

# SOUTHERN VOICES



2017

## SOUTHERN VOICES

is a magazine of creative works by students at the Mississippi School for  
Mathematics and Science  
1100 College Street, MUW-1627  
Columbus, Mississippi 39701

*Southern Voices* is available to read on the Internet at [www.themsms.org](http://www.themsms.org)



Southern Voices  
Volume XXIX  
Spring, 2017

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Essay Judge

Mr. Wilson McBee is Assistant Editor in the Department of Publishing at The Art Institute of Chicago. An alumnus of MSMS (Class of 2002), he was on the staff of *Southern Voices* as a junior; as a senior he served as editor. Between his undergraduate career at Davidson College and graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he worked at the Publishing Office of the Library of Congress.

Photography Judge

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“Sunrise”

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**Jonesy**  
Emily Hook  
First Place—Short Story Competition  
The Chris Read Award for Fiction

Matty pushes me down the stairs on Fridays. Fridays, because that’s when he and Mrs. Sheila come to watch me, and Mrs. Sheila turns on reality TV and sleeps. I don’t bruise, that’s what Matty says. Says it doesn’t show up on my skin.

Must be true, ’cause Mama never asks.

Sometimes I want to tell her, but then I remember Jonesy, and I shut my mouth. Matty says my face isn’t as ugly when my mouth’s shut.

“Hey, butt-face.” Matty jumps on my bed, pulling at my hair. I wince at the pain on my scalp and bat his hand away.

“Hey, I’m talking to you, *butt-face*.”

“Go away, Matty.” In my head, I spoke the words like a command. But out loud they sound like a plea. Matty just grins and grabs a larger section of my hair, yanking hard.

“Come outside, my mom said you have to play with me!”

I sigh—I know if I say “no,” Matty will wake Mrs. Sheila up, and she’ll yell at me.

So, I let him drag me downstairs, past the couch, covered in Mrs. Sheila’s sleeping mound of a body, and out the back door. It swings shut behind us with an ungodly squeak.

I cross my arms over my chest.

“I guess you want me to pick up a stick,” I say. Matty always makes me pick my stick first so he can make sure to choose a bigger one.

“We’re not playing sword-fighting today, idiot,” he dismisses with a snort. “That’s so lame. We’re playing hide ’n seek.”

“But there’s only two of us.” I kick some leaves, secretly glad it’s not sword-fighting. At least I can’t really get hurt in hide ’n seek (*knock on wood*).

“Yeah, and you’ll be doing the hiding.” Matty

shakes his limp, blonde hair from his eyes. “And no bathroom breaks! You gotta stay still until I find you. It’s the rules. Otherwise, you lose, and I’ll just have to get Jonesy to play with me....”

“No,” I interrupt, stomach tightening. “That’s fine. I’ll stay put.”

Matty smiles.

“Good. I’m counting to one hundred. One... two... three....”

I sprint towards the tree line, a hiding spot already in mind. There’s a thicket in the forest where Matty won’t be able to find me easily, especially since it’s getting dark.

I crouch between the branches, ignoring the way they cut at my cheeks. I’m far enough away from Matty that I can no longer hear his counting to a hundred. It’s just silence and bug noises all around me. I try not to imagine the ants and beetles crawling at my feet, or the growing pressure on my bladder as time goes on.

It’s been too long, now—it’s practically night. I chose too good a hiding spot. I should just give up, but then... *Jonesy*.

I give Matty a few more minutes, or maybe it’s a half-an-hour, or maybe two hours. But my legs are sore, and my bladder is full, and I’m starting to get scared, so I stand up.

“Matty?” I call out. No answer.

I climb out of the thicket and stumble back towards my house; luckily, it’s a straight shot.

When I come in through the back door, the godaw-ful screech announcing my presence, Mrs. Sheila is standing by the counter next to Matty, a phone clutched in her white-knuckled hand. She drops the phone when she sees me, relief, and then anger, clouding her expression.

“I’LL JUST HAVE TO  
GET JONESY TO PLAY  
WITH ME....”



“TIANA PRESCOTT, YOU DEVIL OF A CHILD, YOU HAD ME WORRIED SICK! WHERE WERE YOU?” Her lips and cheeks are angry-red. “Matty told me how you ran away because you didn’t want to play with him. You could have been DEAD IN A *DITCH*; how would I have ever faced your mother?”

“W-we were just playing hide ’n seek—”  
“Don’t LIE to me,” Mrs. Sheila shrieks, slamming her chubby palm down on the wooden counter. “LIARS go to their rooms, do you hear me? GO TO YOUR ROOM, TIANA.”

Matty glares at me. I shut my mouth. *Jonesy*.  
  
Matty only leaves me alone long enough for his mom to fall back asleep.  
“Come to the staircase,” he says, standing at my doorway. My stomach sinks, but I nevertheless stand up and follow him.  
He has me stand with my back to the stairs.  
“Close your eyes,” he demands, and I do.

Not only can I hear his movements, but I can also feel them, somehow, the air he’s disturbing forming sinister patterns on my arm hairs. He steps forward a few times, sticking his hands out as if to push me. He gets closer every time. “*Chicken*,” he repeats every time.  
I twitch slightly when he snaps by my ear.  
“Don’t flinch, butt-face, if you flinch then you lose.”  
I stay as still as I can for the next few fake-outs.  
“This is getting boring,” he whines, flicking my shoulder. “Jonesy would be more fun to play with.”  
I shake my head, holding back a whimper.  
“You gonna flinch, then, butt-face?” Matty asks, and I can hear his sickening grin.  
*If you flinch then you lose.*  
But I’ll let Matty push me, if it means Jonesy will stay safe in her crib—not in the dryer, not in the freezer, not in the lake, like Matty promised. Δ

**Waiting for Fall**  
**Reagan Poston**  
**Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition**

Waiting for fall to arrive means  
Being sheltered by air-conditioning  
For the better part of five months,  
Pants rarely touching knees,  
And shirts barely covering shoulder blades,  
Desperate to keep a blessed breeze  
Between skin and the Mississippi swelter.  
  
Waiting for fall to arrive means  
Writhing around in sweat-soaked socks  
For one hundred and forty-two days,  
one hundred and forty-two nights,  
Heart broiling in the sunlight,  
Soul dancing in the creeping, waning summer,  
Autumn buzzing in my thoughts.

Waiting for fall means  
Planning and changing my Halloween costume  
A dozen times:  
Adding a pointed hat,  
tossing a big, green wart,  
Home smelling of pumpkin seed and spice,  
Backseat laden with cotton cobwebs.

Fall arriving means  
Waking to a sharp September morning,  
Swelling and gusting  
And staying for a good five months.  
A smile touches my cheeks,  
Leaves tremble on the trees,  
And my sleeves brush across my wrists.



**Goddess of the Harvest**  
**First Place—Sculpture**  
**Rebecca Chen**  
Ceramic clay, acrylic paint

**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



**Innocence**  
**First Place—Drawing**  
**Mary Owings**  
Clayboard

# Walls

Nayan Chawla

Walls have surrounded me my entire life. I have always had to deal with them. Some offered me structure. I leaned against them when I needed support, and they never gave until I was able to stand on my own two feet. Others left me struggling to escape through their failings, long after they became rotten from the wear of age. The walls that sheltered me were more than just objects, though. They challenged me and gave spark to the solid, unyielding drive of curiosity within me.

Walls of fading culture, worn by the sharp tongues of farmers turned teachers, towered over me as I learned to speak in a foreign tongue. I didn't learn to talk in the rapid beat of Hindi that my mother grew up with. Instead, my speech was slow, harsh, and dry.

"Mississippi" was a six-syllable word when I spoke, and despite my mother's misgivings, I was proud of it. The accent she so deeply loathed made me acceptable to my local peers. But one thing that never collided with

the walls of my rural home was my writing. The words I spoke may have been slow and exaggerated, but the influence I had received from hearing tall tales by quaint story-tellers left the words rowdy, so that they'd sprint through fields of paper. The flow of words was a bit rough; my sentences tended to fight with each other, and poems were just country ditties that rhymed. However, the words soon sharpened themselves as I was exposed to numbers.

Walls littered with equations and graphs sheltered me as I grew fascinated with digits etched upon chalkboards. In my life, most things were variable. One minute Mother would be laughing, but the next, I'd be covering up bruises. A set outcome wasn't something I was used to. But numbers brought with them solid logic that broke the rules of what I knew. I wasn't as opposed as my friends were to welcoming the numbers. Being

a foreigner myself, I understood how hard it would be for such logic-driven things as numbers to fit in with my rough country words. Thus, over time, I worked my hardest to help them fit in. I threw myself into the most difficult classes, and I worked a demanding part-time job. And, most importantly, I gained acceptance to the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science.

A wall of great expectations suddenly loomed above me, epitomized by the stares of previous graduates. Surmounting the transition from a small, tight-knit town to a life with 240 strangers on a college campus may have been difficult. But, it was nothing compared to the rigor of working for my father. I applied the discipline I learned behind a cash register

with him to my studies amongst walls of assignments and opportunities. The firm instructions of my father lit a flame inside of me and pushed me to excel amongst the best my state had to offer. I learned to make my words flow as forcefully as the Mississippi River, swiftly filling research

papers with a seamless blend of precise sentences and incisive numbers. I excelled outside of academia as well, forging friendships through the struggles unique to a residential high school. Studying late at night, adventuring around town, and living together brought my friends and me inexplicably close. We played sports, joined and formed clubs, and grew as individuals. We matured together—young boys in the middle of Mississippi, ready to challenge whatever the world threw at us.

The walls that surrounded me my entire life are now gone. I've learned to rely upon myself to overcome challenges I face and to venture forth into the world unknown. No matter what adversity I face, the words I learned from my father will always lead me forward: "Walls come and go, for better or for worse; just never let one stop you." △

"A WALL OF GREAT  
EXPECTATIONS  
SUDDENLY LOOMED  
ABOVE ME...."

# Trimming the Rosebush

Emily Hook

I remember as a child  
hearing my grandpa whistle while he  
trimmed back the rosebush  
by his back porch,  
back aching,  
but never taking a break.

I saw him come home from work,  
side up to my granny,  
smile and say,  
"Sweetie,  
the squash  
are in season soon."

I remember him mashing potatoes,  
peeling and pounding,  
preparing a perfect meal  
for no occasion in particular,  
as I peered over  
the top of the counter.

Now the rosebush grows wild,  
its thorned web of branches  
hanging heavy under the weight  
of crimson petals  
and woebegone memories  
of my grandpa whistling.

When the squash are in season  
they come forth not boasting,  
but shy,  
sneaking out  
from under their leaves,  
in silent hope of spotting my grandpa.

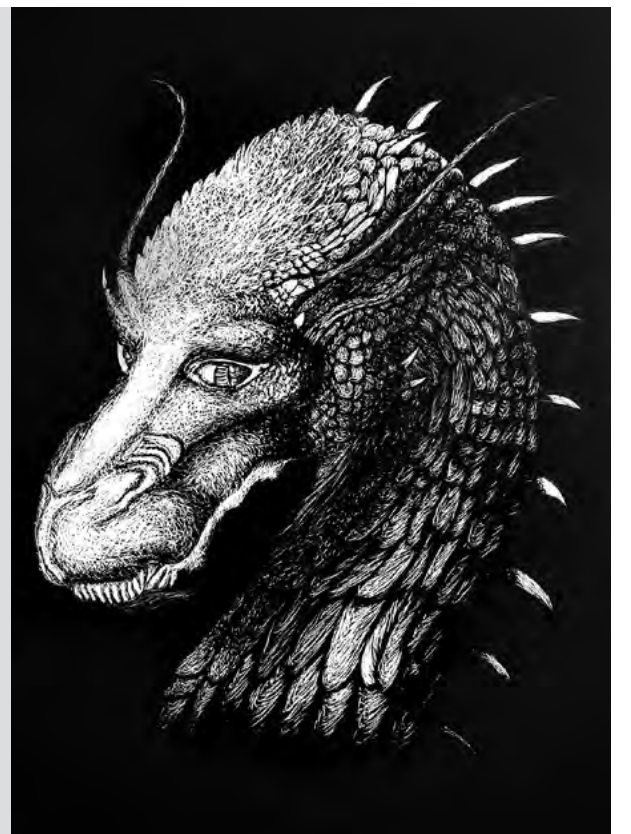
The mashed potatoes  
that I make  
are no match for the ones  
my meticulous cook  
of a grandpa  
mastered.

And yet I am proud  
of the rosebush by the porch,  
and the squash  
in the garden,  
and the potatoes  
soon-to-be-mashed,

because every year  
they persist;  
they never take a break,  
just like my grandpa,  
even with his back aching,  
trimming the rosebush.

## Whevyrn

Honorable Mention—Drawing  
Alexander Wheeler  
Scratchboard





# April Fools

Kayci Kimmons

The spring rain was relentless, the ground beneath soaked and squishy enough that I felt I might fall through.

My younger sister Anna, however, seemed to be right at home with the water. She jumped as high as her little legs would allow and hit the spongy grass below as we walked side by side after school, and no matter how much I told her to quit, she kept on.

She could never take a hint. But then again, the young ones never want to listen to authority. Even I was guilty of that, but not nearly as guilty as her.

“Anna!” I yanked her arm this time, using force to stop her from splashing water everywhere.

Her look of shock was quickly replaced by a pout, but she finally ceased the excess movement. By then, we’d reached our parents’ car, rendering the discipline pointless.

Luckily, Anna’s stellar mood returned as soon as she began to tell our parents of the pranks that had gone on in her first-grade class today. April 1st was generally an exciting holiday to the six- and seven-year-olds in the district; it was a day of laughter and jokes, after all. Any contrast to the usual boring atmosphere of learning was greatly appreciated.

My parents seemed pretty unamused to hear about it all as we hit the highway to go home, which was surprising. Usually they preferred Anna’s wild, childish exaggerations over my real-life stories of school, but today something was different. It wasn’t as if Anna could tell, however, and she spoke as if she could detect no tension in the entire vehicle.

“We did some clever pranks, today, Mom,” she spoke, the gap created by her loose baby tooth producing a whistle as she pronounced the “k” in “pranks.” “Isn’t that the word you taught me? *Clever?*”

As the rain picked up, Mom didn’t answer her. I studied her closely. Her figure was rigid in the front seat, teeth clenched, hands clasped tight to the point where her veins were visible. My eyes flickered to Dad too, and he didn’t look much better.

I opened my mouth to ask what was going on, but the words never left my lips as our vehicle lost

temporary control, the skidding sound of the wheels sending a stab of instant fear to my heart.

“Whoa!” Anna was grinning next to me. She was *grinning*. Had she not just felt that?

“That was a *clever* prank, Daddy.” I watched as she unbuckled her seatbelt—a bad habit that had not yet been broken—and rose up on her knees, clapping. “Do it again!”

Finally, Mom snapped out of her stupor and demanded my sister sit back down. But before she could explain the reason for the terrifying moment that had just occurred, we were suddenly spinning.

My arms snapped outwards, one hitting the side of the door and the other slapping the seat. With horror, I realized it was impossible to see out of the windows now; the only color visible was a dark, angry gray. All of the noise inside the car was muffled by the storm, my dad’s swearing, my mom’s screaming, and Anna’s laughter.

“Anna! Stop! This is real!” I wanted to shout, but my throat refused to make the command. All I could do was sit frozen and wait for the spinning to stop...

“Dave?”

Just like that, it had, and my sister was tugging at my shirt.

“What’s wrong? It’s just a prank!”

I turned my head to gaze into the eyes of my sister, whose oblivion was nearly as scary as the current moment. But my eyes found something else first.

Anna’s car door window was overcome with gray—except for the small orb of yellow light, which grew to become two. They grew and grew and grew until—

Neither of us could hear, but I could see the monstrous truck as it barreled toward her window.

Though every other sound had seemed to fade, her last word was painfully clear as the truck ripped her body apart.

*My name.*

- - -

I jolted awake, gasping for air, in my lightless room.

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” I murmured to myself through the darkness, hoping my eyes were truly open and seeing. My whole being was damp; the sheets, which enveloped me in a tangled knot, were soaked with my sweat.

For one bone-chilling moment, I believed I had not escaped the rain-soaked grass at the beginning of my dream after all. That I had fallen through to meet a suffocating death and was on my way to meet her, in heaven.

Anna.

She’d died five years ago, on that day. I hadn’t ever dreamt about her before.

I had never been able to remember exactly what happened. The details didn’t matter back then, and they still don’t.

Yet, I had clearly pictured the entire event. It was as if the violent memory had burst through a barrier in my mind, forcing me to re-live it through my subconscious.

I’d relived it alright, much too vividly. Her final scream radiated in my brain, piercing my sanity...

I yanked the sheets away and sat up, trying to control the shaking of my limbs. My stomach threatened to send everything consumed right back up again, the nausea making me dizzy and the dizziness making me nauseous.

*Focus on something else. Anything else,* commanded my jittered nerves and my pounding heart.

Forcing myself to rise, I headed slowly out of my room and into the hallway. It was very poorly lit; there was one, lone light fixture with a dim bulb midway through. I briefly remembered Dad telling me to change that...

“Dave,” someone whispered from behind. I expected it to be my mother, probably wondering why I was up.

Turning, I found that it wasn’t Mom.

It was my sister.

She was grinning and standing in front of me about five feet away, right in front of her door, which had been locked since the accident.

But it was wide open.

“Anna?” I asked, voice so quiet I could barely hear myself.

She didn’t answer. She only stared back at me, a faint look of confusion in her eyes. I realized with a jolt that she looked to be older, around eleven or twelve.

Just the age she would be if she were—

I watched as she took a step forward. “Why are you awake?” she asked, head cocked. “We have school tomorrow.”

“I could ask you the same question.” I answered, taking a step back. I was definitely awake, but apparently, I wasn’t awake enough. There was no possible way that my sister was alive. Right?

“I’m only here because you are, Dave.” she whispered.

“But how? How are you here right now?”

She scoffed. “Because this is where I’ve always been? I live here, just like you.”

I let out a nervous laugh. “I have to be dreaming again.”

Anna threw up her hands, turning away. “You’re completely clueless. Good night, Dave.” She walked back into her room, closing the door behind her.

I stared at the spot where she’d been for a while, trying to come up with a rational solution, but my mind was too sleep-deprived. In fact, a severe drowsiness had seemed to hit me like a truck—no pun intended—and I knew I was seconds away from passing out right there in the hallway.

I headed back to bed, and the minute my head fell on the pillow, I was gone until the next morning. This time when I woke, I had both light from the sun to see and a clear head.

The first thing I did, before showering, before eating, before anything, was throw open my door and walk down the hall to Anna’s room.

Slowly, I tried the door. It wasn’t locked. I couldn’t help but feel a prickle of hope trickle up my spine.

But, upon entering, the room was untouched. All of Anna’s belongings that had been left in place were neat, just like they’d been since she died. Even her old digital clock, which still somehow worked, was in place; the time, 7:02, and the date, April 1, 2017, was illuminated in cherry red block letters, with the date in a smaller font underneath the time.

*April 1, 2017.*

Today was the day. I hadn’t even realized.

“*April Fools,*” Anna whispered in my ear. I fell to my knees on the soft, gray carpet of her room, the coldness of the material sending an intense sadness through my bones and squashing every trace of my false hope for good. Δ

# Brackish Blood

Haydn Schroader

My mother comes from a small, marshy town called Violet, just south of Chalmette, Louisiana. She grew up attending newly-desegregated schools and later drove an hour to New Orleans for work in her twenties. She knew every single person on her street, was related to more than two-thirds of them, and had never eaten fresh asparagus until she flew to Las Vegas to visit a friend. That’s where she met my father; her friend was his X-ray technician. My father, who grew up on the Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, one of seven children—all with names starting in the letter D—ended up in Vegas for his medical residency. For the two to be in Las Vegas at the same time and place could only be fate. Las Vegas, with its sandy streets and searing winds, is where I was born. But it was never my home.

We moved to Mississippi when I was fairly young. My siblings and I had not yet started school, so we stayed at my grandparents’ house in Slidell, Louisiana for long periods of time. The slate-gray, brick house towered over Lake Pontchartrain, and on the other side of the road stood the bayou. On the bayou sat the wharf, where the boat was docked, and the wooden swing hung precariously over the water. On the other side of the road, the house, with its white porch and winding stairs, green-shuttered windows and U-shaped driveway, was where the family gathered for numerous occasions – crawfish boils, Fourth of July’s, Christmases, baby showers, and just visits.

Paw Paw’s faded red truck sat parked in the garage, filled with bait and lures in case of an emergency fishing trip, and a neglected basketball hoop stood on the lawn. Behind the house stretched the pier, a forty-foot-long, white-planked piece of the ocean where we would fish, star-gaze, eat, swim, and play. Under the pier was a rusted sword that my sister claimed used to belong to a pirate.

Inside the house, there were more rooms than my small mind cared to count. Sometimes, I would venture into Maw Maw’s room, crank up her music boxes and listen to “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” on repeat. Other times, I would peek into Paw Paw’s office, a secret and sanctified place where classified papers

lay strewn over the desk. In this house, all the fun happened. Spicy aromas swirled in the air at every gathering, and people played cards at the table; the Christmas tree barely bobbed up from an ocean of presents during

the holiday season; watermelon, sweating green, was passed around the circle of people as we watched the night sky bleeding colors.

In this house, I grew up, more so than in Las Vegas or Ocean Springs. My childhood memories sway to the beat of “potpourri,” “Chere,” and “mirliton,” and I dream of rocking boats and Maw’s gumbo. A piece of me left when Katrina took that house, but my identity still lies in those back bayou canals and creaking porch swings, and brackish water runs through my veins. Δ

“I DREAM OF  
ROCKING BOATS AND  
MAW’S GUMBO.”



## A Friendship of Excellence

Lillian Fulgham

Photography

# Stars and Circles

Wrishija Roy

First Place—Essay Competition

Everything in my life, the fine details and the robust connections, always comes back to my roots, colors of bright green and red emerging from the corners of a place dense with hardships, blending into a figure empowered by her culture. These colored roots take the form of a small country named Bangladesh. My Bengali pride stretches out 8,471 miles, regardless of my family’s move to the United States when I was only two years old, regardless of hardly getting the chance to know my grandparents, regardless of not being able to immerse myself in the origins of my identity.

Despite a constant instilling of Bangladeshi values, I am also influenced by my immediate surroundings, a Southern American neighborhood in which I have lived my entire life. Potholes dipping into cracked tar and towering Mississippi magnolias replace narrow, muddy streets and looming mango trees.

Rhythmic taps of soulful Blues music drown out harsh bangs of fast-paced tabla drums. My piano teacher’s Southern drawl challenges the musical dynamic of my Ma’s and Baba’s voices. Churches located on every Columbus corner replace the few Hindu temples of Bangladesh. The Walmart that Ma has worked at for eleven years contrasts with the open-air markets of the Sunamganj district, and the crispy smell of catfish takes place of the spicy, mustard-infused curry of my country’s fishing villages. Yet, regardless of the sometimes overpowering Southern culture, I have retained the very essence of myself, my Bengali heritage.

Aside from these differences, there is much that both of my homes share, like their sweltering rays of heat and fist-sized mosquitos that I attract. Both areas are well-known for their conservative, traditional, and, at times, oppressive values. I see this when my parents talk of the most recent terror killing of an innocent Bengali Hindu priest, or when I look at the stars and

stripes crisscrossing the Confederate flag of my state, still commemorating years of oppression. I wonder how regions laced with such narrow-minded values could have shaped someone like me, someone with interests in liberal politics, someone with multiracial friends, someone who listens to discussions of *The Scarlet Letter* and calculus theorems and, most importantly, to others.

Ma always talks about the life that my parents left behind, the sacrifices that they made so that my sisters and I could be raised in the land of freedom, so that we could attain the American Dream. When she gets teary-eyed, I can tell she’s thinking of the family members she hasn’t seen in years. Sometimes I wonder, had I grown up with them, had I lived in Bangladesh all my life, how would I have turned out?

Has the American Dream been worth it? In moments such as these, I become grateful for the life I have; I realize my own narrow-mindedness when I don’t see past the shortcomings of my cultures. Both countries have shaped me to be hospitable and compassionate, to have integrity and to value my education.

My roots have allowed me to grow in my strengths and capabilities. I can place careful strokes to form intricate henna designs, I peel green Granny Smiths and bake a Southern apple pie, I curve my fingers to key the tunes of Sonatina in A minor, I let words flow from my pen to form an AP Chemistry response or my own poetry, I slot print squares of glass with titanium dioxide in order to create solar cells. Once a timid “Indian” girl, an outsider in both her cultures, a girl with religious and social differences, I am now a passionate woman devoted to expanding her views. The stars and circles found in my countries’ flags have blended, and I am fortunate. Δ

“MY BENGALI PRIDE  
STRETCHES OUT  
8,471 MILES....”



You Can’t Fight Over Jesus

Ariel Williams

’57 Chevys park where horses used to play.  
Yeah, I’ve been to St. Louis, are you forgetting the Bay?  
It’s 9:00 on a Sunday and there is no bell to ring.  
The summoning call is the first hymn that all the choir sings.  
On pews, wooden and splintered, cushions from times of prejudice,  
A hundred people sit Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist.  
With whispers of Emmanuel, Matthew, Mark, and Luke,  
They all tap in unison from clean white heels to torn black boots.  
Their hands clap and praise, open to the Father, Manicured or stained with oil, some don’t even bother.  
Hours and collection plates pass all the same,  
As everyone is empowered with the strength of a just name.  
The pastor has jumped, hollered, and sweated, his tie has come undone.  
The musk of the wooden church is heavy with the Father, Spirit, and Sun.  
The women peer around the velvet curtains and shuffle around chewed wood,  
Reminding everybody that the food is getting cold and it sures smells good.  
Bibles and hymnbooks clap shut. They all flock to the back,  
Complaining about the price of insulin, their hearts, and income tax.  
The greens have finished simmering and the clouds are moving in.  
Even the pastor is more focused on cornbread than sin.  
With mouths watering and bellies full,  
All souls are content.  
They can fuss about taxes and call each other heathens,  
But everybody knows you can’t fight over Jesus.



Stargazing

Hillary Gerber

Acrylic paint

Mother of All

Savannah Poe

I remember as a child  
When my Me-Maw first helped me move in with her.  
She took the tiny backpack of clothing from me,  
And I clung to my one comfort: my fragile 3DS.  
  
She tenderly knocked every thirty minutes  
To make sure that I was okay as I hid  
From merry celebrations of the holiday  
Ringing from the new place to lay my head.  
  
I never fully appreciated her for taking in so many.  
My uncles, aunts, sisters, and mother all stayed  
In her miniscule house in the woods.  
She never had much to offer,  
But she gave all she could.

Tomato Juice

Aidan Dunkelberg

Second Place—Short Story Competition

Jorge’s alarm clock pierces the gray silence between night and dawn, as though shattering a crystal vase into a million pieces.  
I blink open one eye, then the other, taking in my dingy, half-lit surroundings, hearing, rather than seeing; my brothers-in-arms on the floor next to me do the same. One rises, and with a fumbling action floods the room with the incandescence of a single, uncovered bulb, thrusting the wood-paneled ceiling and cinder-block walls into bas-relief.  
“Rise and shine, *amigos*.” Esteban’s voice, from the doorway, has a cynical edge yet to be dampened by two cups of instant coffee. “Another day at the office.”  
One by one, we pull ourselves out of sleeping bags, stumble towards the door, and even though I’ve lived here for the better part of the last year, I still crack my forehead on the low doorframe as I pass through.  
In the kitchen, Tía Ruiz is making huevos rancheros, and the smell meanders through the kitchen, settling the early morning into a lull of familiarity.  
Ramón, however, is not as placated. “¿Huevos rancheros?” he asks, preparing the way for a rapid-fire stream of Spanish. “¿No puedes encontrar algo diferente para cocinar?” You couldn’t find anything else to cook?  
Tía Ruiz scowls. “*Romparé tu cráneo con esta sartén.*” This threat of manslaughter, from the wizened lady standing at the kitchen sink, draws a laugh from the table of now-seated men. Ramón quickly adopts a defensive posture, palms raised to face level as ineffective shields against the diminutive woman’s wrath, which only makes the assemblage laugh harder.  
“*Solo bromiendo, Tía.*” I was only joking.  
She returns the skillet, still full to the brim with eggs, to the stovetop, but doesn’t move her gaze from

the curly head of her antagonist, until he fills a mug of instant coffee and obediently takes his seat at the table.  
She follows him, takes her customary place at the head of the table, and as the long rectangle of still-waking men silently fumble for the hands of those beside them, she begins to pray.  
“Bendícenos, Señor, y estos, tus dones, los cuales estamos al punto de recibir de tu generosidad, Por Cristo, nuestro Señor, Amén.”  
“Coman!” she gestures—Eat!—and we pick up our plates, serve ourselves, and do so.  
\* \* \*  
The kid’s been with us for the last couple months. It was Jorge who picked him up, driving the beaten, rusted red pickup back from *la tienda*, and it was Jorge who took him under his wing, gave up the dingy air mattress he had slept on to him. At first, he didn’t talk much, and it took three days until, mixing Spanish and broken English, he revealed how he had come to be on the side of that road; how his mother snuck him across the border as a toddler, how they had lived together until the bank foreclosed the shack they shared and sent her back across the border.  
He’s gone through a lot, but he’s still a kid, and as twelve-odd men clamber into the worn bed of the truck, he’s prattling on about the day’s coming futbol matches, speculating about Guadalajara’s odds against América.  
Jorge tells him to shut up, informs him that Guadalajara has about as much chance of winning as the kid has of out picking him today. The kid seems to consider a response but decides to let it go, instead, staring off into the fields along the highway.  
Jorge pulls out the transistor radio from his coat pocket, and the bouncing of the shock-deprived pickup falls into line with the rhythm of the music.  
Within minutes, we’re at the greenhouses where

“NOW ALL THAT’S LEFT IS TO PRAY.”



the fifteen or so of us spend our days, making whatever pittance they pay us for a day’s worth of hydroponic tomatoes. Still, as jobs go, this one’s better than most; it’s inside, which means less brutal sun, less sweat, less fighting over showers and water, less musk corroding the house at night when you’re staring up at the ceiling, trying to sleep.

The work is soothing, actually, if monotonous; after a few trays you fall into a rhythm, move to a tomato, palm it, judge its size, its ripeness, then twist it against the vine, let it fall off into your hand, move on. But you can’t let yourself get too relaxed—you have to keep picking, you have to get as many as you can before the California sun sets over the rolling fields.

I’ve worked for maybe forty minutes when a noise sets my nerves on edge—the gravel scrape of a car pulling up to the first greenhouse. At other places, I wouldn’t be concerned—just a tourist stopping by to ask where they can buy some food, or how to get back to the place they were supposed to be half an hour ago—but I’ve been here a month, and haven’t heard a single car come and go in that time.

I start looking around, scoping out the hiding places every one of us picked out on our first days here. There—the tray stack. I know in case it’s a super I should keep working, but my instincts are telling me it’s ICE.

Quickly I move aside a row of trays, then another, create a cocoon at the back barely taller than my head. I try as best I can to position then where they should have been, then do my best to secure a tray over my head. Green plastic on four sides, concrete on two. Now all that’s left is to pray.

I hope against hope that it’s not ICE, that it’s just my paranoia, that my instincts are wrong—it wouldn’t be the first time—but then I hear the door to the greenhouse slam, and the dull, guttural sound of deep, bass, English voices: “Hands up!”

Silently, fervently, I run Hail Marys through my head, every muscle and joint and sinew of my body dedicated to prayer, and standing huddled behind the

green plastic tomato trays, I feel as though I am on my knees before God, prostrating myself on the marble steps before His gilded throne.

Footsteps pass directly past my chosen place of concealment, but my fragile peace lies undisturbed.

In the distance, I hear gunshots, rat-tat-tat-tat, and in the newly still silence after, the engine of a red Ford pickup revves, gravel roars, and silently I cheer my comrades on, though I know their odds of victory to be slimmer than Guadalajara’s.

In the next moments, faraway curses, sharp instructions, boots on concrete, slam of door, and the ICE vehicle roars after the red pickup.

Shaking, I clear away the trays, not caring at this point whether they maintain the clean lines I was so concerned about minutes ago.

I roam the facility in silence, scared to make any noise that could give up my whereabouts to any men they might have left behind.

Suddenly, I round a corner, and beside a hydroponic tower see Jorge. Relief floods me at the sight of just one of my compatriots, but soon it dissolves into anxiety as I see the tears on his face.

“¿Qué es, Jorge? ¿Qué pasó?” What is it? What happened?

He doesn’t answer, just puts his arm around my shoulder and leads me around a corner of shelved trays.

Instantly I see, but it takes a few seconds for the image before my eyes to leak into my brain, for comprehension to rouse its ugly head, and then reality hits me like a tsunami of grief, the reality of the kid, his body lying on the concrete floor of the greenhouse, the red-brown colored hole in his México jersey, his blood mingling with the tomato juices on the floor.

There are so many questions, so many issues to be resolved, but right now the intensity and sadness of the moment overwhelms us, and I silently cross myself, moved beyond grief for a world that can inflict this kind of suffering and go on as though nothing ever happened. Δ

## Orlando (6.12.16)

Landry Filce

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

No religion but her.

No adoration to a God high above,

Floating, dispassionate, from cloud to cloud—

Instead, adoration for the stolen moments,

Away from judging eyes and wagging fingers,

When she intertwines her fingers with my own

And I sync my breathing to hers,

Pretending that we two have become one.

No Eucharist in the way of a flat, pale cracker bestowed upon me

By a priest who would surely be apathetic if he knew

I am paralyzed by the worry that,

Misjudging a moment as private, I may begin to count her freckles  
(Each of them an aspect of her personality that captivates me)

While an unseen onlooker judges them as

A list of the reasons he should put a bullet in her—

Instead, my salvation is passed to me through her kiss,

While receiving the body of Christ herself,

I am painfully aware of the cost of this sacrament.

Still, I feel safer in her embrace

Than I ever have in God’s house.

No home between the walls of a church

Where indoctrination is held in higher regard than action,

Where it is more acceptable to end the lives of forty-nine people like me

Than to remove a clump of cells attached to the wall of a uterus—

Instead her presence is a cathedral to me;

When I am near her, all the years I have been warned against

Falling prey to this “sickness” melt away,

And I feel more at ease than I ever have in the place

That I was told since birth would lift me up

And treat me as family.

No religion but her.

## Ray

Jasmine Topps

Smile greased with

buttery stains,

Oil stains tattoo

his hands and face,

Hands with

tar-filled fingernails

cracked more than

a five-hundred

piece puzzle.

Fingers clutch

around a wrench

and a well-greased

hand towel,

Steel-toed boot tips

dressed with rust,

His aroma more

toxic than a

junkyard dog.

Body encased in

a navy blue jumpsuit

stabbed with a name

tag that reads:

“Ray: your mechanic.”

However, his radiant

personality shines as

he dishes out puns

and gives life lessons.

His appearance grows less

loathsome as his genuine

smile eases all my afflictions.

All the while, he offers a

discount for no apparent

reason and his humility

reminds me why I love

spending the entire day

sitting at the body

shop waiting for our

tires to get rotated.

# Coffee and Ashes

Emily Shy

“Jane, it’s not a coffee mug. You can’t just rest it on the dash and hope it doesn’t fall over,” Kaley reiterated, exasperated. Her gaze hovered back and forth between the urn resting above the glove box and the rearview mirror. Her sister rolled her eyes in silent response. Kaley’s hands trembled slightly in their places on the wheel, vibrations that matched the quick movements of her eyes. They would have been noted as a sign of anxiety by anyone with a perceptive eye, but under her sister’s gaze, they slipped by, unnoticed. Jane reached with her left hand to fiddle with the radio, both to adjust the channel and to increase the volume, but Kaley’s eyes darted to the radio as her hand moved, and the immediate, stern, look Jane received was a reprimand that required no words.

“You need to lighten up, Kales. Mom would have wanted this trip to be fun! The least we could to do honor her would be listen to a little music,” Jane objected. Kaley sighed, but did not respond. She wished she could relieve the tension that was occupying the front part of her brain; as it was, she had to spend all the concentration she had on keeping her eyes open and the car straight on the road. She had no energy to lessen the burden of dealing with the logistical nightmare she had to handle, much less the childish antics of her younger sister.

Jane stared expectantly at Kaley, but when she refused to yield, she smiled a half smile to herself, visibly shook off the interaction, and rolled her chair back, despite the squeaks and groans of protest it issued. Reclining her seat and stretching her legs out in front of her, she carefully positioned her legs so the urn—which had remained on the dash despite Kaley’s protests—containing their mother’s ashes was held in place by her ankles. Although she remained stony, Kaley was reeling in anger. Even with the knowledge that her sister loved her mother just as much as she had, indeed, had shared a closer bond and a more similar personality, she could not help but believe that if she had been there

when their mother’s illness had turned sour instead of her sister, things would have ended differently. Or, if not, differently, the inevitable death would have been prolonged, allowing for more time for arrangements to be made regarding her mother’s wishes after her death. Beyond that, she could have provided better care for her mother, employing better nurses, making sure there was round-the-clock care ensuring all her needs were met. She knew Jane had meant well, but surely it wasn’t fair that the free-spirited daughter, the irresponsible one, who had never made a sacrifice in her life for her future or her family, was the one who got to be there at the end, holding her mother’s hand, listening to her last words, when Kaley was stuck with the mess left

behind after her mother’s peaceful passing.

Even now, she thought, glancing over at her sister—eyes closed, heading bopping to inaudible music—that Jane had

received the least stressful and most rewarding role. While Kaley had to make the stressful drive, late at night and exhausted, her sister was safe-keeper of the ashes, and somehow she was sure that even that job would fall to her in the end. Kaley groaned and turned her mind to her upcoming meeting with a lawyer to discuss her mother’s will and estate. It was equally unpleasant as thinking about her frustrations with her sister, but at least it was fruitful. Jane would never change.

Several hours of silence ensued, until Kaley slowly brought the car to a stop. Jane opened her eyes.

“Kales?” she asked in a small voice. Kaley looked over at her sister. The evident sleepiness on Jane’s face softened Kaley’s unforgiving thoughts of the past several days. She gave her sister a slight smile.

“Yeah?” she asked.

“Do you know why Mom wanted to be brought back to the farm to have her ashes scattered?” Jane said softly.

Kaley did not immediately respond, and instead

turned the car off and climbed outside, stretching her arms. Jane followed suit, bringing the urn with her, and both sisters sat against the side of the car, leaning their heads back against the door. As Kaley thought about her sister’s question, she looked up at the sky. As they had driven farther out into the country, the stars had made clearer and clearer imprints on the sky. She remembered visiting the farm with her mom as a child, and lying on a bale of hay at night with Jane while their mom had pointed out constellations, some real, some made-up, crafting outrageous stories for both kinds. Her mom had always managed to sneak them out of the house without their dad’s knowledge, and he always pretended to be mad the next morning when they ate their cereal more sleepily than usual, but Mom laughed it off and evaded trouble gracefully, just like she always did. Her carefree-ness, a quality that Kaley had not inherited, was what Kaley missed most about her.

“I don’t *really* know,” she said, “I guess because she grew up there? And she loves the orchard and the old barn. I’m sure she just wanted to be back with the things and places she loves,” she postulated.

“Loved.”

“Yeah. Loved.”

“I just would have thought there was a story to why she wanted to go back. I mean, Grammy wasn’t even buried there. She won’t be connected to anyone else in our family there,” Jane commented.

“I don’t know Jane-y. If there is a reason, she would have told you, not me. She told you her best stories.”

“She told me her stories because I listened, Kales.

You were always busy with something,”

Kaley frowned, briefly, but shook the thought off, like a shiver running down her spine—brief discomfort, but then it was gone.

“Well, regardless of why, it’s what she wanted and the reason we have to make this god-forsaken trip so late night,” she said brusquely. Jane laughed.

“We *didn’t* have to go so late at night” she responded.

“Yes, we did! It’s the only time I had enough space between meetings to go,” Kaley retorted, indignantly at first, but soon she joined her sister in laughter.

“I don’t care; it’s nice to be on the road while it’s so dark out,” Jane smiled. “I’d offer to drive so you didn’t have to, but I know you’d never let me near the wheel in a million years, especially with some precious cargo in the car.” She gestured at the urn sitting in her lap. Kaley laughed and nodded.

“You’re right, I would never. Speaking of driving, we should probably get back in the car; I don’t think we have that much farther to go,” she said. She got up, rubbing her shoulders as she moved back into the car. Jane followed suit, keeping the urn in her lap even after she got in the car and moving her seat forward to be upright next to her sister again.

“Thanks, Kales,” she said as Kaley started to drive again. Kaley looked over at her sister.

“Thanks for what?”

“For everything.”

“Anytime, Jane-y,” Kaley reached across the console and took her sister’s hand. △



Mississippi Grand Canyon

Lyndsey Risinger

Photography



# Flaming Cows

Jax Dallas

I have been paranoid for as long as I can remember. While the rest of the family was enjoying an aviation museum, I was busy panicking about whether the ceiling could withstand the weight that the hulking, metal planes forced it to bear. When the tornado sirens would go off near my home, I would sprint to my cellar and kiss everything I knew goodbye on my way there, already assuming that my house would be nothing more than a concrete slab when I climbed back out of the cellar. While riding in an elevator, I would review in my head what the Mythbusters said that one time about how to survive the fall of an elevator car whose tow cable had torn. When I sat down in a theater, I scoured the exit ways and sized up the competition I would have to race in the event of a fire springing up from a projector that had probably not had the dust cleaned off it in years. Though all of these thoughts frequently terrorized my young mind, my father was always more than willing to ease the tension with conversation about flaming cattle.

I could always expect my dad to interrupt me with a, “What if a flaming cow bursts through that door right now, what would you do then?” when I wandered off down a trail of fear paved by my own paranoid thoughts. As a child, I could not understand that he was

asking a hypothetical question, so I answered with the utmost sincerity that I could, but the harder I tried to reason through the scenarios that my dad threw at me, the more and more convoluted my responses became until I had to admit that I could not think up a scenario to protect myself from a flaming cow commandeering a passenger airliner or whatever other scenario he had concocted.

I did not understand it at the time, but my dad fabricated these situations about flaming cows as an attempt to teach me that worrying about every little detail that *could* go wrong served no purpose other than to waste energy. Each time he trumped my questions of structural safety of buildings with questions of machine-gun-wielding bovines, he slowly taught me that life is unpredictable and by stressing over all the things that could go wrong in life, I was not focusing on what is already great about it. His incessant questions taught me that if you constantly worry about whether or not a bee is awaiting you in a rose, you will never work up the courage to stoop down to sniff it; similarly, by constantly worrying about flaming cattle hijacking your flight to Paris, you will never get the chance to visit the Louvre. △

## Chickens on Green

Dustin Dunaway

Acrylic paint



# Listen When They Bark

Dustin Dunaway

Saturday mornings, before my father even started a pot of coffee, I would get dressed and scurry down the gravel driveway to Pawpaw’s house. His house was similar to mine, except his porch could fit a swing. This front porch is where we would sit, him with his coffee, me with my juice. We spoke only in short bursts that strictly pertained to the view from his sacred front porch swing. If I ever strayed too far from the topic, he’d shush me by saying, “Jus’ listen, son.” My ears rang with the symphony of early morning crickets and the chirps of hungry birds. He said that the sounds of nature alone could cure the wickedest of sins and claimed the country is what kept his kids out of trouble. With one son in prison and the other in court, though, I had to disagree. We would watch over the expansive yard and tree line below to see birds fighting and swooping down, snatching up bugs to return to their young. He always laughed at how excited I got over the simplest things. Once the sun was above the horizon and we heard Nana’s alarm ring, Pawpaw would pull himself up and say, “Now, let’s git sum hot cakes.”

“PAWPAW WAS WISE....”

Cooking in my grandparents’ home was a woman’s job, and the kitchen Nana’s domain, with the only exception being Saturday mornings. This was when Pawpaw cooked—pancakes, sausage, and grits. The kitchen is where the three of us talked, mostly Nana. We would talk about my dreams, their past, and the family drama at the time. Nothing compares to the entertainment that is two parents complaining about their children. They talked about my aunts and uncles the way a king discusses his people—the peasants—with whom he must reluctantly comply because they are his driving force. I was only seven years old, and I knew more about gossip than Momma would have liked. Once we had our fill, we scraped our leftovers onto one plate. Food in my grandparents’ house was to never go to waste.

I would follow Pawpaw back to the porch and hold my ears when he whistled through cracked lips and false teeth. Like a loyal militia, half a dozen dogs came running from every direction: Big Boy, Brutus, Abby, Tuffy, Miley, and Rufus, all begging for attention and scraps. This morning Abby was lethargic, walking as slow as Pawpaw’s speech. When she arrived at my feet, she let out a whine comparable to my sister’s when she does not get her way, a sound that is intentionally displeasing to the ears. I was concerned for my pup, asking, “Pawpaw, what the heck is wrong wit Abby? She aight?” Pawpaw was wise, and though I didn’t appreciate him then, I reflect now with appreciation for the man; he knew exactly what was bothering the dog as he reached down and lifted both of her ears. Wouldn’t you know it, we saw a tick the size of a nickel abusing my yellow Labrador Retriever. With hands still sticky from syrup, he plucked it clean off her. She yelped and howled, but then gleefully wagged her tail at the relief. He said, “Boy, Abby ain’t no different than any woman. Listen when they bark.” Then Pawpaw flicked the tick onto the porch steps, and with a bloody stomp of his house shoe, got rid of the problem. △



Curious  
Madalyn Coln

Photography



# The Dam Road

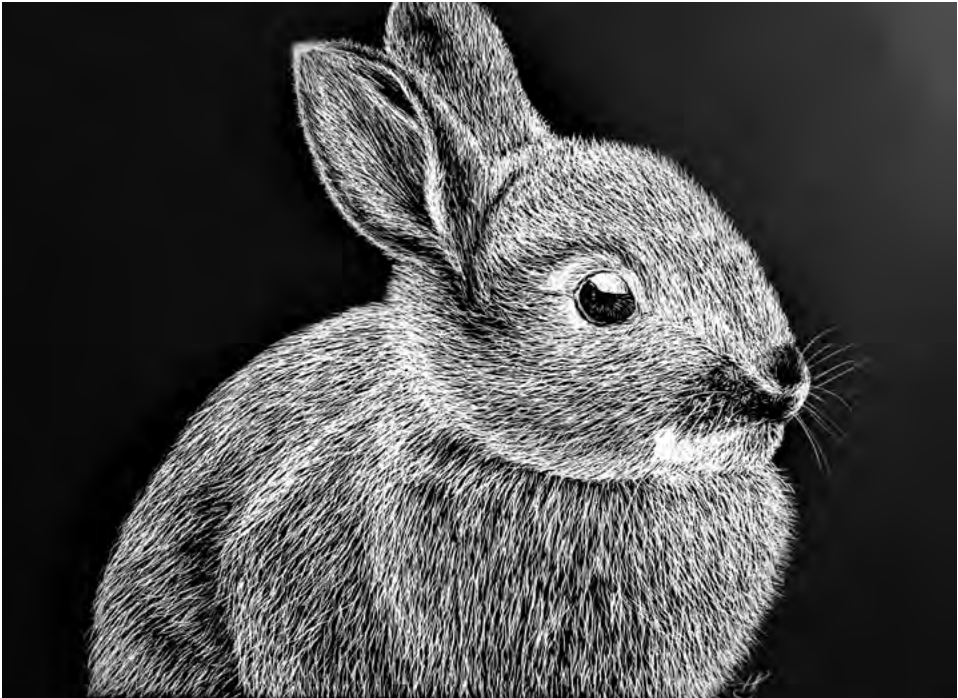
Sam Williams

My father works in Louisiana. No, he and my mother aren’t divorced. Yes, they have a good marriage. No, they’re not just together for the sake of my siblings and me. He just happens to work outside of Mississippi. He comes home on Friday nights and leaves for work on Sunday evenings, he works through the week, and the cycle repeats. When we have school off, though, we’ll sometimes go visit him instead. And when we make that four-hour drive to West Lake, Louisiana, we always drive over the same stretch of road, with the same rickety fence, that happens to be next to the same, old dam: the dam road.

There are some dam cows on the dam road too—the finest dam cows you’ll ever see. Along the edges of the dam road are some dam trees that are older than my grandmother—the oldest dam trees I know. You wouldn’t believe how many dam leaves are on those dam trees, either. And there’s so much dam grass. Sometimes we’ll stop on the dam road to stretch our

legs and play some dam games or eat some dam snacks that we picked up at the dam gas station. When it’s time to get back on the road, Mom will tell us to get back in the car, which, by very virtue of being on the dam road, will inevitably have been dubbed “the dam car.”

There is an endless amount of dam fun one can have on the dam road, purely by virtue of trying to come up with as many dam puns as possible. Yes, sometimes one will draw a dam blank, but that never stops one’s dam perseverance. The dam road is a dam gift that my mother regrets ever introducing us to, because she knows that when we don’t take the dam road, there are even more jokes. We talk about how we want to see all those dam cows again and how that dam fence may have finally fallen down. Or maybe we could find a dam puppy to take home and introduce to the dam kitten we picked up once. If we don’t go through the dam road it’s a dam waste of our dam time. △



## Runny Babbit

Third Place—Drawing  
Haydn Schroader  
Clayboard



## Sea Side

Honorable Mention—Sculpture  
Kate Shelton  
Clay

## Qatar

First Place—Painting  
Hannah Houston  
Paint



## Mardi Gras Jester Mask

Third Place—Sculpture  
Maggie Ellis  
Clay







## One Crystal Drop

Third Place—Photography

Kayci Kimmons



## Cohen's Masterpiece

Rebecca Chen

Ceramic clay, acrylic paint



## Wisp

Sam Williams

Best of Show

Acrylic paint

## It All Comes Out in the Wash

Damare Baker

"It'll come out in the wash," Momma would say,  
as she stared in disdain at my grass-stained jeans.  
As a child, I would frolic in grassy fields  
without a care in the world,  
just seeing myself and the blooming flowers around me.

"It'll come out in the wash," I would say,  
as I glanced at the makeup stains etched onto my dress.  
As a teenager, I would strut down the white hallways of my school,  
hoping a cute boy would notice me.

"It'll come out in the wash," he says,  
as he sneers at the fresh bloodstains in my t-shirt.  
But while the bloodstains may come out in the wash,  
the bruises in my heart won't.



## Ring Free

Savannah Poe

Photography

## Sixteen Candles

Honorable Mention—Painting

Mari Lampkin

Melted crayons







## A Disturbance

Honorable Mention Photography

Hillary Gerber



## Natural Blend

Lauryn Smith

Acrylic paint



## Christmas in New York

Second Place—Painting

Rebecca Chen

Watercolor, acrylic paint

## Overcoming the Silence

Jalexis Evans

Hear the harmonic songs of swinging hummingbirds,  
The whisper of whirling winds caressing the skin.  
Hear a dense crowd clamored with commotion,  
The trickle of dew slithering off crisp blades of crown grass.  
Celebrate the clink of sweat-covered glasses slamming against  
A wet, wooden table in the piercing heat of summer;  
Hear a medley of shrill laughter and old school jams.  
Relish in the croak of beige toads and the buzz of teeny mosquitoes  
In the dark as you bask in the warmth of his hugs  
Shared under the hum of a yellow street light;  
Acknowledge the roar of thunder in a rain shower  
As you dance barefoot in soggy grass.  
Welcome the screech of rubber tires as you rip out of the driveway  
And speed to the congested stadium  
To cheer for Number Five until your breath runs ragged.  
Admire the murmur of the glowing television as you listen to  
Slow, steady breaths on the other side of the receiver.  
Embrace the stillness of your thoughts  
As you succumb to slumber and it takes you under.



## Midnight Predator

Second Place—Sculpture

Jessica Smith

Clay



## Knitted Compassion

Rebecca Chen

Photography



## Embracing the Wild

Second Place—Drawing

Sage Schaumburg

Pen and Ink





**Busy Bee**  
Honorable Mention—Painting  
Dustin Dunaway  
Acrylic paint



**After the Rain**  
Britney Casmus  
Acrylic paint

## Evangelic Florist

Haydn Schroader

Honorable Mention—Poetry Competition

Cracked amber teeth,  
eyeless faces, and ivory bones  
resting in fresh-turned soil –  
It warrants no stir.

Melting starlight illuminates  
the white roses lying by the wayside,  
and dusk drapes slippery moonlight  
over marble gravestones.

Bent and sorrowful, like a willow tree,  
the gravedigger holds up his swaying lantern.  
Candlelight sweeps over the stone path,  
casting shadows like the spindly fingers  
of the underworld grasping for life.

Prayer bead ivy blankets the brick church belfry,  
ring of the bronze bell still reverberating  
into misty whispers.  
The steeple spire pierces the night-veiled sky,  
leading the lost to salvation  
like ships to a lighthouse.

Dogwood flowers fall like snowflakes,  
littering the stone-cold bones.  
The gravedigger makes his way in silence,  
clutching forget-me-nots to his chest—  
the flowers grow best after a funeral.



**Take a Drink**  
First Place—Photography  
Hillary Gerber



**“That’s So Fetch”**  
Second Place—Photography  
Mary Lee



**Alaskan Sunset**  
Raven Ferguson  
Paint





## Through the Woods

Third Place—Painting

Britney Casmus

Acrylic paint

## An Ode to Autumn

Emily Oakes

Autumn approaches  
bringing subtle signs of changing seasons  
green to gold, orange to red  
leaf-filled trees to bare-boned skeletons

Autumn approaches  
making morning walks crisper  
enticing me to pull my sleeves over my hands  
and breathe into them

Autumn approaches  
nipping at my nose  
the biting breath of fall  
chilling my lungs and warming my soul



## The Mask

Honorable Mention—Sculpture

Anjeli Hoskins

Ceramic



## Noxubee Refuge at Dawn

Lillian Fulgham

Photography

# Delta Driving

Emily Shy

Second Place—Essay Competition

In Cleveland, Mississippi, the line of Highway 61 runs parallel to the line created by the railroad tracks—a line both physical and symbolic, a line that still cleaves the town into two distinct worlds, a Delta town unchanged by progress that swept the rest of the country decades ago. Following the highway north, up, up, past Cleveland, past Mom’s Truck Stop and Shady Nook convenience store; past Po’ Monkeys’ in Merigold, a one-room Juke Joint parked in a cotton field, I experience a marked sense of nostalgia. Even though I am only a visitor of the land, a brief blip in the age-old history of the Delta, a sense of unsettling connectivity to the past overwhelms me. Further north, the highway passes through Tunica, speeding by the old Blue and White Restaurant, where waitresses and patrons alike contribute to the acrid scent of tobacco that pervades. Finally, the Interstate reaches Memphis, a hub of culture, history, and innovation, a city still stricken with crime and poverty. It is a journey I have traveled many times.

At first, the trips my mother and I took from Cleveland to Memphis, settling into St. Jude for a few days, a few weeks, a few months at a time, felt novel, unreal, almost an adventure, although of the most terrifying sort. Soon, however, they melted into routine, and even as they became a normal part of my life, they slipped away, fading from a visit once a month, to once every three months, to once every six months, and finally, now, to only once a year. My awareness of and appreciation for the route heightened inversely to the frequency of the visits. Although just for a day now, my world of theater rehearsals, planning lessons for a unit in history class, playing basketball and football with my younger brothers, was replaced by MRIs, bloodwork, and the constant echo of the overhead paging system: “Patient 34601 to D Clinic, Patient 34601 to D Clinic.”

Trips up and down Highway 61 punctuated my adolescence. On the journey, it is impossible not to feel small. The wide, open fields on either side of the road are as never ending as the sky above them, and the rows of crops are as unique as the patterns of the clouds. The two hours spent in the car with my mother became precious periods of stolen connection, an impossibility in the rush of daily life in our household of seven, and I soaked in as much of her as I could. The canvas for reflection and absorption the highway provided was invaluable. Driving with her taught me how to recover, how to forgive, how to grow up. Even five years after I finished treatment, the familiar ride has the power to catapult me back in time, memories pounding through my head, but as I grow older, the recollections are replaced by impressions, and gradu-

ally, any remembrance of the actual experience is embalmed only by my emotions.

Fast forward, and as a seventeen-year-old, driving to Memphis with two friends to visit the zoo, free from parents’ reach, feels like the epitome of teenage freedom. With the

“A SENSE OF  
UNSETTLING  
CONNECTIVITY  
TO THE PAST  
OVERWHELMS ME.”

windows rolled down, sun blazing—a perfect Delta day—the car coasts down the highway, and although for my companions the trip is light-hearted, I feel something heavier. It is a sense of respect for this highway that displays equanimity toward whoever travels it, despite the scars that mar the land it passes through. They are scars that match the marks on my stomach. At that moment, driving down the highway myself after years of being the passenger, I am acutely aware that I am no more significant to this road than one of the mosquitoes that briefly buzzes onto a rice plant before flitting back upward, but at the same time, I am as important a part of the highway’s story as it is of mine. Δ



# Populus Marnides

Haydn Schroader

“Hey, Marnie! Go get the ball!” Josh shouted.

Marnie looked up from her book to see her brother, eyebrows knitted, baseball-gloved hand waving in the air, breath coming out in steamy puffs from the frigid air. His friends looked like marshmallows in their letterman jackets as they practiced swinging.

“Why do I have to go get it?” Marnie yelled back.

“You’re closer!” he sneered.

Marnie rolled her eyes. “Fine, I’ll go get it. If anything, just to shut you up,” she mumbled.

Marnie shut her book with a *fwump!* and hopped off her hammock, falling to the leaf-covered ground with a *puff!* She made sure to kick up as many leaves as possible as she trudged through the trees, running her hands along tree trunks as she went. Leaves flut-

tered to the floor in a tornado of colors—sunset gold intertwined with crimson and a shot of espresso. She felt like her four-year-old self again, holding her father’s hand and kicking up leaves. Autumn always reminded her of her father. It was his favorite season. At the edge of the yard, Marnie stopped to look for the baseball—she figured it would stand out among the leaves. Now that she thought about it, she didn’t exactly see where it went.

“Hmm...” Marnie mused. She scanned the entire yard, but she didn’t see a stark-white baseball anywhere.

Marnie walked a little farther into the trees. It was possible that her brother’s friend hit it right out of the yard and far into the woods. She walked on, not seeing any sign of a baseball. At this point, she could hardly hear her brother and his friends’ obnoxious laughter. She only heard rustling leaves and whippoorwill calls. Nevertheless, she continued on.

Then, straight ahead, Marnie spied a tree unlike any she’d ever seen. It was white—as white as snow—and had bark as smooth as polished ivory. Its leaves were the deepest red she’d ever seen, brighter than lipstick and redder than blood. It stood alone among the other trees—nothing else grew close. Even the fallen leaves made an irregular circle around it. She took a

step towards it. How could she have never seen this tree before? Then, *thunk!* her boot landed on something hard and hollow.

“What’s this?” she breathed. Marnie stooped down and brushed the leaves aside to find what looked like... a door? A small wooden door in the ground? Her hand reached for the bronze handle of its own accord before she stopped herself. Should she really open it...?

Upon closer inspection, Marnie found that the door was not really a door; it was a box. The box was buried so well that she had mistaken it for a built-in door. She took a deep breath, filling her lungs with sharp, cold air. She reached for the bronze handle. It was freezing—so much so that her fingers felt like they would stick to it and never come off. She gave the handle a

pull—but nothing happened. She pulled harder. The door would not budge.

“Ugh...” Marnie sighed.

After all that effort, was she just going to leave the box unopened? It must have been left there for a

reason—for someone to find it. It must have been left there for her.

“Marnie!”

Marnie sprang up from the ground, heart in her mouth. She whipped around to see who had called her. Despite the cold, she was sweating.

Josh came into view, pushing aside underbrush and tree branches. “Jeez, there you are! Where the heck have you been?! How long does it take to find a baseball...” He stopped short. His eyes wandered to the buried box. “Uh. What is that?”

“Umm... it’s well...” Marnie smoothed over her frizzy, corkscrew hair. “Well, I don’t know exactly what it is,” she said. “...Do you know what it is?”

Josh’s eyes narrowed as he poured over the box. He circled around it. He scratched his head. “Nope, no idea,” he shrugged.

“Well, obviously it belonged to someone who lived here... Maybe the people who owned this house previously?” Marnie questioned.

“Yeah, that could be it.” Josh sauntered over to the white tree and leaned on it.

“Josh, what are you doing?! Get off that tree!”

Marnie snipped.

“What? It’s just a tree!” Josh replied in defense.

“Yes, I see that, but it’s a kind of tree I’ve never seen before.... Not even Aspens or Poplars have such white bark—much less those red leaves,” Marnie mused.

“Yeah, yeah, so are we going to open the box or what?” Josh asked. “My friends can only amuse themselves for so long.”

He had a point. Marnie thought for a while. The box was obviously meant to be found. And there had to be a reason it was in *their* yard....

“Yes,” Marnie said. “Let’s crack it open.” She gestured towards the box and smiled. “Do your thing.”

Josh laughed and kneeled next to the box. He gave the handle a tentative tug.

Marnie rolled her eyes. “You’re going to have to try harder than that.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Josh muttered. He peeled off his baseball glove and grabbed the handle with both hands. “Hnnnnnggahh!”

The door to the box, hinges and all, came flying off and soared through the air, sending Josh reeling backwards. Josh fell to the ground with a heavy *thud*.

“Well, that’s one way to do it,” Marnie said under her breath. She kneeled down next to the now-open box. Josh picked himself up with a groan and shuffled over as well.

“Whoa...” Marnie breathed. Inside was someone’s entire life story.

The box was much deeper than it appeared on the outside. Knickknacks and gadgets unlike Marnie had ever seen lay strewn across the box. An open pocket watch lay wrapped in a bronze chain, the hands forever stuck at 12:34, and gears of every size sat tucked into compartments. Old clothes lay folded beneath everything else, reeking of mothballs and cedar. Leather-bound books and a case full of papers lay on top of the clothes. Marnie could see drawings inside—sketches of people, plants, and animals, even house layouts and detailed plans for more gadgets. Pictures rested on top of it all. Marnie picked one up, hoping to identify the owner of the box. A bespectacled man dressed in a suit beamed out from the picture. He held a suitcase covered in stickers labeled *To Africa, Greetings from India!*, and *China-bound*. She turned it over to see if she could find a name. *11.28.1989*. The date meant nothing to her.

Marnie sighed. The box was interesting, but how could she ever find its owner without a name? Just then, Marnie spied a stack of envelopes—letters—all corded up. She picked one up—it was sealed. She started reading:

Dear Margaret,

*I have just discovered another new species. Isn’t that exciting? The tree is normally native to North America, but this species was brought over to the Andes in South America a few thousand years ago, probably by accident. No one noticed it because it only grows in cold and survived cut off from human habitats high in the mountains. It looks just like the North American species, Populus tremuloides, commonly known as the Quaking Aspen, except its leaves are strikingly red. I named it Populus Marnides.*

Marnie stopped reading. *Her* name was Margaret. But how...? Marnie tore her gaze away from the letter to look at the tree. “This tree...” she whispered.

“Hey,” Josh elbowed Marnie out of her thoughts. “You might want to look at this.”

Josh handed Marnie another photograph. This one showed the same man, this time with a woman. Both were smiling at each other, gazing into the other’s eyes. The man cradled a small baby in his arms. Marnie flipped over the picture. *12.13.1996*.

Marnie felt a chill down her back. That was her birthday.

Marnie looked at Josh. He was holding another picture and a letter addressed to “Joshua.” This picture showed the same man tickling a giddy little boy. Her vision grew misty.

“This stuff... is Dad’s....” Marnie whispered. “He left this box... for us...” She stared down at the letter in silence for a long time. She turned to Josh. “Josh, what should—”

Josh was rubbing his eyes. A sly smile crept onto her face. “Josh... are you crying?” Marnie laughed. Her own eyes were wet.

“No!” Josh snapped, “It’s just th-the wind’s making my eyes water!” He coughed and rubbed his red nose. “And I’m still missing my baseball...!” he grumbled.

Marnie laughed as Josh’s friends came through the trees.

“Uh... What’s going on, guys?” *one* of them asked.

Marnie looked at Josh. “It’s... a long story,” she smiled. “We lost the baseball—but I think we found something better.” △

## Miss Ann's Peach Pie

Zoe Fowler

I remember as a child  
racing to Miss Ann's house  
up crooked paths  
lined with sprouting tulips  
and tall grass that spilled  
onto my mud-caked sneakers;  
the fat mosquitoes and  
brown cicadas' buzz resonated  
through the heavy evening sky.  
The soft smell of peach  
and cinnamon filled the air,  
tingling my nose with  
a sweet, sugary scent.

The scent led me to Miss Ann's kitchen,  
the warmest part of her house.  
Miss Ann stooped over the counter  
with wrinkled hands chopping peaches  
and round black frames sliding down  
the bridge of her pointed nose.  
She set a slice in front of me,  
tales of Mississippi, her grandchildren,  
magnolias, and the local haunted cemetery  
echoing around the kitchen,  
her Southern drawl coating  
each word in sugar.

Miss Ann loved sugars and sweets.  
If you told her you wanted  
one small scoop of ice-cream,  
she'd give you two.  
So I always had two  
baseball-sized scoops of vanilla bean  
ice-cream piled onto Miss Ann's  
famous peach pie—  
and a stomachache later on.



## Crows

Honorable Mention—Photography

Hillary Gerber



## Peacock

Dipal Patel

Mixed media

## Moses

Dustin Dunaway

### Third Place—Poetry Competition

You are alone and you radiate a  
pungent scent that repels all the  
Southern Baptist sinners with their big hair  
and gaudy attire. You sit humbly near  
the door in the back waiting for the Lord to speak.

My family is late to the service—  
my sister's hair again. Desperate,  
we look for a pew while the pianist  
clicks away to "Love Lifted Me."  
The vacant pew in the front is chosen  
in place of the empty back row  
so my father can avoid the pain  
of acknowledging an undesirable.

After the service you are Moses,  
parting a sea of complacent faces.  
You seem to disregard the ignorance  
as you make your way up to the pastor.  
You may have been saved,  
you may have been blessed.  
I don't know. But I saw you  
on your street corner the following  
Sunday, as I was on my way to  
pray for lost souls like you.



## Winter Wanderings

Haley Watts

Acrylic paint

## Iowa

Aidan Dunkelberg

First Place—Poetry Competition

Three or four miles from my grandmother's house  
A mineral spring rises from the ground  
And flows into the Cedar River.  
As boys my father and his brother  
Would ride down to the river on their bicycles  
And sit fishing on its grassy banks.  
In rural Iowa it was one of the few places  
Not covered in acres of cornfield,  
Ripe golden ears as tall as a man.  
They could fish for hours,  
Whiling away summer days as long as the cornrows  
Until the time came to go back home,  
Stopping to drink from the pure crystal spring  
Before they got on their bicycles  
And rode back with the sun dipping behind the corn.  
Now nearly forty years later  
I sit by the banks of that river  
With my parents and grandmother  
And my grandmother's ninety-six-year-old neighbor.  
I remember him telling stories of the time  
His high school basketball team was snowed in  
Trapped inside their opponent's schoolhouse  
By a surprise winter storm.  
They spent the night on wooden classroom floors  
And shoveled out the bus the next morning.  
But the road to his house hadn't been plowed,  
So he walked five miles home in waist-high snow.  
Summer and winter, snow and corn:  
These are the two images of Iowa,  
And I see them as if through the kaleidoscope  
My grandmother keeps on the table in the living room,  
Constantly shifting, blending into one,  
Until I set the kaleidoscope of the past down  
And see a dog drinking clear crystal water;  
An old man sitting on a grassy river bank  
Fishing for memories carried along by the current.



# Purple

Emily Oakes

Purple. Purple is my favorite color. Not a light purple, like catmint, but a dark purple, like eggplant. It has been my favorite color since I was a kid when my mother gave me that purple pen with that purple notebook and told me to be everything she wasn't. Now, I look in the mirror, with blurry vision, and see my favorite color bloom across my eyes and nose just like Mom's. Bending over, I retrieve a washcloth from under the sink, stained with bleach spots from when I tried to get the blood out the last time. The warm water washes away the dried blood underneath my nose, and I notice a small cut where my eyebrow split open. That will make a lovely scar, and a lovely story to tell at work on Monday. I can hear him through the door, snoring in our bed—really, *his* bed because I usually take the couch, supplying him with the excuse of: "Darling, I fell asleep watching television."

I start to feel claustrophobic in the bathroom with its white walls and white lights. The small, octagonal window is beginning to look more and more appealing. I place my fingertips on the cold glass and breathe onto it, drawing a frowny face in the fogged-up pane. The window is hard to open at first, but then releases; some white paint chips fall to the floor. The cool, crisp night air hits my face and eases the pain surrounding my purple eye. I shimmy out, barely able to pass my hips through, and my feet hit the ground. The stickers in the grass sting as I tiptoe across the yard. Once I'm at the road, I break into a sprint. My pencil skirt tears up the side, and I realize how ridiculous I must look. I am a barefoot, beaten woman in a bloody blouse running through the streets of a suburban neighborhood desperate to be anywhere else but here.

As my lungs gasp for air and my feet start to bleed, I think back to my mother looking equally as crazy running into the bathroom while I was taking a bath when I was seven. I heard the yelling and the thuds my mother's body made against yellowing, laminated surfaces. She rushed in with my favorite color displayed across her arms and legs. My stepfather of two years had left her face untouched. Maybe because he thought she was pretty. Maybe because he didn't want anyone noticing that he beat her, as if it wasn't obvious. She slammed the door shut behind her and

he pounded a few times before saying, "Fine, but you better get that kid to bed on time tonight. I'm not done talking with you!" She rushed over to me and knelt down sticking her hands in the water and running them up her arms. She kept repeating that everything would be all right in the morning and that he would never touch me or she'd kill him. I believed her.

That night, I kept staring at my mother's face as she lay in my purple princess bed beside me, stalling before she went back out to him. She was beautiful; even her tears were graceful as they traced silvery lines down her cheeks, her green eyes glistening as she sang "La Vie En Rose" to calm herself down—as well as me. Her lips pressed into a thin line as I played with her hair. She said, "Tomorrow, we are leaving and never coming back." I believed her.

Throughout my childhood, I always heard my mother's warnings like, "Don't let anyone do this to you," and "Be stronger than I am." Clearly, I am not blessed with strength. I stop abruptly in the middle of the road, heaving and huffing like I've just run a marathon. No matter how many warnings she gave, here I am in the same trap. But he's different. He loves me. He's the actual father of my children. He provides me with a comfortable life in a comfortable home in a comfortable neighborhood.

At least that's what I tell myself as I turn and walk back toward the house. △



## Simple Things

Stephen Overson

Photography

# Genie in a Matchbox

Rebecca Chen

Third Place—Short Story Competition

In the stifling air of the attic, a single amethyst popped open from its confines, reflecting an unknown light source and cutting through the darkness like a sharp knife against soft butter. Perched above the amethyst was an eyebrow arched at a suspicious angle. Somebody was coming.

Open, flick, *strike*. With a magnificent gust of wind and attic dust, Genie erupted from the matchbox, stretching his long blue torso to the ceiling before snapping back down to the matchbox.

"I am Genie!" Genie boomed, his voice sending a shockwave throughout the attic. He still needed to work on his opening line. He gestured broadly about him, as if conducting an imaginary symphony playing the soundtrack of his entrance. "Three wishes for each match! Anything your heart desires: power, riches—"

"There's four matches in here."

"Strength—what?"

"Three now."

Genie looked down. He hadn't actually looked at the person who struck the match; he was too committed to the bit. Genie sized up the child looking at him: short, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, male. Genie bent over and glared into the matchbox. His breath caught in his throat, and he almost choked.

"A fourth match? Get that out of there!" Genie snapped his fingers, and a match disappeared from the box. "You know what, the bit's ruined now. You lit the first match, make your wish already, kid."

"My name's Lester—not kid."

Genie frowned and looked at the kid with the same annoyance one would look at their freshly-washed dog that fell into a muddy ditch while chasing its own tail. Before Lester could blink, Genie snapped down to Lester's level, amethyst eyes glinting dangerously at him. Genie contorted his visage into a menacing scowl and exhaled heavy purple smoke into Lester's face. To Genie's surprise, the kid didn't even flinch.

"Did I ask? Make your wish."

Lester hesitated. "I don't know what I want."

Genie sighed and straightened back up again. "How 'bout a new puppy?"

Lester's eyes lit up. "You can do that?"

"Yeah, kid, I can do anything," Genie said, then muttered, "If you would've never interrupted, you would know that."

"I *would* like a puppy," Lester said, "but I don't think Carl would like it much."

"Carl—who's Carl? Who cares about Carl? What do *you* want, kid?"

"He's my—"

"Kidding, I don't actually care," Genie said, rolling his jeweled eyes. "You want the puppy or not?"

"I do want a puppy—"

"Great!" Genie snapped, and with a great puff of purple smoke next to Lester, a small puppy materialized.

"Whoa!" Lester dropped the matchbox down on the floor and embraced the puppy, leaving Genie slightly disgruntled by the rough descent.

"You're welcome," Genie said, voice dripping with sarcasm. "Now, about those other two wishes—"

"Shh!" Lester glanced at the attic door suspiciously. Genie scowled.

"Kid, I swear if you interrupt me one more time—"

Genie's words were cut off by Lester's shoving Genie back into the box.

Genie slumped in his silk-draped armchair, arms folded and chin jutted outwards in an irritated grimace. That kid nearly sliced him in half with the matchbox. He knew the matchbox could never do that to him, but the thought of it still made Genie's temper simmer. Kids had no respect for deities anymore. On top of that, there was a ruckus going on outside.

Genie sighed; he couldn't even simmer in peace. The entire place vibrated, making the chandelier above the armchair jingle. Great, now somebody dropped his matchbox *again*.

*Why am I in such a flimsy container?* Genie thought to himself. *I should've stuck with the lamp—even the pickle jar! Still, making somebody eat a pickle before making a wish—and the smell—was annoying.*

Another jingle of the chandelier, and Genie slammed his hands into the arms of his chair.

*This is a bad idea*, Genie thought, flying up into the air. *It's none of your business.*

Genie exited the matchbox and entered a stifled darkness. It seemed that Lester had put the matchbox back into his pocket. Genie kept his smaller form and peeked over the edges of Lester's pocket. Things had quieted down, but he could see a man's face was leaned over and glaring few inches away from Lester's face. He had slick black hair and a cigarette jutting out from the side of his mouth.

"Do you pay the bills around here?" the man asked Lester. His tone of voice was mocking but blanketed a threatening tone.

"No—"

"No, you don't! So you better start treating me with more respect." Every word was enunciated by a jab of the man's finger into Lester's chest. "Understand me?" He sucked on his cigarette.

Lester hesitated, then responded, "Yes, sir."

The man squinted into Lester's eyes for a moment before letting out a slow stream of smoke into Lester's face. Lester didn't flinch.

"Good."

*What a tool*, Genie thought.

"Now, go change your brother's diaper. Lord knows your mother isn't going to. And take a bath, too; you smell like dog."

*No more going outside the matchbox*, Genie thought. *You'll get attached.*

Genie wasn't sure why he was so perturbed. He'd seen worse things over the millennia, and yet...

*No wonder Lester's so disrespectful*. Genie scoffed to himself. *His dad is a huge jerk. They're definitely not the Cohns.*

There was only one kid that Genie had genuinely liked: Danny Cohn. He was a chubby kid with a mop of curly black hair and round little cheeks that jiggled when he talked. Now *that* was a kid who treated his elders with respect.

Open, fumble, flick, *strike*. Genie's eyes rolled open, and he burst out of the matchbox, stretching his arms out and yawning.

"What—"

"Help us!"

Lester's frantic voice snapped Genie awake, and he looked down at the scene before him. Lester was on the tiled floor, a burning match in his hand; scattered around him were broken dishes with globs of food splattered on the walls. Genie's eyes followed the trail of destruction to a blonde woman passed out in front of the stove. Towering over her was the white-collared man from earlier with a knife in his hand, raised above his head. His eyes bulged out of their sockets at the sight of an angry blue deity that stretched all the way from a tiny matchbox to the ceiling. The man whipped around and held the knife in both of his shaking hands and pointed them at Genie.

"D-d-d-d-devil! Away devil! May the power of Christ compel you!"

Genie stared at the knife, then to the blonde woman on the floor, then to Lester. He looked back at the knife, and it finally clicked.

"WHAT," Genie roared, his entire body ignited with blue fire, "DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

Genie dived at the man, who had no time to react. It was all over within a second.

Open, fumble, flick, *strike*.

"Kid, you have really taken your time on this last wish—"

"Genie, shut up!"

Genie looked down. Before him was a young soldier, and under his sludge-green helmet was a motley mess of blonde hair. They were in a cave, and a few feet away was a woman lying down with dirty blanket being propped up by her legs.

"She's having a baby, but there's no medical team nearby that can help! She just passed out—"

"Kid, you want to waste your *last* wish on this lady?"

"It's not a waste," he snapped. "Hurry up and do it before she dies!"

Genie looked at the soldier with amazement.

*Snap!*

Once the mother and baby were taken care of, Genie crossed his arms and gave Lester a stern look.

"Kid, you know you could've wished for nearly anything. You could've wished for whatever war you're

in to stop—I mean, I couldn't do anything about it because I can't step into Death's domain, but kid, you could've tried!"

Lester sighed and tousled his dirty hair.

"So, now, that you've used your last wish—on your lady, no less—"

"No, wait, hold on a second. I have no idea who that woman is—she just didn't have anybody to help her!"

Genie slapped his hand to his face. "Oh, no, you wasted it on a stranger? You could've asked for the world! Money, power, strength—come on!"

"I made a vow to protect and serve!" Lester exclaimed.

Genie slid his hand down his face. There was a pause, and Lester quietly asked, "So, what's going to happen now that I've used all three wishes?"

Genie shrugged. "I just wait until the next snot-nosed kid comes around. Usually I find another vessel to camp in, but I've grown kind of attached to the matchbox."

"So, I guess you'll be hanging around for a while, then?"

Genie shrugged. "For now. But it's not like you can summon me, anyways. Bee!"

"Genie, wait!"

Genie disappeared back into the matchbox.

Genie didn't leave the matchbox; he was not attached to the matchbox at all. But the kid kept the box in his pocket, so Genie stayed. Lester had proven himself to be an exceptional human being, even rivaling Danny. Of course, Genie would never admit that and convinced himself that he was staying for the silk-draped armchair. Still, he allowed himself to peek outside the matchbox every now and then, just to keep tabs on the outside world, and if he had time, on Lester too.

Genie twirled the fourth match between his fingers; Danny Cohn's last unused wish had carried over to Lester. Genie could have let Lester keep it that day, but the sight of the extra match brought Genie back to that fateful day in 1939. He had emerged to talk to Danny, but found himself in a warehouse filled with piles of shoes reaching all the way to the ceiling. When he went outside to investigate, he saw lines of people outside buildings, discarding their belongings to guards in red.

Within the buildings were poisonous gas traps, and these guards in red were leading them into them like cows to slaughter. It was horrific, and there was nothing Genie could do but retreat to his matchbox and imagine Danny: his brown eyes bulging out of his skull and his childish frame collapsing to the floor, his chubby hands scratching at his neck, gasping for his last breaths. Genie snapped his fingers, and the fourth match reappeared in the matchbox.

Throughout the years, Lester had conveniently kept the matchbox within his pocket. Genie was there when Lester's arm got blown off by a grenade. He was there when he returned home, reunited with some childhood lady friend (her name was Olivia), stole her away from her abusive husband (Genie was cheering for Lester throughout the entire ordeal), and married her. They had a child together, and the child died nineteen years later. Genie knew Lester saw the fourth match. Yet, he never used it until a day after Olivia's death, sixty years later.

Open, flick, *strike*. Genie looked down at the bent old man sitting before him.

"Time has not treated you well, kid."

"It's good to see you again, Genie," Lester said, chuckling. "How have you been?"

Genie frowned. "I can't bring Olivia back. Can't mess in Death's domain."

Lester gave Genie a knowing smile. "But you can do the opposite, can't you? You did it to my stepfather, Carl."

Genie felt his mouth go dry.

"Kid, think about what you're asking—"

"I've thought about it for quite a bit; I wish to be with my wife and child, Genie."

Genie hesitated, then started chuckling.

"You could've wished for your damn arm back, you know."

Lester held out his hand, smiling. "It was nice spending eighty years with you, old pal."

Genie shook his head, laughing. He reached and shook Lester's hand.

"Likewise."

Genie raised his hand. The last he saw of Lester's smile was through a watery film gathering in Genie's jeweled eyes.

Snap! △



## Harvest

Madalyn Coln

I wonder what you saw  
through those rusted  
bifocals during your  
88 years of labor  
and toil as that  
Sun bearing down  
on your skin like a cross  
left speckles on your back  
and sweat on your brow.  
You hunched over  
lush, leafy green  
carrot tops,  
potato vines,  
tomato plants, and  
cabbages, leading  
by example, teaching  
us to work hard, to  
reap what we sow.  
But I also wonder  
what went through your  
fading memory during your  
final days as you lay  
in that hospital bed,  
as you told  
me that you “sold  
a Cherokee Indian that  
ole ‘67 tractor for a hun’red dollars”  
and “raised a catfish  
at’ll curl up in a number two  
wash bucket,”  
as you told me,  
“Don’t be afraid to work hard, girl.”

## Grounded Flower Petals

Deven Martin  
Photography



## My Hair is Good Hair Too

Ariel Williams  
Photography

## Gray

Rebecca Chen

Gray is the color of mice  
in those little story books  
with gray little men  
and gray little trees and  
Gray is the color of Britannia  
Where they nibble gray-colored biscuits  
Dipped in gray-colored gravy and  
Gray is that zone  
Where there’s no correct answer  
Who’s left to say what’s right,  
Who’s wrong to say what’s left  
For you to do in the situation at hand and  
Gray is the color of the doctor’s office  
All that labor  
Put into that colorful wallpaper  
Is a wasted effort because  
Gray is the color of the doctor’s lips  
And as he runs his gray fingers through his  
Thinning gray hair on his shiny gray head  
He says to me  
“Yeah, you’re colorblind.”



## Granddaddy Brown

Allison Brown

I remember as a child  
watching my grandfather ride on the tractor  
in the heat of the summer  
to the beat-up hay shed,  
and bringing him a glass of water  
and company.

On good days we would go “jookin’”  
running errands in the 1964 Mustang,  
paying a visit to the barber shop,  
purchasing Neapolitan ice cream  
and pullin’ each other’s leg.

Listening to the twelve, five, six, seven o’clock news  
he’d give a disapproving head shake throughout,  
hand trembling while clutching the remote,  
the other helping itself to chocolates  
and offering me some too,  
in betwixt hollers at the TV screen.



## Cloudy Vision, Coastal Waters

Ariel Williams  
Photography

And the proud, sturdy way  
he wears his dress uniform—  
the only time his back straightens out  
when standing at attention  
only at parades or gatherings now,  
proving the fine soldier he was  
and the proud man he is.

His pride has not faded with age,  
but his strength has.  
His stubborn Southern ways  
do not allow him to ask for help.

These thoughts are in the back of my mind  
as I go out to bring him water,  
when he is still riding on the tractor.



## Koi

Honorable Mention—Drawing  
Steven Chung  
Sharpie



# Change and the Inability

Reagan Poston

Third Place—Essay Competition

I. I call my grandfather—my mother’s father—and he answers on the fourth ring. I know, at his house, the calls echo straight through to outside: sharp and shrill and impossibly loud so that my elderly grandparents can hear them. Any cousin who still has their hearing walks past the amp hiding their ears. My papaw’s voice is not sharp or clear, but instead, deep, and cloudy, closed-throated to keep out unwanted objection.

“Mmm, yellow?” he answers, hum begun in the pit of his stomach and wormed out into the open air to make way for a rounded interpretation of the word “hello.” The hum always lasts longer than the word itself, a baited extension, a lingering moment to prepare himself for a conversation he hadn’t expected to have. It would not matter if he were speaking to a child of his own or to a child of the President of the United States; he answers, “Mmm, yellow?”

I have been hearing my grandfather speak throughout my life, hearing his stories, his anecdotes, his epithets, and he is a man of repetition. He is a man of preparation, a man of structure. He speaks the language he knows in the way he learned it seventy years ago, and it has not changed. My mother tells me an anecdote of her own: she calls her father’s father, and he answers, “Mmm, yellow?”

II.

I am driving roads I do not know, but do, and they are the same as ever: slate gray asphalt riddled with potholes, some filled, some not. Either way, the drive is rough, throwing me to one side or the other, wracking me with jolting cracks my tires cannot absorb. I am driving slowly through the church zone—the whole state is a slow church zone—but soon, I’ll be home. Home is my grandparents’ house, Mathiston, the only stoplight on Highway 82, the only town to straddle Choctaw *and* Webster County. The earth is wet and grassy, and when I am home, I hike out to the old railroad tracks behind the house. In 1888, those tracks gave birth to Mathiston, or “Mathis Town,” eighty acres of land bought and owned by Bill Mathis for \$400. Today,

that’s just under ten thousand. One single semester of college costs more than that, but he could have paid millions for that town, and it still would not have been enough.

Mathiston has changed since 1888, and it hasn’t. It is no longer a mere eighty acres, but the tracks still cut through the ground, dividing home from Trace-Way Restaurant, the friendliest hole in all of Webster County, and dividing home from Oldies but Goodies, an antique store in a blue-paneled building. It cuts apart the best florist in all of Mississippi, the grocery store my nana still calls “Gilliland’s,” and the ghost of a factory affectionately called “Red Cap,” for its red roof. Mathiston is run down and dusty and where I learned to ride a bike and drive a car and love until I thought my heart would burst. Bill Mathis bought home for \$400, but I am driving these roads, roads I know even when I don’t, and \$400 is chump change.

III.

My grandparents have turned the same stretch of that Mathiston earth since before I was born: forty acres of pasture and pine and a small algae pond on the edge of the woods that has not produced fish since Katrina. For my grandparents, the land is nothing but a crimson seeder plow stuck deep in the soil, pulling out weeds and roots and forgotten tomato twines while the earth it turns comes up hard and unforgiving. Outsiders may rave about the fertile Mississippi soil, but *we* know the dirt outside of the Delta is brittle, dry.

My papaw used to rise at four in the morning to hitch the tractor and dig out rows, knowing every summer day would go to begging the dirt to soften and to fortify. My nana used to carry water to the garden one pitcher at time, pouring the first on the first zucchini vine, the second on the second, and continuing, on and on, until she had watered all the zucchini, the squash, the tomatoes, making her way to the house and back again and again to refill her pitcher with tap water. Though my grandparents can now afford a water hose of their own, they don’t farm like they used to. Instead, they grow their zucchini

and tomatoes in a circular bed lined with cracked and chalky red bricks, and Nana keeps sun-yellow petunias in the kitchen windowsill. When they turn the earth now, it is kind and soft to their life-calloused bodies. They break it apart with only their hands, but my grandfather still does not sleep past four, and Nana still waters the plants with a pitcher. I think it reminds her to be grateful. Δ



## Reflection

Sage Schaumburg

Photography



## Just Hangin’

Kayci Kimmons

Photography

## Gone

Yousef Abu-Salah

Her garden.  
Her pride and joy.  
Right in the epicenter of Gaza,  
A fertile patch of land.

This garden.  
One of olive trees and small sheep,  
The place she stood with her father,  
A man taken far too early  
By the tides of depression.

This garden.  
One of silky sand and many chickens,  
The place she stood with her mother,  
A woman taken far too early  
By the tides of war.

This garden.  
One of large stones and many goats,  
The place she played with her brother,  
A man shot eight times in the head  
For protesting against the rise of Hamas.

This garden.  
Where she had screamed,  
Where she had cried,  
Where she had lived,  
Was destroyed.

A stray missile hit the side of her house.  
Everything was gone.  
The animals lay on the ground,  
Now charred pieces of unrecognizable flesh.  
The olive trees now were in oblivion.  
A past memory.

Everything she had ever loved,  
All of the memories of her family,  
All of the remaining slivers of happiness,  
All of the remaining ounces of hope,  
All of it was now

Gone.



# Monarch Season

Wrishija Roy

Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

Gary remembers being young, in age and mind, when he met Lou. He remembers the blazing sun causing beads of sweat to coil around the curve of his ears, winding down the arch of his neck and onto the tips of his fingers as he swatted at a mosquito the size of his fist. His seven-year-old brain was more than familiar with Mississippi summers, and soon his eight-month-old chocolate Lab would be, too. The dog trotted alongside the boy, its fur soaking up the remnants of morning dew. It began to make a burrow in a patch of soft soil. Gary then dug his own toes in the dirt, lying back on the cool, lush grass and pulling out his Magic Tree House chapter book, number 21 in his collection.

Fifteen pages into his reading, Gary saw a head pop up above the top edge of his book. The boy had a flop of blonde hair and round, dark bug eyes.

“Hey, my name is Lou. I just moved into the house next to you.”

“Oh, cool. My name’s Gary.”

Lou couldn’t have been any older than Gary—his short stature and fat, baby cheeks were enough to indicate that. The boys sat in silence, lingering as they observed each

other, or more accurately, as Lou observed his dog.

“My parents won’t ever get me a dog. They say I’m never gonna be old enough.”

“I named him Dirt. We got him two weeks ago.”

Lou’s big bug eyes kept flitting over to look at Dirt. By now the dog had fallen asleep in its own shaded square. Gary realized that Lou would be his first neighbor in his history of living in Mississippi. There was not much of a neighborhood where they lived, just each house separated by at least a mile of fenced-off pastures and farms. Lou’s house was newly built only half a mile away, but even then, it had to have been a real long walk in this heat to come see a skinny boy reading a book. As Gary adjusted his position with this thought, he noticed that he was not holding his book anymore.

“Do you know how to make paper airplanes?” Lou asked as he flipped through the chapters. Gary had forgotten to mark his place. He did not answer and, instead, looked on with teeming anxiety as Lou tore out

the entire last chapter. All twelve pages came out with a uniform *rip*, the sound piercing Gary’s mind. He hated that he would never find out the ending. Lou began making delicate folds, guiding Gary with instructions for each step. Gary soon began to follow suit, and they spent the next hour racing their paper creations, running through fields of knee-high grass as dirt trailed behind them, as clouds among the fiery sky trailed behind the setting sun. Gary made a new friend.

They met again in the following days, each time Lou finding something else to do or someplace else to explore. The weather treated their outdoor endeavors well, the heat not being nearly as sweltering as the day they first met. Gary remembers one such afternoon particularly well, after having known Lou for a month.

“Hey, Gary! I’ve got something cool to show you.”

Gary could see Lou’s faint figure bent, his hands cupped around. Gary tensed anytime Lou had “something cool to show.” As he got closer, he saw a shock

of bright orange bundled in what Lou was holding and could make out a butterfly, dark patterns of curves and diagonal stripes and tiny circles all coming together in Lou’s

palms.

“My papa tried teaching me how to catch butterflies once,” Gary said as he took in the insect’s delicate beauty. “He always let them go.”

“You know what happens when you take off the wings?”

Gary fell into silence, and what happened in the following seconds made him stare in horror, his eyes almost as big as Lou’s. The crunching sound echoed in Gary’s ears, almost like tearing a page in a book, as Lou ripped the wings off.

The day ended soon after, as all Gary could think of was his desire to lie in bed. He remembered the butterfly locket his Ma used to wear daily, a token passed down through generations. The cool metal rested in his palm now, one of his belongings since the day she went missing. The butterfly would not warrant a stir, but Gary would remember Lou. △

# Spanish Moss and Sugarcane

Landry Filce

Second Place—Poetry Competition

When I was a child, every holiday meant a three-hour car ride

To my father’s hometown of Thibodeaux, Louisiana.

I remember spending my Christmas Eves and Good Fridays

Staring out the fingerprint-smudged window of the dented minivan,

Waiting to pass the landmarks I had memorized:

The trees turned from spindly pines to sprawling Louisiana oaks,

With Spanish moss dripping off of them like jewelry.

When I spotted a white castle across the swamps,

There were forty-five minutes left.

And when the air turned sour and the roads grew dense

With little white seashells embedded into the black dirt,

We were almost there.

Whenever we pulled into his cracked driveway,

Paw Paw Ed would be working in his yard.

He did hours and hours of

Pruning and planting and

Watering and weeding,

Peering down at the dirt through his thick bifocals,

To keep busy in his retirement.

I always leapt out of the car faster than my sister

So that I could get the first hug.

He would swing me around,

And I would let out an ear-piercing shriek.

Then he would call me *cher* and *bebet*,

And kiss me on both of my cheeks

Before setting me down.

He made us gumbo whenever we came over,

And it was always too spicy for my taste.

But I ate it all, wiping my runny nose and

gulping down glass after glass of milk from the icebox.

After we finished, I asked him if he had any sugar cane for dessert.

He invariably pretended not to have any, calling me *coo-yaw*

And asking who told me he had any of that.

But, every time, he pulled out a long green stalk

And cut me off a piece with his pocket knife.

# A Father’s Sacrifices

Dustin Dunaway

I remember as a child  
watching my father sweat  
in the Mississippi heat  
as he would curse the rough  
and dry earth.

Dad would spend his time  
in between twelve-hour  
shifts at the paper mill  
tending the garden  
and hunting for wild game.

Dad was not like the others  
who hunted for the thrill  
or for the glory that  
came with killing  
woodland creatures.

Dad spent hours in the  
field and in the woods  
working hard to bring home  
food for his family of four,  
a self-declared chore.

Dad could have been an artist,  
an engineer, or even a poet,  
but in the Mississippi heat  
with a growing family  
he did what he thought was best.

I do not want my children  
to watch their father sweat  
and struggle to make ends meet,  
so I will do whatever it takes—  
or perhaps I’ll not have children.



# Jumping Rope

Emily Hook

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

Slaps echoed on the pavement, dull thuds of five-year-old feet meeting concrete. I could hear the beat of my own heart in my throat, the *whoosh* of rope slicing through frigid air, the chants of “*Not last night but the night before, twenty-four robbers came a-knockin’ at my door.*” I grinned as Alexis from across the street started to count me off: “*One, two, three, four...*” She got to forty-three before I tripped. I listened to the skid of my own body at the same time a scream ripped itself from my lungs. That same scream soon morphed into relieved laughter as I confirmed no serious damage had dampened the fun; I never failed to end up in either figurative or literal stitches when I jumped rope.

The sounds of morning jump roping were only a small section of the symphony that composed my early childhood. Music was my constant companion, whether in the form of my father livening the air with ballads from the battered piano in our living room, my mother mollifying my tears with murmured Christmas carols, my sister holing herself up in her room to practice flute, or the cheerful melodies of my favorite CD, *Cajun for Kids*, sending me to sleep. But this symphony wasn’t fettered by literality—I heard it in the atonal slam of slatted doors at my cousins’ house, in the shriek of my sister when she discovered I snipped her Swan Lake Barbie’s hair, in the drone of cicadas on languid

Louisiana nights, in the scratch of mice during my house’s Great Rat Infestation of 2006, in the halting skid of skin against the plastic slide in my backyard, in the dialogue of *Holes* or *Milo and Otis* playing on repeat in my aunt’s minivan, in the pattering engine of the mosquito truck that sprayed pesticides throughout my neighborhood on Wednesdays, and in the crack of metal bats against tattered baseballs at my elementary school’s field. However, I couldn’t avoid encountering the darker music of life; piercing tornado sirens propelled my family into the pantry a few times every summer, and my fear of death manifested itself in the manic wailing of fire trucks hurtling down streets.

My whole life I have been listening, weaving sounds together into a symphony, a controlled cacophony. The movements are wild and varied: some are *adagio* with dynamics of *pianissimo*, others are *allegro* strewn with *fortissimos*; some are orderly like a Bach minuet, others are dissonant like a work by Stravinsky; some I play on repeat in the turntable of my mind, others I’ve tucked away like records into their sleeves. They have names like “Mom’s Lullabies” and “Attic Creaks” and “Dad’s Sighs” and “Faucet Leaks.” While all of the movements are integral in forming my identity, I do play favorites. “Jumping Rope” is one of the best. △

“I DO PLAY FAVORITES.”

# Speak

Britney Casmus

They point at my mother  
for speaking the language  
they are not used to hearing,  
but I will not apologize for her.  
Endless stares and giggles  
hide behind fake smiles  
as they hear my mother talk  
a little too loud,  
but they will never know.

They do not know  
of what it took for her to leave  
everything she had known  
an ocean away,  
only for them to belittle her  
for a language she has refined  
while still trying to learn,  
the one belonging to the land of the not-so-free.

Her tongue has only ever known the Philippines  
and she is trying to know America, too.  
She is strong, sonorous, spirited,  
and brave enough to speak,  
and I will not suppress her with an apology.



# The Glass Trees

Barrie Wright

Photography

# The Great Snow Day

Braeden Foldenauer

The leaves falling as the wind blows.  
The ground white as the sky snows.  
Laughter ’round and joy is sound.  
Children play where fun is found.  
The day is off but hearts are light.  
For today there waits the great snow fight!  
All is bright, and all is fun.  
Children run, for school is done.  
Oh, oh, beloved snow day.  
Come again so children can play.  
Today there is such a ball.  
Happy and kind, they all run tall.  
There was a call and the great snow came.  
Today and forever we shall always game!



# Little Galaxies

Mary Katherine Stovall

Photography



# Jungles of Cherries

Savannah Poe

Photography



# Homage to Kleptomania

Reagan Poston

## Honorable Mention—Short Story Competition

Little Junior has quite the impressive collection of things picked up from other people. He's got three whole shelves in his room intended to show the extent of his sticky fingers, and the shelf resting in the sun, he's dedicated to things that shine. He's got forty-seven batteries: seventeen AAs gathered from all the neighborhood kids' toys and the next-door neighbor's electric toothbrush, eight AAAs taken twice from his babysitter's expensive calculator, four Cs snatched time and time again from the incessant ticking clock in his dad's hallway, and three Ds from an unlucky camper whose flashlight no longer works. He even has *fifteen* little tiny ones that came from fourteen different watches and a guitar tuner. He, of course, also stole the toothbrush, the calculator, the flashlight, a few of the watches, and the guitar tuner. Next to the batteries, he has three different, almost-complete silverware sets, a pile of Christmas ornaments, a handful of glasses—both ocular and drinking—and fifty-three individual earrings. The only thing on the shiny shelf that does not shine is Little Junior's crowning achievement, his alpha and beginning and creator: a plaid bowtie.

The responsible adult might wonder why Little Junior has been allowed to continue his thievery, but Little Junior does not live with a responsible adult. He lives with his father, Larry the First, and since Little Junior was old enough to walk, Larry has been training him in the art of kleptomania.

"Alright, L.J.," Larry said one night—the first night. He knelt before his son on the steps of the mayor's manor. "Whatever you walk out with, you keep."

"What are *you* going to take?" L.J. asked, peering up at his father with wide, four-year-old perception.

"I don't know, son; maybe a knife. An earring, if we're lucky! Yep, we're living the life," Larry said to his son. He grinned at the boy, pride shining in his eyes, and from there, he scooped up L.J. onto his hip, and in they went with a march-like kingly procession.

They were both wearing tuxedos, hair combed and immaculate, shoes perfectly reflective. Larry even had on a real, knotted bowtie, and when L.J. noticed it, he looked down at his own empty neck and exposed collar. "Why don't I get a bowtie?" he whined, and Larry laughed, delighted.

"You don't get a bowtie because you don't *have* a bowtie, son," he said. L.J. supposed his father was right: he couldn't wear something he didn't have.

The mayor's manor was huge, everything expensive, exactly the kind of place thieves would be kept out of at all costs. Be that as it may, Larry and L.J. were practically royalty among the mayor's type. As Governor, Larry—and in turn, his son—were invited to all the important gatherings, and no one knew—or perhaps no one cared—that the duo was a set of thieves. Little Junior let himself get swept up in the attention of being the Governor's son, in the shine of the men's cufflinks with the faux-candle chandelier light, in the sweep of their mustaches on paper-white skin. As his eyes landed on the mayor, a round, jolly-looking fellow wearing a denim jacket and a plaid bowtie, L.J. sprouted the idea to steal that plaid bowtie right off the mayor's fat neck.

He knew at once he'd need closeness and a distraction, so while guests filed in and mingled, he slipped between them, wandering through the pant legs of adults until he found himself in the dining room. His dad had taught him to read his own name, and he knew the mayor would sit at one end of the long, gold-plated table, so when he found his name, he took a guess and moved his name from its previous position down to one end, next to the table head. Lucky for L.J., the mayor took a seat next to him without a second glance and ordered his waiters to bring out the appetizers: clams and vegetables for the adults, six little mozzarella sticks for Little Junior. As he looked down at the cheesy, golden sticks of deliciousness in front of him, he knew what he had to do.

"WHATEVER YOU WALK  
OUT WITH, YOU KEEP."

He practically inhaled the cheese sticks, and demanded more as soon as they were gone, and when the cheese sticks came out for round two—twenty of them this time, just in case—L.J. dove in immediately.

L.J. noticed his father's knife was already missing, and it inspired Little Junior to keep his eyes on the prize. He wanted that bowtie, so despite every effort of his stomach telling him to stop, telling him he was too full, he kept right on, cramming down cheese stick after cheese stick, hardly chewing, no longer tasting, before it happened. He was on the thirteenth cheese stick of round two, and three bites in, L.J.'s stomach simply refused to take down any more cheese and bread and grease, refused to hold what Little Junior had already eaten for a second longer. L.J. felt the bile rising up in his throat, felt himself going green, and turned his head directly at the poor mayor who was happily slurping down clams and chomping on vegetables. The contents of Little Junior's entire stomach spewed down the front of the mayor's shirt, all twenty-three mozzarella sticks and lunch's tomato soup, so much of the stuff that the plaid bowtie was covered. The whole table was shocked silent, but in that silence, Little Junior's tiny voice could be heard.

"Mine!" he screeched, reaching out, snatching the bowtie straight off the mayor's neck, and sprinting full-speed away. No one followed to get the bowtie back.

After Larry had the thing dry-cleaned, he placed the plaid bowtie in its current position of honor, the only matte object on the whole shiny shelf, the only trophy that didn't need to shimmer. The only time it left that shadowbox of honor was when Little Junior needed to wear a tux. △

## September Song

Aidan Dunkelberg

Summer is over.  
The hordes of cicadas have  
Packed it in for the year,  
And silence drifts down avenues  
No longer clouded by heat  
Or the oppressive glow of humid streetlights.  
A mandolin player sits on a park bench  
Tapping his foot as a mild breeze  
Frees the first wayward yellow leaf.  
Change comes to the seasons  
Just as the steps of students  
Fall into routine,  
School and work and friendships  
Woven into a tapestry of normalcy.  
It is not too late for the birds  
To quit the scene for the winter,  
Or for the squirrels  
To cache hoards of nuts  
To last them until spring takes back the throne.  
But by the time the leaves flee the trees,  
It is too late for us  
To break free of the tapestry,  
To change ourselves in any meaningful form.  
These thoughts surround me  
Like leaves floating on fall breeze  
As I sit playing mandolin  
Watching the first wayward yellow leaf  
Make its way down to the cold concrete.

## Bottle Tree

Madalyn Coln

Photography





# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Yousef Abu-Salah** (Flowood) believes that “writing is the purest form of creative expression, a testament to mankind’s greatest creators.” He hopes that his poem “Gone” will open eyes to the true nature of war and specifically to the Palestinian conflict.

**Damare Baker** (Columbus) says, “Big things come in small packages,” and was primarily inspired by Maya Angelou; she plans to get a degree in International Relations.

**Allison Brown** (Pontotoc) writes for stress relief and says it is the best form of self-expression. She plans to go to UAB and become a neurosurgeon. Her mom is her hero: “She’s freakin’ awesome.”

**Britney Casmus** (Columbus) says her defining motto is “winging my eyeliner but also winging life.” She hopes people who see her work will be open to new things and won’t be afraid to express themselves.

**Nayan Chawla** (Cleveland) plans to study computer science so that maybe one day, he’ll be able to meet himself forty years into the future and ask how things have been going. His favorite book is *Land of Snow and Shadows* by Sarah Ash.

**Rebecca Chen** (Hattiesburg) writes because of an underlying, unavoidable compulsion to bring ideas to life, but says the formula for good poetry still eludes her. In the future, she plans to be on a beach in Cypress sipping virgin White Russians.

**Steven Chung** (Jackson) hopes to work on a website development project in the future and believes that the humanities are what make humans *human*.

**Madalyn Coln** (Tupelo) wants to use her works to show people things they’ve never thought about before or were too busy to catch. She says art is not just art but a rush of words and feelings that flood and speak to our souls.

**Jax Dallas** (Caledonia) was influenced by singer/songwriter Watsky, and says that by making something new, he feels like he’s giving back to the world. He’s undeclared at Ole Miss and says he hopes his piece will encourage people not to take things too seriously.

**Dustin Dunaway** (Brookhaven) says he usually writes about his childhood because it’s the last time he was interesting, but he really only writes to entertain himself.

**Aidan Dunkelberg** (Columbus) wants to be a music major, and he says, “Writing is easy. The hard part is realizing what you wrote needs work.” *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech was a highly influential book for him.

**Maggie Ellis** (Forest) believes that “everyone has talent. You just have to find it.” She wants to meet Lin-Manuel Miranda and become an occupational therapist (not necessarily in that order).

**Jalexis Evans** (Mound Bayou) wants to meet Albert Einstein and pick his brain. She also wants to become a pediatric oncologist and also open an arts academy in her hometown. She hopes her piece will encourage readers to open their mind’s eye and share their own creativity.

**Raven Ferguson** (Monticello) says her painting was inspired by Paul Cezanne’s lovely post-impressionist paintings, and hopes that her own work will help show people nature’s true beauty and inspire them to preserve it.

**Landry Filce** (Hattiesburg) plans to be a psychiatrist and wishes she could have met Cleopatra. Her defining quote is from Lemony Snicket: “Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant filled with odd, little waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don’t always like.”

**Braeden Foldenauer** (Olive Branch) plans to major in Political Science and hopes to one day be a public servant and give back to Mississippi. He wishes he could have met Woodrow Wilson and says Martin Luther King, Jr. is his hero.

**Zoe Fowler** (Columbus) says about art and writing: “I like it.” She plans to be an engineer, and her favorite book is *1984*.

**Lillian Fulgham** (Starkville) is inspired by her mother and plans to study music and biology/pre-med at Sewanee. She says that creativity is a fundamental part of who we are as humans, and without it, we would miss out on so much.

**Hillary Gerber** (Columbus) says her defining quote is from the person who has influenced her most, Robert Frost: “In three words, I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life—it goes on.” She hopes to one day be able to travel the world and continue to show people her photographs.

**Emily Hook** (Olive Branch) was influenced by the Harry Potter novels and hopes to study computer science in college, but after that, she says her life is “pretty much up in the air.” She says that incorporating creativity into every possible aspect of her life is very important to her.

**Anjeli Hoskins** (Pascagoula) wishes to one day meet Oprah Winfrey and says that Katy Perry is her inspiration.

**Hannah Houston** (Purvis) muses, “One person can see happiness in something created in anger or see sadness in something created in excitement, and that’s both hilarious and amazing,” but her defining motto is “Keep it Simple, Stupid.”

**Kayci Kimmons** (Batesville) says that, in a nutshell, her future plans are college, medical school, and forensic pathology. She says, “Happiness is expensive,” and that Emily Dickinson, Ernest Hemingway, and Langston Hughes were all amazing writers whom she would like to have met.

**Mari Lampkin** (Moorhead) plans to become a businesswoman in marketing and fashion merchandising. She lives her life by the quote, “Things turn out best for the people who make the best out of the way things turn out.”

**Mary Lee** (Starkville) says self-expression can’t always be put into words. She plans to major in Biomedical Engineering, then go to medical school and specialize in neurology.

**Deven Martin** (Meridian) is influenced by George R. R. Martin. He quotes his friend Hunter Bell by saying, “There’s a Jesus on me, and he’s flapping his wings.” He plans a career in cybersecurity.

**Emily Oakes** (Columbus) quotes her favorite author Charles Bukowski by saying, “What matters most is how well you walk through the fire.” Her favorite book is *This is Where I Leave You* by Jonathan Tropper.

**Stephen Oversen** (Columbus) was most heavily influenced by John Keats and says that he loves photography because of its ability to capture a moment and bring out forgotten emotions.

**Mary Owings** (Columbus) claims that everything happens for a reason, and that one day she hopes to attend veterinary school. She wishes she could have met Elvis Presley.

**Dipal Patel** (Ocean Springs) is heavily inspired by Van Gogh and says that all art should come from the heart and that you shouldn’t have to think about it. She hopes to one day meet Malala.

**Savannah Poe** (Hernando) lives on the principle that no matter how educated, talented, rich, or cool you believe you are, how you treat people ultimately tells all. Her favorite author is C.S. Lewis, and her father is her hero because of his resilience.

**Reagan Poston** (Mantee) plans to continue editing and/or becoming a starving author. She writes because when she does, she feels like people are actually listening instead of just smiling and nodding politely.

**Lyndsey Risinger** (Brandon) wants to meet Shia LaBeouf and is most influenced by fellow classmate Noah Hunt. Her defining motto is “First we eat, then everything else.”

**Wrishija Roy** (Columbus) hopes her writing will allow readers to explore her Bengali culture, and she lives with A.A. Milne’s words close at heart: “Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there someday.”

**Sage Schaumburg** (Indianola) aspires to attend SCAD and continue a career in the arts. Art is a positive outlet for her, especially when faced with stressors, and she hopes that her art will make other people happy as well.

**Haydn Schroader** (Ocean Springs) is heavily inspired by M.C. Escher. She says that her art is a much faster way of getting to know her than any questionnaire. Enough said.

**Kate Shelton** (Vicksburg) plans to major in nursing at MUW and believes that, “A god is not always meant to be reached; it serves as something to aim for.”

**Emily Shy** (Cleveland) was deeply influenced by Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov. She says that her favorite book is *Anna Karenina* and that she plans to study biology.

**Jessica Smith** (Columbus) makes art because it makes her feel accomplished and good about herself. She also believes that it’s important to express yourself and do what you love.

**Lauryn Smith** (Meridian) is most inspired by Liyah Smith. She hopes to go to college and begin a career as a medical illustrator. Art, for her, began as a fun pastime, but now it’s a method of intrapersonal connection.

**Mary Katherine Stovall** (Strayhorn) says that her mom is her hero because she handed Katie a camera and said, “Find your own beautiful,” and that’s what she did. She plans to go to Mississippi College to major in pre-med.

**Jasmine Topps** (Columbus) wants to meet Zora Neale Hurston and says Langston Hughes has been a huge influence in her life. She plans to become an architect and also manage business.

**Haley Watts** (Hattiesburg) lives her life by the words of *Downton Abbey*’s Lady Grantham, “Principles are like prayers; noble, of course, but awkward at parties.” Her favorite book is either *A Separate Peace* or *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Alexander Wheeler** (West Point) believes that art is a conglomeration of mistakes that comes together to make something beautiful. He was most heavily influenced by Amor Towles and plans to design ships.

**Ariel Williams** (Waynesboro) wants to meet Salvador Dali so she can meet the face behind that madness. She believes art should be a hint of your surface, yet a mirror of all that’s within you.

**Sam Williams** (Purvis) lives his life by his senior Summar McGee’s words, “If you are a strong chicken, you won’t fry.” He hopes his work will help people realize that art/writing doesn’t have to be serious.

**Barrie Wright** (Cleveland) wishes she could have met Walt Disney and says that her motto is “*Hakuna matata*. It means no worries for the rest of your days.” She also hopes to go to medical school and one day perform surgery.