

Susquehanna University

# THE APPRENTICE WRITER



Anna Soderberg  
Germantown, MD  
Jay Corder

\$2.50



# INTRODUCTION

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

Each year we send approximately 11,000 copies--printed free as a public service by Ottaway newspaper THE DAILY ITEM in Sunbury, Pennsylvania--to over 3,500 schools in the 10 states from which we receive nearly 5,000 submissions.

It has been my pleasure to discover hundreds of outstanding student

writers through their submissions to THE APPRENTICE WRITER, and for the past four years, I have had an opportunity to work with some of those same writers, as well as dozens more, through Susquehanna's weeklong summer writers' workshops.

The summer workshops, which attract students in fiction, poetry, and journalism, are just one part of the growth of the Writing Program at Susquehanna. The Visiting Writers Series has brought artists such as Robert Creeley, Sharon Olds, Madison Smartt Bell,

Tobias Wolff, David Bradley, and June Jordan to campus. Advanced workshops in fiction and poetry are available. A student reading series, an expanded literary magazine, independent writing projects, and writing internships have provided interesting options for student writers.

Moreover, because teachers of writing are essential to the flourishing of student creativity, Susquehanna has now begun a four-day summer program, including graduate credit, which brings nationally known writers to campus to conduct writing workshops in fic-

tion and poetry for teachers.

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, 1992.

We also welcome inquiries from students about the Summer Writers' Workshops in fiction, poetry, and journalism; and, from teachers, about the Summer Educators' Workshops in fiction and poetry.

THE APPRENTICE WRITER

Number 9, 1991

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The photo on page 39 came to us without identification.

Barbara Morrow's photographs arrived with no return address.

### LOGO DESIGN

Carolyn Gienieccko

THE APPRENTICE WRITER is published annually by Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, PA 17870, and Ottaway Newspapers through the cooperation of THE DAILY ITEM.



## Knitted Blankets

Aunt Peggy's hair was green during Christmas dinner.  
She thought that a tube of Ben Gay was creme rinse.  
Her curls were the color of the beans that Nana boiled in a plastic bag.

Aunt Peggy knitted miniature afghans for our dolls.  
I was frightened by the darkness of the black yarn,  
And angered when Baby Alive spit her sugar mixture food  
So the white threads turned beige.  
The dolls closed obedient eyes when they were wrapped in Aunt Peggy's blankets.

Aunt Peggy knitted a pink blanket for Katie when she was born.  
The blanket collected blue balls of lint  
From Katie's shaggy rug.  
It matched the patchwork quilt which Mom brought home from Montclair.

I was allowed to use the blanket that Aunt Peggy knitted for my parents  
When I was sick enough to stay home from school,  
Sick enough to watch the Brady Bunch twice in a day.  
That blanket was wine-colored,  
With yellow three-dimensional rosettes protruding in rows of eight.

I never had an afghan from Aunt Peggy until fifth grade.  
I was in the hospital;  
She mailed a pink and maroon blanket.  
I unknotted the fleecy ticking from the yarn  
While Marcia fell in love with Desi Amaz.

We laughed at Nana's green beans.  
She served them inside the plastic freezer bag without a bowl.  
Nobody laughed at Aunt Peggy's green hair during Christmas dinner,  
Even when she smoothed the curls with her left hand,  
And there was a smudge of mashed potato above her right ear.

Elisabeth Egan  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Mrs. Harriet Marcus

## Death of a Coal Miner

At Beckley Memorial they drained  
61 years of black lung dust  
from his body.  
The 1st Established Southern Baptists  
sang sorrow over the whispering  
of children.  
The wife, in pink, rubbed her own  
ridged thumbnails.  
The rainproof covering at the grave  
could only keep four dry.  
Afterwards, her sons  
led her to the car.

Kathy Cottle  
Phoenix, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones

## Night, in Winterpock

I.  
Night, in Winterpock:  
My boots make ice plates  
As I step across the yard.  
I herd along the field's edge, a bog  
Of briars. I turn on the warm pulse  
Of a flashlight, wrap myself  
In the scarf of its glow. Armed  
With light, I search among cornstubble,  
Branches, and roots for the deer.

I watch them gather like wolves,  
Their breaths, a whisper of silver  
Their antlers, fingers against the sky.  
These nomads of the icy woods  
I have seen in dreams,  
Dancing with Indians before a holy fire,  
Running through groves of pine,  
Drifting aimlessly until they leap  
Into the madness of tires and lights.

II.  
Night, in Winterpock:  
I shuffle down the ice-glazed road  
Past cookie-cutter farmhouses  
And trash-littered fields.  
Across the road, Sally's Convenience  
Store and Weighing Station.  
The hunters gather here,  
Their rattling, skeleton pickups  
Huddle together in a herd.

Swirling mists from burning trash  
Drift up, like deer, through the pines.  
A red '79 Ford stands, its tail down.  
I see the polished gun racks,  
The racks of antlers, the eyes mesmerized  
By the white light of death.

Brook Michalik  
Richmond, VA  
Monacan High School  
Judith R. Land

## Mowin'

Father Edwards says to me this mornin'  
how spring's just round the corner.  
Families be comin' with fresh daisies an' wet eyes,  
expectin' the grounds to look worthy.  
Time to cut the grass, he says, but I  
say Jesus don't care if the grass is high.  
Father says he does, all shepherds want  
their grounds lookin' nice. I pull the  
ol' push mower outta the shed, not wantin'  
to go over the fresh plots; the families  
hardly outta mournin', the bodies still flesh.  
But Father says I got to mow it all.  
I listen to the metal teeth gnawin', careful  
to watch for the corners of tombstones.  
Wonderin' if souls are growin' out of the coffins,  
wonderin' what I'm cutting along with the grass.

Millicent Souris  
Timonium, MD  
William Jones



## Show Me

"Show me how to do like you  
Show me how to do it." (Stevie Wonder)

Uncle Jack had a bald spot on his head that yawned a perfect 'O,' so I would giggle every time he turned away from me.

"What's so funny?" Fierce words would snap at me. But twinkling eyes and a smile crawling onto his lips would reassure me, and I'd grin.

Stroking his soft gray beard, smoke curling like a kitten's tail from his pipe, Uncle Jack would read me mysteries and fantasies from thick, gold-etched tomes. Sometimes he would close his eyes, and I would sink back into the thick cushions of his couch. And he would compose his own stories for me, pulling words right out of the thin wisps of smoke that came from his pipe.

"There have been many 'Jacks' in our world," his voice would begin, deep sounds carried to me on the musty air. "But this Jack never climbed a beanstalk nor was he silly enough to fall down a hill." And he would continue, weaving tales of children and other clever creatures, his beard shaking lazily with his words.

Mostly, I remember the evenings Uncle Jack would teach me patiently the numbers and letters, then show me how to fit the words together on paper to make my own stories. For these lessons he would perch me on his lap at his great oak desk, and I'd study the paper clips and felt tip pens and stacks of "reports."

"Do you teach numbers and letters at college, too?"

Chuckling, Uncle Jack would help me hold the pencil and together we would learn the letters. The study would be warm and dimly lit, and soon I would be fast asleep in his arms.

"Show me...."

Auntie Grace wore bright playful skirts that danced with the wind. She would visit me with crayons and paper, and I'd ask her to draw for me.

"No," she would insist. Putting the crayon in my hand, she showed me how the slightest movement of my wrist could create lines and colors. She would watch me for hours at a time as I scribbled furiously the images from my mind. Once I drew a portrait of her—a tiny figure with bands of color surrounding it so that it took up the entire paper—and she recognized herself immediately.

On breezy, spirited April days Auntie Grace would take me to the pond. Her voice rising and falling like the sun, she would teach me how to take a piece of paper and—a fold, a fold, and then it had become a boat! It would sail around our pond, surviving our strong gusts and artificial rainstorms. And then, breathless and dripping, we would dance home, skipping in rhythm to our songs.

"Show me how to do like you...."

Grandpa bought me my first yo-yo when I was four; he should have known better—he spent the next four years winding it for me. Grandpa also taught me to run in circles chasing soap bubbles.

"Catch them!" he would shout, bobbing his head eagerly at me as I frantically chased the fragile dancing light.

Grandpa would hold my tiny hand in his large rough palm and count my fingers, and somehow there would always be eleven. I would sit on his lap and feel his whiskers, studying yellowing pictures of strangely familiar faces that "used to get into mischief, just like you!" He would tickle me and we would both laugh and laugh....

"Show me how to do like you  
Show me how to do it."

It is two a.m. and I'm rocking back and forth in this dark, dark room. Caterwauling and hollow night city sounds seep in through my window. I miss the pipe and the crayons and Grandpa's thick glasses that made me laugh at his huge eyes. How do I do it? This bundle of sweet slumber in my arms is waiting to be shown, and suddenly I can't remember how.

Karin Rubin  
Marblehead, MA  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Douglas Rogers

## Save The Whales

What is peace?  
Is it that man I saw  
In Philadelphia  
Quoting the Bible  
And wearing a daisy  
In his lapel?  
Is it the boy I know  
Who shares my last name  
(but bears no relation)  
Who signs his papers  
Jesus Christ  
And believes it to be true?  
Is it the movie I watched  
On late-night T.V.  
Boy meets girl  
Girl meets someone better  
But they all live happily ever after  
Anyway?  
Is it the Save the Whales tee-shirt  
I see on my best friend  
Does she really mean it  
Or is she wearing it  
Because  
Blue is a good color on her?  
It's a funny thing  
About those whales  
Have you ever seen one?  
The zoo doesn't count  
But I've seen the streets  
Of places too close  
Where the lonely people  
Are too familiar to me  
Families without homes  
Are like  
Fish out of water  
Though I've yet to see a whale  
I know there are stories  
Too long to read  
A truth that proves painful  
To unwilling ears  
But if we don't  
Listen  
And read our own story  
Then who will be left  
To save the whales?

Kristen Weber  
Lansdale, PA  
North Penn High School  
Dr. Kathie Walsh



# Joanne

I hesitated on the elevator landing and glanced at the white metal door in front of me. Oddly, the door handle was shoulder high; I thought the door had been designed to discourage children who could not readily reach the handle from entering. Psychiatric wards seemed the province of adults, who were big and strong and knew what to expect. And I, at sixteen, that precarious age halfway between childhood and adulthood, did not know whether I should be there or not.

I glanced at the yellow visitors' pass pinned to my left breast and knocked on the door, a low reverberating knock that caught in the hollow recesses of the door. Keys turned in their cylinders, locks clicked, and a face the color of tanned leather, attached to a starched white nurse's uniform, barricaded the area between the open door and the door frame. "You here to see somebody?" she asked. She glanced at my pass. "You're here to see Joanne Miller. Come on in," she said and removed herself from the door.

"JO-anne, JO-anne," the nurse called as she walked down the corridor, her slip shushing beneath her uniform, her large rear end sauntering left and right, left and right. "They're finishing their supper," she whispered as we approached the dining area. "There she is," the nurse pointed. I hesitated, the stench of airplane food, of canned peas and dehydrated carrots, filling my nostrils.

I cleared my throat. "Mom," I whispered.

"You gotta be louder than that," the nurse said with a pat on my arm.

"Mom," I yelled. Everyone in the dining room stopped whatever they were doing and stared.

My mother dropped the plate she was washing and walked over to me with short, precise steps and arms outstretched like a toy soldier. "Everybody, this is my daughter Heather."

"Stop, Mom," I pulled away from her grasp on my arm.

"She goes to the best prep school in the country," Mom said. The other patients went about the business of eating or washing as my mother beamed. Wearing smiles that said, "I'm sorry your mother is like this," the doctors and nurses in the dining area stared at me.

"Let's go see your room, OK?" I asked in the same high-pitched, sing-song voice that I used when speaking to my five-year old cousin.

My eyes swept over Mom's face. Her eyelids dropped over her eyes so that they never exposed the upper half of her eyes. My mother was always tired when I visited her; the doctors had plugged her full of sedatives to control her manic episodes. Mom tried to smile, a half-smile that did not extend quite far enough along her lips so that the corners of her mouth would droop like her eyelids; her face gave the appearance of being pulled down by gravity or some other mysterious force. "OK, let's go," Mom said.

The corridor walls were white, so white that if you stared at them, then shut your eyes and reopened them, purplish dots would swim before your eyes. The beams from the fluorescent overhead lights splashed white circles upon the beige-gray linoleum floor. "Here we are," Mom said and pushed against a wooden door. On the door was fastened a metal placard which held a white card with "JOANNE MILLER" printed on it. I wondered what name the stand had held before my mother was admitted two weeks ago, what name would appear when she was gone, why the bearer of that name was in the ward, did she have a daughter like me?

Peering at the walls the color of dried urine, I said, "This is nice." Mom smiled. "Did anyone come to see you lately?" I asked, knowing that only my Aunt Carol and Uncle John had seen her in the past two days.

"Carol, John, Willie Brooks.... He sent me flowers today but I can't remember where I put them." Whenever my mother was manic, she mentioned Willie Brooks, a man who used to work in

her office. She told me when she was well that she had never been attracted to him, although he had black hair and blue eyes and "looked like Clark Gable." My mother had not seen him since I was three, but he would return to her life when she was manic as the bearer of flowers, or candlelight dinners, or wedding proposals.

It was only within the last five years that my mother had begun hallucinating during her manic episodes. Before then, she would do the "usual" manic things: wake up at three A.M., talk incessantly, go on shopping sprees, do anything to keep herself constantly occupied. But now I had to hide my fox stuffed animal in the closet when my mother was manic because she thought the fox would attack her. And my uncle once caught my mother running up Third Avenue barefoot in what she called a "Bubble Gum Race."

My mother cannot remember much about her manic episodes once she is well. She can remember once looking at my Uncle Steven and seeing my Uncle Robert. She can recall believing that the Beach Boys' song "She'll Have Fun, Fun, Fun 'Till Her Daddy Takes The T-Bird Away" was written exclusively for her. But she is amazed when I mention the fox or the Bubble Gum Race; she struggles to remember but cannot, and she says, "I really did those things?"

I began folding the clothes Mom had thrown in the oak bureau. I folded the two velour suits in the top drawer, one black, the other black and pink striped. Mom was wearing another black velour suit. When my mother got manic, her clothing consisted only of velour, only of those three pants suits. I folded the socks, the bras, and the soiled underwear my mother would wear for days. "Mom, do you want me to bring any of this stuff home to wash?" I asked.

"It's all clean," she returned. When I raised my eyebrows in disbelief, Mom said, "Well, if you want to, but it's really not dirty."

"I'll take it anyway," I said and stuffed the underwear and socks in a shopping bag by the door. I removed the sheets and pillowcase from beneath the bed. I unfolded the first sheet, which billowed like a parachute before resting upon the bed. "Why didn't you make your bed, Mom?" I asked, tucking in the sheet.

"Oh, I don't know," Mom said casually, and picked up the pillow and pillowcase. She tried to tuck the edge of the pillow beneath her chin, but it kept slipping away. She tried stuffing the pillow into the pillowcase, but she could not keep the lip of the pillowcase open long enough to get the pillow in.

"I'll get it," I said, reaching for the pillow.

"No, I've got it," Mom demanded. After I tucked in the second sheet, I turned to Mom. "Maybe you'd better do it," she said.

I tucked the pillow beneath my chin and eased it into the pillowcase. "There," I said, and laid the pillow at the top of the bed, knowing that when I came to visit the next time, the sheets would be strewn about and the pillow on the floor.

"So you like it here?" I asked, and moved to the window sill. Small gusts from the slitted metal vent below me warmed my rear end.

"It's nice. I keep busy--cook, watch TV, make things in Art," Mom said. I thought back to something my Aunt Carol had said--that my mother likes the hospital because she is safe there. She knows that in the hospital she does not need to take care of herself because others will do it for her. My mother tended to get manic when she had to take on a new responsibility or undergo a change in her lifestyle--holiday and vacation times (like this Christmas time), and summers when she would visit me at camp.

My mother would usually get manic twice a year, but prior to this last time, she hadn't been manic in two and a half years. A friend of my father's, Peter Cohen, had been a manic-depressive as well. He had had episodes worse than my mother's where he would buy twenty-five thousand dollars worth of

(Continued on page 6)



paintings and stereo equipment in two days. He had not had an episode in three years; his doctor had taken him off lithium and he was no longer considered to be a manic-depressive. I had thought my mother would be as lucky as Peter; she had gone two and a half years without an episode, a time period which generally warranted five episodes. But as I watched my mother, I knew she hadn't improved a bit.

In fact, she had gotten worse. Her episodes in recent years had gone from three weeks initially to two or three months. Medication was sometimes insufficient; electric shock therapy had to be used, which robbed her of some short-term memory even when she became well. And although my family members had tried initially to keep my mother out of the hospital when she became manic, they soon realized that they could not handle her and that she would get better care at the hospital, where she was safe.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you're doing OK," I said, and jumped off the window sill. "I'm just going to check out the bathroom." I glanced at the white counter top where the sink was located. On the counter stood an open tube of lipstick with the tip smashed, a capless tube of toothpaste whose rim was encrusted with dried toothpaste, and a toothbrush that had not been cleaned so that lipstick marks could be seen on the handle and the bluish-white paste still coated the bristles. I capped the lipstick and the toothpaste and washed the toothbrush. "Mom, do you have a hairbrush in here?" I called.

"No, I didn't bring one with me," Mom returned.

"Thanks anyway," I called. I then glanced at the toilet. A small pile of used sanitary napkins stood beside it. "Oh Mom," I whispered, and placed them in the waste basket beneath the sink, wanting so much not to touch them, but knowing that if I did not, they would lie there, festering, reeking like metallic sweat. I turned on the hot water faucet, running my fingers under the water until they were a puffy red.

"I don't feel much like staying in here anymore. Let's go into the common room," I said, beckoning to Mom with my hand. We walked down the corridor to a small room with a couple of couches and a TV.

"Oh, you've got to meet Fred," Mom said, and led me to the only other person in the room, who sat slumped on a couch, his chin to his chest, staring blankly at the TV. "Fred, I'd like you to meet my daughter Heather." Fred did not acknowledge my mother. "Fred, my daughter's here, the one I've been telling you about," Mom said and shoved Fred's shoulder.

I pulled my mother away. "He's watching TV, Mom," I whispered fiercely. "Besides, I met everyone when I came in and you were eating dinner, remember?" I led my mother to a couch and we sat down.

"You look good, Heath," Mom said, touching my cheek. No matter how manic my mother got, her love for me was always obvious. She would hit my father, my grandfather, my uncles and aunts, but she would never touch me. And when my mother would show me she loved me during an episode, it would seem like she wasn't really manic, that her love was the same love she had shown me countless times when she was well.

"I look good because I take after you," I said and winked. But that was a lie. I'm afraid to be like my mother. I'm afraid of becoming someone who hurts and scares the people whom I love most. I'm scared to lose control, do bizarre things I wouldn't normally do, and not be able to remember them afterwards. I'm afraid of not really knowing who I am because there is another part of me that I cannot comprehend.

This fear is worst when I catch myself being like my mother: vacuuming in a frenzied effort to get my rug clean, compulsively doing homework due two days from now. And I think, well, I'm not manic, I know I'm not manic, and yet I'm still not sure.

My fear is compounded by the fact that there is no medical proof as to what causes manic-depression, and the doctors believe there is some genetic component to the illness. Someone once told me manic-depression skips a generation. Maybe it

does skip a generation, and I won't get it. But what if my kids do. Should I have kids, knowing they will be at risk? Will my kids wish, like my mother does when she reflects upon her illness, that they had never been born?

"Did I tell you I'm pregnant?" Mom asked suddenly. I was silent. "Doctor Schwartz told me." Doctor Schwartz was the psychiatrist who had diagnosed my mother as a manic-depressive five months after I was born. He told her not to have any more children because more than one child would be too much of a burden for her. And every time she gets manic, my mother, who had wanted five or six children in her youth, tells me how she is pregnant.

"By whom?" I asked.

"Your father, of course. We're getting remarried," Mom said. My parents were divorced when I was seven. Prior to their divorce, my father was the person who cared for my mother during her episodes, when the rest of my family refused to see that my mother had a problem and encouraged her not to take her lithium medication. My mother seemed never to forget that my father had been her helper. So when my mother gets manic, she calls my father just to say hello, as if they are great friends after a bitter divorce.

"Well, that's great, Mom," I said. I have long since given up contradicting my mother's fantasies. Whenever I tried to make her see what was really going on, she would get angry and more vehement in her assertions. So I just go along with what my mother says, knowing that when she gets well her fantasies will no longer be her reality.

And although my mother fantasizes, she is not crazy. Manic-depression is caused by a chemical imbalance of lithium and is not a mental disorder at all. My mother is not crazy, insane, a lunatic; she is a person with a problem. And I wish that people would ask what is wrong with my mother, not assume what is wrong, not make judgments about her that are applicable more than the two times a year when she is ill.

Oddly, the only childhood memories I have of my mother are those of when she was manic. I remember waking up at 4:30 in the morning to sit with my mother as she blasted Barry Manilow's "Greatest Hits" on the stereo; to this day, I am one of the few people my age who asserts that Barry Manilow is a talented singer. I remember my mother prancing around the house naked, her breasts drooping over her stomach bloated from the medication. I remember her disappearing at 6 A.M., not knowing where she was going, hoping she'd return soon unharmed and without having harmed anyone else. I remember the elevator operators in my mother's apartment building whispering "Mrs. Miller's a little crazy today," their smiles of pity that said, "We understand," when they really didn't. I remember stowing a bag of clothes under my bed, when I saw the increased irritability and longer waking hours that began an episode, for the time when I could no longer handle my mother and would have to flee to my father's apartment.

"What time is it?" Mom asked.

"Six-thirty. I better hit the road. I'll take that stuff back to wash. Do you need anything else?"

"I don't think so," Mom said. We returned to Mom's room, and I grabbed the laundry bag.

"Wait here. I'll get someone to let me out," I said and walked down the corridor, the heels of my penny loafers clicking against the linoleum. I reached the Nurses' Station and saw the nurse who had let me into the ward. "Can I be let out please?" I asked.

"Sure can," she said, jingling her key ring. "Have a nice visit?" she asked as we headed for my mother's room.

"As always," I returned. Mom was standing by her door. "I'll call you later and tell you what time I'm coming tomorrow," I said and kissed her on the forehead.

Turning to the nurse, Mom asked, "Have you met my daughter Heather?"

"Sure have," the nurse returned. To me, she said, "Your



mother here's been telling us a lot about you."

"Oh, I almost forgot," Mom said and scurried into her room. She returned with a tie-dyed t-shirt. "It's for you. I made it in Art class." The shirt was a lilac color which blended into a rose color at the bottom, and had one slate blue sleeve and one orange-yellow sleeve. "You see these rings here?" Mom pointed to two large white rings, one inside the other, on the front of the shirt. "I did this by bunching the shirt in these two places and putting rubber bands around them."

"It's beautiful," I returned. I glanced down at the label, where Mom had written "HEATHER" in indelible black ink. "It really is. Thank you."

"Well, I'm glad you like it," Mom said.

"OK. So I'll see you tomorrow."

"All right. Say hi to your father for me."

The nurse unlocked and opened the door. "Thanks," I said and stepped out of the ward. I glanced back as the locks of the door thundered. I stopped and returned to the door, wanting to get one more look at my mother before I left. Straining on the tips of my toes, I peered into the rectangular plate of glass near the top of the door. But the glass was the kind that you can see out of but not look into. Staring into the glass, I saw not my mother, but an opaque dark purple.

Robin J. Kemper  
New York, NY  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Douglas Rogers

## Groundhog Day at Dumbarton Oaks

*There's no charge for Dumbarton Oaks in the wintertime.  
No charge to creep in  
sleeping Nature's bedroom,  
to listen and watch her  
gag on snores  
and the 9-to-5 workday.*

*Mother peeks in on her quiet child,  
ripples her straw hair twice,  
tingles a blade of grass,  
whispers the Elm's breeze.  
The child murmurs  
sucks her thumb  
And breathes  
a still green.*

*The lullaby of Dumbarton Oaks is free.  
Brown crickets chirp twice in a log.  
Leaves which hung on in November  
Crackle now.  
One white seagull  
slopes  
down with the February sun  
into the rocking cradle  
of trees.*

Lisa Siraganian  
Bethesda, MD  
Walt Whitman High School  
Dr. Martin Galvin

## Death-Month

*Rampant,  
this death in flight,  
this month of funerals.*

*Last Monday it was,  
a funeral,  
a man fifty-seven,  
my mother went.  
Do you know what he was doing (she told me),  
minutes before he went,  
he was dancing,  
he and his wife,  
in the kitchen.*

*This past Sunday it was,  
a funeral,  
a man fifty,  
a marching band choreographer,  
mine.  
We saw him last month,  
he was skinny with AIDS,  
I cried.*

*This past Sunday again,  
an anniversary of sorts,  
my grandfather's death,  
three years.  
The Music Man,  
we called him,  
he had lung cancer and no hair from chemo.*

*This past Monday it was,  
a funeral,  
a man forty-five,  
my friend's father,  
I went.  
Sitting in his chair,  
his recliner,  
late at night,  
no one knew until morning,  
before school.*

*Sometime recent it was,  
a funeral,  
my boss' aunt,  
she told me at work on Sunday,  
I had just returned from a viewing.*

*Last night it was,  
we attacked Baghdad,  
the President's happy.*

*Today it is,  
my clothing sticking with static-cling staleness,  
absorbing the echoes,  
classrooms talking,  
ringing in my eyes,  
a shroud.*

Greta Hannum  
Harleysville, PA  
North Penn High School  
Dr. Kathie Walsh





Jennifer Tonkins  
Midlothian, VA  
Clover Hill High School  
Doug Bader

Jennifer  
Tonkins

## The Criminal in Me

*The criminal in me wants to steal your new haircut,  
your Irish, meat and potatoes boyfriend,  
your yearbook memories,  
and your slight thighs.*

*I gather you bit by bit.  
I follow you as you leave the lecture hall  
with him.*

*I prop myself against a window.  
I pretend to look out,  
to be waiting for my boyfriend,  
and waiting and waiting.*

*In the meantime, I watch your reflection  
in the glass.  
An orange dot, you ignite your mouth.  
I even want your bad habits.  
You leave your lighter in the waiting room chair.  
Its colors are you: blue with pink  
triangles.  
Your features are intact,  
unaffected by the nicotine.  
You have no facial craters, nothing to fall into  
or lose myself within.*

Kimberly Mazur  
Egg Harbor City, NJ  
Absegami High School  
Irene Fineberg

## Ode To Me: \$10.00

*Here I sit, upon your stoop  
Hoping that you will let me in  
I would sing to you,  
But you're keeping my mouth in  
your purse--ostensibly for safekeeping--  
I would admire you,  
But you've got my eyes in your coat  
One in the left pocket, and one in the right.  
I would think of you,  
But my mind is in your jewelry box--  
for tax purposes, I am assured.  
I would dream of you,  
But I believe you're keeping my soul  
In your refrigerator--under the meatloaf.  
I would love you,  
But my heart, you may have forgotten,  
Is in a plastic bag near your umbrellas  
(I may have to wait until it rains  
for you to remember).  
You've left me my hands, so I've written  
This note to you--in the most polite terms  
possible--to ask if you wouldn't be kind enough  
to let me in--or perhaps you could return the  
aforementioned items to me.*

David M. Sollors  
Great Neck South High School  
Great Neck, NY  
Alfred Ruesch



# Loneliness is an Empty Playground

*The sun shows its face and reaches through the clouds,  
As the pavement holds the puddles patiently.  
The swings sway and squeak with the wind's soft nudge.  
Bars, where the sunlight weaves, arch down from the sky.  
Some clusters of droplets merge and lunge down the slide.  
White chalk lines swirl together on black asphalt,  
Losing hopscotch stones in a changing maze.  
The sun, crowded by the haze, releases its grip.*

Paul Narsavage  
Moscow, PA  
Scranton Preparatory School  
Vincent Vanston

## Hilary's House

Hilary was ten years old when I was nine. My sister was twelve that year, with narrow, pale feet and skin that was blotchy behind purple glasses frames. Hilary was Katie's friend even though she was closer to my age. Hilary was impressed that Katie had already read the entire series of yellow-spined Nancy Drew mysteries that lined the lowest bookshelf in the guest room. Hilary called my sister a genius because she could piece together the United States jigsaw puzzle in less than seven minutes, according to a yellow egg timer that was removed from its location above the kitchen stove.

Sometimes Katie brought me to Hilary's house at the bottom of the hill, separated from our house by an uneven slate sidewalk. I rushed along with Katie as she walked. She never had to look at the ground, like I did, to make sure to avoid the slick leaves that stuck to the sidewalk after rain. She was angry when I grabbed her elbow or treaded on the flattened heels of her grey sneakers. I learned to keep silent while we walked to Hilary's house. I was usually only invited to join Katie when my mother was playing tennis or grocery shopping at Kings.

When Katie and Hilary needed a third player for Monopoly, they placed the floppy-looking metal shoe on the space marked "Go," and that was my gamepiece for the fifteen minutes that passed until I was bankrupt or I landed in jail. When Katie and Hilary baked brownies, I was allowed to eat the four burned corners of the pan. I scrubbed the batter bowl with my fingernails while they sat at the kitchen table, licking the spatula and the mixer beaters. During the autumn, Katie and Hilary jumped in pikes of crackling leaves which I raked into the back of the yard, underneath the skinny weeping willow tree which never had leaves to shed.

The air inside Hilary's house was heavy and damp. The walls were papered with burgundy plush, and the living room chairs were covered with a slippery chintz which probably would have been shiny if there had been any light. Hilary's living room had paintings of hunters who wore red, gold-buttoned coats. Their horses were always white with black hooves, and their rifles always pointed to some unseen target in the woods. Hilary's house had a separate room for the piano, with its broken ivory keys and the dusty stool which we were never allowed to spin. At the top of Hilary's front stairs, there was a wire elevator which looked like a giant birdcage. Hilary wasn't allowed to open its door.

I liked to play at Hilary's house because her mother was never home, and we were allowed to eat animal crackers and Cheezits all day long, until the insides of our mouths puckered from the sugar and salt mixture. I never knew where Hilary's father lived. Hilary said that she had been pushed from the top of the Eiffel Tower, but my mother knitted her eyebrows to my

father when I repeated this at the dinner table. Hilary's mother was thin and gaunt like a man. She wore rough wool sweaters, and her eyes were deepset pools of brown. When she came home late in the afternoon, she brushed feather dusters absent-mindedly over mahogany desks and faded leather book spines. When she placed cat food on the back stoop for Hilary's kitten, she did not bother to mash it out of the shape of the can with the edge of a knife like my mother did for our kitten.

Hilary's mother was not beautiful like the grandmother who lived at the top of the stairs, across the hall from the forbidden cage elevator. Mrs. Grey, propped up on feather pillows, wore flannel nightgowns and pearl combs in her hair while she watched game shows on a black-and-white television. She had a grainy, flat voice, which Hilary ignored when she called from upstairs. Hilary wrapped herself in the velvet living room curtains, affecting a nasal British accent. She spoke louder and louder until Mrs. Grey's pleas for hot tea were drowned in the thick air of the house.

Sometimes Hilary and Katie liked to play inside the dead grandfather's dentist office, behind the kitchen and the dining room. I was always the patient. I hoisted myself into the old-fashioned chair, my mouth wide open and my eyes screwed shut. Hilary and Katie experimented with various tubes of hardened toothpaste, which did not taste like mint or bubble gum like the toothpaste I used before bed at night. They placed dusty sets of false teeth inside my mouth and prodded at my gums with mirrored circles. Once we ate rolled-up pieces of ham on the stone steps outside the office. Hilary's next door neighbor threw eggs at us from his bedroom window. When he pulled down his pants, Katie and I ran inside, squealing as we fell onto the swiveling office chair. Hilary stayed outside, enthralled.

Even though Hilary was younger than Katie, the material at the front of her t-shirts stretched tight one summer before Katie's shirts were too small. Hilary grew tall. She loped when she walked, and her hands looked too big to fit inside animal cracker boxes. Hilary still spoke louder and louder to drown out her grandmother's voice from upstairs. Her grandmother called for her dead dentist husband all day long, and I heard Hilary shout words that I was not allowed to whisper. She did not wrap herself in the living room curtains anymore. Her mother's eyes were a deeper brown when she came home from work at night, with her arms crossed tight over grocery bags which we never offered to carry.

Mrs. Grey's funeral was in the living room of Hilary's house. Katie and I carried oatmeal cookies to the back door the morning after she died. We knew that Hilary hated raisins, but our mother told us to take the cookies down the hill anyway. We peered into the grandmother's casket, staring at her severe black dress and the white rosary beads which were wrapped through chalky folded hands. That day Hilary's mother lit candles in the piano room, while neighbors trickled in and out, admiring the hunting paintings, the chintz chairs, and the dead body in front of the living room fireplace. Hilary cut chicken from a carcass that was in the refrigerator. We ate lunch on the stone steps while Hilary waited for her neighbor to pull down his pants again.

I never went to Hilary's house after Mrs. Grey's funeral. My sister stopped hurrying over the slate sidewalk when her feet widened and her skin was a uniform color again. Hilary used to knock on the back door, looking for Monopoly partners. Her eyes deepened like her mother's. Her voice was raspy and toneless when Katie said that we had to stay home while our mother played tennis. I baked brownies with Katie and we shared the mixer beaters at the kitchen table, leaving the batter bowl in the sink for my mother to clean.

Elisabeth Egan  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Mrs. Harriet Marcus





Shannon Fincke  
Selinsgrove, PA  
Selinsgrove High School

## Solitaire

The air is still.  
Only the flicker  
of cards on the table  
disturbs  
the silence.

The widow's  
pallid skin  
sags  
from her arthritic hands.  
Yet,  
the creased cards flow  
through her fingers  
like the musical cadence  
of a polished pianist.

Her game is solitaire.

Day after day,  
she trains the cards  
to move in her favor.  
Their faces become  
more familiar than  
her own.

She is a member  
of the royal family.

Suzanne Bertisch  
New City, NY  
Clarkstown North High School  
Leslie Dachs

## Watching Him...

The man whom I call my father,  
stands in the lighted doorway of the double car garage  
as a rock would sit in a freshly plowed field.  
A cigarette protrudes from his mouth, giving off  
smoke, mixing with the dark air in shapes of  
demons and devils.  
The lights of the garage dance on his hair  
as he watches the crescent moon  
with a critical eye.  
He stands there in his thousand year old coat  
that is torn this way and that,  
from end to end.  
He listens to the wind laughing with the trees  
as he breathes in the dirtied smoke from  
the nicotine filled filter in his slightly aged mouth.  
His wrinkled face shows the careful thought  
of chemicals and math grazing  
on his overused brain.  
He stands there relaxing, not moving a muscle  
knowing I am in the shadows,  
watching him.

Eric Vitner  
Califon, NJ  
Voorhees High School  
Lois Harrod

## Untitled

There were so few fireflies this year. I remember summers  
hunting them in New York--  
children with their jars, such small children,  
catching their private little stars.  
It was beautiful to see them--  
but they died by morning (the fireflies).  
And the children tried again to feed them,  
but it didn't help.  
One child I saw crushed hers on the street  
to see how long they glowed. I helped, then--  
But after that I let them be.  
To see them in the night was joy enough,  
to catch them in my hands was all.  
I didn't need to keep them any more.  
And I remember a time two years gone--  
not this summer past, but the summer before--  
when my mother called me to the window  
and told me to go outside and look.  
That summer, the yard at night  
was like the Disney Parade of Lights  
or the skyline of New York City,  
there were so many fireflies.  
But summer ended, as it so often does,  
and fireflies were replaced by falling snow.  
But there were so few fireflies last year.  
Maybe I wasn't there to see them; I don't know.  
I didn't see them! What happened?  
Where did they go?  
Where did the fireflies go?

Jessica McGeary  
Chatham, NJ  
Villa Walsh Academy  
Mrs. Olive O'Sullivan



# Holidays

The following essay has also been selected as a 1991 Scholastic Writing Awards National Winner

Holidays are hell. For me, anyway. I think it's my family; they can take a pleasant, warm-fuzzy type of a holiday like Christmas and turn it into an event that would drive Santa to beat his elves. I walked into Bertson's Card Shop last Tuesday to buy my Christmas cards and practically yakked all over the Snoopy Christmas stockings. Everywhere I looked, I saw a picture of a happy family unit, gathered around a Christmas tree about the size of a Winnebago, Dad stoking the embers in the fireplace, Mom parceling out the gifts, and Brother and Sis opening presents side by side with cherubic smiles. Mr. Hallmark would weep if he observed a Christmas morning in our house. First off, our tree is fake. And old. Through gaps between the ragged branches, you can see the metal pole running up the center. We don't even have many ornaments to fill out the holes any more, because every year the dog scratches his back on the bottom boughs and tips the whole shebang over. We vacuum up little pieces of broken crystal angels and tinsel until Easter. There are no glowing embers, either. The only time we've ever had a fire in our living room was when my older brother fell asleep smoking a cigarette and the couch shot up in flames. Instead of distributing presents, my mom usually poops out in the Lazy-Boy after swearing about how much work the damn turkey takes to cook. And as for sibling tenderness, forget it. Last year, my brother got up extra early and hid all my presents under his bed upstairs; there wasn't a single package for me beneath the tree.

I stood in Bertson's reading those sappy verses, nausea sweeping over me. "Christmas is a time to care/A time to love and time to share/Please know that you mean more to me/Than any gift below my tree." Or how 'bout this: "Christmas is a special day/When children dance and run and play/But you'll give me more than you know/If we can stand 'neath mistletoe." Ugh. After the fourth card, I realized that in no way did those sugary sentiments reflect my own familial life, so I left the store and went next door to The Lodge, taking a break and letting my stomach settle.

That's when I saw it. Nestled in the back corner of the store, behind a display of smiling plastic carolers, hung a gorgeous periwinkle sweater. Made of luxurious angora, it was soft and delicate. The rich bluish-lavender color was seductively hypnotizing, and an elegant ring of dainty eyelet lace embellished the collar and sleeves. I swooned. This was a garment you had to buy right then and there, the kind that seizes your wallet and leads you to the register without even trying it on, the kind where if it doesn't fit, you'll have surgery to alter your body shape. But wait...a small financial consideration presented itself. I had no money except for that with which I was supposed to buy gifts for my family. I pondered my ethical dilemma: buy the sweater and wallow in guilt on Christmas morning, or make a sacrifice for the greater happiness of my relatives? What the hell, I figured, a little wallowing never hurt anybody. I bought the sweater. Don't be so judgmental--you wouldn't want me to pass up the fashion find of my lifetime, would you?

Well, as it turned out, I did feel twangs of remorse while I walked home with my package in my arms, so I did the only mature thing I could think of...I made homemade cards and wrapped up all the art projects I'd made in my pottery class in school to give as presents. (HA! You thought I returned the sweater, didn't you?) I gave my brother a clay dish (if he uses it for an ashtray we won't have any more couch fires), and I gave my mom a clay bowl for her rings, and Dad got a clay cup for his pencils at work. (That's about all I can do with clay: make bowls and cups.) I felt better, though, and on Christmas morning everyone acted, if not somewhat puzzled, at least relieved that I hadn't bought them anything they'd have to wear in public.

You see, my family isn't psychopathic or twistedly maladjusted or anything. Let's just say that if Cliff Huxtable and his brood represent a straight line in the graph of family lifestyles, my clan would be plotted as something more like a parabola. But we're not evil or anything. I mean, we may not be all mushy like the Waltons, but just because we don't spend half an hour saying goodnight to each other doesn't mean I'd want my brother to wake up dead the next morning. My family doesn't make my life utterly miserable, they just drive me a little nuts at the holidays.

I think it's the grandparents. I mean, we drag these two poor old folks out only two or three times a year, and it's bound to cause some kind of stress in our household. My dad's parents live in Arizona, so all I have to suffer through is a minute and a half on the telephone; my grandmother asks me how school is, and my, my but I'm growing up fast! Soon I'll be another year older, so what would I like for my birthday? Geez, I'm her only granddaughter, you'd think she might know by now that my birthday is in August. My grandfather doesn't spend much time talking; the phone bill's too expensive, he's missing the second half of the football game, and he'd rather be drinking a beer.

It's my mother's family that actually comes to visit. I honestly can't understand why they come back year after year. The food's not that good, and the tension builds up so high around the dinner table that the temperature actually rises. I'm serious. After the meal, we're all sweating as much as if we'd just played a game of championship basketball. My grandmother and my mom don't even like each other. Well, I mean, they love each other because they're parent and child, but there are all these heavy-duty psychological time bombs exploding around them all the time. A shrink would have a field day at our dinner table.

Mom sits up at one end of the table, Gram at her left. My grandmother is uncomfortable with her own advancing age, so she resents my mother's youth. Gram doesn't miss a chance to comment on my mom's appearance, how she looks heavier or how gray her hair's become. My mom is a secretary for an investment banking firm in the city, while my grandmother stayed home to raise her children, never holding a job outside the house. Gram secretly envies my mom's career, but tries to cover it by shooting little poisoned barbs. "Isn't it nice how we share this meal together? When you were growing up, Julie (my mom's name), we had family dinners every night. It's too bad your children experience it only once a year. I guess that's the price of never being at home. Could you pass the peas?"

My mother imagines my grandmother is always peering over her shoulder, waiting to catch some mistake in the way she's drained the carrots, thereby proving that my mom is on the edge of a nervous breakdown and capable of posing a great threat to herself and her children. Her paranoia chokes her all up, though, and she usually burns at least one vegetable beyond recognition ("Hey, Mom, what kind of fossil fuel is this?"). Poor Mom sits behind her plate looking like a hunted animal, chewing on her lower lip, waiting for the next attack from Grizzly Gram.

To the left of my grandmother sits my brother. He doesn't say much; he sort of drifts in and out of consciousness. See, when Christmas vacation starts, we don't really have a bedtime, so he stays up past David Letterman and then past whatever old movies they show on early morning T.V. He drops off to sleep right around the time Good Morning, America! begins. His biological clock is so screwed up, I'm surprised he can coordinate the movement of his fork to his mouth.

I sit on the other side of the table, to the right of my mom. I have the worst seat of all, because I'm put next to my Grandfather. He sits there and burps his way through the meal. He thinks he cleverly disguises it by holding his breath and puffing out his cheeks, but he still sounds like the beginning of a volcanic eruption. And I always have to sit next to him: me and Gramps St. Helens.

At the other end of the table is my dad. That end of the room heats up considerably, too. My grandfather doesn't like

(Continued on page 12)



my dad very much because he stole away his little girl. Grandpa starts off the meal by immediately targeting my dad. "So, Albert, are you taking care of MY Julie? Julie, how about it: are you happy, honey?" My dad tenses up his grip on the closest object (I get worried when he's carving the turkey with that big, electric knife) but Gram shoves Grandpa in the ribs, Grandpa burps, and things settle down.

The table divides into two conversations for the rest of the meal; my mom and grandmother chat about various relatives, and my dad and grandfather argue about the depth of the Pistons versus the talent of the Bulls. My brother interjects every once in a while with a snort when he dribbles eggnog down his shirt. On the surface, all is calm, but we're each dancing an intricate ballet, circling each other like wrestlers before the match begins. Our dance of the wrestlers is accompanied by a musical score of burps and snorts.

I perch quietly at the ringside, nibbling on my dinner. The mammoth turkey Dad lugged home from the store is so dried out that it now resembles a chicken, and the only thing the potatoes are good for is making little train-track impressions, then flooding them with gravy. Personally, I avoid the stuffing; I don't want to eat anything looking like that that comes out of that end of any animal. So I go light on the dinner; I save my appetite for the ice cream pie later on. If I really stuff myself with hot fudge sauce, I'll be on a sugar high until Christmas break ends.

Now for the really painful part of the day: opening the gifts. My Dad insists on donning this heinous Santa Claus-esque polyester flaming red cap (it doesn't even have a tassel on the end anymore; the dog chewed it off last year, then got sick and threw up in front of the television set), and my grandmother forces all of us to pose for pictures. Our faces crack under the pressure while she fumbles around looking for the "advance" switch and curses the Japanese for their plot to confuse us by constructing cameras you'd need an engineering degree to figure out. Come to think of it, I've never actually seen the results of these photo sessions: there are no family scrapbooks of Christmases past, I think because my grandfather leaves the film in the camera until he uses it again next year, and he figures "Hell, we're having another Christmas again now, so why waste money on shots of last year?" And so it goes....

So that's my parabolic family. They're basically good people; there's a real layer of love each other underneath the veneer of jealousy, resentment, and sharp words. After all, my grandparents wouldn't return year after year unless they cared about us, and we wouldn't ask them back if we didn't want to see them; a phone call would do the job. They may be a little hard to take at times, but I guess if nothing else, having them around builds character. And another thing; who else besides family would pretend to genuinely like a lopsided clay bowl? We'll get through Christmas this year just like we got through it in years past, I suppose; I'll just spend a lot of time up in my room admiring my new sweater. Oh, and by the way, I'm sure we'll have plenty of food left over, so if you want any turkey....

Ellen Connelly Gruber  
Exeter, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
Douglas Rogers

## Susquehanna University

# THE APPRENTICE WRITER



## A Nun's Life

Myra Schwartzbaum was a thirteen year old nun. Well, not officially, but in her heart she knew she was. Above her bed she tacked up the promotional poster for Jesus Christ: Superstar and when the lights went out, a small spotlight struck his eyes. In school, she wore her habit; a black choir robe she found at Goodwill. Her Flying Nun lunch box never left her side. Her afternoons were spent watching the commercial-free Redemption Hotline on cable, until six, when Sister Evelyn's Hour of Ecstasy came on. At bedtime, she read articles by the Mother Superior Editor of *A Nun's Life* and in her dreams she was always speaking in tongues.

Millicent Souris  
Timonium, MD  
William Jones  
Elizabeth Fanto

## Three Dream Poems

I.

*I'm sitting in the passenger seat of my step-mother's burgundy Mercedes and my dad is driving and I'm leaning back and gripping the seat and we're going very fast around a sharp curve and we hit an on-coming car and I'm thrown up out of the top of the convertible with the seat still gripped tight in my hands on either side of my legs and my seat belt is still on and I'm flying up fast and looking down at the red sky and the green bush on the side of the road and I see smoke and people yelling and the police are writing things on clipboards and my dad's cheek is against the steering wheel and he's drooling and my step-mother's body is being taken out of the car onto a stretcher and I keep flying up*

II.

*I walk into my house and my family is standing around, looking down and my mom says, "It was the only logical thing to do" and my sister says, "Why didn't he do it sooner?" and I'm walking through the rooms looking at all their solemn faces that say, "It was the only logical thing" and "I would've been surprised if it didn't happen" and my little brother is standing alone with his bottom lip stuck out shining red like when he was young and he tells me "Daddy killed himself" and I become my family's logic, walking through the house like everyone else, saying, "Of course, it was the only thing to do"*

III.

*I'm sitting behind the driver's seat, watching myself drive the Mercedes alone down a grey road and there's a dark sky like ash and the yellow broken lines on the road are bright and they're zooming under the left wheels and the steering wheel starts swerving out of my control and the radio goes on and the stations are flipping around and I fuss with the buttons and the windshield wipers go on and the sun roof opens up and I know I'm not alone and there's a voice above me and around me and it's my step-mother's spirit and she's whispering evil*

Stephanie Levin  
Hunt Valley, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones



## Liza Grey

"The flirt is an antelope of flame,  
igniting the plain wherever she hesitates."  
"Flirt," John Updike

Liza, Liza Grey  
16 years of dazzled  
stares at the striking  
luck of genes.  
She soon realized the  
capacity of her grace--  
even at four, she'd  
twirl her ebony waves  
around a dainty  
little finger, lowering  
her crown and raising  
those lavishly lashed  
sea greens.  
She'd cat walk into  
a room with such presence,  
every Crackerjack Joe  
would follow her  
glided steps.  
Oh, Liza knew,  
she knew well how to  
get what she craved,  
and they'd roll out  
the red carpet,  
eager to see her  
glide down it.  
Liza, even the z  
rolls off the tongue  
in a provocative way.  
Only she, to warm  
up a December day,  
or cool off a steamy May.  
But Liza, she'll never lose.  
Her red carpet is everlasting.  
And even as she gets  
on up in her days,  
she'll just throw back  
her grayed waves.  
So her loosened cheeks  
will fall back too,  
but she'll win them over  
with that sea green gaze.

Wendy Loren Goldenberg  
Lido Beach, Ny  
Long Beach High School  
Ellen Pickus

## Root Beer

he  
silhouetted in the light  
from the open refrigerator door  
passed me a sad root beer  
in the dark upstairs kitchen

and I stood in my coat  
holding the cold and slippery can  
and I watched him  
not look at me

and I thought  
I love you hard  
and spiky, stainless steel

spikes with maraschino  
cherries on the ends  
I love you soft  
like old cool faded  
flowered pillowcases  
I want to see you dressed  
in old pillowcases  
I love you wet waves  
full of sea cucumbers  
and coral  
I want to see you  
with sand in your hair  
I love you dry  
paper dolls in the sun  
I dress them all  
to look like you  
I love you loud  
groaning whale songs  
on a tape  
that I give to your mother  
to give to you  
I love you quiet  
a rich mute tapestry  
with curling edges  
hangs inside my breasts  
for you  
I love you high  
a spiny black  
radar tower making  
faces with its red  
flashing light  
I love you low  
lying in the yard  
with my face in the grass  
in the ground

and I handed the root beer  
back to him  
warm and creamy

Sarah Henderson  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Thomas Steiner

## This Year

10 billion left over pumpkin seeds  
have been planted.  
Their bellies will sprout  
cargoes of mellow orange.  
Dented by gravity and tripping children,  
they'll grow into pies,  
jack-o-lanterns,  
salted bitter snacks.  
Licking the stomachs  
of witches, gypsies, and ghouls  
they've multiplied since  
the Druid priests first  
planted the seeds,  
young, swollen,  
and magical.

Kathy Cottle  
Phoenix, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones



## When Atlas Cried

Chew. Chew. Chew. Chew. Maggie munches on the tough meat. Brown, tough, stringy meat. It always leaves a taste of death in her mouth. Chew. Chew. Chew.

Swallow.

The telephone shrills with a certain urgency. Mr. Taylor puts down his fork and leaps from his seat. Maggie and Tom continue at the table. The clanking of the knife and fork on the plate. The crystal clinks against china as the base of the glass catches on the lip of the soup bowl. There is a humor in it. Coca-Cola washes away the taste of death and makes Maggie's nose itch.

Mr. Taylor is silent at first, then: "That was the hospital calling. They say your mother is going to be just fine." His voice chokes. "Just fine." Then, almost inaudibly, he adds: "Thank God." What was once a statement of fact becomes a relief and a surprise.

Maggie looks up with a question. Of course she's going to be just fine. Isn't that what he'd been promising from the start?

The evening before their mother leaves, Maggie and Tom are brought into the living room for a fire. Dry logs and wadded newspapers are in place but, before the match is struck... "It's nothing, really. Just a small lump in her breast. The doctors want to take it out before it becomes dangerous." His voice rises and falls and his words float through Maggie's mind insignificantly.

Mr. Taylor moves to the fireplace and lights each section of newspaper. The day's events up in flames. He blows out the match and the grey line of smoke shivers upward and vanishes. How does it just disappear? He gazes into the fire and talks on. The fire makes shadows on his face.

Maggie looks to her mom for the first time. She smiles weakly. "Don't worry. You'll hardly miss me." Maggie watches her mother's hands, folded in her lap. Mr. Taylor joins his wife on the couch, placing his strong hand on her more delicate one.

He had tried so hard. They would hardly notice her absence. But they had noticed. They had tasted it in the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that were cut into rectangles instead of triangles. They felt it when a rougher voice awakened them, not their mother's cooing tones. They saw it in the dark kitchen with closed shutters. The pale winter sun of afternoon did not filter through to spotlight the ever-floating dust. They heard it when he dropped a plate and reassured them nervously: "Well, don't worry. She'll be home soon." Maggie had bent to help him collect the tiny shards which his large hands could not grasp.

Her eyes fall again on those hands, which now clutch a napkin for strength. They are calloused and rough. Veins twist and knot like tapeworms beneath the skin. There was once some unquestionable power in those hands. How often she had watched them in silent awe.

The little legs burn. Pedal faster. Pedal faster. Don't let go. Just don't let go. But the faster she pedals, the faster comes his breath. "I have to let go sometime or you'll never learn." His hands release her. Moments of complete freedom and control. She forgets the heat in her legs and hears only the dancing of her heart. Not true, not complete, not control. A wobbling motion, just a moment and all balance is lost. Maggie cuts to one side and is stopped by the curb. She slides along the grass, her head hitting the gravel of the driveway. Daddy hurries to the child and lifts her in his arms. Through her tears, she sees the back wheel still spinning, sees the ripped tire, sees the bent chrome of the handlebars. A birthday gift ruined.

Mommy mends the child: washes and cleans torn skin, dries the perpetual well of tears. "Daddy feels terrible. He says he must have let go too soon." Maggie sees no fault but her own: "I hurt the bike." "Not to worry, darling. Daddy'll fix it."

Up all night, but Daddy fixes it. Fixes the tire, patched to perfection. Fixes the handlebars, warped back into a smooth line.

From that day on, it is always: "Daddy fix." Broken chair? "Daddy fix" with nails and a hammer. Muddy doll? "Daddy fix" with soap and warm water. Skinned elbow? "Daddy fix" with Band-Aids and loving kisses.

Daddy concentrates on the broken locket, Maggie's favorite gift that has opened and closed one time too many. Maggie kneels on the chair, leaning across the table watching. Hair falls from behind her shoulder, blocking his light. Brushed back. There is silence except for her breath.

The hinges are lined up, interwoven. On the third attempt, Daddy lifts the tiny pin. He holds it between two fingernails. Everything is just a bit too small for such huge hands. The locket looks no bigger than a dime, the pin like a thread. Yet somehow he steadily lowers the pin into the hinge's tunnel. Re-creation: a child's cherished belonging repaired. Click, open, close, click, click, open, close, click. It works. He cradles it in his palm and offers it to Maggie. "Thank you, Daddy." She skips away. "See, I told you Daddy always fix."

His hands are brown and spotted with age. When had he become so old? The ends of the napkin in the bloodless knuckles flutter. He is shaking ever so slightly, like leaves on an almost windless day. His face is moist; even in the dim light of the chandelier, she sees the tears shimmer. They reflect colors and on their edges are stars of light. They come more readily, join to become streams on his wrinkled skin that drop onto the red tablecloth, forming crimson dots. He brings his hands to his face, but they offer no protection. Maggie and Tom's awful stares penetrate even these hands. Mr. Taylor breaks the silence with a sob of "Thank God."

Maggie's mind races for understanding. There is no definition for such tears. She, too, begins to cry. There is a loss, a death of something deep: childhood assurances are washed away.

Muted betrayal and despair and sympathy. Daddy fix. Daddy can't fix. Daddy fix. Daddy can't fix. Daddy fix. Daddy fix no longer.

LIAR. LIAR. LIAR.

The children leave their seats, back slowly away. They leave their father crying at the table.

Mary Piciocchi  
Hillsdale, NJ  
Pascack Hills High School  
Nancy Harmon

## Tangle

*You took me to the park to watch the owls kiss under the white polka dotted star-sky and when the crawling black tickle bugs braceleted my wrist like tiny beads, you hoisted me onto your burly shoulders wearing my legs like suspenders until you put me down spreading your coat like a snow angel for me to sit on, then traced my silhouette in the dirt and when the matted leaves behind me tangled in my hair you plucked them out one by one like grapes and made them dance around my ankles like green seraphs cavorting around the feet of God you made sure to uncake the dun flecks from under your fingernails before scratching the itch on my neck that I didn't even ask you to scratch. You said I love you one time that night and I looked at my watch, then right into your saggy chocolate eyes.*

Andrea Goff  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Carol Blum





Susannah Snowden  
Greenwich, CT  
Greenwich Academy  
Jeffrey Schwartz

## And They Could Never Tear Us Apart

You.  
You were standing.  
I was there.  
Two worlds collided  
And they could never  
Ever  
Tear Us Apart  
(INXS: KICK 1989)

When I dream, sometimes I see his face, even the shadows darkening his features and the squinting of his eyes. But when I wake he is not there anymore, not even in my mind's eye. I wonder if it really was him. He came into my life at the beginning of seventh grade year. I had just moved to Botswana, a new country in a new continent, a place I had heard mention of only in my father's adventure stories and folk tales. This new home and the looming threat of a new school had succeeded in making me feel extremely self-conscious and anxious to do the right thing.

On the first day, I stepped out of the house trying to visualize the path I had been shown leading to my new school. The air smelled fresh, tinged with the sultry remainders of the African night. The purple blossoms of the cactii nodded their dignified heads at me. I smiled, it was going to be a good day. As I passed the tiny playing fields where the local boys would congregate to have a dusty game of soccer each afternoon, I noticed the stretch of land beyond. The area was a flat, grassy plain dotted with massive, speckled boulders. Between two of the rocks in the very front, I could see something else--a dark face with two fantastically large eyes gazing diligently at me. The eyes stared, blinked several times, and then, assuring themselves of my attention, smiled. It sounds odd when I say his eyes smiled, but I believe they did, and set a precedent for the rest of his face to

follow. I looked away, held tightly to my back-pack, and walked on.

That day, at school, things did go relatively well. I remember getting lost in the hallways and having to have an older, much more experienced eighth grader show me to my class. The other seventh graders had gathered around when I entered to ask my name, at the same time calling out their own.

"Ayesha!" I would yell to them and I would be answered with Marks, and Jamies, and Jennies. I could feel their smiles, their lukewarm breath surround me. I smiled a huge plastic smile and pretended they were my friends. From then the day whirled by like some crazy monsoon wind whisking away the twelve year old interests and their halloween smiles. Then it was time to walk home again.

He was there again, sitting with his back to a rock, looking again with that smile in his eyes. I turned my face away and studied the jerking movements of my feet, to make it obvious that I was taking no notice of him.

"Dumela Mma!" he called out. I took quicker, more determined steps--I wasn't going to answer his greeting. He started walking towards me, and thinking that I hadn't understood him, he shouted out in broken English, "Your name, Mma? What your name?" I ignored him.

"Please, I wan' your name."

I laughed. He laughed too. I stopped, and he came closer. As he neared me I mentally sped through my "outs" in case I needed them. I figured out that I was close enough to home that I could make a run for it and that I could easily outrun him. He stopped only a few feet in front of me and again asked for my name. I had had enough practice that day not to stutter.

"Ayesha."

"I Tsenolo."

I nodded, waiting for him to do or say something else.

"Come..."

I shook my head. He cocked his head to one side and beckoned to me with a slender, dark hand.

"Show you some."

He touched my hand that was clenched tightly to the straps of my backpack. I flinched and threw his hand off mine as if it was a putrid malignancy. His liquid eyes turned away for a few minutes then back. He squinted at me. I couldn't look at him just then; I wished I hadn't done what I had.

"Not do nothing. Not bad."

He unsquinted those striking cocoa eyes of his and grinned a warm, white smile. He asked again, a little apprehensively, "Come?" He took a few steps in the direction of the boulders and then turned back to see if I would follow. I walked behind him noting how easily he climbed over the rust colored rocks and the pride that showed up in his face every time he turned to point something out or to help me up the steep inclines.

From the top of those rocks I could see all of Gaborone--the unfamiliar roofs of the bungalows stretching out like some magical silver carpet that would anytime fly up and take us to a land far, far away. The sky seemed almost to wet the tops of our heads with her moist touch. I turned towards him to see what he was doing. He was looking out too. He was looking beyond the bungalow tops and the smoke rising from the breweries in the east; he was looking at the phantom huts and stables of an ancient people and of an exalted tribe. These were the ghosts of the old Motswana, the old Bantu tribe. These were his people. I watched his face, his dark, dreamy face, and I thought I saw a smile in his eyes again, then in his lips. I turned away. The sun's last rays were piercing the heavens and a reddish hue began tinting the edges of the horizon. We climbed down together. I grinned at him, turned, and walked home.

I saw him every day before school. He would wave and I would wave back. Then, after school, he would be waiting, leaning on the same rock. He showed me the red and orange wildflowers that grew like carpets of fire beyond the boulders and how if you plucked a bloom by its stem and then sucked on the

(Continued on page 16)



end, you could taste its rich, wild honey. I learned to play the games that had been passed down by the old tribespeople, the games that some of the local children could be seen playing outside the mud-huts on the edges of town. Sometimes, when the heat would die down, just before I would leave, he'd sit down cross-legged on the hot, baked earth and sing to me some haunting tale of warriors and women and woe. And the sun would sink down, shedding her blood and her hot red tears in the sky, as if wounded by his throaty wails. In return I would, as best I could, tell him of the sea and my own country of Bangladesh and the mammoth steel birds in the sky that could carry a person atop their mighty wings, across the world and its continents. I would write long words in the sand with a dry, withered stick, then blow the sand over the crevices to write yet more. The days passed warmly, swiftly, like the African sand through my fingertips when I'd listen to him singing.

A month passed and I hardly noticed. I had made friends in school. One in particular was a part-British, part-Motswana girl called Lena. She had a form of blood disease, and had grown very socially hesitant and did not make friends easily, but she and I had hit it off from the start. One day, a Tuesday I think, she was going to come home with me. We walked along the old path, quite worn by then. I was going to surprise her and introduce her to Tsenolo when we came to the rocks. The day was warm, the weather humid and drowsy, and Lena and I seemed drunk with its touch. We walked along laughing, screaming, shouting--it was beginning to feel like we were on a psychedelic T.V. sitcom that would slow down at times or speed up. The trees and bushes seemed to race by in a whirlwind of color and our feet seemed only a blur beneath us. Then we saw him. He was standing at the usual place with that familiar smile on his face. I tugged at Lena's arm to go and meet him but she pulled me back. "Where are you going?" she cried, terrified. "Don't go near him! He's a lechudu, a thief." She held tightly to me. Tsenolo had sensed that something was wrong. He waved, called out my name and then started to walk towards me. Lena's laugh was terrible at that moment. "Look at him," she shrieked, "he thinks he can just walk up to us to pick our pockets. Bastard!" She screeched again. Caught up in the insanity of the moment, I laughed too. Lena started to run and I ran after her. I heard him calling my name and once I turned to look at him. His face was shadowed and dark, and his eyes, those brilliant eyes, were closed. I don't remember the rest of that day. Maybe I choose not to remember.

I went by the rocks several times in the next few months, hoping to see him there, hoping to catch a glimpse of him sitting somewhere, singing the old songs. Sometimes I would think that I saw a dark figure leaning against one of the rocks but it would always be a shadow of a bird flying above or some other occurrence of nature. Two months later winter came and the frost took away all the orange and red fire behind the rocks. It rained a lot that winter and all I can really remember of that period are sheets of liquid gloom amidst the grey and grey and endless grey. Then spring, then fresh summer came. Lena died that summer. Another couple of autumns, winters and springs, then summers passed by. Our family moved to the States.

I was flying to Boston from Illinois, a month ago, when my school broke for the holidays. I looked out the plane windows at the soft clouds and the blazing sun and the earth baking hundreds of feet below. And I thought of Tsenolo, of where he was. I dreamt that he would be in a native, grass-roofed hut, surrounded by his people. He would be singing the old songs again--and the Bantu would weep for their ancient tribe and would wipe away their tears at the young one who would always keep the Bantu spirit alive with his songs. In my heart I wished that he would think of me, too, if he saw the shadow of a steel bird pass over the African ground or if he heard, through some inconceivable dream, the sea waves lapping upon the shores of a distant land. Then through our dreams and the hopes that rose

like a phoenix from the fires of our collision so many years before, we could bind ourselves within indissoluble bonds so they could never tear us apart.

Behnaz Kibria  
Exeter, NH  
Phillips Exeter Academy  
David Weber

## Wherefore.

*I once knew a boy.  
He was born under gray skies.  
"Not skies that were bad," he said, "just gray  
Like the skies in Pennsylvania."  
I offered him my hand  
And as we bowed to each other we bumped heads.*

*I looked inside his head  
And saw he was but a wee little boy  
With a very shaky hand  
That had painted many different skies.  
I always wanted to go back to Pennsylvania  
But that part of his brain was too gray*

*For me to decipher. The kind of gray  
No one likes to see ahead  
Of them, not even in Pennsylvania.  
I could only shake this boy's  
Hand once, because he was too far up in the sky  
For me to reach his hand*

*Again. But I sang about his hand  
And I painted the notes on my page gray.  
I knew one day the sky  
Would spit him out, but he only shook his head  
Every time I told him about a boy  
Who was born in Pennsylvania.*

*I even drew a map of Pennsylvania  
Then traced his hand,  
Trying to compare the boy  
To the streaks of gray  
On the map. I nodded my head  
And looked up to the sky*

*And I screamed to the sky  
That I had seen the same gray in Pennsylvania  
That I had seen in his head.  
He took my hand  
And crushed it. And with stiff gray  
Eyes, told me I had the wrong little boy.*

*I thought I might jump into the sky with him and mend my hand.  
I thought maybe Pennsylvania had skies that were bad and gray.  
I thought I might rip the head off that little boy.*

Jill Robin Sisson  
Finksburg, MD  
Westminster High School  
Alan P. Zepp



## Inspiration From Taylor

Tony and Jay clutch mugs full of my mother's rose wine stolen from the refrigerator. I hope she won't notice that half of the green-tinted gallon bottle is empty when she comes home from her date with the balding insurance salesman from the other side of the development. Tony shakes his fist at the baseball game while Jay laughs at the Loretta Lynn records which are stacked next to the stereo. My mother was born in Texas, and she still listens to country music.

Girls say that I look like Jay. Nobody ever says that he looks like me, probably because he usually meets girls first and then he introduces them to me. It's always been that way. I'm Pete, Jay's friend. Sometimes I'm known as Tony's friend, too, but I don't like the girls who he meets. They stare at their fingernails, snap bubble gum, and talk about articles in *Seventeen* which, naturally, I haven't read. Tony and Jay complain about the girls who try and steal their plaid flannel shirts and ripped sweatshirts, but I know that their grumbles are actually boasts. Upstairs, directly above the baseball game and the embarrassing Loretta Lynn records, my flannel shirts are folded into piles on my closet shelves. Girls who Jay and Tony meet have never clamored for my comfortable clothing.

My friends howl at Darryl Strawberry and Kevin MacReynolds for making mistakes at Shea Stadium. Their shouts become gravelly and gruff as the wine jug empties, and I hope that the blind woman next door won't call the police as she does every time my brother slams the door to his room. I turn the pages of the annual swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Earlier, Jay and Tony were arguing over the full-length picture at the center of the magazine. The girl is wearing an orange bikini, and both of them want to tape her to the ceilings above their beds. Her stomach is taut and beaded with water. I never meet girls who look like this.

I never saw Nicole wearing a bikini, but I know that she was not the type of girl who would be plastered across anybody's bedroom ceiling. My friends met Nicole once when I brought her to a party. They were busy stealing wine from somebody else's refrigerator, but Jay offered a damp, soft hand to Nicole before he tilted his head backwards to fill his mouth with white wine from a tall juice glass. "Pete's a good guy," he told her. They always said that about me. Before we left the party, Nicole slipped as she walked through a puddle of wine on the kitchen floor. I noticed that her shoes were made of tightly-laced leather, with smooth brown soles. The other girls at the party were wearing college sweatshirts with stretched waists, and tennis sneakers with holes by the toes. The next Monday in school, I thought of Nicole's pointy shoes when a girl in my math class said she thought my girlfriend looked cute.

In the living room of my mother's house, Tony and Jay are standing on the arms of a pillowy beige couch during the seventh inning stretch of the Mets game. The framed Chinese flower print which is hanging on the wall behind the couch is lopsided, tilted towards the stained glass window of the front door. Every townhouse in the development has a stained glass window, with different patterns of circular and triangular panes of glass. My mother's house is decorated in careful, bland colors. All of our rugs are tweedy and flat. When I visited Nicole's house for the first time, I noticed that the carpeting in her front hallway was so thick that my feet nearly disappeared beneath little lengths of green yarn. Her living room furniture was flowered and mismatched, and the paintings hanging on the walls weren't prints like ours.

When Nicole visited my mother's house, I scrubbed shaving cream from the bottom of the bathroom sink. I moved my brother's pajama bottoms from behind the toilet and threw them in the rat's cage on the floor of his room. When we were in the living room, Nicole sat Indian-style on the brown leather chair by the stereo. She never laughed at my mother's Loretta Lynn records, but she stole the remote control when I pretended

to be interested in the baseball game on Channel Seven. Once I gave her microwave pizza to eat for dinner. She stretched her bare feet to the glass coffee table, with her toes curled forward, and watched the Home Shopping Network until I insisted that we change the channel.

Nicole never talked about shopping or hairstyles as Tony's girlfriends did. She told me that she hated shopping for underwear with her mother, but she never spoke of sales at Macy's or Bennetton, and I was just as happy not to hear. Instead of dieting like most of the girls who I meet, Nicole spent her free time playing the oboe. I didn't know that she was interested in music at all until I looked at her hand one night and saw the word "Practice" written on her palm with a red magic marker.

"I play the oboe," she explained, trying to wriggle her hand away from mine. I wouldn't let her go. I stared at the word in her palm, fascinated by the ink which bled into the crevices of her skin. "Sometimes I forget, but I'm supposed to practice every night."

"Even on Fridays?" She nodded, and I stared down at her in disbelief. I thought I was dedicated to the soccer team when I ran a couple of miles and bought new cleats for every season. On Friday nights, most of my friends fall asleep on kitchen floors or underneath beds after they have consumed somebody's parents' beer or wine. I never knew anybody else who played the oboe, but I never laughed again when Nicole spoke about music lessons or concerts. She never invited me to play, but I would have listened if she had offered.

Nicole was more private than girls I watched in school, crying when their boyfriends forgot to meet them for lunch in the cafeteria. When I ventured to tell her that she wasn't like any other girl that I'd met, she was evasive. "But you haven't met every girl, Pete. There are lots of other girls. I know girls who are just like me, only prettier." Sometimes I thought she was trying to convince me to gain interest in the girls who congregated in front of their lockers to gossip, but I learned to listen to Nicole beyond the words that she said. She moved her feet closer to mine when she agreed with me. When I came home from school, sometimes there were notes from Nicole on my bed. She didn't mail passionate love letters, only "Just wanted to say Hi! --Nicole," inside a Snoopy card.

Tony and Jay are asleep on the floor of the living room, so I lift myself from the leather chair to find blankets to cover them. They look young and clean-shaven with their eyes closed and their mouths parted. I remember how Tony looked when I opted to watch the Home Shopping Network with Nicole on Friday nights, instead of entertaining his girlfriends' friends while he kept himself busy in the backseat of my car.

"All right, Pete, but you don't know what you're missing. You should see this one. Curly hair and all." Tony's jaw quivered while he tried to convince me that I wanted to spend an evening with a girl who couldn't spell the name of our state.

"Yeah, but Nicole's coming over..." Tony and Jay moaned in unison. Jay hummed a wedding march, flicking his fingers in disgust, as if I had suggested studying physics in the library for the evening. Tony was more verbal with his feelings.

"Who is this girl anyway? Is this the chick you brought with you...?" He remembered Nicole. He probably remembered her through a hazy fog of alcohol. "Oh, her. She's not your wife. You're seventeen. Have fun, man! Get drunk, live a little! Soon you'll go bowling or something." Tony slapped me on the shoulder as if he was joking. I pounded his back, hard, mustering a hearty laugh from deep in my throat.

"I know, I know. Nicole can be kind of possessive. It's not like we'll do anything exciting, but I feel kind of obligated...you know?" I was lying. I was looking forward to eating microwave popcorn with Nicole. She was so possessive that she offered to introduce me to the girls who looked pretty in the black and white pictures I saw in her yearbook. Jay and Tony looked at girls with long legs and batting eyelashes. I thought that there was something wrong with me because I was in love with an oboe player.

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I stopped calling Nicole when Jay and Tony convinced me that she wasn't as much fun as the sweatshirted girls who they met in the parking lot of the 7-11. They convinced me that I missed the red lipstick smears on my neck, that I missed the sweet alcohol smell of somebody's basement with parents out to dinner or away for the week. Nicole never called me after I stopped calling her. I thought of her sitting Indian style on her green carpet, or playing the oboe before bed, but I never thought of her thinking about me. I became "Pete, Jay's friend" all over again. I wasn't in awe of the girls who inhabited the passenger's seat of my car. I wasn't happy or even friendly when they unbuckled their seatbelts and slid closer to me during red lights. I stared ahead and thought of the red magic marker on Nicole's palm.

My mother closes the front door behind her as the baseball game ends. The insurance salesman kept her out late, but I'm sure that she kept her seatbelt buckled and her hands on her side of the table at dinner. When she takes a Loretta Lynn album from one of the jackets by the stereo, she notices the mugs full of rose wine on the coffee table. I clear them away and she sighs, defeated. For a moment, I feel guilty that the painting is lopsided and the slipcovers from the couch are on the floor beside Tony's head. In an act of repentance, I kiss her papery cheek before I walk upstairs towards the bathroom, with the shaving cream in the sink and my brother's pajamas still on the floor. At the top of the stairs, I can see spots on the living room coffee table. I imagine that the bathroom by my room is clean, that the smudges in the glass coffee table are from Nicole's bare toes.

Elisabeth Egan  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Mrs. Harriet Marcus

## Lemon and Sugar Cubes

I finally found the recipe among the loose tear-outs and filed index cards, under the "Almond Pudding." Since the ingredients included the brown sugar and fresh raspberries missing from our cabinets, I passed his house on my way to Food Fresh to pick up the items. Mom drinks English Breakfast tea with a quarter wedge of lemon and one cube of sugar. Her rosebud teacup is for Wednesdays and the iris field teacup for Saturdays. She likes her tea hot but with a few drops of cream to cool the water and milky the tea.

The wooden spoon was not in the washer or the pantry and I had to use a metal spoon to stir the floury mixture. Bubbly lumps and pellets still didn't settle so I stirred them into the rest of the batter. The steaming kettle whistles, ready for rosebud teacup day, and so I carry the teetering English Breakfast with both hands to Mother reading on the white iron chair in the porch. Shel is sleeping on the mat against the door. I scoot him away and he wakes up and relocates. The screen door sticks at the top corner. I have to put the saucer down on the end table and pull on the stiff knob while prying open the top siding which hangs apart from the metal frame. It doesn't stick from the outside so I'll have no trouble getting back to the kitchen. I set the saucer next to Mom as she smiles at the book. Shel sighs and mumbles at the snap of the door.

The raspberry tarts would probably taste better with Orange Spice but Mom detests it. I bought a bag once just to surprise her when she told me she wanted to try something new. Aftersipping, she opened her hands and watched the cup and saucer spout tea and glass over the no-wax. Tea began rolling into the flowered squares and onto a paperback. Mom fran-

tically knelt and swept the tea with her hands, later realizing that the glass had made little nicks in her fingertips. But her book wasn't soggy, only some of the pages became stiff. She told me never to buy Orange Spice.

Raspberries are sweeter than oranges, Mom once mentioned. She doesn't know that I'm making the tarts but I know that she'll like them. I have to be careful not to bake them for more than twelve minutes since the crusts might become brownish instead of golden.

I made a raspberry cake before and the edges were so dry that I had to coat the cake into a creamy mountain of icing. Too sweet for Mom, but Shel seemed to like it. He chewed around the dessert in his dish, lapping up just the berries. Bits of stained cake grew spongy after a few days, and Shel lost interest since Mom always tossed him those fruity biscuits. When I went to dump the crumbs, I had to knock the dish against the waste basket and scrape the brittle cake off the siding.

I didn't want to pass his house when I bought the sugar and berries because I miss him, his slippery jelly kisses. I remember telling Mom about him right after we went to Domenico's Pizza for dinner. When I arrived home, I rushed up the stairs, skipping every other step. She had fallen asleep with a mystery romance leafed across her blankets and Shel was sleeping on the floor next to the bed. But Mom was really excited the next morning to hear about him.

"Where did you go to eat? The Pavilion? Sir Georges? Cafe on the Bank?"

"Pizza at Domenico's. We had a great time. Afterwards we went strolling through--"

"He didn't take you to the Greens Club?"

"Well not tonight. But the service was speedy. And he paid for my dinner." She had reached for a novel with raised gold letters on the front.

"He has this great car, Mom. It's gold and runs real fast." She looked up from her book. I searched for other important details of our evening as Mom turned back to her pages.

Mom had never met him, but she knew about his car and she asked me once what kind of job he had.

"He's not working now, Mom."

"Then how is he going to take you to see the ballet?"

"No, Mom, he's taking me to see a film."

"At Les Chateaux Theater--then will you be back before sunrise?"

"We're watching a movie at the plaza. I'll be back before eleven tonight." She had opened the cover of a book topping a stack on her bedstand. Shel had jumped onto the duvet and rested against Mom's bumpy lap while she patted behind his ears and reached for a biscuit in the drawer.

I wish Mom had met him. He made me laugh. We'd jog at the park until we were too out of breath to walk back home. When I lost Mom's PRINCESS OF POMONA, he came over and she stared at his car back out of the driveway. He drove me to his townhouse and sat next to me, held me until morning. He even gave me Shel for my birthday.

"Happy Birthday," and he hugged me around my waist. Shel was barking a lot that day. He must have been excited to have new owners. Mom smiled at Shel and gave me a copy of one of her favorite novels. Later she went to read the new one that she must have picked up with my gift.

She didn't like me being taller than him. She wouldn't feed Shel the apple cheese treats that he had bought for him. Soon she stopped asking about my time with him. She almost stopped asking for tea with lemon and sugar cubes.

The shells came out crispy golden and I have to fetch the raspberries from the refrigerator to make the raspberry filling. I hope they aren't too sour.

Tien Lee  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill Senior High School  
Carol Blum





Asajuona Wood  
Poughkeepsie, NY  
Roy Ketcham High School  
Mr. Martin

## The Artist

you just graduated from suburbia  
shed your itchy prom dress in June--  
now you wear clingy t-shirts,  
tie-dyed bellbottoms.  
a professor sees sketches  
in your psychology notebook,  
tells you to study art  
instead of education.

you see the artist  
in the student union,  
a woman who knows  
what to do with her hands.  
she gives her bony fingers purpose,  
smokes a joint, paints a mural.  
her body is limp  
under a black dress  
without a waist,  
all of her energy pours  
out through her hands.  
your hands need a purpose,  
your nails are bitten to the quick,  
your cuticles bleed.

you walk back  
to the apartment  
on fifth avenue,  
hands in pockets.  
red clogs echo up the stairs,  
you unlock the door

and turn on the only light switch.  
the lamp  
above the kitchenette table  
floats through the dark  
it is held up by invisible strings.  
most people have bones  
to hold them together,  
but your support  
lies in clear threads  
like the filaments of flowers.  
sometimes, the threads break  
and darkness gathers in pockets  
under your eyes,  
sucks peaches from your skin.

you fall asleep by the lamp light,  
lulled by the cyclic hum  
of the small refrigerator.  
saturday morning,  
you take the bus uptown  
to the art students' league  
and sketch nudes with  
charcoal so soft  
they blow away when you breathe,  
breasts, hair, and all-  
floating, black dust  
suspended  
in a shard  
of good light.

Jessica Graham  
Port Washington, NY  
Paul D. Schreiber High School  
Carol Nesbit



## Untitled

I  
What is my gasoline?  
This is blood and it keeps me alive.

II  
When there is scraping  
like a rock  
or cutting  
like a blade  
there is my blood

III  
Food and oxygen preserve it.  
Keep it red and shiny  
pumping, rushing blood.

IV  
Lining swords, the National Razor  
and the gutters after violence.  
Sinners and innocents alike  
all have the same color blood.  
Blood red.

V  
I am running, I need oxygen.  
Give me air blood. Give me air.

VI  
In the laundry commercials,  
detergents promise to get rid of you.  
I like you blood, don't go away.

VII  
Kill my infections  
white blood cells. Good job.

VIII  
The Red Cross deals in this  
in this commodity of the flesh. Give blood.  
Get some cash and orange juice.

IX  
Watch AIDS, gift of the monkeys. Sick blood and death  
intertwining like the serpents.

X  
I lie in my bed asleep.  
My heart pumps my blood contentedly.

XI  
I get scared and adrenaline goes in my blood;  
My heart beats faster too.

XII  
And I see pretty things  
like flowing water  
and I feel good in my blood.

Chris Ketcham  
The Field School  
Washington, D.C.  
Michael Peterson

## Love to the Third Power

It is mostly in math class that I need you--  
I sit in dull indifference as a chalkdust universe spins around me  
and yet the algebra filters through.

I factor you like an equation  
until you are linear.

But which factor of you is it  
that I need--  
which constant,  
which variable,  
which parentheses--

Is it a kitchen by twilight  
as you wrap me in your  
arms like cellophane  
after pouring orange juice

Is it sunrise sand  
gritting between my toes  
as a greyed fibrous pole  
(supporting the Boardwalk above)  
presses into my back  
and you press into my front

Is it post-midnight misbehavior  
with slush under the tires  
and thunder outside the windows  
as you trace a finger down my  
ribs and ask me  
how it tickles

Written in inevitable pencil--  
to fade  
as you must,  
when the pages run together.

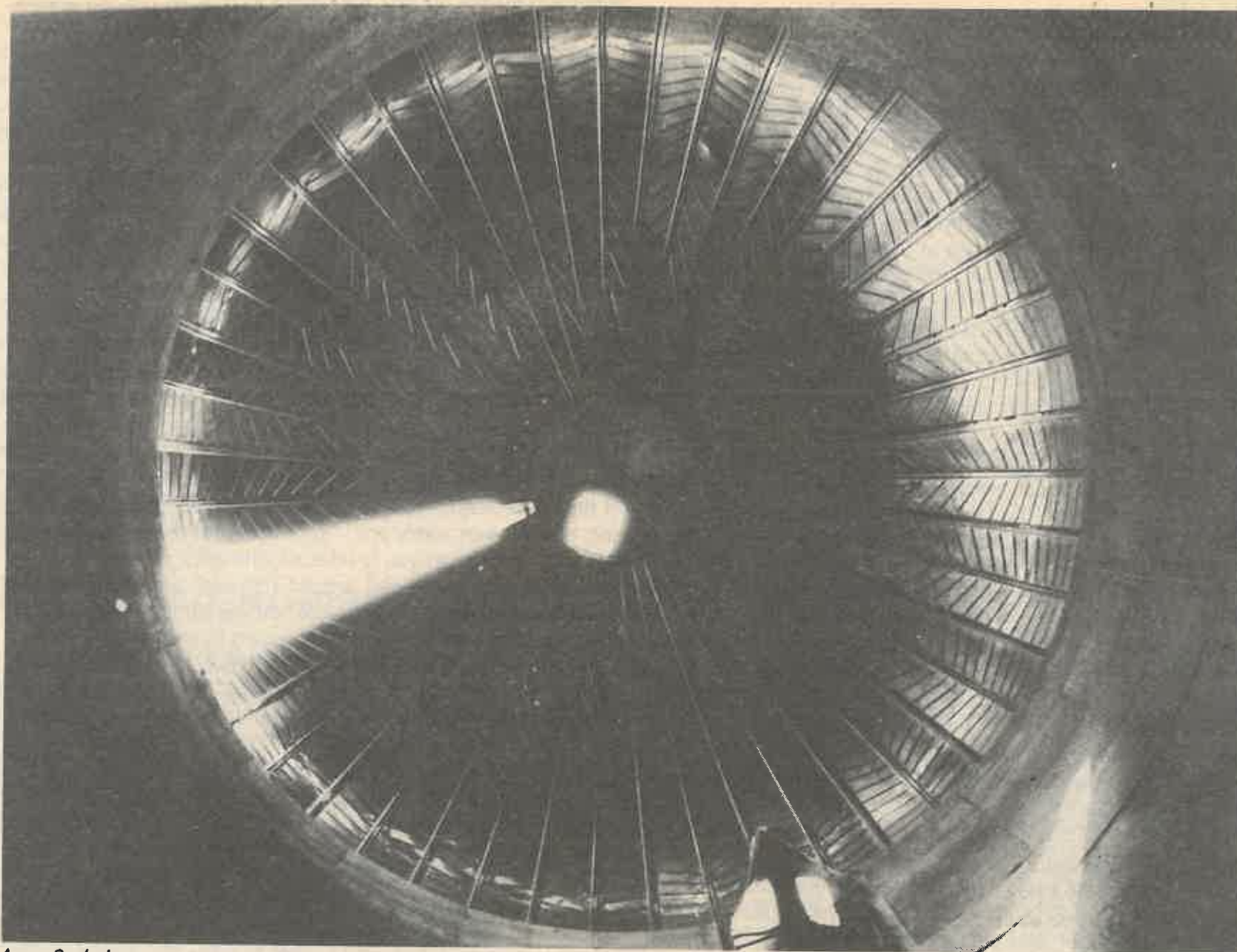
Greta Hannum  
Harleysville, PA  
North Penn High School  
Dr. Kathie Walsh

## So Tell Me, Do Souls Sleep?

So tell me, do souls sleep?  
Do they ever yawn, stretch, hunch over  
in aching, tired death?  
Do they gaze at mirages embroidered on the  
expanse of an eyelid,  
do they practice rapid eye movement?  
So tell me, do souls sleep?  
Do souls grope for pillows in the dark,  
kick at tangled blankets to cover their cold feet  
Wish for morning?  
Are souls scared of the dark?  
Does morning gently tiptoe in to kiss them awake  
or are they slapped, punched, jostled by the arm  
of impatient tomorrow?  
So tell me, do souls sleep?

Kristina Orchard-Hays  
Silver Spring, MD  
Nancy Abeshouse





Anna Soderberg  
Germantown, MD  
Jay Corder

## Summer

### Tangerines

He eats them slowly.  
His silver wristwatch  
Hurls reflected light  
Back at the night  
Each time he raises  
His hand  
To place another slice  
In his mouth.  
The evening's coolness  
Stiffens,  
Tempering tan arms.

### The Moon

Forgot to fall  
With the summer rains.  
Listening to the muffled  
Rhythm of the sea  
That rushes between the gaps  
Of distant trees,  
We sit in the gazebo,  
Waiting for something  
To connect  
Our dry words.

A black truck speeds  
Down the road--  
It had made a wrong turn.

Two swerving lights  
Pull away  
Fast,  
Leaving a heavy gust of  
Dirt and powdery dust  
Rising behind.

He points to the sky  
And traces a faint circle,  
Unaware that, even though  
The moonlight settles  
Disheveled dust,  
It, too,  
Expands  
To fill  
The space  
He draws.

Tomorrow morning  
I will be in a car  
Headed for home.  
Fall screeches  
Summer to a close  
With a rough,  
Acrid  
Smell.

Angie Lee  
Oakton, VA  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen



In my pursuit of extra-curricular excellence, I managed to get myself on the editorial board of my high school's literary journal. Basically, this means that we, the editors, get to publish work written mostly by each other. This invites a barrage of complaints by non-editors whose equally beautiful teenage suicide poetry is not selected. In response to this problem, we try to publish a certain number of non-editors' works.

I specifically remember one of those poems because in the publication it appeared on the page opposite one of my stories. The poem was quite bad. For lack of a better phrase, it pissed me off. The writer herself pissed me off. She was just another loud and irritating, over-hairsprayed "chick" who'd had some kind of surgery, possibly an appendectomy, the previous summer. Her lousy, teenage lit-mag poem was entitled "To my Scar" and it gave quite a metaphoric description of the scar on her stomach, "as it climbed upwards, thin and narrow, like Chile."

I suppose I was just being pretentious--hardly any award-winning writer myself. But I just couldn't tolerate the proximity of that poem to my own. Maybe I couldn't relate to it. I don't have any real scars, physically, and I wouldn't call anything "tragic" that's happened to me emotionally scarring. In any event, now, whenever I think of scars, that poem inevitably comes to mind, accompanied by an image of the "chick" who wrote it and the hellfire hairspray she wore too much of. In the last line of the poem, she refers to her scar as a "Mark of Agony." For some reason, whenever I hear that, I get this bizarre association with Mark Antony, Julius Caesar and the flowery English teacher who taught it to our unenthused class--such itchy recollections of sitting in that stuffy room, creaking back and forth in a simulated-wood chair/desk. I just couldn't deal with that poem.

My best friend has a scar. We were in our school late one night after some event. A dance, maybe. While walking down a dark hallway on our way out, someone threw a glass bottle at us. It shattered, lacerating her Achilles tendon. She was in a cast for a couple of months. I was pretty nasty about the whole thing. I didn't help her with anything--too busy with other insignificant things. Plus I've always hated it when people act so very fragile. When they whine that they need your help. They make a point of making it obvious that you haven't offered your help and when they have to ask for it, you know just how uncooperative they're expecting you to be. Guilt. But it healed, eventually, after months of crutches and therapy. Now, in the summer, she walks beside me in the ocean and it splashes the scar that runs on the back of her calf, so accusingly.

A couple of years ago, my father had surgery on his arm. A huge clump of muscle tissue had to be removed because he had gotten a vaccination with an unsterile syringe. I can't remember much about the whole incident--except that there was a malpractice suit. They used some lawyer friend of my grandfather, an emaciated five-footer named Melvin who spoke in this really queer monotone. He messed up the job so completely that my aggravated, bicep-scarred father dropped the whole suit and just doesn't wear sleeveless T-shirts. When I do get a glimpse of the scar, it reminds me of an illustration I've seen in mythology texts of a bound Prometheus, his flesh being gouged out by swooping vultures.

Before school let out last year, I heard that the Scar-Poem-Chick was back in the hospital. Something fairly serious, like blood not clotting or something. There was the chance that she would die, I remember hearing. The editorial staff was sending her a get-well card. I tried to care as I signed my name in red ink. I wanted to feel some sympathy for the possibly dying girl. But there is only one image now that comes to my mind when I think of her. It first came to me in a hard-sweat nightmare. It is a picture of me lying injured, bleeding, maybe even dying in the middle of a cobblestone street. A faceless crowd gathers around me but keeps a margin of several yards from my body. The sky

opens to swallow me and she comes forth from the still crowd. She hovers above me, smiles knowingly, and pumps hairspray on my steaming wound.

Jessica Levin  
Margate, NJ  
Atlantic City High School  
Peter Murphy

## Rachel

Rachel stood between the two large plants in the foyer, her face filled with fear. Her hazel eyes were normally too large for her face, but now they were positively huge with fear. "Calm yourself," she muttered, and concentrated on taking long deep breaths. She leaned back against the wall, her head making a dull thunk.

"Rachel!?! What are you doing in there? You look like one of the houseplants, for God's sake!" It was her best friend, Allison, and she was not happy. "Rachel, half of the reason I threw this party was to get you to interact with other people! You have to lighten up. I'm looking around for you, people are asking where you are, and where are you? Sitting with my mom's eucalyptus! I can't believe you. Are you going to come out?"

Nodding mutely, Rachel stepped out from between the plants. "You know I don't like crowds," she murmured, her voice almost a whisper. "I can't deal with this many people." She blinked her large doe eyes.

Allison was not impressed and dragged her out into the middle of the party. Rachel stood there uncomfortably, shifting from foot to foot and looking for an escape. Some guy she didn't know asked her something, but she couldn't quite hear what he said. She nodded quickly, praying for him to go away.

He gave her a look. "I said, where's the bathroom?"

She looked at him, feeling all jumbled up by shyness. Her stomach tightened and she couldn't breathe for a second. She pointed to the right and turned away.

"Hey, are you all right?" He wouldn't go away. She chastised herself mentally. It wasn't that she didn't talk, she just became incredibly shy when she met new people or was in large crowds. Allison was her best friend because in kindergarten she'd taken pity on the silent Rachel and had stuck around ever since.

Rachel wished she had something witty to say to the guy, or even just something to say, but she didn't. "I'm sorry," she breathed, "I have this fear of crowds."

He looked at her, puzzled. "Uh, that's okay. By the way, I'm Tom..." She nodded, her throat too dry and tight to say anything. She was trying to act normal, but it wasn't working. She put on a fake smile. "Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out," she thought to herself.

"So," she said, "Um, uh, um... how do you know Allison?" His response drifted by her without her absorbing it. She kept on nodding inanely. Suddenly she shivered and ran away, running through the crowd until she was alone.

She stood by the window, scolding herself. She hated herself for the way she acted, but she just didn't know what to do. When she was with a few certain people, she could talk forever, but so many times she found it almost impossible to talk in front of other people. Sometimes she was with Allison when Allison talked to people; that worked all right. She would just stand there silent, smiling when appropriate, commenting once every few minutes, letting Allison do the talking. But it didn't work well enough.

Rachel looked out the window, wishing she was one of the trees out there swaying in the wind. Her problem was somewhat of a vicious cycle. She often didn't talk because she had nothing to say that would show people what her personality was like; she was terribly afraid she would come off sounding stupid. But

(Continued on page 23)



she also hated not talking because she felt that she was a non-entity to other people; she was just someone who was there, who never spoke and had no personality. She was just a figure in the background, like one of those plants in the foyer.

Tears ran down her face. "I'm going to be different this time," she always told herself, and she never was. Allison always said that it wasn't a problem to talk and socialize with people. But it was, it was. Breaking out of a pattern that had existed her whole life was so difficult.

"Let's be realistic," she thought, "I'm never going to do it. I resolve to try, but I'm just not able to." She bit her lip and stared at the window, silent. She spread roots, her skin changed to unfeeling bark, and she waited for the day when she would grow leaves and blossom.

Jennifer Alpern  
Washington Township, NJ  
Westwood Jr.-Sr. High School  
Mrs. Carol Jane Guardino

## The Day It Rained Forever

Rain fingers clutch at the screen, scraping, hard and insistent. Brittle tree branches tap coldly on the glass, skeleton hands on an arm of wind. I awake and shiver involuntarily. Opening my eyes, I see through morning's film that I am in my own room, familiar but odd. I had half expected to be somewhere else. I look with little surprise out the window at the grey torrents of water. Of course...I want desperately to go back to bed and maybe wake up again, somewhere else.

But I can't. I pull the sheets and blankets methodically back up to cover the pillows in the distilled routine of morning. Then I begin to straighten things. Moving mindlessly around the room, I push the chair fully into the desk. I shift picture frames a fraction of an inch only to move them back a moment later, thinking nothing at all, because that is safest.

I go like this in circles for awhile, I don't know how long, until my aunt's sharp voice breaks through.

"Hurry up and get dressed. Breakfast is ready."

I turn and look ironically at my chair--at the dress. He would have hated it. Black and dull. He never liked the color and had at one time explained to me in exact scientific detail how it wasn't really a color at all, just the absence of color, the absence of light. Not very attractive if you think of it that way, he had declared triumphantly.

I slide reluctantly into the black dress, button buttons, and zip the one long zipper in the back. And inside my head I can hear his voice.

"What're you wearing that for? You look like you're going to a funeral."

Well....

My aunt's voice hurls up the stairs again. She piercingly demands that I come down and eat. I almost retort sharply. I want to scream at her, tell her how she doesn't understand. She just comes to help, opaque and stupid, because that is what relatives are supposed to do. They are there to rejoice on holidays and there to mourn at death. It's tradition. And whatever the occasion, they always bring useless chatter and food.

"The pancakes are getting cold!" she shouts again. You can tell she is strangely angry that we haven't all rushed to eat. To show our appreciation. To make her feel important with the required bits of praise--"You're a saint." "We really couldn't handle this without you." "Bless you." ...It's all so false.

It makes me ill.

But down the stairs I go and into the overly warm kitchen. She bustles about, a flurry of activity, a pillar of strength, the necessary cliches. I sit down. I pick up the knife and fork that some part of me mechanically remembers how to use. I cut the brown circles neatly, raise a few bites to my mouth and then

move the rest around in the sticky syrup, staring out the window at the pounding, heavy rain.

She turns to look disapprovingly at me and chides, "Your brother never pushed his food around his plate. He had a wonderful appetite and certainly appreciated a well-cooked meal." I am furious. I stand up, open my mouth. She is so hopeless. Stupid. My brother never liked her at all. I'm going to tell her that, right now, the truth, and what I think of her and all this. But I halt and abruptly sit down.

My parents have come into the room. They are pale and grey, like water-worn stone. I see with foolish surprise that they're both wearing black too. Absence of life. Father sits slowly down. He sinks. Mother smiles wanly in confusion as my aunt pats her arm and urges her to eat. Everyone is at the table and there is silence. No one speaks and the rain shoves harder at the windows.

The phone rings shrilly and my aunt, of course, rises to answer it. She listens for a moment and then begins to open and close her mouth in agitation. She looks like she's drowning, strangely weak for a moment. Then she begins to nod emphatically as though the person she's speaking with can see her. Finally, "I understand," her voice mumbles softly.

She puts the phone down and turns to us. "The rain," she whispers. "There's too much of it. Everything's wet. Flooded. The cemetery's flooded. They won't--we can't--bury him today."

"So that's it," I think. I get up and leave to return to the safe quiet of my room. My parents continue staring vacantly out at the rain. I wonder if they have heard. I close my door firmly, shutting them out. I imagine all the mud, thick and slimy, dark, clammy clay. All that water with too much to wash away.

The rain is so confusing. I remember once when I was little, and our family was at the seashore. We always used to go each summer. The rain was pouring down in fog-thick sheets of water. Everyone had left the beach. I was looking out the window, only five years old and depressed at the thundering clouds. He ran into the room, grabbed at my hand and made me go with him out onto the beach. We stood there, getting soaked, in our normal clothes. And I remember watching the rain fall on the sea, water to water, continuous. He leaned down and pointed out and told me, "This is all the water in the world, right here in this sky and on this ground, and we're the only ones to see it." And, of course, as a five-year-old, I believed him. We stayed and watched the rain and laughed at the foolish seagulls who fled squawking to shelter. Eventually mother called us, I think. And I remember he took my hand and we raced back across the sand to the house.

I remember also another time, a night a few years later; my parents were out to dinner and he was up in his room, busy with homework. It was raining; huge gusts of wind drove each drop like separate bullets against the windows. The sky was bright with lightning, sharp and electric, and thunder seemed to boom with roof-cracking fury just above me. It had been pouring for hours when suddenly the lights went out. I sat in the thick blackness, afraid to move, in mute terror. Almost immediately I heard his feet on the stairs and he was in the room, lighting scores of candles and saying everything was going to be all right. Everything was all right.

I can feel it, hear it, about me now, constant rain, ambiguous, washing uselessly over the house. It's a blessing really; it blocks the sound of crying, closes me off again. I'm still uncertain how to feel. It reminds me of too much, and I'm frightened again. I crawl back into bed, preparing to sleep until tomorrow. Things may change. Maybe it will still be raining, but just very softly. Maybe it will hail or snow. Maybe it will be sunny and beautiful and everything will be all right. Maybe. But I don't think so anymore.

Alethea Raybeck  
Clinton, NY  
Clinton Central School  
Deborah Hepburn



## In Pursuit of Myth

The hot scents of evening  
 Cling to the moon-washed sheets.  
 Jasmine and rose climb  
 Like insects  
 Through oceans  
 Of fine silken webs.  
 The suitor caresses  
 Cold blankets,  
 And her fragrance  
 Leaves him wanting.  
 Like an underbrush fairy,  
 Deep green as the trees  
 In a midnight forest,  
 Her essence dances  
 Like pin pricks  
 Teasing his nose,  
 Gliding  
 On giggling wings, thin  
 As snake scales.  
 He moans alone  
 Under chilly stars,  
 Like a washed bloodroot,  
 Bone naked.

Penelope lives  
 Trapped in the web  
 Of milky linens,  
 Prisoner of distance  
 And myth.  
 He pursues with Winter  
 In his fist,  
 Stung by desire.

He wants to devour,  
 Lick and ransack  
 The hand of the clock.  
 She watches too  
 For the droning waves  
 To tumble  
 Odysseus home.

Whitney F. Jewett  
 New York, NY  
 The Chapin School  
 Jane Rinden

## Christmas List, Age 17

I want a doll that does it all  
 Wets, talks, crawls, cries  
 All at once.  
 Something Hasboro cannot make;  
 Something plastic motherhood hasn't given me:  
 Flesh lips tugging at my breast,  
 Messy ass that flares red with rash,  
 Babbles through silky spit  
 Without the pull of a string,  
 And when it's in its crib  
 asleep  
 I want to hear the breathing,  
 No batteries required.

Stephanie Levin  
 Hunt Valley, MD  
 Dulaney High School  
 William Jones

## those words

those words i stammered into the phone  
 last night (that made me forget to breathe)  
 those words i stuttered into your ear  
 last night (that made your bottom lip droop)  
 they are yours now,  
 those words

crumple them into tiny, crinkling pieces  
 of nonsense and pitch them into a trashcan  
 (if the trashcan needs love)  
 or weave them into a thick, down quilt  
 and curl under it some february evening  
 (if you want to feel warm)  
 those words

seize a spilling handful and stuff  
 them down your throat  
 (if you want to be sick)  
 or tear their crispness  
 & toss the bits into a wooden bowl  
 & eat the salad  
 (if you are hungry)  
 those words

mold them into pieces of pottery  
 and fling them onto your kitchen floor  
 (if you want to hear them shatter)  
 or plant them in the soil on some warm  
 june day, and then sit and watch them bloom  
 (if you want a flower garden)  
 those words

scoop them up  
 and i am in  
 your hands.

Evan Boyd  
 Bon Air, VA  
 Monacan High School  
 Judith Land

## Postcard From My Kitchen

Wish you were here.  
 The toaster is still warm with this morning's english  
 muffins.  
 Still warm with the smell of burnt nooks and crannies.  
 Pots on the scratched, sticky counter.  
 Crisp, dry tomatoe sauce clinging to their stale, cold  
 insides and soggy spaghetti weaved through the sink  
 drain.  
 Wish you were here.  
 Stained potholders swinging to the beat of the dripping  
 faucet all night long.  
 All night long, crumbs skittering across the floor.  
 Refrigerator humming in a low, mundane tone.  
 Plants entwining their vines around the silver pepper shaker  
 dancing the tango all night long.  
 Wish you were here to see this,  
 to feel this.  
 Wish you were here in my kitchen.

Kathleen Shields  
 Pottersville, NJ  
 Voorhees High School  
 Lois Harrod





Barbara Morrow

## Froot Loops

The morning after Matt said that he didn't love me anymore, the Froot Loops were too sweet in my mouth. Froot Loops used to be my favorite breakfast cereal before I turned thirteen and started worrying about gaining weight and blackened teeth. I still ate them at Granny's house, with the Egyptian dining room rug scratching the bottoms of my feet. The morning after Matt said that he didn't love me anymore, my tongue was thick and heavy, slow to move when I tried to speak.

Aunt Lizzie didn't serve Froot Loops for breakfast, but she got heartburn the first time she went out with Uncle Bernie. They went to see "Gone With the Wind" when it was still playing in movie theatres around Washington. Aunt Lizzie said that she ate so many buckets of buttered popcorn that her heart ached all night long. Six months later, she married Uncle Bernie and they moved to his farm in Saint Louis, with a horse stable and a chicken coop and a bearded caretaker named Jack.

I was always careful not to eat too many buckets of buttered popcorn during long movies because I did not want to get heartburn like Aunt Lizzie. My heart burned the morning after Matt said that he didn't love me anymore. I was thinking of his mud-caked soccer cleats and the musty smell of the inside of his car. His soccer cleats were muddy from long walks around the South Orange duckpond. The inside of his car was musty from the time he forgot to close the sunroof and the windows during a thunderstorm at the beginning of the summer.

The night after that happened, Matt covered the front seats of his car with green Hefty bags before he drove me home because they were still damp. We laughed because we slipped

every time the car turned a corner or stopped for a red light.

The night that I met Matt, we stayed at my kitchen table and ate toast for three hours. He was the first guy who did not want to watch the Georgetown basketball game on television. He did not want to rent a movie, to wrap his arm around me on the couch and wonder at my embarrassment when my father came in to say goodnight. Matt was content with toast and Land-O-Lakes whipped butter that would not soften in the February chill of the kitchen. I was not embarrassed to curl my bare toes around the bottom rung of his chair; I did not wonder about the last time I cut my toenails or if they were still painted navy blue from the summer before. Matt's eyes smiled whenever his mouth did. I noticed that when he said he usually did not eat toast in the middle of the night. He usually did not even eat toast for breakfast, he said. He liked sugared cereals with Vitamin D milk, not skim. When he said goodbye in the driveway, he said that he wanted to take me home with him. When I smiled, I knew that I smiled with my mouth and my eyes and my whole face. My heart did not burn that night like Aunt Lizzie's, but it pounded before I fell asleep.

My mother worried that I would be just like Aunt Lizzie. My mother worried that I would marry at nineteen. She was wary when Matt stayed for Sunday dinner because that was undisputed "family time," but after dinner I saw her eyebrows shoot up underneath her bangs when Matt brought his own dish into the kitchen. Anyway, I told her, Matt's house did not have turkeys wandering around the backyard like Uncle Bernie's Saint Louis home did. My mother began to buy Vitamin D milk for the refrigerator so Matt would not have to drink our skim milk when he came to visit. When the studio picture from the junior prom arrived in the mail, I knew that my mother was proud to

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(Continued from page 25)

frame it on the piano next to my sister's old prom picture. We couldn't remember the name of her date. When I rented movies with Matt, he wrapped his arm around me on the couch. I wasn't embarrassed anymore when my father came in to say goodnight.

Matt's eyes stopped smiling before the Fourth of July. When he looked at me after the fireworks, they were glassier than they used to be, and I realized that his eyes were more like steel than like the sky. When I smiled on the Fourth of July, the tips of my eyelashes were tugging at the corners of my lips to pull them up.

The night that Matt told me he didn't love me anymore, he was wearing the muddy soccer cleats and the inside of his car still had the musty smell, and a black trunk in the back seat for college. He did not smile at all, but his eyes weren't steely. His eyes were wet and soft like blue jay feathers. When he left, he did not say that he wanted to take me home before he drove away with the last remnants of the Hefty bags still clinging to the front seats. The next morning, the Froot Loops were too sweet in my mouth, and my tongue was slow to move when I tried to speak.

Elisabeth Egan  
South Orange, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Harriet Marcus

## Time and Time Again

As I walked towards the house with my father, I remembered taking a strip of metal from the garbage bin across the street and hacking his rhododendrons and evergreen shrubs to shreds. That day it had been sunny, unlike this one, for rain was drenching the earth. When my father had seen what I had done, he threatened to beat me with the metal strip, but then changed his mind. He said he changed it because his father had once punished him in a similar way, and my dad remembered the turmoil vividly. My dad wouldn't tell me what it was he had done to deserve the beating. I think he was ashamed.

The steps leading to the front door of the house that we had lived in once, but not now, provoked in me a warm recollection of a Halloween long since past. The yard had been cluttered with the fallen leaves of autumn, and I had stood upon the porch ever so proud of my werewolf costume, my arm draped around a punked-out Joe Pickard. He was known as Scoots to his friends. Red and orange dye in his hair, a greasy tie-dyed T-shirt, and a cheap pair of blue rimmed sunglasses perched upon his nose were the only accessories needed to render his costume effective. This memory set the mood for many others that would flood my stream of consciousness once inside the house.

The barren hallway took me unaware as I stepped through the door. I was barely able to recognize my surroundings. None of the antique tables, chairs, chandeliers, sideboards, or mirrors were present where they once had enhanced the small rooms of 2 School Street in Rye, NY. Opening my eyes wider, as if trying to take in all of the changes, I walked down the main hall towards the kitchen.

In the hallway was a small alarm box that I had once set off accidentally. The result of this had been a street filled with police cars, their sirens and lights roaring and flashing incessantly. I had been so scared and ashamed at what I had done, that when asked what had happened, I lied about my setting off the alarm. The house was searched and the alarm shut down. Fortunately I was not confronted with the blame, for if I had been, I surely would have burst into tears.

The kitchen was unrecognizable as a room that I had frequented, on any given day, for about three years. The clutter on the counter was missing. No cats mewed, begging for scraps of steak, the smoky aroma of which used to fill the air. The round oaken-colored table with its matching set of chairs no longer occupied the center of the room, nor made passage through it

difficult. There was no computer situated underneath a row of cabinets that were used to store every kind of office supply imaginable. Dirty pots, pans, and dishes did not overflow from the sink and scream for attention. I went to the back door at the far end of the room and peered through the panes of glass into the back yard. Everything was just as it had been. The grass was overgrown, the walkway leading to the not-quite-in-shambles garage was still crooked and incomplete, and ivy still clung to the mass of unkempt hedge and fence line. An enormous maple tree billowed its leaves and branches as if to say, "Nice to see you after all these years! Do you still want to try and climb up my trunk?" Under my breath as I turned from the door, I murmured, "No thank you." Feeling that I had reminisced enough in this area of the house, I travelled back down the hallway from whence I had come and glanced anxiously up the stairway to the second floor.

While leaping up the stairs by twos, I anticipated the images that would soon escape from their cells and present themselves to me in the form of vivid recollections. I reached the top of the stairs and looked straight ahead into the empty room that once had contained a television and a set of imitation leather seats, the kind that mold to your body when one sits in them. I immediately wished that I could stretch out on the sofa, clutch the remote control in one hand, a box of Crunch-N-Munch in the other, and view the after-school cartoons that used to entertain my youthful mind. The only familiar object in the room was the spiral staircase that led up to my old room. Without further hesitation, I, without thinking, bolted up the spiral stairs and bashed my head on the low landing that I had been accustomed to avoiding in the past. I stifled a yelp of pain and resumed my ascent with the utmost care, respecting the landing for its convincing argument.

Once at the top of the stairs, I took in my surroundings slowly. The rooms on my right and left were identical in architectural design. The only difference between the two was the carpeting. Directly in front of me was the bathroom. I stepped forward into it and stared into the tub. I giggled to myself as I recalled trying to keep fish alive in it. Howard Yune, an odd classmate of mine in grade school, and I had gone fishing off the docks at Playland one afternoon. We had caught several flounder and brought them back to my house in a bucket.

After bringing them upstairs, we emptied the pail into the bathtub and filled the tub with water. Our interest in the fish had been shortlived, and we soon had forgotten about the catch of the day. Several hours later that day, my father noticed a putrid stench emanating from the third floor bathroom. He tried to keep a straight face while verbally reprimanding us for our actions, but soon lost all composure. Howard and I ended up, under strict orders from my father, getting rid of the dead fish in the garbage bin across the street. The bathroom no longer reeked of dead flounder.

I stepped back out into the mini-hallway and made a sharp right into my old room. The first thing that caught my eye was the empty space on the floor. The empty space that used to be occupied by a bed--my bed. Next I noticed that the window sills were only up to my kneecaps. It seemed so strange. The entire room had been designed in miniature and then was the first time that I had realized this fact. I could not have sat at the desk built into the wall and felt anything close to comfortable without prying loose the desktop and balancing it on my knees. The closet that I used to walk into was now virtually inaccessible to me. I had to reach down a considerable distance in order to reach the light switch which at one time had been at chest level. I felt as if I might be Alice in the abode of the White Rabbit.

I scanned the walls for any trace of the posters and puzzles that used to bring life into the tiny room and found only several brownish, miniscule dots. Immediately I knew what they were. I remembered the day I purchased a Swiss Army knife with money that I had saved up for several months. Extremely pleased about being the owner of such a fine cutting instrument, I decid-

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ed to try it out on a golf ball. The short, sharp blade had been making quick work of the outer cover of the ball when I slipped and sliced my left index finger to the bone. I stared in horror at the bloodless, painless slash for what seemed like minutes. Suddenly the pain and blood came flowing over my finger, around my knuckle, and down the rest of my hand. In a flurry of panic I had run from my room into the bathroom, flailing my wounded hand as I went. When I had recovered from my accident later that day with the help of my father, I had returned to my room to find tiny droplets of blood splattered all over my bed, walls, chair, and desk. I had done my best to clean the mess, but as I reviewed the scene, I discovered that I hadn't done a perfect job. I raised my hand to look at the neat scar on my finger, wiggled it, for some kind of assuredness I think, and then left the room. On my way back down the spiral stairs I was careful not to confront the belligerent landing with my forehead.

Now looking back, I realize that time is not at all a thief. In fact, it leaves us gifts through which we can remember the past. Some of the memories are fond and as comfortable as a kitten sleeping in the crook of your arm. Others are painful and sorrowful. The emotion is most intense when the incident first occurs, but the sensation can be felt and remembered for some time afterwards. This scar that I have is one such gift. The bruise on my head is another.

As my father and I left the house the rain was still tormenting the earth. I looked at him with a searching eye and saw that he was getting older. When we got into the car, I pulled down the vanity mirror on the inside of the passenger side sun visor and noticed, as I inspected my gift, that I was too.

Jonathan T. Schwenke  
Stamford, Ct  
Mr. Peterson

## Stonehenge is in the Middle of a Wheat Field

*When you and I visited Stonehenge  
We stood between the large weathered rocks  
Staring at the colorful tourists.  
You said it reminded you of a Debbie Harry song  
But you couldn't remember which one.  
The sun came shining through the stones  
Warming my back  
Blinding your eyes.*

*I was alone  
Watching the wheat dance in the wind.*

Jennifer Karmin  
Kenmore, NY  
Kenmore West Senior High School  
Grace Kratzberg

## Fallen Stars

*Night falls around our window  
for the eighty fourth time  
since my little sister left me  
listening to the crickets whisper  
as the night tries to hush them  
and I watch the sky  
wondering if I am not dreaming*

*and the time is eighty-four days  
before this wild night  
and we sit by our window  
Karen and I together  
to watch a falling star  
cascading through the heavens  
and Karen seems so young  
and whispers in my ear so gently it tickles  
and tells me to make a wish  
because when you wish upon a star  
it will always come true.  
So I sit here now waiting  
only this time I sit alone  
my soft white nightgown damp with the tears  
of eighty-four nights  
with nobody to sing to  
and nobody to point out the first rose of  
spring  
reflected in the moonlight  
and nobody to hold when she awakes  
afraid of the chemotherapy  
and nobody's tears to dry  
when she gets very sick  
and is afraid of dying  
while she still smells so young  
and whispers so gently and nobody to pray  
for  
when she gets pale and weak,  
nobody at all  
and I call to her urgently, in a whisper  
that echoes through the lonely night  
and rings in my ears  
as I sit here alone waiting, waiting  
for a star to fall  
because Karen says  
when you wish on a star  
it will always come true*

Eileen Kelly  
New City, NY  
Ms. Markham

## No Soccer Today

*No soccer today  
You lifted me over the third rail to safety  
as we crossed the train tracks.  
I hear the rain crash on the window pane  
blanketed beneath the drawn shade.  
My hair, still wet from the walk to your house,  
drips onto my naked shoulders.  
You brush it away with your lips.  
The wool afghan itches my bare back  
I am no longer afraid.*

Karen Newirth  
Port Washington, NY  
Paul D. Schreiber High School  
Carol Nesbit

Susquehanna University

THE APPRENTICE  
WRITER







Holly Wildberger  
The Catholic High School

## Mole Girl

*A mole, I seek the dark and dusk,  
hide from the light and people. At night*

*under quilts in my cement-floored basement,  
in the dim light of a 40-watt bulb, I clutch  
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,  
inches from my moon face. My glasses,*

*thick and wavy, like old  
church windows, sleep on the table  
and dream of light. Without glasses,*

*the world glide-swirls into a smoky  
purple Monet caress; colors float  
in halos around light. Monster shadows  
guard me in my cellar room. Addicted  
to dark, my eyes grow wide and black.  
I hide among the rustles of the night,  
until the burn-cold morning air startles  
me. I tunnel out and cross over,  
into the sighted world.*

Laura Moszer  
Richmond, VA  
Monacan High School  
Judith R. Land

## They'd Call her I.B.

*They'd call her I.B.  
After an actress, not Madame Curie.  
They'd pile into a tram or trolley bus  
To see her smile over the billboards  
Touting sandalwood soap,  
One bar for four rupees.*

*In her haste to get to the picture show,  
She forgot to shut her schoolbooks  
Not knowing that "the spirits of knowledge would fly out."  
And when she was scolded for this,  
She stood and listened,  
Sloughing off the peeling skin.  
Her palms turned yellow from sulfur in the lab.  
But at the movie house,  
She was I.B.  
With a cover girl complexion  
And tiny crinkles at the corners of her eyes.  
She drank lime juice from a stainless steel cup  
For two pennies.  
And her smile shone pearls over the billboards  
Of the city.*

Anasuya Sanyal  
Mechanicsburg, PA  
F. Jane Scott



# Unending Streets

Strange school mornings. They all start out the same, but are different. Math class. Squaring abstract ideas. They don't mean anything to me. They don't tell me about life or death. I look to the pale green walls for an answer. The room smells dusty.

My math teacher is an arrogant man. Little flakes of dan-druff fall onto his stooped shoulders. He feels prestige by holding chalk. His tongue darts in and out of his mouth. It thinks for him. Does it know of his desolate past?

If I told my math teacher I hate math, he would smile and say, "Don't tell me that you hate it. You do not hate anything." How can he feel that I can't hate anything? I hate him. I can't wait until his hair starts falling out.

Muttering. It is the kind you only hear in the halls. Listening to bits of conversation is boring. There is a couple kissing by the Coke machine. Jealousy is in the eyes of the beholder. I don't really remember what Matt looks like anymore. I wish I had change for a Coke. In my last life, I must have been a coffee drinker. Drinking caffeine is one of my hobbies. Still, I hate coffee. It is too bitter. Sugar makes it too sweet.

Confusion in the library. Why did I come here? Brightly colored books make me feel tired. I take out a very avant-garde book. I think it's by an ex-Beatle. Actually, now he is an ex-person. I sit down at one of the wooden tables. Many names are carved into its dull surface. I open the book and look at my hands. My nail polish looks too red. It is not a cheery red, but a blood red. It shouts sophistication.

I'm in the bathroom. It reeks of stale cigarettes, but I like it. This would not be a school bathroom without that smell. Some tall girl with frizzy hair is talking to me. Her outfit clashes with the drab pink bathroom. She wants to know what I have been doing for the past two months. I don't know who she is and I don't care. I laugh. She smiles and leaves. I am left looking at my empty reflection in the bathroom mirror.

Studyhall is worse than watching T.V. It is hypnotic boredom. The scent of my perfume brings me out of this state. I'm wearing a perfume that I don't really like. I am saving my favorite perfume for a special occasion. How do I know that today won't be one? Suddenly, I realize that someone has been trying to talk to me. I look up and see this guy. He's the kind who never leaves home without his stiff blue oxford on. He knows that it sets off his eyes. This guy is trying to tell me his life story or something. He wants advice. I tell him that you can't please everyone.

My English teacher licks her lips as she reads a poem to the class. Her narrow eyes light up. Poetry is so sweet when read by the eyes of a dreamer. It soothes the mind and aches the heart. This is written all over my English teacher's face. She makes the class keep diaries. We have to write in them everyday. I don't understand why people keep diaries. If something is important, shouldn't you remember what happened? Today's entry:

Diary,

Maybe I should become a Buddhist. I'll suffer and denounce my desires.

--Me

P.S. Maybe not.

I see a friend in the hall. She cut her hair. I know that she did it to forget about him. He used to stroke her hair and tell everyone how beautiful it was. She has freed herself from her past. I see him walk by.

They meet at her locker. He looks down the hall and shuffles his feet. She twists her black hair around her fingers.

He: "Oh--you cut your hair."

She: "Yeah."

He: "It looks O.K."

He strolls away. Her face is the color of disappointment.

My hair is long. I used to want to cut it. But I don't think about Matt anymore. I just remember how he made me feel. I try not to dream about him. If I have a dream about him, I try to forget it when I wake up.

School reminds me of T.V. I know that T.V. is not the real world. Still, it is part of life. I can't ignore it. I look down at my watch. There are only ten minutes left of school. My watch is an hour fast. I'm too lazy to push it ahead all of those hours. Yet, I can't figure out how to make it go back one hour.

Walking home from school, I try to bump into the meaning of life. Streets are magical. They call to me. Everyday. I want to pick a street and keep walking. Forever. I would leave everything behind. I would not turn back.

A pink car with fuzzy dice in the window drives by. It is playing "Staying Alive" by the Bee Gees. It is very loud. When I was six, my father had a friend who owned a disco. On weekends my father would take me there. I was given all the free soda I wanted. Dangling my feet, I would sit on the black vinyl bar stools. My father would spin me round and round on the bar stools and laugh. It made me nauseous.

Home. I turn on the T.V. and turn off the volume. The news is on. If you want to be known, go into politics. Last night I left my mom a list of her phone messages. It is still on the kitchen table. Yesterday Dan stopped by to see my mom. Dan is a good-looking guy who always wears plaid flannel. Usually green. He said he stopped by to see me. I knew he was lying. While we talked, he kept looking over my shoulder. He was hoping to see my mom. Dan gave me a construction hat. Why? Because those are the kinds of things Dan does. He once told me that if money is all someone wants, then that is all they will get.

A couple of days ago, I found a screwdriver. It had a blue handle with red stripes and was rusted. I found it in the basement, under the dryer. It had been in my house for years. Why had I never noticed it before? I left it lying in the dust.

I suppose my house looks like most houses. There are materialistic things in all shapes and sizes. The carpeting is thick and plush. It is the kind you could lose your feet in. There are sleek glass tables in the living room. They always shine. The house itself is very pink. My mom redecorated it after the divorce. My father liked earth tones.

Jimmy Dean smiles at me when I walk into my room. The sun is shining on his glossy picture. He looks like a sad angel. My room is like a picture out of "Better Homes and Gardens." Everything is neat and matches.

Gaudy pink flowers are sickening. It is my mom's influence, I think. I open the blinds to let more sun into my room. There is a container of children's bubbles by my window. I always keep it there. I like to dip the plastic bubble wand into the clear solution and set the bubbles free. They always pop.

I check on my purple flowers. They sit by the window that gets the most sun. I think they are African violets. Not sure. I pick off the dead leaves and flowers. I make sure they are getting enough sun and water. Everything they need. My flowers are beautiful.

Footsteps. My mom is home. I hope she doesn't come into my room. Too late. I stare past her at the wall. My mom is a plain woman. She sets her image in clothes. It is her costume. By the look on her face, I can tell that it has been one of those days. Unfortunately, it always seems to be one of those days. Mom says I look sad. She says I always look sad. I don't say anything. She asks if I am happy. I say yes. She yells as I concentrate on an imaginary spot on the gaudy wall. Jimmy Dean is still smiling.

She continues to yell. Her clothes look wrinkled. Everything sounds the same. It is like being in a trance. My sweaty hands hurt from clenching my fists. "HELP! HELP!" flashes through my mind in neon pink. I try to block it out. I try to block everything out. Numbness. A build-up of frustration. I feel like I am in an airplane. It has just taken off. My ears are about to pop.

A slammed door and I have left the screams behind. Sud-

(Continued on page 30)



denly, I am outside. I am on a path--my path. The street. My feet seem to know where I am going. It does not matter. Sweat is covering my body. I am shaking. A breeze blows back my hair. The evening air feels comforting. I am the only one on the streets.

I walk past everything. The dingy pizzeria. My old elementary school. A metallic phone booth. These are the sights I have seen every day. They look different. Streets twist and turn. They know. The pavement is calloused. It has been here a long time. Waiting. Curbs are endless. They are worn down. Corners await me. The street lights are unusually bright. I am out of breath and tired. Yet, I do not stop. I am part of it all.

Houses pass me by. There seem to be thousands of them. Sharp blues. Wicked greens. Distant browns. They all look the same. They seem to be smiling at me. I try not to think about it. In the houses, I see shadows of people. I can't see their faces. I do not want to. I look up at the sky. There are no stars out tonight.

Clip-clop. Clip-clop. It is a different noise from my own footsteps. Clip-clop. Clip-clop. Someone is finally running after me. Clip-clop. Clip-clop. For the first time since I left my house, I stop walking. I turn around.

All I see is a crushed cigarette box. Tattered red. The wind is pushing it along my path. With my foot, I squish the cigarette box into the ground. I continue my journey. Clip-clop. Clip-clop. The box runs after me. It runs to catch up with me. It runs to me.

I pick up the mashed box and put it in my pocket. The wind whispers in my ear. I cry. I cry for all the times I could not cry.

Jennifer Karmin  
Kenmore, Ny  
Kenmore West Senior High School  
Grace Kratzenberg

## Susquehanna University

# THE APPRENTICE WRITER



## Schrodinger's Cat

She is napping on the couch in the library, but three groans from the grandfather clock wake her. She leans over the coffee table, and the motion makes her clutch her stomach momentarily. I'm going to feel miserable tomorrow, she thinks. But God, what a party. Even Curt was there. She is awake now, smiling. Smoothing her dress, she gathers as many beer cans as she can, then goes to the kitchen to get a trash bag. There are a half-dozen notes attached to the cabinets and appliances, most of them starting with "Holly: Before we get back from California, please...." The notes are on cream-colored stationery with a navy blue border, colors that match the wallpaper and moldings. Leaving the kitchen, Holly turns off the light, and the room glows with neon clocks. The microwave's is blue, the oven's is green, and the automatic coffee maker's is red. They all read 3:05.

Where can I put the cans where my parents won't see them, she thinks. What did I do last time they were gone? I think

I just put them in paper bags in the garbage cans and they never noticed. She does so and goes back to the library to finish cleaning up.

Her friends have knocked out a whole shelf of books. The books are bound in dark leather and have "The Franklin Mint Editions of the World's 100 Greatest Books" embossed on the spine. Holly dimly remembers Derek weaving around the room near the bookcases, his arms windmilling wildly. Even though she sighs heavily when she sees the mess in the library, she forgives her friends. They just like to have fun, she thinks. Nothing wrong with that.

After she cleans up the books, she sits back down on the couch and leafs through a magazine, unable to sleep, thinking of Curt's blond hair and his new car. But the magazine does not hold her attention--the pages are filled with advice columns. Thank goodness I don't need to read those anymore, she thinks. Her pictures from before 11th grade are hidden in the basement, but her junior prom picture sits prominently in two rooms. She looks at it often but feels disturbed afterwards, uncomfortable with her innocent smile, annoyed that she wore too much eye shadow.

Someone has left a book on the table open to a full-page illustration of a tiger cat. Mom would never let me have a cat, she remembers. She was afraid it would scratch up the furniture. Just as well. Now, I wouldn't have time to feed it anyway. Holly turns the book over and reads the title: "The Book of Paradoxes." Strange, she doesn't remember seeing this book before. How can a cat be a paradox? She opens the book again and reads:

### Schrodinger's Cat

The paradox of Schrodinger's Cat is used to illustrate the sources of uncertainty in science.

A cat is sealed inside a box. Inside the box there is also a radioactive source and a bottle of cyanide. There is a 50% chance that the radioactive material will decay, emitting a beta ray which will break the bottle of cyanide and poison the cat. Since the box is sealed and no information can get out, is the cat dead? Is the cat alive? The uncertainty in this situation is not due to an error in date: it is real.

What a stupid paradox, she thinks. Of course, the cat's going to suffocate inside a sealed box and die in a few hours, cyanide or no cyanide. I hope they never tried that on a real cat. She yawns, and a sudden wave of fatigue makes the room fluid for an instant. It's time to go to bed.

In the kitchen, she reads the note her mother has left her for tomorrow: "Holly: Today a man should come to check on the security system. Tell him we've been having problems with it lately because sometimes the doors start locking automatically. Your father says it may be due to an electric surge. If you have problems with the doors locking, there's nothing you can do but wait: usually, they'll be unlocked again within fifteen minutes." She brings the note upstairs and tapes it to her bedroom mirror so she'll remember what to say to the serviceman in the morning.

Amy Nelson  
Vienna, Va  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen



# A World Without Colour

"My buttercup," he cried as a nurse took some blood from his arm. "Meet Nurse Laurie, the sponge bath one."

I giggled and sat down on the chair in the corner of his room.

"Why are you sitting over there. Come on, I don't bite."

"I hate blood," I answered nervously.

"Really? I love it. I had it for dinner. Nothing like a good transfusion to keep you going."

"Uugh! Are you serious?"

"It's like I say, never kid a kid."

"Did it hurt?" I asked timidly.

"No, it felt terrific. It's that good to the last drop feeling that only a transfusion could give you. Maybe Maxwell House can too."

Laurie shook her head and left.

"Now that we're alone, my love..."

"What did you do today?"

"Popped some percocet, took a nap, had the transfusion, you know, the usual. Oh, a psychiatrist came to see me about what happened last night."

"What happened last night?"

"I sort of threw my dinner at the wall because it was making me nauseous and they wouldn't take it away. Then, I told the nurse that I would tickle her to death if she didn't clean it up."

"Did she?"

"Did she what?"

"Did she clean it up?"

"A slapdash job. I only give her a three on a scale from one to ten. You can still see a few peas under that chair."

"What did you tell the psychiatrist?"

"That I was sexually frustrated and the only way I can stop these violent acts if I have sex with her."

"Colour," I moaned.

"She ran and got another psychiatrist. They had a field day asking me questions. They finally came to a conclusion."

"Which was?"

"That I'm not happy here."

"They are brilliant."

"I could become a psychiatrist."

"It doesn't seem that hard."

"What did you do today?"

"I went to school. I got in a fight with Annie."

"Over what?"

"The fact that I forgot to go over to her house and help her study last night. She's sure she got a "D" on the test and she blames that on me."

"I think you two should talk to the psychiatrist. My mum came and visited me this morning. She brought me the balloon."

"I can see that."

Nurse Laurie stuck her head in the room.

"Time for you to go," she said.

I kissed him goodbye and promised I'd come and see him tomorrow.

I knocked on the door and he said come in.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I began.

He was playing with the nose prongs on his respirator.

"I am quite dissatisfied with this colour. I specifically asked for hunter green."

"Hunter green tubes?"

"Why not? Everything else in the hospital is green. Why not tubes?"

"The doctors have to see what's in the tubes."

"There's air in these tubes. You can't see air."

"I guess you're right."

"I'm always correct."

He stuck the nose prongs back on and leaned back on his pillow.

"The head shrinker came back this morning."

"Why?"

"I covered my arms with stickers so they couldn't draw blood."

"Oh."

"They were funky stickers too. Yellow stars. They took them all off."

"What did they do then?"

"They took my blood. It's my blood. I think I should have a choice. I don't go and take their blood, do I?"

"No."

"Then, they called my good friend, the psychiatrist. Her name is Margret, rhymes with maggot, sort of."

"And her conclusion this time?"

"That I have a fear of dying."

"Do you?"

"Of course."

"What did she suggest you do?"

"Nothing. So I asked her if she thought I could overcome my fear of death by trying to kill myself a few times."

"Colour," I moaned.

"She said I was a very sick boy."

"Colour, you have to stop this."

"Why? I like Margret."

I sighed. "What are we going to do with you?"

I knocked on the door and he said come in.

"I was a good boy today," he said proudly.

"Margret didn't come to visit you?"

"She came by to say hello."

"And you were good last night?"

"Extremely. Laurie said I could have ice cream but I wasn't hungry."

"What did you do today?"

"I played checkers with Joey next door."

"Who's Joey?"

"Joey also has cancer. He's blind. He was very easy to beat."

"I can imagine."

"Sometimes, I had to move for him."

"And I could imagine the situations you put him in."

"I must admit that I did get an unusual amount of triple jumps."

"What else did you do?"

"Laurie gave me a sponge bath. It was heavenly."

"Laurie looks vaguely like our school's quarterback."

"Does she?"

"Actually, very much so."

"That's because she is Mark Elson in disguise."

"I was wondering why she had such hairy legs," I said, playing along.

"Mummy came and visited me. You just missed her."

"Too bad."

"She brought me a note my French class had made for me."

"Is that it?" I asked, pointing to the large piece of green construction paper that hung next to his bed.

"Yep, yep, yeppers."

I leaned over and kissed him.

"Not meaning to be rude or anything, but I'm very tired."

And he yawned as he turned onto his side and shut his eyes.

I knocked on the door and nobody answered. So, I pushed open the door a little. Colour was asleep but he opened his eyes when I entered.

"I don't feel very good," he said mournfully.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know."



He turned the knob on his respirator to four.

"I had to get another transfusion today."

"Why?"

"Because of internal bleeding or something."

"That doesn't sound very good," I murmured, worried.

"Because it's not."

"That could be why."

"I bit the nurse by accident today but she said I did it on purpose so they got Margret."

"Was it an accident?"

"Sort of. I bit her because I felt like I was going to vomit and she was trying to stuff some pill down my throat."

"What was Margret's conclusion?"

"For once, she didn't have one."

"Maybe she will tell you it later."

"Did I ever tell you I love you?"

"Many a time."

"Well, I do."

"And I love you too."

"You do?"

"Why are you so surprised?"

"I don't know."

"I do. I love you very much."

"It's just nice to hear you say it."

I leaned over and brushed my lips over his cheek, inhaling the mediciney scent that surrounded him.

I knocked on the door and he said come in. He was crying and holding a picture of his dog.

"I haven't seen my dog for six days."

"Colour."

"No, don't tell me what I can feel. I miss my dog. I want to go home. Please help me get home."

"I can't."

"Please? I'll do anything," he cried hysterically, his voice rising.

"I wish I could help you but I can't."

"Why not? I thought you were my friend."

"Colour, please calm down."

"No, I hate you. Get out of here!"

Colour let out a tremendous scream.

"Oh God, Brooke. Get a doctor!"

I scrambled out of my chair and into the hall. I grabbed the first doctor I saw. He ran into Colour's room and I stood outside but I could still hear him scream.

The clown and I walked down the hall towards Colour's room.

"You go in first and give him the balloons and I'll come in a few minutes later," I told the clown.

"Anyway you want to do it."

We paused at the room. I knocked and no one answered.

"Sometimes, he's asleep," I explained to the clown.

I pushed open the door slightly to find the room totally bare, his covers pulled taut. The card was gone and the balloons had disappeared. Colour was gone. My tongue felt too big for my mouth and I teetered dizzily on my feet. I pushed the clown aside and ran to the front desk. Laurie was there tearing a chart apart.

Melissa Klein  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Carol Blum

## My Grandmother's Kitchen

A glass teapot  
upon a brown stove--

Sounds of  
passing cars,  
footsteps  
on the pavements--  
greeted  
by white curtains,  
blown back  
and forth.

An open  
newspaper  
under a cup  
of coffee  
near a plate  
of doughnuts--  
chocolate, lemon  
cinnamon, cream--

And  
on the wall--  
between  
the windows--  
a hushed  
cuckoo clock--  
Still,

at the turn  
of the hour.

Carin M. Companick  
Trenton, NJ  
Stuart Country Day School  
of the Sacred Heart  
Mrs. Betty Lies

## Totem

My ancestors carved this totem:  
Distorted faces, beaks of birds  
that claw the fiber  
optics of a tree.  
A symbol of my clan.  
The telephone lives.

Pray to it, gods  
of unnatural amusement.  
Electric voices pulsate  
your conductive bone.  
It is ruled: Do not kill  
the species of the shaft.

Indian smoke signals  
wire the sky with messages.  
Conquistadors of bird dung.  
Domestic immigrants.  
The popular pole.

Kimberly Mazur  
Egg Harbor City, NJ  
Absegami High School  
Irene Fineberg





Joanna Karman

## A Visit to India

And the Rains came.  
Leaving the ground  
saturated so that I  
could have the  
luxury of playing  
outside in the flooded  
yard without my  
shoes  
So that the mud  
could squish through  
my toes and cover my golden feet.

Looking down  
from the white balcony  
upon tip toes  
I peered through the  
veil of mosquitoes  
to see if the cows had returned.  
For if they had I wouldn't go.  
Yet there they were roaming  
in the road beyond my white wall.  
Among them, emerging from his  
shanty, a brown naked boy  
upon dusty toes squatted  
to make 'shi' in a  
rusty tin can.  
And I stayed in that day.

Chitra Deshpande  
South Orange, NJ  
Don Lasko

## Changing

I'm staring at your watch on my wrist.  
A watch I'd never buy.  
It's big and gold.  
It has those links that pinch the skin and  
rip the hair out.  
I put away my sensible watch.  
It's your watch  
on my wrist.

I'm wrapping a curl around my index finger.  
When I was little, my mother gave me Shirley Temple curls.  
I remember sitting, smelling of burnt hair and grease,  
praying she would be careful with the iron.  
I'm very careful with my iron in the morning.  
You love girls with curls.

I'm cutting exercises out of fashion magazines.  
High impact, low impact, butt-busting, thigh-trimming.  
You said you remembered when I was really fat.  
Gordo, you said, and blew your cheeks out like Dizzy Gillespie.  
Then you pinched an inch and let the air out in a whistle.  
I'll try to compete with the Swimsuit Issue.

I'm changing because I love you.  
I don't love me because I'm changing.

Lisa Steele  
Silver Spring, MD  
Springbrook High School  
Nancy Abeshouse

## Rainshine

When God made the world,  
Was the morning in the afternoon  
Out of convenience  
So that Adam and Eve didn't have to wake up,  
Groggy and thick  
Like a wet army blanket,  
To enjoy the sunrise?  
When they sinned,  
Did morning come early?

Do blue-eyed people  
See things more clearly,  
Like they're looking through still waters,  
Or crystal skies,  
And not limpid pools of mud,  
Like me?

And when the sun spreads  
Through dark clouds,  
Drenching the air with  
Golden syrup,  
Cutting the drops into  
Filtered yellow or pink,  
Is it like living in a rainbow?  
The light of a prism?  
Is it rainshine?

Megan Durham  
Baltimore, MD  
Baltimore Lutheran High School  
D. Douglas Doellinger



## Diets

My father's on a diet. He's been at it for a month now, but the end may be in sight; he stares drunkenly at the Dunkin' Doughnuts ads on t.v., entranced by the chocolate crullers, and if I listen carefully enough, I can detect a mournful whimper of desire. He's not fat, really; he just has the comfortable, roundish look of middle age--the look of a man who enjoys his dessert after dinner. And maybe another one before bedtime. Or two. Anyway, about a month ago, my dad had his 26th high school anniversary reunion, and he got a chance to see his boyhood buddies, who looked considerably younger and fitter than my father did. Dad was a guard in his school days, a pretty good one, to hear him tell it. He talks a lot about his basketball talent, actually; and with each rendition, the game becomes more important, the crowd grows larger, and his contributions figure more prominently.

His favorite story goes something like this: it's the state championships, fourth quarter, four seconds remain in the game. The home team, the Shawnees, are down by one point. The gym temperature is over 100 degrees; a misty fog hangs heavily in the air. Smells of buttered popcorn and roasted hot dogs mix uneasily with odors of athletic tape and perspiration. Red and yellow cheerleading pom-poms lie in frazzled humps on the slick wooden floor. The referee blows his whistle, the crowd begins to chant: "Vul-ture, Vul-ture, Vul-ture!" (My Dad's nickname was "Vulture" back in his sporting days--he claims it was because he was tough and ruthless, relentlessly picking away at his opponents until they begged for mercy. Mom says the nickname was due to his even-then apparent propensity for consuming alarmingly large quantities of food.)

The opponents, the Warriors, have the ball. Suddenly, Vulture Backstrom leaps into action, appearing from nowhere, slapping the ball away from a stunned Warrior with unbelievable grace and confidence. He flies down to the other end of the court, soaring like the bird he is named for--tick, tick, two seconds left--he stops at midcourt--tick--the fans bite their lips in anticipation--SWISH!!! The ball arcs parabolically in the air, slicing through the net the way an Olympic diver rips neatly through the surface of the pool. The Shawnees win their first-ever championship, and my dad looms heroically in the memory of the town of Claremont, New York.

At the reunion, however, quite a different game was played. Dad resumed his illustrious career in a pick-up round of basketball. About the only thing he was good for was standing in one spot and waving his arms wildly in the air, signaling that he was open. This was because no one bothered to guard him--no one thought that old bird could ever make it down the court. When someone finally did pass the ball to him, (probably out of desperation) he charged off down the court, true to form, only to decelerate rapidly. By the time he reached mid-court he paused and doubled over, sucking in all the air his flabby lungs could muster. A teammate breezed past him, stripping away the ball and gliding to the net, rolling it gently off his fingers for an easy two points. From the sidelines someone hollered, "Hey, Vulture, maybe we should call you buzzard now!" My dad stood dejectedly halfway down the court, glaring at his protruding waistline. He returned slowly to the table and pondered the situation for a while. But Dad is a man of action; he informed my mother he was going on a diet.

The whole family was glad for him at first, especially my mom, who was convinced that if he didn't cut back his cholesterol and drop some weight, we'd lose him to heart disease. She had tried without success more subtle means of persuading him to lose extra pounds, like casually dropping the latest study on oat bran in front of him at breakfast, but he'd only grin and shake his head, his mouth full of chocolate cruller. I was happy with his decision, too, because for the first two weeks, he seemed cheerfully determined to make this diet work. It was a positive experience to live around someone so motivated.

But the diet soon got annoying, because he's not the only one who went on it. He tried to change the whole family's eating habits. Take chicken dinners. Before the reunion, his idea of a wholesome chicken dinner was a large bucket of extra crispy down at ole' Kentucky Fried (protein, you know), two biscuits with butter (as carbohydrates), a chocolate milkshake (dairy product, of course), and some cole slaw (can't forget the veggies!). Now we eat our chicken dinners at home--a glass of watery skim milk, some wiggly-looking steamed carrots, about three or four individual green beans, and a morsel of broiled poultry so small you have to squint to see it on your plate. And everything is dry, too; no more lard for our family! If my dad even imagines that he spies a lipid droplet anywhere in the general vicinity of his food, he whips out a napkin and blots the plate dry. Why don't we just attach the chicken to a vacuum cleaner and suck all the fat right out of it? If the Colonel ever saw this, he'd hang his old white head down and weep.

Dad's exercise regimen is kind of hard to take, too. Just because he wants to play for the NBA doesn't mean I want to. Every morning he's up and on the streets at 5:40 a.m., out for his morning jog. When he gets back, I'm getting ready for school. He walks in the kitchen, sneers at my breakfast of Cocoa Puffs, raspberry Pop-Tart, and toaster waffles, and breaks into a lecture on the merits of soluble fiber. Few subjects are more unappetizing than that of the human digestive system and its relationship with fiber, especially when you're eating Cocoa Puffs. One morning, he actually snatched away my plate and set down a bowl of steaming Cream of Wheat. "But, Dad," I protested. He quickly answered with a "Don't 'but Dad' me. A good hot breakfast will stick to your ribs."

"So will cement," I returned, "and cement probably has more flavor than this stuff." Then he told me I better get started if I wanted to make it to school on time--he was going to make me walk from now on. I was getting flabby (so he said) and needed the exercise. "Dad," I gasped, "We live all the way across town from the high school!"

You'll be in good shape for the cross-country season, then," he snapped, and turned out of the kitchen. Great. This from a man who has been known to drive 3/4 of a mile to the nearest convenience store to buy a pack of Ho-Hos.

But like I said before, I have a feeling the diet-a-thon may be ending soon. My father is not a man of great endurance. After some initial success during the first two weeks, the pounds are sticking unyieldingly to his midline--perhaps they're too accustomed to that spot to leave. I've heard him upstairs in the bathroom, cursing not only the scale, but also the board of directors of Westinghouse, the company that manufactures it. Sometimes it's real quiet up there, and I know he's just standing on it, looking at the dial and waiting for the needle to miraculously settle on a lower number. I accidentally walked in on him once, and caught him doing just that; he had that same dejected look on his face he must have had at mid-court at the high school reunion. So I've decided to help him. Mom's going to pitch in, too. We've agreed to trash our secret stash of M&M's (he claims he can smell them hiding somewhere in the kitchen), and eat dehydrated chicken without complaining.

I guess I'll have to make other sacrifices, too, like going running with him in the morning to make sure he actually gets his exercise (he confessed that once he ran only as far as the nearest International House of Pancakes), and maybe I'll give up the Cocoa Puffs--it's not much fun to eat them with a grown man staring hungrily at you from across the table, anyway. But my dad is worth the effort, that's for sure. I'm proud of what he's trying to do, and besides, the competitor in me wants him to kick some serious butt next year at the 27th reunion.

Ellen Connelly Gruber  
Exeter, NH  
Douglas Rogers



# Rewards

Genie sat in the second to last row of the crowded church. Her head was bent, and she shut her eyes tightly when the organs began to play, costing her a few stares from those sitting around her. Her mother nudged her, and the sharp pain in her arm caused her to lift her head and catch a glimpse of the enormous cross. It was decorated with a crown of thorns for the holiday. Genie's mother had explained that Jesus died on that day, Good Friday, over 2,000 years ago, so that when people on earth died, if they were good, they would be rewarded with heaven. Genie shuddered. The eyes from under the crown pierced her body. This man knew everything she did, every thought she had. And she was a bad girl. She had said a bad word when her brother yelled at her. She had talked back to her father when he told her to pick up her toys. Genie felt a draft in the stuffy church. She looked at the cross which had been placed in front of the altar. He knew her absolute biggest sin. She had lied to her mother about how far she rode her bike. And now she would never go to heaven. She hid her face behind the music book. Her mother snatched it away from her and slapped it against her knee.

The organ music ended and people began to move towards the doors. Genie held her mother's arm tightly until they were safely outside. "You were a bad girl in church today, Genie. What happened?" Genie's mother sighed as her daughter wiped her runny eyes and nose with her sleeve.

Genie wiped the smudges from the glass counter with a wad of paper towels. She was half listening to a customer, Jim, who had been sipping the same cup of coffee for about a half an hour. He was an older man with white bushy eyebrows and soft wrinkly skin. When he lifted his hat, a tan hunter's cap, he revealed an almost completely smooth head. He was talking about his daughter and his grandchildren. He promised to bring her pictures the next time he came in. She nodded and waited for him to stop talking before she went to the back of the store to get the broom.

The bell which hung above the front entrance of the bakery was hit by the sharp metal corner of the door. Genie's eyes automatically left the small pile of crumbs she was beginning to collect and turned to see who had come in.

The man wore faded blue jeans and a navy sweatshirt. He smiled, flashing his perfectly even, white teeth and the smile spread quickly to his clear blue eyes. Genie felt his smile hit her and she looked down, blushing. His fingers were bent around a dollar bill which he dropped on top of the glass counter; Genie noticed there were no rings on his fingers.

"Coffee, black, please."

His deep voice was unique, and she fell in love with it immediately. She looked up at him. He slid his fingers through his dark, wavy hair which was streaked with gray, and she imagined it was her own fingers combing the smooth locks. She poured the coffee with her shaky hand and tried to lift it to the counter without spilling it. The coffee dripped from the edges of the cup.

He thanked her and gave her a quick salute. She whispered that he had forgotten his change. He asked her to keep it and left the store.

"My grandson is going to be a doctor," the old man began again.

Genie laughed. She folded the man's dollar bill and stuck it in her back pocket.

The day went slowly after his visit. She passed the time thinking about him, what she already knew, his smile, his perfect hair and perfect teeth and perfect everything, and what she had invented for him; he was an actor, probably, and she could learn to live with the fame that would result from that. When there weren't any customers in the store, Genie examined the dollar bill he had given her. There was a tiny fold in one of the corners and a smudged pen mark across the letter J on the bill.

She brought it to her face and tried to smell his cologne or something that would remind her of him.

It was dark when Genie finished work. She walked down the snow-filled streets and stared at the bright colored lights which were draped over the branches of trees and outlined the windows and doors of houses. The smell of fireplaces burning in some of the houses filled the street, and she walked slowly, enjoying it. Some of the lawns were decorated with nativity scenes. In almost all of them, the baby Jesus had been excluded. He would not be born until Christmas day. Genie wondered if the people in these houses really believed that Jesus wasn't with them. Didn't they know that he saw everything, always?

Genie didn't work again until the following Saturday. She dressed in her favorite sweater and even wore a little lipstick. She was unable to eat any breakfast, so she was early to work. Each time she heard the bell above the door ring, she held her breath and hoped, each time to be disappointed. Old man Jim came with pictures of his grandchildren. Terry, a short pudgy woman, with a bobbed haircut, came with her usual town gossip. Genie began to sweep the floor, when he finally came in.

"Hello, again." He remembered her!

"Black coffee?" Genie asked nervously.

He shoved his hands in his pockets and smiled, "You have a great memory. Do you know what everyone wants when they come in here?"

She handed him his cup, which she delivered with a little more ease than she had the first time.

"Yeah," she lied.

He dropped a dollar bill on the counter and turned to leave. She listened to the bell ring as he left the store. She watched him leave and almost called him back. Her boss walked into the front of the store.

"Can I go on my lunchbreak?" she asked, staring out the door.

Her boss took the money out of the register and started to count it. He glanced at his watch.

"Why do you want to go so early?" He sighed, "Go ahead."

"Thanks," she said, grabbing her jacket and running for the door.

"One hour," he threatened.

She waved as she pulled the door against the bell.

He was not far ahead. He stood at the corner, staring into the pharmacy window. She jogged to catch up, but then stayed a few windows behind. He crossed the street on the green light, and she crossed it on the red. She turned to look at the display in the pharmacy window, trying to see exactly what he did. A plastic Santa Claus with a frozen half smile held a big, plastic pencil in his right hand. His arm moved mechanically up and down a list of names, which he held in his left hand. There were check marks next to most of the names, and Genie noticed that the pencil did not quite reach the paper. The window itself was decorated with white, paper snowflakes; each one was individual, advertising a great variety of sale prices.

He turned right at the next corner, and she almost lost him. She stayed close behind after that. Soon, he reached his destination and hers. It was a tall apartment building, ten stories high, with snow falling from the blue awning in front. She waited until the front door had closed behind him before she went in. In the hallway she glanced at the rows of typewritten name tags with the small round buzzers next to them. She watched him collect his mail and get into the elevator, then moved to stand in front of it. A bright orange light flashed under the numbers, one, two, three and then stopped on four. Genie smiled. He lived on the fourth floor. He looked like he should live on the fourth floor. She ran to the stairway and up four flights, in time to see him disappear behind the last door on the left, apartment 4B. She headed back to the lobby, anxious to see what his name was. She dragged her finger quickly along the list of names and stopped--"Edward Martin, Apt. 4B."

After work, Genie ran most of the way home. Most of the

(Continued on page 36)



slow covering the ground was now destroyed by car fumes. Genie noticed that some of the lawns without nativity scenes held Santa figures instead. She wondered how Edward's apartment was decorated.

Genie hurried to her bedroom and locked the door behind her. She fell into her peach comforter and slipped her shoes off. She picked up the receiver of her phone, ignoring the two messages that her answering machine displayed. She called information and asked the operator for Edward's number. She listened carefully to the numbers and dialed them quickly, repeating them to be sure she had them memorized.

"Hello." It was him!

She stared, holding her breath, at the nailpolish stain on her carpet.

"Hello?"

Her eyes did not move from the pink stain.

"I love you," she whispered.

"Who is this?"

She hung up the receiver.

Genie swept the floor nervously the following Saturday. What if Edward recognized her voice? She almost hoped he didn't come in, so she wouldn't have to face him, though she couldn't help wanting to see him.

Jim sat in his usual seat, sipping his coffee.

"People just don't seem to treat the holidays the same way anymore."

Genie stopped sweeping to look over at the old man. "I know what you mean. I was looking at the nativity scenes set up on..."

"Exactly!" Jim shouted. "You hardly see any Santa figures around anymore. Kids don't have any faith. When I was younger, every kid believed in Santa Claus."

The door opened and brought in a gust of wind.

"It's snowing," Edward smiled.

As he walked towards the counter, Genie noticed a little girl behind him. She had long, dark curls, very much like his. Her blue eyes smiled, just like his, and a dimple rested on her left cheek.

"Hello," he smiled.

Genie stared at the little girl, who had wrapped her arms around Edward's knee.

"Coffee?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, please. And we'll have one of those Christmas tree cookies."

Genie reached for a piece of tissue paper and wrapped it around one of the green sprinkle covered cookies.

"Hey cutie," Jim called to the little girl. "I have a granddaughter about your age. Are you four or five?"

The little girl held up six small fingers and smiled proudly.

Jim looked amazed. "Six, wow, what a big girl. And I bet you're such a good girl, Santa's going to break his sleigh with presents for you."

She nodded. "I've been a really good girl."

Genie handed her the cookie and Edward his coffee.

"Thank-you," he said and paused, sipping it. "What did you say your name was?"

She smiled. "Genie."

"Hi, Genie. I'm Eddie." He reached for her hand, and she rubbed it on her apron before she gave it to him. "This is my niece, Nicole."

Genie froze. She wanted to laugh for having thought that she was his child.

"Well, see you next week, Genie."

Genie couldn't wait to call him that night. He would definitely know her voice now. On her way home, Genie discovered a new decorated house. There was a manger with all of the same plastic figures as the other ones she had seen, except for one, the baby Jesus. On top of the manger was a huge cross, and Genie stopped to admire it. A little boy pressed his cheek against the window of the house, looking out at her. She waved and left

the scene, smiling.

Edward answered the phone on the second ring.

"Hello."

Genie didn't wait for him to say it again.

"I love you."

"Go to hell," he screamed.

She hung up the receiver.

Jennifer Mancuso

Eastchester, NY

Richard Leonard

## Reassured

*We searched in the dark,*

*our flashlights too dim.*

*All we could find were a few dead leaves*

*and a piece of smooth silver driftwood.*

*The summer was burning.*

*We could find no kindling to keep it alive.*

*No thickly barked branches or fallen birch,*

*only green blackberry bushes*

*and daisies which somehow survived the August heat.*

*We sat wet in our swimsuits,*

*our bodies black.*

*We stared as the starving flames died.*

*The driftwood remained silver, only slightly scarred.*

*It refused to be burnt.*

*We stood,*

*reassured,*

*and threw rocks on the coals.*

*The summer days were baked in our minds.*

*A fossil of an aspen in a slate.*

Katie Lewis

Fanwood, NJ

Kent Place School

Dr. Jane Coil Cole

## Rhythm in the Pews

*Someone snapped their fingers on a Sunday*

*On Sunday a little shiny bronze thing*

*Dropped onto the floor, pirouetting*

*Graceful as could be.*

*Sunday saw the hat of Fred Astaire*

*Host parties of its own*

*And invite green ballerinas whose crumpled tutus*

*Could dance on the ceiling anyway.*

*To the songs of the masses*

*The bass of the preacher*

*Sunday skittered clicking heels*

*Started soft shoes*

*Scampered humble children of God*

*Across a hardwood floor*

*And everyone stood and danced when*

*More dots jeter'd en forme*

*Like the blues organist*

*The blind saxophonist*

*We all had rhythm*

*Because someone snapped their fingers.*

Hanvey Hsiung

Bridgewater, NJ

Bridgewater-Raritan High School West

John Greening

Michael Petrus



# Thailand: A Childhood

## Memoir

The cockroaches are out today, and so is school. It's rainy season, so the buses can't get through--the water's too deep. Our house is built up a couple feet, but this time the water is over our driveway, into our garage, and up to our front steps. It has completely filled our little duckpond out front, and I wish it hadn't because now I can't watch the frog-eggs turn into baby frogs, because now they're all gone. Usually, if we fill up the pond all the way in the morning with the hose, after breakfast, when I stand in it, it's up to my knees, and by dinner time the water's all gone, and there's just a little puddle with some tadpoles and frog's eggs and some baby frogs hopping around.

I wheel my bike past Bow's (pronounced "bough") room, and past the clothesline that's broken because it's one of those square ones that swings around, and I was holding onto it and running around in a circle, and then letting my legs fly out as I spun it around as fast as I could, so I could fly on the clothesline like Cindy Brady, but I was too heavy and it broke.

So now Bow has to use the dryer, but she's scared of it. And she won't use the washing machine either. She washes our clothes in a big metal tub on washing day with the other maids, and she uses a big wooden board like a shutter and sometimes a rock. She's not supposed to, but Mommy doesn't know, only me and Daddy. But Mommy can tell anyway because she says our clothes look "threadbare." Then she yells at Bow when she finds her, and Bow says, "Yes, Madam." Bow calls Daddy "Mister," too, but that's about all the English she can talk. And after Mommy talks to her, she's good for a little while, but then on the next wash day I see her squatting in the back alley with the maids in her sarong and dirty duckfeet, washing our clothes with her rock and the board.

We don't like washing day because all the maids dump their bubbly dirty water all over the back alley, and it's itchy when it splashes on your legs, and there's no dry spots, so we can't roller skate or ride our bikes because they're in the way. Today the maids are squatting in a circle eating cockroaches and Betel nuts, and spitting icky brown juice into smelly little grass juice-spit baskets.

The roaches are everywhere. Usually just the medium ones and the babies come out when it rains, but when it's really deep like this time, the biggest, scariest ones that are as big as Daddy's middle part of his hand come out. They cover the whole back alley and the walls, too. Mommy stays inside all rainy season. I'm wearing my tennis shoes today, because I have to crunch on the roaches. I don't like to, but you can't help it. And if you wear sandals the scary ones crawl on your toes and put their big antennas all over them, and they make me get goose-legs. And you can't rollerskate either, because they get caught in the wheels and they won't roll anymore, and it makes you almost fall and touch them with your bare hands. Ick! And when the roaches are out you have to be careful of the pipes.

Pipes go across the bottom of the alley from each side of the back door to the one across from it. The sewer holes at every other door, between the pipes, are square with rusty edges, and most of them don't have tops. Even the ones with tops break really easy. The sewer holes smell like the dead cats and dogs in the streets. Thai people think it's bad luck to touch dead animals so they're all over. The sewer holes are filled with greenish, grayish, but more blackish goo that's kinda thick like the kind of paste that you make with flour and that's sweet and pinkish and kinda lumpy and you can eat it, but you're not supposed to, because it's for pasting, and not for snack.

You have to be 'specially careful when the roaches are out, 'cause they cover the pipes, and there's just a ridge where the pipe is, and the roaches look like the sewer holes, just a little browner, so you can't really see them very much either. But if you stay in the very middle, you won't step in any. One time my



Barbara Morrow

left leg fell into one by mistake, but when it wasn't rainy season, and the alley was dry and just concrete, so I could go barefoot, like most of the time except rainy season, and it scraped all the way up to the middle of the fat part of my leg going in, and hit the mashy bottom, and squashed back up, and then scraped again because I scooted out really quick, because I was wearing my nightgown. I ran all the way home and washed it and washed it with really hot water and lots of soap and Mommy put yellow stingy stuff all over it, but still it got all gooey and yellow and sore and itchy, and didn't get a scab for a very long time. And Daddy said that's what I got for sneaking outside when I was supposed to be in bed.

But we have to go to bed at eight o'clock, when it's still like day outside for a long time, even when they close the curtains. Sometimes we sit on our beds and throw stuffed animals and our pillows around, and jump on the beds, but usually we sneak outside. We sneak past Bow's room, and she's always with Boom, who's just a little bigger girl than me and can draw better paper dolls. She giggles all the time and covers her mouth with her hand. Bow's husband is Thet, but we call him Bang, so we can call them Bang, Bow (for Pow, like in Bat-Man), and Boom, and we always laugh at this for a very long time, and roll on the ground, and once I even peed in my pants. Usually Bow's eating her spicy water and rice soup with weird things in it, that she even eats for breakfast, and I tried it once, but I don't like it. She makes good fried rice and Thai food for dinner for us, though.

Sometimes we have races in the garage to catch chin-chucks. They're really fast. They're little green lizards, and if you grab them by the tail, it snaps off, and they run away, and then they grow a new one. We try to get the most big tails, and the person who catches the most, or even gets a whole chin-chuck gets a bottle of soda without having to share, and the other two have to drink the water from the big bottle and the paper cone cups, just like at Daddy's office.

Today there was a 'lectricuted chin-chuck stuck to the light-switch place in the kitchen where the cover fell off, and the light-switch broke out. It was all brown and shrivelly, and it was really neat, but it was kind of stuck on, and Mommy and Bow

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wouldn't touch it. It was there all day until Daddy came home.

We usually like to play inside because it's nice and cold, and outside you always stay wet and icky and get tired of playing fast, because it's too hot. I like the Combissary (mispronunciation of the word "commissary," where U.S. government employees buy groceries) and Daddy's office, too, but they're cold inside.

Sometimes I pretend to be sick just so after lunch I can go the Nurse's room, because it's air-conditioned, and she knows my name, and lets me sit in there until I have to go to my classroom, because she likes me, and she knows I don't like it outside when it's too hot. She's Thai, but she knows English. But one time I really was sick for real, and I had a temperature of a hundred and three, and I just lay around the house for a whole week, and sweated, and just saw purple spots, but mostly was asleep, and I didn't eat anything at all, and if I did I threw up, and the doctor came to see me every day, and gave me yucky black medicine. Daddy and Mommy always put washcloths on my eyes, and were always worried, but I didn't know why, too much, but later they said I had a Thailand disease, and it was not like a normal one, and I was a very lucky little girl, but I didn't care, because my Uncle Octopus story won the contest at school while I was gone, and I got a yellow ribbon with #1 on it. It's really neat.

I like the rainy season the best 'cause it's not as hot, and you don't get all sticky, only wet. Tonight when it rained Mommy let us go outside in our bathing suits and play in the rain. It's warm and hard. If you stand too far away from the other person, you can't see them, because the water's like a sheet. It's lots harder than the shower nozzle, and lots better than taking a bath. Sometimes Mommy lets us go outside nakie and bring soap and washcloths, and that's really fun, because we get to run around and slap each other with the washcloths and play rain games.

Daddy doesn't like the rainy season, though, because he has to roll up his pants to go to work, and go barefooted. The streets are really icky. Little nakie boys catch fish in the street, and there's all kinds of squishy things you step on that you can't see, and it's all icky klong water that overflowed, too, so it's kinda greenish and the same color as the sewer holes, only it's lighter, and roaches don't live in it, just frogs and other stuff. Thai kids swim in the klongs, and ride water buffalos in them, and take their baths in them, and wash their clothes in them, and drink the water. Lck! It's green!

One time, in the klong behind our school, behind the bleachers, I saw a maid drown a basket of kitties. The houses across the klong, behind the fence of the back field, have their back doors that open into the klong, and there's some steps going down into the klong from the door. I was watching the klong, and I saw a maid open her back door with a basket, and the lid fell off, and I could hear the kitties crying. I yelled at her, but she still put it on the bottom step where the water was going over, and the basket fell in the klong. She just yelled dirty words at me in Thai, and then bad words in English that she probably learned from the soldiers, at least that's where Daddy said the boys who yelled it from the vegetable wagon learned it, and then she slammed the door. I ran along the fence, and watched the basket. It got lower and lower in the water, and then I could see only one kitty head, and then the fence stopped going along with the side of the klong, and turned to go towards the big swings, and the klong turned the other way around a corner, and I couldn't see the basket anymore.

Once at school, at one of Andrew's T-Ball games, a janitor gave me and Gill a baby rat that he found in the trash can. There's always rats around school, and they're cute. We took it outside and showed it to Andrew, and he held it in his glove and dropped it by mistake onto the hard playground black-top, and then it started shaking. I kissed it on the head better, but he was a really scared little rat. Then we took him inside to give him back to the janitor, but he just laughed at us, because we liked

the rat, and he was going to kill it if he didn't give it to us. So we brought it into the bathroom, where there were lots of toilet paper balls stuck to the ceiling, and he started to bleed out of his mouth in a little trickle, so we tried to wipe him off with a paper towel, but it just smeared on his fur. So we brought him to ask Daddy, and Daddy made us put him down to be for himself, and I think he died, and I cried a lot, but Daddy still made us wash our hands really good, and told us not to play with rats, but we did anyway.

Behind school, there's the spooky place. There's banana trees with bananas that are as big as my arm. They look just like coconut trees, but their leaves are bigger, and they have big bunches of bananas on them. They don't have a good eating taste, because Daddy said they're too big, and they're the real kind of bananas, not the kind they sell at the store, that we like. The scary janitors live in the spooky place, with all the old broken desks and chairs and junk, all piled up over our heads, under dirty old open halls, where evil spirits and the dragon live. We used to play hide and seek in the junk, but one time I ran into a mirror, and I saw the dragon, and after that the mask of death as there, and it really scared me, because it was a Thai big, scary mask, and so we used to run through the path really fast, and try not to get caught by the evil spirits, and the dwarfs and the ghosts and the goblins, like the goblins that lived underground and stole the princess in the scary book by the man who writes books about fairies that Daddy brought home for me one day. But when we walk through on the sidewalk, and don't touch any grass, and stay right in the middle, and far away from the piles where the goblins live, and 'specially if Daddy walks through with us, 'cause it's the short way to get to the T-Ball cotton-tree field, then we're safe, and they don't chase us out, but just make faces at us.

Every morning at the bus stop, we always watch the monks. They walk around the sidewalk and they carry bowls, and they wear orange and yellow sheets, and they all have no hair, even the kid ones. They go to different peoples' houses, and sometimes even old ladies come out to give them lots of rice. But Daddy said they can eat only rice, and drink coconut milk, and they sit at the big Buddah in the place where all the old drawings on the walls are, and they pray and chant really low, and sit Indian style, and hum all day. So I said I wouldn't want to be a monk because it was boring and I didn't want to be bald. But Daddy said that girls aren't monks, and only little boys have to be them, and it's good for them to be it, but I don't think so. They don't wear shoes either, and in rainy season they tie up their sheets around their knees like diapers.

Sometimes Mommy takes us to market with Bow. But Andrew doesn't like it the worst when we go, 'cause he's the only person in our family that has very very light blond hair and Thai people think it's good luck to touch it, so they always pat his head. And when Mommy takes him to the barber shop they sweep his hair in a little pile and save it. I like the market, though, because people sell mangos and sticky rice, and really sweet coconut gooey candy wrapped up in bamboo leaf, with purple beans, and frogs, and chickens, and birds to eat, and chin-chuck soup, and spicy dried orange meat, and Thai dry noodles with little packets of very spicy flavor that are little dried peppers. At school we always have a contest to see who can eat the most peppers plain without a drink. They're sweet and spicy and salty all at the same time. I always win, because I like spicy food, and only my nose sometimes waters a little.

They sell clothes at market, too, and sarongs, and dolls and things, and one time Mommy bought me a really pretty little Thai doll, and I still have it. I didn't lose it, like she said I would.

And if you walk along the street after you go to market, to catch a took-took--they're funner than four-wheelers 'cause they have just three wheels and tip scarier and go faster--you pass sometimes those ladies with big, flat, floppy pointy straw rice-patty hats, carrying fruit across their shoulders in a big wooden thing that looks like a scale, and they're all bent over,



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'cause it's heavy. And when they're old and all their teeth fall out, and they carried those things all their lives, Mommy said they get all hunched up in half, like the old lady we saw in the store one time with a big hump on her back.

But also you have to walk past the lepers that sit all around the sidewalks and beg. They have the real disease like in the Bible. When Daddy takes us, he always gives them some Baht (Thai money--coins) in their cups, and says he wishes he could heal them like Jesus used to. But Mommy says just stay away. She holds her breath and me too, and we walk past super fast, and she looks somewhere else, not at the leper. Some of them don't have their arms anymore, and some of them don't have their legs, and some of them don't have their legs or their arms, and some don't have ears and noses, and they're all scabby and have flies buzzing all around them, and their hair is patchy, and they're scary. But Daddy always looks sad when he sees them and says we should say them in our prayers, too, because they can't help it. Then he always takes off his glasses and wipes them, and rubs his eyes.

When I go to Bluebirds we walk to Juliet's and Elizabeth's big nice houses, where we have Bluebirds. When we walk down the street we see lots of little metal houses, made out of what Daddy said was called corrugated tin, and he spelled it for me. They look like trash in a junk yard, but real people live in them. Sometimes they're squatting outside their house to go potty, and sometimes they're outside washing in their bath sarongs out of a bucket of gray water. And there's flies all over there, and lots and lots of houses, all in rows, on broken up sidewalk, right outside the fence all down the road, outside where all the nice, real houses are, and Juliet's house even has its own pool.

Once at Christmas time we went to the refugee camp. There were lots of different kinds of people there. There were Laos, Cambodia people, Hmong, and Vietnamese. They only had rice to eat, and they drank dirty water, and in one little concrete place there were six different families. Big families, too. And a lot of the little kids were sick with runny noses, and big tummies, and one man was rubbing his throat with money (Coining is believed to remove evil spirits from the part of the body infected; here, rubbing the throat), because he thought it would make it better, and his throat was all red and scabby. And the sewer was just a little stream through the middle of all the houses. We saw Laos people who wore black clothes, and black tall hats with little pom-pom balls on the top that were fuzzy and pink and yellow and orange. The different refugees made things and tried to sell them to us. Mommy bought a lot of stuff and spent all the money she had with her. We sang Christmas songs for them, all in a big, concrete meeting place, and it was really crowded and sweaty. The last song we sang was Thai "Jingle Bells." It goes like this:

Here we are in Thailand,  
Without a hope of snow,  
But through the spreading palm trees,  
A typhoon sure can blow.  
Santa Clause will know,  
That the traffic here is slow.  
Instead of riding eight reindeer  
He'll ride a buffalo:

OH! Jungle Bells, coconut shells, chin-chucks all the way.  
OH! What fun it is to ride in a water-buffalo sleigh!

Courtney Newman  
Vienna, VA  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen



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## It So Happens

*Last night I dreamt you were Neruda.  
This is the truth.*

*I was finally held by a poet,  
Gold melting just beneath your skin,  
Scalding visions tearing from your eyes of  
Parakeets screaming, spinning the globe,  
Muscle arms growing in earthen cellars,  
Vietnamese yogurt stands.  
It made sense.*

*Neruda, you gave a reading in a buzzing barn  
As I lay in a pew, blinded and listening.  
You had a halo.*

*Then, mercy, you kicked the podium.  
Larger than anger,  
You took two steps and were beside me,  
Pulling my hair, fisting my back.  
Making love to ideas. Passion of empathy.  
The reading continued. I was sealed into  
a poem.*

*I cannot, sleeping, flatter myself,  
Only whom I have chosen.*

Emily Bass  
New York, NY

## ernest and sylvia wake up

*ernest hemingway awoke in heaven  
to find that he was beside the body of  
sylvia plath. they lay in a huge ivory  
bed, sheets of white silk air and four  
mahogany posts thrusting up into the  
clouds that padded the afternoon sky.  
sylvia's face was still a little blue  
from the gas that billowed out of the oven  
and ernest's fingers ached a little from  
his pull of the trigger. sylvia's eyes  
opened and she sprang stiff remembering  
that the towels were under the door where  
she had left them and the children in  
the next room. resting again and fixing  
eyes on ernest's bearded jowl, she whispered  
where are we going, his jeweled eyes  
staring back and he said i don't  
know baby, i just don't know.*

Todd Polenberg  
Poughkeepsie, NY  
Brian Connolly





Joanna Karman  
New York, NY  
Saint Hilda's and Saint Hugh's  
High School  
Susan Cirigliano

## Coming of Age

The crisp Autumn air carries the sweet scent of burning leaves. The stiff leaves on the path crackle with every step. My father and I are engulfed in fiery reds and oranges. The wind kisses my cheeks and ruffles my hair. I snuggle down into my big grey coat, forcing my mittened hands deeper into my pockets. As we cross through the orchard, Daddy reaches up and grabs two apples. He polishes them on his shirt till they glow in the slanting afternoon sunlight. I bite into the one he hands me, feeling the skin split under my teeth. It's a good apple, very red and very sweet. The sticky juice runs down my chin as I finish my last bite. Daddy and I toss our cores into the underbrush because he tells me that if the seeds fall on the ground another tree will grow. Then he picks me up and puts me on his shoulders. He sings very loud all the way up the path. I sing too, making up my own words because I don't know Daddy's song. At the top of the hill, Daddy puts me back down. From here we can see all the way to the ocean. I look up. The sky is too big and too far away. I feel small and scared. Daddy must feel it too because he reaches down and takes hold of my red-mittened hand with his big black glove. Suddenly, I'm not scared anymore.

That's my earliest memory of me and my Dad. I think I was about three. Every so often I take out that memory and wrap myself up in it, like it's a warm blanket. Times like that are long gone now. I guess very few adolescent girls get along well with their fathers and I'm no exception. The only time Dad and I aren't fighting is when we're not speaking to one another. It's typical.

He sits sullenly behind the wheel of the car. I stare out the windshield, letting myself get mesmerized by the steady swish of the wipers. The headlights dance across the rain drops, shimmering gold surrounded by heavy black. I watch the sky, hoping to catch a glimpse of Orion through a break in the clouds. But tonight the hunter hunts alone, leaving me to deal with my irrational patriarch.

"You're not going," he says flatly. He sounds as if he expects me not to argue, but I know he knows better.

"Why not?" I ask, trying desperately to conceal the irritation in my voice.

"Because," he answers. He considers "because" to be the end of discussion, the unrefutable argument. He's wrong.

"Because why?" I ask, in my ever so mature and sophisticated manner.

"Because you're sixteen years old and that's too young to go to the beach alone."

"How come I'm always too young to do the things I want to do, but always old enough to do the things you think I should?"

He decides to accept this as a rhetorical question, so he doesn't answer. I'm not satisfied.

"Well?" I demand, querulously.

"I'm only doing what's best for you. I love you."

I hate guilt. Guilt is my father's number one indefensible weapon. I'm too susceptible to it. He thinks I stop arguing because I realize I'm "outwitted," but that's not it. I could answer back; his statement's an easy one to refute. But an overactive conscience points out that, though at this moment in time it may be "a power thing," my Dad truly does love me and tries to do what's in my best interest.

By the time we get home, he's gloating and I'm sulking, but we both realize the battle isn't over yet. It's never over. Almost the instant a minor skirmish is resolved, we blow up at each other again. And, we argue about such stupid things. The biggest fight we ever had was about the color of our car. He claimed it was baby blue while I adamantly protested. Our car is powder blue, a much softer, more delicate shade. It's ridiculous, but even now I can feel my hackles rise at the mere mention of baby blue.

I race through the house and slam the door of my room. I flop down on my unmade bed and stare vacantly at the ceiling. I decide adults are stupid while I lie there and recite to myself every dumb thing my Dad has ever done. Some perverse facet of my personality starts to feel better. Then, there's a knock at the door. I know it's him, so I don't answer. He comes in anyway.

"You didn't make your bed."

"Perceptive observation."

"Make it now."

"What's the point? I'll just have to unmake it when I go to sleep. Why bother?"

"Because I said so!" This is another of Dad's infallible arguments. It's clearly a stupid statement. I've never done anything just because he said so, but I'm suddenly tired of arguing. Besides, Dad has already left the room. I decide to give in and start to make my bed. Five minutes later, my Dad crashes through the door, blustering and red faced. "I told you to make your..." His words fade into an eloquent silence.

"I did." Normally, this event would be a great weapon to use against my Dad. He's as susceptible to humiliation as I am to guilt. But today, my voice doesn't hold even a trace of the smugness I deserve to feel.

Somehow, I can't get the thought of that long past Autumn day out of my head. I am vividly tortured by the thought of a small red mitten enclosed by a huge black leather glove. I'm puzzled. It's not like me to be so sentimental, but my warm blanket has suddenly taken a choke hold on my sense of righteous indignation.

Dad was poised on his haunches, ready to dodge the expected attack. He looks even more nervous when it doesn't come. I feel him watching me with a wary eye.

"Dad, I'm sorry. You're right, I am too young. I shouldn't have argued." The words come out in a rush and I'm surprised to find I mean all of them. His face mirrors my surprise.

"Sometimes I forget what it's like to be sixteen. Sometimes I don't think I could understand even if I remembered."

"Why not?"

Dad sits on my bed and looks at me for a long time. "Things were different when I was sixteen. I grew up as the oldest of nine kids. I had a lot of responsibilities, especially after my mom got sick. I was going to school, earning a living and bringing up



a family without much help from my Dad. He loved us, but he was so busy earning enough to support all of us that he was never home. I was so busy I didn't have time to get into trouble. I just can't believe all the trouble available to you. I mean drugs, AIDS, all the violence. Your world is so much more dangerous than mine was. I just get scared."

I can't help myself. I reach out and hug my Dad. For the first time in a long time, I see him smile. "Let's make a date for tomorrow," he says gently, "to talk."

The heavy summer air carries the pungent scent of cut grass. Heat lightning crackles in the distance. My father and I are sticky with the close humidity. The still air stagnates in my lungs. I struggle out of my Dad's college sweatshirt, tying it around my waist. As we cross through town, Dad stops at the Quick Chek and buys us each a soda. I guzzle the one he hands me, feeling it cool my throat and the inside of my stomach. It's a diet soda, but it's very cold, and very sweet. The last drop misses my mouth and lands with a sizzle on the pavement. Dad and I toss the bottles into the recycling bin because Dad has told me about the effect of landfills on the environment. Then, he pulls our beach bags up onto his shoulders. He sings very loud all the way to the beach. I sit and listen to his voice, slightly flatter than the guy on the radio. At the beach, Dad tosses our stuff onto the sand. From here we can see all the little kids playing in the shallow water. I look up. The clouds are small and far away. I feel grown up and secure. Dad must feel it too, because he stands up and volunteers to go get us each another soda, leaving me independent. Suddenly, he's not scared anymore.

Phaedra Cianciulli  
Mt. Arlington, NJ  
Villa Walsh Academy  
Mrs. Olive O'Sullivan

## Broken English

The stewardess with the frosted smile offered me coffee, tea or milk. Politely, I declined and went back to staring out the window. The clouds were weaving, preparing for snow, I thought, as the pilot announced that we'd be landing in Toronto soon. In the pretense of a dutiful granddaughter, I was on my biannual pilgrimage to my grandmother's Canadian haven. My thoughts went back to work where I'd been earlier that morning. Sadly, I smiled as I remembered saying goodbye for the week to Ella.

She's in her seventies, about. I'm sure she's been working in the bakery of the supermarket for nearly some centuries. I've been working there for three years now, but my memories of Ella go back to years ago when I used to go grocery shopping with my mother. Any kid who grew up in my town knew, if not by name, then by face, Old Ella in the bakery. She gave every child a pastel-colored cookie and broken-English baby talk. I was always too shy to go behind the large glass counter to ask a cookie of the woman who I sometimes mistook for my grandmother. So my mother would ask for me as I clung to her leg, my head about touching her knee.

I remember when I first started working there, I was so excited that I bought a quarter pound of those cookies only to find them sadly stale. I took my place at my counter, expecting Ella to show me the usual kindnesses. But I wasn't a child anymore, and she was now my meticulous supervisor who began to train me in brownie boxing technique.

Most of the employees are terrified of the old crone in the bakery. Even the fat men in the deli tremble at the sight of the five-foot Holocaust refugee with the long, grey ponytail and red false nails. It was those nails that really got me. She was too old to be impressing anybody. I thought maybe they were for fright effect. I heard some of the other employees making jokes about Ella's sexual preferences, usually involving the long knives we used to slice the big pans of hot cinnamon buns.

She seemed to have a certain fondness for some of the

employees, the ones that had been there the longest. Equally obvious was her detestation of the newer trainees. She was incessantly criticizing the way we put the breads in the slicer at the wrong angles or used the wrong size cake box. She called everyone "honey" and put her long-nailed hand, warm from the ovens, on your shoulder when she talked to you.

After a while, I became one of her favorites. I'd learned how to deal with her--truckling. It did an amazing job of turning her ice-face into a mature version of the smile she saved for little children. Now, when I work at the deli counter, she comes over, almost sneaking around behind the owners' backs and looks at all the baked chicken legs on display. Sometimes I'll go and get her one from the back--the ones up front are older and drier. She takes the leg and wraps it up in a paper towel and sticks it in her apron pocket. It's sort of pitiful because the rest of us slip food into our pockets all the time as if to avenge our measly wages. We do it almost openly, knowing that not much will happen if we are caught. Watching Ella steal so carefully, I know the owners give things to the older employees all the time. They probably mind it more when she gives cookies away by the handful to any little boy or girl under a knee's height.

One of the owners has small children. Once a week, their mother with her artificial nose and artificial breasts drags the kids in to the store for lunch with daddy. As they run through the bakery on the way up to his office, Ella grabs each by an arm to offer them cookies. The older girl scowls at her and scampers upstairs yelling for her father. Her little brother stops for a moment to ponder this gift, too young and unaware that its offerer is of such a lower caste. He smiles at her and giggles as she pats him on his behind to hurry him upstairs where our employer is now calling for him.

I know this Toronto trip will be like every other. I love my grandmother but her idiosyncrasies disturb me more than they should. She hoards things like toilet paper and canned goods. She doesn't drive and it snows a lot in Toronto, so I suppose that she saves up since it's hard for her to get out when there are blizzards. My last visit was in the summer and I sat with her and chatted as she stood on a step-stool stocking a storage cabinet with box after box of tissues. Later that night, as we drank warm milk, I asked her to tell me her whole story about the war, how they hid in the attic and my grandfather bribed the farmers to hide them and how she lost her mother, but her deeply religious father survived three Auschwitz selections. And then after the war they came to Canada. She survived those years, married to the man who had saved her and her brothers. She has a daughter that moved far away and two grandchildren who never call and don't visit enough.

One of the older guys in the deli once told me that Ella has a sporty nephew that comes to visit her every so often. He tried to convince me that she even has some little old sweetheart that lives in Philadelphia and he sometimes comes down to visit as well. I don't believe the second story much. It reminds me of the break-room jokes about the knives and Ella moaning in broken English.

After I heard that, I sat and thought about it and a wave of nausea knocked me down. I saw a quick flash of a malnourished teenage girl tiptoeing around an attic. She turns her head for a moment and accidentally bumps into a tall young man, older than her. He has just entered the musty room. Startled, she nearly screams but he hushes her with his hand and she sighs as he embraces her, realizing it is the Friend who has helped them this far.

"I'd like a large seeded rye, sliced, please." A snarling customer woke me.

Ella opens the bakery every morning. She comes in at six and prepares everything for another bustling business day of danish pastry sales and haggling with geriatric customers over freshness. When I get there at eight to work in the deli, she asks me to put paper towels in the bathroom as she eyes the deli counter surreptitiously. I kiss her on the cheek, tell her I love her and, of course, I'll get her paper towels. I know she always likes

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to wash her hands when she gets off the bus. But they get so much filthier from the accumulation of dough and powdered sugar and icing than from the bus ride. I know that she lives in the city, not in the suburbs where the store is. She lives in the bad section, where the projects are. I don't know exactly where, but she must take an early bus to get there by six. She usually leaves work around three and rushes to make her bus home. Just before leaving, she always finds a million things to do: makes sure to give us some last-minute orders, cleans up a little, checks that all of her little cleaning utensils are safe in her drawer. Then she takes off the funny-colored but probably comfortable sneakers she wears at work and replaces them with heeled shoes. Then goes the withering orange apron, a trademark, and she pulls the baked chicken leg out of the pocket. Its juices have started to sop through the layers of paper towels but she puts it in her brown leather bag. She blows small secret kisses to the few of us who have learned to accept them and walks out the employees' back door to the bus stop. As the overdressed doctors' wives with their overdressed toddlers on the street pass by her, she clutches the brown pocketbook. She doesn't notice me peeking out the back door after her, wincing as I watch her get on the bus.

My grandmother meets me at the airport as she's been doing since I was first old enough to fly up alone. We take the bus from the airport to her apartment where pictures of me and my brother adorn every room. A stuffed animal sits on each sofa, bed, and nighttable. Once, I asked why and with the characteristic tone of a guilt-ridden Eastern-European Jew, she told me they keep her company when she is lonely (which, of course, is all the time). I quietly scold myself for asking. Later in the day, after I settle in, she announces that she's going to the bakery a block away to get me my favorite pastel cookies. I escort her down to the lobby and watch her walk into the cold and down the street. Some young mothers approach her, coming from the opposite direction, hustling their bundled-up children to the bus stop to get there before the bus does. My grandmother stops to admire all the pretty snow-covered babies and after she has passed them, she turns and watches as they all board the bus. A small sad smile melts the winter cold on her lips and she catches me watching her from outside her building. We nod and she continues on, probably talking to herself in her own native tongue.

Jessica Levin  
Margate, NJ  
Atlantic City High School  
Peter Murphy

## Untitled

*A knot of toads,  
They knead their amphibious limbs  
in dismay,  
Glare at the fog trodden earth.  
Their eyes narrow slits,  
they wallow in clear dreams  
of pale skies,  
of sharp objects  
and pointed thoughts,  
mountaintips...  
Their memories clog with seaweed.  
They squirm against the water  
pouring down  
To reclaim them.*

Vanessa Curto  
Potomac, MD  
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Steven Swift, Stanley Brodsky

## Sitting In The Wishing Chair

One summer night years ago I could not sleep. I crept downstairs and curled like a fetus in my mother's arms. She cradled me as I cried until the rhythm of her breath soothed my pain to silence, and she asked why I cried.

I could hardly articulate my strange pain of emptiness to my mother. "I want something to happen--something should happen--" I fumbled. Words required a precision that my vague longing never provided, and I felt ashamed to voice the few words I found; they seemed terribly old for the child I was, spending my weeks of vacation swimming in the bluest lake ringed by silent dark trees. Yet it seemed to me that life must somehow give to me more than even the bluest lake ringed by silent dark trees. A void within me was left a void, hungry and untouched by my life.

Mom told me that she knew that hunger. Her confession startled me; she was my mother, and in my mind lived far beyond the place of longing.

"It is like waiting for the train to come. When at last you step onto that train, you know that you will soon discover excitement. Meanwhile, you must wait at the station, but that is not a reason to cry. Sometimes even excitement does not satisfy; it is far too bewildering to even see or enjoy. But you can enjoy waiting, look around you, enjoy the landscape and people around you."

I slept with the image of a train, and in my dreams rearranged the metaphor: sitting by the window of a train, watching life as it passed, waiting for the day the train would stop, and I would step out under the sky and...

The image of a train became part of a song I listened to many mornings this summer driving to work. A soft throb of violins like a heartbeat runs underneath the song, and the lyrics, "I just know that something good is gonna happen, but I don't know when," become part of my own heartbeat. As the music ends, the heartbeat becomes the sound of a train engine slowing to a stop, connecting me to the night I longed for something to happen, when my mother told me a story of a train. All summer long I would open all the windows of my car to the wind and sing the song loud. Driving through a rainy morning that had once promised a dreamy day with a book, or a sunshine morning that had once promised a shouting day with a friend, heading towards a dull job all day indoors during the summer, I had to believe that something good was gonna happen.

I remember falling once, skinning my knee, and crying aloud from the pain, all the while ashamed of my tears. My sister would cry at the ends of movies, and her face would become red, and her nose would begin to run. Her weakness repelled me; I saw nothing beautiful in her runny nose. I imagined a woman in shadows, regal and powerful, terribly in control of her every graceful movement, and never faltering to the vulnerability of tears. With all the strength of my Taurean obstinacy, I willed my eyes dry, and learned to guard my feelings within a place safe from the misunderstanding, mocking world.

In the end, dry eyes only crippled me, left me mute and confused. Instead of letting grief trickle out and peter away, I stored grief until it spilled out all at the wrong moment, perhaps at a joke intended for my laughter.

All at once this summer I learned that power is letting go; letting the past remain a memory and the present remain what is. Power is even letting myself cry.

My summer began with soap bubbles spilling over Talcott Mountain into a hazy sunset. My first evening free after exams I sat on top of a mountain listening to a friend. The next week I flew over the Atlantic and tripped in a daze through the cities of Europe. In the night, I would dream of home, where everything seemed strange and wrong. But those were dreams; in the day, I was surrounded by wonder and new hopes.



As I watched in disbelief, all my dreams of home came true. I returned from two fantastic weeks in Europe to a string of fantastic disasters.

First, I lost a friend. I returned to a stranger after only two weeks of separation and somehow messed everything up beyond any hope of recovery. When I think of the way we once were, I think of the soap bubbles catching the light and creating a transparent swirl of color--and disappearing. For a short time, someone had been lucid to my understanding. But someone became opaque, and I suddenly couldn't see anything I recognized. What was once like gazing at a skyfull of stars became more like slamming into a brick wall.

In July, my mother hurt her back. She could not sit down or walk without pain, and spent her days lying down, frustrated most of all with the pain of helplessness. I would return home from work to find her near tears, and my sister tense and moody and ready to leave the house after dinner. I escaped too, when I could, to a friend's house, or shut myself in my room. I had always turned to the arms of my mother for comfort, and now she was desperate for comforting that I could not give.

In August, as my mother's back healed, my grandmother had a stroke. She had always seemed capable of living forever without ever slowing down, greeting me every day with a cheerful, "Hello, Peaches!" When we visited her at the hospital, she was someone else. She was tired, frustrated with her paralysis, and she spoke with someone else's voice, a tired, frustrated voice. My father hid his grief in tenderness. I returned to my old habit and forced my tears to remain behind my eyes.

Meanwhile my mother fought a torment of her own. My grandmother has lived in our house for six years now, and it seemed she too would become dependent on my mother. As I am, as my sisters are, as my father is. During the weeks on her back, when my mother fought physical restraints, it seemed she was fighting all the other restraints on her life. And even as she healed, it seemed nothing was letting go, just holding on tighter and tighter.

"Rachel, what are we going to do about my karma?" Mom asked me as the summer ended. I could not answer with a fable of a train. I knew none of the mysteries of my mother's secret longings.

"What do you want?" was all that I could say.

When I look in the mirror, sometimes I find my mother instead of myself. The face haunts me; we are so alike. But my hands are my own.

I bite my nails; they grow crooked and unpainted. The cold of winter cracks the skin of my hands, and they are red all year long. My hands are ugly, unartistic. My fingers do not taper, but stop too short and blunt. I thought the gods had cursed me the day I could not find the Mount of Apollo on my palm; my palmistry book told me that its absence means I have no imagination. But my heart line travels unbroken to my Mount of Saturn, granting me luck, and the hard lump on my middle finger shows that I am a writer; years of holding a pen too tightly and pressing onto a page too strongly have created the callous that I am proud of. I have never seen my face, but I see my hands every hour of the day, writing, playing the piano....

Sometimes my hands will not work for me, will not play music as it should be: like telling the one most terrible, wonderful thing you must say to someone. Somehow. Or else what you left unsaid will remain a knot in your stomach forever. Sometimes my hands will not work; they give me notes in place of music, and leave me feeling bruised and abandoned.

At other times my hands give music. This summer I played the Moonlight Sonata for a girl I hardly knew, who would soon return to her home in France. The last time I ever saw her, I played low broken chords like moonlight cast in midnight water, telling her with music that this is what I am, in the music, remember me this way.

If I could say one thing more before an eternal silence, I would say Chopin. I fell in love with a portrait of him painted by

Delacroix, fell in love with him staring from shadows into a distant amber light. When I was eleven, I learned every Chopin prelude in my book, surprising my teacher who could not understand why I loved his music of sadness and rain. She told me of Majorca, of George Sand, his strange and difficult lover, and how he nearly died. I saw gray rain and waves washing onto a lonely island. I know nothing else of Chopin, only: the portrait, the story told by my piano teacher, and his music.

The rain in his music became the tears I could never express. One evening in twilight this summer I played a nocturne of his over and over, and the thread of music became like the twilight, became like my sorrow, and it all became wonderful, even my sorrow. The longing on his face in the portrait, the longing in his music, all seemed a part of the longing I felt that night long ago when my mother told me her story of a train, and the longing I felt in that indigo twilight. When my sorrow became like the music, like the twilight, it became bearable; it was beautiful.

"What are we going to do about my karma?" asked my mother.

"What do you want?" was the only answer I could give. I would play Chopin in the twilight, let her feel her longing, let her cry. I could never do any more than that for her to help her articulate what is inside her. My whole summer long I felt I was opening my mouth and no words would come out. Or the only words I found were the wrong ones. I could hardly articulate whatever my mother wants.

If I could I would take back the night when I asked why I should be brilliant in school if I would grow up to be only a Girl Scout leader. My mother had been brilliant; she is brilliant, and at the time, she was a Girl Scout leader. I was wrong. I have never been more wrong in my entire life, and I will never again be more wrong than I was that night. She was never only a Girl Scout leader, she is more. She is the most.

But things break. Soap bubbles, glass. Last week a careless motion broke a bottle; splinters of glass and marbles spilled all over my bedroom floor. I almost cried; I had thought everything was different, my summer was over and nothing else could possibly break for a long long time. Some mornings, I wake up thinking everything will be different from now on. Maybe I saw a shooting star the night before curl and disappear in a twist of brilliance. Only nothing has really changed; I wake up to an ordinary day, perhaps even a horrible day. I slip, and a bottle full of marbles shatters.

That is what happened to my friend and me: we stopped talking, and our friendship shattered like glass into nothing. We had a universe of ideas to talk about but we stopped. Nothing ever healed because nothing was ever said.

A discovery of the right words might have healed our silence, but words are difficult, like stones caught in your throat, as I discovered long ago, mumbling to my mother, "I want something to happen--something should happen--." Sometimes the only possible articulation of a sorrow is tears, or music.

A train runs through my life, taking me where I want to be. My sorrow is that it is always leaving someone behind. Like my mother and my grandmother leaving behind younger, freer selves, I leave behind moments where I left something unsaid. My train travels forever forward, leaving behind the night I hurt my mother, the night I blew bubbles on top of a mountain. But the sound of the engine soothes me if I listen, it is like a soft throb of violins, like my heartbeat. The sound of the engine is like music saying the one most terrible, wonderful thing I must say to someone, and as I wait, staring out the window, I try to think of whatever that could be, how I could possibly express it. I can believe that something good is gonna happen. But I don't know when.

Rachel Lynn Nevins  
Simsbury, CT  
Robert Archibald



## Like the Backs of My Hands

Back when I was younger, Pi used to set me down on his knee and take my hand and rest his chin on the top of my head. He'd say, "I'm gonna let you in on a little secret." But there was never much worth listening to when Pi divulged his "little secrets." I'd heard them so many times before, and they were all the same--useless tips about the stock market that, at age six, were hardly of any interest to me.

He'd say, "Now you may not find this very important right now, but when you're all grown up and a successful businessman like myself, you'll appreciate what I'm sayin' to you."

I never really listened. I'd always just stare at the mammoth hand that enveloped mine. Loose, liver-spotted skin was stretched across the bony frame of his hand like a poorly fitted glove.

"...The secret to investing in the stock market lies in looking at the man behind the business...." He'd drone on and on as I studied how his knuckles jutted out and his thick blue veins surfaced on the backs of his hands. I'd think to myself, "Poor Pi. His hands have really taken a beating."

A long time back, at around Christmas time, Pi once told me how he got every crease, callous and liver spot on his hands. He pointed to each one and said, "This here was from working at the lumber mill back in North Dakota when I was not much older than you. I got this crease from raising chickens in the backyard of our house with your grandma. And all these wrinkles right here I got from raisin' your mama." And then he laughed.

But he missed a few spots and creases, so every time he'd sit me on his knee and talk of stocks and business, I'd try to guess where the rest of his wrinkles came from (but I never was able to come up with stories for all of them).

The stories I did know, the ones he had shared with me, were about his struggles and hard work. He did it all to be rich--that was his dream (and it was a dream that was almost realized. Pi and grandma Nan had built up a small fortune over the years). He was greedy, materialistic and proud of it. He'd tell me that his boyhood dream was to become rich enough to buy a carriage made of gold and six white horses, and he wanted to ride that carriage down the streets of San Rafael, tossing pennies by the million to the poor.

I'd heard all the stories before--how he'd only been schooled up to the fourth grade, how his father left his family in the Dakotas to live the good life in Hawaii, how he placed first for seven consecutive years in the standing broad jump in the Beaver Dam County Athletic Competition. Always, they were about how he'd made it all on his own, and every visit to Pi and Nan's house guaranteed another story, and of course, another trip to Pi's knee for a business tip. Needless to say, I hated going to Pi and Nan's house. It could get pretty boring. It amazed me how Nan could put up with living with him and listening to his ridiculous dreams and stories. Pi was always so full of himself. So that summer after my thirteenth birthday, on our monthly trip to Pi and Nan's, I wasn't looking forward to anything but the usual monotony that came with visiting my grandparents. The only thing I ever looked forward to was Nan's lunches. Nan made the best noodle ring with string beans--fresh string beans, of course. Pi wouldn't hear of anything else--they're cheaper and of better quality than those wimpy canned ones.

Mama and I arrived at Pi and Nan's in the late morning. Pi and Nan were out front--Pi running to our car flapping his mammoth hands in the air and Nan smiling quietly with her small gloved hands tucked under her arms.

"Well! Look who's here! Have I got a surprise for you," he bellowed as he walked over to the car parked in front of ours and rested his hand on the hood. "She's a beauty isn't she? 1938 Ford Nash. Brand new. Just got her yesterday. Wait 'til you see me drive her."

He looked over toward me with eyes so wide they looked

like they were about to pop right straight out of his head. "Come on. I'll take you for a ride before lunch." He took me by the hand and tossed me into the back seat. "Nan, you're comin', too. Hurry up, get in!" She obeyed, hobbling over to the car. Her legs looked wooden and her stockings were bunched at her ankles which swelled over tiny black shoes.

Mamma waved us off as Pi floored the pedal and shot off into the street beeping his horn wildly. The whole thing reminded me of his dreams of golden carriages, white horses and tossing money to the poor. It almost seemed ironic. Now that Pi was rich enough to flash his money around, carriages were outdated, and few would grovel on the ground for a penny. Nevertheless, we drove through all the main streets, and Pi honked at everyone he knew. Nan sat quietly with her hands folded in her lap.

We drove out onto the mountain road that overlooked the bay. The cool wind kept spearing me in the face. We were going pretty fast--Nan's white hair kept falling out of her bun. It twisted in the air like wisps of smoke streaming from her head, and the sailor collar on her dress kept flapping around, slapping her in the face. I watched as her small gloved hands quietly tried to smooth herself down in vain. Curiously, Pi's brown bowler hat balanced undisturbed on the back of his bald head.

"Suddenly, there was a slam of brakes. Horns were wailing. It occurred to me that we were on the wrong side of the road. The other car, which was headed smack into us, swerved to the side of the road. Pi got out of the car and marched over to the driver.

"Who the hell do you think you are? I'm just sitting here minding my own business, and you come swerving around the corner like a madman!" There was a rumbling of angry words, Pi's voice was strained. The rises and falls of his voice seemed plucked on a string pulled so taut that you felt it was going to break with every note. He returned. His face was pink; his hands were trembling. "Damn tourists!" he mumbled in a crumbling, yellowed voice. We knew it was Pi's fault but nothing was said. We rode back home in silence, and Nan sat quietly wringing her hands in her lap.

Lunch was noodle ring and string beans--fresh string beans of course for Pi would settle for nothing less. He turned to Nan during the meal and said, "Nan, my compliments on the meal. Fresh string beans are the only way to go. I won't have any of that canned garbage at my dinner table." Nan smiled.

After we had finished, I went to the kitchen with Nan to help her clean up. I scraped the leftover food from the plates into the trash can and handed the dishes to her. Nan scrubbed them, one by one, in the soapy water. It was probably one of the first times I had ever seen her hands without her gloves on. They were soft and white with brown freckles burrowed into the skin. They didn't seem so delicate without the small white gloves. I watched her meticulously clean each plate. She looked tired. The purplish skin on her lids was as thin as tissue paper. I wanted to ask her how she did it. How had she lived with him all these years? Why did she stay with him and put up with him, and why did she never say anything? But I didn't. Instead, I turned to her and asked, "Nan, how long have you known Pi?"

She looked at me and smiled. "I've known your grandfather for a long time." She turned and walked out of the kitchen and said, "Now please finish wiping up the counter and take out the trash for me, will you, dear?"

I lifted the bag out of the can. The lunch scraps tumbled to the bottom among the wrappers, crumpled paper towels and empty string bean cans. I looked around. Nan was gone. Her small white gloves rested quietly on the counter. I smiled and finished wiping the surface. She had missed a spot.

Lesley Pearce Howard  
Bethesda, MD  
Walt Whitman High School  
Dr. Martin Galvin





Anna Soderberg  
Germantown, MD  
Jay Corder

## Song of Segovia

*I am gazing out the window of a castle in Spain  
Surrounded by the twelfth century  
Ancient sunlight gilding my hair and skin*

*But my love is travelling travelling  
Sleeping sweetly in the dark backseat  
Of his father's Oldsmobile--  
Sewing a tiny stitch  
Halfway around the world  
Where it is night.*

*I feel his inertia in my hips and shoulders*

*As I dutifully point my camera at the red roofs  
The photograph is already developing in my empty head.  
Not sunny Segovia  
Nor squatting stucco  
Nor wild bitter mountains*

*But a dark-haired boy  
Sleeping sweetly  
In the backseat  
Of his father's Oldsmobile  
Halfway around the world.*

Sarah Henderson  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Thomas Steiner

## Edge

*Goaded by the man in the moon  
who is grinning his rotten cheese smile  
while the stench of the green mold growing  
is landing heavy on the atmosphere,  
he slavers away on the edge of the beach  
ankles in the tide  
long sleeves dripping sea water  
and looks to the west.  
He wants to stretch himself parchment thin  
to lie down as an enormous map of the world in full scale  
feel with his toes where the world ends  
his heart would rise from its bed of veins  
to be a compass among latitude lines  
and the little sea monsters would roll and writhe  
in his bowels.  
Columbus he would crush in his teeth  
and spit out the bones for archaeologists to keep.  
In the east the sun rises  
smearing the remains of its evening repast across the horizon  
with sticky fingers,  
while the waters of the world  
continue sliding off into that dark  
hungry place under the earth.*

Monica Lam  
Winston Churchill High School  
Potomac, MD  
Carol Blum



## The Bagged Boy

they announce his story on the 11 o'clock news  
heavy static charging gaps in the family room  
they said he was bodyburnt  
like some red motel sign in august  
the smallface once deeply pink  
says it's too late in the night

in reconstruction, the hands sewing and patching  
raw cells squeeze yellowness  
blinking pain of whitestarchy sheets  
his new baldness stretches across the table

the child wears a bag of skin  
the luck of a new beige suit  
cleaner against his skin than  
deep wet soil  
the T.V. picture blinks to fade out  
a blank screen as eyeless and empty  
as the re-living boy  
silent, the night covers its head from  
the lateness that drifts  
overlapping like a fog of a dead sleep.

Christina Kurz  
Foxcroft School  
Paul Bergan

## The Death of the Chinese Meal

Meaghan Kenwood met Sven Berensen the day his moccasins exploded. They took it from there, but they didn't take it far.

To begin: The near-fatal accident occurred on what was technically Mr. Kenwood's property, but would soon be Meaghan's, once the dead man's will was probated. Meaghan's pop had been ailing for going on two years. He had been at Rolling Rock, where Mom had died and where Pop had always augured he would end up.

The road crew had been breaking the street into dust for going on two weeks. It was cyclic, Meaghan guessed. Ashes to ashes, and so on. Without the road crew, though, Sven Berensen never would have stepped on a rusty drill bit which shot through his new leather shoes, and never would have wound up a fixture on Meaghan's deck, getting seconds from a rainbow-colored pitcher of iced tea as Meaghan bandaged his foot.

After any litigiousness Sven had in him (he claimed there was none) had been ironed out, they agreed to meet again sometime. First it was for salad and burgers at some open-air health haven called the Back Burner, then shakes at a boardwalk stand painted in peach and crudely lettered "Le Confectionaire's," and then she finally invited him back to her place for dinner one upcoming Friday.

"I'll wear boots--lined boots," he told her.

By Wednesday, Meaghan had settled on a course of mine-strone, sirloin steak lightly seasoned with red wine, mashed potatoes, and spumoni for dessert. Sven liked a simple meal, and this was a simple meal with a foreign flavor, she assumed. Now she sat back and waited for Friday, and it began to rain.

Friday came, and the rain didn't stop. The doorbell rang sharply at six thirty. Meaghan, her long brown hair brushed back over her eyes, glided to answer it in a white silky dress. Sven stepped in, a dark blue poncho covering his striped multi-color polo shirt. He was wearing bluejeans and appeared neatly casual. Still, it began to bother her. She was anything but casual.

Meaghan took his coat under her arm and placed it on the back of a chair, where it would gradually dry.

Sven sat down and began to stare at everything.

"You like horses?"

"They're quaggas," she explained. "They were like zebras. They became extinct in the late 1800's...they were African."

"And you sorta collect things with quaggas in them?"

"Well, it is hard," she said, throwing away a laugh. "There isn't much, as you might expect."

He began to count. "Let's see...you got the pictures, the stuffed pillow, the mural there--does that count? I think there's a quagga in it."

"Yes. You're right." God, she was starting to really hate his blank stare.

"Oh. I got something for you," he said, fumbling through his jeans pocket like a twelve-year old through a copy of Hustler. He produced a small black ring box, which he opened to present a golden-wrapped Hershey's Kiss. "It's nothing," he backpedaled, telling how he had seen it on his way to his apartment from the gym, and she understood immediately.

"Thanks," she said, with a grimace, moving to the kitchen to place the ring box somewhere it might melt--her marble counter by the toaster, or on top of the stove. "Who's she?" Sven asked, pointing to a porcelain framed, blown-up snapshot on the mantelpiece.

"That was my mother," Meaghan said, slightly disturbed at the memory. "She passed away a year ago."

"Oh. I'm sorry," he said. "Boy. With your mother and now your dad--rough! I mean, I'm--sorry."

Meaghan nodded. She removed a matchbox from the drawer by the phone and lit a candle on the table. She sat down, across from Sven, and watched him through the glass oval restraining the flame. He appeared blue, which frightened her.

It was greater than the light from the candle bouncing to every corner of the room. The problem was Sven's very presence in her house. He had never been inside before, other than briefly dropping Meaghan off after a dinner, and of course the first afternoon, when he only got as far as her porch. Now he was inside, the foreigner was in Meaghan's perfect world, and he wasn't the presence she wanted there. He wasn't the perfect man. All she could do was serve the obligatory dinner, suffer through it, and send him off. It turned out she didn't even have to do that much.

"I have some rice dishes out in the car," he said.

Meaghan whipped her head around to face him.

"I said, I have some rice dishes out in the car. And those Chinese noodles--lo mein--or chow mein. Something mein," Sven explained. "I didn't know if you would have enough--you know--so I stopped at the Mandarin Express on the way over. Give it an hour, you know?"

She could no longer keep cool. Meaghan rose, indignant, and let it pour. She condemned Sven for a full list of grievances, many of which occurred before Sven's birth. She assailed him for his attitude, his demeanor, his countenance, his cuisine, his social graces, his insolence, and so on.

Sven was stunned. He first grew pallid, then amused, then equally indignant. He accused her of ingratitude, snobbishness, further insolence, being spoiled, being sheltered, and so on.

Furthermore, he continued, "You have those goddamn zebras all over the house--I can't even breathe!" And he wrapped his poncho around him and stalked off, out the door and into the street.

Meaghan turned down the flame and cut the steak in half. A small dish of spumoni in her hand, she propped her young body up against the sill and watched the cars with their lights on, a block down from this tar-covered, banged-up street, on a night unfit for man and beast.

Hop Wechsler

Bryn Mawr, PA

Lower-Merion High School

Marion Klaus



# An Epitaph for Bill

## Shockley (? - ?)

*In an invisible world, electrons rolled  
Following paths that we knew as distorted  
And ugly  
For God had made electrons like He made the Population  
Random, unpatterned, traveling in gangs  
Yet if we looked from a distance,  
So wonderful!  
This century I, and two others, broke through  
Through the invisible world  
And from then on the law of God  
Was amended  
And it was Good!  
And in a thousand invisible worlds--  
Deep within the computerized minds  
In the newsroom nine hundred miles away from you  
Even in the missiles raining down on you  
The electrons worked for man.*

Michael Nabavian  
Congers, Ny  
CClarkstown High School North  
Helaine Hirshfeld

## Five of Us: An Essay on Consciousness

### Grids

I have the window seat, just like when I was little, but the two seats next to me are empty. As we rise over buildings and fields, I wonder what the businessmen sitting in front of me would think if they could actually feel their ascent; our plane must be going up at three or four hundred miles an hour, but we are oblivious to our speed--we look out the window, but can't comprehend what we see. The earth becomes a miniature landscape for a Lionel train set, falling further away from the stationary plane.

People say that humanity sprawls across the earth, but from twenty-five thousand feet it does not sprawl; it is spread like gray marmalade--melting the autumn forests and forcing the land into squares, the favorite shape of the obsessive compulsive. Rivers become the tiny rivulets you find on naked dirt after a rain. Lining each are borders of trees where the government has declared parkland. Against the shorn fields they look like the raised flesh of an intricate series of scars.

I think that we are all happy when we enter a cloudbank, whose white presses against our windows like a blindfold or a mask.

### Waves

Sometimes I dream that I am running up the side of a mountain; I am almost weightless, the way we sometimes are in dreams. Every step I take upwards gives me a warm, dry feeling, like standing naked in a cold room drinking tea. I never see the peak.

Sometimes my steps kick up stones which roll into an avalanche behind me. Screams float up from the crowds at the mountain's foot and unravel as I climb higher.

Sometimes I am afraid that I have slipped or stepped into the fog and found nothing. Then there is only the white, promising never to tell me where the world surges up to a peak from which I could look down on the intricate cluster of sine waves, on the spirals gathering.

Sometimes the mountain is too steep, and sometimes it is never there.

### Steps

Everything I paint is a study. When my brush pauses anxious in the water, not yet content but afraid to go on, I am one step closer to being an artist. I have seen how light stretches over a diagonal plane, how colors wash away in twilight. Form warps and tangles, and just when it is about to reveal the truth of an object, it disappears.

A concept can be trapped in a book or in a painting, but a concept is primary colors and simple strokes, squares and straight lines--blue, green, and gold. Truth is not a color but the absence of color, or the synthesis of all color. And each brushstroke brings me one step nearer to it. A study is a record of where I have been and where I was going.

When I sell my work, I feel guilty for lying.

### Boundaries

In the end we all explode--scatter the trivialities of our lives awkwardly into the kitchens and TV rooms of those around us. In death, as in life, we splatter random strings of meaning onto the faces of those we talk to--every word a lie which denies reality. I slip the rent under the landlord's door so that I will not see him. I have no phone. I try to forget how to read and speak. Light confuses the truth in darkness with false but convenient boundaries--here, there, dark, green, red, blue.

In the end we all explode, but some of us have the courtesy to live neatly.

### Things

I found a sock in the gutter today where the concrete of the sidewalk meets the asphalt of the parking lot. The sidewalk is a dirty orange and the street a dark purple, but somehow they have come to mean black and white. I suppose I am insane because I think the road is purple and the sidewalk orange. Insane is a word which society has made up, like good or bad, to serve itself. Insane is what society does not understand. The sock is black and there are three ball bearings in it.

Why the road means black I am not sure. Did every child's mother tell him that the road was black? Or was it an uncle? Did some powerful patriarch insist, with failing eyes, that the road was black, not red or green or yellow? I almost did not notice the sock because it was invisible against the black I thought the road was. Now when I drop it onto the asphalt, it is easy to see because black is not purple.

I am not sure why there are ball bearings in it. But when I lay it along the crack where purple meets orange and smooth it flat, they are three bumps, polyester mountains, two eyes and a nose or a mouth. I wonder what the person who wore the sock looked like--and the salesman who sold the sock, the person who ran the machine that made it.

When I want to sleep, I pull the cover up over me because I have never slept without it and when I try to I cannot because something is missing.

The night is a bluepurple that goes to white on the edges, but it means black. I think one day it was black and somebody wrote about it. Then it meant black and then it was not.

I do not think darkness was ever black--it is orange and green and red where I look and a void where I do not. In the dark you can see the tricks your eyes play.

If the sock were truly black, there would be nothing; but it is white and gray where the light hits it, and nowhere truly black.

It's too bad the sock doesn't fit me because my feet are cold where the wind grips my shoes.

Aaron J. Haines  
Vienna, VA  
James Madison High School  
Bernis von zur Muehlen



## Night Trawl

at Seacamp off Big Pine Key, Florida

Lying on the boat looking up at the stars, it seems that perhaps there are more stars here than back home in New Jersey. They congregate here because they like this spot best; like the herons that frequent Horseshoe Island in the distance. They see no need to be where they are second best to the mortal and fatal glare of an all night grocery. It is better here. They know, the heron knows, perhaps the owner of the all night grocery knows too. The stars are so bright tonight we hardly need a light to guide the boat. Like a dense mat of *Palythoa Caribbea*, a golden coral with extending oval polyps, the stars reach out to filter the rich night sky with tentacles of light....

I lie on my back and feel the gravelly boat box grate against the sundried skin of my neck. This place seems drenched in texture. There is a surplus of the sensory. My hair is blown by the only breeze all day. It, too, comes in the night knowing that at night it needn't struggle with the sun. At night the breeze may play games of its own and blow anxious, bold, and curious, like a dusky damselfish darting brazenly around a diver....

We send the net out from the back of the boat. The boat becomes a bloated spider slowly spinning its web of hemp out behind it as it drifts intentionally forward. At night the boat seems to skim lightly on the water like a weightless dragonfly. We sit quietly, so as not to disturb the net at its toilsome business. This is rather arrogant work, this encompassing web that drags the seafloor for sponges, fish, crabs, and any other creatures that rest in the shallow turtlegrass beds. The sponge, contentedly pumping nutrients in and out of its pores, is surely unaware of the great maw approaching....

There is much beneath these benthic inhabitants that will go unturned by the net. Yesterday, we snorkled here. Through the limited world of a face mask the flats appear as though the grassy plains of Wyoming had submerged in a great flood, yet continued to exist unaware of their new surroundings. The seafloor is littered with sea cucumbers that rest like eggplants scattered by a careless grocer. Instructors told us to dive down, to reach our hands deep into the rich gold-brown humus that paves these grass flats. We sought sand dollars who, with their tiny hairs, had buried themselves in the sand. I remember walking with Caroline, the young daughter of one of my instructors, yesterday. She spotted a sand dollar, bleached and dead resting by the seawall. Without the closely cropped covering of brown tube feet, it appeared artificial. Small, round, with only a simple pattern of five symmetric lobes carved on top, it looked like a fragile ceramic sculpture crafted by an only slightly motivated art student. Caroline was delighted by the delicate rattling sound that it made when she lifted it, as if perhaps there were some tiny jewel hidden inside. I told her that when they are alive, sand dollars are often inhabited by tiny pea crabs. She seemed to prefer the possibility of a more elusive treasure within her new calcarious jewelry box. She rattled it close to her ear, and smiled....

The immense sea web grows heavier behind us and our boat becomes weary with the strain. I hope the organisms swallowed behind us understand that we are displacing them only temporarily, only for observation and study. Laboriously, we begin heaving the heavy net back onto the boat. The live mulch scurries nervously about the deck. Equally as excited, we rush to resubmerge the living creatures in the trays of water waiting on the deck. Unlike my instructor, I don't know where to look for hidden creatures buried in the sponges and seaweed. Cautiously, I extract a few fascinations from the menagerie of the seabed. I let a sea urchin crawl around my hand. I try hard to memorize the pattern that its bristly spines trace on my palm so I may recall it later. As we rush to fill our collection tanks, the boat's deck becomes a pseudo seabed covered in *Sargassum* weed and turtlegrass. Marine life has always fascinated me with its weirdness. The observation buckets are now filled with curious eyes perched dubiously on antennae, boxy fish shaped

like ice cubes, and algae in the form of tiny wine cups. As the thrill of burrowing through the net subsides, we begin to release the creatures we found. Splashes surround the boat, and we watch as our trove makes its exodus. Phosphorescent plankton, too small to fall victim to our nets, continue to surround our boat. Their scintillating glow mimics the stars, and surrounds our boat with watery sky....

Sybil Director  
Highland Park, NJ  
Highland Park High School  
Carol Lefelt

## Papa

*Someone has begun to change places with my grandfather.*

*The dawdling old fellow  
whose lips twitch up and down, marking his time,  
is not quite the same.*

*His greatest joy was once to have  
small hands comb through the  
white hair barely stretching over his pink scalp, and  
Bugs Bunny always filled up the room  
with his booming chuckle.*

*Still true but...*

*I have just recently noticed that he has  
the fingernails old men scratch themselves with.  
I see the current channeled through his mouth,  
with a twist of lime and Seagram's Seven.*

*For the first time,*

*I have heard my mother's shaking her head  
"God, did you smell the liquor on his breath?"*

*My Papa was eclipsed by  
his parting words for his son at Thanksgiving:  
"Lose some weight, Rock."*

Rebecca Anne Minervino  
Mashpee, MA  
Falmouth High School  
Michael Rainnie

## Why Don't My Neighbor's Curtains Ever Move When The Wind Blows?

*Why don't my neighbor's curtains ever move when the wind blows?  
Why aren't they ever drawn?*

*I know the windows open for I sometimes hear cries from within.*

*I smelled the smokey stench when their old gas oven broke.*

*I often see the Pravda being delivered to their door.*

*The curtains are so dirty that the red is nearly black.*

*The wind is blowing again.*

*As usual, they don't move.*

*But wait, the curtains...the curtain is cracking,  
Creaking and screaming like the sound of twisting iron.*

*Huge chunks are breaking free and floating in the wind.*

*The pieces are turning white, lacey white.*

*The wind has slowed for now*

*But my neighbor's curtains are still groaning in the calm.*

Lekelia Jenkins  
Baltimore, MD  
Western High School  
Mary Windhaus



## Contours

When I was three  
or four,  
I stuck a bobby pin  
into the kitchen floor electric socket  
where vacuum cleaners ate.  
I did because it fit.  
Monsters came out,  
I ran screaming to my mother's legs  
and coiled round.

The sockets of my eyes  
seek their place  
on my cat's two hip bones.  
She sits with a mountain,  
paws folded under,  
purring negative space.  
Sour and sweet demons I did unleash,  
as the blue fire  
rubbed round me.

Lisa Siraganian  
Bethesda, MD  
Walt Whitman High School  
Dr. Martin Galvin

## Confusion

Sitting on the concrete steps  
beside my best friend outside our apartment building  
I could see the police huddled on the sand.  
This spring day was warm  
and we fiddled with plant buds  
as we swung our feet from the stone blocks.  
The boy was drunk they said.  
Always getting into trouble.  
He would have been O.K.  
if not for that heavy leather jacket.  
Probably eaten by turtles we joked!  
And that was when we saw it.  
On that spring day sitting across the street  
by our apartments in the city.  
The noise was buzzing all around us  
and they grabbed us by the arms.  
I struggled to turn my head and walking fast  
I saw it.  
The wet black bag.  
That was tommy.  
And I saw it.

Kimberly Guedez  
Califon, NJ  
Voorhees High School  
L. Harrold

## The Joy of Getting?

They ate my birthday cake without me.  
Alone, upstairs, I heard the distant sounds of teeth clicking closed on the tines of forks. I heard my mother offering more milk and asking whether anyone wanted seconds of cake. I bristled at the shrill sounds of children laughing and enjoying themselves at someone else's party. I was familiar with the noise. I'd made it myself, many times. For pre-schoolers, parties are ritu-

als, not commitments to friends. You can laugh and have a good time whether that someone else is there or not.

This time was different though. That someone else was me. It was my birthday, my party and I didn't want them to have a good time without me. I was in my room, hungry, bored and upset, missing out on the party. Missing out on the cake. My special cake.

What a cake it was! My mom had taken cake decorating classes and had created the special cake for me. The bottom was a huge round chocolate layer, frosted in white buttercream. It served as a stage for four ballerinas that were mounted on top. The dancers' dresses were large mounds of additional cake. Each was iced with tiny frosting stars, squeezed from a pastry tube. The ballerinas' heads were plastic dolls with long spears on the end that were inserted on top of the mounds. But I couldn't enjoy this special cake. I had been sent upstairs, banished from my own birthday party.

I have read that birthdays are contemplative occasions for adults, a time for taking stock. Some people become depressed. Maybe that's because they didn't endure exile from their own parties when they were children. Or because, even if they did, their birthdays were unrealistically important in their lives. Is this me?

I used to think that my birthday was a national holiday, that the world would stop. I would start to think about the day, October 14th, in August. I made lists and countdowns. I never neglected to mention to anyone that my birthday was coming. After all, it is an exceptional day: the 287th day of the year; Ralph Lauren's and President Eisenhower's birthday; the day, in 1918, when Thomas Masaryk became president of Czechoslovakia.

I would spend an inordinate amount of time contemplating the day. I taped notes on the refrigerator, reminding everyone about desired gifts. I remembered who called, who didn't, who sent cards, who didn't. I decided that fourteen would be my lucky number. Crazy? I agree.

This particular birthday in 1979, I remember vividly. It was the first time I felt grief and disappointment, but not the last. I was only four years old. The world didn't stop.

There was an air of excitement in the house. The table was set with ballerina plates to coordinate with the cake. Balloons festooned the doorways and garlands of happy birthday crepe paper hung all over the house. My mom had prepared the right food, all to my specifications. At four years old, you don't want to be original, so she had bought the usual chips and ice cream. The main course was something I knew everyone would want . . . hot dogs. All my best friends had been invited, including the girl with the patch over her eye whose name I cannot now recall. (All I remember is that I had gone to her party two years in a row and given her the same gift each time--she told me--a Snoopy apron that my mom had bought wholesale. We had a whole carton of them and my mom lost the list of children who had received them.)

Anyway, my mom had planned everything. But even though the stage was set for a perfect party, I felt something was wrong from the start. I couldn't put my finger on what it was, but I went looking for it. I wanted to find it. Of course, I did.

It started with my dress. Any girl I knew would have wanted it. It was chocolate brown with tiny pink embroidered flowers. But it was a hand-me-down from my sister, which wasn't the worst part. There on the wall, in full view, was a huge portrait of my sister at the age of four, wearing the dress. It shouldn't have bothered me so much. No one even noticed the photo. I was just too good at what I was doing--looking for something negative.

The gifts were fine. My parents had bought me the Holly Hobbie oven, something I had wanted desperately. But they also got me socks. I hate socks. Socks aren't good gifts. They spoil the specialness of the good gifts. At least that's true for those of

(Continued on page 50)



us who think that nothing ordinary should occur on a birthday. Of course, I didn't philosophize about such things when I was four. I just felt that socks were not festive enough, especially white socks, even if they did have pink flowers on the side.

My parents think that more gifts mean a more joyous occasion. Perhaps that is true. Who wouldn't be dazzled by an abundance of beautifully wrapped packages all nicely piled on top of one another, the pile so high that it looks as if it is about to topple? Is it still true though when a majority of those gifts are "needed" items such as socks and underwear? Every year the stack and the beautiful paper, ribbons and bows fool me. Every year I rip the packages open feverishly, hoping that my parents have topped all tops. Every year I pray that this will be the year they have finally bought a gift that I love, one I didn't even think of, that they will have read my mind or somehow divined what it is that I want when I don't really even know myself. Of course, they can't know, so every year I feel let down. The super deluxe gifts turn out to be Carter's cotton underwear with the days of the week written on them.

Why haven't they learned that the packages themselves are not important? What am I to do when my friends ask what I received for my birthday? Should I show them the presents and the underwear? Wear the underwear on my head as a joke? Mention that this was also a gift? Nah! Too humiliating. Of course, I pretend I am happy and I give the expected thank yous. Of course, they see right through me.

This whole matter has since become a subject of discussion in our household. However, at age four, at the party no one can forget, I hadn't figured out these feelings. Being upset about the dress and the socks, I was not in the best frame of mind for lunch and laughter.

We sat down at the table. My mom, a polite hostess, served all my friends first, then me, the birthday girl, last. They each had a hot dog neatly placed on their plates. There were shoestring potatoes, the kind they serve at McDonalds. (Children prefer this kind; thick adult-type fries are too dry.) At last I was served and I carefully inspected everything before digging in.

Once again, I found a flaw. This time it was serious. My hot dog roll was broken. I meant business. I screamed in anger. My mom had cheated me out of a good hot dog roll on my birthday. My own mom. Then, as if she hadn't already done enough damage, she sent me upstairs to my room as punishment for being obnoxious. There I sat for the rest of the afternoon, pouting and telling my tragic story to Monkoo and Hossie, stuffed animal friends that I had known from birth. They would always understand. They would never give me a broken hot dog roll.

After that ordeal, my parents grew panicked a week before each of my birthdays. The birthdays were usually disappointments because I expected too much. Once, I went even further. I tried to spoil my sister's birthday party by being a menace and getting underfoot. My grandparents whisked me away to the zoo.

I understand now that I must become more appreciative. I must understand that some things in life will be mundane no matter how much I wish them to be otherwise. I talk to my friends about their birthdays. Some of them receive socks but love their birthdays nevertheless. They do not seem to care about broken hot dog rolls or old dresses. I am trying to come to terms with my birthday. I am trying to cut down on the lists, countdowns and not-so-subtle hints.

I must. In the future, there will be other occasions which I celebrate. Hopefully, there will be one with a many-layered cake with a bride and groom on top. Will I be any different then or . . . will they have to eat that cake without me too?

Gillian Fein  
Stamford, Ct  
Westhill High School  
Mrs. Stephanie Dahl

## Dear Abby

*I've never written to a column before,  
But I don't know where else to turn.  
Last night I went out to sit  
On that oily brown wooden guardrail  
On Bartles Road.  
It was a cold, misty night.  
I turned my wool collar up,  
And it stabbed my neck with sharp jabs.  
I wanted to yell,  
But I walked  
running out of tissues before nine.  
At that stream  
The water sped away  
I wanted to board a tiny paper ship  
And be whisked to sunshine  
But soon I would return home  
To face my parents and dinner.  
It can't rain forever, can it?*

Kimberly Knowles  
Lebanon, NJ  
Voorhees High School  
Lois Harrod

## Grandpa

*His legs look strong and hard,  
but he can't walk on them.  
Grandpa sits on the porch with  
a cigar between his fingers,  
one end wet and squishy,  
the smell of tobacco always on his breath.  
He wears green all the time,  
like a uniform,  
the kind that should boast his  
name on the pocket.  
He watches the trains rumble by as  
he nibbles on a box of Ritz Crackers.  
A white cat sits at his feet, watching  
every cracker enter his scruffy mouth.  
Kitty will get one, always does.*

Susan M. Bowman  
Camp Hill, PA  
Cumberland Valley High School  
Mrs. F. Jane Scott

## Aimless

*Scorched grass  
lying flat,  
dead, unwavering;  
dead stumps scattered  
like Dreams.  
An old Seven-Eleven Super Gulp  
discolored by the weather  
rolls aimlessly,  
chased by a dull wind  
which carries the odor  
of Covington Paper Mill.*

Vicki Byrd  
Hot Springs, VA  
Foxcroft School  
Paul Bergan



# Coming Home From The Mapplethorpe

My hair, which has lost all semblance of neatness after spending a day in Boston, falls limply over my face, shrouding my expression and, more importantly, my eyes. Head bent, I appear to be lost in prayer, or perhaps sunk in deep contemplation of my knees. In actuality, my eyes are rolled up almost all the way in their sockets and tears prick my lids as I strain to take surreptitious peeks at the man sitting in front of me. (Thirty-one or two, short, brown hair. Eyes of about the same shade.)

My neck starts to ache and my eyes begin to burn from the effort of peering at him from such a strange angle. I shift my focus of attention to the window, hoping it seems that it is the commuter train on track seven that interests me so much, rather than the reflection I see when I keep my eyes slanted fractionally to the left. I continue my assessment (clean shaven, pitted cheeks with two jagged scars on them) and wonder idly if I will become motivated and work on my English paper when I get back to school (bulbous nose, square chin, depressed expression). He glances at me, and I turn slightly toward him, trying to look hostile (combat boots, army fatigues, important looking pins and patches).

A hand is demandingly thrust under my nose, chasing away the sneer of contempt I had been working on. "Tickets, please," a voice brays in my ear. I pay for my fare, and while the insistent fingers of the conductor sift suspiciously through the pile of bills and coins, the soldier, Garvey (or so his name-tag reads) begins to get a look I know all too well. "I need somebody to talk to" emanates from his entire body.

"Going home?" he asks.

I grunt. In this case, even a monosyllabic "Yes" would be a too friendly response.

Garvey does not pay attention to my hint: "I'm off to where it's hot, damn hot. Not a tree in sight." He looks at me for a sign of recognition, so I grudgingly paste a sympathetic smile on my face. Reassured, he continues. "Tomorrow morning they're putting me on a boat and shipping me off to where there's nothing but camels, Arabs, and sand. Six months in a desert. Can you believe that?"

I shake my head, not willing to ignore him, yet not so sure that I am ready to listen to "nuke Saddam," save-the-world, patriotic blather.

"They gave me two days leave," he continued. "'Go home and get laid,' they told me, 'in a couple of days you won't be doing anything fun.' So I went home and saw my wife and kid, but what could I say to them, 'See you in a few months?' I can't do that because I don't believe it's true. There is absolutely no way that thousands of us are going to hang around that hole for all those weeks and not cause something to happen. And when we do go to war Iran is bound to join in, and then there'll be hell to pay. They took our men hostage, and they can't get away with that. We'll get them all."

He pauses for a moment, fingers plucking nervously at his shirt sleeves, then suddenly adds that, "Women and children, that's different. We'll put them aside in special little camps, won't hurt them. It's the men we want our revenge on."

"Are you in the Army?" I ask, hoping to move the subject to a more neutral ground.

"National Guard. But I'm not even an artillery man. I drive trucks. The ammunition people are still sitting at home while we delivery boys have to go to the desert. Don't get me wrong now. Though I'm not so happy to be going, I'd never try and get out of it. Flunking eye tests and claiming a bad back isn't for me. I signed on to be part of this unit, and I'll stay with it till the end. I didn't necessarily think that the world situation would ever come to this, but now I'll have to deal. I wouldn't respect myself if I copped out."

I feel a twinge of respect and, almost unwillingly, ask Garvey how old his child is.

"Mathais? Two, only two, but he knows something is wrong. When we were all at the station and I was about to leave, he kept saying, 'Dada, dada go bye-bye?'"

The soldier cocks his head and, with a foolish look on his face, squeaks "bye-bye" again. Eyes misting over, he then looks down, examines his fingernails, whispering "only two."

I stare at the ceiling, then begin babbling about the Mapplethorpe exhibit I saw that afternoon.

"At least I'll be able to go and see Jay Leno for free," Garvey interrupts, "and I'll probably get a look at Bob Hope too. Just think, went all the way to Arabia to see Jay and Bob. Gonna' save myself thirty bucks! What's more, I may even hear them again in '91, '92, and '93."

Another silence, eventually broken by Garvey showing me pictures of his family. His German wife and son are both blond and blue eyed.

"My father nearly killed me when he found out I was marrying a German. He's a World War Two vet, so he was a little unhappy. He shouted and screamed, but I was patient with him, until he called her a 'nigger.' Then I punched him and good. No one is to insult my wife. She's a person first. He can't hate her because of her nationality."

"I was a bad boy when I was growing up," Garvey continued. "I did some really awful things. I had a Harley Davidson, wore black leather all the time, and gave myself some tatoos." He shows me some examples of his artwork: a U.S. Navy insignia, an eagle, and a flaming sword. "Only took a few hours to do, and they didn't bleed that much."

The conversation branches off now, and we talk about computers ("amazing machines, I love them"), perseverance ("You have to keep at it. Would Marie Curie have found the polio vaccine if she didn't keep trying?"), and home remedies for colds ("a little tea, a little honey, and a lot of rum. You'll sweat like a pig, sleep like a baby, and be fine in the morning.")

The subject of alcohol brings us back to the "A-rabs."

"Did you know that you can't bring any liquor into that country, and a black market bottle of scotch costs one hundred dollars? But not to worry, we solved that. Me and my men (I'm a sargeant) opened some tires, took the air out of them, and lined them with bottles of the stuff. Put a little air back in them, and now we're all set."

His face becomes sober, and he starts mumbling about his son again, imitating the child's final words to him. I squirm in my seat, then jump up, telling him I had to go and find my friends, who are in another compartment.

"But first let me take your picture," he insists. "This has been just like a story. Man goes home and sees family, says good-bye to them at the train station, then on the trip back to base gets to tell his life's history to some young woman sitting with him."

I start to pose for him, and the shutter snaps just as my eyes close and my hand moves to adjust an errant strand of hair.

"Did you hear the joke about the three hillbilly women living on top of the mountain?"

I smile, mouth the word "sorry" at him, stand quickly, then turn and walk briskly down the aisle.

Shefali Trivedi  
Groton, MA  
Groton School  
Jonathan Minifie





Holly Clark  
Mechanicsburg, PA

## Uncle Wiggly

Uncle Wiggly was a Communist, and so on May Day, like all other good rabbit Communists, he traipsed off to Latrec's Brewery for stout and some sausage to celebrate. This was a day he had been waiting for; this was a time for his pride to pour through. To express his joy, he stopped off at the plant gates to pay all the rabbit workers there a May Day bonus. This was terribly uncommon—a May Day bonus. The rabbits knew that their pay was stable; it was set. They could work twice as hard and twice as fast, yet still they would be paid no more and no less. Some rabbits admired this, working laboriously day in and day out, sweating and toiling for their idealism. They were working for the state, not themselves, the state; they were totally oblivious to the concept of individualism and free enterprise, and so they worked mindlessly for the good of the state, producing their quotas. But then there were those rabbits who knew, they knew that there was freedom on the other side of the wood; they knew, and so they held their breath.

Uncle Wiggly was another sort. He was a member of the Communist Party, and so he faced a side far different from the other rabbits, where his opinion was the only one that counted. What he said was the law, and what others said, he twisted up and shredded until it was one huge, illogical distortion. Uncle Wiggly was a large rabbit, his fur was the color of wheat with an occasional dark spot. He was very moody and very determined; one could determine his mood by how his spots appeared. Currently, his spots were normal, as he proceeded in the still of the night to Latrec's.

All the other rabbits were glad to see him. Red flags decorated Latrec's interior. From where Uncle Wiggly was standing all he could see was the color red dancing in front of him, and all he could hear were the powerful chants of Communist propaganda morals weaving in and out of his ears in a taunting fashion. For some reason, that night those slogans sounded misty,

yet they lasted til early morning. All night that was all that could be heard, and all night all that could be seen was the spinning red of the flags and the redwood aging barrels combined. Maybe, that night, there hadn't been a platypus who spread anti-communist slogans. Maybe, that night, all the other rabbits didn't decide to turn against the government, stirring up a rebellion or two. But whether it happened or not, all Uncle Wiggly could remember that night was the one thing he kept shouting: "Long live depression and ice cream!"

Jennifer Wiesenfeld  
New York, NY  
St. Hilda's and St. Hugh's High School  
Dr. Thomas LaFarge  
Madeleine L'Engle

## Untitled

*Shy is a spontaneous pregnancy  
and you always knock me up.*

*Some lover.*

*You static my hair, bloat my  
hands and feet, let them grope  
in the shine of your suave,  
fertile smile.*

*It is you as a wizard and I  
as an ox. You enchant me and I  
snort, snuffle, bellow into your  
oval eyes, your wicked patience.*

*It is I the soft Caesar  
of body language.  
Shuffling and ducking, I am  
fluent, a fluid kow-tow to you.*

*Just so you know I plan  
one day to stop my bobbing and  
break water and  
charge.  
Then you will be the fidgeting  
beastie on the run.*

Emily Bass  
New York, NY

## Bedtime

*She told me stories of  
honey bees and the  
elephant that forgot his name.  
She would take her bun down,  
letting me touch her  
silver hair, and I would ask  
if she was related to Jack Frost.  
The spots on her hands were  
grandmother freckles and if I was  
careful I could try on her clip earrings.  
At night, she would turn out my light  
and I would listen to her brushing  
her teeth and smell her in my pillow.  
I would kick my blanket off so  
my legs could breathe the summer air.  
Later she would come in and pull up  
my blanket.  
I always pretended I was asleep.*

Kathy Cottle  
Phoenix, MD  
Dulaney High School  
William Jones



# Chinese for Three

"Lauren, your father's here."

Great, he's ten minutes early. I hate that. It really bothers me when people are early. It's almost a form of self-flattery for a person to show up early. Early people must think you're so excited to go out with them that you're ready hours before they come. So when they show up ten minutes early, they're actually doing you a favor by saving you ten more minutes of doing nothing but waiting for them.

"Lauren."

"I'm coming, mom."

I glance around my bedroom one last time before I turn off the light and go downstairs. God, I wish I didn't have to go to dinner with him tonight. I should be home in my room, talking on the phone with my friends who don't have to go to some stupid restaurant with their dad and his new air-head bitch of a wife.

"What took you so long?" my mother asks.

"I couldn't find my jacket."

"It's cold out. Make sure you button up."

"Mom, please. I'm in eighth grade. I can dress myself."

I kiss her goodbye and leave. She's not too bad, my mom. Sometimes she treats me like I'm two, but she's really a sweet person. I love her a lot.

It's pouring, and I get drenched walking from my house to the car. I hate it when my hair gets wet. The hairspray gets all sticky. Now my hair is going to be flat, and I'm going to look like crap in the restaurant. I open the back door of the car and climb in.

"Hi."

"Hi, Lauren. How are you, honey?"

"Good, dad."

Bonnie looks in the rear view mirror and smiles at me. I notice she has lipstick on her teeth. I don't tell her about the lipstick, but I smile back. It's not my job to look after my dad's wife and tell her to wipe her expensive lipstick off her precious teeth.

We pull out of the driveway and head in the direction of my father's favorite restaurant. The rain is hitting the car in angry shots, determined to get inside and soak us, but the metal deflecting the drops makes me feel safe and cozy inside. It's an empty comfort though. It would have been complete if my mom was in the front seat instead of Bonnie and we were a family again.

"Are you ready to order?"

"Yes, I believe we are," my father says. "Darling, what would you like?"

My father gazes adoringly at his Darling. Bonnie returns the heavy stare. I feel like I want to throw up on both of them. It's bad enough when parents are romantic with each other, but when my father gets sappy with a woman who has only known me a year, it makes me nauseous.

Bonnie's fuchsia, manicured nail runs lazily down the menu and pauses on Moo Goo Gai Pan. She orders it in a dainty voice with a hint of helplessness in it. She then looks over to me.

"Um, what's your special tonight?" I ask.

"Sweet and sour pork with fried rice," the waiter replies in a heavy accent.

I look at my father indecisively. He orders his meal and then looks back at me. I order the beef and broccoli and the waiter retreats back to the kitchen. I wish I'd ordered something different. I don't really like broccoli.

"So, Lauren, how's school?"

I look up, startled that Bonnie has spoken to me. School? Why would she care how I'm doing in school? I bet she doesn't even know what grade I'm in, let alone the school I go to. It gets me mad when people try to make small talk about topics they know nothing about. It's so fake. She obviously doesn't care how I'm doing in school.

"Fine," I say. I don't even bother getting into it with her. It

would just make the conversation more fake.

"Lauren, your mother told me you got an A on your science project. Why don't you tell Bonnie about it?"

Nice try at "family" dinner conversation, dad. Bonnie doesn't care, and I don't like telling her. You can't force people to like each other. We get along and that's enough. You should quit while you're ahead.

"That's great, Lauren. What was your project?"

You don't care what it was on. You're not fooling anybody.

"The solar system. I made a model with styrofoam balls and painted it. My teacher said it had great details. That's why I got an A."

"Oh, how nice."

I can't take it anymore. I have to escape from this conversation before I get sick.

"Excuse me, I'm going to the bathroom," I say as I get up from the table.

"Do you know where it is, honey?" my father asks.

"Of course I do, dad. You and mommy used to bring me here all the time when I was little. Remember?"

"Oh sure. Silly me."

My father blushes. It's so funny to see a forty-five year old man in tortoiseshell glasses and a conservative blue suit blush, the type of man who should be able to hide his emotions under pressure. He's the kind of man who can have business lunches with people he doesn't like, but has to be nice to for reasons only other people in suits know. The ironic thing is my father's lunch partners never know my father doesn't like them, but I say a single sentence, and he blushes and reveals how embarrassed he is by it.

I walk to the ladies room with a smile on my face. It is a smile of satisfaction. With that simple blush, my father has told me that he remembers us as a family. He remembers when he, my mom, and I used to go for Chinese food. He hasn't forgotten the fun we had or how much we would laugh. He remembers how happy I was to be there with them, and now I think he's sorry. I think he's sorry I'm not happy anymore, but I don't think he wants things to go back to the way they were. When we would go out together as a family, and we didn't have to pretend we loved or even liked each other. We would enjoy our Chinese food and tell funny stories. We would open our fortune cookies together and read them out loud. Then we would drive home tucked away from the rest of the world in our car and listen to the rain.

Marah Williams  
Dalton, PA  
Scranton Preparatory School  
Vincent Vanston

## Scolding T

*It was cold outside  
The dog house was drowning  
an ocean of snow  
The cold stole the warmth from the cat  
and fed it a freezing drink  
The dog stood guard, a caricature in his home  
a glacier with no place to slide  
A moment passed,  
Lights were everywhere  
Then suddenly,  
The dog was chasing the cat  
down a long golden road  
I watched, wearing my new white shorts*

Jeremy Dayton  
Owings Mills High School



## Crewcut

A razor slid down the nape of your neck and  
stroked it down to stubble. It slit  
away the brown tumbles. It sent  
your bangs to weep in haystacks on the floor.  
Whirred the softness away from your skull,  
and it whittled you an  
Auschwitz fashion statement.  
If I had been there I would have  
battled the barber.  
Held your hair against your head and  
sacrificed my knuckles to your beauty.  
But it was too late the next morning and  
I couldn't look for days at the obscene  
naked bulb balanced on your neck.  
You knew how to challenge my  
aesthetic affections but now please  
let it grow back or  
I'll ink my blue eyes black  
and ask with a blank stare if  
you can still love me.

Emily Bass  
New York, NY

## Cripple Watches

And he would watch from the unlit side  
every evening  
voyeur  
of a man in thin cotton sheets  
the man with the useful body  
the rolling mass of well shaped  
muscles  
and thick bone  
and...  
then she would open the door  
to their sleeping chamber  
the woman with the body that  
he should crave  
and she would remove her  
clothes and she would walk  
across an unswept floor shivering  
in the cheap coldness to the bed  
and remove slippers  
and brush out plaited hair  
all the while looking at him  
turning her head to the light and  
the body that she lay beside  
to curl and contort a pliant skin  
and shut her eyes feeling his eyes  
upon her spine and buttocks watching  
and the man in the dark  
would circle the bed for hours  
wheeling around to see better a curve  
a flicker a sensation  
that he could not feel  
gain excitement through another man  
another woman trembling  
because he could not be wielding

and destroyer

Ruth Jennison  
Emma Willard School  
Ms. MacNamara

## Phone Call

You say the sirens wailing down the street make  
you wonder where the fire is. The moonlight's fading  
the room with a cold blue light.  
I say I'm lying on the kitchen floor  
and you ask me if the room is dark.  
Once, two summers ago, I touched you,  
very quickly, on your left arm  
between your shoulder and your elbow. You say  
you remember. You were carrying your clothes back  
from the washing room, and your muscles  
and long bones caught me like a  
garlic mushroom hooks a lake trout.  
After I shower,  
I lie arched, naked on my back,  
brushing my nipples with the flat of my hands,  
thinking about your big hands and long bones.

Tina Brown  
Potomac, MD  
Winston Churchill High School  
Mrs. Carol Blum

## Untitled

We stepped through the cold,  
sun-spotted, leaf-fallen path  
toward the shivering shadows  
under the gray frost-bitten  
leafless trees.  
The winter breathed whispers  
from the sky--  
Fall sheeted by the white dust.  
We licked our lips at the snow  
and spoke cheerfully through the white air.  
We walked to a bench  
and sat the morning through watching  
as the snow piled on the earth  
the tree branches christened by white.  
And all the world had no  
better reason to turn!

Stacy French  
Lanesboro, MA

## From Underneath This Water Is The Same

In my dream, I pad down carpeted hallways  
past my parents' bedroom door.  
I draw the bath. I unwrap my muscles,  
unspinning tendons, peeling away skin.  
I have swallowed stones to weigh my body down.  
The water is blood in my lungs. I hear it:  
the voice of my inner ear, singing.  
I sleep underwater.

Light splits the coffin open. I stand  
and shake the droplets from my skin. I wipe  
the blood from my eyes and move, once more,  
through the disturbed and waking world.

J. C. Sylvan  
Milton, MA  
Milton High School  
Barbara Seegraber



## Mid-flight Crisis

The plane drags me  
from home. My eyes search  
the cabin. I wonder.  
Are there any terrorists  
here? Security slipped  
up, and now  
they're all looking at me,  
waiting for me to  
fall asleep, and now the  
murderer on the aisle  
opens his bag to  
grab his gun, and now the  
thief on my left  
begs the time to  
appraise my watch, and now the  
sadist to the front  
leans his chair to  
crush my legs so I  
can't escape my fear  
and I wonder, am I the only  
person flying here?

Jonathan Carr  
Hingham, MA  
Hingham High School  
Mrs. Helaine Silva

## Upstairs

A fog rolls in off the sea to  
the east and I feel the wet gray  
air heavy  
heavy as the footsteps  
downstairs  
laughter drifts up loud and  
drunken the click of poker chips smoke  
dribbles out the open window into the  
deserted  
starless night  
soon  
soon the fog will drop down  
suffocating them in  
beer bottles and card games and  
I will look out over the  
foamy fog as the mocking laughter resounds  
in the dark

Anne Estabrooks  
Cranford, NJ  
Oak Knoll School  
Mrs. Harriet Marcus

## The Angel Patriarchs

A cool in the morning garden park  
stirs us with a purling cloud.  
A coming of the angel patriarchs.

Above, a shadow somber and dark  
casts down on us like angel's shroud.  
A cool in the morning garden park.

At once appears an ivory ark

bright with sun fire--for heaven allowed  
a coming of the angel patriarchs.

The high-browed bows of the hallowed bark  
come to this waiting heads-down crowd.  
A cool in the morning garden park.

Salvation sprays in watermarks  
our sun-showered heads with grace endowed.  
A coming of the angel patriarchs.

Across the dawn sky swept with arcs  
came windships carrying angels proud.  
A cool in the morning garden park--  
a coming of the angel patriarchs.

Jennifer Anderson  
Mechanicsburg, PA  
Naomi Duprat

## Fear

Like a wren,  
My heart beats fast when I waver on a wire,  
Torn between flight and dignity  
As the crows flock and settle about me.  
Should I flee?  
Or stay  
And stare forward with pinheads of obsidian,  
Fluffing my feathers into  
A puffed cotton ball of boldness.

Pamela Hickey  
Bedford, PA  
Bedford High Scho  
Michael Hemcane

## Shell

I find a piece of shell on the beach, on the line of broken  
reeds and glass where it hurts to walk barefoot. It is slightly  
concave and cream colored, with small cracks on the outside,  
like the skin on my grandmother's hands. A fish spine is fossi-  
lized in the center, and I think of the flesh and skin of that fish  
falling away and giving up this backbone. When I see the rough,  
sharp barnacles living in the crevice of the shell, I decide to  
throw it back.

The beach that I go to is in the exclusive part of town, with  
houses on the water and BMWs in every driveway. No one  
swims; it is a walking beach, or a stone-skipping beach. On a  
clear day, I can see Connecticut across the Long Island Sound.  
The water only looks blue and clear when the sky is perfect. I'm  
always worried that I'll get a parking ticket while I'm walking on  
the beach, because there are NO PARKING signs up and down  
the narrow road. The police never come, though, at least not  
while I'm there.

I sit on the chain of rocks that stretches out to the water  
and close my eyes. My mother's face shows up in shadow  
behind my black lids. I can't picture her in a hospital at all, much  
less a place for people who are mentally ill. I packed her bag last  
night, tucked a small notebook between the t-shirts and paja-  
mas. When I told Dad that Mom might want to shave her legs,  
he mumbled something about the hospital not allowing sharp  
objects. As I open my eyes, the sun comes from behind a cloud,  
and I see spots. Feeling dizzy, I walk over to the car and wipe  
the sand off my feet.

When I get home, I eat takeout chicken with my father and

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sister. Barbecue sauce stays under my nails even after I do the dishes. We talk about doing the laundry and Dad says he'll bring it in to the laundromat near his office. My sister doesn't like the idea of having her underwear washed in a public place; I don't think Mom would like it either. But two weeks worth of dirty laundry is piled up in the basement, and it's not going to wash itself.

I go upstairs to do my homework. The sun toasts the off-white walls of my room as I sit at the old pine writing table facing the corner. I'm trying to focus on my Biology book, when the electronic chirp of the phone sends a shock through my body. I pick up after the second ring, but my father already has it, and I hang up quietly, so my grandma can't hear. My stomach burns and somehow I think that ice cream will soothe it.

As I pass through the empty living room, I hear my father on the phone in the kitchen. His forced, monotone voice assures my grandma that we're all okay. The thought of my grandmother bustling around the house and taking care of us is suffocating; I would rather eat takeout food every night and have my clothes washed at the anonymous laundromat.

I know my father hears me slip out the front door, but I don't tell him where I'm going. The car starts on the third try, after I pump the gas. I turn on the radio, and, surprisingly, it works. I don't like the music, but if I try to change the station, I might lose the signal altogether.

I park in front of the train station in a space reserved for

taxis. The all night deli smells of hotdogs, and I scrounge around the dirty freezer until I find an ice cream pop covered with rich chocolate. The old Filipino woman behind the counter tells me that I'll have to buy the Village Voice if I want to read it, so I put the newspaper down and pay for the ice cream with nickels and quarters from the car.

When I get back to the car, the radio has lost its weak signal and begun to crackle, so I just turn it off, and the antenna goes down with a slow whir. Cold wind blows through the car windows as I turn from Main Street onto the Boulevard. I need to find another shell and head for the beach once more.

I've never been here alone at night. I park where the road curves, as far into the bushes as I can get. Barefoot, I creep through the tall grasses and step onto the sand. It's a purple night with lavender clouds, and the water is dark, illuminated only by the lights of Connecticut.

By the seaweed-lined water's edge, I find another broken shell. I pretend it is a piece of the one that I threw back this afternoon. Even in the lifeless Sound, the water breeds continuity; fragments of the same shell may be scattered all over the world. I wonder if a shell can be melded back together. I wonder when my mother will come home.

Jessica Graham  
Port Washington, NY  
Carol Nesbit

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