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L i t e r a r y J o u r n a l



W A L L

WALL

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Wall

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*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.*

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Goddess Pele
Nancy Ako

Mother Earth

spews liquid rock through broken seams

and heaving molten red

rends the sky in birth

Ants and dogs

splintered churches

tumbling screams

all us broken children

ain't dead yet

ain't dead

no

A churning cauldron

all our swirling nightmares

falling

blinded lemmings to the sea

End Brenda

Sid Watts

Oh poor, dumb girl. Not just dumb, ignorant too. The two go hand in hand, but in this case, ignorance wins the war of character. At this degree of ignorance, any self-unaware entity would find such a level of bliss that it would be responsible for innocent bystanders throwing their partially digested daily diet upon themselves. In which many cases I felt the urge to do so, but only to have my oral cavity pointed to that of the instigator. Her. My girlfriend's friend/roommate/ex-friend/ex-roommate.

The date is approximately February something, 2000. Maybe January, maybe March; I don't know anymore. The drive took around twenty five minutes with an average speed of ninety-five mph. There weren't any vehicles on the freeway due to the late hour, so occasional speeds in excess of one hundred thirty mph are reached. I arrive at my destination, park under a tree, and inhale the warm tires. This isn't the first time I've gone to my girlfriend's apartment, maybe the second or third; but it will be the first time that I come in contact with her friend and roommate, Brenda.

It's cold, and I can't wait to get inside. I quietly jog up a flight of stairs and lightly knock on the door, careful not to wake the neighbors. The sound of unlocking can be heard and the door opens partially without a creak. From that partial opening instantly shoots out a perky head with large googly eyes, similar to that of a muppet.

"Hi! Are you Sid?!" happily questioned the guardian muppet with her high-pitched voice.

"Um, yes. Hello."

"Oh cool! I'm Brenda!"

"Hi there, Brenda."

Silence. Literally a whole two minutes of silence with me standing outside the door with my furrowed brows and stupid grin, nodding my head and rolling my eyes, pretending to observe the uninteresting surroundings. I feel the cold air beginning to freeze my head.

"Oh, you should, like, come inside!" suggested Brenda the savior.

"Oh yeah, heh, thanks."

"Kat should be out any second! She's in the bathroom probably peeing!"

"Oh, um, cool," I muttered as I slowly crept into the warm apartment wondering to myself why I just said "cool."

I uncomfortably sit down on the fluffy couch. Brenda flops down with her legs under her on a couch perpendicular to mine of the same make, only smaller and a bit less fluffy.

"So, Sid . . . hmmmmmm . . ."

“Yeah, hi . . .”

“You have spikey hair! Isn’t that, like, really hard to do?! I mean I could never do that! Not that I want to or anything!”

“Ohhh, where is Kat?” I start to desperately wonder to myself.

To my delight at that very instant, Kat slowly emerged from her bedroom wearing black pants and a light blue turtleneck. We decide to go get coffee. Brenda decides to go with us. The coffee house is about a half a mile away and we arrived within a minute. We drank our bitter coffee to the tune of some meaningless chatter from Brenda, and then the night was over.

That was the first encounter with Brenda, and in no way did I find her to be ignorant, egotistical, unintelligent, or even slightly annoying. All I saw was a perky girl. But in retrospect, I realize that first night was just a tasty treat of things to come.

The next day, I decided to visit Kat after my classes were done. The time is six p.m., and traffic is slow which results in taking me about an hour and fifteen minutes to arrive. Once again, I’m greeted by Brenda.

“Hey, we’re like, gonna go get dinner and stuff! Wanna come with us?!” questioned the genuinely curious Brenda.

“No thanks, I’ll just drive back home,” I thought to myself

“Um, so do you wanna get dinner?”

“Yeah, sure.”

We decided to go to the Spaghetti Factory. After tasting my salad, I decided that it might need just a tad bit of salt, seeing how my salad dressing was a plain vinaigrette. But you see, the oddest thing happened before I was about to dash a little salt on my salad.

“EEWWW OH MY GOD WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” said a frightened Brenda.

“Um, I was, uh, just gonna put some salt on my salad . . . uh . . .”

“You’re going to put SALT on your SALAD?! I’m sorry but that is DISGUSTING!”

The tables around us stop what they’re doing for a brief moment. Confused and startled, I look at Kat for some moral support.

“Brenda,” Kat explained, “your ranch dressing technically has more than five times the amount of salt Sid was about to put on his salad.”

“Whatever! That’s just gross!”

I feel the tickle of cold steel in my warm, detached hand. The warmth severs me from the rest of humanity, and I slowly raise the trembling gun to Brenda’s head with sweet anticipation. The room gets dimmer, and I develop a sickly grin as I look into those flickering eyes, confused and so alone. There’s a buzz in the back of my head as my muscles tense and pull the trigger closer. A tiny red dot forms between her stale eyes as the back of her head sprays teeth and gobs and gobs of thick tomato paste. “Heh heh,” I lightly mutter to myself with a pale,

grim face, "Is that a tongue?"

"Honey," says a far off voice subtly resembling Kat's.

"Um, are you like, okay Sid?! You're like, talking to yourself! Weirdo!"

"Ahem, but of course, Brenda. I was just. Thinking. Heh."

The conversation ends quickly. An extremely uncomfortable silence hovers over our table like a bubble. I consume my bland salad quietly, and the bubble remains un-popped for the remainder of the dinner.

After dinner, we attempt to drive home. The silence still fills the humid atmosphere, ringing in my ear. Brenda decides to interrupt the beautiful silence with a suggestion of coffee. Kat and I simultaneously deny her clichéd suggestion. Brenda insists. We give in. We arrive at the coffeehouse ten seconds later. I order an Espresso, Kat orders a hot chocolate, and Brenda probably ordered something stupid; I can't remember. After receiving our ordered beverages, we maneuver between and around punks, scanning the area for a place to rest our bums. We finally find an empty bench and attempt to communicate with each other.

"So you go to Saddleback, huh?"

"Yeah, Brenda."

"Do you like, like it? I mean, it is a COMMUNITY COLLEGE so, well . . ."

"Not really. I'm not too much of a school guy."

I notice a subtle shine of confusion in Brenda's left eye. I can see it, I know it's there. Must resist urge to kill.

"Like, why do you go to school if you don't like it?!"

"Brenda," Kat cuts in smoothly like a ballerina, "most people go to school to just get it done with and get their piece of paper saying that they graduated. Sid's not studying to be a doctor or anything."

I feel good. I feel supported. Kat knew where Brenda was going and she attempted to destroy Brenda's argument before it even took form. Without Kat, I would feel naked. Take that, Brenda.

"Whaaaaat?" asked the scarecrow.

"What, what?" I tensely replied with a fake, but trembling, confused smile.

My right eyelid twitches uncontrollably, and the breathing stops. The voices in the background fade rapidly into murmurs. Slowly, not to scare the cattle, I reach for the plastic spoon left on the table by its previous inhabitants. I feel the smooth plastic at my finger tips as they clutch the engraved handle. My motion must be quick, and I know it will be. My teeth smack each other, and my head slowly tilts downward into the abyss below; all the while a light hiss can be heard from under my tongue. Everything is slowly getting darker and calmer. Without warning, my hand whips spoon first, lodging the plastic utensil into the side of her thick neck, allowing cherry syrup to dribble in blobs and an occasional squirt of pure satisfaction to exit. Her eyes begin to bulge, as the nectar begins to make way from her mouth, spilling onto her clothes as it continues to

spray from her neck.

“Sid, you’re hissing.”

I look up to see a concerned Kat with grin and raised eyebrow. The voices come back. The lights aren’t so dim anymore, and people aren’t moving in slow motion.

“Just clearing my throat, honey.”

“Um, like, what’s with the spoon?”

“Let’s go home,” I coldly suggest, ignoring Brenda.

The drive back was relaxing. We arrive home, and Brenda scurries off to bed like a squirrel.

Months pass by, and things keep repeating themselves. I visit Kat, I see Brenda, I kill Brenda. Sometimes I would look at Kat, and it would appear that she too was committing murder. Kat’s tension towards Brenda was growing, and it was obvious. Brenda wasn’t a very clean girl either. Her room reeked of mold, and her plates would go unwashed for weeks. One time, while Kat was away, Brenda left out a plastic jug of milk for 3 weeks. The milk had actually completely solidified. Kat finally conjured enough courage to throw the jug out, for if she didn’t, it would have remained on the counter forever. As she slowly walked out to the dumpster, the jug began to hiss, and a putrid smell that resembled Brenda in our minds filled the air. Kat’s hatred was growing.

Brenda wasn’t a smart girl, but she wasn’t blind either. Brenda had stopped talking to Kat almost completely. That’s when Brenda decided that she didn’t wish to be roommates with Kat anymore. And with that, Kat moved in with me.

As for Brenda? Kat and I strangled her with her own intestines and hung her from a lamppost. She just swings back and forth in the back of our minds while we drink a warm cup of coffee and watch the sun go down.

Lying In Bed

Marlene Hickey

I like to lie in bed alone
in the pale light of dawn
when he goes down
to make the coffee.

I wrap great armfuls
of warm around me and call
back the dreams of night.
In the dark I tumbled
helter-skelter, headlong
through the broken landscape
of lost, forgotten days,
but now I roam the grayish land
mid wakefulness and sleep,
where I can rout the fearful
phantoms of my dreams.

I like to lie in bed
in the dawn-pale light
until it deepens in the room
around me, and I float
into the morning of my life.

Yellow 5

D. Kroner

the stagnant Mind yearns
for a date with complacency.

the most popular girl
on any walk; these days

provoking women
run in subterranean exile

Vanished are Dreams
of utero Lucidity

tunnels of myopia: beeping,
ringing, driving; devouring

Hope is in sentient tears
Love is in catharsis

a meticulous earth

s n o w b a l l i n g

the tangent humanity

biodegradable graves;
walking on infinite streets

Nightmares in omnipresent
strip-mall; General America
(allegiance)?

Unmask the impostor; and,

Please don't flush me down the toilet
When I Die

Tina

Emma Chu

When I was born, my parents owned and ran a greengrocer. In those days, if you wanted meat, you went to the butcher; if you wanted veggies, you went to my dad. Nowadays, everything your heart desires is all located conveniently under one neon lit roof. Of course, I was too young to remember all that. When I was three my parents called it quits, quits to the greengrocer business, and quits to their marriage. Before long my older brothers, sisters, and I were riding on the top of cardboard boxes, packed with our worldly belongings, in a moving van heading helplessly into a new life.

Our new home awaited us on a street that was a relic of the late 1800s. I remember even at the tender age of three seeing the house for the first time, and shuddering. Squashed between rows of eight houses identical to it, the old Victorian residence stood tall and menacing, the brickwork black with grime from years of smoke and exhaust fumes, a survivor of Germany's Blitz. Three dark and eerie windows equally spaced on top of each other fronted the house, and next to the bottom bay window stood a tall, narrow, front door. The black paint on the door was chipped and peeling, and I glimpsed the remains of ancient red paint underneath. I remember when I pushed through the heavy black door for the first time, I felt a rush of cold, stank air. What I felt chilled me to the core. The inside appeared just as archaic as the exterior. A long black and white tiled hallway led to the foot of a narrow flight of stairs, which appeared to ascend into darkness. As I stepped further into the hallway, a loose tile snapped and crumbled under my feet.

Because I was the youngest of five, I felt that I was doomed to stay in that house. The two oldest siblings were lucky enough to escape as soon as they could, and before long another one left, leaving just us two, my brother and me. With no bathroom (just an antiquated outside lavatory), washing machine or other modern convenience other families enjoyed, we were considered poor. Everyday at school, I would be teased unmercifully for having scruffy shoes and second hand clothes. Because of this I was constantly getting into fights. Once I flushed a classmate's head down the "loo" because of her taunts, forcing her to spend the rest of her day with smelly wet hair. Unfortunately, most of my memories from school are of times I spent in the headmaster's office. I don't think he quite knew what to do with me. When school was out for the holidays, it was a relief for us all. Unable to make friends, I sought companionship in the only place I knew--solitude. One particular Easter morning, I decided to explore on my prehistoric "second-hand" bicycle. My adventure took me into the countryside to a place I would remember for the rest of my life.

In the beginning I watched from a distance, fascinated by the vision I had

stumbled upon. A group of young girls floating around and around, and up and down; heads without bodies in a field screened by a large thicket fence. As I tiptoed on my rusty pedals to peer over the bush that partially hid them from view, I saw what was soon to become my passion. In single file, and moving with a rhythm that could be heard in each melodic foot fall, four magnificent looking horses paced effortlessly around a large grassy arena. I watched in awe as each one passed by: the first one brown, the color of chocolate with a mane as black as night; next a sandy colored palomino whose creamy tail seemed to dance in the breeze; then another with hues of copper; and last a white one the color of freshly fallen snow. I closed my eyes in an effort to process what I had just seen; as I did, I caught the scent of their sweet smell carried on the wind, and I heard their snorts and bellowing breath as each were urged on.

Reluctantly I opened my eyes and shifted my gaze from the horses to the riders. Four girls about my age all turned out in jodhpurs, riding jackets, velvet hard hats and expensive shiny black knee length boots were perched high on their mounts like a plastic couple on a wedding cake, stiff and unmoving. In the center of the ring stood a man wearing the same type of outfit, but with a checkered flat cap in place of the hard hat. He was calling out instructions to the students. Feeling extremely insignificant, I studied the lesson until it ended, wishing I could be one of those girls. Later that night in my cold, stark bedroom, I dreamt of horses. The next morning I had a plan.

Packing a picnic of sugar sandwiches and lemon barley water, I headed off on my trusted two-speed and made my way back to the stables. Leaning my bike against the same thicket I had stood next to the previous day, I marched up the long cobbled driveway with a determination I had never felt before. "I'm a good worker, I'll work hard. Whatever you want me to do, I'll do it," I practiced saying to myself. As I neared the trailer marked "office," I paused. The early morning atmosphere was cold and damp; frost-covered ground crackled under my feet. It felt like winter. I looked around and saw no one. A horse whinnied in the distance; another one answered. A cluster of bluebells, stretching from a long winter sleep at the foot of a large oak tree, caught my eye. I remember thinking how beautiful everything was when shrouded in that delicate veil of white. Nature, waking slowly from a season of gray skies, waited patiently for the sun's warming glow.

As I stood at the door of the office, I felt a knot tighten in my belly, my legs felt like jelly, and I was beginning to have doubts. Just as I was about to turn heel and run, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

It was the instructor I saw giving the lesson yesterday. "Is there something I can help you with, young lady?" he asked in a rather posh voice, his warm breath forming a soft vaporous cloud in the chilly morning air.

Suddenly I felt very conscious of my torn jeans and dirty red raincoat. "Um, yes," I stuttered nervously. My legs were weak; I couldn't move. "I was won-

dering, um, if you needed any help, with the horses, that is?" and after a slight pause, I added, "I'm a good worker." The man glared at me. I looked away. After what seemed like an hour but was probably only a minute, he spoke. "I think we can work something out," he smiled. "When can you come?"

"I'm not in school now," I answered. "As often as you like." Like the cowardly lion in the Wizard of Oz, I felt my strength returning. I looked up at him and smiled back.

"Good," he said. "Be here tomorrow at seven. You'll muck stalls, groom horses, and lead them for beginner instruction. In return I'll give you one lesson a week."

I could not believe my luck. I was ecstatic. Not only was I going to be around these magnificent beasts, but I was going to learn to ride them too.

Although the ride from my house to the stables was about two hours, the journey was extremely pleasurable. Happy and free I'd ride as fast as my legs could peddle, away from the grime of the concrete city and from the creaky old house in which I lived. Gone were the stench of exhaust fumes, sweaty construction workers, and the choking smog of industrial waste. Soon I would be surrounded by green meadows dotted with expensive homes, set within freshly mowed lawns and manicured gardens. I can still remember the heady aroma of the countryside, the intoxicating scent of dewy grass, the muskiness of sodden trees permeating the early morning air. While biking to my favorite destination, I would sing "Abba" songs; my heart was filled with joy. "Knowing me, knowing you aha-a . . ."

Two years would pass in what seems like a minute now, but felt like an eternity then. A father would appear briefly, and with his return came the promise of purchasing a pony. Miss Tina entered my life in the form of a spirited equine; she was as strong as an ox with a personality to match. She became my constant companion. Our favorite escape on warm summer evenings was an old abandoned railway track that stretched for miles. We would meanderer its length with not a care in the world, every dainty footfall accompanied by the sound of crickets and the buzz buzzing of honeybees. As we walked, I would watch Tina's beautiful black mane bob up and down with each nod of her elegant bay head, and I'd wonder what I must have done to deserve such a friend.

Nearing the end of the track, we would turn back the way we had come. I remember feeling the pent up excitement in her athletic body, each powerful muscle tensed in anticipation of the gallop home. Responding to a slight squeeze from my leg with an ecstatic buck, Tina was soon galloping joyously at full speed. The warm wind whistled noisily past my ears; I welcomed its embrace. Faster and faster we would go. I was glued to her back; we were one. At the end of the long run, we would stop to catch our breath, both shaking with adrenaline and exhaustion. I can still remember the smell of her sweat, and the feel of her wet coat as the froth on her neck rubbed off on my fingers.

That year was the best year of my life, and yet it was my worst. My father was unable to provide the receipt for her sale after firing a crooked stable manager, and Tina was taken from me. I never saw her again.

Time went by, and I stopped working at the stables. Eventually we moved from the old dilapidated Victorian house to a modern rabbit hutch council--one with central heating and a toilet inside. On a pinewood dresser in my cardboard box bedroom stood an old black and white photo of my once prized possession. Every now and then, I would make the long journey on my rickety bike back to the stables, stop by the thicket, and peer over the fence in hopes of catching a glimpse of my precious pony. I never did see her. Someone informed me she had been sold on. Instead, I watched the pretty girls dressed in their perfect outfits, sitting all proud and stiff, urging their gallant steeds on, and I wished I were one of them.

Safe Again

Kevin Toth

Three summers ago, Claude asked, "Isabelle, will you marry me?" and I, of course, said yes.

We live about a mile outside of the village now, in a tiny house that sags, weighed down by age and moss, near the cliffs that look out over the ocean. Claude spends his days packing fish at the harbor. He comes home smelling of brine, his shirt stained pink, with barely enough money to support us. The location of our home does have benefits, though. It's a perfect place to watch the fiery sunsets of the short summer months. Much better than the small attic window, the only one that faces west, in my father's house in the village.

During the rest of the year, though, the air is cold. Harsh winds rattle windowpanes and wrap themselves around shivering trees. The sea is covered with a fog so thick that waves and sky become the same shade of gray, merging together until one is indistinguishable from the other. The view becomes one of a featureless void, and the cliff's edge may as well be the point where the world gave up its expansion.

I have a kind of ritual. Every morning, I wake up before Claude and slip out of bed. Some days are easier than others. Often, he'll have one of his thick arms about me, and I'll have to gently untangle myself, careful not to stir him. I stand up and smooth out my baby-blue nightgown. The hem of the skirt always tickles my ankles. I wince as I realize that I left my slippers in the dresser across the room. The floorboards there always creak. Retrieving them would be too great a risk, so I'm going barefoot this morning.

Making my way into the kitchen, I take stock of my sacrifices-to-be. There is an empty green wine bottle on the table, left from last night's dinner. I lift up the lap of my nightgown to make a little basket, and I place the bottle in it. I go to the cupboard and remove a porcelain dinner plate, one in a set, a wedding present from Claude's mother. The plates are pleasant enough, painted with dainty pink roses and looping stems, barren of thorns. This plate has a chip along the edge, though. The smooth enamel has flaked away, exposing the rough chalky beige underneath.

I also take some old silverware: a knife and a spoon. These I have to lift slowly from the kitchen drawer using my thumb and forefinger like a pair of tweezers, so I don't rattle any of the other utensils.

Most of the time, I'll just take old bones from the garbage bin, or crispy blackened wood from the fireplace. Today, though, I've decided to treat myself. I only take things from the kitchen about once a month. The last thing I want is for Claude to notice the missing pieces and become upset. He'd say, "Isabelle, do you know what's happened to our silverware?" and I, of course, would have

to say yes. I would have to tell him everything. But he's such a nice man. He shouldn't worry about such things. Since I'm holding up my skirt full of kitchen goods, opening the house's front door becomes something of a chore. I've had enough practice, though. I can turn the handle with my elbow, push it open with my back, and catch it behind me with one foot to prevent it from slamming shut.

The cold dew on the tall grass sends little frigid spears through my feet, up my back, around my neck, down my arms, into my fingers. It's interesting that no matter how well-covered your body is, if your feet are cold, the rest of your body is likely to follow suit.

After a short walk, I'm standing by the cliff, the last thing between earth and the void. I peer over the edge. The fog prevents me from seeing the rocks below, but I can hear, faintly, the sound of the crashing waves. I set my cargo on the ground beside me, and take the silverware in my hands. The least impressive stuff goes first. I wind up, and with a small grunt, toss the spoon and knife over the edge. Moments later, I am rewarded with a faint tinkling sound above the crash of the surf.

Next goes the plate, spinning downward like a discus. It explodes into dusty white shards with a sound like knives and ice.

Finally I throw down the bottle. It twirls end over end, and when it hits, the sound of smashing glass is accompanied by a popping noise. It must have something to do with all of that empty space on the inside.

Now, like every morning, it's my turn. I get as close to the edge as I dare, and put my feet together. I stretch my arms out and close my eyes. Someone could ask, "Isabelle, are you thinking of jumping off that cliff?" and I, of course, would say yes.

It used to be that I was afraid to get near the edge. I'd stand a yard or two away as I threw my bits and pieces over, or I'd crawl on all fours. Now, though, I'm not so timid. I just walk right up and let my toes curl over the side. Here, now, anything is possible. A bare foot could slide on wet grass. A pebble could pop loose from its home and the cliff could give way. The wind coming in off the sea grabs at my nightgown and presses the fabric to my body. I wobble for a moment, and there's the heart-wrenching thrill I always get when I think I'm about to lose my balance.

I imagine myself smashing against the rocks below, the extremities of my body flying apart like the plate or the bottle, my fingers and toes lost among the pebbles and shells. In these visions, my eyes are always wide open when I hit the beach. I can see Claude and our families at the funeral. All the guests console the mourning husband. So sad to have lost her, they'd say. Such a wonderful girl, never complained about anything. After some time of unhappiness, Claude moves on. He meets a young woman with green eyes and a giggle that rewards his jokes. They marry, and fill the limp little house with children and

brand new silverware. Meanwhile, my stray fragments lay at the foot of the cliff, bleached and salted like driftwood.

A strong gust of wind pushes me back from the cliff's edge and snaps off the end of my reverie. The chilly air, so easy to ignore just a moment ago, fills my lungs and raises goosebumps on my skin. The morning fog has cleared slightly, and I can make out the shiny black rocks far below, cold and desolate. There has to be some better place for me to go. I start shivering, clasping my arms around myself, and I long for the warmth of Claude's body, radiating through the lemon-dyed sheets of our bed. I turn away from the cliff and the sea for another morning and head back to the house.

Claude will wake up, unknowing of where I have been, or what I have done. He'll say good morning, and I'll say good morning, and on occasion, he'll ask me, "Isabelle, are you happy?" and I, of course, will say yes.

The Peace Crane

Panida Ferris

The art of “Origami” actually originated in China around the first or second century and did not make its way to Japan until around the sixth century. The term “Ori” is the Japanese word for folding and “kami” means paper. To this day, every time I see an Origami, I think of my Mom. When I was around seven, she taught me how to fold the best Origami of all: the Peace Crane. One could never imagine that this ordinary paper craft had any meaning or history to it.

In 1945, when the United States dropped the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, there was a little girl by the name of Sadako, who was just two years old at the time. By the time Sadako reached her 12th birthday, she discovered that she had leukemia as the result of the radiation from the atomic bomb. While Sadako was in the hospital, she was reminded by a friend of an old Japanese legend which promised that by folding 1000 Peace Cranes, you would have a wish granted. Sadako began to fold paper peace cranes up until her untimely death when she had accomplished folding 644. Her wish of being cured never came true. Since then, the peace crane has been a symbol of world peace in memory of Sadako. Each year on November 12th, children from all over the world send 1000 peace cranes to her memorial site in Hiroshima. Imagine a bronze statue of a little girl draped by thousands of paper Peace Cranes, in every size and color. What a beautiful sight that must be! So much history in such an ordinary craft.

I remember marveling over how anyone could possibly have thought up so many steps that resulted in this beautiful Paper Crane. My Mom and I used to fold them out of as many color papers as we could find. We really enjoyed talking while we were folding our Peace Cranes. More often than not, we would talk about what I would do when I grew up. She had high hopes for me. “I think you would make a great doctor,” she would say. “You’re smart enough.” On rare occasions, she would talk about her childhood, about how poor they were, and about how her parents could only afford one school uniform for her. After school, she would come home and wash her uniform and hope it would dry completely by morning. She wasn’t the kind of person that said much about anything, except when we were talking about how important school was. I never knew much about her. She immigrated to this country without knowing a word of English. Saved enough money in one year to send for me to come to the United States when I was two years old. Like most immigrants, she worked hard. Years of waiting on tables and saving until she could afford her own business. Her first business was what you’d call a franchise business. What this meant was that she worked hard and gave away one half of

her profits to the franchise. Her first business was a 7-11 store. She started with one and eventually had several.

As the years rolled by, we had fewer and fewer memories of spending time together. She was busy with her own business and I was busy growing up. Entering my teen years as an only child was not a pleasant experience. We had other issues to deal with besides school. We had issues of boys, friends, phones, and going out, all issues that were viewed as distractions to my studies. She saw it one way, and I saw it another. We just couldn't seem to meet in the middle, but it all came to a halt in the summer of 1980.

The Hospital. What a dreadful place to work. I remember thinking about how I would never be in the medical field. When I was 17, my Mom was diagnosed with cancer. They used to allow me to sleep at the hospital with her. I had claimed a personal space in her room. Exactly three feet from her bed, between us was her I.V. machine. The hospital was my home away from home for three months while my Mom was ill. I understood quickly that if rest was what you needed, the hospital was definitely not the place to be. If they weren't waking her up to poke something at her, they were waking her up to check on her. The difference between night and day did not really exist between the walls of the hospital. Nurses would come and take blood at one in the morning sometimes.

My mom went through so much that summer. She was in a lot of pain. They administered morphine every four hours to relieve her of pain. She needed her shot from about the third hour. The nurses were quite adamant about waiting until the clock hit four hours before they would give it to her. After a couple of days, I figured out the system and started rallying them up around the third hour. "Hi, I just want to remind you that my Mom is due for her shot at three o'clock. . . . Hi, it's thirty minutes to three. . . . Hi, it's ten minutes to three, could you get it ready?" The nurses were irritated with my persistence; and at the same time when they weren't mad at me for antagonizing them, they would let me know what a good kid I was. Looking back, I really didn't understand the depth of my mom's illness. I really thought that they were going to fix it and that we could then take her home, in which time, we could continue our twosome power struggle which was, of course, in intermission while she was in the hospital. I wish that I could have had more insight to better use our time together. I wish someone would have told me or that I could have figured this out.

We spent our days and nights participating in awkward conversations about things that didn't really mean anything to either one of us. We chose our words carefully. Not once did we apologize for hurting each other's feelings. For mistakes. Not once did we tell the other that we cared. It wasn't always like this; I remember how we used to talk. We had so much to say to each other. I used to race home from school. I couldn't wait to see my mom to tell her how my day

went. She used to get so excited to see straight "A's" on my report card.

Something happened on the way; we just stopped talking and engaged in power struggle sessions. An example of a typical power struggle episode occurred the summer after I turned 16; my Mom notified me that if I thought I should make up the rules on how much time to spend on the phone, I should get a job and pay for my own phone. I said "okay" and walked to the store to buy a newspaper. The following week, I had a job, not just any job, but a job at an insurance company as a receptionist/secretary, which paid \$800 per month, more than my Mom made at the time. I got paid and notified my Mom that I now had a job and could pay for my own telephone.

A few months later we sat in the same room and neither one of us could think of a thing to say. We were both so stubborn; we couldn't see straight. That summer, the Olympic games were going on so we talked sports. Every sport, you name it. Gymnastics, running, long jump, swimming, and the list goes on. Neither one of us even liked it, but sports was what rescued us from the awkward silence. Not only did I watch it with her, I took it one step further: I'd race downstairs to the hospital's gift shop each morning for the paper, grabbing the sports page to find even yet more information for the both of us to mull over. When lunchtime came around, I'd ask my mom what she wanted to eat and sneak it in. The staff would know we did this, but they would of course pretend that they never saw anything. The funny thing was that it was impossible to miss the spicy smell that circulated through the entire hospital floor. I think they knew how sick my mom was and they decided not to worry about the small stuff. They would always warn me to "stay in for lunch" if they knew that her doctor was going to be making his rounds to check up on her. They were great. I don't know how they did it. Day after day, seeing so much illness and suffering did not make them calloused. I remember riding down an elevator with one nurse who said, "Your mom really appreciates you being here with her; you know that, right?" My 17-year-old response was "Yeah, I guess," but I remember thinking that I wished that nurse could observe us for 10 minutes to see how awkward we were together. When nighttime came, I remember always hearing her I. V. machine beeping all night. A slow beep at intervals of 2 minutes, all night long. I still cringe when I think about that beeping noise.

A mother and daughter relationship. What a simple yet complicated thing. Two people that care the most about each other. Two people who possess the gift of driving the other absolutely crazy. The older I get, the more I understand my Mom. Like all Moms, she did not take a course in raising a child nor did she discover an instructional book that was delivered at the time of my arrival. She did the best that she could. There are times when I've learned from her mistakes, but there were also times when I took what good I've learned and applied it towards my own children. I've learned from her that there is good and bad in every relationship. She never told me that; I just know that I've

learned that from her. Not every lesson in life has to be one that is told to you. I believe that many of the important lessons you learn on your own. That pivotal moment when the light bulb goes on and you say, "I get it." I consider these lessons to be the best kinds of lesson. I've learned how precious life is, how there are really no guarantees how long we will all be here. I've learned never to assume anything. Research it, know where you stand.

Three months later, my mom died. Two weeks prior, we argued. I was staying with friends. I woke up that morning with a strange feeling. To this day, I can't really explain what I felt. It was a feeling of dread, a lump in my throat. I don't recall even thinking before I picked up the phone. I just knew that I wanted to call. They told me that she had died during the previous hour. We were at odds, and I never had a chance to say goodbye. I kept putting off saying things I wanted to say, things I thought of but never said. We all go through life thinking that we have all the time in the world. But we sometimes don't. I was stunned. It's like watching a scene in a movie, except you're in it. I hung up the phone and took the longest shower of my life. When you feel bad, sometimes you think you can just wash it all away. I guess I thought maybe it would all go away, but it didn't. As I came out of the bathroom, I stepped on something. I reached down and picked up what felt like a piece of paper, except it had pointy edges to it. It was a paper Peace Crane. It startled me, I couldn't really understand why it was there. I asked my friends if they had placed it there, but no one claimed responsibility; in fact, no one knew how to fold a Peace Crane. It stunned and scared me at the same time. I think it was my Mom's way of telling me that everything is fine. You always hear of inexplicable things happening to other people, but never even connect that it can possibly be true. The Peace Crane; a symbol of peace. An ancient Japanese legend has it that if you fold 1000 cranes, you can have a wish granted. One Thousand Cranes. Here in the palm of my hands, the first Crane. I guess it was now up to me.

Remorse

Ruth Duncan

Biting cemetery winds
Swirled memories past,
Changed unrepentant sins
 Into regret,
At my mother's grave.

Father

Chayah Kramer

Sometimes I feel like I'm still
in the flight path of your forearm;
sometimes I stand before the mirror
searching for the bull's-eye on my brow,
for the x-marks-the-spot in my smile.

Sometimes, when I close my eyes,
I can still see my skin painted
with the purple-blue of new bruises
against the greenish cast of past sets,
in palettes too vivid to send me to school.

Sometimes I halt like a deer in headlights
when I hear a yell that reminds me of yours;
sometimes I freeze when a parent screams
at a child how life would be better
if she'd never been born.

Sometimes I flail myself with your words:
imbecile, idiot, worthless, loser;
I can still hear your sneer
as you passed judgment on my merit-
good for nothing but fucking and birthing sons.

Sometimes I feel like a child,
small and brutalized,
and sometimes, when I inspect myself
for imperfections through your eyes,
I find them.

Hands

Lori Cardoza-Starnes

My daddy's hands were strong and brown
and in them--
magic.
From calloused palms and blue collar nails
fell ritual blessings over tucked-in sleepers
and the precision readings of too-flushed brows.

Charms in fingers made for milking
or assembly line engines
created light!
(albeit porch)
to resurrect muttering teenagers
from places dark

and far.

A sorcerer's hands conjuring brews from air
to fill six hungry mouths.
With so much strength in one fell point
silencing

-like that-

laments of sullen woe.

Enchantments hover from spells still cast
with the tools of his magic bag:
rosary beads, linguisa pans, go-fish-cards,
old tin cans, nature books and
one thousand angels' prayers.

And if I beg or meditate,
perchance somewhere he hears.
And in these hands--
my own, from his--
my hopes for an inheritance lie.

The Philanthropist

A. Jacobs

The annual meeting of trustees neared completion as Leonard Bishop, President and Chairman of the Board for the non-profit foundation "Education For All," began his concluding remarks: "It has been proposed and seconded that the Trustees of this Foundation shall each receive a bonus in the sum of two hundred fifty thousand dollars. Please indicate your approval by a show of hands. The resolution has passed. Unless there is further business to come before this meeting, it will be declared adjourned. I see no indication of further business. The meeting is adjourned."

As several members rose to their feet, the Chairman turned to his correspondence secretary. "Angie, have those minutes typed up this afternoon so I can approve them." He then motioned to one of the trustees, Ralph Modine, who held the post of Chief Financial Officer, to follow him into his office. Once there he closed the door securely behind them. In the charity business, Leonard, now in his fifties, had clearly found his niche.

"Grab a seat and bring me up to date on the West Virginia project," said Leonard.

"We've got the testimonial from that hayseed teacher, and here's a picture of the schoolroom we asked for. I think it's bleak enough to send out with our solicitation letters. It should tug a few hearts."

"Naw, not shabby enough. Take a look--that light fixture's almost modern. Feather it out and stick in a bulb hanging from a cord. Ah, and that kid on the left side, he's got new clothes on. Scratch him. That oughta' do it, and send the hillbilly the five hundred bucks like we agreed. Now, how do we stand on finding someone to front the new Revitalization of Learning campaign?"

"Not so good. We've been turned down by almost everyone. Nobody'll lend their name to this thing."

"A wash-out, huh?"

"Nearly. The only taker was Billingsdale, Exeter University's Provost, but he wants a 2-year guarantee at three hundred thou a year plus a cut of the take."

"Uh, no way. If there's one thing I can't stand it's a greedy bastard."

"There's another possibility," said Ralph. "This may seem out'a left field, but my kid turned me on to someone from his school. The guy's name is Horace Grassly. He's been teaching seventh grade there for twenty years and with budget cutbacks, it looks like they're going to retire him. I checked him out. He's fifty three, no police record, doesn't drink or carouse, and actually has a Ph.D. from someplace . . . Prairie Teachers College. His only defect seems he's honest, but I guess we can live with that."

"Hmm . . . Dr. Horace Grassly . . . has a nice ring to it. What'll it cost to get him?"

"That's the good part. Retirement pay won't cut it, so he'll need extra income. We can land him for fifteen hundred a month. And even better, he'll come into the office to kinda' bird-dog the operation . . . y'know, handle the ad campaign and correspondence.

"O.K. Ralph, see what you can do. We gotta get this Revitalization on the road, and Grassly's all that's left. There's a bundle to be made if it's handled right."

Month's end saw Dr. Horace Grassly in his new position. His ten-foot-square, windowless office contained desk, chair, filing cabinet and word processor, but his title more than compensated for a lack of fixtures: Executive Director of Revitalization of Learning. On his first day, Leonard dropped by to greet him.

"Ah, Doctor Grassly, I'm Leonard Bishop. Welcome to our organization. I've heard fine things about you."

"Good morning, sir. I'm pleased to be here. It's an inspiration what your foundation is doing to advance education, and I assure you I'll devote myself to making it a success."

"Yes, thank you. I'm confident the project is in capable hands."

After firmly shaking Grassly's hand, Leonard strolled down the hall and into the coffee room where Ralph Modine was sitting alone. "I just had a talk with Grassly," said Leonard. "Does he have any idea what he's doing?"

"He knows he's raising money."

"Where does he think it's going?"

"We never discussed that."

"Well let's hope he doesn't ask," said Leonard as he walked out and headed toward his office.

The Revitalization project, in operation for four months, was proved effective, with over seventy thousand dollars weekly being generated under the guidance of Horace Grassly. Late one Friday, Grassly knocked on Leonard's open doorway.

"Doctor Grassly, it's a pleasure to see you. Please come in and have a seat."

"Oh, thank you sir. I just wanted to take this opportunity to speak with you. It's been so invigorating to be a part of this important project these past several months."

"As I predicted, you'd do a fine job, and I understand it's coming along well."

"Yes, and in that regard I wanted to give you my input on funding recommendations from the many letters I've received." said Grassly.

"Funding recommendations . . .?"

"Yes. The general consensus is that about forty percent should be devoted

to the primary grades with the balance allocated to the secondary level, with a general fifty-fifty split between instruction and equipment. With your approval I'll get on this at once."

"Well now, we hadn't quite planned that part yet. We want to give this a great deal of thought before we actually commit to expenditures."

"But sir, we've taken in over nine hundred thousand dollars these past four months, and the need is overwhelming. There are so many schools that. . ."

"Now look, Doctor Grassly. I appreciate your concern, but the selection will be made in a more formal manner. The board will form a committee later this year and each possibility will be investigated."

"Do you mean that nothing is going to be done for months?"

"Well, we mustn't rush into this without . . . ah . . . due consideration."

"But there's one school just a few miles from here that's in need of textbooks, and for only a few thousand dollars we could. . ."

"Ah, haste makes waste, you know. Now trust me. I know how these things should be done, so just leave it to me." With a somewhat glazed look on his face, Horace Grassly rose to his feet and slowly headed toward the doorway. "I think I'm beginning to understand," he said.

Seven weeks passed after that Friday conversation, with little contact between the two during that time. Leonard mostly forgot about it until his phone rang. It was Ralph, and he sounded upset. "Leonard, we gotta talk--I'll be right down."

Within minutes an agitated Ralph Modine entered Leonard's office and closed the door behind him. "Leonard, we got problems."

"Oh, what's that?"

"It's Grassly. He's been diggin' into everything. He's uncovered our whole operation, says he's ready to send stuff to the Attorney General and close us up. He's probably got enough to send us both away for five years."

"He wouldn't!"

"He sure as hell would," said Ralph.

"Christ! What does he want?"

"I'll tell you what he wants. He thinks it's time you retire, and he'll take over as Chairman . . . and he's got the Board in his pocket."

"And you too?"

"I'm afraid so, Leonard."

"So. . .?" "You'll get a million-dollar going-away present."

"Just like that, Ralph?"

"Yeah, just like that." Leonard managed a weak smile. "Maybe I been workin' too hard," he said. "I guess it's time I took a long vacation"

At the Special Meeting of Trustees, Dr. Horace Grassly, President and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the non-profit foundation "Education For All," addresses his colleagues: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to have

been selected as your Chairman. I want you all to know of my devotion to education and of my intent to pursue this goal tirelessly and in the finest tradition of scholarly endeavor. Be assured, however, that the example set by our esteemed founder, Leonard Bishop, will always be a guiding cornerstone as we continue our quest for excellence in education. Now then, you may expect some enhancement of our scholarship programs, though, naturally, it's far too early to know when. And I anticipate greater involvement in assistance to impoverished schools. Umm. I'll form a committee later in the year to investigate this. But as you see, ambitious goals will be set for which we can all be proud, though of course we mustn't rush into anything without, ah, due consideration.

"Having established these basic principles, there are now certain priority matters that must be addressed at this time. Umm, I would entertain a motion that the Trustees of this Foundation each receive a bonus in the sum of three hundred fifty thousand dollars. Do I hear such a motion? Good. Do I hear a second to the motion? Excellent. The motion has been proposed and seconded. All in favor that the Trustees of this Foundation each receive a bonus in the sum of three hundred fifty thousand dollars?"

Silver Oak Terrace

Ann Brown

It lofted into the air, a beautiful trajectory, the timing perfect. The expertly thrown water balloon sailed off the upper terrace, hovering over its target in the street, and fell with a satisfying splat on the hood of the unsuspecting car. A sharp shooter couldn't do any better, nor practice any harder. The sun beat down, as I practiced my deadly aim. Dreams of glory filled my twelve-year-old head. I could save the castle/fort/home by swiftly reloading. From the pack of balloons, I refilled my next batch of ammo. Hefting the squishy water balloon, I practiced the eagle-eye accuracy necessary to connect the ammo with the cars passing the street in front of my house.

The terrace, high on the third story of our hillside home, provided a secret place to launch my missiles. Enraged drivers could not see who had thrown the offending water balloon. I became instantly camouflaged by simply ducking below the terrace wall. It was a very high perch, a hundred feet above the street. I spent hours alone, while Mom was napping, carefully judging the exact point the balloon had to leave my hand, hanging almost suspended in the air, before it would drop mercilessly on my chosen target.

What a perfect place to be a child. Imagine a private terrace off your bedroom. Built on a hill, our three-story home had a foreboding, English Norman facade. Very castle like, with winding brick steps up to the heavy wooden door, three terraces, and a balcony. Our terrace had an attack turtle. A desert tortoise came with the house, its home under the steps. Expecting lettuce leaves, it would creep up on you, and slowly fasten its pointed beak on your ankle. Curving paths, shaded by trees and ivy, created a virtual wonderland of secret places and hillside hideouts. Enhanced by the warm Southern California weather, every day was an adventure.

Lacking video games, Play Stations, Gameboys, and computers, our days were filled with adventure. Hunting lizards became a fascinating pastime. Using the woodpile as a game reserve, I could fashion a slipknot at the end of a string, hang it from a long stick, and lay in wait. The hot sun would lure my prey to bask, dozing on the logs. Moving stealthily, I slipped the loop over the lizard's head, and with a quick lift, my new pet would be home in a shoebox.

Graduating from the big game hunt of clueless lizards, my next target would be my mother's fishpond. Fashioning a fishing pole from a branch stripped of leaves, I would hang a small gold safety pin off a line at the end. Applying a compact bead of bread over the pin, I would temptingly dip the bait in the pond. Here fishy, fishy, hoping for a bite. Having the brains of a lizard, the large fat gold fish, would fight each other to see who could get snagged first. Hoisting my prize from the water, heedless that I might actually hurt their

mouths, I would then guiltily unhook them. As my first act of conservation I would gently place them back in the pond. Whenever caught, this fishing game did not make me popular with my mother. The pond was a decorator touch, waterfall and all, along the winding steps up to the house.

From tormenting the wildlife, I could graduate up to midnight spy raids. Passing secret notes along a second story rope suspended between my house and my best friend neighbor, became boring, even in secret code. Real spies climb from their bedroom window, cross the secret terrace, through the gate, and knock on the receiving spy's window. Carrying the coded note in a courier's pouch fashioned from a Band-Aid can and string, it was eagerly received by the twelve-year-old spy next door. A real spy could have made it back to the cover of her bedroom before the outraged father next door woke her parents at midnight. My spy/secret code days were over.

Of course, the very best sport of all was the water balloon bomb. Calculating the exact rate of distance and descent, you could be assured of a direct hit if you lobbed the balloon just as the nose of the car peeped out from under the tree shading the street. In free fall forever, the balloon would land, just as you could see the entire car. One fateful afternoon, I filled my weapons of choice from the faucet. Taking careful aim, I waited for the exact moment. The nose of the hood slid out from under the tree. A perfect lob. Unable to fully identify the car until long after the balloon was launched, to my horror, the car was marked with black and white coloring. Gasp, a uniformed officer pulled to the side of the road, ascended the winding stairs, navigated past the pretty fishpond, and pounded on the heavy wooden door.

Even ducking behind the terrace wall did not save me. My mother and the officer caught me. Unable to dispose of the evidence fast enough, it was apparent who was the balloon bomber. Turned in by my own mother, scolded by an angry officer of the law, my days of balloon bombing were over. But maybe, if I launch them from the lower balcony . . .

Writer's Cramp

Roi Patrick Freeman

Cockroach pictures hang on my politician
My life of games, my pen, my typewriter
My television
Images of words and dirt provoke
Giant ugly branches, tapping thorns
This tired little bloke
Oh Ghastly autumn child! Shakespeare's Toad!
The cloud and the wind without catching rain
Impotent triggered loaded words
 embroidered in the rusty confine of a tear
 abandoned by the whisper of a moonlit sonnet
 and stolen by the blood-stained night
Cobweb clouds fogging me
Dry as espalier vine in devil yard
Oh Yes! daydreams of timeless glory!
Yet the hum of distant rain
Embarrasses me
Frigid

Gonna Go Places

Steven McPhail

As I neared my old home, I remembered the times I spent sitting outside the principals office, when I waited for what they called a “progress meeting.” I never waited long, typically no more than five minutes, but it felt like an eternity. I noticed every beat of my heart, and every bead of cold sweat that ran down my arms. As the second hand on the clock inched forward, my imagination took control. I saw not the principal who smiled at every assembly and told funny stories of his youth, but instead Lucifer himself, wielding his pitchfork as he led me into the fires of Hell.

Years went by since I felt that kind of intense fear. Yet now it came back, many times stronger. I was trying to reconcile with my father, after more than forty years.

In my youth, Dad and I got along. In fact, up until I left for college, we spent most of our free time together. Mom ran out on our family on my seventh birthday and, despite having to work two jobs to provide for the family, he made sure he always spent time with us. He took us to the movies every Saturday night, and sometimes we bowled afterwards. My father bowled meticulously fine tuning his every roll with the intensity of Michelangelo working on a marble sculpture. We played only for fun, but my father focused on the game with remarkable intensity, much like everything else in his life.

“Loser washes dishes for a week!” he often barked as we began to play.

My father strove for perfection in many things, but he felt most passionate about baseball. He knew every nuance of the game, and even read the major league rulebook as a hobby. I Practiced pitching in the same fields I drive by now. My father knew how every movement affected the path of the ball as it left my hand, and the minute adjustments he made to my stance made all the difference. Yet, even as I improved, my father hollered advice on every throw, catch, and at-bat.

“C’mon Sean, I know ya can throw better’n that!”

“Ya gotta hustle if yer gonna catch the ball, son!”

“Ya miss another throw, and yer cuttin’ the lawn by hand!”

“Yeah! Got the speed goin’ now, kid. . . yer gonna go places with that fastball!”

I began to cry as I thought of everything we experienced in those fields. The games of catch that evolved into a clinic on pitching remained fresh in my mind. My old man threw overpowering fastballs and pinpoint curveballs with ease. Only an errant pitch that shattered his knee in high school kept him from the pros. He saw a similar gift in me, and encouraged me to develop it. In many ways, Dad lived his dreams through me. That accounted for the disagree-

ment that split us apart.

“Whatta ya mean, yer quittin’?” I envisioned my father actually coming through the telephone as he screamed into it on his end.

“I need to concentrate on my class work, and. . .”

“Son! Ya can get a pro contract with the skills ya got! Ya don’t need an education!”

“But what if I get hurt? What do I have to fall back on?”

“Yeah. . . Heaven forbid ya end up like yer old man, right?”

I winced at his words. “That’s not what I said.”

“It’s what ya meant! So, what the hell are ya gonna do with yer life?”

“I’d like to teach English in high schools. I’ve always enjoyed reading, and I think I have a gift working with children.”

“Throwin’ away yer future for something stupid. Did I do a hell of a job raisin’ ya. . .”

“You did a good job raising me. I’m just going to take a different path than yours.”

“That different path is gonna ruin ya, I already know it.”

“I don’t think so. I have to try--”

“Try. And fail. And don’t come whinin’ to me when it happens!” The connection clicked dead.

That December, I received the first Christmas card marked “return to sender” in my father’s handwriting. Every phone call I made, he hung up when he heard my voice. After three years, I finally stopped trying.

As I drew closer to the old farm, I began to doubt the wisdom of coming. Would the argument be fresh in my father’s mind, even after all this time? My sister assured me he resolved to meet with me, but I still struggled with my doubts. Did he want to reconcile, or berate me for making a “stupid” choice with my life?

I stopped the car as I arrived at the tiny farmhouse where I spent my childhood. To the right stood the makeshift baseball diamond where I learned the game as a child. On the pitcher’s mound I saw my father, a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He wore a pair of tattered blue jeans and his typical long sleeved flannel shirt. He glanced at me, and then back down at his watch. He shook his head as I approached.

“I wondered when ya’d get here.”

His skin looked like old leather, wrinkled and ravaged by his age and constant smoking. A thin white mess of hair replaced the well-kept brown mane I remembered. Still, he carried himself like a man half his age, and his eyes still revealed the intensity I both admired and feared in him.

He took a long drag from his cigarette, and focused on it for a moment before looking back at me. I started to speak when, as it happened so many times before, he spoke first.

"I was wrong." The words seemed strange, especially to come from my father. I never heard him say those words before.

"R-really?"

"Becky's sent me pictures every Christmas. I admit, I didn't look at them, at first. But eventually I did, and I started askin' her how you were doin'. I gotta admit, ya didn't do as badly as I thought."

I look at him strangely. "So you approve of what I've done with my life?"

"Ya put lives on the right track, and that's not something that a lot of people can say they've done. You've changed people for the better." He paused, and then smirked at me. "Didn't hurt that ya coached the baseball team at Eisenhower for ten years, either."

"I thought you might have liked that."

"Ya did a good job with yer kids, too. I see Sarah's making quite a name for herself."

"Her last movie opened at forty million."

He turned his attention briefly to his cigarette again. He exhaled a mouthful of smoke, then focused on me once more. "I always knew you'd go places, son. I just never thought you'd go there without me."

"I wouldn't have made it without you."

"Yeah, yeah. Point is, ya made it on yer own, son."

I paused, at first unsure how to respond. "It's good to see you again, Dad."

"Good to see you again too, son." He smiled, and then lifted up two gloves and a baseball.

"How `bout a game of catch? For old time's sake?"

"I'd love to." He threw one glove to me, and slapped the ball into his own.

"First one to miss a catch makes dinner?"

"You're on."

I Will Never Be Her

Katie Curtis

I look at the faded, blonde, salon done streaks in my hair,

as I put on my \$32.95 Wonder Bra.

Radiation

David Zacuto

I have to listen to this because
I know the gawking windless silence,
whose boughs are night the sky
and shivering vacuous distances
where sustenance is
radio frequency 12 kilometers
dark twilight blue tendrils coming apart in the
quiet disassembly of the universe;
which brings the end
to sound and movement
and I of course would come undone
for a second, long or shorter
a little spin of pale exhaust
stands,
turning soft or lonely looking
in the cold retarding air
blithe and pretty
an efficient machine punctures
and then it is over,
amnesiac tentacles, threads on the wind
in the acid restless air
a nameless blaspheme
a prayer

Homeless

Marlene Hickey

“I had this strange dream last night,” says the whiskered man in torn jeans. “Well to tell the truth, I’ve had the same dream a lot of times before. I’m sleeping on this soft bed in a dark room, see, and no matter how many covers I pile on me, I still can’t get warm enough. But it feels so good, I don’t want to get up and go out into the light.” He looks at his calloused hands and, as if suddenly aware of his dirty fingernails, puts them on his lap under the table and continues. “All at once there’s this big rumble, like an earthquake or something, and I get thrown right out of bed onto the pavement. Bang! Man, do I hate to wake up like that.”

I listen to him recount his dream as I pass out sack lunches. Two of the men at the table nod solemnly at the dream teller; one deals out his cards for a new game of Solitaire, and the others don’t look up at all. I finish handing out the brown paper bags and head back to the kitchen for more.

For the past year I have driven to my church in Anaheim on Wednesday mornings to help feed the homeless. We function as a satellite of the Salvation Army. They furnish the bulk of our groceries, augmented by the food we buy ourselves or bring from our own pantries.

Today one of the women in our group has brought from home a freshly baked cinnamon coffee cake, its delectable aroma permeating every corner of the hall. The men nibble hungrily on chunks of this special treat and bowls of fresh fruit as they wait for their main meal which is still being prepared. There is no chance of appetites being spoiled by these pre-lunch goodies.

Throughout the morning, they approach the kitchen door and politely ask for shampoo, deodorant, soap, and disposable razors, whatever it takes to make life on the streets more bearable. We lift our boxes of supplies from the refrigerator tops and sift through the toiletries, looking for the requested items. Those of us who go on vacation eagerly hoard the small samples that hotels and motels furnish in their rooms, for they are the perfect size for these unlucky wanderers. Also in demand are the socks and T-shirts we buy at the 99-Cent store, as well as other items of clothing, some of which we have badgered our husbands and friends into donating from their well-stocked closets.

I like coming to help even though my contributions are small compared to those who organize and run the whole endeavor. I’m in absolute awe of the women who make the arrangements, plan the menus, and cook the food in huge pots. My nature is to be always an Indian and never the chief, so I make sandwiches and prepare the sack lunches, help fill drink orders, and dish up food onto plates which we pass to the men as they wait in an orderly line. I say men because rarely do we see a homeless woman at our tables. These men may

be temporarily down but they are seldom out, and their humor can be infectious. For months, Le Roy, a black man, was the wit of the regulars who gathered on Wednesdays, keeping us all amused with his entertaining remarks.

Once as he was leaving, he thanked us profusely and said grandly, "Ladies, I like my lobster boiled, with asparagus on the side, served on white linen with a fine wine."

The following week, I marched out to where Le Roy was sitting and with a sweeping gesture, laid a white placemat on the table in front of him. There we served him his chicken and dumplings in style, relieving him of the chore of coming up to the window. His hearty laughter and that of his fellows who had heard his lobster and linen request the week before rang through the hall and lifted everyone's spirits.

He remained the class clown until one day when he came in looking sad and irritable and buried himself in a newspaper without speaking. We heard later that his meager possessions had all been taken, whether by a thief or the police we never learned. We replaced some of the necessities he had lost, but the trust in human nature that he had retained in spite of everything, had evaporated. Though he continues to be polite each week, his laughter has ended.

Sometimes the men use our kitchen telephone to inquire about work and, when possible, we give them bus passes that enable them to get to the job interview. One of the great ironies in their situation is that in order to get a really good job, they need to give the prospective employer a home address. But without the money a job would bring they cannot afford the home or apartment that would furnish them with an address.

One of our favorites was missing for a few weeks, so we finally asked the assembled men, "Where's Shorty?"

"Oh, he's in jail," came back the answer. "Don't know for how long. He got sentenced for trespassing."

When Shorty finally returned to the fold, his front teeth were missing, but he was as loquacious and friendly as ever.

While we served unlimited iced tea, soda, and coffee, a mustached man named Bill often told us how much he craved a glass of milk. Finally, we bought a half-gallon of the white elixir and fulfilled his desire, only to find that this was the drink of choice for many of the other men as well. "Got milk?" became the question of the day, and now we try each week to keep a supply on hand. Latecomers are often disappointed that the milk is gone and they must settle for another beverage.

Charlie brings along his huge black dog, Maggie, a friendly beast with a constantly wagging tail. Charlie shares his lunch with his canine best friend outside on a patio bench, along with a bowl of water that we fill for the dog in the kitchen.

The men jump up to carry our heavy bags as we come into the hall and

offer to empty the trash cans when they finish eating. As they leave, they say, "Thank you, Ladies. God bless you!" One of them added recently, "We like coming here because you make us feel at home."

We do not know what has brought them to this low place in their lives, for it is easier not to ask too much about them or to get emotionally involved. Our work is to see that for at least one day a week, they have a hot meal at noon and a sack lunch to take away for the evening. No sermons are ever preached at them, and they are never expected to offer prayers for their food.

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and think of them out there on the cold, hard pavement in the wind and the rain. How long the night hours must seem, how filled with regret and sorrow for lost loves and homes, for opportunities squandered, for turns of fate that have brought them to where they are now.

Like the man in his dream, I pull the covers tightly around me, craving the reassurance of warmth. But I, unlike the dreamer, can feel secure in my belief that I am not likely to be flung out of bed onto the ground. I stare into the darkness and marvel at the differences in our lives. What would these homeless men think, I wonder, if they knew my secret: that I get more from them than they ever get from me.

Gypsy Night Train

Kip Knight

When I was growing up in Louisiana, my mother often referred to two mysterious groups; the first were American Indians, a source of ancient wisdom. Whenever we'd ask a question she didn't have an answer for she'd reply, "Well, when I was a girl, an old Indian chief once told me . . ." and finish with whatever wisdom she had on that particular topic.

The other group was Gypsies. No one I knew ever met a Gypsy, but according to my mom, they were quite real. She gave young, impressionable children such as myself the distinct impression if one were to actually encounter Gypsies (in all likelihood a massive number of them at the same time), you'd best run for your life.

While my family was living in England, one of the places we always wanted to visit was Prague. This ancient medieval city was steeped in history and was as every bit as intriguing as anywhere else in Europe. So when one of my business colleagues, Andy Skehan, invited our family to come to Prague for the Easter holiday, we gladly accepted.

I thought the trip would be especially memorable (we had two young boys) if we could travel by train sometime during our trip. As a child, I had always fantasized about sleeping in one place and waking up in a different city or, even better, a different country. To go to sleep to the gentle rocking of train tracks, what better way could there be to travel?

We flew from London to Prague on Good Friday. The plan was to spend a couple of days in Prague, catch the train to Salzburg, Austria then drive to Vienna and fly back to London. Andy met us at the Prague airport and we headed back to his house for dinner and to discuss our plans.

During dinner, Andy mentioned to be on the lookout for gypsies in the city which pick-pocketed tourists. This was the first time anyone had actually mentioned "gypsies" to me other than my mom, so I was a bit surprised.

"Andy, there are no such things as gypsies. . ." I declared.

"Yes there are. You have to be especially careful in large crowded places such as public squares. "He mentioned he'd recently been on the local transit route where he'd noticed a couple of gypsies trying to pickpocket an elderly couple. Andy, who has a physically demanding presence, told them to stop it and the pick-pocketers got off at the next stop.

"I'm not saying all gypsies are pickpockets. . . there are just some of them that make their living that way. So be careful tomorrow. . . don't get distracted. If that happens, you're being set up," he warned. I briefly considered calling my mother to apologize about being a non-believer all these years.

The next day's weather was glorious, especially for March. Prague is noto-

rious for nasty air pollution in the winter. We were delighted to see sunny blue skies and fairly warm temperatures for our walk through the medieval neighborhoods of Prague.

The morning passed quickly as we toured various plazas and buildings. However, as we approached one large public square, I couldn't believe what I saw. It looked as if there was a Gypsy Convention being held in Prague this week; women dressed in colorful dresses and turbans, men in baggy pants, kids that looked straight out of *Oliver Twist*.

A quick glance at the map indicated we had a problem. It was either go through this square or go back the long way around to the other side of town to get home.

I quickly decided a family meeting was in order. We formed a quick huddle. "OK, guys, it looks like the situation Andy warned us about last night. Here's the drill: we're going through this crowd as rapidly as possible. Eyes straight ahead, keep moving. I'll bring up the rear. Whatever happens, don't stop or we're as good as dead."

We got about halfway through the crowd when the trouble began. One mother held up her baby and began imploring us for some money.

Peggy turned around and said to give the mom a couple of bucks.

"No, no, no. . . this is a set up! Can't you see! Keep moving! Keep moving!" I pleaded.

At this point something attached itself to my leg. Looking down, I saw a kid hanging onto my leg for all he was worth.

The mom with the baby became more emphatic. Finally my wife turned around and declared, "We're not leaving here until you give her money. I reluctantly reached for my wallet." Peggy gave the mom some money and we started moving again (including the kid on my leg).

"Let go of my leg!" I yelled as I tried to shake him off. You had to give the kid credit, he had a hell of a grip.

I decided it critical we get through the square without further incident. I'd worry about the kid later. So we kept moving (although I had a rather distinct limp). We finally managed to make it to the other side of the square. I heard a whistle and the boy on my leg disappeared quickly into the crowd.

Summing up all my natural instinct to say, "I told you so," we decided to head back to Andy's house.

Andy's wife, Lynn, was waiting for us. "How was your day?", she inquired. We told her about the purse slashing incident. "That's a real shame." she said, "That happened to a couple of my friends as well."

Andy came home later. I sat down with him for a beer in the kitchen while Peggy and Lynn continued their conversation in the living room. "So Kip," he began, "How'd it go today?" Upon telling him about the encounter with the gypsies, he nodded his head sympathetically. "Gee, too bad. What are your

plans for tomorrow?"

"I'm really looking forward to tomorrow. We're going to see some more of Prague and then catch the night train to Salzburg."

Andy put his beer down and looked me straight in the eye. "Tell me you didn't say night train."

"Yeah, the night train to Salzburg. We leave Prague around five in the evening and get into Salzburg at eight in the morning the next day."

Andy looked very concerned. "But what about the train gypsies?"

At the mention of "train gypsies," Peggy and Lynn instantly appeared out of nowhere. "Train gypsies?" Peggy asked.

"Did somebody say train gypsies?" asked the boys who suddenly appeared in the room.

"Gypsies on the night train. They'll rob you while you sleep." Andy warned in a low voice.

"That's absurd." I countered. "We're in a separate sleeping car. We lock the doors. How could they possibly rob us while we're asleep?"

"The gas," Lynn whispered. "They slip a small tube under your door while you're asleep and gas you."

The boys' and Peggy's eyes widened. "Gas!" they exclaimed. "There's no way we're getting on that train."

My boyhood dream of falling asleep to the gentle rocking of the train was suddenly on hold. "But I've got non-refundable tickets," I argued.

Peggy glared at me. "How much are our lives worth?"

I decided to try one more angle. "Andy, how do you know this is true? Did this happen to someone you know?"

"No." Andy replied, "I read about it in the papers."

"Well, you can't believe everything you read, can you?" I argued.

"We're not getting on that train and that's final!" Peggy declared. "I don't care if we have to walk to Salzburg. The train is not an option."

I got out the map to see what our options were. It wasn't pretty. Driving was out of the question; the mountain passes were closed in winter. Flying was a possibility but after calling the airlines I learned that you couldn't fly directly from Prague to Salzburg.

I had one more idea. "What if we took the day train instead? If we never went to sleep, the gypsies would never have the chance to gas us, right?"

I checked with the train station and learned there were two trains to Salzburg. The first was the one we were already booked on the Gypsy Night Train. The second train left in the afternoon and stopped in Munich at 10 p.m. and continued the next morning to Salzburg. It would cost us a night in a hotel in Munich and an extra day of travel, but hey, what's your life worth?

We made the changes and felt better about our plans. The next day Andy graciously offered to come home early and take us to the train station.

As Andy walked in the door the next afternoon, he had a serious look on his face. "I've got bad news, guys," he declared.

"What's the matter?" we asked.

"My secretary called today to check on your reservations. They've canceled your train. The only way to get to Salzburg now is on the night train."

Stunned silence.

If I was going down, I'd go down like a man. "Okay. I just won't go to sleep tonight. I'll stay up all night and make sure they don't gas us." I declared.

"I sure hope you don't doze off," muttered Andy.

We glumly packed our bags and took them down to Andy's car to go to the train station. It was becoming dusk and the mood was gloomy. As we drove to the station Andy tried to lighten things up.

"Hey, it'll work out fine. This train is safe, I'm sure. I mean, if this happened very often, they wouldn't stay in business very long, would they?"

I thought, I'm not sure a state-funded train monopoly cared about repeat business. And what if this did happen all the time and we never heard about it because we never heard from the victims? What if they dumped the bodies in the mountain passes before they got to Salzburg?

But I decided we'd had enough speculation for one trip and kept these thoughts to myself.

As we drove up to the Prague train station, it looked vaguely familiar. Then it hit me, Schindler's List is what this place looked like. Another thought I kept to myself.

We got out of the car and Andy pulled me aside. "Hey Kip, I'm really sorry about this. I hope everything turns out okay."

I felt like asking him if he had any "No-Doz" and a handgun he could lend me but decided against it. "I'm sure it'll be fine, Andy. By the way, if you don't hear from me by this time tomorrow, be sure to call the American Embassy and look for our frozen bodies in the mountain pass.

We began to walk through the train station. It had a surreal look to it. There were dark shadows and shady looking characters everywhere. . . it made our previous outing at the public square look like a trip to Disneyland. *We're dead meat.* I thought.

It turned out to be just the opposite. We found the train platform and got on a German train that was clean, on-time, and very efficient. As I lay in the upper bunk on the train listening to the gentle rhythm of the tracks after the boys and Peggy were asleep, I thought traveling by train was indeed the best way to travel.

I glanced down to check for tubes under the door, and then drifted off to sleep.

Wind Woman

Melissa Savlov

The air she breathes
Is a tornado
Circling around the doors and windows
Waiting but never resting still
She was trapped indoors once
Coaxed into a responsible dedication
The house erupted like vomit fire
But she was still invited back
Like Santa Clause, cookies on the table
Everyone so expectant
And she wooed them like a goddess
Only to leave them
She never leaves until they love her
They love her still as she leaves them
But I don't
Her confidence is too cruel
Her passion, exhaustive
She will never have a home
With curtains and a couch and a family
She will always be alone
And she will love it, love it, love it!
Love it 'til she's gasping for breath,
Whirling on the grass
She will perish gleefully in her solitude
A whale bursting through the placenta sea
Though her ocean is but a plastic wading pool
Where she poses, cross-legged in the center
She has never known the terrors of spaciousness
Beneath, above, and all around her
She's never known the emptiness of a quiet auditorium
A long pause for applause
An obliged caress
She will never know the sting of loneliness
'Til on the threshold of her own bloody arch
Yet she will feel it then
The vacuum, her surety sucking, draining from her
And then it will be too late
To embrace the bosom of flight

Memories Of My Childhood

Fernanda Villbrille

My memories go back to when I was little during the cold weather in my native country, Argentina; also to those moments I had experienced in my neighborhood of Buenos Aires. The winters used to be so long and humid that we had to find a cozy place to play instead of being outside.

Sometimes that place was where my grandpa Pablo whom I called "Nonno," worked. It was a textile factory where the workers spent long hours creating beautiful towels. This huge white building with dark green doors was just across the street from my house. The place had been built in the 1920s, I believe.

I had memorable times there with my grandpa. On Sundays, when nobody worked, my grandpa and I used to make the rounds, checking that everything was working well. I enjoyed those special moments I had with him. Sometimes we changed the clocks in the machinery rooms or just read the newspaper with him in the factory courtyard. I miss the long hours that we passed, chatting alone about the experiences that he had had back in his native Italy. I learned a lot from his conversations. Similar to Robert Fulghum's All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, I think all I needed to learn I got from my Nonno.

My grandpa was a tall, manly, and deep dark-brown-eyed man. I admired him so much not only for his strong belief in justice and perseverance but also for his example of hard work. He was a very strong man, and he was the only man in my life after my dad passed away. God knows how much I miss my Nonno.

I had another special place in that factory; it was the doctor's office. The doctor was there in the mornings. I do not remember his name, but what I know for sure is that he inspired me to become a pediatrician. What a fantasy! What a dream! This incredible human being let me help him with his paperwork, and he taught me how to give vaccines, letting me practice on a big orange. Wow! What an experience this was when I was only six years old! I met quite a few people in the factory. I grew up with them. Some were my extended family, and I am very grateful for knowing all of them. I had many good moments in that neighborhood factory.

During those long winter days, I also remember seeing crystalline drops of water running down the giant boysenberry tree that we had in front of our house. I used to climb that tree, spending hours at my "station" waiting for someone to pass next to it to start what my friends and I called a "mora war." It was just a children's game. We threw boysenberries to each other. Sometimes my friends and I preferred to collect the little purple, sweet and bubbly fruit into a basket to eat later. I have so many memories from that barrio. The time when

one is little goes so fast, like a train rushing to get somewhere in a short time.

If I close my eyes, I can get a perfect picture of that small neighborhood, Ramos Mejia, located just forty-five minutes from the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires. To be more precise, I lived near the corner of Tacuari and General Urquiza. God! This corner was special for all the kids around the neighborhood. It had everything I could dream of since I was an only child in the family and excitement was close to the steps of my door.

Just right there, in that corner was a little store with light green walls and metal curtains. The owners were Jorge and Lydia, husband and wife. They used to sell just about everything. They sold candies, ice cream, bubble gum, toys, and anything that “Dona Maria,” this was the way we referred to any lady, could ask for. It was the only store open on Sunday afternoons. At that time, in the 1970s, I was six years old.

My fifteen friends and I used to meet almost everyday at that corner to play around five in the afternoon. That tiny spot was something else! The bus stop to go to the center of the city was there. From the point of view of a child, this tiny spot was the center of the universe, not just the center of my little neighborhood. At five o’clock, a lot of things seemed to happen.

One day, people hastened to get on the bus so that they could be home when a soccer game between Argentina and Brazil started. Almost everyday I remember seeing ladies running with young kids in their arms who had just gotten out of a school that was located just one block from my house. These ladies would run as fast as they could to acquire seats for themselves and their children. Otherwise, they would end up holding themselves and their little ones from the handle bar of the bus door. I can still picture them in my mind, like feathers flying in the wind.

I still remember other things happening on that corner, like the disgusting face of the poor, drunk old man who always slept on the cold cement bench. I remember that area got filthy sometimes, and my grandma would wash it down with an old, long, green hose. When we played there, we used to make a big circle on the sidewalk. All the kids would then sit down, their legs crossed, with one shoe removed, to play a game. We would pass our shoes around until the song we were singing ended. The shoe that we had needed to fit our feet or we were “out.” Maybe this sounds silly, but for us it was entertaining. No one in the neighborhood complained about our noise or loud laughing because everybody knew that their children were also playing outside at that little corner. Time has gone so fast that my memories are like drops of rain that have evaporated as they touch my senses.

My best friend was named Alexandra. She lived on the other side of the store, just around the corner. She was one year older than I was. She was like a sister to me. We diminished each other’s troubles. We used to run to that little corner from our mothers when we did something wrong or when we did not

want to have our long, wavy hair washed on cold rainy nights. We loved to peak through Alexandra's window to try to see strangers kissing at the bus stop, who had a fight after school, and who was left alone for a date with roses in his hands. Everything happened at that little corner of Tacuari and General Urquiza and in that little neighborhood of Buenos Aires.

Across the street was the bakery of Filomena. This Italian lady had all the time in the world. She was always looking into somebody else's business. As teens, we were afraid that she might catch one of us kissing a boy at night. The trouble was she would gossip and spread rumors around the neighborhood like a glass of water spreading on a cold white marble table. We would laugh at the way she gossiped and talked; we considered her someone special in that small "barrio." Time runs fast but memories are stamped in our hearts.

At the time, our neighborhood was close to a military base. In the decade of the 1970s, Argentinean society faced many problems. This was the time of "the Repression" and many people came up missing or were killed. We called them "Los desaparecidos," the missing ones. Pregnant women, university students, and people who were involved in acts against the government, as well as many innocents were taken from their homes without knowledge of their destiny.

Just a few meters from our house was another textile factory called "Danubio." It had yellow cement walls. Cold, silent and lonely, it was built there and stood close to all of us for many years. The textile factory was a good source of work for the community. It was a linen factory during the day. Around that big structure, we learned to ride our bikes. We took long walks with our friends and with our grandparents. We would play hide and seek over there. We laughed a lot. However, at nights sometimes we heard "boots" running across our ceilings. What was going on? We asked ourselves many times on those dark, humid and rainy nights of Buenos Aires winters. Nobody talked about those episodes at that time. It was a black, big hole in the memory of the Argentinean adults. But if those yellow walls could scream the truth of what had happened on one noisy, bloody night, they would say many people, both innocent and guilty, were killed behind those yellow walls at the hands of our military forces. The neighbors said they saw the traces of the blood on the pavement the day after the tragedy. The holes from the weapons were the vivid memories of what had happened. Could that little neighborhood cover their memories with paint? Could we as little kids understand what had been going on there? Could we put aside those episodes to go on with our futures? No. Maybe. . .

However, through the years, we got older and we learned to manage those bad days. Some of us still live there, and others left with their memories. I can say today that I just remember with love and passion that small, big corner of Tacuari and General Urquiza where the tiny store of Jorge and Lydia was, where my childhood took place.

John Henry

Todd Johnson

it was almost dawn:
waking up to betrayed sunlight,
turns over the steely sheets,
wringing out the greasy sledge,
prepared.

the dirt had paled:
bringing mountains to cellars,
pounds rocks into sand,
working stars into spurs,
dog-tired.

the dust settled:
machining back to bed,
dents rail-ties with a look,
counting hammers over fences,
expired.

Home Improvement

Matt Taylor

As Stanley Baxter and his wife drove to the dinner party, they were stopped by yet another red light. Stanley gritted his teeth and gripped even tighter on the steering wheel, cursing silently. Vivian was at it again.

“I just really think it would be a smart investment, Stanley. After all, they say a remodeled kitchen is one of the few home improvements you can actually get your money back on. Besides, I’ve lived with that same old dark, depressing kitchen for twenty years now. It’s so bad I’m ashamed to have our friends over anymore.” Once Vivian got herself worked up, she gathered momentum like a runaway cement truck. “You promised me a new kitchen three years ago, and I’m tired of waiting. When we get to Rhonda’s, I’m going to get the name of her contractor.”

“Over my dead body!” retorted Stanley. “We’ve been through this before, Viv. Why spend twenty or thirty thousand on a new kitchen when all we really need is new paint and maybe some tile?” Stanley thought he was being generous in mentioning new tile, because a few cracked tiles didn’t bother him in the least. Stanley Baxter was known to be a prudent and frugal man. He did not believe in wasting money on a new car, when a six-year-old model drove just fine for a fraction of the cost. He applied the same careful logic to every aspect of his life. But in the matter of his wife and her constant desire to stay abreast of their circle of friends, he was stymied.

Vivian’s voice started to take on that nasally whine that reminded Stanley of a dying cat. “Rhonda says she cooks all the time in her new kitchen. That would save us a ton of money.”

“At least Rhonda can actually cook something edible.” Stanley muttered to himself. Unlike Rhonda, Vivian was not exactly a gourmet cook, and Stanley knew a new kitchen probably wouldn’t help.

“What a nasty thing to say!” spat Vivian. “Honestly, Stanley, you are such a cheapskate!”

“And you have absolutely no clue about finances!” snarled Stanley. They glared at each other angrily, until the light changed to green. After five more tense minutes, they reached Rhonda’s house, and Stanley saw that Tom and Karen had already arrived, their new black Volvo gleaming in the driveway. He parked down the street a short distance, so oil drips would not soil the street in front of Rhonda’s house. Vivian wordlessly got out and slammed the door. Once inside the house, she completely ignored Stanley and put on her most cheerful, gushing manner.

“Your kitchen is absolutely marvelous! What a huge improvement! And I just love that Sub-Zero refrigerator! But it must have been such an ordeal, so

soon after Rob passed away. However did you manage, dear?" It had been just seven months since Rob's death of a sudden heart attack.

"Actually, it wasn't all that bad," replied Rhonda. "To tell you the truth, I actually enjoyed the whole process. And besides," she said with a wink, "some of those workers were cute!" A tall, striking 50ish blonde, Rhonda looked coolly elegant in a snug black dress and pearls. As she poured the wine, she continued. "I think it really helped to have something to immerse myself in. And I know it's what Rob would have wanted. You know how he detested our dumpsy old kitchen. We had been planning to remodel for such a long time."

Karen put a hand on Rhonda's shoulder. "It's great to see you're doing so well. You look terrific, Rhonda."

"You sure do" said Tom "You know, I'm pretty handy around the house. Let me know if there's anything you need help with."

"Why thank you, Tom. But you needn't worry about me. Rob's life insurance policy pays for everything. If the faucet leaks, I just call the plumber. Shall we go into the dining room?"

After dinner, during which Viv shot more than one harsh look towards Stanley, Rhonda shooed the men out of the room.

"You boys go fix yourselves a cocktail in the den. . . leave us old girls to have a chat." Stanley and Tom dutifully filed out into Rob's wood paneled study, which was lined with English hunting scenes.

As he poured Scotch generously into a pair of tumblers, Tom remarked, "I never knew Rob wanted a new kitchen. I thought all he cared about was golf and fishing."

"Come to think of it, you're right." replied Stanley. "He was always off on some trip, anyway. I'm going to go get some ice from the kitchen. Be right back."

He picked up an ice bucket and headed towards the kitchen. As he passed through the dining room, the girls' conversation abruptly stopped. Stanley realized they were all staring at him. Feeling somewhat uncomfortable, he forced a smile.

"I suppose Vivian's been telling you what a shit I am. Well, we can't all be as extravagant as you, Rhonda." Vivian said nothing, merely fixing him with a look that was no longer completely hostile. She looked slightly curious, somehow. Stanley moved on with his ice bucket.

On his return, Tom shook his head sadly. "You know, it's strange how Rob's heart just seized up like that. I mean, he was probably in the best shape of any of us. I guess you just never really know, do you? And poor Rhonda. Imagine an experienced nurse like her, not being able to revive him. What a shame." As they drove home, Vivian was uncharacteristically quiet, as though she was lost in thought. "Are you OK?" asked Stanley.

"I'm fine, just a little tired. You must be exhausted, too. Why don't I fix

you a nice little nightcap when we get home?"

"Well, that's a switch," thought Stanley to himself.

When they returned home, Vivian disappeared into the kitchen while Stanley got ready for bed.

"Here's your drink, dear," she said sweetly. "You go on to bed. I'm going to read awhile."

Glass in hand, Stanley headed towards the bedroom. He took a full drink, savoring the smooth, smoky flavor of the Scotch. His head began to swim, and as the first shock wave sent wild tremors through his heart, he staggered to the den. Reaching for the doorjamb to steady himself, he saw Vivian curled up on the sofa, merrily clipping pictures from magazines. Stanley's knees began to buckle, and with his last pulse of consciousness, he could just make out the blurry words on one of the covers: "Sunset Magazines Kitchen Dream Book."

I Dream In French

Melissa Savlov

Bonjour et merci pour lire cet essai sur la joie de frangais!

As you might have guessed from my introduction, I love French. One reason I am drawn to zee language of love is that it evokes an air of mystery and romance.

When I speak French, I imagine myself strolling down a silent Parisian lane, in my black beret and a long, gray trench coat, tailored with feminine accents. My gartered black silk stockings peek out from time to time as I drift along, smiling secretly to myself.

I carry a little black bag containing a tube of expensive red lipstick, a luscious felt tip pen, and a journal brimming with my reveries and aspirations. I see myself in black and white, as if captured in a photograph by Robert Doisneau.

Once my feet tire, I discover a little cafe and settle in. The bored waiter arrives and I order.

“Orangina et un croissant de beurre, s’il vous plait.”

He nods and leaves.

I sip my Orangina through a straw, savoring its tartness and fizz, enjoying the little bits of orange pulp that rest on my tongue. The croissant is light and airy. My pen feels smooth in my hand as the words glide effortlessly from the felt tip. I write for at least an hour and the waiter does not disturb me--for this is not the French way.

I sketch out thoughts for my fourth book. It will be the greatest novel I’ve ever written. Perhaps it will take place in Paris in the 1920s, filled with people like Gertrude Stein, the F. Scott Fitzgeralds, and a small cast of glamorous, imaginary characters.

Perhaps I will create a character resembling my grandmother, who also lived in the French capital around that time. I never met my father’s mother, as she died several years before I was born. But I often wonder about her. I wonder if I would agree with my parents that I’m very much like her. I wonder what it was like for her to study at l’Universite Sorbonne, and if she found it difficult to study in a foreign language. Did she ever meet one of our great American expatriate writers and, if so, did she dare show them her work? Was her long-lost Parisian love a Frenchman or another expatriate?

My hand grows weary and I set down my pen, close my journal. I order another Orangina, cross my legs demurely, and think of lighting a cigarette, but I don’t smoke. Someone flips the lights on and I notice a thick blanket of dust on the hardwood floors. I begin to feel awkward, a woman alone after dark.

Men shoot lascivious glances in my direction and the women's laughter grates with cruelty.

I begin to miss my husband--our strange private jokes and his strong, comforting arms. I miss my daughter--her delightful toddler's laugh, and the way she dances, smiling and proud. I think of my job and how much more I hope to learn and achieve.

The fact is, that as much as I dream of living a writer's life in Paris, I love my real life here. I don't have to move to France to share a croissant with my daughter every Saturday morning, or to whisper French nothings in my husband's ear. I don't have to visit Gertrude Stein's Parisian salon to exchange creative thoughts because I already meet with a group of talented local novelists. I don't have to live in Paris to have a joie de vivre. But it is fun to dream, and I dream in French.

His Women

Frances Costikyan

Once they agree black is out of the question
it's easy to decide what to wear.
After all, he made his reputation with his
passion for color and beautiful women.

His wife, who never bothers about the color of
her dress, just so it's blue, selects the aquamarine
chiffon her illustrator-husband gave her when
she posed for his first *Colliers Magazine* cover.

His eldest chooses a periwinkle silk to bring out her eyes,
His youngest picks a short chartreuse faille to show off her legs.

Each stands before the mirror
sets her hat
just so.

They check the seams on each other's stockings,
make sure they have plenty of Kleenex.
With heads high, they stride down the aisle of
the already packed sanctuary
to take their places in the mourners' pew,
knowing this one last time they
do their husband and father
proud.

The Good I Found

Julie Ramirez

Throughout my childhood I learned lessons of determination, sportsmanship, respect, and values. However, my greatest lesson of strength and courage came much later in my life. It was nearly a year-long process, but the realization of what I gained wasn't apparent for months after the experience. Now I draw on those lessons daily.

On a Sunday afternoon in April of 1998, a visit from my parents began with some unusual twists. The first was a phone call that morning from my mom. They would be coming out in a couple hours, no particular reason. Yet when I told my "husband at the time," his reaction was almost rehearsed. It was as though he knew the gist of the conversation without being present. My stomach started to knot up as the morning went on. Shortly before my parents were due to arrive, my husband decided to take the kids and go to a friend's house. Only when he returned, the kids were not with him, the next unusual twist.

"Where are the kids?" I asked.

"Oh, they decided to stay," he replied. I thought all four of them, including our two year old who didn't really know this family?

"What do you mean? My parents should be here any minute. Why would you let them stay?"

"It's just for a little bit; I'll go back and get them," he said.

With the conversation heating and my anxiety level rising, my parents came up the walk. Their usual smiling faces, hugs, and calmness were apparent and helped to ease my nerves. But after a few minutes of small talk, getting comfortable on the couch, and no mention of where the kids were, my anxiety was on the rise again. I wanted to scream, "Ok, I can't take this! What is it? What is going on?" But fearing bad news, I tried to maintain some sensitivity to this entire scenario unfolding before me.

My dad turned to me and said, "Honey, I have bad news. I have cancer." His voice was strong and confident, more concerned with my reaction than his illness. "It's a tumor on the outer backside of my lung, up in my shoulder. It's not operable, but the doctors feel that radiation and chemotherapy will take care of it."

Of course it will, I thought. After numerous questions and some discussion, I was angry. I wanted to say to this cancer, "This is my dad! Now you're messing with 'daddy's little girl.'" The youngest of three and the only girl, I had gotten my share of preferential treatment--just ask my brothers. Although in my eyes, it was earned. My memories of childhood are filled with good times, a sense of security, and laughter, all of which my dad was a part of. There were the Sunday morning trips to the bakery for donuts and pastries, camping trips

and family reunions, jokes and stories, road trip songs and games, and fix-it projects around the house. Each day I couldn't wait for my dad to get home from work. There were hellos, hugs, and kisses. The smell of acid and chemicals lingered in his clothes. His badge would be placed on top of the fridge. After washing up he would sit down to relax in the brown, naugahyde recliner. I would prop the footrest, get him a glass of water, take off his steel-toed shoes, and rub his feet. He would ask about my day and I would hear about his. There was usually something exciting or controversial that happened at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, if not, we would hear once again about the infamous, "big fight." "The waves beat upon the shore."

The evening would run its course with dinner, homework, TV, and maybe a game of cribbage. But it seemed to end with me lying with my head on his lap and him painting my face. "What color shall I paint you today?" He would rub my forehead and cheeks as he painted on whatever color I chose. He would continue around my face and say, "Let's make your eyes green, your nose pink, and how about purple lips?" Occasionally my forehead and cheeks would need a second coat. I would awake in my bed the next morning to the sound of my dad hustling to get out the door and once again start his day. "Bye dad," I would yell. "See ya tonight Julz."

The weekends were spent heading to the valley to visit with cousins and grandparents, hanging around the house playing with friends or at soccer and softball games. There were also those weekend fix-it projects that dad would have to take care of. This is when he would call upon me, "his little apprentice, Rudy." No matter the project, it would begin with the collecting of tools and a walk down to Patterson's Hardware store on the corner. The trees from both sides of the street formed a tunnel like cover with the warm sun peering through sporadically. He would walk and whistle. I would skip to the beat of the change jingling in his pocket just to keep up. We were greeted at the door with the sound of the buzzer and the friendly voice of Jim. "What's the project today?" Dad would explain and Jim would help us with the needed parts for the repair. He would wish us luck and we would be on our way, although we all knew we would be back at least one more time that day. It was as "Rudy" that I learned to soap screws, pound nails, read a ruler, and hold a pencil behind my ear, as well as a few choice words only aloud during fix-it projects.

Shortly after that April morning visit, dad's chemotherapy and radiation treatment began. He entered into treatment with a strong, chubby, healthy frame. Knowing this first session of treatments was to last three months, July was the light at the end of the tunnel. Week after week he received radiation daily and on Wednesday's an aggressive chemo treatment. The elevator ride to the third floor led him to a room of recliners and TVs. Dad would get settled in and hooked up. The next four hours, as his body took in these drugs, he chatted with other cancer patients, read or watched TV. The weeks went by and the

effects of the treatments began to show. His esophagus was burned from the radiation, making it difficult to eat. His body was physically weak, frail, and thin. His mind was emotionally intact and spirits were high. July was near and summer plans of grandchildren visiting; the annual family reunion, and weekends in Bear Valley Springs were anticipated. Bear Valley Springs had been a favorite get away from it all, place of my dad's for the past twelve years. The golf, beautiful scenery, seasonal changes, family and holiday memories made it his choice for retirement. The best news at this time was that the tumor was responding and was now half its original size. July came and went, the recovery process was not as anticipated. By mid-August, dad was the sickest he had been. His frail, weak frame was not supporting him, and he had fallen on a couple occasions. The second fall happened one day while he was home alone and left him unable to get up. He lay there helpless, frustrated and angry. He grabbed for the telephone cord and pulled it off the table and across the floor. He phoned my mom at work, just a couple blocks away. I recall him telling me, "I was feelin mighty low."

The doctor saw him that afternoon and X-rays revealed that the tumor had become aggressive. It was the largest it had been and was pressing on his spinal cord causing nerve damage in his legs. It was just a matter of time before he would have full paralysis from the chest down, an incredible blow to this man. The next ten days were spent in physical therapy. There, with the aid of a wheel chair, hoist, and numerous exercises, he learned to adjust to life without the use of his legs. At home, a ramp was built, the living room adapted to accommodate his needs and new apparatuses, and a schedule was arranged to provide care for him.

My mom and brother were there to care for him in the evenings and HOSPICE came each weekday except Wednesday. So, after my older kids had been dropped off at school, Kelsey, my youngest, and I would make the 45-mile drive to spend the day with him.

His gentle, soothing voice would greet us with the ever so familiar phrase, "Who come to see me?" and "how's my sweet girls today?" Kelsey would climb into his hospital bed for the repetitive reading of the ABC Book and singing of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Dad and I would catch up on the news with the kids and relatives, who had come to visit, play cards, tell a joke or two, and have lunch in between the medications, shoulder rubs, and periods of rest. Wednesdays soon became a favorite day for all of us.

Then, the first week of September, dad was hospitalized with a perforated colon from diverticulosis, a disease very common in his family; he was faced with a critical decision. Should he endure surgery and its risks, buying him a couple months' time, knowing the cancer was consuming him. Or, should he give in to the peritonitis from the perforated colon that would leave him spending his final two weeks in the hospital, deteriorating daily? My brothers, mom

and I gathered with my dad. Many thoughts and tears were shared and the decision for surgery was made. He was taken in immediately. The wait was nerve-racking. Could his body withstand anymore? We were at his bedside when he awoke. As he opened his eyes he said, "I'm still here!" He was feeling and looking good!

My mom said to him, "See what happens when we all put our heads together?"

"Ya, we've got a whole lot of firewood," he responded, without missing a beat.

It wasn't long and he was back home. The increased pain kept him bedridden and on a low-dose morphine drip. The visits continued on Wednesdays and on Sundays, with all the kids, through October and November. Each one cherished, not knowing if there would be another. By December the pain and morphine were at a high. Dad was agitated, hallucinating occasionally and his body was beginning to shut down. It was incredibly hard to watch him suffer. I remember asking God, "Why does this have to happen?" On Wednesday, December 9th, I cried as I made the drive in. I was grateful to have another day with him, but his suffering was getting harder and harder to watch. I arrived to a very quiet house and dad resting quite calmly. He opened his eyes slightly and smiled as I came in. We said our hellos and I commented on how good he looked. He said, "I feel great." It was a very peaceful visit. Dad slept most of the day; occasionally he would laugh as he dreamed. I woke him for lunch, and with some coaxing, he had a few bites of a Popsicle. "God, that's good," he said. There was a little chitchat before he mentioned having a headache. I began to rub his forehead; he closed his eyes and said, "Paint it orange for me." Dad is at rest in Bear Valley Springs, not quite the retirement he had anticipated. It wasn't until the following April that I was able to look back and find the good that came from this experience. And now, when life brings a project that seems too big for Rudy, I know where to turn for courage and strength. Each day I find comfort in memories, but Wednesdays are still a favorite day.

Sex Goddess On Medicare

Gloria Brown

It is not easy to be a Sex Goddess on Medicare. Not only does the force of gravity work against me, but I believe there is a conspiracy involving the U.S. Government, the Postal Service, and the Marketing industry that is determined to destroy my self-esteem and undermine my claim that I am only 39 years old. I have been 39 for some time now, but due to these evil machinations, it is becoming harder and harder to maintain this illusion.

I suspect the conspiracy to destroy my Sex Goddess image began the year that I was living alone with a cranky cat. I had just planted some petunias in my flowerpot when the post office and the magazine industry struck. To my horror, that day I found in my mailbox, a publication called MODERN MATURITY. This is a magazine for senior citizens, not sex goddesses! "There must be some mistake," I told the postman as I tried to return it. "No Ma'am, he countered, "it has your name on it."

The picture of a woman living with a cat, planting petunias in her flowerpot, and receiving Modern Maturity magazine was more than I could handle. This is hardly an image of a sex goddess. Something had to go. Since it was too expensive to send the cat to the taxidermist, and I needed something to read, I murdered the petunias and bravely soldiered on.

It wasn't long before I began noticing other alarming developments. Although I am an Air Force mother, I don't ever remember being subjected to the accelerated G forces my son experienced flying the FB-111 fighters at 2 times the speed of sound. So why are my breasts suddenly pointing to Venezuela and why is my chin following this downward spiral? After all, gravity hasn't affected my son's physique and he was the one that flew the plane. Come to think of it, my son has been somewhat difficult to deal with lately.

Whenever I mention being 39, he reminds me that it is now his line. How on earth did he get to be forty? This is annoying. For years, I bragged about his exploits, explaining that he was a very precocious child. "Just think of it," I'd say, "here he is flying those planes two and a half times the speed of sound and he is only twelve years old." I wish he'd just go play with his Superman cape and stop whispering these rude comments?

It has also been somewhat disconcerting to notice that strange men's gazes seem to wander right by me only to focus on some young blonde child dressed up in her mother's clothes. Why are they looking at her? All the men I now encounter just seem to want to help me across the street.

It wasn't till this last birthday, that the conspiracy began to really take shape. The U.S. Government and the Marketing Industry unleashed a major assault on my image. The postman began by delivering my Medicare card and

a pamphlet announcing that I was OLD and had officially joined the ranks of Senior Citizens.

Soon after that, the advertising brochures in my mailbox began to change. Instead of a catalog from Frederick's of Hollywood with ads for wonder bras, I am now receiving ads for "comfort shoes" and Depends.

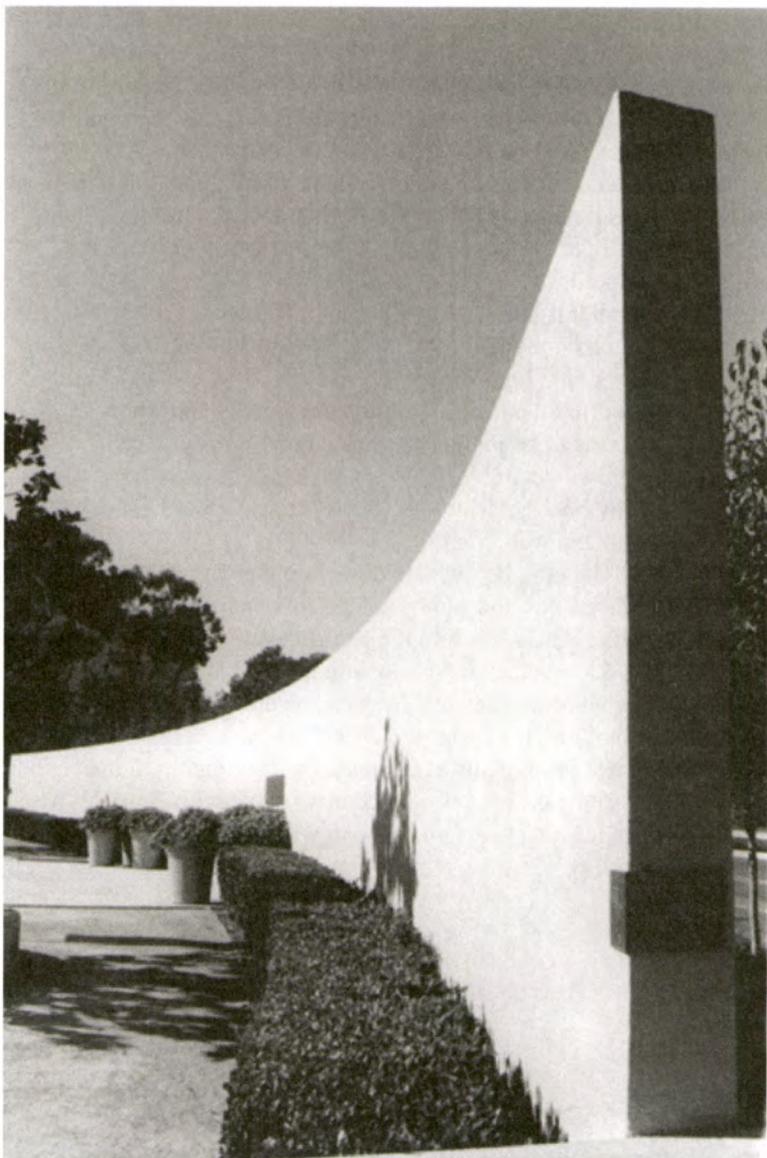
Samples of perfume have given way to samples of Preparation H. The ads for lipsticks have been replaced by ads for Geritol and Fasteeth. It is hard to keep up with the array of brochures for neck braces, wheel chairs, canes, crutches, and porta-potties.

This constant assault is taking its toll on my self-esteem. Yesterday, I turned the dimmer up a notch on my bathroom light. When I looked in the mirror. I noticed that my eyes might be planning to leave me. Why else would they have packed their bags and left them sitting right below on my cheekbones?

My body also seems to be joining the conspiracy. What else can explain this sudden horizontal growth spurt? Why does practicing the hula throw my back out? And why are my bones creaking so loudly? Lord knows I eat enough mayonnaise to keep them well oiled.

Recently I asked the little boy who is now posing as my doctor about some pains I am getting in various and sundry joints. He hemmed and hawed and looked uncomfortable. Finally, he told me he is not sure why I am feeling this way, but that it may have something to do with my age. When he saw my look of outrage, he retracted his statement. However, he did mention he never encountered this condition in 17 year-old cheerleaders.

I refuse to give up. Despite this conspiracy, I am struggling to maintain my sex goddess image. But please, someone, come to my rescue. Stop this assault on my youth. Please hurry! There is no time to waste! Today I received an ad from our local Mortuary.



Steven Homestead



Samuel Johnson

16th Annual Saddleback College Writing Contest 2000-2001

The Saddleback College annual writing contest is divided into five categories:

Poetry
Short Stories
Personal Essays
Expository Essay I
Expository Essay II

Held in the fall of each school year, the Annual Writing Contest invites students to submit brief papers that represent their best class work. The Contest promotes writing throughout all levels of composition, from beginning writing and ESL classes through advanced composition and creative writing courses. The English faculty at Saddleback College judges the submissions, giving cash prizes to the first-, second-, and third-place winners in each category. Though the Wall is not a part of the Writing Contest, we are happy to include the winning entries from this year's competition. With the exception of the Writing Contest section, the general submissions to the Wall are reviewed, selected, and edited solely by the students on the staff of the magazine. Questions or comments regarding the writing contest should be directed to Shelba Robison, chair of the English Dept., at Saddleback College

Poetry:

1st Place - Karen Palmer

2nd Place - Mura Lepera

3rd Place - Lynda Smith

Honorable Mention:

Frances Costikyan

Todd Johnson

Sue Malone

Donald Young

July In The Morning

Father O'Keeffe

Love's Labor

His Women

lark / send

An Artist's Longing

Haiku From A Winter Night

Short Stories:

1st Place - Louise Sherikar

2nd Place - Melissa Savlov

3rd Place - Frances Costikyan

Honorable Mention:

Mura Lepera

Steven McPhail

Matt Taylor

Samantha Tullett

93 Days and Counting

Mint Julep Craving

Why Did I Do It?

Best Wishes to Catherine

Gonna Go Places

Home Improvement

Bovine Intervention

Personal Essays:

1st Place - Rachel Conran

2nd Place - Lori Cardoza-Starnes

3rd Place - Bob Finn

Honorable Mention:

Roger Coleman

Becky Prieve

Galena Segal

Michelle Smaldino

Frank Spittle

Riding My High Horse

Lessons Of The Grail

The Rescue

Home Improvement

Feelings: You Have Three Lumps

The Prince and The Princess

I Cried

Which Road To Manhood?

Expository Essays I:

1st Place - A. Jacobs

2nd Place - Rod Buckley

3rd Place - Roi Patrick Freeman

Honorable Mention:

Marlene Hickey

Lori Lang

Omer Malik

Frank Spittle

Sir Walter Revisited

A Piercing Dilemma

Spank

The Way The Cookie Bumbles

Normal

Absurd Heroes

School Vouchers

Expository Essays II:

1st Place - Jonathan Gaines

2nd Place - Jake Schaeffer

3rd Place - June Spencer

Honorable Mention:

Candy Arnold

David Vaughan

Nightwalkers on the Pier

Censorship Isn't Always Bad

Reusing Recyclable Refuse

Reading To Jordan

Legalizing Drugs Won't Solve

Anything

July in the Morning
Karen Palmer

1st Place - Poetry

This Summer of white legs
and ripe plums
swallows me whole
as though
Winter danced with the sun--
wild as a cat--
and a jack-o-lantern moon
hid Fall under witches' skirts.

This Summer of unexpected blue
splashed Spring
into foam,
spawned seadawn nymphs,
snatched April from her bed,

while we cock our heron head
at the shifting of one grain of sand.

Father O'Keeffe
Mura Lepera

2nd Place - Poetry

Surrounded by your flock
You, our shepherd, struggled to connect.
Those who shared your life
You no longer could recall.
You called me Mary
Though that was not my name.

Pictures of baptisms, weddings, church picnics,
Your trip to Rome and the Holy Land
Spilled across tables
To remind you--us--that you existed once.

Now you, robbed of a memory,
And me, robbed of a friend,
Embraced wordlessly.

Tears spilled over my cheeks
And the taste of salt settled on my lips.
I looked into your eyes
Vacant now of recognition
Telling you silently
That I loved you.

A farewell more grievous than the grave.
You called me Mary
Though that was not my name.

Love's Labor
Lynda Smith

3rd Place - Poetry

Not from battle wounds comes this searing pain.
A sweat-bathed brow is cooled by tender hands.
First-love is resurrected and withstands,
all fury now directed to one gain.
Now pushing, panting, screaming near insane.
A life within is making known demands,
and in so doing wrests all reason planned.
Now pulsing, building, begging, then refrain.

Rejoice! No sunrise ever did attain,
this glow when morning's rays first kiss the land
as does this crying babe. Epiphany!
Sweet cry from cherub comes, soft touch remains.
Each breath measures and hopes to understand,
this moment now begins the symphony.

Christine was nauseous when she woke up, but she didn't want to be late for the Willi Smith lecture. She couldn't throw up now; she didn't have the time. Besides, she'd gone ninety-three days into this pregnancy without vomiting once, and she wasn't about to spoil a perfect record. She squeezed her eyes shut and willed the nausea away. Nothing was going to stop her.

She slipped out of bed and crossed over to her closet, hurriedly eyeing her Willi-Wear. A dress would be out of the question--it would take too much time to pull on the nylons. A lot of her clothes didn't fit anymore, but she found a slouchy oversized tunic and leggings that barely showed the bulge of her belly. She yanked them on and slid into her running shoes--she hated to ruin her outfit, but she'd never make the bus in heels. Pausing briefly to scrutinize herself in the wardrobe mirror, she rushed out of her room, grabbed a bagel from the kitchenette, and fled out of her apartment onto 33rd Street.

She sprinted down the block to Park Avenue, arriving at the bus stop slightly out of breath. She could see the bus more than a block away, so she had a minute to relax and collect her thoughts. A man on the corner studied her, admiringly. "Wow," he said, "you're tall. Are you a model?"

She smiled at the familiar question and shook her head. When she'd first arrived in New York, she had, in fact, taken her portfolio to every reputable agency in town. The Ford Agency had told her that, yes, she was beautiful in person, but she wasn't photogenic. "You're too wholesome-looking, and wholesome isn't in right now," the Wilhelmina people had said. This had been a shock to Christine. For most of her 19 years, she'd been hearing the same refrain over and over, "You're gorgeous, you should be a model." She'd heard this from everyone, from relatives and friends, from strangers like this one, who accosted her on the street. She'd had no reason to doubt that what they were saying was true.

Apparently, it wasn't, because other girls got the jobs. But she'd gotten over it. She'd thrown herself, on the one hand, into her art and fashion classes, discovering that she had a knack not only for wearing clothes, but for designing them, and on the other hand, into her relationship with Steve. She'd spent the entire summer with him at his place upstate, helping him piece his life together after a messy divorce. He was a wreck when they'd met, but she'd nursed him back to sanity. She'd cooked gourmet meals for him, tended his garden, ironed his shirts, and tidied his living room. He'd made her feel like a real grown-up; and now that she was going to have his child, she felt even more grown up. She looked forward to the serenity of motherhood.

The bus came to a stop in front of her, rousing her from her reverie. She

climbed aboard, dropped into the nearest seat, and congratulated herself for having gotten her morning off to such a rapid start. She'd be on time for the lecture after all. Ordinarily, it wouldn't have mattered much, but tickets to the Willi Smith lecture had been hard to come by, and Professor Martin had pulled strings for her. Professor Martin had been a mentor and a mother to Christine. She had consoled Christine when her modeling dreams had fizzled. She had recognized in Christine's early, uncertain sketches the possibility of bold, head-turning designs. But she had also turned away without saying a word when Christine told her she'd be taking next semester off to have a baby. Christine couldn't disappoint Professor Martin again--the least she could do was be on time for the lecture.

A woman with an infant and a pre-schooler scrambled on to the bus at 24th street and settled into the seat across from Christine. The pre-schooler, a slobber-faced boy of 3 or 4, slipped out of his mother's grasp and began running up and down the aisle. "Choo, Choo, Mama, I'm a train!" he shrieked.

"Come back here, Justin!" his mother shouted. "You can't run on the bus. You have to stay in your seat."

"Catch me Mama! Catch me!"

The bus lurched suddenly forward, hurling the boy against the steel frame of a seat. His lip split open, and blood began oozing down his chin. "I'm bleeding, Mama! I'm bleeding," he wailed. "I need a Band-Aid." His infant brother, silent until then, started whimpering in sympathy.

"Now look what you did, Justin. I told you not to run on the bus." The mother rose to rescue her wounded son, but her equilibrium had been thrown off by the baby on her lap, and she stumbled back down onto her seat. The baby's whimpers swelled into screams, and his brother's wailing intensified. Christine leaned toward the slumping mother. "Can I hold your baby for you?" she offered.

"Yeah, that would be great," the mother answered. She passed the baby to Christine, and took off down the aisle after the toddler. The baby, not at all pleased to be in the arms of a stranger, continued to scream. Christine cooed into his ear to no avail. She felt a flood of thick, warm fluid gush through his diaper and recoiled at the stench of diarrhea. The baby's mother finished sopping up the blood from his brother's chin and returned to her seat. "Thanks," she said, reaching over to reclaim the stinking infant. "You're so kind."

Christine shrugged her shoulders in reply, then looked up to observe that the bus was now a block south of Union Square, where she was supposed to get off. "Oh shit," she muttered. "Driver, please stop! I missed my stop!"

The driver glared at her in the rear view mirror, then slowed down and released her at the corner. She trudged off in the direction of Union Square, debating whether it was worth the effort of running since there was now no way she'd be on time. She felt tired, and her nausea had returned. Still, she

thought, better five than ten minutes late. She forced herself to break into a jog. She hummed to herself as she ran, trying to wipe out her memory of the scene on the bus. She ran past a children's clothing store with a poster of well-dressed cherubs floating on clouds. The image cheered her, and gradually she forgot about the blood and diarrhea.

The entrance to Union Square loomed ahead, so she veered down 14th Street and ran the final block to Parson's School of Design. Panting, she pried open the heavy double doors and darted into the lobby elevator just as its doors were sliding closed. She stepped into the corner to catch her breath and realized with a start that she was not going to be late after all. At the rear of the elevator stood Willi Smith himself. Nonplused, she stared at him. A small, gentle-looking man, he peered back at her through oversized glasses. Although accustomed to towering over men, she suddenly felt self-conscious about her height.

He smiled at her and held out his hand. "You're a beautiful girl," he said. "Would you be interested in doing some modeling for me?"

Christine shivered. "Yes," she said, "I'd love to."

He handed her his business card, then cleared his throat. "You know you'll have to lose that little tummy first, though."

"Oh," Christine said, "I'm pregnant."

"Oh," he said. "Then I guess it's not going to work out."

The elevator bounced to a stop, and the doors slid open. Willi Smith stepped out. Christine followed behind. She spied the Ladies' room just to the right of the auditorium entrance, and made a dash for it. She slipped in to the nearest stall, doubled up above the toilet and, for the first time in ninety-three days, threw up.

New Orleans? Oh, sure, I passed through there once, years ago. I'd just graduated from Ithaca College--you know, in upstate New York. Those were great times, my college years. I had my sorority, a strong grade point average, an entourage of boyfriends. So you could see why I was in no hurry to leave and face the reality of getting a job. But the money ran out, and my parents expected me back in California and so what could I do? I took the long route home--up to Minnesota, down to New Orleans--you get the picture.

Yeah, a lot of crazy things happened during that trip. I got suckered into attending a day-long religious seminar in Salt Lake City. I slipped and almost fell into the Grand Canyon. A psychic in Taos tried to mesmerize me. But New Orleans . . . Now that was really something.

After a long day of driving in ninety-degree heat, I finally checked into my hotel and managed to perch myself on one of those ornate Bourbon Street balconies just in time for sunset. I ordered myself a mint julep without knowing what it was, except for New Orleans' best-known cocktail. So I was surprised when I could barely taste the mint for the bourbon; but, at that point, I was too tired to care. Between the long drive, the moist Southern heat and the drink, I felt submissive and womanly--a dangerous combination, especially with a man like him around.

When he sauntered over to my table, his voice, not his face, body, or even his age, struck me first. He had one of those musky, Southern voices, which brought to mind fireflies and chiggers and alligators looming beneath a steamy swamp. He looked slightly drunk and smelled a little sweet, not unlike the mint julep I timidly nursed. Standing uncomfortably close to my table, he winked and slurred, "Are you in desire of some company? Or would you prefer to set alone?"

My eyes strained to see his intentions. I couldn't decipher them, so I studied his looks instead. Opaque greenish-brown eyes with off-whites. Dirty blond hair. Dark skin for a white man. About my father's age. He wore a dapper, if wrinkled, bone linen suit, a dress shirt with a yellow-stained collar. A preacher once lectured that the devil can only harm you if you invite him into your life. Still, something about the polite way he waited for my answer, and perhaps the beginning effects of the bourbon, persuaded me.

"Sure! Have a seat!" I invited him with my self-consciously bright Californian accent, which I never did lose Back East, though I tried. I smiled at him in a way a woman alone should never smile at a stranger, I realized once my lips fell back to neutral.

"Where're you from, if you don't mind my bein' so forward?"

Damn. He recognized my out-of-town accent.

"California," I answered sheepishly. His eyes lit up.

"Ah! 'Been there once, to San Diego. It's a beautiful state, California."

"Thanks," I replied, as if I could take credit for the beauty of my entire state just because I lived there. It was almost dusk. The sky became increasingly gray, and I became increasingly nervous. "Well, it was nice meeting you. But I really should go." I shifted in my chair. "Would you like to finish my drink? Mint juleps are just too strong for me. I get drunk on one glass of wine."

"No. Thank you. I've had my fill for tonight." He paused. "Uh, would you like me to walk you back to your hotel? Lots of dangerous characters come 'round here at nightfall, lookin' for trouble."

Again, I studied him. Which was the better option, a charming stranger whom I'd already given certain allowances or these unknown "characters" of the night? I remembered a statistic I once heard that rape victims are usually acquainted with their attackers. Then I recalled how a naked man chased a friend of mine through the French Quarter after dark the year before. No one helped her when they saw him running after her. Her only salvation was that she was a track star and managed to outrun him. I ran about a mile an hour.

"Thank you. But I wouldn't want to trouble you."

"It'd be no trouble at all, I assure you. I'd be more troubled thinkin' about a pretty young lady such as yourself alone on the dangerous streets of N' Awlins after dark."

I blushed. "Well, since you put it that way, I suppose I'll have to accept!" I flirted by instinct, regretting it a moment later.

We strolled together. I tried not to bump into him as I made my way on the cracked, uneven sidewalks. But my hand flailed into his once or twice. I apologized immediately when it happened. He just ignored it.

He knew a lot about the South and New Orleans in particular. He told me all sorts of stories about the town, and I liked listening to the meandering tones of his voice. It blended perfectly with the wafting scent of jasmine in the air, the little crickets singing their songs in the shrubbery, the tall, untouchable mansions, dressed-up in wrought iron lace. I liked being with him. So, when he suggested a late dinner at Antoine's, I accepted without hesitation.

By the time we finished our succulent meal, humidity still lingered and jiggled in the air. People romped down the center of Bourbon Street, laughing and singing and dancing. I swallowed the mood and caught the contagion. We swirled and swigged from random cups of beer and bourbon and who knows what other concoctions. We undulated to the rhythms of the street, swaying and thrusting, falling against each other and not caring.

His hands slid around my waist, up my back, along the nape of my neck, and into my hair, which he gripped with gentle force. His kiss was slow, syrupy, and molten, like an intoxicating combination of hot Cajun chicken and

bananas flambés. My closed eyes pictured peacock feathers and creeping ivy and dark fingers clasped around a saxophone as the stranger filled my body with his tongue's succulent juices. He knew just when to end that kiss and, when he released me, I wanted no more.

After the kiss, he kept his word and escorted me back to the hotel. He claimed my hand and I gave it willingly. Our bodies moved in sync now. I no longer tripped over cracks or fell off the sidewalk. When we got to my door, he took both of my hands and I expected a question to issue from his lips, or for him to act without asking.

But he surprised me. He did not take me into his arms, but kissed me just once, politely, on my right cheek. He leaned in close to my ear and I heard him breathe in my scent before he released my hands, winked, and left me to dream bed-soaking dreams. He was a gentleman, and I awoke the next morning feeling less the lady.

I never did catch that man's name, but I doubt I will ever forget that night or that kiss. Sometimes, when I feel lonely or unattractive, I just close my eyes and pretend I'm there again, frolicking the night away on Bourbon Street. But, whenever I open my eyes and consider browsing the Internet for fares to New Orleans, that's when I stop. That's when I shake my head clear, note the wedding photo on my bed-stand, and ask my husband if he'd please fix me a mint julep. He knows how to make them just right.

Why Did I Do It?
Frances Costikyan

3rd Place - Short Story

The police want me to admit the killing was premeditated.

Idiots! Do they think I'd be that clumsy on purpose? The idea's an insult. They claim I have a motive since everybody knows my sister and I don't get along. True. But does that mean I'd off her deliberately? No way! All it proves is how little they know about sisters, about the rivalry that simmers from the moment one of you realizes the other's now a permanent member of the family and the other realizes you got there first so she's stuck with you. It's a special sort of conflict few men can understand. How many Cain and Abel stories are there about sisters, anyway?

But to begin with the day of the event, I had driven to my sister's house in Connecticut to finish disposing of our Mom's estate and was in a relaxed mood as I believed we had made it through the worst. We'd sold her city apartment, moved her into a nursing home, had her furniture, jewelry and paintings appraised, and my sister had finally given up the ditsy idea of transferring all of Mother's property into our names so the state would have to pay for her care. All we had still to do was to divvy up her jewelry and move her stuff from the summer house so it too could be sold.

Oh, I admit I was still fuming over the idea of pauperizing our mom. It had taken all the muscle I could muster from three thousand miles away in Oregon to convince Mom's bank and her lawyer to squelch that one. The old gal hadn't much dignity left. I felt the least we could do was leave her the pride of paying her own way. Besides, if our Dad, who had earned the money on which she lived, didn't come back from the dead to haunt us if we appropriated it, he'd certainly whirl in his grave--which he didn't deserve.

So you could say I arrived at my sister's cottage with a chip on my shoulder. Which is likely why I opened our discussion by saying, "I think we should sit on opposite sides of this kitchen table because you know we always disagree. I say something is logical, and you immediately say it's not true. I see red, you see green."

"That's not true," she said immediately. "I never disagree with you--except when you're wrong."

Now it doesn't take a conflict resolution specialist to see our meeting was off to a bad start. But I'd promised myself to focus on the outcome we both wanted: a fair and sensible division of our mom's assets, so I apologized.

"I'm sorry I began by being so negative," I said. "Let's forget about us being opposites and focus on dividing the property. I've brought my copy of the appraiser's list, and you have yours?" She nodded. "Let's start at page one and go through the items, taking our pick as we go. When we're all through, we'll add up the value of the items and see how near to even it comes out."

“Why must you always try and set the ground rules?” my sister growled, her voice barely containing her anger. “I’m keeping a running total on my adding machine. You do as you like!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” I muttered. “We’ll both keep a running tally if that’s what you want. Let’s just do it.”

We hit the lists. First the furniture--right off the bat she chose the dining room table our father made out of wood harvested from our land. I would have loved that table, but how could I object? It weighed a ton and would have been prohibitively expensive to ship to the West Coast.

I took the old kitchen rocking chair. She must have had her eye on it because she murmured gratuitously, “I always hated that chair.” As the day wore on, the lists dwindled. We stopped for lunch and told a couple of “remember when” stories. Watching us, you might have thought we were a couple of old friends. We even divided the books amicably. Some she took I would have liked, but I’m sure I chose several she would have liked. The moment came when we were at the end of the jewelry list and I thought we were done.

With a contented sigh I began to stuff my lists into my briefcase, when my sister said with a smirk, “One more thing,” and produced two tattered shoe boxes each tied with twine. Handing one to me, she said, “I found these last summer in Mother’s attic. That one has your name on it. This one’s mine. I thought it would be fun to open them together.”

In my box was a daily vacation bible school report card, several old home week ribbons, a couple of cast iron bears, and a round metal item I couldn’t identify. In the brief moment it was in my hand, I observed it had a rotating dial that moved a pointer through a field of numbers.

“Look!” I said, holding it up, “what do you suppose this is?”

With a swoop, my sister grabbed the gizmo from my hand and exclaimed, “It’s a valuable Little Orphan Annie decoder-ring, and it’s mine.”

“It was in my box!” I snapped, dismayed. Confounded. What to do? We were both more than sixty-years-old. It was beneath my dignity to risk a physical struggle and snatch it back. As it was, I almost started a shouting match as I demanded, “You give it to me. It was in my box.”

“Make me!” she replied.

Now you’ll have to agree my next move was more an involuntary reaction than the result of deliberate thought. I reached across the table and with both hands, grabbed a cast iron frying pan from above the stove and whomped it down hard on my sister’s head. It was messy, but did the trick. I got my decoder-ring back.

That’s what happened, cross my heart. Think about it. Do you honestly believe if I’d planned to whack her that afternoon, I’d have chosen to do it with an ordinary kitchen skillet? Give me a break. If the killing had been premeditated, I’d have gone out to the barn and fetched an ax.

Riding My High Horse
Rachel Conran

1st Place - Personal Essay

I took an empty cardboard box and scooped the filthy garbage mountain from the kitchen floor. "I'm not living this way when I'm grown," I muttered under my breath.

My mother overheard me. Her tricky feet sneaked up behind me, catching me unawares. She brained me with her wooden cooking spoon. "Miss Fancy Pants up on her high horse again," my mother said. "Miss Fancy Pants thinks she's too good to live like *us*."

I knelt on the floor, shoveling garbage with my hands. I ignored the knot on my head. I would not let tears leak out. I would not give her that satisfaction.

* * *

We did not use wasteful plastic trash bags. My mother got free boxes from the grocery store. Boxes the store had gutted like fish.

My mother set these boxes in our kitchen. She filled them until they overflowed with waste. She mounded them higher and higher. Eggshells, newspapers, and moldy mashed potatoes exploded; a giant garbage beast reached tendrils across the floor. It drew flies. Rather than empty the trash boxes, my mother hung flypaper.

She realized that I regularly hauled overstuffed trash boxes out to our back field, burning them without being told. "Stop wasting the boxes," she ordered. "Miss Fancy Pants."

* * *

I turned seventeen. There was no keeping me. My mother tried, with her sticky flypaper strips and her greasy stove. "Who's gone help me keep up the house?" She looked at me, lost.

"I won't stay," I told her, "unless you leave *him*." My mother knew who I meant. She also knew *what* I meant, though she pretended otherwise.

She raised her hand to smack me down off my high horse. I lifted my own fist and shook it at her. "Better not," I told her. "Better not make that mistake." I was grown then. She feared me, I think.

Mama lowered her hand. "You was always wanting to bust up my marriage any old way," she said, sullen as a little child. "Go, then. I don't give a shit."

I married a military man. We lived in a cockroach apartment in Virginia. I bought a used vacuum cleaner and a plastic trash can for my kitchen. I bought a broom and dustpan. I bought, with tremendous joy, a box of plastic trash bags.

* * *

Lugging my swollen belly, I followed a man through a vacant Virginia house. A military house, for which my husband and I had waited more than a

year, on a long, long list at the housing office.

Wooden floors gleamed waxy yellow-brown, full of the sun beating through clean windows. I thought about our tiny cockroach apartment. I thought about my coming baby. I was due to birth my son any second. No cardboard boxes for him. No cockroach house for him.

Weeping, I sat on the floor. That military house was the nicest place I'd ever lived. I could fit everything we owned in one room of that house.

The housing officer, embarrassed by my tears, shifted his feet uncomfortably. "Sign here for the keys," he mumbled.

* * *

My mother visited when my son was two years old. She watched my son bobble along in an unstained T-shirt and little baby blue jeans. My son gripped my bentwood rocker, bought at a yard sale for twenty-five dollars. He tottered to our new, brown davenport. He whacked sticky hands on the glass-topped coffee table; I tagged after him, spraying Windex.

My mother sniffed. She looked at my kitchen, my spice rack labeled neat. My breadbox containing store-bought bread. My bookcase with my books, bought new. She ran a chapped finger across their spines. "Bet *these* was dear," she said, shaming me. She eyed my knick-knack shelf; it held my son's china baby cup and matching plate, a gift from my friend, Mary Lena.

* * *

I saw my pretentiousness in Mama's surveillant eyes. Had I forgot my place? Who was I fooling? Did I think new books and a china baby cup could raise me above my station?

Finally she spoke. "I like your walls," she said grudgingly, and my heart swelled. My walls didn't have busted holes or blackened wallpaper where small electrical fires caught--like hers did.

"But," she reminded, kicking up her dirty boots across my new brown davenport, "this is government housing. You do not own it."

I hung underneath my high horse while he dragged me. My high horse kicked my head; I did not turn him loose. I looked at my baby son. My baby son jangled me like spurs. I did not turn loose of my high horse.

* * *

I moved to California. My first husband left me. "Are you coming home?" my mother asked on the telephone. She whispered in my mind: *Are you coming home? Dragging your tail behind? Miss Fancy Pants? Who fell off her high horse?*

"I am home already," I told her.

* * *

I last spoke with my mother in 1992. "I want to go to school," I said.

"Why? You're as far as you can go already," she said. She told me about my younger sister, who was on welfare and in college and scratching ends

together as a single parent of a little boy, whose father had been committed to a psychiatric unit.

“Get off your high horse,” she told me.

“Never,” I said. “It’s carried me too far. It’s carried me away from you,” I said.

I think I rode my high horse beyond my mother’s borders. I think my high horse carried me to a foreign land. This must be true. My mother and I do not speak the same language any longer. I forgot her customs. I do not buy flypaper. I do not use cardboard boxes for any reason. I have not spoken to her in eight years.

My high horse gallops me in my dreams.

Who would have imagined such a holy relic could be found in the midst of a Danberry Drive garage sale? As soon as Christine and I saw it, we knew. This Van Gogh at a flea market, this gold found in an old muddy stream at Sutter's Mill, this miracle medicine in the mold of a cheese--it must be ours. We were lucky that day. We had at least three dollars worth of Bubble Up, Tab, and A&W Root Beer bottles to return for deposit at Ralphs Grocery Store, and for that--only that--Christ's holy grail was ours.

Christine and I were third grade King Arthur buffs. We had listened to Disney's The Sword in the Stone record until we knew it by heart. When I was six, Mama had read about the Round Table, Gawain and his contest with the Green Knight, and glorious Camelot so many times, that I could recite the stories over to Christine as she listened, much like me, wide eyed and enchanted.

From that time on, Christine and I were truly the Knights of the Round Table. The old, rusted swing set became our trusty steeds, perfect for jousting tournaments. An old tree branch with foil clumsily wrapped around it mystically transformed into Excalibur which, over and over, we raised from an imaginary stone; buckets full of purple jacaranda flowers, the fairy dust from the centers of red and orange hibiscus blossoms, and weeds and burrs we stole from nearly all of Danberry Drive's yards brewed and bubbled with hose water, and with a few magic spells, turned us both into Morgana le Fey--the evil and marvelous pupil of Merlin the Magician.

But that stuff was just pretend. This grail was real. Dragging our wagon over the bumpy Garden Grove streets to get our three dollars and twenty cents, we knew we were in actuality on a quest. If we, like Galahad, were completely pure of heart, and we didn't manage to break one soda bottle, the grail would be ours.

And truly, that blue glass goblet, the grail, was something enchanting in our lives. Snuggled in the bushes between our two houses, it held deeply meaningful and important coded messages, written to each other on nights when it was too late to play. It held grape juice which, when sipped, allowed us to pass all multiplication tests, made our mothers let us stay outside a little longer in the evenings, and kept all sorts of deadly male cooties permanently in hiding. And, of course, it held our carefully hoarded money which would get me into Canyon Meadows Christian Camp where Christine was privileged to attend one week each summer.

Daddy, you see, was strictly Catholic. He made no allowances for other points of view, no leniencies when it came to Christine's Baptist upbringing. He didn't understand that this Canyon Meadows was a dream, a delightful vis-

age of horseback riding, built-in pools, covered wagon cabins, wienie roasts, and night time games of spot light. The dream, of course, had absolutely nothing to do with whether the pope was infallible or confession necessary. Christine and I understood God simply--we had no need for religious trifles. We prayed and hoped that if we saved enough money and had the blessing of the holy grail, Daddy would forget his prejudices and see the pilgrimage to camp our way.

Over and over, we clinked the coins into the grail, until gradually it overflowed the chalice in a delightful array of copper and silver. And it was, I think, because we believed in the purity of our quest, that it was fulfilled. As we poured the contents of our grail at Daddy's feet, running our fingers through the proceeds of hours of car washing and bed making, we dared not breathe lest Daddy's stubborn religious attitude crumble our hope to bits. Whether our quest was truly noble, our faith in the grail's power complete, or simply because Daddy realized the innocence of our summer-camp dream, he shrugged and nodded a simple assent.

And today, as I teach British Literature to sullen seniors, I never proclaim King Arthur a myth. For I still believe that if hearts are truly pure and quests completely honorable, the grail will grant your heart's desire.

The Rescue
Bob Finn

3rd Place - Personal Essay

Mr. Crow, our lovable pet crow, happened into our lives as the result of a backyard rescue from one of nature's quirks. This episode began a few years ago, on a warm spring afternoon, when my wife Sue and I went to visit our son John, who was attending college in Long Beach. He was sharing a small three-bedroom home with two other classmates in a quiet residential neighborhood. This was my favorite time of the year to visit John because the Jacaranda trees that lined both sides of his street were in full bloom, and their delicate, pale purple flowers created a spectacular aura transforming the street into a mystical-like tunnel.

As we approached his front door, we sensed that something was upsetting the normal serenity of the neighborhood. We could see two boisterous crows perched atop the telephone-wires, squawking like nervous sentries, warning the approach of "Attila the Hun." John informed us that this annoying ruckus had been going on all day. He had noticed that a baby crow had fallen into his fenced back yard, and that the commotion was originating from two vociferous and anxious crows, probably the distraught parents.

The two parent crows were doing a good job, with all of that tumult and chaos, of laying down a blanket of protection to keep any lurking predators at bay. Other crows were also joining in with their clamorous support. Since crows are very social birds, it is common behavior for them to come to the aid of their comrades when there is trouble. Although the crows were providing a great deal of noisy camouflage, they would not or could not provide any other beneficial assistance to the forlorn and otherwise doomed baby. There were prowling cats in the neighborhood, but they either had not yet discovered this easy prey or they were reluctant to venture into this alarmed arena.

When we got our first glimpse of the star of this backyard tragedy, he was perched in stoic defiance on the edge of a large earthenware dog dish, like a proud statue. In an attempt to provide some assistance, John had filled the dish with water and placed it next to where the baby crow had fallen. This defenseless little black ball of fuzzy pinfeathers and pink skin looked so pathetic, that my heart melted for him. Although standing tall and attempting to look brave, the poor little creature must have been thinking something like, "I'm having a baaad day--what else can go wrong?"

My wife and I are not experts in bird care, but we do have some experience with the subject. Some of our neighbors have called Sue "The Bird Lady," referring to her previous experiences of nursing fallen birds back to health. I was raised in a rural town in Illinois and experienced the joys of raising pet dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, geese, and--oh yes--two crows.

Except for his pride, the baby crow did not appear to be injured. We tried without success to get him to drink water from an old eyedropper. We also tried to feed him some raw ground beef, but he was either too frightened or too stubborn to eat. We knew that his survival was in serious jeopardy.

The thought of abandoning that cute little fuzz-ball to the cruelty of the local marauding tomcats created a lot of guilt. So--possibly remembering the wonderful experiences of my boyhood pets and relying on Sue's nurturing ability--we decided to adopt him. We placed him in an old, abandoned wire rabbit cage that we found in the back of John's garage and readied him for the journey to come home with us. We looked up and noticed that the two worried parent crows had become quiet and were inquisitively watching our every move. I would like to think that they somehow sensed that their baby was going to be safe.

This backyard rescue was the end of the baby crow's nightmare and the beginning of the interesting relationship we were about to have with our lovable Mr. Crow--a truly unforgettable and uniquely interesting pet.

As nearly as I can recall, I looked pretty macho back in the forties--it was probably the way my cigarette hung from the left side of my mouth, with the 3/4-inch ash neatly balanced at the tip.

As a two-pack-a-day smoker, the habit reinforcements are still vivid in my memory. At that time smoking enjoyed popular support, thanks to regular promotion by such celebrities as Humphrey Bogart and Ronald Reagan, and the Surgeon General had yet to issue a report declaring it a health hazard. Though the ads of the day proudly proclaimed such nonsense as "Not a cough in a carload," we unsophisticated teenagers knew instinctively that we were breathing something harmful. Raleigh, the brand several of us smoked, came with a coupon attached to each package which, when enough were collected, could be exchanged for various prizes. Our standard gallows humor was that we were saving up for an iron lung.

Many persons wise up at some point in life, my awakening coming shortly after my nineteenth birthday. There is no doubt in my mind that had my cigarette use continued, I would be long dead. Perhaps this is not important from an overview of human history, but it certainly has significance for me.

Most of us who became hooked on the weed started our use at an early age, thanks in part to the effective targeting by the tobacco industry of children in the eleven to fourteen age group. And make no mistake--it was effective. The combination of romantic images, reinforced with seductive Kool billboards, delusions of grandeur perpetuated with visions of an unfiltered John Wayne, and the constant reminder of personal inadequacy assuaged only by a sense of oneness with the Marlboro Man, was what enabled the tobacco companies to declare healthy quarterly stock dividends.

It is also true that many of us who kicked the habit did so without extensive or expensive treatment programs. It is hard to say what is required for a smoker to set tobacco aside, as different people respond to different stimuli. The threat of imminent death by cancer is sufficient for some, while others continue to puff through a plastic tube inserted in their trachea after the malignant larynx has been surgically removed. It is a very personal matter, and as with all addictions--yes, *all* addictions--until the individual decides to quit, it will not happen. Only when the basic psyche finds itself at cross-purposes with a habit, will the practice end. It is for this reason that treatment efforts for all sorts of substance-abuse are normally ineffective. Whether it be alcohol recovery encouraged and paid for by family members or court-ordered drug rehabilitation, without the resolve by the addict, it will come to nothing. It has long been my suspicion that the practitioners who operate such facilities are keenly aware of

this, and count on repeated failures as the basis for continuing profitability. The last thing that Ms. Helga Hammerlock, owner and operator of the Poughkeepsie Bunghole Alcohol Treatment Center, really wants is that any of her \$6,500 per month collection of recyclable sots actually give up the bottle.

Another aspect of tobacco has to do with its physiological effect. Much research has been conducted and over two hundred chemical substances, some clearly carcinogenic, have been identified as smoke ingredients. For many years cigarette makers have stressed filtration and its effect in reducing tar and nicotine. The potency of every chemical agent, from trace amounts of benzene and formaldehyde to the products of the chemically treated paper, is vigorously debated. It has even been suggested, perhaps with justification, that a cigarette high in nicotine would be the safest, in that the addict can get the required fix with the least exposure to other harmful ingredients.

In the discussion, one thing rarely mentioned is the agent which may be the most deadly ingredient of all: the tobacco itself. It is recognized in research circles that the tobacco leaf is surprisingly rich in radioactivity, with evidence that the sources are ingredients of the phosphate fertilizer in which the tobacco is grown. The principal culprits seem to be two radioactive isotopes that decay through beta emission, and which hang around in a pretty active state for the better part of a half-century. These beta particles have a slight penetrating ability, so that when the tobacco smoke deposits its ingredients on the surface of a lung, the tissue nearby will be bombarded for years with ionizing radiation: a recognized cause of molecular mutation with its potential for malignancy. There is an excellent likelihood that this, rather than chemical factors, is the primary cause of lung cancer. If so, no filter which permits the smoke containing the vaporized tobacco leaf to pass through, regardless of the reduction in pollutants, can be effective. Inasmuch as the smoke is the one thing that must get through if there is to be gratification for the smoker, safety becomes unobtainable. Only the ultimate filter that would let nothing through could be claimed to eliminate all health hazard, and trying to take a drag through that would probably result in a double hernia.

My sympathy goes out to today's youthful generation. With the popularity of smoke-free areas, the public's contempt for the smoker, and a tobacco industry fighting for survival, most will find it tough developing the nonchalant swagger I perfected a half century ago. And as they puff, I am reminded of the popular lament: *Ve ist too soon old and too late schmart.*

A Piercing Dilemma *Rod Buckley*

2nd Place - Expository I

Our obsession with decorating every inch of our body uncloaks many contradictions. Some are obvious, others slip by.

First, there's the matter of breaching the epidermal organ, piercing the skin. Females have pierced their ears since before anyone's great-grandparent can remember--to the extent that teenage girls would be lagging, uncool, until their ears are properly punctured. Every extremity has been pierced in our culture; tongues, nipples, noses, lips, eyebrows, private parts, etc. Wait a second; eyebrows are not considered an extremity--unless, of course, you consider the swelling due to infection.

Men boasted gaudy earrings on pirate ships and in the Kasbah marketplaces of centuries past, then in rock bands and the hippie movement on the coattails of the sixties Haight-Ashbury movement. In recent decades, however, the male earring has almost disappeared in most segments of society. It no longer seemed manly with men's hair fashions shortening all the while. Only the daring hung on to their golden or diamond-studded crutch to manliness. A false crutch, at that.

Civil rights attorney and feminist Gloria Allred can hold her own in a war of words with anyone, and often does. Tell me, then, why are her lips all red, and her hair and clothing impeccable, like Barbie and Ken's chaperone? Do her customs carry more iron than her words? Is she dressing up for her man? I doubt it; she's probably telling him how to dress. Is she following trends while sending confusing signals to her followers? I'll bet her toenails sparkle. I'd give her more credence if she chased Rush Limbaugh around with a big shiny sword, messed up hair, wearing a Xena Warrior Princess outfit.

A nudist on a Jerry Springer video (I was looking for Miracle on 34th Street and it just flew into my hand, I swear) wore earrings and lipstick to proclaim her freedom. I guess only from the neck down, right? She walks the streets of Chicago in the buff flaunting her birthday suit. "Why not? I was born this way." Born with breast implants? Dow Corning's pre-natal division must have surely been busy.

Barry Bonds of the San Francisco Giants swaggers confidently up to the plate, tall and arrogant. He commands the respect of fans and sportswriters coast-to-coast and will waltz into the Hall of Fame, in a few years, when he's good and ready to retire. A shiny crucifix affixed to his left earlobe wiggles with his every movement. I've heard there is a significance of the left earlobe, rather than the right, in alternate lifestyles. In Barry's case, however, his batting helmet covers his right ear. He looks just as silly hitting two home runs as he does striking out four times. What's his message? That he's different, bad, cool, anti-

establishment, better than you? We know all that. People love him and love to hate him. His superfluous adornment, a stark contrast to his mundane uniform, only makes him an easier target for ridicule.

By conscious choice I don't subscribe to adornments, such as hats, earrings, tattoos, or neckties. At least not as an enhancement to the individual. This becomes a problem when Americans spend billions on outward appearances and a pittance, in terms of time and expense, on health and longevity-- then slap on a few tattoos for good measure.

Any extraneous jewelry or aesthetics feels like part of a costume or a uniform to me. I can hardly stand sunglasses, and most of the time they're more comfortable on top of my head than on the bridge of my nose. Maybe I'm just chicken to wear eyebrow rings and my belly isn't flat and sexy enough for a navel ring. And I just can't decide on where to brand that naked-lady tattoo, the likes of which won't even come near me.

In the men's locker room of 24 Hour Fitness, a young guy primps in front of a full-length mirror and carefully adjusts his ball cap on backwards, tucks in his sleeveless tee shirt (we called them muscle shirts back East), then enters the floor for his sweaty workout. This, of course, is after circling the parking lot ten times for the closest space to the gym, in an effort not to allow the wind to mess up his hair. His sleeveless workout shirt has a hood, for no apparent reason, reaching part way down his back. He catches a glimpse of his bulging triceps and developing calves as he drifts past one of the three hundred floor-to-ceiling mirrors, wall space permitting.

Next to him, on the Gluteus-Maximizer machine, a friend wearing a tightly wound blue gang-style, paisley scarf on his head and a spider web tattoo on the back of his neck, greets him with a Herculean handshake. They resume their workout with muscles rippling through their carefully coiled athletic attire. Perhaps I should be a little more sensitive. The scarf guy could actually be a chemotherapy patient clinging to life, trying desperately to accumulate new gobs of white blood cells. I doubt it, though.

From the position of an unadorned person, not a ring on my finger (or any exotic place), hat, jewelry, etc., an opposing viewpoint is welcomed. I'm a lone wolf and do not paint the entire landscape.

The human body, with body hair, cellulite, a little flab here and there, is inherently beautiful, adornments notwithstanding. Adornments only adorn, like window dressing. Put lipstick on a pig and you've still got a six-hundred-pound oinker.

Well, enough of this. Think I'll splash on a bit of cologne, brush my teeth, blow dry my hair, prune my mustache, and go select my fall ensemble at Nordstrom's Rack. Then maybe I'll cruise the mall and buy me one of those high-tech wristwatches. You know, the kind that weighs ten pounds, plucks your wrist hairs, shows twenty-four time zones, receives email, reads your horoscope, checks cholesterol, stock quotes, and barometric pressure. . .

Roi Patrick Freeman

*Everything I Always Wanted To Know About 'Spank'--
But Was Too Afraid To Ask*

In my neighborhood, there are only two places you can shop after ten o'clock at night: Ralphs grocery store and an erotic gift shop. It seems that I have never passed Spank at this hour without wondering what secrets are concealed by the garish, flashing lights, sprinkling out from behind the opaque, silver, and gold doors with the boasting pretense of brassy costume jewelry.

A rush of cool air and the blazing percussion of electronic music welcome me as I first enter this dark and glimmering new world. My body momentarily tingles, the awkward shame of a caught peeping-tom riding up my neck, as I breathe in the staleness of the room, forever caged behind permanently closed doors. I bring in with me only the story of an alleged bachelor party and a wallet, in case I have to prove it.

The flimsy leopard print carpet and wrinkled, velvet draped walls look to be quickly crafted from the hands of a twelve-year-old Taiwanese laborer. A short, meaty, dark-haired man, in a Spank T-shirt, approaches me, his tiny black eyes biting at me quickly like a striking snake. His eyes retract, and he nods indifference before returning behind the counter in razor silence.

Along with six people and the waxy smell of artificial cherry, many large fixtures host items such as Black Love Incense, Body Heat Lotion, Liquid Latex, phallic shaped soap and cookie cutters, and a giant penis pinata. A titanic blonde lady, further enhanced without genetics, in sheer black, bends closely into the face of a nervous man, breathing questions, as they shuffle through an assortment of different size, colored and textured prophylactics. They settle on regular latex, and leave, the distance of strangers on an elevator clumsily divides them.

I notice a conventionally handsome man in tailored blue, hair equal parts salt and pepper, browsing through lingerie hanging from silver hooks on the walls. The type of man who signs membership contracts to golf clubs with monogrammed marble pens, he now fingers crotchless female underwear and a latex top with "Trailer Trash Slut" sewn into it. I get the feeling his wife, girlfriend or mistress does not belong to the latter category.

Having broken an innate code, the man notices my eyes surrounding him, and we mutually slither to another fixture. Before leaving, he purchases a simple black negligee, one with ample fabric covering all of the erogenous zones. The other two people in the room are a college-age couple; shoulder to shoulder, hands grabbing, they lazily speak of fixing his car sometime this week, but

definitely before next week.

Next to the sales counter is a doorway to another room; a hanging crimson curtain offers more mystique than barrier. I brush the curtain to one side and immediately absorb the dull brightness of an overnight drugstore. I have nowhere to feign my attention as I am confronted by thousands of plastic and rubber sex toys. An unusually tall, overweight man, holding an uncontrollable nest high in his ponytail, is neatly unpacking and displaying merchandise with likely the same monotony and disinterest as men centering cereal and soup at nearby Ralphs.

Above him, my eyes limply point to The Behemoth. Literally two feet in length, this improbable, battery driven, pleasure device could easily hit a baseball out of Yankee Stadium. Humor, tension and fear collide as I ask him, "Do you sell many of those?" Matter-of-factly, without looking, leaving more questions than answers, he simply replies, "Yes."

Three pairs of dark eyes, previously focused on plastic sex toys, now engage me, and I become the curious center of the room. My chin rotates aimlessly around the room, eyes following slowly behind and the brain searching for a word. A quick "hmm" or a semi-enthusiastic "wow" would have been perfect, but I choose instead to leave the room, head down. Trailing me is the apologetic shame of a man who accidentally walked into a crowded ladies room.

I find myself back in the safety of Pin the Boobs on the Babe, nasty birthday cards, condoms, and candles. Snake Eyes strikes at me again, but this time with familiarity. Perhaps fighting off a smile, his lips bend distastefully, as if he has a hair in his mouth. Before leaving, I momentarily consider purchasing a pinata for my women's studies class, but ultimately, I settle on a few sticks of incense, not Black Love, but lavender.

Jonathan Gaines

The dense marine layer had patched up the light holes in the night sky. Fall was in the air, and with the cool breeze rising up from the ocean the visitors to the pier were few because of the season change. The elevated pier cut and divided the darkness in two, making a walkway of light over the black abyss below. I walked down the pier searching for a spot to observe the night's callers. I did not want to end up trailing people like a private investigator. Instead, I settled on taking a serendipitous approach by finding a spot and waiting for my prey to fall into my trap. I decided on a cold concrete bench just a little more than half way down the pier. I drew an imaginary line on each horizon of the pier where my incoming variables came into view. This designated area would be like the conveyor belt at the airport where bags move underneath the x-ray cameras, so their contents can be viewed. As a specimen crossed the threshold of my laboratory, I noted every distinguishing detail about them. I was not trying to cast any premature judgments upon any of my study. I knew this same spot could be observed very differently in various times and seasons. Nevertheless, I was here to illustrate this particular site at this time.

With my hand cocked and my pencil lead loaded, I was ready to fire out the images onto my notepad. My first victim was not hard to spot. His six-ten frame towered over everyone, including his miniature wife. He walked while leaning towards his lady so they could both reach to hold hands. To keep from dragging her, he walked half his stride so she could keep along side him. Many eyes were upon this Leaning Tower of Pisa, viewing him as a Wonder of the World.

My attention was suddenly drawn to the gawking gang of teenage boys crossing my viewfinder. These five copycats walked, talked, acted, and even dressed the same. They moved around the pier like a school of fish.

I was interrupted by a single grunt and turned to see where it had come from. I could see two Asian men approaching. By sight they seemed to be in a deep conversation. They each had a cup of coffee in one hand and were using the other to sign. They would get their companion's attention by tapping him. Then they conversed silently, listening with their eyes.

It is said that if you sit somewhere long enough the whole world passes by. The entire world didn't pass by this night, but there were many views of the world that did. Like the conveyor belt at the airport that brings a variety of luggage to the checkpoint, so this evening brought me an assortment of characters to view. Perhaps everyone will go home with a memory of that night walk on the pier. Some will remember it more than others, but they all visited the same place. I went into this observation realizing that the same place could be viewed differently in various times and seasons. However, I had been reminded by these nightwalkers the world is viewed differently through different eyes.

Censorship Isn't Always Bad 2nd Place - Expository II

Jake Schaeffer

Pornography - 1. The depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement. 2. Material (as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement.

Pornography today is out of control. It captures scenes of group sex, homosexuality, and child abuse. In "Why We Must Put Up with Porn" Susan Issacs states, "To have speech we love, we have to defend the speech we hate" (187). I agree, but we need stricter boundaries for the first amendment and we need to start enforcing the boundaries we already have, such as pornography that is harmful to children. Can we do whatever we please and just claim freedom of speech? Only in this country would a government put up with so much whining to keep themselves in office. Censoring certain things does not violate any freedom. Our Constitution does have an amendment giving us the freedom of speech; however, our country, in its liberal way of thinking, can't seem to come up with "arty" boundaries for this amendment.

We first have to ask ourselves two questions. According to the Economist Newspaper February 6th 1999, the first question is "What sort of speech is constitutionally protected?" (29). The first amendment is quite vague, but to get to the true definition of this amendment we have to ask ourselves another question: just how liberal and easily bought off are our elected government officials? I find it somewhat amusing that our government protects pornography, explicit sexual material, and pornography that is harmful to children, yet when we want to exercise our freedom to speak out against these immoral acts we are persecuted and immediately shut down. It's ironic that when someone opens a new porn site on the Internet that it is protected under freedom of expression, yet when someone opens a site to speak out against abortion or pornography it is defined as a "hate site" and the operator of that site is openly harassed. If the freedom of one man oppresses another, is it then still a freedom?

Now let's figure out who has the authority to say what is explicit and what is not. Unfortunately, we are going to run into many problems here. Just the phrase "sexually explicit" is culturally defined. In America we see one thing, such as topless women, as pornographic, where in other countries, such as France and England, it is no big deal. So what we have to figure out is, who is qualified to be a judge. To be qualified for this job one would have to be unbiased, well educated in arts, and have absolutely no morals. After all, if they had morals, that would make them biased. Looking at this realistically, no single person could be qualified for this job. No, for this job we would need an entire

panel of people, a group of great diversity, that would act as a committee to vote on what is sexually explicit and what isn't. But wait, our Congress men and women are taking care of all of that for us, right? Oh yes, I can sleep at night knowing my government is making sure that my children aren't easily getting exposure to porn that is being sent to them in their e-mail on the net. I just know the hard working individual I voted for is in Washington now fighting to keep his/her campaign promises. Although I attempt to leave such matters into the hands of the selected few individuals that I am compelled to vote for, I find it far too difficult not to speak out against such matters.

Can we live without pornography? It would be safe to say we can. While some state that porn isn't harmful or degrading, others tell stories of the havoc and destruction it has caused in their marriages. In fact, Tom Minnery states in "Censoring Pornography Does Not Violate the Right to Free Speech" that "the most devastating consequence of pornography is the physical and psychological abuse it causes people who are trapped by it, either as victims or victimizers" (181). As biased as that may sound it makes perfect sense. Minnery later backs it up by stating "women have told of spouses who forced them to imitate perverted sexual acts depicted in pornographic magazines, to the point of broken marriages" (181). After seeing the destruction and abuse that porn causes, why do we still put up with it? Does porn have any benefits? To the current date, I can't say I have found any.

Pornography is very difficult to define. Day to day people change their minds on what is porn and what isn't, and the tug-a-war game continues. Looking at porn on a level playing field, I would have to say that it definitely has no advantages; however, our liberal government still believes that the first amendment was written to protect such rights. Until we can figure out how to put stricter boundaries and restrictions on the first amendment, I guess anything goes.

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There are many forms of recycling that are well known to everyone, aluminum cans, plastic bottles, newspapers, even old tires, but yard waste is being overlooked. "Composting America's fertile mounds of leaves and grass clippings could eliminate one fifth of the nations waste," according to Melinda Beck in *A Garbage Crisis Exists* (114). The opposition believes that there is no shortage of land or natural resources, so why conserve. The significant quantity of unnecessary use of landfill by not composting our recyclable yard waste is a problem that needs addressing if we want a clean environment for our next generation.

There are many recycling programs in Laguna Niguel up and running, but yard waste is not one of them. Finally, Laguna Niguel will start recycling green waste, yard clippings, on April 3, 2000. Participants will be able to put up to eight 32 gallon trashcans, eight 40 pound trash bags or eight bundles of branches weighing 40 pounds at the curb on trash removal day. According to Dan Batty from Solag Disposal, Laguna Niguel decided this was the most cost effective solution to collect yard waste. Using an existing truck, rather than using expensive new equipment, will keep fees down for everyone. There will be no additional cost to Solag or its customers.

The City of Yorba Linda is another example of a well-functioning program that has been operational since 1995, according to Susie Hbad at Yorba Linda Disposal. They collect their green waste in a large brown trashcan, provided by the city, and then take it to Taormina Industries to be composted after sorting and shredding it. This is clean, easy, and convenient for the customer. Once a year participants are encouraged to pick up the composted materials for reuse. This is a great incentive program; people like to see the finished product and see that their effort is put to good use and not being wasted.

Although Laguna Niguel's program is just beginning, they seem to have a well executed and thought out plan, which should be successful. Interviewing Tom Hill, the manager of Tierra Verde Industries (TVI), a yard waste recycling plant contracted by Solag and Laguna Niguel, was an information-littered conversation. Hill advised me that Solag first takes the yard waste to TVI's site in San Clemente to be sorted from contaminants (trash), and then brought to his sight in Irvine to be shredded and some of the materials composted. He also pointed out that 30-40% of incoming yard waste is composted, 50-60% after being shredded is sent to cover the landfill in 2-6 foot layers and about 5% of the shredded material is used for erosion prevention in South Orange County. At TVI they sell compost back to the community at \$15 per yard plus tax. Hill believes the biggest problem with his current system is that people contaminate

their green waste by peppering it with garbage. "Laguna Niguel was second only to Santa Ana for producing the dirtiest trash," said Hill (interview).

Composting can be effective in the recycling of green waste at home with some work or by garbage companies on a larger scale. Peter L. Grogan, author of A Comprehensive Recycling Strategy Is Needed and President of the National Recycling Coalition, states, "Approximately 17.9% of America's Annual Solid Waste is yard waste" (181). Composting could reduce this amount from our landfills annually. Green waste includes grass clippings, leaves and branches, and growing plant materials. These items get shredded and mixed with other items into a compost pile to decay and be reused again in landscaping or gardening projects. This process takes 110-120 days according to Hill (interview). Creating a compost pile at home takes some work most people are unwilling to do, but reusing and recycling your own yard scraps into workable compost is rewarding for both you and your soil.

In addition to composting, another solution to divert yard and kitchen waste from landfills is worm farming, to be done at home or in larger industrial markets. Feeding earthworms yard and kitchen scraps layered with soil allows them to deposit vermicast (worm droppings) that is mineral enriched into the soil that is also thoroughly aerated. There is research being done by the Environment Protection Authority in the industrial market, as well as smaller projects, to test the viability of these programs along with the quality of the products that result (www.epa.nsw.gov).

For yard recycling to work well it needs to be easy for the participants and workable for the disposal company to keep up with. There are some problems that can arise with the composting projects; however, at a well-designed facility, under good management a lot of the problems can be avoided. Many people like the idea of recycling but say "not in my back yard." Considering technology today, problems such as dust, noise, odor, insects, and inferior product can be kept a minimal part of a large program. By anticipating these problems and implementing solutions, quickly at the underlying source, the problem should not arise again.

Although there are a few glitches with recycling, the programs are improving quickly with strides. John Shanahan writes Recycling is Counterproductive because recycling "is extremely costly, wasting energy and creating more pollution than the landfill alternative" (192). Another example of recycling opposition is Recycling Should Not Be Mandatory written by Jerry Taylor. Taylor discusses that even if the law, AB 939, worked optimally it would still leave 95 million tons of garbage to be disposed of annually"(88). He also states recycling is "a path leading to wasted resources and increased environmental stress" (191). There are always two sides to a worthy cause, I believe as recycling continues, and it will, the process will become more effective and efficient. Preserving our land and natural resources by reducing our waste output

and recycling all we can is the lesser of the two contaminants.

Undeniably recycling has a few shortcomings. However with commitment, education and perseverance our goals for waste management can become a reality. The Statistical Abstract of the United States shows that from 1980-1997 yard waste consisted of approximately 12-18% of our Municipal Solid Waste generated (247). In 1989, AB 939, the California Integrated Waste Management Act (IWMA) was established as an "Integrated Waste Management hierarchy" to direct the Board and local agencies in implementation in order of priority: 1) source reduction 2) recycling and composting 3) environmentally safe transformation and land disposal (www.ciwmb.ca.gov/). The law requires 50% of all solid waste from each city be diverted by composting, recycling, and source reduction by January 1, 2000. A \$10,000 fine will be subjected to each municipality not meeting these diversion requirements (www.solag.com). According to Tom Hill, Orange County is at approximately 38% recyclable diversion currently (interview). Without a question, we are making positive progress. In *Recycling: An overview*, Bruce von Voorst points out that "In Oregon and California minimum-content laws mandate the use of recycled materials in new products," which have proved effective (171). We may not be conning out of natural resources or space for landfills, but we need to conserve what we have to prevent this from becoming a threat.

For all its potential, recycling remains only part of the world's refuse-disposal solution. Education, information, and an efficient system for the people and the disposal company are the answer, to removing the Yard waste from the landfill and getting, it where it belongs. Recycling green waste will not only reduce the landfill, but also create a marketable recycled product, which could bring in revenues. Alluring more markets to absorb recycled materials would make real progress towards a long lasting solution. We need to preserve our natural resources, including our landfill space even though it is not in threat of depletion at this time.

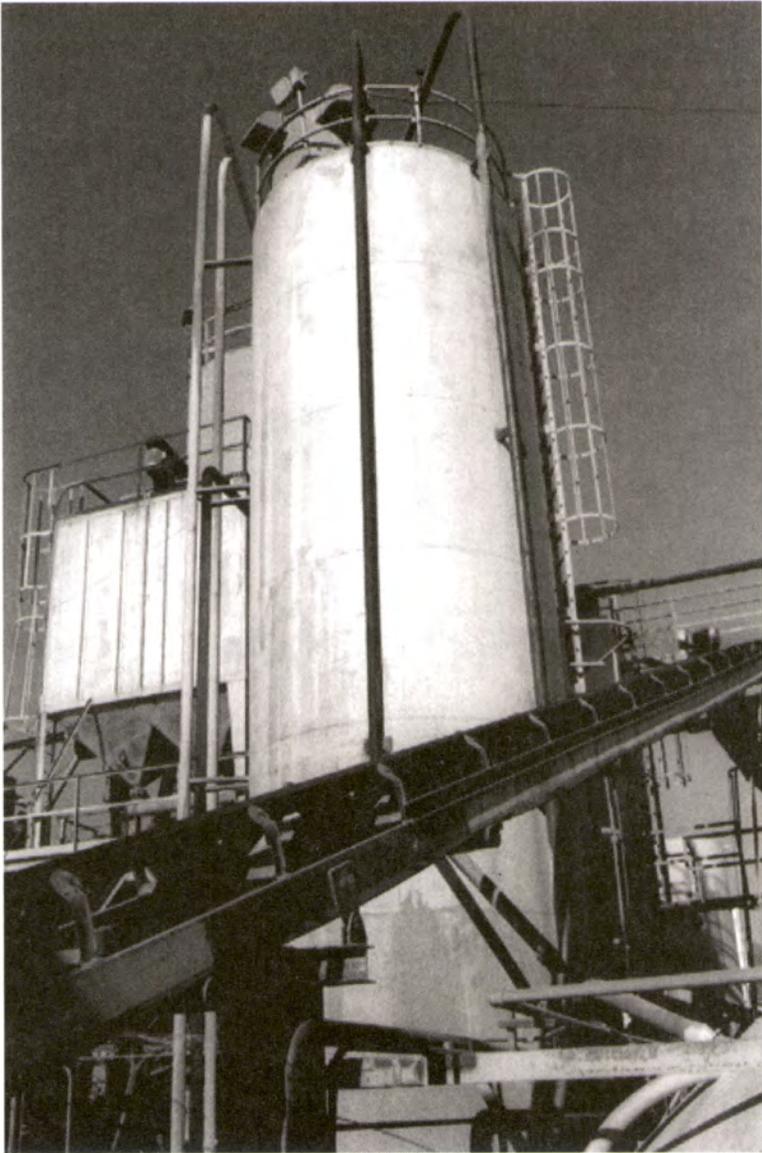
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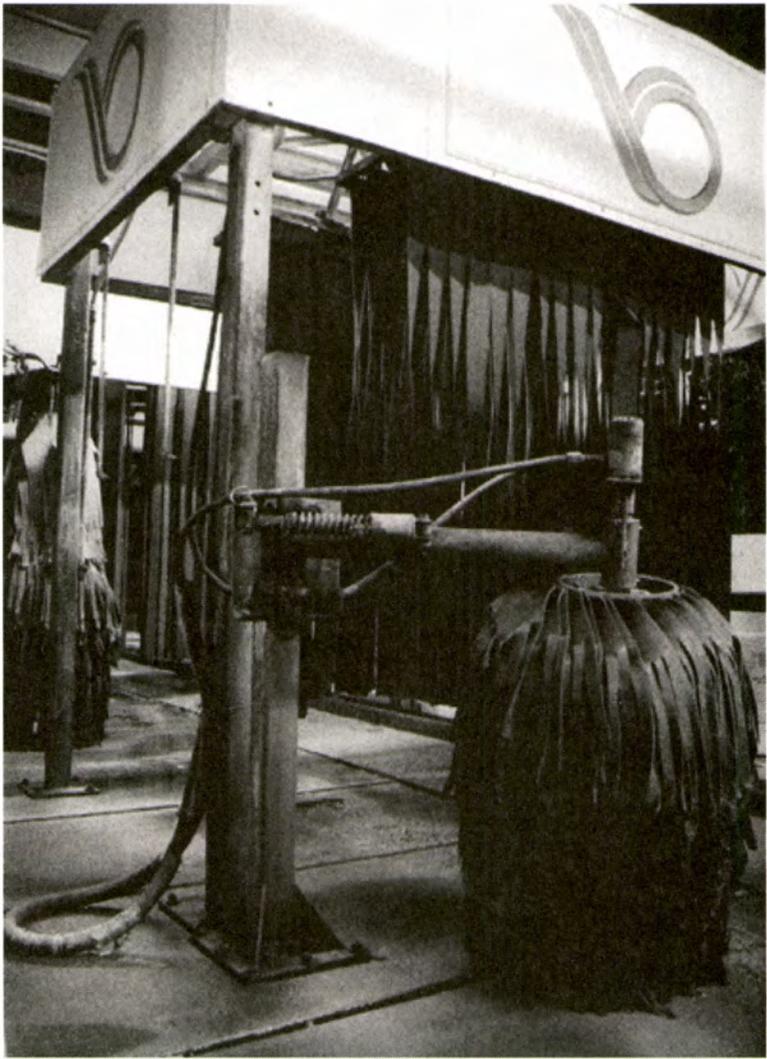
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The Calloused Blue Fabric
of Production:
*A Brief Study in the
Aesthetic Tools of Industry*

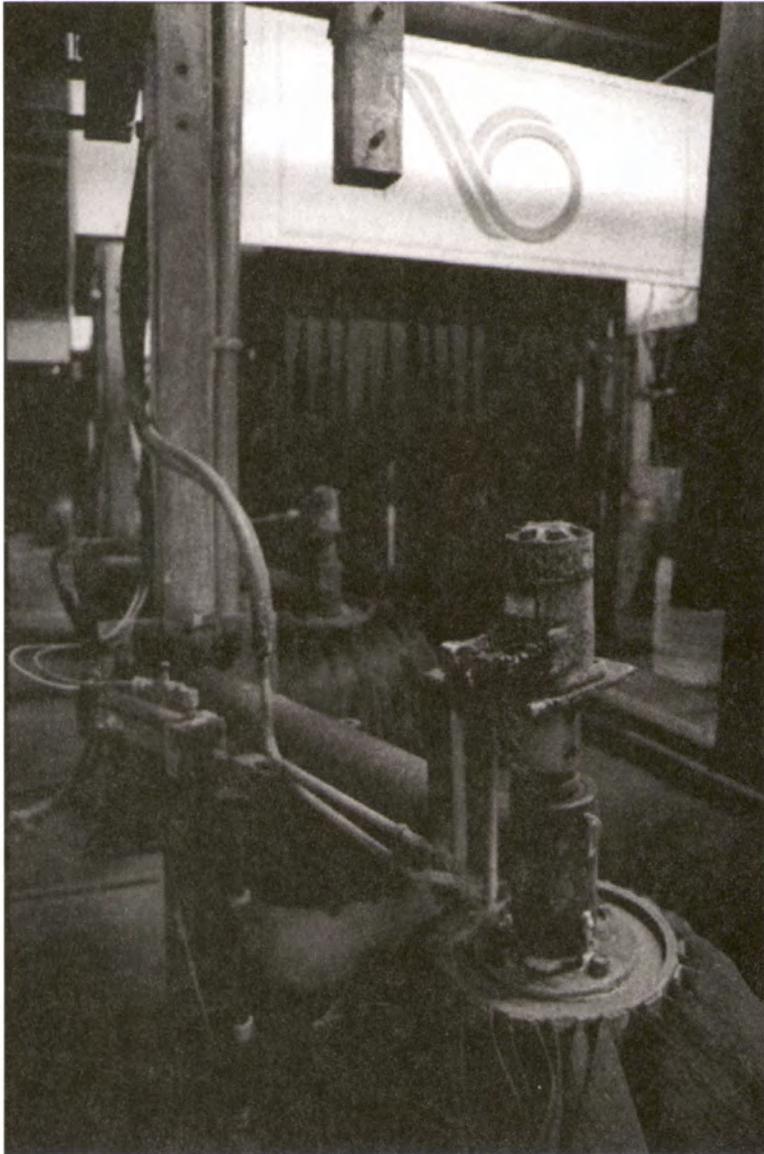
Jared Elms



Silo w/ grain elevator



Car Wash Chamois -Full View



Car Wash Chamois -Cropped



Southwestern Pay-Phone: Interrupted



Car Wash Basin: Faucet

WALL

Staff Submission

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fANTASTICAL realitY

Aaron Alverson

Don't trouble yourself with physicality
Though you cannot touch, you're free to see
Everything I say is true, TRUST ME!
This is your fANTASTICAL realitY

Is your love life all that it could be?
Don't talk to your spouse, turn on your TV
What's Love? What's Lust? Triviality!
Screw anything that moves, fuck and be free!

What's wrong? What's the matter? Are you getting depressed?
Kick back, relax and give your brain a rest
Tune in to our programming it's simply the best
Or receive free advice from today's special guest

Violence erupted today in a local high school at two
The bastard shot forty-five kids, now he's comin' for you
Tune in at eleven and we'll tell you what to do
The terror is real, like it was over there too

Consumer reports say your house may explode
Don't touch that dial this report ain't no load
We're not trying to startle you nor your emotions goad
Is the horror inside starting to make you implode?

The polls have come back and all can agree
Not even God can stop reality TV!
I'll eat a rat if you give me money
It's not moral prostitution just simple bribery.

Kids stay in school, I dropped out at age ten
Though I'm a famous football star I'd like to go back again
And that's the truth, I swear to you, from my Hollywood mansion
Be cool, stay in school, that's the only way to win

We can't push cigs cause everyone says, that they're bad
But here, fill up on alcohol, the masochistic fad
A violent abuser lives in my house and says to call him dad

The bottle flips up, the gloves fly off, and he's stark raving mad

This storm is the worst in decades, tune in for a special report
The winds are aligned precisely and the clouds are beginning to cavort
It must be the Second Coming and that's a truth we won't distort
What do you mean there's but one drop!? Someone silence this old sport!

Everything all right? Do you feel well?
Overcome by the sensation that you're going to hell.
Well aren't we all, calm down, buy and sell
Help the market get through until the closing bell

Why do you cry and suffer from dejection
Of programming you'll find no finer confection
Why has such loneliness reached our detection?
When we provide you with shows like the Love Connection.

Why do you stand with your wrist wide open, over the sink?
Have our shows pushed you too far? You're now on the brink?
But as you stand there dying you've got time to think
Will Cory marry Tammy today or next week?

I'm glad he's gone, that fellow always struck me as sore
He realized that the people who think are the kind that we deplore
That concludes our broadcast day, we have nothing more
Sleep tight America, my pitiful, fat, weak, and frightened whore

Drive

Albert Cordray

The drive is what I remember most. From Park City to Salt Lake there is a winding forty-mile canyon drive that takes about thirty minutes to go down, and around forty-five to ascend. The highway is three narrow lanes wide, but might as well be two or one when there is snow. There is snow in that canyon for eight months out of the year. They built the highway back during the industrial period in the late 1800s. They did it by blowing up half the canyon with TNT. The scars of drilling and dynamite up and down the walls mix evenly in view with the natural erosion. When the canyon walls are a mile high like that, you have to press your head against the car window to see the sky. Mostly you just stare straight to the side and lose yourself in the passing slate and granite, eventually seeing familiar faces and things in the stones. I've been up and down that canyon so many times that going home is like passing down the aisle of an old church, seeing the unchanged expressions of an imagined congregation.

There were so many conversations on that highway. Propositions, delegations, arguments. Often there was more said in the canyon than at home or in the city. When I was really young, the drive down the canyon was the time when I was instructed on how to behave by one parent or the other, sometimes together as a tag-team. The drive up, in turn, was their opportunity to reprove me for crimes committed. There's nowhere you can go in that situation, and the rage of order can sometimes feel like it is coming down both slopes, converging on you. But that was sometimes just an excuse for them to avoid the real storms. . . the storms that had nothing to do with me. I sometimes think that if I hadn't been a wanton, destructive child, they might have been forced to deal with each other in the canyon instead of me.

At eight, I slit my forearm open on a rock as I fell six feet from the side of our elevated driveway. The house was filled with people that day--It was my birthday. There were no hospitals in Park City, just unreliable clinics. The canyon lay between me and badly needed stitches. My father pressed a bathroom towel against my wound all the way down the canyon as my uncle drove knowing he would have to return up the canyon again with us, and back again with my aunt and cousins to Salt Lake where he lived. He drove knowing we had no insurance. He was an architect with a college degree. My father worked construction. The drive took fifteen minutes in my uncle's Volvo.

There would be many more trips down and back over the next three years. Trips to city mortuaries to mourn both parents. Pop was the first to go. The doctor called it epiglottitis, an infection that closes your windpipe if untreated. The only "treatments" we could afford were menthol petroleum jelly and extra

blankets. The heater in his pickup worked fine, but running the heater full blast going uphill for forty-five minutes drains five horsepower and eats a lot of fuel. I imagine his sore throat crept in on him somewhere in the canyon just before Christmas. It took him two weeks later.

I remember two canyon conversations with my mother that would follow his death. The first was when we were almost upon the city. Dan Fogelberg was on the radio.

“This is your song,” she said. It was *Leader of the Band*. “Listen to the words,” she added, turning up the volume. *The leader of the band is tired and his eyes are growing old/But his blood runs through my instrument and his song is in my soul/My life has been a poor attempt to imitate the man/I’m just a living legacy to the leader of the band.* “That’s you,” she finally said. “Your Dad was the leader of the band, and you’re his living legacy.” Several years before the canyon funneled our family in and out of the city, my father had sung lead for a blues band. I must have looked profoundly uninterested when she said this. I was still unsure how to speak about his death. I was probably staring at faces in the rock.

She ended up leaving his guitar to my younger brother. Perhaps she’d lost hope for me in that fateful canyon ride shortly after, where during one of our several struggles I confessed to her with a nine-year-old mind that I wished it had been her that had passed instead of him. I remember her fallen eyes as she said, “I know. I know you would have been happier that way. Too bad.”

She didn’t last much longer. By the time she’d gathered up her wits to try her hand at fatherhood, cancer moved into her chest where apparently there had been a vacancy. We had to move in with my grandmother down in the city for her final months. The canyon mouth, that had swallowed us up so many times, finally laughed her out the door.

Despite my new residence, I continued to traverse the canyon. My lifelong friendship with Chris, an elementary school companion, would continue to draw me to Park City. Through Chris I was introduced to Pink Floyd, Jane’s Addiction, The Melvins, Floater and Alice in Chains. The drive was almost long enough to make it through entire albums, forever linking the scarred rock to lyrics and the snaking asphalt to guitar riffs. We also wrote songs on those drives, making full use of a private fifty mile studio. Experiencing things like this as I grew older definitely made me appreciate the drive more as a welcome ritual; a cold, necessary sacrifice in a damp, forbidding temple.

That old childhood rhyme stays with me, claiming life is but a dream. Maybe it’s partly true. Even now I can still easily imagine myself row-rowing gently down that canyon. I know every mile, every turn around a mountain point, every one of those broken faces that I half created. I hope I can funnel myself into some dream half as relentlessly as the canyon funneled me.

And So On . . . And So Forth . . .

Jared Elms

It is usually said
By professors with huge, mechanical lungs
And, as a result,
Echoes into the moist caverns and crevices of Academia

Within these wrinkles and folds
There is an insufficient flicker of fluorescent lighting
Which leaves it substantially dark
In this cave, where the students sit
Facing forward in their molded plastic seats

And instead of taking notes on the lecture
Attentions have digressed to watching their breath
As it exhales and circulates toward the ceiling
Snailing up to the walls that closely resemble
The forgotten skin that hangs on the back
Of my great-grandmother's arms.

But like Time himself, with his ghastly unkept beard,
The professor drones on
And even *his* eyelids seem to droop
Under the heavy weight of his words
Rambling on to the point of exhaustion
Beating the dead horse whose ribs are starting to show

The way poetry sometimes does
Written by gaunt, young poets
With the collars on their jackets turned up
Sitting in their corners with feverish grins
Swimming with notions of one day surpassing the shelves
That house so many dull, content books

And they swelter with fire to gracefully release the word
Bloated with truth
Their words so bright
That readers have to squint
As they turn the pages
. . . and so on
And so forth . . .

End Of The Poem

Jared Elms

Kindly Hold Your Applause Till the End of the Poem - Thank You

Flat, slightly cupped palms stinging
Striking like venomous fangs
Nimble like the ballerina
Through the birth of repetition

The pads of paws in their constant, mutual rendezvous
Hastefully attempting to memorize the familiar contours
Of hands so good and strong
And more delicate than that of the bark spider
With its twig-like limbs
Sonorously gesturing a certain reverence
A united understanding
Achieving what the agreeable nod could not convey

The fluttering thunder resonates to the perpendicular corners of the packed
auditorium
Wispig through the strands of attentive heads and ears
It ascends and echoes to the furthest bolt embedded in the arched rafters of
the theatre
Weaving its way through the prisms of a gallant chandelier
The quiltwork of clapping softly nesting with the sparrows of the concrete
coliseum
With its roost of moist mud and thread-like tinder
Quietly dissipating in the nip of the evening ozone hosted by the weathered
outdoor venue
Wafting and weightless as if commanded by a magic wand
Circling over a top-hat
Containing a small, frightened rabbit

What nervous enthusiast
What frantic pioneer
What obvious lover of laudanum
Started this new, erratic, two-handed behavior
As the road sign of gratitude
On the highway of greatness?

They must have thought him to be some genius
Some trend setter
Some revolutionary
Or possibly he was just epileptic at social gatherings

But from his cue
We've invented applause out of obligation
Out of approval
Out of habitual numbness
And their have since been breakthroughs and developments
Slight modifications
To include the short, stern clap of discipline
The clap that pursues a humorous joke
And the golf clap

But the best applause
The most rewarding of all
Is the silent, stationary kind
Where the only repetitive interval kept
Is that of the human metronome that sits perched in its cage
Where you just suspend
Mouth widely gaping
The exhale of astonishment mixing carefully with the inhale of exhilaration
And this feeds the million cells of the imagination
And they, in turn,
Belch softly
And are happy.

A Role To Bear

Kirk Ian McKnight

When my nephew turned eight years old, he only wanted a fishing trip for his birthday. I expected the ritualistic trek to the hobby shop. The latest in radio controlled gadgets, bright, laser-ridden robots, and action figures always appeared at the top of Jake's list. But that year, a fishing pole, a cooler of soda, three days in the wild outdoors, and just the two of us seemed to suffice.

Jake's mother added herself to the single-parent ranks when her husband was killed shortly after Jake's birth. I became Jake's father figure and soon found myself involved in every aspect of his life. The thought of following in his father's footsteps terrified me; a cop killed in the line of duty is often immortalized through heroic tales of his final plight against the evil-doers of a society gone wrong. And even though he never said so, I often wondered if Jake minded that my contribution to the good of the world rested in a computer, where I strived to create perfect marketing strategies.

So when I finally got the chance to show Jake the mettle I was made of, I decided to make his first fishing trip the most man-making, wild outdoors experience in the history of experiences.

We reached the campground a little after ten in the morning and met a surly Park Ranger named Ranger Naustey. He sized me up and stared me down with one look. With my pride on the line and my ego in full bloom, I met his gaze and sauntered to the counter. But one look at my Dockers, Tommy Hillfiger "Outdoorsman" flannel, and my shiny new hiking boots told him everything he needed to know.

"First trip to the lake gentlemen?"

Before I thought of my rebuttal, Jake rushed beside me and finished off what remained of my manhood.

"No. My uncle makes computer things. But he says he came here with his dad when he turned twelve." The ranger cocked an eyebrow and glanced in my direction, "I'm eight today. So I'm younger than my uncle was when he came. But he says as long as I'm with him, everything will be fine.

"Is that so?" the ranger turned to me, "Well, I don't think the lake changed much over the last twenty years. Any preference in your site?"

"We'll take your most secluded site. We like to rough it. Don't we Jake?"

Jake nodded his head furiously. "Some place with bears and lions."

"Sorry buddy, won't get many of those here." I said.

Jake folded his arms on the counter and looked dejected.

"I wouldn't count on lions." said the ranger, "But we had some bear sightings recently." His wicked grin flashed in my direction. Then, while Jake ran to the window, expecting one to be foraging right outside, the ranger leaned

across the counter, "Sure you still want our most secluded site?"

"Quite." I glowered at him, hoping my quivering chin came off as pure machismo resolve and not the underlying fear of coming face-to-face with the undisputed champion of the woods. "Do you take American Express?"

Say what you will about park rangers, but they do know their grounds. Our site sat at the far reaches of Lake Quacomo State Park. Jake and I found a half-mile hike staring us in the face after we parked. To Jake, it seemed like any other romp in the school playground. To his fearless, wood lore uncle, I realized then how well "heavy-duty" camping supplies lived up to their marketing.

Jake kept busy by examining the sundry variety of spores, molds and fungi which blanketed the house-sized boulders and tree trunks along the path.

"Hey. Look at this." Jake's voice came from behind a particularly large mass of granite at the next bend.

"What is it buddy?"

"Look." he pointed to a mark in the packed earth of the path, "Its a bear footprint. Huh?"

"I don't know." the twisting in my gut told me otherwise, "I don't think a bear would come this close to the path."

"Uh-huh. The policeman said people saw one."

"He's not a policeman, Jake. He just works at the campground."

"Well, he had a gun. Like dad used to have."

"Any man can buy a gun Jake. And he is not anything like your dad."

Jake's eyes widened and he seemed to notice the many bags that hung from nearly all my appendages.

"Do you have a gun?"

"No." Jake poked at the suspect print with a stick and avoided my eyes, "I don't need a gun." this seemed to reestablish some of my heroism in my nephew, "I could fight a bear without any help."

"Without a gun even?"

I nodded. "Just my hands." the time to shine was upon me.

For the remainder of the hike to our campsite, Jake neglected the wildlife around us and devoted his time determining just how I planned to fight the bear when we found it. Obviously, the weekend would not end until I triumphed.

"Are you going to punch him in the face? Or are you gonna put him in headlock? Like Goldman does."

The mere thought of being anywhere near a bear chilled my bones, but I couldn't suppress a smile as Jake grabbed an armful of air and choked the life out of it.

"Hey." Jake stopped. A stroke-of-genius look on his face. "You can climb one of these rocks and body slam that bear."

I laughed. "Jake. You've got a heck of an imagination."

I pictured myself soaring through the air, arms wide, shirt half-torn, pant leg ripped off and a trickle of crimson down my cheek. With my hair plastered to my head, I plummeted toward a gargantuan black bear's chest. It toppled backward, unconscious. One leg on the ground, the other on the bear, I raised my arms in a "V".

"Uncle, did you hear that?"

"Huh?"

A rustling in the bushes nearby brought me out of my grandiose fantasy.

"Did you hear it?" he said again.

I looked around and listened.

"There's something in the bushes."

My heartbeat pounded in my head. "It's probably just a breeze." I peered into the shrubs, afraid I of what I might see, "Come on Jake. We need to set up camp soon."

The three step, easy-build tent took just over an hour to assemble, at which time Jake felt obliged to help.

"But what are all these parts for?" he asked.

"They're extras, Jake. In case you lose something." I stuffed the parts in my pocket, "Go in and see if there's enough room."

Jake crawled into the small opening and rummaged around.

"The roof doesn't open."

I cringed, "It's not supposed to."

"But it shows it open on the box."

"They do that to sell more of them. Its an old trick." his head popped out of the tent and he clambered out.

"Can we go fishing now?" he asked.

"You bet."

I found the air pump and inflated our not-so-sea-worthy vessel in record time. Just under an hour. Jake helped me heft it to the water and pile in all the tackle. A few minutes later, we dropped anchor halfway into the lake.

"Pass me the bait."

"This one?" Jake held up a small bottle. I nodded.

We cast our lines one after the other and waited sometime for the first bite.

"I got one." Jake shrieked.

Jake's pole arched down and his line pulled taught.

"All right Jake." I set my pole down and helped him steady his own.

The fish put up a whale of a fight but we finally reeled him in. Jake held it while I snapped several photos then tossed it in our bucket.

We returned to our site at sunset with a heavy bucket of fish. I started a fire and helped Jake clean his first fish. While we ate around a campfire we talked about all the ones that got away.

"I'll get `em tomorrow." Jake said.

By the time we turned in for the night, both Jake and I wanted nothing more than a sound sleep and an early start in the morning.

“Goodnight, Jake.”

“Goodnight,” he yawned.

Sometime in the middle of the night, Jake woke me with a shake. I grunted in response.

“Wake up.” His whisper sounded as urgent as his prodding felt, “there’s something outside the tent.”

“It’s an owl. Go back to sleep.”

“No. I think it’s the bear.”

“Jake. There are no bears.”

“But the man?”

“He was joking Jake.” but at that moment, I heard it too.

The sound of something very large rummaging through our campsite penetrated our nylon tent. I sat upright and clamped a hand over Jake’s mouth.

“Shh. It’ll be okay.” I took my hand away from his mouth.

“Aren’t you gonna go kill it?”

I stared at my nephew. At that moment, I knew what he expected of me. But I refused. The thought of being mauled in-front of my nephew outweighed male egotism. Then I watched as a massive shadow appeared on our walls. I thought of making a run for it; make the bear chase me away from the tent. At least then Jake would survive.

“Jake. Wait here. Don’t make a sound.”

He beamed with pride and admiration at my impending doom.

“I mean it Jake. No matter what you hear.”

He nodded his agreement and I crept to the front of the tent.

“Uncle?” he said as I pulled on the zipper, “You’re way better than Goldman.”

Even if I did die, Jake considered me a hero. Empowered, I ventured forth. Only a few embers glowed in the fire and helped illuminate the dark campsite and a dark bulk hunched over our fish bucket. I looked to the side and found a large branch--not a formidable weapon.

As I bent to retrieve the branch, the spare tent parts fell from my pocket onto the ground.

The bear reared.

It stood three feet taller than I. Suddenly, the night filled with a horrendous roar. The beast’s bellow echoed through our site.

I screamed. All shame and bravado poured from my lungs as I stumbled backward. My own howl silenced the bear as I toppled to the cold earth and sent camping supplies flying. I scrambled on the ground, desperately searching for my branch vehemently screaming in aghast terror. The bear stared at me, unsure of my actions. It sank its forelegs back down to the ground and turned

its back on me. As I lay there panting, nerves shot and clothes in disarray, the bear stalked off into the forest, with a final glance at me, as if to say, "What's your problem, buddy?".

It took a few minutes to come to my senses and remember the main reason for my predicament. I stood, brushed off a little of the debris, careful not to make myself look too clean, and turned to face the tent.

"Jake. You can come out now."

Jake's head slowly peeked out through the tent flap. His eyes, like two golf balls, quickly scanned the area and my soiled clothes.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

I nodded.

Jake sprang from the tent and jumped up and down. "You did it! Whoo-hoo! You got the bear." He stopped and looked around again, "Did you kill it?"

"No. Just let it know who's boss."

"Alright. Take that, you big stupid bear. My uncle's the boss."

Instinctively, I glanced to the side, making sure the bear truly left and couldn't hear Jake's taunts. But the bear was gone, and with it, my fear of never living up to the role I played for Jake.

The Candidates

Ian McWhorter

As Gabriel touched down on the desert soil, his wings fluttered gracefully. His angelic robes stirred up the dirt of the well-worn path. He let off enough light to illuminate a ten foot radius, even though there was no moon. He folded his long white wings and concentrated. Within seconds he had transformed into an average human of the years just before Christ. Of course, he was one of the few “humans” who knew that Christ, the true Christ, was about to be born. In fact, that was his mission. Deliver the unborn Christ into the womb of one holy candidate. He pulled a small, glowing scroll from his tattered robes. His bright blue eyes scanned the document. It contained a map and a list, drawn in golden ink by the Lord Himself.

The map was of the city of Nazareth, and the list was of seven women who had never been with a man and who were blessed and upright among their brethren. It was the sixth month. The time had come. Gabriel began to walk.

The next morning, Gabriel entered Nazareth. He came upon his first candidate quickly. He looked through the walls of the simple wooden house and saw her. She was sitting quietly in her room, staring at nothing, mouth slightly open. Gabriel made himself invisible and slipped inside the house. He stepped up right in front of her and transformed back into his full angelic glory. She blinked in surprise, then stared blankly at him. Her lack of shock gave Gabriel pause for a moment, then he spoke the words he knew would go down in history. “Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women!”

He looked down to see the effect of his words. The candidate just sat there, and, as he watched, drool rolled out of her open mouth and down her chin. Gabriel’s face fell. He flapped his wings once and vanished.

Standing outside the house, once again in human form, Gabriel consulted his list. “Well, that’s one down,” he said to himself. He ran his finger across the name of candidate one, erasing it. “Onto candidate two.”

He came to the domicile of candidate two, a slightly nicer home, with several animals milling about. Ruth was her name, and the Lord had blessed her all her life. Like candidates five and seven, she was betrothed but still a virgin. She was not at home, he quickly surmised, looking through the walls. He looked around, his blessed eyes scanning much further than a human could. He saw her, out in the fields by her home, picking flowers. He appeared to her as an angel.

“Rejoice, highly favored one! You have been chosen by the Lord!” He could see that she was afraid, and let out a sigh of relief. At least she was mentally capable. “Fear not, Ruth, for God has chosen you to bear His child.”

“But I have never known a man,” she said.

“The Holy Spirit will conceive the child, and you shall call his name Jesus.”

“But I’m a virgin! Having a child will really hurt.”

“But he will be God’s own son, the Messiah!”

“No thanks. I’ve got enough to worry about without becoming the talk of the town.”

“Ingrate,” Gabriel muttered, and vanished.

A string of disappointments followed. He found candidates three and four sprawled naked and drunk together. While his angelic powers would easily allow him to figure out what had happened, he decided it wasn’t necessary. Candidate five had a fatal heart attack when he appeared, and candidate six was cussing out her parents. He crossed each of them out in turn.

Finally he came to the home of candidate seven, Mary. She was alone in the house, working in the kitchen. He appeared to her and, somewhat half-heartedly said, “Rejoice, highly favored one, for you have found favor with God!”

It was clear that she was terrified.

“Do not fear, Mary, for God has chosen you for a great task. You will bear the Son of God.”

“But I have not known a man.”

Gabriel sighed. “Don’t worry lady, the Holy Spirit will do the deed.”

“Let it be as you have said.”

It took a moment for the words to sink in. She had said yes! Gabriel threw his head back and laughed. “Finally!”

And there was much rejoicing.

The Imagination of an Ex

Anthony Purcell

I came here to get away from my thoughts, to forget what happened. There is no escape. She is here.

She steps out of the movie theater into the rain, cuddling with her new boyfriend, Chuck, under his jacket. She smiles as they kiss. I'm sure she never thinks about me anymore; how she scolded me for kissing her. We never went on long walks in the rain; she always felt it was too sappy. They still hold the jacket over their heads, but it is providing no real cover from the rain, only a shelter to kiss under.

I know that when she does speak of me to Chuck, she refers to me as a nice guy but insinuates that it is a fault. I tried so hard to make her happy. I brought her roses on every date and she always complained about the color. When I'd cook her dinner, she'd scoff at my efforts, "Too bland. . ." and "I didn't know you could burn ice cream." When I told her jokes she told me I was immature. I even used to let her vent at me so she could unwind after work. She fed off of my self-esteem like a vulture feasting on carrion in the desert. I realize now that every time she told me that she loved me it was empty.

The rain is pouring down on the giddy couple and they are running around in it, kicking water from the puddles at each other. She's playing in the rain like a child; I remember how she used to reprimand me for acting that way. How can someone go from being cold and stern to silly and rambunctious? She always acted as if she was desperately miserable with me and made sure I shared in that misery. How dare she skip around like this! Is this new found light heartedness possible because she dumped all her emotional baggage on me? There were times when she talked all night about only herself, constantly whining about her previous boyfriends, never once asking how I was coping with life. Oh I felt her pain all right, and now it's the only thing I feel, pain.

They dance in the swirling rain and I know that my feelings and thoughts are the last thing on her mind right now. She wouldn't care less if I was lying in a ditch in New Jersey, or if I was sulking here in the shadows. She should have to see what she did to me, to have her happiness spoiled. Maybe now would be a good time.

". . . And don't even get me started about in bed," she says callously. They make hand gestures and begin to laugh. They've wandered into the shadowy area of the parking lot now.

"What did you expect? You lying there like a frigid corpse. . ." I growl from the protective shadows of a tree.

The happy couple stops and peers into the darkness. I remain motionless in the dark shroud created by the shadows.

“Uh, who’s there?” asks Chuck with false bravado.

“Take one goddamn guess.”

“What are you doing here?” she demands indignantly.

“Miss me, baby?” I ask as I chuckle to myself.

“Why would I miss you?” she snipes. “He’s more of a man than you are—or could ever be.”

“Which is your handy work,” I respond, stepping out of the shadows.

“You are so pathetic,” she hisses, “and after everything I’ve done for you.”

“Done for me?” I bellow. “Done to me is more like it! After all the drama and anxiety you put me through, you have the audacity to claim that you’ve done anything for me?”

“Hey buddy,” Chuck sneers, “she’s found a real man now, why don’t you leave?”

“Why don’t you go passionately fuck yourself?” I taunt. “You have no idea how she treated me, how much pain and hurt I’ve undergone.”

“You want pain?” he mutters, “You’ve got it.”

I stare him squarely in the eye, only to receive a sucker punch. I fall to the ground, holding back the reflexive stomach spasms. Then Cro-Magnon man decides to lift me to my feet by my throat. With my feet dangling above the ground, I reach to my back pocket; clicking open my spider knife. Within moments, my attacker releases me and falls to the ground. Heaving to breathe between coughs, I stand and slowly turn to the lady of the evening. As Chuck’s final gurgle fades, I remove the knife from its human sheath and smile.

“Steve, no!” she shrieks.

The wind envelops her last words and carries them away.

A car stops at the red light. The passenger stares out the window, oblivious to the noise of the windshield wipers and the driver drumming his fingers along with the radio. Then his reverie is broken.

“You’re not thinking about her, are ya Steve?” inquires the driver.

“Honestly, what would you do if you, say, ran into her and Chuck in the parking lot?”

Steve takes a look back out the window and sees a couple huddled under a jacket in the rain and laughs sadistically to himself.

Summer Teeth

Leah Ramsey

After layovers and connecting flights, the plane ride back East, where I was born, takes about eight hours. I sat next to my sister, Sally. She's two years younger than me, and for some reason, when we are together in a confined space, like the cabin of an airplane, we find it increasingly difficult to act our ages. I brought along my new book, *White Teeth*, by Zadie Smith, to save the other passengers from our sisterly silliness.

Arriving at my grandma's house around nine o'clock that evening, we weren't there a whole hour before my cousin Dara came in through the back door.

"Hey ya'll. When'd ya git in?" asked Dara.

"Not too long ago." My father answered for all of us, and we exchanged hugs with Dara.

"How are you Dara?" we asked all at once.

"Aw good. How bout you guys."

"We're doing pretty good."

Sally and I had grown up a lot since we were last there. So had Dara, in a West Virginia way. After hellos and hugs, she asked Sally and me if we wanted to do something. Since quality time with Dara usually proves to be obscurely entertaining, we decided to go along. On the way to her boyfriend, Charles's house, we stopped at a gas station. A pack of Camel Lights cost only two dollars and twenty-eight cents. I should have bought a whole damn case.

Back in the car, Dara pulled the sleeve of her T-shirt up into her armpit, revealing *Dara* in script fading purple to blue, tastefully etched on her upper arm. "Look at this ya'll," she said, balancing a burning cigarette between her lips.

My sister cocked her head sideways. "Oh, cool," she said.

I raised my eyebrows and nodded.

Dara asked us if we smoked pot because that's what they do at her boyfriend's house. I can't imagine many other forms of entertainment; even their K-mart closes at midnight.

We parked in the Food Lion parking lot down the street from his house. Dara asked me to keep her keys in my purse. On our way up the hill, Charles and two other boys came down to meet us. After introductions we continued up the hill together. As we neared a house on the left, they talked about the boy that lived there.

Apparently Dara had something against him. "Aw that guy. Hae's ig-nirint. I'm ignurint too, butaleast I know Iu'm ignirint. I'm onna key his cawr. Leah, Gimme miy keys."

I humored her and fished the keys from my purse, believing that no person in her right mind would key some boy's car for his ignorance.

Crrreesch. To the disbelief of every other person present, Dara did the unthinkable. "Aw man," she said, "didja heyar how loawd that wuz. I betcha I knocked a big ole chunk a paint offit."

When we got to Charles's house we smoked a few joints in the front yard. Then we walked down the hill, towards the Food Lion.

"So, Dara, what do you think you're going to do after you graduate from high school?" I asked.

"Pff I-unno git mayrried."

"No. I mean like for college or a job."

"Aw, heyll no. I hayte skooul. I cayn't stand awl that readin n shit. I don no. Work at the Long John Silver's lye guess. That's where Charles's mom works."

"Oh. So do you always hang out with Charles and his friends?" I ask.

"Naw a dew. Bud I useda be freynds withis one gurl, Jenny. She's a big fat girl. And she's got summer teeth." She paused. "Ya know, some-are here, summ-er there."

Chances are I could take a few more shots at Dara and West Virginia. But seeing as she's family, I suppose I'll stop there. I also have many other, much more high-class relatives in West Virginia (where anyone who doesn't live in a trailer is considered highclass.) We won't even get into the Appalachian Mountain People. That's a whole other social issue for a non-personal essay.

Dara Up-date: She will start work at the Winchester, Dairy Queen in one week, after forcing Long John Silver's to terminate her employment because she constantly argued with Charles's mother.

Once Upon A Time

Galena Segal

Once upon a time a boy was born in Moscow. He lived with his parents and older sister in a communal apartment in the center of the city. The boy's mother was a piano teacher, and his father was an engineer.

In his family's room, there stood a sofa-bed for his parents, an iron bed for his sister, his crib, a grand piano, a table, a wardrobe, a TV set, and a small refrigerator with a dish rack on it. There was not enough room for a bookcase, so the boy's father hung shelves on the wall above the grand piano. The children kept their toys in a wooden box under the girl's bed.

Five more families--a total of twenty people in all--lived in this six-room apartment, originally designed for a family of six. They all shared one phone. Each family's room had its own electricity meter. Six labeled door bells were wired to each room. Here were two dimly lit shared bathrooms with old enameled bathtubs and sinks, a shower room, and a dark water closet with six removable toilet seats on the wall, one labeled with each family's name. There was no storage space, so the tenants kept their suitcases, skis, sleighs, and bicycles hung up in the hallway. This housing situation was typical for millions of Soviet citizens, and they all felt lucky to have a roof over their heads and a toilet with running water.

For the first three years of his life, the boy slept in his crib. Then his parents bought him a cot, which they stored behind the wardrobe during the day. The boy slept in this cot for ten years until it broke, and after that, he slept on the mattress under the grand piano.

After school, the boy and his sister usually did their homework at the table. However, when their mother's private students came for their lessons, the children left the room. The sister would go to her friends, and the boy would go to the communal kitchen. In the afternoon, the kitchen was not crowded, so the boy would spread a newspaper on his family's kitchen table and continue doing his homework, or read a book, or draw. He was a good boy, quiet and polite. His neighbors liked him and did not object to him being there.

Although the tenants of this apartment had cohabitated without major clashes, there was one vicious man--a low rank militia officer--who kept his neighbors in constant fear, spying on them and writing anonymous slanderous letters to their workplaces and the housing authorities. He would come to the kitchen when the boy was there alone and reprimand him for illegal use of electricity. Then he would turn the lights off to save on the monthly communal utilities bill. This bill, along with the gas and water bills, had to be divided by six.

The boy's parents never heard him talking about this mean neighbor, so they thought the boy ignored him. To them, their son seemed to be satisfied,

living the normal life of a busy Soviet teenager--playing sports, running errands, going to the movies or to school events. They thought that he had everything he needed to be happy and did not realize their son secretly longed for privacy. His primary need was his own space, where he could study, relax and meditate, invite a girl over or talk to a friend. Since his early childhood, he craved solitude, wanting his own tiny room with a door. He would have been thrilled with a closet, a cell, or a cage measuring only two square yards, where he could stretch out on a narrow bed, listen to his radio, or turn the lights on and off without asking permission. But the boy did not reveal his dream to his parents because they would be unable to help him anyway, so he did not want to burden them with his impossible wish. With their permission, however, he moved the wardrobe further away from the wall and squeezed a chair bed behind it. Although it was not a solution, it was a step closer to his dream.

When the boy's sister graduated from high school, she went to college but continued to live with her family. She soon met a young man who lived in a college dormitory, became pregnant and married him. With her parents' permission, the sister's husband moved into their room, and the newlyweds put their bed behind the wardrobe.

Soon, the husband began working as an electrician at a construction site and continued attending college at night. This job would improve his chance of receiving a two-room apartment for his family within a year. About that time, the boy was accepted to college and got a bed in a dormitory room with four other students. His former chair bed soon became a bed for a newborn baby girl, his niece, as there was no room for a crib.

Two other young neighbors also married, their spouses moved in, and they, too, started families in their parents' rooms. In no time, three more babies, including a set of twins, came. At night, the mothers and grandmothers washed diapers and hung them to dry on lines stretched across the kitchen and the bathrooms. Soon, three little chamber potties with the babies' names on the lids were put into the water closet.

The mean neighbor, not too happy about all these changes, could do nothing as these marriages were lawful, and there was no restriction on the number of people residing in the same room. Yet, he wrote a letter to the housing authorities, complaining of illegal use of the kitchen and bathrooms for drying the diapers. In accordance with the conflict committee's decision, the neighbors now had to stretch the lines inside their rooms and hang the diapers on them.

In the meantime, the boy--a young man now--studied art and architecture. His living conditions had not changed much. He kept his belongings on his shelf in a closet and in a plywood suitcase under his narrow iron bed. After classes, he did his homework at the table along with his roommates. At night, he slept with a pillow over his head to shield his eyes and ears from noise and light.

After five long years, the young man graduated from college with a degree in architecture and found a job in a big construction establishment. At that time, the authorities had begun building inexpensive five-story residential houses, and his sister and brother-in-law had received a small apartment in the outskirts of Moscow. So the young man moved back in with his parents, occupying the same space behind the wardrobe. His sister worked all day, so during the week, the baby lived with her retired parents.

Being a bachelor, the young man hadn't been eligible for governmental housing, but within a few months, he found a housing cooperative that was about to begin construction on an apartment building. The young man borrowed some money, his family pitched in, and he soon joined the cooperative. He could not believe his luck. After the foundation was laid, he went to the construction site almost every day to walk around the fenced area. It took the workers several months to erect the frame to the eleventh floor, the site of his future home.

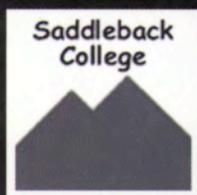
One Sunday, the young man put a sandwich, a thermos and a book into his backpack, took his rolled up sleeping bag and went to the construction site. The place was deserted. He walked around the site and found a hole in the wooden fence. Apparently, the locals had made it to steal unattended building materials. The young man squeezed through the hole and went toward the entrance. He climbed the stairs to the eleventh floor, found the room into which he would soon move, and stopped there for a minute, enjoying the panoramic view of Moscow. Then he got into his sleeping bag and lay down in the corner. All of a sudden, his lifelong dream had come true. He was alone. He had a roof over his head. He owned his own place. He tried to perceive the magnitude of the moment, but the enormity of his bliss blasted his heart, and happy at last, he ascended toward a bright light. His space now was as boundless as the universe.



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