

Southern Voices

Southern Voices

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

Poetry Judge
Dr. T.R. Hummer, author of ten volumes of poetry, including *Skandalon* (Louisiana State University Press, 2014), is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and two Pushcart Prizes. He is a native of Macon, Mississippi, and is the father of MSMS alumna Theo Hummer (Class of 1995).

Short Story Judge
Ms. Lisa Howorth is author of the novel *Flying Shoes* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), her first work of fiction. She is the co-founder and co-owner of Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi.

Table of Contents
Writing

Poetry	Essays
Allison Brown <i>What Can I Get for You</i> 28	Nathan Barlow <i>Chronic Town</i> 46
Joy Cariño <i>Daring</i> 5 <i>My Roommate’s Favorite Color</i> 19	Jenny Bobo <i>Leto the Shire and Dennis the Goat</i> 16
Landry Filce <i>Extra Credit</i> 11	Joy Cariño <i>The Piano Teacher with No Concept of Time</i> ... 39
Zoe Fowler <i>Prima Ballerina.</i> 22	Michelle Li <i>Tan Lines</i> 34
Angie Harri <i>Mr. Lark.</i> 12	Summar McGee <i>Headin’ South</i> 10
Laurel Lancaster <i>Apartment 3C</i> 12 <i>Amazing Grace</i> 15	Connor McNamee <i>Momma’s Boy</i> 20
Kennedy Lewis <i>I Am</i> 27	Sydney Melton <i>Learning to Adventure</i> 13
Michelle Li <i>Dear Sister</i> 19 <i>Tough Love</i> 41	Jason Necaise <i>Poetry of Reality</i> 44
Summar McGee <i>The Itis</i> 18 <i>Pickin’ Day</i> 25	Reagan Poston <i>Where the Heart Should Be</i> 29
Greg Parker <i>Dressing Up</i> 36	
Jalen Perry <i>Broken</i> 47	
Makayla Raby <i>Aide</i> 5 <i>Trade</i> 33	
Wrishija Roy <i>Mind Adrift</i> 28	
Haydn Schroader <i>Puppet</i> 18	
Carly Sneed <i>Dancing on the Factory Floor</i> 28 <i>Flowers at the Service</i> 45	
Maliah Wilkinson <i>The Author</i> 33	

Short Stories
Joy Cariño <i>Goodbye Marnie</i> 31
Griffin Emerson <i>The Journalist’s Tragedy</i> 37
Angie Harri <i>The Other Side</i> 35
Laurel Lancaster <i>Balancing Act</i> 42
Michelle Li <i>Slimy Conscience</i> 3
Summar McGee <i>Meanus Myles</i> 40
Greg Parker <i>Ishmashell</i> 16
Reagan Poston <i>Rummy and Rum</i> 8

Artwork

Drawing

Justin Calhoun	
<i>T.</i>	11
Penelope Carreon	
<i>Just a Quarter</i>	19
Grant Henderson	
<i>Lady Liberty</i>	21
Zach Hodge	
<i>The Snack that Smiles Back</i>	25
<i>Nocturnal Gaze</i>	43
Michelle Li	
<i>Mimi</i>	12
Will Pierce	
<i>Die, Insect!</i>	26
Haydn Schroader	
<i>Time</i>	5
<i>Drop</i>	26
<i>Hibiscus</i>	34
Lauryn Elaine Smith	
<i>First Sunday</i>	17
<i>Fading Beauty</i>	19
Ella Stone	
<i>Blossom in the Dew</i>	30
Justin Calhoun	
<i>The Essence of Marble</i>	21
Dajah Carter	
<i>Frazer Hall</i>	21
<i>Sterling Ballerina</i>	22
<i>Sailboat</i>	24
Rebecca Chen	
<i>Strawberry Battlefield</i>	22
Lauryn Elaine Smith	
<i>Morning Service</i>	21
Vasu Srevatsan	
<i>Lost</i>	24
Emily Waits	
<i>Autumn Wonder</i>	23

Painting

Sculpture

Rebecca Chen	
<i>The Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	46
Angie Harri	
<i>The Enchanted Rose</i>	26
Mary Madeline LaMastus	
<i>Einstein</i>	23
Dipal Patel	
<i>Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge Interpretation.</i>	23
Priya Sanipara	
<i>Juliet</i>	15

Photography

Mayukh Datta	
<i>Human Endurance</i>	5
<i>Among the Flowers</i>	26
Ashley Dobbins	
<i>Jackson’s</i>	11
<i>Southern Fall</i>	27
Lillian Fulgham	
<i>Cypresses</i>	14
<i>Honeybee on Lavender</i>	23
<i>Railroad Ties and Morning Glories</i>	45
<i>Unbroken</i>	47
West Givens	
<i>Lined Up</i>	7
<i>Reflections</i>	9
<i>All Strung Out</i>	14
<i>Fan Rock</i>	24
<i>Forsyth Park</i>	27
<i>Half a Headlight</i>	33
<i>Antique Glory</i>	45
Angie Harri	
<i>Korcë Gate</i>	4
<i>Layers</i>	24
<i>Roadside Market</i>	25
<i>Navy Pier Skyline</i>	27
<i>Photobomb</i>	28
Katelyn Jackson	
<i>Altum</i>	28
<i>Ventus</i>	41
Ari Jefferson	
<i>5PM Columbus</i>	10
Mary Frances Lee	
<i>Solemn</i>	46
Gianni Stennis	
<i>Futility</i>	22
<i>The Receiver</i>	41
<i>Peer</i>	43

Slimy Conscience

Michelle Li

First Place—Short Story Competition

The Chris Read Award for Fiction

The sweltering afternoon sun beat down upon two boys. It was the hottest day of the year, Murphy was sure of it. He could hear his brain sizzling in his skull like the scrambled eggs he had for breakfast. Beside him, Jim was lying upside down on the creaking porch swing, his knobby legs thrown over the backrest, bent like broken twigs off the sycamore tree out front. Murphy watched scarlet blotches spread on Jim’s cheeks, the blood rushing to cover every surface of his friend’s flushed face. Whenever the swing paused with a groan, Jim would propel himself upwards again, fingertips pushing off the sanded, wooden planks of Murphy’s porch.

“Man, I’m so bored,” Jim complained loudly.

One.

Two.

Three.

Murphy counted drop-lets of sweat rolling off Jim’s forehead. They landed on the planks below, leaving dark circles on the light-colored oak.

“Yeah, me too.”

“Can we just go back inside?” Jim pleaded, propping his hands on the floor, stilling the swing’s movement. Beads of perspiration collected on his nose, then slid off to join the others. The circles began to form a puddle.

The roar of the vacuum cleaner drifted through the holes in the screen door.

“Can’t.” Murphy shook his head. “Nancy’s still cleaning.”

Jim resumed his swinging.

Murphy leaned his head back against the porch post, its shadow hiding him from the sun’s scorching rays. His eyelids drooped.

Murphy woke with a jolt to Jim’s startled yelp and turned in time to see Jim fall off the swing, crashing to the floor in a heap. He then stumbled up frantically,

backing away from the porch swing as if it had shocked him.

“What’s wrong?” Murphy grabbed at his friend’s arm.

A garbled noise of disgust escaped Jim’s lips as he pointed to the creature that had sent him into such a frenzy. Next to where Jim’s head had been moments before sat a fat green slug. Its moist flesh glistened in the sunlight and a slimy path trailed behind it.

Murphy was about to tease Jim for being startled by such a harmless insect, when he caught sight of the mischievous glint in Jim’s eyes. The last time Jim gave him that look, they had lost half of their eyebrows, and Murphy was grounded for two weeks.

“You have any salt?”

Before Murphy could protest, Jim was gone with a slap of the screen door, and he found himself alone with the doomed creature. Upon closer inspection, the slug’s skin was more brown than green. Murphy watched disgusted as its fleshy abdomen twitched; the slug inched forward gradually, ignorant of its impending fate. Its two antennae bobbed from side to side, almost as if they were waving at him.

The screen door slammed open again and Jim emerged, his mother’s flower-shaped salt shaker in hand.

“This is gross, Jim,” Murphy said, taking a step back from where Jim was crouched in front of the poor bug.

“Aw, c’mon Murph, don’t you wanna see what happens?” Jim poised the shaker above the slug and, with a sadistic twist of his lips, disposed of the salt upon it.

Murphy watched with morbid fascination as the slug instantly curled in on itself, writhing as if it were in intense pain. He had once heard that invertebrates

don't perceive pain as most other animals do, but he found that hard to believe as the slug twisted sharply on its side. Its body began excreting a yellow mucus and its soft flesh shriveled, turning dark brown in some areas. Murphy found that he couldn't look away.

Moments later, the slug excreted a spurt of thick milky substance, coating the floorboards, and shrank to half its original size. That's when Murphy heard the hissing, like water on a stove or his father's calloused palms rubbing against each other. It was as if the slug were screaming.

The slug was screaming.

The awful noise broke him out of his trance and he became dimly aware that Jim was still applying salt to his shriveled-up, half-dead victim.

With a grunt, he shoved Jim out of the way and stomped on the slug, hard. His new tennis shoes landed with a sickening splat.

He stumbled down the porch steps, tears stinging his eyes, and fell to his knees, spilling the remnants of his lunch on the freshly-mowed lawn.

Jim was yelling somewhere behind him, but the sound grew fainter, fainter, until Murphy couldn't hear him over the hissing in his ears. ▲

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



Korcë Gate

Angie Harri
Photography



Human Endurance

Mayukh Datta
Photography

Daring

Joy Cariño

“You can’t beat me. You’re a girl,”
said a tall and haughty boy,
undefeated among our timid five-year-old class.
But I believed my bamboo-thin legs
and dirty sandals could outrun any boy.
I took my mark and waited for dust to settle.

“On your mark ... get set ... GO!”
The sun reflected the joy in me,
sprint raced across the playground,
brushing weeds with petals, disrupting dandelions.
I passed my opponent, a tall and haughty boy
—who smirked with the arrogance
only a five-year-old could muster—
and reached the end before he did.
I bet he was ashamed.

Aide

Makayla Raby

She bathes others for a living, washing the elderly's paper- thin skin, wrinkled like fabric kept too long in hope chests and treasure troves.	of relief when her shift is done. She is always careful to place the blue latex over her pristine French manicure, and she comes to work with false lashes on and her hair curled.	families have left behind. She washes them with gentle strokes and calming scents and warm smiles, with warm water and soap suds she sees them vulnerable, childlike, and loves them like her children.
She cleans them, feces and urine and bedsores and rotting skin. She wrinkles her nose in disgust at their smell, dying smell, and breathes a sigh	But she bathes them, tender and affectionate, placing love on them whose	



Time

Haydn Schroader
Pencil

Leto the Shire and Dennis the Goat

Jenny Bobo

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

Paralyzed. Leto slipped prancing through an afternoon summer squall, then couldn’t stand. It’s been known for Shires to break bones, being clumsy creatures, but she was young and strong. Her neck bowed out from its base at her withers to her grass-stained cheek, her white downy hair stained with watery mud. Of the four foals born that spring, Leto was the last, and she was my first baby. That afternoon, two hours passed with Leto sprawled on the ground, intermittently writhing towards her mother’s whuffling lips. Nauseous and weak-kneed, I watched her.

I cradled Leto’s head in a pink starfish beach towel as my parents heaved at two ropes looped around her back legs and pulled her up the ramp of the horse trailer. Her mother, Kiri, scrambled up after me, and we left for Starkville.

Blood tests, urine samples, MRIs. Dose upon dose of antibiotics. No definite diagnosis and no

improvement. For two weeks and three days, I hardly slept; when I did speak, it was only to coo softly to mare and foal on my daily visits or bombard my parents with questions of Leto’s condition when I didn’t understand the veterinarians. I only wanted to know: better or worse? Shaking their heads, they would silently blink away away tears of pity.

Leto was euthanized on a Monday morning, three days before I started the seventh grade. During the necropsy, it was discovered that she had Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis, dubbed “possum disease” after its most common host; the disease attacks the nervous system and causes irreparable damage. Leto had probably cropped some grass contaminated with possum feces and died because of it. Kiri, distraught, was brought home and quarantined for a month; she spent that month galloping from end to end of her pasture, nickering mournfully for her baby while I

leaned against a fencepost, crying with her. Then, I blamed myself for not researching her affliction and watching her die, and, sometimes, I still do.

Daddy got me a goat when I was two because he was afraid I’d strangle a kitten. The kid was an African pygmy that ate enough to be a cow. I named him Dennis the Menace, perhaps the best pet I’ve ever had, but picking my favorite is like choosing among one’s children. I spent the better part of fourteen years losing head-butt matches, making clover salads, and happily dragging the Menace away from Mama’s flowers. Then, he started dying.

Mama noticed the lump first. Small, golf-ball sized, only apparent if you crouched level with his chin and looked down at his throat. Once it reached tennis-ball size, Dennis developed a cough. A few weeks later, he couldn’t hold food down, retching up his cud with panicky wheezes. His breath came in gasps. In him, I saw Leto slipping again. Wiping my hands of goat bile and half-digested bermuda grass, I sat down in the shade and researched goat diseases on my phone. It took an hour to diagnose Dennis with Caseous Lymphadenitis (CL), an abscess disease common in

aged goats. I got scalpel and gloves down from the farm medical box, asked Daddy to straddle Dennis, doused the bulge in chlorohexidine, and sliced. The half-inch cut spewed brown fluid onto my boots. And Dennis breathed.

When you live on a farm, you meet Death early; then you become well-acquainted, almost familiar, with him before your tenth birthday. You kill for food or helplessly watch animals die from old age or disease. I have learned the balance between resigning myself to inevitable death and fighting to save a life when there’s still hope. I’ve accepted the existence of pain but still combat it for helpless creatures like Dennis. With no cure for CL, I lance Dennis’s abscess every two months. When he breathes, I see Leto, standing, and smile. ▲

Lined Up West Givens Photography



Rummy and Rum

Reagan Poston

Third Place—Short Story Competition

“Lost my parents in the First World War. Daddy enlisted, even though he had seven kids and a farm to tend; said it was cowardice to sit at home on a plow when there were kids dyin’ over in Europe. Poor bastard thought he was invincible, and when he died, Mama decided she didn’t wanna live no more either. After she got the news, she just laid on down and never got back up.” Gran lays a seven atop my eight and picks up his cup, ice thumping against its plastic sides. I know for a fact that there is rum in it, for he cannot tell the stories of the past without the social lubricant of alcohol. “Well . . . ,” he continues, swallowing and squinting against the sharp light filtering in through the windows of our living room. “Hard times pass, ya know. I raised ’em all the best I could, and it all turned out alright. Your nana raised your mama good before she passed, and your mama’s raisin’ you good.”

A six falls atop his seven. His hands shake, as they often do these days. His hands are practically useless; he breaks every glass he holds, and he has started wearing boots or slippers to hide the fact that he can no longer tie his shoes. He wears t-shirts ragged with holes he can no longer stitch shut, but he thinks them better than shirts with buttons he can no longer fasten. Mother must help him button his pants despite his greatest protests, pride, and pinkening of his cheeks. He can still play Rummy, though, and play he will.

My cousins and I trade out days to sit with him, to keep him here and not floating in the past. Tomorrow, my sister will sit with Gran, and he will tell her the story of how he lost his father in the First World War, the story of how his father enlisted despite his seven children and farm in need of tending. We’ve all heard the story before, and we will all hear it again. My mother believes it is one of the only stories about himself he remembers, and as I lie awake in bed that night, I begin to wonder what he was like before the tremors and the forgetfulness. I resolve to ask tomorrow and drift into a placid sleep.

The next morning when I approach my mother about the enigma that is my grandfather, she smiles and pulls a chair to the closet before perching atop it to retrieve an old and dusty album from the top shelf.

“Come on,” she encourages gently, dragging the chair back to the table and motioning for me to sit beside her. When she flips to the front page, I see a picture of nineteen-year-old Gran and seventeen-year-old Nana smiling, holding hands as rice rains down around them. *S.J. and Eva Hawkins*, reads the caption in Nana’s flowing script, and I smile. I stare at them for a moment, both grinning ear to ear as they run through the rice, colors faded from black and white to some gray space in between. Gran looks happy, and I have to remind myself that he is more than the illness that is overcoming him today. He is thousands of moments that have built him up and worn him down to who he is today. I turn the page, and he sits before me as a child, staring in wonder at the camera before him.

“You look like him,” my mom says, running her fingers over the page, finding me in him. I smile, and the page turns. Picture after picture fills my mind, story after story. He himself was a war veteran, World War II, and he has pictures to prove it. He was an Air Force pilot, a regional champ motorcycle racer, a master poker player, a thief, a saint, a sinner, and by the end of it, I feel like I don’t know him at all.

“He was adventurous,” I say of him finally, my mind swimming with impossible stories captioning each fantastic picture.

“He was free,” she corrects with a smile, and suddenly, my gran comes back into the focus amidst the soldier and the racer and the gambler. The one thing my gran and these things have in common is the insatiable thirst for freedom. “He wanted to be, at least,” my mother says, flipping the page and coming to a picture of him and his littlest sister.

“Is that Faye?” I ask, and she nods.

“He was so attached to her, what with her being the littlest sibling. He lost her in Hurricane Camille and

never forgave himself for not teaching her how to swim.”

“That’s terrible,” I say, and she flips the page and nods.

“That’s life. Your gran used to tell us, ‘even if you die today, someone’s tire will still blow out tomorrow.’ That was his way of saying, yes, life is tragic, but it’s not a tragedy.” We flip through the rest of the shots in relative silence. Gran shows up on every page, either with a harmonica in hand or his latest whittling piece, and I opt to close the book. This gran is the one I know, the one whose endless streak of poker wins has become Rummy with his grandchildren, each one called “darling” or “sport” because he has all but forgotten our names.

Gran does not live much longer after my excursion into his past, a month at the most, and they ask me to speak at his ceremony. Standing there watching all the people gauging me for my sincerity and representation of the S.J. Hawkins they all knew, I stare at them all and open my mouth to let the silence out. I didn’t know my gran, not really, and all of these people probably knew something different of him than I did. I say the only thing I knew of him for certain.

“My gran lost his daddy in the First World War.” ▲



West Givens Reflections

Honorable Mention—Photography

Mind Adrift

Wrishija Roy

We tread along the sapphire stream,
Feet skirting the shallow water
As limpid as a looking glass,
The muddy bottom sticky like honey.

We see horses among the cloud formations,
Majestic in their modesty.
Reptilian creatures, beautifully strange,
Causing us to accelerate out of fervor.

We dash, arched feet quick in the meadow,
Knee-deep in overgrown verdure.
The evening chill raises goosebumps,
Snaking up our bare arms.

We scrape our skin on stumps and trees,
As we invade the impressive forestry.
The leaves ever so chameleonic,
Dotted with raindrops, yet to vaporize.

We creep away from advancing shadows,
Brought on as the day’s glow tucks away.
Stars twinkle like city lights,
Gleaming alongside the lunar orb.

We pass by a splotch of lilacs.
Its smell brings back memories,
Reminding me of a foreign world
With exhaustion and no excitement.

I don’t want to go back.

He takes my delicate hand
And embraces me tight,
Assuring that our escape
Has only just begun.

Headin' South

Summar McGee

It's Friday, 3:15 p.m., and I scan the parking lot for the silver 1992 Crown Victoria. Just as I am about to sit down on the steps of Goen, Ms. Skiffer turns the corner. Rides with Ms. Skiffer are always interesting. I take one last gulp of fresh air hoping that it will counteract the impending second-hand smoke and smile as Ms. Skiffer pulls up under the canopy. For me the journey down Highway 25 is long and less-than scenic, my only source of entertainment—the driver, Ms. Faith Skiffer.

She hops out the car and with a raspy cough, apologizes for being late. She pops the trunk, shuffles around her miscellaneous knickknacks, and shoves my torn navy suitcase into the trunk of her Crown Victoria. I open the door and contort my body enough to slide into the back seat, forcing my arthritic knees to bend at a ninety-degree angle.

As Ms. Skiffer makes her way to the driver's seat, I wonder what radio station she had been listening to. Ms. Skiffer's driving ability heavily relies on the type of music she listens to.

With Ms. Skiffer, guessing her radio station is like playing musical Russian roulette. There are three stations that seem to be her favorites: 95.5 Hallelujah FM—which almost always means a ride of raspy sermons, Bible verse recitation, and stories of her four grandchildren, all of whom she wants to find the love of Jesus; Y101 Jackson's #1 Hit Music Station—the kids' favorite according to Ms. Skiffer—which means a ride of faux ageist cultural assimilation that borders a midlife crisis; or Soft Soul Kixie 107—which means a slow but peaceful ride with in-seat swaying and Ms. Skiffer's occasional soft humming.

95.5 Hallelujah FM causes Ms. Skiffer to be overly cautious with her driving. On these days you can always count on three to four backward glances, turn signals at fifteen hundred feet, and not a single missed stoplight. On Y101 days Ms. Skiffer usually wears something loud, tight, and covered in sequins. You can count on a lead foot, abrupt stops, and a few “tests of faith,” also known as traffic violations. On Soft Soul Kixie 107 days Ms. Skiffer's driving is just as mild and mellow as her mood.

In one swift motion, Ms. Skiffer slides into the car, and fastens her seatbelt. She sticks the key into the ignition and takes out two unfiltered Marlboro cigarettes. She tucks one of the cigarettes behind her ear along with a flyaway strand of hair. She lights the other and takes two long drags before she turns the key and the engine roars to life. Soft jazz plays in the background assuring me that there is a slow smooth ride ahead of us. I fasten my seatbelt, say a short prayer, and await the journey as the Mississippi School for Mathematics of Science fades into the distance. ▲



5PM Columbus

Ari Jefferson

Photography



T.

Justin Calhoun

Honorable Mention—Drawing
Graphite



Jackson's

Ashley Dobbins

Photography

Extra Credit

Landry Filce

Curly blonde hair cascades past
Shoulders to the small of her back.
I've seen her every weekday for the past two years—
We have all the same classes.
But I have only had one, maybe two conversations with
her.
Once I saw her in a ballet,
“The Nutcracker.”
I didn't expect to see her there.
I went because it was an extra-credit opportunity.
But then she arabesqued and grand jeté and pirouetted
until
the audience cried from the beauty of it
and it didn't feel like schoolwork anymore.
The next Monday, I caught up with her on the way
to our first period class.
“Hey,” I called, “You did a great job on Friday night.”
I wish I could have said more,
could have explained how her grace
made me feel such powerful emotion
that it scared me, but
before I could articulate,
she smiled and replied,
“Thanks.”
I don't think we ever spoke again.

Mr. Lark

Angie Harri

Knife scrapes charcoal pencil.
Wood shavings drop to linoleum floor,
like an onion being stripped of layers.
The lead elongates one centimeter
before it meets wood again, bayonet sharp.
I watch the pencil in his hand move along paper.
He draws a circle as smooth as the one on his ring
finger,
and starts to shade it. Layer, upon layer,
upon layer of charcoal shades,
never smudged with a finger, or else that'd be “break-
ing art.”
The charcoal blends in with Mr. Lark's dark skin,
floats everywhere, but the atmosphere of focus he is in
does not allow any distraction to penetrate it.
His eyebrows rest over his eyes like mustaches,
scrunching in concentration. We sit in awe
as a circle turns into a sphere right before our eyes,
as if we could pick it up off the paper.



Mimi

Michelle Li

Best of Show
White Color Pencil

Apartment 3-C

Laurel Lancaster

A woman moved into the apartment next door.
Apartment 3-C.
She drives a clunky Jeep Wrangler,
tires caked with mud in every shade of dirt.
Everything she owns can fit inside.

The woman in apartment 3-C is an art teacher.
Comes back covered in charcoal and clay.
Smock stained with every shade her students used that
day.
Blue flowers bloom under her eyes,
but I've never seen her without a smile.

One day, she invites me over for tea.
Apartment 3-C smells like cinnamon and patchouli,
Walls covered in paintings and pictures.
Preserved moments in time stuck to the plaster.

A globe sits on her kitchen counter, covered in
pushpins.
She carries her passport with her at all times
because she never knows where she will go next.

One night, Apartment 3-C is dark.
I find her outside, fingers caressing a canvas with rich
Mississippi mud.
With pen and paper in hand, I join her.

We sit for hours, in total silence, creative energy
billowing around us
like a cloud of her favorite incense.
With poems and paintings, we both become
storytellers,
trail blazers of our own paths.

Last week I got a letter in the mail.
Inside the envelope, a compass
Accompanied by a note:
“Good Luck.”

When I came home, Apartment 3-C was dark.
But I knew I wouldn't find her outside.
And I hope she won't get lost out there.
Without something to be her guide.

Learning to Adventure

Sydney Melton

I. Secret Garden

She teeters on the red brick edging the winding
path. Sprawling oaks and unkempt woods lash thorn
vines at her wobbling ankles. Her feet are tucked into
a weathered pair of black penny loafers; wiry locks of
golden hair stray from tight pins. The dewy Mississippi
atmosphere weighs down the first sprouts of spring.
Her eyebrows crinkle, remaining focused on the bricks
before her, one foot in front of the other. A rugged
novel is tucked tight under her arm. A brick turns under
her foot and Nini tightens her grip on the young girl's
arm to steady her. They make
their way through the wild, an
adventure leading to their own
secret paradise.

From around the curv-
ing path, nearly a hundred
yards down the trail, the white
arbor peeks into view. The
young girl flies across the
ground, her slick-soled penny loafers skimming the
dirt-covered path. Nini paces not far behind her. The
arbor is the gateway to a getaway the little girl calls
her secret garden. Vibrant lime ligustrum bushes line
the white picket fence, holding all of the secrets inside.
Together, she and Nini planted peace roses that bloom
with the colors of a sunset. Nini taught her to pick away
the weeds, fertilize the flowers, and how to prune the
ligustrum bushes—to take care of the garden

A splintered wooden swing hangs on the left side
of the garden. Gnarled vines of lavender wisteria drape
overhead; rich blossoms hang like a ripened bunch of
grapes. The two sit on the bench to rest and read. The
little girl hands her book to Nini, the binding coming
loose. The spine has etched letters, *The Secret Garden*.
Nini reads the novel trying her best to emphasize the
life lessons the book presents to the reader, but at the
time the young girl is more mesmerized by the descrip-
tions of rose trees and wick. The stories bring to life the
magic in adventure in everyday life.

II. Northeast Lauderdale

Trumpets roar and tubas bellow to the tune of
“Can't Help Myself” that fills the stadium. The high
school JROTC members lower an arch of swords one
at a time as girls in enormous dresses float across the
fifty-yard line. A young girl stands on the sideline of
the field next to her grandmother waiting for Principal
Wilks to announce that year's Homecoming Queen.
After a long drumroll, Ivy Castleman wins, just as
everyone had expected. Principal Wilks hands the
young girl a bouquet of white roses and a tiara. The

little girl stands on her tiptoes
in stubby one-inch church
heels to set the tiara on top
of Ivy's snowy white crown.
Her white dress shimmers
under the stadium lighting.
She hurries back to her grand-
mother's side. Her wide eyes
scan the scene: bright lights,

loud commentators, and loud, obnoxious fans from the
opposing team all vie for her attention. Nini always
takes her to the Northeast High School homecoming.

Nini has been teaching Government and
Economics for twenty-five years at Northeast High
School. She brings the young girl to her classroom
full of anxious, unruly teenagers that finally have the
opportunity to relax in the safe haven of Nini's class-
room. Nini has tutoring sessions every day during
seventh period. Nini teaches her students Article II of
the Constitution, ways to calculate the Gross Domestic
Product, and the Constitutional Amendments; the little
girl scribbles pictures on the chalkboard sending chills
throughout the classroom with the screech of the chalk.
She plops into Nini's tan leather swivel armchair and
shuffles through the papers, making stacks on the desk.
The dream of becoming a teacher floats in her head.

* * *

Ever since I was young, Nini has shared with me
her passion for adventure and teaching. Even though

she has been retired for a few years now, every time we are together she runs into a former student of hers who tells her how much she misses her class. Nini has always had a knack for communication, especially with high school students. She never failed to show genuine care for her students. She told me that everyone has a job she is meant for; she just has to find it. Nini’s contentment in her career has driven me to find a career in which I will be able to naturally excel, one that fits my personality and qualities. She has taught me to consider every situation with an open mind and

that there is always something new you can learn from a person. She says, “The best way to teach someone is to let them teach you.” Nini’s never-ending willingness to discover has inspired me to search beyond the obvious to learn things a book cannot teach. She inspired me to make my own adventures reading *The Secret Garden* and in the process taught me how to maintain a garden, a skill I still use today. Through Nin’s experience I know that adventure is everywhere, whether in interacting with new people or taking time alone to appreciate the beauty of nature and a classic novel. ▲



All Strung Out

West Givens

Second Place—Photography



Cypresses

Lillian Fulgham

Third Place—Photography

Amazing Grace

(After the Supreme Court ruling on June 26th, 2015)

Laurel Lancaster

Second Place—Poetry Competition

Maybe we should’ve stayed home.
Maybe we should’ve kept our heads down as we walked through the chapel doors.
Should’ve stared at our shoes, heels clicking on the cold marble tile.

Shouldn’t have looked them in the eye, trying to cool white-hot stares with brimming baby blues.
Shouldn’t have heard their whispers that whipped across our skin, stained-glass swears cutting deep into our souls.

We should’ve sat in the back row, out of sight but not mind.
Instead, cheeks flushed with hellfire, we marched straight to the front, to our usual pew.
As I knelt before my God, starving for spiritual strength, a beggar for my daily bread, I thought about my family.

Would they care enough to come claim me?
Or deny this disgrace their daughter had become?
Because my kind of love is not allowed.

When we rise to raise our voices towards heaven, we still stand alone.
No one dares to come closer, to offer the compassion they so praise, provided it stays on scripture’s page.

But I pray neither for mercy nor for forgiveness.
I refuse to confess my so-called crime.
And I will endure whatever death they wish upon me.

Because I know.

I know there are those who want to clip my wings.
To lock the Pearly Gates and send me spiraling down the staircase.
To condemn their sister as a sinner and throw me out onto the stones.
This I know.

I know, but I do not care.
Because *she* is holding my hand.

She with stars for eyes and sunshine for a smile
She with the voice that puts angels to shame
She is the one holding my hand.

And when we are linked together,
We cannot be broken.



Juliet

Priya Sanipara

**Honorable Mention—Sculpture
Ceramic**

Ishmashell

Greg Parker

Emma and Adam were strangers to each other; neither of them had seen the other’s face, worn the clothes they had on, or been to the land where they met Ishmashell. They were on a ship with what looked to be other people talking in a language they had never heard before. Adam woke up before Emma. His blond, greasy hair stuck up at random places all around his head and he wore a white cloak with red swirls around his hips and mysterious runic letters on his sleeves and torso. He heard the other people below deck with them and above, speak their strange language. There was no emotion behind their words; it sounded like a casual conversation.

Emma awoke minutes later, her brown, pixie-cut hair as perfectly slicked back as ever. Her face was stiffly symmetrical, with hazel eyes that shone even in the dimness below decks. She was startled after realizing she was not in a familiar place and stared at Adam for a few moments before she spoke.

“Where are we?” Emma whispered.

Adam shrugged, “No idea.”

They sat in silence. Adam knew they couldn’t be prisoners because they weren’t restrained in any way. Still, neither of them moved until a man dressed in black shorts ripped above the knee, a white poet blouse and a leather vest walked over to them and waved his arm, motioning them to approach. The two hesitated but walked over to the man. When they were standing less than a yard away from the man, he didn’t speak, but pointed up the stairs that led to the upper deck. Emma and Adam froze and looked at each other, unsure what to do, until the man pointed over and over to the stairs. Taking the hint, they walked up the seven stairs to the upper deck, blinded by the summer sun for a moment, and saw that they had docked on a beach.

There was only one man present standing by an opening on the side of the ship. There was a wooden board resting on the opened side leading down to the beach, and the man held his hand out in front of the board. Assuming they were no longer welcome on the men’s ship, Emma and Adam walked by the man and

down the board onto the shore. The men pulled up the board and the ship sailed away.

Emma and Adam were not sure what they were to do, but decided to introduce themselves.

“I’m Adam,” he said.

“Emma,” Emma said.

“So what are we supposed to do?”

“Walk around in hopes we’ll find something that can lead us to civilization.”

And that’s exactly what they did. They walked close to the water because they were too frightened to enter the jungle. The vegetation was too thick; they couldn’t see beyond the outmost layer of green. So the two walked for what was only thirty minutes, but seemed like hours, until they came upon a rocky part of the water.

“Why, hello there!” they heard a British man exclaim.

Unable to see anyone, Emma and Adam first looked at each other in confusion, then looked around in search of another person.

“Hello? Am I speaking loud enough?” the British man asked.

“Yes, but where are you?” Emma asked the voice.

“Well, I’m right here!”

“Where?” Emma yelled, frustrated.

“Right HERE!”

Adam stuttered, “Is that you?”

“Who are you talking to?” Emma asked, flabbergasted.

Adam pointed to a large seashell.

“Righto, yes right on the dot! Just perfect!” the seashell cried out, thrilled to be acknowledged.

“But you’re a seashell! How are you talking?” Adam questioned.

“Never mind that! I am in desperate need of your help!”

“Well, do you have a name?” Emma asked.

“Call me Ishmashell!” the shell said.

“Well, Ishmashell, what is it you need?” asked Adam.

“Well, you see I am in a bit of a predicament. As you can see I am a shell. Shells are found on land, yes, but I long to return to my home in the ocean depths! I loathe the sun’s rays burning my shell and crave the taste of saltwater that used to be so familiar!”

“Why’d you leave in the first place?” Emma asked.

“The natives of this land are very inconsiderate, you see,” Ishmashell started, “They have these contraptions called ‘plastic’ and we sea creatures are, at this point, scared of it. My turtle friend, Crush, told me about a few of his family members getting caught in some sort of plastic used to hold metal cylinders. The plastic wrapped around their necks and put them in terrible condition! This plastic wouldn’t be a problem, but the natives of this island throw them into the ocean without a care! They just throw trash into our home like it’s nothing, and the saltwater tastes like garbage; it’s almost impossible to breathe!”

“So why are you on the shore?” Emma further questioned.

“Well, I was trying to talk to a few of the natives, but many thought I was someone called Satan.”

“Oh,” Adam said, trying to hold in his giggles.

“I’m not sure who this fellow is, but they are not very fond of him. They also never made eye contact with me, so I assume they did not realize I was a shell. Then after years you two came along! My saviors!”

“I’d be glad to help, but what can we do to fix all the littering?” Adam asked.

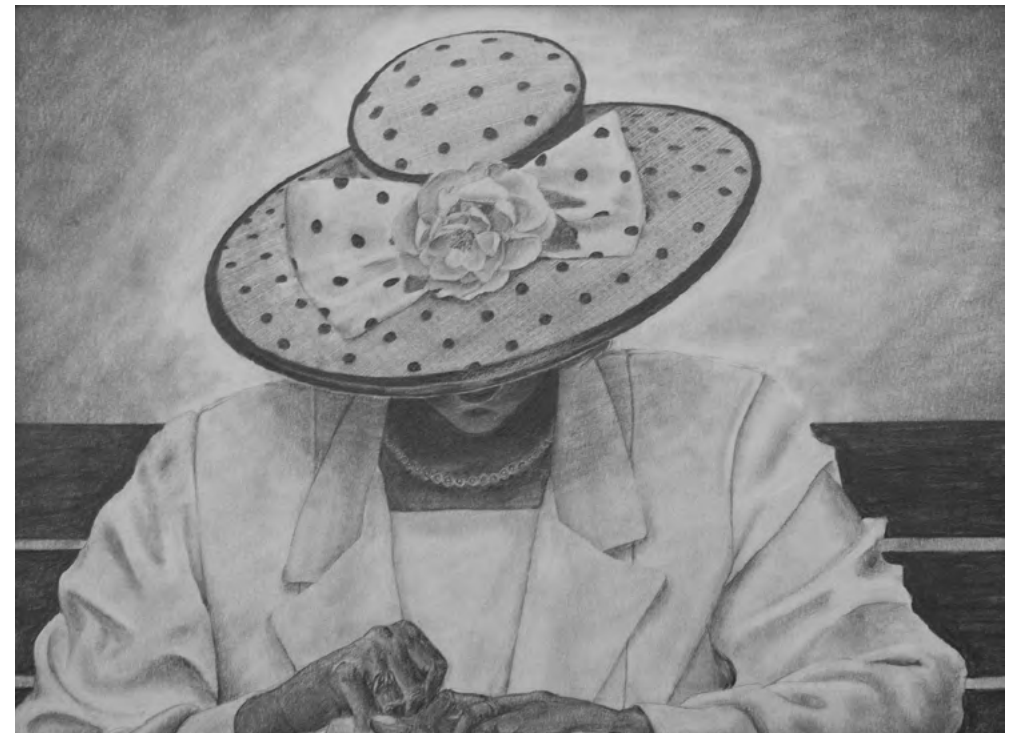
“I don’t know. I hadn’t thought that far.” Ishmashell was silent for a moment, “I’m not sure. Make a poster or something! Just toss me back into the ocean!”

Adam was not sure what to think, but he picked up Ishmashell. Ishmashell screamed in delight as Adam threw him back into the ocean.

“Well,” Adam said, looking at Emma, “That was interesting.”

“Yeah, but what do we do to fix the problems with littering in the ocean?”

“Let’s make a poster.” ▲



First Sunday

Lauryn Elaine Smith

Graphite

Puppet

Haydn Schroader

To the little girl with straight black hair
Cut precisely to the middle of her back,
Bangs tied up with a pretty pink ribbon,
Perfect posture, chin up,
Spine straight, and toes in line:
I see you.
To the little girl with fair skin and faint freckles
Like a porcelain doll,
Glassy eyes and long dark eyelashes,
Icy irises, piercing periwinkle around her pupils,
Cold stare cutting into people’s skin:
What’s going on behind your placid pretense?
To the little girl, always quiet and polite,
Who walks past plush toys
Without even glancing their way,
Who comes when she’s called,
And always obeys:
Do you know how to have fun?
To the little girl who dances
Polished pink slippers always on point,
Tight leotards and frilly tutus,
Constricting buns and heavy make-up:
Do you even like ballet?
To the little girl who shares a plight with Pinocchio,
More like a puppet than a person,
Pulled on strings like a plaything,
A proxy for parents’ expectations:
Are you happy?
To the little girl pirouetting through life
Obsessed with perfection,
Good grades and good impressions,
Only purpose is to please,
Trying to make it seem effortless:
I saw you stumble, then tumble, and crumble;
But that’s okay.
I think that you’ll find
That when the pieces fall away,
And you’ve lost your outer rind,
It will be a better day.
Because you’re no longer just a toy,
You are a real boy.

The Itis

Summar McGee

Raspy coughs give way to
Bloodshot eyes,
Labored breathing, and
Sudden realization of the inevitable:

There is
No cure
For
The Itis.

No salves yet soothing enough
To cure hives of irrationality
No ointments proven potent enough
To clear rashes of infatuation
Not a toddy strong enough
To slow throaty hacks of insanity

Nothing to stop
Creeping bouts of yearning tremors—
Lurking

That leave you—
Pushed
To doctoral visits of cupidity.

The treatment:
Produce embolisms of compassion
'til fondness leaves you bedridden.
Revel in toxemia of endearment
'til adoration renders you incapacitated.

Seek no treatment.
The Itis—
It is a part of you.

Let it engulf the ship of rationality,
Leaving you a lone survivor—
An island of psychosis.

For to be slaughtered by desire
Is the sweetest sort
Of melancholy.

Dear Sister

Michelle Li

In the bottom left corner of my heart
next to Dad’s so-awful-they’re-almost-funny jokes,
I keep the sparkle in your eyes
shrouded in tinkling laughter,
hidden behind rows of crooked teeth.
Do you remember clutching the *right* side of your chest
when I shot you in the heart in Princess vs. Pirates?
Gasping for breath after
games of who can jump the highest (you always won),
we would lie on our backs,
rusted trampoline groaning under our weight,
and trace pictures in the clouds.
Do you remember muffled giggles after midnight?
You would crawl in my bed,
cold toes searching for warmth in the crevice under my
knees.

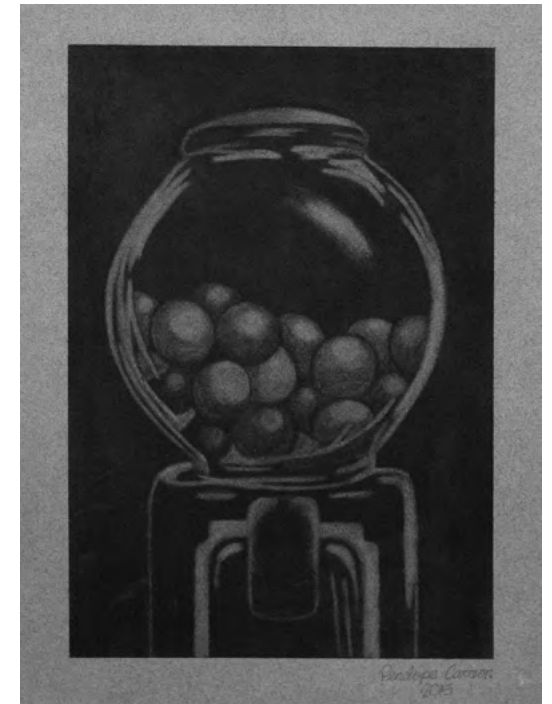
And on nights Mom worked the late-shift,
we would make peanut butter-banana sandwiches
and dance around the kitchen in the refrigerator light.
That sparkle in your eyes is now buried
under clumps of mascara
and I can’t remember the last time I heard you laugh.
You were so relieved
to get your braces off last week,
but I miss your crooked teeth.



Fading Beauty

Lauryn Elaine Smith

Watercolor



Just a Quarter

Penelope Carreon

Charcoal

My Roommate’s Favorite Color

Joy Cariño

“I don’t want to stand out,”
she says as she dons her gray jacket
ready to face the world
and its laws of physics and numbers.
She knows, she’s calculated
that gray doesn’t attract the eye,
doesn’t commit to left or right,
doesn’t offend, doesn’t shine.
But watch: her eyes shine
like pencil graphite, scratching
against numbers that define our world.
But listen: her voice commits to belief
that, when time comes to fight or fly,
she will fight with every ounce of strength,
bounce of curls and spring of wit.
But remember: she possesses the fierceness
of a gray wolf, the kindness of an elephant,
loyal in all dangerous terrain, such as
scorching asphalt or school hallways.
But know: gray does not mean
dull, subdued, uncertain.
For she stands, not too noticeable,
but as sharp and brilliant as silver
in the corner of your eye.

Momma's Boy

Connor McNamee

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

Momma's boy. That's what Daddy used to call me when I didn't act like the other boys. When I attracted looks in McRae's for dancing and singing along to Britney Spears, he'd tell the gawkers, "What can you do? He's just a momma's boy." When I'd cry, Daddy would say to my judging family, "He's just a momma's boy." I never saw the bad in being called a momma's boy; in fact, I took it as a badge of pride because I knew I was a momma's boy. While the other boys were out in the woods learning to kill deer, I was learning how to make my great-great grandmother's pecan pie recipe. When the other fathers were teaching their sons to play football, Momma would tell me to study and learn and read and be the best I could because she "wanted the best for momma's little boy." I took this advice from my mother—as I've taken the advice and inspiration from many other women in my life.

When grade school was over the other boys decided to give me a new name: *Sissy*

boy. This name followed me through most of my time in high school. The other boys never saw me as the boy at the top of the class or the boy who always liked to smile. They just saw me as the boy who sat with girls at lunch and listened to pop music. The sissy boy. I couldn't talk in class without being mimicked; I couldn't walk the halls without being pushed. All I could do was what Momma had taught me to do all my life: Learn. I buried myself in my studies and rose to the top of my class like cream on milk. Again, the most valuable lessons I learned during this part of my life didn't come from my books, but instead from the women in my life. Through the lessons of Mrs. Holder and Mrs. Porter, my first science teachers, I discovered

my love of science as it was able to show me the beauty of the world. Through the laughter of Emmie and Annie, the girls I sat with at lunch, I learned the value of making others and myself happy. Most importantly, through Kori Weaver, the girl who stood up and yelled at those making fun me, I learned that I am worth something.

In my sophomore year I made the decision to leave my small Christian school and attend my junior and senior years at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Momma accepted this decision with more than a grain of salt. She was "losing her baby boy" but knew this was the best way for me to pursue the love of learning she'd put in me. The only person who

took this decision harder than she was the momma's boy who had to leave her behind. What helped me make the decision easier were the advanced classes I'd be able to take. Even though the classes were difficult, I made Momma proud and excelled in all. From this new

school I wanted to get the best possible education, but I got so much more. For once in my life I wasn't renamed; I wasn't momma's boy, or sissy boy: I was Connor. My feminine mannerisms were no longer my defining trait; finally I was seen as the kid who does whatever he can to excel in academics and does whatever he can to see others happy.

This isn't to say that I resent my names, because they are true. I am that momma's boy who couldn't stop crying when my favorite "America's Next Top Model" contestant was eliminated, and I am that sissy boy who listened to pop and soul instead of rock and country like the other boys, and I am Connor, the boy who loves who he is no matter what anybody has to say. ▲

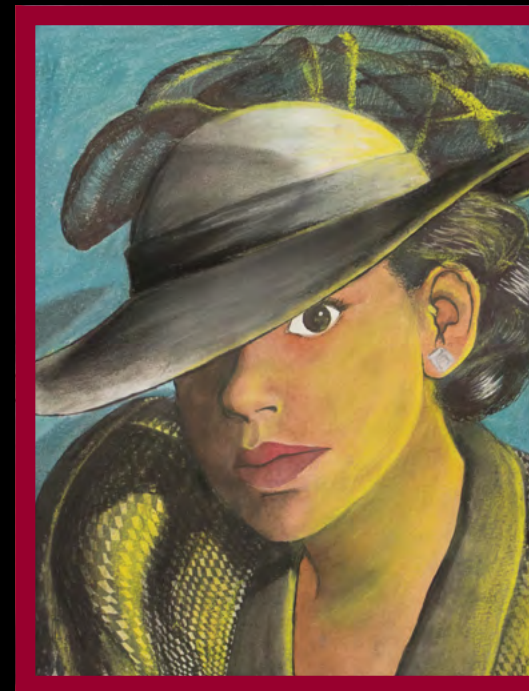
"I couldn't walk the halls without being pushed."



The Essence of Marble

Justin Calhoun

Acrylic



Morning Service

Lauryn Elaine Smith

Third Place—Painting
Pastels, Watercolor, Ink



Lady Liberty

Grant Henderson

Second Place—Drawing
Clay Board



Frazer Hall

Dajah Carter

Acrylic

Prima Ballerina

Zoe Fowler

Dull eyes lined with kohl,
False lashes fluttering to the brow,
Lips glossed a cherry red,
Brush swiping lids with glitter,
Hand painting cheeks a deep rose.

Long hair fastened back with thick pins,
Bun adorned at the base with a jewel comb.
Pale leotard fitted over a slim, strong body,
Frisled tutu reaching ends of fingertips.

Movements as fluid
as water gushing out of a fresh spring.
Movements as smooth
as the glass surfaces of opaque icebergs.
Movements as elegant
as a swan gliding across still waters;
Lofty white wings outstretched,
An aura of grace and beauty.

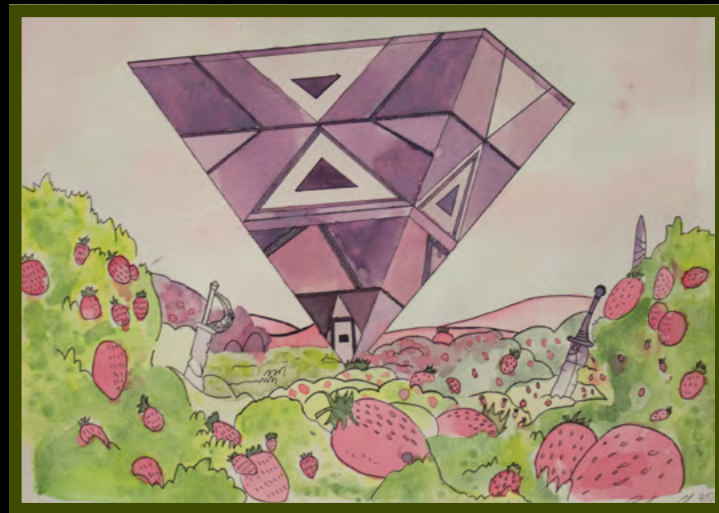
Tired eyes gaze at the reflection
offered by a stained mirror.
Frayed pink ribbons unravel,
revealing bruises and crimson wounds.
Makeup swiftly erased,
Specks of glitter the only indication
that there was ever anything more.



Sterling Ballerina

Dajah Carter

First Place—Painting
Melted Crayon and Acrylic



Strawberry Battlefield

Rebecca Chen

Second Place—Painting
Watercolor, Pen, Ink



Futility

Gianni Stennis

First Place—Photography



Einstein

Mary Madeline LaMastus

First Place—Sculpture
Clay



Honeybee on Lavender

Lillian Fulgham

Photography



Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge Interpretation

Dipal Patel

Second Place—Sculpture
Paint, Wire, Mesh



Autumn Wonder

Emily Waits

Honorable Mention—Painting
Acrylic



Sailboat

Dajah Carter

Acrylic



Fan Rock

West Givens

Photography



Lost

Vasu Srevatsan

Honorable Mention—Painting

Acrylic



Layers

Angie Harri

Photography



Roadside Market

Angie Harri

Photography



The Snack that Smiles Back

Zach Hodge

Third Place—Drawing

Markers

Pickin' Day

Summar McGee

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

Plunk! Okra echoes in neon orange bucket—

Swarms of insects bombard my face and
I am drenched in sweat.

One by one, we strip each hardy stalk:

It's pickin' day with Big Mama.

A well-oiled machine,
Her gnarled hands pick, pick in rhythmic motion:

Grab.

Twist.

Pull.

Grab.

Twist.

Pull.

Big Mama hums off-tempo gospel between chews of tobacco.
Her slate-blue polyester dress hides mud-caked work boots.

She trods forward with hefty hips swaying,
Moves with just the right amount of Southern sass.

The weeds between the rows of okra tower over Big Mama.
Like clockwork, she hacks away with
Rusty pocket knife hidden in her bosom,
A deep and present feeling.

The scorching heat of Mississippi sun sears my flesh.
My hands—red, swollen, callused
My skin—covered in bumps from furry okra leaves
I long for a break,
But I don't stop.
'Cause when it's all said and done,
The okra don't pick itself.



The Enchanted Rose

Angie Harri

Third Place—Sculpture
Plaster



Drop

Haydn Schroader
Colored Pencil



Among the Flowers

Mayukh Datta
Photography



Die, Insect!

Will Pierce
Pen and Ink



Southern Fall

Ashley Dobbins
Photography



Forsyth Park

West Givens
Photography

I am

Kennedy Lewis

Third Place—Poetry Competition

I am black coffee with curves of sugar,
I am the rich melanin infused in my skin,
Glistening and shining in the light,
I am soul food,
Cleaning collard greens with Grandma for Sunday's
dinner,
I am plump pink speckles in my lips singing of the
stony road we trod,
I am the sweet honey stare in my eyes,
Glittering like precious opals and gold,
I am coily locks,
Beaded, Braided, and still as thick as lamb's wool,
I am undeniable confidence,
Head held high and each foot falling firmly behind the
other,
This self-assurance stems from a place of security,
Security composed of mahogany, ebony, caramel,
chestnut, and toffee,
There is abundant history etched into our skin,
Not just years of slavery but years of black excellence
and grace,
We are a people of substance, strength, elegance, and
nobleness,
We are the multitude and finesse of blackness.



Navy Pier Skyline

Angie Harri
Photography



Photobomb

Angie Harri

Photography

Dancing on the Factory Floor

Carly Sneed

First Place—Poetry Competition

Working with my dad on sticky August mornings,
we swayed and sweated to the beat of heat presses.
The screens for shirts lifted with hydraulic hisses,
like cats in the night but steadier.
With the whirl of a thousand paper airplanes cutting through air,
boards of shirts swung exactly sixty degrees left.
Then massive metal arms plunked down,
dropping with the heavy groan of grandfather falling into recliners.
The reluctant clang of metal provided beats to the dance.

On the edges of the shop floor, people would gather.
“Now, I just heard they were moving churches!”
might rise above the rhythm of the presses,
echoing off the high-domed ceiling and reaching our corner.
“You know, she’s behind on her paperwork.
Been drawn up in a knot about that boyfriend of hers.”
Their gossip was to our ears
what movement is to the corner of your eye.

Dad and I just focused on our dance.
As the hydraulics lifted, I folded a printed shirt onto a belt,
while he smoothed one onto the press with meticulous motions.
With the whirring rotation we paused and swayed,
maybe bent our knees to test for stiffness.
As the press clunked back down with a bang,
we moved on the beat, Dad grabbing another shirt to load
while my hands found the corners of a printed one.
Then, like the circling swing of the press,
we just went round and around.

“What Can I Get for You?”

Allison Brown

There’s a lady at the counter
Who stands taking orders all day.
Kind and rude, young and old,
“What can I get for you?”
She’s finishing another coffee
But she’s failing her classes
Her rent needs paying, so:
“What can I get for you?”
Breathing by heaving
Through cancerous lungs
Their coffee needs stirring,
“What can I get for you?”
She works twelve-hour shifts a day
Struggling to make a way,
No customer knows her story,
“What can I get for you?”
The lady at the counter made my coffee,
Drooping eyes, and her silent cry,
Muted by:
“What can I get for you?”



Altum

Katelyn Jackson

Photography

Where the Heart Should Be

Reagan Poston

First Place—Essay Competition

The road home is elusive and foggy. What the road looks like depends on where I’m heading. If I’m heading back to my house, the 1024-square-foot lodging my mother works hard to make home, the road is not unbearably long. Only fifty-four miles stretch between where I am and where I’d rather be, and the distance is *usually* bearable. If I’m heading to my grandparents’, the homey stretch of land on which I took my first steps and learned to ride a bike, the drive takes barely half an hour. Even so, if I’m headed *home*, home to Onaga, the little Kansas town where my dad built his business and the two-story masterpiece we lived in, the drive takes a bit longer. Eight hundred and seventeen miles separate me from Onaga; eight hundred and seventeen miles swell between me and that old wrap-around porch, the tree that brandishes my initials like a tattoo, and the people who would still know my name if I pulled my hair back in pigtails and walked down the street singing about little Bo Peep and her lost lambs—yes, lambs. Eight hundred and seventeen miles covering nearly ten years wait between me and Onaga, but Mayberry towns like that never really leave a person on their own.

My family and I have lived in many places: Dancy, which I swear is a real town; Olive Branch, in a house walking distance from the Tennessee line; Inverness, with mosquitos as big as my palm; Memphis, with one king-sized bed for five kids; Conway, for a short business bankruptcy; Mathiston, when we could not stand on our own; Mantee, when we could; and Onaga, the friendly little town to which I was first brought home. Atop the hill that is Leonard Street sits the house my father built from the foundation up, and now, I am heading back with my brother next to me. We’ll take the thirteen-hour drive in shifts so we do not have to stop, and to keep the other awake on the endless roads, we tell stories.

“I hope it doesn’t
feel like home
anymore...”

“Remember when you got stuck in the laundry chute?” I ask, hands clenched tight around the steering wheel. My brother laughs.

“Mom had half her body in so she could hold my hand while the carpenter cut me out.” I was less than three at the time; all that the memory is, is blurry colors and sections of stories I’ve heard other people tell, yet, still I laugh as the memory swells up around me.

“You deserved it,” I tell him without pity. “You were trying to convince *me* to get in there.” My brother, nuisance that he was—is, forever will be—had all kinds of awful ideas to get us in trouble.

“You wouldn’t have gotten stuck,” he says with a shrug, and I cannot help the incredulous laugh that leaves my lips.

“You’re right! I would have *fallen* the three floors from the attic to the cellar!” He shrugs, a smile on his face. “Remember Rory from down the street?” I ask, half a state and two candy bars later.

“I remember Rory’s hot older sister,” he replies, grinning ahead at the road.

“Gross,” I toss back, and we go back and forth from there.

“I wonder if my room is still blue.”

“I hope they left the tire swing.”

“I bet they finally had to pave the driveway.”

“I wonder if our heights are still nicked into your door frame.”

“I hope it doesn’t feel like home anymore,” he says when it is his turn, and strangely enough, I know what he means. Onaga still feeling like home would mean having to rip ourselves away again and face the hurt with as much difficulty as the first time. Even so, the time to change our minds is drawing short as the 817 miles become nothing but town blocks.

I am driving again, coasting along the roads I no longer know, the roads I realize I *never* knew. They

have changed in the ten, thirty, one hundred years I have been gone. The little library at the end of Main Street has since burned to the ground, and the park where I spent many afternoons playing with my brother and sister is unkempt with trash and overgrown grass. I glance at my brother, but he is staring at the broken swings, the rusted jungle gym. He is staring at the broken and rusted symbols of his childhood, but when he looks back to me, he forces a smile.

Three more minutes along the hilly and haunted roads, and at last, we are there and staring up at the house, The House. My brother steps out of the car first; I am too shocked, too horrified even to breathe. I am staring up at it through the glaze of dirt on the windshield, but there is no mistaking the house before me, as much as I wish I were mistaking it. The house before me is not my home. My home was sprawling, white, clean, open and loving, warm, and never dull. The house before me is broken; its porch sags overhead, and its doors hang off-center from the hinges. Cigarette butts and broken beer bottles cover the steps of brick leading up to the front door. The fresh, white paint my father coated atop the wood is yellowed and cracked; the windows I spent Saturday mornings watching my mother scrub clean to the cadence of her voice have fallen victim to the rocks of neighborhood kids.

As the lump in my throat threatens to choke me, I brave my first step inside the house. The interior is not in much better condition than the exterior. Where our family photos once hung, there is now a barren and dusty stretch of wall, riddled with nail holes and termite hollows. Where there was once our coffee table and couch covered in Mom’s hand-stitched pillows, there now lies an abandoned and broken bookshelf along with a rug of crumpled newspaper covering what was once a shiny, ever-waxed floor. My brother takes my hand, and together we make our way through the rest of the house. The kitchen is water-stained and ruined. The hallway is scuffed and sticky with smoke stain. The laundry chutes have been boarded up on every level of the house, and I am running out of faith. But at the top of the stairs, my beacon of hope: one room remains.

The door creaks as it is pushed open, but the walls are still blue beneath the layers of dust, and the bed that we could not take with us still has his name carved into

the post, E-R-I-C, in blocky handwriting. He smiles a bit, but I begin to cry, the ache in my chest deep and painful. I am not staring at his bed; I am staring at our heights nicked into his door frame. I am staring at the years of memories that no longer live here, no longer live anywhere.

When we leave the house, we check into a motel room a few hours away because neither of us feels able to stay in Onaga, not when my favorite Sunday school teacher offered to buy us coffee, not when the owner of the hardware store called Eric by name after ten years. As we lie in our respective beds that night, I know my brother is not sleeping. I can hear his thoughts from across the room.

“It didn’t feel like home,” I murmur finally, and through the darkness, I can see his eyes flick open. “Isn’t that what you wanted?” he asks, and I turn away.

“I thought it was.” A moment passes; an eternity passes. “It’s worse knowing I don’t have a home,” and by the slow shutting of his eyes, I know he knows what I mean. ▲



Blossom in the Dew

Ella Stone

Honorable Mention—Drawing
Scratchboard

Goodbye, Marnie

Joy Cariño

Second Place—Short Story Competititon

Sandy didn’t know why Marnie was packing her things. She watched Marnie from the hallway, through an opening in Marnie’s bedroom door. She wanted to ask if Marnie could take her to the frozen yogurt place again next week, but most importantly, Sandy wanted to ask if Marnie was okay.

It was late evening after dinner. Sandy saw that Marnie only had her desk lamp on, the light bathing the room in a dim green tint. Marnie tied her long brown hair into a tight ponytail and grabbed her suitcase from the closet. It was the suitcase Sandy loved to sit inside while Marnie rolled her around the house. Sandy watched as Marnie ripped the flower patterned sheets from her bed, the ones she said she’d give to Sandy when she left for college. Marnie stuffed the suitcase with clothing from her closet along with hastily folded sheets. Mother would scold her because she always wanted the sheets folded with a crisp crease. Mother would also scold Marnie for ravaging through the color coded closet, throwing clothes here and there. Then again, Mother has been scolding Marnie more often lately.

Sandy didn’t understand why Marnie was leaving now. Maybe Marnie was going for a sleepover. But why would she need such a big suitcase? Plus, it was a Tuesday, and there was school tomorrow. Sandy watched as Marnie packed textbook after textbook into her backpack. Marnie had told Sandy she was going to college next year, and Sandy remembered Marnie telling her that college would be like school, except you live there. Sandy would miss her older sister’s bright smile in the mornings.

Marnie looked up and caught Sandy’s eyes. Marnie walked to the door and opened it wider. Sandy looked up. She could see Marnie’s unemotional expression behind the glint of her thick glasses. Marnie slammed the door.

The white door was decorated with Marnie’s name in sparkling letters and a crayon drawing that Sandy drew of Marnie today in school when the teacher instructed the class to make a card for someone they

were thankful for. Just the day before, Marnie had picked her up from school and had taken her to a frozen yogurt place, a rare occasion. Usually, Marnie had band practice after school or a math club meeting. Marnie was always busy.

Sandy understood that Marnie was her sister, twelve years older and twelve years wiser. Marnie had brown hair and wide eyes, while Sandy had black hair and thin eyes, but that didn’t change the fact that they were sisters. Sandy also knew that Father was married to another wife before Mother, but Sandy wasn’t a part of that life.

Maybe it had something to do with Mother yelling.

Mother and Marnie yelled more often now. Yesterday when they ate at the frozen yogurt place, Sandy asked Marnie why she and Mother yelled so much.

“She just doesn’t like me,” Marnie shrugged. “I’m different from you, Sandy, and I’ve made different choices for myself, now that I’m older. Mother doesn’t like things that are different. It’s out of order for her.”

Sandy didn’t understand, but she knew Marnie could handle

anything. Marnie could drive, and she did well in school. What else could Mother ask for?

Even so, while Sandy sat in her room to read a book or arrange her LEGO houses, she could hear Mother and Marnie yelling. Their household happenings occurred in a predictable schedule. If Marnie didn’t have band practice, she would pick Sandy up from school, and they would both go home. Sandy would ask to play LEGOs with Marnie. Marnie would say no with a sad smile, reply that she had to finish her homework, and retreat to her bedroom, door shut.

Mother would come home shortly after and prepare dinner in the kitchen. Sandy would play LEGOs in her room, and sometimes, Mother would come upstairs and yell. Once, they yelled about Marnie’s room being messy.

“It’s filthy in here! But what else should I expect...I didn’t raise you myself.”

But Sandy knew Marnie kept her room neat and tidy like Mother liked it. Sandy loved looking through her sister’s closet and counting the colors in order from red to violet. Lately, however, they yelled about Marnie’s school grades.

“Why aren’t your grades as good as they used to be, hah?! What are you doing with your time up here? But what else should I expect...I didn’t raise you myself.”

But Sandy knew Marnie worked hard every day. Marnie always completed her homework, and she went to math club meetings every Tuesday and band practice every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Yesterday, Mother’s yelling included another matter. Cell phones and another name, a boy’s name but not Father’s name.

“Who is Ethan? Why won’t you let me look through your cell phone? Nothing in this house will be hidden from me!”

They would argue, back and forth, angry voices rattling and muffled between Sandy’s light pink bedroom wall and Marnie’s green bedroom wall. Sandy didn’t know what to do, but she wished they would stop, but the schedule would continue. As soon as Father’s car lights shone through the window, the yelling stopped. Then the family would all come downstairs and eat the dinner Mother prepared: rice and fish soup, curry and rice. Everything would go back to normal, calm and collected. Sandy would take the placemats from the kitchen drawers and arrange them in a neat square around the table. Marnie would set the table with clean white bowls and silverware. Mother would bring the food, steam rising from the rice, spicy aroma filling the air. They would sit together and tell each other about their days. Father would talk. Marnie would reply. Mother would reply, then Sandy would reply. Mother would complain about Marnie, and Father would reply with a shrug. Father always listened to Mother.

“You’re right, I guess,” he’d say, chewing on his spoon.

Tonight’s dinner was different. Mother and Marnie talked to each other, arguing about something silly. Sandy was reminded of the fights schoolchildren have during recess over who had the most friends or who had the nicest clothes. There was no point; they just wanted to make each other mad.

“Marnie has been keeping secrets,” accused Mother. Marnie looked up. Father slurped soup from his bowl. Sandy looked at Marnie, confused. Marnie’s face was calm.

“I’m old enough to make my own choices,” she said. There was silence. Father put down his spoon, his eyes closed.

“Not until you’re out of this house,” his voice boomed, “Sandy, go upstairs for a bit.”

Terrified, Sandy slipped out of her chair and ran up the stairs. She looked down upon the scene, the blue checkerboard tablecloth with a flower vase in the middle, the dining room light creating a soft golden glow on the table. It looked so peaceful. She watched Marnie stand to place her half-empty bowl into the sink. Mother’s thin lips parted into a yell. She called Marnie wasteful and disrespectful. These were the yells that Sandy had heard from her bedroom, but she never thought they were this loud or this real. Sandy backed away. She wanted to say something but didn’t know how. Sandy knew Marnie. She was the best sister in the world. She shouldn’t be yelled at for something so small. Besides, Marnie was twelve years older and twelve years wiser.

Sandy thought of all this while staring at Marnie’s closed door. Questions racing through her mind, she returned to her own bedroom and waited. *Maybe Marnie was just upset. Maybe Mother will feel better after Father talks to her. Maybe everything will go back to normal again, and Marnie can take me to get frozen yogurt or play LEGOs with me again,* Sandy hoped.

After a few minutes, Sandy heard the suitcase rolling down the hallway, clicking on the wooden floor, clunking down the staircase, banging with each step. Sandy ran out of her room. Marnie stood at the bottom of the stairs with loaded backpack on her back, suitcase in one hand, red umbrella in the other.

“If it were up to me, I would have left a long time ago,” said Marnie. She faced Mother.

“You never belonged here anyway,” said Mother. Father stood behind them, his face without emotion. Marnie looked to Sandy, “Sorry.”

Sandy didn’t understand why she was saying sorry; she hadn’t done anything wrong to her. Mother should be saying sorry to Marnie.

“Sandy, maybe we’ll get frozen yogurt again some other time.”

Sandy nodded. *Maybe Marnie was coming back later,* “Come back soon, okay?”

“I’ll try,” she replied.

With that, Sandy looked on as Marnie opened the front door, hoisted her suitcase behind her, and walked out into the night. ▲

Trade

Makayla Raby

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

Daddy smiled
as he stuffed the
rusted trunk full
of green, frayed
suitcases and
plastic Walmart
sacks, double bagged.
He spit out
black sludge
onto the dry,
cracking dirt
and muttered,
“Don’t go city
on me, girly.”
He grabbed
my pale,
uncovered shoulders
and pulled me
tight against him.
His sweat soaked
my shirt and
I sniffed one
last gulp of him.
Pine, sweat, and beer.
He released me
and I hopped into
the decaying
Buick Century.
Momma slapped on
her sunglasses
and lit up her
cigarette, pulling
onto Highway 15.
I watched as the
trees were traded
for towers, the
flowers for cars,
and the animals
for people.
I traded my
down-home roots
for opportunities
not found amongst
the deer, the oaks,
or the Indian Summers.

But I never went
city on him.

The Author

Maliah Wilkinson

The smell of oil and dust waft through the air as the pensive scowl on his face deepens into a discouraging frown and finally into a look of overwhelming disgust.

His balding head, sprinkled with the few strands of hair remaining from his youth, shines with sweat even though the window sits ajar. The winter wind seeps through the cracks in the floor and, like the Reaper’s hand, chills his spine and clutches his hand in its icy grip.

Years upon years of writing have taken their toll and gnarled once straight fingers into animal-like claws with swollen blisters and yellowed callouses. Disgusted with his inability to properly maintain his grip on the quill, as the cold continues to set in, he swings his arm wildly scattering papers onto the floor and clutching his throbbing hand close to his chest.

One page sits aloft on the aged desk. The light flickers and the candle begins to dissolve into a liquid wax; he doesn’t have much time to complete his life’s work before his only source of light escapes him.

Ignoring the pain in his fingers as it begins to creep up his arm he snatches the nearest quill and dips it into the molten ink coating the tip and begins to write.

The fluidity of the letters caresses the page forming thoughts of love, sorrow, apprehension, and pain. Still gripping the quill his hand begins to bleed as his nails dig into his palm.

A raven caws in the distance, ships dock at port, lives end, and the author continues to write despite the blood oozing onto the page.



Half a Headlight

West Givens

Photography

Tan Lines

Michelle Li

Third Place—Essay Competition

June in Mississippi is hell on Earth. Heat bounces off the steaming sidewalks, creating an illusion of wavering images. Even the birds are silent and the grass stands still as if too hot to move.

The sweltering sun beats down upon a small child, heating her rosy cheeks until they are as bright as the cardinal that has caught her attention. A young mother scurries behind the child, catching her daughter’s chubby fingers before she can chase after the bright red bird. They wait for the bus.

The woman takes a flyer off the bus-stop billboard and uses it to fan the child’s burning cheeks. Her other hand bunches up the silk fabric of her own shirt—bought across the ocean in a life she left behind—to gently wipe the child’s sticky forehead.

The bus is taking longer than usual, and the child becomes restless. Sweat beads on the young woman’s forehead and slowly trickles down the sides of her face, stinging her eyes. She angles her body to shield the child’s sensitive skin from the scorching rays, her own arms bearing the brunt of the sun’s anger.

Despite all this, the child whines softly, squirming in her mother’s grasp, “Mama, it’s hot.”

“I know, baobei.” Sensing the child’s mounting distress, the woman smiles and says, “How about I tell you a story?”

The child brightens immediately. “Tell me about when you lived in the tall tower!”

So the woman begins her tale of a land far away. She stands on her toes and stretches her arm as high as she can to imitate her family’s apartment on the twenty-first floor. She talks of the street vendors that crowded every corner and the scent of roast duck and steamed buns that permeated the alleyways. Her eyes mist over when she speaks of family and friends whom she may never see again.

The child’s eyes widen in alarm and she reaches for her mother’s face, “If you miss the tower so much, why did you leave?”

The woman smiles through wet eyes, “Because we will have a better life here. Because I want my baobei to grow up in a land of freedom and opportunity.”

Befuddled, the child simply wraps her arms around her mother and buries her face in cool silk. She is too young to understand, but someday she will.

I keep a photograph in my dorm room at school. It was taken just a couple years ago at an awards

ceremony. I am standing next to my mother hugging my two “Highest Average” certificates to my chest and smiling at the camera, while my mother is smiling at me. If I squint my eyes and look closely, I can just make out the faint tan lines that mar her arms, arms that shielded me from the scorching Mississippi sun, arms that carried me across the Pacific. Those arms have guided me all my life and those tan lines remind me of the dream she gave up so that I could follow mine. If she had the courage to leave everything she’d ever known and move across an ocean, then I can muster up the courage to run for SGA President. If she, a forty-one year old immigrant, can return to school and earn an A on every Public Speaking assignment given in a language she hasn’t yet spoken a decade, then I can manage taking one more AP course. Her unwavering faith pushes me to believe in myself, and her actions inspire me to be the best I can be in all my endeavors. With every A on my Chemistry lab reports, every medal I earn at piano recitals, and every dollar I raise for Operation Smile, I am slowly paying tribute to every shade my mother’s skin has darkened.

So whenever I struggle with a Calculus problem or my backhand in tennis, I grit my teeth and remember the sacrifices a woman with uneven tan lines has made for me. ▲



Hibiscus

Haydn Schroader

First Place—Drawing

Pencil

The Other Side

Angie Harri

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

The seawater flirts with the shore, testing out the sand, retracting a second later. Jesse’s feet skim the frothy white water that uncovers crabs from a thin layer of grains. The crabs shimmy back into the sand then surface seven seconds later. Jesse’s always been mesmerized by the way the crabs keep digging after being discovered by the water time and time again.

Jesse’s wearing his swim trunks today, the ones with the blue flowers. His fingers trace the outline of a flower, and then spell out his brother’s name. *Peter*. His brother bought the trunks for Jesse last year, before it happened. Jesse takes a sharp step backwards as the memory is brought to the front of his mind. *Why did we have to move to Florida?* They had moved from Southern California after his brother drowned in an open water swimming accident. His parents believed it would be best to leave behind anything that reminded the family of his brother’s passing; *so why did we move to a state surrounded by water?* Jesse snapped out of his thoughts as a shriek of laughter pierced his thoughts. *Cara*. He twiddled his fingers.

A group of Jesse’s friends had decided to swim to an island 500 meters from the mainland; basking in the sun got boring after a while. He didn’t have the courage to enter the sea, though, and his newfound fear of sinking beneath the weight of the water conquered any tug of valor he had. Back in California, Jesse used to be one of the best on his swim team, never missing a practice and always encouraging the other swimmers. He stopped practicing the day his brother drowned, and it was like losing a part of himself. No more two-hour practices, weekend swim meets, or casual locker room conversations. A big part of his life ended, with no promise of returning.

“Why are you scared of drowning if you can swim?” people would ask.

“Because I know what it feels like not being able to breathe underwater.” The pain would start in his lungs, begging him to relieve them of the torture. His body would try to take over and take a breath, but he’d have to stop it or water would fill his lungs. That’s how it felt not to breathe underwater. Suffocation; that’s how his brother died, so how could he experience that during practice and act like it didn’t affect him? How could he go to practice when his brother wasn’t in the lane next to him?

“Come on, Jesse, you’re making it too easy for me,” Peter said as he dunked another two into the basket. Jesse grabbed the rebound but only made it halfway across the court before his brother snatched the ball back. Peter ran to the 3-point-line, took a shot,

and turned around to look at Jesse before Peter heard the swish of the net behind him. Their laughter echoed in the court.

Jesse snapped out of his memory and saw his friends’ heads bobbing up and down between the waves as they were swimming back to the mainland. Watching

people swim made him nervous; he found himself spelling a word out on his thumb with his pointer finger: *drowned*.

Cara was the first one out of the water.

“Hey, Jesse, we’re going to run to our houses and get some things so we can camp out on the island. Interested?”

“I don’t know...I think I’m just gonna go back home.”

“Oh, okay.” He hated hearing the disappointment in her voice. Cara had first caught his attention when he moved to Florida; her eyes, small oceans, hooked him in. He wanted to know everything about her: her doubts, her fears, her biggest secrets. He’d see her ride her skateboard to town, just to get an ice pop, which usually marked a spot on her shirt seconds after the

“Because I know
what it feels like not
being able to breathe
underwater.”

coins were dropped in the register; she didn’t care. Her knees were scarred from mistakes on the concrete; the white scars made a stark contrast against her tan skin. Cara had a sense of adventure that drew others to her and when she spoke, no one wanted to end the conversation. Was the adventure worth the risk?

His friends returned with tents, sleeping bags, food, and other supplies needed for an overnight stay on the island. Jesse sat watching the crabs dig into the sand as his friends paddled out on a boat full of supplies for the overnight island escapade. He’s wanted to talk to Cara for a while, and the perfect but impossible opportunity was now right in front of him. *Is it really impossible?* His fingers spelled out her name while his feet led him into the water, past the crabs and up to where the water lapped at his knees.

His legs moved as if they had minds of their own; left, right, left. Jesse stopped before he reached the downward slope of sand that dipped two feet, where he had to start swimming. *Now or never, man. Now or never.* He pushed off the sandy bottom and started swimming towards the island. His arms strained against the salty sea but muscle memory helped him swim without having to think about what he was doing. The waves threatened to overtake him, but he forgot about them once he heard her laugh. *So close.* His feet were able to touch the bottom again and he breathed a sigh of relief. The tug of valor made it through this time, though he was thankful there was a boat he could ride back to the mainland. He came up onto the sand and noticed crabs digging their temporary homes on the island also.

“You came!” Cara said.

“Yeah,” he said.

“Will you stay ’til the morning?” His fingers said *yes* the same time his mouth did while the moonlight glinted off the navy waves. The ocean didn’t seem so scary from this side. ▲

Dressing Up

Greg Parker

Sometimes I can’t walk around without catching someone staring.

I never know for sure why they stare, and I know I shouldn’t care, but ...

Maybe I’m just paranoid.

This attention so many give me can’t keep me down, though, because I spent years being put down.

I spent years and years in thundering storms of “weird” and “faggot” and “blasphemous” and disgusted looks and “that’s gay.”

So I endured the decade-long storm of homophobia pouring down on me in a littered ocean of old blue jeans, and dark clouds of graphic tees and muddy Nikes so I would not fit the stereotype.

But then at my new home the Blue Waves washed away the litter and the mud, and I dressed as me.

I dressed with a white button-up, a purple V-neck sweater over it, and a yellow bowtie with my best brown slacks and my hair combed back.

And all I can think about is your smirk when you look at me. It’s not a friendly one, and I shouldn’t let it bug me, but all I can do is look at myself

six times in my phone’s front camera and stare at my reflection when I get to a bathroom for ten minutes until I find something wrong.

Then I don’t think about it until someone asks me why I changed.

Because what do you care of what I wear? Of this sweater to whether this god-awful weather because with these colors together I feel just fine.

You have no power of what I am, no control of me hour to hour because I will allow myself to cower as you tower over me.

I will wear what I want with any color, with no other’s say; I will not change because it is gay. Because gay is not a synonym for *crappy*.

The Journalist’s Tragedy

Griffin Emerson

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

The Alpha Delta Phi fraternity had hung a Confederate flag in pointless defiance. A pleasant breeze ruffled the flag, causing it to fight against the pole. Nikka climbed the marble steps and tapped on the white oak door, ignoring the flag. The door swung open to reveal a monstrous football player wearing a baseball cap with brim turned back. Slightly surprised at seeing a small woman, head wrapped in a burka, his meaty head turned and roared, “IT’S NOT MAGGIE” into the depths of the Fraternity House. Soon afterwards, a loud “Thank god,” echoed from somewhere in the building. Nikka did not have his attention. His head swung back around to the small notepad-wielding woman at the doorstep. Before he could breathe, she prompted a simple question: “Jack Mitchell, what can you tell me about your mother?”

The massive football player was transformed into a weak, helpless boy as he staggered, eyes wide open. Obviously, he was not expecting such an emotional bomb to come from such a small woman. She had his attention. “Wha- What do you mean? Why- Who are you?”

“It’s a simple question, Jack,” she retorted monotonously, “I’ll break it down; do you know what happened to your mother?”

“Ye-yeah.”

“And what was that?”

“...”

“What was that, Jack?”

“She sh-shot my stepdad in the n-neck. Twice.”

Nikka was quick to note the boy’s shaking on her notepad, “Now, how does it make you feel that your mother was acquitted?”

“S-she’s my mother.” He stated this as if Nikka was meant to understand something.

“As for the government, are you angry at the American Government for not imprisoning your mother?”

“W-who are you?”

“I’m a journalist, now-“

“No you’re not. J-Journalists don’t do this.”

“Well, I do.”

Blam. The door swung and fitted into the frame, blocking out the small woman. Click. Click. Click. The door locked in three separate places. Nikka uttered, “Typical.” She turned and descended the marble steps. The blaring sun was blocked out by her overhanging burka. She climbed into her rusted Nissan Ultima, reviewed her notes, tightened her seat belt, and sputtered away.

The sun dunked below the horizon, casting an array of golden light across the cloud-rimmed sky. Nikka sat inside her apartment, prodding the keys of her keyboard, occasionally taking swigs from the glass bottle to her right. Around her were stale, white plaster

“Nikka yanked open her desk drawer and removed a snub-nose revolver.”

walls covered in framed newspaper articles, all detailing horrific circumstances. Two emails had been sent from her email, both to the Iranian newspaper “*Aftab Yazd*.” Nikka was a reporter, she had told the unfortunate frat boy, but she was not employed by any United States business. Tracking

down and reporting on devastating and horrifying news stories in the United States was her job, and those reports went on to remind the Iranian people of how terrible life in the United States must be. She couldn’t complain, despite the anxiety, she was paid well and was able to leave her native country. Her husband and son called her on occasions. In this new connected age, 11,000 kilometers is nothing.

Nikka exhaled a deep sigh of relief; she had met her quota for the day. One case of domestic homicide and a school shooting, or maybe school bombing would be more appropriate wording. Nikka took a drink of the dark liquid from her glass bottle. She leaned back into her chair and her dark brown eyes darted over the rows of framed articles. One featured the story about a four year old found in a ditch and another a double homicide in Overland Park. She took a drink. To the right

was a burglary, a robbery and a rape combined. Drink. Following that was a triple homicide and a story on the homeless of Los Angeles. Drink. On the next row was a mass suicide and a horrifying outburst of domestic violence. Drink. The next frame...

Suddenly, a loud creak echoed through her house. She wasn't alone. Nikka yanked open her desk drawer and removed a snub-nose revolver. Both this handgun and the one under her mattress had never been fired. The apartment was only two rooms, the living room/kitchen and her bedroom. Nikka slowly and stealthily, like a cat, walked to her room, revolver in hand. She got closer to the dark bedroom: Images flashed into her head of what she had seen throughout her career. The nasty, the depraved, the horrific. They flooded into her head as if a dam broke. Her burka was damp with sweat.

The door flung open and Nikka stood with revolver extended in both hands. Her other hand struck the light switch and an empty room was exposed, empty besides the solitary mattress and a few stray stacks of clothing in the corners. A leafy branch clawed at the window, emitting a screech. Nikka examined her revolver before clicking the safety and tossing it aside. This job was not working out for her.

The next afternoon, instead of pursuing a new story, Nikka stood in the dining court of the local mall. After persistently calling through the night, her husband didn't pick up his phone. Emotion and depression had welled up in her, so she decided to treat herself. Chic-fil-a didn't agree with her stomach but Panda Express certainly did. As she stood in line for sweet & sour chicken, her mind drifted to her career. The world was screwed up, and it was her job to expose how corrupt it could be. But then again, seeing so much death and destruction must take a toll on people. She could really use a drink.

Nikka stepped up to the counter, addressed the young man behind the counter, and requested her sweet & sour chicken. He peered at her for a moment, before typing in the order. His red Panda Express hat cast a shadow over his blue eyes. "That will be \$12.87. Ma'am, are you doing alright?"

She handed him her Iranian debit card.

"You look like you got punched or something, your eyes are all black and blue."

"It's just work," she stated.
"Oh, yeah, what do you do?"

Normally, Nikka would have walked away if someone had asked her that but there was nobody behind her in line and the court was more or less empty. The guy behind the counter seemed innocent enough, and this was her chance to get all of this off her chest. She let loose. For a little over ten minutes, she ranted about the propagandists back home and the terrible things she had seen or heard, the life that she left in Iran with her family and the terrible, lonely world she lived now. Most importantly, Nikka finally admitted to herself and to this random stranger that she, Nikka Karimi, had a drinking problem. By the time her rant came to a close, her sweet & sour chicken was sitting at the takeout counter, already cold. She hadn't even paid the cashier yet. "You know what, you seem like you've had a long week; it's on me," he said, while handing back her card.

"What? No, it's fine." For the first time in months, Nikka was taken by surprise.

"Seriously, take your food. Have a great day, and do consider leaving your job; it's doin' nothin' for you."

She thanked him, took her bag of greasy Chinese fast food and took a seat in the food court. The cashier was correct; this journalism lifestyle was a disaster for her. While munching on her chicken, she thought to herself about the public perception of harm. The cashier had done something great for her, and that would most likely never be recorded. If he had done something terrible, it would have made the news. She ranted to herself, *If we want society to improve, maybe we should stop focusing entirely on the negatives, the abuse, the pain, and focus more on the positives. Maybe the government of Iran should be less scared of its citizens sympathizing with the United States and try to actually improve. For once, maybe they could base their government off something that radiates well-being and not something as horrendous as a theocratic republic.* Her mind was made; a letter of resignation would be drafted by the end of the day. After finishing her chicken, Nikka stood up and walked out of the Mall's food court with purpose. Her yellow notepad was left on the table. ▲

The Piano Teacher with No Concept of Time

Joy Cariño

Second Place—Essay Competition

"You've got to learn to listen. No, you're not listening," interrupted Mrs. Dixie as I dove headfirst into "Clair de Lune." I always thought that playing piano involved listening by default, but apparently I was not. "See, Mother was blind..." she began, launching into a lengthy story of her childhood that somehow related to the dynamic quality of Schumann or Debussy. We would continue, but I still did not understand the concept of "listening." It seemed like something only Mrs. Dixie Clark could teach, but now that I live away from home in a public residential high school, there is only so much time I can dedicate to listening. For having studied under a teacher who devoted her life to teaching wonders of the piano, I wish I'd been able to stay, to listen to her longer.

When my parents decided Mrs. Dixie would be my piano teacher, Mrs. Dixie insisted I receive hour-long lessons although they cost twice as much. In unending generosity, she agreed to let my parents pay half the price for three years. Soon, Mrs. Dixie's house became a second home. Every week, I'd check for a glass container full of chocolates on one of the wooden tables scattered throughout her tiny, homey living room. The tables were crowded with *Southern Living* magazines, various versions of the Bible, and important files that should have been turned in months before. If something got lost in one of those piles, it might as well be lost in space. For a music teacher who could organize musical thoughts and phrases into beautiful melodies, Mrs. Dixie could never organize her belongings.

Mrs. Dixie kept her appearance neat, prim, and as upstanding as any Mississippi woman could. Her hot-pink jewel earrings swung back and forth as her fingers rolled across the piano, playing her original gospel arrangement of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." She sang the lyrics in magnificent warbling soprano. Though she loved teaching music theory, telling minute by minute stories of her exercise progress, and listening

to Beethoven concertos, Mrs. Dixie reserved her deepest love for Jesus Christ and never hesitated to tell her students this fact.

For a music teacher who could juggle rhythms and time signatures with mastered skill and poise, Mrs. Dixie had no concept of time. My parents no longer bothered with picking me up at the planned "end of lesson" hour. They knew Mrs. Dixie would keep me forty-five minutes late, pointing out my sloped back, drooping fingers, and lack of musicality. I couldn't help that my fingers would fall and my strained eyes would fail after an hour of staring at black and white keys or faded sheet music. Yet, Mrs. Dixie's southern drawl

urged my fingers forward and into pages of Chopin nocturnes.

When I reached ninth grade, Mrs. Dixie trusted me enough to let me clean her house and make her gluten-free sandwiches. Perhaps she merely needed the extra hand when her husband died the summer

after my eighth-grade year and her breast cancer returned. I remember having to Velcro her arm into a cast that hindered her from playing the instrument she loved. Despite her troubles, Mrs. Dixie held her head high, smiled, and insisted that I practice more often and pay attention to what was written in the music. Her comments never dwindled in honesty or ferocity, and neither did she.

I realize that the path I've taken may not involve the piano as intimately as I would like, but I strive to hold onto what Mrs. Dixie has taught me. I'm learning to practice more often, to make time for polishing. Mrs. Dixie taught me to pay acute attention to what's written, instead of skimming through assignments to check off a to-do list. Most importantly, I am learning to "listen," whether to calculus equations, to *Beowulf* lectures, or to a friend. In remembering Mrs. Dixie's stubborn emphasis on listening, her insistence for excellence, and her bright attitude, I strive to be the pianist—and listener—she would want to hear. ▲

“Mrs. Dixie’s house became a second home.”

Meanus Myles

Summar McGee

Delta blues floated through the air. Mr. Meanus hummed B.B. King’s guitar solo through scattered teeth. He sat on the railing of the dingy white porch as he reached into his worn leather boots and pulled out a balled-up church program defaced with hieroglyphic scrawl. Popping the collar of his tobacco-scented flannel shirt to shield his neck from the heat, he wiped the sweat from his brow with wrinkled brown fingers, squinted at the yellow paper, and pulled a cordless phone out of his bleach-stained Levi pocket. He dialed the number and leaned back against the wooden column, tapping his foot impatiently as he waited for a response. No answer. He scowled.

“I hate when boys call for hay an don’t come pick it up,” Mr. Meanus mumbled under his breath.

As Mr. Meanus slid the cordless phone down his face, his pinky finger brushed the top of his right ear. He stopped. He stood statuesque moving only to run his finger on the forked portion of his right ear again and again. Meanus finally let out a phlegmy cough and flinched, ever so slightly, as he began to reminisce.

Forty-four years later and he still remembered. He remembered every detail of that day as if he were still there. He remembered the deep-set rage in Pat’s glare. He remembered the pain that accompanied the wet, hot blood that poured down the side of his face, but most of all he remembered the feeling of horror he felt when he came to and saw it lying there on the floor—cold, foreign, and unattached.

Meanus and his brother, Bobby, had ridden to the juke joint to “get a lil whiskey.” Meanus knew that “Pat ain’t like him going to no juke joint,” but he thought to himself, “I’m a grown man. A grown man can go to a juke joint an get a little whiskey if he John Brown please. I been on that plow all day, I ain’t gon let no woman tell me I can’t do nothing.” Meanus and Bobby pushed open the back door to the juke joint and walked up to the bar.

Four hours and six shots of whiskey later, Meanus was loose and fumbling. He found himself eyeing a woman in the corner whose blouse was cut a bit too low and whose eyes looked a little too willing. Regardless, Meanus walked toward her as if he was being pushed by an invisible force. Even knowing this, he continued. As he drew closer to the woman, he recognized her by the scar on her left leg. The woman in the corner was “Juicy Jane,” one of Bubba’s Juke Joint’s famous attractions. Meanus found himself scattin’ to the beat with Jane. He put his hands around her robust waist and dipped her. Jane’s legs went flying in the air as Meanus leaned in for a sloppy kiss. By then it was nearing midnight and Meanus was drenched in sweat; he wasn’t quite sure whether it was from scattin’ or the whiskey, but he didn’t care. All Meanus knew was what felt good here and now—scattin’ with Juicy Jane.

Meanus scanned the dim, musky room for his brother, Bobby. Mid-search, Jane slinked a chunky brown hand around two of Meanus’ fingers and guided him to the bar. Meanus was just about to take another shot when a short, stout, shadowy figure pushed open the back door of the juke joint. He squinted to try to make out who it was. As the figure moved closer Meanus spotted the familiar hue

of bright pink sponge rollers. It was then that he realized that the shadowy figure was his wife, Pat. A wave of belligerent explanation began to spill from his mouth. Before Meanus could get out a coherent sentence, he was hit with the scent of Pat’s floral perfume and a strong left hook. Wailing and begging for forgiveness, Meanus struggled to get Pat off of him. Meanus attempted to grab Jane hoping that she would help him fend off the spastic punches. As Meanus started moving towards the door, Pat’s punches began to slow, which in Meanus’ experience meant that Pat was calming down and would be willing to talk over the situation soon. So naturally Meanus headed back toward Pat and wrapped his hands around her waist

“...he was hit with the scent of Pat’s floral perfume and a strong left hook.”

for an embrace—hoping she would be overcome by his sincerity and forgive him. Pat stopped flailing in Meanus’ arms, her breath hot against his ear as she whispered something soft and slow. Just as Meanus pulled her in close—believing things had turned around for him—he felt something clamp down on the top of his right ear. Sudden, explosive pain pushed him into unconsciousness. Meanus was alone; beside him on the floor lay a bloody piece of gristle.

Now Meanus rocked back on the porch railing gritting his teeth and humming louder than ever to drown out his thoughts, his body shaken and worn from the memory. This time, though, it was just him and the Blues. No Pat. No whiskey. No Jane. And no ear. ▲



Ventus

Katelyn Jackson

Photography



The Receiver

Gianni Stennis

Honorable Mention—Photography

Tough Love

Michelle Li

The limp vegetable floats in murky broth
like a bloated corpse in swamp water.

“Eat it now,” you demand,
words staccato, tone harsh.

I scrunch my nose, lips pressed together tight.

Thwap.

Chopsticks smack the back of my hand
sharp and severe

like your eyes when they gaze upon
the first “B” I make in Biology.

I try to tell you it’s the highest grade in my class
but the furrow remains between your brows,
and I lose my phone for two weeks.

“Again,” you command,
as my sore fingers protest against ivory keys
and my vision swims with F-sharps and half-notes.

I hit the right chords, finally,
but you just point to the next measure.
“Claire’s mom let *her* go to the party!” I whine,
fingers fisting the new dress I bought for the occasion.

You shrug, voice cold,
“You are not Claire.”

Mascara streaking down flushed cheeks,
I run from the living room,
“I wish I was, so I wouldn’t have you as a mother!”

You slip into my room later that night,
and I pretend to be asleep

as you tuck the covers around my chin,
press a lingering kiss to my temple,
and in the darkness

framed by slivers of moonlight,
I understand the words you can’t say.
The next day, Claire is sick with alcohol poisoning.

Balancing Act

Laurel Lancaster

Her name is Order. When she smiles, her white teeth shine like stars against the midnight darkness of her skin. Each hair on her head forms a perfect spiral, curling down to rest on her shoulders, not daring to stray from its place. Her voice, smoother than silk, never wavers. Each sentence she speaks sounds like a pond that never ripples, completely undisturbed. She keeps her head up and her shoulders back, steadfast, unbreakable. Hers is a quiet power; every motion, every word that passes her lips is motivated by one thing: control. Control supplies her strength, it gives her breath, it is woven into her very cells. From the rising of the sun till its setting, control holds onto her. And her name is Order.

His name is Chaos. His copper hair mimics a campfire, sparks of spikes flying every which way, unwilling to obey. His skin shines brighter than his blue eyes, like a star waiting to explode. His heart pounds a drumbeat into his chest, echoed by his boots against the ground. Each thought that enters his mind only adds to the noise inside his head; silence is foreign to him, even when he is alone. He is a raging storm, bright lightning lashing out, voice booming like thunderclaps. His aura is freer than the winds, driven by passion and emotion.

Everything we feel is magnified a thousand times in him; emotion burns inside him like a wildfire that cannot be quenched. His is a power wild and free. And his name is Chaos.

Together, they are twins. Immortal siblings, conceived from Conflict and born of Balance, they are destined to rule together. When they were children, they toyed with the world, playing with the fragile blue sphere like a cat with a ball of yarn. They batted and tossed it around, sending the planet into turmoil. They did not understand the consequences, the people

they built or destroyed, treating life and death as nothing more than a game. How do you fear death when you cannot die? Together, they made their mother sick with grief. The Earth was her world, her creation, but her children seemed bent on tearing it apart. As they got older, things only got worse; childish curiosity and mischief transformed to reckless abandon and untamed will.

When they fought, volcanoes erupted, seas thrashed, overturning even the mightiest ships. Chaos would lash out in anger, and so would the people of the world, destroying each other for money, fame, and power. He could not imagine everything being still and calm, with so much darkness and evil in the world. There was no time for control when lives were at stake;

“When they were children, they toyed with the world, playing with the fragile blue sphere like a cat with a ball of yarn.”

he was blind to any flaw in his plans. With a frantic mind and a gentle heart, Order would try to clean up her brother’s mess. She stopped war, all wars, even ones fought for justice or freedom. She wanted peace, direction, precision, no matter the cost. She did not understand that some things are worth fighting for; peace cannot be wished for, it must be worked for, with conviction and tenacity.

Finally, their mother could take no more. With one swift stroke, she separated the twins, casting them

to opposite sides of the cosmos, rendering their powers useless. Brother and sister were pulled apart for the first time in an eternity, cursed to lonesome exile. For the first time in a millennium, the world was still and quiet. Everything appeared to be fixed.

But Balance could not have been more wrong. The world, left to its own devices, was tearing itself apart. There were no wars fought in the name of the fallen, no rock concert crowds joined in song, neither love nor anger moved their hearts. The fire that runs through man’s blood had burnt out without Chaos’s energy and

spirit. Without Order’s guidance, the fabric of society unraveled. Without logic, fear ran rampant, destroying hope in everyone’s heart. Each day brought uncertainty and unrest; they went to bed wondering if the sun would rise again. There was no peace to be found, not in this place where the moon and the stars might move on a moment’s notice.

Balance was in anguish. Her children banished, her world in turmoil, she could not bear the sight. Time went on; she grew weaker and weaker, trying to sustain humanity on her own. When she had exhausted everything, the spell broke, but her children would not return in time. Balance would die, her spirit dissolving into the stars, leaving her creation behind. The twins, reunited after so many years, embraced each other in their grief. Chaos held his sister, sharing his love, his strength. Order held her brother, sharing comfort in the inevitable work of fate. In that moment, their spirits fused together. Passion and peace, control and emotion,

darkness and light, order and chaos became one in a burst of flame.

After, it was Harmony who rose from the ashes. They looked upon the fragile, blue ball their mother had left them and was moved to tears. They cradled the planet with their spirit and began to rebuild their mother’s creation. Day by day, year after year, Harmony healed the planet and the people who lived there. The spirit wielded Order and Chaos, painting with passion and precision to make a world perfectly imperfect.

For they realized that true Balance was impossible. Both sides of their story could not be told separately, but as one. They became as fire and ice, impossible for one to exist without the other. To this day, they rule. Not as warring siblings, destined to destroy one another. But together as one heart and one spirit. Together, in perfect Harmony. ▲

Nocturnal Gaze

Zach Hodge

White Charcoal



Peer

Gianni Stennis

Photography

Poetry of Reality

“Science is the poetry of reality.” – Richard Dawkins

Jason Necaie

I have always been a quick study. When it came to academics, I never struggled to put ideas together; I usually found myself steps ahead of my teachers in class. From the properties of water in freshman biology to vector field operations in calculus-based physics, learning is my comfort zone. When my physics class started electromagnetism, I pieced together the induced electromotive force in a closed wire loop by resistance to change in magnetic field before my teacher had gone over more than the definitions of a loop and flux. Chemical kinetic dependence on mole ratios of products and reactants in single replacement reactions clicked as soon as I saw the differential equation describing reaction rates in class. Throughout school—it all just *made sense*.

The summers for me have been bittersweet: I often enjoyed relaxing with nothing to do, but sometimes I would climb the wall to be occupied. Particularly in the summer before high school, I felt confined within myself.

Just after my father retired in mid-winter four years ago, my family made the pilgrimage back to his home state of Mississippi, where my brother and I would finish high school. I was fourteen, and the summer brought to me the first time where I preferred to stay inside, alone with my thoughts. I had something to think about that *didn't* make any sense.

Like all the other times moving to a new city, I experienced a period of initial isolation. I hadn't been settled long enough to make close friends in Ridgeland, Mississippi, and I didn't like the sticky summer heat outside anyway; so I spent my free days on the computer inside, surfing YouTube for clips that caught my attention. Among those videos were shots of upcoming games and physics lectures by Michio Kaku, but one of them caught my attention particularly: a comedian video blogger discussing why he was atheist.

Growing up, that word had been taboo. My parents

were sure to instill in me the same values that they grew up with, molding my belief system to be as narrow as theirs. I took what I was surrounded by as simple fact: of course God is my lord, and Jesus his son, the messiah. Of course the Bible is true and the final authority. Of course Noah built the Ark to save the animals from the flood, and of course all mankind comes from Adam and Eve. I remember clearly being in third grade when a classmate heard I didn't go to church that Sunday. She gasped and asked, pointedly, “Are you an atheist?!” Of course, I was quick to deny

such an accusation, knowing from various social cues that it was ineffable to be atheist, whatever it was. No room was left for skepticism.

Yet there I was, no more than six years later, learning exactly what atheism meant. The concept of not believing in God had been a distant concept to me: something that I figured that someone could believe, but not something I had thought about. Quickly this video led to another video, and then to one more, all about people explaining why they were nonreligious. Being raised with strongly conservative values, these videos scared me. Not because they offended me, but because they *made sense* to me.

All of the things that made academics comfortable—logic, rationality, and objectivity—were now putting my faith in jeopardy. The points raised both in these videos and my head appealed to my logical side, but my desire to conform to my family's religion kept me immovable. My world view was thrown into disorder.

I agreed that the world obeyed physics, and that if you had enough information, you could determine the end state of any system after any time. But I had been told that humans could never understand the world around them as part of my Christianity. I understood the evidence of the (roughly) four-billion year history of Earth, as described by modern observation of

astronomy and mineral analysis, but I had grown up on the creation story in Christian mythos. Here lay the most stressful piece: I wanted to believe what I did before, but I couldn't escape that I didn't believe in Christianity.

Like that girl said in third grade, I am atheist.

But I learned while analyzing myself that summer that I am not cold. No, I don't think there is a supernatural realm, but I do believe that there is real beauty in the mess that has unfolded since the Big Bang.

It didn't make sense to me when I first asked myself what I believed, but it does now. A creator is not needed to give my life meaning. Friends and family, playing percussion, learning new physics, the poetry of reality—these are what make my life worth living. These are what make my world *make sense*. ▲



Antique Glory

West Givens

Photography

Flowers at the Service

Carly Sneed

Yes, they had a very lovely service for her, I agree. Did you notice all of the flowers they had out? Why, there were more flowers than people.

Bouquets upon bouquets of fresh from the shop, fresh from the shop's freezer, flowers. They were in all array of colors, some more artful than others, some not even real.

There was a lovely bouquet of bright oranges and reds, loud and filling the room, but, you know, I think those started wilting first. Started pulling away from their upright and righteous posture.

It wasn't long before someone at the funeral home fixed 'em together with some string, pulling them tight together, making a presentable picture for the guests. I wonder how tight they were pulled,

I wonder how close they were to losing the color in their leaves. They had been laid so artfully next to her tombstone, but the next day they had fallen to the ground,

their petals scattering amongst each other, like someone laid out the tiles for a mosaic, but of course no one would ever put it together. Did you know her favorite colors were orange and red?



Railroad Ties and Morning Glories

Lillian Fulgham

Photography

Chronic Town

Nathan Barlow

Over a melodic, arpeggiated guitar the lead singer croons about the red spheres that prevent crop dusters from getting snagged by power lines and describes unincorporated towns like Philomath, Georgia—images all too familiar to someone who has lived in the Deep South. The band R.E.M., originating in 1980 in an SEC college town not dissimilar from the one in which I’ve spent the past four years, painted a picture of the South for me—one of commonality, eccentricity, and perception—that my experience here has confirmed.

Most of my friends hate everything about the South. I would too if I only saw the things they focus on—poverty, low educational attainment—but they fail to notice that substance that makes up the cultural understanding of everyone here. On the whole, I notice an unspoken comprehension of the issues of poverty and racism; it’s intuitive for people down here. To grow up in the South is to understand those personal identifications that every person has in the back of his or her head at all times (“I’m single,” “I’m male,” “I’m a student”) and how to put them to use. That commonality is the foundation of every Southern author’s and artist’s work, and R.E.M. is no exception. The song

“Can’t Get There from Here” borrows a Southern expression to identify a common Southern sentiment: being from nowhere, coming from a one-stoplight town. Or consider the title to one of my favorite albums, Fables of the Reconstruction—a pregnant title that conjures images of lessons learned from that most infamous of Southern eras. Just like me, R.E.M. felt and internalized the circumstances of everyone around them, and they incorporated that commonality into their sound.

Because the culture here is so open, so palpable, because we all understand poverty, people feel free to be eccentric in other ways. A man from my town who calls himself Mr. Lala converted his front yard into an open-to-the-public art installation consisting entirely of old umbrellas. Music like R.E.M.’s is totally free of contrivance, yet it captures the eccentricity of a place like Mississippi, where I live. I like to think this eccentricity proceeds from the commonality. Equipped with that visceral base of cultural knowledge and experience, these eccentric people like R.E.M. can move on to a perception of the world as a whole that’s really quite beautiful. My time in the South has given me some of that perspective and has made it a part of me. ▲



The Prisoner of Azkaban

Rebecca Chen

Honorable Mention—Sculpture
Polymer Clay



Solemn

Mary Frances Lee

Photography

Broken

Jalen Perry

The cold triumphed the morning.

The flickering of the sun’s light shimmered past the many leaves from the granddaddy willow tree.

A hard thrust of wind irritated the leaves of the tree and sent them spiraling down to the cold, hard ground.

The thoughts of the tattered old woman seeped into the morning as she sat in her chair on the rickety old porch that was once painted in the dark crimson shade of blood.

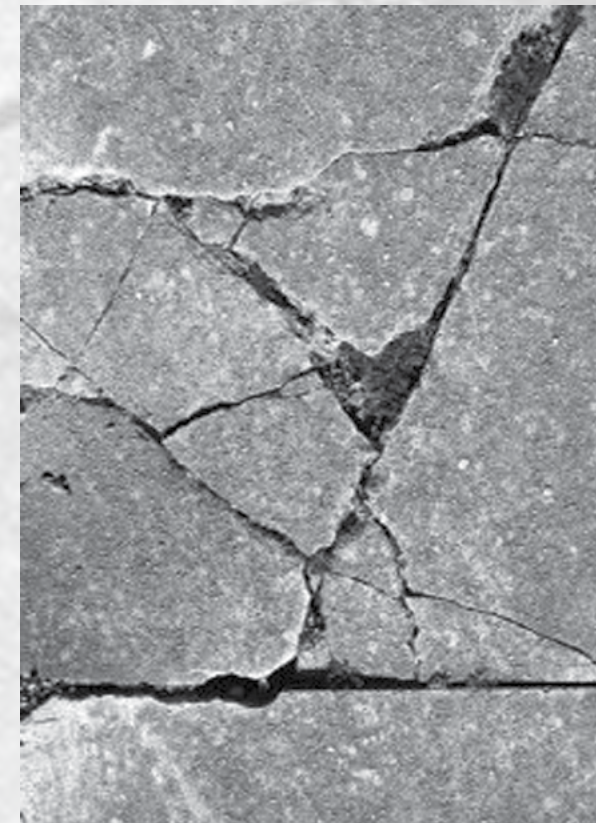
Her face was broken flesh, her eyes darkened hollows; her nails were jagged, her teeth yellow and rotten, her breath pure foulness.

She sat on the porch covered in an orange worn-out poncho and dirty green sweater that hung from her fragile body.

She wore a pair of what she liked to call “holy stockings” because she only wore them to church, and pair of dark brown short-heeled boots that seemed to be a bit newer than the rest of her clothing.

Her hands were cracked. Large and massive, too immense for her short Southern frame, they gnarled with age, arthritis, and ancient scars—cotton husks, leather whips, and briar patches had all left their mark on those swollen hands.

Those hands had seen a lot of things, but she never complained.



Unbroken

Lillian Fulgham

Photography

Contributors’ Notes

Nathan Barlow (Starkville) would like to meet Dr. Ron Paul. Uncle Ben’s advice guides him: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Jenny Bobo (Okolona) would like to have been born around 793 AD, the Viking Era. If she had a superpower, she would want to have the ability to manipulate the probability of anything. She recalls her sister, Rachel Bobo, asking, “Do you want to regret things?”

Allison Brown (Pontotoc) believes, “Your value doesn’t change based on someone else’s inability to see your worth.” Her most influential work is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Her future plans are to attend UAB and major in neurology.

Justin Calhoun (Ruleville) has been influenced by Jean Michel-Basquiat. He believes art should empower and that “Comparison is the thief of joy.”—Theodore Roosevelt. His future plans are to go to college to get more knowledge.

Joy Cariño (Starkville) says her future plans include having a nice family, becoming a teacher, and joining/creating an indie band. She follows the requirements for a significance test: “Must be Random, Normal, Independent.”

Penelope Carreon (Byram) would like to meet Hermione Granger. She believes that art is all about individuality and being able to show your true emotions and personality. She says that art will always be her happy place.

Dajah Carter (Jackson) says her most influential artist is Keith Haring. Her future plan is to graduate, and she believes art is her way of adding color to this monotone world.

Rebecca Chen (Hattiesburg) says she would liked to have met Tupac and would like the ability to control gravity. Her hero is Lil Dicky because “he went to college, got a degree, got a good job, then quit it all to become a rapper and pursue his art.”

Mayukh Datta (Kosciusko) believes creativity is the root of all good art and writing. He credits his late grandfather as a major influence in his life and says that artistically “The Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo has influenced him, also.

Ashley Dobbins (Greenville) says her favorite novel is *Wuthering Heights* and that she would love to be able to teleport. She affirms with C.G. Jung that “Sensation tells us a thing is. Thinking tells us what it is this thing is. Feeling tells us what this thing is to us.”

Griffin Emerson (Starkville) is influenced by the author Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. When considering his future plans he asks, “Can you really plan the future?” Griffin affirms that “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire.”—Oskar Schindler

Landry Filce (Hattiesburg) wants to become a psychologist and would like to have met Sylvia Plath. She believes that creativity is really important to maintain humanity.

Zoe Fowler (Columbus) loves the novel *1984*. She wants to become an engineer and would like to have been born in the 1920s. She wishes she could have met Anne Frank.

Lillian Fulgham (Starkville) says her most influential artist is her mother, Bonnie Renfroe, a potter and painter. Her hero is Steve Irwin because she’s always loved reptiles: “He was a great guy.”

West Givens (Senatobia) plans to pursue both professional filmmaking and photography. He believes that art is the fastest way for two strangers to make a connection.

Angie Harri (Starkville) would like to have met her great-grandfather so she could learn more about her family history. Angie believes that “When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you until it seems as though you cannot hold on for a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time when the tide will turn.”—Harriet Beecher Stowe

Grant Henderson (Leakesville) says that after college his future might include medical school, a career in the military, or a life in politics. He wishes he could have met Ronald Reagan and says he exhibits his patriotism through his art.

Zach Hodge (Olive Branch) believes art is an effective medium to show the darkest aspects of people. He wishes he had the power of omniscience as a superpower.

Katelyn Jackson (Starkville) plans to major in biology and become a pediatrician. She would like to have met John Milton and would like to have been born in the 1960s. Katelyn lives by the motto, “Faith is like Wi-Fi; it’s irresistible, but it has the power to connect you with what you need.”

Ari Jefferson (Philadelphia) counts Bob Marley as her most influential artist and says that her mother is her hero because “She faces her struggles with faith and strength.” Ari hopes to become a pediatrician.

Mary Madeline LaMastus (Cleveland) says her most influential artist is the band Jenny and Tyler. She would like to meet Taylor Swift because she’s always been a “Swiftie” and she’s always admired Taylor’s courage in being honest about her life. Mary Madeline acknowledges, “That’s one of the most admirable characteristics to me: artistic sincerity.”

Laurel Lancaster (Southaven) plans to attend Ole Miss and study pediatric occupational therapy. She wishes she could have met J.R.R. Tolkien and quotes Isaac Asimov: “I write for the same reason I breathe—because if I didn’t, I would die.”

Mary Lee (Starkville) would like to freeze time but still have the ability to do things. She plans to be a psychiatrist and believes, “I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.” Sam Snell has influenced her through his work.

Kennedy Lewis (Greenwood) lists her favorite novel as *Things Fall Apart*. She believes that all types of art and forms of writing are sources of relief that result in something beautiful. Her mother is her hero.

Michelle Li (Starkville) says her defining quote comes from the character she would like to meet: “Hold your head high and keep those fists down.”—Atticus Finch. Her hero is Angie Harri “because she gives me her fig bars.”

Summar McGee (Edwards) is influenced by writer Mildred Taylor. Summar echoes the admonition to “Do as much as you can as best as you can for as long as you can because you never know who’s watching and when your life will take a turn for the better.” She would like to have elemental control, and her favorite book is *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor.

Connor McNamee (Florence) says he wants to meet Britney Spears and that his hero is himself. He quotes Kim Kardashian: “I love when people underestimate me and then are pleasantly surprised.”

Sydney Melton (Meridian) wishes she could have been born in the 1960s. She counts MSMS art teacher Ms. Angie Jones as her most influential artist.

Jason Necaise (Ridgeland) plans to study physics and become a research or corporate scientist. He believes human creativity itself is proof for the chaos theory. He affirms that “If it is possible, then it happens.”

Greg Parker (Benndale) will be attending Ole Miss to study English education and creative writing. If he could have a superpower he would like to read minds. His most influential artist is Lady Gaga.

Dipal Patel’s (Ocean Springs) future plans include a career in medicine. She would like to have met Gandhi, and counts her parents as her heroes because “they managed to come to a country where they didn’t know the language and set up a successful business empire through their hard work.”

Jalen Perry (Ashland) would like to become a doctor and travel the world. Jalen believes that “Without creativity, there would be no progress, and we would forever repeat the same patterns.” He would like to have been born in the 1980s.

Will Pierce (Columbus) says his future plans include digital design. If he had a superpower he would like to have the ability to time travel. He counts the Harry Potter series as his favorite books.

Reagan Poston (Mantee) would love to meet Jensen Ackles. Her favorite book is *My Sister’s Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. Reagan echoes Henry David Thoreau: “Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves.”

Makayla Raby (Ecru) plans to get a doctorate in comparative literature. She believes that anyone can write, but only some will be great and that “All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.”—J.R.R. Tolkien

Wrishija Roy (Columbus) says her most influential writer is Edna St. Vincent Millay. She admires Shane Koyczan’s perspective: “I sit before flowers hoping they will train me in the art of opening up. I stand on mountain tops believing that avalanches will teach me to let go. I know nothing, but I am here to learn.”

Priya Sanipara (Vicksburg) believes art is a form of self-expression: you create a world where you can be yourself. She plans to attend medical school and specialize in oncology. Her favorite books are the Hunger Games series.

Hadyn Schroader (Ocean Springs) would like to have met Walt Disney. Her hero is Leonardo Da Vinci because he combined science and art. Hadyn will combine her interests in math, science, and creativity for a career in engineering.

Lauryn Elaine Smith (Meridian) says her favorite books are her sister’s sketchbooks. She hopes to combine her skills in art and science to become a scientific illustrator. Her mother is her hero for supporting her emotionally and mentally.

Carly Sneed (Pontotoc) plans to major in Chinese and international studies. She likes the words of Lil Wayne: “And I call it like I see it, and my glasses on, but most of y’all don’t get the picture less the flash is on.” She says to fake being creative until you believe it, too.

Vasu Srevatsan (Hattiesburg) wishes she could have met Michael Jackson. She recalls her father’s admonition, “Don’t feel bad about your shoes when the person next to you has no feet.” Her hero is Drake because he started from the bottom and now he’s here.

Gianni Stennis (Columbus) plans to create in as many fields and media of art as he can. The artist that influenced him the most is Kanye Omari West. Gianni believes, “If nothing else, I’m glad I made some enemies. That means I finally stood for something, that something being myself.”

Ella Stone (Tupelo) plans to major in business. She believes art is a language everyone speaks and that there is no limit to how many people it can touch. Her favorite novel is *Jane Eyre*.

Emily Waits (Columbus) plans to attend pharmacy school and wishes she could have met Audrey Hepburn. Her favorite quotation is “Though she be but little, she is fierce.”—Shakespeare

Maliah Wilkinson (Holly Springs) loves the novel *The Bourne Identity* by Robert Ludlum. She plans to become a speech pathologist and believes with President Snow from *The Hunger Games* that “Hope is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective.”