



# Southern Voices



## Southern Voices

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

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# 2010



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On the Cover:  
Best Saturday Ever  
Sindhu Shivaji  
*photograph*

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Grandmother’s Advice

Ena Wei

1<sup>st</sup> Place Essay

My grandmother always looked like she just had bitten into a lemon, lips puckered and brows furrowed. Only when she smiled, usually around her grandchildren, would the hard indentions of frown lighten on her forehead. I couldn’t blame her. According to my mother, life had always been a huge lemon to Grandmother. Living on a nationalized sugarcane farm in Guangxi province, the Chinese equivalent to Mississippi with sugarcane as the counterpart for cotton, Grandmother married a man who was drafted to build railroads for the Red Army, a man who would only visit annually and leave behind a new crying burden every time. Without a husband, Grandmother raised her three children, labored in the sugarcane field, and maintained a small backyard garden to compensate for the impossible rations all by herself. When my grandfather finally returned, the heavy yoke had chaffed calluses upon Grandmother’s thin shoulders, and the hairy blades of sugarcane leaves had hardened her once-soft skin.

Before I came to America, I spent my summers in the country at my grandmother’s house with my younger cousins. My grandmother raised her grandchildren like she raised her chickens. Sometimes she even farmed her grandchildren with the chickens. My mother loved to recount her memories of me feeding the roosters, who towered over me, in Grandmother’s chicken coop. Unlike American grandmothers who bribe small children with excessive sugar, my grandmother stuffed my cousins and me with stir-fried bean sprouts and pork and rice noodles in beef broth. My cousins and I licked the plates clean no matter what my grandmother cooked, even the simple porridge with pickled radish. Grandmother didn’t care what we grandchildren did after meal time, as long as we stayed away from the road. My cousins played in the dirt courtyard, but I trailed behind Grandmother like a young chick behind its mother hen. I watched Grandmother haggling at the market, plowing in the garden, and chopping firewood, but mostly I listened to her stories, stories of her unending daily tasks: waking up at four o’clock, feeding the hogs, and weeding in the steamer basket of the sugarcane field.

During sugarcane’s off season, Grandmother would visit me and stay as long as she could stand the city air. Once, Grandmother came to babysit for me while my mother departed for a business trip. When my mother went out of town, she required that I have the company of



adult chaperones when I went out, but I wasn’t going to allow my mother’s absence to ruin my weekend. So I dragged Grandmother to the commercial district of the city and had a “girls’ day out.” Swimming through seas of shoppers with Grandmother by my side, I hopped from boutiques to department stores buying useless trinkets, sampling everything on a stick sold by street vendors, and ogling shoes that didn’t even come in my size yet. We ended our day with flaky egg tarts from the fancy bakery. As we walked beside the looming skyscrapers with the tarts in our hands, Grandmother suddenly changed the subject and spoke: “Child, when you start making your own money, don’t worry about husbands, houses, and family too much. Those things will come one day. Indulge yourself a little bit. Have a little fun. Go see the world.” My tongue tied. I couldn’t believe that my grandmother, who insisted on scraping clothes against a washing board even with an available washing machine, spoke like a true flaming feminist and told me to go live my life.

I have left my country and my grandmother for six long years now. Last year, Grandmother turned sixty-six. Through Skype conversations with my uncle, I found out that he had to threaten to sue my grandmother’s employer for abusing the elderly in order to convince her to retire and stay away from the sugarcane field. I smiled as I pictured my grandmother finally fighting for the independence and freedom she never had. As I inch toward the milestone of eighteen, the burden of adult responsibilities grows heavier each day. However, once in a while, I remember Grandmother’s long-ago advice and break my piggybank for a pair of sinfully high heels or attend a kickboxing class just for the sake of the dashing instructor,

savoring the privileges of being a modern young woman.

Silver and Glass

Joshua Stone  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Drawing  
*White Charcoal Pencil*



Whispering in the Rain

by John Kim  
*Honorable Mention Poetry*

Among the whisperings of the rain  
the silenced lies and mottled cries  
the songbird shies away

Whisperings in the rain  
of obscure truths  
of untold pangs and stuffy blues  
the story of letters left unsent  
astray on trains and alleyways

whisperings through the rain  
a telephone that never rang  
maddening tempest when all is still  
Nightingale that always sang  
in silence atop that lonely hill

Whisperings by the rain  
thy pleading eyes and voiceless sighs  
that tug and swallow and covet  
but soft, how gently falls, it lies  
on straining wishes wistfully above it

whispers caught and whispers lost  
whispers held and whispers sought  
whisper although tis in vain  
Whisper standing in the rain

The Overcast Kids

by Alan Wells

God bless the overcast kids  
Whose heads hang heavy on overcast days  
They curse into the mocking wind  
And sigh as it resounds

Stoic statues staring blankly,  
Lacking serenity, drenched in downpour  
Time is their waiting room  
Their tears defy gravity

Every step is a new prayer...  
God bless the overcast kids  
Their friends are absent, the kids don't blame  
They only wish that it would rain  
So they can finally cry

Grandma

by Katurah Jackson  
*Honorable Mention Poetry*

Haunting eyes  
With creases  
Sweat trickling down her tanned skin  
Hands rough like sandpaper

Abandoned hair strands  
The color of shiny nickels  
Dance in the vicious winds  
That gust through the field

Her voice  
The angelic sound of heaven  
As she hums the tune  
“Sweet Chariot”

Her frail frame  
Moves through  
The boundless rows  
Of bloody red tomatoes

She works hard  
With the strength of an ox  
Braver than any soldier  
Tougher than any man

I observe her in the garden  
She smiles at me  
I love the sound of her hoe  
Chop chop chopping in the garden

I remember her  
The warmth of her skin  
Her welcoming arms  
I remember...Grandma



Rays of Hope  
Amy Wilcosky  
*photograph*



Sam  
Kalina Deng  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Short Story

“Flight number 54493 to Washington D.C. Terminal 7C. Terminal 7C. Flight will be leaving in half an hour.”

He looks up, casting a weary, spectacled eye towards that familiar terminal on the other end. Everything appears the same – the same as every other time before. This time, however, things look more gray and more dull. The rampant metal fixtures and ceramic tiling appear colder and harder. Babies cry as mothers console. Children weave through the throngs of people and luggage, scamper up and down the escalators, and rummage through the various gift shops, knocking down goods and people alike. The glint in the children’s eyes is precious but fleeting.

Ubiquitous steel mirrors a semblance of the old man as he shuffles towards the escalator. The reflection mimics him in his broken gait and slumped trudge through the masses of happy faces. The metallic sheen exaggerates his scraggly gray hairs to frenzied silver wires. His skin shines an ashen tan amongst the muted neutrals of his umber loafers and Mars black suit. The old man’s suit drowns him in its stiff fabric for age, stress, and labor have gnarled his back and reduced him to a smaller man than he once was. His wrinkles also appear to be etched deeper into his weathered skin, which is as leathery as the bargained garage-sale pigskin now retired on his shelf. His eyes are sunken into his sockets and enshrouded by furrows of pain and regret. The old man looks away.

He looks down. He presses forward.

*Nothing gold can stay.* The words on the back cover of the new print edition of The Outsiders could not be more applicable to any day than to this day. The bookstore at the O’Hara International Airport is loved by all who have a bit of time to kill. Today, it’s loved by one fewer. One person more or less means little to the bustling bookstore that thrives on revenue generated from its over-priced hardbacks, petty gift items, and Starbucks coffee. But to this grayed man, one connotes everything.

Sporadic shelves of stuffed animals reach out from the walls and tiers of best-sellers command the floors. The environment is overwhelming, almost stifling. Even after eleven years, the same red and blue spangled Beanie Baby is still here, sitting atop all the other shelves of plushes as the echelon of teddy bears. Today, the lollipop red looks darker, like crimson, and

the blue seems graver, like the murky depths of the oceans.

*Eleven years.* Eleven years has passed since the family, a three-person

fleeing from communism, tyranny, and destruction. This family came to the states for freedom and life. Despite J-1 visas, they worked their way up to citizenship – proud belonging to the United States of America. Citizenship connotes the right to vote and duty to this country – duty to serve on a jury, uphold the Constitution against enemies both foreign and domestic, and bear arms to protect the liberties of the same. For a young man – a naturalized citizen – of eighteen, registering for the armed forces ignited an internal, eternal pride in his duty to his new nation. This pride grew in him as he ventured across the seas at nineteen, a marine cadet. In tortuous countries like his castigated China, he bore the freedoms of America on his shoulders and feared nothing, not even death. Now, he never will have to fear anything again.

For the old man, waiting outside the terminal for the airplane to land is no longer the same. There is no joy. There is no excitement in a promise of seeing the berated young man coming home. Instead, this time, there is only gray sadness. Unlike the reflective steel of the airport, his sadness does not shine but is overcast with biting pain and aching sorrow. His sunken eyes and wrinkles twist and contort into bitterness as the old man drags his feet across the hard, cold ceramic floor closer to that all-too-familiar terminal.

“Sir... Sir. Aren’t you on the flight to Washington D.C.?” the flight attendant implored with her wondering eyes and furrowed brow, stretched white by the tightness of her twisted bun.

“Yes,” the old man breathes.

“Well, will you please take out your ticket. Flight 54493 is now boarding.”

“Yes,” he echoes.

“Will it be just you traveling with us today?”

“Yes.”

“Good. This is certainly a beautiful time to visit the Capital.”

“Yes. No... No.” His murmured replies melt into the harmony of chattering squeals, clicking heels, and rolling plastic wheels.



Stereotype Archetype  
Majaliwa Mzombwe  
*pen and ink*

O’Hara welcomed the old man’s household of Chinese immigrants,



“Sir, are you okay? Is there anything I can do for you? Are you...” Her voice trails off as the terse passenger files into the growing line boarding Flight 54493.

Such is the greatness of America: a lending hand always nearby. However, this time, no external offer of help can alleviate the eminent, overcast gloom on the old man’s spirit. Life has prescribed him many bitter pills to swallow. Even so, this old man is able to find methods to sugar-coat the drug. However, this time, a spoonful of sugar will not be able to make the medicine go down. The brief details of the dreaded event was swallowed but not digested. Hurt, pain, and regret regurgitate the memories and leave a constant, nauseating aftertaste of grief in his heart.

Despite the present circumstances, pride remains. Citizenship is a privilege but can be a heavy tax on the heart of a non-native American. Though the price of war is heavy, it is tolerable. Protection of the liberties of this country is just that valuable.

The old man understands that. He, like his son, eschewed loyalty to his native land long ago and has since committed himself to the United States. His son simply took a step further. He dreamed. He dared. He protected. He fought. He lived.

He died.

The grayed man reflects on those memories rooted in the O’Hara. As the metallic luster of the steel exaggerates his staid, aged countenance, the memories emphasize the many times he had stood waiting in front of Terminal 7C. He remembers how he was once a part of the exuberant throngs of happy faces receiving returned loved ones. This time, his loved one, his son, will not return to him. The grayed man must go to him.

Dismantling the contorted sadness on his face into resignation, the old man clutches a frayed and grayed red and blue spangled Beanie Baby to the pocket of his overwhelming suit. The folds of the Mars black polyester and nylon mix engulf the bear in its darkness. He tears the bear from his heart and studies all its familiarities: the crooked left eye, his wife’s Special Sauce stain on its right paw, and the tattered “Sam” patch on its back. A faint smile dimples on his leathery face. The grayed man returns the bear to the crevices of his suit as he steps into the tunnel of Flight 54493.

It’s time to return it to its owner once and for all.

Rocky Fall  
Jamie Wiggins  
**Honorable Mention Photography**  
*photograph*



# Through The Flames

by Jamarius Waller

Sparks of insanity light up the night sky Chaos rattles the cradle of humanity Envy grazes the cheeks of every soul Still I love you, through the flames	Metallic missiles race to a target blindly, Pulses of men are replaced by pulsations of machines Anger pulls the trigger...and it stops Still I love you, through the flames
Massive marvels buckle under their artificers Sky lines, horizons, peace. They also have a transparent appeal Grasping into an abyss of darkness Still I love you, through the flames	The ashes are fresh, I smell them Their stench saddens the ground on which they lie Sifting through leaves nothing to salvage I have loved you, through the flames...



Love  
Erwin Morales  
*photograph*

# The Hero

by Megha Singh

A man rebellious to heartache Crushes the door, geared and alert He fights back bits of wood dangling from the rooftop Stumbles upon the rows of stands once full of chips Rushes in to see the place, the majesty all gone. Ashes run towards his face, everything a blur He neither fears nor shakes For he has seen death, bodies bake. He passes the base Now burned to the ground The remnants of the coolers Popping above the ash The bottles of soda, a river flood. A scream, a shiver, the glimpse of a blue cloth peeking from the doors He runs towards the blue as the flames hit his face A scar for life. He saves the little girl, walking past the crumbles His sweaty face, accomplished The promise to his job, his duty, his people, Kept.
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# Family Food

Abigail Cathcart

I crouch in front of my compact dorm refrigerator, observing the assortment of food that is in front of me. It reminds me of what my mother said while dropping me off at the Mississippi School for Math and Science dorms after our weekly grocery run: “It’s all about quality, not quantity, Abigail.” She hands me the last paper bag, which is filled with organic peanut butter, grapes, and all natural apple juice. I chuckle at the ironic statement, as only a game of fridge-tetris will make these newly-bought items fit in my refrigerator, already chock-full of my mom’s homemade quiche, lasagna, and muffins. Her voice carries a strained quality which lets slip that she is concerned about how well I am eating, if I am gorging on mass amounts of processed sugar or pesticide-filled fruits and vegetables. Although my mom’s obsession with feeding me nutritious food can sometimes get tiresome, I know that it is just her nature, and she only means well. Because, after all, my family does not take food lightly.

My mom is definitely not the black sheep of the family when it comes to caring about what to eat. Although she is the Monet of our evening kitchen, creating dishes like artwork that blend healthy ingredients with unique tastes, late at night I often catch my brother, Wendell, experimenting with different gadgets that make anything from homemade sausage to dandelion wine. His concoctions never cease to be successful, but there is a certain amount of daredevilish risk alive when tasting, as you trust his skill against the wrath of salmonella and E. coli. In the excruciating early hours, my father sets to work, pounding away at breads and pies. Both delicious in their simplicity, the tang of rising dough wafts in tantalizing contrast against the sweet smell of apples he is slicing for an apple pie. From her experience in France, my sister, Julia, teaches us how to savor fine chocolate, imported cheeses, and antique wines. She turns the seemingly effortless act of eating into an event which requires a great deal of concentration, as your taste buds become detectives, interrogating complex flavors.

Certain rituals regarding food have arisen from many past Thanksgivings, Christmases, and summer beach trips, as my family reunites with relatives who are equally in love with cooking. We take turns cooking old favorites, experimenting with new tastes, and enjoying what each of us (literally) brings to the table. It is always an exciting escapade to the gourmet food stores around where my aunt and uncle live in Washington, D.C., and each Thanksgiving we seem to stock up on enough dainties to last us until the next Turkey Season. Around



Watermelon Slice  
John Kim  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Painting  
watercolor

Christmas, our family bonding comes not from watching “Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street” or caroling around the neighborhood, but rather from rolling out gingerbread, rich with molasses, roasting brown sugared pecans that we picked from our backyard, and stringing mounds of popcorn, so that our house is a mouthwatering rainbow of aromas. As we molt the layers of wintery warmth and trek down to the beach for vacation, the food we enjoy also seems to bask in liberation. Canned vegetables are tossed aside, making way for bushels of fresh corn-on-the-cob and new-born peaches. My Uncle Alex sheds his usual mask of brusque professionalism and cooks a feast of Mexican delicacies for us. My mouth fills with a lime-marinated steak fajita that knocks me down with heated chili peppers, and I can see from the watery expressions of my cousins and siblings that I am not alone.

Although senses like sight, sound, and touch govern most of what we perceive, taste is the way that my family captures memorable events. Whenever my aunts and mother get together and reminisce about past weddings, the make-or-break point in the event is always the cake. “Her dress was lovely, but the Marzipan was completely off,” my mom says, “Not surprising the marriage didn’t last,” one aunt agrees. And they continue, appreciating memories of their mother or ancient friends based on meals they had had together. Although some may view this way of living as a touch eccentric, our passion for food helps to bring us together. We appreciate humanity by simply sitting down at a table, visiting, and sharing an integral element of our lives.

Caramel CHOCOLATE  
BY KENNETH FANG

c  
MHOACCOTEECLAHTCOOCTLOEOHCACLHTOCEAO  
UOLTAHCOCCOOLTEHAHOCCOTLAETALECOOHC  
NMELLRACAMECAARMELLACRAMEMELARACACLEMRA  
dCEATCTLACOEHOCHOLATEOCCHLOCOCHLATE  
rHHOLEOATELCOOHCLOOTHCCA EHATEOOCCL  
R U i  
p  
B  
M C  
ar  
C H O C O amel L AT E



# Fall Wanderings

Abigail Cathcart

The scent of burning foliage,  
warming and distinct.  
You mourn for the leaves.  
In their golden and red garb,  
now they lie  
unappreciated, but for  
the aroma their cremation creates.

Cheeks and noses,  
slapped scarlet  
by the exasperated wind.  
Hesitant toes,  
trying to escape  
a freezing floor.

Sneaky tastes of gingerbread  
before dinner  
earn a slap on the wrist  
and a molasses-filled smile  
of defiant satisfaction

# Spring

Kate Thompson

I love butterflies that  
Emerge from their cocoons  
Face first into the sun  
Out of their grey sheets  
Into a Technicolor morning  
Floating over parks and ponds and picnics  
Quickly shifting silent sights  
All around their butterfly brains  
Until their wings ache  
And their antennae droop  
And they waft softly, feather-like,  
Back down to Earth.



# Spigot

Kate Thompson

photograph

# Leaves

Miranda Shugars

2nd Place Poetry

My favorite day of the year  
is the day that all the leaves  
decide to let go.  
They cover parked cars  
like rain, but fall  
more gently.

They tap-  
dance between my shoes  
and stain the sidewalk  
with leaf-shaped burns.

I will never understand  
all of my friends,  
silent on this matter.

# Plumb Line

by Kenneth Fang

2nd Place Essay

Entering my house after an extended period, I see my father pretending to clean the kitchen in order to evade the complaints of my mother. I haven’t seen him for three months. After this period of separation, you would think that a father-son reunion would occur. However, there is no “Son. Welcome back.” Instead I hear, “Have you gotten taller? LIU BING! COME SEE IF KENNETH IS TALLER!” Hearing Dad’s excited call, Mom comes reluctantly, ready to follow the drill.

Standing at a whopping 4’ 10”, Dad tells me, “Keep your back straight, Fang Kun. Don’t slouch.” Already annoyed, I stick out my chest and arch my back making myself resemble a duck. Eventually, I cease my exaggerated antics so Dad can finish the always-important task of seeing whether I have grown that one inch. Unable to measure my height due to his lack of height, Dad asks Mom to do it. “Sixty-five inches! You have grown taller!” Once again, Dad’s excitement echoes through the house. Unfortunately, I am not sixty-five inches; I am sixty-four inches—on a good day.

This procedure became a traditional welcome home greeting from Dad. Every time, it seemed like I grew an inch. I suppose it was the angle from which Dad looked at it, or maybe he was blinded by his wistful observation; however, if his assessment of my height were true, I’d be at least seven feet tall. Despite his hopefulness, Dad always left me with a word of advice: “Keep your back straight. Don’t slouch.” The millimeters that I would gain from standing up straight seemed unworthy compared to the energy that I would have to spend. People call that being “lazy.” Back then, I called it being “energy efficient.”

I soon realized that my father was not the only person who wanted me to stand up straight. Coming straight out of the military, our band director introduced us to physical drills that my body never had experienced or wished to undergo. One of these drills involved standing straight with our instruments for however long the director wished—usually what seemed a day and a half. After each band practice, I pictured myself with a spinal injury in the imminent future.

My grandmother followed the trend, treating the situation more harshly than my father and militaristic band director. Stronger than both, she replaced words with actions—painful



actions. A casual walk with her to the local flea market in Wuhan, China, became another “don’t slouch” lesson. As I was sauntering down the sidewalk with my slumping spine, my grandmother released her fury on my back. She screamed at me, pointing at a hunchback coincidentally walking across the street, “Do you see him? Do you want to end up like him? Keep your back straight. You look like a fool.” Unlike any other instance, I responded with a timid nod.

I followed my grandmother’s advice from that day. A few months later I went to an interview, sitting straight up while remembering the sting from my grandmother’s smack. After we finished, my interviewer came up and told me that while the rest of my interview was excellent, he was impressed most by my posture. Inspired by his comment and the “don’t slouch” lessons, I have become a “stand up” guy, not only physically but also mentally, never shying away from difficult tasks. Maybe the energy spent for those extra millimeters is worth it after all.

Circus  
Kalina Deng  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Poetry

spiders trapeze from vine to vine   suspending on translucent wires  
cucumbers glisten with morning dew  
potatoes burrow deep into the sod  
peanuts shy from the spotlight   underneath the moss  
tomatoes chameleon   green, yellow, orange, and red  
string beans cascade from arbors   unveiling young garden snakes  
cilantro, mint, tarragon, and oregano perfume the air  
onion and leek shoots grace the sky   balancing expert ladybugs  
eggplants encircle prize squashes and ripened melons  
acrobatic crickets tumble from leaf to leaf  
water spouts from the hose- cannon  
faucets squeak in harmony with the winged orchestra  
I grip my pillow in suspense as I watch  
the toad plunge into the murky waters  
of the rain gauge  
my sister leads in applause for  
the ingenious Ringmaster



Don’t Forget the Goggles      Flo Osborne  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Painting      acrylic paint

The Hospital Wall  
Ena Wei

The climbing ivy monopolized the back wall of the hospital, facing the garden. Early winter sun shone but brought not warmth. The chilling late fall wind had stripped off the ivy’s thick drapery of leaves, revealing the massive network of vines. John stared at the vines, similar to the protruding veins on his hands. These gnarly tentacles, greedy and obsessive, crept and crawled, taking over every available inch and seeking every thin crack. These gangly botanic hands, with uneven brown knuckles like John’s, stretched across the window ledges, binding the window from the outside. The long-term tenants of the hospital often joked that the rooms with windows on the back wall were just perfect for suicide watch. Even if the patients managed to break the window and saw off the iron bars, the impenetrable web of vines would stop them. Only occasionally, the ivy missed a spot, sparing a patch of yellowed stucco cinder block. On the section where the vines lay extra thick, birds had crafted their little havens with twigs and stones they found. In the spring, little avian families resided in the nooks and crannies in the shelter of burgeoning leaves. The delicate budding green swayed in the warm spring breeze, serenaded in the birds’ love songs. When winter approached, these little twig bowls hung empty, exposed to the wind. John thought, “Maybe they escaped to the South in time.” His optimism fell as quickly as the crisped leaves. He decided that the feathery residents got dragged away by the stray cats or stricken by the sudden cold front. Walking away from the back wall of the hospital, John pondered whether he should request permission to burn off the ivy once and for all. Spare the birds of more heartache.

Across the garden, a dilapidated tool shed stood, slowly sinking into the soft earth. John stepped into the paint-peeling storage room for tools to start on his daily task. Searching for a rake, he sifted through the forest of wooden handles of his gardening tools, each sandpapered glossy and smooth by the tough calluses on his palms. John returned outside with the rake, stopped by the whizzing north wind, and rubbed his hands together for warmth. These hands, so tough, could chop down a twenty-year-old pine in five blows and weed half an acre in fewer than fifteen minutes. These hands, so tender, could trim the most delicate petals on freshly bloomed rosebuds or tend to the constant runny nose of five-year-old Benjamin, but that was long ago.





Creeping Ivy  
Miranda Shugars  
*photograph*

John used his hands to count each dollar bill he earned and sewed each elbow and knee patch on his worn

clothes just so he could send little Ben to where he wanted to go, but only to use those hands again to wave goodbye when Ben was drafted after graduation.

In the spring, John’s hands busied themselves amongst the bushes and trees, making sure the patients could stroll in a full-bloomed garden when summer came. As the brilliant fall retired, John’s hands could only collect the fragile corpses of

what once ornamented the branches in the desolated yard. He turned to take another look at the wall in its obnoxious resilience, and caught the sight of two sticks of legs too long for the baggy blue and white striped pajamas and crimson knitted hat. The patients never invaded John’s garden after October, afraid the chill might take advantage of their vulnerable immune systems. Rubbing his eyes, John thought he was seeing things in the glaring mid-day sun. Crunching on the dry leaves, John came up next to the figure, on the bottom of the wall. John judged the figure as a bony fifteen year old wearing the paper thin hospital gown that made for the toasting heater inside the hospital.

In no mood to entertain company, John warned, “Go inside, boy. You are going to get sick not wearing a coat.”

The boy ignored John’s admonitions.

The boy asked, “Where do you think the birds went?”

Surprised that someone else noticed the illusive bird nests, John was slow to answer.

The boy didn’t wait. He looked John in the eye and said, “Do you think they will come back?”

Bored by the imprudent intruder, John turned around to get back to his work. Leaving the boy, he dropped a line, “If they could fly away from the cat’s stomach or the iced ditches.”

“Well. I think they will come back next year,” argued the boy. He didn’t intend to let John off easy. Tearing the lines right out of an encyclopedia, the boy recited, “See those nests? Those

are Barn Swallows’. I bet they will just migrate to the Southern Hemisphere for the winter, and will chirp their little hearts out when spring comes.”

Under his breath, John spat, “Whatever.”

The boy carried on, “Did you know that the Barn Swallows migrate during winter to more temperate regions because their insect prey population collapses? They also attract mates with their excellent flying skills while in the tropics, I bet those swallows that live in those nests...” Yadi, Yadi, Yada.

Already in a bad mood, John wanted to grieve in peace and didn’t need the biology lecture from a stranger. He was going to let little know-it-all just have it. Veins pulsing in his forehead, John turned to face the boy and started, “You little...” The crimson knitted hat slipped and revealed a bare head and sunken pale cheeks. The boy, still unaware, smiled in pride of the displacement of his knowledge. The anger in John’s eyes softened. John walked over and picked up the hat for the boy.

John requested, “So tell me more about this swallow.”

Flight of the Hummingbird  
Jamie Wiggins  
*Ink*





# Carrot Cake

by Kalina Deng

*Honorable Mention Essay*

I love the house at the head of the cul-de-sac on Southland Drive and down by Temple Baptist Church off Main Street in Greenville, Mississippi. The sap green patina and flat-roofed home is not mine but I do live there. I’m accustomed to the footstep tattoo on the cherry and tile floors and soft scuffles on the Oriental rugs. The smell of coffee and day-old grease hangs onto the papered walls like a portrait of the lady owner.

The lady owner, Miss Georgia, is something else. For one thing, she’s my best friend Alex’s mom. And for another, her hair always looks fierce. She sports a natural Cruella de Ville hairdo, one side of her head molasses brown and the other amber. “Two-toned,” she claims as she tumbles her spindle-like fingers through the umber and sienna strands of her wavy locks. Those fingers are lengthened through labor and calloused from life. She uses those hands to grate the two pounds of carrots that go into her “world famous” seven-layer scratch carrot cake. She uses those hands to put her lollipop-red KitchenAid pots and pans to work and crash supper to life. I love her blue-plate meals, the kind that induces your inner Falstaff and blissful satisfaction. She works those same hands to hem skirts, fix bodices, and take up waists. She uses them again to file land deeds, divorces, and last and final testaments into the back storage closets of the downtown law firm. She’s happy with her occupation as a lawyer’s secretary. Considering that she dropped out of college after her first semester, she believes herself blessed with such a respectable job.

When Miss Georgia speaks, she lectures. When she has no words, she speaks with her eyes. She counsels me about life’s “firsts”: first loves, first failed test, first scratch biscuit and maple syrup, and first losses. Her glassy eyes vacillate from hue to hue, matching her glance – reproach, empathy, and glee. In such cases, she is an inviting and intimidating figure. Her skin is leathered and weathered from manual labor, coffee, and the dust of the Old South. Years of stories are etched between her wrinkles and freckles. These stories have morals and parallelism to mine and Alex’s reality. We often come to her for advice.

I come to Miss Georgia for advice more often than Alex does. My own mother and I have a distant relationship. My mom is rooted in the traditions of China. She is the epitome of my heritage and its customs. To quote Mark Twain, she “eschew[s] surplusage.” My mom despises

decorum and all things enjoyable to the American teenager. My mom doesn’t understand the importance of the “firsts” or the cultural divide between all things Chinese and everything American. Naturally, I identify with Miss Georgia rather than with Mom. I often implore Miss Georgia for her stories and wisdom and indulge in her carrot cake and iced Lipton sweet tea.

Miss Georgia is my connection to the South – the South in which I was raised. My own mother is my tie to China – the past and the land in which I was born. In my senior year, I have many questions about college and, in general, the future. Of course, I lay my concerns before Miss Georgia. She looks me over with those vacillating eyes and shakes her two-toned waves. “Go ask your mom.”

I do.

To relate me to my past and her own self, Mom tells me the stories of my childhood and homeland China. She recounts the time I escaped from our townhouse and rode out the limits of Shijiazhuang on my squeaky rubber and iron tricycle. She muses at all the times she had to get off work and walk the three blocks to my daycare – just so she could comfort me that I wouldn’t tumble out of my top bunk at naptime. We both remember the time I climbed to the roof of a dilapidated barn, fell through the rotted wood and straw, and came home with scratches up and down my body. “Well, at least you didn’t almost burn down your grandmother’s house,” Mom scoffs. Long story short, Mom got carried away with firecrackers on her ninth New Year’s party.

After an hours-long talk with Mom, I realize that I am every bit like Mom as I am like Miss Georgia. Mom and I share our love of roast duck, sciences, math, and giving our own parents hell. Miss Georgia and I both appreciate fried chicken, art, history, and getting dolled up like every other Southern belle. As much as I am an American and a Southerner, I am Chinese. It’s funny how Miss Georgia introduced me to my new world and yet reconciled me to my past.

These days, I am at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, a public residential school three hours away from Miss Georgia and Mom and the “most diverse square

Reflection  
Maryam Mohammadi  
**Honorable Mention**  
**Photography**  
*photograph*





block in the state.” I live on the second floor of Goen Hall across from an Egyptian and an Italian and a couple rooms down from a Nigerian native and the “brown” girls. My roommate Margaret takes pride in her “white” descent and my best friend Ji-Young advocates for the color yellow as well as her Korean roots. Being at MSMS has broadened my Southern-Chinese perspective to encompass a world-view. Now, I have enough stories to author my own Babysitter’s Club kind of a series. As a Southerner, Chinese immigrant, and an MSMS student, I understand the values of hospitality, education, and diversity – the values I now hold onto for the future.

About every other day, I call up Miss Georgia after catching up with Mom. I look forward to my next visit to the house at the head of the cul-de-sac on Southland Drive. I can’t wait for us three women – Miss Georgia, Mom, and myself – to discuss politics, college, and dumb boys. I can’t wait to dig into that carrot cake – Miss Georgia and me with our forks and Mom with her chopsticks.

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Saturday Morning

Ena Wei

Sleeping in Saturday morning

Wake up early enough for one o’clock brunch

Still in flannel PJs, boxers and T-shirt,

Slippers and flip-flops

We walked in a line

Blocking the traffic-less road

Yellow scrambled eggs and crimson salsa

Piled on golden French toast and greasy sausages

Small cup of coffee, half cream and one sugar

Hopefully, the weather will cooperate

Let the sky be high, the sun be kind, and the wind be meek

So we can spread our homework out on the lawn

Count the clouds passing by

Savoring our Saturdays



Miss Maggie  
Reanna Bierg  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Painting**  
*watercolor*

Constellations

by Miranda Shugars  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place Poetry**

We belong on the beach  
under the stars  
counting the tiny white crabs  
that sift through the foam,

one two three, three two one,

where waves carry everything  
lost. They coerce the sand  
from under the arches of our toes  
and leave dear artifacts  
that find us, worn and buried  
in sand; we will know them  
by the dents and cracks,

from that first, uneven  
stair that always caught me  
in oversized shoes; that first,  
passionate fight that rocked  
your mother’s china into  
pieces; our first uncoordinated kiss  
that carried us against  
my bookshelf and bruised  
the cat-shaped book end

whose tail nudges my back  
through the powdered and dusty shells,  
as we count the tiny white stars  
that shift into constellations,

one two three, three two one.

The waves will leave us  
roads of foam, and the crabs  
with trails of foam  
will find us, asleep and buried  
in sand.



Gui Lin  
Maryam Mohammadi  
*Acrylic*





Muddy Artist  
by Abigail Cathcart

His fingers  
bend, fold  
like dirtied dancers  
they create art.  
The clay  
pulls like taffy  
in the front window  
of a candy store.  
The wheel  
twirls in time  
to his foot beat  
on the pedal.  
Firm hands  
mold, create  
a form  
it grows, stretches  
like a butterfly  
from its cocoon  
almost there...

it crumples  
a touch too weak  
he whispers a curse  
and starts again



Epitaphs

Lacy Maxwell

An epitaph for a Christian:  
C u l8r

An epitaph for an Atheist:  
K thx bai

An epitaph for a Buddhist:  
Brb

An epitaph for an Agnostic:  
Now wat?

Indiana

by Miranda Shugars

I was eleven when we returned  
home. The silver maple waited  
in our old front lawn.  
My mother's morning glories  
had consumed the lattice  
and brick bungalow columns.  
Mid-summer, they spread  
full blue behind starry maple leaves.  
I wanted to bring one back  
to Mississippi. But we followed  
the cracked and grass-invaded  
sidewalk, heavy and hot--  
we glanced at our home  
and walked on.

Just Peachy

Alan Wells

**Honorable Mention Painting**  
*oil paint*

Swirls  
Maryam Mohammadi  
*photograph*

Origami Sails  
by John Kim

I, an inebriate of this world  
Drunken with its ignorant bliss  
My lips tainted by slander and calumny  
I blaspheme against the one I hold most dear  
Forgive me  
For tonight I break bread and dine in the halls of  
Bacchus

In my folly, I commandeer my ship  
A folded paper boat through the tempest of life  
Staring up at the pantheon of stars  
At the glittering gods I gaze  
Oblivious of the maelstrom  
That swallows, swallows my origami sails

My lungs saturated, my ears filled  
With the sea's truncated symphony  
The wave's permeating sonata  
Whispers soft, whispers harsh  
Wake up wake up wake up  
Thou starry starry sleeper  
Open open thine eyes oh aged babe

Awashed ashore I look to sea  
It ebbs it ebbs  
Its throbbing womb gives birth to the rising sun

I cry out  
The sea has taken taken all I ever wanted  
It was to be among the stars



Feet  
Miranda Shugars  
*photograph*

Lara Turner  
by Kate Thompson  
Honorable Mention Poetry

Lara, Lara  
the oldest girl  
in the whole first grade  
your knees are stained green  
and your hair is shaved clean off  
you call it "low maintenance"  
your "friends" call it stupid  
you read your books  
upside down  
and devour every color  
in my crayon box  
your house has four wheels  
and seventeen dogs  
none of them have names  
your pockets are filled  
with dirt and leaves  
your arms are filled  
with bruises  
I hear the explanations  
That you tell Mrs. Douglas  
But not even you, Lara,  
Could run into a doorknob  
That many times.



Jalapeños  
Maryam Mohammadi  
*photograph*

A Lizard  
Majaliwa Mzombwe

I caught a lizard once,  
Sneaking inside a shaded bush.  
He squirmed, clammy in my palm,  
Desperate legs trapped in my grasp.  
But only for a moment,  
Then, stilled.

Had he forgotten his damp nest  
Beneath the cracked stepping stones  
That guided giants across the garden?  
Did he miss the twilight of the bush,  
Shafts of sun rays separating the  
leaves?

He forgot, except for his heart  
Fluttering inside his ribs  
Beating; begging his prison to give.

I waited a minute,  
So he would fall asleep,  
Then cracked open my fist,  
To peer at his mosaic skin.

Instead, I saw a green blur,  
And felt a click.  
He left his whip-like tail,  
Pulsing and throbbing,  
Adding blood to my sweat.  
And skittered on home  
How could he forget?

Springy Butterflies  
Jamie Wiggins  
*photograph*

March  
Wayne King

The first month of spring  
And weather changes  
Leave and grass regain their verdant color  
Flowers bloom all across the Earth  
In colorful paint splotches  
Animals awaken from their long winter naps  
Scurrying to find food  
Days become slightly longer  
Nights seem slightly shorter  
Children come outside to play  
This time without a jacket and long pants  
The “beginning” of the year

Churning Daisies  
Amy Wilcosky  
*photograph*

Inspire Me Perhaps  
Darrian Kelly

inspire me perhaps;

give me the thunderstorm of this rainless summer,  
show me the view of this city from your bedroom window,  
drain my attention from the most major burdens,  
generate a composition to make the past just a faint memory.  
with all strings attached, form an equilibrium  
to make components of this soul coexistent.

initiate these electric hearts as they dance in the rain.

repetitively grasping the unfeeling,  
once again giving in to nostalgia —and continue dreaming.

Nature at Work  
Jamie Wiggins  
**Honorable Mention Photography**  
*photograph*



# Revolution

by Maryam Mohammadi

Tonight the cool dew settles on the glass box that imprisons us.  
As the morning sun burns away the fog we wake  
to painful cries of a mother whose son sways limply in the wind.  
Noon comes, and the silent streets frighten us.  
We want to look to each other for comfort but we mustn't speak;  
for the man clad in common men's clothing is the same man  
who tightens this thick bristle around our necks.

Our mothers tell us that darkness is dangerous,  
but some brother's passion pulls him into the night.  
Dawn slowly creeps upon us, and our late brother's mother  
lights candles with her flaming body.  
A dirty child lamely kicks the empty kerosene can,  
crumbling the ashes beneath his feet.

The cacophony, exhaust.

Dusk bears down on me, and a soothing maternal voice draws me into the street.  
A delicate black scarf protects her face and her fierce green eyes  
And she draws out my voice. We grieve.

Dawn clears away the fog, and a thousand faces gaze up at me.  
Those green eyes catch my attention, a friend.  
She mutters a prayer as she tightens this rough chord around my throat.  
I gasp for air, and taste blood.

Rafiki's Dream  
Reanna Bierig  
*acrylic paint*



# Darkness & Light

Sarah Catherine Yawn

Where does darkness come from?  
Shadows under beds,  
Cracks in the bark of a tree,  
The closed seed of a flower,  
A window of an abandoned house,  
The soles of a discarded shoe,  
Footprints left in the sand,  
The grave of a loved one,  
The depths of the mind.

Where does light come from?  
The smile of a newborn baby  
The laugh of a child,  
The heart of a parent,  
A drop of dew in the morning,  
Flashlights with new batteries,  
Candles with newly lit wicks,  
The morning sun,  
Stars in far-off space.



# Pleated Skirts and Poetry

Miranda Shugars

I pause beneath crepe myrtles. In seventh grade I sketched the crepe myrtle that grew in the small valley of my school's outdoor and perpetually dirty swimming pool. The tree intrigued me: its bark, in strips of color that peeled away, resembled a rough and knobby birch--but my fingers slid across smooth gloss. Flaking slightly to the touch, the tree was nevertheless a polished wooden sculpture. This particular crepe myrtle bore years of abuse: carved names and hearts, and a stash of faded, chewed gum in the lee of a principle branch. But underneath, the crepe myrtle's flawless trunk and swaying leaves were, unmistakably, lovely. I sketched it because, as an artist and poet, I constantly search for beauty.

Somewhere in the Between  
Alan Wells  
Honorable Mention Painting  
*acrylic paint*

# I Took a Walk through the Woods

John Corbin Evans

And now in following you, blue jay, home,  
I find the reason that I love you, too.  
Intrinsic to me as my heart; you've shone  
Like the crest of the moon, amid night's hue.

You rest your murky eyes on the surface  
And cry within, no motive to be strong.  
Your voice can carry melodies with haste,  
And though soft tone flourished, years you've grown.

One loss at battle, null and voids a war;  
And folk songs are rhythms of your still heart.  
Memories you'd found, alas, are no more.  
And angels dream for wings pure as yours are.

Ripe blue bird, do not refrain nor fly astray.  
For lustrous stars will guzzle down the day.



Last year at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science I enrolled in Creative Writing. This was my first experience writing for fun as well as for a grade, and I discovered creative writing as a study. For instance, though I have always enjoyed writing poetry, I had not before examined the technique. Over the year, I modeled my style after the Imagist movement that captivated me with Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro.” In the economy of language and concrete evocations, I understood poetry as a tool to communicate beauty.

This constitutes my goal in poetry and, generally, in art. On the third or fourth day of class, my Creative Writing teacher quoted Robert Browning:

“We're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see.”

This, she stressed, makes an effective poem: the quality of showing the world anew, of encapsulating one moment that makes the poet stop and sharing that moment with the reader. These moments speak. It is the job of the poet, the painter, the musician to distinguish and reproduce their message. A poet is a translator.

Every morning now, as a senior crossing campus, I pass crepe myrtles in bloom, and every morning I stop. They stand, smooth-hard and arching, cold arms with leafy shawls and pink tassels. For seven years I’ve passed these same trees--on I-20 moving to Mississippi, on the playground my first day of fourth grade, in my now-familiar neighborhood, and every walk to class--and I always relive my initial fascination. Every morning, between my dorm and academic building, I can’t help but wonder: what do crepe myrtles say? What draws my eye and stops my feet?

These crepe myrtles flower pink--tiny knots, like azaleas. I examined the blooms for the first time about a week ago when school started. Each branch ends in a cluster of verdant bulbs, whose tops part. From these spring pink stems that illustrate perfect geometric arches. They ascend to petals that tint purple through tissue-paper skin, and a lip that curls and wrinkles outward. Each blossom opens upward--cups of sunlight--petals creased as though they hang. Pleated skirts, for all the world. These articles litter the grass, cluster at the edges of buildings, and within a month they will fade. In winter, stripped of their crowns, the crepe myrtles display



Japanese Forest  
Maryam Mohammadi  
*acrylic paint*

the delicacy of their frosty green-tipped limbs, and each cherry tan and auburn shade waxes brilliant. Their bared branches reach skyward, until the leaves and skirts once again bear them down in the spring. On windy days I watch the flowers pirouette toward the grass, lost in private, inaudible adagios I cannot hear amid the static of passing feet and shuddering leaves.

But why am I struck every time I pass? Is it because crepe myrtles do not dominate space like some southern trees, sprawling live oaks or stooping magnolias? Is it that they instead grow to foot-stopping color every spring and offer cold comfort every winter? I suppose I could offer some Kantian explanation about the power of the aesthetic in transcendence, but this essay isn’t about philosophy--it’s about the flowers and the trees. Passing the crepe myrtles in bloom every day reminds me of what I, as a poet and an artist, strive to express: beauty that causes the viewer to stop--and look closer.

Without Moving Lips  
Alesha Briscoe

“ I will start from the top and work my way down,”  
She says, as she examines my nose, ears, eyes.  
“Open wiiiide.”  
“Oh, you can do better than that!”  
A flat popsicle stick compresses my tongue,  
Wandering eyes peer into my throat.  
“Girl, you have some tonsils.”  
“Nurse, do you see how swollen they are?”

“Oooh, yeah, I see!”  
(My throat hurts)  
“Does this hurt? What about this?”  
(Slow, assuring nod)  
“Your heartbeat is split! But it’s not unusual.”  
(Wonder what that’s supposed to mean?)  
White lab coat faces its back to me:  
“You have tonsillitis!”  
“Follow these instructions and you  
Should start getting better,”  
“If not, those babies are coming out!”

Refuge  
Sindhu Shivaji  
*photograph*

Waiting Room  
by Abigail Cathcart

I remembered touching the ball for the first time. That uncertain foot lightly crashing against the ball's side. I remembered coming home from club games and gulping down masses of Oreos and lukewarm milk. I remembered the challenge of supporting my head's growing weight, as exhaustion seeped through me with each deep breath, until my eyelids slumped against each other.







Wishing Well    Miranda Shugars  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place Photography**    *photograph*

My eyes jumped back into focus, back from the daydream that was more attractive than what I was now forced to pay attention to. Nurse Kathy stated to me that Trey's head had hit the side of mine at such an angle that part of his nose was lodged into his brain. "He coulda died automatically, but it just barely skimmed the surface. We're tryin' to figure out how much damage has already been caused. He's in Intensive Care now. We'll just have to see how this plays out." Pause. "Now there are some lovely magazines over here that you folks might enjoy while you wait." Her face reminded me of a large-mouth bass, the state's fish, and as she bustled in and out of the waiting room, I could see a throat lozenge bouncing around in that gaping mouth. Nurse Kathy's obvious indifference to what had happened clenched my stomach. "Just doing her job," I thought. She had to please the number one customers who came in on gurneys, but she couldn't forget about the rest of us. I figured this place was like a morbid hotel, with bedrooms and room service and maids.

I remembered when my mom used to practice with a self-defense tape. It seemed difficult for her to perform each drill correctly, so from another room I would often hear the grunt of an attacking woman, a whispered curse, the whiz of a rewinding tape, and then an even more zealous grunt. The last drill of abruptly thrusting your palm into the offender's nose to push it into their brain played and rewound in my head as if I too needed to practice it more.

The hospital's industrial white and olive-green tiles glared back at me, whispering, "You put him here. You hurt him. He's going to have to be staring at us for a very long time now because of you. IF he ever wakes up that is." I squirmed in my plastic seat, trying to think of something else. Magazines. I picked up a three-month-old copy of *People*, felt the flimsy back buckle underneath the grasp of my thumb and forefinger. I observed the airbrushed models for *Caress* razors and *Victoria's Secret* underwear that were in between articles about some actress's growing butt size and another's obsession with older men. Close quickly. Don't care. Doesn't matter.

My soccer coach, Sean, came back from the vending machines with two Styrofoam cups of coffee. He handed me his right-hand cup as a peace offering. Coach never let us have caffeine because it hurt our game. "You shouldn't've come, Martin" he said in faded resignation. "I'm only here because I'm the Director of Athletics and need to see how things are looking. Plus, I know his family." Pause. "I know his family, too," I replied. "His little sister has

brown curly hair and his dad comes to all of his games. I need to be here. It's my fault." "It's not your fault, boy." His retort came out in a sigh, not very reassuring to a person who may or may not have killed someone. I couldn't stand to see his face, usually sun-beaten and weathered, paled underneath the fluorescent lights, displaying his age. Coach's voice, usually husky from yelling out drills, was now like white tissue paper, brittle. I realized I was not the only one hurting.

Coach had called the play that had made this happen. It was the last ten minutes of playoffs and we were tied, one to one. Before putting me in, Coach grabbed me by the neck, and said that this was my chance. If I didn't leave everything I had on that field, then I could forget about playing like this again. My palms were sweating as I slipped off my warm-ups and jumped into the game, right mid-fielder. I played harder than I had ever before, racing to the ball, burning my thighs as I never stopped moving. A corner kick. The last two minutes of the game. This was it. I saw the ball begin to curve over to me. . . oh, God, it's almost there. . . I jumped to receive it. And so did the defender from the other team. We crashed together. Adrenaline pumping, I retrieved the ball and headed for the goal, shooting and scoring easily. I turned around, grinning, to screams of celebration, just in time to see the defender, Trey, flop to the ground like a rag doll, lifeless. There was a breath of quiet confusion. Then the blur of parents, coaches, blue-red lights, and now a hospital.

Coffee burned the fleshy space between my thumb and finger as my cup slipped. I set it on the linoleum counter to my left, and noticed a pair of hands resting inside each other. One hand engulfed the other, more petite one, and traced circles around its palm. I gasped, looked away, terrified of making eye contact with their owners. My breathing came in punctuated spurts, my eyes stung, and I could not, for the life of me, find a place to rest them as they zoomed from one corner of the waiting room to another. I felt trapped. It's my fault. God. Then finally, "It's alright," Trey's mother said, releasing her hand from her husband's grasp to touch my shoulder. "You didn't mean anything by it. Trey knows that."

I realized she was right. This was a room, full of people who were waiting. Not blaming. It did not matter whose fault it was. Just waiting. And so I waited.

Leaving  
Sindhu Shivaji  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Photography**  
*photograph*







## Contradictions

Sindhu Shivaji

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Essay

Golden Ratio  
Kalina Deng  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Place Drawing**  
*charcoal*

I am a walking contradiction. I have the brownest arms, but the whitest palms. My soft heart clashes against my sharp tongue. I trip while walking to class but glide like Miss America on the tennis court. Though I cannot force even one tremulous, songbird note from my vocal chords, I can pour a whole Beethoven symphony from the deft curve of my long fingers. My hair rivals Rapunzel's in length, but it still isn't enough to bring a prince to my window. I understand my family's native Tamil but cannot speak it. I embrace my religion without understanding it. My roots twist deep into chunky Mississippi soil, but my leaves are reaching out towards crisp, northern air. My soccer cleats look like a twisted pile of leather, but my socks still smell like the plastic bag they came in. I am a leader. I am a follower.

I leave cookies "for Santa" even though cookie crumbs sprinkle my dad's collar every Christmas morning. I like Garfield comics, but Monday will always be my favorite day of the week. I want to meet one of every kind of person in existence without cutting the strings that tie me to my childhood friends. I adore Mother Earth but think bottled water tastes better than tap. I can listen in one instant to the high, warbling, old-woman style singing of my parents' Sri Lankan homeland and, in the next, enjoy rap by a man currently sitting in a prison cell in Memphis, Tennessee. I yearn to go to college a million miles away while a part of me longs to stay in my dollhouse bedroom in my parents' home.

Contradictions make up my life and my sense of self. I've lived these first seventeen years of my life in a small Mississippi town, where *individuality* and *originality* are SAT vocabulary words and nothing more; where having skin and hair that is different isn't exotic - it's strange; and where the number of times you've been to the tanning bed and had your teeth whitened is directly proportional to how interesting you are. And yet, I love the South. I'll never let go of the pleasant flow and twang of the word "y'all" and all it represents. Locked forever in my mind are images of young southern gentlemen carrying my books and holding open doors, pushing their long, Dixie-boy hair away from their eyes. My heart will always have a space for the perfection of blinding Fourth of July fireworks boom-pop-crackling above a field, layered from side to side with the familiar, joyful faces of everyone I know.

Because of the diversity of my personality and experiences, I can identify with ideas, movements, and people. I am glad to know what I know. I embrace my individuality and flaunt it. My contradictions make up a complex code of yeses and nos, cans and cannots, and wills and will nots, and that code is utterly individual, utterly mine.

## Papa

Sadvhi Batra

My father's feet echoed through the wooden tiles of our hallway as he made his way into our two story home around eleven p.m. The owls continued to hoot outside and the moon shone through the window roof of the den, shadowed the wrinkles by his hazel eyes and ashen beard. He poured Crown Royal into his small glass, added Coke, and took a sip. His day hadn't come to an end. His task as a father and husband remained. Today he woke up at five and after completing his morning rituals at six, he made his way to his liquor store. He mopped the newly tiled floors, stocked more liquor bottles, checked the stock market, and reviewed his profit. At ten, he opened to find a line of native residents of Bassfield, Mississippi.

The only goal on his mind involved making money for the betterment of his family. He served customer after customer using his thick Indian accent to ask: "What would you like, sir?" or "How can I help you, ma'am?"--never letting his forehead crease at the nasty words that came through some of his customers' mouths, or letting his nose wrinkle at the foul smell of unwashed clothing many of his buyers wore. He distinguished himself as the true breadwinner of his family after twelve years of persistent labor.

When he initially arrived in America with his wife and children, he immediately set forth on "the ladder of success" without a single penny in his pocket. He started by sweeping and mopping the floors of the local Pizza Hut in Wheaton, Maryland, to eventually becoming the manager of Riggs Bank in Bethesda. During this time period, he lived in a double-family home with his mother, and upon receiving his position at Riggs Bank, he moved to an apartment in



Silver Spring. He worked two jobs—manager of a bank during the day and the single employee of 7/11 at night. He wouldn't set foot into his apartment until one in the morning, only to wake up at six and make his way to Bethesda.

Self-Portrait  
Joshua Stone  
**Honorable Mention Drawing**  
*charcoal*

Eventually, he and his family moved to Mississippi and he became an owner of a liquor store.



One night at the dinner table, after I came home from a football game, he asked me:  
“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

I replied, “I want to become a doctor who works as hard as you do, Papa.”

Thus, I found myself at The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, a public, residential high school, studying for countless hours in subjects such as calculus, literature, and organic chemistry, as a mere attempt to one day become as successful as my dad. I have started doing research at Mississippi State, and I have been titled as a Semifinalist for the Siemens Competition. This award highlights my awaiting success, which will be received only when I become as successful, diligent, and persistent as my father.

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Shape Table  
Joshua Stone  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Place Drawing**  
*charcoal*

Man to (Steamed Bread)  
Kalina Deng

the vender comes at four each day  
“man to, man to, man to!”  
his chant – so familiar and alluring  
the smell of the steamed bread rises  
his call carries – reverberates through the stairwell  
echoes through the door  
rings in my ears  
I glance at my mother – she nods and I’m off  
skipping down the stairs, clutching my two yen  
coveting the steamed good, salivating in childish gluttony  
eight “man to” for my two yen  
ambling up the stairs, guarding my prize  
to my mother, I present six –  
and a half  
“man to”

The Gym  
Majaliwa Mzombwe

The shiny panes of glass and the bright sheets of metal glittered in the hot sun. The building’s modern exterior once invited the old man to work on its new machines, sweat on its track, or relax in its pool. However, the gym now seemed smaller and older; the concrete steps leading to the entrance showed black spots of unscraped gum and grass, the long tentacles stretching, reaching for the other side, one side playing Adam, one side playing God.

It was the place he frequented twice a week, oftentimes with his son James. They would toil together, bone, muscles, and sinew straining on cold steel. “Come on, old man,” James would tease him, “is that all you’ve got?” Father and son pushed each other to go for another set, add another plate, or run another lap. The old man had watched his son exchange tenacious baby fat for confidence, while he remained the same: graying around the temples with an ever-present thin beard, that shone almost white under the gym’s harsh light.

The man snapped back to the present, eyes straying away from Michelangelo’s work and lingering instead on the well-worn passenger seat of his old Camry. It was slightly reclined and pushed all the way back, a position adjusted and refined over countless trips to the gym. However, the seat lay empty now, only a depression, a void that could never be replaced by an American flag.

The old man stared through the tattered cloth of his car as minutes ticked by unobserved. Wet, glazed eyes focused inward, reflecting on the past. The taste of salt in his mouth broke his stupor and the old man cleared his throat and stepped out of the Camry, slamming the door shut behind him and shrugging off the creeping tendrils of his grief. Undaunted the man set his jaw, mandibles grinding teeth and rippling the thin beard that clung to his face, and stepped towards the gym.

The endless parking lot stretched before him, a grey, crumbling expanse of rock and ash, longing for the tar that once filled its various cracks in the surface. The process had been gradual for the pavement. Many running shoes, weeks of rain, and hundreds of cars had stolen the black glue from the surface, drop by drop, and the cement had sifted and sunk in some places.

The old man then walked onto the wide concrete walkway that led to the entrance of the building, avoiding the sharp broken corner of the step. That corner had cracked and fallen inward, its outer edges shoved and twisted upwards after being crushed by a lawn mower. The

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tendrils of grass had yet to conquer that portion of the sidewalk, leaving red Yazoo clay between the cracks.

The door of the gym no longer seemed so far away as the old man mustered the courage to complete his march. He stared at the shrunken man he saw in the door’s reflection before reaching out to grab the curved handle that commanded him to pull. The door swung sharply outwards, discarding the image of midlife crisis and replacing it with a young man. His buzzed hair was jeweled with sweat; beads of it crowned his hairline and trickled around deep dark circles framed in white, racing towards the tip of a slanting chin. It fell onto his grey shirt, adding to the deep collar that darkened around his neck and sloped down his chest. The shining jewel landed precisely between the “R” and the “M” of his ARMY t-shirt. The young man murmured a polite apology and turned to step past the old man.

“I have a son that joined,” he said, nodding to the shirt.

“Really?” the young man responded, face brightening with the prospects of a conversation. “Is he deployed now?”

“No, no. He just returned from his tour in Afghanistan,” the old man responded, grey eyes darting from the dark ones for a moment. “Why did you enlist?”

“College, my parents wouldn’t pay for it, so Uncle Sam did,” he responded, smiling roguishly as he wiped away the diamond that trembled from his chin. “I’m headed out in two weeks. Iraq.”

“They givin’ you a desk job?” the old man enquired.

“No, I chose to be on patrol,” he informed the old man, dark eyes set and determined. “I want to do my part.”

The old man sized up the younger one; there was a tall frame that supported lean muscles, smooth cheeks that rarely saw a blade, yet his eyes showed no trace of immaturity.

“Thanks for serving.”

“Thanks for your support.”

The two shook hands and the young man turned and left for the parking lot. The old man watched him leave, lost in quiet reflection. Slowly, he placed a calloused hand on the door handle behind him and turned to eye his haggard image. After a moment’s pause, he turned and pulled the glass and steel open and stepped through the door muttering, “He had done his part.”

Untamed                      Ena Wei  
**Honorable Mention**      *charcoal*



Banana Ginger Slice  
Clayton Jacobs  
*acrylic painting*

Little League  
Alex Monié



When you’re a little kid, everything new seems exciting. It doesn’t matter if it is a new episode of your favorite show, an extra cookie during snack time, or a new sport; a little kid is going to think it is the greatest thing in the world for the next thirty seconds, until the next greatest thing comes along. For first grade Alex, the greatest thing his parents ever told him was that he was going to be able to start playing Little League Baseball.

This was a big deal for two reasons. First off, sports are big in my house. Super Bowl, World Series, Wimbledon, PGA Tour, whatever, my dad is watching it. Over the years my dad has taken the retirements (and returns) of sports greats like Michael Jordan and Brett Farve to heart. When my mom gave the okay for me to play Little League, you could see the joy in my dad’s face. My mom giving the okay was the second monumental reason. She was, and still is, one of those moms who tries to watch over and protect her baby, even though that baby passed her up by more than a foot when he was thirteen.

Dad drove me to the local baseball fields so I could register and pick up my uniform. After all the paperwork was finished and filed, I was assigned to the McDonald’s team. Teams back then still had to have local sponsors, so having McDonald’s as yours is like winning the lottery for a first grader. As soon as I was home I was in the bathroom trying on my new dark blue shirt, gray pants, and white cleats. I checked myself in the mirror and thought I looked very sharp, like a young A-Rod (who was my hero at the time).

After a trip to Academy Sports to find a decent glove and bat, I was off to my first day of practice. Looking back and writing this now, this might be one of the most important days of my life. Practice started at five and ended around dusk. Having missed a year and being older than most beginners, I started in Coach Pitch rather than T-Ball. After a practice of running small drills and learning the basics, the coach had all of us line up near the pitcher’s mound, facing him. We were a bunch of sweaty complaining six year olds, but coach still wanted to talk to us.

I have no idea, what he said. Not long after we lined up, a small Filipino kid started kicking dirt on my new cleats. I told him to stop and that these cleats were new, but he just kept on going every few seconds. Being a tattle-tale was the ultimate unbreakable rule back



then, so I kept my mouth shut and tried to listen to what the coach was saying, silently hating this kid for getting my cleats dirty.

Except for that one annoying kid, I loved baseball. I could send the ball flying over the other players and catch anything that came to me! My first-grade ego couldn't get much bigger. If not for that one kid, everything would have been great. A silent war started between us, each sabotaging the other whenever one had the chance. A spilt Gatorade in a glove, putting rocks in shoes, throwing a bat in mud, we didn't care as long as it messed up the other person. Probably for the best, one day we got caught.

It turned out the coach was this kid's dad. I had no idea, and this scared me in a way. For sure I thought this kid's dad would believe him automatically! Would my baseball career come to an end over this one feud? Coach sat us both in the dugout until it was time to go home, but by then I still didn't know the verdict.

After school a few days later, I was sitting on the living room couch when the doorbell rang. Not being tall enough or old enough to open the door myself, I resorted to my customary duty of following my mom to the door as her back up. When she opened it, I was stunned that the visitor was eye level with me. It was the kid! My mom, not knowing about my ongoing war with this kid, invited him in graciously.

She left to get us Capri Suns or something, and then it was just a face-off between me and the kid. How low of him to bring this battle to my own home. Right when I was about to talk, he started before me. He said that his dad had found out where I lived and made him come apologize. His house, it turns out, was almost directly behind mine, connected diagonally to my back fence. I asked him how he got over here, and he said he had ridden his bike. This wasn't a confrontational visit, he actually seemed sorry. After a minute of silence, I told him my name was Alex. He replied with, "I'm Adam Grant."

From that day on, Adam and I were best friends. We continued to play Little League, went to school together (even though after third grade we weren't allowed to be in the same class because we were too rowdy together), and eventually became roommates at MSMS. We've spent a million hours playing video games, neighborhood games with other kids, trick or treating every year, bowling, and getting beat up by his brother.

If I hadn't met the Grants, a lot of things would be different for both Adam and me. For everyone who knows Mr. Grant, he's never without his own opinion or piece of wisdom, advising Adam and me on everything from Little League to college. When it comes to MSMS,

my mom and I were the ones who told Adam about it. Now it looks like we're both going to MSU next year. If not for being placed on Team McDonald's, if not for being lined up in that line near the pitcher's mound the way we were, if not for being a year late in starting the league, and a million other what if's, who knows how things would have ended up.

Canada  
Maryam Mohammadi  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Photography  
photograph

Shane  
Lacy Maxwell

He started his first "rock band" at the age of four. Inspired by his favorite uncle, he dreams of skull tattoos and pretty girls and concerts with thousands of people moshing to his beat. But for now he's just a ten-year-old boy with math homework and anger problems who loves picking on his younger brothers and sulking in his room strumming out almost recognizable chords on his guitar.

Hurt  
Xavier Harris

Running through the yard like Jesse Owens in a track meet  
Seemed invincible  
Cut the corner, soared beyond the fences and high grass  
Oblivious to the Beware of Dog sign, I ran  
Chased like Tom and Jerry, I was Jerry and the dog Tom  
Continued through the baseball field  
Passed the basketball courts  
Through the double-dutch ropes  
I ran  
Almost there I thought  
Like the speed of light, it hit me  
Shoes unlaced, I tripped  
Scraped knee and bruised palm  
I staggered the rest of the way home  
Screaming and Yelling, was all I heard.  
I didn't beat the streetlight...

Tickle-Me-Pink  
Caitlyn Chambers

Tickle me pink  
Not red.  
Little notes delivered by hand  
As a token of love  
Flirtation and soft kisses  
Burns inside  
Flaming on the outside  
Turning up the heat to a rosy pink.  
Sweet nothings whispered in your ear  
Blush to some things you don't want to hear  
Funny bones touched  
Lub, Lub as my heart pumps quick  
Tickle me pink  
Rosy cheeks





Hot Coffee Diner

Kate Thompson

3<sup>rd</sup> Place Short Story

Michael pushed the stubborn door of the Hot Coffee Diner and peeled off his heavy, black coat. The air was stifled with body heat and cigarette smoke. Immediately after touching the door, he wiped his hands on the sides of his ironed khakis. Surveying the room, Michael realized he was the only man under fifty. The other men sat fused to their chairs, their tables cluttered with cups of coffee and half-eaten slices of pie, betting on the song the radio would choose next and arguing the importance of technology. Syrup from yesterday’s pancake catastrophe clung to the checkered linoleum, sticking to the soles of Michael’s Calvin Klein’s. He didn’t usually visit places like this, places where you couldn’t leave the building without inhaling countless clouds of second-hand lung cancer or avoid being called Sonny. Eyes red and exhausted, he slumped into the remaining vacant booth and pressed his throbbing forehead to the cool surface of the table. His eyelids squinched shut behind his silver glasses as an attempt to hide from the harsh yellow light screaming from the light bulbs on the walls. A piercing snap of watermelon gum triggered Michael to jump, waking him from his stupor, followed by a husky voice: “So what’ll it be?”

Michael’s waitress had russet hair that grew in short points and papery freckled skin. Her eyes were tired, jade ovals set into deep pleats of wrinkles and crow’s-feet. The apron she wore around her small waist was spattered with raspberry jam, bacon grease, and stale coffee. Michael pushed his glasses to his face and scanned her uniform for a name.

“You’re not wearing a name tag,” he stated flatly. The waitress tapped her pen to her notepad.

“Well, aren’t you just a sharp-eyed city boy,” she said, looking up at Michael. “We don’t much need name tags around here.”

Michael crinkled his eyebrows, “What do you mean?”

The woman turned to face the rest of the diner. With her pen, she pointed at the tables of diners. “Let’s see,” she mumbled, “Bradley, Gene, Drew, Roger, Dale, Matthew, Jim....” She rattled off names until she had aimed her pen at everyone in the diner. “This is a small town, sonny, not many names you got to remember.”

Michael cringed at the the cracked upholstery of the yours?”

“They call me Tilly,” Mrs. Tilly, not Ms. Tilly, not She laughed a husky laugh even deeper. “What do they

“Michael,” he answered, “just Michael.”

Tilly plucked at her gritty white sleeves. “Well, just Michael, you gonna order or are you just gonna lay your head back down and mope.”

Tilly was no nonsense in a sort of prickly but placid manner. It was a remarkable demeanor that intrigued Michael. “I’ll just have water.”

The waitress planted her hand on her hip, her weight shifting to her right leg, and raised one eyebrow. “Now that is not a real meal, now is it,” she said. “I’m-a go back and fix you somethin’ real nice.” Without another word, she turned and walked into the kitchen.

Sitting awkwardly on the tattered cushion, Michael’s hands fidgeted, drumming the table, shredding napkins, and arranging and rearranging the salt and pepper shakers. “I’m just a failure,” he thought. “An utter failure.” His father had done it right. Got the right girl, got the right job, got the right life. Michael’s life, however, sat in the backseat of his sedan in a shoebox labeled “Mike’s stuff” from his ex-girlfriend and an unopened letter from Cornell University. The envelope seemed a tad anorexic to be an acceptance letter and Michael was not in the mood for any more bad news. As far as he was concerned, Cornell’s answer would remain sealed in the back of his car until the day he died.

Everything he had worked for simply crumbled in under twenty-four hours. Now here he sat in a grubby booth in a congested restaurant in the middle of nowhere, studying the older men bickering and joking and playing cards. No doubt Michael would end up like them, with nothing stimulating in his life except the next cup of joe at the Hot Coffee Diner.

In less than five minutes Tilly had stacked three pancakes, scrambled eggs, and wheat toast on a chipped white plate. She slid the platter in front of Michael before throwing herself into the seat next to him. “So what’s eating you?” she said.

Michael asked, “Have you ever done anything spectacular? You know, like really extraordinary?”



Urban Sprawl

Kaytee Doerner

photograph

nickname, leaning back into booth. “I see. Well, what is

she replied with a smile, “not ma’am. Makes me feel old.” that made her eyes crinkle call you?”



Without hesitating, Tilly pulled at her belt loop to expose her hip bone, revealing a small, round scar. She jerked her head towards the knot of men cluttering the adjacent table. “Jim there’s daughter has leukemia. About a year ago it got real bad, doctors said she needed a bone marrow transplant.” She let go of her belt loop and sat back down, elbows propped on the table with her chin in her hands.

Michael paused. He pointed at her hip, “...and you just...”

“Yep,” Tilly replied with a smile. “Took about two hours and it hurt like heck, but it did the trick.” She didn’t seem overly proud of herself. She almost acted like it was just a common thing. “I saw what needed to be done and I did it. Simple as that.” She stopped here, turning back to survey the unshaven faces of friends. “We don’t look like much,” she added, “we know that. But I know for a fact that none of us are totally worthless.” Tilly’s lips curled up into a smile. “Now excuse me, sonny,” she said, “I was just about to take my break.” And with that she stood, grabbed her tan coat off the bar, and walked out of the front door. Michael slapped twenty dollars on the table and followed.

She was leaning against the dirty brick of the diner, with her hands deep in her pockets and a cigarette in her mouth. She was like a pro-smoker, with years of practice. Michael almost admired her skill, the dexterity in her fingers as they spun like dancers, flicking at lighters. Her lips cradled each cigarette delicately, blowing smoky concentric circles into the air. She looked like the perfect combination of age and strength. She took one last heavy drag on her cigarette before tossing it to the asphalt, dashing out the remaining flame with her heel. Michael turned to leave just as she called out, “Hey, kid!” She smiled again and exhaled, smoke swirling out of her nostrils. “Come back soon.”



# Vesper

Miranda Shugars  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Short Story  
The Chris Read Award for Fiction

This girl--she sits and stirs the dust in spirals at her feet. Her legs splay before her, crossed at the ankles. She turns the dirt like the breeze twists the bloody clouds in the sky into orange and red and hints of pink and purple, heralding a curtain of stars. The moon is already visible, dim against the still-blue sky in the west. A breeze shakes the orange canopies above her and small boat-shaped leaves shiver down, back and forth, unwilling to touch the ground. One catches in her dark, wild hair.

This is the best place for watching the sky, and the strangest sidewalk that she knows. It ends quite suddenly in a sheer hundred-foot drop, down into the lower foothills. These foothills clamor around each other for miles, never really ascending into mountains. From an airplane they look like great uneven ripples across the land.

She hasn’t visited this sidewalk since her brother brought her, eleven and some years ago. He held her hand tightly, well away from the end of the sidewalk. She leaned forward toward the edge to scare him. Her brother only brought her once, but her father brought her four times that she could remember: once in the day and three times to watch the sun set. These were hazy memories of her mother’s warmth and her little sister’s uncoordinated half-steps and complaints about the cold, and her brother’s legs beside her and his worn, warm jeans.

One night for no reason she got out of bed and walked outside to find her brother climbing into his car. She begged him to take her wherever he was going. It was the harvest moon. Her mother, father, and sister were asleep. Her brother told her she could come if she kept it a secret from their parents, because it was past her bedtime. He took her to the hill with the broken sidewalk.

“Why didn’t they finish the sidewalk?” she said.

She looked quickly up at him as he looked to the sky. The dark clouds reflected in her brother’s grey eyes, and his wild, dark hair and face were ragged and unearthly in the blue light. He looked very sharp. Everything was blue. The trees, low over the edge of the cliff, and their full summer heads; the fragrant blooming dogwood and pear, the bending aspens; the cotton poplars with one-sided reflective leaves that moved at any breath; her brother’s pale shirt and long shadow; the jagged edge of the sidewalk, worn smoother by the wind and spring storms; the ghost-like and misty pines below, and the few scattered buildings which spread into a grid of glowing office windows and street lamps. Everything was blue.



“They did finish it,” her brother said. “But sixty-three years ago today a dragon flew here and ate up that hill. The hill used to stretch from here all the way to between those hills--the lopsided ‘u’--and farther.”

“It did not! If it was sixty-three years ago, how would you know anyway? You’re only seventeen!”

“Eighteen, star. I’m eighteen.”

She waited. She looked back up at him and tugged his arm a little.

“But how do you know that? That doesn’t sound very likely.”

Her brother met her eyes and tucked a lock of her wild hair back into her woven cap.

“I know because Grandpa told me. He saw it happen with his own eyes.” His eyes grew wide. The whites were blue. “And look. You can see the marks his teeth left. There! He had great fangs! As big as you are, small star. See all the pits? That’s where he bit right through the rock. And here! See how the ground has no

plants? That’s where he burned them all away.”

“Did he eat the rock?”

“The rock? Oh, no. Dragons cannot eat rock. It gives them stomach pains. The dragon hated the people who were living here--”

“All the people?”

“Every last one.”

“Even Grandpa?”

“No. Grandpa was special. But I’m getting to that. When the dragon bit through the rock it flew everywhere. There was so much dust--”

“Dust?”

“Yes. From the broken rock. And smoke, from when he burned the cliff.”

“Oh. If he already bit it, why did he burn it?”

“Well, when he opened his mouth to bite, he blew out fire too. Grandpa told me that there was so much dust that his house was covered. The whole city was covered! They couldn’t see the sun for hours because of all the dust in the air.”

“Haha!”

“What’s so funny?”

“They were all dusty!”

Cliff Hanger  
Jamie Wiggins  
**Honorable Mention Photography**  
*photograph*

She imagined an enormous feather duster like her mother’s bright yellow feathery thing being swept over all the houses. Her brother smiled. The lines around his mouth were deeper in the harsh light.

“So, the dragon let all the dirt and the rock fall into the town. A lot of the buildings were buried or broken. Everyone was afraid because they didn’t know what the dragon wanted, or when it would attack again.”

“What about Grandpa?”

“Well, like I said, Grandpa was special. He looked at the cliff that the dragon had made and said, ah-ha! Look at that sidewalk!”

“This one?”

“This very one. Grandpa realized that, of all the hills closer to the city that the dragon could have attacked, he chose the hill with the sidewalk. Then Grandpa noticed something strange about the dragon. He stayed very close to the hill. He roared and stamped his feet, but he didn’t move from beside this hill.”

She looked at her sneakers and stamped her own feet.

“So Grandpa waited until night, when the dragon was asleep. Then he snuck up here to look around. And he found something carved into the sidewalk, right near the end.”

She stared but she couldn’t see anything through the blue and confusing shadows.

“What was it?” she said.

“He found initials, written into the concrete, in a heart.”

“Initials?”

“Names. Two names. One of the names was DJ--Diana Johnstone. Grandpa recognized the initials because he had seen her name in the paper that morning. The young woman had died the night before.”

“What was the other name? Was it the dragon?”

“The other initials were DT. Grandpa didn’t know what to make of that.”

“DT? Dragon. . .Tail? Was it Dragon Tail? Haha!”

“Dragon Tail? Whoever heard of a Dragon Tail? Oh, no. It was Dragon Talon!”

“Talon?”

“Yes. The dragon told Grandpa himself. Then Grandpa realized exactly that the dragon--Dragon Talon--was sad about the death of Ms. Johnstone. He had loved Ms. Johnstone.”

“That’s silly!”

“Why?”

“A dragon can’t love a person!”

“Oh? Says who?”



Daisy Romance  
Amy Wilcosky  
*photograph*





She thought about it.

“So, what did Grandpa do?” she said.

“Well, Grandpa, you know, lost Grandma not so long before. So he understood what Dragon Talon was going through. So he talked to the dragon.”

“Hmm.”

She sat down and let go of her brother’s hand. The concrete was still warm from the sunny day. She looked across the seeping blue crescents in the hills and under the trees. She looked at the moon. It was huge, closer than she had ever seen it. It seemed as big as the hills. It saturated the sky with its intense hue. She searched around the beacon for stars, but, between the moon and the lingering purple clouds, she only found the brightest few. She found the pole star like her brother had taught her--along past the tail of the Big Dipper.

“It’s pretty, isn’t it?” her brother said.

“Where am I?” she said.

“Hmm. . .that’s a good question. Let’s see. . .it may be too late for you, star. Or you may be behind the moon.”

“Mmm.”

“Are you ready to go?”

She nodded. The dark wispy clouds above drifted closer and opened their mouths wider and wider. She was too afraid to ask how the story ended. She thought she knew. The dragon flew away, into the sky. It lived in the clouds.

“Alright, Vesper.”

He brother picked her up and carried her back to the car.

She never knew if it actually happened. She woke up the next morning in her own room, and her brother never said anything about it. She was so terrified of this place that she hadn’t returned--until now.

She draws spirals into the dust near her legs and watches the leaves gather and fall over the raw edge of the cliff. The evening star shines dimly near the horizon--for not much longer. The clouds in tendrils cradle the falling sun.

The shadows gather like leaves. She moves forward and swings her legs out over the eroded edge of the sidewalk. She puts one hand on either side of herself and leans over her knees. She doesn’t need to breathe--the space beyond her catches in her lungs. There is breath enough in the expanse, empty except the sidewalk that she sits on. The breeze catches her from behind and twists the leaf from her wild hair, into the boundless air. She watches it drift indecisively down, down, down, until she can’t distinguish it from the gold-tinged trees below.

Just beyond those trees, sheltered in their fringe, lies a cemetery. She found there recently a flat, worn stone, one of hundreds. This one was not remarkable in itself, but it held a place of honor at the roots of the brilliant gnarled cherry tree that grew at the center of the cemetery. The other gravestones gave this tree and this grave a breadth of ten feet. The grass grew thick over the stone, the flagstone, almost, at the roots of the tree. She had made out the names by touch as much as sight. The stone was not ancient--from the forties--but decades of moss and blossoms had defaced Diana Johnstone and Draco Travers.

“He fell to their guns. She fell with him, and departed soon after. Remember their love.”

As the sun drops behind the hills, she brushes the dust off the design in the sidewalk beside her and wipes her hand on her jeans. The sidewalk is stained with dark rings that look like burn marks, the pigment of dead leaves, plastered down by rain, that dry and flake away.

Her brother had said, “This is where God puts out his cigarettes.”

She wonders when her brother first found the grave at the base of the cherry tree. In the spring, she will return. The grass will burn with cherry blossoms, and the gravestones will be stained russet.

She watches the evening star disappear into the jaws of pink and purple clouds.

# 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



# Contributors’ Notes

**Sadhvi Batra** (Carson) Sadhvi would like to meet Gandhi, whose words she lives by: “Every worthwhile accomplishment, big or little, has its stages of drudgery and triumph: a beginning, a struggle, and a victory.” Sadhvi will become a doctor and travel to England.

**Reanna Bierg** (Fulton) Reanna is influenced by the work of Ray Bradbury and lives her life by the phrase, “Just do it.” If she were an animal, she would be a hummingbird.

**Alesha Briscoe** (Greenville) “See what you can do with paper and let that define your creative spirit!” Alesha says. She would like to meet Dr. Seuss and plans to attend Mississippi State to become a veterinarian. Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” influences Alesha.

**Danielle Buckingham** (Louisville) Danielle admires the work of Maya Angelou and Emily Dickinson. She would like to attend medical school and be a couch because they always have lost money in the cushions.

**Abigail Cathcart** (Starkville) Abbie says, “Creativity is like water that gushes from your eyes, mouth, and fingertips. Art is just a way of controlling the downpour.” She likes fudge popsicles and would travel to Brazil. Abigail will study theatre and international studies.

**Caitlyn Chambers** (Hattiesburg) Caitlyn says art is the best way to “stay sane at MSMS.” She would like to go to Tokyo, and if she were an animal she would be “the little monkey that sits on people’s shoulders.”

**Kalina Deng** (Greenville) According to Kalina, “In order to be truly irreplaceable, one must always be different.” Kalina wants to be a wedding dress designer. Kalina likes grapefruit and is inspired by M.C. Escher.



**Kaytee Doerner** (Hernando) Kaytee’s motto is, “Always act your shoe size; we all know that age is overrated.” Kaytee plans on attending Northeastern University, where she will study cultural anthropology. Her favorite foods are oatmeal and veggie burgers.

**John Corbin Evans** (Philadelphia) To John Corbin, “Art is the single-most important expression of emotion.” He defines himself with a quotation by John Mayer: “Fear is a friend that is misunderstood, but I know the heart of life is good.”

**Kenneth Fang** (Greenville) To Kenneth, “being intelligent and [being] smart are two entirely different things.” If he were an animal, Kenneth would be a panda bear. He plans to attend Duke University, where he will double major in economics and chemistry.

**Xavier Harris** (Byhalia) Xavier would like to meet his great influence, Hill Harper. He wants to be a civil engineer and would like to travel to the Bahamas. Xavier believes that “truth is taught, creativity is subconscious.”

**Kuturah Jackson** (Tunica) Though Kuturah is influenced by Emily Dickinson, she would most like to meet Sojourner Truth. “If you don’t stand up for something, you’ll fall for anything,” Kuturah says. She wants to be a gynecologist and “deliver adorable babies to the world.”

**Clayton Jacobs** (Picayune) Clayton lives by the words of W.C. Fields: “I am free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally.” Clayton would like to meet Lady Gaga. He would like to become a math professor in Australia. “Without creativity,” he says, “life sucks.”

**Darrian Kelly** (Jackson) Darrian lives by the words of Ella Fitzgerald: “Just don’t give up on what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don’t think you can go wrong.” He plans to be a cardiac surgeon. He would like to meet J. Alfred Prufrock and his *Tales from the Crypt* subject, Jacob Bluhm.

**John Kim** (Hattiesburg) John plans to become a pediatrician. His motto: “Carpe diem.” John is influenced by J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*, and he believes that “humans wouldn’t be humans if we didn’t possess the ability to create beautiful things.”

**Wayne King** (Scooba) Wayne lives by the quotation, “We cannot hold a torch to light another’s path without brightening our own.” He plans to be an electrical engineer or a physical therapist.

**Lacy Maxwell** (Byhalia) Influenced by the work of her brother Garry, Lacy wishes to one day visit Hogwarts. She will attend Rhodes College next year and enjoy her favorite food, Sonic’s Mocha Java Chillers.

**Maryam Mohammadi** (Starkville) Maryam’s future plans include to “travel da world” or to “another earth-like planet.” She likes chocolate and would like to meet Jude Law. Maryam is influenced by William Blake.

**Alex Monié** (Biloxi) Alex is influenced by the T.V. show *Lost*. He says that “every art expression is rooted fundamentally in the personality and temperament of the artist.” Alex would like to visit Australia.

**Erwin Morales** (Moss Point) Michelangelo, Diego Rivera, and graffiti artists inspire Erwin. He plans to be a video game designer, and would like to travel “all over the world.”

**Majaliwa Mzombwe** (Brandon) Maja would like to be a park bench, as it is “surrounded by nature, but grounded in the hard wood.” He believes that art is a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” Maja would like to attend medical school.

**Julia “Flo” Osborne** (Hernando) Dr. Seuss influences Flo, and she wants to meet George Clooney. She enjoys key lime pie and art.

**Sindhu Shivaji** (Starkville) If Sindhu were an animal, she would be the Loch Ness Monster. She plans to attend Columbia University and to visit Madagascar. Sindhu’s motto: “Enjoy life. Think of all the women who passed up dessert on the Titanic.”

**Miranda Shugars** (Vicksburg) Miranda likes cappuccinos, and wants to go to Switzerland. If she could be a piece of furniture, she would be “a sexy yellow stool.” Miranda admires William Carlos Williams.

**Megha Singh** (Brandon) “Art is the natural flow of human emotions and instincts,” Megha says. She plans to study medicine, and would like to travel to Greece. Megha enjoys rice cakes and coffee.

**Joshua Stone** (Starkville) Josh’s favorite food is sushi. He plans to become an aerospace engineer for NASA.

**Kate Thompson** (Picayune) Kate lives her life by “Hakuna Matata.” She would like to meet Dug, the dog from the movie *Up!*, and travel to Tuscany.

**Jamarius Waller** (Brookhaven) Jamarius admires the work of Maya Angelou, plans to attend an Ivy League college and become a pharmacist, and wants to meet Superman.

**Ena Wei** (Starkville) Ena believes that “writing is like giving birth; it is painful when you are doing it, but you are better for it afterwards.” She would like to meet Merlin and travel to the edge of the world.

**Alan Wells** (Greenville) Shel Silverstein is a major influence on Alan, whose motto is “When in doubt, blame Bowen.” Alan would like to be an albatross and travel to Narnia.

**Jamie Wiggins** (Carrollton) Inspired by Van Gogh, Jamie dreams of meeting Stephen King. She plans to be a clinical neuro-psychologist and lives by the motto, “Life is a gift; you just have to untie the ribbon.”

**Amy Wilcosky** (Seminary) Amy quotes Belgicia Howell: “Never explain yourself. Your friends don’t need it and your enemies won’t believe it.” She believes that “creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes, but art is knowing which ones to keep.”

**Sarah Catherine Yawn** (Florence) Sarah Catherine says art is “unpredictable.” She plans to write a book and attend culinary school, and she would like to travel to Japan.