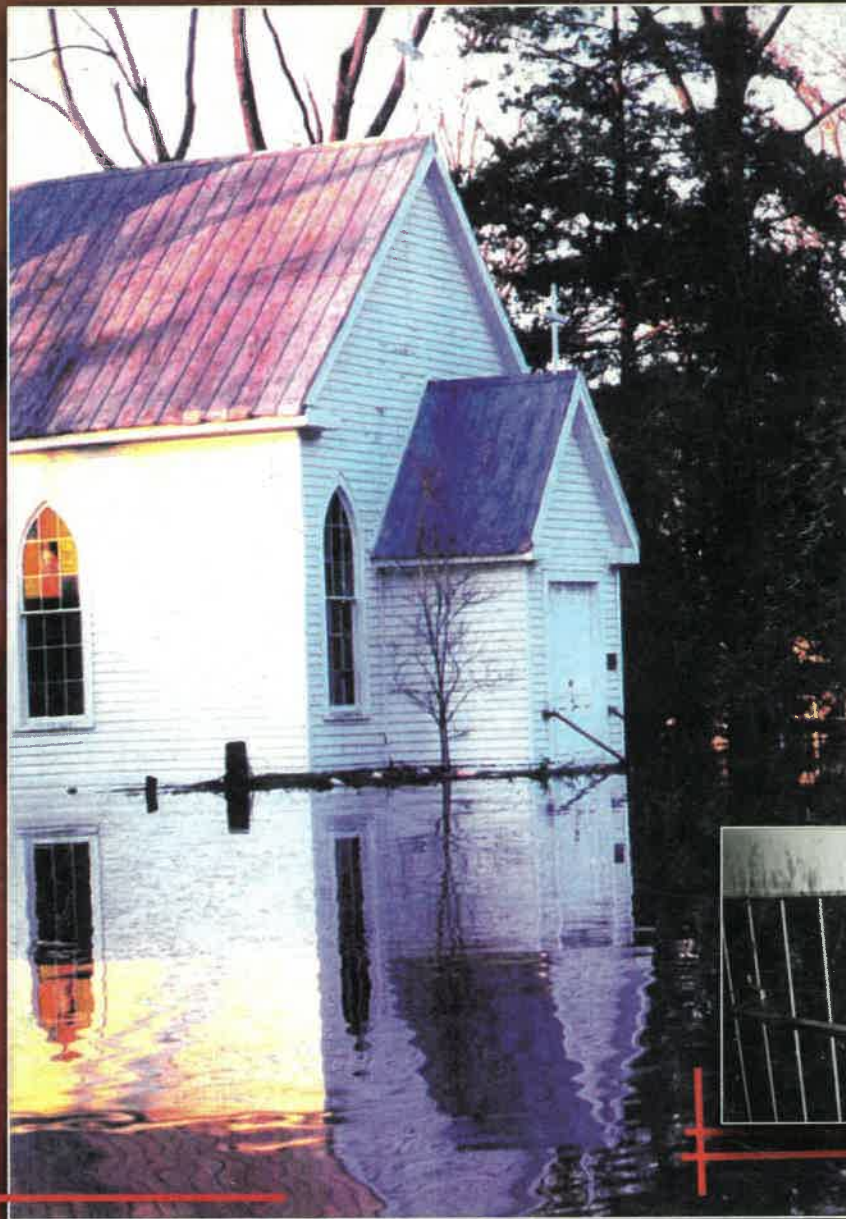


SOUTHERN



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VOICES

2001

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THE BARBER SHOP

By Gabriel Jones

First Place, Short Story Contest

Son, your hair's getting a little long there, don't you think?" "Yes, sir," is my simple reply to a not-so-simple question. My dad is one of those kinds of people that won't come out and say exactly what he's thinking. Instead, he'll make a general "observation" and that observation encompasses whatever he wants. In this case, he wants me to get a haircut, get it today, and not make him repeat himself.

As if by reflex, my hand reaches out in a palm-up position. Dad reaches into his back pocket and pulls out an old crumpled up twenty-dollar bill. (Must run in the family) "Take your little brother, too," he says, "his is almost worse than yours." Crap. That means an extra half-hour in that oily, musty, smoke-filled place that's supposed to be a barbershop. Luckily, I don't have much of anything better to do on this particularly lazy Saturday morning, so I don't make much of a fuss. "C'mon Jay," I yell. My little brother zips past me and towards the car before my mouth can open again. "Hmph." Dad must have told him we were going before he even mentioned it to me.

It takes roughly twenty minutes to drive to my uncle's new shop in Jackson, during which I listen to "tales from the playground" as delivered from my brother. Within minutes, I know all about Tommy's new Red Psycho Ranger with the special deluxe power sword, and Bobby Smith's big fight with Dan, the fourth grader, on Thursday. Of course, I am very interested in these things as evidenced by the fact that on this particular Saturday, we make the twenty-minute trip in only 14 minutes.

Of course, now comes my favorite part of the trip. Maybe it's the big ugly face painted out front of the shop that supposedly encourages customers to enter. Maybe it's the sight of that old, drunk guy who always nags me for some pennies. Maybe it's just that I yelled at him when he tried to tell me for the seventh time how much he wanted one of those stupid Red Psycho Rangers. Whatever the reason, Jay starts in on his first temper tantrum of the day. His now beet-red, scrunched-up face on the verge of tears delivers this proposition: "I'm not going in there and you can't make me."

"Yes, people," I'm thinking to all of the gawkers pass-

ing by the blue Nissan Stanza with the big, mean 18-year-old, trying to wrestle the little innocent 8-year-old out, "I am a big bully, and I have nothing better to do on my Saturday mornings than drag little kids to the barber shop and make them cry." Some old lady comes by and offers a piece of candy. He shuts up. "Thank God." I was about to start thinking of more "creative" tactics. With a bit more prodding, and some not-so-promising promises on my part, I get my brother out of the car and into the shop.

"Damn." The place is packed tighter than—in my dad's words—"a tin of Louisiana sardines in the Mississippi heat." My eyes are searching for some place to sit, but there's not an empty seat to be found. Jay spots some of his friends from church and makes his way over to the far wall of the shop. He slinks onto the floor and joins in a game of paper football. I sheepishly follow, not having any better alternative. I've never seen this many people here before. The thought of leaving crosses my mind, but leaves when, as if in response, an older man rises from his seat and leaves with three freshly trimmed boys that I take to be his grandchildren. Maybe this won't be so long after all.

Now there's an empty seat at the checker table which I quickly take before some other eager body is able to beat me to it. I can still see Jay, and he seems content with his game. That should keep him busy for awhile. I turn my attention to the checker game in front of me, and the toothless old man watching me from behind it. "You wanna play, young 'un?" "Me?" I ask, immediately feeling embarrassed by my uncharacteristically high-pitched response. "No, the other you sitting in front of the board," the man replies with a hint of agitation and a bit more of amusement. Sheepishly, I nod my head in agreement and begin setting up the board. "Who yo' folks, boy?" The man's question startles me, but I manage to answer, "Curtis and Margaret Lee." "Lee?" the man muses and rubs his stubbly chin. "You any kin to ole David Lee?" "Yes, sir." He makes his first move with his black piece. "Hmph." We stare at the board in silence, each sizing up the other's moves and skill. Midway through the game, I've lost seven pieces and he's lost

one. I'm thinking that this guy might be pretty decent. The game ends and the old man has won everything, including my respect. "Not too shabby," is his old man's response to the victory. "You need to protect yo' back row some more and you might beat me someday."

Not wanting to risk further embarrassment, I excuse myself from the table and move to a seat closer to the "hair chair," in some attempt to be next in line. Of course, it doesn't work that way here. I'm not quite sure how, and I've never really asked him, but somehow, my uncle is able to remember the exact order in which people enter the shop. Even on a busy day like today, he knows. My attention drifts between two different conversations both pertaining to sports. "Boy, them Tigers sure is stinkin' it up this year," my uncle says to no one in particular. "Yeah, it's cuz they didn't get that boy from Pica-yune. Johnnie...something." "Well, what 'bout them Mustangs? How they doin' this year?" I speak up, "I hear they're ranked first in the state. They're the favorites to win this year." "Nah," an older man with a harsh voice objects, "They ain't doin' much this year. They gone lose to Provine this week anyway."

I recognized this voice as "Old Joe," the always drunken, but supposedly wisest man on Capitol Street. His voice was particularly pointed as he addressed me. Not wanting to be disrespectful, I politely refute the old man's claims, "They've got three players from the Dandy Dozen, and their coach was named Sportsman of the Year by the "Clarion-Ledger." At this, it seemed as if

every eye in the shop suddenly turned on me, and every conversation ended as if synchronized. Little did I know at the time, but I'd just broken an unspoken but clearly understood barbershop rule. "You don't disagree with Old Joe." Ever.

My head dropped. I wasn't necessarily scared or embarrassed. But even I knew that I'd done something stupid. The thought of joining Jay and his friends in the game of dominoes on the floor suddenly seemed very appealing. Luckily, my uncle saved me with a beckon of his hand. It was my time in the chair. Relieved to have some means of diversion from the hard stare of Joe, I climbed up. "Just a little off the top." Uncle knew that anyway, though. I'd never asked for anything different in the 14 years that he'd been my barber.

It wasn't long before the heavy drone of his clippers weighted my eyelids. My head nodded and Uncle tapped me on the shoulder. "You gettin' enough sleep, boy?" "Yeah." "How's everything goin' at school?" "I'm fine." I'm tired and perhaps still a bit unnerved by my encounter with Joe. He senses it by the soft tone of my voice. "It's all right, son, he knows you didn't know no better." "Yeah," I respond, "I know." He nods and smiles in agreement. We don't say much more and, thankfully, I drift off again.

Soon after, I feel a soft tap on my shoulder and my eyes creep open. A small square mirror sits in front of my face. "You like it?" "Yeah." As if I'd say anything else.

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 pawnshop 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

A Droplet for You

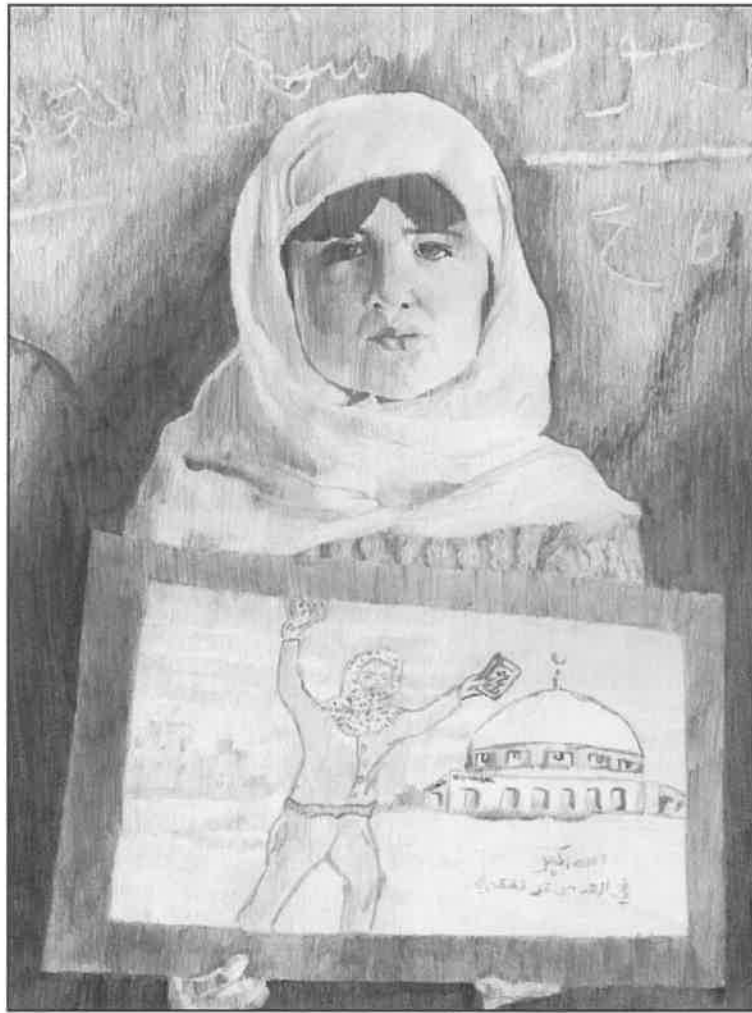
Sabrina Simpson

A single free-falling droplet
Releases itself from my cheek.
Its origin, unsure –
For the loss of a Mother –
A lover – a friend –
My own sanity.
For a single reference frame
I see myself falling,
The solitude I take in.
I know this place well,
Sometimes I am the Creator,
Sometimes I am the Observer,
Sometimes I am trapped
Alone – within myself –
I wonder,
I have shed a single tear
For you,
But will you shed one
For me?

Goodbye

Kendra DeV Vaughn

With head high,
Eyes focused straight,
I walk through that open door.
This is goodbye.
It must be.
You said she was the one,
That special one,
And me,
I guess I'm just leftovers.
But still, I walk through that door
Head high,
Eyes straight ahead.
I said I was okay,
And I really was,
But when she walked in,
I walked out,
But head high,
Eyes ahead, I tell myself to be strong and hide
behind my mask,
For you see no one ever sees
The single teardrop falling down my cheek,
One single tear for lost chances.



Hope, Graphite
Jeremy Abernathy
Second Place, Art Contest

Tasting Rain

Dawn Lukas

Cool, wet, falling
Touching everything
No escape
In love with a cloud
Soaking through
Dark and forbidding,
I'll never let you go.
Say you're mine
Hold me close.
Green...
I see you,
Always seeing you.
Can never touch
Your face
So far away.
The broken concrete...

I'm seeing you
Again
In my box.
I lift up my face to feel-
Feel the drops
That torment my soul
And touch me.
Opening my mouth
And letting you in
To my heart.
I can feel it slide
Down my throat
And I taste it-
The rain
...or you.

Patience, Eloquence, and Style

By Collin Roberts

“Be warned, Jason, be warned... for mine is the triumph.” Applause shakes the stone walls of the packed auditorium as the crowd responds in appreciation of my performance as Euripedes’ *Medea*. The stage lights are white-hot on my flushed face as I bring the final scene to a sweeping, emotional end. People are on their feet, and I am trembling with the overwhelming passion of my character. It takes three curtain calls before the crowd begins to disperse... Yeah, right. The only audience I have is the school janitor, impatient with my late-afternoon use of the stage to practice my monologue. He’s obviously ready to head home to his wife Victoria and his little girl. Not wanting to cause any trouble, I pick up my ratty bookbag and step out the back door into the sweltering Mississippi heat. Practice is over. This is ninth grade.

“OBJECTION, Your Honor! Uh, um... leading the witness?” I stumble over my words, mentally kicking myself for my lack of concentration, and for a display of utter idiocy under pressure.

“People are on their feet, and I am trembling with the overwhelming passion of my character.”

I flash an apologetic look to my witness and wait for the judge’s ruling. “Overruled. Maybe next time you should think before you speak, Counselor.” Oops. Perhaps my eager-

ness got the best of me that time. Focus, girl. Your team didn’t make it to Mock Trial State for your impetuousness to take over. Back to the bench. Remember: patience, eloquence, and style. I’m going to nail his witness on cross-ex. I am loving it. Loving it! This is tenth grade.

I open my tattered copy of Maya Angelou’s *And Still I Rise*. Jessica, in all her blue-haired glory, stands on her chair and proclaims, “This meeting of the Grecian Urn Poetry Society is now in session. Did everyone bring something to share?” I look lovingly at my book, my finger tracing the flowing script on the cover. But not just yet - I’ll let someone else read first. Eric brought a book of Pablo Neruda and looks anxious for us to shut up so he can read. As he stands on his chair, the gazebo grows quiet and respectful, the only sound audible besides the crickets is the sound of a 7-Layer Burrito from Taco Bell being crammed into Stanley’s big mouth. I smile to myself, letting Pablo Neruda’s words wash over me in sweet ripples. I’m surrounded by true artists, talented young students with much to say, as well as the volumes of phenomenal poetry they hold in their hands. I am happy. This is eleventh grade.

As you might have guessed, words have shaped and crafted my world, from the time I was three and my mother read *Max Helps Out* to me as I drifted off to dreamland, to the time I wrote my first research paper on Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night*. I am in love with words, with communication and expression, with unfolding the layers of complexity in all human souls. I am not afraid to stand alone center stage and expose my vulnerability to an audience, nor am I afraid to write a controversial editorial for my school newspaper. It is my hope to lead a life rich enough in experiences that I will, one day, have enough worthwhile to say that people will listen. Whether it’s by demanding justice in a courtroom or moving an audience to tears in a theater or writing a brochure about prevention of breast cancer, I want to lend a voice to those without their own. That is my dream. And while I am not naive enough to still believe I can change the world, I sure will enjoy the ride.

Diction

David Winton

Father is my god

here in my jar is my favorite black bug
it sleeps at dinnertime
i call him "herman."

Sometimes when i walk outside
i see more than leaves and grass
whatever's in between
it looks back at me
with power
asking me to stay with it for a while

picks
lollipops
button down gowns
my mother is a fine lady

when i reach heaven
i'll take my hands with me
to show everyone
that i've been making mudpies

EmGnored

Sabrina Simpson

Hey –

Can I exist in your world too?

Can I be acknowledged?

Can my problems be heard?

Maybe this time –

Is it really too much to ask

To just be friends –

Not your shoulder to cry on,

Not your secret pal,

I just want to be accepted!

Accepted into your thoughts –

Accepted into your heart –

Accepted by you—

I can't say I will help you

Down from this cliff you have created,

I'm really afraid of heights,

But I will meet you halfway –

If you will reach for me.



Great Stuff, Photograph
Bronwen Reichle

Little Girl Without a Name

Trace Thompson

She wears the face of a child so fair
Her tiny features framed in blonde hair
Innocence belied in her gray brooding eyes
A cauldron of storms stirring inside

I see these eyes in the darkness below
Haunting and pleading, vacant and cold
She rises now from her murky sea grave
From the cave of despair from which she's enslaved

Her hands reach out so soft and white
To touch my face and mark her plight
She draws the pain and paints the tears
Around my eyes the misery and fears

This little girl without a name
Continues in this silent game
She acts as though I have a choice
In what I see to give my voice

But she's the one who holds the mood
Compelled towards grief and solitude
A part of the night and of the sea
Of the past that has been and is still yet to be

Knowing more than she cares to show and
Showing more than I care to know
The distance between us so great, so near
A part of the life I deny in my fear

And so she gives me all she dare not say
Without speaking a word she walks away
Leaving me alone to sort and to carry
All of these pieces so long since buried

I wonder as I watch her blend into the sea
Melting into its blues and its deepest greens
Leaving behind her garments all tattered and worn
How she has carried for years this shame and this scorn

Shutter

David Winton

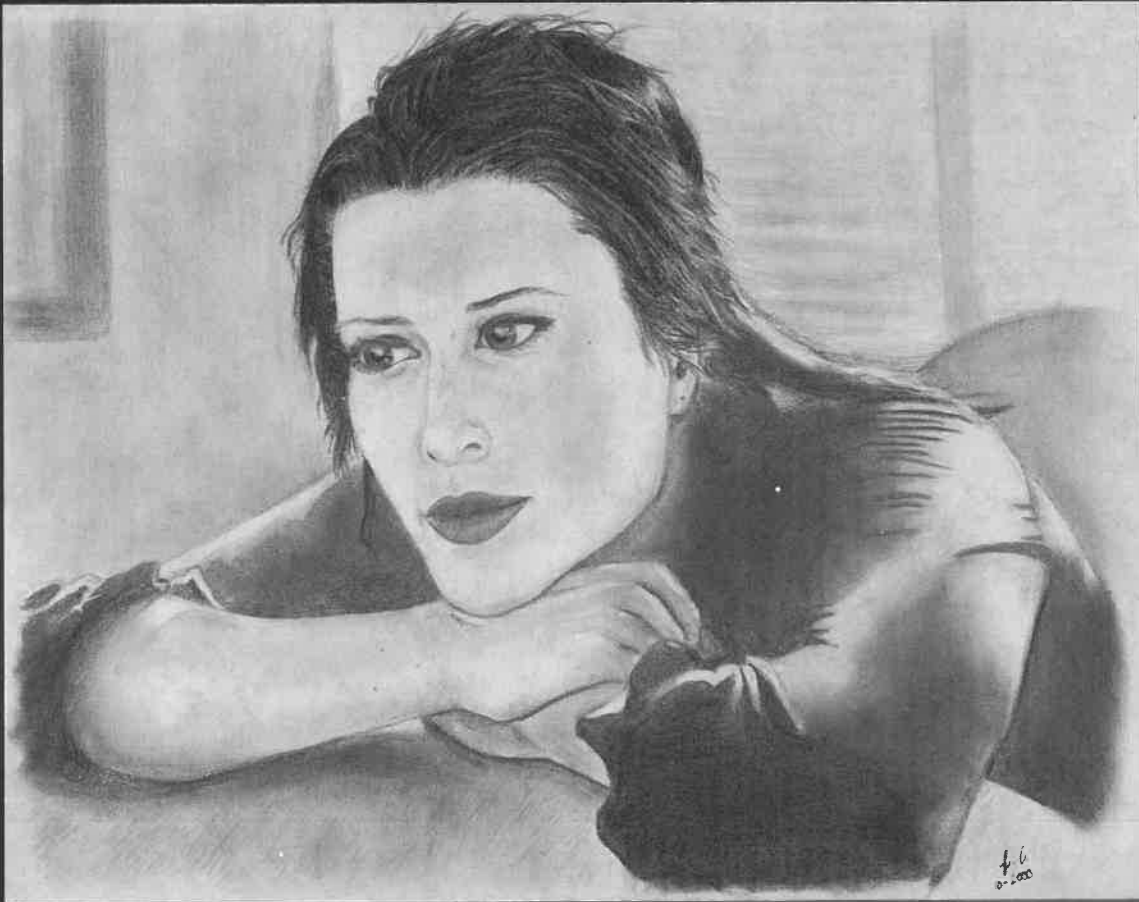
amphetamine driven clock

with simple timed precision
you decide my view of things
whether cute and picturesque
or how the ground can sing

black steel on steel
an affirmation of newness:
each crisp closure
opening just as fast as it shut

at times you make it seem so simple
at others,
more complex than balloons of skin
on brittle bones

making it easier for me
to finally let go,
sometimes.



Puella, Charcoal

Jennifer Chadwick

Otis's Last Plan

By ~~Monica~~ Stevens

Gimme my keys, you looney!" Otis turned and shielded his withered face from the incoming blow. Emma raised her frail arm and slammed her maroon paper straw purse on Otis's skinny shoulder. Otis flinched as a pharmacy of pills cracked onto his shoulder. He felt the sharp edge of a compact sting his shoulder blade, and he grabbed for the unlikely weapon.

"Emma, calm down! I don't know where your dern keys are!" He keenly snatched the purse and held it behind his back. "Just go sit down, now! Your show is coming on."

"You'd better gimme my keys! Edward will be down here soon to take my car to the shop, and he'll tan your hide when I tell him what you've done!" She griped as she shuffled off to the television room where "As the World Turns" was beginning.

Otis gazed around the mint green room. Several patients were strolling around the home in their rusty wheelchairs and rickety walkers. He saw his favorite nurse, Ms. Jimmie, wheeling in a new patient who seemed to be too young for the rest of the crowd. She looked dazed, probably sedated, and she wore a light pink cotton gown with clean white slippers. Otis wondered why she was in a place like this. Ms. Jimmie winked and revealed her pearly teeth to Otis as she passed the sitting room where he was reclining in a fake leather chair. The fish tank across the room held dozens of tiny tropical fish. Otis loved watching their frenzied routine, and he had named the ones that stood out to him. Remus, Femus, and Joe were the brightest of the fish. Of course he could rarely remember who was Remus and who was Femus, but it didn't matter much to him anyway.

Two other patients sat across from him. Mrs. Whitley and Miss Jamison stared blankly at the walls of the SunnySide Home for Mental Rehabilitation. Miss Jamison sighed deeply and crossed her eyebrows at the loud smacking of Mrs. Whitley. She slowly turned Mrs. Whitley's way and tapped her on her sweater-clad shoulder.

"How are you today, Mrs. Whitley?" Her lips curled into a devious smile, and Otis watched intently.

"I'm alright 'cept for my back. I can't dance tonight.

My boss says I can't," Mrs. Whitley replied in a daze.

"Is that right? Well, I want to tell you something," Miss Jamison leaned closer, and Mrs. Whitley turned her attention away from the cracked wall and looked at Miss Jamison curiously. "I just know that gum is going to Heaven."

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Whitley leaned away slightly.

"I'm saying that gum is going to Heaven most certainly because you sure are chewing the Hell out of it!" Miss Jamison burst out laughing, and Otis couldn't help giggling a little. Mrs. Whitley turned her attention back to the wall as if she was thinking about the possibility of gum in Heaven.

Miss Jamison settled down, and Otis stood up to see if dinner would be ready soon. He walked to the busy nurses' station and drummed his thumbs on the counter until someone saw him. The room reeked of Lysol and medical gloves and was decorated with cheery pictures of purple flowers and smiling suns. Otis guessed that this was supposed to make the residents feel better about their situations, those residents who knew where they were, but it only made him want to go home more to see real flowers and a regular sun without a huge grin and sunglasses.

"What do you need, Mr. Bolivar?" A heavily perfumed nurse asked.

"Just wondering when I could eat."

"It's about time. We'll call you. Just go sit down for a minute."

He turned slowly and mocked her snooty response like he used to do when he was in grammar school. His lips turned to form an upside down moon, and he mouthed her words in an exaggeratedly snobby tone. He took his original seat and resumed his study of the fish.

"I need a cigarette, Jim," Otis's curiosity was sparked again as he heard a conversation from the couple behind him.

"I'd die for a chew right now. That's what I'd like." A man spoke this time, and Otis turned slightly to see Henrietta and Jim Walston sitting beside each other.

Otis, a born troublemaker, couldn't resist this opportunity, and facing the couple, he said, "I know how to

get my hands on a pack of Redman, Jim, and Henrietta, we could even bum a cigarette or two.”

Jim leaned close to Otis and whispered, “Don’t be crazy, man. We can’t have the good stuff here. They took all mine when I was turned in.”

Otis saw that Jim felt this was some sort of secret operation so he put his index finger over his mouth when Emma walked into the room. His eyes lit up as he got another mischievous idea. He cleared his throat and spoke loudly, “No, man, we can sneak on out of here tonight. Nobody’ll ever know! We can take Emma’s,” as he said her name he spoke even louder so she would hear, “car and drive down to the store and get whatever you want.”

Jim looked interested, but Emma’s head shot towards Otis as if he had reeled her in with a fishing pole, “Oh, no you don’t, Otis! I knew you had my keys, you rascal! That’s it! I’m gonna tan your hide myself!”

She rushed towards him flailing her over-packed purse. Otis grinned with excitement and jumped out of his chair.

Jim and Henrietta left the room whispering to each other as if they hadn’t noticed Emma’s wild display and seemed to be plotting their escape.

“Nurse! Nurse!” Otis cried out helplessly. He had wanted Emma out of his hair for awhile, and he knew this sort of display should do it.

“You, you, you’ve been plotting on me since I got here! You better give me my keys, or I’m gonna give you a black eye!” Emma drew closer. Her weak body had transformed, and she was steadily swinging her purse like a medieval ball and chain. Otis was genuinely frightened now.

“Emma! Put that down!” A short blond

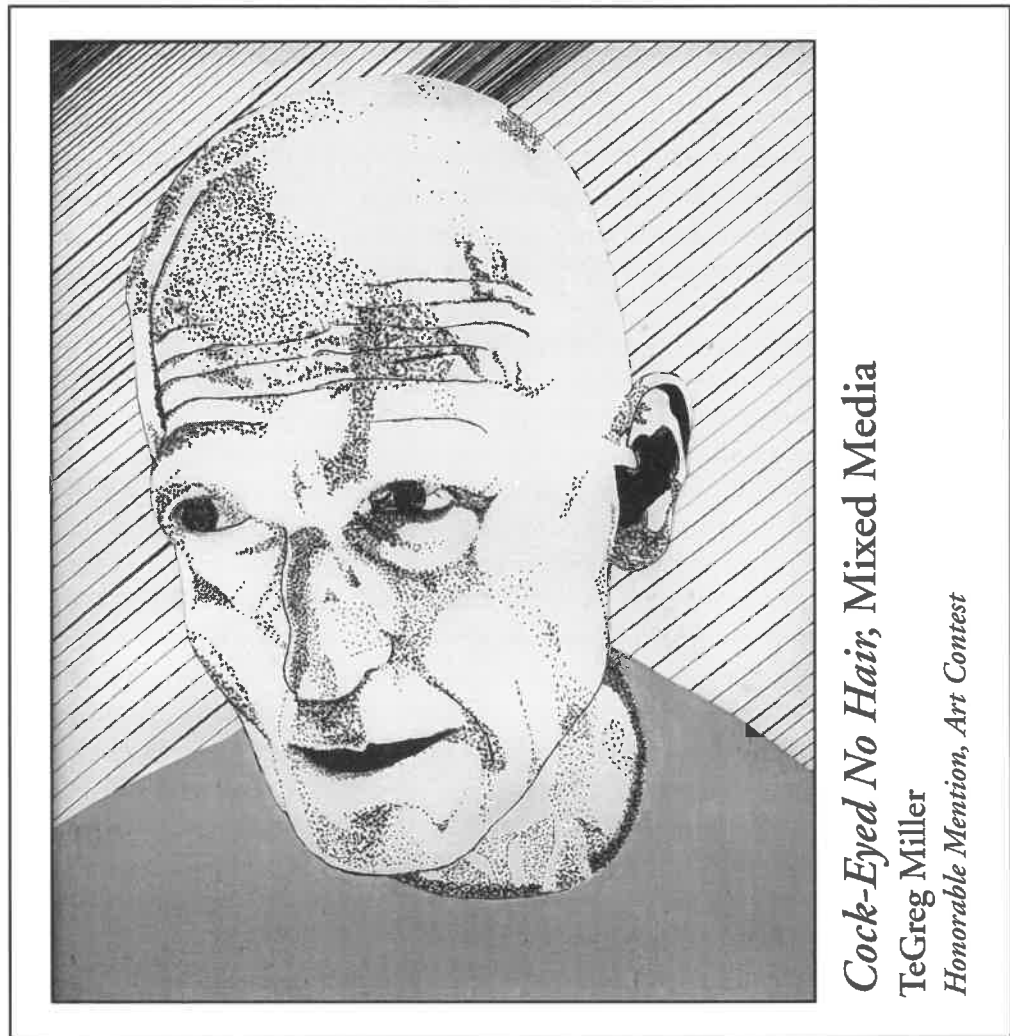
nurse came rushing towards her.

“He’s gonna take my car out and ride the town. He probably can’t even drive, that looney!”

“Emma, calm down. Give me the purse.” The nurse yanked the deadly weapon away from Emma and put her hand on her shoulder. “Let’s go have some medicine. Mr. Otis isn’t going to do anything to your car,” she said as she led Emma away. Emma ranted about Otis as they walked away.

Otis returned to his chair and held his chest. He wiped the sweat from his brow with a cotton handkerchief and sighed. He wished he could have a Diet Coke. Otis’s stomach growled in annoyance, and he glanced at his watch. “Six o’clock and time to eat,” he thought.

He used the chair’s armrests to boost himself from his spot, and he walked towards the dining area. The smell of tasteless pork and butterbeans filled the air making Otis’s empty stomach announce its hunger once again. He pulled a wooden chair out and dropped onto



Cock-Eyed No Hair, Mixed Media

TeGreg Miller

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

the flat cushion. He glanced around the small room and saw Emma staring blankly at her thumb. He thought about how great it would be if he could ride through the parking lot in her car for only a minute. Thinking about the scene she would make, another sly plan dawned on him. He knew the nurses let her keep her keys so she wouldn't throw a fit. If he could just get his hands on those keys, he could aggravate her so bad that the nurses would have to haul her to the first floor. The first floor was the hall that patients went to if they were hard to control. It definitely was not a place anyone with a lick of sense would want to stay.

Otis surveyed the dining area and saw at least ten nurses attending to the helpless patients. He figured that since no one missed dinner, the majority of the faculty would be attending to the residents.

With a second cautious glance around the room, Otis slid his chair back, careful not to make noise. He walked down the south hall towards Emma's room with his hands in the pockets of his khaki Dickies and his head down. He walked unnoticed, and he paused briefly in front of Emma's undecorated door. With a deep breath, he grasped the cold door handle and shoved the door open.

Once inside his heart rate slowed, and he could breathe better. He decided to first check the dresser drawers. The doors slid open easily, and Otis quickly shuffled through the collection of socks, magazines, and sweatshirts. Finally, he came upon a junk drawer that he thought would certainly contain the keys.

He sifted through the debris and found an empty bottle of Oil of Olay lotion, a broken tube of lipstick, a used toothbrush, and a curious pill box. As if he wasn't violating enough of Emma's privacy, Otis opened the strange box just to check for the keys which obviously would not fit into the small container. He looked around the empty room as if he expected someone to be watching him and opened the container. A collection of small yellow pills rolled around the plastic box. He knew these were not normal for some reason, and as he looked closer, he recognized the pills. It was morphine. His mother used to take the same pills for her back, and he couldn't mistake that peculiar color.

He set the box down on the dresser and thought about what to do. If he left these here, Emma would continue taking them, and with her mind slipping the way it was, she may take four or five a day. On the other hand, if he were to confess to his snooping, he would be sent to first floor, and he knew that would not look good for him especially since Ms. Jimmie had been recommending re-

lease for him. Otis stared at the lifeless box as if it would have the answer and suddenly felt ashamed for even coming in her room. He had never really regretted any of his wild schemes until now.

He looked at his Timex with a sigh, and he felt his heart jump when he noticed that it was six-thirty, and everyone would be finishing dinner soon. The decision was overwhelming. Sure, he didn't care too much for Emma, but he cared enough to not want the burden of her death on his heart. He also cared about himself and getting out of there.

Five minutes had passed, and he heard the faint rattling of dishes being cleared away. Being caught would definitely narrow his choices. Chairs were being pushed back, his stomach growled, and he began to sweat.

Without thinking he stuffed the pill box into the pocket of his Dickies. The pills rattled, and Otis put his hand over them to muffle the noise. He rearranged the drawer and shut it carefully. With one last look around the room, he slipped out unnoticed.

Otis walked towards the bathroom whistling and entered the last stall. He bent down stiffly to check for any other feet and saw none. He lifted the lid of the toilet with the tip of his finger and slowly took the pill box out of his pocket. Without a second thought, he dumped the contents of the box into the water and quickly flushed. He watched the yellow circles swirl around the bowl and waited until the pills were out of sight and fresh water refilled the bowl. He then closed the lid and walked over to the sink.

He filled his hand with the pink soap and soaked them in hot water as if the pills had stained his innocent hands. He knew he had made a good decision. He patted his hands with the rough paper towels and threw them in the overflowing garbage can.

Letting out a deep breath, he entered the hall whistling. Just as if he was in a sixties spy movie where the spy barely gets away with the crime, Otis saw Emma scooting down the hall. His face broke into a wide smile while hers turned into mixture of hate and disappointment. Her grey eyes stared at him, and her thin lips opened to undoubtedly curse at him. Before she could spat the usual string of derogatory adjectives, he patted her tenderly on the back.

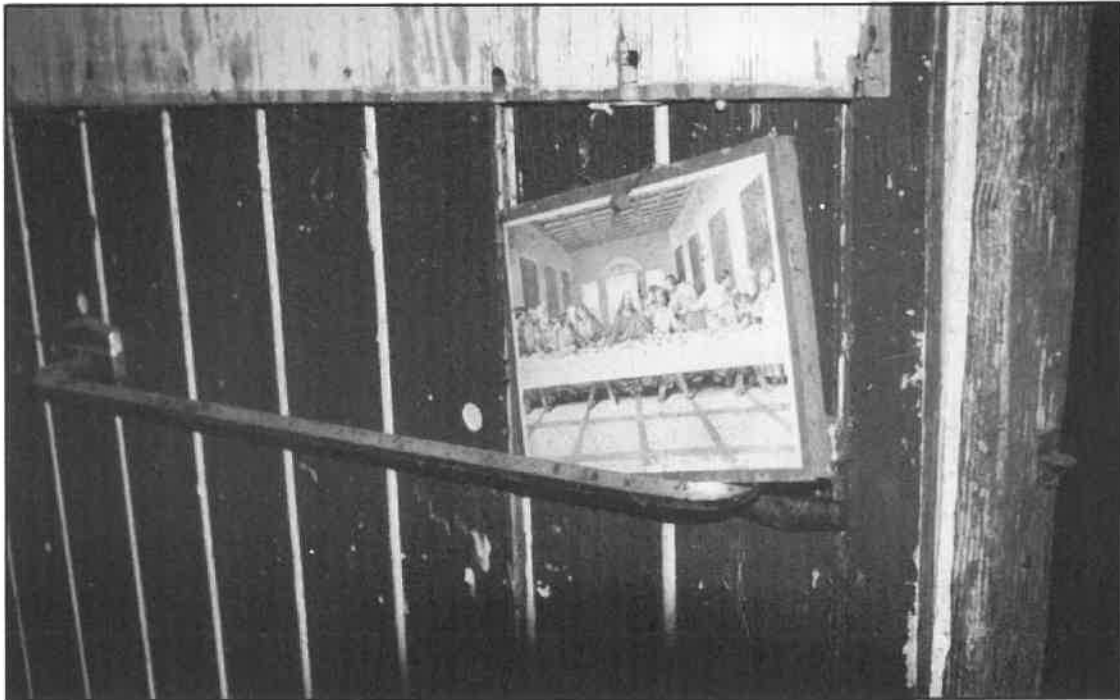
With the smoothest tone of voice he could muster, he said, "Have a good day, Emma." She stared in disbelief, and Otis kept walking as if he was that kind to her everyday.

Retribution

Courtney Cartwright

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

It's been a beautiful day.
It's been wasted. It's been forgotten by everyone except for me.
It's been spent. It's been spent in a dark room completely alone.
Hidden from sunlight and blue sky. Hidden away in a dark corner.
Chained to the wall, I am.
Chained to the wall and sobbing rivers beneath my feet.
Tears don't rejuvenate flowers among floors of stone.
Hard, cold stone hidden from the sun.
Trembling and isolated in misery, you all left me here.
The world moves above me as I picture their bright faces.
An afternoon by the dam.
An afternoon with the breeze blowing freely through their hair.
Purposely. You locked me away in your sanitary institution because
Your eyes are shaded by darkness.
Love has bled out from the punctures you inflicted and now you want to
Share.
Closing in, the walls are.
Faint glimpse of light and sound of violin,
Ever so faint the humanity seeps out
Tenderness hardens into a shrieking rage as you spend my days like
Pennies.
You spend me away- these crucial days- nostalgic days
These are, all given away to you.
So that you can pile them up beneath you to help you sleep soundly.
So that you can have something to smile about.
My heart is so ripe and sweet and unattended it's rotting in my chest.
And still you rob me of my glorious day.



Abandoned House: Last Supper, Photograph

Bronwen Reichle

Fleeting Thoughts of a Last Moment

Chris Kelly

The coarse rope tied around my ankles
And held at the other end by the cruel Death
As he drags me to the next world
Chafes me like the pain in my eyes
As I struggle to twist my body and neck around
So that I may turn my head to look upon the world
I will never see again
And see it in all its glory and perfect things
The things I will never have again
The sun that will no more shine upon my face and warm my soul
The soft grass I will never lie in while looking up
 At the distant, pale blue sky that I will never see again
The sweet blueberries I will never steal from the bush
 While turning in a devilish smile to you, my partner in crime
The cool spring rain that will never fall in the early morning for me to run through
 When all are asleep and no one is watching
The nights I will never spend at the coffeeshop with friends while laughing
 till I cry
 Over that incident in the gym at school today
The shouts of a frantic Candy as she begs me to slow the car
 Before I get us killed
The promising poems I will never write for all to read and hear
Your face, bright enough to shame the sun
 And reduce the grandest beauty to trifle
And the happiness it all brought to my life
A life from which I must be pulled by force
For I myself can never let go.



Steps, Photograph
Jennifer Chadwick

On the Subject of Graves and Teenage Death

Melvin Miller

On the Subject of your Graves

Let your graves be seen

See your graves

See the brown and black dirt of your life turn green

Let your favorite color—the green—replace your favorite thing—for lack of a better description—to look at

Let your favorite color replace the complexion of your skin

Let your favorite color replace your skin

Let the clean black of your death replace the dirty white in which you live

Replace the feeling that you get when you get with the feeling you get when you give

Minimalist

Minimalism

On the Subject of your Graves

Let your graves be seen

Let the green

Replace your favorite thing

Let the green replace your most favorite thing to look at

Your skin

Your Black skin

On the Subject of your Graves

Let your graves be seen

In your young age

In your teen

In your teenage

Let the green

Replace your favorite thing

Let the green replace your most favorite thing to look at

Your skin

Your Black skin

Conceit

Conceited

On the Subject of your Graves

Let your graves be seen

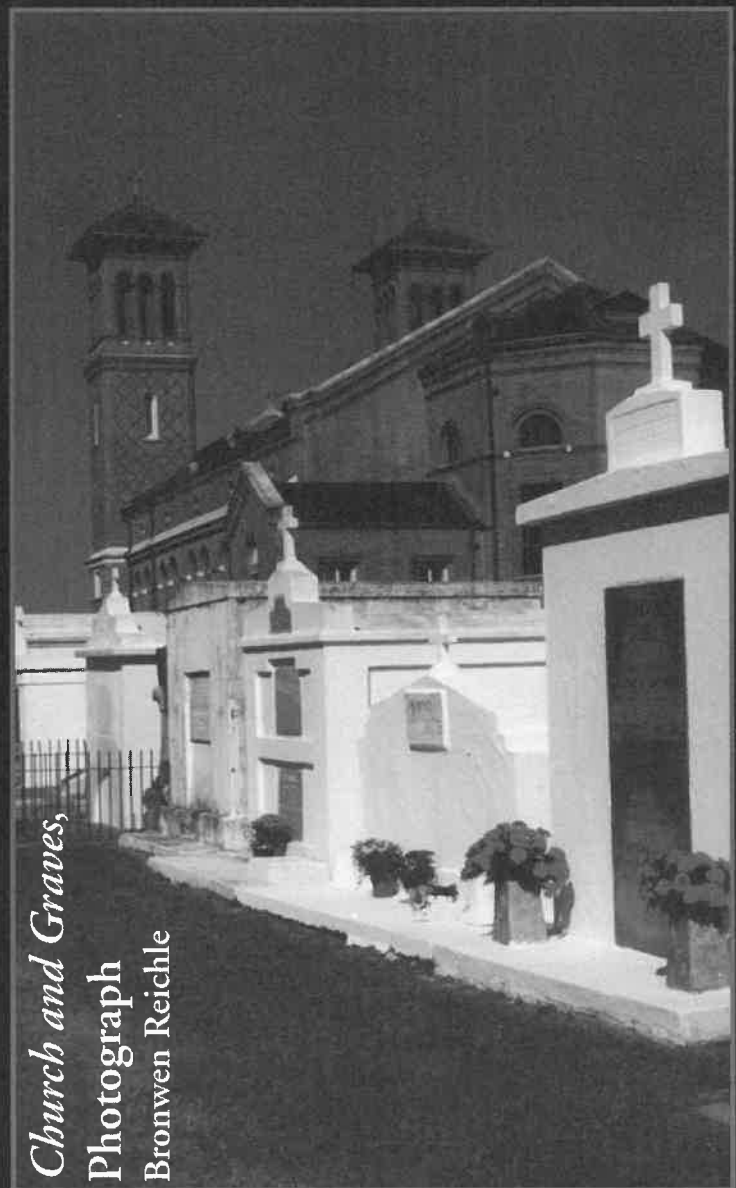
Let the green

Replace your favorite thing

Let the green replace your most favorite thing to look at

My skin

Your Black skin



Church and Graves,

Photograph

Bronwen Reichle

YELLOW

By Jennifer Chadwick
Second Place, Short Story Contest

Desoto Lee was as yellow as the lake she was named after. The daughter of an Irish insurance salesman and a coal-lipped secretary from Mound Bayou, Desoto lived just behind the levee, on the shores of the water she was baptized in. Each Saturday, after tying back frizzy, black hair and sliding her toes into brown leather Hush Puppies, she walked down the roadside of Highway 1, past the pecan orchards and soybean fields, down to Melvin's Grocery.

From his perch on the gas tank in front of Jenkins Pump and Pawn, Ezra watched her walk by. She nodded to him as she passed, her white scrunchi bobbing up and down with the movement. Idly scratching at the zipper of his Levi's, he returned the gesture.

Picking at the popcorn kernel stuck between his crooked eyetooth and left incisor, Ezra slid off the aluminum tank and walked over to the John Deere out front. Two weeks of mowing, and all he had to show was a broken fan belt and half-a-million chigger bites.

Toying with the broken rubber belt, he glanced out at the half-mowed drainage ditch beside the gas pumps. He smiled as he scratched his lower back with the torn end of the belt. "Least I ain't workin' now."

From the front porch, the jingle of car keys momentarily stopped the itching. Watching his boss walk down the gravel driveway, Ezra ran a thumb underneath his belt buckle, scratching ever so slightly, before crossing the yard to Mr. Jenkins.

"Gonna drop by the Western Sizzlin' after I pick up a new fan belt," said the gray-eyed man. Pulling a gold key out of his waist pocket, he handed it to the boy behind him. "Keep an eye on things 'till I get back."

Nodding, Ezra followed the Pump and Pawn's owner out to his Ford. "Don't worry. Not many people come out here about this time anyway."

"Just the same, I want you behind that counter every minute I'm gone. You hear me?"

Ezra nodded as Jenkins pulled himself into the front cab. His eyes flickered to the black men holding the Grocery's door open for Desoto. Catching her gaze, he quickly turned away.

Settling into the driver's seat, Jenkins motioned to the gold key in Ezra's right hand. "Now that's the key to the register. Don't you dare put it down, and don't even think about slipping anything out, ya' hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"'Cause I counted it down to the last penny before I left, and I'll find out if you've taken anythin'."

"Yes, sir," Ezra repeated as he pushed the key into his left pocket.

Gray eyes stared at him for a minute longer before Jenkins finally nodded and cranked his vehicle. Ignoring the rearview mirror, Mr. Jenkins pulled out of the dust-top driveway, barely missing Desoto Lee as she walked down the asphalt of Highway 1. Casually stepping onto the grass, she hugged the laser jet paper and onyx charcoals slightly closer to her chest as she paused for the flurry of gravel to pass before continuing on towards the levee.

Ezra stood for only a second. Briefly watching the retreating white truck and yellow-skinned girl, he pulled out the key as he scratched nubby-nailed fingers over stonewashed denim. Only pausing occasionally to scratch his lower back or scrape the gold key under the inside of his belt loop, he crossed the half-mowed yard, leaped over the porch steps, and locked the shop door behind him as he went inside.

Laying the key beside the register, he groped his left hand under the front counter while the other one kept scratching. Pulling out every household product Mr. Jenkins possessed, he lined them up on oak-top counter. Windex, shoe polish, a half empty bottle of Tums, two gallons of bleach, and a bottle of Jim Beam sat beside the gold key and silver cash register.

He stared at his options.

"The Clorox could work..." he said to himself. His mother had once told him that Pine Sol or Clorox were the only remedies for red bugs. He'd never used Pine Sol, but he remembered the bleach and the baptism of fire that had accompanied his last bout of chiggers. "A man can only take that kinda cleansing once in his life," he muttered before placing the two jugs back under the counter.

He glanced at the clock: only 12:15. He scratched harder.

"I ain't gonna make it 'till five," he growled. "What's wrong with that man? He doesn't even have Pine Sol for Christ sakes, not even a single thing that even looks like..."

Pausing, his eyes finally caught sight of the tawny liquid on the counter.

He chuckled. "Nah, that wouldn't work. Not in a

"He chuckled.

I ain't ever

million years. I ain't ever heard of anybody gettin' rid of chiggers with Jim Beam."

Itching forgotten, he balanced the whiskey bottle in the heel of his left hand.

"Might work," he said. "Alcohol can kill people; shouldn't be that hard to kill bugs, too. And they're pretty small. I wouldn't need to use that much...."

Ezra glanced back up at the clock: 12:15. His eyes paused at the front door, the locked front door, before venturing back to the whiskey bottle and the empty bathroom only ten feet away.

"Oh, who cares," he finally muttered. Picking up one of the white handkerchiefs on Jenkins's center display, he stepped inside the bathroom and closed the door.

Half an hour and a bottle later, the bathroom door slowly opened again as a blond head peeked out.

No shoes, no socks, no shirt, Ezra fastened the top button of his jeans before setting the half-empty bottle on the counter. He shifted slightly in his jeans, tugging at the belt loops that now felt far too tight. While not as bad as Clorox, the yellow liquid bit almost as bad as the red bugs.

Walking back to the bathroom, he picked up his clothes. Pushing them to his nose, he sniffed lightly before choking back a cough.

"They'll air out," he told himself.

Minutes later, with every shop window and locked door open, he could still taste the whiskey in the air. Outside his T-shirt, Nike's, and socks swayed on the limbs of the mimosa tree. Caught between the odor from the open door and the stench from his swinging clothing, Ezra held his breath as he hooked a thumb through his belt loop and walked over to his clothes.

Hoping the breeze didn't carry his curses very far, he

stopped when the hum of flowing water and the snort of a cow broke through the throbbing in his ears. Briefly glancing at the levee behind him and the yellow water ahead, he dropped his head between his knees as he choked deep breaths of cow manure and pesticides into his already burning lungs.

"Anyone ever told you, you're underage?"

Looking down, his eyes caught the yellow skin and the white scrunchi that always passed the shop on Saturday. Lying on her stomach, Desoto Lee glanced up from her paper at the half-naked boy on the hill above her.

Despite the tilting of the ground beneath him, Ezra forced his back to straighten as he hobbled down towards her. Tracing the end of her charcoal over her bottom lip, Desoto watched the boy sway slightly to the left. Folding his arms across his bare chest, he took one last gasp of air before staring back over the water.

Silence lingered. Waiting until his breath evened out, he glancing down at the charcoal still resting on Desoto's lips and the fresh copier paper beneath her chest.

"So," he said. "What ya' drawing?"

She glanced back down at her paper. "Just coloring the lake."

Ezra looked at the yellow water, then back at the white paper and black pencil she held. "You can't make yellow out of white and black."

"My parents did."

His teeth snapped shut as he stared at his toes beneath him. Hiding his embarrassment behind closed eyelids, he finally asked. "I don't suppose you'd do me a favor. Ya' see, I kinda had to leave Mr. Jenkins' place real quick, but I left most of my clothes..."

She shrugged. "So go back and get them."

His tongue flicked his crooked eyetooth as he tugged

'Nah, that wouldn't work. Not in a million years. heard of anybody gettin' rid of chiggers with Jim Beam.'"

fanned his damp shirt with his left hand while he tugged on his belt loop with the other. Impatient, he began to blow on them until the whistle of faulty brakes and the grind of old gravel stole his breath away.

"That can't be," he chuckled, pushing the bile back in his throat. "He ain't gonna be back for another hour."

"Ezra!"

Eyes widening, Ezra glanced back at the pawnshop only once before he ran. Pebbles from gravel roads and sand briars from front yards went unnoticed as his feet grew two extra soles and carried him barefooted over the harsh Delta plain.

Hands on his knees and heart in his throat, he only

a thumb through his belt loop. "Well, Mr. Jenkins was kinda mad when I left, so I was wonderin' if maybe you'd mind goin' back to the store..."

Still grimacing from the icy fire that bit through his lungs and the chiggers still biting through his pants, Ezra held his breath as he waited for a reply.

Dropping her pencil, Desoto turned around and stared at the shuffling feet and the slightly trembling lip. Barely holding back a laugh, she turned her eyes back to the yellow water as it sloshed against the dandelions and dirt clods.

Smiling, she shook her head as she finally laughed. "And I always thought I was yellow."

7.00

By Lee Singh
First Place, Essay Contest

The conversations of the expectant parents hum behind me. I clap for another girl, just completing an uncertain beam routine. She bites the right half of her bottom lip and shrugs a cautious salute to the judges who beam back kindly. Time to move on. Focus. I begin to tremble. We move to the practice floor and drop our grip bags on the comforting gray concrete between the blue carpeted floors. I tug at my aquamarine velvet leotard with the silver foil sleeves and glance down at the swirl of “diamonds” glittering on my chest. “Is one missing?” I think, noticing a space among the plastic rhinestones near the bottom of the pattern. Fearfully glancing down at the sea of aquamarine and silver that flows all over the fuzzy carpet, surrounding me, I am relieved to see that the gap is intentional. “Or maybe we all rubbed the same stone off.”

I corral my random thoughts of bright plastic. Focus. The sea laps nervously toward the judges’ table, which leans under its load of multicolored ribbons, score cards, and bits of paper. The portly Southern ladies with their frizzy hair seem amused at our timidity. They wish us luck, and we wander back to the practice floor. A tiny brunette with a puffy ponytail huddles at the corner of the competition floor. Focus. Back extension roll—arms straight, chin down. I go through the trickiest elements of my floor routine on the practice floor, keeping a wary eye on those competing. Full *pirouette*. Pause. *Arabesque*. Higher! With each movement, the tension within me builds. Now I am shaking violently; my heart pounds silently. One more back extension roll. I must be perfect! There isn’t enough time. Ashley’s grinning and saluting; I am next. I force myself to cross the practice mat to the edge of the competition floor. Dragging my bony feet scarred with a decade’s worth of ballet (and *pointe*) and missing their beloved big toenails, I step up onto the cerulean rug, taking great care not to touch the white tape around the edge. The head judge finishes writing on Ashley’s card and raises one wrinkly, freckled hand in my direction. Her wedding band glints in the dim light of the old warehouse. “Just like my leotard,” I muse.

I salute smartly, burying all nerves beneath layer upon layer of confidence and smiles. Holding my chin just above horizontal, I glide pointedly to the center of the floor. Toe, heel, toe, heel. With my right side to the judges, and the audience, I pose. Wrists elegantly crossed, left foot *tendu* back. In my terror, my right knee locks. “What if I trip!?” The speakers suspended from a support beam crackle to life; my music swells. I swing my arms back and shift all of my weight to my left leg, right leg *passé* parallel. Head back. Focus. Think pride.

I *am* proud. I extend my right leg, spring, twist, and land with a flourish. Suddenly, I am no longer nervous. Back walkover, arch back, and split. I play to the judges and the crowd. Sweeping turn. Contraction, body wave to stand. Waltz – down, up, up, lunge, present. Here comes my first tumbling pass!

I bound forward as though the sapphire floor is bathing my bruised ankles in flames. Barely touching the ground, I hit element after element: handspring, bounce, bounce, flick. Straddle jump and that dreaded back extension roll (excellent!). I am smiling. *Balancé* left, then right, step, skip-turn, kneel, and up. Kicks to *assemblée*, dive roll. I know it’s good. Clean *pirouette*, a flick of my wrists. For perhaps the first time, I satisfy my perfectionism. My leaps are over my own head, it seems, and their splits are greater than one hundred eighty degrees. I fly through my final, most difficult sequence, dimly conscious of the silence in the massive enclosure.

There are other girls competing, but I know that all of the parents’ eyes are glued on the tallest figure — me. Ecstatically, I step forward into my final pose. Inwardly, I trill with pleasure. No breaks, no falls. I salute the judges, just barely containing my glee. The parents and coaches explode, filling the perfect silence of tense captivity with their enthusiastic applause. I salute the crowd and step composedly away from the mat into my coach’s waiting embrace. She is pleased. *I* am pleased. Another girl begins her routine and halfway through, my score is flashed.

7.00.

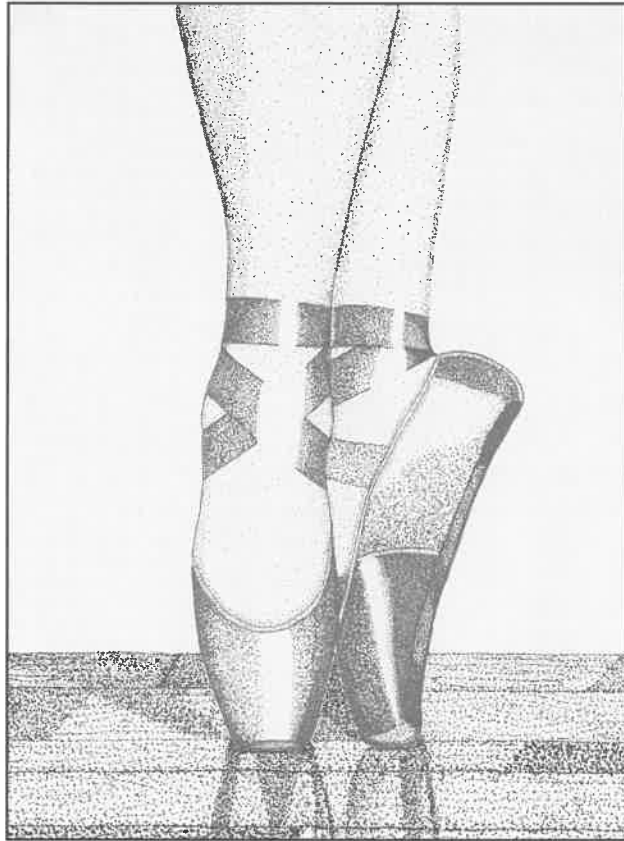
A gasp ripples through the audience and reverberates through our team. The sea of silver and aquamarine

twists to gape at me. I sit wordlessly, forcing myself to remain upbeat, I mustn't reveal to the younger girls how deeply those three digits stab at my soul. They are the second lowest of my career, though most girls achieve such statistics on a regular basis. We continue to the vault and then bars. I put in solid sets; I don't remember anything about them, though. That number kept flashing through my head.

7.00.

I wandered to the medal podium during the presentation and received my ribbons and medals, vaguely remembering that the year before I won floor, beam, and the all-around title at that very meet. That year, I think I came in seventh. Fitting, isn't it?

7.00.



Dancing Shoes, Stipple

Shannah Tribble

PROUD TO BE ME

By Wilson McBee

Third Place, Essay Contest

“I’m proud to be an American,” sings Lee Greenwood in his chart-topping political convention standard, “Proud to Be an American.” What exactly is Lee talking about, though? Is “being American” a layer of our subconscious, like an Oedipus Complex? Or, is “being American” another false motto used by people like Ronald Reagan to make us feel or be something that we really aren’t?

I’m not proud of any psychological imperfections that may be lurking in the recesses of my mind, and I haven’t noticed any songs titled “Proud to be Obsessive Compulsive” sitting atop the Billboard Hot 100 lately, so it seems likely that there may be more to this American feeling than a simple scientific explanation. If Sigmund Freud were around today to assess the situation, though, what would he say? I admit that I am not well read in Freudian theory, nor do I know anyone who is, but I would guess that Sigmund would blame this American-ness on the many different images and symbols that have been engrained into our consciousness, like bald eagles, George Washington, pilgrims, and the Boston Tea Party. But where was Sigmund Freud born anyway? What would he know about “being American?” Then again, what does anyone know about “being American?”

As an American myself, I guess that I can write with some pride about baseball, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the way the hairs on the back of my neck stand up when I hear the first few chords of “Like a Rolling Stone.” But I get that same feeling when Mick Jagger sings the opening lines of “Sympathy for the Devil,” and he’s British. So what does that make me? About as American as Mick Jagger, Slobodon Milosovich, or anyone else for that matter. The hairs standing up on the back of my neck do not signify my American-ness, and neither does my love of baseball. These things signify my human-ness. Sorry Lee, but I am not proud to be an American. I’m proud to be a human being.



*Natches Steps, Photograph
Bronwen Reichle
Third Place, Art Contest*

The Corner

Jessica Doss

Our corner in the world
Concrete
Cold
Eternally solemn
Distanced
Sheltered
We are living in a hole
Buried within the realm
Realm of the educated
Yet of the unexposed
Controlling us
Or trying at least
To keep us
Untouched
Unharmed
Unexposed.

In the Still of the Moment

Bianca Thibedeau

What he didn't say
She could feel;
The words were left
Unspoken.
She looked at him,
He looked at her;
She knew what he was
Thinking.
The afternoon turned late,
But neither of them noticed –
They just sat there staring,
Wondering why,
As a tear rolled quietly
Down her cheek.

Glacial

Dawn Lukas

I am
Whirling –
Searching for a place to fall.
Cold, mixed with ice,
I feel nothing.
Cool to the touch,
I am distant.
The wind blows
And I move
From place to place,
Unfettered.
One touch and I melt,
A puddle of hopeless dreams
On the shoes walking by.

Okay

Jennifer Chadwick

Second Place, Poetry Contest

She drank vodka with her pimento cheese.
Fruit salad always waited for dessert.
With each bite,
And every gulp,
She said,
“Okay.”

Old cool-whip containers littered the sink.
Each destined to be reused as cheap Tupperware.
With each scrub,
And every slosh,
She muttered,
“Okay.”

Okay...
Okay...
Okay...
Each word,
Spoken in the span of a breath,
Added fuel to tired legs,
And frayed nerves.

Okay...
Okay...
Okay...
Each step,
Scuffed across the darkened floors,
Brought her closer to a cheap mattress,
And a lop-sided bedpost.

Cats scuttled around her feet.
Each clawed at her bleach-stained housedress.
With each pounce,
And every meow,
She hissed,
“Okay.”

She scaled the side of her rickety bed.
Stained, floral sheets pulled up to her chin.
With each stretch,
And every yawn,
She breathed,
“Okay.”



Atmosphere, Colored Pencil
Jeff Deignan

Fade

Courtney Cartwright

Gomez echoing through faded air
Empty halls and empty spaces
Ghosts drifting off to their corners
No more laughter and no more tears
Room bare blue and too clear
The window before me reminds me of the comforting rooftops
That whispered hope at 2 AM
When all was blurry and I was scared.
The tower's point drives up to the sky and
The compass points me in the direction
Of somewhere awaiting me.
The naked bed that was my respite
The empty classrooms that taught me how to learn
My life drifts by as the sky circles around me a hundred miles a second
And I realize that this will pass
Just as everyplace passes.
I was 17 last summer, barely holding on
Dangling by a string
And oh, if you could see me now
If you could see me now...
I dreamed of this place
And now my dreams have extended on
Confident that one day I will, too, stare at those faded walls
And wonder how it all passes by.



The Dance, Photograph

Adrienne Howse

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

A Dance with Colors

Erin Roberts

Wildly wicked wine,
Rich russet,
Plumshine passion,
Lime lite,
Goldfire green,
Berry bastic,
And byzantine silver,
Coral vibrante,
Cozy mauve,
Disco ball,
Dusky teal,
Lavender flowered,
With lugano grape,
Misty frost,
From moonshine pearl,
Precious amethyst,
Porcelain beige.

A Clatter Machine

Jeremy Vaughn

Thumping thru the walls
And in my chest
Shaking me
I love the sounds of people
Congregating
Around a loud speaker
A gasp
A laugh
I can even hear the expression on their faces
Up and down
Beating over and over
Feet thump and bones produce friction
Slurping punch
Smacking
Singing off key but no one cares
I'm goin home tonite
The quick spurt of the slamming car door
But now just let me tap my feet and sing off
key
Cuz this is music to my ears

The Green Lines

Jennifer Chadwick

Second Place, Poetry Contest

He looked at me
Through the window —
A brown gaze,
Burning embers
That matched his loosely held Marlboro.
Worn face,
Framed in haloes of smoke,
Burned under the black flames
Of a Mississippi sun,
While the frozen shadow
Of a Parchment cross
Fell upon mud-streaked pants
Striped in green and white.
Through tinted glass
And air-conditioned frost,
I watched him
Standing on the roadside,
Throwing ashes in the wind,
Jerking his thumb down the road.
Green lines growing,
Closer,
Closer,
Until finally they were gone.
No one stops for the green lines.

Once

Jessica Doss

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Once we stayed together:
We played dress up and house;
We ate soft warm sugar cookies
And drank red Kool Aid
Staining our mouths.
We would laugh a lot
At that guy —
He always seemed different,
Our worst acts —
Skipping line in the cafeteria,
Petting the stray dog,
Now taken over by larger ambition,
You aren't satisfied —
Now the consequences are much greater;
You wanted to be like me —
Now you only want to be with me,
With me out here in the world.
But it's your fault;
You tried too late
To hold on to your innocence;
Now it's gone.
Everything bad is an addiction;
Every addiction is you.
I still remember the little you —
The you that knew right from wrong
And that chose wrong anyway.



Eighty-Two Dusks, Photograph

Crickett Nickovich

Memories

Courtney Cartwright
Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

I. I stepped out into the Great Beyond;
And for one second before I stepped outside
I forgot the feeling of fresh wind in my face,
Cool and tossing my hair about
And saturating me in the scent of life; I forgot the bright sun and its glorious
light,

Igniting my soul and waking my slumberous senses;
I forgot the scent of the damp spring grass,
The fresh blades tossed throughout the crisp morning air
That reminds me of childhood and innocence;
The love songs of the birds – their perches my soul
The singing prolonging my weary heart.

II. I forgot about the person that sleeps in the dark corners of my soul
That invited barefoot adventures and afternoons fishing,
The tumbling, boundless meadows and cool, trickling streams;
Collecting tadpoles in Gram's dusty old jam jars;
Peanut Butter and Jelly on summer afternoons;
Nature Hunt and 25 cent-plays,
Cup of coffee? Fold out chairs and Christmas lights running across the beams...
Grandmother's Liz Claiborne scarves and safety pins
(she never complained about the tears)
"Princess Prairie Flower."

Pop's thunderous laugh from the kitchen,
And the sounds of the pots boiling and timers sounding.
Gram's stories... "Once, there lived a princess..."
(whose name was always Courtney)
Slipping in between Gram's cool, white sheets with the purple violets
(they always smelled like her and were pleasantly cold, and the bed was always
softer when she made it)

Walking out to the shop at dusk and inhaling the sawdust,
And spying on my Papa admiringly.
Covering the acres of territory behind the house,
And looking back to make sure the porch was still within sight.
Gram teaching me cursive patiently.
The Christmas Tree... crawling beneath it and lying on our backs,
Gazing up at the myriad of splendid colors radiating through the plush branches
And then falling asleep.
Reading *Black Beauty*.

Grilled cheese with soup.

Hesitantly looking into the window of the dilapidated trailer

And running, in fear of the witch that lurked inside.

Climbing hay bales anxiously and then reaching the top,

(on top of the world, we were)

And then collapsing to slide quickly down on our rears,

Hay catching our mosquito-bitten legs, and finally collapsing in the damp
grass...

My grandmother's voice, soft and deep like molasses

Vibrating in my ears like notes of velvet

("You are my sunshine...")

Scrabble at 1 AM.

Pillow fights and building cities with chairs, books, and sheets

(our mysterious new world, we ventured about courageously)

An unsuccessful attempt to dislodge a bird's nest.

First experience with red lipstick and curling iron.

Hide and seek in rolling fields of wheat on windy days;

Snapping turtles on the front porch; Stealing Jolly Ranchers in the top of Pop's
closet;

And Pie-wacket the cat.

Much more; so much more, fading into my distant memory;

Time is ticking, and I've passed into an adult -

Aware of the soft wrinkles forming, and

Realizing that life doesn't linger in one moment in time;

And clinging to those that I love so dearly,

Praying that they'll never fall away from me

And trying to remember everything, every second in time

Every breath that they take,

Every bellowing laugh that fills the room with warmth,

And every moment, as if it were ~~the last~~

Because I finally realize that a ~~last~~ moment exists for everyone,

Even those that I pull so closely to my heart

To exchange some of my youth for some of their age.

Nothing could fill the empty space or replace the smell of their skin,

Or their ~~tone~~ of laughter or their knowing eyes,

And I fear not even my bitter tears will revive them,

When that sorrowful day arrives.

A Glimpse into Sunrise, Colored Pencil

Shannah Tribble

Shannah



Paradise, Photograph
Rachel Cody

Voodoo Lady **Monica Stevens**

Tell me my fortune, lady.
 Tell me the best.
 I don't care about trouble and
 heartbreak.
 I only want the beach houses and
 hundred dollar bills.
 Hurry, play your cards.
 Voodoo lady, tell me what you
 know.
 Nothing good?
 Can't be.
 Not me.

The Years Flowed Like Honey **Jeremy Vaughn**

Why are her hands so worn?
 Two score, a decade, a hand and one finger – Her years
 Frying on a skillet
 Picking cotton
 Standing on her feet
 Her eyes a frisky green but the youth is drained
 Scars from surgeries and she smoked in the hospital room
 "Faye and John 1987" in concrete in stone
 Well, Faye and John aren't there anymore
 Faye and John got away
 4 in the morning forced her awake like crashing cymbals
 She doesn't get up at 4 anymore
 She did for 13 years though
 To fry bacon and sweep
 Giving her money though making little of it
 Now it comes from Social Security and Retirement
 Retired and gone away
 I know the girl has 30 more years
 She isn't as sure

Scar Tissue

Bianca Thibedeau

White satin sheets –
They aren't smooth:
Where one long leg goes on
The other ends.
Shifting,
She stares at the stump:
Bright pink scars,
Jagged,
Running from end to end
Altering her world.
Such a little thing,
Yet meaning so much,
Through the pale blue curtains the sun
is rising;
Each day the pain is a little less,
And with each day she grows stronger.

Toothpick

David Winton

Blue black fuzz
nothingness junk

creme brulee with extra
sauce

newberry red

sliced up gold
thistle pink

blood clotted stumps
thronging pumps

crispy brown
with just tinges of blue

crackling ash
bottom floor dust

purple
your voice

figment

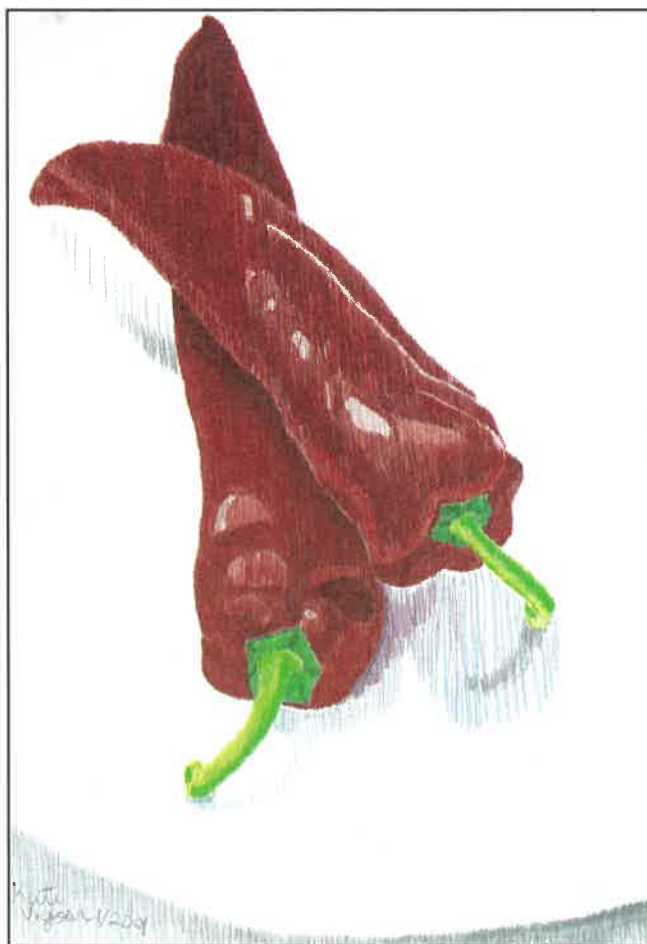
Ode to a Gas Pump

Wilson McBee

Oh, Gas Pump,
What a generosity it is
For you to slip your smooth steel tip
Into my coughing, rankish engine

Oh, Gas Pump,
For you life has been no joyride
Yet you continue to hold fast
To your concrete platform
Stained with oil and radiator fluid
Littered with Coke cans and Sonic bags

Oh, Gas Pump,
Your work is not to be overlooked
Replenishing the thirst
Of every sputtering jalopy
That passes your way.



Bake at 200°C for 20 Min, Colored Pencil

Kate Vigour



After Church

Dawn Lukas

Third Place, Poetry Contest

She slides her fingers
Over the smooth ivory keys
Taking in the familiarity
Remembering years past
Her fingers want to dance,
With a mind of their own
They begin to move
Notes not forgotten
Fill the air
Slowly at first
Then faster and faster
Her head thrown back,
Eyes closed,
The world falls away.
Soaring soprano and chaotic chords
Collide
In perfect harmony.
I watch
As her soul is freed
Through the tips of her fingers.
She is transformed,
A butterfly,
Free,
She now has wings
For a moment,
Only a moment.
The last notes echo
And die away
As she reaches for the switch
To turn out the light.

Flood of '97, Photograph

Lindsay Rosenblatt

First Place, Art Contest

Into the Blue

By David Winton

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

In my oh-so-shy and non-villainous youth, I didn't really pay much attention to the world around me. I enjoyed what I thought I enjoyed, and that was the extent to which my small self thought of such things. Things would fly past me without explanation whilst I struggled to make my overbearing mother happy.

That was that. The ins and outs of whys and whiches bore no weight to me. Well. I suppose in my grandeuristic approach to reflecting now, I think of maturity at its best as being a slow, beautiful process, drawn out over the years by circumstance and chance. A wonderful turning point for my own happened as such.

I was strolling through the kitchen on a particular day and not doing much other than getting a large glass of milk complete with fresh mom-cookies. I wandered past my brother, John, and his friend Stevie-O sitting at our small hexagonal kitchen table. They were typically poring over a sports section of one of the two newspapers we received daily. I paused to sit at the table with them and at least observe what was taking place. They squabbled back and forth over team after team, mainly just describing their favorites. This was easy enough for me to understand and grasp at the tender age of around 6 or 7.

My brother took his stance in a clean statement of, "I like the Charlotte Hornets." Well, nothing like security from your role model to spark a little self-promotion, so I voiced, speaking and saying, "Yeah, me too,

they're my favorite."

My brother slowly turned his head up, the look upon his face more scornful and scoffing than even my mother's maw at my room's worst. He spoke with annoyance and said contritely, "David, you need to pick your own team."

Coming from anyone but my own brother's lips, this would have just been another drop in the bucket as far as advice is truly concerned. I would have felt mildly ashamed and ignored the comment. Here, though, my brother caused the thought to roll around in my cud. I didn't just ponder about picking my own basketball team. I reflected about bands, clothes, opinions, and thoughts. In that one moment, the spark for all my since ideas of individuality and finding such in the most pure sense was created. It would even eventually help me to understand the difference of being different for the sake of it and for shock value as compared to doing it because it truly is what is

"In that one moment, the spark for all my since ideas of individuality and finding such in the most pure sense was created."

inside of me.

Granted, I did not sit there in the thatch kitchen chair and seizure as this multitude of ideas coursed through me, but that one sentence has stayed within me to date. Right after receiving it, I believe I simply walked out of the room, and didn't mention it again to my brother. I doubt he has yet to have any recollection of the event, much less the impact it had on his young naive brother. I like that simplicity.

FEELS LIKE HOME

By Dawn Lukas

Second Place, Essay Contest

I once heard someone say, "You know the picture you have in your mind of the way things used to be? They're never gonna be that way again." Of everything I miss, I think I miss fall the most. Or maybe I miss myself.

It was early and rainy-- too early to be awake and too rainy to be cheerful. I crouched low in the seat and buried my face in a book, blocking out everything around me. The bus taking us to Birmingham was cold and uncomfortable, making me wish I was anywhere but here. As we crossed the Mississippi-Alabama border, I felt a release -- like a burden had been lifted. I forgot about my book, and stared out the window, completely lost in thought. The closer we got to Birmingham, the more I noticed the changing landscape. The trees all around me were red, yellow, orange, and brown -- colors I didn't think belonged in the South anymore than I did. After living in the South for three years, I had become accustomed to the fact that autumn didn't exist here. The seemingly flat land turned into rolling foothills and in the distance I could see the mountains, reminding me of the place I had once called home. A song suddenly began playing through my mind, the lines of which had never meant as much to me as they did at that moment: "Feels like home to me, feels like home to me/ Feels like I'm all the way back where I belong."

I remember moving to Martinsburg, West Virginia, the summer before I started third grade. Back then I didn't think much of it. To me it was just another place that my mother insisted on dragging my brothers and me on her search for herself. I resented the fact that my mother seemed to be born with nomadic blood, restless, always wanting to move on to something new, something different. We never stayed in one place for long; before the third grade, I had changed elementary schools five times. This time our nomadic wanderings steered us north, to the untamed mountains of Appalachia.

We lived in the Shenandoah Valley, surrounded and protected by the Appalachian Mountains. Every weekend we would go up into the mountains to have a picnic or just to drive around. I had to admit, it was the most

beautiful place I had ever seen.

I began to look forward to the weekends; they became my escape. There was just something about being on the side of a mountain and looking into the valley below that filled me with a sense of belonging, a sense of home. It was like being on the top of the world, where the air is open and clear and everything seems miles away. I always felt so much closer to God up there.

During the fall, the leaves would change color and from a distance, it almost seemed as though the mountains were on fire. By that time, all the waterfalls were frozen and had become thick sheets of ice suspended from the mountainside. It was then that I loved the mountains the most.

I remember hearing about people spending their entire lives searching for something. I had always wondered what it was they searched for; maybe they wanted something to believe in, something to fill that empty hole in their lives, or maybe they just wanted to find themselves. Amidst the fiery mountains and open sky, I found what most people never find -- I found myself.

By the time I started middle school, we had quit going as often. Although I missed those weekend drives, I could still look out my window and see the mountains, and suddenly I'd be there. I could close my eyes, and still see, in perfect detail, my hiding place from the world, my home.

After the eighth grade, we moved to Laurel, Mississippi, leaving behind everything that I loved. Instead of the peaceful tranquility of the mountains, I found myself surrounded by the flat emptiness of the southern plains. I no longer had a refuge; somewhere between the Shenandoah Valley and the Deep South, I lost myself.

Perhaps things can never be like they used to be, but one day I know I will find myself again. Sometimes it seems like I left my heart in those mountains. Maybe one day I'll go back to reclaim my heart, but I know that it won't be the same and that I am forever changed by where I've been since then.

She Believes

Trace Thompson

I know not why
My soul rages
I know not how
My mind thinks
But she tells me
I'm a fighter
She believes in me
When I fail
To believe in myself
The dread that clothes me
The fear that overwhelms me
She says can be forgotten
She says can be erased
Am I but a coward

For choosing to give in?
Am I not being strong?
But she believes in me
I can't believe in myself
But she has faith in me
I don't believe in faith
But for her I hold on
And she holds on to me
Her strength overtakes
My stubbornness
And I feel for the first time
That I will be okay
She believes in me
And that is really all I need



Sailing Home, Scratchboard
Jeremy Abernathy

The Broken Bottle Path

Jennifer Chadwick

“Now don’t you go inside and eat,” Momma said.
“You’ll ruin your appetite for dinner.”
Her brown hair was pulled taut against stern features
As she stood on our back porch
And watched me walk down that old dirt road to Mr. Jeffrey’s house.
My back was a little straighter,
My head a little higher,
As I took disciplined strides,
Over cypress-knotted hills and broken-bottle roads,
Until I had passed that imaginary line,
At the corner of Alligator and Fourth,
Between Momma and independence.
Stepping through the gates of a white, cypress fence,
I walked down the gravel drive,
Tip-toed over the briar patch lawn,
And sat in the empty swings of freedom.
Inside the white, brick house,
Through the wire screens and lace curtains,
Alice Jeffrey and her family were eating supper.
They ate.
I swang.
They chewed.
I swang.
They belched.
I swang.
But no one noticed the nine-year-old girl,
Alone on the swing,
Waiting for them to get finished.
No one heard her stomach growl
As she swang back and forth,
Watching.
“Nora?”
I saw Mrs. Jeffrey standing in the door.
Gingham dress and blond hair blowing in the breeze,
She addressed me again.
“Nora, why don’t you come inside and get something to eat?”
I thought,
And I swang,
And I said:
“I’m sorry Mrs. Jeffrey, but Momma said I couldn’t come inside and eat,
But could you pass me a plate out the back door?”

Old Mr. Holliman

Bianca Thibedeau

His day starts with the sun
And ends with its going down;
In the early morning dawn
He eats the hot breakfast
His wife has prepared,
He slips out the door –
Hound dogs rush to greet him,
The horses whinny to be fed,
The rooster crows,
The old John Deere cranks to life,
A cat jumps out of the way.
Adjusting his overall straps,
He puts on a hat to protect
His head from the harsh sun:
Seven hundred and twenty-two
More acres to go

Before the harvest.
After the drought he hopes
That at least half of the corn survives.
Driving back for dinner
He passes the blackened hay field –
Victim of the heat fire.
When he heads to the cotton fields
He sees the hard cracked dirt
And the pitiful crop;
It's Wednesday,
And he has church;
A huge supper awaits him
At home.
Before he falls asleep
He prays to God
For rain.



Abandoned, Photograph
Mary Rosenblatt

BRUSHSTROKE OF PASSION

By Chris Kelly

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

A

nd, thus, I stand here, making brushstroke after brushstroke. Ten years, I have toiled at this work. I stare at the large, tall canvas before me and feel bittersweet anticipation for the work ahead of me still and the majestic completion I foresee. The mists roll about the ground below my open window against the darkness and the shadows cast by the pale and ethereal full moon.

Sustained and entranced by the Gothic beauty of the dark, misty scenes that manifest before my window after the sun sets, I only paint at night so that I can draw energy from the shades and specters of this mystic realm. As one of my ghostly attendants brings me yet another inspiration, I take upon my brush a bit of scarlet to add a radiant fire to her eyes. The very same fire that burns unquenched deep within my soul. This fire is my only connection to the other world, one for which I would give my life in order to wake up in -- her world.

I have continued painting for the past five years since that night, and I am finally finished. The work required numerous sleepless nights and nearly my very life. The little sleep I was able to come by came only during the day when I had to retire to my dusky, somber sleeping chamber where the phantoms from the netherworld would watch over me until the plutonic sun lay down to rest and ceased tormenting me with its purity and brilliance. I could have died, but she would never have allowed it. For the times I felt faint at heart, she would beckon me to look into her fiery eyes, where she would fill me with her power and heal my infirmities, and thus, I could press on. Every brushstroke brought her a little bit closer to me, so I wouldn't have stopped for heaven or hell. At last, I took my smallest brush and added the last streak of luster to her raven black hair, and the lovely Victoria stood before me in all her splendor.

This task accomplished, I could now marvel at the work of my exceptional artistic skill. Truly, Victoria was lovely to behold, or so were the words of the many art connoisseurs and buyers who came to gaze upon, and hopefully buy, this masterpiece. However, I had toiled excruciatingly over my painting, and had no intention of giving her up now. So she sat in my parlor overlooking the vast ocean where she had sat during the fifteen years I had taken to bring her partway into the living world. Victoria would watch me as I created more paintings to sell, resuming my previous occupation as it had been up until I made the first brushstroke to form the loveliness that was she. While I painted, I would sometimes feel lonely, for that is the life of a painter such as myself. But with one look to the side at my darling, the loneliness would almost disappear. She would stand there, smile at me with her full ruby lips, look into my eyes, and unite the fire in her eyes with that in my soul. I, in turn, would tell her my feelings with not a single lie; with Victoria, no lies were ever necessary. She would patiently listen to everything I said, and when I was done, she was still looking at me with no less love than that of our first shared glance. For a moment, just a fleeting moment, I recalled my past love that had left me upon hearing the confession of a deep secret from my heart. As I said, however, it was just a fleeting moment, and I turned back to Victoria to see her lovely face as she seemed to say to me, "No fear my love, I am here, and I shall be here for all time." Her love would permeate me like the mists that flowed into my parlor from the mystic night outside.

So often would she sooth me in my times of sorrow and sing me a sleepy melody at night -- as I had moved the painting into my sleeping chamber. Her sweet love would mystify the brightest day and return me to my shadowy Eden. However, as time passed, though I had by no means and would never in all eternity become tired of Victoria, I was slowly infused with a desire to see her in the flesh, hear her voice with my own ears. Ironic it was that I was so deeply in love, but I had never dreamed of her once. Therefore, several

nights would I fall asleep focusing all my mental energy on Victoria so that I could dream of her, for my desire to be with my love was so desperate that even to be with her in a dream would have been enough to make the celestial architect of Arcadia burn with jealousy. Try as I might, though, she would never deign to appear anywhere in the vast kingdom of Morpheus, to where we all retreat when we leave the earthly realm to slumber and prepare to be resurrected into the living world for the next of an indefinite number of times.

This continued for a time so long that I eventually stopped counting the days. I would walk about my home in a dreadful and somber trance. Ever so often I might look at her, see her mysterious smile, and wonder if she does this out of a sadistic desire to torment me by keeping herself away from me, who loved her with a passion that no mortal or immortal could ever match. But no, how would it be possible that she, who longed for me with a raging lust that dared to rival my own for her, would give even a fleeting thought to aggravating me in such a way? Then again, what else could she be doing? Victoria lulled me with her siren's song of love and afterward spurned the entreaties of my loving heart when I would implore her to travel across the great rent between our worlds to simply bring peace to my anguished spirit. I looked over once more to see in her sneer the inhuman pleasure my heart's torment brought to her. I fell onto the floor at her feet and cried out, "Victoria, my love, why do you torture me this way? Have I not given my heart to you completely, asking nothing in return, save that you would bring to me, for even the shortest span of time, repose with your lovely countenance? Were your countless professions of love nothing more than an enslavement incantation? Were those times we spent together for you nothing more than a prolonging of the time between then and the day when I would be hopelessly in your thrall? Tell me, I beseech you! Let me not spend eternity unsure of your love or hate or contempt or whatever your deceptive feeling may be!"

But she stood there looking down on me, showing no feeling other than scorn and venom. This ascertained, I jumped up from my spot and walked around the room in a daze, bombarded with the harsh,



Worgs, Scratchboard
Ajani Thomas

cruel reality before me. The betrayal I felt tore at my heart like the claws of an ominous black cat having finally caught the bird she had been stalking for so long. The world outside my window seemed to be jeering at me. A sarcastic laughing wind blew into my sleeping chamber to express its pernicious pity. No, no, no... the thought ran through my head. But it is, the air around me said to me. My life could never have value again because my lovely Victoria had never been mine to begin with, just a cruel temptress donning the guise of love. It is done, I said to myself as I set about what I resolved to do.

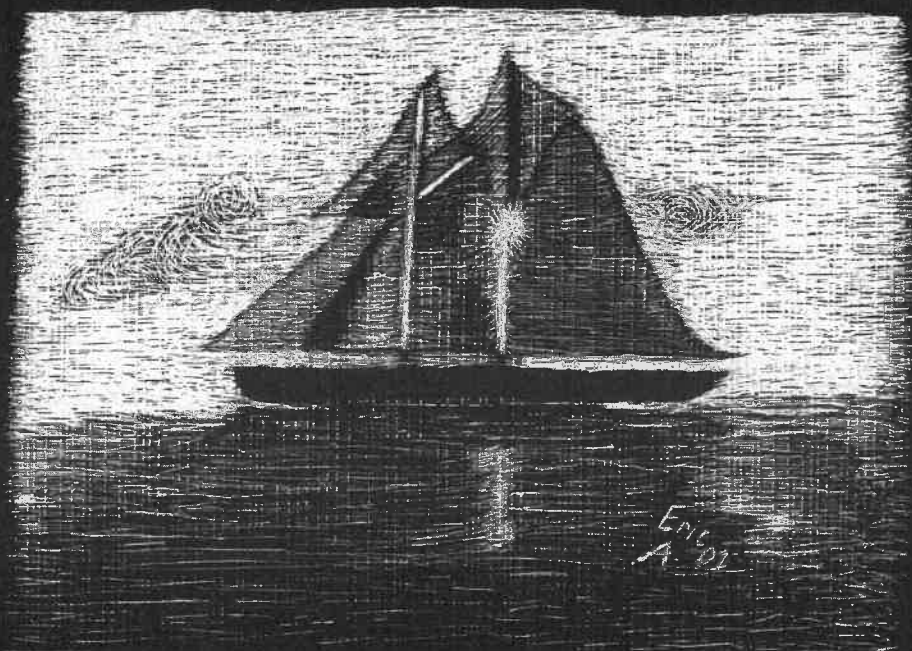
I removed my painting to the parlor from whence it had been and set it in its former spot. Next, I walked over to my bar and took out several bottles of wine, whiskey, rum, and any other type of liquor that was there. As I removed them from their cabinet, I would hurl each against a randomly chosen wall and watch it shatter and douse the floor under it. I did this several more times throughout my house, in every room of the first floor, in fact. When done, I could see that the rooms were well soaked. With the one last bottle of spirit in my hand, I walked over to the fireplace and scooped out a select few embers. These I flung at the couch, which was well wet with rum. The couch was instantly set aflame, and this flame quickly spread to the rest of the living room and less fast to the other rooms, including the parlor.

I walked back up the stairs to my sleeping chamber and sat down upon my bed. I opened the bottle and took a tremendous draught, and the spirit almost instantly set upon my brain and body. In a time I could not even comprehend, the bottle was empty, and I fell back upon my bed and dropped into Morpheus' kingdom once more. I found myself standing on the edge of the cliff that supported my dwelling, alone and disenchanted, ready to make, in turn, the next journey: from Morpheus' world to Pluto's. All of a sudden, a mystical, musical voice called out my name, and who did I turn around to see, but Victoria in all her splendor. "Victoria," I cried, "you have come to me at last, at the very last!"

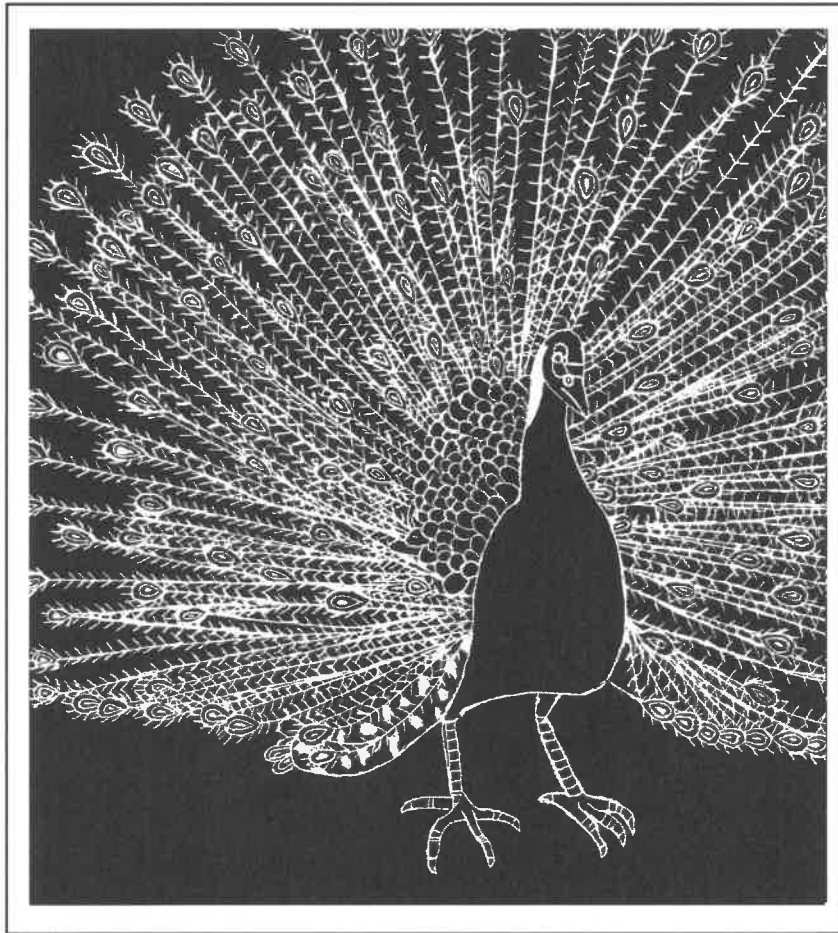
"Did you really doubt my love as to think I would venture to do you any harm? I would never in all time do such a thing to you, never to you the one true love of no longer lonely life," she told me with more love than my heart would ever dare to hope for. It had never been true, none of the betrayal I had convinced myself of. Her love had been as sincere and greater than I had ever believed.

What had I done? I set the house aflame! I awoke with a start, and hurtled down the flaming staircase into the parlor where we had shared so many wonderful moments together. I immediately saw her, still unscathed by the flames. I once more fell before her, this time to beg forgiveness and a final chance to love her for all time. I

picked up the painting, carried it up to my sleeping chamber, lay down with it upon my bed, and here, as the fire creeps up the stairs, I stay with her to the last of this life and shall follow her into the next and on after.



Relief, Scratchboard
Eric Archison



Bharatmata no Mor (India's Peacock), Scratchboard
Om Amin

House of Style

Chris Kelly

Pungent scent of hairspray
Buzzing of electric clippers
The mother who gave me a haircut after business hours
Cold watery mist dousing my hair and face
Scrapes of moving scissors
Questions about school and future plans
Shampoo suds in the sink
That woman's child exploring the entire place
That woman's subsequent scolding voice
Heads under oversized dryers
The daughter who now cuts my hair
Slosh, slosh, slosh, washing hair
Steady stream of a rinsing sprayer
Hair falling in my face from the thinning shears
Talcum-powdered towel whisking away loose hair
The mother-daughter team that runs this place to a tee
A noisy hairdryer drying excess water
My mom griping over my uneven sideburns.

The Fading Out

By Courtney Cartwright

Third Place, Short Story Contest

Hanging her head over the back of the jeep, she threw her arms out into the crisp night, allowing them to sway limply in the surges of the wind, like branches of the barren trees swaying in the gusts of early October. Closing her eyes, she felt her hands become the wind, the clean, fall-scented wind, the scent of Autumn wind rushing through her nose, enveloping her in its whirring constancy. She felt like tumbling over the back; she assured herself that she would not fall into anything, except into the nourishing mother of the night, into the stars, and into the dense, black endlessness. She searched upward, and found comfort in the stars, sitting upon their lofts of the universe; the stars, unmoving, and the moon, voluptuously round and sensual in its calming brightness. Losing her composure, she once again stretched out over the back-seat, as her burdens spilled out in her bursts of laughter. How wonderful to laugh! The laugh was not her own, but instead of an unknown, whose heart was not being held captive. The throaty giggles, the dizzy, dark, spin-wheel of the night, the shelving away of reality overtook her. In moments like these, nothing took a stab at her chest. In moments like these, she slipped into the comforting distortion of her own nurturing drunkenness. She had her reasons.

Surely her mother would be awaiting her, her pasty skin so thin and white that she could make out the skeleton beneath it. A short, blonde number hid the splotchy, baby-fine baldness underneath. It always grew back so incredibly soft; touching the newborn strands was like passing her fingers through strings of silk. Desperately tired were the restless eyes of her mother, a spirit weakened from too many unanswered prayers. Her hands were loving and patient in their weak, sickly caress. Her eyelashes had fallen out. She always prepared dinner, the kitchen's aroma spreading throughout the house in clouds of spices and meat. She took up the plates and offered dessert, as her own nausea mixed with the biting pang of hunger cut through her diseased limbs. Yes, she definitely had her reasons.

A disease plagued her just as it plagued her mother; she felt the contamination spreading through her veins,

surging like the Autumn wind, as her hands turned to wings and she lost herself in the sky. Short-lived was the moment as they turned onto a road thickly forested; her sky was broken into fragments as the branches dipped way too close. Paranoia immersed her mind as she pictured the black, barren limbs cracking and crashing down. The swaying trees were too close to reality, capable of snapping at any moment, and plunging down. She thought of her mother, swaying helplessly between life and death and shivering in the wind. The voices all faded into one underlying groan. She closed her eyes and tried to enjoy the spinning of her mind. The bottle did his job. The night did his. The whirring speed of the jeep did his, as well. All of this pleased her. She basked in their numbing effects, in the apathetic innocence. The branches hung too low, despite.

The pounding echoed through her ears, her eyes half-blind but still half-aware, her mind turning into a creation of something temporary and dark. Every form and sound created a fuzzy blanket that she so readily nestled beneath. Then, the sounds broke through her tranquil night: first, the screech, second, the shattering of glass, and finally, the desperate silence. Her heart was thrust upward at what felt like the speed of sound, then plunged to a depth so painful she lost her breath. She realized that she was only surrounded by air. A frozen second of realization turned into an eternity, as the silence became her. Frantically reaching for something, she tumbled upside down, her palms searching and grasping only cool air. Falling in slow motion, the black pavement came into sight.

The droned voices of unfamiliar people, the pool of wine-shaded blood spilling out into her vicinity, the deep, visceral ache, the fading in and out of sight, the uncontrolled, ever-haunting sobs of her mother, her senses strained to absorb these surroundings, as she slipped away slowly. She thought of her mother, who held on by a flimsy string, who fought the monster-plague of her own body with every ounce of strength instilled in her, and of herself, who invented her own plague, cutting the strings of life that surrounded her. Her eyes searched frantically upward as the limbs of reality faded into dark emptiness.

Reaching Aiden

Dawn Lukas

Lonesome bridge, spanning the mulch
Closing gaps divided by distance.
Two points of separation-
You and I
We never reached him
Weekend plans for the distant future
Never realized
It rained and now you're gone.
Taking all understanding
No one left to know me,
Not like you did.
Long awaited return
Welcome back
Stretching out my arms, moving forward,
You backed away
Too close.
Cloudy days are nice
Appropriate, I think.
We could never reach him.
You aren't coming back,
Not this time.



The Flip Side, Photograph
Jennifer Chadwick

Empty

Chris Kelly

He runs
And runs
And runs
Off into the infinite darkness
Pelted by the perpetual torrent.
Fleeing a relentless hunter.
Shoe soles meet the ground
And send water flying
Left
Right
Everywhere
Including the cuffs of his pants.
The once bright green t-shirt
Now soaked dark
Clings like a repressed memory.
Wet, limp hair
Plastered to his skull,
A dark helmet that won't be shaken off.
Feet pounding,
Clearing puddle after puddle.
One misplaced foot
And the wet ground smashes into his entire body.
The first drop hasn't fallen to the ground
And he's gone.
Never feeling the bits of grass
Pasted on his face.
Or the cold, dirty water seeping through his clothes.
Everywhere he looks, darkness and rain,
Darkness and rain,
And that face!
Scaling the insurmountable cliffs
Leading into the recesses of long-forgotten memories
Memories once tossed aside but now welcome
Like that face.
What he never thought he wanted
He now needed.
The face's ghostly features,
Illuminated by the moonlight
Knew nothing of that which was so close.
But *he* knew.
And *he* calls the name, never worthy of a thought until then.
Obscure eyes turn and look.

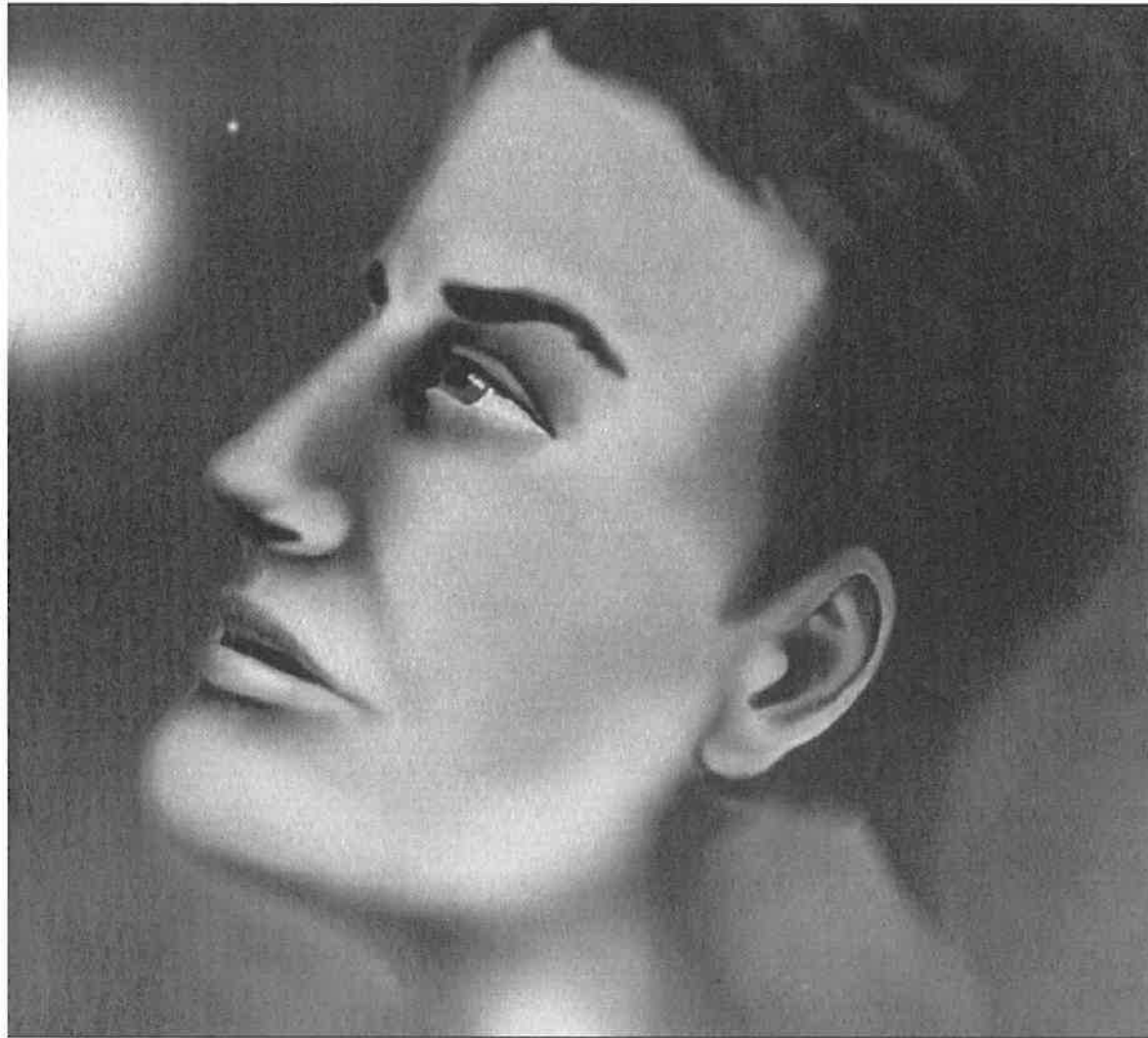
Not a drop of color to their credit,
Penetrate his body,
And see into the depths of his heart.
He can't make out the expression on the face,
So shaded it was from turning away from the light.
He steps up to the face,
Now desperate for what had been his for the taking
So long ago.
Extends a hand, longing for it,
Relating his tale of woe,
Needing and wanting
Any sound from the face?
No, none at all.

Sonnet 519

James A. Comans

First Place, Poetry Contest

When winter's wind makes lemons of my lips
And frozen funnels of my tender ears,
When warmer water from my dullness drips
And stinging frost makes sickles of my tears –
The night is dark, and light departing still
As clouded thunder cloaks the ruthless sky
From up above the treetops comes the chill
That shows my time of solitude is nigh.
But you are always there amidst the frost;
My face and hands are warmed by yours again.
By your smile I regain all that I've lost,
And once again I am an able man:
You are the one that's brought me through the cold,
My angel snatching me from evil's hold.



Last Goodbye, Computer Graphic

Jennifer Chadwick

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

The Delta

By Jennifer Chadwick

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

Devon Reid had a unique family. I suppose any family with names like De’Nae, Drew, Devon, and De’Lila had to be pretty distinct, especially since all of them were natives of Missouri who had gained their French titles from a baby-naming-Walmart-bought handbook that had been passed down from mother to daughter for the past two generations. Of course, Devon’s father managed to stand out. As the only family member that had still retained his natural hair color, it was just as natural that he was blessed with the exotically original name of Pete.

With all of their “D” names, the Reids adapted perfectly to Delta life. Within weeks of their arrival, Pete and De’Nae had already begun cheating on their car tags, a sport almost equal to deer hunting for most Clarksdale residents, and sending their children to the coveted city schools, despite their obvious county residence.

But despite her parents’ sometimes less than ethical nature, Devon and I were best friends, and as such we spent a lot of time together. While I can’t say my parents accepted her like my own fledgling sister, they did view her as an adopted cousin, far surpassing many of our blood relations. Likewise, Devon’s mom, De’Nae, exhibited the same hospitality towards me. So it wasn’t surprising that just about every Friday night I ate brisket and Sam’s Choice french fries in the Reid’s trailer house on Highway 61.

If the Delta was the heart of Mississippi, then Devon’s trailer must have been the upper aorta. Not even my own yard, with its down-hill view of Mrs. Kincaid’s white palace (allegedly the product of chain-gang labor) or the snake-infested Sunflower River where Daddy would shoot water moccasins, could compare to the cotton fields and gold and white crosses that bordered Devon’s trailer house.

When we were little, Devon and I used to run through those cotton fields in her back yard. Making up excuses for ourselves, we’d wander aimlessly through the tilled fields and scratchy stalks while we pretended to look for stray dogs or retrieve a ball we’d never kicked out there. We’d just walk, oblivious to the threats of cotton mouths and hornet nests that my mother associated with every cotton stalk in the Delta.

Sometimes, we’d make it all the way out to the pair of trees sitting by themselves on a mud-cracked island devoid of the cotton around it. Pete kept his farming equipment

out there. He never did own his own land, but as a custom cutter, he cut beans for just about everyone around the Delta, including state prison at Parchment.

Pete never told us we couldn’t play on his equipment, so we never asked. Crawling up into her dad’s combine, Devon would tell me stories about how she lost one of her ovaries when she fell off of a tractor or how her brother Drew burned down half a soybean field with a Roman Candle. I never had much to say, but Devon more than made up for my silence.

That was how we spent our Saturday mornings, waking up early and roaming the cotton fields, then returning just before her parents woke up. Only the mud caked on our high-tops or the threads of cotton caught in Devon’s permed hair ever spoke of what we’d done. I’m sure her parents knew, but they never called us on it. After coating her face with rouge, purple eye shadow, and cat-eye enhancing mascara, not to mention spending another half an hour plucking, ironing, and curling hairs, De’Nae rarely left her trailer before noon. Even if she had any suspicions, she never got up early enough to catch us.

After racing home, we’d spend the rest of the day in Devon’s backyard. Empty trashcans became stuntmen machines. Climbing inside the four-foot black coffins, we’d press our bodies against the sides as we pushed the cans over and rolled down her lawn, inevitably being spat out on the astroturf that bordered her mother’s silk flower garden.

Often, Devon’s sister De’Lila would follow us around. Bottle dangling from her mouth, she let us push her in the garbage can until she tumbled out of the top as well. She’d sit with us in the bathroom, while Devon taught me how to use an eyelash curler. And at nights, she would swing with us on the nailed-down aluminum swing-set in the back yard.

We’d swing from dusk to eleven o’clock every night. De’Lila would sit in her glider, playing with the gold loops that hung from her ears and sucking her bottle every now and then. Devon would glance at the satellite, watching it turn as De’Nae flipped to another HBO channel. And I would stare out at the cotton fields.

The lamp-post in the middle of the yard bathed us in light, only stopping at the fringes of the cotton field. Barely silhouettes, the cotton danced in those late night summer

breezes like water moccasins, open-mouthed and waiting for the kill.

We never ventured out into those fields after dusk. Too afraid, too scared of what we couldn't see, we stayed in the light. But that didn't stop us from going outside, from gazing beyond those rippling shadows to the three crosses, illuminated by a billboard with the words "Clarksdale: Home of the Big Frog" painted in green and gold, that marked the Clarksdale city limits.

We never questioned those crosses, either. Those three specters, standing as sentinels in a cottony sea, seemed as natural as the dirt between our toes. Night after night, the three of us watched as their shadows swang along with us in the evening breeze. We listened to the owls roost on

their arms and the cotton stalks hit their feet. We felt the courage of their presence strengthen our swing chains and straighten our toes as we kept swinging into the night.

Sitting in those swings, we learned more than any Mississippi-bred teacher had ever taught us. We listened to the land, memorized the whistle of the wind between chopped-down cotton stalks and retired farm equipment. We felt the prickle of mosquitoes as they crawled across our skin and the chill of an evening wind on bare feet. We saw our own shadows and watched as they joined the cotton stalks and crosses before us.

We giggled and spat. We cried and sang. And together, we learned what the Delta really was.

He's Worked In Nightclubs

Wilson McBee

Third Place, Poetry Contest

Driving through the back
Parking lot of Hal and Mal's,
And talking about Mose Allison,
We see the man himself –
Sitting on the fire escape
Staring coldly right at us.

We enter the room
Called the Fish,
Where we join maybe twenty
Other people.
Mose sits at the bar alone,
Wearing a Mets cap,
Which covers his white
And balding scalp.

The hat goes off when
It's time to play, though.
When the first line of
"One of these days"
Carries through the
Smoke and chit-chat-filled room,
Mose is clearly the old man.
But when his feeble hands begin to

Slide up and down the
Piano, the crowd begins
To sway their shoulders,
And the upright bass begins
To bounce to the rhythmic
Pit pat of the drummer's wire brush,
I begin to feel like an old man too,
Weary of the cruel and indifferent world,
Just like Mose.

Mose closes the show with "Nightclub."
"I've been working in nightclubs so long,
Can't hardly stand the break of day,"
He moans,
And I clap and shake my head.
I get a chance to speak to Mose
After he has performed.
The old man mutters something about
listening
And playing, listening and playing.
I shake his
Hand and bid him goodbye.
I look at my own hands.
Maybe someday.

A Search for Undaunted Courage

By Wilson McBee

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

Outside the air was humid and exhaust filled, as minivans and pick-up trucks honked and bumped their way down County Line Road on their way to Wal-Mart, Northpark Mall, or Circuit City, all of which and more were encompassed in a half-mile radius around the Barnes and Noble. Inside here, though, the bookstore seemed a breezy, peaceful refuge. Lyle stood in the non-fiction section, skimming through a biography of Richie Havens, a cup of frappuccino in hand.

"Yeah, I have to read it for school. I forgot who wrote it. Stephen Something? Something Stephen?" Lyle heard a voice from a nearby aisle.

Stephen Ambrose. Lyle smiled, probably college age. He hadn't even seen her. No doubt she was a fox, though, and standing less than a yard away, separated only by a shelf filled with post-World War II books.

He turned the corner and walked into the adjacent line of bookshelves. There she stood, slender, and long legged, a Saks woven purse hanging from her bare and freckled shoulder. Standing close by and crowding Lyle's entrance was one of the worst. Lyle had seen this employee countless times, prancing through the store, reeking of cafe mochas, his worn green tie bouncing as if he had practiced it every night in front of a mirror. Here the employee was staring blankly at the Medieval History Section, scratching his goatee. Stephen Ambrose-Medieval History!

Lyle cleared his throat. "Ambrose, maybe? Stephen Ambrose?" He questioned the co-ed with his finessed scholarly tone.

She now turned slightly towards Lyle, pushing the chin-length blonde hair behind her ear, exposing a round, lightly tanned face, staring indifferently at Lyle through a pair of dark brown eyes. Lyle gulped, and the scholarly facade began to fade. He was just sixteen, and had encountered a true woman, unfamiliar with Stephen Ambrose, and clearly out of his league.

"Stephen Ambrose? Did he write a book called *Undaunted Courage*? Do you know?" she asked, intent, but obviously bored by Lyle's immaturity and nerd-like nasal voice.

"Y, Y, Yeah," Lyle croaked. He looked down at the floor to try to stabilize himself, but he was already in deep. The bookshelves around Lyle were beginning to swim. Little droplets of sweat were fast forming on his forehead. "Yeah, it's over there." Lyle pointed his shaking finger at the Civil War section. As she followed his finger, Lyle rested and attempted to regain his composure, only to look up at a portrait of Mark Twain, grinning mockingly at him.

"I don't see it over here. Are you sure his name is Ambrose?" Lyle turned slowly to the female, who was panning across portraits of William Tecumseh Sherman and Nathan Bedford Forest with her finger. Lyle began to blush again as he realized his mistake. The Civil War? He glanced at the employee, who had picked up a book about the Challenger Explosion – he was completely lost. Lyle grabbed *Undaunted Courage* off a shelf in front of the employee and dropped it at the Birkenstock-clad feet of the co-ed, who eyed the book's descent to the green carpet before looking back in Lyle's direction. But Lyle had already left her and was walking hurriedly towards the men's bathroom, frappuccino rising in his throat.

Massacre

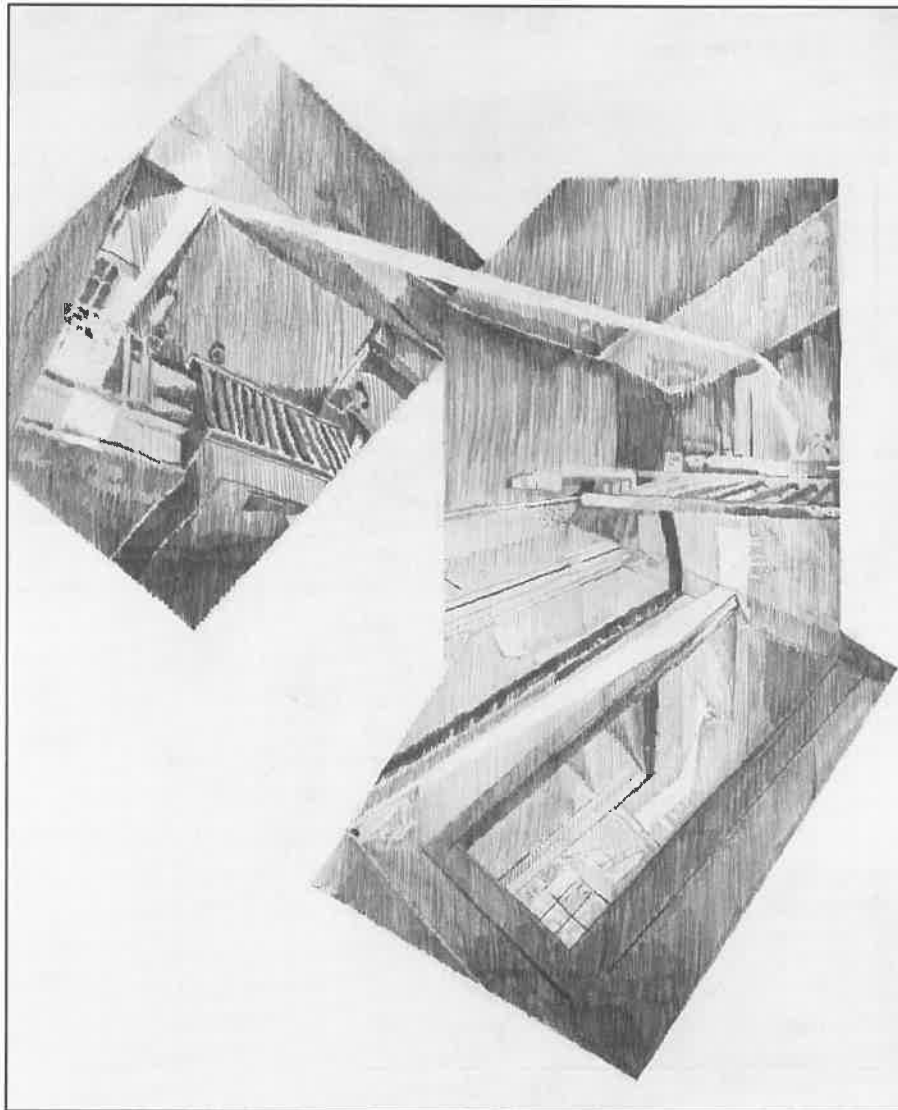
Sabrina Simpson

Did you appreciate my artistry,
Or did you peer through the illusion?
Did my masks deceive you,
Or could you notice my agony?
Was my tedious massacre disregarded,
Or were you perceptive of the act?
How could you overlook my stained cheeks,
Or was that why you caressed them sweetly?
When did I unknowingly transpire,
Or did I surrender to you?

On Ice

Erin Roberts

Hands
or feet,
on ice,
pole,
metal chairs,
and refrigerators.
Wintry sports
in January
and February.
Eyes watching
heartless,
unemotional people,
recluses,
and excuses.
Feelings of
despair,
frightfulness,
and death.



Interpretation of Gordon Matta-Clark's "Splitting," Line Art
Thomas Hackman

Contributors' Notes

Jeremy E. Abernathy came to MSMS from Mooreville High School in Mooreville. While he is not sure what college he will attend, he plans to major in graphic design. Jeremy finds inspiration from people such as da Vinci, Monet, Michaelangelo, and Shakespeare. His personal philosophy is, "Have an open mind."

Om S. Amin, a junior at MSMS, is from Laurel, where he attended West Jones High School. He plans to attend the University of Southern Alabama and major in pre-med. Om finds inspiration in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Faulkner. His personal philosophy is, "Always strive to do your best."

Eric S. Atchison came to MSMS from Biloxi High School in Biloxi. Next fall he will attend Tulane University and major in chemical engineering or cardiology. Eric is influenced by the works of Paulo Coetho and Salvador Dali. His favorite quotation is, "The grass isn't greener on the other side; it's greener where you water it."

Courtney Cartwright, currently a senior at MSMS, is from Hernando. She plans to attend the University of Mississippi next fall and is interested in biology and psychology as potential majors. Courtney has been influenced by the works of Walt Whitman and C.S. Lewis, especially Whitman's work *Leaves of Grass*. Courtney is inspired by the Dave Matthews Band lyrics, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we'll die."

A senior, **Jennifer Chadwick** is from Clarksdale where she attended Lee Academy. She plans to attend Ole Miss where she will major in English. She has too many influential authors to list, and her favorite quotation is *Hamlet's* "Words, words, words."

Rachel A. Cody is from Gautier, where she attended Gautier High School. She plans to go to the University of Toronto and major in psychology. Her favorite author is Dean Koontz, and her grandfather is the person who most influences her work.

James Comans, a senior at MSMS, lives in Jackson. Before coming to MSMS, he went to Forest Hill High School. Voltaire produces the quotation which best identifies James's personal philosophy. It reads, "I may not agree with a word you say, but I will fight, to the death, for your right to say it."

Jeff M. Deignan, a junior at MSMS, is from Columbus. He wants to attend Tulane University in 2002 and major in English or art. Jeff's favorite writers are Lovecraft and Masamune Shirow. Works that have influenced him include *Dune* and *Appleseed*.

Kendra DeVaughn came to MSMS from Meridian, where she went to Clarkdale Attendance Center. Kendra is a senior, and will be attending the University of Southern Mississippi in the fall, where she plans to pursue a major in polymer science. Kendra's writing has been most influenced by the works of Eudora Welty, Emily Dickinson, and Anne McCaffrey. Her personal philosophy can best be summed up in the words, "Live everyday as if it were your last and love like it lasts forever."

Jessica Doss came to MSMS from Southaven, where she attended Southaven High School. Jessica wants to study medicine after she graduates in 2002, but is unsure about the college she will attend. Her writing has been most influenced by James McBride's work *The Color of Water*.

Thomas H. Hackman, a senior at MSMS, is from Charleston, where he attended Charleston High School. In the fall he plans to attend Louisiana State University and major in biology.

Adrienne D. Howse is a native of Meridian who came to MSMS from West Lauderdale High School. She plans to attend Mississippi State University to pursue a degree in both biochemistry and molecular biology. Adrienne finds inspiration from Georgia O'Keefe and Harper Lee. A quotation that is personal to Adrienne is, "Small towns we believe and die in," by W. H. Auden.

C. Gabriel Jones of Pearl, transferred to MSMS from Pearl High School. He plans to attend Emory and pursue a degree in business. His writing has been influenced by the works of Shakespeare. Gabriel's personal motto is, "Life is a journey, not a destination. Enjoy the ride."

Christopher Kelly is a senior at MSMS who resides in Sherman, where he attended North Pontotoc High School. He plans to attend the University of Mississippi and major in international studies and literature. Chris's writing has been most influenced by the works of Ayn Rand and Thomas Hardy. He draws inspiration from Bon Jovi's song, "It's My Life," especially its lyrics, "It's my life, and it's now or never. I ain't gonna live forever. I just wanna live while I'm alive."

Dawn A. Lukas attended West Jones High School in Laurel before coming to MSMS. She plans to attend Ohio State University where she wants to major in psychology and special education. Her favorite writers are T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas. Dawn's motto is, "If you are going to walk on thin ice, you might as well dance!"

Wilson McBee, currently a junior at MSMS, is from Madison and transferred to MSMS from Madison Central High School. Wilson draws most of his literary influence from writers Kurt Vonnegut and Walker Percy, but Bob Dylan is the source of Wilson's statement of personal philosophy, "There's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all."

Melvin Miller, from Winstonville, attended high school at John F. Kennedy before coming to MSMS. He currently undecided about where he will go to college, but is confident that he will study law. Melvin's favorite artists/writers are Mos Def and Jay-Z, and works that have influenced him most include the *Bible* and *The 18th Letter*.

TeGreg C. Miller is currently a junior at MSMS from Laurel, where he attended West Jones High School. He plans to attend Louisiana State University in the fall of 2002 and major in psychology. TeGreg is inspired by the works of Salvador Dali, H. G. Wells, and Anne Rice. His personal philosophy is, "Trust nothing."

Crickett M.C. Nicovich came to MSMS from Starkville High School in Starkville. She plans to major in political science. Her artwork is influenced by her father. A personal statement that she makes is, "Life's a dance."

Bronwen C. Reichle came to MSMS from Murrah High School in Jackson. She plans to attend the University of North Texas in the fall, where she will major in photojournalism. Her favorite artist is Andy Warhol.

Collin E. Roberts came to MSMS from Brookhaven High School in Brookhaven. She plans to pursue a double major in marketing and law at Millsaps College. Collin admires the writings of J.D. Salinger, Bob Dylan, and Joni Mitchell. *A Night without Armor* by Jewel has been an influential piece in her writing. According to Collin's philosophy, "I am here. What more do you want?"

Erin Roberts is from Corinth, where she went to Corinth High School. A junior this year, Erin plans to attend Mississippi State University in the fall of 2002 and pursue a major in computer science. Her writing has been most influenced by the work of poet Maya Angelou. One personal statement of Erin's is "Everything happens for a reason."

Lindsay M. Rosenblatt, a senior at MSMS, is from Fort Adams. His favorite writers and artists are Keith Whitley and A. L. Webber. Lindsay's favorite quotation is from R. E. Lee, who said, "Do your duty. You should want no less, you can do no more."

Mary P. Rosenblatt, a junior at MSMS, is from Fort Adams, where she attended the Wilkinson County Christian Academy. While undecided about which college she will attend, she plans to major in pre-med. Mary is inspired by the works of Van Gogh and Barbara Kingsolver. Her personal philosophy is, "A wealth of wisdom is inferior to a little bit of soul."

Sabrina D. Simpson came to MSMS from Southaven, where she attended Southaven High School. Sabrina plans to enroll in Kansas University to pursue a career in journalism. Sabrina's personal statement on life is, "There is always something new to see, feel, experience."

Lee G. K. Singh is from Greenwood, where she attended Greenwood High School. Writers and artists who have inspired her are Andrew Lloyd Webber, Boubil/Schonberg, and Shakespeare. Influences on her writing come from *My Sergei* by Ekaterina Gorgyeva, *Les Miserables*, and *Surely You're Joking Mr. Feynman*. Lee's favorite quotation is, "Life is like a sine curve," quoted by Leonid Arkayer, Soviet National Gymnastics Coach.

Monica Stevens of Laurel, attended West Jones High School before coming to MSMS. Monica plans to study psychology and English at the University of Southern Mississippi after graduating from MSMS in 2002. Stephen King and Janet Fitch have influenced her writing, as has the saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Bianca L. Thibedeau, a senior at MSMS, is from Caledonia, where she attended Caledonia High School. In the fall she will attend the University of Mississippi and major in international law. Her favorite writers are John Grisham and Shirley Jackson. Bianca's favorite quotation comes from *The Horse Whisperer* by Nicholas Evans, which states, "Where there is pain there is feeling, and where there is feeling there is hope."

Ajani N. Thomas, a junior at MSMS, came from Natchez, where he attended Natchez High School. Although he is undecided about the college he will attend, he plans to major in computer programming. Ajani finds his inspiration from the works of R. A. Salvatore.

Trace Thompson came to MSMS from Blue Springs, where she attended East Union High School. She plans to attend the University of Mississippi and study law and theatre. Edgar Allan Poe influences her writing, and Trace tends to gain direction in life from the words, "Do not walk before me – I may not follow. Do not walk behind me – I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend."

Shannah D. Tribble came to MSMS from Hamilton High School in Aberdeen. She will attend Mississippi State University next fall and major in law. Her favorite writer is Mary Higgins Clark. Shannah finds inspiration in the song, "Closing Time" by Semisonic, which says, "Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end."

David Winton, a senior at MSMS, is from Starkville. He plans to attend Cooper Union School of Art in the fall where he will study photography. Jean-Michel Basquiat and Egon Schiele influence David's work. "God really sits up and notices when you sing chords..." from King Missile III is his favorite quote.

Jeremy Vaughn transferred to MSMS from Water Valley, where he attended high school at Water Valley High School. His favorite artists/writers are Neil Gaiman and Scott O'Dell, and Jeremy has been most influenced by Tori Amos's album entitled "Boys for Pele."

Kate B. Vigour is from Winona, where she attended Winona High School. She has plans to attend Mount Holyoke College and major in chemistry and chemical engineering. Kate is inspired by Jane Austen and Keith Herring. Her favorite quotation is one by William Shakespeare, "To thine own self be true."



Looking Back, Photograph
Crickett Nickovich

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