

Southern Voices



2011

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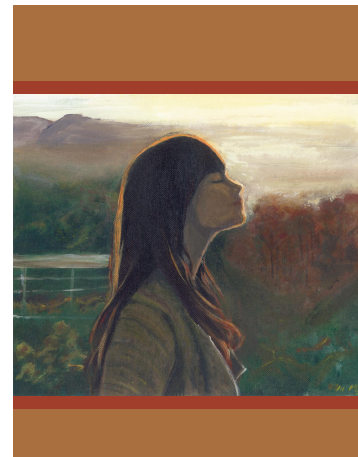
Author of *The Air Between Us*

(HarperCollins, 2008)

and

The Secret of Magic

(to be published by G.P. Putnam, 2012)



On the Cover:

Basking in Bliss

Michelle Zeng

Acrylic

Table of Contents

Poetry

Rachel Banka	
<i>Out of Love</i>	41
<i>Supermarket</i>	47
Maleele Choongo	
<i>Departure</i>	26
<i>Seeds of Beauty</i>	22
Daniel Eisler	
<i>Gray is My Favorite Color</i>	16
<i>Ronald</i>	8
Alexis Hicks	
<i>Delta Harvest</i>	27
Cheyenne Hurst	
<i>Whispers</i>	24
Albert Johnson, III	
<i>That's Them Johnsons</i>	27
Darrian Kelly	
<i>Cadaver Canvas</i>	38
<i>Stamped Ultimatum</i>	25
Sarah Long	
<i>Brother</i>	21
Amber McFarland	
<i>Name Game</i>	21
Marie Polk	
<i>Mother Is...</i>	34
Kate Thompson	
<i>The Chicken Man</i>	8
<i>Mama's Hands</i>	18
<i>Truth on Writing and Human Sanity</i> ..	28
Aaron Williamson	
<i>Human Trafficking</i>	47
Emily Wilson	
<i>Life Lessons</i>	16
Michelle Zeng	
<i>Reminiscence of Communist China</i>	38
<i>Silence of the South</i>	24

Essays

Rachel Banka	
<i>Limbo Everlasting</i>	44
<i>Sinking Stones</i>	35
Reanna Bierig	
<i>Into the Drum</i>	12
Maleele Choongo	
<i>Gardening</i>	46
Jessica Chu	
<i>Bigger Things</i>	6
Daniel Eisler	
<i>Daycare Kids</i>	30
John Corbin Evans	
<i>Never Killed No One</i>	33
Skyler Hensarling	
<i>Palm Reading</i>	29
Kate Thompson	
<i>Southern Fried Words</i>	32
Charlotte Wang	
<i>Dad</i>	39
Angela Wu	
<i>Soulfood</i>	5

Short Stories

Rachel Banka	
<i>Robots and War Paint</i>	36
Tamara Bell	
<i>The Knock</i>	19
Maleele Choongo	
<i>Walker's Beauty Salon</i>	17
Cheyenne Hurst	
<i>What Flavor?</i>	9
John Kim	
<i>Americano</i>	13
Kate Thompson	
<i>In Hospital Gowns</i>	3
<i>Quiet Desperation</i>	42

Photography |

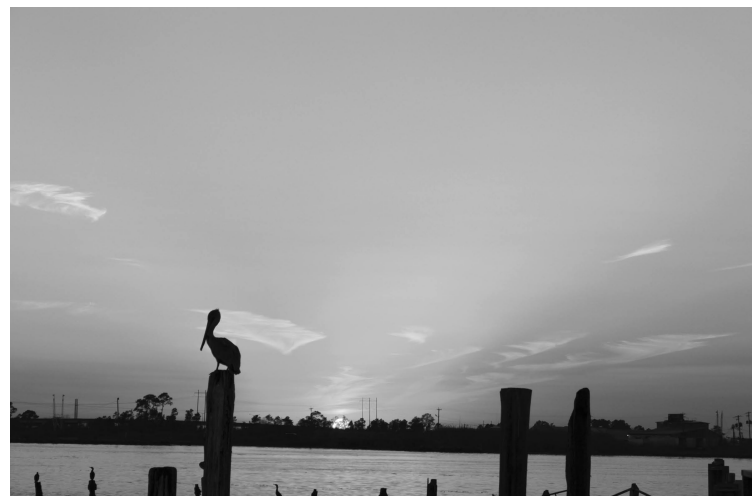
Alayna Adams	
<i>Beauty Shines Through</i>	27
Katie Bryant	
<i>The Chlorinator</i>	22
<i>Home Away from Home</i>	7
<i>Peanut Butter Cookies</i>	21
Jordan Dunlap	
<i>Midnight Reflections of Chevron</i>	28
<i>The Pelican's Goodbye</i>	2
<i>Seagull Crowd</i>	11
Emerald Litke	
<i>Flying High</i>	38
<i>Lighting Up</i>	7
<i>Sunset Beach</i>	24-25
Kate Thompson	
<i>Creation</i>	28
<i>The Girl</i>	18
<i>A Short Reprise for Burning Forests</i> . . .	41
Henry Wang	
<i>Late Night Math</i>	18
<i>Liberty Tax</i>	11
<i>Minions</i>	20
Amy Wilcosky	
<i>Free</i>	8
<i>Reflection</i>	32
<i>Summer Daisies</i>	22
<i>Taking on the World</i>	31
<i>Weathered</i>	21
<i>Window</i>	34
<i>Wise</i>	34
Aaron Williamson	
<i>Dangling Danger</i>	45
<i>Peek-a-Boo</i>	30

Artwork |

Reanna Bierig	
<i>Missiles Don't Fly Far</i>	16
Brooke Bivens	
<i>Magnolia</i>	41
Scott Chen	
<i>The Sunset</i>	26
Adey Efrem	
<i>Striped Daisy</i>	47
<i>Petals of Gold</i>	37
Hannah Fisher	
<i>Monday Morning</i>	40
George Liao	
<i>Dark Lugia</i>	23
Destin McMurry	
<i>Serenity</i>	23
Dailey Nettles	
<i>City in Colour</i>	23
<i>Tishomingo</i>	26
<i>Childhood Inspiration</i>	11
Claire Ratliff	
<i>The Sphere of Life</i>	34
Kaitlan Rester	
<i>Freedom</i>	7
Josh Stone	
<i>Mercedes, the Best or Nothing</i>	36
Henry Wang	
<i>Fix It Man</i>	8
Michelle Zeng	
<i>Basking in Bliss</i>	Front Cover

The Pelican's Goodbye
Jordan Dunlap

Photograph



In Hospital Gowns

Kate Thompson

First Place – Short Story Competition

The waiting room of the clinic was one of the nicer ones I'd been in. The yellow lights hung from the walls, making them look warm. The floral pattern of the thin carpet twisted and bent in swirls of hazy flowers that made me dizzy to look at, but it beat the usual linoleum. The stacks of magazines on the glass coffee table were relatively recent, and there was no music. I never liked waiting room music. All muted saxophones and no words, like you were waiting in a Nordstrom's elevator. It still smelled like a waiting room though, that combination of latex gloves and generic lilac air freshener. I pulled my rag out of my jacket pocket to catch a hacking cough, rolled up the rag, and poked my nose back into my Grisham novel.

"You cough a lot."

I lowered my book to see the boy. He was peering over the back of the chair in front of me, exposing only ten grubby fingers, two brown eyes, and a hundred flames of wild, orange hair.

"Are you sick?" he continued.

I said, "Yeah," and coughed again into my rag.

"Ew," the boy responded. "What do you got?"

"Cancer."

The kid swung his legs back over the front of his chair and ran around to the back wall where I sat. Underneath the legs of the chairs I saw the sides of his Velcro sneakers light up his steps with flashes of red. He flashed across the nauseating carpet and pulled himself up onto the adjacent

seat. Without hesitating, he leaned his face close to mine. A smattering of freckles peppered the bridge of his nose and the apples of his cheeks, like tiny stars across a tan sky. He scrunched up his eyes and nose like he was examining me, bunching together the constellations of his freckles.

"Yep, you definitely got cancer," he diag-

nosed. "Is that your cancer rag?"

"Yep."

"Oh."

"Are you sick, kid?"

"Nah," he shook his head, "I'm just waiting on my mom to get off work."

"Your mom's a doctor?"

"No, a receptionist."

"I see."

"Do you live in the hospital?"

"No, I just visit a lot."

The boy rubbed his nose with the palm of his hand. "My grandpa had cancer, and he lived in the hospital. And he gave me lots of quarters to buy stuff from the vending machines."

I smiled, "From the *vending* machines?"

"Yeah, it had lots of stuff."

I folded down the corner of the page of my book and set it in my lap. I turned to the boy, who was still looking at me like he was asking a question.

"Sorry, I don't have any quarters," I said.

Disappointed, the boy slumped against the back of the chair, stared at his feet, and said, "Shoot." I started laughing. Each inhale and exhale felt like God was striking matches against the sides of my lungs, but still I laughed. My

wheezy chuckling transformed into another coughing fit, which I caught with the inside of my sleeve's elbow. I turned back to see the boy holding out my rag to me.

"Thanks, kid," I rasped, taking it and wiping the slime out from my elbow.

"Are you gonna die in a hospital bed?" he asked.

"In a what?"

"In a hospital bed? My grandpa died in a hospital bed, is that where you'll die too?"

"Yep."

"Are you gonna have to wear those hospital gowns?"

"Most likely."

The boy leaned back and sighed. "Man, I'm glad I'm not you."

"Why?"

"I wouldn't wanna wear those hospital gowns. If you get up, the whole wide world can see your butt."

Then he laughed a giggly child's laugh that showed off the gaps in his smile. His baby teeth looked like tiny white pebbles all spaced apart in his mouth. The sides of his chapped lips curled up, push-

ing the tops of his cheeks around his eyes. He smiled and I smiled and for a moment life was oh-so very ordinary.

A brunette woman stuck her head out of the sliding window at the front desk, scanning the room for a second before spotting her son in the chair next to mine. "You ready to go, sweetie?" she called.

"Yes'm," he answered, and began climbing down from the chair. He bent down to re-velcro his sneakers

before straightening back up to examine me one last time. "See if you can't get some hospital pants or something," he added before running to his mother at the front door,

the little red lights on his feet blinking all the way.

And for that while, death was alright. It was so incredibly usual and mundane, nothing more than a pest throwing temper tantrums inside my lungs. It was something so trivial it couldn't even impress some red-headed kid with dirty fingernails. I will probably die in a hospital bed, but there are more remarkable things. Death will always come second to bare butts in hospital gowns. ■

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

Soul Food

Angela Wu

Every afternoon of my preschool life, I hungrily absorbed my grandfather's nourishing naptime stories. My grubby pre-K fingers grabbed onto the gray belt of Gong-Gong's pants: I strung a shoelace through the loop of his khakis, wrapped it around my waist, and finished by tying it into a double-knot. Suppressing a yawn, I badgered my grandfather in Cantonese, "*La lei doh juar how seen hor yi jow ah*. Now don't leave until the very end." Gong-Gong smiled warmly and patted my jet-black hair, a vivid contrast to his own white top. Still naïve, I took his gesture as a sign of consent, only to wake up each time disappointed when I saw an untied shoelace next to my pillow. With childlike determination, I then always fought against droopy eyes and tried to stay awake to listen to one more of Gong-Gong's tales, whether it was "The Tortoise and the Hare" or "The Three Kingdoms." The stories that my grandfather told became my soul food.

Gong-Gong's tales were not restricted to naptime. He recited the story of "Ming-Ming's Germy Hands" before I reached for the steaming French fries after a sweaty summer walk to McDonald's. If my palms itched to copy the answers from the back of the arithmetic workbook my mom assigned me, I received a crafty lecture of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." My grandpa settled my skirmishes with Jie-Jie, my sister, with his anecdotes of "Two Bamboos are Stronger Than One" and "The Ten Brothers." An exchange of bamboo toothpicks later, Jie-Jie and I chattered about the superpowers of each brother, any trace of hostility melted away through pyrokinesis. In the end, we agreed that Gong-Gong's superpower of storytelling exceeded all others.

As I matured, my grandfather's benign bedtime stories underwent a transition into

more somber sermons. He drew from the mistakes he could not erase, sketching a different path for me. Remembering how he planted the story of his starvation during World War II in my heart, I harvested the squash in the garden the same way I harvested gratitude. Whenever I slacked off at the cash register of Mom's grocery store, I humbled myself after reliving Gong-Gong's past as a penniless factory worker in Guangzhou, China. Immersing myself in the educational possibilities that my grandpa never experienced during his dark past, I sought enlightenment in books. Nevertheless, I keep in mind how much he stresses health over ambitions. Therefore, I joined track when my grandfather's lung condition worsened after thirty-five years of smoking, gratefully inhaling the free American air that he lacked in his homeland.

Last year, I left behind the comfort of my Delta home, childhood friends, and cautious grandfather for the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. I no longer had the guide of Gong-Gong's clever eyes, no longer had a story to map out the road, and no longer had a pilot to navigate me toward the right direction. Instead of depending on Gong-Gong's lectures, I became responsible for myself. Along with calculus, I encountered problems that even Gong-Gong would have never calculated. Once again, I battled droopy eyes not to hear a bedtime story but to study for a genetics test. My eyes did not tear up from a squabble with my sister but from the fumes of a chemistry lab. I stumbled across a rocky path and made my own mistakes. Yet, I still tie my shoelace in the same meticulous double knot, knowing my grandfather will support whichever route I take. Recently, I returned home and noticed Gong-Gong had lost some weight. I think it is time to wrap my frayed shoelaces around him once again as I feed him some of my own soul food. ■

Bigger Things

Jessica Chu

“*Nay um sci fat pei hay,*” my mother says to me in my native Cantonese; she ushers me away from the cash register as I decipher her words, “Calm down, don’t be so angry.” I slump down into the tattered white vinyl ghost of a chair, and the chunky foam peeks out to welcome my weary body. As she grasps my hand to temper my “hot head,” she traces her pumice-stone fingertips on my fleshy palms. The calluses and sun spots that cover her hands indicate years of manual labor. She uses those hands to tame her jungle of a garden. She uses those hands to mop and wipe up remnants of downtown nights off the beaten tiled floor. Yet, she uses those same hands to untangle the furrows burrowed into my forehead.

“Don’t worry about these small things, bigger things are yet to come.”

Mom squeezes peace into her irascible daughter between routine placation of exasperated customers and constant restocking of Little Debbies at our family-owned convenience store on the battered corner of Ohea and Broadway in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. The crumbling red bricks, the scraggly-wired fence sprawled around the perimeter, the spackled graffiti on the leaning walls, and the broken shards of Miller Light attest to the store’s three-decade battle against downtown *civilization*. Here, my mother recounts her struggles in coming to America and a childhood with no thought of a future other than tending the farm in Canton, China and caring for her family.

As she speaks her stories, inspiration floods through me as every word from her mouth reaches my ears. The soft cooing of her voice exhibits her kindness, a kindness I have never seen in any other being. I believe my mother is the only person on earth to have a “giving war” with a friend: the two start off with a few fruits back and forth and eventually escalate to spaghetti and meatballs and

squash soup being sloshed at one another every other day. Even the customers with that extra spunk in their attitudes and mouths full of derogatory remarks receive the utmost respect from my mother. Her compassion for others is such an admirable trait. Her kindness inspires me as well as others to do more than what is asked and to show respect and patience towards all my peers. She always says to me, “Be good to everyone, you never know when you may need them most.”

Sitting with my mother at the kitchen table, I watch as she kneads the dough with her strong thick fingers and she begins to talk about her childhood. In Canton, she would wake every morning to the rising of the sun and help with the cooking, cleaning, and mending. Then, she was off to school, a two-mile trek twice daily on a dirt road in the hot humid weather of rural south China. “School was not important, just for learning the basics,” she says. The notion of college or any ounce of higher education in her future never popped into her mind. Up until that moment, I never realized my mother gave up so much for her children. She made the difficult journey to America at twenty-five and has not taken a rest from her back-breaking work even to this day. She moved to America to give me the opportunities to pursue my dreams, to be happy, and to live the life she never had.

“Work hard, we didn’t come here for nothing,” my mother says to me. Her divine love, sweet compassion, and whispers of wise words will forever stay in my heart. The feeling of her rough hands will always be a reminder to work hard for the bigger things in life. The kindness and patience of her sparkling soul teaches me to look over the small obstacles approaching in the future. Like mother always says, “Don’t worry about these small things, bigger things are yet to come.” ■



Home Away from Home
Katie Bryant

2nd Place—Photography Competition
Photograph

7



Freedom
Kaitlan Rester

Honorable Mention—Drawing Competition
Scratch board



Lighting Up
Emerald Litke

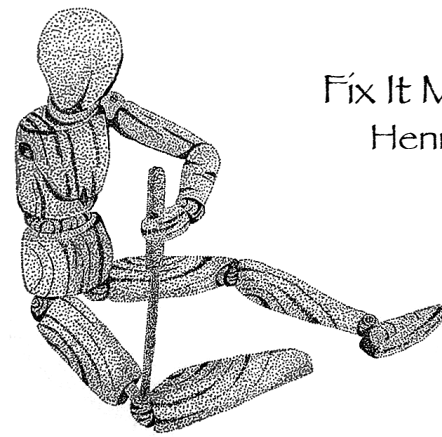
Photograph

The Chicken Man

Stanley raised hell and chickens.
They squawked along the packed dirt floor
Of his musty garage,
Clucking and plucking at monkey wrenches
And Phillips head screwdrivers.
He'd raise them by one wing
So they bucked and spun in a
Frantic fan of feathers
But they never learned enough
To stay away for long.
There were more Budweiser cans than tools
Amongst the chickens in his garage.
The dizzying scent of his breath
Hit you harder than the cans he threw
When he shouted.
I tried to save a chicken once,
Lugged her in my skinny arms
Out of the back gate
Into unfenced freedom.
She gave me one quick flustered look
Before scratching her way back
Through the open gate
To the drunken man she loved.

Kate Thompson

First Place – Poetry Competition



Fix It Man
Henry Wang
Pen and ink

Ronald

*So that's scattered,
Smothered covered,
Chunked capped,
And country?
Sounds perfect.
It'll be right out.
His name is Ronald,
According to the nametag,
But I know his name is Ronnie,
The same Ronnie who broke his arm,
Playing backyard football,
And was always waiting
Alone at the bus stop,
Because it was "anywhere but home."
Need a refill on your coffee?
Asks Ronald,
Two years after Ronnie quit high school.
No thanks.
I can see it:
His pot gets heavier each night,
Filled with stale memories,
And fresh-brewed regrets,
His visor is a blinder,
His apron a strait jacket,
And his nametag a branding,
Of the man he's been forced to become,
Waiting,
Hoping,
Begging for salvation,
From his personal purgatory,
Of fluorescent lights
And grease traps.*

Daniel Eisler



What Flavor?

Cheyenne Hurst

Kat snaked her palms through the deep vicinity of her pockets in search for the treasure. Her face puckered as the pain shot through her aching knuckles when she pulled out a crisp Band-Aid with the promise of pacifying the hours of cart fishing. It had only been two hours since Kat started her daily duty of wheeling beaten gray carts into ten neat rows but as the sunlight dipped down into the vast horizon, it felt to her that she had just conducted hours upon hours of hard labor. Taking a deep breath to calm herself, Kat curled the strip of Band-Aid around the middle of her index finger with a sigh of instant relief. She looked up to see a masculine figure approaching her with a wary look plastered on his pale face.

"You can take your break now." The burly man declared this as he slipped her a couple coins from the tattered cardboard tip box beside his cashier station. Kat gave him a quick nod and shoved the cart she was clutching into the eighth row. On the inside, she felt her heart lift just a smidge, half-forgetting about the torture that she had just endured. Kat quickly paced over to the food court and caught her prey: Praline & Cream Baskin Robbins Ice Cream. She nicknamed it: tiny pieces of Heaven sent to the Earth for pure pleasure. To tell the truth, the only reason she applied for the wretched commissary job was to be near this delicious wonder of certain delight. Not to mention that the person serving it wasn't bad looking, either. It didn't matter, though, because after her recent two hours, with the jamming of loose limbs into carts and four bandaged fingers, all she wanted was a spoonful of P&C and she was sure nothing was going to stop her.

As Kat sauntered into the food-court with her mission in mind, she realized that the place was jam packed. The fluorescent light grazed the faces of people who either had the dreaded hunger look hanging on their faces or the expression of sheer

satisfaction as they dug into their fast-food dishes like they hadn't seen a morsel of food within the past week. The noise was overwhelming, filled with chatter about various insignificant matters. Seeing as how Kat displayed symptoms of ochlophobia, she tuned out the crowd and followed the yellow tile road to the Baskin Robbins station with only one goal in mind.

Kat stepped up to the counter and saw that Kyle, her best friend's older brother and the current employee on the clock, was swooning over his girlfriend as they bantered back and forth. Truthfully, she loved Kyle with all her heart but as he kept his back turned to her after her several attempts to clear her throat, she was about to hurl over the counter and snatch the stupid phone out of his hands. Weighing her options carefully, she patiently waited as she observed the different flavors of Ice Cream. Gingerbread Man, Made with Snickers,

Mint Chocolate Chip, Gold Medal Ribbon, and Rocky Road. But right next to Rocky Road, in all of its glory, lay the infamous Praline and Cream. Praline and Cream! She felt her heart start to beat rapidly at just the thought of the sweet moist morsels of Praline and Cream melting on her desert dry tongue, piece by piece. But then she looked further and laughed:

there was only enough for one scoop and knowing Kyle, he was not about to heft out another tub from the oversized freezer in the dark, dusty back room. Not even if Kat was his "favorite freshmen" as he constantly admitted. She duly noted that she was the luckiest Commissary cart employee on the face of this planet.

"Mommy, I want pwaline and cweam, please! That's my fwavowit!" A soft, puny voice squealed as Kat slowly swiveled around to get a peek at her competition for the last scoop of ice cream. Instead, she came face to face with a woman in her early twenties and bags accumulating underneath her pale auburn eyes. Her clothes were tattered and

The pair looked
like they had
been through a
hurricane
and back.

as Kat saw her searching through the remnants of what could have once been a wallet, she saw that all the lady had left was a five dollar bill. Kat's eyes roamed down to the little five-year old who looked like she could use a nice bath and a new pair of shoes, but Kat wasn't one to judge. The little girl sported two pig-tails as she pressed her angelic face against the glass shield, absorbing the textures and colors of the ice cream. The pair looked like they had been through a hurricane and back. But even as Kat noted their situation, she paid more attention to the mathematical equation at hand. There was enough Praline and Cream Ice Cream for only one person—even if Little-Miss-Pigtails decided she only wanted the Kiddie Scoop it wouldn't work out—but there were two people who desperately needed it. Kat stopped calculating the odds; she realized that she had left out one miniscule factor: she was first in line! She had the upper-hand and she needed it the most. She was the one with four bandages strewn across her aching knuckles, she was the one who had let people jam her fingers into the wires of the carts all day and then had to smile a goodbye, she was the one who had a four hour shift at the Commissary after a gruesome day in the 9th grade. Nonsense! This was a no-brainer. She was the one who was about to enjoy the delicacy of Praline and Cream. She wasn't going to let an evil pig-tailed five-year old in a sticky situation come between that. She cast her eyes down to the five-year old as the girl opened her eyes wide at the sight of Praline and Cream and grinned with a semi-toothy smile. Kat snapped her head up and drummed her fingers on the counter, demanding Kyle's attention. Kyle cooed a goodbye to his girlfriend of the week and snapped his concentration to Kat, overlooking the five-year old.

"Do I even have to ask what flavor you want, my favorite freshy?" Kyle winked as he reached for the scooper and rolled the glass up to expose the Praline and Cream to the contaminated air. Kat glanced toward the five-year old's face as it darkened with the realization of what flavor Kyle was heading for. She didn't bother to lift her gaze to see the daggers that lady would be sending towards her. There was already a tear forming from Pig-Tails as she harnessed the thought that the last scoop of Praline and Cream wasn't about to go into her tummy. Kat

opened up her mouth to protest to Kyle but nothing came out; she knew it was selfish but if anyone knew the delicious taste of Praline and Cream, *they* would understand.

"Sorry I can't slip in any extra, Kat," Kyle whispered over the counter, "but at least you got the last scoop, you should feel privileged!" Kyle stated with a chuckle as he tried to scrape the sides of the tub, trying to give Kat a little extra. As if she didn't already feel guilty about taking the last scoop, she had to have taken every bit of P&C left.

"There's no chance you're going to the back and get another tub of it, huh?" Kat questioned unable to stop her eyes from shifting back to the hopeless five-year old that was going to ruin the only thing she ever looked forward to in life. Kyle scoffed and gave her the "I-don't-get-paid-enough-to-heft-out-these-thousand-ton-tubs-of-ice-cream-every-minute" look and Kat knew there was no sense in pressuring the idea. Kyle finished scooping the last bits of Praline and Cream into the regular cup, tossed in a spoon, and shifted to the cash register.

"Three dollars and fifty cents and it's all yours, Kat," Kyle claimed as he held it in the air in an attempt to showcase it as if she was on a game show. The fluorescent light hit the top of the ice cream and made it glitter while casting an elegant shadow on the Pralines, forcing Kat's mouth to water in delight. She didn't have to look over to the left to know that Pig-tail's mouth was watering in awe, too, not to mention that her glistening blue eyes were now the size of saucers. Switching her eyes back to the prize before her, Kat dug out the three dollars and fifty cents, completely in quarters, that she had already situated into one of her pockets. Kyle let out a chuckle as she placed the quarters in his vacant palm and he, in turn, handed her the cup full of Praline and Cream. "Cool to the touch," Kat thought, having no choice but to stare at its mesmerizing glow, silently praising its existence before she gently set it down on the counter. In one swift motion, she slid the delicacy across the blue counter she was standing in front of, letting it land right in front of the five-year old.

"Praline and Cream is my favorite, too," Kat claimed, making eye-contact with the pig-tail girl before she turned to walk back to the Commissary empty-handed and with lighter pockets. ■



Childhood Inspiration

Dailey Nettles

Honorable Mention—Painting Competition
Acrylic



Liberty Tax

Henry Wang

Photograph

Seagull Crowd

Jordan Dunlap

Honorable Mention—Photography Competition
Photograph



Into the Drum

Reanna B  r  g

The stadium shifted as the halftime buzzer cried out like a dinner bell inviting all the Friday night fans to the concessions. Though my rural town in Mississippi revolves around athletics, I couldn't bear to move; instead, I leaned on the edge of my seat and peered down onto the field where the half-time show would soon begin. My older sister played flute in band, and my mom had chosen the clarinet; everyone expected girls to play woodwinds. However, I had no desire to do the expected; as a five-foot blond, I wanted to stand out in the all-male percussion world. As I sat in the loud bleachers, I could not tear my eyes off the heartbeat of the band — the drum line. As the black uniforms blanketed the field at attention, the center snare seemed to peer down as the ultimate puppet master. With a four-count accented tap-off, he planted breath into the band's lungs and brought his creation to life. The Itawamba band began to move as a large voice from above boomed, "The Pride of Itawamba Marching Band Drum Captain, Chip Lynard!" The simple introduction had not informed the audience of a talented teenager; it introduced me to what would soon become the love of my life.

Four years passed when I found myself standing alone in front of three male judges. With my chin forty-five degrees north, I squeezed my right hand over the top of my drum sticks and pressed my pinky finger into my others while I gripped the left one underneath, triple checking to assure that the middle finger did not wander off the wood; my hands perfected the "traditional grip." Tedious mistakes the boys shrugged off, I perfected. I cleared my body of all nerves, whipped my sticks out one-half inch above the drum head, glared the center judge directly in the eyes, and made him forget what gender dominated the drum world.

No girl had led the Itawamba drum-line; no sophomore had captured the title of captain. Every position was a fierce battle, and the predetermined Corey Chamblis, a junior male, boasted his supe-

riority. These daunting thoughts filled my mind as I tried out and the rudiments I'd practiced for hours poured from my sticks. My wrists buzzed with exhilaration as they produced the Swiss-army triplet, double tap, five stroke roll, and the flam-a-cue. I recited my prepared piece by playing "into the drum" and not "on the drum" as my director drilled into me; then, after thirty blood-driving seconds of scanning the sight-reading piece, I executed the beats like I'd written them.

My confidence was a facade knitted into the essence of every drummer. Though I was terrified of my scores, I had pride in what I stood for. The percussionists sat lining the hallway when the center judge stepped out to declare the five snare positions in ascending order. He read the first name — not mine — then the second and the third — still mine remained. My hands grew ice cold; Corey and I remained. The judge's voice grasped my stomach as he announced the second best, "Corey Chamblis." I became the best.

Becoming the captain of an elite group did not boost my pride; rather, it shortened my boundaries, allowing me to cross what I once would have seen as impossible. I now jump in any danger zone to say *I'm able*; I answer what the world won't ask to prove *it's possible*. I've run half marathons, won a math competition as an individual, placed in talent shows and beauty reviews, led the student relations committee of Student Council, and become a Drum Captain. My goal is to beat the boys in racquetball while the girls watch, to shrug off a meaningless quiz yet maintain a 4.0, and to further myself in the male-dominated world by owning my own dental practice. I enrolled in the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science to strengthen my education and discovered brilliant minds, minds that have challenged me and created a determination to push myself further. Drumming is my passion that taught me what being the best takes, and because of that, I'm able to further myself in all I do. ■

Americano

John Kim

Second Place – Short Story Competition

“So everything’s good over there, right? Life treatin’ you well?” he asked. He hadn’t grown since the last time I’d seen him. He was still encased in his five foot seven frame; stocky, like a lightweight boxer. His curly brown locks that covered his head like kudzu were buzzed into order, but it was made up for with the five o’clock shadow on his angular jaw. But his voice still had the husky quality that I knew so well in high school. That hadn’t changed.

He looked at me hungrily, taking me in. He leaned against the counter, his brown eyes searching my face for memories of the past.

“What would you like to have, sir?” the blonde girl behind the counter asked before I could tell him anything. She had a pretty face, but everything about her was jumpy. Even the way her ponytail swished behind her green visor made her seem restless.

“I’ll have a cup of Americano.”

“What size would you like?” she shouted, over the coffee grinder and the general chatter.

“Uh...I’ll have the 32 oz. please,” he said, as the grinder slowed to a stop.

“Yes, sir, that’ll be \$2.49.”

He handed the girl a wrinkled five dollar bill as the cash register rattled, clanked, and rang. He turned back to me and smiled, his brown eyes twinkling, the sides of them crinkling in that amiable smile I knew so well. I couldn’t help but look up from the magazine rack and give him a weak smile back. He looked past me and gave a friendly wave.

“How ’bout you, Tommy boy? How’ve you been?”

Tommy was already sitting behind us at the round table with his long legs crossed, loosening his tie. He rubbed his head and rubbed his eyes, grinned and waved back.

“Tommy seems a bit tired.”

“Yeah, long day,” I said. It felt strange, talking to him again. Our words hadn’t met in conversation for five years.

“How about you, sir? What’ll you have?” Even the way she talked seemed jumpy, her consonants popping and vowels jerking.

“I’ll just have a cappuccino.”

“What size?”

“Same as him,” I said, nodding at Mark.

“Was that 32 oz.?” with fear in her voice. Having to ask a question like that made her nervous.

“Yes, that’s right,” I said, slowly.

“Okay. \$2.95.”

“Whoa, let me get that,” Mark cut in.

“No. It’s alright, I couldn’t let you do that on my account. I couldn’t impose.”

“Your account? Impose? Jesus, Pete, you sound like you’re talking to your mother-in-law.” He chuckled and handed her the cash. Her eyes darted back and forth between Mark and me. I knew I couldn’t win, so just I nodded and she gave a quick sigh as he handed her the money. She disappeared behind the counter, pony tail swishing madly behind her.

“Thanks,” I said sheepishly with another weak smile.

“Don’t worry about it. Just wanted to buy my best buddy a cup of coffee.” He gave me a wide grin and patted me on the shoulder. He then walked over to Tommy and started an animated

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conversation, making hand motions and smiling the whole time. I turned back to the magazine rack and picked up the *TIME* and flipped through it, pretending to be engrossed. I hated myself at that moment. I wish he hadn't paid for my coffee. 'Best buddy' he said. That was the worst part.

The girl handed me our beverages and I picked up some packs of sugar and cream and walked slowly back to the table where Tommy and Mark were still laughing and having their conversation. Mark was telling some joke he heard on TV about some senator and Tommy laughed his barking laugh. I was glad Tommy came. He was always good with people and conversation and made things a lot less awkward.

"So what's been going on with you two? Tell me. It's been too long. We kind of lost touch. What's been happening?" Mark stirred his coffee, looking from me to Tommy and then back.

"Everything's good," Tommy answered in his lazy baritone. "Just life, you know. Nothing much has been happening. Graduated. Trying to get an internship with this law firm. The interview went alright. The guy asked a lot of random questions. Nice guy, though. He wasn't scary or anything."

"That's good to hear, yeah, it really is. God, it's been so long. What about you, Pete? You're good?"

"Yeah, yeah. Everything's good. Still at school, studying and stuff, you know." I avoided his eyes and blew on my coffee instead.

"That's great, that's great," he said, eyeing me. I stared deeper into my coffee.

"What about you, Mark? How've you been?" asked Tommy.

"It's been good. I'm happy with this marketing job. The boss is okay and it makes good money. I've got an apartment up where Taylor used to live. Everybody misses you guys. We were actually talking about you guys the other day. All those times we had. Seems like ages ago, doesn't it?"

Tommy leaned back in his chair and folded his hands behind his head, chuckling. I just smiled and nodded.

"I was really surprised when Tommy called

me and told me you guys were coming. I'm really glad you guys dropped by to say hi."

"Yeah, it was on the way and we definitely wanted to see you before the long drive back," Tommy said. I nodded again. That wasn't exactly how it went.

Tommy and I were in the hotel room when he told me he just got off the phone with Mark. He was excited when he told me Mark wanted to meet up with us in the coffee shop in Borders. He asked me if I wanted to see him.

"I don't know," I told him.

"Why not, Peter?" He asked, with a puzzled look. "He's been your best friend since freshmen year in high school."

"I just don't know, Tommy."

"Did something happen between you two?"

"No, nothing like that. It's just, I don't know."

"Oh. Okay. Well, I'm going to see him tomorrow morning. You're welcome to come along if you ever change your mind."

"Alright."

I spent all night trying to decide, tossing and turning in the hotel sheets, along with my conscience tossing and turning in my head. I decided only at the last minute that I would come.

"How's Jules?" Tommy asked with a rueful smile. "Is she as crazy as always?"

"Yeah," Mark chuckled, "Julie's still the Julie you know. I think she's seeing somebody though."

"God, finally. Now she can stop complaining about how she'll never meet a guy that's right for her," Tommy said, looking up at the ceiling.

"Hey, you were just pissed because she wouldn't go out with you when you kept begging her to our sophomore year," said Mark.

"Yeah, you were really persistent," I added.

"Whatever. I was young," Tommy said, giving me a shove.

"What, you're old fart now?"

"Well, we are older..." Tommy said, looking back up at the ceiling. We all paused a moment. We were slightly older.

"Hey! You know Bobby has a kid now?" Mark said.

"No way! When was this? He never told me!"

Tommy exclaimed.

"Yeah, he's got a baby girl. She was born last spring."

"Well, we gotta congratulate him," I said, smiling. "You know, I never expected Bobby to be the first guy in our group to get married. That was a total surprise."

"Hey, he's a sweet guy. Yeah, he's kinda awkward, but he's as solid as they come," Tommy said in his defense.

"Yeah, I know. I love Bobby," I said, chuckling.

"Yeah, her name's Alexandra."

"Wow, Bobby with a kid. He's gonna be a great dad," I added.

"Yeah, he really is. I wish him and Angie the best. Oh, she's adorable," Tommy said, as Mark pulled out his cell phone and showed us a picture of Bobby and Alexandra together.

All these names hit me like rain on a window pane. They hit and then dripped down on me for a while, leaving trails of memories behind. I felt even more ashamed.

After I went to college, and the more I stayed there and the less I came back home, I didn't want to think about my friends back at home. When my parents finally moved, I didn't have a reason to go back anymore, I was relieved. I didn't want to remain like them, always trapped in their small town world, never stepping beyond the boundaries of the city and lifestyle. They were immune to life outside that's going on around the world. I was tired of their obliviousness, their blindness. I didn't want to be a part of that. I wanted to branch out and be a citizen of the world, a cosmopolitan, and not just one of this town I grew up in. So I slowly started to neglect my old friends on purpose. I started to ignore their e-mails and texts. I cut calls short. I tried to forget them and move along. I felt like they wouldn't understand. I felt like I had more important things to do – more important than them. And Mark, my best friend since

freshmen year, was nothing but a faint memory to me.

Guilt hit me as I downed my coffee and threw my used sugar packets in the empty cup. I stared over at a young mother fussing over her little boy who spilled some of his smoothie on his shirt, and at an older man flipping through the TIME magazine I was looking at earlier. Mark didn't know. None of them knew. But I still felt guilt.

"So how's everything going with Tara? Are you still seeing her or..." I offered, as I snapped out of my reverie. I was trying to make amends. Trying to fix the mistake they didn't know I made.

"Yeah! Everything's great with Tara. Really great. We're still seeing each other and we're happy," Mark said, clearly pleased that I was speaking to him now and blushed when Tommy and I gave each other a knowing look and smiled. "Speaking of which," he continued, "I asked her

to marry me last week. She said yes. We're engaged."

Tommy and I both exploded out of our chairs, patting his back and shaking his hand. I had been too busy staring into my coffee to see the ring on his finger, but I noticed it now.

"Congratulations! Wow! This is great. Tommy, isn't this great?" I shouted, not caring about the people around me who were starting to stare.

"Yeah! This is something else. Mark, you're something else. How come you never told us?"

"You guys never gave me a chance to," Mark said, grinning. We took our seats. I realized then that this world too was moving on without me.

We exchanged more stories and recounted old ones, like the time we rolled our vice principal's house and went on that camping trip together. The more the memories came back, the more I wanted to talk. The more we spoke the more Mark smiled and laughed. It was nice, the three of us laughing and talking again. Like old times. But it didn't last long.

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Missiles Don't Fly Far

Reanna Bieri

Acrylic

Life Lessons

My sister tells me
About life,
How sometimes
Falling down is harder
Than getting back up.
When I have trouble,
She doesn't dream
Of fixing it for me,
But loves to give advice
And watch me mend
it on my own.
She tells me how
I should wait
To have kids,
To party,
To grow up.

Tells me this
As she washes clothes,
Cleans the house,
Bathes the kids,
Cooks dinner,
Waits for her husband
To walk through the door.

Emily Wilson

Gray Is My Favorite Color

"Oh what a beautiful morning,"
I can hear them saying,
"What a lovely overcast day!"
Their cries reach my ears,
Loud as the applause,
Of an empty amphitheatre,
"I love the new wallpaper!"
They continue,
"I see you decided on the lighter shade of
gunmetal,"
But unspoken words,
Fall on deaf ears,
Let's face it, Kermit,
You were born on the right side of the rainbow,
It's not easy being gray,
Grand Patron color of boredom,
Depression,
And indifference,
I've never been someone's favorite,
But why not?
There is misunderstood genius
Hidden in my hues;
Black or white?
Right or wrong?
Boxers or briefs?
Choose one,
Only one?
I'd rather not,
It's called a gray area,
I'm proud to say,
I form the happy medium,
Of neither here nor there,
So keep your Blues and Greens,
Fuchsias and Tangerines,
With all their monochromatic meanings,
I much prefer to stay,
Gray.

Daniel Eisler

Walker's Beauty Salon

Maleele Choongo

Julia Barnes shifted her weight to the right, resting her tousled chestnut hair on the plush, plum-stained waiting chairs of Walker's Beauty Salon. She fought sleep with the salon's June issue of *People Magazine*, the lazy hum of the hair dryers, and four bites of a bologna sandwich. She had been basking in the smells of lavender and shampoo since 5:35 am, hoping to cleanse, untangle, and straighten both her hair and mind. Abandoning the sandwich, she began to nibble on her bottom lip, nervously nipping at the flaky crisps of chapped skin. Her dampened hands wetted the appointment form she had been letting sit on her lap for the past half-hour.

Name: Julia Bar.

Sunlight was just beginning to pour through the amber translucent curtains and drape over the speckled ivory face of her daughter, Alis. Alis's jade eyes sat on her freckled face as she traced the floral pattern of curtains. She carefully avoided looking beyond the window, ignoring the bustle of the Jackson traffic and concentrating rather on the amber field of flowers. Like her mother, she had developed a keen preference for nature over people. Her eyes were dancing up the stem of a tulip when a booming, stocky figure in purple obstructed the light.

"Who we got here?" A stout lady draped in purple with bleach blonde hair stood, hands planted on the tips of her grape, snakeskin belt. Glossy red nails stuck out in an upward curve as she tapped them on the leather strip.

Alis' mouth hung open, letting nothing out but short, nervous breaths of air. She was uncertain of what a proper response constituted. She allowed a small squeak to escape her mouth, twitching her eyes all the while. The lady in the lilac dress's shoulders shook with laughter, almost in unison with Alis's frantic blinking. Her howls of amusement rang out and bit Julia's ears and spit venom in her eyes. She quickly snatched up the frail, veiny left arm of her daughter, gripping just tightly enough to leave make a print on her pale skin.

"Ms. Vicky, what's going on here?"

"Aww, come on, Julie. Calm down, you know I don't mean no harm. You the one draggin' the youngin' all ovah town ta God knows where at these odd hours of the night. Looks to me like I'M the only one worried about ah. Just tryin' to see if she's okay, is all."

"Ms. Vicky, please. Why we're here is my business. But if you must know, this is my friend's daughter. Asked me to watch her for the weekend. Just trying to figure out what I want done to her head."

"Friends? Girl, when YOU get some friends? That child don't look like nothing I ever seen you with. Spitting image a'YOU! You expect me to believe that lie? Ok, I'll buy it. I'll buy it long as it don't cost me nothing. Take a nap, girl. I think I can find something we can do with her hair. Give you a chance to pick those bags up from undah ya eyes."

Julia slowly loosened the grip on her daughter's hand.

"Sweetie, go with Ms. Vicky. She won't hurt you."

She sank back into the comfort of the plush couch and sighed as she rested her head back on the arm of the seat.

"And Ms. Vicky, try not to talk to mah girl."

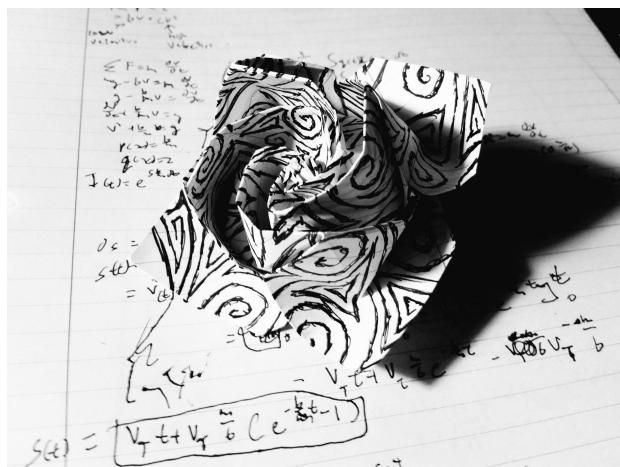
Letting other people watch her child was a hard challenge for Julia. However, it was even harder for her to watch Alis herself. She had sheltered Alis for seven years now to avoid repeating a cycle of her own childhood. She avoided sleep to block the memories of her childhood but watching Alis was her childhood's biggest scar. Every time she saw Alis' jade eyes and freckled face she saw the face of her father, the man who had told her from a young age that you didn't love someone unless you slept with him. Those green eyes pierced hers until her own formed tears. Then that freckled face would admonish her until she felt guilty for "not wanting to make Daddy happy." He had those same pale, veiny hands too. The man was always so cold. Julia would know better than anyone. She finally managed to escape his bed, and brought her daughter...sister?... Alis with her. Having Alis with her was like trying to run away from someone but still holding onto his hands. She glanced over at Ms. Vicky who had already picked Alis up and was talking her nose off. Ms. Vicky never had a child of her own. She was a kind heart, a perfect fit for a mother. All Julia ever wanted was a life and a childhood for her life. Ready to get both, she waited until the hair dryers drowned out the sounds of the bottle clanks and footsteps. Julia Barnes ran. This time, she let go of the man's hands. ■

Mama's Hands

The single pane of the kitchen window
Frames my mother outside, kneeling into
Her vegetable garden.
Worms turn under the practiced calloused fingers
Of her hands drilling holes in the earth,
Burying tomato seeds, mashing in fertilizer
With stiff, dirt-streaked knuckles.
The skin of her hands dips and cracks
In dry rivers across her palms,
Toughened from work digging up our meals,
Beating laundry, and pressing against
The fevers on our heads.
She hides her hands when signing checks
At Hancock Bank, eyes the teller's
Fresh, white fingers, scrubs dirt from her
Own nails with the inside of her jeans pocket.
I tuck my hand in hers, tracing
The tan labor lines with my fingertips,
Outlining the hands that pack my sack lunches,
That braid ribbons into the
tangled strands of my hair,
That will wrap me in my sheets tonight
As I sleep.

Kate Thompson

Third Place – Poetry Competition



Late Night Math

Henry Wang

Photograph



The Girl

Kate Thompson

Photograph

The Knock

Tamara Bell

Honorable Mention – Short Story Competition

Jean sat in her yard chair and placed a kitchen bowl filled with unshelled peas in her lap. Lunch time ended a short while ago, and the sun rested in the highest part of the sky. It was time for Jean's break from working all morning on the farm. She had picked the corn and okra, tilled the ground to plant the rows of squash, and fed and collected eggs from the chickens. Her hand bore calluses from fifty years of working on that countryside piece of land. She leaned back in the chair, though not to lean too far. The chair had been bent back from thunderstorms and abused by raindrops that had fallen over the years. The chair stood in front of the brown, two bedroom wooden house, and its legs were planted into the ground beside the stoops. Jean preferred her chair over concrete stoops. It wasn't because the stoops were hard — the chair had lost all its comfort as well — but Jean knew that if she got as far as where the stoops were, there was that chance of her never getting back up. Jean looked up from the bowl of peas and caught a glimpse of the hogs slopping around their barbed wire fence. She moved her attention to her grandbabies as they ran around the chicken pen playing a game they had created. Jean's husband, Wood, came from behind the house carrying the bucket he used to scoop up oats for the goats. He took a seat beside her on the next to last stoop.

"You ain't done shucking them peas yet?" Wood barked. Jean rolled her eyes at her husband for his untimely interruption.

"You ain't done *planting* them tomatoes yet? I told you to do that yesterday," Jean snapped back.

"Oh, I don't want to hear that. You always talking about what it is you told me to do the other day," Wood responded. Jean rolled her eyes again, and went back to her business. Silence lingered

about them for a while, but Wood soon erased it when he uttered the words that he had meant to ask at first.

"You know them folks coming to kick us off this her place tomorrow don't you?" Wood asked.

"Yeah, I know," Jean replied.

Wood stayed there on the stoops for a few moments longer, chuckling at the sight of seeing his five-year-old granddaughter fall and then get back up to finish chasing her older sister. Jean watched him as he lay against the stoop, his right elbow resting on the edge of the concrete and his left arm going across his stomach; he stared into space with an expression on his face that cast Jean

Wood's body had become a part of that dry land; it was old, overused, and had been trampled over all of its life.

out of his inner thoughts; Wood got up after awhile, and Jean watched him as dragged back behind the house. She could see that Wood's body had become a part of that dry land; it was old, overused, and had been trampled over all of its life.

Wood's bowlegged strut created for Jean the image of her father. She could recall watching her father as he plowed this same land. She could still picture how he had worked from sun up to sun down to turn that dried patch of dirt into a living he could use to provide for his family. Jean remembered how it was her mother's father who had bought this property for a little of nothing. Old Man Boulder had sold it to Jean's grandfather going on the presumption that Granddaddy Alfred was a white man. Jean could imagine the expression on Old Man Boulder's red face when he discovered the truth. Jean giggled at the image in her head, but as she snuggled deeper into her chair, she now knew the feeling Granddaddy Alfred had felt when everything he'd ever worked for and the only thing he ever owned was being threatened to be taken away.

Jean watched her grandbabies as they lay on the grass resting from their game; Jean remem-

bered being the same age as her eldest grandchild when her father had handed her a bag of seeds and her little brother a hoe and put them to work. The sky leaped into its twilight stage. More work needed to be done on the farm, but Jean could not tear herself away from her thoughts. She hoped Wood would take care of her chores for her just this once. It was almost time for dinner anyhow and then, soon after, bedtime.

Jean rounded up her grandchildren and ushered them into the house. The room, a table with four chairs seated towards the back of what was also the living room, was dimly lit by the light bulb that dangled overhead which had a string that swished backwards and forward above the table. She placed four plates on the table. All of them were white but with different patterns and designs. The chairs at the table were mixed match as well, and one of the legs of the table wobbled. Jean and her family had never had many valuable possessions, and she knew this.

“Lord, how can they take away the one somethin’ we do have?” Jean asked.

The beans boiled in the pot on top of the stove while the chicken roasted in the oven. The bell peppers, onions, and spices from the chicken filled the whole house with a smell that lingered long after the stove had been turned off and the pots removed. Jean placed the biscuits on the table adding butter to Wood’s the way he liked them.

“Somethin’ sho’ ’nough smellin’ good in her,” Wood responded.

He aimed to reach over the table and grab a biscuit to calm his hunger before he went to clean up from working outside all day.

“Wood, please go wash your filthy hands before

you start touching all over my food,” Jean scorned.

Wood gave no reply and did what Jean had asked, knowing that it would get him a plate of food sooner if he obeyed her wish. When he arrived back at the table everyone else was already seated and waiting on his return. Jean took the hands of her two grandbabies while they reached up to grab their grandfather’s hands as he began to sit down.

“Bow you heads,” Jean instructed.

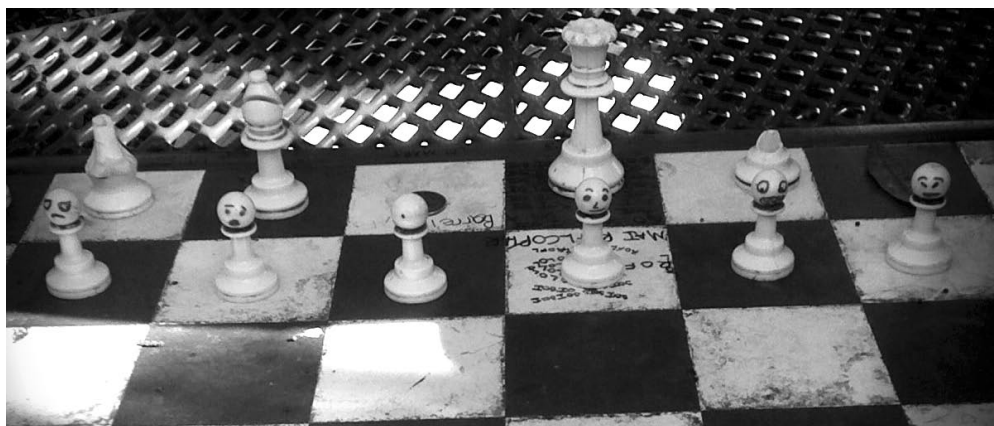
“Go ahead, Babygirl, and bless the food,”

Wood said to his youngest granddaughter.

She began the prayer, and the only words that the rest of the family was able to understand were “Dear God,” but in the end everyone responded with “Amen,” and they began to eat. After dinner Jean asked her elder grandchild to help her clear the table and clean the kitchen. While Jean scrubbed the dishes at the kitchen sink, she laughed as she watched Wood balance the younger child on his feet and dance their after-dinner sway. When the dishes were done she helped the children get ready for bed. Jean always let the two children bathe together; it saved more water that way. She turned off the lights to their room after helping the younger one climb into bed. Jean and Wood soon followed their grandchildren to bed. Jean noticed how childish it was of her and her husband to ignore the problem they would be faced with in the morning, but she didn’t care. She didn’t want to make things tenser by discussing it.

Light crept through the thin, shabby curtains, but it had not awakened Jean or Wood. They were long awake even before the rooster crowed. The knock at the door had not disturbed them, either. Jean lay next to Wood, both melted into each other’s arms, dried up and motionless. ■

Minions
Henry Wang
Photograph





Weathered Amy Wilcosky

Photograph

Name Game

Every summer in June or July my family has a reunion
It's during these times family members
would get their nickname
Uncle Flint got his nickname from never cleaning up
And June Bug got his from always hopping from place to place
Auntie Sugar never met a cake that she didn't like
Cousin Rooster's name came from the way he strutted
While Pinky got hers because she wearing — well you know
Other names in our family just make me scratch my head
Ketabug, Pookie, Turtle, Hound
Pount, Bam Bam, Turk, Duck,
Baby Ray, Coutta Man, Fox,
Goat, Six Pack, and even Booty Cat
Somewhere between the potato salad and pound cakes
We remember what all these names have in common:
Family.

21

Brother

He sits on Grandma's porch
Pleading for a bed and food
Her brother
A title he claims only
when in need
He sidles into the house
All six-and-a-half feet of him
Tracking mud in his wake
Filth from a beggar
His only possession a guitar
The wood warped from moisture
Strings rusty and tarnished
But never out of tune
He is fed and washed
Shaved and fragrant
He tells me he loves me
His smile broken by gaps
But I won't forget
The bruises on Grandma's arms
The mask she wears
Because of this man

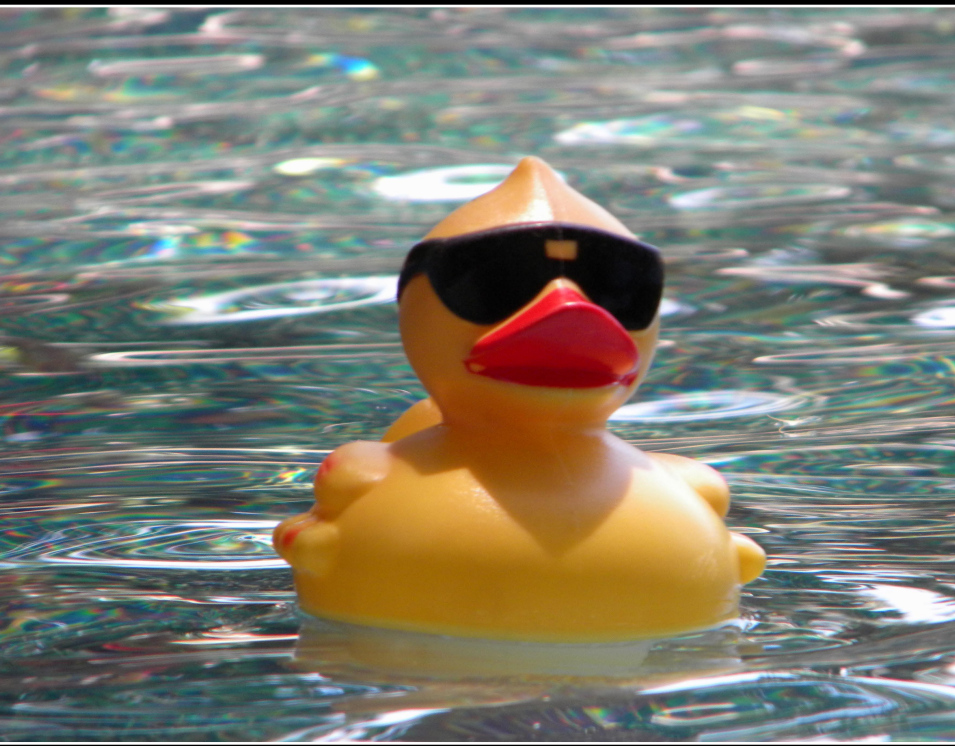
Sarah Long

Peanut Butter Cookies

Katie Bryant

Photograph





The Chlorinator
Katie Bryant

Photograph



Summer Daisies
Amy Wilcosky

Photograph

Seeds of Beauty

"I was beautiful,"
My grandmother tells me
As she traces my face.
"Yes, yes those eyes,
And, ah! That smile!
That smile that you call yours;
It was mine,
They were ALL mine, you know."

"Roses kissed my cheeks, too, once,
But jealous Time clutched onto my hand,
Until it plucked me from the garden of
Beauty,
But he did it just in time
To let me throw out a seed,
And my, my, my,
Won't you LOOK at what bloomed."

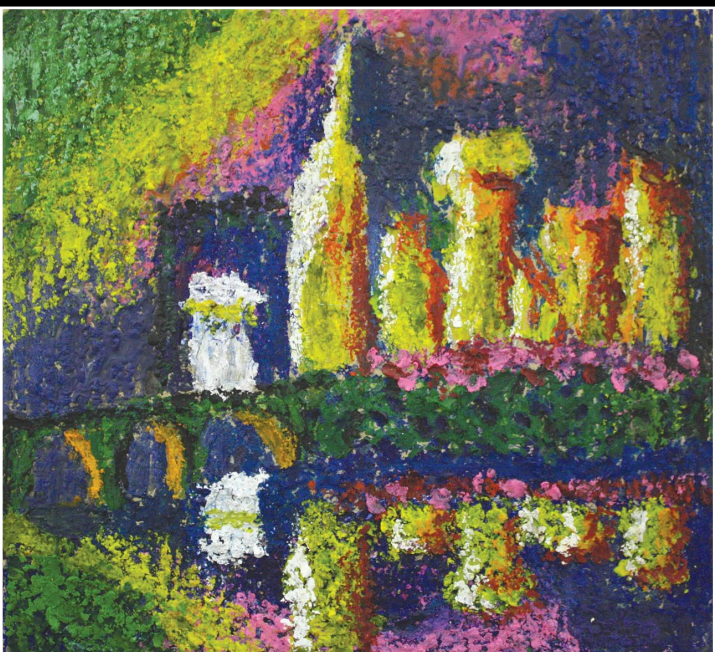
"Gogo, thank you for sparing that seed."

My grandmother throws her head back,
Sending a mane of curls dancing down her back.
Precious pearls bloom from
Their cherry-stained curtain.
She has a smile that puts the sun to shame.
Crinkles creep up her face,
Putting thin lines on her almond-shaped eyes.
They are always a twinkling pool of joy.
Cackles of laughter explode,
Slapping the walls and smacking anything else;
It is their painful pleasure.
For a second, I notice her cheeks flush a deep red.
No wonder roses still steal kisses from her
cheeks.
No wonder time wants to hold her hand.
My grandmother is beautiful.

Maleele Choongo

City in Colour
Dailey Nettles

Honorable Mention—Painting Competition
Encaustic



Serenity
Destin McMurry

3rd Place—Painting Competition
Encaustic



Dark Lugia

George Liao

Honorable Mention—Drawing Competition
Pen and ink

Whispers

Whispers...

Not forceful enough to be considered a voice

Not quiet enough to be thought of as an exhalation of breath

Whispers...

Just Strong enough to induce a flicker of paranoia

Just weak enough to be denied

Whispers...

Graceful enough to caress the ear

Harsh enough to spark pain and anger

Whispers...

Comforting enough to make your heart race

Icy enough to give you chills

Whispers...

Soft enough to send you to pleasant day dreams

Haunting enough to keep you awake

Whispers...

Cheyenne Hurst

Second Place – Poetry Competition

24

Silence of the South

The moisturized atmosphere feels like a
Heavy blanket.

Warm, wet, and wrapped around my body

No trees carry the wind.

The Earth is still.

The miasmic stench of weeds—sweet, musty—fill lungs

Like drowning in a swamp.

Choke and cough from the thickness

Because of the sun, scorching.

Cicadas buzz and shrill in agony

Head vibrates from their hammering

Muse is lost under a sea of sweat

An inaudible plunk from a frog fallen

Into the River.

Close eyes and listen for the soft trickling of the water
current


And cricks and chirps of crickets.

Sounds like

The Silence

Of the South.

Michelle Zeng



Stamped Ultimatum

25

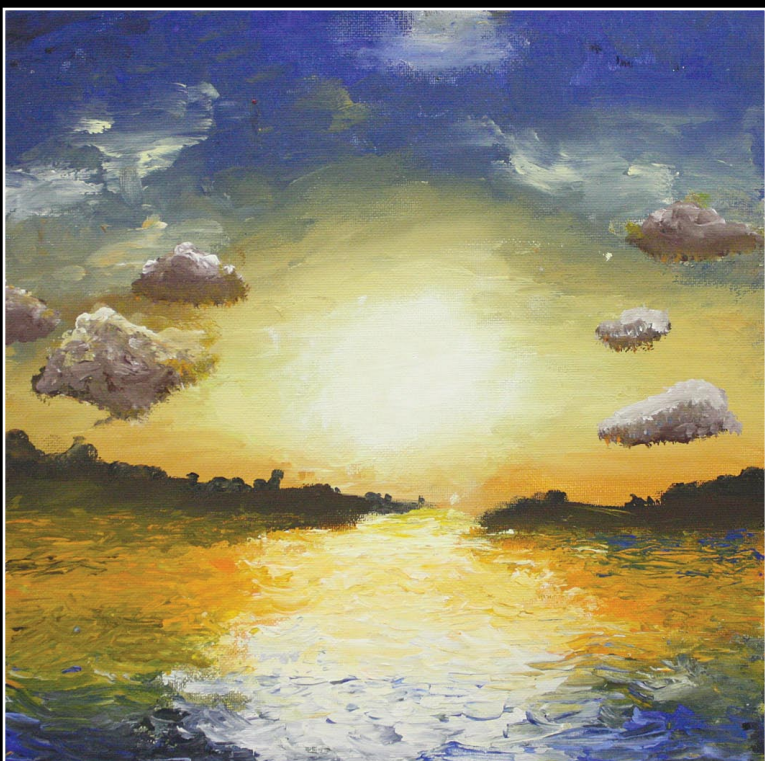
*"I got your love letters, corrected them
for grammar, and sent them back."*

For what it's worth, scream me a love song,
But never one that's covered in drool.
Drain the ditches that formed from
Bluffing every deuce of clubs, and
Measuring every decision with coffee spoons.
Spin a web to leave us suspended above every
Antagonist we want to escape in this town.
Relinquish me from the doubts that
Tip-toe the back porch of my mind.
Give me assurance as I clutch
Your shirttail, never to let go.
I'll write you another letter,
Never to send them anywhere
Except for across the floor.

Darrian Kelly

Sunset Beach
Emerald Litke

Photograph



Sunset
Scott Chen

1st Place—Painting Competition
Acrylic

26



Tishomingo
Dailey Nettles

2nd Place—Painting Competition
Acrylic

Departure

“Welcome to Lusaka Airlines”:
I squeeze to the window seat
Plopping myself next to Luse:
“Pass me the groundnuts”;
I crunch into the salty delicacy
And press my nose against the foggy glass
Searching for Niza and Mwiche.
I peer past the bustling streets of Lusaka,
See ebony beauties in *chitenges* sizzle fish;
Soggy sup seeps out as the
Orange-kissed sun squeezes the chunks
Into golden strips of crisp;
Street kids gambol around the murky mud
pits
Chunking clumps of dust,
Swooping and stooping,
Chuckling and chasing a torn-up futbol—
They would rather be chasing a dream.
Nostalgia nestles my nose:
Smells of *nshima* blanket me;
The tart taste of *tola* trails on my tongue.
Chants of *chipolopolo*
Grace my ears –
We haven’t taken off yet,
But my eyes form their own clouds.

Maleele Choongo

Delta Harvest

No mountains or oceans, but we have cotton fields
In northwestern Mississippi – plentiful crops,
Sometimes even soy beans,
Rice, corn, and of course –
“White Gold.”

My granny tells me stories
Of her cotton-field days.
“Our first jobs were loading the
Ten-foot cotton sacks.
We’d ride out early in the morning
In my daddy’s old jalopy –
Mama, kids my age, and grown folks.
The guys in their
Itchy flannel shirts,
Bib overalls with the riveted pockets
Secondhand, pigskin-knit gloves,
And a pair of beat-up shoes
With a peephole for the big toe.
Us gals in our
Linen dresses
And raveled blue jean
Capri pants underneath
Woven straw hats,
Secondhand, pigskin-knit gloves
Dingy crew socks and raggedy sandals –
And sometimes even a positive ’tude.

As the big-eyed green worms peeped
Through the air holes in the bag
We’d stuff our cotton sack
And weigh it when it was full.

We prayed to be the
Family that gathered the most
For their rewards would be
Laid out on the kitchen table:
Coins –
Fatbacks and black-eyed peas
Canned goods and chicken
Mustard greens and ham hocks
Sweet potatoes, cornbread.”

No mountains or oceans, but we had “White Gold”
In northwestern Mississippi,
That brought my family together.

Alexis Hicks



Beauty Shines Through
Alayna Adams

1st Place—Photography Competition
Photograph

That’s Them Johnsons

That’s them Johnsons:
AJ, Zena, ’Nessa and Al
They live in downtown
Where the river meets land
Where the breeze carries their name
Into the bottomless bayous
Zena-Vanessa and AJ-Zena
Siblings no doubt
Share the same name
And features
They’re called them Vodrou twins
By Daddy’s family in New Orleans
They live upstairs
In an ancient house
Closer to the sky
Their names swaying with the creaks
Miss ’Nessa Marie and Ole’ Al Zena Jr.
Share the same name
It’s called Matrimony
They live downstairs
By the frosted ground
In an ancient house
They raised them Vodrou twins
They a family.
AJ, Zena, ’Nessa and Al
“That’s them Johnsons,” people say.

Albert Johnson, III



Midnight Reflections of Chevron
Jordan Dunlap

Photograph

28

Creation
Kate Thompson

Photograph



Truth on Writing and Human Sanity

Don't write because
Someone tells you to
Or you need to try out your new pen
Or sell a few stories.
Don't write because
You need a niche, or to be creative.
If you have to try too hard,
You're doing it wrong.
Don't write because
Of prize money
Or to seduce a lover
Or to impress upon others your
Brilliant vocabulary,
And cut and paste dictionary
To looseleaf.
Write because
The words are digging at
The tips of your fingers,
Climbing up your throat
Onto your tongue,
Flooding into your eyes
Until it's all that you can see,
Until it stains your vision blue
With unused ink, wanting to
Press itself on paper, form
Haikus, stanzas, lyrics, fiction,
And truth.
But when you have
A puzzle piece cut
From the side of your soul,
When everything turns
Blue blue blue,
When food loses taste,
When it steals your sleep and sanity
So you spend your nights
With itchy fingers and
Daydreams of white walls:
Write.

Kate Thompson
Honorable Mention – Poetry Competition

Palm Reading

Skyler Hensarling

My hands have never resembled a girl's hands. Permanent scars decorate the backs of my hands, the nails have been chewed down to a bare minimum by years of stress and worry, and stories have etched themselves into the cracks and wrinkles with the mud of my home in southern Mississippi. My hands have never been clasped in my father's or skillfully rattled out tunes on an instrument of any kind. They have painted houses and mowed grass in the impenetrable summer heat, prepared numerous late night meals for my younger brother, and worked countless chemistry calculations. My hands know the value of a hard day's work. They have never been encased by the comfort of a silk glove, nor have they ever sported a feminine manicure. They have, however, experienced the childhood glory of thumb-war victories, stroked the fur of the best friend I will ever have, and in the chaos of everyday life, have still found time to push the accelerator of our prehistoric Honda Recon. It was these experiences that made my challenging childhood worth every moment.

I spent my youth in Dixie, Mississippi—all fifteen square miles of it. My mother single-handedly raised both my younger brother and me in our small brick home on AV Hatten Road. As I grew, I learned to care for myself and my brother as our mother worked full-time. I prepared our meals at night after helping with homework and served as bus monitor in the mornings, making sure he was dressed in somewhat matching clothes and on the bus in time. I juggled my roles as faithful daughter, caring sister, excellent student, and honorary adult.

After my work was done, I found ways to fulfill my responsibilities to my own childhood.

My weekends were spent in the woods, building caves and secret hideouts safe from the adult world that I had built. I perfected the art of four-wheeler riding with the help of the hand-me-down Honda that was used for yard work. My summers were full of days at the creek, chasing tadpoles and feeling the squishy riverbed sand rise between my toes. I attended youth trips with my church, cleaning and maintaining countless yards and fighting perspiration. In my mind, these days were simply a part of a record, a never-ending loop of work and play. It was a smooth, soothing sound with only the occasional crackle or skip. In my mind, I faced a life exactly as I had always known it, simple and sweet.

However, my junior year of high school held new plans for my life. I transferred to the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Here I have been able to employ the life lessons that I had acquired simply by living my life. The work ethic that I had developed and the hereditary "Hensarling stubbornness" allowed me to thrive in my new environment alongside other individuals like myself, determined to make something of their own lives. The hours I once spent cooking, playing baseball, and telling nighttime tales are now occupied with endless essays, delicate chemistry, and projectile cannons. MSMS is a far cry from Dixie.

I've never been ashamed of my hands. Their many imperfections remind me of who I am. They tell me where I came from and where I want to go. They are saturated in lessons and unwashed of mistakes. Although the record that is playing has changed tracks since my childhood, I know that my hands are stable enough to keep it spinning smoothly with only the slightest crackle in its melody. ■

Daycare Kids

Daniel Eisler

First Place – Essay Competition

30

Across the railroad tracks and two story houses become rare, past the stop-n-shop and the roads get rough, behind First Baptist Biloxi and residential homes have barbed wire fences. I must have driven this way a hundred times, but it still sparks some indignation. “How could they let it get this bad?” I mutter to my review mirror; “Political corruption may be the biggest problem facing America today,” replies Michele Norris from the radio. But a right turn on Tucker Road and things seem to get a bit brighter as my mom comes into focus, helping Jamal across the monkey bars. I can feel my wheels crunching over loose gravel as I pull to a stop in front of the weather-beaten wooden sign; red letters still clear as ever, “Moore Community House.”

They say great things come in small packages, and they don’t come much smaller than my momma. At more than a little shy of five feet, I sometimes have trouble distinguishing her from the bigger daycare kids on the playground. Yes, sir, my momma is small, but god is she strong; she can carry ten pounds of me

around for nine months, three-year olds across monkey bars, and a daycare through a hurricane. I swear if you left her alone for long enough with nothing but a box of bricks twice her size, she’d move it across the room just to prove she could. Not the type to take the credit, though—no, never my momma. I hear the sound of the lunch bell over the sound of my idling engine and Momma looks almost as disappointed as the kids as they make their way inside. I suppose I would, too; playtime is over and the kids are headed for juice boxes and a cookie, my momma headed for bills and paper work. I cut off the engine and head in

after her, the Gulf air hitting me full in the face like a warm shower, pleasant if you aren’t fully clothed.

Everything is different now, five years newer. The warped wooden floorboards and dark oak doors I grew up with are somewhere in the Back Bay now, along with most of the roof, the playground,

and the odd stuffed animal. But my momma didn’t let a boy with a tongue ring named Nick “destroy her daughter’s future,” and she sure as anything

My four-year-old
toothless smile
is grinning at
me from the glossy
Kodak surface...

Peek-a-Boo
Aaron Williamson

Photograph



wasn't going to let a hurricane with an attitude named Katrina destroy her daycare. In two years Momma raised a few million dollars and was back to business as usual, not that she'd take any credit for it, no never my momma. I can tell which office is Momma's 'cause it's the only one with the door closed. She told me it's so she can concentrate, but I think it's because if she didn't she'd be too busy playing house to get any work done. Yes, sir, my momma sure does love those daycare kids.

"Executive Director," that's what it says on Momma's door, but it just never looks right. Typically when someone says "Executive Director," it's followed by an MBA, a list of credentials, a six-figure salary and a golden parachute, but my mamma has never been one for stereotypes. Her master's is in divinity, not business; the last time she saw six figures was on *Wheel of Fortune*; and the only parachute twenty years of Mississippi politics has given her is made of lead. I head in without knocking, I never knock; I prefer to see what Momma is really doing behind that closed door, not what people expect her to be doing. This time she's looking at something but sticks it in a drawer when she hears the door.

"Oh, hey, love, are you all packed up?" she says from behind her desk, looking more like a kid playing at daddy's desk than a woman in charge.

"Yes, ma'am, just getting ready to head back to school."

"Oh, ok..." Momma says biting her nail, the only bad habit she's ever given me, "well, before you go you just have to try this pecan pie Jerlene made, I'll go get you some."

"That sounds great, thanks, Mom," I tell her with a smile as she hurries by me out of her office. It's always the same; every time I try to head back to my second home in Columbus, there's always something new I "have to try," pecan pie, corn bread, crawfish etouffee, always something new. I take Momma's seat and prop my feet up so she can tell me to put them back down and wait for her to get back.

"You could just ask me to stay awhile longer." I address one of the countless pictures of Momma



Taking on the World Amy Wilcosky

Photograph

receiving some award. "It's nice to have things spelled out once in awhile." After waiting in vain for the picture to respond I reach for the drawer my mother had tucked that something away in. There, sitting on top of discarded sticky notes and loose pens is a picture yellowed around the edges from age. My four-year-old toothless smile is grinning at me from the glossy Kodak surface, and there's Momma holding my hand, a look of slight exasperation on her face overshadowed by her smile, both of us in front of that weather-beaten wooden sign, "Moore Community House." I flip it over in my hands and see Momma's handwriting on the back. It's got the usual, date, place, and people—yes, sir, my momma sure is organized, but underneath the classifications there's something else written, the ink darker, fresher: "Love them while you can."

The door knob turns and I quickly put the picture back in the drawer just in time to see Momma walk in with two plates full of more pecan pie than she knows we can finish.

"Put your feet down," she says and hands me my plate. "Do you want me to wrap yours up for you?"

"No, thanks, I thought I'd stay awhile, maybe eat with you," I reply without getting up.

"I'd like that," my momma replies sitting down, her nonchalance betrayed by her smile, a mirror image of the photo in the top right drawer of her desk. Yes, sir, my momma sure does love those daycare kids. ■

Southern Fried Words

Kate Thompson

Third Place – Essay Competition

“Words and blood are the double helix that connect us to our past.” — Tony Earley

32

Sunflower Grocery in Picayune, Mississippi, is shelved with string beans, spaghetti sauce, and Southern speech. When I was a young girl, my mama took me shopping after Sunday service. I clung to the fold of her skirt as she reached for “dah-sd ter-may-tahs” and “grain bains.” Our buggy squeaked through yellow linoleum aisles, past uncooked “paw-stuh” and bags of “fuhl-ow-er.” I absorbed her words, the pulling of vowels and stretching of syllables. She made groceries sound beautiful. My mother throws sand in her words when she speaks to strangers, clogging and roughing up the oily smoothness of her voice. She keeps her childhood stories in our family: squirrel hunting, rotten orange fights, and sugarcane desserts. “I’m sorry your mother sounds so stupid,” she says after explaining her order to the waitress at Olive Garden three times. Her fingers fidget with a cloth napkin, afraid she embarrassed her daughters with her slow tongue.

My daddy’s tongue is more trained; he tries to tighten his words and corrects my mother every Halloween when she is “carvin’ punk’ns.” Still, you can hear a slow slip at Thanksgiving when he asks me to pass him “su’more cran-bay-ree sawce” or offers me a swig of his “eye-sed tay.” He pulls me onto his lap in the living room, shuffles a deck of cards with one hand, says, “A’right, baby girl, lemme show you sum-en right quick.” He thickens his accent when he’s around other men. I hear it in the bait shop, the football stadium, and at family

reunions. His chest swells up like a bad bee sting, and he drags his “y’all”s out for miles. My grandmother shows me photos of my father barefoot with a bigmouth bass in hand. His shirtless shoulders are freckled and browned by the August sun, his toes dig into a mud bank, and Mississippi dirt runs up through his veins. I like his smile best. It is crooked and young and tells me happiness is a fat fish and a dirt road. I hear his smile in his voice.

I savor the comfort of my family’s voices. They remind me of home, a place where everyone is

Our buggy squeaked
through yellow
linoleum aisles, past
uncooked “paw-stuh” ...

either “ma’am” or “sir,” every soda is a “Coke,” and we call our parents “Daddy” and “Mama” regardless of our age. I envy my mother’s voice; I want that Mississippi stamp on my throat, the smooth, exagger-

ated speech way of “a right, Southern lady,” as my grandmama puts it. I want to sound as Southern as fried okra, wear my words as proud as my daddy, and carry my family’s language to every corner of the earth. ■



Reflection
Amy Wilcosky
Photograph

Never Killed No One

John Corbín Evans

Granddaddy turned left onto County Road 779. This road is peculiar in the way that the left side of the road belongs to the Fulton family and the right side belongs to Granddaddy. Granddaddy travelled 779 in an unforgettable faded white 1991 pickup truck, one with four doors, four-wheel drive, and a decade's worth of stains smudged across the red velvet interior. When I rode with Granddaddy, his mouth oozed Levi Garret chewing tobacco as he tried his hardest to spit into a Pepsi bottle. He told me he bought the extended-bed truck so he could fit more of my tools in the back, and I doubted his hollow but stern voice, thinking he was a joker. I soon realized that Granddaddy wasn't a fan of jokes, but he was fanatic about one saying: "Hard work never killed no one, but I'm going to see how close I can take you, boy." He always concluded with a chuckle.

My most frequently used tool became my best friend the summer after I turned nine years old. He was the best friend I have ever had because I could tell him anything and he would never say a word to anyone. The Kaiser blade, or "sling blade," was very sharp on both edges of the blade but the handle, normally a meter in length, was shortened just for me to use in the farthest pasture from the house. Granddaddy owned forty-three acres of land and a small portion of it was covered in oak and pine timber with a thick impenetrable layer of briars and undergrowth. Well, almost impenetrable: I spent my summer clearing almost an acre of undergrowth. All day, the blade sang me soft "swish, swack" melodies, only taking breaks for me to clear the briars from its path before it continued, "swish, and swack." The day would always end with Granddaddy telling me that I'd only worked half as hard as he had to work at my age. Of course, I hoped this was an exaggeration but I had a churning in my gut that told me it was not a fib. Granddaddy told me work was good for my soul.

I begged to differ—but not aloud. Granddaddy would sit for hours on a parked '73 John Deere and drink my only jug of water for the day. He smirked, made snide comments like, "103 degrees feels good with that Mississippi humidity, don't it, son?" All the while, he barked orders about, "Pile that brush on top and lay all the tree trunks that same direction. Don't forget to place the brush under the trees so they'll burn after dinner." I worked until blisters festered on my hands, busted open, bled onto the handle, and then callused over before Granddaddy had offered me gloves. This may sound like crude child labor, but in our family it's the way to learn hard work and determination.

Now, I'm seventeen, using a Kaiser blade of a different sort: my brain. The briars I fight are in the form of Calculus II integration, history of the English language, z-scores of standard deviations, and American Government. I am in my senior year at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, or MSMS for short, and it is gut-wrenching. Each individual class is as demanding as the others. My typical core classes like American Government are just as rigorous as my dual-credit classes like University Calculus 2. Every night and morning I use my "Kaiser blade" to cut down homework and study, "swish, swack." Hard work, time management, and determination to succeed are the keys to unlocking success at MSMS. How do I know? Well, I've opened the door of success.

I am grateful for the summers I spent manhandling the Kaiser blade and dripping beads of salty sweat. MSMS presented me with a challenge even Granddaddy couldn't give me: two years worth of academic briars. Through the strength I learned the summer after turning nine years old, I have accomplished more than I thought I possibly could before graduating from high school. It hasn't been easy, of course. Then again, "hard work has never killed no one"—yet. ■

The Sphere of Life

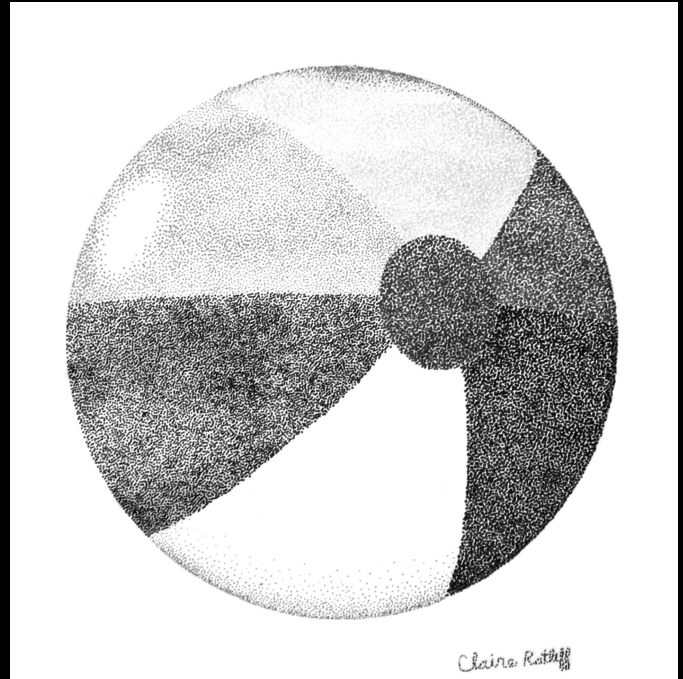
Claire Ratliff

3rd Place—Drawing Competition

Pen and ink



Wise
Amy Wilcosky
Photograph



Claire Ratliff

Mother Is...

Only 5'7" but thick-boned:
Ample cushion for the child I
was.

A long braid of coarse black hair
Snakes down her muscled back,
Her one pride and glory.
You won't find heels on her feet
Or makeup on her face.
You see steel-toed boots
And work clothes
In the place of skirts and dresses.
Her strong legs
Have walked miles
Through downtown Meridian
To take me home from school
When the car broke down.
Her thick brown arms
Are always at the ready
To protect and to comfort.
Her pink lips and big white teeth
Make the most dazzling smiles
And when she laughs
All I hear is the sound of bells.

Marie Polk



Window
Amy Wilcosky
Photograph

Sinking Sister Stones

Rachel Banka

I was about eight when I saved my sister's life for the second time — saved her from drowning for the second time. It might seem as if my sweeping in and snatching my sister from certain death would have grown redundant by the time I was eight, but I had been too young when I clashed with dark, swirling water for Amy's life the first time to remember it five years later. I was old enough, however, the second time to still see flickering images of "water noodle" mountains and discarded "floaties" whenever I go swimming. I was old enough to still recall that it was August in Palm Springs, California, and I can still picture the tops of two blonde heads bobbing in the water of their grandparents' pool, glistening like sister stones in the summer sun. That was the day that the big sister stone was supposed to protect the little one. The day that the big sister stone was supposed to keep the little stone out of harm's way, instead of letting — leading — danger into the little stone's path.

The little sister stone was Amy, six at the time, with chin-length hair, missing teeth, and too many questions. The big sister stone was me.

Amy, of course, just remembers that it was hot and she drowned. Or, that she almost drowned, but maybe that's just the difference between the eldest and the youngest, between me and Amy. Whatever the case, our problem arose that day from the fact that my grandparents' pool was not a "normal" pool, with a deep end and a shallow end, but was actually deepest in the middle. It was three feet deep on either end, and stretched to a whopping five feet at its center. Now, five feet is a lot of water when you only have eight years of growing and three feet of growth behind you, but the depth of the water didn't keep Amy and me from deciding to "build a raft." The awning next to the pool shielded stacks of "noodles" — piles of "noodles," slews of "noodles" — from the sun, and what little kid would really be satisfied with floating around on just one when there were so many to be had?

So there we were. Drifting about the pool on a glorious pile of twenty some "noodles," our legs the only thing straddling them all together. Naturally, we had just made it to the dead center of

the pool when either our plan or our legs gave out. I can imagine how it probably would have looked to all the bystanders that *weren't* there to help us: "noodles" of every color, every length, speeding to each corner of the pool, and two blonde stones disappearing beneath the water. I should have remembered that stones always sink. Anyway, my grandfather was watching us, but he had fallen into some sort of diabetes, blood sugar level-induced stupor (that I have *yet* to fully understand) and was no use to us, merely appearing to stare at his helpless granddaughters as I struggled to keep my chin above water, shouting "GRANDPA, WE'RE DROWNING" and attempting to kick off the little sister stone that had suddenly become a little sister rock.

Amy, who, after enduring many, many lessons at the YMCA, enjoyed boasting of her swimming abilities, had panicked and was clinging to my leg with shocking resolution. So when my attempts to ditch her and protect my own ability to breathe failed, I realized I had no other option: I was just going to have to save us both. I don't claim to have walked on water that day, but I do claim to have walked through it. I ignored my screaming lungs and my stinging eyes and dragged that little sister rock all the way to the far end of the pool. When Amy finally realized she was in a depth at which she could safely stand, she stopped panicking, and the YMCA training came flooding back. Knowing Amy, I'm sure that if I had let her tell the story later that day, my family would *still* be gossiping about how my little sis had kept a cool head and saved *me* from drowning, but I did make sure that everyone knew how I had persevered for miles on end without oxygen. Without hope. I made sure they all knew how I had valiantly cast aside worry for myself in order to protect my sister. How the whole time, when I wasn't wondering "Why is Grandpa trying to kill us," I had been wishing I had heeded the advice my mother had given me so many times previous — the advice my grandma had neglected to reiterate that day. How I had just kept hearing their voices say, "Never put yourself in the middle of things, Rachel." ■

Robots and War Paint

Rachel Banka

Third Place – Short Story Competition

The robot was at least fifty feet tall and over 200 trillion pounds heavy. The enormous *thing* sat on peg legs and corporate-grade “carpet” and towered over Lorie with a poor, electronic imitation of a soul.

“Beep, beep.” This manufactured monster, with its red war paint scratched and peeled back to reveal the metallic silver skin lurking beneath, demanded something from the tow headed six-year-old with the bright eyes and uncombed curls. Its glass front glinted under the naked light bulb of the cinder-block room, but little Lorie could still see the jumble of captives peering at her behind the glare. Red, yellow, brown, green – none had been spared from the massacre.

“Beep, beep.” And now the living cage demanded a dollar.

But dollar or not, the only thing that penetrated the hazy mind of the monster’s potential next victim was that “This was *not* fair!” Lorie hadn’t been the one who decided

that she needed to get out of bed early! She hadn’t been the one who decided that she needed to spend her Wednesday off from school at Work! But “Rules is rules,” as Mamma always said, and today the stupid rule was that Lorie got to skip a day of first grade *only* if she went to Work with Mamma.

So eventually the sleepy school-skipper had settled upon a pair of polka-dotted socks to wear, pretended to brush her hair, actually brushed her

teeth (because Best Friend Jen said that anyone who didn’t brush their teeth was Gross), and walked hand in hand with Mamma through the glass doors of a million and two story building. And just as she had expected, of course, Work was *not* that much better than school. Work had the exact same white lights that made you blink extra, the exact same tolerance for noise as the school’s library, and the exact same so-called food as the school’s cafe-a-gym-a-torium. But worse yet, when Lorie had told Mamma she was still hungry, Mamma sent her to a room where she found a hideous robot-monster!

“Beep. Beep.”

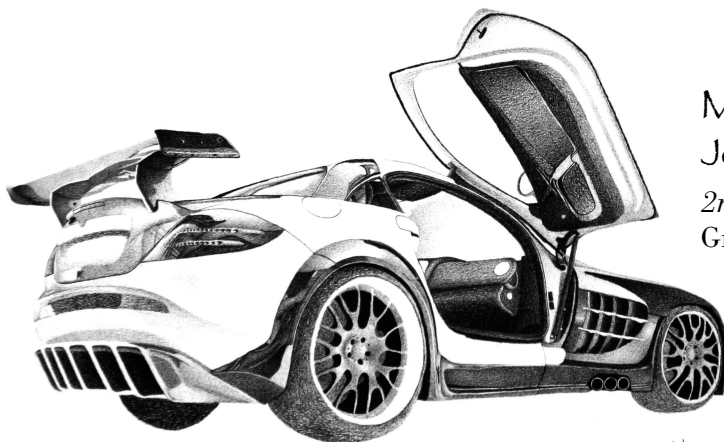
“Yes, hello?... This is she speaking, may I as — ... Bob! No! Of course she’s with me; it’s South Bay’s

Career Day, *remember?*... What?!... No, I... Bob, *just sign the papers.* And stop worrying about what *I’m* doing with our child, ok?! I don’t have time to deal with this... Bob!... Fine! Same goes for you!”

Click. “Jerk.”

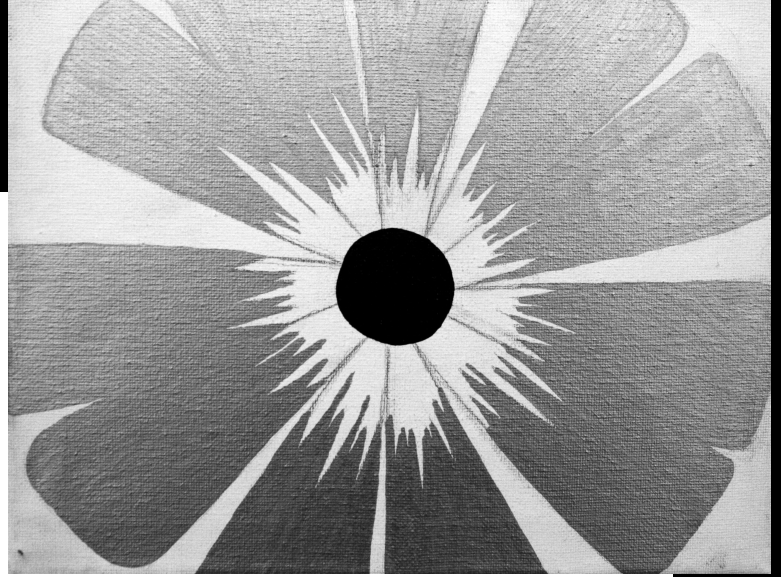
Deborah L. Jamison was an Accounts Manager at L.T. Huey Firm and considered herself a woman on the wrong side of thirty. Deborah, or “Deb” as she preferred to be called, knew that her once-smooth face now bore the marks of thirty-five years, a dead-beat (Almost)-Ex-Husband, a bored six-year-old *somewhere* in the building, and enough stress to last a lifetime. Her main accessories were a thin

[Was the concrete room
getting smaller? Or was
Lorie getting bigger?]



Mercedes, the Best or Nothing
Josh Stone

2nd Place—Drawing Competition
Graphite



black hair tie that snaked around her right wrist, waiting for her to get fed up with pushing unruly black curls away from her face, and a sliver of pale skin where a golden band had once rested.

But with no time to waste dwelling on silly things like hair bands and ring fingers and the blue light of a decrepit Dell blinking across her face, the single mother of one exhaled slowly, pushed a stack of papers that had been threatening to topple since last November towards the gray fabric wall of her cubicle, and once again settled into her never-ending battle against her email inbox.

“392 messages?! How is that even possible!”

“Mister Scary Monster-Robot, please... please don't hurt me! I just wanted a Snickers bar, I swear! I swear Mister Scary Monster!” Trapped in this airtight, windowless room and pressed against an impossibly heavy door, Lorie found herself trembling as she tried to count the minutes that she had been waiting for the robot to advance. Five, ten, fifteen, one-hundred? However long it had been, the *thing* had fallen silent and appeared to be playing dead, waiting for Lorie to turn her back.

“Well, I'll tell you one thing, Mister Scary Robot-Monster, that is one thing that is most certainly not going to happen! I'm just going to stand right here looking right at you until my Mamma comes and gets me! It'll happen! You just wait and see!”

“Bob! How many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me at work?!... Fine, whatever, just talk to her and get it over with ok?... And don't mention —... Yeah, ok, I'll just — well, she's around here somewhere... You know what, Bob? I think I'm going to have to call you back... Don't take that tone with me! Of course I know where Lorie is! I'm not the one —... Well, goodbye, Bob!” *Click.* Deb scanned the room full of gray partitions, empty-eyed workers, jammed printers, and stale coffee.

“Oh god. Where is Lorie?”

Was the concrete room getting smaller? Or was Lorie getting bigger? Is this what Mamma had meant when she said that Lorie would hit a growth spurt soon?! The robot's captive had already counted all

her fingers and toes twice, practiced this week's vocabulary words, sung the ABC's backwards and forwards and was losing hope.

A small voice whispered, “I'm not going to be rescued, am I?”

Deborah had checked *everywhere*. She'd spoken to the security men posted at the door, she talked to nosy Ms. Louis at the receptionist's desk (and almost had to stage a seizure to get away), she'd checked in the fax room, and she'd looked under every desk in the vicinity. She'd even considered sending out an email asking if anyone had seen her missing daughter!

But just as the first-grader's mother, twisting black strands of hair between her thumb and index finger anxiously and biting her inner lip, realized that she was going to have to call the (Almost)-Ex for help, she heard the soft *thud-thud*, *click-clack* of untied tennis shoes hitting the floor. And with that, uncombed curls, polka-dot socks, perfect smile and all, the only beautiful thing in the steel-edged and despair-lined corporate office came flying around the corner, almost knocking Ms. Louis down on her way to go spread some rumor, and into Deborah's waiting arms.

“Lorie! Lor! Sweetie! Where have you been?! I've been so scared, honey!”

“Mamma! There's a robot in that room you told me to go to! I thought he was big and scary and mean but then I gave him that dollar you gave me and he gave me my Snickers!”

And then uncombed curls, polka-dot socks, perfect smile and all, Lorie said, “He was nice once I got to know him! But I'm sorry I lost your dollar, Mamma. Would you like a bite of my Snickers?” ■

Reminiscence of a Communist China

When my father tells me
Of his childhood dreams
He tugs up the corners of his mouth
A rare, warm smile enlightens
His golden skin
Thin skin flaps above his eyes
Fold into rainbows
His scruffy aftershave
Disappears—and
A moment, a flash
A glimmer of light
His youth and innocence, I see—brief
Like his childhood dreams

When my father tells me
Of his childhood ordeals
His amber eyes dodge away
From the sunlight
Recoiling into a dark, swirling pearl—
A world of abyss
Lips curling, chapped and scarred
Like the gates unraveling a story untold
Fisting his shirt
He reflects back
Upon the death of
My aunt, his sister
Who died of starvation
Upon the death of
Ye Ye, my grandfather, his dad
Who died opposing
The government of Mao
The same government
That crushed his childhood dreams

Michelle Zeng

Cadaver Canvas

You crouched there, nothing short of cleavage and tattoos
crossing both your fingers and your line of sight with mine
as we prowled for four-leaf clovers on our high school lawn.
I don't mind the cold-shoulders now, and do you still get
those overdue haircuts to your dyed red, brittle hair?
Do you still drive that red convertible,
perfect for sailing moonlit suburban streets of Georgia?
I ducked while riding to avoid the bite
of the wintry draft of wind diving through the backseat,
using the window shield as its springboard.
You stepped on the brakes beside an unknown driveway
as I dared to uproot a marigold from a healthy garden
to decorate your rearview mirror;
my exact location in your life now, so it seems.
Now ink sinks into your pale back, blood vessels dilating,
feathers forming in cobalt hue, violet depicting the jaw line
of the Roman goddess Victoria;
forever to complement innate beauty.
Your watery ocean eyes are imprinted in my mind,
forever to complement what we never were.

Darrian Kelly



Flying High
Emerald Litke

3rd Place—Photography Competition
Photograph

Dad

Charlotte Wang

“Knowledge is power!” my dad never fails to reiterate. Standing at five foot seven, with balding patches of limp dark hair, my dad’s stature is far from intimidating, but his sharp words cut quicker than knives in warm butter, more than making up for his less-than-imposing physique. He especially loves giving advice, quoting ancient Confucian-style adages in four-word packages of wisdom that befuddle more than educate. He yells “shou zhu dai tu” when I’m not working hard enough, “yán duō bì shǐ” when I talk too much, or his favorite, “nan yuan bai che” as a prelude to his lecture on making the right decisions. In fact, my dad likes giving lectures on “what one should do in life” so much that I have to constantly remind him that he is a father, first and foremost, not a shrink. Unfortunately, whenever I even begin to complain about his excessive lecturing, I just get grilled even more on the “principles of life.” So I have learned to shut my mouth and merely nod in tacit consent to save my ears from further deterioration.

One day, after learning that I had been taken advantage of in school, my dad told me a story that he has repeated frequently ever since. Known in Chinese as <Nong fu he she>, it’s a parable about the farmer and the snake. The plot is simple: a farmer rescues a snake from the freezing winter, but instead of thanking the farmer, the snake bites and eventually kills the poor farmer. Most people would understand the underlying lesson as being careful of who you help, but my dad translated it as “don’t be stupid and become victimized by others at your own cost,” while squeezing in criticism of what he calls, my “remarkable naiveté.”

But my dad gained his cynicism the hard way: growing up in a small rural farm in eastern China, his childhood was far from easy. He never ceases to remind me of all the hardships he has suffered, both physical—toiling through sticky rice paddies under the scorching sun, hiking up mountains for

firewood, and chopping trees to build houses — and mental — staying up well past midnight working grueling geometry problems, drilling himself in English vocabulary and grammar every day, and being the only person in Wuhan to enter a university. He passes these stories on to me in avid, albeit unsuccessful, attempts to make me learn the lessons he did and lead a better life than the one he had.

One day, I entered Dad’s lab by accident and got an inside glance into his natural niche. I watched my dad scuffle around the lab, cramped with laser machines, fiber loops, oscilloscopes, and cabinets full of a jumble of random items: empty flasks, metal bars, iron rails, plastic straws, screwdrivers, boxes brimming with piles of literary journals and research papers, and rows and rows of chemicals — PPL, GOD, PPS. On the walls hung unfurling posters of his latest discoveries, brilliant photos juxtaposed alongside chains of mathematical models and physics formula, their curly symbols and square jagged edges mesmerizing in their novelty. As I turned around, I spotted my dad standing in one corner of the lab, the section where plasma experiments were being conducted. He bent over the humming laser beams in silent concentration, brows furrowed, eyes fixed on a tiny blue-white flame, gleaming and twisting like the glowing coils of a slithering snake. His fingers barely grazed the array of metal knobs, twirling in swift yet cautious turns while his eyes never wavered. A couple of his students walked in and he turned around to greet them, discussing the latest project with vigor, hands weaving through the air in frantic patterns while scratching sketches on the blackboard. In one moment, I had seen it all, his daily work cast in the light of some holy ritual, while I gazed in dumb-founded reverence and awe.

Mostly though, my dad loves telling stories, especially after dinner when we are all sitting at the table, stuffed and lazy. He often begins his tales

after a long day at work, with legs outstretched, body leaned back, and fingers laced behind his head, pausing only to take an occasional sip of green tea while fixing me with an impenetrable stare. My dad was a very impish little kid and his nickname growing up was “Bad Little Weed” because he would always get into mishaps and scrapes. In elementary school, he was the ringleader among a group of friends, ordering others to do his dirty work while he observed from the sidelines, unpunished and unharmed. One time he even told his friends to pull the fire alarm so that he could play hooky. My dad was also curious; he had often seen eggs hatch after hens sat on them, so one day, he thought he would also give it a try. Unfortunately, it took hours of squatting and nearly half a day before he resigned himself to the fact that hatching baby chicks from eggs was something only chickens could do, not little boys. He trudged back home, sulking and sullen while my grandma burst into fits of laughter. Sometimes, however, his adventures would get him into serious trouble, such as the time he fell out of a tree so hard he thought he was dead. After waking up, he thought in muddled confusion, “Oh, I’m not dead?” and then “I’m still *alive*!” before hollering

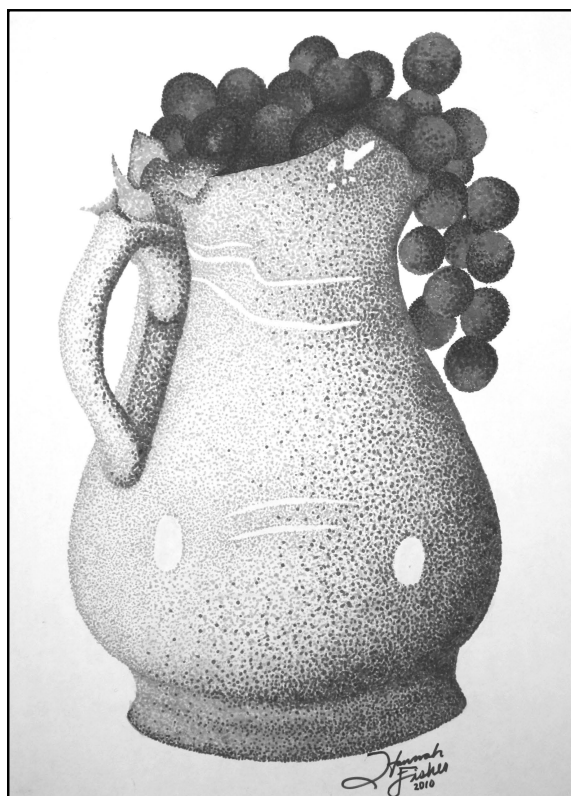
and jumping out of joy. No matter how many times he recounts those anecdotes, I always giggle. It’s just so unbelievable that the calm, disciplined man in front of me today was so immature once and so mischievous.

From there he would plunge straight into discussions of the economic slump, the Obama administration, abortion and capital punishment, tense relations between China and the US, and Christianity versus atheism, among others, issues that are considered forbidden territory, yet ones that seem to burrow themselves into more than half of our dinner-table conversations. We often dive into lengthy debates about these issues, arguing for hours on end until we both shout ourselves hoarse, but most of the time, his logic wins in the end, leaving me tongue-tied and bitter. Other times, neither of us wins, leaving more questions than answers, while my mom just looks on in open exasperation.

“Can you two ever stop arguing and just get along?” she merely sighs in frazzled frustration.

Stop arguing? Not when the sun rises in the east and his chafing retort, “Knowledge is power!” rings in my ears. But that’s what I love the most about my dad. ■

Monday Morning
Hannah Fisher
*1st Place—Drawing
Competition
Marker*



Out of Love

Thirteen's too young to lie to the police.
But that didn't matter to my mother's youngest
Brother, the stranger I call family.

Red-blue lights burst through the woods and
Up our driveway. The summer sun and sheriff's
presence
Made him sweat; he needed me to buy some time.

That was the day my uncle Kurt looked at me and
Asked for something I knew was wrong.
The day my uncle Kurt

Demanded a lie. Out of love.

He rasped, "I'm not here. You don't know me,"
His limp cigarette dangled from his mouth as he
Fled upstairs to the room we'd lent him.

Thirteen's too young to lie to the police,
So when they asked, I told half-truths,
About the stranger I'd called family.

"Yes, I know him. But he's not here.
I don't know when he'll be back.
He might be at the Broke Spoke Bar."

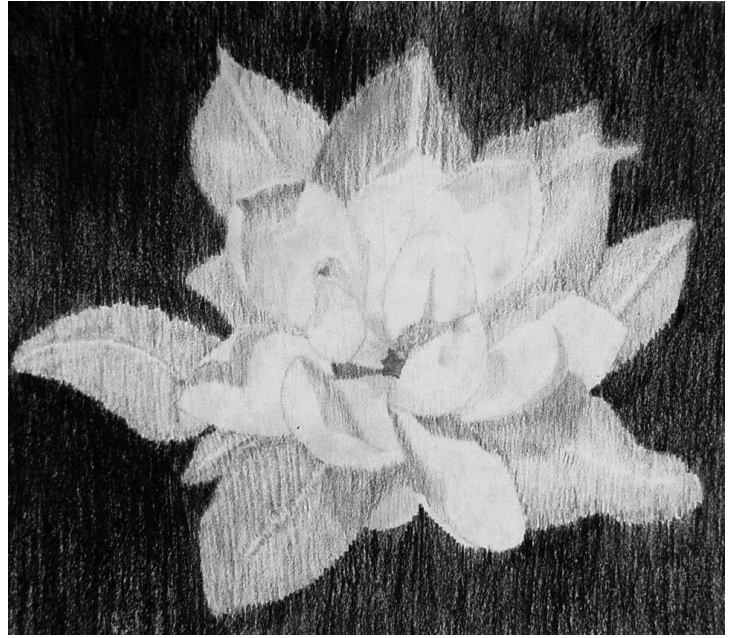
The bright lights faded back through the trees;
I looked away, told my uncle what I'd said.
He answered as he packed his bags.

"Now they know I'm staying here, I have to leave.
Tell your folks I'm sorry."
He whispered, "Maybe I'll see you at your wedding."
And then he disappeared.

Well, at my wedding, if I've forgotten
Budweiser cans and blunt last words,
I might reach out the hand he didn't.

I might invite him. Out of love.

Rachel Banka



Magnolia
Brooke Bivens

Colored pencils



A Short Reprise for Burning Forests
Kate Thompson

Photograph

Quiet Desperation

Kate Thompson

The lights in my office were bright and buzzing like they were filled with a thousand fluorescent fireflies. The shaky whirring of the vents sounded like a giant grinding his teeth; it circulated the smell of cheap coffee and cologne inside my cubicle, mixing it into my air and clothes. Sometimes I'd do my job — adjusting spreadsheets and timelines on my desktop or testing computer software — but mostly I'd watch Dale.

Dale Winters was thirty five, but he looked about fifty. His brown crew cut made his head look like a broom, and dark, saggy bags cushioned the small, shifty, blue beetles of his eyes. His weekly wardrobe rotated the same five button-down shirts, all white and starched with different colored stripes: green for Monday, orange for Tuesday, gray for Friday. He spoke in soft, slow words, like he was always in a library.

At his first morning meeting, Dale passed out Buzzword Bingo cards: little square cards cut out of old cheerios boxes, only instead of numbers he filled the grids with words like “synergy” and “strategize.” Once we had checked off an entire row of office lingo, we asked our boss, Keith, a question using the word bingo: “If we moved the savings to an account with more collective interest, we'd really hit an economical bingo” or “Just monitor their funding and bingo. Problem solved.” Dale bought the winners little prizes, like a box of powdered doughnuts or a Little Caesar's pizza.

Dale always wore a wedding band, even though he never mentioned a wife. The band was too small for his fingers and pressed on the tan skin around it so it bulged around the sides like tiny airbags. He had no pictures on his desk or crayon drawings tacked to his bulletin board. I felt guilty for the

framed portraits of my daughter and wife that cluttered my cubicle. I had glitter glue and macaroni paintings. Dale had an extra pencil sharpener.

After a bomb threat at the high school down the road, office security started cracking down. They checked at every entrance. If anyone fumbled for their I.D., a guard would lean back, rest a hand on his gun, and repeat, “Your...I.D.... sir...” in an over-enunciated voice. Dale was in front of me in line the first day of I.D. checks. He pulled his wallet out of his back pocket and rifled through its leather slits and pouches. I saw a picture of a woman

in the fold of his wallet. It was the kind of display picture that you get when you buy a picture frame; the woman's smile was practiced and wide, and her skin was airbrushed clear of lines and pores. The numbers “3 x 5” were printed across the bottom of her turtleneck in bold, black ink. Dale turned back and looked at me. Three fingers were still stuffed in his wallet as he paused mid-search to meet my stare. The blue bugs of his eyes were hard

and cold. They raised the hairs on my arms and shot ice through my veins. I began pretending to search through my pockets for my I.D., even though I felt its weight on the lanyard under my shirt. I didn't stop searching until Dale was out of sight and the security officer touched his gun.

Two mornings later we were playing Buzzword Bingo; I tapped my finger against my card, waiting for Keith to say “push the envelope” so I could win a box of Tagalongs. Keith shuffled through a stale power point of pie charts and line graphs. There was a shout from the back of the room. “I HAVE A DECLARATION TO MAKE!” The entire room spun around to see Dale standing on his chair with his arm stretched above his head and a finger point-

The shingles
had large, burnt
holes that looked
like a giant had
snuffed out his
cigarettes.

ing towards the ceiling. His face was the color of a bruised tomato; a thick, purple vein was swelling under his hairline. His eyes were glazed but wide. He stood there for a moment. Then his face faded to pink and his arm drooped by his side. Dale looked at our faces before climbing down from the chair and sinking into it. He stared down at his lap with a sheepish look and began picking at the flakes of skin around his nails.

Our lunch break is from noon to one. We sit at the conference room table and chat about our PTA meetings, how our children are doing off of training wheels, and the latest office romances. As the weeks passed, Dale spent less and less time eating in the conference room and more time working an extra hour in his

cubicle. On breaks when Dale was in his cubicle, Sandra joined the gossip. Sandra was our secretary. She had a perfectly brushed, bleached blonde bob and a different pair of earrings every day. Her voice was soothing and smooth and could calm down an angry customer in less than a minute. Maybe it was her voice that drew Dale in. Whatever it was it kept Dale suctioned to the water cooler by Sandra's desk. He stuttered when he said "G-g-g-ood mor-nuh-nuh-ning, Sssandra" every day on his way into work. Between bites of corned beef sandwiches, Sandra told us about how Dale called her from his desk.

"It's every week, poor thing!" she said, waving her hands in exaggerated gestures. "Sometimes he doesn't say a thing! Just kinda listens to me. But just yesterday he asked me to dinner! I tried telling him, 'Dale,' I said, 'I have a boyfriend you know. You can't be calling me like this.' But he'll just hang up and call again the next day! That poor man needs to see someone!"

One day Dale joined our lunch group. He sat next to me and talked about how important it is to wash your fruit before you eat it as he crunched into his apple. I left to get a soda from the vending machine; when I came back, Dale's face was bloodless and blank. The knuckles of his fists were

white. He jumped up, grabbed his lunch box from the table, and hurled it out of the open, third story window. There was a chilled silence as everyone stopped chewing. Dale faced the window frame. His shoulders began to sag and blood rushed back to his fingers as he loosened his fists. Without a word, he turned and walked out the door, leaving nothing but an apple core lying on the table.

The next day I followed fire trucks to work.

...the wind was
speckled with
showers of embers,
like hot, red
snowflakes.

There were four of them, all with hoses and ladders, shooting water at the office windows. The entire building was burning. Black smoke swelled from the roof. The shingles had large, burnt holes that looked like a giant had snuffed out his cigarettes. The fire crawled out of the windows and cooked the air dry; the wind

was speckled with showers of embers, like hot, red snowflakes. A police officer with a notepad was talking to Keith, and Sandra was by her car on the phone. No one could find Dale.

That evening, I drove up to the office. I killed my lights before pulling up to the parking lot. I pulled my scarf up over my nose to shield it from the stinging wind and walked up to the ashtray that was once my building. Wooden support beams jutted from the roof; the brick walls and ground were stained and speckled with black soot. The charred double doors, scarred with cracks, were propped against the front steps. All of the blackened windows wheezed ashes when the wind blew. Their particles flew into the outside air, escaping and dancing like wild things. Shadows slept behind the building's remaining walls and obscured the view inside.

My feet crunched over safety glass as I stepped closer to the rubble. At the edge of the ashes, I saw a square of paper. I bent down and dusted it from the dirt. It was the picture of a woman; the edges were browned and curling up, but I could still see the white of her practiced smile. Barely visible from the burns, I made out the numbers "3 x 5" printed across the bottom of her shirt. ■

Limbo Everlasting

Rachel Banka

Second Place – Essay Competition

Hour one. I shoulder a backpack reluctant to zip and a purple travel tote that I know will make my sister, the tote's rightful owner, shriek with pre-teen rage. With any luck, she'll never realize that that may just be why I always choose to employ this particular bag. Heavier than my luggage, however, is the knowledge that over 250 miles of road stretch between my residential high school in Columbus, Mississippi, and my parents' house in Kiln, Mississippi. With that thought rattling around in my mind, I climb into the car, call my father to tell him I'm heading home so that he can enjoy his *full* five or so hours of parental worry, and start to navigate my way through Columbus to Highway 45. This part of the journey is always one of the clearest, one of the most specific. Left here, right there, stop ahead, merge near Harvey's

Restaurant. But then everything changes and I am out of town, on the open 45, and my distinct directions turn into hazy recollections of important landmarks. I am in limbo, between one home and another, between friends and family, in the miles of unfamiliarity that I call, "the rest of Mississippi."

Hour two. I've already turned onto the US 45-S and passed the last few reminders that I am near Columbus. Macon, a town that seems to consist of a single stop light, a couple of gas stations, and some sort of ghastly conjoined joint KFC/Taco Bell; Scooba, Macon's little sister; and the National Flea Market, positioned just south of a street sign boasting Scooba as "home to a national turkey-

calling champion." Every time I make this trek, I pass these things with a mixture of disbelief and hope that, just once before I die, I'll run into a middle-aged couple from No-where-ville, Illinois, that has proudly traveled to Scooba, Mississippi, to shake hands with a famous turkey caller and hawk their goods at the National Flea Market. It certainly wouldn't be the strangest thing I've seen in Mississippi, but I continue to push on through this seemingly infinite land of in-between.

Hour three? By now, a foreboding sense has

begun to creep over me, telling me that I've somehow missed my favorite landmark, the Chunky River that punctuates the endless expanse of nothingness between Scooba and Meridian. I vow to myself, "Without a doubt, for sure, absolutely, I will find Dear Ole Chunky next time!" but simultaneously

ignore the echoes of, "Hey! Didn't you say that *last time*?" Soon, after eighty-three miles of US-45, I will eagerly turn onto the I-20 W/ I-59 S and shoot through Meridian, excited to be reaching a major milestone, but knowing that I'll soon be sorry I passed up a prime opportunity to partake in fast-food I scoffed at earlier, purchase gas, and locate the *necessary facilities*. The next town big enough to appear on a map that I will hit after that will be Enterprise and I know I certainly won't want to stop there. After all, I can promise that, without fail, 100% guarantee, it WILL be raining in Enterprise. But I like to think that maybe, just maybe, this seemingly permanent wall of rain is

I steer my way up a winding, gravel driveway, try to avoid hitting the hoards of dogs launching themselves at my metal death-trap...

merely a barrier between my two homes that *must* be crossed — a line in the sand that is the result of North Mississippi begging me to stay and South Mississippi pulling me back into its loving arms. So I continue to drive.

Surely hour three! Heidelberg, Laurel, Hattiesburg. Does it matter anymore? Do places *need* names anymore? Have I been driving for so long that society has changed its entire method of identification and done away with titles all together? I know that wherever I am, though, I've passed the longest lasting construction zone to ever exist, having to slow down to sixty, then forty, then thirty, then twenty miles per hour and eventually deciding that the first words ever spoken by my caveman ancestors must have been, "I've heard they say it will be done by Christmas..." Somewhere in that sea of construction, I also passed a black billboard featuring the words, "You know that 'love thy neighbor' thing? I meant it. — God" and resolved to find out if God got a discount just for being God or had to pay full price. But, then again, perhaps it doesn't matter, and perhaps I'm a little tired of driving, and perhaps if I click my heels really, REALLY hard, a wormhole will open up and I'll find myself pulling into a familiar gravel driveway.

Definitely hour four. Maybe. The clicking didn't work. I'm still on the road, but I've passed Hattiesburg and sensed The Change. I am officially on the Gulf Coast, closer to home than ever, *and* I could have sworn that I just saw a seagull fly over head! Now I've just got to keep going until I can turn onto the MS-603 S, zip through acres upon acres of rural nothingness, and turn left when I get to Crump Road. I am pure focus.

Hour four and a half. I've resorted to composing and singing songs along the lines of, "I'm almost home, I'm almost home! Whoo! I'm almost home, I'm almost home! Whoo!" and imagining that the hundreds of cows and horses and sheep that I am passing are cheering me on, delighted that "I'm almost home." But I'm onto those sneaky farm animals. *I* know that *they* know as well just as I do that, somehow, the longest part of the journey will be once I actually re-enter Hancock County, just like the longest day in the sixteen-day wait for ACT

scores to be released is the very last one.

Hour four and three-quarters. Is that what I think it is? It is! It must be! I've made it, I've crossed the invisible border of Kiln A.K.A. "The Kill," Mississippi, and I can now see the painted side of Dolly's Gas Station. The mural, which must be older than I am, celebrates Kiln being home to a football team that once featured Brett Farve — a football team that almost gained the title of most consecutive losses in Mississippi, but won a single game in my freshman year and went straight back to losing. Nevertheless, I am glad to see Dolly's and glad that I can begin to snap out of the madness brought on by my hours of isolation. One, two, three more miles, and I'm taking a left onto Crump Road and a right at a mailbox that Mr. Paul, my former bus driver, seemed intent on destroying every day for the five years he drove me home. Shaking with anticipation, I steer my way up a winding, gravel driveway, try to avoid hitting the hoards of dogs launching themselves at my metal death-trap, and park the car (three times because my dad is watching). And then, all at once, having endured slight insanity and loneliness and miles of boredom, having seen trees and chicken and cows and lakes, I am finally able to step out of the car, break out of my limbo, greet my family, and *find the facilities*. ■



Dangling Danger
Aaron Williamson

Photograph

Gardening

Maleele Choongo

Honorable Mention – Essay Competition

I buckle my seat belt and twist the charcoal-colored volume knob to the right. The radio sends strong surges of static splashing out that drown the faint cries of Lady Gaga’s “Alejandro.” My mother is in the driver’s seat, humming a tune of her own. Her freckled face is focused on Highway 45 and framed with leftover waves from yesterday’s curls. Her plump, coffee-tinted fingers fidget in frantic fury around her purse, in search for her sunglasses. I peer out the window, trying to fall asleep as my eyes graze over the outskirts of Columbus, Mississippi. My mother plucks her left hand from her purse,

coming back with a crushed peppermint and a folded napkin. Handing both of them to me, she asks me about school. I give her a synopsis of the good, and a snippet of the bad. Trying to avoid any more of my mother’s

questions, I turn my attention back to the window and spot a small pineapple-yellow house. Standing in the front garden is a gray-haired woman with a dark blue shirt and khaki shorts sporting a fanny-pack and a wispy straw hat. She drops her hands from her hips as she stoops down, squinting at the ground. With a small smirk on her face, she scoops up what looks like a speckled ball of cabbage. She lets her gloves drape down from her hands as she examines her newfound treasure. After revolving the cabbage around, she plops it down and begins to dig—for more of her green gold, perhaps.

I recall having viewed a similar scene from my Aunt Sichilongo’s front porch. I spent my first six summers on her small Livingston veranda in Zambia tolerating the sun’s rays just so I could crunch on guavas, papayas, carrots, cucumbers, mulberries, and anything she would grow. The

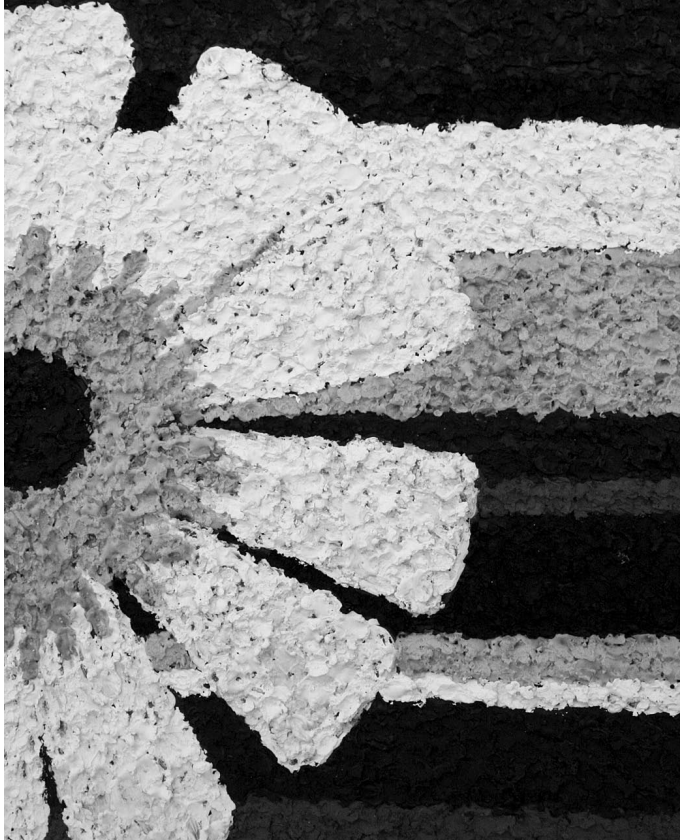
woman was quirky, but admirable: give her a patch of clay, and she would turn even that into a meadow of vegetables. She was the type of person that never let anything say no to her, even if it were mute. Life had never really said *no* to Aunt Sichilongo, but it never said *yes* either; in some ways, Aunt Sichilongo’s life wasn’t so different from her plants’. She would for a second abandon her pepper seeds, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage patches only to have her husband shove her head into dirt, slap her down into a patch with that heavy hand and water her with her own tears. So we all understood

All I see is a wispy
straw hat and a dappled
cabbage nestled in a
tattered blue basket.

why Aunt Sichilongo’s garden meant so much to her: she needed it to survive just as much as it depended on her. Her garden was the only place Aunt Sichilongo had absolute control—of the plants and herself. She grew to be brilliant, just

like her plants, and we all take a bite from Aunt Sichilongo every now and then.

The pineapple-yellow house begins to fade off in the distance. I try to catch one last glimpse of the gray-haired woman, but she is buried in her garden. All I see is a wispy straw hat and a dappled cabbage nestled in a tattered blue basket. I wondered why I’ve only seen this once. I can name just about every spot from Columbus to Jackson, but the little yellow house seems to have sprouted with the cabbage. I shift my eyes back into the car. A neon green 3:45 shows from the screen of my clock. We have been in the car for an hour now. I look back over to my mother. She still has that worried-but-focused look, the one she’s had since I can remember. I wonder what she did while I sat on the porch for my first six summers. I believe she had a garden of her own to tend to. ■



Striped Daisy
Adey Efrem
Melted Crayons

Supermarket

I hate going to the supermarket.

Because when I do, I see *him* there.
Stocking aisles. Toting bags.

But a lost expression lines his face –
And hides the boy I used to know.

A touch of sadness shrouds his eyes,
A gang of ghosts haunts his soul.

He's changed his name.
Wanting something, anything, but *that* man's name.
The man who woke his children to make them watch.

All the newspapers called it murder-suicide,
But the neighborhood gossips called it tragic.

I hate going to the supermarket.

Rachel Banka

Human Trafficking

Amoebic creatures
Bursting through the
Transparent plastic
Egg skin, coming forth
To life
Heads peeking out
Innocent and immature
Locked in a birdcage
By the evil men who
Created them
They crawl around the
Floor, naked and confused,
Bodily features beginning
To form
Unaware of their nakedness
And their beautiful, engineered
Features
Like bejeweled livestock
Manufactured and made to
Be sold off to the highest bidder
Supermodel minions drug and
Discipline the ignorant girls
Fill them with alcohol,
Eyes now like giant black pools,
With notches on their swollen spines
Force them to dance in unison
Cover the girls with make up
And diamonds
Make them pretty for the auction
1,2,3,4
1,2,3,4
Up, down, left, right
Up, down, left, right
Kick and turn
Kick and turn
Jump and twist
Jump and twist
The women dance
Robotic and syncopated
Elaborate machines
Built to perform at the crowd's
Command as a commodity
A joy for the highest bidder

Aaron Williamson

Contributors' Notes

Alayna Adams (Nesbit) Alayna believes “Pain is weakness leaving the body.” Her hero is her mother, because without her she wouldn’t be where she is today. If she were an instrument, she would be a drum, because drums make the most noise.

Rachel Banka (Kiln) If Rachel could meet anyone, she would like to meet Teddy Roosevelt. Rachel thinks “Creativity is a product of intelligence and a thoughtful mind,” and plans to continue acting and writing throughout college and professionally.

Tamara Bell (Russum) Tamara embraces and appreciates all art. She explains, “If art couldn’t be created, if writing were banned for whatever reason, if creativity could not be expressed, the status of the human race would fall almost to the point of nonexistence.”

Reanna Bierig (Fulton) If Reanna could have grown up in any decade, she would have enjoyed the 70’s. Reanna plays and relates with the snare drum, because “It’s hard to understand the beauty in the harsh sound, but if you can play, you can relate to the blunt beauty in the breakdown.”

Brooke Bivens (Byram) Brooke most associates with the color blue, and believes “it’s important to delve into the arts; the arts bring you to a place of self-discovery.”

Katie Bryant (Raymond) Of all the colors, Katie most associates with the color yellow. She defines herself by the quotation, “Never worry whether or not tomorrow will come, because it’s already tomorrow in Australia.

Scott Chen (Hattiesburg) Scott plays the piano and enjoys the works of George Orwell. He lives by the quotation, “Stay hungry. Stay foolish.”

Maleele Choongo (Jackson) Maleele counts Dambisa Moyo as her hero, citing Dr. Moyo’s dedicating her life to “the reformation of African—especially Zambian—politics and economics.” A singer, Maleele says she’d like to be a tuba “because I’ve always wanted to produce low notes.”

Jessica Chu (Greenville) Jessica is influenced by the band The Spill Canvas. She can be compared to a violin, because they can both “be graceful one moment and dramatic the next.” Jessica plans to study chemistry at Southern Methodist University.

Jordan Dunlap (Pascagoula) Jordan believes that creativity prevents redundancy. He plans to be a programmer once he graduates from college.

Adey Efrem (Greenville) Adey enjoys painting nature. Her favorite writer is Nicholas Sparks, and she wouldn’t mind being a cello, because, like art, it has the power to make a person feel emotions.

Daniel Eisler (Ocean Springs) Daniel’s hero is Christopher McCandles “because he did exactly what he wanted.” He believes “some people aren’t satisfied with thoughts staying in the mind,” and relates with the trombone, because trombones are sassy.

John Corbin Evans (Philadelphia) John Corbin would like to have lived during the 20’s and one day meet Eric Clapton. He plans to obtain a doctor of pharmacy degree from the University of Mississippi.

Hannah Fisher (Columbus) Hannah agrees with Oscar Wilde’s view on art, that “it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.” If she could live in any time period, she would have liked to have lived during A.D. 1700.

Skyler Hensarling (Dixie) Skyler believes “if you have something to say or express, do it. There may be someone looking to see or hear it.” She wishes she could have met Walt Disney, and looks up to her mother because “she is strong, beautiful, and selfless.”

Alexis Hicks (Hollandale) Alexis is most influenced by Maya Angelou. She explains that writing is a form of freedom, and “it frees us from the world we see around us.” She plans to attend the University of Mississippi and study medicine.

Cheyenne Hurst (Biloxi) Cheyenne enjoys Shakespeare and The Hunger Games. She likes to write because it helps her mind “view things in a different way,” and can’t wait to go to college.

Albert Johnson, III (Natchez) Albert has a passion for musical ballads and scores, and would love to meet Hermione Granger to “see if she is as smart as J.K. Rowling says she is.” He loves colors full of energy, especially yellow.

Darrian Kelly (Jackson) If Darrian could meet anyone, it would be the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. He plans to study English and neuroscience at Amherst College.

John Kim (Hattiesburg) John believes that “art is what makes us distinctly human.” He is most influenced by Albert Camus and plans to become a pediatrician.

George Liao (Starkville) George defines himself by Yoda’s admonition, “Do or do not, there is no try.” He would like to have lived during the seventeenth century, and his hero is Iron Man “because he has an awesome suit.”

Emerald Litke (Ocean Springs) Emerald thinks art “is a wonderful outlet and a beautiful way to express words and thoughts.” She loves pianos because they are beautiful and she “could sit and listen to them forever.”

Sarah Long (Picayune) Sarah plans to be a psychologist or an editor, and appreciates the role of art in her life, saying, “God has gifted me with abilities that allow me to be myself on paper as well as in person.”

Amber McFarland (Mayersville) Amber lives her life by her saying “Fight on!” She would have enjoyed living during the seventies, because it is the decade of soul music, and is most influenced by Dr. Seuss.

Destin McMurry (Fulton) Destin is most influenced by the musical artist Dewayne Carter, III. She would one day like to meet Demetri Martin, and attend college, go into advertising, and travel the world.

Dailey Nettles (Columbus) Dailey’s hero is Michiaki Takahashi for creating the chicken pox vaccine. If she could meet anyone she would meet Nelson Mandela and is most influenced by Aaron Weiss.

Marie Polk (Meridian) Marie lives her life by the saying “Never give up!” She associates with the color yellow, because it is such “a happy color.”

Claire Ratliff (Hattiesburg) Claire defines herself through Shakespeare’s quotation, “Commit the oldest sins the newest kind of old ways.” She is most influenced by her sister Caroline Ratliff, who is also an artist, and wishes she had the chance to live in the sixties.

Kaitlan Rester (Columbus) Kaitlan’s hero is her older brother, Joshua Rester, because he has always been there for her. Her goal is to “have a lifestyle that will bless others,” and thinks “artwork shows the inner beauty of one’s soul.”

Joshua Stone (Starkville) Joshua’s most influential artist is Andrew Lark, his art teacher from Starkville High School. He believes “creativity is necessary in moving the world forward.” He plans to attend the University of Pennsylvania.

Kate Thompson (Picayune) Kate’s writing is most influenced by her “weirdo family.” If she were an instrument, she would most like to be a piccolo because “they are tiny, but can still make noise.” She plans to dye her hair red before she dies.

Charlotte Wang (Starkville) Charlotte believes “writing is a form of expression, a creative way to share your unique view of the world with others.” She says she would have enjoyed living in the sixties, and is most influenced by Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*.

Henry Wang (Hattiesburg) Henry associates with blue the most of all the colors. He plans to go to college, invent something, make money, and live in a flying castle.

Amy Wilcosky (Seminary) Amy lives by Belgicia Howell’s recommendation, “Never explain yourself. Your friends don’t need it and your enemies won’t believe it.” She plans to study medicine.

Aaron Williamson (Water Valley) Aaron adores and admires Lady Gaga; she is his “biggest inspiration, and she is undoubtedly amazing.” He thinks a person must honor and respect his own creativity and never be afraid to embrace it.

Emily Wilson (Horn Lake) If she could, Emily would enjoy living in the 1850’s and one day meeting Albus Dumbledore. She admires the power and strength of Elizabeth I and plans to study veterinary sciences at Cornell University.

Angela Wu (Clarksdale) Angela plans to study dentistry, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese and become an orthodontist. She admires the works of Eudora Welty and Pearl S. Buck.

Michelle Zeng (Greenville) If Michelle could meet anyone, she would choose George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Lord Byron. She lives her life through Winston Churchill’s quote, “If you’re going through hell, keep going.”



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