocoon of essence and detail
of Nature's design as we travel in time,
to live and to grow with depth and with knowing
that being on Earth is a treasure bestowing
of kindness and friendship and love as we wander
through years of caring and growth to the yonder.

deidre silverman

Tradition

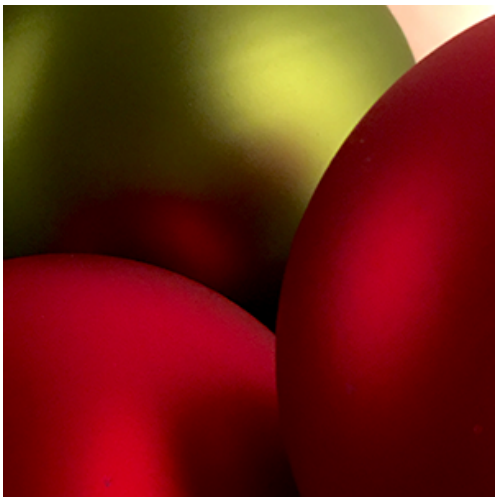
As the days grow shorter
and darkness comes earlier
I feel myself opening up
expanding...
looking forward to the holiday activities
we celebrate every year.

It's tradition that bring us together
a human family carving pumpkins
planning costumes
making sure we have enough treats
for the ghosts and goblins
who will be knocking on our door.

Shopping for Thanksgiving dinner
remembering to buy a few extras
for the local group that makes sure
those who have nowhere to go
are fed and feted
taking time to volunteer.

Rejoicing in the light
from Hanukkah menorahs
Christmas trees
Solstice candles in friendly windows
shining
into a darkness that envelopes
a reminder
the light always returns.

Anne Mulvaney



Alexander Brebner



Harvey Abernathy

Out of Time

Today, there's a hum outside, is it a machine or the earth purring?
Last night, I dreamt crocodiles were swimming under the house,
my backyard had turned into a mote
I was holding on to a rickey card table, like a raft
that had floated up from the laundry room.

Egyptian mythology tells us crocodiles can fly between worlds.
Is the collective unconscious dreaming this again or does it
even understand what it is thinking?

I just want time to stop. Just for a minute or a day or two,
maybe then we could catch our collective breath,
find our footing on this roiling phantasmagoric
world we have created.

Imagine, if you will, the world goes silent
maybe we might then hear the hum—
like the one over the mesa in Taos, after a rainstorm.

What would you do with your frozen time?

Suddenly the thud of a ripe walnut falling,
hitting my deck, lime green, the size of a golf ball.

The crows and squirrels will come and break them open
to reveal a dark brown nut inside. The stain is everywhere.
The tree towers over the yard a hundred feet.
Every year I watch the yellow leaves drop.

My husband and his father are driving across the country
to Houghton Lake, Michigan, for Aunt Linda's memorial on Monday.
They don't want to be late, so they drive ten hours a day
and stop in cheap motels. They say everything looks flat.

Aunt Linda, whom I've never met, fell last week and never recovered.
She was eighty-eight. Gravity will get us all in the end—
but today the sky is the color of a blue egg,
and the only hum, is a distant leaf blower.

-

Marcia Taylor Smith



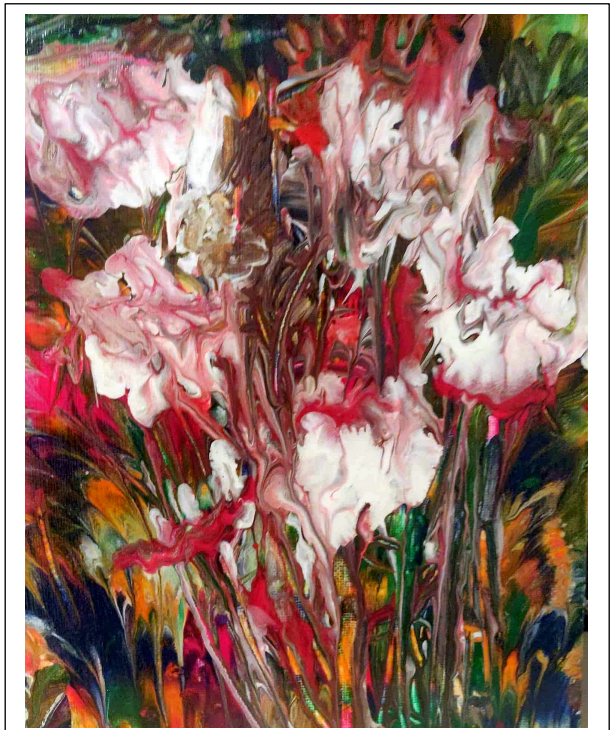
Laura Milholland

Little Things

On a crisp autumn morning I walk
briskly through my neighborhood,
the path lined with trees in fall color.
Occasionally I stop to pick up a fallen
leaf from the frost covered ground,
auburn red, pumpkin orange, golden
yellow., russet brown. The trees'
shade offers no warmth, so when
I come to a spot of sun, I pause, feel
the warmth on my back. I relax my
shoulders and linger a while aware
of the pleasant change I feel inside.

Nature rewards us in whimsical ways.
Open your eyes and ears to her calling.
Your once somber thoughts can brighten
upon hearing the sound of a robin's song,
or seeing your prized sunflower has opened
her golden petals while you were asleep.
Joy happens when it's least expected,
and happiness comes in sudden bursts.

Carol Allen



Ray Shanahan, *Fading Fall Flowers*, Acrylic

The Owl Without Wellness

Body and skin shots of tequila all over town
No music to applaud just guns sound
The owl hangs above leaves falling to the ground.

Who comes calling
And what comes falling
Owl's war chant is appalling.

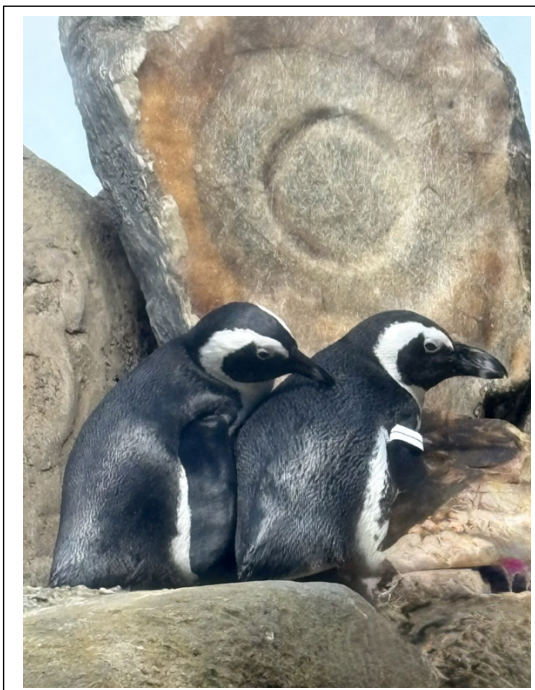
And yet to philander
Joyful tunes turn to slander
What for the owl, the goose and the gander?

A paradoxical system
Where women perform as men
No owl or sense can enlighten.

Is there skin in our trees
Fires hazing rampantly
An owl seeking the presidency?

If the bird is the word
Even those from Antebellum heard
Only the owl without wellness misunderstood.

Karen Arnold



Laura Harrison



Nancy Outenreath



Laura Miholland



Eloise Rivera

Moonlit Horses

My horses emerge
Through whirling snowflakes
The wind whips the frosted darkness
And the moon appears
A jeweled ball of blue ice
On a journey old as time
Whickering
Telling me they're coming
They stop and tilt elegant heads
To gaze seemingly in wonder
Moonlight catches in their luminous brown eyes
Turning them to topaz
Moon beams penetrate
The darkness in the barn
Shedding shadowy light
On their Christmas feast
Windfall apples, oats and hay
Waiting in their manger

Susan Connelly



Susan Connelly

A Place I Once Called Home

*“Time is the longest distance between two places.”-
Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie*

The Bay Area has been my home for some 55 years

but my roots are 2000 miles east, in Illinois, and

one fall day not long ago I took my wife there for

her first, likely my last, look at the Land of Lincoln

The simple frame farmhouse where I was raised by
grandparents owned now by a hunting club

‘No Trespassing’ signs at the gate, locals warned us away

people who are strangers to me now

in a place I once called home

a place that time has moved upon

neighbors I knew then, long gone

At the University of Illinois, all too many familiar
buildings and favorite watering holes now gone,
gone with the nights of drink and smoke and song
students there a third or less our age, we found
ourselves with little to do in a place where I
once felt there was so much more to be done

In a place I once called home



Laura Milholland

a place that time has moved upon

teachers and friends and lovers

I knew then, long gone

Places and people long gone held true

for us the whole trip through

I vouch you can never prepare

yourself to go home and find

that it’s no longer there

Only fading memories left behind

of the precious people, places and time—

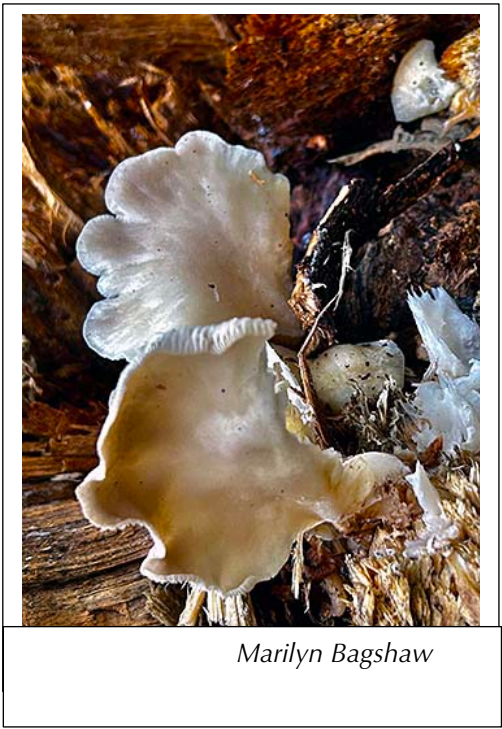
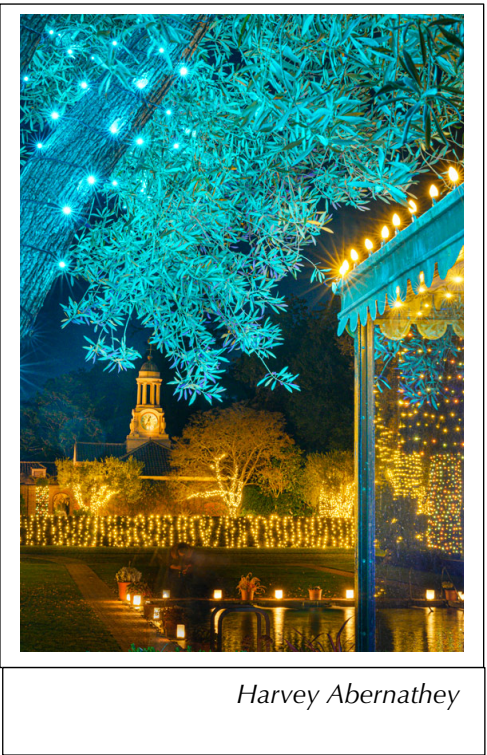
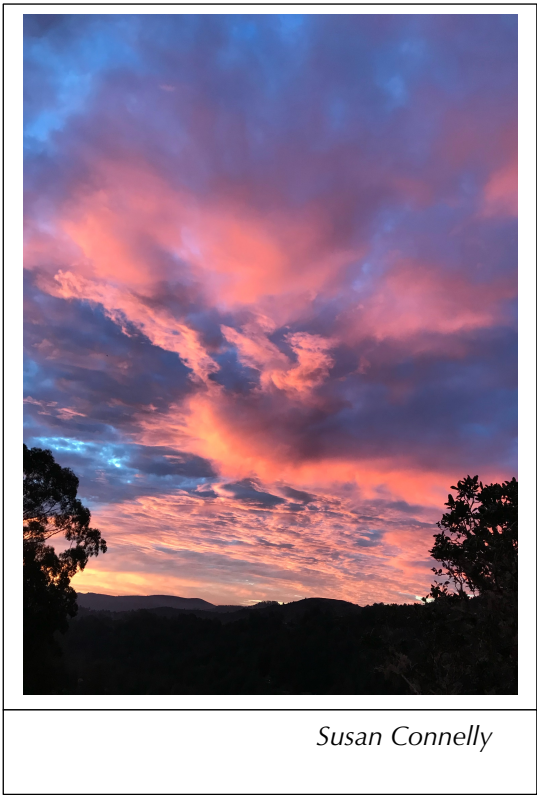
it took your return for you to learn

from the 2,000 miles you’ve roamed

much more than distance separates you

from a place you once called home

Larry C. Tolbert



One Last Look

(On December)

The year's epoch
has played
itself ~
survivor of
stars
reflected
on the
surface
of a still well.

In the
remembrance,
one last look:

the year's embers
falling to the well
with the
stars.

Joan Taschian

The Corvair

Back in the late sixties when my brother Pat and I were both living at home, I thought I'd buy him a car for his birthday. I didn't have a big budget, around \$100 maybe, but it WAS the sixties, and it wasn't unknown to find a used car for around \$50, so I was in the ballpark.

I shopped around in the daily newspaper (*The Chronicle*), which is what one did in those days. I found a '61 Corvair station wagon for \$110.00. I'm ashamed to remember I told Pat we were going out to buy *him* a car.

What really happened was we took it for a drive and found it was a good car. The seller was a beautiful young woman my brother's age and they hit it off right there. They exchanged phone numbers, and I could tell they'd struck paydirt, relationship-wise.

As the hour progressed, I started to feel Pat had no right to both the gorgeous girl AND a decent car. So, I signed the paperwork for the car and took possession. If I could do things over this would be one candidate.

But in those days my conscience was weak. I drove the car and had adventures. Before getting my driver's license, I'd ridden around with my friends. There was one rule: drive fast enough around corners that the tires would howl. One kid got his station wagon sliding so hard it was going backward downhill over 40 miles an hour through a turn that said, "Slow to 25." If you know San Francisco it was Upper Market Street, a long straight descending boulevard that cranked suddenly into a serious blind left. As soon as my friend Kenny saw the sign, he floored the gas.

So, as I drove my rear-engine car around (Ralph Nader called Corvairs *Unsafe at any Speed* in his famous book), I practiced getting it even closer to what I thought was high performance driving. There's a turn in the road out past Fairfax, near White Hill. Thirty mph is reasonable going downhill. I hit it at fifty.

Let me explain. A Corvair is like a yo-yo on a string, the weight is all in the back end, and if you exceed a certain factor, there's no return. No recovering from the slide. You'll start to spin, rear first, dragging the rest of the car out of control.

That turn had no guardrail, it was cut into a hill that overlooks a canyon. So, one day as I was doing my thing I approached that limit. I was within a hair of spinning out of control down into the canyon. I never tried that again. One could tease disaster in a normal car. Not in a Corvair.

Back in San Francisco I'd play around at lower speeds, coming to an intersection in second gear, downshifting to first and flooring the gas, getting it to slide, till one night with three other people in the car I was going down Levant, a 5 mile an hour s-turn. I slammed it, first attempting the classic "lurid slide," and the right rear wheel snapped off and went rolling in the opposite direction. It took the axle shaft right with it. I had it towed to my garage and the tow driver popped it in neatly. Replacing an axle shaft was beyond me, but I knew my brother could do it. That's when I finally gave him the car. He fixed it and drove it for a few more years. His girlfriend went home to Utah, having had enough of San Francisco.

Pat later experienced some hardships, though I don't know how they affected him. When our dad got sick with prostate cancer and was in a hospital for three months, Pat set up the hospital, the post-acute care, everything, but never once visited him. He spoke highly of Dad, though, "we had great parents." I visited Dad every day till one day I came in, and he was dead. I put my hand on his forehead, and it was cold.

For the longest time I've been afraid to ask Pat what he was thinking.

Mike Holland

Happy Falling Leaves

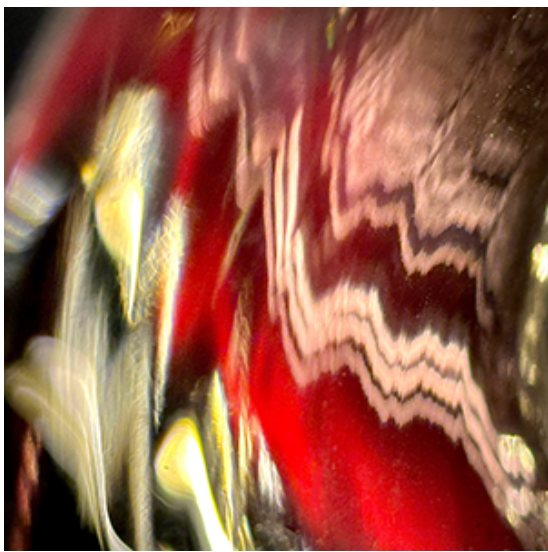
Arcata is a hopping town with musical and artistic flair that suits Mom’s needs per our last phone call. Yet I do not find my family’s needs being met within her whimsical lifestyle. I have wanted permanence of stability to make me feel at home like I felt with Grandmother Maria. I’m so sad that feeling is not happening with Mom as she dances to her own drummer. Thankfully, my children Destiny and Armondo, are on paths that remain stable, so that when I need to feel a strong foundation reflected it is there in my family.

The future of more family gatherings where I too can relate to others in a stable environment is one, I want to be a part of. Therefore, I will listen carefully to tips from family that are stable on how I can make more of a happy difference in their lives too.

I have a strong desire to do things with seniors closer to my age, who also want to enjoy what the Bay Area has to offer. This leaves my desire to research my dad’s family history in Arcata further down on my to-do list. After all, my husband, Rinaldo, is a fantastic dad and helping him to make our family history happy is of utmost importance as our family depends on more of a sure thing.

By hanging out with mellow seniors I can pick up on cues that will help me to age more gracefully. I do not want to be an embarrassment to my family or cause them to worry as to how I spend my time. I think that they will want me to be included within the senior activities, so that I can feel well adjusted to the changes that come from getting older.

Cynthia Rovero



Alexander Brehner



Harvey Abernathey



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To: denizespringer@gmail.com

PLEASE ADHERE TO THESE SPECIFICATIONS

Submit only one piece of final, proofed work. Changes, unless necessary, will not be accepted after submission.

Include your name in the file name and on the page of your document. **You must be an ESCOM member. Membership is free but is no longer automatic with class registration. To join, go to:** <http://escom.marin.edu/join-escom>

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Misspellings, grammatical errors, and erroneous line breaks could be mistaken as the author's intent and not corrected. Proof your copy before sending it in.