

Southern Voices



2009

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On the Cover:
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W. Carnation Street

Boram Lee

First Place—Essay Competition

The car swerved into W. Carnation Street, and pebbles ricocheted off the bottom of the car as smooth asphalt ended and rough dirt roads began. You can't find places like this unless you look for them. There weren't many homes as we bounced along the lane, just mostly walls of scrawny pine trees, patches of grass, and the occasional arbitrary artifact: a bent bike wheel, pieces of a rusted mailbox, splintered fenceposts. Two tiny houses, like the abandoned objects, occupied the otherwise flat landscape and seemed to pop out of the ground and fall apart where they stood. On the way to the home of Mr. David, my father's colleague, the car passed a church that sat in a small depression in the terrain, as if the earth were in the process of swallowing it into its depths. "Isn't the summer hot enough for you?" stated the message board trembling beside the white-washed church. Most of the lettering was faded except "hot enough," and the stem of the "h" leaned forward: not enough.

The Mississippi sun beat down in solid waves, and all the humidity crashed down as we finally got out of the car. Mr. David's house was white and had a flimsy screen door like the apartment 1D Zygmont Drive in Storrs, Connecticut, we had lived in for seven years before. It felt familiar already, and I smiled. Mr. David's voice was warm, although loud and boisterous, and Mrs. Charlotte, his wife, hugged my younger sister and my eleven-year-old self fiercely, although we had never met. A large pool table took most of the space in the living room, and a collection of unique

umbrellas, board games, throws, and other paraphernalia crowded up what area remained: messy, but comfy. I could smell the smoke from the barbeque. Mr. David liked his hot dogs black and was introducing my father to the crunchy, burnt, yet delectable taste.

Sneaking a spoonful of corn salad, I glanced outside the kitchen window across the street. A blond girl my age was playing outside with her younger brother. Mrs. Charlotte saw my covert food thieving operations and sent me out the door to play saying, "That's Tara." The only Tara I'd ever heard of was the plantation in *Gone with the Wind*. I remembered seeing the door of the grandiose building in the Margaret Mitchell Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. Huge, white, beautiful, spotless, it embodied polite Southern society, the gate to secret wonders. It was such a pretty name, that when Tara asked for my name, I gave her my last name as my first.

She wore a yellowed T-shirt and shorts, with no-shoes-callused feet, dirtied by the clouds of dirt that sprang up whenever we took a step. I wore a crisp, white blouse and a new blue skirt with matching dress shoes. Her house sat nearly opposite of Mr. David's, baby-blue and tattered. Tara followed my gaze and threw me the ball she had been playing with. Back and forth. Back and forth. The sphere of rubber flew from our fingertips in the middle of the road where cars rarely came or went. I suddenly remembered an abandoned house that my school bus passed by every morning. One day, it had burned down, and nobody cared. It

still squatted there, forgotten, with its rusted “NO TRESPASSING” sign and broken glass, a black scar scratched above a matted, charred lawn. The image was unbearably poignant, and the remembered feeling dragged at my heart until Tara suddenly spoke.

“It’s just me and my mom. And my two little brothers,” Tara said, as I threw the ball, jumping backwards slightly to avoid an anthill. Her eyes flickered constantly between the ball and her little brother. For the sake of keeping up the conversation, I told her about my family, and asked her about school.

“I don’t go to school,” she said plainly, and before I could say anything else, she continued in a one-breath practiced answer, “I have to watch my little brothers and help my mom,” and smiled. Surprised, I wondered if she would cry instead of grin while reciting this again when she grew older, in this lazy place where cars rarely came or went and tired pine boughs cast slim shadows over dirt lanes; I couldn’t imagine because school meant the future for me, meant

going places and seeing things, meant dreams and hopes and the world. I wanted to ask if it would be enough to live her whole life in this single place with the baby-blue house and sparsely scattered plots of grass, but I was afraid that the church message board had already answered the question for me before I even had to ask.

We left W. Carnation Street late at night, the car rolling and rocking and tumbling over stray rocks and stones. None of us could decide whether the “W” in “W. Carnation Street” was an abbreviation because “White” couldn’t fit onto the signpost, or stood for “West.” Was there an East, South, North Carnation Street also? Were girls living there who couldn’t go to school? The darkness closed behind us as the vehicle leapt eagerly onto the asphalt, and the city lights glinted in the distance. Later, both Mr. David and Mrs. Charlotte moved to Georgia, and I wondered how Tara was doing. But whenever I pictured her, her lips shaped out, *“Not enough.”*



St. Mary's Cathedral

Ginny Kramer

Second Place—Photography Competition

Dry Creek: Intimations

Tiffany Croft

I. Reading

On those summer days when moisture beaded on the backs of necks and dripped lazily down to feet caked in Mississippi mud, I would wedge myself in between the washer and dryer and read. It wasn't an easy task, moving my fading tie-dyed bean bag chair from the dimness of my room to the open and airy kitchen where Mama did laundry. I'd lean back in the squishy chair and prop my feet on the off-white dryer, letting the hum move up and down my legs.

Mama would lug bags full of laundry into the chess square tiled kitchen and plop them down beside me, shaking her head at my foolishness. She'd separate the colors—darks from lights—and ask, "What're you reading this time?" I was always reading something: mostly mystery novels; Nancy Drew or the Hardy Boys would keep me occupied for hours in that cranny. Sometimes, I'd look up and watch the clothes bounce around in the washer, mismatched socks chasing t-shirts through murky water.

That's when I'd think that someday I'd write my own novels. Probably not mystery, no. I wanted to write something that would change the world, or at least the part of the world who knew I existed.

Some days, when Mama had to work, she'd drop me off at Nanny's house. My grandmother lived in a two-bedroom sun-yellow house about twenty yards from home. The garden behind Nanny's house always teemed with fire-red tomatoes and crunchy snap peas

that Papaw and I would pull and eat straight from the plant. Nanny would often put me to work shelling peas. She'd set me in front of a bucket full of peapods and I'd tenderly remove the peas from the

shells, dropping the black-eyed peas into the bucket and the slimy husks into a bag.

At the end of the day, when Mama would pick me up, my purple-stained fingers would ache in a good way. And that night, I would curl up in my bean bag chair, the cool air brushing past the top of my head, and read.

II. Writing

The pen spits words onto blank paper; my thoughts take shape as letters with sharp angles and looped endings. Sometimes, the words come easily and pour forth with little effort. At other times, it is a struggle to say what needs to be said. I do not give up, however. Instead, I succumb to the need to fill what is blank. That is why I write.

I have always been a writer. When I was younger, my mother and I lived in a cramped mobile home on a flat grassy lot in Dry Creek, Mississippi. When I was not playing with the few toys I had been given as Christmas gifts, I sat on the front porch of our off-white home and wrote tales of sharp-toothed dragons and young maidens who needed to be rescued.

Once my mother re-married and gave birth to my little sister, Heather, writing became an even more crucial part of my life. The marriage was not a happy one, so problems

Back to the Basics

Adam Stanford

*Honorable Mention—
Photography Competition*



arose, and I spent endless hours in my room at our new home.

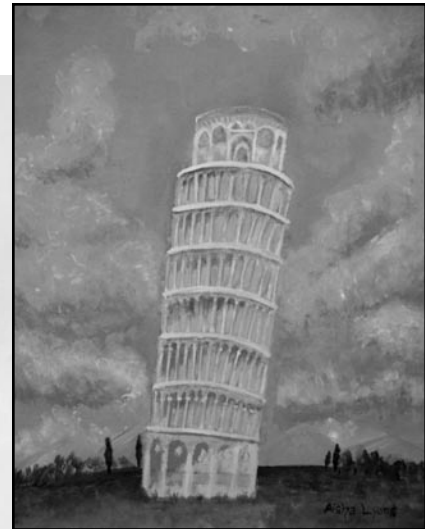
"Why are you always writing?" my mom would ask me, as she hung up laundry or scrubbed dishes. Instead of answering, I would shrug and return to my room, for the shining suds had given me an idea for a story or poem.

Sometimes, my mother would come into my room late at night and find me with my head on my desk, pages of stories sticking to my face. She would usher me to my bed and tell me to get some sleep. I would not sleep, though. My mind whirled with plots (will the girl end up with this man or that one?), settings (Paris, or maybe Rome), and the characters themselves (red hair, blue eyes, and a sunny disposition).

It was not until high school that writing became something more than a personal matter. My freshman English teacher was the first person to tell me that writing was something that I should keep working at. I was beyond surprised that the stories and poems that I had written were more than just random thoughts. They meant something and others just might have wanted to read them.

From then on, I entered every writing contest that I could get my hands on. Placing in them was not my main priority. I merely wanted what I had to say to be heard. I am, however, proud of my handful of writing victories and have learned from my even more numerous rejections and failures.

I stop writing long enough to glance at my right hand and the raised circle of hardened skin that has formed there from years of writing with wooden pencils and ten-cent ballpoint pens. Thoughts of today's main character rattle in my mind. *Should she have blonde hair? Is she a good person? How will her story end?* Then, I stretch my aching fingers, put pen to paper, and begin to write.



Leaning Tower

Aisha Lyons

Ærglie



Bug's Life

Katz Dubickas

Photograph



A Nobody's Story

Czeily Carlisle

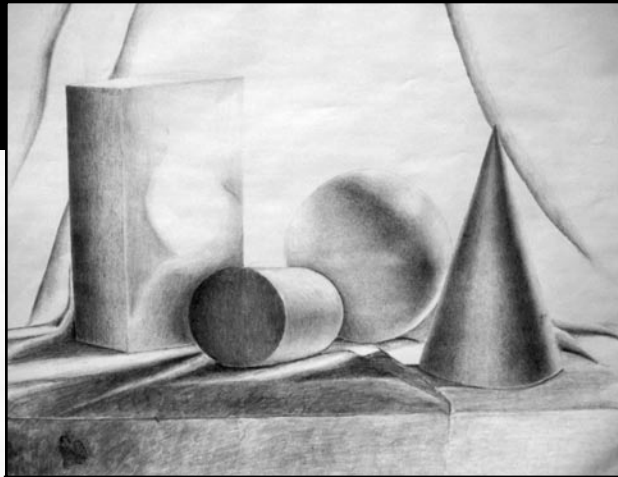
KATHY, Jimmi read from the nametag. The plastic piece hovered, lost between a hefty shelf of breasts and a set of wrinkled lips ribbed in Midnight Ocean Blue, courtesy of Wet 'n' Wild number thirty-seven. Grasping her own bony arm and gathering enough courage to peer past the woman's prow, Jimmi faced something even more daunting than a full figure.

"Front counter." The words slid from Kathy's jeering mouth.

Jimmi didn't need to stay a day at Burger World to know she loathed working behind the front counter. She hated it all—the babies' siren whining, the crooked, trembling fingers of the old plucking nickels from her sweating palm, and the sordid stench of stained sanitary wipes and dog-hot summer lingering in the lavatory door frame. Nobody at the front counter was an anybody.

She sighed a defeated "yes'm" and took her post behind the cashbox and condiments. Finding herself in the eye of a fast-food storm, hanging between the breakfast and lunch rush, Jimmi began surveying the "restaurant." In fact, the building was at best a cramped eatery: the mustard-crusting tables that weren't packed against white-washed walls littered the little remaining space between the soda fountain and side door. The yellowed ceiling perforated the empty air with the mechanical wheeze of trillion-watt light bulbs and the squealing electric chords of a nineties no one on local station KLOV98.

A stray wandered in, the youngest thirty-four-year-old that Jimmi had ever seen. His hair stuck stiff-up, a mere centimeter from his carrot-colored skull, and above his army cargo



Forms in Graphite

Ena Wei

pencil

Second Place, Drawing—Art Competition

shorts billowed a t-shirt bearing a nearly naked Paris Hilton, splay-legged against a creamy backdrop. The sadist.

Jimmi chewed the inside of her cheek, restless, as the man pretended to consider the menu behind her, or rather as he *scanned her cans*, as her brother liked to say. Paris finally chanced a lean upon the counter.

"Ready to order now?" Jimmi side-stepped another whiff of his Family Dollar aftershave.

"Are you on the menu?"

"Not at this place."

"Then I'll have a number four, no onions. To go." He grinned.

"Five seventy-nine, please." As Family Dollar handled his crumpled five, Jimmi noted the pale strip of skin that encircled his left ring finger. She directed him to the other end of the counter.

Her prim lips stiffening into a smile, Jimmi watched silently as seven or so Hispanics filed through the front entrance, and she waited for their approach. The men muttered in swelling waves of vowels, buzzing amongst themselves. *Oh's*, *ah's* and breathless *eh's* padded Jimmi's ears, their clicking consonants pricking like Morse code. One of the men, muscled and mustached, shuffled up to her.

"Hi, welcome to Burger World. Ready to order?" Jimmi bit at her grin and winced.

"Hola...Habla español?"

"Eh...sí, sí, piqueño." The man leered, and Jimmi surrendered a quick prayer to the god of internationality that her dusty ninth-grade Spanish skills would be sufficient for Kathy and the Hispanics. "Qué necesitas?"

"Uno numero dos, três numero siete, non con Ketchup, uno numero cuatro, y dos numero diez, por favor."

"Sí, sí. Yo repito: *uno* number *dos*, *trés* number *sen-te*, *con* no Ketchup, *uno* number *cuatro*, and *dos* number *da-yez*. Sí?"

"Eh...sí, sí." They all nodded, chortling and sharing the man's smirk.

Donning her own plastic smile, Jimmi eyed an incoming teenage couple and felt her patience teeter once again toward its breaking point. She hurriedly tapped onto the register what she hoped was Mustache's order, handed the customer his two dollars of change, and pulled seven bucket-sized cups from beneath the counter.

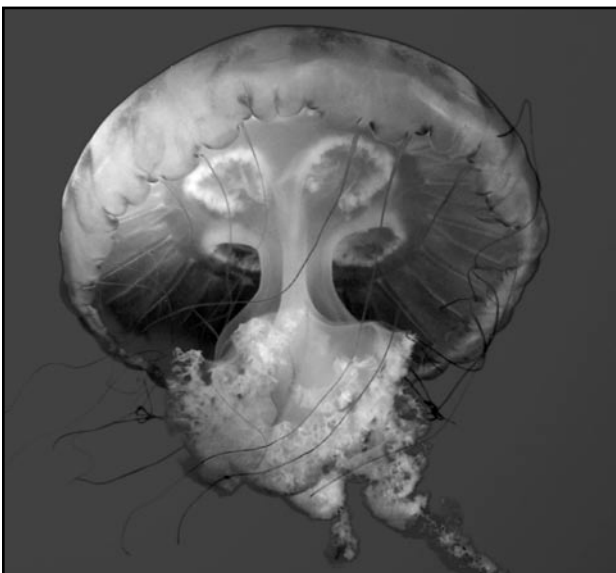
The couple detached long enough for the

girl to rush for the restroom and the boy to order two Cokes.

After seeing to the customers' orders, Jimmi too ventured to the Burger World bathroom. Her foot caught the crinkled edge of some discarded cardboard container. *HOME PREGNANCY TEST*.

Taking a tired seat on the single toilet, Jimmi willed herself to relax. She melted into her reflection, muddled in the toilet water pooled between her Reeboks, and thought back to Kathy's dark face.

How many men had ogled Kathy's generous bust? How many had wedding rings or even ring shadows? Just how many secrets did those blue lips keep, and how many languages lined their corners? She thought to the could-maybe-baby. How many nobodies would he give his secrets to?



Cnidera

Joshua Lonthair

*Third Place Photograph—
Art Competition*

Earthly Delights

Heaven is
A square room
Of wafting smells
And black metal pans on walls,

Where with spatula and chopsticks in hand,
A loving woman cooks
Teriyaki, beef, hot and sour,
Gravy, red, green, yellow,
For her loved ones.

I stare
Into a grimy window,
Shoes dripping with mud,
Sweat dripping from my brows,
At Mama cooking,
A greedy hunger,
Dripping from my mouth.

Jack Li

Mockingbirds

Christopher Vick

Darkness falls at 6 p.m. in the autumn chill of Mississippi. Twilight seeps reds and yellows and violets through the visible horizon, to be replaced with the eerie black that follows. The crepuscular creatures frolic in their moment of glory, while the rest of the world pauses uneasily in the dramatic change, and then continues with its life. I do my best writing at this time, when the winds become cool and the streetlights pop on, like ideas suddenly realized. Past the busyness of the daylight hours, the darkness calms my mind, which begins to engage itself in the words on the page. Sometimes when I am not physically at a computer or with a pencil at this time, I will string together sentences in my head. Sentences that I think are the best I've ever thought up. Sentences that the great English poets and American writers would become green with envy after reading. Sentences that I can never remember. Mathematics is a logical subject that simply requires memorization—I can do that at any hour. But writing takes time.

I've always wanted to be a writer. My mother used to force my sister and me to read at least one book every month when we were in elementary school. And since the first time I read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I became addicted to the English language. Atticus Finch is one of my favorite characters; a (rarely) gun-slinging lawyer who shines as a beacon of hope in a time where hope is desperately needed. The art of manipulating words

into logical phrases, and still creating symbols and deeper meanings, has fascinated me. And how the words, unlike real life, are allowed to be biased, are allowed to judge, and to question, and to make statements and demands for change. Since then the plots, the settings, the climaxes, the denouements, the *characters* of every story have become engraved in my mind. Characters so dynamic, so real, that when the story ends, I have to sigh and stare at the back cover, taking in the words once more. And then read it again. It's at these times I realize how much more there remains to be said.

Harper Lee and other authors make my mind shiver. They act as catalysts in me, as I realize the depths to which writing can go. My fingers twitch with every passing word, eager for the time when they will form their own. My brain reaches and grasps, desperate to find the phrases that will compare. My heart skips a beat each time I read Scout Finch and Boo Radley's exchanges, and how much more real they are compared to the people I pass every day.

I hope to be the cause of these inspirations, to catalyze a story of my own; through teaching, maybe. Or perhaps just as a friend, and become a character myself. But the best would be through writing my own characters and story, my own mockingbird, and that some child, in the twilight hours, will discover it and read it and finish it and stare at the back cover and sigh, and read it again.



The Sound of My Father

Elizabeth Scratt

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

“A long, long time ago,” crooned the crackled speakers. During the first minute or so, the tape whirled almost louder than the piano and sad voice. Daddy’s rasped voice sang along with Don McLean’s, creating an unmatched echo. Fields, trees, cars, ditches zoomed by as the tempo sped up.

We were going to see my grandmother, the one who lives deep in the hills of Arkansas. The sun hadn’t even begun to yawn, and the moon had barely begun to hide behind the tall oaks when we crossed the bridge that morning. I peeked through the window for the river, but the only evidence of its existence was the call of a tugboat, alone in the blanket of darkness that still wrapped my Delta world. Soon, past Lake Chicot and the burned-down house, pinks and yellows and creamsicle oranges began to fight for control with the navy and black and pricks of stars as Daddy’s big hands slipped the tape into the player. It was an unspoken tradition of ours to listen to the tape of Don McLean’s second album until it sputtered

to an end as we stopped for breakfast at the McDonald’s in Dumas. On the next stretch of highway, Daddy’d tell me the stories behind the lyrics—Buddy Holly, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones—and how music changed over the course of his lifetime until I slipped into a doze against the window to the sound of his deep voice. After a while, Daddy would stop talking and start humming; I could always hear it, no matter how far I’d stepped into dreamland. When the sun was high and bright, Daddy would turn on “American Pie” again. It was his way of waking me up as the truck eased into the shade of a thin tree.

The morning I left home, as the pick-up moved over our uneven driveway, I turned to look at the house in the soft August morning light one more time. Piles of my possessions in the bed of the truck obstructed my view, but I could still see the rows of books on the church pew by the back door, the gardening gloves and shoes in the crate, the dog pillow, the magnolias. I closed my eyes, wanting to remember every rough patch of cypress, the writing in the poured concrete that hid in the shade of the azaleas. Daddy rustled around, and then came the hum of the tape player.

“A long, long time ago.”

Niagara Falls

Joshua Lonthair

Photograph



Extra Cheese

Christopher Vick

Second Place—Short Story Competition

Daniel stood by the black cash register behind the worn, wooden counter covered with old-time photos and newspapers protected by a sheet of glass, watching the shadow of the door dance back and forth as it opened and closed. The yellow sunlight was pale and hazy, as if too tired to keep up its hue. The pizza ovens five feet behind him made his back sweat as they heated and his red uniform shirt stuck to his skin. The wetness made him look greasier than the regular *Italia's* pizza worker, but he was the only one who was supposed to work with the cash. His eyes turned toward the customers who came in.

"Welcome to *Italia's*, can I get you anything, sir?" he flashed a toothy smile to the grey-haired, rugged faced man on the other side of the counter. He was tall and wore a wife-beater with rusty jeans. The man held the hand of a little blonde girl in a bright purple tutu, who smiled back at Daniel.

"Can I get uh...a double-stuffed with extra-cheese, an uh regular cheese? And a beer," he asked, his Southern accent thick. He added the last statement only after Daniel saw his eyes trail towards the cooler near the back.

"Sure, just a moment, sir," Daniel punched in the numbers while the man nodded and

looked for a seat, the girl following him. Reluctantly, Daniel noted. The man sat, but the girl stood by his table, looking around at the customers.

"Daddy, watch me twirl!" she screeched, loud enough for the few people in the small room to hear. Everyone in the restaurant turned

and admired her perfect spin, jump, and stumble into the concrete, where she sat defeated like a wilting violet—violet, and slightly pathetic. Not a very graceful ballerina, Daniel thought.

Beside the counter was a case that held all the pre-

made pizzas. Daniel took a slice of the double-stuff and the regular cheese and held them carefully in his left hand while his right one opened

the steel casing of the oven. Heat scorched his muddy brown eyes, his pores opened, and he carefully set the two pieces in the correct depth. Too far and they would burn. Too shallow and they would take too long to heat. He knew from experience that customers hated waiting long for what was supposed to be the best and fastest pizza in town. He took a beer from the cooler, being sure to grab a cold one, and set it down by the father, who nodded his thanks. Daniel knew he wasn't technically allowed to



The Island
Joshua Lonthair
Photograph

serve alcohol until he was twenty-one, but no one who worked there was even over twenty, except the owner. Daniel and Charlie, the pizza maker for Fridays, were the only two workers in that day.

Daniel settled behind the counter again, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the glass and his chin in his tan hands. His black, curly hair fell into tendrils in front of his eyes. He liked it—thought it made him look like some Greek god, and it made it easier to pretend to be somewhere else. It grew darker outside, which Daniel knew meant it grew closer to closing time. He didn't like working with pizza. He hated the food himself. He felt like he was serving killer grease to people, and getting paid for it, like an assassin. The grease didn't do much for his wallet or morals. Or complexion. His eyes drifted down to the clip-pings and photographs he always daydreamed about when business was slow. The Miami beaches, winters in Canada, cruise ships in the Caribbean, and local offices were always the setting. The personal ads were his favorite. In particular one that read "Older woman seeking playmate her own age," with a woman about sixty years old by it. He didn't recognize the name or the face, but every time he saw the clipping, he imagined a dirty image, and would laugh at the idea of looking for a "playmate" in a newspaper. Jerking his head quickly up, Daniel remembered the pizzas.

He went to the oven and, using a pair of tongs, removed the two pizzas and set them on a plate. Just as he got around the counter, though, he paused and remembered. Double-stuff, with extra-cheese. The double-stuff on his plate had only regular cheese. Daniel stopped and sighed, and turned back around. He set the regular cheese pizza aside. Daniel

took from the condiments cabinet the shredded cheese and sprinkled a thick layer that fell like lace over the double-stuff, and set it back into the oven. He knew getting an order wrong meant not only having to give the pizza away for free, but it was also bad reputation for the restaurant.

Italia's restaurant was a small joint known mostly for its old-timey atmosphere. Made of dusty brick and washed-out curtains, old folks loved it, and the occasional group of teenagers would also make it a regular hang out spot. It sat on a side street of the town, where only a few people drove. The owner didn't have much money, so the restaurant couldn't afford much advertisement. Instead the place achieved renown through word-of-mouth. It was this fact that always made Daniel slightly flustered, wanting to make sure he was polite and prompt with orders. But he had always been slightly forgetful. The owner was nice, but would often get impatient with him. No reputation was better than a bad one. Daniel was, however, talented at math, which was why he was one of the few cashiers. Adding to the atmosphere of the restaurant, the cash registers didn't automatically tell how much change was owed.

"Hey, Daniel," Charlie, the only other employee there with Daniel that day, came in from the back. He was much shorter than Daniel, with reddish hair and a face crowded with freckles. He set a newly made mushroom pizza down.

"Oh, hey, Charlie. Thanks," Daniel grabbed the pizza and laid it out in the display case. He heard Charlie begin laughing. "What's up?"

"Ole Donnie is back, and he's harassing some girl in a tutu," he said, still chuckling. Ole Donnie was a local homeless man who would

set up residence outside random shops and beg outside them, like Girl Scout cookie salespeople. He was dressed in four jackets and black track pants. His hair was twisted like a bird's nest, with leaves and sticks and spit mixed in. When the owner was in he usually chased Ole Don away, but Charlie and Daniel liked him. They weren't allowed to give him any food, though, since it would show up a discrepancy in the money and amount of pizza left.

"Anyway, we shouldn't need anymore pizza for the night. I'm headin' home. See ya, dude," Charlie took off his cap and waved goodbye. On his way to his car, he nodded towards Don, who raised two fingers as a response. Charlie's car was an old, bent up piece of scrap metal that he thought attracted the ladies, but Daniel knew it only attracted more rust. It sped out of the parking lot towards the town, and Daniel watched it, sighing. He jerked his head again, and again remembered the pizzas.

Holding the double-stuff, now with an obvious amount of extra cheese on the top, and a regular cheese pizza, he walked towards the tables, but couldn't find the man or girl.

"Double-stuff with extra cheese, and a regular cheese?" No one replied.

"Double-stuff with extra cheese, and a regular cheese?" he repeated, louder, ruder. Still no reply. Regretting having to tell the boss his mistake the next day, he returned to the counter and unceremoniously set the plate down with a clang. The man could have at least said something, Daniel thought, fuming in his mind. He watched Don ask for money from the last few customers leaving, and picked up the pizzas and went outside.

"Hey, Don," Daniel said, setting the pizzas in front of him like you would set down food before an angry bear. Don glared at the

pizzas and then Daniel, and then grabbed the regular cheese and bit down, hard. Daniel smiled, and heard his own stomach growl. He realized he was pretty hungry, too. He sat in one of the wire chairs around the patio tables, and leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

"I can't pay for this," Don said, already halfway done with the pizza, as though the idea suddenly came to him that Daniel hadn't been giving it away. He said it in a rough, slurred voice. Daniel laughed and waved his hand, his eyes still closed.

"It's on the house," he said, thinking he'd just pay for it with his own money later. "Man, I hate this job. Bad pay, and all it does is give me more pimples. And the customers are always jerks to me," Daniel complained. "And I'm hungry, but all there is to eat is this damn pizza...How've you been, Don?"

"Like birds and bees," Don said, taking a quick break after the first slice. Daniel sat up, and turned to him, confused.

"Huh?"

"Like 'squitos and dragon-flies," Don repeated, a smile appearing on his dirt-covered face. "Like twinklin' stars and cold winds," he said again, a bigger smile showing up. Daniel playfully kicked him.

"What're you talking about?"

"Like the moon," he cracked up now, falling over, and Daniel saw the bottle next to him. Ole Donnie was drunk. Daniel grinned and turned his head heavenward and closed his eyes again.

"You're crazy, Don."

"Maybe. But I'm homeless and don't complain much as you," he said, rising slowly. "Thanks for the food."

Daniel watched him stumble, still slightly drunk, across the narrow street beyond

Italia's. "See ya, Don," he yelled, and Don threw up his arm as a crude wave. As a driver honked his horn and yelled out his window at Ole Donnie, Daniel couldn't help but grin. He stood and grabbed the tray to take it inside and close the building, but he stopped at the weight of the plate and noticed that Don had only eaten one pizza, the regular cheese. Daniel stared back through the darkness, but Don was out of sight. Realizing Don had left the pizza for him, Daniel set the plate

back down and sat in the wire-framed chair, propping his feet on the table. Grabbing the slice and taking a bite, he turned towards the street. With the small lights of the city twinkling with the stars, with gnats and dragonflies and mosquitoes competing for air space, with the cool winds whispering around the corners of brick buildings, with the moon casting shorter but darker shadows across the parking lots, Daniel watched and ate in silence.



The Small Things in Focus

Kate Dubickas

First Place—Photography Competition

Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time,
there was a man with a beard, a daughter, and a leather jacket.
He knew no lullabies, save "Silent Night."
And looked vaguely like a Shar- Pei puppy.
Cigarette smoke, Cool Water and old leather made up his scent.
He could cook crab cakes and couscous, but not
macaroni and cheese.
With a storyteller's voice,
He read to his daughter for hours every night.
A silly grown up, he taught her so much:
Literature, carpentry, music, politics, life.
Eventually, he shaved the beard,
and his daughter went away,
but he still had the leather jacket.

Elizabeth Scratt

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition



Echo

Dong Song

Clayboard

15

We Buried Him Under a Grey Sky

That's not black
he said, fingering the hem of my shirt.
I nodded, looked out the window of the silver Cadillac:
the green tent and wintered trees blocked grey sky, full of rain.
The seat was slick, the ground soggy;
my church shoes sank in the mud of the private plot.
Grass roots stretched across the grave, reaching for something
as Nanny took the triangle of red, white, blue.
There were no flowers

Bring me flowers when I'm alive.

No point in decoratin' where my body's at.

It's not like I'm there.

Elizabeth Scratt

Lily

Joshua Lonthair

Photograph



Mississippi Soil

Cecily Carlisle

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

“I feel like a wet seed wild in hot blind earth.” —William Faulkner

I. Growin’ Up Dumb

My eight-year-old legs straddled a stump. One, two, three, four, seven—my best friend Brittany Stepp counted my black leg hairs. I was jealous. She had twelve of them on her own legs and wore a halter top. Summer stinging my eyes, I saw Bubba strutting up the stained dirt path from home to the sweating tool shed. Bubba was Brittany’s older brother, nineteen and full to the brim with it. He carried a little, withered green New Testament stuffed behind the Black & Mild cigars in his front shirt pocket, and like the shed, I wasn’t allowed to go around him much.

Twisting his head to the side, Bubba slid between the shack’s double doors, hand over heart to protect his tobacco.

“Whadda ya think’s in there?” I breathed to Brittany, though I already knew some of it: I had seen Bubba carry in a poster the day before—it was felt, with dogs dealing cards, and Brittany told me it was for luck in his poker games. I’d only ever learned to play King’s Corners, so I wasn’t quite sure what she meant.

“It ain’t nothing good,” she said. “Just some old cables and tractor parts, I think. And a boom box. Nothin’, really.” Nothing? That was better than Christmas! In fact, I had asked for a boom box the year before and hadn’t gotten one. With all of those things, we could put on our own radio show, easy.

The shed was fantastic: all wood, like a cabin or the secret clubhouse from my Baby-sitter’s Club books. Like gingerbread trimming,

pieces of tar squares hung down from the sloped, broken roof. The shed had only one window, stained-glass from the Corona and Michelob bottles lining its sill, and so high up that not even Brittany could see into it. My favorite part was the floor; I’d never seen it, but Brittany swore it was just dirt, ground, no wood or carpet or anything.

Brittany rode four-wheelers and wore short skirts. She had three boys’ phone numbers, from what I knew, and she called them on her own portable phone. Like Brittany’s life, the shed was part of a whole universe of things my mother told me to avoid. She called it “growin’ up right,” but I called



ESP

Shelby Stæelhammer

Photograph

it “growin’ up dumb.” I didn’t care for Polly Pockets, tea sets, or teddy bears; I wanted to know about men and dirt. I had a yearning to see the guts of sheds and wear snakeskin boots to school instead of my penny loafers.

Things have changed since that eight-year-old day: Brittany has a baby girl of her own to warn, and I am hard at work, buried in the books of academia, where I don’t see many Brittany’s. But to the horror of my mother, I swear that the girl is still much a part of who I am. I find traces of her every day—in the honest dirt sticking to my fingertips after sweeping the nests of leftover sod from my father’s Ford, and in my own slight smile as I apply Cover Girl’s Barely There eye shadow before a Tuesday night movie with the girls. Though she probably doesn’t realize it, Brittany brought out the beauty and risk in simple sheds and boys like Bubba. Her world has been the fertilizer of my life since childhood.

II. Listening

I remember my father, shufflin’ up dust from the trailer porch, and my mother, sweating out our Sunday supper to the swinging sex of Steppenwolf. This was before men were banished to the barn to light their pipes, when smoke painted everything in the house that sticky, sickly yellow, and Momma wore her best white dress to Wal-Mart.

But what I remember best are the eggs—we had our own set of hens plus a cock or two. Back then, they fed me eggs with every meal, until I got so full I had to speak. And when I spoke, the language broke out of me and came running, ’til I just couldn’t quit anymore. Then came the written words.

Even without the words, though, there were still voices—the wind licking through my ears from the bed of our pick-up, the dumb bumping of palms laid flat against kitchen

cabinets, even the seething pop of my father’s Marlboro. These were my friends and my familiars, but my mother sought something different. For a time, my world swelled and shook, until again I found footing, at seven years old.

Our new home, discordantly silent and empty of working women, was set off by the shimmy and shrieking of neighborhood children. Rather than gusting up gravel, their din met the padded pavement before settling again against our window panes.

But even these voices weren’t enough for me. I spent hours slinking and sneaking about the house, scooting around couch corners and skulking beneath dust ruffles, trying to catch my mother’s words. Her voice would bubble up to me from the living room and soap my ears good, ’til I could find just the right hiding spot to listen.

My mother made my mouth. I am convinced that my lips are so small-set from all the coffee cups she let me sip from so early. Unlike the many other parents I’ve met, my mother welcomed me into her bedroom, set me up a nest at the head of her bed. In the morning, I’d find myself there, just smelling her—always Design, sweat, and Virginia Slims. And in the evening, she’d sing me there with tales from Beverly Cleary, C. S. Lewis, Jane Austen.

In reading those words filling the pages, I wondered who really spoke them to me, but now I know: it is all those voices I remember, in just the right order.



Car in Old-Fashioned Style

Austin Clinton

Photograph

III. In Their Words

I can remember, my mother fed me words with my green beans.

"You are Mummy's little girl, my dorter," she would coo, spooning in soup or what-have-you. Adding letters, it was refined, like Old English: "dramatical," "styupid," and "warsh."

But my father liked dirt and a dog's bark in his speaking, cutting up consonants with staccatos.

"Crank that tractor, girl—I'm gon' teach you somethin'." He'd sip his sweet tea as my hand slipped for the engine switch. "What boy you been seein'?" he always wanted to know. "Is he a home boy?" A home boy, a "down home" boy, a "right down country" boy. He never was.

The old must keep gardens on their tongues; all of my grands and greats spoke in terms of vegetables.

"Hit's about time for meh squarsh." The words never failed to rattle out of Great Uncle Bob.

"How ya been, Uncle Bob? How's it been goin' in Pontotoc?" I'd ask.

"Hit's been just fine, I reckon. Time for my tomatoes; ain't sure if they gon' show or not." But I know they're going to show; I can already find them springing up in the voices of my parents. I call my mother, and she is "just warshing some cucumbers."

"Been pickin' these kids some cantaloupe," huffs my father when I ask about his summer months.

I suppose my own tongue is still untitled earth, uncharted territory. I'll probably keep a garden as well some day, but with a little more pesticides thanks to "awll that book learnin'."



Mirror Water

Tiffany Croft

Honorable Mention—Photography Competition

Rooftop View

Tiffany Croft

Photograph



Trapped

Miranda Shugars

She steps as she has never stepped before; within the insole of her step, echoes hide. She contemplates the space between the arch of her foot and the dark stone beneath, her rattling breath; recreating lost sound in silent apathy.

pat.

pat. pat. pat.

Her instep screams in protest, wrenchingly screams, silent screams silenced by the stone and their own flesh. Her screams were not silent—no, not they, who bound freely from stone to stone, to bar, rusty iron, to stone. They had wings, she knew. But now she has no voice.

Air flees, rattling her chest, ravaging her throat, harsh. *pat. pat.* she says. She recalls flight, too, like an angel, never touch the ground. But her wings rusted through like the chain on the stone, borne too much blood. She is not fettered; so she steps.

pat— pat— pat—

Her sole cries.

pat. pat. pat.

She replies.

Her skin creeps and writhes over knitted scars and old, old burns—burns on her wrists, her ankles, her throat, circling like snakes; as lithely, each step flees to grace. She touches the floor as she touches nothing—there is no progress, only the steps forward she cannot take. All of her, and her feet scream against their false prison.

Her sole raises flurries, small whirls of dust from long-dead feathers; they brush her face and pass secretly by. She follows them with her dead stare, as they leave behind rusty bars.

Her sole recognizes the space beyond, boundless mystery, and veers. Sleep trickles in tendrils through the bars, clouds near her feet; behind, her rusted chains.

Her sole crosses.

pat. pat. pat.

Then, one final imparted on her bare arm, *pat*, and there is nothing more. Her parents kneel beside her, her doctor leaves, and she, from her white gown, flees.

Fish Out of Water

Katę Dubickas

Photograph



How Long?

Rachel Selph

Second Place—Essay Competition

Light filtered through the translucent window, and I can't remember if my brother was there or not. I remember my mom, holding me back while I shoved to reach the glass. After all, maybe if my tiny fists could beat loudly enough on the diaphanous wall he would turn back around and see me. He couldn't leave if he saw me, right? It was always like that back then, though, especially the separation anxieties (I would learn that was what to call these bouts later). Only I found it was more common for the child to never want to leave her *mom*; well, in that sense my dad was like my mother. He was the one who stayed at home while Mom worked endless hours of my childhood as a secretary for some big cheese of a sports company. I loved her, too, but never got to see her, except in the mornings and at night. At least Dad was home most of the time—well, most of the time.

"How long?" I would ask, biting my lips and scowling at the floor; it was a look as unfit as a grin on an owl. He would glance at me, play around on the frets and strings while tuning the gleaming bass in his fingers. I'm sure he could hear me, or mostly sure. Maybe the music he played really was too loud for my voice to reach him, or all the years of rock-concert speakers had damaged his ears. I'd like to think the latter, because I always had to ask again.

"How long this time?"

He would carefully set the bass guitar in its case and with a click sit back up. "Don't worry, Chickie Pea, it's just a gig. I'll be back sooner than you notice I'm gone."

It wasn't a clear answer; they never thought to explain to a five-year-old what was really going on. Five-year-olds weren't old enough to listen and know yet.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm playing with the band tonight."

"No!" I would clench my fists and bite at my lip till it felt raw and tender. "When are you coming home?"

Here he would pause, but I never remembered the answer. The nights of gigs and then months on tour carefully bled together so that anytime he left the house with his bass in tow I was afraid. Maybe he would be back in the morning; maybe not. They never tell the kids. So we listen carefully. Parents' Day at school would come, and he would be there with Mom.

"And what does your dad do?"

"Oh, he plays in a rock band..."

"COOL!"

"What about yours?"

"He works at home on the computer..."

Each of us could hear the envy layered thick like syrup in the others' voice, neither understanding why the other could feel that way.

Then next day—

Laugh...

... Smile,

Pat on the head,
suitcase and...

Bass.

"Love you, Chickie Pea... ,
I'm... leaving... for..."

Will be back... soon..."

"How long, Daddy? How long?"

"Soon, Chickie Pea, real soon."

"A month? A week? A day?"

"Just playing a gig, sweetie."

"But how *long*?"

The Solitude of Contemplation

Adam Stanford

Photograph



Lovely Ladybug

A ladybug rests upon a leaf
 I wonder what she is thinking
 Her red orange shell contrasts
 Against the bright green leaf
 Covered in morning dew
 I count the black spots on her body
 One, two, three, four, five, six
 I wonder what she is dreaming of
 Maybe of peace
 Maybe of love or happiness
 She spreads her wings
 To fly away
 Towards the rising sun
 Orange, yellow, and pink
 Maybe, just maybe
 Her dreams will come true

Tiffany Harris



Golden Life

Sweta Desai

Oil

Third Place, Painting—Art Competition

21



Paradise

Sweta Desai

Acrylic

Hummingbird

flickers outside my window
curls his tongue and
steals my sugar water.

His head and back are swaying grass,
his throat and stomach blazing Autumn trees
against his ashy beak;
he hovers
and wrinkles the air
as his wings whirl like heat waves.

He comes and goes
as the season withers and sucks
the colour from the weeds
and floating seeds
and ivy wreaths.

But he leaves vivid trails
and steals my sugar water;
and I keep the feeder full
throughout fall.

Miranda Shugars



A Burst of Sunshine

Joshua Lonthair

Photograph

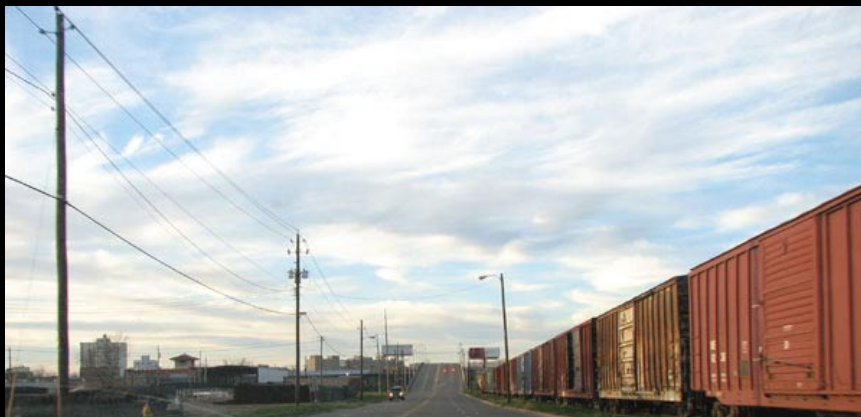
A Thousand Cranes

they were folded with haste
I read desperation in the creases

apologies scribbled on flimsy wings
vivid colors ruined by your silver words

you cannot buy forgiveness

Boram Lee



18th Avenue, Meridian

Ginny Kramer

Photograph

Cotton

Her hands are suited for
dropping chicken in
steamy grease that
pop-cracks against
her blistered skin,
Skin aged in the sun
When her fingers
Snap off tender shoots,
Wrench roots from ground and
Win splinters from shovels,
Shovels she drags out
in bitter winter months
against slicing winds
to hoard snow into
piles of white,
White like the fields of
Bursting cotton where
she used to weave garlands
of emerald silk for her
cotton-colored hair.

Tiffany Croft

Second Place—Poetry Competition



Southern Farm
Tiffany Croft
Photograph

23

A Taste of Mississippi

Aisha Lyons

Watercolor

Second Place, Painting—Art Competition



Mississippi Queen

Kalina Deng

Clayboard

First Place, Drawing—Art Competition

Kitchen Window

the sunlight shines the dust to gold
crashes in like an avalanche

traces the lines of your once-soft hands
but your eyes never leave the windowsill

I cannot imagine,
aspiring composer, how you felt
as you left the baton on the stand

you could have performed
at Carnegie Hall

as a mother, your pianist fingers
casually flick off soapy residue

when you could have instead
continued the birth of song

24

Boram Lee

Third Place—Poetry Competition



Simplicity

Cathy Dickson

Acrylic

Honorable Mention, Painting—Art Competition

Sunday Morning

Elizabeth Scratt

Photograph



The Waitress

She slips feet
fit for dancing
into server's shoes.

Her tender toes
tamp as
she skitters from
table to kitchen
with plates amidst
the symphony of
shattered dish
and din of dying
song.

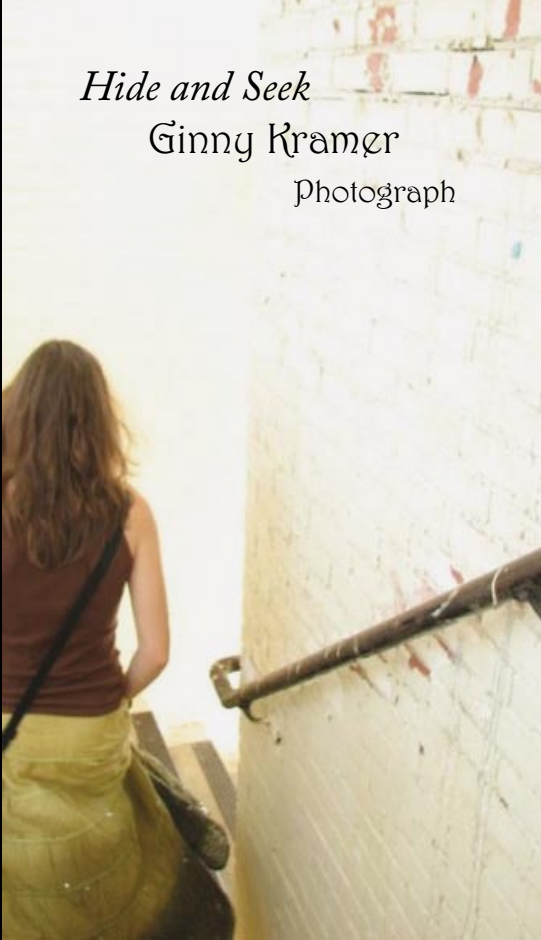
Her dishpan hands
clutch crimped napkins
like roses thrown
on stage.

Tiffany Croft

Hide and Seek

Ginny Kramer

Photograph



almond branches in
bloom

When I see
almond branches in bloom
I think of my sister—
her broken apartment in
New Orleans—broken city—
her one poor, shabby room,
at the top of a narrow wooden stairwell that
peels like bark,
her room that always smells of fish
and ramen—

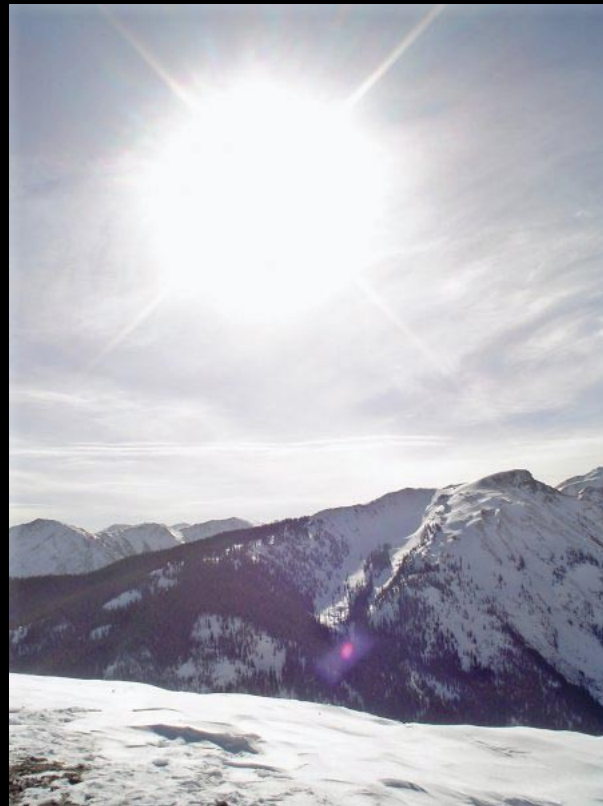
Green twists scars and blooms
white hands
against blue skies reflecting brown eyes—

one of the
posters that fall like leaves from her wall—

When I see
almond branches in bloom
I remember those three months without her;
I still went to class—every day
of seventh grade blurred—
while she missed those three months of tenth.
We talked on the telephone
my hasty breaths and shakes
subsided with her nonchalance—
it was all a mistake—

And when we sit together beneath
live oaks
we watch trolleys clang up St. Charles,
tourists yell and brandish
masks—
the sunlight brushes her bare arms
where scars twist like branches
and my white hands upon hers
like blooms—

Miranda Shugars



Sun-kissed Snow

Adam Stanford

Photograph

Fly.

while I sit here in this metal spiral stairwell,
she stares at the tiny slit of light
through which my smoke escapes
as delicate as a white, translucent moth

up here all concrete and steel and cold

she doesn't mind the god-awful smell
sticking to the wet concrete like saturated honey
and to me, really, that's all that matters
but I know she's only asking one question

she sits there staring, asking, pleading, silent
and I gaze back at her strange black eyes, silent
I answer the only answer I can give
the sound bounces like pearls off
confiding and confining concrete walls

and opaque eyes only dulled again and she turned away
leaning against age-old concrete graffiti-ed
with cliché confessions and colorful profanity
but still pale and unfurnished like an invalid's room
I stood and crushed the fire, waving away the smoke

as I climbed up the stairwell to the rooftop one day,
my eyes widened as a I saw a flutter of white
and she flew, falling, flickering over the side
her hair caught the sunlight and I looked away
towards the sun and further from endings

but God,

it was beautiful

Boram Lee

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition



Edge of Reason

Kalina Deng

Paper collage

*First Place, Painting—
Art Competition*

End of the Day

Joshua Lonthair

Photograph



Off of Route 22

I never took Lennon as a diner man;
there he sat, cigarette in one hand,
pen in the other—scribbling notes on
the pock-marked countertop.
“Gonna write another hit,” he told me.

We sat in the shack off of Route 22 among
women with burgundy lipstick and
too-blue eye shadow trailing down their faces
And the men who watched those women with
glassy gainsboro eyes.

John ordered plate after plate—
stacks of butter-bathed pancakes and
flaking biscuits that crumbled at the touch.
You can afford to be unhealthy when you're dead
and a Beatle, I suppose.

“Shea Stadium—I was on top of the world.”
He mourned for VW Bugs and burlap.
“Does anyone remember?”
Yes, I told him, after a swig of cold coffee,
we still listen.

Tiffany Croft

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition



Hilton

Boram Lee

Photograph

27

Meridian Underground
Ginny Kramer

Photograph



Sounds

Miranda Shugars

Third Place—Essay Competition

My dad always said, “Write about what you know.” My sister and I grew up dancing to this mantra, our bare feet slapping the kitchen’s linoleum in the summer and swinging to Billie Holiday and Miles Davis in the winter, slipping in our socks in time to his golden rule and two great loves: music and composition.

In the center of our half of the duplex at 601 Park Avenue, Lafayette, Indiana, stretched a wooden floor. My dad called it our Dancing Room. There he kept his vast stereo system, record player tape player *and* CD player sandwiched between twin monolithic speakers, which now sits in the corner of his office beneath an inch of dust. But in the Dancing Room he kept it playing his lively blend of jazz and swing, punk, alternative, classical, and country and spun my sister and me in circles.

In the winter the room was filled with warmth, and light cast through the numerous windows by snow banks and swirling flakes, and sound—the low rumble of the heater, the sweet chords of my mother’s violin, amplified by the high ceiling and wooden walls, or the seasonal Frank Sinatra—or the radio. I remember tracing intricate veins of frost through icy window panes and listening to “A Prairie Home Companion” with my sister on Saturday mornings as the scent of sizzling pancakes drifted in from the kitchen.

“A Prairie Home Companion” is the first radio program I actively listened to. The delightful adventures of Guy Noir, Private Eye, and The Lives of the Cowboys captivated me, and I always anticipated Garrison Keillor’s news from Lake Wobegone, where “all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” The sound effects man, Tom Keith, who amplified Keillor’s stories with astoundingly accurate sounds, often creating the illusion that there was actually a can of whipped cream, an elephant, or even a Firebird with them in the studio, was my favorite. His exotic sounds lent the radio life.

Even before Prairie Home I heard—though comprehensive listening didn’t come until later—the news. My dad kept at least one radio in the house tuned to NPR at all times. When I started kindergarten, I could already recognize NPR’s shows by their theme songs.

In my dorm room, I listen to the news before school every morning, when the seven o’clock “Morning Edition” music transports me through middle school, grade school, back to



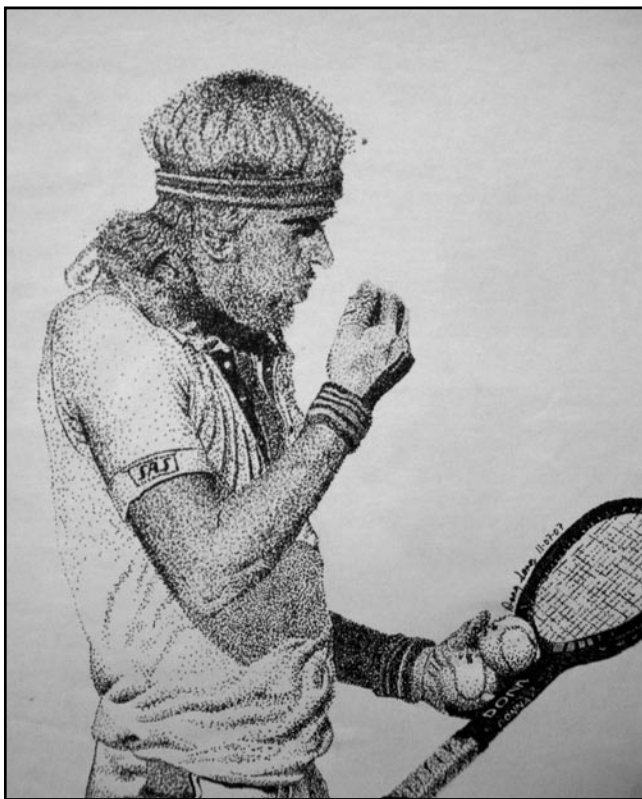
Music

Sweta Desai

Aerylie

chilly September when my first year began—when I woke up every day to the music, ate breakfast to it five mornings a week. Sometimes I arrived in the kitchen a bit later, in time for the stock market announcement, when the song was always “We’re in the Money,” and the voice-over reported that the Dow had shot up again.

As I aged I learned to recognize voices, too: Terri Gross, who has always been my favorite NPR reporter, Robert Siegal and Melissa Block, Neal Conan, and the distinctive hesitation of Diane Rehm. Before I cared about the news updates, I listened to “This American Life,” short, autobiographical essays, almost always brilliant, presented by their writers. My dad’s mantra always returned to me when I heard this program: “Write about what you know.”



Match Point

Dong Song

Stipple in ink

Third Place, Drawing—Art Competition



Winter Mockingbird

Jang Girard

Scratchboard

Sedentary

On riverbanks, graphic girls unlace,
and river rats swell with sullen snakes.
My grandmother says,
“It’s something in the water.”

But the girls,
They drink from the same bell jars
that dusted my own mother’s tongue,
at a sweating seventeen—

That spread across the stained sheets
of her second year
married,
Barren.

Cecily Carlisle

Lifeguard on Duty

Thompson Segars

First Place—Short Story Competition

The Chris Read Award for Fiction

I've only had one paying job in my entire life, if you could even call it a job. I was hired by a woman in my neighborhood to lifeguard for her son's birthday party at the swimming pool at Lake Lurleen State Park. The party was two hours long. I had a job for two hours.

Lake Lurleen is a state park northwest of Tuscaloosa. The park is full of evergreen trees, rolling hills, it has many campsites, and it is located next to Lake Lurleen. Lake Lurleen is the main attraction of the park, and for reasons unbeknownst to me, the park has a swimming pool. I shouldn't question it, though. It got me a job after all. For two hours.

I drove through the winding county roads that were in such a state of disrepair you wouldn't think that their ultimate destination was a state park. The entrance to the park is marked by a security shack in the middle of the street and a small little creek that runs across the street in front of the shack. I drove over the creek and stopped by the dingy little building. The windows were grimy with years of natural, green crud that looked like an algae-covered rock, but I could still see that there was no one inside. There wasn't even a gate, just a little box on top of a post that had a hole in the top of it. Written on the side of the box was "HONOR BOX." I scoffed at the idea of people actually stopping to put their hard-earned money in the box to enjoy a public park. No one was that full of the "milk of human kindness." To prove my assumption, I drove into the park without

paying. I shook off a feeling of guilt that was creeping upon me from the back of my mind as I navigated by the signs that pointed to the pool. The twisted roads cut into the forests like a snake slithering through the water. The trees broke over the opposite side of the road momentarily and I saw a vast lake, shimmering in the afternoon sun. I could see people swimming, people fishing, people in campsites, people boating, people skiing, and people just enjoying the outdoors. Once again, I was perplexed as to why the park officials decided to spend money on a pool. I continued to follow the signs until I ended up in the parking lot to the pool. No



Endless Daisies

Erin Rauenhurst

Acrylic

Honorable Mention, Painting—
Art Competition

one else was there. I decided to get everything straightened out and situated while I waited. The swimming pool was enclosed in a heavy, metal fence. The entrance was actually a small building that housed the bathrooms and changing rooms. The building was shaped somewhat like a boxy “n.” The two legs of the “n” were the changing rooms and bathrooms, and the hole through the middle was the entrance to the pool. All of this was under one roof. I walked through the middle of the giant “n,” and I checked out the pool—actually two pools: a little kiddy pool that was no more than one foot deep and the big kids’ pool that was shaped like a kidney with crystal blue water inside and was five feet deep at its deepest. “Five feet?” I asked to no one in particular. “That’s it?” I jumped when a park ranger that I hadn’t noticed standing back by the “n” responded to my aimless inquiry.

“Yeah, I don’t even know why they have a pool here. I mean, they could have at least made it a decent pool, you know?” he said with a sneer quivering on his upper lip. His uniform was all khakis and greens and his appearance was what could only be described as normal. He looked like the poster boy for the “Average Joe American.” I wondered if he had a normal name and a normal wife and a normal house with normal kids.

“Oh, hi, I’m here for the Robinsons’ birthday pool party,” I said. He gave me a quiz-zical look after I said this, which made me give him one back. Realization dawned on me soon enough. “I’m the lifeguard,” I added. His normal face quickly cleared.

“I thought you looked a little old to be playin’ with the age group that’s supposed to be here. The name’s John,” he said. I knew it.

“Thomas,” I replied. We shook hands.

“Do you have any credentials?” he asked. I pulled out my lifeguard certificate and handed it to him. He had a wedding ring on. I wondered what his normal wife’s name

was. “Ok, looks good,” he said. There was an awkward silence as I looked around once more. The lifeguard chair was just a plastic chair sitting at the kidney’s indentation. Sunbathing chairs were scattered all around the edge next to the fence, and the poles that were used to clean the pool were on the far side by the kiddy pool where they were attached to the fence.

“Is there any kind of lifeguard equipment around here?” I asked.

“Well, uh, we got those poles you use to get leaves out of the pool,” he replied. “I guess you could use one of those to fish the kids out from the bottom.” He chuckled when he said that. I just smiled a fake smile. Fishing kids out was not something I wanted to think about. I thanked normal John then went to the changing rooms to change.

The Robinsons arrived shortly afterwards. Mrs. Robinson is one of those middle-aged women that thinks she’s still got it. She’s a round woman, but she’s not overweight. She has a round face with beady eyes all under a mane of dyed strawberry blonde hair. She always makes me uncomfortable.

“Hello, Thomas. Thanks for coming,” she said. A smirk curled up one side of her mouth. She looked me up and down, and I felt exposed and uncomfortable. Especially since standard lifeguard uniform required me to have my shirt off.

“Oh, it’s no problem, Mrs. Robinson,” I replied. “Is this everyone?”

“No, there are more kids coming,” she said. Little Billy Robinson poked his fiery head out from behind his mother’s legs to look at me. He didn’t look anything like his mother. Freckles dotted his small, gaunt face. His bright, green eyes rested on top of his perky nose. He was a scrawny little kid. Scrawnier than average it seemed. Something about him just seemed so weak and pitiful.

“Alright, well, I’ll be in that chair if you

need me,” I said. I wanted to get away from her as soon as possible. I could feel her eyes burrowing into me as I walked away. More and more kids started to show up, and they would swim while their parents congregated around the sunbathing chairs for conversation. Their conversation filtered in and out between the screams and cries of the children. Apparently, one of the parents was a swimming instructor. I heard a tidbit of their conversation as I was sitting in my plastic chair.

“Well, see, black people are just made differently,” she said. “They don’t float as well because they’re more dense.” I heard murmurs of agreement amongst the parents. I was completely dumbfounded; the level of stupidity that was expressed in that single statement flabbergasted me. I shook off my disbelief and continued counting and recounting the kids in and out of the pool.

Since this was my first job as a lifeguard, I was as nervous as a mouse trying to steal the cheese. Kids were jumping into the pool, splashing each other, and stopping my heart every time they dunked each other. I couldn’t say anything to the kids, though. It was a birthday party, after all; I didn’t want to interfere with their fun. I was just there in case of an emergency. I still exercised my authority a little bit, though.

“No running!” I yelled at a skinny little blonde kid. He looked at his feet, ashamed, but he continued to walk nearly as fast as he had been running. Then, some of the kids in the pool decided it would be fun to antagonize me. They played games like “splash the lifeguard” and “ask the lifeguard hundreds of questions that he couldn’t possibly answer.” I didn’t let it bother me, though. I played along as I watched the rest of the kids, especially Billy. He had been swimming lazily back and forth from the

deep to the shallow end. Every once in a while he and his friends would have a competition to see who could swim the farthest underwater. He always lost. “Hey, kid, go get me a Capri-Sun please,” I said to the blonde kid I had caught running earlier. He was sipping on a Capri-Sun and quickly obliged by running to the cooler to get a pouch for me. “No running!” I yelled again. He swiftly walked back with my drink in his outstretched hand. I thanked him and sent him on his way. The power felt good to tell you the truth. I felt like a little tyrant in my kidney-shaped dominion. I let my loyal subjects play but not too hard. “I can’t let this power go to my head,” I told myself. “These are a bunch of third graders, after all.”

Little Billy Robinson was seeing how long he could swim underwater again. He went all

“I felt like a little tyrant in my kidney-shaped dominion.”

the way from the shallow end to the deep end in one breath. He came up sputtering and coughing, and for some reason he decided

it would be wise to go back to the shallow end instead of grabbing on to the edge of the deep end. His arms and legs flailed and struggled in a haphazard doggy paddle. There was no coordination to his movements. Limbs were kicked and punched out in all directions. He was slowly progressing forward and making himself more exhausted every second. Scenes from lifeguard training a month earlier were flashing on the screen in my mind. I had only been trained in a lake. I realized that I had no idea what to do in a pool. Was Billy going to be an active or passive drowning victim? Should I use the cross shoulder carry or just wade out and grab him? “The concepts are the same,” I told myself. “Besides, it’s only five feet deep. I could wade out there and pick him up.” Tension and apprehension gripped the inside of my stomach and twisted it into knots. “C’mon Billy, you can

make it,” I said in a barely audible but urgent whisper. Billy’s plight finally got him back to the shallow end. He took those first awkward slippery steps on the floor of the pool while tilting his head up to keep his nose out of the water, and at that moment, all of the knots in my stomach were untied.

The adults kept to themselves mostly. Every once and a while, Mrs. Robinson asked me if I needed anything while putting her hand on my shoulder. Her cold clammy hands touched my unclothed shoulder and sent chills down my spine. I felt my shoulder going numb as I tried to edge to the opposite side of my plastic throne away from her. Eventually, I heard some of the adults talking about prior engagements and what not, and people began to filter out of the pool.

“Before anyone else leaves let’s all thank our handsome lifeguard!” Mrs. Robinson announced this to everyone left at the pool. She

looked at me with that same smirk on the side of her mouth that she had earlier, and all the uncomfortable feelings I had before resurfaced. I got handshakes from fathers and pats on the back from mothers as they left.

“So how much do I owe you?” asked Mrs. Robinson.

“Well, the usual fee is around twenty-five dollars per hour,” I responded. I just wanted her to pay me so I could leave. She wrote me a check, and put it in my hand.

“Thanks again, Thomas,” she said.

“Thank you, Mrs. Robinson,” I replied. The check felt heavy in my hand as I walked away. I had earned that money. It was the first sum of money that I actually had to work for. I never thought working as a lifeguard would be that hard. My nerves were shot and my hands were shaking as I got into my car. I felt like I had just been babysitting for twenty kids that I had to take to the pool.

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

She Told Me to Write About My Memories

Perhaps I am a monster
Who swallowed up such things
As memories
To leave more space
For the dark to seep in.

Robert Cook



Nowhere
Lawson King
Charcoal

*Honorable Mention,
Drawing—
Art Competition*



December
Alex Wang

Oil on canvas

*Honorable Mention, Painting—
Art Competition*



Tree
Aisha Lyons
Aerlie

The Tree in My Front Yard Is Normal

Unless you count
That one time
He uprooted himself
And chased the mailman
Down the block
While lobbing apples at his head,
His purple leaves
And blood-red bark
Flaking after him
As he ran

Robert Cook

Our Mud Pie

Dashing across the sun-beat pavement
Hopping over every hot rock, too
My brother, my sister, and I made our way
To the cooled grass under the pine trees
There beneath the drooping limbs
Surrounded by grass was our dirt pile
A few buckets of water would make it good enough to be a mud bath
Two buckets of water would make it good enough to be warrior make-up
One bucket of water would make it good enough to be cupcakes
One cup of water would make it good enough to be a pie
And just a spit of water on the skin
With dirt sprinkled on top
Would make our dirt pile good enough for mud tattoos

Pauline Dyer



Nature's Love

Kate Dubickas

Photograph

Pinball

Shelby Stegelhammer

Honorable Mention—Photography Competition



Waiting

Tiffany Croft

Ava slid her beaten feet into the black leather shoes, careful not to touch the growing blisters. Blisters from years of dancing in paper-thin ballet slippers that permanently curled her tender toes. Blisters from walking across the large college campus, fighting snow and the whistles of construction workers who had been building the new gym for ages. Somehow, those men found beauty in her too-skinny body, skin like fresh snow, and shattered, calloused, blistered feet. Mostly, the blisters were from busing tables from five to twelve every night.

She spent hours following the same routine: take order... give to cook... fill drink... deliver food... clean table... hope for a nice tip... clock out... go back to school... study. She would stay up at night until her eyes danced with equations and burger orders.

This time of the year was always the hardest. Her senior recital hung over her head like the low fluorescent lighting in Rick's Diner where she worked. Dancing was the one thing she could always count on. And now, it was the thing she missed the most. Her only time for rehearsing was between school and work. She missed the smell of the pine cleaner they used on the ballet-hall floor. And the panels of mirror after mirror that created a million of her, all of her allegro jumps and arabesque stances shining back at her.

Now, Ava swished a wet rag across the table in front of her, scooping up the change in her free hand. Change that would pay for meager meals and chalk for her feet. Like her mother used to say—if there's anything more expensive than school, it's dancing.

"Hey, Ava, you wanna hang out after work?" asked Debbi. In her mid-twenties, Debbi worked twelve hours a day to put her little girl through pre-school. She always asked the same thing. And Ava always answered the same way.

"Not tonight, Deb. Got school in the morning."

~

At practices for the recital, Ava stood on her toes for a few seconds and then grew tired thinking of the long night that lay ahead. A night of children standing on tables and calculus problems with no end.

Tonight was a particularly brutal night. Ava missed the beginning of the music three times, each time she had been lost in her own world. A world where she didn't have to think about what came later that night. Rowdy children standing on diner tables. *Parents who blew smoke in each other's faces because smoke was easier than words.* And the spills she would have to clean up.

Ava tried to smile despite those thoughts but she couldn't make her mouth form the movement. Smiles were reserved for when she pirouetted without losing balance and stood on her toes for more than a minute. And that didn't happen much anymore.

"Hey, Ava, you look tired. You need a break?" asked her dancing partner, Mikhail. Mikhail was over six feet tall with the chiseled face of Caesar and the muscles to hold himself on tip-toe while lifting her also.

Yes, she was tired. Tired enough for her eyelids to feel like lead that wouldn't budge no

matter how hard she tried. Her legs didn't feel much different. But she had to keep moving. Had to keep dancing. It was the only way to keep the idea of a recital alive. And that was the only thing that kept her going.

A few twirls and pirouettes later, Ava was close to breaking. She leapt, desperate for Mikhail to catch her in steel-arms. But she fell short, landing gracefully on the wooden floor of the ballet studio, the sound of her misstep echoing throughout the mirrored room.

Mikhail was not there to catch her. Instead, she received the shake of a head from her instructor, Mrs. Greith. And those eyes. Those eyes that told her there was no use in trying. There would be no recital. Not this year. And this year was her last chance.

~

School was harder now. She saw dancing in everything. In the leaves that bounded in waves across the campus. In the groups of students arranged so sporadically. In the folds of books and the hard lines of shapes, the soft edges of numbers. *It was all art, really.*

Sometimes, while walking, Ava would pass Mikhail going across the Quad. Or catch his eye for a split-second while sitting in the cafeteria. Mikhail... her dance partner for almost four years. Her friend. The one person who always cheered her on. Even when they were sophomores and she had considered quitting ballet because some junior with sea-green eyes broke her heart. Now, she barely remembered that junior's name. She could remember how Mikhail hadn't laughed when she started crying in the middle of rehearsals. How he had pulled her to the side and asked her if she was okay. Then, they had spent the whole night watching *I Love Lucy* reruns.

But where had he been this time? This time when the misstep was on her part.

~



That night, Ava skittered from table to table the best she could, dancing across the paper-littered floor, wishing more than anything that she was on the stage. That Mikhail was holding her high above his head with his sturdy arms. That the audience would cheer her success and throw roses on the polished stage.

But no.

Her stage was here, in Rick's Diner. The customers, her audience, who only cheered at the slip of dishes onto the paneled floor. Or clapped when she tripped over her own marble feet.

And her roses—crumpled napkins—withered in her dishpan hands.

Ava bused table after table, thinking of how now, Mikhail was probably catching another girl. A girl who didn't have to work hard. A girl with softer skin and pretty feet. Ava let her tears fall into the dishrag in her hand, polishing the table beneath. Then, the anger hit her... anger at herself for missing that step. That one lapse that had cost her dancing.

Ava tossed the rag onto the floor, not caring that Debbi stared at her with wide eyes and that the manager, Rick himself, was writing notes in a pocket-sized notebook.

She glanced around the diner for something sturdy to focus on. Something that would keep her from falling or from walking out

Rose

Sweta Desai

Aerylie

entirely. Then, there, in the corner. Mikhail sat, his lean-muscled body looking awkward among the diner crowd. He smiled his half-smile and waved slightly. Ava bent down to pick up the tossed rag, sure that her dancer's grace would keep her balanced.

Instead, she tumbled forward, her hands slapping painfully on the floor. A chorus of cheers and applause sounded around her. She wouldn't cry. Not again. But, the tears came quick and easy, sliding down her face in wet trails. Ava knew she couldn't get up. Couldn't face the people who reveled in her embarrassment. Couldn't live without the sound of queued music or the feel of the stage lights.

Then, warm hands gripped her own and pulled her from the diner floor, away from the dirty dishrag and tears.

"Haven't seen you in a while," said Ava to Mikhail without looking up. She knew the feel of his hands.

"I guess we've both been busy," he replied in his slightly accented voice.

Ava glanced once around the diner. The diner where she now spent most of her time cleaning up after other people. The diner that had taken dancing away from her.

Bending low, Mikhail whispered in her ear, "Do you want to get out of here?"

Ava nodded without thinking. Work could wait. School could wait.

She removed her nametag, tossed it on top of the counter, and grabbed her coat from the rack. "Hey, Rick, I'm taking a break," she said over her shoulder, as Mikhail took her hand.

He held the door open for her and they stepped into the cool night air—a *perfect night for dancing*.



Piano

Stephen Smith

Acrilic on wood

I Do Believe in Fairies

Marie Rowland

I do!	I
I do! I do!	do!
I do! I do!	be
I Believe	live
In	love
Faeries!	laugh!
Anything is Possible!	
Imagine! Create! Live!	
You can find Magic!	
Magic in	
The Harsh	
Realities	
Of this Life	
And all of the	
People who Live	
Here on this Earth	
I~~Faith	
Do!~~Trust	
And Pixie	
Dust! Magic	
In all That	
May Seem	
Hope Less	
Or Lost!	
So just	
Believe in them!	
I do!	

Breaking Bricks

Marie Rowland

T.J.'s small hands gripped the sledge hammer and held it tightly to his chest and stomach as he struggled with its weight. He carried the hammer towards me and then put all of his strength into lifting it over his head. Before he had complete control over the hammer, it came crashing down. As the brick broke in two, the carport echoed the sound back to us.

As we listened to the echoes die out, I heard the music that was coming from inside the house.

"Any man of mine better be proud of me. / Even when I'm ugly, he still better love me," Shania Twain sang out on the radio. I jumped up, and T.J. stopped picking up the pieces to see what I was doing. As I began to spin like a ballerina and sing out loud to "Any Man of Mine," my favorite sky-blue dress swirled out around me. My feet spun me out into the sunlight and the rocks in the gravel driveway dug into my bare feet, but my mind was on the song.

"Come on, Cissy!" T.J. yelled from the carport. I stopped to look back at my home. It was a small white house pushed back into some woods, but not far. The neighborhood around us wasn't the best, but the boys on the street and my brother were good friends, so I would have fun climbing trees and playing games.

"I'm a-coming!" I sang out as I skipped back into the shade of the carport and dropped

back to my original spot. I grabbed the broken brick, humming the end to the Shania Twain song, and moved the brick to a pile we had made. As I grabbed a whole brick, the station inside started playing "Let's Go to Vegas," but I didn't dance this time. I hummed it quietly, and laid the brick on the cool concrete and pointed to the center of the brick. The brick was rough against my smooth left index finger.

"When I say *okay*, hit it right here," I said, "Okay?"

The sledge hammer came down before I even noticed he had raised it up. It came down so fast that I didn't have time to move my finger and he hit exactly where I had pointed out to him.

"AHHHHHHHHHH!" I screamed as I jerked my finger back and held it protectively

to my chest. The pain moved from my finger, and my whole arm was shaking as I moved away from T.J.

Mama came tearing out of the door to the house with her cleaning clothes on, and

I could still hear the music inside.

"Hey, baby, let's go to Vegas. / Bet on love and let it ride." Faith Hill's voice was being drowned out with the yelling, though, and I couldn't hear anymore.

"Mama, help Cis!" T.J. screamed, even louder than I was. "Will she be alright, Mama? Will Cissy be okay? I didn't mean to hurt her!" Tears were streaming down his face as Mama

["...I began to spin like a ballerina and sing out loud to 'Any Man of Mine'..."]

came over to me and asked what was wrong.

The only sounds that left my mouth were sobs and blubbers about the pain and what had happened. T.J. ended up explaining to her what had happened, and Mama spun around and ran into the house. She reemerged quickly with two Popsicle sticks and tape. As she doctored my finger, I stopped crying and tried to console my big brother.

“The only reason I cried so much was because I didn’t want to get in trouble.”

“I’m alright, T,” I said and patted his shoulder. “It don’t hurt no more.”

T.J. continued crying the whole way to the Eudora Fire Department, where we met my dad, and I rode in an ambulance for the first time to the hospital with him. I don’t remember much past that, but my family still picks on my brother about crying more than I did. He says, “The only reason I cried so much was because I didn’t want to get in trouble.”

Airplane

The giant squares of land
Form a jigsaw puzzle
With streams and rivers snaking
Their way between each piece
The cotton candy clouds float
Aimlessly around the aircraft
The ground is anti-magnified
Making the window a
Microscope slide of the world

Clayton Jacobs

Seas of Clouds

Joshua Lonthair

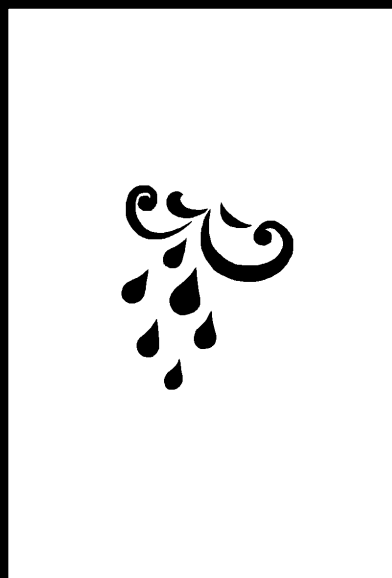
Photograph



The Real Bible Belt Culture

Mud Bogs and permanent Christmas lights,
Huntin' hogs and Budweiser-filled nights
Pick-up trucks with Rebel flag plates,
Jim Bob sayin' anything that's different, he hates
Bleach-blond mullet with a sleeveless Skynyrd shirt,
Mary Sue sayin' math makes her head hurt
Cowboy hats with Wrangler jeans,
Sammy Joe don't really care what first cousin means
Shootin' stray cats,
Bashing mailboxes with baseball bats
Billy Ray's favorite thing to beat up in life
Until he meets his future ex-wife

Parker Lundy



Speakin' of People and Places

Sometimes the words just sigh out of me
when I lick the pen top.

The same words that get up under the dog's nails,
and go clickin' through my daddy's trailer,
Those words that cunned up Gramma Carlisle's cock—
the one that couldn't stop peckin' my momma's head
that time he got after her.

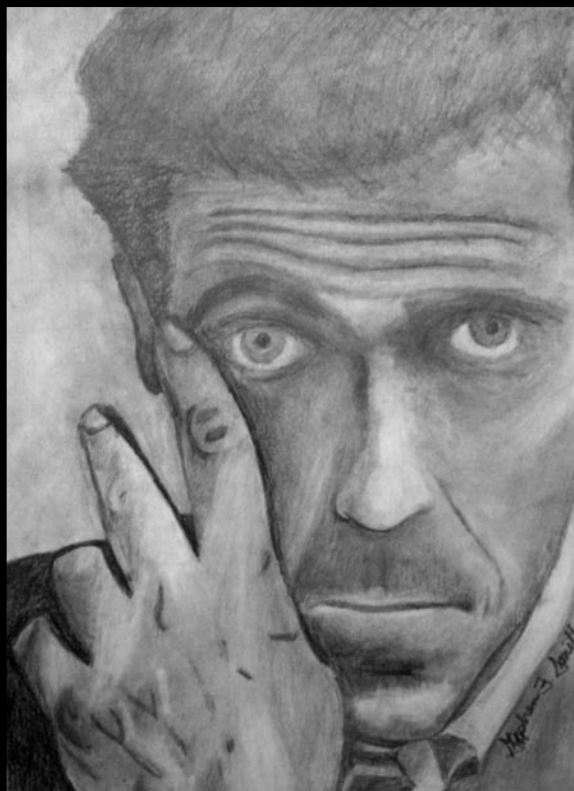
And other times I just coast by and
let my arm hairs do the talkin'.
But when I really got something to say,
By God, I cannot stop it.

Like when smells of my father's Cordova roofing job
come to me,
When I just can't kick that Askew,
Lake View gravel outta my shoes.

So then I really speak it and
whether it be volumes or some
Lack-luster line of verse,
It's somethin'.

And by God, I gotta speak it.

Cecily Carlisle



Dr. House

Stephen Smith

Graphite

*Honorable Mention, Drawing—
Art Competition*

Job

Elizabeth Scratt

Third Place—Short Story Competition

Pink tinged the grey sky while the sun stretched itself into the sky. Gravel grated the tires of the old Cadillac as Job stared out the window. He didn't need to pay attention to the road; he had driven this path every day at this same time of day for twelve years. He knew that when the hole in the tree in Bobby's field came into view, it was time to give in to the snaking incline up the levee, and that, when he heard Mrs. Jett's cows, he needed to move just a little faster, because one of them always thought that his Cadillac was hers, and that, when he came over that last cattle gap, he would want, more than anything, to return to the solitude of his farm that ran from the Arkansas levee clear to the lake by which his ranch-style home sat. But, no matter how much Job wanted to turn back, he couldn't; he had responsibilities to a woman in a white house on Lakeshore Drive.

The trees, fields and peace of the county road gave way to houses, barking dogs, yawning children and stalling cars. Static mixed with bits of talk and country music came

from the radio as he pulled off Highway 18 onto Main Street, past First Baptist, St. John's Episcopal, and Our Lady of the Lake Catholic churches. He turned onto Lakeshore at the old oak tree in Chicot Park, where his sister broke her arm all those years ago. Three drive-

ways, alley, vacant lot, and he turned; the two-story sagging house with peeling paint was the same as it had been yesterday, but only a shadow of what it had been in his youth.

Job turned the Cadillac off and sat in the silent cold of February morning. He glanced in the rearview mirror: his dark hair, still damp from his shower, fell just above his deep blue eyes. Wrinkles from worry and laughter lined his face. With a sigh, he slid to the door, stepped out, slammed the door and walked through the unlocked back door; it slammed behind him.

"That you, Job?" came a cigarette-rasped voice. It could hardly be heard over the blaring

speakers of the television.

"Yes, Mama. Came to make you



Behold a White Horse

Marig Rowland

Clayboard

*Honorable Mention, Drawing—
Art Competition*

breakfast," he replied.

"About time. I been waiting."

Job didn't respond; instead, he made his way to the refrigerator for eggs, bacon, butter and milk, then to the pantry for flour, salt, baking powder and soda, and to the cabinet for a bowl and a skillet. He moved to the table and emptied his hands. Sounds of a game show serenaded him as he mixed and shaped biscuits, sizzled eggs and bacon and poured two mugs of coffee, as he had done for the two since childhood.

"It's ready, Mama," Job called to the living room. He set the table as the television clicked silent. The only noise left was the creaking and sighing of the tired house. Job's mother dragged feet in aged red slippers to her seat at the head of the table.

"No ham?" she said as she looked around.

"Forgot to get some at the store Saturday. I'll get some next time I go," Job answered.

"Guess bacon'll do me. Get the Equal, would you?"

He nodded and stepped to the pantry, pulling two packets from the oversized container. Job made his way back to the table and gave both packets to his mother.

"You talked to your sister?" she asked. Her mouth was full of scrambled eggs and biscuit. Job, hunched over his plate, elbows on the table, shook his head without looking up.

"How about any of them ladies over at First Baptist?" She continued the interrogation. Again, he shook his head.

"Well, you ain't no good for gossip, are you? Ha!" she said. Job looked up, chewing, with a deep exhalation. He looked at her, his eyes the same color as hers, then went back to his food.

"Watch the news this morning?" he asked, without looking up.

"Yeah, nothing real interesting.

Something about the war and then something about the election," she replied. "They didn't have any celebrities or anything like that on, so I changed to the soap channel."

"I see," Job said.

"You sound like your father."

"You heard from him lately?" Job knew it would hurt her, but he needed to know. She didn't respond; she continued to stir coffee that was growing cold and already tasted of bitter-sweet Equal.

"You coming to Wednesday Fellowship with me tonight?" Job asked, though he knew the answer.

"I don't know, son. I don't think so, really. It's just so far over there, and it wears me out so," she replied. Job nodded, scraping his fork over his now empty plate.

"You ain't..." he started, then decided against it. He held his mug with large, calloused hands and cleared his throat. "Are you gonna ever leave this house? It's been twelve years. Next Thursday. That'll make it twelve years exactly."

She stared at him, then moved to fumble in her robe for a package of Marlboro Reds and a lighter.

"Don't you...don't you..." she said as she lit a cigarette. "Don't tell me that like I don't know it, like I haven't been looking at that calendar on the wall over there every day, knowing it was coming up." She looked out the wide window over the sink, smoke coming from her pale, thin lips, and sighed. A glance at her son, and she stood, motioning toward Job's plate. He didn't respond; she slid the plate past his elbows and placed it on hers. Job's mother turned to the sink.

"Maybe," she said, eyes still watching out the window.

Job nodded as he stood. At the coat rack, he wrapped a brown scarf that itched more

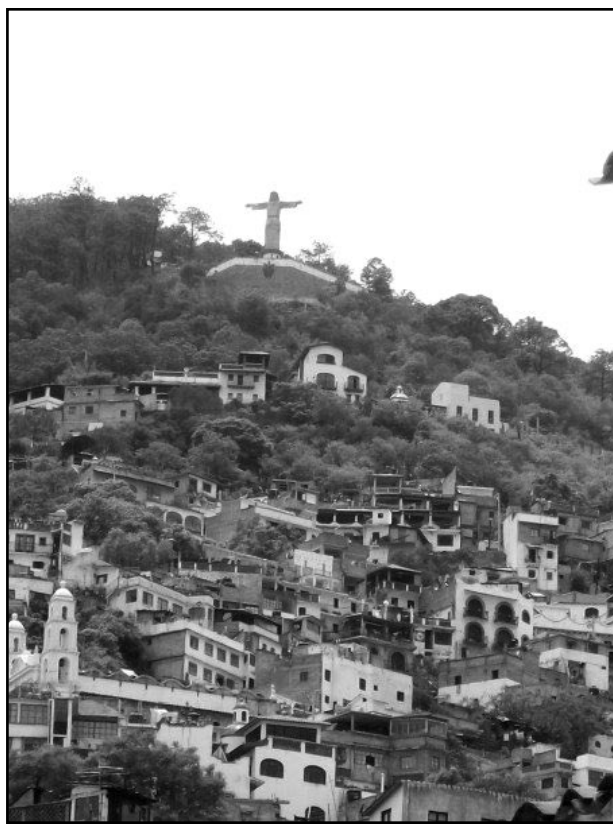
than it warmed around his thick neck. His hand hesitated on the doorknob; he cleared his throat, then stepped over the linoleum checks to where his mother stood, head bent, with her wrinkled hands on the porcelain sink. She turned to look at him with red eyes.

“Maybe,” she said again. Job leaned down and kissed her on the cheek, then walked back to the old Cadillac and onto the familiar roads.

Aribba!

Elizabeth Scratt

Photograph



Fish

Boram Lee

Photograph



When Surya Ceased to Smile

Christina Moore

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

Surya, god of the burning orange sun, rode across the sky and peeped over black mountains of sand and rock, moments before chasing away the dark of night. He ripped open the sky with his massive reach, creating mirages of puddles on the dusty road, pouring out lavenders, magentas, and citrus bliss onto the winding way, blinding all with his golden skin. When I closed my eyes, I saw spots swirling in my vision, resembling the jewels on his golden chariot, whose wheels stirred the dust on the horizon into majestic clouds. My eyeballs searched behind closed lids for a sanctuary from the assault of first morning light. Sand and dust swirled through the open windows, stinging my cheeks and turning my mouth gritty. Surya grinned, creating a haze around the mountains, the road, the bus, and the crisp canal below, the only contrasting blue in a sea of taupe.

There were fifty-four students and four teachers on the bus that morning; I had counted them myself. All the windows on the bus were down, most of them stuck permanently that way. Students rested against others to protest the early morning tribute to school, others sat entranced with the beige sea of rocks and sand that swelled into the deep canal, the sweat of their faces causing their brown cheeks to fuse with the confining panes. On our route to school, we rode elbow to elbow every morning on the dusty narrow strip that stretched for miles along the edge of the canal, separated by a single frail rail. I was always afraid of riding on the right side of the bus because of the intimidating steep hill that rolled into the mystic blue,

so instead, for the majority of the bus ride, I stared into the blank façade of the glaring sand mountains.

To me, the road seemed abandoned, like a neglected dirty child; it was small and rarely traveled by any other vehicle other than our rusted bus. If and when it rained it seemed like a wet dog; more of a nuisance than a being, or in the case of a road, a necessary path for transportation. In a day, we might pass three cars or camels total. The smaller kids would ogle at the camels, skin that blended in with the sands behind them. They always seemed to spit or ignore the kids and continue to meander as their riders saluted us, outfitted in desert wear; large cloths of rough fabric in browns and yellows wrapped over sun-darkened heads and faces.

Every morning the bus goes to three different villages to pick up students and the four teachers to transport to our school. Since I live next door to the bus driver, I'm one of six who endure the entire 65km bus ride to Bodeli. I am always the first to rise in the house, even before the sun even considers its dastardly siege of the sky. I am required to finish my chores before my daily trip, so I gather eggs and water the garden, full of herbs and spices, whose scents fill my nostrils with the prospects of succulent Indian dishes to come, all growing on the northeast side of our little shack. I go next door with my books and eat breakfast with the bus driver; his wife and my mother struck an agreement concerning our small spice garden that allows me to have free meals

every morning before my long ride to school. We never talk a lot to each other in the cool mornings, but just savor his wife's rich Indian cooking as his own small children sleep soundly on a floor pallet.

I finally opened my eyes and looked up at him, his eyes squinted against the glare of the road and the dust stirred by Surya's dancing feet. He held tight to the wheel, as if determined to win an epic battle against the yellow giant. Our old bus creaked around each curb, swaying from left to right and bouncing at each bump in the road. Some of the more active children would giggle every time their small bodies would be lifted off the plastic bus seat and slammed back down again.

In the distance, a monster began to approach. Its four wheels created a tornado of sand in front of us, its massive teeth glaring a vicious smile. The truck was covered in oil, making it seem to have a mosaic black skin. The bus driver tightened his grip on the wheel even more, preparing for the dangerous pass on the narrow strip. The truck rushed towards us.

All of a sudden, a shadow overtook the bus; Surya had ceased smiling upon us. The children looked in silence as the truck neared.

I could hear the hearts beating out of the chests of my schoolmates. The truck flew past, its mirror coming inches from my face, only to hit the window with great force, cracking it and shaking the entire bus. The school bus moaned and creaked as the driver tapped the brakes fiercely and turned to scream some obscenities, only for them to fall onto ignorant ears. He returned to his duties as everyone watched

as the oil monster swerved behind the bus, but regained its beastly posture within seconds. All of our stares were interrupted by a large pot hole.

The bus driver was stomping on the brakes with great force, but received no response. He jerked the wheel fervently left and right with his purple knuckles, tears gliding down his caramel cheeks. A knowing tear slid down my own face, blurring out the bright Surya, and rolled over my clenched jaw as everyone began to panic. As the edge of the road neared, I slid over to the seat across the aisle from mine and looked over three screaming girls into the deep blue canal. My body beat into the thinly cushioned seats, bruising my bones with each bump, but it meant nothing to me. The youngest girl sitting in the

seat I peered over dug her youthful face into my shirt, her arms holding tight to my waist. The driver laid his head in his arms on the wheel, surrendering to Saraswati's terminating pull.

Then, we reached ecstasy. My body released as the dusty road sank out of view and the bus floated towards the sapphire water. My feet felt light on the dirt-covered bus floor as my hair floated

around my brow and my fingertips barely caressed the roof of the bus. The little girl opened her red eyes, awestruck by the moment of finalizing euphoria. Pencils and notebooks swam through the air and backpacks chased them to the rear of the bus. All were silent as they absorbed their dwindling moments of rapture. My body slammed against the seat, an audible crack sounding from my chest.



Seaweed and Fish

Boram Lee

Photograph

Everything went black around me.

I blindly felt the blood on my legs as I searched the floor for anchorage as I endured sharp quakes of the confining bus. My hands searched the ground and strained blood from sand on the floor. As my vision came back, I saw that the little girl no longer wept, but laid her head forward against the seat as a warm pool of blood formed in her lap, her hand limp at her side. A boy in the back screamed, pulling a sharpened pencil out of a developing red spot on his linen arm; I attempted to wrestle my limp leg out of the seat legs, letting out a terrible cry in pain, anguish, and frustration. The bus vibrated for a few seconds, rattling my brain until I was sure it would give, just as the bus driver had. My head shook so badly that chips of my teeth scratched at the sides of my mouth.

With every bump, my body wrapped around the leg further and further. I struggled, but was still unable to see what was coming through my tears. Before I knew it, everything jerked and silhouettes of humans flew forward and then out of my sight. Water began flooding into the bus through the open windows and onto broken bodies in the seats. Fervently, the few able people began trying to close the stubborn windows to keep the water out, stepping on hands and legs in the ineffectual process. Their efforts were to no avail; the old windows continued to allow the crystalline water to pour into the bus.

Saraswati danced along the shoreline and swirled into eddies and small whirlpools. She was beautiful, with mosaic skin and ice blue eyes, but evasive; no one has ever held her besides Surya, and no mortal would ever be able to. Her translucent hair haloed her sovereign face, which always contained mirth and

mischievous, but sometimes held anger and jealousy. There were stories that she was an envious goddess, and whenever she was angered, her fine hair turned into tentacles that would snap up and drag beautiful girls or rogue men into the nadir of her home.

They began pushing small bodies out of the open windows and pounding the emergency door open, but we were trapped. Water encompassed the entire bus, turning the windows from a scene of taupe sand to liquid blue hands writhing their fingers into the bus window. The lessened weight loosened its grip on my leg. People slowly gave into the song of Saraswati, goddess of the water, as she nudged and caressed us deeper into her abyss. Moments went by until everyone slowed and stopped moving, accepting their fate of an eternity with the sinuous deity. I looked through the crystal-line window for the last time before my vision was embraced with darkness and saw Surya make a final reach for me, but Saraswati struck back at him and would not let him touch me. Slowly, his smile faded, as did my vision, as did my pain, as did my life. I should have resented that I was the pawn in the battle between the two jealous gods, but I accepted the moment when Surya ceased to smile.

Lights

Boram Lee

Photograph



Contributors' Notes

Cecily Carlisle (*New Albany*) Cecily defines herself with a quotation from William Faulkner: "I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth." Her favorites include a dish of toast with hot coffee and a paperback copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. After graduating, she plans to "keep on feeling things and maybe write about 'em."

Austin Clinton (*Hattiesburg*) Like Oscar Wilde, Austin believes that "An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all," and he envies couches for their constant comfort and "coolness." He aspires to attend medical school after majoring in biomedical engineering at Mississippi State University.

Robert Cook (*Southaven*) To Robert, poetry is as instinctive as breathing. Robert would love to meet a Buddhist monk, and for the future, he foresees a change in himself.

Tiffany Croft (*Dry Creek*) Tiffany has been most influenced by the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and she can relate to a window before any other piece of furniture. Though she dreams of visiting Japan someday, Tiffany's plan for now is to live as long as possible.

Kalina Deng (*Greenville*) To Kalina, creativity is the expression of personality and imagination. She admires the work of Rivers Gainspoletti and Vera Wang. In the words of Coco Chanel, Kalina believes that "In order to be irreplaceable, one must always be different." She hopes to one day have a career in fashion design or pediatric oncology.

Sweta Desai (*Jackson*) Sweta sees art as the ideal stress reliever, and to her, "Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes." She would like to travel the world, attend college, and major in graphic design.

Casey Dickson (*New Albany*) Casey believes that "You should do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and she's found that art is a valuable means of self-expression. She plans to attend the honors college at Louisiana State University, where she will major in psychology and continue listening to Kelly Clarkson.

Kate Dubickas (*Ocean Springs*) Though Kate dreams of meeting Cedric Diggory, she has been most influenced by the work of Sharon Creech. She finds "a little safe haven" in art and creativity. She hopes to one day become a marine scientist and train whales.

Pauline Dyer (*West Point*) Pauline has been most influenced by the words and life of Frederick Douglass. In her own words, however, "an artist can only create; not create a perception" for the art's beholder. Along with visiting Paris, France, Pauline plans on becoming an actress.

Jane Girard (*Richland*) Aside from Jane's love of Italian food, she enjoys the artwork of Walter Anderson, and she sees art as a way to look inward and define herself. Though her motto is "Take one day at a time," Jane also sees herself pursuing a degree in chemistry at the University of Southern Mississippi in the near future.

Tiffany Harris (*Meridian*) As a young writer, Tiffany finds that inspiration comes best when she's at a desk. Her own work has been shaped by the writings of Eudora Welty, and she sees creativity as a great way to free one's mind. When considering the future, Tiffany is unsure what hers will hold.

Clayton Jacobs (*Picayune*) Clayton holds the work of Dr. Seuss in high regard, and he envies barstools for their ability to spin forever. His motto in life is "World peace!" In the future, he will attend college.

Lawson King (*Indianola*) Lawson says, "I can accept failure but cannot accept to give up." He loves art and continually looks to the life of his grandmother for inspiration. He hopes to minor in the subject along with a major in psychology.

Ginny Kramer (*Quitman*) Ginny believes that creativity is a universal asset, and "it's more a matter of whether one chooses to express it, and how." She has been most influenced by Clive Barker and hopes to soon meet Kal Penn. One day, Ginny will work for *National Geographic* and have a pet Arctic fox.

Boram Lee (*Purvis*) For Boram, "Life is rad," and cupcakes are the greatest food on Earth. Though she would like to meet God and travel to Magrathea, her immediate plan is to become an infectious disease specialist at CDC.

Jack Li (*Starkville*) Jack's motto is "Live with no regrets, die with no regrets." Over the years, he has enjoyed reading the Boxcar Children series, and he would most like to meet Napoleon Bonaparte. Jack plans to major in business at the University of Pennsylvania.

Joshua Lonthair (*Long Beach*) Joshua dreams of meeting Jacques-Yves Cousteau and visiting the Great Barrier Reef. To him, the world is full of beauty, and it just takes people to find it. Joshua will attend the University of Miami Honors College and dual-major in marine biology and biochemistry.

Parker Lundy (*Purvis*) Parker thinks “art is pretty cool” and looks to Lynyrd Skynyrd for inspiration. After graduating from Yale, Parker hopes to achieve his ultimate goal, becoming a bricklayer.

Aisha Lyons (*Southaven*) According to Aisha, “Life’s too short to be normal.” She would most like to meet Vincent van Gogh, and she feels that “creativity can’t be created or destroyed, or even defined because it exists everywhere, in many forms.” She hopes to become a pathologist.

Christina Moore (*Gulfport*) Like Henry Ford, Christina believes that “Whether you can or you can’t, you’re right.” She finds inspiration in the work of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux and believes “art brings emotion into our scientific world.” She plans to become a doctor after graduating from the University of South Alabama.

Erin Rauenhurst (*Sumrall*) For Erin, “Art is really important. It’s a nice excuse to let your mind go.” She feels that “Life is what you make it,” and she envies the bird for its ability to fly. Erin can see herself one day visiting another planet.

Marie Rowland (*Sarah*) Marie sees art as a way to make the reality of the world more tolerable. Along with baked ziti, she loves white tigers, Leonardo da Vinci, and Eileen Regina Edwards. She wants to major in architecture at Mississippi State University and eventually earn a Master’s degree.

Thompson Segars (*Iuka*) Thompson looks to Bill Watterson for inspiration and believes that people should express themselves more often. He could see himself as a rocking chair before any other piece of furniture, because they rock all day long. Thompson hopes to someday attend culinary school.

Rachel Selph (*Olive Branch*) Although Rachel would “rather be without salt for a week than without tea for a day,” her favorite foods are mushrooms, ravioli, and sushi. She would love to meet Walt Disney, become a millionaire, and work for Pixar.

Elizabeth Seratt (*Greenville and Vicksburg*) Elizabeth lives by the words of Lord Byron: “If I don’t write to empty my mind, I go mad.” She would like to meet Einstein and visit every continent, but for now, she’ll be content with pursuing her goal of becoming a gypsy, Brothers Grimm scholar, environmental activist, professional student, and writer.

Miranda Shugars (*Vicksburg*) Miranda finds inspiration in the poetry of William Carlos Williams, and in her own words: “I *refuse* to believe it’s not butter!” She hopes to travel to Switzerland.

Stephen Smith (*Columbus*) Stephen agrees with David Frost, who says, “Don’t aim for success if you want it, just do what you love and believe in.” He wishes he could meet Winston Churchill or travel to England. He plans to have a career as a physician and surgeon.

Dong Song (*Oxford*) Dong defines himself with a quotation by George Santayana: “The beginning of happiness is the knowledge of the possible.” He has been most influenced by the artwork of Gustav Klimt and hopes to one day earn a degree in architecture.

Adam Stanford (*Ripley*) Adam sees himself as an appreciator of art in all forms, whether it be a painting or short story. He admires the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson, from whom he’s learned that “Character is higher than intellect. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as to think.” Adam will continue studying medicine at the University of Mississippi’s Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Shelby Steelhammer (*Gulfport*) Shelby can find inspiration in anyone and anything. In the words of Jean-Luc Godard, she feels that “Photography is truth.” She wants to travel the world, but Shelby’s immediate plans include majoring in chemical engineering and pharmacy at Mississippi State University.

Christopher Vick (*Southaven*) Though Chris values the work of author Michael Crichton, if he could meet anyone, he’d choose Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. When considering art, he feels that “it’s a nice thing to go into, just don’t let it go to your head.” Chris plans on being an English major at Truman State University.

Alex Wang (*Clinton*) Alex feels that the ability to create makes us human, and for him, “Knowledge defines, art transcends.” In the past, he has found Ms. Jones inspiring, but Alex is unsure what the future will hold.

Ena Wei (*Starkville*) Ena admires the work of Renoir, Monet, and Jodi Picoult, but she lives by the words of Voltaire: “To enjoy life, we must touch at it lightly.” She believes nature is most beautiful without human interference, and she is waiting for life to surprise her.



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