

SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY



*the*  
apprentice WRITER



Susan Stuckey  
Timonium, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones

\$2

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the seventh issue of THE APPRENTICE WRITER, which annually features the best writing, photography, and artwork we receive from secondary school students.

Each year we send over 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper THE DAILY ITEM in Sunbury, PA--to 3,500 schools in the 10 states from which we receive over 4,500 submissions.

It's been my pleasure to see this project prosper through the discovery of so many outstanding student writers. Likewise, there has been a parallel growth in the Writing Program at Susquehanna. Since the inception of THE APPRENTICE WRITER, we have instituted advanced workshops in fiction and poetry; a Visiting Writers Series that has brought artists such as Sharon Olds,

June Jordan, David Bradley, and William Matthews to campus; an expansion of the student literary magazine; a student reading series, and the development of student internships. In addition, we now offer weeklong summer writers' workshops that draw high school students from the ten-state region THE APPRENTICE WRITER reaches.

We welcome submissions

of poetry, fiction, essays, photography, and artwork by students in grades 9-12. Send material to Gary Fincke, Writing Program Director, Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, (717) 372-4164. The deadline for submitting is March 15, 1990. We also welcome inquiries about the Summer Writers' Workshops in fiction, poetry, and journalism.

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Number 7, 1989

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### LOGO DESIGN

Carolyn Gienieccko

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**SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY**  
 Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania 17870

## Anniversary

20 years after they were married  
my father sent  
a dozen red roses  
(with petals the size of tablespoons,  
and firm round bottoms  
the color of blood)  
to the school  
where my mother worked.

She carried them home,  
cradled in her arms  
like an overgrown infant.  
She put them in a vase  
on the kitchen table  
where they blossomed

over the sugar bowl, orange juice, ash tray,  
empty envelopes, tissue box, ball points,  
forks, Sunday Times, hand lotion,  
they opened like mouths  
about to sing.

Jenifer Braun  
Elizabeth, NJ  
The Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

## Untitled

There was this mouse, see  
And it came out to the sales floor  
From under the bags  
And we set a glue trap that  
Smelled good to him  
We sat watching after work  
Making jokes  
He came out once and sniffed around  
But was spooked  
We forgot for a week  
Until I happened to look  
Under the bags  
And there he was,  
Mired in the glue, his tail in an immortalized squiggle  
Squirming  
I took him to the washroom  
And stuck him under 3 inches of water  
Once the manager came in and  
Laughed a benign laugh  
I held him down and my head away  
He didn't move for awhile  
The manager said to take him out  
And throw him away  
I pulled him out and  
He moved.  
Oh Jesus Christ, I said  
The manager laughed a benign laugh  
I took him and threw him away  
Jesus Christ, I said again, and  
Thought about it some.

Andrew Krall  
Harleysville, PA  
Kathy Walsh

## Falling

Walking across East Falls Bridge  
one early April afternoon  
we walked over to the edge  
to get a better look.  
I stepped up onto the ledge,  
carefully leaning over  
and there it was  
some thirty feet straight down,  
swift and cold.  
Suddenly I was shoved off  
balance, teetering over the river,  
the noise of rushing water  
filling my ears.  
Fear knifed down my body  
and I screamed.

Just then you grabbed  
my shoulders and pulled  
me back. I stumbled  
away from the edge,  
gulped air and shook.  
Why did you do it? I asked,  
What were you trying to prove?  
But I caught you, you said,  
What if you hadn't?  
But I did.  
And I said, What if  
you hadn't caught me  
and I fell?

Ahree Lee  
Ardmore, PA  
The Baldwin School  
Dr. Olive Ledlie

## Worm Mercy

The part I like best about fishing with my father  
is the worms. The styrofoam container from  
Ralph and Joan's Fishing Tackle holds  
moist expectation in the compost.  
I dig with my finger in the leaves and twigs;  
the blind ringed ends gather their segments close,  
and every worm I grasp contracts in horror,  
in the dull invertebrate concept of  
I know you can, but God I hope you won't.  
Dangled in the air, the glistening body  
hangs and twists, bowing and pleading for  
worm mercy. Can't I see this worm has a family,  
is the father of children? The community  
in the steaming rot is gathered  
near the bottom in prayer, anxiously wringing  
each other, wrapped securely in the slime,  
holding worm breath. I stretch him  
between two knuckles, this poor gray martyr,  
this tiller of soft soil. I wonder  
which end is the head, I tell myself  
it doesn't hurt as I rinse my fingers  
in Lake Bomoseen.

Susan Gray  
Westfield, NJ  
Solomon Schechter Day School  
Penny Harter

# Alexandra

By afternoon, smog would rise into the mountains around Athens, dimming the sun. But now the sun was sharp, glinting off the glass building across the street and shooting through the apartment window into my eyes. I sat up on the couch. Alexandra's mother was frying eggs, and Alexandra was standing in the archway which led to the kitchen. She had her hands on her hips, and her hair stuck out from her head like a dandelion's cotton white seeds. I wanted to grab her shoulders and blow her hair off, making a wish as the strands drifted around the room.

"You awake?"

"Yeah," I croaked. Her voice was always clear as a champagne glass held up for a toast, even in the morning. Mine was more like a tin can, crunching under someone's foot.

"Good morning," she said, and went into the kitchen to eat.

The eggs stopped sizzling in the frying pan, and I could hear the garbage disposal shattering empty egg shells. Alexandra's mother set two plates.

"Jess, aren't you going to come eat?" she called.

I went into the kitchen even though I didn't want fried eggs. They would slide off my fork and ooze in my stomach. If Alexandra's father had been home, he would have made a Greek omelette with purple eggplant and let us drink coffee. He always told Alexandra Greek jokes while we ate, but he didn't translate for me because they weren't as funny in English. He hadn't been home in a long time, and that morning at breakfast I asked where he was.

"Dad moved out for a while," Alexandra said, "but he'll be back."

"He just needs some time to think." Alexandra's mom punched a hole in her egg yolk with her fork. It spilled over the side of her plate, and the glare of the sun turned it neon yellow.

Alexandra and I sat on the steps of A.C.S., the American Community School of Greece. There was no breeze and I felt like I was sipping my breath out of the air with a straw. The sun beat down on the courtyard as if someone had hung it on a string between the two buildings. The Greek kids hung their painted banners like that during Ohi Manza, the bright red letters proclaiming the holiday until the first rain. Then the paper tore and fell to the courtyard's white marble floor, and we splashed in puddles dyed red with paint.

"I might have to go to a Greek school." Alexandra looked down at her shadow, jagged on the steps like a folded paper doll.

"What?"

"Dad might not pay for A.C.S. anymore."

My mouth had gone dry, and my tongue stuck to my teeth. I couldn't be separated from Alexandra.

"He says it's a waste of money. He says, 'Why should you go to school in your mother's language?'"

I could see the Greek symbol on my street. Stray dogs slipped in and out of its wrought iron fence, and the children would stop their games in the dusty yard to stare as you walked by. Sometimes there were Gypsy kids, dressed in colors that seemed to pour from their shoulders to their feet. They would shout at you in a strange dialect, their black eyes daring you to come play.

"Your mom won't let him send you to a Greek school."

"Dad will do what he wants."

"Well, he'll listen to you." I closed my eyes, shading them from the sun.

"I said, 'Dad will do what he wants.'" Alexandra stood up and started to walk away, her sandals slapping the marble floor. I ran to catch up.

"Wait, Alexandra, do you want to stay with us Friday and Saturday?"

She put her arm around me but she left a space between us. It was too hot to stand close.

"No, I can't. I have to go stay with Dad this weekend. He

bought an apartment."

"I thought he was coming back to your mom. He said he just needed time to think."

"Yeah. Well, he lied."

Our class went to the Athens Art Gallery twice a year. The girls stood in groups and giggled at the naked statues and the lost tourists. The boys tried to see how close they could get their fingers to a painting before the security alarm went off. Alexandra studied everything, read titles off the wall, and listened to any tour guide who spoke English or Greek. I wandered after her, in awe of inscribed blocks from the Parthenon and carvings of ancient oracles and heroes. She stopped in front of my favorite statue, a god with angry eyes and square cheek bones. His mighty arm was raised to hurtle something through the air, but his fist was empty.

"Some people say it's Zeus, throwing a thunderbolt," she told me. "Some people say it's Poseidon, aiming his trident."

"He looks like your dad."

"Then it must be Zeus, unfaithful Zeus with all his lovers."

I looked from the statue to her face.

"Dad met a Belgian lady a week ago. They don't even speak the same language, but he's in love with her. She and her three kids are moving in with him soon."

"You didn't tell me."

"He didn't tell me until last night."

"What about your mom? Does she know?"

"No. I can't tell her. Dad won't let me."

"Oh," I said. I couldn't think of anything else to say except "I'm sorry," so I said that next. Alexandra shrugged her shoulders.

I tore the bread in half. The crust crumbled, and the pieces floated in the grease on my chipped plate.

"Why do you always take the end of the loaf, Jess? It's so hard to eat." Alexandra flipped through her salad with her fork, eating only the dry feta cheese.

We were at Luculu's Taverna in Nea Makri. It was our favorite restaurant because the Marines liked it. They would saunter in at ten o'clock, slapping each other on the back and dragging the tables around to accommodate all their buddies. They always ordered pizza--the only thing on the menu that they could pronounce, and they talked about America.

I pulled my legs up and sat Indian style. There were cats in those Greek restaurants, thin grey cats that brushed your ankles and ripped the tablecloths with their claws. Alexandra's straw chair creaked as she leaned back, straining to hear what a Marine was saying about the return of the mini-skirt.

Alexandra's mother speared a chunk of lamb with a skewer and lowered it, dripping with olive oil, to the cats.

"Mom," Alexandra said, "they have worms in their stomachs and it won't do any good to feed them. They'll starve to death anyway."

Alexandra's mom smiled. "Right, but look how that one's ears stand up straighter after he eats. Look at him lick his paws."

She turned back to us. "How's that English project on King Arthur?"

"Fine," Alexandra said.

"We need to work on it next weekend," I added.

"Don't you go to Dad's place next weekend?" Alexandra's mother asked.

Alexandra was braiding the tassels on the edge of her placemat. "Yeah," she said.

The Marines began to dig into the pockets of their wrinkled uniforms, looking for money to tip the barmaid.

"Well then, I can drive you and Jess over there after school on Friday."

"No." Alexandra studied her upside down reflection in the back of her spoon.

"What do you mean, 'no'?" her mom asked.

"No!" The cat at Alexandra's feet leapt up and ran away on its wobbly legs.

(Continued on page 5)

"We'll work on the project at my house," I said.

Alexandra's mother nodded and got up to pay the bill. She didn't say anything else until we were in the car; then she asked about my mother's embassy reception and my brother's soccer team. I answered as we drove, but I was wishing that she would argue with Alexandra about American politics the way she usually did.

That night, I slept at their apartment. Alexandra's voice drifted across the room like the smoke of her father's cigarettes. We talked about Merlin's magic, Helen of Troy, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the boys we knew. I was glad we didn't talk about her father. I could imagine him standing in the hall, his bleached blue fisherman's hat tilted over one eye, listening to us.

I held my hands clenched at my sides and struggled not to blink. Alexandra was lining my eyes with a thick black eye-liner.

"There, you look like Cleopatra!"  
 She handed me a mirror.  
 "I look like Bat Woman."

It was the opening night of our school play, Annie. Our director stomped to the dressing room doorway and bellowed, "Orphan's cue" the same way he yelled "Evacuate" whenever there was a bomb scare during drama class. I reached for my costume. My mother had sewn neat, square patches on it with tiny stitches. Alexandra did her own patches, and they were crooked and orange--the ugly orange you would use if you were really patching something.

"Hurry up, Jess." Alexandra handed me my shoes as we went back stage to wait for our entrance. The stagehands were dressed in black. They crept around like panthers, pulling curtain ropes and pushing scenery into place.

"Is your mom here?" I whispered.  
 "Yes," Alexandra answered, "and my father's here. Too bad he didn't bring his lover."

Someone spun a flashlight over the backdrop, and I could see Alexandra's face: Her eyes were long and narrow like Indian spearheads, glinting in the dark.

"Does your mom know about her yet?"  
 "No. Dad warned me. If I tell Mom, he'll go to the police. Under Greek law, I am his property and he'll get full custody."

I didn't say anything because the music had started and it was time for us to go on. I could see Alexandra's father in the audience. He was holding her mother's hand.

A week later, Alexandra sat down in her desk in English class with a black eye. I didn't ask her what had happened, I just waited for her to tell me.

"Niki whacked me in the face with his fist," she said at lunch.  
 "Niki?"  
 "That's my father's Belgian woman's kid."

"Why did he hit you?"  
 "I don't know. He's mad because he thinks Dad got his mother pregnant."

"Did he?"  
 Alexandra was laughing, and then she was crying.

"Probably. I told Mom that I ran into a dresser. Dad says I'll have two black eyes if I tell her the truth. There's nothing she can do anyway."

She can leave, I wanted to say, leave and go far away with you and never come back. But I didn't say anything because I thought I couldn't live without my friend Alexandra, who leaned against me with tears on her bruised face.

It was Saturday, and my mother and I were looking out my bedroom window. The top branches of our orange tree stretched over the porch roof below us. I was thinking about how Alexandra's father used to make baklava on Saturdays. He would eat it all himself, honey oozing out from between the layers of pastry as he lifted each piece to his mouth. I reached to pick an orange from the tree, and its skin was warm in my hands. I peeled it, turning my fingernails an acid yellow.

"It's a nice day," my mother said.  
 I glanced up at the sky. "Yeah, it's sunny."

"Is Alexandra coming over?"  
 The juice from the orange dripped through my fingers onto the hot clay tiles of the roof. I told my mother the truth about Alexandra's father. She went to Alexandra's mother's apartment when I had finished. I left the orange on the windowsill to rot.

I lost my best friend in April when the smog of Athens washed away with the spring rains. My mother and I helped them pack for America. We were the only people who knew that they were leaving, and we weren't supposed to tell anyone. That night, I made myself kneel beside my bed and pray that Alexandra's father wouldn't find out and bring them back.

When Alexandra's name was called in school the next day, there was no answer.

"Where's Alexandra?" the other kids asked me because I was her best friend.

"She's sick," I said, and I looked into their dark eyes.

Jessica Mount  
 Vienna, VA  
 James Madison High School  
 Bernis von zur Muehlen

## Panman

*The panman is working  
 our back alley  
 pushing his beard into the junk.*

*He is prospecting  
 for trinkets, twists of tin,  
 any scrap attracted to  
 the lodestone of his love.  
 His pot shapes always change  
 but they will never make him  
 rich.*

*Even through my window I can  
 smell  
 his separateness.  
 He drowns in dirt  
 then rises up,  
 Poseidon from the filth,  
 ribboned in the blood  
 of broken dreams  
 His banishment is on him  
 like a stain.  
 It has the taste of salt.*

*I watch the panman  
 as I'd watch a three-eyed dog  
 until my mother hustles me away  
 and quickly shuts  
 the blinds.*

*But now  
 I think I hear  
 a tap-tap on the pane,  
 a gurgle of fading  
 laughter.*

Robin Suleiman  
 Potomac, MD

## Drowning

He woke up early that morning, on the cottage on the lake in the sunshine. I was seven and my brother was eight and a half and my Dad was a big guy who knew everything. I was excited. We were going fishing. Fishing to me was the embodiment of what a family should be doing at a cottage on a lake in the sunshine. Our socked feet padded through into Dad and Mom's room.

"Do it." I whispered urgently over my dad's snoring lump.

"Dad, hey dad." My brother was always the cautious one.

"Umm wha? Who? Blehh snort," Dad responded.

"Fishing!" I urged, tapping my foot.

"Uh...yeah, fishing, get out. Might...wake...mom."

We ran out of the room to get everything ready. We had confidence that Dad would get up; after all, he always did.

On the beach the water lapped, my brother looked like a part of this scene, like a little god.

"You," Orie pointed, "get the life-jackets." I scampered, not ran or trotted, but scampered to follow his orders. One went around my neck, one went on my arm and one was held to my chest with my elbow. On the way back I stubbed my toe. I knew I would. It was all right.

Now Dad was on the beach. Grizzly the way he had to be because I had no need for a father that wasn't.

"You boys get the boat in the water." We did. Orie claimed I dropped it on his knee but he was always the wimp of the family. Dad had the rods, the worms.

We got in and the sun rose. It was in my face as Dad began to row; for some reason I can't remember if we pushed off or not. Dad rowed sitting backward, a concept that I couldn't grasp. I didn't ask; I was watching the water go by, like watching the tops of clouds go by in an airplane but better because you can stick your hands out and touch and watch what you've done. Something every person wants. Then I remembered my Gila monster.

At the time I had no idea what exactly a Gila monster was, but I knew I had one. It was rubber. It was green. It was a Gila monster. I had clasped it in my hand determined that Gila (an affectionate name for a beauty of a monster) would fish too. So I unclasped my hand and watched it straighten out the way rubber does. The black, deep, painted-on eyes looked fearsome. At least to me. My brother was always laughing at my Gila monster. He was always the jealous one of the family. I knew the time had come to see what this monster could really do. Could, I thought to myself on that summer's sunny morning, it swim? I had no doubt that it could, for the Gila monster of my desire could swim and so too would this one. I placed it in the water and my belly button froze as I leaned over the edge of the boat. And my heart was filled with happiness. It floated.

For a minute he looked so noble in the sunlight that I forgot to keep my grasp on his tail. At the time I was in the right state of mind to appreciate the nobleness of a Gila monster. I let go and not the boat, not even the world, stopped as he shot away. But he was not yet out of my reach, believed my mind; who knows, I had been right before. Now the edge of the boat was crushing my testicles. Now the cold water was coursing over my head on a bright green summers day.

"Blub" I said. I got no response. "Glub" I tried. I guess for a minute there I thought nobody loved me. I opened my eyes and saw nothing that I wanted to see. That happens to me every morning. Probably you too. I closed my eyes and felt something lifting me, and as I hung there suspended over the water by my father's arm, I think I turned older. Not very much older. Just a year or two.

"Fish?" My brother sounded excited; I figured I'd open my eyes.

"Wha?" I asked. I don't think I was still hanging there over the green. Couldn't have been.

"Fish! Did you see any fish?" He was shaking a bit. I guess it really mattered at the time because I thought about it and wrinkled my dripping, tan, seven year-old, maybe older at that point, face.

"Nah, couldn't have. Had my eyes shut."

For me, fishing was over and Gila monster was just a hunk of rubber. For dad, hey, he had rescued his son. Next to Gila monster he's the star of this story. For my brother, well, who knows? He was always the strange one of the family.

Hal Niedzviecki

Potomac, MD

Winston Churchill High School

Peggy Pfeiffer

## My Man is an Arboreal Lizard

*You can tell it.*

*I know it's hard*

*-took me twenty years-  
but you can tell it.*

*By the way his coarse skin ripples  
and flaps when he's panicked  
and by the way when*

*he moves a limb*

*he forgets the bone.*

*By the way when*

*he shuts his eyelids*

*he licks his lips quick*

*and by the way he runs the shower,  
not getting in, but setting his head  
crooked back on his shoulders*

*and grinning*

*while the steam soaks through.*

*By the way he's healthiest  
in summer months*

*and how his whole body gasps  
when you've got him mad.*

*How it swells up huge and  
suddenly contracts, like a pin  
popped through the skin.*

*When you get the chance,  
run your fingers down the back  
of his neck*

*and feel the protrusions.*

*And notice*

*if you have occasion*

*that he doesn't need limbs*

*to climb a tree*

*that he slides right up the bark.*

*And if you ever catch him*

*in a deep sleep*

*listen to him breathe.*

*listen to the short huffs*

*of breath*

*each a minute apart.*

*My man is sly*

*He doesn't let on*

*what the truth is,*

*but you can tell it.*

Melissa Levine

Bethesda, MD

Peggy Pfeiffer



Bear's Ears, Utah--Sunrise  
Noel Eisenberg  
Mamaroneck, NY  
Rye Country Day School

## White Widow

Old lady--  
You've got  
a lot of room--  
the whole looming  
November house  
he left you.  
And Sunday night movies  
and magazines  
and a bottle of whiskey  
you'll never touch.

Your desires are painted  
grey.  
So much life,  
you sometimes inhale  
the scent of the whiskey  
to remember him.

Also, you keep  
your rain-drunk carnations  
planted (like bones)  
in the silver  
sunshine.  
Out back,  
you have so much room.

Laura Stallard  
Baltimore, MD  
Towson High School  
Sue Ellen Winter

My parents said we wouldn't go  
to see the fireworks this year  
because there were so many people--  
it was too much hassle  
too many mosquitoes  
and too many families with big dogs  
not on leashes.  
But I didn't mind.  
I always worried secretly that the fireworks would fall,  
hit me on the head,  
set my hair on fire  
(or maybe blind me, like in that book  
I read a long time ago;  
the girl went away to a school for the blind  
and got a seeing-eye-dog named Chester).

So I went down to Jefferson Park  
at the end of my deserted gravel road,  
kicked stones and dirt as I walked,  
watched outlines of oaks on the water.  
They leaned forward, as if to listen to river sounds--  
fish splashing, cicadas humming.  
And I heard the far-off bursts and cracks,  
not able to see the fireworks,  
but knowing they were there.  
I celebrated alone, just listening,  
in darkness.

Susan E. Brown  
Alexandria, VA  
West Potomac High School  
Virginia O'Keefe

## Cathy

The children in the neighborhood called her  
Thelma Weird.  
She lived with her heartsick mother in a house  
Built into the side of a hill and  
Perched on a rebellious stream.  
Her nephew was a photographer for the  
Smithsonian Institution, she said,  
And was into bugs.  
All kids could think of was the way she  
Walked her dogs up and down the hill each day.  
They would warn, "Don't let her catch you!" but  
Unheeding, you would stop near her and be  
Trapped up in a web of tales spanning  
Generations--about her dog's last illness or  
A conversation held three weeks ago.  
She had no respect for property, bringing  
Her dog Gretchen and other fur-balls onto  
Peoples' lawns for drinks from their faucets.  
The only real thing she seemed to have  
Were those daily walks where she could  
Empty the pockets of her life  
For every stranger who strolled that hill,  
Telling them about ticks, blisters, Lyme Disease.

David J. Galloway  
Phoenix, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones

## If Only My Mother's Blond Hair Had Been Natural

This morning it occurred to me that I don't know what color my mother's hair is. I was going to call her and ask her, but I felt there was a reason I shouldn't. Then I remembered she's dead. I wondered how long it takes hair to lose pigment, and if her hair still is whatever color it was or if it's white now anyway, or maybe even altogether gone. I made a list of the possibilities and attempted deductive reasoning. She did have black roots, there was that. So black was winning when the telephone rang.

The predictability makes the ring. It's so mechanical, so rhythmic—a technological wonder. I love the repetition. The vibrato is so charming. It's a problem, though. Too often I get caught up in the ring, and I forget to answer the phone. Which wouldn't be so much of a problem, only sometimes it's my mother at the end of the line.

I considered that it was my mother telephoning, frustrated. It wasn't black at all. I had it completely wrong. Although, if my telephone did indeed transcend the natural world, it could have been anyone. Possibly it was Hemingway, my dead frog. I wondered what the rates were for a telephone call to the dead. Probably the telephone company would charge me heavily, because that's what they always do.

The rain was dripping down the sides of my windows and it tickled. It spat on the panes and pelted the dirt beneath my tree. I was concerned that the paint on the window panes would run away with the rain. It would realize that, as far as being a liquid goes, there's more to it than just sticking to window panes. For raindrops the excitement never ends. After they fall and drip, fusing with other raindrops and birthing even more, there's the sewage system to be dealt with. I imagined my window paint leaving after an argument where I was reduced to my knees, imploring the paint to stay through the month until I could replace it. And I vowed that I would draw up a contract with the new paint. From now on there would be a two week termination notice.

Before it rained any longer, I left the apartment to buy back-up paint. The rain fell on my nose. It wet my shoulders and slid under my feet. When I realized I was hydroplaning, I slowed and steered in the direction of the skid. I regained control, checked my front and rear views, and merged. I walked into a department store in the left-turn-only lane, and I went directly to the woman under the "Information" sign.

"Where is the paint department?" I asked her.

"We don't have a paint department."

"But this is a department store," I said.

"That is correct."

"So where is the paint department?"

"We don't have a paint department."

"Why not?" I asked her.

The woman looked at me, and I fell silent. Her window paint had left her long ago, and she hadn't thought to buy back-up paint. She was touchy about her mistake, and frustrated.

"Look," I said. "It's okay. I'll go somewhere else."

I turned and left.

I wondered if it wasn't brown. Very dark roots can appear black, although really they are dark brown. Most people have brown hair, anyway. And there are so many shades. Genetically, it was feasible.

The rain lapped at the curbs and snaked through the cracks in the sidewalk. The streets were cold and slow, blurred in the fog. People in raincoats moved along the sidewalks, their heads down to avoid the rain. The cinema lights shone on the corner, oblivious.

The movie had already started when I walked in.

"Don't worry, you haven't missed anything," the lady at the counter told me.

"On the contrary," I said, "I've missed the beginning of the movie."

I sat in the front row, feeling digestible. It was a foreign film, dubbed instead of subtitled. I wanted to know what they were really saying, how the rhythm reflected the action, but the people who decide those things decided that it should be dubbed instead of subtitled. I thought the film was Scandinavian, because the people had blunt, blonde haircuts and perfect skin. Then a man with curly brown hair showed up. I tried to block him out, but they gave him a lot of close up shots and I supposed he was something of a sex symbol. Sex symbol or not, I did not enjoy a full screen view of his facial impurities.

Sometime later an usher was tapping me on the shoulder.

"Miss, the movie's over." He was impatient.

"But I missed the beginning," I explained.

He paused. "I'm sorry, but that was the last show. We're closing. It's the middle of the night."

"I see," I said. "Do you always stop the movie in the middle of the night?"

"No," he said. "I mean, we didn't stop the movie. It was over."

I walked out of the theatre through the fire exit because the man told me to.

"It's against the rules, you know," I told him. He looked at me.

"To use the fire exit when there isn't a fire," I explained. "Fire exits are to be used only in the event of a fire."

"It's okay, Miss," he said. "This is an exception."

It was dark outside. The rain had stopped and the streets were swollen and hissing. I walked them slowly, looking for paint stores. A diner was open. I went in and sat at the counter.

"You wouldn't happen to have any paint?" I asked the woman behind the counter. Her back slouched and her hair was suffocated with spray.

"Paint?" she asked. "That some kind of meat?"

"No," I explained. "Paint is what goes on window panes. If you're lucky, that is. You have to get the right kind."

"Duron or Pittsburgh?" she asked, and heaved two cans up on the counter.

"Oh Duron," I said. "Definitely." I removed the lid and had a spoonful. It tasted like coffee. Apparently she had misunderstood.

"Cream, sugar?" she asked me.

"How about a mixer?" I asked, but she was gone. I supposed the coffee wouldn't work as far as my window panes went so I drank it.

It could have been some kind of red, I reasoned. Auburn or flame or something. It was distinctly possible. I pictured my mother with red hair. It was difficult to picture my mother at all.

There was a man sitting next to me at the counter. He wore a thick wool sweater, and his fingers were calloused and red. He was bald. He fumbled with the pull-back tab on his half-and-half. When he got it, he spilled half of it into the saucer. He looked up at me and smiled. I smiled at him.

"Would you mind if I asked you a question?" he said.

"Not at all," I said.

"What color was your mother's hair?"

I ran fast through the puddled streets, my eyes too blurred to read the signs. I turned and weaved through traffic. The buildings were black shadows of each other, impossible to distinguish. I stopped somewhere to sit on a bench. It was wet and I felt the water soak my pants in parallel lines.

Melissa Levine  
Bethesda, MD  
Peggy Pfeiffer





Scott Tozer

## Burning Bush

When Moses stumbled  
upon that bush  
and shielded his eyes--  
did he feel then as I feel now?  
Did he feel as though he were standing  
on the threshold of the Earth  
hearing a name that he had just discovered  
was his own?  
And did he wonder if the words  
were just the cracking sounds  
of his own heart breaking?  
I am standing with you in this dark room  
listening to you whisper that you love me;  
there is wisdom in the raindrops, and I want to tell you  
softly  
that the thunder outside is my only god.  
Did Moses love one woman  
or did the love he bore his people swallow him up  
and crowd his ears with voices  
and his eyes with visions  
of bushes burning with dancing flames  
and brittle branches  
crackling  
on the sand...  
I am wondering if I love you  
and if your words should be the raindrops  
and your whispers crash like thunder  
and I am wondering  
if I have a people.  
If I were to stumble,  
if I were to fall upon my knees,  
would I burn  
like your fingertips  
or suffocate  
like the sound of my heartbeat against your warm body?  
They say that Moses trembled  
and his hair  
grew white--  
was he alone by that fire  
for so many years,  
or was it only  
his destiny  
that scared him so?

Michelle Hope Lerner  
Warren, NJ  
The Pingry School  
Dr. Handlin

## Dream Sequence

emily wasnewski  
long brown hair dream  
homecoming princess  
for the second year running  
running into my nightmares  
who the hell do you suppose you are  
the headless horseman  
with hazel eyes?

you knocked at the door  
smiled like a sucrose seminal vesicle  
came up  
and made my signature  
look real nice on my college  
applications

rubbing against all facts  
you rubbing against my arm  
my arms never against you again  
my arms for you unanimously

but when I looked up through the window  
you were there with the producers  
and directors  
of my sky blue dreams  
--just quality american cinema  
produced for a soul in the purgatory  
of ununderstandable german avante-garde film  
who do you suppose you are?  
Andy Warhol with all of Marilyn Monroe's lips?

who let you in my small greenwich village theater  
I bet you're gonna steal the organ  
citing the absence of silent films  
these days  
who let you in  
I mean who the hell let you in?

Alexander Hicks  
Falls Church, VA  
Bishop Ireton High School  
Br. Rick Wilson

## I Cancelled the Ballet Lessons

My toes have never liked my feet.  
I see where they strain to escape the tips of my shoes.  
They know I need them, they feel powerful-  
though I downplay their importance.  
They imagine me a toeless toppling form  
looming over the ground moments before I  
fall into my shadow. My toes plot-  
if we left her life would come to a standstill.  
I am a slave to my toes:  
How can I respect such anarchists, where have  
my moral teachings gone? I bend  
to the will of my appendages.  
I never know where I stand.

Kate Wing  
Columbia, MD  
Oakland Mills High School  
Diane Pulling

## Weighing Bones

My parents believe you can plan the life  
of an unborn child. You see, they smile,  
the position of the sun and the moon and the stars  
at the minute of your birth set  
the weight of your bones, and you,  
little daughter, with the heaviest bones  
in our family, are destined to do great things.  
They show me the Chinese book they consulted  
eighteen years back, fingers careful on its ribbon binding  
molded soft with age. Picking a birthday  
with its promised burden in bone, they had labored,  
trying to guess right, wondering if conceiving that day  
would bring me on time, or early, or late,  
finally letting fly one night like archers  
on a mountaintop shooting skywards  
in the dark. Their faces are happy now  
in the light from the lamp, pouring over my life story  
predicted in a language I cannot understand  
and yet my mind wanders, blurring  
two faces to call up the image of another  
and a bracelet of gold worn today.  
It lay flat in simple links against  
the large bone of his wrist, so naturally heavy  
he seemed to forget it was there. With such a gift  
of purchased ore, his parents had early brought  
easy gleaming reality to bone, and in the yellow light  
from the lamp I think on of a bracelet  
and of a face so sure and faraway.  
So faraway from a world where parents  
moving on to other things  
must close a book with care,  
just so the pages--  
thin and fragile like old hopes--  
will not fold.

Ming-Hui Fan  
Durham, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
David Weber

## I Found Infinity In My Couch

"Where's my brush?" my sister asked.  
"I don't know," my brother said. "Where are my army boots?" he demanded.  
"I don't know," I said. "Where's my physics homework?" I inquired.  
"I don't know," my mother said. "Where are my bobby pins?" she wondered.  
"I don't know," my father said. "Where's my latest issue of Boy's Life?" he pondered.  
"I don't know," no one said. My father forgets sometimes that he doesn't get Boy's Life; he gets Highlights.  
"Where's Grandma?" we all said. "I don't know!" we all said.  
"Maybe she went home?" my mother offered brightly. But no, my grandmother's pink sloth-skin pocketbook was still hanging on the end of the couch; she never went anywhere without it.  
We all decided to check around the house.  
"I'll check the bathroom!" my sister exclaimed as she flitted into the bathroom. The door slammed, the dryer roared, and hairspray billowed out from under the door.  
"I'll check the basement," my brother said resignedly. The basement door slammed, and music roared from his stereo. The

floorboards shifted and heaved, and the Hummels clattered on their shelf.

"I'll look in the bedroom!" my mother said eagerly as she ran into the bedroom. Light from her television came from the room, and the opening theme to "All Ryan's Children are Without Hope in the General Hospital as the World Turns" could be heard.

"I'll check the roof!" my father said happily. (My father always was a little weird since the gondola accident in Venice.) He strolled out of the house, proceeded to find the ladder, set it against the side of the house, and clambered up.

"I'll check the couch!" I shouted above the pounding of the Rocking Slimeballs, the roar of the hair dryer, and the sound of Sylvia discovering her husband Desmond is her long lost twin brother who has been having an affair with her mother.

"What!?" my brother said, his head coming through the cellar door. We've ruined many doors that way.

"What!?" my sister exclaimed, opening the door to the bathroom and peering through a hairspray cloud with a mound of mousse in her hand.

My mother said nothing, too involved in Jack becoming a monk in the Himalayas after being dumped by his homosexual lover, Kenny.

There was a ruckus above our heads as my father fell off the roof into the flower garden.

"That's a good idea, son," he said, coming into the house with marigolds falling from his hair. "Look!" he said proudly, holding up his missing issue of Boy's Life, a few zinnias falling from the pages. (We still haven't figured out how it got on the roof.)

"Well," I explained, "I figured you always find everything else in the couch."

"That's good reasoning to me!" my father said. "I found your brush, dear," he said to my sister. "It was in the petunias." He held it up, a few of the aforementioned flowers falling from the bristles.

"Oh, thank you, Daddy Dear!" my sister gushed. "I don't know what I would have done without my brush!" She skipped back into the bathroom, reaching for the gel bottle. My father headed for the den, flipping through the magazine, pondering if he should order the x-ray glasses or the do-it-yourself hovercraft. A trail of mums preceded him. My brother shrugged and pulled his head back through the door, suffering a few splinters in the process. My mother cried as Phoebe was reunited with her lost pet aardvark, Thaddeus.

I turned to the couch to begin my search. Pulling up the first cushion, I discovered the following: a half-eaten Spam sandwich; a ten year old issue of Reader's Digest; a flashlight (batteries not included); my other argyle sock; and my hamster blissfully sleeping in a pile of shredded physics homework. Replacing the hamster in his cage, I salvaged what I could of my homework (hoping my teacher wouldn't mind the hamster teeth-marks). I then proceeded to the next cushion. Underneath was another cornucopia of interesting artifacts: some clothing, beer bottles, and assorted snack crumbs from my brother's last party; my brother's Uzi; Amelia Erhart's luggage; and a dodo bird snuggling with a carrier pigeon. The dodo glared at me in his dodo way, I excused myself for disturbing them, and I moved on.

The third and final cushion contained another plethora of pickings: a handful of pens and pencils; Hitler's diary; Elvis; a message left behind by the Atlantans before sinking into the sea; and eureka! my grandmother. "It's about time you found me" she said. "He keeps gyrating his hips, singing Love Me Tender and trying to kiss me!" She pointed at Elvis accusingly. I scolded him, slapping him on the hands, and helped my grandmother out of the couch.

Pulling some pencils from her hair, I dislodged some bobby pins, which fell to the floor; they were my mom's. Bending over to pick them up, I noticed my brother's army boots on my grandmother's feet.

(Continued on page 11)

"Grandma," I said scoldingly, "have you been stealing things again?"

She looked at me guiltily with puppy-eyes. Then she smiled and held up her hands. "Look what I found!" she beamed. Her hands overflowed with pennies.

I patted her on her head, gave her her pocketbook, and set her down in the dining room, where she proceeded to count her bounty.

Returning to the couch to replace the cushions, I saw something I missed before. It was lodged down the side of the inside of the couch. I plucked it out and blew the dust off. After the cloud dissipated (and I finished my sneezing fit), I examined my discovery.

It looked kind of like a lazy-eight. I don't mean that it was lazy like a bum, but that it was like an eight laying on its side. (So why didn't I just say that in the first place? I don't know.) Looking through the two loops, I noticed that I could not see anything on the other side. Looking more closely, I could only see a point...way off in the distance.

"Hmmm," I said.

Then it hit me. (I hit it back of course.) The sideways eight is the symbol for infinity. I looked with new wonder at my discovery.

I found infinity in my couch.

I eyed it; it eyed me back. This disconcerted me; I was not used to being stared in the face by infinity. I turned my face away and thought for a moment. My eyes fell upon the mirror on the wall (the kind that is framed by roses on vines, and naked, winged cherubs doing the kinds of things any naked; winged cherubs would do.) I got closer to the mirror and discovered that I could look at the symbol without too much of a problem; obviously, it wasn't as bad to look at infinity indirectly.

The sideways eight did not seem to actually lay directly in my hand; instead, it seemed to hover in the air above my hand, a pair of gaping black holes. Peering into the holes, I could still only see a point way in the distance, as if everything converged there, on the horizon....

"That's the vanishing point!" I exclaimed proudly to no one in general. I had learned that in art class.

"What?" my grandmother said, gazing up at me from her pile of copper.

"Uh, nothing. I mean, everything," I said, pointing to the infinity in my hand.

My grandmother looked at me as if I were weird, shrugged, and returned to counting.

I shrugged and returned my attention to the mirror. I blinked as I saw the symbol, for it seemed to have become larger than life. (Well, I estimated; it could have been larger than life, or smaller, or even the same size. I didn't happen to know the exact size of life at the time.) I blinked again--and it became infinitessably...infintessaly...infatessamably...infimally...REALLY small. I shook my head and rubbed my eyes, becoming confused. This thing was getting out of hand!

Indeed, as I looked up, I saw the symbol had left my hand. I walked over to the couch and saw that it had settled itself there again, between my hamster (escaped again, this time nibbling contentedly on my English homework) and a food bill for the Last Supper. There it lay, glaring at me, obviously satisfied to stay where it was.

"Well," I sighed as I put the cushions back, "the world probably isn't ready to find infinity yet, anyways." All visions of glory left my mind, probably ending up in the couch, along with infinity.

Vincent Spina  
Farmingdale, NY

*This is a poem about toast  
& jam & Evan & me playing  
house on a hot summer day.*

*This is not a love poem.*

*Bluebarb or strawberry?  
you ask.  
Both,  
I kiss.*

*The smell of toast adds comfort  
& you say,  
Where's the paper, Dear?*

*The day & the toast  
are warm & golden  
like you & I.*

*This is not a love poem.*

*Crumbs in the margarine tub--  
things people divorce over.*

*Not you & I  
for we have toast in a playhouse  
&  
this is a poem about toast.*

*Kristine Willing  
Catonsville, MD  
Catonsville High School  
Dr. Gary Blankenburg*

## Night Shift

*Casually he chuckles  
at Ralph's new hair-brained  
scheme,  
and admires Norton's job  
at the sewer.*

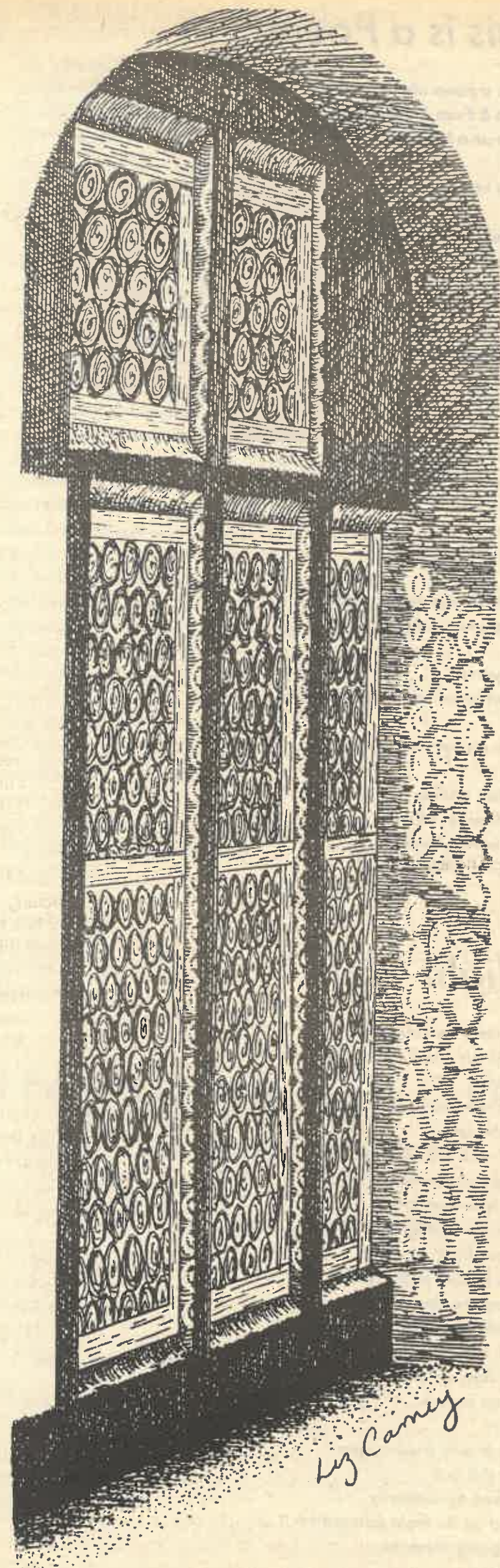
*A 7-inch tall Gleason  
peeks at him from  
his television land,  
and the all-night watchman  
stares back.*

*The human video cam  
scans the department,  
viewing clothing  
left sloppily on hangers  
by careless shoppers  
hours before.*

*He is only a passenger  
on this bus  
driven by authority,  
and all he looks forward to  
is going home to  
Alice.*

*Jane Elias  
Long Beach, NY  
Mrs. Pickus*

# Untitled



Liz Carney  
Dorchester, MA  
Gita Kupcinskas

Myhead is killing me. I'm draped across the back seat of the school bus, trying to get ready for the state cross country meet in Holmdel. My watch says I've got about two and a half hours until race time. It'll be more like five hours before my body stops feeling like it's been run over by a truck. Our coach, Mr. Cunningham, is standing in the aisle at the front of the bus, looking real smug. The old man's the last person I need to talk to, so I get a freshman to get me a set of the spikes he's passing out. The freshmen on the team have been trained since the beginning of the season to take very good care of the seniors. This one doesn't look happy about it, but he goes and gets them anyway. Good enough.

It takes him forever to get back. I just sit here staring out the window without really seeing anything. Eventually the freshman comes back and passes me a handful of little metal spikes. Actually, these are pretty large: three-quarter inches. Might as well be running on telephone poles. Now I remember. It rained hard last night so the course'll be a mess. The spikes are the right size, after all. That's one of the things I hate about Cunningham. He's always right.

Time to stop looking at the spikes and start putting them in. Except my body won't move. No doubt everyone on the bus can see my grimace as I bend down and pick up my duffel bag. I open the zipper and start randomly poking through it. Past the walkman, past a crumpled hoagie, past the thermos-full of peach schnapps. On to my racing shoes and a spike key. I take them out and drop the bag on the seat next to me. I try to screw the spikes into the sole of one shoe, but my fingers won't talk to my brain. Then the key snaps. Cheap plastic crap.

I fling the broken key onto the floor and watch it disappear under the seat. I put down the shoes and push off from the seat, barely managing to remain standing in the aisle. Every head on the bus swivels. I just lurch forward to the closest varsity runner, Alex. He stares up at me, "How're you doing, Josh?"

Like you don't know. "Not too good. I'm pretty tired." He nods. He knows the real story, but I can't guess at his opinion. He's a pretty cool guy—I bet he understands. Anyway. "Can I steal your spike key?" He pulls a key from the pocket of his sweatshirt and tosses it to me. I go for it, but my reflexes are slow, and it clatters to the floor. I work on bending down, but Alex beats me to it. This time he hands the key to me, not letting go until he's sure I'm clutching it. I force a little smile and shuffle back to my seat.

After a while, I manage to drive the spikes in. I stare at the spike key, then drop it in my bag. Alex won't need it back yet. I dig out my walkman and put on my headphones. In theory, some music will clear my head. I've forgotten what tape I loaded in, but I figure it out with only a little lag time. My brain must be less dead than it feels, because I know Pink Floyd pretty quick. The Final Cut. A very mellow album. I don't believe music can be depressing, only stages of mellow.

So I'm just sitting here, gorking out to a beat. One of the things I'm best at. That and running. I should try and keep thinking about running. Get psyched up. This is the big one. My mind is fighting me. As the tape winds and the trees fly by, it's thinking about partying. It wants to relax and have fun like it did last night, and not get nervous about this race. I want that. Maybe throw a couple of beers, work on that one Freshman girl, none of this running bull. Maybe I should just bag it, give up and veg. I feel my thoughts start slipping. You know that feeling when your head slumps down and you have to pull it up to stay awake, but it keeps falling. I wish my head didn't hurt so bad....

My head jerks up. I must have gone to sleep. The bus has stopped in front of the rather boring entrance to Holmdel State Park. The walkman is still going. It's got that stupid auto-reverse feature. I punch the stop button and tear the headphones

(Continued on page 13)

away from my ears, stuffing them in the bag along with all the other garbage I've pulled out. Close the bag, stand up. Ouch. I'm not as sore as I was, but I still don't feel ready to run. I drop the bag and stumble into the aisle. It still takes an effort to get to the front of the bus and go outside. Other guys are hauling stuff off the bus and setting up our "camp": a couple of ragged picnic blankets, a pair of water coolers and tons of duffel bags. Piles of stuff everywhere.

I go back to the bus and repack my bag, carefully burying the thermos at the bottom. Then I carry the duffel out to the island of blankets and the waiting faces of my teammates. It's always easy to tell the varsity runners from everyone else. They're moving around busily, looking very somber, while the rest of the team is smiling and relaxing. They separate like oil and water. I squat down between the two groups, positioning myself far away from Dave, the number two runner. He's good, but he's a jerk. He's the coach's boy who rats on us whenever we mess around. He has no life. It feels real good to finish a minute ahead of him. I'd rather hang out with the rest of the team. He starts walking around and talking to each of the varsity runners in turn, probably to deliver some brilliant piece of wisdom. It seems like everybody listens to him, which is strange. Usually everyone just tells him to shut up. Fortunately, he sits down instead of coming and talking to me.

It's incredible how much there is to do before a race. First is a warm-up run. We go out and look at the course. Not like we need to. It's obviously in lousy condition. Mud everywhere. You'd be better off running through glue. I've always hated the Holmdel course because of its monster hills, but today will be worse than usual. And my usual at Holmdel has never been very spectacular. I remember that as a freshman, when I didn't have to run varsity, I thought Holmdel was beautiful. Beautiful trees, rolling landscape, all that bit. Now I've learned to hate it.

Next comes signing up and getting race cards. Because I'm captain of the team, Cunningham expects me to do that. Pain. It's one of those jobs someone else could have done while I was out suffering through the warm-up. But instead I get to sit in line and wait my turn to shout at a deaf old race judge. Finally I get them. Then I have to distribute them to our top seven runners. Then get into race clothes, including stripping down into our team's revolting black shorts. They're ancient, and they've got holes in them to "let outheat" and let everyone see what's underneath. We crack about them a lot, until we actually have to wear them. Put on racing flats, complete with newly-installed three-quarter inch spikes. Then start stretching. This is key. If I can't get my muscles to recover, I'm going to be left behind. Undesirable.

The stretching goes well, but things are still going to be touch and go. And now comes that long walk from our campsite to the starting line. Only a hundred and fifty yards at the most, but it's a brutally long walk. Standing at the starting line is another pain. We do what are called striders; short sprints. They claim that it helps loosen your leg muscles but I think it just helps pass some unbearable seconds. We all bunch together in our slot on the racing line, surrounded by crowds of runners from the other teams. I watch the yellow-jacketed judge walk about twenty-five yards in front of the throng of runners and raise his gun. And, same as always, it's the first time I feel like I actually have to run. All the preliminary stuff doesn't really get you ready for what's coming. It's like waking up in bed screaming after a pleasant dream.

The gun fires.

Chaos erupts as everybody tries to elbow to the front of the pack. I'm up there, but not far enough. I usually have trouble with my starts, and I certainly didn't expect today to be an exception. Just have to battle back. I know Dave's in front of me, which should be some extra incentive.

The course starts on a long, gently-sloped meadow. I'm not hurting yet because I'm running on adrenaline. The end of this long grassy strip builds into a vicious hill; not the longest, but by

far the steepest. Now I can feel my bones creaking. Still, I'm passing people at a pretty good clip, zeroing in on where I want to be. The crowd goes thundering into a little narrow path that winds through a bunch of smaller hills. If we're joking, we call them moguls. Today, it's not funny. This segment of the course makes me claustrophobic. The path is real narrow, and it's very dark because it winds through a bunch of massive trees. At this point, I'm probably ahead of ninety percent of the racers, which isn't good enough, but I can wait. Once we break out of the hills, everything should be great. Already I can see Dave in front of me. Just the kick I need.

I shouldn't get ahead of myself, though. I can't pass him until I snag the guy in front of me, and the guy in front of him, and the guy after that. All three of them are wearing the same shirt. At first I don't know it, but then I remember the white and green of Del Barton. Scrub school, but a good team. The trick is not to get too excited over Dave, to just stay in tempo. Sure enough, the Del Bartons fall, one by one. And now, I'm staring down Dave's throat, baring my fangs for the kill. And then we come out of the hills.

Dave hears that someone is coming and makes the mistake of looking back. Stupid. He knows better, but he's also paranoid. And here I come. I pull up to him just as we reach the cornfield. The path here is cut out like a trench through the corn. As I go past, I mutter, "C'mon Dave," but he knows I don't mean it. He tries to hold my pace but gives up pretty quick. Face it, Dave, you know I'm better than you are.

There's another relatively flat stretch where I pick up another couple of runners. Then the path dives into what we call the "bowl." It's a huge hill which we have to run down, then double back and fight our way up the slope. I don't like it, but if I can keep cruising like this, everything will be fine. I start coasting down the hill. Maybe a little faster than I should, but I still need to pick up plenty of ground, and this is a good place to do it. I hit the bottom and jerk right--the turn is tight and I'm moving fast. I relax a little and swing right again. I'm staring at the hill of all hills. The lead runners have just broken the top. Push time.

Now some serious pain starts. My legs start buckling, and by halfway I feel like I'm inhaling napalm. Every muscle is aching. I can't fall apart here. Not when I'm this close. Here mental has to beat out physical. Ignore the pain. I'm collapsing. When will this hill end?

I hit the top. Groaning. My body is choking, strangling itself to death. The tough part is over, but the fight is only beginning. I've been skirmishing with the hills, and I've won. At a cost. Now I have to fight myself all the way in. Another mile, just one more mile. Downhill most of the way. No problems, right Josh?

I'm running in rewind. Instead of me passing people, people start passing me. They're getting ready to burst with their final kick. Not too many of them have gone by, but it's bad news. I'm in trouble. Up against Cunningham's proverbial wall. I catch myself looking back once. My concentration is slipping right along with my stamina.

Minutes drag by. I'm almost in. Victory is impossible. The team may place, but I've lost my medal. Now I'm gunning for survival. Even that is going to be tough. Every stride is agony. My stomach is churning, my head pounding. My legs feel ready to wither and fall off. My mind is the only thing that keeps me moving. And it is complaining.

In a hundred yards or so I'll break out of the woods and into the homestretch, another short field. Again I hear footsteps behind me. Slowly, somebody is reeling me in. He pulls up alongside. It's Dave and it's his turn to play aggressor. All I can do is weakly try and hold him off. He kicks.

I want to go with him, but I don't have the strength to chase. We clear the woods, and then he's gone. My feet are pounding into the ground, jarring my whole body with every stride. It seems like the finish line isn't getting any closer. I stumble forward, and finally reach the broken tape. I stagger into the "chute," the long roped-off line where everyone waits for their

(Continued from page 13) finish card. I latch onto the guy in front of me for support. He glances back, but doesn't say anything. He can see how bad I am. Even clawing at him, I can barely stand. Dave is almost right in front of me, no doubt very smug about the whole thing. The line presses forward, and I come out the other end. One of our freshmen is standing there. I crash into him. I guess he catches me. I keep picking up images from around me: Cunningham staring viciously, Dave walking away, Alex coming out of the chute. He helps the freshman support me. Somehow, they get my arms around their shoulders and haul me back to the camp. They prop me against a cooler and get me a cup of water, then just sit and watch. I pour water down my throat and just let myself slump down.

Somebody gets a conversation going, and everyone relaxes a little. Seems like every time I try to say something, I get cut off. I just tune out after a while. Cunningham comes back. Second place. Hurray for the team. Everybody is pretty excited. I don't follow it. I'm not going to bother with pretensions. My gut knows the truth. That race was ours. Past tense.

The JV runners start packing up while the varsity team just sits there, freaking out. It's like nobody realizes that we lost. How can they be so thrilled when it was that close? Eventually everyone takes off, and I have to lift my body to stay with the crowd. Slowly I drag my duffel bag back to the bus. I trudge to the back row of seats, but not before picking up a look of total disgust from Cunningham. At least he's finally acknowledging the fact that I finished the race.

I fall into a seat, sagging under my own weight. The bus leaves Holmdel and rumbles down the highway back home. First we stop at a place called the Jersey Freeze. One of Cunningham's great traditions is that after every meet in Holmdel, we stop at this place to get ice cream. Usually I enjoy it, but today I'm too sick to eat. Bag it. I stay on the bus while everyone else scrambles into the restaurant.

I think of my walkman, and start groping through my bag, trying to find it. Eventually my hand touches it, and I pull it out and start listening to the Floyd tape. I listen to it for about three minutes, and then the pitch starts dropping. Before I close my bag, I see my thermos, and I pull it out. I unscrew the lid and smell the schnapps. It's strong stuff. I was planning to celebrate with this during the ride home. Right now there's not much to celebrate. I stare at the thermos, then drink deep. What the hell.

I barely notice when the team comes back.

Chris Burns  
Haddonfield, NJ  
Mrs. Bloom

## The Dig

The woman with the doctorate in archeology has buried six dead chickens in the playground, near the tires. Each one is entombed as an ancient Jew; some are wrapped in linens and spices, others inspect the lids of ossuaries. They lie in their plaster catacombs, crossing their legs, leaning up on one wing, telling jokes and making fun of the woman's clogs and velour dresses. They reminisce as they slowly decompose. When the shovels of her students scrape the homemade tomb, the chickens flop onto their stomachs and play dead.

Susan Gray  
Westfield, NJ  
Solomon Schechter Day School  
Penny Harter

## On the Sixtieth Anniversary of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre

Don't look it up.  
If you want to know  
ask me. I was there  
squinting as though I had just come  
from the movies  
into that loud noon.  
I was there to see them.  
Eight men  
with carnation badges  
all shoulders and lapels  
knocking at the door.

Ask me  
or you won't hear the breath of jazz as it opened;  
eight tipped brims  
and later the staccato syncopation.  
You won't scuffle closer to the doorway  
to see the dancers.

Don't look it up;  
you can't possibly see  
the love  
that was in their eyes.

Jordan Ellenberg  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Peggy Pfeiffer

## Conversation

I talk to you  
and am moved through  
history  
in the beginning...  
science  
there was light...  
religion  
and God said...  
philosophy  
it is good.

Like mourning doves  
with dawn before us  
Like blue birds  
on barbed wire

We balance on  
a filament  
of reason.

At daybreak  
the whisper  
of our voices  
blurs in the  
rustling wind.

Tonya Yoder  
Vienna, Va  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen

I was sitting at my desk in my room in my house as it was my custom to do at about that time of the day. It was night, actually, but there are no windows in that room and I keep it lighted all day. I had read in National Geographic the previous month that in Alaska the sun shines for up to six months at a time. I had thought it was a good idea then. I still think so. What happened on that night at about that time of the day was that I turned around and saw an anaconda wrapped around my bookshelf.

The anaconda's natural habitats are tropical rivers east of the Andes and in Trinidad.

My house is not on a tropical river, so I knew that the anaconda was not in its natural habitat. From reading National Geographic I knew that natural habitat is very important to animals, especially anacondas. I decided to simulate a tropical river in Trinidad as best I could. I went downstairs and drew some warm water from the tap. It tasted a little greasy but I was sure that was all right. I brought the water back upstairs in a bucket and poured it over the anaconda. It moved slightly, dislodging a few novels. I made a few more trips and before long there was a sizable puddle beneath the bookcase. Very nice. The anaconda swished his tail through the water a few times and seemed somewhat more content. I noticed that volumes A-Barton, Lalo-Montpar, and Pewter-Richilieu of my encyclopedia were ruined. That was all right too. After all, four or five letters out of twenty-six is a small price to pay for a tropical river in one's bookcase. It was approaching the time of the day when I went to bed, so I did.

Later I woke up. The anaconda looked unhappy, even though the river was holding up nicely. I thought about this for some time. Then I realized that the lights were still on their Alaska schedule. I turned the lights off and the anaconda immediately relaxed. I noticed that it seemed a little bigger than it had yesterday.

The next day I had to go out in the street to buy a baobab. Ordinarily I do not do this. Go out in the street, that is. Although, ordinarily, I do not buy a baobab either. In any case it was an unusual experience for me. However, it seemed to me that a baobab would be an appropriate item for a tropical river setting, and I understood that sacrifices had to be made in order to provide authenticity. So it was that I was in the street, and later in a store that advertises a wide variety of plants. The proprietor watched me, curious but distant, as though I were some kind of exotic orchid below glass.

"I'd like to buy a baobab," I said.

"A baobab?"

"Yes. Such as those found near tropical rivers east of the Andes and in Trinidad."

He trudged into the back room, hunched like a rat in a too-small hole. He came back a few minutes later with a stunted tree in an olive green pot. Greyish dirt was leaking from the sides. The tree was not nearly so impressive to my untrained eye as those featured in National Geographic. However, I could tell from my baobab checklist (which I had torn from the magazine the previous night) that it was authentic. I took the pot from the proprietor; he let go eagerly. I handed him a few deeply creased bills and left before he could say anything else. In the street people looked around me at traffic signs. I was glad when I arrived home and shut the door against the city.

I found that there was a residue of soil lining the floor of my room, only a thin dusting in most parts but thick enough near the bookcase to plant a baobab in. I took the tree out of the pot. It came with no resistance. As soon as I planted the baobab it looked much healthier. The anaconda looked at me listlessly. There was moss growing from between the books on the shelf.

One night I woke up and thought I heard macaws screaming in my window.

Some days later the anaconda was far more vigorous than it

had been on its arrival. It was nearly twice as long and the sluggishness in its eyes was gone. It had extended a loop of itself around the baobab, which was approaching in quality the pictures I had seen in the magazine. I was downstairs filling the bucket for the river when I realized that the baobab pot, being larger, would be more convenient. I went up to get it but I couldn't find it, which was strange as I hardly ever move anything once I've put it down. I was going to go finish with the bucket, but looking down at the river I realized that the water had begun to flow on its own, a sullen current from the hall to the wall under the window. That was good; it meant I didn't have to go downstairs anymore. I was tired of downstairs. It was like the street. It was like a foreign country where they spoke a language almost the same as our own.

The only thing I actually knew about anacondas was that they wrapped themselves around South Americans until they were dead. The South Americans, I mean. I had read about it in a National Geographic story some months ago. The South Americans didn't worry about it too much. You'd expect them to have an anaconda hotline, or something, to deal with it. They don't. There was a picture of an anaconda wrapped around a South American. Some others were standing nearby, just watching. I imagined them very calm, especially the wrapped one, making small talk in South American, taking a siesta after it was all over.

By the next day after that the baobab had sprouted further. Its tendrils were wound around the books on the shelf, they had climbed the legs of the desk, they had dipped listlessly into the river. I thought I felt one touch my ankle but when I looked down I saw only soil and floorboards. It was at least fifteen feet tall, although I didn't remember the room being that high. Just then I picked up the phone, which I had forgotten was there. The buttons were stubborn under my fingers but eventually there was ringing on the other end. The man from the plant store picked up the phone. I asked him to come over right away, if he could. I told him it was a baobab emergency. His voice through the phone sounded underwater, as though his forbears had never made the transition from sea to land. He said he would be right over, though, so it was all right.

While I was waiting for the baobab man I noticed that there were tiny piranhas in the river. I dangled my toes in the water and they rubbed against me like cats.

When the doorbell rang I had to go downstairs to answer it. Everything looked faintly off, every right angle transformed to ninety-one or eighty-nine degrees. The doorbell rang again and I opened the door. The baobab man awaited me, stoop-shouldered. I told him the problem was upstairs. He shrugged and pushed past me. By the third step his hands were scraping the ground; by the sixth his slouch had become a slow scurry. When he reached the landing he turned around and his eyes and teeth were tiny and sharp. By the time he reached the top of the stairs his clothes had become fur, sweaty and matted. I gestured towards the door and he pawed it open without hesitation. The anaconda was very fast. The baobab man turned around once and to my delight I saw that his face was like that of a South American. The coils of the anaconda were like foliage growing thicker and thicker. At the end there was a flash of tooth.

Once I tried to make out the ceiling beyond the crown of the baobab but the branches were much too thick. Now I mostly sit on the outcropping that my desk is and look at the anaconda. Periodically I watch the baobab man, who bobs up and down peristaltically inside it, somewhere beneath where the encyclopedias were. Sometimes I hear car horns from behind me like the calls of imaginary beasts.

Jordan Ellenberg  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Peggy Pfeiffer

page 16

# Gramma

I would jaunt  
down to gramma's  
everyday.  
Skipping down  
the hill I went  
heading for Gramma's...  
I was so young.  
Me and Gram  
picked peas  
in the radiant afternoon.  
"Stay away from  
the BLACK BUSH!"  
Gramma used to scold,  
"I don't want ya  
gettin' jiggers!"

The BLACK BUSH, just like DEATH,  
so hard to understand

With a pile o' peas  
in the old silver bucket  
We trudged up  
to the house  
I, being so young,  
carefully tiptoed  
way around the  
BLACK BUSH

The BLACK BUSH, just like DEATH,  
growled at me from behind  
its black curtain of leaves

From the window  
I spied  
the BLACK BUSH.  
It was big,  
engulfing  
a large portion  
of the  
pea patch

The BLACK BUSH, just like DEATH  
glared at me defiantly  
just begging me to come outside  
and get close enough  
so it could pierce me  
with its jiggers

Then one night  
something happened  
to Gramma.  
Momma said,  
"Gramma  
won't be  
picking peas anymore,  
Gramma's...

Gone"

The BLACK BUSH must have taken  
her away.

Melanie Spotts  
Halifax, PA  
Halifax Area High School  
Agnes Kelly



Cemetery Gates  
Cynthia Hacker  
Dumont, NJ

## Communion

I liked to ride my bike to a crabbing dock  
when the sun started to sink  
over Duck, North Carolina.  
Today there were at least a dozen people  
dangling their strings over the edge.  
I sat there on the dock  
breathing in the breeze  
and the fishy bait smell.  
The sun threw a million golden triangles onto the bay.

"Hsss! Look!"  
whispered a man in Birkenstocks and plaid bathing shorts.  
We all followed his finger to the water--  
"What?"  
"Where?"  
"I can't see anything."  
And then we saw it--  
a Snake,  
green and brown and black like the water,  
eyes staring up at the giant figures above.

"Lookitim!" said an old man with gold teeth.  
"That's a copperhead."  
"Where did he go?" screeched a young mother,  
clinging to her red-faced little boy.  
We scanned the green-gold surface--  
"There he is!"--  
and watched him zigzag through the water.

He dipped his head,  
then surfaced, gliding warily around us.  
We stared in terrified delight.  
"He's dancing," said a little girl.  
"Can we take him home?"  
asked her brother.  
And then the Snake was gone.

We watched the crabs battle  
on the floor of the bay  
and listened to the water lap up against the dock.  
The sun turned into a red ball of fire,  
and the water shimmered like burnished gold.

Evelyn Wiener  
Chevy Chase, MD  
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School  
Marilyn Alberts



# K-Mart Used to Look So Good

It wasn't quite right and Jamie knew it. He could just about hear his kindergarden teacher warning in the background that stealing is no good. He looked at Harry and wanted to tell him so.

But Harry wasn't looking at him. Harry was looking at the big red SALE sign in the window.

"It's a shame we're rippin' 'em off when the stuff's cheaper!" Harry said. "Can't wait until tomorrow, eh Jamie?"

Jamie knew he was serious. Too bad Harry was so stupid. He didn't realize that stuff's stuff and SALE or no sale, it didn't matter.

Jamie told Harry that he had to go home and Harry said that he was a chicken, but Jamie walked away anyway. He walked through the parking lot and imagined himself in the cars that he passed. He walked by an old Cadillac and he imagined that he was a grandfather and his four grandchildren were in the back seat begging him to go above the speed limit and to change the radio station to some cool music. That's what Jamie always said to his grandfather.

Jamie got to the corner and noticed a police car at the intersection. He imagined he was in Mayberry and that he could be arrested for jaywalking. He crossed the street right outside the crosswalk and waited for the policeman to notice.

He got to the other side of the street and felt good.

Boy, he thought, I really have something to tell Harry now.

He walked in his house and found his mom. She was reading the paper--the ads section. He looked at her and the paper and said hi.

The other side of the paper had something about a Big Sale at K-Mart.

Jamie moved to the phone and waited.

It rang five minutes later. Grandma was late. She must've had a hair appointment tonight, Jamie thought.

"Hi dear. Everything all right?"

"Yes."

"Okay, just wanted to say hi," every night of every week of every month of every year.

"Yeah. Hi Grandma."

"Talk to you later." Tomorrow at 7:30. "Bye."

Jamie hung up and went upstairs. He reached for his homework and decided not to do it but he left his book open in case his mom walked in the room or something.

It didn't take very long for Jamie to fall asleep.

The next day after school Jamie met Harry at K-Mart. Harry had on jeans and a t-shirt and so did Jamie, but Harry's looked meaner. Something about the rips in the knees, Jamie thought.

They walked in and the first thing Jamie noticed was the sterile light which seemed to splash everyone in K-Mart. It bothered Jamie but no one else seemed to care.

"Attention K-Mart shoppers. Today is Thursday and our Thursday sale is on feminine protection in aisle 16."

From then on Harry laughed every time they passed a girl.

They got to the candy aisle and Harry walked slower.

"Here."

Jamie stood and watched Harry sway through the aisle. He felt like everyone was watching them but he kept moving. The candy looked pretty bad. In fact, it looked awful and Jamie didn't want any of it but Harry put some in Jamie's pocket and walked to the other side of the aisle.

Jamie looked up and saw a round mirror. His face looked distorted and he wished he was in the Fun House because he wasn't having any fun in K-Mart.

It was time to leave. Jamie looked up while he was walking out of K-Mart.

When they got outside Harry was yelling about something

being great but Jamie was still looking up. The sun was being squeezed through the clouds and it made lines at angles to the ground. Jamie counted twelve of them. It looked to Jamie as if someone could take a giant scissors and cut them and the sky would fall.

Jill Himelfarb  
Potomac, MD  
Peggy Pfeiffer

## To Salvador Dali, having just visited a museum where your work was not exhibited

*I owe you a few things*

*A lust for Spanish men  
for their eyes like glass eggs  
in dark sockets, and for  
the tweak of a greasy moustache  
Yours was huge.*

*A drawer fetish  
(Although mine were never  
as deep as yours)  
If my shadows were darker  
I would be the woman  
I would let you open each drawer.*

*Elongation  
My fingers are longer than before  
And I have come to love  
a substantial nose  
When the man at the yard sale  
wanted the stilts,  
I would not sell them.*

*And at last, water.  
Like a guest I offer you drink  
for drink  
for the first time I wet my fingers  
and for the ocean you spilled  
into my living room  
Mostly, for the fire in your bed.  
It was only your second death  
Like everything else,  
you did it to excess.  
In a photograph  
above my bed  
you are eyes and moustache  
larger than your whispers  
from behind the museum walls.*

Melissa Levine  
Bethesda, MD  
Peggy Pfeiffer



Scott Tozer  
Fairless Hills, PA  
Pennsbury High School  
R. Lefferts  
D. Denick

## The Good, The Bad, and the Okra

There are things in life which we must classify, things which we must separate one from another. Among these things are the foods we eat. As Bill Watterson's Calvin once observed, "There's an inverse relationship between how good something is for you, and how much fun it is." This is quite obviously true, and using this knowledge we can categorize food into four groups. Contrary to popular belief, the four basic food groups are not Grain, Proteins, Milk, and Carbohydrates, but (1) Food which Tastes Good But is Not Healthy, (2) Food which Tastes Disgusting But is Healthy, (3) Food which tastes Disgusting And is Also Unhealthy, and finally, (4) Food which Tastes Good and is Good For You, Too.

Group number one should be really easy to specify. Anything with more than, say, nine thousand calories per serving is not healthy. Now, if we look at this group and remove such inorganics as small buildings, inedible organics such as house pets (well, I don't know about your pets, but my Fluffy would never put up with such hanky panky...), and eventually you get down to the real food. I can't, of course, list them all here, but some of them are: anything made by Cadbury, anything made by Ben and Jerry's (in case you are unfortunate enough not to be familiar with B & J ice cream, keep in mind that it is the only food in the world with more than one hundred percent sugar, featuring such flavors as Dastardly Mash and Cherry Garcia), anything on which you can smell the confectioner's sugar, and numerous other things. But besides being unhealthy by having too much sugar, food can be unhealthy by having too much (yech) cholesterol. Good examples of these are any food item from any fast food restaurant anywhere in the world. Avoid Chinese fast food because not only will it have really disgustingly high cholesterol levels, but also, you can't really be sure what animal it was before it died. Of course, it still tastes good.

Some food is good for you, but is so unbearably disgusting that only your mother or the Inquisition would ever force you to eat it. This food is the classic basis for things that stupid bratty kids in sixties sitcoms and comic strips always whine to their artificial parents about. We're talking brussels sprouts, asparagus, eggplant, tofu, and the crown prince of them all: okra. Okra, in my opinion, is a Southern biological warfare experiment which escaped from the lab to terrorize children who didn't clean under their beds regularly. I mean, how else could something so hideously disgusting yet still healthy come into existence? Ya gotta wonder. It seems strange somehow that the most disgusting foods are vegetables, but if you're into sharing

breakfast with your cat, you can get some high protein food which really has some unique flavor combinations. This food is strange, because as you grow older, you acquire a taste for most of these foods. I can bear eggplant and actually enjoy asparagus, but I still don't like Brussels sprouts or tofu, and I will never like okra. Okra is an acquired taste, to be sure, but then, gonorrhoea is an acquired disease.

The third group of food is one which I personally try to avoid at all costs. These are the goods which have no purpose and no redeeming qualities whatsoever and should not even be sampled, let alone eaten on a regular basis. These are the things which sane people do not eat, and if they do, they immediately begin searching for a stomach pump, or, in extreme cases, the plunger. This category of foods includes such hellish concoctions as the last fifteen flavors at Murgatroyd's Hundred and One: such things as Raspberry Banana Fudge Ripple. Other things which are not healthy and taste really bad are choice delicacies such as halvah, that wonderful food which sadistic parents like to give to their unsuspecting children while saying "Try it, you'll like it--it's a Middle Eastern dessert." How many of us considered that in the Middle East they also eat camels and larval slimy things, as we eagerly popped the cube of multicolored hell into our mouths. Painfully few. Some foods are neither healthy nor unhealthy, but taste so bad that they can be included in this category anyway for inducing raling. Yes, of course, I am talking about liver. This is an organ which is so important in life that it should remain with the animal in death, because that way we don't have to eat it.

The fourth category, the one which we all keep hoping will exist one day, is food which is not only healthy, but tastes good too. We're talking high protein chocolate and low fat ice cream which doesn't taste like Vaseline. There actually are some foods which do fit into this category, but even as we lift the fork to our mouth we hear C. Everett in the next room saying that it has been found to be linked to cancer of the nose hair in laboratory rats. For your information, this rare carcinoma (Bommeldorfer's rhinocilianoma) is the cause of death of 0.0000000001 (or two guys in Moonshine, Kentucky) percent of the American public each year. The disease causes your nose to swell until it explodes, some weeks later, at which time the disease is untreatable and the patient's internal organs should be carefully swept up. So until we actually figure out how to remove the fat, cholesterol, sugar, and all the other icky things we eat from our food without making it taste like a petroleum product, this category will unfortunately remain the smallest.

So bearing in mind the contents of each of the four basic food groups, several options for a diet are available to you. The first is to pig out on the first group and enjoy yourself thoroughly. And gain around forty-five hundred pounds in the process. The next, obviously, is to pig out on the second group. This diet will not make you gain weight, but in subscribing to this diet you are experiencing Chinese Hell number 431, right up there with the Hell of Having Your Kneecaps Chewed Off By The Pet Gerbil You Flushed Before He Was Ready. The third diet is an unpleasant if not downright scary prospect. This is the diet for the person who wants to commit suicide the slow way. The diet for the masochist who not only enjoys making himself sick, but also has no mirrors in his house. The fourth diet, therefore, would seem to be the best: all roses and song. Unfortunately, eating roses and song would provide you with more calories than this diet would, because the entire diet consists of less food than the average lemming eats just before it dies. So, if you want to enjoy starving to death, be my guest. However, there is now a fifth option available to you through the grace of Mass Media. The fifth choice is to eat in moderation. See the John Roy Celebrity Diet: "How I Lost 549 Pounds in Three Days" for information. On sale now at a store really really far away from you.

John Roy  
Bethesda, MD  
Mrs. Mohr

# Scene Study

Desdemona was living flame; she was bright and beautiful and she burned Othello into cinders with every glance and move and touch—burned him into insanity. And she wasn't even trying! She loved him, of course; she saw him going up in flames and looked for the match everywhere but in her own hand. I admired Desdemona tremendously, her power and her innocence. Her only fault was her forgiving nature—she absolves Othello in the end, you know, of the sin of her own murder. Forgiveness chafes, an unrequested gift; I think there is nothing the admittedly guilty fear more.

This is what I thought as I lay on our stolen gym mat in the vestry of the abandoned church and watched Ronnie walk slowly towards me. I was supposed to be asleep; I opened my eyes a dime's thickness to peer at his dark shape through the dust on my eyelashes. His brow was mottled and wrinkled in fury. The candle in his hand shook and threw irregular flashes of light on the red piping of his black robe.

At the foot of the mat he stopped. He breathed as though to speak, but what came out was a growl, a snarl, a snapped off sigh and a flash of teeth. I shut my eyes again. For once I was truly afraid of him. Now who was waiting for me, should I open my eyes, was truly Othello and I felt Desdemona seep up into my bones from the mat, with the hot air of Cyprus wrapped around us both. Deep inside me the forgotten sense of dealing with magic unfolded and glimmered, reborn. I heard a shuffle as he walked to me, the exclamations of the air as he crouched down to put a shaking hand on my arm, as without a hesitation he began the old recitation:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

Let me not name it to you, you chase stars!

It is the cause.

When I went to let the dog out, I grabbed Ronnie's letter off the counter. I hate reading mail in the presence of other people—you are forced either to repress your reactions or to explain your giggles, gasps, or sudden sobriety. I shoved the envelope inconspicuously into my pocket as I opened the door and the puppy and I walked out into the night.

It was just cold enough to make you keep your hands in your pockets, the patio bricks dark, almost blood-colored, and shining with old rain. The grass was dead, yellowed by winter, but the sky was beautiful. It was full of towering, bulbous clouds, a shocking bleached white against navy passages of clear sky. You could see every twig and dripping, brown leaf outlined against them, too; the glowing disk of the moon was rising, glorifying the grass and the branches with silver edges, making the dog into a comet's shadow as he streaked across the yard.

I ripped up the envelope trying to get the letter out; I am clumsy with my fingers. The moon lightened the night just enough to read Ronnie's lean, tall scratchings in blue ink on torn loose-leaf:

Dear Jenifer,

I heard Stairway-to-Heaven for the first time on the radio today, and I don't care what ya'll say, I do not like that song. Deac says it'll grow on me. He came over yesterday.

When I was younger, I was superstitious, I believed in the magic of everything. My vision seemed to clear things, revealing hidden lives in ordinary objects: a sweater thrown over a chair became a leering octopus as the sun went down, and the octopus was more real to me than the sweater. Once, my grandmother gave me two small rhinestone clips. I buried them in a package of fern leaves and pine needles under a crooked-

trunked apple tree in our backyard. I believed that when the setting sun became a particular shade of mangoed yellow, I should look where it hit the ground in front of the apple tree and I would find my treasure buried there. My belief in the fantastic rituals of pirates, and other treasure grubbers who never lived, held the sun in its path.

For I did find them again, a few times, kneeling in the damp earth with brown dirt rings under my fingernails as I unwrapped my decaying package. I would enclose the clips in fresh leaves and bury them again, stamping on the disturbed dirt with summer-bare feet. That I could find them again with the aid of the sun, I did not question. The summer was bright and enchanted, and solstices were not yet part of my world.

I'm all right and Mary is okay, too, but she works now and she's dead tired a lot. Eric says to call him, he's sick of leaving you messages—he misses you. Call me, too, you know I hate writing letters.

The year I was twelve my great-aunt died forty-eight hours before Christmas. My mother went to the hospital, my father stopped putting lights on the tree. My grandmother refused to go into the wake when we arrived at the funeral home, so I sat alone with her and watched her cry in the sadistically revealing winter light. The plastic seats of the station wagon gnawed on my legs with teeth of ice and the air froze. I watched her and could not make myself believe that the tears flooding her glasses like mercury and rolling down her waxpaper cheeks were anything but tears. Inconsolable, abandoned tears that sucked up the daylight. I held her hands, I held her in my arms, and tried not to listen to her choked words. Once I heard her say, "She was all I had left." I winced as I pressed the loose yellow skin and brittle twiggy bones of her shaking hands between my warm, soft fingers.

That night I lay in bed and watched the sun set, a fat, sloppy, leaking ball of orange sliding down my window. Nothing but branches against the purple sky in the background. No power, no magic. The sweater on my chair remained a sweater in this new sun's impotent grasp; the pattern in the cloth of my bed's canopy that used to resemble wide, surprised faces with starry blue eyes, now was reduced to a pattern of dead cornflower bouquets. I felt achingly old, and jaded. My gaze ran around my room like a carousel horse, tossing half-hearted glances like brass rings at the doorknob and the bedpost, but never halting its serene gallop. No object was worthy of notice. I lay there until the whole room was swallowed up into a gray like that of soot.

That year I learned about solstices in school, and declared the winter solstice to be my only holiday. It was older than Christmas, I explained, and scientifically provable. Without a touch of imagination at all, you could see it, feel its rock-hard truth; my new religion was confirmed with a telescope.

I could never find my clips either. I dug up half the yard during one sunset or another, but now the sun approached and receded in predictable patterns, and its rays scattered around the yard. But they never touched the earth so gently that it would yield up my sparkling stones again.

So, how are you? Doing anymore shows? Been back to the Met?

It was soon after that, when I was blundering through my early adolescence like some poor blind laboratory animal in a cardboard maze, that my parents decided to make the back room into a den and moved everything out to peel and paint and build. The room had the scraped, chemical smell of hardware stores, and the softest noise clattered in echo from wall to wall for long solid minutes. The room had one window, balanced on its sill, I could see the backyard far below, and the moon far above, and a long ribbon of cityscape between them.

I would turn off the light, and in the impenetrable black air, I could feel my flesh relax and then melt away. I evaporated and

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became the only dust in this clean cornered room. Disembodied, I would watch the moon rise over the P.S. 12 and the apartment buildings and the apple tree, and I was amazed at its searing bare light. Sometimes I would sing to the moon, kneeling on the window sill with my hands and face pressed against the cool glass; wordless, ebony songs of seduction, filled with the sound of crushed vowels and underscored by the hum of the highway. My soul was the empty side of night--clear and dark, longing for the moon's return to illuminate the crannies of the earth. I sang whatever song I thought might bring its barren enchantments down.

The songs would drip down the walls into a puddle on the floor. The moon dropped down around the curve of the earth and was gone. I felt that my soul was now very, very dark. I would come back to my senses, throat dry, lost in a dark room.

I've been in kind of a slump. I get along with my Mom by avoiding her. How are you and your Dad? Still rocky? I know. Remember, what happens, happens. O-bladee-O-bladah, life goes on. Til next time, Desdemona--

Ronnie

In the yard the wind is picking up, the paper flaps and twists like a small animal in my hands. The moon is fading behind a grandfather of a cloud. I shove Ronnie's letter back into my pocket, along with my hands. The dog is sitting impatiently by the stairs; his flopping tail shakes his whole body. We go back inside.

Out, strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my face?

Desdemona, reeling from Othello's blow, collapses on the red gym mat. Propping herself gingerly on her elbows, she shudders as she turns toward him and she sees his mad eyes flinch away from her terrified gaze even as he raises his hand toward her with the thick cloth in his hand. I saw real, wet tears glowing on Ronnie's cheeks. I missed a line, staring at his shining cheeks. "Down, strumpet!" Othello thunders, choking on the last syllable. The black cloth descends, and finally Desdemona grabs at it, pushes it away.

"Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!" she cries, edging away from him, watching his eyes.

He must look away, but he mutters, "Nay, and you strive...."

She sees her chance, and is on her feet, stumbling for the door; "But half an hour!"

She is not quick enough; his long arm grabs her wrist. She struggles, pounding on his arms, lashing back and forth as he wraps the black cloth around her and she falls to the floor.

"Being done, there is no pause!"

"Noo--!" Desdemona screams, another wrong line, and is cut off mid-crescendo.

"It is too late." Silence. I opened my eyes. Darkness.

I sat up, and pulled the black cloth off my face and arms. I was sobbing. Ronnie gave me a hand, and I stood up, wobbling. Ronnie was still crying.

"Are you okay?" he asks. "Oh, Jen, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to throw you like that. I'm so sorry."

We stand slumped together in the buzzing air of the vestry, crying, exorcising the spirits of Desdemona and Othello. I nod to tell him I'm all right. Ronnie has a dark soul, too, I think now. Dark souls are very sensitive to light.

Pale and shaking, we call it a day.

Jenifer Braun  
Elizabeth, NJ  
The Oak Knoll School  
Pat Mahoney  
Harriet Marcus

## Distributing Food at the Soup Kitchen

He struts in front of me, exposing his grimy plumage like a peacock. The sinews in his tough old bird's neck say that he will never appeal to me, the white girl who sits among the paper sacks of food. His roost is out there, somewhere. Mine is here. The sticky oranges are my eggs, doled out three in a bag with sandwiches for the old men with no teeth, and coagulated pastries for the families with children.

"You got anything sweet here besides yourself?" he asks, smiling so I can see the holes in his gums. I think of heroin. When he takes off his shades, his bloodshot eyes and the scar on his cheek twitch as he leans close and whispers his name. "Al-Jabbar, ain't nobody else do what I do. God, he done give me the big one, the only one. What you say your name is, girl?"

Recoiling into suburban albumen, tucking all limbs safely inside, I poke Betty, the fat social worker. Al-Jabbar stumbles out, reminding me, "I like you, girl." When I come here next week, I hope he is frozen or dead, or can't find his way back.

Susan Gray  
Westfield, NJ  
Solomon Schechter Day School  
Penny Harter

## Untitled

Everyone's heard of "Poetry in Motion."  
Well, I've just invented  
"Literature in Motion."  
I ran over the newspaper  
with the lawnmower  
yesterday.  
It was just  
innocently  
lying there,  
carefully placed  
by a newsmedia transfer  
engineer.  
Suddenly  
it was  
all over the place.  
Decapitated photographs  
mangled articles  
obliterated cartoons  
devastated editorials  
all one giant love letter  
to humanity.  
Destroyed.  
I felt like Fawn Hall.  
King of guilty.

But I wouldn't think twice about doing it again.

Mike Clark  
Germantown, MD  
Mrs. Barbara Early

"God does not exist," she whispered to the doorman as she walked out of her building onto Central Park West. The early April air was cool, and it carried her doorman's Italian curses past her and into the park. She loved this type of weather, and today she was going to walk down the avenue to Columbus Circle, where she would sit on the steps and watch the juggler perform.

Nearing the corner of her block, she saw an old lady dressed in black saying her rosary beads. "God does not exist," she said, but the lady did not hear her. She then stepped directly in front of the woman and mouthed the words. With an astonished and insulted air, the woman briskly stepped around her and crossed the street.

"I am a strange girl in a strange land," Izzy thought to herself. Her bony knees and frizzy red hair convinced her of this. In fact, her hair was so frizzy that it stuck up on top of her head to a height four inches taller than she was. She had measured it once. "I am Frizzy Izzy the Great." Satisfied with her title, she continued to walk.

There were other reasons why she was strange, but she did not think about these. The main one was that she pretended to be anorexic. She was five feet, eight inches tall, had very long, skinny legs, and ate whenever she had the urge, which was often. But after each meal that she ate with her mother, she solemnly got up from the table and went to the bathroom. Once inside, she would make gurgling noises for about five minutes, flush the toilet two times, and then lie on the living room couch complaining of hunger.

"But you're just digesting your food, Izzy," her mother would say.

"Maybe I am not," Izzy would hint, hints that were missed as often as they missed going to church. Don't worry Iz, Mom will get it soon, Izzy said to herself, after three and a half months of trying.

As Izzy walked, she lifted up her sharp knees high in the air, like a marching soldier. She liked walking this way because it made people on the street uncomfortable. Izzy loved making people uncomfortable, this being, of course, another thing that made her strange. She was going to Columbus Circle to make the juggler uncomfortable. She usually perched herself on the steps, high enough so that the whole crowd could see her. While he juggled, she imitated him, distorted her face in odd ways, and made bird-like, squeaking noises. Often she made him miss one of the multi-colored balls, and he would turn to her with a pained expression on his painted white face. Izzy would then smile, raise her eyebrows three times, and stick out her tongue.

Today, when the juggler's act was finished, Izzy sat with her pointy knees sticking straight into the air until the crowd dispersed. "Juggler man," she cooed from her perch.

The white face looked at her and replied, "What do you want?"

"I have a proposition for you," she said, walking up to him, lifting her knees as high as possible. "My father is an agent, and if you let me join your act, I'll make him represent you." The juggler stopped counting the money he had collected in his black felt hat, and was unsure of what to say.

"Hmmm," Izzy said, peering into the hat. "Not much money in there, I must say. Looks like you need an agent to get you some work."

"Who are you?" the juggler asked, as if to say, "Why do you torment me?"

"I am Frizzy Izzy the Great Eckstein," she said smiling. "I'm in ninth grade." Then she said with mock solemnity, "You should pity me because I am an anorexic." As he did not know what to

make of the girl, the juggler started packing up his props, trying to ignore her.

Izzy picked up one of the apples he used in his act, and started devouring it as emphatically as possible. "That's right," she said while chewing. "I am an anorexic and it's your fault 'cause you won't let me be in your act." She stuck a seed in between her two front teeth, and dropped the apple core into his hat. She walked directly up to him, so that his white face was practically touching her pink, freckled one, and said, "Since you won't accept my help, you're going to starve. God does not exist, you know. Now if you'll excuse me, I have important things to tend to. I do not think I will be able to attend your performances anymore, either." Walking as strangely as she could, Izzy left the circle, leaving the juggler, a man of intelligence and sensitivity, staring after her, disturbed.

That evening at dinner, Izzy ate four helpings of spaghetti and meat balls. When she had slithered the last strand in between her front teeth, she abruptly left the table and went to the bathroom. "She'll get it tonight," she thought as she closed the beige door behind her.

Her mother, an attractive woman with chestnut brown hair and a dignified face, did not notice that Izzy had left. She was going over the accounts of her store, "Frivolity," a boutique for rich women. She usually did something useful while they ate, since it seemed to her that Izzy was content talking to herself.

One half hour later, Mrs. Eckstein, realizing that Izzy had been in the bathroom for a while, called to her, "Do you want some Ex-Lax?"

Exasperated, Izzy walked out of the bathroom after she had finished placing her comic book back under the rug. She kept it there for entertainment purposes while she waited. Sometimes she even took some of her mother's expensive round soaps and tried to juggle.

"I wasn't on the toilet, Mom. Jeez. I was bending over it," she said in her most offended tone, saved for occasions like these.

"Why, did you lose an earring or something?" her mother replied, not looking up from her papers.

"No, I lost my mind. I'm going to take a walk."

Before Izzy could walk out the door of her building, the doorman shouted to her, "I don't want to hear your blasphemies!"

"My what?" Izzy asked innocently.

"Oh you," he muttered under his breath. "Why can't you be more like your mother?"

Izzy looked across the street to the black outlines of the tree-tops in the park. "I bet that's where that stupid juggler sleeps," she thought to herself. But the twisted feeling at the bottom of her stomach was not anger for the juggler.

Izzy did not feel like walking aimlessly, but since her father lived in Los Angeles, the juggler would not be at Columbus Circle, and her friend Maria lived downtown, she had nowhere to go. She turned up a side street and approached the steps of an old church. Since she was Catholic, she thought it an appropriate place to sit. In the darkness, she noticed some glistening pebbles in the square patch of soil around the tree on the sidewalk. She picked up three, sat back on the steps, and started to juggle. People walked by, but no one threw her money. "I should have worn a hat," she thought to herself, but then remembered that hats barely stayed on her head because of her hair.

"I am Frizzy Izzy the Famous Juggler. One day I will make it to Columbus Circle," she thought, and when it was late enough for her mother to worry, she stood up and put the pebbles in her pocket. Izzy walked home slowly, in perfect form, for she was pretending that, with her kneecaps, she could touch the stars.

Tristine Skyler  
New York, NY  
The Chapin School  
Jane L. Rinden



Susan Stuckey,  
Timonium, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones

## The Sum of My Perceptions

I went to McDonald's after school and sat at a table by myself, smoking a cigarette and watching the veins in my hand while I waited for David to give me a ride home. I always rode home with him. He was across the restaurant, talking to his neo-dead-head friends.

A girl's voice said "Hi," and when I looked up from my hand, Jeni was standing in front of me. "Do you have a cigarette?" she asked. I had met her a month before, when she asked me why I had shaved one side of my head. I didn't remember what I had told her.

I gave her a cigarette. She pulled a chair from another table and sat across from me, putting her hand on my hand. "What's up?" She bounced as she spoke.

I looked at her hand, then at her. She moved her hand to push her bangs out of her face. "Nothing worth talking about," I said. "I didn't think you were gonna sit down. I thought you just wanted a cigarette."

"No," she said, slapping my hand.

I wondered if she knew that I wanted her to leave.

"I heard Smith gave you a hard time today," she said.

"Nothing major," I said. Mrs. Smith was my English teacher. She had informed me that I was going to grow up to be her garbage man. "I just told her she didn't know anything about me and blew it off."

"Oh."

I could tell that my silence made her feel awkward. Since it was my silence, I enjoyed it.

"Tom," David called from the door, "wanna split?"

"Sure." I held my stare on Jeni for a second before I got up to leave.

The inside of David's car was like the inside of a box. A psychedelic Beatle's tape was playing. I thought it was out of touch with reality, but it wasn't unbearable.

"What do you think of this music?" David asked.

"Weird."

"That punk stuff is kind of weird too," he said, smiling. "It's violent, man. I noticed that about you, too. Even the way you put out your cigarettes. I figure that's why you like punk so much. It's harsh."

"I don't know. I just can't understand all this peace and love stuff. It looks to me like everyone's trying to screw over everyone else."

He dropped me off at my house. I was glad that the conversation had ended, because I was afraid to explain my logic. He

wouldn't have understood, and I would have come out looking and feeling stupid, even though I knew I was right.

I went to my room and turned on my tape deck loud enough so I could hear it on the balcony. I could smoke out there, so I lit a cigarette and looked down on the driveway with the stereo screaming a song called "I Hate You" behind me.

Inside, the phone rang. I put out my cigarette, went in, and answered it. "Hello?"

"Hi!" It was Jeni. She sounded happy.

"Hey." I turned down the music.

"Listen," she said, "this takes a lot of nerve, but I'm just gonna come right out and ask. Are you mad at me?"

I wondered if she thought we were friends. I didn't answer.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Why are you always so upset? Is it Mrs. Smith?"

I laughed. I had forgotten about Mrs. Smith.

"Well, if that's not it, what has been wrong lately?"

"Lately? You just met me lately. I've been this way for a while."

"Explain."

"What are you talking about?" I was exasperated. "This is stupid. You're talking to me like we're best friends and you don't even know me."

"I thought we were friends."

"If you think this is friendship, then that's really superficial and I don't want anything to do with it."

"It's not superficial; I care about you." Her voice was sweet, like when she asked for cigarettes.

"No, you don't," I said, matter-of-factly.

"How can you say that?"

"Easy. You'll freak out now, but later you'll just tell all your little friends that you hate me; then they'll hate me, and you won't care anymore. You think you care now but you don't, really." She made a whimpering noise, like she was about to cry. I was almost sorry. "I hope they hate me," I said. "I don't need people screwing around with my head."

She tried to sound calm. "Using your logic," she said, "you can't say I don't care about you because you don't know me well enough either."

"Yes, I can, because you don't have any idea what's going on in my head."

"Yes, I do. All that anger's just a front. I know that deep down you're not as mean as you try to be."

"You sound like a psychology textbook. I'm not trying to be mean. I'm just being honest. How can you say what I'm like 'deep down'? You don't even have a 'deep down.' If you did you would give things a little bit more thought." My voice was rising. "Maybe you would realize that no one really cares about you, either." I hung up.

I went back out on the balcony for another cigarette. My dog tags clinked together as I paced.

I was smoking when my mother's car pulled into the driveway. She looked at me when she got out of the car. I waved. "Still smoking?" she asked calmly.

I took a drag.

"Dumb," she said.

I nodded.

"How was school?"

"Dumb," I said.

"You're skinny. Your ribs are sticking out."

I was surprised that she could tell through the shirt, but I was happy. I liked it when my ribs stuck out. I waited until she was inside to grind my cigarette out on the balcony railing, because I didn't want her to think that she had any influence on me.

We wouldn't have dinner until my father got home, so I waited in my room. I was bored enough to consider doing my homework, but since I never brought my books home, it didn't matter whether I considered it or not.

I looked at the broken guitar in the corner, hoping my father would be in a good mood. Sometimes I almost liked talking to

him because he told stories about semi-delinquent things he did when he was in high school. We laughed together when he said, "I could solve all my problems with a machine gun." The rest of the time we yelled at each other if we spoke at all.

That night at dinner he sipped red wine and leaned forward, his face red and his eyes dull. He frowned and said, "You have dark circles under your eyes."

"Semi-circles," I said. He might have been trying to be friendly, but I wasn't sure.

"They're dark." Nobody said anything for a few seconds. "You seem a little withdrawn, lately."

"Oh," I said. We both forked our food around on our plates. My mother ate nervously.

"You have to start going to bed at a reasonable hour," my father said, aggressively. "You don't have any consideration. You keep me up all night."

"You keep yourself up all night," I said, "listening to me."

"I don't know why you treat us this way," my mother said. "We're so lenient; we send you to a nice school--"

"You send me to a school where they tell me how to act and what to think."

"What is your problem?" My dad's voice changed from angry to concerned. "It's obvious that you have one. I want you to feel like you can come to us, and it seems like you don't want to tell anyone anything ever."

"I don't see that as a problem."

He brought his fist down on the table. "You can't live like that. It's a psychosis."

I couldn't think of anything to say that wouldn't start a fight. I didn't want that. I was too tired, my dad was too tired, and my mother was already shaking enough. I excused myself and went for a walk.

Outside, the wind was blowing enough to make the branches creak. Occasionally there was a click and one would fall onto the side of the road. Most of the trees were dead. I walked quickly, angrily, thinking about what my father had said.

"Nice pants, fag." The voice went by me, interrupting my thoughts. I looked back to see a guy about my age with his back to me.

"What?" I asked, blankly.

He turned, smirking. "You look like an idiot with all them holes in your jeans and that weird hair."

I told him he was narrow minded.

"Who do you think you are, talkin' like that?" he asked, strutting towards me.

He was big, and I envisioned him beating me senseless. Light from the street lamp reflected off the cross around his neck. I wanted to walk away, but I would have hated myself for it. He pushed me. "Who do you think you are?"

"I'm Jesus Christ," I said, reverently.

He pushed me again, called me a name, and pulled his arm back to punch me. I brought my fist up into his throat as fast as I could. My father had taught me that trick when the kids had picked on me in eighth grade. He stumbled back, fell down, rolled over onto his hands and knees, and vomited. I kicked him in the stomach, partly because I was still angry, and partly because I had always wanted to do that to someone--everyone, actually. For the time being, he was everyone.

I half-ran home and went straight to the balcony. It was ten o'clock, so my parents were in bed. I wondered if the redneck was standing up yet. I wondered if I would have backed down from him if I had stood up to my parents.

I remembered the last time I had fought them. Certain details of that day were still vivid in my mind; the rest was just a flat series of events. My mother had made me go to an afternoon Mass with her. I felt like the priest was calling me a bad person for not letting him tell me what to think. In the car, on the way home, I said, "Don't ever take me to that place again."

The muscles in my mother's face stiffened. "You have to go to church."

"No, I don't."

"As long as you live in my house, you'll go to church."

"You're awfully uptight about it."

"You will go to church."

"No."

"I'm warning you...."

"You're so intimidating, Mom," I said. "I'm warning you. Don't take me to that place again."

She raised her voice. "Or what?"

"I'll kill you." I didn't know whether or not to believe myself, but I couldn't think of anything else to say. I understood that she just wanted me to have good influences, but I couldn't back down. It seemed like we were both deliberately over-reacting.

She didn't say anything after that. She just parked the car. I went upstairs to play the cheap acoustic guitar my parents had brought back from Mexico.

I thought that the argument was over and I had won, but my mother told my father the whole story. If I had thought about what I said as much as about what the priest had said, I would have known that telling my father was her only option as far as she was concerned. I hadn't thought about what my father's options were.

He walked into my room and over to me, sitting on the bed. He didn't look angry at first. He stared at me, and I watched his face turn to disgust. Suddenly, without feeling, I knew what was going to happen.

"Don't you ever threaten your mother again," he yelled, punctuating each word by hitting me wherever he could.

He stopped for a second, and I hoped he was finished. My feet hung off the bed. I lay on my side with the guitar across my chest. He looked at my combat boots. "You think these make you tough?"

I tried to say no, but he grabbed my leg and twisted my foot as if he were trying to shove my boot in my mouth.

I sat up as much as I could and, holding the guitar by the neck, hit him with it. The flimsy guitar broke, but he didn't seem to notice the blow.

Trying to get free, I jerked my leg and saw my mother in the doorway.

"That's enough," she said.

I fell off the bed onto the floor. I couldn't remember when I had dropped the guitar. My father stood over me, looking down as if he might spit on me. "I don't wanna look at you anymore." He left.

Still standing in the doorway, my mother was crying. Initially I wanted to thank her for stopping him, but then I decided that he wouldn't have started if it hadn't been for her. I tried to stare at her angrily, but I couldn't. When I looked back she was gone, probably with my father, comforting him over what they must have thought he had to do.

I left the house. I didn't have any intention of running away, but I didn't have any plans to come back either. I just wanted to get away. It seemed like the thing to do.

I walked to the nearest shopping center. On the way I realized that leaving was not my only option, just like violence wasn't my father's. It didn't matter. I was already gone. Maybe I would call later. No one had said I was grounded.

I bought a pack of cigarettes at the drug store then walked along the sidewalk, smoking and glancing in the windows of each of the little shops. It was a boring street, but it was still somewhere to be. At the corner of the sidewalk there was a little pizza place in between the grocery store and the bank. I stood with my back to the window and looked at the parking lot. I wasn't thinking. I just stared at the parking lot until I wasn't even seeing it anymore.

"Hey, man!" An excited voice called from behind me.

I turned and saw Matt, white bangs hanging in front of his smiling face, standing in the doorway of the restaurant. I hadn't seen him since summer, when we used to hang around together. I surprised myself by not smiling. "Hey," was all I could say.

(Continued from page 23)

"Come in, man. Sit with us."

I went in and sat with him and two of his friends that I didn't know. They noticed that my hair style was just as weird as theirs so they acted friendly. I guessed that Matt had seen me through the window.

"So what have you been doing?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said. "Getting mad."

One of his friends said, "That's cool."

I glared at him. For one thing, he was interrupting, and by giving my anger a term like cool he was taking it and making it petty. It had taken two words for me to decide that I hated him. I didn't know if that was his fault or mine.

"Do you remember when D.R.I. played?" Matt asked.

I turned to him. "With that big fat guy? Self-appointed bouncer?"

"He almost stabbed you."

"Until you put your boot in his groin."

"And you punched him."

The conversation was a ritual that usually made us laugh, but we only smiled vaguely.

"You think you broke his nose?" he asked.

"It bled enough."

Matt looked directly at my eyes. I didn't like it. I could remember times when I was angry, and he would slap my shoulder, asking, "What's the matter, man? What's worth being so bummed out?"

I would say, "I don't know."

I couldn't look at him anymore. "Later, Matt," I said. "I gotta go."

I walked until I was at a 7-11 a few blocks away from the shopping center. I bought a Coke and sat next to a pay phone outside. It was getting dark. I stared at the phone, then at my Coke. "Nothing else left," I said to myself, standing up and putting a quarter in the phone. I called home.

My father answered.

"Dad," I said the word without expression. When no one says anything over the phone the silence is like static. I wondered if the pause was a competition. Who would speak first? "Do you want me to come home or what?" I asked my question so bitterly that it didn't matter who won.

"You can always come home." His voice was gentle. "You live here. No matter what's happening you're always welcome."

I wanted to say, "I felt real welcome with my boot in my mouth." The words that actually came out were, "All right." There was another silence, and having lost so many times that day, I didn't want to give in first again. I hung up and started home.

This is stupid, I thought. Don't tell them anything. It looks good but don't trust it. Like Matt. "What's the matter, man," and now I can't look at him. It doesn't matter whose fault it is even though it's probably mine. It's nothing.

When I got back to the house I went upstairs to my dark, quiet room. I thought my parents had gone to bed. I wouldn't have waited up for me, either, and I didn't want to talk to them anyway.

I sat on the bed and was taking off my boots when, silently, my mother came in and sat on my desk chair, across from me. I turned on a small lamp so that I could see her without ruining the darkness. She was crying, and she wouldn't look at me. She stared at my shadow, instead. "I just don't understand," she choked.

"There's nothing to understand."

"What's happening to this family?"

I had not thought in terms of the family. The problem with the family was only a small part of what I perceived as the problem with the world. To me, I thought, the world is the sum of my perceptions. Therefore, I am the problem. "Don't worry, Mom. It's me, not you. I'm sorry." The words came without warning and I hated that.

"We try to help you, but you won't let us." It was such a

motherly thing to say. She looked at me then, pulling at me without touching me. "What's wrong?"

Everything switched, and I focused on her shadow, almost crying. "I just don't feel like I can trust anyone anymore."

I guess she didn't know what to say, because she laughed. Looking back honestly, I don't know what kind of laughter it was. At that moment, as if to justify to myself all my thoughts and actions, I made it into cruel laughter. I didn't do it intentionally, though. It just happened.

I glared at her. "Get out of my room." She sat like she didn't know what to do. "Get out," I repeated.

Slowly, she stood up. As she left, she looked back at me. She wasn't crying, and I wasn't even close. I was just angry. "We try to help you," I thought. That is stupid. That is nothing.

Still sitting on the balcony, smoking my last cigarette and remembering, I started to think about Jeni. Since the week after I met her, every time I saw her she tried to hug me. On her birthday I hugged her back. It was nice, warm and soft. She was so innocent. It would be nice--I didn't let myself complete the thought.

I rolled up the sleeve of my T-shirt, held what was left of my cigarette with two fingers, and mashed it into my arm until it was out.

Sam Ruddick  
Vienna, Va  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen

## Queen Morning's Crown

*The night's black  
Crystal knife cuts through me.  
My face turns wooden.  
My lungs crack like ancient leather.  
The tips of my toes,  
Age-old stone, probe the dark.  
The porch boards scream as  
I step on them.  
Agonized cries from the snow as  
I tread across it.  
Coal black air seeps into me.  
Ahead looms the stolid door.  
The flip of a finger lights the barn.*

*The rank odor of over-used bedding,  
Dark as the night with manure.  
Waves of black grey and white woolen bodies  
Slam against the pen boards, and each other,  
Demanding their morning's dole.*

*Packed in a dim corner,  
Shuddering like a storm cloud,  
Bundle of wet life,  
Why did you choose this night?  
Kneeling I rub the death from  
The innocent with a towel  
Until the fleece shines white.  
My pale one's sides rise and fall.*

*The slight tingle on my neck.  
Light creeping through the  
Frozen dust-covered windows.  
Morning crowns the lamb in gold.*

Cynthia Elaine Hoisington  
Norwich, VT  
Hanover High School  
Deborah Boettiger





Kym Smith  
Paoli, PA

## The Library

*The soft breathing of the water  
in the radiators, the gurgling  
of the pipes settling down  
became her breathing,  
her mind settling down  
as she sat in a worn chair  
in the library, empty  
but not cold.*

*As her head sunk forward,  
thoughts evaporated into sleep,  
her mouth opened a little  
to breathe in the heavier, sleep-laden air,  
her fingers unknotted and released  
the book, letting it fall to the carpet,  
the moment of impact reverberating,  
stunning the silence.*

*The breathing of the room sifted  
over the hard sound,  
erasing all the traces.  
The silence settled into the cracks  
between the open pages of the book  
and filled the hollow of her ear  
like sand, deaf and dumb.*

Ahree Lee  
Ardmore, PA  
The Baldwin School  
Dr. Olive Ledlie

## Reason Conquering Passion

*The last drops of rain roll from the roof,  
Lick the copper drainpipe  
As the plump tongue of a child  
Would suck the sweetness from a candystick.*

*You push your basketball sneakers  
Beneath the dusty radiator  
To dry the November downpour  
From their wear-worn canvas.*

*As you pass me in stocking-footed silence,  
I watch you return to the other bed,  
Where you welcome Sartre into your arms  
And resume a cozy embryonic position.*

*I hear you laugh to yourself in French.  
I hear your heart beating in my short term ememory.  
I hear the soft sounds you make  
As you make love to your better judgment.*

*You were no tabula rasa when we met.  
You knew the ramifications by rote.  
Now you act as though erasing the slate  
Will require only a dampened sponge.*

*As you lie there in the other bed,  
I wonder if those linens  
Still hold traces of our musk,  
And if your morals pinch your nostrils shut.*

Gia M. Hansbury  
Avon, MA  
Gita Kupcinkas

## Dam Near Pipestem

The dam near Pipestem, West Virginia,  
was open for touring.  
My brother and I rolled our eyes at the appropriate moments,  
standing on line beside Hawaiian shirts and comfortable walking  
shoes.

But the cavern within the dam  
impressed us.  
We touched the cool stone walls,  
Peeped around the pipes,  
Listened to the whoosh-whish echo of our breathing--  
Shivered in delicious terror over the limits of the air supply  
down there in the dark.

"The fish that pass through the dam  
think they are spawning," shouted the tour guide,  
steering us towards the window on the river.  
My brother and I rolled our eyes again.

But standing in front of the window,  
I had to hold my breath.  
My heart pounded into the roar of the water around us.  
I watched the trout swim past,  
Fighting the rush of water--  
Irridescence surge push push push--  
Push.  
Water flowing under, over, around me,  
I wondered at the artificial spawning and  
the black fishy eye that stared me full in the face.

Evelyn Wiener  
Chevy Chase, MD  
Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School  
Marilyn Alberts

## Midsummer Blessing

It rained today in Africa  
in the small village with its tiny huts  
and ancient rituals  
the people hurried outside  
the boys  
tall and lanky  
with long, gawky arms  
and women  
with dark skin  
and bright rag dresses.  
The rain poured from the sky  
a midsummer's blessing  
turned streets of dry clay  
and dust  
into puddles of crimson mud  
The woman smiled at me  
with her toothless grin  
and bright eyes  
she put down the basket  
and took my frail hand  
then she led me  
into her home

Karen Butts  
Newville, PA  
Big Spring High School  
Jack Zeigler

## The End of Winter

We sit in faded armchairs  
on February afternoons  
I read Anne of Green Gables  
aloud in yellow light  
She interrupts with stories  
of her grandson's science project  
Over the rim of the book  
I watch her fingers  
beat melodies  
on her plaid skirt  
her husband's organ song

Sundays  
I back the car up the road  
She hobbles from her door  
clings to the metal railing  
fears sliding  
in Icelandic boots  
on ice she doesn't see

Snow falls  
whiter against gray green pines  
"I photographed snowflakes once,  
ivory against black paper"  
she tells me  
seeing with closed eyes  
Watching her, I fear March  
and with it the end  
of winter

Anne Merrill  
Sewickley, PA  
Quaker Valley High School  
Shirley Stevens

## Mr. Warren Looks at His Lunch

Mr. Warren looks at his lunch  
He sees his wife,  
folding the waxpaper neatly  
Now--there can be no divorce

He sees his wife.  
She has carefully filled his thermos with soup,  
Now--there can be no divorce  
Mr. Warren--trapped by a bologna sandwich.

She has carefully filled his thermos with soup.  
There is guilt in every mouthful.  
Mr. Warren--trapped by a bologna sandwich.  
It's a Tupperware box of conscience, now he thinks of her,

there is guilt in every mouthful.  
Mr. Warren looks at his lunch,  
it's a Tupperware box of conscience, now he thinks of her,  
folding the waxpaper neatly.

Ted Natale  
Rockville, MD  
Richard Montgomery High School  
Mrs. Wilchek

# Milk and Cookies

Streams of  
Brilliant winter sunlight  
Fall in through  
The frosty pane of glass.  
My sister and I  
Sit at the kitchen table  
Eating freshly baked cookies,  
Their sweet scent  
Linger in the air.  
And Grandma  
Is at the counter  
Watching us,  
Her face glowing with  
The colorful stories  
She will tell  
Of when she was young.  
Her skin  
Is the color  
Of our milk,  
Her eyes,  
The color  
Of the chocolate chips.  
She comes to the table,  
Ready to put us to bed,  
But we smile secretly  
Because we know  
That Grandma will let us  
Stay up all night  
Laughing and talking  
In her cozy bed.  
Plates go into the sink,  
And the three of us  
Float off to the bedroom,  
Holding hands  
And happy.

Elaine Rubin  
Baltimore, MD  
Mrs. Carol Lapan

# Trust-Walk

I held you by your bony wrist because I didn't  
want to maneuver with your sweaty fingers.  
Gripping you firmly, I dragged you out  
of the classroom, knowing you were blind,  
yet choosing to let you discover the doorjamb  
yourself. I was making you independent.  
I typed in your ear, stuffed dial tones  
into your head, let you get  
a tactile glimpse of the tubes and intestines  
of the fire extinguisher, before suddenly  
pushing off for a port down the hall.  
It was sweet to look behind and see you  
stumbling, trying to meet the pace.  
Outside, I crumbled pine needles  
and ordered you to smell, afraid for a moment  
that you would vacuum up my fingers.  
You knew the playground well; that pain  
was the slide in your leg. It wasn't my fault.  
You should have known better  
than to trust me.

Susan Gray  
Westfield, NJ  
Solomon Schechter Day School  
Penny Harter



# The Homestory

I looked down at the little person in front of me, head bent in concentration. "These darn pants, they just don't want to come up."

"Here Gram, let me help you." I shifted my weight so that she leaned on one arm while I used the other to hike up her pj bottoms.

She straightened a little to look up into my face, "I tried to pull myself up with the sink, but I just couldn't do it." Hearing my cue, I started telling her about how the toilets were really built too low in this new house as I guided her into the bedroom.

"Oh, here it is, I always forget," she chuckled a little, preoccupied by something else. Dropping onto the bed forced a huge sigh from her, but when she looked up, her eyes were full of the quietly crafty sense of humor it took me this long to find out she possessed.

"You know," she whispered, "my parents said they'd come for me, maybe I should give them a call."

"Oh Gram," I said, taking her teeth and glasses, "they know where you are, I wouldn't worry about it." When I looked over, she was watching me, and not for the first time, I wondered who was telling the truth, or rather, who was fooling who. Face still sweetly unreadable, she swung her legs onto the bed, ready to let it go as long as she could go to sleep.

Having got her settled for the night, I closed the door, flushing the toilet on my way into the living room. The T.V. was on, and with the ease of long practice, I fell into the story, fascinated as always by the supreme ego of the Beautiful People undergoing their 30-minute crises in my living room, handling their difficult situations with poise, wit, and warmth. Then again, reality is probably much easier to cope with when there are breaks in the middle for commercials. Gram staggered into the doorway, gripping the wall and blinking a little. "Gram, what are you doing up?"

"Well, I thought I'd come out and see if you were warm enough."

"Here, sit down here." I looked at her close enough to see the fear flickering behind the reflection from the T.V. "Why don't I get you a blanket?" Coming back with the blanket, I saw her watching the T.V. without her glasses on. Turning to go back for them, I realized, perhaps for the first time, what the Beautiful People were actually doing, and pretended to forget them.

"Where are the kids?" she demanded fiercely, having gone from child to mother in the time that I was gone. "Are they all in bed?"

"There's no one here but you and me, Gram." Again, I couldn't tell whether she believed me or not. Just a glance, and suddenly I wasn't so sure; suddenly I wanted to run upstairs and check, see if the beds had been slept in, were the kids okay? She wasn't even paying attention, something on T.V. had caught her eye. She was amused, "Lookit that, she must really want a boyf-

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riend." She glanced over at me from a world of experience I could only guess at, and I relaxed. As long as I could pity her, I was safe. And look at her, poor old woman, her sense of reality is as atrophied as her sense of balance; her world of experience just isn't operable here in T.V. land. I peered out at her from my pity, watching as I had so many times before as she drifted from one time to another; places and roles an effortless blend of the bits and pieces of that other world that no longer existed. She almost had me going there, but I had the T.V. on my side, still confidently blaring its message of cause and effect; ain't life a blast; you get what you pay for; everything will come right in the end--still earnestly expounding its electronic logic, its two-dimensional morality. Suddenly I hated it, hated the way it mocked my grandmother with its sterile jokes, but I didn't dare turn it off. Gram was profoundly bored. "Did you say something?"

"I said I hope they think to follow my trail; I forgot to leave a note."

"For who, Gram?" She is always patient with me, "Why my family. I took Dad's car to come up and visit you, and they won't know to find me here unless they follow my tracks."

Again, in one move she had reduced me to sheepishly automatic, "I wouldn't worry about it." Guilty, looking for something to take the fear out of her eyes, I added, "What will they do when they get here?"

"Why, take me home." Her faith was always that of a little girl, and it hurt me to see it shining out of a face dissolved by age. She wasn't aware of it, but to me the T.V. was unbearably intrusive. She was listening for something. I knew what it was, and on an impulse, I turned the T.V. off. Silence. I'm not so twentieth century that I don't know the power of silence, but I had turned off the noise; I had set the stage, and there was no going back from that. Gram didn't even notice, she was watching the clock. Nothing continued to happen, and I felt extremely foolish, sitting there gripping the remote control, forlorn and alone in my very own living room. Was this how Gram felt, adrift in familiarity? No wonder she wanted to go home. So did I.

They didn't even knock. Two grubby little kids, a girl and a boy, burst through the door, a door that belonged to another house, a house that had sprung up around Gram with the permanence of never having not been there.

"Momma, Ben and Dale won't let us go fishing with them. We are not too little and we got our chores done, tell 'em we can go too!"

If Gram saw them, she didn't show it. She was watching the blank T.V. with the same myopic patience that she had before. Suddenly she smiled at me, a quizzically uncertain expression, but she could have been smiling at the two that were watching her so intently. "I think it'd be alright, but it would help if I had my glasses."

The three of us were equally puzzled, but the two little kids took it for permission, and went racing back the way they'd come. I went for the glasses. It struck me that she was always saying things like that; was this why? Scared and confused, I hurried back into the living room. Everyone looked up at the same time, except for Gram who was watching the teacher and had her back to me. The class started to titter as I crossed the room to her seat.

"Here you go, Gram."

"Hm? Oh, thank you." I was surprised at how flustered the giggles and whispers were making me, until I realized that these were essentially ghosts who were scuffling their feet and doing simple sums in my living room. I could barely breathe as a panic as ancient and vast as the fear of falling in the dark wormed its way out of the pit of my stomach, and it was all I could do to keep from screaming or vomiting. Was this how she felt every day, sitting in the rocking chair and watching with incomprehension as people she knew passed through on their way somewhere else for reasons she didn't know or couldn't remember,

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leaving her behind? Was this the fear I saw in her eyes when I told her there were no little girls in the cellar? Realizing that my eyes were closed, I reached out with her name, "Gram?"

"Yes, dear?"

Last chance, "Don't you notice anything different?" This time she recognized me, and we were sitting in the old farmhouse where we had sat on many a summer's evening. "Did you get your braces off? That's nice. How about a banana sandwich?"

"I'm not all that hungry, are you?"

"A little," she grinned up at me as though this was a secret to be kept between us. "I wonder when your parents are getting back."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Gram." Getting up, I went into a kitchen I hadn't seen in over a year and made her a banana sandwich, glad to have something to distract myself with. I worked fast, though, afraid of being forgotten. "Didn't you make one for Grandpa?"

"Where is he?" I looked around a little fearfully.

"Oh, he'll be home soon," she stated with supreme confidence.

"Really?" She looked a little uncertain, but nodded her head. Try again, "Gram, Grandpa Joe has been dead over ten years now."

"Really?" And we were back where we started. Now neither one was sure and both were afraid.

"Here's your sandwich." It was accepted in silence, a silence that belonged to neither of us. Now that everything was peaceful, I was reluctant to force the issue of reality; I didn't want to hurt her, and I'm sure she felt the same way about me. There was a quiet moment as she munched her sandwich and I stared out the window at a view I'd never seen before in my life.

"Where is she?"

"Who?"

"The little girl. I left her in the cellar, her parents were supposed to come and pick her up. They said they would come tonight."

In the cellar?

She started out of her chair, "I hope she's all right."

"Why don't I check for you, Gram?"

She sank back, unmistakably suspicious this time. "You believe me?"

I didn't have the answer for that one, so I left to see if the cellar was where I remembered it to be. It wasn't.

"Gram, where's the cellar?"

"Out back of the kitchen, oh, and would you bring me a napkin on your way back in?"

"All right."

I found myself stepping gingerly onto a floor that didn't squeak when it should have. "This is silly," I thought firmly to myself, and then realizing how silly it was to be thinking firmly to myself at a time like this, I reached for a kitchen knife and continued to ginger-foot my way to the door. Flinging it open, I braced myself to face...nothing. No little wraith was huddled on the stairs; there weren't even any stairs, just a solid rectangle of darkness that faced me like another door. It was one door I didn't particularly care to open, and so, quietly shutting the one that I had opened, I wedged a chair under the doorknob, snagged some paper towels, and went back to Gram.

She opened her eyes as I entered the room. "Oh, thank you, I was just too tired to move. I'm always tired these days, but what with the baby and the store, I guess I shouldn't be so surprised."

She gave me one of those small, patient smiles that I'd learned long ago to dismiss as plays for sympathy. Now I wondered if I hadn't been a little hasty.

"Have you decided on a name for the baby?"

"Bernard if it's a boy, Rebecca if it's a girl." She patted her stomach, rounded, but by what? The birth of seven children, or my father the fetus?

I was very tired myself, and I wanted to see my parents as I

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remembered them, twin pillars of practicality, unshakable and secure. I wanted my family, my dog, my home, and I was badly jolted too by the realization that I was remembering my old home, not the one that had just vanished on me, but the home of my childhood. My brother and sister before they went off to college, my parents without the grey in their hair, my room, my house as I'd left it, when I'd left it two years ago, only to come back and find it gone. I smelled warm grass and the lilac bush out back; I could see the Christmas tree in the corner; I could hear the little kids next door; maybe I could take Scruffy for a walk before dinner. This didn't make any sense; I was sitting in my grandmother's living room, or so I assumed, but I was seeing/hearing/smelling/living an entirely different world. All seventeen years of it. At one time. Gram was busy wiping banana off her shirt front, but she looked up to meet my eyes, and for just a second there we must have looked very similar indeed, something we had never managed to do physically.

It was over. And I found I wanted it to be over; I just wanted to curl up somewhere and sleep it all into unbelievability.

"It's 9:30 Gram, you sure you don't want to go back to bed?" She looked up from her blouse again, startled and confused, and I could see her take in the room that probably seemed stranger to her than it did to me: at least I recognized it as the one we'd left behind, so long ago.

"Well, I'd like to, but I can't, I'm waiting for my mother and father. They said they'd come."

"It's awfully late, Gram, are you sure they're coming tonight?"

She shrugged and looked down at her hands. Had she answered me, I would have had something to push against, something to affirm or deny but she didn't so I resorted to a Newsweek, determined to keep the world just the way it was; car bombings, political cartoons, cigarette ads, and all.

This time they knocked. The door didn't change, the house didn't shift away from me...they just knocked and waited for me to come and open the door. I was watching Gram, but she didn't change either. She didn't even really move, not at first, but her eyes; eyes washed a faded brown from a lifetime of watching that lifetime slip away; her eyes got very big and bright. An expression crept over her face that I hadn't seen there since, perhaps I'd never seen it there before. She maintained her customary dignity, but with the joy welling up in her eyes, she whispered, "Mama." And I couldn't do it. I knew what was on the other side of that door as surely as she did, but these things do not happen where I come from; houses do not disappear, and grandmas don't either. I didn't look at her, but I could hear the frantic squeaking of the rocking chair as she struggled to get to her feet. If I flinched, I don't remember it, I don't think so, for in one smooth motion, the remote appeared in my hand and I swung it towards the T.V. in one short, vicious swing, tasting the bile of the executioner. I was redeemed in a flood of noises, lights, colors, and motion, and I almost cried with relief.

It was a long time before I found the courage to look at Gram. There she was, still chewing her sandwich, a kind of wondering skepticism on her face as she watched the cloud-man open his briefcase to reveal two rolls of toilet paper, one of which was obviously superior.

Sandwich finished, she glanced at the clock again, "Well, it's getting pretty dark out. I probably shouldn't drive this late. I might as well stay here for the night."

"Might as well."

She let it sit for a minute before continuing in the same casual tone, "Well, as long as you're staying up, I might as well go to bed now."

"Yep. Might as well." I found it as hard to cross the room to her as I'd found it to meet her resigned eyes.

And so the frail little woman, looking rather lost in her white pajamas, levered herself onto my arm, and we headed back the way we'd come.

She dropped onto the bed with her customary sigh.

"Honestly, sometimes I can't tell whether I'm asleep or awake, I'm just so tired all the time." She chuckled a little and laid back to look up at me through glasses knocked askew. I set them on the table on my way out, and it wasn't till I'd gotten to the door that that unreadable expression slipped. I turned around to see her thrashing against her covers, hopelessly entangled already.

"Gram?"

"Oh that poor little girl. You can't leave her there, how will her parents find her in the dark? They said they would come; they must have forgotten, how can they have forgotten? They said they'd come, but they didn't, and we have to let her out. She's lost and cold and scared, we have to help her. Don't leave her there!"

She stared into my face, panicked, and I did the only thing I could. Again, I didn't even hesitate, not so's you'd notice; I just went back to the bed, gave her a hug, and delivered my line as believably as I could, "Oh, Gram, I wouldn't worry about it."

Jenny Sauers  
Oakmont, PA  
Shady Side Academy  
Harold Hendershot

## Reed

*Reeds are tall thin  
watery plants;  
also a college in Oregon.  
When my mother brought David home  
from Boy Scouts  
I told her I wanted to go to a college called Reed  
in Oregon*

*(secretly because I wanted to be tall and thin  
too, but  
I told her)  
because its motto is  
Communism  
Atheism  
Free Love  
I'm agnostic myself, but,  
(Jesus Christ)  
2 and 1/2 outta three ain't bad*

*Not over my dead body  
she roared,  
indomitably alive*

*Oregon, she sniffed, Oregon  
Oregon doesn't even exist,  
you ninny*

*we fought for a while  
and of course I won;  
I am younger, louder, and have a bigger vocabulary, but  
then*

*What would I do if you went off to Oregon?  
she wailed,  
my brother in the corner started pulling off his olive and pimento  
outfit into the laundry and i love my  
mother.*

Jenifer Braun  
Elizabeth, NJ  
The Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus



Cassandra Papajohn  
E. Elmhurst, NY

## Perry

I usually visualize him sitting cross-legged in the middle of the bare wooden stage. He wears a lavender tank top and is reading a soap opera magazine, carelessly ripping out photographs and putting small stones on top of them to prevent them from blowing away. He is always alone. Looking at him that moment, I know he is different and that he hates Legacy International Vegetarian Peace Camp as much as I do.

Perry is always in the back of my mind. Few of my friends know about him, or my experience at Legacy in general. Sure, they know that I was thirteen at the time and that we sang songs like "Peace Street" and "Fill Up My Cup With Love" and that I was subjected to the horrors of veggie balls and tofu, but I don't ever seem to mention Perry.

We were assigned to the same community service group each morning. Soon we found that we had some things in common—silly things like favorite songs, and we watched the same soap operas. Perry was different from the stilted, sheltered people at Legacy, some choosing to live there all year. He used brash, coarse language. He was obviously not very educated, although he was three years older than I. But he had wisdom.

I know that sounds corny. Only grandparents can have wisdom, or a teacher, or even presidents in years past. But I could rely on Perry for his optimism when I didn't have any, especially in the months after my father died.

Although he hasn't exactly changed my life, Perry has made me hope for better things, made me believe that if I want something, it can happen. An attitude like that isn't generally accepted today in a world of cynicism; it's considered naive, childish. I'm still not an optimist, but just by knowing someone like Perry is out there, I have more faith in others and in myself. "Keep strong," he says.

Perry still calls me occasionally to let me know how he's doing. We always end up talking late into the night, sometimes about how "old" we're getting, sometimes about the time we had to pick stink bugs off cabbage leaves for a service project, or about how the nurse in Legacy's health house was convinced that flower nectar could cure anything from stomachache to head cold. He continually speaks of a Corvette—always candy apple red, always shiny and new, always "his."

Once Perry called me to tell me about a letter he had received in the mail from Ed McMahon—the letter I had instantly thrown out, not believing that I could possibly have just won ten million dollars. Perry told me that inside the envelope was a fake million dollar bill which he pinned to a bulletin board in his room. He always says to me that one day he will replace it with the real thing.

Perry is constantly using phrases like "one day." He says it reminds him to keep working to get what he wants. Sometimes, when I'm down, he tells me about the bill and how hard he worked to go to computer school and how soon he'll be able to

buy his mother a new, nicer home. He tells me I can do anything, that even a cynic like myself can succeed. And he tells me that one day he'll come to see me in his new red Corvette, and that we can get on a plane to the Bahamas, if we like. He says we can go anywhere. And sometimes, I even believe him.

Susan E. Brown  
Alexandria, VA  
West Potomac High School  
Virginia O'Keefe

## Song for Three

*I know I was staring  
that first day,  
when you came late to chemistry  
and struggled  
to slip into a desk seat  
made for a girl  
with a 32-inch waist.  
I tried to smile;  
you did not.*

*I wanted to ask you  
how it felt  
to push yourself  
against the carved edge of the desk  
and know the protesting kick.  
To pass down the hall  
and see no smiles.  
Did the baby  
clatter through your thoughts  
like an oscillating atom?*

*Propped in the bed  
by mounds of semi-sterile  
pillows—gaunt like Leonardo's  
St. Jerome. His gaze protrudes  
to grab at me.  
It is the color of a solution  
made from lovers and memories  
The color of his eyes.  
I've seen it in the mirror  
I think while he smirks  
in his satirical way.  
"What now?" it asks.*

*Months later we mix solutions  
in delicate glass flasks.  
Mine is the pale of your eyes.  
Yours is the gray autumn sky  
where the leaves  
release their energy  
in resplendent suicide.  
I gather that energy in.*

*Your waist has again  
grown slim. I think  
of his death and smile as  
in waves his energy  
reaches you and for a moment  
you look remarkably like your child.*

Kimberly Marcott  
Bradford, PA  
Bradford Area High School  
Phyllis Longnecker

# The Last Foul

It's over, Travis:  
Footsteps that were too soft  
For a six foot M.V.P. whose blue  
Eyes could shoot faster than a ball  
Said it,  
As the too-fluid movements of your  
Unmuscling legs poured you  
On the bench.

While exaggerated white bulbs  
Shouted from the scoreboard,  
Two minutes,  
You threw the towel  
On yourself, rocking your head  
In unconscious agony:  
It was over.

So far away, out on court,  
Those four fallow  
Uniforms floundered in a deep  
Purple sea, needing one  
Player, one basket.

Your eyes held still, unable to pass.  
Without tears  
Your whole body cried.  
The plastic water bottle  
Slipped from your hand,  
Unscrewing on the  
Overvarnished gym floor.  
You just stared at the puddle  
Of water between your feet.

Heather Stoll  
Amsterdam, NY  
Galway High School  
Johns Hopkins C.T.Y. Program  
Tom Eslick

## Nick's Girl

If you walk through Cedar's Corner past  
Seven o'clock on a summer evening  
The only sign of life is the purple and pink neon sign flashing "Eats"  
And there you'll find Candi Dodd  
Flipping burgers on the grill  
Back in High School her feet were lightning streaked  
And people said she could throw a baton higher than anyone  
And after a game she could be seen floating into "Eats" on Nick's  
arm  
With his jacket draped loosely around her shoulder  
And his arms wound tightly around her waist  
They would dance to the nickel bought tune of love  
Under the fluorescent lights  
And now she stood in her cottony pink and white striped uniform  
And listened to the hissing of the grease hitting the frying pan.  
And turned to the pyramid of dishes reaching for the dirt streaked  
ceiling

Christine Jemielita  
Brooklyn, NY  
Midwood High School  
Ms. Lustbader

# i must not be jamaican

if i don't know the  
jamaican anthem, line from line  
so i can sing at the stadium...

i must not be jamaican

if i don't like yellow  
yam with salt fish and  
ackee...

i must not be jamaican

if i can't climb a mango  
or a pear tree  
with great ease...

i must not be jamaican

if i can't appreciate  
the rhythms and style of  
Bob Marley and the Wailers...

i must not be jamaican

if my feet can't scant  
and i can't labrish  
along with spars

well, then, ja'no  
i must not be jamaican

although my heritage  
and heart is.

Carin Bailey  
Laurelton, NY

## Seafoam

Through pink cotton nightgown  
my knees fill two dents  
in yellow carpet  
at the foot of the stairs.

I press my eye  
against the chilled pane.  
Glass waves  
lap the front door.

Through a glinting crest  
I see my father, in uniform,  
fold into our Morris Mini

Leaning back  
on bare heels,  
I watch  
seven green cars--  
seafoam  
floating my father away.

Lauren Hennessey  
Sewickley, PA  
Quaker Valley High School  
Shirley, Stevens

## Two Right Shoes

"Do you always run up hills?" she had asked that day in her British "U" accent.

I can imagine how I must have looked to Elspeth, standing there, in my baggy field pants, binoculars hanging from my neck, and my face even redder than my sunburn with fatigue. In those first few days in the islands, the only way I could climb the hill was to thrust my weight forward and sprint in short spurts. Later on, I would no longer dawdle at the beach bar, brushing off sandflies and hoping for a jeep ride, but stride up expertly, looking down at my expanding calf muscles with pride.

That day as I rounded the curve, I just laughed breathlessly and slowed my pace. Elspeth walked by, gravity pulling her steps longer and longer, her gray eyes squinting in the sun. She was not a college student on summer vacation like the rest of us, but had just sailed her boat into the harbor one day--no one knew exactly why. Tortola was the wrong place to pick up rich tourists--they all went to St. Thomas--but Elspeth seemed to have money anyway. Maybe catching lizards all day in the heat was just a diversion--something to amuse her for a few weeks. But the grad students were glad for any help, and the rest of the field assistants and I were fascinated by her.

Elspeth and I sat on bar stools and sipped our warm ginger ales.

"Do you think it hurts them?" Elspeth asked me, screwing up her sun-bleached eyebrows.

"Well, maybe. But I'm sure it only lasts for a second." Greg took the next *Anolis Cristitellus* and held the bag to the sunlight. Each specimen was contained in a blown up sandwich bag sealed with a twist. The lizard sprawled on the side, its suction cup toes grasping the plastic. When Greg opened the bag, the lizard shifted its eyes and fanned out its red throat, the white goosebumps pointing out as dangerously as agave spines.

A local named Pete stood to the side and handed Greg the bagged lizards. Pete wore a faded blue T-shirt that was too small for him and a pair of cut-off jeans, the loose strings hanging to his knees. He watched us with dark, wide-set eyes. Greg deftly picked the lizard up, flipped it over, and quickly touched its stomach with the burning brand. Then he put it back into the sandwich bag and into the cooler. Later we would let them go again in the woods and see how many we could catch without brands. It was all part of Greg's Ph.D. thesis, as I tried to explain to Elspeth. It was scientific.

"I wonder if fish would eat termites," Elspeth said, indicating the nest Margaret held in her hands.

"Well, it seems logical," Margaret said. "I'll put on my snorkel-mask and try it." Elspeth was always thinking of strange ideas that amused the researchers. I watched as Margaret handed the crawling termite nest over to Elspeth while she put on her mask and flippers. The termites were scurrying around in their intricate tunnels, occasionally running up Elspeth's arm and biting her. Then Margaret took the nest and eased herself into the rippleless water. Elspeth, Pete, and I stuck on our masks too and dunked our heads to watch the experiment.

The termites floated out all around, their little orange legs flailing like propellers. Two small zebra fish came in for a closer look and then began snatching up the helpless termites, darting around the nest with their mouths open, catching any in their path. I watched intently until the water seeped into my mask, blurring my vision. Elspeth took off her mask too, and we became involved in a game of trying to fill up Pete's snorkel with seawater from an empty soda can. I stood over his floating body, pouring the water in slowly so that he would think it was only a bit of spray. Then Elspeth, with a wicked smile, tipped my hand, and the whole stream of water ran down into his mouth-piece. Pete jumped up choking and coughing, ripped off his mask and threw it to shore. I darted away, kicking my flippers sound-

lessly, but Pete dragged Elspeth back from the dock.

"Who did it?" he yelled so loudly that I could hear him underwater.

"Sarah, I swear," Elspeth squealed. "Sarah did it! She dumped the whole thing! I had nothing to do with it!"

Pete held her in a dunking position, contemplating his revenge; then Elspeth was under, then up, gasping, her long blond braid slapping Pete's skin like a whip. One more dunking and I swam under Pete and pinched him so hard on the ankle that Elspeth was able to break free. She breast-stroked calmly to shore, slipped on her sandals and walked up the road, her black bikini glinting wet in the afternoon sunlight.

"Pete, Petey, wait for me!" the little boy called, running up the deserted road. Pete turned to me as if he hadn't heard; his dark brown eyes reflected the brilliance of the hot asphalt.

"Petey, I want to catch lizards too! Give me the stick!"

Pete shoved the little boy back and kept on walking, his eyes in the trees, alert for pulchellus lizards. Spotting one, he whipped the stick out and made a flying leap for the branch above him. The lizard sat motionless, only shifting its eye upward as the noose caught a dead twig.

"Is that your brother?" I asked, keeping my eyes on the pavement.

He nodded, gave the boy his lizard stick, and ran on ahead of me to catch up with the group.

Later, as we came back down the hill, an old man was driving a herd of goats across the road, blocking our progress. Pete's little brother, running so fast down the hill that he couldn't stop himself, tripped and fell. Katelyn rushed over to him, her motherly instincts pouring out of her mouth like honey. "Ooh, baby. Is he all right?" She set him on his feet and then said mournfully, "Oh, look, the poor kid has two right shoes on."

I didn't look at Pete, but Elspeth stared at him relentlessly.

Katelyn wanted to celebrate having caught a rare slippery-backed skink, so she bought a soda for herself and a grape drink and Snickers for the little boy. He scampered off with his treats after Katelyn and Julia took pictures of him with their Nikon cameras. They didn't know he was Pete's brother.

The boy ran into a tiny shack, kicking a chicken out of the doorway. A large woman in the yard, wearing a scarf around her head like most Caribbean women, was roasting a pig over an open fire. The pig's eyes bulged out of its head as if it were still alive.

"Is that your mother, Pete?" said Elspeth in her most matter-of-fact tone.

Pete cut through the dangling orchid plant, the petals falling in shreds to the ground. The blade of the machete slashed through a mass of tangled vines and leaves, inadvertently tearing down a spider's web. The furry red spider jumped to a nearby tree.

"Why are the threads golden?" Elspeth asked no one in particular. Pete glanced at Elspeth's long blond hair.

The air was damp and almost cool in the rainforest. Unlike the dry scrub-like woods we spent most of our time in, the rainforest on the top of the island's highest mountain was tall, dense, and dark green. Pete breathed deeply, taking in the sweet smell of wet soil that hung in the air like a mist. "Where did everyone else go?"

"You live here, Pete," said Elspeth. "How do we get out of this god-forsaken jungle?"

"You don't," said Pete. "You just tuck yourself in a rock when it gets dark and pray that a jumbee don't get you."

"You don't seriously believe in jumbies, do you?" said Elspeth, giving Pete a disgusted look. "I've heard the cooks telling stories about jumbee-spirits as if they actually believed in them."

Pete shrugged his broad shoulders as if to pass it off.

"I know, I know. When I smell smoke from a corn cob pipe, I'll know a jumbee is coming to get me, right, Pete?"

"What's that strange smell?" Katelyn asked, sneaking up be-



hind Elspeth and grabbing her shoulders. Elspeth jumped but laughed with Katelyn. "Couldn't be smoke from a corn cob pipe, could it?" They laughed together.

Pete laughed too, his lips drawn taut.

Elspeth was beautiful when she was sailing, her movements graceful and fluid. She reached for the anchor and twirled it up, working the chain around in her palm so fast it became a blur. The day she took me sailing was perfect: sunny, breezy and dry. She came up to the hotel while I was eating breakfast, walking in assuredly in her black bikini and sandals.

"Wanna go for a ride?" she had asked me and no one else. Katelyn and the other field assistants had looked up expectantly, but Elspeth ignored them.

We only sailed to the neighboring island, since I had to be back by 7:30 to go on the lizard hunt. As we neared her usual anchoring spot, the servants' boat came bouncing along the water, packed so full with people it seemed a miracle it could stay afloat. Pete was sitting wedged between the two cooks. I waved at them and all fifteen waved back, shouting "hello" and "good morning" into the breeze. Elspeth, who had had her back turned, now faced the boat. Pete pretended not to see her. Laughing, she said to me, "Look at poor Pete stuck between those two enormous women."

The woman set the bowl of soup down in front of me, the orange liquid sloshing up around the rim. I spooned the soup slowly—I wanted to save room for the main course. Greg passed me the white wine and laughed as I added a dash of red to my glass.

"Homemade rose," he chuckled. The dinner conversation went as usual: the herpetologists talked about how many lizards had been caught; the marine biologists discussed their experiment with barracuda, and the sole ornithologist droned on about his dove-tracking project to whoever would listen. The entomologists kept to themselves. No one else cared to hear about bugs at the dinner table.

A girl about my own age served me, setting down the dishes carefully, and later standing over me and watching my last few bites. Embarrassed, I handed her the dish.

Elspeth never stayed for the evening meal. She left after hors d'oeuvres, preferring to eat dinner on the sailboat. She would stand up abruptly and say, "You young scientists enjoy your supper. I'm off!" And out she would walk, sandals clicking loudly on the stone floor.

The night of the carnival, the cooks were dressed in brightly colored printed dresses and instead of turbans wore combs and flowers in their hair. As I walked by the back porch after supper, I saw the staff gathered around their tables, eating hurriedly and laughing and talking in their lilting voices.

Pete was leaning back in his chair laughing loudly, the girl who had served me at dinner sitting on his knee.

The Caribbean steel band music rang in my ears, and I swayed to the beat. In the distance the unlighted ferris wheel was silhouetted against the blue night sky, and dark forms moved underneath.

Pete brushed by Elspeth, his elbow moving along her hip.

"Want a beer?" he asked me, holding out a Heineken. Grasping the wet green bottle in both palms, I wondered who had given him the money.

Elspeth was talking with the blond guy from Duke, her hands gesturing wildly in the air as if she had had a few too many Heinekens.

A circle of people formed around a dancing man, his arms flailing, dreadlocks flying. A woman jumped into the circle with him, winding her arms about his waist, her spine arching and her eyes rolling back into her head. Then she swerved around the circle and grabbed another partner, forcing him to the center. As the swaying crowd pushed me out of the ring, I saw that it was Pete. One arm around her waist, he spun her off the ground. One of her shoes flew off into the crowd, and a young man caught it. Everyone laughed and more dancers jumped into

the middle, changing partners continuously. Elspeth was dancing at the edge of the circle with the guy from Duke, her sundress mushrooming when she turned. As she broke away, Pete grabbed her hands and pulled her to the center, smiling. She laughed as he spun her, arching her spine the way the other woman had, her loosed hair almost touching the ground. When she straightened up, the smile was gone. She looked up into Pete's face for a moment, her pale eyes catching the moonlight. Pete pulled her into the shadow, his arm still around her waist. Unsteadily she pushed him away, stumbled over to the refreshment stand, and vomited into the sand. Pete took a few steps after her, and then stopped, his arms at his sides. We didn't see her again until it was time to go back to the hotel.

The day after the carnival, I found Elspeth asleep on the library couch, her sandals lying in the middle of the rug. That day she hadn't shown up at the lizard plot. Katelyn, Pete, and I had stumbled around, catching fewer lizards than ever before, teasing each other about the dark circles under our eyes.

Towards evening, as we all straggled down the mountainside, I noticed Elspeth walking towards the dock with the jeep driver. She turned around to me and waved broadly. In the boat she raised the mainsail and the jib; a light wind caught the sail and rippled through the thin material. Then she pulled up the anchor, expertly winding the anchor chain, and, not looking back, turned the boat towards the horizon.

I saw Pete in the distance as he strode up the road towards his home, the lizard stick resting on his shoulder like a fishing pole, the noose hanging broken.

Abby Chipley  
Vienna, VA  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen

## Bones and Flowers, for Georgia O'Keefe

*Someday I will go to New Mexico.  
The only Southwest I have known  
has been her citified landscapes,  
bare of cattlebones,  
her desert flowers mowed down  
to make way for concrete monoliths  
& stagnant rivers of macadam.*

*I will turn red as leather chewed by the sun  
on ruddy mesas waived by Bauhaus style.  
I will sweep my hands  
along the smooth snout  
of a longhorn's skull,  
& I will know the woman  
to whom those hands belong.*

*My legs will grow strong from squatting  
in the garden I will nurture there--  
filled with irises painted pink & red--  
I will quench my dry hands  
in the moisture of her good soil  
& laying down my cloudy head  
to lap up the fragrance of orrisroot,  
I will sleep with the knowledge of myself  
among the bones & the flowers.*

Gia Maria Hansbury  
Avon, MA  
Fontbonne Academy  
Gita Kupcinskas

## Exciting and Provocative Experiences



Liz Carney  
Dorchester, MA  
Gita Kupcinskas

## Life

The little bugs lived deep inside her. Under her most vital organs, they grew in their softness. They stayed far below so no one could see them and danced with her breathing. One day, in their black shell hardness, they came out. Crawling softly and quietly, inside her borders their little black legs finally touched her all too tender veins. Like walking on tight ropes, they balanced their little bodies about her. Being gentle only to save their own lives, they were quiet. Their shells were hard, shiny, black as their legs. They were like large black dots compared to her pinkish white organs. When they found her weak and her breathing slight, their also weak will found their hunger and they began to feed. Her juices quenched their thirst, her meat controlled their minds. They died within her as one who swallows poison does.

Jenny Cassidy  
Wall, NJ  
Collier High School  
Robin Karlegwski

The rainwater splashed in swollen drops, creating navy splotches on my blue jeans. Within five minutes, the jeans were again a solid color—but it was a darker shade than before. I'm not sure why I was standing outside in the rain; I had somewhere to go. I suppose we all eventually have a place to go—a destination—because when we don't have another place in mind, or another thing to do, our minds must die.

Anyhow, it was the point at which my jeans were thoroughly saturated that I decided I would thumb my way down to Holyoke Mall. I thought it would be an exciting and provocative experience; but then again, what did I know? It was a Thursday afternoon in August; my parents had been away for a week, and I was, essentially, bored. I figured Holyoke to be about sixty miles from where I was (a place so obsolete, most of the people who lived there only knew the name of the substantially larger town neighboring it). I unfolded the map that the gas station attendant had given me. It was ripping along its folds, and the edges were damp and smudged with the dirt from my fingers. To my amazement, the town I was in was on the map; it was represented by a microscopic dot, but it was there. With a grungy finger, I slowly traced the route I'd have to take to get to Holyoke.

"66.4 miles," I thought to myself as I ambled backwards in the gravel and glass-filled shoulder of the highway.

"66.4 miles," became a chant in my head, an involuntary rhythm, beating with my heart. "Six," right foot back, thumb up, eyes alert; "ty," left foot back, thumb still up; "six," right foot back, thumb sinking down, averting eyes towards pavement; "point," left foot back, thumb almost at side, but still up, head completely down; "four," right foot back, thumb down, eyes gazing straight ahead; "miles," left foot back, look back and then ahead again—repeat.

By the time a car pulled over, I think I had covered the first six point four miles. I had learned to stop looking down; the trick was to look at the driver—right in the eyes, and bring him to you with a magnetic stare. The car that pulled over was actually a pink pickup truck; it seemed a sort of paradox. The bright, metallic green of the Vermont license plate clashed terribly, and I winced as I walked by. I stood on my tiptoes as I approached the cab of the truck, suddenly nervous. The man in the driver's seat looked harmless enough, just a typical Vermont farmer. He nodded his head, and with a large and relatively hairy finger, pushed up the yellow ochre baseball cap which was perched precariously on his head. (I had an incredible urge to pull it down so it would fit snugly on his scalp). When he smiled, he exposed dentures in bad need of Polydent, and his entire face appeared to collapse into a pile of soft wrinkles; the lower part, reminding me of a cartoon character, was covered with peppered stubble.

"Hi," I said, my voice trembling just enough to be heard.

"Hi thar!" he exclaimed in a booming voice which seemed inappropriate for such an old man.

"Thanks for," for a moment I couldn't remember what I was saying; "picking me up," I continued. I sat down gingerly, keeping my feet in the air for a moment too long before I took the plunge and nestled them somewhere among the pieces of paper and McDonald's bags on the floor.

"Happy t'blige. Help yerself to the food," he glanced at the light blue styrofoam McDonald's container on the seat. "What's a little miss like yerself doin' hitchin' fer a ride?" he asked in a tone which reminded me of my grandfather. I laughed inwardly at what my refined and very rich grandfather (not to be confused with grandpa) who lived in New York City would think about being compared to this "hick."

"Well, I needed a ride out to Holyoke and I don't drive, and I didn't have ta money for a bus." I tried to add a toughness to my voice to make him think I did this sort of thing frequently.

(Continued on page 35)

"I see," he said slowly, then he held his breath and waited for something to happen. When it didn't, he let the air out of his mouth in a big puff and grasped his bulbous nose and pulled down on it with a big, calloused hand. He continued, "Whatcha gonna do in Holyoke?"

"Stuff," I continued the tough girl act.

"Oh," he said, somewhat offended.

We drove on for another thirty minutes in silence. Then I remembered what every hitcher always asks the minute they get a ride, "So, how far do you think you can take me?" I asked, finally deciding to lose the tough exterior.

"Well," he pondered the question for what seemed like three full minutes, "I reckon I can take ya just 'bout all the way."

I brightened. "Thanks," I said.

I forgot the obscene color of the truck until I rolled the window down to rest my arm on the edge and got an eyefull of the effulgent pink. He noticed the sour look of distaste on my face and chuckled loudly.

"Don't like the color of my truck?" he asked heartily.

Assuming he didn't pick the color himself, I replied, "It's different."

"Well gurl, a blue cow's different too--I din ask ya if it were different, I know that, I asked if ya liked it!" he laughed.

"It's not really for me," I said.

"Hell! I thought all gurls liked pink!" he declared, astounded.

"Not this one," I laughed, and then felt something heavy resting on my thigh and creeping up, none too slowly.

"Whoa! Don't do that!" I screeched, slapping his greasy hand off my leg as if it were a mosquito.

"Jus testin' the waters--seem a mite cold," he began.

"I could be your granddaughter!" I pointed out.

"And so...?" he had a glint in his eyes.

"Oh God!" I cried out and made a face. "Stop! Stop this car, or truck, whatever! Just stop right now!" I yelled.

"No need to get all huffy and puffy..." he protested.

"I mean it, you'd better stop right now if you know what's good for you," I threatened as if I had some brilliant back-up plan.

He kept driving. I leaned out the window and started screaming at the top of my lungs; I felt a finger hook onto one of my belt loops and yank me back into the truck. The force in his pull made me think he was going to hit me. Suddenly, an image of my father came to mind; the glares, stony silences, and sudden temper tantrums. And my mother would never do anything....

"Hell and damnation girl! I'll let ya out--jus stop yer hollerin' now!" he roared and pulled over immediately. I pulled on the handle of the door with such force that the nail on my index finger broke below the quick. I flinched at the slight pain, but it was eased by the relief of getting out of the truck. He pulled off the shoulder and onto the road in a fast burst, making the wheels of the truck spit wet gravel at me.

"Son of a bitch!" I yelled, looking at the vehicle which soon became little more than a pink dot, and then nothing at all.

He had gotten me almost all the way there. After fifteen minutes, I arrived at the mall. It was then that it occurred to me that he hadn't even asked me my name; I guess he wasn't a regular in terms of hitching either. I was glad that nightmare was over. Whatever had possessed me to do that?

I walked into the elegant dressing room at Nordstroms. I peeled off my now-dry jeans and laid them on the lilac colored, fake-satin chair. I then pulled off the black t-shirt I had been wearing and stretched, cracking my back. I looked at myself in the mirror, wearing just my underthings--I smiled, satisfied with the image grinning back at me. I knew I looked good; but I knew I'd look better wearing the silk shirt on the hanger. Maybe it'd make my mother happy.

"You'd think you were born in a dirt poor family. All of my friends' daughters would kill for the kind of wardrobe I buy for you--but you insist on dressing like a slob. You have no fashion sense whatsoever--will you ever learn?"

Would I ever learn? What a question. I think all of my teachers had asked it at least once, and always in the same breath with the "p-word."

"She has so much potential, and she does so well on aptitude tests--she just doesn't try; I don't understand why."

Nothing I did was ever right, maybe that's why I stopped trying--it's just that nobody had ever bothered to ask me why. I would have told them. But none of that mattered now. At least when they were yelling at me they couldn't ignore me....

I didn't have any money with me, but there were ways of getting around that. I wore an innocent look on my face as I walked out of Nordstroms and past the salesladies and makeup girls who were smiling at me with lips hidden under piles of red and fuschia lipstick. As I walked out of the store, a beeper went off. "Shit! I know I took the sensor off!" I thought to myself. I had imagined stealing would be an exciting and provocative experience; but then again, what did I know?

Lee Middleton  
Fairfax, VA

## Water

It's been a typically frazzling day and I'm sort of trudging down the block from the train station to my house like a pack animal under the weight of my bookbag. A hot bath sounds nice. Really nice. I've got that sample of bubble bath I could use, too. I could just soak for about an hour, reading something like Cosmo before I settle down to a nice cozy five-hour session of doing homework.

My house looms closer. The unborn bath beckons from within the bathroom like a Siren. Just thinking about the warm water relaxes me.

And then I remember. They posted the notice on the door last night. The words on the ugly blue background cheerily announced that there would be no water between the hours of 8:30 am and 4:30 pm today. I'd been looking forward to going to the bathroom too. How annoying.

Nosferatu, my cat (who thinks he's a dog), is waiting in the backyard to be let in when I get home. Before admitting him, I try to turn on the tap, hoping that they'd decided to turn the water back on early. No such luck. My mom had had the foresight to fill several pots up with water. Deciding against heating them up and carrying them upstairs to fulfill my dream of having a bath, I take one of them with me into the bathroom. The lid is up on the toilet bowl and a three-inch long cockroach is skating around on the tile floor. Odds are the little fellow came up from the bowl. I must decide between risking an encounter with a family member of his and relieving myself. I choose to be brave.

I take out a bottle of refrigerated water and pour some on my hands over the kitchen sink in an effort to maintain a connection with civilization. Then I pour some into Nosferatu's water bowl. He yips happily.

I take a big juicy purple grape out of the refrigerator and bring it over to the sink to rinse it off. I actually attempt to turn on the tap. I end up eating it still coated with pesticides.

I consider making myself tea, but am somewhat wary of using water that's been sitting around all day.

I'm so tired, but I don't want to take a nap because the last time I did that I ended up with an awful headache. If I just lie down for a minute, though, that wouldn't happen.

Nosferatu curls up next to me, forgetting himself and purring.

MaryAnne LoVerme  
Brooklyn, NY  
Midwood High School  
Sharon Lustbader

# My Cross

"Don't chew so loud," I said. "You chew like a cow."

"Sorry," my father said, not the least bit sorry.

"Is the air on?" I said, becoming edgy from the "climate control" of the car.

"No. It's fine," my father said, still looking ahead, chewing the same wad of gum he'd been chewing since ten o'clock this morning.

"What do you mean it's fine? Get some air in here, I'm dying," I said with an annoyed, harsh voice.

"Should I call an ambulance?"

"Why don't you ever just give me a straight answer?" I said.

"What, you said you were dying," he said with a smirk on his face.

"You know you're annoying? I hate it when you do this."

"Do what?" He was acting innocent. "You just get all wimpy on me because of the air. Just shut up about the air!" he said sternly. There was a silence.

"Turn here?" he blurted.

"What? Yea, here. Here!" Too late. We missed the turn.

"Why don't you know where you're going. Damn! Don't you get anything straight son? Huh?"

"I said turn but...."

"Next time get a ride with someone."

"Why do you start this every time we go to a game? Why are you going anyway? I told you I don't want you to go."

"I want to see my boy score a touchdown!" he said in lively spirits, putting his arm around me.

"Why are you doing this to me?" I said, brushing his arm off my shoulder.

"Doing what?" he said.

"You know, making me do this. I want to know."

"Because it's good for you and I want you to do it. You make me proud to see you out there."

"No, but why this? Maybe you were a jock, but just leave me out of it."

"No, no. I wasn't."

"Get a touchdown for me!" he yelled out the car window as I gave him a dirty look and walked up to the gym. Don't get me wrong, I love my dad. It's just some things that he does that make me wonder if he really cares about me as a person, not as a possession. I went into the lobby of the gymnasium as I heard my dad's '88 Firebird drive off with my little brother in the back seat. I felt bad for him, so young and naive, unknowing that he too would have the same fate when he was older. Yes, I felt disgusted about this, but what could I do? I had no choice either. I had no choice in taking dance lessons, clarinet, lacrosse, or Latin. My mother was making my brother take piano. He hated it. Parents are probably taught to make their children take piano lessons in Lamaze class.

The front door had been left open by our coach so we could come in. It wasn't usual that there were weekend games, and it seemed as if I was the first one there. There's something eerie about that, about being alone in a gymnasium, especially in a locker room. The lobby was green with a large trophy case. Inside the case you could barely read the dusty, old plaques from '49 and '55 teams. The days when we used to win games. I looked at the case hoping no one else would arrive and the game would be cancelled and I could catch a movie or something, but soon enough Harley arrived, and with a bunch of junior and senior kids on the team. So I quietly followed them into the locker room. The floors had just been waxed, and I guess that's why I slipped.

It was just a giant room filled with old, blue lockers which serviced grades nine through twelve. But in the front was a large, separate locker room especially for the football team. Boy did it stink in there, like ammonia. There was a yellow metal door to the room full of dents from frustrated players. It looked

flimsy and tired, but when I pushed it, it was strong and sturdy. I kind of admired it for hanging in there and being tough by surviving the beatings from the feet of football players.

Some loud fan was going in the ceiling of the room trying to get some ventilation in there, but it was no use. The odor from sweaty jerseys and unwashed shirts overpowered the fan and deodorant sprays in the locker room, and had permeated into the outer locker area which the "sissy-wimp soccer players occupied. However, there were over a hundred of them, and fifty--three of us, so I hardly thought we were in a position to make comments. It's that ego that makes us so outspoken. My locker was in a corner of the room, neatly situated so it was impossible to get anything out of it. At least it was next to someone I liked, and he didn't shut my locker or put the lock on backwards while I was changing. To my surprise, most of the team was in there. For some strange reason they like to come early and watch tapes of other games, and fart and make crude noises and talk about who "did what" the night before. All I did was my homework.

It was comic though. Most on the team actually got good grades. In fact, most were the top of their class. Our school was one of those upscale Catholic schools named after a Cardinal or something, so most of the kids were good students. So, we got smart jocks on the team instead of invariably dumb jocks. I was probably one of the smartest there. I didn't mind changing in front of other guys, 'cause you know some guys aren't crazy about that, but I didn't care. It's just when they start talking about whose is bigger, and who could do it with a bumble bee, I get annoyed because, let's say, it's just not the kind of friendly discussion I'd like to have with the Queen at tea time. It's funny how guys who are supposed to be so macho, have such a fascination about their genitals. One of our guys did commercials for a local car dealership. He got to miss practice sometimes, about the closest our school got to excitement.

"Hurry up, Martin," one of the guys said, "We're leavin' in a sec."

"Yeah, all right," I answered.

We all squeezed into the three cheap green and yellow vans the school bought for transportation and headed off. I wondered if my father was driving behind us. He said he might follow the vans to the game so he could watch me play. Why should he come? If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have to be doing this. Good, he's not following us. I didn't quite understand his motives, but it must have had something to do with his being a water boy in high school.

Our manager was there. He was a pretty good friend, but most of the guys gave him a bad time because they thought he was different. I had to admit though, that being a "computer geek" didn't score points for him on the team, but he didn't care or even know it. He just wanted to fit in, you know, to feel important. If managing a bunch of smelly, gritty football players was his way of being important, to each his own. He was a good friend of mine though, and what perturbed me was that I had to be kind of mean to him too, so as to not look like a wimp or something stupid like that. When I think about it though, most of the guys appreciated him deep inside. Who would rush to their side when they came off the field and needed to be taped or wanted water? Filthy, sweaty, scrungy or anything; he would fix them feeling like he had aided a wounded soldier, ready for battle again. I respected him, I really did, and so did the guys. They just wouldn't admit it. It's not that I didn't respect the team, because I had plenty of admiration for it. I actually liked being on a team, it's the sport I hated.

Even though we were traveling what would be considered a long distance, the ride there always seemed too quick. The guys would turn on the loudest rock station they could blast their ear drums with, and recline on the seats being gross and disgusting, making obscene noises with various parts of their body, and crude comments about people in cars next to us. I always sat in front. It didn't matter where I sat because no one would notice

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anyway. As soon as I would see the city drift away, we were there.

In games at fields where there wasn't an electronic scoreboard the time went quick because you never knew what time it was. Green Park had a gigantic digital scoreboard that counted the seconds of the game, like I did the season: very slowly. Since it was a varsity game I didn't have to worry much about playing, but I kind of wished the coach had put me in. I mean, if I was going to give up my Sunday to be in a football game, I wanted to play! It was freezing, as it usually was the last week of November. All bundled up in a sweatshirt and gloves I looked like a wimp, but at least I was warm.

The holes on the sides of my green helmet made a whining noise from the blowing wind that annoyed the hell out of me. Besides, I looked horrible in green. I just stood not really caring if we won or lost, but I acted enthused. I was one of sixteen freshmen on the team and one kid was in St. Elver Heights, visiting his mother. We used to be great friends, but after the season he ignored me to be friends with a bunch of "in" kids who drank and smoked. I was too decent for him. Why was that? You know, why kids my age thought it was cool to smoke and drink. I mean, I was no Einstein, but c'mon! I understood that it was people like me who were going to have to shell out four thousand bucks to bury them in twenty years. He thought he was a rebel. I'll never understand freshmen, or my father for that matter.

Anyway, no one noticed me there, so I blended right in with the scrub freshmen team. There must be something wrong with this scoreboard, I thought, but I knew it was perfectly o.k.

Our coach was a really nice guy, but tough and kind of on the chubby side. He admired me for being out there, friend or fowl. I didn't take advantage of his niceness, like other guys did. They would make up really stupid excuses for missing practices, and he would let them get out of practice. What they didn't know was that he was on to them all along, he just acted dumb about it. He knew they were only cheating themselves. The coach was probably one of the most well liked members of the faculty, and the only one not part of the clergy. He had a good reputation and so did the team, so we got new equipment and the largest fields. His kids always followed him to practice and ran around the field tackling each other and nearly killing themselves, hoping to one day follow in the footsteps of the "big guys" on the other end of the field. Once the littlest one who was five, Eric, came up to me and said with starry, admiring eyes, picking his nose, "wan'a play catch? Huh?" I knew he looked up to us, but to me? I just continued the drill, barely knocking him over, which he liked. If he wanted a football role model, he picked the wrong person. Hey, I couldn't even make those fart noises.

Well, just Eric was at the Green Park game, his two year older brother wasn't there. He was probably in the hospital with stitches from being chased into a power line or goal post. Green Park had made a big thing about their football homecoming, refreshments and cheerleaders too. I never really understood homecoming, since ours was called Annunciation Day. Green Park even had an announcer who read our first string roster out loud. Get this, they said I was starting receiver. Everyone cheered in the stands because they didn't know the difference, but the guys on the team laughed at me. The starting receiver was angry that the paper would think I was the one who caught the passes. I just laughed. I really didn't mind.

Now the third quarter had started and I was standing on the side lines as usual. Eric had bought a plastic bag full of water. Of water? No, there was a tiny goldfish inside. Why were they selling goldfish? Probably some jerk had sold it to him for something like ten bucks. He was jostling the bag and shaking the water tremendously. The fish inside was swimming around, frantic and scared. He continued to bounce the bag up and down until I was sure it would burst. Then he stopped and began to trap the fish in the corners of the bag. Once he squeezed it so tight that the water escaped to the other end, leaving the fish

between his fingers. He let it go, but not after seeing it squirm and struggle. It gave him great pleasure to see the fish in agony, and he would have done it again had I not said something.

"Stop," I said quietly. "Stop it," I repeated, raising my voice.

"Why should I," Eric said.

"Because you shouldn't do that to it. It doesn't like it."

"How do you know? I like it."

"Would you? How would you like it if you were the fish and someone squeezed you and suffocated you and tried to drown you. You wouldn't like it."

"Well, not really." My reverse psychology was working.

"So then don't do it."

"It's not worth anything," he said easily. Not worth anything? How could he say that!

"It's a life! Of course it's worth something." I said, but I had lost his concentration. It didn't matter to him.

"I'm getting tired of holding it," he said.

"Then put it down gently on the bench." He followed the directions, and then grabbed a football and played catch with himself. He had forgotten the fish already who was finally swimming calmly in the bag of water. Not worth anything! I still can't believe it. Even the guys on the team were worth something, but only on sale.

We don't always know what's best for each other, or for fish, for that matter. It was probably happier in its little fish bowl where it was surer and felt safe. Now someone had taken it and put it where it didn't belong. In a plastic bag.

We lost. It was a shutout. One hundred and ten to zero, or something. I didn't care either way, but I was kind of disappointed. If I had to be on a team, I preferred it to be a winning one. The last Sunday game of the season. One less cross to carry.

"How'd it go?" my father asked still chewing the same piece of gum.

"We lost." I said as I climbed into the car.

"Aw, too bad. Bet you guys gave 'um hell, huh? Of course you did. Play any?"

"Some defense," I said. I was lying. "Are we going home?"

"No. Your mother wants us to get Chinese for you guys tonight. Your mother and I are going out tonight. I want you to be in charge, o.k.?"

"In charge. Yeah, sure."

Christian M. Gullette  
Lutherville, MD  
Friends School of Baltimore  
Thomas Buck

## *baby*

*baby?  
can your sweet ears open  
to the wide sea yet?  
my little sugar boy, how do  
your simple eyes take  
in the swimming night?  
you, my only illumination  
cling to me,  
your new skin glowing;  
wrapping you in my arms,  
i take to the water  
where the candles float  
under the soft stones.*

Angie Blake  
Arlington, VA  
Yorktown High School  
Judy A. Boesch

A black girl in a floral dress lies rotting in a field between a church and a schoolhouse. Her hair sticks out from her scalp in twists. Flies buzz around her body, landing on her lips, her eyelids, and the edge of her ear. Her body swells with the gases of rotting compost, like the calf I saw in New Mexico whose bloated belly pushed its legs into the air and made its eyes roll back in his head. She lies in short grass, small yellow flowers scattering the green. The red dirt road winds between the church and the school. Her dress is dirty, her feet calloused and orange on the bottom; someone has stolen her shoes. The dress feels like cotton; yellow, pink, and spring green dyes give it an uneasy color like pea soup with pieces of fatty ham. She lies on her side. She is young, short, and her cheeks are full. Near the church stands the Royal Poinsettia tree with its red tulip flowers and long seedpods that look like cheap rubber snakes in the toy store. Its fern-like leaves produce only speckles of shade, giving the body no relief from the sun. Behind the tree, an overgrown hedge spews out bees and flies; bromeliads and love-weed crawl onto the churchyard. To the right of the tree, leaves, cut branches, and paper trash line the bottom of a cement pit. The pit serves as the garbage pail for the church and school--when it fills they burn the rubbish. Beyond the church, the land drops off quickly, reaching for the road. Between the road and the church lies the graveyard, full of long cement beds, some covered with tiles. Kati and I lay down on these beds of cement the other day, stretching out our legs to the sun, baking on the color that some Jamaican blacks would so soon scrub off with a brillo and bleach.

One woman in a shop in Mandeville had patches of white skin. She worked at the Rasta shop, a closet-sized place with a glass-topped display case and T-shirts draped on the walls. They had black coral jewelry laced with red, gold, and green, and a few posters of Marley and Tosh. The skin patches looked like she had clawed parts of her skin off. The sections were greyish like scar tissue, stretches of sickly skin that looked soft to the touch. I read someplace that cocaine can cause your skin to fall off your bones; from the looks of the woman, this might have been the cause.

Randy Reid, one of the Bible school students, had three small marks on his face. They popped out like scabs, but seemed more like freckles or moles. He complained on game-day that boys weren't being chosen, so I helped him get into a game of "farmer in the dell." He didn't come the next day, but he hopped past the church in a dirty T-shirt and jeans cut off at the knee, alone, barefoot, looking poorer than the days he had come in his plaid shirt and bluejeans.

Shelly-Ann had little money for clothes, either. The first two days she came in a deep purple velveteen dress with a big white collar and an empire waist. The last three days of the five she came in a short-sleeved dress with a white Peter Pan collar and light blue sash. There was no button at the nape of the neck, so I asked her if I could pin it closed. Her face lit with a yes. The quarter-inch nametag pins were perfect for the task. I wonder if she had her mother take the pin off the back, and kept it to use again. I wonder if she was cooler in the dress before I imposed my correction. Her two year-old sister Petal may someday grow into the same dress, and stroke some blonde lady's hair in admiration, take home her colored paper stars and mobiles with Shelly-Ann's innocent pride. I can imagine the picture I took of the two of them fading black, slipping away from me, dissolving them from my grasp.

I wonder if it is Shelly-Ann's sister I see lying dead, hot, and bothered by flies in my mind as I think of stone churches and stained-glass missing panes, hot sun and red earth rich with bauxite. I wonder why the child I imagine when I think of Jamaica lies dead, alone, stuck near a road in the noon sun near a church and a grave and a road and a school. This cluster of things does not fit well together in my mind, nonetheless shares

the same rolling rise scattered with small yellow flowers and stones in one village in the South Middlesex parish of someone's Jamaica.

Stephanie Mohr  
Ellicott City, MD  
Mrs. Vecchioni

## Sig and the Stupid Squirrel "The world is my fuse" -Rites of Spring

Sometimes I can look at people and realize I could hate them by next month. I don't know, but when Sig came by to pick me up to go to the Omega to see Quality Scar for the twentieth time, it was one of those moments. We're going down Soren Meadows Boulevard at around 65 when this squirrel darts out and crouches frozen near the sidewalk where me, Sig, and Cory used to skate. I asked him just what the hell he thought he was doing after he slammed and skidded for about five minutes. He yelled that the squirrel was probably confused and could dart into the road, and then, he asked me, how would I feel then? Well, of course, I don't eat meat or anything that was alive before or anything. I mean, I'm a member of PETA like Sig and Sal, but I'm not gonna go shoot myself if a stupid squirrel runs under my wheels.

So the thing is, I really didn't feel like seeing Quality Scar for the thirtieth time by the time we got to the Omega. I saw everyone I knew and someone said the Zealots were the opening band. A couple of skinheads came up to me asking to borrow a knife to cut the laces of some guy's Doc Martins. They said he was a poseur. I guess he let his hair grow or something. That's when I went in.

I don't know if you've seen the Zealots before or not, but I wouldn't if you haven't already. They're this Christian Speed-Metal band and all their songs are about Satan's hatred of good, and how much they hate that. Their bass player was this girl with an Italian face and a skull t-shirt. It had this torn v-neck with safety pins holding the sides together. I could imagine someone ripping the top of the skull apart for the first time. I sat there listening to every "To Hell With the Devil" song over and over, thinking that I wouldn't mind being the one to rip it, if you want to know the truth.

I went outside when the Zealots were done playing and busy selling their demo tapes and t-shirts. Sal was there and it was cool to see her passing out Radio Free Cotton, this 'zine she puts out with Mike and Rollo. I shot the breeze with her for a while, talking about how Brent Schaefer got it published for her. I asked Sal if he got that discount he said he could get for her. Sal punched the USA Today dispenser that was sitting on the same curb we were. She said that he didn't because it wasn't worth it to him. She said that he really didn't say it like that, but she couldn't elaborate because she had to go interview the Zealots.

Some people were passing around dried apricots on a styro-foam tray over by Sig, so I stood over by him for a while. After listening to Sig whine about how much he hated the Zealots for a couple of minutes, I saw Brent Schaefer sitting with some dark-haired girl on the steps of a darkened shoe shop. I walked across the street, thinking about love and skull t-shirts. I used to be good friends with this girl, Carla Ciardi. When I was bored on Sunday afternoons, I used to sit in my backyard hammock and listen to all of her grandfathers and uncles play noisy bocce ball. A couple of times she came over and we would walk up to the zoo to see the peacocks. They were her favorites, not the

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giraffes or the ponies, but the peacocks, and sometimes the emus.

Carla sort of changed when she fell in love with the lead singer of The Smiths, I think his name is Morrissey. She was real nice to anyone who looked like him, you know, tall and boring. She went out with anyone with the facial expressions of a Smiths poster or a collection of subdued cardigan sweaters.

Brent and his new woman hadn't noticed me, as I watched them stare into the lights off 29th street. God, that girl looked a lot like old Carla. I said, "Hey Brent, how's it going?" I could've said Hey Brent, why'd you ask Carla to the Junior Prom last spring and get drunk as a pig? And why do you judge the work of friends who just want it printed? Where's your new-wave sense of tact? And where's the brim of that goddamn Mets hat you have on?

Brent never introduced me to who he was with. He murmured that he'd never seen Quality Scar and that he didn't really like Radio Free Cotton because he "appreciated something with a more serious approach." After a while I said I had to go because I thought I heard Quality Scar tuning up. I knew it was just the soundman playing old Minutemen albums to tell everyone the headlining band would be playing in about 10 minutes. I decided to go sit on the stage to get some good standing room that would disappear when the slam pit started. You know how good it gets at the start of the first song. I saw Sal on the way in and she said she wasn't paying to get in; she only came to see everyone outside. We hung on the melted-white brick outside wall of the club, musing about where Quality Scar got their name, until Sig came out with a couple of his skinhead friends. They had the fire extinguisher from the Omega's hallway smuggled under a vinyl jacket. They were going out to spray people at bus stops. I went to ask him about the fact that he was sort of stranding me here, you know, just to joke around. But he was already laughing loudly, like he really wanted people to notice what a wild time he was having.

I went in and was about to go over and pay and wait a couple of minutes, but just then I remembered that squirrel from about two hours ago. I felt like running out the back exit, finding Sig and seven skinheads crammed in his mom's Chrysler which me, Sig, and Cory used to ride with our skateboards in. I really felt I should find him and tell him that it didn't matter about that goddamn squirrel. It wouldn't've mattered if we had squashed that stupid squirrel's head or not. Either way, I would still be right here, eating red hot cheese popcorn at the bar of the Omega Alternative Music Club, getting thirsty and thinking everyone hated me because they were such assholes. And either way, you would be wherever the hell you are.

Brent and his woman walked in and he dutifully informed me that that was the same kind of barbecue popcorn they served at the Inner Circle Club, and that it was "a real killer." He offered me some of his Big Gulp. I said no, I like something with a more serious approach. He mumbled something but it was drowned out by Quality Scar. They were finally tuning up for real. I could've walked down the hall with the empty fire extinguisher cabinet to see them. I could've, with Brent sitting around with his new brown-haired clone and his New York Mets skullcap making him some sort of Progressive Music pope. But I never paid the additional three bucks to see them play for the tenth time. I stepped out, smelling the downtown air's blue electricity and squirrel fur smells. I thought I saw Sal's brown beret going down the subway stairs, a block south. I went down to the platform, but I didn't see her anywhere. Then I couldn't even remember if she wore her favorite piece of clothing tonight; her brown-red beret. Then, I took the blue line uptown and walked the rest of the way home.

Alex Hicks  
Falls Church, VA  
Bishop Ireton High School  
Br. Rick Wilson

## Untitled

The silver surfer's got a real big board  
He rides the solar wind around  
And conquers evil.  
He's got no eyes or ears, really.  
It's all been filled in,  
No windows to his noble silver soul.  
It's not a money thing at all  
Just the result of hailing from a silver planet.  
Us? We're the water planet.  
But we don't wear it.  
We do crave silver, though, and to balance it out  
I'll bet those guys out there crave water.  
We could establish trade relations  
But scarcity's the key to value  
So we'd better limit it, anyway  
The silver surfer's fine like he is  
He's prob'ly satisfied, and I'd be disappointed  
Seeing him cry borrowed silver tears.

Andrew Krall  
Harleysville, PA  
Kathy Walsh

## Even Though Your Feet are Ugly

Palm readers would probably contend  
that your wide-palmed hands,  
short, conical fingernails,  
belonged to a sculptor  
of clay.  
Everything about you  
suggests the simple pleasures  
of touching  
earth mixed with water.

You sculpt me  
when you rest my head against your stomach  
and run your sculptor's fingers  
through the tangles in my hair  
as we lie on the flat side  
of Federal Hill watching clouds.

Sometimes I fear  
that even clouds are made of clay;  
you made them for me while my head was turned  
(we saw a lake in the sky).  
Gravity could force all the sky sculptures down on us,  
smashing and cracking,  
crawling back into the earth to be dust again.

I would develop amnesia,  
only remembering  
your hands and the earth mixed with water.

Francie Roberts  
Towson, MD  
Towson High School  
Sue Ellen Winter



False Start  
Michele Dunbar  
Germantown, MD  
Seneca Valley High School  
Jay Corder

## Untitled

They ought to put your tongue  
In the Museum of Natural History  
frame it,  
or let it loose  
in a cage  
its writhing body  
labelled, next to the dinosaur bones  
and that giant squid.

Stephanie Mohr  
Ellicott City, MD  
Mrs. Vecchioni

## Before the Purging

I'm beginning to get the Christmas-time feeling  
Of fat and full and unstretched and sniffing.  
He says, "How are you" and wraps the words  
In cashmere intention, turning my pink skin fluffy,  
Keeping me slightly sweaty, preferring sitting.  
And when I do uncurl my beanstalk legs,  
I open the cookie bag meticulously,  
White fingernails flashing,  
Though my throat is sore of sweets.  
I'm wondering whether this is true love.

Sarah Raff  
Swarthmore, PA

## Enlightenment

"To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun,  
the day is a perpetual morning."  
---Thoreau

I read today that the entire amount of energy  
the human race expends each day  
thinking  
weighs about a billionth of a gram  
and I discovered that from 500BC  
to the present, Man in all his wisdom  
hasn't even thought the weight  
of a postage stamp.

I also read that in the course  
of an average day, 160 tons  
of sunlight settle on the earth  
which means that, per diem,  
everyone has to support .00006 lbs.  
of sunshine

In comparing these two numbers  
it seems that each of us spends  
250 million times more energy  
holding up the sunlight  
than the whole race of homo sapiens  
does trying to understand it

The day is  
a perpetual morning

Andrew Gerle  
Baltimore, MD  
Catonsville High School  
Dr. Gary Blankenburg

## Late Night

Late night  
In an orange booth--  
Nine people,  
Filthy silverware,  
Open all night.  
I sit alone,  
With a craving for  
Hash browns.  
My waitress is high,  
Single--  
Wearing an almost-clean  
Apron.  
And a black nametag  
Missing an E.  
I can smell the Truck Driver's  
special.  
I look outside--  
Morning and still dark--  
Late night on a sleeping avenue.  
I stir my juice  
With a finger--  
Four twenty-six A.M.  
As I leave,  
The man at the counter  
Blows me a kiss.  
I feel numb.  
Out in the alley,  
Under the greasy sky,  
The streetlamp is the moon.

Laura Stallard  
Baltimore, MD  
Towson High School  
Sue Ellen Winter



# Reaching Back

I never cocked my head to the  
stars as they whirled away at dawn  
and shouted my questions  
Shaking an indignant fist  
I never did any of that  
catching my voice in my teeth before it could fly

Now underneath the warmth of  
the blankets on the  
girl on a cold night in  
winter now maybe to  
tear my throat  
rage rips out at  
her  
out of the past  
But maybe not  
And she sleeps oblivious because  
how could I expect otherwise  
Outside snow is falling and I remember spring

The green wind had blown  
smelling of new and wide sensations  
I smiled like anybody despite empty arms and silence  
I looked around then puzzled like a foreigner  
at the people around me and heard the things they said

A girl in black  
leaned back her chair  
on two legs and  
walked with me through warm rain and taillit streets  
glistened red  
Her hand and mine dripped with water down between them  
and we felt the green press of grass on bare legs and arms

But people and colors faded behind me like  
accidental bleachings  
and my reachings back  
won me cold hands as fall came on  
And shipments of factory seconds

And now winter with  
those shifting strangers  
shoving up close to my face  
So I can touch them and  
see blurs of flashing color

I accept them wordlessly  
The fists I raise fall back against my sides  
to be taken softly into other hands

Snow outside spills blank whiteness  
across the stars  
across memory  
across even the soft sleeping skin against mine  
New dreams are awake and hot inside  
I can't reach back anymore  
I want to shout.

Jason Innes  
Baltimore, MD  
Friends School  
Helen Underwood

# Yellow

Punished  
I walk to my room.  
Tears in my eyes,  
I blink.  
They streak my face.  
I look at a lightbulb  
And close my eyes.  
I see night with its two  
Yellow stars.  
On my night table  
Is a lemon drop.  
I place it in my mouth.  
It tastes yellow.  
I open my eyes  
To see if the night has taken  
Me away.  
I close them and see  
I am the color of grass  
Under a forgotten bucket.

Becky Freyer  
Atlanta, GA  
Foxcroft School  
Paul Bergan

# Untitled

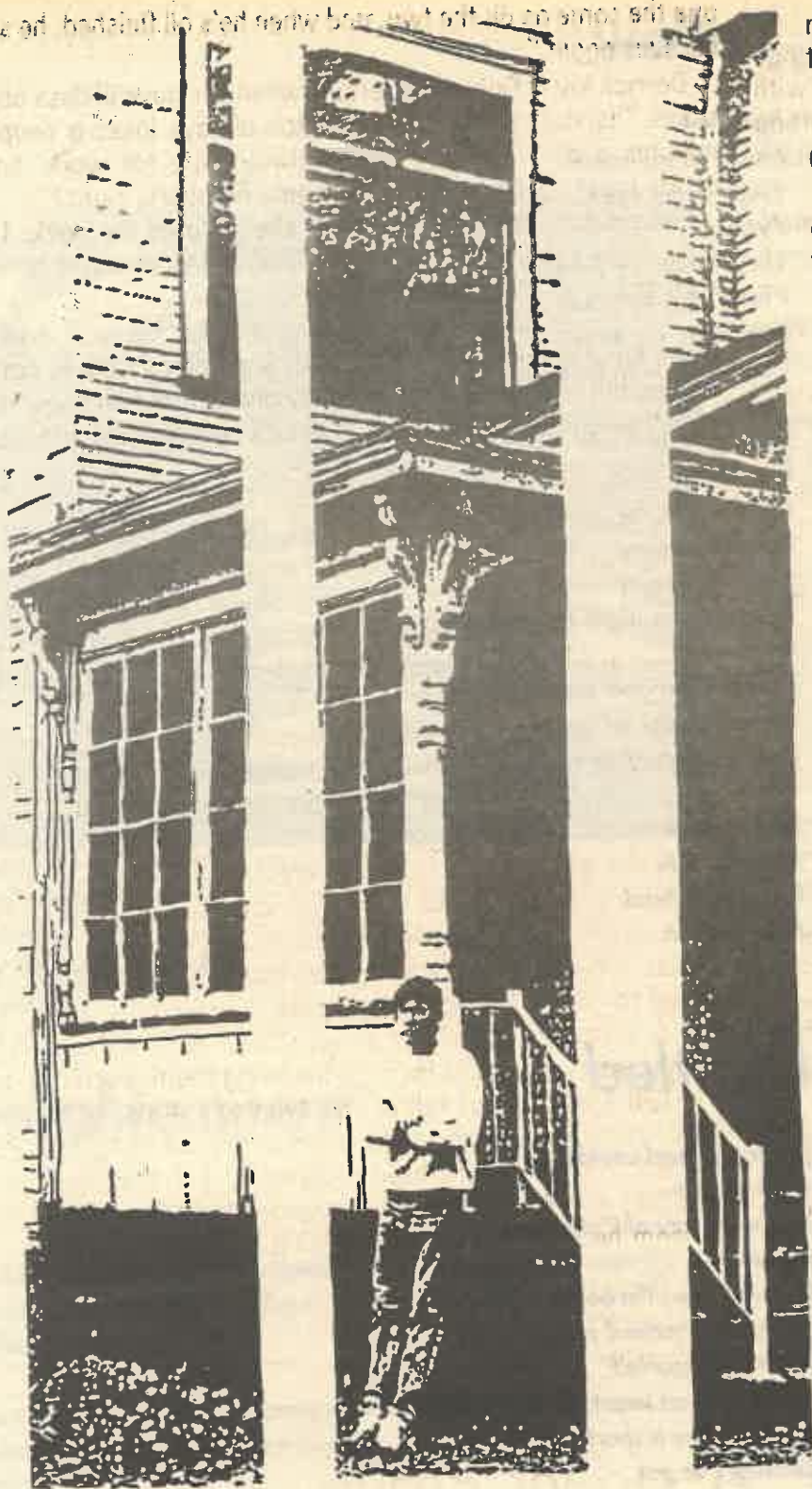
I hear my head could hold  
--inside it--  
All the Library of Congress  
And more  
But, just now, I'm not reading.  
I wanted to remind you  
Not to kill yourself  
Trying to read twenty thousand books....  
This message is short  
Because I've got  
Books to read.

Tara Erin Browne  
Lee, MA  
Lee High School  
Cheryl D. Nelson

# Bullet

A bullet ran past  
My face today like a track star  
In the Olympics;  
He didn't have time  
To say, "Hello," or even, "Excuse me,"  
All I could see were  
His silver sneakers as he raced down the  
Street after this guy;  
Suddenly he bumped into him  
And knocked him over  
And disappeared like a ghost.

Bryant Wells  
Pittsburgh, PA  
South Vocational Technical High School  
Arla H. Muha



House on 286  
Bryson VanNostrand  
Saltsburg, PA  
Kiskiminetas Springs School  
James Nagle

## A Twist of Champagne

Gabe closed the front door slowly. It was raining outside and squalid footprints stuck to the entrance way. She looked down, sighed and whispered to herself "tomorrow." Gabe walked into the living room, still tipsy from the evening's champagne, and stretched out on the floor. She didn't even bother to clear away the remnants of napkins and crushed potato chips. The music still played loudly. She hadn't the energy to shut it off, so she just held her head.

"Derrick, shut the music."

"What?" Derrick yelled back from the kitchen.

"I said, kill the music, will you?"

"I can't hear you, Gabe. The music's too loud. Why don't you shut it off?"

Gabe rolled her eyes in frustration. She then pulled herself up halfway, reached over and turned the stereo off. Then she fell back to her sprawled position between the couch and glass table. She lay there face up and dug her nails into the carpet.

Gabe felt something wet hit her face. She pretended not to

notice, but every few seconds her face grew increasingly wetter. She opened her eyes widely and stared at the ceiling.

"Derrick, we have to call the plumber."

"Why, is the toilet stopped up again?" Derrick called out. Gabe could tell by the echo that his head was in the refrigerator.

"No. The ceiling is leaking." Gabe stared up, looking suspiciously at the cracks. She squinted and sneered at the culprit who incessantly kept spitting down water on her face.

"Is it really bad?"

"Come in and see for yourself, and bring some pots." Derrick walked into the living room wearing Gabe's Budweiser apron. He held a pot in each hand and a dish towel hung from the apron's belt. Gabe loved seeing him dressed like a housewife. She gave a small smirk. As Derrick approached, he felt something soft under his loafer.

"Uh - Gabe, I think the carpet will need a cleaning." The dead cupcake stuck to the sides of Derrick's shoe, but he ignored it and released himself into the loveseat. Four eyes stared up at the dangling drip that was about to hit Gabe's face in two seconds.

"You don't call a plumber for this," Derrick said in a tired voice.

"Then what do you call?"

"You mean, whom do you call? I guess you call a contractor or something or other."

"A something or other doesn't do the job, Honey."

"Well, a plumber does plumbing, not a ceiling that can't hold it in."

The ceiling finally spit out the drip on Gabe's face and started to form another drip. Derrick tried to swallow his laughter and almost choked. Gabe gave him an eyebrows-up and then coughed out some laughter too.

"Come, get up off those stale pretzels. I want to hold you."

"Oh, great. I go from stale pretzels to a stale husband," Gabe mumbled as she slid across to Derrick.

"You're so cute, but you'd be even cuter without that tongue of yours."

"I thought my tongue was the best part," Gabe said with one eye peeping out from beneath her hair. Derrick stretched over Gabe and tried to position the pot under the leak.

"Damn. Missed it."

"A little to the left, Derr. Look, put it on the wet carpet spot." While Derrick was struggling to catch the escaping water, Gabe took another few sips from the champagne glass resting on the table.

"Judy looked marvelous tonight, didn't she Derr?"

"She looked okay but that throw-up fushia...it...well, I don't think it particularly compliments her olive complexion."

"She's just going through a phase. Judy feels she has to stand out wherever she goes," Gabe said as she ran her fingers over Derrick's. Shethen stretched over for the champagne glass and took another big sip.

"Like your phase with cigarettes."

"That wasn't a phase. I honestly liked them," she rebutted.

"Well I didn't," said Derrick, stroking Gabe's hair.

"Who cares what you like?"

"What do you mean who cares what I like? I care...you care...don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I didn't mean to snap at you. Just don't go around accusing me of going through any phases," Gabe said, with decreasing emphasis.

"They both sat there on the loveseat leaning on each other and completely interdependent. Derrick held Gabe tightly. He pushed his forefinger on her cheek and watched her blood fill up his circle imprint.

"Derr, I wonder what it's like to be satisfied, I mean completely satisfied," Gabe said.

"And what brings up this inquiry?"

"You're going to laugh. It's about Judy's brother."

"And what about Judy's brother?"

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"I was over at her place yesterday. He was visiting for a couple of days. He's from this small town somewhere upstate with some name I can't even pronounce. Well, we were all just sitting around drinking tea and talking. And I've come to the conclusion that he is completely satisfied."

"Okay, Mrs. Philosophy, why do you think he is completely satisfied? And don't tell me you have mental powers," Derrick replied.

"His face. You can see it in his face. That's what small town life does."

"You're not really in a position to assume that he's completely satisfied. That just isn't fair. After all, a lot goes on beyond the obvious. You're living proof of that. If you ask me, there's no such thing as completely satisfied. There just isn't. It's human to be discontent. I would even go so far as to say it would be abnormal to be completely satisfied."

"Now who's talking philosophy, Mr. Socrates? Well, if there were a man completely satisfied, he would look just like Judy's brother."

By now the dripping had slowed to one drop every half minute...ptang, another drop hit the side of the pot. Both Gabe's and Derrick's eyes focused downward to the carpet. They had almost forgotten about the leak.

"We should have bought that nifty brand rug. You know, the one that's impervious to everything." Gabe blurted out.

"But it doesn't resist everything firstly, and, secondly, we're on a budget," Derrick said, as he gazed down at his shoe and smeared the caked-on pastry.

"Then first of all, why do two people on a budget have a party, and, second of all, why do you correct everything I say?"

"When was I correcting you? Sometimes I just don't get you!" Derrick said, taking away his hand from Gabe.

"You don't have to get me...you have me," Gabe said, taking back his hand into her own.

"Oh, Gabriella," Derrick pushed Gabe's head off his lap and pulled himself into the kitchen.

"I hate when he calls me Gabriella. I ask him not to call me Gabriella and what does he call me...."

"Gabriella, that's what I call you. Don't talk to yourself. You worry me," Derrick said, as he stuck his head into the refrigerator.

Gabe finished the rest of her drink, gave a feminine burp, untangled herself from the loveseat and sauntered after Derrick.

"Pour me another glass of champagne."

"No, Gabe. You get so fiesty."

"Fiesty shmiesty."

"Gabe, admit it. It just doesn't agree with you."

"Plenty of things don't agree with me but I have them anyway—pour."

"I love when you're so demanding, like a bull," Derrick said, giving in to Gabe's smile while pouring another glass.

"I thought you loved me for my bod," Gabe let slip out while leaning against the countertop.

"Yeah, you're cute all right."

"Gee, cute. That's not what you said last night," Gabe muttered as her finger delineated the rim of the glass.

"You can't hold me responsible for what I said last night."

"Yeah, yeah, I know, a fit of passion."

They both stood there sipping for an extended length of time. Gabe's eyes grew increasingly puffer, and they began to wander around the clock sluggishly. Derrick could tell by her look of delirium that she was about to spit out another philosophical analysis.

"I bet this clock is the only fair thing."

"What in the world are you talking about, Honey?" Derrick said in a tone that sounded as if he could predict her next words.

"Look, the second hand moves steadily, equally giving the same amount of time to each number. Absolutely no prejudices. He's not biased towards the three or the five. He stays on the

one the same as on the two, and when he's all finished, he starts all over again."

Derrick knew Gabe was serious when she gave lifeless objects sexes. "Is that so? Well, my watch always loses a couple of minutes a day. That's why I'm always late for work. So the hands must spend less time on some numbers, right?"

Gabe didn't answer Derrick, yet she imitated the clock. Tick--Tick--Tick--equally and steadily, giving an equal pause between each tick.

"You know, Gabe, what always stunned me was how the hours hand always made it around. Sometimes I try to catch it moving but I can't. Then I look away and before you know it, it's somehow on the next number," Derrick said, getting into Gabe's mood.

"Sort of like the light in the fridge, Derr."

"No, there's a little switch for that," he rebutted, disappointed that he knew of no solution to his problems. Derrick stared at Gabe but she didn't seem to notice. She was too busy with the glass. She looked all disheveled. Her hair wasn't in its part, and he loved it like that, almost as much as she loved him in that apron.

"You know what I've decided, Gabe?"

"What Derr, you decided on the deluxe lawn mower?"

"No, silly, I've decided you're not influenced by this champagne at all. You're just crazy."

"I'm the wild woman from the West."

"And I've come to tame you. Why don't I lasso you and take you upstairs to the corral? It's getting pretty late."

"You, my dear, are right...per usual," Gabe added. She wanted to get on Derrick's good side.

Derrick put the unfinished glasses in the sink and turned out the light. As they walked through the living room, Derrick's loafer kicked over the pot full of the evening's drips. Gabe didn't notice. Derrick didn't want to get her angry, so he told her he'd meet her upstairs. He'd been married to her long enough to know that water left on the carpet meant mold. So when she left the room he knelt down and wiped up his mistake.

Linda Burnett  
Brooklyn, NY  
Mr. Zwisohn

## Accident Prone

"And then there was the time when your uncle Eddie's chemistry set exploded and he caught on fire."

I remember hearing this story time and time again as a child. My mother (Edward's younger sister) and grandparents used it as a bedtime staple. Accordingly, I grouped it with all the other stock anecdotes: my mom taking Peetie outside for a walk (Peetie was a bird); my grandfather lulling his barking dog to sleep with calmly spoken obscenities. Recently I was able to hear a more factual account of the tale, and, having had my own version of a traumatizing hospital experience, it becomes more of a nightmare than a bedtime story.

Like most fifth-graders in 1934, my uncle Edward had a chemistry set. One day while performing an experiment, he spilled alcohol on his shirt and got too close to a Bunsen Burner. His shirt caught fire and lit up like a torch. Instead of ripping off the button-down shirt he was wearing, he unbuttoned each button separately and removed it. Afterwards, he was rushed off to the hospital, in critical condition, where he stayed for three months with third degree burns which covered his back.

Six months ago an ambulance rushed me to the emergency shock trauma center at Suburban Hospital when a van broadsided my Toyota in the middle of an intersection. The van crashed directly into the driver-side door, and my seat (the driver's seat) whirled around so that it faced the back window. I instantly sustained multiple pelvic fractures and internal rup-

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tures, contusions, etc. When the police arrived at the scene, an officer (Montgomery County's finest) demanded that I show my driver's license and registration. I reached into the glove compartment, then into my wallet (which hung from the ignition), and handed them to him through the shattered window. Though I remember nothing from the scene of the accident, it seems clear that this 270 degree turn must have been excruciating. To spite him, I spilled my blood all over the two documents.

This show of shocked calm on the porch of the Grim Reaper is not the only similarity between my accident and my uncle's. We both ended up doing some serious time--in the hospital.

Doctor Miller was my uncle's doctor while he was in the hospital. He never actually entered the room unless it was necessary. Every day he would literally stick his nose in the door and ask my uncle "How you doing?" After a while, Edward's Uncle Mickey started marking the point on the wall where Doctor Miller's nose would reach.

I spent six days in the Intensive Care Unit, heavily sedated on morphine. The day that I got out of intensive care, my doctors took me off the drug. For the first time since the accident I was able to think clearly, and the possibilities frightened me. What exactly had I done to myself? How long was I going to be in the hospital? Was I paralyzed? In the midst of this confusion Dr. Barkin, my orthopedic surgeon, walked into the room. During the morphine-induced delirium, Dr. Barkin had been equivalent to Jesus Christ. He would dash into my room, cheerfully prod different parts of my pelvis and ask things like, "They treating you O.K. in here, sport?" "Pain getting any better, sport?"

"Ack," I would respond, dripping an elastic thread of spittle onto my pillow, "Splurf."

So when Dr. Barkin walked into my new room and I was in a condition to ask intelligent questions, it made me a very happy invalid. I was ready with an opening question. "So Doc, what's wrong with me?"

"Well sport," he said, "you really did it this time. You broke your spine." As soon as I put my tongue back into my mouth, closed my jaw and wiped all the drool from my face, I followed up with an eloquent inquiry, "Oh, well, um, yu?" Well said, Chuck, very well said. Luckily my mother still had all of her wits about her. She grabbed him by the lapels and crystallized my thoughts, saying, "What the hell's that supposed to mean?!! Is he ever going to walk again?!! Hah?!!"

The rest of my memory of Dr. Barkin is a big blur. He was constantly moving, usually towards the door. If I ever wanted to ask him a question, I would have to time its delivery so that he was still in the room when the words came out. I generally failed. For a week, my conversations with Dr. Barkin consisted of four syllables: "Um, Doctor Bar ..." and he was out the door. Then we switched orthopedists.

The skin on my uncle's back was continually dying because of various infections which resulted from the burn damage. Every day he had to take a bath in which a nurse would scrape off all of the dead skin with a sandpaper-like substance and Duz Soap. "They used to have commercials for it," my grandmother recalls, "with the slogan 'Duz does wonders.'" The commercials did not mention Duz's usefulness in the removal of human flesh. My grandmother still associates the soap with Edward's agony. "I can't think of it without remembering having to sit in the waiting room and listen to the blood-curdling screams of my son."

Complications which resulted from the pelvic fractures rendered my bladder almost useless. It filled up but would not allow me to release urine. When that occurred it was time to utilize one of the most effective instruments of pain known to man: the catheter. The catheter is a long rubber tube. This seems harmless enough until a nurse inserts it into the tip of the urethra and pushes it through that extremely sensitive passageway until it penetrates the bladder. I was catherized four times during my hospital stay.

The first time, I did not know what to expect. I asked the nurse who, I very clearly remember, wore a black cape and

hood: "Is this going to hurt, or just be extremely embarrassing?" How innocent I was. How naive.

She responded, "It'll be a little uncomfortable, but that's all. Actually, it's easier with boys."

"You mean it doesn't hurt as much?" I asked hopefully.

"No, I mean it's easier for me. With boys it's a straight shot."

"Wonderful, I'm very glad to hear that," I said (to myself). "If this ordeal becomes at all too taxing for you, just let me know and I'll make every accommodation. Oh, and by the way, I hereby condemn you to spend all eternity smouldering in the fiery depths of Satan's Dark Underworld."

Each nurse had the same down-home remedy for the helpless pain of catherization. "Now Charlie, in order to minimize the discomfort, it is important to completely relax your body. Got that?"

Yeah, okay. I got it. And when we're done we get to switch places and I'll evacuate your bladder with the lubricated garden hose, right? Sorry to disappoint you, Oh Cheerful One, but I've already done this thing twice and that's obviously two more times than you have.

Completely relax your body. It sounds like such a simple task. But imagine being told not to writhe and squirm as someone who you don't know peels off each layer of your skin, one by one, and says that it's good for you.

It may seem that these similar experiences are common to anyone who has ever been in a trauma situation turned lengthy hospital stay. However, those who are lucky enough to be released from such a hospital stay are changed fundamentally; they are different from everyone else, similar to each other. The change is not a conscious one, which makes it impossible to reverse.

I have been told by people very close to me that I am not the happy, carefree person that I used to be. I am not eternally depressed, but sometimes I can feel exactly what those people mean. I feel it somewhere deep in my chest. It hides in the same place that I'm sure my mother felt it when she got a call telling her that her son had been in a car accident, but that it was against regulations to reveal his condition or even whether or not he was alive. My grandmother must have felt that same hopeless void during the Duz scraping sessions. I'm sure that it surfaced when she heard her son's reverberating screams but was not able to reach out, to kiss and make it all better. That feeling links me and my uncle. That feeling is more than enough.

Charlie Buckholtz  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Peggy Pfeiffer

## East of Kiddie City

*If there weren't a telephone cord rooted in his back  
twenty feet of tight twisted lime green to  
around and around Mom's unyielding grip  
Little Adam would be turning that frown upside down  
before the great fluorescent shrine of  
Slimor He Really Oozes only nineteen ninety nine  
praying and praying gimmegimmegimme instead of  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAG MAAAAAAAAAAAHMEEEEEEEEEE and  
hanging his tongue out to dry  
two hardboiled eggs quivering in his eyesockets  
and Mom not staring back at the people  
but nod sigh blinking at squinting gasp of  
Mrs. Thomas who won't shutup about  
Lord what a hyperactive child*

Keith Crouse  
Timonium, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones



Self-Portrait  
 Todd Swanson  
 Saltsburg, PA  
 Kiskiminetas Springs School  
 James Nagle

## The Way It Is

I can't help but laugh to myself whenever a friend starts telling me how in love she is with her current boyfriend. I'd try to explain but I don't think she would understand. You see, I know something it may take others years to discover. I was fifteen and he twenty-one, though I never thought of our age difference as being that big a deal in terms of our relationship. After all, fifteen is really only young in retrospect. For the first week of the bike tour we tried to keep it a secret, since leaders weren't supposed to be dating the trippers, but when you're living with a group of people, it's hard to hide anything.

I won't go into a whole physical description. He was a throw-back to the sixties, a wiry pseudo-intellectual from Cal-Berkeley, originally of Greenwich, CT. Steve was good looking, but what first drew me to him was that he treated us as equals. He wasn't like past bike tour leaders who tried to be everybody's best friend. He knew who he liked and that was who he hung out with. We all formed a sort of clique. The other leaders hated us because we would conspire to speed up and ride an extra twenty miles or so, so that we could lose the rest of them, then set up camp in a baseball field or something. Steve would buy us a couple of cases of beer and we'd build a fire and sleep under the stars. This could go on for days because, aside from my friend Janet and myself, none of the girls could ride up a hill unless they were being towed by a truck. We used to joke that they only bought cycling shorts to make it easier to slip in and out of cars when they hitchhiked. Personally, I always felt that the other leaders only got so mad because they resented being left behind with them.

Steve mystified me. He seemed to know so much about everything. I mean, we used to sit and discuss Buddhist philosophy and the powers of Chinese herbs, though actually everyone but

Steve just listened. Once he bought us a box of Renshenfeng-wenjeng, which is a mixture of Ginseng and Royal Jelly and it's supposed to make you live longer and healthier. It doesn't taste all that great, but it comes in a little glass ampule and you have to slice the top off with a glass cutter, and we all felt pretty full of ourselves sitting on the grass sipping this exotic potion with everyone staring at us. When I got home, I found out that it was the same stuff they sell on the counters of Korean food markets next to the cubes of fudge.

We spent all our free time together. He used to comment that it was almost like being on a honeymoon, except that we had brought seventeen kids along. We even joked about getting each other's names tattooed on, but he backed out so I shaved my name into the hair on his leg. I remember one night, after everyone went to sleep, we took our sleeping bags and snuck into the amusement park down the road. It was just a hick town so there wasn't any "Rolling Thunder" or ten-story ferris wheel, but it had the most colossal potato sack slide I had ever seen. We climbed to the top, tied our sleeping bags over our heads and raced to the bottom. It was incredible, we couldn't see where we were going and there wasn't any friction so we were zooming along at about 70 miles an hour. After a few runs we finally fell asleep at the top where the attendant found us the next morning.

The best part though was the sex. At first he was real cautious about going too far; he didn't want my first experience to be bad he said. When I told him that I wasn't a virgin, he got pissed off and said that I had to be a slut to be sleeping around at fifteen. But I just kept thinking how funny and wonderful it was that he was jealous, just because someone else had slept with me. It was better that I told him too, because once he calmed down he was a lot more relaxed. The next night the group was sitting around planning the weekends's itinerary and he just took my wrist and led me to the nearest room. It made me feel special, desired.

Sometimes I watched him in the morning, still asleep with his lips slightly parted. Gently I would trace his profile, the sun filtering through the thinner sections of the canvas illuminating piles of dirty laundry and scattered water bottles. He would smile groggily and hug me into his chest as we lay listening to the first noises of the group outside our tent.

I never meant to fall in love with him. I may have been naive, but I wasn't stupid. Love was never an option. None of this was new to him; he wasn't doing anything with me that he hadn't done before, but there was that night. I wish that I could tell you everything and maybe understand it myself, but it's one of those memories where you remember the emotions but none of the specifics, so I don't recall exactly how it happened. It was three in the morning and we were standing in the bathroom of a hostel in Toronto. I was in hysterics, trying to explain how much I hated myself for loving him. It seemed like he let me talk for hours, babbling about how stupid I felt for letting a summer fling become anything more. He just stared at me until I wore myself out, and stood there tear streaked and hiccuping. Then he turned to me and said, "I love you too."

He went on about how after he graduated, he would move to New York and how we would spend all our vacations together. I didn't really listen, I didn't need to. What else could love mean? Love is forever, the inability to live without one another. But I guess he misunderstood because he went back to California and within two weeks he was dating a thirty year old cyclist. He slept with me, dammit; he lived with me for forty-one days. It took me four months of sophomore year to get over him, but at least I learned early. Now I know there's no such thing as love, no matter what they say. There's lust and there's affection, but love is forever and forever is a lie.

Aliyah Silverstein  
 Brooklyn, NY  
 Midwood High School  
 Mrs. Lustbader



Ted Dobkin  
Saltsburg, PA  
Kiskiminetas Springs School  
James Nagle

## Sparks

Gentle summer night  
The fireflies are  
everywhere  
You can hear them  
on the cool leaves  
signaling in the dark  
Captured and put in mason jars  
cheesecloth for a lid  
tinkling against the glass  
I let them go  
not able to keep them  
prisoner-  
insect love is  
very  
brief

Sarah Fox Jahn  
Lee, MA  
Lee High School  
Cheryl Diane Nelsen

## My Trial

"Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning." So K's life, without his being prepared, was changed forever, as was mine on a Good Friday over a year ago. Kafkaesque, I'd label it now, that feeling, after reading *The Trial*. As I ate breakfast and automatically turned on the television, I remembered that my mother had asked the day before if I wanted to go with her to work. I had said no, I wanted to sleep in. I continued to feel that something was out of place; the uneasiness grew when I received a phone call from my mother's studio asking where she was.

The calls continued. I phoned my father at work but couldn't

reach him; a message said he had left for the day. I was K., trying to get information on my case. By the time my father came home, I knew my mother wasn't coming back. A young man, a year older than I, had rear-ended a car in front of him on the parkway and had bounced over a divider and crashed into my mom's car.

I still can't understand my reaction--no tears, no destructive rage. My emotions were externally and internally frozen by what had happened, although, unlike K., I knew and accepted the truth. Of course, I still imagined various possibilities--my mother couldn't be dead; she had just started to gain recognition as an artist--but I rejected them one after the other. The one thing that did rise again and again, the knowledge that arrested me/K. was the eternal "If...." I wondered why I hadn't gone with my mother; even when I had said "no" to her before she left, and I felt uncomfortable: "If only I had listened to that instinct...." I imagined myself in the passenger seat of the car; somehow that would have changed everything--I could have grabbed the wheel, pointed out the oncoming death: "If only I had been with her...." In all the possibilities that I created in my mind, the two of us never died.

As the cliched dust settled, I saw that my mother's death would not be resolved quickly. We received the same runaround from the local hospitals that K. had from the Court. My father called nearly every hospital in the county before he found where my mother had been taken. I saw this as a deplorable lack of respect for the dead.

The next day, the story of the accident made the front page of the Metro section of *The Washington Post*, complete with a picture of my mother's Toyota Camry: the car was upside down, surrounded by crushed glass and rescue workers. When the police came by that day, we were told that the wrong man had been named in *The Post* as the cause of the accident. The parents of the man responsible had mistakenly identified someone else as their son. This time the insult was to the living.

"Compensation" in the form of money eventually had to be considered, but it turned out that the man we wanted to sue had no insurance. Any money would have to come from our insurance company or his uncle's. This young man had been borrowing his relative's car the day it became scrap metal.

When I finally went to court, there was no great hall filled with spectators--just the lawyers, my father and I, a court recorder, and the judge. I was disappointed that the man we were suing was being represented in absentia. I had wanted to meet him, the cause of my Case, to scream at him, to denounce him, to assume the duties of the Court and pronounce him guilty. Although the case was finally resolved--we were awarded the amount of money we sued for--we were denied complete victory. The lawyers representing the young man told the judge that they agreed to "give" us the award, with the stipulation that their client was not guilty--he was not to blame.

I realize now that it is this young man who is really Kafka's K., the existential coward afraid of responsibility. At the beginning of my Trial, I had judged myself to be guilty; I had abandoned my mother to her fate on the parkway. Eventually, thinking about all the "If's" helped me realize how futile it was to dwell on possibilities. I remembered Vincent Price reading a line from *Macbeth* years ago, a line that became a litany for me: "What's done cannot be undone." With the decision that I was not guilty came a slow acceptance: my mother was dead. There was nothing to do but carry on with that knowledge. By the time I went to court, I had finally passed acceptance and guilt. Any doubts vanished when the defendant, through his lawyer, tried to absolve himself from blame for the accident. I realized that guilt lay not with me but with the man whose car had slammed into my mother's and killed her.

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# Shopping Talk

I like Ma best when we go shopping together at the Keyfood across the street on Avenue A. Somehow she manages to convince me to accompany her, no matter how tired I am after coming home from school. "The bags are too heavy for me to carry," she mutters, trying to make me feel guilty. It always works. Pulling open the kitchen drawer, she quickly scans the coupons and newspaper cut-outs from the Sunday Times and picks out the ones she wants. At the same time, she begins to dictate the list of groceries that we need to buy. Orange Juice...Loaf of Bread...Cheddar Cheese...I scribble on a torn post-marked envelope. Before I can put my jacket on, Ma is already waiting by the door to our apartment.

I can hear the piercing voices of the teenage Puerto Rican cashiers in the front as we meander our way through the meat section at the other end of the building. "I need a price!...Cuanto cuesta esta lata de salsa de tomate?" one of them screeches out half in English, half in Spanish. Shoppers, mostly old women living in our apartment building, stroll through the aisles. They ignore our presence, too wrapped up looking for bargains on chicken breasts and mayonnaise. Other shoppers rush by, hurrying to get in line in order to get out. Ma's not so anxious as the other shoppers. She walks deliberately from one aisle to the next, expressionless but eyes firmly fixed on whatever she is searching for. I try to keep up with her tiny, purposeful steps.

"Let me see the list," she holds out her hand. I give it to her nonchalantly. "All I need now is some ground beef," she whispers to herself.

"How was work?" I blurt out curiously.

"Oh, nothing much." She hesitates by the ice tea powder mixes and carelessly throws one into the shopping cart. "Oh, yeah...something did happen." She begins walking again. "One of my patients over-sedated herself this morning." I pick up my ears. Ma starts to tell me about a woman named Joanne. Joanne, a heroin addict who comes for her methadone doses at the drug treatment clinic Ma works at, sat herself down that morning in the middle of the street. Cars missed hitting her by only a few feet. She was ranting and raving about her job and how terrible her life was. She cursed out anyone who tried to persuade her to get off the road. Finally Ma managed to nudge her back onto the sidewalk and call the police. Just when the police arrived, Joanne passed out unconscious. It was later discovered that she had taken a slew of pills.

What interests me is not Ma's story, but her attitude towards it. She has faced so many crises in her life that a mere single incident cannot perturb her. When she was born back in Taiwan, her mother "gave" Ma away to her sister, who had no child of her own. As Ma grew up, she had a great deal of trouble knowing who her "real" parents were--she had no identity. Even now, Ma still holds a silent grudge against Grandma for that. At school, Ma was never a good student. She tells me that she always attended school for the first fifteen minutes of the day. After those fifteen minutes had passed, she and a few friends would cut school and run to Mr. Lee's mango orchards. There they would sneak in, climb the trees and pick the mangos off to eat. They always got constipated afterwards. Despite playing "hooky" and having horrendous study habits, she managed to pass her tests--she even got herself into one of the most prestigious public high schools in Taiwan--yet she never lifted a pen or read a book. She always got by using her common sense and practicality.

In Taiwan, a person's score on an exam comparable to the SAT in the United States determined where and what that person's future occupation was going to be. Ma was placed in a nursing college; she had no choice. Marrying my father after graduating, she had me and my brother soon afterwards. Although she would have liked to further her career as a nurse, Ma decided to stay home and take care of us.

Making the painful choice to leave me and my brother E-Bai behind in Taiwan by ourselves with Father, Ma emigrated to the U.S. in 1977. When Father passed away in the spring of 1978, Ma, living in New York City, made up her mind to have E-Bai and me sent here.

Ever since then, her life has always concentrated on feeding the two of us and putting a roof over our heads. She always pays the bills the same day that they arrive. Every weekend, my brother and I reluctantly help her clean the house. She always throws anything out that she considers old and unusable. Newspapers, magazines, envelopes, old clothes, left-over foods all quickly disappear. When her relatives have any problems with procedure and paperwork, they call on Ma to translate the English and help them distinguish their choices.

Although our life is never luxurious, E-Bai and I have been well-provided for since we have lived here. Despite her practicality and frugality, Ma is willing to indulge herself and us once in a while. To this date, we have been to Boston, New Orleans, Florida, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and even the '82 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee. Ma is the epitome of a good problem solver. Today, the car transmission needs to be looked at; tomorrow, the cable company is coming to check the antenna; the day after, the bank requests her presence in order to verify a statement. She proceeds from one problem to the next like a businessman, not necessarily happy in doing so, but mature enough to accept the responsibilities.

Throughout her life, Ma has tried to control her own path. That is the reason why she works so well in an environment that many people find difficult and tedious to face. She accepts obstacles in her way and acknowledges their existence as a fact of life. She always prides herself on her ability to overcome these everyday problems. In this way, she attempts to find some sort of stability and regularity--something she has lacked her whole life. America is the perfect country for her. Its values of self-reliance and hard work are her values. She deeply believes in the responsibility of the individual in shaping his or her own destiny. She sees the achievement of the American dream as a challenge and prides herself on accomplishing this goal to this point.

Perhaps this is why she has such bitter and vicious fights with Ralph, her boyfriend who lives with us. Ralph is a social worker who deeply believes society is the major cause of many of our current problems. He blames society for indirectly permitting racism and social discrimination to flourish. He sees the infrastructures of America promoting prejudice and jealousy. Thus, Ralph and Ma are diametrically opposed to each other in their view of everything.

A few months ago, Ma bought the Times and read an article describing the prosperity of the Korean grocery shops in Harlem while the black grocery shops suffered. The article mentioned the anger and frustration of the blacks as they saw the success of the Koreans. The blacks regarded the work ethic of the Koreans as inhuman and unjust. They complained that there was no way of competing with someone who works 24 hours of the day and 7 days a week. They wished the city would do something concerning this issue and marched on the streets in angry protest.

Ma immediately took the side of her fellow Asians. She stressed that this was what America was all about--trying to provide a home for one's family and improve one's living situation. She said that we cannot fault people for working too hard. She then rebutted the position of the blacks by claiming their laziness and lack of dedication and ingenuity as the primary cause of their trouble. Ralph, on the other hand, saw the blacks as venting their frustrations for generations of financial and social stagnation on the Koreans. He tried to explain to Ma the anger of blacks at seeing a people who were able within five to ten years to succeed at something they themselves had been trying to do for a hundred and fifty years. In his eyes, blacks had a right to be angry. They logically used the Koreans as scapegoats.

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In hindsight, I can understand the rationale for both arguments, but what interested me a great deal more was the tremendous and indescribable anger of Ma when Ralph attempted to explain his position. I can see the passion behind the reasoning of both in quarreling their points. In an indirect way, they are arguing for what they stand for--they are arguing for the "righteousness" of their identity. They are arguing for being who they are. Even if they fail to win over the other person, they are trying to "justify" their own personalities to themselves. It is almost as if they are fighting with themselves, struggling desperately to come to terms with how they have lived and what they believe to be the only truths in their lives.

This especially holds true for Mother--her existence depends on it. Her persistent efforts to secure and regulate her circumstances force her to believe. Every action--paying the bills, fixing the car, going to the bank--is a way to control her life in what seems to be an irrational reality that escapes logic. The reality of blacks being trapped in their world must not be true in her mind. She must insist on the idea of social and personal freedom. Without this idea of freedom--the ability to make her own destiny--all her actions of the past, the present, and the future would be futile. She vehemently rejects the thought of living her life on false hope. The chance that this is true frightens her.

I suspect that there is a connection between her attempts to control her life and her vicious rage. Unless a person is actually present in our home, the feeling of pure absolute hate and anger cannot be felt. The verbal fights and abuses Ma and Ralph hurl at one another physically hurt my ears. Mother always raises her voice--louder and louder--until she can drown out the voices of everyone else. She is like a child, immature and unhappy un-

less she gets what she wants. Her malicious rage is her way of fighting the irrationality and unpredictability in her life. Like a baby, she combats irrationality with irrationality.

It is ironic that there is such childishness deep inside while there is such common sense and pragmatism on the outside. The best problem solver I have ever known refuses to compromise.

As I become older and a little wiser, I begin to discover the joys of doing things without asking so many questions. I still like Ma best when we go shopping together in the Keyfood. In just that tiny moment, I am allowed a glimpse into this familiar yet mysterious woman I live with everyday. I see maturity, childishness, practicality, irrationality, kindness, rage, compromise, and stubbornness all rolled up in a five feet and three inches tall person.

The image of her cooking in the kitchen--dicing up the bamboo shoots, cutting the mushrooms, and slicing the beef steak provide a brief respite from all the stresses of this world. As Ma shops in the supermarket and cooks in the kitchen, she is feeding me not only food but also her experience and wisdom. Her life and personality, no matter how "imperfect" and "contradictory" they are, have given me a perspective of this world that is immeasurable. So I accompany her every Sunday to the Keyfood, and I will do so the next Sunday and the Sunday after. Perhaps I'll be able to catch just a little bit of Ma as she stands there...holding the vegetables...trying to see which one she likes best.

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