

Wall

Wall

A Literary Journal

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All communication should be directed to:

Saddleback College
c/o Liberal Arts Division
28000 Marguerite Pkwy
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
(949) 582-4500

<http://www.saddleback.edu>

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Volume VIII Spring 2008

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Amy Luem and Claire Macaraeg

Layout Editors

Amy Luem
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Essay Editor

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Amy Luem

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Erin Markland
Claire Macaraeg

Faculty Advisor

Gregory Barraza

Cover Art by Rita Zeid

Wall is a student-produced literary magazine of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. The submissions of *Wall* are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the staff of the magazine. We accept entries that embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the SOCCCD Board of Trustees. They are solely those of the authors.

Introduction

The individuals published in the *Wall* submitted personal life stories, stories from their imaginations, poetry from the heart, or artwork that reflects their spirit not only to express themselves but to share their unique talents and ideas. In this edition of *Wall* you will find moving pieces like “Walking Away from Hell” a girls account of leaving her sister behind in a mental hospital, “Journey to Dylan” about a mother and daughter duo going through great lengths to see the illustrious Bob Dylan sing his eclectic collection of songs only to watch him play with his back to the audience, and “Silent Snowfall” about a woman’s sweet vindication against her abusive husband. All of the artists featured in the *Wall* covered a wide range of topics with new plot surprises and refreshing points of view.

It takes guts for an artist to allow an idea they are so proud of so enraptured in to exit the mind and hit a blank page or canvas, and more guts to even allow others to be a part of their work. It is common taboo that artists are misunderstood oddballs who choose to starve themselves rather than become a commercial sell out. The truth is an artist longs to be inside their craft so as no to lose the precious point of view that separates them from the rest of the world. Submitting these imaginative stories, essays, poems, and works of art took guts, hope for a good outcome, and respect for the individual crafts that lie within these pages. Therefore, it is with respect that you, the reader, should enjoy the contents of these pages because they are the exertion of a tremendous effort by your colleagues and peers. I have poured over this journal throughout the semester, and have found that each of the artists has something new to teach me, and I hope the same is true for you! Enjoy the 2008 Spring edition of *Wall*!

Amy Luem
Editor-in-Chief

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Acknowledgements

Ernest Hemingway once said “bullfighting is the only art in which the artist is in danger of death and in which the degree of brilliance in the performance is left to the fighter’s honor.” However, I contend that the artists who contributed their pieces to the *Wall* brave the unrivaled perils of peer scrutiny. The *Wall* wishes to recognize both the writers whose myriad preponderances mark these pages and the readers who venture to explore these meandering minds. Their avid support breathes life into this magazine and gives it true purpose.

The staff of the *Wall* wishes to give thanks to the following individuals whose contributions enable the continued publication of this literary magazine. The Board of Trustees: President David Lang, Vice-President Nancy M. Padberg, Thomas A. Fuentes, William O. Jay, Marcia Milchiker, Donald P. Wagner, and John S. Williams. We would also like to thank the Student Trustee Matthew T. Reynard, Chancellor Dr. Raghu P. Mathur, and the college President, Dr. Richard D. McCullough.

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Claire Macaraeg
Editor-in-Chief

The *Wall* is a community space for creative expression. It is a printed canvas, a surface to be scrawled upon, a vast white page that invites our words and images.

This Literary Journal has been produced through the support of Tableau Publishing of Dana Point. You are invited to visit their website at: www.tableaupublishing.com.

Mouth Watering

This city yearns, day in and day out,
her heart longs to be touched;
Can you hear it?
She's crying out to us –
this city of ours is in need.
Her streets rumble with hunger pains
as the sirens wail; she hopes we can hear her desperation,
Muscles and bones are aching;
She's been left idle for too long;
Her heat touches our skin
as she reminds us that she is still alive;
Trying to cool our fevers and bring us in closer,
she aims for unity among her children –
but the division weakens her;
Mouth watering for our Love,
sugar drips from her lips....

Silent Snowfall

Lilly hurried into the beauty salon late that afternoon--she only needed a quick cut and some touch-up work to cover up her premature gray. All the same, before she could rush out, Ethel stopped her to chat when she paid.

"Lilly, I just don't understand this," said Ethel. "You're only twenty-seven years old. Why're you already getting gray? Nick needs to ease up on you. You both need a vacation."

"I know," replied Lilly. "...Maybe next year, if things slow down." Her hand trembled as she handed Ethel the cash. "I've got to run now. See you later."

Ethel caught her wrist, and then leaned in closer to her. "Dear God, Lilly! Who the hell gave you that black eye? It's showing through your makeup."

"Oh, it's... it's nothing. I accidentally walked into the door yesterday. No big deal. I'm... I'm just so clumsy." Lilly tried to force a smile but her lips trembled ever so slightly. Her sad, blue eyes almost over-shadowed her soft features.

Ethel put her head down and lowered the tone of her voice. "Sorry Lilly. I didn't mean to be nosey. Still, we really need to talk."

But Lilly never looked back as she dashed out of the salon into the cold mid-December afternoon without even stopping to button her overcoat. She looked at her watch again and shook her head in despair. A sudden cold wind pushed her back a step, but she defiantly quickened her pace.

In order to avoid the afternoon freeway traffic, she decided to take the side roads back home. She always knew the fastest routes home. The roads were icy and treacherous, but she remembered every

twist and turn as she wove her way through the slippery maze that led to her house on the hill. A heavy snowfall was predicted for that evening. The dark, threatening storm clouds were rapidly stretching over the horizon as their foreboding colors turned from off-white to the cruelest shades of dark gray.

Lilly and Nick had moved into Highland Park, Illinois, nine years ago. This was the first home that they had purchased after marrying. Lilly never dreamed she would be living in this elite suburb of Chicago. Nick was five years older than she, and he was making good commissions on his real estate sales when they became engaged. However, his long work hours had clearly begun taking a toll on both of them.

Upon arriving at her home on Valley Lane, she was greeted by the babysitter, Joyce, who was watching Lilly's five year old son, Tommy.

"Can I help you with anything before I leave, Mrs. Carter?" asked Joyce. "Tommy was tired today. He took a nap right after lunch."

"No thanks, Joyce," replied Lilly. "Was Tommy crying today?"

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Carter. He still looks out the window looking for his puppy. Did the vet ever tell you why Snuggles died so suddenly?"

"Yeah. The vet said Snuggles must have been poisoned somehow. He said it may have been rat poison. But we don't keep anything like that in the house. I don't know. You better get going now, Joyce. It's already after five."

Lilly turned on the oven, and then raced to the bedroom to hang up her coat. She nearly jumped out of her skin when she heard the back door slam loudly. Nick had come home. He was six-foot-three and very well-built for a thirty-two year old real-estate executive who spent most of his hours sitting at his desk at work. He had rugged, masculine good looks which were always an asset in selling real estate.

"Dammit Lilly! Where's the newspaper?"

"I'm sorry, Nick. He must have skipped our house today."

"So you couldn't pick up a damn newspaper at the store? Or was your schedule too busy with all your fancy beauty salon and spa

treatments?"

"I'm making your favorite dinner tonight, Nick. That seafood lasagna you liked so much. It's your mother's recipe. And I thought that after dinner we..."

"Did you at least remember to buy the beer?"

"Yes."

"And don't forget to starch and iron my dress shirts as soon as they come out of the dryer this time. Remember what I told you about prioritizing. Those shirts can't be wrinkled." He slammed his briefcase down. "Where's Tommy?"

"He's sleeping. The babysitter said Tommy cried all day about Snuggles dying like that. I don't understand, Nick. How could snuggles get into any rat poison? We don't keep anything like that in this house."

"I told you not to bring that animal into this house. But you never listen. You satisfied now?"

There was a long and uncomfortable silence. Lilly put her head down and neither of them spoke a word. Suddenly the phone rang and Lilly, who was standing next to the kitchen phone, answered it. Nick appeared startled as he jumped out of his chair at the sound of the ringing phone.

"Hello? ... Hello?" Lilly's hands trembled as she held the phone up to her ear. "Hello? ... Is anyone on the line?"

There was an uneasy silence. The woman's voice on the phone replied, "Oh...um...sorry. I must have dialed the wrong number." The caller hung up before Lilly could reply.

"Well, who was it?" shouted Nick.

"It's just a wrong number again. But I thought it sounded like the same woman who called last week."

Nick appeared agitated and walked upstairs to the master bedroom. Lilly stood at the bottom of the staircase and could hear him pick up the upstairs telephone. She heard him whispering to someone on the phone, but was unable to hear the actual conversation. Her heart raced faster as she recognized the familiar, sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. She walked into the kitchen, placed her trembling hand on the telephone, and was about to attempt to pick it up in order to eavesdrop. No! Far too risky. Nick would explode if he caught her

eavesdropping

Ten minutes later, Nick hurried down the stairs. He had changed his shirt and pants and was wearing his new suede jacket. "I need to go into the office for just a few hours. One of my deals might fall through. I'll be back as soon as I can."

As Nick walked past Lilly toward the back door, she could distinctly smell the fragrance of the expensive cologne he claimed he had received just a few days ago at an office Christmas party. She also noticed the slightest odor of whiskey on his breath. Her red cheeks burned hot with anger as she forced herself to hold back the rage that had been building up all these months.

As the back door slammed shut, Lilly's anger led her to curiosity about Nick's late night meetings. Did they meet at an expensive luxury hotel with red satin sheets draped over the bed? Or was it a cheap, seedy, rundown motel with porno movies playing non-stop? Were drugs involved? A thousand images flooded her mind as she felt her heart-rate accelerating.

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a loud thud coming from outside. She ran to the back door and out to the driveway to find that Nick had slipped and fallen on the icy driveway.

"Help me up, Lilly! I can't move my left arm. My chest is burning. God! It's a heart attack! I can't stand up!"

Without hesitation, Lilly ran toward the kitchen. But just before the kitchen entrance, she passed the laundry room, and, at that instant, the loud buzzer on the clothes dryer rang out loud. His damn shirts. Can't forget his damn shirts. Can't let his damn shirts wrinkle. She walked over to the dryer to reset it for another quick spin when she spotted the small yellow box, which was carefully hidden behind the dryer. The corner of the little yellow box of rat poison was peeking out at Lilly from behind its secret hiding place.

She slammed the lid of the dryer and paused for a moment. A collage of images invaded her mind. She remembered how Snuggles died such a horrible, painful death. She remembered how Tommy couldn't stop crying for days, wondering where his beloved puppy had gone. So many images appeared. Her mind overflowed with memories of broken promises, broken dishes, broken furniture, broken hearts, broken dreams, and a broken spirit.

“Lilly! Call an ambulance! Now!”

“Yes, Nick. I’ll call an ambulance. But first I’ll need to iron and starch you shirts. I remembered what you said about my priorities. I remembered, Nick. I remembered everything. I remembered it all!”

Lilly walked into the living room and put her feet up on the coffee table. Staring through the living room window, she watched the falling snow as the storm intensified in both velocity and the tremendous amount of snow that was now being deposited everywhere. The windows began to rattle as the deadly, cold wind beat upon the walls of the house. She poured herself a glass of white wine and lit the fireplace in the living room.

An hour had passed, and Lilly had finished the bottle of wine. The gentle glow of the dying embers in the fireplace had managed to keep the living room warm and cozy. In the corner of the room, next to the fireplace, was the tiny Waterford crystal bowl that her beloved Snuggles used to eat out of. She walked to the back door to peek outside as the snow drifts continued to pile high against the outside walls of the house. There was no sign of Nick. There was only silence. The gentle blanket of death had covered every inch of his body. Lilly curled up on the sofa next to the fireplace and slept soundly throughout the night.

Escape Velocity

The sharp sound of my phone vibrating next to my head rouses me from a deep and satisfying sleep. I look at the screen: it's Schain. Grumbling, I glance over at the clock: just after ten a.m. Why is he calling me this early? Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I reluctantly answer. "Hello?"

"Wake up, moron. We're going skating."

"All right. I'll drive, but you're buying lunch," I retort, irritated at being awoken before I was ready.

Recognizing my inflection, he throws one of his classic comebacks. "Your mom's buying lunch."

I can't help but laugh. I've known him for years, and I'm still amazed at how little he's changed in that time.

"Shut up. I'll be there in twenty minutes." I hang up before he can say anything else.

I roll out of bed and walk into the bathroom. Still groggy from the unwelcome wake-up call, I stare at the shower for five minutes, debating whether or not to clean myself. I decide it would be a total waste to do so right now; in an hour's time, whatever I'm wearing will be soaked with sweat. I return to my room to throw on some jeans and a t-shirt.

I pour myself a bowl of cereal for a quick breakfast. It's summer, 2003. Just three months until senior year. Three magical months when our days are finally our own: to live and learn, not according to someone else's curriculum, but by whatever we choose to fill our days. Some people go to distant countries. Some stay inside to watch television. I prefer to go to common places, for we tend to see them as ordinary: shopping centers; schools; parking lots. In the summer, learning institutions can be found anywhere, and our curriculum is

solely dependent on how hard we push ourselves today.

I throw a few water bottles into my backpack and grab my video camera. Then I grab my skateboards and head outside. The rough griptape used to irritate my thumbs; by now, the pads are hard and calloused. As I open the door, a blast of heat slaps me in the face. It's quite a contrast from inside the air-conditioned house. The interior of my Thunderbird is sweltering, but I don't feel like airing it out before I leave. I throw everything into the back seat and turn the ignition. The car rumbles to life. Driving to Schain's house, I roll the windows down and let the cool wind caress my face and tussle my hair like an affectionate aunt. I never felt so free in my life.

I arrive at his house, and he's waiting for me outside. We exchange high-fives, and he throws his gear into the back seat. He tells me about an apartment complex he saw with some nice ledges and stairs. As we drive, Streetlight Manifesto tests the strength of my speakers. We can feel the energy of the music and we get pumped to skate. The sun is already high up in the sky and I can tell it's going to be a good day. There's almost no traffic anywhere, the tank is full, and it seems like there's nothing in the world standing in our way.

We get to the apartment complex and the day truly begins. The asphalt is smooth and there are no rocks or debris to get under our wheels. We take a lap around the area, scoping out potential spots, already forming lines in our heads to catch on film. The smooth sounds of our bearings and polyurethane wheels gliding, unhindered, over the asphalt and concrete is almost portentous of the day ahead of us. We break out the camera and catch a few minutes of footage, flipping and grinding our way into our kind of fame. We don't do this for recognition. We don't do this to impress others. We don't do this to make friends. We do this for the pure love of skateboarding. In these moments, we feel truly alive.

After about half an hour, a resident confronts us. Her clean, white Volvo looks fresh off the lot.

"You know, guys, they just resurfaced these streets a couple days ago, so I don't think you should be skating here."

So that explains the faultless pavement. "Oh, seriously?" I respectfully ask.

"Yeah, it was finished just two days ago. We're not even sup-

posed to be driving on it yet.”

Schain and I glance at each other, trying not to laugh. Apparently, the irony is lost to her.

“Alright, we’ll leave then.”

“That’s a good idea. Those skateboards could really mess up the new asphalt. I mean, we’re not even supposed to be doing this right now,” she proclaims as she dramatically jerks the steering wheel left and right, turning the tires and, undoubtedly, marring the new surfacing.

Choking back our laughter, we return to the car while discussing the finer points of physics. More specifically, how a couple of 150-pound guys on skateboards will damage asphalt more than an irony-impaired, overly theatrical driver of a 2,000-pound car.

We skate until the sun is low in the sky, and the comforting summer night breeze starts to set in. Our clothes are soaked and stained with sweat, our legs scream with aches and scrapes, and our hands are black with dirt. It’s almost time to call it a day, but we decide to use the last, precious hour of sunlight to wrap it up with some film. We decide to stop at the next spot we see. Within minutes, we are behind a hotel, staring in awe at an amazing film opportunity. There’s a concrete sidewalk, roughly thirty feet long, ending abruptly with a glass planter, about four feet long. The whole thing drops around three feet into a nice, smooth asphalt runway. It’s beautiful. We steel ourselves for one last session.

The gap proves to be more formidable a foe than originally anticipated. The concrete sidewalk is divided into sections by deep grooves that catch our wheels, slowing us down considerably. Losing so much speed makes it difficult to clear a four-foot gap. Our palms are bleeding and our knees are skinned from falling. We persevere. When our bodies are ready to give out on us, we take turns on camera, and get back to our boards as soon as the slightest bit of strength returns to our weary frames. We film and skate and film and skate, pushing ourselves to the limit for that precious five seconds of footage that captures the joy and sense of accomplishment brought on from landing a difficult trick.

Finally, the streetlights kick on, and we know it’s time to wrap up for the day. Schain is exhausted, barely able to stand on his skate-

board; he always pushes himself harder than me. I ask him to film my last attempt before we give up and go home. He looks at me like I'm crazy.

He frames the shot, and I set up at the head of the sidewalk. It feels like this is the only thing that matters, or has ever mattered; once you get into the proverbial "zone," it feels as though it is the culminating moment of your life. Do or Die. I'd be damned if I was going home without conquering this monster.

"Go!" Schain shouts.

I was so into my own thoughts I forgot he was filming. I push. The sharp clacking sound of my wheels passing over the deep grooves cut through my every thought. I push harder. The time between jolts decreases. I push until it feels as though my calves are going to burst. It seems I've been pushing for an eternity. The quickly-approaching gap wakes me up to reality and I set my feet up on the desk. One foot firmly on the tail. The other, just behind the front bolts, with my heel just off the back side. This is it. It's now or never.

Tap. It's the solid sound the tail makes as I break earth's gravity. I flick my front foot off the tip of the board, putting a slight backwards push on the tail with my back foot. I look down as my body spins to the left and see the deck flipping in slow motion beneath my feet. I am an astronaut on his first voyage to the moon. These few seconds of weightlessness extend off into infinity. My brain is a super-computer, calculating angles and revolutions at a frightening rate.

My skateboard is upside-down. Halfway there. If I extend my legs right now, it's over. Done. I keep my legs in my chest and watch.

270—I am backwards, and my skateboard is sideways beneath me. Landing right now would mean more skinned palms. Most likely, it would end with blood and slight head trauma. I hear my wheels, still spinning, but covering no ground.

The deck comes to a full rotation, and my brain kicks into gear. The bolts come back to bear, ending the board's slow orbit. I hear the soles of my shoes connect with the rough griptape, as though drawn by my own field of gravity. Feet aligned perfectly over the trucks, I prepare for my descent.

Almost there. My body continues its slow westward rotation – 180 degrees. Perfect. I extend my legs, like a meteorite plummeting

to earth.

There's a loud crack as the wheels slam the ground. My landing gear reacts as it should; my legs bend to absorb the impact. I counterbalance by rotating my torso to the right, and ride away clean.

I did it.

I go to sleep thinking about today's events. I play it over and over in my head, only imagining what I'll do next. I wish I could be out skating right now. It really doesn't matter, though.

I have all the time in the world.

Poverty

When I was younger poverty was a concept I was not familiar with. I was aware of people less fortunate than I, especially the homeless and families on welfare. I was fortunate enough to be raised by a single mother who brought in a steady income. We always had a roof over our heads, electricity and food on the table. Looking back at my childhood, I had the necessities, and occasionally we went on vacation. I also had the opportunity to participate in activities, such as dance and gymnastics. I knew we were not rich, but I never felt as if we were poor. However, it was not until age of sixteen, when I took a missionary trip to the Dominican Republic, that I truly understood the definition of poverty.

The second I stepped off the airplane I knew that I had entered a different world.

As I entered the terminal of the Santo Domingo Airport, I was consumed by the heat and humidity. With sweat dripping down my face, I was struck by the awful musty smells that were intensified by the overbearing heat. I felt like I was in a trash dump. As I glanced around my foreign surroundings, I empathized with Dorothy, in *The Wizard of Oz*, I definitely was not in California anymore. As I entered the restrooms, there was this little old lady holding a roll of toilet paper. I was allowed to use the restrooms for free, but if I wanted to wipe, it would cost me. What was a quarter anyway? In this case, it was personal hygiene.

My church group and I had just traveled twelve hours, only to sit on a bus for three more hours. This bus ride was more like a roller coaster at Magic Mountain than cruising down the 405 freeway. The path was not a freeway; in fact, I was not sure it was even a road. Darkness clouded the scenery. Not until we reached our final destina-

tion, the city of Barahona, did I begin to understand the true meaning of poverty.

My group, which consisted of ten students and three adults, and I were given a tour of the house in which we could stay. The facilities were nice. Four walls, a roof, a bed and a toilet; I felt this was all I needed. Then we were sat down to discuss the details of our trip. The number one rule in our house was, "if it's yellow let it mellow; if it's brown flush it down." Additionally, we were not allowed to flush the toilet paper. That was manageable. Even a bucket shower with cold water seemed okay, especially with the scorching heat. Next we discussed food and water. Do not eat or drink anything that The Children of the Nations, the organization that we were associated with, does not provide. Furthermore, we were told that we had to buy certain phone cards to call home. A phone call home was about five dollars for three minutes; I knew my ability to talk fast would come in handy one day! Lastly, our leader described the rolling blackouts. At any particular time, the electricity could turn off for an undetermined period of time. I also believed that would be tolerable. That was until it was time to go to bed without air conditioning.

As I lay there in my bed, sweating profusely, the realization that no one in the country had air conditioning or even a fan, hit me like a tidal wave. I only had to endure these conditions for two weeks, not a life time. I began to cry. It did not seem fair.

Why? Just because I was born in a different country, does not make it permissible for me to live a life with so many luxuries while these people lack life's basic necessities? I wept for the people but more importantly the children. What did they ever do to deserve this? I finally composed myself, and I drifted off to sleep.

When I woke the next morning, my heart still ached. We headed out to Los Robles, a little village twenty miles from the city. I was nervous but at the same time excited about making a difference in the villagers' lives. We were scheduled to do Vacation Bible School at the village's church for about thirty kids of all ages. When we arrived in our big blue bus, a swarm of mostly naked children began running along side the bus as we approached the church. Their bright smiles and excited screams were contagious, and their energy permeated our entire group. As we stepped off the bus, we were welcomed with mil-

lions of hugs and kisses. I looked upon the joyful children, and they did not seem to be suffering. This was the most joyous crowd I had ever seen. We were escorted into the dilapidated shack that functioned as their church. The structure was bright pink with no chairs and a single lectern. We brought in all the supplies, and despite the lack of structure, I can honestly describe this as one of my most rewarding experiences.

Next on our agenda was a tour of Los Robles. As we walked around, my sorrow returned causing my heart to break even more than the night before. Most of the homes were pieces of cardboard with blankets serving as roofs. The floors were dirt, and the beds were blankets. The toilets were large holes, dug in the ground with tarps and cardboard for privacy. In the center on Los Robles was a stream that was used for laundry, bathing and drinking. The water was murky with trash floating aimlessly. I felt a wave of nausea fast approaching. I have never seen anything so disgusting and mortifying in my entire life.

Next, we visited the school, which looked completely out of place. It was made of concrete and actually had a door. The Red Cross came to Los Robles earlier that year and built the school for the village. They had desks for the children and limited educational supplies. Adjacent to the school was its kitchen. Children of the Nations, the organization that I traveled with, set up this kitchen to supply breakfast and lunch to every child attending the school. There was a lack of sanitation procedures, and disgust settled in as I observed the meat that would compose what would probably be the children's one meal that day.

Our second day visiting Los Robles resembled our first. We led Vacation Bible School and played with the children. We were divided into special groups assigned to perform different tasks. I had volunteered to work with a nurse who was traveling with us, and our base camp was in the kitchen. We taught the cooks to boil water in order to kill any organisms. This was a foreign concept to them. The nurse, Edith, and I visited several homes, looking for anyone in need of basic medical treatment. We cleaned and bandaged wounds and gave antibiotics for minor infections, along with directions on how to administer them. Since the nearest hospital was forty miles away and

only accepted cash, none of the people had ever been there. As our day continued Edith and I gathered a list of children who could benefit from the services that Doctors without Borders could provide during their visit the following month.

After these first two days, I adjusted to the conditions of Los Robles, and with each passing moment, I grew more thankful for the innumerable blessings in my own life. At the trip's conclusion, poverty was no longer just a word. It was the faces of those children running along side our bus, who were so eager to share all their love with us. It was the sick and suffering and all those who accepted our aide and clung to any occasion for hope. The villagers of Los Robles inspired me to provide hope for the suffering and to look beyond material possessions in search of that which truly delivers joy. Though poverty stricken, these people were not poor in spirit. For the last ten years, I have been able to apply their energy and hope to my own experiences. They taught me to find joy in what is truly meaningful: to love and to provide love for one another.

Butterfly

His life had always been unspectacular. He was just a boy, plain and simple. He was not ugly, or good looking. He just... was. His hair was a shade of sandy blonde and his eyes deep brown, which he often wished were any other color. He spent most of his time by himself, sitting in the beautiful city parks and watching life pass by around him. The only thing unusual about him at all was the fact that he could speak to spirits--the energies and forces that live all around us but cannot be seen. Though they kept him company, he often felt lonely.

He did have one friend who was flesh and blood, and her name was Danica. Stunningly beautiful, and popular with all who knew her, he could never figure out why she came to visit him in the park every Saturday afternoon. Her long raven hair was always styled, and her makeup was always done just-so. She had large hazel eyes which she frequently batted her long eyelashes over, and her slightly tanned skin never showed any blemishes. Danica always wore the latest fashions and knew all the things that were going on with everyone else. She lived a life with everything he wished he had. Though he was envious, he never told her as much. She was not arrogant, but she rarely asked about him. Danica often spoke of the various encounters she had at parties, how life was at home--what she thought about everything -- and she expressed her want to find true love.

But I love you.

He thought this longingly to himself every time she spoke about love, but he always remained silent. Three years had passed since they first met, and by now he knew all there was to know about her.

"I tell you things I haven't told anyone else," she would say to him. "It's nice to get away from everything once in awhile."

And he smiled. Maybe she only came to see him because he

was not involved with anything else in her life. He didn't mind. Every time he was with her he felt nervous and shy, and each time she left him there at the park, he missed her terribly and wished she would come again sooner.

"What can I do?" he whispered, speaking to the spirits.

The wind blew through the leaves in the trees, and he closed his eyes to listen. If you tell her, she may leave you forever they whispered back. And so he held his secret closer to his heart and kept his mouth shut. The next time Danica came to visit, she was eager and beaming with happiness.

"You won't believe what happened!" she exclaimed excitedly, sitting down beside him.

He looked at her curiously. Danica smiled coyly and bit her lip.

"I've met someone," she said.

In that moment his heart sank, and a great sadness overcame him. That was it--any chance he may have had with her before had vanished completely. He forced a smile anyway.

"That's great, I'm really happy for you," he responded flatly.

She hugged him tightly, not noticing his obvious displeasure, and he breathed in her perfume with a sigh. A faint smell of cigarette smoke lingered in her clothing from the night before. She proceeded to tell him every detail, but he did not listen. The next few weeks she came to visit him, all she talked about was her new boyfriend. She adored him in every way, and told about the sweet texts he had sent her on her phone or how she felt when they kissed. She would not be parted from her phone, and tapped her fingers across the keys to text continuously. It hurt more each time. On this particular day they sat quietly after she had finished her musings, swinging their legs over the edge of a tall planter. The sun was setting, casting an orange glow over everything. Danica looked up and pointed to a collection of bushes close by.

"Look at that!"

A small assortment of butterflies was fluttering around a collection of flowers, graceful and carefree. Just like her, he thought.

"How pretty..." She tilted her head to one side.

"I don't like butterflies," he said simply.

"Why not?"

“Because... they’re beautiful.”

“But you like me, right?” She looked at him with big sad eyes and pouted lips.

“Of course.”

“Good.”

As time went on, Danica came to see him less and less. Each weekend she came later and left sooner, because she “had plans already.” He felt a new type of loneliness, one he had never known before, and part of him resented her for it.

“Why can’t she just leave me be?” he cried into his hands. He sat slumped against the trunk of a tree, wiping his face and tugging on his hair.

Eventually she stopped coming altogether. Without so much as a goodbye, Danica had walked out of his life. He still went to his spot every Saturday, scanning the crowds for any sign of her. It rained that evening, pouring down and creating shallow rivers in the streets. He stood in the rain, wet and hugging his arms to his chest.

“Where has she gone?” he asked through chattering teeth.

To the hospital, there was an accident... came the reply.

“What if something bad happened? And I’ve been angry at her...”

Without hesitating a moment longer, he ran to the nearest hospital as fast as he could. Leaving a trail of water behind him once he got inside, he went to the front desk and stood before a middle-aged woman who was tapping her fingers on it in boredom, a phone supported on her shoulder by her tilted head.

“Is there someone here named Danica?” he asked, panting to catch his breath.

The desk clerk looked him up and down.

“A Danica came in here about thirty minutes ago-“

“What room please?”

He was directed to a room on the third floor, and he hurried there as fast as his legs could carry him, still leaving puddles of water wherever he stepped. When he came to the designated room and looked inside through the glass window, he saw Danica, but she was not injured at all. She was leaning over someone whom he presumed

to be her boyfriend, badly bruised. It looked like there had been a car accident. He put his hand on the window, watching them quietly. He's dying, the spirits whispered into his ear through the hum of the hospital machines. Danica looked like her world had fallen apart.

"Please wake up," she was saying to her boyfriend.

He waited, breathing heavily to catch his breath. Swallowing hard, he looked around at nothing in particular as if he were expecting something.

"...If I gave him my life, would he survive?" he asked after a long time.

Yes, the spirits answered.

"She won't remember me," he said with a quivering breath. He had meant that to be a question.

She will be happy.

With a deep sigh, he briefly touched his forehead to the window, letting a tear fall. He slipped away from them, leaving only his handprint behind. As he walked outside, each drop of rain that fell on his skin made him feel lighter. He felt himself drifting upwards, vanishing into a flock of the most beautiful butterflies anyone had ever seen. He flew up into the clouds, and never looked back. She was happy. And for once, so was he.

Erin Schuhrke
Poetry

A Kiss in 10

You
and I,
hand on hand;
then up my arms,
they rest on my shoulders,
warm, strong fingers down my sides,
your hands rest lightly, holding my hips,
behind me, tickling my spine, up my back,
at my neck, into my hair, bringing me closer,
your hands pull me towards you for a gentle kiss.

Walking Away from Hell

As I walked into the holding area between the two sets of electric-locked steel double doors, the first thing that hit me was the smell. Like the scent of treated meat gone bad, the chemically-altered body odor wrapped my nostrils in its sweaty grasp and it permeated the otherwise empty hall with its presence. It was like the groundskeeper announcing we were about to enter a cage built, not for animals but, for humans.

Staff workers in blue green hospital garb stood in their offices, safely behind double plated glass windows. They peered somewhat curiously at my parents and me before motioning for us to back away as the second set of doors buzzed open.

The heavy metal doors swung open quickly and then thundered shut as they closed behind us. I heard the click as the magnetic locks bonded solidly with the door plates. There was something permanent about that sound. For the first time in my life, I felt a dread-like terror that could not be escaped. The hospital walls were empty and white, and my footsteps have never sounded as loud as they did on those bare linoleum floors. Complete with locked rooms, orderlies with restraints, and nurses with carts of mind-controlling liquid substances, there was no doubt that this place was built to cage the most violent and de-ranked of humankind.

The human inhabitants roamed the halls, some resting, others so violent that even the strongest of drugs could not subdue them. There were no women. Some patients stood and stared at you with a calm but unnerving intensity. Others would suddenly burst out in a barrage of cursing and slashing motions. Still others sat slouched in sixties type diner chairs with no expression at all, like bodies without souls. The aggressive ones tried to grab or kiss you and their chemi-

cal body odor was nauseating. We made our way past a pay phone, a secured window where patients could make requests of the staff, down the hallway, to an open area with a couple of beaten couches and a television blaring an old sitcom rerun. It was like living in a horror movie, only it was real.

A hospital orderly appeared from nowhere and told us to wait while he went to get my sister for her supervised visit. Usually assertive and commandeering, my abrasive type-A father was unusually quiet. In a similar fashion, my five foot tall, eighty five pound mother stood close between my father and I, her big brown eyes looking around the room, with an expression I was unable to read. I think we were all in shock.

Manipulative and demanding, my sister's reign of terror throughout my childhood had been my cage. Threats, lies, and thieving were the only things she chose to do well. I watched in disgust as she stole whatever money and valuables she got her hands on and then blatantly lie or put the blame on someone else. She threatened to call me friends and humiliate me unless I gave her what she wanted. The worst part was that it was always a game to her. The more lies and stories of pity she got others to believe, the more her twisted soul triumphed.

That morning she called and demanded that we come down to the VA hospital to pick her up. My father, the ultimate rescuer, rushed us down to the hospital as soon as we got her call. We didn't find out where she called from until the elevator doors opened to a sign that read "High-Security Psychiatric Ward."

As we neared the visiting section, my sister came out and the four of us sat talking in the area where the sofas were located. She was happy to see us and in good spirits. The orderly stood in the background and watched us. The normalcy of the conversation was an eerie contrast to where the conversation took place. I couldn't help but feel the moment we left and the lights went out, this world would become even more eerie and terrifying.

To be honest, I don't remember exactly what happened next. I know we visited with my sister for about 15 minutes and she showed us the room where they were kept locked in. I know she began packing her things, believing she was leaving with us. I remember the men swarming around her and me as though we were fresh bait to be

devoured. I remember my dad getting angry because they wouldn't release her.

Then I remember... we left her there.

It felt as though my soul was being wrenched from my body. I remember the orderly holding onto my sister while she screamed. I remember walking through the zombie-like bodies back to the steel double doors. Turning away from her was the hardest that I have ever done. As we walked past through the doors to the holding area, I heard the metal doors slam and click shut.

I will never forget seeing the doors closing her in and locking her screaming into that God-forsaken place. As much pain and hurt that she caused e, I cannot describe another time in my life where I felt as awful as I did that day. It was like leaving someone you hated to their just demise. But instead of feeling triumph and victory, it felt as though we were doing something only the truly evil could imagine. That day I realized as much as I hated and despised my sister, hell was not a place where I wanted anyone to live.

I remember sobbing.

She Was So Young

Sitting there, on the hard, cold bench, in the crowded church, sobbing, with 200 other people, I wondered, how many people would come to my funeral?

Nicole Rogers and I both worked at California Pizza Kitchen for about a year, until one day, when walking into work my manager, looking very somber, stopped me halfway through the doorway and told me he needed to speak to me about something. Immediately I thought, "Oh no what did I do?" But instead heard the words that would shock anyone, "Nicole passed away last night, she had a heart attack." Nicole was only 19 years old, I just kept thinking, "She was so young, she was so young." The rest of the day at work everyone was very sad and would randomly start crying, and then another person would start crying, almost a domino affect. Nicole and I were never really that close, and we rarely worked the same shifts, but she was a very sweet girl and no one should pass away at such a young age.

The funeral was on a Sunday morning about a week later, and it was the only day besides Christmas and Thanksgiving California Pizza Kitchen closed their doors. Almost every single coworker showed up to grieve, along with 150 more people, which is a tremendous amount of people, especially since the church was so small, the parking lot was overcrowded with cars parking wherever they could find a decent spot. The altar was consumed with beautiful bouquets of flowers that seemed to consume everything, even the air smelled of lilacs and roses. When you finally got passed looking at all the flowers, straight ahead on a huge screen was an old video on Nicole when she was younger that just made everyone seem to weep uncontrollably because she looked so happy singing, laughing, smiling, and dancing. Looking around at everyone that came, all dressed in black, with their

sunglasses on to cover their tears, so many people, made me think about how many people I hold so dear to my heart, how many more people there could be, since after high school I lost touch with a lot of people, and realized that before these people, or I, pass away, it is important to get to know them, laugh with them, cry with them, anything, because who knows when your last day is going to be. Nicole's sudden passing made me realize that even if you are nineteen, eight-two, or even four years old, you could breathe your last breath tomorrow, and never have time to tell the ones that mean the most to you how important they are, how much you love them and hope for the best for them, so it is essential that you tell them today, or as soon as possible, because who how long you have here. I realized that having fights and never making up is such an insignificant thing in the long run, because you want that person to know that you still care, and it doesn't matter if you lied about that, or whatever.

Everyday could be your last, and it is important to tell others how you feel about them and let them know that you will always be there for them, I want to make sure, that at my funeral, there will be friends, family, and coworkers.

Ingrid Starrs
Poetry

Addicted to Mondays

Gray haze split by red glowing light
5:30 a.m. – Uhhh
lift, fluff, pull, tuck, roll over
slow breath in – slower breath out...
slipping back – hills take rise
hips curve – press into mine
whiskers bristle – coax down my spine
temperatures climb – then dive with the tide
hands slither under – thumbs cup my breasts
holding me – helpless

ah...
Mangos sweet you
ripe – running down my chin
sticky sweet – two bodies lie still
ankles locked – breath in my ear
we meld – every sweet drop of us
wells
into Mangos...

6:00 a.m. – Crap – Work
flat against the mattress,
this disentangled dream – Get up!
I create you – you possess me
fix a pot of coffee – enemy mine
this hurts – I burn
longing to linger on you – my heavenly ghost

dark roast Antigua holds my head
face turned – cheek to chest
half moon – half dressed
one cup – never enough
brewed gourmet – warm to my touch
milky clouds sting my lings
slowly drinking – finger tips.

Poor Bones

Years ago, I went to George Washington's funeral and halfway through I got this idea... Well, first of all let me tell you about George.

George was one hundred and twelve years old and living with someone he thought was his great grandson; but as it turned out, he was so old they couldn't actually remember who he was really related to. Living might not be the word for how he spent his days, but there he was, in a side room behind where the family ate everyday. He hadn't left the room for years. Even so, he was near enough to the rest of the family, and would comment on the conversations at hand in the dining room. It seemed only they could understand him.

In Northern Chile, where George lived--and died--it's customary to have the viewing in the home. The mortician brings the coffin in, cleans and dresses the body and then places the casket in the front room with huge candelabras at each corner along with a flowered wreath. (Strangely the funeral wreaths in Chile always look like the ones the horses get for winning a race.) Traditionally the family will remain awake all night and receive visitors until the next day when the hearse comes to take its heavenly load away for burial. And so it was for George. The following day the stale-faced, pallid funeral director took him away, followed by the mourners in a big rented rickety city bus. At the cemetery, he was grimly placed onto a well-worn brass cart with wheels.

George and his family could afford only what was available on the far side of the cemetery grounds. They were so poor they couldn't purchase a plot and were left to lease a niche. This essentially meant that George could be evicted in three years if the rent wasn't paid. By that time, of course, George would only be bones and loose bones at

that.

I was soon to find out what happens to poor loose bones.

We clustered together behind George and beneath the tall and wide stone arched entrance. I could see the tall, ornate markers in between the larger tombs of the wealthy. The caretaker, tall and pale, gently motioned to the pallbearers and we began our journey.

The procession was led by a little brass that pandered a low sorrowful dirge on endless rewind. Then came George in his little grey fabric covered casket; the pallbearers along side pushing him deeper into the cemetery with the caretaker to one side like an army sergeant guiding his troops. Head bowed and arms crossed, he set the slow methodic and pulsing pace in which we would descend for the next 20 minutes. The family came next; all in black, red-necked and puffy from their tears and no sleep.

Friends followed next in shabbier, less chic dress--black and sadness, mixed together. No one spoke and apart from the band, the leaked sobs of the family, there was no sound except for the constant high pitched whinny from the wheels on George's cart and the splintered leather shoes on the grit of the cobbled path. This was death Chilean style.

Visually, there was no illusion now that we had left the wealthier side of town.

The path wound around to the left, leaving behind the stately resting places of the municipally famous and well to do; we crept through what looked like flat, dull, multistoried Soviet apartment buildings. Actually, it turned out to be a highly functional and economic solution to accommodate the multitudes. All over Latin America the dead hold forth in a ghoulish architecture where their remains are slid into niches like drawers in a dresser. Once placed in their niches, it is a simple matter to plaster over a covering cement block and await a carved stone marker with the name and pertinent dates of death and birth. In George's neighborhood, the niches were stacked 12 high and I noticed that many of the residents had no marker other than the name scratched into the plaster with something like a nail. The niches pushed skyward above us and seemed to bend in closer at the top. This closed in steep narrowness, the music from the little band, the cries of the family louder as we came closer to George's final address, all

together assured me this would eventually be a permanent situation for all of us.

In South America I became aware very early that a large component of everyday life included the fact that anything could happen at anytime. And so it was this day as well. We were deep into the poor man's niches now and still descending. Did the music get louder, the day get greyer, the valley deeper...or was it just me? There to one side of our path stood a well-used rusty scaffold. Four workmen stood, their fedora hats off by now, with heads bowed. They wore coveralls over button up shirts with small close knotted dark ties; tight cuffs pushed white from beneath the sleeve ends at their wrists. On the scaffold deck above and all around its base, on the ground and in a wheelbarrow, lay the small pieces of what had been the sealing stones of an individual niche.

This seemed normal and what I would expect from such a scene with four workman, a scaffold and rough tools in a cemetery; but then beside all this was something I didn't expect....the bone cart. What else could you call it? A cart with bones...and a shoe, and clothes, and broken casket bits, and hair, and more bones. It took but a moment to put together that someone's rent was up, and atop the pile was his skull. It was not a bright and shiny clean skull but a messy dirty, hairy, browned and vacant skull. Beneath it all was what looked like a rib cage, femur, and an ankle with the shoe still on. All mixed in were the broken casket parts, torn, dark, flat, matted clothing and what looked like a mound of dried seaweed.

What was going on? This was a shock and I was fascinated. The important thing now was where were these bones going to go? It wasn't until sometime later that I found out when I went up to the cemetery on a mid-day sabbatical to take some pictures and just look around. I walked in and around everything that was there and found myself off to one side of the grounds and before a rather large domed and low slung cement structure. It wasn't long before Riquelme came across me there and inquired if there was anything that I needed. I quickly stumbled into the story of George and what I had seen that day on the bonecart. He smiled and motioned for me to follow him around one side of the domed structure. We came to a door that led into a small passage with a few steps that went down into blackness. The sun

was blazing away high in the sky and yet only a few feet inside an impenetrable curtain of indefinable blackness stood against its brightness. The last step was not well finished or perhaps it was finished at one time and what was inside had slowly corroded its edges and, although timid, it was slowly working its way out.

Riquelme motioned for me to follow and descended into the narrow passage and down the steps. I might have expected a draft or a rising dampness from this hole I could not see but instinct told me was there. I waited for some light from the entrance to enter to a point where I could see just a little bit of the interior. My eyes adjusted and yet I could see nothing.

"This is where they go," he said and waved his hand gently into the void. "Their time in the niches ends and we toss them here to be with their brothers and sisters

...forever ...together..." Riquelme's hands rested at his sides, palms flat and open over the front pockets of his pressed blue-jeans. I stood beside him at that last step with one hand on the dusty, calcified plaster wall and the other held back a bit in an effort to keep most of my weight away from the immeasurable depths I knew to be inches away. Beneath an audio canopy of a gyrating Hendricks type guitar rift my mind's eye gave way to a cinematic series of dark, repetitive, short angle quick-stop scenes of Riquelme and the workman tossing load after load of vagabond hobo bones into the blackness.

"I think it's closer to filling up now...it used to be that I could dump the bones and hear nothing and now by the time I reach the top step I can hear a small, faint little sound..." As he said this he raised his hand and pinched two fingers together to indicate "small" and smiled, clearly not bothered by the reality of his job.

I imagined the bones, all mixed up and forgotten. Maybe some were friends and felt at home and then maybe others were enemies or worse...strangers. I could see the events that led the living lives of those bones to at last arrive where they were in that brittle clattered bonepile below.

I am not afraid of dying but I thought that we'd all stay together...me and my bones that is, all of us together in a little box, basically connected, alone and un-bothered. I realized that no matter what I did I was racing forward to an isolated moment when death would greet me.

It might not be tomorrow, but it would be relatively soon. When you're only 19 in a cemetery, taking pictures, 65 or 70 seems suddenly very, very, soon.

I hadn't reached the top step before an idea set itself firmly in my mind, giving me clear direction to tell stories of those dry loose bones. I closed my eyes in the taxi on the way home and lowered myself figuratively into the domed cavern. I closed out everything around me and began to concentrate; a collar bone, a wrist?, a scapula, a rib, a hand, a femur...a pelvis. It began like static from a car radio on a hard stretch of road...in and out...close and then far away...a song, news....commentary, a song again, a speech, a sermon...more static...but through it all I began to hear their voices and they were telling me their stories. I could see the stories that had always been there and even the stories yet to come from those poor loose bones. Every bone had a story to tell...some lonely or happy or desperate...confident, worried, lost, in love, angry, hopeful and hateful. As long as there were loose bones it would never end.

Erin Markland

Poetry

Chess

Play me,
I am your pawn,
Manipulate my moves;
Corner me in your bed and say—
Check mate!

Children of GULAG

WWII ended in May of 1945. After that, numerous documentary films, based on sound evidence and the testimonials of survivors of this outrageous evilness, revealed unimaginable Nazi crimes against humanity. Thousands of memoirs, books, essays, and dissertations about the young victims of the Nazi Holocaust were written and published throughout the world.

However, long before the war, Joseph Stalin and his accomplices had committed a multitude of heinous crimes against the citizens—and against the children in particular—of their own country, the Soviet Union. Millions of innocent citizens had been accused of spying, sabotaging, and spreading anti-Soviet propaganda. They were arrested and sent without trial to the GULAG camps. Millions of children of all ages, whose parents perished in these inferno-like concentration camps, met a similar fate in these camps and in the state-run orphanages for the children of the enemies of the state.

The word GULAG were an abbreviation of the Russian words for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps (*Glavnoye Upravleniye Ispravitel'no-Trudovykh Lagerey*). GULAGs were created in the former Soviet Union in the 1920's and existed until the early 1990's. Their proclaimed purpose was to confine enemies of the state in camps where they might be productive workers for the good of the country. However, their covert purpose was to terrorize the population, keeping people in constant fear of imminent arrest, and in fear of becoming a slave within the camp.

Who were these enemies of the state? They were ordinary citizens—men and women, some old, sick or crippled, some young and healthy. They were high executives, doctors, teachers, clergymen, generals, famous scientists, engineers, inventors, prominent writers, poets,

and musicians. A nuclear physicist, and missile and aircraft designers were among them too.

Typically, the arrest of an innocent person followed a false accusation of him or her being a spy, a wrecker, a collaborator, an imperialist, or a betrayer of a socialist ideology who was spreading rumors and supporting anti-Soviet propaganda. Even a simple joke could send a person to a camp for ten years. Such incriminations were fabricated by paid informants, corrupt neighbors, or members of a local Communist Party who had been assigned a certain quota of arrests. Quite often, some brainwashed children—members of the Young Pioneers League, or Komsomol (Communist Youth League)—would snitch on or denounce their own parents. These young tipsters would inevitably be arrested as the children of the enemy of the state and sent to the orphanages or concentration camps. Ironically, these children frequently encountered their arrested parents behind barbed wire.

Those who were arrested became automatic targets of prosecution. NKVD, the investigative agency which would later be renamed the KGB, kept personal files on all male spouses and all children fifteen years and older, as they were considered potentially dangerous and capable of committing anti-Soviet actions. Arrested females were sent to camps for women. Their babies were allowed to stay with their convicted mothers until they reached twelve to eighteen months of age. Once the infants were older, or the children were one to three years old at the time of their mother's arrest, they were sent to the undisclosed nurseries or orphanages. In most cases, the authorities would change the children's identity, giving them new names and nationalities.

Children three to fifteen years of age were also taken away from their homes to orphanages which were located in different remote regions of the country, far away from major cities and ports. Some of the children were sent to correctional facilities for at least five years, depending three factors: age, the degree of potential danger they could allegedly represent to the Soviet society, or changes for rehabilitation.

Children fifteen years and older would inevitably be sent to concentration camps. They were taken away from their families, packed into cattle cars and taken to unknown destinations. Like the adult prisoners, they were considered political prisoners and given a mandatory ten years confinement without privilege of correspondence.

Another ten years would be automatically added for any attempt to escape. Most of these young inmates never saw their families again.

The GULAG camps were not only a form of a prison, but also an unceasing source of cheap labor. The Soviet empires possessed an abundance of natural resources, so the country constantly needed slaves to work in their coal and gold mines. People were also needed to cut down forests, and drain marsh-ridden areas, and to build canals, roads, railroads, and towns. Therefore, Stalin and his cronies had arranged an immense, forced removal of minorities—over a hundred different tribes—from their original places of living, deporting men fifteen years and older to vast, uninhabited territories of the Arctic, Siberia, the Far East, the Ural Mountains, and Central Asia. Hundreds of camps were fitted with free manpower due to this “ethnic cleansing.”

In his ‘infinite’ wisdom, Comrade Stalin cynically posted a citation from one of his own speeches at the entrance of every concentration camp. It read, **WORK IS A MATTER OF PRIDE, HONOR, GLORY, AND HEROISM!**

But for the fifteen-year-old children, who were sent to the camps to work along with the adult prisoners, work was a matter of life and death. They toiled with non-stop eighteen-hour work shifts. Some of them were robbed and molested by sadistic criminals; many were killed by vicious guard dogs or shot by watch guards for inadvertently stepping away from the marching column. Many froze to death while working in blizzards at temperatures of minus sixty degrees centigrade. All prisoners in these camps lived in huge, unheated tents, sleeping on three-story berths without pillows or blankets. They were eaten alive by lice and mosquitoes. Millions died from exhaustion, tuberculosis, and starvation. The prisoners’ breakfast usually consisted of a spoonful of cold porridge and a slice of sticky black bread. After long hours of intense, backbreaking labor and endless marches back to the camps, they received a chunk of bread and a bowl of watery soup with some grains, rotten cabbage, some fish bone and shreds of frozen fish. The prisoners would drink if from the bowl, and then wipe it with a piece of crust. They learned to hide the rest of their bread in their bosoms or deep in their pockets and later suck and savor its pieces to suppress their hunger pains. On rare occasions, they were given a half of a herring with entrails—their only source of protein. They

would often cry if they did not receive a fish with a head on it. When they weren't able to perform their daily duties, they were denied their dinners. The guards were instructed to shoot those who picked some meager tundra berries when working.

The younger children who were spared from the GULAG camps were sent to orphanages. A typical *detdom*—orphanage—held up to four hundred children at a time. The majority of them were the children of deportees and political prisoners, and the rest were children whose parents had died of starvation in the famine of 1933 or were killed later in WWII.

Prior to placing the children in orphanages, armed guards escorted them to numerous distribution centers where they were fingerprinted and photographed (both from the front and in profile) while holding boards with their identifying numbers in their hands. They were not allowed to keep any personal possessions. After a month or so, they were taken to railroad stations, stuffed in cattle cars and driven to remote areas. They had to walk long distances to their final destinations—prison-like orphanages where a few gloomy barracks with barred doors and windows would become their permanent home for many years to come.

Many former inmates of these orphanages recalled that they were constantly hungry. They would flock to any passing cart carrying grain, corn, beets, or seeds, trying to fill their pockets with edible items, sometimes while being beaten with a whip. In the winter, it was so cold in the dormitories that they usually lay two on a mattress in their clothes and boots, covering themselves with a second mattress and a blanket. They were taken to bathe once a month where they had to dry themselves with wet sheets already used by other children. They had no gloves or handkerchiefs, so they had to wipe their noses on their coat sleeves, which came to resemble tanned leather. They were denied money for postage stamps to send letters to their incarcerated mothers as their caretakers insisted there was nothing to say to enemies of the people. Many of the corrupted caretakers would steal the children's food, medications and supplies. Not only were the children solely deprived of the most important human need for love and contact, but being forced to work long hours at the factories and collective farms, they were exposed to intense threats, humiliation, and

abuse. And those who died from starvation and infectious diseases did not even get decent burial; they were dumped into the shallow holes outside the fences.

It was estimated that over 25 million innocent people perished during the Soviet Holocaust. But it is impossible to estimate how many millions of strong, talented children were taken from the Earth and never were able to develop their potentials and to enrich society with their knowledge and experiences. Varlam Shalamov spent seventeen years behind the fence, and described a drawing he found in frozen trash in search for food. A child of GULAG, he remembers barren yards and rows of dirty barracks. The inmates dressed in rags and the guards stood watch with their vicious dogs by their sides.

There are now numerous maps showing the thousands of concentration camps that existed in the former Soviet Union, but there is not a single map of those orphanages which contributed to the vanishing of the ill-fated young generation of the Soviet empire. Ironically, one of the many popular Soviet slogans sums up the entire horrific experience. The slogan, created by one of the most evil men in history, Comrade Stalin, was to be repeated, and repeated again, to brainwash the Soviet children of all ages. And it read: THANK YOU, COMRADE STALIN, FOR OUR HAPPY CHILDHOOD.

David Diaz

Poem

Born Free

it's a disease made like heroin's hype
we are in the mind set to celebrate this disease.

from the beginning your presence was devastating.
so I won't celebrate america's arrival;
I won't celebrate the AIDS or the flu;
because it is all a celebration of you.

wasted. you perpetuate the lie of the american society;
I am not free in this democracy. I became possessed
in the new world to work in a slave society.

I am taught today and day by day to respect the environment,
but it is the earth which deserves my respect.
to come into harmony with the universe,
the environment was tortured, now feared.
we are ready to understand the ancient thought of my ancestors:
"be at peace with the earth."

I lost my spiritual identity with religious identification;
beads of christ ran down my forehead, but was never under my skin.
I was born free.
I see no humanity in a country that treats me the way she does;
I tried to breathe in the uncomfortable land;
to see, and to survive in this god-loving country,
in this murderous god-loving country.

death came to my people along with christianity.

no humanity. as for the holidays--
meaningless.

I have no natural rights, no freedom.

what is there to celebrate?

I can't celebrate where i'm from,

to celebrate the discovery of a new drug,

a new addictive high as potent as heroin and crack,

to celebrate this flu is to be connected with this old addictive chain.

I will not smoke the disease, nor will I let it travel through my veins.

taught to say "no," I say, "no," to a celebration

of disease and unnatural drugs created when my spirit was lost.

my spirit will not survive

in this hardened witchcraft and wise men, nor does it want to.

I came into myself

to stop spreading the disease.



Trilogy of the Viet

Spring 2008

David Bro

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My Table

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Jennifer Anderson

Wall



Cabin

Spring 2008

Angela Smith

45



Rise

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Matthew Sutton-Pryor

Wall

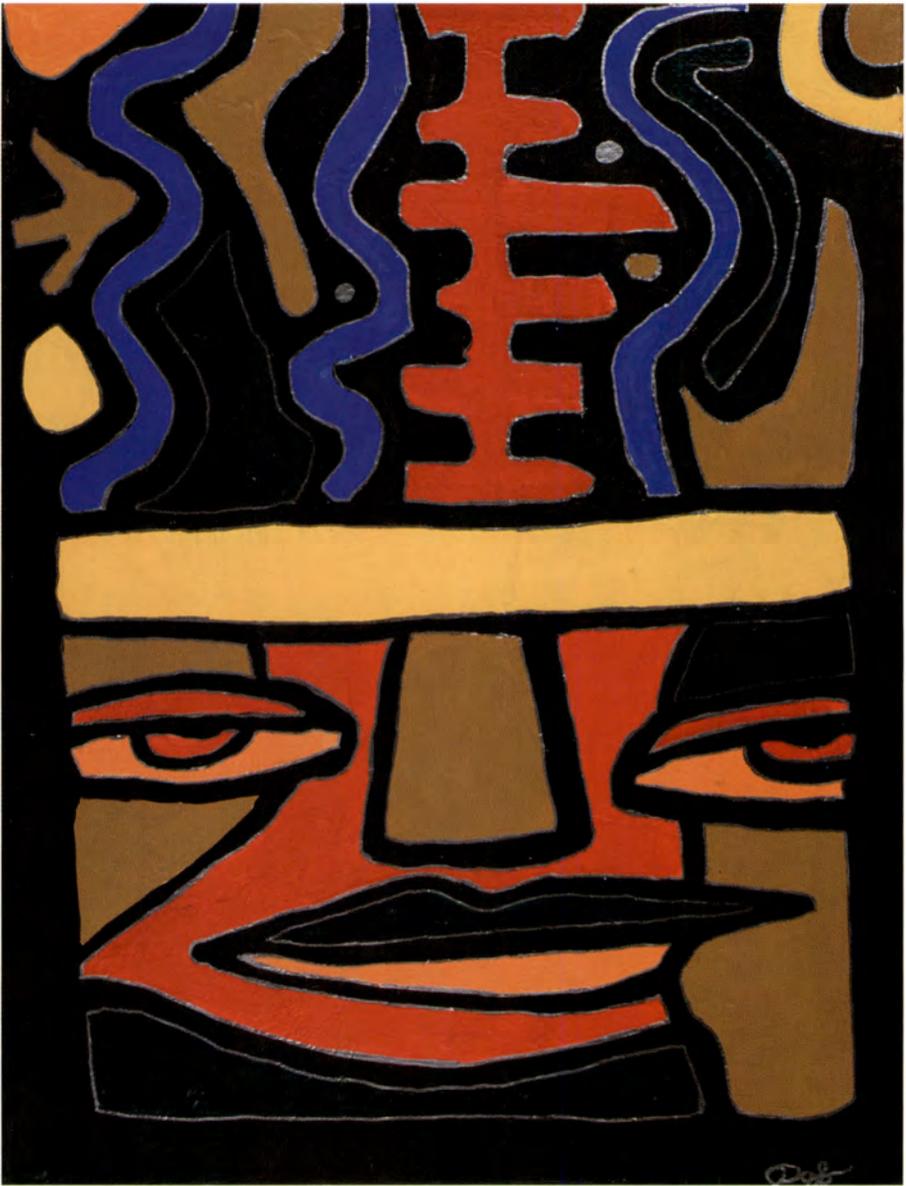


Serris

Spring 2008

Sophia White

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God's Mask

David Swanson



Helena and the Demon Loo

Sophia White

Spring 2008

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Wrap Girl

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Al Barrs

Wall



Sarah

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Amy Luem

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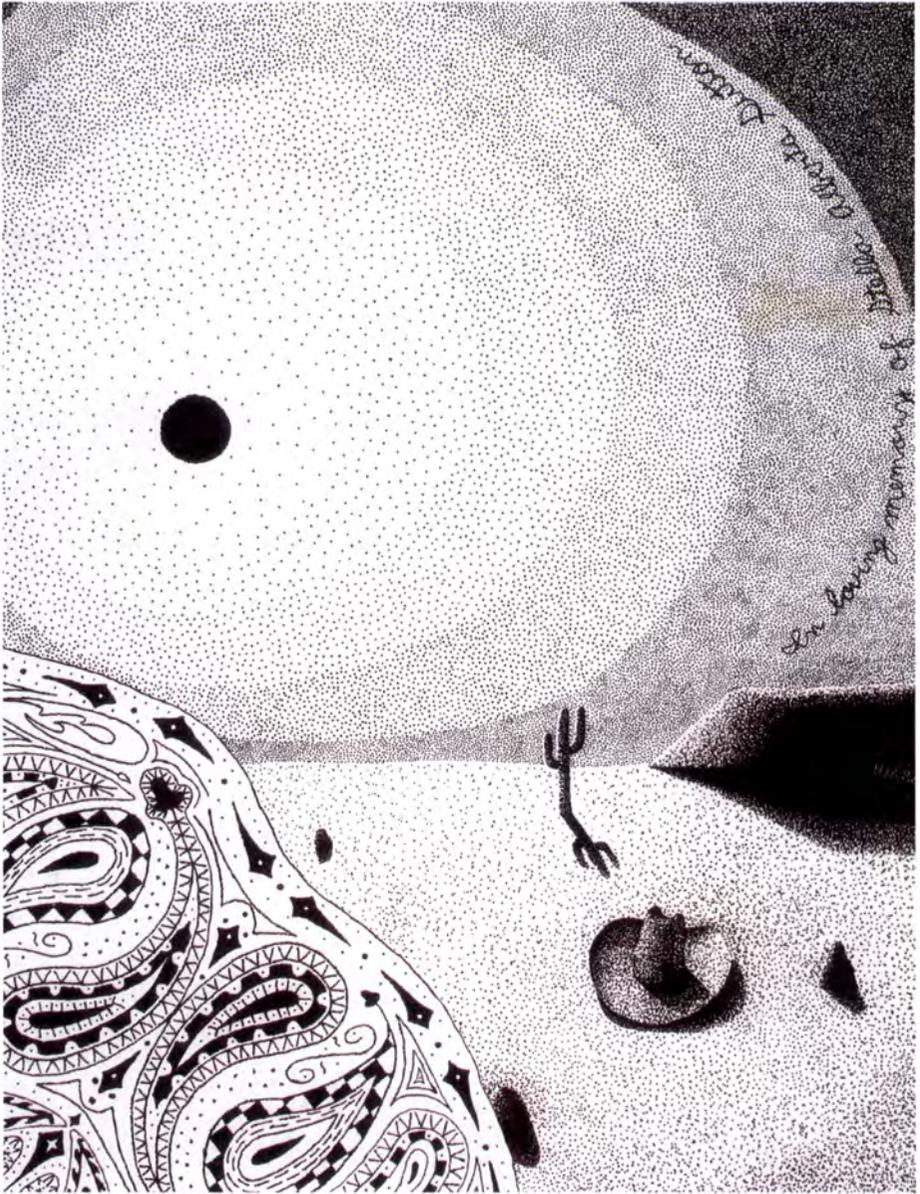


Rhino

52

Dane Bottino

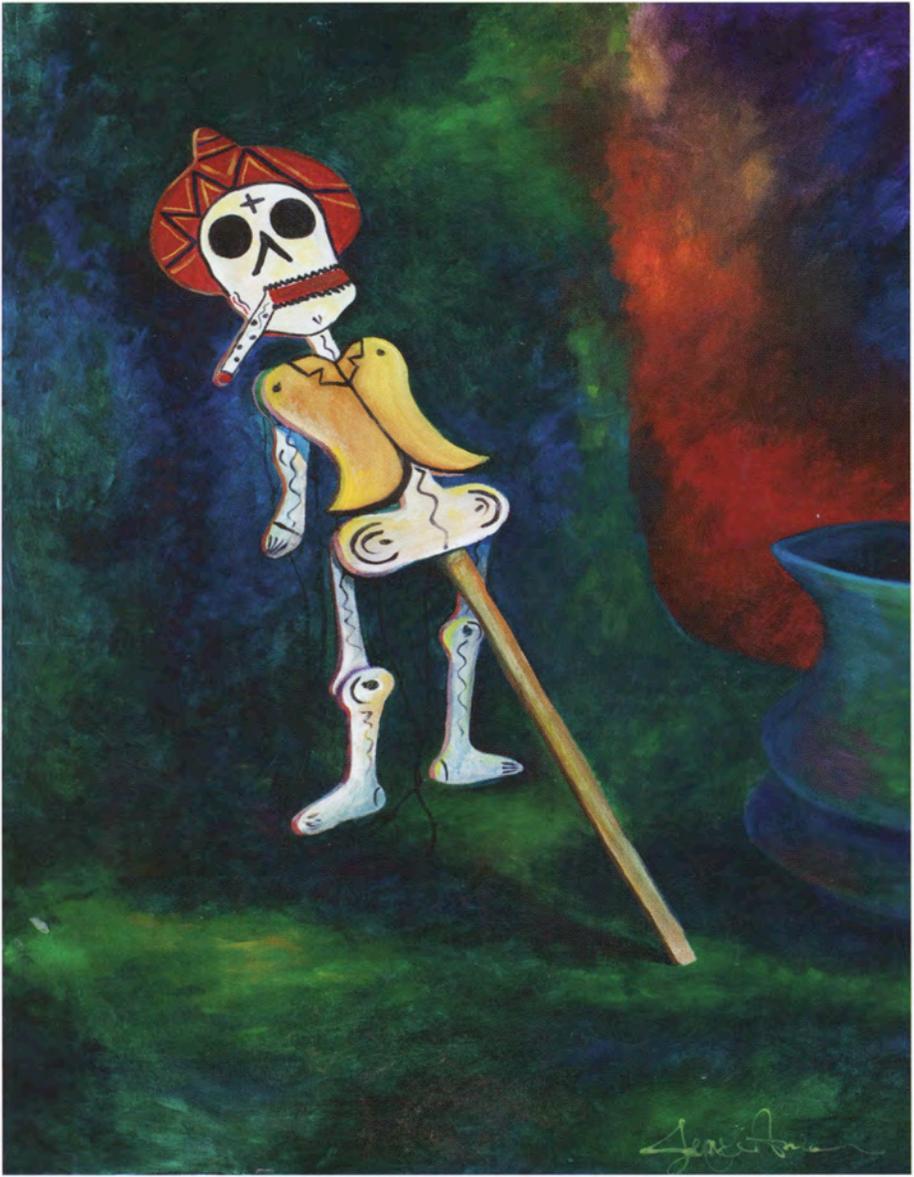
Wall



Black Hole Sun

Matt Sutton-Pryor

Spring 2008



Dios de los Muertos

Jennifer Anderson



Gargoyle

Spring 2008

Dane Bottino



Seahorse

Angela Smith



Wilting Sunflower

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Amy Luem

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Last Memory

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Joel Duggan

Wall

Babushka

Babushka painted her beads, brilliant bloody shades sans Christ. For her rosary's never had their crucifixes. She let others deal with that before they were sold and taken away.

Babushka had many grandchildren; and she liked to think of them while she painted. Rocking, humming lullabies bleak as Siberian winter, she painted rosaries, mystery to mystery, decade to decade. And her beads shone like sunlight, minute brush strokes steady.

Gregor—and she painted the Joyful, angel's greeting and still Virgin a glance of white and blue. Svetlana—she moved to the Visitation, magnificent and the child leapt in the womb. (She tinted shadow; the wan infant in a cocoon glowed.) For dear Raisa—her thoughts fell there often—and she was painting the Glorious, and Christ rose beyond all reason or hope, stone cracked and crumbling behind his gleaming halo.

Her beads clicked. With a sigh, she straightened the string, winding round her feet and laid drying beads, still linked, across her knees. The end hung loose...for Babushka's beads never had their crucifix. She left that to others, if they would.

Weary of the triumphant, she turned dry aves away, their decade finished and paters gleaming; she paused at the eighth.

Sorrowful.

Thinking of her grandchildren, she painted on: Sorrows, scourging, crowning, carrying... Ivan, she smiled, beginning to paint the crucifixion.

Babushka painted these beads brilliant, bloody shades now—sans Christ. One could not fit his tortured figure; one shouldn't. And memories mingled with the paint, faded and edged by vigil shade, like gilt shadow cast beneath the old icons.

She recalled little Vanka in his crumple-collared shirt, asleep on poor Sonya lap, hands fisted in her skirt as he slept, slept through Easter mass, holding her. She recalled him clever and earnest, waiting on the porch with schemes for Halloween. She recalled his hope of the priesthood, and the fall that kept him confined to the hospital for months.

Oh no, poor dear Vanka—no chasuble, no cope or episcopacy for you.

Her hand slipped, slightly shaking...crimson paint marked her thumb. But the bead was fine, and the cross on it stood bleak and stark as on that Friday, an eternity ago. It stood like a blade, pressed cleanly through the earth and she forgot to paint the dawn behind it.

Poor dear Vanka... Abstractedly, she dabbed at her hand. She recalled him asking, asking about her rosaries and why she never fixed a corpus or cross to them herself. Vanka, dear—I never liked you, she thought.

She woke with the morning sun a slant across her face and the rosary beads askew over her skirt, tangled in one fist. Her paint had dried out. The rocker felt like a knot in her back, creaking, bars pressed through cushions and she couldn't remember her dreams. Of Russia, she knew, of shadows on the tundra and the spires over Petersburg—of snow, black wood, of tales with Baba Yaga—or with informants...

No, no, she told herself; no.

This was a new land. This was her small front room, draped with Old World things. This was her life draped with chicken-leg shadows.

Putting beads and rosary aside, she rose on aching legs and made tea. Strong, black tea; and after a weary turn around the room and through the kitchen, she returned to her rocker and strung the beads across her lap.

For Raisa, she thought, and her fingers found the unfinished Joyful mysteries, three empty beads at the end. She painted the Nativity, bead by bead—the star, piercing-pure; a cave and hay; a baby's human and divine face; wise men, bearing gifts. Gold. Frankincense.

She recalled Raisa asking questions, quietly, and waiting with her dark eyes down. She recalled the girl's lithe frame and hanstands,

vaults, games on the front lawn. Dear Raisa—she smiled, and the fissured lines in her face drew dark shadows down her features—dear Raisa, standing with the silver, thirteen and growing, silver medal like Bethlehem's star on her chest.

Babushka painted well and skillfully. Sometimes she sold her rosaries. Sometimes not. But she never sold the thought-through ones, never sold her grandchildren's memories or their fates.

Mat moya, she murmured. Everyone, she recalled her mother saying, everyone plays a part here. Sometimes we walk the darker lines. Sometimes the lighter. Devuskha, think. Some walk Christ's joy, beginning; some walk his end; some stand somewhere in between. She spread the rosary on the scored tabletop. You see? It's why we call them mysteries.

And old Babushka nodded, thoughtfully. Da. It was so. Pravda.

Gold, for the child. Her hand wavered on the final bead. Gold. Frankinsence. ...Myrrh.

She was painting another when she got the news, painting a Glorious Ascension. Gregor came, out of breath, to tell her. For she had never had a television; and never watched.

Raisa had won the Gold in Beijing.

And she was painting another when Gregor came a second time. No longer out of breath, ashen-grey as winter skies, he walked in tentatively and stopped.

"Da, Grisha? What?"

Ivan was dead.

And Babushka rocked still, a faint smile drawing shadows through her wrinkles. This time, her hand didn't slip. For she was painting a Crucifixion.

"How? Poor little Vanka..." she shook her head, "How?"

A Wandering Mind

I was told to shoot for the stars and aim for the bleachers.
Our hunger sets us apart because we're all God's creatures.
We're used to taking notes as we listen to the preachers,
But they crush our young minds never measuring up to what they
teach us.

They say the harder we work, the more we gain.

I'm doing all I can and still all I feel is pain.

My pops had a heart attack and my mother has tumors,
How do I take it? – Cheap talk of death in everybody's rumors.
I'm confused should I pray to God or should I pray to Buddha?

No response, now I'm taking hits like Zab Juddah.

I don't know how to dress; I don't know what to say,
Baggy jeans and slang is not a good image to portray.

Now I wonder if I phrase the wrong words when I pray,
Is this why I struggle? – The Lord misinterprets what I say.

So I gaze and just look up at the stars,
To clear my mind as I sit with a peaceful entourage.

Journey to Dylan

I love Bob Dylan. I always have, especially after he went electric. He not only spoke for a generation, he spoke to me—to my soul. His lyrics are pure genius.

When I heard he was appearing in San Diego on October 21, 2006, I paid top dollar for two tickets. But it didn't matter. It was Bob Dylan. They were excellent seats—second row from the floor on the right side of the stage. A major score! I never saw him in concert and wanted to share the moment with my adult daughter. We would see Bob Dylan for the first time together and witness a living legend in person.

However, my plans hit a huge snag two days before the concert when I ended up in the Irvine Regional Medical Center Emergency Room with angioedema. My face was distorted—my lips and cheeks were swollen.

To make matters worse, when the doctor saw me, he asked, "Do you know what we do with people who come into the ER looking like you?"

"No."

"We admit them."

"No way! I can't be admitted. I gotta go to a Bob Dylan concert."

He obviously didn't understand. "Not tonight, you're not. You're not going anywhere tonight."

"It's not tonight, it's on Sunday."

"You should be out of the hospital by then."

"Should? I HAVE to be out. I've got tickets!" I continued to plead my case, reiterating how much I wanted to see the concert and how much Bob Dylan meant to me when I was growing up. I tried

bargaining with him, asking him to let me go home if I promised I'd check myself back in after the concert.

"Hospitals don't work like that." The doctor explained that I had an allergic reaction to medication (Lisinopril) and before the night was over, the swelling would probably get much worse because it had to work its way through my system. He hospitalized me in case my tongue swelled or my throat closed. "Right now," he explained, "we're trying to stop a runaway train." I was ticked off.

The nurse wheeled me to my room and my lips felt like they were going to split. I looked in the mirror and saw my entire face swollen and unrecognizable even to me. I looked like a Bratz doll. The doctor was right. It got much worse.

The following morning (the day before the concert), most of the facial swelling disappeared and I expected to be released, but my blood pressure was dangerously low. The nurse explained that the allergic reaction is still in my system. However, when I looked in the mirror, my lips looked fabulous. I applied lip gloss and looked just like Angelina Jolie.

When the doctor made his afternoon rounds, he was worried about my low blood pressure and refused to release me. "Maybe tomorrow," he said.

Are you serious? What if I miss the concert?

Saturday night, I resigned myself to the fact that I probably wouldn't get to see Bob Dylan and decided it was okay to miss the concert. I rationalized that maybe he wasn't an actual person, but a myth or a music god. I felt better and decided to give away the pricey tickets.

Sunday, the day of the concert, arrived and I was still stuck in the hospital. But now I felt (and looked) a lot better and decided to go to the concert after all. Fearing the doctor wouldn't release me, I asked the nurses for the procedure to sign oneself out of the hospital. They discouraged me from doing something that drastic and assured me the doctor would see me soon. I kept looking at the wall clock in my room and it was nearing noon. The concert was in San Diego. I had to leave San Juan Capistrano by at least four o'clock because neither my daughter nor I had been to the Cox Arena before.

The nurses kept taking my blood pressure and were concerned

it was still too low. But I had a plan. I asked one of the nurses to get me the biggest, strongest cup of black coffee she could find. Hopefully, that would raise my blood pressure. I drank it in a hurry before the doctor arrived. He showed up at two o'clock. He took my blood pressure, said it was still a little low, but released me anyway. After he left, the nurses high-fived me. Freedom!

When I arrived home, there wasn't much time. I took a shower, but still had IV tape residue on both arms and hands. Hopefully, no one would notice. My face was a little swollen, but not too noticeable. My lips still looked pretty good. I picked up my daughter at four o'clock. I practically went from hospital bed to rock concert in under four hours.

The crowd was very diverse, ranging from old hippies to high school students. We mingled and chatted with other fans and bought tee-shirts and a program. Inside the arena, we found our seats, which were off to the side, but close to the stage. Then HE appeared. I was disappointed because my hero stood at his keyboard with his back to us—and his head down—wearing a hat. We couldn't see his face. If he only knew what I went through to get here tonight! My daughter sensed my disappointment and hugged me. "I'm sorry, mom. I know how much you wanted to see him."

I told her it was okay because maybe he'd probably turn around and look in our direction sometime later in the show. He didn't. But I still jumped up and down and cheered along with the crowd. I was a happy camper.

The show was over and he didn't perform THAT song. Oh well. However, during the encore, I heard the familiar downbeat. The crowd spontaneously stood and sang the chorus of our anthem, "How does it feel. . . like a Rolling Stone."

When the concert ended, fans rushed out of the venue, but I wanted to savor the moment. I'm glad I stayed, because Bob Dylan and his band stood on stage for about five minutes for a curtain call. I jumped up and down, screamed, and waved my arms. "He's looking at us!" My daughter laughed and hugged me again. We had a wonderful time. We saw Bob Dylan.

Adolf

“Please remove your shoes sir.”

“Excuse me?”

“Sir, you must remove your shoes before walking through here.”

I stared at this man. I knew what he was asking.

Why?

I’m not sure. I’ve never been to the airport before. I’m sixteen and I’m very clever for my age. My parents are letting me fly by myself for the first time ever. They know I can handle it. I’m mildly excited about the airport, but the more I walk around the more I realize that it’s full of the same stupid people I see every day at school. So I suppose I have the flight to look forward to at this point. I’m traveling to Germany to see my favorite table-tennis player of all time. He’s my hero, and his name is Adolf Von-Schlinker. It is by coincidence that we share the same name. Only first names though. My last name is Goldberg. Adolf Goldberg. That’s given me some trouble.

“Sir, will you please remove your shoes and step forward, there is a rather large line accumulating behind you.”

The man is talking again, but I’m not interested in him right now. I’m more interested in the fact that I’m the only one around being asked to take off his shoes. I look to my left and notice the portly blonde-haired woman in the line parallel to mine removing her shoes as well. Maybe they think we’re in on something together. An unlikely crew for a terrorist strike, but they’re getting “smarter” so they’re deciding to target random people that are highly unlikely to commit any crime at all.

I’ve seen the news. I’m very up to date with all these happenings of terrorism in the world. I’m very concerned about the world and all. I

just wished there were better people to save.

“You know, officer--or whatever you are--I don't know her. I've never seen her before in my life,” I said, as I pointed at the woman.

“Sir, if you do not remove your shoes I will have to ask you to step aside to let the other passengers step through.”

I turned to notice that each of the other passengers in line behind me were bending over to take off their shoes as well, as the ones directly behind me were growing very impatient. I could tell they were growing impatient by the way they were raising their voices at me, frowning, and tapping their feet. Some were quiet but I could pick up on their rage. I'm intuitive like that.

So I finally gave in to this obviously unintelligent supposedly security-guard man. It made me feel a bit stupid, but sometimes I think the wisest decision is to let the stupid people think they're smart.

I proceed through the archway that is obviously supposed to be intimidating. It seems rather juvenile to me. I pick up my baggage on the right, which went through the x-ray machine conveyer-belt-thingy. Bright idea, I guess. I didn't check any bags. I don't trust those brutes down by the planes tossing all that crap around. Why would anyone? They don't care about me or you. So, why bother? I crammed two weeks of clothing into one tiny backpack. I have excellent style. I notice a lot of people staring at me day to day. It's either because of my grandiose style, or my haggard good looks. I am the perfect height, 5'4", and have perfect complexion. I have a well-shaped nose, thin ankles, and high cheekbones.

It is a zoo inside of this airport. It's interesting that I've never seen a picture of the airport before. I've seen pictures of most things. Maybe I did see a picture of the airport, and I confused it with the zoo. That's where I feel like I am right now. A lot of people are walking around me at a very fast pace. They are all different shapes and sizes. Kinda like animals. You get the idea.

I approach this large screen in front of me. It is the screen that my parents described to me. I need to find my flight number on this screen. I should have no problem with this. I'm very good at things like this.

I find my flight number and to the right I see my gate number.

I wasn't informed about what gates look like so I will need to use my problem solving skills to find this gate thing. Mine is called A1.

I begin to walk up and down, and on my left is shop after shop after shop after shop after shop. Food, souvenirs, magazines, toys, candy, sodas, clothes, bars, books--you get the idea. I walk and walk and I don't get it. I am frustrated so I decide to speak with someone to find out where my gate is. I feel sheepish.

I approach a woman speaking to a friend. She looks awkwardly friendly and sadly shy at the time. As I get close, I hear her say to her friend, "You know, something new for a change." I turned immediately away. What? Something new for a change. What a completely redundant statement. This woman obviously had no answers for me. New for a change? This will probably occupy my mind for a while. Change would imply new. New would imply a change. What about just, how about something new? or how about a change? The fact that this lady had to use both back to back in the same sentence warned me of her foolishness. She would have sent me on a wild goose chase for a gate that is probably right under my nose.

Why am I even looking for help? I don't need help.

I find the gate on my own. I use inductive reasoning to find it, something most people don't know about.

As I was saying earlier my name is Adolf Goldberg. This has really been interesting, and I've actually enjoyed discussing it with people. Mostly I like winning arguments. I always win arguments. I come from a very long lineage of Jewish people. That is, up until three generations before me when my relatives decided to ditch the religion forever. Good thing, too. I'm not a fan of those types. I guess it doesn't really matter though. I wouldn't have been Jewish anyways. The way I am now has nothing to do with the way I was raised. I am who I am, and I made myself that way. It feels pretty good to have independently matured, another thing that most people just don't get.

A lot of people have a problem with my name. Jewish people mostly. It doesn't make any sense to me. Adolf is a beautiful name, really. They just can't get past the fact that Hitler man killed millions of their people. That kinda makes sense. No one ever takes into account that the Fuhrer had to repeat sixth grade. That's gotta be a blow to the guy's self-esteem. Maybe that drove him into megalomania. Give him

a break, I say. Adolf is beautiful. Plus it's the name of my hero. Incidentally, it means "noble wolf." I'd say that fits me just fine.

At my gate there are people already waiting for the plane to arrive. I made sure I got here at just the right time. These people arrive too early. They are waiting too long. The people arriving just now are too late. They are cutting it too close. What a world we live in, huh?

Alyssa Brooks
Poetry

Peeking

like a whisper without
any wind
it carries through until
lost,
exhausted
taking its heave
echoing through
leaving leftover exchanges
of forgotten conversations

“I wish”
fell silently,
humbly,
softly
like lilac fingertips
the simplistic lover’s touch
giving calming
blue waves of ocean’s
front porch view
under lulled lips
nothing held it closer
than the wind’s name

morning erupted
lifted its eyes
speckled smiles
of answers shot through
as the sun’s eyes hit mine

Flotsam

Meditation never felt so good. At the end of a tiring day, the ocean beckons to me.

The sea, for me, is the antithesis of the modern day. As I scuttle across the surface like a much less aerodynamic water strider, time seems to stop. The occasional glance back at the shoreline is the only indication that I've even moved at all. Many times I wonder if it is not the rest of the world moving, as I lie isolated and motionless, upon my kayak. However poetic I can make this activity sound, it is easily mundane enough for me to describe.

My ill-conceived voyage begins within the confines of Dana Point Harbor. Lugging a beastly hideous, salt rot-ridden mariner's nightmare—a refurbished 60s era kayak—to the docks, trying my best to grasp it as securely as possible. Unfortunately, as ancient as the one I possess is, innovators have yet to come up with a solution, like adding hand notches, to avoid making transport physically painful. Forced to utilize scarcely existing muscle groups, my face transforms to a macabre shade of red by the time I manage to chuck the source of my misery, less than gracefully, onto the pale green surface of the thickly polluted harbor.

Hopping in, much like a kamikaze pilot would, I ignore the fact that my craft is not exactly built for the return trip. Already visibly sinking, no amount of repair could fill the amount of tiny holes that dot its fiber glass exterior. As lazy as I am, it takes the added encouragement of possibly plunging to the depths to get me to paddle quickly. As I dart out of the enclave and onto the main thoroughfare off the wharf, I find myself immediately dodging numerous yachts. The inexperienced rich jerks at the helm ignore my presence, narrowly missing

me. As they pass by so closely, I find myself in a smoldering cloud of cancer-inducing black smoke. Trying my best to avoid the hellish trail of noxious air, I thrust as quickly as possible toward the harbor's exit.

In the open ocean, I can relax much more. Flipping through the song catalogue on my mp3 player, *How to Save a Life* by The Fray entices me. Eagerly, I punch up the volume to hearing-loss decibels. I can now proceed to belt out unflatteringly poor karaoke without fear of persecution. Seagulls, egrets, pelicans, and occasionally a frightened fellow kayaker, panic and take flight, as I approach them with tone deaf performance.

As I paddle from point to point in the endless wave pool, I can't help but feel lucky. The very idea that some people live long lives without experiencing the ocean feels even more painful than when the occasional swing of my paddle yields the red lash-like welts from a jellyfish sting. People are quick to point out the beauty to be found there. While it is true there are dolphins and sunsets, the reality, for me, lies with the other things that can be found at water's edge. There are many objects, far more overlooked, that would be on my list: the scent of the congregation of thousands of sea birds, leaving their excess upon the stained rocks of the shore so putrid that it induces dizziness when I get too close; the tint of the water's surface so covered with oil's sheen that I can't help but wonder if you might be able to ignite it; and the distant and often not so distant roar of a jet ski or motor boat hauling by with disregard for the environment for others. Sure, these realities may not seem as lovely, but they are as much, if not more, a part of the sea as what tired writers reminisce to fill their pages.

As my eyes glaze over from the endless repetition, stroke after stroke, debris pass by me. Occasionally, it's something I recognize from my own world: a deflated balloon (although upon closer inspection, mysteriously, some of these turn out to be condoms), plastic bottles and cans. More often than not, I find even stranger things bobbing by my vessels: uneaten candy bars (still in their wrappers), rubber duckies, waterlogged undergarments, shoes of every size and design. Based on what I come across, the conclusion is that stranger things occur here when I am not around. Each one inevitably brings about an imagined scenario of how it could have found itself there. The but-

tocks are remarkably adaptive. It is well-known that the movements of the sea don't follow any exact code of conduct. Thus, it is not possible to consciously tell the body what to expect. While seafaring stories are filled with mentions of how people have earned their "sea legs," much less emphasis is given to the capacities of our fleshy rear; through endless close calls, in which the kayak appeared far more like an awkward one person teeter-totter, I can merrily say that I have earned my "sea arse" (note: added a Scottish intonation to lessen its harshness).

More often than not, I find myself tempting fate by going through to the rocks. Close to the shoreline, I can hear these juggernauts taunting me. Trying my best to scull quickly through them, I'm often skating on top of them or scraping against them with my hull's side. In hindsight, this is probably how my kayak became the broken-finned laughing stock of the harbor. Anyway, aside from finding myself and the craft significantly more waterlogged, I manage to get to the other side of these oceanic edifices still floating.

It is at this point, nearly halfway submerged, when I realize that it is time for me to go back to the harbor. With some relief that I can now feel less guilty about spending the rest of the day eating cookie dough and watching cartoons, I push myself once again through the obstacles and back onto land. Each wave breaks its own way. Some will push left. Others will tug right. The least friendly ones will break on top of a person, leaving them doused with brine and kelp. A kayaker should feel free to curse and the longer they stay, expect to hear the sea return them.

The Tornado

Screaming.

They were screaming at each other, the sickening sound of loathing dripped from each syllable. The boy tried to interrupt them, to stop them. He counted: one two three four; they ignored him. Five six seven eight, he implored.

Why was the boy saying numbers?

I couldn't tell, but it seemed as if that was all he could say. They turned to the boy. What's that? One says. What are you trying to say? The other asks. I don't understand you. Emotion welling inside him, a wave of grief flooded over the boy, his chest surging with feelings of helplessness. Almost painful, the tears wouldn't spill.

My mind raced: why couldn't they understand the boy? Don't they see he is upset? Why do they fight in front of him?

The boy's hands shot to his face as he began to give up hope of ending the fight. Looking on, I could feel his sadness as if it was my sadness. Looking on, I saw the boy begin to turn slowly around and to my shock, it was me.

I hate this.

I wrenched myself from the nightmare. Like a whale pulling itself up for its final breath, I pulled my mind from the depths of the dream-induced despair only to discover, like always, it remained. Looking up, I tried to make shapes in the cottage cheese-like ceiling texture. There's a heart. There's a lion. I turned my attention to my cat snuggled into the crook of my other arm, and I looked back up to find the shapes once more, but I can never find them again.

My name is Gideon.

Gideon is a chubby boy, not yet nine with sandy blond hair and a spattering of freckles across his face; he had done nothing wrong.

That's what they tell him, they all tell him. Apparently, everyone thinks that little boys like him think it is their fault that daddy is gone. He knew it wasn't his fault, they think they knew how it is, but nobody knows how it is. The dreams are the worst, and no one can ever know the terror of his dreams.

Gideon found solace in one thing: Kamay, his Burmese cat. He didn't know where Burma was but Mommy and Daddy bought him when Gideon was born, all the way in Japan. He was always so proud that his daddy flew airplanes in the army and could take his family to far away places. Who else at school could say they were born in Japan? Not many. Loving his cat, and always moving from house to house, Gideon didn't have many friends, only Kamay. Kamay was always there to curl into his lap, yawn his rancid breath into his face, lick him awake or snuggle him to sleep—

But sleep was what the boy feared most.

The door to the car creaked open, and my mother stepped out saying, "Gideon, get the rest of the groceries." The metallic sound of our gate clicked as she entered our yard and proceeded to the house. Scrambling to grab the last of the groceries, I heard a bang as the door shut. I glanced behind me and as I did so, the locks snapped down. Perplexed I tried to grasp and unlock the thin pencil-like locks, but my fingers could find no purchase and the locks seemed cemented in place. A low rumbling sound began emanating from the front of the car and my seat began to vibrate. Frozen in disbelief, I watched as the stick shift moved as if by some invisible force to reverse. My mother's blue jeep began to glide silently back off the oil-stained driveway. Frantically, I tried to unlock the doors once more, but to no avail, they remained cemented down. I screamed with all my might, every ounce of my strength trying to pour all of my breath into one desperate call for help. The force of my breath seared my throat but not a single sound escaped me. Shaking with fear, I began to beat at the windows, silently screaming, willing my mother to come out of the house and rescue me. My mind was racing--*please! Come outside! Please! I'm alone. Where are you?* The car began driving down the road, tall palms flashing past on either side, out of sight, my hope of being rescued died like a flame in a winter breeze. My hands covered in black and blue bruises, I lay down in the back seat. There was no hope. Amidst

the groceries, my eyes closed in defeat.

I didn't wake with a start this time. I slowly rose from my slumber. But when I did I felt as if all the weight of the world, as if all of the sins and guilt of humanity were upon me. Maybe the weight will break the bunk beds supports and crush my brother beneath me. I just want it to stop, but nothing ever happens my way. I pray for him to come back every night but as time goes on, I realize that just like in my dream it is a futile endeavor.

"Fat Pig! Fat Pig!" Hunter jibed. *"Keep crying fat pig!"*

I sobbed in the corner. My brother Hunter was four years younger than I. He was the exact opposite of me, growing stubborn and bitter in his newfound environment, we always fought. It started with Hunter teasing me. To him it didn't matter that I was older; he was ruthless.

"Fatty," he would taunt while I calmly played with my green plastic soldiers, setting up forts in the bookshelves and knocking them down as each one was wounded in mock battle.

"Shut up. Leave me alone," I would respond; and from there it escalated. Hunter would continue his jibes until I would lash out, pinning him by the neck to the ground.

"Fat pig," he would choke out, his small tanned face turning redder by the second.

"SHUT UP!"

"Fat pig," Hunter said it quietly then and with a smile on his face; he knew he would win; it was a battle of wills, and if Hunter had gained anything through this hellish change it was willpower. He never showed much emotion--in fact, he never showed anything except for rage and indignation. Nothing phased him, neither pain nor sadness.

That is why I lose.

I start crying, thinking, *how could he do this? Why does he do this? Why is he so mean? He is supposed to be my brother, my friend.* The sense of loss and confusion weakens and undermines me, so I throw myself into a corner or in my bed where Hunter taunts me until he becomes bored. When the words stopped, I peek through the covers or between my fingers to see his ratty tuft of brown hair bouncing away. I wipe my tear-stained face, find Kamay, set his chocolate brown frame in my lap and continue my epic battle between the tan and the

green plastic men.

A strange sound made its way into my room. Angry sobs echoed through the hallway. Setting down my men, I rose to investigate. Creeping quietly through the house, an orange glare permeated the living-room, the flaming orange sun was setting, the ocean consuming it bit by bit. Dust motes rose through the air like little frantic fairies flying this way and then parting before my stealthy form. My mom was talking on the phone. I peered around the corner of the kitchen door and quickly jumped back, resting upon the red brick of the adjacent wall. Curiosity bit me and as a result I stayed. I listened as mom cursed the telephone--she wailed, despair in her voice, and she screamed her hatred. I couldn't figure out whom she was mad at.

"I hope you fucking crash your plane that you love so much!"

It was then that I knew. She was talking to dad.

Why would she say that. I loved him, I idolized him. I didn't know why he was gone, I didn't want to know, but hearing mom's words filled me with so much hate it destroyed me. Eyes welling with tears I ran to my room, climbed my blue painted ladder, and buried myself in my comforter. Kamay climbed the ladder after me, wormed himself under the blankets and we both fell fast asleep.

I opened my eyes to the whirling torrent of a massive tornado. The sky was ominously dark; lightening arcing through the clouds, and dust and debris hurtled at unheard of velocities. The tornado rose high into the sky, its peak enveloping the very clouds themselves. The tall pale grass at my feet was bending and waving towards the tornado; it looked as if the grass was bowing to this remarkable show of nature's unholy might. It was coming towards me; the dark bulging mass of nature's fury was coming straight at me and I knew flight would be futile. I braced myself for the impact, but no matter how hard I willed myself to stay put I knew that the roiling tornado would suck me up like an autumn leaf. And it did just that. I felt an unnatural force surround my body and was weightless, almost as if one of God's holiest angels had grabbed me in its arms to lift me straight to heaven. I became infused with feelings of anticipation, fear, and curiosity. Where would I go? Where will this hellish wind take me? My feet left the ground and all such thoughts ceased--I was torn from the earth, my body tumbling through the air. In a gut-wrenching spiral, I was thrown higher and

higher. Mall twigs snapped at my face, dirt clouded my eyes, and a small dog whizzed above my head. I could hear its fearful yowl fade as it raced higher into the vortex. Fear gripped me.

I was going to die.

An embarrassing sense of self-preservation overcame me; all I cared about in this instant was to live, I would give anything for that, to live and be happy. *My* vision was beginning to fade when the tornado shot me free. I had traveled in the vicious spiral all the way to the top, and was shot out like a cannonball through the clouds. Vapor dampened my face, causing me to blink my eyes and further my failing vision, but before I closed my eyes in resignation, I saw the bleak grassland below growing larger and larger, and my heart filled with an immense sadness.

I jolted awake; a cold sweat drenched my whole body, my patchwork pajamas stuck to every part of my skin.

How much longer? I thought.

I hate this.

Still I hugged Kamay even closer.

Ingrid Starrs
Poetry

Seeing Scarlet

Bitter wind carrying serpents bite,
bouncing through trees,
bruising branches deep and hollow,
chilled to the bone by ravaging fire;
roots scratching up and out
gasping for the Son;
the heart fears darkness;
ears push to hear
sticky sweetness,
front to back,
and side to side,
twisted in the widow's web,
exhausted by life's game;
to struggle and run
ain't worth the battle,
so stand up...
fight...
oh God come...
fill the hole
in this one.

Bath Time with Isabella

As the sun submerges itself into the ocean, it takes not only the light, but also my energy. Being a single mother of a two and a half year old takes the endurance of a tri-athlete and the patience of a saint. But despite the draining level of activity, my daughter, Isabella, and I enjoy all the events of our day, as long as we do them together. We engage in numerous activities. We go to the local park for hours, read dozens of books and play with hundreds of dollars worth of toys. Even though running necessary errands is sometimes difficult, they are most definitely an escapade. Every aspect of my parenthood is an adventure and a blessing. However, bath time is a very special time that Isabella and I look forward to at the end of each long day.

Our nightly routine begins at about seven in the evening as I announce to my precious little one that it's time to take a bath. With a smile from ear to ear, she shouts, "Yeah, bath time!" As her not quite three-foot tall body sails into the bathroom, a smile is brought to my face. I quickly follow, only to find her frantically trying to dislodge her head from her t-shirt. With a little help, she is on her way. First her shirt goes flying, followed by her pants and a pretty pair of princess socks. She removes her diaper and properly disposes of it in the trash. As a toddler, Isabella only allows me to help with the particularly challenging tasks.

The sound of flowing water from the faucet elevates the energy of the room beyond the ceiling. With a naked little one behind me bouncing like a jumping bean, I adjust the water's temperature. As the warm, soothing water begins to fill the tub, Isabella carefully lifts one leg over the ledge to test the bath water. She enters without trepidation, for after innumerable baths I have gotten the temperature perfect. After the initial step is complete, she gracefully lifts her petite body into

the tub.

The laughter fills the room and, most definitely, my heart. Isabella's giggle is better than any Toys R' Us doll's giggle. It's not just the simple sound of her laugh that makes me smile; the melodic sound is accompanied with a grin showing all her pearly whites and eyes so big and bright, they sparkle with anticipation and delight.

With all of her bath toys floating in the crystal clear water, she greets "the guys"—Elmo, Cookie Monsters and Ernie. Accompanying "the guys" are a sea of alphabet spongy letters and a family of yellow rubber duckies. Pleasantries are exchanged with each and every toy. The Sesame Street gang gets filled in on the daily events. The Duck Family stars in Isabella's fantasy of choice, ranging from Peter Pan to Cinderella. Letters are used as building blocks to make birthday cakes and pirate ships.

After a few minutes of playing with toys, my little entertainer reaches for her plastic cup, and proceeds to rinse her body of daily dirt and grime. This is the signal for me to reach for her Strawberry Shortcake loofa sponge. With several pumps of Baby Body Wash, our ritualistic bath time song begins. The details of the song are a sacred secret, but as the songwriter I will share the title: "Scrub the Baby." Upon completion of washing each and every square inch of her body, I wash away all the sparkling bubbles perched on her porcelain white skin. Now with the tub is full of bubbles, the fun really begins. As Picasso might have done, Isabella paints the shower wall with abstract art of animals and characters. My job is to decipher the often unrecognizable shapes made of soap and water.

The most challenging part of bath-time is washing her hair. Isabella doesn't exactly like her face to get wet. With several swift motions, I rinse the hair, apply the shampoo and rinse her hair again. Once her thick and beautiful copper red hair is clean, we pat her eyes dry with a towel. With that part of bath time over, the rest is smooth sailing. Depending on the outside temperature, the amount of time she spends in her bath varies. It may range from five to fifteen additional minutes. Each and every one of those precious moments is spent exploring what new and creative things she can do in the tub.

For most, a bath or shower is just a task of monotony and necessity. For me, bath time is one of joy, creativity and bonding. It is a

reminder of the fun voyages we encountered throughout the day and an incentive to provide the best day I can for my precious little one again tomorrow. Even though I know it will be another long day, I always have bath time to look forward to.

The Brisa Motel

Vernon sat where he always sat. The front room had a big slider and Vern sat there, pointed so he could see out the parking lot. I say pointed because for the last 2 1/2 years now he'd been in a wheelchair. Melissa deposited him there every morning before leaving for work at the Wal-Mart. Vern would sit alone until Veronica got there about 40 minutes later. Vern liked Veronica; she seemed to understand him. When she came in everyday she'd move him a little further out and over so that he got a better view of the parking lot and a good view of the southbound traffic out on the highway.

Vernon wouldn't see Barry's truck until it came blasting in the parking lot and skidded to a stop in front of room eleven. Barry was Vernon's son and worked the graveyard shift at the plant. Melissa was Barry's wife and they lived with Vernon at the motel in room eleven. Sunday in the afternoon was the only day during the week when the whole family was together at the same time. Monday through Saturday they had jobs that meant they weren't ever home. Vernon hadn't left the motel in a long time.

It all started when Vernon got sick 3 years ago. Vern went to the hospital for awhile and it all just fell apart--well, maybe it didn't all fall apart but it grew into something worse at least. Medical bills piled up and Vern was able to get loans against the motel until they wouldn't give him anymore and then he signed it over to Melissa, his daughter-in-law because he knew Barry would gamble away whatever was left. The motel did okay, although not as well as before Vern was sick. The bills and debt piled up and it wasn't long before they all had to work. Vern didn't have too much to look forward to, other than the view of the parking lot and the southbound traffic. He'd sit and call out to himself whatever it was he saw....car, car, truck, car, semi, truck...car...

motorbike...car...car...car. Each time ha saw a motorbike he strained to see if he'd recognize it. The only thing he really missed was his grand-daughter, Sophie; she left a year ago on the back of that guy's motorbike and he'd been hoping to see her ever since. Car, car, truck... truck...truck...truck....a lot of trucks today, he thought.

Veronica came in a while later and left just as fast. She came in to get more cleanser from under the sink. After she left he remembered how hard his wife had worked cleaning the rooms when she was alive. He wondered what Veronica always said to him as he sat eating lunch each day. Veronica didn't speak English and Vern didn't speak Spanish. He thought he ought to have learned something after all these years, being this close to the border, but it never had slowed him down until now. It didn't really slow him down but he thought it would be nice to know what she was saying. He heard an electric saw start up and hoped it was Barry getting around to fixing the door in number six. Number six had a door that always seemed to get wet from the shower spray and was constantly warped, rotted or otherwise causing problems.

Veronica came into the office again and said something in Spanish; probably that she'd make lunch soon. She went out and at the same time the blue Ford 4 door in number three rolled into the parking lot. The man and the woman went into the room like they had done every morning since they checked in five days ago. He went in first and she followed him. Today he had a big suitcase. Vernon always watched how folks came and went. He knew all the tricks for skipping out on the bill and even though he knew he couldn't do anything about it, he figured that number three would try to slip an extra person into the room without paying. He didn't have to look because he knew the sign was still up behind the desk advising everyone that extra people were charged extra.

White sign, black border with red letters; he had pointed it himself. Veronica came in and started lunch. It smelled good and he wondered what it would be. Veronica was a good cook and it was always something Mexican. Everyday, with lunch almost ready, she'd go to the fridge and open a beer and they'd share it. He heard the pop of the can and the pouring into the glass; and took a sip when she set it next to him. It was cold and although it was cold outside it was just

right. The woman in number three came out of the room with a small bag and got in the blue Ford and pulled out of the parking lot onto the highway. She hit the gas going north like she wasn't coming back, he thought. Veronica sat his plate of lunch down at him and was saying something he couldn't understand but he figured it was about the woman in number three. She went back into the kitchen and came back to the sofa alongside the slider and ate her lunch. She had turned on the TV to the Spanish station with the sound off like always and began to say whatever it was that she said like she did every day. He ate his lunch and slowly sipped his beer.

They finished lunch and Veronica and Veronica sat saying nothing and Vernon watched Barry pull out to go down to the diner for lunch like he always did. Veronica took the dishes into the kitchen and placed them in the sink. He waited for the kind scrubbing sounds but nothing happened. Veronica walked right past him and out the slider, across the parking lot and towards number three. He watched her pass over the spot the blue Ford had been earlier and into number three. She didn't knock or call out, he noticed, but walked in like it was her room. She came out after about five minutes later with the same suitcase the man had taken in earlier. Veronica swayed from side to side as she came back across the parking lot to the office; whatever was in the suitcase was heavy.

She opened the slider without setting the suitcase down and came in shutting it behind her. Veronica set the suitcase on the floor where Vern's lunch tray had been before and opened the zipper flipping back the lid. The suitcase was filled with money--a lot of money. Vern focused and saw only hundred dollar bills bound together in tightly wrapped bundles. He had not noticed that Veronica had left through the slider and was now pulling up in her old white Toyota. She came around to the slider, passed through and knelt at the suitcase in front of Vern. Quickly and professionally, she counted out several bundles of cash, placing them one after the other on Vern's tray. She zippered the suitcase closed and stopped to look at Vern for a few moments before returning to the Toyota with the suitcase and placing it in the trunk. Vern watched Veronica as if it was something that happened every day and it was just occurring to him that he was going to miss her when she came back through the slider. She passed behind him to

the back of the wheelchair and slipping off the brake, she moved him across the carpet of the office. He hadn't been outside in awhile and it wasn't nearly as cold as he thought it would be.

Veronica opened the passenger door of the Toyota and pulling the side rail off the wheelchair, she used it to support Vern as she passed him onto the seat. She collapsed the wheelchair and placed it in the trunk on top of the suitcase. Veronica climbed into the Toyota, and as she had never turned off the motor, pulled away from the office to the middle of the parking lot. Vern noticed the slider was still open. Veronica pulled to the edge of the highway and stopped; she hesitated, not looking at Vern. Vern lifted his hand and pointed south. There were no cars on the highway and Veronica pulled out and across the road heading south.

David Diaz
Poetry

Me and Steve at 80 mph

blind lights of cars stream by at 80 mph
steve and I rolled in the black Jetta
talking about the workplace
everybody in it

we came to one agreement;
one girl shines above all the rest
I really dug her compassion when the clouds
were gray and the streets were black
we kissed for one night
it was a two-year one night stand
it was good

she treated me like an adult in a world of children
steve liked her smile

and the way she jokes around with him;
he says she makes him laugh
he says she has humor, which is good
in a place full of actors playing the role,
most of them will remain actors to me and steve

I like the original smile too
I guess that is why we hang out, me and steve,
we kind of dig on the same things

the light shines off the hurricane as I break a promise
and I laugh because she thinks I am trouble
I like to play, yeah
but I like for people to take me seriously, too
compassion, yeah. humor, yeah
and steve and I drive 80 mph down the highway
talking about our workplace and everything in it
and everybody in it
all the bright things within the store
and the brightest in it
I need to close my eyes for this love
I swear to god

Woman to Woman

Every woman is a daughter of a mother, and that relationship shares a mysterious intimacy all its own. As far back as I can remember, I was afraid of my mother. Not only did she emotionally abuse me with her fiery tongue, but she also did so with the hands that were made of love.

Growing up in our family was like walking blindfolded through a house of fragile glass. If I wasn't very careful to monitor each step exactly right, a stumble would send razor sharp walls crashing down on my head. It wouldn't be a lie for me to say I hated her. That's why I should have been happy on that afternoon in South Carolina when the doctor asked me to step into the hospital hallway just before he said my mom was dying. Looking back, joy escaped me that day. However, the sequence of events that led her to her dying changed the view of my world forever.

A month before my mother's death, my husband and I attended the 2007 Wedding and Portrait Photographer's International Convention held in the city of lights, Las Vegas. My photographer husband makes his living shooting high-end weddings and special events. Attending this annual trade show allows us to reunite and exchange creative ideas with other photographer friends from all over the world. We've always been known to mix a little business with a lot of fun, but this year was different. On day two of our five-day stay, an eerie feeling swept over me in the middle of a crowded casino: the feeling that I wanted to die. Without symptoms of depression, I realized it wasn't me who wanted to die and wondered if I was picking up on someone else's energy. After all, I was in Vegas and lots of people lose bundles of money along with all their hopes.

I retreated to my room and lit some candles while drawing a

bath, thinking the creepy feeling would melt away in the candle-lit water. After an hour's soak, my pruny skin continued to crawl. By morning, the intensity had grown so great, I told my husband I wanted to cut our stay short and go home. We spent half a day trying to book a flight, but no schedule would fall into sync. At this point, my husband asked me if I could just stay and make the best out of whatever it was I was experiencing. Reluctantly, I agreed.

The first thing I did when I got home was listen to our phone messages. Three days old, message one was my sister saying that mom was in the hospital. "Nothing to worry about, just a bladder infection. Call me when you get home," she said. Until this point, my mother had disappeared into a distant corner of my life. Two and two suddenly began to add up. Without a doubt, it was my mom's energy I was picking up on.

My sister, Ilona, is ten years older than me. The fact we share the same mother makes us sisters, but we grew distant over the years. Impulsively, I called her to gather more information. Ilona explained that what was going on with our mom was no big deal and some simple antibiotics would surely do the trick. Uninterested in what Ilona might think about my weird sensations, I let her in on the unexplainable impressions I had. I asked if she thought I should come for a visit. My sister's analytical approach to life was challenged. She sounded perplexed by the confidence I placed in my own intuition. "Well, I don't know. Well, maybe you should," she replied. I ironed out a few details and my daughter, Mikayla, and I hopped on a plane heading east.

When Ilona picked us up from the airport, she was still stunned by the rapid change in my mom's condition. She informed us that over the last few days mom took turn for the worse. We drove straight from the airport to the hospital. I was grateful afternoon traffic conditions in South Carolina were nothing like the gridlock I'm accustomed to in Southern California. Getting across town took less than fifteen minutes.

We pulled the mini-van into a half-empty parking lot, got out, and made out way though two doors that opened automatically. Following close at Ilona's heels, I made two quick left turns and looked away when I was distracted by an elderly patient in a wheelchair.

When I looked back, my guide was gone. I knew she hadn't gotten far, so I stopped and looked inside each patient's room.

In the third room, I saw a tree outside the window next to her bed. Sunlight cast the tree's spiny shadow in a criss-cross pattern atop the blue flannel blanket, tucked neatly at her feet. Goose flesh tingled on the back of my neck as I slowly walked toward the shell of a woman I once knew. I shook my head in disbelief. Still vivid in my memory was the mother who had been explosive and unpredictably ferocious. When had she gotten so old and frail? Her toothless mouth hung open as a faint heartbeat thumped beneath the faded cotton gown. At that moment, I thought it was too late to unravel the web of pain we wove together over the years.

Tears rolled over my cheeks because none of it mattered anymore. It was unimportant that she was a cruel and abusive woman in the past. Seeing her again, so helpless, wiped away my own injustice. My only desire was for her not to suffer. Helplessly spellbound to foreign sights, smells, and sounds, I felt as if I'd stepped into a swirling flood, slowly sucked in by myriad memories from long ago. Asphyxiating emotions took rise inside me as a sudden interruption of body heat pressed in next to mine. Twelve-year-old Mikayla, my little lamb, was dropped into the lion's den of death beside me. Unlike my childhood memories, the young recollections of Grandma were fond because her visits were never unsupervised. At my side, she squeezed my hand while in the other; she held an open box of tissues. I think she wanted to comfort me as much as she needed comforting herself.

When making his rounds, the doctor asked to speak with us outside. Somewhat out of body, I followed him into the hallway. Focusing on his mouth moving, I heard him say, "There is no physical reason for your mother to die." Her vital signs, heart, lung, kidneys were all strong and working well, but he explained her condition to be "Adult Failure to Thrive." Simply stated, a switch was thrown in her brain, creating resistance to the idea of food and drink, which became repulsive to her. He explained that Mom was asleep now, but would wake up periodically and then fall back asleep for longer periods of time. Eventually, she would voluntarily starve to death and would need someone to stay with her. The hospital staff would arrange for Hospice Care and Mom could be released as soon as the next day.

The sterile notice sent a shockwave riffling through my body. Questions arose over how everything could get done in such a short period of time. Mikayla had to return to school in California, and Ilona needed someone to stay with Mom in South Carolina while she worked. Unable to be in two places at once, I hopped on a flight home, dropped my daughter off and returned to South Carolina to move into my mother's house indefinitely.

The Hospice nurse arrived as planned and said it could take between three to forty-five days for a person to die from starvation. I settled in for the long haul. Each day, I woke up before morning light. Possibly because I was jetlagged, but more likely because I was afraid mom would stop breathing during the night. Everyday I tiptoed down the hall and peeked around the corner before entering the family room. Once inside, I stood at the foot of her bed and prayed. In silence, I waited for the dawning of Mom's eyes and thought about how sunsets, the birth of a child, or death of a loved one can change a person. These glorious experiences are junctures where God drops in and imparts His truths to us of unfamiliar horizons.

Without notice, the silence broke when Mom's eyes fluttered. I rushed in and cradled her face in my hands. My eyes screamed unspoken words, trapped by a tight throat and heavy tongue. One breath pressed out after another, each more labored than the last. In her natural environment, she slowly became like a fish out of water. We stared at each other and unusually sweet smells floated in the space between us and I said it. "I love you Mom." She gasped and mouthed, "I love you, too." Her eyes closed and she returned to sleep. I knew Mom wouldn't open her eyes again. Her body was shutting down, and we said everything to each other that needed to be said. It was almost a month since I'd been home, and I wanted to get back to my family. It was agreed that I'd return to California and begin funeral arrangements.

My last cross-country trip gave me plenty of time to think about my relationship with my Mother, and how a fire was generated by emotions rising out of fear. Her temper was a burning distraction as she lived, and moved. If I stood too close to her emotions, I became consumed. But when I cut myself off from the fire completely, I missed out on the life-giving gift of a warm touch. As Mom's human

nature diminished, her spirit increased and I was left with the sweet breath. As her facade faded, I saw her true self emerge as a shining child of God. By walking this journey of her death, the value of surrender was obvious to me. Surrendering to vulnerability clearly became the master plan in this circle of life. A veil lifted from my eyes, because when I looked around airports, restaurants, and shopping malls, I saw God's children hidden in adult bodies, longing for their divine moments of restoration.

It was early evening when my husband and daughter picked me up at John Wayne Airport. We stopped to eat, and then headed home. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I returned a few calls and turned in early. The next thing I remember was a gentle kiss on my cheek followed by crushing pain traveling across my chest and running down my arm. Trapped in the place between consciousness and unconsciousness, unable to open my eyes, I moaned, "What is happening to me?"

Somewhere in the dark distance behind my head, I heard my husband say, "I don't know." "Oh Joe, it hurts! I can't breathe!" I slid both legs off the side of the bed and laboring to sit up straight. Seconds stretched into minutes as my tongue grew fat and fell into the back of my throat. Powerlessly coughing, I tried to clear the deep weight from where it did not belong. In a gasp, my blocked airway cleared as I rolled back into bed. Slowly, the gripping pain began to release my chest and drained out the end of my fingertips. A profound cleansing breath filled me. As I exhaled, it seemed as if my being was connected to invisible gas shooting into space. Freely expanding into wonder, I experienced the most beautiful freedom I have ever known. Without missing a beat, the phone rang and I was sucked back into the confines of my body as fast as I had left them. My eyes opened abruptly as I shouted, "Oh! No!" The clock read eleven-o-two.

Joe picked up the receiver, "Yes...Okay...I'll tell her." He clicked the phone off and stood at the side of the bed trying to make sense of what he had just witnessed. Joe turned on the light and stood staring at me with the phone still in his hand. The expression on his face was strange when he said, "That was your sister. Your mom just died of a heart attack. She was choking so Ilona put her fingers in your

mother's mouth to pull her tongue out from the back of her throat. Your mother took two more breaths and then she was gone."

The clock read eleven-o-four. I had experienced my mother's passing at the exact same time she had. Suddenly, I realized I spent most of my adult life thinking I was different from my mother, and that we were as far apart as the East is from the West. When in truth, every cell in my body, except for one, split from her own. Intimately, she carried me in her womb, rocked me to the rhythms of her soul. I had been in her and she is in me. I can't fully explain what happened that night when I experienced my mother's crossing over. But what she passed onto me, woman to woman, I will never forget. I was afraid of dying, afraid that it would hurt. It does hurt, but no more than living through childbirth. Really, dying is more confusing than painful. The thing to remember when lost in the pressure of confusion is to bare down and trust, because on the other side, all is well.

The Plant

What could he possibly be doing down there? Lindsay's husband, Peter, spent too much time in the cellar of their large farm house. And it bugged her. Whenever she asked about his project, he explained, "It's almost done. I'll show you then."

Being married to a busy botany professor had its drawbacks. Besides teaching, he was also busy on the lecture circuit. He was much too busy for her. She felt neglected. "I have needs," she told him.

"Be patient. Pretty soon, when it's finished, you won't be lonely again," he assured.

But Lindsay was impatient and began a series of affairs. Her latest flame, John, was actually her husband's assistant. While on one of their trysts, she asked, "Does Peter ever talk about an experiment he's working on?"

"No. Why?"

When she explained what was going on, he said, "Babe, you gotta leave him. Just say the word and I'll get you outta there. Promise you'll call me?"

Lindsay agreed. Until lately, she had no intention of leaving him until . . . the cellar. But before she left, she needed to get into the cellar to see what occupied so much of his time. His clandestine activity soon became her obsession, so she decided to do a little sleuthing. Peter carried the only cellar door key on him, so she had a plan.

One morning, after he left for work, she entered their large kitchen and dropped a mat on the tile floor. She knelt in front of the cellar door, pulled a credit card from her jeans pocket and began working the latch. The doorknob wouldn't budge. She brushed her long, blond hair from her eyes and continued. Her next weapon of choice

was a large paper clip. Lindsay straightened it out and tried picking the lock. But the paper clip was slippery and sharp. "Ouch!" She looked down at her right index finger. It was bleeding.

She ran over to the kitchen sink, turned on the water, and held her finger under the spout until the bleeding stopped. Lindsay retrieved a band aid from the overhead cabinet and then gathered up the mat from outside the cellar door. Totally frustrated, she cried. *Get a grip, Linz.* So she grabbed a bottle of wine from the refrigerator, went outside and sat on the porch swing.

It was a beautiful summer day and bordering their property were large majestic pine trees. As she looked around, she noticed large barren patches in Peter's beloved vegetable garden. *How weird. I wonder why it's dying.* A soft breeze blew across her face. She smiled and dialed her cell phone. "John? Can you talk?"

The window! She quickly slipped on her sneakers and walked on the porch to the back of their beautiful home. Once there, she jumped off and crawled under the porch. Small stones and twigs dug into her knees and palms and as she inched her way toward the small window. *There it is.* Peeking inside was futile because the window was boarded up from the inside. *Damn!* Lindsay tried opening it, but it was locked. Because it wouldn't move, she backed up to the window and kicked it in. *Crash! Good thing I wore tennis shoes.*

She screamed out and kicked at the boards again and again... harder and harder. However, after many attempts, she gave up. Broken glass on the ground made it difficult to move away from the window and a few shards found their way into her knees and palms. She dropped to her stomach and wept. *You bastard!* Covered with dirt and grime, Lindsay wriggled her way back onto the lawn.

Tonight she was leaving. Evening was best because Peter had a bad habit of coming home at different times during the day. He had no set pattern. At least when he was asleep, she knew where he was. No surprises.

Not wanting to raise suspicions, she slept with her husband that evening. As she waited for him to fall asleep, minutes turned into hours. Lindsay watched the clock on the nightstand and glanced at the

nearby window.

Moonlight shone through partially opened drapes and cast an eerie shadow across the room, spraying a glow of light over his face. When she raised her head to check if he was asleep, he startled her by opening his eyes.

“What are you looking at?”

She struggled for a believable answer. “The moonlight was streaming across your face and you looked so peaceful.”

He mumbled something and turned away from her.

That was close. Her head fell back on the pillow and she waited ...and waited.

When Lindsay heard him snore, she slipped out of bed and tiptoed into the bathroom. Her “getaway” clothes were neatly folded under the lid of the clothes hamper. She quickly changed from her nightgown into a black sweat suit and sneakers. After she tied her long hair into a knot, she slipped on a black beanie. When she finished dressing, she tiptoed to the closet and picked up a backpack. On her way out of the kitchen door, she grabbed a flashlight from the counter.

Once outside, Lindsay took a deep breath. She was grateful the moon offered some light. Even though she proceeded cautiously across the lawn, twigs broke and dried leaves crunched under her shoes.

What if he hears me? She turned and looked back at the dark house. No one was following. *I must be paranoid.* To save time, she opted to use a shortcut to meet John, who waited in his car near the highway. On her way into the woods, Lindsay deliberately stomped through Peter’s vegetable garden. However, her chosen path wound through the thickest part of the forest, limiting the amount of moonlight to guide her.

When she felt safe, Lindsay put on her backpack and turned on the flashlight. Unfortunately, the rustic trail made it difficult to run. It was dark and everything looked the same. *Oh, my God. I think I’m lost.*

Snap. Crunch. *What was that?* She froze, but the only sound she heard was her heart beating. *It must be my imagination.* Lindsay quickened her pace and stepped in a small hole. When she fell, the flashlight flew out of her hand with the beam turned away from her. Snap. Crunch. The noise moved closer. She stood up and limped

towards the flashlight. Before she retrieved it, a pair of men's shoes appeared in the spotlight.

The man stooped down, picked up the flashlight, and shone it on her face.

She screamed. Trying to run was impossible. Her ankle was too weak, so she dropped to her knees and crawled across the twig-riddled earth to escape. Terror forced her to go on, but there was no escaping the flashlight's beam. Snap! The sounds got louder indicating he was closer. Lindsay screamed when her pursuer reached down, grabbed her hair, and pulled her up.

She cried out, "Who are you?"

There was only silence as her captor moved the light to his face. It was Peter. She struggled to break free, but he was too strong. Lindsay had never seen him this angry. As he led her back towards their house, she begged, "I'm sorry. Please let me go. I promise I won't leave you again."

But Peter didn't answer. Instead, he silenced her with duct tape and forced her across the lawn and back into the house. Dragging her across the kitchen, he dropped his wife's bruised body, face down in front of the cellar door. He held her in place by stepping on her back while he unlocked the door. After he pulled her up, he shoved her down the cellar stairs, and scurried after her.

He's gonna kill me. Lindsay cried as she lay in a heap on the cold floor.

But he walked past her and unlocked another door. He then grabbed her arm and pulled her across the concrete. When he pushed her inside a large cavity, he pulled off the duct tape.

"What are you going to do to me?" she screamed.

Lindsay struggled to stand, but the floor was too slick. *Where am I?* Pulling herself up by holding onto the walls was impossible. They were too slippery.

He stood at the door and smiled down at her.

When she realized the nature of her prison, a hollowed out orange gourd, she screamed, "Peter. Peter."

"Pumpkin eater. Had a wife and couldn't keep her. He put her in a pumpkin shell and there he kept her very well. Very well indeed."

So this is his experiment! This is what he was doing in the cel-

lar. "Why are you doing this to me? Why?"

"For two reasons. You're obviously very unhappy here, so I thought I'd put you out of your misery. I also needed the perfect compost for my dying vegetable garden and the human body was the only ingredient missing from my formula."

"No!" she shrieked while holding her head in her hands.

"You can scream all you want, but no one will hear you. The walls are soundproof. But soon they'll rot away and so will you. Incidentally, you don't have to wait for your boyfriend to save you. John's my assistant and I paid handsomely for his loyalty. Who do you think told me you were leaving tonight?"

The heavy door closed with a dull thud and he locked her inside.

Speed Kills

Every once in awhile, I spot a tree on the side of the road, any road, that is adorned with flowers, balloons, or praying hands--a memorial at the very spot where someone has died. It's a reminder to drive safely; somewhere there's a family mourning and repairing over the loss of a loved one. whenever I see such a commemoration, I am reminded of the orange flowers and letters for my brother at the side of the road, and remember vividly the events of his death.

I climbed in the front passenger side of my brother's green Honda Accord carrying with me that months issue of US weekly. Dan, a friend, got into the back seat on the driver's side. The car smelled new with a touch of Curve for men. We blacked out of the long driveway toward the road. We lived in Georgia next to Currahee Mountain, so the way to town was downhill and curvy. It was a two-lane highway called Homer Road. We were on our way to get dinner.

My brother liked to drive fast by preference. On January 3, 2000 he reached his highest speed. I was frantically flipping through my magazine cursing at pictures of Jennifer Love Hewitt for capturing the attention of all the boys' hearts. It was my only distraction from how nervous I was. I asked him repeatedly to slow down, but he was selfish and didn't listen. For no reason at all Dan switched sides. from behind the drivers seat to the seat behind mine; a life saving move.

With two hands still on the steering wheel, he turned to Dan in the back and said "Holy Shit Dude! We are going 90!" When I heard this I took my eyes off of the page and up the road. His body was still turned around ignoring the fact that he was merging into the next lane about to hit the oncoming truck. I pointed and screamed, "Mike look

out!" My brother grabbed the wheel. "Oh Shit!" He yelled jerking the wheel in the opposite direction. When he did this, my head bashed into the side window.

I woke up an hour later to the sound of my mother, "Amy, it's time to wake up for school." She turned on my bedroom light. I saw the stickers on my door and my mothers hand flipping the light switch up. I opened my eyes. A tire was spinning. The surrounding area was a blur of brown and green. I closed my eyes. When I opened them again there was a strange man standing over me. He knew my name. He wanted to know if I knew the date. I did. He asked me who the President was. I responded "Is it still Clinton?" the man had a brown mustache; his name was Warren. He lifted me into a strange room. Moments ago my mom was waking me up to go to school now I was being put into a vehicle by a stranger. Warren told me that were in route to the hospital, and asked if he could have the sirens turned on when I remembered that I was supposed to be getting dinner. "Michael! Where is Michael!" I asked Warren. My voice was loud and shaking.

"Shut up Amy, shut up!" I heard someone say. It was Dan, he was in the ambulance with me. That was when I realized that my brother was not okay.

"Let's just worry about you right now Amy!" Warren suggested. I tried to close my eyes. I wanted so badly to go to sleep. "Amy, you need to stay awake okay! I need you to try and be alert." Warren spoke in a friendly voice. He joked that he was wearing overalls. I participated in this jargon, but I needed to rest my eyes.

The next thing I knew I was being pulled down a hallway. When I opened my eyes I saw white walls with bright florescent light panels on the ceiling. Like I had been abducted and was now aboard the mother ship. Streams of tears just flowed down my cheeks. I thought that I needed my face to be dry because if it got too wet I would itch. I was put into something orange. A man in a jacket, a doctor, began to yell at me not to move. All I wanted to do was get up, I couldn't hold still. He told me that if I moved I would damage my neck, spine, and possibly my brain. I remember not liking him; he didn't say please. My friends' mom was a nurse at the hospital. I recognized her red hair. She came to give me a tetanus shot. I hate

needles. Somehow she soothed me into it. I felt much better when she ran her hand along my skin when she had finished with the shot.

I was moved down another hallway. This time I was aware of people. I could barely make them out but somehow I recognized them. My dad came to me while I was being wheeled into another room. I couldn't see him, but he told me that he was there. The sound of his voice was more comforting than the nurse's touch. I was safe. I heard a woman come to him and say, "I am so sorry Dr. Luem." He went with me to get the x-rays. I was wearing my favorite pair of jeans, and a plain black shirt. These items were cut off of me with scissors because they didn't want to move my body. They told me that I was going to need a CAT scan. I didn't know what that meant. I knew that I was going to be put in this small little tunnel and I had to be especially still. I was upset about my clothes, so I demanded that they allow me fall asleep in the machine. They let me.

I was woken up in yet another room where a doctor told me that I had fractured my T-4 vertebrae, sprain my wrist and ankle, and suffered "one hack of a concussion". I had no clue what T-4 meant other than three more and I could sink in a battle ship. Dan had to have several stitches across his back and shoulder, and had a severely bad tear in a ligament in his knee.

The damage should have been worse considering that the car did an upside down nose-drive into a tree in a neighboring front yard less than a mile from home.

The only thing on my mind was going to bed. My dad came back into the room this time with my sister in tow. I couldn't see them standing next to me as I was forced to look up due to a heavy brace around my neck. I will never forget what happened next. In between sobs my dad said, "Amy, Michael is with Jesus."

I already knew that. My brother had died on impact. It was a good thing. His head trauma was so severe that if he had survived, he would have lived the rest of his life a vegetable. I responded, "It's going to be okay dad. I need to sleep."

Obsession

I would brutalize myself, attempting to bleed out the pain of my heart the only way I truly knew how. Most of us are known as “cutters” although I disdain the phrase. The many connotations it holds leads others to believe that those who do have this addiction, whether it be mild or severe, inflict these scars, burns and bruises upon ourselves for the attention of it all. To the contrary, attention is the last thing I was attempting to gain from the fascination of cutting my skin, watching it bleed and hoping and praying it would scar. I was looking for a way out, to free me from myself. For a long time, my obsession with the disfiguration of my veins took over my life.

I can recall the day my father first saw the neatly cut slices on my left wrist, vertical (if I had cut horizontally, I would have looked weak, although I was not trying to end my life) and clean cut; done with a kitchen knife while he was asleep. I had been lying on my bed, a tank top on, arms exposed, forgetting that my wrists may have still been oozing relatively light colored blood. I hadn't learned yet how deep I really could go. My head was resting on the palm of my hand, my elbow sunk into my comforter when my father gasped and began asking questions. I hadn't been prepared for anyone to ask me what exactly those vertical gasping wounds were doing residing on my wrists. I stuttered and stammered excuses, unaware of how I was to explain. I remember him walking out of the room in silent anger; I could feel the coldness exit the room. That was the day he had realized I was different.

Most people don't find satisfaction out of inflicting physical pain upon themselves whereas I have an obsession with it. Most people will never comprehend why this would induce real and actual pleasure, a numbness I'd never experienced before. I knew all too

well, and regardless of my parents pleas for me to stop. I continued on and on. I became worse, finding different weapons against the pain that resided in my soul: kitchen knives, cardboard cutters, lit cigarettes, exact-o knives and even when all of those were hidden from me by my parents in fear of producing more gashes upon myself, I would resort my razor. I picked and prodded the horizontally set blades with tweezers until one would pop out; my fingers bleeding with contempt for myself, for my desperation. I needed to cut. I needed to insult my skin, bleed myself dry. I needed to punish myself for my past; the pain and memories burned into my brain would not evaporate.

When it came, the compulsion, it generally started in the pit of my stomach, and after all these years I have yet to recognize it before it's far too late. Panic stricken, anxiety ridden, I still get that way from time to time; doctors say it's a chemical imbalance. Although recently the attacks come months and months apart; I nearly forget all about them until they return. It starts deep down, and progresses up, up, up. It prickles underneath my skin and I can't stop it, it seeps through my veins and I rid myself of the feeling the only way I've learned how; cut, cut, cut, scrape, burn; inflict, cicatrix. It's a simple process, really. The panic swims through my veins, so I bleed them dry, hoping that the more blood that trickles out, finally the hurt will leave my body too; logical to me, insane to everyone around me. Sometimes I'd hide in the dark from it; confine myself to a black closet for hours, my hands over my ears, rocking back and forth. Or I'd scream until my vocal cords ached and begged me to stop. Then maybe the throbbing inside of me would find its way into the air and not back into me. But we need oxygen to live, so I'd breathe it right back in. When those attempts wouldn't work, and I knew my parents would punish me for punishing myself, I would smoke, sniff and swallow as much as I could until I felt the same incoherency I would feel when I cut. Mumbling and nodding off at the sight of blood, the same way drugs made me feel. The tears would cease whether I was smoking black tar heroin, sniffing cocaine or hacking at my arm with a lacerated cut-co knife. I would forget about the panic, and about the assault my mind was imposing on itself. Clear as day I was lacking the ability to cope; I could never control when the bomb would explode.

Occasionally, when the panic attacks would become so ruth-

less and cruel, my entire mind would erase the occasion in which I brutalized myself. Doctors will call these black-outs. It's as if someone scribbled a story across my mind, and then erased it completely, although everyone but me could recall it. One particular black out, I cut so deep I could have truly bled dry, and stitches were necessary. Maybe I would have learned my lesson if I had remembered it at all. All I can recall is a haze of alcohol, pills and blood streaming down my arm. Elbow to wrist. My father and I had had been in yet another fight regarding my incessant drug use and I made my way out the door, a bottle of painkillers in one hand, a hunting knife and a bottle of Jack Daniels in the other. That's when the memory stops. I don't remember swallowing the entire bottle, and washing it down with the booze, I don't remember dragging the knife across my skin until I saw bone. I surely don't remember my brother finding me in the bushes a mile away, near the creek. I still don't believe I was intending to overdose, although I was told later as I was kicking and screaming my way into the emergency room I shrieked at the doctor who was later to save my life to let me die. I was stitched up quickly, apparently, and a tube full of charcoal was led down my throat. The last thing I remember was waking up, my extremities strapped to the sides of the bed, barren of clothes except a paper hospital gown and my fathers head on my stomach, holding my bloody hand, tears from his eyes dropping hastily onto the crackling blue paper that covered my body.

I wish I could say that the cutting and the drugs stopped there. But there are countless more instances where I've blacked out and caused more and more heartbreak to my family. It took a long time for me to stop, I attend self mutilation anonymous meetings and I work on a daily basis to cope. I knew I was out of control, and still have scars to prove it, although most have been removed by a laser. When I hand a check to deposit to the bank teller, I see her glance at my arms, then quickly avert her eyes back at the computer screen. When I shake someone's hand, there they are; all purple and pink, some faded to white like a canvas of my pain for all to see. Sometimes I'm ashamed of what I've done to myself; sometimes I still want to do it. I've relapsed once or twice in the past year but I've found a way to somewhat curb my obsession with blood and scars and sharp objects. I realized hurting my body was doing nothing but causing bore humiliation upon

myself. Maybe I'll never truly overcome it, and it will be a constant struggle, and infatuation. I can't say that every time I come across a razorblade I don't get the urge to snatch it and stuff it my wallet. You know, just in case.

