



Southern Voices

2000



Southern Voices

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"Los Pimientos," Pastel

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

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The Bathroom Shift

by Alyda Hardy

First Place, Short Story Contest

Mercedes adjusted the flimsy gold plastic name-tag pinned to the front of her scratchy shirt to where it was straight, and leaned over the counter, squinting into the spotted mirror that hung over the sink. If she crossed her eyes just a little and blurred everything slightly, the worn cotton shirt looked almost red, instead of wash-faded to a dull pink like the inside of the hamburgers they only half-cooked here. Her hair smoothed out, instead of being frizzy from laboring over grease-smoked baskets of French fries. And you couldn't see the heaviness that hung with the bags under her eyes anymore, either.

Her eyes started to hurt and she eased back, blinking to adjust to the real world. She glanced around the tiny bathroom with distaste, taking in the crumpled, dirty paper towels spread around the basin and the bottom of the trash can, and the shreds of toilet paper in puddles of water—or worse—that slithered under the two stall doors like wet chalky snakes. The smell was worse than usual—damp and sour, the odor of garbage and people missing the toilets and not caring.

Mercedes thanked her lucky stars that today was not her day to clean the ladies' room. She was already tired, and it was only ten. She didn't get lunch break till two, and she was at the high end of her fifteen minutes right now (staring into the mirror in a filthy restroom, no less), but outside wasn't much better, because it was dingy and gray and not very cheerful. She guessed it was about time for her to get back to the shift, and she backed out the door to avoid touching the handle that had God-knew-what on it.

"Mercedes! You off your break?" The voice rang across the nearly-empty restaurant.

"Yeah. You can go." Mercedes tossed a half-smile to the other teenage girl, who hurriedly yanked off her tag and checked her watch.

"I gotta go meet my boyfriend. I'll be right back!" The

door had almost shut when she popped her head back in, the bell jangling harshly. "Hey, girl, Charlene's sick and she ain't comin' in today, so it's your turn to do the bathroom, 'k?"

Mercedes' heart sank as she nodded dumbly to her coworker, who smiled brightly and left, waving over her shoulder as she ran to her car.

Fifteen unhappy minutes later, gritting her teeth, Mercedes pushed open the door with the squeaky three-wheeled mop-bucket and rolled it inside. She popped on the thin cheap gloves, and reached for the first strand of toilet paper with repugnance. It went under one of the stalls, and she'd yanked on the door once before she realized it was locked. The lock clanged against the metal fastener and the door shuddered. Mercedes backed up

*She popped on the thin cheap gloves,
and reached for the first strand of toilet
paper with repugnance.*

quickly and called "Sorry!" to the occupant of the stall. She went into the next stall and picked up the rubbish with the very tips of her fingers, as though it could somehow jump through the powdery stretchy gloves and get into her bloodstream and kill her. She emptied the sanitary bag, and wished once and for all that women would actually make it in the bag instead of the floor under it. And it was always the same thing with the trash can—like an invisible force field was there, launching the debris away from the foot-wide hole and onto the grimy tiles below.

The toilet flushed in the next stall, and then she heard the water run in the sink. She put in a fresh garbage bag and turned to move to the other toilet, praying the woman wasn't being messy.

She nearly recoiled on the spot from the person who was washing her hands. Mercedes gazed in a kind of shocked disgust at the disheveled woman, noting the stringy, oily hair that might have been blonde with a good shampooing, and the ratty bluish dress that hung too big over bony shoulders and hips. A pungent odor rose from her dirty body, and Mercedes nearly gagged.

Then the woman looked up into the mirror and her hollow eyes met Mercedes' gawking stare. Instantly blushing with embarrassment, Mercedes looked away and went into the next stall. The water continued to run in the sink. Mercedes devoutly hoped that she was using a *lot* of soap, and not tossing paper towels on the floor.

It took her a second to realize when the other toilet door banged that the water had stopped also. Exasperated, she bent over and searched under the walls, and, sure enough, the woman was back in there, and that stall just cleaned, too! She muttered a few choice words under her breath and went over to the sink, which was still littered with trash from the previous day. She swept it all into the bag and soaped down the counter, then went back out into the restaurant to get a refill of paper towels and toilet paper. Two or three customers were eating, and they looked up from their hamburgers briefly, then looked away, back out the windows or into space. It always made Mercedes uncomfortable, the way they wouldn't meet her eyes. It wasn't as if they was any better'n her, she always thought, so they needn't make her feel like they was.

It took a good ten minutes to find the paper towels, as she had to open a whole new box, and Mercedes was griping to herself as she trekked back to the ladies' room. She hoped the woman hadn't messed up the stall again before she left, because she wanted to get done with the

revolting chore and get back to doing what she *really* got paid to do.

When she shoved open the door, she found the woman standing in front of the sink again, the water just runnin' away. She avoided even a glance in the direction of her, and instead went to put the toilet paper in the stalls. As she popped the new rolls into the dispenser, she heard the water stop *again* and the other door slam shut! Mercedes swore quietly, and then decided two could play at this stupid game. She walked over to the bathroom door and opened and shut it, then tiptoed back into the first stall and held her breath.

After a minute or two, the other door squealed on rusty hinges, and she heard the water again. She waited for about five minutes, debating on how to handle the situation, then boldly threw open the door and strode out.

The woman was half-bent toward the sink, where the water was now running hot and steam was drifting up. On the counter next to her was a travel-size bottle of cheap shampoo.

"I'm so sorry—sorry!" Mercedes stammered, hating the sight of the ashamed flush in the woman's gaunt cheeks. She ran out of the bathroom, and the customers outside jumped at the sound of the banging door.

Suddenly, the bathroom didn't seem quite so dirty, nor was it so urgent to clean right then after all. ■

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



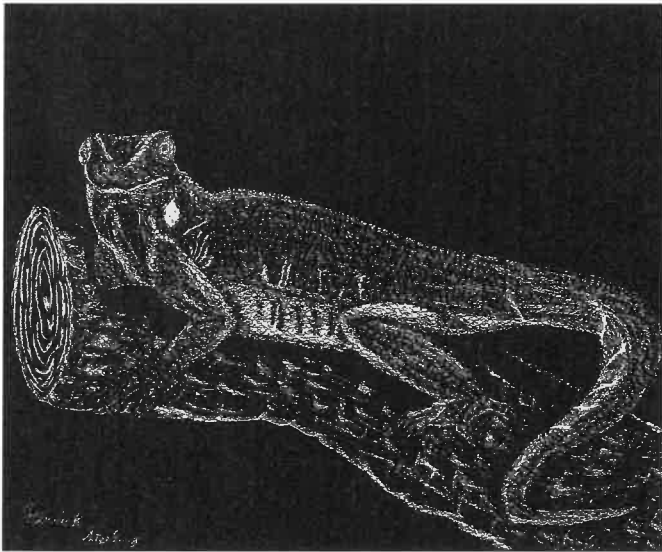
Get Me Clear

My mind fills with questions,
Like trying to decide what to buy from the vending machine.
Did I hear God call from the Gazebo?
But my mind didn't think to look up.
I seem lost here,
Like the deer the car hit on my way home last week.
Home where all the answers seemed so much more clear.
But the birds scatter as I fled from that place.

But now the days pass like months
And it's winter again,
A sweater and thermal underwear
Couldn't mend my heart.

But I give it up
and cry to you like a child
And my questions now fall like snow;
It covers the landscape of my mind,
and I stop to see the whiteness
as they gather on the ground.

Matt Kilgore



Derrick Sterling
"Lizard on a Log," Scratchboard



Ian Colmer
"Word on a Sign on a Post," Photography

Speeding

You drown among the waters of dread,
Your lungs grow heavy,
Your heart leaps,
Your arms fall limp,

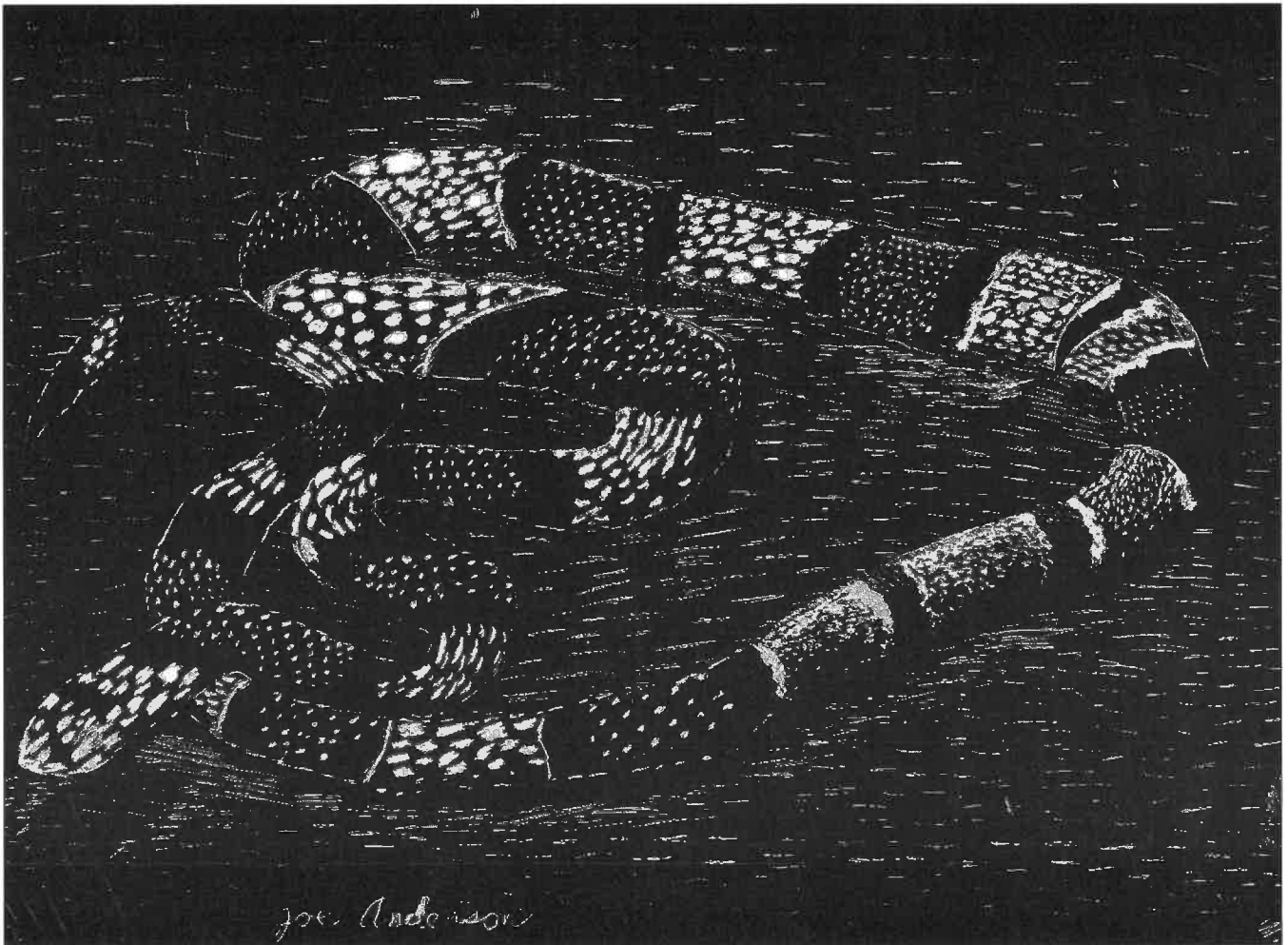
Looking in the mirror
you see and hear,
those blue shining lights of
a cop on your rear.

Aaron Piletz

Cynical

What do you think
The shiny, happy people
In your world help create
With their whispers and stares,
Cruel pranks, snide remarks,
Fear and hate because we won't blend
Won't pose or act for them
What do you think is left of us
When the mainstream of your world
And of mine take a wrong turn and collide?

Angela Harwell




Joseph Anderson
"Waiting," Scratchboard

The Eve of Summer

by Nga Le

Second Place, Essay Contest

 I wore the traditional, white-hooded robe over my nicely pressed striped suit. Mother told me to pull my hair back and handed me a white ribbon so I could tie it. My sisters, my brother, and I resembled ghouls celebrating their one night of fun on Earth. But we weren't celebrating; we were dressed for Great Uncle's funeral. I didn't want to go because I had always been afraid when Great Uncle was in sight.

"Do I have to go?" I asked Mother.

"Yes, you do. You are of an age, so it is expected of you," Mother replied in her perfect Vietnamese.

I was often scared I would disrespect Great Uncle without any knowledge of it. In the Vietnamese culture, there are two ways of addressing an elder—formal and informal. The difference, I learned, is that formal is the correct way to show respect when addressing an elder. Unfortunately for me, I discovered it the hard way. I was punished on one occasion for calling Great Uncle in the informal way. That night, Mother scolded me for being rude and then punished me. Since that day, I spoke the respected words and tones that I soon learned were expected from a child when addressing an elder.

Upon arrival at Riemann's Funeral Home, I suddenly felt an awkward knot slowly twisting inside my stomach. There was an uneasiness that I had felt only once before: the night my little sister violently struggled to breathe. It was the first time I had ever seen my parents panicked, and the first time I saw Father cry. Somehow, this moment, this place was like that terrible night. I had read obituaries in the newspapers, had seen funeral processions from a distance, but I had never actually attended one. Or at least, I was never brought along to one.

As I studied the dimmed funeral parlor, I noticed that there were no children. No laughter or soft giggling could be heard on this sad day and at this sad place. I froze at

the door, unable to extend a step forward while my eyes affixed to the open casket. I was scared to go in. *Great Uncle is in there*, I told myself. *He is...* My thoughts were interrupted when Mother hurried me inside. She was afraid that Great Uncle's spirit would haunt the family if I had showed any sign of disrespect to the dead. Many of the adults believed this superstition, and that was why they did not allow their little ones to come.

I followed my older sister into the pew near the front of the parlor and took the seat next to hers. I anxiously sat there fiddling with the loose thread on my robe when

I noticed my sister's hands were clutching her robe till her knuckles turned white. Her eyes were red and puffed, but at the moment, she was not crying. I didn't know how to console her so I just put my arms around her. She looked at me, flashed a weak smile, and then looked straight again. At this moment, I felt a sense of safety.

I glanced around the room observing everyone who came in. There were many that I recognized, and there were some that I could not remember from my childhood. Mostly the women's faces were crimsoned, probably from crying during the night before. Their sorrows, displayed by sobs and frequent outbursts, never ceased while the Buddhist monk meditated and "prayed" in the lavishly Christ-adorned building. I stole a sight of Father. He sat stiffly right in front of us and wore a blank expression on his face. I assumed Father did not like Great Uncle enough to cry for but soon contradicted myself when I noticed that all the other men present masked the same look. I had forgotten that custom and tradition did not allow men to cry or show any emotions, a sign of personal weakness.

I faced forward and began mimicking the words the Buddhist monk said while trying not to mix up the words. Great Uncle was watching me from his new home

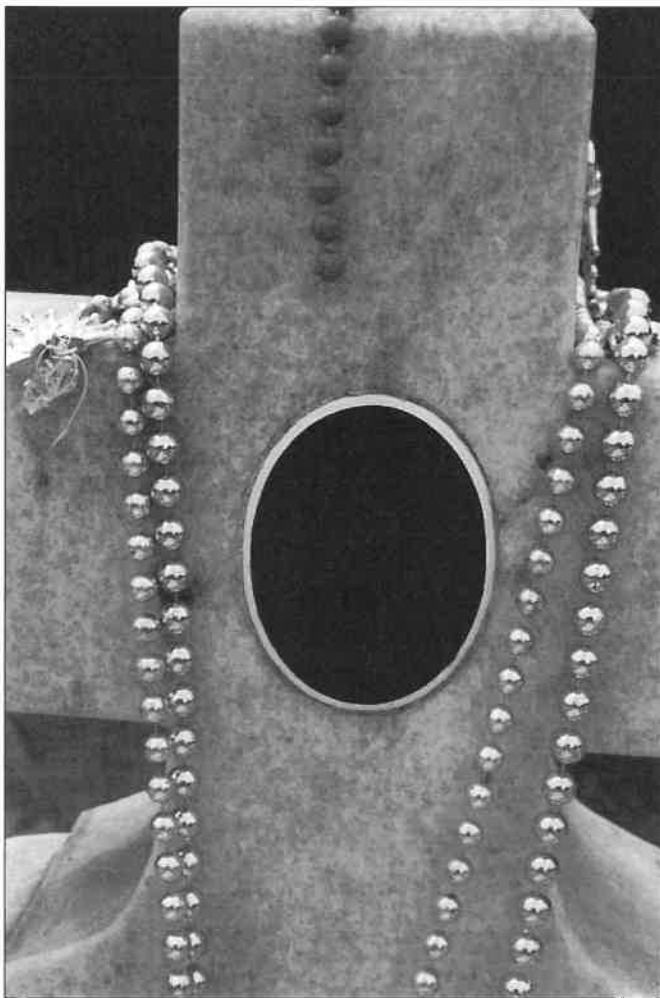
Their sorrows, displayed by sobs and frequent outbursts, never ceased while the Buddhist monk meditated and "prayed" in the lavishly Christ-adorned building.

so I could not mess up even now. Then, the monk spoke English and told us, those who did not fully understand Vietnamese, the philosophy that true happiness comes from a life of goodness and hard work and that the purest of the pure would finally be chosen by Buddha to go to Nirvana. Great Uncle, I suspected, would be there. He was in constant meditation whenever I met him.

When the monk was finished, one by one, we went to bid our final adieus to Great Uncle. I hesitated at the pew for a small allotted time. Sister motioned me to get up and we went together toward the casket. My body trembled as Great Uncle's face came into view. I felt my

heart beating too quickly for me to breathe. But as I came closer, my body ceased to tremble and my heart slowed to its normal beating. For the first time, I was not afraid of Great Uncle.

After the procession, Mother and Father sadly led my little sister and brother to the van while my older sister and I went over to our car. I paused for a second and found myself looking down at my feet. I didn't see my shadow miming my every move so I looked up again. The sun was gone from the sky and had been replaced by heavy, gray-bottomed clouds. I thought that Great Uncle was angry with me, but I was no longer afraid. ■



Adam Williams

*"Beads of Deception," Photography
Honorable Mention, Art Contest*

Waiting

She lies in forced inanimacy
Still with a learned patience
Waiting for death to come lift her
From her crippled body
The old woman waits
Wishing for a better life
To have the luxury of hearing
Her grandchildren's voices
Or to scratch her itching face
Or for the nurses to clean her
Or even to open her hands
Long bound by arthritis
She waits for her family
But they have better things to do
Not one of them will see her today
None can spare five minutes
To rub her aching hands
Or kiss her tired forehead
Or to sit at the foot of her bed
And give her troubled soul
A moment to forget
Her crippled body
And useless hands

She waits to wake from her nightmare
Or for sleep to deliver her from reality
Or for the Savior she worshiped
Every Sunday
Now even that is beyond her means
And still my grandmother waits
If only for someone to stop and say
Hello in there

Rusty Parks



Mom

To see her face,
to hear her laugh,
to know she's coming home.

For these things I dearly wish,
but know I cannot own.

To have a hug,
to give a kiss,
to answer when she calls.

These are things I'll never do,
but want to most of all.

To hear my name come from her lips,
to see her beautiful smile.
To know that she walks by me always,
and that she'll be there for awhile.

To have, to hold, to touch, to see,
to know, to feel, to seem, to be.
Keep her close and closer still.
Remember her love and how it feels.

Never forget to say "I love you."
Always let her know you care.
It seems as though you have a lifetime,
but a lifetime is only for as long as she's there.

Molly Dye



Amber van Vlymen
"Rachel," Pencil

Unsilenced

Your face was carved
from the blackest smoke
Your arms numbed the world
In a single stroke

Your eyes were the darkness
Beneath a storm
Your chest was the mountain
That kept me warm

The sound of your heart
Make the planets collide
The weight of your lips
Changed the pace of the tide

You made me whole
and tore me apart
Your perception of life
unsilenced my heart

Crystal Wilson

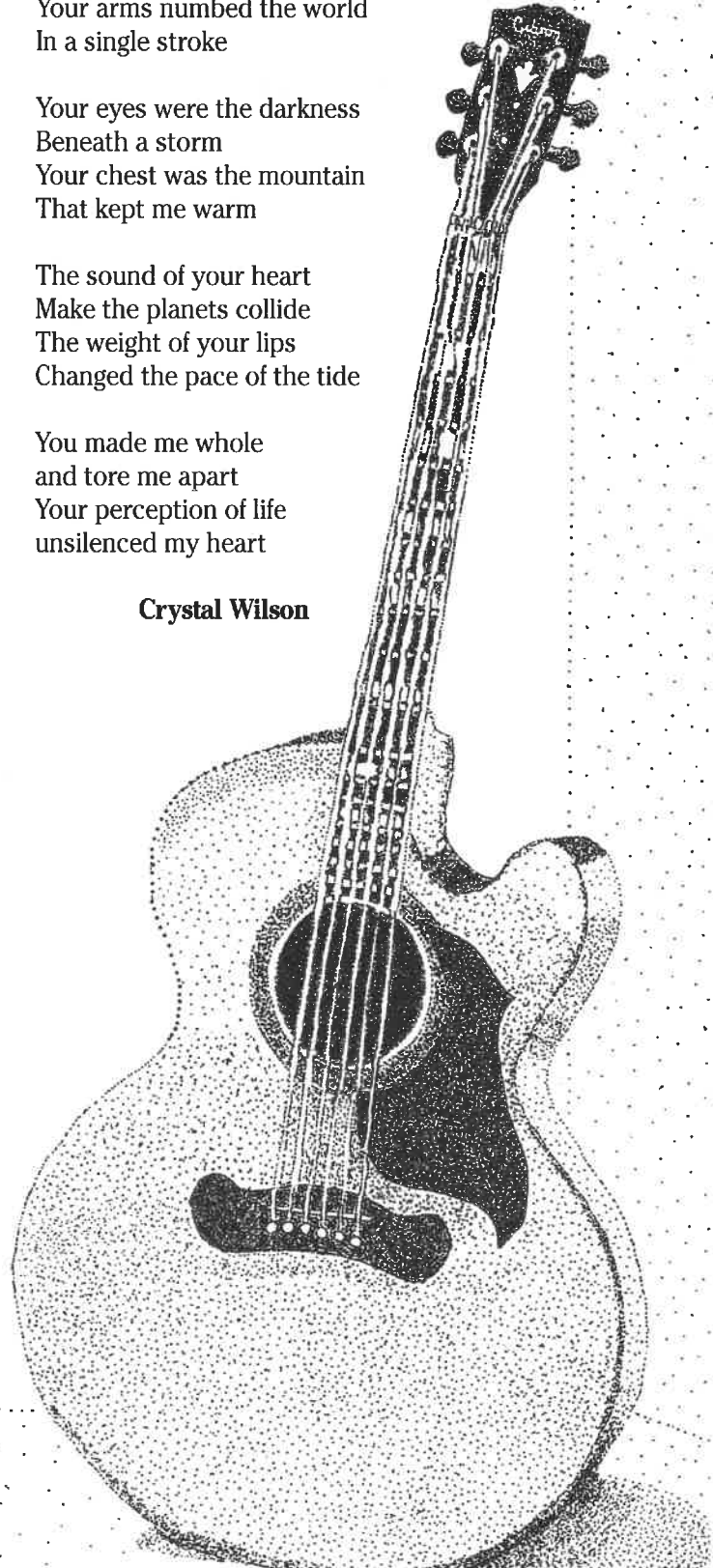


Prologue

If poems are windows into the soul,
What do my windows show?
When the dirt and dust is cleared away,
What can be seen inside myself?
Is it a man, dark and brooding, or
A small frightened child, held in sway
By things he does not understand?

Ryan Stocks


Andy Canion
"Robert Johnson," Stipple



Shula

by Miller Henderson

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

The laughter, the sweet perfume, and motherly embrace sliced years off of Jeff's life and rushed him into childhood. Shula May reached out, rescuing him from the adult world of confusion. With her comforting hymns and peaceful demeanor, she loved all things.

On the outside, Shula May's house was just another impoverished shack on a desolate street overtaken by drugs and violence. But take one look closer, and there was a fine distinction. Her porch, although streaked with stains from years of stormy nights, was meticulously swept. And her door, although carefully barred against the evils of Daughtery Street, was eagerly opened to a kind soul. From her house, chaotic music was not found, but instead gospel radiated from every crack and hole.

And once inside her home, Jeff felt safe. He did not notice the pots scattered around the house, placed to collect rainwater. When it rained, they just provided a pleasant tune that added to the holiness of the house.

Jeff looked into Shula May's brown eyes which were a lake radiating compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance. Jeff remembered the first time he looked into those caring eyes.

Jeff tagged behind his two older brothers, wanting to be included in their summer wanderings. His little legs and heart pumped anxiously trying to catch Bo and Sid. They approached the shed out back. Its rusty doors opened up to a dreamworld of trinkets no longer needed by their father. A dingy smell flowed from the shed, but Jeff ignored it. A surging excitement pushed away thoughts of mold and dirt.

Bo, the eldest, swept back his black hair and gazed into the rummage. Bo hoped nobody dropped by, for he would not be caught dead playing with his two younger brothers. Lately, Bo had been infatuated with himself.

Sid felt privileged to be hanging out with Bo. The glory in his summer days was leaving Jeff at the house, and he and Bo, the "Old ones," would venture. He resented Jeff had to tag along today.

"Hey, Sid," Bo said while giving a subtle wink to him. "How about we let Jeff ride the little contraption we

made last week."

Sid, playing into Bo's plan, responded. "Well, should we? I don't know if he could handle it. He'd probably go crying for Mama."

"Would not," Jeff protested. "I wanna do it."

"Okay," said Bo, giving in rather quickly. "Here is the Fly Board."

Bo pulled out a pathetic model of a skateboard. One rotten board was what first met Jeff's eyes. The board looked like it had been fished out of an old ditch where it had idly lain rotting. It had been sloppily painted red and cracks showed through the scantily applied first coat. As Bo held up the board, a piece of wood splintered off. Somewhat attached to the bottom was a pair of Sid's old roller skates. "Idn't it out of sight?" asked Sid.

Jeff, wanting to please his brothers, said, "Yeah, guys. Shoot, everybody in the neighborhood is going to want something like that."

"You, lucky kid, are going to test it out for us." Bo looked at Jeff with false envy.

Once in the kitchen, Shula sliced a huge piece of pecan pie. Its sweetness drifted in the air toward Jeff, making his stomach churn.

Jeff timidly looked at the Fly Board. The choice was not his. He would test it out. Whether that meant dying or just breaking his neck, his brothers would force him on that rotten, rolling stick of wood.

Jeff pulled together a small streak of courage and said, "Sure.

What are we waitin for?"

Bo and Sid smirked. "How bout you try it down the driveway."

Jeff paused in a moment of shock. Their rocky driveway was the steepest by far on Edenwood Street. From the top, it dove straight down to meet the harsh black pavement. It was on this driveway that Jeff had skinned his first knee, had his first bike wreck, and now where he was about to get killed.

"Not scared are you?" Sid taunted.

Jeff took a deep gulp and managed to squeak out a "Nnoo."

"O.K., then, buddy, time to go." Sid said.

Bo carried the Fly Board and the group trudged back to the driveway. This time Jeff's footsteps were not quite as energetic. His legs wobbled and his blood pulsed

through his veins. "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die," repeated itself over and over in his head.

While they were passing the house, Shula May stuck her head out the kitchen. "Honey, I know nobody is about to get on that rickety thing."

"No, Mam," replied Bo. "We're just putting ole Sally Dog on it."

She grunted with disapproval. "Ya'll goin to kill that poor dog."

A pleading look in Jeff's eyes left Shula doubting Bo's response. She had learned in her few weeks of working here that Bo and Sid abused Jeff on a regular basis. She was the usual referee. Bo and Sid held their heads down submissively when confronted by her and their picking on Jeff subsided for a couple of minutes.

Shula watched patiently from the kitchen window. That ironing could wait; she had to see what these boys were up to.

Bo and Sid led Jeff like a small puppy being led to the vet. Jeff looked down the rocky driveway and winced; he could imagine the pebbles grating into his knees, the sharp burn like fire being streaked across the skin. Dizziness inspired by fear circled in his head. He wanted to cry, to scream. Anything to release the tension that hammered in his chest. Sweat poured down—streaming down his face like raindrops, bringing the taste of salt to his mouth.

Bo and Sid were already chuckling, just imagining the spectacle that was about to happen. Bo sat down the rickety board; it almost fell apart when Jeff applied pressure on it.

Jeff took a deep breath, trying not to let his brothers see him so vulnerable, so scared. His hands were trembling. He lifted up the other foot and shakily began to roll. It was like somebody was trying to hurl him at the ground; the board was plotting to see him on the concrete. He was riding a bull, and any minute he would be thrown off.

Something managed to briefly catch his attention and pull him away from his doom. A huge figure dashed across the lawn. Fat rocked from side to side as Shula ran—actually running was an understatement for the way Shula was moving. Her face focused straight ahead as she heaved in air. In one second her slow body had hefted itself out of the kitchen and turned into a sprinter.

Shula's feet pounded against the earth while she screamed, "Steady, Baby. Hold on a little bit longer. I'm coming to get you . "

As Jeff's speed increased, so did Shula. And suddenly she was in front of him, saving him from the burning pain, rescuing him from humiliation. Right then she was his angel. His flying body was gently caught in Shula's

arms. Their beating hearts calmed each other. Jeff's tension erupted—tears streamed down his innocent, terrified face. Shula swept back his blonde hair, hiding his tears from his brothers.

"It's O.K., Baby. You safe now. Shsh...It's O.K." Her words eased Jeff's sobs.

He was safe. Her arms shielded him from everything and his frantic breathing faded into soft movements of air.

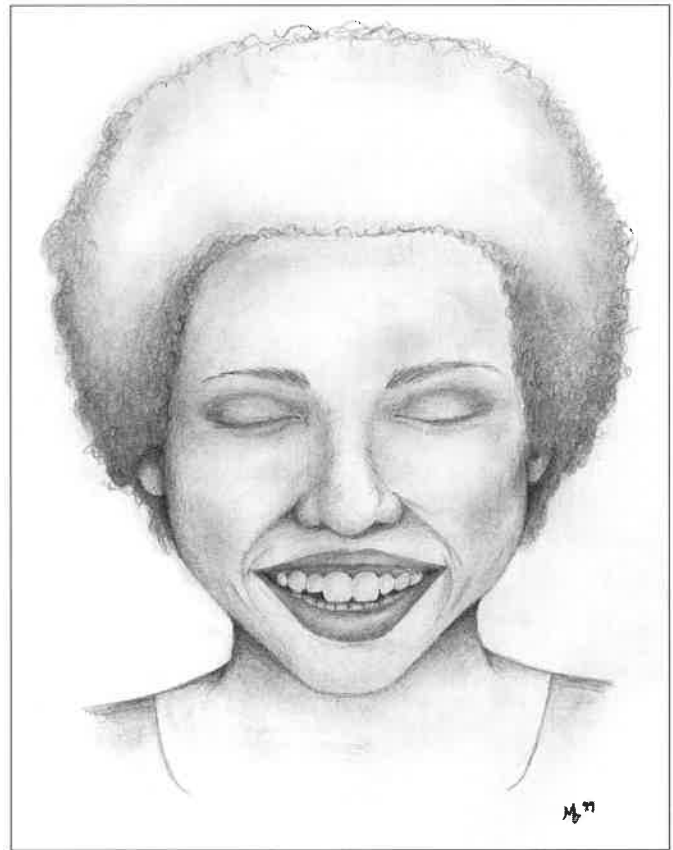
"How bout we go inside and get a little bit to eat of my pecan pie? How that sound?"

Shula scooped him up like a baby and her strong body took him to the kitchen. Once in the kitchen, Shula sliced a huge piece of pecan pie. Its sweetness drifted in the air toward Jeff, making his stomach churn.

"Is there gonna be enough left for Bo and Sid?" Jeff asked.

"Baby, forget about them. They won't be getting any of my special cooking for a couple of weeks—if not longer."

Jeff sighed with contentment and looked admiringly into Shula May's eyes. Those same eyes that would pull him through many more struggles in the future. ■



Megan Dareing
"Happy," Graphite

Letting Go

by Ashleigh Crosby



At the age of fifteen, I was uprooted from the place that I had called home my entire life, and moved to a new community that was completely out of my comfort zone. For the first fifteen years of my life, I lived in the busy and often dangerous metropolis of New Orleans, Louisiana. My mother was a kindergarten teacher with the Jefferson Parish School District, and my father was a mail carrier and acting-supervisor at the U.S. Post Office. We lived in a safe upper-middle class neighborhood in Marrero, a suburb of the city far from the infamous Bourbon Street and French Quarter. Although my parents enjoyed living in New Orleans, they had long decided that, given the opportunity, they would move somewhere safer, where my younger sister and I could grow up without worrying about if we were going to get robbed, raped, or even killed.

In June of 1996, my parents received the opportunity to move.

My father received a job offer from the U.S. Post Office in Natchez, Mississippi. They were looking for a full-time supervisor, and my father had all of the qualifications needed for the job. When my parents informed me that we were moving to Natchez, I was horrified. I could not believe that they were even considering leaving a town as glamorous and acclaimed as New Orleans for a small, country town like Natchez. My mom thought that maybe if I visited the town, I would like it. However, when we went to Natchez, my feelings did not change at all. There were no freeways, skyscrapers, or multi-level malls. I could not understand how anyone could, or why anyone would, want live in such a boring place. Maybe, I thought, my parents are playing an evil trick on me. But, much to my regret, they were serious. We were moving to Natchez.

The summer of 1996 became the worst summer of my life. I was forced to say good-bye to my neighbor-

hood, my house, and most of all, my friends. Friends that I lived by, played with, and went to school with my entire life were now going to be a part of my past. I was sad and angry, but, most of all, I was hurt. I could not believe that my parents would even consider making me leave my home to move to some small, primitive town almost two hundred miles away. They continuously told me that this move would benefit me in the long run, and that I would thank them one day. They said we were moving so that my sister and I could live in a safer environment where we would not have to live in fear. This all, however, was irrelevant to me. I could not see past my own wants and

desires. I was too selfish to realize that the move was affecting my entire family, not just me.

By August of 1996, I was officially a citizen of Natchez, Mississippi. I despised every minute of every day that I was in Natchez, not because it was unbearable, but because I was

afraid. I was suddenly enrolled in a school with hundreds of other students whom I did not know and who did not know me. I was always referred to as "that new girl from New Orleans," and I hated it. I wanted to be more than just a new girl—I wanted to be recognized as an individual. However, this was almost impossible because I would not allow myself to get close to anyone. I did not want to make friends, because then I might actually start to enjoy myself.

Then one Friday evening in October, everything changed. April, a girl whom I took classes with, asked me, as she did every Friday evening, if I wanted to go to the football game with her. As usual, I said no and quietly walked away. Usually she did the same, but this time she said, "Ashleigh. Let's talk." This took me by surprise because during the two months I had been living in Natchez, I had never had a real conversation with anyone.

I could not believe that my parents would even consider making me leave my home to move to some small, primitive town almost two hundred miles away.

"You need to get out more and at least try to like Natchez. It's really not that bad," she said. "I know you really liked New Orleans, but you can't keep holding on to the past. You have to let go and move on. Accept the fact that you are here, and try to make the best of it."

This little talk changed me completely. I realized that by being antisocial, I was only making my situation worse. I was looking to replace my friends from New Orleans. After listening to April, I came to the realization that I could not replace my old friends; I could only make new friends. I began to appreciate the good things about Natchez. The crime rate is almost non-existent, the city is cleaner, the schools are safer, the people are all down-to-earth and friendly, and, most importantly, my parents are happy.

Once I finally accepted the fact that I was in a place where I did not want to be, I was able to make the best of my situation. I think that this was the point in my life when I put aside my childish, immature ways and started thinking like an adult. People at school were begin-

ning to think that I was either conceited or crazy, because I never talked to anyone. April made me realize that by not talking to people and being anti-social, I was only hurting myself. So, I changed. I started going out with April and her friends. This alone made me realize that Natchez really wasn't that bad. By isolating myself, I was separated from the one thing that makes a city—people. Once I started going out and meeting people, I also began to be active in school activities. I joined the Beta Club and the tennis team. After someone resigned as Freshman Class Representative, my classmates elected me to fill her position. I was no longer identified as "the new girl from New Orleans." I had an identity, a reason, and a purpose for being there.

April's advice has stuck with me ever since the ninth grade. By holding onto the past, I could not move on. Once I tried to appreciate Natchez, I actually began to like it. I learned the most important thing that I have ever learned in my life when I was only fourteen: there comes a point in everyone's life when you just have to let go. ■



Crystal Wilson
"Red, Red Rose," Acrylic

A Walk in Paradise

by Alyda Hardy

First Place, Essay Contest



The shuddering motion of the boat finally woke me. The rumbling of the mammoth engines shook the little mail-boat from end to end in undulating surges, and shook me out of the cramped bunk-bed as well. It was 8:30—we'd left at 7, but the screams of the hysterical baby in the waiting-room outside our door had only briefly drifted through my dreams, along with the chattering voices that now filled my ears and seemed astonishingly loud.

My family and I were on our way to what the natives call the "out-islands" of the Bahamas. My two younger sisters and I had never been, but my parents had sailed through when first married, and they had the starry-eyed nostalgic look of people coming home at last. My mother had planned this trip from our kitchen counter, mountains of glossy brochures threatening avalanches above our heads as she made phone calls and wrote letters to people my parents once knew who now lived the "paradise life." We half-listened as they traded private jokes and stories about barracudas and island bars and rich people who wrecked their million-dollar sailboats, and

we went with them to try on scuba gear without really knowing what to do with all of it. My youngest sister, Ashley, wanted to see the sharks and fish, and Allison was fixated on the idea of "the perfect tan." I didn't want to go. A week with my family in close quarters brought no starry looks to my face, and aside from that, my parents planned to stay on an "out-island"—one of the less-populated, less commercial parts of the Bahamas. No big condos or hotels, no night-life, no casinos, not a lot of people...and, to my teenage mind, not a lot to do. This wasn't the dream-vacation won on a game show; it was the version of a typical family vacation that my parents always did. We didn't go to popular places the popular way—we backpacked on foot and camped, or drove,

hauling a pop-up trailer, over a period of weeks, while others flew in a matter of hours. And now, my father had gotten in touch with some old friends, and we were spending a week meant to be in paradise on someplace I could only classify as "bor-ing."

"In order to get to the out-islands," my father had explained, "you either own a boat, or you take the mail-boat."

Guess which one we did.

As you can tell, my disposition was less-than-enthusiastic, and this wasn't helped at all when we arrived four sea-drenched hours later at Spanish Wells, population all of maybe three...if you counted the birds.

My first impression was of a huge concrete dock, green with grass and encrusted with barnacles. I could see all of it because looking down into the water was like looking through a window, a fact which my father pointed out with embarrassing zeal. Secondly, I saw the elderly couple, waving as they stood in a perfect scene of "growing old together." My parents saw them, too, because they waved back and shouted

I gloomily followed my sisters up a cramped staircase, deposited my bags and myself on a bed covered with an orange crocheted blanket, and prayed that my parents would forget I existed.

"Michael! Bearl!"—a cry my sisters took up with more vigor than I thought it merited.

Once safely off the gangplank and onto land, with our luggage unloaded and stacked into an intimidating pile next to us (Allison, being persuaded that there was something she might have left behind, had undertaken the task of packing everything she owned into a wide array of duffel bags, suitcases, and about sixteen cosmetic cases), introductions were made to the tanned, white-haired couple who looked like they'd found happiness a long time ago and held onto it ever since. I was hugged familiarly by these unknown people, and then shepherded to a beat-up truck that looked like someone had mistaken it for a tin-can, tossed it in the air, and shot

it full of holes. My dislike of the place was complete when I was set amidst the luggage in the back of the truck for the trip to Michael and Bearl's house—it mortified me beyond belief to be seen like that, sitting with suitcases.

Spanish Wells consisted of streets that brought a new meaning to the word “narrow”—lanes where there wasn't even a side enough to drive the wrong one, all lined by cement blocks and scraggly bushes of indiscriminate type. It was down these tiny, cramped roads that we careened at break-neck speed, taking the sharp curves and steep hills in a much faster manner than my non-seatbelted self deemed safe. It was all very death-defying. And in spite of the comparative down-sizing of the roads, all the drivers continued to dance a tire-squealing, cringe-inducing waltz with Fate at every bend.

The houses also caught my attention—stucco on the outside, painted almost neon-bright greens, pinks, peaches and purples, they were tightly-closed and compact. Land was at a premium, so most of them were two-storied, and often shared a driveway, or even a backyard, with a neighbor. We turned in to one of these exactly like the others, and I was allowed to finally alight from the sweltering heat of the truck bed.

Anticipating the cooling flow of air-conditioning inside, I was the first out of the back of the truck and swift about getting my bags and heading for the house—only to walk through the door and find that inside was the equivalent of outside, just with a draft from battered metal fans which had the martyred look of ancient war veterans.

“Most of the houses here don't have air conditioners.” said my mother cheerfully from behind me, as I came to a dead stop in shock. “Isn't that cool?”

“If you say so.” I mumbled. Not quite the wording *I* would have chosen.

I heard my sisters' similar reactions to the oppressive heat as they came through the door, and Ashley's succinctly-put, “Whoa. *Time* warp,” completely summed up my response to the house's decor. As I was to come to find out, Spanish Wells is so remote that it moves more slowly through decades than the outside world. It's caught forever in the 70's—the era of orange and avocado green and harvest gold and dark wood. And plastic. And flowers. And *plastic flowers*. Formica countertops, shag carpets, and “dinette sets” dominated the interiors of *all* the houses that I saw the three days we were there. Even the *people* have hit this wall in progressive time. The women had what my mother termed “Charlie's Angels'” haircuts and wore rolled-up dungarees, and the men dressed up to go out in polyester leisure suits. The kids looked normal enough in T-shirts and shorts, so maybe they will survive the generation-warp, even if their parents seem determined to re-live it.

I gloomily followed my sisters up a cramped staircase, deposited my bags and myself on a bed covered with an orange crocheted blanket, and prayed that my parents would forget I existed.

No such luck.

For the next three days, they hauled us around the tiny island to meet Michael and Bearl's various offspring



Chris Oliver

“Paradise,” Computer Graphics
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

and kids, who looked with slight awe at our clothes and jewelry and listened to our southern accents with slight contempt. The first meal was awkward, with my sisters and me trying to remember every single bit of manners our parents had ever drilled into us, and these people from an entirely different social setting watching us like we were novelties as we folded our napkins and placed our silverware “just so.” There was a girl of about fourteen, and no matter how many times Allison and I tried to talk to her, she answered in monosyllables or ignored every word. The younger children seemed a little bit scared of us, and the parents viewed us warily. But after one of the toddlers dropped a huge lobster in Allison’s lap and she managed to still smile when everyone laughed at her screams of terror, the ice was broken.

Even though these people hardly knew us, they took us out on their speedboats (a prerequisite for island life) and taught us to scuba dive over brochure-worthy reefs that ordinary tourists never see. They showed us how to de-shell and cook enormous conch, spear fish and lobster, look menacing to curious sharptoothed barracudas, and swim *really* fast back to the boat when a shark shows up. They took days off of work to boat us over to the cave where the first settlers of Spanish Wells lived and to just take us out to lunch at one of their two restaurants. It slowly dawned on me that these people were really *nice*. Over a period of three days, my view of the island underwent a rapid change. There wasn’t any kind of night-life, but there wasn’t any need for it, either—we were too tired by 8:30 at night to do anything but tumble into a bed. There weren’t lots of clubs with strobe lights and techno music, but there was plenty of beach and moonlight and all the middle-aged people were always willing to provide their own harmony (or at least *their* version of harmony). Kids didn’t ask for cars on Spanish Wells, they asked for boats (and it was probably safer that way). I found that, far from my original perspective of boredom, there was actually a lot to do, you just had to know where to look. And the atmosphere was something else—people didn’t stress over the problems we have. They just relaxed and went with the flow of life and the tide that surrounded them. It amazed me,

these people so content with their lives in this far corner of the world where they did really nothing at all, but at the same time they did everything that could ever be important. It didn’t matter that they would make no great impact on the outside world—they made an impact in *theirs*.

When we left, it was with a lot more emotion than when we arrived. *I* even went so far as to wave to one of the grandchildren as they hung out the sunroof of their mother’s tiny Japanese SUV as they paced our boat. Allison would have waved, but she was too sunburned to lift an arm, and Ashley nearly fell overboard in her enthusiasm. My parents stood silently together watching the land slip away, hands clasped...in an exact copy of Michael and Bearl’s content tableau as they watched the boat slide out into the ocean. ■



Sahar Baghail

“Prodigal Son,” Colored Pencils



Amber van Vlymen
"Self-portrait," Colored and Wax Pencils
First Place, Art Contest

Always

It's the loneliness of having no one
That overrides the joy...
It's knowing that no one feels for you
That aches the heart's core...

You've all of these friendships
But no real friends...
You've so many lovers
But nothing that is true...

And you sit at night and wonder how
Life could have turned out so...
When all you ever wanted
Was to be loved for who you are...

Yet you know that that hope is a joke
Which is laughed at every day...
And you know that acceptance does not exist
For people who are like you...

You've tried to uncover the real you
For, now, a year or two...
And you have realized now
That the mask must be worn again...

The real you must be so ugly
To be uncared for by so many...
The real you must be covered again
To hide the tears that stain...

Wear the mask to hide the pain
It only protects you more...
Wear the mask to hide the real you
The real you that is so ugly...

You'll never be loved for who you are
The pain will forever conquer the joy...
As in your nightmares...you'll be alone in the end
Your loyal companion, heartache, will be your last
friend...

And you know this
Because you've tried to change fate...
And you know this
Because you've learned fate can't be changed...

You understand people see you
As melodramatically sorrowful...

And you understand them
Because they will never know the pain...

You wouldn't wish the pain on anyone
Even though they mock you so...
You would never wish them to feel as you
Because you wish you could feel their joy...

You're alright.
You always will be.
You'll always smile.
Always for them.

You can make it.
You always do.
You won't fall apart.
Not without the truth.

Shauna La

Morpheus

Lace your fingers through mine.
Green meadows, swaying daisies
Your musical laugh, shining eyes
I let your love wash over me
Like the gentle azure waves that lap the shore.
Take me away to our paradise.
Love me and set me free.
Sunlight pierces the daydream
I awaken to the stark white walls
Sunlight fades—
I am alone.

Tenesha Lewis



Brittany Henry
"Life," Colored Pencils



David Winton
"Diane," Scratchboard
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Victorian Lace

But she swore she saw butterflies...
I never understood those things
Her disappearance plagued us
We who refused to search
Preferred the tangled vines she embraced
She kept her antique roses,
They grew her attic
In which she could hide and fade
Away
But she swore she saw butterflies
Sweeping across the attic rug
Ignoring them seemed the option
Their tears would dry
Wilt and fall to dust
She said thorns didn't
I wondered why we began to listen
It would have been too thick
Stagnant memories can smother
Given time
Photographs can bleed
That's why her fingers were always dark
Never ask about eyes
They'll turn away...
Bury themselves within the soul
She called it her roses
She swore she saw butterflies.

Erin Allen

Grandmother

Hands gnarled as dogwood
Grasp the wintry wheelbarrow
Century old legs
Incite movement over a rusty wheel
Mile deep eyes carry love
Over four generations
 A thin smile stretches
Underneath a bumpy nose
Like God's blueprint for starlight
And the breeze against my cheek
Burns me like a kiss

Rusty Parks

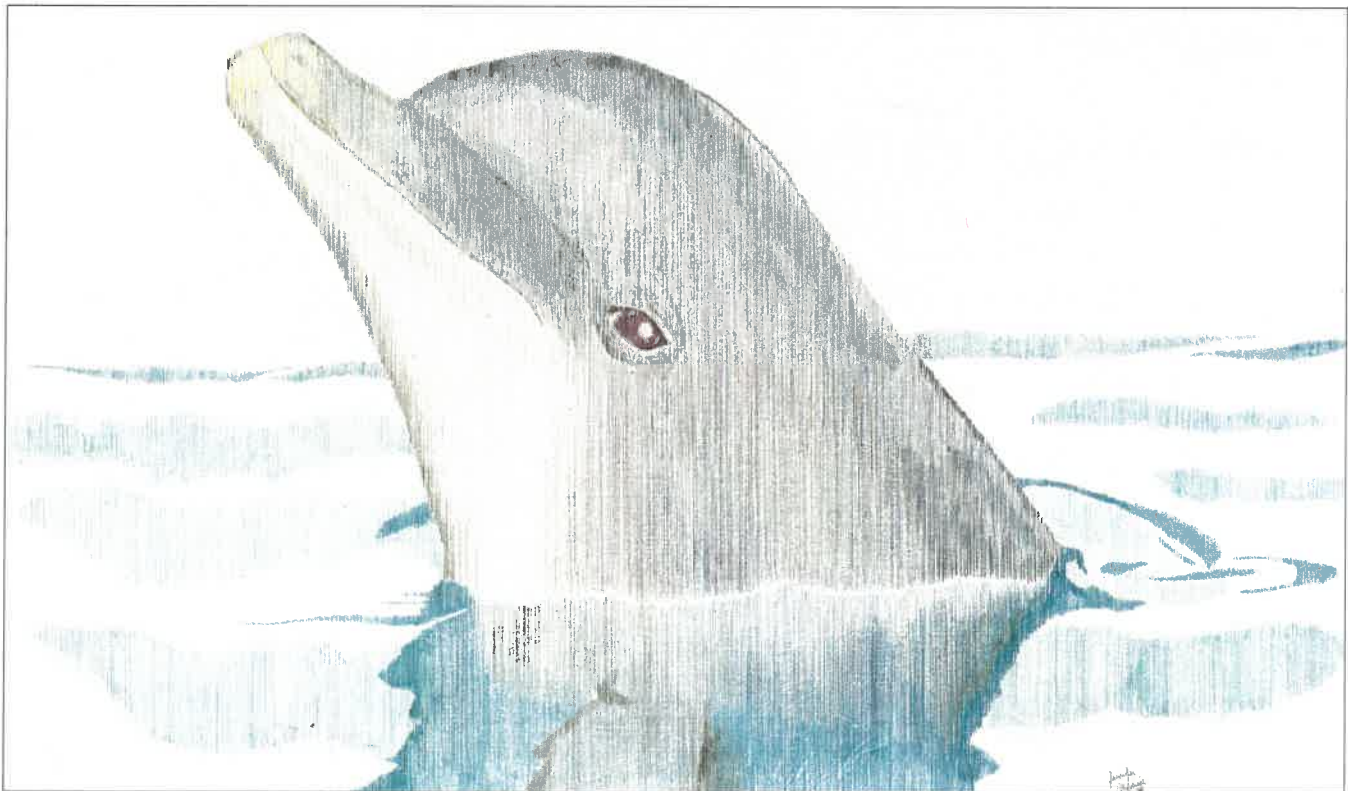
Second Place, Poetry Contest

Idy's Eyes

Better off not to see
 These burning white halls,
 These sterile walls.
 The light at the end of her life,
Gleams from the sanitized linoleum,
 From the faucets and the stainless sinks,
 From the inside of the windows,
 From all of these clean things that Idy can't see.
Her old eyes fell asleep ahead of her.
 With her withered hands,
 Idy looks for the doorframe that she can't look for,
 Idy watches the great-grandbaby that she can't
watch,
Her eyes opened wildly,
 Glasses poised upon her gentle nose,
 Useless.
Everyone remembers being seen by Idy,
 Her hands quivering across these eyes,
 Her fingertips along this chin,
 Her eyes closed,
 Concentrating,
While Idy sees the things that she can't see.

Maya Weilundemo

Third Place, Poetry Contest



Jennifer Chadwick

"Dolphin," Colored Pencils

Pearl

Pearl's face (always smiling her gold teeth)
 Deep, black, darker than the Delta night
Staring at his paleness
Holding his dying, grandfather eyes in hers
Sacrificing her time
 For his last days
Held me closer than my mother's embrace—
 Than my uncle's handshake.

Pearl's arms
 Big, warm, more lovely than her flowers
Straddling my chest
Gripping my heart
Loving me more than
 I knew how to

Clung to me because it's all they knew
 How to do.

Pearl's eyes (always entrancing me)
 Brown, sparkled, more inviting than a cozy
 fireside bed
Showing me visions of black mothers
Loving their fellow suffragettes
Singing strong songs into the night's river
 Without drowning an ounce of pride
Whispered, "I Love You"
 Even though she had no reason to.

Pearl, my eyes whispered, "I Love You, too."

Seth Garrison

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest



Lindsay Rosenblatt

"Fort Adams, Mississippi," Photography

Fashion

A lonely flower,
Solemn and sophisticated...
She used to be
A nonconformist pink carnation.
There were few of them,
Sparsely distributed
Among the more commonplace red roses

She saw how alone she was
She knew
She couldn't stay this way
At first she felt proud...
Different...
Special.
But now she felt foolish
For wanting to disengage herself
And wanting to show Them
Her individuality.

They were all
Perfect red roses,
Love flowers
That laughed at her.

So the pink carnation
Underwent a metamorphosis.
The flower mutated...
Still full of sophistication
As she was before
Yet she conformed and became
Like the others.
She was refined and beautiful,
Yet still unique
She had become
An elegant yellow rose.

Becky Long

Early Morning Hairdresser

Mama used to do our hair
In the early mornings before school.
Her quick, strong hands plowed
Through my sister's tangles
As though she were laboring
In her daddy's fields.
Nimble fingers delicately
Made parts as straight as rows of cotton.
Methodically, she tested the heat of the curling iron
With a damp cloth lying nearby
And curled strands of hair
With the same precision used
While examining patients in her clinic.
Busily critiquing my own style in the bathroom mirror,
I didn't notice that she never seemed to have time
To do anything more than run a comb
Through her own hair before going to work in the
morning.

Lydia Lucas

For the Romantics

The fire in the artist
Images, choices, awareness of self
Abstract and trite, we wonder
Is life significant?
Is simplicity sweet?
Prove your faith
Purge your pride and process
Take a taste of flowers and easy understanding
Be a champion of the wilderness
Live in a classic commercial world,
The pretty picture of what real should be
Put on a fancy costume, dine on cuisine, and
Live in a sandcastle anyway.

Forrest Dillard



Silver Hand

She sits alone on the rusty chair
Just watching those who have passed by.
First, she gives a glance—
Followed by a long stare—
Then, her hand starts wandering off.

People and places live for a while
As Time freezes itself on paper.
The person is immortalized—
The drawing is complete—
And she gets up to leave.

One hand has the board
And the other has the pencil.
There is a sparkle covering her hand—
A sort of silver glimmering—
That comes only from graphite.

Nga Le

B's

I think that I shall never see
A grade as lovely as a B.

A B whose lovely form is pressed
Against the records of the Blessed;

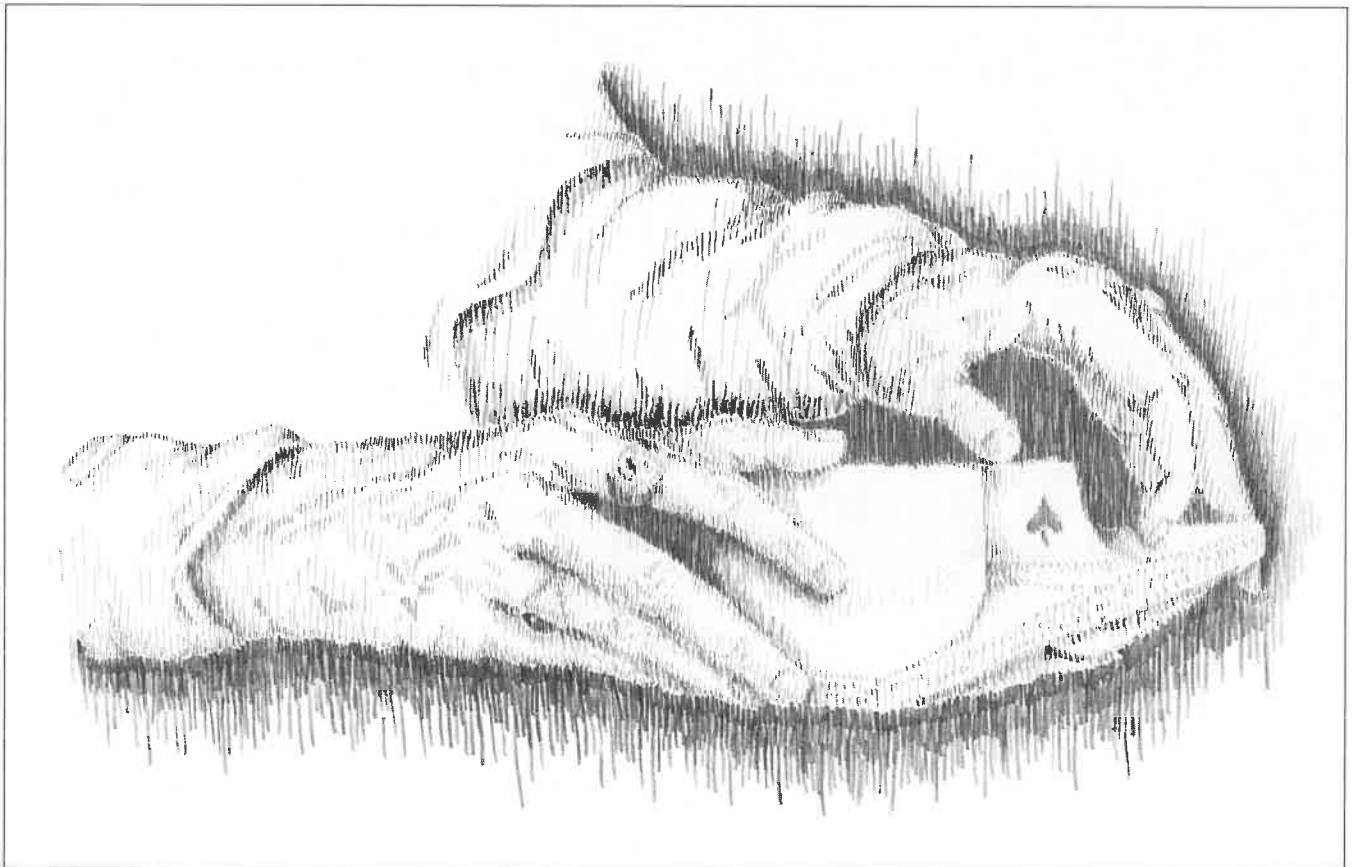
A B in Mechanics, Thermo & Waves
Would my graduation surely save!

A B that may in summer bare
A freedom from my scholarly fare;

Whose sumptuous humps I strove gain;
My studious toil proved not in vain.

F's are made by Fools like me,
But only God can make a B.

Nicki Dickman




Megan Dareing
"Let's Play," Graphite
Second Place, Art Contest

Rt. 3, Box 153: A Symphony

by Seth Garrison

Third Place, Essay Contest

The first sound that hits my ear is the door: squeaking springs propel a ripped screen portal forward and stop it just before the frame hits the porch railing.

Then comes the tap of shoes on brick, carrying me down the father-laid brick path towards the gravel. That's when the real stuff starts happening. That incessant, metronomic crunch of rocks underneath the soles of my shoes lets me know that I'm really home. The first sound I probably ever heard, besides those arbitrary hospital noises and that necessary song of my mother's voice or my father's coo, was the clicking of those rocks.

But I could feel it

On a country road

As my gait increases along with my speed, the memories start pouring back like the creek water flowing through the makeshift beaver dam in the valley behind my house. I started walking on top of that hill, the one behind the row of pines—taller pines than I remember. I first ran on top of those golden rocks—that hard, red dirt—and I first bled from a fall inflicted by one of those dangerously positioned jutting stones.

I remember one run.

There was a bee. Buzzing in my ear. I was stung and I yelled, my soprano voice filling the dusty air, and soon after, the clunking of my old tennis shoes commenced. The *prestissimo* tempo of my running eventually carried me to my mom's old wooden frame veterinary clinic, the one my dad put together, and my mother, with leash and dog still in hand, comforted me.

That wasn't the only time that the end of that gravel path brought me consolation. Every time my car's tires spin against that drive as I turn in from the paved county road, I know that there's solace just waiting for me at the end—after the spinning rocks settle down into that

clickety-clack. We live in a different place than we did when all the early things happened—bee stings, screeching screams, walking lessons, mud pies. Then, we lived in a trailer—a small one, a full one. Now, we live in a house my father started building the year I was born. It's been seventeen years and that house still isn't finished. There are still things to be done: some of the floorboards still creak when one of us walks over them.

It's a short walk—about five minutes—from that trailer to my home, but I don't take it often. Usually, the walk was borne out of necessity, and having a car reduces the chance of needing to walk. But I can still remember the sounds. The sound of the gravel that was constant and the sound that only played when the sun fell under the trees and stars found their way out into the open sky over head. It's a sound that almost every

Every time my car's tires spin against that drive as I turn in from the paved county road, I know that there's solace just waiting for me at the end—after the spinning rocks settle down into that clickety-clack.

Southerner knows, the song of crickets and owls and small creatures that permeates our humid air. That low din that serves as the continuo for every thing else that goes on in the night.

Sometimes during those nighttime strolls, though, something would crack suddenly in the distance and that feeling would hit.

That feeling that you get from utter fear—clenched stomach and fist, heart pumping.

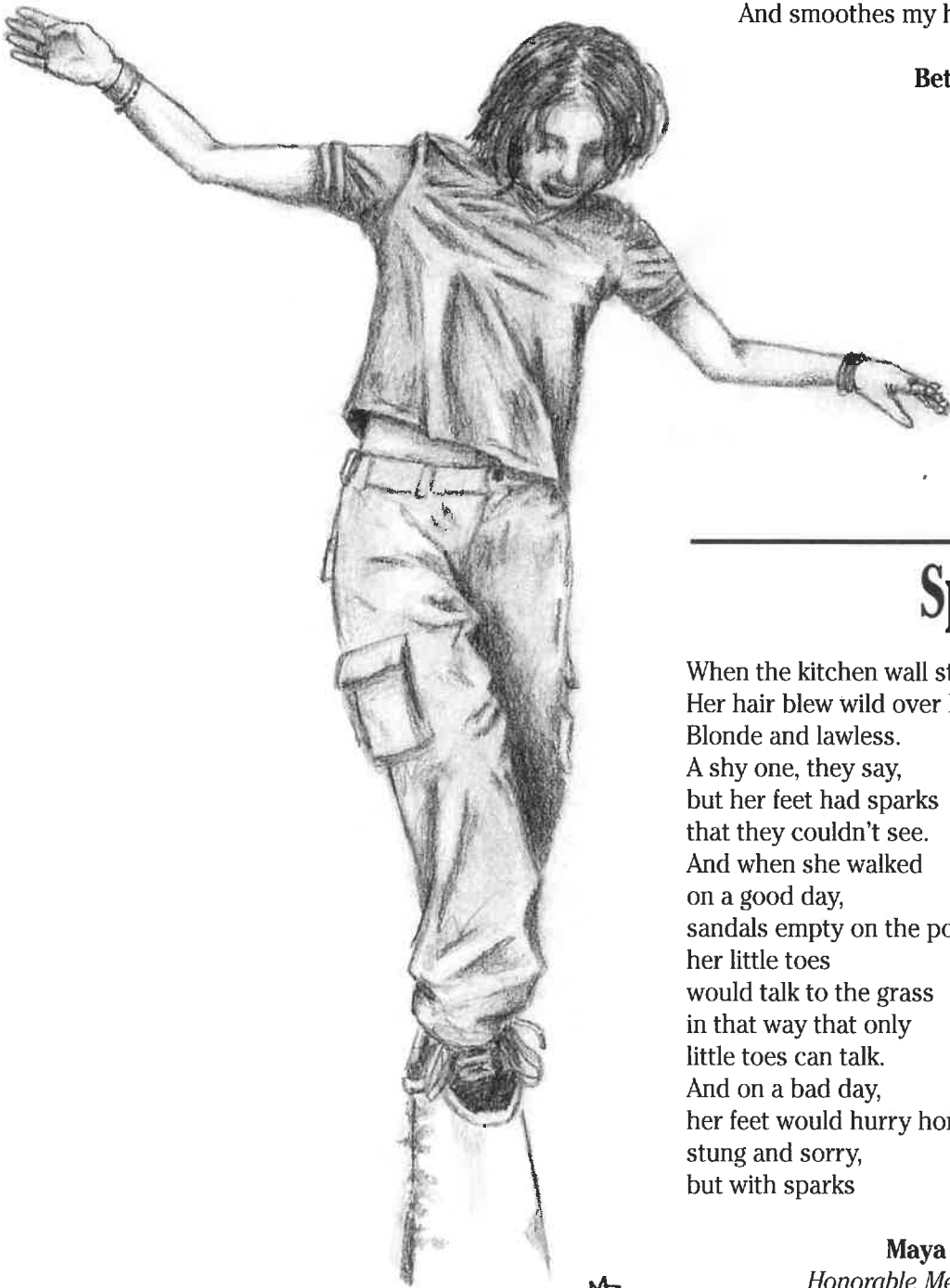
They're not that scary anymore—those forest noises—but at the time they were enough to start me running home towards the warm porch light—toward my own little heaven.

No matter what would happen on those walks, though, I knew what I would hear when I got home. The pulling of the door would make that creak, and as I would walk in, the abrupt slam of that screen door would follow close behind me, signaling my return, resolving the chord of absence. ■

early education

Girls have long hair
Guys wear pants
Big boys don't cry
And real men don't dance

Rusty Parks



Megan Dareing

"Can You Walk a Straight Line?" Graphite

Navy

Navy blue is soft against my skin.
It holds me close and doesn't let go.
Navy blue kisses me softly
And smoothes my hair as it wipes a tear.

Beth Lacey

Sparks

When the kitchen wall still knew her height,
Her hair blew wild over her eyes like a sandstorm,
Blonde and lawless.
A shy one, they say,
but her feet had sparks
that they couldn't see.
And when she walked
on a good day,
sandals empty on the porch,
her little toes
would talk to the grass
in that way that only
little toes can talk.
And on a bad day,
her feet would hurry home,
stung and sorry,
but with sparks

Maya Weilundemo

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Guts

by Maya Weilandemo

Third Place, Short Story Contest



Things hadn't changed much in the meatpacking business. Sure, they used gas now, and bolts to slaughter, but that wasn't what made the job what it was. The men and the occasional woman who worked at Hudson Brothers didn't worry about humanitarianism or pain or death at all. As far as they could allow themselves to think, no breath had ever dignified the snouts of the hogs that they saw dangling from the overhead conveyor cables six days a week. The hog carcasses hung at just the height that those pigs' eyes looked at the guts of the workers, and the workers' eyes looked at the guts of the pigs—all that mattered. This business was just guts.

The grinding of chains under the burden of dozens of stiffened hog bodies tormented but deafened the ears of Hank and Dwayne as their hands worked without the consent of their minds. Hank and Dwayne were veterans in this slaughterhouse—they had been employed at Hudson Brothers for nearly five years, since they'd graduated high school together. All Hank could think was how much he wanted to be somewhere else, but the farthest away his mind could imagine him was sitting on the tailgate of his truck, staring directly into the sun.

Dwayne's mind was elsewhere. He had heard his entire life about the significance of his hands. Although their small-town vocabularies sometimes inhibited their compliments, people who met Dwayne with a handshake often commented on the softness of his hands or their beauty. His grandmother thought they looked strong like his grandpa's, but his mother claimed not to know where he got such perfect hands, always looking disappointedly at her own knobby fingers. His football coach even told him once that he had "pretty hands for a lineman." Apparently, Dwayne had nice hands.

He thought of that as he worked, as he carved the shoulder from another dangling hog carcass. Dwayne watched his hand, with fingers that reached just as far as they should, with all those smooth knuckles, with all that

blood smudged across the back of it. He tried to wipe the blood off on his apron, but his efforts were inefficient. Dwayne set down his carving knife.

"Hey, Hank."

Hank raised his grizzled brow. "What?"

"Hank, would you say I had pretty hands?"

Hank was busy, but he did shift his weight uncomfortably. "No, I don't believe I would."

"People always told me I had pretty hands."

Hank grunted. "Get back to work, Dwayne. You're holdin' me up."

Dwayne's face was painted with disappointment, but he went back to work without argument. He couldn't stop thinking about his hands, though, inspecting them

as he held his knife. Dwayne was far too distracted to work like this anymore. He stopped suddenly. "Hey, Hank."

Hank looked at him finally. "What?"

"Let's say you did think I had pretty hands. You would tell me, right?"

"Damn, Dwayne."

Dwayne looked at his hands again. "I was just thinking... ya know, there's people somewhere that all they do all day is model their hands. You think I could do that? It'd be a hell of a lot better than this."

Hank shook his head. He couldn't bear this any longer—working eight-hour shifts with all those hogs and with Dwayne for nearly five years straight. Something had to give. "Alright. Let me have a look." Dwayne held out his left hand, the one with the least blood on it. "They are pretty nice," Hank admitted. It was the truth. Dwayne had pretty nice hands.

"So, you think I could make it? I mean, as a hand model?"

Hank nodded his head. "I really think you could," he lied.

"Alright," Dwayne said. "I'm outta here."

With that, Dwayne took off his apron, threw it to the floor, and walked down the aisle between the rows of hanging pigs, out into the dusty day. ■

The hog carcasses hung at just the height that those pigs' eyes looked at the guts of the workers, and the workers' eyes looked at the guts of the pigs—all that mattered. This business was just guts.

Poindexter Steps

I feel so cold and alone
In this old dreary town.
Compacted with memories
It leaves no room for mine.
Filled with cemeteries
Ancient and new
Frivolous and neglected.
The cobwebs I see
Scattered on all the buildings
Feel like my mind—
Fleeting with each breeze.
The chills and thrills
The heat and defeat
Of it all
Astound my eyes
Beauty in natural freedom—
Melting icicles drip on my thoughts

Adam Williams

The Veteran's Pain

Through a tinted window
Burned an image deep in my brain
A tired young man in uniform
Reached toward the face
 of his fiancé
A scarred hand reached to touch
The face that had never left his side
From thousands of miles away
It was his good hand
His left hand
His only hand
He used to be right handed
Before the war
His only index finger graced her lip
Still in disbelief that he was home
Tears of joy and sorrow
Disbelief and discomfort
The amazement of how love can change
And lives can change
But the light changed
So I drove away

Rusty Parks



Adam Williams
"Irony," Photography

White Roses

by Beth Lacey



I can't bend my little toe anymore. I've broken every one of my toes at least three times. I've had surgery on my right foot and shattered my left ankle. I tore the cartilage in my right knee and displaced my right kneecap. Every physical therapist in Mississippi knows me by name. I do not give up. I love ballet.

As a child I had a mild case of cerebral palsy. I took my trips to the local clinic three times a week to push against a nurse's hand with my crippled legs. I could eventually crawl up stairs and slide back down on my rear. I had broken all of my toes with my shuffled walk, which the nurses struggled to correct.

At the age of two my parents enrolled me in a "special" ballet class. The doctors said it would help me with my balance and coordination. I still went routinely to a specialist. By the time I was four I could walk in a straight line and run my still wobbly run. When I was eight I progressed in my ballet skills and got promoted. It was time for me to switch to a real ballet teacher. Three days after my tenth birthday I had a surgery on my right foot. There was too much scar tissue in my joints. I couldn't walk correctly for about a year and ballet was limited to stretches and balancing on my left foot.

After my break from dancing I was more determined than ever to prove to everyone, including myself, that I could do it. I practiced every day for hours, watching my slim reflection in my mother's smooth black double-decker oven doors. I stayed after each class determined to perfect the steps I missed. I kept dancing through the tears of broken toes—after the second time you hardly notice their bruised and awkwardly bent shape.

When I was fourteen I thought I had it made—I was accepted into a professional dance company. It was time for my debut: I was cast in *The Nutcracker* as three different roles—the lead Spanish cocoa, a puppet, and one of many flower petals. I couldn't believe it. I got a tape of the conductor's music and practiced in my room every night after I'd finished my homework. My parents had now bought me a full-length mirror so that I didn't disturb my mother cooking dinner while her oven doors

showed my mistakes. My favorite part was practicing the bows. I would graciously accept my bouquet of flowers from my cavalier as the audience cried out "bravo" and "magnifice." I'd kneel down by the orchestra pit, as small children would run at me with their programs begging for me to sign them. Every night I'd practice, making sure that my rehearsed thank-you smiles and my surprised tears for my bouquet of white roses—what only prima ballerinas get—weren't too obvious.

Finally it was the dress rehearsal. Everyone wore costumes with sweat pants pulled awkwardly over their slim legs. I sat quietly in the balcony waiting for the third scene to end. Then I knew I had exactly ten minutes from the piccolo solo to get to my cue. I seemed to float down the stairs as I scurried to my spot, behind the third drop curtain. I stood anxiously awaiting the small pause that would occur before the triangle was struck with its twinkling song. I was focusing so hard, listening so close for the quiet ting to let the dancers know the tempo that I

Every night I'd practice, making sure that my rehearsed thank-you smiles and my surprised tears for my bouquet of white roses—what only prima ballerinas get—weren't too obvious.

didn't hear the shouts of warning. I didn't realize that I was in trouble until it was too late. The last scene panel dropped. I hit the ground with a loud clump. My left ankle was pinned underneath the lead-weighted scene. My first instinct was to pull my leg out from under its wooden weight. I heard the bones popping as the pain shot up my leg into my soul. I watched, as the conductor did

not miss a beat. I saw all of my fellow flowers fueté turn to the tune that I knew by heart. The conductor didn't even notice the flower that was missing. I sobbed softly into my tutu while my mascara dripped down my pale cheeks. I was carried to the emergency room still in full costume. I didn't care about the funny looks I got, all I cared about was tomorrow. "Will I be able to dance?" I whimpered through my fallen hairsprayed locks to the night shift nurse.

The next day I got a temporary cast from a sports specialist. It allowed me to move my toes—that's all. I got dressed and went to the theatre three hours before the ballet began. I sat and watched all of the members of my company mark their steps on the freshly laid marley. I marked mine as well, as I sat moving only my toes. I got

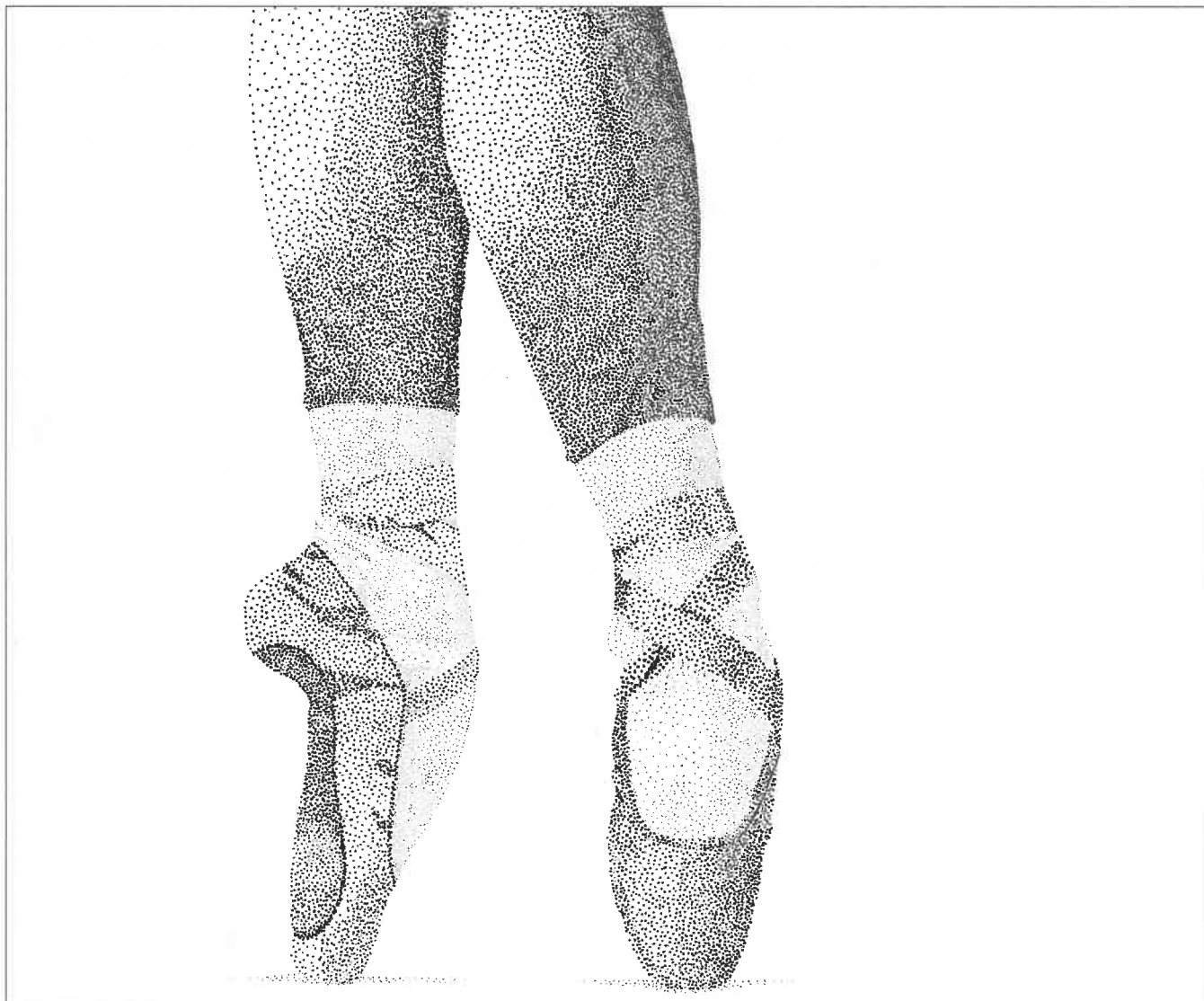
my mother to help me up the stairs and backstage. I set up my chair behind the third drop curtain, my cue. I had to sit far back to hide myself from the audience. I could not see the dancers, but I could feel them. I heard the rhythmic tap as they piqued onto Pointe, and I heard my partner, Melinda, counting the beats in a melodic tune.

The ballet was over. It was time for the bows. A cavalier rushed by me with a bouquet of perfect white roses. They were probably for Serena—the prima ballerina. I heard the applause roar up as the cavalier returned to my hiding place behind the third drop curtain. He picked me up and carried me out onto the stage. He gently set me down on the front line. I grabbed the hands of Dolan—the director, and Serena. Dolan slightly raised my ankle-length skirt to reveal my cast. Everyone in the audience stood up and cried out cheers of “bravo” and “magnificent.” I took three limping steps up and three hopping steps back, a sign of thanks. Then we bowed. I will never

forget my perfect bow. As I raised my head and my hand into the air it was met with a bouquet of flowers—white roses. Dolan smiled at me and whispered, “You deserve these and so much more.” My surprised tears flowed freely and fell in a way that rehearsed tears could not.

The next day I found myself back in my physical therapy supervisor’s office. Together we worked every day for the next three months before I could return to my class. I danced my heart out those two last weeks of the season with Dolan as my instructor.

The following year I had a new teacher, and in the second class I fell during a jump—a freak accident, the doctor called it. I tore the cartilage in my right knee and displaced my kneecap. My doctor hasn’t allowed me to return to ballet yet. That was over a year ago. I still go to physical therapy. I have to wear my brace when I run my still wobbly run. I don’t give up. ■



Hope Harris
“Dance,” Stipple

Godiva

Dark, brown boxes...

The power to persuade,
The strength to succeed...

Sweet without pity,
Rich without money...

Friends during depression,
Enemies during suppression...

Sin...

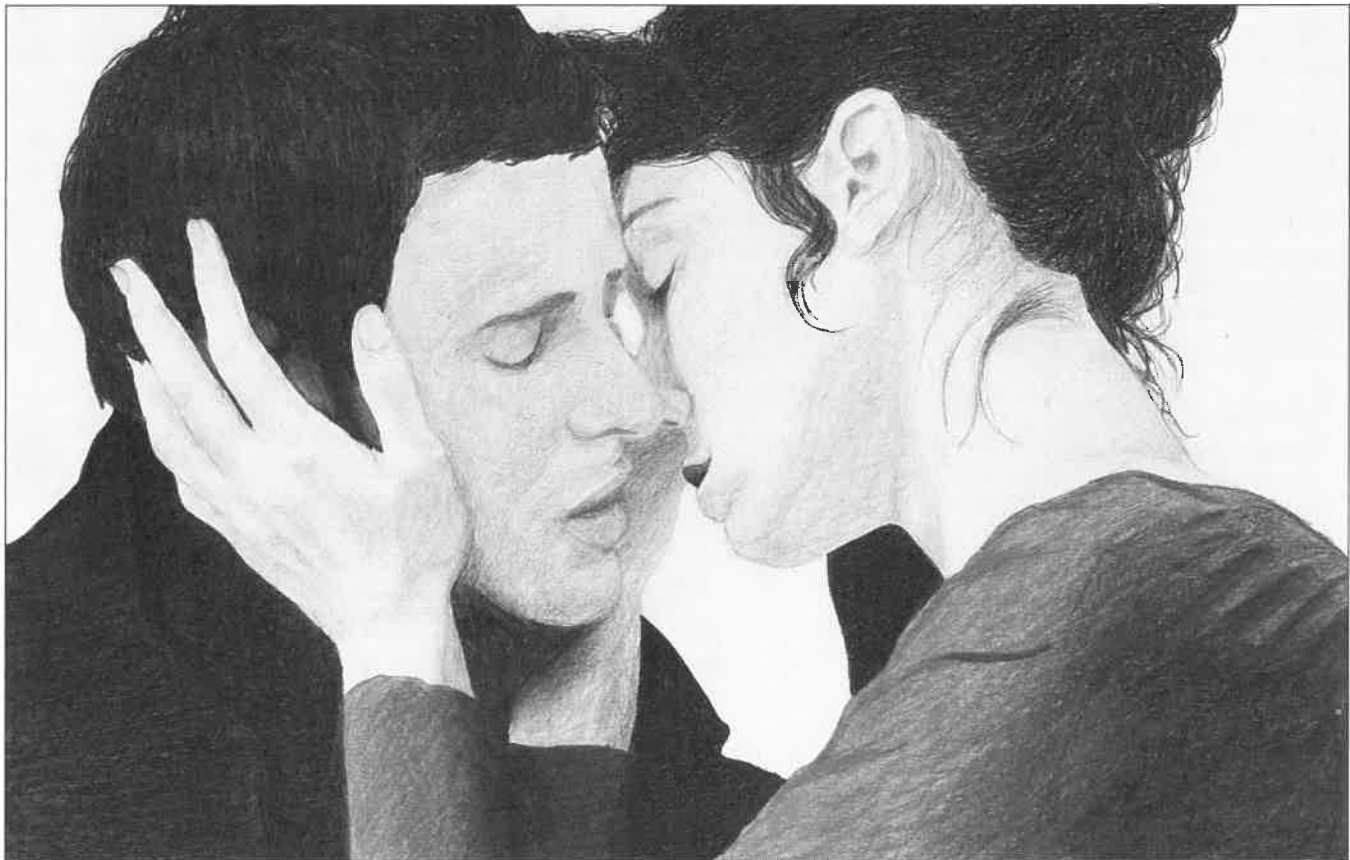
Melts in your mouth,
Not in your hands.

Morris Hamilton

swallow

you beckon me like the Great Whore of Babylon,
breaking me down to pieces and swallowing my sight,
stopping orbit and freezing time's breath,
you come to haunt me, once again—
like a ghost tiptoeing through my dreams
gnawing at the pit of me like the clouds swallow the sun
delicately cutting apart the heart of me
and then gently slipping, only to reappear.

Courtney Cartwright



Alyda Hardy
"The Kiss," Colored Pencils
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Rain and the River

Hadn't heard rain for a while,
Not in dozens of dry days.
My skin tightened, my lips too,
Waiting for the rhythm of rain.
The other day I heard that sound—
Free water striking metal,
Reminding me of a storm
That left everything,
Even my memory,
Green.
My hands were locked on my lap,
His on the wheel of our '78 Datsun.
The bridge to Mississippi
Seemed to go through the river that day,
Leaving our lives drenched in the back of our truck.
At least the wipers proved themselves,
So we could stare into the storm.
But I closed my eyes and listened,
And I knew that
The world was wet,
That the river was full,
That the clouds felt a little relief.
I wish I could feel that kind of relief.
I wish it would rain.

Maya Weilundemo

First Place, Poetry Contest

Our School Bus

Our school bus was yellow
same as their bruises.
In the very back, two boys,
alike in every way,
same kindergarten voice,
same sleepless look,
same hopeless mother,
who scarred their bodies
with the same familiar belt.
Familiar to those boys, surely.
It knew their bodies better than they.
Familiar to us, too,
who stared from the frozen windows
of that yellow bus,
same time
same house
same belt
same reason
every day.
Did they deserve it?
Well, those were two mean kids.
Watching their hopeless mother,
Nobody wondered where they got their mean streak.
Nobody wondered where they got those yellow bruises
either.

Maya Weilundemo

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

*Third Place in the Southern Voices' Art Contest goes to Tanner Imes for the
photographic work entitled "Superhero."*

Mother of Steinway

by Seth Garrison

Second Place, Short Story Contest



Allegro Con Brio

Briskly walking into the side door of the rectangular building, he saw her up the steps of the brick-red fire escape. She was wearing a typical, janitorial black jacket—it might have had her name on it, he didn't notice—and a stiff, denim skirt as she waddled up the staircase, deliberately, catching her breath every other step.

That wasn't the first time he noticed her. He visited that building every day and on each occasion he took note of her dark figure—wiry hair framing her face. He watched each day as the wisdom poured from her brow while she swatted the floor in a steady "swish swoosh" of a wooden broom.

He waited for her to notice him.

Allegro

Through the side doors, he stepped into the circular foyer of the first floor of the music building. He was immediately faced with the double doors that led to the part of the building where his own fire escape lay. The two black pianos, slicker than a newly paved road after rain, sat stiffly on the stage. The lights above them served as makeshift suns to shed warmth and glare over actors, performers, and even him, the lonely kid sitting on the padded bench of one of those smooth, silky, and strong Steinways.

As he glared into the empty floor of the auditorium, he wished to himself for someone to walk in and occupy one of those uniform chairs, to make the room seem less cold. The fourteen cups of lights that adorned the wall pointed up to the balcony where professors, with doctorates in hand, college students, and a few high school kids walked round and round, destined for some dilapidated music room where they spent the majority of their lives.

He began to play. The crisp sounds of Bach made the room feel a little less lonely, but the acoustics stubbed out some of the prepared articulation. He didn't mind. This wasn't for perfection. This was for release—for comfort.

Andante

As he started his second piece, he glanced up through the corners of his eyes. Through the arches that provided a window for the people above, he only spotted her at the last minute. She was moving in that same slow, andante motion, in congruence with the piece he played, carrying a bucket of water and a sponge with which to clean windows.

This wasn't for perfection. This was for release—for comfort.

He wasn't sure, but he thought he saw her look down. The speculation formed as a smile on his face. He wanted her to listen. He wanted her to smile,

to find one little piece of enjoyment in her job. Maybe he could help, maybe the music he was making could ease her soul, lighten her load.

He could only guess.

Andantino Molto (Tempo Rubato)

This was real.

He was sure that those reflections swept over the building all the way to the third floor. The reflection he saw through the closed doors, covered with a light, semi-transparent fabric, was of her dim silhouette moving around the oval room. He saw her stocky figure, marching languidly with a jutting stick held perpendicular to her upright posture—a graceful, royal posture.

As the music faded, the notes slowly seeping into the carpet, the chairs, the walls, to disappear forever into the spirit of the room, he saw her stop.

The doors blinded him, but he felt her smile as the last note made its final vibration through the cozy room. ■

Contributors' Notes

Erin Evangeline Allen is from Meridian, where she attended Meridian High School. She plans to study architectural archaeology in college. Erin has been most influenced by Dali, Escher, and Bradbury, and her favorite quotation is by Escher: "What I give form to in daylight is only one percent of what I have seen in darkness."

Joe Anderson is a senior from Tchula and was a student at S.V. Marshall School before coming to MSMS. He enjoys chess and playing the piano. He will attend either Yale University or The University of Mississippi.

Sahar Baghail came to MSMS from Picayune Memorial High School in Picayune, Mississippi. While she is undecided about which college to attend, she plans to major in architecture. Her favorite artist is Peter Beard.

Andy K. Canion is from Columbus and attended New Hope High School before coming to MSMS. He will enroll next fall in The University of Mississippi and major in pharmacy. Lewis Nordan, Kurt Vonnegut, and Salvador Dali are his favorite artists. His favorite quotation is "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Courtney Cartwright is from Hernando, where she attended Hernando High School. She plans to major in pre-med. She names Walt Whitman and Stephen King as her favorite authors. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* inspires her. Her personal philosophy on life is "Este Perpetua" (may it be forever).

Jennifer Chadwick is a native of Clarksdale. She attended Lee Academy before coming to MSMS. Jennifer hopes to attend either The University of Mississippi or Mississippi State University. She affirms with Sheryl Crow that "Every day is a winding road."

Ian Henry Colmer is from Pascagoula, where he attended Pascagoula High School. His favorite writers and artists are Billy Collins, Thomas Harris, Vincent Van Gogh, and Renee Hague. He has been most influenced in his work by the radio program "This American Life with Ira Glass" and by Red Dragon. His favorite quotation is "What beautiful shirts!" spoken by Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*.

Ashleigh Chanteil Crosby came to MSMS from Natchez High School. She plans to attend either Louisiana State University or Mississippi State University to major in political science and psychology—she hopes to become a lawyer. Her favorite authors are Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Ashleigh's work is inspired by *Jubilee*, *Sula* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Her personal philosophy on life is "To thine own self be true" by William Shakespeare.

Megan Yale Dareing of West Point attended West Point High School. She is undecided about which college to attend but plans to major in business and art. Her personal motto is "Carpe Diem."

Nicole Blanche Dickman is from Yazoo City and previously attended Yazoo County High School. She plans to enroll in Mississippi State University where she will major in psychology. Her favorite authors are Willie Morris and Alice Walker. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* inspires her.

Forrest Anne Dillard is originally from Pontotoc, where she attended Pontotoc High School. She plans to attend The University of Mississippi to major in advertising. Her favorite artists include Nikki Giovanni and Stevie Nicks, and her favorite book is *Gone With the Wind*. Forrest's personal philosophy is best expressed by the line "Dreams unwind, and love's a state of mind" from "Rhiannon" by Fleetwood Mac.

Molly Katherine Dye is a native of West Point, where she was a student at West Point High School before coming to MSMS. She plans to attend either Mississippi State University or Louisiana Scholars College to major in chemistry. Her career goals include becoming a forensic analyst. Molly's favorite authors are Ernest Hemingway and Alice Walker. Her personal philosophy on life is "Life only lasts for a split second."

Seth H. Garrison is from Taylorsville and attended Taylorsville High School. He will enroll in Oberlin College in the fall and major in English and music. His favorite artists are Joni Mitchell and Alice Walker, and he is inspired by *The Color Purple*. His personal quotation is "I'm too wacky for most weirdos. Who am I to judge?"

Morris Robeson Hamilton is from Pass Christian, where he previously attended Coast Episcopal High School. He plans to major in international affairs and names his favorite author as Michael Crichton. Salvador Dali is his favorite artist. His personal philosophy is echoed in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Alyda Elizabeth Hardy is from Columbus, where she attended Heritage Academy High School. She plans to attend The University of Alabama and major in graphic design and journalism. Her personal quotation is "You gotta dance like nobody's watching and love like it's never gonna hurt."

Angela Yvonne Harwell is from Water Valley and was a student at Lafayette High School before enrolling at MSMS. Angela says she is inspired by Xena, and her favorite quotation is "This is Jezebel in hell" by Poe.

Hope Harris, who previously attended Newton High School in Newton, Mississippi, will major in biology and forensic pathology at an undecided college. Her favorite writer is Patricia Cornwell.

Anne Miller Henderson is originally from Hattiesburg, where she attended Hattiesburg High School. She plans to major in biology in college, and she says her favorite author is Tennessee Williams.

Brittany Henry, a junior, was a student at Belmont High School before enrolling in MSMS. She hopes to attend Duke University.

Tanner Elizabeth Imes plans to enroll in Evergreen State College after she finishes MSMS. She is a native of Columbus and was previously a student at Columbus High School. Her favorite writers and artists include Moby and David Byrne of the Talking Heads. Her personal statement is "Be here now."

Matthew R. Kilgore is originally from Gautier, where he attended Gautier High School. Next fall he will enroll in Mississippi College. His favorite author is C.S. Lewis, and he is inspired by *40 Acres*, *To Chase the Birds Away*, and *Mere Christianity*. His favorite quotation is from 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Through Christ we are a new creation; all things have passed away, behold all things have become new."

Shauna Ran La is from Columbia, Mississippi; she was a student at Columbia High School before coming to MSMS. She hopes to attend college either in California or the northeast and is considering a major in French, art, computer science, or genetic engineering. Her favorite author is Poe.

Elisabeth Anne Lacey is from Columbus, where she attended Columbus High School. She plans to enroll in the Illinois Institute of Technology next fall and major in architecture. Her favorite authors are Ernest Hemingway, Alice Walker, and Dylan Thomas.

Nga Tiet Le lives in Pass Christian, where she was formerly a student at Pass Christian High School. She plans to major in neuroscience at Louisiana State University. Her favorite writer is Ray Bradbury.

Tenesha Jean Lewis is from Forest, where she attended Scott Central High School. She will attend Mississippi State University and major in communications. Her favorite writers are Janete Oak and John Grisham, and she is inspired by William Shakespeare. She affirms with Melanie Griffith that "Sometimes you have to lose your mind to find your freedom."

Rebecca Marie Long plans to major in microbiology. Her favorite artists are Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Neil Gaiman, and Tori. She is inspired by *The Collected Poems of Allen Ginsberg*, *Kerouac's Book of Blues*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Her favorite quotations are "I'm still the kid of obscene chance awaiting" by Ginsberg, and "When you've got a dream, you've got to grab it and never let go" by Carol Burnett.

Lydia Lucas attended Washington School in her hometown of Greenville before coming to MSMS. She will enroll in Pomona College in California next fall. Her favorite writers are Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Ernest Gaines. Lydia advises that "The ax forgets. The trees remember."

Chris Michael Oliver was a student at Tupelo High School before coming to MSMS. He says he will probably attend Mississippi State University, where he will major in 3-D art and design. His favorite artists are Salvador Dali and William Weyman, and he says that Dali's "Metamorphosis at Narcissus" is an influential work to him. Chris affirms that "What will be, will be. What won't, won't."

Brandon R. "Rusty" Parks is originally from Shannon, and he attended North Pontotoc High School before coming to MSMS. He plans to attend Mississippi State University. His favorite authors are Dylan Thomas, W.H. Auden, Douglas Adams, and Kurt Vonnegut. Rusty's favorite quotation is "Eagles may soar, but weasels don't get sucked into jet engines."

Aaron Mitchell Piletz is from Madison, and he was previously a student at St. Andrew's Episcopal School. He will attend The University of Mississippi next fall and major in business. His favorite author is C.S. Lewis, and he is inspired by *All Quiet on the Western Front*. His personal philosophy is "Short and sweet."

Lindsay Rosenblatt is a junior from Woodville. He will probably major in pre-med in college. His personal quotation is "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again."

Derrick Lemond Sterling is from Indianola, and he went to Gentry High School before coming to MSMS. He plans to attend The University of North Carolina and major in computer engineering. His favorite author is Richard Wright, and his personal motto is "Life isn't complete without risks, dreams, and effort."

Ryan Allen Stocks is from Southaven, where he attended Southaven High School. He will enroll next fall in Mississippi State University to major in computer science. His favorite authors are J.R.R. Tolkien and Douglas Adams. His personal philosophy is summed up in "Please remain calm."

Amber Renee van Vlymen of Natchez plans to attend The Savannah College of Art and Design, where she will major in drawing and design. Her favorite artists are Edgar Degas and Andy Warhol, and she says that she has been influenced by the photography of Bert Stern and by pop art in general. Her favorite quotation is John Ringling's "Life is short, art is long."

Maya Weilundemo is from Jackson, where she attended Murrah High School. She plans to study English at either Texas A&M or Davidson College. Her favorite authors are Kurt Vonnegut and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The works that inspire her are *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and *The Hobbit*. She affirms with Vonnegut that "When I write I feel like an armless, legless man with a crayon in his mouth."

Adam Grady Williams is from Jackson, and he plans to attend Johnson and Wales University to study culinary arts. His favorite writers are Alice Walker and C.S. Lewis. He is inspired by the art of Salvador Dali.

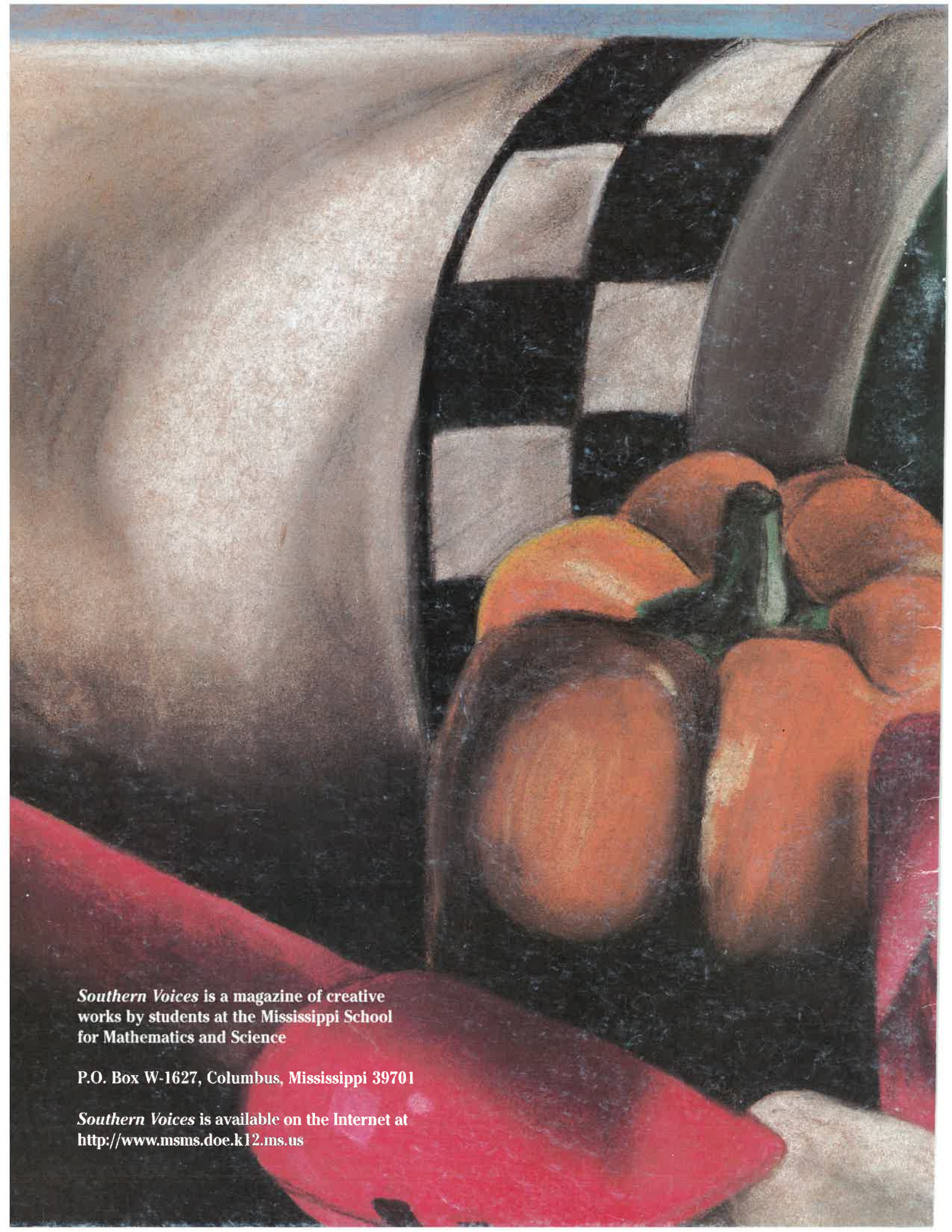
Crystal Sherie Wilson is from Vancleave, where she attended Vancleave High School. She plans to attend Millsaps College and perhaps major in biology and forensic science. Crystal's favorite author is James Patterson. She affirms with Alana Davis that "You conform to what society says; I conform to me."

David Winton came to MSMS from Starkville High School. He hopes to attend Cooper Union in New York and study art. David counts Jean-Michel Basquiat and David Bowie as his favorite artists, and his favorite quotation is "God really sits up and takes notice when you sing chords" by King Missile III.



Chris Oliver

"Stairway to Heaven," Computer Graphics



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