

Army Brat

by Leah Chaffins

Often we camped on the water's edge, the shore
Line between Army and civilian life loomed
In the near-distance, unseen, but lapping,
Lapping, lapping and lurking. Eventually, he would retire
The Army life, and with that everything I knew. By
Seven, I was a professional at leaving, at packing
Life up. How do you say good bye to all you know, over
And over
And over.
These tides in and out, turns turning life
Over like a lake, like an upheaval of
Everything. I watched with envy the children
On commercials, at school, down the street, kids
Whose height was carved into door frames,
Walls hung with pictures of their family in the same house
Year after year. Their Christmas trees in
Front of the same window. All their pets buried
In the backyard. Their walls were painted
In shades of memories I could never have.
For me, each move, a new duty station,
The new-to-us house, the mysterious maze of hallways
And windows that looked out upon the unknown.
The kids at school all knew each other. Their mothers
Were cousins, best friends, or enemies, since grade school.
Those kids didn't want to know me; I sat with the other
Military kids in the cafeteria, away from the others.
The smell of the next move, soaked through our clothes
Like stale piss. The other brats moved away, and then we found
Each other on our next move, once again.
Falling apart and joining back together in a great
Ritual of choreographed chaos.
Military "brats" circling base after base, resilient and wild,
Moths, grey and parentless. We had the same babysitters,
Same PX clothes and we ate the same wholesale commissary
Ring bologna or brauts. Once brown
Buildings faded a shade of puke-orange,
Cannon dust in every breath, cars
Weaving in and out of lines of jeeps and jogging soldiers.

Left, left, left, right, left

We “brats” looked, we always looked. Was it mom? Was it dad?

If they were home

When they were home

When AIT, or the field or foreign shores didn’t demand, demand,

Demand.

Leah Chaffins is a short story writer, a novelist, and a poet. Her primary writings are horror fiction, memoir, poetry, and journalism. Her work can be found in publications such as the anthologies *Bull Buffalo and Indian Paintbrush*, *Ain’t Gonna Be Treated This Way: Poems of Protest & Resistance*, and *Behind the Yellow Wallpaper*, *Red Earth Review*, and *580 Monthly*. Leah recently published her first novel, *The God Seed*, and is currently revising her second novel, *Birthmarks: Lucille* and a chapbook *Deep Prairie Bitters*. She is an Assistant Professor at Cameron University. In her free time, Leah volunteers with organizations that are using creative writing to positively impact the world we share.