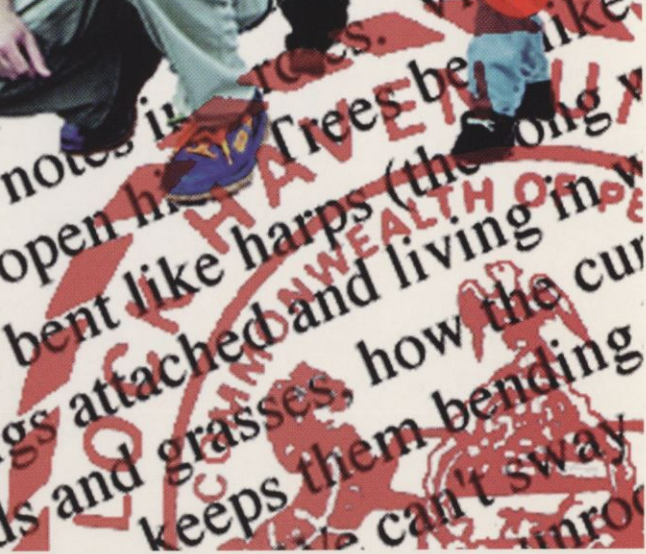


That too
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rush in. Southbound US 101, wh
cried which way curved, paralle
stream which way curved, paralle
sweet
are begin
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The world
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ribbed the open hills. Trees be
grapevines bent like harps (the only
arch of things attached and living in
seeds and grasses, how the cur
keeps them bending
can't sway

The Crucible



The Crucible

The Literary Journal of Lock Haven University
Annual 2000

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On the Cover: "Farewell Bend" by Justin Brocious lays the text background for a photograph of published students taken by Shana Grove. Design is by Ryan Gill and Glenn Thierwechter.

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Commitment

for Craig Geppert
by Justin Brocious

I thought it was you rumbling across the abandoned lot,
but today the leaves fall constantly in golden sheets,
giving that strange boy your shine.
How far does he believe his young leg will push him?
He is an adolescent, the age we never want back,
yet his skateboard is attached to his feet
like a wooden grill, and the faster he surges forward,
the more you can see energy and life swelling inside him.
Those days urethane burned above every silent street,
freedom was like high school—rarely there,
and life was counted in pale vibrations
through the balding soles of our shoes.
We were the bridge, we were the low crystal fog,
wrapped in gray disdain, rolling wild.



Shana Grove



Tom Peske

Within City Limits

by Tara LoPresti

I am a traveler amid artificial city lights,
Enveloped beneath the crushed velvet sky,
Learning silence on this still night.

The lampposts lining these streets fade
Black, into the charcoal night,
Overshadowing a traveler amid artificial city lights.

My journey's already spread out, pre-made,
Sketched out in maps dog-eared and dry;
I am learning silence on this still night.

Adventures are obscure amid streets neatly paved,
But still there are lessons to be earned in time,
For I am a traveler amid artificial city lights.

This forest is planned, each tree neatly placed
Within the wilderness of the human eye;
I am learning silence on this still night.

In the hesitant air of this controlled space,
Where pollution paints the blackened sky,
I am a traveler amid artificial city lights,
Learning silence on this still night.

Slight Overlap, Soon Amended

by Thomas Justice

A man walks as a stranger
through the bubble
he has so carefully constructed
with a prayer that
karma exists.

I'm watching,
however,
beneath the darkened marquis
and I read
in his footsteps
a lack of import.

I carry him
with the music of thought
to the brink of an ocean
and he is submerged.

Beneath the water,
a drowning man releases
the galaxy of his final breath.

It travels from the deep
with planets in tow
only to break on the surface
of another reality.

Absence
by Matt Bow

Nothing.
Absence of everything or
anything at all.
Scream out loud and
the shadow of a doubt
answers your call.

Nothing.
Do I hear an echo?
Echo?
Surrounded only by walls.
An echo thanks to the
hand of God
that smites until
there is absence of
anything at all.

Nothing.

Not anything at all.

Nothing.
A page without ink.
The clouds without sky,
no point of focus.
No magic spell,
abracadabra,
no hocus pocus
can bring back
anything at all.

Nothing
makes a ghost town
seem populated
or a wasteland alive.
No point in waiting
for death to arrive.



Corry Cass

Midnight Between Streets

By Thomas Justice

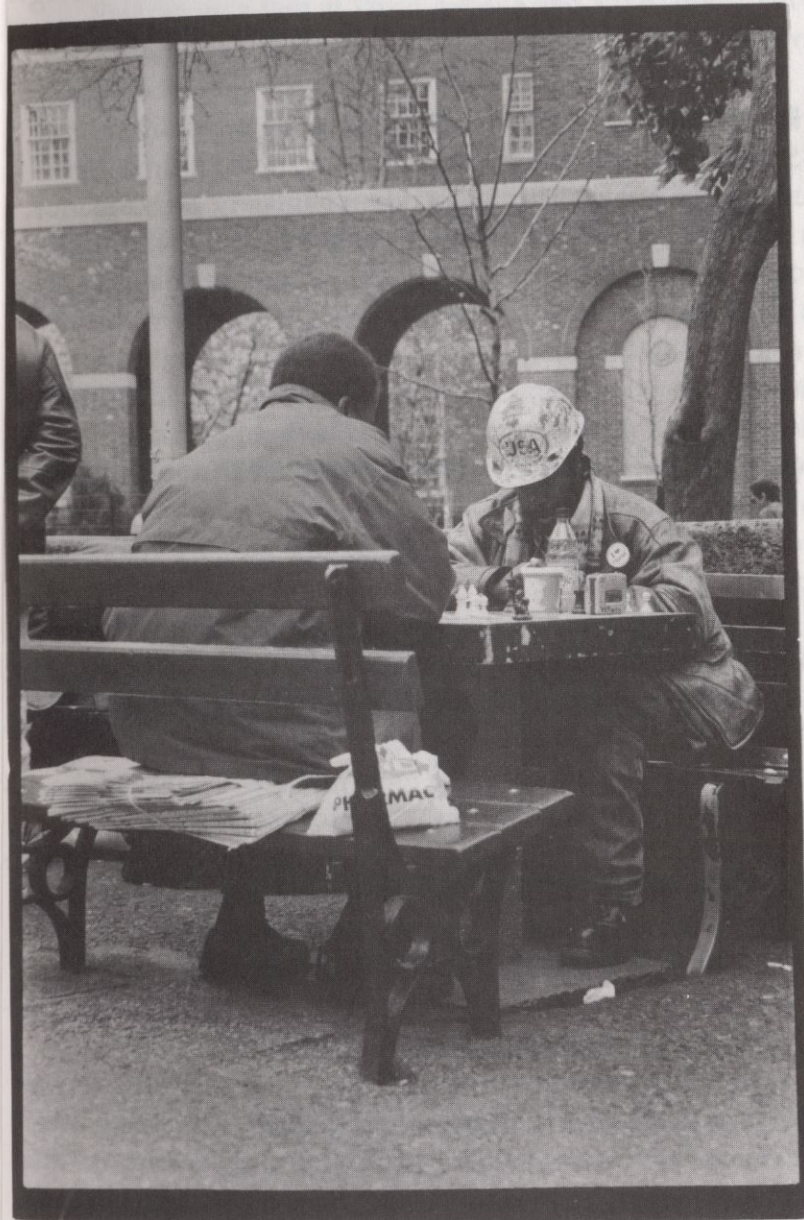
Something screams to me
that we are all born in
cold pavement and
measured in asphalt.

This dark alleyway
is lined with
telephone poles
in narrowing parallels
preaching confinement
as powerlines cross
over my head
like a crucifix.

This is the concomitant clutter
of wasted time.

The crippled scavengers of night
lurk in solitude
by dumpsters framed
in yellow spheres
cast from streetlamps.

We lurk like they do
in a twisted limp
of weakened flesh
as each pained step
drains beloved certainty
into sidewalk cracks.



Shana Grove

On a New York Night

by Dave Har

For millions of people the world over, the eve of Christmas, 1945, marked a new beginning. For many, it was a time for rebuilding the human spirit and faith in humanity. For America, was a time to rejoice and celebrate the holiday season, as well as welcome in a new year free of war and hatred. In no single place was this euphoria more evident than in the avenues and streets, the markets and shops, of New York. Against a dazzling backdrop of neon lights, New Yorkers, each in their own fashion, pushed aside the veil of darkness, to see the white light of hope.

On this Christmas Eve, a gentle mist filtered from the heaven through the chilled December sky, the sights and sounds of the holiday filling the nighttime air. Yet despite the celebratory spirit despite the pealing bells, life for some remained a bleak and arduous journey devoid of meaning and design; instead it was random sometimes savage, unforgiving, and uncertain. For one such person, enduring endless nights of indifference had become an all-too-painful fact of life. Frank Madison had tolerated the harshness that could be New York; the reality of war had taken a young man from a sense of innocence and introduced him to the stark reality of life, leaving Frank physically disfigured and emotionally bereft. Only within the confines and the torn interior of an aging taxi could he hope to deny others the knowledge of his deformity a leg left forever twisted by the agonies of war. Only within the safety of his cab could he be looked upon as just another Joe, concealing from the world his inner anguish.

Adjusting the rearview mirror, Frank cast a doleful glance at the person staring back. "You're a real winner. Christmas Eve and here you sit, freezing your butt off in this broken down rattletrap with no damn heat, waitin' to pick up some stiff in a three piece suit, cocked to the gills, so he can go back to his fancy upper eastside apartment while you, you go back to your crummy

little hole-in-the-wall apartment."

Picking up a fare at Third Avenue and 32nd, Frank gave the cab company's required spiel. "Thank you for using Metro Cab. Your business is our pleasure. Now, where to Mac?"

The stranger, a large dark-featured man snarled, "1520 Astoria."

"Astoria?"

"Yeah, Astoria. That a problem for you?"

"No. No problem, Mac. 1520 Astoria."

Frank enjoyed conversing with his fares, asking questions, telling tales, especially asking questions. Some, he found, talked freely, some not so freely, others not at all. Regardless, Frank enjoyed studying each of his fares, their every movement, their every twitch, their every change of expression. People's personalities were like puzzles and Frank loved puzzles.

"What'cha do for a living?" Frank asked.

"I provide services."

"Services? What kind of services?"

"Just services. Say, don't you have heat in this rat-trap?"

Frank could see that the stranger was not in the mood to talk. He seemed nervous and agitated. The source of his distress, Frank was certain, was most likely to be found at their point of destination. Since the man was clearly not in a conversive mood, Frank entertained himself by discreetly studying the fare's mannerisms. He determined that the stranger was married, wrote with his left hand, liked scotch and water and, from his demeanor, was used to getting his own way.

"Not bad," Frank thought to himself.

Over the Queensboro Bridge and up 31st Street, the pair traveled, turning onto Astoria. As they approached the given address, two figures could be seen struggling amidst the drifting snow. The stranger grew increasingly agitated as they drew near, pressing himself against the door.

"Pull up here and wait! Don't get out of the cab."

"Sure thing. Whatever you say, Mac."

Frank could now see a man and a woman struggling on the sidewalk. A blow to the head sent the woman crashing to the pavement. Leaping from the cab, the stranger intervened, shoving the male figure against a storefront window.

"What the hell's the matter with ya? Have you lost your mind? Look at ya. Drunk again. I've just about had it with ya. Now, get your sorry ass up those stairs and sleep it off. Ya got me?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I understand. But she got a taste of what she deserved. I told her to get rid of it. I told her to get rid of it, and she lied."

Turning now to the badly beaten figure sprawled on the pavement, the stranger helped her to her feet. The drunken man, having failed to follow the stranger's command, once again began screaming at the young female, "I'm gonna kill ya!"

With one short, effective blow, the stranger silenced the drunken outburst. Hustling the battered female toward the cab, the stranger demanded, "Get her outta here!"

"Where am I supposed to take her?"

"I don't care where ya take her as long as it ain't a hospital or the cops."

As the stranger shoved her into the cab, he reached into a pocket and pulled out a wad of bills as thick as his fist. Peeling off two fifty-dollar bills, he tossed them at Frank and prepared to close the door.

"But I don't know what to do with her."

"Take her home and introduce her to your mother. Let her meet the family. They'll love her."

Resigning himself to the situation, Frank could not resist confirming his previous observations about the gruff stranger. "Hey! Scotch and water."

"What?"

"Scotch and water. That's your favorite drink."

"I hate scotch and water. Now get the hell outta here! I got some business to take care of."

With that, Frank pulled away to what he considered a safe distance from the scene of altercation.

"Are you all right? Lady, are you all right?"

"Oohh!"

"Let me take a look. Man, you're really messed up. What am I going to do?"

Frank glanced with consternation into the rearview mirror. "Well, what are you going to do? You can't take her to a doctor. You can't take her to the cops. This is one fine mess, one fine mess."

"Seventy-three. This is dispatch. Copy?"

"Nina! This is Frank. How are you doing?"

"Frank, you're supposed to say 'Dispatch, this is seventy-three, over.' Honestly, after four years, you'd think you'd get the hang of it."

"Sorry."

"Frank, what's your status?"

"Status? Uhh, well, I just dropped a fare off on Astoria. Uh, Nina, I get off at midnight. I was wondering if it would be alright to...."

"To get off early? What's up Frank? You never leave early. You got a hot date?"

"Why no. No, not at all. It's just that, well, Atlas has been under the weather and I was just worried about him."

"That's the lamest excuse I've ever heard. You gotta play nursemaid to a cat. Sure, Frank. Go on. Get outta here. Go home and check on your little kitty. Oh and Merry Christmas, Frank."

Now, what to do about his backseat package? Frank thought of his possible options. Perhaps he could take her to a friend or a relative. Perhaps he could take her to a shelter. Of course, they would ask a million questions, a million questions and he didn't even have one answer. The only option Frank could come up with that seemed safe was to take her to his place, to his apartment, make certain she was okay. Once her head cleared, she'd

just go away.

Arriving at his Bronx apartment, Frank assisted the young woman to the door of his fifth floor flat and down a narrow dimly lit hall that opened into a living and sleeping area. On the left, a green sofa sat tightly pressed against the wall. Nestled between two windows sat a chair, burgundy in color with miniature yellow flowers. The papered walls, adorned with vertical stripes, revealed numerous holes, exposing the plaster and lath framework beneath. A small, walk-in kitchen was framed on one side by a bathroom, which surely must have been constructed for an individual of diminutive stature. Wooden floors, long neglected, appeared gray and worn, subjected to years of unabated use.

"Sit down, right here. I'll get you something for your face."

"Oohh! My head," mumbled the woman. "Say, where am I and who the hell are you?"

"You are in my fifth floor apartment. In the Bronx. And my name is Frank Madison."

"The Bronx? Are you kidnapping me or something 'cause if you are, I got no money and nobody I know got money and if they did, they wouldn't give you a nickel for me anyway."

"I'm not kidnapping you. I'm just trying to help you out. Your friend, the big guy, he told me to get you away from that guy on Astoria."

"The big guy? Benny. Good old Benny, my knight in shining armor. Saved me from—how could he do that to me?" Turning her attention to Frank, the young woman said, "You must be Benny's knave."

"No. I'm just a cabbie."

A feeling of self-consciousness swept over Frank as he realized the focus of the young woman's glance. "Hey, I don't mean to be nosy or anything. But, what's up with the....?"

"The leg? I injured it toward the end of the war. It's something I find difficult to talk about. Say, I don't even know your name," Frank interposed.

"Mattie. Mattie Grey. And what'd you say your name was?"

"Frank Madison."

"Well, Frank Madison. It's not that I mind spending the night with a total stranger. But, really I should get going."

Grasping the arm of the sofa, Mattie attempted to stand, only to fall helplessly back, clutching her head between her hands. "Wow. All of a sudden my head got fuzzy."

"It's okay. You can stay here tonight. Really. That sofa's not bad to sleep on. So you just rest. You'll feel better in the morning."

"Thanks. I mean it's not as if I don't have places to go. Those I got plenty of. It's just that, well, you seem like an okay guy, and me? I feel like my head's gonna fall off."

As Frank sat beneath the windows, the distant sound of bells danced through the air, not the bells of churches ringing praise to God on high. No, these were bells far different, bells that jingled, bells that brought forth faded memories of childhood.

"Did you hear that?" Frank exclaimed.

"Hear what?"

"The bells! The bells of Christmas!"

Straining to hear, Mattie replied, "They're just jingle bells. Someone's playing with jingle bells."

"No! They're much more. I can remember as a child, maybe four or five, it was Christmas Eve. We were just getting ready for bed, my brother and my sisters and me. We all slept in the same room, and we were all excited, waiting for the morning. I was just getting cozy under my covers when I heard it, the sound of bells, jingle bells. 'Santa's sleigh,' I yelled. The others came running, and we pressed our faces against the window; I can still recall the cold touch of the glass. I've never stopped believing. Never gave up hope. From that time I knew. Christmas is real. It's not a dream."

Wiping her face, Mattie queried, "What about your family? Where are you from? I know that couldn't have happened in New York, not in New York; it couldn't."

"Family. My family lives in Michigan. I haven't seen them

since the war." Turning away, Frank said, "We had some great times."

"So why so sad? You still see them. I mean, they're not..."

"Dead? No. They're alive. Still in Michigan. I write from time to time. Mom writes back. Tom's pretty much running the farm now. Dad's health is not so much that he can handle it alone. My sisters. Well they're grown up now. Mary's all of fifteen and Tracy's seventeen."

"You write letters. But when was the last time you saw them?"

Frank could feel a sense of anxiety welling up inside. Rising from his seat, he made his way to the kitchen, fumbling for an imaginary meal. "What about you?" he asked. "What happened tonight between you and Mitchell?"

Frank returned with a sense of relief to his seat beneath the windows. "Mitchell is, correction, was my boyfriend. He came home, drunk as usual. Only this time, he came home ranting and raving. Seems he found out my secret and well..."

"Secret? What kind of secret?"

"Someone told him that I'm...I'm pregnant, three months pregnant."

"And your uh, ex-boyfriend didn't like it?"

"That's an understatement. He was furious. Insisted that I have an abortion. Insisted that it couldn't be his, that I was some kind of tramp. I didn't know what to do. He was threatening me. Threatening to hurt the baby. He didn't know it, but, when it seemed like he was gonna follow through, gonna hurt my baby, I was desperate. He stormed into the bathroom, still screaming, still tellin' me to get rid of it. I got on the phone and called his cousin, Benny. Told him Mitchell was drunk, out of his mind. I pleaded with him to help. He's everything that Mitchell's not. Of course, he doesn't, or least didn't know, about the baby."

"So now what? What are you going to do? You have family, friends to fall back on?"

"No. It's just me and the baby. My parents and I, well, we

didn't get along. I left when I was just sixteen, vowed never to go back. Dad was abusive. Abusive towards me, abusive towards my mother. It was a terrible situation. I had to escape."

"Say, you feeling any better? I mean, you're still banged up and all, but..."

"Yeah, yeah. I feel better. It must be all this talking. They say if you tell someone your troubles, that you'll feel better. I feel better. I'm gonna be, we're gonna be, all right," she said with a new found sense of confidence.

Suddenly, a loud knock came upon the door, instilling a sense of dread in the bewildered pair.

"Mattie! I know you're in there. Open up!"

The banging continued as Frank moved between Mattie and the door.

"Come on, Mattie! Open up!" The voice echoed.

Frank moved cautiously to the door, wondering what terrible fate awaited on the other side. As he undid the lock, the door burst open, sending Frank, off-balanced, onto the well-worn floor. Facedown, Frank could feel a pair of hands close around his right arm, pulling him to his feet. "Sorry about that. I guess I got a little carried away." Benny smoothed Frank's disheveled clothes with all the care of a tailor and continued, "You're as good as new." Turning now to Mattie, he said, "Why didn't you tell me you were pregnant? If I'd known, I'd never have shoved you into that cab."

"But how'd you find me?" the astonished Mattie asked.

"It's like I told your friend there, I provide services. I provide services and I receive services, and I want you to go home with me. Not with that two-bit cousin of mine, but with me."

Benny helped Mattie to the door as Frank, with a sense of regret, followed. He was relieved that it was Benny and not Mitchell who had sent him sprawling on the floor, but he was sad to see the young woman depart, the first young woman who had made him feel normal, who hadn't labeled him a freak, an outcast.

Bending over, Mattie gently took Frank's face in her hands so

softly Frank thought, as to rival the touch of an angel. Gently, Mattie caressed his cheek and whispered, "You've got to go back. You can't let your injury keep you away, isolated from the people who truly care about you. You haven't been home since your injury because you're afraid they will not accept you. Be brave and trust. Go home, Frank Madison. GO home."

The door slid shut, leaving Frank Madison alone with his thoughts. Christmas truly is a wonderful time of the year.



Shana Grove

Algebra of Change

by Thomas Justice

I won't beg you to understand
the infinite possibilities
of a streetlamp
on a night
when water falls
draping rivulets
of cyclical sweat
on sleep—listen—the old fire hydrant
with layers of red-like time
speaks of probability functions—the numerous
events passed.

Rain must come,
allowed to gather in lonely pools
only to be taken up again
with a question
back into that cosmic sweat,
burned off
by the next sun.

This evaporation breeds cynicism
as a mind peels in stratum
to affect
another layer
of paint.

Sunbathing by the Side of the Road

by Danielle Resnick

Your white coat shines,
colors reversed; you never had a chance.

A faded white stripe branded on your back
Latex-based.

Weeds, like funeral flowers, sway in the breeze,
bending like mourners paying their respects.

O poor, slain, patron of pungent stench,
now discarded like an empty aerosol can,

I can't see the lively white rice,
stuffed inside like a Thanksgiving turkey,
but I know they make a meal out of you.

Malodorous scents mingle, two levels of darkness
twist tightly together in decadence.

Kaputa!

Dirt-stained paws extend towards nature's heat lamp
basking, basting, baking.

Furry sausages protrude from the bloated vessel
that once dared to challenge the asphalt rill.

Is that a smile of blissful peace
or a furious snarl like Old Yeller's last burst of rage?

Sunset
by Tara LoPresti

The sun burned up dry,
dusting the clouds with flecks of crimson powder
as I watched Mommy peek through the blinds
in crimson shades of pain.
Seeing Daddy through the dusty, gray glass,
with her quiet tears,
with the silence of the sun slipping down the sky, but burning,
she watched
as he leaned in to kiss
our heroine-addict neighbor,
and shattered Mommy's heart into pieces
as small as the needle marks in that woman's pallid skin.

And I drank in all I knew of heaven in her,
standing there framed by the scarlet window.
I sipped her salty, stinging tears
that ran like the sun,
that fell like the light,

dripping crimson on white clouds,
saturating, seeping,
like warm blood flowing
over the wrists of life,

drowning in that puddle of death
where Daddy found me screaming,
holding her cold, sticky hands
in the dying light of the scarlet sun.

*The Other Side of
Yellow*

by Debra Haddad

Desperate steps
of lilly pad
hopping,
oasis of despair

suspended over
darkness,
indifference everywhere.

Clouds reflecting night-
fall
through cool
and somber
waves,
chilling all security
within
extinguished faith
of pure
obscurity.



Tom Peske

Under That Tree or Maybe That One

by Nicholas Trumbauer

It seems to me, as we get older, it takes more and more to amuse us. When we were little, a simple game of hide-and-go-seek would keep us busy for hours. I can remember when I was young, a time when life was much simpler, my favorite thing to do before I went to sleep at night was to press my face into my pillow and watch what I called the star effect. I would take my pillow and place one arm on each end to stretch it out. Then, I would open my eyes as wide as I could and shove my face into the center of the pillow. For a while, all I could see was darkness. All of a sudden, something would start to happen. Little sparks of light would appear for a split second and then disappear. They were like little stars glimmering in the distance, but there was no distance. It seemed that some would start farther away and get bigger as they got closer. They were of every color imaginable and of every size possible. Back then, I just thought it was kind of neat to watch these bursts of beauty. I had my own personal light show, and it was wonderful.

I am older now, and I no longer slam my head into my pillow to watch these wondrous bursts of light, mainly because I think what I saw was caused by a lack of oxygen to my brain, but also because I am jaded by my years of life and the memory of those little lights is simply brighter than my present perspective. The eyes of a child are filled with pure excitement, and I have lost some of that. Although I don't watch the lights anymore, I still see them in my mind, and lately, they have found a new place in my thoughts. This new place is no longer one of wonder and joy. Instead, it is one that causes my heart much grief and my mind much fear.

What has caused a childhood joy to give me such pain? Everyday I walk around a college campus, and everyday I see many others going about their business. There are people on their

way to class or hanging out with friends. I sometimes think how great it is to be here. There is so much going on. It is exciting and different. I am at this place to learn and to mold my future. What a great time it is to be a college student. The world is changing every minute, and now being college students we feel more a part of that than ever. Then, I look deeper, and I find that there is something very wrong.

The longer I am here, the more I start to look around. I can see, and understand, better than I could at the age of three, but I still see sparks of light. The more I notice things around me, the more I begin to compare the people around me to the sparks. Not that they themselves are like the sparks, but the life they are living is like a spark. My life is a spark. My life will probably never be long enough no matter what I do to extend it. In the entire span of time that ever will be, my life is like that brief spark. It has a beginning and will grow, and one day it will end. It is the largest thing for me and yet so very small to the rest of this universe. So is the life of every other human being. We are only given a short time to exist, and that short time is ours. It is up to us what to do with it and what quality we will enjoy.

So then, why do so many people choose to rush through life? Is there simply not enough time to stop and breathe? Why are so many people in a hurry? I walk from class to class trying to enjoy the day, but everywhere I look people are in a hurry. I realize that some of them might be late for a class, or hurrying to meet someone for lunch, but not everyone is in one of those situations. Yet they will run to class, just so they can be there a few minutes early and sit and wait for the teacher to show up. This makes no sense to me.

One other thing I have observed is that most of the conversations I hear going on between fellow students somehow involve the word stress and some complaint about a class they are having difficulty in. I begin to wonder why people stay here if they hate it so much. Is it their future they value and not the present? If that

is so, how are they going to make it through four or more years of college?

College is a hard transition for some people to make, so the complaining is to be expected. All people will have bad days and need someone to listen while they unload their troubles on them. Yet if this behavior becomes everyday practice, what is to force us to better ourselves? If I spend every day complaining, I have wasted a day I could have spent living.

These thoughts, questions, and ideas have led me to form a possible solution. I think the best way for all these headaches to be lessened is if we took a little time each day and spent some time just sitting under a tree. I believe that this would make the individual life of each person better. This will create a ripple effect that will eventually lead to better societies. One day it may lead to a better world.

How is sitting under a tree going to do all this? First off, if you take some time and clear your mind, the result is a period of time for your creativity to go wild. Some of the best writers have used this method. Henry David Thoreau spent two years just sitting around under trees and doing work in his garden. During this time, he formed ideas that would one day change the world. Later in his life, he wrote an essay called "Civil Disobedience," which fell into the hands of a certain black preacher and became the most powerful weapon used to fight racism. In case you don't know, that preacher eventually made an "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington D.C., and his name was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. An entire race was led out of a terrible injustice because a man in New England took the time to let his mind expand. If he had not, where would we be now?

Times are a lot different now than they were in Thoreau's day. I realize that it is very improbable that we too could live like Thoreau. The demands of life in the 90's can be very high. Thoreau was only taking care of himself; many people have families to take care of. I am not saying quit your job and go live in

the forest. If you ever find a time when you are really confused and need some time to think or you have extra time, maybe a tree could offer a little shade and time for thought.

Do you think you would look strange just sitting under a tree? To some people, this could be embarrassing. Thoreau took all kinds of harsh criticism for living so far away from town. The people in the town thought it was weird, yet many people came to visit him in his cabin. They were famous people. Writers, reporters, and politicians all came to visit him. So maybe some people will think you look a little goofy, but some may find it interesting and stop and talk to you. Maybe, you might even make a new friend.

For some people, the best way to relax is to listen to music. You can't very well plug a boom box into the base of a tree. I realize this. If you have ever spent time outside, you surely know that it is never silent. There is always something to listen to. If you sit under a tree and listen to what is going on around you, not only will you get in touch with your surroundings, but you may also discover a little bit of a new kind of music. It doesn't run off electricity, and you won't need any speakers. It is the music in your mind, and it is begging for an audience.

What if it rains? Well, rain could be a damper on a nice day of sitting under a tree. If it is a light rain, it might be a good idea to stand under a tree for a couple minutes and just experience the rain on your skin. Sitting might be a bad idea because the grass is probably a little wet, and a wet bottom is not a very enlightening or beneficial experience.

I understand that not every one is the outdoors lover like I am. Sitting under a tree offers many possibilities for everyone. Many of our science theories were formed by a man who was just sitting under an apple tree and happened to be hit on the head by a falling apple. Instead of swearing and throwing the apple, he began to think about why the apple fell down and not up. He eventually came up with three ideas. Today, we call these

Newton's three laws of motion. Not only has the idea for great literature been formed by people just sitting under trees, even science has benefited from a simple guy spending some time relaxing and thinking under a tree.

You could argue that these people could have accomplished what they did if they had never sat under a tree. Maybe that is true, but if Newton had been too worried about a calculus test to stop and relax, would the thought ever have entered his mind? Newton had the potential to form his laws without the tree. The question is would he have ever realized his potential if he had never given his mind a chance to wander off and find itself somewhere else?

Many of our great thinkers spent most of their time outside teaching classes under trees. I can see Plato talking to a group of young students under a great big maple tree. I am sure Socrates spent a little time thinking under a tree, and I can't even mention the name Confucius without imagining an Asian guy sitting under a tree letting his mind wander.

I understand that these people worked outside because there really was no place for them to meet inside. So no, the tree is not the most important part, but it is an example of a place where you can go to let your mind be free for thought. The reason I have picked a tree as the desired place for relaxation and thought is because in today's world, trees can be found almost anywhere. You can go to a county park or visit a nearby nature reserve. There are even trees in the big cities like New York. It is not very hard to find a tree that you can use for a little shade.

You may be telling yourself that you are not a philosopher. Either you don't think you are smart enough, or you don't care about the big questions in life. Are you sure? Have you ever given yourself a chance to find out? Here is what you can do to find out. Try to remember a time in your life when you asked the question "Why?" Then go find a nice maple and pull up a seat.

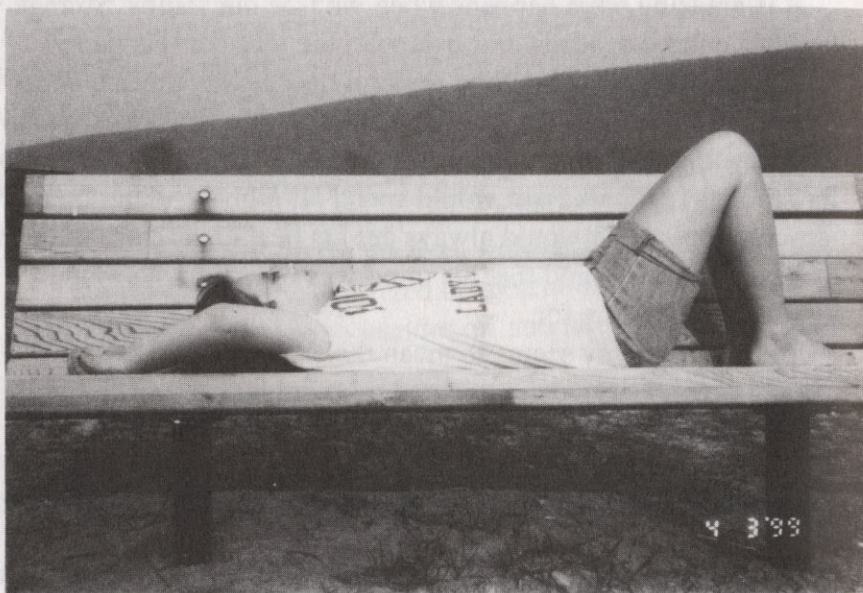
Concentrate on that time and see where your mind goes from there.

It is amazing what happens when we free our minds. Strange thoughts enter our heads. For example, the idea for this paper came to me while I was sitting under a tree. I sometimes wonder what else I could think up. Ideas are what we form when we stop concentrating so hard on one thing and open our minds up to random thought. Robert Frost would spend all night working on a particular poem. He would always get his best ideas close to dawn because he was so tired that his mind was open, and he found what he was looking for.

To be alive today seems to mean the same as being busy. Finding time to sit under a tree and relax might prove difficult. When you think about it, what in life is actually required? You need to breathe, eat, and sleep. Maybe, you can combine one of these activities with sitting under a tree. Having lunch in the park by a big pine tree sounds like a pleasant idea to most. An afternoon nap by an oak tree might be very refreshing. You would have the little span of time before sleep came to ponder whatever you want.

It is true that sitting under a tree might not make you a Newton or a Thoreau. You might not think up new philosophic questions or discover a truth about life. These things are side benefits of freeing your mind underneath a tree. The real reward is the one that is the sure bet. If you can learn to slow down and take your time in life, maybe you will notice a lot more of what is going on around you. Simpler things will become a real joy, and life will take on a bigger meaning.

The spark that is our life will burn out all too quickly, so we need to enjoy every minute of it we have. Next time you're rushing through the park on your way to that big meeting, pick out a good tree and take a seat. Let your mind grow wings and fly. Hopefully, it will land on something wonderful.



Candice Rayls

This Bewitching Violet in Soft Array

by Debra Haddad

This bewitching violet in soft array,
A winsome breeze blows her petals to weep
Imprisoned within a fleeting bouquet.

In hide-and-seek moments of child's play,
Awakening from a blissful night's sleep,
This bewitching violet in soft array,

A careless stroke to pick her as she lays,
I could pray dear Lord her soul to keep
Imprisoned within a fleeting bouquet.

Should I have left her for another day?
Red, yellow, and blue, all colors complete
This bewitching violet in soft array,

Taken from contentment without her say,
To dress my table in my own conceit
Imprisoned within a fleeting bouquet.

My guilt and remorse I can not convey;
A thoughtless mistake I'll never repeat,
This bewitching violet in soft array,
Imprisoned within a fleeting bouquet.

Haiku

by Debra Haddad

A wilted flower
pressed between the worn pages,
locked wishes in time.

Branches of the trees
reaching towards heaven's glow,
fading silhouettes.

The lonely daisy;
he loves me, he loves me not;
life is just a lie.

Fat, calories, grease;
I deserve a break today.
Pass the ketchup, please.



Corry Cass



Corry Cass

Dinner at Ground Zero

by Matt Bower

Said the waiter to the party:
Your table is waiting,
Mr. President.
May I recommend
the soup of the day?
Hearty tomato soup sprinkled
with the ashes of
registered voters
and wash it all down
with acid water straight
from the golden springs of the Rockies.

Said Mr. President to the waiter:
It is up to my dinner guests:
Ex-President Reagan and Mrs. Thatcher,
Admiral Hitler, and my old comrade, Castro,
Napoleon and company,
and, of course,
Mr. Gates.
I believe we'll have the usual.

Said the waiter to the party:
Very good, gentlemen and lady.
chop, chop,
get these fine men,
and lady
their dinners before
the Russians arrive.
Said Mrs. Thatcher to Mr. President:

I have a request.
May I press the button this time?
I heard the French have signed no treaty.
No offense, Mr. Napoleon.
Mr. President, please."

Said Ex-President Reagan to Mrs. Thatcher:
Is it the red or the green?
Ah, hell, press them all.
Just keep those damn missiles pointed away
from my backyard.
If my sandbox is hit
I'll have nowhere
to play tank invasion.
And those military ah...flying things.
Boom, boom,
bang, bang,
the Americans win again.

Said the waiter to Ex-President Reagan:
An intriguing hobby you have sir...
What the hell was that noise?
There goes New York.
And the Knicks were in the playoffs.
Well, well,
dinner is on the way.

Said Mr. President to Mrs. Thatcher:
Excuse me, but I don't quite understand
just why
your face is melting away.
There must be
a leak in the bunker.

Said Hitler to the party:
If you press your ear
to the ceiling,
you can hear
skulls bouncing off
the sidewalk and brains spilling.
I'm glad you brought back the draft Mr. President.
Now the maggots can enjoy three
full-course meals
a day.

Thought the waiter to himself:
That gives me an idea for a new dish.

Said the K-Mart employee to the party:
Mr. President, sir, and distinguished guests,
K-Mart has run out
of gas masks and
the air is getting black.
I was able to salvage a few.
Gold plated,
of course,
and they will be brought out
on silver platters
with Burger King crowns
at your convenience.

Said the waiter to the party:
Dinner has arrived.

Said Mr. President to the party:
Good.
Eat quickly.
Remember we have little time.
Tonight we need

to appear
on Propaganda TV
to the world.
So shine up your medals
and whiten your teeth.
Remind yourself
you're still real
and don't forget,
no wearing gas masks
through your address;
we can't frighten the public.
But first,
place your flags on your laps
and dig in.

Said Mr. Gates to the party:
And for God's sake don't mention Y2K.

Said Sir Churchill to the party:
And when this night is over,
you are all invited
to my bunker
for Holocaust Karaoke Night.
Now I'm going to eat
like this is my last day
on Earth.
God forbid.

Said Castro to the party:
A toast to us.
Another successful
nuclear fallout.
I miss days like these.

Said the party in unison:

To many more mushroom clouds
and refugees torn from families and pitch-black Sundays and
reasons to point a finger and industrialized third-world countries
and frightened looks and computer crashes and new radiation
treatments and another war Ex-President Reagan can forget and
games of follow-the-leader and a rise in the prices of fallout
shelters and a demand for nerve gas and a one-world economy
and the Revelation of Saint Peter and the mark of the
Beast and a Weekly World News headline and another
day the hippies protest and another reason to
wave a flag and another special
television broadcast
from Billy
Graham
and another
publishing by Nostradamus
for the cockroaches have regained control.



Traci Snyder

Parallel of Digestion

by Thomas Justice

I've invented a mirrored toilet bowl, so I can watch the end result
of a day, of last night's insomnia

a morning kiss

feeble advances bending like wheat to the wind

your favorite sitcom on five days a week

people passing like smog over temporary puddles

suits selling Coca-Cola to Vietnam

minivans in strip bar parking lots

curse hurled like cigarette butts from open car windows

memories like a poorly filmed movie

my boiling mind losing

to another daydream,

trickling

into another

daydream,

descending

like a stillborn fetus of confusion

into a glimmering pool of

ephemeral reality

only to be flushed away

and repeated

in the eternal now.

Ice Cream Scene

by Hope Mitchell

Smooth like the stones along the river,
you sit upon a waffle-cone-shaped pedestal,
my coolant against the blistering heat.

You cheer me in your many disguises:
browns, pinks, swirls, and polka dots,
and leave my smile covered with a creamy mustache.
I lick-after-lick not too much for fear of the infamous
"brain freeze."

You restore childhood traumas
of lost tonsils and loose teeth
to soothing tasty moments.

The older I've become, the more I long for you
and search for your distinct richness
among the worlds of frozen yogurts, like tangy sherbert
mixed with NutraSweet.

Your distinct flavor satisfies me and leaves me
feeling like a cactus after the rain.

As I become older, though I search
for comfort to calm my inhibitions,

I still carry the memory
of my creamy mustache,

your disguises,

and your waffle-made pedestal—

all a magical part

in my Ice Cream Scene.

Dancing with Dad
by Kimberly Autumn Heisler

Black dress,
metallic blue jacket:
I clash with his purple shirt and gray tie.

The band plays, "Love Me Tender."

We're on the stage,
the band right behind us.
The floor vibrates beneath my feet,
a baby grand at my back.

We're the only ones dancing solo.
In the middle of the tiny stage,
we're no Fred & Ginger, but we dance,
together, but alone,
like two lone figures on a wedding cake.

I stare at his shirt collar,
then peep over his shoulder
at the sea of faces in the smoky dark,
our only light, muted footlights,
& the reflection off my jacket

that clashes with his shirt.

My fingers,
crushed in his hand,
my hand once so tiny (like a doll's)
now almost as big as his (like a baseball mitt),
my hands soft & uncallused,
hidden in his big, callused, work-worn hands.

He whispers, "I used to be able to hold you in one hand."

I whisper, "I used to be able to ride on your shoulders."

He whispers, "You've grown into a beautiful young woman."

I whisper, "Because I had a great dad as a role model."

As the song ends, he lets go,
the memory of the song
filed away in my mind,
the heat of his touch on my hands
still there, the memory of what he said
parked in a permanent space
in my mind.

As the song ends, we part,
me in my black dress & metallic blue jacket
that clashes with his purple shirt & gray tie.

Spilled Milk

by Tara LoPresti

Yellow painted daffodils
Shatter in fragments
On the sterile white tiles of the kitchen floor.

A glass cup with tiny daffodils etched around the edges,
Flowers broken,
Yellow shards of a porcelain
Fragile sun fallen from the sky

Glistening, taunting me,
Smiling at my guilt.

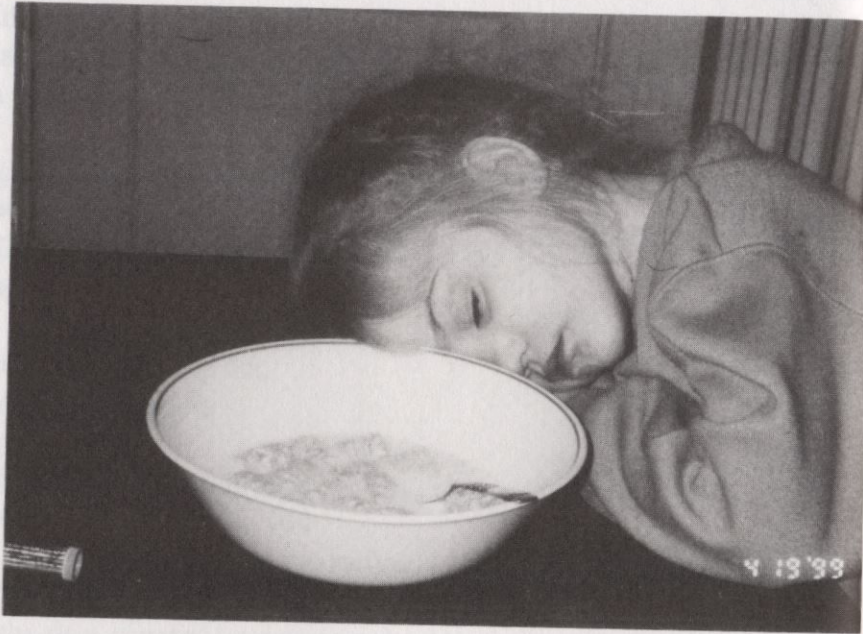
The staircase looming long,
Towering over me, like you
As I sit in the shadow of the railing,
Picking at the frayed edges
Of the dust-covered orange carpet worn
And tattered

From passing feet
Rushing up and down
Or perhaps just sitting,
Like me, waiting
With tears.

Your words bruise my apple-red cheeks.
We could not have
Nice things, you said.

And how could I
Know what value
Yellow painted flowers held
To you?
I did not know

That a single glass cup could show
All the "nice things" I would not have,
Things I could not have
Like your love.



Candice Rayls

A View From the Children
by Candice Rayls

Give us the swings and boogie on sand,
Let us again find between our toes,
Make busy days and fixly things,
Help find the lost lost corner.

Concinn with us give, just-what-I want,
How buddies to not the other end is a friend,
Sing our favorite songs in your kitchen,
And dance till we to get it done.

Tickle us when you're in a playful mood,
Make us practice with letters and numbers,
Remember back to back, "I will be"
And now is our turn to be happy.



Candice Rayls

A Plea From the Children

by Candice Rayls

Give us tire swings and beaches of sand,
Let us squish mud between our toes,
Make daisy chains and firefly rings,
Help find that four-leaf clover.

Come run with us, play hide-and-seek,
Blow bubbles to kiss the clouds,
Sing our favorite song in your loudest voice,
And dance till we're out of breath.

Tickle us when you're tired,
Make us pancakes with happy faces,
Remember knock-knock jokes, "Sam I am,"
And notes in our lunch for no reason.

Give us butterfly-kisses, a game of checkers,
Let us climb a tree to the top,
Make us ice cream sundaes with extra cherries,
And swing us just one more time.

Forget everything else
But the wind in our hair
And giggling until it hurts.

Make time for us.
Share with us.
Come love us as we play.

Toy Soldier

by Candice Rayls

Damn! I have found you again,
Invisible as a four-leaf clover,
Camouflaged in a field of grass,
Waiting for me to step on you.

You infiltrate my carpet,
Weapons in ready position,
Prepared to attack like the chained
Pit-bull starving next door.

Your aim is very clear,
Obvious as the center ring of a bull's-eye:
Mother's bare feet,
Skin as thin as a thawing sheet of ice.

Your knees and elbows,
Sharpened green blades,
Posed so uniquely,
Stab me with pain.

Yet, you amuse the children,
Your naive allies in this game.
They eagerly explore with you,
Pioneers upon new land.

They scheme and they plot,
Like grunts in the bush.
They're three-star generals
In footed pajamas.

In footed pajamas.

How many of you lurk about
Like life's sudden invasions,
Continually bombing my shelter
Disregarding the cease-fire?

I'll pick you up, put you away;
The victory is yours.
But next time "armed" in slippers,
I will not be overthrown!



Candice Rayls

The Child in Me

by Jennifer Koskey

The child in me wants to
unfold this umbrella and
play in the rain.

She wants to
stomp in the puddles
with her brand-new white shoes on,

scoop up the mud,
slather it on herself,
someone else, and
play with a handful
of worms.

The child in me doesn't care
about how slimy the worms feel.
She wants to throw them at her enemies and laugh.

The child in me doesn't care
about the fish under the ice
that might harm her.

She wants to eat and chew
at her fears
until they are gone.

She wants to be in awe
of her inner and outer beauty,
not the dirt.

She wants to stand tall
and proud of who she is
in spite of their words.

But, at the same time,
that child in me wants
to run away from all the

pain
hurt
heartache
and sadness

eating away at her tiny body,
chewing at the insides.
It aches so badly,
she wants to scream

but nothing comes out.

And so she must stand
in the rain
looking pretty
under her umbrella.

Raindrops

by Debra Haddad

A
tear
is shed
to stream
down the face
of heaven, descending
from sorrow high above
the trees, synchronizing
side by side becoming
simply ... rain.

Breaking Storms

by Patrick Stehley

Vast blue meadow
About to be taken
Clouds move in
Turbulent gray soldiers
Under orders of the wind
Marching on to the bright blue sky

Rain falls
Leaving gullies in the ground
Droplets pelting the tin roof
Crying as they fall from the sky

Thunder thrashes
Sounds exploding like breaking souls
Lightning splitting the sky
Clear delineation

The dam bursts
Flood water traveling through the town
Washing away
Cleansing

The sun battles the militant soldiers
Clouds part
Blue skies expand like bread rising
Drying dark puddles still left

New life grows
Erupting within the ground like Pompeii
Warmth on my skin
Dry sidewalks to travel again

Little Brother

by Candice Rayls

There are those who chase after
you, just to see the twister
first hand. They disregard
the unpredictable power
of your gusts of wind. You
touch down on hearts,
bring pounding rain and
damaging hail. Dreams are
tossed about in the eye of
your ego. The chasers
seek shelter, lucky
to escape your
intriguing
destruction.

You are
a force
not to
be

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o
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q
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e
r
e
d



Shana Grove

My Dream

By Steven Winkler

Come Down on Me

by Brian Pelka

Come down on me
like a rain cloud,
saturate my skin
descending flesh,
thrown to the colors
which permeate and pulsate,
weightless and unimaginable,
softly granting a peace,
unparalleled and unknown.
May I rustle with the leaves
and become the autumn breeze?
Lift the hair from your skin,
let us finish then begin,
alone in the forest,
subdued by the wind,
innocuous kiss
against the pale blue sky.

My Breath
By Steven Winkleman

My breath,
Hot, moist,
Carried away on a cruel wind,
Escapes my mouth,
Home of hollow words,
Lair of lies.

It carries this taint
Into the world outside,
A reborn Typhoid Mary,
Infecting the world anew.

Turning justice into abuse,
Love to hate.
Turning peace into dissension,
Ease to hardship.

Seeking rebirth,
Searching for truth,
Destroying what it desires most,
Oblivious to its effect on others.

It wafts away,
Just out of reach,
Beyond recovery,
Beyond my control.

Desperately I struggle to regain it,
But the struggle is in vain,
The battle lost before it is begun.
I am less than I was,
Incomplete.



Traci Snyder

Alone with Your Self

by Michael Reighley

If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? (Continue reading after a moment of thought.) An interesting, as well as a timeless, question. I question whether it is a question that is to be answered, or a question to be pondered, posed to twist the mind upon itself. Originated by Zen masters, to manipulate the folds of their students' minds into origamis of clear thought, each side of the argument submits powerful reasoning, questioning, and creativity, until the mind can take no more. Some will say, of course, it will produce a noise, but another will ask, where is the proof? How are you so certain if you are not present to hear the sound of the tree?

To find an answer, I traveled to where the trees stood and fell. What better place to seek my answer? I trod lightly into the mysteries the forest held, the canopy of leaves keeping the sun from fully penetrating. I was forced to listen more closely than before. While I searched, I came upon a rock, much larger than a man, which protruded from the earth and possessed a quality that made the stone appear to be at the center of the forest. (If this was indeed true, I did not know.)

Finding a place to rest on the stone, I assumed a cross-legged position and simply listened. I began to hear the sounds of the forest in a way I have never perceived. I heard the buzzing of the bee; how diligently and focused at his tasks he was. My ears caught the soft trickle of a brook to my left, and I turned to watch the fish swimming about without a care in the shallow waters. How joyous and merry they seemed to have become. I listened to the rabbits, making no sound except for the leaves they crushed under their soft paws, eating the green grass and fleeing from any creature they did not recognize.

As the morning turned to afternoon and the day into night, I began to hear an increasing collection of sounds, sounds of a

greater variety and intensity, sounds that were once hidden. The moon, sun, and stars had become one, and I did not recognize the night from the day. I questioned if I ever truly had. The myriad creatures no longer feared me; we now understood each other. The sounds would not relent, a ceaseless ocean, ebbing and surging with the pulse of my breath. I drew the deepest breath I had ever drawn, for I wanted every sound to be known. The pain was unlike any, and I feared my soul would take no more, expanding and pushing in every direction, the pain reaching into a place that knew no direction. And the moment came, when I feared my soul would accept no more, and then came a sudden silence, an all-encompassing silence that was more still and more pure than any I had ever known. I stretched my legs and rose to venture into the calm. I walked alone with my Self through the speechless hills and valleys, waiting for the secrets to be told. I turned to face Self and Self spoke,

“Child, you know nothing of the forest in which you dwell. Until you give up your perception, this concept cannot gel. Some would call this life heaven, while others would call it hell.”

I became confused and bold and asked, “What do you mean, Self? I have seen and heard everything in the forest. I am one with it. I know all of its secrets.” Self took my hand and led me to the foot of a great tree, a tree of such unimaginable heights, I could not begin to see where it would end. Self did not move his steady gaze from the base. He held my trembling hand and thrust it into the syrupy bark. I felt no pain. He commanded me to remove my hand from the once impervious grooves of the ancient bark. The life fluid, which coursed through the tree in the form of sap, stuck to my hand and as I pulled away, a piece of the bark was also torn from the great tree.

I saw a great multitude of termites, ants, insects, and fungi, which lived and flourished beneath the sheltering of the protecting bark. How did I miss all of these creatures? I searched with my

eyes and listened with my ears the best a man could. This is impossible. "How can this be?" I questioned. Self replied,

"These souls you have never seen, and you have never heard,
Do not listen to me speak, will I not produce a word?"

I was beginning to understand, and I smiled to Self. I reached out and picked up a beetle from within the great tree. I laughed as the beetle danced joyously in the palm of my hand. My heart was light, and I turned to face Self, but he was nowhere to be found. "Self," I screamed to the tallest branches of the tree and "Self," I whispered to its roots. I did not understand why he would desert me?

The beetle in my hand began to tickle my thumb. I looked to my little hand and found Self! Self laughed and shouted up to me,

"Why should you live, but why should you die?
Truth is in the depths and truth is on high,
I pray these lessons do not pass you by."

I was also chuckling by now, and I held Self, who had become as tiny as a bug, up to the ethereal blue sky, stretching out above for any who would look to see.

Before a second could pass, a great white bird was swooping down to gobble up Self and carried us up towards the branches of the great tree (although, I could still see no top). Self was firmly held in the tight grip of the bird's beak, but I was holding onto Self for dear life, dodging and weaving in and out of branches and through leaves faster than my sense of direction could handle. Finally, we arrived at what I first assumed and later knew to be the bird's nest. The nest was delicately woven together with each piece gently resting on each other piece to form a unique balance between the whole.

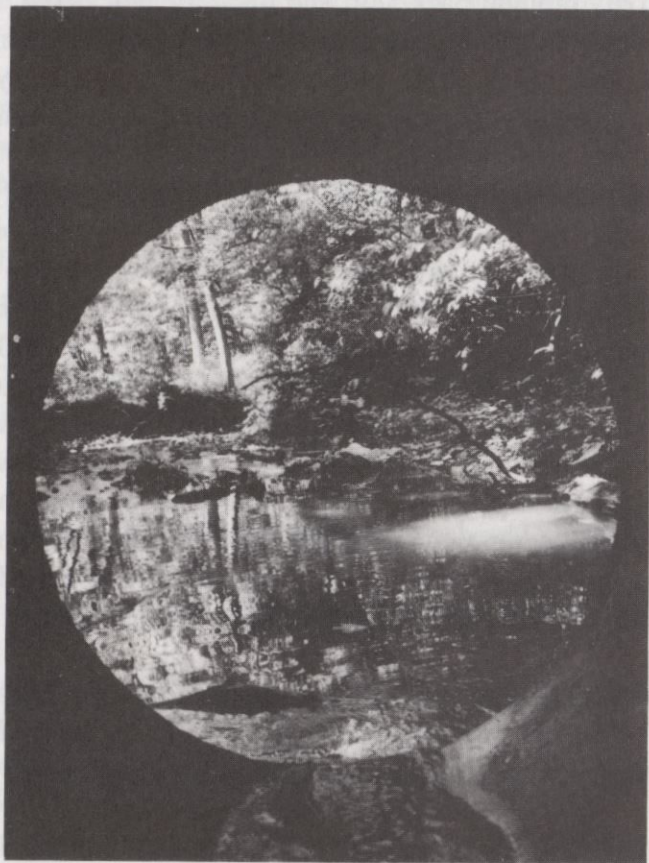
It was truly a thing of beauty, yet it paled in comparison to what it held within its structure. I watched as the mother's chicks chirped and peeped excitedly at their mother's return. The mother bird had only brought back Self, and I and the chicks did not understand why there was no food for them to eat. The white bird left again, in hopes of finding life-sustaining food for her young. We were forced to watch the newborns grow thin in their mother's absence. I became concerned; she may have lost her way, for it was a long distance to this out-of-the-way nest. Despite my fears, she returned with the much-needed food, but not quite soon enough. One of her children died in the time it took her to find the food. The chick was so very thin when she died and passed away in her sleep. Before she died, I bent close to the baby chick, so I could hear her faint breath whispering in and out of her weary lungs. The last breath is the one I remember, the one that will reverberate in my mind for eternity. I did not understand why there was so much pain in this place. The view from this height was unlike any other and everything about the tree was equally inspiring, yet there was no escape from the hurt. I doubted it would ever end. Self stood and cried out,

"Because you are unaware of the pain of another,
Would you discredit the tears of this mother?
Will you see the truth or would you rather it be covered?"

Tears began to burn my face as I cried to Self, "Take me away from this place! I beg you, take me from here! I can watch no more; if you have any mercy..." I was on my knees pleading. The knowledge that had been revealed convulsed my body. Self simply nodded. He understood that I was not yet ready.

I woke in the forest. All I could recall of earlier was pain. The sun had set, and I struggled to find my way as I kept retracing my unsure steps. I came upon a clearing and again saw the stone on which I rested before. Stumbling and tripping through the briars and brush, I ran towards it until I fell upon the jagged place of

rest. My eyes were almost immediately drawn to an unassuming cedar box resting on the stone. The mysterious box was no longer than the distance between a man's elbow and hand. I touched it to



Tom Peske

find it was smooth and felt welcoming as my undecided fingers began to lift its lid. The hinges were rusted and began to creek like you've never heard a hinge creek. (I know no words that could do the noise justice.) I peered into the gaping box darkly visible; I could discern the outline of an object. I took it from the selfish box. I had never held anything like this before; it was icy and frigid in my burning palm. I wanted to drop it to the earth, but

my hand wrapped itself around it too tightly, gripping tighter and tighter, while life hung on a frenzied silence. Not one soul heard the metallic clang as steel struck steel while filling the chamber, but I assure you a sound was made.

As I raised my hand toward the star-filled expanse of universe overhead, but cut short, you never heard the sound of the dishonest metal as it sliced through the night air. It is truly a shame you didn't hear the breath tremble and become caught in my throat as I pushed the unforgiving barrel against my forehead. And it's a shame you weren't there to hear my shame or the confusion shrieking in my mind. I was only a sapling in the forest, but a tree nonetheless: leaves budding towards the light, potential cut down as I began to fall to the earth. When I struck the floor of the forest, the sound waves exploded outward from their point of origin, circling the earth, moon, sun, and stars, fleeing towards the nothingness, flowing in and out of your mind like the blood coursing through and seeping out of my head, yet you could not perceive. The heavens came crashing down with a thunderous noise and a rapturous commotion, and still, your ears could not hear.

My mind could not think and my body could not move, while Self gushed and oozed out of my opened person. As I lay helpless as a child on the sweet forest floor, through the blood and the tears that covered my eyes, I could make out his silhouette. He stood over my broken body. A tear fell from his cheek and splashed in the red puddle that had formed; this too, you were not present to hear. Self grew tired and his strength became weak. He fell to his knees and if a place such as heaven does exist, his tears were like the coldest rains to ever fall from its skies. He was in terrible pain, but I knew his tears were for me and not the result of his pain. He bent close to me and with his last breath, whispered ever so softly, resonating for my soul to hear, "Child, if you would have patience, all would have been revealed, For love is truth and the truth shall heal."

I woke in the forest, nestled between the laughter of children as we walked through the quiet pines.



Shana Grove

Encounter

by Thomas Justice

As I sleep
I fear that
I may be blinking
in and out of existence
as one dream
absorbs my being
from this world
and returns it
when ended in blackness
like a traffic light
changing for no reason
but want of passing cars.

Galaxies come and go like this
interminably
which makes life
nothing but a bad joke
told to you by the regular
at the end of the bar
in a whiff of liquor
and smoke.

Nicole in My Dreams

by Heather Rooney

I dream of you now and then
as a child near seven
with ringlets of golden brown
dancing about your sun-kissed skin
while your copper penny-colored eyes
and your cherry lollipop-stained lips
laugh soundlessly at a joke made for your ears alone.

I dream of you now and then
as a young girl in your teens
with mousy-brown hair that refuses to be held
shading your pimple-studded skin that refuses to clear
with all knowing eyes still showing hints of pennies
and a plastered-on smirk that would rather disintegrate
than smile.

I dream of you now and then
as a woman three years my junior
with chestnut-brown hair softly-salted with gray,
framing a face worn wise with senseless worries
with little penny-tinted-eyed girls all of your own
who will never have to dream
what it would have been like to have a sister.

Totem

by Kelly June

On a lonely stretch of road,
a tree marks the place—
a Mecca for survivors,
a shrine for the dead.

At its roots, in brown-red soil,
standing small and white, erect and alone,
the cross signifies the loss,
proving man's mortality.

Hanging around its girth, hitched to the bark,
a ribbon of pale blue,
remnant from the final service,
clashing gaudily with the green branches.

The brown bottle with its peeling label
resting on the ground near the tree,
sober and still after its final, drunken spin,
a grim reminder of the cause.

Today, a rose—faded and stained—adorns the tree,
petals drifting sorrowfully to the moss-clothed floor.
Tomorrow, a t-shirt embraces the trunk with empty sleeves,
its hem rustled by the breeze of passing cars.

Tokens, momentos,
placed by unseen hands on a midnight pilgrimage
to help us remember,
help them forget,
emblems that fade and wear with time,
even as sorrow slowly subsides
until the spot and the tree stand alone
and vacant once more.



Tom Peske

Mortal
by Jessica Grim

I turn the corner
into the room;
there lies fallen Goliath,
Superman on kryptonite.

Rationality, that dam in my mind,
collapses.

Under white sheets, his massive body
turns less tan, more blue.
Lips pursed,
too uncomfortable for sleep.

Ammonia scent overpowers
Old Spice, King James cigars, and blue-collar sweat.

Both of my hands lift just one of his
huge, thick, leathery, bear-paws.
It drops onto my hand,
releasing childhood memories
of long, warm hugs.

Mucus builds in my throat as dewy-sweet tears
roll down my cheeks, into my mouth.

But the warmth in his hands
and air in his lungs
are no longer his own.
With the flip of a switch, it will all be
done.

In a hospital, he saw my life begin;
the circle continues, I see his end.

Funeral March

by Tara LoPresti

Find my way back home
To you,
Where the clouds rush forward
In wild cranberry waves
And the shadows of the trees
Creep ever closer to the door.
I stay distanced
Somewhere within the tree lining.
Anywhere but home,
Concealed under the same night sky,
Imagining different stars than yours
Are mine.
You remain in that room
Where death hangs above your bed
Like a Van Gogh painting on the wall.

Starry, starry night
I know is waiting for me
Where I cannot find the will
To make my way back
To the place I fear to love,
Where hearts are worn through,
Fading red to gray,
To stone-cold granite beneath,
Softness stamped out like the tattered threads
Of the welcome mat at the door.

Mother's day cards and birthday wishes become
Fields of tombstones and lush cemetery grass
Stretching on into the horizon.
All the way through the crimson sun,

Bleeding through the crisp clouds,
And our frenzied stars,
Through the creeping shadows of trees.
The blades of grass go on forever,
For as long as you
Are no longer here
The grass climbs over the path,
Over the memories of the past
Over you
And I cannot find my way back home.

Into the Night

by Melissa Long

The loneliest place to be is in bed at three thirty in the morning, silently thinking about everything and nothing all at once, while the person that you care about the most in the world is asleep beside you, so close to touch, but too far to reach, sound asleep, oblivious to the fact that you are upset, upset about the same old thing, the same thing that always gets no better but worse. It's too cold to get up and turn the T.V. on for company; besides, the radiated glow would seem too eerie reflecting off the silent darkness outside.

Actually, the cold outside seems more comforting than the cold right next to you. It seems almost like relief to picture being out there in the frozen, black void, so numb that even the virgin moon and stars are afraid to show their faces. Out there you would feel nothing; it would feel you. You wouldn't have to worry about caring or care about worrying. The wordless dark would be a haven from the flashing red colons of the clock reflecting off his smooth, motionless back, screaming at you his silent existence. You want to just grab his hand, feel his breath; you want him to notice. But he won't. And all you want to do is scream back at those mocking lights, flashing on and off, reminding you that time is slipping by, out of your control, and that there is nothing that you can do to stop it. If only you could arrest the flash and choke the life out of it, make it stop tempting you to wake him up and make him feel as miserable as you feel, to cry and scream and kick like an unleashed two-year-old.

But you can't, so you begin to think again, that never-ending cycle of uncertainty and rejection. Self-respect suddenly breaks its way through, so you sit up and think, "What the hell am I doing here?" You decide to leave but realize you have nowhere to go that isn't as lonely, and anyway why do you want to go; you've already waited all week for him to help you forget to forget about

all the things that won't let you. But you're not going to beg, so you cry, which he wouldn't understand anyway. It's not that it makes you feel better; it just makes you feel worse, which is better when you're upset. And you get up to turn the T.V. on because the cold doesn't matter as much anymore; you now have the company of tears.

To escape the ambiguity of it all, you decide to go look out the window to see the night, who understands. It's still dark out there, even though yet another hour has passed by and it's even closer to morning than you thought. So you open the window just a crack to let the air soothe your swollen face. And suddenly it's not enough to just be a crack; you need to open it wide to let it reach you in ways that he can't, or won't, which is worse. And then it seems to be enough to have the night with you. Out there, it would wrap you in its arms and hold you, hold you away from those ridiculous flashing lights, away from him. So you step out onto the roof and find that it's not as cold outside as in, which makes you desire the night even more. You go, into the night, into you. And inside he rolls over to stretch across the barren mattress, unconcerned by the flashing lights echoing your reality.



Tom Peske

Missing

by Tara LoPresti

February stands still
On the shelf of time,
Collecting cobwebs.

Thick layers of dust
Swaddle my sadness.
Somewhere within these layers of forget
Lies a faded picture of you,
Dog-eared now and yellowed
Like my memories.

Someday I will tell a story.
From a weathered rocking chair,
I will sigh,
A sigh that tells of a thousand nights
Spent staring at the ceiling,
Memorizing the shadows of an empty room.

The bittersweet sparkle in my eyes will say
That I once owned an authentic jewel
Called love.
Wore it to special occasions,
Let it transform me.

They will know that I was in love once
Amid German cathedrals and cobblestone walkways.
Swirling in the confusion
Of foreign tongues and uncertainty,
I held your hand with confidence.

Until I woke one day
With an ocean between us,
Boarding a plane in the haze of dream,
Waking to find you lost,
Evaporating into the corners of my mind.

Yes, I will tell my story with a sigh,
A weathered look.
Until then I must spend a thousand nights
Whispering to the bare walls,
Hearing your name every time the sheets rustle,
Softer and softer,
Until your memory is no more
Than my hand fumbling in the darkness
On the empty side of the bed.

Sleeping Sockless

by Beth Bertram

Since I was always concerned that footless creatures might reside at the bottom of my bed, I found comfort for many years in a simple pair of white socks to protect my precious feet from the faceless, legless, but surely toe-biting, creatures that lurked beneath my covers. So, the summer after my college graduation, I began to think it might be time to start discouraging this silly habit of mine. At this same time, I was also dispelling fears of unemployment, forever living at home, and basically just being an all-around, Charlie Brown-like failure.

Sleeping with my socks was the first hurdle. Baby steps, they say. So one night, I sucked up my courage and dared to expose my naked feet to the bottom of my bed. My bare feet sliding against the cool sheets sent images of a snail that left a boundless trail of slime, a snake that excreted something closely cotton-like in feel, or, even worse, a worm that liked sage-green gingham sheets and twenty-two-year-old's toes.

But, determined to conquer at least one fear that summer, I braved the removal of my white (with a pink toe line) socks. Somewhat tentatively, I slid my nervous toes toward the bottom of my bed while I quickly pulled the covers up to my ears. Shifting to be double sure that nothing was down there, I traced my big toe along the parameter of the bed until I was satisfied that I was alone.

Realizing that indeed I would be able to conquer this fear, I rather easily drifted off to sleep. If only getting over every other fear was that easy. Within a few nights, I could stick my exposed toes down into the covers with only the tiniest wince.

As for the rest of my fears—unemployment, parental dependence, and Charlie Brown syndrome—they're taking a bit more work. Heck, they're taking heaps, piles, mounds, and even mountains more work. I wish I could just kick off my shoes, rip off my

socks, and go into the real world bare feet first. But, it's hardly that simple. There are resumes to write, newspapers to read, contracts to make, interviewing skills to tweak, portfolios to arrange, and countless, endless, mammoth decisions to make.

Having never been afraid of a challenge, at first I tackled the job search head-on. Then came the unreturned phone calls, rejection, and all those sympathetic "Poor Beth can't find a job" gazes. Soon, like all of those books I devoured at the beginning of the semester, I felt lost on a shelf of similar copies, all of which are striving for the same goal—to be read, reread, and, most importantly, remembered.

The early chapters of my life, to continue the book metaphor, were filled with success, motivation, and focus. I'm now feeling a little yellow around the edges, perhaps even a little dusty. Nothing seems to come easy now; hence, success seems almost unreachable, and I don't have the desire to dig deeply enough for that tiny bit of motivation that might be lingering deep within. Notice I say that success seems *almost* unreachable. Considering myself a bit of an optimist, I like to think that some random, rainy Tuesday in October, I'll wake up with a plan, or at least the desire to formulate some sort of design for the next phase of life.

While I'm waiting for that random act of motivation to occur, I suppose I will settle for being happy sleeping without my socks on.

Ode to a Stapler

by Joy Kania

Silver and shiny, strong,
durable, you balance on your bottom
like a tightrope walker in midair.
Spring-loaded weapons—tiny, top-half, upside-down goalposts
bundled as tightly as slaves on a ship.

Your gun fires bullets semi-automatically,
sometimes missing the fingers, sometimes not.
Your only weakness: a stack of papers
thick as a slab of granite.

Fingers find their way into grooves
like a nervous child who slips his into pockets.
Up and down, up and down, seesaw at the park,
stalking your prey like a crocodile waiting...
waiting... for the exact moment....

You spring forth, catch your dinner,
hold tightly, choking it with your teeth,
never letting go unless forced by the Jaws of Life.

In the aftermath, you snap back, rest,
like David's victorious slingshot.

Vain Picture Frame

by Joy Kania

Periwinkle,
no, translucent blue,
like the slow inner burning flame
on a Bunsen burner.
Stable just laying there,
all alone though wobbly

when standing on its own
as a child just beginning
to walk, teetering about.
Screaming, "Look at me; notice me."
Dancing in front of my eyes,
grabbing at my attention,
the way wind howls and
tosses leaves around.

Unsuccessful as it is,
its pride is too great,
like the king of the forest;
growing angry, it strives
to show me what it holds:
memories, expectations,
clinging to the past
like a tattered history book.
In its tug-of-war,
it trips, loses the balance
it never had, crashing and
smashing to the floor,

only to be replaced with another,
another frame...another picture...
another memory.



Corry Cass

From the Bottom of This Wishing Well

by Sheila B. Gernavage

When I was younger, it seemed like it would take lifetimes to become an adult. Well, I'm almost there. I can't help asking myself over and over, "Where have you been? What have you been doing? Was it all worthwhile?" I have to admit—I don't really know, I'm not quite sure, and I often doubt it. But, sometimes late at night, I go through the important things, and often a lot of the unimportant things. I don't try to figure out which outweighs the other or which created the biggest reactions, but I consider which I'd like to experience all over. Honestly, I'd have to say all of them. Each teardrop, each sunset, each and every memory I own has created a majestic masterpiece in my gallery of life that will never, ever be torn down. I remember eating my first piece of cheesecake and thinking, "THIS is the exquisite dessert my mother has been telling me to avoid all these years?" It was given to me by my ex-boyfriend. My thighs will never be the same. I remember getting penny candy and really wanting to try the three-cent saucer that looked like Styrofoam. I loved the way it melted on my tongue! It was filled with little candy beads—I wasn't expecting the extra surprise! Sadly, I don't recall ever eating one again. Life is sometimes odd, I suppose, well, odd more than not. It's almost as though life were a parable, and after each page is another and another—it's as though we're to search forever for the moral and may never really find it. I don't remember learning how to walk, how to talk, how to exist. And yet, here I sit—in front of this digital memory, waiting for my laundry to do itself. I'm the master of a destiny I'll never understand. "Won't you be my neighbor?" Oh, if only it were that easy! Here you are, little girl—here you are. Diving boards were always so tall, so far from earth, so scary and out of reach. Special days are usually spent alone, in my room—writ-

ing and thinking. My diving boards are much higher now but, all in all, not much has changed. Perhaps the best things in life are a bit more free—okay, three cents to be exact—but I know that my dreams are well worth it. I've lived a thousand lives and I've worn all kinds of masks. I carry my favorite in my back pocket. I slip it on, when I think no one else is looking. It's beautiful—no paint, no rips, no fingerprints. Perhaps tonight I'll leave it on for awhile—sit around in nothing else. Often, late at night, when I wonder where I've been, I climb inside my back pocket—and truly live.

Bottom of My Pocket

by Matt Bower

Father of the country
in the bottom of my pocket,
what is your worth today?

Hey, George Washington,
you freed us
from the shackles of yesterday,
tore down the bars
that caged the American Dream.
That is what I learned in history today.

They tell me your life was priceless,
an equal trade for two dimes and a nickel
I found on the floor.
Four of you could buy my Uncle Sam a draft
at a local dive bar,
or a gumball from a machine,
or even a Spice Girls' lick-on tatoo—
pretty cheap for a textbook definition of liberty.

At least you're needed
for Monday Night Football.
Who kicks off, the Red Team or the Blue?
Settle an argument, Mr. President.
Who gets the girl tonight?
And who gets to ring the liberty bell?
I'll send you swirling into the crisp American air
until you land on the very soil you
died for.

Your frozen stare of silver eyes
remind me you're a king,
afraid of nothing but people like
Benedict Arnold.
If you could open your mouth,
ending your two-hundred-year silence,
you'd scream
when flipped into this fountain as I
wish for a new Mustang.
Do you know how many Lincolns that would be?

Father of whose country
in the bottom of my pocket?
Buy me back the Dream today?
You're only worth twenty-five cents to me,
and that much I can give away.

Transaction

by Thomas Justice

Within this crumpled dollar bill is the story of America,
each wrinkle the ticking of a clock hand
coming down like a hammer blow
to drive a nail or bend red iron.

It starts so crisp
like the leaves of a new book
only to end
in the nursing home of another careless pocket.

This crease is the fingerprint of a transaction
of diverging paths
tucked by longing into the space made
by thigh and naked garter
crushed again—Why can't you stick up for yourself?
Aren't you only so much money?
Sculpting a niche from a dwindling domain,
interrupted dreams that never finish
but tick the nights away
like so many hammer blows
second
by
second
as broad as a universe
or two.

Because of Agriculture

by Thomas Justice

Man is swimming madly
in a dizzying sea
of intricate technology
which weaves a silicon web
of illusion
over his head.

It rattles his nerve
and drives him
to acts of boredom
in dark parking lots
and lone alleyways.

His mind knows only debris
and marketing ploys
and one-liners from sitcoms
and soap operas.

He is awake
in this commercial
of modern life
that hurls the vibrant
colors of demise
at his unsheltered eye.

He searches that bright garbage
for a sense of value
and finds only a sense of more
to place
on more of the same.

'Twas the Night Before Yom Kippur

by Matt Bower

'Twas the night before Yom Kippur, and all through the house,
Binging and purging to dislodge the mouse.
The ballads were sung by the mimes with malaria,
Eskimo monks with top hats worsened the hysteria.
Confused and scared, I ran for cover,
Grabbing my children and waking my lover.
But Grandma in her kerchief fainted on my lap,
Seeing her deodorant collection covered in sap.
Looking out on my lawn, I made an observation,
I hadn't cut the grass due to weeks of constipation.
The weeds were like trees, I hadn't trimmed the hedge,
Out of frustration pushed Gram o'er the edge.
Hopefully the piles of new fallen snow,
Would cover her body two stories below.
When, what down the chimney did finally appear,
Santa all right with Jack on his breath, a half case of beer.
This repulsive, lethargic, drunkard stumbling around,
Ran to my bathroom after doing twelve rounds.
While my kids stood shocked at their hero being sick,
I peeped in the bag of good ole Saint Nick:
Jim Beam, Captain Morgans, a kilo of crack,
Hoffa's body, and a Playboy all shoved in his sack.
On the top of the porch, on the top of the wall,
Were eight dirty whores and no reindeer at all.
I was about to join Grandma when to my surprise,
Up in the sky was the Starship Enterprise.
Whether Spock did it on purpose or by goof,
Beamed those greasy hookers right off my roof.
Collecting my sanity, pushing aside my guilt,
Noticing Phillips Magnavox knitting a quilt.
Just as I flipped as a result of the clatter,

Arthur Treacher said, "Have a fish and shrimp platter."
Out in the distance was the roaring of a Harley,
And the new guest, go figure, the ghost of Jacob Marley,
Accompanied by Ralph, Ed Norton, and Trixie,
And finally Beetle Bailey whistling Dixie.
But his eyes how they twinkled, his dimples how merry,
Of the five food groups, he quite preferred dairy.
Just wanting to go back to that long winter's snooze,
I caught Rodan and Mothra stealing the booze.
With the stump of my pipe, I began swinging,
My wife grabbed some sporks and she started flinging.
With a barrage of stuff just lying around,
Put most of the intruders flat on the ground.
With victory at hand and the enemy fleeing,
I couldn't believe what I was seeing.
With the wink of their eyes, and quick shake of their rears,
They morphed into Voltron, the end was quite near.
Remembering back to my days as a scout,
I grabbed the salad tongs and flung sauerkraut.
The smell of the stuff put the beast to his knees,
So I gouged out his eyes with the thongs as I pleased.
As I dumped his dead body clear out of my sight,
In the distance Spock's voice, "Those whores made my night."

Sometimes Angels Wear Rags

by Matt Bower

Every once in a while, somebody a little weird gets on my bus. I've been a driver for damn near forty years, and I have to admit that very few people I've given rides to have been too extremely out of the ordinary. Maybe I just don't notice the weirdos anymore. When I first started my bus route, I made acquaintances with a lot of people. I even made fairly good friends with some. Riders would greet me when they boarded and say "good bye" as they left. I knew almost everyone's name, and the face to go along with it. Back in those days, if someone was getting on the bus for the first time, I and everyone else knew that he was a new guy right away. However, he was always welcome.

Things are much different today. All the nice folk I used to give rides to are no longer around. I think most have moved, and others have passed away. It's still the same faces from day to day though; that much has not changed. They are mostly middle to upper-middle class citizens; some I believe are fairly rich. I bet they all make damn good livings. I have nothing against that. Most of them just walk on my bus in their suit and tie and sometimes lugging a briefcase and go sit by themselves. They might talk on those new cellular phones or shuffle through files and papers or other stuff. No one seems to pay any mind to anyone else looking too busy to speak. I think everyone is too busy to have a conversation, all caught up in their own little worlds, I guess. I must say I think this world has become too busy a place for people to have time for one another. I don't really know; I can't say I understand their lives. I'm only an old, humble bus driver taking people to where they need to go. I never complain much.

Anyway, even back when I knew my riders, every once in a blue moon somebody out of place would board. Usually it was some out-of-towner who needed a short ride, or maybe someone

just seeking shelter or trying to scrounge for change from the other passengers. I remember this one big black guy who would bring a guitar on the bus and he'd play the blues and everyone would applaud him when he finished a tune. He only rode for about a week. Regardless, I never had any trouble. Today if someone dresses quite differently or acts a little strangely and decides to board my bus, all the "regulars" eye him or her up and down with dirty looks. Sometimes the new guy has to stand because no one wants to share a seat. If the blues singer tries to ride the bus tomorrow, I betcha' he'd end up with a lap-top computer halfway up his ass.

This old lady that rode on my bus for that one week was certainly one of those "out of place" riders. I remember the day she first got on. It was a usual Monday, and a chilly November morning. I made my first stop at the corner of Fifth and Locust around seven a.m. She was waiting alone on the bench. It took her a few long seconds to struggle to her feet, but eventually she made it. She slowly took the three-step journey from the bench to the bus. Being my first rider of the day, she sat right up front. In fact, she was directly behind me.

When I pulled away from the stop, I felt compelled to look up into the mirror above my head, enabling me to watch my passengers. I could see her fully in the mirror, and I recall exactly what she wore. Her hair was almost completely white and large; plastic frames sat awkwardly on her small nose. The lenses themselves looked to be about a quarter inch thick. Her head was quite tiny, and her skin was wrinkled severely; it was pale white and there were a few dark blotches on her neck. Her body frame was extremely small. She didn't look much more than a living skeleton. She couldn't have been much more than eighty or ninety pounds. Her clothes were little more than rags. She wore a buttoned-up white shirt underneath a gray sweater. Both had a few holes and multiple stains. A dress looking more like a table cloth covered her legs. It too had holes and was extremely dirty. On her feet were large, cumbersome, black, rubber boots. She

carried nothing at all with her, probably couldn't. I tell ya, her clothing was weird but her stench was hideous. I got quite a whiff being a few feet away; almost had to keep my nose plugged the whole day. She smelled like garbage mixed with body odor. I didn't blame the rest of my riders for sitting as far back as possible that day. I assumed she was just a homeless person trying to get out of the cold for a while. Makes sense. Anyhow, she just sat there staring at the ground, not saying anything.

She sat in the same position for the length of my route, right up until the last stop of the day. I guess it must have been about three in the afternoon. When the rest of the passengers exited, she remained. I had to get her off, so I turned around and said, "Hey lady, I'm sorry but I'm going to have to ask you to get off the bus." She just lifted her small head and slowly got up and walked out the doors. She didn't speak. I kinda' felt sorry for the poor, old lady. Probably had nowhere to go.

The next day she was right there waiting for the bus at the first stop just as the day before. Without even lifting her head, she again struggled to her feet and then to her seat behind me. At each stop from that point on, the other riders seemed very displeased to see her riding again. Once again, everyone crowded as far away from her as possible because she smelled so damn bad. Every once and again, I would peer into my mirror to see the men in their business suits ignore the papers and files to stare at this elderly, homeless lady.

At one point, some asshole in the back of the bus made a "phew" noise. I don't know whether or not he meant to get her attention, but he must have because she actually lifted her head and peered at him a few seconds. Everyone else quickly snapped their eyes out the window or back down on their suitcases. I was ashamed to have witnessed this lewd act of rudeness. Once she turned her head back and dropped her chin back on her chest; I didn't think she'd move for the rest of the day. Again, she rode all the way up until the final stop. That's right, right up until I stopped at the exact bench she boarded. I repeated to her, "I'm

sorry but you're going to have to leave." Reluctantly, but without saying anything, she made her way to the door. I kept an eye on her before pulling away to see where she was headed. As soon as she stepped out, she made her way to the bench and sat down, same position. I wish I could have done something to help her, but what?

Things got worse the next day. She boarded first thing in the morning as usual. By now, the regulars really frowned upon her. To make matters worse, it was raining that day, and there were more people on board than usual. One guy walked on my bus and when she caught his eye he blurted, "Son-of-a-bitch, you're on the goddamn bus again!" Those who got on the bus late that day had little choice but to sit near the front, some only a few seats away from her; a lot happened to be middle-aged women who were out shopping or cheating on their husbands or whatever. Some women had babies with them, and they bawled and wailed because of the smell. One complete jackass near the back had the nerve to stand up, walk up to the poor lady. With his nose pinched shut, he dropped a dollar on her lap. As he walked away she said, "It is raining today; you can use that." The only people to not bother her surely had rude comments of their own, but at least they kept them to themselves.

However, she quite surprised me that day though. After a bit, she began humming pleasant tunes very quietly and she even sang in a very soft but gentle voice. Maybe it was kinda' a wall to separate her from the others. As I pulled up to the last stop, by now I'm sure you know where that is, I didn't even bother to ask her to leave. She simply got up and made her way to the doors, but this time she muttered a "thank you." I was caught off guard and asked without thinking, "Do you live anywhere around here?" She stared an empty stare at me for a few seconds but didn't answer. She just turned her back and headed toward the bench. I left her that day feeling more sorry for her than ever.

People can be such jerks. Not surprisingly it was the normal morning routine for the elderly lady on the fourth day. The regu-

lars had had enough by then. For whatever reason, those bastards were too proud to ride with the homeless lady. I guess they thought she carried a disease. The same guy who gave her a dollar the day before approached her again. Everyone else held their breath and watched as he towered above her. "Listen to me, lady," he said. "I've been riding this bus for five years now and if you haven't noticed we are all well dressed and well bathed civilians. You see, you smell like shit, and look like shit, and no one can take it anymore. The smell gets in our clothes and eventually our furniture and God knows what else that we pay for. Not to mention we also smell like crap all day at work. Just do yourself and us a favor and get off at whatever stop you need to and stay off." Some people could be heard laughing slightly to themselves. Maybe I would have found it amusing if I was a rich asshole too, but I was sickened. I wanted to stop the bus and tell everyone to get off.

When she got off the bus at the last stop, I apologized for the actions of the other riders. I told her that if it was up to me, that she could ride for free every day. I also was honest with her and told her she may want to stay off the bus for a while. She proceeded to reach in her pocket and pull out a dollar. She handed it to me and said softly, "This is for the rides." I tried to hand it back, but she had already turned her back and ever so gingerly moved her frail body off again. I just let her go.

As much as I didn't want to see her waiting on the bench the next day, she was. She was almost huddled into a ball because the day was particularly bitter and it was snowing for the first time all season. I opened the door for her, letting in cold winds that blasted my face, and snow whipped around the front of the bus. She stood in front of me, trembling horribly. The weather was so hostile that I didn't have the heart to recommend her leaving. Instead she spoke first in a very soft voice, "Don't worry about me. Today I'm going home." I was shocked to hear those words. I was sure she was homeless. Her riding all those days all the sudden seemed to have no explanation. I wanted to ask her so

many questions but couldn't. I just wanted to actually see her exit somewhere and enter her front door.

Because the weather was so bad, a lot of people elected to ride, no surprise. The first few to board beside her just shook their heads to see she had not taken the advice. As seats quickly filled, people began uttering the usual complaints. In no time, the only available seats were near her. As I approached my sixth stop, I could tell that she might have to share a seat. I felt so bad as I envisioned the reaction of that unsuspecting rider. One by one, people boarded, pinching their nostrils. I tried not to listen to any of the comments. After closing the door after the stop, I peered into my mirror to see that the only seat open was next to the lady. I began to pull away when I heard a pounding on the door. I opened it to reveal a small, black boy, probably no older than seven. He was dressed in only a white tee shirt, scruffy blue jeans, and sandals. Most shocking were the bruises on his arms and face. He walked right up to the lady and eyed her curiously before asking, "Excuse me, do you mind if I sit with you?" She slowly lifted her head like it was a hundred pounds and answered, "Not at all, child." I heard people conversing about the situation in the background.

As I drove on, continuing to make stops, I glanced into my mirror periodically. They sat silent until the old lady spoke, "Young man, isn't it a little cold to be wearing a shirt and sandals?"

He answered softly, "Well, my dad sent me out to the store to buy some stuff for him and he said that if I stayed out of the cold I would be alright."

"Oh, I see," she said, "but if I were you, I'd run from the bus to the store so I wouldn't freeze to death. One more question child, where did you get those terrible bruises?"

That really caught the boy's attention as a worried expression overcame him, "Oh...ah....I tripped on the way to the bus stop."

"I don't believe you," the lady replied. "You wouldn't have those all over your body. Hmm...they don't appear fresh either.

It looks more like somebody hit you a few times."

Tears fell from the boy's eye as he began to sob. She rested his head against her shoulder. He tried to talk, but all his words were slurred.

"Where is your mother, son?" she asked gently.

"She's home with Daddy," he said as he cried even harder.

I became so immersed in the conversation that it didn't seem long before I noticed that the lady and boy were the only two riders left. I watched them through the mirror every chance I had. I heard her ask him his address.

"Three Twenty Arch Street," he told her after a long hesitation. "Why do you need to know?" he asked looking confused and worried at the same time.

"Don't worry about it dear," she replied.

I nearly steered off the road when I peered up to notice she had taken off her sweater and handed it to him. She proceeded to unbutton her white shirt, take it off her back and hand it to him. I was shocked to see her pale, wrinkled chest in my mirror. The sight of her uncovered breast was enough to make me vomit, but I drove on speechless. She continued by removing her rubber boots and handing them to him. "Take these; they should be your size."

The boy was obviously confused even more now as she handed him all of her clothes but her dress. "I want you to put these on. I know they are stinky and look ugly, but they will keep you a bit warmer, and the boots will keep your feet dry. They've always been good enough for me. Do whatever you have to do, just stay away from home for a day. Tomorrow, catch the bus back home but don't go back till then."

I was so caught up in the two of them that I almost missed a stop. As I pulled over, the boy got up to leave, wearing the lady's clothing. She spoke, "Now wipe your tears and say good-bye."

"Good-bye," he whispered without hesitation.

She just smiled as he left the bus. No one else got on that day.

I closed the door behind him and drove away without knowing what to think. Suddenly, I heard her voice behind me. "What is

your name?" she asked me.

"Ed," I answered.

"I thank you so much for all you've done for me this week, Ed. Now please take me downtown; I'm going home."

Her words had a power over me. I did exactly what she said without thinking twice and drove downtown even though the city was not on my usual rural route. She sat motionless the whole trip until we got to Center City and she asked that I pull over. I did so without question; however, I've never been so curious in my life. As she walked to the door, she laid her hand on my shoulder. I looked up into her aged eyes, and she nodded her head as if to say, "Don't stop me; I'll be okay." All I could do now was watch as she left my bus. Step by painful step, she fought her way through the gusts of wind and snow. I need not even say that most everyone around stood and stared as motionless as can be. Some others just walked by without taking much notice. Nobody offered any assistance to this elderly lady, but for once nobody had a rude word to say; they were just too much in disbelief. So was I.

Through the bitter cold she made it to a phone booth. I watched eagerly as she slowly dialed a number and talked for no more than a few minutes. After talking, she dropped the phone, having lost the energy to hold it. Her body trembled uncontrollably from the cold. Staggering, her bare feet trudging through the snow on the ground, she headed for the main intersection. Although the wind would push her back a bit during its hard gusts, she walked forward. Paying no mind to the passing vehicles, she stepped into the intersection and kept walking toward the center. Drivers slammed their brakes and some came to a screeching halt. Others lost control and slammed into parked cars. Once all the cars on the road had stopped or been stopped by another object, the only sound that could be heard was people's infuriated voices shouting "Get off the fuckin' road" or "What the hell is going on?" The weird part was that no car came close to hitting her. Finally, when she made it to the middle of the inter-

section, she stood still and I could tell by watching her that she was singing. I don't know what, but she sang to herself. With command of all attention, she raised her arms spread eagle and held the pose for about a minute. Soon her skeleton-like body collapsed to one knee, then two. Once on her knees, the horrific sight continued as her body went completely limp and fell toward the ground, her head and torso striking the pavement hard. And there she lay, motionless. I closed my eyes for a second and when I reopened them, one driver got out of his car, which happened to be smashed into a telephone pole, ran over to the lady's body and began kicking it in frustration. I drove away from the thud of boot cracking skull.

I will never forget that day. I retired just weeks later, not much longer after reading in the newspaper that the call the lady made was to 911 to send a policeman to Three Twenty Arch Street where a father was arrested for child abuse. I learned that I have had life pretty well as a lowly bus driver, even in a town of stuck-up residents. I live with my beloved wife and treat her as well as I can. I also learned one other thing; sometimes angels wear rags.

A Child of God, I Dream

by Jessica Grim

Oh, to sit in the lap of Jesus,
as the children of Israel did.

I lean my tired head
against his fleshy-warm shoulder;
He rests his cheek on my forehead,
stroking my hair.

With a voice like
the quietest choir member,
with a truth in it
that would stir a whole
auditorium into praise,
He tells me about heaven.

Floating into a peaceful sleep, I slowly
inhale
and
exhale
the smell of the Holy One,
content to stay there
forever.

How Sweet the Sound

by Beth Bertram

Beads of sun spill through the screen,
illuminating dust pixies
as they dance across the top of your dresser,
seasoning flowers, candy, and family pictures
of people you no longer remember.

Picking at an invisible seam in your skirt,
your watery eyes flood at the slightest distraction
and you mumble, agitated by the unseen.

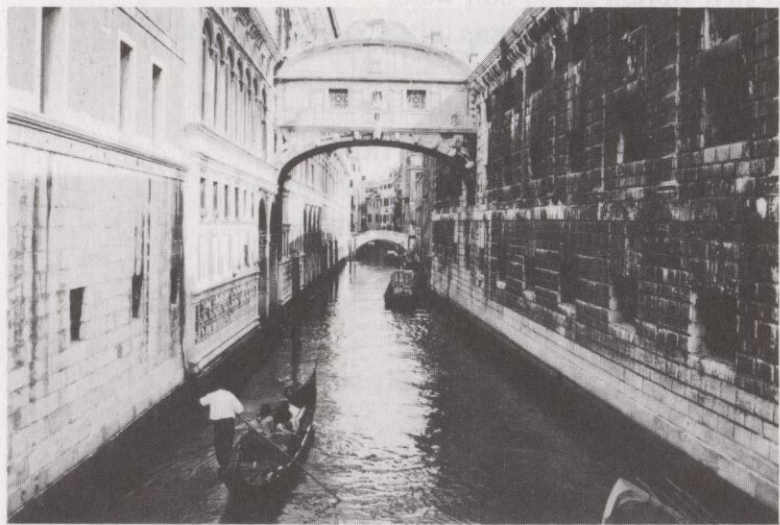
Shrouded with memories,
Mom leans over you, brushing her fingertips
over your nearly invisible skin and rippling veins.
Imagining you, gliding, slender in your white bathing cap,
a water lily, vibrant in the dull water
in the pool on the mountaintop.

Always poised and beautiful,
carrying a laundry basket of picked flowers:
she still sees you navigating swollen roots,
arteries of shelter mapping your backyard.
Summers on your back porch
were lessons in flowers, birds, and the serenity of shade.

Now your eyes dull and spill a steady stream of tears.
Mom sings, voice heavy with hope,
“When we’ve been there ten thousand years.”
Slowly, your eyes meet the sound,
mouth parts and “bright shining as the sun”
escapes on key and lovely as always
from your wrinkled lips, thinner

than the cellophane twisting the swirled
peppermint candies once in your pockets.

“Lin,” she longs to hear you say,
loving you no less now that you can’t remember.



Corry Cass

Farewell Bend

by Justin Brocious

That road hooked toward the river
and turned away again.
Falling water broke
headlong off the high bank,
surrendered back,
pouring into the eastern dusk.
That was you, rushing on

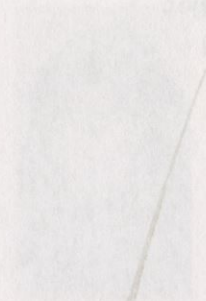
southbound US 101;
wheels cried wild,
wind was a liquid touch,
the stream and highway curved
in parallel sweeping gestures.
These brief occasions are beginnings
that end too fast:
current bears in, then recedes, a speeding
crescentic drain and fill
of rushing liquid and machine.

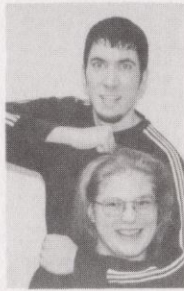
The world was sinuous.
Windmills ached their rusty notes in circles.
Vineyard ribbed the open hills.
Trees bent like longbows;
grapevines bent like harps
(the long waving arch of things attached
and living in wind—river reeds and grasses,
how the current keeps them bending).

We can't sway so beautiful;
unrooted, we move in effluent waves,
shoulders nudging past—
every brushing glance is just teary searching.
It's short hellos and long goodbyes
that afford us our mystery:
it's rivers crashing by without hesitation.

Contributors' Notes

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Matt Bower says he is a witty, good-looking, sexy, learned, charismatic showman with a mission to rescue faltering Lock Haven University from mediocrity.

A 1999 LHU grad, Beth Bertram's greatest accomplishment since college is sleeping without her socks on. She was the 1998/99 *Crucible* editor.

For the past five years, Justin Brocious has been attempting to procure his B.A. in English. In the summer, he lives and writes in northern California, where nobody bothers him. Graduating in May, he plans to move to L.A., compromising his poetry for a screenwriting career.

Corry Cass is a Fitness Management Recreation major, who plays volleyball and is involved in choir at LHU.

Sheila Gernavage, a senior, is majoring in Computer Information Science. She loves writing poetry; among her favorite writers are Stephen Dobyns and Shel Silverstein. She also loves any poetry that is a bit unusual.



Jessica Grim, a senior Secondary Education English major, is a member of Campus Bible Fellowship, the LHU Rotaract Club, the Excellence in Leadership Program, the FOCUS Program, and is an Americorps Scholar. She also works at the LHU Office of Human and Cultural Diversity. She is interested in traveling and meeting new people.

Shana Grove is a senior art major, concentrating in photography. She will graduate in December of 1999. The photographer for *The Eagle Eye*, she is also president of the Fine Arts Society and an instructor of various children's art classes. Her goal is to have a career that uses her photography experience and knowledge.



Debra Haddad is an LHU returning freshman, majoring in English. She loves poetry, coaching, and nature.

Dave Harris is a junior Secondary Education English major from Williamsport. A non-traditional student, Dave is married with five kids.

Kimberly Autumn Heisler is a senior Secondary Education English major and international studies minor. This is her third year on The Crucible staff; she will be graduating in May.



Kelly June is currently a non-traditional senior and a Secondary Education English major. Kelly is happily married and has three children.

Thomas Justice is a junior at LHU, majoring in English.

Joy Kania is an LHU junior, majoring in English. She enjoys writing, playing tennis, and eating ice cream.



Jennifer Koskey is currently a senior English major with a writing concentration. She has enjoyed working on the staff of The Crucible all four years and looks forward to a writing career.



Melissa Long is a junior with a double major in English Literature and Environmental Biology. She likes to play rugby, read, and spend time outdoors.



Tara LoPresti is a senior at Lock Haven University majoring in Journalism/Mass Communications, as well as German. She has spent a semester abroad in Germany and plans on continuing her education through graduate school. Her hobbies are writing poetry and drawing.

Hope Mitchell is a sophomore, majoring in Social Work. In addition, she is the secretary for LHU's Gospel Choir.



Brian Pelka is an LHU student.

Tom Peske is a journalism major with a supporting study in photography. He is a senior who enjoys writing, photography, and drinking.



Candice Rayls is a junior, majoring in Secondary English Education. The mother of two daughters, Brittany and Hannah, Candice enjoys creative writing and photography.

Michael Reichley is a freshman Secondary Education major with the intentions of reforming the public school system from the classroom out.

Danielle Resnick is a senior English major at LHU. She loves horseback riding, reading, and grammar.



Heather Rooney is a senior majoring in Secondary English Education. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family, especially her fourteen-month-old son, Bobby.

Traci Snyder is a senior, majoring in Fine Art, with an emphasis in three-dimensional art. Future plans include going to Boston and attending graduate school.

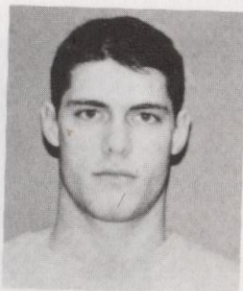




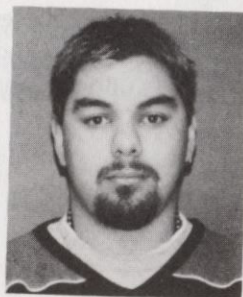
Patrick Stehley enjoys writing and playing and composing music. He is a senior Environmental Science major with a minor in Chemistry.

Nicholas Trumbauer is a freshman in the First Year Excellence program.

Steven Winkleman is a sophomore Economics major at LHU and a brother in Phi Sigma Pi. He is employed on campus.



Glenn Thierwechter (left) is a junior Art major and involved in ROTC. Ryan Gill (right) is a junior Management major with the intention of becoming an Art major.



The Literary Journal of Lock Haven University