

Southern Voices

2012



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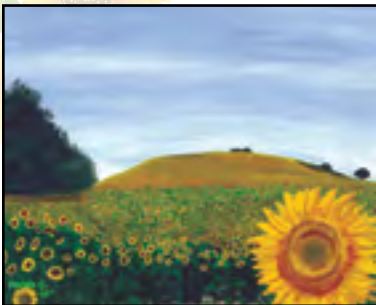
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Rivers (to be published by Simon
& Schuster, Summer, 2013)

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Lucy

Holly Baer

First Place—Short Story Competition
The Chris Read Award for Fiction

Lucy opened her letter and skimmed it. *Another rejection*, she thought. She opened the bottom drawer of her desk and placed the latest letter on top. She kept her letters pristinely organized: plain rejections in the bottom drawer and rejections with encouragement in the top drawer. The middle drawer held her supplies: a pair of thick black glasses, a notepad, and three pens. Lucy’s desk stayed neat unless she was having a burst of creativity. Those bursts produced little more than clumsy sonnets, but at least she kept writing.

Lucy grabbed her glasses and adjusted her grandmother’s lamp. The mid-afternoon sun kept ruining her mood, so she hid it with blinds and velvet curtains. She preferred to write in the dark. Lucy opened the top drawer and grabbed a handful of letters. The latest was from a year and a half ago. The editor had been kind to her saying that she showed immense promise and that she should continue her endeavors. *No one has said that for a while.*

Lucy put back her letters and grabbed her notepad. Lucy decided to go back to a story she had been writing for a while. The novella depicted a young couple from 1950s Mississippi, Ronnie and Etta. Lucy loved Ronnie and Etta more than they loved each other. This couple amused Lucy alone; she wouldn’t dare show them to her publisher, her husband, and certainly not her mother. Lucy wrote about their passionate kisses and late-night swims in murky streams.

After Lucy finished another scene in Ronnie and Etta’s lust-filled summer, she picked out poems to send to a magazine. Lucy had sent her poems to every publisher possible, from online journals to famous—and well-respected—print

publishers. She had one of her poems published on a small website for struggling poets, though she had to lie about her financial status to be considered. She pulled out a few poems she had written in the past week. Lucy analyzed her lines and came to a familiar conclusion: something wasn’t as it used to be. Freshman year of college she had won the Dean’s Award for creative writing. By senior year she was a frequent guest of English teachers to read her work. Now she frowned, but typed the poems anyway; she had nothing better to send.

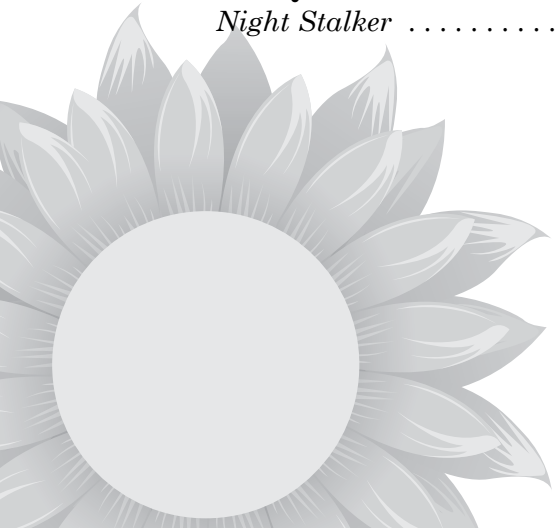
As Lucy typed a poem about springtime and rebirth, she heard a cry. Lucy leaned back in her chair hoping the cry had been as fictional

as the fresh daisies in her poem. That would not be the case. Lucy heard the cries again, soft as a whisper but serious as death. She put her glasses in the drawer, the frame lined against the side of the drawer just so. Lucy walked towards her baby’s room. “Hey, honey,” Lucy said, “how was your nap?” The baby’s cries went silent as she slobbered on Lucy’s shirt. *Joy.* Lucy patted

her baby’s back as they made their way to the kitchen.

Lucy placed the baby in the bouncer, then got out her bottle. Lucy stared at her child as she mixed the powder and water. *Margot seems fine despite being bottle fed. Maybe breastfeeding isn’t all it is cracked up to be.* Lucy popped the bottle in the microwave and went to play with her daughter. Lucy’s friends had always given her flack about not being a “kind and supportive” mother because she refused to breastfeed. *Margot took everything else, I’m keeping these.* Lucy kept smiling at Margot, attempting to get a reaction. Margot sucked on her own fingers

“The middle drawer held her supplies: a pair of thick black glasses, a notepad, and three pens.”



and stared at the ceiling. *How exciting.* Lucy grabbed the bottle out of the microwave and she and Margot headed toward the rocking chair in the living room.

Lucy didn't sing or tell stories to Margot as she fed her. Lucy just gave her the bottle and thought about her day. *This rocking chair is probably as old as I am,* she thought. As Lucy burped Margot, she wove a story about a poor farmer forced to sell the lumber on his land to support his ever-growing family. Maybe a rocking chair had been made out of an oak tree he had loved since he was a boy. Lucy lost herself in this man's life until Margot started fussing. Lucy realized she still had half a bottle to give Margot and the baby was tired of being burped. Lucy refrained from her farmer fantasy to focus on feeding her child.

I've got plenty of reasons to love being a mother. I don't have to teach anymore, I have more time to write. Lucy never believed herself, though. Lucy hadn't put on a nice dress in over a year, and her killer stilettos remained dangerously unworn. She had traded in pencil skirts for sweat shirts. *As if that's a fair trade.* Margot whined in Lucy's arms. As sunset started, the sky filled the room with a pink glow. From the corner of her eye, Lucy saw the time. *Five thirty. Derrick should be home soon.*

Lucy gathered herself and Margot and went back to the kitchen.

Lucy placed Margot back in the bouncer and grabbed the pots and pans from the cabinet. Lucy hated cooking large meals, so Derrick and she would be having pasta again. Lucy dashed some salt into the heating water and a little into her mouth. *No wonder I'm always dehydrated.* She looked at Margot as she waited for the water to come to a boil. Margot had not been the bundle of emotion that Lucy's friends had prepared her for. Margot did smile sometimes.

Lucy had drained the pasta and seasoned the sauce by the time Derrick got home. Lucy ran to her husband, arms ready to be thrown around his neck. Lucy smiled and opened her mouth for a kiss, but Derrick had other plans: “Margot! Hey, baby. How are you? Daddy hates to be gone all day while you and Mama have all the fun.” Margot giggled and waved her hands towards her father's face. *Of course she shows out for him.*

“Derrick, dinner's ready!”

“I'll eat later. I'm gonna go play with Margot for a while.” Lucy watched Derrick and Margot disappear to the back room, the two of them cooing the entire way. Lucy sat at her kitchen table and felt the fluorescent bulb sting her with its light. ■

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

The Perfect Persuasion

Emma Thompson

He always knew
Just the right way
To persuade a little girl
In Daffy Duck overalls
With tissue paper hands
To abandon her plastic teacups
And leave Ken and Barbie
Poised in their plastic pink chairs
For a hand-me down fishing rod
With a weathered wooden handle
And a two-hour ride through the forests of pines
That engulfed the road to Lake Perry.

Her hands would fidget around the pole
As she leaned away from the swivel chair
That was bolted into stained carpeting
And the weed of a flower
Once tucked in with the care
Of ten strong seasoned fingers
Dangled from atop her ear
As if hoping to see an old friend
In the watery reflections below.

And when the depths finally produced
A wet wriggling perch
Whose scales shimmered in rainbows
And made small cotton palms clap together
She would stare in silence
As rough skillful hands
Danced around a hook
and finally released the fish
into the green, cloudy sea.



Daddy Took Us To the Beach

Emerald Litke

Photograph

Leader of the Pack

Aleah Liddell

*Third Place —Drawing
Competition
Clayboard*



Coyote Ugly

Emily Wilson

Third Place—Essay Competition

Every time the breeze sliced at my skin, drawing puffs of misty breath from my lips as I gasped, I felt a thrill of fear as the deer stand swayed. I had been hunting before, but this morning was my first experience twenty feet above the ground, resting my back against the jagged bark of a tree with my feet on the freezing metal platform hoisting me up. My bedraggled curls snagged flyaway twigs as I let my head droop against the tree. Randy reminded me in hoarse whispers that sudden gestures would frighten any deer, and I had to make a conscious effort to slow my movements. I grinned as I remembered his speech from the night before: “Your hands are like flags. When you wave them around, it’s like saying to the deer, ‘Run, Bambi! Run!’” He gave me the same lines before every hunting excursion, but I anticipated his witty, down-home-country-boy metaphors. His words, savory and helpful, managed to keep me awake with soft chuckles as I recalled the humor throughout the cold and snowy morning.

I drummed my gloved fingertips on my leg as I watched leaves drip to the ground. Birds cried out into the chilled dawn, their songs somber as squirrels scampered through the

trees. They burrowed into piles of dead leaves, rustling and displacing them. My eyelids lowered to cover my straining eyes as I grew accustomed to the echo of crisp leaves scattered by the squirrels, miniscule nuisances of the forest. I was learning that every sound in the woods didn’t have to be a deer, and that my bushy-tailed arboreal neighbors had a playful streak that was almost endearing, were it not that I was impatient to have my first white-tail. As I scanned the horizon, I peeked over at Randy, who sat slumped against the tree, puffing cigarette smoke in picturesque rings. My head lolled to one side, a few ringlets catching on the grasping reach of a twig, and I let my gaze unfocus as sleep, a plush blanket in the deep chill of a white winter, wrapped her warm arms around me.

I woke to Randy’s hand on my arm, squeezing with an iron grip. He shook me until the deer stand wiggled against the tree and my eyes peeled open. At first, against the white backdrop of the fallen snow and the grey shadows of early morning on the forest floor, I didn’t spot the coyote. Randy’s slender finger aimed my sight at the creature as he pushed the .30-30 rifle into my hands.

“Shoot,” he whispered, expressionless.

My eyes picked out the silver-white of the canine. His ears twitched as he pawed his way through the undergrowth. Every few seconds his nose brushed the ground and he would step forward a few feet, then pause and repeat. After about two minutes he took his position beside a fallen tree and stood, staring into the heart of the woods.

As I clicked the safety off, I quailed at the thought of squeezing the trigger. The coyote looked up as the sound reverberated off the trees and I found eye contact with the other hunter. I took sight along the scope and found a dog’s deep amber gaze locked on mine. I had the feeling that he could see me through the scope, too, and the chill that numbed my bones was independent of the weather.

Licking my cracked lips, I asked, “Do I have to?”

Randy pulled the gun out of my hands and rested the barrel against the metal bar of the deer stand, closing one eye and finding his target in the scope. His hand flexed and his finger –

“Wait, wait. It won’t do anything to us. It’ll just go away. We don’t have to shoot it,” I reasoned.

“It’s scarin’ the deer away.”

The crack of the bullet sounded like a cymbal’s final crash, and the coyote’s yelp echoed a dozen times in my ears and in the

woods. I watched it scurry away, loping off between two crooked, bare oaks.

For the rest of the morning I found myself staring at the spot where the coyote had been. I sought a trace of him amongst the brown leaves littering the undergrowth or beside the log where he had stood. It was only when we climbed down from the stand at nine in the morning, our limbs stiff, that Randy led me to the muddied patch of snow and leaves where the animal had been shot. He bent down and wiped his gloved fingers across dots of red speckling the debris of the forest floor, studying the stain on his work gloves. A profound silence as thick as bricks settled over the forest, and even the birds ceased to sing. As my brother-in-law turned away, slinging the rifle across his back and hefting our supplies, I lifted a tuft of grey fur from the ground and raised my head, gazing into the thicket of trees toward the center of the woods.

The ride home was quiet as the morning sun drowned the highway with light. I pondered over my eagerness to fell a deer, and compared it with Randy’s immutable decision to have the coyote shot, one way or another. As we rolled homeward I decided that my brother-in-law was coyote ugly, but I knew that I would have pulled the trigger for a different target. With my scopes sighted on a buck with a branching rack, I wondered if that didn’t make me a little coyote ugly, too. ■



Wolf

Taylor Galmiche

*First Place —Photography
Competition*

Photograph

Maestro

Anna Liang

Gnarled, nut-brown,
Dexterous digits dip
into clay-filled water;
a bare, calloused foot presses
down on a pedal:
Go. Stop. Go. Stop.
The wheel wheezes into
motion, smoothing and
rounding the curves of a pot
coaxed from reticent clay.



Meticulous Music

Michelle Zeng

Honorable Mention —Drawing Competition
Clayboard

Not Just Any Bread

Claire Belant

There's a recipe in my grandmother's cookbook
For not just any bread.

My sister opens the faded green cover,
And flips the yellowed tissue-thin paper.
Hair piled on her head,
She channels the 1950s in her floral apron.
A pinch of this, a sprinkle of that,
Oh, now that's about right.

She dumps and splashes ingredients,
Flour, sugar, cinnamon,
Enough butter to stop your heart.
Beating eggs with butter into submission,
She sways to the music of The Drifters.

Dough rises under a damp cloth,
A muffin top over the rim,
Strong hands beat it down,
Only for it to rise again.

The oven heats,
Filling the room with steamy air,
Curling the hair around her temples.

Now pinch, prod, and knead...
Knowing fingers maneuver the rolling pin,
Slicking sticky dough into oblong sheets.
Sneaking a nibble here and there,
She dollops on buttery cinnamon sugar,
Bringing the dough to life.

She feeds the bread to the oven,
and bumps the door closed with her hip.

The timer beep beeps,
And bread pans scrape against metal oven racks.
There is my sister's six hours of work,
Sitting in a glass tin.
A bit of joy for us to share
From the faded green cookbook
My grandmother passed on to my mother,
And from her to us.

Closing my eyes,
I pop a piece into my mouth and taste
Warm doughy sweetness
Of three generations.

Eat More

Charlotte Wang

Second Place—Essay Competition

My relatives don't take eating lightly.
When I was ten, I went back to
China to visit my relatives in Anhui.
After the initial jet lag and cultural shock,
I remember my great aunt saying, "*Ni kan!*
Look at how skinny you've gotten! You must
eat more!" *Duo chi!* She would always say to
me with half-raised eyebrows and disapproving
glances, waving chopsticks in the air.

Cooking is a communal thing in my family;
when one person starts cooking, everyone joins
in. Momma marinates roast duck, Grandma
makes egg rolls, Auntie stirs porridge with
radish pickles, Uncle stir-fries bean sprouts,
and Grandpa kneads the dough for dumplings.
Soon, the kitchen cackles with frying grease on
the stove and clanks with the sound of knives
chopping against chicken bones and vegetable
medley. Steamed, white rice is served with
almost every meal with noodles serving as an
occasional replacement, and fish are always
cooked whole, with two beady eyes staring at
me every time I eat, glassy and dull. I always
avoid the seafood.

Sampling is another matter, though, and
this is my favorite pastime. While everyone is
bustling around to prepare a feast for twenty, I
scamper in and steal quick bites of every dish
before anyone else notices. I usually "taste-test"
so much that when it comes time to eat the
actual meal, I'm too full to take a single bite.
My mom raps my knuckles with her chopsticks
when she sees this and yells at me for being so
rude; one time she even chased me out of the
kitchen with her wooden ladle, but Grandma
and Auntie always take pity on me and slip me
food when my parents aren't looking. Grandma
just doesn't understand how my mom could be
so stingy.

"You're not feeding that girl enough. Look
at how tiny her wrists are!" Grandma gently
chides as she hands me another juicy piece
of sizzling pork chop straight from the pan.
Exercising and dieting are foreign concepts to



Egg Shells

Sarah Chong

Best of Show
Charcoal, Eraser



Tree Frog

Claire Belant

Honorable Mention —Drawing Competition
Charcoal Reverse

my relatives. My parents complain about the high-fat and high-sodium food and prevent me from eating too unhealthily, but my other relatives shush them each time and tell me to eat more. Always more.

I don't mind personally—the summer heat and miles of meandering countryside roads burn most calories during the day—and I always look forward to dinner time. The clinking of chopsticks against ceramic bowls mingles with bursts of laughter as everyone sits around one table. The women eat and only take occasional sips of wine, but the men drink and chat. Grandpa smokes his pipe and smiles as my seven uncles each take turns toasting my dad. When my second uncle gets slightly drunk and starts spouting stories of his childhood, I always listen with half-amusement and half-wonder.

Then my third uncle joins in the fun with his scrape with death when he went swimming with some friends in the deep end of a mountain lake and nearly drowned before latching hard and fast onto another swimmer's leg. Together they reminisce about growing up together in the Yue Xi countryside, chopping firewood in the mountains, toiling in the rice paddies after school, and feeding the hogs every night. In the summer, the boys would fish and swim in the river, capture fireflies, and trek for miles to help my great uncles pick green tea. Mishaps

and accidents were frequent, but occasionally serious, such as the time my second uncle fell from a tree so hard that he believed 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.

As the men talk, the women gently urge everyone to eat more, filling plates with roast duck, spicy and tender tofu, chicken soup, and fried eggplant with beans. As everyone digs in, I wonder how my relatives can eat so much yet not be fat. Even though everyone eats at least two or three bowls of rice in addition to heaping mounds of meat and vegetables, not a single person is obese or even overweight.

In Chinese culture, food is shared among all; instead of separate servings for each person, everyone eats from the same dish. When guests come over, it's considered common courtesy as the host to tell your company to eat more—more food for them means less for yourself. Eating represents sharing, and for my relatives, food is not simply just delicious sustenance—it's a social gathering, a culture. Eating has become a way of life.

Auntie nudges me with her chopsticks and breaks my reverie. "*Dou chi!*" she reminds me, dropping another drumstick into my overflowing bowl of rice. Always eat more. ■

My Grandmother Tells Me

Catherine Croney

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

My grandmother tells me
Stories of the great Zimmalee
Sometimes in the sweat of summer or gray of
winter and
Always over coffee—
Stories of my grandmother's grandmother:
She tells me of the cow being let in the house,
The time Zim beat that man with the "one-eyed
child,"
Of her grandmother dancing on tables with Pat
O'Brien;
And my Gran's eyes dance right along with her.
I ask on a lazy Tuesday to record the tales
Of my gran and her gran.

Born Martha Evelyn,
In the middle of Louisiana, my grandmother was
the oldest of seven;
She lived with her grandmother, sisters
Rolled up in the one bed, pigs in a blanket,
No air conditioning or telephone,
But there was coffee.

Life was yeast rolls and molasses
In a time when people would stop by
And you eavesdropped on party lines;
My gran grew up
Sandwiched one behind the other with her broth-
ers and sisters,
Fighting for car keys and attention,
Losing to the boys all around,
Until she was having babies, instead of watching
them,
And my mother was born the first born of the
first-born.

My grandmother says Zim left the world just as
she did all else—
On her own terms;
Everyone she knew was dead,
So, what was the point in living?
No one ever knew Zim's age;
Gran says you'd have to count the rings to find
out.

My grandmother tells me
Stories of the great Zimalee
As she pulls at the edge of
A tattered table top, and avoids my eyes.
"KK," she asks,
"What is the point of my telling these stories?
They aren't yours, happened before you could
care.
Only thing on it is my voice."
I trip over my words:
"I like your voice," I reply.
Gran just pours more coffee.
Why do I need these stories?
Because even I, a last born,
Know it is important
Because my Gran has a lot of rings,
And someone has to tell Baby Bella
The right way to make coffee,
Which bar tables can hold
Body weight,
And stories of the Late Great Zimalee;
So I take a sip and say, "Keep going—
"Please."

The Kayaker

Dailey Nettles

I always loved going camping with my brother's Boy Scout troop. My dad was an assistant Scout Master, and I was the honorary member. One Friday after school, I exchanged my Pokémon backpack and Five-Star pencil case for water shoes and a one-piece bathing suit. We loaded up our gear into my dad's truck and headed over to the Scout house for the rendezvous. This weekend, we were going white-water rafting on the Nantahala River.

I trail behind the Scout boys, making my way off the rafting bus. As we snap on our life jackets and helmets, the guide goes over some safety precautions: the white water swimmer's position, how to throw a rope to a lost paddler, and the proper technique for hoisting a sopping wet man back into the raft. We start to push our raft into the icy water as a group of smelly college guys paddle like windmills down the current, singing, "To the window! To the Wall!" Their exuberant spirit sets a bright mood for our adventure.

The October leaves float through the air like a sea of burnt pepperonis. The gawky Scout boys smack their paddles on the flat water, splashing each other with icy blasts. I see the horizon in front of us, mist rising from the sparkling line of a waterfall drop off. With Dad steering in the back, we plunge into the gushing froth. Drenched, we paddle down the current to a rumbling road of white water.

I once asked my mom, "Why is water blue? Does it reflect the sky?" She is a research hydrologist, an H2O expert. My mom replied, "Actually, water has a faint blue tint; it's not completely colorless." I think of this as I shred the river's surface with my chilled fingers, drifting along a rocky stretch of river. All of the sudden, I hear a scream, "HELP!! PLEASE, SOMEBODY HELP!" A young man with a beard is perched on an egg-shaped boulder, a rock probably weighing three tons. I avert my attention to the screaming man. I see one... no, two paddles floating downstream followed by a two-person ducky, or inflatable kayak. "Dad, what's going on?" I ask. "Someone's stuck under the boulder," he says in a tone flat as Kansas.

Three rafts of onlookers sit still in the water. No one is moving. Everyone turns to stone, watching. After twenty minutes, our raft moves on as if nothing has happened. Down the stream, I see a paddler on the bank, weeping into his spray skirt. An hour after we leave

the boulder, an ambulance drives past on the road that runs along the river. "It's too late," I overhear my dad whispering to himself. At the end of the river, we dry off and walk to the gift shop. I'm looking at a navy blue Outdoor Research hat when I hear the man at the register reply to my dad's question in a hushed tone: "Yeah... we're trying to keep it on the down low. Don't want to scare anyone." It's not until a few months later that my dad asks me, "You can talk to a counselor about it, if you want to." I still had not wrapped my mind around exactly what had happened; the ducky went under, and only one man came up with it.

Six years later, I'm at Lake Lowndes with my friend and youth leader, Carl. He's a kayaker, and today he's teaching me the basics. After explaining strokes and formation, he adds:

"There's something imperative you need to know about around white water: it's called a 'hydraulic.' The water forms a vacuum that sucks you under the surface and binds you to the boulder. A friend of mine got caught in one once. He was pinned to the boulder, and tried with all his effort to fight the current. When he lost his breath, he accepted that he was going to die. He gave up, became limp like a rag doll... and then the water let him go."

I pull on my neoprene spray skirt and snap the elastic around the cockpit of my kayak. Carl pushes me into a marshy pit, explaining to me how to "pull skirt." A spray skirt is designed to keep a kayaker in the boat if it goes under water. When using a skirt, one also must learn how to pull it from the boat while upside down or stuck in a whirlpool. I take deep consoling breaths, preparing to swing my hips, straddled in my lime green Dagger Outlaw kayak. I take the plunge, flipping the boat and inverting my body towards the earth. With my eyes closed, lips poked out to keep my nose closed off from the water, I think about the man under the boulder. *How long did he fight? Why wouldn't the current let him go?* As I grow dizzy from holding my breath, I reach forward to the now invisible skirt handle, yanking it towards my chest. Water rushes into the upside down boat as I free myself from its grasp. This tranquil lake holds no restraints on my fluid movements, yet its molecular composition mirrors that of the Nantahala. I never saw the man who went into the hydraulic, but I can see his crystal blue eyes shimmering in the ripples of the water. ■



Baby Mine
Emma Thompson
Clayboard



The Stare of the Koala Bear
Shelby Simpson

Second Place—Drawing Competition
Clayboard

The Kangaroo Korral

Hannah Hultman

Third Place—Short Story Competition

No light filtered through the windows of Natalie's 1998 faded blue Toyota Camry due to the heavy storm clouds; no cars met hers on the straight-shot highway. The lack of light and company did not perturb Natalie—her six a.m. drive didn't invite the sun or people during the harsh winter of Grand Rapids, Michigan. She clicked her blinker on, turned a sharp right into the employee parking lot, and hushed the purr of the engine. Natalie pulled on the two weighty coats that had been occupying the passenger seat, braced herself for the cold that put insta-blush on her pale face, wrenched the door open, and stepped out of her car. She rushed to the employee entrance, pulling her coats closer and her hat down over her eyebrows. Nodding to Hal, the security guy, she began to wrestle the elephant lanyard out of her jeans pocket. The lanyard had been given to her on her first day of work at John Ball Zoo nearly six years ago. She had just finished her intensive eight-hour orientation—something she had to bear with a hangover from her twenty-second birthday party the night before—and as a "welcome to the place that will steal your soul"

present, her supervisor gave her the lanyard with a key attached at the end. The key, bent from years of use, opened the small restaurant in the middle of the zoo. The sun still hadn't risen, and the lack of light gave the zoo an eerie feeling. The fountains, usually bubbling with an estimated forty gallons a day (something orientation taught her) and small children frolicking, were shut down for the day and the winter. No sounds—happy sounds of laughter and animal noises—echoed throughout the small zoo.

The Kangaroo Korral, a horrible attempt at alliteration in Natalie's opinion, was painted bright purple because everyone knows that the outback is automatically associated with purple—and not pretty purple like royal purple. It was more like we-couldn't-agree-on-a-color-so-the-painter-closed-his-eyes-and-picked-a-paint-chip purple. The door that Natalie unlocked was in the shape of a kangaroo who had puke green eyes and a sinister smile. She flipped on the fluorescent lights, noticing that one of the lights had begun to flicker, and cringed at the décor, a hideous take on the Australian wilderness.

Kangaroos exactly like the door littered the walls, and koalas made a few appearances (the koalas were much less frightening, with kind eyes but no smiles). Instead of silky blue skies with fluffy clouds and red dirt like the pictures Natalie had tacked up around her room at home, the Kangaroo Korral went with a more barren, lackluster look. The right wall was glass, and it doubled as one of the walls to the kangaroo exhibit. The kangaroos hadn't risen yet for the sun still hadn't caught up with Natalie's morning activity. She stared for a moment at one that had nested for the night against the Korral's glass wall. As she studied the animal, obviously female from the pouch on her abdomen, Natalie absent-mindedly began to tidy up. She pushed tattooed tables into three perfect rows, assigned the white wicker chairs a specific spot, and began to make a strong pot of coffee for the morning shift. The smell began to waft through the spacious place, and the silence began to overwhelm her. She flipped on the radio in the hopes of filling the stillness with something of more substance.

Natalie hadn't always aspired to be manager of the Kangaroo Korral; at one time she hoped to be a zookeeper, and even thought of specializing in marsupials. However, six months before coming to work at the John Ball Zoo, finances—particularly the lack thereof—forced her to quit Michigan State University in her third year. She thought she would return to school after a year of saving money, but as time wore on, stacks of bills grew higher, account balances diminished, and Natalie accepted her fate. She would forever work at the Kangaroo Korral and spend her days filling orders and fantasizing about Arthur Watkins, the newest zookeeper on staff. Arthur specialized in elephant gestation, had light blonde scruff on his chin, and liked his vanilla lattes with an extra shot of espresso. He visited Natalie three times a day—once in the morning, once at lunch, and always right after the zoo closed for the day. Arthur's evening visits were Natalie's favorite time. Between lunch and four-oh-three, Natalie spent her time predicting what would

never happen. Often during these whimsical daydreams, Arthur fell to one knee, begged for her hand, and whisked her away to a marriage ceremony in front of her favorite exhibit—the giraffes. Her friends and family, whom Arthur always managed to get to their wedding despite not knowing any of their names, would greet her with tears and kisses, and lead her down the aisle to marry in her purple polo, jeans, and kangaroo hat. Other days, he would simply offer to pay for her to finish her zoology degree. When Natalie would inquire about the generous offer's motive, Arthur always replied, *"Because I love you."*

In real life, however, Arthur talked about animals and nearly nothing else. The hope of pregnancy for Gertrude, his favorite elephant, the "fascinating evolution theories of woolly mammoth to elephant," and, most often, stories of Gertrude and her pals' antics—these topics were what attracted Natalie to Arthur at first. After three months of nothing but elephants, she had decided to address the fictitious elephant that was out of place in the repugnant rendition of the outback. She had worked up the courage: when Arthur Watkins walked into *her* restaurant with his shining teeth, Polo Black scent, and faint obsession with elephants, she *would* tell him what she thought. She'd say it as

she handed him his coffee with extra espresso.

"Arthur, I think we should have dinner sometime," she'd say.

"That sounds delightful," he'd say. He'd smile wide, showing off every last tooth in his head. *"Here's my number."*

And that'd be that. The sun had risen, and its light filtered in through the window wall, waking the kangaroos. As employees began to trickle in, Natalie's heart began to beat against her ribcage. Each voice that wasn't his, each smile that greeted her only unnerved her more. Finally, eight o'clock rolled around, and in Arthur walked. Smiling as always, he strolled right toward her. She handed him his vanilla latte with the extra shot of espresso with a nervous laugh and said in a rushed manner, "Good morning." ■

"She pushed tattooed tables into three perfect rows, assigned the white wicker chairs a specific spot, and began to make a strong pot of coffee for the morning shift."

Beach Window

Carlee Odom

The water glistens in the moonlight
I lie on the carpet next to the sliding glass doors
The wind is blowing heavy, for it's winter now
Faint sounds of waves crashing the shore encourage my memories
Six years old when I was first stung by a jellyfish
Eight years old when I won the Big Bertha contest with a record of 15 seconds
Ten years old and I swam to the sandbar unafraid
Every year Dad and I created a princess' palace in the sand
Hands on my hips and grinning from ear to ear
Thirteen years old when I started making friends with boys instead of girls
Fifteen years old when I fell face first in the sand after stepping on Casey's skim board
Seventeen years old now and it seems that nothing yet everything has changed
You've both watched me every summer out of this window sipping coffee hand in hand
I hope every day that I make you proud
But I know that no matter what college I attend or how many miles I run
Through this window, I'll always be your little beach bum

Wild Hairs

Holly Baer

Second Place—Poetry Competition

My grandmother tells me
She raised three terrible Catholic boys
That never go to mass and that if they don't
Get their act together,
They won't get to join her with Jesus one day.

My grandmother tells me
She did everything right.
She had them baptized as infants
And forced them in to confirmation to solidify their faith.

She doesn't know what wild hair got in 'em,
But it sure as hell better get out.



Computer Vision Syndrome

Bonnie Baker

Clayboard

Bitter Melon and Beer

Michelle Zeng

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

I ask Ba, “Why
Do you like bitter melon so much?” Ask him this the first time Ba stir-fries
The melon pieces, serving them on
A ceramic platter with
Cracks, chips on the edges. Crispy, juicy sweetness of the protective crust
Against bitterness inside, bitter like poison and Budweiser that
Ba drinks after he and Ma stop fighting.

Ba burns a hole in the ground, concentrated. I stare at
Deep creases and crinkles on Ba’s forehead, glimmering.
Oil sheens on his round, bald head, a few flimsy strands shimmering, too.

He says, “Ma and I searched for apartments
In Greenville, South Carolina. Do you remember
The rundown maroon Toyota that we drove in?” and my mind pushes back
To remember dents and dull paint and clanks and clunks.
Ba says, “Had ten dollars and little gas. It was winter, but we couldn’t afford
To stay in a motel. Drove to a parking lot where the Mexicans also parked their cars.
We locked the doors and huddled together in the backseat, eating bitter melon and
pickled plums.”

I stick a piece of stir-fry bitter melon in my mouth, and Ba closes his eyes, sighs,
And chugs a second-long swig of Bud.

Hide and Seek

Elizabeth Dobronski
Clayboard



The Way We Get By

Casey Griffin

When I was a little kid, I tried my best to learn everything. I would follow my daddy around the house asking, “How does this work?” or “How come it makes that noise?” Normally, my father would try to explain, but I was too young to understand. I grew up in an environment that is hazardous for a child to be in; however, my dad believed that it was one of the only ways to get me to learn how hard it is to survive without a proper education. I never knew much of my mother; she would come home from work as I was leaving for school on that big yellow taxi they call a school bus. She worked all night at the chicken processing plant as a machinist and mechanic repairing many of the machines that kept the plant operational. Even though she never went to high school, she worked as hard as she could to make a living from a factory paycheck. My mother was inducted into the machinist hall of fame for her work at the plant. Nothing good can last forever, though, and she was laid off for medical reasons. As a result my family struggled to get back up and survive even with all of us doing what we could to make money. It seems from my experience that money controls everything, regardless of how hard I’ve tried to live without it. My parents taught me to not be ruled by it and that to enjoy life I do not need it.

Later in my life, my mom left us to go “be herself,” leaving us with a father who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, a mental disorder that causes auditory hallucinations. Living with him with only my brothers turned out to be an unusual experience. Daddy often would think he was talking to us, but we would

not be there, and he would be upset that we forgot what he told us. Also, he would imagine that we would ask him to do things for us—like cook, for example—and we wouldn’t have said a single thing. My aunt would stop by often to help with the house and to keep my dad calm, but she had a drug problem which led her to steal my grandmother’s checkbook. The family forgave her, but she stole our car afterwards—which my dad reacted to by dousing her in gasoline and chasing her through the yard trying to set her on fire. My dad has to seem completely out of his mind, but he tried his best

to keep us safe and provide for us what he could, and that in itself makes up for it.

Eventually I started working with my father at a sheet metal fabrication plant outside of Morton, Mississippi. The company I worked for had many workers who traveled out of town to aid in the installation of equipment in factories across the South. I would normally stay behind with a few others and repair the machines inside the shop, including the table drill and numerous saws or grinders. The first time I went out

of town I ended up in north Mississippi at one of the largest chicken processing plants I had ever seen, so large even that it was visible from everywhere in the city. My job was to climb above the bridge, a catwalk-like structure, and secure all the hoses and wiring that needed to cut through the side wall and to hang new rafters for the ceiling. Once my job was finished, everyone else got to start. While the others worked on either making a new entrance for a machine the size of a Titan, or bolting up additional rafters, I would run across the

*“... she stole our car afterwards—
which my dad reacted to by dousing her in gasoline and chasing her through the yard trying to set her on fire.”*

bridge carrying cutoff disks, welding rods, and additional tools to whoever needed them while jogging across the bridge as narrow as six inches or shimmying across the rafters.

Not to falter, destiny snatches that away, too. The plant went bankrupt and left my family without a job. So, being used to this, we moved on and found work removing nuisance trees off private property. I had already assisted in the assembling of my family's small collection of axes including the double bit, a light dual-bladed axe; the splitting maul, a heavy broad head axe; and two wedges and a sledge hammer. For the rest of one summer, the familiar smell of hot metal was replaced with the sweet smell of sawdust and gasoline.

There was never a dull day in my life then, and sometimes I miss it since coming to the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, a public boarding school for academically gifted students from Mississippi. My family has dwindled down to my father and Chauncy, my twin brother who stays with my father. My oldest

brother moved to Greece as part of his Navy training, leaving Chauncy and me to deal with Daddy—and I left Chauncy to better my education. I do not regret leaving home, but I do miss the fun I had with my family. I plan to attend college to study in the engineering field, which should get me on track to starting a career where I can use my hands—but not for hard labor. I intend to move my family with me wherever I settle and hope that we can continue the life-changing experiences we so happen to keep stumbling into. On the way there I aim to share my experiences with as many people as possible: maybe they can use that knowledge to help themselves conquer some of their own obstacles. Witnessing how my family lives leaves me with a hunger to help others like myself, and I enjoy it so much that I go out of my way to do so. The need for a better life fuels my ambition to achieve a successful career. Fulfilling my education, I believe, is a direct route toward a new life. ■

Writers

Holly Baer

Glasses and a slick chestnut bun,
She reads a novel.
Her boots cost hundreds,
But her coat costs \$10.
Starving writers prefer
Footwear to nourishment.
She jots down lines with
An orange pen. Probably
Her next novel coming to
Life. Yes, she lives her
Dream, her poor, starving
Dream. Yet, as the smile
Slips across her face, the
Familiar pang of jealousy
Wreaks havoc on my gut
As I make yet another
Latte and she makes
A new civilization out of
Ink and ramen.

For the Love of Rhett Butler

Catherine Croney

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

The summer between my tenth and eleventh grade year began bad, ended worse, and I could blame it all on lust and Margaret Mitchell. The Quick-N-Run gas station in my grandparents' three-stoplight town has, for as long I can remember, provided the good denizens of Carter, Mississippi, with reading material—in the form of dime novels. Being the only store for a hundred solid miles, the Quick-N-Run takes this responsibility seriously and shifts its selection every season; each time ten new books appear and never, in eighteen years, have the titles repeated. May 2009 was the dime novel season of Southern Writers and my undoing.

Every summer, at the first of May, I migrate from my suburb just on the coattails of New Orleans, Louisiana, to Carter, Mississippi, a town so small it doesn't even make the map, and that is why, on the next-to-last day in April, my daddy sat me down and explained that the "confusion that had taken upon my grandmother" was *stuck*. "Confusion" is a Southern expression, and like most Southern expressions exists to replace something altogether unpleasant to say in civilized company—in this case, *Alzheimer's*. The fact that my Mimi had Alzheimer's was not something new, but the "stuck" part was. Usually she had good days and bad, but now it was all reverse and I just wanted to hop in the front seat and mash the gas pedal for her. One might assume that forcing an easily influenced teenage girl to bear witness to the decaying of a loved one's mental faculties might be a trip worth postponing, but one would be wrong, and two days later off I went to my own personal

hell, no air conditioning or television.

As fate would have it, when, after seventy-two years, Mimi couldn't help pick tomatoes or shear the azaleas anymore, my grandpa decided to hire some help. That help came in the form of papa's neighbor, Mr. Oh. H's, grandson: Michael G. Stenson. Michael was liquid thunder; he went by "Luck" most of the time, as in *damn lucky he wasn't dead yet*. Michael always had dirt caked over every inch of his body, smelled of hogs and Downy detergent. He was beautiful. And twenty-two. All of a sudden, the idea of spending my summer in exile didn't seem half bad.

Then, I was only very nearly sixteen, but this didn't bother Michael much. And by the

time the honeysuckles bloomed in mid-June we had progressed past sneaking kisses in the washhouse and straight onto picking out future baby names. He had a way of bringing out the housewife in a woman, and I, a mere girl, didn't have a prayer. I spent those lazy days between cookin' Papa and Michael's supper and readin' Mimi the dime novels. Papa

had picked up the set of ten for her at the start of summer and we went through *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Optimist's Daughter*, and *A Confederacy of Dunces* before Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* walked into my life, and the book, much like my grandmother's Alzheimer's, *stuck*. From the third week of May to the end of June I read aloud the tortured fate of Rhett and Scarlet, and Mimi stared straight ahead except to say again *Sarah* (I haven't the faintest clue who Sarah is) each time we reached the end. And the summer drug on this way: days with my

"Michael always
had dirt caked
over every inch
of his body,
smelled of hogs
and Downy
detergent."

grandmother, Miss Dessie Dell, and nights with Michael on the porch swing telling me about the little brick house we would live in and the hound dog we would have, sticking whiskey kisses on my temple and circles on my hips. Truth be told, if not for a stroke of fate I might still be there in that house: readin’, swingin’, and cookin’. And I would be happy. Happy Enough.

As “Luck” would have it, things did change, and I was swept right off of my porch swing and onto my ass by a force of nature named Hurricane Hannah. Hannah Sue Sinclair was an “English major” (I didn’t even know such a thing existed) from a Yankee school, Yankee as in located above Kentucky, who was down south for an extended vacation, and she “extended” her way into my nice little summer romance. With a flip of her stringy strawberry blonde locks and what I assume was a wink, or quite possibly the girl was just a bit slow, bless her little heart, she whipped Michael just out of my grasp. Now, the man I had once adored was no longer beautiful to me but dirty, smelled of hogs, and needed a bath. Just like that it was over.

Despite my vehement protests to the contrary, my parents insisted I finish the week and a half I had left of July before coming home for the summer. Naturally, I did as any mature, highly evolved, dignified young lady would do: refused to come out of my room. And, I would have stayed there, too, if not for the damn dime novels. Bright and early in the morning my Mimi sat in her rocker waiting and when I dragged myself to the bathroom I was forced

to see her, just sitting there waiting, for the voice who read to her of Rhett and Scarlett—not her granddaughter whose hair she would piggy tail braid or make monkey bread with, just a voice no more special than the next. I could not feel anything but disgust for the bag of bones in the chair and yet, I could not leave her just sitting there. I grabbed a new book off the shelf, tore the plastic wrap and started to read. It wasn’t until I reached the end of the book that I realized that I’d even begun and my grandmother sat there stone-faced as ever, but I could see that the sun was dangerously close to slipping away and I had no one to spend my nights with any longer. “Michael and I are over,” I told Mimi. Not that I expected her to say anything back, but summer love is a flare—hot and fast—and I needed someone to put out the flames. Gravity to tie myself to reality. Needed to hear that I had known this boy a few months and I would be fine soon enough, but my grandmother had no more cognitive reasoning skills left to dispense. I let the book, Eudora Welty’s *One Writer’s Beginnings*, fall to the floor and got up to go back to my room; a hand grasped my wrist. “Jerk,” Mimi croaked, her eyes wild as she nodded up and down, “Jerk,” she said again, this time more certain. “He is a jerk, Cadiebug, but all men are when compared to Rhett Butler.” And I nodded in agreement, wide-eyed as ever. Then my senile grandmother, who cannot remember her own name on a good day or how to chew on a bad one, gave me the best advice in the history of the entire universe: “Forget ’em all,” Mimi said, “Forget ’em all.” ■



Rest

Hannah Fisher

Photograph



Typical Day

Terri Le

Third Place —Painting Competition
Acrylic



Villa

Adey Efrem

Honorable Mention —Painting Competition
Acrylic



The Midnight Awakening

Prithvi Singh

Clayboard



Satisfaction

Tanvi Rao

Honorable Mention —Drawing Competition
Felt-tip Pens

poems birth

Alexandra Failing

poems aren't written
they are born
born of creativity and
a prompt
a fleeting inspiration
or a memory
they grow
sprouting seedling tendrils
that wrap around my cranium
until each spreading leaf blots out
calculus history latin chemistry
leaving only english
and expression
taking root
each poem burgeons buds
tender peachfuzz buds of ideas
not yet fully formed
ideas that bloom
spreading petals of thought
in my echoey skull
then wilt
leaving me to wonder



Possibilities

Sarah Long

Honorable Mention —Photography Competition
Photograph



Where Lovers Meet

Toi Wilkes

Acrylic



The Mind is the Limit

Phillip Liu

Second Place —Painting Competition
Acrylic



Piercing the Dark

Brittany Silas

Honorable Mention —Painting Competition
Acrylic



Purple Mountain Majesty

Marquisia Walls

Acrylic



Love

Janine Nowak

First Place —Painting Competition
Watercolor and Acrylics

Love, I Thought I Should Tell You

Hannah Fisher

The night is sweeter because you held me
from the frigid air in our tent made of sheets.
We drifted off to a lullaby, cicadas' symphony,
on the banks of the Tombigbee.

The morning is dearer because you held me
as the sky grew lighter, turning lavender,
and the first sunbeams stroked the water
and kissed your eyelids. Birds lifted their songs
to the top of the oak tree; their throngs
swooped and dove in search of food.
Our piercing green eyes spoke
what words alone could not.

Disco Inferno

Karien Dixon

"Granny," I asked, "What's your favorite color?"

"Well, red of course!"

I never asked but wondered, why red?

At midnight, I sneaked into her room and scanned through pictures from the 70s.

She "boogied" at the disco in hip, groovy, slim-fitted bell bottoms,

And an Afro out of this world.

With those bell bottoms, a white crop top that fit her slim waist like a glove.

Earrings her mother passed on to her were her only accessory.

Lipstick and eye shadow enhanced her flawless beauty.

Disco Inferno was where she met Grandpa.

Her yellow cheeks, rosy red, when he whispered sweet nothings in her ear.

A sly grin planted on her face as she handed him a napkin with seven golden digits.

And that uncontrolled blush as he winked and said, "I'll dig ya later, foxy mama."

He blew a kiss and strolled home with his "jive cats."

That night, Granny got a call.

And again her cheeks glowed red.

Now I know why Granny chose red.

Her bell bottoms,

Lipstick and eye shadow,

Her blush and earrings,

And that napkin

Were all red

The groovy night she met Grandpa.



Dip Dyed

Carissa Howie

Photograph



Colors of the Wind

Adey Efrem

Melted Crayon



Serenity

Aleah Liddell

Acrylic



Kingston Jamaica

Carissa Howie

Photograph



Calm Before the Storm

Trey Chestnutt

Acrylic



Monarch

Claire Belant

Stipple in Ink

Coloring Inside the Lines of My Body

Terrika Rayford

My body is the house to colors like the White
House to Obama

Combining together the colors create the
outline of my body

My personality has the power of the brilliant
sun above,

So bright and fierce with a benign warmth

Face beautiful like raw umber

Eyes so peaceful like the fall sky

Fingers as gentle as a dandelion

Arms and legs as delicate as a rose

Mouth just as loud and bold as Mrs.

Richardson's lipstick

Feet as shy as a diligent gray

And my body completed, dignified and impul-
sive with intricate flaws

As the color BLACK!



Beach

John Aaron Howell

Honorable Mention —Photography Competition
Photograph



Mama's Paradise

Katherine Cole

Acrylic



Innocence

Terri Le

Acrylic



Cat Fang

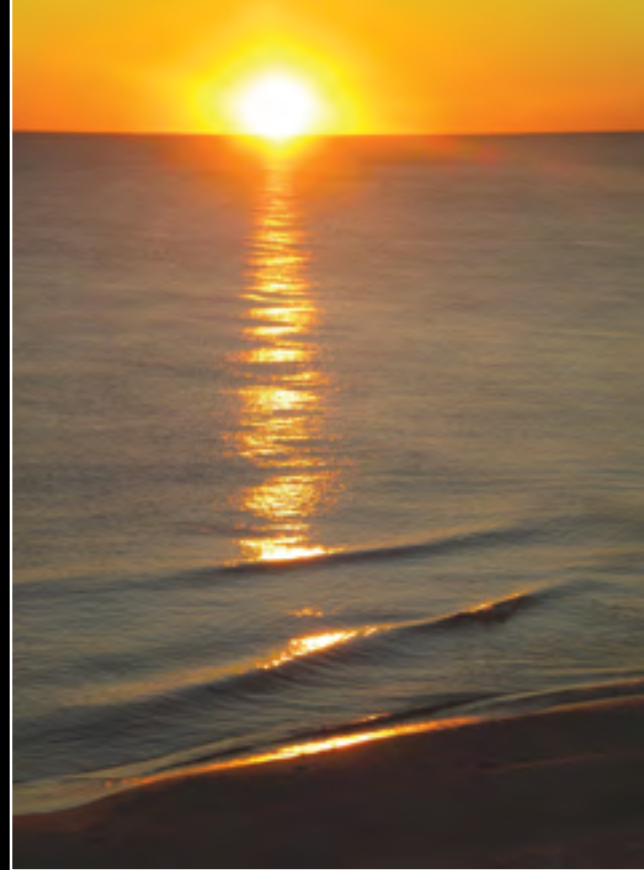
Victoria Chen

Acrylic

Your Sign

James Washington

The archer comes out this August day,
The night sky is dark,
Small beacons of light appear within its folds,
As the stars become more radiant with time,
Every year they gather together,
Till a masterpiece materializes,
God's will evident to all who behold,
His bow in hand with a quiver on his back,
Arrows composed of stars to strike down an enemy,
The archer of the skies looks down on all his prey,
The night remains quiet, perfect for hunting,
The Sagittarius hunts only on an August day.



Panama City Sunset

Hannah Fisher

Photograph



Buhsut Stipple

Sarah Chong

First Place —Drawing Competition
Felt-tip Pens



On Pointe

Alison Patterson

Marker

Lady

Emily Wilson

Second Place—Short Story Competition

Rain dripped from Theresa's raincoat to wet the stiff carpet under her feet. Although this was just her sixth month of working at the antique store, it was as much of a home on weekends and school holidays as it was a part-time job. Today the twenty-minute walk had turned into an hour-long adventure because of the rain. Droplets rolled in rivulets down the slick blue fabric that Theresa pulled close around her body as she shivered, and goose bumps dotted her arms underneath her thick wool sweater as the antique store's frigid air pricked her skin. Her sweater was the churning dark grey of the winter sky, which leaked weak light through the windows facing the flooded street. Sheets of sleet obscured the people splashing by on the sidewalk, muffled the loud roar of vehicles whishing by on Main Street, and blanketed MacNiall's Muddy Memories in a cocoon of silence. Theresa breathed hot air across her clenched fists, pushing damp and frizzy dark curls from her face. She rubbed her frozen fingers across her wind-chapped cheeks as she turned to face the inside of the one-room store. Furniture decorated the majority of the open space: squat stools with woven tapestry cushions bolted to the top, elegant wooden chairs carved with curling fleur-de-lis, writing desks with tarnished silver keyholes gleaming in the faint daylight, and a hulking wardrobe in the back corner with creaking golden hinges. The walls, covered in wallpaper with a flower motif, held shelves weighed down with a museum's worth of artifacts.

Muddy Memories reminded Theresa of her own family. She compared her mother to the fragile porcelain tea set settled in the dusty inside of a china cabinet. Through the glass she could see the delicate painted lines of flowers tracing the thin edges of the cups and plates, much like the slender wrinkles branching across her mother's face from the corners of her eyes and lips. The porcelain set was fragile like

her aging mom's sensitive nerves; if she forgot to clean her room or wash the dishes, Theresa knew the faded colored flowers of her mother's precarious disposition would crack and break into hysterical fits of yelling. Her father was the heavy pendulum of a long case clock, swinging with perseverance through the trials of time, oblivious to the harsh reality of his wife's decay.

Theresa folded her arms, hugged herself, and pushed her hands underneath her jacket to hold them against her warm sides. She stepped towards the cash register in the back of Muddy Memories, wondering if the MacNialls had stepped out for lunch. Behind the desk she flicked the light switch and the fluorescents buzzed to life overhead, glaring down with impunity on the fragile treasures of history littering the shelves. Theresa's feet guided her to a decrepit trunk perched in front of the rain-streaked floor-to-ceiling window of the store. The coffer's heavy lid was pushed open, displaying its contents for passersby. After a quick glance around the room, she dipped her fingers into the belly of the ancient mahogany chest and fished out a mess of lace and soft cotton. The faded blue plaid of a dress fell in folds from her hands and trickled into its container, where it rested with a dozen more outdated outfits. Her fingers ran over the fabric, trembling with cold and excitement as she held it up to herself, one hand pressing the dress to her chest and the other unfolding the cascading ripples of the billowing skirt, pulling it out from her body with her arm outstretched in a wide, graceful arc as she twirled in a circle. Her eyes slid closed as her mind ran away from her, dancing through a sparkling ballroom as her feet stirred the dust of Muddy Memories. She felt a rush of adrenaline and the joy of living through a lost dream coursing through her and wondered to herself, *What do you do when your dreams come true?* Stepping to the beat of an imaginary waltz, she was oblivious to the man approaching the store from the street.

"The porcelain set was fragile like her aging mom's sensitive nerves..."

The crash of tinkling bells cut through her reverie. Theresa’s eyes fluttered open, her dark lashes clumped together over her green eyes widened with surprise. A gust of wind flung the glass door of MacNiall’s open, invading the chill of the store with a blast of freezing rain and the cold smell of decay and wet that accompanied winter weather. The harsh overhead light bore down on the shimmering silver head of a man with skin crinkling at the corners of his glittering eyes.

“Hello, Theresa,” said Mr. MacNiall.

The dress slid between Theresa’s fingers and fell to the ground in an audible whoosh. She seemed to be frozen. Mr. MacNiall’s lips twitched into a small smile as a thin stream of water trickled down the side of his face. In his hands he clutched a large round box made with a thick cardboard that might have once been colored blue. Its top was spanned by a limp green bow. The man’s hair stuck up in numerous cowlicks, glinting grey under the harsh scrutiny of the antique store’s artificial light. He coughed, covering his mouth with a large calloused hand and scratching his chin with stubby fingernails as he contemplated the antique dress heaped on the carpet. A clap of thunder exploded outside, rattling the glass door in its frame as Mr. MacNiall thrust the hat box into Theresa’s hands.

“Ol’ Henry found this in his attic and I just went and got it from him. Belonged to Ma Grady, he says. Made in 1883. Real blue jay feathers,” he said. He rubbed his hands together as he began shuffling towards the back.

“I’ll find a place for it on the shelf,” Theresa called. Her cheeks were hot with embarrassment. Mr. MacNiall was a fair man, and he was harsh when dealing with curious hands and sticky fingers. Theresa was afraid for her job, but she was more ashamed that she had been caught dreaming of being a *lady*, of white kid gloves with pearl clasps, laced leather ankle boots with a heel, and crinolines that swayed with every step.

“There’s no room. Might as well hold on to it. Matches that dress, I think.”

Theresa leaned down to lift the dress into her arms. She was struggling to comprehend the

events of the past few minutes. Of the dozens of times she had held this dress up to herself, the few times she had tugged the material over her head and wished for petticoats, crinolines, and stays, and the countless instances of staring into the overflowing depths of the rotting wooden trunk at the front of the store, Theresa had never imagined that the MacNialls would understand or appreciate her desire to be a true lady, to don a bona fide walking suit, and to heft a parasol over her shoulder on bright Sunday mornings as she took a leisurely stroll through the streets. They owned MacNiall’s Muddy Memories antique store, but they were fans of collectors’ items taking their places on the shelves and not being used. Theresa had assumed that the couple would judge her for her dream, much like her peers. Teenage girls weren’t supposed to dream of the 19th century with fond smiles and aching hearts. The shock of the moment faded and she felt gratitude warm her inch by inch as she pushed the hat onto her damp hair, and turned with a smile to Mr. MacNiall.

He contemplated her hat for a moment, observing the shimmering cerulean feathers tucked into the ruffles of white lace and watching as Theresa tied a bow under her chin with the blue ribbon.

“I should’ve worn my coattails, but my quadrille is atrocious,” he commented. His face lit up with a smile as Theresa grinned. She remembered her first glimpse of the painted portrait that sparked her dream and ignited her passion for history. The picture of her great-grandmother as a fourteen-year-old girl dripping lace, pink fabric, and ostrich feathers, had elicited the first twinge of yearning that had embraced her as she rubbed her fingers across the faded painting. Two years ago she had dug through piles of ancient family possessions in the attic, sifting through the junk in search of valuables.

Now for one more moment she could dream of being a lady, the swirls of her blue plaid skirt swishing as she twirled and her feet tapping out the beat of the Viennese Waltz as she hummed under her breath. ■

Cafeteria Blues

Lalita Klag

She worked her days away,
Living a life she didn’t love,
Pretending.

When she came home,
Her hands and her hair
Were rough with wear and tear.

“Dealing with high school students for a living
Isn’t a walk in the park,” she’d say,
“Especially when you’re trying to feed them all
Before the bells.”

My mother,
Unhappy,
I saw it every day.

When I was little,
I’d listen to her dreams.
She thinks I was too young
To remember the biggest one:
She longed to own a restaurant.

But we were always too deprived
To be happy,
Which was what she craved
Most of all.

My mother,
Happy,
Unheard of in her tired eyes.

I’ve made a small promise,
That when I’m rich and famous
For doing something important,
That I’ll give my mother what she wished for:

Happiness,
And a high-class restaurant.



Lo! How A Rose E’er Blooming

Mary Blair Ward

Clayboard

She Could Always

Nick Brewer

She could always make
The pains go away. Scraped knee,
Childhood bullies, nightmares,
You name it. Her comforting voice, Neosporin,
Or hugs
Always there to lead me
To a sense of peace. But,
Where do I go now?
She has left me, alone,
In this desolate place. Where is the comfort,
The love, in this world we call home?
The only comfort I find,
Is that I know I will see her again one day.



Tangible
Taylor Galmiche
Photograph

Mud, Muck, and Medicine

Katie Howell

First Place—Essay Competition

Shrieks of terror. Quiet sobs. Silent grief. The thick, tropical air became a blanket, smothering all who lay beneath it. I wiped the tears rolling down the face of the grief-stricken woman. Unable to comfort her with words, I held her tight and shielded her eyes from the sight of her husband’s autopsy taking place on the concrete slab adjacent to the hospital. I had arrived in this remote village the day before and I spoke only the slightest bit of Spanish, but I was there to comfort the broken-hearted — to weep with those who wept, to mourn with those who mourned.

The previous spring, I had been asked to join a team of medical professionals on a journey to a remote hospital in Guimaca, Honduras, in order to perform surgical procedures for those in need of immediate care. As a rising senior at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, however, I had no medical training. While I had been on several previous foreign mission trips, I had never been out of the country for more than a week at a time. I knew neither the people I would be working with nor the patients I would be caring for. I did not know what to expect or what was expected of me. But three weeks later, I emerged with an awareness that was not limited to the trip but encompassed my future as a whole.

I arrived in Guimaca in early June with the hopes of being able to watch life-changing surgery and to learn from the medical professionals whom I already admired. As the least

qualified member of the team, however, I was assigned to the night shift of post-operative care. My job would be to take each patient’s vital signs every four hours, to maintain intravenous fluids and irrigation lines, and to alert a doctor in the event anyone’s condition worsened. I was instructed on the proper manner of emptying Foley catheter bags and holding the basin as patients experienced the nauseating effects of anesthesia. My only companions throughout the nights would be an armed guard who spoke no English and a meticulous, overbearing nurse.

Despite the careful instruction of my supervisors, nothing went as planned. My first night on the job began with the honking of a pick-up truck — the siren of a Honduran ambulance. Following my co-workers to the emergency entrance, I watched as the body of a man who had been fatally shot was examined. The man had died en route to the hospital; there was nothing the doctors could do but call the police. I alone was left to comfort the deceased man’s grieving wife when she arrived. I alone saw the horror in her eyes when she first glimpsed the bloodied face of her lifeless husband. And I alone was there to hold her during his ongoing autopsy.

In the nights that followed, I witnessed more than any seventeen-year-old girl ever should. I dabbed cold water on the face of a new mother burning up with fever from a ruptured appendix. I held the hand of a child as she underwent a gynecological exam after being

raped at a local orphanage. I wiped blood from the hair of a young woman whose drunken husband had sliced her head with a machete.

In addition to nurse’s aide, I became crowd controller and janitor. Each night, I created make-shift cots out of stretchers for the family members. I swept and mopped the floors of the operating rooms and arranged packages of various sterilized instruments into neat stacks within cabinets. As I went about these mundane chores, I found myself amusing the restless patients with my broken Spanish, singing to those in fear of upcoming procedures, and encouraging those who may or may not live to see their children the next morning.

In the nights which lay ahead, I uncovered details into the life and death of that first patient I remembered so well. He had been a hard-working farmer; the shooting resulted from an accidentally triggered pistol in his pocket as he attempted to mend a broken fence. He and his wife had two-year-old twin boys at home; the night of his death, they had been left in the care of their grandmother. With a glimpse into this man’s story, I was able to see the individual beneath the illness, the person beneath the pain.

Completely exhausted, I plopped down in a wheelchair at three o’clock one morning to clear my head and sip on a cup of coffee. Glancing into the full-length mirror hanging in the bathroom across the hallway, I gasped at the sight of my reflection: hair tied back in mesh netting, face masked, hands gloved, pink scrub top splattered with vomit like paint on an artist’s canvas, teal scrub pants — one leg rolled up, the other soaked with urine. But strangely enough, I did not gasp because of the grungy clothes or the lack of make-up. I gasped because I saw a person different from the one who had left small-town Mississippi. With renewed strength, I stood up and finished mopping the mud and muck that marred the too often glamorized field of medicine, then dumped the dirty mop water out the back window and grabbed an armful of threadbare sheets from the hall closet before heading back to the shrieks of terror, quiet sobs, and silent grief. ■

Dad’s Car Window

Shayna Long

We’re headed across the river
From Mississippi to Arkansas;
Dad stopped at Harlo’s,
So he was a little late.

I’m driving:
Dad loves his beer.
He takes a hit from a cig
And turns that gold can up for a swallow.
There’s a twelve pack in the back.

He shows me any new scars
That often trace his dark hands,
Tells me how he got ‘em,
And I cringe at the thought
Of him falling off his rig.

I tell him he’s too old
To be working so hard.
He says, “I gotta do it.”
He always has.

When he is far from sober,
He sets his navy hat on the dash
And leans back,
His feet in socks.

We’re getting close.
Six beer cans litter the floorboard,
And the car densely smells of smoke.
The indentions in his face are so defined;
His hair has thinned even more,
And he’s told me the same story five times
About meeting a red-haired girl,
Who is young and full of life.

Online Dating

Janine Nowak

Greta closed her eyes and said a silent prayer: *Lord, please help me survive another day in “paradise.”* Her desk chair squeaked as she leaned backwards to stretch her aching back. The white walls around her were a constant reminder of the dismal place she worked in. The humming of computers and clacking of keyboards grated her nerves. Her desk was filled with masses of paperwork, long overdue. It reminded her of the mess her life had turned out to be.

For fifteen years, she’d been stuck in that office, taking endless calls from concerned customers and nervous people. She never understood why she had taken the job in the first place. She’d hated it from day one.

She stared at her computer monitor, playing Solitaire like she did every day at 3:00 p.m. Her mind wandered to a time when she’d been happy, her high school years, her college years. Everything had made sense then. She was going to be a pediatrician. She’d heal sick children and relieve parents from their worries of their child’s health. She, Greta Sevell, would be successful and make a name for herself. *It’s funny how dreams turn into reality*, she thought.

“GRETA!” her coworker, Sandy, shouted. Greta returned to reality and looked blankly at Sandy. Greta nodded. “I’ve been calling you! There’s a lady on line three that says she needs to talk to someone.”

“Why can’t you take it?” Greta replied.

“Because I’m in the middle of something very important, of course.”

Greta rolled her eyes and answered the phone. “Hello, Young Money Dating Services. If you’ve got the money, we’ve got the love. How may I help you today?”

“Yes, I’m in need of a man in my life. I did the online registration and paid the fee, but no one has messaged me yet. I’m concerned I’m not able to be seen publicly. Like, is there a way to tell?”

“Your name, ma’am...”

“Connie Burton. It should say I’m 5’7” with platinum blond hair and crystal blue eyes.”

“Yes, ma’am, I see your profile. Ummm.... it says you’re public. I guess you just haven’t received any lookers yet. Give it some time. I’m sure someone will find you.”

“Thank you, darlin’”

“That’s no problem. Glad I could be of assistance. Have a nice day.”

“You too, hun.”

Greta hung up the phone. *I’m sick of lying to people. Online dating sites never work, anyway.* Greta sighed. She couldn’t understand the point of it. *Why do I do this to myself? Why do I do this to other people? They really believe in this stuff, and I’m supposed to just sit by and let them keep believing so we can get lots of money from poor, hopeless romantics. It’s such a shame.* She returned to her Solitaire game. Memories filled her mind of a time when she, too, believed in love.

“Greta, you should try this new online dating thing. I hear it’s all the rage now, and you’re totally in need of a special someone in your life,” her sister had told her five years ago. She’d signed up like a fool. A guy requested to meet her, and she’d been so excited. She was in school, working her way into medical school. She was determined that even with a special someone in her life, her career had to come first.

Dave was perfect: handsome, charming, funny. He took her breath away from the moment they’d met. They spent every moment possible together. He was a real gentleman, always trying to do what was best for “his lady,” as he called her. Dave bought her presents all the time: roses just to remind her he loved her, chocolates to show his affection to her. He painted her portrait and created romantic evenings just to impress her. He was everything she’d ever wanted in a guy.

What went wrong? she asked herself, as her thoughts became focused on the computer game again. *Oh, that’s right. He got in the way of my*

career, dumped me, ran off with my cousin, and I dropped out of school and got this crappy job at the same site that ruined my life.

Greta went home that evening and thought about Dave. As she recalled all their time together, his flaws started to surface: the way his eyes glazed over when she was talking to him, the way his unshaven stubble poked her face when they kissed. She remembered the way he criticized her cooking: “There’s too much salt,” and the constant nagging she received to look nicer for her “sugar-boo.” But, most of all, she remembered the way he flirted with any girl that passed by: the winking of a blond as she crossed the street, the goo-goo eyes over a brunette in the grocery store, or the wandering looks over a fiery red-head as she was yelling at someone over the phone. *Come to think of it, he was always flirting with other girls*, Greta thought to herself.

When she returned to work the next day, one of the messages on her phone caught her attention. “Hey, it’s Connie. I have great news. Thanks for your advice of not getting worried about no one contacting me. You were totally right. This guy messaged me last night, and he’s a total hunk. His name’s Dave!” ■



Night Owl

Claire Belant

Clayboard



Phillips Hill Road

Hannah Fisher

Third Place —Photography Competition
Photograph

Faulkner: A Family Ghost

Hannah Hultman

William Faulkner follows my family around. According to family legend, Faulkner's birth home in trucker town New Albany, Mississippi, stands directly across from the red-brick house of my great-grandmother's childhood. On Christmas Eve, I can remember my grandfather telling his favorite Faulkner memory: the day Papa and his postmaster friend drove up to Rowan Oak to deliver the author's mail. The story always accompanies dessert, normally my grandmother's famous Hershey cake topped with Blue Bell vanilla. As Papa brings a sugar-free spoonful to his laughing mouth, he delivers his punch-line: "And there's the old coot drunk off his ass sitting in that big 'ole oak with a shotgun!"

Faulkner followed my mother to Ole Miss where she immersed herself in Southern literature, particularly Faulkner. She still tells stories of afternoons spent under the magnolia leaves at Rowan Oak, studying the words where Faulkner penned them. Faulkner even followed my family to Ripley, Mississippi, when I was eleven. The blink-or-you'll-miss-it town where Faulkner's great-grandfather's grave is located was my home for two years. Sitting in a certain red-vinyl Pizza Hut booth, you can see William Clark Falkner's four-fingered statue, and I often stared at the granite, as my mother told us how Falkner influenced his great-grandson's writing. As a child I'd visit Oxford with my family,

and we'd always at least drive by Rowan Oak and marvel at its architectural beauty. Often, we'd stop if the weather was right and the day was short. My grandmother would spread her grandmother's quilt on the dewy summer grass and my mother would read excerpts of poetry written by Southern writers. I always ended those summer mornings and afternoons listening to my mother quote something, anything from Faulkner, her words lingering in the air as I imagined Faulkner himself reading on the same lawn. I wanted to drink coffee on the front balcony, look out at the tops of the trees, and read. I still want that. In fact, I'm taking my senior pictures at Faulkner's home this spring, among the creaky buildings and on the grounds.

" 'And there's the old coot drunk off his ass sitting in that big 'ole oak with a shotgun!' "

I've always loved to read; in fact my love could be called an obsession. This obsession began with *The Foot Book*, the first book I ever read without my mother's help. It began with a two-year old obsession with Dr. Seuss and his catchy rhymes. By the time I was five, Junie B. Jones, whose B stood for Beatrice, had taken the place of cats in hats and numbered things. Soon after came Harry Potter and the friends, the adventures, the spells that captivated me from the first sentence. Lemony Snicket then wormed his way onto my reading list, with his pessimistic outlook on the Baudelaire children. Soon, my reading tastes grew more adult, thanks to my mother. When

I was nine, she began to hand me stacks of classics—Frankenstein's monster and Dracula haunted my dreams while I longed for a Mr. Darcy or Lysander of my own. As I grew older, I began to explore contemporary literature as well as those from outside English-speaking nations. I began to challenge myself with Dostoyevsky, Tennessee Williams, Fitzgerald (who cluttered my reading desk for months), Atwood, and many more.

Despite my family history and my reading obsession, I've never read a Faulkner novel. It looms over my head; a storm cloud that grows with every "You've read *The Sound and the Fury*, right Hannah?" my mother throws out there. Every time she says something of that nature, I lock my eyes on some miniscule item behind her and mumble something like, "Not yet, but it's next on my list, right after *Lolita*."

Countless books and empty promises later, I still have not read anything by Faulkner. To tell the truth, it frightens me. I fear that my family Faulkner connection will ruin my experience with the novelist. I avoid his novels like a disease that could quarantine me from my family. I imagine if I don't understand—or worse, don't like—the books my mother idolizes, I'll be labeled stupid, an alien in my intelligent family. So I make excuses, find other books to read, and discuss them with my mom instead. I like to think that every other book I've read—*Death Be Not Proud*, *Dante's Inferno*, *The Bell Jar*, *My Antonia* and countless others—will prepare me for that day that I gain the courage to pick up a novel written by a man whose ghost has shadowed, and hopefully will continue to shadow, my family. ■

Home

Sarah Long

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

Two silos tower black against the dimming sky,
Their bellies empty,
Marking the center of Grandpa's farm;
In front of the iron giants, inside a white picket fence,
Peeling and leaning with the dry wind,
Their home stands just as they left it;
The untilled fields to the northwest lie barren,
Where sticks and briars have choked the soil.
Grandma's clothes line stands suspended between two poles,
Floating like a gossamer thread, weighed down at intervals by splintering clothes pins.
The dust stirs, picked up and tossed against the wooden frame of the front door,
Knocks, waiting for it
To open again.

Feather

John Aaron Howell

Honorable Mention —Photography Competition
Photograph



The Hitching Lot Farmer's Market

Dailey Nettles

Six a.m. on Southside

The rusty pickup trucks chug-a-lug into the market
Stocked with tomatoes and tiger melons
Rolling 'round in wicker baskets

A community of early birds gather
Swishing shorts on her morning run
Clicking of his bike chain
Cranky sighs and high-pitched fusses
Children dragged out of bed

Bubbles pop in the searing, fresh-brewed coffee
Squeezed with a hiss from the thermos

The thud of almond-colored potatoes
In a scratchy burlap sack,
“Fivedalla a’pound, folks.
Fivedalla a’pound.”

Mother Goose with her music stick
A bang from the cymbals and jingle bells
A honkie-honk on the bike horn
With a “Helloooooo,” and “Goodmwaning to
yoooooooooooo!”

Such a merry lot of folks.

James Evans

Sarah Owens

“James Evans passed away this Sunday,” my mama
told me.
He was aged seven,
But a baby in every way.

He’d just learned to stand on his own,
And he’d started splashing chocolate pudding
With ghost-like hands,
Stronger than one might think,
All over the tables, and he’d giggle
And giggle,
His entire body shaking from his
Gigantic, black wheelchair,
Covered in so many buckles to hold just one baby up.

At the funeral, not too soon after because
His mother was drug-addled and
His father had a family to feed—
Twins with a new wife—
James Evans could finally run away,
Not just stand,
Or throw his chocolate pudding,
Or make a fist,
Or giggle,
Or even shout,
But run away into the heavens.

A boy dancing upon death.

Gravity

Sherry Reddix

The minute hand on the generic
clock in Mr. Reed’s Advanced
Mechanics class inches toward six
as I tune back into the class discussion.

“A free falling object accelerates at the rate
of gravity: negative nine point eight meters per
second squared,” Mr. Reed preaches. The blues
chords that John Mayer strums on an acoustic
guitar sound in my head as I murmur the words
to his song: “Gravity is working against me and
gravity wants to bring me down... .” Ysoldé, my
friend, squints her eyes, raises her eyebrows,
and glares at me while my own eyes glaze over.

I recollect a year ago: before leaving my
home to attend my new two-year residential
school, the Mississippi School
for Mathematics and Science, I
visit my best friends’ house to
watch one of our favorite movies,
Anastasia, and chow down on
homemade cookie dough.

After the movie, Natalie
explains, “We have a surprise for
you. Close your eyes!”

“Okay, open!” Shelby shouts.

I flash open my eyes to a jumbo bulletin
board crammed with photos from our trip to
Disney World, pictures from homecomings past,
and snapshots from pep rallies. I glance to
Shelby’s and Natalie’s anxious faces as nostalgic
tears drench my face; I pull them into a bear
hug.

I transition into remembering orienta-
tion week at my new school. Tears of sorrow
and regret pour nightly, and I begin to parti-

tion myself from everybody. Why is everybody
weird here? Why can’t they be like Shelby and
Natalie? One day, I bump into a shiny-haired
Filipino girl named Ysoldé as I am cooking
Ramen in the microwave, and she invites me
to eat in her room. Crouched on her turquoise
quilt, we bond over our passion for dancing,
Catholicism, and noodles. Soon, the end of the
year comes, and it ends in tears, too. How can I
possibly go all summer without seeing my new
classmates?

I shift into reminiscing the beginning of
my senior year. “Hello! My name is Sherry,
and I’m your Emissary.” I introduce myself to
the four juniors that I am assigned to counsel

throughout the year. Soon, they
approach me with their home-
sick sobs, and I comfort them
with how awful I felt when I got
to MSMS. I assure them, as a
wise senior, that they will love
MSMS like I do now.

Then, the present hits me.
Literally. Ysoldé nudges me in
the arm with her pencil. “Are

you okay? You were drooling.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. I was just thinkin’...”

Coming to MSMS, I have learned that
change is hard. Because I wanted to keep the
past, I was stubborn to create new memories.
Embracing new experiences, though, is not
about forgetting the past; rather, it is about not
being afraid to assimilate into a new environ-
ment. I can’t let the past — gravity — keep me
down. ■

*“How can I
possibly go all
summer without
seeing my new
classmates?”*



Monster In the Shadows

Tanvi Rao
Charcoal

Stephen Buckerman

Ericka Wheeler

Oh, Stephen Buckerman,
Better known as the Boogerman,
As you stare at me with those small beady eyes,
Cheeks puffed out as though you've eaten too many pies,
I cringe in my desk, squeezing my eraser,
Averting my eyes from you to my paper.
As the bell rings announcing recess,
Everyone moans and groans with sounds of distress,
For you reach out to grab the glorified kickball,
And your sticky, booger-infested fingers cover it all.
We frown and gasp, make faces and laugh,
Never once thinking on your behalf.
The creepy smile you strain your face to make,
I know deep inside is hiding all of your hate.
You take it out with your revenge,
By digging in your nose,
As though you are searching for gold,
And stuffing your treasure inside of the small holes
Of our favorite play toy, our kickball that we would roll.
I'm sorry, Stephen Buckerman,
That I did not stand up as the better woman.

Ghost

Emma Thompson

First Place—Poetry Competition

Every day I passed you by on my way to school,
You in your shrink-wrapped jacket
Two sizes too small
With all your siblings trailing behind
Like little ragdolls.

I used to wonder why you smelled that way—
Like musty blankets and damp cigarettes,
Wondered why your hair was knotty and glimmered
with grease,
Wondered why when the teacher asked for homework
You would just give a Cheshire grin
And say you didn't do it.

The teachers hated you;
You took up too much time,
And during show and tell you just sat in silence
Picking blindly at your face with crusty brown nails.

I lent you my pencil once,
Slender and glitter coated
With a freshly sharpened tip.
You never gave it back.

You followed me to middle school;
I mostly forgot about you
Unless I saw you in the hall
With your tiny eyes now caked black,
And you'd whisper hi to me...
We mostly forgot about you.

But I think about you now
With your ripe belly
And GED,
And I'm sorry
That I couldn't offer you more
Than a gaudy pink pencil.



Modern Teenager

John Aaron Howell

Second Place—Photography Competition
Photograph

Johnny Walker Red and the Elixir of Life

Michelle Zeng

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

An odd silence drifted in the air. It was morning, and nobody had come in yet, which suited Al just fine. The silence echoed and hung still in the air, not like the usual pulsating beats, thuds, and bangs from the speakers when nighttime came around.

The bar Tiki Ti smelled like a casino. Ashtrays filled with mini piles of cigarette soot lay in random places: on the bar countertop, on the tables, between the glass bottles of vodka and coffee liqueurs. Cigarette butts littered the floors. Al was sure that if the lights weren't so dim, she'd see coiled translucent arms of smoke floating in the air in a hazy, gray mist. But, she didn't really want the lights to brighten. Tiki Ti would lose its secrecy that every customer sought, customers of thinly veiled disgraces, filled with the desire to discover shared soiled questions and seeking answers in one of the most human places of Los Angeles.

A man walked in, tearing Al from her thought. He plopped by the countertop.

"Johnny Walker Red," he mumbled, his eyes cast down.

"ID, please," Al said. The man only sighed, reaching a hand into his jeans pocket to pull out his wallet and driver's license, flicking the card towards her rather than placing the card in her hand. She picked it up and examined back and forth between the photo and him, a frown stitched on her forehead.

Matthew Caliber. Same blonde haircut, she noted, eyeing his floppy hair. Looks about 180 pounds. Rude expression.

She glanced at his birth date. "Well, aren't you a baby," she said. Placing the card back down, she laughed and patted Matthew's bouncy hair. "Just turned 21 yesterday?"

He hunched over even more and averted his gaze away from Al. "Yes," he whispered. "Johnny Walker Red, please."

"That's too strong for beginners," Al said. Another chuckle escaped from her throat, only

softer, and the cheeky smile upon her lips fell as she stole another glance at his expression. Constrained. Tired. Listless. The dim lighting cast dark shadows above and under his eyes and drained his skin sallow. The mist of dry, microscopic cigarette soot floated in the air, caressing and curling around Matthew like a villainous friend, like a seductive serpent. Like a fleeting dove trapped in a storm, Al thought. She could relate.

Turning her back to Matthew, she leaned against the countertop and crossed her arms. Facing the high walls of neatly stacked bottles of alcoholic beverages, Al admired the diversity in her collection, her eyes trailing the curves and dips of shining emerald green and velvet purple wine bottles, of clear and fat and smooth and skinny bottles. She remembered the first time she had walked into Tiki Ti, catching sight of the wall and its hoards of bottles. Despite the dim, flickering florescent lighting and the synthetic neon orange, blue, red, pink signs, despite the pulsating, ear-numbing vibrations of the music during the nighttime, despite the high energies of people swimming, bouncing, grinding to the beats, Al thought the wall of glass bottles was the best attribute of the bar. Ode to Epicurus, she thought. You're better than sin.

"Johnny Walker Red?" Matthew asked again, his impatience slipping through.

Al tilted her head back, and he stared at her cascading wavy brown hair. "Where did you say you were from again?" she asked. She heard the whispering of his clothes as he shifted in his seat.

"I never told you," he said, a snarl on his face. A pause. "Park City, Utah."

Al's lips curved into a smirk. "Sounds just as small and boring as my Broken Arrow, Oklahoma," she said. Her mind shifted to a wide, empty four-lane road, cracked and pale. There was more sky than land; buildings were

no more than four stories high. Yet, heavy, dull clouds touched roofs, ate shadows, and smothered the bright sun. Living there had been as suffocating as the sharp, ashy smog of cigarettes in Tiki Ti, but she was too old to fly away, to escape. Twenty years of her life had been ingrained in the bar; she was scared to leave again.

"Johnny Walker Red?" Leaning her head back more, she caught Matthew's irritated gaze and smiled. Irritation shifted to embarrassment as he quickly glanced away, his cheeks tingeing rosy pink. How cute.

Her smile turned slightly bitter, her small but existent pang of envy for Matthew's youth gnawing at her chest. Shouldn't let that youthfulness go to waste, she thought.

Matthew watched her as she pushed herself off the countertop that she had been leaning on, watched her hips sway as she walked towards one of the shelves, grabbing a bottle and shot glass. He observed those agile arms reach, swing, and shake. Her eyes cast down not in concentration but, rather, in thought. Her lashes, curled. Hair swept back.

"Elixir of Life," Al said. She walked back to the countertop holding a shot glass in each hand, the clear liquid sloshing at each step. Elixir of Life, he hadn't heard of, but thank the Lord, she concocted something. Cupping the glass she offered in her right hand, he closed his eyes and sipped.

"Isn't it tasty?" Al asked as she twirled the shot glass in her left hand. The grin on her face widened as Matthew's face flattened into a placid expression, his eyes blank with dullness. Matthew tipped the glass over, pouring the liquid in a single stream onto the ground. It didn't bother Al, though; after all, it was merely water.

"I just wanted a Johnny Walker Red," he said, his voice low and calm. As Al watched him walk out of the door, she lifted her shot glass filled with Johnny Walker Red, examining the transparent shot glass of bubbling liquid.

"A toast to Matthew Caliber," she said before chugging the liquid. A toast to youth.

The Johnny Walker Red tasted mild. ■



World Weary
Adey Efreem
Photograph

Trucker

Emily Wilson

Third Place—Poetry Competition

He is anticipating
The cold, unyielding, groaning plastic
Of a seat at Love's,
Where his chair will cry out
With the weight of two weeks away from home.
He yens for
The slimy and grease-coated,
Undercooked diner hamburger
That waits for him,
Dripping onto a chipped white plate.
He grips the steering wheel tighter,
And paws at straining eyes
With a hand dirtied
By motor oil and one showerless week.
He smears ink across his paperwork,
And tosses McNugget containers
Onto the bed in the nightcab
Of his truck.
He knows that driving
Is hard business,
That sometimes wending through
Mountains, hills, and across rivers,
Will remind him of
How the time ticks past
While he is trucking the roads,
How his family slips farther away
As he presses his foot to the gas.

Little Welty

Sarah Owens

Papa started slipping “101 Books to Read before You Die” beneath my bedroom door when I was nine. Soon it was my mortal fear not to finish them all. Like a game, I read every *Illustrated Classic* at the Meridian Public Library, using “101 Books” like a grocery store list. I brought home as many books as the cranky old librarian would let check out: *Little Women*, *Moby Dick*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, each missing a few hundred pages of the original text, leaving me dreaming of the day when I could read real, unabridged books. The classics were my new favorites, replacing *Flat Stanley* and *Clifford and Friends*. When I got older, I began to rush through Dreiser and fiddle through Wilde, but one name on the list was off-limits.

Welty was already my favorite. After all, Papa quoted her all the time: “A sheltered life can be a daring life as well, for all serious daring starts from within.” (I knew she was ugly, but Papa told me that the uglier the woman, the better the writer; so I stopped brushing my hair in the third grade.) Welty was still against the rules. Even as I kept reading, it took five years to prove to him I was ready for a Welty novel.

Papa promised me writing lessons the way he promised a Welty novel. When he decided it was time for our writing lessons to begin, he pulled out his creative writing book he used to teach with at the community college. We started with poetry, and Papa patiently sifted through my poems consisting of every trite pick-up line I knew: “You must have fallen out of the sky because you look like an angel” and “Heaven must miss you.” All the literature I had read was wasted on me; I had no natural literary sense. Yet, the repetitive garbage I wrote didn’t really get to Papa, but my appalling grammar did. After a week of it, he quit, leaving me with

permission to read a Welty novel as an apology.

A day later, I finished the novel. As I snuck it back on Papa’s bookshelf, Papa caught me. He was on his soapbox, still overwhelmed by my terrible grammar. He preached on the old family joke: when I was nine, Mama’s sister had found one of his paintings hanging in a dingy antique shop window when she went antiquing in little dried-up Mississippi towns when she went to Jackson with her new boyfriend.

The antique store was ninety minutes away from where Papa had gone to art school. He’d quickly dropped out. When Mama heard Papa’s art was up for sale, she quickly packed

us in the car and drove us to the antique store. From the car, I could see the painting through the dirty window. “Lilies #3” was smudgy, painted in quick, frustrated strokes. Inside, Mama laughed as the shopkeeper took it down; the back of the canvas was yellowed. Papa ignored them and played in the old books as I played with a box of ill-groomed dolls. The shopkeeper announced

the painting’s price: “Five dollars” between gum smacks, “but three’s good, too.” Mama hung it in an old peeling gold frame over the commode in the guest bathroom when we got home.

Papa tightly wrapped up his little speech and walked away, leaving me to figure out what the hell he meant by telling that story.

As I look back, Papa had kept me waiting for Welty out of the 101 other writers on his list because he wanted me take one secret from her—“A sheltered life can be a daring life as well...”—to keep work from rotting in an antique store. He didn’t want my writing to die with a couple of comma splices, the way “Lilies #3” died with a couple smudges. Instead, I should have had patience and dared to write something impassioned—something that meant enough to fix the punctuation. ■

*“Papa told me
that the uglier
the woman, the
better the writer;
so I stopped
brushing my
hair...”*

To Walt Whitman

Emily Wilson

This is what you will do:
Taste the mercury dropping low
And hear the crisp grass cracking under the first frost,
Feel the pinching breeze rake nails across your skin,
Give in to scalding cups of cocoa,
Know when to toss another log onto the fire to keep it blazing,
Build a snowman,
Wear fingerless gloves to feel the searing freeze,
Blow-dry your socks when it’s impossible to wiggle your toes,
Leave your shoes to dry on the front porch,
Forget your hand-knitted scarf in the igloo,
Send snowballs rocketing into hats, faces, coats, trees, fences, friends;
And it will be winter at last
And you will feel it in your bones, in the dry callouses of your skin, in your cracked lips
And in the silence of the still world as the first flake spots the ground.



Night Stalker

Bianca Quade

Charcoal

Visits with Minnie

Emma Thompson

Sticky bodies glommed together as they attempted to squeeze past each other under the hot midday sun. Interlocked hands were put to the test as little ones dragged behind their parents through the crowds, the sounds of clicking turnstiles adding fresh faces to the thousands already roaming the park. With a canvas duffle bag rhythmically bumping her upper thigh, Alyce diverged from the mass of people shuffling towards the ticket entrance in lieu of the empty one on the far right. Her passing caught the attention of a curious parent who paused quizzically for a moment then, upon noticing the employee entrance sign dangling above the young woman, nodded and turned back towards the ticket entrance. Alyce chuckled quietly to herself, as the subtle *clop clop* of the round oversized yellow heels that peeked out from beneath her pant legs echoed her entrance into the park.

She wove through the bustling cobblestone main street, cut sharply to the right, and passed through a discretely placed crimson door that read *Characters Only*. After twenty minutes, Minnie Mouse exited from the door and began her stroll down Sunset Boulevard. The sun shone intensely down on her as she walked; her large black ears resembled satellites as they funneled in the lingering warmth of the rays. Her palms and neck were already beginning to sweat; Alyce hated her job. Kids were just not her thing. They had the ugly tendency of being dirty and grimy and ungrateful. Or maybe it was because she tended to get pegged as a kid herself. She seemed to be suspended in a stage of perpetual cuteness, with small rounded features, attractive enough but hardly memorable. Heels flat to the floor, she reached about four-ten, but this, combined with her petite frame and soft high voice were not conducive traits for a pre-med student

who wanted foremost to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, it had helped her to get the gig as a Disney character actress, and at a time when jobs were scarce for all and towering student loans seeming to shadow her every move, this summer filler was well worth it.

As she made her round down Sunset Boulevard and onto Hollywood Avenue, swarms of hands swallowed the folds of her spotted dress. “Minnie!” screeched a chorus of excited children. “Mind taking a picture with my little one there?” Alyce systematically raised her gloved mitts up to settle on her hips, nodded

enthusiastically, and let out a squeaky giggle. The “little one” was anything but little. He waddled up to Minnie’s skirt bottom, stopping before posing to haphazardly move his hand up his face, past his chocolate-covered upper lips to his nostrils, where he sought to quell an itch deep within. The boy left, only to be replaced by several more children, all of who scrambled for Minnie’s attention. Protective

parents lathered additional layers of sunscreen on their children as the line grew and snaked across the street. As previously instructed, Alyce responded to this by throwing up an energetic hand motion that beckoned the line of fans over to a more shaded side area. Several children whined with impatience about the wait while their parents offered them compensation popcorn and juice.

For her lunch break, Alyce escaped to a counter order eatery in the park, the Starring Rolls Café. Though the French doors were pinned open, the light summer breeze seemed to linger just outside the door, leaving the diner stale with mingling scents of ham, pizza sauce, syrup, and coffee. Babies screeched from their highchairs as sunlight slipped through the door and into their tired eyes; a parent snapped sharply as her child stood wailing in a puddle of

“...her large black ears resembled satellites as they funneled in the lingering warmth of the rays.”



Hypnotized

Mary Blair Ward

Charcoal

Coke. Alyce massaged her temples and stared dazedly at the cash register five bodies ahead.

After some thirty-plus minutes, she escaped with a croissant and lemonade to the patio; scraps of food littered the only free table, so with a makeshift napkin glove, she pushed to the ground several mauled chicken nuggets and a sticky novelty cup. After tidying up, Alyce sat down at the table and drew a paperback from her purse. With the crisp fresh pages of *Atlas Shrugged* in hand, she began eating; however, after little more than two bites into her sandwich, she was distracted by a sharp cry. “Momma! Momma!” She looked up to see a small boy crying out from the cobblestone street in sharp frantic chirps, like a lost baby bird. The empty response frightened the boy further, and his shoulders shook like an old washing machine. Alyce abandoned her meal and crossed the bustling street to the child. “Hey, are you missing your mommy?” He looked up at her, petrified, his chocolate skin reflecting two streams of shimmering tears that dripped down his chin onto his Power Rangers tee. “No, it’s okay. I work here.” His head seemed to recess like a turtle’s as he looked up at her with a pouty protruding bottom lip. “Here, I’m going to get you back to your parents, okay?” After a moment of dumbstruck awe, he slowly lifted his head up and down and held out his hand. His fingers were slippery with sweat, but she grasped them nonetheless, and gently guided him down the street and towards the security office. Souvenir shops lining the streets ebbed with customers and added to the confusion of the day. “What’s your name, dear?”

“.....Jake.”

“You know, I am friends with Mickey Mouse.” “...” “And Minnie too!”

Jake didn’t issue another word until they had arrived at the security area. After reporting the situation to the head of security, a middle-aged man with a handlebar mustache and a name tag that read “Aubrey,” she sat down with the kid. He was no longer crying but instead was quietly staring at the ground with his hands tucked under his legs. Or, rather, he was staring at a tiny ant carrying a crumble of pastry. Alyce sat down next to him. She felt marginally awkward, but someone needed to keep the kid company while the situation was reported to the proper authorities. “...do you like ants?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Where do you think he’s going?”

After pausing a moment to contemplate his response, he looked up with a cocked eyebrow and shrugged. “Probably to feed Mickey Mouse.”

Within a few minutes, a pair of worried parents was on the scene and covering their son with warm hugs and kisses. Alyce stood mutely to the side, watching the reunion unfold. The father of the family approached Alyce and thanked her for her quick thinking and responsibility. As she accepted his thanks, Jake peeked out from between his father’s pant legs and peered up at the young woman. “Say hi to Minnie for me.”

“Sure. I mean, of course. I’ll pass the message along.” Alyce glance at the time displayed on her phone and retreated back through the globs of sticky tourists to redress for her afternoon shift in the back of the park. ■

Contributors' Notes

Holly Baer (*Flowood*) Holly's motto is "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly." She calls writing her "first love, the fickle creature" and will attend Ole Miss with a major in international studies and religion.

Bonnie Baker (*Long Beach*) Bonnie's favorite author is Garth Nix, she finds cats inspiring, and she wants to retire with lots of cats. She wishes to meet Robert Plant.

Claire Belant (*Starkville*) Claire's defining quote is "You mustn't confuse a single failure with a final defeat." She finds inspiration for her writing from the subtle details in life that could be easily overlooked.

Nicholas Brewer (*Columbus*) Nicholas finds Maya Angelou very inspiring and thinks that poetry is "a wonderful medium for releasing one's inner thoughts and turmoils." He plans to major in biological sciences before attending medical school.

Ysoldé Carreon (*Byram*) Ysoldé finds Ms. Jones the most inspiring artist she knows and believes that creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Her defining quote is "Serve God by serving others."

Victoria Chen (*Hattiesburg*) Victoria loves the Hunger Games series. She gets inspiration for her writing from her freshman English teacher, Mrs. Clark, and her parents. If Victoria were a kitchen appliance, she'd be a stove so she could nurture a home or burn it to the ground.

Trey Chesnutt (*Long Beach*) If Trey could be any kitchen appliance he would be a refrigerator. He wants to meet "that kid from Project X" and hopes to become a doctor.

Sarah Chong (*Madison*) Sarah believes that "creativity is underrated." She loves the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* and hopes to have a career in the medical humanities.

Katherine Cole (*Columbus*) Kat's favorite book is *Pride and Prejudice*. She wants to meet Queen Elizabeth and is inspired by happy people. She plans to attend Ole Miss and specialize in genetics.

Catherine Croney (*Picayune*) Cadie finds inspiration from her mother, and she wishes that she and creativity had a more symbiotic relationship. Cadie will attend the University of Mississippi.

Karien Dixon (*Macon*) Karien's defining quote is "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly." She wishes to meet her late grandmother and finds inspiration from her mother.

Lizzie Dobronski (*Caledonia*) Lizzy finds Confucius very inspiring and wishes to meet the Tooth Fairy so that she can "get her teeth back." Her defining quote is "Suit up!"

Adey Efrem (*Greenville*) Adey believes that "without art, Earth is just eh." She finds God most inspiring and will major in graphic design at Mississippi State.

Alexandra Failing (*Indianola*) Alexandra, or Xan, thinks it's "fun to have fun but you have to know how." She loves the book *Ender's Game* and wants to meet Laura Bailey or Vic Mignogna.

Hannah Fisher (*Columbus*) Hannah believes that writing "comes from the soul" and would like to meet Anne Rice's character Lestat. She finds inspiration for writing from her life experiences and wants to become an English teacher in the future.

Taylor Galmiche (*Picayune*) Taylor believes that "change is the only constant." She finds nature inspiring and would like to be a blender so that she can "mix things up." Taylor will attend Rhodes College.

Casey Griffin (*Morton*) Casey is most influenced by the writer Leo Tolstoy and believes that "creativity comes from the urge to change." He finds his father most inspiring and for the future wishes to "pick a road that will never end."

John Aaron Howell (*Bentonla*) John Aaron is very inspired by Ansel Adams' photography. He gets inspiration from "the quiet moments when thoughts overflow" and plans to major in biochemistry and become a cardiovascular surgeon.

Katie Howell (*Brookhaven*) Katie believes that "writing allows you to learn from the best and worst experiences." Her writing is most influenced by Jane Austen and she will major in biology at Mississippi College.

Carissa Howie (*Madison*) Carissa's favorite book is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Carissa believes in "holding yourself to a standard of grace, not perfection" and wants to be a cardiothoracic surgeon in the future. She also wishes to meet Dumbledore.

Hannah Hultman (*Ecru*) Hannah is most influenced by the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald. She finds a strong cup of black coffee to be very inspiring and gets ideas for her writing from family stories and memories. Hannah hopes to become a corporate lawyer.

Lalita Klag (*Saltlillo*) Lalita's favorite books are the Harry Potter series and her defining quote is "Wit beyond measure is man's greatest treasure." She finds public speakers most inspiring and wishes to meet Albus Dumbledore.

Terri Le (*Starkville*) Terri's defining quote is that "The past can hurt, but you can either run from it or learn from it." She plans to attend Millsaps College and major in biochemistry with a minor in business.

Anna Liang (*Cleveland*) Anna finds inspiration from Wikipedia and OneRepublic. She wants to meet King Mursili II and will major in biology at Washington University in St. Louis.

Aleah Liddell (*Greenville*) Aleah's favorite work is *Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper. She wishes she could meet her grandfather, and she hopes to become a pediatric surgeon while being an artist on the side.

Emerald Litke (*Ocean Springs*) Emerald thinks inspiration is spontaneous and her defining quote is "Be the change you wish to see in the world." She wants to be a doctor and continue playing music.

Phillip Liu (*West Point*) Phillip's favorite author is Dr. Seuss. He wishes to meet Ricky Williams who he believes was "a great and influential man." Phillip hopes to "make the world a better place" in the future.

Sarah Long (*Picayune*) Sarah is inspired by Diana Gabaldon. She says that "writing has allowed me to say the things I couldn't say out loud." Sarah wants to major in marine engineering and naval architecture.

Shayna Long (*Rolling Fork*) Shayna thinks that "the world isn't logical, so why should I be?" Her favorite book is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and she will attend Mississippi State to pursue a degree in psychology.

Dailey Nettles (*Columbus*) Dailey finds inspiration from the South and her favorite author is Rob Bell. She will major in neuroscience at the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

Janine Nowak (*Gulfport*) Janine believes that "creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes, but art is knowing which ones to keep." She wants to meet Hermione Granger and finds inspiration from her mother and sister.

Carlee Odom (*Columbus*) Carlee thinks that imagination is more important than knowledge. Her favorite author is John Green and she will attend Louisiana State University.

Sarah Owen (*Meridian*) Sarah is most influenced by the author Eudora Welty because "she is wonderful." She believes that writing is horrible until you finish, and she wants to become a park ranger.

Alison Patterson (*Booneville*) Alison believes simply that "art is life." She hopes to become a famous Broadway actress and wishes to meet Zora Neale Hurston.

Bianca Quade (*Biloxi*) Bianca finds Tim Burton very inspiring and her favorite author is Stephen King. If she could meet anyone, living, dead, or fictional, she would meet Gandalf from *Lord of the Rings*.

Tanvi Rao (*Clinton*) Tanvi is most influenced by J. R. R. Tolkien and her favorite work is Dante's *Inferno*. If Tanvi could be any kitchen appliance she would be a coffee grinder.

Terrika Rayford (*Louisville*) Terrika finds Alicia Keys and Raven-Symoné most inspiring. For Terrika, writing has been an escape from the real world. She plans to attend the University of Southern Mississippi, majoring in nursing and minoring in music.

Sherry Reddix (*Madison*) Sherry believes that creativity is about "having a different view on an old perspective." She wishes to meet Condoleezza Rice and wants to be a sifter so she can "shake things up." Sherry will major in biomedical engineering at Brown University.

Brittany Silas (*Greenwood*) Brittany is most influenced by the author Anne Bradstreet. She finds inspiration for writing from her father and believes that "art frees the mind and releases one's inner thoughts." She will attend Mississippi State and major in biological sciences.

Shelby Simpson (*Indianola*) Shelby finds the artist Claude Monet most inspiring. She doesn't believe in giving up when it comes to art or writing, and her favorite author is John Green.

Prithvi Singh (*Madison*) Prithvi believes that "you make your own destiny." He finds the world around him most inspiring because there is so much beauty; he hopes to graduate from a good university that excels in business.

Emma Thompson (*Picayune*) Emma says that her sister Kate inspires her every day and thinks that she would like to be a teacup—gentle but able to face the heat. She wants to meet J. R. R. Tolkien and major in engineering in the future.

Marquisia Walls (*Holly Springs*) Marquisia finds Emily Dickinson very inspiring. She believes that "being happy doesn't mean everything is perfect." Marquisia will attend the University of Mississippi.

Charlotte Wang (*Starkville*) Charlotte's defining quote is "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." She finds inspiration in long walks in the park and will attend Yale University.

Mary Blair Ward (*Columbus*) Mary Blair sees art as a way to relieve stress. She finds nature and weather to be good sources of inspiration and hopes to attend nursing school at Southern Miss.

James Washington (*Meridian*) James's defining motto is "You have to work hard to be lazy." He wants to meet Albert Einstein and finds inspiration in his dreams. James plans to become a theoretical physicist and study the space-time continuum.

Ericka Wheeler (*Greenwood*) Erika is most influenced by Tamora Pierce. She believes that "the mind is the only thing that can't be stolen from you." Erika finds her family most inspiring and will major in chemistry at Millsaps College; she wants to become a dermatologist.

Toi Wilkes (*Horn Lake*) Toi finds inspiration in the paintings on the Sistine Chapel. Her favorite author is Edgar Allan Poe, and she plans to major in fashion design after high school.

Emily Wilson (*Horn Lake*) Emily's favorite book is *Oliver Twist*. Her view on art is that it's a "permanent anchor in a world of mutability." If she could meet anyone living or dead, she'd like to meet Steve Irwin.

Michelle Zeng (*Greenville*) Michelle believes in "writing like you're drunk and editing like a world-renowned critic." She is most influenced by Aldous Huxley and would like to meet Winston Churchill.



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