



Southern Voices

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Southern Voices

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Daniel Richard
"The Crow," Stipple
 Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Orange Leather Flamingos

by Tiffany Rayburn

First Place, Short Story Contest

She had Dolly Parton hair, a million tight unnaturally blond curls. She wore pounds of blue eye make-up and bright red lipstick, and orange leather flamingos hung from her ears. She had on leopard skin pants that bulged unattractively at the hips and thighs, and a blue tube top that squeezed her skin until it overflowed out of the cheap material, flesh heavily freckled and beginning to show signs of wrinkles. Her hands were rough with callouses, covered with third-class gold rings and tipped with crooked red fake fingernails. Her mouth turned down and her nose turned up. Her name tag said "Merle" and she was my only chance.

Through a curious series of events, I had ended up in Bogalusa, LA, over the weekend. It was Monday afternoon, and I had to get home to Tylertown, MS, before my parents did. I didn't have a friend in the state of Louisiana who wasn't drunker than a skunk in love and I didn't have any change to call a more sober friend. I was so desperate that I do believe I would have tried walking but it was July and the sun was searing flesh with a vengeance. I had tried calling all the people I knew who I thought would accept a collect call from me, and after that failed, I had checked every convenience store I could walk to for a friendly face. It looked like Merle was as close as I was going to get.

Despite the apparent despair of my situation, I began to see the humorous side of it, as I often do when trying not to worry about something. After observing Merle, I figured I might as well just have a little fun with this latest slice of insanity in my life.

I strode confidently up to the counter. "Merle, huh?" I said with a big grin, showing my twenty-five hundred dollar dental job. "I thought that was more a man's name than a woman's." Merle didn't remove the Virginia Slim from her mouth. "Reckon it can be both," she said.

I pursed my mouth like I'd just had a bite of lemon. "Well, I guess so." I laughed queasily. "Listen, Merle," I began. "I'm kinda needing some change if you could loan me a little..." I struggled clumsily with the words I'd never used before. "Reckon whatcha need it for?" she asked,

graciously taking the cigarette from her mouth and laying it in a tin ashtray. I looked at the lipstick imprint on it.

"Ummm, well actually, I'm kinda trying to find myself a ride up to Tylertown."

"Reckon I'm going that way when I get off."

I twisted my mouth in a half grin. "When you get off?"

"'Bout five minutes."

Approximately ten minutes later, I was sharing an old green Chevy truck with Merle and a big black and white mutt named Bandit after the movie *Smokey and the Bandit*. I was reminded briefly of what my mother told me about riding with strangers. I have to admit I was a little concerned about Merle's lack of conversation skills but I figured it was worth it to get home.

In order for me to sit down, she had to clear away a bottle of psoriasis treatment, a black leather bra, a brush

In order for me to sit down, she had to clear away a bottle of psoriasis treatment, a black leather bra, a brush full of brown hair (confirming my suspicion about the wig), a half-eaten ham sandwich, and a huge bunch of papers about the importance of having a good insurance plan.

full of brown hair (confirming my suspicion about the wig), a half-eaten ham sandwich, and a huge bunch of papers about the importance of having a good insurance plan. I settled into the hole in the seat and sat back to relax. I had three hours to make a one-hour trip. I didn't really pay too much attention to my surroundings since Bandit was sitting on me, but after a while I caught a glance out the window and realized I didn't know where I was. For the

first time, I felt a stab of real alarm.

Suddenly, Merle swerved the Chevy off the paved road and down a bumpy strip of gravel to a brown trailer. "Oh, God," I thought. "I'm about to be sacrificed." I tensed my muscles and started looking around for large blunt objects.

Merle stopped the Chevy and got out. "Reckon I'll just be a minute," she called over her shoulder. I sat in the truck nervously, watching for any sign of an ambush from the nearby woods. I heard obscenities being hollered in the trailer and then breaking glass. I was convinced I wasn't going to be able to get out of Merle's company without a murder taking place. I considered making a run for it but remembered I didn't know where I was.

To make matters worse, it was the late afternoon and the heat was sweltering. Sweat ran into my eyes and my

mouth. It slid slowly down my back and collected in the backs of my knees, making me stick to the seat and pray for an ice cube. Bandit panted in my ear and his hot dog breath pulsed on my neck like a fan blowing nothing but hot air. Finally, I pushed him away and strained to hear anything else from the trailer.

After I had worried about a decade off my life, Merle burst out of the trailer with her orange leather flamingo earrings dancing ninety to nothing. She was holding a swinging garbage bag and a fresh pack of Virginia Slims. She stumbled slightly, trying to run, as her five-inch heels caught in the gravel. She tossed the bag in the back and jumped in the truck. I wouldn't have thought she could move that fast. As we headed out back to the paved road, I heard screaming. Looking back, I saw a guy in baby blue boxer shorts throwing shoes at us. I glanced at Merle and decided I better not ask.

Apparently Merle was in a little too much of a hurry, because we didn't get too far down the road before the front right tire blew out. Merle managed to keep it under control alright and got us over to the ditch, where she inspected the damage. "Shhhhh...FIRE!" she exclaimed. I couldn't help it. I started laughing. I don't know if it was because of the hilarity of the situation or from relief or both but I very nearly fell out of the Chevy. I doubled up, choking on my laughter. Merle eyed me suspiciously. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." I struggled to catch my breath and to avert Bandit's tongue from my cheek.

"It's just that lovely display of emotion."

"Reckon that's just natural."

She grumbled the words but I saw her smile briefly, trying not to show her crooked teeth and their varying shades of yellow. She pulled a large tire from the back of the Chevy. As she changed it, I sat lazily in the sun, watching her and wondering about her life and the guy in the baby blue boxer shorts. In the heat, she pulled off the Dolly Patron wig to reveal a half-pinned up, half-falling-down mess of dull Indian straight brown hair that matched her eyes. I stole a cigarette and made up stories about her life while she squatted with the leopard skin pants stretched tight and Bandit walked around in the grass, sniffing and barking at passing cars.

Merle may not have been the Ivy League type but she changed that tire and got us on our way yet again. I gave her some sketchy directions and she got me to my house about an hour before my parents were due back. I stood for a moment, holding the Chevy door open.

"Well, I really appreciate the ride. I'll be more than happy to pay you for it."

"Reckon I'm alright without it. I'll see you around, kid."

I gave Bandit a companionable pat on the head and shut the truck door. Merle backed out and headed north. I waved until the Chevy was out of sight. I could see the silhouette of the orange leather flamingos the whole way. ❖

In the heat, she pulled off the Dolly Patron wig to reveal a half-pinned up, half-falling-down mess of dull Indian straight brown hair that matched her eyes.

THE CHRIS READ AWARD FOR FICTION

The Chris Read Award for Fiction, instituted with the 1994 issue of *Southern Voices*, honors a member of the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science's Class of 1991. Christopher David Read was an active leader at MSMS as a member of Emissaries, the Debate Club, and the *Southern Voices* staff. Chris's first love, however, was writing. Southern style.

Chris often wove his Southern tales late at night. Chris would compose either on the computer or on (his favorite) the old, brown Royal typewriter he had bought from the pawn shop down 13th Street South. Faking sleep, I would watch the grin on Chris's face as he worked out the next great story. When he finished, Chris would always "wake me" and excitedly read his new story to me. He never knew that I had been hiding, watching his creative process with admiration. I was not the only one to admire Chris's work. This award stands as testimony to the admiration that we all held for Chris and his work and as a memorial to the Southern writing tradition which Chris loved.

Chris had the potential to become a great writer. Unfortunately, Chris never reached this potential: he was killed in a car wreck on January 17, 1993. Though Chris will never attain his dream of writing a great novel, all of those who loved and respected Chris hope that the recipient of this Award, as well as all the other aspiring writers at MSMS, will achieve their dreams.

Michael D. Goggans
Class of 1991



Rebekah Page
"Java," Linoleum Print

Two Down and a Pasture Full to Go

Black spots blend in the darkness
As white blotches seep from within the black pasture.
Light summer night breezes carry silent tails back and forth
Like a pendulum.
Heads dip toward the ground like a dog in shame.
Tall grass tickles pink, sagging underneath.
Bobbed-wire fences are the only barrier for the two.
Four bare feet fly over rugged wire onto shredded hay.
Eyes adjust in the darkness as each finds its victim.
Tip-toes lift high and meet kindly with the earth again.
Cow dung fills their nostrils as steady hands reach out.
One quick shove and plunk.
Girlish giggles mix with the night.
Two down and a pasture full to go.

Memorie McCreary

Hands that Bled for My Sake

My hair is strong
Strong like the spirit of mothers who begat me
Mothers who worked hard and outlived their husbands
Who died inwardly
Sacrificing their souls
For those of their children
Whose will could not be broken by uncontrolled fear
Pressing onward with
Strength filled by hope
that has brought me to the place where
I now stand
I stand, hungering the thrill of the chase
Where I'm not running from those sharp yellow teeth
That snapped at my mother's heels
Where I'm the one doing the chasing
Taking what is rightfully mine
fighting off hands that grab and pull at my hair
hands that fondle inquiring for the sole
purpose of their own gratification

I have grown weary of swallowing my tongue
Listening to the jargon of lost souls weeping in my head
Their death did not come in vain
Because I won't succumb
I will resist.
No more will I crawl on my hands and knees
Scrubbing spilled love and companionship from the floor
Using my hair to wash away sins not mine.

Altiemeis Howard

Age

The flour sifts into the bowl;
Her tired hands pull and tear at the dough,
Mix it with worn fingers.
She limps across to
The Kenmore stove.
Sighing, she sinks to a rickety chair and
Asks me to bring her oscillating fan.
She holds her chest, worried.
Ignoring the pain, she points with love
To the Hunt's Ketchup on the wooden counter—
She knows I'll want french fries, too.

Casey Williams

“Corners”

by Mary Burge

First Place, Essay Contest

Driving to my church on a Wednesday night is like driving into a different part of the universe. At least, a different part of Hattiesburg’s universe. The old brick-red building is located near the heart of downtown Hattiesburg, a rapidly disintegrating “historic district.” What was once a thriving commercial boom centered on the railroad and logging industry is now adorned with old law offices, cobblestone one-way streets, and turn-of-the-century three-story houses occupied by senior citizens or transient day-cares. It is also composed of a collection of low-income apartments, an old fire station, and a BP that monthly gets robbed. My church, aptly named Main Street Baptist Church, is further up Main in a pseudo-protective sphere of tradition and reverence.

One evening, in route to Wednesday’s service, I came upon the nameless “freak” that gave everyone some amusement around Main Street. He stood on the sidewalk next to my diesel Mercedes offering that benevolent, if extremely lost, grin of his and one chocolate brown hand in greeting. He wore an orange sundress that clung in desperate bulges to his body and dirty grey flip-flops badly in need of replacement. In his hands were anemic brown plastic bags apparently from the Big Star three blocks up Main. It’s unsure if this man was given hormones by his over-intoxicated mother as a child or if there is some deeper psychological impediment unbe-

knownst to the “normal” populace. He was well known around my church, even by the restless front pew seven year olds, although no one had ever talked to him. I’ve always found him friendly, the few times I was close enough in my car to see him, and wished I had the lack of social prejudice to speak. I have always tried to smile back at him, but a mixture of shame and awkwardness overrode the cordiality.

For a second, I naively entertained the idea of inviting him to church. Sure, I might become a statistic in the vast metropolis of Hattiesburg, and my mother was sure to follow through on her threat to send me to a psychiatrist—plus threaten to move for endangering my father’s position on the church finance committee—but some

*He wore an orange sundress that clung
in desperate bulges to his body and
dirty grey flip-flops badly in need of
replacement.*

vague concern plagued. I felt like I was trying not to glance at a homeless man who, holding up his cardboard sign, is never as trustworthy as you want to believe.

So I turned the corner, headed north on Main, past the air-brushed bouffants of Sisters’ Boutique, past the Tara house with the yellow door, and into the church parking lot. Since it was Wednesday night, there wasn’t a deacon to give you a peppermint and cold handshake. As I walked upstairs to my department, a large easel caught my eye. On it were “Project to Build” posters with neatly drawn steeples against a matte brown frame. “The Vision” it said in fine black ink. ❖

Truckstop Good-bye

The neon sign flickers and buzzes overhead
calling in greasy hair and potbellies
jumping down from 18 wheels at 2 a.m.

Stale cigarette smoke mixes with the smell
of fried chicken and coffee left from this afternoon
and a little girl stands on the seat of
the tattered, rust-colored booth
with her hands and nose pressed against the cool glass

A tired woman still in her suit and heels
stands with her arms crossed
tapping one foot on the oil-stained concrete

She glances back towards the child
and the harsh light emphasizes
the wrinkles in her pale skin,
too many for such a young age.

Then she glances at the glinting gold watch
on her wrist again

The child still in her pajamas

rubs her sleepy eyes and looks up to
an 18 wheeled monster
jerking to a stop too close

A large man with week-old stubble
in cowboy boots and a torn, dirty work shirt
drops from the cab with his famous
"it's not my fault" expression

He moves towards the woman and
as her voice gets louder and firmer
his body tenses and his face
flushes to a bright red

Not wanting to witness the all-too-familiar scene
the little girl hops off her booth and climbs onto
a squeaky bar stool to ask the waitress
for another cookie

The lady behind the counter smiles
a sympathetic smile
"Sure, hun, here ya go"

The child says her thank you's and makes her way
back to the cold window to see tears fall from
brown and grey whiskers as the trucker
rises from his knee and shuffles back
to his lonely cab

The woman, shaking, but trying to
keep her composure,
turns and silently steps to the
grungy restaurant's only door
as the mighty truck grumbles out of the lot
The child waves a young, sticky good-bye,
She slumps down in her booth and whispers
"I still love you, Daddy."

Dana Grant



Lorraine Posadas
"Fourth Grade Girl," Graphite
First Place, Art Contest

Nude Soul

An invisible force pulls between us, You across the small
linoleum table.
Tousled auburn hair now slick and straight; words
smooth as ice;
same legs, powerful pistons that once carried you, glori-
ous, down soccer fields.
The unchangeable core of You inspires love,
validated in two pools of shimmering emerald
green.
I see all the old tricks hidden in a new thesaurus of
words.
A semblance of certainty undercut by frequent ques-
tions,
Your way of sounding good or bad ideas, hoping for a
crumb of direction.

Compliments given in exquisite simplicity revoked as
conscious thought catches loving heart.
Words echo painfully Your belief that love can't be
wrong so it never was.
Portals to Your soul averted as You see untruths slither-
ing out slowly and the
constant clasping of quivering hands and frequent
quests of nervous fingers searching for
a rebel strand of hair
reveal the effort belief requires.
Words are illusions, heart shines from scars and wrin-
kles in familiar hands.
Old virtues and ideals underlie new philosophy,
You struggle to hide Your nude soul in the spotlight.

Anna McGehee



Mary Jensen
"Blossoming Magnolias," Color Pencil

Cotton

by James Dunavant
Second Place, Essay Contest

As we pull onto the highway for another day in the life of farming, I remember all of the things I didn't do for the day's task. I approach the day ahead of me with the utmost of caution, yet we speed to the office due to our extreme tardiness. Trying to get my head together, I peer out into the infinite fields of cotton, looking sideways and watching the rows in the field swing by at the speed of light. The awful, yet familiar, stench of pesticides circulates through the hot, humid Delta air, bringing a strange feeling of coziness and reminding me that I have no reason to worry. This is my home and my world in the Mississippi Delta.

We call our town "Rolling Fork." Now this slightly puzzlin' name derives its meaning from the two-bit, muddy creek that runs through the middle of town and serves as this area's nourishment for agriculture, therefore, money. For this plentiful nourishment the inhabitants are very grateful because, after all, this creek basically supplies its people with the two greens that make the world go 'round. In order to make a decent living in these parts, a person only has to know how to work in the fields, follow a father's footsteps, and inherit the thousands of acres owned over a hundred years ago by a great, great-grandfather, and pull in well over a hundred grand in an off year.

Weather is the only force of nature that a man fears in the Delta. The weather could mean one year of wealth, or it could mean one year of worrying about what is going to be fed for the next meal. It all lies within the Hands of Almighty God. These Hands are why a man of the Delta Way of Living will be seen on the front row of church every Sunday morning, giving his proper offering to the Lord, for he wants that money back in the ways only God Almighty can be responsible for.

Yes, a farmer certainly gets close to the Lord in these parts, for no other job in the world truly witnesses default by the actions of one hundred percent nature. Others in the world who are enslaved to their personal

professions have people to blame when they get fired or laid off, but only a farmer sees the pure fire, brimstone, and water (I might add) coming straight from the Gates of Heaven itself. Now, don't get me wrong: an individual of the Mississippi Delta is not ignorant of the modern way of Christian beliefs. He knows that supposedly God doesn't directly interfere with the earth's business, and He is *supposedly* sitting back and just watching His children with a grim smile. You just begin to wonder when you leave for the deer camp on a Friday night; everything is going great on the farm, and you enjoy a wonderful night of poker and drinking with the boys, only to get a call the next morning that a tornado touched down on your land and your land only, wiping out about twenty thousand dollars worth of soybeans. Oh, yes, it will keep a man in close relations with the Lord.

Growing up around this area, you gain very little from an education, for that doesn't stop that cold snap

Weather is the only force of nature that a man fears in the Delta.

which kills every last bit of acreage, doesn't stop that time of year when flooding from the Mighty Mississippi completely drowns all the great crops you

thought you had due to a heavy winter in the North. Hell, an education doesn't even teach you how to drive a tractor, or how to rebuild an engine, or change a damn'd flat tire. None of the skills you'd think a man would need to know are even addressed. Rather than attending school, just have a few years with Daddy and let him show you how to do everything, for you are just going to be doing the same things he always has. Why not just let him show you how? Well, I say this, but it is true that in this day and age, you do need to know how to read and write, add, subtract, and multiply, and count money to run a farm, but if I remember correctly, you learn how to do each and every one of these things by the end of fourth grade. Yes, living this way of life does cause many questions, but God is always somewhere, and if He doesn't seem to be answering, there are plenty of long, lonely dusty dirt roads just for a good thinking spot in the Mississippi Delta. ❖

The Technicalities of Hog Killing

by Emma Johnson

Third Place, Short Story Contest

We heard Jeff's thundering Ford tear across the beaver pond and yank into the yard. Judging from the sound of the slamming door and the swiftness with which he opened the tailgate, we knew Mama had better grab her camera and step out onto the concrete front porch as soon as she could tie a rag around her head. Jeff, proudly beaming into the bed of his '64, stood tall and proud in his hunting gear, his rusted .22 hung smartly over his shoulder,

Anxious to get a good look at the bed of the truck, I pushed past George's aluminum crutches and Grandpa's four-pronged walking stick. Mama bustled out of the house and quickly claimed her place of honor at the end of the tailgate, camera poised in its critical position. Grunting with determination, she shoved my nephew Scotty to the rear of the crowd and began snapping pictures and hootin' and hollerin' louder than she did the time my daddy caught a forty-two pound carp in Mr. Beckman's pond down on Prairie Road. Jeff began shedding orange vests and camouflage coveralls just as the picture taking began, and I noticed that he was edging away from the road a little bit, probably because my Grandma Ed's tobacco stream wouldn't spare anybody and Jeff was slam in the middle of his path.

If only I could get a glimpse into the back of that truck, I thought, then maybe I could get back in the house and finish that bowl of okra and cornbread I'd left sitting on the coffee table. With all the determination a seven-year-old can muster, I bit my lip and tore through the front lines, sucking in my breath as I came face-to-face with the hairiest animal I'd ever seen. A mixture of repulsion and interest churned in my belly as George, who had already used his crutches to hoist himself into the truck bed, grabbed my skinny arms and pulled me up over the rails.

Stretched out on a wad of black garbage bags was a huge monster with two broken teeth sticking out of its gnarled, still mouth. Looking down, I watched with mortification as a warm, sticky pool of blood oozed even closer to my pink Shirt Tails sneakers, and I backed

silently against the cold crutches, clinging to George for support. After staring at this smelly lump of filth for a minute, I whispered to my brother, "So what in the world IS the darn thing?"

"Aw, Emmer," he said, drawling my name into about fourteen syllables and taking the liberty of adding an "r" or two for a dramatic effect, "it ain't nothing but one of them there wild hogs been eatin' up John Roe and Whitey Fulmer's grass patch. Jeff got him over there by Leroy Parker's on his way in from the parts store this evening, shot him clear from the truck."

Now I seemed to remember an incident back in '85 involving my brother and a truck and two dead rabbits, and it seemed to me like somebody got into a little trouble with the game warden, Mr.

David Green. As good as I could remember, it seemed like my brother got a long talking-to about the sinful nature of shooting anything from a moving vehicle, and I was pretty sure Jeff hadn't parked the truck for this one either.

About this time, I'd had enough of peering into the vacant eyes of one of God's own creations, and I hopped out of the truck onto the

packed red dirt below. Jeff was doing everything he could to escape Mama and her vicious Polaroid, and his escape route looked like it was taking him across the road and into his trailer. With my only option at home being to get clobbered by the ooh-ing and ahh-ing of my favorite kinfolks as they fawned over the expertise hunting skill of my dear brother Jeff, I decided to follow him past the crowd and into his house.

"Jeff," I began, "is it really illegal to shoot stuff from a moving vehicle? Last time, Daddy said it was and you'd go to hell for getting in trouble with the law. Is that true?"

"Shoot naw," he quickly replied, "the illegal part is if the engine is on, not if the truck's moving."

I paused for a second and let that sink in. Seemed pretty impossible to me. Everybody knows cars don't just up and move. At least that's what my daddy said, and he knows everything about mechanics. Junior Johnson didn't own Shubuta's only profitable Napa store

As good as I could remember, it seemed like my brother got a long talking-to about the sinful nature of shooting anything from a moving vehicle, and I was pretty sure Jeff hadn't parked the truck for this one either.

by chance; it was what he loved and what he knew. So if he said a car had to be on to move, then it just had to be. That was all there was to it.

"Emmer, you're looking all in a tizzy," he said. "What's a matter? You don't believe what I'm telling ya?"

"Well, I just can't make it fit together. If you killed the engine, how was the truck moving?"

"It's all about your timing," he explained. "Find you a good hill and cut the engine off at the top of it, and you'll roll right on down. No need to waste gas, now is there?"

"But Jeff," I whined, "isn't that against the law? If you go to jail, I'll have to ride the school bus, and you know me and them Davis girls'll scratch each other's eyes out. You know they stole all my glue last September, and I can't get no more."

"To be so smart, Emmer, I swear you don't listen to a

word sometimes. The illegal part is if the engine is on, NOT if the truck is moving. You get it?"

Chewing on my lip a while longer, I realized the genius of his plan. It's like living dangerous, but not TOO dangerous, I reasoned.

Since then, I've figured out a lot of ways to almost get in trouble, but not exactly. Who would have thought that a hog killing in the middle of May would have been so educational? Of course, my Mama doesn't see the beauty in it yet, not when she needs her lipstick and I tell her I don't have it. But I really don't. It's at Stacy's house, along with a bottle of Elmer's glue I found in one of the Davis girl's backpack and two twinkling earrings my sister-in-law left on top of my mama's chest of drawers. Seems to me like there are lots of things I could learn to, umm, "borrow," don't you think? ♦

Doomsday Wore Yellow

Were you aware as I pressed my forehead against a cold rattling pane of glass,
That I discovered Kansas was not monotonous?
The orange and violet sky is a moving color wheel at 5 a.m.—
Poignant and calming,
Dry and fire-driven like a slow moving fever,
Spreading out its insolence in subtle waves,
Slow at warming my shaking hands.
Underneath me a vice of cold aching memories
Is packed like an old carpetbag.
They merged in a confusing jumble, the purple black recollections,
Eight months prior to this journey.
Back in August when the sky was a blank blue face,
Emotionless and uninspiring in its stoic beauty.
Now through the glass the sun keeps pace with this sighing red bus
It jumps in fits and curves in response to the Inconsistency of the road,
Yet from a purely mortal distance,
Seems without motion.
It comes into itself without comfort or disdain,
Steps over the brown grass hills,
Swims in sharp thrusts through the pastels of morning,
Keeping my colorless face dry.

Mary Burge
Honorable Mention
Poetry Contest

And of Course

And of course you made her eyes blue
You know I like that color
Dash me against foreign rocks
Rip out my humanity through my chest
And throw it against the wall
So that it may splatter and shutter my eyes
Weeping over the shaving basin
So that's why tears are blue
And is my favorite color
You realize how cold it is out here
How my body shivers in the blue light of the moon
How her eyes gleamed blue
Above her freckled face
Blue is to lament, as I am to lament
I am always in some shade of mourning
Though blue also means some calm
Surely I am calm
But blue yields deep into violet yet not unto
Red

Jeffrey Jenkins

Color Me Purple and Blue

His cotton shirt is colored purple.
His cotton shirt is colored blue.
Both are stamped with a white seven
Dreaming to be a number twenty-three
Just like a real Rosedale Eagle.
Just like Daddy.
Inexperienced hands throw slippery baseballs
Long distances
And run hard the whole time.
Throbbing knees bend behind white diamond plates
As eyes focus through plastic masks
And catcher's mitts rub hard against blistered, calloused
hands.
Burning eyes blink in the brightness between first and
second
Cursing for not getting the spot between second and
third.
Mama told me not to cry.
Lips puckered out

Either from blisters or too many sunflower seeds
Or maybe a dip.
New plaid boxers show through both
Clorox white pants.
They both bend in the box
Butt poked out
Never keeping the bat steady
But swinging it firmly back and forth.
Full count.
Mama told me not to cry.
A dry breeze takes the ball over outfield
Over the chain-linked fence
That seemed so far away.
As far as seven from twenty-three.
His legs stretch out showing purple-striped socks.
His legs stretch out showing blue-striped socks.

Memorie McCreary



Eric Dahm
"Madonna and Child," Stipple
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Kiss of Life

by Bridget Gant

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

The nylon rope bit into my arm while my whole body strained through the vicious, murky water. Jeremy, my brother, grabbed my extended left arm, and, with a sustained steady pull, we crept to the shallow water. A string of orange floats extended over the turbulent surface of the pond. With the frayed rope over my shoulder, I leaned toward the east bank and started walking. Jeremy slipped into the icy water and inched along with the lead line. The gurgling, sucking sound of my slow passage through the gray mud was accompanied by the staccato tapping of freezing rain striking the bare trees and pond. My half-frozen clothes sapped the heat from my body. As we approached the mud-covered black truck and the other end of the seine, the pace of our march quickened. Now the net came out of the pond without resistance. The mesh of green seine and floats and ropes began to extend behind us like a monstrous aconda.

"Get on the bag," my father said. He slipped in behind me and grabbed the nylon float line from my cold, cramped hand. I slipped between Jeremy and Dad and funneled the net behind us; this kept the catfish from becoming trapped in the tunnel of discarded net. The catfish, turtles, and assorted snakes churned the water around the net; the float line would slip beneath the water's surface in the height of their frenzy. The lead line lay a foot out of the water in front of the truck. Dad splashed into the pond, carrying a stake in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth. The cigarette couldn't have been doing him any good; it was discolored and soaked through, but it hung from his chapped lips anyway. The wind that had churned the pond earlier had died, and the rain had finally converted to stinging sleet. I slid a cold steel stake over the net to Dad, and he draped the seine in swift, wrapping motions. Jeremy and I walked to the nearby truck and collected buckets and a dip net.

"How many buckets are we gonna get?" Jeremy asked.

"Twelve or thirteen, I guess," my father replied. He seemed to realize that his cigarette had gone out and

started patting his pockets. He found his Marlboros in his shirt pocket and lit up. I tossed the dip net to him, and he walked carefully out into the bag of the net. The water began to churn and froth as he slipped the dip net into the bag. Dad staggered out of the water with a dip net full of squirming catfish. Dumping the fish into the buckets layers at a time, Jeremy and I picked out the stockers and the fingerlings. Dad approached with dipper after dipper until every bucket was full of gray, flopping catfish. Two huge brood catfish were left in the seine.

"I dare you to go in there and catch one of them fish," Dad said.

"No, thanks," I replied, and Jeremy echoed me. Dad grinned and threw away his cigarette. He walked down to the net and plunged his hands into the stirred up muddy water. He came up with one of the brood fish. He examined it and said it was a girl.

"Well, turn out the net," Dad said. Jeremy and I removed the stakes and began pulling the bag of the net until the few brem, catfish, and turtles that were left in the net landed in the pond. Dad was still holding the catfish.

"Go, have some babies." Dad said this as he looked into the catfish's eyes and grinned. Then he gripped that slimy gray fish and kissed it right on the whiskers. In a smooth motion he threw the "cat" into the pond. The sleeting stopped while we loaded the buckets. We piled into the back of the truck, my clothes bunched in soggy clumps. I wedged my body between buckets of fish.

Living and working on a farm will teach you many things about teamwork, endurance, and patience. These lessons don't come easy but some things are even harder to teach. My father found the essence of a special lesson when he lovingly conveyed that bottom dweller home. You have to take a little joy in what you do. You have to look for beauty and hold a piece of life. Sometimes you just have to kiss the fish. ❖

Mississippi Snow

by Anna McGehee

Excitement bubbles as long rows of parked cars come into view. "That's gotta be it!" we think. I drive my green Jeep over the tilled earth, cracked from too much sun and too little water, through clouds of bugs and dust rising from the ground like fog. We cross the parking lot, passing trailers with R&B blasting from cracked windows and head towards the entrance. A wrinkled hand sticks out through the dusty ticket window, life and experience etched in the maze of crevices criss-crossing the pink palm. A neon yellow bracelet becomes my ticket to a temporary heaven, a get-out-of-jail-free card from reality.

Sitting in the inferno of a dry Delta afternoon with no shade, I feel the soul of the blues rippling through tense air. Sweat pours down my face and body in torrents like rain I wish were falling from the sky. The beat subtly possesses my body, as frantic tapping of my foot manifests the wild explosion of my soul; flailing arms and rocking head join my pounding heart. Now we sit in trampled grass as a harmonica wails an indolent, melancholy rhythm. Smoke from hundreds of Marlboro Reds and GPC's rises and curls about my nostrils, fumes from sweat, hot grass, and fried chicken blanket the steamy ground and blend to become a singular, memorable odor. A sea of vibrantly colored umbrellas (some ruffled, rainbowed, and my favorite, a yellow and navy stripe) blocks the idolistic figures on the main stage. I laugh as an immense woman vainly tries to stretch a tiny umbrella-hat over her coarse, 1960's bee-hive hairdo with the help of several sympathetic friends. Beads of sweat glisten on miles of weathered Delta skin, as drawled shouts and curses crackle in the silent anticipation of another band. The music begins and ecstasy shoots from electrified fingertips, melting with the doleful guitar riffs.

Another intermission tempts us to wander through the vast world of unknown faces. Silver blues-gods hanging from chains glint in the blinding sun against black velvet backdrops. Vendors decked in gold necklaces of their African ancestors shout into uncaring space about food and jewelry and T-shirts. Walking through a candy-cane

striped tent we stared at black-and-white faces of past kings and queens of the blues. They are frozen in time on black and white film; with eyes closed and mouths open, they sing of black, lonely nights and cotton withering in heat. Colors and images rush by in a blur of chaotic stripes and blonde ponytails, my sunburned face is reflected in a thousand pairs of mirrored sunglasses staring hollowly at me, and the sun undulates as I stare at it through the salvation of a plastic water bottle. A steady stream of people with ice-chests slung across their shoulders tread like exhausted camels across the hot field.

Finally we end up at the Juke House Stage, the weathered wooden symbol of the Mississippi Delta, with its rusted tin roof a mirror of the desolate shacks dotting abandoned cotton fields along Highway 82. Surrounded by dulled metal of drums and slick wood of acoustic guitars is Eddie Cusic, a god of steamy, sorrow-filled blues. Withered hands run like fire down metal strings, dancing from A to G to D like mischievous imps. Glittering in the

Smoke from hundreds of Marlboro Reds and GPC's rises and curls about my nostrils, fumes from sweat, hot grass, and fried chicken blanket the steamy ground and blend to become a singular, memorable odor.

reflected sunlight, a silver slide on his first finger distorts and bends the pure notes. A camouflage net supposedly shades entranced believers as we worship the mystical rhythms emanating from the stage. A familiar face lights up as recognition dawns and we chat as painful memories flood faster and faster, making the music more poignant. The blues echo my weathered sounding board; each note strikes

an emotion rooted deep in my character. Lyrics, notes, and spirits float up to the sparkling turquoise sky and fierce sun, offerings of love and pleas for knowledge.

Everyone who likes the blues is cool, we decide as we wander through the rhythmic, sweating bodies, united in one passion. I have found my home in the blistering sun, metal twang of guitars, and soft undertones of Southern drawl at the Delta Blues Festival. I gaze at fields of Mississippi snow blanketing the ground and the azure sky overhead, glowing with childish excitement as we walk back to the Jeep, only the faint echo of blues wafting over the arid afternoon. ❖

Tradition

my grandmother's old friends
would sit me between them,
chanting indian blessings
from which I may receive
a wonderful tall husband

squeezing my hands until
until I could take no more
bangles must be worn for marriage

I used to think —
what would happen if —
if all these blessings were given in vain?

Sara Haque



Joel Carranza

"Ascending and Descending," Scratchboard

When You Get Home From Work

At five thirty I creep back to Mama's room,
suck in my breath.

Your footsteps tell so much,
heavy boots
dragging lazily over scuffed linoleum
foretell yellow eyes and acrid breath.

Just this once
I decide to meet you on the steps,
Wrap my skinny arms around you,
Walk you to the door.

But you never left the car.
George cut the engine off for you,
And you slept out there.

Almost like the time you bought the
mahogany porch swing
But never made it to the porch,
Keeping crickets company for a night.

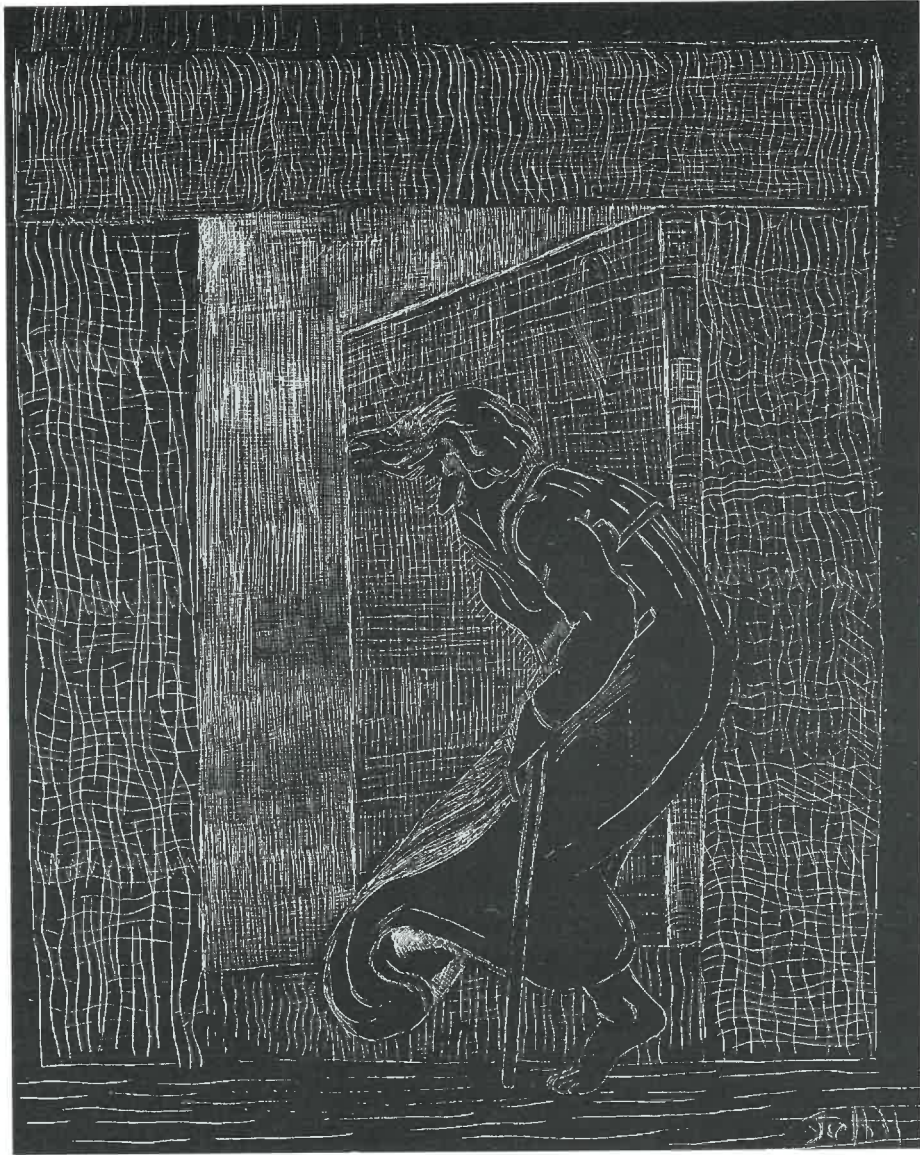
Emma Johnson

First Place
Poetry Contest

Why do i wait for You

why do i wait for You
(in misty mornings and corners of my mind)
when You pass in shadows of dreams
leaving me in love (with You)
in quiet dark houses as i stare at
You passing on the distant street.

Anna McGehee



John Imes
"At Death's Door," Scratchboard

Family Tradition

by Emma Johnson

Second Place, Short Story Contest

Lizzie eased the car into park and switched off the headlights, her face illuminated by the bar's fizzling neon sign. Yep, she thought, the place was shabby, greasy, and her mother would snatch her blind if she knew where Lizzie had gone off to. But Lizzie didn't want to think about her mother, didn't want to think about her father or her brother or anyone else in her tight-lipped family. She just wanted loud country music and a mean shot of whiskey,

A girl will do some crazy things when the rest of the world seems to fall apart, and Lizzie Beckman had little direction as she waltzed into Ed's Pool Hall that Friday night. With her hair pulled and twisted into an agonizingly fashionable knot and her almost-too-thick make-up caking in the sweaty room, Lizzie caused quite a ripple in the drunken reverie of the joint. Moe Felder, Mr. Beckman's pal, remarked to a table of liquored-up deacons, "I tell you boys, that is one pretty little lady just walked in that door. What ya'll reckon she's up to out here by herself tonight?"

Joe Forehand and Frank Purvis only muttered and opened their eyelids long enough to nod as Lizzie strutted past their table.

Lizzie wanted a drink more than she ever had in her life, and she knew that it was dangerous. She wanted the imprint of her

painted red lips clinging to a shot glass, her stomach blazing with warmth. She wanted the coolness of the glass in her hand to relieve the inadequacy of the lazy overhead fan, the liquor to cool her fingertips and palms and spirit with a bit of illegal rapture.

Lizzie licked her dry lips and tried to forget about the earlier part of the evening. She tried to focus on her immediate wish, but her brother's angry eyes began flashing at her from the bar's every angle. The men resembled her father, liquored up, hungry for trouble, and she silently wondered if they all went home to a house like hers—a house with garage-sale dishes from 1967, a front yard screaming for potted plants and kudzu grass, dirty children wandering near the road to chase dogs and cars and lost balls.

She straddled a chair near the bar and slowly took in

her company. There was Judge Meyers sitting two tables over, eagle-eyed and hungry for a fight. Dudley Bonner, clear across the room, rattled off a story about "the big one that got away," and Harold Lafferty was making his poker rounds, swiping all his buddies had.

"You're not worth the shovel I'll use to dig your grave!" Lizzie's father had slurred.

Lizzie recalled her brother's ill-timed remark, "Hell, you're too damn lazy and drunk to even get out of that chair and do anything about it!"

All too quickly, Mr. Beckman became a whirlwind of swinging arms and stumbled steps, threatening both brother and sister with everything his intoxicated mind could muster. False accusations and startling lies slapped Lizzie's contorted face as her father and brother became an inseparable twine of fury on the kitchen linoleum.

Stop it, Lizzie told herself. Forget it all. Hell, that's

what they do. Drink away all the despair you ever had, little girl, and count on everybody else to do the same. They've done it for years, and what do you reckon makes you any different?

Lizzie saddled up to the bar and casually glanced at the small round man three tables to her right. He quickly averted his eyes and nudged the guy beside him in

the ribs. The knowing looks they exchanged slightly bridled Lizzie's self-assurance as her eyes drug the bartender close to her face.

"Gimme something strong, man," Lizzie pleaded, "cuz you have no way of knowing the things I've seen."

The bartender felt every yellow pair of eyes in that room fall on his shoulders, anticipating, and Lizzie searched his features, scrambling for a taste of his intentions. Her face was reflected in his glasses, and the expression pasted in her painted eyes jolted her. Everything she was swirled and came into focus in those glasses. Her bedroom with its faded curtains, her mother with her weakened chin, her father and brother with their violent fists. Lizzie's mouth grew cold as she thought of prettier boys and bigger buildings and faster cars. I could have those things, she thought. I could hold

A girl will do some crazy things when the rest of the world seems to fall apart, and Lizzie Beckman had little direction as she waltzed into Ed's Pool Hall that Friday night.

those pretty boys in those fast cars and forget about Butler, Alabama.

And she did for a moment. Quietly, smoldering in their heat, But her mother's eyes flashed in the bartender's glasses, and Lizzie forgot hope and freedom and vitality. Her mother's tired face became a mirror, a reflection, and Lizzie backed away from her dreams, away from her escape.

"Honey, I can't give you this. Your daddy would kill me sure as the world."

"Ah, man, you know he won't know. He just left here himself about two hours ago anyhow, and besides, what's a girl gotta do to have some fun around here these days?"

Slightly hesitating, he turned and pulled a long-necked bottle from the shelf above his left shoulder.

"Take this and get on out of here," he grumbled. "I don't want to hear of you getting in no trouble."

Lizzie threw the man a fierce lipstick smile as she headed for the door, oblivious to those sweaty men and their off-color remarks.

Outside, the Alabama night draped about her like a sticky film of molasses, suffocating in its grasp. But Lizzie didn't care. There wasn't time to fall in love with an oozing southern night or to park her car on Basset City Road and drink in a million stars.

Lizzie Beckman had her slim hand wrapped tightly around the only solace she needed, and she was headed for freedom. ❖



Lorraine Posadas
"Bridge," Graphite
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Growing up

she didn't have a daddy.

Too absorbed in work or
too drunk to know
his little girl was starving.

She was
never tucked into bed—
never carried around on his shoulders—
never picked up from school—
never taken to church—
never read to at night—
never loved.

Too busy to notice her,
to see her standing by herself.
And she never questioned why her daddy
wasn't like other dads.

She just wonders if he ever thinks
about what he missed.

Karen Smith

Experience

Mama wouldn't let me go
barefoot—
too many broken bottles to cut my tender feet.
seven and immortal, I unlaced my shoes,
slipped out of my yellow socks,
stepped off the back porch,
forgetting ring worms, ground itch, shattered Absolut.
first my left foot,
then my right behind the other,
digging feet
deeper into dirt.
my nephew said we could reach the devil that way.
toes dusty,
then red.
Mama should have known I wouldn't listen—
her feet were tough as nails.

Emma Johnson
Second Place
Poetry Contest

Knights on White Horses

Black
The color fades in and out of my consciousness.
It's funerals and angry eyes,
It's the Cherokee hair of a kindred spirit,
It's pepper sprinkled on golden kernels of corn,
and dots on ladybugs, and the soul of my father.
I miss my childhood when white was pure and good,
and black was everything momma didn't want me to
know
and I knew the difference, but now,
black turns sometimes misty as my head fights my
heart
and I can't see right from wrong.
The sharp tones of ink on fresh paper
fade into a sepia photograph
and black dulls to grey.

Kate Roselle

Rushing On By

Racing, my heart pounded
as I gasped for breaths of air
between bursts of laughter.
Around through the kitchen, hallway:
and into the living room
where he sat in his chair.
Pretending he didn't hear me
galloping down the hall,
I would try to sneak, then rush
by his territory
without being seen
by his watch-dog eyes.

I was always caught,
my skills of slithering and tiptoeing
not helping a bit.

He would stretch out his arms and
catch me by surprise,
Tickling and laughing
the whole way down.

Barbara Tippens

Would You Rope Me Off a Piece of Heaven?

by Kate Roselle

Third Place, Essay Contest

At home, my favorite place to be is in the hammock on our front porch, contemplating the mysteries of life and the ancient Magnolia god towering over the house in a protective embrace. My ears tune instantly to the dull scratching of dog feet sliding in random directions across the wood floors. Lucy, our Golden Lab, slides, skidding crazily across the porch towards my haven; behind her Goose runs frantically on legs not so long. Daria and LSD come later, Stupid Dog plodding on with no regard to the pace of the world, and Daria nipping at her heels.

The floors of this porch are green, grass-like in their deepness, while overhead the ceiling is pale sky. Mamma says that this is lucky, "to keep out bad spirits," she says. It must work too. Sometimes, I take my bad spirits to that hammock, but they never stay for long. Somehow between the hardwood grass and

sheetrock sky, things work themselves out. That is the magic of my front porch. It is my heaven, it is my secret place that the world can see, but it's magic is for me alone. The rope of that old hammock is dirty, frayed in some places — burned in others, it is stained with tears and old loves, and it sags from my familiar seat. In that hammock, I find my inner strength, and I make my decisions. On that porch, I am protected, and I am safe from

prejudice, rivalry, and sharp words. It is my little piece of heaven "roped off."

As I lie supported by thick twisted shoe string, the land drifts away and I rock gently on waves of my imagination, suffering from scurvy, or threatening to mutiny. Often, the Mississippi-dyed bricks of my home transform into golden arches, Anna's cats feed me succulent grapes, and I am the exotic Empress Irena - lounging outside the palace on a sultry Byzantine day. The best porch times, though, are those nights I lie quiet, tasting the

tobacco aloneness of my dearest friend - my wailing song mingling with the desperate mating call of the cricket and the bullfrog. The ebony sky presses down on my sanctuary of false light. I gaze at the rain-warped fan, green blades sagging in determined - not - to failure, and it spins slowly, slowly, slowly, as my eyes follow in sad circles.

*The rope of that old hammock is dirty,
frayed in some places — burned in
others, it is stained with tears and old
loves, and it sags from my familiar seat.*

Once I sat in that hammock all night, didn't even notice the darkness rising until the voice of a morning lark broke my reverie and the bright orange ball burst unannounced into the sky. Brightness seemed to pour through the windows of my parent's home, and the world came alive before my eyes. As the bold sun rose across the mirror lake and the world flamed into blazing color, I loved the old porch swing even more. ❖

Smoke

You huff and puff
Like the wolf
At the pigs' houses.
You choke on your sin,
Coughing mucus up
From your black lungs.
You destroy yourself
In front of me.
I have done it,
My mother never has.
My grandfather died from it.
It will tear us apart.
One day you will gasp for air
And grasp for love.
I won't be there.

Kathryn Welch

LP Symphony

Small particles shuffle in their black beds,
Scratching in irritation their previously inert bodies.
For them motion comes in wave-minute discrepancies
in direction.
Each one sprouts its hairy legs when awakened, shrugs
off the halos of dust and dirt,
And paces down deeply trodden paths surrounded by
rubber walls.
They stumble and fall and rise, cutting the air with dark
fingers, each foot
Beating through the journey like tiny war drums.
Periodically ten thousand or so slip and fall through the
holes in each
Porous petroleum wall
Only to right themselves,
With the repositioning
Of the needle.

Mary Burge

Band Director

You raise your arms with baton in hand
And every instrument comes to command
The dialect of musicians escapes your lips

“4/4 time,
key of C,
B-flat Concert,
mezzopiano,
andante,
that's it.”

With a drop of your hand, the music commences
How sweet it sounds, calming the senses
Slowly you rise from your high-ranked seat
Heart throbbing, veins pulsing, you lead the new beat
Thunderous sounds complement your sharp motions
Like the waves crashing the four great oceans
An abrupt decrescendo, the melody returns
A retard near the end secures afterburns
You drop your hands and instruments rest
Applause from the crowd
You've passed the test.

Charity Wilson

The Peach Orchard

(Shiloh National Military Park)

Softly
Gently

Lazily slipping toward the ground,
the pure, innocent blossom—
so violently ripped from the tree
'midst the confusion and the din—
comes to rest on a body
that'll never stir to life again.
With sabers clashing and bullets whizzing,
roseate snow of delicate blossoms
falls
silently
where soldiers lie like toppled snowmen.

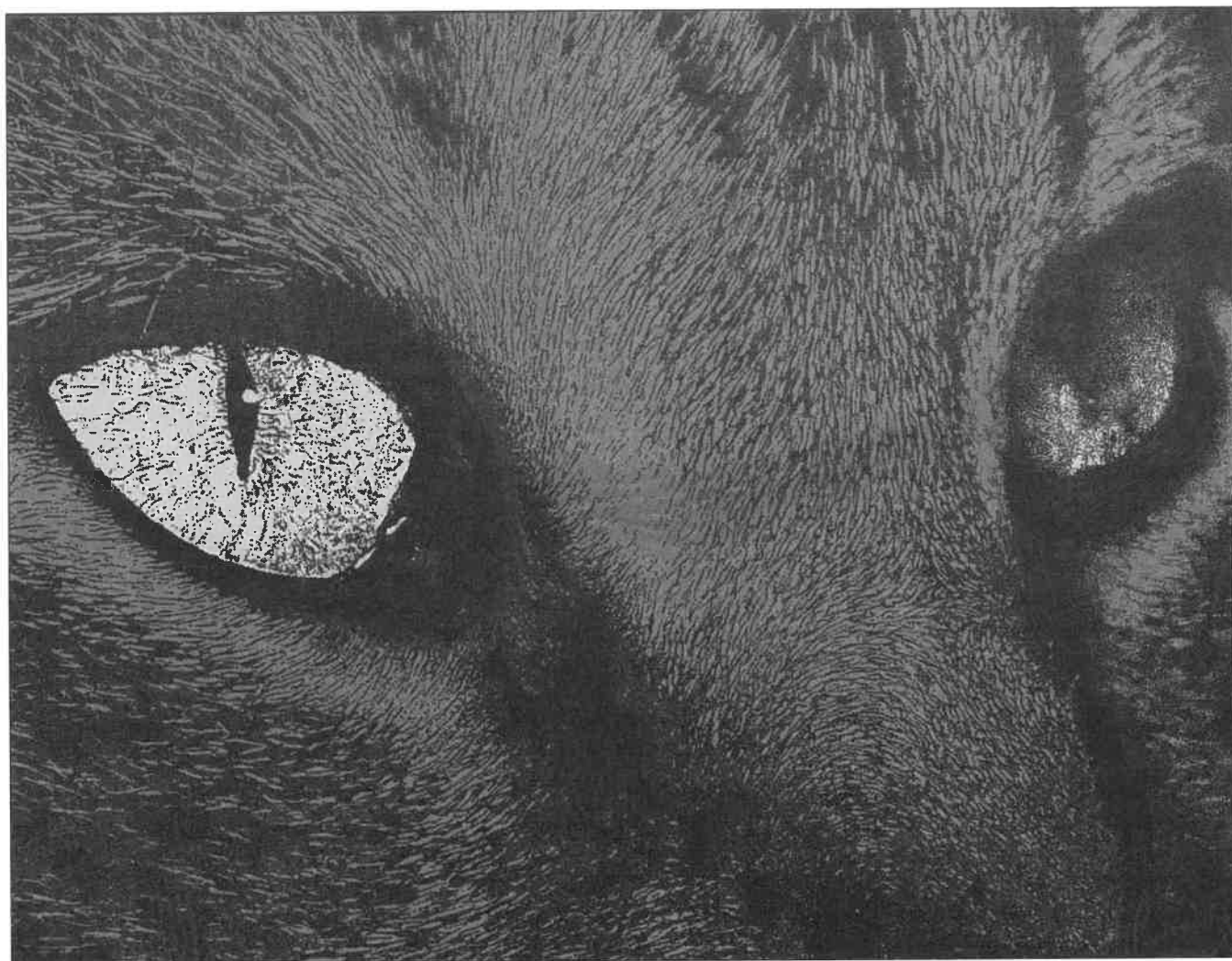
Kathryn Goodloe

She Walked into the Room

She walked into the room
With every hair in place, gently brushing her shoulders.
By just looking at her flawless coffee-colored skin,
I could already tell she was sheer perfection.
Her almond eyes and highly positioned roses for cheeks
Helped her fire-engine red lipcolor accentuate her sly,
 sexy smile.
With her handbag slung over her shoulder,
I noticed that the crown of her head barely reached my
 chin

As she walked toward me and stopped, poised and elegant.
At that moment, I felt like crying out to her in admiration
 That I wished that God would make me over
To look exactly like her,
But all I could bring myself to say
Was to shyly ask, "Are you ready to go now, Mom?"

Reneatta Austin



Loraine Posadas
"Cat Eyes," Stipple
Second Place, Art Contest

Window of Light

by Kathryn Welch

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

Momma used to watch me scamper from our house when Daddy started yelling. She used to sit at a window in our living room, holding baby Jenny in her arms, listening to Daddy, and combing Jenny's hair with her bandaged fingers. I ran miles through the wheat field and always ended up in the same spot. I would sit there for hours, crying, waiting for Daddy to finish. He didn't hit as much now that Jenny was around. Daddy knew where I always went, he just never came and got me. I don't think he cared.

Momma had died three years back, and I just know it was because of Daddy. Now I stared out the window Momma had always sat in front of. Five-year-old Jenny took my old place, running the miles I was too familiar with just weeks before. Her yellow hair flowed behind her skinny body. It looked like cotton candy, except when I brushed it. She ran through the golden wheat field almost lost in the tall growth. Her desperation meant Daddy was on a warpath again. Across the five miles she had traveled she could almost still

hear Daddy yelling his curse words at me. Sometimes, he would include her in his list of "damn-its," and sometimes Momma. Jenny went to the same place I had always gone — right past Momma's grave, sat in the same spot I had worn to bare earth with my whipped behind. She cried the same tears I cried.

We were close, Jenny and me; we had to be. There was no one to fight back for us. Our bruised faces never left the house, cause Daddy thought we would be taken away from him. Daddy did all the shopping, mainly for beer and Jack Daniels. Jenny understood a lot about Daddy, but sometimes she would ask me questions even I couldn't answer.

Jenny and me often sat at the window. It provided the one light in our dark house that worked every day. The window had become a television for us. One day,

the sun was shining light, as yellow as Jenny's hair. I combed her lemony hair as we looked out the picture-box. A silvery blue station wagon came around the curve that led to our house. It slowed and pulled into our driveway. "Who's that?" Jenny asked me, more curious than worried.

"Daddy," I called to the drunk in the navy chair across the dark room, "someone's here." He looked at me and smiled, his front two teeth missing. He wrestled with the chair and pulled himself up onto his feet. He waddled to the door covered in gauges from what he called his "fix-life" knife. He opened the door, squinting as the glistening light embraced the room. A tall man in

a gray suit appeared in the framed daylight; this was the first time Jenny and me saw our house as beautiful. He came directly into the house, without introducing himself. Jenny and me stood up.

"Who are you, mister?" she asked slowly, in spite of my elbow in her side.

"Git to your room," Daddy barked, not turning his gaze from the man. He finally shut the front door, and the room was again trapped in gloom. I dragged Jenny into the hallway, but not far enough so we couldn't see into the living room. We crouched near the bottom of the door frame; Daddy never saw us there.

Daddy offered the man a seat, a raggedy chair missing an arm. The man sat in it, and looked as comfortable as Daddy does in his navy chair he sits in to get drunk. He and Daddy talked some business words we couldn't understand. But the words that came next from the man's mouth were ones we did understand.

"You have no right to keep those children," he said, the smile escaping from his face. He looked at Daddy for a response. Daddy sat up with a grin on his face, two front teeth missing from dipping black tar.

Jenny went to the same place I had always gone — right past Momma's grave, sat in the same spot I had worn to bare earth with my whipped behind. She cried the same tears I cried.

"Gimmie five hundred dollars," he said, and sat back in his chair.

"What do you really want? Food, snuff, beer, anything but cold cash," the man choked in response, not looking at Daddy's eyes.

"Yup," Daddy replied, picking up the beer can he had forgotten wasn't empty yet.

Jenny stood up, took my hand, and led me back to our room. She closed the door and turned on the uncovered light bulb dangling from the ceiling. She jumped up and down in excitement.

"We're getting outta here!" she repeated over and over again. I sat there on our bed and smiled at her happiness, but I knew she didn't know what was really happening. I pulled her down next to me on the bed and hugged her, saying a silent prayer to God. Then I prayed that He heard my prayer. We got up to go back to the living room, and the light bulb went out. Jenny looked up at it and turned out the switch anyway.

We went back to the living room and the man was putting up his wallet. Both men turned around when Jenny tripped on a beer can and made a noise.

"Git your stuff, you're leavin,'" Daddy said.

We had to pack in the dark because the light bulb didn't come back to life. We had one bag full of stuff

between us, clothes included. The man came back to our room and gave us each a hug. He took the bag from Jenny's hand and walked with us to the living room. Daddy was on the phone talking about races and odds and betting. He didn't even look as we left; he didn't see Jenny's little hand wave bye to him. He didn't see her smile as we shut the door, with us on the outside.

The sunshine hit our eyes like a yellow cannonball. Jenny and me held hands as the man led us to his car. He opened the door to the blue station wagon and motioned to us to climb in. He put the bag in the very back as we took our last gaze at the house we had never called home. I climbed in first, letting Jenny know it was all right. She clambered in the back seat with me. The door shut behind her and she jumped. The man looked in the window with tears in his eyes. I think he knew what we had been through, though he wouldn't speak of it. He got in the driver's seat and started the car. We took off down the road around the curve we had watched so many times. We looked out to the field we had watered with our tears for so long. Jenny slid over next to me and we stared out the back glass together, me stroking her cotton candy hair. I watched a single tear fall down her cheek. We took one last look at Momma's grave. That dark house disappeared with her tear. ❖

After the Burial

Driving home with the cousins I only see twice a year,
Out of that sinking graveyard with its flat marble
stones,
On to Grandma's house to eat—
from the mound of dishes in the kitchen;
The whole neighborhood will be there.
People will rush to tell me how sorry they are,
but I will know
they're just there for a feast.
200 hot, sweaty bodies, perfumed and painted,
wearing silks and plumes and heels like stilts;
I don't even know half these people.
They stand and talk pouring Coke into plastic cups,
Griping about who brought those deviled eggs with the
rusty
powder on top. Somebody brought a Kroger ham. Yep,
I see those pineapples with the cherry in the middle.

And there's the box of Kentucky Fried Chicken;
Plastic forks, cups, styrofoam plates with triangle sections
litter the house.
People in the bedrooms and football on the tv;
about two hours later the whole rush winds down.
Reynolds Wrap over every dish, the fridge overflows.
"Honey, you take this pie, there's so much!"
"So much" won't begin to cover this supermarket in disguise.
Make a plate and take it home. Warm it up for lunch tomorrow.

Sally Hanks

Builders of Walls

formed from a calloused
imperfection—in the mind,
or in the heart,
precious stones of great luster
from deep within one's being,
tempered under the pressures
of living,
calls the attention of a builder

he mines them with great
fervor and desperation,
digging into the ground
with broken nails and
hardening muscles

he howls in delight as
they emerge from the dry soil,
and ecstatically throws
them aside to search for more

after the reckless plight
has ended, the builder calms,
then—choosing carefully from the
stones strewn about his feet—
he builds his walls

the walls are large and strong,
protecting him from howling winds,
and giving him some immunity from
violent animal attacks

but they are not wholly impermeable;
the cold seeps in through tiny
cracks and mixes with the damp dark air,
the builder shivers in his erect fetal
position, confined and alone.

we all have stones
we all build walls
we *must* break free

John Yu

Slightest Touch

Every instance to me is a mystery,
Light and smell and the sound that I am aware,
Essence is the mystery,
Constant curious child to learn and touch everything,
To dig my hands into the soil,
Lock the fingers together underground,
As if I am receiving the earth into an embrace,
Fill my mouth with the kiss from the air,
And to sip upon the falling rain,
Only to be swept up above the burning lights of man,
Interesting and vain creatures that we have turned out
to be,
Pondering to what is going to happen to us next,
Reason and instinct we think that we possess
And only to have the slightest touch to take it all away,
Another one is there to fill your space,
And more after that will come.

Jimmy Quinn

Back Seat View

The trees zip by
With the solid line of the road.
The pebbles on the side of the road
Are reduced to mere pixels.
The road signs pick up speed as they near me,
Racing away from the car.
Only the things farthest away
Stay for awhile.
As darkness falls
I lean my head against the window,
And look at the stars.
They don't seem to be moving.

Charles Blanchard

November

We sit on the front porch, listening to
The fan making a soft swoosh as
Its creaking blades sever through
Brittle November air.

A fly hums by my ears,
In search of a place to land.
Browning leaves crinkle
As they dance across the front yard.

Grandma's rocking chair squeaks,
Moving back and forth
To the monotonous rhythm of
The crickets' nighttime symphony.

We talk about the weather,
And then of the future,
And many other subjects
Before all is lost to the prevailing wind.

Acorns plop to the ground like rain,
Only to be gathered by squirrels,
Who scurry around, chatting in their own lan-
guage
About the fast-approaching winter.

Holly Covas



Patrick Kirkland
"Birches," Scratchboard

Acts of Dignity

Attempting to move on his own
He struggles to release himself from
Physical bonds

Kindling wood bone
Supporting his washboard frame
Frustrated again, he collapses into straps

Grasping Mother Earth with all
Willpower he can summon
He begins to roll

Slowly
Inchworming

And reaches his destination
Relaxes his legs

Lays his hand on the rope
And heaves his strength
into the pulley
Evoking the bell to peal
Even this decrepit leftover

In our time of streamlined
Muscles and bodies

The leftover staves of tendons
Pull and Draw the Controlling Ropes

Father Time rings the Bell of Eternity
Telling us it's time for lunch

Wesley Duffee-Braun

Yard Decorations

by Sally Hanks

Not too many people where I grew up have much use for pretty stone columns at the end of the drive. You know, the ones, with the little mailboxes? Nope, people generally spend their money on cows, combines, chickens, fishing reels and tackles, and tractors. For a while, my dad even owned a tractor. We had a garden and I guess it just looked right to have a red Case tractor beside all those organically grown vegetables. Tractors do become obsolete, though; new models come out just like new cars, but it's a very rare occasion when someone gets rid of a tractor. Lots of people like to keep them on display for everyone to see. Plenty of fifty-year-old tractors are sitting in the yards of many inhabitants of Pope and Courtland. Pope is a town which holds Lipe Gas Company, a post office, and a gas station. Courtland is a town with a gas station. Well, anyway, those tractors just sit in yards year after year, some orange with rust that don't even have a seat left. Mothers scream at their children to stay away from the tractors or they will cut themselves and get blood poisoning. The tires don't go to waste, either. Painted white, blue, or red they work just as well as stone columns to mark the entrance of a driveway. The mailbox is supposed to be on the opposite side of the street anyway.

Outside every mobile home in rural parts of the state amazing recycling is underway. Car tires are put to some hefty use; they work wonderfully as flower beds. Pop a few marigolds or a shrub in and voila!-instant landscaping. Tires are definitely good for fencing because so many people use them for such. People love to plant trees in tires, but I can't quite figure out what happens to the tire when the tree gets too big for it. Tires make wonderful weights to hold the roofs of mobile homes on. No trailer park would be complete without being practically shingled with tires.

Wildlife and cattle are abundant in the woods of Mississippi, and this is why I will never be able to figure

out why people place life-sized deer in their yards. I have been held at gunpoint by a hunter during a hike in the woods, and I know the terror of having life threatened. The "Good 'ol Boys" of Mississippi like to spotlight and yard hunt. It's probably in the best interest of the citizens of this good state to remove their life-sized wildlife replicas out of the yard before a bullet flies through their living room window. Make sure when driving by Enid to look out for the life-sized Jersey cows standing in a yard. Someone made wooden cut-outs of cows and painted them and stood them up right in front of the house. Seems kinda strange to some people, but it's old hat to Northwest Mississippi.

Holidays make decorations very colorful. The Eggberts, who live down the road from me, always have their yard filled with little wooden bunnies, Easter baskets, and of course their egg tree. They have a tree right

in front of the house which they cover from the highest branch to the lowest with plastic eggs hanging from fishing line. Every color of the rainbow hangs from every limb.

Of all the holidays, Christmas is the brightest and best. There is a family who puts a new trailer on their place every time a

child marries. No one ever moves away from the compound. This family literally wraps all their trailers in lights every year. Some blink; some don't. Some are colored; others aren't. The lights are draped, wrapped, zig-zagged, and circled around the houses and trailers and left there all year long, but only turned on in December. The highlight of a drive home around Christmas is seeing this true festival of lights on the side of the road.

Mississippi can boast some of the most imaginative and strange yard decorations. I think this weekend I need to cut all the kudzu off my mailbox so it can be seen and then put elaborate decorations on it. Maybe I'll surround the base with painted tires. Rainbow-colored, that is. ♦

It's probably in the best interest of the citizens of this good state to remove their life-sized wildlife replicas out of the yard before a bullet flies through their living room window.

Me and You

To leave that bed filled;
Blood, sweat, tears,
Pass the crying baby,
Neglected children and wasted guardians,
Stained table,
Burned tokers,
Resined spoons,
Empty bottles of like and kind,
Small parcels of paper and loose powder,
Blasted through the glass stained frame,
Burst of blinding light,
A smell of a familiar scent,
Grasses from the European countryside,
Gray filled top,
Flecks of color with the slow dying sun,
Cool breezes through the long grasses,
Through my hair,
First stars appear to the eye,
The first time to look up,
First time tears begin to fall,
And a crash is sounded upon my knees,
Another burst of light,
Drawn through two doors,
Into a kitchen where mother has been before,
Ever no longer,
Man is bent on a worn leather chair,
Sound of sleep fills the room,
Tears fall once more,
Stained clothes are soaked,
With water and foreign mud,
Dirt is caked under nails,
Intoxication is filed through the mind,
Resin in tender lungs and veins,
Fluid flows easily through the mouth,
Is this how you beat immortality;
Dad,
Is it?

Jimmy Quinn
Honorable Mention
Poetry Contest

The Bloody Pond

(Shiloh National Military Park)

Here on the edge of the pond
silent trees,
like sentries, stand
reaching their arms heavenward
watching over a place
where men stared death
full in the face.

To escape the fiery Hell raging on around them,
men agonizingly dragged their broken bodies
to this aquatic refuge.
Though different were the men that fought,
the humanity they shared brought them
to the pond.
First a brownish color,
the shallow waters were soon stained deep

crimson.

Here on the edge of the pond,
I see ghostly figures in muddy, blood-stained uniforms—
crumpled, twisted figures, aged far beyond their years—
scattered about the bank.
Some are dead or unable to move,
and some move languidly,
struggling to help themselves and each other.
Some cry out in pain,
others, fearing they'll never again see home or loved-
ones,
whimper softly.
I listen.
A park ranger tries to explain:
algae blooms now cause the water's terrific

rubescence.

I am not so sure.

Kathryn Goodloe
Third Place
Poetry Contest

One Danger of Southern Living: Having a Southern Boyfriend

by Kathy Wise

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

“All right, here are the rules. No perfume, no hair spray, no makeup- that includes lipstick, mascara, and eyeliner. Also, no loud clothing, keep your hair pulled back, and no jewelry. Got it?” Yes, I got it. Had ‘got it’ every day in November since I had known Anthony. But there’s no helping it. He always gets this way around deer season. He struts around with an attitude of haughtiness, of self assurance, for about four months. The other eight months out of the year he is fine, a perfect boyfriend. But during the months of deer season, nothing can keep him from trying to catch that twelve point, not even his girlfriend!

The first day Anthony and I had gone out, everyone warned me about deer season. “Stay away in November,” they said. “If he asks you to go hunting, tell him no,” they cried. But somehow it must have slipped my mind, because there I was telling Anthony that I would love to go hunting with him, while my best friend screamed in terror in the next room.

“It isn’t going to be that bad,” I told her. “We’ll just sit in the deer stand and watch a couple of deer for a few hours.” Never before had I eaten my words and had them taste that bad!

On that fateful day, Anthony called me at 4:30 in the morning!

“Suit up,” he said. “I’ll be there in an hour.”

I put on my favorite outfit: a bright green shirt, white pants, and a light, bright yellow, jacket. My hair was curled and styled, not skimping on the hair spray, and my makeup had never been applied with such skill. The perfect look for me to go hunting with my boyfriend. Anthony thought otherwise.

“What are you wearing?” he cried when he stepped through the front door. “I told you to suit up. We’re going to the woods, not the mall.” Reluctantly, I put on my drab camouflage overalls and washed my face. Yet, I was still determined to have fun. Maybe he was right; this outfit

was more suited to deer hunting anyway.

We finished getting ready and headed down the road in Anthony’s four-wheel drive, red and blue, mud-speckled pick-up truck. We were almost to his favorite hunting spot when he started sniffing the air.

“What’s that smell?”

“It’s my new perfume, Raspberry Dream. Do you like it?” At the mention of my wearing perfume, Anthony nearly swerved off the road!

“Don’t you know deer can smell things like that!” he yelled. “I know you’re going to hate it, but you’ll just have to put on some of this, a lot, too, to cover up your other perfume.” I read the box and nearly choked!

“Fox Pee! You want me to wear Fox Pee!”

“Well, yeah. Deer won’t notice that as much, and really, they kind of like it,” he added with a mischievous grin. Wanting to make a good impression, I doused myself with the stench of fox scent. But a firm dislike for deer hunting was growing steadily with each urine-scented breath.

Finally we reached the woods and climbed up in his deer stand. After a while it got very boring, so I decided to make small talk.

“Shh,” he informed as I mentioned how lovely the woods looked. “You’ll scare off the deer. No talking, not even whispering.” Hurt, I turned and sulked in the corner, hoping he would feel bad and apologize. Not so much as a whisper came from his lips. Slowly, the first hour went by, then the next, and the next, but still no sign of deer. Anthony had not moved since we had gotten there. He had the patience of Job, I had to give him that.

Eventually, around 1:00 p.m. Anthony saw a deer, a buck to be exact. Making no noise, he poised his 12-gauge shotgun on his shoulder and slowly squeezed the trigger as he let out the air he had been holding. “Boom!” The shot rang through my ears and the sound, being so

close to me, nearly knocked me backwards.

The deer took off running and so did Anthony. I think he even jumped the ten feet out of the deer stand, but I can't be sure. He tracked the deer for a good mile or so and finally found it lying next to a dried-up river bed. I wasn't with him, but I heard the last shot of his gun putting the animal to rest. With a strength I did not know he possessed, he dragged that animal back to his truck and heaped it over into the bed. It was the most unsightly thing I had ever seen. By that time it was 5:00 p.m., and

I had protested so much, Anthony felt compelled to take me home. He didn't even bother asking me if I had a good time or what I thought about it. He just kept muttering something about the buck only being a ten point. I don't even think he noticed when I got out at my house.

I opened the kitchen door and stormed through the living room. My dad, crinkling his nose up from the smell of that God-awful Fox Pee, asked me if I had a good time:

"Never again," I yelled going up the stairs to the shower. "Never again!" ❖



Tommy Byrd
"Mountain Stream," Photography
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Contributors' Notes

Josh Anderson is originally from Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where he attended Ocean Springs High School. He plans to major in architecture at Tulane University. Robert Heinlein, Ayn Rand, and Frank Lloyd Wright are some of his most influential artists. Josh's favorite quotation, "We cannot look out far, we cannot look in deep, but since when was that ever a bar, to any watch we keep," is by Robert Frost. His cover design, "The Islander," won Honorable Mention in the *Southern Voices* Art Contest.

Reneatta Rachelle Austin came from Columbus High School to MSMS and plans to go into pre-law in college next fall. Her favorite authors are William Shakespeare and Terry McMillan; the works that have most influenced her style of writing are Shakespeare's sonnets.

Charles Wesley Blanchard is from Louisville, Mississippi, where he attended Grace Christian School. Some of his favorite authors are Ambrose Bierce, C.S. Lewis, and Michael A. Stackpole. His favorite quotation is "Do or do not. There is no try" by Yoda.

Mary Katherine Burge, from Hattiesburg, attended North Forrest High School. Her favorite artists are e.e. cummings, Bill Waterson, and Samuel Beckett. The *Bible*, Calvin and Hobbes, and *Les Miserables* have all greatly impacted her work.

Tommy C. Byrd attended d'Iberville High School in Biloxi before coming to MSMS. He has plans to attend Mississippi State University where he will major in computer science. John Grisham has had the most influence on his writing style.

Joel Carranza is from Ocean Springs and plans to attend the California Institute of Technology in the fall and major in electrical engineering. He counts Kurt Vonnegut as his favorite writer and M.C. Escher as his favorite artist; his art has been influenced by Escher and Salvador Dali. Joel affirms Dick Teresi's assertion that "The average scientist wouldn't know a gerund if it bit him on the bum."

Holly Jean Covas attended Northeast Lauderdale in Meridian before she came to MSMS. She plans to major in biology and do cancer research in the future. Her favorite writers include Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. She says that life experience is what has mostly influenced her writing.

Eric Dahm, from Biloxi, attended St. Martin High School before his career at MSMS. He plans to major in history at Boston University. Shakespeare and Leonardo Da Vinci are two artists that he admires most.

Wesley Hamilton Duffee-Braun is from Hattiesburg where he attended Hattiesburg High. He plans to attend Georgia Tech and major in computer science. Salvador Dali, William Wordsworth, and William Blake are some of his favorite artists and writers.

James Hannah Dunavant is originally from Rolling Fork where he attended Sharkey-Issaquena Academy. He plans to attend Mississippi State University where he will pursue a career in law. Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake are two of his favorite authors.

Bridget Denine Gant is from Corinth, Mississippi, where she attended Kossuth High School. C.S. Lewis is one of her favorite authors. The 1997 recipient of the Chris Read Award for Fiction, she plans to attend Mississippi State University where she will go into veterinary medicine.

Kathryn Lindsay Goodloe is originally from Ocean Springs where she attended Ocean Springs High School. The Romantics and Impressionists are some of her favorite writers and artists. Her favorite quotation is "As each one has a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God," from I Peter 4:10.

Dana Michelle Grant is originally from Jackson where she attended Byram High School. She plans to attend the University of North Carolina where she will major in physics. Aristotle is her favorite writer and her favorite quotation is "Anything that doesn't kill you only makes you stronger."

Sally Jo Hanks is from Batesville and she attended South Panola High School. She plans to major in communications at the University of Memphis. Her favorite writer is L. M. Montgomery, and her favorite books include all of the titles in the *Anne of Green Gables* series.

Sara M. Haque attended Warren Central in Vicksburg before she came to MSMS. Her future plans include law or economics. Ayn Rand and Andy Warhol are her favorite artists.

Altiemeis Angela Howard comes from Quitman where she attended Quitman High School. Alice Walker is one of her favorite authors, and she says that everything she has read has influenced her in some way. Her favorite quotation is "Sometimes it's nice to get away from reality."

A native of Columbus, **John Imes** attended Columbus High School before enrolling at MSMS. Some of his favorite artists are Nikos Kazantzakis, William Blake, and Edward Gorey. John believes that "Impulsiveness doesn't exactly follow any personal philosophy."

Jeffrey L. Jenkins attended Indianola Academy in Indianola before coming to MSMS. He plans to attend the University of Southern Mississippi and major in history and art. Sam Shepard is his favorite artist and television has been one of his biggest influences.

Mary Jensen is from Brandon where she attended Northwest Rankin Attendance Center. She plans to enroll at Mississippi State University where she will major in graphic design. Leonardo da Vinci, Salvador Dali, and Monet are a few of her most influential artists.

Emma Darlyn Johnson is from Quitman where she attended Quitman High School. Some of her favorite authors are Alice Walker, Roald Dahl, and Nikki Giovanni. Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Things Fall Apart* are books that have greatly influenced her writing. Her favorite quotation is about life by Gustave Flaubert: "Break with the outside world, live like a bear."

Patrick James Kirkland is from Philadelphia where he attended Neshoba Central High School. He plans to enroll at Mississippi State University and get a degree in international business. John Grisham is one of his favorite authors.

Memorie Shea McCreary, a native of Cleveland, Mississippi, transferred to MSMS from Cleveland High School. She will attend Delta State University next fall and major in biology. Dr. Seuss is her favorite author, but her most influential work is Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. One quotation from Nietzsche that has greatly influenced her is "One must have chaos within oneself to give birth to a dancing star."

Anna Catesby McGehee, from Natchez, attended Trinity Episcopal Day School before coming to MSMS. Some of her favorite authors and artists are e.e. cummings, Walt Whitman, and van Gogh. *Leaves of Grass* by Whitman and a book of selected poems by cummings have been her greatest influences.

Rebekah Page is from Jackson and attended Murrah High School. She plans to attend Connecticut College in the fall and major in English and art history. She counts Walter Anderson, Keith Haring, and Andy Warhol as her favorite artists. Rebekah believes that "Truth is just like time: it catches up, and it just keeps going."

Loraine Alviola Posadas from Pascagoula originally attended Pascagoula High School. She plans to be at Mississippi State University in the fall and get a degree in computer animation. She has too many influential authors to list, and her favorite quotation is "Drawing makes me happy."

James Robert Quinn originally attended Ocean Springs High in his hometown, Ocean Springs. He plans to attend Auburn University where he will major in biochemistry. John Steinbeck is his favorite author, but John Carroll's *Basketball Diaries* has had the most influence on his writing.

Tiffany Grace Rayburn attended Tylertown High School in Tylertown before coming to MSMS. She plans to attend the University of Southern Mississippi and major in television production. Fannie Flagg and Lewis Grizzard are two of her favorite writers. One of her favorite quotations is "Frogs in wells cannot be told of the sea."

Daniel Richard, II, is from Ocean Springs where he attended Ocean Springs High School. He plans to attend Mississippi State University and major in aerospace engineering. Bosche has had the most influence on his work and his favorite quotation is "As little as possible for as long as possible."

Kate Marie Roselle is originally from Vicksburg where she attended Warren Central High School. She plans to attend Washington University and get a degree in broadcast journalism. Her favorite author is Sylvia Plath, and one of her most influential books is *Ariel*, a collection of Plath's poetry.

Karen Guinn Smith is from Columbus, and she attended New Hope High School before coming to MSMS. She plans to attend the University of Mississippi and major in chemistry. William Faulkner and John Grisham have most influenced her, but her favorite quotation is from George Sand: "There is one happiness in life: to love and be loved."

Barbara B. Tippens is from Natchez where she attended Trinity Episcopal Day School before coming to MSMS.

Sandy Ut is from Bay St. Louis and was a student at Hancock High School before coming to MSMS last fall. She would like to attend New York University or Tulane University and major in business.

Lindsay Kathryn Welch attended Columbus High School in her hometown of Columbus before coming to MSMS. She plans to major in architecture at Mississippi State University. Shakespeare is her favorite author and his works have most influenced her writing. Her favorite quotation is "A rose which we call by any other name is still a rose."

Casey J. Williams is originally from Oxford where he attended Lafayette High School. He plans to attend Mississippi State University and become a veterinarian. Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson are his favorite authors, and *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner has been one of his most influential works.

Charity Lavette Wilson is from Bassfield where she attended Bassfield High School. Maya Angelou and Dr. Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., are two of her favorite authors; *Think Big* by Dr. Carson has been a very influential work for her.

Andrea Katherine Wise attended Kossuth High School in Corinth before coming to MSMS. She plans to attend Mississippi State University and major in economics. Orson Scott Card is one of her most influential authors, and her brother has had the most influence on her writing.

John Jung-Yeol Yu, from Jackson, originally attended Murrah High School. The authors with most influence on his works are Hermann Hesse and Stanley Kunitz. His favorite quotation, "It is impossible to go through life without trust: that is to be imprisoned in the worst cell of all, oneself," is by Graham Greene.

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