

THE CRUCIBLE

Life essential
at life path
metaphor



The Crucible

The Literary Journal of Lock Haven University
Annual 2003

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Table of Contents

<i>Morning in a Duck Marsh</i> Nicholas Trumbauer	1
<i>And to the Musician Water Shall Say</i> Matthew Burne	2
<i>Common Ancestors</i> Nicholas Trumbauer	4
<i>Back Home</i> Christopher Ruff	5
<i>Rainbow</i> Betsy Henry	7
<i>McDonald's Cup</i> Cheryl Kirkwood	9
<i>With Nowhere to Go</i> Dana Ciciliot	10
<i>Taken By Life's Currents</i> Paul Salamh	11
<i>Connecticut Reflections</i> Alan A. Vezina	12
<i>Why I Am Afraid to Love</i> Dana Ciciliot	15
<i>Beautiful September Saturday</i> Candice Saquin	17
<i>Cherry Corner Morning</i> Rachel Kester	19

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<i>Seed</i> Brooke Peters	21
<i>First Rose</i> Mary Lyter	22
<i>Cemeteries of Spring</i> Mary Lyter	23
<i>Spelunking: 2:00 a.m.</i> Paul Salamh	24
<i>Gray Paradise</i> Jason Turner	25
<i>Why You Don't Know Me Anymore</i> Jason Fromm	26
<i>In the Days of the Firefly</i> Brooke Peters	27
<i>Every Fall: Sestina</i> Jason Fromm	31
<i>Tapered Refuge</i> Dana Ciciliot	33
<i>First Snowfall</i> Paul Salamh	34
<i>Snow on the Mountaintop</i> Brienne Linn	35
<i>Native Feathers</i> Paul Salamh	37
<i>Forest of Glass and Steel</i> Paul Salamh	38

<i>Sageurbia</i> Brooke Peters	39
<i>Mexican Dreams</i> Candice Saquin	41
<i>Must I Return to Cannibalism?</i> Abigail Lynn Moore	42
<i>Charismatic Movement</i> Matthew Burne	47
<i>And Do Not Return (Prophecy Over the Self)</i> Matthew Burne	49
<i>Crucifix</i> Paul Salamh	50
<i>Lucky Charms</i> Shannon Dodd	52
<i>Her First Time</i> Christopher Ruff	58
<i>Criminal Love</i> Cheryl Kirkwood	63
<i>Even the Tears of a Rapist Are Insufficient</i> Matthew Burne	66
<i>His Own</i> Christopher Ruff	67
<i>Her Own (Revenge)</i> Christopher Ruff	68
<i>Losing Hope</i> Dana Ciciliot	70

<i>Scar</i> Mary Malmquist	71
<i>Scars of a Child</i> Lisa Kiwak	72
<i>Surviving a Hurricane</i> Rachel Kester	74
<i>Getaway</i> Lisa Kiwak	76
<i>Your Path</i> Tara Myers	78
<i>Jack</i> Miranda Krishak	79
<i>Bartender</i> Tyler VonNeida	80
<i>At the Checkout Counter</i> Candice Saquin	81
<i>In Dreams</i> Rachel Kester	82
<i>Regret</i> Cheryl Kirkwood	84
<i>When You Were Born</i> Nicholas Trumbauer	85
<i>Salvation</i> Miranda Krishak	86
<i>Please Pull Out the Chairs</i> Tiffany Slingerland	87

<i>Beauty Queen</i> Brooke Peters	95
<i>Loneliness</i> Dana Ciciliot	97
<i>An Island For a Day</i> Robert Doyle	99
<i>Second Floor Stevenson Library</i> Paul Salamh	105
<i>Thoughts</i> Alan A. Vezina	106
<i>Grandfather's Hat</i> Tyler VonNeida	109
<i>Look Right Through</i> Alan A. Vezina	110
<i>Seeing Them from Across the Street</i> (for Malcom) Matthew Burne	111
<i>The Naked Buttocks at Sunrise</i> Mary Altmire	113

Photo and Drawing Credits

Anastasia Bannikova	13, 83
Steven Beatty	14
Katrina Brown	3, 104
Matthew Burne	8, 20
Erin Carhart	77
Brianne Goldsmith	18
Autumn Good	40, 51, 62, 108
Zach Kreider	46, 73, 94
Tiia Lahdesmaki	36
Amanda Lesslie	30, 65, 69
Jen Manley	29
Brooke Peters	96, 98
Chris Stanonis	75

Morning in a Duck Marsh

Nicholas Trambauer

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Anastasia Bannikova	13, 23
Steven Beatty	14
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Matthew Burne	8, 20
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Autumn Good	40, 51, 62, 108
Zach Koelder	42, 71, 94
Tira Lahdesmaki	36
Amanda Leskie	30, 65, 69
Jen Manley	29
Brooke Peters	96, 98
Chris Stanonis	75

yes 11an2 Morning in a Duck Marsh

Nicholas Trumbauer

The white dog sits as a ceramic
sits on a table of pottery.
Night's camp has not broken.
Clouds and fog invite him to stay
a little longer.

No light, but warmth beats down fog,
and night is asked to leave. Slowly, I can see
the goldenrod lean with the wait of frost's mortality.

The thistles are old men, doorkeepers,
too softened by age to keep me from standing
by the shores of this glorified puddle.
I conceal myself among them, an attempt to belong,
as they do.

Visibility is a myth in this half-drowned
world of water vapor and dew. Eyes tell fairy tales
of ducks between the reeds—or beyond the fog.

Spider webs collecting tears
form a crystal necklace for the marsh.
Rushes take their time, waste not a minute
of my visit.

My toes have grown too stiff to stand.
As I retreat towards my car and job,
a mallard flies from the corner.



And to the Musician Water Shall Say

Matthew Burne

Soon I will freeze, so please allow me
a single breath of your melody
rippling in me when you release
yourself from your soft mouth,
opened and engaged,
with your strings breeding
something finer than the hair
found standing straight on the arms
of a blue metallic fly floating still
in my puddle beneath the window
of your concert arena.

Matthew Burne

Katrina Brown



Common Ancestors

Nicholas Trumbauer

Branches on branches down into unrecorded time;
today is the end, like a point on a circle it is the beginning.
What was, is and will be, lies in dust and fossils.

Only creatures from the common, a river running backward,
forced to split into its contributors without design.
Small creeks filled from the flow of the common.

Lacking in improvement, with added complication,
or simultaneously simple, changed only to fit.
All still from one, going nowhere.

Creation is by chance, His hands long gone,
and upon me shall chance create.
I am the beginning and the end.

Back Home

Christopher Ruff

We were valley boys.
Only two routes wind and crawl
over the slight pleat
in the landscape called Peter's Mountain,
north from Harrisburg into Halifax.
Only one mattered to us
—Powell's Valley Road—
twisting along a slow, crippled creek—
the namesake of the valley and its macadam artery.

A tarred and blacktopped pipeline,
pumping us away from town—
away from its one-story, red-brick rules
embodied in hallways, lockers, and classrooms;
from the bright fluorescent light of the free market
hanging from Giant, McDonald's, Subway, and Sheetz;
from the small critical mass of men and women,
moms and dads, and their Sunday morning morals.

The road, the valley
called us out into the countryside—
to Wertz's Pond for mid-afternoon barbecues
or late-night games of euchre;
to the hotel for wings every Thursday night,
drinking in the atmosphere of old men
tired from hours at the shop
or in the office,
hands permanently stained
by grease or broken fountain pens;
or to simply cruise the furthest outreaches,
in the backwoods, where the roads are dirt,
where beer and conversation quarrel
for attention from our mouths and minds.
The hum of our tires sang faint melodies
blending with adolescent hymns
and anthems that poured out of dashboards
at higher decibels than necessary.

It led us to *her*. A different name for each,
a different house, a different experience,
but she was out there, as alluring as the valley itself,
an albino whitetail deer, graceful and swift,
darting in between and behind birch trees,
teasing, tempting us to follow....

and I followed *her* and the road,
filled my afternoons with fall drives,
Jimmy Page playing in the background,
proceeding onward: past the hotel,
past the llama farm, farther than the farthest
we ever drove with Jacob's Best
and The Allman Brothers' Band.

She drove.

Out and up the mountain
into new country filled with a faded-jeans sky,
a bed of amber and bronze leaves along the ground
and forget-me-nots filled with orange-yellow jealousy.

But we came down from the mountains,
back to the valley and the road, the lifeblood
that coursed through our own veins.
It led us onward, in new directions,
over mountains and rivers, onto college and jobs.
We were valley boys. We are.
Exploring new roads and crippled streams
living adult lives, recollecting younger memories.

Heart is red.

No! Not mine

Beats onyx

Pulses azure.

She communicates in prisms

Bleeds translucent

Through not the ventricle

So much as the eyes.

Her skin turns yellow and green

And she screams purple,

But then beats onyx and azure again.

Matthew Burne



McDonald's Cup

Cheryl Kirkwood

Poor McDonald's cup, tossed around
as if you are a toy thrown over a child's head,
a prisoner of the other brothers.
As if you are a treasure in the sea, I pick you up,
carry you to a tranquil paradise.
The garbage can awaits, glistening in the sunlight
with big brown lips parted,
a plastic invitation to heaven.
And the two of you connect, fit together,
like lovers separated by time.
He holds you in his sanctuary,
and you are finally at peace,
resting in the pillows of paper,
plastic, and cardboard.
My good deed done, time to head back
to the place where the lawn is an endless ocean
of napkins, waving in the wind,
begging for attention
but left alone
without ever reaching the altar.

With Nowhere To Go

Dana Ciciliot

You walk along the railroad tracks
seeking direction to somewhere,
sun melting on parched leaves,
seeping onto a pale silhouette of doubt.

You leave tracks that betray a story
you've never told:
delicate impressions of disbelief,
stale, suffocating smell of reality,
consuming your confidence until
you are empty,
stumbling on stones,
jagged reminders of personal failures,
refusing the thoughts
that embrace your mind,
but offer no comfort.

Sneakers wear away the backs of your ankles,
and the pain causes you to forget
why you started walking at all.



Taken by Life's Currents

Anastasia Paul Salamh

In the middle of a summer day,
the sweet aroma of candles tries
to pry through silence.

My eyes are now open wounds
from which warm salty rivers pour.
Instruments sob what was

once a favorite song,
now heard for the very first time
in this dark church.

Roses bow their heads.
Her casket: a log slowly floating along a river,
unaware of its final destination.



Connecticut Reflections

Alan A. Vezina

It's one of those nights.

I'm lying down in the back of Joe's gray 1986 Sierra, looking up at the dark globe through the rear window. The rain is coming down at a hard and steady pace—it's comforting. No matter what happens, the laws of the world dictate that some things are near-constant: the sky will be blue in the morning, and no matter where life takes me, a midnight rain will always bring comfort. It's the little things in life that we have to grab onto, because they're a lot more permanent (if less permeable) than the larger constructs of society.

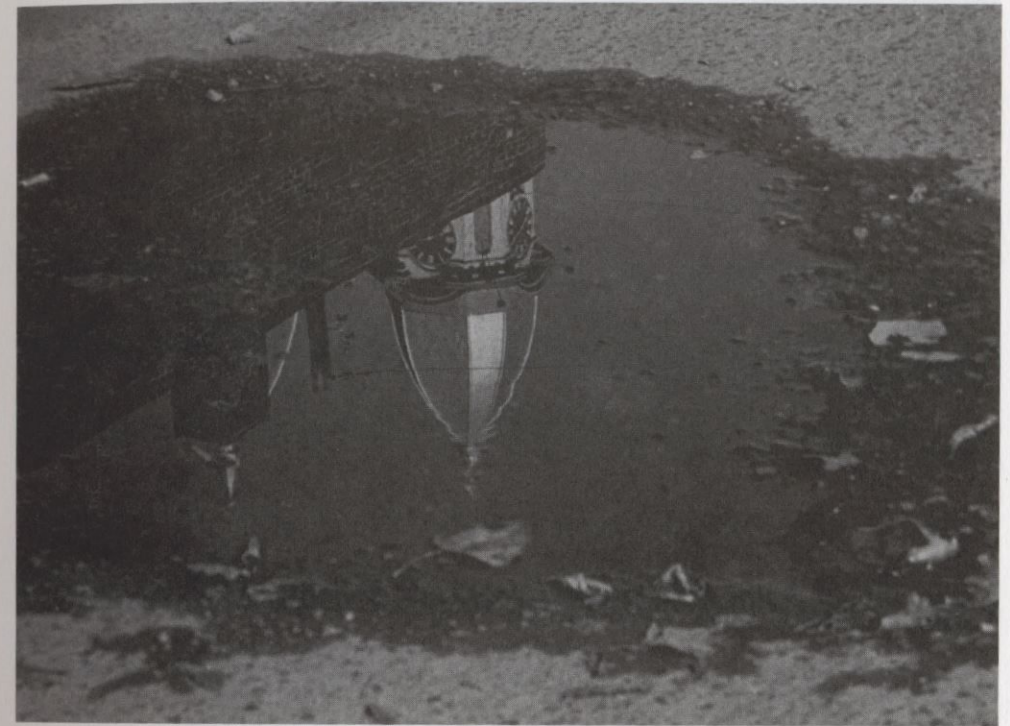
Joe and Rita are in the front seat talking—some problem with the brakes, I think. The car was making weird noises. I need to get home tonight, and thus, I'm sure we'll get home; that knowledge gives me the comfort that I need to continue probing the dark sky with my tired green eyes. They seem far away, their voices distant echoes inside my cavernous mind, the sound bouncing off the walls and fading softly into the dark recesses. In many respects, they are far away; at the same time, however, they're also closer than I feel comfortable thinking about. Humans...we're like eggs, you know: introspective, self-obsessed, self-contained, and ultimately all the same. What few realize that the fears and doubts that we think make us unique—an oddity—actually do the exact opposite. Every fear and hope that we hold personal in our hearts is shared by everybody else; not only that, but they are also shared by the scores of people who have come before us, and the scores that will come after we've been buried and forgotten.

When I first began writing at the age of ten, I wrote to express my "uniqueness"—I had to put to words the depression, the isolation, and the mind-numbing fears. But then, something strange happened—as I started to share my work with others, everyone commented on how they felt the same way. I never realized the importance of that until recently. This is why we come together at funerals and weddings, at churches and in the bars—this too is why writers write. We express and share our emotions, and in doing so, we reach an aspect of our true selves (our species being, if you will)—not something greater, but something that we have the potential to become.

And it's still, still one of those nights. The dark globe is black and moonless. The car is still parked here, and the rain is still falling on the roof, echoing inside. Some things are universal—some things are unlikely to change. In the end, it's these things we need to hold onto.

Why I Am Afraid to Love

Anastasia Bannikova



Steven Beatty



Why I Am Afraid to Love

Dana Ciciliot

Confined to a sterile hospital bed,
you surrender
to the weight of your eyelids;
I watch.
You shrink
beneath the refuge of your sheets;
I wait.
You suffocate,
deprived of peaceful breath.
I listen.

Vacant frame—sunken and defeated.
Devoid of all you held,
I struggle
to remember you:

Patient man
in flannel shirts,
now disguised in a pale nightgown
one shade darker than your skin.
I'd give anything to hear a story
about the coal mines or see you
resting peacefully
on your green recliner overlooking
the maple tree
that grew stronger
as you grew weaker.

Instead,
I breathe
the air your lungs protested;
you tremble.
I whisper,
"I love you."
You hear nothing;
you suffer.
I lose courage.

Deprived of one more day,

I leave.

Echoes of your dripping IV chase me
down the hall.

I imagine
this was what it sounded like
in the coal mines.

Beautiful September Saturday

Candice Saquin

The sky overflowed with sunlight,
casting a shadow over his casket.
Birds hummed in perfect harmony with the priest.

The lush grass glowed a green
plucked straight from the rainbow,
bordering his now permanent earthy residence.

The clouds cleared the bright blue sky,
ushering a path for his soul.
Roses bloomed full,

colorful, vibrant, his favorite pale yellow
picked to wilt
on his grave.

Brianne Goldsmith



Cherry Corner Morning

Rachel Kester

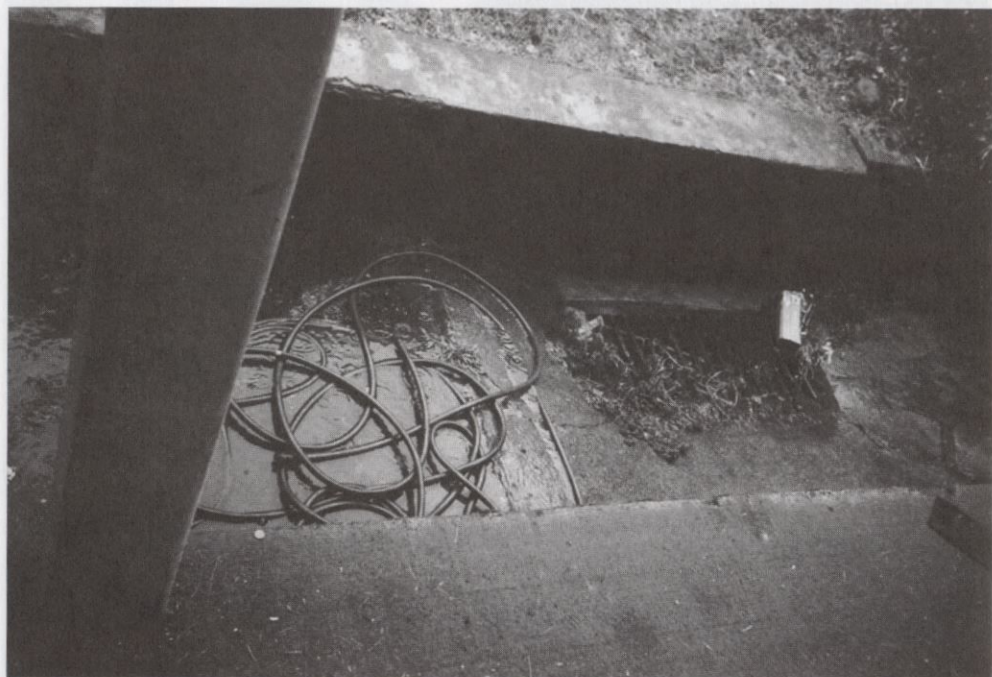
Two tall towers
flash like red lightning bugs,
alt-er-nat-ing in the dim light,
as stars fade to sunrise.

Mother Maple awakens,
shakes the dew from sleepy boughs
and watches while white-tails
leap off to locust thickets.

The storage shed stands silent.
Shingles like chocolate shavings
curl up from the roof, iced with tar
to melt in the open mouth of morning.

Rushing to ready myself
for the deluge of daily chores,
I almost miss the simplest joy
of a Cherry Corner morning.

Matthew Burne



Brooke Peters

Washed with the passing rain
beneath layers of soil,
radiating from the sun,
surrounded in warmth.

Thrust deep into earth,
sprouts forth a new form,
leafy stems spreading arms
far and wide like golden fields of wheat,
deep roots locked to earth.

Seventy-nine dead blossoms,
fragile petals scattered across ground like
blowing leaves of fall,
time faded: mere petals in autumn.
Only memory still flourishes,
its blossom intangible.

First Rose

Mary Lyter

The first roses to bloom
in early spring
are the first, too,
who cry their petals
to the ground.
And around the bushes
the forsaken petals lie quietly
like beautiful shards
of a broken heart.

Cemeteries of Spring

Mary Lyter

Through the glass I keep watch.
I know when the leaves lose
their tenuous grip on reality.
I watch them as they helplessly fall
one by one
to the ground
until at last
they lie there
at rest,
flat like headstones.
Everywhere green lawns are covered with them:
graveyards now,
cemeteries of spring.

Spelunking: 2:00 a.m.

Paul Salamh

Icy stones burrow deep in my back
as I clench knees to my trembling chest.
Days with no light seem darker
than any star-eating hole in space.
Looking up is the same as looking down.

My screams heard only by the rocks
that hurl them back and forth
to one another until they become
a lost whisper repeated,
now silent.

No one knows I am here, or ever
that I was there: smell of wet clay and earth crawl
all around me, both wishing
the water that once filled this hole
would seal my lungs, take away air that buries,
a prisoner of dark, this deep, tilted tunnel
that light dare not enter,
afraid it too will be victim,
like a haunting ghost
unable to return where it came from; even that
I do not remember now.

Gray Paradise

Jason Turner

I can never remember the sun,
only the swings, pavilion, and merry-go-round.
I'd try crawling to the middle.
Dad would spin me round and round,
only to get thrown to the outside—
and the grinning spring ponies
only half covered with chipped colors,
the rest pewter gray,
as gray as the sky that day.

Why You Don't Know Me Anymore

Jason Fromm

A sketch of a boy rests on the mantle.
He doesn't know it, but he's dead.
All that's left is me
and his thoughts of me.

The drawing was born,
scraped with dark lead.
The boy was oblivious to
that deliberate act
forshadowing his life.

A gust of arrogant wind
knocks it from its place,
bringing in the light of summer,
warm comfort of renewal.
I notice my dog staring
at me.

The broken glass of the frame
which protected me
begs to be cleaned, to cut me.
But he can't hurt me now.
My dog is confused,
but a friend at least.
The boy is still grinning.

He and his glass are patient,
waiting for me to look back.

In the Days of the Firefly

Brooke Peters

Running about the neighborhood,
barefoot,
shrieking and laughing,
a cool breeze blowing
through our maize-colored hair,
sweet smell of grass, cut by daddy;

riding over rainbows,
spinning in circles over the setting sun
with the stars at our feet,
pedaling off into the milky way,
racing our bikes
over many sidewalk chalk murals
flashing quickly like
the silky seeds of milkweed
blowing in the wind on a crisp autumn day;

standing before the tall magnificent trees
glimmering green,
their long arms reaching for sunny warmth
so high above us,
limb by limb,
a continuous climb,
up, up, up
we go,
then leaping into the sandbox
without crushing G.I. Joes and ewoks
far below;

later on, lying in the downy grass,
making daisy chains
and new plans for tomorrow,
all the while the setting sun,
casting its mellow yet vivid hues,
beginning a game of hide-and-seek,
last one to be found;

soon tiny fireflies gather,
faint green halos of nature's angels
above our heads,
shimmering like the wings of fairies,
flashing their bright-green incandescent bodies,
tiny fluorescent fires of the night,
surrounding us with glowing limey light,
everyone placing their catch in the huge jar
we call lantern
to guide us back home;

while gazing up at the brilliant stars,
each its own glittering sun,
spectacular radiating presence
that makes the night sky sparkle;

we let each firefly go,
one by one,
off into the darkness.

Jen Manley



Amanda Lesslie



Every Fall: Sestina

Jason Fromm

Every fall,
dressed in nice clothes,
we'd go for a drive
where they'd paint
horizons: masterpieces hung
and dangled from a single nail.

And strung from that nail,
time would linger until fall
would return hung
in our closet with our clothes
behind doors that had chipped paint
like on the car we would drive.

This year, out of the closet and garage, we drive
our car and our tires over a nail.
Someone must've asked God to paint
a portrait of a tragic family fall.
Besides the car, only our clothes
reflect our mood in how they are hung.

I try to imagine being hung
on a cross. What kind of drive
must it take to tear someone's clothes
and pierce their limbs with nails?
I know now, after His falls:
it was eternity He was trying to paint.

I look differently now at the ones who paint.
I picture them with their heads hung
low. What if their artwork would fall
to the earth? Would it drive
them insane, like a thousand nails
only an inch from their clothes?

Only true artists would then shed their clothes
and by doing so would paint
a masterpiece so strong no nail
could pierce. It would be hung
in heaven next to pictures of parents who'd drive
their kids to museums in the fall.

A canvas is clothed and then hung
on the horizon painted during the drive
without nails on the road. Every fall.



Snow on the Tapered Refuge

Dana Ciciliot

Vanish
beneath the vast umbrella
of spruce
as prickly drops
of needles
rain from the sky.

Peek through
the curtains and pine;
cones consume
your secret haven.

Rest upon
the tapestry
of brittle toothpicks
while the breeze
chases loose earth
through your fingertips.

Confide
in the loyalty
of weeping branches
as the sun casts
golden promises
to keep your confessions.

Abandon
the safety
of the shelter's embrace,
but remember,
remember your hideaway
when you brush
pine needles from your hair.

First Snowfall

Paul Salamh

Silver fields wave to an overlooking
brittle tree that reaches for
an evaporating brush-stroked
swirl hurried by the icy push
of a northwest breeze, bringing
millions of spinning diamond flakes that cling
to one another and sit on glassy lakes.

The ground no longer boasts its carpet
of fallen leaves quickly veiled
by a layered mask of weightless pearls
that huddle together
and melt on rocks soon to freeze as they once did
on the glassy surface of the lake, this intricate
seamless blanket, woven flake by flake.

Snow on the Mountaintop

Brianne Linn

She sits outside of the house
on top of the mountain.
The snow makes her shiver,
but it's cold inside the house, too,
and at least out here
being cold makes sense.

The wind blows strands of her hair back.
She pretends they are dark
like distant galaxies with snowflake stars.
She thinks of the dark hair and dark skin
of ancestors she never had
who lived before this obscuring white snow.

She found one of their arrowheads
years before she began to hear
their voices, so she knows
they were here in this place.

The wind and snow are heavier now.
She has been crying
for fear of being lost,
for fear of fading into the mountaintop's snow,
for fear of being swept away
with nothing to cling to,
not even a name.

Tiia Lahdesmaki



Native Feathers

Paul Salamh

A hawk soars overhead:
two wings, many feathers,
talons tucked in its speckled belly.

Blood stains the forest floor.
White feathers scatter
like shells along the shore.
A fox licks his silent paws.

Teepees take root in the clearing
like mushrooms sprouting
on an old dead stump.
Weathered with painted stories,
feathers spin from medicine wheels.

A language almost lost,
passed on from generation to generation
like the story of creation,
sometimes altered but never forgotten.

Hair longer than a squirrel's tail
and darker than a groundhog's tunnel,
filled with many feathers
like the quills on a porcupine.

Faces dark and full of creases
like the bark of an old oak tree,
rooted deep in Mother Earth,
painted with the blood of berries.

Smoke from burning sweet grass
fanned by eagle feathers over faces
like a prayer to the Great Spirit,
cleansing souls.

An eagle sits, its feathered head of white
like the top of a giant wave,
high above it all.

Forest of Glass and Steel

Paul Salamh

People hurry down sidewalks
crowded together like rows of corn stalks
avoiding the harvest.
Venders on street corners
hocking magazines, umbrellas,
T-shirts, and hot dogs
I wouldn't feed to wild pigs.
Lights turn from DON'T WALK to WALK;
people dart across the street
like tiny fish in a bowl.

Record stores, cafés, bakeries, and book stores
so close, you pass them in a single stride.
A tree in the town's square
towers alone in a forest of steel and glass
like a rose rising in the sands of the desert.
Buildings higher than sparrows can fly.

Night's lamp posts hide:
stars squinting through smog.
Cars herd themselves
to clubs, coffee houses, bars, and homes.
Those without, stumble to dark alleys
or cold park benches,
collapsing wherever the day has led them.

Irate music penetrates open windows and closed doors,
blocks a gunshot, screeching tires, sirens.
Silence hasn't visited here in years;
it went home to the back woods,
to the still waters
of the country nights.

Moss Sageurbia

Brooke Peters

Competing with mammoth giants—
—redwood, cypress, poplar, sweet gum—
puny skyscrapers plant themselves in the forest.
Thick vines cover tinted windowpanes,
lush, green foliage, a natural awning,
shades windows from sunlight.

Mountain stone streets border moss-covered sidewalks,
grass and wildflowers sweeter than smog and cigarettes.
Crickets chirp and locusts murmur
above the roar of cars and cycles.
Green stretches a bird chorus before us.

Solar-powered, fern-colored taxis buzz by.
Venders with fresh, organic produce flood the streets.
Hot houses crowd parking lots.
The cityscape:
the glow created of stars' shadows.
City dwellers sleep in hammock beds.

Sunshine invades the room,
exotic birds, soft moss,
velvety leaf pressed
neatly in my back pocket,
five pointed, reminiscent of the stars,
lavender still lingering in my nostrils.

Autumn Good



Mexican Dreams

Candice Saquin

Fiery colors chase the sun into the ocean,
imprint our bodies in sand
as a warm breeze rushes overtop, encompassing us.

We stroll along the endless shore,
grains clinging to our feet
before whisked away by the salty tide.
We may just wander down the coast forever.

Later, loud music drowns our words
where we have too many Coronas
and lip-to-ear mumbblings,
run-ins with drunk, sweaty Mexicans,
asking with their eyes
why we are here.
We ignore their questions,
smoke narrowly passing between us.

Heads now spinning,
we retreat to the humid beach air,
where we splash and wrestle
as the chilled water
soaks up our desires.

Then warmth overcomes everything
and the drunken dreams of dawn
sneak up on us.
We crawl into bed and lock the door
before the morning light can crash through
and end our Mexican night.

Must I Return to Cannibalism?

Abigail Lynn Moore

Her feet hugging the cobblestone road, she can smell the age within the stones that support her city. She is a woman selling a mountain of pink, purple, green, and yellow swirled icing in Latacunga, Ecuador. Eyes of passers-by adjust to the contrast of her bright food coloring, to the muddled poverty of Latacunga. She is leaning on the penny profits of a bright landscape of sweets. For one or two cents you could purchase a cone filled with rainbow icing. What contentment follows making five gallons of icing every morning?

She must remember when this city waltzed wealth in front of the ballroom of South America's countries. In a process lasting half a century, their economy has become a reflection of uncertainty; citizens are on their own. Spray paint beats the city's buildings, pounding, "The revolution is change" in Spanish graffiti. Years ago, a dictatorship eased the back pains of this diseased nation like a cane would an elderly man. Greed in the present democracy has stolen the cane and cried over the robbery. The new president has been allotted one year to improve the economic situation, or he will be removed with sticks like his predecessor.

As I walk the streets of Ecuador, my mind recalls how earlier I had little knowledge of the plagued economy of Ecuador. I had grown up attending a Christian school in Pennsylvania that annually travels to share the mercy and grace evident in the Biblical promises of God. I, now in my junior year, board a plane with twenty-three other students and two leaders. After a nine-hour flight, we land in Quito, Ecuador, prepared to remain for twelve days. Now, as we stay in Latacunga, my former view of humanity and value prove to be inadequate. I am being made aware of my inability to prize each person I meet as a precious, beloved, handcrafted image of the same beauty as his/her Creator. This is a story of beauty in its most raw form.

I walk beside the woman's candy tower that sits on a wooden table. She witnesses my fragile, pale, blotchy skin. Immediately, we have been separated by differences. Her rich, warm, caramel face smiles to convince me that she has accepted me. She has accepted me without reason. She is presenting me with a gift.

I continue walking. Several times I pass a long line of citizens waiting for checks from their government. Provision is hard to come by as their government fishes for a dictator to lead an ocean of families. I am slowly being drawn to the patient, gentle eyes they wear. I begin to realize how eyes glaze over with sadness and fingers wilt. Within days, I long to be

a sister of the man who lets me hold eye contact, or a daughter to the woman wrapped in the knit orange shawl.

Young boys around the age of seven demonstrate a world of their own. Carrying their supplies in a wooden box, their business is shoe shining to the few who can afford it. Laughter creases their faces as they chase you around the cobblestone courtyard. Functioning as a group, they travel together. As an alert support system, they watch for opportunities or coming attack. They are unified like a pack of intelligent wolves raised to seek the veins of wealth hidden within their society.

Two days working for a church, we carry water several hundred feet from a stream that has sunk into the valley and fortified itself with reeds. We are mixing concrete by hand. We shovel stone and sand to form a foundation that, to my eyes, resembles a fourth grader's art project. Watching these Ecuadorian men pick and shovel earth with perfected agility, I think how never before have I seen the human body used at this high of a performance. Have I ever before seen the human body labor?

I take a break from shoveling and look to the expanse of the sky. I am like a figurine on a coffee table in a seven-story living room. Because of what I am made of, I am incapable of grasping the world I am seeing. In days, I must return home to the shelves of glass and mirror I was raised in. There, I return to the like-minded figures of falsity. They choose to remain in the glass by refusing to comprehend the expanse of this sky. This sky symbolizes the world now captured in my heart. If only we could see the possible growth or the need for change in our lives in the United States. If we could comprehend life itself, our dead glass would rivet to breathe, then beat, and thrive on the pleasure of offering grace to one another.

What is so different here in the "living" room? With buildings cracked with age like gray flour, the people of Latacunga enjoying one another's presence richly decorate the buildings?

This country has been destroyed, but its people are refusing to suffer. One evening as night approaches, I witness through a towering window an image of the Virgin Mary parading through the street. Her statue erected in shiny cloth, four men support her platform on their shoulders. Several dozen people follow, singing and dancing. This is a celebration. I am here in this organism of community, breathing by the oxygen of adoration for one another. Rarely have I seen someone walking alone. Rarely have I seen women selling goods without their family or friends surrounding them, talking to pass the time. A thriving atmosphere of togetherness steadies the heartbeat of this body of community. This diseased country is suffering, but the people are refusing to be destroyed. Is that what "life" provides? Is it an ability to carry on through circumstances?

As I grew up in the United States, I was taught to suffer if I was treated harshly. I was taught to pout if I didn't get the result I longed for. I was taught to complain if I wasn't satisfied. What sturdy character does this found? If my soup was cold, I was to ask for a new bowl. The United States enlisted me in an army that resorts

to cannibalism of their own men when a conflict arises.

Nurtured in a culture tightly woven by pride and materialism, society took its capable arms and wrapped its weave over my eyes, covering my ears. Twelve days in Ecuador unraveled seventeen years of skilled handiwork. Simplicity, the height of the mountains there, humbled me to where pride and judgment stood empty-handed.

In twelve days, not only were my eyes adjusting to the light, but I was also guided to hidden understanding. If understanding could be personified, then my heart was pulled from my chest. Its fingers smeared my former ignorance across my body. I feared the disfigured flesh had lost the ability to beat. Now directed to assemble a heart capable of pumping grace through the arteries of my mind, I am subject to His guidance.

Perhaps "culture shock" is when you are placed outside of your own culture and understanding asks you to follow Him. He stands before you and rips off the weave that you have perceived as reality. I was never "shocked" in Ecuador; I was shocked when I returned home.

There is a restaurant next to the King of Prussia Mall in Pennsylvania called Dick Clark's American Bandstand. Two days after I returned, I sat in it with a group of the same students with whom I had gone to Ecuador. Quilted in a pattern of American culture, we sat at a large table and got ready to order. Several of us had become frayed from seeing the expanse of Ecuador's honesty. We were the ones whose eyes teared when others were rude to the waitress. We were the ones who let our straws drag water lines on our napkins. We let time rumble by as the storm approached. Beckoned by the Art Deco décor of the restaurant, blue-eyed pop culture raised its fists at our accusations.

Our lungs began to collapse. If a child who has breathed oxygen is placed back in the womb, the amniotic fluid that once pleased him murders the recently found life. Was I being asked to return to the womb after breathing for the first time? Was I being asked to forget the face of my Creator? Was I being asked to forget what growing had felt like?

I began to feel heavy, gray, wretched netting over my eyes. Depression begged to smooth out my frustration. Even with all my attempts, I have not been able to escape the skilled hands that bind eyes and cover ears. My tears quickened my family to usher me back to the shelf where I belong, back to the womb I still imagined the warmth of.

Unrest seems to be my only option. I have become blind again. Have I joined the figurines once again? My heart is still bruised and destroyed. I continue to learn how to love, how to see people correctly. I scratch the glass, trying to describe to others what life felt like. I am young. I have met people that gave all they could. I received one of the most vivid pictures of what God's unconditional love for me is by the

grace offered me in Ecuador.

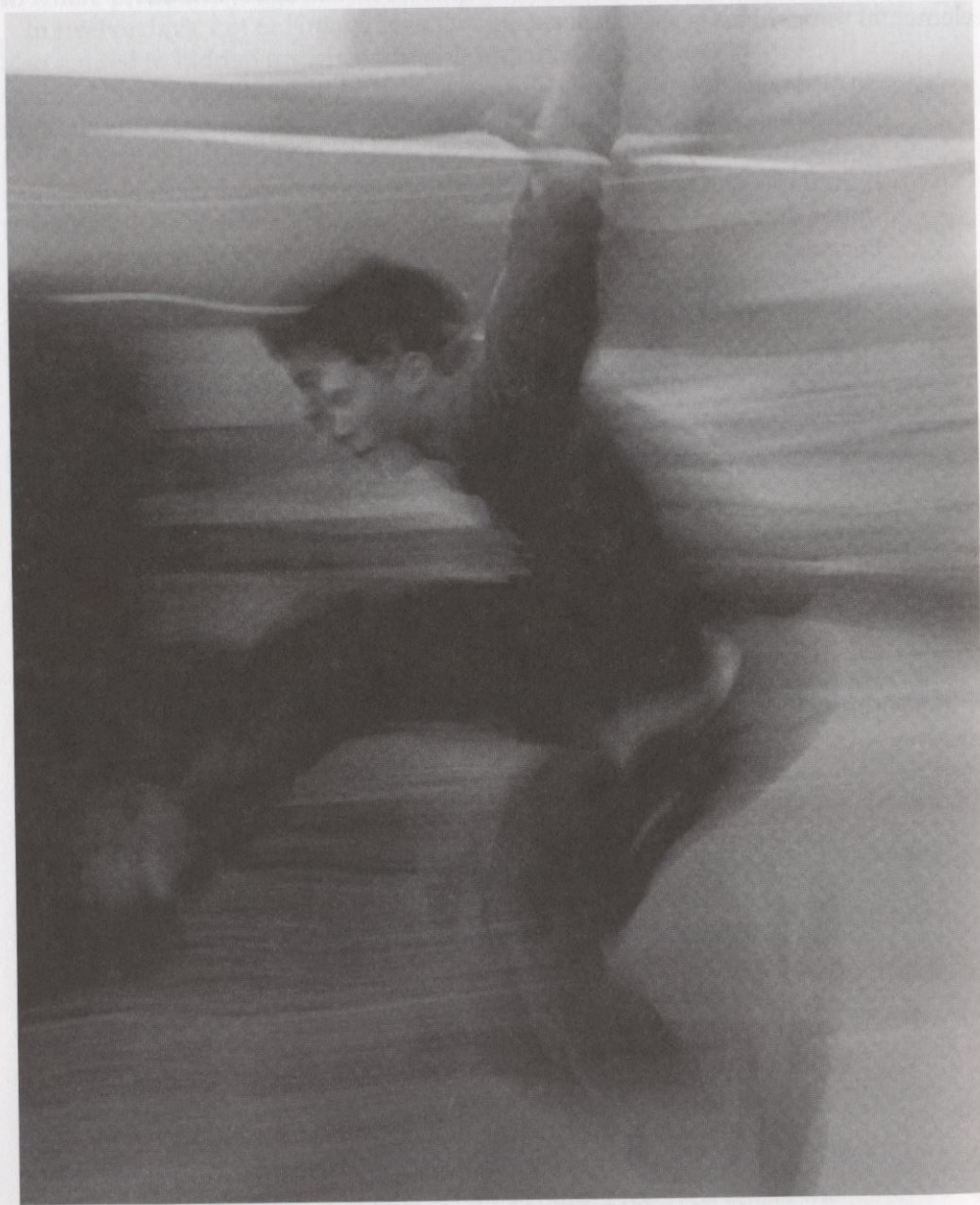
I witnessed contentment in a pure form. I long for the ability to relax in the knowledge I have of my God's characteristics. The only rest found for me in this area of my life is that God promises to complete the works that He starts in us. When will the glass be broken? When will I love as He desires? How is it that I turn back to the weak and worthless elemental things? Do I wish to be enslaved all over again?

So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. However, at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Galatians 4:3-9 (NAS)



Zach Kreider



Charismatic Movement

Matthew Burne

In a renovated theatre set apart
by servants of the Lord,
we stood trance-induced. Mouths
open, heads tilted, bodies
sucked upward like bits of dust.
Sometimes after bursting
into a chaste orgy of dancing
and crying, we crucified our arms
in the air till hands hung limp.

All must have possessed
the spirit briefly—the stable
archetypal ones, the lonely
secretive man, even the menopausal
woman in the front row.
Perhaps they tossed it around
to one another, watching
each other sway like totem poles
constructed of paper.

Often, some man or woman
from the crowd
proclaimed the spectacle
in a gripping outlandish tongue:
“Eh yan doshala to mara.”
Interpretation shrugged
because of Reason.

I should mention now
the ones on stage:
at a microphone, a woman
stood releasing herself
with shrill sounds from her mouth.
Behind her, a man pounded
somehow beautifully
with wooden sticks.
Another closed his eyes,
letting the tips of his fingers

have their way with strings.
And when they step away
from their instruments,
the congregation steps away
from its current state.

Yes, those Sunday mornings,
like a drunken bastard,
I forgot to give thanks
for the ancient inducer of us all.

And Do Not Return (Prophecy Over the Self)

Matthew Burne

Your plea is like roasted
flesh between His teeth.
Sliced with your eloquent
silver lips. He will spit
it back in the flames
at your altar where you remain
suffocating still on its smoke.
Stand now. Turn to walk.



Crucifix

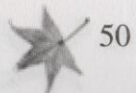
Paul Salamh

A wreath of thorns encircles your head
like the beaks of vultures,
picking at your flesh,
thirsty for blood;
take and drink.

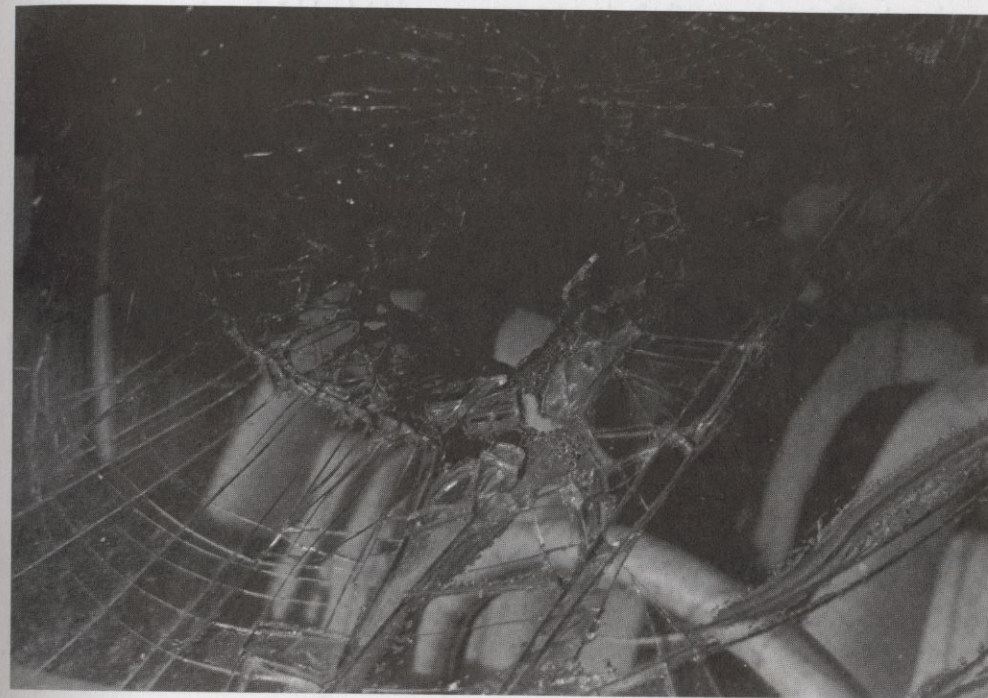
Your face weathered and worn,
not by age, but
disbelief, betrayal, hatred
moistened only by the spit on your face.
Your head hangs low,
shadowing your bare chest
with long wool bristles of beard,
your lifeless outstretched arms,
seized only by rusty spikes,
driven through your wrists.
They pin you there,
between thieves.

Each of your ribs
grows thick and defined
like branches growing
around your body,
fingers from the
wooden hand that holds you
prisoner of your Father's will.

Hung from an upright grave,
motionless in the midday storm,
even your hair beneath the thorns
is dark and full of waves
like the angry waters of the sea,
now calm.



Autumn Good



Lucky Charms

Shannon Dodd

In the cereal aisle of a local grocery store, I overheard a child shouting, "No, I don't want that kind! I want Luck Charms!" as his arm, fully extended, reached for the box of cereal on the shelf. The exhausted mother sighed and in a soft tone she replied, "No, Ben." The boy, red-faced and whining, began throwing a tantrum and kicked his legs hysterically. I heard a snicker from the other end of the aisle and an elderly woman, maybe in her sixties, was blatantly staring at the child. It dawned on me that I recognized that sneer and I had, in fact, been given that same stare before, where the eyes turn into machine guns and the pupils are like bullets firing into your flesh. Feeling a bit uncomfortable, I decided to grab my box of Golden Grahams and hurry along. As I was leaving the aisle, I noticed the box of Lucky Charms at the bottom of young Ben's grocery cart.

Although I do not argue with my mother about the type of cereal she buys, we typically do not see eye-to-eye most of the time. Unfortunately, we often have our disagreements in public places, such as grocery stores, where stereotypes are thrown about like confetti on New Year's Eve. I do not believe that it is proper for children to "talk back" to their parents, so I understand those who have judged me as ill mannered and disrespectful when I have defied my mother in public. No person on the outside, however, can see the full picture of what goes on inside of another household. Judgments are made without knowledge of backgrounds, cultures, and the environments of other people. Perhaps a full picture of another's lifestyle may not justify but rather make sense of the matter.

I cannot remember a day of my childhood when my parents were not arguing. They were nearly at each other's throats every day. My father always seemed to be dissatisfied with everything my mother did or did not do. If it was not one thing, it was another. My mother, on the other hand, was usually just nagging my father to spend more time with the family and help out around the house. As I can recall, my mother was always the one who would give in. It seemed as if she would do anything, so long as it kept a fairytale-like marriage and a perfect, happy family. My mother always told me that she wanted me to have what she did not; she wanted a perfect family because she had come from a broken one.

My father gained the "upper hand" in marriage and became very demanding when he realized my mother's weaknesses. He was always yelling at her, although he would hardly ever so much as raise his voice at my sister, Dana, or me. Dana, who is four years younger than I, was extremely close to my father. She was the little tomboy, and he loved teaching her how to play all of the "boy" sports. I was also close to my father, but I tended to spend more time with my mother. While my sister wanted to play football, my mother introduced me to ballet and cheerleading. I would say that my sister and I definitely spent a good bit of quality time with each of our parents, though it was a rare occasion when we did anything as a family.

When I was about nine or so, my parents told me that they were getting a divorce because my mother became involved with another man. She had become so weak in the relationship with my father that she sought out a new one. This, I believe, is one of the greatest factors in my loss of respect for my mother. I did not understand adult matters, which is the kind of situation this was, but I formed my own beliefs and thoughts about it. My belief was that the divorce was solely my mother's fault, and I was angry with her, despite my father's cruelty towards her. Ignoring the faults of my father, I could not understand how she could do this. I thought she loved him. She often replied that it was none of my business what she does and that "she shouldn't have to explain herself to a child."

After my parents separated, they received joint custody of Dana and me. Eventually, my mother and the "new guy," who later became my step-father, decided that Dana and I should not have contact with my father at all. My mother took my father to court and fought for full custody. Meanwhile, he was given the right to see to us only every other weekend. Dana took it especially hard since she was so close to him. I think my mother must have over-looked our unhappiness in order to feel righteous about her decision to take our father out of our lives. We felt torn between both of our parents. Meanwhile, my mother was on a roll and just dragging us along with her.

In the summer of 1994, my mother told me that we were moving, leaving Ohio, my homeland, and moving to Pennsylvania. "Why Pennsylvania?" I asked, but her answer was less than satisfactory. As it turned out, Patrick, my step-father, had family in Pennsylvania and he sought out a job close to his childhood home. What about the family I had in Ohio? My relatives were scattered all over the state of Ohio, especially in Dayton, where I had lived for so long. I had grown very close to my family, especially my cousins, over the many years. My cousins were like my best friends and we had been inseparable, until now. And what about my childhood home? I did not want to move from the house where so many precious memories were made. All of the memories of holidays and birthdays were locked inside of that house. I did not want to move to Pennsylvania, but it was apparent that children's opinions and feelings did not matter in such decisions.

Our first few months in Pennsylvania, Patrick became more and more "comfortable" playing the fatherly role in our family, and he began establishing new rules. He insisted that my sister and I begin attending Sunday school, so that we could adopt his faith and become Roman Catholics. Initially, I was excited to attend church and to have a religion. I did not detest the idea at first, but I began to realize that I was joining a masquerade rather than a religion. At dinner, Patrick would make my sister and me pray aloud before eating, but he would not so much as fold his hands, much less pray. Once, my sister asked him why he never prayed, and he replied, "I do not need to pray." During church and any of the church events, he would participate as if he were a loyal and faithful Catholic. At home, however, he did not practice the faith and even acted as if he were too good for it. When I started noticing his phony ways, I became belligerent and refused to become a Catholic. Patrick manipulated my mother into believing that he was a "true" Catholic by taking her to more church events and even purchasing Christian music. She did not see through him like I did. He didn't give a damn about the religion because going to church was strictly for promoting a better social standing. By this time, Patrick was urging my mother to be more disciplinary towards my sister and me.

Patrick believed in physical punishment. I was not exactly brought up like that; we were only spanked if we needed it. Patrick, on the other hand, seemed to think it was necessary for everything. He found justice in hitting us, even if it was for spilling milk. He took discipline to the extreme. This is perhaps another reason that my respect for my mother deteriorated over the years. She did not like being hurt by my father, so I did not understand why she let Patrick hit us.

My mother and I had definitely lost that mother-daughter relationship by this time, and I did what I could to avoid and ignore both my mother and Patrick. I missed my father, despite the fact that he had not even tried to contact us for months. I blamed my mother for taking us out of the state and away from our father. I told her that it was her fault that we could not see him on the weekends anymore. I gave him every break I could because in many ways, I wanted to believe that one parent still cared about how Dana and I felt. The truth was that I felt trapped and deserted. I was trying to comply with rules that were practically foreign to me, as well as accepting the loss of touch with my family in Ohio. When we moved to Pennsylvania, Patrick purposely did not get long distance on our phones; therefore, I could not contact any of my family from Ohio.

My mother had two children with Patrick, Patrick III and David. When Patrick, whom we called "little Pat," was born, my mother proposed that I begin addressing Patrick as "Dad." They did not want

to have to explain to my brothers that Dana and I had a different father than they did. I was furious. Of course I didn't want to call him "Dad," but I lived in a "disciplined" household and I would be punished for not doing so. So, Patrick became "Dad" and I became enraged. I established true and untamed resentment for the both of them. I did what I could to stay out of Patrick's way. I was afraid of him. I was not afraid of my mother, however, so I gave her long, harsh glares. Sometimes she would just glare back, as if we were competing in a match of the staring game. Other times, she would scream at me and send me to my room. On the bad days, I'd just get slapped across the face. Either way, I always won; I loved being alone in my room no matter how many times I got sent to it. Eventually, I became so immune to those slaps in the face that I could even crack a smile in the end. I felt as if my mother was weak. I was beginning to hate her.

Patrick's disciplinary actions became frequent and often untargeted. He used violence whenever he became frustrated. He left marks on my body, mostly on my legs, because he always kicked me. I started wearing jeans, even in the summertime, to hide the bruises. Most of the attacks were directed towards me, but sometimes he left marks on Dana, too. Eventually, my neighbors became suspicious and began interrogating me about things. Supposedly, a few of them saw incidents that took place through the kitchen window of our home, and they were getting worried. Many of my neighbors had children where I went to school, so I told them everything was fine.

Many incidents had, indeed, occurred in front of the large kitchen window in our home. One incident in particular that I could never forget happened on a late October night. Earlier that day, my mother was severely bitten by a stray Alaskan malamute, and she was taken to the hospital. Patrick would not even take me to see her when I got home from school. He said, "I have more important things I need to do, and you are not important to me." My friend's dad offered to drive me over to the hospital when he heard about what had happened to my mother. When I arrived, the doctor told me that he wanted her to stay for the night. Dana was spending the night at a friend's house that evening, and I did not want to stay alone in the house with Patrick, so I asked my mother if I could stay somewhere else. She said, in a kind of disgruntled way, "If you must."

I decided to stay with a friend who actually lived just a few houses down from me. We walked over to my house, together, to get the things I would need for the night. When we arrived at my house, Patrick was peering out the window as if he were waiting for me. He opened the front door and told me to go inside, but he asked my friend to wait outside. He slammed the door and yelled, "What the hell is this all

about?" I explained my evening arrangements and that I would be staying with a friend while my mother was not home. He laughed, "Are you afraid of me, Shannon?" and he stepped closer to me. "Do you think I would hurt you?" he asked. I knew he was being sarcastic. He had hurt me so many times already. Before I could reply, he said, "You are not going anywhere." I stared at my feet for a while, and as he began to walk away I said, "Yes, I am."

He became volatile. "Are you?" he said, and he began sliding his hands across the kitchen counter, knocking off anything on its surface. He picked up a coffee mug and threw it at me, but it went through the window instead. I started running towards the door, but he grabbed the hood of my sweatshirt and pulled me to the ground. I could hear my friend begging him to stop from outside, but he proceeded to kick me in the stomach and chest a few times first. When he stopped kicking, I was afraid to stand up right away, so I lay on the floor for a few seconds. He started to walk away, and I darted out the door.

The "walk" back to my friend's house was a sprint. I think her heart was racing as fast as mine was. She was carrying the coffee mug he had thrown. Before we went inside her house, I made her promise to never tell anyone, not even her parents, about what she had just seen. She promised, but I knew she wasn't going to keep quiet.

I was called down to the principal's office the next morning at school, where two police officers waited for me. Just as I had suspected she would, my friend told her parents everything after I had fallen asleep that night. They called Children's Services and reported my stepfather for child abuse. I learned that my gym teacher also made prior suspicion reports to the office, regarding my frequently bruised legs. The police officers took me into the nurse's office to take photographs of my bruises and asked me to explain them. For the first time, I told the whole story.

When I arrived home later that day, I could see my mother through the window, sitting in the kitchen with tears streaming down her face. I wanted to give her a hug, and I needed one, too. When I walked in the door, she gave me one of those glares that we used to give each other. "Look what you have done to our family," she cried. I was confused, so I went to Dana's room to see what was the matter. Dana told me that Patrick had been taken to jail and that we would have to testify in court against him. In court, three months later, my mother sat on Patrick's side and testified on his behalf.

Patrick was charged with simple assault and harassment. He was sentenced to nine months in prison and two years of probation to follow. Also, he was made to take classes in anger management and better parenting. My mother did not talk to my sister and me for nearly

two days afterwards. Eventually, we tried to get on with our lives as normally as possible, but to this day we have not talked about what happened. My sister and I have become closer than we could ever have imagined, due to the unfortunate circumstances we have experienced together.

Months after the trial, I realized my mother was not the same woman she used to be. She was melancholy most of the time and stopped caring about things in which she always took pride. No longer did she slave to prepare a nice dinner, wear makeup, or even style her hair. She locked herself in her room most of the time. Meanwhile, I did most of the cooking and cleaning and even became a parental figure to my three younger siblings. In many ways, I felt as if I were watching over my mother as well. "Mom, you need to get ready for work...you should eat something, Mom...and Mom, please try and get some sleep." She was having difficulties sleeping at night, and sometimes she would not sleep at all. She began sleeping during the day and missed nearly two weeks of work. A perfectly happy family is what she had always dreamed of, but our lives took a drastic turn.

I do not feel I have a mother-daughter relationship that anyone else could understand or appreciate. For a short time, my mother and I switched the roles of parenting. The ironic thing is that everything that I ever taught my mother, she had already taught to me in some shape or form. She just didn't know it. When people see me arguing with my mother, I know they are looking at me the same way that the woman in the grocery store looked at little Ben. I can feel their deterrent eyes burning through my skin. However, I have made young Ben my own "lucky charm" and try to think of him as a reminder that my mother is still the parent. I forget that sometimes.

I think that a good parent is one who sets her child into the world with open eyes, and most importantly has taught her everything she possibly could. I have undoubtedly learned so much from my mother, whether she directly or indirectly taught it to me. I have learned from her marriage to my father, as an abusive husband, as well as from her marriage to Patrick, an abusive father. In either case, not one of them is necessary to have a happy family. Some of the happiest families are those that are broken. I wish someone could have taught my mother like she has taught me. I still think she is weak. I think she depends on men, and I think she lacks faith in me. Nonetheless, she is the reason I feel confident and aware of the world that surrounds me today. She says she took the wrong path on the road of life. I will be sure to take the right one.

Her First Time

Christopher Ruff

Show me, she pleaded,
urgency underlying her words.
Her desire—vague, allusive, intangible—
more seductive
than the truth of her
auburn hair against my
cheek as she whispered wishes.

I took her
the next time to Pine Creek,
its patches of grassy, treeless shoreline,
its wide breadth—simple,
a naked body of water
spread out like a transparent satin sheet—
simple, more suitable for her needs
and lack of expertise.

She was prepared—
too well—with the perfection
of the unpracticed.
Her vest, shorts—clean khaki;
shoes, t-shirt—unsoiled whites;
all neat enough,
expecting, anticipating ruin.

She relied on me
to provide her with a rod.
I did. Newly purchased (not for her)
graphite, long, sleek and light.
Mine was thrown casually in the back
of my jeep—an old six-and-a-half-
footer, bent and lax,
tattered and used, flesh-
colored fiberglass,
having too much flexibility, too much play,
passed down to me from past generations
of grandpas and fathers come

and gone (or never there),
my own gear seemingly ancient,
waders slightly mildewed,
vest and sneakers infested with holes,
flies battered and torn—
all familiar with many waters,
offering less with each creek—
yet still landing fish.

Reaching the side of the stream together
we prepared—
her hands, moist with a faint, vulnerable sweat,
threaded the delicate tippet
through the awaiting eyelets—
expecting, anticipating.

My hands, eyes
engulfed her actions—aiding, guiding
her through her awkwardness:
here like this or yes that's it
my words encouraged, from somewhere above,
from somewhere outside of me
when my arms wrapped around, assisting.

Her first few attempts failed.
Her line—whipping, cracking
and knotting—sulking
beneath the flowing sheet.
I tried to show her
but my movements were too quick—
back and forth,
like the arms of the weary oak
caught between the changing
winds before a storm—
too rapid, swift
for her to study and replicate,
too aggressive
for her to see fluidity and rhythm
in the simple repetition.

But she saw beauty—
the linear perfection of neon green
on water, of the white speck of feathery dust



that sits amongst the mirage of potential—
either emerging into or spilling from
life into that rolling sheet that begins to glare
with twilight's fading potency.

She tried—once, twice, more—
then again, fighting dusk,
each time failing but thinking, feeling
closer to comfort (or maybe ability)
coaxing the fly to partially float
at the end of the slack, curled line.

The sun sank below the mountains
twenty minutes earlier for us
than those standing on the crests of ridges,
as if it were drowned by weights.
Night followed sharply behind,
filling the vacant air
with crickets and cicadas
crying out the verdict: *guilt, Guilty!*

She tried still—again—
with tears and sighs
as the unseen line's report
slapped ineffectually off the water.
She reeled the line in; we broke down
the gear and threw it in the back of my jeep—
to lay in wait for future trips
that will hold less expectations.

Ever since that first time
she has followed me, slightly unwillingly:
out to that stream, to that soft sheet,
simply out of habit—
to justify her own fading vest
and perpetually muddy shoes.

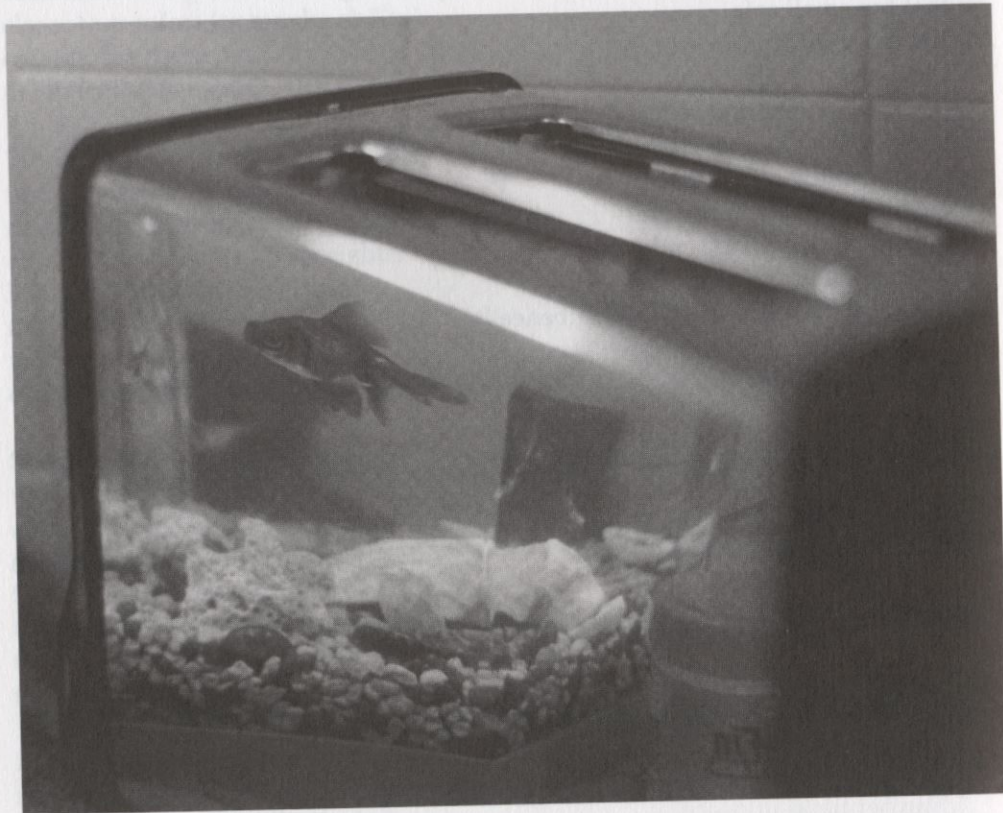
But she believed she wanted to,
at least that first time,
without knowing the rancid smell
that eventually comes—
lingering after beauty
like the whiff of manure

that chases after and up with you
as you drive quickly by plaid patches
of corn and wheat.

She asked, she believed she wanted to;
I was content as is—
the two of us wrapped up
in blankets and each other's arms
on that too small sofa,
in that too small apartment:
like twin born caterpillars
interwoven in a knitted cocoon,
hanging delicately from a tree limb
that sags heavily above the stream
by only a single silken thread—
fearing a strong gust to send
us fallen and lost,
drowned by the clear satin flowing beneath.



Autumn Good



Criminal Love

Cheryl Kirkwood

Like old women bird-watching,
I memorized her every move,
obsessing every second in the day.

All I wanted was for her to love me again.

Drawing her out of the front seat,
gently covering her mouth, her lotion on my hands,
tugging at her ponytail with the tenderness of a child.

I love her.

Her pink shirt and grey skirt twisting,
she wiggled in a dance to free herself,
but I enjoyed tangoing with her.

We were meant to dance together.

Her left shoe falling to the gutter below,
driving the tiny run up her silk-soft nude stockings,
coercing her to limp away with me.

Arm in arm, forever.

I blindfolded her, a child at my birthday party,
and led her to my room, to our room,
holding her hand in peace.

If she just could have seen it.

The bed was covered in peach rose petals,
vanilla candles dimly lit,
"Sounds of Nature" humming in the background.

Finally alone in our sanctuary.

Slipping her beneath the maroon satin sheets,
the bed surrounded by pictures of her, of us;
she started to cry.

"Don't worry, love," I cooed.
"There's no reason to be nervous."

I longed to hold her,
but she denied my tenderness,
spurning my compassion like a baby spits out a pacifier.

I held on to her, afraid to let go.

Gasping now,
extending her arms,
embracing the aromatic air that surrounded us.

It pleased me to know that her last reach was
for me.

Turning a romantic red,
brightening to a lovely lavender,
concluding in a blissful blue.

"Let your emotions out; tell her how you feel,"
my therapist once said.

She finally gave in,
falling gently into my arms
like a bouquet of flowers,
her new necklace
made entirely of fingerprints.

Amanda Lesslie



Even the Tears of a Rapist Are Insufficient

Matthew Burne

She begged between each thrust.
Then he wept, and withdrew from her
like the final twitch of a flickering light bulb.

As she lay soft and flowing, his eyes dripped
down onto her forehead while he traced
her clavicle bones with a soft finger.

His Own

Christopher Ruff

The sun glares off her tender, plump cheeks, reflecting rainbows into the sky. sometimes it's little specks of glitter sprinkled over her cinnamon skin. other times it's tears, notes of a silent song escaping from her coffee-colored iris-instruments. the rest of her body glistens and trembles as dew condenses on the fine, blond hair of her arms and slight, pudgy stomach. her chest taut with adolescence. her legs twitch and twist barely, struggling beneath my weight—pointless, barely. My hard calloused hands trace the outline of her soft skin, soft as melodies—simple, sweet. i hold her close to me, like when she was a baby—naked, vulnerable—mine. her breath stings my face, unnaturally cold. short, quick, irregular bursts—close to me—mine: slow, deep, regular rhythm. i hold her. Mine. her skin. so soft. sweet. forgiving. forgive me. for giving me. Mine.



Her Own (*Revenge*)

Christopher Ruff

five years. six too long gone. blood still lingering from the first. *redeeming the last*. my head hurts with the possibility. *throbbing under pictures* of the preacher in his white-collar ignorance of salvation. *not in the blood*. it always bled after. *it's not in the blood*. it hurt after, as if I were gored by the large bull out in the pasture. it hurt right up the middle. from there to my head—pure as talc—flashes, bursts of heat and lightning from there all the way to my head.

throbbing. pictures of her hanging over the fireplace. perfect in that dress. not knowing the blood. the same dark skin. same coiled hair, eyes—both brown. *not mine. not knowing blood*. not in that perfect dress. white as porcelain.

him. underneath pictures of him. his rough, bearded face hiding scarred hatred. masking as love. making his mouth speak love. pictures of his eyes glinting in the evening sun as he calls me to that blasphemous barn speaking love. *throbbing. pictures of his scarred hands*: yellow, scabbed, rough. brushing thick, soft black springs back off of my forehead. *pictures of his breath*: staining the air. *pictures of his tools*: slaughtering, bloodstained.

throbbing. under the weight of probability. throbbing. under the cold, stinging weight of steel possibilities. my head hurts. my hand trembles like the pines under the changing winds. *under the weight in my hands: so heavy, heavier than any Book*. he shook. he sweated. cried. *under pictures of me*—crying, fighting, sweating out the fear—he smelled it, thrived off it, got off on it—

under pictures of the blood. still lingering. fresh from him. fresh once. only once. only the first. fresh. if he could have only promised once. lingering from the first. once to bleed. i wouldn't have cried. i wouldn't have cried for five years. for me. no, only once for her. once for you. now none—blood washes blood; tears, tears.

Amanda Lesslie



Losing Hope

Dana Ciciliot

Outside

snow spills gently from a charcoal sky.
It paints the trees,
coats the rooftops above a sleeping town
while serenity brushes the air
with tender strokes of irony.

Inside

the aroma of buttered noodles lingers in the air—
a stale reminder of the dinners
her father often missed.

She stands

huddled in the darkness.
The light from the kitchen sneaks around the corner,
unlike the shouts that stormed into her room
earlier in the night.
With her feet pressed firmly against the frigid tile,
she remains paralyzed—frozen as

she listens

to the deafening bellows.

Slowly,

the fence around her reality
begins to rust.

Scar

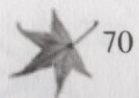
Mary Malmquist

On the side of your back.

You were
marred by the fall.
It left its autograph.

Sweat gathers

on the plain white plane.
A landscape of smooth terrain
with a topographical map
that tells me where I am:
Home.



Scars of a Child

Lisa Kiwak

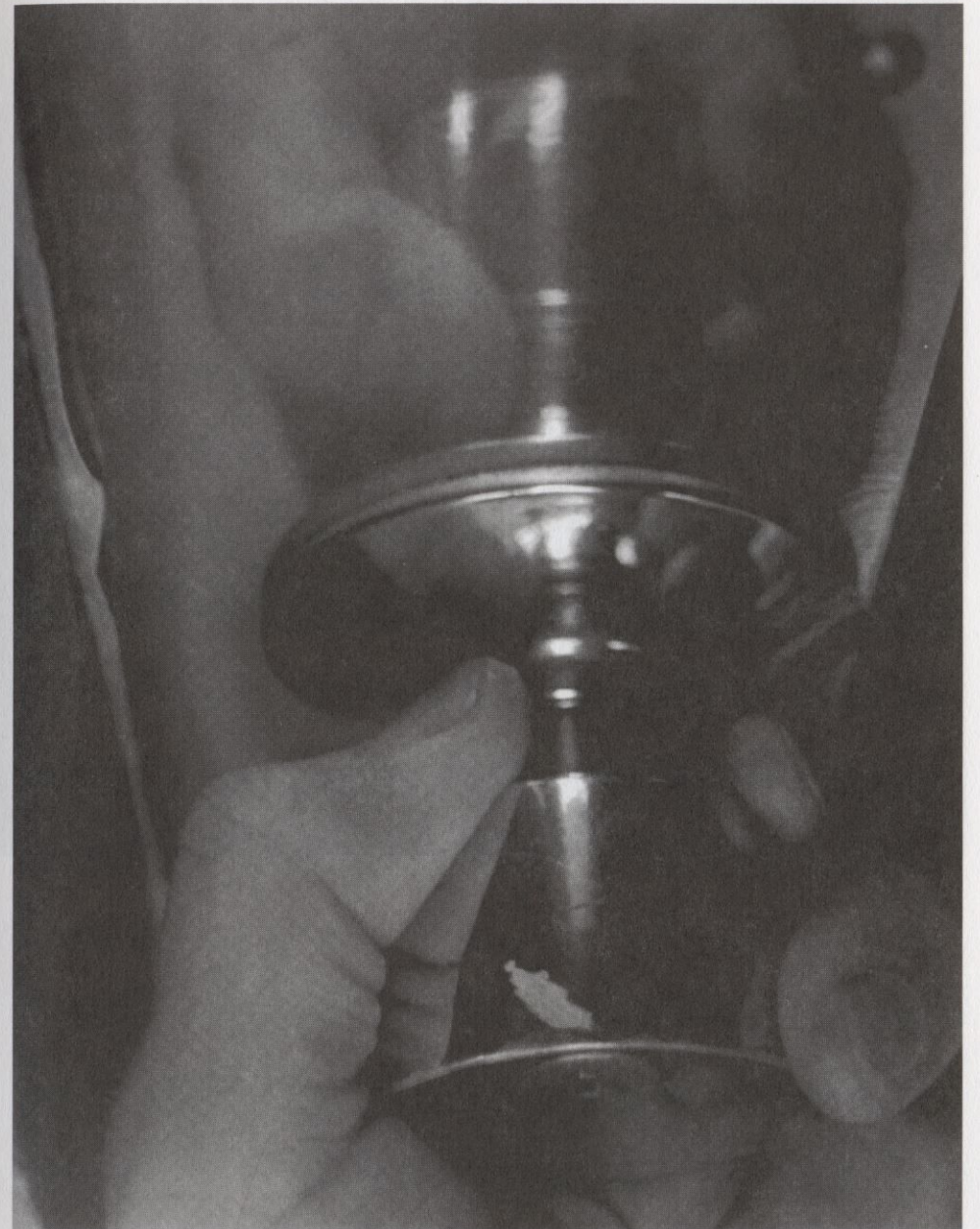
Fragile knees kiss
the hot asphalt.
Shrieking.
Slap, pinch,
like a referee at an intense soccer game
my mother steps in.

Afternoon bike ride
rolls into
band-aids
and bleeding elbows.

Your fingertips
feel the faint scar
the swing set screw
smacked on my back.

Even now, scent of alcohol,
sight of cotton swabs
knock me back,
to the slamming door
that scraped my face
and how you walked
away, leaving
scars.

Zach Krieder



Surviving a Hurricane

Rachel Kester

All that stands between us
is the white door.
He pounds and pounds.
There is no talking to this man.
Tears and sweat trickle down our bodies.
We are drowning in fear's salty sea.

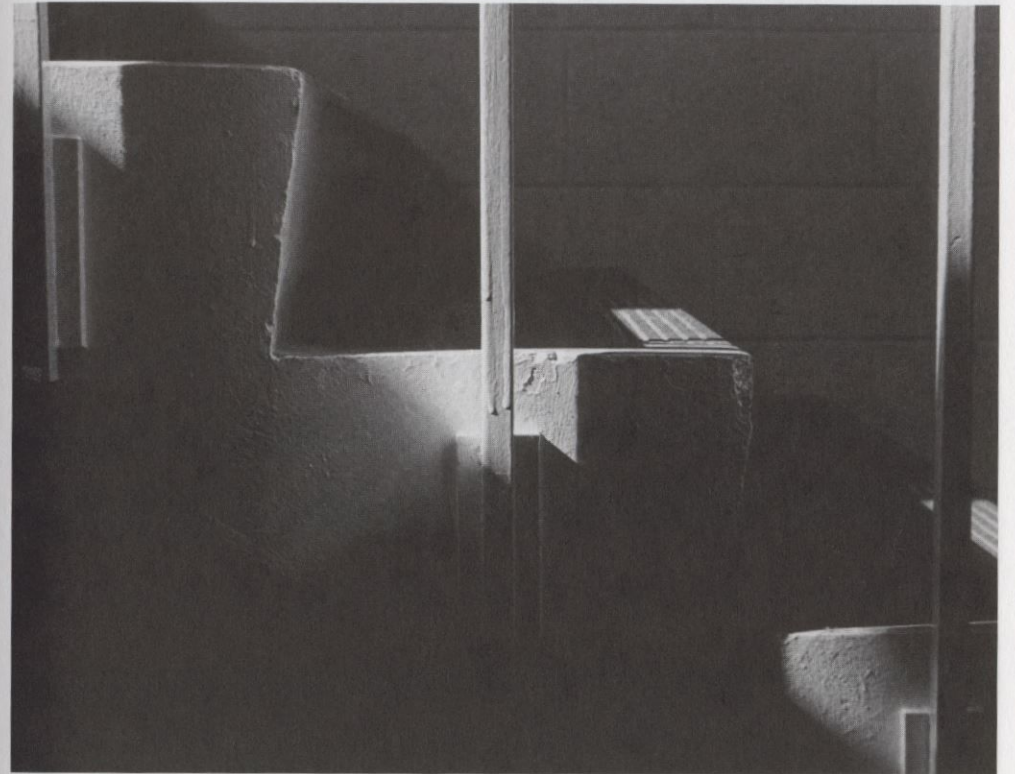
Exhausted from all the years of this,
Mother sinks to the floor.
Still, he beats against the door
like the endless waves of an angry ocean
that push and punish the shore.

The small, hook-shaped latch
bends beneath his weight.
We brace ourselves,
backs pressed against the door,
awaiting the gust of a hurricane.
He has come to sweep us away again.

Through the crack, the alcoholic stench of his breath
hits me like a rogue wave.
I shout out words that ripple through the darkened night.
They scratch at his face like scouring sand
whipped at him by an outraged wind.
In the midst of a stormy, surging sea,
I throw lightning bolts, safe
behind the fortress of the door.

Suddenly, the deafening downpour of his voice
subsides to a mere trickle in the gutter spout.
The hurricane collapses,
fading back into the swirling sea.
Gently, as if I am the mother,
I lift her from the floor.

Chris Stanonis



Getaway *a Hurricane*

Lisa Kiwak *artD*

Muggy, murky,
humid and sticky,
my basement,
my getaway from you.

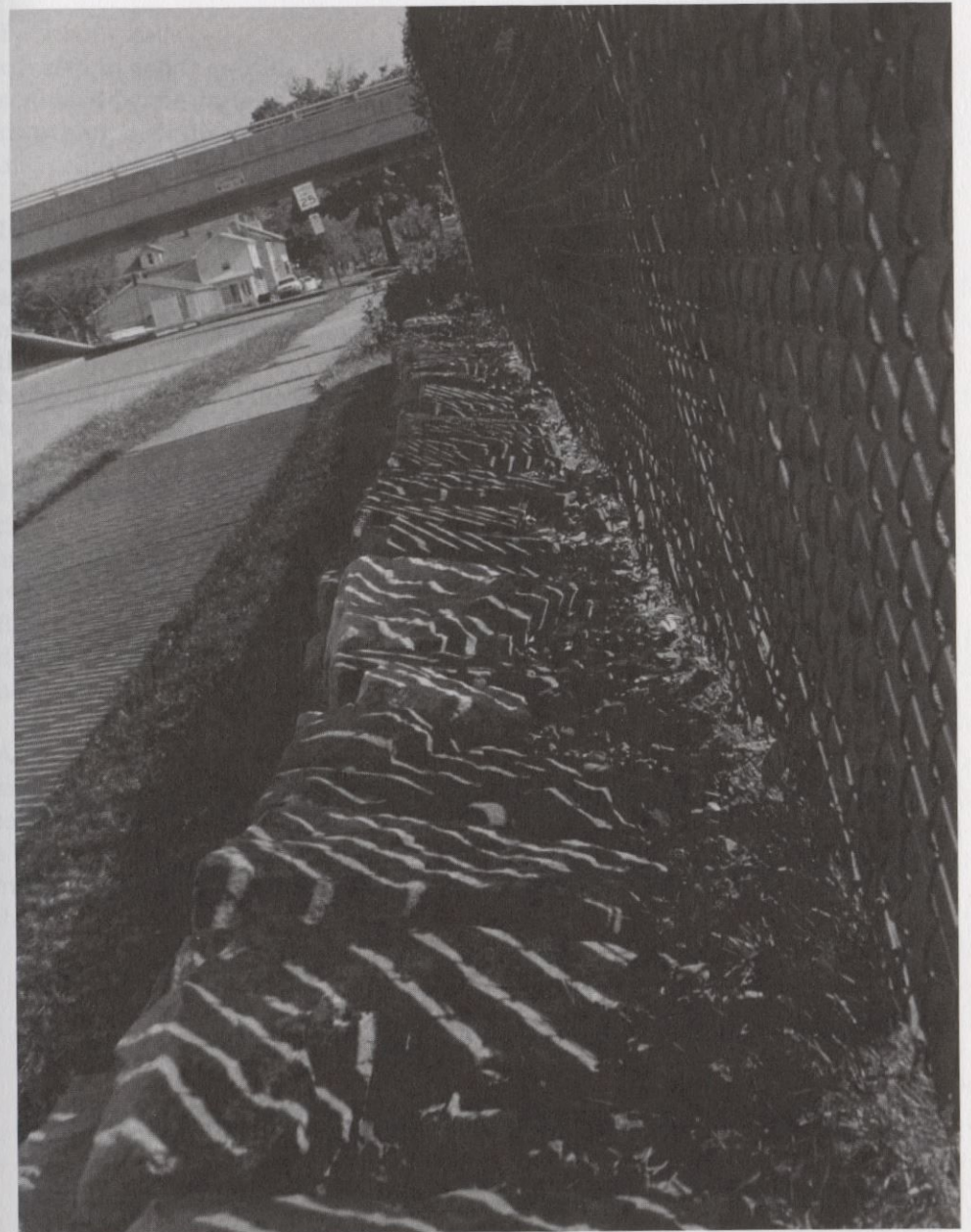
Cement blocks,
paint cans, and canned goods
console me, protect me from my
father's incoherent words.

A centipede darts by.
I jump, almost as far
as when the scent of moonshine
seeps through the cellar door.

My security guards,
four tightly packed walls,
shelter me from your favorite
men: Jim, Jack, and Jose.

And as my rosy red cheek
presses against the familiar floor
that has become my mattress, I drift
off to sleep as the faint smell
of liquor intertwines with mildew.

Erin Carhart



Your Path

Tara Myers

Led me to drinking
like a lost sheep to a pond.
I drank it down, down
to find you, to lose you.

The prodigal daughter,
I returned
to an empty, house—
the church.

You weren't home,
but somewhere high above my reach,
like the eggs I hid in trees at Easter,
out of reach of Sunday School children
who jumped frantically to grab them.

But the eggs eluded them
as you elude me now.



At the Checkout

Jack

Miranda Krishak

Bathroom stalls
covered in poetic graffiti,
scribbled by the yuppies, wannabes, and sell-outs,
drowning their delusions in cranberry cocktails
and calling it art.

I sit in the corner watching two lovers
entangle their bodies
around one another,
avoiding the eyes of the drunken bartender,
thrusting himself at the curly brunette
he has pulled behind the counter
to exchange sex for free drinks.

The crazy, copper-haired man
discusses religion, greed, and self-sacrifice
and loudly mocks the man
two tables to his left,
flashing a calligraphy pen,
dropping ink that will
never run through his veins.

A poet takes me by the hand
and leads me to a dirty sidewalk step
to sit in silence and see
a single, perfect rose, overlooked
in the city with nothing to offer
the few like us.



Bartender

Tyler VonNeida

I stand here catering
to fools.
You all swallow
like young birds,
sucking down that vile worm.
I am your mother.

Familiar faces,
friendly at times
especially when flames
of Vodka erupt from
porous skin.

Twenty-five cent tips
equal success
according to you.
Slave of the taps,
golden soapy sap
runs cold, as
urine collects
on rims of frosty pilsners.

After the last chair is turned,
I crawl to my nest,
shaking my head
of the salt and beer...
my eyes collapse.

At the Checkout Counter

Anastasia Candice Saquin

Holding back her frustrations,
bagging my lunch meat and chips,
she sighs discouragingly.

I hand her my crumpled five;
she slowly counts.
"\$2.73 is your change,"
her hopeless voice wails to me.

Our eyes briefly meet,
and I see her struggle:
screaming infant at 2 a.m.
when he comes home,
filling the air with the scent of
beer and cheap perfume.

Slurring his insults,
staggering around the dimly lit hall,
he slaps her already moist cheek,
knocking her into a wall,
shoving her out of his way.

Stumbling, yelling, falling,
he finds his way up the stairs
to pass out cold, again,
leaving her with a questioning six-year-old
and a hysterical baby,
crying as if he knew
just how bad it was.

Sobbing, hoping, praying,
this won't go on another day,
she arises from her three-hour slumber
to find another morning, same as the last,
grey sky, somber life.

"Have a nice day,"
she tells me with a frown.



In Dreams

Rachel Kester

Smoke drifts in all directions.
Smoke drifts into the sky, carried by angels
whose wings are like mirrors
that reflect my sadness in all directions.

I fear regret, regretting us,
our moonless love.
On a moonless night, regret is pleasure;
pleasure is a wilting rose
whose petals reflect my sadness,
whose petals are mirrors.

I see regret's face in those mirrors,
mirroring the face of oblivion.
The eyes of regret are staring, burning into me.
Pride smolders at my feet,
sending smoke in all directions,
sending smoke far into the sky.

Anastasia Bannikova



Regret

Cheryl Kirkwood

Give me back my pants, my pillow, my personality.
Give me back my shirt, my scarf, my soul.
Give me back my bra, my books, my bravery.
Give me back my lotions, my lighter, my love.
Give me back my voice, my validity, my virginity.
The rest you can keep.

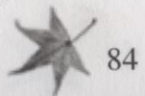
When You Were Born

Nicholas Trumbauer

You were already ten,
already able to see, defying her,
leaving, cutting the invisible cord.

Escaping that caging womb,
eating what you wanted to eat,
drinking what you wanted to drink.

Into the waiting hands
of the doctoring world, rid
of her stench and filth.



Salvation

Miranda Krishak

Soft whimpers of a newborn,
naked, cold, starving,
in a dumpster behind Main Street.

Mary sticks the needle in her vein,
looks to the sky, and sighs,
God take my baby.
Give him wings.
Let him fly.

The strange man in her bed
beckons for his pleasure.
Here my angel.
Show me heaven.
Make me come.

Innocent tears cease,
soiled money tossed
carelessly on her bed.

She whispers,
Dear God.
Sweet Savior.
Forgive Me.

As young boys masturbate
to fantasies of their mothers.



Please Pull Out the Chairs

Tiffany Slingerland

"It is often not what is on the table that should be paid attention to, but what's on the chairs that really matters."

Quiet... reserved... distant from interaction, she sits alone in her room like a turtle curled safe in its shell. She is often like the turtle that refuses to "come out and play" and carries on at its own pace in happy solitude. As a turtle has its reasons for retreat, such as protection or independence, so does she as she's learned so much through the observations of her life thus far. She's gained new perspectives and sometimes others seem to be lagging behind in sharing her concepts and don't seem to fully grasp and understand some of the very things that she has learned. Many, however, have chosen to simply accept her passively without trying to learn or understand her methods.

She, on the other hand, is completely content with herself because she knows what few others have taken the time to see... the real her. She is an independent turtle, crawling on her own hard-earned understanding of the world around her. Often, she needs to hide in her encompassing shell of protection, which enables her to peer out at her surroundings and secretly observe them, study them, learn from and about them, so she can better understand not only the world around her, but also how to apply her findings to her own life as well. This has truly allowed her to gain a unique understanding of not only herself but also life in general.

She knows that each person in this world is like the distinctly made pieces of a puzzle; each has his or her own personal contributions to society, and she's in the process of discovering her own. As she is seen "hibernating," sitting by herself, reading, listening to music, studying, performing tasks on her own, or sitting at her "lonely" computer, those who don't know her well suddenly, and often times unconsciously, categorize her as a "loner" with no friends, no sense of fun, or even as shy or as an outcast.

She's alone in her room. With her favorite music on continuous play, she carries on about her daily tasks, all to herself, answering to no one. She enjoys the freedom that the independent world that she's created often allows her. The phone rings. The upbeat friend on the other end of the line asks if she wants to join a group of friends for a movie. When she turns down their offer once again, they begin to denote her as not a "people person" who lacks skill in socialization and has no fun or is, what they refer to as, a "goody-goody." All of these misinterpretations



lead to their false image of her being unsocial and detached from the "real world." It is important to her, though, to study, do her work, and maintain self-discipline and self-control. She has simply realized that there is a difference between needing and wanting things. Sometimes people will even go so far as to label her as being a "stuck-up" who thinks she's too good for them.

But that's not the case at all! She's just a laid-back person who, at times, desperately needs her personal "down-time." Other people often don't see and understand that as her personal way of playing the cards that life deals out to her. They don't understand that her idea of fun doesn't always consist of "going out on the town" to participate in something. She enjoys quietness and time by herself where she can focus her thoughts and energy and organize her mind's filing cabinet. If she doesn't manage her "fun time" and "down time" in a proportioned way that works for her, which may be totally different from most other peoples' needs, it easily leads to cluster and stress in her life. This is where she becomes easily misjudged and misperceived.

Her reserved nature doesn't only affect her casual friendships, but also her personal relationships with the people closest to her. The accusations about her distant and uncaring personality extend to areas much deeper than simply choosing homework over being with friends. Her values and standards have been rigidly built upon the shell that she carries and she often allows no room for compromise. Whether it relates to an acquaintance or a date, she stands firm on not falling captive to situations that she shouldn't be in. Even if it means being different, she refuses to change and give in just to follow the crowd.

This is especially true in how she handles her more serious relationships. She's never had a boyfriend but has never really shown a concern about it. Those who don't take the time to learn why she doesn't date, assume it's because she's either too shy, not outgoing enough, or has some unknown defect! She simply stands firm on her values and standards in the opposite sex and doesn't let anyone pressure her into settling for anything less... even if it means being falsely accused.

When you evaluate such a creature as the turtle and parallel it in terms of understanding the "shy" people of society, those who stay seemingly distant and reserved, you can begin to see these people under a different light. The turtle has its own ways of responding to different situations. Pulling inside its protective shell when disturbed, exhibits its own means for living and balancing its life in order to personally survive. Some people are turtles with their own uniqueness in this

sense that has to be understood individually. This is equally true and important to learn in our society. When we make new acquaintances and find ourselves wanting to judge people by their outer actions, we need to step back and take time to see the whole picture and recognize what contributing factors might be behind those actions.

"It is often not what is on the table that should be paid attention to, but what's on the chairs that really matters."

I have always been an independent and fairly self-sufficient person, which has been very beneficial to me in many aspects. So far in life, I've experienced a wide variety of situations, which has helped developed my character. Being an only child, I have gained a different outlook on certain things through these events that other people often don't get the opportunity, or maybe even care, to see. I've been able to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning behind some things and have developed a more defined act of self-discipline and self-control. Because of these behaviors, I have grown a vivid and concrete foundation in my definition of morals and values as an active Christian as well, which is very important to me. The values that I have and the standards that I hold myself to, often make me reluctant to engage in situations that contradict my natural disposition and beliefs.

For example, some people think that it is wrong to be single. Many people believe that they have to have a girlfriend or boyfriend nowadays in order to be "complete" or even accepted. I've come across people who are bound and determined to know why on Earth I don't have a boyfriend! I have many friends who date people just for the mere fact of not being alone. Their relationships rarely ever last long and true; then they look at me and don't understand why I have never "taken the plunge," like it's as simple as picking a meal off a menu! If you don't like it, send it back and order a new one.

Growing up in a small public school, it was easy to see that kids always want to follow the "in-crowd" so they don't get categorized or "degraded" as less of a person. Some girls come to the conclusion that more boyfriends mean more popularity, but what for? What do they really gain by this? How many of those young "dating" relationships were true and meaningful and worth the "heartache" when they didn't last? It always looked to me to be more of a game to some people than actually working towards developing and applying their standards and values in another person. A lot of kids look more at immediate satisfaction than how they can hold out for a long-term, serious, and beneficial relationship by setting standards that they feel to be important to them. Instead, they get impatient and compromise their natural dispositions in an attempt to fit in with what the world has tried to establish as right okay.

It is very important to me to stand my ground on not settling for things in my life for basic reasons that many people just don't understand and don't see my way. Why not strive to make the first choice a wise choice? Whether it's dealing with relationships or simply knowing when to put work before pleasure, you cause unnecessary stress on yourself by going against what you know is right. We all see and handle things our own way based on our own knowledge, understanding and perspective, but some of us need to further learn to accept these differences as well. There needs to be more awareness and consciousness towards the things we do and how we interpret the things we see.

In my serious friendships, for example, I am always aware of what I say and do and how it may be digested on their end. Sometimes if you aren't careful, you can lead someone astray by not coming across concrete on your values and what you are and are not willing to do. I try to make a solid statement that I am not going to allow myself to be "walked-on" or disrespected while still treating everyone how I would expect to be treated in return. I've also found that it's important to avoid saying or doing things that might be considered above the level for that relationship. By doing this, I am holding out for something that is going to be much more beneficial to me in the long run, because I have stuck to my values and refuse to settle or give into counteracting views. Sometimes, however, this leads to people inferring that I am just not capable of having a serious relationship.

Sacrificing your individuality to participate in something that isn't defined under your standards or values won't always lead to happiness. I have learned that words can be very powerful, and saying things, such as "I love you," too early in a relationship, for example, can lead to serious problems. If you should find yourself in a situation that isn't where you want to be or that is requiring you to step away from any of your standards, it would be hard to go backwards and take back what you may have previously said or done. Doing things like this that aren't really "you," in order to please someone else, can be damaging to the elements of the relationships, such as trustworthiness and reliability, as well as personal self-esteem. If someone can't be in a relationship without altering their personal standards, then, chances are, the friendship isn't true and honest. Sometimes this means being judged by others who don't agree that compromising your personal standards is not the best way. We're each given our own shell to live under, though. Our personal restrictions and means of retreat from situations must be taken carefully into consideration by understanding that each person's "shell" protects him or her differently.

I feel that people need to learn to be more understanding of each other. Just as a gardener has to be aware of different plants' needs in order to care for them properly, people need to be treated and respected in this way as well. Each plant grows best under its own personalized

conditions. You can't expect one lifestyle to fit for all, and you can't have the attitude that a certain way of doing things is the right and only way. Allow yourself to be unique! Every turtle has a slightly different design on its shell. Be the person that you are comfortable being, even if others seem to have different tactics than what comes natural to you.

So many people look at how things "appear" to be and base their understandings on the "easy observations," rather than putting effort forth in discovering what is really "behind" that person and what dwells deep within them. If they see someone always eating alone in the school cafeteria, day after day, they immediately conclude that that person has no friends and, therefore, must not be the type of person who anyone would want to get to know. In this case, they might cast their eyes down upon them. In reality, that may just be the only time that person is able to have "happy solitude."

Some of my friends see the fact that I do my work and I'm conscientious as a negative aspect. Once, a friend practically called me a "goody-goody" to my face and then quickly tried to cover by saying, "Not that wanting to excel in everything and in school is a bad thing!" Because I didn't spend all my time going out with my friends or participating in every school activity, she assumed all I was concerned about in my life was being more successful than everyone else instead of relaxing and enjoying life. Our definitions of "enjoying life" vary drastically, however. Going out every night to party is not my idea of absolute fun. A quiet evening either by myself or shared with one or two friends for quality time is more satisfying to me. I've learned that these disagreeing people simply have a different disposition, conscience, work ethic, or schedule structure that works for them than I do. That's fine, as long as there is also understanding!

I am a quiet person. It comes by nature! Some people often seem offended by my silence at times and sometimes accuse me of not liking them and so forth. I simply set about my business and don't interfere in other people's space. I'm a private and reserved person, and sometimes I just don't feel comfortable sharing some things with other people. I often don't just hand out unnecessary information unless asked or provoked. I am more comfortable keeping things to myself to avoid giving them fuel for any further misjudgments, especially when something has a risk of unintentionally leading to something that might go against my personal standards.

This isn't the only reason, however, that I am often quiet. You can learn a lot about a place or person by being silent and sitting back to observe it or them. This is a great way to learn about someone when you really set your senses to work and stay focused. If you're doing all



the talking, your mind is too preoccupied to fully absorb everything they have to offer in return. When you step back and take everything into consideration, such as interaction and reactions with or to their surroundings, you're able to take that person's attitude and character out of direct context. You might be able to catch a glimpse of the bigger picture and see why that person might do, say, or be like they are.

Many people put this into practice at store parking lots. While they're waiting outside in the car for someone who is shopping, this is an excellent opportunity for them to "people watch" and study different behaviors of people unaware of their observations. You can pick up on a lot of things from people about whom you might not otherwise give a second thought. Seeing how they respect certain pieces of property, react to someone who carelessly bumps into them or cuts them off, or how they handle various tasks or obstacles might make you view someone differently. You are able to stand back and observe the whole picture rather than being physically involved in the situation and unable to gather all the contributing factors. Being actively involved in a situation such as this, or simply a conversation with someone, limits your ability to gather a complete and truthful perception because of all the various distractions that might cause you to oversee an important aspect of the other person. We should learn to be more silent and let our senses guide our perceptions, so we aren't too hasty in making judgments.

Those who have taken the time to really know me have continually admitted that I am not at all what they thought I was when they first met me. Not too long ago, a friend and I found ourselves starting to take our relationship deeper. We started spending more time together and found ourselves revealing things about ourselves, as far as interests and hobbies go. We really stopped to take the time to see each other in different perspectives than mere friends passing in the hallway. He was astonished to find out that I love boats, fishing, camping, and just simple things in life such as sitting outside in the dark! These are the things that help me forget about the day's troubles and get back in touch with my priorities. I need times that I can be alone, one on one with no one other than myself. This friend said that he had never imagined me liking such things based on what he had always known of me and thought of me. After he had taken the time to learn some of these things, he gained a much more meaningful understanding of me and the person that I really am.

It is often just second-nature for people to unconsciously categorize others and pre-judge them based on first impressions, or rather "outer shell observations," without first gathering the deeper meaning of those observations. I have run in to many situations where people tend to jump to conclusions before knowing the

facts or without keeping an open mind for how things really are rather than how they appear to be. They see the turtle hiding in the shell, but don't take the time to look inside the shell and see what the turtle is really doing in there and what it's thinking or feeling inside its uniquely built world.



Zach Krieder



Things that help me forget about the day's troubles and get back in touch with my priorities. I need times that I can be alone, not in one with another man myself. This friend said that he had never imagined me being such things based on what he had always known of me and thought of me. After he had taken the time to read some of these things, he gained a much more meaningful understanding of me and the person that I really am.

It is often just second-nature for people to unconsciously categorize others and judge them based on first impressions, or rather "inter-ship observations," without first gathering the deeper meaning of those observations. I have run into many situations where people tend to jump to conclusions before knowing the

Beauty Queen

Brooke Peters

Beneath layers
of whale blubber and petroleum,
a pale, dry, lifeless face
looks out,

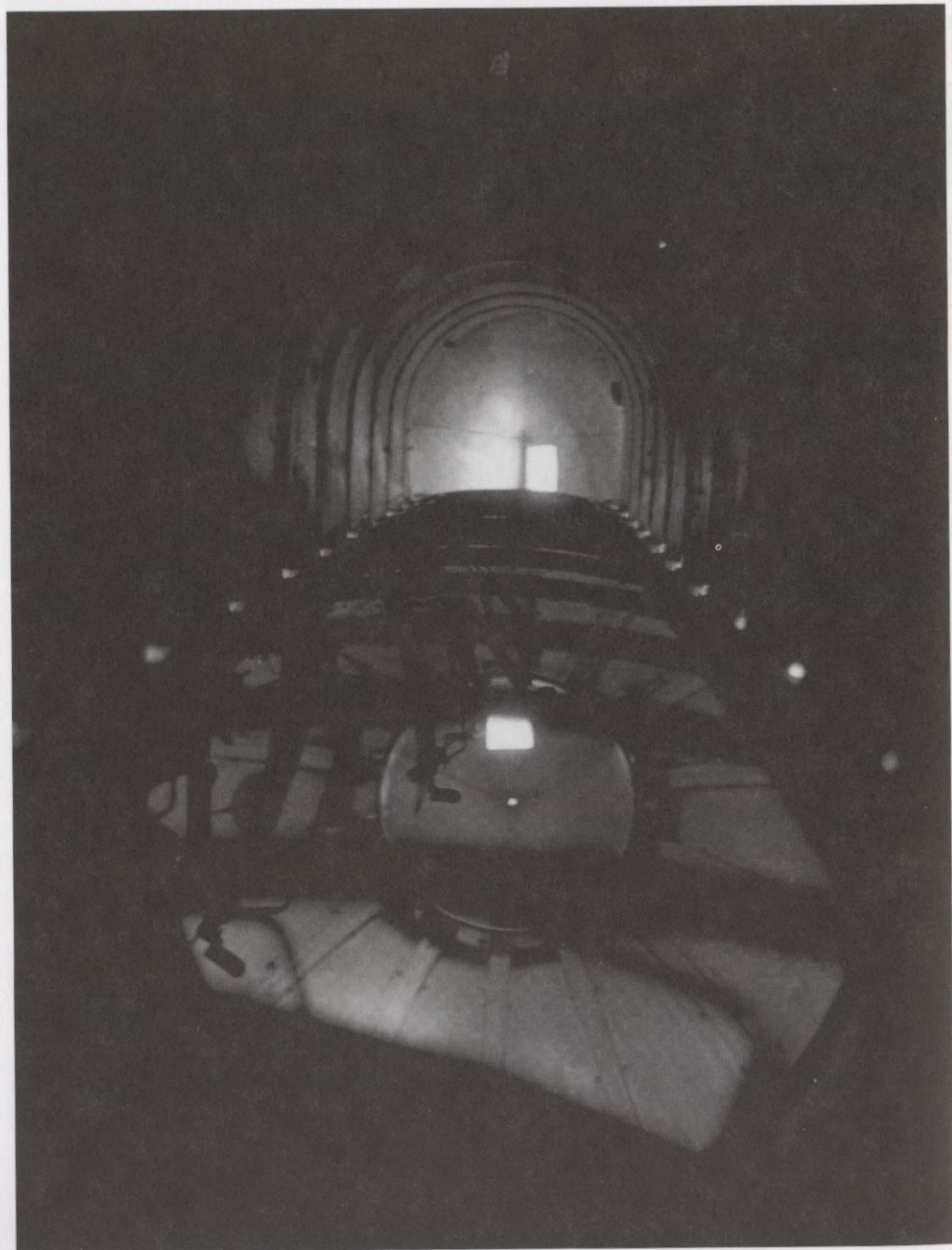
the hues of
humanness
reflecting off broken bits
of glittering glass washed along the shore.

Stop the compulsion
of buying a new shade of lipstick
every time you visit the store.

Like a compact,
in your tiny folded nest,
you reflect conformity.
Still you shimmer
clearly like a pot of gloss,
melting individuality
on the dashboard of your mind.



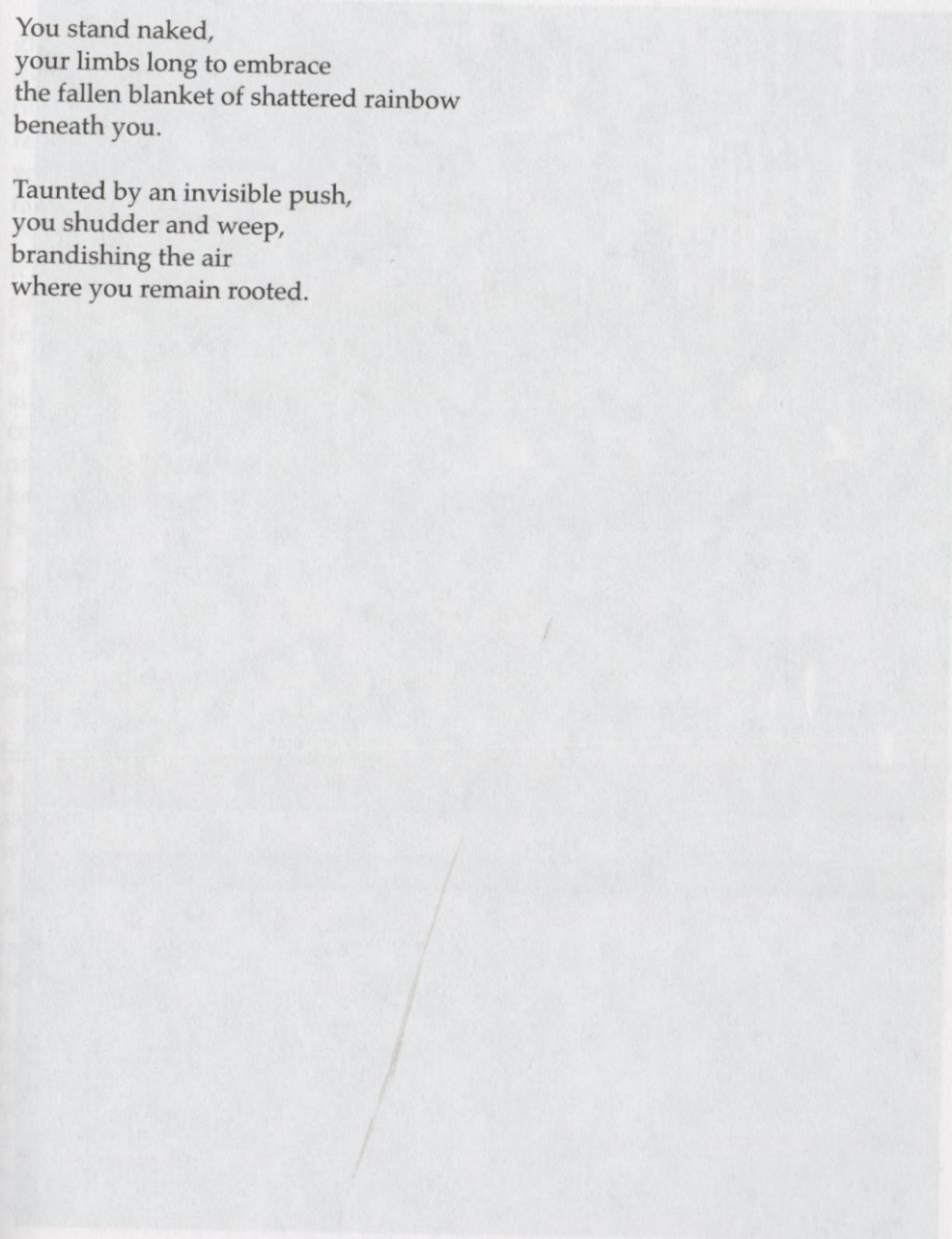
Brooke Peters



Dana Ciciliot

You stand naked,
your limbs long to embrace
the fallen blanket of shattered rainbow
beneath you.

Taunted by an invisible push,
you shudder and weep,
brandishing the air
where you remain rooted.



Brooke Peters



An Island For a Day

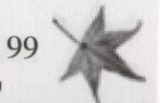
Robert Doyle

Picture yourself a scared ten-year-old child, stripped and isolated in a glass box. There is light somewhere, but you can't quite find it. You look to your right, but it's as dark as a country road on a moonless autumn night. You look left, but it's just the same dark abyss. A 180-degree turn reveals a blinding spotlight of inspection. The crowd is not visible as you look out into the light, but you can sense people staring at you, faces pressed against the glass, waiting for you to do anything so that they can criticize everything. All of a sudden, you realize just how quiet it is. The silence is deafening, so much so that you can hear your own panting breath. You curl up like a mouse in the corner, trying to hide from everyone. This is it, your very own hell. At this point, you're afraid to think, too scared to cry, and too traumatized to talk. You begin aimlessly fumbling around the tiny box, trying to grasp anything. The combination of blinding light and overwhelming darkness take sight out of the equation. The quest seems pointless, but you're driven to keep going. Finally you've got it! In your hands is everything you have been wishing and praying for: comfort.

This is how I felt the first day of school after moving from Philadelphia. I was completely alone. I had no friends to make the transition easier, nor would I attempt to make any. I had nothing, knew no one, and had no choice but to stay. Regardless of what John Donne said, I was an island.

Before the move, I thought I would have no problems. I was from the big city, and these were simple mountain people. In a way, I felt like a dove among pigeons, like I was better than them all. I figured I could say a few "city" slang words and mention some street names; they would all be impressed. I had it all figured out.

My first opportunity to put "Plan Impress" into action was the bus ride to school. Living in the city, I'd always walked to school; I wasn't really sure what to expect. After a five-minute wait on the corner, I heard the big yellow elephant rumbling up the road. The beast came to a screeching halt, and I prepared to board. Grease, oil, dirt, and exhaust fumes all mixed together to create an invisible cloud of stench that hit me as soon as I stepped foot in the door. The seats seemed to go back a hundred rows, each one with kids packed like sardines. The sea of children sounded like an angry mob, each wave screaming at the top of his lungs. I waddled row by row, with my over-sized book bag hitting people as I went, looking for an open seat. It was as if I were walking



my last walk down the aisle of death row on my way to the electric chair. All eyes seemed to be glued to me, following my every step. The crowd of children lowered their voices from a deafening roar to an inaudible whisper as I passed. Finally I found the lone green-leather protector that would cradle me the entire ride. This experience was all too new to me. I made no attempts to speak and didn't make eye contact with anyone. During the journey, I kept my focus on the scenery visible through the window. I kept my mind off my current surroundings only by imagining what the actual school day would be like. The ride seemed to take an eternity. I didn't notice a sign for New Jersey, but I didn't think, after driving all this time, we were still in Pennsylvania. We just kept going. Everything looked the same; the road was always narrow and winding, and there were trees everywhere. Finally, out of nowhere, the school was visible, but after the long lonely ride, my confidence had dropped. That didn't matter though; it was time to start the day as the bus quickly pulled into the parking lot.

Everyone lined up single-file to leave the bus. There I was, in the parking lot, not knowing what to do next; I was lost. Quickly, I located a group of students going in through the front doors, and I followed. Luckily, the main office was the first visible room as I entered. Scared and shy, I forced myself to explain my situation to the secretary at the front desk. She had me sit and wait as she looked up files and filled out papers. The first bell went off, and all the children scurried to their homerooms. I waited another five minutes, and the secretary was ready to lead me to my new classroom.

I followed closely behind her, only speaking to answer the assault of simple questions she laid on me. The hallways were bright and clean; the school had just been built that year. With neatly placed yellow, red, blue, and white blocks, the walls looked like legos. We seemed to walk the toy maze for miles. Each corner led to an even longer hallway, followed by another corner that did the same thing. I didn't think we'd ever find it. Finally though, we stopped, and it was time to see my new haven.

However, instead of a warm welcome, I was greeted with blank stares. I felt eyes scanning every inch of my body. Once again, as on the bus, the whispers started. I couldn't understand the reaction. I didn't think I was that much different from them. Then I heard one of the whispers. "Look at that nasty jacket," the voice said. I couldn't believe it. I was completely insulted. The sole purpose of purchasing the green, flannel, winter coat was to fit in. I assumed everyone with trees in their yard dressed like lumberjacks. As quickly as I possibly could, without drawing too much attention, I took the jacket off and

hung it in the closet. That comment sent me into an even deeper isolation. Luckily, class was beginning and I was able to sit by myself for about an hour.

The second bell rang, and it was time for a three-minute break. I'd decided to muster up enough courage to talk to some of my new classmates. Boy was that a bad idea. As soon as I started talking, people again stared and giggled. I had simply asked where the water fountain was. They seemed to criticize everything I did. Immediately they made fun of my accent, telling me I didn't say things the "right" way. The notion that I was better than everyone quickly changed to that of being the outcast. I didn't look different from any of them, but I certainly felt different. It was very obvious that the other kids weren't impressed by my being from the big city. I felt like a dirty stray dog that no one wanted to touch, much less care for. Once again feeling all by myself, I went back to the closet to get my jacket.

While wearing the jacket, I was no longer isolated. This was no ordinary coat. Not only did it offer warmth, it was my only friend during the loneliest time of my life. It offered protection that nothing else could. There was no way I was going to take it off now. With my head tucked inside, no one could make fun of me, or at least I wouldn't have to hear them do it. I wouldn't have to look at anyone, seeing them staring at me. The lumberjack coat was my savior. I clung to it like it was the last life preserver on the Titanic.

With the day slowly creeping by, I was holding up as best I could. Since I was only in elementary school, the experience was a bit easier. As a class, we didn't have to switch rooms. That meant I was able to sit quietly in my seat without interruption for most of the day. Along with that, I was still young. The teacher realized that the transition would not be easy, and didn't expect me to participate immediately.

So there I sat, by myself, waiting for the time to pass. Finally, the bell rang and the class left for lunch. I had felt like I was going to cry all day, but the sound of everyone's feet rustling out the door, leaving me behind, triggered every emotion I had bottled up. Immediately, I began weeping. The teacher quickly noticed and took me aside. She offered some encouraging words about how everything would get better after the first day. She was so sweet and so confident that I couldn't help but to feel better. A bit happier now, I went off to lunch.

Before I reached the cafeteria, I could hear the roar of all of the students. As soon as I opened the door, my heart sunk into my stomach. I was once again alone, but this time my isolation was magnified ten-fold. All seven classes were jammed into one room. Over 200 kids my age congregated into one place, and I was by myself. I couldn't bare the possibility of everyone staring and laughing again, so I didn't even



bother to join anyone. I waited in line for food by myself, sat by myself, and ate by myself. Every minute dragged on for hours. Blocking out all of the surroundings, I was in a trance. My vision seemed to be blurred, and the only sound was the constant and quick drum of my heart beating. Trying to keep myself occupied, I ate my lunch very slowly. The last thing I wanted was to be by myself with nothing to do. However, it didn't matter how small of a bite I took; the clock was not moving. Piece by piece, I gradually finished my lunch. There was nothing left to do now but sit and wait. As seconds slowly faded into minutes, I couldn't keep my mind off of one shimmering idea; my situation could not possibly get any worse. Searching my brain in an attempt to find something that could further dampen my day, I was interrupted by the bell that ended lunch. That's when I realized the lonely train had just shifted into higher gear.

All at once, like a stampede, the children rushed through the doors to the outside play area. It was time for recess. How had I forgotten about the most exciting part of the day? Just looking out into the vast fields, seeing everyone, I knew I would have a tough time getting through this half hour.

For a young kid, recess was like a piece of Christmas morning thrown into the middle of every school day. It gave a break from work and allowed you to have fun with your friends. Unfortunately, with no friends, I was like a bad child that receives coal in his stocking. The day was beautiful; the sun was shining, birds were flying, and the recently-cut grass was crisp and green. It was almost enough to make me take my coat off, but instead, I just sat in the grass watching as everyone else had fun. Straight ahead were kids on swings, slides, and monkey bars. To the left, there were people playing basketball and football. On my right, there were kids running around playing tag. Each and every one of them had a smile on his face as if he didn't have a care in the world, and there I sat, alone with the sudden urge to start crying again. But before I could muster up some tears, I heard something over the gleeful laughter of the children. It was a voice, a child's voice. "Would you like a krimpet?" Was I hearing him right? Had he directed a sentence to me that didn't include an insult? "Excuse me?" I said, startled yet excited. He repeated, "Would you like a krimpet. It's a cake."

Suddenly the spotlight went off and a dimmer light came on. I could see one boy in front of me holding clothing. I wanted badly to reach out and take them, but I was still in my box. I was reaching desperately, swinging my arms, but I hit nothing but glass. Just as I was about to give up, other students started to appear. At first I began to feel scared again; I didn't want them staring and laughing at me anymore.

But with the light on them, I could now see that they weren't belittling me at all; in fact they were trying to break down the walls. Each of them began to violently swing at the glass as if they were trying to rescue me, but

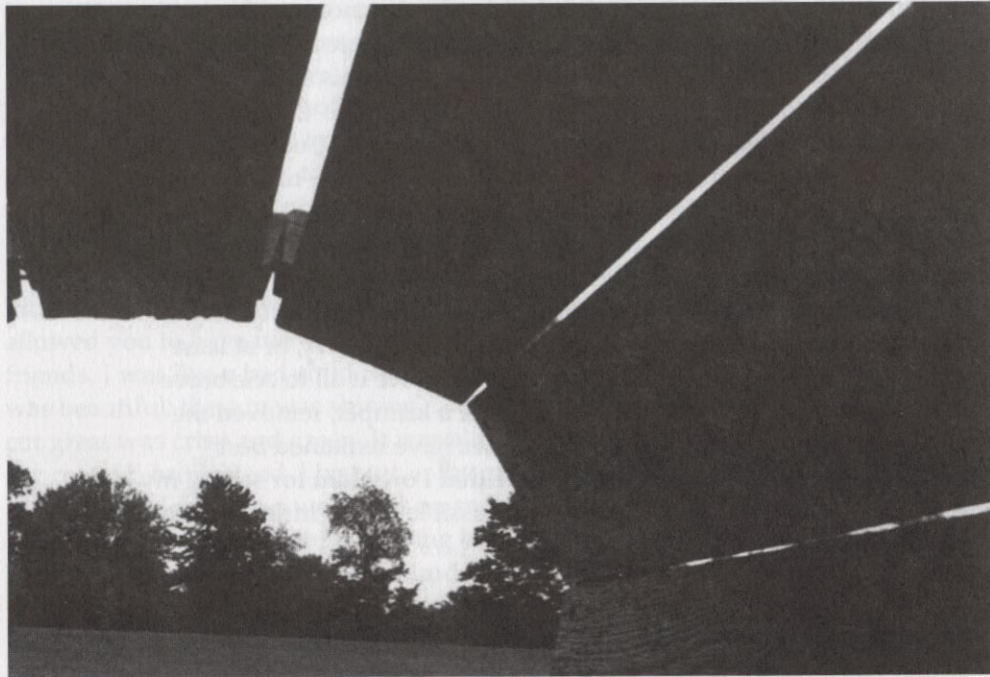
the glass would not break. Even with everyone trying to reach me, I was still isolated. My heart was broken, and I didn't know what to do. Why couldn't I just get out of the box? Suddenly I had an idea. I began banging on my side of glass as they went at their side. All of a sudden, it began raining glass. It was the greatest feeling of my life; I was free. All I had to do was help everyone else get to me by not shutting them off. I was no longer scared and naked. I wasn't on my own and had no need for protection.

The kids let me join in with them doing everything. I played basketball, swung on the swings, ran around, laughed, had fun, but most importantly, I took off my jacket. I didn't need it anymore, and it was only holding me back. Then, as quickly as the fun started, it ended. The bell rang again, and it was time to get back to class. This time, however, the rustling feet didn't trigger tears; I was smiling ear-to-ear because I was part of the crowd. I had friends. I couldn't believe it, actual friends. We got back to the room, and I couldn't wait to volunteer to answer questions. With friends, the rest of the day went smoothly.

Looking back, I now know that the move was the best thing that has happened to me. It made me a stronger person. I know how it feels to be so alone that you can't help but cry, and I know what to do about it. I also now know that you can't make friends unless you try, or at least don't shut people off completely. I pretty much owe it all to one brave ten-year-old boy who, by simply offering me a krimpet, removed me from my isolation. Throughout the years, we have remained best friends, and he often jokingly reminds me that I owe him for saving my life. I have learned that no situation is impossible with a little help from your friends.



Katrina Brown



Conflict

Second Floor Stevenson Library

Paul Salamh

Bricks flush against pale yellow shelves,
forced together.
An index card reads Alcove 210.
Sighs from the air conditioner,
the drone of electricity walking through lights.
Drapes shadow uneven books that read
like a topographical map.

White letters on black binding:
Black Sheep by Christopher Sykes,
not opened since Kennedy's assassination.
Pages turn a crusty yellow;
they have no other color to turn.
Smell of stale musty paper,
like the pages of your parents' yearbooks
in a box above their closet,
unaware of purpose,

much like myself, sitting here between
Feminist Issues and *The Naked Heart*,
my pencil in my right hand,
my book in my left.

Thoughts

Alan A. Vezina

Poetics

When poets, writers, boy bands, or any other artistic folk start comparing themselves to those of the past, I get a little nervous. I shouldn't talk, as I've developed a pathological fear of becoming Marianne Moore, but I've already started—talking, that is, not becoming Marianne Moore (though I suppose it could be argued by pedantic undergrads in the far distant future)... I once thought of becoming a transcendentalist, so as to condemn my peers with greater efficiency, but I realized something: above all, a transcendentalist should never admit to being a transcendentalist. Emerson, an author who dislikes me just as much as I him, once posed the question, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"

Take your pulse with your fingers—the answer to that question lies in the hands of every person that creates, not in the necks of the dreamless sleepers pumping up and down on the treadmills of the local Bally's. How much can you possibly learn by sucking on a marrow that has been empty for your entire life?

The Sky

Take a moment once in a while to just look up at the sky and appreciate the fact that infinity (pending approval) hangs over your head. I left New York City to come to this hamlet because of the view. People laugh when I tell them that, but I mean it with all the seriousness that a pretentious and snobby writer can muster from behind the depths of sarcasm. I hate to sound like a hippy (thank God I'm a card-carrying Republican), but nature possesses an essence that artists have hopelessly tried to emulate since we first escaped the primordial soup-kitchen. It's something that we will always try to emulate, until the eggs finally rise up and take us all.

An artist has two options: to spend life in the shadows of giants or not to. Too many people are developing stooped backs from bending over and studying the shrubbery of South American rain forests.... As long as a writer crawls on the forest floor with the leeches, the tree coverage will always block the view of the sky. It is not until the writer can stand atop a barren hill that he can appreciate the crystalline sky.

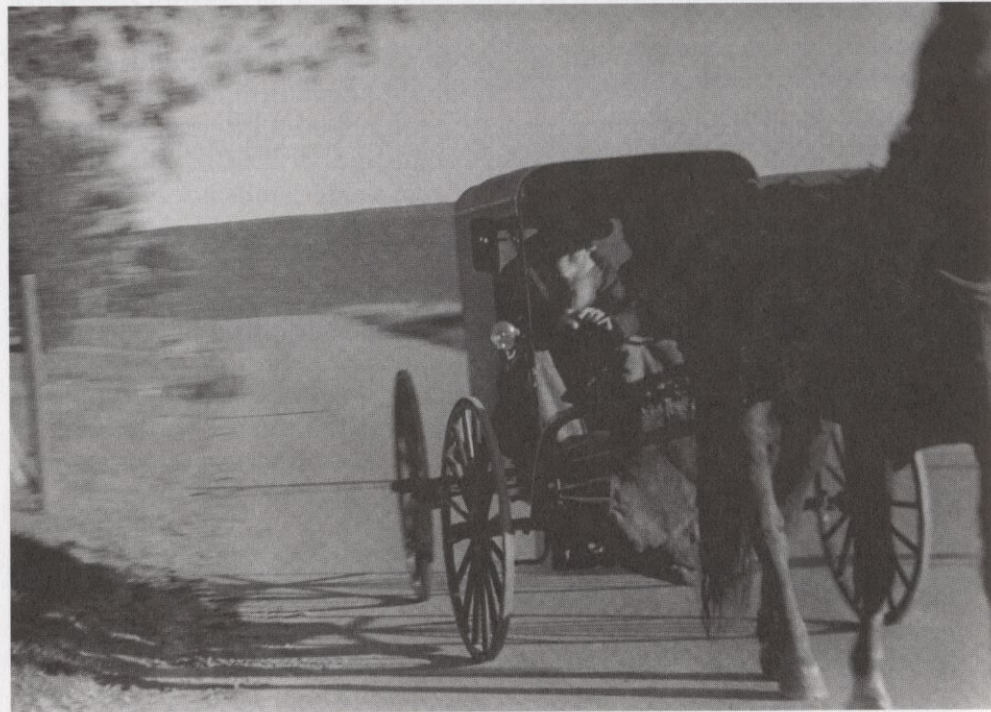
Conflict

There is a certain sentiment brewing in the filaments and firmaments of art that the Dionysians are too fogged over to hear: the post-modern era is a joke. It is a floundering fish washed up to the shores of the collective ocean, waiting for a sentimental Darwin or a kindly Pope to come along and kill it. The death is inevitable, with or without the Pope, but there is a certain artistry (irony) in gutting an era with a serrated blade and turning it into a well-intentioned dinner.

There are too many writers who are good, not because they are good, but because they are supposed to be good. We live in a world where taste has become a moth, fluttering in the darkness—fixating on any flash of light, no matter how brief or how dim. If we don't watch our path, we too will wash up onto the shore like bloated, beached whales at the macabre carnival.



Autumn Good



Grandfather's Hat

Tyler VonNeida

This worthy hat hangs
like a retired baseball jersey,
carrying the allure
of the diamond,
placed upon the head
of a four-star general.

Years experienced
bring many tales to ear...
protection from falling
shards in WWII,
to wedding day's finest attire.

This hat now an eagle,
prestigious and powerful.

Wrinkles display earned
stripes of passion,
once embellished by
the old man.

Folded bill tastes of salt,
remnants shielded from summer's
furnace of shining hair.

This worn piece hangs
on his wall,
undaunted crown of style,
worn until the time comes
to retire it forever.

Look Right Through

Alan A. Vezina

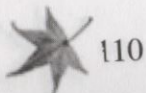
We thought
they knew
something.
Staring up at
blind men tripping,
we thought it was
a dance.

All we know is that
which we can love—
no secrets, no truth,
no realisms lie
beneath the breast
of any human.

I love the sunrise;
I love the music
of two hearts beating
against each other
in the darkness.
Each morning I wake,
I find joy with the fact
that the sky is still blue.

My current fantasy,
my current thing,
is hope in a forever.

But in a flawed,
imperfect,
worldly world,
there are no heroes:
all things grow
only to be stricken down.



Seeing Them from Across the Street (for Malcolm)

Matthew Burne

*"Almost never does he really see you
as he sees himself... You'll find
that as mixed in him as his bone structure
is his sometimes subconscious conviction
that he is better than anybody black."*

They're enriching the street.
She covers her tall legs
with a flowered skirt
as if they were two pieces
of varnished furniture.
The other's got tight
round shoulders; he displays
a thick scar stretched
across the left one like a symbol
of his lineage. And the hair:
his high-flown and thread-like,
hers shiny and French-braided,
falling from each side.

They walk by the Turkey Hill
and the neon Coors Light
windows, carrying themselves
now patiently down
the long sidewalk
outside the synagogue
until they pass it by
like a momentary movement
of the humanities
occurring only here, each night
along this street.



And here I am, drawn out
of the gas-station,
observing from behind
the hazy window
of a beat-up Oldsmobile,
wondering where they're off to,
if I should stop to talk.

But I don't. Instead
I take the highway,
where there's a display
of "God Bless America"
bumper stickers
stuck in a traffic jam.

They're watching the street
Scurrying her tall legs
with a bowered skirt
as if they were two pieces
of varnished furniture.
The other's got light
round shoulders; he displays
a thick neck stretched
across the left ear like a symbol
of his bridge. And the hair
his high-crown and brush-like
hair shiny and frizzed-out
falling from each side.

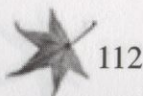
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and the neon Coors Light
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until they pass it by
like a momentary movement
of the furniture
occurring only here, each night
along this street.

The Naked Buttocks at Sunrise

Mary Altmire

Like two peaches pressed up against each other
in a fruit basket,
the morning breeze blows over them,
raising the soft sensual hairs from the dimpled flesh,
pale when untouched,
flustered when squeezed.

Robert Doyle is a business manager in Computer Science. He was born in Philadelphia, PA, and has been playing basketball since he was a child. He is a member of the Philadelphia 76ers and has been a fan since he was a child. He is also a member of the Philadelphia Eagles and has been a fan since he was a child. He is also a member of the Philadelphia Phillies and has been a fan since he was a child. He is also a member of the Philadelphia Flyers and has been a fan since he was a child. He is also a member of the Philadelphia Flyers and has been a fan since he was a child.



Contributors' Notes

Mary Altmire is currently a senior here at Lock Haven majoring in Early Childhood Education. She was introduced to *The Crucible* in her Poetry Workshop Class

William Barnhart is a fan of James Joyce.

Steven Beatty is a 2-D art major from Blakeslee, Pennsylvania. His favorite medium is photography, and he most enjoys taking interesting shots while using various photography techniques. Steve's main goal in becoming a 2-d major would be to land a job working for a newspaper, magazines, or for some artistic publication.

Mathew Burne is an English major who enjoys the arts and humanities: particularly poetry, music, and film. He is 21 and currently lives in Scranton, PA.

Dana Ciciliot is a junior majoring in Secondary Education/English with a minor in Speech Communications.

Shannon Marie Dodd was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. She loves reading, but she absolutely loves to write. She has a strong admiration for Stephen King, but unfortunately she says she has trouble writing fiction. She thinks her best work derives from writing about her own life experiences. She doesn't like spending too much time on one thing. Poems are short, sweet, and expressive!

Robert Doyle is a freshman majoring in Computer Science. He was born in Philadelphia, PA, and has been playing baseball since he was about eight.

Jason Fromm is a third-semester freshman with an exploratory major. In his spare time he drinks coffee and solves calculus problems.

Brianne Goldsmith was a B.A. Literature major who graduated in December.

Betsy Henry is a senior graduating in May with a B.A. in English Writing. She dreams of moving to Montana with her family, editing through the internet, and having lots and lots of animals! She would like to thank Nick for helping her find a way back to life and love.

Rachel Kester is a senior majoring in Biology: Ecology and Environmental Biology. She enjoys walking in the woods with her dog, drawing, and writing poetry. Upon graduation, she looks forward to starting a career in environmental biology or whatever suitable job comes her way.

Cheryl Kirkwood is a third-year undergrad in English, with a concentration in writing, and a minor in Women's Studies. She is planning on going into publishing and editing after graduation, May 2004.

Lisa Kiwak is originally from Northeast Pennsylvania. She is a senior Biology major with an ecology/environmental emphasis. She likes to write and participate in outdoor activities in her spare time. After she graduates in May, she hopes to pursue a career with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or in environmental education.

Miranda Krishak is a senior here at LHU majoring in Secondary Education English.

Tiia Lahdesmaki was a Media Management major visiting from Finland in the Fall semester of 2003.

Amanda Lesslie is a senior receiving a B.A. in Graphics and Online Design. She is from New Jersey. She enjoys photography, shopping, and traveling.

Brianne Linn is a 20-year-old sophomore at LHU. She is an English writing major.

Mary Lyter is a sophomore majoring in Psychology and English with a writing concentration. She writes poetry solely for pleasure.

Mary Malmquist is a Senior Theatre Major who enjoys all aspects of expression. She resides in Sloan Fine Arts Center and is a very active participant in the theatrical activities at Lock Haven University. She is currently the president of University Players and Secretary of the National Honorary Theater Fraternity, Alpha Psi Omega, Theta Zeta Cast #198. She would like to thank her family and friends for all of their understanding and support through the crazy ride we call college.

Jen Manley is a senior here at LHU with a B.F.A. in Print Based Graphic Design. She is from Centre County and enjoys mountain biking, climbing, snowboarding, and kayaking.

Abigail Lynn Moore was a freshman at LHU during the 2002-2003 school year.

Tara Myers is a senior here at LHUP with an English/Secondary Ed. major. She's a "townie" who enjoys writing and creating artwork when she's not slaving away in school.

Brooke Peters is a senior, receiving a B.F.A. in Art with a specialization in Online and Graphic Design. She enjoys the outdoors: landscaping, hiking, backpacking, climbing, camping, kayaking, and also likes to travel.

Chris Ruff is a Junior English major. While Chris is not writing or reading, he is either playing basketball for the university or tromping around somewhere in the woods or a local stream searching for some cool single tract to ride or a big ass trout to hit his fly.

Paul Salamh is a senior Health Science major at Lock Haven University with a Concentration in Pre-physical Therapy. He plans on attending graduate school in Philadelphia and receiving his D.P.T. (Doctorate of Physical Therapy). He enjoys running, fitness, and being around family. He says: "No matter what you do in life, do your best and have fun doing it."

Candice Saquin is a twenty-year-old junior at LHU. She is a Psychology major with a minor in Philosophy. She is originally from Kane, PA.

Tiffany Slingerland is a freshman here at LHU, majoring in Art and thinking of dualing in Psychology as well. She loves drawing, playing the piano, expressing herself through writing, horseback riding, and being with her wonderful friends!

Chris Stanonis is from Franklin, PA, and currently in the Master of Liberal Arts program. He has an undergrad degree from Edinboro University in Anthropology. He is also an active amateur photographer.

Jason Turner is a senior at Lock Haven University majoring in art.

Nicholas Trumbauer is a senior who will be spending an extra year at Lock Haven to complete degrees in English and Biology. He enjoys the outdoors and spending time with his dogs. After he graduates, he hopes to go on to law school.

Alan A. Vezina is a senior English major who also plans to minor in sociology.





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