

Southern Voices Volume Sixteen

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Angels Guard Me Through the Night

Kristin Klaskala's glass etching, *Angels Guard Me Through the Night*, was awarded an Honorable Mention in the Art Competition. Due to technical limitations, the work is unable to be represented in this publication. The staff of *Southern Voices* expresses its apology and congratulates Kristin on her accomplishment.



Honorable Mention, Short Story Competition

His hands shook a little as he fumbled

through his glove compartment, looking for his box of Turkish Jade Camels. It was not uncommon for his hands to shake, for he was a nervous child. He had long been labeled as "troubled" by those nearest him so the shaking was hardly of note to him anymore. His face, normally a plaintive olive, had, after flushing bright red, drawn a melancholic pale. He battled with the cheap lighter until his cigarette had finally been lit, and then glanced through his rear view mirror at the blue duffel bag, green pillow, and red quilt that he had hastily thrown into his back seat a little over four hours before as he blew his first puff of smoke.

"I suppose I'm done crying" he thought. It wasn't a conscious choice of defiance and personal strength; his glands were empty, his eyes were sore and more tears were literally impossible at this point. He took a small sip from the bottle of Sprite that lay in the cup holder of his Jeep Cherokee before putting the cigarette back to his lips, taking off the safety brake and putting the vehicle in drive. "I'm almost to Georgia—don't want to stop now."

He had no idea where he was going. He honestly could not remember why he had left. Surely something traumatic had occurred that could spur him to make the decision to abandon his life at home, but he could not think what it was. Something must have driven him to continue driving on across the Alabama state line into Georgia, but he did not know what it was. Something must have happened. There had to be something. But no. Nothing.

The sun went down as he directed his route north to South Carolina. Nights were never easy for him. Ever since he could remember he had had nightmares or bad thoughts in the darkness. The setting of the sun literally drained him of all energy. As the stars came out, his mind became a fluid pool of time and space. Events, places, and people of the past intermingled with those of the present and those that might be the future. He saw vividly the entrance to Mountain View Hospital in Gadsden, Alabama— that ethereal place where he had lived for over a month in a constant haze brought about by twenty-four-hour-a-day therapy and the rigors of de-tox. "We believe that each patient has individual needs that must be mutually identified, planned and met in order to facilitate the attainment of his/her optimal level of functioning and maximum health potential," the check-in sheet had read. He thought it funny that he could still remember its exact wording.

He had tricked himself for a while into believing that these people were totally insane and he was completely and totally separate from them. He then came to believe that it had been those on the outside that were the ones insane and that he had finally found "his" people and a place to belong, but this too was false. "You are in control," his psychiatrist had told him. "It's not easy— It's a fight every day to the death—but you are in control." He had believed her. Perhaps he still did. "Don't stay here," she had told him. So he didn't. And within a month's time he had left Mountain View, according to his sign-out sheet, a "recovered bi-polar." "What signifies recovery?" he angrily demanded, silently in his head to God or whatever higher being was there to define the limits and boundaries of "recovery." Had he really recovered? Was recovery even a realistically possible goal?

He remembered that James, one of the patients at Mountain View, had been totally convinced that the idea of recovery was a lie told by societal heads in order to suppress individuality and force conformity. Perhaps James had been right. He had liked James a great deal. James was, unlike himself, unashamed of what society considered to be his weaknesses. James was flagrantly open about an addiction to some form of speed as well as his homosexuality. But the fact remained; he was on the

0 3

outside. James was still in. Perhaps there was something to be said for shame, at least in some instances.

He blamed his mother. Perhaps too much. She had tried tirelessly, but the genes were still hers. He blamed his father for not being able to understand him or his mother, leaving them alone to their own devices of recovery, which more often than not included a bottle of Jack Daniels, a handful of Sominex, and a box of Kleenex. He blamed them. And he found blame in the entirety of society for their standing. He also felt guilty and more than a little ashamed, for he knew that the driving force of his life had been a search for someone or something on which to place the blame. But he had not found it. And he knew he never would. "Why," he wondered, "must someone be lower for me to be higher?" He couldn't answer that question. But he accepted the theory behind the question as truth, and whether right or not, he refused to refute it.

He had been driving for almost an entire day when the phone rang. It startled him. He did not want it to be his mother, and he felt certain it was. He dug around in the junk in his passenger's seat, trying to grasp the cheaply made Nokia cell phone he had received as a gift from his parents. "Caller I.D. Unavailable" it read as it flashed a bright green and sang Georges Bizet's *Toreador* from *Carmen* in annoyingly electronic tones. Hesitantly he accepted the call, expecting to find, without a doubt his mother's shrill and angry voice on the other end.

"Hello"

There was a pause.

"Hello"

"Ryan..." a broken female voice quietly said.

"Yes."

"I'm so glad you answered. I really didn't expect this number to work. It's been almost a year since you gave it to me."

His eyes widened somewhat as the unfamiliar voice slowly became a familiar one.

"Eileen...," he said.

She answered with a simple "yeah."

Eileen had been at one time the most promising prospect of real friendship he had been able to find. The two had met dancing in the chorus line of a musical, both of them making a singularly desperate attempt to connect with the rest of the human race through the particularly commercial entertainment known as the musical theater. They had fooled themselves together into thinking that what they were doing was artistic and important and a means by which to gain the love of others. The venture had proven to be a devastating failure on many terms for the both of them.

"I was going through one of our old programs the other day. Your number fell out of the pages. I just had to see if it still worked."

"I'm glad it does," he said.

"It was written on that little piece of napkin, remember? We were talking out on the back patio at the closing night party. We said we'd keep in touch because us crazy Virgos had to stick together."

He laughed a little, remembering how they had discovered upon their first meeting that they had the same birth date, and how excited Eileen had been, being intensely interested in astrology, at the prospect of discovering that another Virgo besides herself truly existed.

"How have you been?" he asked, trying to go through the motions of a typical phone call.

"I'm better now. I'm so glad this number worked. I've wanted to talk to you for forever."

She could no longer hide the crack in her voice. His voice followed suit. Words suddenly spilled forth from his mouth like a raging white river.

"I'm in Georgia. I got in my car and I drove. I don't have any money or anything. I don't know why I did it. I just couldn't stay still. I couldn't stay still. I don't know where I'm going. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm so scared. I don't want to be me anymore."

Tears and words poured like sweet rain from heaven as Eileen told him of how, only a few hours before, she had cleared out her bank account and filled up her cheap car with gas, having every intention of skipping town in the same way he had. He confided in her his memories of Mountain View, of Quaaludes, of sleepless nights and detachment from his family, only to discover that her memories were one in the same.

"Why did you call me, Eileen?"

"I needed a reason to stay. I wanted to know that there really was nothing here for me before I left."

Tears flooded his eyes. His throat closed off and he could not breathe.

"I want to be enough to make you stay," he said.

"I'm so scared right now," she told him. "I've never felt like I needed people. I'm so scared that I could come to depend on you."

The words sounded so much like his very own, running simultaneously through his mind that his tears turned cold and he felt tinges of ice travel up his neck. He finally broke.

"I want to go home," he sobbed.

Her sobs bled together with his. "I'm glad," she said.

"I don't know where home is," he sobbed even more heavily.

"It's not running," she said.

"It's not hiding. It's not reaching. It's resting. You're almost there."

He sighed through his sobs. Her words had simultaneously destroyed him and rebuilt him within the blink of an eye.

A half hour later he pulled into a Burger

King. After ordering a chicken sandwich and a cup of Sprite, he returned to his parked car to eat his meal. After he was finished he began feeling around in his glove compartment, searching for a Turkish Jade. His hands shook a little as he fumbled with the cigarette and the lighter, but it was not uncommon for his hands to shake, for he was a nervous child. He wondered if his mother's hands shook as well and felt ashamed that he had not in his eighteen years paused to notice. He glanced at the blue duffel bag and the green pillow once again through the rear view mirror as he blew the first puff of smoke from his cigarette. He turned on the radio as he put the car in drive. He came to the exit driveway and turned left. Westward. Home to Mississippi.

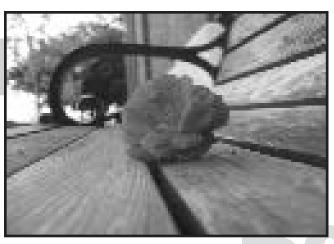
As he traveled back, he decided that if he were to ever feel the need to "just drive away" again, he would drive west as opposed to east. Eileen lived in Arkansas.

The City That Never Sleeps

Photograph Second Place, Photography Competition

Kimberly Golden





Left Behind Silver Gelatin Print Brandon Thornton

Jamie Ausborn

Honorable Mention, Essay Competition

My Black and White Medium

After a long, stressful day filled with tests and homework, I make a short hike across campus. When I reach the old building, I tug on the heavy door and walk inside. Climbing the stairs to the second floor, my footsteps echo through the building, disrupting the silence. As my eyes adjust to the dim lighting, I make my way down the hall, lined with small rooms on both sides. The creaking of my footsteps ceases when I reach the last door on the left. I turn the handle and flip the light switch.

Staring at the blank wall in front of me, I sit on the bench erect. A million thoughts are rushing through my head: worries, fears, hopes, and dreams. Thump, thump, my heart pulsates within my chest as the pressure builds inside me.

Exhaling, I slowly release the air from my mouth and then gently lower my fingertips onto the cool, slick keys. My emotions flood through my veins and focus themselves in the tips of my sweaty fingers. With intense concentration, I begin translating my emotions with my fingertips, releasing a surge of energy. The sweet melody pours out from within my soul, filling the room, as my hands glide first slowly, then rapidly over my black and white medium. Twelve years of practice have helped me to perfect this tune. My ability is for myself alone. I do not intend to please anyone but myself with my song, for only I know the true meaning behind each note. My mood changes, the pressure of my fingers increasing with the crescendos of the melody. Each staccato and accent reveal another thought. Each chord exposes a part of me, my undisclosed feelings. My expression is original and, if not expressed, will be lost. No song is like another because of the hidden emotions behind it. Without my art, my feelings and emotions would remain entrapped within my being, piling and adding more pressure to my already crammed life.

Staring at the blank wall in front of me, my fingers linger on the last note of my song. My tight muscles relax, and my heartbeat slows. A weight is lifted from my chest. My soul is refreshed; my mind calmed. I no longer feel overwhelmed with the anxieties and demands of life. I pull the cover down over the keys, push back the bench, and stand. Walking towards the door, I flip off the light switch, and the room becomes flooded with darkness. My shadow stretches on the floor in front of me, formed by the faint light in the hallway. I turn around and take one last look before leaving, barely able to make out the shapes and forms in the room. Patiently waiting for my return, the piano will remain dormant, enclosed within it the music of my soul.

Last Night As You Lay Sleeping

Last night as you lay sleeping I looked upon your face, And startled by such beauty, My heart picked up its pace. Behind those tender lashes I think I saw your soul; I saw each of your tomorrows; I saw your dreams unfold. Though no mystic light surrounded you, I felt God smile down from above On this most innocent babe This precious child of Love. Then with readjusted focus, I noted the rising of your chest Sending waves of comfort through my body With each reassuring breath. Then looking again upon your face I couldn't help but touch The one I'd grown so close to, The one I loved so much. Trailing my fingers through your hair, Feeling warmth I never knew, Inside my heart I made a vow To never let anyone hurt you. Then before I left the room, A simple farewell I bade; I asked the Lord to keep you And on your brow, a kiss I laid. Not just any kiss, But a promise etched in stone That I will always be here And you will never be alone.

Jessica Jennings

Jordan Brittany Hollis

Black fingernails run across my hair, Comforting me in my darkest hour. I look up to see shining eyes, Short cropped velvety brown hair, Gentle streaks of light running through her hair As the sun's rays paint her with goldenrod rays, A cross necklace draped from her neck, A heart of gold shines in her gentle glance, Shimmering with the glow of kindness That lights up a room. As the world around her weeps, She is always there, The last thread to hold together Their world as it falls apart, piece by piece. Her air of both sadness and warmth, Darkness and light, Mixes with her pale blue veins. Her white scars that run over with Pain and despair deep within Are hidden by her vibrant laughter And a smile that makes everything all right, As she shields herself by the constant books in Her hands: magic, vampires, philosophy -all her refuge from this world until she returns to earth to mend the broken among us again, reaching out to them from the musty gray stone dungeons of time with her dark fingernails.

Felt tip pen

Across your skin, graceful lines form valleys of ink. Your pores expand to let the foreign substance in. Your body reacts and you tingle with excitement. Heavy breathing starts to come in.

Light, wispy touches tickle you with glee, as pup's paws are drawn on your feet. Feeling more daring, you bare your stomach... a heart is drawn with an arrow pointing

down the middle. Ah, but physical love isn't for what you aim. A second heart, under a bare chest Half under sternum, half under breast.

Creamy, smooth skin, Can I touch it again? The passion of tension increases. The pen is drawn up the neck, where our lips meet for the first time. Eyes open wide, did I cross the line?

You look back languidly at me. Then it can be truly seen. A love so deep in body, spirit, and mind Physical tension so strong, yet undefined.

The pen is dropped as a full embrace occurs Then the tongue takes the place of the pen's soft swerves. Bodies glisten, and consummation takes place. Hunger and exhaustion leave us loosely at peace.

On the mass-less void, we drift within. All because of a felt tip pen.

Chris Gresham

Second Place, Poetry Competition



Grass Spray Paint

Andy Guan



A Hard Path Kendrell Wells

At a very young age, I was sent by my

teenage parents to live in McAdams, Mississippi, with my grandfather. My grandfather was shaped by the 1920s and didn't hesitate in passing on the hard-knock life to me. As a lesson on resourcefulness and appreciation, I had to buy my own soap, toothpaste, and other toiletries with the money I earned. After spending the day at school, I would grudgingly come home to help my granddad cut timber; repair farm equipment; tend to livestock; and either plant, hoe, or harvest the endless fields. The tasks seemed tedious at the time, but I know now that my grandfather was showing me the virtues of life rather than preaching them to me.

My grandfather's work ethic was greater than that of any man I've ever known. He didn't stop working after retiring from a twenty-five year career in the Chicago steel industry; instead, he returned to Mississippi where he worked his 120 acres of farm and timber land. In addition to farming and cutting timber, my grandfather and I created Wells & Sons Lawn Care Service, a business that brought our number of trades to three. At the time, I thought my grandfather was crazy for

giving up a "made" life only to pursue hard labor. I now appreciate my grandfather's sacrifice of giving up his retirement to teach me the rewards of hard work.

The years passed, and as I aged, so did my grandfather. As the eldest of all the grandchildren that he provided home for, I began to take on responsibilities beyond that of normal teenagers. Very few high school students have been the cook of their house. "What'll it be tonight?" I'd ask my grandfather as I anticipated the night's challenge. Perhaps the most frequent and challenging response he gave was, "Whatever you can whip up." Although it seemed to be a nonchalant response, my grandfather was calling upon my ingenuity and creativity. He was reminding me that the fate of our home was becoming my responsibility and that I must learn how to make important decisions for myself as well as others if I am to become a leader.

With my grandfather's passing, I've adopted a new rigor, attending the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, a residential high school for the academically gifted. Juggling



advanced courses, athletics, and club leadership positions; being an Emissary; conducting university research projects; and taking independent study courses can potentially become a burden. However, the ethics my grandfather instilled in me allow me to overcome these obstacles.

The most influential concept that my grandfather taught me was that I could be anything that I wanted to be. Regardless of my race, hometown, or high school attend-

ed, I was not at a disadvantage. Simply being born in a small rural town did not destine me to become a country boy who works his fingers to the bone and has nothing to show for it but bony fingers. Rather, I was given an opportunity to learn through the work set before me. Hard work, though a hard path, will lead me to success. **Tiline** Photograph Sara Peek

The very essence of my life rests in the

palms of my grandmother. She lives deep in the hills of Una, Mississippi, where the favorite pastime is sitting on a creaky, sun-dried porch or under the old shade tree that grows in front of Big Ma's house, its leafy arms swaying in the country breeze, just to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. A place where everyone is related and people greet each other with a genial hello. A place where sitting by a glistening pond in the birth of the morning, holding an old rod in one hand and pulling down your great-grandfather's favorite straw hat over your eyes in the

However, it was my summer trips to Grandma's house where I learned the most. Early in the morning, while the dew was fresh on her lawn and glistening in the morning sun, I would step out of the back seat of my father's '76 Buick, holding a My Buddy doll firmly in my arms, dragging my favorite Ninja Turtles blanket behind me. I stood on the splintered porch of Grandma's house and watched as my parents pulled out, headed to their summertime destination somewhere off in the distance. Heading into the house, Grandma immediately picked me up and placed me in her gigantic,



The Essence Jershuntas Webber pillow-covered bed, pulled my blanket over me and watched me fade into a realm of magic and mystery. Awakened later by the aroma of fluffy buttermilk biscuits, hot gravy, grits, and the sizzling of bacon on the oven, I rose from my slumber and headed to

First Place, Essay Competition

other, takes the place of corporate business meetings and the bustle of Wall Street. A place where the best conversations are silent, gazing upon the emerald cornfields, sipping a tall glass of ice tea, and reflecting on this majestic world, whose beauty seems to be reborn everyday. Here is where I first learned what life was.

My grandmother is a simple woman, whose only worry is what to send to Sister Marble to show that she's in her prayers after her recent hospital visit. But in her humble soul lies knowledge and wisdom from her seventy-something years of trial, error, and learning. Our visits were often; every Sunday the family would gather at the old blue house on the hill and have dinner after hearing Rev. McMullen raise fire from our souls. The conversations were always the same. "Rev. sho' did preach today, didn't he?" The reply was always, "Sho' did." Then the conversation evolved to smacking and crunching on golden fried chicken, slurping up collard greens, and washing it down with a cold glass of sweet, red Kool-aid. At the center of the chaos was always Grandma: sitting with one of her great-grandchildren in her arms, rocking steadily in her favorite rocking chair that her late husband designed just for her. With a twinkle in her eye, she watched over us, only talking with the smiles upon her face. its source. Greeted by a smile warmer than the kitchen she was cooking in, she picked me up and sat me down at the table and placed a big plate of steaming food in front of me. The golden biscuits swimming in molasses, the crispy bacon, the stomach-warming grits, and the mouth-watering eggs were enough to fill the mightiest of men, but I gobbled it all and washed it down with a cool glass of orange juice.

The backyard was our next stop, where a list of chores that never seemed like chores awaited us. First, we picked ripe peaches from her peach trees, careful to avoid the wormy and rotten ones. Then we would take her clothes off the line, which was hilarious for me because Grandma's underclothes always looked funny to me. Together, we would fold them and place them in their proper drawers, not knowing that she always followed behind my sloppily folded shirts with a crisp fold. Then we would head for the porch where Grandma would watch me frolic in the field, chased by a swarm of bees, while she peeled our morning pick. She came to the rescue when an angry bee stung me on the arm, holding me and assuring me that everything would be all right. After placing a Bugs Bunny band-aid on my wound, we would squeeze lemons and make a fresh pitcher of lemonade. She would pour us both a glass, and once again, we would head back out to the





Photograph Honorable Mention, Photography Competition

Kimberly Golden

white rocking chairs on the porch. Creaking under the weight of our bodies, we both rocked steadily, as I tried desperately to keep up with her pace. No one said a word; instead, we let the silence of the country talk for us. The sweet smell of the prairie air, the low buzz of bees swarming over Grandma's marigolds, and the low rustling of the trees in the wind soothed my soul. There, without a word between us, Grandma and I connected. Our souls became in sync with each other and the beauty before us. Before the sun went down, we would enjoy a nice bowlful of homemade ice cream and curl up in bed. I felt safe with her lying next to me, embracing my body as I slowly drifted back into my realm of magic and mystery.

Those summers at my grandma's house were about more than delicious food and a gorgeous landscape. Those summers were about growth. Watching the gracefulness and humility of my grandma taught me that there is more to life than being rich or famous. The greatest rewards in life are free and are available to everyone, despite their reputation or bank account. The greatest rewards in life are as simple as enjoying the smell of your grandmother's orchard and admiring the beauty of our world. Success is not measured by how much a person is worth, but how well a person can appreciate the things that they have. To my grandma, success was measured in the smiles of her grandchildren, the fiery sermons of the Reverend, and the hearty hellos of her neighbors. I have learned to appreciate what I have as well as strive to achieve what I do not have. My grandmother taught me the greatest lesson of all: Life is what you make of it and nothing more. We only have one life to live; appreciate it, cherish it, and strive to make it all that you can.

Dixon Grey Nyssa Perryman

Second Place, Short Story Competition

"Dixon Grey." The immortal name

stretched out across the main wall of the cafeteria, masking the chipped, mint green paint beneath. From where Susan was standing, she knew it was an act of defiance. Globs of mashed potatoes, over-steamed broccoli, and Heinz 57 shaped the vowels and consonants of scrawled infamy. Groups of curious ninth and tenth graders crowded around to gawk as chunks of the cafeteria concoction slid slowly to the tiled floor below, leaving behind a vertical trail of shiny slime. Susan cringed at the thought of cleaning the mess up, and even more at the punishment which loomed ahead for the culprit. Yet, Susan had no doubts as to who was responsible for the atrocious act. Everyone knew in the back of their mind. It lay right in front of them, spelled out in a colorful display for all eyes to see. But over the roar of second lunch and the bark of staff and teachers desperately trying to restore order in the lunchroom, Susan wished with all her strength for the impossible, the fallacy of truth, an act of some higher being, or a miracle, even. Just a replacement for the one person it could be, the one person it had to be.

"Dixon Grey, please report to the office," the powerful voice of Mrs. Ballard, the Navarre High principal, boomed from the overhead speakers. Susan felt her stomach take a sharp turn. Plopping down at a side table, away from exhibition, she finished the stale fries and cold hamburger she had selected from the grill line before she spotted the food graffiti. As she started in on the sugar cookies, Susan glanced up to see a figure parting the crowds. His stride was rhythmic, his stare firm and empty. A pair of battered Converses scuffed a heavy path beneath bulky second-hand jeans. In his hand was the only evidence of his C.D. player since the earphones were hidden deep inside the dark, fuzzy monster perched above his face. Frizz seemed to consume everything except the jet black jewels which sparkled beneath the

fullest eyelashes Susan had ever seen on a guy. His complexion was also unique, being a smooth, milk chocolate cappuccino shade. His color was his downfall. He wasn't light enough to be white, nor dark enough to be black. And there was no band of brothers in the middle at Navarre High. No one was stuck in gray but Dixon.

As Dixon passed her table, Susan made certain not to make eye contact. His presence alone was enough to throw a tremble into Susan's pale hands. It happened every time. Dixon struck her down with his frozen glance, then melted her with his sweeping lashes. Susan compared it to the process they put drunkards through to sober them up. Enough to make anyone sick.

Pushing his way through the double-swinging hinged doors of the lunch room, Dixon shuffled on down the hall, out of Susan's view. The noise subsided to the normal level as students filed back onto long-benched picnic-style tables to scarf down as much food as time would allow. Susan brushed her dirty plate and tray to the side while glancing up at the cracked beige clock bolted to the wall above the doors. Fifteen minutes to contemplate the consequences and why she even cared so much about what they were.

This would mark the fourth, real "act of rebellion" as the teachers referred to it, on Dixon's record. He had done countless of other petty acts such as trashing freshman lockers and putting washing detergent in the front courtyard fountain along with a few riskier stunts like locking the blonde cheerleading captain in the bathroom and leaving her to be discovered four hours later, an act which they didn't have enough evidence to pin on him. But everyone knew. Most of the time he made it obvious. But his reasoning was an urban legend. Of course, students had some pretty crazy ideas as to why he acted so brashly. Rumors ranging from "maybe he's an only child" to

"maybe he didn't get into the college he wanted to" and the most popular belief of "It's because he doesn't have any friends." Susan had heard them all, whispered in the hallway and classrooms. Only Susan knew the truth. That's why she cared so much.

Tamika Johnson, considered the most malicious girl in the history of Navarre, cut her deep, brown eyes toward Susan as she limped by Susan's table on the way out of the dining hall. They said Tamika headed up the West Posse, a gang from the ghetto which roughed up the weak and white. Dixon was in love with that despised tomboy. He would do anything for her, lose it all if just for the approval of Tamika. Lose his good standing with teachers, underneath his furry beast of a mane. He was slouched in the "I don't care" position, and Susan prayed that the lashes would be paralyzed long enough for her momentary valor to walk her over to the seat beside him. She eased her weight into the plastic chair and immediately went to work, trying to appear busy in a "search" for the only huge binder in her book bag. As she pulled the notebook out, Susan felt it from the corner of her eye. Dixon's gaze had shifted to look in her direction. It was a heavy, penetrating gaze, and in her fight against that soft cocoa look, the gaze won. The turn was slow and contemplated, but Susan managed to shift around and meet Dixon's glossy stare.

"What?" was the rich, velvety baritone

response. Susan figured it was worthless to make conversation with Dixon since he wouldn't be able to catch anything she said above the chants of his angry C.D. But it never hurt to try.

"Are you suspended?" Susan was wary of his reply. They used to be best friends before he met Tamika. He couldn't leave Susan now; this was their senior year.

"I dunno." It was the nonchalance which annoyed Susan the most. She

really wanted him back. The little kid that climbed trees with her, bought her the Black Lab for Christmas two years ago and helped her name it "Cookie." She wanted the late night-movies and water gun fights. If only he could look at her the same way he used to, if only he could view her in the same light as Tamika. If only she could be black.

"They just said I had to clean it up after school," he suddenly mumbled, just as Mr.

lose his place on the basketball team, even his education as long as Tamika noticed. But it was more than just a teenage crush that pressed him to do the irrational deeds. It went deeper than that.

The rusty bell pushed Susan from these thoughts as a crazed flock of students rushed toward the double. doors and on to their fourth period classes. She threw away her trash, walked through the doors and on to Biology 101. It was the only class she shared with

Dixon, and to her surprise, he was already seated in his usual spot—far left, back row—when she arrived. Usually after one of his antics, the principal held Dixon hostage in her office until his parents came in for a conference. Susan hoped it was a good sign, but in the back of her mind winced at the truth. Dixon stared blankly ahead, ignoring the multitude of eyes leeched to him, head slowly bobbing up and down to some unheard melodic rhyme flowing



Woman

Charcoal Lekha Sunkara Reed began the lecture on some cold-blooded animal that Susan didn't catch. She was too caught up in her plan for that afternoon, a plan of courage and possible salvation. It was time to win Dixon back.

The end of the day came much too soon for Susan. Her initiative and guts seemed to wax and wane throughout the day. Running over possible words and phrases she would use, Susan marched through the swinging doors of the cafeteria with the sound of the last bell still ringing in her ears. Dixon was already there, sitting on a bench next to his dry work of art, scrub brush in hand. Setting down her book sack, Susan weaved between each long table, cursing the sticky bottoms of her shoes which noisily ripped a layer of white from the tile below with each clingy step, proclaiming her approach. Of course, the C.D. player concealed her footsteps, and she stood there a good five minutes before he realized someone else was in the room.

"You better get started. That's a mighty thick layer of greasy plastic to cut through in one hour." She saw traces of a smirk come across his face before the lashes took their toll, sweeping away Susan's sharp focus. His eyes almost seemed tame for a moment before jumping back to the work in front of him. An old cloth floated in a bucket of steamy Pine-Sol which rested beside his feet. Bending over, Susan grabbed up the rag, wrung it out, and started in on the Y of his name. Taking her cue, Dixon dipped his scrub into the murky water and rose to start on the pink potatoes which formed D, scrubbing gently at first before adding the extra effort needed to scrape the tough carbohydrates from the wall. They worked in silence, stopping only to rinse their cleaning tools before tackling their task with growing enthusiasm. Susan broke the ice fifteen minutes into their scrubbing frenzy.

"What are you trying to prove to them?" It was bold and Susan expected the worse possible reaction. But she was tired of dancing around the issue. She didn't want to do it any longer.

"You don't know what it's like to be me. You don't know how it feels to be rejected on all sides. People judge me by my color. And I'm not one of the primaries." His biting sarcasm dealt a crushing blow to Susan's insides. She wanted to hug him, let him know it didn't matter what other people thought. People were stupid. Still, Susan knew rejection; it was staring her in the face. He turned back to scrubbing, the strokes becoming harder and harder.

"What about our friendship? Doesn't that mean anything to you?" She was desperate now. Something had to break. He stopped scrubbing, and turned slowly to see her questioning face. He was searching for something to hold on to in her eyes.

"Susan, you know I love you. You've been there for me year after year. You're an angel to me, my savior. But you don't understand...."

"I understand that I'm tired of knowing that this isn't the real you," she cut in, pointing up at the letters now dripping with soap suds. "And I know that you're tired of playing these games. You shouldn't have to prove you fit in because of something you were born with. Can't you see the truth? I miss you, Dixon! I miss the real you, your personality, your horrible jokes. I miss you. Not your skin color or crazy hair. You shared life with me, and that piece of me is gone if you change."

A flash of anger mingled with regret slowly built up on Dixon's milk-chocolate visage during the length of her plea, finally escaping in the violent sling of his filthy rag across the cafeteria floor. Dixon's lashes were the ones in combat now, fighting off the tears welling up over his brown gems. Damp Converses carried him over to a bench where he buried his face into crossed arms and wept. Only his messy hair was visible, sinking up and down with each sob. Never in her life had Susan seen Dixon Grey cry.

Dropping her soiled cloth into the water, she quickly moved to sit beside him. In the haste, soapy tile caught her off balance, carrying Susan to the ground with a loud smack. Startled, Dixon looked up to find Susan rolling in laughter. The amusement caught Dixon off guard, forcing out a rumble of laughter characteristic of the Dixon Grey she was so fond of. In an act of pure delight with the resurrection of such a laugh, Susan reached into the foamy bucket and threw the largest pile of suds she could gather, right into those lashes.

Biorhythmic Repetition

If I could see the mountains again then let it be with your eyes, and let the wind cool your skin as well as mine.

If I could taste the ocean again then let it be with your tongue and your taste in my mouth.

If I could sail this world again take this trip a second time then let it be you forever on hand, and let it be your figure that stands at my side.

If I must take this road again then let there be no moment, and no day of travel without you.

Jordan Richard

Ella

Scratchboard Hannah Burnett

Walking in the Rain

A light sprinkle falls Down from the clouds As we run laughing through The puddles, splashing the world around us. Everyone stares from their windows. We dance soaking wet in the rain And marvel at the blue lightning flashes all around us. A soaked leaf falls on the sidewalk, He puts it in my hair And laughs as our lips touch And the sky lights up around us.

Brittany Follis



Jeremy Crawford biker while standing at a measure

Honorable Mention, Short Story Competition

Chilled breath condensed before my

eyes like ghostly tendrils of smoke as the old Maxima sputtered to life. The car shook and jived as though it had spent the entirety of winter in hibernation and was dancing in excitement to have been awakened. Too old for antics, it groaned and squealed with each movement, and I rushed to make my way down the street before the noise awoke someone. Thoughts of my unfortunately restless mother awakening from a much-deserved slumber gave me a slightly heavier foot.

As I rounded the curve near Olive Branch Elementary School, I slowed to a mere creep, rolling slowly over the speed bumps and taking careful precautions at every intersection and stop sign. The OBPD was only three blocks from my house, and at fifteen I was not legally allowed to drive past ten o'clock. I blamed sleep deprivation for my intense moments of exaggerated paranoia, and I spent the remainder of the drive creating excuses for the police officer should I be stopped. "I had a flat tire and that's why I'm late," or "My mother is awful sick, sir, and I had to run out to get her some medicine." Perhaps the real reason would work just as well as those obvious fabrications, and as I pondered the explanation, I realized it to be somewhat comical and at the same time slightly depressing. "I'm on the way to go pick up my alcoholic friend (she's a whole twentyfive years older than me) so we can go make donuts over there at Hacks Cross Road." I couldn't help cursing "my friend" silently as the car sputtered ten miles out of the way in the direction of the police department just to pick her up.

Connie Douglas was rough. In fact, she was more than rough. She was rugged, lacking any culture or finesse, even when compared to the inhabitants of small-town North Mississippi. With a face marked by furrows and a mouth twisted from years of the bottle, Connie was able to pull off the menacing look of a convict

biker while standing at a measly height of five feet two inches. Her hair was coarse and oily, unnaturally thin for her age, and tangled locks shadowed a near toothless grimace in between rounds of Marlboro Reds. On top of it all, her arms were covered with enough grease-burn battle scars to capture the minds of listeners for hours on end.

The brakes screeched as I slowed to a stop in front of Connie's tiny apartment. Flashing the headlights, I signaled my arrival, hoping she wouldn't invite me in. But I knew she would; she always did, even for just a moment. Unfortunately, it was usually for far more than just a moment. She turned on the outside light and cracked open the door to wave to me, beckoning. "Hey, man!" she said as I came in, finishing her cigarette and wrapping up her phone conversation. "How's it goin' tonight?"

"It's fine, Connie," I said under a deep sigh. "We better get going. It's almost eleven o'clock."

"It's fine? Just fine?" she asked, completely ignoring the latter half of my statement. Her face contorted as though she were shocked with my reply, sending a chain of wrinkles across her cheeks and revealing her near-toothless gums. "It's not great, or even real good?"

Connie was the type of person that didn't let anything bother her, and she felt everyone else should be the same way. She lived in a small apartment with her youngest son Dillon and not a penny to her name. Her mother still helped support her, and she had to bum rides to work because she lost her license for DUI's. But, nevertheless, she didn't let it get to her, and if at any time she started to get down in the dumps, a drink would bring her right back up.

We always got to work a little bit late. No matter how early I arrived to pick her up, Connie would be doing something that just couldn't wait. "Just let me finish this cigarette, man," or "I'm on the phone with my mom, it'll only be a minute." It didn't really matter what time we got to work, considering we were the only two people there. As long as we got our job done before the morning shift came in, we'd be fine. The donut shop was always cold when we arrived, but we knew better than to adjust the heat. Instead I would walk immediately to the fryer and flip the switch. It wouldn't take long for the enormous vat to start bubbling and popping, and in no time the entire store would be hot enough to smother a Mississippi water moccasin in a frozen pond.

In no time, the entire shop would come to life. The dough would be mixing in one of the giant mixers, and the fryer would be melting the fresh vegetable shortening. Connie would always turn on the radio, and we would spend the entire night jamming to her old-school rock-and-roll. Dancing and laughing, we would knead the dough, making half a table of soft, pillow-shaped loaves. We held deeply intellectual conversations about the art of donut-making, and how Connie could make better twists than I, while I could make better cinnamon rolls than she could. We had contests to see who could recognize the name and band of a song whenever it came on the radio, and sometimes we would get so carried away trying to shout out answers before each other that an unknowing observer might think us near deaf. Connie would entertain me with wild stories about parties and concerts; and she would always answer my complaints about working at night, or being burned by the grease, or being tired, with gruesome details about her last job, or one of the many before it.

The way that donut dough rises, Connie and I would always have two "cigarette breaks" before things really got rolling. After the yeast had been mixed into the dough for twelve minutes, it had to rise for twenty minutes before we could do anything more, and then we had to knead it into loaves and let it rise an additional twenty minutes. This was our quiet time, our time to relax and talk about our families, our hopes, our dreams, our goals. "Come on, man. It's time for a cigarette break," Connie would always announce, even though I was usually already headed for the door. We'd go outside and sit and talk, me rambling incessantly in my mind but saying little and Connie commenting between puffs as though she knew what I was thinking. "We need to stay until five tonight at least, so I can get my hours in. Rent's due tomorrow." I didn't object; Momma needed the money as well.

The blue "Heavenly Donuts Plus" sign above us cast a faint glow over the surroundings, which concocted a surreal setting when mixed with the apparitions of Connie's smoke rings. Connie was the only person other than my grandfather I knew that could blow smoke rings. During rainy days when there was no work to be accomplished on the farm, my grandfather and I would hollow out the nub of a dried corn cob and plug it with a whittled cane shoot to make a homemade pipe. Papo would slit the tobacco out of one of my grandmother's long cigarettes to pack the rude contraption, and we'd spend the rest of the afternoon talking about how we were going to get rich off of selling homemade pipes at the annual Watermelon Carnival while I watched him puff concentric circles of smoke into the air. Connie couldn't blow concentric circles like Papo, but her smoke always stayed circular longer than his, and was much thicker. She would move her lips, and tiny wisps would emerge and expand to the size of a glazed donut before drifting up into the darkness of the night sky. I was always amazed to see the rough old woman create something so delicate. Donuts were one thing-soft and beautiful, it was quite hard to imagine Connie playing any role in their creation—but watching her manipulate something as fragile and disgusting as cigarette smoke to form such beautifully magic rings was extremely captivating. I couldn't help imagining where the rings were drifting off to. Perhaps they floated off to join the smog of the big cities up north, or maybe they became the ironic aureoles of the seraphim.

As the tinge of orange left her first Marlboro, Connie would always ask the same question. "How's your mom doin'?"

"She's okay... still working three jobs. She's always tired." Connie knew I didn't work the night shift just for spending money. My family had been having a hard time ever since we moved to the city, and I volunteered to contribute as much as I could. It wasn't too bad, though. Despite my protests, Mom would always make me keep some of the money I made to spend at the movies or on a new CD or something like that.

"You still doing good in school?" She knew the answer hadn't changed since the night before. "You're a momma's boy, you know that?" I would just look at her in response. "Nothin' wrong with that. I'm the same way about my family. You can do whatever you want to me, as long as you don't mess with my money, my kids, and my momma." Connie explained these values to me every night.

The only other quiet time we would ever have was when we had fried the last of the donuts. By this time, we were usually exhausted. Connie was always ready to get home and watch Star Trek, and I was ready to go take a shower and grab a quick nap before school. It would take us about thirty minutes to clean the entire kitchen, a miraculous event considering all of the dough, flour, sugar, jellies, cream, and grease that were scattered throughout the room. Connie always got onto me for making messes. "Man, you've got to learn to clean up as you go!" She'd turn off the music, and as she finished the dishes she'd exclaim, "Okay, Jeremy... Mop us out of here!" That was my signal. I knew we didn't have much longer. If we could just finish up a few more odds and ends, we'd have survived another night in the blistering heat of the donut shop.

Then we would clock out, a night's worth of work on our ticket and a week's worth of soreness in our muscles. We were allowed one meal on the company every night, and we would gather a few donuts to take with us. I always got donut holes, because that's what Mom likes, a chocolate twist for my little sister, and a cinnamon roll for my best friend Cierra at school. Donut holes were the easiest to make, but Mom still proclaimed them to be the tastiest. Sometimes, after watching Connie work on her twists throughout the night, kneading, shaping, concentrating, it was hard to let my sister eat one. I couldn't help comically imagining a donut full of tar and nicotine. But my cinnamon rolls were the best, and I was always proud to give Cierra a glowing bronze bun that shimmered as the light caught streams of the glaze.

As we stood in front of the door ready to lock up and leave, Connie and I would always take a last look at the display cases to ensure that everything was in order. "Man, those donuts sure do look pretty," Connie would say. "They turned out real soft. Come on, man, I'm tired. You wanna take me to the store on the way home so I won't have to walk to get cigarettes later?" I always consented, and therefore never answered.

The drive home was a cold one after the winter season had time to settle back into the depths of my old Maxima. This time, though, we did turn on the heat. Dropping Connie off was always the easiest and most relieving part of the job. "See yah tonight, Connie!"

"Okay, man. You take care!" she'd nearly yell as she slammed the door. I would sigh in reprieve as I made the way to my house. By this time I was too tired to worry about policemen or excuses for driving before six in the morning. I was only concerned with getting clean and taking a nap before class. I would leave my treats on the table for my family, and the cinnamon roll was always hand delivered to Cierra's beaming face.

"Hey, Jeremy! How's it goin'?" "It's great, Cierra," I'd say as I watched her

savor the sweet bun. "It's real good."

111-

Say Cheese!

Charcoal Eric Davenport





Many teenagers with straight A's and a

long list of extracurricular activities are tagged "over-achievers" and feel pressure to achieve a higher vocation; but what is "vocation?" The Latin root, "vocare," means "to call," so when did a vocation's value become based on salary instead of calling? It is no big secret that an educator's salary does not compare with that of a doctor's or physicist's, but the rewards of teaching are outstanding. This valuable lesson I learned in my eighth grade year through Mrs. Patricia Parker and her unwavering confidence

in my potential. Mrs. Parker, my gifted teacher for fifth through eighth grades, challenged me to do the unthinkable, changed my



life forever, and implanted in me a seed that has grown into the desire to sow the same seed in others.

In every student's school career, there is at least one special teacher — a teacher who really connects with the student and helps her to focus on her talents and prepare for success. For me, Mrs. Parker was that special teacher. Mrs. Parker knew that I loved to write; she had been there when I wrote the very first poem in fifth grade. She also knew that I was extremely introverted and that I hated for people to read my poetry. However, Mrs. Parker saw potential in me that I refused to believe was there, and she was unwilling to let me throw it away. That is why she convinced me to apply for the Promising Young Writers Award, awarded by the National Council of Teachers of English. At first, I refused. My writing was the only thing I had that I could be proud of, and I was terrified of having a panel of English teachers tell me that it was worthless. Mrs. Parker was persistent. Eventually, I gave in and reluctantly sat down to write. That year, only three students in Mississippi won the award—and I was one of them! Growing up in a low-income family with an abusive father, "success" was just a word I learned to spell in second grade. But if confidence leads to success, I had definitely taken my first baby step, all thanks to Mrs. Parker.

Science (MSMS) with pride in her face. Remembering my eighth-grade success and thinking that this was the opportunity of a lifetime, I carefully filled out the application. Waiting was scary, but my teachers were very supportive, and I even called Mrs. Parker and talked with her about it. When I got my acceptance letter, she was the first person I called.

Taking that first step changed my life com-

pletely. I had more self-esteem than I had ever

known and I was no longer afraid of taking

risks. More importantly than that, the confi-

dence I gained from the experience gave me

hope. I was no longer destined to make the same decisions that my parents had made. I

knew that I had a way out — an opportunity to

be "more." Opportunity knocked, not on my

door, but in my mailbox two years later. My

Sometime after arriving at MSMS, I did some reflective thinking and realized how much Mrs. Parker's simple act had affected my life. I decided then that I want to have the same effect on someone and that the best way to ensure that is to become a teacher. I want to give my time and attention to children who might otherwise not know what it means to have someone believe in them. I want to see the light in a tiny pair of eyes when the first 100 is made on a spelling test, or the first contest is won. I want to meet the parents of remarkable children and get them involved in the education process, let them know how important they are to their children. More than anything, I want to give some child what Mrs. Parker gave me — a connection to success.

If my parents, friends and teachers ever wanted me to be something "more," I do not think I am letting them down. I will never go to Harvard or work for NASA, but I will change lives. I will touch hearts. Hopefully, I will be the first rung on someone's ladder of success.

2

Columbus 23 Jordan Richard

Coming onto 84, out of Natchez, I stop

thinking in terms of minutes and miles and begin to measure the distance in music. It is three-fourths of a CD from Natchez to Brookhaven and the exit onto 55, then the rest of the disc straight up to Jackson. I change discs just before hitting the freeway and stick with that til I'm almost to Starkville. From there, Columbus is barely five or six tracks.

The signs on the sides of the highway tick by like a metronome. Signs for roads to towns most people will never hear of or have any reason to go to. They are my only landmarks on these monotonous stretches of pine forests, hunting lands, and travel distinctly devoid of gas stations. A green sign announcing the turn for the Roxy Business District tells me I'm still close to Natchez. An increase in the signs mentioning McComb gives warning that I am close to my turn, and I begin to scan the horizon for the blue roof of the Chevron that I know will soon coming gliding into view at the top of a crest. Just after it passes, I make the switch and point myself North. The number of green and white clicks drops off on narrow 55, and I ease into the Zen-like state of focus that will carry me through the increased traffic here and the coming insanity of the Jackson freeway. In and above the city, the signs whiz past and I glance at them only long enough to know that I don't need them; I follow the ones that read Memphis and Grenada, because those are the ones that will take me to blessed Lakeland Drive, north. Personal necessities are seen to at the Fast Track in a wide intersection on Lakeland, then the trip continues, easing now into the miles of completed and underway construction between Jackson and Starkville.

Another CD should last most of the way. At least until I can see the edge of Mississippi State University stadium, or that red light at the campus entrance.

Here, also, there aren't many signs. But there are more trees, fewer gas stations, and greener grass that grows between the tell-tale lines of sand left-over from months of pouring

Honorable Mention, Essay Competition

asphalt. I notice the difference in the road. Last year, there was more construction than fourlane on this stretch.

Then there's that stop sign, random stop sign in front of a gas station in the middle of nothing. I love it. Because five minutes down the road is "Louisville / Starkville / Next Right." And I sigh, ready to be there.

Recently, I finally noticed the "Starkville Corp Limit" sign, a remarkably inconspicuous marker, but it makes no difference; apparently "Starkvegas" officially begins at an arbitrarily chosen pine tree as there is nothing else of consequence to indicate the spot.

Driving in S'ville is like pushing a broken buggy around clothes racks in Wal Mart, complete with women on cell phones and kids with big toys. So I watch the signs and the suspicious cars through one corner of my eye then the other and wait for it to clear, wait for the signs to begin reading "Columbus." Then I see it. The sign I have been waiting for, the one that I think of through every meter of road from Home to home and back, so simple and unassuming, so glorious to have brought me to tears on occasion. How easy it would be to miss the sparse little shape that says "Columbus 23."

Then the exit onto 82 and a fresh disc of music. The album barely has time to get going before I've sailed up Main Street, waved to the guard at the front of campus, and eased my precious red van into a place of precarious parking. Now I'll unpack and go find Ashley because we always go for lunch on the days of Return.



Notre Dame

Graphite Honorable Mention, Art Competition

Kristin Klaskala

Demented Thoughts

Ahhh!

My mind screams its insane thoughts As the rest of the world Closes in on my life Pain piercing my wretched heart Soiling the sacred ground With my unholy red water

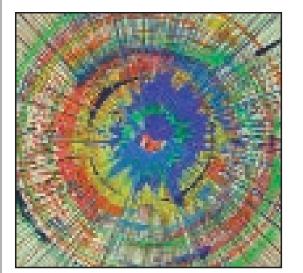
Jack Neldon

Natural Coordination

Photograph Third Place, Photography Competition

Hannah Bruce





Autumn

A chill North wind Walks his bitter fingers Across my cheeks, And winter threatens. But the sun shines bright; She laughs her defiance, And the world remains Under her golden spell For one more day.

Addie Leak

Vertigo

Acrylic Second Place, Art Competition

Jordan Smalley



una mariposa transparente Photograph

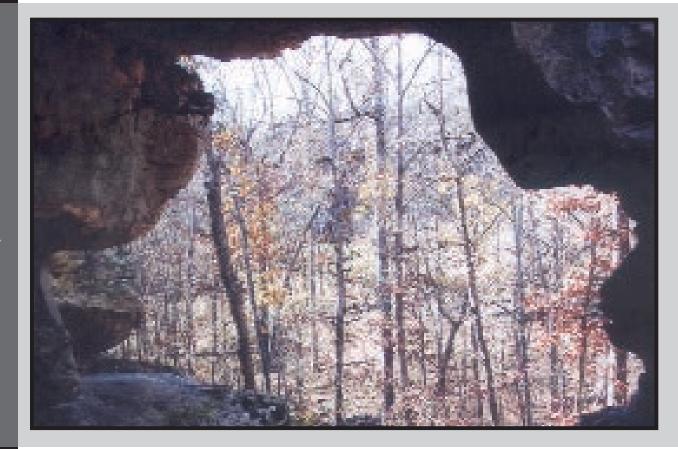
Laura Amye Williams

Beautiful Blue

Splash of fresh sea-breeze in my lover's eyes Cast upward on angel's swimming pool Laced with fluffy sky dunes Which sadly cry to earth crayon tears Berries, Hibiscus, Birds—all drenched With bright color Endless shades and tones Of beautiful Blue

Nyssa Perryman

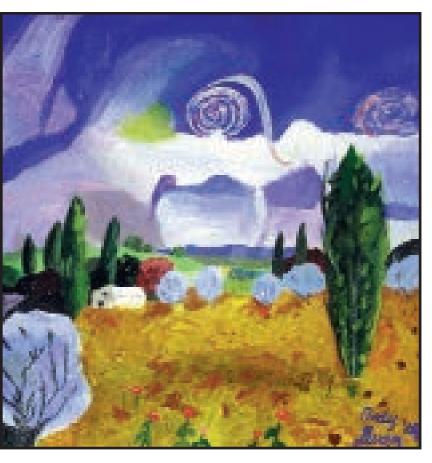
Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition



Natural Bridge

Photograph Honorable Mention, Photography Competition

Flannah Bruce



Melancholic Bliss

Days fly by in a rushing tide, I get older, sentimentally. The rain falls depressed down; Distorting time— For a moment, For a moment, For a brief year. Yet, the cosmic cycle still continues, And moons orbit planets orbit suns. In one instant my whole life changes With an unstoppable forward momentum, But the universe stays exactly the same. Predictably. In a state of orderly chaos. In a state of melancholic bliss.

Brittany Penland

Rolling Field #2

Acrylic

Andy Guan

Stringy brown hair, Almost dirty blonde, Split-ends tied back,

Faded burgundy t-shirt and faded blue jeans, Flat white tennis shoes:

The

Color

Gone

No one will know they don't match—the five dollar kind all look the same.

Reaching into a sagging, tan, third-hand purse, A little more beige to soothe the black,

The swollen blue and purple;

Maybe no one will notice,

Cheap brown shades to make sure; And easing the door closed behind her, She left.

Jessica Jennings

2



Beauty

Mixed Media First Place, Art Competition

Kannah Burnett

I have never been much of a girly girl.

I don't like to wear make up, I don't fix my hair, and I've never liked girl activities such as shopping. In fact, I have always preferred the more natural approach to style and life in general. The way I saw it, if God had intended for us to have blue eyelids, He would have

Hayley FCill

Third Place, Essay Competition

made them that way in the first place. Of course, as luck would have it, I was raised by the queen of all girly girls. It's not an uncommon scenario at my house to find my mother chasing me out the door with an eyelash curler in one hand and a tube of lipstick in the other, determined to smear a mask of oil and wax all over my face so I will look like my "true, beautiful self."

Apparently, though, these years of abuse have warped my psyche, and, as a result, I have always disliked any girl that could be labeled as fluff. In my opinion, these girls were exactly what the name fluff implied: pretty to look at, but not much substance. All my life I have done my very best to stay away from and be in a separate category from the fluffs, and I had succeeded until I made the life-altering mistake to compete in the Miss Teen program. I should have known I was stepping into a pool of sharks as soon as the Miss Teen director forced all the girls to chant, "It's a program, not a pageant." They were lying. It was a pageant all right.

I came to this realization during the week of rehearsals at state Miss Teen in Meridian, Mississippi, when I found myself surrounded by all the top fluffs from each county across the state. They pranced into every rehearsal with each hair in place, matching spandex workout clothes, and elaborate stage makeup. Just picture "Barbie Goes to the Gym." I, on the other hand, had not a stitch of makeup on with muddy softball shoes and a mismatched baggy t-shirt with shorts. It was obvious; I was not one of them. I never would be, and I didn't want to be. They were finely tuned and polished, which of course made me want to run away and lick cold steel, and they were hungry for the title of Mississippi's Miss Teen (perhaps, though, because they were all anorexic). I made up for this by telling myself that I was better than them because I was smarter. I even compensated for the weight issue by persuading myself that there was just more of me to love. I would have never dreamed at that point that one of these fluffs would teach me the greatest lesson I have ever learned.

The final night of competition had arrived, and every girl was frazzled. We were tired of dancing, prancing, and smiling for the camera, and we were ready to just get it all over with.



The only problem was that one girl was missing. The Miss Teen director searched all over for her and eventually found the girl had overslept at her host family's house. The rest of us sat around backstage in our puffy dresses and mile-high hair chatting until she arrived and we could start the show. The poor girl arrived ten minutes later and hurriedly changed into her gown. It was then that she realized she had left her makeup at home. Now, to a fluff, this should have been the end of the world, and in fact many of the other fluffs were freaking out for her. This fluff, though, did something very unexpected. She started pinching the fire out of her cheeks, and then she began pillaging through every drawer backstage. All of us trailed her, asking what in the tar-nation she was doing, but the blond-haired, blue-eyed fluff just ignored us. She kept on searching until a moment later she whooped with enthusiasm and thrust her discovery high into the air. I swear you would have thought she had stumbled onto something like King Tut's tomb, but no, all she had found was a black fine point Sharpie pen.

"Rachel, what in God's name are you going to do with that Sharpie? We're on in two minutes."

"Honey," Rachel replied, "when life throws you lemons, you shove them inside your bra and hope everyone notices. I'll tell you what I'm going to do with this here Sharpie. I'm going to line my eyes. So, if you don't mind, how about you just shut your mouths and find me a mirror?"

I was shocked. Not because this crazy girl was about to line her eyes with a Sharpie, though, but because it was right then that I realized how wrong I had been about the capabilities of all fluffs. This girl was actually ten times wiser than I could have ever imagined. Life had thrown her a lemon, alright, and this girl hadn't cried, whined, or given up. She had shoved that lemon in her bra and moved on. Rachel ended up placing in the competition, and her eyes had never sparkled on stage the way they did that night. I, on the other hand, walked away with no awards and nothing to show for the hard work I had put into the program. I was okay, though. I just shoved it in my bra and moved on.



Acrylic Emily Vance





I know what it's like to watch the life

being choked out of the woman who gave birth to me. I've felt the weight of seven boys compressed into the small of my back, the pressure intensified by their screams of discriminative insults as they attacked me. I understand the dread that comes when the dismissal bell rings at school and a student has nowhere to call home. I know the South, the Deep South. Its generosities. Its prejudices. I conquer them daily.

His rage was all but fleeting; rather, this trait marred his personality near consistently, exploding without cause or warning. That day he took it out on Mom's neck, straddling her



Second Place, Essay Competition

stomach as whispered gasps escaped her swollen throat, muffled by dirty, wrenching hands. He wasn't even my step dad, just the third drunk to live with us for any extended period of time. Ronnie abused us more than those drugs abused his body, and that says a lot. My half-sister, a toddler at the time, was his illegitimate daughter, and I thank God he treated her a little better than us. Most of the time he just let her watch the show, often from his arms. Sometimes I wouldn't fight back just because I was afraid she would get hurt. Her continuous attempts to escape his alcoholic stench made her easily dropped. But today he wasn't drunk, and his anger seemed to intensify with all the more vigor, perhaps fueled by some purchase made from the rusty trailer park down Old Seven Highway.

I wondered how long it would take the police to arrive. At our old house, a 110-acre run-down estate that was once the prized dairy farm of Potlocana, they never arrived in timeor at all, for that matter. I guess the winding roads through the densely forested hills of North Mississippi were too frustrating for the officers to travel. The trip from Oxford alone involved trekking over the Yocona River and a twenty-minute drive through hay fields and cow pastures just to arrive at Tula, an outlying community in the forest we referred to as the

"Big W." And once someone got there, not many people knew of our farm still twenty minutes further into the woods. Surrounded by thousands of pines, three near-empty catfish ponds, and two rundown home places, we were at the mercy of the land. I missed that mercy.

Next it was my turn. I had somehow drawn Ronnie's attention from my wheezing mother, though I forget how. Instead I remember the sudden intensification of horror that overwhelmed my senses as he turned towards me. How can anyone imagine his mother being choked to within an inch of her life, and then imagine becoming even more afraid? My bare feet slapped the cold concrete floor as I raced away, but I didn't have far to run. He cornered me in my room, pushing me to the floor as he raised the butt of my shotgun for a strike. My arms were crossed in defense: one blow could surely finish me, but he enjoyed observing me, watching me scream and cry in terror and pain as I pushed my face into the hard floor. It was icy against my flesh, and it shimmered with the reflection of his towering figure. Momma and I had spent weeks staining that floor, swirling the wax to create just the perfect imitation of Mexican tile, a mélange of browns and reds. Our move from the country to the city had been a challenging one, and she tried so hard to make it a home. We had planted azaleas and poppies and wildflowers to make it feel more like "the old house," hung our hummingbird feeders, and unleashed our pets. But alcohol cuts through wax, and bloodstains overpower any wildflower, no matter how resilient the petal's hue.

I'm not sure how, but Momma's screams saved me. Managing to recover herself for the moment, she appeared in front of my curled body with raised arms. "He was just scared for his mother's life!" Her pleas fell upon adamant ears as Ronnie kicked and stomped. He swiftly brought the shotgun down upon the concrete floor, shattering the butt and suddenly exposing the room to the stiff scent of gun oil. I guess the realization of what he had just done surprised him. He'd given me that shotgun as a gift a few years before, and it was one of the few guns in the house that he didn't keep locked up in his gun-safe. He loved that vault, filled with his treasured rifles and pistols. It was his trophy, a trophy he killed with, a trophy he used to claim his other trophies: deer, and

Past Reflections

Photograph Kimberly Golden

beavers, and our obedience. He almost loved it as much as he loved our fear.

We managed to make it to the car, Momma and I. His hands were grabbing at her head through the window, and as we sped away he hurled a weedeater towards us. A sigh of relief...wait, it wasn't over yet. My little sister was still there, unable to get to us in the frenzy of our escape. We had to go back. My mother's purple mascara dripped from her cheeks as she puffed ferociously on a cigarette. The quick loop through the neighborhood proved to be uncomforting. We were surrounded by his family and his friends, and a few miles down the road marked the beginnings of a city we didn't know or trust. "Jeremy, we're just going to go back and take our whoopings. We've got to get your sister. We can't leave her there. We've just got to be brave. Just take your whooping."

It wasn't the first time I had taken my whooping, and it wouldn't be the last. Sometimes whoopings are the only way. I did what I had to do, kept moving. Couldn't stop. Else I'd get caught, get drawn into the unmotivated mindset that claims so many of my southern neighbors. I took whoopings to get my sister back; I took whoopings for being disrespectful; I took whoopings for being a country boy in the city; I took whoopings to teach me a lesson; I took whoopings for being different. I might have been beaten, but I didn't lose. I kept trying, and with each punch and each prod I got a little stronger, my objectives became a little clearer.

These days, my advanced courses at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science issue my whoopings. The rigorous course load, matched by my numerous extracurricular activities, provides an impossibly busy schedule. Balancing AP Calculus with Yearbook and Literary Magazine editorial duties, as well as maintaining my position as Student Government Association Vice-President, can be rather difficult. As one of the few members of my family to value education, whoopings also tend to come in the form of destructive criticism concerning my academic priorities. However, that doesn't stop me from pursuing my classes and my dreams to their fullest. The ceaseless battle for my rights only spurs my motivation. I may take a few whoopings along the way, but I'll come out of the ordeal with something to show for it: an A in physics, an understanding of college-level chemistry, a successful year as the President of the MSMS Senate, a place to call home, or my little sister in the safety of my arms.



"Celestial"

Photograph, Laura Beth Moore

A Moment

The sun begins to set

- No fear a new dawn awaits us yet
- This chapter has come to a close
- We can only guess what the future holds
- A timeless adventure that awaits us all
- No fear we must take a step before we can fall
- Friends forever our paths once crossed We've grown and now must part
- Those who are always with you are those that touched your heart
- We will all venture out full of hopes and dreams and
- Someday a long time from now we will remember back to these years
- And think fondly, smile softly, shed tears
- We remember yesterday, live today, and hope tomorrow

Monica Cook

Flowers at Dawn

Beauty unfolds, Its tender petals caressed By a gentle breeze, Its faces upturned, Waiting for a kiss From the early morning dew.

Addie Leak

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition



Woman of Night

Oil Orlando Croft,

Modern Immortal by Caitlin Wolfe

"Your father's dead," my mother yelled

indignantly down the hall. Her voice was loud and piercing in the early morning.

I sat up and rubbed the sleep from my eyes.

As I crawled out of bed and stumbled down the hall on my way to breakfast, I had to pass my parents' room.

A strong smell floated from the room and began to mingle with the fresh air about me, a sour-smelling gas that gripped my throat and lungs.

I made my way to the kitchen.

My mother was bustling about trying to ready a breakfast for my two siblings and me. My sister was sitting at the table, with her head huddled in her arms with her long russet curls sprawled across the table.

"Don't put your head on the table," my mother scolded her as I sat down.

She sat up straight, but not without sneering at my mother's back.

My eyelids still felt heavy from the night's sleep; they flew wide open when my mother slammed a plate down in front of me.

I looked down at the small lumpy mush, what my breakfast looked like every morning. Usually, I would go through the routine of whining for her to change suppliers, but I knew she was already upset and didn't want to make it worse.

After I ate, I hurried back to my room to get dressed. I passed my mother on the way, who was pushing my brother down the hall.

First Place, Short Story Competition The Chris Read Award for Fiction

"You're the last one up and now you're going to make us all late," she nagged.

He would get an earful. My brother never did anything but mope about, and my mother never did anything but badger him about anything she saw unfit about him. It was because she had to go through labor twice for him. The first time he died due to pneumonia. He was eighteen months old, young enough to be reborn by the GCS's standards, instead of rebuilt. The second time they kept him in the hospital for an extra two months to make sure his immune systems were up. My mother was, indeed, grateful.

I pulled on a t-shirt and some jeans from the floor of my room. I grabbed my jacket off the bed and my book bag from the floor.

"Get in here, Lexi," my mother yelled as I was on my way to the door.

"Ready, Mom," I sighed.

She came out of her room, overloaded with her usual work bundle of papers and bags. She was flipping through the keys in her right hand. The bag on her shoulder began to fall and she just let it plop to the floor with an exasperated sigh.

I stood by patiently, longing for my bed, and watched her try to manage more than she could handle. Dad wasn't here to help this morning.

"Go get your brother and sister," she said as she let her purse go to use both hands to try to find the right key.

I shifted my bag and went to my sister's room. The hall light poured into her dark room. She lay on her bed with her eyes closed. I flipped the light on and watched her wince.

"Get outside before Mom has another aneurysm."

She rolled off the bed with a sneer, picked up her bag, and headed to the door.

I walked a couple feet to the doorway of my brother's room. As I stepped in and pushed the door open a bit, I caught a glimpse of his reflection in his bathroom mirror across the room. I walked over.

He was at the sink, his left shirtsleeve rolled up and a razor in his right hand.

"Do that later," I sighed, "we're already late."

He jumped when he heard my voice and the razor clattered inside the sink.

Quickly, he pulled down his sleeve and followed me out, picking up his bag on the way.

My mother and sister were already outside. As I closed the door, the tram appeared around the corner, its bald metal head glaring angrily in the early sunlight. I shielded my eyes and stepped up the metal platform, the last of my family. The steps disappeared and the door slid shut with a prominent clunk as I followed the others to our seats.

As we waited for the tram to stop at the next house, I noticed the empty seat beside me.

I glanced at my mother. She was quiet, undoubtedly fretting over the imminent hospital bills. Her face was set with a stern expression that never seemed to disappear. But this morning the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and lips were more evident than usual. I always sat beside my mother because I was the only one who could handle her. Even my father lost his grip at times.

My sister sat opposite my mother near the aisle. She stared angrily out the opposite window, her lips pursed, her eyes narrowed, obviously upset, yet still unnoticed by my selfabsorbed mother. Looking at them, both angry and intent, I again realized the likenesses they shared. They both had long, curly, dark brown hair, but my mother's had gone limp years ago from stress and exhaustion and now she always kept the frizzled strands pulled back in an untidy bun. My sister let her hair fall freely in ringlets around her face and over her shoulders.

They both also possessed small dark eyes that looked distant and cloudy, a thin, sharp nose, and high, protruding cheekbones—like ancient goddesses, chiseled and cracked in the pages of history books.

My brother, conversely, resembled my father. They each had dusty blonde hair, a wide nose, and a prominent chin. They were sullen and quiet, shy and acquiescent. Compared to my mother and sister, they resembled a pair of meek, substandard mortals.

I was unlike both of them, like a foreigner. Short, straight black hair fell around my face, with a wide, blunt nose and dark, olive-shaped eyes.

The tram stopped at the Prep School first where my brother timidly scurried down the ramp. Next, at the Intermediate School, my sister got off, flipping her hair angrily towards my mother, who was now staring past me and out the window. I noticed the lines in her face had eased somewhat.

When we stopped at the Secondary School, I started to get up, when I felt my mother's hand on my arm.

"Come with me to the hospital," she said. "I don't mind if you're late for classes."

She was more telling than asking me.

I sat back down as the tram began to pull away from the school. I saw my classmates dragging themselves up the gray steps to the main building for assembly. I was relieved to miss the tedious morning address.

I glanced at my mother. She was sitting with her head against the seat and her eyes closed. The wrinkles were almost invisible, her face almost placid.

I knew why she wanted me to go the hospital with her. She grew up with the development of the Genetic Cloning Session. There were so many protests and so much controversy, it took a little over nine years for the Session to be established and become a federal-funded organization.

My grandparents strongly opposed the Session and refused to donate samples to harvest spare parts. My grandmother said the Session was sending mankind into a regression of humanity, and sooner or later we'd all be empty shells living infinite, meaningless lives; we'd be as miserable as the gods. Maybe she was exaggerating. Or maybe not.

It always gave my mother chills to go to the hospital, though she was never outwardly against the Session. She never said that, though; her pride would never permit it. I suspected it when my grandmother died. My mother avoided the white building as much as she could. And since Grandmother had no spare parts, that made it easier for her.

But bits of my grandmother were in my mother still. I knew she didn't like the ways of the Session, how they cheapened life to nothing by their "advancements in technology." Her pride, though, just let you think she didn't like the bills. But she went through the routine of donating and cataloging replacements in case of an accident for her and the rest of my family.

We stopped at a general station to take the hospital tram. Silently, we rode to the anodyne building.

We walked inside and rode up to a floor labeled "Deceased In Waiting." My mother walked confidently to the secretary's desk, her anxiety dissolved.

The secretary wore a long, black robe buttoned in a single row in the front and straight, loose white pants. Her long hair was in a braid and stacked on top of her head with a diamond of cloth covering it, one of its points resting in the center of her forehead.

"Jaye Harrison," my mother said, the lines returning to her face.

"Let me check the catalog," the woman said robotically.

My mother and I waited as she pulled out a



Photograph First Place, Photography Competition





small personal catalog and began scanning through it.

"Jaye Harrison," she finally read, then looked to us. "Brought in for a fatal heart attack."

She pressed a button.

"He has a replacement cataloged, but it will take a couple hours to create a spare before we put in the replacement."

"When will he be out?" my mother asked bluntly, her pursed lips causing a web of lines to shoot out from the corners of her mouth.

"The surgery will take an hour at the least and he will be released at the end of the day."

"Yeah, thanks. I'll be looking forward to the bills," she said as we walked away.

The secretary seemed to have taken no offense because when I glanced back she had already busied herself with other things and discarded my father's catalog to the corner of her desk.

My mother and I walked back outside to catch the next tram. I'd be an hour late for classes. She didn't seem worried.

When we reached the school she sent me in without an excuse. The office secretary marked my tardiness with a large red T on my schedule then sent me to classes.

I sat for hours through the tedious lectures, the monotonous drone of the professor's voice.

I dozed off for half of one class and woke to my red-faced professor looming above me. I was assigned a ten-page report on the history of genetics in the twenty-second century, due in two days.

I dragged myself through the next class and an exam in my last period. I was afraid to scan my test, knowing I wouldn't get a high mark. I was right.

After classes, I picked up some books from the Archives Hall for my report then caught the tram home.

When I walked in the door, a smell alerted my senses. It wasn't the sour-smelling gas from the morning but more like the smell of hospitals, that opened your nostrils and lung with a burning sensation.

I passed my parents' room and glanced inside. Under the thin blue-gray thermal blanket a body lay on his side with his back to the door. A patch of tousled, thinning pale blonde hair stuck out from the blanket. The body heaved up and down with slow, rasping breaths.

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



I walked on to my room to start on my homework.

I'd gotten to the first page of my report when my mother summoned us for dinner. Everyone crawled into the kitchen. As I started to take my first bite, I realized my father's chair was still empty. I stuck the fork in my mouth and chewed as my mind drifted to other things.

My family ate quickly and quietly, as we did every night. No one wanted to share their day, announce an upcoming event. My mother served, we ate, we left, she cleaned.

I was almost half-way through with the paper when my clock beeped the time to be 12:30. I leaned back from the laptop and rubbed my sore eyes. My back ached from sitting hunched over the computer for so long. I closed my eyes to let them rest.

They popped open when I heard my mother's piercing voice in the early morning.

"Lexi! Get up !" she yelled.

I sat up. The computer still sat beside me, its screen black. I crawled off the bed and into the kitchen. I joined my sister and brother at the table. My mother passed out the plates, putting one at an empty seat, and we began to eat.

I'd choked down about two-thirds of the brown mush when I heard someone coming down the hall. I knew who it was, but reflex made me look.

My father came stumbling into the kitchen, his face pale and unshaved. He looked thinner, despite his usual muscular frame. The surgery must have added ten years, I thought looking into his pallid, wrinkled face.

"Morning." His speech was slurred from the medication.

No one responded except for my mother. She just told him to eat his breakfast because he would need the strength.

I watched him wince as he lowered himself into the chair. He looked up at me. Our eyes met for a moment then I averted them to the plate in front of me and forced down another bite.

I felt his eyes watch me a minute more, then he sighed and looked down to his own breakfast.

We ate in silence then went to our rooms. I pulled on another pair of crumpled up jeans and a fresh t-shirt.

"Get outside before the tram gets here," my mother yelled.

I grabbed my bag and started down the hallway. I passed my father, walking slowly towards his room. He smiled weakly and again I saw the years in his face. He looked so sad, so pitiful.

"Bye...Dad," I said awkwardly.

His smile widened. "Goodbye, Lexi," he said as clearly as he could.

I quickened my step to the door, the discomfort of the situation turning my stomach.

My mother held the door open as we rushed outside, the tram just appearing around the corner. I stepped onto the ramp and into the cabin of the tram. I sat down and looked out the window at the gray concrete wall lining the tracks as the tram pulled away. Past it, the tops of the few trees left by the tram engineers, wafting gently in the breeze.

I knew my father would be back to his daily routine by tomorrow. He'd be there to eat breakfast with us, he'd sit with us on the tram, and be there for supper. But something in me didn't want things to return to normal.

A sick feeling rushed into my stomach. What does anything mean if you can't lose it?

33

Laura gave her mom the eye as she pulled in to the parking lot of Rolling Acres Group Home.

"I thought we were going to the doctor first."

"Well, Uncle Jim asked if he could come along. You know, Laura, he looks forward to seeing us all week, and he promised he would behave himself this time."

Laura had been through this before. Uncle Jim always promised to behave, but he never seemed to be able to do it. Once, he had made

Uncle Jim Hayley Hill

Third Place, Short Story Competition

a spectacle of himself in Wal-Mart by cussing out a cashier because he believed she was plotting to kill him. One other time, Uncle Jim had cried all during Thanksgiving because Mama had been ten minutes late to pick him up from his apartment. It never took much for Uncle Jim to embarrass Laura. Just the fact that he drooled, talked to strangers, and wore mismatched clothes made it hard for her to be seen with him in public. It wasn't her fault that she had a middle-aged, mentally handicapped uncle.

Uncle Jim was already waiting outside his apartment when they arrived, a big goofy grin plastered on his face. They had hardly stopped the car before he had jumped into the passenger's seat and rolled the window down; Uncle Jim always rode with the window down.

Laura crouched low in the back seat, hoping Uncle Jim would think she was asleep. As bad as it seemed, she just didn't like to talk to him. He laughed for no reason at all, and he was always drooling, drooling, drooling. Huge puddles of spit would migrate from the corners of his mouth, down his chin, and onto his white T-shirt. He also had a bad habit of asking about Laura's non-existent boyfriend; it annoyed her that relatives, especially Uncle Jim, always assumed she had a boyfriend.

As they pulled into the parking lot, Laura

noticed that there weren't many other cars, which relieved her; that meant not many people would have to see her with Uncle Jim. They got out of the car, explained the no-talking-tostrangers rule to Uncle Jim, and made their way into the clinic's waiting room. Laura chose a seat in the far corner and began reading the *Seventeen* that had been resting in the seat next to her while her mama and Uncle Jim signed in.

The waiting room was small, square, and extremely cold. Pink couches and chairs were arranged around the walls with stacks of magazines piled on a table in the middle. An older woman with short brown hair and small, penetrating eyes was the only one of the three people in the room to even glance up from her reading when they entered. She gave them a disapproving stare and then shifted back to her magazine. Laura could tell they would need to stay out of her way; she didn't seem like a woman of much patience. Another woman and her teenage son sat on the other side of the room directly across from the older woman. They were whispering back and forth to each other, unaware of anyone else in the room.

"Laura Ann, can I sit next to the beauty queen?"

"I'm not a beauty queen, Uncle Jim. Junior Miss was not a beauty pageant."

"I'm gonna sit next to the beauty queen anyway. Hey, y'all! Look! I'm sitting next to the beauty queen!"

Laura's frown grew deeper as the beady eyes of the older woman darted straight in her direction.

"Some people are *trying* to read. Perhaps you should keep him quiet."

Mama and Laura just nodded their heads at the woman as she positioned herself in a chair facing towards the restroom at the other end of the room and away from where Uncle Jim was sitting.

"Oh, God," Laura thought to herself, "I'll never make it out of here alive."

Laura hid her face with the magazine and prayed that her name would be called soon. She couldn't put up with it much longer. Uncle Jim was too much.

Uncle Jim didn't seem to notice her disdain. He just went right on talking and laughing to himself. Laura stared at him. His peppered, thinning hair and deep-set laugh lines made him look so old, even though his mental capabilities were that of a child's. Actually, his eyes were the only part of his physical appearance that showed how childlike he was; Uncle Jim had huge blue eyes that danced with boyish enthusiasm. welled up in Uncle Jim's eye, spilling over on his contorted face. The only sound that could be heard in the waiting room was that of Un Jim's weeping. His tears were flowing freely now, and all the older woman did was stand up and march out of the clinic without a wor

Laura was still waiting there in her seat, trying to wish herself invisible, when it happened. Uncle Jim got up and headed towards the restroom on the other side of the room.

"Mama, you've got to stop him. Please. What if he makes a mess?"

"You hush! If he makes a mess, I'll clean it up. He's not doing anything wrong, Laura."

All of her life, Laura had been made aware of Uncle Jim's problems with personal hygiene. She couldn't count the number of times she had to clean the bathroom at home after he used it and the number of times she had to wash his soiled clothes for him.

"Please, God, let him make it in the toilet just this once. Please, God, let him make it just this once. Please. Please."

Laura closed her eyes and waited to hear the toilet flush, and after a while, it did. She heard the handle shake, and she saw Uncle Jim's profile as he stepped out of the bathroom. Laura couldn't believe her eyes; he looked dry.

"THANK YOU GOD! Dear sweet Jesus in Heaven, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!"

Her sudden exultation was interrupted as Uncle lim turned in their direction. His entire front side was darkly moist. The older woman with snake-like eves gasped and covered her mouth. Mama and Laura looked at each other. They didn't even have to say anything; they apologized to each other with their eves. Uncle Jim headed back toward them to take his seat, but he stopped when the older woman muttered, "Look at that crazy fool. Why do people let him out of his cage?" Uncle Jim just stood there. The mother and son glanced up at the commotion, their eyes growing large at the sight of Uncle Jim's stained pants and the older woman's comment. Mama closed her eves, and -Laura sat frozen in shock. The entire room was silent and still, not knowing what to say or think in response to Uncle Jim's accident or the woman's offensiveness.

That's when Laura saw it: a huge tear

welled up in Uncle Jim's eye, spilling over onto his contorted face. The only sound that could be heard in the waiting room was that of Uncle Jim's weeping. His tears were flowing freely now, and all the older woman did was stand up and march out of the clinic without a word. The mother and son tried to pretend like nothing had happened. They just sat there, staring straight ahead, flicking their nervous eyes toward Laura and her family every other second.

Laura felt so sorry for her Uncle Jim. He was standing there crying like a baby, and she had been so mean to him earlier. Laura's memories of Uncle Jim when she was a child flashed through her mind. She remembered how nothing ever seemed wrong with him when she was growing up, and she couldn't remember when her perception of him had changed. Laura thought back to the time Uncle Jim had taken care of her when she had the chicken pox. He stayed by her side the whole time, entertaining her with countless games of checkers and wild stories about what he and Laura's mama used to do when they were Laura's age. Another time, Uncle Jim had comforted her when the family's cat died by taking Laura fishing at the old pond behind their house. Uncle Jim had even made Laura a doll once during arts and crafts when he was at his old group home. Uncle Jim had always been there for Laura, and it hurt her to think she had abandoned her uncle as she got older just because he was different from other people. Laura wanted to rip that woman into shreds and then do the same to herself. How could that woman have done that? How could she? Uncle Jim didn't know any better.

Mama and Laura went to him, put their arms around him, and took him back to the car. They just drove around Hattiesburg while Mama tried to calm him down. She soothed him with her voice, assuring him that it would be okay, that they loved him. Laura just sat there in the back, not saying a word. She felt so terrible for every bad action, word, or thought she had ever had towards Uncle Jim. She had been such a brat, and he had never deserved any of her petty cruelties.

"Uncle Jim, I love you. How about I show you my beauty queen pictures when we get back to the house?"



Phoenix Color Pencil Jordan Richard

Random Thoughts of Life

When I grow up I want to write the deep sayings found in greeting cards or on those bright, quirky t-shirts. When I grow up I want to travel on a road-trip to California (because I'm too afraid to live there) or on another mission to moon (because I don't believe we really went the first time). When I grow up I want to learn from fortune cookie advice what the true meaning of life is. When I grow up I want to dive head-first into an exciting job every morning, and sleep each night with anxious anticipation of the day to come. When I grow up I want to laugh at all the crazy antics of my teenage years. When I grow up I want to dance off arthritis and death to the horrible music of the 1980s. When I grow up I want to live with my tongue sticking out in the madness and pure excitement of the moment.

Nyssa Perryman





Ford Photograph Brandon Thornton

Comfort

Goodness lives because Love is warm and smells of rain and clean clothes. And Blessed Blessed are the days when you are light, the nights when our kisses taste of chocolate of breath of weeks without and golden hours of silence.

Jordan Richard

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition

Spring

The world emerges from her cocoon Fresh and childlike, Slips out of that old gray coat, And paints her face. She steps out proud, Head held high with Confidence like high heels, Flirting with the passers-by, Making them blush crimson. The young mother's belly swells With the promise of rebirth, A clean slate.

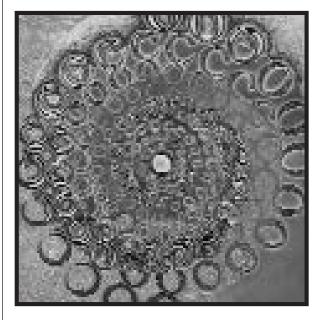
Hayley FCill

Stained Glass

A star, its glory falling softly Upon a simple manger, A dove, gently alighting Upon a humbly offered arm, A cross, rough-hewn, but beautiful, A man, His eyes filled with love, His arms outstretched. An empty tomb... Through this glass, I watch the world go by, And it is painted in hues of truth.

Addie Leak





Fractal

Acrylic/Charcoal/Color Ink Orlando Croft

Waiting

She sits alone. There is a book in her lap, But she isn't reading. She stares, her gaze unfocused, Into the melee of the crowded mall. It is Christmastime, But she has already finished her shopping... She is only watching now— And waiting... A tear falls from a heavily-mascaraed eye, And my heart weeps for her.

Addie Lonk

Wonder

Pen and Ink Jordan Richard

Hands

In the morning, I see his hands reach for his watch, his wallet, his sunglasses His hands seem to know exactly where to land On the left side of the picture frame To the right of the alarm clock Right in front of the tape player I see his hands guide him through the house Turn right at door Turn slightly to the left Now go forward But stay close to the couch Because it's right behind

At meal time, His hands guide him To the left And then straight Onto the hard floor His hands pull the chair out Making just enough space from him to sit They reach for his pillbox Knowing exactly which compartment to open And then they reach for water Bouncing here and there until they hit a glass Then his hands bring the glass to his lips And let him drink Washing down those big pills His hands show him where what food is on the plate And then his hands feed him

At bedtime,

His hands lead him to the bathroom Go straight out this doorway And then turn slightly to the right His hands show him the toothbrush The paste, The denture box His hands tuck him into bed Pulling the warm covers over his exhausted body Then his hands rest as he sleeps Knowing that tomorrow will the same... Not only tomorrow, the day after And the day after that

Preeti Kumar



Hands of Time Chalk Pastel/Charcoal

3

Dance

Hallowed

Acrylic/Chalk

Jeremy Crawford

Trees

Night falls, Music dance Across a bitter sky. Love gone, Faces lost, Coffee shared in days gone by. Time, work, world—dead. Emotion—free Ink flows As blood, As tears. A night spent in remembrance, Bittersweet, Pain and Bliss, Candle-light, The song! The eyes! ...the deep brown eyes... Wild child Wild deep from inside, Wild child Being forced to hide, Moon and stars They cry your sweat; Don't leave me now! Don't go just yet! Silver beads of perspiration, Silent cries of desperation, Leaking Longing Into the night; Dreaming Drawing on childish fright. Breaking barriers, Born to bleed, Sweet wild child Unconscious need. Don't wake the babe! Don't turn her sour! Let her dance Just one more hour There in her world Of broken skin, She's in control, ... just let her win...

Jessica Jennings



Poetry Jeremy Crawford

Third Place, Poetry Competition

The call came at 3 a.m., "Jeremy, I need a favor." I wasn't even fully awake as I stumbled up three flights of stairs.

"Jojo, wake up." His groans weren't unexpected. I handed him the phone and curled up on his stomach.

Then came the conversation, a heart-wrenching talk concerning love, sex, drugs, life, the future one that only happens at 3 a.m.

And through tearful whispers, I lay there staring at the ceiling. Glow-in-the-dark stars hung from fishing line, flowing with the vent's slow current.

As I lay there barely conscious and took in everything around me, I looked at those stars and thought, "Now that's poetry."



My mama has always been a little bit

scatter-brained. Well, maybe scatter-brained isn't the right word... I love my mother; there's nobody like her in the world. She is brilliant and funny and good with my friends and a health nut- everything anybody could possibly want in a mom. But she doesn't always think... Perhaps that's the best way of putting it.

I remember one particular morning in the fall of my freshman year of high school. I was stressed out- I was stressed out a lot back then. Anyway, I wasn't at my best that morning... I'd been up late the night before, studying for some test, and I woke up late, too, probably at about 7:30. My first class, English I, began at eight, and I barely had time to wash my face and throw on my school uniform before my mother's yells echoed through the hallway of our house— "Tim-o-thy! Addie!" Her voice always went up on the last syllables of our names. My little brother was typically unresponsive; of course it never mattered if he was late. The elementary portion of our little K-12 school had no punishment for tardiness; after all, how could they- it's not like the kids could drive. I'd only been introduced to tardies a few years before- in seventh grade- and I'd discovered that I didn't like detention.

"TIMOTHY!" I hollered. I threw my long brown hair into a messy bun and stormed through the hall into my parents' empty bedroom and into the closet that served as my little brother's room. He was stretched out on his bed, leisurely reading a book. I snatched it up from him, and ignored his irritated yell as I stole a glance at the title before placing it out of his reach. Captain Underpants and the Attack of Wedgie Woman. It figured.

"We're about to be late," I hissed. "Are you ready to go?" It would be his fault if we were late— it was always his fault if we were late. I flounced back out of his room and into my own where I proceeded to jam my feet

into my worn Doc Martens and pull my school anorak over my head.

Makeup, makeup, makeup... "Aaad-die!" Never mind. I grabbed my makeup case, tossed it into my backpack, and half-jogged to the kitchen, where my mother was standing with her purse already slung over her shoulder and her keys in hand. "You ready?"

I gave her a pained look— "Almost, Mom— I just woke up."

"All right. You have five minutes. I'll be in the computer room." She looked rather impatient, but I decided to overlook that. After all, she was my mother; wasn't it her job to wake me up if my alarm clock didn't go off on time?

I grabbed an apple from our fruit basket and a half of a protein bar from the fridge, unscrewing the top of a bottle of water as I did so and placing it under the tap. I was on a health kick then (Mom's fault), and not even a bad morning would allow me to skip breakfast. As the bottle finished filling, I replaced the top and threw it into my backpack as well, taking a bite out of my apple and shoving the protein bar into a pocket. No time to fix lunch, but I'd already decided that if worse came to worse (and it appeared that it had) I could always eat a salad in the cafeteria.

I hurried toward the front door- "I'm ready, Mom!" Then a thought struck meactually, I wasn't; I hadn't printed out my essay for Mississippi Studies. I sighed exasperatedly and changed course, heading back to my room instead and pulling up my three-page report on Mississippi in the early twentieth century. I clicked the print button and suddenly remembered Timothy.

I yelled his name again, and was absolutely infuriated to see, as I rounded the corner to his room, that he had pulled out vet another book and was reading it. "Are you READY?"

He looked up at me, all injured innocence. "Yes..." He was, too. I glared at him for a moment and then returned to my room at top speed to collect my report. "LET'S GO, THEN...!"

When I got to the door, Mama was standing there looking at me. "I thought you were ready."

"I am now— Timothy!!"

"He's already in the car."

"What? Oh..." I hurried past her to the car and slid into the backseat. "Timothy, put your mirror down."

"Why?"

"I have to put makeup on."

He flipped the visor down and adjusted it for me; I frantically began to apply concealer and eye makeup. Mama got in and started the car, and I promptly jabbed myself in the eye with my eyeliner. 7:55. Gogogogogo...

The five-minute drive to the school seemed longer than usual. I was all set to spring out the door as we pulled up to the high school building, and I did, reaching back into the car to get my backpack and turning to go— the problem was that when I turned, the car rolled forward— right up my heel.

I daresay my voice must have gone a little hysterical. "Mama. The car. Gobackgobackgoback..." "What?"

"You are running over my foot. Back up."

Thank heaven she finally understood and backed up the Caddy. I'd have been even later if she'd had to rush me to the emergency room. As it was, though, I got to English just as the second bell was ringing— with only a slight limp... and a very interesting excuse.

Characteristic Nostalgically



it's so characteristic nostalgically the abundance of irony and the infinite distance whispering all around a bittersweet letdown resolving to stand alone to move alone to be alone for that is the way the setting sun goes not with an entourage and grand formality but with an acceptance of solitude with an understanding of finality

Brittany Penland

Wave of Midnight

Acrylic Kristin Klaskala



Fallen Angel Photography Nyssa Perryman

"Reflection Gone"

Reflection gone The face of a man in a boy's eyes Trapped; longing to realize

Who he is

Reflection gone Disappearing in this magic act This act of disappearance Looking thru this invisible fence

And he still longs to figure out Who he is

Reflection gone Bound beyond his wildest dreams With the torture of knowing That he's never going 2 know

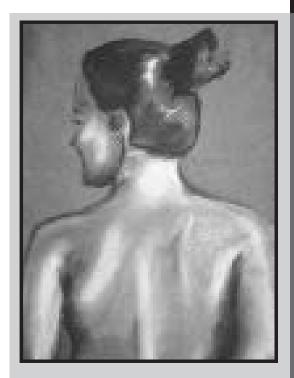
Who he is

Reflection gone Surrounded by this river of mirrors And if only they were clearer

He'd know who he is

Reflection gone

Quinnon Taylor



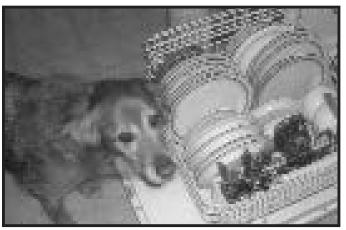
Nude Woman Chalk Orlando Croft

Who Ate the Last Piece of Chicken?

I had been in my room set in my favorite

position: stomach pressed against the faded carpet on the floor, knees bent, feet in the air swaying side to side with the rhythm of the music creeping in under my door from the outside world, and a book glued to my palms. Suddenly the harmonious aroma of collard greens, mashed potatoes and gravy, candied yams, corn bread, and, yes, fried chicken floated through the vents, filled the room, and sang to my soul. I remained on the floor for a minute trying to believe it could be true: We're having fried chicken today!

We hardly ever had fried chicken. Our most frequent source of protein was dry eggs from WIC and two for \$1.00 packs of bologna from Greer's, our small town's only grocery store. The task of supplying enough chicken for me and my nine siblings was not so easy for an unemployed mother and a father who made minimum wage. Obviously, I was anxious to indulge. After finishing a chapter of Mildred Taylor's *Let the Circle be Unbroken*, I got up,



stretched a bit, and headed for the kitchen.

Forcing my way through the crowded kitchen of my six older brothers' towering, sweaty, bodies and two sisters trying to ration out portions between them, I kept my sight on a bowl of golden brown, crisp pieces of chicken. As my mouth increasingly watered, I reached my destination, looked in the big round bowl, and sank to a bottomless pit of

Mattie Brown

disappointment: "Who ate the last piece of chicken? Ma! I didn't get no chicken!"

As ridiculous as it may sound, I grasped a pertinent piece of knowledge from that incident which otherwise may require some people a lifetime to figure out: in order for one to succeed, one must have their priorities in order. My hunger to finish the chapter of Let the Circle Be Unbroken conquered my hunger for being the first in line for rare, finger-licking fried chicken. Even after gazing into that greasy, empty bowl, I never regretted my choice. Since that day, I've learned that having my priorities straight will never let me down and did not then. Earlier that day, my mom peeked in my room and saw me wrapped up in the book. She put aside the best piece of chicken for me, so in fact I ate the last piece of chicken!

From that moment on, I continued making wise choices and am continuingly reaping the

good, still receiving that last piece of chicken. I worked hard and excelled at my previous high school, Greene County High, and got accepted to the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, a residential high school for Mississippi's best and brightest juniors and seniors. I worked hard for my successful junior year at MSMS, and I am determined to bring about an even more successful senior year. Between community service, classes, clubs, homework, and personal relaxation, I still find time to devote to my friends and classmates and clock in eight hours of sleep per night.

Growing up in a large family, I have had no other choice but to learn from my surroundings and to be thankful. Sometimes a couple of things have slipped my mind, and I have consequently yet painfully had to be reminded. But one lesson I've learned that has never failed me is that if I keep my priorities straight, life will always give me that last piece of chicken.

Me?

Photograph Honorable Mention, Photography Competition

Sara Peek

Grey.

She carries home the stars after the revelry of the night, Orion, drunk and aching, leans upon her shoulder and stumbles home to sleep away the light.

She dresses too thin for the cold witching hour, she shivers under silver, and sheer dull shimmers under grey.

She sweeps away the sky just in time for brilliant sister Dawn to throw carmine to the grey.

The bastard half-sister of Dawn, Day, and Dark dances when no one can see. She gathers the stardust from the constellation rave and sets the silver canvas for Sunrise.

Jordan Richard

First Place, Poetry Competition



Jacy

Acrylic Jordan Smalley

My Little Tiger Jom Feng

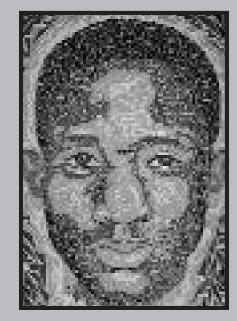
Clutching a little tiger in one arm, a boy almost six climbs down four colossal flights of stairs. They are not only layered with soot but sprinkled with charcoal chips. He smiles at this graffiti caused by his bump into a stack of coal earlier in the day. His right hand enveloped partially by a moth-eaten glove fumbles along the wall to avoid those pillars of coal.

His papa trails him with a box of matches and zhong ze, rice cake wrapped in lotus leaves. Once outside, Papa lights the tiger lantern and tells his son, "I'm going up to help your mom finish making your favorite, tang yuan." After checking his son's plush coat bought from Beijing Mall one last time for any open zippers, he leaves, glancing over his shoulder with each stride.

It is the fifteenth day of the New Year. The boy has a tiger lantern, cleverly picked for the animal of his birth year. Beaming with pride, the boy trudges along the snow-covered pavement towards the dances of ten-foot long lions, lit with flashing eyes and bodies; pounding drums, cymbals, and brass instruments; and the multicolored butterflies, dragons, birds, and many more that accentuate the ordinary red, spherical lanterns. In one hand sits the savory zhong ze. He debates whether or not to give in to his watering taste buds and lose the sole source of heat. Meanwhile, his other hand tugs on the string of his lantern, traversing through the firecracker remains embedded in the snow.

"Your little tiger is catching on fire!" scream some boys twice his size. The little boy turns into the cheek-battering winds and stares blankly at his blazing tiger while tears flood his dumbfounded eyes. His tiger is no more, only ashes and four shiny black wheels resting on the endless monochromatic pillow. The zhong ze falls to the ground melting the snow around it as the boy tries to collect the wheels, only to find them seized in the bullies' hands. He cries more and more when they play catch with the leftovers of his lantern.

Distinguishing the hiccupping whimpers from the roaring hee-haws, Papa plunges from the fifth floor to the little boy's side. One hand rests on the boy's shoulder caressing him and the other hand, densely muscled and tightly tendoned, lies palm up in front of the big boys. Without a word, the bully hands over the wheels of the lantern with a timorous, trembling hand. Clutching the wheels tightly, the



Self-Portrait

Paper Third Place, Art Competition Orlando Croft





Rumble in the Bronx

Scratchboard

Emily Vance

little boy seeks comfort on the brawny shoulders of his papa and falls asleep after a few circles around the eight-story building where they live.

That was thirteen years ago and my last lantern. Upon my arrival in America, I was different: not able to sing the alphabet song; or eat the nauseating cheese glued on to fish fillets; to play a simple game of kickball; or to blend in with the blond, brown, and redhaired kids in class pictures. As a child wanting acceptance, I tried to become as much of an American as my classmates. Saying "Amen" before eating, competing for the best scores on Nintendo games, and pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States of America every morning in elementary school made me as American as anyone else my age.

Yet in this transition from childhood, I never realized that much of the Chinese part of me had burned away like my tiger lantern had until my summer in China after graduating from middle school. Back in my home country again, I did not find the delight which I had expected from being with people of my culture. Instead, I was again different. Unable to read or write Chinese symbols, I was illiterate. I did not know where the stops of transit buses were, how to order food at restaurants, or how to exchange currency. In addition, the colloquial Chinese that I speak to my parents in America proved useless in conversing on folklore and computer jargon with my friends. More surprisingly, my relatives and friends sometimes could not comprehend my Chinese because of the Southern accent I have acquired from living in Mississippi for over half my life.

Now, I am aware of the importance of my Chinese culture, and consequently, my ties with it remain as strong as ever. After my summer in China, I attended Chinese School every Saturday with a passion unlike before: reading passages to the advanced class, cramming hundreds of symbols in a week, and writing essays that won first place consecutively for two years. Though I do not attend Chinese School anymore because of my studying abroad, I still review my notes and reread the stories in my spare time to prepare me for the Chinese classes that I hope to take in college. Moreover, I build on my culture by actively participating in the Mississippi Chinese Association, an organization funded by the locals in Jackson and the Chinese Embassy. I volunteer with decorating and organizing the festivities on the Chinese holidays and also plan activities and care for the younger kids.

I am now as resolved as ever to retrieve my culture. Although this will require patience, hard work, and determination, I will succeed if my fervor is as strong as my yearning for the wheels of my lantern. Now, I truly understand why I had cried so much just for four black wheels of a burnt tiger lantern.

4 7

Contributors' Notes

Jamie Ausborn (Aberdeen)

Jamie's favorite writers are Agatha Christie and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She plans to attend Princeton University in the fall. "High expectations are the key to everything." —Sam Walton

Hannah Bruce (Saltillo)

Hannah attributes her love of photography to some prints she took of fall scenery which turned out unusually well. "Enjoy life."

Mattie Brown (McLain)

Mattie plans to attend Millsaps with a major in either physics or English. Some of her favorite artists are Bebe Moore Campbell, Maxwell, and Erykah Badu. "Life is fabulous."

Hannah Burnett (Ocean Springs)

Hannah will be attending Yale University in the fall. She is influenced by the work of Henri Matisse and Joan Miro. "A person should do one thing worthwhile or that they truly love every day. The more things you enjoy, the easier it is."

Monica Cook (Pontotoc)

Monica plans to attend the U.S. Naval Academy with a major in marine biology. "Life is what you make of it."

Jeremy Crawford (Olive Branch)

Jeremy has been influenced by Dr. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. His life philosophy can be summed up in lines 73-81 of Bryant's "Thanatopsis." Jeremy plans on attending Duke in the fall.

Orlando Croft (Hernando)

Orlando plans on majoring in neurobiology at Rhodes College. His favorite artist is Monet. The song which best describes his MSMS experience is "Good Riddance" by Green Day.

Eric Davenport (Greenville)

Eric plans to attend Grinnell College with a major in biology or mathematics. His favorite writer is Langston Hughes. "Enjoy the sunshine, laugh, and smile because today is the day."

Kyle Doherty (Meridian)

Kyle's favorite artists are Salvador Dali and Francisco Goya. He plans to attend Millsaps College in the fall, where he will major in English.

Kimberly Golden (Eupora)

Kimberly plans to attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a major in international business and fine arts. She wishes to work in a museum while freelancing as a photographer. "Beauty is everywhere. It takes an imaginative eye and camera to capture it!"

Tom Feng (Madison)

Tom plans to attend Princeton University in the fall and major in molecular biology/chemistry. "Far and away the best prize that offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." —Teddy Roosevelt

Chris Gresham (Lake Cormorant)

Chris plans to attend Mississippi State University and major in music and CPE. His favorite artist is Dennis McKiernan. "Never regret."

Andy Guan (Ridgeland)

Andy's favorite artists are Norman Rockwell and Van Gogh. He has been interested in art since the seventh grade, especially the work done on the human body.

Hayley Hill (Taylorsville)

Hayley plans to major in English or history at Rhodes College in the fall. "It is with the heart that one sees rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye." — *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Brittany Hollis (Brandon)

Brittany plans to attend Mississippi College with a major in medicine. Her favorite authors are Sylvia Plath, Ayn Rand, and Michael Crichton. "Leave your mask at the door. It's you that I want to see. The real you."

Jessica Jennings (Yazoo City)

Jessica plans to attend MSU with a major in gifted education. "Round here we talk just like lions/ But we sacrifice like lambs." – "Round Here" by Counting Crows

Kristin Klaskala (Starkville)

Kristin plans to attend MSU or MUW with a major in art. Her favorite artist is Michelangelo. "Do all you can— 'til you can't anymore."

Preeti Kumar (Vicksburg)

Preeti plans to attend Ole Miss with a major in premed or pharmacy. "You must have control of the authorship of your own destiny. The pen that writes your life story must be held in your own hand." —Irene C. Kassorla

Addie Leak (Woodville)

Addie's favorite writers are J.R.R. Tolkien, Jane Austen, and T.A. Barron. She plans on becoming a journalist or novelist in the future. "Life is beautiful!"

Felicia Mo (Natchez)

Felicia will be attending Millsaps College in the fall and majoring in business. She has been influenced by the works of Vincent Van Gogh.

Laura Beth Moore (Tupelo)

Laura's favorite artist is Van Gogh. Her future plans include attending Ole Miss with a major in pharmacy or pre-med. "I'm sorry, try again later."

Jack Neldon (Glen Allen)

Jack plans to attend the U.S. Military Academy with a major in electrical engineering. "A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do." — U.S.M.A. Cadet Honor Code

Sara Peek (Ocean Springs)

Sara plans to attend Caltech as a researcher in physics or biology. Her favorite artist is Richard Feynman. "If you think you can, or if you think you can't, you're right." —Henry Ford

Brittany Penland (Columbus AFB)

Brittany is influenced by the Bible and plans to attend MSU in the fall. "Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself." —Harvey Fierstein

Nyssa Perryman (Columbus)

Nyssa is influenced by Melissa Bank's book *The Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing* and the writing of Shel Silverstein. She sums up her MSMS experience with Weezer's "The Good Life."

Jordan Richard (Natchez)

Jordan plans to attend Ole Miss with a major in broadcast communications. She is influenced by E.E. Cummings and J.R.R. Tolkien. She best describes her MSMS experience with "The Baka Song."

Ryan Scott (Vardaman)

Ryan plans to attend Savannah College of Art and Design with a major in musical theatre or speech pathology. "You can't deserve the sweet and tender in life unless you can take the rough and cruel with itand you can survive it- as long as you have a twinkle in your eye and a wink."

Lekha Sunkara (Ridgeland)

Lekha's favorite artist is J.W. Waterhouse. She plans to attend Washington University with a major in biology. "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." —Oscar Wilde

Quinnon Taylor (Greenville)

Quinnon plans to attend Belmont University and major in vocal performance. He is influenced by the works of John Mayer, Aaliyah, Beyonce Knowles, and Madonna.

Brandon Thornton (Carriere)

Brandon plans to attend MUW with a major in culinary arts. His favorite artists are Allen Ginsberg and Andy Warhol. "Anything can be made into art with a little self-influence."

Emily Vance (Starkville)

Emily's favorite artists are Douglas Adams and Salvador Dali. The Beatles have influenced her writing. Emily best sums up her MSMS experience with Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust."

Jershuntas Webber (West Point)

Shun plans to attend Tuskegee University with a major in mechanical engineering. The work which has influenced his writing is *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* by Tupac Shakur. "Make every moment count."

Kendrell Wells (McAdams)

Kendrell plans to attend Dartmouth College with a major in both mathematics and pre-med. His favorite artist is Blondie. "When you're born, you get a ticket to the freakshow that we've all become. Enjoy the circus; don't for a second take it seriously." – George Carlin

Laura Williams (Gulfport)

Laura plans to attend Ole Miss with a major in pharmacy. Her favorite artists are C.S. Lewis, J.K. Rowling, and Anne Geddes. "If you can dream it, you can do it." —Walt Disney

Caitlin Wolfe (Brandon)

Caitlin's favorite writers are Edgar Allan Poe, Alexander Dumas, Ray Bradbury, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Jane Austen. "Wait until it is night before saying that it has been a fine day."



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