



Southern Voices 2003

Southern Voices is a magazine of creative works by students at the
Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

P.O. Box W-1627, Columbus, Mississippi 39701

Southern Voices is available on the Internet at
<http://www.msms.k12.ms.us>

Southern Voices

VOLUME XV
SPRING 2003

EDITOR:
Margaret Montgomery

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Samantha Pettit

ART EDITOR:
Watson Lamb

ASSISTANT ART EDITOR:
Preeti Kumar

STAFF MEMBERS:
Alexis Banks
Matthew Huber
Sara Johnson
Jack Neldon
Susan Rankin
Mitchell Robinson
Josh Swan

ADVISOR:
Emma Richardson

ART CONTEST JUDGE:
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Gallery Director and Professor
Divison of Fine and Performing Arts
Mississippi University for Women

ESSAY CONTEST JUDGE:
Thomas Grayson Easterling, III
Staff Member, *The Oxford American*
(1994-2000)
Instructor, Division of Humanities
Mississippi University for Women

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(Yale Series of Younger Poets, 76)
The Iron City
(University of Illinois Press)

SHORT STORY CONTEST JUDGE:
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(University of Missouri Press)
Mercury Man
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COVER ART
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Chalk Pastel/Collage

Margaret "Blunt" Montgomery (Pass Christian)
She plans to attend The University of the South in the fall. Her personal philosophy is, "We must all fear evil men, but there is another kind of evil which we must fear most and that is the indifference of good men."

Jack Neldon (Glen Allan)
A junior, Jack plans to study engineering at the United States Military Academy. His favorite writer is John Grisham and he has been influenced by the lyrics of Kid Rock.

Bethany Nickerson (Aberdeen)
Bethany is a senior and plans to attend Brigham Young University and major in architecture. She is inspired by the works of Van Gogh and Degas.

Samantha Pettit (Vanceleave)
A senior, Samantha's writing has been influenced by Wally Lamb, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Sebold. Her high school experience can be summed up in the lyrics, "I journey through the desert of the mind with no hope."

Susan Rankin (Bogue Chitto)
Susan plans to attend Boston University in the fall. Her favorite author is Elizabeth Spencer. She lives by the words of Eudora Welty, "A sheltered life can be a daring life, for all serious daring starts from within."

Thomas Richardson (Columbus)
Thomas is interested in studying public policy and international affairs, and his personal philosophy echoes the Rolling Stones: "You can't always get what you want." He admires the photography of Eudora Welty and Birney Imes.

Mitchell Robinson (Madison)
Next fall, Mitchell will attend the University of the South. A book that has influenced his writing is *Uncle Tom's Children*. His personal statement is Ken Kesey's, "Always stay in your own movie."

William Rosenblatt (Fort Adams)
William plans to attend Furman University in the fall. C.S. Lewis is the writer who has most influenced his writing and his favorite band is Radiohead.

Gina Sabbatini (Clarksdale)
Gina plans to attend St. Louis University. A book that has inspired her is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Her personal quotation is, "The aim of life is to live, and to live means to be aware, joyously, drunkenly, serenely, divinely aware."

Joshua Swan (Purvis)
A senior, Joshua plans to attend Ole Miss and major in pharmacy. His personal quotation is, "I am as all these men, who cry upon their gods and are not heard, or are not heeded. Perchance the gods have need of help themselves."

Phillip Taff (Jackson)
A senior, Phillip has narrowed his choice of colleges to Yale University or Rice University. Phillip's quotation on life is, "We're just dust specks on a planet particle hurling through the infinite blackness."

Rebecca Vidrine (Woodville)
Becky plans to attend Louisiana State University next fall. While her favorite authors are Ernest Hemingway and C.S. Lewis, the work that influences her the most is the *Bible*.

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Days Inn

by Josh Swan

First Place, Short Story Contest

I open the door to room 411 and see two unmade beds, a McDonald's food bag and cup on the dresser, and the nineteen-inch television blaring some crap on MTV's *Total Request Live*. This was the normal scene for me; at least they didn't spill anything. I pluck a thick, black trash bag from the shelf on the side of cart. I have a routine, you know; you have to. Otherwise, it could take twenty minutes to clean a room. And when you have twelve rooms before the first cigarette break, those minutes add up.

Thinking of a cigarette break reminds me to get a piece from the half-empty sheet of Nicorette gum in my shirt pocket. Of course it's more expensive than Marlboros, but it gets me through twelve rooms every morning. I empty the trash bag in the bathroom first; that way it goes straight to the bottom. There's nothing creepier than what people throw away in the bathroom. I remember some three or four years ago, Carla Henson found a little piece of a pinky finger sitting right on top. Must have been them teenage hoodlums doing drugs and getting crazy. The rich people stay up on Hillsdale Road, at the Starchman Inn, but their crazy kids come party down here, at the good old Days Inn. Well, that's just ironic, isn't it, "Days." You'd think they'd call it the "Nights Inn" or something to that effect, seeing as most of the time you spend in a hotel is at night anyways. I mentioned it to Mr. Winters, the manager, one time, but he just laughed. "Not much of an advertising expert, are you?" he said. Then he jabbered something about people associating light with happy and dark with dreary. I guess that was the nice way of saying that I'm better off down here cleaning up after people and not making important decisions like naming things.

I tie off the trash bag and throw it in the back bin of the cart. Now it's time for the towels and sheets. Towels aren't that bad; usually they're damp, and sometimes the women

leave makeup stains on them, but the sheets! I know that you've been to a hotel before, and my advice would be to bring a sleeping bag. Now, of course, I'm playing; I would get fired for saying something like that. But we don't have to wash the comforter, so remember that.

My cart is kind of like a rolling office. I've got the trash bin on back, the dirty hamper in the middle, and an assortment of fresh towels and sheets tucked away on the sides. There's even this apron-looking thing that's got all of my cleaning supplies right up front. Yep, I'm doing well; a regular business tycoon, I am. My office has about a hundred windows, fifty doors, and more staff than I can keep up with. I'll quit joking around now, because it's time to make the

sheets. And this, my friend, is a task that takes full concentration. The fitted sheet is the problem. A full-sized bed is a little easier than one of these queen-sized beds, but the technique is the same.

You might assume that the rooms are clean when you check in, but I'll let you in on a secret. We clean just like a twelve-year-old kid doing chores for Momma. If you can't look at it and know it's dirty, we aren't going to clean it. I look around one last time for any visible signs of neglect before I close the heavy door. The engraved, golden

plate reflects the hall lights as it comes to rest. I can hear Chris vacuuming down the hall towards my left. He does the hall carpet, then the rooms; that's his job.

I run through basically the same routine until I get to room 423. That's the end of my morning shift, and that means break time. Break time is an important part of any job. It's the fifteen minutes every three or four hours that you can relax and reflect on just how bad your day has been. Without this time, you might actually get through the day without a chance to complain over a gravel ashtray while you suck down two cowboy killers. And I know that can't be

“
My cart is kind of like a rolling office.
I've got the trash bin on back, the
dirty hamper in the middle, and an
assortment of fresh towels and sheets
tucked away on the sides.
”

healthy for you. For fifteen minutes I get to take off the cellophane gloves and forget about soggy towels and messy sheets. I always run by the bathroom on the way out because Ms. Amy Alexander always takes her breaks about the same time as me. She works the front desk; you know how it is, one of those pretty faces and a chest that fills out that striped button-up shirt they make her wear. I try to look real nice for her. I even wipe my face with a wet paper towel to make sure I don't have sweat beads around my hairline. Ms. Amy makes the morning drag out with anticipation; I just wait to look at her dark brown hair and honey eyes.

When break is over, I get back up on the elevator with my traveling office. This time I press the 3rd floor button instead of four. Although it's a different floor, the room numbers are the same. I open the heavy door, and the engraved, golden 311 plate reflects the fluorescent lights from the hall. The door slams against the stop, revealing two unmade beds and a puddle of half-melted ice cream in front of the television. That's weird because the guests should have checked out by eleven this morning and that ice cream should be a lukewarm puddle by now; it must be all of those preservatives they add to things nowadays. Of course, the floors are Chris's job, so it's on to the bathroom trash for me.

I open the bathroom door, but this bathroom doesn't look like all of the other ones here at the Days Inn. This one has a three-year-old kid. I've always thought that the crazy things people leave behind are supposed to be in the trash-

can, not standing on the floor crying. "Hey, buddy, where's your mom?" Saying nothing in reply, the kid just gives me a blank stare and removes his hands to reveal a snotty nose. I don't exactly have a family, so I'm not really a kid person; actually, I wasn't much of a kid person even when I was one, so I'm sure the communication problem is pretty obvious.

Then it strikes; I have the perfect idea. I'll just let him call his parents. I take my cell phone out of my pocket. I have one of those Nokia phones, the one that every kid over the age of twelve has; I'm sure that he knows how to operate it. "Why don't you call your mommy? She can come get you, ok?" I squat down so that I don't seem so intimidating and hold the phone close to his chest. He takes the phone in his tiny, snotty hands and then looks up at me and smiles. Alright, he was getting it! I put my hand up next to my face and made a fake phone with my thumb and pinky finger.

"Phone. Call Mommy."

"Toy?"

"No, it's a phone. Here, just tell me your number, and I'll call her for you." I reach for the phone, but the little rascal thinks I'm playing with him and turns to escape. I only wish he had stronger hands because as he turns, he loses grip of the phone. Kuplunk... It drops. My 59-dollar toy that comes with monthly payments is swimming in the toilet. I know I have a temper, and I can usually control it. But when I realize that I have to fish my phone out of a hotel toilet, I become politically incorrect. After pinning him in the corner

THE CHRIS READ AWARD FOR FICTION

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

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

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

Michael D. Goggans
Class of 1991

by the tub, I pick him up by his back belt loops. As soon as his feet leave the ground he comes alive, kicking and screaming. His white Keds sneaker kicks me in the corner of my right kneecap; I'm beginning to realize that carrying him to the front desk is going to be an adventure. Then I have another plan; I could escort him via my office. He fits quite nicely in the linen bin of my cart, and the sheets seem to brace his fall. I know I'm breaking a few laws, but I figure his parents already broke a few laws leaving him here. In the long run I'm sure they'll forgive me if I forgive them.

I walk out of room 311 en route to the front desk, but before I can reach the lobby I hear a voice call to me from down the hall. It's Chris. "Everything alright, man?" I guess the crying cart spawns some curiosity in him.

"Everything's fine with me, but there's a present for you on the floor of room 311. Have fun!" He says something in reply, but the closing elevator door muffles his words. In the long run, it's probably better that way.

As I push the crying cart through the lobby, I receive some rather interesting looks. Luckily, Ms. Alexander is behind the front desk.

"Amy, I have something to show you, and I'm not sure how you're going to take it."

"Umm, should you do that here?"

"Not that. It's a kid!" The kid sure is a fighter; he bites my hand when I try to pull him out of the bin. But I get a good grip under his arm the second time and lift him right out. "I found him in room 311 in the bathroom. I would have just cleaned him and been on my way, but I don't think I have the right chemicals for that." She just smiles at me and then kicks into "female motherly mode." She begins talking in a sweet voice and calms him down.

"I'll take care of it. We can get in touch with his parents; we have their info in the hotel registry."

I take one last look at the kid; now he is propped up on the desk with a sucker in his mouth while Amy is hacking away at her computer. My right index finger begins to throb, so I pull it out of my pocket to look at it. Damn, I have five little teeth marks going right across the first knuckle; I had forgotten about him biting me. Things seem to be under control so I figure I'll head back up to room 311 and actually clean it this time.

I open the door to room 311 and see two unmade beds and a circle of pink foam from where Chris attempted to clean the ice cream. I can't wait to tell Carla Henson what I found in the bathroom!



Thomas Richardson
"Sunset at Catfish," Silver Gelatin Print

The Kiss

finally . . .
 after wanting and waiting a
 pale pallid place
 I have left behind a
 vivid vibrant vision
 I have witnessed through this
 single solitary step
 I have seen the depths of his soul
 — a kiss —
 perfection has never known a sweeter form

Gina Sabbatini

When the Gate Falls Open

When the gate
you were leaning on
falls open
and the only thing
between you and the sun
is your own inordinate balance,
what do you do?

Brittany Hollis



Melissa Hill

"One Way to Nowhere," Silver Gelatin Print

Singer

Strumming his guitar,
he dances to the beat,
shouting how he loves his girl
and smiling broadly
as his song plays on.
When the song comes to a close,
he blinks with just one eye,
and makes me think that
his true love is nothing but
a beat.

Matthew Huber

Rainsong

I wear no rain jacket,
Bare but warm.
Let the flood wash me away
Into the gutter, into the sewers,
The disgusting filth.
I'll survive.

They wait to welcome me—
My homecoming.
Dreaming in the world of
Reality.
Damn, it hurts.
I'll survive.

Kiss Death on the lips,
Give Insanity a great bear-hug,
Envelop Chaos in my arms.
I'm home! I'm home!
Another year of stagnation.
I'll survive.

Up, in the streets,
Blind lead blind,
Pushing a door without
Turning the knob,
Trying to get out of the storm.
They'll survive.

They've been trying to get in
For the past few thousand years.
Maybe they should try another one.
Soaked to the bone...
What's there to lose?
They'll survive.

I try another door. It opens, I step in, and
Stare at the hopeless wet forms outside,
Piled against that door, still banging and
Demanding to let them in. Someday...
Until then, this is the way
They'll survive.

Ben Huang

Appearances

by Jack Neldon

It was during the last baseball game that their school would have this season that Clyde asked Jason about taking Janice Newsome to the stock car races at the county fair. Just as the opponent school hit a home run, Jason's reaction to the news came out.

"Janice? You've got to be kidding! Did you line me up with her?" Jason's heart began to beat with the adrenaline rush of a trapped animal. He looked around to see if anyone else in the dugout was listening.

Clyde grinned. "Ah, come on! The woman needs a night out, you know? She won't win any beauty contest, probably wouldn't even place. Who knows? You might have fun! Besides, she's Sally's best friend. The four of us could go together."

"That's it, isn't it?" Jason asked, "Sally won't go out with you if you don't find a date for Janice, right? Clyde didn't answer. "Right?" Jason repeated, grabbing Clyde's shoulder and forcing him to look at him.

"Something like that," Clyde mumbled. "But we'll still have a good time! Tell you what—I'll buy the tickets. What do you say? Deal?"

"Oh, all right, I'll go." Jason didn't like being railroaded into anything, but he did feel sorry for Janice. At times he had made fun of her behind her back. This was his chance to make up for it.

Clyde was beaming. "It's a short walk, about six blocks from Janice's house. She's expecting you around 6:30 Friday night. We'll meet you at the gate."

As Friday arrived Jason became nonchalant, equating the evening with cleaning the garage or studying. Although he was sure it wouldn't be the best thing in the world, nothing too bad could happen. It was just something that had to be done.

He surprised himself by whistling as he began the walk from his house to Janice's. Dressed in blue jeans and a navy short-sleeved shirt, he felt comfortable. His beat-up tennis shoes seemed molded to his feet. There was a bounce in his step as he approached Janice's grey stucco house, sprang up the steps, and rang the bell. The front door opened. The sight of Janice sent him into shock.

"Hi, Jason!" she smiled. "Right on time! We better get going. Walking might take me awhile in these shoes."

"Yeah, fine," said Jason, still reeling from Janice's appearance. Didn't she know how to dress? I can't do this! I can't be seen with her! I'll be laughed at for weeks! She was

dressed in a pink prom dress. All that was missing was the corsage, and he almost felt guilty for not bringing one. Nervously, he looked down at the porch, only to encounter two pink shoes with spiked heels. 'Why?' he asked himself. Probably because she didn't get out much and wanted to look her best. A joke! That was it! Something Clyde and Sally had set up with Janice to shake him up. She'll probably start laughing and invite him in to meet her parents while she goes upstairs to change. He waited for the laugh. It never came.

"It's a great evening for a walk, don't you think?" She grabbed his arm and almost lifted him down the steps. She was big for her age.

Jason figured this must be what hell is like: being seen with the best-dressed girl, dressed for the wrong occasion. Janice had never done this before. Normally she was a quiet shy person. How could she have dressed this way? Cars honked, and his friends waved as they drove past. He wanted to melt into the sidewalk.

Janice beamed. "You've got lots of friends, Jason! It must be nice to be so popular." Envy was in her voice.

He wanted to tell her they were honking because of her, but he didn't have the heart. "Popularity is a fading thing," he said. "Sometimes you have it, sometimes you don't. It's really not all that important."

"That's what my father keeps telling me," said Janice. "He says people have to accept you for what you are. You shouldn't try to be what you think they want you to be. True friends will like you despite your faults. Do you think he's right?" She pulled Jason a little closer, as if she might miss his answer if he mumbled it too softly.

"Yeah, I guess," he murmured.

The sidewalk ended and gave way to the gravel drive that led to the fairgrounds. The smell of cotton candy drifted in the air, and they were soon surrounded by all the sounds and sights of a running carnival. The ground was dusty from the thousands of people that had passed over it during the week. Jason looked down and noticed that Janice's shoes were no longer pink.

"Your shoes are getting dirty," he said, as he voiced his first recognition of her attire.

"That's okay," she said, flashing him a huge smile. "I'm enjoying myself. I don't even care if my dress gets ruined." She glanced at the line of people waiting for the bumper cars.

"Jason! Janice! Over here!" Clyde's voice cut through the din of shouts and laughter coming from the carousel and Ferris wheel.

Jason turned and saw Sally aiming a cork gun at some moving targets at a booth beside the race track as Clyde approached.

"Right on time!" Clyde gave Jason a wink. "You look great, Janice!"

Jason couldn't believe Clyde's attitude. This mess was his entire fault.

Clyde paid for the tickets and the foursome climbed into the bleachers. The races would soon begin. Sally looked at Janice and they both laughed. Jason didn't know what was so funny.

As the cars revved up their engines as the yellow light lit up. Off they went, screaming as they raced around the oval track, the dirt flying up as they sped around each corner. The overall victory after a ferocious battle was the home-town favored driver.

The dust rose from the speeding stock cars and the dirt and grime of the bleachers had not been kind to Janice's dress.

Clyde and Sally went their way, while Jason walked Janice home. If it hadn't been for the dress, Jason would have enjoyed himself. Janice had a personality that shined. He liked her, but—"I'm sorry about your dress. Maybe your mom can have it cleaned, make it look as good as new." They climbed the steps to her front porch.

Janice turned at the door, and took his hand. "The dress isn't important. Listen. I know it was the wrong thing to wear. I wore it to see how you would react. If I embarrassed you, or made you sorry you took me out, I apologize. I had to see if Dad was right. I wanted to know if you were someone who could accept me as I am. Sometimes I do crazy things just for the fun of it. I'm not the best-looking girl around, but I'm not stupid. I took a chance with you, hoping you'd take a chance with me." Her blue eyes sparkled in the moonlight.

Jason felt numb. "You knew the dress wasn't appropriate?"

"That's right."

"You didn't care what other people thought?"

"Nope."

Jason's mind was reeling. Maybe Janice and her dad were right. Too many people cared about what other people thought. Perhaps it was time to be an individual.

"Janice, I..."

"What, Jason?"

"I want to see you again. How about we see a movie tomorrow night?"

Janice leaned forward and gave him a quick kiss. "I'd love that! Call me!" she said as she disappeared inside the house.

Jason started walking home, a bounce in his step. He surprised himself by whistling.



Melissa Hill

"God Was in the TV," Silver Gelatin Print

Summer, Winter

In the hottest weeks of my thirteenth year
I'd ride the twenty miles
To see her each and every day
Laid out silent on the bed
In and out
In and out
Each labored breath more shallow than the last
I wondered how she'd lived this long
No words to permeate the air
Too weak for talk
I'd hold her hand and sing her songs
In hopes that she would hear me
And know that I was there
So strange it was to me
In the belly of that scorching summer
To see my only grandmother
Freezing in the winter of her life

Samantha Pettit



Gina Sabbatini
"New Born Hands," Graphite
 First Place, Art Contest

Savannah, Georgia

His hands are gray from graphite
 Sketching the portrait of paying patrons
 Crisp lines, he draws the gray-scaled scenery
 The cryptic artist squints his dreary eyes
 Focusing on the task
 He seeks perfection on his curves
 Using indigent fingers to shade.
 The tranquil customers sit patiently
 The drafting completed, the framing done
 He gives the portrait away for money
 So that he may eat another day.

Jack Neldon

If I Were to See

(After Ray Young Bear)

If I were to see your radiant face,
 Shining brighter than the sun,
 I'd know quickly that it could be no one but you.
 If I were to feel your loving arms around me,
 Immersing me into your divine world,
 I'd know quickly that only you could be loving me.
 If I were to hear your glorious voice,
 Soaring over the mountains, breezing over the oceans,
 I'd know quickly that only you could be humming.
 If I were to smell the sweet fragrance of yourself,
 Paling all fragrances man has ever known,
 I'd know quickly that only you could be around.
 If you were here...
 Only if.

Preeti Kumar

Kindergarten Shoes

Barely three feet tall,
 finally we could see above the belts
 of those teachers and their nose-tipped glasses,
 Still closer to those brown loafers than we were to those
 gray hairs.

Most of us had white Velcro sneakers
 with pink lines or blue gel packs.
 Lights, lights within our heels!
 Black tar basketball courts filled with little red strobe
 lights,
 bouncing and pulsating with every jump and step.

Our parents were patient with us,
 they tried to graduate us beyond the Velcro
 into new, softer sounding, forms of shoes.
 To black laces, and blue laces
 and the short-lived white laces, which soon turned tan.

We always took a piece of our red clay playground home,
 sometimes in small sharp rocks,
 or in teaspoons of sand between our socks and the inner
 lining of
 our Kindergarten Shoes.

Josh Swan
Third Place, Poetry Contest

the trees

hopeless white
not a puff
so low, twigs can touch
weekday comic strip
symphony of deafness
the dark lumber its own shadow
thousand branches
fighting for the top
so high, yet so low
weak and naked, not a leaf
they've all fallen
defeated by truth
the tiny sprouts
new generation
what would they do
grow their own direction
the branch too traditional
restraining future, clinging past
new leaves are old leaves
the only leaves are no leaves
cut trees down
the sky descends
it is only nature

cut the dull
razor-sharp
bleed bright gold
so blinding
cannot look away
the cold is warmed
sprouts are growing
new direction
old disapprovals
sprouts grow into leaves
they do not heed
branches sew
the incision seals
the warmth is chilled
helpless white
not a puff
leaves wither and fall
old direction
new leaves are old leaves
the only leaves are no leaves
cut trees down
the sky descends
it is only nature

Ben Huang

Melissa Hill

*"Swamp Thing," Silver Gelatin Print
Honorable Mention, Art Contest*



Vocare

by Margaret Montgomery

Winston Ramsey prayed for a subtle stop as his tiny white marshmallow of a car eased up the broken driveway. The scrape of 1986 bumper on 1926 concrete made him cringe as his mud-splattered Toyota Camry surrendered. His grandfather's felt hat, worn and ragged from the saltwater he sailed on, scratched against the door frame as his top-siders sank into the swampy green grass. He kicked the door shut and walked on, lit cigarette dangling from his chapped lips. This used to be home.

The definition of solid black asphalt faded into aged cracks before dissipating into walking path gravel. Winston's sides burned as the February wind attacked his rib cage. Scanning with squinted eyes, he could vaguely recognize where the door should have been. Another five paces and he saw the fountain. Only a stub of a statue, grungy filthy water, and a few stubborn fish survived. He used to beg to feed those fish, until the house came down in ashes.

The remaining columns, hints of a seaside two-story masterpiece, were crumbling into charcoal-painted shards. The wiring of the doorbell frayed up from the brick porch and he knelt down to run his fingers across it. The colors ran into each other, melted from the flames that so greedily devoured 682 Scenic Avenue.

Winston sat down, feeling the burn of cold bricks seep into his jeans as he leaned heavily against one of the columns. He hadn't believed his roommate when he heard about the house. It was only his second year away from home at The University of Washington, and he had gotten used to the absence of southern sea air humidity and Mississippi small town gossip. He had no intentions of ever setting foot on that soil again. And then Ralph sat him down one day to tell him. Winston closed his eyes and could still smell his room, a blend of coffee, musk and freshly painted walls. Faded pictures of Bob Marley and Bob Dylan stared off into the distance, music flowing from their black and white stilled lips. Winston remembered sitting on the couch and fingering the shredded armrest where the cat that they kept a secret found fond to play with. Ralph didn't say too much, he sat there uncomfortable and jumpy in his own skin.

"Winston, my parents called me today."

Winston looked up and asked with his silent eyes what this was all really about.

"The newspaper had an article about a house burning

down in Point Cadet. It was an electrical fire and there wasn't anything the firemen could do to save the couple that lived there. I thought maybe you would know them. They lived on your street. I think the address was 682 Scenic Avenue..."

A leaf smacked Winston on his face and he jumped. It had grown dark. The sky was running quickly from the bright blue into squealing pinks and reds and even those colors were making way for the night. He had to find somewhere to sleep, and the thought of showing up at a friend's house presented too many obligations of explanations. He wanted time alone and the only other option was to sleep on the beach or in the car. He lit another cigarette and cross-eyed watched the flame shoot up and spark a cherry. The smoke ached down his throat and the sour taste of cheap tobacco filled his bruised lungs. The trunk banged as it shot up and Winston started to rummage through the roadmaps stained with coffee and powdered sugar. Tossing aside a pair of mud-soaked jeans, he took out his mildewed Boy Scout sleeping bag and slung it over his shoulder. The walk to the beach was quiet, save the crickets and frogs. All of his restless nights of staying up on the porch listening to the subtle beach symphony flooded back into his memory. He sighed and took his top-siders off, allowing his toes to sift through the cold sand. The water whispered quiet protests as he crawled into the bottom of the bag and curled into a tight mass of shivering hair and clothes, sleeping and struggling to trap in his heat.

His parents warned him of homeless people who camped on the beach. Winston and his friends spent late night early mornings throwing beer cans at the masses of human flesh slumbering on the sand and then would run away in drunken laughter, their consciences left somewhere far behind. Winston tossed and turned in his sleep, haunted by his memories of home and how it should have been, still would have been. He scraped his hands up the side of the sleeping bags, stretching his muscles that were frostbitten and numb. The air breathed salty stings of cold seawater and he groaned at the familiar chime of his watch on an empty beer can. He stood up slowly and looked out on the still glass horizon as the sun eased into view, bringing ammunition of yellow and gold. The light made him squint and he shielded his eyes from the growing glare on the water. A brown pelican swooped down and then satisfied itself with

perching on a post. Winston sat back down on the empty sleeping bag and cupped his hands to hold the heat he pushed from his lips, twice as chapped than the day before. He reached over and grabbed the beer can and in a single curve, slung it into the murky water as the sun pulled out the crystal reflection of the water in the foggy winter sky.

Winston Ramsey, Son of Ramsey Communications, heir to the throne of cell phones and great silver towers, was sleeping on the beach like a bum, homeless and hopeless. He laughed to himself. Dad must be turning in his grave.

"You WILL stay here and continue the tradition set forth by my father and his father and his father before him! I won't let my only son spend our family money so that he can go teach in some poor lower-class school. It was hard work and dedication that led our family to success and I will not let you stand in the way of our legacy. Your foolishness will not be tolerated. Family pride is the only matter here..."

His father gave that speech precisely four times before Winston decided to crank his Toyota and never look back. It was true, the business had been in the family for as long as anyone could remember, but Winston hungered for more than a corporation at his feet. While volunteering as a mentor for Point Cadet Elementary, he discovered his love for teaching children. He thought his parents would be proud of his decision to put off instant fortune for a back-breaking salary in dusty brick lay schools. Instead, his father threatened to disown him and his mother cried for the family name.

With little more than the scattered clothes he had stuffed into the trunk, Winston drove as far from Mississippi as possible and worked his way through small jobs along the way in Texas and Colorado on the journey to Washington. He stumbled through college, eventually got his degree, and began teaching at Okatobie Junior High School. He found that the smiles and laughter of the children he taught could push away his thoughts of home.

But something tugged at him when the leaves turned colors and the winds spoke softly of sailing. There was something dragging his thoughts to home, a place exiled from his memory and as best as he tried to fight it, home would not take no for an answer. So the pilgrimage began with the crank of his tired car and his heart began to seek the forgiveness that even his students could not satisfy.

A boat shuffled on the horizon and Winston shook his head. It had been eight years since he left, six since he found out about the fire, yet the first time he had come back home. Home. Home was different now. It used to be filled with morning papers, coffee makers, phone calls and rushed conversations. Now it was just a ghost of memories. He jumped up and shook his sleeping bag free of sand and

slowly made his way step by step to the house. Winston stared down at his feet until he reached grass and ultimately the driveway. His hair was ruffled and unkempt. His skin felt the stick of the air and he thought back to his days of sleeping in his car on the sides of highways.

His parents completely cut him off when he left town. With no bank accounts, Winston had no choice but to drive until he had no gas, work small odd jobs for money, and continue. He learned the brutality and kindness of strangers, the generosity and corruption of neighbors, the stares and smiles of people on the street. He saw life that, at home, was kept behind his forty-foot yacht and felt the comfortable beat of his heart and learned to be thankful that it worked one day more. He learned more on the road to school than the four years and an aged slip of diploma could ever show.

Waiting for him at the foot of the columns was an old man. Winston recognized him as Bill Jenkins, the father of the seven Jenkins boys who comprised over half of Point Cadet's population. He was examining Winston's car with furrowed brow as if he faintly remembered the look of it resting in the driveway. Winston stopped at the mailbox and leaned against it, feeling fatigued from the combination of road life and emotion that ran through his veins.

"Son, I don't know where you're from, or where you're going, but you can't stay here. This is private property. A great family lived here once and I will not tolerate the unlawful use of Ramsey ground."

Bill had always been an articulate speaker, especially for lectures to young boys who enjoyed egging neighborhood houses on Halloween. It had become almost as much of a tradition as carving a cross-eyed, one-toothed jack-o-lantern.

"I'm sorry, I'm just passing through. I work for a literary magazine and we're doing a special on 'burning the past.' I had wanted to take a picture last night, but the light wasn't right, it was too cloudy. This morning it's much better, though."

The old man coughed and shifted his weight to his left leg, unsure about the ragged young man he saw before him. He shrugged and said a mumbled curse to journalism and the regard to private property and left.

The mailbox complained with a creak and Winston stood straight and walked to his trunk to retrieve his grandfather's camera. Stepping back, he focused and took shot, capturing the mailbox and remains of his childhood in black and white.

Throwing his sleeping bag back in the trunk he reached for his keys and fingered his leather key chain and turned back to the abandoned rust-ridden mailbox. He opened the



Margaret Montgomery
"Going Home," Silver Gelatin Print

faded door and it gave way slowly. He reached his hand to the back and felt the top of the box for the familiar silhouette of the spare skeleton key. He found it taped as it usually was and scraped it down. Placing it back on his key chain, he ran to his driver's seat and muttered a soft goodbye to his charred childhood and remains of 862 Scenic Avenue. His hands reached for his last cigarette and he let it dangle limp from his lip as he slowly backed out of the driveway. Before

he slid into second gear he took a look at the key once more. Underneath a slimy film of rust was a wrapped piece of ribbon, frayed and worn to a soft scrap. He stared at the words inscribed, wiped his hands clean of the rust and drove off leaving the past suspended in the wind and early morning mists of ghosts forgiven but not forgotten. He whispered the words as his tires beat against the black serpent road.

"Welcome Home..."

That of Love Unrequited

her descent from the golden staircase
my world hurled into infinite time
ritual corsage-pinning commenced
her breath synchronized with mine

fifteen minutes then
a realm of streamers and song
the fake I.D. bought peach schnapps
bleachers dividing the throng

another swig of sweet nectar
her mouth created a honey-touched kiss
two watched with captive mirth
a moment of pure bliss

now moving sassily
the dress only enhancing desire
a slim frame under the drapes
home-made, impeccable desire

our first dance shared
only after being crowned
i in my suit
my queen in her gown

their heaven ended
feeling invincible tonight
her innocence I'd take
our audience, dark stadium lights

six searched secretly
defeated they'd return
never rendering felicity
our candle would burn

a steadily dimming flame
fifteen minutes then
not to final, final farewells
her image, never again

an ever-natural soul and corruption
one dulcet dark
irresistible enticement
two images larked
pure pleasure parted
a fancy, now caged
candle-lit nights
her face, a plastered window-pane

awaiting my Lux to be set free
memories haunt my mind
someday i'll meet you
my virgin suicide

Gina Sabbatini

Runaway Train

She gets a little nervous
At a rumble on the track;
Her palms are getting sweaty
But she'd never turn back.
She's screaming like a
madman,
Laughing at the rain,
Her neck's craned west,
Waiting for the Runaway Train.
She's a little out of touch,
A little insane,
But anything's better
Than taking the pain.
She's going to leave tonight,
No doubt.
She has to escape;
She's got to get out.
She takes one last look around
And says goodbye to the pain.
Then in a cloud of smoke and
tears
She climbs aboard the
Runaway Train.

Jessica Jennings

Thomas Richardson
"Rec. Center," Silver Gelatin Print



Sweaty #15

by Margaret Montgomery

First Place, Essay Contest

“**T**he smell of hospitals makes me sick!”

I walked through the sliding electric doors, still shining with post-game sweat, clad in cleats, a muddy softball jersey and a pair of pants big enough to hide a squeaking metal knee brace underneath. I took pride in how much dirt I tracked in. I bounced my steps a little higher just to make sure Memorial Park Hospital had a present delivered first class from home plate. I had been snatched snap out of the fourth inning by my mom. I knew something was wrong when her smile deflated as she took me by my mud-encrusted elbow out of the dugout. She didn't speak at first, just nodded to Coach and he dropped his eyes to nod back.

“Your grandfather's sick,” was all she said on the way to the car. The cheers of my high school team faded away as she cranked the engine.

All the drive over to the hospital, my mind churned. I thought of all the times I woke up on Grandpa's couch from late night B Horror movies to find him cooking breakfast. He'd bounce from the bacon to the biscuits like an Olympic track star. All the time whistling some crazy old score from his memory of afternoons driving with a half-alive radio barely hanging onto a battle tank Cadillac... “It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing... do wap do wap do wap do wap do woah.” I thought of his office as I saw the green of the softball field turn into the glow of downtown Gulfport and then to the clean show of a hospital parking garage. I thought of his tiny country veterinarian practice that seemed infected with 6th avenue toy poodles instead of West Jones County jersey cows. I remember the smile exploding softly from his round merry face every time some-

Kimberly Golden

“A Columbus Sunset,” Photograph





Hamza Barmada
"Mask," Chalk

one on two or four legs walked through those pale cigarette-yellow stained glass doors boasting that "the Doc is in."

We walked into intensive care and I saw a glimpse of him through the window. His face was a ghost and the only movement was the small slow hops the heart monitor performed for us. I stared off into the electric images that were supposed to be in my grandfather's chest. We walked into the room, rank with latex gloves and clean disposable paper garbs. I took a perch in the chair and my mom sat on the edge of his bed. I'd imagine that he sat the same way whenever he took care of her fever and to see her switch roles pained my heart. I watched her run her fingers through his snow white hair, thin and sparse on his cracked freckled scalp. I sat cradling my chin in awkward idle hands and sighed.

I remember looking down at his hands. Underneath the chemical pushing plastic vines of IVs, I could see the calloused fingertips and the scars that seemed to play connect-the-dots with his freckle speckled knuckles. Those were the same knuckles that dug into my white gold hair when I called him old. I remember that hand and I looped my finger around his like a toddler's handshake and suddenly my high school demeanor turned small and I found myself gripping his index finger hard like he was the only stability that could keep me from sinking down.

We sat there in the still room. Mom on the bed, I on the floor, both clinging desperately to a man that had always been there. And now we were slapped with midnight reports and doctor opinions, all stating methodically that he wouldn't be for much longer. As I scanned down the image of my grandfather, he seemed small. I had always

been the small one and he was the giant, but looking at this vibrant man encased in a paper gown and strung with IVs, he seemed so small. It was like he was shrinking rapidly and at any moment he might disappear completely. I looked down at his legs, now one-and-a-half feet shorter than two years before. I imagined that, if he could have talked, he would make up an outrageous war story about how he lost the legs instead of explaining that his heart was too tired to push the blood all the way down.

"I was stationed in the Pacific and this Jap came out of nowhere, ten feet tall and that's HUGE for a Jap. Well, I showed him what was what, but not before he stole my legs out from underneath me!"

When I was younger, he used to tell my friends a story about how a bullet shot off the bottom part of his left ear. He had lost it because of skin cancer, but he never turned down the opportunity to make our imaginations cringe at the thought of a shot in the ear.

Still clinging to his index finger, I heard the heart monitor slow its hopping before it fell flat to the floor. I looked up at Mom and she just stared at him, bent down to kiss his forehead and left the room before collapsing in tears to the nearest nurse. I rose on one knee and propped my head on crossed arms on the side of the bed, looking up. Rising, I kissed his hand and walked to my mom.

Before enfolding my mom in my mud-sweated jersey, I got one more look at him. A faint thought of a smile emerged and I realized that heaven didn't have a clue what was going to hit them when old Doc Huston, smelling of red clay, dachshund, and gin walks up to St. Peter's gate grinning from ear to ear-shot-ear.



The Bowler

Peculiar is the least one could say
About this party man,
Stuck in the seventies,
And never catching up with times.
With his Antebellum home,
Open windows,
Spinning fans,
Exotic plants,
And spiral stairway
Leading to the shag room,
With its yellow shag carpet on every inch.
A room which smells of incense,
And that distinct smell
Of that potent grass.
The man is a trip
Walking onto his balcony
In a cloud of smoke,
Then staring into oblivion,
While leaning on the balcony rail
Clad in his yellow robe of silk,
Cigarette lit
Hanging from his lip
And taking in deep breaths
Of silent meditation
As he ponders the meaning of life.
Then going back inside
To meet his friend
Mary Jane once again
For one more dance
Before he goes,
Bellbottoms and all,
To the bowling alley.

Watson Lamb

Bethany Nickerson
"Mother's Flowers," Acrylic
Second Place, Art Contest

Cookies & Half-Smoked Cigarettes

by Samantha Pettit

Third Place, Essay Contest

Back in 1993, before the world became complicated, there were simple pleasures, like my neighbor Mrs. Jack's cookies. She made the dough from scratch and rolled the chocolate chips in by hand. What more could an eight-year-old be looking for in a cookie? Sometimes in the summertime she would take two of her wonderful desserts and smush ice cream between them, making perfect cookie sandwiches. I would always peel the top cookie off and eat it first, licking melting vanilla ice cream off the edges of the remaining cookie. That was the best way to make those last. And the summer after second grade, Mrs. Jack promised me she'd be the neighborhood's kickball pitcher and faithfully served at every game. She would come down the road with a little red kerchief tied around her graying hair and her huge sunglasses on, complete with her Keds and a cigarette dangling from her lips. She'd tap her foot in anticipation and toss our half-deflated rubber kickball from hand to hand as each kid took his turn "at bat." Nobody I've ever seen could toss a kickball as straight as Mrs. Jack could.

No one really knew her name. My best friend Kelly, who lived two houses down from me, called her Mrs. Jack one day when we were discussing her husband, Mr. Jack, who cut grass for a lot of neighborhood houses. So the name stuck. She never seemed to mind being called Mrs. Jack, and she never offered up her real name to any of us kids, so we went by what we knew. I remember asking her one day why she didn't just tell everyone her real name. She replied, "Kid, it don't matter what they call you; you're still just you. Don't sweat the small things; life ain't long, so

make the most of it."

Aside from her superb kickball skills and her divine culinary abilities, Mrs. Jack had the finest garden I'd ever laid eyes on. Multitudinous flowers ran rampant over her old wooden fence, blossoming with color and overflowing into our backyard. My favorite was always the wisteria vine, which peeked over the far left edge of our backyard fence. Laden with purple blooms, the wisteria hung like full bundles of grapes and filled the air with a sweet and wonderful scent. Mrs. Jack's love of her garden paralleled, if not exceeded, her love of us neighborhood kids. Each carefully planted row of flowers was tended with utmost care, daily checked for weed infestation, and sheltered from all harsh weather, not to mention watered so that each tiny bud would have just the right amount of moisture to grow. And grow they did. She held onto those flowers and us like her life depended on it.

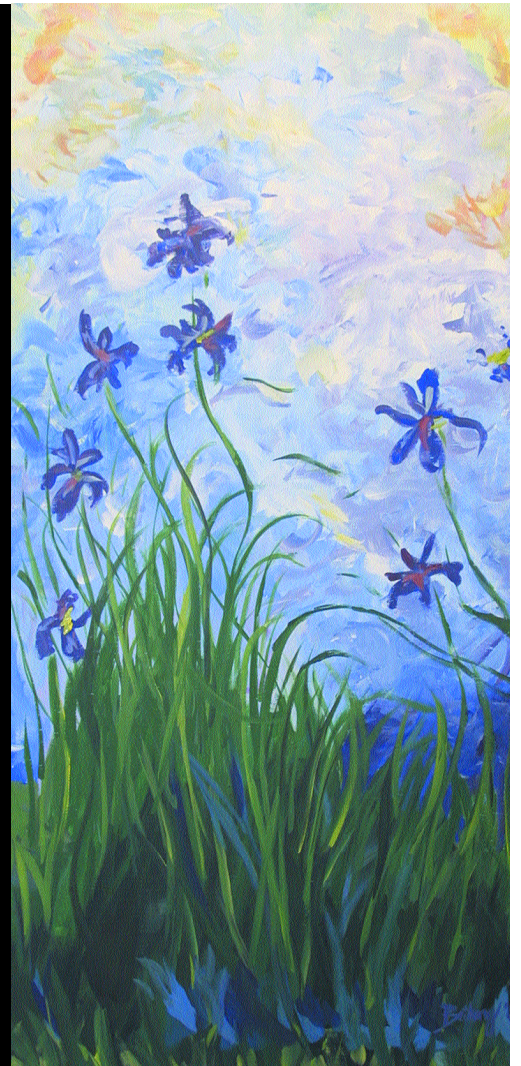
It was a beautiful July day when Mrs. Jack offered for us to come play kickball in her backyard. The new girls' softball team was using the old baseball field, where we usually played, and we had nowhere else to go. So we tramped off to Mrs. Jack's, kickball in hand, to play a game. It was the extraordinary collision of two worlds for Mrs. Jack that day, as we played among her petunias and azaleas, and she pitched a grander game than she ever had before. We were in the middle of the fourth inning when something strange happened. Clutching her heart, Mrs. Jack fell. She hit the ground in slow motion before my eyes, the cigarette dangling from her lips falling limply onto the soft green

Kimberly Golden
"Belleza," Photograph





Eric Davenport
"Purple Rose," Colored Pencil



Bethany Nickerson
"Purple Irises," Acrylic

grass; I wanted to scream for help or look away, but I didn't. Instead, I watched as withering wisteria petals fell from their branches and dusted her light gray hair. They settled on her white t-shirt and pooled around her ankles, framing her perfect white Keds in a sea of lavender.

At eight, the concept of death is a foreign one. It simply doesn't happen, and when folks go away, they always come back. I put on my best dress for Mrs. Jack that morning and went to the funeral parlor with my mother, who had promised to take me. At the funeral, adults in stiff black outfits offered up their grievances for the family and bought twenty-dollar bouquets of flowers for decoration at the wake. To show just how sorry they were, they would say. Seeing all the tacky flowers sitting around, I wondered how Mrs. Jack had ever allowed it; she was always so meticulous and particular about her flowers, I thought to myself. She was laid out in the back room, the funeral parlor worker told my mother. So I hurried to the farthest room from the door and unconcernedly peered into the casket. She didn't look the same; her red kerchief was missing, and where was her pack of Sailems that she carried around religiously? Her fingernails, once marred by layers of garden dirt, were

scrubbed clean and polished, and her t-shirt and shorts had been replaced with a Sunday dress. I knew I too looked quite different from the usual, but in my mind, old women like Mrs. Jack were supposed to look the same forever.

At the reception, folks who halfway knew her talked about how great she had been, munching on cocktail sausages and tiny sandwiches and sighing tearfully, overly emotional, like many adults I knew. But me, I was a rock. No sir, I wasn't going to cry over something like this. I mean, she was only gone for a short while; she'd be back, right? A growl erupted from my tummy, and I realized I hadn't eaten all morning, so I walked to the food table to see what I could find to nibble on. I perused the contents of the fold-out table for a few moments, then spied a plate at the very end of the table. Cookies. Chocolate chip cookies. Overly excited at the prospect of cookies, I flew to the end of the table, certain Mrs. Jack would be there to greet me, all dressed up, and offer me one of her tasty treats. And a half-hour later, when my mother found me with a plateful of cookies, sobbing uncontrollably, she couldn't seem to understand what was wrong.

Mickey D Morning

by Susan Rankin

Honorable Mention, Essay Contest

Sunlight filtered through the big stick on advertisements on the window at the booth we were sitting at. The plastic bench seat pressed sweaty against the back of my bare legs. Daddy sat down on the other side of the table and started to pass me my breakfast. I unwrapped the yellow wax paper from the sausage biscuit as if it were a present, the most fun as the wrapping is taken off. Daddy opened my orange juice for me; I couldn't quite get the foil to come off the top yet. He shifted the paper he had picked up and handed me the comics section. The early Saturday morning air was almost as muggy as it would get for the day, so the orange juice felt wonderfully cool going down the back of my throat. I was just starting the first bite of my biscuit as Daddy was finishing his first breakfast burrito. I always got the same thing every time Daddy took me to breakfast, a sausage biscuit and orange juice. He never had to ask me, "Susan, whatta ya have?"

I stared at the comics for a bit before I gave up trying to read the little talk bubbles. Daddy would read them to me just as soon as he had finished eating all he wanted. I sat back with my biscuit in my hand and started to look around. MacDonald's at seven o'clock in the morning boasts a strange mix of people. The shift workers from the factories in Jackson and in Louisiana were just coming home and had stopped for a bite to eat with the workers for the next shift. Truckers lined the back of the dining area, their tall boots and leather hats intimidating the rest of us to the front by the playground. War veterans sat over in the smoking section. Talk of military policy and pipe tobacco wafted over the few homeless who could work up a buck to get a butter biscuit. Ladies were few

and far between. Not many could be found driving a truck with their husband or by themselves at that time, and the military section was a boy's club with the rare granddaughter along for the ride. Daddy got up to get some more of the extra strong black coffee that sat in the corner of the counter. The servers that worked the early shift knew to make the coffee strong enough that it ran almost like mud out of the pot. Truckers and factory workers had to get their strong black coffee or the occasional four-letter word was heard from the back. Daddy would just grin down into the weak coffee if that ever happened and told me not to tell Mamma what I had heard that morning at breakfast. She wouldn't like it too much if she knew that I had learned some new vocabulary. So, things like that became Daddy's and my little secret, things that we conveniently forgot were ever mentioned.

"Okay, sweetheart. Where do you want to start first?"

"Here, at *Cathy*."

Daddy was the best comics reader ever. He knew when to make it funny and when not to. He acted all the parts and made all the right motions. We had a system for the comics; first the back page, then the first page, and then the inside pages. Daddy was so good that even some of the people eating stopped talking to listen to him read me my funnies. And of course, at the end, he always tickled me. If he didn't do that, what was the point of the whole ritual?

"Want some more juice, sweetheart?"

"Yeah, and can I have another sausage biscuit?"

"You haven't finished the one you have."

"Yeah, huh. I ate the part I liked."



Phillip Taff

"Blue," Photograph

Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Kimberly Golden
"A Walk in the Park," Photograph



"You only ate the sausage."

"Right."

"No, I'll get you some more juice, but not another biscuit until you finish that one."

Of course, this upset me because what I wanted wasn't some nasty old bread, but the sausage. However, the good effects of the recent tickling did much to sooth my ruffled feathers so that I settled for just the orange juice. Daddy took pity on me and put some butter and grape jelly on my biscuit so that it would have some taste to my five-year-old mouth.

Being a child, I had the natural tendency towards a small attention span. So, about the time that half my biscuit was eaten, mostly by Daddy, I wanted to go out and play on the playground. MacDonald's had yet to renovate all their playgrounds, so all the playground equipment was still the cool stuff that gets a kid really excited. The playground had a Hamburgler tree that we could climb up and play jail in. The slide was a McFry slide and served as a great castle for Rapunzel. I was the only child that morning, so I had the whole place to myself. Daddy sat at one of the mushroom tables reading the financial section while I played George of the Jungle and Sleeping Beauty. On the mornings that were cold, we usually only stayed for about ten minutes, but during the summer and that day in particular, imagination games lasted until it got too hot or Mamma called and asked where we were.

I watched Daddy as he read the black print on the page. A child often notices things that should go unnoticed, and I could see Daddy's face become more and more serious as he read through the articles and numbers. I could hear ominous mutterings of "crashes" and "bankruptcy" coming from his

pale, chapped lips. His mood turned really sober when he pulled out his calculator and began to type in numbers. Daddy sat there in his jean shorts and sweaty t-shirt trying to figure out how to live on too little money for too much time.

I didn't know it at the time, but we were poor. Not extremely poor, and not even moderately poor. In the South, my family is called "shabby gentility"; land rich and cash poor, educated but menial. We never lacked for anything, not food, clothes, or even money. Daddy always found a way to scrape by with what we needed and sometimes even more than that. I always had presents at Christmas and some new clothes every year. It never struck me until later that, although I had new things, Daddy and Mamma did without so that I could. Subtlety was the name of the game. Not a word was ever spoken to alert me to the fact that Mamma had done without new clothes for five years. It was never mentioned that Daddy passed up on a new car, although the old one cost more to fix.

"Okay, sweetheart, time to pack it in."

"Just ten more minutes, please."

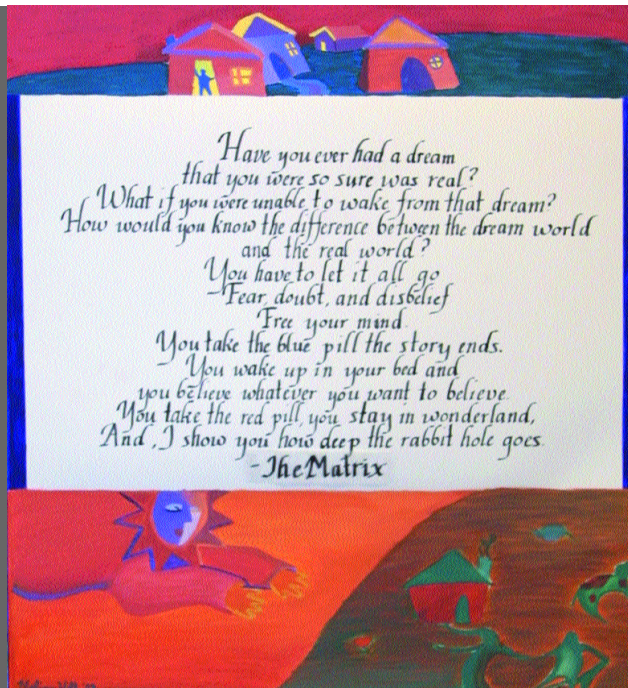
"No, Mamma just called and she wants to stop by Perkins Hardware to pick up some cord for the weed-eater."

"Okay."

Daddy went in to thank the people for the use of the paper and to say bye to the old timers. He used to joke about almost being one. He came back out to get me out of the Hamburgler tree, where I had hidden, and we climbed into our gray minivan.

"Ready to get into some mischief?" he asked.

"Yep."



Melissa Hill

"Dream," Calligraphy/Acrylic
Third Place, Art Contest

Dylan

Our thoughts, lusts, hopes and dreams
Resonate in his rhythms and rhymes.
Those that speak pervasive
Hymns of times near and afar.
We know the gypsy girl
Of that *Spanish Harlem Incident*.
She floats in our minds,
Dancing down *Highway 61*.
Keeping time to
Rainy Day Woman 12 & 35.
We've seen *Blind Willie McTell*,
Heard the *Chime of Freedom* flashing,
And with adamant reason
Realized we are not
"gonna work on *Maggie's Farm* no more"
During distraught days,
When we're *Tangled Up in Blue*
An affable affirmation
From our folk-filled friend
Offers us *Shelter From the Storm*.
His time is passing
And his end is near,
Another will come
As to whom, *One of Us Must Know*.
But with regret, I can proclaim
It Ain't Me Babe.

Mitchell Robinson



Robert Lewis

"Barriers: Man Made and Natural," Photograph
Honorable Mention, Art Contest

Penny

by Josh Swan

Third Place, Short Story Contest

“Penny, get up here!”

The words were empty, but he knew what I meant by the tone of my voice. He hopped to the pier on command; his front claws scratched the wood, and his heavy breaths were in sync with his every step. The flux of his departure rocked the boat as it crept away. Its ropes saving it from the water’s vastness, they tightened around the cleat and jerked it back with a superior force. The faded army green hull slapped the waves, but the barnacles held on tight. Those things always amazed me; they looked like a disease for metal and wood much like chicken pox on us. But they were determined, never letting go. Even when the small engine would thrust them through the water at twenty miles an hour, they would hang tough. Interesting creatures, I always thought.

Penny didn’t like to swim, but he sure liked to drink. His tongue created perfectly repeating waves inside the customized five-gallon bucket for a dog bowl. Dachshunds aren’t very tall, and he could only reach about halfway up the original bucket. A hacksaw fixed that one. That’s how we recycle in the south; we’ve been doing it for years. The Yankees keep ranting about recycle programs and putting those little triangles on everything plastic. And the whole time they’re talking about recycling, they’re still throwing away perfectly good trash. We solved that problem years ago; all you need is a backyard that you can throw stuff in. Anytime you need something new, you can customize. Rather genius, I think.

But Penny was faithful, partly because he was too fat to ever run away. Shrimp and seafood will fill a dog’s belly before you know it. He was the runt of the litter, hence the name Penny; it’s how much his previous owner thought he was worth. It gets rather boring out at the bait house, especially in the off-season. I figured he’d keep things interesting, but I was wrong. He just gets bored with me. Kind of glad he can’t talk; I’m sure he’d find some nasty things to tell me. But he’s faithful to me. He only naps by my chair, and you couldn’t drag him into someone else’s boat. But every time I hop in the old army green float tank, he’ll come running up so fast that he slides off the pier and luckily lands somewhere in the boat. Yeah, his vision is fighting the same battle as mine

is, and old age is whooping up on us old timers. He’s only twelve years old to me, but the vet that rents trailer nine says that when you convert it to “dog years,” he’s slightly older than me. I don’t see quite see how all that works out; by God, I know a *little* math. And I know that I was already an old man when I bought him. But let them know-it-alls say what they will. Penny’s good to me; we’re on the same frequency. The basics—we eat together and sleep together and both stay bored as hell in the bait house.

The shrimp boat was running late; the sun had lit the east up into a fury of red. “Red sky in the morn, sailors be warned, red sky at night, sailors delight.”

Mike’s voice was familiar and full of wisdom. Seamen always trust old wives’ tales, and usually they were more reliable than weathermen. He walked up to the bait house and grabbed the shrimp-pump hose. As he dipped the end into the live well, I flipped the switch. The pump was old and made a terrible noise when I first cranked it up. The first few minutes of water were always full of bubbles, making the water spit out of the hose instead of flowing. This old contraption wasn’t smooth like the new machines; instead, its engine roared an awful sound, and the belt squealed with every turn. It wet the walls and floor almost as much as it fed the well, but I only had to run it a few minutes every morning, so I managed. Most of the shrimp lived through the process of being sucked through a hose, and the ones that didn’t weren’t worth selling. I handed him 200 dollars, half of yesterday’s profits. That’s the way business works between honest men. No paper work, no detailed percentages. He knew that I was fair. After I took out the cost of running the well and paying the Laddner boy to scoop them for customers, I split it evenly. This way of business was a dying culture, but the sea kept men honest, and I respected that. Mike Miller was almost a spitting image of his father, Murphy. Both had scratchy brown hair and deep eye sockets. Of course, I never knew Murphy when he was in his thirties like Mike is now. He didn’t start working for me until he was well into his fifties, but even then his eyes were deep and the hair he had left around the big skin spot in the middle of his head was salty brown and rough from overexposure to

Crayon

I ate my best friend's crayon
when I was five. I
smiled with wax hanging
off my lips.
I said
"red."

Margaret Montgomery
Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Disease

Like a good case of herpes
Lying low for a while
Letting me love
Letting me smile
And then when I least expect it
You pop back up again
The heart I freely gave you
You twist and squeeze and bend
So go away, Disease
And leave my heart at the door
'Cuz the girl who cried for you yesterday
Doesn't need you anymore.

Jessica Jennings

the sun. The Millers were dedicated; even in '97 when commercial shrimpers started working the mouth of the river and times got hard, they would still shrimp all night to catch enough shrimp to fill the bottom of the well.

After all the shrimp were pumped he bought a Coke and a pack of peanut butter Nabs. Of course, the early breakfast was, in his words, "overpriced, but convenient."

I adjusted the white towel before I sat down. There were dirt stains in the shape of my rear end in the middle of the towel, and I adjusted it accordingly before I gave way. Penny was still panting heavily; it had been thirty minutes since he had endured physical activity, but he was still acting like he had run miles. He was losing that battle to old age alright, and so was I.

I sat in the recliner and picked up the remote to turn on the T.V. Early morning light filed through the screen door in columns diagonally across the floor and glared off the right edge of the screen. The aged Curtis Mathes blared the local news. The humdrum of the drink refrigerators were dulled, replaced by Barry Smith's choppy voice listing the local crimes, Clinton's latest scandal, and something about recycling. I never heard what he said about plastic and glass; instead, I focused my attention to the rest of the room. Something had changed. It was quieter. I looked down and immediately realized the change. Penny's chest was no longer bellowing and sinking into his ribs. He was perfectly still. His ears weren't adjusting to the barking dogs across the street. His tail wasn't flopping futilely against the vinyl floor. The battle was over for him. I was left there, with the sound of the pier as it mastered each wave with a gentle slap and tapped the rows of boat hulls like a mother protecting its young.

For a man, crying is a completely different feeling

than what I suppose it is for women. For women, it's an outward thing, a way to show your emotions, and, in my opinion, often overused. For me, it was something different. Something I couldn't control. It was like a river overflowing the levee after a hard rain. It started by filling my throat with what felt like cold mud—almost suffocation—and then formed a single tear, in the inner corner of each eye. For me, it was always easy to hold in, unless I had to talk to someone. Thankfully, I never had to cry for Penny; I never had to talk and let my emotions come spitting out like the water in the shrimp well.

I remember having a sharp feeling in the middle of my chest, just behind my name patch. Just like the tear, it overwhelmed me. My arm muscles clinched and filled my coverall sleeves completely. The blue fabric wrapped tightly around arms and legs, and I heard the remote crack inside my grasp. I didn't have a flash of visions about my life. Instead I saw the water slapping against the navy green hull of my boat; I saw a close-up of the barnacles hanging tough. I watched the waves rock the boat against the pier. I watched the mother clean its young of chicken pox. It rubbed one of the barnacles and broke it into a few chunks that fell and were consumed by the passing waves.

I never heard the weather that day; Barry Smith didn't get a chance to tell me how I'm supposed to recycle. I wouldn't have taken his advice anyway. I don't know why I became so upset. I knew Penny was old, but I guess it's easier to think you can lose something until you do. He was only worth a penny to his previous owner, "the runt of the litter." But I have a backyard for things like that; it's where I put trash that I will reuse one day. I like to customize old things and make something new. I hope that's where they put Penny and me.

What Used To Be

By Samantha Pettit

Second Place, Short Story Contest

Wrapping her coat tighter around her to block the icy winter gusts of wind, Donna stood at the front door, key in hand, looking down at her feet and debating whether or not she should actually go through with entering the house alone. She was a sad sight: forty-five and divorced, entrapped in a job she hated, her thin, short blonde hair shifted slightly in the passing breeze, her bright blue eyes dulled by the onslaught of stress life had dealt her. As she inserted the key into the tarnished golden doorknob of her mother's house, Donna felt a sense of dread; the day was cold, and the task at hand seemed especially overwhelming in the wake of last night's biting frost. The desire to continue into the house was small, and Donna, staving off the chill, instantly regretted agreeing to come back here alone; she imagined that even her five-by-five cubicle would be a better selection on such a day as this. Turning the key, she forced open the front door; the house emanated a musty smell, attacking her nostrils with a pungent odor and making her turn her head and emit a hoarse cough before she could compose herself and continue through the door into darkness.

Dark hallway floor was flooded with light, as the door remained wide open. A heavy breeze sucked into the entryway as the screen door banged against its hinges. Random stray pages of an old newspaper left on the hall tree fluttered

in the sudden influx of wind. Looking down, Donna stepped lightly over the bright blue stain in the middle of the worn gray carpet. Her sister Deborah had dropped the entire crate of freshly dyed Easter eggs that year, right into the middle of the then newly installed flooring, and Mom had been so furious. She went through three birch switches before Deborah was finally dismissed. Donna smiled faintly as her shadow crossed over the now faded light blue spot still remaining.

The interior was frigid; the power bill hadn't been paid since the house had suddenly become vacant just six months before. "There's absolutely no reason for trying to keep the property intact," her sister Ronnie had argued three weeks ago when the seven Crowley children had met to discuss what they should do about their widowed, now deceased, mother's estate. "I think we should just divide the remaining things in her house among ourselves and sell the land. It is zoned as commercial property now; do you know how much money we could make off just that one little plot of land?"

"That's right," her older brother Robert had agreed. "It's getting so close to Christmas, and everyone could use the extra money; I know I could put it to good use."

It was just another conflict of interest between herself and her six brothers and sisters; after their father had died



Kimberly Golden

"Occasions," Silver Gelatin Print

two years ago, it had been a constant battle between herself and her siblings to keep the things that meant the most to her still in the family. It was as if her own flesh and blood were interested only in profit and utility. Sure, the old antique china in the dining room wasn't in the best condition or of much use, but it was a family heirloom. Authentic Wedgwood pieces, decked with dark blue flowers, each plate, saucer, and cup had been used every Thanksgiving since before she was born. That china was part of her memories, part of her past. Wasn't it worth it to keep possession of the aged, cracked dishes, rather than auction them off or give them away to someone who didn't even care anything about them?

It had been a long and tedious attempt to convince her siblings to leave her parents' things alone, but in the end, the battle had been lost. Now, in the tenebrous inside of what used to be home so many years ago, Donna, as official named caretaker of the estate, pulled out the yellow legal pad she had brought with her. The lined pages looked garish in the slats of light filtering through the shuttered windows, waiting to be filled with all the items that had meant the most to her mother. Beginning to inventory, she wandered around the house, taking note of all the things that had been left behind. She began in the cavernous living room, where her mother's beloved collection of celebrity porcelain figurines and snow globes filled with bright metropolitan scenes remained perched on the shelf above the couch, each tiny work of art covered in a thick layer of dust. Donna's mother had always wanted to pay a visit to New York, see the sights; she was a city gal at heart.

"Oh, come on! You know you want it!" Donna had pleaded, fourteen and bright-eyed. "We don't have the money for me to go out buying myself things like that, Donna, you know that!" her mother had reprimanded, frowning slightly. The wintry glass orb glistened in the fluorescence of the department store lighting, the city skyline in the center frozen inside a perfect world. It had reappeared under the Christmas tree that year, all polished and glistening with tiny faux snowflakes. Donna had spent three-fourths of her savings on the tiny trinket; it was worth every penny to see her mother, teary-eyed and smiling, softly say, "It's the best Christmas gift ever!"

Moving away from the trinket shelf, blinking back tears, Donna hurriedly tried to occupy herself with other things; her eyes finally rested on the grandfather clock in the corner, which was still ticking, miraculously enough, keeping the time just like always. It had been an anniversary gift to her parents from all her brothers and sisters, back before the squabbling had begun. Mom had polished its shiny cherry

finish religiously each Sunday after church, her designated cleaning time, softly humming hymns to the rhythm of her swipes across its surface. And to think that now, in the midst of such a loss, Donna's siblings, who had united to buy such a grand gift, were now all fighting over it like babies.

In the bedrooms, all the beds were still neatly made, just as Donna had left them the day before the wake. Not a trace of a wrinkle could be found on any of the three beds, not a single misplaced pillow. So different from her childhood, Donna could recall the days when three beds weren't enough; with nine heads that needed a place to rest each night, four beds were barely enough to get by. Crammed in with two of her sisters, Donna recalled her mother's sweet Southern lullabies and once upon a times, thinking wistfully of childhood, back when things were simpler.

Blowing stray hairs out of her eyes, Donna moved on. All through the house, the lamps sat dormant and unlit, the kitchen pots and pans were scrubbed clean and tucked neatly away in their respective places under the sink and in the cabinet by the stove—everything was as it should have been. Scribbling hurried notes about furniture and appliances, clothing and jewelry, Donna hurried in the trenchant cold of the house to account for everything, wanting this task to be over with as quickly as possible.

Finally done, she shoved her old ink pen with the chewed-up top back into her coat pocket. Looking around the living room one last time, she spied a picture sitting on the mantle, a picture of all of her brothers and sisters when they were children with their parents. Picking it up gingerly and wiping dust from the grimy glass, she smiled at the frame's contents, thinking that maybe for a moment she could recall that day, a day when her mother would have belted out, "Kids! Picture!", a day when they would have reluctantly lined up for a freeze-frame of their life, a moment that would be frozen in time forever. It was bitter-sweet, seeing all of her siblings' stoic faces entrapped in the black and white photograph, her mother's façade so silent and serene. Seeing her now aged reflection in the dirty glass of the old frame, Donna remembered how happy her now quarreling family used to be and thought of her mother, now gone forever. Shoving the tiny weathered photograph in its wooden frame inside her coat pocket, Donna pushed out into the glaring frost of winter, contemplating her next move in the continuing battle to preserve her family's history. She knew that all the precious memories stored safely away for now inside the house simply could not disappear forever, and glancing back only once, Donna shut the door firmly behind her one last time.

Thomas Richardson
"Downtown," Silver Gelatin Print



Yellow Days

Cricket song rises up to meet the falling night;
A red sun bleeds into the purple clouds,
signaling the oncoming dark hours.
Faded grass brushes across my cheek.
The thick sweet perfume of azaleas whispers across my
nose,
hiding the pungent scent of freshly cut grass.
Dusty dogs lie next to me, heating my hot body.
The last of the day's dragonflies flit from flower to flower.
Twilight falls fast, just in time to meet the tail of the day.
The light creeps away, shadows fly to fill the spaces left
behind.
Stars wink out to twinkle, while the moon burns brighter
in the dusk.
All day it had been a pale forecast of the hours ahead.
My arms lie flat, nurtured by the soft ground.
My feet slowly push the swing; forward, back, forward,
back;
the creaking keeping time to the rhythm of crickets.
Humid strands of hair fall over my face, pushed by a tiny
breath of air.
Heat from the day sits on the lawn like an old man, fat
with breath.
Daylilies pull up their petals, protection from the dreams
of shadows.
Summer came in today.

Susan Rankin

Holy

With tattered jeans and faint memories of the days before,
I stumble into the back pew of the holy church.
The evasive smell of two-day-old drinking
escapes during the Old Testament reading.
The yellow crusted pages stick together
as clumsy fingers strain to find pages
written by men who no longer breathe.
A bearded man in a dress speaks of *Gospel*
but all I hear are words rising and falling into my ears
and out of my memory like a stream of letters and sounds.
But the incense screams for my attention.
A boy swings the smoke like a yo-yo
and the smell burns at my nostrils
as the cross-dressing man yells for my salvation.
Barely walking, I receive the body of a man who died for
me
But I far more enjoyed his blood.
And as I fall out of those gothic doors of the church
The demanding smell of incense on my shirt
Reminds me that the bearded man spoke of the word
Love.

Margaret Montgomery

Small Red Heart

I drew a small red heart
On a piece of paper yesterday
I threw it to the wind
And it

whirled
danced
cascaded

through the air
Just like the feeling I got
When you said
hello.

Then the wind just stopped
And the paper
fell

plunged
plummeted
to the ground

Buried in the dirt
Just like the feeling I got
Inside my heart
When you said that
There was
someone else.

I watched my heart
Once soaring with
The thought of you
Lay to rest
With the wind blown
From its sails
And I realized
How much I really do
Love you.

Kimberly Golden

The Fisher

His hands had minds of their own.
Without looking, his fingers, black with dirt
formed perfect knots on perfect lines
To keep the shabby crusted boat at dock
while polo-collared tourists bought his shrimp from the
pier.

The line of smoke from his cigarette fought upward to the
mast
and kept his attention as he folded the nets.
His arms twisted and turned as the sound flop
flop flop swish flop flop flop swish
escaped from the tiny woven squares in slime green
material.

His eyes never looked up.

I felt almost unworthy buying his catch.
He thought less of the consumers every day
because every day they thought less of him.
They didn't see the training in the skill of his fingertips
or the agility of his boat skipping wave to wave,
somehow maintaining under the worst of storms.
They didn't see the gleam in his eye when he left the
harbor
or hear his shouts to his crew.
The perfect businessman, though clad in ancient boots and
jeans.
The tourists didn't see his love of the ocean.

But I did.
And as I walked away, pound for pound of his hard-earned
catch,
I felt proud and nodded to him, like seafaring folk do
And bounded to my bow for another day's sail.

Margaret Montgomery
Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

The B-side

by Mitchell Robinson

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

B lurring his vision into a coalescence of fiery pinks, oranges, and yellows, Ben gazed into the psychedelic painting of Hendrix across the store as he rapped his fingers to the pumping rhythm of the Grateful Dead's *Franklin's Tower*. While the sweet smoke of Nag Champa ascended into his sight, a bell rang behind him, breaking his gazing glare, while he contemplated whether to acknowledge who was coming into the store. Supposing who might turn the corner, Ben guessed right, being it was another after-school brat out to spend daddy's money on the newest Nelly album or whatever was topping the charts that week. Realizing there was no need for acknowledgment, he turned his attention back across the store. He hadn't sold a worthy album in six hours and figured, by the end of the day, he would probably break his record of the longest period of crap album sales.

For nine months, Ben had been working at Uncle Buck's Records. His first weeks there, he spent his time traveling through the aisles, striking up debates and conversations with the clientele, searching for music elitists like himself. He would eagerly await whoever approached the counter, interested in who was buying what. Yet he had grown tired of selling the same crap everyday, tired of ringing up Linkin Park, Creed and Eminem to the predictable customer of the "TRL" music public. Although he still retained the same eagerness he had in his first weeks of work, his eagerness was now for reassurance about his predispositions with those walking toward the counter, CD in hand. Ten years ago, Counting Crow's *August and Everything After* was his favorite album, yet Ben became tinged with grimace each time this disc was pushed across the counter for him to ring up. He wondered if they were responsive to anything interesting, besides music accepted by the mainstream, eras after its release.

Taking in a deep sigh of breath, Ben filled his lungs with stale aroma of Curve cologne, as an overly pampered teen in an undersized Abercrombie shirt and homemade visor approached his counter. Ben swiveled in his chair, turning toward the CD player and inserting Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*, making a point to show no recognition of the kid's presence. In time with the military beat of Rainy Day Woman, he drummed away on the countertop of laminated postcards of Van Morrison, the Black Crowes, John Coltrane, and Led Zeppelin, and a humorous sticker reading "Music Nazi," as he relived his first Bob Dylan concert of last spring.

Breaking a customary daydream, a rash, audacious

"Hey" snapped at Ben from in front of the counter. Turning reluctantly, Ben replied, "You need something?" Puckering his lips up to blow his blond bangs out of his eyes, the kid asked if they had any Tim Reynolds. Ben immediately knew the source of the kid's interest. Like so many before him, the kid probably heard of the amazing and recondite guitarist through his collaborations with Dave Matthews Band on *Live at Luther College* and *Live at Red Rocks*, along with his studio work on the band's past five studio albums. Ben pondered telling the kid, "You know there's no singing on his albums." But it wouldn't matter. If he bought one of Reynolds' works, he would try exchanging it the next day for the new Sum 41 and would never again try to venture beyond the styles of music the mass media shoved down his throat. Ben felt bad for the kid who thought he had some new interest in underground, free form guitar music and was hoping to spend twenty bucks on some obscure album he had never heard of. With a face blank of consideration, Ben pointed the hopeless kid in the right direction.

Sinking back into his seat, Ben pulled a box of imports into his lap and rummaged through them, looking for the North Mississippi All-stars EP. At the chime of that recognizable bell, he looked up to find a surprising figure making his way into the store. Dressed in baggy corduroys and a polyester T-shirt, the shaggy-headed teen made his way toward the R's, flipping through the assortment of the Rolling Stones. Aimlessly sifting through the albums, the teen's face twitched as he admirably studied each cover in concentration. Although thrown off by his initial appearance, Ben soon realized that he has seen this type before. Basically the guy was a wannabe. He thinks he sets himself apart by engulfing himself in music that he heard was good. The reality is that this guy saw an ad about the Stones' reissuing of all their early stuff with the *Forty Licks* greatest hits album and a 40th year reunion concert. The guy knew nothing about the Stones, he only wanted their title in his CD case.

Interrupting his analysis, the guy approached the counter. "Do you have the Stones' *Exile On Main Street* reissue?" the guy asked confidently. Ben had just seen the album while sorting through the box of imports, but he was tired of selling great albums to unappreciative teens. He knew this guy would buy the record, listen to it once, decide it was too old fashioned, and tape the liner notes to his wall, as if he agreed with *Rolling Stone* magazine and had the perception to say that this album deserved to be put on a pedestal. Finding his treasured North Mississippi All-stars EP, he

pulled it out and answered the kid with a brash, "No." With a shrug of his shoulders the guy turned his back and headed out the store, the welcoming bell jingling behind him.

Ben tore off the cellophane wrapping on the disc and pulled out the liner notes. Turning around he saw the guy stick his head back in the door, signaling the bell. "You know, if you haven't listened to that All-stars EP you oughta put it on *Storm*, I think it's number five. It has the tightest jam toward the end of the song." Ben sat stoic. "Umm... Yea. Thanks," he said humbly. The bell jangled again, as the door shut, shoving a chilling breeze into the store. Ben sank back into his chair. Fixing his eyes on those of Mick Jagger on a poster across the wall, he fumbled in his pocket for his Marlboro Lights, throwing the disc on the ground. He lit up a cigarette, taking a deep drag. He exhaled, watching the smoke merge with the buzz of the silent speakers.

The Widow's Love

The gray-haired woman
Sits on the porch each evening
And sings "Amazing Grace"

Her hair rolls into a neat bun
Yellow shadows her white blouse
A long skirt covers her ankles

She doesn't speak to those who pass
Only gives a slight smile
Continues to sing the sweet melody

She lives alone in her large home
Her husband left her widowed
Years before I was born

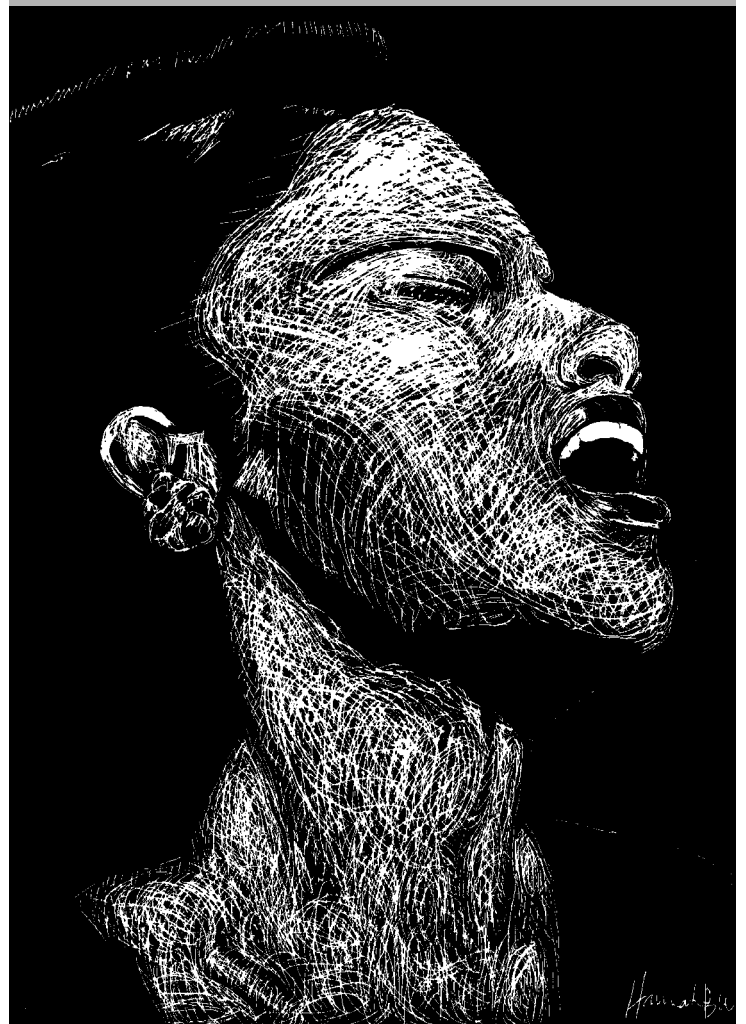
Their love was known throughout the town
Sweethearts from the time they could talk
Served the community as one

Hearts go out to her
A longing desire
Bitter from the lonely days and long nights

There's weary in her face
Coldness in her veins
And traces of blue in her eyes

Yet each day she sings the gospel
As we each wonder by thinking to ourselves
When will the Lord carry her home from pain

Alexis Banks



Hannah Burnett
"Billie," Scratchboard

A Life Worth Living

by Becky Vidrine

Second Place, Essay Contest

The sweat slid down my brow and then off my nose into the pile of rubble left from the dismantled house. We had been scraping bricks all morning. Fifty-cents a brick. The airborne mortar filled the air, so thick that I could feel the pasty texture in my mouth. The grit in my mouth only complemented the layer of dust that settled on my perspiring skin. The image of what the neighborhood could be was the only motivation that kept my hands in the monotonous pattern of scraping. Two inner-city kids helped by gathering the clean bricks and arranging them on the flat.

Last week a group of fifty stacked enough bricks to amount to three thousand dollars. Our goal was fifteen-hundred dollars. Picking up the hammer and railroad spike, I resumed breaking away the disintegrating sandy mixture. Working fast, I could clean one brick a minute, so I tried to keep my momentum up.

"Hey, what's your name?" looking up I saw Rotrecca. He was short for his age, with pained eyes. He was in the older age group, so I didn't spend much time with him, although I had heard of his blissful spirit.

"I'm Becky," I replied.

"Can I help ya'll, too?" I couldn't help but wonder why these twelve-year-old boys wanted to get pasty.

"Sure, that would be awesome," I replied and handed him a hammer and spike. He joined the other neighborhood kids and began breaking the mortar. The eagerness of those kids to help will always amaze me.

The next day we went to another part of the neighborhood. When we emerged from the van, I noticed how severely the house bruised the street appearance. Grass three feet tall surrounded the boarded doors and windows. Although the house looked bad, it didn't need to be knocked down; we were going to restore it. If we were going to make this abandonment livable, we had to start somewhere. Brady and John reached for the weed-eaters; the lawn mowers couldn't handle the massive height of the grass. I grabbed a crowbar and walked toward the boarded door. I attempted to unboard the door. The nails didn't budge, so Lizzy commenced to help. The nails began to loosen as we simultaneously jerked the board. We re-angled the crowbars and started on the next section. My legs began to burn with the resistance of the nails and my elbows throbbed

from the tension of the jerks. I began to thank God for the "meet Jesus days" as Coach Grey called our nearly fatal basketball workouts. The conditioning was paying off. The sun was being magnified through my perspiration, scorching the top of my shoulders.

"Okay, Becky, on the count of three, pull with everything you've got," Lizzy instructed. Taking a deep breath, I nodded. "One... Two... Three!" she counted.

With a jerk the door came ajar. Inside, the dust coated the floors. The sheet-rock was severely cracked, undoubtedly causing the grit. I began to have flashbacks of yesterday's dust-thickened atmosphere.

"I guess we need brooms," I suggested in Lizzy's direction as I turned toward the trailer of tools.

"And a light would probably be nice," Lizzy added.

I shuddered at the eerie atmosphere as I walked in; the windows were blocked, along with the sun and the breeze. I looked to either side of me, making sure there were no spine-tingling characters in the dark corners. Condemning myself for such faithless thoughts, I began to sweep.

The surrounding rooms were void of light, I wondered when someone last entered the home—anything could be hiding or living in here. As superstition thickened over me, I kept singing to myself "God's bigger." Mrs. Rebe, Tori, and Chezera stepped into the dust-filled air, carrying with them a dustpan and a trashbag. They gathered the large fallen pieces of sheet-rock and scooped the piles of debris that Lizzy and I had gathered. Moving into the old broken kitchen, I was volunteered to open the cabinets. Mrs. Rebe and I shrieked as I swung open each cabin with the blunt end of the broom. We anticipated a bat, rat, or at least a flying roach, but none came into sight.

As we finished the first rough cleaning job, we exited the abandonment that was to be a future home. Stepping into the yard the sight was shocking; it was void of prairie grass, fallen branches and overgrown bushes. The holey rusted gutters were being ripped off. In just three hours the yard, house and rotten porch were all either cleaned or torn down. The early evening breeze was gratifying against my sweat-dampened clothes. As I noticed the fulfilled expressions on each person's face, I reflected on the kids who were all so eager to help, and smiled. Sweat slid down the spine of my back. I finally understood true joy.

Hotel Clerk

Oh, hotel clerk,
Your superficial smile greets me
Before your coffee-stale breath
Engulfs my nose.
With unkempt hair and
And an excuse for a presentable tie
Over a partially tucked shirt,
You know my fears of *No Vacancy*
Before the unsure request
Escapes my mouth.
You flash your well-versed,
Easily learnt skills
As you slap the keyboard,
Revealing how diligent you work
Striving to find me a room.
Filling up with giddy glee
You realize my night's fate
Lies at your fingers' tips.
With strained eyes and pursed lips
You study your computer screen,
Acting as if your job requires concepts
Beyond the click of a mouse.
Turning away my sweet talk
With an ephemeral laugh,
You imply how earnest
The hotel business is.

Mitchell Robinson

First Place, Poetry Contest

Cousin Bonnie

Look at me
Looking at you.
See your reflection in my eye.
See how your nose tilts to the left,
Only slightly,
Enough to make you interesting.
Your forehead, sitting like a grandfather, smiles at me.
Crows have nested in the corners of your eye;
Your cheeks hang like curtains, ready to draw back in a
grin.
Delicate spider webs of veins cross the eyelid,
trace a path to the mouth.
Antique pearls peek out from faded roses blooming in
your lips,
thorns have long since dropped off.
Gone is the dew.
Parchment now wraps your bones.
Walk slightly now, not too heavy.
You might break.

Susan Rankin

Second Place, Poetry Contest

Raymond

His inviting face and childish grin pull me in
as I stare at his beer-soaked red eyes,
sunken in sun-dried skin.
Brick-broken hands shake
the virgin skin of my palms
while he confesses that
he likes to help people.
His overworked and cut arms
sport a tattoo of a skull with a cowboy hat
and a mean attitude that he doesn't possess.
Pulling away from my exhausted truck
he stares down Hwy. 25
as if he hasn't traveled it everyday.
Offering me a cold one,
trying to hold back his joy
as he realizes he's chalked up
another good deed.

Mitchell Robinson

Honorable Mention, Poetry Contest

Blue Gingham

by Sara Johnson

Honorable Mention, Short Story Contest

It was Thursday. Emily walked down the narrow halls of Turner Elementary School once again on her way to Mrs. Nicholson's tutorial session. A day's worth of books pulled at her seventeen-year-old back and she regretted accepting the tutoring job for the fifth year. It was her senior year, the year she was supposed to relax.

TES' hallways were covered in artwork from the elementary children. Red, orange and brown leaves were tacked to the wall, bearing the names of the eight-year-old artists. Few children were still at school. The only reasons to stay were tutorials or your parents forgetting to pick you up. Emily had always stayed. Her father worked until five-thirty. She sat in the library until four-thirty when it closed. After that, she would wander the halls. Emily first learned about tutoring from wandering the halls in eighth grade. She had made straight A's all through school, everything came easy for her. Mrs. Nicholson said she would be a wonderful tutor. She had the brains for it, but not the patience.

Emily walked into the small classroom and set her books on the table. The dingy room was poorly lit and filled with old desks, the kind the last kid in class prayed he wouldn't get. There was only one student in the classroom. Mrs. Nicholson was helping him. She had probably been helping the boy for an hour, but you could never tell. She was very patient, explaining how to solve for x or factor some equation as many as ten times.

Emily liked the days when there was only one student. She didn't have to bother with trying to sound patient or understanding. She heard the call of *1984* and quietly reached for her book bag. The room was quieter than usual and she quickly became lost in the novel. A tap on the shoulder brought her back from her fictional world. An awkward creature with freckles and long, strawberry-blonde hair stood before her. Her piercing blue eyes, framed by long eyelashes, matched her well-worn gingham dress.

"Yes?"

"Can you help me?"

Annoyed, Emily closed her book and led the little girl to a nearby desk.

"What's your name?"

"Marie."

"What do you need help in?"

The girl answered too softly for Emily to hear what she said, and she had to repeat herself.

"A book report for English."

Helping children with reports was worse than anything. They were slow and didn't really try. Most were only there because their teachers made them. If they tried harder, Emily was sure they could do better.

"What do you have to read?"

The girl pulled a green book from her Pepto-Bismol-pink book bag.

"*Jane Eyre*."

Emily rolled her eyes, making sure no one saw. The girl was too young for the book. She began constructing a list of easier books in her mind as she opened to the first page.

"Have you read it yet?"

"No."

"When's it due?"

"Three weeks."

"Don't you think something easier would be better? What about *A Wrinkle in Time*?"

"I want to read this."

"Fine."

Emily was aggravated. She didn't have time to waste on stubborn eleven-year-olds who wouldn't take her advice.

"What do you need help with?"

"The words. I don't know a lot of them."

"Well, I'll go get a dictionary."

Emily walked across the hall to the library and found the largest dictionary they had. She was sure the book itself would discourage Marie.

"Here."

She dropped the book on the desk, just light enough to not seem rude.

"We'll start from the first, and every word you don't know you'll look up."

Marie began reading aloud, but stopped after a few

lines. She reached for the massive book.

"Somber. Dull, dusky, somewhat dark, gloomy."

She began reading again, very slowly, reaching for the dictionary every other line. She was adamant; Emily had to give her that. For an hour they sat, Marie reading and looking up words. Emily stared into space most of the time, waiting for the moment she decided to give up.

"It's five-thirty. I've gotta go now."

"Can I stay?"

"No. The school's about the close."

"How will I read the book?"

She was actually going to read the whole book. Emily wasn't sure what to say.

"I need a dictionary to read the book."

"Don't your parents have one at home?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, I think I have a smaller one in my book bag."

Emily walked across the room to get her book bag, still amazed at the girl's persistence. She found her old, worn dictionary from junior high in the front pouch.

"Here."

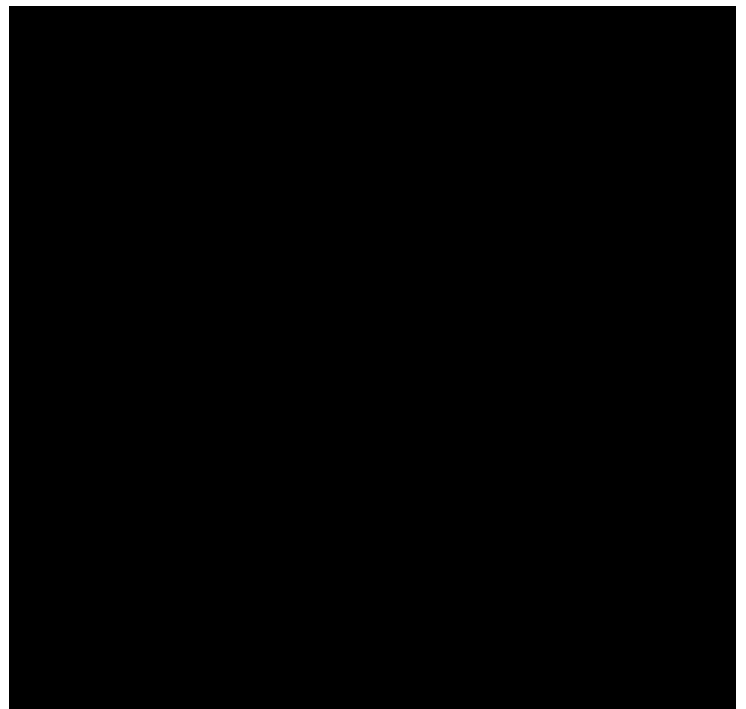
"Really?"

"Yeah, sure—whatever."

"Thanks."

"No problem."

The small girl gathered her books and placed them in the pink book bag. She left the room with a whispered good-bye. Emily picked her books up as soon as Marie had left. She walked out of the room and to her car. On the road she passed a girl in blue gingham, reading as she walked. There were no houses for at least two miles.



Thomas Richardson

"Keep Out," Silver Gelatin Print

Barbeque

by William Rosenblatt

I didn't know they were flammable. Twice before I had lined them up single file and herded them down the chute, but today I was ready for lunch. Sleep was still wrestling my eyelids when I walked down to the field early that morning. The day seemed old to the real workingmen, but they said I was still in the making. I hopped the fence, shook sweaty hands, and looked around for the ice chest.

The chute was about thirty-five feet long with old boards tacked up the sides. At the head was "the squeeze" that a pot-bellied man activated to violently cradle the cow's abdomen while the doctor did his duties. The veterinarian came about three times a year to give our cows shots and play in the manure. He was a lively man with arms of steel and a voice that was constantly exercised. His wit kept our minds off of the abusive sun and eased the thought of a distant lunch. Tyrone, a man who could toss his own pickup truck around, always found a spot by me on the rail looking down on the cows' backs. He talked about his new girlfriends and pistols and all of the things testosterone-induced beings spoke of in Fort Adams, Mississippi. He tossed me a hotshot and said, "Let's have some fun."

I walked to the far end of the chute to gather up all of the stupefied cows and headed them single file into the long narrow path. I closed the gate and rushed back to my position. I perched myself back on the rail and watched the beasts fumble in with terror in their eyes. My father always told me to use moderation in all things, but I never let that apply to my electrocuting skills. Tyrone and I zapped the

cows like hornets when one was holding up the line. The doctor was moving quickly today, and the end of the herd was approaching. In an effort to knock off early, one of the workers decided to go ahead and spray the highly flammable flea medicine on the rest of the cows' backs.

With only a few more cows left, my stomach reminded me of my neglect, and Number 187 was going to keep me on that fence for as long as she wanted to. As I strategically approached her with my electric wand, she began to dig further in with her heels. Knowing that she wouldn't give up, I gave her one long zap, and the cow shot up into flames. "Sweet Lord in heaven!" was the commanding response from the crowd, and I didn't know what to do. After the cow realized that she was on fire, she screamed to the top of her lungs. I tried to think fast. Water was nowhere to be found. When all else failed, Tyrone ripped his shirt off and began to suffocate the flames.

After the fury was controlled, laughter unloaded. For the rest of the day, sarcastic fear was delivered towards my hotshot and me, and I was left speechless for hours. As I left for lunch, I received a slap on the back from everyone present. In my own suffering, I did lighten the worries of many bystanders that morning. Many of those men hadn't seen laughter in years, but fervently welcomed its approach. After that day I was implanted with a humorous memory every time I looked at that long cattle chute. And Number 187 was left with a new tattoo.

Contributors' Notes

Alexis Banks (Ocean Springs)

Alexis, a senior, plans to attend the University of Southern Alabama to study both nursing and business. She is influenced by the *Bible*.

Hamza Barmada (Long Beach)

While Hamza is not sure of a major, he plans to attend Wabash College next fall.

Hannah Burnett (Ocean Springs)

A junior, Hannah plans to attend the University of California at Berkeley and major in anthropology. Her favorite artist is Diego Rivera.

Orlando Croft (Hernando)

Orlando is inspired by the works of Langston Hughes, and his favorite book is *Think Big* by Ben Carson.

Eric Davenport (Greenville)

Eric, a junior, plans to major in biological sciences in college; his personal philosophy is, "Go with the flow without compromising along the way."

Kimberly Golden (Eupora)

Kimberly's favorite saying is, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger." She plans to attend George Washington University and pursue a degree in international relations.

Melissa Hill (Poplarville)

Among Melissa's inspirations are the writings of Nietzsche and Douglas Adams. Her favorite quotation is, "Without music, life would be a mistake."

Brittany Hollis (Brandon)

A junior, Brittany's favorite author is Michael Crichton.

Ben Huang (Greenwood)

Inspired by the works of Heinlein and the book *Starship Troopers*, Ben plans to attend Mississippi State University and pursue a degree in business and political science.

Matthew Huber (Starkville)

Matthew plans to attend the University of Tennessee and major in geology; he is influenced most by the work of William Faulkner.

Jessica Jennings (Yazoo City)

Jessica, a junior, plans to major in both gifted education and foreign missions and is influenced by the works of Charles Dickens and V.C. Andrews.

Sara Johnson (Waynesboro)

Sara's favorite quotation is, "Total absence of humor renders life impossible." She will be attending the University of Southern Mississippi Honors College.

Preeti Kumar (Vicksburg)

Preeti's favorite author is Janette Oke, and she plans to attend George Washington University with a major in medicine.

Watson Lamb (Greenwood)

A senior, Watson will be attending Mississippi State University in the fall and pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering. His favorite writer is J.R.R. Tolkien.

Robert Lewis (Woodville)

After graduation, Robert will attend Georgia Tech and major in aerospace engineering. He has been influenced by his step-mother's photography as well as Matchbox Twenty and the Dave Matthews Band.