

Southern Voices

2006



Southern Voices

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Literature, and Philosophy
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Short Story Judge
Ms. Ruth Moose
Faculty Member, Creative Writing Program
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
And author of short story collections,
Dreaming in Color and *The Wreath Ribbon Quilt*
(August House, 1989)

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Love Goes *Down* the Drain

Michael Counihan

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

Hermes eased himself into his office chair, the type with moldy brown fabric and beige plastic supports. He looked around his “office” with great satisfaction; the threats of failure after he had dropped out of high school seemed to have been false. After all, he had done quite well for himself, what with this nice business and all. The headquarters room wrote silent volumes about the business it directed. Stained paneled walls tacked to drywall, latest Hooters’ calendar tacked to those (he only went there for their hotwings), and burnt yellow carpet that smelled of stale beer and Draino. A picture of a homey woman reclined next to his computer on a press-board desk that Hermes found by the side of the road (“still a perfectly good piece of furniture”).

Hermes was leaning back in his chair and enjoying the last few crunchy morsels from a Cracker Jack box when the roll-to-dial phone vibrated.

Mr. Gautier answered in a not-quite Deep Southern but not-quite Cajun accent: “Hermes Gautier Plumbing. What can I do you for?”

A rather anxious voice came across the wires, “Hello? Okay, my fiancé is out of town...”

Turning red, Hermes replied: “Ma’am, I think you might have the wrong number. My name is Hermes Gautier and I’m a plumber. A real plumber, too, not like one of them fireman that’s really not a fireman that you call when there’s not really a fire, ’cept in his britches. I guess you just got the wrong number. Best of luck to you.”

“No, let me finish. My fiancé is out of town and I was taking a shower...”

Hermes interrupted thoughtfully and in all earnestness, “That might explain why your fee-awn-say got himself out of town, if you ain’t gonna clean yourself until he do!”

Exasperation turned to patronizing condescension. “You must not be married.”

“No, ma’am, I’m not. But I sure hope to be real soon like.”

“Okay, then let me help you out. When a woman is talking, the last thing on earth she wants to hear is someone else talking. Understood?”

“I think I’m picking up what you’re putting down. So what can I do you for?”



Forgotten History

Photograph

Kelly Lence

The lady, whose name was Grace, proceeded slowly, enunciating every syllable. "My fiancé is out of town and I was taking a shower. My engagement ring slipped off and went down the drain. I've tried to get it, but it's too far down. I need you to come over and get it out of the pipes."

"All right, miss. I'll be over in a jiffy."

"But you don't know where I live."

"That's kinda mean of you, making it hard on me like that."

"Aren't you supposed to ask?"

Hermes replied in a most discombobulated fashion, "I thought I wasn't supposed to be talking."

Grace had reached her limit. "118 Sycamore Drive," she yelled before she hung up.

"That's a mighty strange woman that is. Wellp, suppose I'll be getting over to 118 Sycamore." Hermes pulled on a jacket and, having grabbed the precious box of Cracker Jacks, headed out to the van.

Soon, a grey monstrosity was seen pulling up the driveway of 118 Sycamore. The van was emblazoned with the following:

Hermes Gautier, Plumber

"We fix your cracks without you seeing ours."

Mr. Gautier did not immediately egress his vehicle. Instead, he turned to 66.6, the local classic rock station, took a gulp from his Coke-and-peanuts bottle, and finished the delectable toffee popcorn.

"Uup. There's the little booger. What do I got here?" Hermes gingerly lifted the plastic-covered trinket and raised it to his eye. "It's a ring! It's a ring!" Jollemnity, that wonderful yet awful mix of happiness and solemnity, took hold of the plumber. "It's a sign! I'm supposed to marry Luberta. I've been a meaning to, but ain't never had a ring, 'til now! It's a sign from the Almighty! Now, I...I...I'll be getting more responsible. She's expectin' me to look after her, and I better do a good job." After a brief contemplative pause, Hermes was back to ebul-

lience. "I'm gonna be married!! I'm gonna be a married man! And a dad! I'm gonna have kids! And I'm gonna have kids." With a starry look in his eyes, Mr. Gautier put the ring in his embroidered pocket, got out of his van and wafted to the front door of 118 Sycamore.

A woman wearing navy blue sweats with the sleeves pulled up opened the door. She was "glistening" (since southern women never sweat), but the moisture could not entirely smudge her girl-next-door beauty. Her voice sounded perturbed but relieved. "Oh, good. You made it." She began walking back, into the house, and motioned with a flurried wave of her hand for Hermes to follow. Left, Right, Straight, Right, open a door, Right. The shower was a typical fiberglass stall with a rose-tinted curtain.

**"Jollemnity,
that wonderful yet awful
mix of happiness
and solemnity,
took hold of the plumber."**

Grace beckoned in a peppy voice, "Here it is. Call me when you're done." She turned and left the room.

Hermes was taken aback at being left so hurriedly. But, he got down to business and pulled out his plumber's snake, which he referred to lovingly as "Bubba-Beaux." This was a sophisticated instrument, with titanium casing and clips at the end to secure an errant object. The plumber bent down and began searching for the ring. Soon, he felt his belt on his hind quarters and quickly pulled his trousers up. "Can't be going against our motto, now can I?" While leaning over the shower pipe, his pocket opened and spewed forth its precious

cargo, which plummeted straight from the pocket into the drain. Hermes threw his hand out to arrest the fall, but only succeeded in shifting his center of gravity enough to topple into the stall.

Light footsteps, unheard by Hermes, came up the hall and Grace appeared, her face showing a look of concern that quickly turned into a look of suppressed laughter. Seeing that all was right, and that the moment was too priceless to be interrupted by words, she slowly backed up and left.

Mr. Gautier was not concerned by the unfortunate events described above. He simply ran the snake down and fished out the two rings. He then examined them like the jewelers he had seen on TV, squinting hard, moving each one towards then from his eye. One had a large clear stone set in white-gold finish connected to a petite band. The other had a large clear stone set in white-gold finish connected to a petite band.

The only difference was in heft. This gave Hermes some trouble, but he quickly settled the matter using his intellectual prowess. “They seem to be comin’ out

with a mighty large bit of light metals that cost more than the heavy. And this woman seems like she’d get hitched to the type of man who’d be likely to buy expensive things, like light metals. Why, this ring’s probably a thousand times more expensive than the other. But my Luberta won’t mind my ring. She’s a right nice woman, never expectin nobody to do more than they’re able.” He left the ring on the sink counter, collected his fee, and left.

The next week’s paper contained the following succinct entry in the Marriages and Announcements section:

Ms. Luberta Thibodeaux

Ms.Luberta Thibodeaux was recently engaged to Mr. Hermes Gautier of Right and Wrong, La.

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

Rain

f

a

l

l

i

n

g

Rain
Cold rain
Icy on my face
Streaking my glasses
Dissolving the eyeliner
Dispersing the façade
As I smile at you
Dripping rain

Rain
Cold rain
Drip - dripping
Gel from your hair
As you hug me tightly
Sharing your humidity
Sharing your rain
Dripping rain

Falling like tears from your face

Tiffini Oman

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition

Cup Man

Does anybody know your name?
I call you Cup Man.
You walk along the sidewalk,
With hair outdated by decades,
And jeans worn light blue.
You search through empty slots
Of vending machines and phones
At the local Jitney Jungle.
Do you ever find any change?
You always have a cup in your hand
And walk with a rhythm,
Shoulders stooped and legs in perfect unison.
I've seen you walk from Dunbar Avenue,
All the way to the colossal giant.
Is there something else you're really looking for?
You walk with determination,
You look as though you're on a mission,
With that cup in your hand.
I think the day I stop seeing you
Is the day I leave the Bay.
Other people have their thoughts of you;
Some say you live in the nut house.
They say you're crazy,
I've had many wonders about you,
But as impersonal as you are to me,
I think you're the perfect example of normal.

Aspen Nero

The Test

Worthington Phillips

“What’s the answer to number 13?” whispered a dark-haired boy who sat behind me in my 9th grade Mississippi History test. I whispered through clenched teeth as subtly as I could the correct answer, “Tallahatchie.”

The boy behind me was an example of the “cliché” jock. He was a hit with not only the ladies in our freshmen class, but the older sophomore and junior classes



The Carnivorous Garden

Ink

Aspen Nero

as well. He was an all-state athlete two years running. Thirdly, he was always looking for some geek to bail him out of anything that required any academic work. On this day, like so many other days, I again was that geek.

Over time I had grown used to the custom of supplying fellow classmates with everything from homework answers, to the way the teacher had made out daily quizzes, to solutions to math problems, to doing my best to discretely give students the correct responses on any test question they asked for. After four years of a life with supplying students with all sorts of answers and having never been caught, I came to the conclusion that I was the slyest person on the face of the earth, and with that notion and sense of overwhelming arrogance came more carelessness in my “services.”

Halfway through the hour-long class I rose from my seat to turn in the test that I knew I just aced with my usual 100%. As I returned to my desk I noticed that the boy who sat behind me had still not finished the test, and by the grim look on his face I understood that he had a significant number of questions unanswered. To a fourteen year old who still spent his Saturday mornings watching cartoons, this depressing look on anyone’s face due a tricky free-response test was the equivalent of the black and yellow Bat signal calling the Caped Crusader to come save the day.

As was expected, no more than two seconds passed after I sat back down when I heard the familiar sound, “Pssst.” With my left hand I eagerly took the cap off my ball-point-pen and with my right I searched through my bookbag and pulled out a steno notepad that had a cover littered with sketches of people, animals, and buildings. “Hey, who’s the guy who tried to enroll at Ole Miss in 1962?” asked a hopeful voice behind me. I printed and underlined the name “James Meredith” in the only white space I could find on the notepad cover. After writing down the name I leaned to the side of my desk and pretended to search through my bookbag so that the boy behind me could clearly see the notepad with the answer on it. Having too much confidence in my own experience with such matters I believed the chance of being caught ran slim

to none, despite the fact that my desk was in the front row.

However, I was *not* too sure of the discreetness of my partner-in-crime. As my luck would have it, apparently when the jock asked the question, his voice was much louder than a whisper and with the teacher sitting no more than ten feet away even he could hear it. When I finished writing the “-ith” at the end of the name and looked up from my desk, I saw the broad-shouldered teacher gazing directly at me. The basketball coach of the varsity team who was also the teacher of our Mississippi History class opened his wide mouth and said in his usual stern, demanding voice, “Mr. Phillips, bring that notebook to my desk.”

The only time my heart had ever beat that fast was either right before a wrestling match, or when my mother would call me by my full name. However, I do not believe my face had ever turned that particular shade of red, nor had I ever had so much difficulty walking a mere ten feet.

Doing my best not to look the 200-pound man in the eyes, I laid the notepad down on his desk as gently as I could. With hopes that I could return back to my own desk, my stomach ached even more when he told me not to go anywhere. He demanded me to tell him what the name “James Meredith” was doing written on my notepad.

After recounting my story, the teacher gave a slight nod and signaled me with his hand to return to my desk. Several minutes after my having sat down, the instructor marched over next to my desk. “Boys,” he asked in a military-like voice, “do you both admit to cheating on this test?” The two of us both responded with a simple and quick, “Yes, Sir.” With nothing else said the teacher placed a piece of paper on both of our desks. In large, flamboyant, black letters that had his signature style of putting capital letters in the middle of words, the paper read, “I _____ ADmit to Giving/recEiving inforMation (Cheating) on a MISSISSIPPI State History Test.”

Taking a heavy breath I signed my name on the blank line and gave the paper back to the instructor. With two pieces of paper in his hands and a look of disappointment in his eyes, the teacher left the room, undoubtedly to give the headmaster of the school the news.

It had not occurred to me until the teacher left the room that seventeen other peers of mine had all just witnessed the whole incident. Three or four of these seventeen students who were probably wishing that they were the one sitting behind me getting answers were surely now incredibly thankful they were *not* in that position. It was also at this time when I finally remembered that I, along with half the class, had been inducted into the National Honor Society just a day and a half before. Being slightly disappointed in myself for having this honor taken away due to cheating, I could not help but see some humor in it, too. It doesn't happen every day when someone is thrown out of the National Honor Society thirty-six hours after being inducted.

“It doesn't happen every day
when someone is
thrown out of the
National Honor Society
thirty-six hours
after being inducted.”

As I had known for quite some time there are both advantages and disadvantages to everything. Getting thrown out of the National Honor Society, a 0% on a major test, and a day of in-school suspension were the obvious disadvantages. However, it was also this incident that helped spur my incentive to do the best thing that has ever happened to me: attend the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science.

At the end of school that day a grizzly old man with a Santa Claus-like beard that I knew as “Dad” pulled

up in his beat-up, twelve-passenger, GMC van. After relaying the day's story to him, and expecting a lecture on cheating and being honest, I was surprised to find the conversation end rather quickly. Instead of being furious he was actually proud. Not proud of the fact that I cheated on a test, but proud of the fact that when I was caught I did not try to "scheme my way out of it." When caught, I didn't try to get myself out of trouble by emphasizing the fact that I was giving answers and not receiving them as some people might have in my situation. I also did not complain to either of my parents hoping that they could bail me out. I simply took the consequences and that was enough for my father.

"Well," said my father on the ride back home, "seeing as there isn't too much going for you at Hillcrest, maybe you should take a look at this." He slipped me a jagged newspaper cutout that had his coffee spilled on the top half. The name of the article actually caused me to laugh out loud to myself: "Worst High School Basketball Team in Mississippi wins its First Victory *Ever*." The article told the story of The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS), a residential high school located on the campus of Mississippi University for Women, three hours north of my home in Jackson. The fact that the school just won its first basketball game in fifteen years—although humorous—was surprisingly not what captivated me. Statements like, "The basketball coach may be a volunteer, but the history teacher is certainly no mere volunteer," and "The team has had few if any practices this year due to students skipping them to study their physics" absolutely fascinated me. Up to that point in my life the different schools I had attended in New York, Iowa, and Mississippi were all the same. Basketball coaches were primarily hired to coach basketball and then choose a history class to teach, and the idea of studying physics instead of going to basketball practice was ludicrous. As I read on I learned that MSMS was a tuition-free high school for academically gifted juniors and seniors taught by the best teachers in the state.

"The team has had **few** if any
practices this year due to
students **skipping** them
to study their physics' "

After doing some research about the school, I came away with an idea of paradise. For free I would get an education several times better than the one I was having to pay for at my home school; secondly, I would be at a school with students on my own academic level, and as a bonus I would get out of the house two years early.

When I got the acceptance letter two months after sending in the application I knew that I would soon be in an environment where I would no longer have to provide students with answers to homework and tests. Nor would I be taught by teachers who were only a few pages ahead of the students in the textbook. I would no longer be wasting my time with classes that barely put their students to a challenge. Instead I would be in a school that made it a point to challenge their students academically and that made sure they were ready for a post-high school education. I would be in a school taught by top-of-the-line teachers. Finally, I would be in a school with students who were as eager as I was to learn.

Swim

“Swim, child, swim,” said the woman, with tear.

“The waters are constantly changing. They not be crystal clear.”

The hold of her hair pounding the waves

Refusing to conform to the demands of the ocean

Her steadfast strokes, her heart of devotion

“It not be safe to feel the grit of the sand

To feel a façade of certainty—to
think you’ve reached land

The current will crusade, battling to sweep you away

The limit, infinite

The boundaries, unseen

Blankets and blankets of blue

Never forget... it not be serene

Arms of the waves will slap you galore

My arms wizen, so full of yore

But still, I push to hammer the beats of
the waves as I wane from shore

The sun shall always rain yellow

The dew always flood blue

Shall you never cease with miles of ambitions

Swim, child, swim...”

Lamees El Sadek

The Heavy

Sometimes when I see a fat girl

It’s not very hard for me to imagine

A skinny girl trapped inside

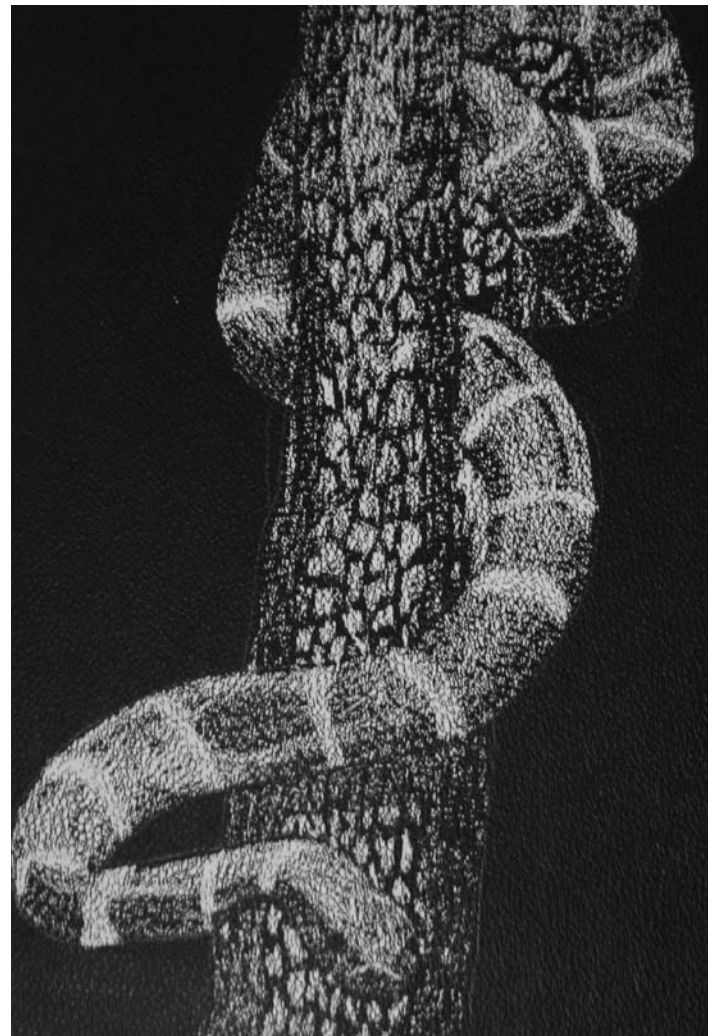
Seeking a frantic escape from a heavy cage

Under rolls of skin, a tummy taut

Under a double chin

Maybe something deemed more acceptable to a 21st century observer

Lauren Klaskala



Snake

Scratchboard

Daniel Baker

Like A Major

David Elion

“Staccato! Staccato!” screamed Sir Wilhelm,
“Off the bow! Off the bow!”

The first clamored into measures, bumping notes to notes in a stark attempt to play in perfect presto. Already behind, the seconds rushed to keep up with an inevitable wreck.

“Stop,” sighed Sir, “Just stop! This is a professional orchestra – professional! You sound like first year high school children. You people don’t deserve to get paid. Really, I should fire you all. Marina, start us off again and please, people, my God, get it right!”

As the stolid concertmaster lifted her bow to begin the concerto, the rest of the first section hastened to take a breath before replaying the tiring piece. It was Pops season, and the strings of the Collierville Symphony Orchestra were obligated to play at the annual *Bach and Brahms Festival*. It was a small ensemble composed of forty-nine people, the string section being largest at thirty-one.

“That’s enough for today. Come back tonight prepared and ready, and if you embarrass me, you all will be fired.”

The orchestra flinched toward Wilhelm’s threat, a sheer contrast to Marina’s nodding smile. The group disbanded and scattered from the room. Paul broke from the warm seat. Sweat dripping from his forehead, he headed toward the stage exit. Reaching for his case, he felt a slight nudge on his shoulder.

“Hey, Paul, I just wanted you to know that I got the call. New York says they’re interested, and I have an interview next week. Just wanted to let you know,” smirked Marina as she turned toward the door.

“Snotty prick,” whispered Paul as he strode toward the exit.

“Paul,” called Wilhelm, wiping the sweat from his face, “I’m going to need you not to wear those drab old rags again tonight. Be a lad and buy yourself a new tux. You’re on the outside for God’s sake. Do it or be demoted.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” shrugged Paul as he opened the door.

“Freedom,” he sighed to himself. The young musician ran up the street to the MATA bus. Paying his fare, he carelessly took a seat at the rear. The second shift 4:00 bus always made its first stop at the Canon Center, giving Paul a ride to himself. He could have walked, but Paul made it a modest tradition to take the 4:00 MATA after concert practices; it gave him time to reminisce. As the bus driver drove slowly through the rainy streets, Paul sat back and drifted into his wonderland.

“Why do good things happen to bad people; why can’t good things happen to me?” he thought to himself. He could not get over Marina’s comment: “Just wanted to let you know,” she had said. The young Russian was always a stickler for competition and Paul was her greatest yet; they both had auditioned for the New York Philharmonic that Tuesday. Paul remembered Marina’s remark before he went into the audition: “Why would you even try? It’s better against best.”

He shuddered at the scene and embraced his case. Unlacing the velvet ties he cracked open the bold, wooden casket. He took the neck of his violin in his hand and brushed the aged “S” holes with his fingers. The soft, cold varnish brought back memories of his grandfather, the wise old virtuoso. He remembered constantly dodging the troubles of home by spending long afternoons in his grandpa’s studio. He learned every note and every scale, every style and every song from his grandfather’s fingers. Ole Mozart, as he was called, was the embodiment of Paul’s playing, and his sound reflected in every stroke from his grandfather’s bow. Paul began to air bow while humming an old traditional. He often compared his grandfather to A Major: being sharp minded will always bring about the sweetest sound. The MATA came to a halt, and Paul stepped from the bus. Opening the apartment building door, he ran up the front stairwell. Entering

his home, he threw down his keys and headed toward the refrigerator. Seeing nothing but stale cheese and a foil-wrapped slice of onion, he opted to eat out on the way to the concert. The young musician was lowly and exhausted; slowly plopping himself on the couch-bed, he fell asleep.

Less than three hours later, Paul awoke to the sound off hostile traffic on the wet streets. "What time is it?" he wondered to himself arising from sleep. "Oh, my God, it's 6:50."

The young man hammered to the floor. Rushing to the closet, he found his "drab rags" and quickly put them on. He knew that he had already missed the 6:45 call time and would have hell to pay if he were to show up late; his job was truly on the line. The young man rushed into the street and although he steadily waved, the cabs neglected to stop.

"Dammit!" screamed Paul as he scuttled up the walkway. Thirty minutes passed and Paul continued toward the theatre. After finally arriving at a quarter until seven, Paul nervously dashed up the stairs. Entering the left stage, he saw Sir Wilhelm preparing to process after Marina tuned the orchestra. Carefully creeping toward the upstage, the youngster managed to boot a cello case.

"Son, are you mad?" called out Wilhelm. "Did you really think that you could sneak into second chair?"



Night Light

Photograph

Jaime Johnson

"I'm so sorry, sir! I tried not to be late but..."

"Paul!"

"Sir?" he asked

"Are you still wearing those ragged threads? I thought I told you to get rid of those."

"You did, sir, but I didn't have time to get a new tux."

"No time?" asked Sir Wilhelm. "Well I have no time for you. Goodbye."

"Goodbye?" questioned Paul

"Yes! Goodbye! You're fired!" shouted Wilhelm.

"Fired?" shuddered Paul.

The old English conductor uncaringly turned his nose toward the curtains and walked into a welcoming applause. Paul, his face dreary, sunk into the background and allowed the curtains to close at his face. His fingers grew numb, and his face turned cold. He stood, quivering as the E minor concerto played at his front. Stale notes from the back of the section cut through his ears as he continued to drudge in fear. He dropped his instrument to the ground, and the strings began to pop in a dreary echolalia, sending Paul into a whirl of anxiety. He began to become nauseous with angst as sweat dropped from the top of his forehead to the tips of his eyelashes. Looking toward the window, Paul stared at the sky. The stars lit with a brilliant incandescence that drove him into eerie solace. He was in ambivalence and had never felt better. The young musician looked toward his instrument; the old violin had been through worse lapses and sat on the ground like a solid rock, posing toward its owner. Paul grabbed the neck and grasped the instrument. As he hugged it to his chest, he felt Old Mozart clasping him into a loving embrace and telling him to keep his mind, stay sound. Paul began to hum an old tune and slowly trail toward the door. After grabbing his coat and case, he prodded toward the exit and entered the street. Paul looked to his watch. "7:30 — just enough time."

The young man clutched his coat and walked to AMRO; he needed a new pair of strings to audition for the New York Philharmonic.

Sibling Ties

Rachel Wiley

*Third Place,
Short Story Competition*

“Kevin, move your scrawny little butt, or I’m leaving you here!”

“You can’t do that! Mom would roast you when she found out!”

“You’ll be in the fire right along with me if you don’t move it, runt!”

Eve paused in running her fingers through her rusty brown hair and waited for her little brother to respond. She was pleased that she heard no rebuttal to her last threat. Her parents had told her to meet them in Houston for a nice family get-together, but if she and Kevin didn’t leave now, the bus would be gone. Only two buses ran between Silsbee and Houston on Sunday, and the other one didn’t leave until one in the afternoon. The very thought of her mother’s wrath if they missed opening mass at church made Eve cringe. She loved her little brother, but there was no way she was going to make that kind of sacrifice for him.

Kevin’s presence was hailed by his heavy boots slamming down the staircase. Eve leaned against the refrigerator, which gave her a perfect view of the end of the staircase and the foyer, and waited for the inevitable. Kevin hit the last five stairs at a lethal speed and stumbled on his loose shoelace. He barely managed to recover but still slammed into the wall opposite the staircase in his haste. He landed in a heap on the floor and moaned theatrically, head buried under his arms. Eve pushed herself off the refrigerator and prodded the black mass on the floor delicately with her high heel.

“Move it, runt. If you get blood or guts on the carpet, Dad will kill you.”

“Eve, I’m lying here dying and that’s all you say!”

“Yep.”

Kevin heaved himself to his feet, muttering abuse the entire time. He shuffled into the kitchen while Eve checked the floor for anything staining the pris-

tine white carpet, just in case. After all, her father had thrown a terrible hissy fit when Eve had shoved down a piece of toast while going out the door one day. She had gotten crumbs on the carpet, and her father had kept her back until he had finished his “scolding.” Never mind she had been late for school. She didn’t want her little brother going through that kind of stress for nearly killing himself on the stairs.

“Kevin, stop stuffing your face and move it!”

She cared a lot about her little brother, but she’d never tell him that.

Shrugging on her jacket, Eve couldn’t help but look her little brother over. Kevin had his hoodie drawn up around his thick brown curls, forcing them down around his thin features. Being all of eleven, Kevin really hadn’t grown into himself yet and looked more like a six-year-old girl who found the largest sized clothes she could find in the bottom of a Salvation Army box. It was a rather cute picture to Eve’s mind, but her parents couldn’t agree less. In fact, Eve could see exactly how they were going to react when she and Kevin strolled into church; they would take one look at Kevin’s torn jeans, army boots, black hoodie with its heavy metal emblems, and eyeliner and have him sit as far from them as possible while still being in the church. Kevin knew this, and he knew Eve knew it, too. He also knew that it went without saying that she would sit with him. She always sat with him.

“You look like a girl. You know that, right?” Eve spat at Kevin, taking in her brother’s delicate features and shoulder-length curly hair. Kevin glared at her over a bottle of Mountain Dew but was too intent on sucking the container dry to respond.

Eve took a closer look at Kevin’s face, or more specifically, his pale blue eyes. Gripping his chin, she carefully tilted his face toward the white light of the kitchen.

“Is that my eyeliner?” she demanded.

“Yes,” Kevin replied, making no attempt to hide it. “I lost mine and yours was just sitting there on your dresser. You never use it, anyway.”

Part of Eve’s brain was caught up in disbelief, but the other wasn’t at all surprised by his answer. She might

have been six years older than her brother, but that didn't stop him from the occasional raid in her room for this and that. She would never admit it out loud, but she had done the same thing to him in the past.

Eve sighed and released her brother's chin, then noticed the time on the clock next to the door.

"Oh, God, we're going to be late!"

"...Kevin would be the one to paw at the door with chocolate and a six pack of Mountain Dew."

Without further hesitation, Eve grabbed Kevin and shoved him out the door, ignoring his protests as only an older sister could.

Eve slumped into her bus seat and shut her eyes, determined to catch her breath after their mad dash across town. Kevin had complained, continuously and bitterly, that he was still hungry, but Eve had blocked him out long ago. It was unfair, but Eve was more intent on getting them to Houston on time; then she would worry about actually feeding her brother.

"This sucks, Eve! I'm starving, and it's two hours to Houston. Two hours!" Kevin repeated, as if Eve had not understood the severity of his words the first eight times. Eve twitched, slowly opened her eyes, and turned to Kevin. Her face was devoid of all feelings.

"If you're that hungry," she whispered in a deadly voice, "gnaw your arm off and eat *that*." Kevin paled considerably and held his hands up in defeat.

"Okay, okay! I'll leave you alone. You should have warned me it was that time of the month," he said. Eve briefly entertained the urge to bash her brother's head into the seat in front of them but decided against it. She was tired, and the seats were too well padded to do any real damage that made the effort worth it. The comfortable

padding make up for the horrible upholstered color, which fell somewhere between pear green and faded gold — not that flattering of a color, over all.

The bus driver had at least had the sense to turn the heat on, so by the time Eve and Kevin had rushed onto the vehicle it was warm and pleasant. All in all, she was content to lie back and sleep for the next three days. But Eve knew she couldn't afford to. She still had to watch over Kevin, who had the nasty habit of causing trouble when left to his own devices. So she rested her head on the broad window, careful not to get her hair tangled in the emergency latch, and worked to stay awake.

Kevin wasn't a bad little brother — annoying as a yapping puppy at times, but never cruel or embarrassing. In fact, he was a remarkable little brother. When he would come home bruised and bloodied because some kid at school called him "girly," "pansy," or the worse "cute," it wasn't Mom who he went to with bandages and Neosporin in hand; it was Eve. When she would lock herself in her room after arguing with Dad, Kevin would be the one to paw at the door with chocolate and a six pack of Mountain Dew.

"Excuse me, sweetie, may I ask you something?" a soft voice called Eve from her walk down memory lane. The voice was kind and soft, with a tone of a mother. Pulling herself from her thoughts, Eve looked up to see an older woman with delicate features, thin wire-frame bifocals dangling uselessly around her neck, and a blue power wig. The older woman was smiling kindly down at them with, squinting her hazel eyes slightly.

"Yes, ma'am?" Eve spoke politely. Her parents were both true southerners at heart, manners and all. Kevin, by now immune to such manners, merely snorted and eyed the woman with a menacing glint in his eyes.

"Excuse me, young lady. Is that your little girl?" the older woman asked, pointing to Kevin. Eve regarded the older woman with a sweet smile on her lips. She really couldn't help it.

"No, ma'am. She's my little sister."

Kevin punched her in the shoulder. Hard. Sibling love, wasn't it great?

Taste of a Language

Tiffini Oman



Bullet

Acrylic

Jaime Johnson

The first words I said in a foreign language were explosions of exotic flavor on my tongue. Since that first taste, I've never stopped questing for more. I have come to know that Spanish is more than just the initial taste of chili powder and *tequila*; French is more than honey and *chocolat*; and German is nothing like the sauerkraut and *schmalz* that first bombard one's palette. Spanish is my first love, and I've spent roughly five years nurturing our relationship. French and I have unfortunately grown apart for the time being; and I've just begun to establish an undeniable infatuation with German. Languages have always held a certain intrigue for me. Something about the mellifluous avalanche of syllables just makes my brain drool for more.

The first time I shuffled into Mrs. Maria Esther Routt's classroom, I knew I was in for something. Of course, being one of only a handful of freshman in the class, I didn't know if this something would be a captivating journey through a language I was just beginning to love... or nothing more than a torture session at the hands of my much older peers. Mrs. Routt's first sentence dissolved the apprehension gnawing at my gut. Her English, though grammatically perfect, sang with the cadence of the Spanish woven through it. She told us that we were in her kingdom, and she was queen. We were her *princesas* and *príncipes* (until we messed up, at which point we were demoted to *peones*). By the end of her introductory speech, the music of the language rang in my ears, a hint of its spicy flavor already wending its way through my taste buds.

I had just begun my third year of Spanish when I decided that I should sample at least a morsel of French. I entered the class with high expectations and the anticipated flavor of *chocolat* dancing across my tongue. My brain feasted on the written words. The spelling and silent letters left me craving more while my mind struggled to digest the annoying *liaisons*. The vocal aspect of the language, however, eluded me for some time. My ears refused to listen as my teacher (herself only a 2nd year student of the language) turned *beignets* to *croissants* with a painful exaggeration of French's already nasal tendencies. I was forced to spend hours with Mrs. Routt—who spoke better French

“...the slippery
words that filled my mouth
and slithered
down my tongue...”

than my French teacher—demolishing my atrocious acquired accent so she could replace it with the proper one. Towards the end of the semester, a foreign exchange student from France was plunked into our class. My teacher promptly abdicated instruction of the pronunciation drills to her vastly more qualified student. Under his reluctant teaching, the whole class flourished; accents improved, interest increased, and the rich flavor of *chocolat* began to captivate the entire class. Now, with barely a hint of the previously tainted *beignets*, I can proudly say: *Je ne parle pas français*.

After my bad experience with French, German was a doubly risky endeavor for me. The language had always battered my ears, making me cringe at the seemingly guttural words. But my craving for more language gnawed at the fringes of my consciousness. I signed up for German. As I meandered into the room and sank into a desk, I reassured myself that I could always drop the class if I found the taste too foul. The teacher swept into the room, addressing us in German, and I was surprised to find myself entranced. I sampled the language gingerly at first, wary of the taste of my first non-Romance language. The flavor was strange to me, lacking the fluidity and flow of the Latin-based languages I knew so well. It struck me as a *schnitzel und kartoffel* tongue rather than the spicy *tamales* I adored. Within the first week of class, I found myself spell-bound by the hard trills that instantly improved my Spanish, the slippery words that filled my mouth and slithered down my tongue, the perpetually underlying growl.

I began to whet my appetite for languages the second that first Spanish word rolled off my tongue. Since that first taste, I've acquired a physical dependence upon learning languages. My tongue ties itself in knots and refuses to speak until I've fed it more words. Any words from any language will do. Spanish taught me that, French made me question it, and day-by-day German rebuilds my depleted faith. The infatuation with language stirs once again, prodding me to find yet another tongue to savor. I have the utensils of learning and many courses of languages to go. I've barely begun to sample the many languages of the globe, from the modern and ever-changing to the dead that birthed the new. All I have to do to have the taste of a language forever flooding my mouth is pick up those utensils and feed my addiction to words.

Aubergine

Aspen Nero

Second Place, Short Story Competition

I used to love the way the broken glass would crunch under my feet and then sparkle in the sun as I walked through the abandoned green house. The cement floors were painted a forest green, and the broken windows would make perfect long rectangles on the floor, lighting the place into a broken mosaic. There were silk flowers all over the floor, blanketed in dust, and polka-dotted black with mildew. I brought one back once, and Emily's mom made me throw it away, asking me where I'd found it.

The greenhouse was behind Emily's house, back in the woods, and every time my sister and I would come over to play, we'd venture back in the woods to the green house. I'd go back there and play with my older sister Eva, and Emily, our best friend. I was eight, Emily was seven, and Eva, always lording her age over us, was ten.

Emily's mother was always skeptical of where we went in the woods and told us not to go back so far and to stay by the house. We would never listen to anything she said. For the first few hours of the morning she'd monitor us, as we'd dig through the driveway looking for pebbles shaped like hearts, or flip each other around in the hammock. Once she was content that we weren't going anywhere, she'd retreat into the house to do her cooking or sewing.

We'd take off and run through the neighbors' yards, back behind the ugly white-bricked house with the swimming pool full of goldfish. Though we'd always talked about getting one of those fish, we never did. There were so many, and it was a mystery how they ate.

Once we walked through the woods enough, there came a clearing where there was a long grassy field. We pretended that it was an old street that never got paved, and that the greenhouse was a florist shop that got battered and abandoned after the fierce lady Camille.

Everything we found in the green house we'd keep together in a canvas bag that we toted back and forth from each other's houses. It was a bag I'd gotten from selling 100 boxes of Girl Scout cookies. Since Emily's mom didn't allow us to go back in the woods and knew that whatever we found was from the greenhouse, Eva and I brought everything home with us in that bag.

We'd taken some of the not-so-moldy flowers until we had so many they filled the bag. Every time we found a new flower, or something worthy of going in the bag, we'd dump it out and sort through the things that were of most importance. There were some things that did not fit in the bag, such as the old typewriter on the desk up in the office area of the loft and a wreath made of silk violets.

We never went up to the loft much, mainly because we were too scared. There was an old stained mattress up there, and a broken shopping cart. We had no idea how they'd gotten up there, or why they were there. Maybe the reason was why Emily's mom never let us play there.

Eva was the first into the greenhouse that day, and she picked a chunk of florist Styrofoam off the floor and yelled, "We're playing monkey in the middle." Of course, I was the one in the middle. I was between Emily and Eva's age; I was always the one in the middle. We played, passing the foam back and forth, me always missing, until I had to pee. Eva complained that I ruined everything and refused to walk back to Emily's house with me and go to the bathroom. Emily just listened to Eva and stayed with her in the greenhouse.

I turned on them and went into the woods to pee. When I came back, neither of them were in the greenhouse, and the canvas bag was gone. I decided just to stay there until one of them got bored or felt bad, and came back to find me and tell me the joke was over. I waited in the greenhouse. I went upstairs to the office area, tracing my fingers through the dust on the desk and opening each drawer, even though we'd already rummaged through the desk, and finding nothing, never came back up. I saw a glint of light through one of the desk drawer's cracks. I pressed my hand up to the glint and felt the glossiness of plastic. The plastic was

reflecting off the light of the window and making the object look metallic.

With my fingers I pushed up on whatever it was and managed to pry it from between the drawers. It was a plastic card, probably a credit card. I'd always take Mom's card out of her wallet and play with it, before she'd yell at me and take it back. It was a deep blue, with silver raised numbers, and a name on the bottom. There was no last name, or middle initial, just the name "Aubergine." I didn't know how to pronounce the name, and I kept coming up with different ways to say it. I liked saying it over and over in different ways and I loved even more the way it sounded when I clicked the card against the desk.

Emily and Eva came back and shouted my name. I jumped up, sort of embarrassed and scared. I didn't



Gnome

Ink

Abby Regan

want them to see the card; it was too private and too interesting to show to them. It was something I had found without Eva or Kay to claim as theirs, too. It was my own treasure. I was wearing a skirt and had nowhere to put it, so I hid it between my pantyhose where it stuck out flat and rectangular.

"Why are you up there?" Eva asked, in the bossy tone that she loved to use ever since she hit "double digits."

"I don't know," I said, walking carefully down the winding staircase, feeling the plastic card digging in my skin. Eva always made me feel low, lower than her or anyone else on the earth. She always made me feel like a worm, wiggling and crawling away from her angry stomping foot.

We all walked back to Emily's house silent. None of us said anything, and Eva carried the canvas bag back, as she always did. When we came back, we went straight into the house, still not talking.

I didn't want to say anything else, or do anything else. I just wanted to get home so I could take Aubergine out of my pantyhose and have her or him to myself. For the rest of the day, the card stayed with me, tucked away safe on my leg. I knew that if I showed it to Eva then she'd want to keep it to herself, or knowing that I liked it, make fun of it.

The memories of the greenhouse are hidden in the back of my mind like a dream. The canvas bag and all of its treasures ended up in the trash, after spending years in Eva's closet, but I still have Aubergine. If I had put it in the bag with everything else, I probably wouldn't have it anymore. I keep Aubergine in my wallet with me, and he or she goes with me everywhere. I know now how to pronounce the name and still love to say it over and over, and let it sit in my mouth like melting chocolate.

The Road to Home

Aspen Nero

First Place, Essay Competition

Whether it's from a long road trip or just a weekend away from home, I'm always eager to get back on the road home. Whenever I'm driving and get lost, I just find the beach, and I know exactly where I am. Roads in the country trap me in, and I feel lost and have no idea where I'm going. I never feel at home, or near home, unless I'm on a beach road. The beach road that runs along my street is part of my home. It meets with Highway 90 and runs the length of the coast. When I get off Highway 90 and drive down Beach Boulevard in Bay St. Louis, I almost forget I'm still in Mississippi.



Beached Catfish

Photograph

Jaime Johnson

The beach along the Bay isn't sun-bleached white, and the water isn't crystal blue, like some fake resort town beach. Hotels and souvenir shops don't litter the view and tower over the waters like in Biloxi and Gulfport. The beach is a real beach, and the road that runs along it is full of real residents, with proud homes that have withstood massive hurricanes and hundreds of years and stand amongst the great live oaks. A beach without Spanish moss and prickly burrs that stick to my shoe laces seems foreign and unreal to me. Whenever I hear a rope rattle against a flagpole, I'm reminded of the masts in the harbor rattling their sails' ropes in the wind.

People have original mailboxes painted to match their homes or to show a scene of the beach in front of them. When the mailman comes in his white box of a car, he blocks the entire street.

Church bells from Our Lady of the Gulf can actually be heard, and cyclists wind in and out of the old torn-apart sidewalks along the boulevard. A seawall meant to block the waves of any storm borders the road and hosts fishermen bent over with fishing rods sticking above their baseball caps. A breeze off the bay scatters dead and fallen oak leaves that get crunched under passing cars. White triangles lie sprinkled out across the water racing in the winds of the regatta. Driving along the beach is like driving nowhere else. The sea touches the sky, and there are no broken objects blocking the view.

Roads in the country and interstates are so boring. They're surrounded by tall stickly pine trees or rows and rows of endless corn and cotton. Even though they're just boring country roads, they're roads of the south. What differentiates these roads of Mississippi from any other part of the country is the "beauty" of the south. Billboards stand upright, screaming at me to "Praise the Lord," that "Jesus loves me," and to turn right for the closest flea market. There are no peaceful murky waters and the horizon is chopped and marred by trees. The speedometer keeps rolling over miles, but the roads keep looking the same.

The air conditioning is always full blast, blocking out the thick humid heat. Dust plumes over parts of road

where monstrous trucks pull off into country streets. Over-heated dogs with their ears flapping in the wind pant in the back of their owners' pick-up trucks as they speed by. Hostile signs spray-painted on plywood warn drivers to "Keep Off" property. Kudzu wraps itself chokingly around each and every protrusion from the earth. The masses of green foliage block out rusted and forgotten trash. Wreaths of flowers woven together sit sadly on a cross marking the ground where some young driver was killed. I always wonder if people actually stop and pray by those crosses. My mother would always comment about those crosses, and I began to hate them, and cringe whenever I saw them. If I were ever to die on a state road or interstate, I would not want a wreath made for me, telling others to pray in my memory. Any road I took through Mississippi, my eyes would never bore of these sites. And even when the boring stretches of land mused themselves with stickly pine after stickly pine, I'd flip through the radio stations and only hear preachers rant the gospel.

"There are no peaceful
murky waters and
the horizon is chopped
and marred by trees."

The drive home the weekend after Katrina, however, was not at all full of this scenery. Instead of looking for wreaths and angry signs, I kept my eyes peeled for torn-up road signs and blown-over billboards. Gas cans and barrels took the place of over-heated dogs, and the kudzu seemed to shrink back behind the view of the traffic. All that could be heard on the radio was NPR or contact information for lost loved ones. Gas stations were shut down, not only because of the scarcity of gas, but because there was still no power in most of Mississippi.

This was the longest road to home I'd ever taken. Roads were blocked south of Jackson down, and getting home was like playing a game of Shoots and Ladders. I felt that at any minute an Army truck would be parked in the center of the highway, forcing traffic back up north.

There were no such blocks, though, and I was able to drive right through my scattered town.

The sun-stained Highway 90 littered with used car lots and vacant grocery stores was now washed over with mud. The permanent oil stain down the middle of the road was completely covered.

As I got closer to my street, I kept hoping that there would be no tree or house in my path, and, surprisingly, I made it right up to the camp my parents had made in front of our home. Behind my parents' camp lay our house, scattered and festering in the sun.

Before sunset, I walked with my family to the end of our street where my beloved beach road still sat. The homes were all gone, along with their matching mailboxes. Instead of the mailman's box, there was a Red Cross van that resembled the same exact shape teetering down the road handing out free meals. Sad and distant-looking people came out of nowhere to receive those. Everybody looked the same, with that distant and sad-looking face, a look that said: "What's going to happen next?"

I knew for sure that farther down the road past the bridge, there was no more beach road. I feel like it will never be the same until that road is fixed and drivable again. Whenever I dream or think of that beach road to home, I don't think of the chaos that it is now in, but I think of the way it used to be. I never before looked at that road with so much admiration as I do now. Never did I think how beautiful the murky water was, or how the massive and wild oaks hugged the coastline and held it back from the water. I can't even think of the way it is now. The only thing that comes to my mind when I think of my beach road home is the way that I left it.

I have been on a long trip from home and haven't been back since. I won't truly be home until my road and home are fixed. When I take the trip down to the coast, it is not my home, and I'm just visiting. Now when I think of home, I think of my home in Columbus. It's sad because I feel lost up here in North Mississippi where there is no beach, but when I get on the beach road, I'm still not at home.

Matriarch: A Memory

Fleshy-faced; bustling around the kitchen
She has silver hair and eyes crinkly around the sides.
Overweight- there's just more to love.
"Are you hungry?"
"No, Nana...no."
Swing sitting with her Diet Dr. Pepper in the a.m.
Petite hands, cared-for nails.
Never any jewelry, save her small diamond studs.
She's Queen of the Night: "The Magic
Flute," starring Nana, in the shower.
And she won't sing a word outside
of the loo.

Kent Denton



Burnished

Prisma Colored Pencil

Joanna Oliver

Honorable Mention Drawing, Art Competition

National Geographic

Acrylic

Julianna Vick

Third Place Painting, Art Competition





Lotus Leaf

Photograph

Kelly Lence

Mulberries and Muscadines

Maybe he remembers the morning
When we made our way
Through the meadows and fields
To the bursting vines
Full of mulberries and muscadines.

We wore masks and were pirates
With a treasure map made by
Mellowing bright white paper
With water and brown paints.
We brought muffins and Mountain Dew
To feed our moaning bellies.

We passed ant mountains
And crawdad mounds,
Avoided the mulch
Mom piled months ago.
We fed the ducks stale bread
And old "mutt chow."

We skipped like in *The Wizard of Oz*.
I was Dorothy and you, Scarecrow.
Five-year-old Katie was a Flying Monkey already.
Tyler, same height as Katie, became our Tin Man.
Toto and Cowardly Lion were left behind
To find for themselves the Wizard
And his mulberries and muscadines.

Emily Williams

First Place, Poetry Competition



Scarlet Dusk

Watercolor

Julianna Vick



The Firepit

Photograph

Matthew Russell

Contineo contigi

It is when you find a penny,
The face staring at your eyes.

It is a four-leaf clover
Hiding in a mountain valley.

It is yelling "Bingo!"
When B7 is called.

Contineo contigi is working hard and getting
An "A" on the difficult exam.

Contineo contigi is finding that lost item
Gone for three months.

Contineo contigi is finally meeting
The one you spend your life with.

Contineo contigi, Latin for *good luck*.

What an interesting word.

"Good luck" is more than just a saying,
It is a way of living.

Blake Sessums



Patient Mother

Photograph

Joanna Oliver



Jeju Island

Acrylic on Posterboard

Julianna Vick

Honorable Mention Painting, Art Competition

Carnival

Sea of sunset
Splashing wildly
Swirling, twirling,
Jumping, diving.
Salamander reds,
Fire orchid yellows;
Women cheer and men will bellow.
Trumpets blasting
Torches casting
A dancing light upon the night

Michael Counihan



Spring Drops

Photograph

Joanna Oliver

First Place Photograph, Art Competition



The Cane Dance

Watercolor Batik

Aspen Nero

My Stuff

It's been a month and two days.

We walk in through the back door
And a little photo album sits outside,

Distorted faces stare up at me.

Completely unrecognizable

And encrusted in mud.

We are told not to touch our stuff.

I see the bugs trying to salvage what we couldn't.

But I can't even tell if it is mine or not.

I don't want to believe them.

The stuff that hides my memories
Is what came from the broken sewage pipes.

And I can't touch it because

It is "crawling with disease."

It is crawling with death!

It teases me, much worse than any
cruel middle school joke.

DO NOT ENTER, warn the walls.

UNSAFE. DEADLY BLACK MOLD.

Unsafe are my books, my clothes, my pictures,

My school, my beach, my mall, my street.

And everything else that I know.

Sarah Marshall

Third Place, Poetry Competition



Symmetry Friends

Photograph

Jaime Johnson



Andalusian Majesty

Acrylic

Emily Traylor

First Place Painting, Art Competition

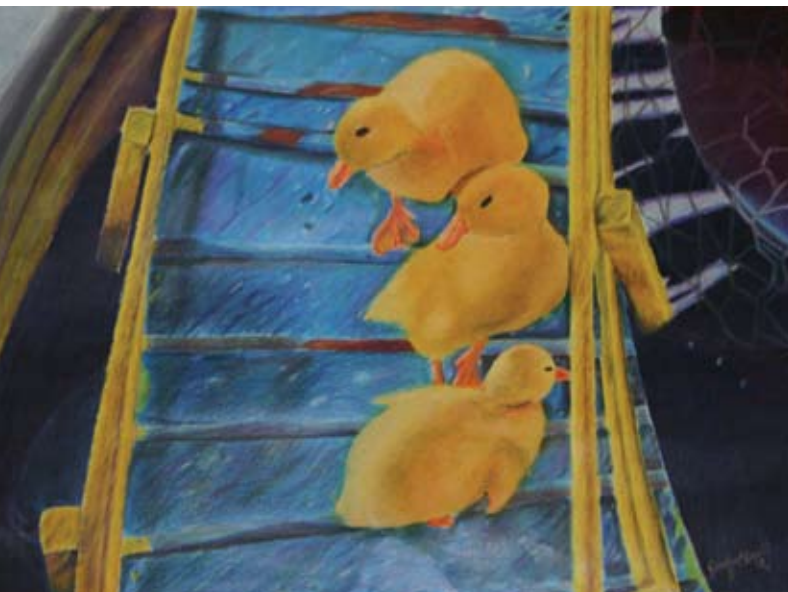


Solar Intrusion

Photograph

Sarah Prather

Honorable Mention Photograph, Art Competition



Ducks

Colored Pencil and Pastel

Jennifer Sloan

Poetry

Poetry.

How is it written?

How is it formed?

Poetry's a tear of ink that falls from someone's face,
Lands on paper and dries up satisfied with the words
it formed.

It's a wound that bleeds black and dark in a notebook,
Healed as it's absorbed into phrases and prose.

It's laughter breathed into life on a book,
The humidity changing its dark water into words.

A sigh that pushes down keys on a keyboard,

Lighting up pixels in a pleasing form.

It's love poured out through all the orifices in the
body,

Taking the shape of sonnets and odes.

It's joy talked through the mind and the hands,

Forming limericks, rhymes, and songs.

It's the soul imprinted on paper;

The most accurate picture of all.

But most of all it's all these in one

It's pure emotion observed through its most accurate
medium

It's heart, and soul, mind, and body working as one.

Poetry is the poet.

Katrina Vizzini

Second Place, Poetry Competition

Rehearsal

Whines, whistles, booms
Mozart's 40th to my left,
Barber's 3rd to my right,
A slightly flat E scale sings softly
Followed unevenly by a C minor
from 3rd stand cellos,
Two failed attempts at the 3rd Bach
partita arise from the seconds
As the co-concertmasters simultaneously
play the Bruch concerto in perfect pitch,
Overlapped by trumpet arpeggios,
Underlined by tuning flutes,
All brought to silence by one, two,
three taps on a stand,
Instruments rise,
The upbeat is given...

David Elion



Prom Night

Photograph

Jennifer Sloan

Third Place Photograph, Art Competition



Coffee Shop

Photograph

Jennifer Sloan

Ideas

Why is it, when the ideas are needed,
they get stuck somewhere

Between the subconscious and the
brain we can access?

But when they are un-important, or un-appreciated

They flow like a mighty river??

The Mississippi of Ideas, only it runs right
over the Niagara of Fools in Company

That falls onto the Sea of Deaf Ears, that
runs through the Inlet of Conformity,

Then meets the Hoover Wall of Damn Opposition

Trickles through the Stream of Dismissal

And ends in the Swamp of Lost Brainchildren

Why bother.

Chris O'Brien



Mother's Day

Acrylic and Colored Pencil

Missie Smith



Japanese Daydream

Acrylic

Katrina Vizzini

Second Place Painting, Art Competition

Man in the Box

Emily Williams

Honorable Mention, Short Story Competition

Jeff didn't understand most of his trig homework again but figured he'd just ask the sophomore behind him. She was the youngest person in the class but could explain the problems much better than Ms. Parrot (alright, her name was Ms. Blackman, but the thin blonde woman really did look like a bird). The girl behind him had a last name between "Simmons" and the end of the alphabet; Ms. Blackman had seated everyone by alphabetical order, and the girl behind him was the only one after him on the roster. He didn't really remember her first name, only that she lived next door to his friend Justin, who sometimes drove her to school in the morning to catch the Vo-Tech bus. Jeff sometimes wondered what class she took there; he only knew that it wasn't Allied Health (juniors and seniors only) or Heating and Air (his class).

The Girl Behind Him quirked an eyebrow at Jeff when he turned around and asked about the third problem on their review sheet. "It's not that hard," she said, pushing her light brown bangs out of her face—they brushed her chin but were too short for the low ponytail she wore every day. "What exactly are you having problems with?"

"Don't really know," Jeff answered, looking at the paper to avoid her brown eyes—or were they hazel? "I always get to this point and my mind goes blank." He shook his head a bit in a fruitless attempt to move his hair out of his eyes.

"Well," she said, "considering the test is tomorrow, you might want to get this down fairly quickly." Easy for her to say, Jeff thought. Between his girlfriend and basketball, he barely had the opportunity to eat or shower (his stomach made sure of the former and his mom the latter).

Of course, he had considered breaking up with Savannah. Every time he so much as *thought* about being discontent in his five-month relationship, however, his friends (also known as teammates) slapped down on his shoulder (hard) and reminded him how lucky he was to date the high school cheerleading captain, even if she was at a different school. Some days, Jeff believed them, even when they tried explaining why the "shag" look was absolutely crucial to his status in the school. Honestly, he would rather cut his thick dirty-blond hair much shorter.

Jeff didn't say any of this, though. The Girl Behind Him helped patch the damage that his schedule wrought on his grades in this class, and he wasn't about to offend her. Instead, he replied, "Yeah, I know. Do you know an easy way to memorize these identities?" Sighing, she proceeded to show him how she remembered the little buggers.

Jeff did not notice all the skirts until he walked into his second block class; a few of the girls in Vo-Tech had been wearing them but not in enough numbers to draw attention. He and Justin sat down next to each other; Biology II under Mr. Pumpernickle was their only class together. "Any idea what's goin' on?" Justin muttered.

"Not a clue," he answered.

"Some girls planned this thing called 'Skirt Day,'" a brunette, who was not wearing a skirt, said from behind Justin. "Apparently you ain't nobody if you didn't wear a skirt. It's supposed to show who's cool and who's not."

Because of the "strict uniform rules," girls found themselves limited in what they wore and often complained about the "lack of individuality." Jeff privately liked the limits of khaki and navy but never said so aloud; his friends would never forgive him. The cheerleaders, who complained about the similar clothing throughout campus the most, were the ones who always made sure that someone else was wearing something akin to their outfit—but not exactly the same, which would be "dorky."

Jeff tried to raise his eyebrow the same way the Girl Behind Him did (he'd been practicing in the mirror at

home) but only partially succeeded. Oh, well, he just needed more practice. He needed to be able to reflect it back at That Girl to at least partially catch up with her; Jeff knew he would never beat her in math, so he chose the next best thing: eyebrow-raising. “So I’m not cool?” he moaned with a depressed face, eyes scrunched and mouth pointing down. “Nobody told *me* that I should wear a skirt today.”

Justin sighed in fake remorse. “Yeah, I always did like the airflow of the cotton kind. It also would’ve been a good chance to watch the admin die of epilepsy and call my parents, only to have my dad laugh his ass off.”

Jeff dropped his sad façade and grinned at his best friend. “He would, wouldn’t he? Probably show up in overalls that are just on this side of ripe; y’know, between the goats and the chickens y’all have.”

Before they could finish talking, Mr. Pumpernickle began his lesson for the day, and Jeff forced himself to pay attention. The girl sitting behind him was not *the* Girl Behind Him, so he needed to pay attention in this class. Besides, it was his turn to take the notes; Justin had written down every word out of Pumpernickle’s mouth the week before.

After class, he walked to the cafeteria with Justin (both had first lunch) and began to outline his idea. “Now we just need something to wear that girls wouldn’t have just hanging in the closet.”

“Sports jackets, I think,” Justin said after a moment’s thought. “We should wear sports jackets tomorrow. Spread the word this afternoon at basketball practice, and I’ll tell the baseball players. Don’t let any girls overhear you.”

“Selective about who to tell?”

“Nah, just don’t let any girls catch on.” They shared a thumbs-up and waited in the lunch line for the mystery meat of the day.

“Hey, J, wasn’t there a dog on campus yesterday that wasn’t here this morning?” Jeff asked.

Justin looked down at the piece of meat reminiscent of stale Spam on his once navy blue plate, which clashed

with the pumpkin orange tray. The piece of what their cafeteria called meat gleamed with grease in the dull fluorescent lighting that needed replacing about two months ago. “Man, I so did not need to know that.”

Trig class was after lunch, and Jeff pulled his sleeves down over his hands to protect against the cold of the room. Ms. Blackman liked to keep the room at 50 degrees or so, which was odd considering how thin she was. Jeff tried to hold back a smile.

The Girl Behind Him was almost defiantly not wearing a skirt and quirked her eyebrow at him when he said, “What, no skirt?”

The eyebrow stayed up. “It’s against my religion. Besides, I didn’t even hear about Skirt Day.”

“Why not? Surely you’re enough in the circle, being so smart and all.”

“That’s one of the reasons I’m not, actually. Besides, I’m a man in a box. My only communication with the outside world is a row of light bulbs that I turn on and off.”

“Morse code?”

“No, binary. That’s the description our book gives for a computer processor, and I felt it applies.” Ah, so she was in the computer class at Vo-Tech. One mystery solved, at least. “I think that’s why people don’t really talk to each other. We’re all just men in boxes with a row of light bulbs, but only the computer geeks can comprehend any of it.”

“So what happens when a light bulb dies?” Jeff asked, curious about her train of thought. The Girl Behind Him only ever talked about trig (well, last nine-weeks it was advanced algebra), and she was always so personal with the math, explaining little stories and rhymes that helped her learn. He wondered if she put that much thought and time into everything.

“I don’t know. You either paint your nails a glittery hot pink or start speaking Bulgarian like the sink in my bathroom. I haven’t discovered which is true yet. I’ll let you know when I find out.”

I hope I can manage to put all these
words in the right place

So that they slowly paint a picture of someone trying
Very Hard

(but not too hard)

And if I'm lucky you'll appreciate their attempt at beauty

Because the way they are presented on paper

Just isn't good enough to satisfy me

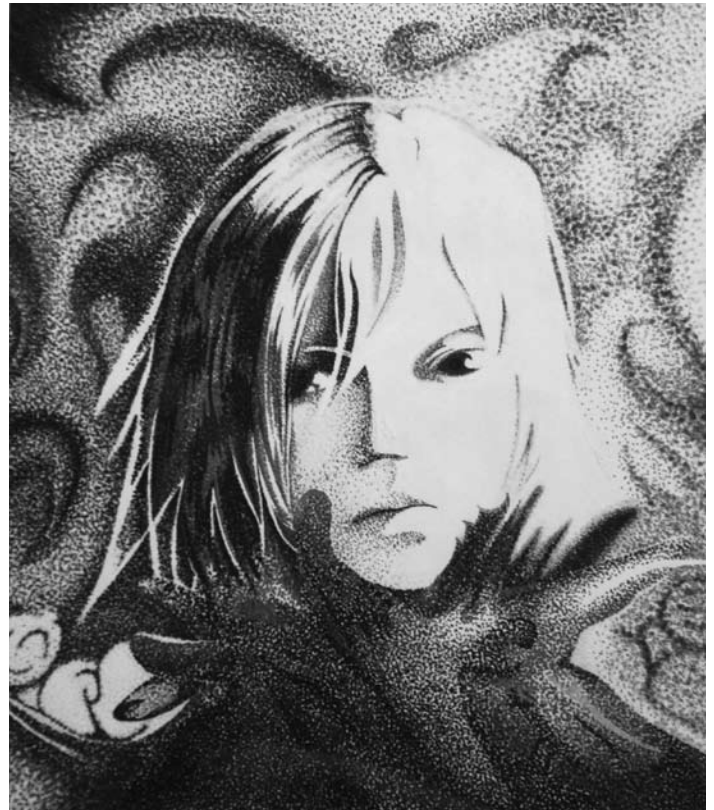
Lauren Klaskala

The Sword of Sword

Distant screams curdle the mid-morning air.
A piper, full Highland gear, awaits his orders.
The low silhouette of the landing craft is
Broken by Lord Lovat's fierce frame.
"This is the job we were born for."
200 meters, 100 meters, 25 meters, stop;
Lovat prepares for war,
He carries no carbine.
"Piper Millin, play us a tune."

The planks drop.
Bullets tear into flesh and steel,
Accents in the wild weave of the pibroch.
High does Lord Lovat raise his sword and roar,
"To War! To War!"

Michael Counihan



Fredricke of Cid

Stipple Marker

Breanne Uriz

American Dream

My face
Outside
A stoic mask
The stony absence of emotion

My gait
A measured, steady stride
Each step unwavering and solid

Inside my soul is breaking up
Shredding the tender flesh underneath
Sharp shards imbedded
In the cement
Of my protective outer skin.

Emotions explode
Clouds of destruction
Inside my weary head.

My skull echoes
From my inner implosion

My brain ripples
Softness and yielding

L i q u e f i e d

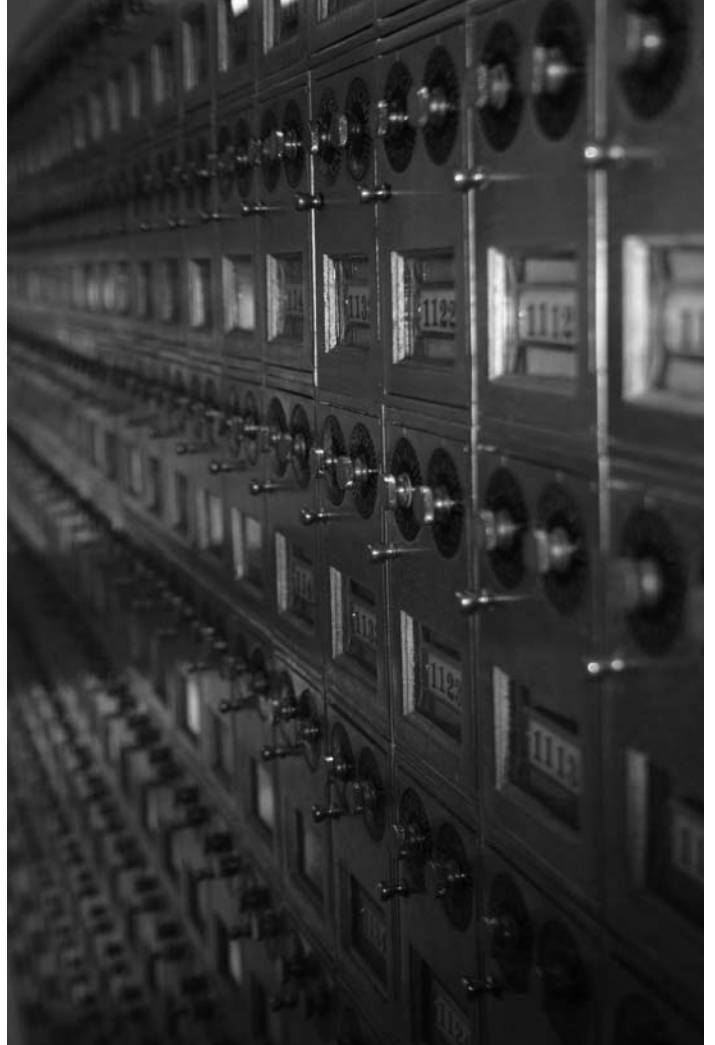
Organ, tissue, cell, bone
Outer concrete epidermis

Containing a cesspool
Of the dissolved humanity
That once constituted me.

And still the shell walks on

Face unmoving
Gait unchanged
Waiting for me to congeal.

Tiffini Oman



The P.O.

Photograph

Jennifer Sloan

Highly Qualified

Quadreka Smith

Third Place, Essay Competition

I cannot stand busting suds. “*One day, this whole situation is gonna change,*” are my only words as I stand at a sink of mile-high dishes plastered with Hamburger Helper from the previous night’s meal. “*How many times have I told these kids to rinse these dishes before they put them in the sink!*,” I think, as I scrape a thick layer of coagulated noodles from a plate used by one of my eight younger siblings. My mom, Terry, left for work an hour ago. Before she left, she had come into my room and told me, “Bird, I’m about to go. Get off ya butt and get on ya feet.” These words are not foreign to me, and I know that when she said them, it signaled the beginning of my work day.



Stipple Eggs and Co.

Ink

Julianna Vick

Second Place Drawing, Art Competition

As I put the last plate in the right side of the double-sided sink, I look at my watch: I have been washing dishes for an hour. I stroll around the house; everything is still in place: raggedy, stained couches; leaky refrigerator; and a stove that has to be lit with a match. My youngest brother, Devin, born with a hole in his heart, still lies asleep in my mother’s bed, while the two boys above him in age have made themselves pallets on the floor. I kneel down to tell them to get up and move to the couch that I’ve slept on for the night. They brush their eyes with their hands and do as they’re told. However, it takes a second for nine-year-old Mario, who was strong enough to live through an accidental electrocution, to get into his mind who I am and what I am saying; I continue my journey throughout the house. I go into the girls’ room. My sister who is one year younger than me in age is asleep in her twin-size bed, while my sister Jessica, who has a mild case of cerebral palsy, and Veronica, the beauty queen, sleep in the full-sized bed that has just enough room for the two of them. Just as I walk past their door, Jessica says something to me. “Huh?” is my only reply. And then I realize that, yes, she is once again talking in her sleep. Next is the boys’ room. Jarvis and Antonio are sleeping like little men on the bunk bed that was given to our family by a close relative. “Eew, what is this?” I realize that these boys need to get up and clean their room. They have stuff everywhere: stained clothes, balled up loose-leaf notebook paper, and even Cheetos are scattered across the floor! “Bigman! Tooty! Get up and do something with this room! Terry ain’t about to yell at me because this room ain’t clean! Get up! NOW!” Ready to mouth off at me, my brothers begin to stare. Realizing that I am serious, they get up, put on their house shoes, and begin picking up things off the floor, starting with the dirty mud-stained socks that most little boys acquire after running around outside all day.

I look at my watch again: it's now nine forty-five in the morning. My brothers who moved to the couch have let everyone in the house know that it's time to get up and make use of daylight. Like clockwork, we repeat our routine. Antonio goes into the living room and puts a cd into the disc player and turns it up as loud as it can possibly go. Nobody can stand the racket that he produces, and he won't listen when people tell him to turn it down. In his own way, he uses this to signify the time he wants us to wake up. Within fifteen minutes everyone has risen from his or her sleeping quarters.

Folding blankets, washing faces, and changing clothes is what happens for the next hour or so. Then it's time to eat. My sister Jessica, despite her slight handicap, walks to the kitchen and makes her specialty: Pancakes! The fluffiness of her pancakes will always make a person's heart melt. We devour these pancakes one by one as she flips them from the skillet to the plates that we most often eat upon. Everyone eats standing or sitting around the kitchen table, and I firmly remind them to "wash out what you use because I am tired of washing dishes!" I say this and feel momentarily guilty. Then I look down at my shriveled hands.

After the house is clean, we sit and talk. We discuss things that typical brothers and sisters would discuss and get an occasional joke in about one another. By now it's two o'clock. My mother has returned home and has long been asleep. This is one of the side effects she suffers due to the medicine that she takes from her illness that includes congestive heart failure and high blood pressure. I look in on her to make sure she is alright. By the light snoring I hear, I know she's having fun in a world full of dreams.

Although it's now five o'clock in the evening, the blazing Mississippi Delta sun has just begun to peak. Our old air conditioner in the window and the three fans in the living room are no match for the heat index, which on this particular day, reaches 110 degrees. We do the best we can to keep cool by making sure that all

the doors to the living room are shut and that the kids don't run in and out.

As the nighttime sky descends on our house in the outskirts of a small town that may even be considered the outskirts of another, almost everyone in the house gets ready for the coming hours of darkness that seem to last for an eternity. My youngest brothers bathe. My sisters, who have already prepared themselves for the night, talk amongst themselves. I, on the other hand, end my day as I started it: busting suds.

The routine described is the routine that has followed me day in and day out for the past few years. After my family moved to Ruleville, Mississippi, from Milwaukee, times have gotten harder. I have had to take on the role of a family leader. I have had to overcome the things that have tried to bring me down. I have had to become not only the kind of person who will do well for myself, but the kind of person who has to do well for others, especially my family. I have taken on a parenting role without any rewards promised or my hand stretched before me looking for something in return. I know that these things will come later on with the success of my younger siblings. Even at their age, they have experienced some things that some adults can't even imagine. And for this, they need a role model. They need someone to stand with them to make sure they do not fall, but that if they do, they need to know they need to get back up. They also need to make sure that they clean up their rooms and do homework when the time is needed; I have proudly volunteered myself for the job.

I am the mother of eight: five boys and three girls, all of whom are my brothers and sisters. Each of my siblings deserves something special, and I am preparing myself for making all our lives better. I currently attend the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Even when I am at school, I am busting suds. My hands are submerged in soapy water every time I work a physics problem, every time I read a page of *Beowulf*, and even when I arrange and categorize data in Statistics. When things get hard, I just look at my hands and keep working because I know that if they do not have that wet feeling, I am not working hard enough.

Self-Made Treasures

Arianna Mohiuddin



Textured Still Life

Ebony Pencil

Jennifer Sloan

Third Place Drawing, Art Competition

On the morning of December 2, 1990, my parents, Javed and Yasmin Mohiuddin, disembarked from a fourteen-hour journey at the first terminal of John F. Kennedy International Airport. They were armed with two suitcases, three small children (myself included), and four twenty-dollar bills. It was the first time anyone in my family had set foot in the United States. I was not yet two years old, and I dozed peacefully in my mother's arms. As the customs agents scanned our luggage, my father assured my sisters, Farah and Zoya, of what lay ahead. This was our new home, he told them. This was our new life.

My parents gathered our belongings, and we moved through the airport's large sweeping doors and into the shivery New York City air. *Abu* (father) signaled to a taxi. We were off to stay with family friends until we found our own home. Abu and the taxi driver, "Rico," argued over rates and after twenty grueling minutes, finally agreed. "On the dollar," my father uttered in his heavy foreign accent, an amalgamation of Indian, Arab, and English tongues. But before he could load the dinky yellow conveyance, I woke up and started crying. My mother held me even tighter, and she soothed me with her sweet words, "Don't worry, *mera jannu* (my dear). This wind might be cold, but oh! How this wind frees us! *Hai Allah!* It is the wind of America!"

Exactly four months earlier, my mother and father were saying their early morning *Fajr* prayers in our Kuwait City apartment as history was taking place. As dawn broke on August 2, Iraqi troops infiltrated the Kuwaiti border. Under the command of Sadaam Hussein, they occupied strategic posts throughout the occupied territory, and before long, our Kuwait was under siege.

What followed was a time of absolute horror for my family. Just days after the invasion, Iraqi officers raided our apartment. Their relentless pursuit left us deprived of family heirlooms, important documents, and virtually all photographs. The officers kidnapped my father and deported him to an undisclosed military location. My mother, sisters, and I were then taken to a local

hotel where hundreds of other women and children were gathered. For over three months, we endured in a state of constant fear, separation, and uncertainty. (Despite my curiosity, my mother and father refuse to recount the remaining details of this experience.)

But time had since passed, my father had escaped, and the five of us sat in the taxi. The American government had granted my parents resident alien status, and my mother and father were convinced we had found the golden road to self-improvement. And so the taxi engine hummed again, and I fell asleep once more. As the car traveled on, my parents did not speak a word, yet their thoughts ventured down the same path. Kuwait had abandoned us, and America, with its immense opportunity, money, and education, would become our refuge.

“Our lives would center
on distresses: hospital bills,
eviction notices,
and racial slurs.”

Little did my parents know: their quest for the “American dream” would soon become a never-ending struggle. Our lives would become the convoluted results of a hurried experiment, rushed and off base. Dear “friends” would usher us into some of the poorest and most crime-ridden areas of Rochester, New York, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Reality would smother my parents’ aspirations of a permanent home in a safe, beautiful community, and my mother and father would instead hang honor roll certificates on grimy apartment corridors. Our lives would center on distresses: hospital bills, eviction notices, and racial slurs. Many would react against us out of generalized prejudices, regarding our “foreignness” as a source of disorder and corruption. My father’s international credentials would be of little value, and it would be almost impossible for him to find substantial work. My parents’ failure to adopt

American accents would erroneously classify my family into the “ESL” subgroup. We, elements of a unique ethnic and religious heritage, would also be reduced to mere “sand n_____.” Allah would bless us with two more family members, Eamon Abbas and Imran Qasim, but their births would push an even greater strain on our foundation, as financial concerns governed all. The process of assimilation would soon become inexorable, much to the dismay of our culturally-oriented parents. Hamburgers, slacks, and American English would take the place of *daal chawwal* (rice with lentils), *shalwar kameez* (traditional South Asian Muslim dress), and Urdu.

And yet, our plight would typify a prevailing American struggle. It would embody the hard-hitting defeat known by all immigrants, whether starved by Ireland, persecuted by Nazi Germany, or cast overboard by Vietnam. Millions would be able to identify with our harrowing sentiments. Indeed, the “American Dream” would elude us, just as it had eluded the countless masses. The United States would endow my family not with immediate prosperity, but with years of tribulation. That December 2nd, we were the Mohiuddins, war torn and ravaged, yet we were only one of the hundreds of families who had immigrated to the United States on that same dismal morning.

It has been fifteen years since I sat sleepily in Rico’s taxi, my then-grey eyes peering through the vehicle’s rain-matted passenger widow. Our first morning in America is not a faint blur but a pervasive and everlasting memory. Our (somewhat overpriced) taxi-drive symbolizes our emergence into a rugged, realistic, and rasping land that altered our perception forever. The sullen echo of my parents’ first shuffling footsteps in New York reflects our naïveté and intrinsic desire for change. However, a horizon of wisdom now separates us from the frail and exhausted individuals exiting JFK airport. My family eventually found stability in Gulfport, Mississippi, but hardships taught us many lessons. We are no longer the unwanted, insignificant remnants of a political crisis, just another country’s leftover trash. We Mohiuddins are self-made treasures, duly polished by adversity.

The Hunting

Kelly Naylor



Star of the Night

Scratchboard

Adeola Adebisi

She became angry because her father wouldn't let her ride in the front seat. "It's too dangerous," he said. But soon they arrive. The forest reminds her of the afternoons she and her mom used to spend throwing out corn for the deer in her backyard. She looks at the greenery that surrounds her. The smell of the fresh, after-autumn air slowly fills her nostrils. The sound of mockingbirds fills her ears like church music does on Sundays. However, this is not her backyard. For this is the wilderness, the real outdoors, where there isn't a house to run into when one gets tired.

She looks up into a wide, clear blue sky—not a cloud for miles. It is cold on this mid-December day. She can see piles of snow just over the top of the hill resting on the tip of the cliff she and her dad used to climb. Just...there. Undisturbed snow. Meant to be seen, not touched. She hears a sound to her right. It is only a squirrel. Squirring around quickly trying to find a place to hide his recently found acorns. She finds a stump to rest her back on, and she sighs. Leaves have fallen out of many of the trees. Most are lying on the ground. The hard crunch of these leaves, along with dead bugs and iced snow, reminds Millie of her grandmother fixing chitlins at Christmas time and the horrid smell and painful pops that would come out of the pot while they were cooking. She sees in the distance three black birds circling the tops of the cliffs behind her. "There must be something dead out there," she says to herself as she plops down in the snow. As she begins to doze off, a sudden shot wakes her up. She looks over at her dad. He is still getting dressed, and she suddenly realizes that they are not the only hunters out and about.

"Stay close," Millie's dad says to her firmly. She just rolls her eyes. Of course, she never really understood why her dad hunts in the first place. Her dad throws her camouflage suit at her, and Millie puts it on with dread.

"It's ugly," Millie says disgustedly, "and why do we have to wear these things, anyway? It's not like the deer are really gonna be able to see us if we don't have these things on."

Her dad looks at her and smiles the kind of smile that Mrs. Harper had the first time she saw little Millie.

His yellowish teeth and aged skin give Millie a sense of comfort and stability—a sense that could only come from a caring father.

They both exchange loving glances and continue walking, tripping over buried rocks and slipping on slick pieces of wood left by continuous blizzards that haunt many forests in the Northern Wisconsin area.

After minutes of walking and laughing to her dad's unbearable “when I was a kid” stories, Millie finds a tree that looks as if it would be a good tree to sit and wait. Yes, the part she hated the most—the wait. She would sit and wait for hours along with her dad for a deer to walk by at just the right moment, just the right angle, only to be shot down, by a hot, fiery piece of merciless metal, traveling straight through the bosom of an innocent animal.

“His yellowish teeth and aged skin give Millie a sense of comfort and stability...”

So, that's what they do—they wait. Millie sits on the right side of her father, reading hunting magazines—the only thing he would dare keep in his Jeep, and her father looks around, trying to see or hear any sudden noises or movements that would tell him if a deer was approaching. Of course, every new hunting trip is that much harder. He is old, a man of sixty-nine. His hearing is slowly deteriorating to nothing; he has to put his hand up to his ear just to hear his wife call him in the kitchen. It bothers him. He feels challenged, as if he can't take care of himself anymore. He feels angry that he can't do the things for his daughter that he used to. After all, she is only eight. A girl of that age, in his opinion, needs a father. Someone to tuck her in at night or to tell ghost stories to when her mother is too tired from work to spend quality time with her. But he manages. He manages because he knows that Millie knows his love for her. Although his time to live is becoming short, he is determined not to leave this earth until he is sure that he has accomplished his only

goal here on earth—to watch his only daughter grow up and become a successful young woman. A young woman who can say, *My dad was Mr. Jean Harper and he helped me get to where I am now.* Of course Millie, although only eight-years-old, loves her father with all of her heart and soul. They don't have the father-daughter relationship that many families have. They seem to have a mutual understanding of each other, one that you see just by the look in both of their eyes.

“Daddy, Daddy!!!!” Millie whispers to her dad, “to the left.” Sure enough, a doe is standing in front of a tall magnolia tree. Millie can't help but stare; she's never seen anything so beautiful before. It is taller than her by far and is a light-brown mixed in with off-white, piercing through the forest with its keen yet soft black eyes. Her dad slowly begins to raise his gun. Millie's eyes begin to tear. She wishes that he wouldn't shoot it, but she knows from traveling on several hunting trips with her dad that her opinion will not change his mind this time. This deer is a big one that could feed all three of them tonight. She figures that all in all it is for the best. Her mom won't have to worry about finding stuff around the house just for them to have a healthy meal, and her dad won't have to worry about driving into town just to find a store with some bread or maybe driving over to the Barnums' to see if they could loan them a piece of meat.

They are poor folks. Yes. But they live off what they have. And they enjoy every bit of it.

Millie closes her eyes and covers her ears when he pulls the trigger. And when she opens them, she sees the doe lying on its side in the snow. Her dad looks over at her but Millie doesn't move. He shakes his head.

“C'mon, girl, help me get this into the back of the Jeep.”

Millie grabs the deer's legs and, with the help of her dad, throws the doe onto the back seat. As they get inside to drive home, she wonders if this is the right thing to do. But she is only eight, and she turns around to look at the doe: “At least I get to ride in the front seat,” she states happily, and they take off on the slippery road back home.



Tired Feet

Photograph

Joanna Oliver

Old Man

He whistled as he walked
Down the path
Crooked path, walking:
Home, and away from
He wandered, bumpily
On the
crooked path.
But he walked it so often.
He forgot.
Its switchbacks
And its retired hunch
Merrily he would jaunt
On
z
i
g
z
z
z
a
g
s
and never **stumble** on outlaying
rock.

Julia Cheng

Gossamer

A fine film of gossamer
Reminder of a home
Once owned by a spider
But now he lives alone

Softly rising on the wind
Twisting helpless in the breeze
Now the home rests helpless
In the cemetery trees

Pathetic puny spider
Sitting homeless on dry lawn
Now he rests secluded
From dusk until the dawn

For on the film of gossamer
Nestled feeble in the fold
Lies the mate of lonely spider,
The love he used to hold

But now poor spider's gloomy
There's sadness in his pose
For on the film of gossamer
Lies all that spider knows

Eric Woods

Sunlight

a prose poem

Sunlight highlights the hidden gold in hair, sprinkler rain on the ground. Small plants stretch their growing arms to feed on the earth's source of life. Children play with brightly colored balls—lime green, bubblegum pink (but only for the girls), baby blue, Easter yellow, and pastel purple (called “lavender” by a proud second grader). Crickets chirp away from seeking hands; rollie pollies swarm in plastic cups. Airy butterflies soar into the faraway sky, closer and closer to life-giving light. Little toes feel the grass growing underneath. See-saws push uncovered heads with baby-fine hairs up and up before bringing them down again. Swings go back and forth and back and forth; the brilliant one says “tick tock” while watching the children’s pendulums move like the clock in the den. Mothers watch their baby chicks play and the pies bake. Men gossip around the grill about the latest baseball prodigy on the next street over and his football quarterback cousin. The littlest one pedals his tricycle, looking over his pacifier at the world. Aunt calls for the children to wash hands.

Sunlight shines on the checkered tablecloth as they eat.

Emily Williams

Jack of All Trades

I watch him
Lovingly
Through the glass
Doing his job
In the sweltering heat
Beads of sweat
Travel from forehead to chin
Dripping on his hands and feet
Evaporating
Before they reach the ground
His face scrunches
As he lifts a heavy piece of siding
Nailing it to my sanctuary
He climbs the ladder
To the roof
Adding shingle by shingle
Working to protect me
Fixing our home
In the few hours he has left
Before enduring 8 hours on his feet
At his real job

Kelsey Morris

Singing to Maggie

Kent Denton

Second Place, Essay Competition

The wooden handle of my post driver takes on the rusty color of my cracked and aching hands. I hammer the fence post deep, deeper into the dry Mississippi dirt. The thunk, thunk, thunk, of steel on soil keeps rhythm with my resolve to survive another day on the farm. I think to myself that another day on the farm won't kill me; one must keep that mentality, even if it doesn't feel true. At last I am through with the fence. Getting the cows through the gate without breaking the newly repaired section will be an entirely different endeavor. My dogs come running when they hear the telltale five-note runs, and thankfully they know exactly what to do. Nipping at hooves, pulling on tails, and staring a cow right in the face, the collies I work with are some of the best trained in the state. The cows are secure and the dogs fed. Work is over and it's time for a voice lesson.

"The thunk, thunk,
thunk, of steel on
soil keeps rhythm
with my resolve to survive
another day on the farm."

I started private vocal education at the young and impressionable age of eleven, only the payment for my lessons wasn't exactly conventional. My father was extraordinarily opposed to furthering my artistic ventures. When I asked if I could take private lessons for vocal technique I received a prompt, "No." However, I've always been an enterprising young man

and I sought out a way to chase my dreams. I reasoned that if I took on a workload fit for a man's man then my dad just might let me seek my artistic voice (no pun intended). Indeed after inquiring about such an option I found that my father was more than willing to make said trade off.

In fitting one piece of life's puzzle I presented myself with a picture entirely different than what I expected. A deal was made with Mrs. Barnes that I would serve as her middle-aged husband's farmhand as a substitute for monetary payment for my tutorials. My duties would include but wouldn't be limited to: keeping the perimeter fence intact, feeding the herding dogs, herding the cows from pasture to pasture, general farm equipment maintenance, and, quite possibly worst of all, assisting in calf delivery.

I began my training and payment the summer before returning to Mendenhall Junior High for my sixth-grade year. Seeing that I was unusually young my tasks on the farm were kept pretty simple. In fact, some of the jobs were enjoyable. I loved feeding and interacting with the herding dogs, pure-bred Border collies, raised by my voice teacher and her husband. The dogs and I became very close, especially Maggie and me. Maggie was one of the older dogs and the mother of many on the farm. She was too old to breed any longer but she was an excellent herder. In fact, as I rode up to the farm on my four-wheeler, or sometimes one of the horses, she would cock her head at the sound of my warm-up drills. Maggie was my biggest fan. As long as I was singing she'd never leave my side. Eventually, all the dogs answered to my singing. They knew they were being called and were very efficient once they arrived.

However, as I grew older the workload grew, too. No longer was I just responsible for handling the dogs and feeding the animals. The fencing became my responsibility. (As a side note to the reader, I'd like to say that a fourteen year old is taking on an overwhelming task when he delves into fencing.) Every day after school I rode around the perimeter of the farm to check the fence. It was often that I had to get out of the farm truck and repair the fence, but not before finding the cow that had made the hole in the fence and convinc-

ing it to return to its proper place. After my duties with the fence and the dogs I attended my voice lesson.

The difficulty of my repertoire had also increased as I became a more experienced vocalist. I had the basics of voice: breathing correctly, phrasing, covering my high notes, and I had begun to smooth out the break in my voice. I began with classical hymns and by fourteen had moved to easy arias and art songs. I was entered into many talent competitions and most of the time walked away with the grand prize. I have excellent projection and judges were astounded that such a quantity of sound could spring from such a small-framed young man. My vocal ability also earned me the right to participate in several years of honor choir. I was soon to begin high school, and I knew that voice, theatre, and farm work were going to be lots of work ... then there was also homework.

High school did pose many problems for me. Every day I was tired from working on the farm, voice and theatre practice, and schoolwork. Work on the farm was very demanding particularly during the winter. One particular incident is brought to mind. I was pitching hay and singing to myself like any other day when I heard awful sounds from one of the pastures. I immediately went to check on the troubled bovine and indeed there was a distressed and very pregnant cow. I also knew what was wrong. This animal was in labor!!! Something had to be done, and as gruesome as it was I knew exactly how to handle the situation. I returned to the shed and grabbed the shoulder-length gloves, made my way back to the moaning creature, and helped birth my first calf. After my ordeal with the “miracle of life” (which I found not so miraculous) I returned to pitching hay and my normal voice lesson afterward.

I worked like this year around from age eleven until I was accepted to the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. To attend school I would be moving away from my familiar surroundings. My last vocal recital took place in May of my 16th year. I performed two songs: “The Lord’s Prayer” (also my first recital piece) and Josh Groban’s “To Where You Are.” My teacher had fulfilled her end of the deal; she taught me everything she knew about vocal technique and I would be serving my last day as a farmhand the

very next day. When I arrived for my last day of work, I planned to have a tearless good-bye. As I began to call the canines with my favorite heady runs I found myself completely unable to do so. As Maggie trotted to my side I discovered all I could do was to sit and stare at all I had become so familiar with. However, work is work and I planned on finishing what I had started. I picked myself up and mounted the 4-wheeler with Maggie on the back rack. For once the fence was untouched, I checked the oil in the tractor, fed the dogs, and performed a few more of the same routine chores. Finally it was time for me to leave for good. (At least leave as the farm hand, the monotonous job I had come to enjoy so much.) That’s what I did. I left. I moved on to a place with more opportunities. But I won’t soon forget what it’s like to have my hands blistered and bleeding, my face burnt and peeling, or the happy face of Maggie when I serenaded her.



Moonlight

Acrylic

Emily Traylor

Just before the Benediction

Amen, they cheer, rocking in the seats,
Reverend stands again and clutches the podium
His eyes graze the congregation and
with his mouth wide open, he cries
“You don’t know like I know...what
God has done for me!”
and the crowd rebuts,
in hoots and hollers, the congrega-
tion raises their voices
and he presses on,
“I said, you don’t know...like I know...
what God has done for me!”
and they answer,
lifting up voices of praise in a glori-
ous echolalia of song and acclamation
framed by dancing notes from the organ
and tapping toes on the floor,
heads swinging and hats falling, the church
breaks into a fit of divine convulsions,
and the parsons in red unveil the sacrament.

David Elion

Finding the Music

It slides—
Underneath the staff,
Around the descant
Shimmering in the poor kid’s voice
Lurking somewhere around the larynx
In the bright sound of a practiced tenor;
It hides—
in the cacophony of an amateur drummer’s beats
Weaving its way through a difficult fugue
Settling into an alto’s chesty resonance
Find it—
in the liquid rhythm of a stenographer’s fingers
The tink tink tink of dripping water
It’s blasted—
from a young man’s car speakers
Pouring from the mouth of a solid bass
Even in the nasal sound emanating from a squealing
soprano
It’s in the binding of society
The cornerstone of love and peace
Don’t look for the music... let it find you.

Kent Denton

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition

Roadway Art

Zachary Bugg

“Stop here, Mom,” I said as we neared the Tallahatchie River Bridge. I wanted to get a gaping photograph of the historic over-truss bridge that stood like a monument over the low plains of Lafayette County, Mississippi. My mother pulled the car onto the shoulder, and I got out onto the grassy gravel. The hazy blue sky hurt my eyes, and the scorching southern air pummeled my face. A few seconds later, the picture was taken; I had captured a grand scene of the South.

My affinity for roads goes beyond photography. Most people find them monotonous, but I am intrigued by the art of roads and bridges. I find beauty in the design of a simple two-lane highway, and I find pleasure in driving along a freshly paved and striped road. Furthermore, I am amazed by the complexity of a high-profile freeway interchange, with its smooth curves and overpasses. Engineering is only one factor in road planning and construction—design, I believe, is just as important. I celebrate the birth of new roads because I believe they are improvements to the community. A few years ago I read a newspaper article that included the time that the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a local highway extension would take place. The public was invited to attend. As my mother and I arrived on the scene—a newly finished overpass at the terminal interchange of Highway 302 in Marshall County—I was sad to realize that we were the only members of the general public there. I still have a piece of the ribbon in my bedroom at home.

In recent years I have become particularly interested in the quantitative aspects of roads, and I have already started to use my coursework at school to analyze them. Using an equation that I found in my Algebra II textbook, I discovered the relationship between the radius of a curve and the maximum speed that a car can achieve without skidding on the curve. Later, in my physics class, I presented that equation to the class, and we explored how it was derived using mechanics. I

have also gotten information from the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices about the standards for highway construction, and I frequently design my own roads on paper using these standards. I drew many road scenes in my art class, and during my freshman year I won an award at my school’s art show.

When I hear that a road will be demolished, I always go to enjoy it for one last time. My mother and I drove to Greenville this summer just to see a bridge. The bridge, a narrow two-lane span of U.S. Highway 82 that connects Mississippi and Arkansas across the Mississippi River, is scheduled to be removed when an upscale cable-stayed four-lane span is completed next year. It took us three hours to get to the bridge, but the drive there wasn’t boring because I was entertained by the roads themselves. Old roads give me a sense of nostalgia; last summer I had a picnic on an unused ramp at an interchange in Memphis. A remnant of the aborted Interstate 40 alignment through midtown, the interchange was completed in the 1960’s, but a few miles of the freeway were cancelled during the 1980’s due to local opposition. When the “ghost” ramps were scheduled to be removed due to reconstruction in the area, I had to go see them up close to take pictures.

Currently I enjoy the 160-mile drive between my house and my high school, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science in Columbus. At MSMS I pursue an education that I hope will prepare me for a career in civil engineering. Now that I spend a lot of time in Columbus, I photograph roads and bridges there; I recently took pictures of an abandoned over-truss bridge near the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway that has been converted to a walking trail. Last summer I attended QUEST, a three-week engineering research program at Mississippi State University for high school seniors. At QUEST I was delighted to be exposed to a real materials lab, and I got to spend ten to fifteen hours a week with a civil engineering professor. This summer I’m hoping to continue my education by majoring in civil engineering and mathematics at Duke University or the Georgia Institute of Technology. As I make plans for my career and my life after school, I know that my passion for roadway “art” will help me to design my own life.

“And miles to go before I sleep...”

Michael Counihan

*Honorable Mention,
Essay Competition*



Down the Road

Photograph

Jaime Johnson

Turn left onto Ridge Road. Sleepy Hollow Rd. passes on my right. I always thought that a wonderfully memorable Halloween could be had by borrowing a horse from RIDES, donning a flowing black cape, fashioning a pumpkin helmet, and charging down the street at 10 o'clock. Of course, following that delightful caper would probably result in fines for disturbing the peace on a night of mob rule.

The gently rolling Country Club golf course swells like a turf ocean on my left. My truck veers right, treading on dirt, as a sports car zooms around the tight turn and into my lane. The ribbon of sidewalk lacing the golf course is thrust upward by the trunk of an ancient oak felled during the hurricane. A gigantic root base grasps at the air, a wooden star. Somebody's boy, dressed in the comical golfer's garb, is calf-deep in the ditch water searching intently for his ball. His face loosens and his eyes grow wide; I think he might have seen a fish. His hands shoot into the water and are raised carrying his catch: a muddy, glistening Top Flite XL 2000.

My tires slide on the red mud spilling onto the road. For the past year, contractors have been building a subdivision right next to the street. So far, their efforts at preventing the erosion of future yards have proved futile; the clay-saturated road is evidence. About half-a-mile in, the trees start closing in, forming a gigantic arbor, shutting out the rest of the world, everything except the billowing masses of cloud climbing to the stars.

The road looms ahead and arches its serpentine back as I increase gas flow to maintain speed. The extra gas is wasted, because after the crest of the ridge, a stop sign

halts progress. Seeing my fuel is running low, I pull to the left into the small gravel lot of Penny-Ridge. Penny-Ridge is a small convenience store that has managed to survive the commercialization and globalization of road-side stops. Its inventory doesn't rival the library at Alexandria, but it carries what a good-ol'-boy needs for the weekend: gas, beer, ice cream, new Turtle-Shell wax for his V12 Dodge Ram 3500, and cans of Skoal to reinforce the spectacular ring of white on his back pocket. I make a call home and ask Mama if she needs anything; a pint of Blue Bell Rocky Road sits on the checkout counter alongside *The Packet* and Trolli cheeseburgers.

“Lumbering up the hill
on my left is a young man
who resembles Henry VIII in
girth borne upon a weather-
beaten Honda
riding-lawnmower.”

Looking at the road as I prepare to pull out, I spy with my little eye something most remarkable. Lumbering up the hill on my left is a young man who resembles Henry VIII in girth borne upon a weather-beaten Honda riding-lawnmower. Perhaps he is cruisin' for ladies, or perhaps the sun was too oppressive; whatever the reason, he has decided to remove his shirt and travel in nothing but a pair of gym shorts. He is greeted by two elderly ladies who seem to have given up on society's constraints, and are now riding along the road in a golf cart with a walker in the front and an oxygen tank in the back. Closing my mouth and chuckling, I pull out onto the road.



Sky Spray

Photograph

Emily Traylor

Second Place Photograph, Art Competition

Finally, Ridge Road flattens into a gently curving lane. I am now driving Church Row, a Presbyterian next to a Nazarene next to a Mormon. But the churches are not interesting today; it is the houses, or more specifically the people, on my left that captivate me. A man is burning a brush pile during a drought. He is using a plastic rake to keep the fuel contained. Recognizing that this odd combination can produce entertaining results, I slow to 25. A branch is caught in the plastic tines; the man swings the rake like a pickaxe, trying to dislodge the burning bough. He resembles a man swatting at a fly with a giant swatter but never hitting his quarry. Finally, he licks his fingers and pushes the wood free, then licks his fingers, trying to soothe the burns. I drive a little further, but have to stop to let the tears, which accumulated from nothing more than allergies (honest as a crying crocodile), dissipate. Having composed myself, I push on about 100 yards, and then turn into Sherwood Forest. Scarlet Drive, the first street on the left, is my final destination. It seems as if everything interesting on the way home happens on the left. Funny, if you think about it, that a trip so very left could end up so very right.

Skeleton Bones

We were both too thin, and the way we hugged made
bone knock bone.

We spoke of poetry and beautiful things,
And both lived for pretty stories concocted with
Graceful nouns, verbs, adjectives.
She reminded me of a faded fairytale,
Our antiquated ways, and speech
In which sometimes sly slang inserted.
Some days, I separated—not wish-
ing to bring such harsher things,
For I was of this world, not of fey.
Not a faded fairytale, nor a grandmother's quilt,
The dusty chestnut piano, where her
fingertips caressed lilting song.
When we hugged, we grasped too tightly,
taking breath out of breath,
And making bone knock bone.
She took me under feather, and petted my hair
And we danced like awkward herons.

Julia Cheng

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition



Flying High

Photograph

Jaime Johnson

Dreamy Day

Cool breeze
Calmly overcast sky
Freedom beneath
Heaven's sleepy face.

Its snores witness of deep slumber
Did you ever wonder
What lies behind the shroud;
What this day dreams?

Alex Thompson

Contributors' Notes

Adeola Adebiyi (Starkville)

Adeola plans to attend Mississippi State University and to major in engineering. She came to MSMS from Hebron Christian School. "Do not put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

Daniel Baker (Long Beach)

Daniel attended Long Beach High School before MSMS. He wants to major in engineering. His favorite writer is Terry Brooks.

Zachary Bugg (Horn Lake)

Zach plans to attend Mississippi State University to major in civil engineering and mathematics. One of his favorite writers is George Orwell. "He that would live in peace and at ease, must not speak all he knows nor judge all he sees." — Benjamin Franklin

Julia Cheng (Oxford)

Julia enjoys reading John Irving. She plans to attend Dartmouth College and major in history and biology. "What makes a desert beautiful... is that somewhere it hides a well..."

Michael Counihan (Columbus)

Michael attended Columbus High before MSMS. His favorite author is Mark Twain. "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

Kent Denton (Mendenhall)

Kent plans to attend Hendrix College and pursue a double major in music education and psychology. "Such love as this, tragic, criminal, impossible, a dream meant only to be dreamed... should burn more brightly." His favorite author is Christopher Rice.

Lamees El Sadek (Crystal Springs)

Lamees's favorite authors include Robert Frost, C.S. Lewis, and Jane Austen. She plans to attend American University in Cairo upon graduation and to major in biological science.

David Elion (Southaven)

David plans to attend Columbia University and major in molecular biology. He believes that "patience is the mother of all virtues." His favorite piece of music is Barber Violin Concerto: Movement 3.

Jaime Johnson (Poplarville)

Jaime plans to attend Mississippi State University to major in graphic design. "Why write? Where does writing come from? These are questions to ask yourself. They are like: Where does dust come from? Or: Why is there war? Or: If there's a God, then why is my brother now a cripple?"

Lauren Klaskala (Starkville)

Some of Lauren's favorite authors/artists include: J.D. Salinger, Allen Ginsberg, Tom Wolfe, George Orwell, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee. She states, "Everything changes you, even if it's just a little."

Kelly Lence (Tupelo)

Kelly is inspired by the natural beauty that fills the world. Her personal philosophy is "Think with your mind, act with your heart." She enjoys F. Scott Fitzgerald and Emerson.

Sarah Marshall (Bay St. Louis)

Sarah is influenced more by her own experiences than by the works of famous writers. "Better to write for yourself and have no public, than to write for the public and have no self." — Cyril Connolly

Arianna Mohiuddin (Gulfport)

Arianna plans to attend Baylor University and major in biological science. "A great soul is generous but not extravagant, humble but not miserly, and defends moral convictions above all else." She enjoys reading Leo Tolstoy, Richard Wright, and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Kelsey Morris (Diamondhead)

Kelsey attended Hancock High School before MSMS. She wants to major in English. "Life is precious, and there's not a lot of room for anger" — Fran Drescher

Kelly Naylor (Hattiesburg)

Kelly's personal statement is "No pain, no gain." Her favorite writer is Alice Walker. She wants to major in medicine and become a plastic surgeon.

Aspen Nero (Bay St. Louis)

Aspen enjoys reading Tennessee Williams and other Southern writers. She feels that the Broadway musical *Hair* best describes her time at MSMS. "Some painters transform the sun into a yellow spot; others transform a yellow spot into the sun." — Pablo Picasso

Chris O'Brien (Grenada)

Chris plans to attend Mississippi State University to major in architecture. He enjoys John Knowles. "All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream." — Edgar Allan Poe

Joanna Oliver (Senatobia)

Joanna's art is influenced by her sister's photography. Her favorite author is Emily Dickinson, and her favorite photographer is Margaret Bourke-White. "A good snapshot stops a moment from running away." — Eudora Welty

Tiffini Oman (St. Martin)

Tiffini plans to attend Mississippi State University and major in Spanish. Her favorite books include the *Animorphs* series, *Everworld*, *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and the *Abhorsen* trilogy. "Don't take life too seriously. You'll never get out alive."

Worthington Phillips (Raymond)

Worthington plans to attend Carleton College, majoring in history and political science. His favorite authors are George Carlin and Lewis Black. The song he feels best describes MSMS is "Live without Warning" by Green Day.

Sarah Prather (West Point)

Sarah plans to attend Mississippi State University to major in veterinary medicine. Her favorite authors are Kathryn Tucker Wredham and Norman Rockwell. "Why should I flock to the masses when they should flock to me?"

Abby Regan (Foxworth)

Abby plans to attend Louisiana State University, majoring in microbiology or medicine. Abby is influenced by Da Vinci's "Head of a Young Girl." Her favorite artist is Jackson Pollock, and her favorite author is Anthony Burger. "Live and learn."

Matthew Russell (Starkville)

Matthew's favorite authors are Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Jack Kerouac. His personal statement is "Ob-la-di, ob-la-da." He attended Starkville Academy before coming to MSMS.

Blake Sessums (Vicksburg)

Blake's favorite author is Dan Brown, and he is inspired by the *Harry Potter* and *Eldest* series. "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

Jennifer Sloan (Starkville)

Jennifer plans to attend Mississippi State University, majoring in environmental engineering and mathematics. Her favorite artists are Georgia O'Keefe, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Claude Monet.

Missie Smith (Columbus)

Missie plans to attend Mississippi State University, majoring in mathematics or industrial engineering. She is inspired by a love of nature. "Whatever you do, do the best you can at it. Don't let yourself slack off, or your life will be filled with regrets."

Quadreka Smith (Ruleville)

Quadreka plans to attend Mississippi State University to major in psychology. Her favorite author is Zora Neale Hurston. "Even throughout the hardest times, a task can still be completed, a smile can still uplift your spirit and a friend can always be found."

Alex Thompson (Forest)

Alex plans to attend Mississippi State University, majoring in computer science. His favorite author is Brian Jacques, and the *Redwall* series influences him. "Destiny and Fate are not as fixed as they would seem, only changed by choice: what you choose to dream." — Alex T.

Emily Traylor (Pontotoc)

Emily thinks that Fall Out Boy's "Sophomore Slump or Comeback of the Year" best describes her experience at MSMS. She plans to major in animal and dairy sciences at Mississippi State University to become a veterinarian.

Breanne Uriz (Long Beach)

Bre's favorite artists are Kazuya Minekura and Yun Kouga. "Emo: (n) Similar to Goth, but less depressed and more Harry Potter."

Julianna Vick (Southaven)

Julianna plans to attend the University of Delaware, majoring in biology or obstetrics/gynecology. Her favorite artists are Vincent Van Gogh, Andy Warhol, and Salvador Dali. "The world always seems brighter when you've just made something that wasn't there before." — Neil Gaiman

Katrina Vizzini (Starkville)

Katrina plans to attend Mississippi State University, majoring in aerospace engineering. Her favorite author is Neil Gaiman. "What fun is it being cool if you can't wear a sombrero?" — Calvin and Hobbes

Rachel Wiley (Long Beach)

Rachel's favorite authors are Terry Pratchett, Tamora Pierce, Neil Gaiman, and Ayn Rand. She believes that anything she picks up, reads, sees, or hears is fair game for inspiration. "Five exclamation marks, the sure sign of an insane mind." — Terry Pratchett.

Emily Williams (Ocean Springs)

Emily plans to attend Spring Hill College and major in biochemistry. Her favorite authors are Terry Pratchett, David Eddings, and William Shakespeare. "A lively tune... I'm inspired to dance!"

Eric Woods (Brookhaven)

Eric plans to attend William Carey College to major in religion/youth ministry. His favorite author is Donald Miller, and his favorite artists are Nickel Creek and John Mayer. "Dream as if you'll live forever, live as if you'll die today." — James Dean.



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