

# Southern Voices 2015





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Judges

Art Judges

Larry Feeney was a professor in the Department of Art and Design at Mississippi University for Women for thirty-five years, where he taught drawing, painting, and calligraphy. He served as the director of the Eugenia Summer Gallery for ten years until his retirement in 2003, and he continues to teach in MUW’s Life Enrichment Program.

Katherine Feeney Munson graduated from Mississippi University for Women in 2007 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and is the daughter of Larry Feeney. She is currently a freelance graphic designer, painter, and mother in her hometown, Columbus, Mississippi.

Essay and Short Story Judge

Edward Allen is a managing editor for St. Martin’s Press in New York City, a publishing company “dedicated to publishing emerging new authors, and offering a fresh perspective on classic genres.”

Photography Judge

Anthony Thaxton is a television producer, photographer, writer, and painter who graduated from MSMS in the inaugural class of 1990.

Poetry Judge

Michael Smith is an Assistant Professor of English at Delta State University and author of three poetry collections: *How to Make a Mummy: Poems* (WordTech Communications, 2008), *Multiverse* (BlazeVox Books, 2010), and *Byron in Baghdad* (BlazeVox Books, 2012).

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Watercolor of a Woman Through a Window

Conor Hultman

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

If someone picked up the roof of the apartment complex between the drugstore and an empty lot, on any day (except for Sundays), he would see Jay sitting on a small wooden stool, before a cheap wooden easel, using rough wooden brushes to paint. The easel and stool sat next to a window, out which he could see the sidewalk outside the apartment complex’s door. He painted the same subject every time. Between 7:00 and 7:15 A.M., a tall middle-aged woman would walk outside, wait for a car on the sidewalk, and depart. Later, between 6:30 and 6:35 P.M., she would reappear in the same car, get out, and walk back in. Jay painted thousands of portraits of those scenes, in every style imaginable: realistic, impressionist, expressionist, surreal, cubist, abstract, minimalist, modernist; there was no method he would not adopt and try out. He was mostly limited to using watercolors, though, because they were cheap, and he was poor.

Jay didn’t do much between the Woman’s “visits.” He would leaf through art

books and historic novels from the library, eat little, shop even less, and sleep. The only source of income he had was commercial painting for hotels and doctors’ offices. He disliked painting anything other than the Woman, and worked slowly and tiredly on other work. When he had to paint a bowl of fruit for Holiday Inn or Dr. Davidson, he could almost feel his heart collapsing from total, crushing boredom. Because of his refusal to paint for money more often, Jay relied heavily on welfare, and still saw his ends left unmet.

The only other place Jay went was to church on Sunday. He didn’t feel like he had anything to atone or pray for; in fact, he didn’t really even believe in God. He just liked to be close to a large group of people, see them move in different colors through shades of light. It gave him inspiration for his paintings of the Woman.

The paintings of the Woman were given to a local gallery, since Jay couldn’t afford a storage unit. He demanded that the paintings not be sold; the owner only agreed because he liked the paintings so dearly. A few were put around the owner’s

office, but eventually they all made their way to the back room, left to collect dust.

For three years, Jay painted the Woman with intense fervor, running to the window in the morning with the excitement of a child, and running back in the afternoon in the same way. One day, though, the Woman was putting boxes into the car. Jay painted the boxes in her hands with a nauseous feeling of unease. That afternoon, she wasn’t there. Nor was she

there the next day, or ever again.

Decades after Jay’s death, a cache of his paintings was discovered by an art critic in her deceased father’s collection. The unknown “Jay,” whose signature was brushed sloppily at the bottom right corner of every painting, became a buzzing new topic around museums and galleries across the world. Nothing much was known about his life; even less about the woman in his paintings. Nevertheless, soon exhibits of his work were showcasing in major art centers throughout Europe.

“He just liked to be close to a large group of people, see them move in different colors through shades of light. It gave him inspiration for his paintings of the Woman.”

Onlookers were captivated by the passionate attention given to the Woman. Thousands of people became infatuated with her, their hearts inspired by her beauty and mysteriousness.

Even with the ever-changing styles, the basic setup of every painting remained the same: the Woman in the center, the sidewalk shooting sideways under her feet, and a sizable swath of cement road to her right, bordered on all sides by a closed window. In the last painting discovered,

the Woman is nowhere to be seen, and the window isn't painted. Critics debated for decades the significance of the absence of both elements. Books were written, careers were made and ruined, and dollars were made all over these two one-time breaks from consistency. They never knew the answer for sure. If they could have found out, they wouldn't have believed it anyways, simply because the answer was so plain.

The Woman left, and Jay opened the window.▲

Pavement

Shreya Gunapati

Photography



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.

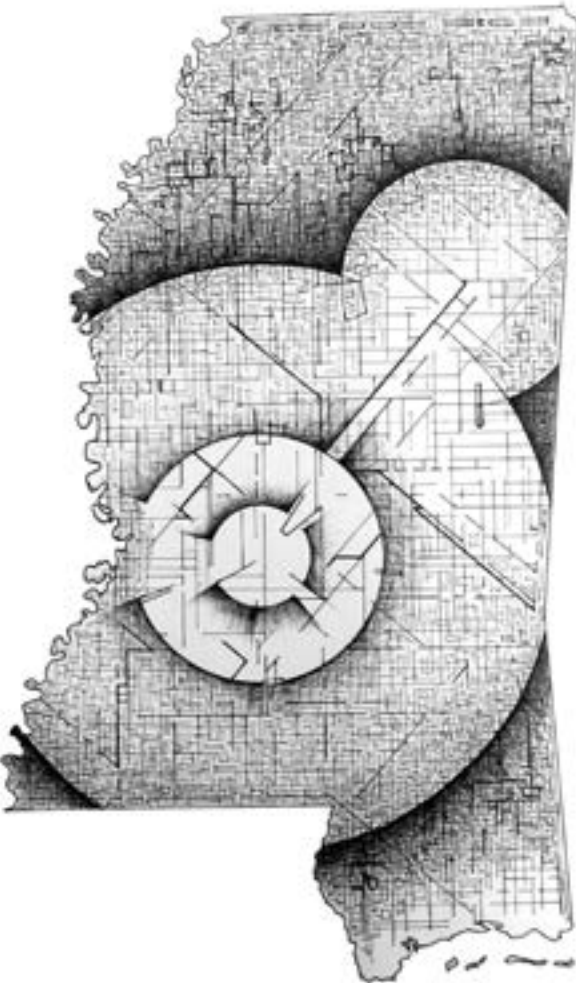
Chris had the potential to become a great writer. Unfortunately, Chris never reached this potential: he was killed in a car wreck on January 17, 1993. Though Chris will never attain his dream of writing a great novel, all of those who loved and respected Chris hope that the recipient of this Award, as well as all the other aspiring writers at MSMS, will achieve their dreams.

Michael D. Goggans  
Class of 1991

Atlas  
Carly Sneed

Hurricane, Mississippi, isn't on any maps,  
but every generation of Sneeds can outline it,  
memory by memory,  
our ancestral atlas.  
The great forest across the creek has been torn up  
now, ripped from the ground.  
My dad can map it for you, though, in latitudes and  
longitudes of adventures and mishaps.  
The woods around my great-grandfather's house  
are still standing, at least.  
My great-uncle could paint it in colors of light  
through leaves and dirt under nails.  
Sometimes, though, voices go quiet  
and stories still.  
But Sneeds don't stay quiet long.  
Someone will always raise her voice in the silence,  
the duty of each generation.

I'm still choosing a medium, myself.  
I'm not sure how I could sketch out the warm  
Sundays in Grandmother's living room,  
if pencil strokes could show the wind from the  
window  
or the contentment in conversations.  
Or if quiet music could invite the rhythm of  
Hurricane,  
of welding in the shop and Grandmother calling for  
supper.  
But I forget the cacophonies of the geese overhead  
and the gossip in the kitchen,  
when all I can hear is an air conditioner and  
complaints  
In this uncharted territory.



Mechanical  
Navin Solomon  
Honorable Mention—  
Drawing Competition  
Ink



# Samson in Gaza

Emily Williamson

Third Place—Essay Competition

My dad is an impulsive person. Every couple of years throughout my childhood he would purchase ten to fifteen ducklings from one of his friends from work, and we would raise them in a cozy little pen behind our house. My sister and I were always ecstatic when he brought home our little pets. We would rush to assign them genders (we couldn't tell the difference) and name them by their features so we could tell them apart.

In following weeks, my sister and I would play with the wonderfully soft creatures. We would line them up and race them or make little hats for them out of discarded papers.

I remember wrapping them up in my jacket on a cold day, only to end up cleaning the mess out of it later. Their little chirps kept my spirits up when I was sad, and the sound of their little webbed feet slapping against the tile of our porch made

me laugh every time. When I became more interested in science, I would research ducks on our old computer in the dusty office, and all of the stories I wrote would cast either one of my ducks or my cats

as the main character. I was obsessed with them.

Once our fluffy friends had passed the duckling stage, my father and I would move them to the lake behind our house and return every day with a decent helping of corn for them to eat. Sometimes they would get lucky and we would bring stale bread for them too. The more they ate, the more they grew; and the more they grew, the more their real feathers began to appear. Once this began to happen, it was time to help them learn to fly. Because we had nurtured them so much as ducklings, they were not afraid to be near us. So, one by

“His feathers flew everywhere; it was in the end that part of Samson could finally fly.”

one, my father picked them up and tossed them off the edge of the pier so they could practice flying. They were not thrilled about this, but no harm came to any of them. However, this time we had one duck that could not fly for some reason: Samson. We could never figure out why he

did not possess the ability to fly.

On the weekends, it was my job to feed the ducks. Once, I retrieved their corn from the shed and carried it down to the little brown patch they

had eaten in our yard just like I did every other time. The whole drove of ducks was out for a swim because it was a rather warm day. However, when they saw me approaching with their familiar white can of nourishment, they quickly began to make their way to the bank. I waited to greet them on the shore.

Suddenly, I heard my neighbor's large mutt start to bark furiously. Before I could even turn my head to see what was happening, she had run the length of our yard and flung herself into the lake. Because the ducks could see her coming before I could, they began to fly away before she made it to the water. Their wings pumped as quickly as they could in the flurry of feathers and quacking, but Samson was not quick enough. I screamed.

Samson tried so hard; if you were there you could see how hard he pumped his wings like the others, but they refused to obey him. The dog locked her jaws around his neck and dragged him back to shore. I screamed and cried, but I could do nothing as she began to whip him back and forth with all the strength she could muster. His feathers flew everywhere; it was in the end that part of Samson could finally fly.

Although I screamed and cried, it did nothing to slow the dog's rage. I did not hear my father behind me, but I saw him in my peripheral vision. He ran down our yard as fast as he could while wielding a shovel. There was no time for me to process what he was doing, but, before I knew it, he hit the dog on the back with the shovel which sent her yelping back to her own home.

Samson lay bedraggled; that is the only way I can think of to describe him. He had bones sticking out of his legs and torso, blood covered his broken body, his neck was at a strange angle, what was left of his feathers stuck out in every direction, but he was alive. I remember the hope and relief welling up inside of me. My eight-year-old mind shouted, “He's okay! We can save him!” I began to walk towards Samson as I celebrated in my mind, but, before I could reach him, my father raised the shovel over his head and cracked down as hard as he could on the bedraggled duck's neck. I will never forget the look that my father gave me after that. It was a mixture of remorse and his own pain, but I did not understand why Samson had to die.

We don't raise ducks anymore. ▲



Boundaries

West Givens

Honorable Mention

Photography



# Sugar-Sunny South

Quinn Massengill

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

“Well,” began Martha May Alcott, as if she were about to speak, but instead she paused, inhaling deeply to ensure an adequate supply of oxygen as she embarked on the first verbal sprint that characterized her tale telling.

“You know, our family is one of the founding families of this historic town. Some might compare us to English nobility, but we surely don’t have as much as we used to in the old days,” she continued, as Elizabeth noted her Louis Vuitton handbag and Prada footwear, “back before the Yankees stole Great-Granddaddy’s silver and burned that b-e-a-u-tiful white mansion of his. Why, those Northerners just had no appreciation for the beauty of Great-Granddaddy’s hard work!”

Elizabeth Short listened to her cousin’s prattling with a vague sense of annoyance while the pair waited on lunch outside Brookside Delicatessen, a restaurant about which Martha May sang highest praises. However, sitting at a black, wire mesh table so warmed by the sun that Elizabeth was certain she would later find diamond shaped brands on her unprotected skin, Elizabeth’s perusal of the menu only reminded her how intensely her pocketbook resented this uptown eatery.

“Not that I mean any offense to the lovely company you’ve surely kept up at that reputable university of yours. How *do* you say that *delightful* name again? Dart-mouth? Dartmutt? Dart—”

“Dartmouth,” finished Elizabeth.

“Oh, yes, Dartmoat,” mused Martha May. Her syllables were like an acrid taste amid a diet of pure sugar. “You were always such a smarty-britches, Liza Beth. What’s so interesting in all

those dusty books anyway? I just can’t see . . . .”

Martha’s honeyed voice lulled Elizabeth to the memory of a summer afternoon years ago. The vision in her mind was as crisp as the *crack* that announced the turning of pages in forgotten tomes at the county library, sheets of paper crinkled and crumpled by moisture and misuse: Elizabeth recounted the memories of growing up with Martha May.

“She responded fiercely, as if in defiance of Martha May and everything about this place that she had tried to leave behind her.”

“Aren’t you ready to leave yet, Liza Beth?”

Elizabeth’s eyes did not lift from the page as her cousin questioned her. She couldn’t bring herself to abandon Edna Pontellier just after the young woman realized her true feelings toward Robert Lebrun.

“Yoo-hoo, Beth. Are you ready to go? We have to get

home in time to get ready for the game; you do realize this is homecoming, right?”

Sighing, Elizabeth snapped shut her copy of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. She could relate to Edna: Martha May possessed Adèle Ratignolle’s persistent personality and embodiment of traditional feminine values. While social gatherings were uncommon in Southern culture beyond church and school, high school football games might as well have been mandatory for every self-respecting Southern Belle, or, in Elizabeth’s case, the cousin and constant companion of one. Shortly, Elizabeth would find layers of a foreign substance caked across her face as Martha May applied blush and mascara, insisting Elizabeth look the part of a beauty queen at such a vital social event. Elizabeth could hardly wait to spend hours with her rear stuck to cold steel bleachers beneath blaring lights and amid the hubbub of cheering and heckling that

the crowd of spectators would faithfully provide as they observed the brutish sport. Elizabeth longed to cling to her realm of literature and solitude, but Martha May would have hardly allowed Elizabeth to escape her duties as a pseudo-Southern Belle.

As Elizabeth emerged from her nostalgia, she considered retorting to Martha May’s comments that dust hardly collected on volumes at the university to the same two-inch thickness as in the local county library. She was interrupted, however, when a server arrived to take their orders.

“I’ll have a Diet Coke and the lemon chicken Caesar salad, light dressing, no croutons,” declared Martha May.

“And for you, Miss?” the server inquired of Elizabeth.

“Oh, I think I’ll go for the apple pecan salad,” she answered, further irritated by Martha’s cheery request, hearing her speak as if she had been troubled to issue only the simplest of commands. The waiter, however, appeared unbothered by Martha May’s instructions and proceeded to ask Elizabeth her preference of beverage.

“And a Diet Coke for you as well, ma’am?” he asked.

“No, thank you!” came Elizabeth’s sharp reply. Elizabeth was tired out from bearing the weight of Southern expectations, even for a short while. It annoyed her that the server would assume she should have a diet drink simply because she was a woman sharing lunch with someone else who drank it, so she responded fiercely, as if in defiance of Martha May and everything about this place that she had tried to leave behind her.

The clang of silverware falling to the ground called the server away from the cousins then, but Elizabeth looked at the now quiet Martha May and saw hurt in the young woman’s eyes as a crystal droplet traced a path down Martha’s cheek. Instantly, Elizabeth tasted the bitterness of her own attitude, a bitterness nurtured by harsh winters and late nights studying in solitude. Her apprehension piqued by the weight of having to tell her parents about her decision to switch her major from their ideal choice of psychology to her preference of women and gender studies, Elizabeth caught herself showing the same severity as the winter

weather in Hanover, New Hampshire.

“I am dreadfully sorry, Beth,” confessed Martha May, “since I seem to have let rudeness get the best of me. It’s just been so long since I’ve seen you, and—you know how things are around here—everything is terribly boring on the best of days. When you left for school, my momma said the truest thing I’ve ever heard pass her lips: ‘Martha May, I do hope you’ll try to keep in touch with that girl. She’s the most capable young lady I’ve ever known to come out of this town.’”

“I’ve missed you, cousin,” Martha continued. “Things just aren’t the same without you. Life is much less interesting with no one telling me about all those darling characters you loved so much. I have to tell you, I even tried getting into a book myself—imagine, me, a reader, ha!—but I just wasn’t cut out for all that.”

Before Elizabeth could reply, the server returned bearing their two salads and Martha’s Diet Coke.

“I’m sorry, Miss,” began the server to Elizabeth, “but I didn’t catch what you wanted to drink.”

“Coke will be fine,” she said.

“Diet?” he asked, involuntarily wincing as the words left his mouth and making both cousins laugh out loud.

Smiling, Elizabeth answered, “No thank you. I’ll take a regular.”

Elizabeth left for college with a thick concentration of sourness toward her Southern roots built up in her blood. Returning, she rediscovered the sweetness of home sweet home, her worries melting away like candy in the summer heat. Dartmouth was wonderful, but it could be cold, lonely, and bland when Elizabeth recalled the taste of home. With swift steps, the waiter presented a glass of iced Coke, midday light glittering off the frozen cubes floating amid the dark, bubbly beverage. Lifting the drink to her lips, a sweet fizzy sensation danced across her tongue. After a long sip, Elizabeth placed the glass back on the table and listened to Martha May remark on the beauty of the day. Elizabeth smiled—she was proud to be refreshed by the taste of life in the sugar-sunny South. ▲

# Opposites Attract

Michelle Li

My parents were born in drastically different environments. My mother was born in a spotless hospital room in Hefei, the capital city of a wealthy province in China, my father on the dirty ground of a straw hut in a tiny village near the Yangtze River. While my mother slept to the sound of traffic and people, my father was lulled by the sound of crickets and firewood. While my mother showered daily in a tiled bathroom complete with soap and a showerhead, my father bathed weekly in the muddy river waters. To me, my parents' divergent ways of life make their love story that much more compelling.

The city of Hefei is fast paced and indifferent, full of flashing lights and emotionless people all rushing from point A to point B, pushing and shoving towards their respective destinations. Raised voices tangle with the noise of traffic, creating a cacophony of chaos. The mouthwatering smells of steamed buns and roast duck interweave with the choking scent of gasoline and the stench of rotting garbage. But my mother embraced it, loved it even. She enjoyed strolling the streets that were always crowded with vendors advertising their trinkets and customers bustling from shop to shop. With the pocket money my grandfather gave her, she would buy a red bean paste popsicle and settle on the curb to watch traffic whiz by. She reveled in the brisk pace at which life seemed to move there in the city. My mother was fortunate, being born into a relatively wealthy family. My grandfather had a considerable amount of political power and my grandmother was the human resource manager of a large clothing company. My mother, an only child, was greatly spoiled and received almost anything

she desired. My grandparents pulled some strings and my mother landed a job as the co-manager of a successful bank. Needless to say, her life was that of a sophisticated, social elite, full of luxury and ease, until, of course, she met my father.

My father's hometown was nestled at the foot of a mountain range and framed by the Yangtze River. The river was the source of the villagers' existence. They bathed, drank, cooked and cleaned, and watered their crops with its murky water. The village consisted of a few scattered

farmhouses and a school building that looked as if it'd fall apart in the next breeze. My father grew up farming; it was how his family made a living. Dad always joked that he held a plow before he held a bottle; it was his duty as the oldest of four children to provide for his younger siblings. By the time he was ten, he could cultivate yams, rice, and potatoes, cut firewood, and differentiate

between poisonous and nonpoisonous herbs. He enjoyed the physical labor and the peaceful nature of his surroundings, but his real passion was math. He fell in love with numbers before he learned to read. Throughout his primary education, he excelled at anything math related; whether algebra, physics, or calculus, if it had anything to do with numbers, my father loved it. It was because of this that he knew he could not remain in his hometown. He dreamed of going to one of the top universities in China to study applied mathematics. Then he applied and was accepted to his dream school in the city of Hefei—and thus met my mother.

Being polar opposites and coming from completely different worlds, they overcame all odds and fell in love within a month of meeting

each other. I can just imagine how outlandish a pair they made: my mother, with her designer clothing and mile-high heels, dragging along my overwhelmed father, with his faded jeans and worn boots. What a sight! I know their love was strong, though, because my father sacrificed his last year of schooling to help my mother with her business, and my mother left her entire life behind to follow my father to a foreign country so he could to pursue his dreams. My mother's parents disapproved of their relationship and refused to give their consent when my father proposed, so my mother snuck out every night just to see him for a few hours before dawn. They would sit on the roof of my mother's apartment building and stargaze until the sun peeked out above the skyline. They spent months like this until my father was accepted to college in America. That very night, they packed their bags and left everything they'd ever known.

Moving to America posed even more challenges for them, further testing the strength of their love. But like my father's college essays written in a language that he'd just learned a month before, they passed them all with flying colors. Every hurdle thrown their way only served to strengthen their love. From reusing paper towels to eating ramen every other night, they gradually adjusted to this harsh, new life until my father finished his schooling. Strangely enough, my mother fondly recalls this as one of the best times of her life. They didn't have much, but I guess they never really needed anything but each other. ▲



**Momma**

**Ella Stone**

**First Place—Drawing Competition**  
Charcoal



**Extra! Extra!**

**West Givens**

Photography



# Brown River

Agrippa Kellum

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

Fish in Mississippi must rely merely on touch and smell to navigate our muddy rivers. Twenty walking-minutes from my residential public school in Columbus, Mississippi, a platform floats on the Tombigbee River. On it, I sit about an inch or two above the water. At no point in my life have I ever lived more than a thirty-minute drive from this waterway, and at no point in my life has it ever looked familiar to me. It’s solid brown and so opaque you could lose track of your own hand in this water. Life in Mississippi can be murky.

Life here can be murky because I can’t see out. I can’t see what the rest of the world is like. I’ve written emails to those who I think lead the kinds of lives I might want to live, to see what they have to say about life beyond the Tombigbee. But I can’t see any of it for myself. I can’t feel their surroundings like I feel mine.

What’s in Mississippi? Peering down on its surface, some see warm hospitality and hushpuppies. Some see homophobia and racism. Some see cracked roads and hungry mouths. I’ve spent seventeen years feeling my way through this state.

Let me tell you what I’ve found:

It’s easy to feel different down here. People like me, who aren’t Christian, often feel like outcasts. People like me, who really love reading—thinking—about Sartre and evolution and binary trees and real-life trees and everything but football, often feel like they have nobody to talk to. I’ve spent many lonely afternoons at my lesbian parents’ home to which many children were invited, but few permitted by their parents to come. Feeling alienated, it’s easy to curl up and wait for the current to carry me somewhere else.

I’ve also found that those feelings of alienation are a trap. My crossed arms in line for the Eucharist every Thursday at Catholic elementary school were met with nothing more nor less than

a soft prayer and a smile. A gruff Christian man whose chicken coop is modeled after the Sistine Chapel taught me to love history. Southernness is not the antithesis of intellect nor kindness, and even though nobody can give me all the answers, everyone has something to teach.

Over the years, I’ve learned to seek out human connection through the murk. I’ve found it under gazebos and magnolia trees as under overturned rocks, with used-to-be strangers like Dudley who writes detective novelettes and Elizabeth who studies musical speech therapy. The world around me is brought to life as something to soak in rather than merely drift through. It can be scary to search for social sustenance—so necessary for growth—

knowing I may be bitten or crushed, but without doing so I’d surely starve.

I’ve been at my residential school for a year now. I’ve learned a lot from being out on my own, farther down the Tombigbee. I remember watching this year’s new juniors on one of their first nights here. Many sang and socialized in a large circle. Others floated by on the outside, not quite ready to poke out of their shells. Remembering my own awkwardness giving way to close friendships ignited by brief nighttime walks, I encouraged them: “Try finding somebody to walk with. It might be uncomfortable, but it’s worthwhile.”

I don’t know what lies ahead, far away from the Tombigbee River. I find it easy to forget how big the world really is. I don’t know what the people I’ll meet will be like. I don’t know what opportunities or options I’ll have. I don’t know what I’ll see or who I’ll become. I’m not sure if life ever becomes less murky. If fish are bothered by the uncertainties of living in this opaque brown soup, they don’t show it. I’ll just keep feeling my way through. ▲

# Like Music to My Ears

Markeisha Pollard

“There’s a lot of entertainment in the dictionary,”  
Mrs. Richardson intones as she cradles a  
Thick collegiate dictionary in her arms  
And reads from the endless list,  
A symphony of words flow from the page and fill my mind

*Affectionate*

*Ambitious*

*Ambidextrous*

*Benign*

She harmonizes

Like a saxophone emitting beautiful notes, she continues

To utter words like *chic* and *chivalry*

and *enthusiastic* and *excellence*

*Happiness*

*Holiness*

*Honor*

*Liberty*

*Life*

*Love*

*Peacefulness*

*Spiritual*

All of a sudden, the music intensifies as

*Vibrant*, *Vivid*, and *Vivacious* spring to life

As the word *zealous* falls from her lips,

The violinists lower their bows.

The woodwinds release their last puff of air into the mouthpiece.

The brasses blare out their final note

And the dictionary closes.



## Highway Tranquil

Kristen Conguista

Photography



# Pill Bug

Olivia Spires

First Place—Poetry Competition

Do you Remember  
Peeping into the edge of the concrete,  
Sifting into the Dirt,  
Picking at the blades of grass  
The way you picked at scabs,  
Pulling slowly, trying to get the biggest piece?

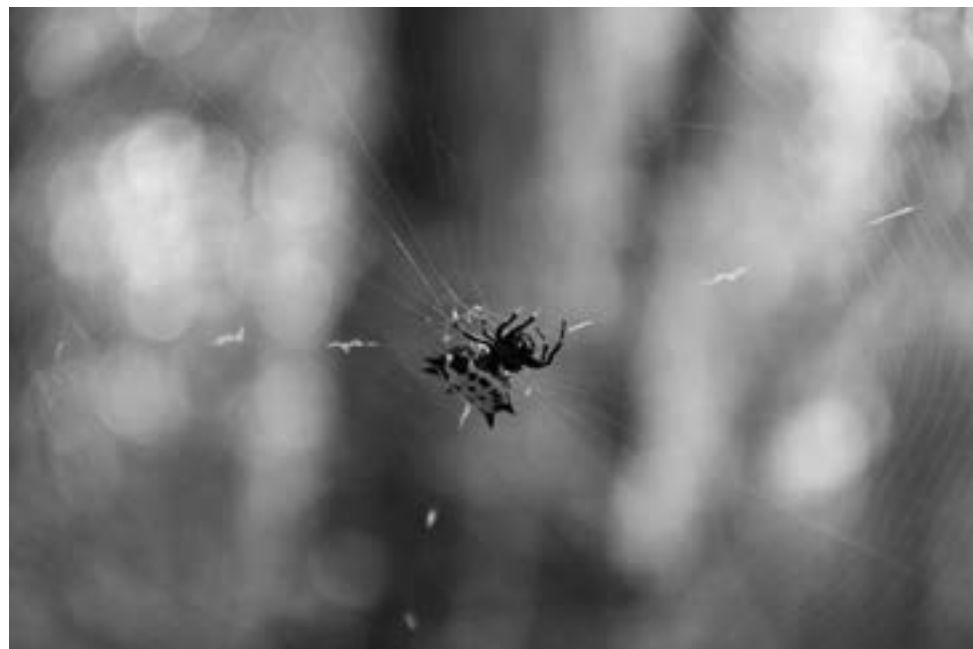
Do you remember the way  
The dirt was Alive,  
And when you Flipped a rock,  
Life Exploded  
Worms thrashed, pushing back into the Earth,  
PILL BUGS squirmed into tiny spheres?

Do you remember  
Their tiny Bodies—  
Rolie Polie Olie, rolie polie olie  
Rolls around in your mouth, pulls on your Tongue  
Tiny legs tickle the back of your Throat  
Armadillo bug, Potato bug?

Do you remember  
The way your pills  
Would crawl across your Scrawny legs  
If you stayed Still enough  
But you quickly'd Snatch them up  
To watch them furl into necklace beads?

Do you remember roly polies  
Miniature marbles to Gamble with,  
“Let’s play a game  
I have ten, I have twenty  
Pill bugs crawling all over me,”  
Goose bumps Creeping up your neck?

Do you remember,  
Do you remember them?



## Little Spiny Orb

Kristen Conguista

Photography

# People of the Carverse

Agrippa Kellum

Second Place—Short Story Competition

Samantha speaks from the driver’s seat of a borrowed SUV: “Do you ever, like, think about what it would be like to be another person, and then you stop thinking about it after a while because you start thinking about something else or something, or you go to sleep. But then later you, like, realize that that person never stopped thinking about what it would be like to be them, because they are them, and stuff. You know what I mean?” Her foot presses lightly on the gas pedal. Rapid explosions in the SUV’s engine keep the wheels moving.

“Oh, yeah, I mean, I guess. What do you mean?” Rob asks.

“I mean, I saw this girl in Florida once. And she had like these massive growths on her face. Or like, her face was made of massive growths. I mean, her face was smooth and every-

thing but like the lower half of her head,” Samantha takes a hand off of the wheel to motion an invisible contour of the shape of the girl’s face relative to her own. “See what I mean? Like everything below her nose was just a giant blob. And her mouth was like always open and didn’t really have lips. Sort of.”

“Really? Strange. It sounds like elephantiasis, but that doesn’t really happen in America.”

Ten seconds of silence pass as Samantha accelerates slowly to reach the speed limit. “Yeah. So anyway, like, I thought about what it would like to be her. I mean, it must be scary to go outside and be in public and stuff. Or maybe she doesn’t care. Does she let people know if she likes them? As in romantically. I mean I don’t know what I would do if I had growths like that. It kind of scared me to look at her. I mean I guess it didn’t scare me but it made me wonder like, ‘is this a dream?’ And I guess that made me feel bad for her. Anyways,

eventually I stop thinking about her but, like, it never goes away for her. You know? I guess I can never be like fully empathetic because I don’t know what it’s like for something to be such a constant like that.”

“A constant like what?”

“Like having giant growths on your face.”

“Oh, I see. I don’t think I’d go outside if I had severe elephantiasis. Though I don’t think that’s what she had,” Rob says, looking straight ahead. Samantha looks at him before continuing to drive in silence.

\*\*\*

Carl, driving on Interstate Highway 20, slams his brakes and comes to a halt. He pulls over and steps out of his car, clad in a white fuzzy bathrobe.

“What the hell,” he murmurs as he hastily traces his car’s path before reach-

ing his destination, about fifty feet behind his tan Camry.

“I killed a turtle. What were you doing on the highway, turtle?” The turtle does not reply. Carl looks across the highway. He scans for a now-broken turtle family, or a “free lettuce” sign.

“There’s just a bunch of trees over there. It’s the same as on this side. What the hell.” Carl nudges the turtle off the highway with his foot, and a car zips by. He watches the automobile fade into the distance as his hair settles from its turbulence. He walks back to his car, and gets in.

“Jesus Christ.” He starts his car and begins to move along the highway once again.

“What happened?”

Carl’s attention turns to a groggy voice in the backseat. “Huh? Oh. I hit a turtle.”

“Oh.”

Silence. Carl thinks about dying. *I still have*

“He pulls over and steps out of his car, clad in a white fuzzy bathrobe.”

*time for the things I want to do. I just have to be careful around highways. Turtles are dumb, but I'm not much smarter. Maybe crossing the highway is worth it for a turtle. What else have they got to do? What if they don't like the other side, though? Maybe that's what happened to that turtle, and he was trying to make his way back.*

“You know, I had a dream about a turtle once,” the voice states.

“Just now?”

“No, silly. A long time ago. I dreamed I was in a rowboat out on a lake—except it wasn't really a lake because there wasn't any land nearby, but there was no waves or anything. And this giant

turtle came up out of the water and started saying stuff. But I couldn't speak turtle so it just sounded like gibberish. I wonder what the dream meant.”

“Hm. Interesting.” *If that was really interesting to me, why didn't I say anything else? Maybe I'm a bad conversationalist. I talk all the time, though. Why don't I talk to her more? What do I even talk about with people when I do talk? I used to talk to Samantha a lot. I wonder if she still thinks about me.*

Carl hears a yawn from the backseat, and yawns himself. He hears a soft sigh, and sees a sleeping face in the rear-view mirror. His body relaxes and he smiles.

*I think I missed my turn. I hate driving cars. ▲*

“Rapid explosions in the SUV's engine keep the wheels moving.”



**Just Like Marriage**

**West Givens**

Photography

**We Were**

**Nikki Gary**

**Third Place—Poetry Competition**

We used to fashion sticks into swords and swamp moss into itchy scarves;  
Shoving back brush with tiny hands like we commanded nature –  
Willingly losing ourselves in the muggy Mississippi woods  
The oaks and fortified pines were soldiers *en garde*, the forest was our kingdom.

Often we'd scoop up mottled turtles with our bare hands.  
Laughing, we'd watch them snap, hungry, and crane their creaking necks towards heaven.  
“If ya hold 'em from the back he cain't reach ya!!”  
We weren't afraid of the bite, only the loss of a friend in the end.

Sometimes we'd even wrestle with filthy mutts,  
We'd end up with dirt on our sun-washed jeans and bundles of scratches on our knobby knees;  
Days later still, we'd pick rye grass from our ever-snarled hair and loose it gently back –  
To where it belonged,  
Laughing from our bellies about how we sent that mutt runnin' again.

We know we were raised by Mississippi,  
By heat that'd bronze skin twelve shades darker after a full day of work,  
By foggy mornings filled with iridescent dragonflies and heavy-aired nights thick with lightning bugs,  
By honeysuckle, the sap of flora more satisfying than sugar on our busy tongues,  
By slick brown creek water, daring danger in the eyes of a water moccasin, the needle-like limbs of a great banana spider,  
By courage, and kinsmanship, broken, sliding syllables of dialect  
and the happy open mouths of youth.

We were raised by sweet tea and the sweet mush of scrambled eggs in the morning.  
By the leathery loving hands of Grandpa that'd swing us skyward to join the clouds,  
repaid by the clinking fall of laughter, like coins.  
By the molasses voice of Granny, a seamstress, a cook, wise beyond any words.  
By blankets tucked tight, unlocked screen doors, even goats in the living room,  
By experience and adventure, and labor, and always the unexpected.

We know we were raised by Mississippi,  
We can still feel it when the red dirt clouds descend like fire,  
But we check twice that our doors are locked at night, the fireflies remain unchased.  
We can't wander through the woods of our youth, they're overgrown and unruly, and  
We'd never risk the brutal snap of a cranky turtle; better just to take a picture.  
We were raised with hands and knees, smiles and handshakes, warmth and light, trust.

Our youth was old Mississippi, and even armed with swords and scarves,  
we can't find it anymore.





## Looking Back

West Givens

First Place

Photography

## Lionheart

Laurel Lancaster

I can still hear them,  
 The high-pitched squeals that echoed in the halls  
 Yelling: “Nice hair, Simba!” and “Go buy a brush!”  
 I pushed my hair out of my eyes, thinking:  
*As if a brush could tame these locks.*  
 Little do they know how truly they speak,  
 That my messy mop masks a wild mane,  
 That the little girl has a lion’s heart.  
 I traded terrifying teeth for a razor-sharp wit,  
 A thirst for knowledge over a thirst for blood,  
 And gory claws become golden curls.  
 I am no beast, merely brave and bold,  
 Yet people are afraid of both.  
 I gave up being ferocious for fire in my eyes  
 And a head to hold up high.  
 As I plant my paws beneath me, I am no longer afraid.  
 No longer ashamed.  
 I tie my hair back and push past the bullies  
 While the roar of the lion rings in my ears.

## Gray

Joy Carino

Clockwork gears  
 Skies overcast  
 Blurred eyes finding comfort in sleep at last

Winter’s sweaters  
 Dust and fluff  
 The sulking mood when nights are rough

Grandmother’s hair  
 Old bread’s mold  
 The waiting for bedtime stories untold

His worn sneakers  
 Dusting photographs  
 The empty hallways echoing laughs

Failing patience  
 Scales of fish  
 The nickel thrown in for a fountain wish

Cracks in sidewalk  
 Cobwebs in corner  
 The billowing disturbance of a passing ship’s anchor

Pencil’s graphite  
 Nocturne’s song  
 The precarious expanse between right and wrong



## The Dance is Over

Ella Stone

Oil Painting

# Mockingbird

Mary Frances Holland

Who knew a bird of such small stature  
Could fight as furiously as you?  
For any irritating imbecile that comes your way  
Meets a flash of white on sterling  
And short talons digging into fur and feather.

But I never question your methods.  
I simply trust your proud perch in the trees.  
I read wise when others yell wild.  
Darting eyes spot what I cannot see,  
Ready to discover and defend.

Cantor and collector,  
You share a myriad of found melodies,  
A repertory of repeating rhythms  
Sounds both different and the same,  
Weaving a web of lost and found.

But sometimes I wonder if in all of this  
You lost your own voice  
Finding bravery in a mask of stolen things.



## Looking Out

Boone Leetran

Second Place—Drawing  
Competition  
Charcoal Reserve

# Nets

Nikki Gary

Latex dipped fingers and a jawline that could cut like coral  
The world around him is painted in muted tones of gray and vibrant safety yellow  
He is a killer of angels, he smothers stars, with his massive hands he chokes the air  
From horses  
Of the sea  
And the nets are mimicking the way the sunlight drapes across the seafloor  
The undulating ebb of light strands are replaced by coarse knots and peepholes  
Waiting for willing fish to play hide and go seek  
The nets always win.  
Go seek the catch!! The captain instructs.  
Kill the angels!! (Tiny fluorescent creatures that flutter through currents)  
Smother the stars!! (Five-pointed lives, regenerating only because they have lost)  
Bring in...the nets.  
With a whistle he obeys, and under the gentle sun hundreds die.  
Borrowing the hearts of merfolk, gasping as the sea-dwellers that lie dying do,  
Today's catch and I all gaze at the sky,  
The sun  
With glassy un-lidded eyes, weeping, and ask  
Why.



## Jester of NOLA

Ross Berry

Second Place—Sculpture Competition  
Clay



## The Girl in Pink

Justin Calhoun

First Place—Painting Competition  
Acrylic





## Mamma's Sweet Iced Tea

Hannah Crouch

Second Place—Painting Competition  
Acrylic



## Keeper of the City

Quentin Whitsitt

First Place—Sculpture  
Competition  
Clay



## Graffiti

West Givens

Second Place  
Photography

## P.S. from Oxford

Ashtyn Steel McAdams

Second Place—Poetry Competition

And some time make the time to drive down south to Hernando  
Past Tunica where fields fill with white fluff and get harvested by blue overalls.  
And don't forget to visit Louie May's,  
Her spotted-white picket fence and flowers that smell of vanilla  
Mark the old house from the rest of the neighborhood.  
The drive past your dad's speed shop should remind you  
Of the days we spent laboring next to the stench of gasoline  
With oil painted on our noses.  
It's those days when we couldn't reach the gas pedal  
That Granddaddy would sit on the porch with a magazine in his hand  
As we ran around the yard 'til fireflies got caught in jars.



## Head in the Clouds

Shreya Gunapati

Third Place—Drawing Competition  
Pastel, Colored Pencil





## Paw Paw's Place

Carly Sneed

Third Place  
Photography



## Fires of Fall

Laura Creekmore

Third Place—Painting Competition  
Encaustic



## Monster Me

Hakeem Mickle  
Pen and Ink

## Eyeless Groaning

Conor Hultman

I was seeing Grandpa  
in the nursing home where he stayed.  
“Just a week or two,” Grandma said,  
“Until he gets better.”  
He was rooming with a blind man,  
all loose skin and warped bones.  
“Wish he’d quit that groanin all day,”  
Grandpa quipped at me.  
“Bout caint getny sleep.”  
The blind man shifted and groaned,  
open-mouthed, shut-eyed,  
craning his baby-like face up  
toward the ceiling.  
The groaning stopped.  
Later, while I was still talking to Grandpa,  
a nurse came in to check on the blind man.  
Several hurried glances and hushed tones later,  
I was ushered out into the hall.  
More nurses hauled his body onto a table  
and carried him out.  
His family stood in the hall  
already in tears.  
I saw him all of a good thirty minutes,  
and yet for the next three weeks  
I couldn’t stop wondering:  
“Was he asleep?”



## Floral

Kay Burnside

(Originated by Class of 2014, Painting II;  
Completed by Kay Burnside)

Honorable Mention—Painting  
Competition  
Acrylic



## Eye

Elise Stoxstill

Third Place—Sculpture  
Competition  
Clay





## The River

Lauren Chatelain

Honorable Mention—Painting  
Competition

Acrylic



## Looks Can Be Deceiving

Michelle McCullum

Honorable Mention—Sculpture  
Competition

Clay



## Stada di Mattoni

Kristin Conguista

Honorable Mention  
Photography



## Magnolia

Shreya Gunapati

Watercolor



## Bottle Cap Checkers

West Givens

Honorable Mention  
Photography





**The Reach**  
**Shreya Gunapati**  
 Honorable Mention  
 Photography



**The Blue Demon**  
**Noah Ulmer**  
 Honorable Mention—Sculpture Competition  
 Sculpture



**Night Street**  
**Seth Lee**  
 Encaustic

## Grissleback

John Johnson

I assume the story begins in the middle of a cotton field, in Greenville, Mississippi. The time my father lived in required a boy to become a man much more quickly than puberty would normally allow. The transition was fast: “You go from being born, to breast-fed, then in the next few months, when you’re a man, you’re out there pickin’.” My dad often tells me of the rows and rows of little white clouds he had to pick as a child, how he and six of his siblings would many times work from sun up to sun down just “picking, picking, picking.” The plush clouds growing from the rich soil couldn’t thwart the sun’s unrelenting effort to cook my father in the big, white skillet. Since I often find it demanding to clean up around the house, I asked him if he ever complained about the less-than-adequate conditions he worked in. He said that he did complain—once. He filed this complaint to his mother, the warden of the whole cotton operation. She sharply replied with, “Boy, ya gotta grissleback; na go out there and finish so you won’t be slowin’ down ya brothers and sisters.” There’s an old saying that goes, “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” Noting that his mother was not often very sparing, this was the last complaint my father filed. I questioned my dad on what exactly a “grissleback” was. He told me that it basically means a person has no back bone, or is weak. Apparently, a fifty-pound child being unable to drag a fifty-pound bag stuffed to the brim with cotton got him the classification of “feeble” during my dad’s youth.

My dad had children of his own at a young age. He was forced to grow into a man even *more* quickly than what was initially expected of him. Of course, this is a tough idea to wrap one’s head around, since he was essentially born on soil, picking cotton. He had to work multiple tedious jobs at a time to not only feed himself and his family, but to also pay his way through college. Balancing college work, family work, and *work work* must’ve

been as hard as being an adolescent slaving in a cotton field from a scalding sun up to a bone-chilling sun down.

Through the many adversities my dad had to overcome, he continued to turn hardships into minor successes and minor successes into major triumphs. Now, my dad has earned a Bachelor’s degree in Health Science and a Master’s degree in Public Health; he currently works as a respiratory therapist in Delta Regional Hospital. Although initially meant as a chastisement, I believe a “grissleback” is exactly what my dad needed to survive. Had my dad had a “bone” back, it would have surely broken. The tough cartilage composition of my dad’s back is what allowed him to be so resilient and be the man that he is today—and it is what continues to inspire me. ▲



**The Face**  
**Justin Calhoun**  
 Acrylic



# Cruel Silence

Michelle Li

Third Place—Short Story Competition

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon when her noisy red van first clanked down Marilyn’s street, shattering the routine tranquility of the small, gated community. Marilyn watched as the colorful van rolled into the driveway two down from her own. She looked over at her best friend Alice, silently confirming their curiosity. The two girls crept up the hill and hovered behind the pecan tree, watching as the brightly colored van came to a squeaky stop and an equally as brightly dressed girl tumbled out. Her hair was sticking up in every direction as she furiously rubbed her eyes, obviously having just woken up. She stretched her arms while scanning her sleepy eyes over the neighborhood. By this time, Marilyn and Alice had abandoned their hiding spot behind the tree in favor of further investigating this strange new girl. When her gaze landed on them, she smiled, face splitting from ear to ear, and held out her hand.

“Hi, I’m Heather!” she chirped. “And I moved here all the way from California!”

Marilyn was amazed by this because she’d never really left their little town. Her parents couldn’t afford that kind of luxury. Her eyes widened at the crazy stories Heather told about running into the Jonas brothers at Subway or Hannah Montana at the mall. She invited Heather over to her house that afternoon, eager to hear more about her adventures in Hollywood. Boy, did Heather love telling stories! The way her entire face would light up and her hands gestured widely in accompaniment to her ridiculous tales further enraptured Marilyn, her captivated audience.

That summer, Marilyn and Alice expanded their exclusive friendship to include Heather. They

would skip over to her house almost every day at noon, just in time to grab a chocolate chip cookie off the top of her mother’s tray before she headed to her shift at the nursing home. Maybe it was the scent of freshly baked cookies that always seemed to hang in the air or the strange trinkets that Heather’s mother collected that supposedly kept out evil spirits that made Heather’s house so appealing to Marilyn. Either way, the funky colored rugs that littered the floor and the mismatched furniture that decorated the living room became as familiar to

“Maybe it was the scent of freshly baked cookies that always seemed to hang in the air...”

Marilyn as the back of her hand. The three girls spent countless summer nights gushing over Zac Efron’s biceps and sneaking Capri Sun’s out of the kitchen. They’d paint each other’s nails in funky colors and

hunt for mismatched clothing in Heather’s mom’s closet, giggling the whole time at how ridiculous they looked. That summer was a blur of laughter, late nights, and nail polish, but one particular event stuck out in Marilyn’s mind.

It had started off like a regular night. Heather’s mother was working a late shift at the nursing home and the girls had decided to spend the night at Heather’s house. They cranked the old radio in Heather’s living room as loud as it would go and were singing along at the top of their lungs and trying out their funkiest dance moves when Marilyn, who was trying to Wobble, accidentally knocked over one of Heather’s mother’s sacred vases. The girls froze, watching in slow motion, as the vase hit the floor and shattered. Heather’s eyes widened in horror and Marilyn felt fear fill her throat. They panicked and ended up burying the pieces in Heather’s backyard, praying all the while that her mother wouldn’t notice. Unfortunately,

the next morning while tidying up the house, Ms. Cardin noticed her missing vase and angrily summoned the girls. Marilyn felt dread pool in her stomach as she filed into the living room behind Heather and Alice, facing Ms. Cardin.

“Where is my vase?” she demanded.

Her finger viciously stabbed at the empty space above the mantel which the vase had previously sat. By this time, Alice was trembling like a leaf and had just opened her mouth to rat Marilyn out when Heather stepping forward and declared, “I broke it.” Alice’s eyes widened at the lie but she said nothing. At that moment, Marilyn felt not only impossibly grateful for Heather, but also a deep sense of admiration. She had taken the blame for a crime she didn’t commit, for Marilyn’s sake, and had lost her TV privileges for two weeks because of it. Marilyn had apologized profusely afterwards and even offered Heather her favorite lip gloss, but Heather just laughed and shrugged it off as if it were no big deal. This incident brought the girls closer than ever. But as all good things come to an end, the summer soon led into the school year, and before they knew it, school had started.

Honestly, even now, Marilyn is still not quite sure what happened. She still can’t pinpoint exactly what changed; all she knew is that something did. Somewhere along their transition from summer into the school year, the bright colors that Heather often wore weren’t so cute anymore and her unruly brown tresses that Marilyn had always thought gave her spunk made Heather the target of spiteful jokes. Being the new girl also made things worse. At lunch, the girls they sat with often poked fun at Heather, and it made Marilyn uncomfortable; she had never thought it was anything serious, though, until Heather was late to lunch one day and Kylie placed her lunch box on Heather’s usual seat. When Heather arrived, she had nowhere to sit.

“I’m sorry, but Kendall asked me to save her a seat,” Kylie said, a cruel smirk twisting her lips.

Heather stood there helplessly, her face burning

with humiliation. Marilyn opened her mouth to object but Alice elbowed her, effectively quieting her protest. She was forced to watch as Heather lowered her head in shame and turned to leave the cafeteria.

As the year progressed, Marilyn saw less and less of Heather; the bright colors she once wore faded into grays and then blacks. She withdrew further and further from their group of friends. Echoes of “Does she even own a brush?” accompanied by cruel snickering and judging stares widened the ever-growing chasm between them. Her once proud shoulders became permanently hunched, molding around her neck as she walked through the hallways. Marilyn saw all this, yet she did nothing. The fear of becoming a victim herself stopped her from coming to Heather’s rescue. She was a coward, standing by and watching helplessly as the other kids tormented Heather. She will always be haunted by the powerless look in Heather’s eyes, filled with pain and self-loathing. Marilyn had never felt so ashamed in her life.

Then, halfway through the school year, Heather moved. One day she was there, then the next day she was just gone. When Marilyn went to her house, she found it completely empty, a bright orange *For Sale* sign marking the front lawn under the pecan tree where they’d first met. She ran to the front window and peered into the living room. It was bare, not a trace of Heather’s once vibrant presence left behind. The floor was tiled with dark gray stone. Funny, Marilyn was almost certain she’d never seen the tiles before. Then she remembered they’d always been covered by colorful rugs. A wave of guilt and nostalgia washed over her.

Rumors spread at school that Heather had attempted suicide and that her mother had checked her into a mental hospital. They made Marilyn sick to her stomach. She wanted, so badly, to turn back time and change her actions, to apologize for all the pain she could have prevented. But it was too late. Heather was gone. ▲

# Free Ravens

Veronica Miniard

I ponder about those obsidian blurs  
Resting among the trees in the forest  
Their piercing dark eyes stare into mine  
Crying out like a small child into dusk  
Calling their brethren to circle around a meal  
All fear this misunderstood creature  
Uttering as if death is turning the corner  
Misfortune they are called  
Omens of disaster they are named  
Carnivorous yet rarely laying harm to living flesh  
Little beasts encased in the whispers of those who have fallen  
Never to be released from your bonds of sorrow  
I pray that light will shine in your favor



## In Thin Air

West Givens

Honorable Mention

Photography



## Paradiso

Kristen Conguista

Photography



## The Farm

Carly Sneed

Photography



# Counting Taxis

Katie Shy

Second Place—Essay Competition

Before I visited New York City for the first time, I was primed to fall in love with it. My dad hadn't moved there yet, but had amply related its virtues: lofty architecture, long city walks, people-watching. At twelve, trailing him around Manhattan, I dutifully appreciated them too. A few years later, going to stay in his tiny studio, there are new things, family things: counting the ratio of taxis to ordinary cars (secretly hoping taxis will win), reading his books after daylight fades, straining to watch the TVs across the street, guessing what color the Empire State Building will be each night. There are teenager things too—resisting when Dad tells us to go to bed, hiding snacks in his fridge, dragging everyone into vintage kitchenware stores.

Children's books often have similar frames—parents, for instance, are out of the way—but my favorite underlying structure is that which ties together the Boxcar children, the Magic Treehouse duo, Francie in Brooklyn: a private space, a hideout, a secret. I don't think that longing for this romanticized near-solitude fades with age, or even as you enter a city with millions of residents. It hasn't for me, anyway. I'm usually the last awake at Dad's apartment, and use this time to warily hoist myself onto the window ledge, my hideout. The window ledge isn't a window seat; in fact, it's not a ledge at all at Dad's but a home for a ceramic dish of

pennies, a few NY Real Estate magazines (we find them outrageous), and a rubber band ball, all of which I move with attempted stealth. I bring whatever book I've borrowed from his shelves and start to read but soon close it. Curling into a ball, I watch the city, count the taxis, alone. I am awake and I shouldn't be, but the solitude is precious at the same time that it is an illusion.

I can never tell if it's illusion or solidity I want from the city, actually. Maybe it's both. I want

every single person here to be real, earnest, touchable, and yet I want to transcend this simple perspective. I want to see illuminated windows, and in the most innocent sense I want their blinds to be open; I want to be in their lives. As I watch, as I give myself to the ordered streets and disordered street vendors, multitude of buildings and glorious architectures, socialites and street musicians, I am not a taxi rider but a taxi, a living, breathing organ of the city's life force. I am on the window, separated by a sheet of glass and Dad's firmly locked apartment—separated by no more than some stairs—not separated at all. I am disconnected,

too young, but feel no barriers between myself and the city. I feel no barriers between Holden Caulfield and me, or Nick Carraway. Dad's wall of literature lies to my left, the openness of unrestrained life waits below my ledge, and everything is at once part of New York and part of me.

“As I watch,  
as I give myself to  
the ordered streets  
and disordered street  
vendors, multitude of  
buildings and glorious  
architectures, socialites  
and street musicians,  
I am not a taxi rider  
but a taxi, a living,  
breathing organ of the  
city's life force.”

There are no barriers in this city which, after all, is the old entry point to America. For me, already a citizen, the city is the entrance to so much more: it is infinite possibility, infinite connectivity. Billions of feet have walked 23<sup>rd</sup> Street as we did to get bagels this morning, millions have made the same brunch run, thousands have constructed the streets and the store. New York offers precious anonymity, but I don't want to hide; I want to identify, to shape-shift. The city's cast of never-extinguished lights are lives, panoramas, dramas within my reach, and they are open to me because everything is in this moment. I am in the literature and it is in the city and the unrestrained life is right here, in this apartment and on this street, and it is beautiful and it is true.▲



**Sterling Dancer**

Dajah Carter

Encaustic



**Stairway**

West Givens

Photography

# Dad’s Dogs

Nikki Gary

First Place—Essay Competition

Looming granite bulldogs took over the city when my father left it. Hunching in the corners of playgrounds, standing brazen on city-street corners, frothing frozen mid-woof amongst the throngs of schoolchildren. They were stoic and scattered, instillations of art and wonder that seven-year-old me longed to climb atop and claim. Built by the city, the canines served to unite and glorify the city in which my father was born: Athens, the home of the Georgia Bulldogs. These Cerberus-like statues were placed in an Athens, Georgia, that my father no longer knew.

I was born in Athens, just like my dad, but I spent more time there in the years following than he did. Childhood there could not have been

sweeter; I remember romping through the cool woods behind my house and taking day trips to the city, always easy days that passed by in shades of sepia and smiles. I loved Athens, craved every downstairs, alleyway, two-turns-and-a-drop hidden store there was, and clutching my mother’s manicured hands I vowed to seek them all. Memories of navy lanterns, blue and fluorescent, stiff

cardstock folded into seven-pointed stars, danced like the lantern light itself across my vision. I remember the city feeling empty at times, even though I still deem it the city of “good vibes,” where no malice was ever felt among the streets housing new-age bookshops and tiny courtyard coffee brewhouses. In contemplation I came to realize the emptiness was the presence of “Daddy” turned “Dad” turned “Father”—pleasantry dropping with each year that passed.

My father’s past presence was felt in the district of Winterville, sleepy houses and red-dirt plots where the trailer and rickety shack of my countless cousins sat and rotted. I hated going to those parts of Athens, where the flattened carpets in the houses were more dirt than cloth and the whole cul-de-sac smelled like a melody of week-old grease. Couches that longed to devour me in their overstuffing, static masking soap operas I was never interested in seeing anyways, mutts and wood and stagnancy. The only thing that shone like a beacon of light to my small wide eyes was the fish tank filled with odds and ends instead of water, and all the possibility for light and life it held. It *must* have been the same when Dad was

“In contemplation I came to realize the emptiness was the presence of “Daddy” turned “Dad” turned “Father”—pleasantry dropping with each year that passed.”

growing up here, I thought, but when I called to ask him only my message got through. He travels now, works odd jobs, and sometimes he is just too on-the-move to pick up the phone.

I wonder how Dad felt when he looked up at the not-quite skyscraper building laced daintily in ivy and felt the leaves of solemn birch trees crinkle underfoot for the first time. Was Athens the same for him? Was it the same Athens where the

streets looped and intersected like the spaghetti I could never finish and the teachers all had short hair and smiled honest and wide when teaching us our colors? Where people smiled when they passed you on the streets and strangers made fast friends while their dogs sniffed each other? Where every weekend the blacks and crimsons (outlined in white) flew vibrant from car doors and tailgates and faces and every surface the colors would stick to, the whole city on the edge of its seat, roaring for

gametime? Was Athens magical and easygoing and full of light and love, warmer even than a hug for him too?

I know my father left his mark on Athens. He is responsible for the rust-tinged brick that lines the streets these days. He “laid it himself!” Now when I visit Athens I don’t do much more than analyze the brickwork; I can’t help but stare at it in a search for him, for the old feelings I got from Athens, and I wonder if this is the reason I have the bad habit of walking with my head down.

A contribution: he left me there, to grow up smiling in a city that loved me back, a place where I

“I’d press my palms to the cool stone and imagine the larger prints were my father’s, and that we made our mark on Athens together.”

thought of family and longing and love above all else. When I think back now to my favorite bulldog statue, I think not of the stoic black marble one on Beaverdam Road, but of the contained chaos of the one covered in rainbows of handprints. I’d press my palms to the cool stone and imagine the larger prints were

my father’s, and that we made our mark on Athens together. ▲



## Waiting for Butch

Carley Sneed

Photography



# The Twenty-First Pizza Hut in Tennessee

Conor Hultman

“Relax. Breathe. Slowly, in through the nose. Ten seconds. Slowly, out through the mouth. Good. Relax ....” June imagined the words in her head, counting the ten seconds in equal measure, her fingers clicking on the edge of the cash register. The words came from an inspirational CD she had bought at a gas station while on a cigarette run (that yellowing and empty habit which she had picked up her last semester of high school, so many years ago). She didn’t know why she had bought it then, but now June could feel its magic working, lulling her into a pleasant, half-lidded fugue; repeating the words to herself, June was barely even aware of the customer, red-faced and screaming at her to refill the Diet Coke in the soda fountain.

“Relax. Breathe ... .”

June said the words to get through the nine-to-five shift as a cashier at Pizza Hut; “Twenty-First in Tennessee!” read an imitation-wood plaque, right above the health inspection certificate (“B”). June said the words to handle the mobs of patrons that assaulted her counter every day, such as the one she had just forgotten about; she glanced up at the face, flushed a deep scarlet; from somewhere she thought she heard, “Where’s the manager? May I speak to the ... Hello! Hello? God, are you kidding me?! ... .” June said the words to ignore Maurice, the slimy teenage scuzzball who would slink over from the kitchen, powdery dough still stuck to his stubby fingers, to crack inappropriate jokes and then laugh with that awful, breathy wheeze. June said the words to endure her boss, Mr. Rindle, who took entire pizzas and two liter bottles of soda from the kitchen and would stroll up to June, smacking and slurping, spraying pepperoni and Fanta everywhere, just to demand she pick up an extra shift or lose her job. And June said the words in an attempt to forget the tube of lipstick that was not hers (the mysterious tube read “Cherry Blossom,” a color much too girly for June) that she had found underneath the bed she shared

with her boyfriend in their dingy, three-room apartment. The words, for all their cheesy, TV evangelist smarm, worked wonders.

Remembering the furiously red man, June snapped to and realized he was gone. Looking around the almost empty restaurant, she saw no sign of him. The inky eight o’clock darkness hanging outside the windows seemed a troubling omen to June. Only one hour, and three more pizzas for delivery, and she could claim another day survived. The yellow-white fluorescent tubes on the ceiling pulsed a drowning *brzzz*.

“Relax ... .” June incanted.

Through the door for the first pizza lumbered a massive, perfectly round man sporting a sweat-stained wife-beater and ripped pajama pants. He lurched up to the counter (she wondered why he didn’t roll) and addressed June.

“I came fer my pizza,” the perfect sphere boldly announced. “What I owe you?”

“Um ... thirteen-ninety.”

Staring harder at the blob’s shirt, June perceived words on the fabric sunken into his fat folds; “Sexy Thing.” Sexy Thing peeled two damp bills from his pajama pants pocket and stuck them to the counter.

“Breathe ... .” June recited.

Soon after Sexy Thing left, Maurice crept from the kitchen and sidled up to June. He leaned a hand on the countertop, leaving a crumbly white imprint.

“Pretty slow night, eh, June? Hehe, *thssss!*”

June said nothing, hoping that if she didn’t acknowledge Maurice and his painful hissing laugh, she could will him out of existence.

“Say, June, you ever hear the one about the bear, the rabbi, and Hillary Clinton? Hehe, *thssss!* It starts off like this ... .”

June repeated, “Slowly, in through the nose... .”

“... and imagine explaining *that* to the Senate! Hehe, *thssss!*”

Maurice took a sharp inhale, likely preparing for another intellectual witticism, when Mr. Rindle came in swinging a two-liter Orange Fanta.

“Whup, don’t wanna get stuck with an extra shift. See ya!” Maurice turned and sped off, hissing all the way back into the kitchen.

Mr. Rindle flipped one of the two pizza boxes open on the counter and started folding slices of stuffed crust pepperoni into his mouth.

“Hey, er, June,” Mr. Rindle chomped, expelling flecks of sauce onto the counter. “I’m gonna need you to come in Saturday.”

“Mr. Rindle, I don’t ... .”

“Hey!” he shouted, spewing the Orange Fanta he was guzzling over the counter in a fine mist. “That *wasn’t* a request. And I’ll have you know, I didn’t become manager of THE twenty-first Pizza Hut in Tennessee by being a lazy slouch sleeping at the register!” He snatched the rest of the pizza and turned to leave.

“Oh, yeah,” he added, looking at the Picasso of flour, tomato sauce, and orange soda on the countertop, “and clean this up. It’s filthy.”

“Slowly, out through the mouth ... .” June sighed.

The door slammed. June, already feeling groggy, her eyes stinging under the harsh fluorescent lights, turned to see who was picking up the last pizza of the night. It was her boyfriend; on his arm was a woman June had never seen before. She was tall, blond, skinny, and at least ten years younger than him. If June were asked to describe the color of this woman’s lips, she’d say “Cherry Blossom.”

June’s boyfriend, still hugging the tramp, walked right up to the counter, eyes locked with June’s, and levelly said, “We’ve come to pick up our pizza.”

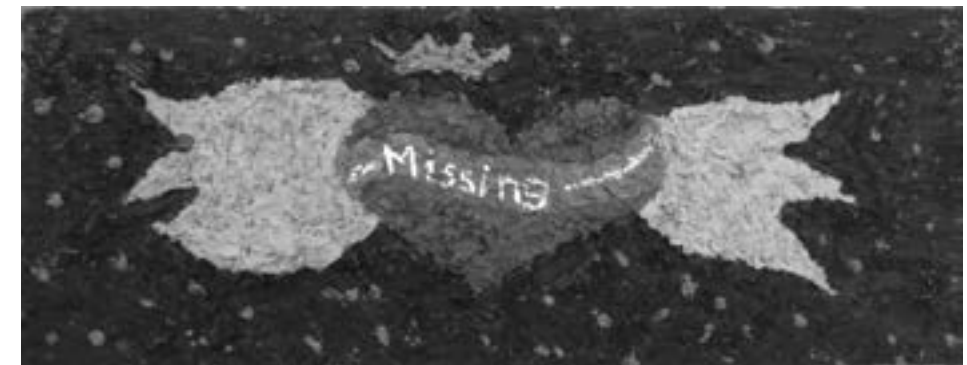
June kept looking at him. Nothing came to mind to say. Nothing *could* be said. She just felt; her head was pounding, her hands were shaking, but worst of all, a phantom ache gripped her lungs, squeezing the air out of them. The words could not stop, nor even conceal, any of this.

After a while, June finally said, “Sure, just a moment.” She grabbed the last pizza box and headed for the door. Mr. Rindle was just plodding back into the room.

“Woah, where’re you going, your shift’s not—” he started.

“*Bite me,*” she said.

June marched through the parking lot towards her boyfriend’s car, a battered blue Toyota, the same one she had been helping him make payments on for months. She opened the door, tore open the pizza box, took out the extra-large deep-dish meat lover’s, and stuck it onto the gear shift. Then, June made her way to her own car. She turned the ignition, got her package of Marlboros from the glove box, and was lighting one up when she noticed the CD sticking out of the stereo: *Wise Words for the Worried Heart*. She slid it out, rolled down the window, and threw it as her car barreled out of the parking lot and into the nine o’clock dusk. ▲



**Missing**  
**Michelle McCullum**

Encaustic



**Little Italy**  
**Shreya Gunapati**  
 Photography



**Alone**  
**Lauren Chatelain**  
 Acrylic

## Chiron

Jenny Bobo

**I**  
 To the ancient Greeks, Chiron was a kindly centaur, mentor to great heroes like Achilles, opposite in nature to his warlike, constantly inebriated brethren. To me, however, Chiron was a full horse, with little tutoring skills except to those younger, rowdier foals he was sometimes pastured with. My Chiron was a quiet gelding, complaisant to simple commands and fairly decent at cart-pulling if given a slow pace to match and lots of praise afterwards. He never balked, kicked, jumped, charged, bit, or even pawed at any human: a true representation of the ideal working Shire. It can be said, however, that his training was rudimentary; he knew little of the life of work beyond the occasional short-lived wagon festivities. Perhaps if he'd been worked more in early years he could have put up with that witch. I sure as hell know I couldn't have, even with a thousand years of training, even from the tutelage of the greatest centaur the Greeks ever had.

The witch herself arrived one balmy autumn midday, shambling up the sidewalk whilst complaining all the while of her stiff hip and every minute inconvenience of her entire drive. The

trailer had blown a tire; her phone had died; the entire world was against her. I leaned against a porch column, attempting to blink away the headache her jabbering would soon form. I'd already been out to the gelding pasture twice that morning, both times at my daddy's beck to "brush them boys 'til they shine." Indeed, they shone. I'd given each boy a quick bath and scraped away the water with a tined brush; Chiron was the most brilliant of the four, his ebony coat highlighted with russet from a long, sunny summer and his wiry mop of mane coiled into lustrous dreadlocks. Mama cut the witch off from her complaint monologue with a polite offer of refreshment and rest. The hag declined, grumbling about needing to see the horse "right now, otherwise we're wasting time." I snorted and leapt off the porch, striding across the yard to the gravel road that meandered across the creek up to the gelding pasture. My parents, sister, and the witch all loaded into a set of ATVs and zoomed ahead of me, plodding along with my eyes on the line dividing the chalky rock road and the silky byhalia. When I reached the feeding stalls connected to the front of their forty-acre pasture, no horses were to be seen; there was only



**Weeping Angel**  
**Candace Carter**  
 Acrylic



my father banging on the buckets, mimicking the feeding call for all creatures we have ever owned. The boys rounded the corner from the pine forest, thundering their way clumsily to the stalls. They snorted and pawed, eager for food they would not receive, as my sister snuck around behind them, securing each pipe gate to ensure no escape from the witch’s clutches.

The first three horses proved to be inadequate for the witch; she looked Comet, Zeus, and Apollo over without placing one finger on any of them, denouncing each to be “not what she needed.” With each word she slurred from her tobacco-stained teeth, my hatred of her grew. This woman had already been to our home twice, viewing our horses then rattling off after several hours with a declaration of “I need time t’think.” My parents both kept inviting her back, hoping to sell a horse after almost a decade of no sales. She oozed superiority and condescension; she treated my

friends like trash, slapping their hocks and jerking their halters down so she could meet their eyes with her own beady, black, soulless gaze. She had yet to inspect Chiron; from what she’d described as the right horse to pair with her other black Shire, I knew she’d settled on Chiron. After the same rough once-over, she proclaimed Chiron to be

“good.” I jammed my greasy hands into the pockets of my mud-splattered jeans to stop my body from trembling with anger. She struck a deal with my father for a trial period, and off she whisked my sweet brother. My tears had hardly any time to seep into the dirt smears on my cheeks before the trailer bobbed down the highway and out of sight.

II

It had been close to five months since she taken him, and the first spider lilies were shooting up from Mama’s raised flower bed. The crone called during a Saturday lunch after a morning of

mulching and pruning, explaining that it hadn’t worked out, Chiron had been “too lazy t’fix after all.” So she brought him back the following Thursday. It’s a blessing I wasn’t there to see her, for if I had been, she’d have been sent on her way with a few less teeth. My mama was the only one home and, therefore, the only one available to help unload Chiron. He shuffled from the back of the trailer, his lips drifting over the soft tufts of milo. He was not the same horse. He’d lost weight, now lacking that roll in his step that made his jolly belly jiggle; his eyes were glassy, blank of all previous expression, even anger. The witch towed him towards the paddock; he tottered behind in a stupor. His gaze wandered from the ground to Mama’s boots then up to her face. If asked today, she’d recall his eyes “lit up like someone threw a match on a brush pile in a drought.” His spark, I believe, was reignited in that instant. And how he chose to rejoice in its return will forever be

the reason I believe horses are smarter, and wittier, than people. He jerked to a halt, snapping the witch’s arm back to near his shoulder. She squealed and thumped him on the face, the face! Even my mama would’ve slapped her for it, but Chiron beat her to the punch. He whipped around, situating his haunches near the hag’s face, and

double-kicked the woman’s bad hip, the one she’d bleated about since I’d first met her. Mama says she might’ve actually given a little delighted whoop before fetching the horse and helping the witch to her stubby feet.

The crone wasn’t injured badly, just given something real to complain about for once. She left without much fuss; perhaps, in a moment of clarity, she’d realized her cruelty and just how much injustice she’d done to Chiron. That day after school, I strode quickly up the hill, over the creek and culvert, and through the paddock gate, dreading to see Chiron, broken and weak as my mama

had woefully described. I whistled and glanced around, seeing none of the geldings. Then their hoof beats echoed from the fringes of the pines, and a resplendent sight, very much like the day Chiron had left me, emerged a moment later. I marveled at the skinnier figure of my friend, head high as he led the procession of proud Shires into the bodock paddock. His eyes were not glassy; his countenance displayed his usual charm. I yanked the carrot bag from my shoulder and dispersed the treats quickly, my eyes flickering across Chiron’s form as he walked and ate, searching for signs of trauma. Although he was smaller and weaker than his normal self, he showed no feelings of pain, much to my delight. He nudged me, and I wrapped my arms around his arched neck, draped with shaggy coal tresses. This time my tears fell on Chiron’s shoulder and were given ample time

to soak into his dusty, matted hair, christening his deliverance from hell.

Although I saw no wounds on Chiron that day, I soon realized there were still plenty lurking in his mind. It took months before he didn’t flinch at a hand being raised or run from the sight of a wagon. For the longest time he wheezed pitifully when confronted with a harness. We slowly coaxed him back into his former self, helping him regain the confidence the witch had stolen from him. Today, he has been rehabilitated to his full being, once again the sage-like elder to the rambunctious weanlings of any given year. I give you my word that I saw him hold lessons in decorum for his little adopted brood in the clover patches just this spring. As for the witch, she was never heard from again, and it’s a good thing, too. Bad things can happen on a farm. ▲



**Landscape**  
**Justin Calhoun**  
Acrylic

# Hiding Behind Dust Bunnies

Angie Harri

The sunlight slanted through the cracked blinds, mingling with the dust in the air. Legos scattered across the floor created a dangerous path to tread as the tabby house cat meowed in pain when it didn't watch its step. A pair of startled blue eyes peeked from under the bed, the grimy floor full of dust bunnies and animal hair.

"Now Will, what are you doing under the bed? You can barely fit down there," said a deep, kind voice. Unresponsive, Will crawled out into the world he could call his very own, littered with soccer balls and worn clothes which gave the room a permanent sour smell. After a quiet pause, Will said, "I don't want to be seen." His grandfather sat down on a flimsy, red plastic chair and motioned Will to come over. Will stared at a piece of lint hanging on his grandfather's sweater until he decided to move. Gnawing on his lip, he dragged his feet toward where his grandfather sat and stood there with his head drooping down 'til his chin met his chest.

"I'm not going back, Pop!" Will said.

"I didn't say you had to, I just wanted to see that new game you're obsessed with," replied his grandfather. Will's eyes shone a little brighter and his gnawing intensified as he tread across the room

towards the colorful board of Monopoly, excited to share his new favorite game. Momentarily forgetting why he was upset, Will became engrossed with the pieces to the board game he had begun to set up.

"Will you teach me?" asked Pop.

"I mean, I guess...it's kind of complicated so don't get mad if you don't get it the first time, mmkay?"

"Well, I'm in good hands."

"Okay, so first what you do..." Pop and Will

spent over an hour in the dim room rolling dice and buying properties. Tiny green houses lined the board, sometimes turning into big red hotels. The sun began to set, leaving the room in a dark gray light, and the game wasn't even close to completion.

"Will, why do you like this game so much?"

"Cause I get rich, that's why. I wish I was rich now."

"And why is that? You have all you need right here." Pop motioned around the room, looking at the numerous games lining the walls, the closet full of clothes, the bed promising sweet dreams. Will followed his grandfather's gaze, his eyes gleaming in the dim light.

"Will, you know you can tell me anything, right? You know I love you very much, right?"

"I..." Will started. "Have all of the people left yet? I won't go outside if they haven't. They'll all laugh at me." Will heard Pop's bones crack as he

stood up to lay his arm across Will's small shoulders.

"Now why would they do that?"

"Because I knocked over Ma's favorite vase and the dirt spilled and now the flower's gonna die and everyone laughed at me! And I don't have enough money to buy a

new one!" Will directed his gaze at his small piggy bank, which was slowly gathering dust.

"Oh, Will, is this what you're hiding yourself from? They weren't laughing at you! They were laughing because someone finally broke the vase. It's hideous! We couldn't wait until your mother got rid of it, and now she has no choice but to do so."

"But what about the flower?"

"The flower will be fine; we'll get a new vase, a better one! How 'bout we go back to the living room and show everyone the game? What do ya

say?" By now, the room was almost completely dark; neither Pop nor Will thought about turning on the light. Pop stood up and stretched out his weathered hand towards Will's small one.

"Come on, let's go. We can't keep this game to ourselves!" The living room light momentarily blinded them as they came out of the dark bedroom. By now, everyone was off minding his or her own business. Uncle Joe was smoking his cigarette out on the porch, watching the last rays of sun disappear from the navy sky. Aunt Sally was helping Will's sister braid her hair. His cousins were running around playing tag while the littlest of them all was sitting in her own corner playing with Barbie dolls. Will's mom and dad were stuffing leftovers into the already packed fridge. The smell of meat and gravy still drifted in the air, making Will's stomach growl.

"Will, where have you been?" his mom asked.

"Oh, he was just showing me the new game you got him," said Pop. "As a matter of fact, he's going to show us all how to play."

As Uncle Joe extinguished his cigarette, Aunt Sally tied the end of Will's sister's braid. His

cousins calmed down and seated themselves in a semicircle around the board game, picking up random pieces and pelting them at each other. His mom and dad came to the living room and took a seat on each side of Will. The family came together and listened to Will as he explained the game to them, blue eyes shining bright, teeth gnawing on his lip. The memory of shattering the vase vanished from his thoughts. Engrossed in the game, no one noticed Pop's absence. Pieces were flying across the board, money was being handed this way and that, and properties were being bargained over. A car's headlights shone through the blinds as it entered the garage. The car door slammed and keys jingled as they entered the lock. Pop came through the door, carrying a blue and brown vase.

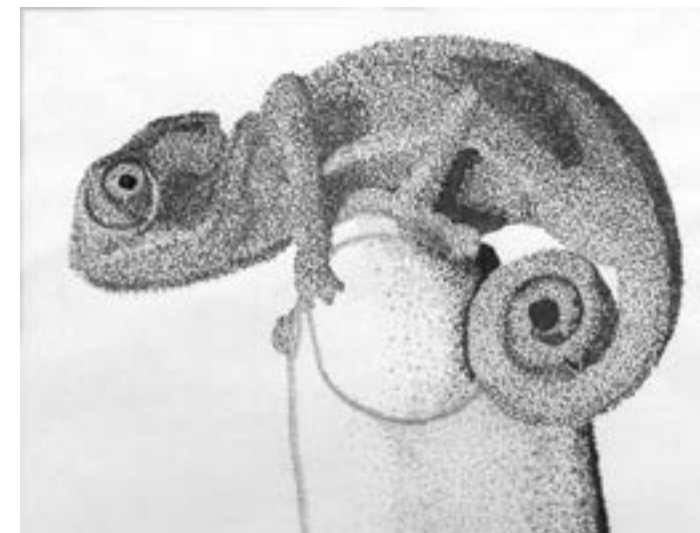
"The flower won't die now, Will," Pop said as a huge smile spread across Will's face.

"Now we don't have to look at the horrible red one anymore!" said Uncle Joe.

"I don't want to play," said Will.

"Why not?" asked Pop.

"Cause I don't have to be rich anymore." ▲



Chameleon

Conor Hultman

Pen and Ink





## Midnight's Illusion

Laura Creekmore

Acrylic



## Avalon's Triumph: The Salvation of Pink

Claudia Parker

Honorable Mention—  
Drawing Competition

Ink—Stipple



## Basilica

Kristen Conguista

Photography

## A Combat Boot

Carly Sneed

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

Scratched and scruffy,  
my boots aren't a pretty sight.  
Just like his boots from the war, the old man said.  
But he had to shine his,  
and lace them with painstaking precision.  
As soon as he was out of the hospital bed, he'd show me,  
but we all have promises to break.

When he left the hospital I did visit,  
and I did wear my boots.  
Everyone else wore jeans, because he didn't like fancy dress,  
even at his funeral.  
Hateful looks burned my back,  
but it wasn't the living I wanted to impress.  
My boots were shined for the first time  
and the laces were almost right.

# Contributors’ Notes

**Ross Berry** (Wiggins) Ross’s favorite book is *The Things They Carried*, and he would like to have grown up in the 1970s or 1880s. His hero is his mother, who overcame unfortunate circumstances earlier in life to live in better ones today, and he wishes he could meet his grandmother who died while his mother was a child. Ross will attend Mississippi State University and study architecture.

**Jenny Bobo** (Okolona) Jenny says, “Creativity is the best facet of humanity.” She would like to have been born near the year A.D. 860 and would like to meet Egyptian actor Omar Sharif from the 1960s. She finds inspiration in the words of James Herriot who said: “If having a soul in me means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.” Jenny hopes to work with animals in her future career.

**Kay Burnside** (Carthage) Kay finds inspiration for her art in the works of Claude Monet and Pablo Picasso. Her favorite books are *The Giver* and *Invisible Monsters*. Kay wishes she had been born in the 1980s so that she could have grown up as a teenager in the 1990s. About art, Kay says, “Stunting a child’s creativity is the quickest way to normality and the end of civilization.” Kay aspires someday to become a police officer.

**Justin Calhoun** (Ruleville) “Art is a creative outlet that allows me to express my sense of individuality, heritage, and culture,” says Justin, who draws inspiration from artist Ashley Chew. Justin would like to meet Beyoncé, who is his hero because of the freedom she expresses. His favorite book is Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers*. If given the opportunity to be born in any decade, he would choose the 1960s.

**Joy Cariño** (Starkville) Joy draws artistic inspiration from the Harry Potter series, and she would like to meet Vincent van Gogh. Joy’s favorite book is *The Life of Pi*, and her piano teacher, Dixie Clark, is her hero for always being compassionate and hard-working. Joy lives by these words of Thomas Merton: “Our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy.” Joy hopes to study linguistics in college and later become a teacher.

**Candace Carter** (Columbus) Candace would like to meet Langston Hughes and live in the mid-1930s during the Harlem Renaissance. Candace lives by the motto “Knowledge is power,” and names the Sistine Chapel Ceiling as the work of art that has most influenced her. Candace plans to continue studying art in college next year while also studying to become an obstetrician and gynecologist.

**Dajah Carter** (Jackson) Dajah says, “The arts are important to some people. They are fun to some people. You may sequence a genome, let me write a play.” Dajah aspires to graduate from MSMS and find a meaningful career. If she could meet anyone, it would be Laverne Cox, whose work toward human rights inspires her.

**Lauren Chatelain** (Kiln) The work of Giambologna encourages Lauren’s work, and she lives by the philosophy that you should “Think before you act, because you cannot take it back.” Her favorite book is *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, and if Lauren could have any superpower, she would choose flight because it would allow her to travel for free. Maya Angelou is Lauren’s hero because of her unshakeable ideas. Lauren’s future plans include enjoying her next few years at the University of Southern Mississippi.

**Kristen Conguista** (Flowood) Kristen follows the advice of Jesse Jackson, who said, “If you fall behind, run faster. Never give up, never surrender, and rise up against the odds.” Kristen’s favorite book is *Pirate Cinema* by Cory Doctorow, and she would like to live in the 1960s because she loves the fashion of that age. Kristen will attend Mississippi State University where she will study to become a computer engineer while pursuing photography on the side.

**Laura Creekmore** (Meridian) Laura finds inspiration in the work of Georges Seurat and believes that one should “always look, listen,

and think.” Laura says that art is an effective way to express oneself and is a great stress reliever, and her biggest hero is her grandmother. In college, Lauren plans to major in computer science.

**Hannah Crouch** (Caledonia) Hannah names MSMS art teacher, Angie Jones, as her greatest influence, and she heeds the advice of Alfred, Lord Tennyson who wrote, “ ’Tis better to have loved and lost / Than to never have loved at all.” Hannah proclaims that painting “freezes emotions and thoughts onto a canvas.” Hannah will attend Virginia Commonwealth University where she plans to study Russian.

**Nikki Gary** (Lucedale) Nikki defines herself by a line from Wallace Stevens: “Let be be finale of seem.” Nikki would like to meet musical artist Claire Boucher, also known by her performance name, Grimes. When asked for her thoughts on writing, Nikki responds, “I think it’s kind of easy to write for a prompt but a little more difficult to write about yourself and your feelings. Poetry is how I explore myself.” In the future, Nikki will continue writing, mostly poetry, while also preparing to work as a wildlife conservationist.

**West Givens** (Senatobia) West describes himself as “happiest when creating.” He is inspired by the art of Christopher Nolan, the humor of Steve Zaragoza, and the idea that you should “Climb mountains not so the world can see you, but so you can see the world.” West plans to go on to film school after MSMS and later direct films for a living.

**Shreya Gunapati** (Brandon) If Shreya had the opportunity to meet anyone, she would like to meet Malala Yousafzai. Shreya would appreciate possessing the power of mind-reading and mind-control. Shreya’s greatest influence is J.K. Rowling, and Shreya defines herself by Walt Whitman’s words: “Henceforth, I ask not good fortune—I am good fortune.” Shreya plans to study biomedical engineering at Duke University.

**Angie Harri** (Starkville) Angie takes the advice of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who said, “When you get in a tight place and everything goes against you, ’til it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the time and place when the tide will turn.” Angie believes that art is “an opportunity to collect our thoughts and turn them into masterpieces.” In college, Angie hopes to study biology or a related field.

**Mary Frances Holland** (Lucedale) Mary Frances loves the work of Dr. Seuss, who wrote, “Be who you are and say what you feel because people who mind don’t matter, and people who matter don’t mind.” Concerning art, she says, “I might be called Craft Master Mary Frances, but art is how I make sense of the world.” Mary Frances wishes she had been born in the 1960s, and her favorite book is *Hold Still* by Nina Lacour. Mary Frances will attend the University of Mississippi and plans to major in international studies.

**Conor Hultman** (Oxford) Conor’s greatest influence is the rock band Modest Mouse, and he would like to meet Jesus Christ. His favorite book is *Cat’s Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut. William S. Burroughs is Conor’s hero for killing censorship and saving freedom. Conor will attend the University of Mississippi where he plans to pursue writing.

**John Johnson** (Greenville) John enjoys the Hunger Games trilogy and the work of artist Kendrick Lamar. If he could have any superpower, it would be the ability to read people’s minds. John’s plans for after MSMS include a career as an anesthesiologist.

**Agrippa Kellum** (Starkville) Agrippa’s favorite book is *Catch 22*, and he guides his actions by the phrase “Keep talking.” “Experiencing effective art,” says Agrippa, “is like having a good conversation with its creator. And good conversation is of value.” Agrippa names his mother as his hero, because he has her to thank for many of the things he likes about himself. Agrippa will attend Cornell University.

**Laurel Lancaster** (Southaven) Laurel lives by Macklemore’s words: “The greats weren’t great ’cause at birth they could paint. The greats were great because they paint a lot.” Laurel finds inspiration in the work of J.K. Rowling and would like to meet Louis Zamperini, an unbroken World War II pilot. In the future, Laurel hopes to pursue her interest in pediatric occupational therapy.

**Boone Leetran** (Monticello) Boone lives by the philosophy “If you do what other people don’t do, you get what other people don’t get,” and he finds artistic inspiration from his friend, Mcaulay Jaunsen. Boone’s hero is his father, who dedicates his life to bettering his children’s futures. Boone’s future plans include graduating from pharmacy school, starting his career, becoming a husband, and raising a wonderful family.

**Michelle Li** (Starkville) Taylor Swift’s lyrics “Shake it off” are Michelle’s motto, and Michelle finds inspiration in Swift, who has handwritten and composed every song she has ever recorded. Michelle says, “I try to write every chance I get, and I always feel better after I’m able to get my emotions down on paper.” Although not yet totally certain about her plans for the future, Michelle hopes to study in one of the STEM fields.

**Quinn Massengill** (Hickory Flat) Quinn follows the advice of Oscar Wilde, who said, “The first step to better times is to imagine them.” His favorite book is *The Awakening*, and he would love to meet its author, Kate Chopin. “Art reflects the artist; it maps our change, our growth. Art shows us who we are,” says Quinn. Next year, Quinn will study English and creative writing at Davidson College.

**Ashtyn McAdams** (Walls) “Why imagine the impossible when it’s already happening?” asks Ashtyn. She says, “Arts are a way for me to break away from reality for a while and vacation with my favorite characters.” Ashtyn’s favorite book is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and she wishes she had the power of mental projection. Ashtyn will attend the University of Mississippi and study pharmacy.

**Michelle McCullum** (Clarksdale) Art matters to Michelle because “a picture is worth a thousand words, but a thousand works can influence emotions, set a scene and bring false hopes all at once.” She draws inspiration from her favorite book, *Sign of the 4*, and wouldn’t mind meeting Sherlock Holmes. Michelle plans to go to graduate school for chemical engineering while working as an editor on the side.

**Hakeem Mikle** (Gulfport) “Courage is the most noble form of insanity,” says Hakeem. He believes “Art is relative in beauty, and creativity is difficult when done correctly.” Hakeem’s favorite book is *Batman: Year One* by Frank Miller, and his hero is Bruce Wayne for proving that the powerless can become powerful. Hakeem’s future plans include becoming a mechanical engineer for the military and working as a social activist.

**Veronica Miniard** (Lucedale) Veronica’s favorite book is *The Magic Toyshop* by Angela Carter, an author who creates fantasy worlds that inspire Veronica’s own writing. “Art is an amazing outlet for personal feelings that cannot be put into words,” Veronica asserts. Veronica’s future plans include studying computer science to prepare for a career in video game development.

**Claudia Parker** (Gulfport) Claudia says this about art: “It is a vital part of growth as a person, being able to express yourself.” Claudia draws her inspiration from Salvador Dali and lives by the words of Sonic the Hedgehog: “Do I really need a reason to help out a friend?” Her favorite books are the Harry Potter series, and she longs for the superpower of flight. In the future, Claudia hopes to become a pediatrician and provide for her family.

**Markeisha Pollard** (Port Gibson) Markeisha follows the wise words of Langston Hughes who wrote, “Hold fast to dreams / For if dreams die / Life is a broken-winged bird / That cannot fly.” Markeisha would like to have been born in the 1970s so that she could have

been a teenager in the 1980s. After high school, Markeisha plans to further her education until she reaches her ultimate goal of obtaining a Ph.D. in biology and then researching infectious diseases.

**Katie Shy** (Cleveland) Katie guides her life by the wisdom to “always choose humble love, always.” Her favorite book is *Anna Karenina*, and she takes inspiration from the writer David Foster Wallace. About creativity, Katie says, “Art and writing help make pretty things prettier.” Katie will attend Yale University where she will study English with plans to become a teacher and work at MSMS.

**Carly Sneed** (Pontotoc) Carly’s work is informed by The Brothers Grimm collections, which show her the importance of capturing a culture’s stories. Her defining quotation comes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who wrote, “He who possesses art and science has religion; he who does not possess them needs religion.” Her hero is Iron Man, a narcissistic guy who used science to be a better person. In the future, Carly hopes to pursue the “equally poetic” fields of biology and literature, planning to conduct research in the former.

**Navin Solomon** (Starkville) Navin draws inspiration from the creations of Peter Deligdisch. Navin’s ability to create art comes from “working until it sort of looks okay, then doing more.” Of all superpowers, Navin would prefer to possess time control, and his future plans include finding clever ways to “generate income.”

**Olivia Spires** (Hernando) Olivia’s defining quotation is the Latin phrase, “vi veri universum vivus vici,” which translates, “I, while living, have conquered the universe.” Her favorite book is *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and she finds inspiration in writers Elizabeth Gilbert and Robert A. Heinlein. “Sharing your imagination is the most you can expose yourself,” says Olivia. Olivia would someday like to live in New York City, Paris, and India.

**Ella Stone** (Tupelo) Ella states, “Art should stir emotion in people. That’s what makes art great.” Her greatest influences are the artists Kate Sammons, Edgar Degas, and Robert Longo. Ella’s favorite novel is *Jane Eyre*, and her hero is her mother for teaching her that she could do anything if she worked hard enough.

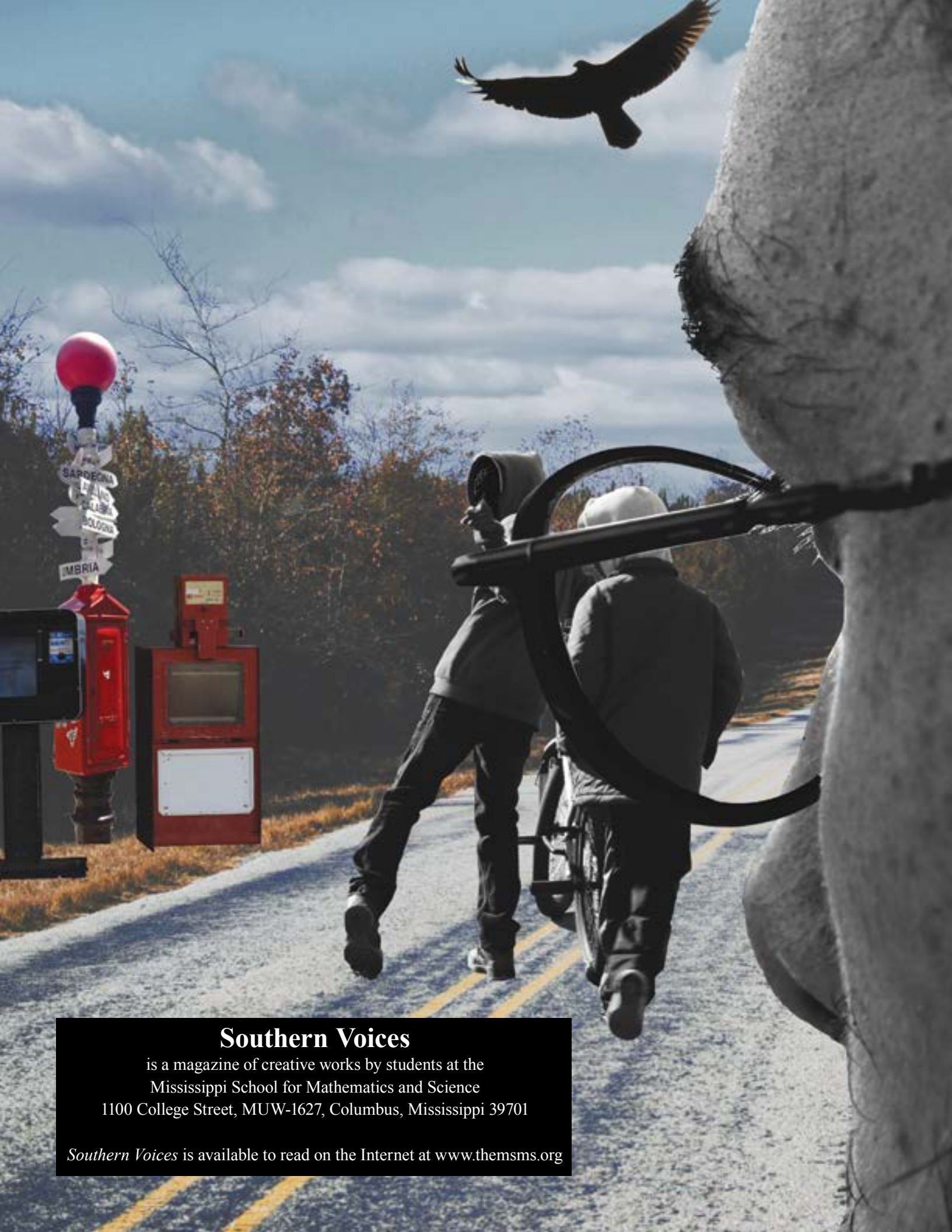
**Elsie Stoxstill** (Jonestown) Elsie believes that “every person should embrace art.” Her favorite book is *The Preacher’s Daughter*, and the one person from history she would most like to meet is Adolf Hitler. Elsie lives by the philosophy, “Be yourself, no matter what.” If Elsie could choose one superpower, it would be the ability to heal, and, in the future, she hopes to find herself by helping others.

**Noah Ulmer** (Ellisville) Noah draws his inspiration from Auguste Rodin’s statue “The Thinker.” Noah follows the wise words of Bugs Bunny who says, “Don’t take life too seriously. You’ll never get out alive.” Noah’s favorite book is *Arabian Nights*, and he would like to have the superpower of plasticity, or the ability to stretch and reform. Noah hopes to one day “build something important” and plans to study the fields of robotics, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering.

**Quentin Whatsitt** (Long Beach) “Never regret anything, because at one time, it was exactly what you wanted,” is Quentin’s philosophy. Concerning creativity, Quentin says, “Artistic creativity is not much different from scientific or mathematical intelligence.” Quentin would like to meet George Washington and wishes he had the power of invisibility. Quentin plans to attend the University of Alabama at Birmingham, major in neuroscience, and conduct research.

**Emily Williamson** (Purvis) Emily’s favorite book is *Winter Girls* by Laurie Halse Anderson, and she says, “Humanity hasn’t quite made things easy on itself; and the ways in which we show our creativity are how we purge the bad so only the good remains.” Emily wishes she had the power of invisibility, and she plans to study psychology in college before moving to the Northeast.





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