

Fall 2011-Spring 2012

THE WORKS

The Official Arts Publication
of Sauk Valley Community College



Winner of student visual art contest (above):
Puddle City
by Michael Krabbenhoft

The Works 2011-2012 Editorial Staff . . .

Forrest Cheatwood

Abigail Davis

Sarah Fassig

Christian Padilla

Megan Zabran

Faculty Advisor . . .

Tom Irish

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*Special thanks to President Mihel, Alan Pfeifer, and SVCC's English Department for making *The Works* possible.*

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Poetry

2011-2012 student poetry contest winner:

The Penultimate Chance

If I'd have known that the turbid wet of twilight's half-frozen puddles
Or the gelid confessions of a jilted heart
Was all I'd have between here and never again,
Or if I'd have known that the hungry, nocturnal vermin of this city's back alleys
Was the last bit of life I'd see,

I wonder how differently I'd be.

Perhaps I'd have let the unwelcome chill of a November night
Find its pleasure in rapping against the contented warmth
Of blood shut and kept beneath the skin.

Maybe instead of quickening my pace and raising my hood
I would have let the wind's cold demand a more deeply drawn breath.
I would have smiled at nature's sweet nothings, whispered under the trodden
leaves,
The ones I missed merely from lack of periphery.
Maybe I would have wasted less time anticipating the too little too late.

To pause, stop, and rewind
Again and again,
And each time to rue further from the almost unadulterated consumption
Of an evening with you,
It could have been more unexpected, transcendent, and true
Than anything to hope or think
At the time.

But I only gave half of me
When Even I know
I'll die eventually.

by Philip Arellano

2011-2012 student poetry contest honorable mention:

Hallways and Heroes

You're my period ever month.
At first you trickle in slowly one by one,
Then suddenly a heavy flow all at once.
The thirty-six of you come together, as if a month never passed.
Meets and greets; handshakes and high fives.
I am your hub, I am your Alpha, I am your home away from home.

Different faces, same names, pass through me for generations.
You're not my first and you won't be my last.
Same stories, different person, country, or year.
I've heard it all before.
Same orders, different commander, or executions.
I am your hub, I am your Alpha, I am your home away from home.

Your booze tainted breath stains my walls,
Your decadence shows evident with every story of debauchery,
Your wife would leave you in a heart-beat if I could tell her what you really did last
night,
Your secrets are safe with me, I am a vault of unspoken lies and truths.
You're still a hero in these hallways.
I am your hub, I am your Alpha, I am your home away from home.

I will see you off when you leave for a year.
You will be replaced by your family showing up every month to share information.
I will wait patiently like a good time capsule does best.
Some of you will come back to me, some of you will not.
Some of you left with families behind, but will return to find them gone.
I am your hub, I am your Alpha, I am your home away from home.

I am your armory, I'm also your Omega, and I will always be here.

by David Waters

Fiction

2011-2012 student fiction contest winner:

Social

by Stephen Hoyle

When he woke up his body felt heavier than usual as though years of aging had suddenly arrived whilst he'd slept, and every movement seemed more difficult and demanding, and he wondered if he had taken a sleeping pill before bed. Keep in mind that by that time he hadn't done more than turn onto his side. It's right about now that he begins to realize that the lower half of his body is unusually warm considering he usually slept naked; *I must have put sweatpants on last night when I got home*, he thought to himself. He hadn't opened his eyes yet, but like an instinct he knew he was in his own bed.

And while he didn't remember going home the night before he was just as relieved to be lying in his very own bed, and it was upon feeling the relief of this fact that he had an even more intense and gnawing sense of grief when he suddenly felt the presence of someone else's body lying next to his. He began to panic quietly to himself, if that's even possible. He lay there motionless like a fugitive trying to hide from his would be captor; which is to say his breathing was scared and heavy and unnatural, giving away his state of semi-consciousness to her (or him, or whoever was lying next to him). He heard a woman sigh deeply and he thought: *she must not have been as drunk as I was last night*, he inferred this from her unusual animation of tossing around in the bed. He could tell she was discontented with his lazing around, and rightly so, for it must have been about ten in the morning he thought (gauging the time by his level of laziness and usual hangover tendencies), a time which he usually occupies with energy and vigor, so for her to sigh would be a sign of her knowing and expecting this of him, he concluded to himself (a painful sign of her previous acquaintance with him, a particularly discomforting fact for him if it be so).

He gave a tired sigh of his own and said, "Good morning," with a less than enthusiastic tone. He faced his head away from her (and also the light shining through the window on her side of the bed) opened his eyes slowly and reached out for his stereo remote and in a ritualistic sort of way, contorted his arm behind his back to turn the stereo on. Car Talk was still on so he knew that he was right in assuming the time was somewhere between 9 and 10. *Good*, he thought, *still breakfast time*. The sound of voices in the room woke him a little and he turned over slowly and laid his still morning-crustured eyes upon her.

They must have gone to bed pretty late, he assumed to himself, because she still had her makeup on, and her thick blond hair was still clinging to the loose curls she had pressed into them the night before. She sat up leaning against the headboard with her arms crossed, one leg bent and the other extended so as to form a small tent with the sheets. She looked as though she were waiting for a ride to arrive that she knew wasn't coming, but other than her body language she showed no signs of discontent, except for her lips, pouting naturally, almost asking for a good morning kiss that at that point he was still unsure if he was entitled to. Her eyes were an unnatural shade of emerald green with a particularly piercing saturation and hue, enough to cause him silence if he hadn't already been waiting for a reply. Her cheeks sat high and full below them, as though they had been placed there as a frame for her gemstone eyes. When he saw her he was almost sick with desire (but mostly just hung over); the hunger and emptiness in his stomach became immediately punctuated by the fact that he couldn't recall who the woman was.

"Good morning," she said, with a sudden illumination that both surprised and

relieved him all at once. "Are you going to make me breakfast?" she asked with a smile he tried desperately to recognize. "You promised me you would," she said cheerfully and with a slightly rising tone, but not without a sense of hunger in her voice.

"Of course I'll make you breakfast." he said with a sudden endurance, as he realized he couldn't recognize her at all. Her eyes fixed on his deeply and questioningly for a moment as though she knew that he had no recollection of the night before. His stomach was knotted yet again at seeing a sign of suspicion in her, and this time it stuck.

And almost immediately she again showed no sign of suspicion as she said, "Great, what about pancakes?" But he didn't wait to see if suspicion surfaced as he jumped from the bed and proclaimed, "I'm gonna hit the shower quick before I start." and, realizing his rudeness, added, "Unless you want in first." He stood there motioning at the bathroom door. "Sure, why not," she said possibly calling his bluff, "I could use one." and in one smooth motion she propelled herself to the end of the bed and bounced off the corner and up at attention, her breasts swayed playfully underneath the button-up shirt she was wearing (that he assumed was his own from the night before), causing him to instinctively and awkwardly sit down on the bed and blush a little as she rushed into the bathroom and shut the door. She had been wearing his boxers too, he noticed as he sat there assessing the situation.

She was obviously comfortable enough with him to oblige taking first shot at the shower, and didn't much care that he had seen her practically naked. *Am I a fling or a friend?* he wondered. She gave off an air of comfort ability that he didn't and couldn't comprehend. He naturally assumed that his gender was keeping him from picking up some clues in what little behavior he had seen from her that would allow him to figure it out. He felt a little weird in attempting to identify her.

He decided to check the room for clues, sleuthing around quietly like some noir detective. *One of us (probably her)*, he noticed, *had folded our jeans and her blouse and laid them on my dresser last night before falling asleep.* He unfolded both of their jeans carefully and felt the pockets like a blind man, but they were empty. He looked around the room with a confused expression and remembered that he hadn't play detective as a kid for a reason.

And then there it sat at the foot of the bed on the floor: her hideous brown leather purse, wide open and inviting him to peek. He stood over it, looking down like a child looking into a wishing well, and with just as much amazement. On the radio, the car guys were helping some caller get his e-brake "unstuck," and in the bathroom he could hear her singing through an orchestra of artificial raindrops, her voice as lulling as her eyes. Without taking his gaze from the brown leather well, he reached behind him on the dresser (contorting again) and turned the volume to the stereo down until it was barely audible. He was entranced and befuddled at his next move.

Do I search through her purse or just admit to her that I have no idea who she is?

He stood there for a couple of minutes (a long time for hypnosis) before he realized she was singing "Captain Jack" by Billy Joel. *Who was she singing to? Herself? Him?* These thoughts, among others swirled around cautiously and simultaneously at both the front and back of his mind.

An awakening feeling washed over him as he grievously tore his gaze from the depths of his wishing well and turned to look at the bathroom door. He couldn't betray that voice, he thought (maybe a little too gallantly). *Or those eyes! Stimulating and intoxicating to the greatest degree like an opiate designed to kill its user slowly.* With frustration and a little misplaced guilt, he left the room and headed out to the kitchen to start making breakfast.

The apartment was originally a studio, but after a few weeks of effort he had built his own room. This being so, the bedroom happens to be the warmest in the apartment, so a gust of cold air swooshed in the doorway as he opened it, slowing down his already dragging feet as he stepped out into the main room, which was basically a large living room (minus a television) with a kitchen tucked off in the corner.

Before he even opened the door to the fridge He remembered that he didn't have any milk, but decided to look anyway, and groaned just as convincingly as he would have if

it had surprised him. *We couldn't possibly eat breakfast without milk*, he thought; *breakfast is probably the only actual meal I have with a glass of milk*. He opened the door to the fridge again and stood there staring in at the food, feeling the cool air roll out onto his feet. It reminded him suddenly of being a little boy again and being at home on his birthday, a typically cold March day every year, waiting patiently by the door to greet birthday guests. *I must have been pretty young*, he thought as he stood there reminiscing, *because I remember all the guests were family instead of schoolmates*. And whenever the doorbell would ring he would pull at the old heavy oak door with all his little boy strength, his bare feet squeaked on the hardwood, and like a pre-greeting the wind would swoop in and send an intoxicating shiver up through his naked toes, exciting him even more.

He stood there staring at the empty void where he usually put the milk, the empty space reflected the void he held in his memory where her name should have been. The fridge started beeping at him impatiently begging for the door to be shut, but the cold air was so hypnotic flowing between his yet again naked toes cooling them like absent blades of cool morning grass. He began to regret not having stood in the morning grass in many years; his pendulous mood that morning was beginning to fatigue him again already. At this point he wanted nothing more than to crawl back into bed.

He shuddered and brushed off the cold feelings of regret and sadness of his situation, like dirt from working shoulders. *I can't very well make pancakes without milk; I can't even eat cereal, the basest of breakfast meals*. He felt utterly defeated by such a small battle.

From the bedroom came the distinct squeak of the faucet signaling the end of her shower. He began gauging her comfort ability again as he noticed she had been in the shower for close to twenty minutes, not the sort of short utilitarianism one might expect from a visitor, but a telling action nonetheless. The pendulum swings again and an acute sense of panic approached him. He wondered why. *What consequences truly hinge on my lack of recognition?*, he asked himself. Analysis is a disturbing thing, and while it is almost an equal to the observation which sets it in motion, it is also a distinct and separate entity in the mind; it is the infection to which observation is the exposure. In his terrified observation his analysis became that infection, directing itself to each cell and invading it, replacing itself endlessly until he was consumed with excess examination; over the years he had become definably neurotic. The panic in him began swelling like a cyst, and a pain (whether from the panic or hunger) started to form in his stomach as he heard her morning rituals continue, specifically the drone of the hair dryer, which he naturally assumed bought him some more time.

As he walked to the medicine cabinet to retrieve the Pepto Bismol he began retracing his steps in his head, but all the steps led back to his bed, and how he wanted to be there again gloriously ignorant of her existence. As he tipped back the bottle of chalky pink liquid he realized how strange it was to be completely oblivious of another person's existence despite their proximity and recent interaction. He felt unusually better at that thought. Or maybe it was the Pepto. *Maybe she isn't even there and I'm still dreaming*.

But that insanity fled upon hearing the hair dryer cease. He opened the fridge once more to check for the milk that certainly wouldn't be there, and trudged defeatedly to the bedroom.

Like some cliché of fate they both entered the bedroom at once and their eyes met instinctively. She was wearing nothing but a bath towel around her chest and a surprised look on her face which slowly contorted into a telling smile that sent a warm sense of calm from within him. He smiled back at her with a cheesy grin. A level of primal communication had overtaken them both as they circled the bed together slowly, constantly eyeing each other. His doubts began to recede as did the bath towel, and they both crawled under the sheets as the car guys explained adiabatic pressure to a clueless car owner.

This American Life was half over when they started getting dressed. She was still wearing his shirt and stuffed her blouse into her purse.

"So I'm out of milk," he said, expecting her to react with frustration.

"Oh. Well that's alright I'll just grab a bite on my way home"

"Well I was thinking we could grab one together. On me." he replied, with only a slight desperation. She seemed all business now as she began to gather her things together.

"Are you sure?" she asked as she zipped her jeans. He could tell she already knew it was alright.

"Of course, I promised you pancakes right?" It was only after he said this that he realized the question (or at least the way he had posed it) was all too questioning and his paranoia began to inflame again.

"You did" she said, grinning.

He felt like his character was faltering. He had been trying to keep the conversation as minimal as possible to avoid any notice of his obliviousness. There was a level of confusion occurring that the two of them seemed to recognize but neither would acknowledge.

She finished dressing in silence and they left arm in arm. She clutched him like a small child clutches a toy; she kept half of her mind on what she was doing and the other half constantly monitored his level of intent on holding her back. He recognized her child-like excitement and kept his arm around hers to her liking. All the while his mind was processing with the will of a supercomputer, in an attempt to produce a means of acquiring her identity without her knowledge.

They stepped from the cave-like lighting of the vestibule of his apartment building into the striking mid-day light of the city streets. It was exceptionally muggy and they both coincidentally and mentally reviewed their list of morning grooming to see if they had remembered anti-perspirant, but it wouldn't have mattered because by this time of day the streets smelled like sweat themselves. It hung in the air as if the night had been a real creature with real perspiration slithering its slimy girth through the avenues and boulevards.

She unbuttoned his shirt she was wearing until only one button clung around her breasts. She had released him of her grip and rolled up her sleeves and resumed holding his hand loosely. He noticed her sweating belly and forearms and thought blissfully of them rolling around his bed once again, and how even though he didn't really know her he figured they could just stick with that. They didn't have to know each other's names really. Most people only know each other's names. At least he knew she liked pancakes. Which he supposed was only true if she didn't "like" pancakes on Facebook too. This made him realize that her Facebook friends probably know more about her than he does (in whatever intangible plastic way).

They passed a farmers market and she started telling him about how she loves them and how she saw a documentary about health food that said that farmer's markets were becoming popular again.

He only half listened as they walked the ten blocks to a smallish hole in the wall restaurant. He decided to let her know the truth after they had already eaten. By that point, he figured, she would be satisfied enough to understand. He thought this despite the sick feeling of worry still hanging in his stomach. He was only faking his appetite to keep his lie intact.

It isn't really lying, he childishly thought, *I haven't given her a reason to believe that I don't know her*. He found this all to be very unique due to its supposed complexity. He began to wonder how long a relationship could be sustained with only one person knowing the other.

They approached the restaurant and she (not knowing its location) almost walked past it, but he pulled her back towards the door and in the heat she gave way as he dragged her playfully inside. As soon as they were inside she buttoned her shirt as the air conditioning cooled the fresh sweat on their skin.

Inside the restaurant it was almost empty except for the waitress and cook behind the counter at the small grill and a lonely bum at the end of the counter drinking a cup of coffee. Across from the counter (which was on the left) was a lonely wall lined with six four-patron tables; the last two tables were hidden from the counter by a wall at the back creating a hallway at the end of which was a single unisex restroom. The waitress and the cook wore

identical outfits consisting of: a red apron over a white shirt with a red hat with the name Jimmie's emblazoned across it, along with a fresh greasy scowl.

The linoleum floor crackled as they walked back to the farthest table at the rear of the restaurant in the hallway. It was quiet and smelled faintly of scalded butter.

He pulled out the chair that faced the wall for her, a gesture he felt less than gentlemanly for, considering the situation.

As he sat down across from her, the waitress approached carrying a tray with two glasses of ice water atop two menus in one hand and a pot of coffee in the other. She placed the glasses on the table, not really placing them in front of either of the two of them specifically, and held out the pot towards the empty mugs placed upside down on the table. He flipped his over, accepting a cup. She shook her hand at the pot and the waitress set it on the table and produced a receipt pad from her apron pocket, along with a ballpoint pen. They grabbed the menus off of the tray themselves, and feeling rushed, perused them hastily.

She was a heavy-set brunette in her late thirties. Her glasses sat low on her nose for reading and her face bore a permanent yet characteristic scowl. She also had a slight limp which contributed to her half-cocked annoyed-looking stance. She looked more like a rendition of herself; a caricature of a dumpy-restaurant waitress. If not for the character in her scowl she would have looked like a complete bitch, a fact that both of the two of them recognized early and smiled at each other in spite of the waitress noticing.

She waited there in silence looking down at the two of them in a way that seemed patient only to herself.

After about a minute or so they looked up at the waitress who had been spacing out, lost in the curvature of the artificial wood-grain paneling lining the restaurant. "My name's Stacy," she said with a misplaced squawky drawl, "what can I get for ya?"

He motioned at her across the table and she hesitantly ordered: "I'll have one scrambled egg, a slice of fried bologna, an order of grits, and a hot cup of green tea." she looked back at him with a smile as if to say "your turn."

Her choice surprised him and he hesitated slightly until the waitress cleared her throat intentionally loud. "Uhm, I'll have a large bowl of oatmeal with blueberries and a coke."

"You want a coke and a coffee?" she asked.

"And the ice water." he replied jokingly, pulling a glass toward him and smiling across the table.

"I'll be right back." she said as she scrawled their order out. She finished and stuffed the pad into her pocket, grabbed the tray and hurriedly shuffled away.

Bob Dylan's, *It's All Over Now, Baby Blue* played softly from a speaker aimed at them from the corner.

"What happened to pancakes?" he said with a grin.

"Eh," she replied with a shrug, "changed my mind. Who orders oatmeal?" she tossed his very own grin back at him and he felt his face become red. She had a sexy sarcasm about her and it was enthralling to him.

The waitress returned with a smallish teapot full of hot water along with three bags of green tea and placed them on a dish towel on the table in front of her. She unmannerly reached across the two of them and grabbed the remaining mug from the other end of the table and filled it with hot water. They stared at each other with telepathic expressions composed of wide eyes and hysterical grins. They stifled laughter at the sight of the waitress' manners, and were more entertained than annoyed.

The waitress left and took their subject matter from them. He had not anticipated the rough awkward period of waiting for their food together and was sitting across the table from her dumbfounded and becoming steadily more nervous and uncomfortable.

She grabbed the two small bowls containing the individually packaged creamers and jams, and poured them out in between them and began stacking them into various structures and knocking them down. She was as effective as antacid on his stomach with her

playful demeanor and they began to play like children with blocks, and without a word they waited for their food.

The tepid aroma of fried bologna made him regret his oatmeal. Their food arrived shortly after its smell and it looked especially fresh. The waitress refilled his coffee with the pot she had brought and promptly left.

It Ain't Me Babe, played.

"So you're a coffee drinker huh?" she asked awkwardly between bites. She half smiled while she said this, and it reminded him of the expression she gave him when she had taken her towel off. He almost forgot to answer.

"I'm an infrequent coffee drinker." he replied "It is infrequently right? Or is it unfrequently?"

"Un or in? I think its un."

"I think it's in. I'm pretty sure it is."

"Whatever grammar boy." she replied. She sounded only slightly more entertained than annoyed.

"What do you mean?" he asked her, a little hurriedly. Something in the way she said that had jarred him and he was now paying full attention.

"I just mean that's how you always say things."

That statement confused him.

"That doesn't really make sense."

"I mean online."

There it was. He had what he needed. She knew him from Facebook. He no longer had an account, but he had about a hundred friends-of-friends he hardly knew from when he did, and she must have been one of them. But he didn't grasp this thought quickly enough, as he said: "O so that's where I know you from! Your Teresa's friend." he immediately realized his mistake and immediately placed his utensils on the table and stared at her blankly. He had blown his cover outright himself. A cold fear eased its way through his veins, pulsing red under his skin moving from his extremities to his core and up into his head and behind his eyes until his vision was greying and distorted with anxiety.

She sensed a shift in his attitude and knew what he had been hiding, he could see it in the way she mirrored his expression. She was stunned.

She flipped whatever breaker had been short circuited in the front of her brain and blinked and managed to make an almost smile as she said: "You don't know my name do you?"

"No, I don't" her slight smile confused him and his shoulders slacked as she continued eating slowly wearing her smile like a pirate flag. He was suddenly glad they were in a shithole as he would not have been ready for her to make a scene at a nice restaurant.

"Well I wondered if you remembered my name. I know you don't have an account anymore but I thought you at least recognized my face." she seemed calm. She picked up her bowl and slurped the last spoonful of grits out like a little kid eating cereal. Grits were running down her chin as she said: "It's OK though, I forgive you. You asked me my name all last night, but I didn't think it was that bad that you would forget it this morning." He was confused, and his stomach was permanently knotted. "Hell, you should be forgiving me. I know it's sort of a cheap way to hook up with someone, but I saw you last night at the bar and I couldn't help it. You were so drunk, so I walked you home. If I would have known you didn't know me, this morning wouldn't have happened I swear."

"Its alright." he replied, on cue.

"It's not alright, because I have to leave soon, and the only thing we know about each other is how to make the other one cum. I should have introduced myself this morning."

"It's alright." he repeated. "We can see each other again," he knew every line he was supposed to recite as his stomach slowly eased back into a contortion he could fit oatmeal into, "call me."

She grinned and dug a pen out of her purse. She tore off the unused portion of her

napkin and scribbled a phone number onto it. She held it out to him. He stared at it, a little stunned. She shook it at him and he grabbed it. She stood up, bent over next to him, and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank for the pancakes.” she said, and then turned around and left, still wearing his unbuttoned shirt. Like some urban apparition she disappeared in the haze of the dirty windows of the restaurant.

He looked down at the phone number begrudgingly. She hadn’t written her name on the napkin. And while he felt a sense of relief at the cheap origin of their acquaintance, he felt an equal sense of self-loathing at his own inherent dishonesty. *I’m a snake*, he thought, *I’m a lying piece of shit. She threw herself under my bus, forgave me, and then left her number... so much for social networking.* He sat squirming in his seat staring down at the coalescence of oats and fruit that suddenly seemed less like food and more like an excuse. He closed his fist around the shred of paper and dropped it, hidden, into her still steaming green tea, and left to pay the bill.

2011-2012 student fiction contest honorable mention:

The Bettendorf Panic
by Forrest Cheatwood

Earl Bettendorf rolled out of his crusty bed sheets. He really needed to wash those at some point, but it could wait. He lethargically pulled his robe over his body and fumbled with his slippers. Running a tired hand across his chin, he made note that shaving might not be a bad choice either. Still, it was not a necessity at this point. The only subject matter he cared to even consider was that of his breakfast.

The floorboards creaked and groaned under his feet as he picked his way through his apartment. Perhaps his over-indulgence of alcohol the previous night was a poor decision. Nonetheless, he proceeded through the screaming house. Nothing would stop him from acquiring his morning toast.

As he reached his kitchen, the thick aroma of booze mixing with urine reminded him of his reckless night. His stomach retched slightly, but his mind sent his digestive organ a reminder that the kitchen was where the toast would be. His stomach settled slightly, but he still felt nauseous. The air was almost visible. Maybe he should buy an air freshener, he thought, but, like everything else, it could hold off for a few hours.

Forcing himself to brave the toxic environs of his kitchen, Earl made his way to his breadbox. As he opened the wooden holder of his favored wheat product, a wave of panic flooded his being. His breadbox was bare. How he could possibly forget to purchase bread, he could not understand. Of all the things, his bread was forgotten.

Leaving no time to waste, Earl hurried to his door. Throwing on his hat and a coat, he ran down the steps to his apartment building's entrance. Realizing he had forgotten his car keys, he started towards the convenience store across the highway. Luckily, at that time of day, traffic was at a minimum. He managed to get to the station within two minutes. However, that was two minutes in which he did not have bread or toast.

As he opened the door to the convenience store, Earl heard two quick pistol retorts somewhere nearby. He paused for a moment and patted his body in order to discover any bullet wounds. Satisfied he had no new bodily holes, he proceeded into the store. At first, he was worried since he saw no clerk at the counter, but then he heard the terrified panting of someone behind the desk. He leaned over the counter and saw a shaking teenager huddled under the counter. Seeing no blood on the linoleum, Earl headed towards the bread division.

A plethora of wheat by-products greeted his hungry gaze as he stepped up to the displays. Though there were only three types of bread and all of the same brand, Earl found himself having to make a tough decision. Whole wheat, multigrain, white bread, they all looked delicious. Perhaps he could buy all three. No, he reminded himself, he hadn't received his paycheck. He could only afford one loaf. Remembering that he had had multigrain just yesterday, he opted for whole wheat. It was supposed to be healthier anyways.

As he neared the check-out, he found that he did not have his wallet with him. He panicked slightly, but then he realized that the clerk was still cowering under his desk and had not taken notice of Earl's existence yet. One loaf wasn't going to put the store in debt, by any means. Besides, if need be, he could always pay the store the two dollars and fifty cents another time. So, without further thought on the matter, he stepped out of the store and made his way back across the empty highway and back into his apartment.

Tossing his coat and hat on his floor, Earl stumbled to his toaster. He fumbled with the plastic wrap around his whole wheat, cursing the manufacturers for the flimsy material preventing him from retrieving his bread. Finally, he pulled two slices out from the plastic cage and placed them precisely in the toaster's slots. He checked the setting to make sure it was correct. Too high and it would burn his toast, leaving blackened charcoal for him to moan over, whereas too low meant that his toast would merely be warm bread. Over the years, he had learned which

setting worked with each bread type and size that he ate. Remembering the one for the whole wheat occupying his toaster, Earl turned the knob and directed his attention to his pantry.

His toast would not be complete until he applied the proper topping to compliment the toasts' robust flavor. Pulling the double doors of the pantry open, Earl Bettendorf was greeted by an abundance of decisions. Due to his incessant need for toast every day, he had amassed a significant collection of condiments and additives by which to enhance his toast-enjoyment. However, such an armory forced a volley of decisions upon Earl. How could he pick just one?

Apple butter, cinnamon sugar, grape jelly, strawberry jelly, apricot jelly, grape jam, strawberry jam, marjoram, peanut butter, crunchy peanut butter, Nutella, honey, syrup, almond butter, but the list was seemingly endless. He could mix some of the choices; mix the jams and jellies, the syrup and the honey, or the cinnamon and the Nutella. If he made coffee, then he could even dip his toast in that, or milk for that matter. Spying some of the cereal in his pantry, he chuckled to himself that he could even top his toast with Cap'n Crunch! However, having noticed it, the various cereals in his pantry presented themselves as options. Perhaps Peanut Butter Crunch would be good with apricot jam. Maybe Froot Loops and cinnamon sugar would make for a pleasing palette of tastes.

The short, sweet ding alerted Earl that his toast was ready. He had to make a decision quickly before his toast lost its comforting warmth and satisfying crunch. Thinking quickly, he grabbed a jam and almond butter and placed them on the counter. Taking one of the few clean plates from a cupboard, he removed his toast from the appliance and placed them on the plate next to the hastily chosen seasonings.

Making note of the types of condiments, Earl took a knife and a spoon from his utensil drawer. Rushing to unscrew the lids from the jars, he slathered the first slice with what appeared to be blueberry jam. Not wanting the other slice to lose his heat before he applied a topping to it, he smothered the toast with the light tan paste that was the almond butter. Once both slices were adorned with their respective flavorings, Earl didn't waste any more time.

Seizing the piece of toast with jam, he took a hasty bite out of the crispy, golden bread. Slowing his chewing speed, something horrible started to dawn on him.

Blueberry jam did not taste right on whole wheat.

Visual Art

2011-2012 student visual art contest winner is located on the cover.

2011-2012 student visual art honorable mention:



John Lennon
by Sandra Vargas

Morning Fog

It catches my breath, this beach in fog
with everything half-hidden from sight
All I can see is white – a concealing light
and though I cannot see the waves
the rhythmic sound of their crashing is clear,
their foaming surf erases the memory of my steps.

Wondering at this foreign familiar place with every step –
the world around transformed to a ghost by the fog
I know every rock, twist and turn when it is clear
but this half-obstruction completely changes my sight
I could close my eyes and feel the familiarity of the pounding waves,
but I feel bidden look on by the ghostly light.

The stark reality after the mist is burned by the sun's light
accentuates the fading memory of my preceding steps
The wild spray thrust against the rocks by tumultuous waves
is an ancient reminder of sea force, hidden only by dark or fog
I couldn't forget it, but still the reminder is unwelcome to my sight,
for when my eyes see it, its violent nature is made clear

When the mist has lifted, my thoughts are forced to clear,
the implications of my vague ideas are harshly brought to light
Each idea twists and squirms, trying to remain hidden from sight,
and I am filled with a longing to retrace my steps –
rewind each move, change each thought – back, through the fog,
forget the endless sight of the crashing, pounding waves

A sea of events, roaring, falling, unending like waves
each terror, dark thought, and suffrage made cruelly clear
betrayed, left naked, forgotten by the fog
everything all at once – a dizzying light
I pause, bewildered, uncertain of where next to step
I'm in the same place, but clarity has changed my sight

Why did I ever wonder at the gentle sight,
only tasting the salt, feeling the rhythm, but not seeing the waves?
Yet the atmosphere hardly matters to my steps,
their course and their purpose simple, clear;
unchanged by weather, my feet continue, no matter the light,
not caring whether or not their direction is masked by fog

I'm reminded the sight doesn't matter, that much is clear
I'll remember that the spray of the waves, though salty, is light
And my steps will fade with the surf whether or not there is fog

by Abigail Davis



Farm
by Amber Cech

Farewell Friend
by Brian Guttman

I found myself sitting in the local church on one early Tuesday morning; the sky outside was dark grey and overcast, giving the day a dreary atmosphere. It was a chilly morning, cold enough to see the puffs of breath escape from the sobbing crowd of people that had gathered outside. The only light in the church came from the multitude of candles lit around the altar and the tiny rays of sunshine that were able to pierce through the stained glass windows. On the walls were marble statues of various deities, all of them with vacant white eyes that stared deep into the souls of all in attendance, standing frozen and keeping watch over the numerous rituals that had taken place there many times before. They saw every moment and heard every word, firsthand witnesses to the triumphs and tragedies that had unfolded upon the well decorated altar.

A grim silence hung over the air of the church. The tension was thick as the people in the crowd hung their heads in solemn contemplation, all of them dressed in black with faces pale as plaster. The looks in their eyes were of intense grief; it was obvious that they were suffering from inner torment. The grieving congregation kneeled and prayed with all their might, hoping to bring our loved one back from the dead, stumbling through the doors wrapped in bandages and carrying the name of Lazarus.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the playing of a thunderous organ, a despondent hymn that fit the mood in the church. Then, through the heavy oak doors came the beginning procession, a group of parishioners wearing all black robes led the procession. The eerie exhibition was followed by a chubby pastor in a white robe and his short bald headed deacon. The clergymen were followed by four young lads carrying the casket on their shoulders as they made their way down the aisle. The casket had an elegant wooden finish and looked extremely cumbersome; the intricate design on the coffin was a masterpiece of carpentry. I imagined the raw emotion those boys must have felt, the pure distress of being chosen for the task of carrying your friend's corpse; a final favor for a dear comrade ...one last farewell to times well spent. I could see through their teary eyes that they were saying their goodbyes, remembering all those moments spent with the young soul in the casket. It was a personal escort to the gates of certain oblivion, their way of leading an old friend to the border of that final frontier. I imagined the inside of the casket to be completely dark for our loved one as they lie on a bed of silky red velvet, a proper place for their much deserved eternal rest.

The pastor took the podium and began his eulogy; Lying through his rotten teeth as he tried to speak about a person he never had the pleasure of knowing. I could see the sweat roll down his face as he racked his brain for anything to say about the dearly departed. He stuttered multiple times as he tried to spit out a line of comfort, something profound to assure the mourners that everything would be fine. Empty promises of an eternal paradise were uttered, but at the end of it, all he could come up with was "ashes to ashes and dust to dust."

The pastor then began to bless the casket as the deacon anointed it with foul smelling incense. The putrid smoke filled the entire church as young children coughed harshly from having their lungs packed with an odor as rancid as death itself. At that time, an older woman in the front screamed out with a cavernous despair. She then fell to her knees at the foot of the casket and solidly clutched it whilst sobbing uncontrollably. She had an iron grip on the coffin strong enough to strangle the life out of a grown man. Bellowing with deep depression, she laid her head against the coffin and kept repeating "not my baby...God please not my baby". It was then that two men came to her side and pulled her away gently, after that the casket was carried out of the church.

The crowd poured out of the doors almost as fast as the heavy cloud smoke that had settled in the church. The casket was loaded into a black hearse which was at the front of a line of cars. I slowly followed the procession which led all the way to the cemetery located across town. The casket was put in place over a seemingly bottomless hole; a crowd had

gathered in a circle around the gravesite.

The pastor once again said a few words to ease the funeral goers' suffering; a calming proclamation that our friend was in a better place now, and with those words said, they lowered the casket down to its final resting place. One by one the gravediggers shoveled in scoops of dirt as I wiped the tears from my eyes. Another good friend began their journey into the obscure haze of the other side. Remember to fear not when death wraps upon the door and it's finally time to depart. I turned to walk away, but before I did I articulated one last phrase; the only line I saw fitting for that particular occasion: "This is the end...my only friend, the end."

What the Therapist Said.

Calm and yet so scattered, tossed among the waves.
Versatile and ruptured, she's hiding in these caves.
Walls and stories build it high.
Waiting for a purpose, waking up to die.
Holding breaths in silent panic, don't waste another inhale.
They tell me that I'm manic, like the moon I'm pale.
Crevices are darkening, shadows paint the scenes.
A little girl who had no chance cries for you, she screams.

by Yvonne Weegens



Cat Woman
by Elisabeth Nyberg

“The Box”

A magical place where you
can always retreat and hide
To escape the horrors
that have been scarred into your mind
Where the real is or can be still real
Giving way to the surreal
Is it this place of escape
a treasure to find
When evils come and take
your innocence for a ride
Are you finding your solace
Is this the imprint
that you want left behind
Or, are these fruits of your bounty
capsizing your soul, challenging your existence,
dictating your course and vanishing goals
Step outside of your box,
or stay if you're pleased
Remember, demons are demons
who want to keep you in this place that you hide
and will never let you out alive
Relinquish their temptations
Find a new place to hide
leaving your place of retreat far behind

by Jacob Conklin

Problematic Total Self Destruction 2

The Firing Squad.

by David Waters

“You son of a bitch!” Ash yelled across the living room from the front door of the house as she crashed through it. “Is this what you’re going to become? A waste of life?”

Darren just sat there motionless in his video game chair, the Xbox controller still resting on his lap with both of his hands on it staring at the pause screen. He had been expecting this from her for over the past month. He knew this was coming, and he knew that there was nothing he could do to stop it. After all, she had driven two hours from Madison Wisconsin just to tell him off.

Ash’s tall slender frame stood condescendingly in the door way. Her silhouette was completely black due to the sunlight blindly beaming in from behind her. Darren hadn’t even seen sunlight for the past three days up until this point; it hurt his eyes to even try to look at her, and the beaming light just added to the intimidation.

“Well! What do you have to say for yourself?” She asked impatiently. Ash looked over the room and took note that the coffee table beyond the living room couch was covered in beer cans, whiskey bottles, and empty cigarette packs. The air was stale with smoke and alcohol. The whole house was lightless with all of the shades pulled shut. She was appalled at the sight of Darren sitting in the chair with an unshaven dead-pan face.

Darren said nothing. He just sat there in the game chair staring blankly at the television screen. He was taking what he deserved.

“Say something!” She yelled at him again.

Ash walked around the living room couch to the end of the coffee table and stopped in front of the fire place so that she stood at a forty-five degree angle from Darren in. His eyes shifted towards her and he could see her face better. She had a look of pure anger, a look that he had never seen of her face throughout the sixteen years that they had known each other.

“So you’re just going to drink yourself to death?” she asked with a criticizing tone.

“That’s the plan.” Darren finally responded.

“Fuck you, I’m outta here.”

Ash turned and headed for the door, her high-heel boots thundered and echoed across the hard wood floor. “I’m tired of having to carry your ass through every crisis in your life, no matter how big or small. When you decide to pull your head out of your ass, and man the fuck up, let me know.”

The front door slammed shut behind her just as loud as it did when I burst open. Darren sat there for a minute before he finally reached over and grabbed a cigarette pack from the table. He shook the pack to ensure that it had a few in it, opened it, took one out, and lit it. He tilted his head back with the first inhale of the menthol and stared at the ceiling with a feeling of relieve that the one way argument with Ash was over. He paused and looked at the cigarette.

“Lucky you, you’re the winner. You’re the final nail in my coffin.”

Darren stood up from the chair and stretched as he looked around the room which was being illuminated by the television screen. He looked to where Ash had been standing just moments before and realized that if she had walked into the room just a little bit further she would have noticed the Baretta 9mm pistol sitting on opposite side of the game chair.

Darren reached over the chair and picked up a half empty bottle of whiskey that he had been drinking since seven in the morning and took a pull from it. The raw booze burned its way through his throat on its way down to his empty stomach. He stood there, wobbling, trying to recall the last time he had eaten any food; it must have been days. But then he recalled that he didn’t really care anymore, and he just wanted the torments to end.

Darren was out of love, out of luck, out of money, and now with Ash walking out the

door, out of friends; but most importantly, Darren was out of hope. He set the bottle down and picked up the pistol. He stood there, looking at it with a semi-confused look on his face before tucking it away on his backside between his belt-line.

Darren picked up the bottle again and headed to the bathroom. Upon entering Darren took another pull of whiskey and bent himself over the sink anticipating his stomach's disapproval. The chemical reaction never came. He looked to the mirror and looked into his own eyes. He analyzed its features, like how long his hair had gotten over the past three months, and how it had not grown over five inches long since he was nineteen. His facial hair had been growing out for the past three weeks, but he could never grow a proper mustache or beard.

"Shave your face first".

Darren opened the medicine cabinet and grabbed his razor and shaving gel. Despite his intoxicated vision he took his time through the grooming process. He needed to ensure that all facial hair was properly disposed of and without missing a spot. This was a seemingly odd ritual for him that he used to conduct every morning. Once he was finished he looked back to the mirror.

"Now get rid of that hippie-ass mop top!"

Darren opened the medicine cabinet again and grabbed the hair clippers from the top shelf. He plugged them into the wall outlet by the sink, and then proceeded to take off his shirt. He shaved his head, once again, like his face, ensuring not to miss a spot. He even used the hand held mirror that his ex-wife had left in the house to ensure that he properly shaved the back of his head. After putting the clippers away he looked back into the mirror.

"Aha ha ha ha ha ha!" He laughed smacking the back side of his head.

"There you go, now you look like a God damned trained killer again! Fuck'n A! Get some! Kill'em all an' let God sort'em out!" Darren's mood went from joy at the sight of himself in the mirror, and was now suddenly solemn. He pulled out the pistol from his belt line and looked at it again, then back to the mirror.

"But forgiveness is up to God."

Darren grabbed the whiskey with his free hand and took a swig. This time, his body rejected the booze and he bent over the sink again, the coughing and gagging caused him to dry heave a small amount of blood up into the sink. He looked back up into the mirror. He stared into his glassed over red eyes.

"Yeah, you're some kind of hero alright. The worst kind."

Darren collected himself and walked out of the bathroom into the hallway and up the stairs. He continued onto the second floor of the house where he entered the bedroom and sat at the end of the queen sized bed. He looked around the room. The contemporary style home furnishings that his ex-wife "just had to have" were taunting him. He didn't want to look at them anymore. He stood up and walked into the closet and pulled his old foot locker out onto the floor.

Darren opened the trunk and began looking through its contents that had been left undisturbed for over the better half of two years since he was discharged from active duty. He looked at his medals first. They were clumped up in the corner of the top tray. He picked them out and lined up all twenty-two of them in order.

"A highly decorated hero, and for what?"

Darren moved on. He rummaged through old M-4 magazines, unit patches, old letters from his family, Ash, and his ex-wife, and hand grenade pins that he had kept for some reason. Then he came across the photos. The first one he looked at was of him with his old buddy Cortez, or as Darren and the rest of the platoon called him, "The Manic Hispanic" on 'shit burning detail' out in the desert. Darren smiled, thinking of his old fallen comrade. As Darren flipped through the loose photos of old comrades, and places he had been to during the campaign, he found his old platoon photo. Out of the forty guys in the picture, five of them had an "X" penned in over their face, while twelve others had a circle around theirs.

"Dude, we should totally 'X'- out the face of everyone who gets killed, and circle who

gets wounded!"

"Leave me alone!" Darren cried out.

Darren stood up and walked away from the foot locker and went back into the walk-in closet. He turned on the light and walked over to his old class "A" uniform that was hung separately from his other clothes. He stared at it in his drunken state of mind.

"Let's do this."

It only took him five minutes to don the uniform. Darren stepped out of the make shift dressing room as if he were about to be inspected by his commanding officer, and walked out in front of his bedroom mirror. He grinned to himself, somewhat impressed with how well he cleaned up.

"You can make the monster presentable, but he is still a monster."

All twenty-two of his medals on his left chest, accompanied by his combat infantry badge, air assault wings, mountaineer badge, and his expert rifleman's badge were the great accomplishments in his life; and now they were gone, lost in the past. Along with his wife who called him a murderer as she left out the door four months ago when she left him for another man. Along with the money he spent, trying to drown out the pain of her leaving; and along with Ash who he had isolated himself from because he wanted to deal with his own problems his own way. Along with his luck, that seemed to become more and more sparse as he kept drinking. As for his hope?

"You only have one hope left."

Darren looked to the pistol he was still carrying in his hand. He put the barrel of the pistol to the bottom of his chin and looked at himself in the mirror one last time.

"For God and for country, right?" He spoke into the mirror.

His reflection spoke back to him.

"Right."



Peeling Back Time

by Nichole Kriz

2001

Do you remember the replay?
Standing, sitting, lost in the blue
Images shattered across the screen
For days, until I had to turn it off.
Today I wish it would all go away
The aim of the lie.

I push it all away
Ignoring the screen
That makes us lie
About the red, white and blue
Marrying it off
To dismiss the replay.

His dignity lies
As his face flashes across the screen
The dumb lost look tied off
Turning his face blue
Stop the conspiracy replay
As the soldiers are thrown away.

I may not be a woman of blue
With a protective screen
And a little off
Because of all the patriarchal replay
Sick of the lie
That the U.S. government tucks away.

There was no screen
As the twin towers gave away
To the smoke filled color blue
That rolled off
As bodies lie
Stunk in my image replay.

Cancer stricken firemen lie
With little hope given off
As the ten year anniversary replay
Fills the television screen
Giving no hope away
To the melancholy blue.

The real reason lies deeper in the blue
To set my dreams off and the wishful thinking away
To kill the constant screen that replays and replays and replays...
replays, replays, replays...

And replays!

by Sarah Fassig



Ambassador of Rust
by Michael Krabbenhoef

Coming Home by Nancy Mayfield

George braked to a near stop as his car bumped across a double set of railroad tracks winding through the small Northwest Indiana town where he'd spent part of his childhood. When he was a kid, a train had passed through at least once an hour, carrying coal to feed the smoke-belching furnaces of steel mills or bringing crude oil to the refinery where it would be processed into gasoline.

Just beyond the tracks, he drove through huge iron gates and slowly rolled past the rows of tombstones on either side of him. He pulled his car off the road about a quarter mile in and sat with his foot on the brake, his hands gripping the steering wheel as though he were bracing himself for a crash.

He turned the key in the ignition, killing the engine.

George got out of the car and closed the door. It slammed hard, pushed by the fierce October wind. The gusts carried hints of a storm as they thrashed through the dead leaves on the ground, working them into a furious swirl. The huge oaks lining the road quivered, sending more leaves raining down. George walked in tall grass that hadn't been cut since summer faded weeks ago. Water droplets beaded on his shiny black shoes. He turned up the collar of his overcoat as he trudged through the uneven terrain. Damp cold seeped into his knees, which after 62 years of carrying him through life were starting to feel some wear and tear.

George knew where Robert's grave was, though he'd never been to visit it before. He hadn't been at the graveside during the funeral. Watching it from a distance, shielding his presence behind one of the massive trees, he had seen everything – the pain, the desperation, the regret. Robert's mother sobbing uncontrollably.

As mourners left, pieces of conversations reached his ears.

“Such a tragedy.”

“What a terrible accident.

“God's plan.”

“That other boy's fault.”

The words hit George like a cannonball. He had never meant for this to happen. Robert had been his best friend.

A freight train screeched by the cemetery, barreling through George's memories. He cringed at the sound caused by the friction of the metal against metal.

George heard the sweet music of the carousel floating through the air. The smell of hot dogs and popcorn was so thick he could almost taste them when he inhaled. Robert pulled his arm.

“Come on Georgie. We can't be late. The fireworks are gonna start any minute. You'll love them. They light up the whole sky.”

Robert pulled George by his sleeve toward the park. George had never been to a Fourth of July carnival. Shuffled around from orphanage to orphanage since he'd been three years old, he hadn't done a lot of the normal things most ten-year-old boys did. Since February he had been staying with Mary, a second cousin of his mother's.

Mary and her husband Stephen, with four children of their own, barely made ends meet. She earned a paltry wage at the laundry, working nights and weekends. Stephen did a little better working as a laborer at the steel mill, but he drank away his earnings. There was no room for another person in the tiny, one-bedroom apartment above a grocery store where they lived, but George, older than all of Mary's kids, could work.

After school, he delivered groceries. On Friday and Saturday nights, he was a pin boy at the bowling alley, re-setting the wooden pins after each bowler's turn. Before school and on Saturday mornings, he worked in the grocery's meat shop, holding the chickens

whose necks were about to be severed by an efficient swing of the butcher's knife.

Even though he wore a white apron for that job, he often came to school with smudges of chicken blood on his clothes, an occasional stray feather stuck in his hair and a rather gamey scent about him. None of this did much to endear him to his classmates. Except Robert.

He and Robert had become quick friends. The first day George walked into the classroom, he heard the snickers at his short pants that left a space of visible skin between them and the worn leather shoes he wore. Embarrassed, he'd taken a seat next to Robert in the back of the room. When the teacher told them to take out their pencils and notebooks, George sat staring at his desk. He didn't have any school supplies. A sheet of paper slid in front of his eyes. Robert held out a pencil to George.

"Here. I have an extra," he said.

They kept each other company during lunch, sitting on a wooden bench off to the side of the playground. Robert wasn't invited to play with the other kids. He wore clothes that were too nice. And he had such difficulty breathing that he couldn't run.

Sometimes Robert and George played marbles. Mostly they talked. Robert loved to hear about George's jobs at the butcher shop and bowling alley. And George loved to hear about the books Robert read. Robert had a lot of books at home. He told George about the Arabian Nights and about pirates who roamed the world's seas. He talked about all the exotic places he was going to visit. George was mesmerized.

"You can come too Georgie," Robert would say.

George would just nod, and say, "Maybe."

When summer rolled around, George worked more hours. He only saw Robert once or twice a week. But on this Fourth of July, George didn't have to work. And Robert was allowed to spend a rare day away from his nanny. They were going to see the fireworks, something George had only imagined.

About a block away from the park, they heard the distant whistle of an approaching freight train.

"Oh no." Robert stopped. "We'll never make it."

George craned his neck and looked down the tracks. The train still had to round a bend before it hit the straightaway that would take it by the park. They could make it.

"Come on. Run!"

He took off, clearing the tracks as the train made the curve about 30 yards away and chugged forward. Robert, not very athletic, stumbled and was picking himself up as George turned around. Robert kept running, as the train got closer.

George's heart raced. Robert would not beat the hulking black engine. Why hadn't he waited for him? George's scream was lost in the screech of the train as it rushed by.

"Robert! Stop! Stop!"

A hot whoosh of metal-tinged air hit him head on as the train rushed by. Panicked, George looked for Robert, but everything was a big blur. The train slowed down until it was rambling along at about 10 miles per hour. George threw himself down on his hands and knees, looking under the cars, trying to see any trace of his friend.

He caught sight of Robert's skinny legs on the other side of the tracks, fidgeting as he tried to see George. George started laughing as the train groaned to a halt.

"Whadda ya laughing at? Now we're going to miss the show. This darn train."

Robert glared at the solid black mass of machinery before him.

George looked up and down the length of track, seeing the caboose about 20 cars down. He thought about telling Robert to run to the end of the train to cross the tracks, but there was so much brush to slog through. Robert's asthma flared up when he got within a foot of a weed. Better just wait it out, he thought, looking at Robert's stricken face across the tracks.

"That's all right. This train can't stay here forever."

He smiled at Robert. They were about 12 feet apart from each other, separated by

the bars of the metal that attached two of the cars.

“Well, I don’t wanna wait,” Robert said. “You gotta see the whole thing.”

Robert took a few steps forward and lifted one leg over the metal hitch that connected the train cars in front of him. He got the foot over and sat straddling the bar about three feet above the ground. His feet dangled.

“Hey, whadda ya think you’re doing? Get down from there,” George said.

“It’s all right. I can make it.”

Robert clumsily maneuvered over the bar. His right foot got stuck on the metal piece and he almost lost his balance as he yanked it free.

Robert wasn’t very coordinated. George knew he shouldn’t let Robert do this.

“Listen,” George said, stepping forward and stretching his hand out to Robert. “This isn’t such a good idea.”

Robert reached his hand out to meet George’s. Their fingertips brushed.

“See Georgie, I can make it just –“

His words were cut off as the train gave a sudden lurch forward. Robert toppled forward, one of his legs still splayed on the tracks. George jumped back and the train started moving. He heard the crush of bone before he heard the agonizing scream as the mighty wheels of the freight rolled over Robert’s left leg.

That hot summer day in 1943 was the last time George had ever seen Robert.

He had been rushed to the hospital where they’d amputated his leg above the knee. Robert’s already weak immune system couldn’t fight off the infection that had set in, killing him ten days later.

At school, George went from being fairly invisible to drawing icy stares and harsh, judgmental whispers. The following fall, when he was caught stealing empty soda pop bottles from the laundry lunchroom where the workers collected them to take back for deposit, he was sent back to the orphanage. Mary cried when he left.

In the interim years, George had bounced around from place to place, eventually finishing high school and landing a job at the oil refinery. In the evenings, he puttered with an electronics set in his basement apartment. That hobby became his doorway to success. He eventually completed trade school in Chicago and went to work for a television manufacturer, later starting his own electronics technology company specializing in doing business overseas. Making it a point to stop at every place Robert had ever mentioned in his lunchtime stories, he had traveled the globe. He had loved it. He had married, had children, lost a wife, retired.

He had never been back to that small town again, until now. Mary had died. Although he hadn’t kept in touch other than the occasional post card, he returned for her funeral out of respect. She was one of only two people who had ever shown him any real kindness as a child. The other person was Robert.

George reached the row where Robert’s tombstone stood. He turned and counted as he walked along, staring at his feet and the bases of the stones. He knew it was the 11th one from the end. When he reached eleven, he stopped.

He looked up and locked eyes with the young boy smiling up at him from the black and white picture mounted on the left-hand corner of the stone. George pulled his eyes away from his old friend’s happy gaze and read the fading inscription on the stone.

“In loving memory of our dear son Robert Trustman. April 4, 1932 – July 3, 1943.”

The train passing by the cemetery had slowed to a meandering pace as it wound its way through town like a river carrying years and years of sediment to the sea with its constant current.

From his pocket George pulled an envelope filled with a dozen coins, from Spain,

Egypt, Costa Rica, South Africa and other countries.

He laid them on the edge of the tombstone and removed a folded piece of paper from the envelope, slipping it under the coins so it would not blow away.

It read: Fireworks are beautiful, my friend.

America's dark children

America, we are your children, grandchildren, and even your great grandchildren, we were black as the night and you could not stand our sight. You brought us, chained us, you stoned us, you hung us, you beat us, you raped us, you talked about us like a dog, we worked for you till we bled, you told us we were stupid and dumb,. We got drunk from the self hate you taught us, but still we kept your house, cars, and even your grannies. You said we were a louse and a snake with a disease but we took care of you, we suckled your babies and let ours starve. We became your entertainment, and your stereotype.

You condemned us when we acted out, you praised us when we acted like you and talked like you and used your words. You sent our men to fight your wars and cut them off when they tried to sit at your table. We died for you but you killed us anyway. Oh, but, yes, America we are still your children, your black and brown tar babies, who you nurtured in the bosom of degradation. We may be the hated and despised children but we belong to you and above all we still love you.

We tried to look like you and act like you, we entertained you as all children do we danced and sang for you, hoping you would love us. We loved you, as all children do, when we grew and questioned you, you told us we were bad and Anti-you. When our brother Malcolm yelled at you, you said he was crazy and mean and he should be more like his brother Martin. But oh all we wanted you to do is love us, love us the way you loved your other children from faraway.

by Lenie Adolphson



Untitled

by Yvonne Weegens

Last State

now you're afraid of Alaska.

a bleeding brown stain has supplanted your vision of
Everlasting whiteness Alaska
How you cupped your hands around the word crisp
Like you could roll it around your mouth forever
Until it was spat like ruined tobacco on the frozen dirt.

Here are things you used to do with dirt:
Soft lichen moves into springs into sponge
The light is trapped in micah
Flat crystal geometry
Hexagon
Tetrahedron
All the while joining to create structure
The mortise and tendon
The bird's mouth joint
The peg, the biscuit, the full menu of how things go
When you have more time than metal
More hands than wood
More cows with names

Still, you thought we might go to Alaska

Parents, grandparents
They flew to Seattle, they went,
With RVs and cruise ships,
With snow trains and remissioned cancer
They floated the inner passage
They came home smaller
Holding hands

But this mud, we
bring it in and sweep it out and it comes back year after
It's on the children
In the bricks, struggling against the axles
It quiets the garden seeds as they murmur
Together like castanets in their crisp paper promises
The pumpkins will not be so round
Nor the lettuce so unblemished
The rhubarb will freeze and turn to poison

anyway, you thought Alaska

by Amanda Eichman



Hanging Around
by Michael Krabbenhoef

New Kicks

Just copped a pair of new kicks
And I couldn't feel any better.
Out with the old pair that had rips
And got my socks wet in stormy weather.
With them laced up on my feet
I head out and hit the stroll.
In my ear, some hip hop beats
And not yesterday's rock-n-roll.
So with my ear to ear grin,
And my happy heal click,
I say "Screw Charlie Sheen,
It is I who wins!"
Because I got a pair of new kicks.

by Christian Padilla



Untitled
by Karen Donohue

The Turning of the Leaves

Like leaves we bloom
Learning joy and gloom
In an earthly tomb
While accepting doom

Like leaves we grow
But rarely show
The warm glow
Of the things we know

Like leaves we age
Inside a cage
Red with rage
From the war we wage

Like leaves we die
Wither and dry
With the end drawing nigh
Without knowing why

Like leaves we flee
Forever free
Abiding solely
By the winds that guide thee

by Brian Guttman

Task Force 132

The forgotten battle of Jonny's "man" cave.
by David Waters

The waves crashed at the bow of the mighty battle cruiser U.S.S Alaska as she sailed full speed into the wind. The sound of the ocean was rhythmic while the battle cruiser maintained a strong heading north and as the splashes of salt water weighed heavy on her decks while she plowed through rough waters. The grey/blue camouflage painting of her hull and decks matched that of the cloudy skies and sea behind her, from which she tore through with violent ease. The Alaska was a formidable fighting ship. She was the only cruiser to be mistaken for a battleship after the armistice of 1920 and the "Washington Treaty" where she was designed as a "Super Cruiser" In other words her guns were not the same caliber as a battleship, yet her size as a war ship matched that, thus making her a battleship with only fifteen inch guns as opposed to the standard sixteen inch caliber.

The Alaska was the flag ship and at the center of the small task force. TF 132 also consisted of three heavy cruisers: the U.S.S Salt Lake City and the U.S.S Huston were sailing off set of the Alaska's flanks, while the oldest ship, the U.S.S Richmond, was bringing up the rear of the formation. On the outer flanks of the Salt Lake City and Huston were the Task Force's two destroyers, the U.S.S Kidd, and the U.S.S Shaw. The point ship for the small fleet was the light cruiser the U.S.S Atlanta, and some where miles ahead of the battle group the submarine U.S.S Swordfish was scouting for the Japanese.

TF 132's mission was simple: Stop whatever re-enforcing Japanese warships from approaching from the north, and prevent that force from linking up with Admiral Yamamoto's main fleet to ensure the success of the invasion of the Philippine Islands. A task easier ordered, than accomplished, as most are.

"Where are they?" Rear Admiral Waterloo thought as he focused his binoculars on the grey horizon head of him. He was a tall, skinny, and greying man who smoked filter-less cigarettes like it was the national pass time, and fought like the devil at a nunnery. However, this was his first fleet command. He was inexperienced at maneuvering a whole battle group against a superior enemy force, or any force for that matter, that was somewhere out ahead of him.

"Any word from the Swordfish?" Waterloo asked over his shoulder.

"Negative skipper." Replied back the Alaska's Executive Officer. "We've had zero contact with them for more than eighteen hours."

"God damn-it" Waterloo hissed under his breath. "I told captain Hoyle I wanted a Situation report every twelve hours. And what does he do? Leaves me blind! Let's hope to Christ he didn't get compromised and depth charged to death."

"He may be trying to evade the enemy right now skipper." The XO tried to reassure Waterloo.

"Contact! Bearing 3-2-5 multiple radar blips!" yelled the radarman.

Admiral Waterloo walked to the port side of the bridge and focused his binoculars to the azimuth given. At first look he saw about twenty Japanese fighter/bombers heading straight for the Task Force.

"Fuck! Sound General Quarters! All hands man their battle stations!" He ordered.

Suddenly, a distant explosion was heard just before the Alaska's warning siren drowned it out.

"Sir! The Richmond has been hit!" Called out the Radioman.

Admiral Waterloo look took a second look through his binoculars at the same azimuth, this time at the horizon. There moving out from behind an island he saw multiple Japanese warships, two of which were battleships. The next thing he saw was the flash and smoke from their main guns firing in unison.

"Evasive Action! All Ships, evasive action!" He ordered to the Radioman, and the XO.

"It's a trap!" Yelled Lieutenant Akbar.

It was too late. The massive enemy shells came crashing down and around. All but one of them fell short of their intended targets. The Destroyer Kidd practically blew apart with a direct hit to her forward magazine shooting derbies hundreds of feet into the air. Admiral Waterloo could do nothing but watch with horror as the small ship sank with all hands. Task Force 132 began to break up, zigging and zagging to avoid being hit by the next barrage.

“Helmsman! Right full rudder, reverse starboard engine!” Waterloo barked out. “XO, get me a firing solution on those battleships and return fire!”

The sky began to become peppered with flak as the Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and Huston tried to feverishly fend off the incoming enemy aircraft.

“Sir! Shaw reports sonar contact, enemy submarine, bearing 1-2-5, probably torpedoed the Richmond, and is pursuing afterwards!” Cried out the Radioman.

Task Force 132 was out gunned, out maneuvered, and had no air support with a superior enemy force bearing down on them. The Alaska’s anti-aircraft batteries were in full action but not accurately enough to stop an incoming Kamikaze from crashing into her bow’s hull at full speed.

Another salvo of enemy shells came crashing down, this time they were concentrated on the Huston. Of the eight sixteen inch war heads that crashed around her, two found their target. The Huston took an enormous blow to the mid-ship and stern. Her main guns belched flame and smoke in a desperate attempt to return fire as the incoming rounds hit her. Even if her shells found their mark, it would be nothing more than a pin-prick to their target in comparison to what she just suffered. The Huston began listing heavily to the left showing signs of inevitable capsizing.

“Sir, firing solution fixed! Jap Cruiser targeted!” called out the XO.

“Give ‘em hell!” commanded Waterloo.

“Give who hell?” the XO asked in a confused female voice.

Waterloo paused and looked behind him to where the XO should have been standing. Instead he saw The Dead Poet standing in the doorway. The command bridge of the Alaska quickly dissolved into walls covered with posters from punk rock bands, “Taxi Driver”, Betty Page, and half naked women from Maxim Magazine.

I scrambled to collect all of the miniature warships off of the table and hide them in my arms, but it was too late. The Dead Poet had already discovered what I was doing, and figured out what I was up to in the privacy of my own “Man Cave”.

“Awe,” She smiled and teased “are you playing with your battleships again honey?”

“I am doing very important research for creative writing class, thank you very much!”

“Does that important research involve you spending all day in here playing with your toys?” She crossed her arms as she leaned against the frame of the doorway with a grin and cocked eye brow. Her scarlet hair draped over the right lens of her thick rimmed glasses which were a window for me to see the look of doubt in her eye.

“They’re not toys, they’re miniature figurines!” I tried to protest, but it was no use. For the first time since my mother had caught me masturbating in my closet fifteen years previously, I felt humility like none other.

“Oh, you’re so cute, come on, let’s go make dinner.”

I shrugged to myself and admitted my fate. I looked to the small armada in my arms on the table and looked over my shoulder to ensure the Dead Poet was gone and out of ear shot. I leaned my head down to the little plastic replication of the Alaska and said.

“XO, the bridge is yours, let me know how the battle turns out.”

The Plot

I tied him to a chair in my heart. A hood of delicious lies cloaks his head. Wrists bound behind, he can't help but wish he hadn't opened his mouth. A mouth so bold. The drool is collecting in a pool between his thighs. Oh yes, I gagged him. I will not tolerate screaming. He attempts obscenities between gritted teeth. It's hard for me to hear him with this bass pumping through my veins. I dance around him. Circles and circles. Flames of hateful vengeance consume my inner child. I want to kiss him, but his lips are lathered in bullshit. It simply won't match my lipstick....

by Yvonne Weegens

Pointalism
Skulls

by Donielle
Hoffman



U of Minion

by Christian Padilla, Nathan Rice, and Megan Zabran

Open with the main character Minion and Robert talking in their dorm room. Minion is having a flash back during this time.

Minion: *Okay man please tell me you have some good news.*

Robert: *What do you consider good news?*

Minion: *Oh I don't know maybe that you're actually going to go on a second date with one of the girls I set you up with. Did you and Abby have a good time or what?*

Robert: *Yes, we had a very good time actually. And yes we are going on a second date.*

Minion: *Excellent! See what'd I tell you. I knew you would find one that you would like. Well, I would find you one that you liked.*

Robert: *Yeah well I didn't really have a choice.*

Minion: *(laughs) What do you mean? She forced you to go on another date with her?*

Robert: *No, I mean that she insisted on a double date so we spent the whole night with one of her friends and her date.*

Minion: *Well that's not so bad is it?*

Robert: *No, only that I didn't get any time alone with her.*

Minion: *Hey man, not every girl is gonna give it up on the first date. Just be patient and she'll put out eventually. (Laughs) So, you wanna go grab a drink tonight or what?*

Robert: *No thanks; I've got to get planning for our next date. It's tomorrow night.*

Minion: *Now that's what I like to hear man! Before you know it you'll have a steady girl that you'll be able to ditch to go party with me! (laughs again) Well good luck with your plans.*

Robert: *Thanks, I'll need it. I don't want to let this one get away.*

Minion: *Tell me about it. Anyway, I'll see you later man. Knock her dead.*

Robert: *Oh I will.*

Back to the present in the story, Minion steps into the bathroom and tripods on the wall, nursing a hangover and blurred vision.

Minion: *Ughhh...*

Minion looks to the left and notices the leg hanging out of the bath. He finishes peeing and investigates, Seeing the ankle bracelet he recognizes her.

Minion: Abbey? You alright? Rough night last night huh?

He opens the shower curtain to reveal that she is naked.

Minion: Damn girl Robby must've worked a number on you.

Minion finally realizes blood on the shower curtain and running down her body.

Minion: What the f....

Stares at the body for a lengthy amount of time, speechless.

Minion: What the hell is going on? Is this a fucking joke? Seriously this isn't funny.

Minion: Abbey wake the fuck up this isn't funny!

Minion checks her pulse, and feels nothing.

Minion: OMG she's dead! What the hell happened? Okay let's go through last night.

Minion pauses, thinking over the night.

Minion: Was she at the party? Did Robby take her there? How the hell did she get in here?

Minion: Oh yeah I did see Robby there, but they were barely there I thought. Maybe Robby left her there, since he's not the party type of guy and someone else picked her up. What if I did it?

Minion: No...impossible. I was only at that party for about three hours then I came straight home. I barely even saw her and I know I didn't talk to her.

Pause.

Minion: Her throat is cut. Who cut her throat? It's Abbey. God what happened? Why did anyone want to kill *her*? She was sweet, beautiful, and young. Who's the fucker who did this?

Minion: Jesus, is there like fucking Ted fucking Bundy copycat starting his kill streak or something?

Minion: What's next, a girl with her head down in the toilet or shoved in the bushes?

Deep breath.

Minion: Maybe that creep of a boyfriend she always talked about did this, but I thought he was across the country. This is just too fucked up.

He notices that Robert's jacket is on the floor near the shower.

Minion: Why the fuck is Robby's jacket in here?

Minion: Robby took her out last night, but he left her I thought.

Minion: Wait was Robby fucking breathing in the room? Yeah I think he was, maybe he knows what went down last night.

He searches Robby's jacket and finds his pocket knife with blood all over it. He immediately throws the bloody knife on the floor.

Minion: Why the fuck does Robby's knife have blood all over it? Why is it even in here?

Minion: Maybe someone jumped him and stole it from him, and used it to kill Abbey.

Minion: I don't know what if it was Robby?

Minion covers his mouth and paces the bathroom.

Minion: Could it have been him? No, not the mousy little Robby.

Minion: I don't even think he was capable of getting in her pants let alone kill her.

Minion: Shit what if he actually did this? Fuck!

Minion: Wait, wait, wait! Let's think. It's just one girl. Should I sell out my buddy for life over just one girl? Bros before hoes, man.

Pause. Thinks for a time.

Minion: Robby said that Cassie transferred. Where to? The grave?

Minion is having another flashback which takes him back to the dorm room and talking to Robert.

Minion: So how was your night last night?

Robert: What're you talking about?

Minion: What do you mean 'what am I talking about'? The date with Cassie you went on; how did it go? You did show up didn't you?

Robert: Oh that...yeah I showed.

Minion: So how did it go?

Robert: Oh we won't be seeing her again.

Minion: (confused) What?

Robert: I mean we won't be seeing each other again.

Minion: Oh. Well that's too bad; I figured you two would hit it off. So what, are blondes not your type?

Robert: *It's not that...I like all types.*

Minion: *Okay, well I'll keep that in mind. You remember that one girl I've been talking to?*

Robert: *Yeah.*

Minion: *Well she's got this friend: real cute, brunette, a little over five feet tall, and she's got a great smile. You might like her.*

Robert: *I think I will.*

Minion: *You don't mind glasses though do you?*

Robert: *Not at all.*

Minion: *Okay then. I'll see what's up and make some inquiries.*

Robert: *Yes please do. I would greatly appreciate that.*
Back in the bathroom with Minion pacing by the shower.

Minion: *And Sherrie; she was supposed to have gone home for the summer but then she never came back.*

Having a flashback to the dorm room talking to Robert.

Minion: *Hey man, how did everything with Sherrie go?*

Robert: *Oh pretty good. Much smoother than last time.*

Minion: *Great! That's good to hear; so you think you guys will go out again?*

Robert: *No, we won't.*

Minion kind of disappointed.

Minion: *Damn man you're just not having any luck with these girls are you. What exactly do you do to them that you only go out once? (Laughs)*

Robert becomes angry and snaps at Minion

Robert: *Who said I do anything to them?!*

Minion gets defensive.

Minion: *Whoa man I'm sorry; I didn't mean to piss you off. (Sees hair clip on desk) hey, isn't this Sherrie's hair clip?*

Robert: *Oh, yea it is.*

Minion: *(Smiles) Well looks like you'll have to see her again because she'll be wanting that back.*

Robert: *No I don't think she will.*

Minion: *What do you mean? Why not?*

Robert: *She'd want me to have it to remember her by.*

Comes back to the bathroom as Minion is pacing back and forth in front of the door.

Minion: I've been setting him up with these girls this whole time. Man I thought I was doing him a favor. The kid needed to get out more, get a life. He's been down on himself so long now, ever since that summer at camp. No way! He couldn't have!

Minion pauses and stops where he is just looking down talking to himself.

Minion: Yeah, I guess he could have killed that girl way back then. But it was a mess! And we were so young! What was her name? Bianca? I'm so fucking stupid, of course he did. That's why there's a body in the shower right now with a brand new smile. What the fuck!

Minion: Maybe it's not even his fault that he's this way. His folks weren't the greatest. I should have been more supportive. But the kid always lagged behind on everything. I did what I could. I bet he blames me. I got a scholarship; he had to work so hard just to get into college. I always got the girls, and he was just my wingman. It's my fault. God damn it!

Minion starts rapidly pacing once again.

Minion: I should hide the body. I could smuggle it out and bury it somewhere. No way, it's like ten A.M. People would notice a dead girl. What would Ted Bundy do? What has Robby done? Fuck!

Minion looks around the bathroom as if he was looking for something.

Minion: I should call 911! No. What if it was him? My best friend? How could he do this? I thought I knew him. I've known him my whole life. This can't be him. But what if it was. What if he did kill this girl and I was the one that called the cops on him? I introduced them! I'm like...accomplice to this shit. Fuck! Anyways, I couldn't do that to him. But he could do this? It's my duty to America to call somebody...anybody!

Robert walks into the bathroom.

A staged reading of this script was performed at SVCC on Thursday, April 19, 2012. It featured student actors Ben Thornton (as Minion) and Aaron Berogan (as Robert).

The Lovers Watch

Spin hands round your face
Like her you stay on measure
Always my reminder

Alternative

(You click as days pass)
(Chain holding on so tightly)
(Loves embrace I pine)

by Spencer Aurand



Hide and Seek
by Elisabeth Nyberg



The View
by Elisabeth Nyberg

Thanksgiving Crowd

jumping awake, stomach turning circles, face beaming
already a potpourri of smells have filled the house
I practice invisibility, avoiding the chores,
staying alone, waiting on the clock, studying the driveway for cars
until the longed-for crunch of gravel, barking dogs, doors slamming open

each voice muffled by so many others
surging excitement bursting from mouths

the obese turkey is stubbornly refusing to cook,
so we two sneak off, returning only for snitching raids
seeking to be alone in the crowd, though private adventures
remain hidden only by the mass of activity
until a shrill bell restores the crowd

each voice muffled by so many others
surging excitement bursting from mouths

for one moment united in uncoordinated singing,
the returning muddle of conversation only achieving new volumes
quickly we chew and flee, fearing the mention of dishes
leaving the adults alone, each group planning courses of action
we two slip off, retreating from the activity

my door muffles the surrounding hubbub
roaring laughter, stampeding feet, shouting, and cheering
all take some distance and leave us alone – until
the darkening sky catches our attention, and the ringleader gathers us
we march out – I, bubbling, scheming, coaxing, she sighing

each voice muffled by so many others
surging excitement bursting from mouths

united chant, rising to a deafening shout –
utter silence: we slip away alone, into the dark
cold air piercing my lungs, I sneak shadow-to-shadow
so alone, so dark, so cold, I pause, feeling the black
blood curdling shriek, I bolt like a terrorized rabbit to safety

each voice muffled by so many others
surging excitement bursting from mouths

excepting hers – too cold, too much running
she leaves, I stay – now I'm alone, guilt-ridden
still chanting, screaming, creeping in silent dark
until the shrill bell reminds us it's time to be thankful
come in, settle down – we come, but fail settling

each voice muffled by so many others
surging excitement bursting from mouths

droning on through the thankful lists,
attention is as steady as butterflies
cutting the pies, choosing our slices
eyes drooping, tongues still wagging
parents edging to the door, children try scattering

each voice muffled by determined yawns,
surging excitement melted to contentment

by Abigail Davis

“Release”

Patiently pacing on a spiral, laughter is engulfing my mind
A smile cannot describe the rage charging up my spine
With walls disappearing and cobwebs emerging
I try to feel to soothe my soul and keep my mind
The world has slowed, I'm losing my hold
I must escape this whimsical home of illusions
Where I can no longer hide
I must go, I need a ride

The fear that is billowing with my sanity receding
Tingling, I watch stars burst from the sky
My destination unknown as I teeter out of control
The music only condones
What is happening I still do not know

The air so sweet approaching a place of retreat
Hearing all sounds while I float above ground
Yet, I cannot concentrate on the steps I've found
My footing survived the ascent
To a place that I have been time after time

Paranoia creeping nearer with voices becoming clearer
Pondering should I step to the other side
The impending doom I feel as the eyes cut like cold steel
Slicing me down in my prime
Ceilings are collapsing while the crowd keeps laughing
Where is a place that I can hide?
Images keep pulsing, twisting, contorting
My mind is in steep decline!

I must surrender to the flow or lose my soul
Fearing to never regain my mind
It is all I can do as hundreds of hands come toward my face
But only two are mine
This night will forever be etched in memory
I must laugh and giggle, smirk and stare so I can say
Yes, I survived!

by Jacob Conklin



Self Portrait
by Danielle Hoffman

Winter Solstice
by Nancy Mayfield

Mary Ellen stepped around a puddle with an icy sheen on its surface as she made her way toward Rebecca's place. No trace of snow on the ground yet, but a chill stung the air. The pavement was probably icier than it looked, so Mary Ellen stepped onto the frosted grass, which provided more solid footing as it crunched under her boots.

This weather was to be expected, Mary Ellen thought, on a day in the last month of the year. She pulled her gloves out of her pocket and wiggled her numb fingers into them.

Mary Ellen and her daughter always spent Dec. 21 together.

The shortest day of the year; the Winter Solstice. A day when the old sun dies, and night takes over. Just for a time. It was too heavy of a day to spend alone, Mary Ellen believed.

When Rebecca was younger, the day was reserved for traditions and laughter. The two of them would spend a brief span of the afternoon rolling pinecones in peanut butter, then in birdseed. After setting the finished products on the bare branches of the maple tree in the backyard, they would watch from Rebecca's bedroom window as cardinals and sparrows discovered the special treat.

Rebecca was convinced that the same birds came back every year. "There's Blue-bell!" Or, "Mrs. Tibbs! How nice to see you again!"

On years when their Midwest world was still just a palate of faded grays and browns despite the calendar's mandate that it was, indeed, winter, Rebecca would do her "snow dance," skipping and twirling around the yard, waving her arms to the heavens, singing her special song, entreating the sky for a white Christmas.

She would beg her mom to join her, and Mary Ellen always would, dancing and spinning with her daughter, until they ended up laughing so hard that they would drop to their knees and fall flat on their backs. The year Rebecca turned 13, sparkly snow began to fall on them as they lay panting and gazing at the sky.

"Mom, it works! See, I told you! It works!"

She grabbed Mary Ellen's hand and squeezed it tight. They stayed there until dusk folded around them into an inky black night, the gentle snowflakes sprinkling them in a magical moment that Mary Ellen could sometimes conjure up on a sleepless night.

On Dec. 21 they always drank hot chocolate with marshmallows. Not the mini ones, but the big, fluffy barrels that filled your whole mouth. The year Rebecca was six, Mary Ellen had forgotten to buy marshmallows during her routine Saturday grocery shopping. Winter Solstice that year fell on a weekday, and Mary Ellen had to take a few hours off from her secretarial job if she and Rebecca were to have any daylight at all. On her way home from work, she rushed through a convenience store, which only had miniature marshmallows.

Later that night, after they'd done their usual rituals of making bird feeders and doing the snow dance, Mary Ellen poured milk into a small saucepan to heat for their hot chocolate.

"Rebecca honey, would you please get me the marshmallows from the pantry?"

"Okay Mommy." Rebecca slid off one of the green padded folding chairs that had come with the card table where they ate their meals and did their homework, Rebecca for first grade and Mary Ellen for the medical records transcription course she was taking by mail.

Rebecca's little feet pattered down the back hallway of their one-bedroom apartment to the closet that served as a pantry, utility room and coat closet.

Mary Ellen stirred the chocolate powder into the warming milk and listened as the creaky pantry door swung open, followed by the rustling of cans and boxes as her daughter's hands searched for the marshmallows on a shelf with which she was barely at eye level.

Rebecca came back with the bag, looking utterly dejected.

"What in the world is wrong?" Mary Ellen stopped stirring, wooden spoon poised in mid-air.

"Marshmallows aren't supposed to be small," Rebecca said.

Mary Ellen opened her mouth to begin a lecture on the virtue of being grateful when Rebecca continued.

“You know Mommy, they should be big. Like the ones the angels eat.”

Rebecca was referring to a commercial that came on sometimes when she and her mom watched “The Price is Right” on weeknights. It showed three little girls dressed like angels and sitting on a cloud, sharing a bowl of big, fluffy marshmallows. Each of the winged and haloed trio bites into one, sighs deeply and smiles as she chews.

“It’s softer than a cloud,” says the girl whose face is framed with golden ringlets.

“Sweeter than candy,” says the next, a redhead with cute bob.

“Simply divine,” finishes the third, a brunette whose sleek hair cascades to her waist.

As the angels dip into the bowl for another treat, a man’s deep voice says, “Fresh Goodness marshmallows. They taste heavenly.”

Whenever the commercial came on, Rebecca would sit perfectly still and watch, enraptured, then turn to Mary Ellen and say, “I want to be an angel too, Mommy!”

“You already are,” Mary Ellen would reply, hugging her daughter close.

Now as Rebecca looked imploringly at her, Mary Ellen swallowed the words of reprimand and said instead, “You know what. You’re right. We do need big marshmallows.”

She removed the pan from the flame, turned the burner off, grabbed her purse, got their coats and drove with Rebecca, gleefully giddy in her pajamas, to the grocery store, where they purchased a bag of properly sized marshmallows.

Some 25 years later, Mary Ellen still put two big marshmallows in each cup of cocoa she made. Today she’d brought hot chocolate she’d made at home in a thermos. It was tucked into her backpack along with plastic baggies of marshmallows and birdseed, a small jar of peanut butter, a blanket, and a well-worn copy of “Pride and Prejudice.”

Today, Mary Ellen had driven to where Rebecca was. She hoped it would be a good day. They both could use one.

The last five or six years of her daughter’s life hadn’t been pretty. While Rebecca had spent fewer than 10 full days of her life with her father, who had left Mary Ellen before their daughter was born, she did have something in common with him. She was an alcoholic.

In time, the Winter Solstice celebration she had looked forward to for years, became a dark reminder of past happiness. Rebecca, whose promising foray into jewelry design hit a dead end after she missed deadline after deadline for a major distributor interested in carrying her work, was a depressed, angry drunk.

In fact, when Mary Ellen had shown up at her daughter’s door three years ago on Dec. 21, Rebecca hadn’t even gotten out of bed. Mary Ellen used the spare key hidden under the huge stone toad on the front stoop to let herself in. She’d found Rebecca under the covers, curled up into a ball.

“Honey?” Mary Ellen sat down on the bed next to her. Rebecca groaned, pulling the covers tighter around her head. An empty bottle of booze stood on the blue plastic milk grate that served as a nightstand.

“Hey, I brought some peanut butter and birdseed, and later I’ll make us some hot chocolate and—“

“Dammit. Mom, I don’t drink hot chocolate. I drink vodka. OK?” She popped out from under the covers and grabbed the neck of the empty bottle, shaking it at Mary Ellen. “You got any vodka, cause I’m all out.”

She threw the bottle at the bedroom wall. It smashed into pieces. She pulled the sheets over her head.

“Just leave Mom. Just leave. You don’t need to be here.”

It was the shortest day of the year, and Mary Ellen believed no one should spend that vacuum of darkness alone. She did what she always did when she didn’t know what else to do. She got into bed next to Rebecca, gathered her daughter in her arms and held her.

Rebecca sobbed.

“I’m so tired of this, Mom. My life is a mess. It sucks mom. It really sucks.”

“It doesn’t have to be Rebecca. Let me help you. There are places you can go. I’ll help

you.”

Rebecca untangled herself from Mary Ellen’s embrace. She pulled a pack of cigarettes from underneath her pillow, pulled one out and grabbed a book of matches off the milk crate. Her hands shook as she tried three times to light the cigarette, finally succeeding on the fourth try. Mary Ellen didn’t move to help her.

Rebecca took a drag from the Marlboro.

“You shouldn’t smoke,” Mary Ellen started. “It’s bad for your—“

“Don’t even say my health, mom. Don’t even say it. Look at me. Smoking is the least of my problems.”

They never made their bird feeders or the hot chocolate. Things spiraled downward fast after that day.

Mary Ellen pushed those memories out of her head and set about getting ready for the day. She didn’t need a key anymore to see Rebecca.

“Hi honey. Me again. You know what day it is, don’t you?”

Mary Ellen unfolded her green canvas chair and gave the arms an extra firm push, feeling the legs dig into the soft ground. Last year, she’d failed to make sure she was on steady ground, and she’d ended up tipping over on her back as the chair squeezed around her. She’d laughed, hoping Rebecca would find it funny.

When she had been a girl, Rebecca laughed easily.

“I thought I would read some Jane Austen this year. How does *Pride and Prejudice* sound?” Mary Ellen sat down and rummaged through her backpack.

She took out the thermos and set it on the smooth, cold surface that was the base of Rebecca’s tombstone.

“Maybe we’ll read first and have some hot chocolate. We can make the bird feeders a little later.”

She unfolded the blanket she’d brought and draped it over her legs. She was sitting with her back toward the wind, so she wasn’t too cold. Besides she had the hot chocolate to drink. She opened the book and began to read.

Four hours later, Mary Ellen decided she’d better make the bird feeders. She tried as best she could with her cold fingers to spread the peanut butter on a pinecone that she’d found on the ground not far from where she sat. She dropped the pinecone in the baggie of birdseed she’d brought and rolled it around until it was coated.

“It’s getting late Rebecca. They’ll close the gates on me soon. I have to go honey. I’m sorry.”

She set the bird feeder on the base of the tombstone, next to a white porcelain angel figurine. She took out two marshmallows and set them next to the bird feeder. Then she gathered up her things into the backpack, stood up and folded the chair.

As she walked to her car, a soft, sparkly snow began to fall.

Germ Horrors

by Forrest Cheatwood, Jacob Conklin, Abigail Davis, and Sarah Fassig

WAITER IS WEARING LAYTEX GLOVES, AND KEEPS A PACKAGE OF THEM IN HIS APRON POCKET AT ALL TIMES SO THAT HE CAN CHANGE GLOVES WHENEVER HE TOUCHES SOMETHING.

WAITER: Excuse me, sir? I'm going to have to ask you to leave. So, if you would just... you know... leave?

CUSTOMER: I'll leave when I feel like it – I have rights. Bring me more of this (LIFTS GLASS TO WAITER AND SHAKES IT). Whatever it was. Vodka?

WAITER: Um, we don't serve alcohol here, so it couldn't be vodka.

CUSTOMER: Well, sniff it and see what you think. It's something with alcohol; I feel fuzzy.

WAITER BACKS AWAY.

CUSTOMER: What's your problem?

WAITER: What's your problem? Why would I put my face next to your germ-infested glass?

CUSTOMER: Well, I think it was Fountain Goo – no. Hot and Chew. No! Mount and Spew. Wait... Dountain Mew. That's the stuff, Taunt and Hew.

WAITER: Mountain Dew? What have you been adding to your Mountain Dew, the air around here smells like... like... cherry cough syrup?

CUSTOMER: Whatever. Just get me a refill!

WAITER: No! It's after hours. Go home before I kick you out.

CUSTOMER: I demand to see your manager. I'm a loyal patron of this five star Kid-Z-Land. You can't kick me out!

WAITER: Like he'll tell you anything different?

WAITER TURNS TO LEAVE AND GET MANAGER, ONLY TO SEE MANAGER APPROACHING.

MANAGER: Intern, we have a problem.

WAITER: What now? And I'm a waiter, not an intern.

MANAGER: There's been a little "accident" in the ball pit.

WAITER: *Again?*

MANAGER: 'Fraid so. And since the janitor is gone, it's going to be up to you.

WAITER: Me? I can't do that!

MANAGER: Well I can't either, but all the shit in there HAS to be cleaned out, and I out rank you.

WAITER: How much bleach do we have? Do we have elbow-length rubber gloves?

MANAGER: Cool it, intern. We don't have bleach, but we have Lysol. And we all know you have plenty of laytex gloves.

WAITER: No bleach? I have to have bleach!

MANAGER: (SCRATCHES HIS HEAD) Well, there might be some in the bathroom, but you'd have to check.

CUSTOMER: (SHOUTING) Hey! Where's my Mew Dountain? What kind of service is this?

WAITER WALKS OVER TO THE BATHROOM DOOR AND MANAGER WALKS OVER TO CUSTOMER.

FREEZE MANAGER AND CUSTOMER WHEN WAITER REACHES THE BATHROOM DOOR.

WAITER TRIES THE BATHROOM DOOR, BUT IT IS LOCKED.

WAITER: (RATTLEING THE DOORKNOB) Hey! Who's in here?

GUYUTE: You can't come in! You can't make me leave!

WAITER: But I need bleach. I have to clean up a bunch of shit.

GUYUTE: It's not a big deal. Just use Lysol, there's some in the kitchen.

WAITER: How do you know? Who are you?

GUYUTE: I'm just a (MUMBLES) named Guyute.

WAITER: A what?

GUYUTE: (MUMBLES)

WAITER: Whatever. It doesn't matter. But how do you know there's Lysol in the kitchen?

GUYUTE: What does it matter? Just use that; you don't need bleach.

WAITER: I do too need bleach. Just find it and hand it over – you don't have to leave the bathroom until I finish cleaning.

GUYUTE: No! No no no no no NO! You can't make me open this door!

WAITER: I need bleach!

GUYUTE: Lysol!

WAITER: (STORMS OUT, CHANGING HIS LAYTEX GLOVES AS HE GOES) Why do I even work here?

UNFREEZE MANAGER AND CUSTOMER.

MANAGER: (LEANING ON THE TABLE) Sometimes do you wish you worked in a bar or something on the Moon?

CUSTOMER: I wanted to be a ballerina when I was 27. Is that the same?

MANAGER: (SHRUGS) Nah, but I guess it's the same feeling. I've just always wanted to serve drinks in zero-G, you know?

CUSTOMER: (THINKS FOR A FEW SECONDS) No. Is a ballerina in space the same thing?

MANAGER: Not at all. Then again, ballet in zero-G could be pretty neat to watch.

CUSTOMER: (STARTS TO GET REALLY EXCITED) Exactly! I mean, it would allow for harder moves like the Pirouette and Agrippina, and even allow for more switch-ups in mid-flight! It would be epic!

MANAGER: Agrippina, what the heck is that?

CUSTOMER: It's like a Pirouette, but it's done upside down.

MANAGER: (NODS) Hmm. Sounds hard to do – I'd like to see it.

CUSTOMER: Well, if I was a ballerina, I would be pulling Agrippinas all day long. And then when NASA actually sends me a response letter I'll be pulling Agrippinas all day long in zero-G!

MANAGER: Nice. How awesome do you think it would be to mix drinks in zero-G? I mean, the sheer spectacle!

WAITER COMES STORMING UP TO MANAGER. WAITER IS WEARING RAIN PANTS AND RUBBER BOOTS.

MANAGER: (PICKING HIS NOSE AND WIPING THE BOOGERS OFF ON THE TABLE) Hey, nice suit!

WAITER TAKES OFF RAIN PANTS AS HE TALKS.

WAITER: So I went to clean up the "little accident" in the ball pit. Why didn't you tell me it smelled like piss? Huh? Piss and feces all

over! Now I smell like piss and feces! And I had to use Lysol – Lysol! Because there’s some freak of a customer who won’t leave the bathroom! (PUTS ON A NEW PAIR OF LAYTEX GLOVES).

MANAGER: Well, for one, if I’d told you it smelled like pee in the first place, you probably wouldn’t have cleaned it. And calm down. There’s nothing wrong with Lysol.

WAITER: There’s nothing wrong with Lysol when it’s used for dusting! I’m going to have to go home and soak in pure bleach to get all of these germs off!

MANAGER: Please don’t do that. Remember, last time you had to go to the hospital and take three days off work.

WAITER: What choice do I have? I can’t live day in and day out knowing that there are live shit-germs all over me. And anyway, what would be so bad about missing work?

CUSTOMER: Shut up. Bring me my Fountain Mew!

WAITER: You mean your Cough and Dew? No. Get out. It’s after hours.

MANAGER: Just bring the man a drink.

WAITER: I’m filthy! Do you want my filth all over your Mountain Dew?

WAITER STAULKS OFF TO REFILL THE MOUNTAIN DEW, MANAGER AND CUSTOMER START LAUGHING.

WAITER: (RETURNING WITH DRINK) Here! There’s your stupid drink! Now, will you please leave? (CHANGES GLOVES).

CUSTOMER HOLDS UP A FINGER TO STOP WAITER, PULLS A SMALL FLASK OUT OF HIS JACKET AND POURS SOMETHING INTO THE GLASS.

CUSTOMER: Now, was that so bad?

WAITER: What the hell. That really smells like cherry cough syrup – you can’t be drunk off cherry cough syrup.

MANAGER: Well, maybe it’s just Pepto-Bismol.

WAITER: And that changes things how?

MANAGER SHRUGS.

WAITER: I need bleach NOW! I can’t do anything until these germs are dead. Do you want me to start hyperventilating?

MANAGER: What do you want me to do? I think there’s bleach in the bath room, have at.

CUSTOMER: (STANDS UP) Well, now that I finally (ahem) have my Countin' Two, I'll be off.

MANAGER: All he wanted was some Mountain Dew before he left? Why didn't you give it to him earlier, intern?

CUSTOMER: (OVER HIS SHOULDER AS HE IS LEAVING) That's what I want to know.

WAITER: Well, for one a certain somebody made me clean the ball pit. Speaking of, there's a customer who won't leave the bath room and I need the bleach!

MANAGER: (SIGHS) Okay, okay. But cool it with the bleach. You don't have any more sick days or paid vacation left.

WAITER: (MUTTERING TO HIMSELF) Well maybe I'll just quit then.

MANAGER: What?

WAITER: Nothing.

MANAGER AND WAITER WALK OVER TO THE BATHROOM DOOR.

MANAGER: (KNOCKS ON THE DOOR) Hey! It's past closing time, so you really need to come out of there.

GUYUTE: No!

MANAGER: (PULLS SET OF KEYS OUT OF HIS POCKET) Please don't make me do this.

GUYUTE: I'm not making you do anything. Just leave me alone – do you know how long I had to wait to get in here?

MANAGER: (UNLOCKING THE DOOR) I don't care how long you had to wait, you've had long enough yourself in there, and if I don't get some bleach to this pathetic intern...

WAITER: Hey!

MANAGER OPENS THE DOOR.

WAITER: (GAGGING) What is that smell?

MANAGER: Who the hell are you?

GUYUTE: (EMERGING FROM THE BATHROOM) It's not my fault! This toilet is defective!

WAITER: That is the worst flooded toilet I have ever seen. What did you do?

MANAGER: I guess I'm going to have to ask you to leave, Guyute. And intern, I'm going to have to ask you...

WAITER: No! I am not cleaning that. Make Guyute clean it.

MANAGER: What? You can have the bleach now. And no, he's a customer.

WAITER: Do you actually think he bought anything?

GUYUTE: I will not clean that bathroom! It is not my fault the toilet is defective!

GUYUTE RUNS OUT OF THE RESTAURANT.

WAITER: My shift ended over an hour ago. You can't make me stay.

MANAGER: And you can't expect me to put up with you! You've taken twice the number of sick days allotted to you, and half of next year's vacation days. You're impatient with customers, and downright obnoxious with the other employees. I have plenty of grounds for firing you.

WAITER: And I could have you shut down for all the unsanitary practices that go on here!

MANAGER: Alright, then I can make working here hell for you. Shut me down and you'll lose your job.

WAITER: Then I quit.

MANAGER: Right, intern. Where do you think you'll find another job?

WAITER: What?

MANAGER: There aren't many jobs around here, and I can assure you I don't have any praises to sing of you, if anybody asks. It's just an overflowed toilet.

WAITER: Oh whatever.

MANAGER: Good. Then I'm going to leave it to you to close up. If the memory of this mess isn't erased from the planet when I get back here tomorrow morning...

WAITER: Okay, okay! I get it.

MANAGER: Cleaning is good you anyway. It should make you happy to rid the world of so many germs.

WAITER: Good for me? That room is a contagion factory!

MANAGER: Exactly. Save the world from the contagion. I'm leaving. You'd better (POINTS AT THE BATHROOM) Or Else.

WAITER: You can't ask me to do this!

MANAGER: Good night intern.

MANAGER EXITS.

WAITER GOES OVER TO HIS RUBBER BOOTS AND RAIN PANTS AND STARTS TO PUT THEM ON.

WAITER: Wait. This is shit, just pure shit! I don't have to do this. I am NOT doing this!

WAITER DUMPS BOOTS AND RAIN PANTS AND PULLS A PIECE OF PAPER, A MARKER, AND SCOTCH TAPE OUT OF HIS APRON POCKET.

WAITER: (WRITING ON PAPER AS HE SLOWLY SAYS WHAT HE IS WRITING) I quit. Sincerely, Intern.

WAITER WALKS OVER TO THE BATHROOM DOOR AND TAPES HIS NOTE TO THE DOOR.

WAITER EXITS.

A staged reading of this script was performed at SVCC on Thursday, April 19, 2012. It featured student actors Aaron Berogan (as The Waiter), James Jaeger (as The Customer), Ben Thornton (as Guyute), and Alejandro Valdez (as The Manager).



Zombie
by Donielle Hoffman

Bob and Joyce
by Tom Irish

Bob is sitting on his filthy coat, buried deep in the evening shadows in a quiet corner of a park, not really thinking about how he came to be there by himself. It had started earlier that day during a conversation with his wife that went like this:

“Do you want this?”

“Why would I want a black banana stump?”

“Well, I don’t know. Maybe you’re hungry.”

“Well I am. But I’m not eating that.”

“Well, you have to eat something. I’ll eat it. I’ll eat anything at this point.”

“Go ahead. I’ll find something else.”

There was silence for a while, then. Joyce popped the heavily bruised banana fragment into her mouth and chewed without looking at Bob, who leaned over the trash can so far that his head was almost inside. He pawed around for a while, and just as Joyce swallowed her banana, Bob dropped a torn, moldy Ziplock bag to the ground. He followed it with a huge sheet of newspaper, crumpled but still stubbornly flapping, and a couple of microwave soup cups. She huffed. “You can’t do that!”

Bob pulled a broken flashlight from the can and dropped it on the sidewalk before sighing and asking “Why not?”

“Because, Bob . . . it’s not clean. Holy crow, I don’t know what to do with you sometimes. You treat the street like it was your own private garbage can.”

“Who says it isn’t? Everybody else throws stuff down here. Why shouldn’t I?”

“Because you sleep here, for one.”

“Not *right* here.”

“Bob . . . you know what I mean. I don’t know why you can’t talk to me seriously.

Bob. Seriously, why can’t we talk . . . why won’t you talk to me?”

“I do.”

“You talk to me, *at* me, but you don’t talk with me. *With.* That’s what I meant. All we have out here is each other, Bob. I didn’t mind so much when we were still in the house, when there were still other people to talk to occasionally. But now . . .”

“Well, you’ll always have your rotten banana stumps.”

There was no answer to that. Even an emphatic huff would not have expressed Joyce’s shock. She didn’t know what to say, couldn’t decide how angry to be. After a minute or two of silence, she just moved next to him and looked into the can. Bob knew she was there, but said nothing. Eventually, Joyce pointed and said “There’s some bread.”

Bob looked at it, looked at his wife, and then walked away. “You eat it.” Everything Joyce said lately grated on him worse than the sidewalk grit caught between his skin and his clothes.

“Well, we can split it. It looks like there are two or three pieces. Still in the bag.” She retrieved the bread from the trash herself. “Look, no holes in the bag! And I can’t see mold . . . no . . . no mold! Maybe I *will* keep this to myself.” She said this last in jest, hoping semi-consciously to come across as flirty, young, fresh.

Before he could think about it, Bob said “You fuckin’ cow.” He immediately regretted the comment, a little, but he didn’t look around and didn’t take it back. The next garbage can contained an empty pizza box. Bob removed it and peeled a bit of softish cheese from the lid, trying not to think. He ate the cheese, chewing slowly, at first afraid to taste it, and then relishing the lack of green or powdery corruption. He knew Joyce was still behind him. He thought this was possibly the longest time that she had been quiet in their nearly forty years of marriage.

He discarded the pizza box and then went down into the depths of the same can, making sure that he hadn’t missed any returnable cans or bottles. Joyce always forgot to look for the returnables. Bob had for years felt that most of the work that had to be done to

sustain them, in good times or bad, fell to him. He almost mumbled “lazy bitch” under his breath, and then didn’t.

Finally, as he straightened up from the disappointing can, he glanced behind him. Joyce was still there. She was looking at something in the distance off to his left, but Bob never figured out what it was. He looked instead at his hands, and then his feet, as he sat down and leaned against the wall of the next building. Then he waited for the inevitable outburst. She would start in on him at any second, he knew. She’d say *Bob, you can’t talk to me that way* or *What did you just say to me, Bob* or *Why do you hate me, Bob* or, worst of all, she’d just splutter until he apologized. Her splutter made his stomach hurt in a way rotten cheese never could.

Still, he thought suddenly, they didn’t usually curse at each other. They had crossed many other lines, together and separately, but at some point early in the marriage they had seemed to decide that cursing was just too much. He wasn’t sure why . . . and maybe that unspoken decision had been a mistake. Maybe he’d be less angry if he had had a better way to blow off some steam over the years.

He checked for Joyce without really thinking about it, and then checked again. Then he forced himself to slow down and look everywhere: in the street, behind the garbage cans, on the pavement next to the other buildings in sight. Then he stood up and looked behind every car that he could see. Joyce had vanished.

He walked up the street to the north and peered around the corner there. There were plenty of overweight, middle-aged women around, but none of them was Joyce. He retraced his steps and then checked the corner to the South. Also no Joyce.

Maybe that was ok. She’d never just ditched him like that before. If it had been him, he would have just blown off some steam for an hour or so and then come back. So he sat back down and waited. He polished his cracked glasses on the cleanest part of his shirt tail he could find. Some people walked by. He let the middle-aged ladies go—he had discovered that they either were stingy or thought he would try to rape them—but when businessmen passed he put on a fake drunk, southern accent and asked “fo’ sum chaynge, could’jall spayuh any.” In less than an hour he made almost five bucks.

He walked around the corner and went into the convenience store. He bought two Snickers, a Mountain Dew, and a bottle of strawberry kiwi Snapple. He asked about Joyce, but the clerk answered in monosyllables that he hadn’t seen her.

When he came out, he finally saw her waddling down the other side of the street, and he hurried to catch up. She stopped and started to harangue some kids about their skateboards. He smiled—better than him. But when he caught up, he saw that the woman had no real resemblance to Joyce other than her size. She was at least twenty years younger, and her clothes were tentlike but clean.

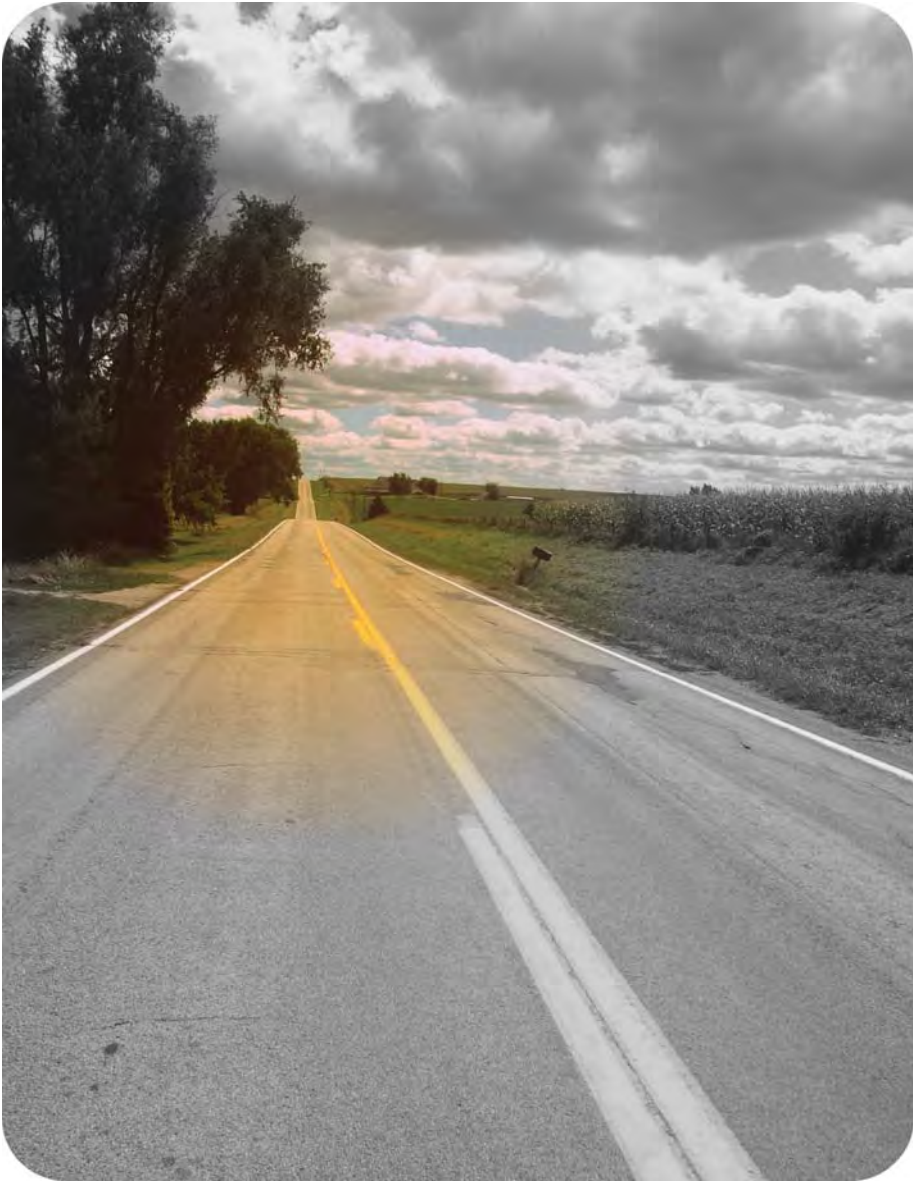
Bob found a quiet place to lean and cracked open a Snickers. He ate it slowly, and when he finished he ate the second one, chasing it with Mountain Dew. Someone else gave him a dollar, and he decided to hide it from Joyce. He’d buy a Slim Jim or something and eat it that night, or the next, after she fell asleep. Then he promised himself that, if he made any more money that day, he’d share it with her. He deserved to keep the buck to himself for doing more than his share all the time, but he was starting to feel vaguely bad about the “cow” comment. He’d save her Snapple for her and, if she finally pulled her weight when she returned, maybe they’d make enough money to get hamburgers that night.

When it got dark and Joyce wasn’t back, Bob used the money he’d made to buy himself dollar burgers and a shake from Wendy’s. He ate them standing alone in the parking lot, wolfing them with a hunger he didn’t know he had. Families lumbered in and out of the restaurant, and as he watched them he thought for the twelve thousandth time how happy he was that he didn’t have kids.

That night Bob spread his coat out in his usual spot in the park. He was thankful to have it all to himself for a while. When Joyce came back, he knew, she would refuse to take

off her own coat, and her bulk would slowly edge Bob to the bare ground over the course of the night. This had happened every night that Bob could remember for years, and he didn't expect that it would stop any time soon.

So there he sits looking across the park, checking for horny teenagers and thinking about what to say to his wife when she finally shows up again. He's not especially worried about it. He doesn't miss her. Instead, he's relishing finally having some time to himself. He'll have to tell her about that, he thinks. He'll explain to her that spending these few hours separately was great, important, a good idea on her part, and then maybe he'll hug her. He can't remember the last time that happened, the last time that he'd touched her for any reason other than an accidental brush when handing over food or an irate shove in the dark depths of the early morning. But it should make her happy, he thinks. That and telling her that she finally did something right really should light her up.



Untitled
by Yvonne Weegens

Storm on the Sea

Colin Adams

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

This musical score is for the first system of 'Storm on the Sea'. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin I part begins with a melodic line: a dotted quarter note on G4, followed by eighth notes on A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, and A5. The Violin II, Viola, and Cello parts are currently silent, indicated by a horizontal line on each staff.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

This musical score is for the second system of 'Storm on the Sea'. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin I part continues with a melodic line: quarter notes on G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5, followed by a quarter rest. The Violin II part continues with a melodic line: quarter notes on G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F#5, and G5, followed by a quarter note on A5. The Viola and Cello parts are currently silent, indicated by a horizontal line on each staff.

2 Storm on the Sea

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This is the first system of a musical score for 'Storm on the Sea'. It consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Vln. I staff begins with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) followed by a melodic line. The Vln. II staff plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The Vla. staff plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. staff is mostly silent, with a few notes in the final measure.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This is the second system of the musical score. It continues the four-staff arrangement from the first system. The Vln. I staff continues its melodic line with some grace notes. The Vln. II staff continues its rhythmic accompaniment. The Vla. staff continues its eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. staff becomes more active, playing a rhythmic accompaniment similar to the Vln. II staff.

Storm on the Sea 3

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains the first three measures of the piece. The Vln. I part features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and some slurs. The Vln. II part provides harmonic support with a mix of eighth and quarter notes. The Vla. part has a sparse, rhythmic accompaniment with dotted notes. The Vc. part has a steady eighth-note bass line. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4, 5, and 6. The Vln. I part continues its melodic development with more complex rhythmic patterns. The Vln. II part has a more active role with sixteenth-note passages. The Vla. part introduces a busier texture with sixteenth-note runs. The Vc. part maintains its eighth-note accompaniment with some syncopation. The key signature and time signature remain the same as in the first system.

4 Storm on the Sea

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This is the first system of a musical score for 'Storm on the Sea'. It consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The Vln. I part begins with a measure number '4' and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a descending interval. The Vln. II part has a more sparse, dotted-note pattern. The Vla. part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. part provides a low-frequency accompaniment with dotted notes and rests.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This is the second system of the musical score. It continues the four-staff arrangement from the first system. The Vln. I part continues with its eighth-note pattern, which becomes more complex in the second measure. The Vln. II part has a more active role, with eighth-note runs. The Vla. part continues with its eighth-note accompaniment. The Vc. part continues with its dotted-note accompaniment.

Storm on the Sea

5

Musical score for measures 1-4 of "Storm on the Sea". The score is written for four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a half rest in all parts. In measure 1, Vln. I plays a half note G4, Vln. II plays a half note E4, Vla. plays a half note C3, and Vc. plays a half note G2. In measure 2, Vln. I plays a half note A4, Vln. II plays a half note F#4, Vla. plays a half note D3, and Vc. plays a half note A2. In measure 3, Vln. I plays a half note B4, Vln. II plays a half note G4, Vla. plays a half note E3, and Vc. plays a half note B2. In measure 4, Vln. I plays a half note C5, Vln. II plays a half note A4, Vla. plays a half note F#3, and Vc. plays a half note C3. The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 4.

Musical score for measures 5-8 of "Storm on the Sea". The score is written for four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. In measure 5, Vln. I plays a half note D5, Vln. II plays a half note B4, Vla. plays a half note G3, and Vc. plays a half note D3. In measure 6, Vln. I plays a half note E5, Vln. II plays a half note C5, Vla. plays a half note A3, and Vc. plays a half note E3. In measure 7, Vln. I plays a half note F#5, Vln. II plays a half note D5, Vla. plays a half note B3, and Vc. plays a half note F#3. In measure 8, Vln. I plays a half note G5, Vln. II plays a half note E5, Vla. plays a half note C4, and Vc. plays a half note G3. The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 8.

6

Storm on the Sea

Musical score for 'Storm on the Sea' featuring Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. The first staff is Violin I (Vln. I), the second is Violin II (Vln. II), the third is Viola (Vla.), and the fourth is Cello (Vc.). The music is divided into three measures. In the first measure, Vln. I plays a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. Vln. II has a whole rest. Vla. plays a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, a quarter note B3, and a quarter note C4. Vc. has a whole rest. In the second measure, Vln. I has a whole rest. Vln. II has a whole rest. Vla. has a whole rest. Vc. plays a half note G3. In the third measure, Vln. I has a whole rest. Vln. II has a whole rest. Vla. has a whole rest. Vc. plays a half note F3.

POTLUCK POEM

I remember when... I came to Sask the
first day and wondered will they like
me and learn.

My mother sang to my older sister and I before
we fell asleep.

She had the most beautiful voice.
Thought I knew how to drive.
My father told me the perfect way to kill a
man.

I remember racing a lawnmower
for the first time. Going 60 mph and
running from the cops.

Going to a different country made me feel free and
felt that ~~the~~ possibilities are endless. The feeling of this
New land and fresh free air. I am home.

I remember when I decided to turn my life into a different direction.
"And head for the light at the end of the tunnel finally
so fast.... Just hoping.... that the light that I see
isn't a train coming at me.
no matter how scared I got I kept thinking that
a change represents a challenge and I need to deal with
this chance.

I remember when getting good grades was
my biggest challenge.

I remember when growing up in my neighborhood was
awesome - (1960's) - no worries, playing with neighbors
at night - outdoor games. no bullying.

I remember when

Above is a poem written on March 21 by audience members during the performance of the spoken word poet Jinahie. Each line was written by a different person. The poem is presented here in its original form, in the original authors' handwriting.

The Anne Horton Writing Awards

The following pieces are the winners of SVCC's annual writing contest, named for a former chair of the English department and a founding member of the school's faculty. This award is given to the best essays written in SVCC's English 101 and 103 classes during the 2011-2012 school year.

Narrative/Descriptive Essay Winner

**An Heirloom Story
by Elizabeth Mock**

Lying in the bottom drawer of my pressboard bedside table where I keep all my most precious things away from little helping hands, is an old hunter green hardback copy of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Its once detailed cover, bearing a picture of a young Mary Lennox in an orange coat, is marred by many tiny white lesions across it where the book has been rubbed raw. The spine is no longer completely intact on the inside once opened; and the pages, fading to a rustic ecru from a once pristine white, are fuzzy on the edges instead of razor sharp. The corners are frayed, and the fibrous brown layers of the inside of the hard back are exposed and turned slightly inward. Some of the browning pages have come completely out of the binding, but the blotting paper set in between the book's four pictures to preserve the ink is still intact. It is common knowledge in our culture – indeed in many cultures – that books bring knowledge. Encyclopedias bring information about various subjects, history books contain collective knowledge of society, and dictionaries list endless definitions. My book is no different in this respect, but it contains stories in its wobbly, loosening binding that are not written in the text. It tells stories of a time long gone when the world was a different place, and my book belonged in different hands. Moving through time from generation to generation, it contains in its old frame a story of how those lives before my time have helped to shape my life today.

My book, now a centenarian, has had an extraordinary life, as evidenced in its appearance. It began its time in New York State, in mint condition, ten years before my Grandmother Virginia was born. After about two decades, it was passed down to her immediate family from an older family member. In 1938 when my grandmother was seventeen, the book moved with her family to Washington, D.C. where it remained for a few years before she met my grandfather Avery. It endured the Second World War with my grandmother, as my grandfather fought in all five European conquests and as he remained for the Reformation thereafter. It has been packed, moved, and unpacked in Colorado where my mother spent her youngest years growing up. She still remembers Grandma – a short, delicate woman with long, slender fingers and perfect fingernails despite all the dishes and cooking – reading from this book to her every night before she fell asleep. Even though the book had never been formally given to her, she cannot recall a time when it was not present in her life.

She was inspired by the characters and loves the story because to her it is “victorious,” and has been a prevailing message of hope to her for many years. It is a tale about a lonely, spoiled, and neglected child named Mary Lennox. Together, she and her cousin Colin Craven embark on a journey of self discovery with the help of a few friends. They battle obstacles such as their own terrible dispositions, being neglected and unwanted, and grief. Eventually, they succeed in their own redemption from their chosen unhappiness. In the process, they heal themselves and also Colin’s father, Archibald Craven, who had been mourning the loss of his wife for years. Growing up during the Vietnam War, my mother remembers most the message of healing in the story – at a time when the country needed healing.

The book had been packed and moved again, this time to Missouri, my home state, when my mother was still in high school in the 1970’s. Here she met my father, a southern man with a passion for gospel and gardening. Life has not always been kind to my book. It has survived a particularly long stint in a musty garage where it was nearly forgotten and has been likewise an occupant for many months at a storage facility. It has survived countless moves where it was smashed into crumpling boxes amid immense collections of knick-knacks, being packed and unpacked, and shuffled in and out of piles of possessions before it ended up in my dry, cracked waitress’s hands. Our shared love of this classic story was something my mother and I had in common. She later revealed that the book’s message of hope was the reason that my mother – an empathetic woman with wild, wiry hair, Elton John glasses, and a Dr. Seuss sense of humor – had chosen to pass the book along to me, not to one of my brothers. At the time, my life mirrored that of the main character, Mary Lennox: we both just needed a little tending.

“This book has been one of my prized possessions,” the letter began. “It is three years shy of being one hundred years old. It has been in the family all these years. Please keep it in a safe place. Love, Mom.” It was the year 2008: the economy had recently experienced a terrible nosedive; the war in the Middle East continued; and many people wondered how they would support their families. I myself had two small babies at home to care for, and it was hard to imagine any other time than the present. But time, I was beginning to learn, would not stop ticking, no matter how badly I had wanted it to. And as a working young single mother, I was always running out of time. I considered this relic in my worn hands: it felt much lighter than it looked, as if it were holding its breath and waiting to tell me a secret.

A quick glance at the copyright information confirmed that that the book was an original copy from August 1911, the first year that this classic tale was released to the general public. And when I looked at it, my eyes were drawn to one of the book’s most notable features. Inside the front cover was a smallish piece of white paper containing a personal stamp, which was framed by three nesting rectangles. Right in the middle, facing to the right, was a profile of a human skull. It was made in very fine, miniscule black lines, and the detail was so great I could make out fourteen teeth inside its grinning jaw. A knowing look emanated from its craggy eye socket; it gave me the feeling that it was harboring wisdom that can only come from many years of existence. Above it, in all capital letters, was a name that I would soon never forget. “Frank Webber Low,” the stamp read. Below the skull, written in careful handwriting, was “No. 543”: proof of the original owner’s love for books. I was told that he owned many books, and that every one of them bore that stamp. I wondered who he was and what life was like for him. I asked myself, what had the story meant to him? Was he as moved by its message as I was? A symbol of death, the stamp is especially poignant to me now because of the story it holds: but the story I was about hear was not one of death, but one of life.

I stood in the small, warm kitchen at my grandmother’s home; out of all the rooms in the two-story house, it was the center of all family gatherings. It smelled of spices and the home-made bread that she was famous for in our family, and everywhere in the kitchen were signs of Grandma’s personality: homemade magnets rested on the vent above the oven; cards

from loved ones and close friends perched on the built-in shelves; a hanging plant snaked its way to the floor. Despite being small, the kitchen was meticulously organized, just like my grandmother. I sat at the small round table in the corner, sharing the streaming light from the window with a large potted plant. My son Joshua was only six months old, and was enjoying the box of toys that Grandma kept in her home just for him. Picking up the book, I asked Grandma if she knew anything about Frank Webber Low. Listening to my grandmother speak in her gentle voice, I began slipping away from the present. The book in my hands became a vessel sailing on the river of time and I was its passenger:

“Uncle Frank,” she lovingly called him, “was one of my grandmother’s half brothers on my father’s side.” A “sweet man,” he had been an M.D. in Buffalo in the field of dentistry; my grandmother still remembered taking rides up and down in his dentist’s chair. She didn’t know his birth date but could remember his gray hair in 1925 when she was four years old, and guessed that he was in his mid- to -late fifties then; that would put his birth sometime shortly after the Civil War. It was he who had given the Averills, my grandmother’s family, a great many classical books, such as *Little Women*, and my copy of *The Secret Garden* had been one of them. Grandma remembered very clearly a picture in it of the children in the story standing in a garden and singing the Doxology. In the picture are Mary Lennox, old Ben Weatherstaff the Gardener, Dickon, and Colin Craven, who is standing up after learning to walk again. The beautiful symbolism of singing praises in this picture represents healing; the symbolism is illustrated most in Colin, who had been lame, but is now standing. She told me that every Sunday when she sings the Doxology at church, she still thinks of that picture, as she has all her life.

None of these memories would have been possible if it had not been for Uncle Frank. In 1921, my great-grandmother, Suzanna Lois Strauss Averill, was eight months along in her pregnancy with my grandmother and alone in her home in Buffalo. Her husband, Felix Eugene Averill, was very far north above the Arctic Circle with an engineer friend; the two of them were working on the prospect of a gold mine, which proved itself to be fruitful in the future. There was no transportation except for a dog sled, and as one can imagine, no communication by telephone. Suzanne, who was due in January and who had very few relatives nearby, waited: she awaited the return of her husband from far away, and she awaited the arrival of her new baby girl. On a whim, Uncle Frank visited her on December 21st before the holiday, knowing that she was alone at home. What he found was an emergency.

Suzanne had gone into an early labor and was in so much pain that she was immobilized. Later, it was discovered that she had placenta previa, a very painful and dangerous condition that can arise during pregnancy, in which the placenta gets in the way of the baby in the birth canal. In present times, if placenta previa is discovered, the mother will have a C-Section to keep from compromising the health of herself and her child. Miraculously, the placenta had been delivered before my infant grandmother; this meant that the umbilical cord that supplied oxygen to my grandmother was no longer functioning. “I should have died right then,” Grandma continued in her matter-of-fact tone. Even Suzanne’s life was at risk, as the bleeding from this type of birth is severe. Being a month premature, my grandmother weighed only four pounds, and it has been said that she was so small she could fit into a cigar box. Even with modern technology, a child this small is lucky to survive. Had it not been for Frank calling the ambulance in the nick of time, things would have been very different.

“So he saved your life!” I said incredulously. “And yours, too,” Grandma chuckled, her eyes twinkling. I looked at the skull again, this time with new meaning. From that moment on, it would be a powerful reminder of how lucky I was to be alive. By my count of my grandmother’s siblings, her children, their children, and my children, the number of lives to date that have been saved by Frank Low’s appearance are fourteen souls; however, the collective years of life add up to be much more.

Three years have passed by, and my book has been along for the ride. Packed

among all the boxes of my life's possessions, it travelled to Illinois with me. Fortunately, it was not in one of the boxes that sustained major water damage and were tossed, along with their contents. It was placed in my bedside table – with my favorite childhood book, *Frog and Toad*, some letters, pictures of family, and other mementos – and has remained there since that day. Even as the book continues to meander through time, one day the time will come when I will pass it on. Who will I choose to receive this book? Will it be my son Joshua, with blond haystack hair and cherub eyes, who at four years old already has a passion for learning and knowledge? Will it be my daughter Allison, who melts me with her smile and her silliness, that I will eventually give the book to? What meaning will it hold for them?

For me, this book holds many meanings, which are inspired by its previous owners. When I think of my grandmother and of Frank, the book holds for me the joy of life. When I consider my mother, transformed is the meaning in the text to that of victory. Hope is the message in the pages when I remember the details of my life upon receiving the book: much like the transition Mary Lennox's character experiences in the novel, I have grown and changed for the better; therefore, this story will always hold for me the reminder that hope exists in seemingly hopeless places. And when I think of my children, the book symbolizes the passing down of a legacy – the stories of which I intend to share with them fully. But for now I am content, as well as proud, to be its current owner. Every now and then, I still take it from its residence in the drawer and turn open the cover to view the stamp I find most fascinating. And I wonder at how a person I've never met can play such a big part of my life. Despite never meeting, I feel as if I know Frank. In this family relic exists a link from owner to owner binding us all; it seems as if a part of each owner has been imprinted on this book, and also within me. And I wonder: what effect will my life have on the book's future owners? For I know that someday I will be gone and I may never know who they are, but perhaps they will know me. Perhaps the message of hope in my own story will hold new meaning for someone else, and my story will live on – another entry between the lines of the pages.

Narrative/Descriptive Essay

Honorable Mention

Connotation, Guns, Ethnocentrism, and Morality

A Personal Narrative

Waters, David K

I feel the need to tell this story, not just because of the lesson learned from it, but also I wish to address a concern of mine that I constantly hear in the English language; the over use of words. Every day I hear people say “Man, I love (insert whatever sport, television program, hobby, here.) But the one thing I hear that irritates me the most is when I over hear people say “Man, I wanted to kill that (guy, girl, douch-bag, ect.) Let’s face it, we are all guilty of using words to a point where they lose their connotation; words such as: awesome, epic, love, kill, but I try my damndest to avoid saying “I’m going to kill…” whomever. Killing is not a pretty thing, especially if you’ve had to do it before. I have to say that facing the person you had just shot, but wasn’t dead, is an even uglier experience.

It was early 2004 on Feb.12th. My Platoon was operating in the middle of the Iskandsaryiha Gap and had just dropped off a scout sniper section to over watch a road while we were to continue further north to set up an ambush a few clicks (Kilometers) away. About two hours later the scout snipers called us up on the radio asking us to assist them in taking out ten armed men. I, being the RTO (Radio Telephone Operator) had been monitoring the radio traffic between the scouts and the battalion. I had a bad feeling that we were heading right into shit-storm, but then again when in a combat zone, you always have that feeling.

When we arrived back to the reported location we saw the unidentified gunmen moving about and around a civilian bus with the cabin lights on and hazard lights flashing on and off sitting on a dirt road that cut across a wadi (irrigated field). Just like so many fire fights in so many wars before all hell was about to break loose on some no-name road next to some no-name village. 2nd Squad was tasked with dismounting from the gun trucks and try to neutralize the situation by using the least amount of force possible. I called the scouts and informed them of our intentions and to provide our element with sniper fire if needed. The lieutenant and I would accompany 2nd Squad in order to maintain command and signal. As we approached we managed to take down and detained a sentry without alerting the other men of our presence.

The lack of force was not going to be the case as we stealthily maneuvered on the remaining nine men. As we closed to about twenty meters of the men and the bus we were compromised. A muzzle flash along with a gun-shot rang out, then, followed by two more of the same. That’s all that it took to set off a barrage of rifle and automatic weapons fire in the middle of this once quiet, pitch black, night. It so black for that matter, that one could not tell where the horizon ended and the sky began if it were not for the stars. One of the nine insurgents, who were patrolling around a bus, had compromised our squad, and had shot three rounds at us with his pistol. We Unleashed hell.

I saw one of the darker, human like, shades of green through my N.O.Ds (Night Optic Device) running for cover behind the bus. Training kicked in, there was no thinking just reaction; “If it lives, it dies!” I remember being drilled into my head during the past two and half years of my infantry career. I raised my M-4 carbine and pressed on the forward pressure switch that was taped on the forward “tommy” grip, activating the night time laser aiming device mounted atop the forward rail mount of my carbine. I “glazed” the target, and fired a controlled pair. The dark green figure in my night vision went lip as it was running, and hit the ground.

“Assault through! Assault through!” I heard SSG. Mullen yell. All nine men of 2nd Squad picked up, with weapons at the ready, and pushed across the objective. I, being the RTO hung back a few meters with the Lieutenant as the others rushed ahead sweeping and

clearing across the objective.

I kept my eyes on the dark green figure lying behind the bus. The hazard lights illuminated the ground, and the figure, as though pure day light were flashing on and off in my night vision, temporarily blinding me. I wanted to see it. I wanted to see the body.

I am suddenly ten years old again hunting with my father. I remember the first time I shot and killed a rabbit, I was so proud of myself I couldn't wait to see the prize I earned for myself. I wanted to just run up ahead of my comrades just to see my score.

As the rest of my comrades pushed across the objective, I got to see the target I just shot. I lifted up the N.O.Ds from my eye, since the blinking hazard lights, and light from the bus's cabin provided enough illumination for me to see without them. I wasn't prepared for this, I don't think anyone would be. Suddenly, it wasn't a game anymore. Suddenly, that ten year old boy turned twenty-three again in a matter of seconds. "It" was alive. "It" was still breathing. "It" was human.

Training had ended for me. The dehumanization of my opponent ended right then and there. No shit, there I was, looking at a man who I had just shot twice in the lower abdomen. And now I was holding the muzzle of my carbine to his head, wondering if I should finish the job.

I saw his hand in the air, as if that gesture alone would shield him from any other incoming bullets that might be shot by us. Those rounds never came. All he saw was me come out of the darkness; and all I saw was a man in a lot of pain. This is my threshold. This is where I realized what I was made out of. This is where I met my dark side, I never thought myself capable of such atrocities. I started to get angry for some reason.

He was begging for his life, or medical attention, or asking me to spare his life. I don't know, nor will I ever know. One thing is for sure; after the dust settled, it seemed like the world around us just stopped. There we both were, sharing and intimate moment about life and death. His eyes were locked on mine, and I shared the same courtesy.

I will never forget that moment, locked into my mind forever. The smell of gun powder mixed with dust, and HE (High Explosive) residue caked the air. I ignored sweat running down my face. I ignored the straps of my heavy radio pack cutting into my shoulders. All of my senses that did not involve survival were shut down. The whole world had stopped setting the stage for this one moment in my life. This wasn't the first time I had been in a gun fight, nor was it the first time I had shot and killed a man; albeit, this was the first time I had to see my handy work up close and personal. Personal indeed. All of the incidents beforehand were so surreal that they seemed like an interactive first person shooter video game.

My anger only intensified while I looked into his eyes. Oddly enough, he wasn't yelling or moaning. I think he was waiting to see what my decision would be. I had never looked at someone so superciliously before. It was as if this man alone was the cause of all the world's problems. 9-11, the Holocaust, the assassination of Duke Ferdinand, the meteor that killed the dinosaurs, all of it was his fault and he needed to pay for it.

My sweaty trigger finger started applying weight to the warm metallic death button on my carbine. "*I can do*" I thought to myself "*and no jury in the world can convict me for it.*" The man braced himself as if he could read my thoughts. My breathing started to intensify. My anger began to show more and more.

Suddenly, as if God himself intervened, I delayed my own actions and called over my shoulder to anyone who would answer. "Hey! Are we double Tapp'n?" I waited for a response, but none came. I looked back down at the man. My anger and frustration could be identified through the increase of heavy breathing. I was going to do it.

"Fuck this guy, if it weren't for people like him I wouldn't have to be halfway around the world in some ancient shit hole called "The Cradle of Civilization" anyways. How is this for civilization, mother fucker!" I was just about to pull the trigger when all of a sudden a familiar voiced called for me from the opposite side of the darkness, and broke my hateful gaze.

“Waters! I need you over here to help with the EPWs (Enemy Prisoners of War)!” SSG. Lopez ordered.

I looked back at the man on the ground on last time with that hateful look and kicked his AK-47 away from him out of his reach.

“You’re fucking lucky!” I needlessly yelled at him, turned, and walked away.

I don’t know what became of that man. I do know that he was medically provided for and CASEVACed (CASualty EVACuated) him. Given where I shot him at, I was told that he probably bled out en-route to the field hospital, but nothing is for certain. I think that is what is so troubling about this narrative. Nobody knows except him.

I think about him from time to time. I wonder if he did survive. I hope he did, for both of our sakes. I learned a lot about life, and death that night. I also think what it would have been like if the situation had been reversed. I learned that there is a primal dark side to every human being on this planet whether they know it or not. I also know that no one should actively try and find that side of them; it may scare them just as much as it did me.

Expository Essay

Winner

The Problem with Persuasion
by Geoffrey Lemay

Persuasion is an integral part of life in America. As a child you have to learn how to be persuasive to be able to do things you want to do like have a sleepover, go to the park, play a game, make friends, or choose what will be made for dinner. After reaching adulthood, persuasion becomes even more important. Whether convincing an employer to hire you in a job interview or convincing your significant other to watch the movie you want to watch on date night, being persuasive is often an important part of having enjoyable life experiences.

However, there are many drawbacks to living in an overly persuasive society. I have countless times been having a conversation with someone and instead of listening to the other person speak, I am thinking about what I am going to say next. Of course, when I am not carefully listening to my spouse, co-worker, or friend when we are having a conversation it is easy to have misunderstandings. As a father it can be frustrating when I ask my daughter to clean her room and she goes to grab her backpack so she can start working on her homework. "What are you doing, Andrea?" I'll ask. "I'm going to start my homework, like you told me to, Dad!" she would exclaim. Then we get to have a ten-minute conversation to clear up a misunderstanding that never should have happened, seeing as I never even mentioned homework at that time. I have also frustrated my daughter at times by answering yes or no to a question she asked me, just to change my answer later when I realize that she didn't ask me what I thought she did. These are just a couple examples of people hearing what they want to hear. It's so easy to think you know what somebody is about to say, and to start thinking about your response, before you even know what's being discussed. What's the hurry? Why are we so quick to think about what we are going to say and so slow to listen to what others have to say?

As a former salesperson, it is easy to see where this kind of behavior leads. On numerous occasions I have heard salespeople saying whatever they can to make a sale with no regard for what a specific customer may need. "Wouldn't it be great to be able to reach your daughter on her cell phone?" I have both heard and used statements like this while selling prospective customers on adding an additional phone line to their cell phone plan. In fact, there are times when statements such as these, are completely true. The problem arises when a salesperson doesn't properly educate their customer. I would often take extra time to explain to customers exactly how they can check minute usage. I would also show customers how much their bill could be if they went over their minutes because of adding another phone line. I'm sure I cost myself some sales over the years by being up front with my customers, but I couldn't be a salesman any other way. I saw many sales people make the sale and then rush the customer out the door. Some of them were much better at selling than me, but there was often a cost. The very next month their customers would come back into the store, very upset, with hundreds of extra dollars on their bill. "Well sir, your new line went way over the minutes or texts," the salesperson would say. Then, after the upset customer would leave I would hear the other salespeople talking to each other and saying things like, "Who cares? I got the sales and made the commissions I wanted to." I have definitely seen the dark side of persuasion.

An even greater problem with people constantly persuading each other for their own agenda is the inability to compromise. Listening to the national news dialogue on a daily basis is rather disturbing. Both sides of any debate seem to resort to an insane level of hyperbole. I've heard people portray President Obama as Hitler. I know people who

actually believe our current President is the antichrist. How in the world can two sides discuss an issue when both sides believe themselves to be so completely correct and the other side to be so completely wrong? While I have many disagreements with the way our country is currently being run, I don't believe our President can even remotely be compared to a genocidal dictator. Even though I disagree with many republican ideas, it would be insane for me to start calling them Nazis.

Why do we as people have this overwhelming need to demonize the opposition in order to convince others to be on our side of an argument? Are we so fragile that we are unable to handle the idea that we may be wrong about something? As I continue on in life, I am constantly changing my views about things. I have dozens of beliefs today that are contradictory to my beliefs ten years ago. The more I live and the more I learn, the more I seem to realize that fewer and fewer things are certain in this life. Most issues are complex and have many differing viewpoints. To believe that my viewpoint is the only one just seems to be such an arrogant way of looking at things. I often find myself unable to take strong stands on issues for this reason. Who am I to say what is right and what is wrong?

How does this excessive persuasion translate across our society as a whole? It seems to be a very selfish approach to life. We are continually creating an environment of us versus them. We are right and they are wrong. Is it any surprise that our political system is often found to be gridlocked and ineffective? Is it any wonder that people throughout history have been so at odds with each other that war and atrocity are often a way of life? How important is it to be right?

Expository Essay

Honorable Mention

Visiting Paris: A City of Delights for the Epicurious.
by Shannon Cervantes

Abstract

Paris is a metropolis with a storied history and all sorts of interesting venues to visit. Reasons abound for visiting this diverse and historic city: however; the city's cuisine stands out as one wonderful reason to visit. If for nothing else, Paris' gastronomic culture merits a trip to the city. From its traditional French restaurants, to its pastries and world-renowned fresh markets, Paris is a foodie's wonderland. Tourists, food enthusiasts, and hungry travelers everywhere will enjoy visiting Paris solely to experience the culinary delights found within the city.

Built on the banks of the Seine, Paris is a city filled with amusements, set amid some of the most world's most exquisite architecture. It is a city famed for its role as muse in innumerable artworks, its reputation for decadence, and of course, its delectable cuisine. But there is one claim Paris merits that no other city, worldwide, dares make; Paris is the food capital of the world. No matter if dining among the who's-who at a traditional Parisian haute-cuisine restaurant or devouring a scrumptious dessert at one of the city's charming pastry shops, the remarkable Parisian cuisine alone is a wonderful reason to visit the city.

Paris won its illustrious gastronomic reputation hundreds of years ago, and from former kings down to the working-class commoners, it is rare to catch a Parisian making quick work of a meal. Meals are thoughtfully prepared and gratefully eaten. As the Credo Reference database contends, "The French have taken great pride in their food, and the rest of the world has recognized French cuisine as the most refined and sought after in the world" ("Cuisine"). A meal becomes a feast for the senses, and whether the bites are miniscule or gluttonous, the flavors explode, according to the accounts of enthusiastic diners. As a testament to Paris' history of culinary achievement, in "Eating in Paris" Ann Richardson chronicles the gustatory pleasures of nineteenth century Paris, saying:

One of my clearest memories is of a Parisian workman, in his bright blue denims, sitting at a restaurant table. Beside him was a dusty bottle; before him was a whole roast fowl, golden and succulent, on its salver. A napkin was spread across his chest, and a beatific smile across his face. There, to me, was the difference between the Frenchman and the rest...A Parisian had earned his pleasure, and he delighted in it. Food is a major pleasure in Paris; and only in Paris could the eighteenth century gastronome... observe: 'With this sauce, one would even eat one's father' (Richardson 125).

Richardson's commentary on nineteenth century Paris and its gastronomic pleasures are not lost on the modern Parisian, or the contemporary Parisian tourist. Culinary enthusiasts will certainly not go hungry while sight-seeing; Paris' food culture is diverse, and never fails to disappoint. Parisians continue to invent and reinvent their dining experiences, adding and subtracting culinary techniques in order to produce spectacular results, and they enjoy their creations with gusto. Whether stripping their cuisine down to the fundamentals, or making an elaborate, extravagant feast of a meal, Parisians truly endeavor to enjoy dining. As the Credo

Reference database affirms:

In France, food and wine are still major topics of conversation, and gastronomy is seriously respected and considered an art. France has had a lasting influence on the cooking and eating habits of many other countries. In fact, all over the world, French cooking and cuisine have become synonymous (“Cuisine”).

In the fine French tradition, Parisians continue to prepare customary French cuisine. Characteristically French cooking is known for several famous dishes, including foie gras (liver pate), escargots (snails), and a variety of sauces that use butter and cream with abandon. These dishes are still served, traditional French decor included, in Paris at the renowned “L’Espadon” restaurant, located at the Ritz, Paris at 15 Vendome Place. The mere description of the menu sets mouths to watering, listing ingredients most North Americans rarely encounter:

...seared foie gras served with a horseradish consommé with small vegetables...[a] delicate and complex preparation of a frayed pheasant on a bed of red cabbage and fried vegetables. The caramelized puff pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and coated with a warm chocolate sauce is an appropriate classical conclusion (RitzParis.com).

“L’Espadon” still espouses the traditional methods used by French chefs for generations, and for those with healthy credit ratings, the fixed-price menu options begin at a hearty 150 euros per person. A small fortune for a little slice of heaven, and a little bit of rich culinary history, otherwise known as “frayed pheasant”. If the meal is anything akin to the description, even the most wary tourist will be excited to visit again.

As further evidence that Paris’ taste buds are still alive and well in the 21st century, in her piece, “The Sweet Life” Monique Truong of *Town and Country* magazine attests to the modern-day Parisian love of food- in this case, dessert- and distinct flair for infinitesimal detail. In Truong’s piece, she describes her encounter with Parisian macaroons, a typically innocuous cookie known for its cononut flavor and chewy texture. Truong details her ethereal experience at a Parisian *macaron* mecca:

“I had come to the grand temple of the macarons, but I was willing to endure the line -- if I could try the “Ispahan.” Named for the beautiful city, once the capital of Persia and now the third-largest city in Iran, Hermé’s signature creation was almost too pink and fairytale-like for me to order: an oversized, deep rose-colored macaron filled with a rose petal and lychee-flavored crème and whole fresh raspberries. A fresh bright-red rose petal, complete with a clear drop of “dew,” lay atop the “Ispahan” as if it had fluttered down upon it from some distant land” (Truong 110).

Truong’s description defies one to discover a *macaron* crafted with greater care; even the sweetest American Grandma’s macaroons may fall a little short of the sublime rose-petal and lychee flavored crème-filled, whole-raspberry version. And Grandma didn’t name hers, either! A journey to Paris will provide hungry travelers with sweet-teeth enough memorable desserts to make lasting gustatory memories. Anyone with even a sliver of culinary curiosity must wonder, just what do rose petals taste like? The answer lies in the pastry shops of Paris.

As an extension of its exquisite cuisine and outstanding dessert repertoire, Paris’ fresh provision markets reflect the Parisian appetite for fresh, delicious flavors. Tourists have another mouth-watering inducement to peruse the city that always aims to please the palate; Paris is home to the Rung Market, the largest fresh market in the world (visiterungi.com), As the old, French saying goes, ‘Perfect

meals begin with perfect ingredients.' There is no shortage of fine ingredients in the city of light, and many of the cities finest chefs in the city utilize the Rungi daily. In the country famed for creating the Michelin star system, a trip to the Rungi fresh market morphs into an event to prepare for as opinions and prices are gravely, boisterously, and fervently debated, defended, and sometimes defeated by the merchants and customers regarding each fresh purchase. As Tom Vaughn attests to in "In Search of Perfection," it is a renowned spot for rising stars in Paris' culinary scene to buy their ingredients (Vaughn 44). Curious tourists will need to hire a guide, become a registered seller, or tag along with a registered seller, but the trip is well worth it for any aspiring gastronome (VisiteRungi.com). Visitors should be prepared to arrive in the early-morning hours in order to scoop up prize ingredients, or even see them, as Paris' chefs arrive as early as four a.m. in order to procure superlative ingredients (Vaughn 44). Vaughn and his compatriots arrive at the Rungi at four a.m., greeted by "... ripples of excitement from the fish market, the first port of call that morning. Box after box of shimmering seafood: shiny-eyed swordfish, 3001b yellowfin tuna, tanks of alien-like langouste (spiny lobster)" (44). Not only is Vaughn impressed with the extensive selection of beautiful, fresh fish, but also examines walnuts alongside eight chefs who sing their astonished praises of such perfect nuts. Only in Paris would one arrive bleary-eyed and barely awake at the world's largest fresh market at four a.m. in order to eulogize walnuts and peer into the eyes of freshly-caught spiny lobsters. For the epicurian, Paris is a city that never fails to inspire and astonish, even at four a.m..

If fresh ingredients and traditional cuisine still don't provide a reason to visit the city, perhaps Paris' ever-evolving notions of the dining experience will offer incentive to stop. For traditional French cuisine enthusiasts, the city's fine dining establishments provide ample fare for enjoyment, but Paris aims to please the unorthodox diner as well. Paris may be the only city that contains a restaurant in which diners eat in complete darkness. If fine cuisine, sublime desserts, hundreds of years of culinary excellence, and the largest fresh market in the world aren't enticement enough to travel to Paris, perhaps a trip to "Dans Le Noir?" will sate even the most discerning avant-garde clientele. "Dans Le Noir?" provides a dining experience like no other. According to Scott Simon of NPR, who braved "Dans Le Noir?" for National Public Radio, the meals are served in complete darkness, by blind waiters, and eaten as such. (Scott) Without regard for the cuisine at hand and what it actually tastes like, just the experience of eating in such a bizarre setting draws visitors to "Dans Le Noir?", and there are plans in the works to open a similar establishment in London. (Scott) Only in the City of Light is there an establishment in which people dine in complete darkness!

Paris is a city famed for many things; the French Revolution, the beautiful architecture, museums bursting with world-class art, and so many other interesting diversions. There are myriad reasons to visit Paris, but the city's gastronomic history, continued tradition of culinary excellence, and innovative approach to cuisine make it a crucial destination for any tourist who wishes to have his cake and eat it, too.

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