

*Southern Voices*  
is a magazine of creative works by students at the  
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# Southern Voices ♦ 2014



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**Photography Judge**  
Ms. Stacy Clark serves as editor of *Catfish Alley*, a quarterly magazine published in Columbus, Mississippi, that is “a gathering place for the words and images that paint an authentic, compelling portrait of life in today’s South.”



**Poetry Judge**  
Dr. Kendall Dunkelberg is Professor of English and Director of Creative Writing at Mississippi University for Women. He is the author of *Time Capsules* (Texas Review Press, 2009), *Landscapes and Architectures* (Florida Literary Foundation Press, 2001), and *Hercules, Richelieu, and Nostradamus: Translations of Poems by Paul Snoek* (Green Integer Press, 2000).

**Short Story Judge**  
Mrs. Jane Nickerson is the author of *Strands of Bronze and Gold* (2013) and *The Mirk and Midnight Hour* (2014), both Young Adult books published by Knopf. Mrs. Nickerson knows MSMS well; four of her children are MSMS graduates: James (’98), Bethany (’03 ), Phillip (’05), and Stella (’08).

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Ms. April Comes to Visit

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

In retrospect, we should have listened to Momma. She was right about Rudy. He was rotten.

Rudy moved into the neighborhood at the same time Mike and Ross were getting to that mischievous age: puberty. Momma tried her best to deter us from associating with Rudy. “His Momma is an alcoholic, you know?” she would tell us as we walked out the door to go to Rudy’s. Momma told us everyone she thought was bad for us was an alcoholic. She told us the local pervert was an alcoholic so that we would avoid him. We believed her most of the time, but we were so enamored with Rudy that we couldn’t avoid him.

Momma thought Rudy was too rambunctious. He was an early bloomer, and that frightened her. Rudy, a mere seventh grader, already had a voice suited for radio, and his facial hair was years beyond the pencil-line mustache that underlined the noses of most boys his age. “I really don’t like you hanging out with that boy,” she would warn us. In typical, teenage rebellious spirit, we ignored her.

Momma was right about Rudy, though. He was a bad seed.

\* \* \*

I remember one day Momma was so furious over something

Rudy had done. She stormed into the dining room looking for the boys. I was sitting at the table reading *Nancy Drew* and was interrupted by her screaming.

“So you like to read this?” she said rolling up a magazine. “Well, let’s see how you like it when it smacks across your bum.” She wielded the rolled up magazine like a baseball bat and hit a home run right on Mike’s and Ross’s bottoms.

Mike responded, “It was Rudy down the street. He said he found it in a stack in his attic. They were his dad’s or something.” Mike was never afraid to rat someone out if he thought it would save him from getting punished.

“I told you not to associate with that psycho,” said Momma. “He’s no good, and this magazine is dirt. Pure dirt. Do you know who reads this garbage?”

Ross began to respond with a smart-aleck remark, but Momma cut him off. “That drunk pervert down the street reads this garbage? Do you want to grow up like him?”

“No, Momma. We’re sorry, Momma. We’re terribly sorry. We didn’t look at it, we swear,” Mike and Ross said, trying to appeal to Momma’s softer side.

“Don’t you stand here and lie to me. Want to go say that to the

Lord? Would you lie to him?”

“Of course not, Momma,” responded Mike and Ross.

“Then don’t lie to me. I don’t want you ever to look at a woman again until you’ve said some prayers and thought about what you’ve done,” said Momma.

“Yes, Momma.” As they left the room, Mike made a grab for the magazine. Having run cross country, Mike was swift, but Momma was swifter.

“Not so fast,” said Momma. “I’ve got an idea of what do with it.” A smirk bloomed on her face like a fresh, spring flower. “I know exactly what to do.”

That night right before dinner, Momma called Mike and Ross into the dining room. “Since you two think this smut is so enjoyable, I’ve decided to share it with the whole family. It’ll make a great conversation piece at dinner.” Momma flipped through the magazine, found the centerfold, and ripped it out. She pinned up bare-breasted April right below the cuckoo clock behind Father’s seat. Mike and Ross tried to make her take it down, but she wouldn’t budge.

“Momma, please don’t do this,” they implored. “Father’s going to be so angry.”

“That’ll teach you to look at dirty magazines,” said Momma.



When Father got home, Momma greeted him with her typical hug and kiss. “Ms. April will be joining us for dinner tonight,” she said.

“And who is that? Is she a teacher? Have the boys been up to no good?” asked Father. He never asked if I was up to no good. I was an angel in Father’s eyes.

“No, she’s a friend of the boys,” Momma said. “She’s quite the woman. You’ll be delighted to meet her. I just admire her so much. She just exposes everything about herself. It’s refreshing to find someone so open.”

“Well, I’m glad they’re inviting a lady friend over. I was convinced they would never warm up to females.”

“Oh, I guarantee you they love women. You’ll be glad to meet Ms. April. I’m certain of it. Now, go sit in the dining room. Dinner will be right out. We’re having spaghetti and meatballs.”

Momma went back to the kitchen to finish up dinner. Just as she was draining the spaghetti, Father screamed from the dining room, “Who the hell is this anorexic skank with the plastic breasts pinned up behind my seat?”

“Why, that’s Ms. April, dear,” yelled Momma from the kitchen. “Isn’t she such a classy woman? I’m glad the boys invited her over.”

Dinner was interesting that night. Mike and Ross sat in their seats, barely looking up at their food. If Momma had caught them even glancing up at Ms. April, she would have beat them with the magazine again.

Father, on the other hand, kept making jokes about the centerfold tacked up behind him. “Would you like some food, Ms. April?” he asked, shoving spaghetti sauce all over the picture. “Does it taste good? My

wife is an excellent chef. Eat up, Ms. April. You look like you could use a good meal.”

After that night, Mike and Ross never let Momma catch them reading *Playboy*. Rudy still gave them ample supply, but Mike and Ross stashed them high in the attic behind the Christmas decorations where Momma would never find them. They did not want a repeat of the Ms. April incident anytime soon. ▲



Sharpie

Shreya Gunapati

Second Place – Drawing Competition  
Sharpie Marker

## 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

## I Remember Sunday

Rachel Jones

### Third Place— Poetry Competition

I remember the smell  
of starch tip-toeing around corners  
every Sunday morning.

It lurked from Uncle’s room  
where he stood,  
his fried-chicken gut standing firm,  
as he frosted his khakis one more time.

From near the pool-pit,  
I saw his smirk as he stood,  
hands behind back, shirt stiff,  
tie straight, and modeled a saint.

He told me  
I sang well that day,  
simply because I sang at all;  
The other kids wouldn’t sing  
“This Little Light of Mine.”

I remember the smell of  
Crown Royal  
on Sunday afternoons  
lingering from rooms I evaded.

I was safe under the bed  
with mattress-fuzz stars  
when his gait grew staggered  
and his speech lazy.

And now, his breath,  
heavy with whiskey,  
hugs my nose  
whenever any hands open a bottle.



# Against the Current

Sabrina Moore

Second Place — Essay Competition

The grit of sand is washed away by the swells that surround me as a gust of sweet, salty air kisses my face. I glance back to the shore where my family of six laughs on the sand and smile at the view, then turn to the crashing waves that add a crescendo to the constant chorus of coastal sounds. I dive into the pleasant chill of the waves, swim out to where I can hardly stand, and just float. I am perfectly happy.

I peek back to the shoreline and watch my twelve-year-old brother construct a castle. Mark's forehead crinkles in concentration as he adds the fine details to the masterpiece, adding touches Michelangelo would applaud. My brother has a learning disability and speech impediments; you can't see them at the moment, just sometimes. You can see them when he struggles with math, unable to count to ten. You can see them when he talks and misuses his verbs. You can see them when he studies all night for a test and fails to pass. But you can't see them now. I smile at how happy he looks.

Mark has had more than his share of teasing and torment from schoolyard bullies. The tears that fall from his hurt-filled eyes roll straight from his cheeks into my heart and shape the way I treat others. In an age where sharp words and unkind

looks cover school hallways like the thick plaster of walls, it is at times difficult to break from the crowd and do what is right; this is when kindness is most important. Therefore, I step in when I hear people tease the kid in math class who doesn't know how to integrate, when I hear the girls on my soccer team trash talking about number six who has Coke-bottle glasses, when I see a group of teens mocking the boy who doesn't know how to act because he has a social disorder. I think about this as I watch my brother race to construct a castle before the sea claims it. He smiles as my dad walks over to help, and I smile with him because at the beach, he has no worries.

Water crashes over my head and I'm reminded of the countless hours I've spent fighting against these waves. I've always liked to swim against the current. The brute

force of the salt-water walls dragging me backwards serves only to strengthen my desire to push forward, kick harder, and overcome the struggle. Pausing my thrashing, I think again of my brother who is now pouring a bucket of sea onto a new plot of sand, laying the foundation for his next creation. He knows better than anyone the pain and thrill that accompanies a struggle. I remember the long hours Mark has spent hunched beside a desk, begging information to seep into his brain cells—it never seems to. I remember my parents' reddened faces as they screamed at him in frustration, unable to understand his inability to grasp concepts such as counting, addition, or the alphabet. The school district was a separate battle altogether. It was a common occurrence for my mother to return home puffy-eyed and distraught after a meeting with a school district



Afternoon Swim

Stearman McCalister

Photograph

administration both ill equipped and unwilling to provide for my brother who didn't fit the mold of the other children. Wrestling with the waves of teachers and principals paired with the swells of knowledge Mark worked so hard to learn became a torrent of stress that put the household on edge.

I swim a bit deeper, my muscles begging for relief from the endless churning of water. As I kick farther and farther from the shore, the waves begin to calm and the ocean becomes the picture of serenity from a travel brochure or commercial. I look back to the shore to make sure my family hasn't left me and see Mark appearing as a speck in the distance, laughing and splashing with my other brothers by the edge of the water. His grin takes me back to a cold auditorium where he sat two weeks prior to the beach trip. He had walked, proud, nervous, and confident all at once, as my family watched him receive his certificate for making the honor roll for the first time. His years of late-night studying, persistence, and determination had finally paid off.

I grin at the memory and return my thoughts to the calm water surrounding me. Here, with my toes far above the sand beneath my feet, my mind is free to dream, reflect, plan, and challenge. I think of the rough waves behind me and the inevitable rough waves ahead, willing this moment of tranquility to last as long as possible. ▲



PKD

Conor Hultman

Honorable Mention – Drawing Competition  
Colored pencils

## Driving in August

Nick Elder

The single white dividing line beats past,  
Not measuring blurred distance or rhythmic time,  
But the spinning of wheels over asphalt.

Mississippi summers creep in through  
Latched windows and locked doors,  
Beneath warping floorboards smooth and  
Marbled black with long words spoken  
Over cornbread and sweet iced tea.

Summer cannot be escaped.  
The Delta cotton fields are as vast  
As the downy blue baskets they gaze at,  
And old as the Live Oaks standing sentinel between  
Coastal views and nodding waves.

Summer can only be lived,  
Accepted without questioning,  
Without numbers to speak of its extremes.

The single white dividing line beats past,  
Measuring life, the breath of wind licking my face,  
The heartbeat winding its way deeper into the soul.



# Life in Space

Joseph Messer

“Tell me something about space,” I said. Mom stopped and pointed up. She told me that all stars tell stories, that supernovas expand like cream diffusing into a cup of coffee, and that NASA sent a chimpanzee into space. His name was Ham, and he could talk with his hands. “But mostly,” she said, bending down to my eyelevel, “space is empty.”

“Like our home?” I asked. Under Katrina’s floodwaters, my house, like my life, had fallen in on itself, as if it were a neutron star collapsing. Now I could hold all that I had in two suitcases and all that I loved in the space between my arms held out for a hug.

Some things stayed the same—an unbroken china plate buried under rubble—but most things changed; they were blown away across the yard or into the bay. In the days that followed, I would change the most.

Hurricane Katrina had uprooted my sense of self that had been embedded in my community: in the Purple Cow ice cream parlor where I always ordered triple chocolate fudge, celebrating the latest soccer victory, and in my elementary school where I learned how to count to one hundred in English and in Spanish, but only answered questions with “bien” because everything was good back then.

Returning to Bay St. Louis after the storm, the first thing I saw was the steeple of my church lying in the street. I no longer believed that what I once knew would always stay the same; I no longer knew what to believe in, so I started to believe in the regenerative power of stories.

With the town’s television cables disconnected, I started reading books. I read like I was falling in love, slowly at first and then, all at once, fast until I was hopelessly lost in a relationship with books. I read everything from Stephen King to David Foster Wallace. With each page, I understood a little more about the space I call home. With each sentence, I found more of who I was—an entity separate from my surroundings—and started to remember, word by word, how my life’s story fit back together.

What do I remember?

I remember watching CNN as my friend’s house split into two equal halves; witnessing my mother cry, in her hands a photo album ruined by flood water; meeting a FEMA worker, who gave me an extra pudding cup with my MRE; walking into a

temporary school in Alabama, thinking that the students would be nothing like me until a boy halved his deck of cards and asked me to play gin rummy. I remember the day my school in Bay St. Louis reopened. My fourth-grade class started writing a book called *Story of a Storm*. In this book we told our stories as students displaced from our friends, families, and homes. It was then that I realized I was not alone; my story included everyone and everything around me.

Some nights, I remember the story of Ham, the space chimp who spoke with his hands. Mom told me that as he passed through orbit, Ham turned to the spacecraft’s camera and signed:

*Home.*

*Home.*

Perhaps he was thinking of Cameroon, his original home, and of his family eating bugs and bananas. Perhaps Ham was attempting to say that outer space was his home now. One of the first beings in space, he could see just how bright the stars shine on the other side of the atmosphere.

Like Ham, I think home is wherever I make it. ▲

# Hail, Mary

Rachel Jones

Grandma, the Holy Woman,  
brands our wrists with her fingers  
when dragging us into the church house  
every Sunday.

Grandma keeps her grip  
On her Bible tight,  
And with lips balled up in fury  
she’ll use it to knock your eyes on the word of God.

Grandma’s kitchen floor must shine like it is new,  
So we leave our tattered shoes at the door  
And polish it with our bitter sweat  
While Grandma wails hymns.

She gives us our stained plastic bowls  
And we eat our rations in the yard  
Where the grass licks our ankles  
and the mosquitoes kiss our skin.

She believes if your body is clean,  
So is your soul,  
And before bed, she uses her switch  
To persuade us to ask the Lord for forgiveness.

But she always puts her wig on straight  
And irons her dress that matches her shoes  
And leaves her laundry in the bedrooms  
Where company cannot see it.

Some women hold their criticisms  
in the side of their mouths like their husbands do their dip,  
But some swallow them along with their envy  
and chuckle, “Oh, Mary, you are a great woman.”

Mary simply flashes her dentures  
And makes sure to  
Tilt her head towards where she thinks God is  
And presents Him their words as proof that she is righteous.



Unlikely Friends

Christina Legradi

Photograph



# Boys

Mary Frances Holland

## Honorable Mention— Short Story Competition

The afternoon sun beamed down on the Northern Riverside Elementary playground. A soft breeze was blowing and Margret kept fidgeting to keep her shaggy blonde bangs out of her eyes. She was surrounded by a throng of boys. Rather, she stood on the edges of their circle. Seven-year-old boys, due to their ever-present fear of the “cooties” epidemic, have never been too keen on letting a girl penetrate their ranks. Margret eyed the group of girls she should have been playing with. They were huddled under the monkey bars, chatting about clothes and pets and how icky boys were—and occasionally how lovely. No matter how hard Margret had tried to fit in with them, she couldn’t. Margret’s mother was a model of femininity, an airy glow of pink with a perfectly coiffed blonde mane. She had grown tired of Margret coming home covered in dirt. After multiple parent/teacher conferences trying to resolve the “problem,” Margret’s mother finally confronted her child directly. With the voice of an angel, soft yet endearing, she had urged Margret to just “try playing with the girls today.” So for the past week Margret had ventured to the makeshift palace the other girls had created on the

playground: the caged mound of monkey bars. She was welcomed warmly, the girls’ eyes shining brightly and freckle-covered cheeks grinning friendly. They gathered around her and braided her knotted, blond hair, asking her all about her life, each collecting little pieces of their new friend. She was content and her mother was thrilled by the news that her beautiful little girl was finally acting normal.

One day, as Margret’s new group sat in a circle, talking and laughing under their castle, one of the leaders of the group, Liz, focused in on Margret and asked, “Margret, why did you always play with the boys before?”

Margret was puzzled. Why had she? She simply spoke what she felt. “They aren’t that much different than us girls.” The other girls just looked at her, confused. “But I like you girls, too!” Margret stammered as she tried to save herself from total social ruin.

The girls laughed.

“I still don’t understand, but it’s okay that you do. I mean, they can be super cute,” Liz giggled, and looked around at the other girls. Margret sighed in relief. They didn’t think she was weird yet, but she dismissed Liz’s comment about boys being cute. She could never think of

the boys that way. She didn’t find bugs or mud gross, but *that* was disgusting.

As the rest of the girls giggled to each other about who was cutest, she couldn’t help but look over to the boys as they chased each other around the dusty playground. No matter how she felt about them, she just felt more comfortable with them. So the next day, instead of venturing out to the dome of monkey bars, Margret strutted out to the middle of the playground where the boys would always meet. She finally felt comfortable again. If only they felt comfortable around her. She was left following around and participating in as many of their games as they would let her. As they barred her from yet another activity, Margret caught herself looking over to the monkey bars longing to be included again, even if it meant that she wouldn’t feel as free as she did now.

Steven, the leader of the group, saw her and said, “Hey, Margret! Why don’t you go back to being a girl again!”

Margret, hurt but once again filled with confidence, stated, “But I want to stay here with you boys.”

Steven smiled, “Well, you can only stay if you can beat,” he looked around the circle at the

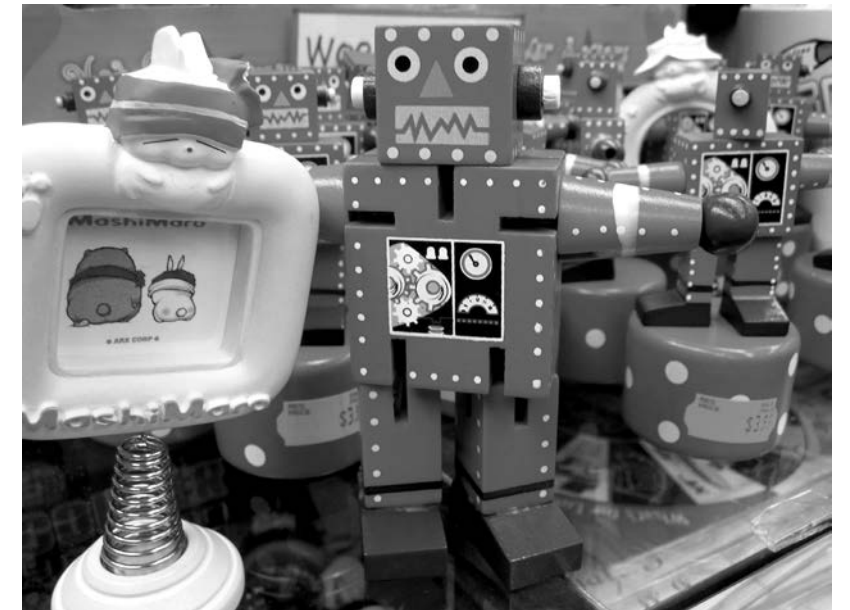
rest of the smug boys, “Andrew in a race.”

Margret stopped to think. She knew she could beat any of these boys in a race, but Andrew was the fastest and she was out of practice; but she had to prove that she belonged in the group. Margret cocked her hip to the side, just as Steven himself was standing, and said, “Where to?”

Steven looked surprised that she actually would take the challenge. “Um ... the first one to that tree over there wins.”

“Fair enough,” Margret smiled.

Margret and Andrew lined up. Steven yelled, “Go!”, and Margret was off. Andrew had started just before her, but she wouldn’t let his centimeter of advantage get between her and showing all of those boys that she could keep up. Her short seven-year-old feet were light against the dusty playground dirt, leaving small clouds of red debris as she raced alongside him. They were almost to the tree when Margret began to edge past him. She felt free, her long blonde hair flowing in the wind. Her smile spread as wide as the sea as she grew closer to the tree. Andrew had begun to slow down, and now she was several feet in the lead. She was so close. She reached her tiny hand out to grasp the bark before Andrew could claim the win. But just as her fingers were about to touch the gray pecan tree, proving her win, she felt her foot catch on one of the protruding roots



## Robot Rampage

Vikram Sachdeva

Photograph

below. Before her hand could make contact with the trunk of the tree, Margret was already on the ground, sliding on the rough red dirt. Andrew touched the tree. He had won. The rest of the boys ran up to the tree, congratulating him. Margret stayed on the ground. They half-heartedly asked if she was all right, and she said she was fine. In reality, Margret’s body ached, her hands and knees scratched and caked in red dirt. More than that, her heart was torn.

Steven laughed and said, “Well, I guess boys are really better than girls.” The pack moved away to continue more of their treacherous games. But as they moved farther away and Margret stayed huddled on the ground, trying to hide her tears, one peeled off from the pack. Sam, a boy with bright blue eyes and dark brown hair, walked

sheepishly up to her.

“Are you really okay?” he asked.

Margret slowly looked up at him, wiping away the tears. “I guess.”

“No, you’re not.” He stuck out a small hand and pulled Margret off the dusty ground. As she stood, they both realized that her knee was oozing with bright red blood, creating a red muddy cake on her left knee. He kept his hand in hers and said, “Come on, Margret, let’s go to the nurse.” The two walked hand in hand from the back of the playground back to the school building. His hand was warmer than she had expected. His fingers wrapped around hers, protective and caring. She was filled with a strange feeling. She finally realized what Liz had been talking about. ▲



# Kings of the Playground

Brendan Ryan

In third grade, we owned the playground,  
Our dominance strengthened by the cooties  
We gave out like candy.  
Girls and boys alike feared our strength.

You were as swift as Hermes  
With your highlighter-green Converse  
That matched your favorite Ninja Turtles shirt.  
You could outrun any fifth grader.

I was as cunning as a fox  
With my pocket dictionary filled with all the dirty  
words  
We weren't supposed to know.  
I was never afraid to use them.

We spent summer days together  
Building castles with our minds  
And traveling to foreign lands  
By walking across the street  
That separated our houses like a river.

We spent summer nights together  
Underneath the stars  
Making up our own names for the constellations.  
Each new year brought on a new adventure.

Our childhood was idyllic.  
We owned the world.

In tenth grade you changed.  
Your mother lost her job and  
You had to move across the tracks.

We stopped talking.  
The river that divided our houses  
Became an ocean.

Now, instead of giving away cooties,  
You give out STDs.  
And I doubt you can see the stars  
Through the haze that fills your mind.

You now use your swiftness  
To run from cops.  
You use the skills you learned from the Ninja  
Turtles  
To fight anyone who looks at you funny.

Meanwhile, I sit and read from my pocket  
dictionary  
And can't help but cry over how  
Your innocence faded like your green Converse  
That now dangle from the telephone line  
Outside your decrepit house.

And all I want  
Is to go back to the days  
When we were Kings of the Playground.

# The Best Advice Ever

Rachel Jones

At about four feet and nine inches, my mother stands over everyone in our house. Not literally. My brother and I have to tilt our heads downward in order to be face to face with her. However, she manages to stand the tallest. She demands respect without physical size.

I think she got her tough skin and strong spine from the Army. I was told they hand them out along with sweats and boots once you fall off the bus at training camp. She tells too many stories about the Army. According to her, they never feed you, everyone yells, they don't pay you that much, and your free time is spent cleaning floors with toothbrushes.

She says that in the Army, when you're not running, you're cleaning. You have to make your bed a certain way. You have to fold your clothes a certain way. The floors have to be scrubbed. The walls have to be cleaned. The ceilings have to be cleaned; the place has to be spotless. Her Army rants are wrapped up by her revealing that the only things she learned in the Army were how to shoot a gun and how to clean a toilet

The Army is not the sole origin of my mother's vast cleaning knowledge. Her mom was nothing short of a fanatic when

it came to having things cleaned. After school each day, the house had to be cleaned: the kitchen, the bedrooms, the bathrooms, the yard. Once my mother and her sisters had children, Grandma began teaching them how to clean. I never saw any mess in the kitchen, yet it was always being cleaned.

My grandma is a sweet, stern Southern woman, who spent most of her life in Mississippi. She lived in Louisiana for years after she met my grandfather in a place they both forget (or try not to remember), but they came to their senses and moved back to Amite County. Amite County has a few houses in it here and there—much different than New Orleans, my grandfather's home. I'm sure he likes it, though; there's plenty of grass for him to mow.

Due to her lack of negative or positive stories, I assume my mother feels indifferent towards moving to Amite County from Louisiana when she was younger. However, I know her precise feelings on cleaning. She knows how to clean, but she often doesn't want to. I once had the idea that she developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from the Army and Grandma.

My mother finds Grandma's footsteps unappealing, and

following them is, in her mind, the worst thing she could do. So, cleaning. I'm not required to clean a single thing in my house. But, sometimes Mom needs help.

One evening, she needed more help than usual, which forced me to be her assistant. The goal was to make the kitchen spotless, and my job was to shake out the tablecloth. Well, that day, cleaning was the most repulsive thing I could spend my time on. The tablecloth was my enemy; I yanked it off the table, flinging stale crumbs in every direction.

For reasons unknown to mankind, projectile stale crumbs pushed my mother into the abyss of insanity. I guess a roach died in her coffee that morning. She grabbed my arm, with the force of a man, and gave me the lecture of a lifetime. She yelled until tears poked their salty heads out of the corner of my eyes.

Only one thing was heard through her rant. In a fit of rage, she yelled "It don't matter if you mop floors for a living! You better be the best floor-mopper in the world!" It sounds absurd, but it remains the best advice I've ever been given. ▲



# Pizza and Hoagies

Brendan Ryan

First Place— Essay Competition

My father’s accent is scraped from the burnt crust found in the back of the brick ovens that fill Brooklyn, New York’s, pizzerias. His words are sharp like the points of the thin pizza crust, and his words often come out faster than he can think.

In our small town in rural Mississippi, people notice his thick accent. I can’t count the number of times I have been with my father and he’s been asked, “You ain’t from ’round here, are ya?” It’s always the country folk that ask, the people who speak like they were playing chubby bunny and got carried away. They are the men with a musky scent, no teeth, and speech that sounds like it is disfigured by a mouth full of marbles.

The Southern Belles have questions as well. When they come around, I can smell the sweet tea on their breath and see the questions brewing in their minds. They mark their territory with their sugar-water breath as compliments drip from their tongues like molasses, too sweet to swallow. “Why, darlin’,” they say to my father, “Do you have any kinfolk down here? I don’t think I’ve ever heard that delicious accent before. It’s so

enchanting.” They speak just like they’re from *Gone with the Wind*. My father thinks that Southern women elongate their words so they have time to think, to catch their tongues before they accidentally speak their minds, just like their mamas taught them. I wholeheartedly agree.

When we’re at home and the marble-mouths are out hunting or riding their four-wheelers, my father seasons the conversation with expletives, especially when he’s working in the garage. When he drops a wrench, the F-bomb falls with it. My father drops the S-word into the conversation when the computer doesn’t work, spicing up the discourse. My mother likes to joke that we could pay for a vacation if we started a swear jar whenever my father is in the garage. I think there’s truth to that.

My father’s humor is dry—like pizza crust left out too long—and his jokes are often misunderstood by outsiders of my family. He possesses a brute sarcasm many people don’t understand. He even likes to sour the conversation by calling me a *bastard*, and I kindly remind him that he was, in fact, married to my mother before I was conceived.

My mother’s accent comes right off the food trucks of her native Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Just like the food truck workers, she serves a delicious hoagie every time she talks. Her accent is more subtle than my father’s, but she dresses her discussions with wonderful neologisms and colloquialisms. The foremost of these is in her discussions on sandwiches.

My mother insists that all sandwiches are “hoagies.” She refuses to lower herself by calling sandwiches “subs,” “heroes,” or “grinders.” When my mother and I go into neighboring Louisiana for a day, she cringes every time she hears about the latest “po’ boy” shop. “It’s a *hoagie*,” she tells me. “I don’t want to catch you calling it anything else.”

My mom also likes nicknames. She laces her conversation with lovely invented sayings. In my family, all elderly people are generically referred to as “feeb,” short for “feeble.” When my mom comes back from Wal-Mart, she always complains to me about how many “feeb” were using those “cursed electric scooters.” “Brendan,” she tells me, “I swear, they must have been giving out free life-insurance in Wal-Mart today. It was

awful in there. I couldn’t get my cart through any of the aisles.”

My mom also has a bad habit of using derogatory expressions as terms of endearment. I know she’s talking to one of my aunts when she answers the phone with her customary “Yo, skank, how’s it going?” My brother and I have picked up the habit and like to refer to my mom as a “feeb,” when teasing her about her age. Instead of getting offended, she smiles at the compliment. In my house crude words are mercurial; they can be used in both fights and expressions of love.

My mom also likes to add the suffix “-er” to the end of words to indicate their function. The remote control is the “clicker” because it is used to click through the channels. It can also be called the “flipper.” When my mom streams Netflix on the television, the “clicker” becomes the “Netflixer.” My mom’s favorite “-er” word is “texter.” She will be driving, hear that she has received a text message, and say, “Brendan, could you check my texter for me? I think I have a new message.” It’s usually one of my aunts saying “How’s it going, skank?”

My accent is generic, lacking the deliciousness of my parents’ speech. I have no problem

calling “hoagies” “subs,” and I do not wield my father’s sharp accent. I don’t get asked where I’m from or if I have any “kinfolk” from around here. My accent is neither enchanting nor unique. However, I do use my

# Grandma’s Hands

Adina Harri

Honorable Mention— Poetry Competition

Deftly scrubbing, peeling, chopping, cubing  
Dirt-covered garden potatoes.

Sewing embellished curtains  
And flower-patterned pillowcases;

Mending my frayed jeans,  
Full of holes like Swiss cheese.

Washing clothes with skin-chafing soap;  
Pinning them up to flap in the balcony wind,  
Like pirate flags beating above the ocean.

Crossing her heart as she enters church,  
Left, right, up, down;  
Praying amongst kindled candles.

Swinging a beer-filled mug to her lips—  
Chilled relief after a work-crammed day.

Holding mine—  
Mountains and valleys of lines and wrinkles,  
Rough like sandpaper.

Carrying me when I fall;  
Guiding my path on life’s rocky road—  
Always there to pick me up.

mother’s coined phrase, and I do find myself cursing like my father on occasion. I possess a pleasant blend of my father’s pizza and my mother’s hoagies—and for that I am thankful. ▲



# Teachers’ Lounge

Tylicia Grove

I wish I could just retreat to the teachers’ lounge for the rest of the day was the only thought that Mrs. Shah had for the first half of class. “Okay, everyone, I need for you all to put away the Uno cards. You need to pay attention.” Mrs. Shah looked around the crowded room filled with students, mostly seniors who waited until the last minute to take the course. Some of the desks that were filled were reserved for the sophomores who were considered overachievers by the upperclassmen. Then she took a peek at the clock. It read 2:15 p.m., meaning that she had a whopping forty-five minutes left before she could leave the grounds of the campus. Mrs. Shah glanced past the window pane into the dreary, dimly lit parking lot. *Even the sun would hide from the students.*

Among the murmur of complaints, “Shut up! Why you here n-e way? We can’t even undastand you half tha time,” was what the anxious Geometry teacher heard.

*And if you paid attention in class for once, you’d realize I speak it better than you* was all she could think of as she listened to the broken dialect of each student. However, she knew better than to say this aloud. She remembered all her failed attempts to teach there. Feelings of defeat and shame filled her with a heaviness that

the even the clouds didn’t carry that day. *The broken batteries that were thrown are the least of my worries from the trick they pulled last time.*

“Who do you think you’re talking to? You need to respect her; she is here for a reason,” was what Mrs. Shah heard in her defense from one of her better students. Mrs. Shah paused, glanced up to gaze at Terry for his heroic words. The words seemed to be the most beautiful symphony to her ears at that moment. Those words almost gave her the courage to continue trying towards being more authoritative with the rest of the group, but it wasn’t enough to empower her to do so.

“Why don’t you go back over to the corner you little...” Mrs. Shah gasped. Never before had she heard a flood of obscenities leave the mouths of such young people. As the obscenities progressed, the light outside became dimmer and dimmer. *That’s it; I’ve got to buzz the office.* Her only line of defense against the war that brooded in her room was shot down by the loud screams that came intentionally from the mouths of the soldiers that sat in the desks. Leaving her without a way to notify the office of the incident that was taking place, they once again won, getting a chance to see the fourth altercation of the day at Cordele High. What Mrs.

Shah thought would turn into only a sharp-tongued verbal dispute turned into a knife fight. Mrs. Shah panicked and hyperventilated to the point where her mind swam with the scenes that unfolded before her. Before she knew it, she had been pushed onto the floor and had bruised her head on the cold tile. *It’s happening again. This time, they will kill me.*

Shah was helped up by one of the few students, Andre, who actually obeyed her few rules in class. She stared blankly at his mouth as he told her he’d go notify someone in the office. Yet, she didn’t hear him. The only words she heard were in her head. *I’ve got to get out of here.*

She fought to get through the crowd that laughed at the new bruise she had on the right of her forehead. She stared at them battered and bewildered at their obsession with causing pain. Yet, she pressed forward, as if leaving that room meant that she would find oxygen to finally breathe for the first time on the other side of the thick, wooden door. She ran until she reached the teachers’ lounge. With no one there to see her shame, she cried. “Why didn’t I just stay in India?” she whispered through sobs.

Verbal abuse was all she thought she would deal with in her first few weeks of teaching. Before she knew it, she’d had paper balls thrown at her. Later

paper balls were replaced by the batteries from the TI Inspire calculators the school owned. *I guess those didn’t leave enough bruises.* Next they decided to throw the actual calculators at Mrs. Shah. *There were nine of them;* she remembered being broken because three of her paychecks were used to purchase new ones. Then, Mrs. Shah sobbed a bit harder. *I couldn’t even eat my meal in peace* was the next thing she remembered. Mrs. Shah was never one to be mean to others, especially her students. Somehow she still could not figure out why they poisoned her water. The tears that streamed down her face reminded her of the eye drops they placed into her cup that day which led to her being in the hospital for days. The internal bleeding and shock left her too weak to be left alone for a week.

When she imagined life in the United States, it was never like this. She thought she wanted to teach. She thought she wanted to do a lot of things that involved her only ending up hurt in the end. One thing she knew for sure was that she had to leave the school; she had to leave town immediately. Without returning to the classroom to see the result of the fight, she grabbed her belongings from the locker on the yellow wall and walked out of the building, doing what she felt she should have done two years ago. ▲



## Afghan Contour

Olivia Spires

Sharpie and Pencil

## Aunt

Rachel Jones

I wish you’d keep your finger out of my ear while I’m asleep;  
Your nails hurt and Q-tips have a purpose.

I can’t do what you ask;  
I have yet to learn how to “quite cryin’,”  
how to fix my hair, and how to dress like a girl.

But, even though I hate ruffles,  
I’ll wear that dress you put on the bed  
because I’m sorry Uncle likes Budlight  
as much as he likes you.

When the sun creeps in, so will he,  
to fill the empty sheets.  
I wish you’d keep you finger out of my  
ear, but we’re alone here,

so, I guess it’s okay.



# Roots

Adina Harri

Some people are like pine trees. Their roots run straight and narrow, diving deep into a chunk of earth until strong winds or lumberjacks knock them down. Others are like far-reaching oaks. Their roots explore every crevice of dirt, stretching their arms past earthworms and nodules into unfamiliar territory. Some people live their whole lives on the same soil, entwined within one community. Others spread their lives in a variety of directions: north, south, west, east—or somewhere in between. Like the oak trees, my roots extend far beyond my hometown of Starkville, Mississippi. My roots reach into clays of different colors, each shaded separate from the rest. Each section of clay guides my roots, molding me.

Originally, my tree found roots in Stillwater, Oklahoma, a region even flatter than the Mississippi Delta. I survived in a tiny apartment with my parents, first-generation Albanian immigrants and college students. As a toddler, I was oblivious to the struggles they encountered, caring for a small child on a measly monthly income, struggling to assimilate into a culture unlike their own. Without help from my godparents, Mr. Ross and “Grandma Marie,” my roots would have lacked a strong foundation to nourish their growth. Love from my parents and my godparents nurtured me into a

toddling tot. I grew up happy, not through material possessions or a luxurious home, but through love. I still remember sitting in Grandma Marie’s lap listening to stories of Abraham’s sons, Noah’s ark, and David’s battle; I remember sleeping over, cuddled under Winnie-the-Pooh blankets while waiting for my little sister to arrive; I remember eating at famed Eskimo Joe’s and ordering cheese-covered curly fries with Mr. Ross after Sunday morning church; I remember building a snowman outside our apartment on my first White Christmas. These little memories had a powerful impact: They fostered the love my tree used to flourish.

After three years spent enveloped in love, my origins were uprooted. My family left the flat, familiar soil of Oklahoma for the rolling sand dunes of California. My roots adapted, replanting on a suburban, cement-walled house on the outskirts of Torrance. Although Grandma Marie’s stories and Mr. Ross’ hugs no longer comforted me, Disney Land and San Diego beach easily distracted my four-year-old mind. The first day of kindergarten erased my lingering blues. I met my best friend, Caitlin, played freeze tag on the playground, and laughed at the brown-eyed guy sitting next to me in class. Still, I never forgot the Oklahoma love that raised me strong.

Now, a different kind of

love surrounded me—a love for learning. My kindergarten classroom was an early Christmas present, teaching me numbers and letters that whirled together to create words and symbols I could understand. I read everything that crossed my eyes—billboard signs, restaurant menus, newspaper clippings, and Grandma Marie’s Old Testament stories. I absorbed information like a dehydrated desert sponge in an attempt to quench my thirst for knowledge, a desire I have to this day.

My learning was interrupted by an unforeseen dinner-table announcement: We were flying overseas, moving back to Albania, the land of my heritage and my true roots. There, I was exposed to a different kind of learning—a holistic cultural experience unlike any I had known before. Grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles surrounded me for the first time in my life, teaching me: not with letters and symbols, but with gestures and actions. I learned how to dance the traditional Albanian *valle* and greet guests with two kisses on the cheek, learned the best cooking in the house, how to cross busy city streets on my way to the park, to finish my plate of food so that it sparkled like new, and to celebrate life with friends and family. I learned the values of hard work and sacrifice through my grandmothers, who gave

up everything for their families: Nëna Vangja, who cared for her crippled daughter, serving her on hands and feet; Nëna Dhorka, who worked tirelessly as a seamstress from the time she was a teenage wife to the day she became an aged, wrinkled woman. I learned what it felt like to be enveloped in love, surrounded by family that shared my roots.

One winter day, this bubble burst. While my family lounged in the living room, exchanging bits of small talk on a stormy afternoon, Daddy blew through the door, shaking off raindrops and frost like a wet dog. He sat my younger sister and me down on each knee and inquired, “How would you two like to move back to America?” Remembering exciting kindergarten classrooms and Disney Land characters, I said yes. America was home; it held a piece of my history. Although it was difficult to leave my Albanian roots behind, our compact family of four boarded the transatlantic airplane, loaded with hefty luggage, good wishes, and lessons learned—lessons crucial to my survival in the heart of the South.

I still remember my sister’s first words upon reaching Starkville, Mississippi: “This is America?” Lost were the sunny days of Southern California; found were the sticky, muggy days of Northern Mississippi.



## Scars

Nick Elder

Honorable Mention – Photography Competition  
Photograph

Gone was the language of my Albanian ancestors; alive was the distinct Southern dialect. Despite the initial culture shock, I learned to love the South. I attended Overstreet Elementary School as an eager third grader, and learned more than just multiplication tables—I learned to say “yes, ma’am” and “no, sir,” I learned that “y’all” is the plural “you” form absent in the standard English language. Growing up in Mississippi, I learned to appreciate the slowed lifestyle—days spent riding four wheelers in the woods, fishing on lazy Saturday afternoons, eating everything deep-fried: fried pickles, fried green tomatoes, fried corn fritters, and the classic fried chicken. I learned to love differences—it doesn’t matter if people are from the North or the South, from Oklahoma or

California, Europe or America: We all share the same roots. We’re all human.

Each place I’ve lived in and visited has influenced me, taught me lessons, and shaped my tree’s high-reaching branches. My widespread roots push me to grow taller and stronger, to achieve my goals. Each section of clay I’m a part of contributes to my education as a world citizen—without my diverse roots, I wouldn’t have grown into the adventurous person I am today. Because of my roots, I appreciate differences, and I’m not afraid to step out of my comfort zone into unknown territory. Each time I do, I’m proud to say that I’ve added another place for my roots, another place I belong—and I can’t wait to see where my roots will next find fertile soil. ▲



## Clock

Sabrina Moore

The ticking tendrils tiptoe across the number-speckled countenance,  
Trapping time in its tocks.

The curve of the six sees the break of dawn,  
The fleeting seconds of quiet before day drifts from dark.

The quiet curve of two  
Spies the scorching sun,  
Shining in the day's hottest heat.

A lazy hour hand atop the twelve  
Peers out at a moonlit mirage of the world,  
Shining under lunar light.

The speedy second hand spots  
Every drop of a dime,  
Every wink or blink,  
Every twinkle of the eye.

And still the lazy hour hand spins  
On its minute-marked face,  
Watching the world  
From its glass-covered case.



**Two-Face Vase**  
Ross Berry

Honorable Mention – Sculpture Competition  
Wire

## Lost Girl

Quinn Massengill

Little Lucy Harrison,  
So much smaller,  
So much older,  
So much poorer,  
So much *quieter*  
Than everybody else.

We were in sixth grade together.  
In seventh, I wondered if you had gone away.  
But there you were,  
Your silence somehow even quieter than before.

In eighth grade, you were always changing,  
Trying to metamorphosize into a butterfly,  
Never finding the beauty  
In who you already were.

I thought once to tell you  
How pretty your hair looked.  
The next day I found you,  
And it was cropped short,  
No longer bright auburn,  
But bleached blonde.  
And the week after,  
It was stained as black as ink.

I still remember you,  
Not for the few words that passed your lips,  
And not for the words others said about you  
That spread like wildfire,  
But for the words you always kept inside.  
And for the words I said,  
Or to my shame,  
Mostly kept hidden in my mind,  
Rather than using them  
To defend you from the hordes.

Now, I wonder, Little Lucy Harrison,  
Are you still lost?  
I'm sorry I did not do more  
To help you find the girl I saw every day,  
But you never stopped searching for.



**The Eye of Smaug**  
Liyah Smith

Honorable Mention – Drawing Competition  
Charcoal and Pastels

## Lanterns

Nick Elder

Second Place – Photography Competition  
Photograph



**Morning Sea Salt**  
Christina Legradi

First Place – Photography Competition  
Photograph



**Swan Love**  
Stearman McCalister  
Photograph





## Skull Kid

Lauren Chatelain

First Place – Painting Competition  
Watercolor and Pencil



## Color in a Dark World

Kristen Conguista

Honorable Mention – Photography Competition  
Photograph



## Coast Life

Michael McMillan

Photograph

## La Chica Nueva<sup>1</sup>

Jena Dees

Second Place—Poetry Competition

Usually Star Students got to take  
care of the class pet,  
But Mrs. Franklin asked me to  
take care of you.

You:

“The New Girl”

“The Spanish Girl”

“The One That Can’t Even Speak  
English.”

Learning Spanish became my  
new hobby,

But a lot could be shared through  
a simple smile.

We both liked dress-up and  
dollies and daisy chains

Out on the playground.

Soon, we were inseparable.

With you came Sofía, Adriana,  
Guadalupe, and Lucy.

And it turned out that it was not I  
helping you make friends;

Rather, you all receiving me  
As *una amiga y una hermana*.<sup>2</sup>

Our young ears did not  
understand

The hushed whispers  
Between the teachers –

“*Illegal Immigrant*”

“*Pylar vs. Doe*”

“*Day-crossers*”

I asked my mom why they called  
your *madre*<sup>3</sup> an alien.

Mexico was another planet?

Mommy explained that everyone  
wasn’t as lucky as me.

I didn’t understand what she  
meant

Until I invited you and your  
sisters and your cousins

To my seventh birthday party.

When we went to pick you up,  
I couldn’t believe that “house”  
was your home.

You were astonished at my  
“*casa*,”<sup>4</sup>

And I could not believe  
You had never known anyone  
with a pool.

When you gave me your gifts  
Wrapped up the best as could be  
with tissue paper and tape,

I was astonished to see

Your favorite Polly Pocket,

Guada’s only hair ribbon,  
Lucy’s cherished Beanie Baby,

And a card

That had “*Feliz Cumpleaños!*”<sup>5</sup>  
Scribbled in pink crayon.

<sup>1</sup> The New Girl

<sup>2</sup> A friend and a sister

<sup>3</sup> Mother

<sup>4</sup> House

<sup>5</sup> Happy Birthday



## Drop Dead Gorgeous

Kay Burnside

Acrylic



## The Deep

Erin Graves

Second Place – Painting Competition  
Fabric Paint



## A Skin of Ice

Joseph Messer

How anybody lives is a mystery:  
Everyone stands on thin ice.  
Yet I will dance tonight, swinging a woman  
Whose eyes glisten like glaciers.

Both bodies inflected differently  
Rotate on a one-inch blade  
Revolving in a blur of motion.  
Twisted, white limbs swirl and twirl  
Like dancing ballerina girls.

How long until we reach escape velocity?

Bodies become birds  
And take flight.  
The Atlantic is under us now;  
We lose sight of a land  
That was never ours.  
Ice on the shore  
Glisten back like blues eyes.

We'll glide out of sight  
Until morning when weight returns  
And we're back, standing  
On a skin of ice.



## The Skies Proclaim

Rhiannon Hancock

Photograph



## Autumn Leaf

Stearman McCalister

Photograph

## Farewell to the Day

Stephanie Smith

Third Place – Painting Competition  
Acrylic



## Red Meniscus

Michael McDonald

Third Place – Photography Competition  
Photograph



## Hellboy Camille Dent

First Place – Sculpture Competition  
Ceramic



## Memories

Candace Wheeler

Honorable Mention – Painting Competition  
Acrylic



## Foxy

Claire Caprio

Honorable Mention – Painting Competition  
Acrylic on Wood Panel



## The Black Widow

Elise Cannon

They called her “The Black Widow,”  
But in class they said, “Ms. Charlotte.”

Her long, bony limbs moved with  
Delicacy and purpose as she fastened

Thin, white letters together on  
the blackboard.  
She spun short, curled webs  
From her scalp in mangled clusters.

Her voice was a soft whisper,  
Daring them to make a sound,  
To miss a word.  
No one spoke in that room.  
Every little back was straight and still.

A poisonous spider lurked  
In their midst, ready to strike.

The Black Widow’s feet  
Stepped on creaky floorboards.  
The air felt thick and heavy  
On the children’s backs.  
Smoke filled the room,  
Made it hard to breathe,  
Cobwebs grew in the corners  
Like the weeds.

One day, Debbie,  
With straight A’s and straight laces,  
Gave in to the lullaby of  
The chalk: *tap, scratch, Tap, tap, scra-tch.*  
The Black Widow took the  
Dusty paddle from its rusted hook and  
Called the sleeping child to the front.

Debbie’s eyes welled up.  
Her short gasps moved with her  
Through rows of desks  
Until they became earsplitting sobs  
That echoed in the students’ minds.

Every child held his breath  
As The Black Widow raised her paddle.  
The moment she struck, the sobbing ceased.  
The child’s shock came through her voice,  
“That didn’t hurt.”

The room erupted. The sun came in.  
The heavy air flew from the window,  
And laughter pressed through every lip.  
Ms. Charlotte’s paddle destroyed The Black Widow.  
Even after the second thump.

## Dozing Off to Fill Grain

Liyah Smith

Marker







**Blue Bird**  
Erin Graves  
Watercolor and Sharpie



**Animal Spirit Mask**  
Lauren Chatelain  
Second Place – Sculpture Competition  
Clay, Acrylic, Balsa Foam, and Feathers



**Love**  
John Johnson  
Acrylic

## The Sweet Sound of Southern Syllables

Quinn Massengill

“G rowin’ up, I always called my pa ‘Daddy,’ just like he did his daddy and his daddy did his daddy and his daddy’s daddy did his daddy. I s’pose it’s been that way since the beginnin’ ’a time, ’cept I know the English language ain’t been around that long.”

This is my father’s native tongue. Not that my mother is any less Southern than he is; she just happens to be a language teacher. Here at school away from home, I have a new tongue in my mouth and a new vocabulary in my mind. If proper grammar is my pair of nice, new “church shoes,” then Southern slang is my old, worn-out, beloved pair of sneakers I wear only in the comfort of home. I’ve always been taught proper grammar and, after devouring thousands of books, have acquired an extensive vocabulary; however, such language simply sticks out like a sore thumb at home as much as Southern slang would in a research paper.

Back to my daddy. He’s quite a remarkable man. He is the most honest and hardworking man I have ever met, with a mouth that matches his north Mississippi roots. I never, ever would have imagined my father as a politician, let alone a state

representative. I remember a time when I wouldn’t have imagined my father’s ever uttering the word “representative,” but low and behold, he became one. I guess when your opponent is named something like Jimmy John Shooter, it isn’t too important who’s more “country.”

In Hickory Flat, Mississippi, where both my dad and I grew up, you never put a “g” at the end of a word. That’s just too much for your lips to carry in the sweltering Southern summers. Back home, “well” is where water comes from; everything else is “good,” and we sign checks with “pins,” not “pens.” At night we turn “own” the lights, stretching out our i’s until the cows come home. When somebody’s in trouble “over yunder,” we make sure to “give ’em sum hep.” When you can step on the head of your shadow, it’s *dinner* time, and in the evenin’ we eat *supper*.

Around those parts, everything outside “shaw is purty,” except in winter when we have to build a “ferr” to keep us warm. In north Mississippi, we drink cokes, and a pop is a smack in the face. Little kids better slap a “ma’am” or “sir” after every “yes” and “no” or their daddy will “shurr” nuff tear them up.” On “Sundee’s” we go to church and eat dinner with my

momma’s momma. “Mundee” through “Fridee,” mommas and daddies go to work and kids go to school. On “Saturdee’s,” the “old folks” get up early and the “young uns” sleep all day long.

More than anything else, I always remember the one exception to Southern speak. There are a few things in the South that are held with reverence befitting the Ark of the Covenant. One is *singing in church*, which even the stuffiest of crotchety old men stand and salute with silence, and my own daddy even takes part in with a whispering, nearly voiceless song. Another is *death*, where everybody who knew anybody who was an acquaintance of the deceased person attends the funeral and women stifle sobs and men shed a few shimmering tears.

Perhaps above all else that is holy to my daddy is a single word. Of all the titles of endearment given to many members of our family, it is the only one that is never slung about, always drawn out and pronounced in its fullness and glory. “Grandmother,” slow and still passes his lips, and reflected in his face, I know that I am seeing the spirit of a woman I have never met. ▲



# As Lonesome as the Moon

Conor Hultman

Third Place— Short Story Competition

He sat in his cracked leather armchair, facing the window. A withered hand rested on a clouded tumbler, half-full with whiskey and ice, which had served him well over the years. And the years were many. The lines in his face, like the creases in a folded quilt, crept down from the temple above his brow to the jowls at the corners of his mouth. His gray hair was swept from his face and fell down the nape of his spotted neck. His eyes, clouded like the whiskey, but also cold like the ice, were set on the window. The rest of the room was as chipped and faded and layered with dust as the old man and his chair. The door, high and made of rich mahogany, had scuffs on the edges; the knob was tarnished. On either side of the door were desks stacked with papers and envelopes, topped with coins and letter-openers to weigh them down. A shelf to the man's right held decade-old liquors, kept in green and brown bottles corked with jeweled stoppers. Above the shelf was a simple white wall clock, long-since broken. That was okay. In here, he didn't have to know the time.

Past the window, his two grandsons were playing in the garden. Among the bushes and flower beds they were dodg-

ing and weaving around each other, like they were caught in a wind or dancing to an unheard tune. They were aiming cap pistols at each other, taking turns rolling to avoid the "shots" and swinging out an arm to "shoot." Occasionally, one would awkwardly fall down and straighten his legs and loll his tongue. Then the other would pick him up, both beaming cheerfully. The old man didn't smile, but put the tumbler to his mouth and drank.

Finishing his cool draft, the man wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. The pieces of ice in the glass clinked together. He brought the tumbler down from his face and examined it. It was still beautiful, although smudged from years of use. All the faces of the tumbler reflected the man's stone gaze on top of the whiskey, as if trapped in amber. It was a wedding present from his father-in-law. He remembered the reception. The ballroom was decorated with streamers and balloons, the tables set with deep purple tablecloths and embroidered napkins, bordered by sterling silver forks and knives. A massive crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling. He could see his face in the marble floor. Everything glittered, like a cave full of precious

gems. But most precious of all, his wife sat at a table in the middle of the dining area, seated between her father and some family friends. Her red hair tumbled down her fair face and roared down her straight back like a waterfall. Her full lips wore a slight smile. Her eyes, green and twinkling, like emeralds, looked at one of the faces beside her, blinked, then flitted to him. She flashed a wide smile, her teeth gleaming like carved ivory. She turned back as a waiter brought the main course on a pewter platter. Setting it down, the waiter drew off the top, revealing several steaming, glazed doves—

Doves.

The old man gripped the chair tightly, his knuckles white, trying to get back to the room. But already he was falling back into that vision, cloudy like the whiskey, but also cold like the ice. He fought, in vain, to pull himself away from it, until he found himself facing that clear morning sky that haunted his dreams, asleep and awake. That same forest, crowded with naked trees trimmed with frost, that he had revisited a million times in his mind. His brother walked slowly ahead of him. They both carried shotguns. His brother had his slung over the shoulder. The

man had his bent downwards, the butt pressed closely to the side of his chest. As they trekked through the woods, an aura of stillness seemed to coat the air like wet, warm paint, filling their ears and making it hard to think. The sun, bright and distant, was only a little under half over the horizon. Birds should have been chirping, but maybe they had learned better. They worked their way closer to the edge of the lake where they had set the decoys. Almost there now, he could see lake through the stark, bare trees.

And there were the doves. Hopping around the decoys, they jerked their heads inquisitively up at them, sensing something different without deciding what. His brother looked back at the man, then began at an even pace to swing his shotgun off his shoulder. The man swung his gun from his side towards the doves in one fluid motion. Just like it had been, just like it had to be, he saw himself slip his hold of the gun and clutch the trigger as he tried to pull it back up. The shot boomed out as loud as the bells of God's grandfather clock. The doves lifted up their slight brown bodies and flew away.

His brother fell on his knees and slumped backward, his hair

spread out on the snow. Rushing over, he could see his brother's hands draw up around his neck. The man crouched over him, and saw the blood seeping up through his fingers and out onto the snow, staining it crimson. His eyes swam up at the man, wide with shock, like two colossal, looming moons. His brother opened his mouth and tried to speak, but only a sick gurgle came, and more blood spilled over the corner of his lips. As sudden and powerful and frightening as the shot itself, the man started to scream. The scream rattled his whole frame, squeezing his lungs and pushing down on his stomach. His brother's face was gray and drawn, his mouth smeared red. When the man picked him up, his brother's neck slipped backward, and the blood flowed quickly, almost like a river. His brother's face was tightening, then slackening, then tightening again; but always the eyes fixed upward at the man, scared. So scared, always.

The old man sat slumped in his armchair, facing the window but not looking at it, not really looking at anything. His grip on the tumbler had long since loosened, and he held onto it with the tips of his fingers. The room had that same suffocating silence of

the winter woods, choking and burying his thoughts, threatening to rub him out. Blinking and refocusing his eyes, he looked past the window. Outside, his grandsons were still play-fighting with their cap pistols. The taller one drew up his gun and pointed it directly at the other's head, pulling the trigger. The smaller one fell down, splaying out his legs and arms. The old man looked onward, feeling his lungs draw tight while his stomach sank. He made no motion on his face; it was as bleak and pitted as the face of Antarctica. The room was as lonesome as the Moon.

Then, from the corner of the window, the old man saw his little granddaughter stomp out to her brothers on the lawn. She grabbed the orange-tipped cap pistols out of their hands and stood between them, pouting. The smaller one drew himself off the ground, and they both shuffled sheepishly around her, apologizing out of the corners of their mouths. At that, she grinned brightly. The old man permitted himself a small smile; then, he drew his attention back through the window into the dusty room, put the tumbler back to his mouth, and drank. ▲



# Mimi's Museum

Nick Elder

Third Place— Essay Competition

Bones and fossils line the haphazard metal tool closet in the garage. Mummies sit spine to spine in the oak armoire that stands in the corner of the living room watching years pass as every new layer of dust settles.

My grandmother is a native Texan living in Wadsworth, Illinois. Her name is Elizabeth, but she is called Mimi or Yiayia by a growing horde of grandchildren. Besides being a world-class traveler, gourmet chef, and independent tutor, she is a collector of artifacts—tangible history.

One summer afternoon, as my cousin and I play ping-pong in the basement of her house, I realize a screw in the table is loose, the obvious source of my missed shots. I run upstairs to ask Mimi if she has a flat-head screwdriver so I can fix the ping-pong table and take back my rightful place as grandmaster of the paddle in the family. She leaves the peach half-sliced on the cutting board and heads out to the garage. I, however, am distracted by the nine-month old cousin attempting to eat Cheerios off the yellow tray of his highchair. Mimi comes back with a rust-tinged screwdriver with wooden handle. It feels old. Always a nosy kid, I ask her where she got it. She just smiles.

She takes me out to the garage, glancing over the white Lexus and black Buick, but focusing on the beige metal tool shed in the corner. She opens the doors wide, her smile even wider, inviting me to come do more than look. Slight confession: the “bones,” “fossils,” and “mummies” are actually tools and books, but they hold just as many stories when in Mimi's hands.

I hold the tools as I would a newborn baby, wary of their strength—amazed at their age. She instead grabs them, thrusting them upon me, confident in their power. She doesn't need any encouragement. She leaps into stories. Her eyes glaze over as years past come flooding back. A few tears spill over the corner of her eyes, too. She picks up a wrench, large and dusky gray. It shouts MADE IN THE USA. She remembers her father using it to fix his Model A truck, leaning for hours over the engine of his first car that he babied for thirty-seven years after. The spade that sits in the corner was the one he used to show her how to grow tomatoes, as she still does. Fresh soil from the small garden bed outside clings to the tip—old tools for old lessons. She hands me a hammer. The

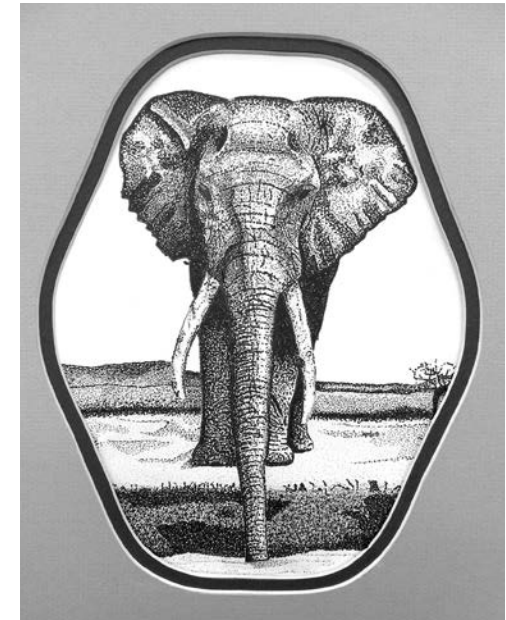
head is dented, but the handle is worn smooth. Her father used it to build her a bassinet the week before she was born. That was seventy years ago, but the bassinet still lives, its smooth walnut waves gracing the room I sleep in when I visit.

We head back inside to the living room. The glass-faced armoire looms large. Usually I don't dare go closer than three feet, but as Mimi turns the key—the one with the tassel that always sits in the lock on the glass doors—I can't help but to be sucked in. I shuffle closer and smell undeniable age. Not old-people age, but yellowed-pages, cracked-leather, and dusty-memories age. On the front shelf is a book, no larger than a regular-sized picture, bound in brown worn leather, “Autographs” printed in gold leaf. The only thing she says is that it was her grandfather's, uncle's, and father's before it came to her. Books can tell their own stories.

I am scared to breathe as she sets the book in my hands, worried that the mere stirring of air will crumble the dog-eared tea-colored pages. Names tumble spill out: Lindberg, Dempsey, Temple, Chaplin, and Hepburn. I move on to a set of encyclopedias. I pick out J-K,

and recognize Mimi's scrawl in the margins near Jamestown, juggernaut, and kangaroo as I flip through the pages. It's the same tall, tight writing that has adorned many a Christmas and birthday card. I move on to a cup of nib-tipped pens with wooden paintbrush shafts. They are the kind that you have to dip into an ink-well. I imagine how messy it must have been to write essays—and shudder.

Four generations of stories and artifacts pass through my hands in a mere twenty minutes, I am left in a daze. I eventually resume my ping-pong match with my cousin (I lose of course) before helping make dinner, clearing the table, and trudging off to my lonely blow-up mattress upstairs. Before I fall asleep I wonder what things of mine will be passed down to my great grandchildren, and what stories will accompany them. What things of mine will inspire, will link my world with theirs, a bond across time, a greeting from the grave. I get as far as my name before I pass out in a tangled mess of flowered sheets exposing bare feet and a faint smile. ▲



African Oasis

Candace Wheeler

First Place – Drawing Competition  
Stipple

## Neighbor

Rachel Jones

You planted your  
weathered sandals into  
our cement porch,  
taking your familiar,  
desperate stance.

Your skin harbored a  
fellowship of grime.  
Sweat stained, you knocked  
on another door that was,  
for you, to never open.

I smelled you  
through the walls.  
The epitome of a beggar,  
you left with empty hands  
and charred palms,

unaware that I  
sat watching through the window.



# Lily

Nick Elder

## Second Place— Short Story Competition

Peter was a little more than a lot embarrassed to admit that he had finally succumbed to the idea that he should get a dog; he wasn't the type to contradict himself. He had played high school basketball for four years just to prove a point to his cousin—who lived two hundred miles away. He hated basketball, but his cousin sure wasn't going to find out. He was the same way with mushrooms. On a date sinking faster than the Titanic, he had told a girl that he didn't like mushrooms, just so they had something in common. There had never been a second date, but since then he never ordered entrées with mushrooms. This was not a problem anymore. He hardly left his studio apartment and had fallen out of touch with nearly all his friends. Peter had been checked out of the “real world” for a little over a year.

He hadn't eaten for one week after it happened. He wasn't allowed to live by himself until three months had passed. He spent three hours a week sitting on an over-fluffed couch in a stuffy room, talking to a balding Indian. His therapist, Dr. Kruthrapali, tended to peer over his frameless narrow lenses whenever Peter wouldn't talk. This happened often, and, as a result, Peter felt his therapy hadn't gone anywhere. That's why, on the anniversary of the

storm, he went to the pound. Several years earlier, he had seriously considered getting a dog, but his allergies that followed him since childhood prevented it. Now he was fairly certain that he had outgrown his allergies and absolutely certain that he needed a puppy.

The brakes on Peter's battered Toyota Corolla announced his presence as he squealed to a stop in the flat gravel parking lot in the rear of the county rescue shelter. He glanced in the rear-view mirror, his sunken steel eyes daring him to stare back, before reaching down and pulling the emergency brake. As he trudged into the door an electronic chime greeted him before a raspy voice from behind a reinforced window in the back called, “Be right wicha, baby.”

A little woman came out of the back wearing steel-toed boots, worn khaki Dickies work pants, a blue button up with the sleeves rolled up above the elbow, and a name patch sewn onto the left breast-pocket that read *Eleanor* stitched in cursive. Her wiry gray hair was in a tight ponytail and a cigarette was tucked behind her right ear, disregarding the NO SMOKING signs plastered all over the wall.

“You here to volunteer or adopt?”

“Ma'am?”

“I ain't yur mother. Call me Ellie. Now are you here to volunteer or adopt?”

“Uh ... adopt.”

“Ya sure don't sound so sure there, son.”

“Adopt.” This time with more confidence.

“Fill this out,” Ellie said.

She slid a pink form across the counter to him and took a seat in swivel chair that squeaked more than his car's brakes. Peter could feel her sizing him up as he filled out his basic information. He became more conscious of his hunched shoulders, un-combed hair, stained hoodie, and the fact that a five o'clock shadow was working its way up his face even though it was 11:00 am. When he handed the semi-completed form back to her, she held it at arm's length and peered at it down her nose, as if she were wearing glasses.

“Peter, huh?”

“Yes, ma'am, I mean, Ms. Ellie.”

“Ain't no *Miss* in it, either. Just plain ol' Ellie 'll do just fine for me, thank you very much.” She put a little emphasis on the last *thank you* part. “Now, before I let you see my babies, how's about you tell me why you really here. I sure wasn't born yesterday an' I know you sufferin' from somethin', so tell me what it is so we can get on wit this bidness.”

Peter was taken aback. This lady sure didn't mince words, but he liked her, so he decided to yield to her inquiries. He didn't realize that this was the first person he had told outside of his parents and Dr. Kruthrapali.

“Do you remember the storm a year back that cut out all the power?” She nodded. “Well, my little sister and I were driving down to get a generator from my uncle, and it was still thundering and lighting, and she was driving... .” At this point his voice started to crack. “And I guess we just didn't see the tree that had fallen across the road... and then she swerved... and the car flipped... and I woke up in an ambulance and... she... she... just wasn't there.” Ellie's face hadn't changed. “It's all my fault! She shouldn't have been driving, hell, we shouldn't have been out in that weather at all, but I let her convince me and—”

“Stop that this instant! I won't hear of it.” She paused. “I understand why you're here, but I'm 'fraid I ain't got nothing for ya. I really wish I could help... .”

Peter stood there for a few seconds after her voice trailed off. He couldn't believe it. All this way, all this convincing, debating, arguing, anguishing, and he didn't have a chance. He turned on his heel and marched back out to his car. He fumbled with his keys for a second, before regaining his composure and pulling back out on the highway. Ellie watched him from the window, a handkerchief held limply in her right hand.



## Weeping Angel

Kristen Conguista

Photograph

Peter didn't know where he was going. He just drove. Sometimes he felt this was more therapeutic than therapy, driving with the passenger window down, radio off, and one hand on the steering wheel and the other clutching the emergency brake. After an hour he decided to head to the little country cemetery he knew all too well. Within ten minutes he was in the farthest back plot, kneeling beside the rose bush that stated to creep toward the smooth quartz stone with a lily carved above the name *Grace Lily Greene*. He didn't say anything, didn't adjust the flowers he meticulously placed on the grave every Tuesday, didn't think; he just sat.

Eventually the call of a mocking bird brought him back to his senses. He didn't know how much time had passed. He was content to listen. A steady whimper drifted through his consciousness. Peter's first

instinct was to assume that it was him, but then he checked himself. He wasn't crying. The sound was coming from the rosebush.

Peter edged his way around the bush, and froze. Lying on its side in the grass was a dirty, white and gray puppy. He began to size her up when he saw her back left leg had an extra bend that should not have been there. She whimpered as he inched his way closer to her refuge beneath the thorns. He gingerly lifted her into his hoodie and marched back to the car with a new purpose.

He drove to the animal shelter, this time with one hand on the steering wheel and one hand cradling the puppy.

Three hours, a cast, two parasite shots, a bath, and a meal later, the puppy was sleeping and Peter began to fill out another adoption form. In the blank he wrote “Lily.” ▲



# A Pariah's Travelogue

Rachel Jones

Honorable Mention— Essay Competition

The air on Summit Street seems to be an entity its own. Somewhere between the bar and the liquor store the air gets heavier. It's always thick with the odor of grass, oil, and old men who are too drunk to remember how bad their knees are. Summit Street in McComb, Mississippi, is the long stretch that leads me to my neighborhood which is one of the many "projects" that branches from this center. This compilation of pavement and tar serves as the core to a mass of bleak depression, which, against my will, I'm a part of. Often, I need a ride home, and when the drivers ask where I live, I whisper, "Community Parks," and they ask, "On Summit Street?" Regret blossoms on their faces. On porches, babies squeal and fidget in rancid diapers. Stained whiskey bottle shards and shreds of candy wrappers collect in the brown grass. Even with a picturesque cerulean sky, a grimy ambience still lingers and it seems to find its way into the wan faces that litter my trail home.

Three ways are available to enter Summit Street—beneath the bridge or on one of the two streets that make an

intersection with the bridge. On the corner, a rusty gas station sits and watches. This gas station screams "old South" with its one gas pump and the toothless attendant, who waits in his tattered overalls. It's obvious that the station used to be a shed.

To an eye like mine, Summit Street houses enticing buildings. Near the street's entrance the old barber shop rests with its faded title "Afro City" and its ancient poster encouraging protest against oppression. Farther down, the abandoned apartments stand, decorated with graffiti on their boarded windows. Even farther down, the laundry-matt holds its ground with its box tv and squeaky, rolling laundry baskets. The only one I've ever entered is the laundry-matt. The buildings resemble a dump, but they hold an authenticity that nothing can forge. Every man and woman who's marched, protested, and cried down this street has left their passions on the floors and in the walls of these buildings, giving them personality.

My mother has ordered me to never walk down Summit Street alone. However, she is unaware of its lure. I've never hoped to see what I've set eyes upon there:

casual dealings, addiction feedings, selfish abandonments, acts of blind passion. It's all a stark contrast to my dreams of mini-mansions, picket fences, endless love, and green pastures. A look at this street leaves me with little hope that stability and contentment even exist.

But somewhere in the air I find rejuvenation. Amongst thieves and outcasts, I feel my burdens carried away in the breeze. Sometimes I'll slip out the back door while the moon floods the city with light and wander until I'm ready to return home. Shadows watch over me. Underneath yellow lights, wisps of foul smoke blow past me, and my heart adopts an abnormal thump, yet I'm not afraid. The same weary eyes that make me cautious during the day become my protectors at night. I'm sewn into their quilt of wanderers and become my own person. My theory is that the air is heavy with the confessions of so many lost souls.

Summit Street oozes history and serves as a shelter for the lost; however, it also holds a reputation. It's surrounded by three separate public housing complexes and it's infested with cheap night clubs.

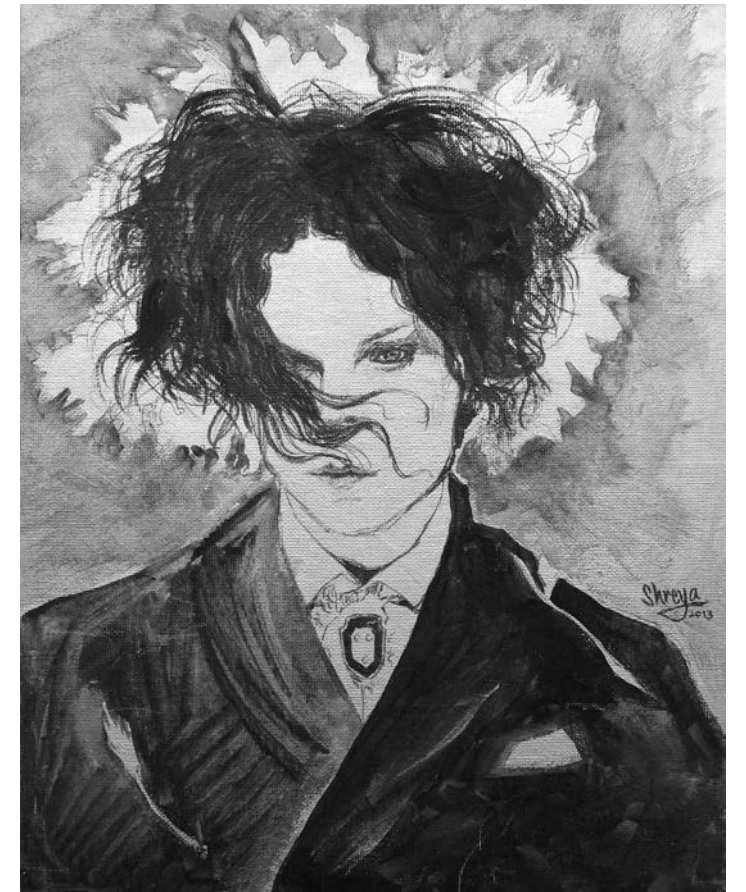
Jack White

Shreya Gunapati

Best in Show  
Pen and Sharpie

I'll never forget my first night out with my best friend. Caleb was about my height and had long, straight brown hair. I had never been to Applebee's, so his plan was to pick me up and buy me dinner. I remember I threw on a "McComb Tigers" hoodie and jumped into his truck. He said, "I told my dad where I was going. He asked me not to." I tried to hold it in, but shame crept onto my face. "I told him I'd be fine."

I can't help it. Summit Street has been my home for eighteen years and I've grown into it. Here, I've felt alone and ostracized. I've felt targeted and afraid. Yet, also here, I've felt safe. I've felt free to think and see what I often don't dare to look at. I know it's an area to evade for those who know where they're going, but for those of us already here the future remains murky. I'll maintain my love-hate relationship with Summit Street and my neighborhood that juts out from it like a tumor. It's been a rest stop for those gone astray, but for me, it's a road home. ▲



## Mother's Memories

Elise Cannon

Honorable Mention— Poetry Competition

She furrows her brows and tries  
To recollect events of years past.  
Her voice recalls its Southern twang  
As she re-lives the bits that remain with her.

I wasn't there the Christmas  
Santa left Aunt Lynn coal,  
Nor seen Pepaw strike a rabbit's head,  
Telling Mama to stop her hollerin'  
Because it was part of life.

But I can see the images in my mind:  
Mama's embarrassment in high school  
When she was nominated "Most Beautiful"  
As a joke, and her joy when Daddy got on one knee.

She tells details I remember for years,  
But she forgets all the next day.



# Vampires

Desiree Carpenter  
(Based on a true story)

“Did you know that vampires have to untie any knots they come across before they can attack someone?” Melissa sat on the flowery comforter atop Sara’s dorm bed and fiddled with her tangled headphones.

“Uhh, no.” Sara scrunched up her face in response to her friend and suitemate’s random statement. “Why would I need to know that?”

“Just a random fact of the night. They also have to count all the seats in a room. By the way, why do you have three chairs in here?”

Sara’s eyes widened and she pulled her sweater tighter around her waist. It was a little after ten on a cool night in mid-October, and she had only started attending MSMS, her state’s fancy residential school, three months ago. Back when she first moved in, she met her roommate and suitemates, and became fast friends with her suitemate Melissa in particular. They had similar tastes in nearly everything, from food to music. But around the beginning of the current month, Melissa began acting a little bit stranger than usual. As of late, she seemed to be fixated on vampires, Sara’s biggest fear. Whenever Sara would enter Melissa’s room now,

her friend would be hunched over the computer at her desk, eyes alight with both the glow of the screen and the knowledge she was gathering on her horrendous topic.

Sara had wanted to say something when this weird event first occurred, but she didn’t know how to word it. In addition, the idea of offending someone she would be living with and seeing every day for the rest of her school year terrified her. But Sara couldn’t take it anymore; this was just going too far. She had no explanation for Melissa’s weird behavior, except one idea that sat in the back of her mind.

“Hey, Mel, what’s up with you and vampires lately?”

“Why, does it scare you?”

Melissa looked up from the tangled mess in her hands and at her friend.

“A little bit. It’s kinda sketchy.”

“The heck? Sketchy? What, you think I’m a vampire?”

The hairs on Sara’s neck stood on end. She had never said that, but Melissa knew what she had been thinking. But it’s not as if she had no reasons to believe that. Since the latest weekend that Melissa went home, during which the two girls didn’t talk at all, Melissa had been obsessed

with vampires. Sara didn’t know what else to think at this point. Were there even any vampires in Mississippi? If so, they probably would’ve been from Melissa’s hometown.

When she saw Sara’s wide-eyed expression, Melissa laughed in a low, ominous voice. “Well, you know I must have been researching them for a reason.” She paused, as if to think. “And I do have some pretty sharp teeth,” she added with a grin.

Sara started to back away, but Melissa kept talking. “Better watch out, Sara! I might get you too!”

That was all it took. Vampire or not, Melissa went too far, and something snapped in Sara’s mind. She let out a shriek before spinning around and bolting straight out her door and down the hallway. Eyes followed her through the hall, the lobby, and the door to another, non-blood-sucking friend’s room at the end of the opposite wing.

“Quick! What do I do if my suitemate is a vampire?” Sara panted from her sudden sprint.

“What?!” laughed out a couple of voices. Sara stepped back out of the room and saw that everyone sat in the hallway. All of them stared up at her, giggling to themselves. But then she got distracted by a voice that

called out from behind her, the voice of the vampire herself.

“Sara! Come back here!”

Melissa walked towards Sara, who pressed herself against the wall in response. “Would you quit being ridiculous? I’m not a vampire!”

“But you kept looking up all this stuff about them, and you were doing vampire-y stuff, and you have sharp teeth... .” The terrified girl’s voice faded out as she realized how pitiful her argument sounded out loud.

“Seriously? It’s almost Halloween. I was just trying to get into the spirit. And I thought you were kidding when you said that, so I went along with it! Now come on, we have to get back to our rooms for room check.”

Room check. That’s right, Sara forgot all about that. Everyone had to step out of their rooms before 10:30 to show that they were inside the building, which would explain why every girl in the hall was outside, watching her, and laughing at her. Of course Melissa wasn’t a vampire; Sara wandered around campus outside with her just the other day, in broad sunlight! And now every girl on Sara’s floor had just watched her have a freakout over nothing. Her face felt like someone had lit it on fire. “Let’s go,” she mumbled.

## Center Stage

Michael McDonald

Thunder rolls and lighting clashes,  
Shining flashes of light through the window.  
My tiny eyes peer through the glass pane,  
Trying to get a glimpse of the storm.

Twigs leap and trees dance,  
A mixture of leaves, dirt, and rocks  
Dim the light that manages to shine through  
The darkened clouds hovering above my home.

I gaze out the foggy glass at the ballet  
Of ultimate destruction.  
The trees sway in sync and twigs fly,  
Prancing to the howl of the wind, the rhythm of the rain.

I watch as droplets smash against the glass  
And leaves plunge to the ground.  
Then the sounds and dance slow to adagio.

The trees take one last bow,  
The twigs take a finishing leap for the coda,  
Bright lights appear through the clouds,  
And the ballet is at end.

Then the embarrassed girl hung her head and followed her friend back down the hallway, looking like a puppy with its tail between its legs.

Sara decided that from now on, she would try not to jump to conclusions quite so much. She

also thought she should check her facts before accusing people of things, and figured she might want to work on getting what facts she did have straight, especially when it involved vampires. ▲



## Listen, Look, Feel

Nikki Gary

First Place— Poetry Competition

The skies are impatient, waiting,  
and I've noticed that the clouds are just subtle signs;  
Those bright wisps of smoke beckoning, leading by example;  
Sun to storm, day to night  
Starshine and raindrops alike, reminding us always to look up.

The earth itself is forgiving, and ever changing, willing to bear the footprints of the first one to stand.  
The first one to be brave, to roar not with voice but with action;  
Wind scrapes along ancient branches, the forests therein pulsing with sunlight and shaking with whispered words.  
The same wind making songs like old nursery rhymes, comfort to ears unaware and hearts only peering;  
The earth is anticipation in the guise of a home.

The water we are made of is the same to destroy us;  
It makes up the blood that clots, the rivers that foam, the rain laced with acid, the tears paving our golden paths to  
heartbreak.

When clear, this water persuades, tucking its depths behind shining surfaces like starlight;  
Springs and creeks we splash through ever singing, ballads lacking words,  
All too easy to fall in love with,  
Telling us always to jump feet first.

Wildlife as natives, scavenger hunts abandoned, hieroglyphs we still yearn to decipher;  
Ancient species reaching from all sides to join in, their language all inclusive.  
They speak not with words, but with paw prints, hisses, fur left caught on branches in passing.  
They tell us of the secrets this earth keeps, but with our eyes forward, feet always moving, we are too frantic to  
listen,  
their eyes blinking in time to the heartbeats we forget to feel, telling us always to look just a little deeper.

In cities and alleys, with graffiti lying like grime upon walls too much like prisons, we draft our homes.  
We tell ourselves the world we see outside the window is beautiful, reaching to push against the glass with palms  
gently pressing,

Though we fail to open doors to see the world with glass removed.  
When buildings crumble and foundations rust, when Rome falls,  
Only then we hear the cries of things we've built, telling us always not to be so sure.

When did the voices of earth become soundless?  
We talk but never speak, we are silent with the thoughts we tell ourselves not to think.  
Saplings grow to trees, hundreds of years elapse, before we even learn to say hello;  
Our fluttering eyelids hiding eyes like blank canvases,  
Sound moving just like water over skin, reaching us through hours, and telling us always that common sense is  
using sense.

## The Jokester

India Yarborough

My dad has always had a joke for just about everything. He loves to tell stories, too. He has always been exceptional at telling jokes and stories in that he builds up the story or joke, reels you in so that you half believe it, and then, boom, there's the punch line or twist. His stories range from family events to childhood adventures to college pranks. One particular line of ongoing jokes of his pertains to his balding head. He refers to this series of jokes as "freak hair-loss accidents."

My dad started balding shortly after college in his mid-to-late twenties. I've always been told that guys get their hair patterns from their mom's side of the family, so my dad's grandfather on his mom's side must have rocked the horizontal Mohawk. However, my dad prefers to tell things a bit differently.

One story commences around Christmas time and goes like this: One year during the Christmas season, my dad was decorating the Christmas tree. He put on the lights, starting at the top of the tree. Of course, to reach the peak of the tree, he stood on an eight-foot ladder. With the string of lights

coiled around his neck, his hands guided the lights in a circle so that they made contact with each branch. All of a sudden, my mom passed by, bumping the ladder, sending my dad tumbling towards the ground. The string of lights still attached to the tree, pulled on the lights that were coiled around his neck, squeezing them tighter and tighter, slipping the lights up and over his head, pulling his hair off as he fell backward and they tugged upward.

Whenever friends or family members talked about a dangerous event that they had endured, my dad would chime in, making it a lesson in disguise, saying, "And funny you mentioned that because I actually, unfortunately, lost my hair in a matter much like that."

Another freak hair-loss accident story that he has told numerous times occurred during his first few years of teaching at Holy Cross High School in New Orleans, where he was also one of the assistant football coaches. One player on the team, a freshman, had a threatening father who would always attend the games. The father was famous for, as my dad likes to call it,

"the single finger sweat swipe" (and if the dad got really angry, "the double finger sweat swipe"). The father, Bill, always sat at the top of the bleachers (only six rows high, so he wasn't that far from the field), smoking a cigarette. One night, during an especially poor football game, Bill got furious at the players and flicked his cigarette towards the field. Back then, the football coaches wore 100% polyester pants which were highly flammable, so as you can imagine, the cigarette floated toward the field, landing on the ground at the feet of the head coach in his 100% polyester pants. The coach's pants caught on fire just as my dad was leaning over to discuss the upcoming play, sending a few lone sparks in the direction of my dad's hair, burning the hair off of the top of his head.

My dad continues to tell freak hair-loss accident stories and other bad jokes to this day because that's just his way of speaking. I never know when he will strike with another hilarious account of the unfortunate day he balded away. ▲



# Last Resorts

Rachel Jones

At one point in time, Clara thought the space between her and Stiles was too abundant. That’s what made her pull him close; she thought it was possible to mesh two of their atoms into one. Maybe she could sew his calloused, pink fingers to her soft, brown ones. The goal was to minimize space. But as she stood at his door, she now wanted mountains, cities, and whole layers of atmosphere to separate them. Her clammy hands rolled the door knob. He never locked the front door; it made it easier for people to come and go. That way, he didn’t have to leave the piercing light of his computer screen.

Perhaps if the city they claimed was not so small, Clara could be far enough away. Despite her desperation, McComb remained as tiny and compact as the day it was founded. In McComb, trees were kept to a minimum and everyone kept a Bible at home—even atheists. SUVs and blue collars milled back and forth during the day, while mutts and pariahs littered the night. But it was still best to travel by foot at night—no tracks were left. If the city was too wide or too long for her to walk across, she wouldn’t have made it there to the famil-

iar cement steps. It was cold that night, so Clara put on her favorite vest. It had a huge, thick hood, and if she wore it the right way, it was hard to tell if she was a girl or a boy. *This is my last option.*

The best way to go up those steps was one at a time. One. Two. The house hummed with a soft, welcoming glow, and this time he was alone. But Clara saw the cans on the coffee table and the pair of shoes in the corner. They weren’t his; they were a pair of knee-high leather boots with a modest heel. People had been there and they’d be back. He sat in the usual chair, the one from the dining table. It creaked under his shifting weight. He looked up and let one side of his mouth slide up. Never a full smile as a greeting. Now, the air between them was heavy and the awkward space lingered like a stray cat—unwanted. “You said I could use your computer,” she whispered. She craned her neck left and right to catch glimpses of the living room she missed, and her fingers twirled around in her pocket, searching for traces of patience. He ran his fingers through his hair, making sure to start at his forehead and expose his whole face. That used to be appealing.

“Sure,” he said. He slid away into the kitchen, pretending to look for some necessity. Everything was on computers now. How many fast food joints even checked their online applications, though? But, it was worth a try. Someone, anyone, in her house (apartment) needed job. The government didn’t care who paid the rent. Maybe McDonald’s wasn’t as bad as she thought it was. There may have been a secret satisfaction in handing off piles of diabetes to innocent people. Every day could be like an adventure where she delved into a new world. Then, with enough effort and false enthusiasm, she’d have enough paychecks to get her own computer. She only heard her mother’s laughter from earlier that day. *How can she still laugh?* Clara wondered if she was tired of stealing toilet paper from the public library for their bathroom. But the vision of her sitting on the couch, worriless, verified that Clara’s mother was not stressed. She didn’t worry about where food came from or who paid rent.

*Two applications down, one to go.* The television screen glowed with *Gone with the Wind* in the background. Scarlet O’Hara had just dug a carrot

from the dirt and belted her famous line. “You know, you’re the only person I’ve ever known that liked Scarlett,” Stiles said. He stood in the archway between the living room and the tiny dining room-turned-computer room. His hands were crossed across his chest.

“She’s just a goal-oriented person. I like her,” Clara said. Her face remained glued to the computer screen. Of course, she saw his silhouette standing in front of her and then gliding around to her shoulder. His aimless pacing dug into her mind like fingernails into skin. Her mind flipped and drifted to her physics book she left sprawled open on her bed. She hated slipping out and abandoning it at night. But, the book could wait. It was almost time to leave. The sun would be rising soon and she needed to wake up in her bed like the rest of her family. She needed to give the illusion that everything was okay and that she could sleep through the night.

“I’m done,” Clara whispered. Stiles had sauntered to the living room and was resting with his feet on the arm of the couch across from the television. His eyes popped open to the sound of her voice, but he remained on the couch. He stretched and jerked like a cat awaking from a nap. Clara almost expected him to lick the back of his hand and rub his head. She didn’t

wait for him to roll onto his feet. She made sure to leave the door behind her the way she found it—closed. She made her way back through the dimly lit streets as the sun began to lurk over the horizon. *It’ll be okay.* Her breath wafted up through the thick air into a puff of white smoke.

By the time she turned the

door knob of her home, her fingers were numb. But, the lights were still out and she heard her mother’s soft snore down the hall. *It’ll be okay.* She crept back into her bed and let her chest fall, releasing a sigh of exhaustion. She tried to push every thought out with the sigh. Then she let her eyes close. ▲



Hannibal Lector Mask

Stearman McCalister

Third Place – Sculpture Competition  
Ceramic



# It's Full of Stars

Joseph Messer

Carriere, Mississippi, 2013

For the last week news broadcasters have reported the date for the Orionid meteor shower. On the predicted night I wait outside to be a witness. Looking through the lens of a telescope, I see the inside of the barrel. I blink. My eyes water. I fiddle with the focus until both eyes are blind, and then, slowly, I learn how to see again.

A spray of stars shimmers in the night sky. Suddenly the shower begins. My brain's right half sees each meteor as a spaceship, zooming past, while my brain's left half knows that each meteor is a piece of cosmic debris, entering Earth's atmosphere, fighting friction, and making heat.

For a moment, I am a part of something bigger than myself. I feel connected to everyone who looks up at the sky tonight. Like all moments, this moment passes, leaving me humbled and bewildered—more or less human. I am left to wonder: What's out there?

Los Alamos National Laboratory, 1950

Asking questions that do not have clear answers, scientists at the Los Alamos National Laboratory took the first, crucial steps into unknown territory, and no territory was more unknown than the universe.

While debating his fellow scientists on a lunch break, Enrico Fermi, a physicist and practiced questioner, asked, "Where is everybody?"

Everyone understood the question, but no one knew the answer.

A paradox arose between facts and evidence. Fermi recalled the facts. One hundred and seventy billion galaxies migrate through the universe. Four hundred billion stars fill the Milky Way with an estimated sixty billion habitable exoplanets, most crowding around red dwarf stars. The universe turns 13.8 billion years old while human beings began 200,000 years ago, a blink of the cosmic eye.

Accounting for the sheer immensity of our universe in which Earth is an infinitesimal part, probability suggests that life must exist elsewhere. Cosmic waves, however, bring back only silence.

National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Green Bank, West Virginia, 1961

Years passed, and still the question of alien life—predicted by the sheer heft of reason—remained unrealized. Scientists and mathematicians clamored to prove the certainty of extraterrestrial life, scribbling equations and deriving solutions.

Dr. Frank Drake, a man who believed in the power of mathematics and science, deduced what no one on Earth knew for certain: the existence of extraterrestrial life. Working with other scientists in the field, he created a laundry list of all the factors involved in life. With life so mathematically defined—each concept reduced to a variable, representing an attempt to quantify not only the sky and the stars, but also the greater extent of the universe—Drake created an equation:

$$N = R_* \times fp \times ne \times fl \times fi \times fc \times L$$

From equation to solution the thinking man takes a leap of faith. In Calculus II my teacher scribbles the fundamental theorem of calculus on the chalkboard. The equation (only if the function is continuous) bridges the integral and the derivative, guaranteeing an antiderivative and, with a defined range, a solution. Given a continuous and expanding universe, I wonder if Drake's equation can bridge the distance between two stars, between Earth and Mars, or between what scientists know and want to know. Can it guarantee the existence of aliens?

Drake, at least, believed so. By his estimate one thousand civilizations (if not more) should exist in our galaxy. Ours is only one of them.

## A Hypothesis: We Are Not Listening Properly

Astrobiologists search for the unknowable. They move through mysterious and unexplored space, explorers searching for something sublime. Today, scientists think they will find it. They know more than ever before. They clutch radio telescopes, observe patterns in distant emissions, and watch wavelength chatter, hoping to discover a special message, maybe as much as Hello, Goodbye, or It's better on this side of the universe.

Unless silence is a message in itself, nothing has been heard. Day by day humanity's part in the universe seems more like a fluke. The alternative is that humans are the only beings in the universe making any logical sense - who could believe it?

Some scientists hypothesize that since humans have not heard alien communication a problem exists in the human capability to listen. Our technology may be inadequate. Current radio searches skip over highly compressed data streams and fail to recognize gamma rays.

Aliens might be out there, attempting to speak to us. Their voices travel through crests and troughs along a wavelength, but humans cannot find their frequency. Somewhere between them and us, humanity drops the connection. On the receiving end of our radio telescopes, all

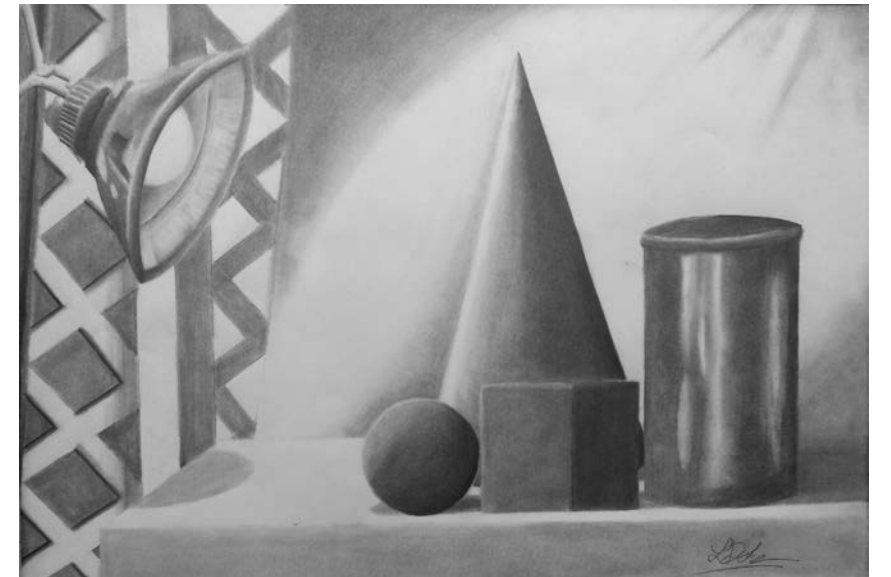


Photo 1-6

Liyah Smith

Third Place – Drawing Competition  
Pencil and Graphite

we hear is static buzzing through space.

To hear extraterrestrial life, we may have to sit still, stay silent, and hope for news to come. If I don't blink, I might see a star man. Maybe he is not here tonight, but perhaps he will be here tomorrow. And if a star man does suddenly step out from the asteroid dust, his fingers splayed in a "V," what would change? Maybe some deep human mystery will complete itself; perhaps people will panic; or humans everywhere might simply feel bewildered, their confidence broken.

## A Second Hypothesis: They're Here Unobserved

Proud of our perceived place in the universe, humans like to draw borders. We divide along the atmosphere, choosing what

we are and what we are not—what is termed alien. The aliens are different, if only on the outside: some are green, others black, brown, or pale white.

My Hispanic friends pile out of a broken-down minivan onto the soccer fields every Tuesday night. "Illegal aliens," some whisper. We pass the soccer ball between us. Together we shout "Goal!" the ball rippling the net. If they are different, I do not notice.

I believe that deep down everyone is similar in that everyone wants to believe that he or she is special in the whole of outer space. In the wide universe, however, uniqueness is rare. Instead of drawing differences, I try to accept the similarities that connect everyone else with me. Mi casa es tu casa. After all, aliens could call



Earth home. They could live here, right now, unnoticed—no different from you or me.

Carriere, Mississippi, 2013

I stand witness to infinite variations of light on my retinas,

a brightness only dimmed by my own sense of growing insignificance. If life fills the universe like meteors fill the sky during a shower, our lives would seem infinitesimal in comparison. However in a

special instance, each meteor influences another—through magnetism, attraction, or repulsion—as each human in his or her life can reach across space and affect another, as aliens might be doing, tapping us on the heads, unnoticed, as we speak.

The meteors have dispersed into the ionosphere. For now there are still stars, but soon, with dawn, reality will resume. I will find it hard to look away from a view of the world I could not previously have guessed. If no extraterrestrial being ever answers our radio call, then the search for other life will not have been fruitless. The range of answers inspired by the Drake Equation and Fermi’s Paradox challenges each person to reflect on his place in this world and, beyond, in the universe.

Above me float the icy rings of Saturn, Earth’s moon, and the unknown all around me. In the pre-morning silence, I reflect on my place in the universe. I think that my life may be the result of a chance occurrence in the greater scheme of cosmic evolution. The result of one cell evolving to laugh, to love, and to think, human life, itself, may turn out to be a gift from the universe, something to be cherished, a one-time thing, like an unexpected epiphany during a meteor shower. ▲

## Treasure Hunting

Adina Harri

I comb through the labyrinth of Rome,  
Feet pounding on stone-cobbled streets,  
Heart beating,  
Palms sweating.

I can taste victory on the tip of my tongue,  
Tangible as the smell of roasted pizza nearby.

Skidding into a sharp left,  
I nearly collide into a moped  
Laden with crates from the morning market.

Gazing past the sea of faces,  
Over the tips of heads,  
Through the chatting crowd,  
I discover the treasured sign:  
Gelateria.

Running up the steps I ask the vendor,  
“Straciatella, please.”  
“Stracia-TE-lla,” she tells me,  
Exchanging gold pieces for my treasure.

I dive into the creamy goodness,  
Engulfed in utter chocolate bliss.  
*Straciatella.*

## The Real Reason

Jena Dees

Clara couldn’t think straight. She looked down, watching her two pale-blue Converse step across the black and white tiled floor of Myers High School’s hallway. It was a quarter past four, and the halls were empty. The rest of Clara’s peers had bolted out the big red doors to the senior parking lot after 8th period. Clara, however, had a 4:30 meeting with Coach Scott. Coach Scott had no idea what it was about, and Clara wished she didn’t either.

The pale-blue Converse stopped. Clara looked up and saw what she had been dreading to see: a door with a sign reading “Melissa Scott, Coach of the Lady Myers Jaguars.” “Suck it up, Clara,” she mumbled under her breath. She knocked on her basketball coach’s door. Clara heard the familiar voice thick with a New Jersey accent tell her to come in.

“I’ve been expecting you,” Coach Scott continued, “Now, I know you are probably here to speak with me about why you are not playing starting forward in the game against Cornwall, but let me tell you, I’ve got the best plan. Just—“

“Wait,” Clara said. She couldn’t let Coach Scott go on like this. “*Quick and easy*,” she told herself, “*Like a Band-Aid*.”

“Coach Scott,” Clara took a big breath, “I’m actually here because I need to let you know that I am quitting the team.

I-I-I just don’t have the time.” It seemed like an eternity before Coach Scott responded.

Looking Clara straight in the eye, Coach Scott sullenly said, “Clara, I know you are smitten with that boy, but basketball has always been your dream. I cannot believe you would give it up to spend more time with him.”

Despite Coach Scott’s harsh assumption, Clara left the meeting relieved. “*If only she knew the real reason I had to quit*,” Clara thought, looking down once again. This time, as she looked down, Clara did not

concentrate on her pale-blue Converse. Her eyes instead bore down into her stomach, which was already poking out a bit. “*You. You’re the real reason I had to quit.*”

Clara realized that this baby would also be the reason for many more meetings: telling her parents, telling her boyfriend, consulting a doctor. As she walked out the doors of Myers High School, Clara wondered how much longer she would be able to call the school hers. “*Will the baby also be the reason I have to drop out of high school?*” she asked herself. ▲



## The Edge

Nick Elder

Honorable Mention – Photography Competition  
Photograph



# Contributors’ Notes

**Ross Berry** (Wiggins) Ross believes that “Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.” If he could be born in another decade, it would be the 1920s, where he could meet poet Langston Hughes. Ross’s hero is his father because he “shows me the life I want to live when I get older.”

**Kay Burnside** (Carthage) gleans inspiration from Vincent Van Gogh and Lil Wayne, who says, “I got ice in my veins, blood in my eyes; / Hate in my Heart, love in my mind.” To her, “without art the world would be a dull place of uniformity.” Kay plans to help children as a social worker, and longs for the superpower of flight.

**Elise Cannon** (Byram) Elise’s heroes are her father, mother, and brother because they overcame things in their paths instead of running away. She believes writing is something that cannot be wrong. Elise plans to do something with music, something that helps people. “Ultimately,” she says, “I’m trying to follow God’s plan for me.”

**Claire Caprio** (Starkville) Claire lives by the motto, “Claire don’t care.” The works of Claude Monet influence Claire. If she could have a superpower, she would want to fly.

**Desiree Carpenter** (Bay St. Louis) Desiree’s favorite book is *A Clockwork Orange*. She lives by the quotation, “Never take life seriously. Nobody gets out alive anyway.” Desiree plans to attend Champplain College to study creative media.

**Lauren Chatelain** (Kiln) “For me, art is one of my favorite outlets,” Lauren says. She would like to meet Maya Angelou. If she had a superpower, she would shape shift.

**Kristen Conguista** (Flowood) Kristen’s hero is her dad because he showed her the world of reading and taught her that it’s okay to have her own opinion. If she could meet anyone, it would be Leonardo Da Vinci. She wants to go into the world of computer science because it requires applying creativity to logic and strategy.

**Jena Dees** (Columbus) Jena lives by the words of Mark Twain: “Why not go out on a limb? That’s where the fruit is.” To Jena, art is “comfort when I am upset, as well as my wakeup call when I am too far in my comfort zone.” She would like to go into international business and travel.

**Camille Dent** (Jackson) Camille would like to meet Sherlock Holmes. She lives by the words, “Courage is the magic that turns dreams into reality.” Camille dreams of one day becoming a high school English teacher.

**Nick Elder** (Starkville) When reflecting on art, Nick states that “It’s a means of escape—for both the artist and viewer.” Nick would like to meet Jeremy Clarkson. He plans to work toward a research career in genetics.

**Nikki Gary** (Lucedale) Nikki lives by the motto, “Work until your idols become your rivals.” Her favorite book is *The Night*

*Circus*, by Erin Morgenstern. She plans to work in the fields of wildlife conservation and art.

**Erin Graves** (Caledonia) Erin would like to meet Robert Downey, Jr. She lives by the motto, “If you never ask, you will never receive. If you never practice, you will never get better.” She plans to become an animator for DreamWorks.

**Tylicia Grove** (Morton) “Art is the beauty you can see; writing is emotion, memories, and thoughts on a page,” Tylicia says. Her mother is her hero because she never ceases to amaze Tylicia. She plans to attend the University of Southern Mississippi, taking both pre-med and writing courses.

**Shreya Gunapati** (Flowood) Shreya lives by Walt Whitman’s words, “Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune.” If she could meet anyone, she would choose J. K. Rowling. For her, art has always been her sanctuary.

**Rhiannon Hancock** (Rosedale) Rhiannon is afraid of how dull the world would be without art. Her favorite book is *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. She plans to travel, change lives, and spread the Word.

**Adina Harri** (Starkville) Adina lives by the motto, “Never, ever, ever quit.” She believes that art gives you something to hold on to when everything around you spins into chaos. Her favorite book is *The House of the Scorpion*. If Adina could meet anyone it would be the soccer star of Uruguay, Diego Forlán. As far as future plans, she “just wants to help people.”

**Mary Frances Holland** (Lucedale) Mary lives by the admonition, “Be who you are and say what you feel, because people who mind don’t matter and people who matter don’t mind.” She believes that artists have the clearest view of the world. Her favorite book is *Hold Still* by Nina LaCour. If she had a superpower, she would be able to transform into any animal.

**Conor Hultman** (Ecru) Conor lives by Joseph Heller’s words, “I want to keep my dreams, even bad ones, because without them, I might have nothing all night long.” He says that “If you write long enough with enough passion, you’re bound to write something good.” If he could have any superpower, he would want to do all of his homework on time. One day, he wants to become a writer.

**John Johnson** (Greenville) John believes “art should be thought provoking,” that “every decade holds its own problems,” and that he would like to have Superman’s superpower—whatever it is. He hopes to become an anesthesiologist—and an artist.

**Rachel Jones** (McComb) Rachel lives by Childish Gambino’s verse, “If Biggie can make it through it, man then I can.” She says, “I think writing is the best therapy in the world to turn your worries and thoughts into beauty.” Rachel plans to learn two more languages, travel the world, and become a doctor.

**Christina Legradi** (Hattiesburg) “The only way to enter a new universe while still living is by reading a book,” Christina says. She lives by the assertion, “The jungle is dark but full of diamonds,” from *Death of a Salesman*. Her favorite book is *Little Women*. She plans to study pre-dentistry at UAB and also to follow her passion for photography.

**Quinn Massengill** (Hickory Flat) “Reading teaches us about the world. Writing teaches us about ourselves,” Quinn says. The best book he has ever read is *The City of Lost Souls* by Cassandra Clare. He shapes his life by a passage from *Alice in Wonderland*: “‘This is Impossible,’ said Alice. ‘Only if you believe it is,’ replied the Mad Hatter.”

**Stearman McCalister** (Corinth) Stearman lives by the words, “What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?” His favorite book is *The Giver*. About creativity, he says, “Psychologists say that art helps best with depression.” He plans to attend medical school and become a psychiatrist.

**Michael McDonald** (Lucedale) “Creativity is the courage to express yourself,” Michael says. His favorite book is *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. He lives by Bill Cosby’s words, “In order to succeed, your desire for success should be greater than your fear of failure. Michael plans to major in neurology and minor in journalism.

**Michael McMillan** (Long Beach) gains his inspiration from Mother Teresa, who states, “Life is a dream, realize it.” If he could be born in another decade, it would be the 1940s. Michael wishes to have the superpower to “duplicate” himself. He plans to become a chief strategic officer.

**Joseph Messer** (Carriere) “To write, you must first have the courage to be vulnerable,” Joseph says. His favorite book is *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* by Dave Eggers. He lives by David Foster Wallace’s assertion that “The really important kind of freedom involves attention and awareness and discipline, and being able truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them over and over in myriad petty, unsexy ways every day.” Joseph plans to attend Deep Springs College for two years and complete his studies in English literature at either Stanford University or Oxford University.

**Sabrina Moore** (Starkville) Sabrina lives by the belief, “Everything happens for a reason.” She would love to meet Queen Elizabeth I. Her favorite book is *Pride and Prejudice*. Her dad is her hero because he’s the kind of person she wants to be when she grows up. She plans to major in biomedical engineering.

**Brendan Ryan** (Diamondhead) “If you don’t have an idea, take a shower,” Brendan says. He lives by Yoko Ono’s words—made famous by John Lennon—that “A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.” His favorite book is *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury.

**Vikram Sachdeva** (Jackson) The defining quotation in Vik’s life is “So it goes.” If he had a superpower, he would want to control the subconscious. “Creativity,” he says, “is not a simple

word to describe. It is intangible, a passion, a way of thought, a way to live—it is a mesmerizing ideal.”

**Liyah Smith** (Meridian) states that art is “what I’m all about besides food.” If she could be born in another decade, Liyah would choose the 1970s. She strives to “pray for the best while preparing for the worst.” Her favorite book is *The Hobbit*, and she finds a hero in her little sister.

**Stephanie Smith** (Columbus) lives by the words, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” If she could meet anyone, she would choose her grandfather, who passed away before she was born. Her favorite book is *The Hollow Kingdom*, and she plans to devote her life to children as a pediatrician.

**Olivia Spires** (Hernando) believes that “by expressing yourself, you get to know yourself.” Her defining quotation advises to “love all, trust a few, do harm to none.” Authors Elizabeth Gilbert and Valentine Michael Smith inspire Olivia. If she could have a superpower, hers would be teleportation.

**Chase Velotas** (Meridian) Chase lives by Dr. Seuss’s admonition, “Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.” He believes that creativity is the “truest form of communication,” and is inspired by the humility found in Bill Gates’ life. If he had a superpower, he would want to understand and speak any language. His favorite book is *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*.

**Candace Wheeler** (Carrollton) Candace says that art “soothes the soul.” Her most influential artist is Thomas Kinkade, and if she could meet anyone, it would be the English poet John Milton. Her favorite book is *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, and she finds a hero in her sister Lydia.

**Hayley White** (Taylorsville) Hayley strives to paint a living image of Audrey Hepburn’s words, “I believe in pink . . . I believe in overdressing . . . I believe that happy girls are the prettiest girls . . . I believe in miracles.” Hayley credits her parents as her heroes for their unwavering support of her educational endeavors, which she plans to continue by majoring in biochemistry.

**Abigail Wippel** (Hernando) finds inspiration in Jane Austen’s assertion, “Our scars let us know that our past is for real.” Her hero is her father, who showed her that “success could be achieved through hard work and determination.” Abigail plans to work for the FBI as a forensic anthropologist.

**India Yarborough** (Columbus) lives by words from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb inside his skin and walk around in it.” If born in another decade, India would like to have been a child of the 60’s because she feels as if “there was so much to fight for.” India aspires to become a journalist.