

Southern Voices 2007



Southern Voices

Volume XIX

Spring 2007

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Barefootin': Life Lessons from the Road to Freedom
(Random House, 2006)

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Gracie in the Grass

Hannah Kaase

Scratchboard

First Place Drawing, Art Competition

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Tempus Fugit

Michael Counihan

First Place, Short Story Competition

The Chris Read Award for Fiction

“I’m here to kill you.” Letha stopped fidgeting with the potatoes and turned to face Harvey with a pan in her hand and a towel over her shoulder. She was a woman old only by age, and a quality of keeping-on hung on her petite frame. The speaker she faced was clad in polished black shoes, pressed and pleated black Calvin Clines with a sheep’s leather belt, solid black mock turtleneck, and a white gold Rolex. She didn’t seem surprised at the silenced Glock smirking at her.

“If you must. But first, hold this.” She handed him a Spode gravy boat. “And this,” a matching butter dish. “And these,” a wicker basket with sourdough rolls. “Turn around and put them on the right of the dinner table.” Harvey simply stood with his elbows out, trying to balance the basket on the two vessels while holding his gun by its trigger guard on his right pinky. “Move along, now, young man.” Letha grabbed his elbow and turned him, then flicked him on the rear with her towel.

Harvey came back in with the gun grasped firmly. “I told you, ‘I’m here to kill you.’”

“And I responded, ‘If you must. But first hold this.’ Wasn’t that fun? Can you remember what I said next?”

This last comment threw Harvey completely off. He was here to execute the contract, and now she was chiding him like an insolent schoolboy. Harvey decided to respond in kind. With a wide flourish of arms and a bow, he asked, “Is this a bad time,

Madame?”

“Actually, it is. Louise and Tess are coming over for dinner, and now you’re getting in my way in my own kitchen. But, I understand you probably have places to go and money to make. Would midnight be alright with you?”

This wasn’t the first time one of his marks had tried to negotiate with him. But normally they said phrases like, “No, No,” “Please, I’ll pay you...” and even “But I’m a priest!” Never, ever had he been asked to simply postpone it seven hours.

“Well, I suppose, if you must...”

Letha cut in, “Good. Now set yourself a place.” She pointed to the cupboard where dishes were kept and handed him two forks, a knife, and a spoon. Harvey obeyed.

He moved into the dining room and looked around for the first time (when he was in there before, all he saw were red spots everywhere). The walls were painted a dark, robust green that looked like the smell

“The walls
were painted a
dark, robust
green that looked
like the smell
of an oak forest
at sunset.”

A gold-rimmed Baroque mirror perched behind the head of the table, and there was a gold chandelier. If he wasn’t a professional, he might consider redistributing some of this to his collection. Of course, his client wouldn’t be happy, because the house and its contents were most likely the reason for the contract in the first place. Harvey didn’t ask any questions — the less he knew the better — but the story probably went something like this: “I have two kids who are about to go to an Ivy League and a great-grandmother

who has (insert exorbitant amount of money). I know..." At least, that's what Mr. Bumble told Harvey back in '95 when the gentleman was seeking a specialist. Harvey had told his clients not to disclose their motives, and when Mr. Bumble did, it showed a propensity towards talking that could not be tolerated. Mr. Bumble was hit by a laundry truck one day.

A cacophonous cry caught Harvey from his reminiscences and he jumped into the kitchen. A cockroach was staring down Letha, who was wedged into a corner with her arms and palms pressing the adjoining walls. Harvey dispatched the pest with a stomp. "I walk in with a gun, and you put me to work. A cockroach walks in with an antenna, and you scream like Oprah died."

Regaining her composure and extricating herself from the corner, Letha said, "I can talk to you. God knows what language that roach speaks. Did you find the napkins?" Harvey might have been starting to like her at this point. She trotted into the dining room to check his setup and sighed. "Surprise of surprises, the Yankee can set half a place. And here I thought hitmen were dumb, brutish apes. Silly me. However, your glasses are confused. Sit down, now, and I'll show you how it's done."

Harvey had met his nice quota for the day. "No."

Letha immediately switched into mother-of-a-pouty-eight-year-old mode. "Oh, I sorry you not doin' well. Just sit down and let Momma teach you a teency-weency little bit. When you grow up big and strong like your daddy, the girls will love that you have manners." And then, in her usual voice, "Snookums." Rolling his eyes, Harvey obeyed, and Letha was back to her old self. "Now, you set the forks on the left and the knife and spoon on the right. Good. But the wine glass

perches to the east of the water glass, which is north-east of the knife. Then, the champagne flute is east of the wine glass. Well?" He hadn't been following her commands. "If I'm going to waste my time trying to make you a more marketable person, you better at least participate. Now, those glasses, sir." He set them out, this time. "Start eating with the outermost fork and work in. Use the spoon to roll pasta, always put your napkin in your lap before eating, never have a prayer that lasts longer than God is willing to listen, and try a bit of everything put before you."

"By the way, what is going to be put before me? I'm allergic to peanuts, you know."

"Why, no, I didn't know. Now I suppose I'll have to whip some peanut soup served with a side of peanut-crusted salmon." Letha was scolding the man. "It's a wonder you've lived so long in your profession if you tell everyone your weaknesses."

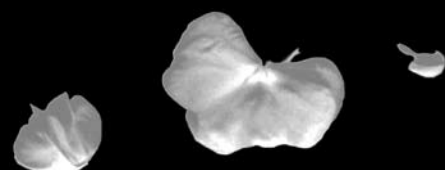
"I don't usually get invited to my mark's last meals. This is a very odd occurrence. And plus, you're still alive, so I wouldn't go fussing at the man who added seven hours to your life."

"No, and I won't. I'll fuss at the man who *subtracted twenty years* from my life!" Letha marched back into the kitchen and opened a top cupboard by extending her toes to their limit. No matter how hard she stretched, she couldn't reach the bottle of wine. Exasperated with her small frame, Letha hollered

into the dining room for Harvey to give her a hand. "It's the white wine at the front." Harvey walked in without a sound and retrieved the bottle. Cradling it in his outstretched arms, he frowned in thought while examining the label.

"White Zin... '89... bottled in Napa Valley..." he muttered over his breath. Then, turning to Letha, "What did you say you're making?"

"A cockroach
walks in
with an
antenna,
and you
scream like
Oprah died."



"Angel hair pasta with clams sautéed in a white-wine sauce."

With a shake of his head, Harvey replied, "Then why on earth are you using this wine. White Zin is better for drinking than for cooking. Do you have a generic brand, or a Sauvignon, or cooking wine? Trust me, your guests will prefer a cultivated drink over a cultivated sauce. Plus, the clams in this region clash with White Zin. Too tough."

"And aren't we the sudden domestic. Why, Martha, can you give me any other advice?" Letha smirked.

By now, Harvey had a gardenia-patterned kitchen towel over his shoulder and his sleeves rolled up. "Yes, in fact, I can. Serve crêpes as dessert."

"Where do you suppose I can learn to cook crêpes in fifteen minutes?"

"Me."

"You. Your cooking skills? Yours?"

"Good, you've established a complete understanding of second-person singular pronouns. Would you like a cookie?"

Letha could see the contractor was possessed of more wit than she had originally suspected. A tiny arsenal of cinnamon, flour, butter, sour cream, sugar, mint, blueberries, and sherry was cached beside the stove, and Harvey stood behind Letha, watching over her shoulder, correcting seemingly miniscule mistakes with a pointed finger. They had been working for forty-five minutes, and Letha had only managed to create one functioning crêpe. With fifteen minutes until six, Harvey decided to take command of the pan.

"If you don't mind me asking, where did you learn to cook? Forgive my impropriety, but it seems queer for a hitman to comment on the quality of wine used in a clam dish, or advise on the proper consistency of crêpes."

Harvey was in the middle of beating a mix and dashing seasoning. "Tradecraft class. There were

six of us, all learning from the great Pierre duLallemonde. He showed us the basics of Mediterranean cuisine and some special seasonings."

"Rosemary, rhubarb?"

"More along the lines of arsenic and thallium. We were studying an unorthodox technique, for modern times, anyway. We learned what chemicals should not be used in certain dishes, because their taste would be so terrible the mark would suspect something and call an ambulance."

"So what would you use tonight, hypothetically of course?"

"Humm...hypothetically...For the white wine sauce, a fifty-fifty mix of cyanide and polonium. For the crêpes, bake in tetramyacin, which becomes poisonous only after heating." Letha began looking over his shoulder, in case he dropped any tetramyacin.

Very soon, Harvey had a plate of twelve crêpes ready to be stuffed with cream cheese, cinnamon, and blueberry sauce.

Tess and Louise arrived promptly at 6:00 p.m. and saw that their friend had a well-built man wearing gardenia mitts and a matching apron standing in her kitchen, and all the six-dollar romance novels ever read provoked scandalous conclusions. Tess resembled an overly large cotton stalk: crinkled and brown with a tuft of white fluff on the top. Louise was the inverse: bulbous on the bottom with a stick-like neck supporting brown roots of hair. Dinner went smoothly. Harvey remembered to work through the forks outside in, to keep his elbows off the table, and to tear off pieces of his roll rather than buttering the entire glob of dough. As conversation began dwindling, Tess (who had been very polite all night even though she wanted desperately to find out everything about the mysterious young man who seemed to be keeping Letha company) asked him what he did for a living.

Harvey answered, "I work in population control."

Tess smiled sweetly, and asked Letha if she was

alright, and that she should really take Vitamin C, “it’ll clear that cough right up.” She continued to question Harvey. “What type of population?”

“Rodents, mostly.” Here, he paused for a grin and drink. “Moles, rats, but sometimes snakes and even, unfortunately, the occasional snowy owl.”

Then, the crêpes came out on a silver platter with a Spode bowl of blueberry-sherry sauce in the center; the dessert was greeted with much appreciation.

“And he can cook! Letha, how did you manage to snag this one?” Louise was beginning to get jealous.

“Oh, he found me, really. I think my grand-nephew sent him over to help me sleep better at night... with burglars around and everything.”

After crêpes came coffee, and after coffee more conversation. Around 11:30, the guests decided to leave and Harvey helped Letha clean up. At midnight, Letha excused herself to her bed, and asked Harvey to give her five minutes. When he went in to the bedroom, he found her in a flannel nightgown sitting upright in bed with translucent brown glasses reading “French in Forty Minutes.” When she saw Harvey, she put down the book, took

off her glasses, and folded her hands. “I suppose it is time.”

Harvey sat on the foot of the bed. He put on black leather shooting gloves, but did not pull out a gun. “Yes, Ms. Letha. It is time. Good night.”

Fifty minutes later, Harvey was greeted by a man used to winning. Taking Harvey in to his library, the man offered a Cuban and a glass of brandy, both of which Harvey declined.

“Has the contract been executed? Is she dead?”

Harvey did not respond, but instead pulled his gloves from his inside breast pocket and put them on. The man was beginning to get fidgety.

“Have you killed her? How did you do it?”

Harvey then screwed the silencer onto his pistol, and checked that a round was chambered. The man loosened his tie.

“What are you doing? *Did you finish the contract?*”

A sardonic half-smile sculpted Harvey’s lips. “Not yet.” ■

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



Ducks in a Row

Stella Nickerson

Scratchboard

Alligators

It's a relief, once, when
After all this hot weather,
We can lay our awkward growing bodies,
Husked like Mississippi corn, on
your linen white bed

Fans whirr, dry feet-skin scratches sheets,
Bony hands, long fingers brush over —
Short hands smooth under —
Freckles and the smells of deodorant and sweat
Rich with the days' adventures —
Pickin' paw paws
And taking your dog swimming
In the last days of precious summer
On wild Loakafoama lake

We dipped our hands in the wet,
Our bony hands, stubby hands,
Where alligator teeth can snatch them away
And learned what it means to be losing something

Lauren Klaskala

A FEMA Window

We're beachfront now,
The view is nice.
I can see for miles out of my FEMA window,
With one hand on the fridge, one on the sofa,
And one leg on the kitchen table,
the other in the bedroom,
The beach would look so inviting,
If the trucks would just get off it;
And maybe if the trees would grow,
The birds would come back
To sing a lullaby to the
Skeleton buildings, fallen steeples, ghostly yards,
And put them to sleep for good.
The white sand still looks wet,
The street's still gray and torn,
And one year later, Her smell creeps in,
Through the cracks in my window.

Sarah Marshall

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition



Bottled Memories

Marianna Prather

Acrylic

Iuka Kook

Jackson Segars

I first noticed the sad-eyed straggler when he walked in front of my minivan, dressed head-to-toe in black, cowboy boots thudding heel-to-toe across the unmarked asphalt, puffing slowly on a large stogie. Usually, this wouldn't make a large impression. After all, this was Iuka. But, I was stopped at the only red light in town where there happens to be no crosswalk. Occasionally members from the local Lion's Club will stand at this intersection between downtown, uptown, midtown, and out of town to collect donations from stopped pick-ups for glasses for children and the elderly, but no one really walks there. He maundered past my minivan, leaving a puff of smoke and tangible trail of mystery.

I told my uncle first about the black-suited, cowboy-booted vagrant, but I forgot that he was a jaded county attorney.

"Oh, yeah," he recalled with only slight amusement, "Goober."

"Goober?"

"Goober Gowdy," Mark said.

"So, you know Goober?" I asked.

"Hell, everybody knows Goober," he drawled in a voice seemingly standard among Mississippi lawyers.

"Goober Gowdy," I repeated. He had the name of a regular folk hero. I pictured him as the type of hero vagabond who knows what's best for the people before they do, armed with a banjo, hopping trains

"I pictured him
as the type of
hero
vagabond...
armed with a
banjo,
hopping trains..."

to escape the society that he so very hates, yet is determined to improve. I soon learned that Goober was no such man, though. My uncle told me about a specific court case involving Goober. Apparently, Goober and his brother got into a tussle over a woman, and in the heat of the moment, Goober bit off his brother's ear. I asked my uncle if Goober's

brother was around. Mark said he didn't know whether it was hearsay or not, but the story goes that Goober's brother was walking across a bridge when he was hit by a car and knocked over the side of the bridge and onto the railroad tracks below, only to be hit by an oncoming train. I was fascinated. I had to learn more about Goober Gowdy.

The next few times I made it into town, I kept my eyes peeled for any sign of Goober: cigar butts, a trail of ears, steel-toed cowboy-bootprints. The first few weeks were unsuccessful, but one day, I was running empty so I pulled in to the BP to fill up. I was pumping gas, and I saw Goober standing on the curb in front of the convenience store, puffing on his ever-present cigar, wearing the same suit. I walked in to pay for my gas, and walked briskly past him, too nervous to start conversation.

"Lord, it's hot," I heard behind me.

"Lord, it's hot," he repeated matter-of-factly, pulling on his bolo tie.

He wasn't talking to anybody in particular. It just seemed like a random observation put into the air for anybody to ignore or acknowledge. I turned

around and decided to take advantage of this opportunity.

"Ain't it," I said in my most affected Southern accent.

I contemplated asking Goober if his attire might have anything to do with his discomfort, but I thought it might not be taken too kindly. Instead I told him I thought it would be cooler inside of the Kwik-Mart. He puffed a cloud of smoke in the air and looked at it, thinking about my comment.

"You're probably right," he said, and he made his way inside.

I made it a habit to always fill-up at the BP. I started seeing Goober about once a week. We both became familiar presences in each other's routine. I would always stop and comment on his comments about the weather or fishing, never making eye contact. I looked into his tired, silver eyes once, and it was eerily comforting and disconcerting. I wondered if Goober had made amends with his brother before he died, or if he still harbored a grudge after his brother probably slept with his lady. I wondered if he had seen sorrow beyond sorrow, sorrow even incapable of embodying in a country song. I didn't ask, though. It seemed too personal.

I asked around town for the real story of Goober Gowdy, but everybody knew just what everybody else knew. All the hearsay was the same. There were a lot of myths behind the man: Goober, who bit off his brother's ear. Goober, whose brother probably got hit by a car, then the ground, then a train. Goober, who owns one suit. Goober, who probably only owns one cigar. Goober, whom all the townspeople keep at a distance. It seems ironic, though, a regular outcast roams around the most public areas of a southern town whose denizens are too polite to personally acknowledge him, yet they share stories upon stories about his life. He's unfit for the company of normal people. Yet, by keeping

him at this distance, the town has unintentionally integrated him into their culture, keeping him closer than normally desired. They have insured the sharing of Goober's story around Sunday dinner. I think Goober thought that if he just hung around long enough, he would eventually find a place in Iuka town. Or, maybe, he doesn't care at all. Either way, Iuka needs people like Goober for history, for culture, or even warnings to their children.

The last time I saw Goober, he wasn't at our normal meeting place. Rather, I saw him walking on Battleground Drive between Piggly Wiggly and Wal-Mart. I stopped to say hello.

"Where you headed?" I asked. Just maybe I could give him a ride.

"Corinth," he replied.

"Corinth!? That's a twenty-minute drive."

"Yep, heading to the singles' club. Gonna see my woman," he said, and kept walking.

I wished him well and went on my way, quietly questioning the contradiction of planning a date at a singles' club.

Through our brief encounters, Goober had become somewhat of a mythic figure to me. I no longer wanted to know anymore about him. I just wanted to imagine him through the stories I had heard about him, not from him. I didn't want to question him about the veracity of any of those tales, for fear of a rational explanation, a refutation of all the tall tales and myths behind the man.

I want the tale of Goober to live on with all the inaccuracies and exaggerations and speculations as I heard it. A tale which insures his immortality in Iuka. If I ever see Goober again, I'm sure he'll make the first comment to no one and me about the weather or fishing, and I'll reply, both of us never daring to be more intimate than we already are. ■

All the Pretty Little Horses: A Story of HC

Sarah Prather

"All the pretty little horses / Blacks and bays, dapples and grays..."

—Nursery rhyme

The equine ophthalmologist said that he began studying the horse at the nose. When he got to the eyes, he said, he knew that he didn't need to go any further. Funny, that's when I knew I could go on. During Lassie's necropsy, that is. It was only after she had been decapitated, and the big, soft brown eyes that I knew so well were no longer intact, that I could stop seeing the dead horse in front of me as Lassie.

DFL Lassie Bar Lena, a stocky blood chestnut with deep chocolate eyes, was foaled in British Columbia about ten years ago. She was admitted to the HC research herd at the MSU College of Veterinary Medicine around age six. Through the research/mentorship option offered to students at MSMS, I became her caretaker for the last six weeks of her life. She became my summer "research project"—and so much more.

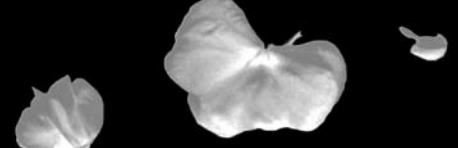
Hyperelastosis cutis (HC), also known as hereditary equine regional dermal asthenia (HERDA) is a skin disorder that primarily affects Quarter Horses and their stock. The disfiguring lesions characteristic of the disease are caused by defective collagen fibers that fail to bind properly the layers of skin. Sometimes lesions are present on a newborn foal. More often, they fail to appear until age two, when horses generally are put under saddle for the first time. Average lifespan for an HC horse is four to five years, which is due either to hopeless progression/complications or, more commonly, euthanasia.

An affected horse's skin is stretchy and tears easily. Pinching along the mane often yields a "mushy" feeling. HC horses wound themselves easily, and

the wounds do not heal correctly due to lack of adhesion between the skin layers. In some cases, such as Lassie's, horrible lesions occur spontaneously with no apparent stress. Lassie's initial "wound" was a flat scar, which stretched, blistered, and festered due to a combination of sun exposure, age, and pregnancy. By early 2006, Lassie's wound was being treated and evaluated daily. By June, the wound's diameter was larger than my outstretched hand, and several inches deep. Lassie spent the last month of her life in a stall in the equine clinic, where I spent approximately two hours every morning flushing, cleaning, and re-bandaging the smelly, oozing wound.

Lassie's wound got increasingly worse over a six-week period. From day to day, I could note small changes: some days, the perimeter would appear pink, seemingly on the road to healing. The next day, the wound would be covered in black necrotic material and would bleed profusely. I always knew deep down that Lassie would die, and probably soon, but I loved her anyway.

The only reason that Lassie was allowed to live was because of her young foal, a little sorrel filly with a few white hairs on her forehead. It was mandated that Lassie would be euthanized on the foal's two-month birthday, a safe time for weaning. The night before the euthanasia, I made a special trip to sit with Lassie, but her huge bunny ears and brown eyes got to me very quickly—from the withers forward, she looked so normal, and healthy!—so I had to go sit with the vet students on night duty and talk of subjects dry and unimportant; anything



but Lassie. The next morning, I gave Lassie her last meal (she loved to eat) and took more pains than usual in cleaning her so that she would die in relative comfort. Then I sat with her for a few hours, waiting for the veterinarian. Finally we led Lassie onto a trailer, and once her foal was inside, Lassie was backed out and the foal was driven off to South Farm for weaning. The mare and foal called to each other as long as they were still in earshot. Lassie then let out a desperate whinny all the way across the parking lot to necropsy, where she must have been terrified by the terrible odor, and the fact that her foal was nowhere in sight. I held her lead rope as the doctor attempted to insert the needle. Lassie jumped out of the first stick (she hated needles), but the second was successful. One syringe of Beuthanasia was emptied, and then another.

An equine euthanasia is a terrible thing to witness. It is much different from a canine or feline euthanasia; smaller animals are usually already lying down. A horse, however, is standing tall one moment and crumples in the next—almost like on those hunting shows on television, where a standing elk is brought down with a single shot. Its head hits the ground with a sickening thud, and a final grunted sigh is not unusual. Then the sphincters relax and the bowel and bladder are emptied.

Lassie's head did not hit the ground too hard because I did not let go of the rope. She appeared to stop breathing almost instantly, but I detected a corneal response almost a full minute later. The doctor and grad student worked quickly to collect a few pre-necropsy skin samples. I used a scalpel blade to cut off her forelock, leaving her with a stupid haircut resembling the "Mohawk" that I once gave to my pony, Starla. I had washed Lassie's tail that morn-

ing, thinking that I would collect it as well, but for some reason, I could not bring myself to take it. Later, when her beautiful chestnut fly-swatter became soaked in crimson on the floor at necropsy, I wished that I had.

The necropsy workers then opened the garage-like door leading into the facility, and they perfunctorily came out to shackle Lassie's fetlocks and hoist her into the main exam room. The students on rotation were very matter-of-fact as they sliced

I spent approximately
two hours every
morning flushing,
cleaning, and
re-bandaging the
smelly, oozing
wound.

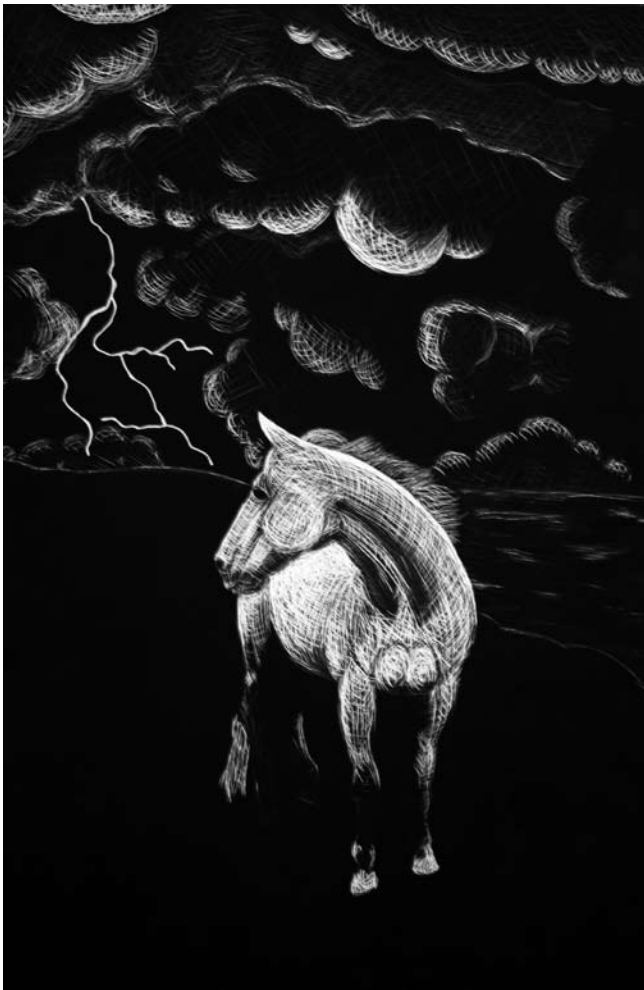
and quartered Lassie. Those that noticed my wide, moist gaze quickly averted their eyes and, I thought, worked with a bit more reverence. As I watched, I could not help but marvel what a beautiful horse she was. One student caught my gaze and said: "Not too long ago you were leadin' this horse around...Funny feelin', ain't it?" My soft reply was "Yes...yes, it is." Watching became easier after Lassie was decapitated and her eyes were

removed (we needed a sclera sample, as well as a cornea). I watched with mild fascination as Lassie was skinned and the anatomy lesson began: first, easily peeling layers of skin and adipose tissue, then muscle, then ribcage that had to be snapped apart with what resembled limb cutters, then the main body cavity, with all the internal organs, was in full view. Glistening entrails, emanating gas, were exposed. Still-firing muscle tissue on Lassie's powerful foreleg caught my gaze. Shocked, I pointed this out to a student. "Hmmm...Pretty neat, huh?" was his reply. Then I felt silly for thinking that this random firing of neurons was Lassie's body in pain. A cross-sectioning of the horrible dorsal wound revealed that it was necrotic or near-necrotic to within an inch of the spine, which came as no surprise, since the wound often felt bottomless upon palpation. Countless samples of various tissues were collected and carefully placed in Sharpie-labeled Whirl-Paks placed in ice water,

and before I knew it, the grad student said: “All right, we’ve got all we need.”

I went straight back to my dorm room after leaving necropsy. Usually I spent the afternoons checking on and visiting the other HC horses out at pasture, but not that day; I was contaminated from being in necropsy. Spreading germs was not my only concern, however; horses are distressed by the smell of death. I don’t remember anything about the bicycle ride back that day, or climbing the stairs. It was not until I began typing the day’s journal entry that I broke down and cried, as I cry only when animals die, but I was glad that I was with Lassie until the end, and that I had taken the best care of her that I knew how.

It is said of human memory that our most poignant recollections are triggered by smells and sounds. How much more vivid animals’ memories must be, since their senses are much sharper than ours! The day following Lassie’s euthanasia, I went out to South Farm to check on Lassie’s foal, who was sharing a weaning stall in the “hoop barn” with a gangly great-grandson of Seattle Slew. The filly, who had delighted in kicking and nipping when her mother was alive, stood still and let me stroke her all over. In that alien environment, I was the closest thing to Mom that she had. That day, as I looked into her eyes (they were clearly Lassie’s), and felt her firm skin and smelled her healthy baby smell, I felt like a veterinarian. ■



Calm Before Storm

Falan McKnight

Scratchboard

The Hitchhiker

Those tired, expectant eyes
Dimmed with every passing vehicle
As you maundered down that
 interminable asphalt stretch
Unsympathetic to your aching
 feet and heavy chest
Encumbered by the woes of the world

You have a loneliness all your own
It lingers in the space between
your fingers and your thumb
And wraps around your spavined soles
Tying each step closer to the ground

It materializes in my roaming headlights
Like fog
and reflects everything back
Preventing me from looking anywhere
But down

Oh,
But I would help you
If only I didn’t have groceries in the car
Ice cream melts so quickly you know

Jackson Segars



Collection for a Cure

Joanna Oliver

Photograph

Nothing Happens in My Neighborhood

Except the Crepe Myrtles' boughs bow outward,

Pointing blossoms moon-ward,

Looking like toy tops.

And then, the bulbous bunches

Spin and fly off.

And when they've flown for ten seconds,

They explode.

And gold and platinum

And plum and peach

And putting-green green

Stardust

Falls.

Michael Counihan

Third Place, Poetry Competition

How to Enjoy the Blues

Swatting the flies, and mosquitoes

Drawn to the lamp lights on a weathered porch;

A familiar, formulaic bass twang

First makes you swing

And swig, and slap your bare soles in the dust,

While rough knobby fingers tick notes around

Breathy wahhhhhh of a harmonica

pushing notes through.

Listeners-electric, signals rush into the skin,

But the dancing, dirty feet connect

electric to earth.

A paradox, a bluesman:

Muscles twitch uninhibited;

Heads must be rockin' down and

hands must be wavin' up;

Slap clapping sweating bodies against one another,

Tossed around indiscriminately

in a harmony of grey.

And he's got it caught it —

The hook, some throaty voice sings

'Bout in the morning when his baby wasn't there,

And it doesn't matter how many times he says it,

It feels just as true every chorus.

You know then, you know, you know, then

This is how to enjoy the blues.

Lauren Klaskala

Second Place, Poetry Competition

Saving Souls

Ashley Conoway

My grandmother walked me into the school. How embarrassing. I love my grandma, but she really wasn't dressed to go out that morning. She had on the khaki capris that I had outgrown during the summer before last, and her shirt—if you can call it that—was a button-down muumuu of bright, peacock-inspired colors. The shoes weren't bad, but the baby blue crew socks she wore with them were overstretched and loose on her small ankles. The two ladies in the front office immediately recognized Grandma and made a big fuss over her, asking her about her retirement. I stood there keeling my feet over in my Birkenstocks, biting the inside of my jaw waiting to be noticed and given my class number so that I could escape this seventy-six-year-old spectacle.

"And this is my granddaughter, Corrine. She is new here. Yes, she just moved from Cleveland." I smiled weakly, careful not to show any teeth; I didn't want to blind them with my metal mouth. They looked at me for the first time. I noticed them look me up and down, analyzing my attire. They were probably searching for a hereditary link in fashion sense. Well, they weren't going to find any here. Despite the chain links on my teeth, I had on the cutest outfit—or so I thought. I had on a blue, button-down blouse with a white v-neck vest and wide-leg, denim knee knockers. My 'stocks really set off the outfit: they came across the middle of my foot, joined by another strip of leather from my freshly painted big toe. The women's brown eyes stopped at my feet. I looked down at my toes and then back up at the two ladies. They tisked disapprovingly.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, but you can't wear those shoes," the larger lady said. I glanced at my grandmother. Grandma looked back at me.

"Why not?" I asked. I was confused. What was wrong with my shoes?

"They are against the dress code. No flip-flops can be worn on campus. It's a hazard to your health,"

the other lady said. How could my shoes be a health hazard? It's not like my feet smelled bad. Besides they weren't even flip flops, they were thongs.

"So do I have to go home and change?" I hoped the answer would be yes.

"No. You are already late for class. We have some shoes in the back that you might be able to wear. We have socks, too," the kind of plump woman was talking again.

Were they serious? I was not about to put my feet in somebody else's shoes. Besides, they would not match my outfit.

The shoes I had to choose from did not even look close to being any size shoe I wore. I picked out the smallest pair. They were white and purple and two sizes too big. I slipped them on my stockinged feet. The socks were crew. I tried my best to fold them down under my foot. I looked like a clown. After I turned in my shoes ("You will get yours back at the end of the day," the big lady said) I walked back to the front of the office. The smaller lady smiled.

"Good. Now let me tell you where your class is. What's your name again?" she was too nice. I didn't like her.

┌ "...Jamarkus,
the devil himself
in little
black-boy form,
my angel
and savior." ┐

“Corrine Tillis.” I wished I didn’t have to go to class now, not in those clown shoes.

“Ahh, here it is.” She handed me a schedule and highlighted my homeroom teacher’s name and class number. “You need to report to your first period class now. If you go to the left-most hallway, it’s at the end of the hall. The teacher’s name is Mrs. Southerland.” She smiled again, “Welcome to Savior Sutton Jr. High!” Grandmother started to follow me as I left the office. She was going to walk me to my class, too. Oh, no, this was not good.

“That’s okay, Grandmama, I got it. I’ll see you after school.” I tried to rescue myself from any more embarrassment.

“Are you sure?” I nodded quickly. I thought to myself, “Oh, heck, yeah.” I was real sure.

“Yes, ma’am, I’m sure. I’ll see you this afternoon.” Please leave now, I thought. The school shoes flopped on my feet as I trudged through the hallway. When I got to the door, I peered through the small rectangular window. My first thought was, “Wow!! Look at the clothes!!” They wore name brands I hadn’t even heard of. Most of the boys had on Girbaud jeans with the colorful Velcro strips and T-shirts. The girls had on tight shirts with “Baby Girl” and “Sexy Mama” in glittery writing. While I was concentrating on the fashion commentary in my head, one of the students realized I was standing there. The teacher, a short, rather large-bosomed woman, opened the door. Now all eyes were on me.

“May I help you, sweetheart?” she asked me.

“Yes, ma’am. Is this Mrs. Southerland’s homeroom class?” I hoped this was the right classroom. It would be so messed up if I had stood there all this time and I was at the wrong door.

“Yes, it is. Are you supposed to be in here?”

“Yes, ma’am. My name is Corrine Tillis and I’m new here. Sorry I’m late,” I answered her in almost a whisper. I could feel the students’ brown eyes staring me down. I knew they were looking at my feet. Luckily, Mrs. Southerland didn’t make me introduce myself in front of the class. I just had to

stand at my seat, which was in the middle of the room.

“My name is Corrine Tillis. I moved here from Cleveland...” that was all I could get out before, “Is that where you stole Ronald McDonald shoes from?” It was inevitable. Somebody had to make a joke. I turned around, and there he was. I clenched my jaw. Not because I was embarrassed or mad, but because he had a face that would make you clench onto something; my automatic reflex almost made me slap the little bastard in the face. Even though he was sitting down, I could tell that he wasn’t that tall. His sallow, apricot-brown skin was acid blotched. Those rashes did nothing to complement the massive number of whiteheads on his face. His pointy ears reminded me of a gremlin. His teeth were sharp and randomly stacked in his mouth. He had a very large forehead that protruded and was illuminated by the fluorescent lights in the ceiling. I looked down at his shoes; he had on black Reebok classics. Just as I opened my mouth to respond, Mrs. Southerland interjected.

“Jamarkus, that’s quite enough from you. How dare you disrespect this young lady? Now, either you will apologize, or you will be sent to the office. The choice is yours.” She gave this ultimatum like



Can You See Me Now?

Marcie Walker

Clayboard

it was really going to scare him or something. He mumbled a nonchalant, “My bad,” under his breath and turned around in his seat. The word must have spread about the apparent mugging of Ronald McDonald, because the rest of the day I was the butt of whispered jokes, rude comments, and random outbursts of “*We looove to seeeee you smiiiile!*” The one thing that really made me mad were the rude comments about my “white girl clothes.” How would they know what white kids dressed like? None went to school there. Many times I had to fight back the tears. I thought the day would never end. At 3:15, I was so glad to get my shoes back.

“How was your day, sweetie?” Grandmama had on the same outfit from this morning. I was glad she didn’t get out of the car.

“Fine.” I wasn’t going to tell her how I jacked up Ronald McDonald for his shoes. She might want to go inside of the school again. I would just have to tell Mama when she got off of work.

That night I told my mama about my first day. She gave me some very good advice. In a nutshell, she told me not to let the little *ghetto bunnies* punk me. She was right. If I let them see me hurting, I would never live it down. I had come up with a plan: I was going to become invisible. One of the things I found odd about this new school was the fact that the first day of the school year was on a Friday. But this was convenient because it gave me time to gather my materials and gave the other kids time to forget about me. On Monday morning I was going to make sure my outfit was *fy-ya* so they wouldn’t be able to say anything about me. I was determined to blend into my environment. I had planned on going to the mall and buying some clothes that looked more like theirs, but I was shocked to find the big *Mall* sign was a great hoax—the Mall was merely a three-store stretch of stores that consisted of a grocery store, a P.J. Quarter’s, and a Chexker’s Drug Store. Now I understood why the kids dressed the way they did. I couldn’t bring myself to actually *shop* there, so I went to school on Monday with a brand new attitude instead. My plan seemed to be working. During Mrs. Southerland’s class no one said anything to me. Everything was moving smoothly—until lunch.

Clank! Clatter! Splat! With that all eyes were on the cafeteria line. Right in front of me, it was about to go down. The two girls were just playing at first, but now, since the first girl made the second girl drop her tray, they were serious.

“Oooh!! T-Baby and Pooh finna fight, ya’ll!!” the girl standing behind me yelled. I looked around and saw a swarm of people coming towards me. That’s when the fists started flying. Amidst cheers of “Get her!!” and chants like, “I don’t fight, I don’t argue, I just hit that...,” I don’t know what they said next because that’s when somebody threw the spaghetti surprise on my shirt. I looked down, and that’s when I really got caught up in the crossfire. Somebody pushed me into the middle of the fight. I did like anyone who had never been in a fight would do—I yelled. Then I saw that impish little yellow face break through the ranks of the mob of kids struggling to see the slapdown. I couldn’t believe my eyes: Jamarkus, the devil himself in little black-boy form, my angel and savior. He swooped in and yanked my arm, which had a sort of whiplash effect on the rest of my body, but he got me out of the line of fire. My shoulder felt dislocated, but I was safe.

“Thanks. I...,” that’s all I got out. Did I really think he was going to let this be a nice moment?

“Girl, you real stupid! You don’t jump in no fight like that! Move out my way now, I can’t see.” I should have known. He pushed me out the way, rolled his eyes, and left laughing at me. He was probably going to go to tell everybody how he saved me. The next day I would hear about how I almost got beat up and how he had to “save me” from getting beaten to death—Oh, joy. I could hardly wait.

“How was your day, sweetie?” Grandmama asked me as I slid stealthily into the car. I was still trying to remain as transparent as possible. I didn’t need any more attention. Grandmama looked over at me through her huge nineteen-seventy shades. I smiled. She looked like a huge praying mantis in her shades and green lounge suit. As we pulled off, I pondered how to best tell her about my near-beat-down-experience. I couldn’t think of anything else to say, so I told her, “I got saved today, Grandma.”—but not by Jesus. ■

Ten, Fifteen, Switch, Thirty

Ten hip-throws right and left
Fifteen boot straps
Switch uke and tori and do it again
Switch partners, thirty pushups
Ten hand techniques right and left
Fifteen crunches
Switch uke and tori and do it again
Switch partners, thirty squats
Ten Tai Otoshi's right and left
Fifteen jumping jacks
Switch uke and tori and do it again
Switch partners
Randori groundwork, hajime

Lynn Wilson

Not Romanticizing

Let's make a fort today (in the living room)
With all the pillows that I own
And all your blankets.
The corners will be held down
By the encyclopedias of our parents;
(we have the Internet)—
Let's see if we can't recreate that old feeling—
That—unless we let it in—nothing and no one
Can penetrate our walls of Poly-fill.

Sarah Prather



Park Bench

Leslie Datsis

Photograph

Third Place Photograph, Art Competition

Perogies in Mississippi

Aspen Nero

Honorable Mention, Essay Competition

I come from a strange family. My mother took up belly dancing as a bored housewife, and eventually my family blended cultures into our own culture. I play the Middle Eastern Zurna on the banks of the Tombigbee River, belly dance in the ruins of Hurricane Katrina, and eat perogies in Mississippi. I have grown up a complete oddball in the South. My entire family comes from Canada, and some how we moved from the top of North America all the way to the bottom, the Deep South. Not only did we move to the South, but we also moved to the south of Mississippi, right along the Gulf Coast, which has been a major pivotal experience in my life.

At first, I never fit in with the ways of the South, and still do not say “sir” or “ma’am” to any of my teachers or “respected elders.” I do admit to using “Y’all,” but my “both” is still pronounced with an “L,” as “Bolth,” and I say sorry with a long “o,” such as “sore-ry.” It is correct to say “sorry” as far as I am concerned, because when people say, “I’m sorry,” they really mean they are sore inside. Teachers at school would tell me to sound out words and spell them the way they sounded, so I did this, and spelt “both” “bolth.” Students at school always asked me if my parents were hippies, or if I were a flower child. My name, Aspen, usually brought this conversation about, and after describing my family to them briefly, they would confirm that yes, I was a flower child.

I never thought it weird that my father was a member of the National Bamboo Society or that he would occasionally be brought home by the cops for windsurfing during a hurricane. I belly danced with my mother and soon learned to play gypsy songs on my violin. I learned how to wrap an Indian sari from my father, who has now mastered that art of sari draping. One birthday party my mother

made our traditional Ukrainian perogies for all of my friends, and they all just poked at the doughy cheese and potato dumplings and did not eat them. Friends would always comment, “Your family is so weird.” I never cared, and I liked the fact that we were different from the many Southern families who surrounded us, not thinking that we would become Southern as well.

Now I find myself addicted to Mardi Gras and cannot detach myself from anything that goes on in New Orleans. The Mississippi Barrier Islands have become my second home, and I have grown to like the Gulf Coast beaches more than any other. I view hurricanes as storms with a little more rain and wind than the average thunderstorm. Furthermore, I just recently attended an Ole Miss football game clad in three-inch heels, pearls, and a little black dress. A school known for its Southern ways, I was surprised to fit in.

Just several years ago, I used to despise the South and wished to get away as soon as possible, but now my views have changed. After hearing of people like George Ohr, the Mad Potter of Biloxi, and William Faulkner, I am more than proud to claim myself as a Southerner. My mother has even come up with her own whimsical term for me, GRITS and BUN, (girl raised in the south, and born up north). I still take pride in being Canadian and, at the same time, take pride in being raised in the South. I belly dance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina with my family on the ruined Main Street of Bay St. Louis, and draw an excited crowd pleased to see us. I have found a new love for muddy riverbanks and find it impossible to stop staring at the kudzu-covered trees. At Christmas, my mother does not just make our traditional Ukrainian dinner with perogies; she now includes chicken gumbo and fried oysters. I think I have become a Southerner. ■



Path to Perspective

Kelly Lence

Photograph

Love is Brown

Red is obnoxious;
It yells, "**Stop, look here!**"
It is angry and gaudy.
Red draws out the bull in me,
It makes me stubborn.
Red makes itself stand out.

Brown is soft and warm;
It says, "Come, I will protect you,
I will shelter you from the storm."
Brown is home,
It is in the smell of apple pie;
It is in the wood paneling;
It is the worn path leading to the front door;
It is the log in the fireplace.

Brown is the color of coffee,
The color of chocolate,
The color of my cashmere sweater,
The color of pages in old books,
The color of his eyes,
All things that I love:
Love is brown

Marcie Walker



The Pier

Katie Caves

Oil

Blues Got Me

Marshall Bartlett

“Lemme gitcha, Lemme gitcha up on stage with me.” L.B.’s voice lazily slurred at me through the boom boom of the base amp. I followed him closely, dreading the awkwardness of being on stage with no reason to be there: I was nine years old, could not play an instrument, and belonged to a different race than the band and ninety-five percent of the audience. L.B.’s fumbling gait led me to the stage, which doubled as the front porch of a shotgun shack, and he told me to sit in the drummer’s lap while he plugged in his Epiphone. I looked at this man apprehensively, afraid to approach the large and unfamiliar figure. He laughed and said, “Come on, son, we’ll show you something you ain’t never heard befo’.”

They launched into “Goin’ Down South,” and I bounced in the drummer’s lap, entranced as he stomped the bass drum to the nearly off-key whine of L.B.’s guitar. Halfway through the song L.B. motioned to me, and I hopped off the drummer’s lap and crossed the stage to him. He held out his guitar and yelled, “Play it, boy.” When I realized he wanted me to hit the strings while he worked the fret board, I reached out and clumsily did so. The crowd cheered me on as the notes of my first guitar solo pierced through the thick air and dust of the annual Othar Turner picnic in Northwest Mississippi.

I have loved the blues for longer than my memory allows me to recall. My dad has always told me about the time he and my mother took me to a blues concert in my small town of Como, Mississippi, when I was three or four. According to my dad, I wobbled to the edge of the stage, put my hands on it, and beamed a gummy smile at the guitarist as he played. “The guy loved it,” my father says, “No one in that crowd could have shown a more genuine sign of enjoyment.”

As I got older, I learned the history of the blues, and recognized how living and working on a cotton farm in Mississippi closely links me to the art form. Inevitably, my interest led me to pick up the guitar,

and I began trying to conjure the unrefined tone and rough licks that had hit me so directly and had forbidden me to be still. I learned that though the blues is perceived by some as a simplistic, repetitive style of music, mastering the tone, feel and directness of blues that the greats have is nearly impossible. Because the blues is such a real art form, its sound derives from the experiences of the musician. One can hear the hardship and restlessness in Mississippi John Hurt’s voice in “Got the Blues and Can’t be Satisfied,” or the violent, vengeful nature of Robert Johnson in “32-20 Blues.”

Now, I have started to play with L.B. at local parties and juke joints. Often he gets too drunk to do much but sing the same line into a microphone and play a simple root lick over and over with some small variations. However, L.B. introduced me to playing blues music, and though he may not be the most talented blues musician Mississippi has ever produced, he does embody what is most important about the blues to me: the complementarity of the music and the life of the musician. L.B. murdered his wife, is an alcoholic, and works menial jobs to support multiple illegitimate children and girlfriends. These problems also happen to be the subject of most blues songs. L.B. is an unsavory character, but his playing is honest, and therefore I respect him as a musician. He expresses himself through his instrument, and that is what makes a great musician. I can fly through pentatonic scales and play more complicated songs, but he is the master and I am the novice, because his sound is powerful and true: it is real because it is him.

Wherever my music career and life take me, I will always think of L.B. Woods endearingly. He made me understand the power of living an art form, of pure and true expression, and how poignant that is no matter what is being expressed. On stage that night while he helped me play my first solo over the yells of an enthusiastic crowd, I realized that if L.B. can make his troubled life into something beautiful, expressive, and powerful, I have great hope for what I can do with mine. ■



Life's Trail

Katie Caves

Oil

Third Place Painting, Art Competition

Magnolias, Softly

Stella Nickerson

Watercolor

First Place Painting, Art Competition





Adventure at Midnight

From a look out the window comes a slip through the door

Down the stairs and over the threshold

Into the inky night with the cover of dark

Sliding over wet grass, sneaking through trees

Hop over a brook, pop through the brake

Snap to attention, is something there?

Carefully, cautiously, slip behind a tree,

Silent as night, still as the stars

Hide from the light, lest be discovered

Where to to-night?

Slipping, sneaking, creeping,

Mischief

Adventure

Ann Hamilton McGuire



Tuesday on Toulouse

Aspen Nero

Acrylic

Second Place Painting, Art Competition

She Had a Way

She had a way with flowers—
Not when they were growing,
But once they were cut and dying.
She knew how many roses are too many
(Thirteen is forceful, fourteen gaudy)
And how to balance lilies
In a blue glass vase with pansies
And baby's breath. She snipped
The stems of baby's breath
With her thumbnail
And gathered cloudlets of it
With tender-fingered skill.

She made bouquets to the order
Of thin women in sharp shoes
Whose daughters had decided
On lilacs for their wedding,
And when young men came in
Demanding irises or roses
She tied the stems with ribbon
And wrote "with love" in curling script
On white name-tags. She wondered
What could someone give her love with
Since she had enough of flowers?
She worried to distraction
As she had her way with flowers.

Stella Nickerson

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition



Nature's Voice in Spring

Joanna Oliver

Photograph

May (Maia)

An accumulation of cumuli
Billows venerably across the sky
As fertile forewarnings make festinate farewells
For others

But not us
We listen to the crickets
And take in stride their stridulations
On the way to new discoveries.
(They tell temperature,
We tell tales!)

Guided by lambent Lampyridae
We scale earthly heights
To view iridescent arcs
above viridescent floors.
And *everything* is efflorescent

We stretch our arms across the stratosphere
And reach
We put our minds above the mesosphere
And create

Pansy Mosaic

Joanna Oliver

Paper Collage

Jackson Segars

First Place, Poetry Competition



Beautiful Dreamer

Stella Nickerson

Oil



A Resident of Trees

Marianna Prather

Acrylic

Words with Feeling

I flip through my dictionary in delight,
Softly mouthing the words my eyes trace,
Lolling them over and around my tongue.

The short round words such as
Pope, pour, pamper, and power
Are black berries plopping into my mouth.
The plump dark beads of fruit
Release sweet, tart juices down my throat as they
Pop with the pressure of my purposeful lips.

I flip the page and shiver with bliss as other
Long prickly words tickle my throat.
The sharp words of
Scruples, scrounge, scraggly, and scarce
Trip, kick, clamor, and graze down my gullet,
Making me tingle, swallow, and stretch my neck,
A dog enjoying a long back scratch.

Further down the graceful fluid words of
Silver, soliloquy, salutation, and serendipity
Flow down my mouth,
Moistening my tongue like a
cool swallow of water
Or a long luxurious steam shower.

Finally I close this textured book,
Letting the cracked leathered spine relax,
Hiding the rest of its treats for another day.

Jena Stafford



My Japanese Garden

Marianna Prather

Acrylic

The Next Move

Joanna Oliver

Photograph

First Place Photograph,

Art Competition





Water Droplets

Joanna Oliver

Photograph

Drained

Cody Jordan

Photograph



Silence

Silence sounds like me scraping my
 brain for something to say
 After I made that fantastic joke (that can't be
 surpassed!) at which you giggled goofily,
 Inhaling exhaling simultaneously with a hearty
 "hee ho" escaping deep from your belly.
 How repulsive! How compelling!
 I wanted to hear more,
 But my jokes slapped pancake-
 flat on the cruel cement,
 And with their last breaths solicited
 your acknowledgment.
 My head dropped sadly in defeat,
 And I watched the sidewalk slip slowly by,
 And your feet shift restlessly forward and
 backward in your too-big shoes;
 That was the longest 126 steps in my life
 (I know; I counted.).
 Just as I began to recrudescence,
 With a sibilant "shh" you killed all tension,
 And told me just to "listen"
 We no longer needed words to speak.

Jackson Segars

Red

Red cha-cha's in the clay
Her panting hair prays for relief
Fattened female thighs seduce
The elderly black in the corner.

They clap as her shoulders vibrate rhythmically
Underneath the layers of silk
Woven to create an ensemble
That establishes a fixed stare
On Red.

His arms flail
If just to hurry her feet
Shoes forgotten,
Sweat forgiving,
The seldom slip of his hand down her back.

Red dances.
Her castanettes cement his pace
And threaten his tongue.
Words would ruin her flamenco.
Words would ruin her relief.
Red gasps.

She hurls her strong torso around his middle
Suggestively creating excitement.
He grasps her outstretched neck.
Her once-pinned hair rose plummets dirtward.
Red halts.

His hopes of mambo die
As her click-clacking only echoes
And leaves him longing
For Red.

Victoria Purvis



Night Life

Tessa Palfreyman

Photograph

Second Place Photograph, Art Competition

Company Policy

Lauren Klaskala

Paula watched as her green gummy bear melted into glowing ooze atop the waffle cone irons. No customers were inside the Ice Cream Café, nor was Mr. Supervisor in the front to see her sweating over the steaming equipment while torturing candies. The florescent lights above Paula glared as the tiny facial features goosed into an indiscriminate mass, and tiny arms and legs turned to jelly. Mr. Supervisor would be coming out of the freezer soon, so she scraped up the green mess with a spoon, and tossed it in the used sample spoon jar; *"Already Enjoyed Sample Spoons,"* it said.

The sound of the Ice Cream Café's signature music, well, if you want to call it music, filled the store. *"Company policy,"* Mr. Supervisor had said, *"we can only play the tapes sent to us from franchise headquarters."* It was called *Muzac*, and consisted of groups of songs specially formulated by a team of psychoanalysts who assessed the customer demographics of Ice Cream Café. It made sense that most customers were depressed, middle-aged, and slightly nutty women when songs such as "Celebrate" or "Shout" or George Michaels' "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" blared three times each and every shift she worked. Supposedly

it was meant to excite and cheer the resulting demographic, and Paula thought it was no coincidence that *Muzac* rhymed with *Prozac*.

Mr. Supervisor was the only other person in the store, if you didn't count Macy, who was completely zoned out and lost under a pile of dishes in the back. Macy started working at Ice Cream Café a little after Paula, and quickly learned that spacing out of reality was the only way to pass time. Paula was an expert at it, and she spent much of her time thinking of creative ways to torture gummy bears (she somehow felt it was a way of bringing others down in flames with her summer job, or her actions might work some kind of voodoo on Mr. Supervisor), and spent a lot of time pondering innovative flavor combinations with the ice creams. *"Cotton candy....and coconut? Peach and coffee? Yes, Peach and coffee."* But alas, Paula's recipes could never be tested. Employees were not allowed to nibble, much less even as to smack their lips at the ice cream bin. Sometimes when her plump belly smushed against the counter, she thought this might be for the better, but always she longed to have free reign over the large array of flavors, if only, if only... It was company policy, though, and to trespass company policy at Ice Cream Café could get you fired. Mr. Supervisor never failed to remind his employees of *that*.

Mr. Supervisor was what had made the simple summer job of an ice cream server so unbearable. He was the type of guy who had sniveled and brown-nosed his way to the top. *"Anyone could have done it,"* Paula explained to Macy, *"it was just a matter of who had the least self-respect."* And he was the kind of guy who used hair gel, and had been promoted on grounds of being a former fraternity buddy with the manager, and whose real name was something like Mac or Pat, or some other ill-sounding abbreviation. Paula heard the freezer door cluck open like a vacuum seal, and Mr. Supervisor marched out importantly with his clipboard of inventory. He walked with the puffed-up airs of a peacock, but he was the worst trespasser



Hidden Retreat

Kelly Lence

Photograph

of all of his beloved company policy. He spent hours of company phone call time baby-talking his fiancée in the back pantry. If only Paula could see him exposed to the Manager for breaking company policy, if only...."Gather 'round crew, come on, crew, we're one pan short of merry mango, so we have to restart the machine, which means we'll need to re-clean, disassemble, sanitize, and reassemble the machine." Paula felt Macy suppress a sigh, and she herself felt her frustration growing. "And Paula, I know you're excited about making Ice Cream Café's famous ice cream flavors, so when you're done with those waffle bowls — start on it." Mr. Supervisor snatched the company cordless and walked to the back.

There was a funny smell in the air. It smelled like a car crash, or something equally disastrous, something burning... or burnt. When Paula realized it was the waffles she had left unattended when Mr. Supervisor called the meeting, it was too late. The stiff black plate of a cone had to be tossed out. "Paula," Mr. Supervisor called from the back, "*company policy says to mark every mistake on the inventory chart; we need to know where every penny is wasted, so, write it down.*" Paula managed to submit to an understanding nod, and she found the clipboard to make a note.

Between the steam from the waffle cone irons behind her, the whine of George Michaels, the itch of her Ice Cream Café regulation visor, and the recent encounter with Mr. Supervisor, Paula was in no mood to be friendly to any customer, but of course, one walked in. It was Company Policy to give every customer the Ice Cream Café "spill" before serving them. Because she knew Mr. Supervisor had an eye on her, she began a long description of Ice Cream Café's homemade ice cream process, boasted of the newest flavors, and quoted the Ice Cream Café guarantee. The customer was a middle-aged woman, "*Aha! The Muzac demographics were right-on!*", and she was trying to hold still a four-year-old boy who had gotten loose and pressed his wet little mouth to the glass of the ice cream display. Two evil flares of breathy fog shot up above his nostrils and gave the unruly child a more crazed appearance. Paula tried to convince the woman to buy cotton candy coconut ice cream, or peach and coffee, but the woman was resolute on a plain vanilla. The boy garbled

something about chocolate with gummy bears and it was scooped into a cup for him as well. "*On top of all the annoyances of the Ice Cream Café,*" Paula thought, "*there just had to be customers that came in to order French Vanilla.*"

By now Merry Mango was almost forgotten, but Paula made her way to the back room to the walk-in refrigerator to get the Ice Cream Mix. She scowled at the spiked hair on the back of Mr. Supervisor's head as he nodded in tempo with his baby-talking. The refrigerator door sucked shut behind her, and a serene and glorious world suddenly lay before her. The walk-in refrigerator was a cool alternative from the heat of the frying waffle irons. Paula looked around at beautiful piles of candies, cookies, icings, fruits, and nuts that filled the shelves. *Company Policy, everything must be inventoried. No nibbles. Hair gel. Muzac. Regulation visors. French Vanilla.* Paula thought of the innate goodness of the sweets and the inherent corruption of Mr. Supervisor and Ice Cream Café, and she found herself taken over with rage, no, *starvation*. Without regard to health regulations or Company Policy, Paula shoved her naked hand into a giant bin of peanuts, and slid it through the waves of legume. To feel the touch, to taste what had been forbidden by *Company Policy* became a sudden outlet for revenge at all that had infuriated her. She felt the little spheres of nut roll around in her palm and in between her fingers, and reached to shove them into her mouth. With her other hand she grabbed a chocolate-covered Oreo, "*For Company sakes only, do not touch!*", and devoured it in one bite. She grabbed gummy bears, she gnawed nuts, and snuck Snickers. Crumbs went flying, and icing was smeared over her lips as she managed to sample everything in the refrigerator. It was not gluttony, it was mutiny! Paula had finally lost it, but in that moment of epiphanic lunacy it all became so clear. "*Mr. Supervisor and Ice Cream Café' wronged me, so I will eat the inventory; when the inventory is empty, there can be no more sales, and Ice Cream Café will be gone! Gone!*" She chuckled wildly at her idea, with her cheeks bulging. She glared through the refrigerator door window at Mr. Supervisor as he turned around with the phone in his hand. His eyes widened as he saw Paula mid-munch. Mr. Supervisor barely managed to mouth the words "*Company Policy*" as the cordless dropped from his hand. ■

The Manhattan Equinox

Sarah Marshall

Second Place, Essay Competition

I grew up in Mississippi amongst bayous, thin pines, and the longest man-made beach in the country. I've spent most of my life suppressing my accent, trying not to say "ya'll," and planning my escape to New York. I was actually born in Manhattan, and I have spent summers in New York as long as I can remember. I have always looked forward to visits to my dad's apartment in the Lower East Side and to the excitement that they inevitably bring. The streets are like tunnels; skyscrapers are the only thing you can see in any direction, and I have spent many summer afternoons walking down Delancy Street just looking at everything.

The summer before my senior year I stepped into JFK Airport to meet my dad. I was immediately enveloped by the New York air, noticeably less humid than that of Southern Mississippi. I couldn't wait to grab a bite to eat at a delicatessen before watching a Mets game on TV, but my dad had other plans.

On the train headed home, he told me about a rare event that was predicted to occur that night: the "Manhattan Equinox." The streets in Manhattan are cleverly designed for easy navigation; they form a perfectly perpendicular grid system. According to numerous New York City newspapers, tonight was the night that the sun would shine directly through the streets. I was excited to see the equinox, and, based on my dad's description from the paper, began to imagine what it would look like. I pictured the gray buildings turning whitish silver, the people looking like walking glow sticks, and a large ball of whitish orange looming ahead. After a rushed dinner, we hopped onto the bus to 14th Street, where the equinox was predicted to be especially visible.

The street was particularly crowded that evening. I suddenly noticed a faint glow of orange in the distance and decided the equinox must be approaching. The crowd around me "Oooooed" in unison, running out into the middle of one of Manhattan's busiest streets to snap pictures. Yuppies tossed their briefcases aside and darted in front of taxi cabs, squatting to get the perfect angle of the sun. Brakes screeched and horns blasted as children skipped across the crosswalk, rebelling against the *Don't Walk* signs flashing red across the street just to get

Yuppies...
darted in front
of taxi cabs,
squatting to get
the perfect
angle of the sun.

a glimpse of the rarity. I took pictures, too, figuring I'd follow the crowd and document the life of the equinox— from what I was now seeing to the eventual mystical illumination that was sure to come. After about ten minutes of snapping pictures of angry taxi drivers, I returned to my dad who stood puzzled back on the sidewalk. We stood there watching the crazy New Yorkers taking pictures of a very weak

sunset for about twenty more minutes. "Where is the equinox?" I asked a nice NYPD officer.

"Kid, you're looking at it," he answered with a chuckle. Suddenly it hit me— why this equinox meant nothing to me, a Mississippian.

Looking out of a typical New York apartment window, people can't see sunsets. The most dramatic sunsets I have since noticed in New York are simply the fading of the sky from a bright blue to a much darker blue. There is almost a particular moment when all the lights seem to flicker on and the sun isn't visible anymore.

In Mississippi I drove along the Gulf of Mexico daily, hardly noticing the picturesque sunsets; however, since my experience with the Manhattan

equinox, I frequently pull off the road to photograph the colors that the over eight million people of New York City rarely get to enjoy. I have since gained a greater appreciation of what really is my home. When talking to out-of-state friends, I now make it a point to say “ya’ll.” I feel privileged to see a collage of reds, oranges, and blues through my window every night instead of getting only a glimpse at the setting sun twice a year. I still have plans to escape to New York next fall for college, but I have already started my collection of sunset pictures. ■

One Particular Harbor

Hannah Cunningham

Clayboard

Second Place Drawing, Art Competition



Swan's Sanctuary

Kelly Lence

Photograph

Wading Pool

My school that year was open to the world.
There was no fence on any side between
The grassfields that farmers cut for hay
And the playground where boys ran and scraped their knees.
Most girls were too old for playing then,
And gossiped clustered by the double doors,
But I ran arrow-straight towards the swings,
And, climbing up, I pumped my legs like wings.

Straight above, the center of the sky
Was smooth, a blue so deep it dragged me up
Out of the high-point of my swing until my feet
Splashed in tidal pools of molten sky, and I
Waded upside-down in waist-high blue
And let it stain my clothes and fingertips.
I stuffed sky in my pockets while I could,
Then fell back sighing to the blueless world.

Stella Nickerson

Honorable Mention, Poetry Competition

The Organic Vegetable Garden

Lauren Klaskala

The Mississippi sun was merciless by midday; I was frustrated that I had not started earlier to get to work. In the summer before my senior year, I loaded my small, un-air-conditioned Toyota with shovels, hoes, and old Kroger bags and traveled to work in the Organic Vegetable Garden. As I pulled into the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science campus, my home during the school year, it resembled something of a ghost town. Over the railroad tracks and adjacent to the art and history building, lay the garden. I found the rows that had been so carefully pruned by my classmates and me before school let out invaded by little green patches. Grass had sprung up everywhere, and because it was an *organic* garden, my only choice was to either cover the 35m x 30m plot with mulch — or make like the “good ole’ days” and get to work chopping and cutting. With a rough wooden hoe grasped in my hands, I began the day’s labor in the garden by severing the grassy fiber roots apart, carefully minding squash leaves and some new bean sprouts that only recently seemed to stretch and yawn, as if awakening from sleep. The hard part of work went by quicker in a good humor, so I reminded myself that I was saving a “majestic chicken hawk, soaring through the air, threatened by the dangers of biological magnification.” As I straightened the crick in my back and wiped beads of sweat from my lip, I realized the satirical remark had been a lot funnier when I was not working alone.

The OVG was a new endeavor at the school, begun by a friend of mine and entirely student operated, but when I had volunteered to help take care of it during its producing time in the summer I had no idea the amount of effort I would be putting into it. Everyone involved, including the creator, lived something like three hours away, so I often found myself alone in the garden.

I did not mind being alone so much after the hard work was done. I wandered between the rows barefoot, the moist dirt squishing between my toes as I inspected the day’s produce. Organic farming requires constant care. I lifted the fragrant tomato leaves to find tiny aphids clinging underneath — the price of not using pesticides. Still, I did not regret the care that was put into the garden’s overall success. Finally, I could participate in a high school organization that actually *accomplished* something *monumental*. The fact that the garden was operated by organic standards made the endeavor environmentally friendly. It was also good for the economy because produce required little outside transport to its final destination. But most of all, the garden helped the community; all the produce from the OVG was given directly to Salvation Army Headquarters downtown, where it could be sent out in food baskets every day to the needy of Columbus, Mississippi. Tender tomato plant branches were so laden with red and orange fruit they dipped to the ground. I could imagine those that would enjoy today’s harvest.

Other vegetables were ripe for the picking. I tugged at the tiny green fingers hanging from the string bean bushes — the numerous skinny pods made it tedious work. I began a new sack, and filled it to the brim with the cucumbers. They produced exponentially; I would often find ones that I had not seen from my last visit hiding under sunning leaves, overgrown to the size of my arm. My hands itched with a thousand tiny needles from fuzzy squash leaves, and my wrists ached from yanking plump ears of corn from their woody stalk. I continued slowly making my rounds through the peppers, onions, and lettuce — and finally to a very tempting, green-striped bulge of a watermelon. By now, my t-shirt was dripping with sweat, yet I was happy to be just surveying my nature kingdom. I

usually had my own fun when I would go to the garden — I had a long love affair with the outside world and growing things.

When you grow up in rural Mississippi, you cannot resist spending time outside, even in the unrelenting summer sun. Ever since I can remember, my passion for the outside world merited nicknames from my family. My mother has called me her “little nature girl” for as long as I can remember and, less affectionately, my younger siblings would complain I was being a “hippie” when I would sit cross legged on old tree stumps or study frogs and crickets as a child. As I grew older, I became more interested in studying my nature world scientifically. I evolved from going through hundreds of kid bug kits and aquarium visits, to coming up with original, and winning, high school science projects, ranging from the best methods to clean up oil spills or the importance of coral reefs in preventing beach erosion. My passion for the earth, though, has become something more than a favorite pastime. It has motivated me to pursue a degree in an environmental field that will facilitate me with the knowledge and tools to create more real change in my local community and the world. In a college community of like-minded and intelligent people, I know I can gain the support and ability it will take to make a difference.

Temporarily satiated with my desire to “save the world,” I packed the weighted bags of vegetables in my car for delivery. Looking through my back window, I saw the garden picked and pruned neatly once again. ■

The Queen of Taco Bell

We all used to get annoyed
Because she was soooo slow.
She would count the change for us—
One, two, four, oops, three...
Though we usually couldn't
understand what she said.
She wore a purple visor and polo,
And her black sneakers shuffled
across the greasy tiles
As she walked to the back to get more Mild sauce.
I knew this was probably the only
place she could work,
And she *did* always smile more than
her grumpy coworkers.
She was proud of her job,
She got every order right,
I know because she told us so.
She was the Queen of Taco Bell.
I saw her at Wal-Mart wearing her
work clothes, neatly pressed,
On her days off.
During her break she sat in the booth in the corner
That overlooked the Mississippi Sound.
Taco Bell was on the beach,
Twenty miles from the Eye.
I saw her just after the *Boom*
Looking for Taco Bell:
All she found was a slab.

Sarah Marshall



Little Drops of Rain

Misty White

Photograph

The Driftwood Café

Aspen Nero

The rough knife jammed into the back of my hand as I scraped off a curling chunk of wood from the piece of driftwood wedged between my legs. I lifted my hand away from the piece of the wood, letting it gently drop to the ground. Blood started to well up and run the length of my hand while I made my way to the back of the coffee shop to clean my hand in the sink. The sun was just beginning to shed its pink and orange across the beach, marking the time to open the coffee shop. I ran peroxide over the cut and wrapped it in gauze. I would have to manage with the hand for the morning rush while I worked it alone. Nash, my brother and owner of the shop, was sick in bed with a Fat Tuesday hangover.

I managed the morning crowd fine, pulling smoldering muffin pans from the oven and foaming milk for lattes one-handed. Nash promised he'd be in the shop after ten to help clean up after the morning rush and prepare for lunch. The regulars kept me busy for the most of the morning when the huge crowd left. One man came in almost every morning and ordered breakfast and coffee in his pajamas and would sit right at the front porch and watch the beach alone, and he would stare at his watch and leave at the same time every day. It reminded me of Valentine's Day alone in high school making trails of pastel conversation hearts on the sidewalk behind the old railroad station. I always bought a bag of the sugar hearts and after eating only a few, I sat with regret for buying three pounds and reading "I love you," "you're so special," and "kiss me" to myself. I prided myself in thinking that someday some other lonely individual would take a walk behind the train station and find the trail of gushy hearts and get a warm little feeling for at least a day.

The morning crowd ebbed off and I was left in the

shop with a pile of dishes crusted with burnt eggs and a few customers when Nash came in, sporting sunglasses that covered his face. He had a large plastic cup, and I knew it was full of iced mint tea, what he swore cured his hangovers, but never worked for me.

"Feeling better?" I asked him in a teasing manner.

He just looked at me and raised his sunglasses in motion towards the intense sun.

I decided not to tell him about my injured hand right away and let him tackle the dishes. I was aching for a dull moment so I could go to the back porch and finish my piece of driftwood. Before I started

"...I was left
in the shop
with a
pile of dishes
crusted with
burnt eggs..."

carving driftwood, I hacked at old stumps and dead trees around town and turned them into absurd faces or animals. I stopped the stump carving when Nash came home from his job at an art shop downtown with a flyer advertising the stump art. The flyer claimed that an anonymous artist in town was carving trees and stumps into pieces of art, and after reading that, I quit.

Nash knew it was me, and knew that I had now taken up driftwood carving but never said anything to me. I kept my carvings a secret.

Before we owned the café, Nash was our only source of income. He worked at a frame shop in downtown Bay St. Louis selling art and jewelry. He felted hats and knitted better than any knobby-knuckled grandma. After several months of painstaking work at the frame shop, the term, "starving artist" hit home with an EBT card presented to us. I got a job at the Waffle House on my way home from school in New Orleans every day. I choked on cigarette smoke and sticky batter fumes just to bring in extra income.

We never had income problems until third grade, when I got called over the intercom to come to the



Serenity

Harrison To

Clayboard

office. I walked along the linoleum hall; fish sticks in the cafeteria and recess echoed behind me. When I got to the office, Nash was there, waiting for me with his sunglasses that covered his face, because under those sunglasses were eyes puffy and tear-stained red. We drove to the hospital together, cutting over the speed limit on the highway, trying to make it to the hospital to see Mom in time. After several excruciating hours, Mom died. Her car had collided dead on with a train, right across from our house.

We got home early in the morning and we both climbed into the cupola at the top of the big blue house and just sat staring at the railroad tracks where Mom's car crashed. Bits of greenish glass glittered up at us from the road and we stayed up all night, neither of us saying a word until Nash retired to his own bedroom and I left the house to walk along the beach. I walked along the cool sand until it turned hot and scorched my bare feet. On my way back I saw a piece of wood gnarled and grey poking through the sand resembling a skinny hand. I pulled at the wood until sand bled from its pores. I dragged the piece of wood home with me and dumped it in the front yard. Nash came peering out of his window to look at the oddly shaped wood. Over the next few weeks I began to wake up before the sun and scour the beach for driftwood and debris. I began a collection that littered the yard and filled the house. Mom's death soon passed and became a collection of driftwood and I never touched another fish stick again.

Nash forced me to quit my job at Waffle House when my grades started to get lower. I lied to him and told him that me working had nothing to do

with my grades, but with the fear of losing my scholarships, I quit. About several weeks later, Nash decided to start investing. With the last of Mom's life insurance and an SBA loan, we bought a little shotgun about half a block from the beach to fix and rent for the summer. I spent blistering months in July painting and nailing that house to perfection. A lawyer on disability from Mobile rented it out for several years and we later sold it for more than double what we paid. With those earnings we bought a run-down bait shop that sold po-boys on the beach. We turned it into a café and used the driftwood around the house to make the furniture. All of Nash's artist friends donated art for the café and we named it The Driftwood Café. The café has become my life along with the beach combing.

I heard Nash speaking to me from behind the counter, "I got it all under control if you want to go in the back." He had his glasses off and knew exactly what I had been planning.

The knife I had been using to carve the piece of driftwood was still in the back of the café in the sink. I went to the back and started carving the piece of wood again. The young teenagers we hired would be in for work soon, and if things got really busy, they would call back for me to help them. I sat down with the driftwood in my lap and started chipping away at the soft worn wood. Like my candy hearts in high school, I drive along roads and leave my driftwood randomly in places for people to find, but I make sure I save the best pieces for home and for Mom. In the bamboo grove behind my elementary school where I went for third grade, there is a stump that nobody has found, carved of my Mom where I leave her driftwood. ■

Home

Michael Counihan

First Place, Essay Competition

I discovered that I have a knack for finding secluded music rooms. One summer, I took a stroll in between classes at Mississippi Governor's School, and was passing Poindexter Hall, a Victorian building on the campus of Mississippi University for Women, which Eudora Welty mentions in *One Writer's Beginning* as offering solitude for music students. Poindexter's vanguard is a line of resplendent birches and its musty corridors hold a squadron of pianos, instruments similar to antique cars: what they lack in performance they make up for in character. Every year since I was seven I participated in piano competitions held in Poindexter. That day, I decided to explore its cryptic depths for myself.

As I opened the front door, I was struck by the ear-numbing silence: walls normally humming with tonics and harmonics now stood as voiceless as an England fan the day after the World Cup Finals. Stepping slowly forward, I peeked into the director's office to make sure I was alone. Any fear of punishment was assuaged by seeing the well-worn seat of her chair. I passed quickly through the foyer, and then turned right, following the hall enclosing the auditorium until I came to a set of stairs. If one can be in the belly of a beast, I suppose I was in the pancreas of Poindexter. The stairs led to a hall filled with the darkness of shadow, but on the left wall hovered wheat-colored rectangles. Opposing the blocks were doorways leading to small eight-by-ten cells whose only inhabitants were antique pianos and their benches. Black mildew bloomed on the window sill, bumps and bruises marked the white walls, and the centimeter-tall carpet faded into seaweed green.

This hovel of a room was a pitiful example of construction, but to me it offered a quiet sanctuary, a monastery of music. I opened the window, and

all of Mississippi, drenching humidity and boiling heat, gushed in. The piano was below average in quality, with a broken B-flat string that made the V-VII chord sound like a sitar. I started playing Beethoven's *Pathétique*, wondering if perhaps a future Eudora Welty could hear me. That was home.

Nine months later I was in Stuttgart, Germany, on an excursion from our field trip to the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire. That was a dark, dank, and devilishly cold day, complete with javelins of rain bombarding us. The road I was walking on intersected with another, and as I looked around the corner, my eyes caught a large

sign proclaiming "Klavier"; I changed direction. I can only imagine what the new-three-piece-navy-suit-wearing salesman thought of my drenched-New-Balance-and-Old-Navy-wearing self, but when I managed to ask, "Kann Ich ein Klavier spielen?," he nodded his head. A spiral staircase of blackened steel took me to a showroom inhabited by grand pianos of

...I chose
a baby grand
Bechstein
and started into the
second movement of
the *Pathétique*.

local varieties: rosey Petrofs, ebony Bechsteins, and ivory Bluthners; I chose a baby grand Bechstein and started into the second movement of the *Pathétique*. That was home.

One week passed and I was at Hotel Falken, nestled in the instep of the Swiss Alps. Management kept the Yamaha in the piano lounge locked, preserving its keys for the professional who played every night. Beyond the piano lounge was a bar: light smell of tobacco, raw timber walls, and an upright piano. Since the morning was only five hours old, all the stools were empty. I sidled onto the bench and opened the keyboard cover. Before playing, I looked out the window on my left and was able to see the very bright and very sharp summits of mountains in the Jungfrau range. A few chromatic

runs up the keyboard showed age and fair maintenance. I had about thirty minutes until my group left the hotel; my fingers started playing the first movement of the *Pathetique*, then they meandered onto the second, and finally dashed into the third. The runs of the third were not recollected perfectly, but my mind filled in the gaps and held the rhythm together. That was home.

What my three experiences taught me was simple: always have a piece memorized. Also, different parts of the world are the same. Certain things make square blocks fit in circular holes, things like music and memories making up a feeling of home. Home isn't a tangible place, isn't an address or zip code; it is what reminds one of happiness. Home is the thing that makes me remember summers in a Victorian music hall, rain splashing on medieval streets, and one morning in a Swiss bar. Every time I sit at a piano, I am home. ■



Broccoli Bear

One beautiful day
 A big bad bear named Barney
 Bought big bags of Broccoli.
 Barney carried the big bags of
 broccoli on his back.
 When he got back Barney's bear
 buddies banged on his door:
 "We've come to bum some broccoli off of
 our beautiful buddy, Barney."
 "Bo away. Bere is bo bore broccoli!"
 bellowed Barney
 Barney's buddies were befuddled,
 Befuddled by Barney's baffling behavior.
 Barney's buddies replied, "Barney,
 we're your buddies. Be the best and
 let us bum a bag of broccoli."
 No answer....
 Balked, Barney's buddies, banged boisterously
 on the door until it broke down.
 They stared at their friend:
 Barney had a belly as big as a boat;
 Barney's floor was buried in broccoli bags
 and bite-sized broccoli bits.
 Barney's cheeks were bloated like
 basketballs with broccoli.
 "Bhat? Bere is bo bore broccoli." Barney barely
 managed to bellow out of his broccoli-bursting mouth.
 Baffled, Barney's buddies beat up Barney badly:
 BANG! BANG! BANG went
 Barney's bear behind.
 Beaten and bruised, Barney bought his
 buddies another bag of broccoli.
 Barney's buddies left and Barney
 learned his lesson:
 Share your broccoli with your buddies.

Harrison To

Lilly Operetta

Tessa Palfreyman

Clayboard

Bibu

Stella Nickerson

Second Place, Short Story Competition

"**You should be** out at the desk," said Miss Jean.

"No one's going to check out a book," said Molly. "No one ever checks anything out except sometimes the Mennonites, and there are none of those out there, just some people using the computers and Mr. Joel with newspapers like usual."

Molly sat balanced in a child-sized chair, her elbows propped on the low table, watching Miss Jean make a snowman out of cotton balls. She much preferred staying back in the children's section rather than the main room like she was supposed to. Miss Jean made her domain bright, with colored paper covering the white walls and carpets in geometric patterns on the faux-wood floor. On top of the shelves there were displays of books set upright with their covers facing the room, but also stuffed tigers and dolls in kimonos and a model pirate ship complete with spider-web rigging and stiff white sails.

And then there was Miss Jean, called "Miss" even though she'd been married for twenty-something years. Molly supposed "Mrs." was too hard for little kid lips to pronounce. Miss Jean was middle-aged and motherly, with a soft voice and highlighted hair and a body which looked, to Molly, as squishy-comfy as a teddy bear.

"Would you like to make a snowman?" asked Miss Jean. "My snow story time is Friday and I wanted to try these things and see if they were too hard for the younger kids. Now I'm thinking they're not too hard, just too messy. Glue's getting everywhere."

Molly picked up a cotton ball and a white bottle of Elmer's glue. "Miss Jean," she said, "I'm thinking of doing something big."

"*Something* big," said Miss Jean. "That's pretty vague. Did you have a specific something big in mind?"

"Not really." Molly dabbed a perfect bead of white glue onto her cotton ball. "It's just that... Leaving high school, going to college, I thought that'd be a big thing, you know? But the University's barely half an hour away, and I'm still living with Dad, and I'm still working here, and I'm still sitting in here every day doing craft projects with you like I always did before."

"So transfer. Go somewhere, bigger, farther away. You have the grades to do it. All of my children went all the way across the country to go to school.

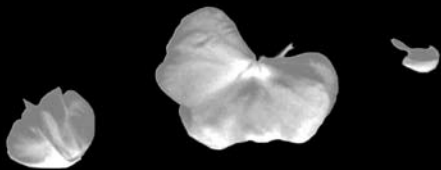
It's good for children to leave when they're that age. Sad—at least, it made me sad—but good."

"Well, I wanted to go somewhere far away," said Molly. "But..." She had finished the body of the snowman without getting any glue on her fingers, in contrast with Miss Jean, who had gotten sticky drippings on her hands and arms and the table in front of her. "You know what Mom's like."

Miss Jean said nothing, only pressed her lips together in the disapproving way that sometimes got on Molly's nerves. When she did speak it was on a different subject. "We've got a new book in today and I'd thought you'd like it. It's over on my desk."

"Really?" Molly got up and walked over to Miss Jean's desk in the corner of the room. "*Bibu*," said the cover of the book on the desk. Below the title was a picture of a strange little creature with white fur and gigantic ears like rainbow-colored fans. "Miss Jean," said Molly, "this is a picture book."

Below the
title was a picture
of a strange little
creature with
white fur and
gigantic
ears..."



“So? You’ll like it anyway, I promise. Just read it.”

Molly took the book home with her, and once she had pulled into the driveway she sat in her car reading. It was getting dark, so she switched on the car light and read by its pale-lemonade glow. *Bibu was a tiny widget, smaller than a thimble, even, but he had enormous ears* read the first page. The art was interesting, each colorful page like a painting. Those wide rainbow flaps of ears—they must have been done with a computer somehow. They looked translucent and fragile, thin as tissue paper or butterfly wings.

The story was thin but cute, good for children, Molly supposed. The other, small-eared widget children ran and jumped, but Bibu wasn’t allowed to. “No,” said his momma, “you mustn’t jump about. Your ears might tear, my baby Bibu.”

Molly was nearing the end of the book when she was startled by a tap on the car window. She looked up to see her mother standing outside the car, looking in, her forehead wrinkled in worry. Molly’s mother was a thin, tall woman, with murky, blue-grey eyes. Molly rolled down the window.

“Honey, is something wrong?” her mother asked.

“What? Mom, why are you asking?”

“You don’t usually sit out in the driveway like this. And you usually come home earlier. I always get worried when you’re late. I called you but your phone must have been turned off. I’ve told you to keep it turned on.”

“I’m fine, Mom. I was reading.”

“You should have come inside, though. I like knowing you’re in the house.”

“Mom...” Molly hesitated. Her mother’s blue-grey eyes were two whirlpools, tugging at Molly’s conscience. It made her guilty to see how wary and wavering and scared those eyes looked. “Mom, I’ve been thinking of doing something big.”

“Big? I don’t know what you mean, sweetheart.”

“Like... Big changes. Big life things.”

“But things are so nice now! And trust me, darling, big is overrated.”

They went inside and her mother headed to the dining room to fix dinner. Molly realized that she had left *Bibu* in the car. She had been only two or three pages from the end when she was interrupted; it seemed a shame not to finish it now. She turned, headed out to the car. She turned the car light on again and thumbed to the last page she had read. The picture showed little white widgets jumping against a bright-colored background as Bibu looked on, envious.

She turned the page and read: *Bibu jumped*. That was all on that page. “No!” his momma cried. “Don’t jump, my baby Bibu! You’ll tear your ears to pieces!” The illustrations really were beautiful. As Bibu jumped higher and higher, his ears billowed out in iridescent ripples.

Bibu jumped. He leaped. He bounded. And then... Bibu flew! The last page had no words, just a picture of Bibu flying through a pale sky, his rainbow ears spread out like a hang glider.

* * * *

Molly’s cellphone rang. She took it out of her pocket, turned it off, and threw it onto the backseat. It landed on a heap of black trash bags full of shoes and winter sweaters. As she turned the key in the ignition, she was reminded of Sundays when she was younger. Her mother always slept on the way home from church, so Molly could unbuckle her seatbelt without being fussed at. When she lay flat on her back, nothing was visible through the windows but sky and the pointed tips of trees. It was easy to pretend that the car was flying, that it didn’t touch the road at all.

She drove. As the speedometer crept up towards the speed limit, acceleration pushed her backwards into her seat. It felt like breaking free. It felt like launching. ■

The Old Road Home

Lauren Klaskala

Third Place, Essay Competition

I grew up in a small, yellow-aged house down the long, winding subdivision of one of Starkville's oldest neighborhoods, Yeates. My house, though I did not realize then, was a place extremely dear to me. The first thing that comes to mind when I think of my old house is a vision of the backyard—riddled with many dark, joyous hiding places, wild rosebushes, and sheds full of crickets and climbing ivy. The whole yard lay covered in pine trees, and where there was not a carpet of pine needles, there thrived unruly St. Augustine. The big move started when I was about nine, when my parents sat my five siblings around our kitchen table, as if it were a pint-sized conference hall and as if we had a say in where we would be going. I was old enough to hate them for it, but not old enough to understand the need for a move. How could they have known that I had just set up a makeshift fort, Blackberry Bridge, on the edge of the pond? How could they have known that I had just decided I liked the color pink, so my floral and fragrant bedroom was now acceptable? How could they have known that I did not want to leave my dog Butter alone in the earth beside the plum tree?

We spent the next long four years loading the family van to burn up the road across town to the building site. My animosity towards plans regarding the new house were not helped by the fact that I had to trudge in red dirt around the building site, collecting and sorting the dozens of different types of nails into brightly colored plastic buckets, or wiggling plastic-covered electrical wires through rough holes of wood in the slowly erecting skeleton of a mammoth house. The more my parents put their energy and will into the success of our new house, the more I wanted to just go back to my

floral bedroom at my real house, with real finished floors, and real running water.

The thing I found that I could hold onto, as my own small world was being turned upside down, was the world outside of two changing houses. The only thing that seemed to remain unchanged to me was the road between. Leaving my old house, back country roads morphed into city streets, and, as we arrived closer to the new house, the roads faded back into more, if more manicured, country roads on the other side of town. As many times that we drove back and forth in a week, I became an

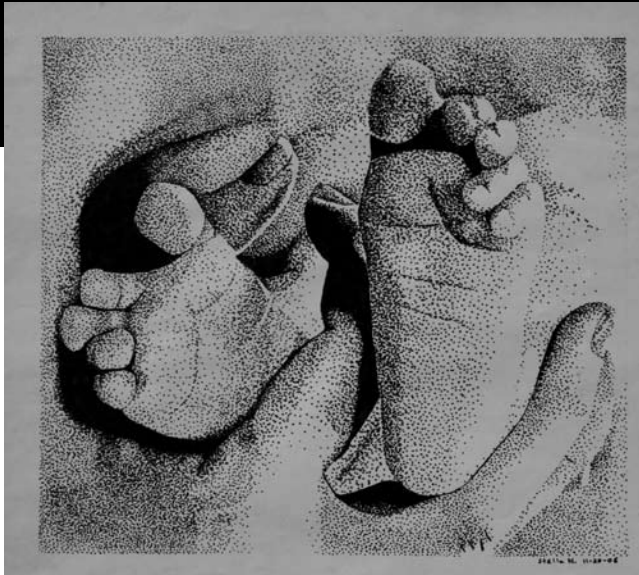
expert on the journey, tracking at what point we would be at a certain distance. This would be a game I would play with myself, to make the dreaded rides towards change go by less painfully. I would hide my head upside down below the car seat disregarding seat belts and all. My bare feet in the air would fog the window, and when I had decided on my guess of where we were on the ride, I would pop up to view

“The only thing that seemed to remain unchanged to me was the road between.”

the answer through fogged framed windows of toe spaces and feet prints. I popped up in time to see algae-covered ponds that resembled swamps on the way out of Yeates. I recognized each pine tree after we exited the subdivision, even when hanging upside down. I jumped up just in time to see All-Go Auto Parts, a car graveyard junkyard just outside the city limits, followed by a Christmas tree farm where we cut down our tree every year when we lived at my old house. We passed overflowing black churches and Sprint Marts as we entered town. At this point I would sit up to watch until my little game got harder, and when we started down the new road to my new house I would hang upside down again. My toes framed unfamiliar, impersonal suburbia, roofs of look-alike houses,

a country club. As we got farther out of the other side of town, we passed a rodeo arena and Lazy H Ranch until we reached a wealthy neighborhood. The brilliantly detailed and fussed-over houses made me feel even more like we didn't belong, and I was content to continue hanging upside down.

Change came, though, whether I wanted it to or not. And while the scenery of the car rides did not change significantly, the house I loved so much did drastically. It gradually was emptied of familiar toy chests and torn lilac couches until it was just a shell of its former self. The only thing left was my pink floral wallpaper and lonely backyard. My new house became brightened to me since it was filled with my old things. I quickly learned to forget about things like Blackberry Bridge, and Butter, because it made the transition less traumatic. When I travel out to the old house now, to repair something for the renters with my father or attend some other errand, the car ride is still the same. We pass country churches, pine trees, farms, the car junkyard graveyard, and swamps until we reach Yeates. Driving the old road home no doubt brings back a flood of nostalgia, but I have found it easier to distance myself from it. The old house and neighborhood are now as impersonal and unfamiliar as the new neighborhood had been, and finding new owners who know and care nothing for the house's past, and who fill floral bedrooms with cigarette smoke smell, only make the task of forgetting easier. Change must happen and some things are better left forgotten, but the old road home does not change, and for that, perhaps, it should not be driven. ■



Little Feet

Stella Nickerson

Stipple

Third Place Drawing, Art Competition

How to Make Your Eyes Blue

Gather two moist petals from a columbine
Scrape off crisp snow from a mountain's summit

Steal a soft, delicate egg from a blue jay

Snag a bottle of fresh air from the stratosphere

Slice up a pair of jeans

Swipe some water from

The turquoise beaches of Tahiti

The brisk water spout of a whale

And a kitchen sink

Commingle everything quickly

Take a few large, greedy swigs

Lock your eyes tightly

And jump off a plane

Through warm rays of sunshine

Through wispy bundles of clouds

And finally through lithe, elegant ocean waves.

Then, open your eyes

Ian Barclay

Learned Community

Brooke Owens

Photograph

At First Glance

Kyle White

Bella stood in the bathroom plastering on the massive amount of make-up she wore every day. Her purple tank top showed her slightly protruding belly over her skintight jeans. She wasn't fat by any means, but she just bought clothes that were too small, making her full frame hang out. No one seemed to notice but me. She turned her head to examine all sides of her face in the mirror. She leaned over the sink to apply another layer of black eyeliner over her already well-lined lids. Eye shadow, powder, and lip-gloss were scattered all over the sink, and there were smudges of lipstick and black, liquid liner covering the countertop. Bella never seemed to care about the mess she created in *my* bathroom. She'd simply flip her long, blonde, straightened hair and claim that it wasn't her problem. When I would complain about her to my mother, Bella would bat her long mascara-covered lashes over her stunning blue eyes and my mother would side with *her*. Considering her name meant *beauty*, I was surprised how ugly she could be.

Among the many things I was convinced no one else noticed was Bella's incessant need to be right. Since I was forced to drive her around when she visited, I spent a lot of time with her. She'd argue with me about the most random things like the population of Las Vegas.

"I saw the census records in class *yesterday*," I had said.

"Yes, well, I've *been* there and I *know* that more than a million people live there," she had retorted. I didn't understand her logic, and I was convinced she had none. She would argue until she was blue in the face, and if she still failed to win outright, she'd appeal to the higher power, my parents, who'd tell me to be nice to my cousin.

"So, I swiped
the keys to
my parents'
2005 Ford
Mustang
before leaving
the house that
morning."

Bella had woken me up fairly early that morning, proclaiming that today we would go to the mall. I hated the mall, and it seemed to me we had gone there every day since she'd gotten here two weeks ago for her annual three-week trip. I didn't get out of bed right when she told me we were going. I had been able to figure out her routine quickly. If I waited twenty minutes to get out of bed after she'd woken me up, I would be able to eat breakfast before taking my turn in

the shower. After that I could get dressed and be ready by the time she was done with her make-up. I'd only have to wait ten minutes for her this way. It depressed me how much thought I had put into this, but even with all her bad qualities, I had to admit she was reliable to take so much time.

I had my own car, a 1991 gold Honda Accord that I loved. But whenever Bella came I wasn't

supposed to drive her in that. So, I swiped the keys to my parents' 2005 Ford Mustang before leaving the house that morning. As completely incredible as driving around in a slate-blue Mustang is, I longed for my own car. But again, I didn't win that argument. Bella slid into the passenger seat with ease. She was nineteen, but she didn't like driving in Seattle. She was from a small town and driving in the big city scared her, which is where I come into the picture as chauffeur. After getting in, she played with the radio stations for a bit before settling on a hip-hop station with someone singing about "smacking that" until someone was sore. After securing the radio, she eyed my outfit. In keeping with my lack of caring about what I wore, I had thrown on some ratty jeans and a red Starting Line t-shirt.

"You know," she began, but I stopped listening. She would take to rambling about how I "would look so much better if I would let her dress me." I had learned to zone out during these long-winded speeches. She was repetitive, so I knew I wasn't missing anything I hadn't already heard. As she rambled on about make-up and hair care, I pulled out into traffic from our small subdivision. We had been driving for about ten minutes before I made the mistake.

While sitting at a red light I heard something about when Bella dyed her hair for the first time. I glanced over to look through the passenger side window and let off the brake. I didn't see the car coming from the other direction until it took out our back end. I did hear screaming coming from inside the car, as well as outside. After fighting the recently deployed airbag, I looked back to see a red Toyota with steam coming from its engine neatly mashed into my parents' perfect blue Mustang. I let out a groan and hit my head on the steering wheel. I heard Bella get out of the car, and after removing my head from the wheel, followed suit.

"Sid, go make sure they're okay," Bella said pointing to the couple getting out of the Toyota.

I meandered over to them and asked if they were okay. We chatted for a couple minutes making sure everyone was safe for the time being and that the police had been called. They seemed like nice people, which made my tension go down a little bit. I excused myself to go call my parents when I noticed that Bella was already talking on her cell-phone. Irritated by the fact that Bella would choose now to chat on her phone, I furiously marched over to her. It wasn't until I got close enough to hear what she was saying that I noticed she was not on the phone with one of her friends but with my parents.

"We're at the corner of Sullivan and Highway 20. It was all my fault, really; I grabbed the wheel thinking I knew better. The accident really wasn't Sid's slipup, she was just trying to drive and I messed everything up."

Bella spoke with such sorrow, as if she really had caused the accident. I stared in awe as she told my parents that she had grabbed the wheel and yelled when I was trying to make a turn that caused us to get in the way of oncoming traffic. The usual whine in her voice was gone and replaced with a serious tone. When she wasn't speaking, she was nodding and listening intently. When she finally got off the phone, Bella turned and said, "They'll be here to handle things in a little bit."

"But...w-w-w-why?" I stammered.

"I would get into *so* much less trouble than you for crashing your parents' car. Plus, who's going to drive me around if you get your driving privileges taken away?" she said very matter-of-factly. Bella had put more thought into her actions than I ever thought she could. I watched her pull out a compact mirror and check her hair and make-up. Well, at least I knew some things didn't change.

Bella didn't complain for the next week when we had to ride in my Honda to the mall. In return, I didn't complain about taking her. ■

Riding Shotgun

Kiara Boone

His muffled voice travels from under the hood of a grey 1999 Pontiac Bonneville; I watch closely as my granddaddy attempts to teach me everything he knows—which according to him is everything—about the automobile. His words echo in my head whenever I see a vehicle: “Kiara, I ain’t gone let you end up like the other women in the family, always depending on someone else, especially a man.” Because I know Granddaddy wants me to be independent and teaching me to be self-reliant makes him smile from ear to ear, I sit through yet another lecture about periodically checking and changing the oil of a car, changing a flat tire, obeying the rules of the road, and even properly pumping gas in the scorching Mississippi sun.

I am not amazed that Willie Gean is wearing black boots caked with gravel and mud from long days on his cattle farm, thick black jeans that I am convinced only absorb heat, a long-sleeved shirt with enough stains to have its own biography, a favorite cap that has changed colors three times over the course of my life and that reads BEEF in faded letters, and not a droplet of sweat on his body even though it is one-hundred and five degrees in the shade. I listen intently to him because my granddaddy has always had my best interest in mind. I watch his hands that are rough and black with car oil and that evoke strength. His strong Southern voice breaks my thoughts: “Kiara, you HAVE to make sure the car is in park before you decide to pop the hood.” I know that he is making fun of my first driving lesson when the hood on his old dusty red Ford pick-up mysteriously flew up while I was driving. It scared me silly but Granddaddy, always knowing what to do,

calmly instructed me to park the truck, step out, and breathe before I passed out. With encouraging eyes, he insisted that I drive again after I looked him directly in the eye—as he has always taught me to do when speaking to people—when between sobs I whined about how I would never drive again in my life. He chuckled and hopped into the passenger side of the truck with a mischievous grin across his face. I climbed into the driver’s side and gave him a phony frown which quickly faded into a smile because the moment reminded me of the way that Granddaddy has always been there for me,

always in the passenger side and encouraging me to drive for myself.

Granddaddy moves slowly from under the hood of the car with the dip-stick from the oil chamber and holds it up so that I can observe it. Willie Gean reminds me that I must be attentive to the oil levels or I will be stranded on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. He stresses that I have to be responsible for the automobile that I am driving.

I remind Granddaddy that if I were ever stranded I know that I can depend on him. He smiles and says: “The only thing that you can depend on is God. But if you ever need me, I’ll come running.” Then Willie Gean turns around and puts the oil dip-stick back into the oil chamber. He slams the hood of the car down and walks away.

Granddaddy paces around the grey Pontiac in an almost trance-like state as he contemplates his next movement. He strolls around the car and stops at the front tire on the passenger side of the car. He kicks the tire with his right boot and gravel falls swiftly to the ground; he frowns. I frown as well because I know that Granddaddy’s frown means

“I watch
his hands that
are rough and
black with
car oil and
that evoke
strength.”

that the tire's air level is low. He backs slowly away from the car and gives me a sly grin. I mosey along to Granddaddy's black work truck; I scramble onto the back and grab a rusty air pump with both hands. As the pump is filling the tire with air like a hot air balloon, Willie Gean emphasizes the importance of my knowing how to do this for myself once more. He glares into my brown eyes with his chocolate eyes and declares in a powerful, deep baritone voice: "I just want you to be independent." Granddaddy's words reach out to the depths of my soul because independence is a characteristic that he has instilled in me since before I learned to walk.

The tire fills with air quickly and this time Granddaddy takes the bulky, rusty air pump back to its home. Willie Gean jogs back to the car yelling, "Shotgun," tosses the keys into my hands, and plops down into the passenger side of the grey Pontiac Bonneville. I open the driver's side door, and sit down beside Granddaddy. I turn the key in the ignition and glance over at Willie Gean, as he

is giving me last-minute instructions about today's driving lesson; I realize how thankful I am to have Granddaddy in my life. The lessons that he taught me empower me to be a more independent person. I utilize my independence at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science where I am living on my own. Being self-reliant has affected my time management skills and allows me to feel comfortable asking for help in all aspects of life. I think about how Granddaddy has taught me that with independence comes responsibility. This characteristic has enabled me to be a leader in many extracurricular activities at school, church, and in the community. Then something Granddaddy says catches my attention once again, and I hear in his strong Southern accent: "Kiara, I love you and I only want the best for you." Tears fill my eyes and I tell him that I love him, too. As I buckle my seatbelt, all I think about is that I am glad to be driving for myself and even more excited that Granddaddy sits beside me every mile of the way. ■

Dump Truck

O dump truck, O dump truck,
How I miss you.
You drove me through my childhood happily.
Now that I am old enough to abandon you,
I will miss your presence.
I wish you could serve as a magic key portal,
That would take me back in time,
So we can enjoy our sweet times together again.

Boshen Liu



His Ole Truck

Joanna Oliver

Photograph

Backwards Joe

Sarah Marshall

Third Place, Short Story Competition

Backwards Joe spent the day outside of the pizzeria I worked in, as usual.

He earned his nickname because one of his feet pointed the wrong way. He spoke with a stutter and yelled at customers as they walked into the pizzeria, telling them to try the other place down the street, but, if they had to go into this pizzeria, they should buy him a slice. I always felt bad telling him to leave. He was at least seventy-five years

old and, in the entire borough of Manhattan, the best place he could find to go was the bench outside of Giuseppe's Pizza. Every day he wore a baseball cap with a logo long since faded, hiding a head of knotted grey hair. Backwards Joe was crippled, and, to be honest, he scared the customers away, which let me do my homework. I could care less how much the pizzeria made in a day as long as I got my \$6.50

an hour. Though money had never been much of an issue for my family, I had to prove to my parents that I could keep this job. It was turning out to be more of a headache than any argument from my parents could've been.

The biggest headaches that I got from working at Giuseppe's came from Backwards Joe. I was scared to leave the pizzeria because, even though I figured he was harmless, he yelled at me every time he noticed me, even if it happened to be through the windows. My boss, actually a Puerto Rican man named Guillermo ("Giuseppe" was completely made up) gave me a lot of trouble

about not calling the police when Joe was bothering potential customers. But I had seen a million Backwards Joes in my life, and I knew that soon after the police came to scare him away he would be back, and if he wasn't, maybe I would get to meet Backwards Jenny or Backwards Willy. That didn't stop me from tensing up, though, every time Joe knocked on the glass window and yelled something completely indecipherable at me. I was a kid,

and my parents had taught me to stay away from crazy homeless men like Backwards Joe.

This particular afternoon it was raining, and Backwards Joe was standing inches away from the door, his feet in a puddle and his head kept dry by the neon "Giuseppe's Pizza" sign. At 5:14 the train came in from the Delancey Street station, and three men wearing soggy gray ties rushed to the door.

As they hurriedly motioned

for Backwards Joe to move, he yelled to them, the whole while eyeing me. "Ya know, a guy died last Tuesday 'cause Giuseppe put rat poison on a pizza." They looked skeptical, so Joe added, "Look guys. What am I getting outta this? I work for the NYPD and I'm just tryin' to do my job. Now go eat somewheres else." The men rushed away, probably more scared by Backwards Joe than by the rat poison. Joe turned around and pointed a finger at me, his laughter exposing all fifteen of his teeth.

While Backwards Joe advised a woman dragging a toddler by the hand to eat at the Chinese place across the street, I got a phone call from Guillermo. "It's raining, no? You busy? Got a full shop?"

“Backwards Joe
was now
drinking
rain water
from a Giuseppe’s cup
he’d dug out of the
garbage.”

“No, Mr. Sanchez,” I apologized, “haven’t had much business all afternoon.”

“Why? Is that bum standing out there again? I told you to call the cops. He is very bad for business!”

“No, I haven’t seen him in days. Cops must’ve picked him up. About time, no?”

Backwards Joe was now drinking rain water from a Giuseppe’s cup he’d dug out of the garbage. Though the rain persisted, he dragged himself to his bench, where he sat and watched as customers finally drizzled in. I spent the next two hours serving men in soggy ties Giuseppe’s Famous Italian Style Cheese Pizza. It was amazing how smoothly things ran if Backwards Joe sat on his bench, five feet away, instead of directly in front of the door.

My shift ended at seven-thirty, and I began to clean up so the next \$6.50 worker could come in and take over. When the refrigerator door was clear of smudges, the metal counters clean of crumbs, and the tables free of sticky Coke spills, I waited for someone to come take over my shift. At seven forty-five I became impatient, and stepped onto the sidewalk to see if anybody wearing a Giuseppe’s Pizza t-shirt was headed my way. I sighed when the only person I recognized outside was Backwards Joe, picking M&Ms off the sidewalk. “Are you hungry, Joe?” He nodded.

I dashed into the pizzeria, hoping Joe would be back asleep before anyone noticed. I grabbed a slice of cheese pizza and handed it to Backwards Joe. He scratched his head before grinning. “I’m gonna eat this slow.”

I knew there was no way I could simply shoo Joe away — Guillermo had been trying to do that for months. The only thing left to do was hope that whoever came to take over the pizzeria didn’t notice Backwards Joe with his golden slice of pizza, as I was the only employee that didn’t call the police the second he appeared. I watched as Joe broke off

tic-tac sized pieces of pizza and ate them one by one, chewing each at least ten times.

After almost fifteen minutes, Joe was not even halfway done with his pizza, and I was still left alone to run the pizzeria. Just as I was wondering if I would get paid overtime, I spotted a familiar pair of black sneakers schlepping through the grey puddles on the grey sidewalk less than a block away. It was Guillermo, and I knew that if he saw Backwards Joe I would be immediately fired. I ran down the street to meet and — hopefully — delay him. Guillermo started ranting about how George, the boy who was supposed to take over, had called in sick just five minutes before, and, boy, was that kid gone. I watched his thin mustache, neatly groomed to curl at each end, wiggle as he talked. “Don’t worry about it, Mr. S-Sanchez. I can work until close. I-I-I don’t have anything else t-t-to do,” I lied.

“Nah. I’ll take care of it. I’ll pay you for the rest of this hour. Overtime pay, sound good?”

Before I had a chance to stop him, Guillermo rushed past me and quickly noticed Backwards Joe slowly nibbling on the pizza. For a moment, we all just looked at each other, forming a triangle — the Puerto Rican pizzeria owner in black jeans, the high school junior with chattering teeth, and the homeless man who nonchalantly ate his slice of pizza.

Guillermo’s face turned red and his mustache twitched. My mind began to race — my parents were going to kill me. Backwards Joe was the first to speak. “Yeah?” he shouted, tiny pieces of pizza flying everywhere, “You need something?”

“Did she give you that pizza?” Guillermo demanded, pointing at me.

I looked at Joe with pleading eyes, all the while knowing my fate at the pizzeria meant nothing to him. Joe chuckled. “You kidding? I would never eat any of the garbage that you make, Giuseppe. This is from the place down the street.” ■

Contributors' Notes

Ian Barclay (St. John High School, Gulfport) Ian will be attending either Johns Hopkins University or Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study bio-molecular engineering and applied mathematics. Chopin, various rock artists, and nature influence his work. "Take me to you, imprison me, for I / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free...."—Donne

Marshall Bartlett (Memphis University School) Marshall will enroll at Dartmouth College in the fall to study environmental science.

Mississippi Fred McDowell has influenced his blues, and Jack Kerouac his writing. Marshall writes, "I'm planning to be a train-hopping bootlegger in my spare time this summer."

Kiara Boone (Noxubee County High School) Kiara may be attending Northwestern University as a political science/marketing major (making for an easy transition to law). "It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get up again." —Lombardi

John Bradley (Ocean Springs High School) John would like to study computer and electrical engineering at Mississippi State University. Mrs. Ross, his eighth-grade gifted teacher, taught him the essentials of taking photos, which greatly helped his art. He loves computers, cars, and planes, and hates broccoli. "The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do." —Bagehot

Katie Caves (Enterprise Attendance Center, Brookhaven) Katie wants to attend Mississippi College as a pre-med student. She feels that Barbra Wyland (her grandmother), Brenda Durr (her aunt), and Ms. Jones have had the most influence on her work. Katie writes, "I thank [my family members] for the love and support each of them has given me."

Ashley Conoway (Greenwood High School) Ashley will be attending Xavier University in New Orleans as a pre-med student. Her favorite writers are Zora Neale Hurston, Mildred Taylor, and Lewis Nordan. Ashley writes, "I'm from the Mississippi Delta, where I thought nothing interesting happened. After heeding the very good advice to, 'Write what [I] know,' I found that the Delta might not be so boring after all."

Michael Counihan (Columbus High School) Michael will be attending Georgetown University as an international political economy major. His favorite artists are Burns and Beethoven. "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself [Napoleon] founded empires...[u]pon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire

upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him." —Bonaparte

Leslie Datsis (Tishomingo County High School) Leslie wants to attend the University of Southern Mississippi to study theater and business.

Ansel Adams most influences her work. "Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind." —Dr. Seuss

Cody Jordan (Tupelo High School) Cody will be at Mississippi State University double majoring in environmental conservation and information technologies. "Come forth into the light of things / Let nature be your teacher." —Wordsworth

Hannah Kaase (Northwest Rankin High School) Hannah will be in the pre-veterinary medicine program at Mississippi State University next year. Michelangelo and other Renaissance artists have influenced Hannah's art. "Aerodynamically, the bumblebee shouldn't be able to fly, but the bumblebee doesn't know that so it goes on flying anyway." —Ash

Lauren Klaskala (Starkville Academy) Lauren will be in the environmental studies and biology programs next fall at Hendrix College. Her favorite artists are James Joyce, Jack Kerouac, and William Carlos Williams.

"We do not write because we want to; we write because we have to." —Maugham

Kelly Lence (Tupelo High School) Kelly will be attending Davidson College in North Carolina this fall. The greatest influence on her work is the natural beauty of the imperfect world. She loves singing, traveling, and encouraging positive thoughts: "Find a place to stand, and move the world."

Boshen Liu (Madison Central High School) Boshen wants to be a pre-med and chemical engineering student. He writes, "I'm an easy-going guy who likes to have fun, and make fun of my best friends. My motto has always been, 'If I don't make fun of you, then I don't love you.'"

Sarah Marshall (Pass Christian High School) Sarah will be studying applied math and statistics at State University of New York/Stony Brook. Her favorite artists are Ayn Rand and Kelly Lence. Sarah writes, "My ultimate goal is to be a statistician, employed by either a baseball team or a [capitalistic] politician." "Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart" —Wordsworth

Ann Hamilton McGuire (Central Academy, Macon) Ann Hamilton will be attending Mississippi State University as a broadcast journalism major.

Her favorite artist is Robert Burns. "Grit your teeth and think of England." —Queen Victoria

Falan McKnight (Weir Attendance Center) Megan Dempsey, a peer, is one of Falan's favorite artists. "Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive." —Hubbard

Aspen Nero (Bay High School) Aspen will be studying environmental science and biology at the University of Mississippi.

Her favorite painter is Gustav Klint and her favorite author is Truman Capote. "Some painters transform the sun into a yellow spot, others transform a yellow spot into the sun" —Picasso

Stella Nickerson (Aberdeen High School) Stella, a junior, is a future chemical engineering student at Brigham Young University. Her favorite poet is Gwendolyn Brooks. "My mind is open...it's just not empty." —John Nickerson

Joanna Oliver (Senatobia High School) Joanna feels that William Wordsworth's work has influenced her own style. She would eventually like to open her own pediatric clinic. "Nought may endure but Mutability." —Shelley

Brooke Owens (Philadelphia High School) Brooke would like to study history at Mississippi State University. When asked who influenced her work the most, Brooke replied, "My mother."

"She's so number nine;
She's incredible math,
Just incredible math."

Tessa Palfreyman (Gulfport High School) Tessa will be studying graphic design and animation at either Jefferson Davis Community College or Perkinson Community College. "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last, you create what you will." —Shaw

Marianna Prather (West Point High School) Marianna sees herself studying art education at Mississippi State University. Monet has made an impression on Marianna, and Robert Frost's work has given her a road to take in her own art. "There is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it" —Camus

Sarah Prather (West Point High School) Sarah will be studying animal and dairy science at Mississippi State University next fall.

The writings of Kathryn Tucker Windham and the paintings of Norman Rockwell have most influenced her own work. Sarah writes, "I enjoy correcting grammar, driving to international music, talking into fans, [and] streaking bacteria." "Are you full of years, fated to burn / quietly overshadowed?" —Goureglewski

Victoria Purvis (Oak Grove High School) Victoria's plans include attending Millsaps College where she will be a pre-med student minoring in Spanish. Her favorite artist is E.E. Cummings. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure...We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God." —Williamson

Jackson Segars (Tishomingo County High School) Jackson will be attending New York University and studying film and television production.

The contemporary Japanese writer Haruki Murakami has influenced Jackson's own work.

An interesting tidbit: "I never wanted to be a gunfighter. It's just...sometimes I get lonely."

"Educated men are as much superior to uneducated men as the living are to the dead" —Aristotle

Harrison To (Starkville High School) Harrison wants to become a pre-med student when he graduates from MSMS. The person who most inspires him is Andrew Lark. "Talk doesn't cook rice." —Chinese Proverb

Marcie Walker (Olive Branch High School) Marcie's favorite poet is Dorothy Parker. "Love is a snowmobile racing across the tundra and then suddenly it flips over, pinning you underneath. At night, the ice weasels come." —Groening

Kyle White (Pass Christian High School) Kyle will be in the industrial engineering program next fall at Mississippi State University. Her favorite author is Douglas Adams. "The impossible often has a kind of integrity which the merely improbable lacks." —Adams

Cynthia Lynn Wilson (Eupora High School) Lynn will attend Mississippi State University and major in zoology with a concentration in wildlife. She is interested in continuing her study of the martial arts and weaponry.

Little Red
John Bradley
Photograph



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

1100 College Street
MUW-1627
Columbus, Mississippi 39701

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

