

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Erika Togashi
Packer Collegiate Institute

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the sixteenth issue of **The Apprentice Writer**, which annually showcases the best writing and illustrations from among the nearly 5,000 entries we receive each year from secondary schools. Every September we send 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper **The Daily Item** in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to 3,500 schools in the thirty states from which we receive submissions.

It has been my pleasure to discover thousands of outstanding student writers through their submissions to **The Apprentice Writer** and the eleven years many of those students and hundreds more have attended the **Susquehanna Summer Writers' Workshops**.

The summer workshops, which attract students in fiction and poetry, are just one part of the Writers' Institute at Susquehanna University, which is responsible for providing classes, programs, support, and opportunities for students interested in writing. Since we now offer a **Writing Concentration Major** which is rapidly growing in both quality and quantity, the back page of this issue features a summary of our programs as well as a guide to a number of ways to obtain more information about the **Writing Major** at Susquehanna.

Send material to be considered for next year's **Apprentice Writer** to Gary Fincke, Writers' Institute Director, Box GG, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870. The deadline for submissions is March 15, 1999.

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DAILY ITEM

for kirsten, on beth's birthday

before we lit the candles on the cake
laura arrived and dashed up the stairs
hurriedly tossing out her contributions
to the conversation
from the bathroom

it's great to see you

happy birthday

by the way, kirsten's dead

and then she was in the shower already,
giving no explanation of any sort,
just five words to say
that the brilliant girl i knew
to drip water unmercifully
onto her stand partner's music
to wisecrack in the midst of rehearsal
to be everyone's darling
was gone
and would not disrupt another concert
to empty her french horn's spit valve
onto the floor of the symphony hall

that horn was the sole survivor of the accident,
metal in a case enduring the impact
of car head on into mack truck
after a skid on early november ice.
wedged beneath a seat, it was retrieved
by a family member the next day
and sold because it's hard to lose a child.

so nine months later
when the obituary fell from the pages
of my book,
untouched since kirsten's funeral,
my stomach turned because i remembered
the shock in beth's face
at receiving such a birthday present
the tears in laura's voice
as she took refuge in the shower
and that horn
the one that some unknowing stranger bought
because it was shiny and barely used
and because it was such a good deal.

Aggie Donkar
Baltimore, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones

LAI D OUT AT THE INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES

Laid out at the International House of
Pancakes
between Edmondson and Johnnycake,
I thought of you.

While eight ghetto kids
from down the block,
ranging in ages
of nine months to ten
pranced about the aisle with
their church clothes on.

and as the two year old
behind me, banged a
porcelain IHOP mug
on the table,

my mind was on the gay
waiter with the relaxed hair.

Daddy and I both got a Belgian Waffle,
his satisfactory, but
mine, totally undercooked,
and I waited twenty minutes
and when it returned
it looked worse than before.
Daddy said that it was okay,
that I should just eat it,
but you would never have said that.
You would have never accepted
anything unfit, anything "unacceptable."

It would have to be redone
and redone, and redone again
until it was the way
you liked it, the way *you* wanted it.
To "Mommy's" idea of "perfection."

I would have had to sit there
and endure the twisting of my intestines
while listening to you nag
about the service of ghetto restaurants
and the weak operation of Black-owned
businesses.

No matter how many times the waiter
would have gone back and brought
another,
if it were you sitting there
across from me in that booth,
I'd still be in that IHOP
waiting for something.

Ersula Jawanna Ore
Randallstown, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones

Seaside Heights Boardwalk

- after Allen Ginsberg
Seaside Heights boardwalk,
cool black night in salty air,
people near the benches
all around, lights bright
in the distance, a bonfire burning in the sand,
and a few drunks leaning over
toasting marshmallows. In the huge
arcades, orange carpets
at 12:00 pm, the beat of video games:
Street Fighter, Tetris, Mortal Kombat,
Super Mario, and 50 old women
frantically trying to win at the slots,
a little weed over in the corner, little girls in vinyl
mini-skirts, one crazy man
ranting and raving for hours, cigarette butts
flattened, littering the boards, a big ice-cream sign
with strawberries that look like tongues
dangling above Kohr's,
babies sleeping softly in their strollers,
as their whorey mothers roll them home.

Ali Arace
Clinton, NJ
Voorhees HS
Lois Harrod

He is old, he is my Latin teacher, and, last year, when it rained, he had an umbrella that snapped and pulled, backwards leaning to the sky at any suggestion of wind. I used to watch him, reaching after the terribly-angled metal, and I would suppose that he had looked, just so, forever - the wide rims of his glasses approaching with infinite slowness the protrusion of the cheek as that, slower still, roughened. Behind the safety of a spattered window, I liked to imagine that he and his umbrella might fight on, so, into eternity.

I found a yearbook - 1960 - and, flipping quickly through the pages, I missed him. But, turning back, my eye caught a defiance, a challenge to one grimace, and I read: William Dick, Upper School Latin. There were no glasses, and no hollow to this cheek - but this man had a mustache, twisted in question, a cigar, clamped, suspended between his lips, and a tiger's leer, steady, steady, promising: forever.

I felt a strange sort of sadness, and a curiosity even stranger than that compelled me to watch him, that fall, as he taught Vergil to our impatient class. Watching, I twisted, turned, transposed my images of him. He would walk through the room, bouncing in time to the dactylic hexameter, then he would whirl, and, pouncing - "What tense is that, John?" - he would be defiant, leering, and I would know that I had missed him, again, and his shift.

I wasn't watching him, but it was raining on the day that he showed himself to me, and I was translating, "here, still, are - tears - of things - and mortal -"

"Slow down: 'lacrimae' - listen to that, Ashley - 'lacrimae rerum.' Hear the shape of it - it's round, isn't it, like a tear?" I looked up to him: his gaze, steady, questioning, was upon me, and his right hand was curled, gentle, around the tear. "What does that mean? Think about it - all of you." He turned, slowly, and his step barely bounced as, tragic in striving, comic in leering, he explored the uncertainties of his own room. "Aeneas is alone, virtually, and in a foreign land - who holds it, ferae aut hominis? - and there is this wall, and - Ecce! Priamus - his king is on the wall, and his people, and yes, look, there Aeneas is, on the wall, too. And what does that mean, 'lacrimae - lacrimae rerum?'"

"Human compassion?" From the back row.

"Thank you, Ben. I'm glad we are all growing adept at reading footnotes." He rested, delicate, on his desk. "Even here, says Aeneas, there are - tears of things - and mortal affairs touch the heart. Even here, in this unknown place, people will cry - lacrimae - tears, and celebrate, with art, those great - rerum - things, that other men do. Lacrimae rerum, tears of things--" I thought I heard his voice break, and I saw his hand, still curving, tremble, weighty with the tear. "That's all that Vergil said - that's all he has to give us. Lacrimae rerum - tears of things. Class is dismissed."

Mr. Dick's hand fell, then, and, gathering his papers, he turned; he left, quickly. He has a new umbrella, this fall, and it stays, firm, in his control: he might hold it, so, forever. He is old, he is my Latin teacher, and, last year, when it rained, he helped me to believe in a different kind of eternity.

Ashley Evans
Greenwich, CT
Marilyn Ebbitt

Let me sink into the silence of what I once knew.
I am no longer frightened walking home
at night from the neighbor's house,
twirling under a street lamp until I feel uneasy:
somebody in one of the houses watches me.
I walk the dog, and his leash trails behind him.
Clouds race in front of the moon,
the spindle forms of wind.
The sky opens and seems to groan under pressure,
billions of years of spinning.
Trees strive for some warmth
in this land of frozen perspiration,
rising up toward it like strange bacteria.
The winter will not give way and
I feel I've become a pile at my feet;
the cold resides in my bones.
There is no use in trying to invoke memories,
no one to hear,
even if you were to say those words outloud.
The air is a heavy burden;
like the absence of another voice,
and the dog has disappeared into the woods.
I don't call for him though,
just start down the hill,
the gravity propelling my footsteps
at a speed they're not comfortable with.
I haven't been comfortable in a while.

Astrid Anderson
Natick, MA
Walnut Hill School
Jessie Schell

UNTITLED

I'm learning to weave
like the indians did
even though they weren't really indian
and it feels new and sweet
like I would feel if I were there
with the indians and the desert
out in new mexico
so I'm trying to weave
and I see the mountains
in the woolen constructions
only I'm a beginner
so the mountains are crooked
but I am constructing them
and I can see myself
atop one of them
sitting indian-style
maybe thinking about my weaving
and feeling the sky
on the back of my neck
and I'm going to weave
for good now
because they think that we can't construct things
that I can't construct the sky
but I'm finding that I can.

Sharon Wit
Massapequa, NY
Mrs. Hay

The Food Pyramid

Today our teacher asked us to write about our summers for homework. So my decision is - do I tell the truth or make up an amazing lie? And if I go the direction of lying, I still have many options: there's the blatantly-lying "I joined the circus and married the woman who walks on the elephants" story, the "he could be telling the truth but I doubt it" story about a summer in Germany with an aunt who let me wander the streets until dawn, or finally the highly believable "suburban family goes to the shore for a month" routine. I've opted for the last one for the past five years of my life. They've liked that one since kindergarten. I change it a little every year, of course, to try to keep it believable. I throw in little twists. I think this year my older sister broke my finger while we were arm wrestling - she's an eighth grader at our school and I've wanted to turn her old teachers against her since she broke my nose two years ago and told the entire school I'd done it by tripping and falling face-first onto the sink.

My sister's name is Cory. She started shaving her legs last week before school started. I like that she shaves because now she cuts herself once in a while.

Cory's got a boyfriend named Biff, and he's got big blank eyes like a deer. His friends say Cory's got nice tits. Maybe they're right. I don't know.

I couldn't write about what I really did this summer. My dad said it wasn't "100% legal, if ya know what I mean" - *wink wink*. Nothing criminal or exciting like armed bank robbery or corporate money laundering - maybe I'd write about that if it had happened - I worked for my dad. He says I'm a little too young to do it by the rules, so we don't tell the tax people. He owns a butcher shop downtown and I have to rotate the hams. That doesn't mean I turn them over a fire - it means I hang big bloody pig carcasses in window displays and move them around every so often to keep them *visually stimulating*, as my dad says. He says that pig meat never gets boring, and I'll learn to love it. I'm still waiting for that rapture.

A few months ago my mother threatened to divorce him if he didn't give up the store. Of course, they didn't tell me any of this directly - I listen through walls. She said she simply couldn't make love to a man who reeked of beef entrails. I stopped listening when I heard him say, "But honey, I thought the smell turned you on..."

"Who'd like to read his essay first?"

Mrs. James looks directly at me. I always seem to be the one teachers assume will volunteer, though I don't think I've ever given them reason to believe that. Maybe it's the fact that my mother has formed me into her idea of the perfect khaki-clad L.L. Bean child in penny loafers. Perhaps she buys my clothes that way to secretly send those messages to teachers so that no matter how far down I slouch in my seat, they'll call on me.

"Jeffrey?"

"Okay. *My Summer Vacation on Martha's Vineyard*. I spent my summer like I've spent many before - at the beach with my family. During the day we swam in the ocean and went on family picnics. I got stung by three jellyfish in one day."

I have never seen jellyfish except in books.

"At night we played Parcheesi and baked brownies at our beach-side cottage. My sister broke my finger on purpose while we were arm-wrestling. She got grounded for two weeks."

"What a nice, wholesome summer you had, Jeffrey!

That's lovely. But I can't believe that Cory broke your finger!"

"Yep. She said she'd have broken my whole hand too if our mother wouldn't have found out."

She bites her lip and tries to giggle. "Oh, Jeffrey, such a kidder! Who'll read next?"

And so on.

"How was school, honey?"

Nancy is washing dishes. Nancy is my mother, but I've always called her by her first name. She has spoken in the third person for as long as I can remember. Everyone she knows (including herself) calls her Nancy. She's the kind of woman who never seemed to show enough personality to merit a nickname.

"Not so bad. I got an A on my homework assignment."

"Nancy is so proud of her little bear!" She resumes her furious scrubbing. Nancy is forever washing dishes, splashing and spilling hot soapy water on the white tile floor. I can't understand where all the dishes come from because it seems to me that we always eat off paper plates with plastic forks, but somehow she finds a multitude of bowls and plates and pots to scrape and polish to a gleam daily. Sometimes I imagine her begging the neighbors for their dirty dishes, just to have one more thing to do.

"Nancy, I had a question about my vocabulary homework... could you--"

"Not now, Honey Bunch! Nancy's busy. She should be done in about 45 minutes or so if you'd like to wait."

I head for the living room to watch television. *Who's the Boss* is my favorite show. I watch it every day at 3:30. I pretend I'm Jonathan on the show because he's got a macho father figure who teaches him softball and a working-class mother who takes time to go to the arcade with him and tell him she loves him. But when the half hour is over, I remember I'm Jeffrey again, and I don't know how to play softball. I got hit in the forehead in the first week of kindergarten tee-ball, and I've stayed away from sports involving bats since then.

"Get away from the TV, asshole," Cory says. "I wanna watch *Beavis and Butthead*."

No wholesome fantasy families for me today. "I got here first, though."

"I don't give a shit. I'm older and more mature. Go jack off in a corner."

I am focusing on my plate. If I make eye contact with my father, he will ask me to work in the shop this weekend. I can hear him taking in breath to say it every time the conversation lulls, but Cory is babbling relentlessly about the Megadeth concert next Saturday that she is not allowed to go to.

Cory stuffs too much lo mein into her mouth.

"Say, Jeffrey-boy, wanna help old Dad out in the shop this Saturday?" He winks at me as though we share an intimate secret about beef - highly personal, a great honor to be in on.

"Uh, I think a bunch of kids from school are playing kick ball in Riner's Park that day. I kinda wanted to go to that."

Dad's bushy eyebrows crease inwards to greet each other. He rubs his black beard pensively. "Now, why would you want to do a thing like that? Think of the

valuable life experience you'll get in the shop. When you're older, no employer will want to hire you if you spend your whole childhood playing in a park, will they?"

"Oh, Jack, he's only twelve!" Nancy protests.

"Nancy, he's got to learn responsibility eventually, and better sooner than later." Dad likes the *head of household* title that he and the tax forms give him.

"Dad, come on, it's embarrassing. Sometimes my friends come in with their parents."

Dad's eyebrows jump up in shock. "Did I hear you correctly? You're embarrassed to be seen earning a living? What kind of attitude is that? Son, meat is life, and everyone needs it. You should be proud to uphold such an important nutritional pillar."

I slurp the broth from my soup to piss Cory off and ask to be excused. Dad answers, "So it's settled then, you'll work Saturday. Great, kiddo. I'm looking forward to it."

I take the stairs to my room two at a time.

"Up and at 'em, little butcher!"

Yuck. It's 5:30 in the morning. Instinct tells me that Dad's already been bustling about, doing useless cheerful things for over an hour. Even the sun's got enough sense not to be awake yet.

"You know, Dad, depriving my body of sleep will only make me cranky and prone to illness - when I get sick you'll go broke paying my medical bills. Eventually, you'll lose the shop to some fat sweaty guy named Moe who will sell three-day old roast beef, and all of McInnard Street will blame you for it. Is it really worth it? You'll be throwing off the cosmic balance, killing millions of people in the process."

"That intellect stuff doesn't work on me, young man! Out of bed!" His beard is floating over my head, dangerously close to my face. I wonder if there are termites or maybe frogs in there. I wonder if Dad hides things in it, things that could be clues to his secret life. Maybe there is a small coke stash in that big black beard. Or phone numbers of exotic women named Carina and Letitia. I'm sure a cricket just leaped out onto my bed.

"Dad, ten more minutes. It's the weekend."

"Meat knows no season, no hour, no day of the week! Meat only knows maggots if its owner does not know time. Now you'll get up or you'll be eating the shop leftovers for a week. Out of bed. O-U-T."

Dad thinks that he gets his message across more clearly when he spells for me. As if I don't understand spoken English without being able to visualize the words.

Breakfast is grinning obnoxiously at me when I reach the kitchen table. Scrambled eggs are giggling like seventh-grade girls and toast is beaming at me as if to say, "Doesn't it feel great to be up even before your grandparents! Smile!" I think I'll skip breakfast this morning.

"Better eat something, Jeffrey-boy. Takes a good full stomach to handle raw meat all day."

It's not a full stomach it takes, but a strong one, a stomach that doesn't notice or mind the kind of things I'll be digging my poor fingers into today. I have a feeling that I'll be a vegetarian by age sixteen.

"I'm not hungry. My body doesn't allow me to eat when it knows I have to work in the shop; it doesn't want me to throw up on the meat." I am trying with my eyes to gnaw on his wrist.

"Are you feeling sick? All the more reason to have

something to eat. It'll settle your stomach. We'll take some pop tarts in the car with us. Let's go."

McInnard Street in the morning feels like a junkyard full of broken down trucks and rusty baby carriages - everything is inviting to look at, but you wouldn't want to touch or get too close to anything for fear of strange Third World diseases. I fall into the habit of walking with my hands in my pockets.

My dad has rehearsed this play six days a week for seventeen years. I think now he's just waiting for the thunderous applause to overwhelm him to the point of tears. After crossing the threshold, he kisses the door frame, the same spot he's kissed for seventeen years, the same spot his father before him kissed for forty eight years.

When the shop first opened, no business at all came for six months. My grandfather took to staring at the door, waiting for the customers that never came. As he was fixated on an eye-level spot on the door frame one day, the ladies' prayer group from the Rakestown Church of the Precious Blood of Jesus of Nazareth came in - sixteen pious, girdled women, needing different versions of dead animals for a church luncheon. The church women proved to be very loyal customers, and they told everyone they knew about the new butcher on McInnard. The shop took off from there, and Grampa (thought he) owed it all to that lucky spot on the door frame. Tribute has been paid to it since then. I refuse to kiss a wall because a bunch of Christian women wandered into our lives and bought cold cuts. I am a firm believer in not believing in anything but coincidence.

"Why don't you go get washed up, Jeff? Customers will be in soon."

No, they won't. It's 6:30 a.m. on a Saturday. For one thing, the shop doesn't officially open until 9:00, and for another, no one I have ever met wants anything to do with raw meat anytime before noon. Dad takes excessive pride in his work, and, therefore, insists on getting here long before it's necessary, just to put on his apron and feel important and "get centered for the day." Perhaps he means "contemplate for a long time if I actually like this job." I can't imagine that anyone really likes animal carcasses as much as he professes to. It's just not a natural thing to be enthusiastic about, unless you're a serial killer or Frank Perdue.

My technique in the store is to perform each assigned task as slowly as humanly possible in order to stall my arrival at the next job. I've decided that the more incompetent I appear to my father, the less he will request my help in the store. The problem with this method of job avoidance is that I have this problem that I call my conscience - it always occurs to me that I somehow have the capability to single-handedly bring about the ruin of this shop. I haven't yet figured out how that's possible, but I always feel as though purposeful offense against the shop will bring me bad karma in this family for the rest of my life.

"I need you to set up the window case, kiddo," Dad calls to me over the rush of the sink. "Use the new smoked hams on the second shelf of the display and some of the lettuce and parsley from the fridge."

Upon quick inspection of the refrigerator, I find a can of opened (and aged) tomato soup, pasta salad with raw ground beef in it (something that simply did not sell this week), but absolutely nothing else. "We haven't got

any veggies, Dad."

"Oh... well, run up to Mr. Benton's shop and pick up a head of that bright green lettuce we use for the displays. Get some radishes too - they add good color. Here's ten dollars."

This is much better than packaging ground beef or sniffing the cold cuts to determine which seem rotten. I am through the door before he finishes washing his hands. That's another part of my system - if I have left the store before he has time to think of anything else he needs, I'll get to go out again when I come back.

On McInnard Street, the sun is painting a new shade of gray over the old one, leaving the buildings looking messy and thick. The paint coat is uneven, like the way the front door looked after Dad painted it last spring, with the color either bare and translucent or dripping down in little gooey rivers. The buildings look like they've been painted this way every day for as long as they can remember and their outsides might peel off soon, window by window, shutters flaking off in the wind.

Mr. Benton's shop's official name is "Central Grocery and Tobacco," but no one in this neighborhood calls it by name. It's always been *Benton's Place* or *George's*. Mr. Benton is eighty-two. He was in some war a long time ago with my grandfather and always gives me free candy. He calls me by a different name every time I see him.

"Joey! Good to see you, ya little runt! Ya here for a pack o' smokes? You know, you're too young to smoke. No, no, you must want to buy some bubble gum, right? This kind will turn your mouth green. Tastes like shit. You can give it to kids ya don't like. No? What then, Jeremy? What else do I have left?" He grins and reveals his lack of front teeth.

"I need some lettuce, Mr. Benton. For my dad."

"Ah ha! What have I got in my magic case of veggies... romaine, iceberg, raddiccio, buttercrunch..." He is fervently digging through a display of vegetables. Heads of lettuce are rolling across the floor.

"The one headed toward the deli counter looks good, Mr. Benton. I'll take that one. I need some radishes too."

"Some ravishing women? Not gonna find 'em here! You might try Mr. Blumenthal's flower store down the street; he seems to get more than his fair share of young female customers. Me, I just get the widows with no bladder control. What's this world coming to when women who've seen more presidents in office than I can count without losing my place have to wear diapers again? I tell ya, Jason, things are changing - you've got to either roll with it or be knocked flat on yer ass."

McInnard Street isn't quite as bad once the sun claws its way up above the buildings. Then it looks like any other neighborhood made of chain-link fence and rough red brick and crumpled newspaper. In the morning it reminds me of the spot on the white linoleum floor that got missed when it was being mopped. Someone skimmed over this neighborhood while dusting the world.

Mr. Bailey is in the shop talking to my dad when I get back. His first name is Vern and he runs Vern's Vittles, a diner where the booths always feel sticky.

The obnoxiously tinkly door bells announce my entrance.

"Well, how's it going, sport?"

I don't think he knows about my tee-ball incident. Still, I don't know why he calls me sport. "Pretty good, Mr.

Bailey. How's the diner?"

"Aw, the thing's goddamn near bankrupt again. Lizzy's having more knee surgery - damned if I can afford that! - and the cat has a bladder infection. I say we just shoot the old shrew, but Lizzy'll have none of that, you know. Says the cat's 'always been there for her.' Damned if I know what the hell she means. It's always been there, all right - for me to clean up after when it shits on the living room carpet! But other than that, things are fantastic."

Dad laughs his hearty man's laugh. "Oh, Vern, such a card!" He slaps him on the back and roars as if he's never heard anything funnier.

I can never tell if I'm supposed to laugh too or make an *oh, I'm so sorry* expression, or just nod in a pseudo-understanding fashion. Mr. Bailey's monologue of troubles always lasts awhile, but at least listening to it distracts Dad from making me touch the meat quite yet. Even complaining types can be beneficial in certain situations.

"Well, Jeff, you'd best get working, eh? Daylight's burning!"

Time's up. "What do you need me to do?"

"Why don't you get working on the display cases? Oh, but the window needs some color to go along with the hams. Run out and get some flowers, all right? Nothing too expensive."

Another chance to escape. This time the adventure won't take me far, only to Mr. Blumenthal, the florist, across the street, but it's better than listening to Mr. Bailey talk about his prostrate problems and his wife who refuses to iron.

"Hi, Mr. Blumenthal. How are you?"

"Aw, good morning, Jeffrey," he responds shyly. He stares at his hands and his cheeks flush a little, though it's neither too warm nor too cold in the shop. Mr. Blumenthal responds to each remark made to him as though someone has just commented directly on a sizable pimple on his forehead, or has just told him that he's the best friend they've ever had. He's uncomfortable hearing anything that anyone says to him.

"I need some flowers for the display. Do you have any nice carnations? I think my dad likes them."

"Oh, sure, Jeffrey, in the refrigerated case in the back. I know you can get them. You've done it a million times before, and you never spill anything." He blushes fiercely, as though he's just confessed his soul-conquering love for me. "That'll be seven dollars even, Jeffrey."

"Thanks, Mr. Blumenthal. Have a good day."

"Thank you so much." He smiles and makes eye contact for a nanosecond, then drops his gaze back to his knuckles, blushing and grinning. I feel strangely as though I've made his day.

"Ready to get to work, little man?"

"Sure, Dad." He hands me a stack of cheap plastic trays that look vaguely like real glass when seen from the sidewalk and tells me to get to "using that artsy imagination." That's his fatherly way of saying "We must be paying for those art classes for *something!*"

"Just the ham in the windows or the cold cuts too?"

"Maybe the ham and some of that new Hungarian sausage. Look at that," he marvels, holding up a long, glistening, maroon tube of meat. "Isn't she a beauty!"

"Sure is, Dad. Um... isn't it almost lunch time?"

"Jeffrey - it's 8:00 in the morning! Look, kiddo, we need to have a little man-to-man."

I dread the phrase *man-to-man*. It translates into, "I've caught you slacking and now I'm actually going to make you work."

"Why do you hate this job so much?"

This is not a line of conversation we've had before. Generally, these talks move toward "I know you really like this job and want to own the store, but you'll never be able to if you don't start working harder." It's always been assumed that I am gnawing my fingers away until the store will be all mine.

"I don't really *hate* it. Well, okay. Yeah, I do. I dunno, it's just not my thing. I'd rather be out with my friends or drawing or something. Why do you want me to be here so much?"

"You'll only learn to love this place if you spend time with the meat, get to know it personally, feel a connection to it, you know?"

"I don't want to form a friendship with the goddamn meat! I don't want to get intimate with it! And I don't want to own the store - ever."

Dad looks at me as though I've just told him that his mother was a prostitute and his father a sailor in town for the night. "You don't? Really?"

"Really."

"But this business is a part of the family. Don't you want to carry on the family tradition?"

I am not thinking anymore. I can only hear the words coming out of my mouth, like I'm watching my life pass as an innocent bystander, but I'm not exactly innocent. I hear my voice saying words I can't believe I'm saying: "I'd rather shovel shit for ten hours a day than make another hamburger patty."

Dad's mouth hangs open in outraged astonishment. He scratches his head violently. "I will not hear this meat blasphemy. I think you'd better leave. You can walk home from here, it's only ten minutes. Tell your mother you'll be staying in your room for the day while you think over what you said. I'll speak to you when I get home tonight." He focuses his attention on the roast beef he's slicing.

I'm out the door before the bells can even announce my departure. Now it's time to contemplate my options. I could be the good son and walk straight home and tell my mother I'm an evil child and that I deserve punishment for what I said; I could try to hitchhike to New York and pray I don't get raped and murdered by a fat guy driving a pickup and wearing lipstick and calling himself Laqueesha, or I could just head in the opposite direction of my house and see where I end up. I think I choose option C.

The park is a five minute walk from McInnard Street. It was the beginning of a series of projects that made up the *Nice Neighborhoods Now* plan, a *communitytogethernessweloveourtownletsplanttreesandsi ngkumbaya* sort of idea. The town hired some bored housewives to plant a few beds of petunias and conned a greenhouse into donating some grass seed. The park consists of two benches, a big square grass area, and a plastic birdbath. The town gave up on the project when several local teenagers died in a car crash after drinking vodka out of the birdbath with garden hoses. The mayor decided that "any kind of liquid-holding or liquid-dispersing vessel will subliminally promote underage drinking," and the plan they had for a fountain in the center of town "must be abandoned because it will cause unnecessary youthful

deaths." The project has been postponed indefinitely. *Nice Neighborhoods* will have to happen *Later*, I guess, which doesn't make such a great campaign slogan.

I can hear the kids from school as I round the corner onto Stamford Street. It looks like they see me coming, they're all looking in my direction, but nobody's waving or acting as though they notice me. They just stare like I've got an extra leg coming out of my stomach. I wonder if I didn't notice that my hair was making animal shapes this morning, but on closer inspection of the park, I realize what is wrong with the picture: a white mini van is parked beside the grass square, emergency lights flashing, engine off. And I realize that there's no emergency, and no accident, and no reason for this car to be there. The mini van belongs to Nancy.

She finally notices me approaching when I'm close enough to hear her teeth grinding - she doesn't like to be out of the house, can never seem to remember how to carry herself in public. "Hi there, Jeffrey. I was just out on a walk, thought I'd sit and chat with your friends for a while."

"You're not out on a walk. The van is over there. You put the emergency lights on."

"I did? Oh, I mean, I did." She does not understand most of the mechanisms on the car. She presses buttons. Kitchens don't have cars.

"Why are you here, Nancy?"

"Um... your father called me, Jeff... he thought you might be here."

"And?"

"Well, he wanted me to make sure you weren't. He wanted me to bring you home. Said something about *nutritional morals* and said you were to come home immediately."

"I don't want to come home. Dad's just being an asshole because I won't do exactly what he wants me to."

Nancy winces. "No, it's not that, it's that - he wants you to - he thinks that - okay, yes, you're basically right."

"Hey, Jeff, are you playing or what? We need one more player," Joey calls across the lawn.

"Naw, I need to talk to Nancy. I'll see you tomorrow, maybe."

Nancy gives me a look like that of an injured animal begging you to stop its bleeding. "Really? I won't make you come home right away if you want to stay for a while."

"No, it's okay. I want to talk to you. I can't deal with the hurt looks I know Dad will be giving me for the rest of my life."

It always vaguely amazes me that Nancy knows how to drive. For a woman who doesn't know how to use a remote control to adjust volume, or even a trowel to weed a garden, she's a decent driver. But once she stops the car and it's time for her to get out of it, she gets confused and starts playing with buttons. I think it's when she has to rely on understanding the simple ritual parts of the process - putting the car in park, opening the door, stepping out, locking it, closing the door - that she gets mixed up. It's almost endearing, really. This time she manages the routine fairly well. After parking the car, she only turns the volume on the radio all the way up, winces, and abruptly turns it off again. "Oops."

We take seats across from each other at the kitchen table, and I lay it out for her in simple terms. "I would rather have needles poked into my fingertips for three hours every day of my life than spend another minute behind that counter."

"Oh. So, let me see if I've got it straight - you really don't mind the work itself, but it bothers you to exploit the animals' bodies?"

I have no idea where she pulls her conclusions from. "No. I detest the work. Looking at raw beef makes my stomach turn."

"So what you're saying is that you don't really like the shop that much, right?"

Bravo, Nancy! I'm proud to have half your chromosomes. "Essentially, yes."

"Maybe it'll... grow on you?"

"Meat will grow on me? What a gross thought."

"No, well. But meat must be kind of interesting, right? There's lots of different... national meats, and, um... brand names... and, uh..."

"Get my point?"

I can tell that Dad is angry - he's eating one of his carnivorous meals. When he's pissed off, he eats an entire plate of assorted meats. Says it calms him. Tonight the menu is steak, last night's meatloaf, and some slimy-looking slices of lunch meat. He won't even put ketchup on the meatloaf, which means it's an extra-bad night.

"Would you like some steamed peas, honey?" Nancy asks.

"No, thank you, darling, it's just protein for me tonight." He is now hacking into the bleeding steak with frightening fervor.

"Which piece of steak do you want, Jeff? This one's really well-done."

"No thanks, Nancy, just some peas."

"Abandoning all your meat morals now, are you, Jeff?" His voice has the same edge to it as the steel he's carving that beast with.

"I just don't want to eat it, okay?" I am calm and trying not to get into an argument.

"That's not true. You're doing it to spite me." He is not looking at me.

"Why do you think that I do everything to personally annoy you? I make my choices for myself."

"Oh yeah? Then why do you refuse to eat meat? Lack of protein will make you ill. You'll regret it." He sounds satisfied with his prognosis. Now he is looking at me.

"This isn't about dinner, is it? Why do you care so much if I work in the store or not? You could find someone else just as easily. Cory could do it."

Cory is glaring at me over the dried flowers between us. "Fuck off, you little runt," she hisses.

"What was that, Cory?" Nancy asks.

"I said, I coughed in the middle of lunch."

"Oh. You aren't getting sick, are you?"

"Naw, I'm fine. What were you saying, Jeffrey?"

She grins.

"I'm saying, what's the problem, Dad?"

"The problem is - I want you to - my father gave me - I think you'd like -"

"Spit it out, Dad."

He spits his steak onto his plate. "You're my son and I don't want you to be ashamed of what I do for a living."

Nancy uses her napkin to scoop his chewed bite of steak off his plate. I can see her making a mental note to wash his plate extra well tonight.

"Ashamed? Where did you ever get the idea that

I'm ashamed?"

"You don't want to own the shop because you don't think it's dignified. You want to be some intellectual type and hang out in libraries and scoff at the working class. You want to be better than your old man. It's some sort of twisted ego trip."

"That's not it at all! I've got years and years and years to think about things like this."

"I started working for my father when I was nine. I loved it. Meat is exciting."

"To you, maybe."

"To everyone! Nancy, isn't meat exciting to you?"

She takes a bite of steak to support him. "Sure it is, honey! Wow, steak is great!" She grins unconvincingly as she chews.

"See? Cory, don't you love protein?"

"Sure, Dad. Whatever," Cory says as she picks the dirt out of her fingernails with her steak knife.

"Maybe some day I actually will want to own a store. I don't know."

"How can you not know? This is your future I'm talking about! Don't you have dreams? Don't you have ambitions?"

"Dad! I'm twelve! I just try to finish my math homework and eat all my dinner so I can have dessert. I don't get caught making ugly faces at teachers, and I've never smoked a cigarette. I don't tell girls they're fat, I don't say the F-word, I don't play heavy metal music all night long." I send a quick glance to Cory, who snarls. "Isn't that enough for now?"

I'll never convince him that this isn't about him.

"And I know that this is all about me, Jeffrey, though you'll never admit it," he says, "and you'll never convince me otherwise."

Everyone at the table focuses on his plate and chews slowly. Nancy is trying hard to think of something cheerful and unrelated to say.

"Hey, guess what! In my travels in the kitchen today, I found some mint chocolate chip in the freezer! How does ice cream sound for dessert?" She smiles, her lips sliding over her pearly teeth.

"Nancy, screw dessert. I'm trying to teach Jeffrey some life skills here."

I can see weak little tears in Nancy's eyes, embarrassed drops of salty inferiority.

"Ah, Nancy, I'm sorry I yelled. I didn't mean to take it out on you."

I begin to formulate a reason to be excused - excruciating stress-induced stomach cramps, endless history homework - but I decide to keep my mouth shut. I figure I may as well get this over with before I turn into a potential family-murdering Oprah Show guest, explaining how my parents drove me over the edge.

"Jeff, I do what I have to do to support this family and my father's name. You'll understand responsibility when you're older and you have some."

"Exactly! Let me remind you again - I'm twelve!"

"I know, Jeff. I do see that. It's just that I don't want you to have your heart set on something that may not work out for you when you grow up. I want to protect you from being disappointed." The way he hangs his head and stares at his plate, I'd think he was embarrassed to admit to liking me.

I'm astonished. But before I can catch a breath, Nancy's voice rises cautiously out of the silence. "Jack?"

"Hmm?"

"How often do you need someone to work in the store?"

"Oh, I dunno... two or three days a week would really help a lot. But I don't know if I could find someone with that kind of spare time."

"Well, maybe... if you wouldn't mind... could I do it, do you think?"

She bites her lip, waiting for rejection. Cory and I exchange glances.

"You must be kidding. You'd leave the house - for hours at a time - to cut meat? I thought you, um... hated the smell of it. I remember you saying that once, though I, uh, don't remember the context. Really, Nancy, you don't have to do this. I guess I'll find someone, eventually."

"Well, no, I actually would like to do it, if you wouldn't mind. The kids don't need me around the house anymore, really. I'm not much of a shopper, and, anyway, I'm, well, afraid to drive the car around. Before I met you I had a few jobs in stores - gift shops, mostly, nothing squishy or perishable. I'd like to see if I, you know, remember how to make change." She pushes the food around her plate with her fork. "And we could, you know," she blushes, "spend more time together. I think it'd be good for us."

Dad looks up from his plate.

"Chew and swallow, Dad," Cory says.

"That would be so... Do you really mean it? Could you stomach it?"

I can tell he's trying to conceal his excitement, convinced she's just being polite. I shove some peas in my mouth to keep from laughing.

She fluffs his hair with her fingers and kisses him noisily on the cheek. "I know how you love meat. And I love you, so I'll love it too." Sounds like a line out of a bad middle-aged love story. "It's settled then. I'll start Monday morning. Oh, but... who'll do the dishes?" Her lips twitch, then begin to quiver uncontrollably. She adjusts the tablecloth, making certain that it covers each edge evenly.

"Cory will!" Dad says. "Jeff, dish me up some peas, will you?" He grins and puts his hand on Nancy's shoulder like he's congratulating her after a softball game. "It'll be great fun, Nance. I'll teach you all about the differences between smoked and baked ham. And you can go with me to the Protein Merchants of America Conference - This year it's in East Biffertown, Ohio! I've heard it's a pretty hep town, if you know what I mean."

He begins to whisper in her ear and she blushes, giggles, hits him playfully with her napkin. "Just the two of us, Jack. It'll be so romantic."

"It sure will, my little pork sausage."

They begin speaking the language of newlyweds, using assorted foods like "apple dumpling" and "roasted lamb chop" as terms of endearment.

My homework for tonight is to write about what my parents do for a living. It's supposed to be a detailed paper, with all the important parts of the job explained specifically and clearly. I could say that Nancy is a sky-diving instructor who rescues mistreated pets from abusive homes in her spare time. My father could be a scuba diver for the forensics unit of the homicide department. I could describe a piece of skull he found in the bay across the street from my house.

But tonight I'm not so creative. Sometimes truth is even stranger than fiction. *Once upon a time, there was a*

man named Jack, and he had an unusual dream. Jack had a passion for beef...

Chelsea Morse
Natick, MA
Walnut Hill School
Jessie Schell

I THOUGHT MAYBE WE COULD FORSAKE GOOD LEGS FOR REALITY

I'm gonna demand that they renovate Barbie's dream house from pink paradise to subsidized inner-city apartment complete with noisy neighbors and leaky faucet.

They can furnish it second hand with a social worker that decides whether or not to provide adequate welfare (social worker, angry landlord, and food stamps sold separately).

Of course the Corvette has got to go, traded in for an all day city bus pass.

While they're at it I'll make'em repair Barbie too. I'll do it for womankind.

Those legs have got to be shortened and stumped with a cellulite implant around the inner thighs.

She'll have to get a more practical hairstyle because after awhile those roots are gonna show and long and pretty are always the first to go.

I'm gonna demand that they change her wardrobe and finally giver her that big terry bathrobe she applied for in '72.

The one that got stuck in all the red tape.

But hey they made up for it with the leotard and gym membership 'cause you gotta stay in shape.

I think then, Barbie, that we'd all relate to you and the woman you've become, of course that would be after they released the new Eating Disorder Barbie complete with scale and fashion magazine.

And Barbie, we wouldn't be surprised if you chose Abusive Ken over just a nice guy 'cause hey we've all been there.

Vanessa Burgess
Washington, D.C.
St. Andrews Episcopal School
Dona Weingarten

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER





Erika Togashi
Packer Collegiate Institute

a soft kitten that smelled of jasmine,
you'd have none of it.
I used to beg you to sit still so I could brush
your sweet, thick raven hair.
Your father would watch us,
pause with the smile of memory crossing his lips,
to say, "She looks so much like..."
Then your blue eyes would lift to his face,
those blood lips parted in laughter,
mocking me in my very presence.
Even the servants snickered behind my back and spoke of
her
as though she still walked these halls.
Your very face is like a mourning flower in her honor that
will not wilt.
Every time you hum, you stretch wounds of her death
open and bare.
Perhaps without you, this entire palace would not be a
memorial to her.
Perhaps he would make love to me as though he meant it.
I've tried every method of erasing her memory:
her portraits were taken off the walls, gowns put away,
every scrap of her handwriting has been burned.
But your face stays with me at night,
it floats over my head like a lily pad.
I have lived only in shadow.
It is your turn to feel like a phantom.
I rake my hand across this mirror,
leaving a mark I know will fade,
until I bind you in silence low as a grave.

Lauren Mefferd
Natick, MA
Walnut Hill School
Jessie Schell

**EXCERPT FROM THE JOURNAL OF SNOW WHITE'S
STEPMOTHER**

I recall the sharp morning your father brought you before
me.
Your eyes looked down in somber resistance.
Their spidery dark lashes cast shadows
along the height of your cheekbone.
I took your small chin in my hands and broke a smile.
It was an honest smile, years before the lies I would tell.
You drew in your shoulders, inhaled sharply, turned your
face away,
and ran off into the rose bushes to hide under
the linen-white petals, smell of mud, and warblers.
I looked at your weary father,
his eyes dull, mouth tightening.
He followed you into the garden as I stood
clasping my hands in the courtyard amongst servants and
carriages.
My maid tried to break the awkwardness with light talk,
but silence had caught in my throat and my face steamed
with shame.
After that morning, nothing I tried could win you over.
Spoiled with ruffled gowns, strands of gritty pearls,

FROM THIS MORNING

this day has grown stale
the trees
 stand at rest
the wind
 has perished
from this morning

the puddles
 lie tranquil
since the rain has ceased
flower beds
 immersed
wait until tomorrow's sun

this day has brought along
a grieving sky
 full of storm
and
 we have all had enough

Dani Decaro
Newtown Square, PA
Mr. Tom Williams

They are gutting the building on Twenty-third Street. Cleaning it out, making it an empty husk. Chairs have been hacked up, dragged from discolored carpet, stacked for incineration; carpet has been ripped from the dirty, naked floor. They are preparing for the conversion from primitive to sleek, smashing the old to make way for the modern. Masonry is demolished, walls are whitewashed, and progress is hammering down the antique door.

It is July, 1977. The sun is glaring at the city, turning the air above the streets into water. It is five in the afternoon, and the day is still humid and heavy. A young woman standing across the street, far below, drops her cigarette and crushes it into the burning sidewalk, grinding its insides out with the toe of her white orthopedic shoe. She shifts her weight, feeling her pink polyester uniform dress stick to the sweaty small of her back. She breathes the wet, dense air through her mouth, tasting the street.

I smoke too much. I know it. I pat my dress pocket, making sure that my pack is still there. I have an unopened one in my pocketbook, of course. A backup. Cellophane intact, foil uncrinkled. For later, after I've finished, when my feet hurt and my legs have turned to lead. I'm a cleaning lady. I work in the Toy Center on Fifth Avenue, cleaning toy showrooms, vacuuming, emptying wastebaskets, dusting pink, perfect plastic. They shut off the air conditioning at five, when all the important people leave; then we invisibles move it to clean their mess, and I sweat under the fluorescence. We shouldn't be seen or smelled; no touching the merchandise, and no smoking. So here I am. I pop one last Marlboro up and light it before I have to hold my breath for five and a half hours. I inhale deeply, and the doom retreats a little. I stare at nothing in particular, ticking off the seconds until I have to turn around.

The sun should be glinting off the windows of the building on Twenty-third Street, blinding the woman with the halo of smoke; the still-blazing sun sets late and lazy in July. But it isn't glinting off the windows. Because the building has no front. It's been sheared off, part of the renovation in progress. It looks like half of a dollhouse, swung open, with the other half nowhere in sight. There are no windows, just empty space, gaping rectangular holes. It is dangerous. It invites tragedy. The dirty air from the street floats unhindered into the formerly sterile building, meandering around corners and circulating freely, warm and wet, like blood. The building stares accusingly at the smoky angel.

So what if I smoke too much? The way I see it, I could quit and live to be eighty-five, still cleaning up after grown men who play with toys; I'd be so hunched over that I'd hardly need to bend to pick up the wastebaskets for emptying. I could do this for sixty more years, but I may as well cut it short. Oh, I tell myself this cleaning job is not what I'll always be doing, that it's only temporary, until I publish my first novel. Yes, ha ha, I'm a struggling writer, but it's not so funny when it's you. I sit in my little shoebox apartment, smoking, clacking away at my typewriter. I know I'm not any good, but everyone knows you don't have to be a good writer to be a famous one. It's not even the writing part that appeals to me so much, but how many professions are there in which having a

messed-up life is an advantage? Writers are a sad, strange, short-lived bunch. My kind of people. I've already got the living-alone, ruining-my-health, paranoid-delusions thing down pat. Which is why I'm standing alone in a city lousy with people, smoking, watching that obscene building across the street stare at me. What I'd really like to do is dart between the cars that separate us and climb the stairs to the top floor. I'd stand at the very edge of the anti-window, and I'd be inside and outside at the same time, warm air spinning round. I wonder which one, inside or outside, would have the stronger pull on me. I shut my eyes. I may just do that after work. I drop my cigarette and exhale. I'm late. I crush it and notice that my shoe is untied, my ridiculously puffy shoe. I stoop to tie it, and I hear a dog barking. I pause.

A German Shepherd bounds up the street, tongue lolling, dragging an exasperated young man in a green polo shirt and jeans behind him. The dog's full tail wags joyfully. The young man's shirt has a darker green alligator near the shoulder, near the shoulder straining from the leash's pull. The dog is panting. Its droopy tongue is a real, vibrant, rich shade of pink. It shames the artificial, cotton-candy pink of the smoky woman's uniform. The dog's coat is shorn for the summer, but still the dog is panting.

I see the Woman crouched ahead. She is looking down, so I bark. She looks up. She is uncertain about me, so I slow, to show her that I am not mad. The Master says my name, and tugs lightly at the leash, but I ignore him and approach the Woman. She smiles hesitantly and holds out her hand, palm up, for me to sniff. The inside of her wrist is bumpy and wrinkled and seamed. She smells strongly of cigarettes. Under that is a faint, lemony, pleasant smell. I nudge her dry, warm hand with my cold, wet nose. When she touches my head and rubs one of my ears between her thumb and first finger, I know that she is sad. It is a dry, cold, defeated sadness, and I nudge her hand harder, trying to make it better. She frowns slightly, looking at my eyes, and I lick her face. She loses her balance and sits down hard, laughing a stifled laugh. I am glad for that laugh. The Master crouches down now, apologizing profusely. He is a good man, but sometimes he does not know what is going on.

"I'm so sorry! Oh, bad dog! Here," I say, red-faced, as I offer the woman my hand. Her hand is warm and dry and thin, and as she stands up, I watch her eyes. They are a light shade of gray, and very tired. But they are crinkled around the edges, and I'm relieved that she's not angry. "I'm sorry. This big dummy thinks he's still a puppy."

She brushes the back of her skirt with both hands and swoops down in a fluid motion to grab her pocketbook from the dirty pavement. I hold the leash tight as she fishes around in her bag, looking for something. She takes her hand out, pats her dress pocket, and says, "Don't worry about it. I'm fine. I'm really okay." She shoots a bewildered, happy look at my silly dog, who's wagging his tail like mad. She flashes a self-conscious smile at me, glances down at her watch, then at the building across the street, which my firm is renovating. I finally made foreman, and I'm in charge of this project. But all my ideas of being a "strong on-site presence" and unifying the crew in their immense respect for me

evaporate when I look at her. Then she is gone, leaving nothing but a faint odor of cigarettes, and something more pleasant which I can't quite put my finger on.

Slowly the hour grows late. The sun moves across the sky, lethargic, like an overripe peach through heavy, sugary syrup. Lights come on around the city: taxicab headlights, neon beer signs. Office buildings stand against the hot horizon, pillars of clean, cold light. But the half-building on Twenty-third Street remains dark. It is ten-thirty, and a young woman is across the street on the fifth floor. She stands before an open window with a marble sill. Shadow dances across her face as she lights a cigarette.

The darkness is upon me. It comes every night, and waving a cigarette doesn't make it go away. I've finished my 13,000 square feet of toy showroom (mandated by the Union), and those square feet are immaculate, clean and shiny enough for the toys they house. I've earned my nine dollars and thirteen cents an hour, not bad, considering minimum wage is two-something. It's ten-thirty. Time to punch out. But I'll finish this cigarette first, inside this now smoky showroom, just like I've always wanted to do. And then I'll head across the street and see what's doing on the top floor. I'm certainly not going home. My typewriter will be there, waiting, dark and malignant. And cold. Probably the only thing in this God-forsaken city that is.

Opposite the smoke, in the fifth floor room now exposed to the world, for all to see, a rectangle of light appears in the darkness. A young man is silhouetted in the doorframe, light from the hallway filtering through his hair, falling on his green shirt. A dog peeks around his legs into the room. His sensitive ears hear the street noise far away, down below. His keen eyes see a woman across the way, in black and white.

I see the Woman. Her cigarette glows brighter as she drags on it, then settles back, dull once again. Smoke outlines her head. I can smell it from here. Her sad eyes are cast upward. Her sadness floats through the darkness to me, and I feel the weight of it on my chest. I know. I glance back at the Master.

"Here we are, boy," I say, patting him on the head, and he looks at me for a later, magazines and talk and steamy tea but better without. Just the darkness of that small square room is enough, and the waiting for our loved ones to return to us, the knowledge of all these people rooted deeply in affection that stems we don't remember where. All the strain melts from our faces and there's nothing desperate or lonely here, just bodies held together in love or sadness and warm contentment swirled into one, heat from the flames, movie scrolling across the screen, actors murmuring and fire flickering and all of us safe together.

Emily Weiss
Waban, MA
Milton Academy
Mr. James Connolly

My sister danced even
before she was born:
Our mama's belly would bounce
and jiggle to the music
of our fathers fiddle.

That's how we knew she was still in there.

She was born with patent leather feet.
Her metal soles
clicked when she danced.

She tapped in the house.
And on the porch
Until our grey tabby
stirred herself and left.

The cat was an indolent audience.

My sister tapped at school too.
When the class recited the Pledge
or sang in youthful voices

And when Teacher told her
to stop dancing
on the floor
She stood on her desk
and did it there instead

At night
When shades were drawn
And the sky was purple,
I would hear her tapping
in the room above me.
I dozed off to the clicks and taps
that wove together
into webs of rhythm
that captured me.

She was my Pied Piper.

Her hair would fly in her face
tangled and matted
With beads of perspiration
stuck to her eyebrows
and dripping down her cheeks

We once asked my sister
if the tap shoes really were part of her feet
And if she took them off
would she fall over
Like a pony without hooves?

She said they weren't her feet,

But her heart.

Caryn Casano
South Setauket, NY
Mrs. Faith B. Krinsky



Karen Sollenberger
Cumberland Valley HS

THE WINTER HEXAGON

Drab, drab, drab,
I scuttle like the woolen crab,
Claws filed and defenseless,
Picking at the whitened days
That settle in the dullest ways
And lull to soft impressions.

I am the candlestick in the window
Reflecting back against the pane.
I am the ancient cobweb in the corner
That huddles in with a slight peep
(You sprang up, roused the wrinkled sheet,
And covered your mouth).

I am the automatic time-keeper,
Pacing with a time-keep snicker.
With the rhythm of a sleeper
And the tapping of a finger.

Then comes the tapping at the screen
And the footsteps on the porch,
Painted gray twice over
In the spring.
But still the season hovers
With the snowflake hexagons
That these shaded days of winter bring.

I apprehend the icicles,
Daggers melting to
The morning time,
The salt, the sand, the plow,
The old street slant rhyme
Of a cat-gut bow
Resonating through the brown snow,
With the quartet that tarries
In the waning street below.

On the porch, painted gray twice more
At the coming of the callous wind,
The morning paper's bound in twine
And covered by the horizontal snow.
The front page tattered, headlines gone,
We talk of how the winds blow
And the world is white,
The expiration of our breath,
Like the last warmth,
Dissolving in the winter light.

Carson Cistulli
Concord, NH
Milton Academy
Mr. James Connolly

TUPPERWARE

She's a tupperware container,
gathering others' words,
ideas and thoughts
and locking them in with a
snap
like they were lettuce
or jello
like she could claim that they were hers
and label them
"lasagna"
leaving off "Mary Carpenter's"
in the deliberate rush.

Yea
She's a tupperware container
retaining others' thoughts
waiting silently
for the time when she can
regurgitate them
to use in her own defense
like a vulture
Saturday Night Supper
her specialty
I see
I see
Oh yea
she's clear
plastic
I can see right through
her curly little labels.
I can see the mold
the dirty smears.
Yea,
she's a tupperware container.

Kelly Lynn Mulvey
Shenwood, MD
Sts. Peter and Paul HS
Mrs. Stacy Ringel

1

Walking to the doctor, checkup time. It's six blocks in the steaming August heat, and I am wilting. I get there, and after nearly an hour and a half of squirming on the orange vinyl of a waiting room chair, I am ready to walk the six blocks back home. I picture myself lying motionless and serene on pale silk. The excruciating weight of my tragic and unexpected death is solely on the conscience of Dr. Jaskewitz and his staff of incompetent nurses.

A bored and overweight woman emerges. She calls me to the back and leads me to a depressingly sallow examination room. She is friendly and conversational as I sit on the cushioned table, paper crinkling and bunching with each movement. She weighs me, measures me, takes my temperature, and tells me to roll up my sleeve. Because I hate to feel the blood running through my body, because its rhythm makes my stomach turn inside out, I can't help but hold my breath, stopping the life completely. I do the same as she's taking my pulse, and she struggles to find it.

"You alive in there?" she asks, holding me more firmly.

I begin to wonder.

My mother's passion that year, the year I turned seventeen, was opera. She'd send the CD's spinning and fill our house with it-thick soprano clouds wavering in the air and bursting at the ceiling, notes dripping down our walls and windows. My father and I made it difficult for her; hating opera was the only thing we agreed on. The attacks on his part were grumbled complaints and the stretch of a finger towards the volume knob. Mine came as slammed doors and an explosion of loud music of my own from behind them.

Even to me, the extreme distaste was a little irrational. I could tolerate the music, but the calm spreading across her face that came with it drove me insane. That kind of peace was totally foreign to me, and I think I was jealous.

One afternoon, I had pounded down the stairs, heading for the kitchen. She was standing in the dim light with her eyes closed, gripping the dining room table with white knuckles. A can of Endust and a rag sat abandoned next to her, and the milky white light of the dying day made her face almost translucent.

Puccini throbbed through the room, and my mother was beautiful -- a Renaissance sculpture. She looked angelic but untouchable, and as I left the room silently, I felt a hundred years older.

II

The sky shook with heat and light, the world was alive. Dark greens and blacks swam around me in the wet heaviness of the night.

"Hey girl, why don't you come inside?" he said.

He was grinning at me just outside the dark cavity of my car, and I couldn't pull my eyes from him.

"I hate you," I said, laughing huskily and pressing my forehead against the wheel. My hair was wet and curling from the rain. I was tired and vulnerable; he was charming and beautiful. His body slouched carelessly against the car -- lean and strong, with smiling eyes. It had been a night full of dim gatherings in rooms where

smoke curled and danced toward the ceiling. The clock blinked 12:33 at me indifferently from the dashboard.

"Why?" he asked, smiling at me in the dark.

"Because you're a bad influence on me."

Laughing again, he swung open the door and stepped onto the pavement. I followed him through the door, up the stairs, and into his small apartment. I tried to look around inconspicuously, searching for the little pieces of his life to make it whole in my mind.

We sat on the stone railing of his balcony. He chain-smoked, and I breathed in the mist that had settled like a halo around us. Fat drops of rain fell occasionally on the stones, the trees, or us. I watched him wipe them away with the back of his palm.

Thunder growled in the distance, and sharp streaks of lightening followed.

"Did you see that?" I asked breathlessly, hopping from my perch. I stretched into the night, pressing hard on the cold stones, searching for more light in they sky.

He just laughed.

"What?" I asked as I turned to him, stepping closer.

"You."

"What about me?"

"Nothing, it's just funny, how you get all excited like that."

He was looking at me steadily, smile fading. Something in my chest contracted, heat rose to my face, and I met his eyes.

"I can't help it; I like storms."

I was standing close to him now, nearly touching his knees. I felt the pressure of his hand on my wrist, felt him pulling me close.

At home, the garage door rose mechanically, creaking and bumping on its metal tracks. I huddled a little closer to get out of the drizzle, letting myself sway with dizziness and fatigue. Looking down at the wet concrete, I watched the mad flight of bugs displaced by the door. They scattered in the mire, blinded by the light. I noticed the layer of grime beneath my toes and ducked under the door to get inside.

His sweater hung from my shoulders; the smell of him wrapped itself around me. I pulled my arms closer, appreciating the warmth. Inside the garage, I paused and waited for the door to lower, squinting in the bath of golden light as it hit the floor.

It was three thirty on the morning of Friday the thirteenth, and I thought of the two parents dozing above me, settled into the routine of middle-aged security and commitment. I thought of the growing distance between us, bridged by instructional notes on the kitchen table and day trips to see relatives. The crashing of the door was sure to wake my father, but I had nowhere else to go.

I sat in the basement for almost ten minutes that night, counting my breaths and listening to the swirl of the storm. There was no noise from above, so I took off my shoes and started up the steps. The cool kitchen linoleum met my bare feet. My ears were ringing, and I shook my drooping head to clear the fog.

In the dining room, I stopped again to listen for noise. My body ached with fatigue, and I massaged my temples to appease the pounding. In the dim light, glassy framed photographs stared into the empty room. Usually, three smiling faces gazed out, but sometimes only one -- a chubby little girl's face with glowing eyes and sprouting pigtails. There were no other chubby children for her to hold onto. The triangle is the strongest shape, my mother

had always said.

I stumbled into my darkened bedroom to realize there were no sheets on the bed.

"Dammit," I whispered to the empty room. "I hate laundry."

There was a clean pillow on the floor, so I left it where it was, lowered to my stomach, and pressed my face to the cool cotton. It smelled like dryer sheets and my mother's lotion.

I woke up forty five minutes later with a crash of thunder that tore through my head, chest, and bowels. I was sweating now, but still wore the same damp clothes. Groping in the darkness, I found a short sleeved shirt and peeled the wet clothes off of my body. An old quilt was under the bed, and I wrapped myself up in it on the bare mattress.

My eyes darted along the edges of the ceiling. I wasn't tired anymore. The storm was subsiding, but diamond drops of rain still drove their path along the pane of my window. Black branches swung with the wind and the weight of the water as I stared into the silver night. I was sleepless and still for a long time, thinking about the years spinning away, thinking about going crazy.

III

A memory. The next morning I wake and turn my face to the sunlight, thinking of another time. I am eight years old and running into the yard for no reason in particular. My heart is full with living, and the infinity of blue overhead swallows me. I am smiling, and I spin myself to the ground, feeling the earth's pull against my back. Above me, wide oak leaves shift and shake, ready to go from green to orange to brown.

Lying in bed, my eyes are still thick with sleep and my head heavy with dreams. This memory pleases me, and I am stuck with a thought that it is all the same. My mother's opera swells in the blue of the sky, and the pull of his hand matches the pull of the earth. I shift a bit under the quilt, letting myself drift back into sleep as the morning wanes.

Alison D'Amato
Sewickley, PA
Mr. Lawrence Connolly

CONSTRUCTION

The pounding of my shoes reverberates
in my ears
like my Father's reprimanding
The stories and colors and lies
of the stained blood windows
are hallucinations
like seeing the image of the Virgin Mary
in a cherry Jell-O mold.
I hold tighter to a plastic bag filled with sadness and anger
over the death of a princess,

and I wonder,
as I gaze longingly into the sanctuary of hell
where truth burns
like the North Star.

Needing a source of comfort,
while surrounded by judgement
and corruption,

I finger the gold chain
around my neck.

I am a sinner

and should be burnt at the stake, flames melting my flesh
into bubbly plastic
suitable for molding a cabbage patch doll.

I deserve to die,

here,

in my Father's arms,

here,

in the House of Lies,
surrounded by flowers

and Body

and Blood.

I see,

with distaste,

the admiration and loyalty

etched into stony faces,

and hands, forcing one's eyes

to look at a false hope,

a bigotry,

a fascism.

A man is there

polishing the wood,

a servant of lies,

and I recall

five years ago

being in the wooden cage,

along with Him and His servant,

unable to meet the witness' eyes

until I had served my comeuppance,

and I vowed never again,

never face to face,

and for a moment I thought,

"Maybe, just maybe,

He and I are alike."

We were both confronted by the hostility of propriety

and neither of us gave in,

but I know now

this likeness is not enough for me

because he forgave

and I cannot.

I will not.

I wonder,

"Is it okay

that I am here?"

Some mumbled answer

that proclaims the truth,
but not really the truth at all.

And all of a sudden

I am frightened,

deathly frightened,

at having to be

in the House of the Lord.

Sara Luby
Pittsburgh, PA
Mrs. Susan Nee

MENTHOLATUM, CLOTHESPINS, & LEFTOVERS

Back when we used to live just
ten childhood skips
and two baby-steps from her house...
My grandmother and I would spend
lazy summer mornings
hanging pastel daisy sheets
on the green line in her backyard.
I'd hand her wooden clothespins
from the handmade yellow bag
while she - with her quick, agile fingers
would whisk red housecoats
and double-knit trousers out to dry.

I lived for those long, precious hours.

We'd take a nap in her sun-kissed sheets
every afternoon following a dinner of leftovers -
her specialty.
I'd awaken to the familiar smell of
Mentholatum
and the sound of Oprah.
I'd tiptoe into the living room
where she'd be swiping smooth,
candy-apple red coats of nail polish
onto her long, tailored nails.
I'd crawl up onto her footstool,
scattered with National Enquirer
and crossword puzzles,
to watch
while she finished her nails
so we could cut out chains of paper dolls
from old envelopes
for me to color.

In the evening we'd sway, softly
on the old porch swing.
Eating watermelon and
capturing fireflies and memories
in clear, glass canning jars.

Leslee Layton
Newkirk HS
Newkirk, OK

THREE GIRLS ON BIKES

We have them, Aunt Angela,
The bloated girls riding bicycles,
With textured hair that sticks out at sharp angles
And rainbow pants
Done in oils.
They hang in the hallway,
Rather than over the kitchen table,
Watching our blank walls,
Rather than my dad and Anna
Doing the locomotion through your house

We cleaned them off
When they came to us,
Wiping from their gold plate frame
Frame and tainted glass
The coating of soot and tar

From ten years worth of
Paper wrapped smokestacks
That you lit with Bics
And sucked.

We saved them after you left, Aunt Angela,
The moon-shaped cyclers
We'd teased you for loving
So long.
We saved them from him,
And his taste for Jack Daniels,
Kept them from the pawnbroker
Who'd already gotten
Your china.

Lauren Mancini
Towson, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones

LAWNMOWER MAN

How often must you
mow your lawn,
you Kentucky transplant?
I'm eating dinner,
watching the Orioles,
making love to my wife,
and you've gotta break out
that lawnmower.
It's the middle
of the night
or first touch
of morning,
but you turn on
those halogen headlights
the accessory you had
to have
on your riding mower
and you're off.
So I shouldn't have been
surprised
that night when I
took Lisa's hairpin
and broke in
to your garage
to put sugar
in your Lawnking's tank,
and you came
down the stairs
to mow.
And now, because you
are a light sleeper
and a jerk,
I'm sitting in jail
with Big Joel staring at me,
making a growling noise.
When I get out,
I'm coming
to mow you down.

Max Rawn
Towson, MD
Towson High School



Carolina Leon

THE ROMANCE OF KOSHER HOT DOGS

Every Sunday I go to Lombard Street,
 Corned Beef Row,
 pastrami and pitbeef,
 on rye with swiss,
 pickled tomatoes,
 and the most beautiful kosher hotdogs
 you have ever laid your eyes on.
 The Weis Deli, legendary,
 sits on Lombard
 just in front of the projects.
 Miss Mercer, the cashier there,
 has been there longer than I've been alive -
 four feet tall,
 thick Jewish accent,
 barely ever cracking a smile.
 I imagine though that her knowledge
 reaches the height of
 the high rises of downtown.
 Looking in her eyes
 I can see past the cheese,
 the chicken, the cheesecake,
 there is more.
 As I sit in the corner with my meal,
 I imagine long ago instead of the thin,
 red apron she models daily,
 she wore a long dress
 which hugged her petite frame
 and a gold Star of David necklace
 that decorated her collarbone
 and enhanced the glow of her skin,
 porcelain and perfect.
 I imagine a man and passionate rapture,
 a beautiful love which produced a son,
 the same son who now serves me
 corned beef weekly,
 the same son who wears
 BVD shirts soiled and stained
 that barely cover the gut
 hanging affectionately over his belt.

Leslie Hunt
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Mr. William Jones

Mrs. Whitley told us
 to go home and write
 our family trees.
 Mine is simple -
Victoria Tsien Marshall.
 Whoever bore me
 left me on the front stoop
 of People's Hospital #32
 in Shexian,
 wrapped in an old towel,
 cord uncut.
 I was lucky;
 the Marshalls heard the sad stories
 and spirited me away
 to a land of many-childed families,
 where girls aren't trash.
 But the Marshalls aren't
 really my parents.
 For Mrs. Whitley,
 I could make a tree -
 descent traced to Mao, Sun Yat-Sen,
 and seventeen assorted empresses.
 Nobody would know the difference.
 But I can't,
 so, in the middle of the posterboard,
 I write my name,
 each letter huge,
 doing its best to take root.

Lydia Haile
 Baltimore, MD
 Towson High School
 Mr. William Jones

Summertime

The cab smells strong of air freshener and the heat
 inside intensifies the odor. The heavy traffic buzzes
 around the car, making my ears cringe under the noise. I
 read over and over the passengers' bill of rights which
 guarantees me an air conditioned and noise free ride. I
 try to close my eyes and sleep for a few minutes. The
 driver asks once again where we are headed, and my
 mom answers for the umpteenth time Monitfore Hospital in
 the Bronx. I need fresh air.

"Julian, roll down the window," I mumble to my
 brother.

Unfortunately, the air outside is as still as the air
 inside, and traffic is extremely slow. We crawl down the
 city streets and make our way to the hospital.

My mother and sister stop in at the gift shop to get
 some magazines, and I lead my brother though the
 winding hallways following the blue arrows.

I walk past the sign that reads "Blue Zone." My
 father has been in the "Blue Zone" for a month now. The
 pungent odor of death that fills the hallways of the "Blue
 Zone" suffocates me more and more with each step. We
 slowly approach the sterile ward on the floor.

Before entering, we stop off to wash our hands, put
 slippers over our shoes, and attach our face masks. I
 push the button on the wall and the doors swing open. I
 say hi to the nurses, and we continue into my father's
 bubble. I sit on a chair and my brother starts playing with

the TV remote. He flips to the channel that constantly tapes the temple located on the third floor. We watch an empty room. A few times a day they have a service televised when the rabbi comes in and delivers a sermon ending with well wishes to many.

"Kristen, Julian, your father needs to get some shots. Can you leave for a moment?" the nurse asks my brother and me. We make our way through the same hallway, remove our masks, and head to the waiting room to meet the rest of the family.

Together, the four of us walk a few blocks to our new favorite deli. We spent the first half of the month frequenting the Irish Pub, but recently we moved on to the deli across the street. The city air hits me hard. I feel the air wrap its dirty arms around me. My shoes stick to the ground, and my mouth breathes in as many toxins as it can. I want to be home; I want all five of us to be eating dinner together. I'm sick of eating out at restaurants; I'm sick of living with friends and in apartments rented by the week.

We meet my godparents, the Vidonis, and their children at Epstein's Deli for lunch. In my attempt to be Jewish, I order kasha varnishkes and potato latkas. They stick to the side of my throat welded by the tears forming within. The children sit at one table; we all grew up together. The oldest, Bobby, is three years older than I am, and the youngest, Gabe, is only two years younger. When my father went in for chemo at the hospital at home, we stayed with the Vidonis. Now they just come into New York a few times a week to see my father and us.

We all return to the hospital together and take turns in the waiting room.

"Lily," I beckon my godmother in my most angelic voice, "do you want to go down the block and look for book bags?" She declines my request with a shake of her head and returns to her book.

I look around the waiting room. I watch sons and daughters the age of my parents embrace one another. These statues are mourning the loss of their parents before they are even gone. They sit in the waiting room with nothing to hold onto because they are not eleven. They don't need their parents to watch them graduate from middle school; they don't need their parents to watch them get married or have children. So they are letting go before they even have to say goodbye. I watch them blot their tears with tissues and call their children to make sure dinner is already in the oven. I want to scream at the others waiting. I want to run over and kick and punch and make someone feel something for once. I want them to look at me, going into eighth grade and learning to say goodbye. I want them to understand that they are so lucky and they have everything, and I have nothing and I don't want to say goodbye. I want to hold on forever. I want to be able to look back and actually remember the way he talked and the way he smelled and the things he said. But I'm too young and I won't remember and even this moment will fade to a distant memory. My mother walks into the room, saving me from my own thoughts, and waves me forward.

I meet up with my brother and Gabe leaving my father's room. "Hey Kris," Julian says with a smirk across his face, "when you go in, flip to channel fourteen, okay?" He and his best friend giggle as they leave the room.

I walk into the bubble and sit on the edge of my father's bed. His walls are decorated with pictures of us and a poster of different cartoon characters my brother

drew. I remember my father's bedroom at home and how different it was. I think back to the posters all piled up in the corner. Happy birthday posters, welcome home posters, and the please don't smoke poster. What good are any of those when here I am and here he is and they're at home collecting dust. My father holds my hand.

"How's Egypt coming?" my father asks me. We've been planning a trip to Egypt since I was in fourth grade. I knew we weren't going, but I always give him updates of my mapped out plans. I smile at him and lean back so that I am lying next to him. I begin to talk. I flip through the channels to channel fourteen while I talk.

I stop and I see my brother and his friend running from seat to seat waving at the camera. They are in the temple on the third floor. The room is empty, void of any service, but there is my brother and Gabe running about and making faces. I laugh; the laughter feels so clean and refreshing. My father laughs, and I want to cry.

Kristen Pelekanakis
 Mercersburg, PA
 Mercersburg Academy
 Mr. Joel Chace

CONNECTIONS

I was busy licking all five of my candles,
 and your hand crinkled with wrapping paper
 as you told the truth: I was adopted.
 And ever since that day, I've wondered
 at your dark, swirling DNA,
 so foreign from my bones.

Does it matter that store clerks
 never assume I'm your daughter?
 Your light brown hair,
 your milk skim of skin,
 pale against my Spanish ferocity,
 these angry black curls.
 At night, in the mirror,
 I can almost see my mother's face.

Still, when I walk into the kitchen,
 you never have to turn to know my expression.
 Every year at summer camp,
 my stomach pulls to hear your car
 whir from the driveway.
 Something in me has latched on to you.

The woman who pushed me
 into your world is insistent.
 I try to hear her over the din of TV,
 the edge of conversation.
 A rope, pulled tight, drags me towards her dreams.

But by day, I hear your voice,
 and know you are mine.

Amanda Burr
 Natick, MA
 Walnut Hill School
 Jessie Schell

A woman of unparalleled energy told me on the phone, "Tomorrow our Christian Youth Fellowship is going ice skating!! Do you want to come? It'll be a great chance to meet people!!!!" This was an extravagantly cheerful voice. The cheer in this voice was relentless, unstoppable. It refused to be dampened. The woman asked me where I lived, and I said, "North Park."

"I live in North Park."

"Oh!" she said. She didn't say, by just a little bit, "Isn't that nice?"

"You're just a hop-skip-and-a-jump away!" The minute I heard that idiom I hated it. Phrases like that are used just often enough to really put a blot on the English language. Hopping, skipping, jumping - these are all verbs that imply weightlessness, a lightness of movement. These are rabbit-like actions, useless in the human vocabulary. No, lady, I don't *skip* rope. I thud heavily on the ground, shaking it mightily each time I land, and if you mention hopping, skipping, or anything of the sort again, take my advice and go back to Peter Rabbit Land, from whence you came.

"No," she said, "that's not very far at all. A short hop-skip-and-a-jump away, from where I live!"

I could just tell she was a Christian. Christians, in my mind, are people who are always going to church. They talk a lot about faith, trust, obedience. They talk about forgiveness. They listen to Christian rock, go to Church Camp. They shake their heads sadly whenever they hear the news, that someone has refused to "know Christ as their Savior."

I fear Christians. A free word association, starting with the word 'Christian,' would sound something like this coming from me: *Christian. The Crusades. Salem Witch Trials. Hitler. Hitler Youth. Youth Groups. Mind Control. Must run. Quickly! Must run far, far away...*

Of course, it's clear that I am a bit prejudiced against Christians, and carry a few minor negative connotations with the idea of Christianity. But being the artistically inclined liberal minded young citizen, the kind that kicks hard (if only in theory) against rules and stereotypes, I follow a policy of welcoming any new experience that crosses my path. So, I thought I would learn something about Christianity. I said to myself that this was the right thing to do. This was what being open-minded was all about. And afterwards, when I found out how horrible Christian People were, I could go on living as a defiant non-Christian, freer than ever from the confines of organized religion.

I considered my strategy. I would mingle with the people, get to know them... I would never actually step foot inside a church. That was going too far, just too dangerous. I might accidentally come to accept an idea or two, and that was too much. A purely social event like this, just a bunch of kids going ice-skating - it seemed fairly safe.

"I'll go."

The next evening, my father drove me to the ice rink. He warned me that the group might not just be ice-skating.

"They might have some sort of prayer meeting. Just be prepared for that. They might even," he said gravely, "want you to come to Church with them!" My father isn't Christian. He is just as suspicious of Church activities and people as I am.

"You know why I don't like going to Chinese Church? The people there all look at you differently if you're not a Christian. If you're not a Christian, you have to go to hell."

My father doesn't agree with the formal standard of Christian belief, that only Christians can get into heaven. He says that he believes in God, but that he doesn't like certain Christian beliefs, and that he doesn't like the Chinese Christians he knows. "They want to make the entire world Christian. Why do they have to do that?"

Halfway through the drive, my father said that there was nothing wrong with being a Christian.

"Daddy, don't worry. I'm not going to be a Christian."

At the rink, I met the woman who had called me on the phone. She introduced me to the other teenagers who were there; I smiled and shook hand with all of them. Then we stepped onto the ice. I hadn't skated for almost a decade, which apparently annihilated all kinesthetic memory of skating I ever possessed. The members of the group moved at different paces, and most of us spent the time trying to catch up with the others.

My father's predictions of the youth group seemed to be false. No one made any attempt to pray, though the way most of us were skating, we sorely needed it. Then there was an awkward moment, when one girl asked me if I wanted to come to church the next day. I didn't want to come, but I wanted even less to say no to her. I told the girl clumsily, "I had these really... traumatic childhood experiences with... Sunday School," meanwhile thinking that it was too bad that I didn't have some better excuse...

"The last time I was in a church, I unintentionally set fire to it," or "My parents were murdered in a church and ever since then I relapse into seizures every time I step inside one." I escaped onto the ice where I could look as if I were concentrating hard on staying upright. When the girl asked me again, I gave in to a sense of politeness. I felt as if I had lost some invisible game.

"Church starts at ten o'clock."

The next morning, I arrived at Church, extremely determined to like it. I convinced myself that this would be a Journalistic Experience, and imagined myself months later, tape recording intimate conversations between young Christians to write my strange but true, detailed, and humorous account of my wild experiment with Christianity. I sang the songs the other people sang, and bowed my head when they did. I listened intently to the speakers and laughed at their jokes. It was not nearly as unpleasant as I had hoped it to be. I was almost disappointed. No one pointed at me, damning me to hell. It was an almost insidious attack on my heavily fortified barricade of prejudice and caution. Christianity was so *normal*, so *unassailable*. My cause had been stolen from me; there was simply nothing left for me to protest. Stripped of my right to be an Anti-Christian, I knew that from that point forth nothing on earth but my own ignorance could save me - from conformity, from acceptance.

Yomei Shaw

North Allegheny Senior High School

By Dashboard Light

1:16

I just woke up from dreaming that I was pregnant. With myself.

There was a light going by, slowly, as if someone were carrying a flashlight. Then the rain was playing on the car roof. I was curled up into a fetal position, with one leg hanging down, in the front seat of Royal's car, clutching the pair of sweatpants he wears to lacrosse practice to my stomach, which explains my dream. It still doesn't explain why I'm in Royal's car, wearing his tux coat backwards and my prom dress. I don't even recognize what's out the window. Maybe it's the rain. And both my shoes are missing. I didn't drink or smoke anything, and I don't think that the mushrooms Casa de la Maison serves with the veal are the funny type, so either I'm dreaming, or it's real.

1:23

Damn.
It's real.

My seatbelt is cutting into me, which is probably what woke me up. I undid it and looked around. Royal, my date, is sitting in the driver's seat, his head leaning on the window. He's drooling a little. He has on the smelly old Duke sweatshirt he wears to lacrosse practice.

Ch'iennieng is asleep in the middle seat, wrapped in Ethan's coat. Her head is on his chest, and he has his arms wrapped around her protectively. How sickeningly cute.

Patrick is sprawled out in the back. I can just see Leanne's head next to him. I'm not asking.

I found one of my shoes. It's stuck to the ceiling of the car with a huge wad of green chewing gum. It can stay there.

Leanne blew a huge bubble. Patrick leaned over and plucked the gum out of her mouth. "That's vulgar." He gave the gum to Ch'iennieng, who slapped it on the ceiling near me. I was rubbing a blister on my foot and had my shoe in my hand, so I reached up and stuck it up there. "Look! Shoe storage!"

1:29

I should have gotten more than four hours of sleep last night. But what with the AP's, I couldn't. If I had, maybe I wouldn't keep drifting out.

But I remember a little more now. Ch'iennieng threw a map of New York at me, and it hit Royal. It's there on the floor, covering my other shoe. Are we in New York?

On a much more pressing matter, I'm more broke than I was when we left home. I tipped the waitress, but that was ten. I'm out fifty. Problem.

1:33

There's a congealed lump of fries on the dash. Putting that together with the Mickey Dee's bag that's washed up next to the map, I deduce that I treated everyone to deep fat fried grease. Royal is definitely drooling now.

The whole right side of my head hurts.

1:37

I'm the only one who was really tired during the prom, so why am I the only one awake? I do remember

Hannibal, who was as drunk as usual, coming up to me and trying to get me to go home with him.

He lurched past, holding a cup of what didn't look or smell like punch. Judging from the reek coming off of him, it was probably rum. "Hey! Guys! Howya doing?" He reached out at me, and I darted out of his reach, but he managed to grab my skirt and pull me in. "Hey! Howsabout you ditch Royal and come home with me, sweets? He doesn't know how to show a girl a good time."

"Go to hell, Hannibal." I pulled my skirt out of his hand.

"Hey! You don't know what you're missing, babyface."

"Good." I dove for the ladies' room. Hannibal lurched off, saw a table in a skirt, and started making passes at it.

1:46

My head is really hurting, enough to keep me from getting to sleep. Luckily, Royal's mother, much more conscientious than he is, bought one of those car first aid kits and put it in the glove compartment. Luck! It has Tylenol with codeine. I always knew dating a doctor's son would be good. Well, he did loan me his jacket.

We'd just gotten off of the boat. Leanne tripped, but Patrick caught her. They started laughing.

I rubbed my arms. "It sure is cold."

Ch'iennieng nodded. "Yeah."

Ethan stripped off his jacket and gave it to her. She snuggled down into it. He put his arm around her, and started shivering.

Royal gave me his coat. "You must be cold."

I took it. "But won't you be, too?"

"Nah."

1:52

Lights just went by the window, only higher. I turned to watch them, and saw that they were from a car on a road. But the road is well above us. Then a car passed on the other side. It looks like Royal drove us off into a field so we could sleep. What a brilliant idea. Why, it's almost as good as when he decided to save time in the mornings by putting in his contacts while driving. I mean, I know he wears glasses until he's got them in, but still...

1:57

I decided to go out and investigate the field to see if there was a reason Royal decided to go a-parking here, in the rain. However, my door's jammed, and my legs are asleep. It's just not worth it.

2:00

Royal moved. I was beginning to wonder if I was the last person on earth or something, so it was very comforting. He groaned and turned his head to face me. Not only is he drooling, but it looks like he's having one of those nosebleeds he used to get whenever he was excited. I wonder what he was dreaming. I wiped the blood off.

2:06

I suddenly realized that, if the dash clock is working, the power windows must be too. With that kind of deductive reasoning, I can guarantee a 5 on every

exam I took. Maybe even a 6 with the Euro History.

Well, the window only opened partway. It's all cracked.

"Royal, be careful with the driving. I want to survive to go to college."

"You worry too much."

"It's just that magnolia was almost in my eye."

"You've got a window. Close it. Nobody else's complaining."

"Patrick and Leanne wouldn't notice if a Scud breezed through. So could you pay attention to the road?"

"I am."

2:09

Leanne and Patrick still haven't moved. I'm sure that they're getting well-deserved rest. Ethan is holding Ch'iennieng less tightly, which makes sense. After all, those guys just threw dice to find out who would take whom to the prom. They would've gone with the first ones they got, but Ch'iennieng and Leanne already had their dresses. They claimed that electric blue (Ch'iennieng) and "tawny amber" (Leanne) just don't go together. One of Ch'iennang's shoes is jammed between the stick and my seat, and Leanne's chiffon scarf thingie is near it, so I agree. Eew.

2:11

It was a miracle. Nobody got tossed out of prom for drinking. Of course, that doesn't mean much; we just know when to put the flasks away.

At the dance, Royal was wild.

"Guys! Look! We can do the chair dance!" He ran over and got the chair someone'd left by the railing. "Hop on in, Ch'iennieng."

"I think not." She held on to Ethan. "You'll drop me."

Ethan shook her off. "I'll be the one who holds it the most. Don't worry; I can catch you."

She sat in the chair. Ethan and Royal each took one side. Ch'iennieng grabbed the edges. "On three," Royal grunted. Ch'iennieng counted. As soon as she hit three, the boys lifted. Leanne, Patrick, and I ran around them as they turned slowly, waving Leanne's scarf.

Suddenly, there was a pop of light. Royal let go of the chair, and Ethan grabbed Ch'iennieng before she could crash to the deck.

Oblivious, the yearbook photographer asked for our names. Ethan managed not to strangle him.

2:16

Enough's enough. If we don't get Ethan home by three, he'll turn into a pumpkin. I need to get Royal up.

I forgot what a heavy sleeper he is. Well, maybe he'll wake up soon. He is breathing, however. And he reeks of whiskey or whatever it was in his flask. I think I'll get someone else to drive.

Actually, he's the biggest of us, and Leanne's the only other one who can drive stick, so that's out. I'm not disturbing her. If I can find his cell, I should be able to call someone to come and get us.

The velcro he keeps the phone on is empty, and the damn car's even messier than it is usually. I can't see the phone anywhere.

There's a puddle of coffee on the floor mat.

"Here's a farm store." Royal pulled over into the parking lot. He dug a ratty dollar bill out of his pocket.

"Will you go get me some coffee? The biggest one you can get. Black."

"Sure." I hopped out of the car and got the coffee.

2:40

I try to get up, but my legs are still asleep. I've been sitting on my right, so I pull it out and start rubbing it. My left is wrong. The stocking's all snagged, and touching it turns my stomach. It doesn't feel like a shin splint. I must have caught it on something at prom. But I don't remember that.

Royal was definitely drunk by the time we left the farm store.

"Do you have any pennies?"

"What?" I passed him his coffee and buckled up.

"Pennies. For me to suck."

"Why?"

"If we get stopped. So I'll test negative."

"Run that by me?"

Ethan sighed. "If you suck pennies, they can't breathalyze you. I'll drive instead of him."

"It's stick, Ethe."

"So what? Better that I can't drive it than that you can't."

2:25

I need to find Royal's phone. I hope I still have my penlight.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

I accidentally shine my light outside the window. There's no hill for a bit. A car is going along the road at the top of the hill. In its lights, I can see that there's a muddy patch along the hill. All the grass got rubbed off, just leaving a big patch of mud as long as the car. The rain is running down it now. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

"Well, it's a map of New York. How'm I supposed to find us on it?" Ch'iennieng started looking for the other map.

"Maybe it'll be more or less the same. Like fractals." Ethan smiled, but Ch'iennieng smacked him for that. After a moment's consideration, she kissed the spot on his forehead. "There. Now it won't bruise."

"Where are we?" Royal stopped looking at the road. I grabbed the wheel until he got back to it.

"How the hell would I know?" Ch'iennieng threw the map at me. I put up a hand to keep it from hitting me in the face. It glanced off and flew at Royal. He grabbed the wheel for a hard right. The car slipped across the road. Then it wasn't on the road. Ethan grabbed Ch'iennieng and held her head against his chest. Then the wheels weren't even on anything. Then we rolled over. My face smacked against the window. Then I woke up from dreaming that I was pregnant. With myself.

Lydia Hale
Baltimore, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones



Meghan Miller
Cumberland Valley HS

Jimmi Valentine

Jimmi Valentine was a friend of mine who always carried a Salad Shooter in his front left pocket. He said it was something about the salad where he came from, but I don't quite remember. The point is that he carried around a Salad Shooter in his pocket. He would carry it with him no matter where he went -- the bookstore, the school, even to play hockey -- and people would always look at him and stare. I knew he loved the attention, and I suppose to a degree I did too, because I always hung around with him. The Salad Shooter is in my front desk drawer now. It's been there everyday since he died. I don't carry it around, because I'm afraid if I were ever in a situation that demanded me to use it, I wouldn't know what to do. I wouldn't know when I would need it though; he never told us exactly what to look out for. He never told us where he came from.

Whenever we would ask Jimmi about where he came from, he just pointed straight up. When we would ask him where he was pointing to, he would just smile the smile of men who've come closer than most to figuring out the ways of laughter and love and loss, and shake his head from side to side, dragging his blond hair with it. When we would ask him if that place he was pointing to was where he came from or where he was going, he'd just reply, "Yes."

Jimmi was constantly observing people -- people being selfish and insensitive, people being thoughtful and honest, people being crazy and happy -- but he'd always eventually get bored and his eyes would turn to the sky. He'd just stand there, in the center of a yard, even in the middle of the street, looking up. One day we were playing soccer in the field by the elementary school with a bunch of little kids. We were the biggest kids there, and it felt

good to show off. When the kids made teams, we were the first to get picked and it felt great. Jimmi rarely got picked last and if he did, he never minded it. But for me, it really felt nice. Anyway, we were playing soccer and predictably, Jimmi started staring at the sky again. Most of the little kids yelled at him to keep playing, but one real thin and short little boy, the one who always got picked last, wandered curiously to his side and looked up to try and find what in the hell Jimmi was looking at. All the little kids kept screaming for Jimmi to quit fooling around and start winning the game for them, but they never called for that real scrawny kid to keep playing. As Jimmi was looking up, the sun began its reluctant descent, and in frustration, threw pink all over the sky. Jimmi was entranced by the sky, and the little boy was entranced by Jimmi.

Eventually, the little boy went back to playing soccer, and Jimmi's team lost. All the little kids on his team, except that one real little kid, blamed Jimmi and started incessantly insulting him. They called him "stupid" and "sissy." One big fat kid even called him an astronaut and asked him when his ship was coming back.

When we saw Jimmi the next day, he was wearing a pair of pink-tinted ski-goggles. None of us could understand what they were for until he got bored of answering our questions and looked up at the sky. After he put those goggles on, he always walked around with the biggest grin like he couldn't believe no one else thought to wear ski goggles. He walked around with them constantly. He said they made the sky look crazy and happy.

The only time he stopped wearing them was during the evening. When we asked him why, he would only say that nothing he could do could make the sky look happy in the evening. We rarely saw him after the sun went down anyway. He was never happy after the light completely disappeared, and he never wanted to go out with us. He simply remained home and contemplated the sky and the reasons for its unhappiness. He attempted to empathize with it, but to no avail.

When we would attempt to drag him out with us or go out without him, he'd yell at us all. He'd say we were guilty of stupidity in the first, that none of us understood why the night was so hard for him and why he had to be by himself. He'd never get really mad at us and always told us just to go out and be careful, and that when he figured out how the night works, he'd tell us and make us safe.

Often, he would go out for long walks or wanderings to nowhere in particular, never forgetting his Salad Shooter, but always by himself. During these trips, he would continue to observe the actions of people, but while during his days his goggles filtered out all sources of discontent, watching people in the evening brought him endless pain, and there was no joyous sky to look up to. The couples radiating sweet romance cut him deepest, he told me once. Sometimes our independent evening paths would cross, and I would see him flee the sight of a couple enjoying their special unity, leaving a trail of pink life juice that no one else could possibly see or follow.

In these subdued frenzies of pain, all of Jimmi's confidence in the world would vanish, and he questioned all the essentials of life. Sometimes he would even walk out into the middle of the street, just because he was curious to see if the cars would stop for him. Last year, in late December on the winter solstice, a car finally refused

to stop for him. The entire day before was dark and downcast. The night was long and unmerciful. He never made it to the hospital, but died alone in the street below the night sky he hated so much.

Like I said before, I keep his Salad Shooter in my desk drawer because I don't know what to do with it. If I had gotten his goggles, they would have provided good company for his Salad Shooter, but they found a better fate. Once in a while, I see that little scrawny kid from the soccer game walking around town. The goggles are always either shielding his eyes in the day time or dangling from his neck or jeans, and this little kid, less than half my age, wears that same satisfied smile Jimmi wore. All the other kids always insult him. They call him "astronaut" and ask him when his ship is coming back, but he just observes them as part of his surroundings, just like Jimmi did, and smiles just like Jimmi smiled when he saw a car cut off another car, or two men arguing over something stupid. He flashes the world that satisfied smile and continues on his way home.

Randy Goldsmith
Livingston, NJ
Dr. Pauline Griskey

REQUIEM

I.
Wisteria is here again, and
cherry blossoms and green
infiltrating everything. The sun
is a Beethoven sonata and I
am in love with the Earth.

Suddenly I remember
her, irrigated with life support,
trying to pull the system
out of herself,
to pluck
the plastic stems
this cold April
has brought her
in its arms:
sickly, sickle-shaped.

II.
She has come up North
to watch her daughter die. I
see her face
sharp-edged and blood-ready.
She is a broken mirror;
light glints, slices
off her eyes.

The laughter is hard as flint
without sparks. All is inert,
a room full of kings in check-mate.
It's a matter of time, we all know,
but it is vinegar, sharp on the lips,
bitter on the mind.

III.
Everything is stuck in time:
waves coming in
intermittent heartbeats,
bare feet
of the woman walking by,

wind hitting
its head on the roof of the world.
Why does the sand
arch up in a grainy race
on the track of wind?
What does the ocean think
it's proving by bulldozing
only to break? What's
so great about infinity --
it's just the frame
for something we
all fall into.

Lucy Boyle
The Chapin School
New York, NY
Jane L. Rinden

RING

It is his token of long time yeses
and slow good-byes.
And it sits on her finger
like the gold of the tomb of Tutankhamen.

It is loud over the knuckles
of the man next door
who talks to his cats
like fat women who have swollen fingers
talk to chocolate.

They say "sweet nothing -
you are my sweet nothings
and I love you."

And the chocolates are their
ring bearers, their lovers
like cherry lifesavers
on the tongues of children
sitting quiet at church,

children who will twist
rings of graduation
ninety-eight times
and turn locker combinations
and drink sodas at movies
with slender legs
pressed against one another
legs that run miles each day
and dance through theaters.

Their fingers are like puppets on strings
and socks on fathers' hands
that tickle children asleep
like the ka of Tutankhamen
on brass framed beds
that sag with the weight
of fat women
and become life
for slow yeses
and long good-byes.

Alexandria Sica
Voorhees HS
Whitehouse Station, NJ
Lois Harrod

We arose that Thanksgiving morning earlier than was traditional in our household, a programmed autodrip trickling coffee at precisely six-thirty. My father, up in the night with a sour stomach, lumbered over the cold pine floorboards to raise the heat. He was tired of lying in bed the same one feels on Sundays, as if there were nothing better to pursue than trace the ceiling water stains with faintly sleepy eyes; the advent of six-thirty gave him permission to begin the day. He climbed into the shower and counted in his brain the layers of clothing required to weather early winter winds on the highest hill in Worcester, itself a city of hills. He shuddered and turned the temperature knob to HOT. Outdoors, a nor'easter had swept through only days before, and while the Canadian maritimes picked up several feet of snow, an air mass from the shores of the Hudson Bay had emptied into New England.

We arrived in Worcester at nine-thirty. Our destination was Holy Name High School, situated on the city's highest point, up the bloated drumlin just south of downtown (closer to God, the Worcester Catholics supposed). We turned off I-290 directly onto the street leading to the school's playing field. Our Olds shifted into second to climb the slope of the city. We passed Italian restaurants where my father had taken high school dates and triple deckers with yellow vinyl siding not unlike the building where he grew up, their foundations exposed downslope, revealing the steep grade of the hill.

The clapboard entrance sign to Holy Name and the crucifix that ornamented it waved in the winds. The fields here were the locale of my maternal first cousin's Thanksgiving football game; his team, Wachusett Regional High School, was the visitor. To have slept late as was customary on Thanksgiving would have been sacrilege, a dishonor to his big day, the finale of his high school football career. We parked on the driveway that led to the field, packed already with hundreds of Jeeps and station wagons, and applied the emergency brake. The summit of all Worcester stood above us, and on it the game had probably already started. We exited the car, to what felt against exposed skin a frozen hurricane. The wind was swirling around the hill in every possible direction, and the air, blisteringly cold, seeped into all jackets, gloves, and hats within moments.

My cousin, Ronnie (or Rondog, as the cheerleaders had nicknamed him the previous season in a pep rally) wore #47, a starter who played both ways. However, he looked more like an overtrained golfer than a football player. He had worked since freshman year to increase his bulk, but to little avail. He lifted after school daily, but after four years, he stood only a bit taller, but had not grown stronger, except in his arms. He had never seen a trainer about weights, because he supposedly "knew more about muscles than any loser with a degree," and accordingly, his arms had widths twice what would look normal. Not as strong but much more agile, I could still beat him at pick-up basketball on Easter afternoons or Mother's Days.

From the way he talked, you would never guess he could lose. Ronnie spoke as a Rondog would, monosyllabically and lower than his vocal range truly allowed. In junior high, engineering and building technically complex models had interested him. Once

after a Christmas dinner, he disappeared to his room. Later in the evening, as my immediate family stood in their kitchen ready to leave for home, Ronnie showed his entire family a painted and seamless Seawolf submarine. He told us that its dimensions were precisely sixty-five and a half to one between the actual sub and the model. His mother had gasped in surprise and told us that he had only received the model that morning. I still remember that smaller Ronnie's face beaming at our amazement and admiration. Now, after walking through my uncle's house, I could still find the models, the machinery design magazines, and the technical manuals, more concealed than earlier to prevent questions about them, but still a significant use of his time. They were not his visible obsession. That was the pigskin.

We reached the gates of the field; two ruddy-faced football parents held fistfuls of cash with gloved hands. They asked for five a piece to benefit the Catholic Church, and my father dug out his wallet. Their cigarette smoke blew into our faces, but the stench dissipated in the fierce wind. I could sense the blood leaving my wool-socked feet, and I begrudgingly accepted the bitter cold. It would happen only once in this lifetime, that I would be in such a place on Thanksgiving morning. Clouds raced overhead as if in time-lapse photography, and we trudged over the frosted grass, hopeful that Ronnie's performance would justify this aberration of a holiday.

To get to the Wachusett side of the field, we passed through Holy Name's cheering section. The cheerleaders' multiple warm-up suits restricted the vivacity of their motions. Other spectators, parents standing solemnly in long topcoats and teenagers slouching in oversized ski jackets, seemed uninterested in the game. They cupped concession stand coffee between their mittens, perhaps praying for a swift end to the game. So, from the first, we knew that Ronnie was winning. Wachusett, on the other side of the largely dirt field, looked enraptured. As we stood briefly across the field from Wachusett's sidelines, we heard the far louder bubbly yells of Wachusett's cheering squad, coming to our ears with a delay as if kept hostage for a moment by the wind. We could tell the girls were moving their mouths, but the garbled words proved unintelligible. I considered these girls, who had nicknamed my cousin Rondog, cheering with more enthusiasm than they had for most other things they did for boys in thirty pounds of pads crunching into each other with all their might. The game continued through half-time, and the only moment Ronnie touched the ball involved a deflection of the ball off his back. It was a play that caught my cousin completely off-guard, perhaps because he had been furtively scanning the sidelines during the huddle, finding our eyes before turning back quickly to the turf, his hands on his hips.

We found my uncle and his collection of brothers-in-law rife with gameday commentary, standing on a small rise underneath the inoperable, blank, and rattling scoreboard. They tried to sound like amateur John Maddens, and I put my mouth under the collar of my inner fleece so as not to laugh at them. We could barely see the field over the lines of Wachusett fans; their criticism of referees' calls could only have been speculation. And they were so intensely serious, speaking in hushed tones, shaking their heads, holding up their hands as if to God -- praying for the Catholic school to stop cheating and for the refs to start catching the violations. All the while Wachusett continued to rally as the cheerleaders gyrated

and the score widened in their team's favor. My mother and sister, with little knowledge of the game, stood upright without a hint of movement, only their eyes exposed beneath their tightly layered clothing. My father held a trampled copy of the program listing the various players, their numbers, and their vital stats, and studied it from behind his glasses, barely able to turn the pages with frozen fingers, attempting to convince my uncle of his interest. On the field, Ronnie ran to the end zone after every touchdown, all the way to the collapsed scorer, pig-piled with the rest of his buddies, then ran back to the line of scrimmage to line up behind the place kicker. The boy tried to stay on his toes, shifting from role to role, even though the distance between us, and his facemask, obscured our view of his gameday performance. His frantic moves and his body so drastically out of proportion gave little impression of enjoyment despite the score. We tried to get his attention, and we knew that he knew we were there, but his eyes avoided us as the passing time proved his poor performance. He kept looking down, and then to the cheerleaders. Later touchdowns inspired more flamboyant victory celebrations, but the very next play, his demeanor would sober again, concentrating not on the team's imminent victory, for that was already assured, but another goal he had, unknown to us.

I turned away from the distant football to even more distant sights: the three hundred sixty degree horizon that we would see from our perch on the sidelines. Mount Wachusett, for which Ronnie's high school was named, had a snowcap, even this early, the tallest mountain within view. Worcester filled the valleys with its own attempts at suburbs, actually quasi-rural towns like my cousin's of Sterling Junction. The gale blowing around me, from all sides, the landscape sunk deeper into the background, vast and bleached by the morning air.

We left before congratulating Ronnie on his victory, to beat the rush from the parking lot, and drove north down off the Holy Name Slope back onto I-290, to our uncle's house. We reached the car numb, unprepared for the painful thawing ahead.

Thanksgiving proceeded much as always for the remainder of the day, and we ate our twenty-pound turkey in the early afternoon. The little cousins still ate only rolls, and my father still cracked the bad jokes about the priest who had some vodka slipped into the chalice. The meal was held perennially at my uncle's dining room table, beside a pair of glass sliders that looked out over the snow-covered backyard, and would brighten the table until at least the serving of dessert.

My uncle had given Ronnie the privilege of saying grace that Thanksgiving; his victory was an American coming-of-age that proved him an adult, or at least it was to my uncle. For every Thanksgiving meal I remembered, the grace had been a humble, succinct testimony to the importance of family given by my father or uncle, despite the kids' snickering in protest of being quiet for even a moment.

He thanked God, in his forced bass, for a good game, a win; no injury, a good four years playing football for his school, and the food, and then a good game again. I looked up from the flame to see my father sigh and mutter a word he had learned during his francophone childhood in the Quebecois quarter of Worcester, "douleureux," or "distantly sad." Under my breath, I uttered a quick amen.

After the meal, I fell asleep, presumably from the

turkey, in front of the Lions vs. the Packers, alone in the furnished basement of my uncle's big house. Outside, the winds died to a whisper and the slower, rising cold of calm winter nights blanketed Sterling Junction; the starlit rural skies appeared overhead in the growing darkness. The women cleaned the dishes, the younger cousins went to the Nintendo, and my father sat with his brother-in-law chatting about politics at the dining room table under a dimmed chandelier.

Ronnie stood in the kitchen, staring at the sign the cheerleaders had made him the night before, "Get Crazy Rondog." If I had been awake, I might have noticed him cry.

Christophe Courchesne
Exeter, NH
Phillips Exeter Academy
Mr. Douglas Rogers

Mother and Son

A flash of sudden light blinds Joan - Betsy Hayes in her Buick is driving by, inspecting the battle against the weeds. Joan returns Betsy's half smile with a gesture that is not quite a wave, and, aware of the heat, tugs at her gardening gloves and lays them in a careful pile beside her.

She shapes her lips as if breathing through a straw, draws her face upwards, twists in her kneeling position, and settles finally on her heels. As she presses wearied fingers against the bridge of her nose, she hears the rhythm of the drums, beating in the basement, and of the chair, creaking on the porch.

The chair stops creaking. "Joan?" her husband asks. "Are you all right?"

She turns. Her voice is sharp. "I'm fine, Daniel."

He studies her. "You're sure you're not too warm?"

"Fine, Daniel." She stares at him with steady eyes until he returns to his reading: Madame Bovary, again. On Sundays, he re-reads the classics.

The drum stops beating, a heavy, uneven step makes its way up the basement stairs, and Joan's eyes fall to the ground. The door slams and voices mumble before Mark calls, "Mother."

She does not move, but waits for him to make his deliberate way across the garden before she turns toward him. "Father wanted some milk, so he said I could take the car to the store." She looks at her son: twenty-four years old and asking to use the car. He narrows his left eye and tilts his head, jouncing the belly that hides his belt.

She sighs, checks her watch, places her hands in her lap, and speaks as to one of the first-graders she used to teach, "It was only two hours ago you took your lithium. You know you're meant to wait four hours before you drive."

"It's only seven blocks to town, and besides," he pauses, clears his throat. "I didn't take my pill this morning."

She sets her jaw and mutters, "Don't do this to me."

"I feel fine." His hands tremble.

"You have to take those pills, Mark." Her voice is suddenly loud, and she spits the name like a lemon seed from iced tea. Fearing her husband might lift his eyes

from Flaubert, she continues more softly, "You know what happens."

"Mother, really, I --"

"Mark, get inside." Now she spits each word.

"Take your pill. Change your clothes." His eyes widen, and, turning from him, she continues, "You're not fit to be seen in a church that way."

He examines his blue shorts, new in March and since grown too tight, his white shirt stained with chocolate sauce, and he says, "I wasn't planning on appearing this way." He puckers his lips, attempting imitation, "Mother." Frowning at his failure, he tugs at his shorts, pulls at his shirt, and glances at his father on the porch. Mark clears his throat. "And what about Father's milk?"

She keeps her eyes down. "You both know the condensed milk is in the cupboard." Mark glares at her, then turns and walks inside.

"I really would prefer fresh milk. Mark can walk." Daniel's voice seems quiet after the slam of the door. There is a pause in the heavy stepping, and then the door slams again.

Joan listens to his walk, waiting to feel his shadow on her face before she spits, "Did you take your pill?"

"Well," he clears his throat. "Yes, Mother."

She focuses her eyes on a blade of grass. "Then go. I'll expect you at church." He stands there for several moments before he turns and walks towards town.

And it is only after he turns, only after the light beats again on her face, that she moves her head to watch him. Only then, as she watches his wide shoulders sway in time with his uneven step, as his figure diminishes in the distance, does she feel her rage dwindle. For she does love him, sometimes. After she has had a spell, he is always the one to soak the towels in ice, without words, pressing them to her forehead. And because she, too, has been shaking, she cannot sense the tremors in his hands as the large fingers slip over her palm. Her eyes close, silence fills the room, and she knows nothing but these fingers that stroke, that calm her own.

But always she opens her eyes, and he clears his throat, speaks his measured words. Just before the picture comes clear, she pulls her hand determinedly away from his. His hand, shaking, reaching out, remains. And then she turns away.

She turns away now, removing her hat before she gathers her basket, gloves, and clippers. Despite her burden, she rises gracefully, her short walk across the garden serene as flight. Though she is approaching forty-seven, years of placid expressions have kept wrinkles from lining her face. Though she has twice lost her body to pregnancy, her skin stretches tautly across her narrow frame. Even on this quiet street, she carries herself with the self-conscious arrogance of the young woman who knows that men watch her.

She stands on the porch, looking now at her husband. "Daniel, do you know whether Mark took his pills?"

Her husband takes several seconds to respond, and she lifts the clippers from the basket. "I can't say, Joan that I do know whether he took them. But we ought to trust our son." The last - irritatingly undeniable - wafts across the porch like an unpleasant perfume. Joan runs her fingers along the length of the clippers, deftly avoiding the blade. Her husband returns to his book.

Daniel and Joan enter the church together, so

close they nearly touch, but the slightest hint of such a touch - fabric on fabric - sends a shudder down her arm, moving it just far enough away that Daniel feels the withdrawal. Though the minister will not begin for nearly thirty minutes, their brethren flank them as though they are late.

Daniel is gregarious, shaking every hand, discussing with the bank president plans for a new library, asking a farmer about the effect of the summer's heat on the fall's harvest. He explains the dangers of expanding into Laos to Henry Johnson, town mayor, who nods and furrows a single wide brow.

Joan stands apart, hands clasped before her. Her hair, graying now, is pulled from her face, revealing the angular bones, the gaunt cheeks that translate into severe beauty. Her expression - pleasant indifference - is calculated, chosen before the mirror as a peach from the grocer. Her eyes are focused on some point above Henry Johnson's head, and, though the church is filled with the bustle of mismatched fabrics, she is surrounded, enclosed by a still calm. Words fly meaningless past her ears, and the congregation always gives her, like a statue in a public park, the distance, the formality her presence demands.

But today her focus, her separation is incomplete, and Betsy Hayes, sensing this, addresses her, "Joan, are you feeling all right today?" Betsy takes on the expression of concern. "I saw you weeding this morning; it was awfully warm."

Joan winces - Betsy, among the few who know about her spells, revels in this knowledge, using every possible occasion to remind Joan of it. "Oh, no, I'm fine." Joan turns her eyes towards Betsy, focusing on the middle of her forehead. "It was actually quite a beautiful morning to be out." Joan allows the shadow of a smile to touch the edges of her mouth.

Betsy narrows her eyes. "I was surprised to see you weeding this morning; I caught my weeds early, and I really have had very few since the beginning of the month." She starts to smile, but the organ begins, and Joan purses her lips in farewell.

Daniel offers Joan his elbow, and the two glide forward into their usual pew. She turns her head towards him, asking, as though the matter were of no consequence, "Have you seen him?"

But she turns her head back, her eye catching an incongruous sharpness against the muted tones of filtered light. It is through the mother's inexplicable recognition - of gesture, of expression - that she knows it is her son before she sees him, standing at the front beneath the stained-glass representation of Jesus crucified. She runs her eyes past his tilted head, his narrowed eye, his unadulterated smile - his neck is bare, his chest is bare...

She closes her eyes, trying not to see, but the light in the colors of Jesus illuminate him, imprint the image of his white body, his red briefs against the back of her eyelids. Smiling still, he leans his weight against the side of the door, his stomach and thick thighs sticking to the siding. She opens her eyes and looks at him again, this child that she has borne, she has nursed, she has bathed, and she places her hands on her concave stomach, wondering what childhood admonition, what splash of bath water could have created this smiling ogre.

Words stop their rushing past her ears, fabrics pause in their bustling, and from every direction, condemning glares push her layer of calm towards her, force it upon her. She gasps for air, and as a dizzy

uncertainty overtakes her, she recalls the steady gaze of the doctor and his question - "Do you take any medications, Mrs. Brown?" She recalls Mark's kick, his urging from within, the vision behind her eyelids of those large pink pills, and the shake of her head - "No." She recalls Mark's birthing cry, loud, proud, sure, and she remembers, some days later, that he opened his left eye, and gazing her full in the face, winked, a slow, promissory wink filled with baby sagacity, with child foreknowledge.

He tilts his head now, gives her that same wink, and, slowly pulling his soft stomach and thighs from the siding, he steps forward. The organ player, realizing he can hear his own toneless notes, falters, then stops, and Mark turns his eyes to him, smiling as in friendly introduction. "You don't have to stop playing." Mark shakes his head and walks toward the organ player. "You don't have to stop for me. I like music." He turns to the crowd, row upon row of burning eyes, and he says, "I'm sorry I'm late, but it's only because Mother said I couldn't come the way I was. She said I had to change, and I did. But I think you're looking at me funny. Why? I did what Mother said."

Mark begins to walk down the aisle, searching for an empty seat, and the minister appears behind him, stands arrested in the front entrance. Mark's smile begins to fall; he continues walking, now faster, and he shakes his head. "I thought I was late. You don't have to wait for me. Begin!" he shouts again, tossing those awful arms in that same gesture, and as they fly in the air that second time with no response, as Mark's smile fades completely away, something in Daniel seems to snap.

He takes Joan's hand, trying to push her toward Mark, and she shakes her head violently, withdraws her face, presses the backs of her knees against the pew. Daniel stares at her for one moment, shakes his own head, once, slowly, releases his grip on her hand, and watches it fall from his own.

He turns from his wife, pushing neighbors aside without apologies, and walks up the aisle in military time, the swish of his trousers and the slap of his heels answering the conductor's call. He reaches his son, whose crazed features lie defeated on his face, whose head tilts even further than before, whose lips curl as in repulsion of his mouth, and who asks, in the voice of the smallest child, "Father... why don't they begin?" His arms begin to float upwards in that terrible gesture, but they flap down as he watches his father shake off his jacket. Daniel wraps the jacket around his son's shoulders with as much gentleness, with as little blame, as he used to wrap towels around Mark when he fought getting out of the lake until his lips had turned blue, his cheeks white with cold.

Mark's eyes drift through the church, pleading with a hundred blank stares, and Joan's fear fills her as his gaze comes near. He searches into her eyes, pushing past the brown surface, finding his way past her defenses, and he asks, he begs her to come near. Joan does not move. And as father walks son down the aisle, Mark's arm continues its flapping, his ignored order now a farewell. Joan watches, a stranger with the rest, until they leave her, and she is suddenly, and entirely, alone.

Ashley Evans
Greenwich, CT
Marilyn Ebbitt

REMEMBER

Remember
the shoes,
piles stacked up
like tiny mountains that crumble too easily.
See
how gun powder
blocks out the sun
when mixed with human smoke
hovering overhead.
Feel
gray air,
as it coats your skin
creates layer upon layer
of therapist material.
Imagine
showers:
soap squeezed in sweaty hands,
bodies pressed so close
you can feel the stubble
of where they just shaved you;
the concrete so solid
it absorbs the cries,
pulls them inside
to push out forty years later
for ancestors you'll never have.
Smell
the gas pouring out of shower nozzles
drenching you in death.
Or:
think
about being so small,
four people instead of one fit in a twin bed.
There is still room.
Touch
the numbers etched into your skin,
permanent,
sore,
hidden under long sleeves
years after you escape.
Breathe.
The ashes still lining your lungs
seep into your blood stream,
make speaking hard
make telling your story impossible.
Now pretend
you survive.

Martha Hutchins
Natick, MA
Walnut Hill School
Jessie Schell

Susquehanna University
THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Murmur of a forgotten March,
A mere whisper on a cold breeze
off the Gulf of Finland.
Howling from the depths,
Carried by the icy current,
Lost in the unforgiving Neva,
The Souls of the Damned.

And St. Petersburg is waking.
Church bells chime a hollow ring,
Reincarnation
as St. Basil's breathes once more.
Men climb the Kremlin walls,
Not to siege.
Not to pillage.
Today Lenin's stars will fall.

And Moscow is waking.

Where once hung a poster,
Painted with blood,
And Lenin's eyes burnt holes
in your skull
with the caption
"He watches you,"
Now hangs an ad for Levi's.

And Lenin himself lies,
a vision in wax,
Dreaming in crimson light,
Crypt a museum,
Solemn. Deadly.
Nearby Stalin and Khrushchev
Snore in their caskets
As a young girl poses by the tombstones.

They wait.
Lurking in your churches,
Slinking through your streets,
Screaming silent oaths at sunrise,
Polishing tarnished tools at dusk.

The Reds are sleeping.

Heather Ann Dooley
Cohoes, New York
Dr. John Danaher



Kate McDonough

(for Adam)

There are pieces of
you in me red palm
prints on my back the
falls of my bicycle

I remember when i came
home late you took my
papers and threw them
out in the street.

When the neighbors
through rice paper
thin walls called the
welfare agency and
you made me tell them
i played football and
bruised easily with a
smile on my face.

I'm afraid of your
shadow when it glides
down my hall i can hear
the buckle on your belt

click. And when i'm alone
and i've gotten away from
you so i still feel your
rough hands worker's hands

under my arms yanking me
to my feet. I can't tell
you so i lie about where
i've been though in your

eyes i know you can see
the fingers through my hair
and you can smell the smoke
in my clothes even though

i stood in the rain for
hours to drain it all away.
In your eyes a mirror of
my face blotted out by

your cavernous pupils
i see my lips shiver
flecked with blood and
i wipe it away with tissues

before i drop them in
the toilet bowl and
watch the fibers moisten
and expand until it's

all just water again.

Michael Allen
Bancroft School
Worcester, MA
Mrs. Elizabeth Tsang

Ghost Town

- This is dedicated to Zac, Charles, and Alston, for only you three truly know.

"We were talking about the space between us all, and the people who hide themselves behind a wall of illusion, never glimpse the truth, then it's far too late when they pass away." - The Beatles

I guess the day that started it all would have been August 20, 1980, the day of my birth. My family moved to Asheboro permanently a few years later. When people ask me where I am from, I say "from a town near Greensboro," hoping their inquiry stops there. Most would say that Southern tradition should have taught me to respect my heritage and the people around which I was raised. It is safe to say that notion passed me and my three friends by.

"Mr. Furman, where is the hall pass? I'm going to the bathroom," Brody, the muscular, rustic high school junior, blurted out while the rest of the thirty odd people in the class halfheartedly translated a battle between Caesar and the Gauls.

Mr. Furman, the clueless Latin I teacher at Asheboro High School, responded: "Well, sure you can. But can I ask where you are going to?"

Observing this from my seat near the window, I felt like yelling at the poor man. He really couldn't get any more naïve, nor any more grammatically incorrect, for that matter. You think he would have caught on after Brody asked for the hall pass twice every class period, which were ninety minutes long because of the school's recent switch from the normal schedule to the "block schedule."

"You might can," Brody spit out as he slid the transparent hall pass off the chalk tray and strolled out of the classroom, not waiting for a response. Brody Trogdon exemplified the average Asheboro High School student, and Asheboro citizen. His routine became normal after a while. He would walk right out of one of the exits near the Latin room and straight to the student parking lot, of which I had a clear view from my seat. Leaning against his car, he would whip out his zippo and flick the top in one motion, cup his hands around a cigarette hanging from his mouth, and light it. He would usually look, puffs of dark smoke flowing from his nostrils and rising above him, in the general direction of the window through which I stared and crack a smile, revealing the retainer which held his two fake front teeth in place, the teeth he lost in a massive fight when a drug deal went wrong a few years previous. As the story goes, he tried to pass Brazilian nuts off as crack rock and paid for his stupidity.

However, this day was different. He paused as he stomped out his cigarette in the gravel lot, as if he was actually doing something positive with his brain on school grounds. He pulled his keys from the back pocket of his Levi's, opened the door to his red Fiero, which he had twice wrecked, fired up the engine, and slammed on the gas with his multi-colored, oversized bowling shoes, which he actually stole from The Family Sports Center Bowling Alley and made a strong point of bragging about in a previous class. He stormed out of the student parking lot as Mr. Furman began talking some more about Caesar's battles.

By the standards of nearly all of Asheboro's one

thousand students, Brody was "cool," and accepted as the most popular guy in the junior class for his efforts, or lack thereof. He started at safety for the football team and played on the tennis team, of which I was also a member. Every day at practice when we were jogging laps around the park, he would stop behind a huge clump of bushes and whip out that same old zippo. By the time we made it back around, he had usually finished his "homemade cigarette," which I seriously doubt consisted of tobacco. By the end of the season, he had basically created his own pile of "homemade cigarette" butts behind those bushes. And the coach always wondered why he would hack up phlegm on the court.

Brody's biological father lived somewhere in Colorado. He twice tried to run away from home. Eventually his parents caught on. They paid a mechanic to come over and remove the Goodyears from his car and put the whole thing on cinder blocks in the driveway. Of course, like the typical Asheboro teenager, Brody smoked pot and was heavily addicted to cocaine, at least as far as I could tell. He was a virtual grocery store of illegal drugs, explaining his ability to buy a new car for himself at age sixteen.

Little more than twelve minutes later, the Fiero skidded into the parking lot and Brody stepped out of the car, a McDonald's bag clinched between two fingers and a Styrofoam cup between his tobacco-stained thumb and forefinger. He disappeared from my view and reappeared in the door about a minute later, the food and coffee still in hand. Brody, smirking, tossed the hall pass on Mr. Furman's cluttered desk and took his seat at the back of the classroom. He proceeded to sip black coffee and munch on an Egg McMuffin while Furman continued with his lecture on Caesar's prowess as a military leader.

"You were gone for quite a bit," Mr. Furman slowly uttered in his baritone voice. "The bathroom swaller' you or something?"

"Uhhh, yea," Brody replied as he washed down the muffin with his coffee and hurled the cup twenty feet across the room in the general direction of the trash can. A few people giggled. I couldn't help but laugh a bit.

Trogdon now lives in a small house in downtown Asheboro with three other adults. He pumps gas at the Servco across the street from the high school, the same Servco at which he always filled up his cooler with ice before keg parties. Two of my friends, guys who have so far escaped the town's curse, ran into him when they were trying to find a redneck to buy beer for them in a small town out in the county. According to my friends, he already had six cases, a shopping cart full, of Bud Ice. He gladly loaded a twelve pack of Rolling Rock onto the cart and paced up to the counter, where he presented a horribly faked North Carolina driver's license, which said he was twenty seven, to the cashier, who accepted a crisp hundred-dollar bill from Brody and gave him the change. He has grown ashamed, ashamed at who he was and has become. I can hardly recognize him anymore, and that's the way he likes it. He is ashamed to reveal his identity. Maybe one day Brody will be pumping gas when he looks across the street at the high school and sees where he killed himself.

Sonny Heines served as the Associate Director of the Asheboro Parks and Recreation Department. Basically, this was a fancy title for a fifty-something obese man who sat in his office with a flask in his desk and a

large wad of Skoal tucked neatly in the back of his mouth. He oversaw all the town's recreational sports, the sports for the elementary and middle school kids.

The first memory I have of Sonny is from the basketball tryouts when I was in fifth grade. The routine was always the same. You and your dad would stand in line for thirty minutes with your birth certificate in hand. When you got to the front of the line, Sonny's assistant would check you off the list and pin a number on the back of your T-shirt. The coaches, usually immoral fathers, sat in the gym's bleachers with clipboards in their laps, making notes on the players they thought had at least the ability to make a foul shot. Sonny, his MacGregor athletic shoes firmly planted in the middle of the court, always dressed as if he had raided John Travolta's summertime wardrobe: tight, gray polyester shorts covering only a few inches of his large thighs and permanently imprinted with a circular area in his back pocket for his can of Skoal, a tight T-shirt that accentuated his breasts, and a whistle that navigated his cleavage and rested on his stomach. He reminded me of Rodney Dangerfield plus a hundred pounds. Nevertheless, he was always a friendly guy, which should have made up for his grotesque looks. For such a large guy, he was athletic as well, his whole body shaking profusely when he jogged or, even worse, sprinted.

Charles, a good friend who lived across the street, was in line right in front of me. When his number was called, he stepped forward, receiving a chest pass from Sonny. Each of them sidestepped their way across the court, parallel to each other, slinging the ball back and forth.

Sonny's assistant, Ricky Walker, yelled out, "Sonny, this kid don't have his birth certificate," just as Sonny released another pass. He revolved one hundred and eighty degrees to answer the pesky assistant. Charles was too concentrated on impressing the coaches, and thus did not notice Sonny's revolution. He heaved another pass across the court.

I could see it coming once he let the leather Spalding ball go. The ball arched slightly but sustained its velocity as it zoomed across the gym. Sonny started to say something to the effect of "Just let him..." when the ball slammed into the back of his head, still at high speed. His body sort of vibrated from the impact as the ball bounced back in Charles's direction.

"What the hell!?" Sonny yelled at the top of his lungs, turning his pear-shaped body back around at the same time.

Charles looked and realized his mistake. "Ohhh, goddamn, Mr. Heines, I didn't mean to," he blurted.

Once he heard what his son said, Charles's father, Allen, sprinted onto the court and grabbed Charles by the arm, dragging him off the court.

At the same moment, Sonny, his hand pressed firmly to the back of his head, yelled "Son of a bitch," still not realizing he was in front of about one hundred fourth-grade boys and their parents.

By this time, the gossip of the parents and talking of the kids had ceased. Even the coaches raised their heads from the clipboards and gazed in amazement. The gym was silent. Many of the parents just stared. Some reached for their children. All of the basketballs stopped dribbling. The squeaking of the Reeboks and Nikes on the gym's wooden floor ceased as well. Sonny paused, thinking intently of a way to save face. Silence hovered

over the gym, everybody anticipating his next words. Softly, he let out an elongated, "Next," with a strong element of caution in his voice, as if sure not to mess up this time.

Needless to say, Sonny's reputation as a man who could deal with kids slid downhill. Even though word of the incident spread around town quickly, the city never demoted him from Associate Director. I always wondered why those parents thought Sonny polluted their kids' minds by cussing in front of them. In actuality, the children of Asheboro referred to each other as "bitches" and repeatedly said way worse than "hell" years before Sonny slipped. The parents found their scapegoat, though.

Three years later, Sonny invited three little league baseball players to attend a card show in Winston-Salem and stay with him in a motel overnight. Idiotically, the children's parents agreed. Several months later, the children finally squealed. I remember opening the Courier Tribune one afternoon to see the man, his head covered with a jacket in a pathetic attempt to conceal his identity, being led away from a car by two police officers. I didn't even have to read the caption; I knew immediately the man was Sonny Heines, his tight, gray polyester shorts hugging like spandex to his jello legs. Sonny had molested all of them that night in the bathroom of a Motel 6. The thought of that gargantuan, three-hundred-pound man naked in front of three "innocent" ten-year-olds always makes me cringe. I have heard nothing of him since; for all practical purposes he is dead as well.

"Go long," Officer Timothy Harrelson, a sergeant in the Asheboro Police Department, bellowed as he dropped back in the pocket, his mammoth hands nearly swallowing the over-inflated rubber football we fifth graders used for pick up games at recess every day. Darin Coble, the most athletic boy in the school, broke into full sprint down the field, his tall flat top flowing in the wind as he dusted the cornerback. Officer Harrelson, a six-foot four-inch, barrel-chested man, robotically reared backwards, cocking his arm behind his head. Still in his shiny, black leather shoes, partly polyester pants with a yellow stripe covering the seams, a black polyester shirt decorated with badges and awards for performance in undercover narcotic operations, and the customary tool belt fit with pepper spray, aluminum handcuffs, and a Colt 45, he chucked the ball down field towards the streaking Darin. In all respects, he was your typical cop: large, hair everywhere except his head, jolly, good with kids, and intimidating. He did, however, have his own idiosyncrasies, as do all of Asheboro's citizens. As the ball arched downward, Darin clasped his hands around it in full stride and strolled into the end zone uncontested.

"AIIIII right, Darin," Officer Harrelson yelled, barreling down field toward Darin. "You gonna be a pro someday. You got the potential to make it to the top," he continued.

Darin simply grinned from ear to ear, returning his own congratulations to Officer Harrelson for the great pass.

It was this kind of false logic at which we fifth graders jumped. A compliment from a man such power and position thrilled us, further pumping our already large, naïve, eleven-year-old egos. Officer Harrelson always had our complete attention when he spoke. He had all the respect we could give him; he had the chance to make a

difference.

For over three weeks of fifth grade, we experimented with the different techniques to shun drug dealers: the cold shoulder, the safety in numbers, reverse peer pressure, etc. Using chalkboard erasers to simulate bags of marijuana, we would all reject Officer Harrelson's attempts, when he served as the pseudo drug dealer in the classroom, to sell us drugs.

"Drugs are bad for you," we would methodically chant when he would ask why we weren't supposed to buy or use them. We fifth graders sang the D.A.R.E. theme song with true enthusiasm at the closing assembly. And at the end of the program Officer Harrelson presented us all with certificates stating that we had successfully completed the course and a black T-shirt with the acronym "D.A.R.E." stamped across the front in red lettering. And, at the time, at least, the program was successful. Officer Harrelson gave us one more sermon on how drugs were "bad for the body, mind, and soul" before he moved on to another of the area's elementary schools to continue the education with its students.

Two years later, when I was in seventh grade, I sat down in front of the television one night to watch the local news. The top story featured Officer Harrelson. I immediately recognized him, only this time he was without his alluring uniform. Trying to shield his identity by burying his head in his muscular shoulder, Tim Harrelson had to be forced into the back of the squad car by police officers. I paused, startled, to say the least. He was busted for dealing cocaine. He used his status as an undercover agent as a cover for his own narcotic dealings. Word leaked out as one of his customers was busted for possession, and another undercover policeman busted him. After pleading guilty, he received thirty-five years, I think. I thought that an especially lenient sentence considering the real, intangible damage.

Within a year my whole class became involved with the drug scene of Asheboro. They began to experiment not with the manners of repelling dealers, but rather the techniques to attract them and bargain for the best price. Worst of all, Darin Coble took a step further. It turns out his potential lay in the business of drugs rather than football. Working his way up the gang hierarchy, he eventually became one of the heads, a "clocker," as each above him slowly got plucked after taking a wrong step. Maybe he knows he is next. Maybe they all know.

As Tim Harrelson rotted the remainder of his life away in a prison cell, I am sure he had time to think. Thinking would have done him some good, but it could not have repaired the damage he beset on the youth of Asheboro. He killed them way before he hanged himself in his cell. Hopefully, he died knowing.

And the scariest part of this all is what lies ahead. The more I look at it, the more I see myself and my three friends, having escaped so far, ever so slowly drifting towards the likes of Brody and Officer Harrelson. As much as I would like to deny it, I grew up around a city of them, people who have forever lived their lives behind a wall of illusion, never glimpsed the truth, and are now too afraid to reveal their own identities; they are dead. But they made an impression, for better or for worse. And that's life, the life and death of Asheboro, North Carolina.

Wes Rankin
Asheboro, NC
Woodberry Forest School (VA)
Ms. Jennifer Hubbard

returning to Ridgetale

fresh green leaves
sway in
and out
flying squirmy caterpillars

the slated
cold roof top
where we watch the orange fireworks
after my bed time

snuggling
in grey, thick sweats
while the pink breeze grows cooler
and the whispering sunset grows warmer

when I'm flying for that one second
as the subtle yellow breeze carried me
over the sun-burnt lawn
its soft finger tips throw me into the caribbean sky

and landing
so I can do it again
then run in circles
till my feet slip from under me

just barely grabbing
my best friend's ked
I know I won anyway
'cause it's my house

the smell of flowers budding
in my garden
the crunchiest, dripiest
strawberries

the red of my mothers lipstick
when I put it on
to show how big I am
and they clap because they know I look pretty

dressed like this
even though I trip
in the high heels
when they're drinking

their cold tea
and watching the green leaves
as they sway

Lauren Stephenson
Madison, NJ
Mrs. Marcus

Susquehanna University
THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



Sudden Light

The man in the navy blue suit is going to kill someone.

My coffee is much too strong, and my heart will soon be pulsating with drug-induced energy.

In the city, I can always pick out at least one person per square block who looks not only capable of murder but intent on carrying it out. The man in the blue suit is sipping coffee and reading a newspaper.

Caffeine always makes me sweat for hours after I've finished drinking it. My forehead will glisten before you like it used to in the summer heat.

The traffic is, as usual, deafening. I won't hear you arrive. The man in the suit has a tie clip that casts startling beams of reflected sunlight into my eyes when he shifts.

I have added nearly my cup's weight in sweetener to my coffee; the table is littered with ripped pink paper packages. It still tastes bitter. But my fingers were numb, so I ordered something hot.

The man has a thin line of perspiration on his brow. He reaches gently within his jacket and pulls out a white handkerchief, mops his forehead gingerly. He never takes his eyes off his newspaper. This one's even more menacing than I thought -- someone really is going to die today.

My fingers are still numb.

The man in the navy blue suit takes another sip of his coffee.

I wonder if Borgia coffee is better than Figaro coffee. Across the street, the man in the blue suit looks like he knows his coffee, but I've always preferred Le Figaro. But I'm just kidding myself; I wouldn't know the difference. I could be at any café on the whole goddamn island; I'd still be waiting for you.

Sometimes I feel as though I've been waiting for you my entire life. I remember when I kissed you goodbye, I knew I'd never see you again. Now, despite the fact that you're supposed to be here in one minute and thirty-seven seconds, I'm sure I was right. Life isn't much fun without something to wait for.

A tall brunette with a short skirt and amazing legs joins the man in the suit. She carries a shoulder bag bulging with papers which she lets fall by her chair before kissing the man briefly on the lips. He pulls a white rose from somewhere on his person and presents it to her. Her expression is momentarily pained, but then she smiles brightly and accepts it, pushing her hair behind her ear.

The first time we kissed, it was late. We had been dancing, and our lips were cracked and dry. They crinkled in the muggy air.

The man in the navy blue suit talks easily with the woman in the short skirt. They laugh frequently. He keeps his gaze on her as she glances around at her surroundings.

I wonder what their sex life is like. I wonder what *your* sex life is like.

The man in the blue suit asks something eagerly, and the woman in the skirt laughs. He turns his head away, blushing.

Any moment now, you will appear at my table.

The woman picks up her bag.

You will be beautiful, and I will remember.

She kisses him, and he reaches out to hold her.

She is already gone.

You will be genuinely happy to see me. You will want to talk to me. You will smile, and I will remember why I did not mind being dead.

The woman in the short skirt flashes one last smile at the man in the navy blue suit and walks away. She does not look back. He watches her until she disappears into the crowds of Bleecker Street.

But you will hug me tightly, and you will see nothing sexual in it. You will want to know what you did to offend me, but you will not understand why I am offended. You will not ask for my forgiveness because you will not know that I want to give it to you. You will not know that my stale love is as much your responsibility as mine.

The man in the blue suit is going to kill someone. He is still watching the spot where she disappeared. He is a professional. He kills slowly.

Perhaps you will find my drained coffee cup sitting precariously on the metal table. You will ask the waitress, and she will describe me in vague, confused detail. You will know it was me, and you will know I am not coming back; I give you that much credit. You will sit down forlornly, not because I do not love you, but because you could not keep me. You will look around, perplexed by this strange city.

The man in the suit will still be watching. He will fold the newspaper and get up to leave. His gazing eyes will slowly drift haphazardly over the street. They will fall on you. You will push your hair behind your ear, and he will sigh before walking quickly away into the settling dusk.

What will you do?

I will go home and try to remember the feeling of life.

Isaac-Davy Aronson
Leonora, NJ
Dwight-Englewood School
Mrs. Frimi Sagan

One Twenty-Four A.M.

The lights go out and darkness closes in around the t.v. slashing at the blackness with her color and light in rapid fire

I sink to the bottom of my fish bowl
and can feel the world swimming past me
soft blankets smell of warming by the heater -
all day they waited for me with patience I could never match

I turn away from the screen to face my myriad of cut and paste reality
all pictures, postcards, ticket-stubs, and records of my life hang against the dark
sheltering it from the sharp pieces of light
in pockets paper thin, made of frozen faces, numbers, lists that feign importance
the darkness hides beneath; I might hide too
but I curl up dense, and the universe around me moves through my fishbowl, with the viscosity of molasses
and I am sweetly
turned off

D.B. Charbonneau
Falmouth HS
Falmouth, MA
Mr. Charles Ozug

I Blinked

Female. Blue eyes. Five feet, four inches. Did they want my natural hair or my current color? Never mind, I'll tell them I've dyed my roots. What matters is for all of my sixteen years, the only impression I have made on the world is female, blue eyes, five feet four inches. When the lady with the orthopedic shoes passes by, she grabs her purse full of \$5 social security checks and gasps, but according to the DMV, I am just another blue-eyed, blonde female, five feet, four inches.

I don't mind the old lady, but the license needs a space for personal comments. I would write, "law abiding citizen -- does not speed." On second thought, maybe I should just grab my license and run.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

Great, now I'm old, and out of a license. I spun around.

"Don't forget your 'Let's be friends, don't drink and drive' bumper sticker!" she declared with a glassy-eyed stare and a rather squeaky voice.

"That's all right, save it for someone who really needs it. I have a Volkswagen, a bug, but what if there's a minivan out there, naked. It's just driving around with no sticker. It is your duty as a state employee to be prepared. Hold it with pride." Her eyebrows folded to the middle to form an upside-down "V." Exactly the way all grown-ups do when they think a teenager is being "fresh." I smiled, snatched the sticker and smacked the door on my way out.

On the stroll to my beetle, I tossed the bumper sticker into the trash. It was just another fish in a sea of "Let's be friends, don't drink and drive." A few were taped on the can with the "Let's be" and the "don't" ripped away, but nothing which took too much thought.

I smiled as my light blue 1976 Volkswagen came into view. I loved that car. I framed the window with "Beetle Bailey" comic strips, so I could hear people comment, "Oh, how cute. Did you know that or did you do it on purpose?" Usually, my response was, "Yes." I enjoyed watching people get annoyed, especially after they gave me an ultimatum. It is never black or white with me; it's always gray. I guess that is why I love my car so much. The tires were not custom made, rust is in a few, but not all, parts, and the passenger door is only a few shades lighter than the rest of the car. We were made for each other.

Granted, we have not known each other long. My dad handed me the keys exactly one month ago today, but a lot can happen in a month. I was supposed to "not drive often" until I had my official, picture license, but that did not stop me. There isn't anywhere else I can be me. My room is quiet, but there is always the looming possibility of my older sister barging in on me. I wish I had a lock, or a gun. She is nice, but try living with a sister who has been going through a "stage" for four years, coupled with the single longest case of PMS in recorded history. No, my room never made the cut, and everywhere else is either rat infested, a public area, or both. But I cannot forget the grays, there is always my VW bug.

I adjusted my mirror and the fuzzy white dice swayed along with Janis Joplin. My parents could not knock on my door and my friends could not call. The only thing flowing in and out was the cool rush of highway air. My hair lifted from my neck. What a wonderful Saturday.

I felt calm, collected, and free. The scene was flawless. I blinked.

"Boom! Flap, flap, flap, flap, flap..."

"Oh, crap." The tire blew out. Some idiot probably threw a large nail out of the window. I hate people who do things like that. They are the same people who steal car radios and put sugar in gas tanks. I really hate those people. They did not even have the courtesy to drop the nail near a gas station, or even near some type of civilization. True, the DMV was close, but after the attitude I gave the clerk, I chose plan "B." There was a building in the distance after the next cornfield. I knew I needed to get there, but I did not want to leave my baby all alone and injured on such a hot day. I knew it was possible to ride on a flat for a short distance, so I turned the key.

"Vr-r-r-r-r," then silence. "Vr-r-r-r-r," silence. I kissed the window and began my walk.

I squinted to read the building's sign, "WXBQ 1040 Mechanicsburg." 1040, that meant it was an AM station. At the time, a loyal fan of FM, I assumed they were talking about quantum physics or communism in China.

Through a glass divider, I glared at two men sitting in a booth. An "on air" sign was illuminated above them. One had chubby cheeks, and probably a pot belly, but it was hidden behind the divider. Still, his mustache made him kind of cute in a teddy bear fashion. He was speaking and I could hear him through the loudspeaker in the corner of the lobby, "...Now although God loves all creatures, we need to eat, so it is okay to fish. But if you want the really big fish, you need to use a tart green apple. Trust me, they grab onto apples faster than you can say, 'Ambesol.'"

"Good point, Earl. And if you have tried the apple and are unsuccessful, don't be embarrassed to return to good old fashioned worms," continued the second man. He had double-bar glasses and used his hands to speak as though the listeners could see them. "There really is no replacement for something you know is going to work. Anyhoo, it's time for a short music break. This is Steven Curtis Chapman with 'King of the Jungle' on WXBQ 1040 Mechanicsburg - mostly Jesus most of the time."

The first man, now known as Earl, motioned for me to enter the booth, but I was unsure how I would fit. There was only enough room for the controls, microphones, two chairs, and a small coffee table with some open magazines. Earl moved the magazines from the table and tapped it, "Have a seat." I sat on the table, slightly unsure and a little curious. "I'm Earl, and this is Preacher Bob. We don't usually have callers come down to the station. It's a good area for a clear transmission, but H-E-double-L for people to stop and visit," Earl laughed.

I was surprised he didn't comment on my appearance, but I was more preoccupied on leaving. "I'm not really a listener, my tire --"

Preacher Bob put his index finger to his lip, pushed his glasses back to his face and spoke, "Okay, welcome back. If you're just joining us, this is Preacher Bob and his sidekick Earl and now begins our next topic, Jesus and cars. We have a special guest today..." He looked over at me and his eyes urged me to speak.

"Aryana." He pulled a third microphone from under the desk and shoved it at me. "Aryana!" I shouted.

"Well, calm down, Aryana, no need to yell. Our older listeners keep the volume turned up. Trust us, they can hear you. What Earl and I really need are your views.

Do you agree with the Amish, would Jesus disapprove of cars?"

"I'm not sure, I'd just like to use a phone so I can call a tow truck."

"Sorry, no can do. Until you convince us that Jesus says it is okay, we cannot rightfully help you drive away. That would make us accomplices in a crime against the Lord." I gave Earl the evil eye, but he kept speaking.

"What are your personal beliefs?"

"I believe that Ronald McDonald is our savior." I expected Preacher Bob to make the upside-down "V" with his forehead, but he just chuckled.

"Then would Ronald approve?" asked Earl.

"Please, call him 'Mr. McDonald.' And yes, he would approve."

"I'll be more careful in the future, but for now, let's see if our listeners agree, right Bob?" Preacher Bob pressed a button on the control board and Earl pressed "line 2." "Caller, you're on the air."

"Yes, hello? I'd just like to say that I really enjoyed it when Aryana shouted. More people in radio need to speak up!"

"Okay, thank you caller. Line three, you're on the air."

"I think Jesus wouldn't approve of cars because they kill animals, and they pollute. I think Henry Ford's going to hell."

Earl covered his mouth to keep down the laugh. Preacher Bob spoke, "Ma'am, Henry Ford is already dead."

"Well, then I guess he got what he deserved."

"Okay, ignoring the last few comments, Aryana, would you like a rebuttal?"

"Well, if I must," I began. "Cars don't kill animals, drivers do. I have never seen an automobile start itself and purposely create road kill. Her second statement was true, cars do pollute, but there are more serious pollutants out there. The problem with automobiles are the people driving. If more people used carpools, lived closer to their work, or even took a bus instead of driving, pollution would decrease. Her last argument was that the inventor of automobiles should be punished, but with my preceding points, her last argument becomes that the inventor of people, God, if there is a God, should be punished. So in conclusion, that's not really my point to argue." I smiled. I felt good. It was if I was released from myself. I felt... gray! I felt more gray than ever before. Suddenly, I was an unique shade, a bright and shining individual. It was the same feeling my beetle gave me only magnified, because now the car was listening AND talking.

"I don't know about you, Preacher Bob, but I thought that was beautiful."

"Do bears pee in the woods, Earl? That was absolutely fantabulous... Let's let Aryana take the next call. You're on the air."

"Hello? Is this the lady who questioned God?"

"I guess."

"Well, if there is no God, then who pops the next Kleenex up in the box?" This time even the preacher had to cover his mouth to stop laughing.

"It certainly is a predicament, but I believe the next tissue is folded over the first one in such a way that it pulls out both tissues, but the plastic around the opening keeps the second tissue vertical and in the box."

"Oh, sure."

"If you're still unsure, just pull the tissue slowly so

you can watch, or cut open the box and explore."

Bob looked at Earl and smiled. Earl nodded and said, "Time for a short commercial break, but more to come on WXBQ Mechanicsburg." Bob flipped a switch and they removed their headphones. Earlier in the day, I may have thought this was a prelude to a rape scene (Preacher Bob had an uncanny resemblance to Jeffrey Dahmer), but I felt completely at ease.

"Listen, Bob and I think you did a really great job with those callers. We would really like it if you came back. You don't have to answer now, and don't worry about the religion issue. It's not a problem." I was ecstatic. I grabbed a pair of headphones and placed them over my ears.

"Caller, you're on the air," I heard my voice crack.

"Aryana? This is your sister. My boyfriend called and said you were on the radio. Mom and Dad want to know where you are."

I fidgeted on my coffee table. I tucked my hair behind my ear and wiped the sweat from my forehead. I could barely believe my sister had invaded my new hideout. I could barely believe my sister had a boyfriend, and wondered why he listened to Christian Rock. "I... uhhh... my... ummm..."

"Aryana, don't play games. What are you trying?"

Earl pressed a switch and her voice disappeared. Then he made a mocking face at the control board.

I didn't flinch, I just continued, "Let's take another call..."

I must admit I was brilliant, witty, and firm when necessary. I even convinced one woman that her cinnamon bun did not resemble the Virgin Mary.

"Same time next week?" asked Bob.

"Do bears pee in the woods?" I answered.

"I'll call a tow truck for you. Earl will set up for the next show; it's called 'God and Pets.'" A scrawny woman smiled from the lobby.

"Tell them I had a light blue Volkswagen. I know it's far, but I think I'll walk home." Bob nodded.

The next Saturday when I WALKED back to WXBQ, I discovered Preacher Bob was just plain Bob. Preacher was added to increase the listening audience. I became "Aryana Answers." Earl turned out to be a co-owner of the station, who was fighting for an hour or two of non-Christian talk a day. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, those two hours became my show.

My sister never again attempted to call the station and her boyfriend dropped her the next week. Last came my beetle. It was two months before it ran again, but since that Saturday I haven't needed to drive it anymore.

Debra Zagofsky
Allentown, PA

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE
WRITER



As my mom rummaged through her purse, trying to find the keys to our townhouse on Stone Drive, I prayed that they were buried somewhere in some hidden pocket. We could hear the phone ringing from inside, and my mother and I both knew who was on the other end. It was Ahmed. Ahmed was this kid in my fourth grade class who looked a lot like Fred Savage from "The Wonder Years." I was madly in love with Fred Savage, but this was not the case with Ahmed. Although I did have some sort of feeling for him deep down in the pit of my stomach, it wasn't love. Then again, it wasn't hate either. I'm not exactly sure what it was; all I knew is that if anyone found out that I had any kind of feelings for him, yours truly would be the laughing stock of the fourth grade. Ahmed was pretty unpopular with the "cool" fourth graders at my school. Maybe it was because he just tried too hard, or maybe it was his annoying jokes or his annoying laugh. I'm not sure what the exact trait was that made him so socially unacceptable. All I knew was that being teased throughout my remaining years at Northside Elementary was not ideal. This would be the case if anyone found out I had any kind of feelings for Ahmed. Yet knowing this fact, when Ahmed had shown up at my door step the day before, I had accepted an invitation to his house. I couldn't say no because something inside me said that I did want to go. I just couldn't let anyone else find out.

"I found them!" my mother shouted as she jammed the key into the lock. When we walked inside, the phone had stopped ringing. "You can stop holding your breath now, Marianne," she said. "It doesn't matter if we missed his call, you made a promise and you are going to stick to it. I'll call his mother right now to tell them that you are on your way," my mother said strictly.

Why did it matter so much to my mother if I went or not? It was none of her business anyway. It was snowing pretty hard outside, and Ahmed's house was on the other side of the development, so my mother made sure I was all bundled up for my long walk. She had me put on my blue snow pants, my big winter jacket and my scarf and hat. I was wearing so many layers I could hardly move. "Make sure if Phaylyn or Sophia call that you don't tell them where I am," I warned her. "Oh, I'll just say you're out," my mother grinned. Then she hurried me out the door and down the steps, and stood there waving goodbye and chuckling.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," I thought to myself while pludging along in the snow. If anyone saw me I would just die. Trying to remain inconspicuous was key, although it would be kind of tough in my bright blue snow suit. Fortunately, for some odd reason, the neighborhood seemed to be deserted that day. "This won't be so bad," I thought. In a way I was kind of glad to be going to see him, or that was the message I was getting from the butterflies in my stomach. By the time I had passed the tot lot with the broken swing, I was in a pretty chipper mood. Then I came upon a set of town houses with the middle one reading 5216. I ran the numbers through my head. Was his address 5216 or 5261? Not being able to remember, I thought, "I'm sure this is the right house." So I walked up the door step in my big pants and knocked on the door. The woman who answered the door looked as though she could have been his mom. I let out a sigh of relief. "Is Ahmed here?" I asked with confidence. "Who?" the woman questioned. "Who is it, mom?" I heard a

familiar voice calling. "Oh no, this is not happening," I thought. Then she appeared. Jessica Roberts was peering at me from the doorway. Jessica Roberts, the most popular girl in the fourth grade was standing right there, and her mother knew I had asked for Ahmed. "I-I'm at the wrong house, sorry," I stuttered and then turned, jumped, and ran. As I ran I prayed to God Jessica's mother would not tell her whom I had asked for, and if she did, I prayed that Jessica would not tell anyone. After running for what seemed like forever, I stopped. Something had occurred to me. I still had to go to Ahmed's house.

Then I looked up and saw the numbers 5261. This was it, this was where I had to go. I wished so badly that I could turn back and go home, but I couldn't. If I didn't show up, he would call, so I couldn't lie to my mother. When she found out that I hadn't gone, she would make me go the following day. So I pulled myself together and reluctantly went up the steps and knocked on the door. I had barely tapped the screen when it opened. A woman with short, curly brown hair answered. "Welcome, come on in," she said smiling. I forced a smile and stepped inside. Ahmed was sitting there in the family room playing Nintendo. "Hi Marianne!" he said with enthusiasm. He had a twinkle in his eye and a large grin on his face. He was so happy he made me feel like crying. I wanted to be happy too. I liked Ahmed, still I felt horrible being there. I felt really confused and sick. I wanted to be there, but I didn't. Then his mother came in from the kitchen with a tray. On it were every kind of chocolate I liked. There were Twix, peanut M&M's, Snickers, and Kit Kats. "Take whatever you like, dear," she said. "Are you hungry, would you guys like me to order a pizza?" "That would be great, Mom. What do you think, Marianne?" Ahmed questioned. "I'm not too hungry," I said quietly.

"Marianne, do you want to play Nintendo?" Ahmed said. "Go ahead, Duck Hunt is in right now, but play whatever you like. I have something to give you upstairs, I'll be right back." With that, he raced up the stairs. I just sat there on the carpet thinking about what I could do to get out of this. I didn't want to leave, they were being so nice, but I just couldn't stay. Something inside told me I had to get out, right now. "Marianne," Ahmed called. "Come up here for a second." Then I did it. I just got up and walked slowly to the door. Ahmed's mother came out of the kitchen. "I'm sorry, I have to go, I'm really sorry," I muttered. With that I was off. I ran down the steps and all the way home.

When I got home my mom didn't ask how it went that night. The next day in school Ahmed acted like nothing had changed. He didn't talk to me in class. When we got out on the playground, he would chase me around and push me down in the snow. He would hold on to my arms, we would laugh and I would break loose. There were a lot of boys that chased me and Phaylyn and Sophia out on the playground, so they never noticed that Ahmed always seemed to be the one chasing me. And if they did say anything, I would just make an ugly face and say how gross he was.

Our family moved away a little while after that, and I remember writing a letter to Ahmed. I told him that I had always had a crush on him. I didn't receive a letter in return until about Christmas of the next year. Actually it was a card. When my dad handed it to me I put on a puzzled face as if I had no idea why he was writing me. When I opened the envelope the front of the card had

Egyptian hieroglyphics on it. On the inside it read:

Dear Marianne,

I live in Egypt now. I always liked you too. I'm not mad at you. Do you have a boyfriend where you are? I don't have a girlfriend. Please write back! I miss you. I hope to see you someday.

Love,
Ahmed

P.S. Send me a picture and I'll send you one of mine.

When my parents asked me about the letter I said it was a Christmas card and I didn't know why he sent it. Then I went outside and threw it in the dumpster, just so no one would ever find out.

Anne Frommelt
Fairfax, VA
Fairfax High School

Polish Cooking

Returning from school, it feels as if I've survived eight months in a war zone instead of an eight-period day. On this particular day, at the long-awaited moment when I open the front door, an odor rushes to greet me. Could it be boiled eggs? Cooked broccoli? No, not quite - it's cabbage, or kapusta, as Gram says. Why does my grandmother have the ability to launch that vegetable into a full frontal assault on the olfactory nerve? Probably because she's Polish. Keilbasa and sauerkraut, cole slaw, and pierogies are some obvious high points in Polish cuisine, and Gram is a master in their preparation. Now that she lives with us, there's no telling when something odoriferous might be on the menu.

Gram and the smell of her cooking haven't always lived with my parents, my sister, and me. After she was married, my grandmother lived on a country road in suburban Wyckoff, just a few minutes away from where we live now. Her little brown stucco house still sits alone at the bottom of a hill next to two ponds. My mother and my aunt grew up there; I also grew up there for a while when Gram would take care of me before I was in school. Even after I started kindergarten, it seemed I was always there ice skating in the wintertime or fishing for sunnies in the summer. When my mother was a girl, she even swam in the pond on hot days and once in a while on cold days when the ice wasn't thick enough. Gram never swam and most definitely never ice-skated, though. She enjoyed the ponds most when she was yelling at boys who would throw rocks and old tennis balls in, but after fifty or so years even this got tiring. After about fifty years of shoveling coal into the furnace, her house was getting tiring, too. So this winter when she finally gave up on heating her home, she moved into the basement playroom at our house.

When I was younger, I had always wanted Gram to live with us. I hadn't foreseen the aspect of my playroom being taken away in the event of Gram's inhabitation. After I started kindergarten, Gram had her first heart attack, and this proved to be traumatic for me. Usually, my father would pick Gram up early in the morning, and she would walk me to school, walk me home in the afternoon, and then stay at our house until my mom got home. During her week-long hospital stay, I had to go to a neighbor's house before school after my parents left for work. When Gram couldn't take care of me, everybody missed her. Mrs. Konde, my kindergarten teacher, had

the class make Get Well cards and sent me home with a book of them for Gram. To this day, Mrs. Konde always asks about her. "How's Gram?" she says. (Never "your grandmother," always "Gram.") Ever since kindergarten, I've also worried about Gram. She lived alone, and I imagined horrible things happening to her if she shoveled snow or raked leaves even though she wasn't allowed anymore. Fortunately, nothing horrible ever happened to Gram even though she did shovel snow when she felt like it, and except for her few minor cases of chest pains, I always told Mrs. Konde that Gram was just fine.

Now that Gram lives with us, I don't worry about her so much. I worry more about her effect on our mental health. Gram has always needed something to take care of; I remember her having a dog, a cat, and even a duck once. She needs something to do or at least fuss over. After our own cat's untimely death, she focused most of her energy on my eight-year-old sister. Gram had hitherto been feeding Otis, the cat, at least three times a day, then letting him out, and then calling him back in to feed him after about forty minutes of supervised recreation. Now my sister, Kara, bears the brunt of Gram's fussing and hovering about. When Kara walks into a room, Gram has something to say about a mess she's making, what she's wearing, what she's doing, or how she's doing it. Poor Kara is always in the wrong place at the wrong time. Lucky for her, Gram always has something to say about everything; it's nothing personal. For instance, before I leave for school in the morning, I come downstairs in a nice skirt and blouse, and Gram looks at me apparently delighted. Then she says, "You look nice for a change." That's as close as Gram comes to a compliment.

Gram has plenty of inanimate objects to fuss with all day, too. First, she must do the ironing in order to assure herself that my father has an inexhaustible supply of starched shirts. We buy four cans of spray starch at a time. She will also iron anything that stays still long enough. The T-shirts and shorts I wear to bed sometimes return from the laundry looking regimental, and I occasionally end up with poseable blouses if the starch has been flowing heavily. Gram treats plants well, too. She always provides plenty of water to the African violets, the Christmas cactus, and the philodendron, not to mention Bubba. Bubba lives with us now, too. He lived in Gram's basement during the winter months, but now he sits in our dining room in a giant flower pot on wheels. Bubba is a gardenia tree. He was once a bush, but in Gram's care he grew to about six feet two (pot and wheels included). Now my father can only sneak down in the middle of the night and surreptitiously perform the sorely needed pruning. Just the other day Gram said to my father, "Jeb, I think that tree's gotten *smaller* since it's been there." "Could be," he said, "could be." As soon as Bubba fits out the back door, he'll be spending the warmer months sunbathing on the deck.

Gram, on the other hand, will still be living in our basement come summer. We can't move into a bigger house with a real room for her until her property in Wyckoff is sold. There are still things to pack up. Her Get Well book must still be in there. I hope it hasn't been touched. Boys these days don't just throw rocks in her ponds anymore - they break into her vacant brown stucco house for fun, I guess; there hasn't been much damage. It's not the house that matters anyway. It will be demolished, the ponds will be filled in, and the woods will be cut down so another housing development can go up

on her four acres in suburban Wyckoff. I haven't been to her empty house. I haven't helped clean it out, and my parents haven't asked me to. I couldn't dismantle a place where I had at least partly grown up. I know my grandmother has moved out of that house for good, but if I ever go back inside, I'm sure I'll be greeted by that pervasive smell - it must be in the woodwork after all those years - that Polish cooking.

Caitlin Bargmann
Midland Park, NJ
Mrs. Gillow

TREES

I wonder if the day you decided
to join some higher order of a beauty
requiring little more
than a 34-26-34 body and a bottle of Evian
was the day I raised my eyebrow
at a dress you tried on in front of me
or smirked when you lifted another spoonful
of sweet nothings to your lips.
If that was the day you strolled behind
the willowy girl whose brittle hair
and stalk legs seemed to radiate
your vision of American health.
If that was the day you saw perfection
lurking in the toilet bowl
before you stuck your fingers down your throat
and dreamed of being lean.

I can still smell
the hospital sheets
while I hold the bones of your wrist
and squint at the i.d. tag
slipping off an inhuman arm.
The lights blind me
and your eyes glint,
the anger you felt
to leap
out of bed
and escape from breathing,
the heart monitor beeping alarm,
the nurses running to strap you back in.

When we didn't visit you at night
did you watch your neighbor in her hospital gown
do sit-ups behind the couch
until they switched on the lights
and removed her, kicking and screaming?
Did you wish you could be on the floor too,
molding the perfect body for a perfect life?

Later, you'd tell me
what it felt like for your body
to disobey you,
for your stomach to reject anything you ingested,
and how they had to pump hot water through your veins
to keep your shrunken heart from stopping.
The listlessness of watching
hair strands writhe down the drain
before you had even touched your head.

How remarkably alike your ribs were to the twigs of a
sapling
arrested in its growth by poison rain.

I wandered into your room at home
and found your diary on the desk,
the lock hanging on a necklace
next to a broken heart pendant
I couldn't stop from turning the pages,
from reading words in a child's script
encrypting all the self-loathing
and plans for a thinner life.
I smelled your pillow
missing you --
I cursed the world.
Missing you
I cursed myself
for the day you became
a body
that the sunlight shone through
leaving you without a shadow.

Vicky Tse
Milton, MA
Milton Academy
Mr. James Connolly

THE CALCUTTA - BARDAWAN TRAIN LINE

Skin ashen with pyre's breath
a man
swings on trains.
Calcutta office sweat
coils under his arms
pungent as chopped onion
left out too long.
His body shaved thin

as naked land,
her shell spiraled off.
Loose resin smoke
from hand-rolled cigars, clay
twisting on a wheel, scaly flesh flaking
off bone, spinning down.
With the slap of dung on wall
oil flames blink against the night.
Violence blue under the farmer's scythe
will desiccate wheat.
Each shoots up, pronged fingers spread,
searching for rain.
The land shivers like grain
before storm,

tired as a man swinging home on a train.
Neck an ox horn
curved with strain.
A land's neck arching
over rivers to other shores.
Her cotton sari unravels in flame,
a white gull to the sky.

Poulami Roychowdhury
Farmington HS
Farmington, CT



Leah Danielo
dressed in peel

I could have mistaken you for an orange.
all that citrusy stuff coming out your pores
and the residue your skin left on my lips.

you wore an orange shirt once.
I thought of peeling it off your body.
I wanted to throw your peels and your skin
on the floor so the wood
would have the permanent stain of your smell.
the citrus would outlast you for years
after you've been gone.
by the time the scent would fade
the floor would be stained in patches of ochre,
and if I got down on my knees
and put my nose to the ground
i'm sure i'd still be able to smell you.

sometimes, I want to leave you in your orange peel
because not all oranges are made for eating.
sometimes, I want to suck your peel right off
like caul in abortion
and spit the rind to the ground
so that it might disappear forever,
so your pulp could be soft and sappy enough
to let your orange blossoms break through
the toughened membrane.

if you were an orange
I could change your name
and link your fruit with the word.
i'd spell your name o-r-a-n-g-e
in sticky citrus letters
to forget the name that makes you so bitter.
but then your backtalk would always be sweet
and your taste would have to change
to define you.

the oranges don't need you anyway
with you as an orange
too many of them would be left uneaten.

Dayna Crozier
Staten Island, NY
Susan Wagner HS
Ms. Decker/Mr. Hopkins

The rim of white curled in
against the edge of your body.
Your arms swam until they tired
and you drowned in the field of snow.

When you stood to examine
the imprint trailing you like a shadow,
moisture in your fine hair
dancing like crystal
in the kitchen window sun,
you said everyone knew:
angels were thinner.

You declared your creation
a Snow Moses, fresh off the mountain,
raising the tablets above his ears
and pumping his legs,
like a child on Christmas Morning.

On hands and knees,
your finger carved an eleventh
into the soft stone:
"Thou shalt make snow angels nude,
if it is an angel you wish to be."

Danny Hurwitz
Brookline, MA
Milton Academy
Mr. James Connolly

TO AN APATHETIC RADIO DJ

So.
You'll "see what you can do," hm?
Is it such an inconvenience
to play me a three-minute song?

Were you ever thirteen and lonely,
skipping the dances where no one danced,
but ran around, giggling and whispering,
in groups menacing as barbed-wire fences?

Did you call the radio stations
just to have someone to talk to,
someone to help you kill the time
while you sat by the phone all night -

sat listening, attentive,
waiting for the song you requested hours ago?
Waiting for its sparkling chime
to crush the stretch of long slow days?

Or were you raised as a faceless voice,
broad and perky, floating even then
as thin as static, as empty as a tin can
into the sterile-suburban air?

Jessica Manack
Moon Township, PA
Mr. Theron Aiken

Tobal Thinking

He hadn't had an education. No schooling for him his father had said. Not in those schools his mother had said. Not with those hooligans I had said. Private schools? Bosh. "Money doesn't grow on trees. And if it did, we wouldn't own one of those trees." His father always spoke of the Shaft. Getting the Shaft, became a household response to anything Life could dish it. No taking it like men. No biting the proverbial bullet. You spoke of the shaft or you didn't speak at all. And so it went.

He hadn't had many friends. Or any. At all. He liked a girl once. It passed. No friends for him his father had said. Not in these parts his mother had said. Not with those hooligans I had said. My interjections produced another eruption, as they said it was no place for a mailman to assimilate his proclivity into the affairs of the family. I would tend to agree. And so it went.

Tobal thought. He thought he hated his parents. He wasn't sure, though. Probably not, actually. His Best Interests were commonly mentioned. This seemed positive enough, positive enough for now. So he continued on in his existence, what he thought was an existence. Assumed was. Someone once mentioned that his parents were myopic. He didn't know what that meant. He thought he might. Then he forgot. No matter, of course, because it was probably wrong anyway. Probably.

His father said one day: "How in the heck are you gonna b'lieve her over me that girl's lyin her cute little buns off if I were in my right head I oughta do sumthin with the bolths of yous and furthermore..." His father's diatribe had been predeceased by his mother's inquisition into the alleged affair. Someone explained alleged to him once. He forgot now, though, as he sat on the loft listening. Kind of listening, but more thinking. More thinking, I suppose.

"There warn't no damned affair if you'd jus' let me to me business everyone could jus' get along all fine an' good -" He rephrased the comment to *almost* everyone as his eyes wandered to the loft. "Besides the idea of an affair is ludicrous she is the ugliest damned woman ever to come near me an' I wouldn't share no bed with her if m' damned life depended on it and even then..." He trailed off. His wife had stopped listening some time ago, as his slightly slurred speech was vocalized without breaks or pauses. He didn't much care for sports, the boy. He was called a sissy. His father hunted customarily. Animals of all shapes and sizes. Male deer, female antelope, females. Especially the latter.

The two supposed adults sat listlessly in the kitchen. Then there was a noise. Two in reality. He had fallen from the loft and lay kind of hurt in the middle of the room. The loft wasn't so high, but it wasn't so low either, and besides, anybody else would have noticed. Anybody else would have been worried. The noise that coincided with the fall was the sound of the mail thudding through the mail slot, and I continued on my way, as they had kindly requested the lack of my non sequitor presence in their abode. Understandably. He heard the noise, too, and perked up. The mail. He loved to read. Anything. It took him away from anything else. The mail he loved the

most, because it was real, not some philosophical, symbolic extended metaphor of a story by some wanna-be philosopher, contemplating existence. He liked them, too, of course, but was much more complacent with a letter, like the one he received that day:

Toby,

I hope everything is good. I hope you are good. Mike where I am very much. I am glad that mommy and daddy decided to send me here. The drill sergeant says that I am a natural, and they have upgraded me to high-powered weaponry. I got your package for my birthday. I can't believe I am already seven years old. Mommy and daddy promised me a big present when I come home for Thanksgiving next year. I am happy. How are things?

Eliza

Tobal thought. He thought about what kind of monsters would send a girl like that to military school. He thought about how absurd it was. Then he thought about the hunger pangs in his stomach. The household held but one meal per day, deeming it worthy of a fictitious nom de plume in order to arouse enthusiasm. They thought it made it sound respectable. It did not, and it was not. Nothing there was. He the exception, of course.

It was because he didn't go to school, because he had no friends, because he had no expression, in the classical (and ignorant) sense, that he had to go to the Religious House. Almost everyday. He was unhappy there. They told him how all the books he read were written by Satan, and should be burned. He found this curious, as he could have sworn he remembered the names of the people who had written the books, and that was not one of them. So he thought. What did that matter though, as everyone generally assumed he couldn't think. The girl knew he could; otherwise she wouldn't write those letters. I knew he could; that look in his eye screams it out. He has millions of thoughts in there, trapped. He was the only one who had them because he was the only one who listened. Everyone talked. He listened. And so he thought about what he heard. And so it went.

Each person has the right to think, the right to thought. Each person has the choice to waive that right. Most do. Everyone thinks, but thinking that that guy over there in the yellow sport coat looks like an idiot is not a thought; it is a judgement. And thinking about how cool it would be to win one hundred dollars is not a thought; it is a wish. And thinking about how good grandma's pie was that night you stopped by her cottage in the woods with your sister when it was raining is not a thought; it is a memory, an inclination. And thinking does not make you intelligent. It is the thought that is synthesized in such. Tobal knew all this. He thought he knew, at least. But what good is a thought when there is no one to share it with. And how can one think when the nonsense of nonsensical caricatures of real people never ceases to emanate. So many setbacks, so little time.

Mail. Male. Interesting how the former is the one sense of salvation. The latter, the most profound source of discouragement and disgust. The one is the exact antithesis of the other, and yet, as a single spoken word, there is no difference. The Mail to him was what I delivered, a tie to the intelligent, unprejudiced people, who

continued on p. 41

appeared to care. The Male to him was the nagging stupidity and ignorance of his father. Interesting, indeed.

On this particular day, one in the perpetual flow of them, the library was cool. Because he had managed to sneak in unaccosted, he could take pleasure in the breadth before his eyes. The aging shelves of books were endless down the slightly yellowed corridor. Renovations were a most unlikely prospect, as the particular city council that was supposed to fund things like libraries and schools had funded other things like warfare and death pools. The wallpaper was peeling off each corner where one wall would meet its brethren. The choo-choo trains on the wall paper that had put forth the apex of human thought with, "Learning to read is the first step in learning to enjoy and have fun with all sorts of literary adventures" (a rather lengthy bit of knowledge to be repeated hundreds of times on a sheet of wall paper) now read at certain spots, "Learning to read is learning to fun." A disheartening message to complete the ambience. Hell, even the card catalog was well beyond dissipated; wanting a book meant the most exciting of all treasure hunts, no map and no clues.

The thing, however, was that all of this was of the greatest inconsequence. What he desired was no more than the library offered. He cared not what book happened to careen off the shelf into his hands in a cloud of dust. He cared not where he was constantly relocated to, even when it always eventually became the janitorial "reading room." The words on the page, any words on any page, were what inspired the thinking and were what inspired the thoughts and were what made him happy. And so he was.

Tobal thought. He thought about the book he had in his hands, the title of which, and even the content of which, was insignificant. He saw the man to his right, struggling with the perforated pages in a shoddy notebook, ensconced behind mounds of encyclopedias, ensconced behind mound of original thoughtlessness. Tobal cared not the least. He saw me, passing by, on the incessant journey to deliver what truth may be found. He may have acknowledged me. He may have not. He saw the young child to his left masquerading as a flasher, and its scowling mother, probably scowling at him. His face remained placid as he turned back to his book. Remained placid as he was asked to get up, remained placid even as he was ushered, ever so cordially, into the janitorial "reading room." And so he thought. And so it went.

The library was old, but it wasn't that old. Not as old as hate. Not as old as hate groups. These groups didn't like idea, didn't like thoughts, didn't like writing. They liked to burn writing. Not to read it, though, as one was meant to do. They didn't like ideas, they didn't like thoughts, they didn't like writing, because writing is where the ideas are stored, so people can see them and spawn new thoughts. Writing was fecund in that it was able to produce infinite ideas, infinite thoughts, as long as it was read. That was the point. So the haters wanted to burn it, so no one could read it, so there would be no new thoughts. That, too, was the point.

Men burst in. Men, actually, by definition, children as far as mental capacity. Children as far as accepting things different from yourself. Children in all aspects

except body. The torches in their hands told people what they were doing there. The glint in their eyes told people why they would do it. The armbands around their uniforms told people from whence they came. Regardless. The people were petrified, as one would be, as the Menchildren lit the precious house of thought, his precious house of thought. They came, they did, they fled like little kids. All the better, of course. Probably.

Crimson shone for miles as members of civilization stared listlessly, drool probably collecting at the corners of their mouths. Fire. Catastrophe. "Probably deserved it" is a common insight, although in reality they have no idea the veracity of this statement. If they knew, they would be god, and there can only be one god, and that is the guy with a gray beard and slippers who hangs upside-down by his knees from a roofbeam two houses up the street from me.

Billy-bob-joe-henry-rick rushed all of the members of the close knit community out of the library. Armed with a glass of water, he fended off the fire beast, crying out such reassurances as "run for your lives," and then offering such condolences as "it can't no way burn for ever." Many were soothed. Many were saved. I wandered past, looking curiously upon the rapidly developing crisis. People shouted some incoherent statement in my direction, but I had no desire to help. I had my bag of mail at my side, my uniform with the shorts on, and some dog down the street that wanted a piece of me. I was staying there, just where I was. It was odd. It gave me a curious thought. As the town's source of ideas burned to a nonexistent, I couldn't help but feel a paternal love for the sack under my arm. Not only this, as I had the quiet epiphany that what I held was the last source of thought the town could receive. Of the library, a rebuilding was out of the question, a restoration utterly preposterous. So I sat, thinking to myself that nobody really knew the price of thinking. Nobody had any idea the price of thought.

He was engulfed by the huge flames. The screams had meant nothing to him, as he stared deeper into the book. The warnings, being as so unintelligible, meant little more. The book was incredible. His thoughts were incredible. He had to share them. Then the front end of the library collapsed into a fiery mass, and the walls around him fell outwards. He knew. He knew he needed to cry out for help. He saw the damned people right outside, grinning foolishly in alleged victory. He saw their idiocy, and he knew.

He smiled, a smile of complacency, a smile not seen before. He wanted to laugh. Instead, he saw the irony. As he sat down in the closet that was becoming a mere hole in the wall, and as the fire raged around him like a vindictive beast, he saw the irony. He stared down at his beloved prize, thinking of how, as the ideas held within its boundaries were going to waste, unheard of by the majority of stupid people, the ideas held within him were following in suit, unheard, as well, by the majority of stupid people. And so he thought. And so it went.

And then someone outside asked, "Where's that mute boy?"

Ted Martin
Rydal, PA
Mr. Baker

Easily Swept Away

The suit looked deflated. It sat, as it did every morning, thrown on the wicker rocker from the day before. Sari always tried to avoid it; getting dressed for work was the last thing she did before leaving. On these hot August mornings, she often threw on a T-shirt and carried her jacket all the way to the tollbooths. But today, a thin rain sliced through the air, toning down the shrillness of the heat. It was her last day before her two-week break, and Sari knew it would be a long one. But she hefted the suit onto her pointed shoulders and headed out the door.

As always, Sari was the first to arrive, and was forced to remind herself - "All those minutes add up!" - as she punched in on the time clock.

"You're in booth thirteen today."

Old Joe smiles as he nods in the direction of the militant line of sharp edged boxes that held the workers all day. Sari returned the smile before dashing into the rain. Once inside, she flicked on the green light and sat back to wait for customers.

The first to pull up drove an old Chevy with a patchwork paint-job attempting to cover up erratic patches of rust. The man inside greeted her with a smile and two quarters.

"That'll be another ten cents, sir." She hated it when she had to ask twice.

"Another ten cents? What do you need ten cents for? The road's in decent shape!"

Mumbling on and on, the man reached down and found an extra dime among straws and bottle caps on the floor.

"Thank you, sir."

Sari began to spin pennies on the desktop. What was the big deal about a dime, anyway? She didn't set the rate, and the sign outside was big enough for anyone to see. Oh well, what did she care? Soon she would be bronzing in the sun. The penny spun to the desktop and came to a rest with a resounding, "Thwap!"

Sari leaned back and looked at the box-shaped office. Thin walls ended in tight corners that allowed an occasional slip of rain to streak the insides of her booth. Traces of puddles formed on the clean-swept floor. The posters and pictures that formed a quilt on the wall had long ago been sealed in plastic so as not to serve as decorative paper towels. The subdued light in the corner put out a lazy, yellow light that was just enough for Sari to see the new crossword puzzle in today's paper. The topic was *Places to Go*, and Sari was stuck on thirteen. She blamed it partially on the fact that she just couldn't stop thinking about her upcoming trip; she could practically feel the sand sifting underfoot.

"Excuse me, ma'am. I'm in a hurry."

Sari snapped out of the sunny pool of thoughts and looked up at the brand new hunter-green Jeep Cherokee. A shift in the wind placed two thick drops in her left eye as the smell of leather interior swirled amidst the humidity.

"Thank you, sir."

Sari shook her head as the car sped away and plunked the pennies down in the tray before turning back to her puzzle. Number thirteen: *Easily swept away...*

Shaking the kinks out of her legs, Sari gave a quick glance to the box-like room, making sure everything was in place before stepping outside. The rain had stopped falling, but its evidence lay in the air and on the ground; Sari had to step quickly to the left to miss the shallow puddle right outside her booth, rippling with the short bursts of wind from passing cars. Back inside the main building, old Joe had nodded off. Sari wished the rain had stayed just a minute longer so it could muffle the soft whir of the vending machine as it released her chocolate bar. It hit the metal with a clang and she snatched it up, as if taking it fast enough might excuse the disruption. But Joe barely twitched his brow, and Sari gave a sigh of relief.

She retreated to her regular chair in the corner of the room where she could sit and watch the cars go by. Maybe one of them was going to the same beach she was going to... it could be that one, the Mustang with the top down. The car looked like it had just been washed and waxed; the doors reflected the dim light that slipped through the clouds, and the seats looked clean and smooth. In the reflection of the owner's sunglasses, Sari could see the envious glance of the collector in booth ten. He probably wasn't going to her beach. No car like that ever went there. Sari thought of her own beat-up Volvo. If she tried hard enough, she might be able to make it that shiny...

"Sari!"

Sari jumped and swiveled around in her chair.

"I've been calling you for five minutes!" Joe's face was twisted in annoyance. He hated it when she didn't listen.

"Well, don't sit there and complain. What do you want?"

"Cancel your plans for next week. Booth three just quit."

"Just quit?! She's hardly been here for three weeks!" Now Sari was annoyed.

"Yeah well, that's what happens when the state refuses to heat them damn boxes. Just be here on Monday."

Joe's eyes lingered for a moment and Sari thought she saw his eyebrow twitch, as if he might have felt sorry. But when no retort came from Sari, he turned on his heel and headed back to his desk.

Sari sighed and looked at her watch. Lunch break was over. She heaved herself up off the sunken-in armchair and let the candy wrapper fall to the floor. To pick it up, Sari had to fold herself in half, stretching her legs. She crushed the wrapper in her hand, crinkling it over and over until her anger subsided. On the way out, she purposely went out of her way so she could pass the old man's desk. His chair let out a dull groan as he swiveled to meet her gaze. Sari leaned over to his eye level.

"Just make sure I get overtime."

Sari pushed her way through the heavy door into the thick air. It closed behind her with a bang, and he saw her march out to her booth, rippling the shallow puddles that passed underfoot.

Katherine Wilwol
Newtown Square, PA
Mr. Tom Williams

"I just think I ought to tell you that," he paused, "Norman and I were... soulmates... and I loved him very much." Rev. Metzger was an elderly priest and spoke very slowly with pauses, not where old people who have forgotten what they were saying would put them, but where he needed them for emphasis. He told of great conversation and long evenings in the MacLeod house, and pointed at the chairs where he and Norman sat.

I was sitting in Uncle Norman's chair. I felt even more like an interloper -- how dare I, who had hardly known this man, sit in the chair which would never be his again? Then I looked down at the blue paisley, the classical CDs next to it and prayer books next to me, and felt my first solid, cushioned connection with this 86-year-old minister we'd all come to mourn. More and more graying family drifted in -- I never knew I had so many relatives -- and we carpooled to the cemetery.

I had never been to the outside part of a funeral before, only seen them in movies and lunchtime detective shows. Here there were only 14 or 15 of us, no one wore black, and the casket was periwinkle with a color-coordinated mound of flowers arranged on top.

The service by Reverend Metzger was lovely. I couldn't remember the actual words of it afterwards, which was sad, but I knew as soon as it was done that it had been lovely. "Lovely" is what people always say about such things -- but it really had been just right. I sniffed all through it from a cold, trying not to interrupt. I was further frustrated by my wintergreen candy, which I had thought would distract my rumbling stomach and sore throat, but ended up coating the latter with sugar. The minty sweetness sent coughs rattling up which I then had to suppress. The service lasted only as long as it took the wintergreen to dissolve.

In the middle of a psalm, a ladybug landed on my arm. "Good luck," I thought and tried to free it discreetly. I wondered if it was good luck for Uncle Norman or for me. It seemed as if he shouldn't need good luck -- if anyone was going to heaven, it would be him. I wondered what sins he was most ashamed of when he was alone with only God.

I turned and saw my grandmother standing in front of my grandfather with a tiny bit of lace pointing out from her long beige coat. She was clenching his hands in hers behind her back, and it occurred to me that I'd never seen them touch or clasp or kiss. Aunt Helen stood alone. Her face bore some resemblance to my grandfather's, her shoes were orthopedic, her arms were long and her hands too large. I suddenly wished I had big, manly hands too, strong-looking even when arthritis-riddled. The knuckles were huge and asymmetrical and the digits thick and slightly angled, like trees which the wind has tried one time too many to topple. It seemed as if such hands could handle anything, pain or love or in between. Discarding tears was child's play to these fingers, which were a gift to Aunt Helen just then.

Within minutes, the service was over, and I stood a little overwhelmed with the solemnity of it all. I looked up for the conclusion, the phrase which would make me understand it all: Reverend Metzger snapped his prayer book shut breezily, opened his hands, and said, "Well, that's it." I was jarred. It was as if he were at cross-purposes, destroying the inhuman peace of his words. The gathering at the churchyard quickly turned to

discussing what kind of trees surrounded us and when we'd all meet for dinner, and it was not through any sin of superficiality, but merely because we were alive. My stomach resumed its rumbling.

Norman Macleod III, Uncle Norman's son and a minister, caught my attention by saying in the midst of the chatter, "This place is covered with time." I turned and blinked at him, exploring the truth of the metaphor in my head, thinking of Uncle Norman's 86 years, my 16, and how long until someone presided at my wedding as Uncle Norman had presided at my parents', and how long until I stood as this man was and said goodbye to my father. "You can smell it," he said, kneeling down and plucking one of the purple flowers. "Now, is it thyme that's for remembrance, or is that rosemary?"

Hilary Plum
Storrs, CT
Carol Auselment

The Assignment of Names

"What about Irving?" my brother asked as he took another ice cube from the see-through hotel ice bucket. "Did we already say that one?"

"I don't think so. But what about Isadore? Like Izzy," I added to the list of old world names, "old school" as we called them. So many names have gone out of style, but we, my brother, sister, and I, would bring them back, or at least talk about them.

"How about Gussie?" my sister shuddered as she said it. "I can't imagine being named that." But she almost was. According to tradition, my parents wanted to name her after a dead relative, in this case my mother's grandmother. However, somehow they just couldn't see having a baby named Gussie. So they did the next best thing and chose a name starting with a G. It's the memory that counts anyway. If Gillian had been a boy, she would have been Geoffrey. But then what would our brother's middle name be?

I'm glad I'm not a boy either. I would have been Matthew, too common, but with the initial of my grandmother, Gussie's daughter, Mary. Her name wasn't always Mary though; it only changed when she immigrated and needed an American substitute for Miriam. My parents didn't need a substitute, though, when they named me. I am an American Miriam, no compromises.

"I wonder if Mom and Dad can hear us?" I shot a glance at the wall that separated us from our parents' adjoining hotel room. "They'd probably find this discussion pretty funny." It was funny. We were conjuring up memories that mostly belonged to other people, older people, dead people. We recalled names and people we'd never met with a fervent mixture of passion and prayer. Ancestor worship? Or perhaps history worship, for we love our past, even the parts we hate, and the parts where people hate us.

"I'm going to name my kid Sidney," my sister broke my chain of thought.

"Boy or girl?" my brother asked; she hadn't specified.

"Either."

That was perfect. Our great-uncle Sidney, who loved everyone equally, would not care upon what gender

his name was bestowed. But his name would never belong to his own grandchild or great-grandchild, for he had none. He became a paraplegic in the Battle of the Bulge before he had the chance to create a family. But what a wonderful father he would have been.

However, Sidney, although clearly a victim of war, was not a victim like other relatives were victims. He was an American soldier. He could fight back. He was allowed to keep his clothes, his rations, and his identity. Our other relatives of war tragedy fame were denied all of these things, and in the end, most of them did not even keep their bodies. As useless as half of Sidney's body was, it was still his. So many others, cousins, aunts, uncles, have no idea who or how many are gone, and even their names remain buried in Europe.

"Who am I named after?" my brother asked, wanting his own past identity.

"Someone," was the clearest answer either Gillian or I could offer. He must be named after someone. But who was this Daniel, somewhere in our ancestry, who gave his name to our brother? Perhaps he swings out on a far branch of the family tree, clinging to the limbs as he would hope to cling to our memories. It's a good thing that my brother came along to relieve his namesake's desperate grip. Or perhaps my parents did not have a relative in mind. Maybe they chose the name hoping to instill in my brother the qualities found in the Biblical Daniel. So, is my brother strong enough to keep faith in a den of lions? Would he survive? Are any of us strong enough to keep the memories of our names alive?

I remember a song I used to sing that said, "From now on I'm not afraid. What I have they can never take away. We'll be strong, I know we'll survive, if we keep the dream alive." My brother, sister, and I sitting in this hotel room, cherishing our lives and our names, maybe this is the dream that people will remember and care about the past, and that memories will be passed on. Then we are the dream and the dream is alive.

The song goes on to say, "Sister Miriam singing by the Red Sea, keeping the dream alive." I like to think that, perhaps like my brother, my identity has something to do with my Biblical namesake. Miriam, leading her people in joyful song and dance as they moved from slavery to freedom, gives me an ideal to pursue, the ideal of a woman in love with freedom and in search of happiness.

"What other good Biblical names are there?" Gillian asked, trying to refocus our conversation. There are so many, and people so often disregard the Biblical origins of their names. But everyone comes from someone, and then we all become ourselves. What a confusing process we all must undergo to be people and to have identities.

"Howard, now that's old school," Dan started again.

"But not Biblical," I reminded him. Israelis tend to think of most Biblical names as "old school," but we in this country do not entirely agree, an ironic discrepancy, considering the histories and contents of each nation.

"No one's named Bernice anymore." We could all think of several good reasons for that.

"Or Harold."

"Hey, I know a sixteen-year-old named Harold," I contradicted.

"Do people call him Harry?" Dan snickered.

"I know a girl named Ada, too." Maybe these names aren't strictly old world, gone, forgotten, and remembered only when it was convenient, like the moth-

balled afghans in the back of the closet. Maybe these remain living, viable names, for they are certainly more alive than the cutesy, plastic-barrette, key chain names so many kids receive today. Then again, at a specialty store in the heart of Jewish Baltimore, I found my name on a key chain. There it was in rainbow letters: MIRIAM. Clearly the popularity of names depends on one's vantage point.

As a child, and from a first-generation American child's vantage point, Fraydl was not a desirable name. Yet my mother knew she was called Fraydl and could not change it or forget it. But years later, another first generation child is named Frayda, so similar, yet her feelings about her name are so different. This Frayda loves her name and would never pretend that she didn't speak Yiddish fluently. Such different points of view. I wish I could stand on top of the world and see everything from the "true" perspective. I wish everyone could. Then no one could deny her identity. And everyone could see old souls floating and find their namesakes and be proud.

"And then we could tell all our relatives who's named for them!" I was so excited by the idea.

"What?" Gill and Dan both asked, implying my temporary insanity.

"Oh, sorry." But I wanted to find a way to tell everyone they would not be forgotten. I especially wanted my mother's father to know about his grandson, Joseph, named for him, of course. The beautiful, charming, brilliant three-year-old will take a few years before he can understand the importance of his name, so, until then, the rest of us will remember for him.

Maybe that is the real issue, the summation of identity, that someone else always has some of our memories for us. Even every Alfred, Goldie, Leonard, Rose, Maurice, Ethel, Herbert, and Sylvia had someone they were named for and someone who remembered lives and times past for them when they couldn't. We all thrive on memories, we are fed them, and grow up with them pumping in our hearts, for memories are life. Survival. Remember.

"I'm going to sleep," Gillian said with a horrified look at the clock reading 1:20. "It's late." I disagreed, but as Dan got into his own bed and I got into the double bed I shared with my sister in the confines of the hotel room, I fell back into my thoughts as I gradually fell asleep.

There are eras gone and people removed from this world that are so much a part of me yet so far apart from my existence. Who will feel this way about me in a hundred, two hundred years? Another Miriam? Perhaps someday I will find a way to look down upon the world and see everyone, find every lost name and save it. I will find dreams and souls and names and memories and throw them into the air like confetti for the crowds to gather and save, as precious souvenirs of themselves, recited at weddings, births, holidays, and funerals, secured with moth-balls but stored at the front of the closet. We do not need to dig to find our pasts, for all our histories skim on the edges of our minds, merely waiting to be retrieved, recollected, and treasured. And then assigned a name.

Miriam J. Steinberg
Fredonia, NY
Fredonia Central High School
Carol Conley

I ran away in a red 4x4.
 The hot and dusty air raced through my wide-open window
 and made knots of the strands
 of my newly-dyed cranberry hair.
 That's not what the box said.
 When I went to the store, the box read:
 "Passionate Burgundy."
 And even though it's guaranteed not to bleed,
 it left my white towel pink.
 It's a good thing my leg hair is bleach-blonde
 and not cranberry
 because I need to shave.
 And after I threw on a grey tank top
 (no bra)
 and a pair of wide-leg LEVI'S,
 I didn't brush my teeth.

Pushing the knots aside I dive into singing show tunes
 terribly off key, swallowing the acidity of the air in gulps.
 In bare feet I feel the ridges of the accelerator -
 faster and faster.

I was an acrobat once,
 and I ran across the tightrope - my toes gripping the wire -
 spreading and curling.
 I balanced three balls, red, yellow, and blue, on my nose.
 And for the finale I juggled the balls
 while sweeping across the remainder of the rope
 like a ballerina.
 My hair was blonde, then,
 and my legs were smooth and soft as a baby's bottom.
 I wore tummy-flattening and thigh-sucking nylons
 that made my legs appear thin and firm
 so that when I leaped across the wire,
 I looked like a fawn.
 That's what he called me.
 The man I swore I'd never fall in love with,
 I did because he called me "fawn."
 We hopped on a plane to San Diego -
 my only luggage was a bikini.
 We were in love for a month.
 And then I realized that I didn't want to be
 a tightrope walker with three balls anymore;
 so I stayed home and played Vanna White
 in front of the TV with a microwave dinner on my lap.
 And I read.
 I read a book called "Effective Speaking"
 and I read it so I could say goodbye to him.
 I wrote, too.
 I wrote to the author of "Effective Speaking"
 and told him that I wanted my money back.
 And the man I swore I'd never fall in love with
 fell out of love with me
 but swore he'd keep me until my dying day.
 He came to me at night like a checkered snake sliding
 through blades of grass.
 Always at two AM there was the hissing of the snowy
 screen
 of the TV in the background -
 a wonderful serenade.
 That hissing gave me comfort that somewhere in this
 crazy world

there was consistency.

And I've done it.
 That hissing now hisses its freedom cry to me
 through my wide open window as I drive down Route 17
 and a long way from the flashing neon orange sign of
 "Pecos Bill's Trailer Park Homes."
 And I suppose I ought to thank all those who helped me
 get this far.

I remember writing in kindergarten;
 learning, really.
 My teacher passed out the newsprint paper that
 had the three lines on it -
 the solid red line on top,
 the solid blue line on bottom,
 and the dotted red line in between.
 "Imagine the top line as the sky,
 the bottom line as the ground,
 and the dotted line as the horizon."
 She said.
 My pudgy little fingers grasped the fat, sharpened pencil
 and created masterpieces.
 Awkwardly but joyfully, I forced and urged
 the new, unknown forms
 to fly over the sky and see the stars,
 to explore the treetops,
 to wander underground.
 I held my first communicated emotions carefully,
 and inched my way to the teacher's desk.
 She callously took a red permanent marker
 (that her fingers fit so nicely around)
 and squarely and neatly laid red "X's" over my newly-
 discovered
 language,
 cutting short my expeditions,
 making them rest within the enforced limits.
 But if the sky isn't there to explore,
 and if trees aren't there to climb,
 and if the ground is proclaimed the bottom,
 and believed,
 then what is growth?

And then there was the boy in fourth grade who had
 blubbery lips
 and thick glasses.
 His glasses made his eyes look like little black fish
 swimming in pools of water.
 He was always the first one to raise his hand
 and always the first one to get called on,
 especially in math.
 I always believed that two plus two was five
 because we had five people in our family,
 but I only knew four.
 And with those little black fish glittering,
 he would point his finger and laugh
 when I responded that one divided by one was alone;
 because that's what it really is.
 And when fish stop swimming,
 that's when I'll believe that two plus two is four,
 and one divided by one is one,
 because that is what it really will be.

Just last year I took a self defense course at the firing
 range.

I was dressed in brown polyester hip-hugging bellbottoms

and a white mens dress shirt tied in a knot at my bellybutton.

Laying my guitar at my bare feet,
I picked up the .45 caliber, steadied my wrist, and aimed.
My instructor cautioned us that if and when we were to shoot at someone (for our own protection), we should make sure they were dead.

And so I did.
And I am thankful.

Michal Markanich
State College, PA
Ms. Alexander

CASSANDRA'S WARNING

Cars thickened the twisted edge that lined Providence Road. Pointing their noses, they led the way to the funeral, and the building that was a burnt shade of brown. With sandaled feet, we tested the stiff grass that gathered around the stout building. Dry blades straightened and reminded me of Cassandra's warning, but we leaned on sharp umbrellas and pushed down the earth as we approached the door where knots could be seen, bending in the wood. Once inside, we joined the procession of mourners racked with tears and rosary beads. As the line shortened the air grew thick, and when I met with a window I looked through the stained-glass eyes of Mary to the cars that thickened the edge of the twisted road.

Katherine Wilwol
Marple Newtown HS
Newtown Square, PA
Mr. Tom Williams

When autumn comes to my backyard

When autumn comes to my backyard
I like to eat apples cupped in my hand
kind of the way you think you'd hold water if you drank from a stream.
I never wash them because the skin gets slimy and maybe an apple should have impurities the way water does.
I hold it cold against my cheek
and it makes my body seem all the more warm
like when I put on my winter jacket
for the first time and go to the top of the driveway to get the mail.
There usually isn't any for me
but sometimes I trip over a stick or an acorn on the way back
and it seems like mail, anyway.
And I sit with my legs tucked under me
and talk with my mother as she slices bread for a turkey sandwich.

She pours a glass of milk to wash it down, and I think of her meal
the way it will look in a few days,
curdled and moldy and spotted with disease
and her cheerful motto - "Don't eat to live, live to eat."
She suspects, and gulps it down with gusto
as we sit and talk in the kitchen
which is green like my apple.
But then again the grass is green and so are leaves
until the day they rot and die like a washed up corpse,
just like an apple if you sit it in the sun too long.

When autumn hits my bedroom window I sit and stare
because it is so deathly beautiful
just like a picture I once saw of a dancer.
I think it was by Degas.
She wasn't eating an apple.

I can dance, sometimes, too, but in the autumn so can leaves.

Kara Becker
Basking Ridge, NJ

CACTUS

Mexico City, 1982,
the orange hotel lobby
where I showed you the way to curl your fist
around the thick thumb of the cactus,
the way to slip the needles
beneath flesh like water

Brushed the narrow
of your wrist,
I spread my daggers over the blue spray of veins
bleeding silently into the milky joint,
you pressed the swells to another depth,
sucking the wisps of a braid,
tattered through to a day's end
of a hot car and tight lips

With cupped palms, blister heavy,
there was something we were trying to catch,
an angel maybe,
an angel with heather eyes
and pale pale wings,
a cool mouth to bend close
to the creases of rust and blood

When no one came we must have forgotten
what we were waiting for
we must have settled into the stale chairs,
smoothing numb fingers over and over
the diseased fabric,
nursing the swollen fruits beneath skin

Later, when night fell,
I remember how you rose
with a blank face to the ledge of the window
and pushed out into the still heat,
I remember
how you reached with your bruised fingers into the
darkness
and didn't say a word.

Meg Shevenock
Camp Hill, PA

Red Line to Shady Grove

Okay, the guy in back of me *really* smells. And his wheezing breath is truly inescapable, as I discover in trying to move as far away as the creaky plastic seats allow. I would switch seats, except that the, shall I say "abundant," woman next to me shows no sign of budging an inch, and anyway, there's nowhere else to go.

The seats are just about filled -- it's an early rush hour, on one of those Thursdays that everyone wishes was a Friday, hoping there was some mix-up about that that has just taken a really long time to sort out. Patience is in short supply; tensions are high, my own included. The rain I just escaped from outside drips off my bangs; I can actually feel it smearing my "waterproof" mascara. I squirm in my seat, curling and uncurling my toes, the toes that will inevitably have to go back into the shoes on the floor in front of them. I glare at these horribly mocking navy-blue heels, feeling a rather large blister on my big toe. A lot of good they have done me today. I remember the agony of searching for the perfect "interview outfit," the one that would say "confident, mature, and (most importantly!) going someplace." I might as well have worn my brother's ripped-up "garage band" jeans.

"Mmm. Uncomfortable shoes?" the woman beside me, whose accent I vaguely place as middle eastern, breaks into my thoughts.

"Huh? Oh yeah." I try unsuccessfully for a smile. "Yeah..." Why the hell is she talking to me? Why do people talk to people they don't know? It's just unnecessary. She makes me feel guilty, though, for my lack of insipid blathering. Staring at a rather large mole on top of her eyebrow, I comment that "I wish I'd brought sneakers."

"Eh?"

"Sneakers? Other shoes?"

"Ahh, other shoes. I see. Mmm." Jesus Christ. Why today?

Just then the always unintelligible announcement of the next stop comes on: "Necht stop, Grvn Es Rudi-C."

"Oh-oh, nice talking to you, my stop, bye-bye," says the woman, getting up. I flash a weak smile. She disappears out fo the cloudy-glassed door, and, to my delight, much of the car goes out with her. Some genius who's just gotten on then decides not to turn up his Miracle Ear and therefore can't hear the sickening plastic woman's voice from the speaker patiently imploring him to "Please stand clear of the door. Please stand clear of the door. Ding-dong. Please stand clear..." A guy with a particularly strong smelling leather jacket, who has just sat down next to me, mutters under his breath about the bleeping nursing home runaways. I laugh, even though his comment isn't directed at me.

My vacant gaze then shifts, from the GW Hospital ad that I have memorized to the people. My expression is mirrored by the majority of those left on the train; it is only alternated by the vaguely annoyed frown of a few and the contemptuous glare of a dyed-black-hair-multiple-piercing-type teenager. The latter meets my unabashed stare and doesn't look away until I lose interest in this subject and shift to the one to the left, a grandmother-type old lady calmly reading a thick book. I wonder if she has noticed the specimen to her left. In front of these two are seated two businessmen, making what seems to be idle chit-chat with each other. One, dressed in what I would call a disgustingly expensive suit, distractedly checks his large

gold watch every few minutes. The other seems a little more concerned about the conversation. He actually looks at Gold-Watch Man every so often, in saying something to him. Sitting in the handicapped seat in front of them is a distressed Indian man. He keeps glancing out the window as if he expects to see something of interest pop out of the blackness of the tunnel. Sitting next to him is an elegantly dressed black woman with a permanently annoyed expression. This expression must have something to do with her long manicured nails, from the way she is examining them.

To my left, across the aisle from the large leather jacket of the man beside me, a man slumps over, his walkman audible even from my seat. Beyond him, I encounter two of the largest eyes I've ever seen. They belong to an adorable little boy, who returns my gaze, then goes back to staring at the man next to him; it seems as if he, too, wonders how these people manage to wake up in tim for their stop. His mother is behind him, speaking in rapid Spanish that my brief experience with Spanish class in high school didn't prepare me for. The boy seems to be the recipient of her comment, but he makes no reply. The baby on her lap soon distracts her from anything she had been saying. Listening to her coo at it, my head starts to nod down: the soothing syllables of the romance language and the steady swishing that the train makes together is enough to lull me to sleep.

The baby that had been calm is now screaming. I suppose this is what woke me up, or maybe it was the adorable little boy's frightened whimpers. For that matter, it could have been any part of the general state of commotion that the subway car is in. Even the Walkman guy next to the little boy has woken up. I look around to see what the problem is. Seeing nothing worthy of all the noise, I ask Leather Jacket Guy what happened.

"You didn't see? The lights went out for a couple seconds." And? "Nothing else." But why is the car slowing down? And now barely moving? The lights blink again, and even the well-manicured lady looks concerned (with something beyond her nails). We aren't anywhere near a stop - why is the train slowing down?

"What the hell?! Are we being hijacked, or what?!" Leather Jacket Guy laughs, but his joke provokes a few alarmed glances from people. The car is still slowing, and the lights blink again. This time they don't come back on.

"MAMA! *Porque esta oscuro!!?* Why is it dark? *Donde-esta?* Mama! Turn on the light!" the boy cries. The blue lights on the side of the tunnel begin to give his face a strange eerie glow as my eyes adjust to the dark.

Everyone is standing up, talking at once, and craning their head to look first one way, then the other, out of the windows of the train. Unfortunately, there's nothing to be seen in either direction. For once I long to hear a word, anything, over the speaker. Nothing. People try the doors, as if there is anywhere to go outside of the train, as if the doors weren't about two inches from the sides of the tunnel, as if the doors weren't electric. Someone then remembers that it is 1997 -- "Who's got a cell phone?!"

A chorus of people -- "I do!" Thank God! Thank God for technology. Thank God for cell phones! The businessman in the less ostentatious suit offers his.

"Who do I call?"

"Anyone! No, call Metro. Who knows the number? No! Call 911," decided Manicure Lady.

"Yeah, oh yeah." This seems to be the general consensus. Yes! The police can figure out what to do,

No!

"There's no signal. The tunnel must be too thick. Or the train walls..." Groans all around follow this.

"What do we do?" People try the doors at either end of the car - locked. We can see the people in the next car doing the same. But we can't communicate with them -- the doors are too thick.

The old lady with the now unreadable book speaks up: "Well, we'll just have to sit and wait -- there's nothing else to do. I'm sure the train will start soon enough."

"Why would it stop in between stops? And why would the lights turn off?" demands the girl next to her, the metal on her many earrings shining in the blue light.

"Maybe train has stopped running for de day. Maybe driver has forgotten about de people still on his train. Maybe we have to sleep here and in morning get off at next stop," worries the Indian man aloud. I can feel the glares of all around him even if I can't see them. Who wants to hear that?

The little boy is still crying, even louder at that last statement. The Walkman guy gets up and moves away; I assume to try to go back to sleep. The boy's mother admonishes him to be quiet, but she also occupied with trying to rock the baby to sleep at the same time. Leather Jacket Guy leans over and asks him what his name is.

"MAMA!!!" No other response, still more sobs.

"Please, no talk. Jose has fright," his mother tries in broken English.

"I'm just trying to calm him down. Jeez, everyone is upset. He just needs to be distracted," the man tries to explain.

"Do you know why it's dark?" he turns back to the boy, still trying to calm him down.

"Nooo." Jose sounds as if he's hoping the man knows. I'm dying to know myself.

"Because... the train driver turned out the light!" What an idiot. He thinks that's going to calm him down?

"Why did he do that?" But he's listening! His sobbing quiets to little sniffles, as he waits for the answer.

"Because... he wanted to take a nap in his driver car! *You* need it to be dark when you sleep, right? He needed to stop and take a rest."

"How do you know that?" This little boy demands answers!

"Because... you saw the lights blink?"

"Yes..."

"Well that was him trying to decide whether he was too tired to drive. He thought he could keep going, so he turned them back on, but then he found out that he was too tired to be a good driver. He needs to sleep. You wouldn't want our train driver to be asleep when he drives us, would you?"

"No... Well when is he going to wake up then? I want to go home! Does he think we will go to sleep too?"

"Yes, that's why we stopped here. Are you tired?"

"No! I don't want to go to sleep!"

"Well then you don't have to. I could tell you a story -- do you want me to tell you a story about when I was your age?"

"Do you know good stories? I like when Mama tells me stories about when she was little in the place-where-they-drink-the-milk-of-goats."

"Oh! *De donde esta?*" asks the man in well-accented Spanish.

"Peru," the woman replies, obviously glad to

understand some of what was going on.

"You said you'd tell me a story!" Jose protests.

"And I am! Now, what would you say if I told you that when I was a little boy, something like this happened to me, and I was also very scared?"

"What happened? Did you have a driver who was tired too? Is that how you knew what happened?"

"No, this was not on a train. This was a place that is also a long, long way from here. Not Peru. Another state, called Oklahoma."

"A state? Like Maryland?"

"Yes. Wow, I'm impressed. You're a pretty smart kid."

"Tell me your train story!"

"Well, it wasn't a train. But it was a very dark place underground. I was there with my family, too, except that I didn't have any little brothers and sisters. I had an older sister, though, and she was there, and so were my parents."

"Where were you?" Jose demanded. I was totally wrong about this leather jacket guy! He's a pro! He's got the little guy hooked!

"If you let me tell you the story, you'll find out. Well, like I said I was around your age. I was outside playing, I think I was riding my bike. And the sky was looking very dark -- lots of clouds, you know, sort of like today except even *stranger!* The clouds were almost black, and it was really still, you know, no wind." Jose leans forward.

"But then all of a sudden -- there was wind! It came up from the east, first a little, then stronger, and stronger --"

"Oh! Was it a hurricane?!" Jose broke in eagerly.

"No, but you're close. It was a tornado! Have you ever heard of those?"

"No. Mama told me about a hurricane that she was in, when she was little."

"Well, a tornado is a -- it's like a whirlpool, you know, in your bathtub? Where the water swirls all around itself. Jose nods. "Well, tornadoes are like when a cloud, a certain kind of cloud, comes down from the sky, swirls around so fast that, when it touches the ground, it can pick up anything and spin it around, so fast that you never see it again. It can pick up cows, horses, cars -- even houses!" Jose's eyes, if it is possible, have just gotten even larger. Leather Jacket Guy now has the attention of just about every person on the train. "Well, *my* mom saw me outside that day, and she looked at the sky and the clouds, and she ran out. She told me to come inside 'this instant!' and so I did. My father was there, and my sister. We didn't have a basement, so we didn't know what to do -- see, you're supposed to go underground in case the tornado goes across your house and takes your house up in the cyclone, so you won't go with it. But luckily, my mom remembered that our neighbors, who had a really old house, had a tornado cellar from a long time ago, before they had basements. Our neighbors weren't home, but luckily we could get into the cellar anyway. It was a good thing we got in then, too, because the tornado was so close I had to cover my ears, it was so loud! But we were safe in the shelter. You think it's dark here -- we didn't have *any* lights there! We found some candles, but there were no matches to light them with. So we just sat there -- sat there and listened to the roaring of the tornado outside. I remember that I was so scared that I was squeezing my mother's hand almost until it broke! So what do you think about that?! See, we don't have it that bad."

"Did it carry your house away?" asks Jose excitedly.

"No, our house was fine, but it pulled out a tree and the tree landed on our car."

"You're from Oklahoma?" the non-Armani businessman jumps in. Leather Jacket nods. "What part?" the man asks, moving closer to us.

"Tulsa. Well, a suburb just outside. Oakhurst?"

"That's funny -- my wife is from Oakhurst! You didn't by any chance go to Middleburg High, did you?" the businessman says, taking a seat in front of us.

"No, I went to Lincoln. But I had some friends who went to Middleburg -- what's her name?"

"Cathy Linszieg - now Cathy Stark. I'm Carl Stark," he affirms, sticking out his hand.

"Nathan Howland." He takes his hand and gives it a hearty shake. "Hmmm... Cathy... no, I can't say it sounds familiar." He shakes his head. Then he looks around at the audience that had gathered around to listen to the tornado story, having no other distraction. "Well as long as we're not going anywhere, we might as well know who these people we're stuck with *are*," he says jokingly. He looks at Jose. "Well this is Jose, we know that. And *su madre es - ?*"

"Rosa Pinterez. Err... thank you, *gracias*, eh, for calm Jose. He like... your stories," she finishes, smiling at Jose, who smiles shyly at Nathan.

"No problem." He winks at Rosa.

"I'm Elizabeth," I speak up, sticking out my hand.

"That was pretty cool of you to talk to Jose," I said, smiling at the kid who was now turned around talking to his mother. "I can't believe this," I say, now gesturing to the tunnel with its blue lights that we're so grateful for now. They seem so bright -- my eyes are totally adjusted.

"I know!" Carl says, "I can't believe that it's taking so long!"

"You know!?" Manicure Lady agrees, shaking her head. "The only time the metro ever stopped when I was on it was right before a station, it was waiting for a train to leave, you know? But the lights didn't turn out or anything."

"And you are-?" Nathan asks pleasantly.

"Denise Cook" shakes hands all around.

The rest of us are introduced and we exchange pleasantries.

"I'm Christina," the black-hair-piercings-girl announces, as no one has asked her her name. We all look slightly surprised and then feel a little guilty and maybe a little silly. But in the command spirit, Margaret (the grandmother-type sitting beside her) inquires about her eyebrow ring.

"So it doesn't hurt now?" Margaret asks, now genuinely curious, after getting the lowdown on how she got it and what her mother said.

"No, see?" Christina pulls at it, causing all around to grimace. She laughs at this, "It doesn't hurt any more than getting your ears pierced. Well, maybe a little." She shrugs.

A question-answer session ensues -- how often her ear/nose/eyebrow/lip/etcetera rings get infected, how much they cost, what her mother said, what she did, how she eats, sleeps, does other things.

"My boyfriend likes them." This ends all discussion on the piercings.

It also kills conversation in general, and we all sit in silence for a couple of minutes. Jeez, I mean it's no

wonder, we're sitting here talking to what were just complete strangers like five minutes ago about piercings -- in partial darkness, in a cement tunnel god-knows-where!

"Nathan?" Jose breaks the silence.

"Yeah?"

"Do you think we could wake the driver-guy up?" he whispers, hoping that maybe we wouldn't hear the hint of uncertainty that still made his lip tremble.

"I think we'll have to wait for him to wake up on his own," Nathan answers, unfortunately unsure of his own answer. I say unfortunately because he has become our unofficial leader, for his casual command of the situation: defined by his reassuring of Jose and reassuring of us, at the same time. If there is action to be taken, he will take it, or so we assume.

"I'm saying, *something* better happen soon. I'm not trying to be sitting in this train all night," Denise shook her head and arched her eyebrows. "I gotta be somewhere..."

"Going home?" somebody asks.

"No, I'm meeting my fiance at a restaurant. Well, I'm sure he's left by now anyway... probably worrying and all."

"Oh wow, when are you getting married?" I ask her, leaning forward.

"Next summer. We've been engaged for a year now!"

"Wow, that's a long time. That's smart, though, I mean so many people just do those 'oh we're in love let's get married this afternoon!' things, and you know they never work out," I reason aloud.

"Well it's definitely working so far!" Denise smiles.

"I remember when Cathy and I got married," muses Carl. "We'd originally planned for the wedding to be a year after we got engaged, but we were so anxious for the huge wedding thing that we moved it up six months. Well, I mean Cathy was so anxious. Well, I guess maybe it was her mother who was so anxious... but anyway. The wedding was a little much for me, and I think Cathy wishes it was a little smaller, too --" He suddenly looks up, with the slightly embarrassed look of someone who wishes they had shut up five minutes ago.

"Hmm. Yeah, I know what you mean. I've been to those weddings where you never get to say a congratulations to the couple, there are so many people. But we have so many people that we need to invite... the list just keeps getting longer, and it's still almost a year away. It's just that I'm afraid if we forget any of the relatives, they'll all be mad."

Carl laughs. "Sounds familiar. We said the same thing. Well, Cathy's mother especially said the same thing." He frowns. "Any trouble with the future in-laws, if you don't mind me asking..."

"Oh, no. No, his folks are great. Real nice people and all," Denise assures us. "You married?" she asks Nathan.

"No. I just haven't found, you know, *her*, yet. I've been looking." He smiles. "Actually I thought I had." His expression changes, to something we haven't seen before. It's a serious expression, and in his eyes I sense frustration. "We were basically married -- I mean, we weren't really. But we lived together, ate dinner together every night, for seven years. We even adopted a dog together, Chelsea. She has her now... I always thought we'd end up getting married one day."

"So why didn't you?" I can't resist asking.

"Well, she didn't agree. I mean, she was happy like that for a while, I don't know how long she would have been... but I started hinted about formalizing our relationship. You know, what difference would it have made? It's just a ring, you know? But I wanted a real, solid commitment, not just for tax purposes, but for it to be an ultimately satisfying relationship. She didn't feel the same way, though. I think it was also the feminist in her... she had always been sort of anti-marriage, and her parents were divorced. Well, I'm not sure what it was... she just got scared by the thought of it. So the issue created a rift between us; eventually she decided she needed time off. I thought that giving her "space" would change her mind, but, instead, we lost the connection that we had had. I kept thinking she'd call one day, at least to talk, but she didn't. I wanted to respect her space, and let her think about... things... but not calling only made the situation worse. I think she always expected me to call. And I did, finally, but it was too late. I mean she wasn't seeing anyone, but the connection, like I said, the connection wasn't there. It was awkward, and it would have been even more awkward to suggest that we try to go back to how it was. So we made vague plans to get together, and then we hung up... and then that was it."

"She never called? Did she ever apologize?" Denise asks.

"We ran into each other at Boston Market, of all places, in the line for take-out. It was about three months after that conversation. I was standing there, trying to decide between the Turkey and Chicken Carver Sandwiches, when I heard my name. I turned around, and there she was. Just looking into her eyes -- they're this fierce blue, really deep blue -- my heart almost stopped. We asked about each other's work, I asked about the dog, you know, safe things. We didn't mention the things that we were really wondering. I had heard from a mutual friend that she was seeing someone, not really serious or anything, but it still really hurt -- I mean, it really meant that it was over, completely. But I didn't ask her about this. The line moved so slowly, I remember, all I wanted to do was get out of there. She actually did broach the topic of our last conversation -- she sort of apologized, at least for being so curt. But it was the single *most* awkward conversation I've ever had. As I left with my Turkey Carver Sandwich, she invited me to come over to her new place to see Chelsea some time. I just sort of offhandedly accepted, knowing it was just one of those things people say, you know, just to be nice. I never did go over, though."

"So you never saw her after that?" I ask, almost tearfully.

"Oh, here and there. Well, it's been almost two years since then. We run into each other every so often, and it's not as bad as it was back then. We even joke around a little."

"That's so sad," says Margaret, wiping her eyes. "Sometimes I think that all the freedom that young people have these days isn't really as good as it seems. Things were so clear cut when I was your age; when we fell in love, we got married, it was as simple as that."

"But what if you were unhappy? What if the guy turned out to be abusive or just irresponsible?" argues Christina.

"You dealt with it. That's how it was -- you chose, and if it turned out to be a bad choice, you just took it day-by-day."

"But that's throwing your life away with one bad decision."

"I think that we just took more responsibility for our actions. Life isn't perfect, it can never be. I love my husband, I love him now as I've loved him for the 46 years of our marriage. But sometimes life deals you a bad hand -- you have to just accept it," Margaret asserts.

Christina starts to say something, but changes her mind.

It is then when we become aware that something is happening in the next car. Although the glass is thick, and too thick to see through unless you're standing right in front of it, the muffled sounds of a commotion are audible. The Indian man who has been silent throughout our discussion walks to the back of the car and peers through.

"Something is happening!" he pronounces excitedly. Great -- thanks for the info!

"De people are all up - dey are going out de other way! And --"

"Why? Are there Metro people? Is *somebody* in charge *anywhere* around here?!" the Armani-wearing businessman interrupts impatiently.

"And -- and -- dey -- dey are coming over here!" By this point, everyone is out of his or her seat, making their way towards the back. We squeeze around him, straining to make out what precisely is going on.

"YES! They're coming -- oh stand back --"

"Everybody move back!"

"Finally!!"

One month later

Damn these shoes. I should have gotten rid of these things months ago. Just because I'm a so-called "business woman" now, why do I have to wear shoes designed by some freaking sadist? I shift from one foot to the other, agitatedly wishing I could just sit on the subway station floor, checkered gum splashes, spit marks and all. Finally! The lights wink on the platform, promising the train's arrival before it appears. The two gleaming eyes of the train appear in the distance, the headlights sweeping a path in front of it. The slowing of the train provokes long, piercing protest from the wheels, but to no avail. The doors open, and I push my way onto the subway with what must be half of the free world. Low and behold! -- a seat -- but no! Damn that woman. I know I'm supposed to let those annoying old women have the seats, but why today? And she's looking up at me -- wait -- she looks familiar...

"You have same shoes, eh?" she smiles unknowingly down at my uncomfortable feet.

"Yeah! And I still don't have sneakers! Can you believe that?" I smile at her, recognizing the accent and noting the mole on the top of her left eyebrow.

"Oh yes, sneakers. Mmmm. Too bad!" she nods. "Well here, sit down!" she motions to her own seat as she starts to pull herself up in the stiff way that woman of her, ahem, size, do. "Ahh, no, no," she says to my protesting, "I insist!" She shakes her head and smiles.

The man sitting in front of her hears, and with a smile, gallantly offers his seat to me.

Flustered, I smile gratefully at both of them, and wonder what the "proper" thing would be to do. I finally accept the man's offer. I thank him, and the woman in back shakes her head in mocking disapproval.

"Oh, I see, you reject my seat, mmm," she says, then laughs. I smile back, and then we simultaneously

turn our ear up to the speaker, frowning. The mumble coming from it seems to be an announcement of some kind:

"Necht sctopp, Ffrenschip Hibbdndes..."

Rose Reis
Silver Spring, MD
Mr. Omari Daniel

Outcast

Outcast: adj. driven out; rejected - n. a person or thing cast out or rejected, as by society

Being disabled, I consider myself an outcast. I am different from others because I use crutches and wear a one-leg brace to walk and sometimes use a wheelchair to get around more easily and comfortably. I feel I do not always fit in with others because I do not cheerlead, dance, or lay on the girls' soccer team.

Others find it hard to accept my disability. I find it to be more like an obstacle course or math problem that not even a mathematician can solve. A disability is simply having something that does not work as well as everybody else's. I do not consider myself as being a whole lot different than others. I go to the mall, swim, talk on the phone, go to sleepovers, and pig out on cheeseburgers and ice-cream sundaes (the hot fudge is the best part).

I am not offended when strangers open doors for me or pick me up off the ground when I have fallen, which used to happen quite frequently when I was younger and had better things to do than to watch where I was going. Being disabled or an outcast is not a penalty, just something worth improving upon.

There is a bright side to all of this. In my spare time I get to experience a whole new world in wheelchair sports. Wheelchair sports are in many ways similar to regular sports; they include almost any sport you can think of. Track and field, swimming, archery, tennis, basketball, road racing, and weightlifting are just some in which the athletes can participate. However, wheelchair sports are somewhat different than regular sports. For example, track is "run" in a racing chair instead of on foot; field events are thrown from field chairs; and basketball is played from a sitting position.

At these events everyone has a disability, whether it's osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bone disease), spinabifida (a hole formed in the spine during its development), or a spinal cord injury. Wheelchair sports do not only provide me and other athletes with various disabilities something to do in our spare time, but also provide each of us with a great personal experience and the satisfaction of knowing that even though we are physically challenged we are still able to achieve the impossible. Together we experience competitions, food fights, and dances--just like anyone else. At these events no one is considered an outcast.

To me, athletics is not only about winning or losing. It's really about crossing the finish line second to last with the same amount of pride I would if I were crossing it first.

The best part of it all is doing something that makes me feel good about myself and having others acknowledge me for it. Not only does that build up my self-esteem, it also informs me that others have noticed my success. Therefore, I know that I have succeeded.

After spending a week with those I feel very close to, I go right back to where I started. In school I do not feel as safe, wanted, included, and accepted as I do on the track and in the pool with others who are disabled. I especially miss being on the same dance floor with those at the same eye level as I am.

However, I do not feel sorry for myself. I use what I have and give what I have to offer. Sometimes I just have to keep this fresh in my mind, and then I am able to go on with the rest of my life.

I respect those who find time to learn more about me and my disability. Having a disability does not make you less of a person, but makes life more of a challenge.

Abby Park
Dover, NJ
Dover HS
Susan Bodnar



Abby Park

"Get packed. We're moving," Mom told me as I entered the house. Our meager collection of kitchenware and home furnishings was already distributed among the cardboard boxes littering the living room. Our home had been modestly decorated to begin with, but the absence of rugs and lamps in the rooms made it even plainer than usual. You never realize how much space you actually have until everything is gone.

"Where are we moving to?" I asked.

"It doesn't matter." Mom took a therapeutic pull on her cigarette and sighed the smoke out of her lungs. She crouched down and resumed loading silverware into shoe boxes. I left her there and pounded up the stairs to my room.

"Where are we going, Ned?" I asked my little brother. He sat atop the suitcase which lay on his bed. Ned stared back at me with blank eyes, swinging his feet violently.

"I dunno."

"Dan! Danny!" Mom yelled from the bottom of the stairs.

"What?"

"Help Ned pack his toys. I already packed his clothes." I looked at my brother with disgust. That spoiled brat never had to do anything himself. When I was his age, I packed my own toys. I did everything myself. Ned was never going to learn how to function in the world if Mom always made us do everything for him.

"Pack your toys," I ordered him.

"But Mom said that you had to help me." I kicked a box at him. It hit his legs and he shrieked. Crying echoed from down the hall.

"Now you've done it, you little retard! You woke the baby."

"I am not a retard!"

Mom appeared in the doorway. "What in hell is going on here?" she asked.

"Mommy, Mommy!" Ned cried, running to her.

"First Daniel hit me with a box, and then he called me a retard!" Mom glared at me.

"What? I didn't even get a chance to defend myself, and you're already blaming me! It's not fair. You take his side for everything." My throat throbbed from holding back my tears.

"You're fourteen," she told me. "He's half your age. He's a kid. You're not. Grow up. We want to be out of here by the time Dad's home, and now I have to stop packing because the baby's screaming. And why is she screaming? Because my teenage son is bullying his baby brother. No more of this, Daniel, do you understand? Act your age."

I would have argued with her then, but I knew that if I tried I'd only wind up crying. I was so furious that I imagined lines of heat must be radiating from my red face. I wanted to pick up Ned and fling him into the wall. This thought made me feel a little bit better, and I picked up my suitcase and went to work.

We arrived in Maryland the following day. We were coming from Georgia, and the ride was a long one, but we drove straight on through the night. Dad allowed us one pit stop, in North Carolina. The new naval base was located in a pleasant suburb, and the entrance was lined by a Chat 'n Chew on one side and a Lutheran church on

the other.

"Mom?" I asked as I got out of the car. "Can I go to church?"

"If they'll take you, you can go there," she told me.

As soon as I had dumped my suitcase in my room, I went off to explore the base. The thrill of moving into a new home had worn off after the fifth or sixth time we transferred, but there was still enough variation between the different bases to interest me. The sun beat down relentlessly that day, and I would have liked nothing more than to go for a swim in the pool. But when I checked out the sign, I learned that the hours for the children of enlisted men were either early in the morning or late in the evening. I stood there eyeing the rippling water enviously, resentful of the lucky children who splashed around in the pool. They were totally oblivious to me, the sulking boy outside the gate, whose heritage segregated him from enjoying the same pleasure.

"Are you new here?" came a voice from behind me. I turned around to face a boy of about my age.

"Uh... yeah."

"Welcome to the base. Where'd you come from?"

"Uh... Georgia."

"Yeah, I been there. What part?"

"Newnan."

"Oh, I was in Vidalia. I just got here about a month ago, from Maine. But I'm originally from down Alabama. Where you originally from?"

"Uh, I don't really know. Virginia, I guess. That's where I was born. But I've really been moving all my life."

"Yeah, ain't the navy great? It's just one adventure after another. I can't wait to be in it for real."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Oh, my name's Sal," he laughed. "I can't believe I forgot to tell you that."

"Yeah," I smiled. "I'm Danny."

"So, you going swimming?"

"I can't. My dad's an enlisted man."

"Don't be silly. My dad's a captain, you can come swimming with me." I brightened at once.

"I'll run home and get my trunks," I said.

After we swam, Sal and I went back to his house for dinner. He was an only child and he had his own room, with a play room and a guest room as well. In every house that I had stayed in, I shared a room with my brother, and my baby sister slept in with my parents. The inside of Sal's home was decorated so nice, it was almost as if his family was living there for good. Blue and white checkered curtains hung at the kitchen windows, and there were hangings of cloth apples on the wall. In the living room, tables were covered with silver picture frames that contained old photographs of long-dead relatives. Brass lamps were set on top of knitted doilies and crystal vases of fresh flowers were placed near windows. Sal's bedroom and toyroom had been wallpapered, with baseballs or jungle animals.

"Are you planning on remaining here for some time?" I asked at the dinner table. Sal's mom had a nice-sized kitchen to work in, and she had cooked up a meal of chicken and yams. It was a step up from the fill-in-the-blank casseroles that my family had grown accustomed to eating every night.

"Well, we really don't have any control over that," Sal's mom said. "I'm sure it's the same with your family. We go when they tell us to."

"Yeah," I said. "I was just wondering because your house is so nice and all." Sal's dad smiled proudly at his wife.

"Nancy is really amazing. She whipped this house into shape in under a week. On our last base, she even organized the officers' wives into a bridge club. Right now she's working on plans to hold a barbecue for the officers and their families. You're welcome to come, Danny, as our guest, of course. But Nancy is just great. Every time we move, she takes on a new project. She's a real trooper."

After my dessert of Tapioca pudding, I headed home. Sal stood outside waving as I left. I kept looking back to watch as Sal got smaller and smaller and eventually disappeared from sight. It was an experience that I was very used to.

When I entered the house, my mother was in the kitchen trying to balance both her smoking a cigarette and the baby's dinner.

"Danny," she said to me, "I was thinking. If you want to join that church, you have to make sure that you still have your good outfit all together. We might have to get you new shoes or something like that."

"That's okay, Mom," I said. "I don't think I'm going anymore."

"Oh? Why not?"

"I don't know. If I start going then we'll probably have to move again soon, and there may not be a Lutheran church at the next base. It's just easier not to join."

"Yeah, that's how I feel about it, Hon'. You shouldn't tie yourself down to something that you can't stick with." I left the kitchen and went upstairs to check out my new room. My brother lay in his bed, watching me. Ned was always there, one of the few constants in my life. I smacked him and he moaned. I had no reason to hit him. I was just sick of him I guess. I went to go unpack my suitcases, but I changed my mind. There was no hurry to get settled. So I didn't bother.

Evonne Gambrell
East Setauket, NY
Mrs. Faith B. Krinsky

CARVING MAHOGANY

His withered hands
encircle the dead, yellow wood
and twisted tools
forcing the gold heartwood to scatter
curled and thin, like eyelashes,
The bright flecks of wood-gold
filled the air
and covered the ground, thick and musty.
The wooden lashes,
caught in the crevices of his hands,
glinted like fire
frozen in a single flicker.

The wooden trunk
sat hollowed and rounded.
The still sap patterned the chestnut landscape
with blackened bloodlines.
The charcoal veins rippled
like streaming seaweed
that shines in dark water.

He pressed his wide palms on the bulging woodwater
and slid his shriveled fingers across
leaving streaks of sweat
that glowed like gold
lagoons at daybreak.

Roopal Patel
Iselin, NJ
Mr. B.J. Ward

BENDING THE NECKS OF LILIES

Fireflies were carrying the cool of the evening
on their wings. I had been waiting,
deepening the glow of my punk
with spared breath.
A heavy tree leaned on the moon,
pulling down that summer night on the back porch.
The punk traded with the horizon --
dull red, for a silty gray
that crumbled at my feet.

The sun pushed in the sky, stretching it,
smoothing its wrinkles.
It knew the routine well,
turning shadows in their place
and bending the necks of lilies
as it slumped across the sky.
Old and red, it finally folded over in night
when it saw the flashing lights
of fireflies, carrying the cool of the evening
on their wings.

Katherine Wilwol
Marple Newtown HS
Newtown Square, PA
Mr. Tom Williams

sugarbaby

The ghosts of my Christmas past,
the slushy angels who flew by the pat of my
mitten-fisted hands,
the cold-shouldered adams,
powder-nosed eves, and the
carrot-kissed snow babies,
all looking to me,
the young deity,
with frozen, contented faces.
But I'm growing.
Growing up,
growing cold,
and growing to love
the Swiss Miss chalets
where the air, eternally,
is seventy-two degrees
and where my sugar babies
melt like marshmallows
sweetly into hot chocolate
oblivion.

Sarah Best
South Williamsport HS
Williamsport, PA
Mrs. Susan LaMont

GOING SOMEWHERE

Let me tell you about what happened to me last week. I was at work, just like always. It was the middle of the day and my ankles were hurting like you wouldn't believe. My shift had started at seven o'clock in the morning, God help me, and you know what it's like being on your feet for twelve hours straight. I hate waitressing.

But that isn't the point. The point is that this guy walked in and sat down in my section so I stumbled over there not even bothering to fake a smile and dropped a menu down in front of him. Then he looks up at me.

He's a grown man, but he's got these plump pink cheeks and laughing blue eyes and not a hint of a mustache. He looks about twelve. He's also got one of those white collars on him. So, he's a priest. Now let me tell you what really got me. It isn't anything he said or did. Oh, he was polite and all, and he ordered grilled cheese and a glass of milk, but it really wasn't anything he said. It was his manner, and his appearance. Boy, he was so calm and subdued, you know. Said everything in this light, cultured voice, quietly. Moved all slow and graceful. Just sort of exuded all this calm and peace and harmony. If my best friend had seen him, she would have been wild about his "aura."

And then, while I'm waiting for the cook to pass the grilled cheese across the counter, I get to thinking about my life, you know, philosophy and all that. I mean, here I am, in the 1990's, which are all but coming to an end anyway, and everyone is so confused, you know. So hurried. Why even back home in New Jersey there were all these people just running blindly through life, and here in New York City, why it's even worse. I've got friends and acquaintances who drink, you know, and others who do all sorts of drugs, and others who are into witchcraft or voodoo, or homosexuality, or just being real promiscuous. And I know people who seem to be left-over from the sixties or the seventies, you know, all hippie-style and tie-dye. I've got friends who wear all black and read satanic literature (well, not friends really, just people I know), and others who wear rainbow colors (that's including their hair) and rebel against society. And then there's this one girl I know. She wears green all the time and sits out in the sun on all her days off from work and tries to get the sun's energy to flow through her, like she's a plant or something. I've got friends who don't ever talk to their family, and others who can't hold down a job and others who are into all this strange art and stuff and well... uh, a lot of other stuff.

Now, mind you, it isn't my place to judge anyone, really, but it seems as though everyone's all confused. All these psychic hotlines and gay bars and rap music and all. I'm not old-fashioned or anything. I mean, I do all that too, but I'm not as into it as other people. I'm not really into anything much. That's why I feel so out of place in my own life. So lost. So out of it. And it seems like everyone else is too. We all rush around so fast, and we all say things we don't mean and live lives that seem strange even to us, and here I see this guy (a priest, no less!) and he's so totally cool. So calm. So... well, I don't know, like he knows so much about himself and his life and all and like he's so content. And I got kind of jealous. I wanted what he had.

I served him his food and he paid the bill and left, but he stayed with me all that day. His smile, and rosy cheeks, and the book he had been reading (some classic,

I suppose), which was in this old, worn binding, and the way he walked out into the street. Most people in the city kind of rush by and don't look at each other. This guy strolled. He held his face up to the sun, and looked around at everything and just strolled. And then I saw him nodding hello to people walking by, and stopping to take an old bag-lady's hand and say a few words to her.

So serene, I tell you. I just wanted to be like him.

When I got home that day, and it was real late by then, I sat on the couch and looked around and I thought about myself. But before I tell you what I thought, let me tell you who I am.

I'm twenty-seven. I grew up, like I said, in the suburbs of New Jersey. My dad has a hardware shop, my mom is a housewife. My brother died of a drug overdose when I was seven. My sister, who is eleven months older than me, lives just two blocks away from my parents. She and her husband have three kids. She can actually talk to my parents. But that's because she went to college, and became a stock-broker and because she settled down and didn't decide to waste her life away like me (my mother's words).

I can't talk to my parents. Well, I can physically talk to them. I call my mother twice a week to see how everything is, but I can't really talk to them, you know. They don't understand me. They can't see why I couldn't fit into the little mold that they have for a full and happy life, the mold my sister seems to fit into so well. They don't understand why I wanted to move away and just be different and see all kinds of things and experience all this new stuff, which is what I'm doing in New York. So, you see, with my family, it's like a generation gap sort of thing. We love each other but there's no close feeling beyond that. I can't very well go to them for help or anything. I mean, I can, but I wouldn't want to. I could never get them to understand anything.

I got a job as soon as I moved up here eight years ago. I only had a high school diploma so I really didn't have all that many choices. I'm a waitress. It's okay, I guess. The diner's a nice place and I get by somehow, but there's really not much future in it. And I'm not one of those people who come to New York to try to be on Broadway, or a musician, a writer and singer, an actress, or whatever. I'm not all that talented in any direction actually. I'm just a waitress. It's depressing to say that, for me, but I don't know why. Well, it doesn't matter. I get by.

I got this apartment from a friend. She moved out and helped me get in. I don't know how I would have done it otherwise. The apartment is small, tiny actually, but it's clean, and even though the building is practically falling apart, the neighbors are nice and the landlord is a wrinkled-old Turkish gentleman, who is so sweet you wouldn't believe it. He has a great big smile and watery gray eyes and he's had this house for something like sixty years. The city just sort of grew around him in leaps and bounds, and most of the houses around here have been torn down for new condos or office buildings. But he's a good man, and the rent is pretty good, and he always fixes anything that's broken real fast. I guess I'm lucky.

I have one main room, and a kitchen and a bathroom. The bathroom is tiny, and it's only got a shower, so I miss taking long baths. It's one of the only reasons I like going home for the holidays. My parents have a huge bathtub. The kitchen is so small I can barely

turn around in there, and there aren't any windows. But I painted it bright yellow, and it isn't so bad. The big room (well it isn't big, but compared to the other two, it is) has my bed in one corner and a couch and a television in the other corner and a table with chairs in the middle. They call it a studio. I guess I can go with that. I actually like the apartment. It's cozy and neat and it's home.

So here I am, thinking about my life, you know, about my parents and my job and my friends and relationships and all, and I kind of feel like I'm not satisfied. Especially not with my relationships.

Now, I'm a pretty girl, I guess, or at least that's what most people always tell me, but it's still tough dealing with guys. I mean there's no one in this city (or so it seems) that I can really relate to. You can only go so far meeting guys in bars and getting hooked up with strange people that your friends met God knows where. Plus, I'm not too big on casual sex. I'm not a prude or anything. Don't think that. I mean, I'm not a virgin, but I really don't like sleeping with guys I just met. First off, it's sort of dangerous, but you know all about that. And then, it isn't all that comfortable afterwards, and they barely ever call you again, and well, I just don't like it. The few times that it's happened, I felt all sick and sleazy and just... bad, you know.

I am sort of dating this one guy right now. He's real Italian, you know. I guess I'm stereotyping and all, but he's dark and tall and handsome. He was born in Brooklyn and he's got this accent and he thinks he is the hottest thing alive. He's okay to me and all, but he's not all that interesting to be around and I don't think it's really going to go anywhere. I guess I get to wondering once in a while about where all the good men have gone.

But that isn't the point. Anyway, here I was, sitting in my apartment and thinking that I'm not real happy and that I'm sort of confused and that I need something. And then I remember this priest. I am Catholic you know. It's just that my family was never all that much into religion, so I never went to church much. And I decided that I should go the very next day. Because that priest had looked so right somehow, and I wanted a little bit of that which made him feel so good.

I figured, I'm confused anyway, so maybe I should look at all kinds of things to get some sense. And maybe religion is one of them. I mean, I don't want to go crazy and be "born again" and start preaching the gospel or anything, but maybe going to a service or a confession would be okay. I've never been to confession, and the only time my family goes to church is at Christmas.

"Yes, my child."

(My God! Just like in the movies! I knew what my line was.)

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned. I've never been to confession before."

(Boy, did that sound evil! I hoped he wasn't shocked. I also hoped, I don't know why, that he wasn't the same priest who had been in the diner.)

"What is it you'd like to tell me?" he said evenly, not missing a beat and obviously not blown away at my previous confession.

"Well, I'm not really all that sure. I mean, I've done bad stuff in my life, yeah, everyone has. But I can't very well talk about everything. I mean, there was stuff I did when I was a kid you know. And now that I'm an adult,

well... Sometimes I don't respect my parents as much as should. And I do have, you know, sexual relations, and I'm not married. I don't know if that's still a really bad sin, even with everyone doing it. But the reason I came is because I am sort of confused about what I want. I mean, I'm a working woman in the modern world, and all. And it's tough, being independent and all. I, well, I saw this priest in the diner where I work, and I noticed how happy he seemed to be, and how he seemed to know himself and all, and here I am, so out of it, and I thought maybe religion could help....."

He told me a lot about embracing the Lord and coming back into the fold and all. He was real optimistic about my soul and where it was going. He told me to say some Hail Mary's and Our Father's, and I was afraid to tell him that I didn't know what they were. He came out of the booth, and he was an old gentleman. He gave me a really tattered copy of the Bible, but I haven't read it yet. I'm sort of scared to find out what it says people should be like, and how they should act. What if I've been doing everything wrong? But anyway, the priest was real nice. He also invited me to come to Sunday services, but I don't think I'm going to go. Maybe that young priest in the diner was all happy and all, but I don't think that the church is the thing for me. It's a little too pure, you know. I can't walk around all day afraid to do anything my friends are doing because I keep thinking it's a sin. I mean, I know that everything, even the church, keeps up with the times, and that no one expects people to act the same way they did hundreds of years ago, but I still felt strange about it.

Anyway, since the church isn't really for me, I decided that maybe I should look into my family life. I mean, my parents aren't all that bad, you know. They're good people. And they love me. I don't want to be estranged from them forever, so I called my mother the next day, and I tried real hard to be friendly and all.

"Hello?"

"Hi, mom."

"Oh, hello honey, how are you?"

"I'm good. How are you?"

"We're all fine, dear. Just fine. Your father's cholesterol is down, thank God, and I'm just about done with the baby blanket. Your sister will be so happy when she gets it. She's fine too, by the way. All fine, healthy, you know. Well, how are you? How's your job, and that boy you're seeing?"

(This was all rehearsed. We said this every time. And then I said I was fine and dandy and send my love to everyone and we'd hang up.)

"My job is fine, mom, and I'm not really seeing anyone. But something did happen a few days ago. I was feeling sort of confused, you know, like I wanted something I didn't have except I wasn't sure what it was. So I went to confession yesterday."

I stopped and there was silence for a moment as it sunk in. She spoke again, cautiously.

"Oh, did you? Well, did it, uh, help?"

"Not really. It was a new experience and all, but it wasn't what I had wanted."

"I see. Well, dear, maybe what you need to do is come home. You know, just the other day, your brother-in-law brought by a friend of his who was such a nice, handsome boy, and I thought of you and...."

Yes, she told me a whole lot about what I needed, and not about what I wanted. Just like I knew she would. It was silly, after all. I knew what she would say before she said it. And I didn't want what they had to offer. I didn't, and I don't, want to live in the same town as my parents, have a hard-working, blue-collar American man for a husband, and have a bunch of children. I admit that I don't know exactly what it is I want, but that's not it.

I went out with my best friend that night, after having talked to my mother. I was sort of short on money, I told her. Check wouldn't be coming till the end of the week, credit card and telephone bills were starting to pile up on the night-table. So she treated me to dinner at one of her "places." All pale blue and green, feathery curtains in doorways, soft music, the works. She's a spiritual person. Does a lot of meditation. A lot of yoga. You should see her apartment, and hear the tapes of wind and ocean sounds that she plays for herself at night.

The thing is, though, that you would think that someone like her would be real calm and mellow, right? All at peace with life and everything. She wears these soft, light clothes, and no makeup. She tries to move all light and airy, but it doesn't quite look right. It seems like she isn't really as into all that stuff as she tries to come off.

Maybe she just pretends to be into it because no one feels (or looks) right unless they're into something. Whatever it is. You have to be different, you know, or at least try to be. You have to stand out.

That's what happens when you get out of high school. You go from wanting to fit in and trying to be just like everyone else to trying desperately to be different, to make everyone look at you and be shocked.

That's what tattoos and body-piercing are all about. And different colored hair.

I never did have the nerve to paint mine all different colors. I just bleached it real blonde.

And I have four earrings in each ear. But I took them all off when I went to confession. I guess I'm not as proud of standing out and making people shocked as everyone else is. I mean, I want to stand out, but for some different reason.

Anyway, I decided to try the yoga thing. The meditation. The next morning, my friend took me to her center. I ended up alone because my friend went into an advanced class. I couldn't twist my legs into that darned position so I just sat Indian style and the criminally skinny woman in blue tights sang out "very good" to me when she passed by.

Then she put some tape on, very low. Sounded like wind chimes in the wind. I started to wonder exactly who goes around taping strange things like that and do these people know that it will be used for meditation, or do they think that normal people will actually buy a tape of wind chimes at the local music store and listen to it?

I missed the first thing she said, which was probably something about deep breathing, because I noticed that everyone around me had their eyes shut and was breathing in and out. I quickly closed my eyes and did the same thing. We were supposed to think about nothing, but I'll be darned if I could do that. I kept thinking of a blank white wall, but after a few seconds something would come to mind. That credit card bill I haven't paid. The glass I broke in the kitchen the day before. My youngest niece, who was soon going to have a blanket like her older sister. The hideous green socks my mother

had knitted for me when she first started to take those knitting and sewing courses. Next year she'll start advanced crocheting. Wow. Well, anyway, I just couldn't get my mind to go blank.

So then I started thinking, this is silly. I opened my eyes and looked around at everyone else. They looked serene enough, but I figured they probably thought it was silly too. Then I noticed that a girl in the far left corner's got her eyes open too. She met my gaze and we were both sort of embarrassed at first, like we were caught doing something bad, but then we realized that we were both thinking about the same thing, like we were accomplices or something, and we smiled at each other and closed our eyes again.

There's another lesson for beginners next week. I'm not going. I don't think that girl is going to go either. That makes me feel better. At least I'm not the only one quitting.

I should've talked to her after the session, maybe she was there looking for something, just like me. Maybe we're all looking for something. All of us.

I spent that afternoon in the shower, wishing I had a bathtub. My legs were all sore from trying to do that yoga position. That guy I'm seeing picked me up that evening to go out. He has a car, which is a silly thing to have if you live in Manhattan. There's no place to park it. He pays a crazy amount every month to keep it in some garage, but he won't get rid of it. He's proud of it. It's freedom, you know, like when a teenager first gets a car and realizes he can go anywhere he wants (as long as it's okay with mom and dad), and get there quickly.

I told him about what was on my mind, and that was an idiotic thing to do. He didn't understand. I should've known he wouldn't.

"What do you mean, confused?"

"Well, nothing really, it's just that it seems like my life has sort of stopped in one place, you know, and I don't think I like where that place is. I have this matchbox-sized apartment, and this dead-end job, and no real interests in anything, and I don't know where I'm going."

"Oh."

"I tried going to church, and I tried talking to my mother. I even went to this yoga session, but I couldn't get into anything. And it didn't make me feel better. I'm still not going anywhere."

"A church, eh? Well, where are you looking to go, heaven?"

He laughed at his own joke.

"No, I just, well, never mind..."

"Yeah, right. So, what movie do you want to see?"

I guess it was my own fault for bringing it up. I really do wish that I had someone I could tell things to. Like my very first boyfriend in seventh grade. He used to walk me home and carry my books, and he carved our names in a heart on a tree in his backyard. And he held my hand. I used to be able to tell him anything and he was so *sensitive*, he really cared. But then everyone started making fun of him and calling him a sissy, and I had to break up with him before they started making fun of me too.

I wonder where he is now.

Inspiration came the very next day, in the diner. I

was on break, reading an issue of *The New York Times* that someone had left on the counter and there was an ad for the Empire State College of Continuing Education. Said they had a campus right in Metropolitan Center. Now, let me tell you. At first I was just going to blow it off. I mean, I remember how much I hated high school and all, so why would I want to go to school now, when I don't even have to. But then I thought about what it was like in school, with my friends and everything. Plus, I wouldn't have to take stuff I hate, like chemistry or algebra or anything. I could just take stuff I thought was interesting. There were a few courses listed, but mostly I was interested in writing. I was always good at writing in high school, and so I figured it might be something to look into. I mean, I couldn't tell for sure yet, but maybe this was just the kind of thing I needed.

You know. Learning.

Growing. Discovering myself. All that sort of cliché stuff that really does make a whole lot of sense when you get right down to it.

At the registration, I found out how much it would cost, and I think I can pull it. I met the professor, a sad faced little man who says that he's got books published somewhere. I'm going to go to the bookstore tomorrow and see if I can find any, just for fun. I haven't been in a bookstore for a while. Come to think of it, I haven't read a book in a while. Maybe I'll look around for an interesting novel or two.

Anyway, the sad faced little professor suggested that for our first assignment we start writing a journal, which is what I'm doing now.

The first class is tomorrow night. Well, I'll let you know how it works out.

And, to tell you the God's honest truth, I think I feel better already. My professor says there's a lot of opportunities for free-lance writers in New York. So maybe I'll really go somewhere now.

And you know what else? I found a tape in the music store of sea waves and whale songs and water and all that stuff, and it's pretty good. One day maybe I'll try my yoga breathing to it again.

Maybe.

There's always time to try new things, you know. I think I learned that. Finding what you're really into is a whole lot more important than trying to fit some silly mold that other people (my mother) have for you. I don't want to be like my friend, living a life I don't really believe in, just because I feel like I should have *something*. I want to be myself.

Like I said, I'll let you know how it works out.

Marina Severinovsky
Levittown, NY
Island Trees HS
Ms. Bengels

KETCHUP STAIN

Salem, OR (AP) Shooting in a downtown eatery leaves fifteen dead and four listed critical.

Demon knocks at my screen door.
I don't let him in so he
upturns a poinsettia on the sill

as he comes through the windowpane.
Grins. Breaks the microwave with his fist.
I go out the front door, drive my '93 Acura to McDonald's. Model 61 Scorpion semi-automatic machine pistol lies heavy in my coat pocket. Dad bought it for "protection."
I sit down in the booth next to the bathrooms.
Demon arrives. He followed me.
He says he's my brother.
Demon buys 10 cheeseburgers.
\$.69 each. It is Wednesday.
Demon takes a seat on the other side of the room, next to the condiments.
I jam a loaded clip into the gun.
Demon sits across the table.
I release the safety.
Demon sits in my lap.
We pull the trigger.

David Hudson
Danville, VA
George Washington High School

ESKIMO PIES AT THE 7-11

Just as plump and baked
as she wanted to be,
no less, she still worried
him half to death about
Eskimo Pies at the 7-11.
I never understood why
he just couldn't talk her
into buyin' the six pack from
the Teen Giant down the street,
rather than pay 97 cents for one
every single day!
Regardless, Phine had to have her
way, and every day,
no matter if it was stormin', or hailin',
she'd sit outside underneath
that same balcony,
in that same chair, and
wait for his car to pull up.
Woman couldn't even give the
poor man a chance to get
out of the car, before she was all
over him, beggin' to go down and
get that Pie!
And even though it was the same scene,
day after overtired day,
it was a sweet scene,
and made this wrinkled old woman
happy to look down from her balcony and
wave her hand good-bye to the two
young love birds as they made their
way down that long stretch of street
that they called, Baker Road.

Ersula Jawanna Ore
Randallstown, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones



Lee Thompson
Oil City HS

The Clockmakers

for Switzerland

i see you lying
huddled under rocky
bomb-shelters make-shift
slip-shod centuries-old
geological drip clocks in skiing revenues and
snowfall and careless laughter careens
over screaming bullets whistle like
teakettles aiming missing cavorting overhead
like young butterflies as the sun shines making
love making
war making

it seem like time stands still
but i see you laughing tongues and
hands stained chocolate brown with
indifference to pity and suffering making
cuckoo clocks to measure other people's
mad time seconds
that can count only the rhythm of someone else's
beating heart someone else's
kicking gun someone else's
flashing knife as you laugh
and watch and
wait and see
what the shipment needs to be this year
what the going rate is for other people's
precious borrowed time

Deena Skolnick
Wyckoff, NJ
Mr. John Brancato

Emerald Haze

Her creamy hands
tickle ginger
into the blades
of Irish grass,
the grass like
the belly
of a garden snake,
the grass
hissing
as it waltzes
madly
to c flat minor
with the mist
of the seventeenth
March morning.
"O'Leary, O'Leary,"
she sprinkles
into the
emerald haze,
her silver eyelashes
butterflying
about the clover,
hovering
to count
one, two, three,
one, two, three,
then dully twinkling
to the sister patch,
fate fluttering in the haze.

Kelly Davison
Mechanicsburg, PA



Lee Thompson
Oil City HS

Thicker than Water

The snow finally stops falling, which means only one thing: I *have* to go to the dumb Christmas party. The snow that did fall only left the roads wet. It's too warm out for it to freeze. I was hoping - no, praying - that it would keep snowing and the roads would become too dangerous to travel. I wanted the roads to become snow covered and icy. No such luck. I guess there is now no possible way of skipping the family gathering.

"Valerie, stop staring out the window," my mom says as she steps into the room behind me. "It's too early for Santa to come. We're leaving in half an hour and you better be ready to go. I'm not waiting."

Oh Mom, that is so funny. Can't you see that I'm depressed and not in the mood to be made fun of right now? Where's the sympathy, the pity? "Then leave me here. You know I don't want to go. I'd rather walk to the North Pole and discover that there's no such thing as Santa Claus than go to this party. Why do we even go in the first place? Aunt Claire hates us. She hates Uncle Steve's entire side of the family."

Aunt Claire always throws this huge Christmas party on Christmas Eve. Everyone within an hour's traveling distance from her house is expected to attend. It's a tradition that she started ten years ago when it was her first Christmas in the family. In my opinion, it's just a way to get on the good side of my uncle's mom, my grandma. It's solely for appearance sake. The kiss-up.

"Come on. You're sixteen. You've known that there was no such thing as Santa Claus for years. We are going to this party whether you like it or not. Look on the bright side. We get to see Grandma and Grandpa. I know you love to see your cousins." My mom begins to climb the stairs to change her clothes, but stops halfway. She remembers something. "We always manage to have a good time." She continues up the stairs and turns left into her room.

We had a good time because Dad was there. He's not going to be there this time or next time or the time after that. I blink away the tears that start to cloud my eyes. I don't like to think about him even if it has been six months since the funeral.

"I am not talking to her kids!" I shout up the stairs. There is no way in hell I'm talking to those stuck up brats. "Fine."

I walk away into my room down the hall. It's already three o'clock. I still have at least six hours of fun to look forward to. Oh goody! I change into a black pair of jeans and a dark purple sweater to reflect the *happy* mood I'm in at the moment. Well, Auntie, this is as dressed up as I get for you. I'm wearing sneakers; she's going to love that. I'm ready. What about everybody else?

Upstairs I find my younger sister fixing her hair in the bathroom. "You know you're spending way too much time on that mop. Look at me: ten minutes tops," I explain as I pose in the doorway. Without even looking at me, she replies, "It looks it."

My fifteen year old sister Sandy takes great pride in her physical appearance, but has neglected her mind. There is never a hair out of place, never a wrinkle in a shirt. Her brain is the same way: no wrinkles.

She once made our parents turn the car around (we were only two blocks away from our destination) because she found a small pen mark on the sleeve of her

shirt! The self-absorbed airhead. I say that in the most affectionate way possible. If that is even possible.

"Well, anyway, hurry up. Mom wants to leave A.S.A.P. Understand?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'll be done in five minutes. Why don't you leave me alone? Go bother Peter." Peter, our brother, is twenty but acts like he's twelve. Last year, he dressed as Santa for the party. He spent the whole evening playing with the kids, all the younger cousins. When I asked him if he had a good time, he replied, "The best!"

I walk back down the stairs and find Peter right away. He is stretched out on the couch with the remote in his right hand and a cup of what I guess is coffee. He's always drinking coffee. He says it makes him look more "grown up." He needs a little more than that.

I join him by sitting on his feet at the end of the couch. "So Pete, my man, how is it hanging?" All he does is look at me and then turns back to watch the television. *It's a Wonderful Life* is on.

"Come on. Talk to me. I'm not a happy camper. Say something funny. I'm begging."

"If this is any indication of how Miss Valerie will be acting for the entire time at the fiesta, maybe she should not be anywhere near me. Maybe you shouldn't even go."

"Tell Mommy."

"Oh, no way, Sister! You will have to suffer like the rest of us. After all, we're all depending on you to tell Aunt Claire what for and how to and what not. I have a deep foreboding."

"Foreboding." Really. College man trying to act all smart.

"Yes, foreboding." He takes a sip of coffee and turns the TV's volume down a notch. "Don't they teach vo-cab-u-lary," he lifts his hand to his face and points to his mouth as he slowly and carefully forms the word vocabulary, "in high school anymore?"

"No, they're too busy teaching us how to tie our shoes and zipper our jackets." I lightly slap his leg. "We got to finger-paint last Friday!"

"Ho, ho. Very humorous. Are you done? Can I continue, please?" He pulls his feet from under me, sits up, puts the cup on the coffee table, and flicks the TV off. Then a door is heard shutting upstairs.

"Well, I guess..." Our mom descends the stairs. I stop talking to see if she has anything to say, and she does. "Is everybody ready to go?"

"Sandy is still upstairs," I inform her. *Sandy's in trouble! Sandy's in trouble!* I live for these moments. "She said that she would be down in five minutes. That was ten minutes ago."

Mom checks the wall clock: three-thirty. She flings her purse over her shoulder and shouts up the stairs, "We are leaving right now. So you better be outside in less than two minutes, or I will not be responsible for my actions." She looks at Peter and me. We both grin back like angels. "Let's go," she says.

We hop in the car with Peter in the passenger seat, Mom driving, and me in the backseat. "Hey, Mommy, I got an idea. How about I drive?" I offer. She turns around in her seat.

"Not on a permit, Dearie."

Come on, I'm getting my license in one week. I think I can manage the twenty minute drive. I'd fight her for it, but I'm not in the mood. I have to conserve my energy. It's going to be a long night.

Sandy joins us a minute later. Her hair is perfect.

The trip is filled with singing. Every radio station is playing holiday songs so we all start to harmonize with the radio. The first song is "Winter Wonderland." Peter sings the loudest while he bobs his head from side to side. Daddy used to do the same thing when he was alive. When...

I clear my throat with a gentle cough. "Hey, Pete, lower the radio," I ask after the song is done and the DJ starts to talk about Santa and elves and things. "I wanna ask you something."

He turns the dial down. "What, Val?"

"What's your foreboding?"

"Huh?"

"You know. You said you had a deep foreboding about tonight."

"Oh that! I don't recall. I guess it wasn't important."

He always does that! His short term memory is only two minutes long. How on earth he survives in college I'll never know. He turns the radio up, only this time louder than before. Mom sings "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." I have a deep foreboding that it is going to be a very long night.

We pull into Aunt Claire's and Uncle Steve's driveway at about four o'clock. Five cars are parked in the road in front of the house. It's not big surprise that we're the last to show up. But then again Aunt Claire is lucky we show up at all.

I enter the house last behind Peter with my eyes almost completely shut; you could see this thing from Mars it has so many lights on it. My plan is to not be noticed. Maybe Auntie won't even try to talk to me. Yeah right. I would have better luck avoiding light or oxygen.

"Oh Laura! Thank goodness you're finally here." Aunt Claire always shouts. You could be two inches from her face, and she will still yell. I think it's a power trip or something. "Dinner is almost ready."

I stay behind Peter, quickly remove my coat, place it on the chair next to the door, and then sprint to the living room where everyone is laughing. Sorry Mom. Every man for himself. She'll be fine. You see, she took all these classes in college where you learn how to deal with people of all kinds. Even those you can't stand.

The living room is definitely the place to be. The tree is off to the left in front of the large picture window with its lights blinking rhythmically. The fireplace is directly in front of the doorway. The fire crackles and spits. The stockings hang from the mantle, all four of them, complete with names in glitter. In front of the fireplace, the little kids play with toys. To the right of the door is what Auntie calls "the refreshment table." All it really is is a small folding table with a punch bowl full of egg nog. Yuck!

There's Aunt Penny standing by the tree. I smile and wave. "Hi Penny. How are you?" I stand next to her, close to the fire. I might as well try to get warm. My toes are numb.

"Fine, honey, just fine. How are you?" She lays a hand on my shoulder and drops her voice down so I can barely hear her. "How is everyone doing since..."

I swallow. "Fine." The knot in my throat doesn't go away. I look around the room. There's gotta be someone in here that I can talk to without my dad coming up.

There's Lucy. Sweet *three year old* Lucy. "I'm gonna say 'Hi' to everyone. I'll talk to you later, Penny."

"You go right ahead Honey. Grandma has been

asking about you."

I take three steps forward and sit on the floor next to my cousin. I just sit and watch her play with Legos. She stacks them in small piles based on their colors. I grab a red one and a yellow one and put them together. Lucy stares at my hands while she removes the tiny pieces from my palms. "Don't touch. Mine. I'm making, making," she cries. "A house!"

"Sorry." I put my head in my hands with my elbows on my knees. I should not be here. Lucy won't even let me play with her. Daddy, I miss you.

Where's Grandma? She usually sits in the corner in a recliner. But she's not there. I check the room again. Maybe she's by the eggnog or helping out in the kitchen. No, she can't be in there. Auntie hates it when she does that. Last year the turkey was dried out. Auntie didn't take the blame. She blamed the overdone bird on Grandma just because she was the one that suggested that the turkey be cooked at a higher temperature.

There she is at the window talking to my Uncle Joe. I weave through my little cousins and my aunts sitting on the sofa. Grandma's face lights up when she sees me. Uncle Joe says hello and excuses himself to catch his son who is running for the front door. Smart kid. She hugs me and kisses my cheek. "How's my sweetie doing?"

"All right, I guess. It's so good to see you. How is Grandpa? Where is he?"

"He's outside. He said he needed some fresh air," she leans toward me, "Claire tried to take his pipe away. Big mistake."

"The nerve!" She chuckles at my remark.

Suddenly the group of people around the doorway parts like the Red Sea. Oh no! Auntie's coming. I stand up and move to the corner. Blend in Val, blend in. I can hear her clearing her throat. So what have you got to say now? Is little Julie going to entertain us with a dance? Did Bobby skip a grade? Come on, what? "Everyone, can I have everyone's attention?" No. "Dinner is served. All the places are set. So just go into the dining room and sit down."

Everyone files into the dining room. The little kids move to the kitchen where a card table is set up. I look around the table for my mom, brother, or sister. Where are they? I see Grandma, Grandpa, Auntie, and Uncle Steve, but not Mom, Peter, and Sandy.

"Hi, Grandma," I say as I cross the room and grab her arm. "Do you know where my mom is at?"

"I think I saw her in the kitchen helping with the little ones. She was always so good with children. I was telling your Aunt Marcy just the other day how your mother should have been a teacher. You know, for little kids. There's a shortage of good women who can handle kids nowadays. Kids just walk all over their parents. Now when I was younger..."

"Grandma, I'm sorry but I have to find my mom. I'll be right back." I leave without waiting for an answer. I know that if I hang around she would just start up again. I've already heard this philosophy before, anyway. I head straight for the kitchen.

I enter the room full of kids, about ten in all, ages three to eight. The food is already in front of the little tykes. My mom is helping Lucy cut her turkey. This is not easy considering Lucy is only allowed to use a butter knife. I stay in the doorway. "Ma, are you coming to the table?"

"No. I'm going to stay here for dinner. Somebody has to."

"Okay. Do you know where Pete is?"

"He should be in the dining room."

"What about Sandy?"

"She told me that she was going to the bathroom." I should have guessed that. Time to check the hair. She grooms herself so much her hair is going to fall out. That would be pretty funny. I smile.

"Well, see you later." I wave good-bye, but she's too busy to notice my exit.

In the dining room everyone has taken a seat. Peter and Sandy are sitting next to each other. There's an empty seat next to Pete so I take it quickly. The only other seat open is next to Auntie, and I won't be caught dead sitting there. Uncle Steve is across from me and Grandpa is to my side. "I was looking all over for you two," I whisper to Pete, who is molding his lumpy mashed potatoes into a snowman.

"I could say the same about you. Who are you? Houdini?"

"Yeah. And you're David Copperfield, right?"

Sandy hates to be left out. "What are you guys saying?"

"We were just discussing," Pete answers matter-of-factly, "the cow lick in the back of your head." He decapitates the snowman. Sandy excuses herself from the table. I laugh. Time for the bathroom. Again.

Auntie turns to my uncle. "Steve, will you carve the ham?" He can't do that. He just can't! Daddy does it. Daddy always does it. Every year. Peter, why don't you say something? A lump the size of a grapefruit rises in my throat. Everything gets blurry. I push my seat away from the table and leave without a word. I just have to. I can't go through this. I thought I could, but I can't.

I walk down the hall and enter the spare room where Auntie puts her guests' coats. I sit Indian style on the floor with my back against the bed in the dark. The tears start to flow. I taste the salt on my lips. It's so quiet in here. All I can hear are my thoughts and memories. Daddy's voice saying, "Smile, Val. It's a party. If Claire sees that you're having a horrible time, then she'll have an even better time. We definitely do not want that." His singing fills the room. He never could carry a tune.

"Daddy," I mouth the word as a rock back and forth. Daddy, I miss you.

The door opens. "Valerie, are you in here?" Aunt Claire whispers through the slightly opened door. I've never heard her whisper. She doesn't turn the light on but just enters the room and joins me on the floor. In her right hand is a tissue. She places it in my lap. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. You probably won't," she pauses as she takes a deep breath, "believe me but I understand how you feel." I sniff and wipe my face with my sleeve. The tissue stays untouched.

"I was sixteen too when I lost my father. A heart attack." Her voice is shaking. "The first Christmas without him was s-so hard. Y-You think you see him everywhere you turn." I nod and sniff. "You w-want to call him but," she pauses, "but you can't. Life changes so fast sometimes. And you can't go back." She hugs me and rocks me. "You cry as long as you need to, and you just stay in here as long as you need to. For the rest of the night if you want. It's okay."

I put my arms around her. I feel guilty. "I'm so sorry," I manage to say into her ear. She lets me go and stands up.

"Me too," she says, "me too." The door opens and

she walks out to the party. I use the tissue to blow my nose and head to the bathroom to splash cold water on my face.

People surprise you sometimes. I thought I knew Aunt Claire's story. But I don't know anything.

By the time I rejoin the party, dinner is over. Everyone is in the living room. Aunt Claire guides me to the kitchen and warms up some ham and potatoes. "Feel better?"

"Yeah." My mom comes in while I'm eating my dinner. She sits next to me. Peter and Sandy follow. Aunt Claire leaves the room. Peter kisses the top of my head. I'm full. I don't touch the potatoes. "Come on, everybody. It's Christmas." I pick up my plate and walk to the sink.

My mom asks, "Do you want to go home? We'll go home if you want. Really. We'll go."

"Maybe we should go home, Houdini," Peter adds.

"And let Auntie know I had a horrible time! Never!" I shout. "To the living room!" We all march towards the laughter. I finally feel like everything is going to be fine.

The fire is crackling and spitting. The lights around the tree are blinking rhythmically. The little tykes are playing with new toys among the shredded wrapping paper. The grown ups are sipping coffee and laughing at shared stories. I hear my dad say, "Val, this is Christmas. We are so lucky." Yeah, we are.

Christine Carlo
Vernon, NJ
Vernon Twp. High School
Mr. Walsh

MOTHER

She tickled me
with her cold, needlepoint needle
as I lay, drowning
in the giant, red, velour sofa,
that bowl of spicy tomato soup
that warmed my insides as well as my forehead
while we watched soap operas swapping with cartoons.
We would fall asleep to the buzz of lovers and Woody's
laugh
heads touching, arms dangling off the edge
of the giant, crimson pillow
as our blond wisps of hair entwined
with her needles.

Amy D'Anna
Califon, NJ

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE WRITER





Lee Thompson
Oil City HS

Depth Perceptions

My brother fits into a folder
His drinking in one file
His laugh in another

They have left the state
I try to touch them
but they are farther than they appear

Smoke scent
Captures the garage
Unwilling to release
The boy who left

Memories once scattered
Stand vertical
In the cabinet

Katie Roecker
Princeton Jct., NJ
West Windsor-Plainsboro High School
Mrs. Blader

A Traveled Path

miles above but eye to eye stands the dogwood tree
its years more than triple my own
yet my seasons hold longer
leaves of experience falling within creases of onion grass
and weeds
farther across the street not often crossed
under a dormant Cadillac lies the stray cat
piercing yellow eyes, seemingly murderous at night
charcoal coat rising in defense to barking dogs
b a r k i n g d o g s, working shifts of nine to five without
medical benefits
retired man up street a few still waking at ninety-six
still smiling at the fall squirrels
still waving his aged hand
and as if I were still ten, he gives me bread to feed the
robins

Stephanie Curson
Marple Newtown HS
Broomall, PA
Mr. Tom Williams

sign on a bulletin board

two surly cats to a good home,
brash and opinionated
as much as felines can be,
have likings for tuna and fresh salmon,
whine like teenagers.

one, a whirling dervish,
full of claws and whiskers and calico fur,
the other, private and reserved,
declawed but apt to bite,
black and white,
responds to the call,
hey, you bastard, stop that!

prospective owners must have
stoic characters and
indestructible furniture.

these animals are worth
all the personal lifestyle adjustments
they may cause.

call Stacey
after 5
and hurry.

Aggie Donkar
Baltimore, MD
Towson High School
Mr. William Jones

Untitled

Gathering the family around the table at dinner time is an age old tradition that started somewhere between the time when cross country family car trips and annual mini-golf tournaments were also established. Luckily, somewhere along the line most of these activities, no less painful than family reunions, were abolished due to unanimous votes from antisocial teenagers and union leaders who were sick of demanding for shorter work days and paid vacations. Yet a few rebellious families have gone against the grain and continued to subject their children to the nightly nightmare of eating dinner together. More surprising than this, though, is that far from being psychologically damaged, children who eat with their families get higher SAT scores. In fact, statistics show kids who eat dinner with their families every night not only have higher SAT scores, but go on to become integral parts of society, like astrophysicists and housewives. Thoroughly amazed by these results, I decided to start eating with *my* family to see if I could become better at answering multiple choice questions, too. But clueless as to where I should start, I went to see my counselor. Much to my enlightenment, she told me that it's not the *eating* with others that's helpful, it's the *talking* with them. That explained a lot. But after I learned it, I was slightly disconcerted. What were we impressionable teenagers supposed to talk to our families *about*? Deciding that I should research this if I wanted to really pursue a higher SAT score, I went to the library. The only book I found on the subject of dinner table conversation was called *Dinner Table Conversation - A Time to Bond*. Not positive of what I was going to be binding myself to, I checked out the book and read some of it before dinner.

"Chapter One: Getting Started

The responsibility of initiating discussions at dinner rests on the parents. A good way to get the ball rolling is to ask how your child's day was."

Arriving at the dinner table, I forced my parents to ask me this very question. I replied, "Fine." Wow, I could feel the juices flowing in my brain already, making me smarter every second of this intellectual conversation. So as not to overload my brain, we moved on to another topic. My dad had visited his old pal Ernie that day at Ern's place of employment, the funeral home. Dad was real proud of how far his friend had come - he had a real knack for corpses it seemed - made'em look real life-like. Biology!, I thought. This was great!

The next day while my mother was heating up the T.V. dinners, I figured I better read another chapter in the book to have some new material for that night's feast. I read:

"Chapter Two: Topics to Avoid

Dinner is a time for delicate and cultural talk. Topics such as war, poverty, and death (including dead bodies and funeral homes) should be avoided."

OH NO! I had broken rule #1 and I didn't even know it! Did this mean negative points on my SAT? Who could tell? I was beginning to think this whole deal was much more complicated than I had ever imagined. I was also beginning to think that I would die of starvation before the T.V. dinners were done because it takes considerable more time to heat up five at the same time than it does to just heat up one.

When we finally sat down to dinner that evening, we actually had things to say. My sister brought up the schedule for the next night. It seemed that she had rehearsal (for what, no one bothered to ask) and she wouldn't be getting home until 7:00 so we would have to hold dinner for her. My mom agreed that that would be fine, but my brother pointed out that he had a mandatory meeting (again, I don't know of what) at 6:30 and wouldn't be back until 8:00 so we'd have to hold dinner until then. With everyone's schedules figured out, we decided it would be best to eat dinner again right after we finished the one we were currently eating, so that we wouldn't get behind. I was a little bit against that plan (I needed to read another chapter, otherwise the developments of that meal would be lost), but I agreed to it anyway because the only other choice was to have dinner instead of breakfast the day after the next day.

Whenever the next time we had dinner together was, I came prepared. My book had read:

"Chapter Three: The World Around Us

Evening conversation can be a great time to catch up on current events. The younger children can get an introduction to politics and world diplomacy."

So before dinner I skimmed the newspaper for international news.

"Something happened in Africa today," I stated all matter-of-factly.

"That's nice dear," my mother responded.

"And Congress voted on some bill," I added.

"Good," my dad mumbled in between mouthfuls of Salisbury steak.

"They invented something in Japan, too," I beamed.

"That's nice dear."

As well as that conversation was going, an even better idea hit me while we were debating these discussion points - we didn't have to hear the news from

me, we could watch it on T.V.! So I hopped out of my chair and flipped on CNN. Ha, I was even smarter than the book; this was getting current events firsthand. Sometimes I amaze myself.

The next night, I was tempted to not even look at the book because we were doing so well, but I did anyway.

"Chapter Four: The World Within Us

Use dinner time as therapy. Discuss how everyone is feeling and how they coped with the day's events."

I told everyone of what we had to talk about and everyone thought it was a good idea. My brother kicked us off before we even started eating. He said, "I feel hungry."

I kept us rolling with, "I feel fine."

"I coped really well with my day's events," my sister said. After that, we were quiet while we ate and when we were done, my brother said:

"I feel full."

My SAT score had to be growing by leaps and bounds.

After a couple months of this nightly bonding, with in-depth talk over choice topics, I took my SAT and my score increased by 10 points from the last time I took it. As I was triumphantly explaining this to my counselor, she chose to tell me that reading one book increases your score that much. So after all my fiascoes it was *Dinner Table Conversation* the paperback that helped and not the real thing. Plus, I realized, I was still in the dark about how to increase my score by communal feasting and socializing. My experiment was not a complete failure though, because now that we've established eating together as one of our family customs and we're already so bonded, my dad has decided to bag the camping trip in Wyoming this summer. That's fine with me because I'm pretty sure there won't be any studies which show next that camping increases your SAT scores. At least I hope not.

Rebecca Howley

Fairfax, VA

Mrs. Bicknell

listening for planets

suspended in an echo, spotlights fall
on Saturn: how you straighten stockings with
a beat like blues (piano-banging teeth,
like keys beneath trance-stricken fingers) - all
your jazz-joints splitting plaster, cracking walls
like paper pulse - sheet music to your breath.
still rhythmless, i sway to match the wreath
of resin you call skin. it's soundless...dull.
i'm hearing you (a woman moving - slick,
just barely frictionless), and in this pit
of indigo, i sense my hips can hear
you too. they dream of turning thin blood thick,
snapping elastic veins with one curved hit,
that cosmic chord still ringing in my ears.

Alicia Potee

Lutherville, MD

Towson High School

Mr. William Jones

THE WRITING MAJOR AT SUSQUEHANNA

Susquehanna's writing major provides students with the opportunity to work closely with nationally-recognized, published authors in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and playwriting. Workshops are limited to fifteen students to ensure individual attention, and all upperclass majors pursue independent writing projects by working one-on-one with faculty mentors. Besides the extensive writing curriculum, the major is the cornerstone for a number of writing-related activities:

THE VISITING WRITERS SERIES: Five or six well known writers (Tobias Wolff, Sharon Olds, Robert Creeley, Esmeralda Santiago, Madison Smartt Bell, Nancy Willard, Li-Young Lee, and Russell Banks, for example) visit Susquehanna each year to meet with classes and give public readings

THE SUSQUEHANNA REVIEW: The student literary magazine is written, edited, and produced entirely by a staff of student writers. The Juliet Gibson Prize honors the outstanding student writer each year.

LIMINAL SPACES: Students write, edit, and publish a quarterly newsletter which features creative work as well as news articles about writing activities on campus.

STUDENT CHAPBOOK SERIES: Advanced students publish their writing in book form. Each senior major is responsible for content, editing, and production.

STUDENT READING SERIES: All senior majors give public readings of their work. A number of open mikes and group readings give all writing students an opportunity to read each year.

INTERNSHIPS: Recent internships have been with a number of newspapers, WNEP-TV, Simon and Schuster, AT&T, and various government and social agencies.

During the past seven years, the writing faculty has published eight books of fiction and poetry as well as hundreds of poems, stories, and essays in magazines and newspapers such as **Harper's, The Paris Review, Newsday, The Atlanta Constitution, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Poetry, The Georgia Review, and Doubletake.** Their books have been widely reviewed, and their work has earned fellowships and literary prizes. If you would like to know more about the program, there are several ways of contacting Susquehanna:

Dr. Gary Fincke, Director: Telephone 717-372-4164
E-Mail gfincke@susqu.edu
Admissions: Telephone 717-372-4260
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Information on the major: <http://www.susqu.edu>
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