

S a d d l e b a c k C o l l e g e
L i t e r a r y J o u r n a l



W A L L

WALL

A Literary Journal

**Volume Two Number One Spring 2002
Saddleback Community College
Mission Viejo, California**

Copyright © 2002 by Saddleback College
2 3 4 5 6 7 First Edition 7 6 5 4 3 2

Text is set in Times New Roman 10pt
Cover photography is printed in four process color

Printed in the United States of America

Wall: A Literary Magazine is published annually by
the students of Saddleback College for the students
of Saddleback College.

All Rights Reserved. Reproduction whether in
whole or part, without the written permission of
Saddleback Community College, is strictly
prohibited. All enclosed works are copyright of
their respective author(s) and upon publication
copyright reverts to the original author(s).

All communication should be directed to:
Saddleback Community College
C/O Liberal Arts Division
28000 Marguerite Pkwy
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
(949) 582-4500

<http://www.saddleback.edu>

South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees:
Dorothy Fortune, Thomas A. Fuentes, David Lang, Marcia Milchiker,
Nancy M. Padberg, Donald P. Wagner, John S. Williams
Steven McCarty - Student Trustee
Dr. Raghu P. Mathur - SOCCCD Chancellor
Dixie Bullock - President - Saddleback College

Wall

Editor-In-Chief

Chad Hogan

Copy Editor

Kathryn Schulz

Assistant Copy Editor

Leah Ramsey

Layout Editor

David Osborne

Poetry Editor

Albert Cordray

Personal Essay Editor

Marlene Hickey

Short Story Editor

Duncan Jacobson

Art Editor

Galena Segal

Faculty Advisor

Amy Ahearn

Contributing Editors:

Samantha Higgins, Steven McPhail, Ian McWhorter,
Brian Petyo, Krystle SaHagun

Cover Photography: Frank Kuck

Wall is a student-produced literary magazine of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. We accept entries embracing all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas presented in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the SOCCCD Board of Trustees. They are solely those of the authors. With the exception of the Writing Contest section, the general submissions to the Wall are reviewed, selected, and edited solely by the students on the staff of the magazine.

The Wall staff will be accepting submissions for its next publication during the 2002-2003 school year. For more information on how you can submit your own work, please visit our website at www.saddlebackwall.com.

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

* * *

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

Introduction

It is with great pleasure that I present our second volume of the Wall Literary Journal. Founded in 2001, this journal promotes student expression through its publication of outstanding creative writing, photography, and artwork. All Saddleback students enrolled during the 2001-2002 school year are eligible to submit to this journal.

In October we were honored to have the Community College Humanities Association name the Wall as one of the “Best New Magazines” from 2001 (Honorable Mention). The award speaks to the value of student writing on our campus, and even more importantly, to the quality of the work set forth by our staff. This publication would not be possible without the team of highly dedicated students who make up the staff of the magazine. From managing the publicity early in the Spring semester to reading and ranking the entries, from editing to designing the layout, from arranging the printing and correcting the proofs to, at long last, distributing the book, these students commit themselves to an intense working semester. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with such talented students over the last two years.

In addition to recognizing the many students involved with this publication, we extend special thanks to the following people: the Liberal Arts Division, especially Dean Kevin O’Connor; the English Department, especially Chairperson Shelba Robison; the Fine Arts Department; the Emeritus Institute, especially Pam Turner and Mary Jane Roberts; the Associated Student Government, for providing valuable financial support; and Vice President Don Busché, for providing much needed encouragement.

And finally, a very special thanks is due to Tableau Publishing of Dana Point, California, whose generous support over the last two years has helped breathe life into the Wall.

Amy Ahearn -
Wall Faculty Advisor

Table Of Contents

Personal Essays

Frances Costikyan	<i>Encounter at the Generation Gap</i>	21
Humera Mufti	<i>Virtual Reality</i>	27
Diane Marcus	<i>Kaleidoscope</i>	32
Fabiola Alatorre	<i>Meeting My Father</i>	37
Betty Laskey	<i>Lessons Learned</i>	43
Geraldine Murphy	<i>A California Afternoon</i>	45
Laura Harvey	<i>Poached Eggs</i>	58

Poetry

Lily Ashbrook	<i>Upon Impact</i>	18
Marilyn Mitchell	<i>Earthbound</i>	25
Melissa Savlov	<i>Paper Doll People</i>	31
Phyllis Bricker	<i>Hanging Out</i>	36
Valerie Foster	<i>Eloquence</i>	42
Frances Costikyan	<i>Love Song</i>	46
Todd Johnson	<i>Night Silences Windows</i>	51
William Osgood	<i>Another Medium</i>	52
Candace Ryan	<i>Hotel Bohemian</i>	60
Matthew Geldin	<i>Nails</i>	62

Short Stories

Stan Brin	<i>Past the Bottom of My Wife's Purse</i>	9
William Osgood	<i>The Intoxication of Love</i>	15
Chavva Olander	<i>A Tale of Misguided Productivity</i>	39
Scott Averyt	<i>The Working Man's Dilemma</i>	48
A. B. Jacobs	<i>God's Work</i>	53
Casey McEachern	<i>The Failed Revolutionist</i>	63

Staff Submissions

Albert Cordray	<i>Sooner</i>	105
Marlene Hickey	<i>Original Sin</i>	106
Samantha Higgins	<i>Disappearing Act</i>	109
Duncan Jacobson	<i>Tiny Soldier</i>	110
Steven McPhail	<i>Fly Away</i>	113
Ian McWhorter	<i>Jacob's Mule</i>	117
Brian Petyo	<i>Personal Best</i>	119
Leah Ramsey	<i>Lucky Strikes</i>	121
Krystle SaHagun	<i>Mini Skirt</i>	123
Kathryn Schulz	<i>What More Do Women Want?</i>	124
Galena Segal	<i>A Struggle</i>	127

Past the Bottom of My Wife's Purse

Stan Brin

It was my day off, I didn't want to go shopping, and I had an excuse, so I used it.

"Honey--I can't go to the store!" I shouted from inside the house. "Lisa took my keys!"

This seemed to me to be a perfectly reasonable extenuation, but my wife disagreed.

"Take mine instead!" she shouted right back, from her perch on the patio. I was defeated. Another afternoon off I wouldn't get.

"Where are they?"

"Where they always are," she said without looking up. "In my purse!" She turned the page of her magazine.

I pretended to be dumb. "Where is the purse?"

"Where it always is!"

Argument over. I was licked. I went to the breakfast room, to that small counter between two sets of built-in cabinets--one for out of date telephone directories, the other for out of date canned goods--and found her purse sitting above a pile of expired coupons and untried recipes. The purse was a big one, this year's model, made of beige cloth and brown leather, flat on the bottom, and about a foot deep.

I didn't know what to do. Men don't like to pick up women's purses. They don't match our self-image. They are "her" thing, the bearer of feminine secrets. To touch one is to pry, and real men mind their own business.

But mostly, purses are full of stuff, endless, relentless accumulations of stuff. New stuff, old stuff, stuff whose purpose no man could ever fathom, all jumbled together and wrapped in leather, to be carried about--everywhere.

I didn't want to touch it, but orders were orders. I looked inside and saw her wallet, her makeup kit, her address book, a rumpled mass of tissue paper, and a pack of gum, but I couldn't see her keys. Damned keys.

I could dump the whole mess out, but that would make an even bigger mess, and that simply wasn't done, not in our house. I took a deep breath and stuck my hand inside. Down past the wallet and the makeup kit, down between the address book and a rumpled mass of tissue paper, I pressed my arm--no keys.

My hand moved left to right, back and forth. I could feel the silk lining of

the purse, but no keys. I still hadn't touched bottom . . . I took another breath, and pressed as far as I could . . .

Suddenly, there was nothing. My arm was inside the purse, all the way to the elbow and past. I wiggled my fingers a bit and found something, small metal things on a ring. Keys!

I yanked them up through my wife's precious detritus and there they were . . . or rather, there they weren't: they were keys, but they weren't my wife's keys. They weren't anyone's keys. Long, flat, and narrow, each had a metal contact point at the end.

The family picture stuck inside a tiny plastic case at the end of a key chain was not that of my family, or, for that matter, of anyone born between the orbits of Mars and Venus.

There was a button on a corner of the frame, which I pressed. The family came alive, waved, and said something in a language that no human voice could imitate.

I wondered how the thing worked. It had no moving parts that I could see, but it was none of my business; it wasn't mine. I stuck it back inside the purse, pushed it down past the wallet and the makeup kit, as far as I possibly could, all the way up to my armpits . . . I felt a tug, and the key chain disappeared from my grasp. I suppressed an urge to pull the hand back, but there was the slight matter of my wife's keys and of going to the store. I waved my fingers, and presently, a ring went around my pinkie. I shook the finger and smiled. It felt like my wife's key ring. What do you know . . .

Suddenly, there was something else. Something was pressed into my palm, and my fingers found themselves wrapped around it, something round and very, very cold.

I pulled my hand back through the purse, and--there they were, my wife's keys, and attached to them, our family photo and her little black car door opener.

Wrapped inside my fingers was a bottle, ice cold, with a label I couldn't read, but whose purpose was unmistakable--a token of gratitude for returning his wife's keys. I fiddled with the tab at the top of the bottle and poured the contents into a glass.

It was beer, sort of. Really good beer, bitter and earthy, but clearly not made from barley or hops. Made from . . . something, probably the fruit-like thing printed on the label.

Well, every guy knows what must be done when a bud buys him a round: I went to the fridge, found a bottle of Steiner's Private Reserve, and pushed it down. It was probably not as cold as the fellow on the other side liked his, but

he took it and a package of beef jerky.

He sent me a "something" filled with a twisted meaty thing, and we sent each other another beer, which I decided to save for later. After all, I was going shopping.

"I thought we agreed, you were going to the store!" my wife yelled.

"Yes, ma'am!"

I grabbed a piece of note paper, thought quickly, and drew an image of the current time on my wall clock, big and little hand, and an arrow pointing to another image of a clock, this one set for midnight.

I stuck it through and found myself fumbling with another piece of paper. I pulled it out, and there was an image of a clock, big hand and small, and an arrow pointing to what looked like six-thirty, but the meaning was clear, even if this guy's clock was upside down.

I put the second "beer" in a paper bag in the back of the refrigerator and went to the store. That night, well before midnight, I went downstairs and laid out a group of materials that must be sent to my new friend at the bottom of the purse.

At the appointed time, midnight sharp, I shoved a bottle of single malt scotch to the bottom. A bottle of a vile looking blue-green stuff emerged. It certainly didn't taste vile, however. Nor did a fat, greasy, triangular concoction that was brought forth in exchange for a "Super Grande Double Chicken and Cheese El Hot-Hot" purchased at the Burrito Barn. The fat, greasy, triangular object was tasty in a pleasantly painful way.

So it went, night after night, my hand invaded the purse of beige cloth and brown leather. I gave my doppelgänger, my alien twin, a pound of dark roast coffee; he gave me a similar amount of ground--something very good at keeping eyes open. I gave him family pictures; I received the same, only his were fully three-dimensional.

These guys knew something we didn't, and I was sure that we knew something that they didn't.

I gave him something that I just knew he could really use--packages of heirloom seeds. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, corn, a dozen varieties of each. Cherokee purples, chocolate bells, bush vines, all the result of centuries of patient gardening and breeding for size, color, and taste.

The packets that I received, well, there were no words for them. I would think of some, certainly, before the next county fair.

The next step was harder and cost some money. I bought a portable video player, a transformer, and a bunch of used videos--classics, stuff for learning the English language, whatever I could find--a variable voltage adapter, some

batteries, and a voltmeter. I made some instructions on how to adapt it to his own current. And I got the same thing right back, including a version of "Guns of Navaronne" with a cast of really blue people. Mine had a better screen than his, but his had a much smaller, much more compact disk format.

The old technology bug got to me. There might be something of mutual interest in this friendship across time, space, or stellar plane.

I decided to do something that would make our fortunes, his and mine: I bought a brand new pocket computer, top of the line, complete with that commercial operating system we all hate. I would stick it through and get back another, with an operating system that would break that horrible monopoly, and perhaps see to my kids' college education.

Only that evening, when I went to the breakfast room to find the purse, it wasn't there. Instead, parked in the usual spot on the small counter between two sets of built-in cabinets, one for brooms, the other for canned goods, was this brand new thing made of a patent-leather-like material, rounder but not quite as deep.

I picked up the pocket computer and stuck it down past the wallet and the makeup kit, down between the address book and a crumpled mass of tissue paper . . . and hit bottom. Hard, flat, bottom. I dumped the contents of the purse onto the kitchen table, and there, at the bottom of the purse was . . . the bottom of the purse. Nothing else. A disaster. The Gate of the Purses was closed.

I rummaged through the trash and the pile of stuff in the garage next to the washing machine, and finally found it in my wife's closet, only there was no opening at the bottom, just a bottom. Not a good sign.

That night I went downstairs and carefully dumped the contents of my wife's new purse into the old beige-cloth-and-brown-leather model. There wasn't as much stuff in the new purse, no-half empty gum packages, half-used tissue papers or bent paper clips. I put back what there was and stuck my hand inside, with a bottle of Steiner's Private Reserve.

No bottom. Good. My arm went down, down, down. Would my alien clone be waiting? Suddenly my hand contained another bottle.

I pulled it out. A different beverage, made from something I hadn't tasted before, and the writing on the side was completely different. I pulled an old family photo from a drawer and stuffed it down. I received another photo, but this one was not the blue family, but a mottled-green one, with ridges on their heads.

I could imagine my poor blue twin, back on his blue world, looking at a photo of purple people, and wondering what to do next. I had nothing against the mottled-green guy with ridges on his head, but he was certainly thinking

exactly what I was--how do we fix this?

I did the only thing I could do. I rolled up some tissue paper, emptied two packages of gum, and bent some paper clips. I stuck my hand through and pulled out a third type of alien beer. This calls for fine-tuning, I thought. I opened a lipstick, smeared a streak along one of the tissues, and stuck it back in.

This had better work, I thought--I was running out of beer. For the third time, I stuck my hand down into the purse, and this time I received the bottle with the fruit on the label. My blue friend's beer. From across the galaxies, or those other planes of existence upon which all my alien twins lived, I heard a massive, shared, sigh of relief.

A nebula of middle-aged males, until then stuck on the shady sides of their careers, were about to change the universe.

Vegas

Gretchen Radzwill



The Intoxication of Love

William Osgood

It was nearing the end of summer, many moons ago, when I found myself living with an assortment of students, artists, musicians, and one working slob in an antiquated two-story Victorian on Chestnut Street in eastside Santa Cruz. Our house was not what you would call the pride of the neighborhood (a peaceful tree-lined affair of well-kept family homes), but it wasn't as if we cared. It was funky, it was cool, it had high ceilings and hardwood floors, and my share of the rent was a whopping hundred-ten dollars a month. It had no computers or cable access, but since marijuana had recently jumped to thirty-five dollars an eighth, such were the sacrifices we were willing to make. In any case, who had time to watch television or visit chat rooms with all the dedicated drinking and smoking going on? We all knew that drugs and alcohol were the true cornerstones of meaningful social interaction.

My good friends and housemates, Rob and Steve, both talented music students who spent their days smoking pot, playing guitar, and waiting for their big break, had grown up with two of the musicians in a locally popular post-punk band out of San Francisco called Jimmy's Problem. Jimmy and the various members of his band used to come down to Santa Cruz on occasion to party, hang out, and reminisce about old times. One Friday night in early September, Steve, Rob, and I had nothing better to do, so we drove up to the city to check out our friends' latest gig at a club on Broadway.

It was during the crowded after-party at Jimmy's gothic abode that I first met Stella. She lived just upstairs and couldn't help but hear the cacophony of screams, laughter, and breaking glass, so down she came to join our drunken debacle. I was loitering near the door with two others as she let herself in. We took notice of one another straight away. There was chemistry in the air. I'm not sure exactly which chemicals they were, but they were definitely starting to have an effect. She was absolutely beautiful with her chestnut hair, slim shapely figure, and big open smile. She had apparently just returned home from an evening out on the town. Her black sequined dress was low-cut and stunning, and she appeared as wild and inebriated as the rest of us. Jimmy, having once carried a torch for Stella himself, had long since told me all about her.

Somehow though, seeing her and her incredible legs for the first time in my increasingly liquid state, I managed to selectively forget that he had said she was more than just a little wacko.

Strangely, I remember not a single word that was spoken between us, but vividly recall the gaslight chandelier reflected in her softly swimming brown eyes, as well as the tone and nature of our conversation as we helped kill off the bottle of Jack Daniel's that was being passed around. With the help of those ethereal spirits, we became intimate fairly quickly and before long I felt her sensuously soft lips on mine and tasted her sweet, whiskey-sharp tongue in my mouth. One thing led to another, as they often do, and gradually our surroundings seemingly began to dematerialize in a swirling mist. Unaware of all else, molecules and galaxies converged and dissolved as the Universe coalesced and collapsed in the eternal moment of our undulating embrace.

By the morning's first light, reality slowly returning through the haze, we both realized how badly we needed to shower and decided we'd take our venture upstairs to her place. The thing was: much like us, Jimmy's place was almost completely wrecked, and we couldn't find her keys anywhere. We couldn't even find our clothes! No matter though; after all, when did lack of clothing ever dampen the enthusiasm of a budding romantic entanglement? So it was we found ourselves, standing in the early morning light, naked and laughing outside her front door, unsure what to do. It appeared neither one of us could fit through the tiny mail slot, so we decided I would gallantly kick the door in for her, which I managed to do, only not so gallantly, as it took four or five tries and woke up half the neighborhood before the doorframe finally split in two with a crash. Ah, 'twas a noble sight, to be sure. We quickly jammed the door shut before running up the stairs and into the warmth of the shower. Between bottles of wine, fits of sleep and more showers, we continued our now somewhat less frenzied acquaintance throughout the long holiday weekend.

A few short months later, after several eagerly anticipated visits and finding a job on nearby Potrero Hill, I happily moved in with her. We got along marvelously, though we probably drank more wine than we did water. She was particularly fond of two California vintages: red and pink. I had no objection. To me it was like heaven with a hangover. I found myself falling in love with Stella. We were surprisingly compatible. We liked many of the same things, including eclectic Japanese films, slow meandering walks in Alta Vista Park, and exotic foods like passion fruit and onion-fried rubber bands. We especially enjoyed sharing long baths. She was great fun to be with and had a sweet disposition. She was also generally responsible, had a good job, and enjoyed reading the paper snuggled on the sofa with me on Sunday mornings.

Every payday though, she disappeared psychologically and in her place emerged a paranoid, delusional fiend who heard imaginary gunshots and barricaded the front door at the faint sound of a distant siren. I discovered, to my considerable dismay, that she took part in a long-standing tradition, among

a small group of her coworkers, of pooling a portion of their paychecks and purchasing a pile of freebase cocaine which they smoked all night and into the morning in a little glass water pipe, arguing all the while over whose was the most efficient technique. To make matters worse, the more Stella smoked, the less it seemed to her that she was liked, or that she was among friends. As the night wore on, she began to feel that everyone in the group was against her, and was secretly making fun of her behind her back. Anytime someone laughed aloud, she felt that she was the butt of the joke, and her eyes flashed accusingly from one person to the next in resentful anger.

Her friends were so whacked-out themselves by this time that their erratic behavior only reinforced her paranoia. She was even convinced there was a Judas in the group who had spilled the beans to their superiors. This person was supposedly in silent contact with a S.W.A.T. team, which was waiting outside to break the door down at any moment. Of course, this was only in her head, along with the cocaine, but there was little hope of telling her that. When I finally tried, she said, "See, even you think I'm crazy!" It was a sad, self-fulfilling pronouncement. Regrettably, I found there was nothing I could do to dissuade her from this bizarre and pointless behavior.

Every two weeks it was the same routine. My feelings for her quickly started to deteriorate. It was a painful process. Even our lovemaking seemed like a desperate attempt to salvage something that had only begun to fully bloom. After a while, she even stopped changing the sheets. In all honesty, I had enough issues with myself at the time. If only her pay schedule had coincided with the cycles of the moon, I'd have thought I was living with a modern day werewolf.

Two ultimatums and two paychecks later I moved back to the comfort and relative stability of our conservative bastion in Santa Cruz. I didn't miss the wine so much, but I did miss the long baths. And while I honestly believed at the time that social drinking was a great way to meet someone, it proved a fairly disastrous way to get to know someone. Maybe if I hadn't had three sheets to the wind through so much of our short relationship, I'd not so easily have confused lust with what passes for love in these troubled times. Maybe I'd have seen the warning signs a good deal sooner.

Thinking back now, so many years later, I wonder whatever became of my onetime partner and friend. Did she finally pull herself together? Or is she perhaps a bag lady of some kind, shuffling along at this very moment with a shopping cart full of aluminum cans and empty Thunderbird bottles, mumbling to herself on her way to the nearest recycling center to get just enough cash for a forty-ounce and a five dollar hit? As the sun is my witness, I hope never to know.

Upon Impact

Lily Ashbrook

I saw her
eyes big behind the wheel.
Did she see?

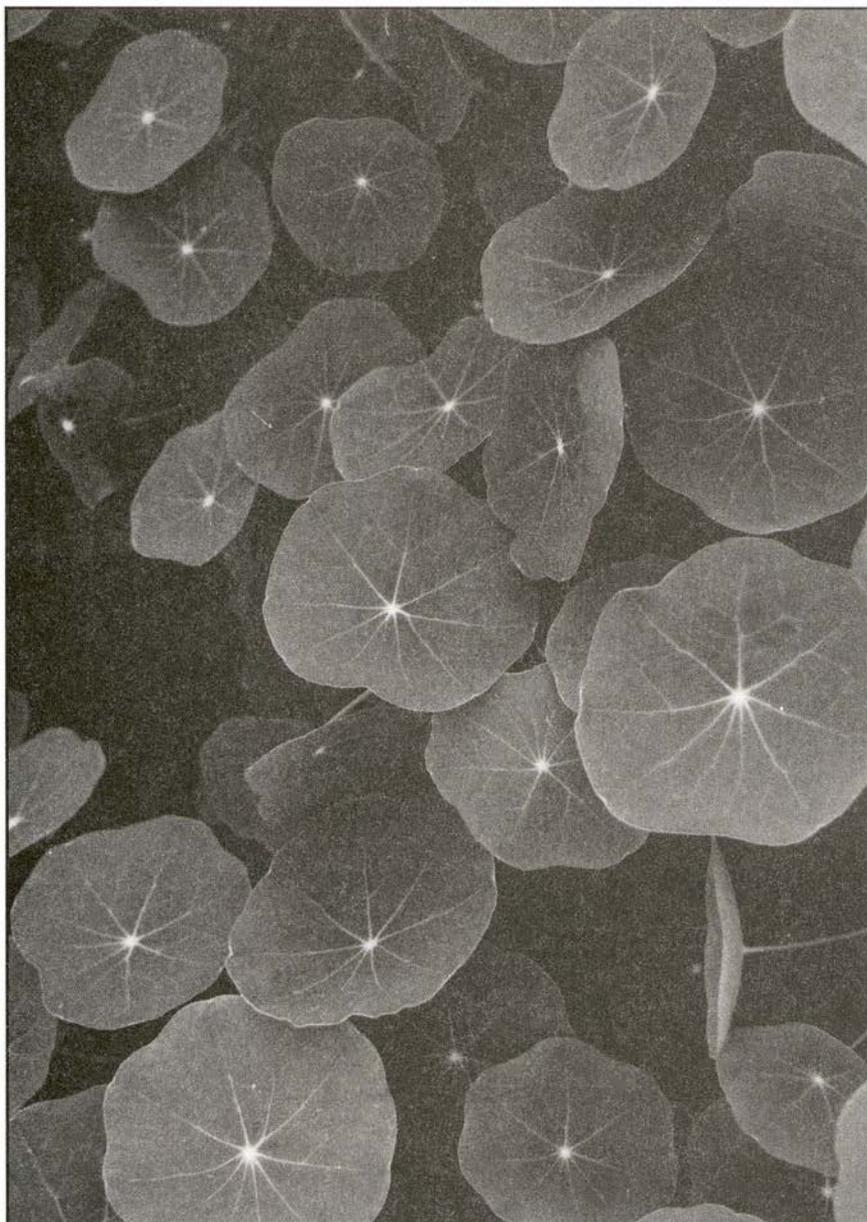
In the seconds that I can't remember,
seconds we forget for our own sake,
I collapsed into those who tiptoe
on church spires
while we walk below.
Faint echoes sounded inside me,
as my spirit laughed with them, even as great
silver drops welled up inside
because I was not afraid.

Still I don't remember
those seconds where divine mingled
with the pains of the world
as the blood wiped the dirt
 off my face as it ran down.

Seconds I can't remember,
seconds I will not forget.

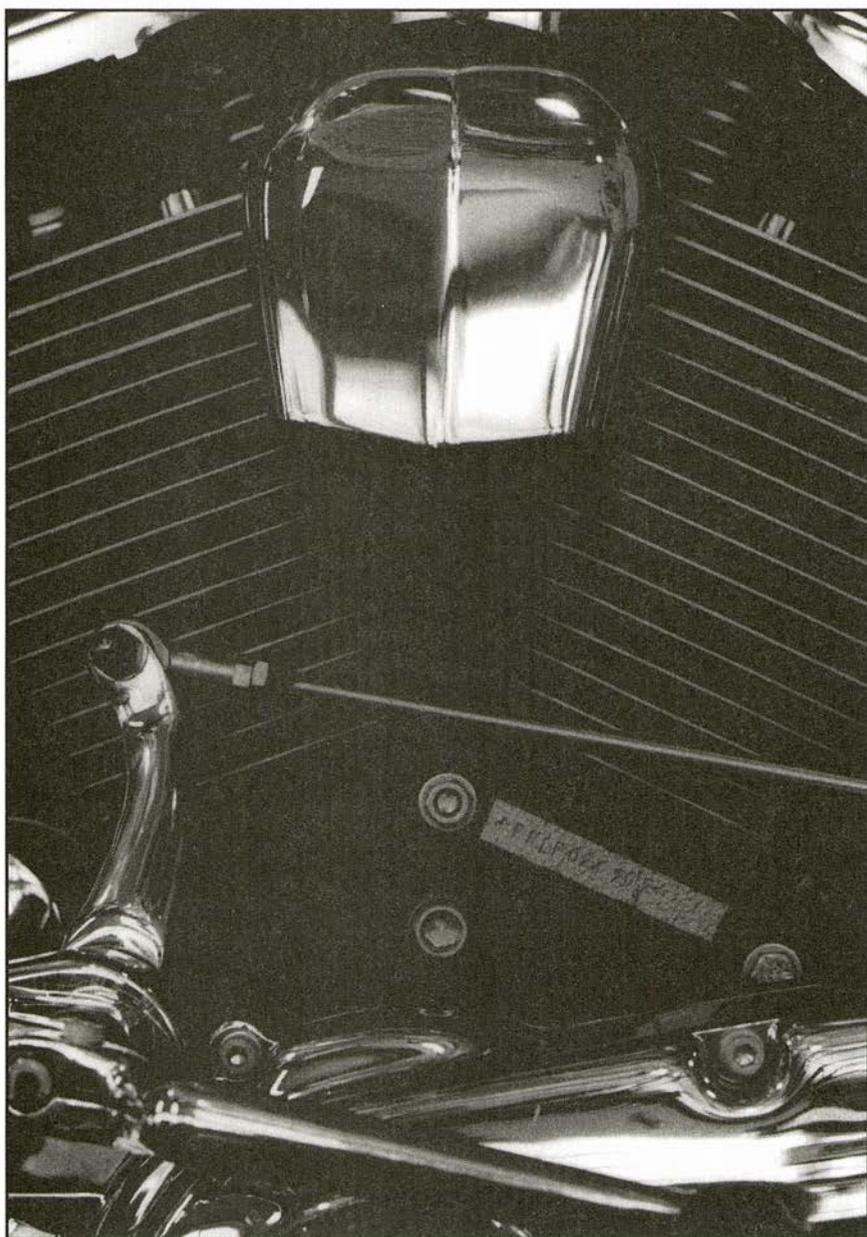
Untitled

Joshua Ballinger



Chrome

Jodie Nopper



Encounter at the Generation Gap

Frances Costikyan

When we lived in New York City, my dog Victoria and I generally took our morning walk along the river on Manhattan's Upper East Side. I was a divorced "woman of an uncertain age," and Victoria was a ten-year-old black woolly middle-sized Puli (a Hungarian sheep dog) with just a little gray in her tail.

One sunny February morning we were out early. We followed our usual route along 88th street towards the river and headed into the park at the entrance near Gracie Mansion, the official residence of New York City's mayor.

The city had been engulfed by snow the night before. Every tree and bush was frosted with white and shimmered in the sunlight. The few footprints in the snow left by those out earlier tantalized Victoria. She ached to be free of the leash--to run and gather the latest canine news imprinted in the glades of white.

But I kept the dog tethered until we had turned south, crossed a small bridge, and were safely out of sight of the Mansion guardhouse. It is against the law to walk a dog off the leash in the park and the fines are serious.

We had the park to ourselves at first, but once over the bridge we spotted another dog, a Wheaton terrier, and its person walking towards us from the direction of Doctor's Hospital. Victoria pranced towards the oncoming dog, barking furiously. The terrier's mistress, a woman in her early twenties, looked worried.

"Girl or boy?" she asked.

"Girl," I answered, knowing the information would be reassuring. Girl dogs rarely fight with other girl dogs and never with the boys.

"Oh, good," said the Wheaton's owner, unleashing her dog. "He likes girls."

I let Vicky free too and we watched our pets circle and smell each other.

"Her name's Victoria," I volunteered. It always helps to start a conversation with another dog's owner to cover any embarrassment either of you might feel as the dogs become acquainted.

"What a nice name," the Wheaton's person remarked, as if reading my mind. Pointing to her dog she introduced him. "His name is Hawkeye."

"Hawkeye!" I crowed. "How wonderful. The fictional character is one of my favorites."

"Mine too," Hawkeye's owner replied.

"Hawkeye is a much better name for a dog than Deerslayer," I continued.

"You can't imagine how delighted I am to meet someone who's fond of Hawkeye."

"My husband and I fell in love with the dog at first sight," said my companion. "He was such a friendly, good-natured puppy. When we thought of the name Hawkeye, it stuck right away."

"I'd come to believe I was the last person on earth who still loved James Fenimore Cooper and his *Leather-Stocking Tales*," I exclaimed. "Though it shouldn't surprise me there are so few of us, considering the way young people are introduced to Cooper these days. Like my nephew who's a freshman in college. He's taking a course in the romantic novel and they're studying James Fenimore Cooper. My nephew tells me they've been assigned *The Prairie* to read."

"Can you believe it? Not *The Deerslayer* or *The Last of the Mohicans*. Not even *The Spy*. None of the Hawkeye novels at all. Even so devoted a Cooper fan as I am will admit *The Prairie* is dull."

"What's worse," I went on, "as background the professor gave them Mark Twain's two nasty essays on Cooper to read. I thought kids were supposed to learn to think for themselves in college. How can they think for themselves about James Fenimore Cooper if they are introduced to him by Mark Twain and *The Prairie*?"

As the dogs ducked in and out of a clump of bushes pouncing on each other, I recalled yet another bit of Cooper lore. "Did you know that Jules Verne was also a fan of James Fenimore Cooper?" I took my companion's quizzical look to mean she was unaware of a tie between the 18th century American novelist and the 19th century French writer. "When Verne was about eighteen years old, he and a cousin visited America. The first thing the two boys did was run around in the forests of upstate New York calling each other 'Hawkeye' and 'Uncas.'"

"Really," Hawkeye's person replied, her bemusement finally penetrating my enthusiasm.

"My son told me that," I muttered, confused.

"Whatdaya know," mumbled Hawkeye's mistress.

Gazing at the romping dogs, I was torn between wanting to allow their fun to continue and my readiness to end the outing. "I think it's time for us to go in," I said gently.

Vicky was now standing on her hind legs with her front paws around Hawkeye's neck as she whimpered in his left ear. Hawkeye was twisting gently this way and that, apparently trying to escape. "What's so important Victoria is determined he hears it?" I wondered. "Or is she just tired?" The pose looked

affectionate, but it also prevented the younger dog from giving chase.

"Hawkeye!" his mistress called.

With a gentle reluctance the Wheaten broke free and loped over to have his leash clipped back on his collar. "It certainly has been interesting talking to you," said Hawkeye's person. "Actually, we named our dog after the Alan Alda character in *MASH*."

As Victoria and I strode north towards home, in my mind's ear I could hear the younger woman telling her husband about her morning's encounter in the park. "You wouldn't believe how the old lady rattled on," she was probably saying. "She couldn't stop talking about some hoary old American novelist. It was all I could do to keep a straight face."

"We're a fine pair," I growled ruefully at Victoria, who was now lagging behind, her fatigue pacing us both. "Neither of us knows when to shut up."

"By the way," I added, giving my dog's lead a sharp tug. "What were you so busy whispering in Hawkeye's ear, anyway? Every damn thing you know about James Fenimore Cooper?"

Stormy
Chelsea Grimes



Earthbound

Marilyn Mitchell

Sometimes

on warm summer evenings

when ephemeral breezes

summon

I dance beneath the street lamp

in luminous shadow

to an internal symphony

with ethereal fireflies.

Fluttering, quivering, hovering

together

we celebrate life

our essence

enjoined

in our shared

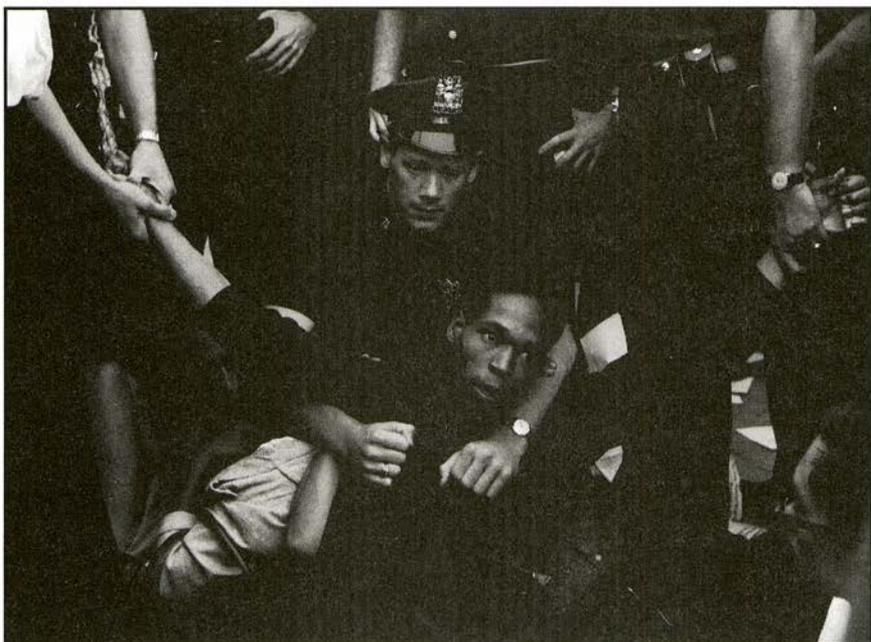
parallel universe.

I trip on a wayward shoelace

and fall over my tennis shoe

but the fireflies keep dancing.

Retrospect
Robert Greger



Virtual Reality

Humera Mufti

Every time I go through the process, it seems more and more like a religious ritual. I sit in front of the machine and throw the switch. Electricity flows, lights blink, circuits are checked. The clank of the hard disk is heard as it searches for commands and information. The screen begins to glow and the picturesque scenery of paradise appears as the desktop image. After a few mouse clicks, I am in the midst of a paradox which blends the technological with the human. In an instant I am connected to virtually millions of people, a concept that never fails to overwhelm me. In a world of hard disk crashes, viruses, stalkers, unwanted porn, and screen names with obscure genders, I can safely say I've had enjoyable experiences online and have learned some tricks of the game along the way. The ramifications of having relationships, whether they are romantic or otherwise, can often be humorous. Astigmatism and carpal tunnel syndrome aside, I would like to touch upon some of the charms and titillations exclusive to the Internet environment that seem to have seduced millions into the dimension of "virtual reality," often leading to comedic consequences.

Considering everyone goes through the phase of assuming the "Internet newbie" status, it is natural to blunder one's way through chat-rooms and instant messages initially. This is a purely transient phase, sort of like the occurrence of winter dandruff, and should not be fretted over. However, a few pointers would be in place here. In the quest of transforming oneself from the mundane, pre-occupied, flesh and blood, smaller-than-life person one really is into an unforgettable online personality, great thought should be invested in the creation of the ultimate screen name. During the brainstorm, keep one eye on the bottom line: To be or not to be a virtual potted plant. (If you answered in the affirmative, further reading is strongly recommended, namely, "Cyber Flirt: How to Attract Anyone, Anywhere, on the World Wide Web" by Susan Rabin.)

Obvious no-no's are incorporating your social security number into your screen name, or calling yourself "Crudeman" if you work for a petroleum company. The Internet is a great opportunity to camouflage your corny side--make use of it. However, even though the anonymity of online interaction tends to bring out the saucier side of many correspondents, there are some distinct "don'ts" that, if followed, can save one from considerable embarrassment, or worse. Do not use XXX's to fill in any space remaining after your name,

unless you want others to assume you have earned a triple or quadruple X rating. In fact, avoid inserting any words or phrases that have subtle or blatant sexual innuendos. Ask your friends to check your screen name for any off-color references you might not realize are there. Alas, I found this out for myself when my professor mistook me for a porn solicitor and sent my mail to the trash bin (virtual trash, that is) after seeing the "venus" in my SN. I was, of course, completely oblivious to the ungodly insinuation my name held, which, in reality, was an innocent product of my quirky eccentricism (Venus in "Mquirkvenus" reflected my metaphysical location, as I did not feel rooted anywhere on earth).

The most obvious limitation of chatting on a faceless Internet, void of any physical dimensions, is that all the subtle, interpersonal clues one usually receives in conventional human relationships disappear behind the monitor. The "ideal" man or woman whom you meet claiming to be twenty-two can technically be anywhere between the development of twelve-year molars and the need for dentures. Naturally, if this individual insists on the topic of his experiences in the sandbox, you can safely assume he is using either a pillow or a cereal box to elevate himself to the level of the monitor. Given the technically adept generation of tots today, anything is possible.

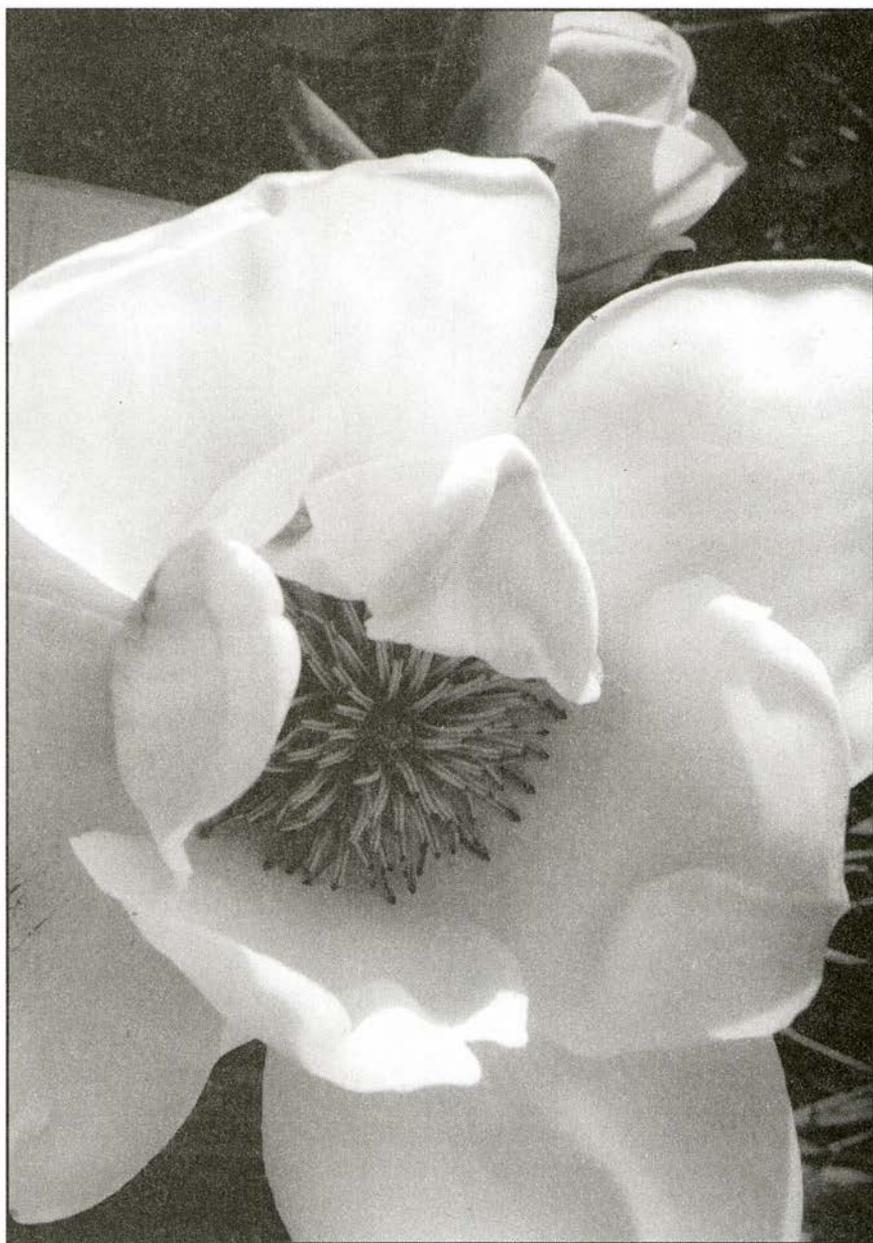
The adage, "Never judge a book by its cover" brings new dimensions to its meaning in a text-based world. In their chapter titled "Men who Make Women Want to Scream," Connell Cowan and Melvyn Kinder describe a particular female nightmare in the form of "The Pseudo-Liberated Male." Initially quite attractive to women, "this type of man interpreted the woman's movement as an invitation . . . to distort this new 'freedom' as a license to whine . . . and to express endless fears." Simply the thought of such a male individual, who "sincerely believes his emotional diarrhea is a gift" to surf loose in chat-rooms, is enough to induce an anxiety attack. Learning to separate the dross from the gold is one of the first challenges of riding the network, and through sufficient practice, one's filtering tactics become attuned to the good, the bad, and the netversation-impaired flirt.

If you are a shy flirt, one of the chronically tongue-tied, a strong-and-silent type, or simply one of those very witty men and women who know exactly the right thing to say ten minutes after the opportunity to say it has passed, you will find a home in cyberspace. As a person plagued with communication anxieties, I can personally relate to writer Meghan Daum as she describes her verbally oriented phobia: "I often call people with the intention of getting their answering machines." Although speaking has an immediacy that writing simply cannot match, one may discover his or her words having a profound effect on

others in ways never imagined possible. For some of us, “virtual reality” has been a godsend, supplying us with much-needed intellectual stimulation and an avenue through which the discovery of others has opened new prospects. For others it remains a code yet to be cracked. Nonetheless, even though we cannot help but wonder whether reality truly holds for us what we have come to imagine during enthusiastic play at the keyboard, one always has the sweet option of taking the humorous way out, a rare possibility in three dimensions.

It is now safe to shut down your computer.

Steel Magnolia
Jodie Nopper



Paper Doll People

Melissa Savlov

We wander through our lives, stairs on an escalator recycling in shadow
My breasts are bloated fruit, dangling on a tree on your way to work
Your buttocks are throw pillows on the bed I drowsily make every morning
We kiss each other good morning, good night, goodbye, good luck
With less ardor than a dog licks its mistress
And our lives are beads in a bracelet, set together incidentally
Though sometimes,
A spotlight of sun
Will catch your eye
Through the blinds
And my tongue flicks
My front teeth
In unconscious caress
Then, we are human
We are explorer and virgin soil
Endangered species first united
Kismet
A lone wind chime on a mountaintop
Our hearts are double-dutch ropes
Slapping sidewalk echoes
And we stray
From the ever-churning, though insensible conveyor belt of conventional,
 redundant fate
To breathe blossoms
And collect stardust
Until the pungency fades and the glitter disintegrates in our palms
Suddenly
Like a hiccup
Then we return to the usual automation, ease back into the static of common,
 inaudible purpose
We remember who we are, who we should be, and what we must do to get
 there
In essence, we are ourselves again, paper doll people

Kaleidoscope

Diane Marcus

We lay side by side, so close together our bodies touched. I felt his skin next to mine. His hands, once so warm, smooth, and sensuous, used to send sparks of energy rejoicing through my veins until every nerve in my body danced to his touch. Our body heat rose as we embraced. His large smile, that contagious smile, spread across his face so that his lips collided with his cheekbones and never failed to make me laugh. We were so certain of our commitment to love one another, we became arrogant in the knowledge that our lives would never be different.

Now the body next to me is cold, dry, and flaky, afraid of water. Now the corners of his mouth are frozen into a downward slope, laughter gone, replaced by fear. He lies in bed, curled, fetal position, facing his pillow, covered with a sheet or blanket to just above his shoulders, convinced he is dying of some undiagnosed form of cancer. He rises now and then for nourishment, not unlike a child who reaches out instinctively for food. Part of the day he lies awake staring at the dresser beside his bed where his glasses sometimes hang on the handle of the drawer, when he remembers to put them there. But most of the time his eyes are closed, his thoughts veiled in some obscure memory.

“What are you thinking?”

“I have cancer and I’m dying.”

“Please don’t die. I’ll miss you!”

“I’m useless.”

“Can I get you anything? Water, juice?”

“Nothing,” he replies, but his large brown eyes bulge with fear as he looks suspiciously at a fading world which daily becomes more difficult for him to grasp.

It is a cruel irony to watch my husband’s mind disappear into tangles of plaque that steal his memory of a life that provided him with an acute sense of curiosity, wanderlust, adventure, and most important, the ability to laugh.

He walked into my life the 19th of November, 1982, at 12:50 PM. After months of refusing to meet him, I finally relented, hoping my friend would then leave me alone (she was convinced that if we met we would marry). A tall, thin, long-legged man, wearing jeans with a dark blue sweater and tennis shoes, confidently approached me and with his large, soft, and gentle hands, reached out to introduce himself. Our forty-five minute lunch stretched into

nearly four hours.

“You were right,” I told my friend. “I am going to marry him.”

He became my “Shining Knight,” wrapping me within his warm, secure arms, making me feel protected. I was finally safe. He would never let me be hurt again. I would never be alone.

Our lives became an exercise in spontaneity, a “why the hell not” philosophy. At noon I said yes to dinner at Herb’s favorite fish restaurant. I didn’t know that eight hours later I would be dining in San Francisco. And I didn’t know that we would bike from Los Angeles to San Diego on the tandem bicycle he bought as a surprise. Could I have dreamed that when I agreed to have lunch with him on a Friday afternoon in November, I would be driving down the Baja coast to Cabo San Lucas in a broken-down 1969 Volkswagen camper just one month later? We had no reservations, no trip itinerary, just *The Lonely Planet* guidebooks and a need to escape into our very own fantasy. It never occurred to me that this would be only the first of many excursions into Mexico. We drove our camper on every road in every state as we celebrated Thanksgivings, New Year’s Eves, and anniversaries, arriving finally at white isolated beaches that we would accidentally wander onto. We took ferries and trains and traveled like college students, avoiding the well-known tourist spots. We drove through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec into the Yucatan through a town called La Ventana, and nearly had the only Volkswagen camper convertible.

We visited ruins, meditated at an ashram, and accidentally steered our horses across the border into Guatemala. We dared our 1980 Diesel Mercedes with 350,000 miles to get us safely past Cancun, past Tolum, and nearly into Belize when the road ended and forced us to turn back. We drove on roads that we were told were impassable. We were run over by a boat and hospitalized. We got Montezuma’s revenge, were infected by bugs, and nearly drove off the highway where the road collapsed. We were caught in rainstorms, a hurricane in Cabo, stuck at road closures, threatened by the Federales, and nearly arrested in Mexico City. But we kept going back for more and more.

We criss-crossed the United States and Canada five times, always taking the Blue Highways, and when possible staying close to water using bridges, tunnels, and ferries. National and State Parks became our backyards. During the summer of 1991 we prayed that winter would come very early to Alaska so we could be stranded in Denali Park.

We drank Chianti in Italy, ate tapas in Portugal, paella in Spain, falafel in Israel, drank beer and ate rice in China. Every moment was filled with new temptations. We had no time to waste. Perhaps we had a premonition, an intuitive sense of urgency, that the perfect world we created would have to come to

a halt.

Now I'm left with only glimmers of memory that swirl around inside my head like colored shards of glass within a kaleidoscope that burn my eyes and constrict my vision. Yet I am grateful, for these are the sensations that keep me connected to this dependent shadow of the man I love and cherish. And though the lines of time have blurred for him, for me they stand as vivid portraits of who he was, and it is only through these snapshots that he exists.

Untitled

Steven Homestead



Hanging Out

Phyllis Bricker

Bright red
It caught my eye
Beneath a well-kept crypt
A modern shiny roadster

Its owner ambled to
An empty vase
To place blossoms
In memory

A shiny can
Occupied the other hand
With soothing drink
Satisfying Thirst

What would soothe his soul
As he leaned against the cold stone
Remembering
And just hanging out?

Meeting My Father

Fabiola Alatorre

One of the most difficult days in my life was when I left my country and decided to move here to the United States. It was difficult because I came without my mother's permission and practically ran away from my house. My parents are divorced, so I never had the chance to live with my father and know him closely, especially since my dad has been living in the U.S. for a long time. Actually, my parents were married just six weeks when the conflicts started, and my mother decided to come back to Mexico before I was born.

However, the relationship that I had with my father was very limited and restricted by my mother since I was a child. On one occasion when my father came to visit me in Mexico, he invited me to a restaurant. My mother followed us. She always thought my father wanted to kidnap me or something like that, so we couldn't talk or really go wherever we wanted because obviously we had the police (my mother) behind us. Now that I am older, I can understand that maybe she was afraid that one day when I grew up, I would decide to come here and live with my father. She thought that if this happened, she would lose me; this obviously didn't happen because I still love and respect her exactly in the same manner as when I was a child. The only thing that makes me sad is that she tried to separate me from my father. I remember once she told me: "If one day you decide to live with your father, you won't see me again, do you understand?"

All the effort my mother used to separate us didn't work because when I turned eighteen years old, I thought about living with my father and knowing the man who had given me life. The curiosity was so big but I didn't want to disobey my mother; therefore, I had conflicting feelings and was confused about my resolution. At the same time, I thought I had the right to decide with which person I wanted to live. I had the right to know my father's life and how much he cared for me. I planned my escape carefully because if my mother noticed something, I was sure it would be the end of the relationship between my father and me forever.

I had the courage to come here approximately one year ago. I realized if I didn't make the decision myself to come, I wouldn't have the chance to be with my father. So I talked with my father about it. I don't remember exactly the conversation, but we talked for a while on the phone, and finally we made an arrangement that he would send me the airplane ticket. I had to leave

Guadalajara on September 7, 2000. I had exactly one week to prepare everything. My father asked me to take just the necessary belongings with me.

By that time I was studying at the University and the classes had already started. Of course it was perfect for me because the day that I had to run away, no one in my home would have notice that I hadn't gone to school. I had mixed emotions that I couldn't understand and clarify by myself. I felt happy because finally I would be with my father. I felt so scared and guilty because I didn't like the idea that I had to run away. I felt sad that I wouldn't see my mother in a long time, and perhaps she would be so angry with me that she would keep her promise and I wouldn't see her again. But the most important feeling I had was freedom, the freedom to choose my life and my destiny. I felt like a bird with huge wings, and it was the first time that I was going to fly from the home nest. Finally, I would fly toward my father and a new life.

The "important day" arrived; I had to leave my home. Before I left home, I asked my mother for a huge hug and kiss. Also, I asked her for her blessing as in Catholic tradition. She was surprised, especially because I was always in a hurry and used to forget to eat the breakfast that she made for me every morning. She couldn't understand my action but she smiled and did all that I asked. So I left my home and I made a concentrated effort because I didn't want to cry. I was so nervous, and as soon as I arrived at the airport, I had to board the airplane. When I was on the airplane, I started to cry, especially when I saw Guadalajara farther and farther away until the clouds covered the entire town.

Later, I arrived at Tijuana, Mexico, and my father was waiting for me. I felt better because I was already with him, and as if by magic, all the fear disappeared. So far, since I have been here living with my father, I have discovered that he is a wonderful man and person. I think he is one of my best friends.

Well, about my mother, thank God she didn't keep her promise and now we are closer and our relationship is better because we don't just hear each other; we prefer to "listen" and "understand" each other, something we had not done for a long time.

And finally about me, I just can tell you that I have been putting my best effort to be a better student, daughter, and woman, and so far, I have been doing well.

A Tale of Misguided Productivity

Chavva Olander

The stairs leading up to the building were gray and littered with partially finished cigarettes. I sat beside the guy who couldn't do his political science homework because he thought himself to be the Nietzschean Superman, and behind the long-bearded man who wasn't able to finish last night's English assignment because the hemispheres of his brain became tragically disconnected when he blinked too hard. Superman reeked of whiskey.

A small group gathered every morning, either here or at one of many local coffee shops, to discuss our grievances with institutions of higher learning and the injustices surrounding every aspect of our lives. On this morning, one of no particular significance, the topic for debate was marijuana. Superman had asked me what I thought of legalizing it. I found it interesting that someone who claimed to exist on a level far above the rest of humanity would find any significance in law, but telling him so might spark a genocidal rage. He often misinterpreted his idol. Ordinarily, I'd find it repulsive, or at the very least, offensive, but I got a cheap thrill out of witnessing the creation of a modern-day Hitler through the distortion of Nietzsche.

I didn't see how legalizing marijuana would have much of an effect on my existence. I tried to live outside the boundaries of society, and occasional pot smoking was necessary to relax or to maintain an image. The Christian informed us that the use of illegal substances was against God's laws. Superman informed her that God was dead. Thank you, Zarathustra. Before storming off, she gave us a brief description of the hell we were to burn in. It was nothing like Dante's version; I was thoroughly disappointed. The long-bearded man seemed irritated that the subject had moved from drugs to religion. He connected the sides of his brain long enough to say that smoking pot should be an Olympic sport. The discussion ended fairly abruptly.

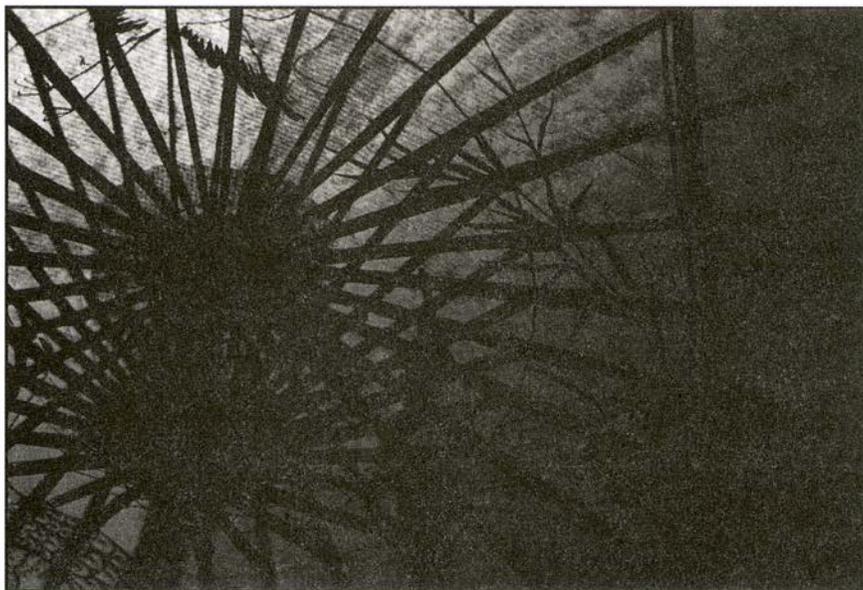
The tattoo guru stopped by to ask for notes from yesterday's trig lecture. She couldn't make it to class because a recent form of artistic expression wouldn't allow her to sit. No one had the notes. Superman transcended the boundaries of mathematics; the long-bearded cannabis fanatic had to drop the class because Timothy Leary came to him in a dream and said it would disrupt his inner balance; and I was painting my bathroom black because forest green seemed too inviting. The tattoo guru saw the animal rights activist approaching, so we checked ourselves for leather. I still maintain that activism is cultish. The

activist wasn't taking trig. She came to request that I take notes for her in history. She had to break into a laboratory to free the imprisoned animals. Of course, I told her. Anything I can do to hinder scientific development. Displeased with my inability to grasp the seriousness of the matter, she left to preach about veganism to unsuspecting carnivores. The tattoo guru went home to contemplate getting a ladybug on the inside of her ear.

Consistent with the events of every morning, the time came when it was necessary to decide whether going to class was the most practical use of our time. Superman had to re-define his morality and the long-bearded man didn't want to risk rupturing his spleen. After a bit of cogitation, I decided that I thought too much to attend philosophy, and went home to watch talk shows for the remainder of the day.

Years later, we are the same nameless, faceless, worthless individuals we were then. It's amusing to think we all had such extravagant aspirations for ourselves. Superman once told me that his name would echo throughout the entire world, striking fear into the hearts of the weak. I forget what his name was, now, but I heard he's serving time in prison for trying to kill a religious leader. The long-bearded man died when he walked off a cliff. Apparently, he was practicing for the Olympics. The Christian joined a religious cult and died eating cyanide-flavored pudding. The vegan is on trial for bombing an abortion clinic (it was right next to animal lab; she must have written down the wrong address). The tattoo guru shot herself when she ran out of room to be artistically expressive. I've been thinking.

Parasol, Gypsy Feet
Chelsea Grimes



Eloquence

Valerie Foster

Walking on sun-blazed cement,
fumes clogging your nose,
blisters on heels,
you squint through the glare,
and see a white heron
gracing the sidewalk.

It looks like the parson
you revered as a child
about to chant prayers
and sing hymn number ten.

He watches you inch
your way to his pulpit,
glides over the road on
wings two feet across,
alights--folds his wings
on a silent Amen.

Lessons Learned

Betty Laskey

As a former child of the Great Depression of the 1930s, I find myself out of step with the "disposable" philosophy of our times. While the lowly penny is no longer respected, I still bend to pick up one lying abandoned in the street. I have been obsessed with the axiom "A penny saved is a penny earned" for my entire life.

With only my husband and myself at home, I, as of this moment, have approximately nine thousand three hundred and eighty-two rubber bands of every possible size and strength at the ready should there ever be another rubber shortage. I have enough plastic bags--both the type used to wrap vegetables and the shopping bag size--to open my own supermarket. I have five hundred and thirty glass jars--from the half-cup to the half-gallon size--with at least five caps for every jar. (The jars break but the caps linger on.) My closets bulge with wire hangers, which ruin my clothes, but which I cannot throw away. I save aluminum foil used only once, plastic-wrapped toothpicks from restaurants, and string. I have clothes in every size I've ever worn from size ten to size twenty-four and a half, because they are still in fine condition. I own two four-drawer metal file cabinets crammed full of old bills and newspaper and magazine articles that I am convinced will be of service one day.

I take stationery from hotels and motels and then am too embarrassed to use it because my friends will think I'm too cheap to buy my own. I won't belabor the point. Suffice it to say, I collect things.

As I write this list I am tempted to toss all of the above possessions into the trash and start afresh. It would be so cleansing (and would give me room to start accumulating once again!). However, I am held back by an incident which took place a long time ago. It started in 1948, the first year I was married. It was right after World War II. My husband and I had been lucky enough to find a one-room apartment in over-crowded Manhattan. The apartment contained a large closet, which had once held a folding Murphy bed. On one side of the closet were shelves used for storage, and I decided a curtain would be nice to cover the clutter.

A friend invited me to a Charity Bazaar where I bought six yards of a fine quality pale-green upholstery cloth for fifty cents a yard. Total purchase: \$3. Upon examining my bargain at home, I realized it was too heavy for a curtain, but I was certain that I could find another use for it.

When we moved to a three-room apartment in the same building, I took the fabric with me. When we moved to our own home on Long Island in 1951, the six yards came with us. I was still determined it could be useful. Unfortunately, a use had not surfaced by the time we were ready to move again in 1965.

At that time my husband put his size thirteen shoe down. He emphatically declared that he would not pay a mover to haul all the things that I was saving for future use. Inasmuch as I had not found a use for the fabric in seventeen years, I had to admit that he might be justified. So, though my heart was breaking because the material was still in perfect condition, I included it with all the other treasures that I donated to the Salvation Army Thrift Shop.

Upon moving into our new home, we hired an interior decorator to help us select a color scheme. My husband wanted stereo speakers built into the living room wall. Our decorator suggested covering the speakers with a wall-matching fabric. You guessed it! The walls were pale green, exactly the color of the fabric that had been given away. It took five weeks of constant searching in shops near and far before I was able to find cloth precisely that color. I will not tell you how much it cost. It hurts me too much to remember.

“If we do not learn from our mistakes we are doomed to repeat them.” This second maxim nurtures my hoarding tendencies. What difference does it make if my drawers and cabinets are bulging with things I might never need, as long as I am convinced that someday I will be glad I saved them? Isn't my peace of mind worth a little inconvenience? Of course it is!

In the meantime, if you should need any rubber bands, plastic bags, glass jars, wire hangers, slightly used aluminum foil, plastic-wrapped toothpicks, string, or anything else I have mentioned, give me a call. You will find that I am willing to share.

A California Afternoon

Geraldine Murphy

We met in a sandbox. She was one of several young children who had gathered about me as I watched over my three-year-old granddaughter. With the aplomb of an adult, she looked at me directly and said, "Hello, I'm Alana." The formalities done away with, she settled herself comfortably by my feet and began to build "a mountain." From time to time, she waved reassuringly to the maid who sat nearby with her younger sister.

She offered without prompting, "I'm 5 and 1/3 years old and go to the Montessori school."

She was a stunningly beautiful child. So much so that I had to say to her, "You have such beautiful hair."

"Thank you," she replied, "but you know my hair isn't black and it's getting lighter. Even my Dad said the other night that it had a lot of red in it."

"Well, I think it's as lovely a color as I've ever seen," I replied.

"You know," she confessed, "I was in my room the other night and I told my Dad that I wish I had different colored skin."

"Really? Why do you wish your skin was a different color?" I asked. It was beautiful skin in texture and color, close to the color of fresh-ground cinnamon. I would have defied any artist to capture its tone and texture on canvas.

"Well, my friends at school say it is black but it's not."

"Well," I said, "nobody's skin is black or white. Look, if Rebecca, Devon, Will, and I hold our arms together, you'll see that we all have different shades of skin."

This conversation ended as abruptly as it had begun, and we were all soon lost in the challenge of "the mountain" and whether we should embed a time capsule in its side. Due to the prestige of being "the oldest one," Alana was soon lured off by several of the other children.

How in this beautiful place on a lovely September day in an enlightened California did this child get the message that she was less than other children? How had this child of an apparently affluent home, at the tender age of "five and a third," already begun the process of self-hate? I felt so helpless to offset this message. How could I mirror back to her in our brief encounter in a sandbox the singular beauty of her skin, eyes, and hair, the glory of her bright intelligence? For some, even on the golden days in the golden state, life intrudes and sends back small dark messages.

Love Song

Frances Costikyan

Catnip for a King of Beasts.
Sunshine for a whale to frolic in.
A long drink of cold water
 ending in a quick spray bath
 for a hot elephant.
These have I been.

My soul turns cartwheels
knowing the delight I give
 your eye
 your tongue
 your skin
 your fingertips
when I am most myself.

Untitled

Janet Anderson



The Working Man's Dilemma

Scott Averyt

I was five minutes late for my noon shift on Monday. My college classes did not end until 11:45, which left me fifteen minutes to run home, throw on my uniform, and drive to work. Apron and tie in hand, I slipped in through the back door of the restaurant and into the kitchen. I threw on my apron, flung my tie around my neck and casually leaned against the wall, acting as if I had been there all day. The cooks threw cold stares back at me while they spoke quietly to each other. Although I didn't understand Chinese, I knew that their conversation revolved around me. I'm sure the conversation went something like:

"I see that he is late once again."

"Who the hell does this guy think he is?"

"Perhaps today is the day of his firing."

I had only worked there for a few weeks. I needed the job: I had a cell phone bill, a healthy drinking habit, and a high maintenance girlfriend, all of which were a major drain on my income. I heard waiting tables was an easy way to make money, and this second rate Chinese joint was the only restaurant hiring. The only problem was my incompetence as a waiter: I disliked the customers, my memory was unreliable, I was a slow learner, and I had what some considered a "bad attitude." My boss, Gloria, noticed my mediocre work habits and for weeks had been trying to find an excuse to fire me.

After my arrival Gloria blew into the kitchen. She stood only five feet tall but was still extremely intimidating. Gloria had two-inch-long orange nails, which were so long they began to curl inward. They made her look as though she had large claws hanging at her sides. In every way Gloria was the boss and she ruled the place as if it were her kingdom. I was clearly the serf in her feudal system. Pointing a single orange nail to my chest she asked, "When did you get here?"

"I've been here for awhile," I responded calmly, as if it were the truth. She eyed me like a drill sergeant inspecting her worst cadet. Looking me square in the eye, she yelled back over my shoulder to the cooks. Chinese or not, I knew for sure that they were talking about me. The head cook glanced toward me for a second before he responded. What had the cook said? Did he sell me out? Gloria redirected her attention toward me with another slow look over. Taking a deep breath, I practiced in my head a number of excuses for tardiness that I had perfected over the years.

"You have a table. Get out there and take it," she barked. The cooks had spared me. I smiled at them in appreciation. Again, they did not smile back.

I straightened my tie as I sauntered out into the dining room to greet my first customer. As I got closer I realized that she was a senior citizen, and when I say senior citizen I'm not referring to the recently retired grandma who takes long walks and jazzercise lessons on Tuesdays. I'm talking about the one-foot-in-the-grave kind, the kind with an extensive amount of ear hair. Her silverish blue hair was so thin that I could see straight through it. The woman's pink scalp was dotted by moles, freckles, liver spots and several other blemishes that mysteriously appear on a person that old. Diamond earrings pulled her loose earlobes down another inch. She wore a light blue sweatshirt that spelled the word "Florida" in embroidered gold letters. As she hung her matching gold purse on her worn silver walker, I remember thinking, "Old people are cute."

With a cheery smile I said, "Good Afternoon. Welcome to . . ."

Suddenly she interrupted me, saying, "I have a grandson about your age."

"That's great. And how old is he?" I asked, still smiling.

"He's thirteen and he's a lot more handsome than you," she said under her breath as she studied the menu.

My first thought was, "Well, I have a grandmother who's been dead for seven years, and she's a lot more attractive than you," but what came out was, "That's great! Grandsons are really special. What kind of drink can I get you?"

Still studying her menu, she barked, "I'd like a Pepsi with two limes."

"Great! I'll just go grab that and be back in a jiff!"

I strolled back to the kitchen, poured her drink and returned to the table muttering obscenities under my breath.

"Tell me what's good here," she demanded.

"Well ma'am, I enjoy everything on the menu! If I had to pick one, though, I would pick the Orange Chicken and Shrimp." I always recommended the Orange Chicken, the most expensive item on the menu. The extra few bucks would increase the sale and possibly my tip, which was all I cared about.

"Okay. That's what I'll take. But if this doesn't taste good, then you ain't gettin' any tip," she snapped.

"Is that all you need, ma'am?" I asked, hoping that it would be.

"No. One more thing. Does your food have MSG in it?"

"No ma'am. It doesn't."

"Are you sure? Because I am highly allergic to MSG!"

"Yes ma'am, no MSG."

At this point I reminded myself to be sure and ask someone what MSG was. I wandered back to the kitchen and handed my order to the cook. After turning

in my order, I did what I usually did when I wasn't busy with the delightful clientele: I ate cherries at the bar while I watched the T.V. and swapped bullshit with the bartender. A few minutes passed before I looked back at my table to see how my lovely lady was doing. She had already gotten her food. One of the other waiters must have brought it out to her.

Still eating cherries, I leaned across to the bartender and asked, "Hey, do you know what the hell MSG is?"

"Yeah, it's like a flavor enhancer," he replied eating another cherry.

"Do we use it in our food?"

"Only in the Orange Chicken and Shrimp."

My heart seemed to stop. I watched the woman shovel the chicken and shrimp into her mouth. The words "highly" and "allergic" kept running through my head. I raced over to her and stood at the end of the table at a complete loss for words. She stopped, put her fork down, and looked up at me to see what I wanted. The old woman slowly chewed whatever was left in her mouth, like an old cow with a chunk of cud. I watched her swallow it and I could see it travel down her wrinkled throat. She slowly ran her tongue across the hairs above her chapped lips, removing a thin layer of Orange Chicken sauce.

A million thoughts and questions ran through my head. Should I just play dumb and let her keep eating it? Maybe she was exaggerating when she said "highly allergic." Maybe she was just "allergic." But at her age maybe just being "allergic" was still enough for an appointment with "The Reaper." I thought about whether or not she would make loud, painful sounds when she died, or whether she'd just quietly fall out of her chair. Would she die now or would it take a couple hours? Would this be traced back to me? Would I end up in jail? Maybe I should just take the plate away from her right now and send it back to the kitchen. That would be the moral thing to do, but something was keeping me from doing it. If I sent the food back, the woman would complain, the cooks would tell Gloria, and I would be fired for sure. I'd be in credit card debt forever. I could never go out drinking with my friends. My girlfriend would surely dump me.

The old woman looked up at me, probably wondering what was with the crazed look in my eye and why I'd been standing there speechless for what seemed like minutes. Suddenly the right words came to me from somewhere deep inside.

"How is the food, ma'am?" I asked quietly.

"Delicious. Absolutely Delicious!"

Night Silences Windows

Todd Johnson

night silences windows
locked in desperate glances
descending
coming together beneath
muscle tissue,

sore from
long hours in cold beds alone

a thousand faces
in this crooked body
palpitating
pulsing out from
an artery in the dark

Another Medium

William Osgood

Words mock me
Trying to express the inexpressible:
That which is--
Beyond the coarse uttering of human language
Beyond all vanity and ego
Beyond "you" and "me"
Behind the illusions that separate us all
That which IS
Everything is everything, yes
Every Thing IS everything
Yet here i stand trying to erase with writing
(like trying to write with an eraser)
the illusions that seemingly separate our souls

God's Work

A.B. Jacobs

The Reverend Roy Wilberton feels at ease when addressing a congregation, perhaps more so than at any other time. From his place in the pulpit he normally warms to the sermon within moments as the spirit envelopes him. Though a small man of modest demeanor, his vibrant voice carries to the last row of the nave. “. . . And I say unto you that ye shall obey the commandments,’ spoketh the Lord, ‘for it is only with sublime grace that ye shall know the kingdom everlasting and revel in it for an eternity to come.’” The good parson is truly at home in this setting. He needs neither prompting nor written notes, as the words flow as if by divine inspiration. Rarely does the oration convey a rational message; the mesmerizing effect substitutes for any lack of lucidity.

Early in life Roy aspired to a career as a clergyman. The religious calling held more for him than mere purpose. It represented, as he so often said, an opportunity to do God's work. This ambition induced him, soon after completion of high school, to enter Mount Aldo Seminary in Missouri. However, despite a positive attitude and perseverance, he did not do well in his studies. Other than a natural bent for rhetorical oratory, he excelled in little else, being on the verge of withdrawing several times. Nonetheless, through four years of dogged tenacity, he managed to fulfill the course requirements and received a Divinity degree. His graduation came as a surprise to him as well as to many of the faculty.

Following ordination and marriage to his high school companion, he secured an appointment as assistant pastor at a rural Missouri church with several hundred parishioners. Though he held the position for seven years and during that time demonstrated a tireless eagerness to serve, he developed no real grasp of the duties of a minister. The vital functions of congregation building, Christian education, interchurch relations, and the particularly important element of church finance never fell within his understanding. Only his one-on-one evangelical zeal, together with those rare Sundays when he substituted for the Pastor in the pulpit, caused his presence to be noticed.

Under the prodding of his wife, and in the hope of securing a more meaningful role in the world of the righteous, he accepted an associate pastorate at a church in the St. Louis synod. Its urban congregation offered a different set of challenges, but his deficiencies left him, as before, less than a full participant. The next couple of decades saw him in and out of various cleric jobs, but never

with a sense of fulfillment. By his fiftieth birthday Roy Wilberton's aspiration to do God's work was no closer to realization.

About that time, as he began to despair of ever fulfilling his ambition, an opportunity presented itself. An opening for a pastor became available in the small community of Lee's Summit in Jackson County, Missouri, not far from Kansas City. Despite a congregation numbering only 150, and a minuscule salary accompanying the position, it at least offered a last chance to provide the religious direction to the faithful that he had for so long yearned. With his wife's encouragement he applied for the position; with little fanfare the job became his. At long last the Reverend Roy Wilberton prepared to assume the responsibilities for which God intended.

* * *

The facilities that greeted Roy upon his arrival could best be described as primitive. Instead of a church structure, he found a reconditioned warehouse seating 350 in a strip shopping mall. A wooden lectern substituted for the altar, with the pews no more than sets of folding chairs. The "parsonage" consisted of three rooms on the second floor renovated into a quasi-living space. Were the owner of the mall not a member of the congregation, providing the space with utilities at a token charge, there would have been no church at all. With the post of pastor unoccupied since its former occupant departed eight months earlier, administration lay in the hands of a three-member board of trustees consisting of a local real estate broker, the town banker, and the Chairwoman of Lee's Summit Civic Betterment League. Neither working committees nor congregation groups existed. A checking account containing \$768.14 represented the church's sole financial asset. Despite the conditions he found, Roy remained optimistic, perhaps in keeping with the adage, "When ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

With enthusiasm, if not a well-founded sense of direction, Roy embarked on his ministerial duties. With a natural bent for discourse, the words did not stop. He lectured, expounded and harangued, with not a parishioner overlooked. By phone and in person he encouraged all he spoke with to attend Sunday worship and to bring their friends and relatives. And from the pulpit his verbiage poured forth, abundantly and melodically. Though he did nothing to enhance the church's dwindling reserves, nor organize programs and committees, he accomplished one thing during his first months: he made everyone within earshot aware of his presence.

As Roy's first year extended into the second, profound changes began to occur. The little town of Lee's Summit, lying in Kansas City's natural path of development, began to experience a population explosion as thousands of new

families moved into the area. The number of parishioners increased and the Sunday morning crowds began to overflow the space. Roy soon was conducting two, and then three, successive services. Matters escalated out of hand as the shortage of space became critical. Whatever might be done to resolve this overcrowding, the Reverend Roy Wilberton had not a clue.

* * *

Following one especially hectic set of Sunday services, two members of the board of trustees, banker Homer Weir and real estate broker Scott Sizemore, meet at a local café to discuss the growing problems. "Scott, what the devil can we do? It's becoming a mob scene," says Homer.

"Yeah, I know. It's botherin' me too. I mentioned it to Wilberton a couple weeks ago, but he seems to be havin' so much fun preaching, I don't even think he notices."

"Got any thoughts?"

"As a matter of fact, I do, but it'll take some fancy footwork," says Scott.

"What do you have in mind?"

"Remember that old theater-in-the-round out on 34th Street? It seated about eighteen hundred, I think. Well, it's still sittin' there, seats and all."

"Sure I remember. Second Alliance carried the mortgage. It was a lousy loan they made. It deserved the foreclosure. That was seven . . . maybe eight years ago."

"Well, it'd be a perfect church, n' can be bought dirt-cheap. Trouble is, even that's more than we got. What'a ya' think, Homer?"

The banker leans back, takes a long sip from his coffee cup, and a smile comes slowly over his face. "Considering the crowds being generated, there must be some money there, and I think I know how to get it. With the church connection, we should be able to get a bunch to switch their accounts to my bank, and since Wilberton's in touch with everyone, he might be able to convince a lot of them to go for contribution withdrawals. I'll bet we could get fifty a month from most. That'll pay for a lot of deliverance."

"An' not bad for your bank, either," says Scott.

"Well, why not? It's all for a good cause. Now about the old theater, do you think you can swing it?"

"Matter of fact, I can lease it myself, and sublet to the church. I'd make a fair deal, though of course I'd be entitled to a reasonable profit for my exposure."

"Just one thing: We'll need Sylvia's okay," says Homer, referring to Sylvia Moore, the third trustee. "Do you think she'll want to go along?"

"My guess is a nice annual contribution to the Betterment League will do it."

That n' Wilberton's weekly boost from the pulpit. She likes the status it gives her better'n anything."

"Fair enough. Just one thing: What'll we give Wilberton? He'll want some-
thin' too, won't he?"

"Naw, I don't think so," says Scott. "He's too dumb to know what's goin'
on. But I know exactly what it'll take to get him to push this hard. We'll give
the church a fancy new name like . . . say . . . 'Redemption-in-the-Round' or
some such thing. He'll work his fanny off so there's a full house every week."

"But don't you think we'll at least have to get him a decent place to live?"

"Maybe eventually, but for now let him stay where he is till we're sure
there's enough dough for what really matters."

"Done," says Homer, with a nod. "I'll get on the accounts right away while
you tie up the property till we know we can handle it."

* * *

Two years following the inauguration of Lee's Summit Redemption-in-the-
Round, the church boasts a congregation numbering four thousand, and two
Sunday morning services, both normally filling the hall to capacity. The reso-
nant tones of the Reverend Roy Wilberton, poised behind the massive ivory
pulpit resplendent in a custom-tailored white linen suit, reverberated at 95 deci-
bels from the integrated amplification system through 16 strategically located
loudspeakers. ". . . O Lord, I beseech thee in thy profound wisdom, as you gaze
down at the faithful before you, to hear our fervent plea for benediction and
bestow thy divine gift upon us all." As usual no one, including the good rever-
end, quite understands a single word, but the touch of majesty and the ring of
sincerity more than compensate for the vagueness. And following each service,
the parson circulates among the flock shaking every hand within reach. There
can be no doubt--he is truly in his element.

During those two years Homer Weir's bank added an additional branch and
saw its total deposits increase fivefold. During the same period, Scott Sizemore
negotiated the purchase of the parcel the church occupied and tripled its rent.
Finally, in keeping with its newfound prosperity and notoriety, Sylvia Moore
expanded the Betterment League to three neighboring communities.

And as Reverend Wilberton retires at the end of each day with his wife to
the small two-bedroom parsonage now provided, the smile on his face clearly
depicts the exuberance he at last experiences in doing God's work.

Spring In Venice
Roland Harrison



Poached Eggs: My Life as a Childless Mother

Laura Harvey

Last night my son was in his crib, crying loudly from a toothless frown, with flushed cheeks and outstretched fingers . . . and I did not calm him. I was eighty miles away, on my couch, half-drunk, not hearing. I am not his mother now. He is not my baby; he is a dotted line that lives in my imagination, running through years of childhood and my non-existent memories of him. He runs to a mother who is not me, with friends I will not meet, through a life devoid of any knowledge of who I am or what he means to me. All of these things, these truths, these images, are a compilation of my experience as “Donor #245” and represent the greatest loss and most wonderful event I’ve ever experienced.

“Intended Mother” and “Intended Father” chose me from hundreds of young women willing to donate eggs. I had registered as a donor of genetic material and had been placed into a catalogue of profiles. From the extracted eggs, their fertility doctor would be making embryos to implant into her womb. Within two months, I became a symbol of hope for a couple who had been trying to have a child for over four years.

The process was painstaking. I immediately stopped drinking, smoking, partying, and holding onto the idea that I would not be a parent for years. Three months after I was chosen and had undergone grueling psychological, physical, and genetic testing, I was prepped for surgery. The doctor extracted nine eggs. By seven o’clock that night, I was home. By eight o’clock, I was hysterical.

Those were my children. Those eggs were an extension of me. I missed them. I hated the idea that, as children, I wouldn’t know them. It has been ten months since I donated and one month since my baby was born and it will take a lifetime for me to accept that he is not my baby, after all.

Now I can die fulfilled. With the overwhelming sense of loss that accompanied my egg donation comes a satisfaction for which there are no words. My father’s eyes, my mother’s hands, their genetics, their history, have been immortalized. I have passed on the legacy of a London-born immigrant who instilled courage in me, and an educator who taught me to seek out truth, embrace the unloved, and exhibit unrelenting compassion. If I should die tomorrow, their honor will live on. Everything they have taught me to be has been reincarnated into this little baby who, to me, stands for the children I will someday have.

I have made a difference. I allowed a couple to turn their dream of becoming parents into a reality. When they attend his graduation, when they see him get married, when they hold their first grandchild for the first time, they will think of me. My life experience has been transformed into the seed that grew to be a baby for two people who might have otherwise been childless. It was the most rewarding experience I have ever had and I will never forget it.

I have seen the face of God. It is encoded in the words that flow from my pen, when I reflect on the indescribable sense of loss and overwhelming sense of joy I feel from this profound experience. At this point in my life, I would not be a good mother; however, I have proved to be a parent, one who is good for the sacrifices she made to create someone where there was once no one. Through this, I have come to understand that with the pain of "having a child I will not have" comes the satisfaction of knowing that last night, the woman at the end of my baby's outstretched fingers loves him enough to be his *real* mother.

For D. and B. and J. and S.

Hotel Bohemian

Candace Ryan

Enveloped
In the rapture of uncertainty
Left in the residue of what is beneath
Alongside of me
A collision of confirmation
Relished in the exegesis of what to be
Is molasses to the soul
I feel it solidify
Wreaking havoc on my fate
The nothing I believed in stays the same
While disbelief breathes with ease
As ballistic children laugh
I carry an encapsulated love hidden within
There is a drought in the corduroy of my soul
Thinking back on reflections of simpler days
When grass grazed my heels
And dragonflies made a halo around my head
Reflecting on better days
Again I'm stuck
In the quicksand of guilt
Recalling all that I have never done
Undone and redone
As I wait
I am easily let down
And all that was beneath me becomes my friend
As all that I have liquifies
The sense of sensing nothing
I am forced to believe
That it is over
And the uncertainty comforts me
Like an old bottle of whisky and a life long friend

Pier

Heidi Christensen



Nails

Matthew Geldin

I bite my nails.

Sometimes more than other times.

I try not to. Sometimes.

Lately it's been worse; I've bitten off all the white part.

The skin that's under the white part--

when the white part was there--

it's gone now.

The cuticles, they're gone too.

I can barely get my teeth under my nails now.

I just keep chewing away.

The Failed Revolutionist

Casey McEachern

He had to attend yet another fundraiser; was this one for some unknown Republican Congressman? Or maybe the church needed money again; he couldn't remember anymore.

At dinner he slumped forward in his chair, looking down at his belly, wondering when his stomach grew so grotesquely full. An incessant hum of stale conversation buzzed in the background. He faintly heard the same stupid people discussing the same sterile ideas: the economy was down, but it would go up again; then they talked about support for the military and human rights; they ate veal and talked about building more dog parks for their pets; they sipped martinis and puffed Cuban cigars and talked about drug smuggling Colombians and the new War on Drugs.

In college he'd shouted from megaphones, protesting, arguing, yelling, educating the masses about them. And now he was one of them. He massaged the sides of his temples and motioned for the waiter, ordering another martini--his fifth, and it was still early.

Later that night the waiter woke him up and called him a cab; he was too drunk to make it anymore. It was Sunday.

-Noam Casey

17th Annual Saddleback College Writing Contest 2001-2002

The Saddleback College Annual Writing Contest is divided into five categories:

Poetry
Short Stories
Personal Essays
Expository Essay I
Expository Essay II

Held in the fall of each school year, the Annual Writing Contest invites students to submit brief papers that represent their best class work. The contest promotes writing throughout all levels of composition, from beginning writing and ESL classes through advanced composition and creative writing courses.

The English faculty at Saddleback College judges the submissions, giving cash prizes to the first-, second-, and third-place winners in each category. Though Wall is not a part of the Writing Contest, we are happy to include the winning entries from this year's competition. Questions or comments regarding the writing contest should be directed to Shelba Robison at Saddleback College.

*Expository Essay I, Personal Essays, Poetry, and Short Stories are open to all Saddleback students. Expository Essay II, however, is limited to students enrolled in EN 300, EN 200, Reading 220, and all ESL classes.

Poetry:

1st Place -	A. B. Jacobs	<i>Unrequited</i>
2nd Place -	Alicia Hamilton	<i>Ask Me to Deny My Soul</i>
3rd Place -	Todd Johnson	<i>Saw Blades, Sharp Spades</i>
3rd Place -	Kristi Sanders	<i>My Warning</i>
Honorable Mention:		
	Marie E. Andersor	<i>Seraphim II: Reading</i>
	Christopher Potts	<i>Beyond the Resurrection</i>
	Whitney Rose	<i>Flung Face Down</i>
	Galena Segal	<i>A Struggle</i>

Short Stories:

1st Place -	Kevin Toth	<i>Safe Again</i>
2nd Place -	Andrew Lincoln	<i>Dance Steps</i>
3rd Place -	Charles Banks	<i>Old Lady Oliver</i>
Honorable Mention:		
	James W. Gilchrist	<i>Warrior</i>
	Todd Johnson	<i>A Stranger Night Falls</i>
	Jeremiah Jones	<i>Back to Angola Prison</i>
	Galena Segal	<i>A Miracle</i>

Personal Essays:

1st Place -	Elizabeth Anderson	<i>The Strength of Misfortune</i>
2nd Place -	Charles Banks	<i>Winning the War</i>
3rd Place -	Steven McPhail	<i>Twinkies</i>
3rd Place -	Arundhati Samanta	<i>Mohon-Pur</i>
Honorable Mention:		
	Ann Keith	<i>One Nation, Indivisible</i>
	Leah Ramsey	<i>I'd Be Crazy Too</i>
	Kristi Sanders	<i>Fatalities of the Heart</i>

Expository Essays I:

1st Place -	Della Janis	<i>Nouveau Femme</i>
2nd Place -	Gary Hansen	<i>Too Many Laws</i>
3rd Place -	Steven McPhail	<i>Just Desserts</i>
Honorable Mention:		
	Sara Cicognami	<i>Piazza Americana</i>
	James Lyon	<i>A Horse with a Broken Leg</i>
	Arundhati Samanta	<i>Namaste</i>

Expository Essays II:

1st Place -	Elizabeth Morgan	<i>Beyond Circumstance</i>
2nd Place -	Christan Johanides	<i>Heredity vs. Environment</i>
3rd Place -	Karen Leal	<i>Products of Our Society</i>
Honorable Mention:		
	David Haag	<i>Lack of Respect</i>
	Michelle Junco	<i>Home Is Where the Heart Is</i>
	Tina Smythers	<i>Nurture Is an Essential Asset</i>

Unrequited

A. B. Jacobs

1st Place - Poetry

At one time in a garden grew
An orchid of exotic hue.
Its crimson petals curled between
Sheer sepals cast in emerald green.

Possessing fragrance to beguile
The Goddess Flora . . . and the while,
The stamen at its apogee
Reached toward the sky majestically.

Its presence in my heart did dwell,
As mystically it worked its spell.
Such splendor caused in me to soar
A passion never known before.

At last I tore it from its place,
And clasped the flower in my embrace.
I held for it a lust divine . . .
Above all else it must be mine.

And as I knelt in rapture there,
The orchid writhed in grim despair.
As if to show my love denied,
Forlornly in my arms it died.

Ask Me to Deny My Soul
Alicia Hamilton

2nd Place - Poetry

Ask me to deny this persistent growing feeling,
 Tell me I am dreaming in a world that's wide-awake.
Show me how I've let this sturdy heart go reeling,
 Somewhere down beyond the ventures of mistake.

I will then reply and speak of honest constants,
 The world's own system-check within a place awry.
Free me of this still and eerie instance,
 This questioning soul no longer a steady alibi.

There then my mind will become master,
 Of both flighty soul and floundering heart.
Yet like Arabian horses running ever faster,
 This pulsing stream fills my every part.

Renounce one's soul? So many times I've tried,
 Both heart and passion have cast all sense aside.
What then is left except to then succumb,
 To all these dreams that I was hiding from.

Saw Blades, Sharp Spades
Todd Johnson

3rd Place - Poetry

preparations
are
 made, locks broken
stars shake off sparks
from another
 spade
 lodged in the
morning dirt

another axe handle
 glancing in
the wrong
 direction,
 another

saw
 blade turning
 bringing down blood
 sheared from
her beating
 chest, squirming
 wetly

 above the
heart i misplaced somewhere
 in mexico
during august.

My Warning
Kristi Sanders

3rd Place - Poetry

Listen, Girl,
to him you are
a morsel,
an appetizer of the month.

To you I am
An ex-girlfriend,
His last conquest.

You believe,
Before you
All others were unworthy.
Believe me,
before you
there were many.

He is
A cloven-footed Prince
His destruction is faceless.
He'll leave you
wanting,
willing,
then waiting.

Waiting
for him to come back
to you.
He'll break it off
With your panties
still drying over his bathroom tub.

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

We live about a mile outside of the village now, in a tiny house that sags, weighed down by age and moss, near the cliffs that look out over the ocean. Claude holds a job packing fish at the harbor. He comes home smelling of brine, his shirt stained pink, with barely enough money to support us. Most of my days are spent knitting socks and caps for the baby that my husband and I have yet to produce.

Regardless of the isolation, the current location of our home does have benefits. It's a perfect place to watch the fiery sunsets of the short summer months, much better than the small attic window, the only one that faces west in my father's house in the village.

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

I have a kind of ritual. Every morning, I wake up before Claude and slip out of bed. Some days are easier than others; often, he'll have one of his thick arms about me, and I'll have to gently untangle myself, careful not to stir him.

I stand up and smooth out my baby blue nightgown. The hem of the skirt always tickles my ankles. I wince as I realize that I left my slippers in the dresser across the room, on the creaky floorboards. Retrieving them would be too great a risk, so I'm going barefoot this morning.

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

I also take some old silverware, a knife and a spoon. These I have to lift slowly from the kitchen drawer using my thumb and forefinger like a pair of

tweezers, so I don't rattle any of the other utensils.

Most of the time, I'll just gather some old bones from the garbage bin or crispy blackened wood from the fireplace. Today, though, I've decided to treat myself.

I only collect things from the kitchen about once a month. The last thing I want is for Claude to notice the missing pieces and become upset. He'd say, "Isabelle, do you know what's happened to our silverware?" and I, of course, would have to say yes. I would have to tell him everything. But he's such a nice man. He shouldn't worry about such things.

Since I'm holding up my skirt full of kitchen goods, opening the house's front door becomes something of a chore. I've had enough practice, though. I can turn the handle with my elbow, push it open with my back, and catch it behind me with one foot to prevent it from slamming shut.

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

After a short walk, I'm standing by the cliff, the last thing between earth and the void. I peer over the edge. The fog prevents me from seeing the rocks below, but I can hear, faintly, the sound of the crashing waves. My collected items go on the grass beside me, except for the silverware, which I keep in my hand. The least impressive stuff goes first.

I wind up, and with a small grunt, toss the spoon and knife over the edge. Moments later, I am rewarded with a faint tinkling sound above the crash of the surf.

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

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

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

It used to be that I was afraid to get near the edge. I'd stand a yard or two away as I threw my bits and pieces over, or I'd crawl on all fours. Now, though, I'm not so timid, just walking right up and letting my toes curl over the side.

Here, now, anything is possible. A bare foot could slide on wet grass. A

pebble could pop loose from its home and the cliff could give way. The wind coming in off the sea grabs at my nightgown and presses the fabric to my body. I wobble for a moment, and there's the stomach-churning thrill I always get when I think I'm about to lose my balance.

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

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

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

Dance Steps
Andrew Lincoln

2nd Place - Short Story

One Thursday morning, as Henry sat down to eat breakfast, everything in his house became unstuck. He reached for his spoon and found it up in the air instead of on the table next to his cereal bowl. The bowl soon followed, along with the morning newspaper, his coffee cup, and eventually Henry himself.

"Isn't this peculiar," said Henry to a napkin that fluttered past his eyes. He awkwardly maneuvered into the living room finding the occurrence was hardly unique to the kitchen. Everything in the living room, released itself from the floor: chairs, lamps, tables, and the big rug passed down from his grandmother. Even the paintings unhooked themselves from the walls. Everything spun, soared, and revolved over, under, and around everything else, and all at different speeds.

And there hadn't been a sound. Henry looked to the floor to find no shattered glasses or broken chairs. Indeed, nothing collided or crashed into the walls. It appeared flawlessly choreographed, involving the entire interior of his house, like a dance staged by every object Henry owned. Its beauty overwhelmed Henry; he could no longer remain at the sidelines clutching the wall. He pushed himself off into the perfect mess. Immediately his face met with something large and fluffy that knocked him off his course.

"Franny!" exclaimed Henry through a mouthful of cat hair. The cat howled in return. Henry swung his arms wildly in an attempt to propel himself toward the closet, though he didn't escape without meeting several more less-fluffy objects, including his authentic African tribal mask, which knocked the air out of him.

Once inside the closet, he could ponder his situation in peace, though not before casting out an unruly umbrella and several jackets that had not taken his presence lightly. He looked at his bruises and wondered why he wound up in such bad shape while everything else in the house went about unscathed. It wasn't long before he realized what went wrong. He had tried to join the dance without learning the steps.

Henry knew nothing of dancing, having turned down every opportunity to dance in the past. So Henry spent day and night trying to learn the steps. He went to each part of the house, clutching the walls and corners, and observed the ceaseless activity. The kitchen he left for later, of course, due to the many sharp objects that could quickly end the career of an amateur dancer. Occasionally, he tested the waters, though rarely got out without a bruise or a scratch.

Henry soon became frustrated, for the dance did little but confound him. Even after days of observation, it revealed no patterns or steps or hidden rhythms.

Then one night, after a long day of observation and study, Henry fell asleep hugging the banister while watching his bed glide down the stairs like a whale. Upon waking, he found himself spinning and soaring among books and chairs and silverware in the center of a very elaborate dance. He began to panic; how easily he could be squashed between a couch and a table or knocked unconscious by a telephone. But before he could react, he realized that he knew the dance and was performing it perfectly.

His previous attempts at the dance all failed because he thought he could learn the dance through observation and practice. But dancing in Henry's house required one to completely let go. He allowed the complex rhythm of the dance to guide him and paid no attention to how he moved his arms or contorted his body. He freed his mind of doubt, even when it looked as if his face might meet the back of a chair. Henry knew the steps, and he smiled.

Word spread all over about Henry's house. The streets soon filled with talk of the house that defied physical laws. Friends and family stopped by, followed by complete strangers who wanted to witness the spectacle too. Then came scientists, philosophers, ghost hunters, priests, reporters, and others who each had an answer, be it mischievous ghosts, black holes, or the will of God.

Each day brought more and more people. Crowds gathered before dawn and stretched down the block by noon. Henry didn't dance for them, not because they weren't deserving of the knowledge of how to dance--Henry wanted very much for others to experience it--but because of embarrassment. The dance left his soul exposed to anyone with eyes to watch. The thought of one person, let alone a crowd, observing something so personal to Henry frightened him.

So he stood aside and watched people launch themselves around his house, despite the danger. They rarely reached the other wall without injury. Ambulances collected in the street early in the morning, ready to cart off the injured of the day.

Henry couldn't stand seeing so many people get hurt, but he couldn't force them to leave. His only option seemed to be to end the dance. The next morning, with nails and duct tape and glue in hand, Henry proceeded to secure the couches and tables to the floors, the paintings and mirrors to the walls, and finally the books to the bookshelves and the silverware to the drawers. Each nail silenced the inner music of the dance a little more, until finally, the house looked as it did before. Some things continued to move, struggling against the nails and tape and glue, but eventually grew tired and stopped altogether. That day, his visitors' faces beamed with joy as they entered a much safer house.

The scientists could conduct their experiments without fear of getting in the way of any spinning stereos and his friends could soar from wall to wall without winding up scratched and bruised.

Henry immediately noticed the house taking on a different air. The tables stood slightly lower, the lights shone slightly dimmer, and the chairs appeared slightly dustier.

Days passed, and still the torrent of guests showed no sign of letting up. Henry looked upon the furniture, trapped against its own will--denied the dance it performed so well. He couldn't deny it any longer. That night, Henry went to work removing every nail and piece of tape.

In the morning, the crowd outside his house stretched farther than ever before. Instead of opening the doors, Henry opened the blinds of every window. The crowd gathered around, many upset to see that the furniture was again on the rampage. Once Henry saw the windows full of the faces of onlookers, he bowed to them. And then he danced.

Old Lady Oliver
Charles Banks

3rd Place - Short Story

Roger Morehouse heard him, even over the buzz of the highway. Xavier's yell sounded more like someone in pain than somebody trying to get someone's attention. Roger stopped and waited for his friend to catch up.

"What up?" Xavier said, adjusting his schoolbag on his shoulders. The two boys high-fived, then the conversation got heavy.

"Yo, your girlfriend came into Castle Burger last night. And she wasn't alone," Xavier said.

"Nah, you trippin'. Shanell went to bed early. I talked to her on the phone."

"Maybe, but I saw her mackin' with Bobby Rhodes last night," Xavier said.

A car drove by with a booming system, while the smell of rotten eggs drifted about. On the corner, a young black man peddled bean pies near a stop sign riddled with bullet holes. They crossed the street.

Roger tried to appear unruffled, but he couldn't. The truth was as unmistakable as an unmarked police car. He looked mortified.

Shanell had been acting different lately. Roger knew it. Hell, everyone knew it. She seemed to be drifting. Things that never mattered to her before suddenly seemed all too meaningful. She didn't even wear her hair the same anymore.

"So whatchu gonna do?" Xavier asked.

The discussion suddenly came to an unexpected halt when the boys noticed a commotion up ahead.

"Oh shit," Xavier said.

"Why do they always leave her out there?" Roger asked.

Just ahead, the boys watched as three younger boys--second or third graders--played a game of Blind Man's Tag with "Old Lady Oliver."

"She's gonna break somebody off," Xavier said.

Roger ran ahead to help. Xavier, on the other hand, wanted no part of it. "Stay out of it," Xavier yelled. "What Miss Oliver needs is to be placed in a home with her crazy ass instead of sitting on that milk crate all day."

Blind Man's Tag is a simple game; the person who is "it" stands in the middle with his or her eyes closed. That would be Miss Oliver, only she doesn't need to close her eyes. She is blind.

These juveniles have to tag her and get away before she can tag them. But these kids didn't tag. They punched and kicked. Miss Oliver didn't tag, either; she swung her cane.

"Are you okay, Miss Oliver?" Roger asked after running the kids off.

"Oh, Nadine Oliver is just fine," she said, smiling. "But can one of y'all do me a favor?"

Xavier stood there, arms crossed, completely annoyed and put off for having to wait for this crazy woman. Roger answered, "Sure, anything."

"Can one of you boys call Mr. Clinton and Mr. Nixon and let them know that Miss Oliver won't be in today. Governor, oh, what is her name, Mrs. Davis would like my advice on the best way to transport tea from the Bay Area down to Orange County. Miss Oliver has to help her country," she said.

"I sure will," Roger replied.

Through stifled laughter, Xavier said, "I told you that bitch was crazy."

They started walking again, and had gotten three or four steps away, when she called once more. Only this time she pointed her cane at Roger.

"You will be at the Governor's Mansion, won't you?" she asked. Uncertain how he should respond, Roger turned to Xavier.

"Yes, I will."

"Good, then Miss Oliver will see you tonight," she said.

After ducking through a back alley and jumping a rickety, old fence, Xavier asked his question again.

"I dunno, what can I do?" Roger asked. Xavier removed his schoolbag from his shoulder and opened it wide.

"Oh, snap," Roger said. "Where'd you get that?"

The bag contained a .22 pistol.

"Deuce-Deuce revolver, that's my problem solver," Xavier said. Roger's eyes flickered. Xavier threw an arm around him, pulling him close.

"You could take him out. BUCK, BUCK, BUCK. He'd never know what hit him," he said.

Roger's gaze remained locked on the pistol.

"Hey, if you mess with someone else's woman, you deserved to get capped. It's Karma." Xavier didn't know crap about Karma, but Roger bought it hook, line, and sinker.

"Yeah, Karma," he said, still staring at the gun, fantasizing about pulling the trigger, hearing the screams, and getting revenge.

Roger grabbed the gun and stuffed it down his pants. After Xavier explained the intricacies of the pistol, the two boys parted company.

* * *

Roger leaped from the window of his ground floor apartment graced in black. He patted his waist. The gun was still there. "Let's do this," he mumbled to himself, and raced off.

Minimal traffic cruised the streets. The reddish-orange glow of neon lights brightened the roads in every which way. A patrol car slowly rolled by. Roger watched it. He craned his neck, still walking forward, paying no attention to where he was going until something caught him under his feet and sent him crashing to the pavement.

"It's about time," a voice said.

Keeping one hand on the pistol, Roger picked himself up.

"Hadn't your mama ever taught you it's not polite to keep a woman waiting?"

"Miss Oliver?" Roger asked.

There she sat on that same empty milk crate where Roger had seen her eight hours earlier.

"I ain't got time for this, not now," Roger said, throwing up his hands and turning to leave.

Before he could move Miss Oliver said, "Where you going with that gun, boy?"

Roger turned around. "How do you know what I got? You're--," but she cut him off, electing to finish his thought for him.

"Blind?" she asked. "Son, I see things you only wish you could see," the portly black woman said. She adjusted the scarf on her head. "Let me talk to you for a minute." Roger didn't move.

Miss Oliver reached into her skirt pocket and placed a pinch of snuff between her cheek and gums. Roger cringed, partly because she chewed, but mostly because she sat so un-ladylike. He tried not to look.

"You're at a crossroads, boy. Your whole life will be shaped by this moment in time," she said as she stared blindly into the serene night. Roger listened.

"Go that way, to find that boy, and the you that exists now will be no more. L.A.'s finest will kill him in the not too far off future."

She doesn't know what she's talking about, Roger told himself. He thought he should just turn and leave. Don't listen to another word, not another word. Leave, that's what he should do, but he couldn't.

She hocked a wad of tobacco juices at his feet and continued on. "There are some who want your demise, even pray for it. And if you go meet that boy tonight, their prayers will be answered." She spat across the pavement again. Some of the juices rested on her chin.

"But if you go home, oh, what a different place the world will be tomorrow. I see you being hailed as one of the nation's finest lawyers, a defender against all the country's greatest injustices." She spat again, only this time, Roger hardly noticed.

“Son, I see hope, not just for you but for all people. I see a better and brighter world because of you. I see you being the first black man in the White House . . . but you gotta go home.”

Roger got lost in what she said. Could this be so? he wondered.

“You wanna do your mama proud? Go home,” she said before spitting more juices into the street. Roger didn’t move. How could she know all this? he wondered.

“Now, gimme the gun.” He slowly pulled the gun from his pants and placed it in her old hands.

“Now get out of here and start building a better tomorrow, Roger Morehouse.”

His eyes widened one last time, and he turned away from her. But before he did, he softly kissed the old woman’s cheek, and she smiled as she had earlier. Roger raced off into the night.

* * *

As night became day, a jogger passed the crate where Miss Oliver sat. She called out, “Hey boy, you’re at a crossroads. You’re whole life will be shaped by this moment. Gimme that gun, just gimme the gun . . .

The Strength of Misfortune *1st Place - Personal Essay* *Elizabeth Anderson*

Shivering beneath the scorching mid-July sun, I reached for my sweater. My mother shot me a glance, shaking her blonde head bitterly as I pulled the soft knit across my back. Through my sweater the deep ravines and protrusions of thinning shoulder blades and spine stuck out unabashedly. My collarbones were hollow cups. I looked much like the corpse of a rotting fish, draped pitifully in a sheet.

Avoiding my mother's glare, I concentrated on the small tub of non-fat-peanut-butter flavored-frozen-yogurt melting in my lap. Dragging the edge of the plastic spoon across the top, I slowly brought it to my lips, licking off a fine sheen and ignoring the pain of my tailbone digging into the plastic patio chair I was sitting on. Shifting, I tried in vain to find a soft spot on which to rest my weight. I couldn't find one.

My mother finished her yogurt and sat nervously drumming her red acrylic nails on the table. She hummed a happy tune with a big fake smile, saying "hello" as staring strangers walked by. Just then, the apprehension of the coming day swooped over me again and I dropped my spoon. Remembering my fate sent my heart barreling into the pit of my stomach like a rock, and I stared at the blur of traffic on the nearby street.

Tomorrow I would be shipped, like a defective weed-whacker, back to the hospital for repairs. They knew me there. And thanks to my parents, they had been made aware of my drastic relapse into this pit. They also knew that if no one acted soon, I would drop dead before they ever got another chance. I was, to say the least, a child with a proverbial bomb strapped to my chest. Heart attacks at seventeen are uncommon, but not for kids starving to death from anorexia nervosa.

I walked onto the adolescent unit of the hospital the next day, shivering. Not much could keep me warm anymore, and anxiety didn't help the shakes. A smiling woman with shiny black hair and a silk shirt suddenly emerged from the office. I smiled back.

"Beth! How great to see you!" she whispered compassionately. Her expression was pained. "Come on, we've got to get you weighed."

I followed her like an old woman, hunched over. My bones were sucked dry from the beginnings of osteoporosis and my lungs strained for air. My vision came in like bad television reception, constantly fading from shades of gray to black.

The scale settled cautiously into place and she gasped. I was a whopping seventy eight pounds and dropping.

Soon my mother left, the doctors came, and a day or two had flown by. I was trying my best to adjust to the rigid structure of eating and activities when I was thrown frantically off course, in the trenches of midnight. I'd been there only two days.

I awoke with a start and drenched in sweat. Ripping the soaked sheets off my body, I fell on my knees to the floor, retching in violent heaves. I cried out as my stomach lurched again, my weak body trembling, running out of fumes. Falling into the blaring lights of the hallway, I screamed for help until I was heard by a member of the night staff, who caught me in his arms right before I hit the ground cold.

My body had been thrown into shock. I spent days tossing and turning with gut-wrenching nausea. My head buzzed through an endlessly semi-conscious state while nurses came in and out with needles the size of Manhattan, piercing the dry flesh of my backside, promising an end to the emetic longings of my throat.

Eventually, pretending I could walk again, I stood up in secret (against all orders) trying to get from one wheelchair into another. Before I could get all the way to my feet, I fell to the floor in a seizure. So much for the "independence" part of Independence Day. That was July 4, 1995.

* * *

Anorexia has been my struggle since the year I turned nine. It has taken me through six hospitalizations and innumerable visits to the ER, stealing immeasurable time in its course. But through all of those years and all of the experiences during and preceding them, I have grown far beyond my twenty-three years.

I grew up believing firmly in right and wrong. And I still do. I believe in absolutes. I believe in morality. I believe in immorality. But I also held fiercely to a scathing criticism of myself that I based upon a very flawed concept of human capacity. That has changed.

Never could I have learned more about the truth and imperfection of humanity than through the wonderfully imperfect girls I shared rooms, lives, and tragedies with, through my illness. I saw in them, and eventually in myself, the how's and why's to human behavior. I realized the vast spectrum of struggles and triumphs that lead to the choices we make in this great minefield we grudgingly must submit to call our lives.

For years I berated myself for being weak, for being stupid and hateful, for putting those I loved through my illness, and for doing something to myself

that I knew in my heart of hearts was fundamentally evil. Although I could sense my own lack of control over the situation, I refused for a good long time to accept anything but full responsibility for it.

Ultimately, I realized the last standing pillar of humility: the ability to acknowledge my lack of omniscience. While I may not agree with the actions of people, they have reasons for doing what they do. And although I may always believe certain things are right and wrong, it makes it a whole lot easier to deal with individual differences when I remember that in some cases, things may only appear clear cut. And that's good enough for me. I have my own life to live.

Winning the War
Charles Banks

2nd Place - Personal Essay

I heard her screams all the way upstairs. Her wailing sounded like somebody lamenting for a lost loved one. The variance report, which had held me spell-bound for most of the early morning, now would have to wait. I moved like an article of women's clothing on fifty percent markdown to find out what was the matter. I descended the stairs two at a time until I arrived at the first landing, and then it dawned on me. From where I was standing I could hear my three daughters talking in the kitchen. Having been a kid once and having worked in a child care center for God only knows how many summers, I know that kids speak very differently when adults are not present. I decided to wait on the stairs and listen.

"What's wrong, Jessica?" the oldest asked.

Jessica, my youngest daughter, continued to sob noisily. Someone is in big trouble, I thought to myself.

I gripped the railing as I went down, the way I always tell my kids to do, so I would not fall. But before I could continue any farther, Jessica said, "I put my tooth under my pillow last night, and the Tooth Fairy didn't leave me anything."

As I stood there, I heard myself say, "Uh-oh."

The night before, my wife went to bed early because she had not been feeling well. She gave me a dollar to place under the pillow and I took it reluctantly. I did not want to do it.

I was unwilling to partake in the whole Tooth Fairy shenanigan because I want to teach my kids the truth about things. I want to win the war on right and wrong. I want them to believe that honesty is the best policy. And I believe it is.

I have never encouraged the idea of Santa Claus, nor have the words Easter Bunny crossed my lips in their presence. My wife usually handles that.

I checked my pants pocket and pulled out the dollar. I thought maybe I could go up there and just place the dollar under her pillow. Who knows, maybe she would think she just missed it the first time. Or I could say, "Oh, I think I heard the Tooth Fairy leaving just now." This is what my father-in-law always does at Christmas time. We always seem to just miss Santa no matter what time we arrive.

As I turned to go back up the stairs, my oldest spoke again.

"It's okay, Jessica. Whenever the Tooth Fairy is late or misses you on a stop, she always leaves five or ten bucks the next night."

What the devil was she talking about? I wondered. When I was a child in the

early seventies, you were lucky if you got a quarter. Did the Tooth Fairy's pay scale rise with the cost of living? Was my wife giving away fives and tens for a tooth she eventually just threw away? I had to get to the bottom of this and get to the bottom right now. So I marched down the rest of those stairs and I asked her.

"Jen, honey, when did the Tooth Fairy leave you five bucks?" I asked, trying to conceal my emotions. The smell of waffles and hot maple syrup fluttered about. I asked the question as she was stuffing a waffle slice in her mouth.

She chewed, stabbed her fork into another waffle slice, and gulped down what she had in her mouth. She knows not to talk with food in her mouth. So when her mouth was free of food, she said, "At Grandpa's house." Then she thrust another waffle slice into her mouth. That father-in-law of mine, I thought to myself.

By this time, the entire ordeal sickened me. Now I had to come up with a minimum of five dollars because I didn't put the money my wife gave me under the pillow the night before.

My unwillingness rose to a new high. There was no money in the house. I only had a credit card and the checkbook. Could I write her a check? What would happen to the Tooth Fairy if we went to a cashless society? I wondered.

Then I realized I was given a golden opportunity to set the wheels of truth in motion. I told myself I would not back down. I would win the war on right and wrong. Without taking another step, I turned on my heels and headed back into the kitchen to tell her the truth about the Tooth Fairy. I pulled up the seat next to her.

"Jessica," I said, as I looked in her guileless brown eyes. Her weeping had ceased but her tiny face attested to its truth. Her cheeks were marked by a clear liquid trail. Her eyes were puffy and red.

"Win the war," I told myself. "Win the war."

Through her smile, I could see the hole where a tiny tooth once remained. My eyes fell on her untouched waffle.

"Jessica, you know . . ." I started, but stopped. I could not go on. Staring into her swollen eyes, it occurred to me that I could still win the war even if I lost an occasional battle. I mean, I have the rest of her life and mine to build on her character, don't I? I could continue to be an example for her to follow.

"Jessica, I think I heard the Tooth Fairy leaving just now," I said. Her eyes ignited. "But you can't go up until you finish with your waffles. And I mean every last bite."

As I walked out of the kitchen, I felt great delight, joy, and relief, until I realized I still had to scrape up five bucks before she finished eating.

Twinkies

3rd Place - Personal Essay

Steven McPhail

Many writers tell fascinating and moving stories of how they came to their decision to write for a living. Sometimes a social injustice motivates them, and sometimes they have felt it as their calling from the day they were born. I, too, have a story about how I came to see writing as my calling in life. However, my story does not involve predestination or activism. Mine involves Twinkies.

I was in sixth grade, the final year of elementary school in Oklahoma. Like roughly half of my classmates, my parents still stubbornly insisted on packing my lunch for me. Mercifully, they retired the Walt Disney lunch box and opted instead for nondescript brown paper bags. Each day, I opened the brown bags to discover a sandwich, a bag of chips, a fruit juice drink, and some kind of dessert snack. On this particular day, my mother included a package of Twinkies. I ate my meal undisturbed, which was nothing new. As I reached for my dessert, however, a cry echoed across the classroom.

"He stole my Twinkies!"

My accuser was a young woman named Heather. Heather participated in almost every school activity and had almost every boy in class chasing after her. The word "popular" defined her as well as it did not define me. Despite the fact that I carried the same lunch each day, my classmates refused to believe the Twinkies I ate were actually mine. The whole issue quickly dissolved into an elementary school debate, which is to say there was a lot of shouting and finger pointing.

Mrs. Copeland, our teacher, devised a solution to solve the mystery. If no one would confess, she reasoned, we would spend our recess period writing "The Great Twinkie Mystery." I would like to publicly thank Mrs. Copeland for further ostracizing me from my classmates, as every story they wrote pointed the finger of blame at me. Each story grew progressively more insulting, and Mrs. Copeland simply laughed, demonstrating her reputation as a sensitive educator.

Two options remained for me: I could continue to take the rampant abuse of my classmates and read the rather pathetic detective story I had written, or I could revise my story and fight back. I chose the latter, and feverishly rewrote my tale as another classmate wrote about my house covered in Twinkie wrappers. Then came my turn to read.

The story that followed would have made Sam Peckinpah cringe. Quentin Tarentino would have decried it as far too violent. To make a long story short, I

blew up the entire school and spared only my closest friends. I learned three things that day. The first was that shock value is a valuable tool, when used in moderation. I also realized that I enjoyed writing and enjoyed seeing the reaction of my classmates to my writing. Finally, I learned that writing a story about the violent destruction of your school earns you three years in counseling, no matter how provoked you were.

To this day, I have no idea who took Heather's Twinkies. I cannot be certain the Twinkies even existed in the first place. What I do know is that they have earned a small place in infamy, as they are responsible for my attempts to break into writing. So, when I have a particularly bad case of writer's block, I buy a package of Twinkies. And this technique very rarely fails.

On a crisp, January Sunday, the day after my wedding, I traveled by car with my husband, Omi, to visit his old village. "My distant family has lived in Mohon-Pur," he exclaimed, "since the be-gin-ning!"

As our car drove through the lush countryside of gigantic shadows from out-spreading mango trees alternating with flat-rowed green rice fields, the landscape changed gradually. The ground was flat and the lustrous glossy-green began to be replaced by a few scattered, scrawny trees and dwarf bushes with tiny, fragrant, orange flowers. My instinct told me that I was near to Mohon-Pur, a small village in the Birbhoom District, West Bengal.

"We are," our long-time family driver announced, "precisely one hundred-seventy miles west of Calcutta." We drove four more hours on the paved but bumpy road, seeing the mud houses with thatched roofs of Mohon-Pur. The clear view of the left side of the road showed miles of ready-to-harvest wheat fields swaying in the crisp breeze, and yellow, dusty mustard flowers displaying their lucid beauty. Beyond the field, I could see the curving horizon where the morning sky embraced the ground. A little stream with muddy water flowed through the wheat fields to its unknown destination, while the village farmers weeded their adjacent vegetable patches. Some herons and kingfishers were busy making a morning catch as the *ru*, *mirik*, and *putee* fish jumped out of the murky, reddish water. The sunshine glistened on scales when the silver fish leaped out of the stream's cold water to kiss the kingfishers' deadly yellow beaks. It stole my breath. On the right side, patches of tropical bamboo forests reached for the blue sky. Occasionally, I saw rickety-tall, lonely palm trees guarding the nearby villages for the last century. There were rows of bean bushes about two feet high alongside the road, and village cows grazed or crossed the road, mooing in their time. The crisp, cool air filled our car with a spicy smell from the mustard fields, and the swishing air from the bamboo leaves invited us, as the tall shafts bent down to the ground. The bare-foot, barely clothed little children clapped and ran with cheerful voices alongside our car, announcing, "Uncle Omi is here to show his bride!"

Slowing almost to a halt, to avoid any mishap, we drove for another half a mile and finally arrived at a narrow, crooked bridge--the entrance to Mohon-Pur. The bridge was built almost a hundred years ago on the little stream. A posted sign informed us, "Warning! Cross the Bridge at Your Own Risk!" We laughed and drove over the bridge as we swore at the useless politicians and faulted the government. "The buggers visit here every five years with empty

promises to improve the conditions, and the ignorant villagers continue to live only with unfulfilled dreams.”

As we entered the village, our car had to stop next to the unpaved road. We started to walk to his uncle's house. The midday air was filled with the revolting smell of chicken droppings, *taari* (aged rice liqueur), piles of garbage, and stagnant rain water from the patches of ankle-deep holes. By then, our arrival had been announced, and all rushed out to receive us with natural smiles. Omi was delighted to see his old uncles over-burdened by dowry, his weathered-faced aunts chewing *paan* (green leaf with beetle nut), his olive-skinned cousins with babes in arms, their servants, and the rest of the villagers. The women wore colorfully printed cotton saris with matching blouses and hair braided with jeweled clips and stylish ribbons. Their tinkling-glass bangles and vivid, multicolored forehead-dots and ear-to-ear grins welcomed me to their village life.

Men hurried to join us, wearing madras cotton, hand-woven shirts tucked under their shin-covering, white *dhoties* and shorter *lyongis*. They carried their toddlers on their shoulders. Children halted their Sunday soccer match, stopped their midday swim in the hyacinth-covered *jhill* (a very large pond), abandoned their hide-and-seek game, and climbed down from the guava tree to see us. They touched my sari as they cheered, “Bride is here! Bride is here!” Two spotted village dogs didn't know what to make of my brocaded, bridal visage, but they approved anyway with a bark and a wag. Omi was smart to wear his khaki pants with collared shirt and a pair of slip-on shoes; he easily mingled in the crowd. It seemed as if the whole village had waited for us since the dawn, and they stopped their daily life for a while to celebrate our visit. I was the delighted guest in their monotonous life.

The unpaved, dusty road was about fifteen feet wide--enough room for a cart. The neatly maintained mud houses alongside the road were built in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Although I knew about the uniqueness of Mohon-Pur, I was astonished to see each house painted with a beautiful mural on its roadside or entrance wall. The images were carefully chosen from the *Ramayana* (the great Indian epic): *Rama's Demon Killing*, *Sita's Wonder About the Golden Deer* and *The Death of Garuda*. Painted with vibrant characters, blues, greens, oranges, and reds, the houses were visible from far away.

We finally stopped at his great-uncle's house with its spectacular display of a mural: *Rama's Returning Home with His Wife after a Long Exile*. The mouth-watering aroma of the feast, the sweet smell of pink honeysuckle, and the white jasmine on the front door welcomed us, while sweeping away the ever-present foul air. I gladly accepted the great-aunt's cordial invitation and entered their home to join the celebration.

Nouveau Femme
Della Janis

1st Place - Expository I

Good-bye Errol Flynn, Good-bye James Bond, Hello Lara Croft.

I love old-time movies, but gone are the days when we see another person like Katherine Hepburn working for Cary Grant at a big corporation.

No more pouted lips or cooing whispers from a passive Marilyn Monroe-like character, and no more close-up shots on the silver screen watching Sophia Loren strut her stuff.

Sorry, dudes and dudettes who still enjoy the oldies. The screenwriters behind a very diverse group of scripts are being called to task for changing the female culture--daring to update the "chick flick." Bless'em! The "woman's movie" is breaking out of its mold, and there's no going back! Oh, there's still the occasional inspirational weeper and respectable romantic comedy, but look out for more of the edgy escapist fare that teens and young adults find titillating.

The "chick flick" is now a larger genre that encompasses the female action films, along with the traditional romantic comedies and weepers. Maybe the word "chick flick" will carry a lot more weight renamed "nouveau femme."

Erin Brockovich is a great example of the new genre updating the times. In the beginning of the film, she lacks self-esteem and has a general feeling of powerlessness. She grows more confident, bolder, and more daring as the story develops. I applaud the brave way she handles supporting her children and the toughness needed to duke it out with a giant corporation. Erin is a heroine in charge of her own destiny.

In one of the old classics, *The King and I*, Deborah Kerr portrays Anna, the defiant, independent instructress, but she doesn't grow as a character. She stays within the secure walls of the palace, sings a few songs, and the king never views her as an equal.

However, in the modern version, *Anna and the King*, Anna played by Jodie Foster presents the governess as defiant and independent, but also displays her as being courageous and clever in a key battle scene. She is instrumental in saving a kingdom; and the monarch views her as an equal. It's inspiring to see changes that match a new era, to see stronger women's roles leap through old classics.

Even teens look for a more individualistic character, unlike Molly Ringwald in *Sixteen Candles*, a 1980's coming-of-age teen story. The lead performer in this movie sulks and complains because the most desirable guy in school is not

available. She leaves us with the impression that wishful desires and starry-eyed stares win the heart of a male.

Today, main characters would never be as wimpy, nor would they parade around at a debutante ball in long flowing gowns and tiaras. Tired of this old genre, young adults pushed the envelope in the story *Coyote Ugly*. A teenager actually wrote the script, showing the world that coming-of-age stories can be more than fluff. However, the movie did draw some negative reactions for the midriff baring "Britney Spears" generation, by depicting teen barmaids dancing on a bar counter.

Getting even with ex-boyfriends also raised the bar to a new level--just go to Harvard Law School. *Legally Blonde's* leading lady has enviable abilities in showing how it's done. She doesn't change her personality to please anyone, overlooking put-downs and criticism in order to accomplish her goals. Will Harvard be getting an increased number of female applications for law school? I bet the guys won't mind!

We can use a little shock once in a while. The shock arena is in a buzz about the film *Ten Things I Hate About You*, which came in for some major "tsk-tsking" because of a penis joke that some felt was insensitive. Don't feel disheartened by the lack of respect because there is some make-up time in this sphere. Young screenwriters of today feel this is what the audience wants on the big screen.

Let's not forget to include the "girls kick ass" category. Now heroines like Lara Croft are swinging from chandeliers, accomplishing daring feats, becoming as bold and adventurous as James Bond. So impressed after seeing *Lara Croft*, I went out to purchase a new set of gym clothes and renewed my membership at the local gym. Lara's act is going to be tough to follow.

The words Errol Flynn and fencing are synonymous, but "nouveau femme genre" upped the level in fencing. After the successful run of *Crouching Tiger*, a female-friendly fantasy film, fencing classes gained in popularity, and enrollment doubled in the past year. This action movie puts more emphasis on gravity-defying stunts than on blood-drenched gunplay, leaving room for a new generation of action icons to replace aging stars. The Errol Flynn swashbuckling style is rapidly being replaced by martial arts--Hong Kong style.

Another example would be the Emma Peel heroine, who combines fashion, wit, and attitude in her mega kick-action crime fighting style in *The Avengers*. She is smartly leather-suited like a cat, has a sassy posture, and never loses her cool. A spot of tea anyone?

I adored the new version of *Charlie's Angels* for the high-tech gadgets, the action, and the triumph of will over insurmountable odds. The trio has their

own style of kicking evil in the butt. They combine their different intellectual skills, martial arts, and high-tech knowledge along with light-hearted humor, showing girls just wanna' have fun.

After so many years of trying to define my role as female, I'll have to update my image again and come to terms with the "nouveau femme genre." Don't assume that the term "chick flick" is pejorative. I just happen to think the term "nouveau femme" is more fitting for this era. After all, what's in a name? If "the media" reflects culture, then in the near future both male and female genders will redefine themselves and their roles in society.

Too Many Laws
Gary Hansen

2nd Place - Expository I

I've always thought there were too many laws. But it's getting worse. It seems like everything is illegal nowadays. You name it and there's a law against it.

Soon after I moved to California, they passed a helmet law for motorcyclists. Nobody asked the motorcyclists how they felt about it; they just did it. One rider showed how pissed off he was by putting a helmet on his head and committing suicide with a gun to his head. He left a note: "You've taken away my last freedom; life's not worth living." Now, I'm not as fanatical as this guy, but I understand his frustration. Ask yourself, whom does the motorcycle helmet law serve?

When our founding fathers founded this country, they based our constitution on an unobtrusive government. Needed was a minimum set of laws to keep citizens from getting out of control. An abundance of laws was perceived to restrict freedom. By electing a representative government, we could ensure that overly restrictive laws would not be enacted. The Declaration of Independence states: "That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."

Then came the lawyers, career politicians, and the old perception that politicians are smarter than their constituents and therefore know more about what's good for us than we do.

I remember when the late Sonny Bono was elected to the House of Representatives. He owned an Italian restaurant in Palm Springs and ran for mayor to eliminate some of the stupid laws. After arriving in Washington, he was placed on the Justice Committee. One time after a committee session, one of the career politicians took him aside and said, "Sonny, you need to work on your speech." Sonny responded, "You mean I need to talk even dumber for you to understand me?"

If you want a simple and uncomplicated life, you certainly wouldn't elect a lawyer to make your policies in Washington. Unfortunately, well over half of our politicians in Washington are lawyers. I constantly hear about rooms full of laws in Washington, many of them incomprehensible and conflicting with each other.

Of all laws, the one I find most offensive is involuntary manslaughter. This

law is used to prosecute people for having accidents. A good example is when a mother accidentally backs her car over a child in the driveway, or when a guy changing the tires on your car, forgets to tighten the lug nuts. Involuntary manslaughter allows the government to blame somebody for almost every death. We don't have accidents anymore. Unlike almost all other felonies in America, involuntary manslaughter does not require the prosecution to prove intent (since by definition, there was no intent). Citizens can be arrested and incarcerated even though no laws were broken, due to a tragic result of which the citizen was only indirectly responsible.

Many of the cases are so pitiful that charges are never filed, such as when a car trunk or an old refrigerator is left open and a child crawls in and suffocates. But you often hear about some gung-ho district attorney willing to press charges against parents when their child drowns in the Jacuzzi. Ask yourself if this law serves the governed.

One day I was watching the evening news and heard something that made me go orbital. The story concerned a guy who was cleaning his gun, which he thought was unloaded. The gun went off accidentally, and he shot his child in the head. Miraculously, the child wasn't hurt badly. Since the child wasn't dead, the DA charged the man with attempted involuntary manslaughter. I went nuts and screamed at the television.

"How the hell do you attempt to do something involuntarily?"

"How do you attempt to have an accident?"

My wife thought I was crazy, and I have to admit that maybe I was. I found the address of the station and wrote them a letter. I asked them if I had heard incorrectly, or if the reporter had misspoken. If not, I prompted them to do some investigative reporting on the absurdness of "attempted" involuntary manslaughter. Of course, they never responded.

I searched the Internet and found another story about "attempted" involuntary manslaughter. An Ohio judge had thrown out a case, saying there was no such law. Thank you very much.

Often, during campaigns, I hear politicians say, "When I am elected, I promise to pass a law to . . ." When I hear this, I tune them out. We have too many laws already. I'm waiting for a candidate who wants to clean up our current laws and get rid of some stupid ones. That's the guy I'm waiting for. I would support some term-limit laws if they prevented someone from becoming a career politician. I would definitely support a law prohibiting retirement programs for politicians. Until then, I'll just keep complaining and hoping that I don't hear about anymore arrests for crimes like attempted involuntary manslaughter.

I stared across the table at my enemy. Weighing in at just over half a pound, a mountain of chocolate, whipped cream, and strawberries began to collapse under its own weight. As I readied my weapon of choice, a fork that the proprietors of the restaurant kept in service despite the loss of one of its prongs, I knew I had confronted the most deadly and terrifying dessert of them all: the dish known simply as Death by Chocolate. Death by Chocolate is a perfect example of the dessert confections that, with one bite, can incapacitate or even kill an unsuspecting diner. These "Fatal Desserts" are the most intimidating to the dessert hunters. For beginners, it is best to begin with the "Harmless Dessert" dishes, such as cookies and plain ice cream, before working their way up to the "Dangerous Desserts" family, which include the most basic chocolate and peanut butter pies offered today.

The cafeteria at Saddleback College remains a prime training ground for the amateur dessert hunter. Here, any number of Harmless Desserts can be found. The most basic desserts for the beginners are, of course, the sugar cookie and vanilla ice cream. They prime the palette for the assault of flavors that later levels tend to bring, as well as acclimate the body to higher amounts of sugar. With time, the amateur dessert hunter can work his way up the ladder to the slightly more dangerous "sundae cups" with chocolate or strawberry topping, or the more daring cookie creations offered. At the very edge of the Harmless Desserts category exists an insidious new creation: fudge cookies with peanut butter and caramel chips. These dangerous morsels of dessert are not for the uninitiated dessert hunter, as their high sugar levels can induce the horrific condition of "sugar shock," in which the victim begins to get very hyper and, in extreme cases, blathers of nonsense and other embarrassing acts, which the victim will both forget and regret later.

The second category, the Dangerous Desserts, is not for the uninitiated. The high sugar and rich flavor of these confections can overwhelm even the most experienced dessert hunter. The entry level Dangerous Dessert remains an old standby, the French Silk pie. While containing dangerous levels of sugar and chocolate, the French Silk pie does not overwhelm, a testament to its original creator and an explanation for its presence on many dessert menus. Other chocolate and peanut butter pies fall into the category, though a combination of peanut butter and chocolate can push even the lightest dishes into the Fatal Desserts category. Other members of the Dangerous Dessert family include

Drumstick Sundae Cones, candy bars such as Reese's Nutrageous and Milky Way Dark, and anything produced by the Hostess Company. Indeed, Hostess's most recent creation, the Banana Twinkie, pushes the realm between Dangerous and Fatal.

Fatal Desserts can be found at almost any high scale eatery. At no place can more Fatal Desserts be found than at The Cheesecake Factory. From the deceptively titled "plain" cheesecake, to Adam's Peanut Butter Fudge Cup Ripple, patrons of the Irvine branch typically leave with cases of severe sugar shock. Grocery stores also contain prime examples of Fatal Desserts. One of the most notable is the Dreyer's Dreamery line of ice cream. From New York Cheesecake, a strawberry cheesecake ice cream, to Banana Boogie, a peanut butter, chocolate, and banana ice cream, the Dreamery ice cream cups have doomed many a dessert hunter. Indeed, the Dreamery creation known as Grandma's Cookie Jar, which features three different kinds of cookie dough in a vanilla ice cream, almost doomed this author a few short days ago. This ice cream is only topped by Death by Chocolate among the Fatales.

As I finished the Death by Chocolate, I felt a sense of satisfaction despite the lead weight that now resided at the pit of my stomach. While the sugar shock would, no doubt, make me intolerable for the rest of the night, the mere challenge made it worthwhile. I mastered all three levels of dessert, and I earned the rank of "Master Hunter." The only thing remaining was the five-hour stay at the gym, just to work off the dessert's high calories. Even in dessert hunting, no victory comes without a price.

Amber was raised on welfare. Her single mother waitressed in bars and restaurants six nights a week to provide for Amber and her two siblings what the government could not. Amber would look after her brother and sister on her own, though she was just a little girl herself. She cooked for them on the fortunate nights they had food; she did the laundry and put the kids to bed. She was just like a mother, only in grade school.

Later, Amber was one of the few of her friends to graduate from high school. Today, she is in college, taking nineteen units of classes and getting straight A's. She works full-time in retail in order to pay for school and food, and her siblings are still her priority. Amber wants a different life for herself. She has seen and lived in worse conditions than I'd care to mention, and she has learned to cope in a hostile environment. Her nurture has caused her to work hard for a better life than she's had.

On the other hand, there is Kayla. Kayla lives in a large, beautiful home owned by her parents. Like her two brothers, she was handed the keys to a brand-new car on her sixteenth birthday, and she has the luxury of trading her "old" car in for a new one every year. Despite all of this abundance, Kayla has no direction in her life. She has no goals, no desire to give her talents or her mind to anything except for partying and shopping. Because she has been so pampered in her life, Kayla has no desire for achievement. Her "nurture" has led her to believe that her sole purpose is to be taken care of by others.

These two true stories are about two friends of mine. Although there are many exceptions, it seems that being raised in poverty will very often instill survival skills in a person. Not only this, but it also seems that having very few possessions, living in hunger, and knowing there is more out there will push a person to rise above their situation. On the other hand, being handed every material possessions one desires will result in having no desire for achievement.

This concept is clearly illustrated in the movie *Trading Places* starring Dan Aykroyd as Louis Winthrop III, and Eddie Murphy as Billy Ray Valentine. A very wealthy man, Louis has been pampered and taken care of his entire life. His every need is met by his butler, Coleman. Through the schemes of Mortimer and Randolph Duke, the owners of the company Louis works for, he is framed and thrown into poverty in order to prove the concept of "nurture" to be true. Once on the streets and out from under the wings of his wealth, Louis is unable to cope. He resorts to his need to be taken care of and befriends the

prostitute Ophelia. She clothes him, feeds him, and gives him a place to live. What is most surprising is the change in Louis's behavior. As a rich man, Louis was very sophisticated and snobbish. On his own, Louis becomes a thief. He steals food from the Duke's Christmas party. He becomes a liar, attempting to frame Billy Ray by placing drugs in his desk, and he comes home from the Christmas party drunk. Because of his very wealthy and sheltered upbringing, Louis cannot cope with the harsh realities of the world.

Then there is Billy Ray. Billy is homeless in the beginning of the movie. Because he has always been poor, Billy Ray is self-supporting. His street-smarts tell him that pretending to be disabled will make more money than simply begging. Later, even as a rich man, Billy's rough upbringing is apparent. Because he has always taken care of himself, Billy feels very uncomfortable allowing others to take care of him. For example, when Billy first arrives in his new home, he refuses to let Coleman take his jacket.

Another aspect of his nature is ambition. His first day on the job, Billy amazes the Dukes by knowing exactly when they should inform their clients to purchase stock; his life on the streets has taught him the situations in which people will buy or invest. *Trading Places* clearly exemplifies the contrasts in social classes and the effect they leave on one's personality and attitude towards life through the characters of Billy and Louis.

I believe that my upbringing and financial circumstance have in many ways affected my life. Very much like my friend Amber, I too cared for my siblings while my stepmother worked long hours to support my sisters, and I resented everyone in my life at the time. I hated the fact that I could not be a child and had to care for children while everyone else was at a party, having fun and doing what most young people do. Despite these hardships, I am thankful now for everything I have been through. It was in those times that I was taught responsibility and endurance. There was never much money, so I didn't have new shoes or live in a beautiful, large house. My sisters and I received "lunch tickets" for school, provided by the government for underprivileged students. Instead of buying the lunch everyone else did, we ate cardboard-tasting peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I began working at fourteen and haven't been without a job since then. People will sometimes ask me why I put so much effort into my job. The truth is, I want more from life than what I have had, and I never want my future children to experience the pain of poverty in their lives.

Everyone has their own story. The environment in which we live can very much shape our personalities. Our choice is not what life will hand us; it is what we will do with the situation we have been given and whether we will let it affect us for the better or the worse.

We have all heard the debate about which aspects of an individual's genes are biological and which are caused by upbringing. Obviously, people need both heredity and environment to develop. However, my argument will be on how environment ultimately has the greatest influence. To prove this point, I will be discussing *Trading Places*, "La Vida Loca (The Crazy Life): Two Generations of Gang Members," and myself as examples. Each of these examples will emphasize how environment has influenced the characters in the movie, the article, and myself.

The movie *Trading Places*, written by Timothy Harris and Herschel Weingrod, is about two wealthy investors who pit heredity against environment when they switch the roles of a wealthy young trader and a street hustler. The movie clearly emphasizes environment as having the most influence in the characters' lives. First, there is the young trader, Louis Winthrop III, who is undoubtedly a product of a good environment. Winthrop had it all: a trustworthy butler that waited on him regularly, a beautiful woman, and plenty of money. He also worked as a successful investment broker in a million-dollar company. He had all of these things because of the opportunities that his environment provided him. For example, when Winthrop was growing up, the environment provided him with a good education. However, Billy Ray, the street hustler, clearly illustrates a product of a bad environment. Unlike Winthrop, he had to struggle just to get by. The environment that he lived in didn't give him the opportunity to get a great education. Where he lived education wasn't even a top priority; street smarts are what counted when it came time to put food on the table. An example of this is the time when Billy Ray pretended to be a street bum with no legs so that he could get sympathy from other people. In return, he hoped that they would give him a couple of dollars.

Finally, when it came time for the two to trade places, they had to adapt to a new, unfamiliar environment. Winthrop's previous environment hadn't taught him the skills that he now needed on the streets, and because of this he had a difficult time adapting to his new environment. The movie goes on to show Winthrop adapting to Billy Ray's old ways of life: hustling, stealing, cheating, and lying. For instance, when Winthrop was stealing food for the Christmas party that the two wealthy investors were throwing, he was only doing so because his poor environment left him hungry. This clearly proves the point that environment affects one's behavior. However, Billy Ray quickly adapted to

his new environment. His new environment gave him the chance to shine because he did not have to worry about how he was going to eat or where he was going to sleep. Even though Billy Ray didn't have Winthrop's education, he caught on to the business quickly. For example, when the two investors were explaining exactly what they did, he inferred that they were "bookies" and understood this because his previous environment had plenty of bookies. Billy Ray had skills all along but was never given the opportunity to put them to use. In the end, when Winthrop and Billy Ray found out that the two investors had had them trade places, they were angry and had to come up with a way to get back at them. Billy Ray then used his street smarts to come up with a plan to make the wealthy investors flat broke, but he also needed Winthrop's education of the stock market to bring down the investors. Ultimately, it's what they learned from their environment that prevailed.

In the article, "La Vida Loca (The Crazy Life): Two Generations of Gang Members," Luis J. Rodriguez names environment as having the greatest influence in his own life. Rodriguez starts off by painting a picture for the reader of how, at such a young age, his environment already started affecting him. At the age of two, his family moved from Mexico to Watts. When he got to Watts he spoke only Spanish, which automatically became a problem. In his elementary school, every time he had to use the restroom his teachers wouldn't allow him to go unless he asked in English. He was also teased, taunted, and picked on throughout his school years. Of course this affected Rodriguez. He had a hard time respecting his teachers and didn't like school much. He just wanted to feel as if he belonged somewhere, and school wasn't it. Then one day Thee Mystics, a local gang, came through his school with "bats, chains, pipes and homemade zip guns." Rodriguez saw how everybody feared Thee Mystics and wanted to feel that power for himself. He describes how most adolescents, like him, just want to feel a sense of belonging and respect; in many areas, much like the one where he lived, gangs provided this sense of belonging for young people. Rodriguez states, "Gangs flourish when there's a lack of social recreation, decent education or employment." Next, he talks about how society made him and other people in his same situation feel as if they were outcasts, and that they should be locked away. He finally explains how this approach that society has taken for so long doesn't work, and how the society as a whole must take some responsibility.

Finally, my last example will explain how environment has had an effect on me. When I came into this world, I didn't understand most of what was going on around me. When I was growing up, I looked to my parents for guidance. From them, I learned how to love and communicate, and to this day, I carry

some of their religious beliefs with me. For instance, whenever my parents have a disagreement, their way of communicating turns into yelling and screaming at each other. Because this example was set for me as a child, I have noticed that in my own relationships I resort to this method of communication. In summary, parents have the power over the sort of people their children become because parents provide the environment.

In conclusion, our environment plays an enormous role in our everyday life. Who we are today is based on where we grew up, the people we know, our parents, and everything else that our environment consists of.

What makes us who we are? Nurture is the dominating factor that controls our actions and sole being: Louis Winthrop, Luis Rodriguez, and I all have been molded by our surroundings. One's surroundings consist of environmental influences that determine social status, the type of people with whom one associates, and economic factors.

First, Louis Winthrop is a character from the film *Trading Places*. He is a fine example of a product manufactured by circumstantial locations. When Louis's world is turned upside-down due to a criminal conviction that later leaves him dirt poor, his character is also turned upside-down. He goes from morally and figuratively rich to a low class criminal. For example, the infamous Louis Winthrop III resorts to befriending and living with a prostitute. However, when he was wealthy he would not have been caught dead speaking to anyone who was not a member of his snobby country club, let alone a woman of easy virtue. Also, due to economical losses, he submits himself to a life of crime by attempting to frame an innocent man and by stealing food, thus breaking his previously clean criminal record. Last of all, he goes mad and suggests blowing up his worst enemies who had been responsible for his financial downturn. His environment determined his morals and values, regardless of who he was or where he came from.

Second, in the article of "La Vida Loca (The Crazy Life): Two Generations of Gang Members," Luis Rodriguez defends the nurture thesis by arguing that it is the community that creates the criminals. On a personal account, Rodriguez describes his own life as a gang member in a barrio in East Los Angeles. He grew up surrounded by danger and crime; he witnessed brutal police attacks, suicides, and car accidents that resulted in countless deaths. His explanation for resorting to this tragic life was that he felt his gang was his only defense against a harsh society. He was the offspring of a heartless society that shunned him for his alien appearance and peculiar language. As a young child, he desired respect, a feeling of belonging, and protection, which the society was unwilling to give but that (as he falsely believed) a gang would provide. For instance, Rodriguez describes the motives of the youth who turn towards gangs: "They can only satisfy their needs through collective strength--against the police, who hold the power of life and death, against poverty, against idleness, against their impotence in society."

In addition, I myself am a product of nurture. I was brought up in the city

of Aliso Viejo, a white suburban neighborhood located in southern Orange County. I come from a middle class family; I have never been deprived of essential or even unessential luxuries, so I have never felt the need to resort to crime. Not only does Aliso Viejo have a low crime rate due to its middle to upper class social status, it also has an extremely low gang rate. Thus I was never exposed to the temptations of Rodriguez and his friends, who all resorted to gangs and crime. Moreover, I attended an above average public school, which should be justly accredited for my scholastic desire and success. My surroundings have protected me from failure and guided me toward success.

Life is controlled unfairly by our circumstantial surroundings. Those surroundings are responsible for who we are and even more importantly they indirectly affect our decisions and actions. Specifically, it was the newly founded slums that broke Louis Winthrop, driving him to the companionship of those with questionable values, criminal actions, and madness; it was East Los Angeles that pushed Luis Rodriguez to gangs, a life of danger and crime. Lastly it was my cushioned neighborhood that kept me from temptation and led me toward success. Consequently, nurture was the determining factor in all three of our lives, and in an ironic sense, this makes us all in common despite different upbringings.

Staff Submissions

The following section features work from the magazine staff. The Wall Magazine Staff is comprised of fourteen close-knit, hard-working, extraordinarily dedicated Saddleback students who are wholly responsible for the publication of this journal. These students spearhead all aspects of the process, promoting a campus-wide call for submissions, selecting entries and artwork, editing, designing documents, organizing the layout, proofreading, arranging the printing, and distributing the journals at the end of the school year. We reserve the final few pages of the Wall to showcase the talents of our staff, who each were able to contribute one piece of writing.

Serving on the staff of the journal provides a unique opportunity for learning all aspects of literary magazine publication. We welcome students from all majors and backgrounds to join our team; no experience is necessary. Students who want to join the staff should enroll in a three-unit course, English 189: The Literary Magazine, during the Spring 2003 Semester. The class can be taken for a grade or for credit/no credit; students may take the class four different times. This course is particularly valuable to those interested in English, Creative Writing, Journalism, Art, Photography, Design, or Publications.

For more information about joining the staff of the magazine, contact Professor Amy Ahearn by phone at 949-582-4265 or by email at aahearn@saddleback.cc.ca.us.

Sooner

Albert Cordray

soon the consolation will be enough
i can go on and you can go on
buying into war
and rationed fear

soon our mourners will be pacified
smooth and fitted sheaths
for the softest grace
soon our bumper stickers
will mean that we actually vote
and give a damn about more
than temptation islands
and eMpTyV cribs

soon our enemy will have a bullet
in his skull
and we can look for a new one
to keep the little engine that could
chugging

it's too bad though
about McVeigh
that rascal kept us
from pigeon-holing islam
sooner
imagine the propaganda that could have been
but not to worry
soon we'll all be comfortable
with bombing

soon freedom will ring
safety
like countless cell phones
and credit card affirmations
in exquisite unison
the calling consolation of a billion soons

Original Sin

Marlene Hickey

“So, are you with us or not then?” Conor Murphy pushed his belligerent face close to mine and waited for my answer. He was a head taller than me, and I drew back but kind of natural like so he wouldn’t think I was scared or anything.

Aidan O’Sullivan tried out his own power of persuasion. “It’s not really stealin’, Fergus,” he said. “That old woman has loads of apple trees. She ain’t gonna miss a couple of apples.”

I still hesitated, cursed as I was with an overly developed conscience for a boy of ten. In Catholic Ireland where I was raised, small boys had to walk a narrow line. A short and soul-threatening step it was from high-spirited play to simple sinning. But torn I was, too, for I desperately wanted to be one of the lads.

“Old Mrs. McGrath’s always mean and snappy to us kids anyway,” Brendan O’Toole said, wiping out any touch of wrongdoing with this simple bit of reasoning. Added all together, it started to make sense to me. Maybe if you have an abundance of fruit and you’re not kind to kids, you deserve to have some of your apples “borrowed.” Besides, everyone knew that she had the tastiest apples in the countryside.

We had all read about American cowboys and bandits, and in every story there was always a lookout man. To avoid being a full-fledged thief, I grabbed at that solution. I didn’t want to admit to the others that my heart wasn’t comfortable with stealing apples, so I offered to be the lookout man.

Once I agreed to help raid the small apple orchard, my three mates and I crept stealthily to old Mrs. McGrath’s land, bolstering our courage with stories of similar exploits by our older brothers who had taken fruit from neighbors’ farms and lived to tell about it. We knew there was a good chance of the old woman runnin’ out to screech at us but, so far as we could remember, she had never actually sicced the police on anyone.

One of us, probably me, mentioned the frightful possibility of being caught and questioned by the police if she did report us, but Conor had the solution to that. “Just say nothin’ and keep on sayin’ it,” he advised us with solemn authority.

When we reached McGrath’s, the others jumped over the stone wall while I crouched on top of it. Each one climbed up the nearest tree, leaning into the leafy branches to shake loose the apples and making noise enough to wake the

dead. When Brendan slipped from a high branch, his crash to the ground sounded like the last trumpet. Sure enough, the back door swung open and out charged Mrs. McGrath in full voice, reading us out by all the saints in the litany. Delaying only long enough to pick up another apple or two, we raced across Jack Kelly's neighboring field. When we stopped to regain our ragged breath, the other three boys divvied up the apples from their pockets and took two apples apiece. Aidan offered me the smallest apple, but by then the fear of almost being caught and the enormity of our foul deed had hit me. I could all but taste the sweetness of the apple in his out-stretched hand. I reached out to take it, then pulled back my hand and ran home as fast as I could.

Sleep didn't come easy to me that night. I suppose I was afraid of dreaming, maybe dreaming of the fires of hell or about being in jail. The next morning was Saturday, confession day, and the weather was as foul as my mood. The sky glowered darkly and threatened the green land beneath it with great cannon blasts of thunder. The booms scared my little sister, so my mother repeated her oft-quoted lines:

"Tis the thunder that frights
But the lightning that smites."

There was no sign of lightning when I looked up at the sky, but I had a sneaky feeling that I was about to be smitten anyway. Slowly and dutifully I plodded up the hill to the village church to make my confession. All the other boys waiting their turn had clean shiny faces and slicked back hair, but none of them seemed nervous like me. Not even my three partners in crime.

Waiting was an awful ordeal and I wondered would I have the guts to go through with it. My turn came. Into the dark box I stumbled, shaking. The only other time I shook like that was at my very first confession when I was just a youngster.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned," I muttered as I crossed myself. Like every other kid, I had a little laundry list of venial sins and I stalled for time by reciting these with great care:

"I was bold twice, Father."

"I was angry with my little brother."

"I disobeyed my Mother once."

Then came the only one that mattered. "I stole apples once, Father," I said softly.

The penance wasn't bad at all, only five Hail Marys. Maybe he didn't hear me right, I thought. Maybe he was a little deaf. He was old, after all. I remembered my Da once sayin' that Father O'Brien was almost 50 if he was a day.

It was the first real sin I had ever confessed, but my stern conscience was

not satisfied. Something told me that I got off too easy. So even though monthly confession was my normal routine, I returned the two following Saturdays with my list of small sins and The Big One, "I stole apples once, Father." On my fourth visit, after I'd confessed again to being a participant in the epic apple-stealing caper, I thought I heard a chuckle from the other side of the screen.

The fifth time I went, I moved it up and featured it as my number one sin. This time there was a long pause. I'd been digging at the dirt under my fingernails that I hadn't quite been able to remove in the morning tub, but now I looked up nervously at the vague shadow opposite me. What was this hesitation? Why wasn't he saying anything? Maybe this was the first time he caught on to what I'd been telling him and realized at last what a terrible thing I had done. What would be my punishment? Would he bellow his anger for all the waiting people to hear?

At last the priest cleared his throat and gave a weary sigh. Then he whispered very, very gently, "Did you confess this before?"

Disappearing Act

Samantha Higgins

I followed the beat of their drum
I was the "silent" one
Truth
Unchained
Bringing forth
My growing rage
Chaos screams
From these crumbling walls
On the floor
Shattered glass
A foretelling of my future
A reflection of my past
I disappear from these halls
Deafened by the loud silence
Locked in my mind
Hiding is all I could do
To survive

Tiny Soldier

Duncan Jacobson

Taylor woke up to pained whimpers and metallic thrashing drifting through the open window. His fingers, which were just beginning to give up their baby fat, rubbed the sleep out of his dark eyes. It was still dark and silent, except for the faint sounds of a struggle drifting through his window. The TV flickered the last scenes of an old war movie, the victorious soldiers being pinned with medals by the cigar-fuming general. As he waited in bed, hoping his parents would check the yard for whatever woke him up, the images of the terrible things that could be in the darkness around his house floated through Taylor's blond-capped skull. I ought to solve this mystery myself, he thought; maybe he would end up on the TV, in a parade, like Athletes.

Taylor put on his plaid bathrobe and fuzzy bunny slippers, reasoning that his parents weren't going to wake up from the noise soon enough, and then he would lose his chance to win the war against something. Taylor's clothes draped on him at two sizes too large, because his mom insisted upon sticking him in clothes that he would grow into. The general pattern, repeated since he was old enough to remember, was that Taylor would grow into his clothes, and then have his mother insist on replacing the clothes that fit him because they had worn out. He appeared bigger than he was, but also younger and less organized.

What if it's a burglar, Taylor thought as he quietly opened his bedroom door and began making his way down the hallway. He took special care not to step on any of the creaking floorboards, spots which Taylor had memorized when he learned of all the horribly great things that glorious Cable TV spewed while his parents slept. An army of burglars met thousands of gruesome deaths in Taylor's mind, hundreds of communists, burglars, mafiosos, and other ne'er-do-wells, dying on every step. Taylor's bloodthirsty fantasies grew more intense as he made his way to the first floor with tense baby steps.

At the bottom of the stairs, Taylor noticed that the struggle had stopped. Whatever was shaking the fence and creating an unruly racket had decided to stop. Taylor awoke completely as deep silence dropped on the house. He assumed that the communists had heard him coming down, and had stopped moving, holding their breath. Maybe brown people are invading, Taylor thought. He had heard the brown people's music on TV, and he didn't like it one bit. Also, apparently the brown people on another continent had the AIDS, and Taylor shuddered as he realized that perhaps some of them had come to

give it to him. One quiet hallway later and Taylor was lugging a stool to the pantry, looking for his dad's gun.

Taylor, formerly anxious, was growing eager, with the same feeling he imagined a knight for King Arthur must have felt before charging into battle. The bulky gun stood the same height as Taylor, and weighed down his arms, but he just imagined he was carrying the Christ-like glory that awaited him, and his shoulders handled the strain better. All the parts of the gun, from the dangling trigger to the shiny, brutal shaft, stood up to Taylor's cursory checks. At nine, he understood completely that the manliness he craved was attainable only through proper gun maintenance. He didn't know what he was doing, except he felt that he had seen his dad go through the ritual many times, before leaving on hunting trips. Exiting the pantry, Taylor flipped the safety off, and felt as if he were a proper warrior in the army of good. Justice would save his house from something, and Taylor deemed himself worthy of being the vessel. Do they give Nobel Prizes for killing the Un-American? Taylor wondered. He imagined the glory of his death, and the President throwing a red, white, and blue rose into his grave.

He made his way to the back door. As if startled by the soft creak of the opening door, the noises began anew. They were more distinct, like a fish wrapped in chickenwire, struggling in a tacklebox. Taylor opened the door with bold aplomb and struck a series of poses that he thought looked ferocious on his toy soldiers. The gun went from shoulder, to waist, to eyes, and finally to the ground, where Taylor wound up at the end of his brief war dance. Then he remembered that Indians did war dances, not cowboys, and he felt embarrassed.

Just like soldiers in the movies, he crawled belly down, tossing his hips from side to side, feeling the hunt take him over. The yard was an abyss; a cloudcover had moved in earlier in the night and had completely blocked out the moon and stars. Taylor could make out, barely, the shape of the chainlink fence on the far side of his yard. Otherwise it was closely cut grass and an old barbecue. Taylor lay in wait, imagining blood.

One flash of movement in the darkness, and Taylor fired. The fence never got a chance to jingle, and the blast from the rifle was the only sound to pierce the darkness. Taylor leapt to his feet and ran through the grass, flinging his slippers off on the way through the damp, dew-covered grass. Something like glee drove him eagerly forward, and bloodlust put a smile on his face. He fell to the ground with a wet thud, in the same position as he had fired from, when he was close enough to see what he had shot.

Killer, the family terrier, lay half in the yard, half out in the alley behind his

brick house. Half in the yard is slightly inaccurate, because the head had been poking into the back yard, and it was nowhere to be seen. Or rather, it was everywhere to be seen. Taylor, had he not been in shock, would have been delighted to see the brain matter hanging from the chain link fence. A patch of hair, maybe an ear, was stuck to the house across the alley, adhered by fresh blood.

When Taylor's parents rushed outside to find what had woken them up so unpleasantly, they found him lying face down in the dog's blood, huddled in a ball, like a shell-shocked soldier.

Fly Away

Steven McPhail

Cheerful singing greeted Elizabeth each morning, a sound she never grew tired of. After months wasted in the adoption office, she began to fear a life without a child of her own. Then her old friend Nicholas intervened and brought her the perfect child. While she felt nervous at first, she now cherished the bond with her beautiful daughter.

In the living room, the Mighty Mouse cartoon her had daughter mimicked before still blared. Her daughter, Alera, lay sprawled out in front of the television, focused on her favorite rodent's adventures. She clutched an open box of cereal in her hands; she refused to grasp the concept of a bowl. She wore faded blue jeans and a black t-shirt featuring Slashman, her favorite character from the Mega Man cartoon. Alera treasured the shirt, having earned it after a marathon begging session. The deadly robot held his claws at the ready, his fierce expression a stark contrast with Alera's ever-present smile.

"Alera, honey?"

The girl refused to turn away from the adventure on the television screen. "G'morning, mother!" Elizabeth barely managed to decipher the words through a mouthful of cereal.

"I'm off to work. Promise you'll be good today!"

"I'm always good!" Alera's long, bushy white tail swished as she spoke. The tail seemed to grow faster than the child herself, quite a statement given her six foot height.

"Just remember . . ."

". . . no cartoons if you break the rules."

Elizabeth waved and walked out the front door. On the street, the other children of the neighborhood took advantage of the clear summer day, playing in their front yards. She wished Alera could play outside, but it presented too much of a risk. Many people in Atlanta, even her own neighbors, hated Alera's kind, the Emejre. Their hatred and fear of the half-human, half-animal creatures ran so strong, they might attack an innocent child like her daughter. Only a few weeks earlier, police had found a younger Emejre in an alleyway, hands and feet bolted to the wall, in a hate crime some justified as part of an ongoing war.

Such hatred, after all, provided the reason Nicholas had brought Alera to her in the first place. Elizabeth was her only chance to have a family and something resembling a normal childhood. The arrangement still posed a risk; if her neighbors learned of the Emejre child, both mother and daughter would be in

great danger. Still, Alera made the risks worthwhile, and Elizabeth planned a long, happy life with her daughter.

Alera crammed another fistful of cereal into her mouth, as her attention remained focused on the television. The train barreled down the tracks, growing closer to Pearl Pureheart with each passing second. The young Emejre crossed her fingers as the train neared, seemingly about to hit the heroine. Then, at the last possible second, Mighty Mouse swooped down and grabbed Pearl, along with the rest of the track, and whisked her to safety. Alera threw her arms into the air in celebration, launching her cereal throughout the room. "Oops."

She began to scoop up the tiny pieces, but stopped immediately as the commercials came on. Commercials, Alera reasoned, proved almost as entertaining as the show itself. The first commercial boasted the merits of "Chocolate Frosted Sugar Bombs," and the girl immediately resolved to ask her mother about buying a box. The next commercial boasted a new line of stuffed animals. Alera giggled as a mink showed up on the screen.

"It's me!" she said to no one in particular.

The next commercial, however, captured Alera's attention immediately. She knew the product, the words, even the theme song by heart. The X-47 Rocket Plane remained at the top of her toy wish list, and with good reason. Not only did the plane's sleek black and red body look cool, but the X-47 performed the most amazing stunts of any toy she'd ever seen. The commercial ended with her favorite moment, as a boy threw the plane with all his might, and it sailed the distance of an entire football field. It even flew right through the uprights, like a well-kicked-football! Yes, the X-47 Rocket Plane, with no batteries needed, stood head and shoulders above other toys. Alera wanted . . . no, Alera needed this Grail of the toy world.

"Mom'll cave, eventually," she reasoned, then picked up the remaining bits of breakfast and carried them to the kitchen for a proper burial.

As she dropped the wasted cereal into the trash can, she glanced outside to see the neighborhood children playing. She saw the group every day, and her sensitive ears caught almost every word they said. As a result, Alera knew them almost as well as if they were her own friends. Each day brought a new game, and Alera watched from the shadows of the kitchen, the cheerleader none of them knew they had. She longed to join them, as they often role played as heroic Emejre, but her mother forbade any contact.

Then, Alera stopped in her tracks. Derek threw something to Johnny, but not the usual football or baseball. She tracked it from Johnny's hands to Suzie's, and she knew.

They owned the X-47 Rocket Plane!

The plane failed to sail like it did in the commercial. In truth, it struggled to fly the twelve feet between the friends. None of that mattered to Alera, however. The toy she craved lay just outside her home. The thought of a cartoon-less afternoon passed through her mind briefly, but seemed a justifiable risk. She could venture outside, at least for a short while, and play. She might even make new friends.

She ran to the door and threw it open. The bright midday sun greeted her, and she took a moment to appreciate its warmth on her face. She sniffed the outside air, filled with many unfamiliar aromas. Most seemed appealing, and she resolved to learn about them each in time. She dashed to the street where the children played. Derek threw the X-47 to Amy, but she missed . . . after all, she always missed . . . and the beloved plane landed at Alera's feet. She kneeled to pick it up, and at last, felt the sought after plane in her hands.

A second later, Suzie screamed, "It's a monster!"

Alera jerked up, and watched as the children ran away from her. She watched in confusion and fear as they looked at her and screamed. Wasn't it cool to be an Emejre? Didn't children always get along with her kind in the commercials? She looked towards them, trying to figure out a way to calm their fears.

Just as she started to speak, a small rock crashed into the back of her head. Alera noticed less the little damage the stone caused, and more the look of hatred on the face of her mother's neighbor, Mr. Hankins. She liked Mr. Hankins, his kind face and his constant offers to help her mother with yardwork, but he no longer seemed to exist. The man in front of her instead held a handful of rocks, managing to throw them even as his hands shook.

"Leave our children alone, you filthy anthro!"

"I didn't . . ." Another rock sliced her forehead, and Alera backed away. She longed for the safety of her house, but Mr. Hankins stood in the way. Another rock hit her shoulder, and she finally turned and ran. She ran down several streets and through numerous alleys, not sure of where she planned on going or how she might return home. Finally, her legs gave out and she collapsed in an empty lot overgrown with weeds.

She curled into a ball, still clutching the prized X-47, tears soaking her fur. Once again, she smelled the air around her. Many of the odors remained the same, but Alera could only think of them as potential dangers now. The world around her seemed large, unfamiliar, and dangerous, and her heart pounded so fast she feared it might burst from her chest.

Alera closed her eyes, and thought of her home. She imagined her mother

coming in the door, with a bag of baked potatoes and broccoli, tired from a long day at work but thrilled to see her daughter. The two ate dinner, watched their favorite television shows, and went over the day's home schooling lessons. Alera even missed homework, compared to the alleyway. And, as her mother tucked her into bed, she would beg for the X-47 as a birthday present.

Instead, Alera fell into an uncomfortable sleep holding the X-47. Her home, her bed, and even her mother became the dreams in her new world.

Jacob's Mule

Ian McWhorter

Jacob was a simple man. He lived alone, with a few chickens, and a mule named Asa. He was a man of deep faith, and though he could not read, he had heard the Holy Scriptures of the Torah and meditated on them. Asa went with Jacob to market, carrying on his back the pots that Jacob made of clay from the river behind his home. He went with Jacob to synagogue, and on the way home, Jacob would tell Asa the things he had learned in his smooth, deep voice.

Lately, all anyone had talked about was the supposed "Messiah." Some said it was Barabbas, some said it was Jesus, some had even stranger candidates. Jacob didn't really believe any of them, because none of the "Messiahs" looked like God to him. But he would talk to Asa at great length about the prophecies and the people surrounding this phenomenon. He knew that the leaders of the synagogue favored Barabbas over Jesus, but he wasn't sure.

One day, several men came to Jacob's house. They climbed right over the fence and grabbed Asa. But Asa wasn't going to go without a fight. He began to bray and kick. All the commotion roused Jacob from his afternoon nap and he ran outside. When he saw what was happening, he was horrified. He ran to Asa's side.

"What are you doing? This is my donkey!"

"The Lord requires this donkey. It is your duty to give it to him. Many blessings on you."

"I don't want your blessings, I want my donkey!"

He shoved at the men. One of the shoved him back, and he fell down. They led Asa away. He chased after them, but he tripped and fell. When he looked up, they had vanished into a crowd. He searched around in vain, but could not find them. He sagged down in the middle of the street and began to cry. There was no way he could afford another mule, and even if he could, he couldn't replace Asa.

Then he realized something. They had said that the "Lord" required Asa. This probably meant one of the so-called "Messiahs." He went to the gates of the city and waited. Before long, he saw a man riding Asa followed by the men who had stolen him. As he entered the city, people recognized him and began to bow. That is, except for Jacob, who would not bow to thieves. He tried getting through the crowd in order to expose this no doubt wicked man. Unfortunately the crowd was too thick.

Jacob was perplexed. How could he get Asa back? His beloved mule did not look very happy. He tried using the special whistle he had taught Asa. Two blows short and high, one long and low. Somehow, Asa heard it over the crowd. He kicked once, dislodging the would-be Messiah and sending him sprawling into the mud. The crowd parted as Asa made his way back to Jacob.

“Good boy, my dear Asa. I wonder if that was in their prophecies,” he said.

A few days later, Jacob was out in his yard, tending to his chickens, muttering softly in Hebrew as he sprinkled their feed along the ground. He didn't even notice the group of men walking up to his gate.

“Hey old man,” their leader shouted. “The time has come to pay for your crimes.”

Jacob looked up. “What crimes?”

“You disgraced our leader. You knocked God's own Son off his donkey.”

“It was my donkey.”

“Everything belongs to the Lord.”

Jacob noticed the stones in their hands. He was about to ask what they were for when the first one hit him in the chest. He held up his hands. “Wait! This isn't nessecary . . .” Another stone struck him. Then another. Asa began to bray. The chickens scattered. Blood ran down Jacob's chest and forehead. And so it went. The first innocent man killed in Jesus's name. Amen.

Matthew 21:2

Personal Best

Brian Petyo

"Stomach in, chest out, arm muscles flexed . . . hmm, I wouldn't look too bad with a couple pounds trimmed off my waist. What a stud? Just look at that athletic physique." That's what I tell myself anyway and it usually over-inflates my self image about 75%. A quick twist in the medicine cabinet affirms the thinning area at my vertex--actually it's balding quite rapidly--and my self-worth plummets back to earth.

"Ahh yes, I can't wait until tomorrow," I muse, "cuz I just get better lookin everyday."

Now, really all that I need is to take a hot shower for forty, maybe fifty minutes--however long it takes for my muscles to peel away from my tired bones--and apply several tubes of BenGay to my throbbing feet and knees. I ran today, ran like there was no tomorrow. Now I'll probably not be able to even walk tomorrow.

"Three miles in twenty-one minutes, not bad for my first day of training," I told myself. My muscles and joints were fatigued, but I felt like a champion for having accomplished my first goal, which was to start running. I have since learned how to keep my sweats from falling and my joints and muscles have strengthened enough to endure runs more than twice as long as that one. I ran, and continue to do so, with a purpose. At the age of thirty-three, thinking that I could have been a good runner if I tried, no longer satisfies me and the time has come for me to try. The scariest part of my story so far has been deciding to go for it. I don't know if I have the fortitude to keep going, but I will find out.

My pipe dreams unfold during my longer runs, and my imagination runs farther than I do.

"This is an unbelievable performance from the runner out of Irvine, California. A no-namer making his debut race here today has upset the marathon by passing bla bla from New Zealand at a blistering pace." At this point in my dream, I imagine the shocked look of the other runner as I pass him to take the lead position.

"It appears as if Brian, an amateur runner from California, has stepped up the pace even quicker. For bla bla of New Zealand to catch up, he'll need to run faster than he ever has. It appears like only an act of God could change the outcome of today's race as Brian approaches the finish line for a gold medal." My dream varies from time to time, and I don't always get the gold medal.

Sometimes I don't cross the finish line first, but my performance is outstanding and the announcers run my story.

"You have overcome a late start and you've made the Olympic team. Tell us your story."

Then I say, "I was watching the 2002 Winter Olympic ceremony taking place in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Olympic theme for that year read 'Light the Fire Within.' I dismissed the motto as ridiculous and even stupid. After all, I thought, there really isn't a fire inside people. And I truly did not understand what that meant. And then it happened. I was changed by the spirit of the Olympics and became determined to obtain my personal best--I at least needed to try."

Now back to reality. I watched men's speed skating intently and gasped with lost hope as Apolo Anton Ohno fell down after being cut off by a Korean skater. Apolo was injured but continued to look toward the finish line and crawled past it for a silver medal. In my opinion, Ohno, the epitome of grace under pressure--patiently waiting to light the fire within until the last lap--was the best skater in that race, but he did not cross the finish line first. And then there was the captivating Michelle Kwan.

Michelle ascended the ice and skated virtually into the hearts of everyone watching, including myself. I completely surrendered to the beautiful performances of Michelle and gasped again as a second Olympian fell on the ice. And although she did not cross the finish line first, she championed an example for all. To get up, keep going, and finish a true champion--isn't that how real life is? In my heart, she crossed the finish line first. Her tears became a permanent piece of the figure skating rink forever and a reminder that everyone who tries is a winner. These exceptional champions demonstrate what it means to try.

In reality it is not likely that I will ever cross a finish line in first place, but there's no harm in dreaming. And to cross the finish line at all will be an accomplishment for me. The best thing about all this is that I am not afraid to try. The Olympic flame that ignited my dreams of being the best runner I can possibly be has thrust me into scheduling my first 10K race. In the quiet places of my heart I remain competitive. Becoming an athlete will take time, crossing the finish line first may never happen, but I will be good enough to make the other runners work for it.

I quit using multiple tubes of BenGay and I sprung for a pair of sweats that stay on. I no longer look in the mirror and imagine what might be or could be or if only this or that, but instead, I'm chasing my dreams of being my best.

Lucky Strikes

Leah Ramsey

Saturday morning the phone rings. I pick it up.

"Hello?"

"Hi dere, howr you douing?"

"Hi, Grandma. Good. How are you?"

"Verry vell, dankg you. Und ohw ist de vedder?"

"Oh, it's nice out. It was hot before, but now there's a breeze. How's Maryland?"

"Terrouble. Ve sit in da ouhse awday vwid da aiwr coundijshoner hrunning. Hwen I go ought wid da dawg und smoke, I melt."

"Uugh. Is it really humid this year?"

"Yeah, bude not more tso dan anyodder yeare. Und ohw is everybaudy?"

"We're all fine. How's everybody back there?"

"Doingk hwel."

"That's good."

"Jyeah, hun. Vwell, jjur grandpap hast gaune to de stoure. Ist your fadder hround?"

"Yeah, he's upstairs. Hold on."

"Alwright deare, mujch love to you."

"Okay. I love you, too. G-bye, Grandma."

While the weather changed, this conversation remained the same. But to know my grandma, you must understand her idiosyncrasies--she's German.

For starters, when she wakes up in the morning, first she fixes her hair and puts on her pink lipstick and blue eyeliner, then takes a shower and tries to keep her head dry.

She also smokes a pack of filterless Lucky Strikes every day. When she speaks, her voice sounds like a Volkswagen driving over gravel.

One time, Grandma, Dad, and I sat in a restaurant a few blocks from the house that they lived in after their first move from Germany to the U.S. My American grandpa enlisted in the army when he was seventeen and met my grandma in Germany just after World War II ended. We finished eating, and Grandma lit another cigarette.

"You know, Mom," said my dad--and of course we both knew, "they're saying those things kill you."

"Jyeah, but it don maudder tinz de Lourd takes es hwen he hwants us. It sayz szo in de bible."

I looked at my dad. "Yes. But doesn't it also say that the Lord helps those who help themselves?" He leaned back, folding his hands on the table.

"Wright. Szo I help myzelf to anudder Luckey Schtrike." Then she laughed her dry German chuckle and tapped the ash off the tip of her cigarette into the ashtray.

* * *

A few years later, Grandma and I sat alone at her kitchen table, against the window facing the driveway. The overhead light glowed with that yellow that veils photographs from the 1970s. She held a mug of black coffee in one hand and a half-smoked Lucky Strike in the other. I smelled the coffee's steam and the cigarette's smoke as they intertwined in the air between us.

"You know hgun, I started schmoking vhen I was about jyour age. Nasty habvit. Of course, everybody in Germany schmoked at de time. Und we were in der shelters mujch a da time, you know, vwiad whid da war und everyting.

"Vwonce when I was abaud eighteen, I sat on de porch, and dis is when we shtill lived in Nurnberg, ov course. Most au die property we onned was gone. Und I tought if I hat to go into dat shulter once more I'd go crazy. I lit a cigarette und that alarm went off, you know, and vwe're supposed to go into the shelters. But I didn' go. I thaught, if it's my time to go, den it is my time to go. And there weren't anything you could do about it.

"Tso I hurd da airplanes coming when I decided I'um just goin to sit der und finish my cigarette. Und I finished my cigarette and now der bombs were dropping. Und I lit anudder cigarette, und de bombs were gettin much loudher. Szo finally, durig my fourt cigarette, dey were vfallin all adround, und taught, vell maybe tis is it.

"Und den about fourty-five minutes past und dey all come bach agin from der shulders, I mean. Und I was just fine, und I um shtill fine today because I um wright, und he takes us when he whants us und not before den. Wright, dere."

I looked straight ahead and maybe I nodded. She put out her cigarette and went to the sink to wash the dishes. The pile of charred butts in the ashtray filled my head, settling in my throat. I retreated to the porch to swallow July's evening breath where fireflies flickered in the backyard. Mosquitoes, fattened on humidity, whirred around me, dive-bombing patches of bare flesh. One landed on my shoulder, but buzzed off before I could smack it. I rubbed the welt beneath my first and second fingers, trying not to scratch it, and a second one landed on my ankle.

The screen door creaked open, and my grandma sat down at the patio table, lighting another. The mosquitoes didn't bite her. She must taste like cigarettes.

Mini Skirt

Krystle SaHagun

Pink lipstick left on their mugs
Too young
For six dollar lattes
And blueberry scones
Purity--and white summer dresses--
Replaced with black eyeliner
And expensive panties
That spell out S-E-X-Y
Silly girls with makeup
And prom dresses
Making boys uncomfortable
Will they fall in Love
Or will they fall for lust?
Do they know what a "Lady" is?
Sit sidesaddle--Don't straddle
When you tease the boys
They like it
Offering cold open-eyed kisses
Warmer than their drunken embraces
When you please the boys
They forget you . . .

When silly girls are alone
They pray
Love me
Leave me
But please come back

What More Do Women Want?

Kathryn Schulz

I'm in my Sex and Gender class, sitting in front of Andrew. That's not really his name; I call him that because I swear he's related to Andrew Dice Clay; he takes it as a compliment. I am not at all surprised. He calls me Stanton. I'm shocked he knows who Elizabeth Cady Stanton is, but I consider the nickname a compliment.

It's nine a.m. and we're discussing Women's Rights. I hear Andrew's arrogant voice shout, "Dude, what more do women want? Seriously, you guys don't have it that bad."

I can't breathe. I clutch the scar on my inner thigh, the one I got when I was attacked outside of work. And although I somehow managed to run, my best friend was violently raped. Twice. I'm nauseous and I'm screaming. I had to take her to the hospital and hold her hand while doctors searched her body for his semen or hair. I forced her to reiterate the gruesome details of her rape to the police--over and over again. I drove her to the clinic to abort the baby that was forced in her. Protesters outside the clinic called us murdering whores as we walked through the door. They recited Bible verses and accosted us with pictures of aborted fetuses.

Tears of frustration roll down my cheeks when I think about my Graphics class: I remember the unwelcoming stares as I stood in front of a class filled with men. I remember the professor telling me that the Cooking class was down the hall and I remember them laughing.

I can hear my grandmother crying because she lost her children when she divorced my grandfather. I can still see the blood and spit dripping from her mouth as she yells, "He beat me. I had to leave or he would've killed me. Why can't I take my children?" She tells me I'm lucky: I am not property passed from father to husband, I can vote, and I have rights. I feel lucky, until my mom comes home crying because she is the only woman on the "top floor" of her company and people turn their heads while men harass her, then I feel helpless again.

I hear my mother and grandmother. I hear women all over the world. Too many mothers and grandmothers are crying. And now, I am crying too. What more do women want? We want to stop crying. We want to stop being raped and beaten, oppressed and ignored, objectified and degraded, violated and used, underpaid and underappreciated.

Of course, all that leaves my mouth is, "I'm sure it's hard for you to under-

stand.”

Andrew says that things are bad for men too. I agree. Society and gender roles oppress both men and women.

“We always have to lift heavy boxes and pay for dates.”

Oops, spoke too soon. I don’t believe Andrew has ever been on a date. Andrew thinks a woman’s place is in the home. I think that if I killed him, no one would care. I feel my teacher thinking the same thing. I can see her mentally beating him to a non-sexist pulp.

“Women need to stay home to take care of the kids.”

I can’t believe he’s still talking. I turn around and yell, “Either shut up or take your ignorance outside where I don’t have to hear it.”

“C’mon, Stanton,” he says, “Isn’t it possible that God gave women wombs because they’re supposed to take care of kids.”

I kick him as hard as I can. No, I don’t really kick him; I just wish I did.

“Hey, it’s not me; it’s God.”

He tells me to read the Bible. I tell him to read Nietzsche. He doesn’t get it. And again, I’m not surprised.

The subject shifts to sexism in the work force.

“Women can go to work if they really want--how’s that sexist?”

I remind Andrew that in the same job women still only make seventy cents for every dollar men make. He looks perplexed. I think he’s trying to subtract.

We finally take a break. My head falls to my desk and my shoulders quickly follow. I’m mentally exhausted. In times like this, I wish I still smoked.

Andrew taps me on the shoulder.

“What do you want?”

He looks at me with troubled eyes as he tells me he is from Pakistan and each of his parents have to work two jobs because their credentials are not valid in America. And they too make less money, doing the same job, than everyone else. He says that people give him unwelcome stares, call him names, and treat him poorly for no reason other than the way he looks. I’m in shock. I feel as though a curtain of oblivion and selfishness has just been removed from my eyes, exposing me to a new truth. I never thought Andrew suffered. How could he? He’s a man. I’m just as guilty as Andrew, and the whole world is just as guilty as the two of us.

From the youngest age, we learn to worry only about ourselves, our own struggles. The disease is not gender, race, or class. The disease is oppression. Society is tearing all of the Andrew’s and Stanton’s of the world apart. We are fighting against each other when we need to be fighting together, against something bigger.

An old man who used to drive by my house comes to mind. He had a bumper sticker on his car that read, "No one is free when others are oppressed." I tell Andrew about it. He nods. The teacher comes back in the room and interrupts our moment of understanding.

Now we're talking about the way women are portrayed in the media. She puts up a slide of Kate Moss, and Andrew says she looks like a crack-whore coming off of a ten-day binge. We finally agree.

A Struggle

Galena Segal

I startle at the voice of the radio announcer,
Trying to cling to my fading dream.
The war with the Germans is far from over,
And a few more towns are expected to be freed.

I wake up in a room with a low, dark ceiling.
My bed is a bunk with a skinny mat on it.
On the stove, where sunflower husks crackle,
A sooty teakettle whistles its morning song.

I smell a crust of bread that is under my pillow,
Feeling proud for having saved it for today.
My boots by the stove are still soggy,
But my coat has dried from last night's rain.

I drag myself through a veil of droplets,
Covering my head with yesterday's news.
My classroom smells like a wet dog has slept there,
But the stove is warm, and the ceiling doesn't drip.

At noon, the bell rings--a long awaited moment.
The student on duty brings a tray to our class.
I count the minutes as she carries it around,
Waiting to get my sugar cube and dark rye bun.

After school is over, I rush to the library.
It's warm there, and the shelves are well lit.
My soul, like my gut, craves nourishment:
"How many books may I borrow today?"

On my way home, German prisoners toil,
Tearing down the wreckage of a preschool.
Their Russian guard hands me a haggard doll:
"Take care of her," he says, "she's not dead yet."

Staff Notes

Albert Cordray-

This semester, I was cut off by a Cadillac at a green light on Alicia and Paseo De Valencia in Laguna Hills. The driver was apparently under the impression that my lane was her lane when the light turned green. When I caught up to her I was still caught up with myself, so I flipped out my drivers license and carded her like a soccer referee. She was straight outta Leisure World. She tried to look away, but I had her by the soul. What she did next is something I will carry to my grave.

Marlene Hickey -

Considers herself an eternal student, and is a longtime participant in a Saddleback Emeritus writing class. She claims she is Irish by marriage.

Samantha Higgins -

An English major, and a native South African. She frequents coffeehouses, bookshops, and often takes long drives with no destination in mind.

Chad Hogan -

"I have not failed. I have merely found 10,000 ways that won't work." -- Thomas A. Edison

Duncan Jacobson -

"I get up around seven / Get outta bed around nine / And I don't worry bout nothin' no / Cause worryins a waste of my . . . time" -- Axl Rose

Steven McPhail -

An aspiring writer and filmmaker who lives in Las Flores with his girlfriend and two crazed, homicidal guinea pigs. He also enjoys writing in the third person, like he did when he wrote this. "Bakunetsu God Finger!" -- Domon Kasshu, KoH 4711

Ian McWhorter -

My educational goal at Saddleback College is to start an accidental fire by way of careless cigarette disposal.

David Osborne -

A second year student at Saddleback College. He considers himself a modern day Renaissance man. As a result, he changes his major more than he changes his underpants.

Brian Petyo -

My hope to populate the countless blank pages and computer screens that lie ahead is for me, the essence of life: creation, replication and procreation. Admission to UC Irvine's English department--where I expect to shape the inner landscape of 21st century human experiences--is a post-mile mark on my becoming educated.

Leah Ramsey -

Leah Ramsey feels neither clever nor witty at this moment. Ask again later.

Krystle SaHagun -

Time is precious, hold it like glass. When you give it away wrap it in plastic bubble paper so loved ones may store it away forever in their hearts with lovely memories. Time is all I need. Thank You. Peace-Late!

Kathryn Schulz -

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -- Margaret Mead

Galena Segal -

Galena Segal immigrated to the United States in 1979. Atrocities of WWII and life in the former Soviet Republic are reflected in her screenplay, stories, and poetry.



Saddleback
College



US \$5.00