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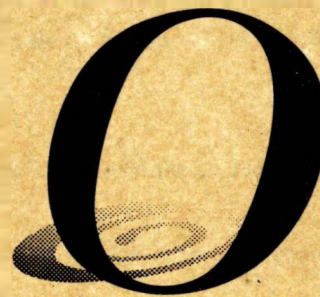
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**Paul Witherington Awards
for High School Writers**

Christopher S. Harris--Coordinator
Desiree Wheaton--Judge



o a k w o o d

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Letter from the Editors

Telling stories is an ancient tradition that humans invented in order to provide themselves with a place in history; and , more importantly, to preserve history through an entertaining medium.

Stories have been communicated through the arts of oration, pictography, and writing.

Oakwood provides SDSU students with a platform where they can tell their stories in the written form and through visual artistry. We all have stories to tell, and the opportunity to be heard is golden.

The platform that Oakwood provides is a great privilege that we encourage all SDSU students to use. Keep the tradition alive!

Many thanks to Jan Hanson, the English Department secretary. Jan has proven to be indispensable to Oakwood and we greatly appreciate her efforts. Also, thanks go out to Professor Dave Evans, Professor Tim Steele, and Professor Mary Haug.

Our most special thank-you goes out to our friend, Lynn Yost, who gave us unlimited guidance in putting this project together.

We can not neglect the student contributors in offering thanks. We are proud to offer students the chance to display their artistic works.

The Paul Witherington Award for High School Writers is an important facet to Oakwood in that it encourages high school writers to develop as storytellers.

This year was a record year for the high school contest, as there were over three-hundred submissions. A world of thanks to Desiree Wheaton who read and judged the high school submissions

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."

-Albert Einstein

Rebecca Weisz and Chris Harris

Oakwood 1998

Editors

University Literature and Art

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After Your Letter
Dandelion*

Julia Angerhofer

The Frog

Amy Bennett

*Fireworks
Dirty Acts*



Gab Ault

Untitled

Rachel Bierman

The Crusade

Allen Brandt

*To Sketch, To Draw
8:51 p.m.*

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Prairie Summer

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Paths Unknown

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Life's Lessons

Nate Maass

Long Blonde Hair

Jason T. McEntee

Destroying "Death Stars"

© Tony Downs

Emilie

Marcey Moss

Shoebox Memories

April Myrick

To My Parents

© Molly Engquist

Shadows

Christy Nebben

The Silence

Amber Noem

Time and Place

© Mark Henderson

Fingernail Clipper

Amber Noem

The End

Tyler Omoth

Tacklebox

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Damion Rassier

Up In The Fields
What Wild Winters Carry

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Circus

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Paul Witherington Awards for High School Writers

First Place Poetry Lynette White Hat
Prayers for those on the Killgore road

Second Place Poetry Angela Tyler
AFTERTASTE

Third Place Tie Poetry Penny Hanke
Unhidden Mysteries

Angie Klein
The Plot

First Place Prose Todd Van Der Werff
Technical Difficulties

Second Place Prose Levi Bard
Race Day

Third Place Prose Daniel Cohen
The Game



Don't Tell Me About Prayers Inside of Coffins

Before I meet the material earth
With a bloody chest and
Toes black from ashes,
I will say
Don't tell me about
Prayers inside of coffins.

Those sweaty night sessions
With fatherly sea shells and ornaments,
I screamed my prayer at the shell
Till my throat sloughed tonsils
Thick to my bowels,
And my ears bled from the echoes.
Sirens of ocean stream through the ear
And make me willing food
For pious waves with anger
White in their eyes.

Little sea shell on the ground
Could never tell me what I found.
Not my keys, not the grail,
Not even an ever-lasting deal.
The one that makes placid waves,
The mind is the only thing left to save
Dancing on innuendoes above the water
And never think about it later.

I will not concede to the oncoming waves
Nor give in to the redundancy of salvation.
The bone is hard,
Mired in blood forever,
Never to be moved
Or stolen away in the purple Galilean night.

When the evening has left
Her timely brand on my forehead,
I may not refuse to melt away
In the absence of soft, varnished idols.

After Your Letter

You can make me so little sometimes
like I'm far away,
a flame living on a petrified sun
shouting at your distant figure
tip-toeing across a desert
till I'm hoarse and sleepy,
yet you offer one searching word
into a dry astronomy,
and we walk side by side
into the desert horizon.

Michael Amon

Dandelion

I hate you.
I hate your yellowed, sagging face
and all its sentimentality.
I hate the fuzzy disintegration
of your fertility
courting the breeze
like a ghost in gliding rapture
to a new, filthy womb.
I hate how you sell yourself to the sun,
but you are not green and cut.
You are no rose.
I am young,
plucking your life-blood,
scattering you over the waiting landscape
in your feeble years.
Later, I grow metallic flowers
with no smell near my pretty lawn.

Michael Amon

The breaking of glass rushes to the floor
And opens up screams in the night,

A heart lies bleeding as red surrounds it
And others simply walk by,

The lightning from the sky tears the soul
And rips it apart for looters,

The moonlight fades away from the clouds
And leaves the blind man unable to see,

The candle dies out with no phlogiston left
And forgets the lady trying to read,

The wings are ripped off from the dove,
Leaving God far away in the emptiness,

And the Frog looks over the masterful destructiveness
It has created through terror.

For it was the screams of terror that the world shouted at him,
And they shoved him away, wishing never to see him again.

They forgot that he was only human,

And that he broke like glass,

And that his heart could bleed,

And that lightning could tear his soul,

And that he could not see without a moon,

And that he could not read without a candle,

And that his wings were ripped off,

And that he could no longer reach

God.

★ Fireworks ★

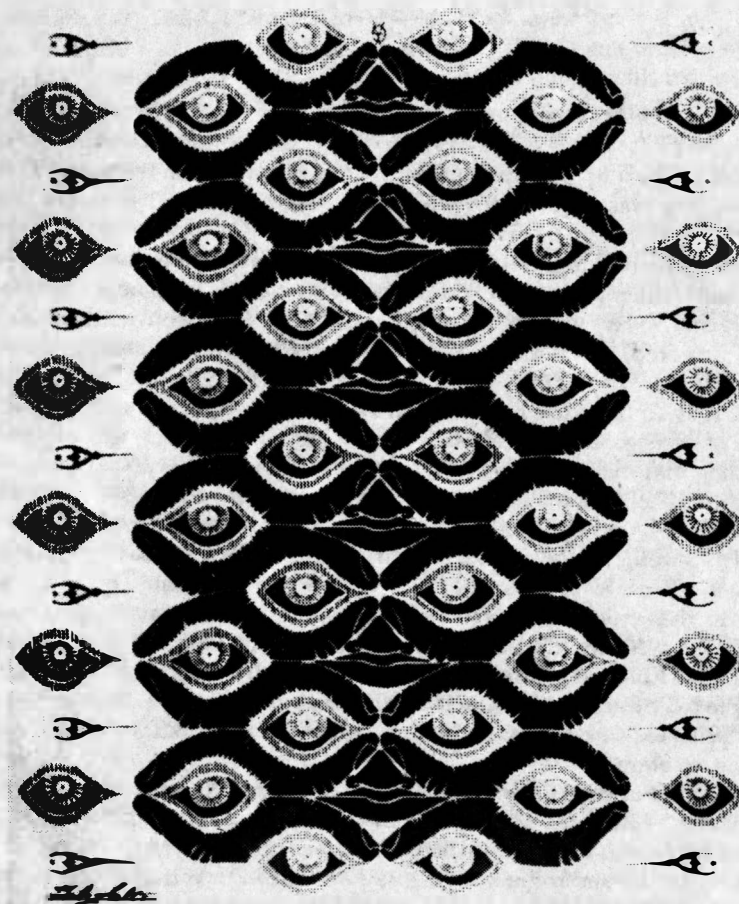
I know I only met you once
And that I'll probably never see you again
But I wanted you to know
It was nice to hold your hand
-long brown fingers entwined with mine
secret squeezes we thought no one saw-
And that if I knew you better
I'd say we had nothing in common
But our hands were meant to be together
-teasing me with soft moist kisses I wouldn't know
showing me a smooth tanned torso
shaped from working out in the sun-
Other than that night, our worlds will never collide
Again
-but your hand whispered secrets and stories
and promises you'd keep-
I think I'll dream about you tonight
 your smile, the golden-boy waves in your hair
 your self-assurance that our digits should not be divided
It was nice holding your hand.

Amy Bennett

Dirty Acts

I look out my window,
 I look between the steel iron bars,
And then I see her,
 And I begin to remember,
Pretty little thing,
 How she brightened my life,
So full of energy,
 And then took it away,
I needed her-
 The lies she told-
Didn't matter that she didn't want me,
 And how they all believed her,
The sane man before I saw her
 I've gone crazy in here
Disappeared,
 Nothing is real,
Tonight is the night
 I can never give back what I've taken
I'll show her I love her
 She calls it rape.

Amy Bennett



Gab Ault
Untitled
Inking

The Crusade

The rain fell with a steady hiss. Once I entered the tin building, the sound became a roar. It was hard to believe that it was only rain and not ice or stones that were pelting the roof of the shed. Shed? It was large enough to house several of the beat up pickup trucks and land-boat cars that were parked outside. That was probably what the building was intended for when it was constructed. That was not what it was being used for that day.

I went to take a seat on one of the hundred or so folding chairs that were set up neatly in rows facing a stage complete with speakers and a microphone and all else that would allow us to hear over the din of the storm. About two-thirds of the chairs were already occupied, mostly by older people. Some of the younger folk of the area were there, too. But it didn't matter what the age was; they all appeared almost excited to be there.

Now, I've been to church. Actually, I've tried out several and I've never noticed that anyone was excited to be there. I've heard of revivals and I'm told that people get excited at those, but I've also learned enough to keep me from thinking that this was a revival. Anyways, this had been going on once a week for the past three weeks and the talk around the area had gotten me curious. Curious enough to get soaking wet and cold to see why everyone else was willing to get soaking wet and cold.

I'm not what you call the most religious of people, but I'm no disbeliever. In fact, I think that I have the best religion of all. I call it the "God helps those that help themselves" religion. This is not to say that I am greedy or self-centered or anything like that. It's just that I've never relied on any organized church to tell me that I'm a sinner or that I've been forgiven or whatever. As a matter of fact, my religion doesn't need a church, just faith. I do what I feel is right for myself and others. If I think that I've done wrong, I mention it to God when I talk to him, but I don't make it a habit to abuse that privilege. Besides, sometimes I wonder if other "believers" are just going through the motions -- "Blah, blah, blah-blah, blah. In Jesus' name, Amen. Etcetera, etcetera."

While I was lost in thought, the building filled. All of the chairs were taken and there was a sizeable crowd at the back. At about the same time, the rain slowed to an occasional "pitter-patter" and finally stopped altogether. The crowd hushed as though signalled by the silence created by the cease of the rain.

Soon, I began to get a very peculiar and frightening sensation. The hair on the back of my neck seemed to stand on end and my skin began to crawl. Although almost everyone else seemed fine, I suddenly felt very cold and not just from my wet clothes.

All of the children present that were under the age of six, there were only about five, began to bawl. And I mean bawl. What was weird was that their guardians did not seem to notice. I couldn't imagine why their parents weren't shushing them. Stranger yet, they all quieted at almost the exact moment the "man" entered the stage.

When that man appeared, I nearly fainted as my fear rose to instinctual panic. I almost fled the building, but my mind was whirling. It was screaming, "Why aren't these people frightened?" and, "Why can't they sense the danger?" all the while it was trying to reason with my fear.

After my vision cleared from that first moment of terror, I did see that I wasn't the only one sensing danger. Those children who had been crying but had been silenced were still red-faced and their mouths were twisted with screams. Their eyes were clouded with terror and though they squirmed, they appeared to be held in place as if by many invisible but firm hands.

Then I shifted my gaze to what seemed to be the source of my urge to flee. The man. "He" seemed to possess two images. I could see what I could only assume all of the other adults and older children were seeing. That image was of a man who was fairly handsome. He could have been anywhere between the ages of 25 and 50. He had dark hair, was tall, brown-eyed, and medium-complexioned. He wore the black of a clergyman. But I could also see what only I and the children who were too young to understand religion was more than having to get dressed up for were able to see. This image was hideous. "He" wore the black of a clergyman. His other features were indescribable.

It says in the Bible that whoever had the honor of seeing God was not able to describe Him, except that He was magnificent. What I saw that day could only be described as maleficent.

Then "he" began to speak. Again, there were two images, or rather, voices. One was, for the benefit of those who appeared to be in a stupor, beautiful, melodic and carried good news and heavenly images. This voice was not perfect as the image for it twisted the Word slightly, just slightly. The second voice was in a language that I could not comprehend. I could nonetheless comprehend its meaning and it was, if possible, even more monstrous than its appearance.

As it spoke, I noticed that tiny "things" were flitting about its maw. A closer inspection revealed minuscule winged creatures. They were revolting in appearance. They had gaunt, twisted features. Some were pale, others black, some blood-red, others a deep purple, yet others a sickening green. I could only guess that the ugly little things were demons, attracted to the evil coming forth in the form of the words pouring from "his" mouth.

My mind began to race as again my reason mixed with panic. I had to get out of there. My mind said, "Save the children!" and, "It will see us!" and more loudly, "Send it back!"

At that point, I began shaking visibly which drew its gaze to me. The fear grew to be so great that it was painful. My heart pounded, my mouth went dry, my head and eyes felt as though they would explode, and my lungs and chest constricted so that I could not breathe.

My mouth opened and I heard my own voice fall from my lips.

I said, "Oh my God." It was the most truly sincere thing I have ever said in my life. I felt the power emanate from "him" and crackle in the air like lightning just before it strikes. "He" seemed to expand and then shrink as the force of "his" wrath was hurled onto me like a brick wall that had been thrown by some enormous hand.

My vision shattered into a million shards with a burst of light. From that point on, I remember very

little except that I prayed. I do know that the battle was fierce because although I had been chosen to survive it, others did not. I am sure that they felt very little pain before they died because they were still bedazzled by "him." At the end, I got the impression of a vast explosion and then nothing.

When I came back to consciousness, the building had been torn apart, chairs had been scattered, and there were people wandering about dazed. There were people lying on the ground, too; some whole, some not, some twisted and mangled. My own body was broken in places, but I remained where I had been when it all began.

Those people from the newspapers and rescue squads credited the destruction to a tornado. After all, it had been rainy. However, they did have trouble explaining why just the one building had been destroyed and not anything else around it except where debris from the building had struck.

As for those who had survived, very few remembered anything, which most people attributed to shock. Those who did have some memory recalled only the good-looking preacher who sadly was missing.

The five children that shared my vision are labeled as "imaginative" when they describe the "tornado" as a "big, black monster that had things flying around it and made noises they never heard before."

Now, I've never been much of a fighter. I've never been real fond of fighting. But this was a war that I am proud to have fought in. It was me and God against evil. I think we won.

Rachel Bierman

To Sketch, to draw

I have a big pencil box at home. I have collected these pencils from all of the desks and lockers I inhabited at Elkton Public growing up. Pencils have told me to “celebrate the century” or to “be all that you can be.” Some are broken and some are little stubs; a few have never been used at all. My favorite cartoon characters have graced my pencils like Garfield and Bugs Bunny. My favorite baseball team, the Minnesota Twins, and my favorite football team, the Minnesota Vikings, also have been showcased on my pencils.

The first time I saw a pencil, I snuck into my Grandpa’s study. It was a flat pencil that my Grandpa Steffen used for sketching. He used a knife to sharpen that pencil since it couldn’t fit into any of the pencil sharpeners in the house. He would sketch houses, churches, school buildings, apartments - whatever he would sketch, he used that flat, white pencil.

He had a big eraser he used to erase some minuscule error on his sketch. The particles of the eraser danced around the old, beaten, wooden desk as my Grandpa carefully brushed the particles with his right hand. The big, green eraser was the same size as my tiny hand. It was hard to hold onto and slipped from my hands every time I tried to pick it up. Grandpa laughed. He carefully put it in my hand and , to my amazement, it didn’t fall!

Grandpa put me on his lap and pulled out a piece of sketch paper from the beaten desk. He handed the pencil to me. Somehow I was better at holding the pencil than the eraser. I would draw lines, squiggles, circles trying to copy what Grandpa did. I showed him my drawing. He smiled and told me it was a beautiful picture. He took me off his lap, grabbed the drawing from my hands and placed the drawing where future Rembrandts, Picassos and Renoirs put their artistic achievements -- on the refrigerator. There it stayed until my Grandpa Steffen passed away and Grandma moved out of the house Grandpa designed.

The flat, white pencil and the big, green eraser are still in the desk my Mom keeps in her bedroom. They are hardly, if ever, used anymore. There they lie, waiting for someone to use them one more time.

Allen Brandt

8:51 P.M.

Right now, the sun is setting,
spry young children dream of a new day
Moms kiss their babes on their little foreheads,
Dads help put the dangerous monsters back into their hideous realm,
students are studying with half-wide eyes for an exercise they're preparing for the day to come
and I am ready to go into my nightly routine
and I listen to the somber cries of a lost,
lovelorn soul proclaiming their poetic chorus to me.

Good night ...

Allen Brandt

**It is old
Seemingly ceaseless
Surrounding with all that is
Tugging gently at first**

clothes,

leaves,

hair,

doors,

It grows stronger

slapping,

whipping,

slamming,

thrashing,

**With all of nature's forces
With all of nature's spirit
Whispering
All the time**

whispering,

calling,

shrieking,

pleading,

**Go where it blows
Listen to what it says
But always remember . . .**

You may be left standing still

alone,

calm,

untouched,

deaf.

died while the snow fell gently from the sky

Grandpa

(by her side)

stood

looking out the window

watching . . . waiting . . .

for us to arrive

We pulled into the parking lot knowing we were losing time

and rushed into the hospital to see

Grandpa

(with nurses by his side)

coming through the big swinging lobby doors

to tell us she had died.

But, he said,

Grandma had been strong and

had waited,

for us to be spotted by

Grandpa, who,

(by her side)

stood

looking out the window

watching . . . waiting . . .

for us to arrive

and then, only then, did

Grandma die while the snow fell gently from the sky.

Have you danced with a stranger
In the dusky dawn?
Spent the night with a lover
And in the morning he was gone?

Have you ever stopped to smell the roses
And been run over by the herd?
Tasted the forbidden fruit of life?
Been poisoned by the cure?

How often do you open your eyes
To watch the sunset fall?
And how often do you play your memories
In your dusty remembrance hall?

Have you known the bitter taste
Of defeat upon your tongue?
Have you seen the innocence
We knew when we were young?

How often have you watched the lightning
With a storm brewing in the sky?
How often have you accepted the answer
Without ever knowing why?

Has the light of life been drowned in your eyes
By the tears of your past?
Have you ever done something today
Then tomorrow wished for it back?

Illusions and deceptions follow
Along the road you must travel.
And sometimes right before your eyes
You watch your dreams unravel.

How often have you sat alone
Your thoughts flowing like the wind?
How often have you walked away
Knowing you can never go back again?

How often have the stars in your eyes
Distorted your present view?
How often have you lied to yourself
Only to believe that it's true?

Father Time will be dying soon
Sister Whiskey is upon the shelf;
Isn't it odd how life can still be lonely
Even when shared with someone else?

Prairie Summer

Long hair streams out behind copper-burnished skin
like golden wheat whipping in the hot prairie wind.

Blowing dirt stings unprotected eyes, squinted tight against the sun;
gritty teeth clenched hard from the strain of work-never-done.

Grass burnt brown by scorching summer sun on the endless plain
is bent almost flat from first too much then too little rain.

Rise before dawn, work hard, sleep well;
life is a circle: winter, spring, summer, fall.

Amy Cissell



Allen Brandt
Paths Unknown
Photograph

6 AM, Tuesday

Shrill ringing wakes me from sleep.
Listening with fogged mind, I hear
hushed conversation, approaching
footsteps, knocking. I open the
door, still shaking the confusion
of early morning and waking too soon.

Warm sunlight spills bright patches
across my bed. I stare; two words
ring clear: "Sharon's dead."

Grief hits like a tornado and
coherency is torn away.
light mocks my grief;
how do I say good-bye?

Amy Cissell

People

As far as the eye can see
there is nothing but a mass of humanity
Bobbing and weaving
In heat that is seething

They struggle to hear
The music they hold so dear
They strive to view
The bands and their crew

At last night falls
They hear their beds call
The day has come to an end
Like the bands and the messages they send.

Jason Currie-Olson

Friendship

A friend is a person
There doesn't have to be a reason
Someone to talk to
Who does not judge you

Somehow they reach your heart
And fit like an essential part
They touch you in a special way
That is a price which you must pay

Friendship is a two way street
A common ground on which two meet
There must be give and take
And compromises each must make

A friend, like a diamond, is forever
Always there just whenever
Always changing its facets
To adjust to the relationship and its assets

Friends, they do not discriminate
And very rarely do they hate
Sometimes, though, they disagree
With certain things that just may be

Friends, quite often show concern
It is a privilege that they earn
For those about which they care
By sharing the love that they can spare

A friend's love should not be wasted
Like a delicate fruit which has been but tasted
it must be cherished to the end
To return the honor of being a friend.

First Kiss

Oh, I remember it well. December 1, 1978, at 8:38 p.m. She was tall, beautiful, and the same age as I. I was 17, a junior in high school, and out of my mind with hormones. We were at the state finals football game. It was cold, windy, and wet, all she had on was a letterman's sweater.

Until that point I had been one of those typical baby faced individuals who constantly had to keep an eye out for the senior bullies who so enjoyed "initiating" us. Scuzzy is what they called me. Maybe that was because I always had short hair. You see, my dad was a big time military man, and well I was, as a result, a military brat. The only type of haircut you would see me with was a buzz. My clothes were never anything special. In fact, I was one of the most plain American boys around. That is the reason my first kiss was so amazing.

As I said, all she had was a letterman's sweater. She had that because she was in gymnastics. I, on the other hand, had one of my dad's old military winter coats and a big wool blanket. I remember it quite clearly. It was the end of the third quarter and we were behind by six points. Just before the end of the quarter, our full-back broke free and ran for a touchdown. I jumped to my feet and screamed. I saw her then. She had huddled right up next to the railing, hoping to find some warm dry place and take a nap. I picked up my blanket and made my way through the throng of the screaming people. When I got next to her I finally recognized her. "Heidi? Hi. You look really cold. Do you want to share my blanket?" I asked. She looked at me with her soft brown eyes and said, "Oh Steven, that is so sweet of you."

I sat down next to her and covered her up all over and watched the rest of the quarter. Just before the fourth quarter started I jumped up and said, "I'll be right back." I didn't know why I was doing it, but next thing I knew I was at the concession stand buying the biggest cup of hot chocolate I could get my hands on. When I got back to their she was all huddled up and getting warm. I sat down next to her and took her hands in mine and said, "here this will help warm you up." Her eyes got big and she said, "Oh you are so sweet, I don't know what to say." Something happened when she took the warm cup from me. It wasn't much, but it was a lot. Our hands met, we looked up at the same time and I became lost in her deep brown eyes.

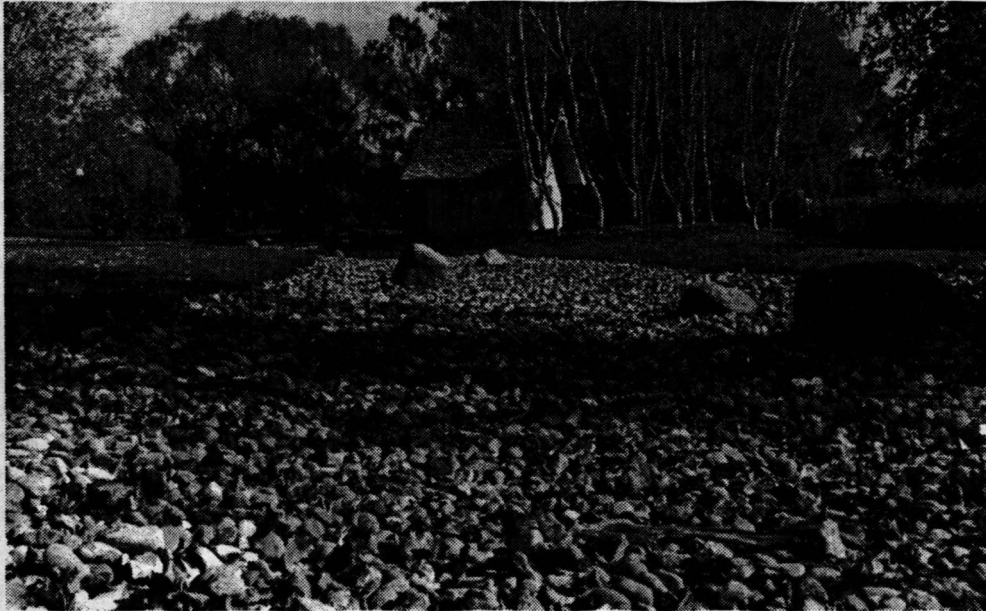
The fourth quarter started and she was sipping her chocolate. All I could think about was, what was that? What is this feeling? Is she feeling it too? What do I do now? I didn't do anything. She did. "Heidi," I said, "are you better now?" "Much better," was all she said, but not all she did. The next thing I knew she had her head on my shoulder and my arm had somehow become wrapped around her waist. I could feel the warmth of her body as she snuggled up against me. It was like the heat of a million suns. We sat there like that for the majority of the fourth quarter watching our team win. Score after score it became more apparent that we were going to win.

I started to caress her back. I don't why. It just seemed like the right thing to do. She snuggled even closer. So close that I thought pretty soon we might become one. Then she moved again. It wasn't a big move or a cuddling move. She put her hand on my thigh and looked up at me. I just about screamed, but something held me back. I kept caressing her, she kept looking at me and in the process we somehow kept getting closer. Now I was pretty sure we were one person. She was so beautiful, her eyes, her hair, her lips. I hadn't noticed how rich her lips were, but now I couldn't take my eyes off them. Full, deep, red lips were coming closer. Suddenly they were touching mine. Then I knew we were one.

I don't remember the last few minutes of the game, all I know is that we won. After the game she gave me a ride home. As we sat in the car in front of my house I looked at her again. Here was this beautiful girl giving a geeky army brat a ride home. I knew I was in for a beating, but I didn't care. We kissed again and I got out of the car. "Good night," I said. "Good night," she said.

Now, as I lie in bed with my wife and think about that night 20 years ago I wonder, how did that happen. Then I roll over and look into those same soft brown eyes and kiss those same red lips. Maybe the nice guy doesn't always finish last.

Jason Currie-Olson



Allen Brandt
Rocky Paths
Photograph

A Healer Battles Death

Rushing through the forest, a silver-haired maiden fought the tree branches and the underbrush. A message had arrived, mere hours ago, from her friends in Mapleden. Fortunately, she had already been on her way to visit, but terrible news had hastened her journey. Misfortune was always hard for her to endure, and this was no exception, especially when a dear friend must suffer the affliction. The young child, a healer of astonishing skill, shook her head to clear it. She couldn't think such thoughts, not when she had finally reached the city. Somewhere inside, writhing in pain, an old ally needed her, and she needed all her concentration to help.

Arriving at the gates, breathless and hurried, the child walked straight to the guardsmen and asked for admittance. However, the soldiers neither recognized the maiden nor honored her anguished request. Nervous excitement was rampant throughout their precious city, obvious in the anxious, uneasy expressions on their pale, saddened faces.

"Please, I have no time! I must see Her Ladyship. Please!" the small, strange girl cried in distress.

"Forgive us, child. we have strict orders to admit no one, save the Crown Princess herself." The superior officer addressed the agitated visitor but stepped back in alarm as the stranger removed her hood nonchalantly, not realizing the significance of her action.

"Lady Silvana!" The other footman bowed, amazed at the presence of his future queen. "Forgive me, forgive us! We had no--"

"There is no need for apology." She said gently, breathlessly. "But, please, I must see the governor. At once!"

There was no hint of demand or command in her voice, but a pleading shone in her silver eyes, and she unnecessarily begged for passage through the city and into the governor's house. Ever patient, the future sovereign waited with the serenity of any citizen. Any other royal personage would have exploded in needless, unwarranted rage, but Silvana calmly stood, knowing that the two gatesmen, in anxiety of the situation and the presence of the crown princess, were trying their best to settle nervous, trembling fingers long enough to open the gates. Moments passed, and the gates parted. Then, with purpose and strength, the maiden stepped into the city.

"I suppose that I should enter." The courageous traveler whispered finally, as she arrived at the Great House of the Governor. Suddenly, absolute, terrible fear began to creep into her very spirit. Silvana had never experienced such an over-powering, all-consuming terror, and she found herself unable to even move.

Even more bizarre than her apprehension, the doors opened wide, allowing a lone man to withdraw. As the stranger drew ever nearer, the Crown Princess felt her fear grow even stronger. She could not even bear to look at the visitor, until her silver eyes caught his. Their eyes locked in an undeniable battle of power and strength. Gaining intensity from within, the newcomer paused, letting his eyes bore straight into her beleaguered soul. Feeling all the confidence drain from her, Silvana could not contain her incontrovertible trepidation, and the wanderer knew it. In fact, he seemed to induce even more might from the knowledge. Closer and closer he came, and farther and farther did the maiden back away. Finally, the young gentleman passed by her without so much as a backward glance, satisfied that he had asserted himself.

As soon as the sojourner had vanished into the crowd of Mapleden, the small, slim girl breathed great gulps of fresh air, trying to dispel the aura of fear and foreboding. Fortunately, she had only seen his eyes. Otherwise, his terrible features would have invaded even her dreams with their devastating supremacy. The eyes would cause enough nightmares, such frightening, appalling eyes, by filling her nights with unending dread.

Alone in the street, lost in contemplation of this newfound terror, the silver-haired adventurer could not shake the consuming emotions of hopelessness, helplessness, and dismay. Such reflections brought such great distress to the young princess that she did not recognize the approach of booted feet, attributing the sound to the beating of her broken, heavy heart, losing consciousness from the dread of another encounter. The governor's husband had been notified of her presence and raced out to find her.

Unfortunately, he was stunned by her limp, fear-stricken body. Shaking her, he tried to reach the child.

"Silvana." A voice called to her out from the gloom. She finally let the shining rays of hope lead her out of the blackness of those unforgettable eyes. Staring down at her, Lord Baird Pieran, Assistant Governor of the city of Mapleden, brought her out of that realm between dark and light.

"Lord Pieran/" She tested her own voice, not knowing if she had retained control for her own self.

"Finally, I've been trying for many long moments to reach you. You seemed to be in another place, Silvana. A place where no one should ever have to be. Want to talk about it?" It was more than a request but less than a command. His concern for her shadowed his sapphire eyes, and the princess felt whole again.

"No." She simply stated, shuddering involuntarily. Baird merely stared hard at her, wishing to comfort the maiden who would bring great assistance to his house, but felt unwilling to press.

"I understand. I'm glad you've come. Oh, Silvana, you've brought such joy to our city. We only wanted to return the favor. Instead, we've brought you another problem." The lord sighed, physically and emotionally exhausted by the strain of his wife's illness and the need to carry out the gubernatorial duties of the surrounding province.

"I'm so sorry." She drew in a tight, forced breath. "I don't know--"

"Father, quickly! You are needed. Both of you are needed." Ancelot Pieran rushed out of the house. The governor's young son, even younger than Silvana, stared at his future sovereign, hope and desperate urgency clouding his eyes.

"I shall come." The visitor replied sternly, bolting for the steps, prepared for any emergency. As the nobleman ushered her into the lady's outer rooms, the child glanced back into the harried, anxious crowds below. Somewhere among the swarm of worried citizens, a stranger wandered with purpose through the streets. Silvana could feel his presence, hear the whispers of his blackened soul, see the cold, harsh glitter of those ghastly eyes. Shaking her head to clear it, the king's eldest child concentrated on the undeniably urgent task before her.

"Lady Pieran!" The future ruler of Zurin cried in alarm, staring open-mouthed at the noblewoman, as she entered the inner chambers. The governor of the fair city of Mapleden lay upon a silken couch, gasping in exhaustion and pain. Every breath taken was pure agony for the stricken aristocrat. Her husband, the lord

chancellor, clasped her hand in worry, identical beads of sweat appearing on his forehead that mimicked those of his ailing wife. The couple were so close, in fact, that each ache and pain that afflicted Lady Collette was visited upon her beloved as well. Finally, unable to fathom the misery in his wife's eyes, Baird turned his pain-filled eyes upon the visiting princess.

"Silvana? Help me. Help her." Baird begged, his voice full of sorrow and distress. Urgency raced through his grieving words; time was precious for everyone involved.

"I'll do what I can. However, I must warn you. I am merely a student of the gift. You would have done better to have sent for my grandfather." The silver-haired young woman sighed, inadequacy oozing in her tone.

"You have never given yourself enough credit, Princess." Baird countered. "You've healed so many people. All I ask is that you try to restore my wife. Nothing more."

"All right, Lord Pieran." she sighed once more, her strength nearly consumed. "I will try my best. That is all I can guarantee. Nothing more." She repeated his two words, and he nodded quietly, hope shining in his eyes. "It will take time, though. Time and Energy. Please, if all of you would wait in the other room. But not you, Baird. I need your help. She needs your help."

As the others filtered out of the room, Silvana withdrew the pack that had been hidden beneath her cloak until now. Everything that she would need was in that small, nondescript knapsack, all of her medicinal instruments and herbal remedies. Feeling the weight of the world upon her shoulders, seemingly, the young princess rubbed her pounding head to try and recollect her grandfather's lessons. Summoning all of her talents, the healer put all of her self, body, mind, heart and soul, into her work. With the lord chancellor comforting her, the lady governor could not have been in better hands.

Ancelot had been lost in thought for so long, he had almost forgotten about his mother's condition, almost but not quite. So it was with great hope, but also great trepidation, that he rose in reception of the silver-haired healer stepping into the anterooms. Rivers of perspiration ran down the future queen's face in bright, shining rivulets. The young heir of Mapleden stared in anticipation of the outcome, but he had great confidence that Silvana would not fail him.

"It is finished." collapsing unto the cobblestones of the balcony, she murmured so softly that Ancelot almost didn't catch her words. "you may see her now." The young man, joyful beyond compare, but also secretly fearful, ran to his mother.

"Bravo." A golden-hired man began to clap.

"Demitrius. I didn't realize that you were here." Silvana said to the royal youth, Prince Demetrius Ancoran.

"I've only just arrived." He charmingly replied. "Do you think I could miss one of your great moments of glory?"

"Glory? What a laugh!" She practically fell into one of the chairs, her exhaustion finally taking its toll.

"Yes, Glory. You are too harsh, and too modest. You are one of the greatest healers in all the world. You far surpass your grandfather's skill and gift. Do you not recognize your own talent?"

"You honor me with your words, Demitrius, false though they are. I am not half that which you believe me to be." She could not look at him. The princess doubted that she could look at anyone. Swiftly, silently,

whispering in a tone as still as Death himself, she confessed her shortcomings, staring out at the resplendent full moon instead of him. "I very nearly lost her."

"Listen to me, Silvana. You are powerful and talented. You shouldn't waste your time in this backwater town, this horrible land." He clutched her shoulders, with a half-mad look in his blue eyes. "You should travel the world. Gather money, power. With your gifts, you could own people. Don't you realize that"

"This is my home. I love this land. Besides, these people need me. I can help them, heal them, make

a difference. I know it. Demetrius, don't you understand that? What being good is? The personal satisfaction received from helping others?" She asked.

"I wouldn't know anything about that, Silvana. Helping others is a waste of time! You can only harm yourself. I've seen you at work in your healing. It taxes your reserve of strength. Seriously, consider this: Travel with me. See the world. I'll be waiting for you in Oakford. My ship sets sail in seven days. come with me, and you won't be sorry. Stay here -- And who knows what will happen."

"You can wait, but you'll be waiting forever. I can't leave my homeland, my family. They need me." She said, shrugging him off.

"Fine. Suit yourself, but don't come begging me for favors when things don't go your way."

"Farewell, Demetrius. Good sailing to you." she clasped his arm in comraderie, to settle things favorably. He smiled mysteriously and walked off, leaving the silver-haired healer with an uneasiness that choked her very soul and made her question her own resolve.

Joanna R. Even

The Night They Drove Old Disco Down

Oakwood Vol. 2, Iss. 7 [1998], Art. 1

*They, hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.*

-John Milton

*Staying alive,
staying alive,
ah, ah, ah, ah,
staying alive.*

-The Bee Gees

When John Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, I was 11 months old. In 1968 I was more interested in Captain Kangaroo than Bobby, more fascinated by Play-Dough than Martin, and more concerned with naps than Vietnam.

It seemed that all the world had an opportunity to move from stability to turmoil and back to stability. I was born into turmoil, and the stability of the 80's only bored me. While other generations sat back to relax, I sat with my peers and grew ever more concerned. After all, these were supposed to be the most exciting and tumultuous years of our lives.

And yet, through the malaise, I recall one night when we rethought everything we had once held dear. None of us would be the same.

It was Friday night; I was dressed in my best white suit (with its necessary black psuedo-silk, open-necked shirt) and I was dancing the Hustle while Donna Summer sang sweet melodies to the beat of the pulsating lights buried in the floor.

We were wild and decadent. Each of us secretly prayed the crowd would willingly move to the side so we could unleash our dynamic solo; a frenzy of dancing. It would be the mating strut of the 70's party animal.

It was late that night; most of us had stayed at home to watch the Village People on The Merv Griffin Show before coming to the disco. We didn't care, we thought the night would go on forever.

This was our opportunity to scandalize our parents. Without draft cards, we were reduced to burning up the dance floor.

Suddenly, the clock struck two and a bright light flashed in our eyes. Someone had turned on the lights, not the funky flashing colored strobes we danced the Bump to, but the daytime lights.

They were garish lights and they hid nothing.

We stared at each other. As if at once, we all knew we had made a terrible, terrible mistake. As the women tried to wipe away the excess make-up they had applied, I realized that polyester suits itched.

What could we do, we were trapped. There was nothing left but to lie to one another.

As we stood in the parking lot wondering if any store would sell us a pair of jeans at 2 a.m., we avoided looking anyone in the eye while we mumbled, "I always hated disco."

Embarrassed and dazed, we went fitfully to our beds.

The next morning, we woke up and voted for Ronald Reagan.

Orpheus

As we walk the blood-dark path,

I feel her eyes on me;

Beyond the fog and her shroud,

I feel her breath on me.

She'll die if I look,

I'll die if I don't.

Michael L. Griffin

A Life ... A Death ... A Name ...

It seems as though many friends have been taken from this world,
after a very short stay and that has gotten me thinking. Thinking about
Life ... Death ... My Life ... My Death. So I would like to share my thoughts ... just in case.
Death. I do not see this part of Life as horrible or something to worry about. And yet I
wonder ... what will happen to my body when it can no longer function? I believe my soul will
be floating around and watching and listening ... everything ... everyone.
Life. It is great, mysterious, complicated, and questionable. Great ... I have the ultimate choice
of what I do, say, and learn. Control is the ultimate goal and achievement,
which is great. Mysterious ... new ideas, thoughts, plans, and people are popping up
everywhere and when I least expect it. Complicated ... if I didn't have conflict
I would be bored and at the same time, I resent it.
Questionable .. why did my friends need to die so young?
My Life ... My Death. I want to be known for how people see me ... a daughter,
a sister, a relative, a friend, a lover, a student, a neighbor,
a name. All of these and many more are titles for me.
None say truly who I am or what I stand for because that lies in each individual's heart,
which is revealed in memories when they hear
a name ... Tabitha ...

Tabitha Griffin



Sandy Buelow
Untitled
Photograph

Best Friends

We were best friends
Now we don't talk
The rules don't bend
Different paths we walk
Will they meet again?
Do they go separate ways?
How heavy is the burden?
What price do I pay?
You hurt me before
Would you do it again?
The trust is no more
But does it have to end?

Renetta Halverson

Freedom

Young men and boys die for it
the basis of our country
(don't you know)

It makes us superior to
those third worlders
(doesn't it?)

We are blessed by this
We have FREEDOM!
(sort of)

freedom of speech
We can say anything!
(as long as they think it's right)

freedom of the press
We can print anything!
(but don't offend the reverend)

we can demonstrate
show what we think
(don't light that flag)

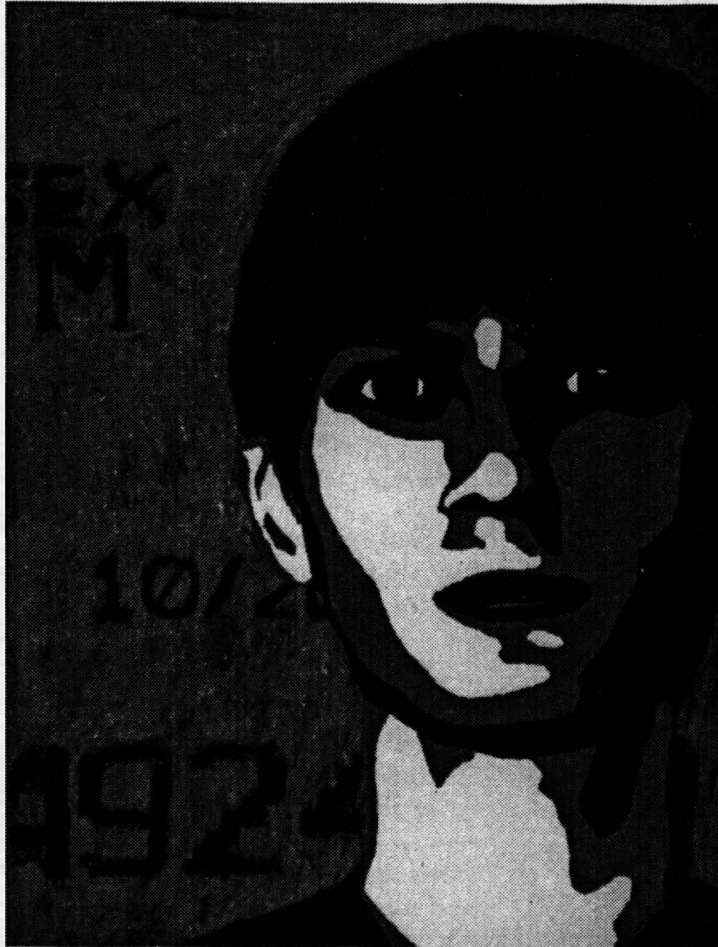
we can arm and defend
ourselves against crime
(not for long)

Wouldn't Washington and
Lincoln be proud of us?
(?)

Porch

Oakwood, Vol. 2, Iss. 7 [1998], Art. 1

sitting
drinking whiskey
the bottle
(good in my hand)
leaning back
another drink
ambrosia
down my throat
drunk.
cigarettes
smoke genies rise
pondering.
what does life hold?
is it real?
what is it?
confused
reality is strange
the idea that
i am
you are
he is
inebriated
the dogs wake me
my trance
shattered by their noise
they're real
whiskey
cigarettes
they're death
they are real.
A friend is gone
dead cold in the grave
never to be seen again
crying.
the dogs play as though
nothing's happened.
blind
to tears
rolling
down my face.
sad
for i know what is real,
and wish i didn't



Bryan Dahlmeier
Self-Portrait
Oil Pastel

SOULS LOST

The sleepers are in the bar
putting on false pretensions
acting out forgotten passion
dancing on the red star.

Their sheer bodies slither
and their sunken souls sleep
as lives are saddened with slime
as lives are under-nurtured by idols.

Skeletons by the box of music
they are well-read and undereducated
they are dirty and well-fed --
dancing with chaos.

Infra red men loose their evil
they do not know of death
because Death knows no dread
hypnotized on a red star.

Kester

She awoke to a hand over her mouth
And mumbling in her ear.
"You better run. You better run."
And she learned Fear.

She tried to fight but couldn't move.
She tried to scream but no one heard.
The hand pressed harder
And she learned Hopelessness.

Her cat screamed and hissed.
She struggled free.
It was his turn to run
And she learned Vengeance.

She sat alone in the glow.
Every light now burned.
Too scared and too angry to cry
And she learned hatred.

She sits in a small room
Finally admitting to herself and to a friend
All her fears, anger and hatred
And she learned Forgiveness.

Now she believes Shakespeare.
Forgiveness and mercy is twice blest
On he who received and she who gives
And she learns peace.

Long blonde hair

Long blonde hair,
With strands of gold.
Bright blue eyes,
Filled with sparkle.
I say she's beautiful,
She says your blind.
What does she see in the mirror?
I tried to get near her
But all I did was watch her
A quick glance over to me
She thought I didn't see her
But my eyes never leave her
Just when I think it's over
Here she comes again
I just want to kiss her
I wonder if she knows
How much I wish to be with her.

Nate Maass

My eyes filled with tears as Luke Skywalker's Force-driven proton torpedoes plunged into the dreaded "Death Star," a symbol synonymous with absolute evil capable of destroying that which stands for purity and goodness. Of course, Luke's direct hit triggered the chain reaction which ultimately destroys the evil Galactic Empire's dreaded space station. Not that I experienced the uncontrollable sobbing that overtook me at the end of such recent dramatic tour-de-forces as *Shindler's List* or *The Joy Luck Club*. Rather, my emotions produced a rather uncharacteristic outburst -- a deep-seeded feeling of nostalgia, longing, and a fond remembrance of the past.

Now that I deeply immerse myself in my career, the words that indicate the beginning of George Lucas's masterpiece ("A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...") seem hauntingly prophetic, considering my first trip to see *Star Wars* occurred over twenty years ago. In the midst of grading essays, preparing lessons, and working on several bits of literary criticism, I sometimes yearn for those long-gone childhood days. In fact, I recall my father held my tiny hand as we waited in a tremendously long line which snaked around the block in quaint Mitchell, South Dakota (yes, the home of the "World's Only" Corn Palace). He, in his Irish spirit of optimism, keenly noted that "people are crazy as hell to stand in line for a movie." Nonetheless, we shuffled forward, unknowingly becoming a living part of cinematic history.

At the tender age of four, I failed to understand everything in the film (which is one reason why I attended seven more times during the summer of '77). My father, in vain, tried to explain that the Empire, with its "Death Star," blew up Princess Leia's home planet, Alderaan, not Luke Skywalker's planet, Tatooine. But I failed to comprehend his words. I vividly remember subsequently lying on the floor of Shopko's *Star Wars* aisle, writhing with desperate urgency, begging for any (and all) related toys, even though I had not fully understood the film. My father, to this day, admits that taking me to *Star Wars* nearly broke the family financially.

But what I remember most of all lies much deeper in my soul. *Star Wars* creator/writer/director George Lucas inspired me (and I assume millions of others, young and old) to consciously dream. More importantly, he inspired me to *create*. After viewing *Star Wars*, I began reading voraciously, searching for other worlds to explore and finding them occasionally, but always returning back to the *Star Wars* galaxy. I drew pictures based on the film in my

elementary school classes while I probably should have practiced my alphabet. My friends, (including my brother), and I always played *Star Wars* after school, acting as characters from the film, and to this day, my brother can produce a perfect Chewbacca howl on command. We role-played with ourselves and with our action figures and ships. *Star Wars* paraphernalia adorned my room in exorbitant fashion -- the sheets, curtains, posters, and toys -- I lived in this universe.

I saved proofs-of-purchase from action figures to order a free "Bossk" (the reptilian bounty hunter from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*). (Today, I still have seven "Bossks" proudly displayed in my office). I would wait by the picture window for my father to return home from work so we could play together. Sometimes he would present a sack from Shopko, a sack containing a new action figure, prompting my mother to say: "You're going to spoil those kids rotten." Remarkably, he always knew what figures we (my brother and I) needed, and we would cling to his legs in desperate fashion, wailing (waiting) to see what precious goods the sack contained. He would smile with fatherly pride (knowing he knew exactly what toys would make us happy) and tease our fervent emotions by holding a sack just out of reach. Eventually, he would reveal the sack's contents, and we would stare at them with delight.

I recall my baby-sitter, Mrs. Phinney, gathered all of the kids (her own, included) around the kitchen table one summer afternoon. We were, of course, playing *Star Wars* in the backyard. Then, with the skill of an accomplished vaudevillian, she presented each of us with a brand new "Yoda" figure. Our eyes widened and a collective gasp escaped our lips. We had heard of the Yoda figure, but we were not privy to the information that Kenner had released it. To our young minds, Mrs. Phinney, by producing this figure, wielded what young hearts easily construed as the power of the "force" -- a mystical, almost-religious power similar to sorcery, used by several characters in the *Star Wars* trilogy. We looked at each other, awestruck, and, with reckless abandon, tore out of the house to continue our adventures, thanking our wonderful baby-sitter on the way out.

Strangely, however, in the midst of these childhood memories, I cannot recall when I ceased playing with my collection of *Star Wars* toys. I simply drifted away from them at a point which I believe coincided with the advent of adolescence. I suspect my interests turned to sports, girls, watching film, and reading books -- probably in this order. I relegated my *Star Wars* toys to the back of my closet and sought my adventure from different avenues. I cannot recall a more dreadful period in my life -- adolescence. Conversely, I cannot recall a happier period than the

years during which I played with my *Star Wars* toys.

And recently, while I stood in line waiting to purchase tickets for George Lucas's *Star Wars: The Special Edition*, I experienced an epiphany. I realized that for the first time in my life, I yearned desperately to return to my childhood. Occasionally, I do "slice up" the living room furniture with the "Luke Skywalker Light Saber" (a type of sword used in the *Star Wars* films) I recently purchased, exacting classic looks of dismay from my wife. But this action does not fulfill my yearning. What I truly desire is only a few moments to again experience the childhood feeling of complete astonishment at the possibilities of life and dreams, and the innocence of simple things, like discovering a new playmate.

Yet I see all of these notions fading away, even as technology like the Internet connects us all with endless possibility -- an oxymoron if ever one existed, since the Internet, in my experience, threatens to pull us further apart into worlds of isolation. Perhaps I might attain this feeling if only I take a few moments to thank my mother and father for indulging my propensity to play hour after hour with a character like Darth Vader, a complex villain capable of both reconciliation with his estranged son and redemption for his sinful past. Even now I wonder how many fathers sought out their estranged sons after witnessing Vader's courageous transformation in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. Or perhaps I might call either my brother or one of my former playmates to reminisce about our childhood exploits in the *Star Wars* universe. And if I do connect with these people who now seem so far, far away from me as I grow older, might I destroy the "Death Stars" that plague my adult life: struggling for career advancement, achieving a solid financial status, pleasing a spouse, and raising a family, for example? Although these things are not necessarily bad, striving for them can potentially destroy that which one holds pure and good. I only need a few moments to feel like a child again, gazing with starry-eyed wonder at life's possibilities.

I sat in a strangely quiet mood as people filled the theater. My wife attempted to engage me in banter, but I would not concede. I waited, patiently, for the film that shaped my childhood to start. The prophetic words ("A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...") flashed across the screen, and I allowed my past to wash over me, savoring every moment. My mind raced, connecting images of past with present, fusing them for my collective memory. My wish, which I

earlier in line, became reality. The pleasures of my childhood raced through my mind, energizing me and lifting me to a spiritual high. I wondered how many people surrounding me were viewing this film for the first time, and if they would marvel at the awesome spectacle of vivid imagination. Would they experience feelings similar to those of mine?

But then a darker thought crossed my mind. Would today's children and teenagers simply disregard the film's message, instead racing home to fire up the Internet, conjuring and then viewing pornographic or violent messages of destruction much more realistic than any film? Or would they slump into their chairs and watch such tasteless drivel as *Sally* or *Ricky Lake* or *Saved by the Bell*? Or would they fire up the latest 2-Live-Crew or Marilyn Manson album to learn how to dream of vulgarity and violence? Could the experience of viewing a film like *Star Wars* change a life like it had mine?

Upon exiting the theater, I overheard a group (which appeared to consist of pre-teens) talking about how "cool" the film was. I felt a twinge of hope. I wanted to say: "Great! Now go play with the toys and with each other and learn how to cooperate and communicate and interact creatively. Abandon your televisions and the World-Wide-Web and just play!" I did not speak, however, and I remained somewhat satisfied that the film might have inspired them slightly more than the latest episode of *Beavis and Butt-Head*.

And as my wife and I traipsed to our car, she asked me why I had cried at the end of the film. I said, "I'm just happy Luke blew up the 'Death Star.'" Oddly, my words could not be closer to the truth. Luke had the potential to blow up millions of "Death Stars" twenty years ago, and he did so by encouraging me (and a whole new generation) to realize what constituted (as echoed by *Star Wars*' subtitle: *A new Hope*) feelings of hope and wonder for the future. Sure, I could have said that the film molded my childhood and taught me more than any textbook ever will, drawing me closer to my father and brother and encouraging me to dream. But as I unlocked our car, I knew I had uttered the correct words. I remain ever thankful for that chance to revisit my childhood, if even for only two hours -- destroying the "Death Stars" of my adult life and viewing *Star Wars* in the intimacy of a packed theater.



Tony Downs
Emilie
Photograph

Shoebbox Memories

I remember
Your birthday and the pay phone on 8th street
I remember
It was what was best for you
I remember
Watching the moon come down
I remember
Being the only one that was punished
I remember
We had bad timing
I remember
Not wanting to get up in the morning
I remember
The fourth of July and dirt roads
I remember
You going home
I remember
Everyone got what they wanted but me
I remember
It was February and I never slept there again
I remember
I was strong enough to be alone
I remember
Watching you through the window as you held your face and sobbed
I remember
Throwing away my shoebox
A leather bracelet, my moonpin, lovebeads, and a picture of you

Marcey Moss

To My Parents

I love you for loving me
You are everything I want to be
Everyone makes mistakes
You accept mine
I wish I was as forgiving
But I loose my mind
You sacrificed your dreams for me
I never knew
I meant that much to you
You are my true heroes
The kind of people I want my family to be

April Myrick



Molly Engquist
Shadows
Etching

"What do you think he'll say to us?" questions my sister, after what seemed like an endless period of silence.

I turn down the radio in my Taurus and look over at her, "I don't know," is all I can answer.

The rain beats incessantly on my car, and the wipers squeak with every swipe across the windshield. My sister and I both attend the same university, and today, we are going home. We had made the trip many times before, but today, things are different. My parents' farm is only forty minutes away from the city, but today it feels like the longest trip home that I have ever taken.

Thoughts are racing through my head, but one keeps reoccurring: how could he do this to us?

"Do you think he's going to cry?" asks my sister.

"Have you ever seen him cry?" I reply.

"No..."

The silence between us returns. I look over at my sister once again, and a tear rolls down her cheek. She had taken the news much harder than I had. We both love him, but she adores him. Dad was her hero, and to hear how he lied to us was almost too much to bear.

I turn off the interstate. We only have eight more miles to go. I suddenly feel very ill. Apprehension mixed with pain is creeping up my throat, like I could vomit.

"I don't think I can face him," my sister says, in a cracked voice.

"He wants to apologize, Stacey. He wants to try and explain why he did it."

The silence bears down once again. I turn up the radio, and some old Bon Jovi song is playing. It reminds me of junior high, when things were different, and when my dad was different.

A change had come over him. It was gradual, but nonetheless, very apparent. He had lost weight, and with his pale skin, he appeared sick, old; not the same father who cared so much for us kids. Lately, he didn't care about anyone, not even himself. They say that will happen to people with addictions.

I pull into our long gravel driveway. My sister sits up in her seat and whispers, "I don't think I can do this."

I don't answer her, mainly because I feel the same way. I park my car in front of our old, white farmhouse. The rain has let up, but it is still very dreary. As I open my car door, our dog runs up to me, his tail wagging, wanting me to pet him. I push him aside, and wait for my sister to get out of the car.

As we walk into the house, I see him sitting there, waiting for us at the dining table. It seems as though it had been years since our family had sat together at that table. It is almost ironic that he is waiting there for us to sit at the table together today, while he tells us why he had done things that are now ripping our family apart. Ironic because I know that we may never all sit at that table again.

I sit down next to Stacey, and the damn silence has followed us into the house. The rain has begun again, and I finally look at Dad. He takes both of our hands in his and begins to speak. But his words are barely audible, because today, for the first time, he is crying.

Christy Nebben

Through broad glass doors danced sparkling beams of sunlight. Each ray moved pointedly towards a young woman who sat with her back to the entrance, enhancing the curled, golden highlights of her hair. Every sound that originated from the doorway jerked her slender neck and anticipating eyes in its direction, disappointing her.

For the last two months, thoughts of him had danced through her mind at the most inappropriate times. Everything the woman encountered in her life led her down a winding path of daydreams and physical sensations. In church she would recall the feel of his arm on the pew behind her and how his finger traced the freckles on her shoulder.

Even as she sat waiting for him on a comfortable couch in the lobby of the Cottage Hotel, she doubted whether he would make it there. He had only two days but was driving twenty hours to meet her, and she felt like she was waiting for something uncertain -- something new. The howling wind spoke constantly to her, reminding her of the treacherous weather outside. Ice and snow fell to the ground like bricks, taunting her with the idea that he might not make it. She circled her fingers on the soft skin of her knee just as he would if he were there beside her.

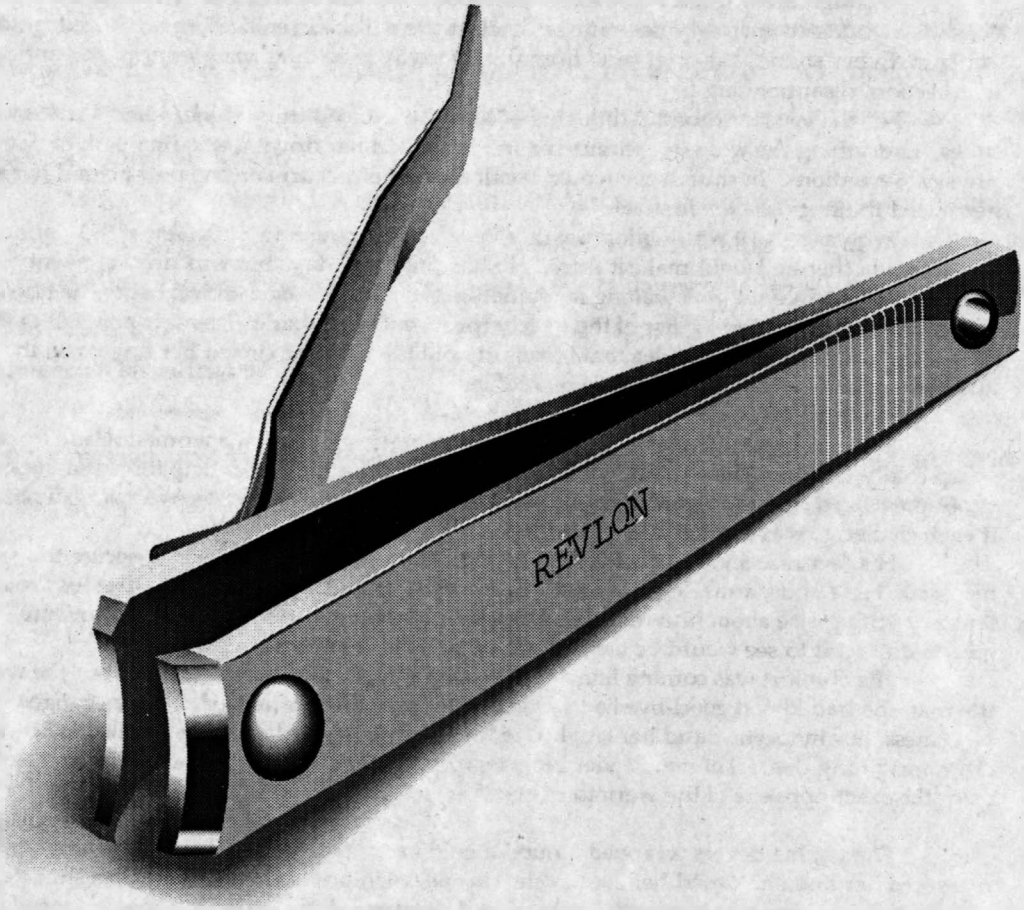
From ceiling to floor the doors glowed teasingly, blocking the woman inside from his view. A sharp cold wind stung his cheeks, which were already colored with anticipation; the thick ice beneath his shoes prevented him from quickening his pace. The man felt as if he were running an obstacle course - as if each challenge was strategically placed to keep him from reaching her.

His feet rose and fell confidently upon the treacherous ice, though insecure thoughts ran through his head. His hands, arms, legs, and back had grown stronger in his training, but his thoughts, character, and everything else about him had been changed in that time, too. The man was unsure if the woman that he couldn't wait to see would be happy with what he had become.

His comfort was coming home to the same woman he had left behind, but she waited to see what the man she had kissed good-bye had become. Her eyes and smile would be unchanged, along with her sweetness, her innocence, and her laugh. He loved to make her laugh, and smiled as he came closer to the door, imagining the feel of her slender body leaning against his steady chest. The air seemed pointedly cold, the exact opposite of the warmth of her skin.

Finally, his fingers wrapped around a cold metal and pulled, noisily opening the door. Her heart reassured her and she closed her eyes as she turned, cushioning the shock. When she opened her eyes she was careful, gazing up at him with her head tied downward in shock. When she opened her eyes she was careful, gazing up at him with her head tilted downward. She added small rhythmic steps to the beating of his anxious strides.

The two of them came together quickly, writing a temporary treaty with the time and place. She was astonished by the feel of him, and the sound of his voice startled her even before it escaped his mouth. He surprised himself, felling confident and strong. She listened to the beat of his heart and ignored the ticking clock. He absorbed the music of her voice, blocking out the song of a small bird perched on the luggage rack of his still running car.



Mark Henderson
Fingernail Clipper
Computer Illustration

The End

He asked,
"Should I have waited
until our wedding invitations were sealed?"
She walked
in the opposite direction
and found comfort on cold pavement.
He touched
her with sharp fingers,
and she shivered.

Amber Noem

Tackle Box

Spiderwire,
Floating jigs,
A pair of pliers,
And crappie rigs,
Twirl tails,
Bottom Bouncers,
A weighing scale,
Spoons (half-ouncers),
Floaters,
Spinners,
Sinkers,
Bobbers.
A beetle bug,
Leaders (steel),
Hand-painted plugs,
An extra reel.
Walleye assassin,
A Rattlin' Fat Rap,
A copy of *Bassin*
And an Old Mil' cap.

Tyler Omoth

So Much of You in This Land

I see so much of you in this land,
This Midwestern dream hold my heart in its hand,
with the same passion and beauty I love in you.

Spring, a soft, wet apology for a winter-fed fear,
comes like your touch to my arm, and a tear
in the morning, to see our love renew.

Then summer, a bold, joyous, lighthearted dance,
like you, sweeps me in its arms, enveloping me in-elegance,
its days fast, flirtatious, and few.

Summer then yields to Autumn's gentle keep,
So sweetly pretty as you prepare to sleep,
a soft and delightful adieu.

Then Winter storms in loud, fierce and biting,
a terrifying force so offensive yet exciting,
that can chill a heart clean through.

And again you touch my arm,
a tear and a smile to warm
a love that begins anew.

Tyler Omoth

Circling the Pond

"Go on, get outta here."

Daniel nodded his head to his left, toward a well beaten path which encircled the pond. Without waiting for further instruction, the dog wheeled around his legs and began to sprint down the path. Considering his size, the dog moved very quickly, yet his gait was easy and comfortable, as if it were only part of a routine. The sun danced off the silver blue hair that formed a collar on him.

Daniel continued down the path himself, being careful not to step into the water. While his eyes searched along the pond's edge for skipping stones, his mind wandered to the things that made up his real life, back there in civilization. He thoroughly enjoyed the few afternoons that he could get free to take his Blue Heeler out for a roam through the acreage. It was something that they had both enjoyed since Daniel had gotten Odin from the farm across the valley eight years ago. When they did get out together, they inevitably ended up at this pond. Odin, the dog, named for a birth defect that gave him only one eye, loved to run the beaten path that encircled it. Daniel, meanwhile, could simply relax, and think.

This day his thoughts were more confused than ever. His eyes earnestly searched for the perfect skipping stone, smooth and flat, but at the same time his hand was in the pocket of his Seattle Seahawks jacket, feeling the cut stone on an engagement ring. Was he really ready for this? Alyssa had been dropping hints to him for well over a year now that she thought it was time to make a commitment, but he could never completely make up his mind.

Daniel glanced across the pond. The water was exceptionally calm, its glassy surface showing nothing but a mirror image of the sky, a thin curtain hiding its depths from those unwilling to come in. On the other side, Odin still ran at a good gallop, hesitating only briefly to jump over a fallen tree. Such hurdles were nothing to him. Counterclockwise, he continued to circle.

It wasn't a question of love. Daniel was sure that he loved Alyssa. What he wasn't sure of, however, was if he really *knew* Alyssa. How could anyone ever be sure that they really knew someone? Everything had seemed great so far, but forever is a long time, and he didn't know what to expect from such a step.

Daniel's eyes happened across a small flat stone; just the type he's been looking for. He picked it up, turning it over and over, testing its qualities for skipping. It seemed to be flat enough, and the weight was good, but it lacked balance. One end was sharp and thin, almost to a point, while the other was wider with two rounded edges. Satisfied, for the time being, he kept the stone and continued walking.

Odin, his tongue flopping joyously outside his mouth, circled anxiously. He anticipated the end of his run, but for now, he circled.

Daniel walked underneath an old maple tree. Its leaves had already blushed and fallen, many of them landing on the delicate surface of the pond. Soon enough the water would cool enough to form a thick coat of ice over it. The pair did not have many of these days left.

Daniel fidgeted with the stone, tossing it lightly into the air and catching it again. He looked out over the pond, trying to get a glimpse beneath the surface, but to no avail. The shallow blue beauty of the sky seemed almost real as he looked at it in front of him, though he knew it was merely a reflection. Rolling the rock in his right hand, and stroking the ring in his pocket with his left, Daniel sighed and broke the silence.

"Well, Odin. What do you think? Am I ready for this?" he asked, smirking at himself for his child-like habit of talking to his dog.

Odin, at the sound of Daniel's voice, turned slightly in his path and increased his speed. As his new route took him to the edge of the water the dog leapt into the air, plunging into the pond. The impact of the dog's weight broke the glassy evenness of the surface, sending ripples in a game of leap-frog to the edge.

Daniel laughed softly to himself. As he turned to walk away, he flipped the uneven stone into the pond, not skipping it across the surface, but letting it dive into the middle, finding the depths unseen from the surface.

Tyler Omoth

Up in The Fields

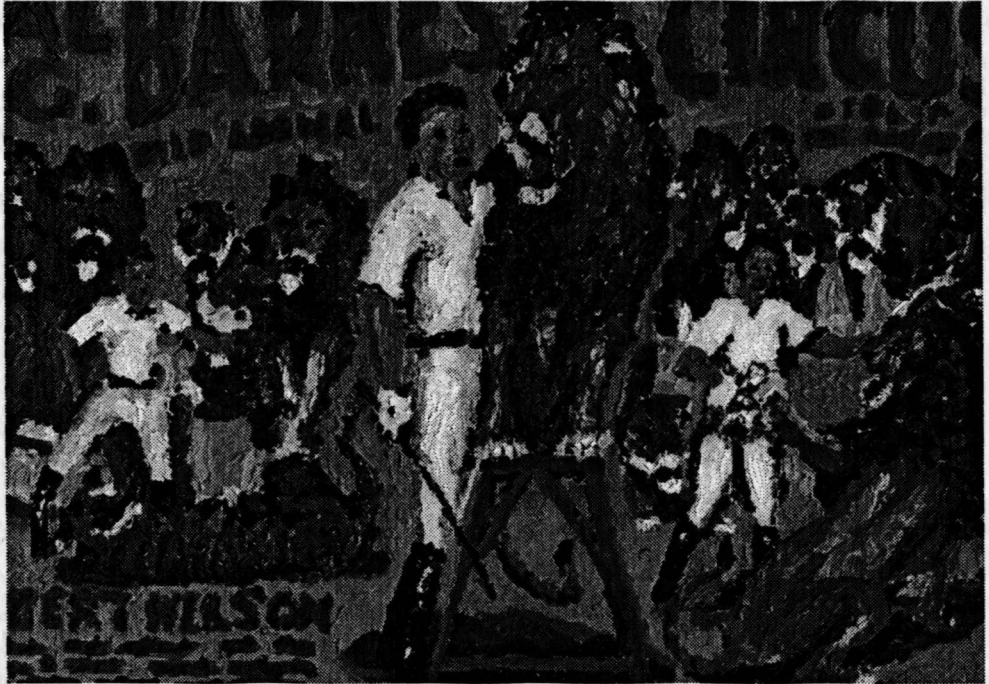
...and arthur
Begot john who bought a tractor
To plow and to plant wheat
Up in the rocky field above the coulee,
Where late last summer a fire burned
The cottonwoods to ash
Leaving no shelter,
No solitude, or refuge
From the cold winters to come.
John, the son of arthur,
Despaired not, but
Merely turned the bottle and checked the date
In great comfort and relief
To celebrate himself and
All of his character and wisdom.
Dug deep he did
And soon begot arrowheads and bones
Up in the field above the dead coulee,
And for great celebration of such finds
Drank cognac and
Pretended he was hemingway in
Some spanish hills after a day of
Fine fishing.

Damion Rassier

What Mild Winters Carry

No one wants to feel frigid flesh and
No one wants to feel a straw man's hair.
I have come to approach you like a harvey dunn,
From ten feet away for not to see the diminishing strokes that
Me and my little midwestern mind have blended and conjured
Into broad conclusions and listless acts of love.
Me and my little midwestern mind who
Are not going east any more,
Where once we filled so well the useless
Void of ambience with the bliss of our intrinsic folly,
We have taken to gravel, chewing tobacco, and
Cupboards filled with half-empty pretzel bags.
We have learned brand new commandments and
We have learned how to look at a Harvey Dunn.
No one will give judgment to a dead man's deeds and
No one will misunderstand me and my little midwestern mind.

Damion Rassier



Jason Kallas
Circus
Oil on Canvas

Feminism

Feminism is another
form
of modernity;
in an attempt to
interfere with
nature,
with natural
male-female
distinctions
in the name of
pride or equality,
a society,
an institution,
unbalances a
balance,
and allows for a
willful or unanticipated
perversion
of a more naturally ordered
ecological whole.

Randall Rogers

I Once Met God In The Form of a Corny Girl

This was the third weekend in a row that Thurmon had spent in his bedroom. In agreement with his many complexes, there had been few calls or voiced concerns about his seclusion. Even his mother, who rumbled through the notebooks in his desk regularly, had not made a single comment.

Without removing the side of his face from the mattress, Thurmon ran his hand along the floor searching for a book. "Oh, fuck all" he said while raising his head to see if his hand hadn't missed it. It soon occurred to Thurmon that the book was in his locker at school. But what was another fifty pages when he was already two hundred behind? Tolstoy and all six hundred pages of War and Peace could burn in hell wearing a gasoline suit. Besides, he could start the book on Monday, no problem.

All academic problems settled, or at least forgotten, Thurmon began rubbing the side of his face that had been lying on the mattress. He enjoyed the tingling sensation and texture that the mattress had imprinted. The mirror on the dresser revealed no flower, only redness. He was sure that he could feel the flower on his cheek.

Maybe it was the way that the 40 watts bounced off the Radiohead album on the floor, or the way that his pea coat was slung over the room's only chair. Whatever it was, it crept back, immersing Thurmon in what he had concentrated on forgetting ... Her.

It was at Matt Jensen's party where they'd met. Although she was new at Huron (a curse or blessing, she hadn't yet decided), Mary Deveroux had been at most of the parties--a sort of background piece; like the faded orange arm chair in everyone's basement.

Frustrated with the lack of intoxicated gregariousness, she went outside to sit on the porch, glass of beer in hand. A few minutes passed before Thurmon stepped outside. He pulled a war torn cigarette from his pocket, and with amateur rank, lit and inhaled.

Why did he even go to parties anymore? It was just people all but having sex on the living room couch or a bunch of guys talking about blow jobs that had never happened. Sighing and exhaling simultaneously, Thurmon sat on the porch railing.

"Do you think I could have one of those?"

Neither Mary or Thurmon had expected the question. He drunkenly fumbled through all seven pockets in his coat before finding the pack. Not that it had mattered, but Thurmon had made sure to remove the cigarette from the pack while they were in his pocket; the cigarettes were Lights. Not faggy, but nothing to be proud of either. Mary sat next to him.

"Shitty party, huh?"

"Yeah. Welcome to Huron, *The Worst Fucking Place Around*."

She wasn't sure what it was that the sign at the city limits had said, but she immediately picked up on the part that Thurmon had inserted.

"Mmmm," she said, shaking her head longitudinally. Perhaps more intoxicated than he thought, Thurmon picked up the growing slack in the conversation.

"Hey, you aren't friends with that Megan bitch are you?"

"No, but I don't really know her," Mary said with a twinge of 'you shouldn't be calling any girl a bitch' in her voice. Without looking up, he tried to justify the comment.

"She's the type of girl who always corrects people when they're reading out loud in class. I mean, not just politely whispering it if the person is sitting right next to her and all. She fucking says it in a goddam acting voice, just so the teacher can hear. Like she's Aldous Huxley, the fucking bitch."

Exhaling and squinting out into the yard, Mary looked him over. There was something almost elegant about his awkwardness. He was average looking in almost every way, except for his almost black eyes and nappy haircut.

"You wanna go see a movie at Uptown? I don't like beer anyway."

Never one to turn down the requests of beautiful girls, Thurmon shrugged his shoulders, hoping to conceal his excitement. "That's cool. Do you have a car?" Mary pointed to a deep green Mercury Cougar from the seventies. A true pimp car. Thurmon smiled and they took off.

It was 10:30 by the time they found a parking space big enough for the car. After three embarrassing attempts to parallel park the car, Mary squeezed the car in and turned off the ignition. "Shit. We've only got ten minutes."

Taking this as a sign to hurry up, Thurmon broke into a slow trot. he soon discovered that he was alone. At a careful and slow pace, Mary was walking about thirty feet behind him.

"C'mon. The theater is like six blocks away!" he shouted, even though she was only about thirty feet behind.

"I don't run!" she shouted right back. A broad smile moved across Thurmon's face.

"Whadya mean you 'don't run!'"

"I just don't run, that's all."

Thurmon tried not to, but he broke down in hysterics. It was like trying to hold back laughter at church. Laughing soon became coughing, and he braced himself against the nearby light pole.

"Honest to God, that makes my fucking day," he said in between coughs. "That's goddam nice. It really is. And I'm being serious as all hell here."

Mary grinned and squeezed his arm, slipping her tiny hand in his.

He couldn't remember anything about the movie. All he could remember was the fact that he actually had the balls to kiss her. ^{Oakwood, Vol. 2, Iss. 7 [1998], Art. 1} Thurmon didn't even know how to explain it...it was like closing your eyes and picturing nothing but black; only spirits floating around the outside of the universe.

The second and last time that Thurmon saw Mary was the next Friday. He was picking her up to go to Adam DeNaldi's party.

Wrapped in a blue bath towel, Mary answered the door. "Thurmon!" she exclaimed, hugging him tightly. When she let go, there was a large wet spot on his shoulder from where her head had rested. Thurmon smiled in a parent-like way as she began to apologize. He loved shit like that. Two minutes later she was fully clothed and ready to go.

"What's this all about?" he asked, picking up and dropping an envelope that was on the dining room table. Mary tried to wrinkle her brow.

"It's an order form for a pair of x-ray glasses. You know, from the backs of magazines."

Thurmon took his Jerry Seinfeld stance. "See, now I never got the point of those things. People seem to think that they'll just see through clothes. Like I'm just going around, looking at unsuspecting girls." He stopped his flailing arms for effect before going on. "C'mon people. If this were the case, every disgusting, sloppy man in America would be sitting on benches in malls, ogling women. The truth is, the glasses see right through people."

She giggled and rolled her eyes. Thurmon winked with both eyes, wanting to pick up her fragile, thin frame, and carry her out to the car. Damn corny movies always made you want to do stuff like that.

"I'm getting the glasses so I can see peoples souls" Mary said as he unlocked her door. She looked at him inquisitively. He silently started the car, not knowing what to say. "Off to DeeeeeNaaaldeeee's!" he yelled while honking the horn. Thurmon had always found yelling and honking the horn good for breaking uncomfortable silences.

Thurmon changed positions on the bed, as his left arm was beginning to go numb. Looking up to his window, he noticed that it had begun to snow. He laid down and almost felt the snow covering his body. White quietly hiding everything.

The accident happened one week after DeNaldi's party. The funeral had been on Tuesday. Would it have been right to go? He wasn't sure. After all, they'd only seen each other twice. Thurmon didn't want to be some phony like the majority of the school was. There were all sorts of people bawling the Monday after it had happened. People who'd never even talked to her. Phony Christians who wanted to feel good about themselves by pretending to care. It all just made him want to puke.

Sue Keely's party. The police had found Mary's body forty feet from the crash, missing a head. Even at 60 mph., the pimp car had escaped with little damage from a telephone pole...

Thurmon got up from the bed and flipped on the light at his desk. Yanking the middle drawer open, he took out a yellow pad of paper and a pen. Sniffing an obnoxious snuffle--the kind that you can only do in the privacy of you own room--Thurmon dated the letter.

5 december 1996

Dear Mary,

Christ. I know how insane this is...but it's your birthday and all, and I couldn't help but write. Perhaps I'll send this letter in the mail. Address it to Mary Deveroux in Heaven. You know, like when kids write to Santa Claus in the North Pole? Maybe they have old ladies replying to letters addressed to the deceased, like they have for Santa. Maybe I'll get a reply telling me why I couldn't have all of the ridiculous things I want.

Thurmon dropped the pen. Enough. This was ridiculous. He laid back down on the bed, face up and arms crossed. Tilting his head backwards, he looked out the window behind him, upside down. It was snowing harder.

In this uncomfortable position, Thurmon fell asleep, sleeping the sleep of confused, cynical children. He envisioned himself picking a postcard out of the mail. On the front was the picture of a deep green tank in a park, covered with snow. The back was only a single line which read:

"I never did send for those x-ray glasses."

Thomas H. Rue



Renaë Kurtz
Untitled
Ceramic Sculpture

john keats
is only john
and not so bright
in the dark

Thomas R. Rue

Catching Up To Nathan

"Get those logs unloaded and bring Old Orange up to the house, then we'll talk about tonight," our dad said as he headed up to the house.

Nate and I spent a good share of our summers in the wood piles of our backyard. Our dad taught biology during the school year and cut trees in the summer. I was jealous of Nate because he was a year older than I, which doesn't seem like that big of a deal, but to a thirteen year old, it's huge.

"Nathan, you bring Old Orange up," dad yelled, half way up to the house.

Nate shot me his evil little smirk, just to rub it in, but I acted like it didn't phase me. Driving was just one of the many things that Nate got to do before I did. I had plenty of reminders every day; he got to use all of the chainsaws, climb all of the "tough trees," while I loaded Old Orange with the brush that he got to cut. Sometimes dad would let me use the small chainsaws, like the 011 and 028, but never the 041 or 056. Nate loved being fourteen, but even more, he loved to think that he had a ton of experience packed into that extra year.

One day, when dad had to run home from the job-site, I grabbed the 056 and let it rip. I had 18 pounds of Stihl screaming up my forearms, my whole body was vibrating. Nate was on the ground, paralyzed from laughter, before I could shut the damn thing off. If he didn't have 40 pounds on me, I might have pounced, but I just stood there trying to figure out when my arms were going to quit stinging.

"Get your ass in gear or the street dance will be over before we get this unloaded," Nate snapped.

Nate and I finally finished unloading Old Orange and I headed for the driver's seat. A vice-like choke hold from Nate to my throat helped me decide to walk up to the house. I bitched the whole way up to the house because he was my only chance of getting to go to the street dance in Carthage. I knew he wasn't exactly excited to drag his kid brother along, but he knew I'd pay his way in.

Just like every weekend dance that summer, he got to go while I sat home hating my parents. The only thing that I had to look forward to on the weekend was a little deal that Nate and I had worked out. He agreed to tell me every thing that went on at the dance and all that I had to do was sneak him in, an hour after his curfew. I got the shit end of that stick but I always had something to blackmail him with.

These little scraps of blackmail came in handy. For instance, he would let me drive Old Orange when he and I took out loads of brush to the dump. I loved the old truck. It was given to us by our neighbor, Elmer, because he couldn't get a license anymore. We took care of him and he took care of us. It was the only three on the tree, rust orange, 1968 Chevy, with a FORD tailgate in the world. It had no back window, thanks to Nate throwing a log through it. Old Orange died two years after Elmer and dad sold it for scrap.

Another time that blackmail came in handy was when Nate didn't want to take me fishing with him. On one occasion, he was going to take his friend Brian because he was the same age; but more important, Brian always had smokes. I reminded him that I had his only *Playboy* and that it would be disastrous if our extremely Catholic mother ever found it planted in his sock drawer.

After several punches to the shoulder, he decided to take me fishing with him. We loaded up Old Orange with our rods and reels, tackle boxes and a bucket. Dad didn't expect us to come home without fish to clean.

Our next stop was Don's Place. Don's was the only drive-up liquor store in town, and was notorious for selling tobacco products to minors. There were rumors of kids on bikes buying cigarettes at the drive-up window, so I knew we would have no trouble getting some Redman. It didn't hurt that Nate had a half-assed goatee and a set of Luke Perry sideburns. Everyone in town thought he was at least 17, including himself. After forking over two bucks for the chewing tobacco, which I could barely even smell without getting sick, we were on our way.

Lake Thompson was only 20 miles North of Howard, but Nate was always driving like it was on the other side of the state. After 15 miles on a paved county highway, the road turned to gravel that was freshly windrowed. We hit the windrow and headed straight for the ditch. I crouched down and cussed out Old Orange for not having seatbelts, like we would have used them.

I wasn't even that worried because Nate always had things under control, but when I saw his face, I knew that he was scared sick. I peeked back out my window and saw fenceposts flying by, then a telephone pole, then more fenceposts. It was like this for what seemed to be hours, but Nate finally maneuvered Old Orange back on the road. Silence hitch-hiked a ride for those last five miles that led to Lake Thompson. As we pulled up to the lake, I realized that the silence didn't scare me, but the fear on my big brother's face did.

Knowing that Nate felt as awkward as I did, I stumbled out of the cab and grabbed my rod and reel. It was only after I had cast my line a dozen times that I looked back and saw Nate leaning on the side of Old Orange. He just sat there, gazing out at the water.

"Are you gonna fish?" I asked.

"I want to, but I can't tie my lure on. My hands just won't stop shaking," mumbled Nate.

I asked if he wanted me to tie it on for him, but he just shook his head. He grabbed the pouch of Redman and walked down the shore a few hundred feet. He sat down on the gigantic piece of granite that he usually fished from and just stared directly ahead. He was looking ahead, but I knew that he was seeing what had happened just five miles back. He looked different that night and he has ever since. He was my big brother, but he didn't seem as big after that trip.

Ted Ruml

For the grass that will never be theirs again

Head held high,
hands held praying.
On sun-baked feet,
the Grass Dancers
swaying.

-inspired by Oscar Howe's 1960
painting "Grass Dancer"

Ted Ruml

Shaking Hands With A Grasshopper

I communed with a grasshopper early one cold morning
The dew sparkled in the new golden sunlight
And there he sat, on top of the picnic table
Amidst the turkey and the bread and the fruit and the milk

I hunkered down
Till we saw eye to eye
What a tiny marvel a grasshopper is

His green hard outer body full of chitin
Delicate antennae, quivering in the cool air
His tiny jointed legs
And soft yellow underbelly

Slowly I lowered my hand
And stroked his small body
Soft, smooth, hard, tickly

Suddenly the grasshopper put his tiny leg on my finger
As if proffering his hand

"Good morning Mr. Grasshopper," I said
While shaking his hand,
"It has been a pleasure to meet you."

Cara Schott

Songs of our lives

© Peter and Gail Wood

When Prince was still Prince
and purple rain fell from the sky,
we crimped our hair and
never said goodbye.
We walked like Egyptians and
built the city,
all we needed was a miracle 'cause
everybody wants to rule the world.
Another one bit the dust while
material girls went to
Africa and stayed at the
YMCA.

I dialed 867-5309 and
she blinded me with science but
don't worry be happy,
I just wore my sunglasses at night.
Parachute pants, Cabbage Patch dolls, friendship bracelets,
bandannas, and Roo's with pockets,
St. Elmo's fire, that
eternal flame we didn't start.
I wanted to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.
We fought for our right to party, and headed out to the
love shack with
99 red balloons.
Billie Jean became a
Centerfold,
Roxanne
walked the dinosaur,
and we all watched MTV.
Sister Christian found her
paradise by the dash board lights.

Like sands through an hourglass
These are the songs of our lives.



Jason Lorrie-Olsen
Man's Best Friend
Photograph

Where the Heart Is

et al.: Oakwood

Perhaps it is true that home is
where the heart is and my heart,
what little there is left of it
is definitely not here. (New York)

If only I could vanish
and become a little of every thing
that is enjoyable to me. I would
become a feather floating aimlessly
on a warm western breeze.

that feels like the rising
and the setting sun somewhere
two hundred years ago when the world
was clean and crisp and full
of new beginnings

and not of beginnings
that have no place to start
without bumping into everyone elses.

Perhaps I could be the breath
that is taken away at something
that exhilarates, or the pleasure
we might feel in following

our dreams.

Sheri Scull

The Blood Bond -a sestina on the prairie-

Oakwood, Vol. 2, Iss. 7 [1998], Art. 1

Out of the fall darkness comes the cleansing dawn.
Dragging myself out of bed, I brush
my hair, preparing for a day in the fields.
I tiredly give myself to the olive-drab bonds
of my hunting coat. It is now my father by blood,
a hot thermos of coffee, and me versus the wild.

With drowsy eyes, we watch the clouds go wild
with roses and violets of South Dakota dawn.
Pheasants with feathers the shade of glistening blood
escape into the flammable browns of the brush
while natural camouflage takes over as colors bond
in the Creator's palate of earthly fields.

Dad and I leave the truck to hike the miles of field,
stomping our worn out boots upon prickly wild
grasses. Cold twelve-gauges bond
with our bony shoulders until the dawn
warms the black steel earlier scrubbed with brushes
held by hands flushed pink with pumping blood.

I squint at the man who contains the same blood
as I, searching my childhood fields
for a memory of my first brush
against his power over my wild
stubborn will, but realization finally dawns
upon me: I have never felt an absence of our bond

Dad's presence alone is a great part of this bond,
which firms our connection like coagulating blood.
His smiles at my antics are warm like this dawn,
and his unconditional love fertilizes the crop in my field
of insecurities, taming the weeds running wild.
With my scraped hand, I finger painfully prickly brush.

I wake from my dreaming, brush
gritty dust from my eyes, and see the bond
between my father's shell and a wild
pheasant's breast that is seeping sticky blood.
I stumble across the rocky field
where the bird thuds to the frosty ground, and the dawn

of raw death brushes my hand covered with drying blood.
The irony of this father-daughter bond in this killing field
overcomes the wild distraction of the bird's life-changing dawn.

It seemed winter always came in a rush at our place. Some mornings it would be bare and cool, but the sun hinted of warmth and the air would feel warm, too. But the next morning we would be wrapped up in layers of coats and coveralls trying to keep warm and helping Dad feed hay to the cattle. The wind would blow sharp and bitter and our hands and feet would feel like blocks of ice. Chores took a long time because we would have to jump in the pickup cab to warm up. If it was snowing, it was agony.

On one particular hay field was the rickety shell of the old Bennett house. Wood weathered gray and tinder dry, the wind had knocked out the windows before I could remember. We kept protein cake there and my brother and I would have to load cake from there while Dad fed hay. But sometimes when the tractor wouldn't start and Dad needed to smoke while he waited on the battery charger to recharge the tired battery, he'd come along with us and tell the eighty-year-old story of the Bennetts and our legendary winter storms.

The Boy

Even with the wind picking up I could hear the telling creak of the axle. I had babied it along for most of the way from the dance, but I knew it would probably break at the next rut or crossing.

Mary Bennett was with me. She didn't usually go to dances, her pa was as stiff as starch and hadn't generally let her go anywhere.

And then it had started to snow.

They'd been waiting for me when I drove the team up. Mary, bundled in her coat and overcoat, red flannel blankets for lap rugs and a new bucket of coals to keep our feet warm, was handed up into the wagon. He pa kept looking west to the weather but he saw Mary looking determined and gruffly told me to have her back after the dance.

The dance had been bright, the air hot and stuffy. I hadn't noticed that the snow was coming down harder until I checked on my horses. Raffie, my cousin, noticed the crack on the axle from the way the snow had melted. the crack looked short but dark. Had it cracked clear through? Raffie and I walked back to the dance knee-high in snow. I found Mary right away.

"We should leave now," I told her. "It's gotten colder since we arrived and there's more snow, too."

Her face which had looked so eager and happy took on the look of an old shepherd dog.

Against my better judgement, we stayed. When the party broke up, all I could think about was that starch ol' man wanting his daughter home lickety-split.

So now I had a broken axle. Mary was up on the wagon seat wearing thin leather slippers. The only thing I could do would be to walk over to Max Burgee's - the closest farm. They had a stone boat that would glide over snow. I could use it to come back for Mary.

I walked more than seven rods and I was swallowed up by the snow. The drifts had

filled the ditches and wind had crusted the drifts into a void flat plain which drank all sound except the wind's plaintive moan. I tried to backtrack but the wind had swept all traces of a trial from the earth.

I swept snow from my front pockets in a search of matches. Nothing. Blindly I surged ahead. Maybe Burgee's would have left a light on - maybe a forgotten kerosene lamp burned in the dairy.

Hours drifted by. Nothing could stay in my thoughts. Snow was in my eyes, snow was in my mouth, snow was in my blood. I walked into a wall before I saw it. I couldn't understand why I couldn't go forward and tried again before falling into a shallow trough of snow. Like a curtain that lifts to a breeze, my stupor lifted to show me the barn wall. I was alive and Mary needed me.

The Neighbor

That boy pounded on the door like the Angels of Jericho. Claire and I both jumped out of bed and rushed to the door.

My God-he looked like a polar bear. Frost crusted over his face, milk white cheeks and his lips the color of slate. He sorta stumbled toward us when we opened the door. I caught him as he was falling and pulled him toward the center of the room.

"Shut the door," says I. "He's still alive. We'll need the medical book and get the whiskey from the shelf."

That's when Claire sings out, "Jesus, Joseph, and Mary!" And slaps a hand over her mouth, pointing down. The boy had been so cold, so numb, that he walked out of his boots. His feet were as naked as the day he was born.

His feet had the look of a marble headstone-gleaming, veined and solid stone.

The Father

I let the lamp burn just in case they needed the light.

"They'd stay in town wouldn't they?" Ma asked. "No one would let them travel in weather like this."

"No one would be fool enough to try."

But I felt uneasy. The wind had shifted and was blowin' full force. Even with our shelter of trees the snow was drifting deep. The mercury had dropped steady all evening.

I'd seen how the boy had looked at her. All through the night I had lain in my bed with uneasiness all around. Finally at four I got up.

"Where you going?" Ma asked. Her voice told me she hadn't slept either.

"I'm going to get Gabe. Stock is probably drifted from here to Montana."

But she knew I wouldn't be looking for cattle.

Gabe and I had just ridden west of the shelter belt when Gabe spotted a rider on the

ridge. It was about eight and still, like the prairie was holding its breath.

"That's Burgee on the hoary gelding, he wouldn't ride that unless..." Gabe stopped talking and we raced toward Burgee.

Only death would get Burgee on a horse and I knew that if my little girl was lost, Gabe would track her for me.

The Mortician

They brought her in at about noon. I had just finished fitting a casket together when I glanced out the window.

I think I watched a full fifteen minutes while they came down Main street.

Most of our beloved, when they pass on are left in a shed in cold weather since we can't dig the graves until a thaw, so it was out of the ordinary when Brother Bennett came with his dear departed daughter.

My gracious, my heart wept seeing the grief on the man's face. Watching that proud man endure while his lamb of a daughter had to be brought into town that way.

Come to find out, she had froze to death. Oddly enough she had froze sitting up on the wagon bench. Most folks usually tumble out when exposure is their bridge to the hereafter. Of course, you have only to know Brother Bennett to realize that his dear departed flower would be as erect in death as in life.

When Brother Bennett brought her in, she had her feet resting against his hip pocket. her knees wobbled above the wagon side panels and looked like the bottom rails of a rocking chair. He father gently and tenderly brought her into the workroom. We quickly pointed out our white casket for her final resting place. Unfortunately, no matter how we wedged, eased and finally strained-she would not fit the casket.

It is never easy wrestling with the dead while loved-ones watch. My assistant quickly pointed out she was froze and would be more pliable once we thawed her out.

We quickly placed her on a cane back chair and drew an old quilt about her to draw off the frost. My assistant would stay with her while I drew Brother Bennett away to make arrangements. We had only gotten to the part about being unable to dig the grave when his wife appeared. She gave Brother Bennett a glance and marched straight into where her departed lamb of Jesus was thawing out to the rigors. He daughter was flinching and shuttering enough to have flung off the quilt and Sister Bennett took it all in at a heartbeat. Her keening death song was still in my ears when her husband caught her as she fell.

Jomay Steen



Andy Smith
Self-Portrait
Oil Pastel

Apparent Shyness

You make me speechless, voiceless,
without a sound you drive me crazy. If I
close my eyes I can see you with me,
but when I open them you are with
someone else. I watch you from a
distance, safe for me, but too far from
you. You caress me with your diamond
eyes and hold me with your golden
smile. You speak in poem, laugh in
rhythm, cry in harmony. You are my
providence, you are my emotions, you
are my purity. When you touch me I
melt inside and out. Oh how I'd tell you
I like you, how much I care. For
shyness is my drug and you are my
remedy. Help me from being so
reserved, unmask your acceptance and
allow me to be part of your center.
Teach me how to love. Show me how to
be yours. Show me heaven.

Kim Sweningson

Something in Common

I have never lived in a small town, or graduated with a class of thirty-eight. I have never worked on a farm, or driven a tractor. I have never milked cows, run through fields of corn or swam in the pond behind the barn. I have never called lunch, dinner, or had steak, baked potato, and corn for lunch. Though, I have grown up in a town of forty-eight thousand, graduated from high school in a class of five hundred and fifty, worked at a grocery store and drove the family mini van. I've bought milk at the farmers market downtown and ran around a baseball field. I've swam in the pool at my neighbors house and have always had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, an apple and cookies in a little brown bag for lunch. So ... what do I, a city girl, have in common with you small town folk? Everything.

Kim Sweningson

Bologna Sandwiches

(an interview with Wolfgang Anderson on the floods of '97)

"It all started with
that River.
They said the crest was
coming tomorrow, but
it's here today and now
I got 18 feet a' water in
my house.
Everybody's been losing
something. Up the road the
sewers been
backing up for 2 days.
I heard out in the country
one man's cattle froze
to death 'cuz they couldn't get
out of the water in the pasture.
The DNR pulled the bodies from the
ice with a noose around each
cow's neck.
Yesterday, at the United Church of Christ
they threw that beautiful
grand piano in the dumpster.
Emma Brown lives three miles
up the road and she said when she
went back to her house
her fridge was packed
with mud.
She told me every wedding photo
she had was destroyed.
Here in The Kitchen we
been eating macaroni-tomato hotdish
and bologna sandwiches for a week. I think
the only ones who love this flood
are those ducks.
Them TV news guys
should tape their happy little faces."

To Mother

Blessed be the mother whose child disagrees with her,
for she gave them the strength to speak their side.
Blessed be the mother whose child refused her help,
for she gave them strong will and independence.
Blessed be the mother whose child is stubborn,
for she taught them not to back down.
Blessed be the mother who raises her child in God's teaching,
for Jesus will guide them when she isn't there.
Blessed be the mother whose child wanders and travels far,
for she gave them wings to fly.
Blessed be the mother who sacrifices for her child,
for she teaches them unselfishness.
Blessed be the mother with endless patience,
for it teaches her child much more than tying their shoe.
Blessed be the mother whose marriage and family comes first,
for her child will carry on that devotion for generations.
Blessed be the mother who quietly watches her child's mistakes,
for she knows they must learn for themselves.
Blessed be the mother who stays home to raise her child,
for her job is the most challenging and rewarding of all.
Blessed be the mother who loves her child,
for there exists no stronger love.
Blessed be the mother who prays for her child,
for God hears no stronger prayer.
Blessed are you, Mother.

Laurie Troth

Screaming Whispers

Bare feet
trapped inside high heels
A genuine smile,
painted over with crimson lipstick
Wind blown hair
held captive by tight barrettes
Carefree soul
imprisoned by role model rules

At a beach in Barcelona
far, far away from
these harsh florescent lights
I sift sand between my naked toes
instead of sniffing out children's errors
in their writings and dreams.

Who am I to stain their creations with my red pen?
And do you hear the sun and sea calling my name?
Not by some formal, pretentious title,
but screaming whispers at my buried soul.

Now I can smell the freedom I am so close to
which cannot be measured in miles but only
through my courage to answer

Laurie Troth

Oakwood, Vol. 2, Iss. 7 [1998], Art. 1
Tribute To a Gentle Man

God chooses special people,
that's what they always say.
God chose our special one
to take from us today.

His smile was like an angel's smile,
always kind and warm.
He was our great protector,
to keep us safe from harm.

His eyes were like a child's
innocent and true.
He loved to be with family,
and teach them all he knew.

My children will not see him
or know his gentle face;
they'll only know he loves them,
through my family's grace.

So God, if You're listening,
please our prayer hear.
Our hearts are asking You,
to keep our loved one dear.

Husband, Father, Grandfather,
God, lead him by the hand-
You see, the one You've taken,
he was our gentle man ...

In loving memory of Donald P. Peterson
September 20, 1997



Wade Thurman
A New Power
Computer Illustration

Umbrella

Today, I forgot my umbrella.
As I walked in the rain,
my shoes got wet.
The farther I walked,
the wetter I got.
When I got home
I had a cough,
My nose was runny,
And my forehead hot.
My goosebumps had goosebumps,
And I could not get warm.
I will not forget my umbrella again.

Niki Van Maanen

Home

It repels and draws
The longer I leave, the more I am beckoned
Growing up, I am getting out as fast as I can
Once gone, realize what I missed
Everything
Foreignness makes me crave insipid familiarity
Returning defeated, joyful
Taking experiences with, now a part of me
Difference

Paula Walsh

plastic and forced

it's easy to remember the things that pulled us together
but it's hard to say what they were and why they affected our lives
or why they disappeared
but they faded like your welcoming smile
just as buds were becoming leaves
and rains formed rivers absorbing the sun
now things are too plastic and forced
to bring back the meaning we both felt times ago
when we shared everything and asked for nothing in return

Jeremy S. Waltner

10,000 Flowers

She awoke slowly, looked to her right, and her memory vanished for a short time.

Who's arms were wrapped around her, and why did it feel so right, and at the same time so wrong? These were the questions facing her, her eyes barely open to see the day. So she rolled over and went back to sleep, paying no attention to the music playing in her head. And she dreamt.

As she faded off into her escape, her sleeping mind saw a field of 10,000 flowers beneath a sky brighter than beauty itself. To her right were mountains, to her left were pastures, and she was in the middle of it all; dancing, playing, singing. It was so real ... so peaceful she couldn't hide her joy. Even in her sleep she smiled and spoke nonsense.

She made her way through the flowers and began to walk to nowhere in particular, just to somewhere. "The horizon," she decided. She would walk to the horizon. It seemed so close that it would be foolish not to try and reach it.

"... just a little further and I'll be there," she thought as she played in the soil and the sand and the 10,000 flowers. "Just a little further and I'll be able to answer the questions of the greatest dreamers."

"Just a little further and I'll be Queen of the castle."

The ground crunched as she walked, like dry sticks underneath the steps of a giant. She picked flowers as she danced, her strides growing bigger and bigger as her hands overflowed with red and white silk.

But ... wait ...

What was that ahead of her a ways, blocking her path towards the light ... the tunnel leading to her savior.

And she stopped dead in her tracks as a feeling of panic overcame her. She didn't know what it was infecting her vision, but she knew she couldn't get past it. And then she heard a voice.

"Do you believe your fear will get you?"

It was an appropriate question, but one she never took time to answer - not even in her head - because she was afraid of what the answer might be. But this time the answer came easily ... too easily, so she lied.

"No!" she screamed. "I've got nothing to be afraid of. Look at Me! I'm in the very center of all this beauty. I look over there and see green pastures, I look over there and see bold mountains. And look where I'm standing, right in the middle of 10,000 flowers. Fear doesn't exist. Not here."

Her walk became faster and faster as she screamed louder and louder, shouting words even she didn't understand, struggling to get to the horizon anyway she could. There had to be a way to get around whatever it was she saw, now shining brighter than even her foolish dream.

"I'll just jump it," she told herself, "or walk around it ... or ..."

And then she realized there was nothing she could do ... no way to escape the evil that awaited.

So she sat down.

Clouds rolled in, the mountains turned to ruins and the pastures to dust. And she noticed she was sitting in the middle of 10,000 dead flowers. And then she fell asleep. She had to, it was her only escape.

"The sun is shining," said a voice.

As she opened her eyes she saw a smiling face, and she sat up.

"What's going on?" she asked, barely coherent and extremely confused.

"It's eleven, Do you want to get up?"

She didn't answer but laid her head back on her pillow, rolled over, and gave a small weak laugh, not at anything in particular, just a laugh.

"... or do you want to go back to sleep?"

"I want to sleep a little longer," she mumbled.

"All right," the smiling voice said. "There will be coffee waiting."

But the flowers were already dead.

Jeremy S. Waltner

living on the coast

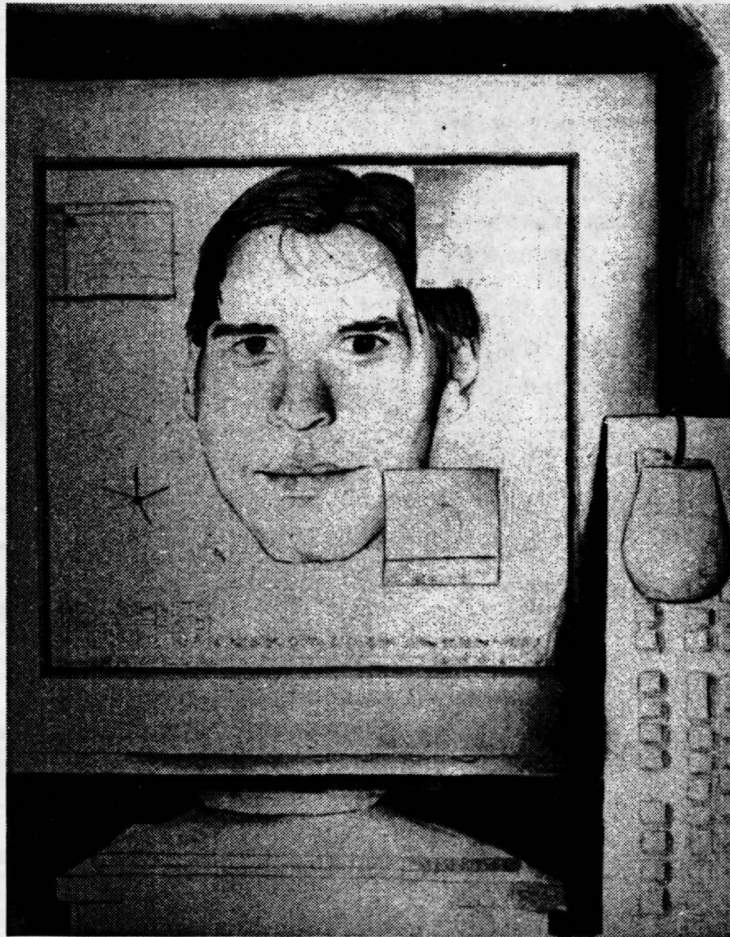
overwhelmed by the inland sea
though the waves are not massive
and they do not break
true to form, there is no displacement

covering the continents
unrelenting stillness
unquestioning and unconscious
each part content to fill its given place

(ostensibly separate individuals
simply following the flow
like automatons without autonomy
to me, they look like the sea)

off the beaten path i wander
on the edge of the sea, contemplating
it is often depressing from this view
but wholly liberating, and so i remain

Matt Vidal



Justin Woitas
Self-Portrait
Pencil

Private Victory

Wins come, wins go
But one thing is always certain
When all goes well
And triumph is achieved
There is no celebration
Ceremony is unheard of
There is no prideful boasting
Or telling of great deeds
No one may know
No one may care
A few brief moments of contentment
Soon to be replaced by a deeper longing
The private victory is only a memory

Louis George Whitehead

Finding Christ

I ran three miles searching frantically
wind-blown tears wind-blown hair
Blinded
no light
all death
bleeding knees embedded with rocks
I fell hard in prayer
Mixed blood and tears running in a stream
mixing with the gravel road
Happy pain joyful pain
Loving the sunrise the birth of yet another day
Could it be?
Then
In the breaking pink orange red twilight
still shrouded in darkness
I found Christ

Sonya S. Wieman

BEWARE

I stumble around in the darkness trying to find the light.
As I'm feeling around something strikes the side of my body.
I can feel the blood gushing out, but no pain exists.

Beware the sharp object that hides in the dark, for it can cut you.

I prompt myself up against a wall trying to let my eyes adjust to the darkness.
I see an object coming toward me. My body begins to tremble as it moves closer and closer.

Beware the images in the night for they can haunt you.

I run but there is no escape.
I reach for my window.
Looking down staring four stories below me, I realize that it was my only way out.
I can fly, I can fly away.

Beware your ideas, for they may not always be right.

As I stand on the ledge outside my window the numbness in my body seemed to increase.
A smile appeared across my face as I spread my arms and leaped into the air.

Beware your actions, for they alone will bring death upon you.

Stacey Wallman



Paul Witherington Awards for High School Writers

et al.: Oakwood
Prayers for those on the Kilgore road

**There is a narrow, windy road south of the St. Francis community.
To many this road leads to a good time, a night on the town, and what
some came to know as a waste.**

**At the end of this road is a small community on the Nebraska borderline
called Kilgore, a paradise to many.**

**This town is known for a bar which over the miles calls the natives not too
far away.**

**This bar calls the unwed, dependent mothers who collect their children's
S.S.I, G.A, and A.D.C. on the first of the month.**

**It calls those who carry the heavy addiction of Alcoholism and have nothing
better to do with their money when they have some.**

**It calls the teens who want to fit in, be cool, and want to put a show on for
their friends,**

**It calls the teens with family problems and have no one to talk to and
nowhere to go.**

**To some this bar is a place to come when they're worn down by problems,
just plain bored, or want to have fun.**

**To some it's a place where good times are had, a game of pool is shot,
a bottle of reserves is slammed, and it is the last place they remember
until they come to the next day.**

**To me it's a waste of time and money,
It is the waste of a healthy mind and spirit,
It is the waste of talents and accomplishments,**

**Also it hurts knowing it is a place where many relatives go and never
return home,
The only proof that they were ever there is a white cross on the side of
the road where once in a while,
Prayers are said for those who have died on the Kilgore road**

AFTERTASTE

Strolling into Mr. Waltner's classroom.
Tie dye shirts, ablaze with orange and red.
Bell-bottoms,
Bandannas with peace signs,
and high-heeled platform shoes.
Hippies, Hippies everywhere!
Silence devours the room.
Eyes scan me with questioning looks.
Red lips separate.
Girls begin to whisper
"she,"
"blonde,"
"new."
Quizzical expressions.
Excited giggles.
A new mix of city and rural flavoring.
The *aftertaste* will develop.

Unhidden Mysteries

Where is the supreme being?

The maker of Baby Ruths',
Could it be- and the Empire State Building,
-that we are hiding- and hate.
-not to be found?

I pushed against the air with my body, making tremendous winds.
I stomped my feet on Panama's Beach, creating the ocean waves.
I raised my voice to gather clouds, loosening the gull's screech.
I molded conch shells from my fingerprint, absolving the sun's grip.

Where is the supreme being?

Creator of the universe,
Perhaps it is- and divorce settlements,
-what we can't reveal- and Niagara Falls.
-that he already knows?

I hid my face from the Big Bad Wolf, shivering beneath the covers.
I cried my protests at the land's injustices, sleeping safely at home.
I wept my great tears at a mirror image, closing my eyes from it.
I locked myself away from sight, refusing their loving sympathy.

Where is the supreme being?

Lover of humankind,
Is there- and Ann of Green Gables,
-something here- and the lonely.
-that we can't guess at?

I think maybe so.

The Plot

Some people have great stories
Things that they've been through
I have stories also, but
only a few

When will my life develop a plot
fairy tale, or tragedy
I don't really care
I just want it to happen now

As time turns the pages
Hopefully it will appear
The story of my life
Maybe it's beginning here

I could walk out the door and
fall into the arms of prince charming
or maybe a wicked witch
has me in her sights

Whatever the case
It had better happen soon
Before my pages rot
And my binding comes loose

Technical Difficulties

That morning, Ron Stevens woke up and shuffled through the maddening paces of his increasingly static life. He poured his Cocoa Puffs and a glass of milk. After plopping two ice cubes in the milk, he took a long gulp and sighed at the prospect of another day.

His mother, as usual, was seated at the table doing the previous day's crossword. "Good night's sleep, Hon?" she kindly inquired.

"Insomnia," Ron grunted from behind a mouthful of chocolate bits.

"Maybe you should stop writing just before going to bed. I think that would help."

"Why?"

"You get your brain all worked up. I don't know why you think you have to do it."

"I *have* to. I don't know *why*," Ron replied while reading the cereal box's side panel. He was getting 25% of his recommended daily limit of riboflavin. Just *perfect* for his last day on Earth.

His mother shocked him out of his self-induced reverie. "Are we running out of Cocoa Puffs again?"

"Yeah," he mumbled.

"You go through them so fast! Although I honestly don't know how you can eat them dry."

"Practice."

"Uh-huh." She turned to her puzzle. "What's the capital of Vermont? Burlington?"

"No, I'm pretty sure it's Montpelier. Fifth grade geography."

"Yes, I believe you're right." She filled in the answer in block letters in the corresponding squares. "Say, where's Leslie? I haven't seen her in a while."

Ron let out a sigh. "Don't remind me."

"Oh! You...you broke up?! How long ago was this?"

"Two weeks."

"Why didn't I know?"

"I *like* to keep you oblivious."

His mother laughed at what she thought was yet another clever joke from her son. "That's too bad. I liked her. Was it a bad breakup?"

"Think Hiroshima."

But actually, Ron's brain reminded, it *wasn't* that bad. She had walked up to him, her black hair gleaming like a trove of undiscovered jewels. And she handed him a necklace. Recognizing it as his Christmas present to her, his brain prepared a ready line of defense and went into full dump mode.

"Ron, I can't keep this. I...I...don't feel that way about you. Anymore. I'm sorry," she barely got out.

"Why not? I love you!"

"I know, but...dear *God*, Ron, we agreed this was just going to be *fun*. A crazy little thing we'd do just for laughs. And you wanted...I don't know, *more*."

"But I've been in love with you since second grade! Does that mean *anything* to you?"

"Ron you...I...just..."

"Lemme guess. You think we make great friends. So, naturally, let's just stay friends. But I'm really funny. Am I right?"

"Yeah." Her face brightened. "I'm glad you understand!" And she flounced off leaving him to roll around in his own little linoleum covered miserable portion of the world.

“But I don’t understand!” he called after her. “I’m *tired* of being funny! I wanna’ be...*unfunny*!”

"Nice comeback, Stevens," a random contributor added from the side.

"Yeah. Sure. Whatever."

He slammed his locker and ran down the hall into...his mother asking, "What was the name of Kevin's brother on 'The Wonder Years?'"

“Don’t you get it?!” he finally exploded. “My girlfriend left me, I can’t find a prom date because that jerk-off Randy told everyone I was *gay*, a *freshman* got a higher chair than me in band, and my life is *static*. *Nothing* ever happens. Nobody dies or gets shot or contracts HIV from a prostitute with no arms or *anything*. Why can’t we be like TV? At least someone would laugh at all our lame jokes. And then they could go on the Internet and debate about who I should sleep with, or write porno about me or something. At least 20 million people would *care!*”

His mother appeared stunned by his outburst. "Well...I can see where you're coming from."

"No you don't! You never get *anything*. *Everything* flies over your head." He stormed out the door. At the last possible moment, he stuck his head in the door. "It was *Wayne!*" he seethed.

"Thank you," she called as the door slammed. She marked it on her puzzle and took another sip of coffee. What was wrong with that boy?

[illegible]

Ron didn't go to school. He pushed his driving nightmare of a beater car way past the speed limit and rushed to the only place he *could* go. Spartan Falls. The third-largest waterfall in the whole state. It wasn't that big, but it would serve his purposes well.

Standing on the bridge and looking down into the whirling cloud of black foam, Ron began to wonder if what he was about to do was the *smart* thing. But he was *sick* of the smart thing. Holding back tears, he cherished the thought of Leslie and plunged off the bridge.

As he hit the water, he became suddenly aware of a gnawing fear of death that had spontaneously developed in his gut. Still...Holding the word "stasis" in his brain like a beacon, he closed his eyes and let the water sweep him over the falls.

The first breath of pure water was hell, but he let go and gulped in water like it was soup for a homeless person. Soon, blackness enveloped him and he thought briefly of Leslie's black, black hair and suddenly, up, up, up! And he plopped into an apartment so dirty it made your average Wal-Mart look like a boutique. Three scruffy guys were huddled around a computer in the corner. Ron looked around at the superhero collectibles on the shelves.

The man in a "Beer IS Food" T-shirt spoke. "The kids on the net are gonna eat this up!" He

had a voice that sounded like he had a permanently clogged nose.

"I know, man. It's an Emmy for us, for sure!" the man who was typing said.

"Suicide and unrequited love! Who wouldn't love it?" the pony-tailed man commented. "What a way to kick off February!"

"Excuse me," Ron began.

The three turned in perfect synchrony and gawked at him. clogged- nose- guy finally spoke. "Well! Look who finally showed up!"

"Excuse my disappointment, but I half expected the afterlife to be slightly more exciting than an apartment full of Superman memorabilia. And, if you're God, then *why* are you wearing a 'Beer IS Food' T-shirt?" Ron asked.

"Afterlife!?" typing-man inquired.

"God!?" clogged-nose-guy chipped in.

"Sometimes you act like it," pony-tailed-man snidely commented.

"Shut up!" clogged-nose man snapped. He stepped forward. "Apparently there's been some confusion. Perhaps we can explain. This isn't heaven, and I'm not God. The reason you're not there is because you're not really dead yet. You're just unconscious. And you've slipped into a parallel universe. Where you really *are* is a TV show. I'm your head writer." He offered his hand. Ron sat with a dumbfounded expression on his face.

Typing-man continued, "Yeah, that whole little speech you made to your mom about TV and stuff is *great* irony! Or something. Because people on the net really *do* write porno about you. And Leslie, mostly." He winked lasciviously. "Wanna' read some?"

"Maybe later. So, let me get this straight. Everything I've ever done has been out of my control. *You've* made me kiss Leslie, get that speeding ticket, drink that beer that got me grounded, and commit suicide?"

"Basically, yeah," pony-tailed man answered.

"Then again, in some other universe, our lives are TV shows, too. Everybody's life is one somewhere," typing-man patiently explained. "Eventually, *you* get to create a show, and *you* get to be in charge. But that's a few years off."

"Terrific. But someone, *somewhere* must not be a TV show," Ron reasoned.

"Hmmm...that would be God then. After all, who'd wanna' watch a show where the hero's omnipotent. In our post-modern society, your heroes gotta' have a weakness," clogged- nose-guy said.

"Gotta' have a weakness," typing-man echoed.

"So, basically you're saying that God's a TV writer?" Ron questioned.

"I guess I don't know, but why *not*! After all, he's in charge of the whole universe, right?" pony-tailed man contributed.

"Yeah, that's *real* Judeo-Christian," Ron sarcastically remarked. Switching topics, he asked, "So, what are my ratings?"

"Well, we're about five places lower than 'Walker,' but we win more Emmys. And the critics like us. And you don't solve everything by kicking stuff," clogged-nose-guy answered.

"I could start. Kicking stuff, I mean," Ron replied.

"No, there's not gonna be any of that! We don't wanna' mess with you! You're a *great*

character to write for. All that pent-up rage and libido and your undying love for Leslie. *Good stuff!* Oh, and your Cocoa Puffs fetish," typing-man commented.

"So why *now*? Why have me commit suicide? *Now*?"

"What month is it?" clogged-nose-guy asked.

"February?" Ron answered.

"And what's *in* February?" typing- man continued.

"Uh, Valentine's Day?" Ron guessed.

"NO! You *idiot*!" typing-man half-screamed. "Sweeps!"

"All the big stuff happens in sweeps month. Haven't you *ever* noticed that all the major events in your life occur in November, February, or May?" pony-tailed man explained.

"No, as a matter of fact, I haven't."

"Well, they do. We end this week with you plunging off the bridge. Next week, a passer-by pulls you from the river and saves you. You're revived at the end of the episode after everybody worries for an hour. Then you and Leslie 'get it on!' The nets been buzzing for *weeks*!" clogged- nose guy exclaimed.

"Doesn't it bother you that you spend every day entertaining people by making people in another *universe* die or have sex or any of a number of other equally manipulative things?" Ron ranted.

"No," they answered in unison.

"Why are we entertained by that anyway?" Ron asked.

"Well, I certainly don't know!" typing-man answered. "But it might make a good episode."

Pony-tailed man glanced at his watch. "Well, time to go. Have fun. Oh, and we're looking forward to your next season. When you form a private investigation firm with Leslie!"

"And a talking dog! Oughtta' be a real ratings grabber!" typing-man excitedly added.

"But what if I don't *want* to?!"

"He's up!" his mother called out. A flood of people deluged his hospital room. Leslie was front and center.

"Ron, I've done some thinking, and...I love you, too," she shyly proclaimed. The crowd sighed in approval. And she kissed him.

"Great!" Ron answered. "Could I get some Cocoa Puffs?" Everybody laughed.

Fade to black.

Roll credits.

Nothing.
Emptiness.
Utter silence.

As the numbers on my clock radio change from 6:59 to 7:00, the atonal screeching of country music blasts me into consciousness. My mind in a fog, I wrestle out of my tangle of blankets and stagger across the room to my closet. I sluggishly put on my uniform and then my warm-ups. I go outside into the cool morning air to pull my car out of the garage. I fire up the gold Impala and head for town.

As I pull up at the school, the navy blue school van is waiting, its sliding door open. I grab a hat, my spikes, and some cash before locking my car and climbing into the van. Within the next few minutes, the rest of the team members have arrived, looking about as awake as I do. Mr. Elgethun, our coach, gets in, starts the van, cranks up an oldies station, and we're off.

The van turns into the parking lot at the Roe Granger and stops. We climb out of the blue mammoth, barely more awake than when we got in. We yawn, stretch, and head across the crowded parking lot toward the restrooms. Refreshed and almost fully awake, we head back to the van again, receiving our course maps and entry stickers from Mr. E. The girls take off to stretch and warm up for their race, which is first. The rest of the team, consisting of Justin Mattson and I, stroll around the course, checking ground conditions (moist and moderately muddy), doing some light warm-ups (slow jogging, arm stretches, etc.), and talking. We wander down to the starting line to wish the girls good luck. The gun goes off, a stream of ponytails and brightly colored tank-tops surge forward, and the race has begun. Justin and I find a spot along the bike path where we can shout encouragement (or disparagement) as the runners go by.

After a minute or two, we hear shouting and cheering on our left, the volume riding in a crescendo effect as the runners near. As we watch, the leaders crest the horizon, preceded by a tall, skinny guy on a bike, his t-shirt splattered with mud from the tires. The runners pass by in twos and threes, ponytails bouncing with each step. Justin and I shout support to our female teammates as they go by, then begin warming up for the boys' varsity race, which is next. I begin to get a tense, excited feeling in my stomach as I stretch, jog, and jump. As the girls' race finishes, the guys begin assembling at the starting line. Nearly a hundred athletes in colorful jerseys and shorts are milling about, checking shoes and entry stickers, stretching, and nervously talking and laughing. After a few minutes of this, the starter steps out in front of the line, and begins his speech, shouting to be heard.

"There are 96 runners. We will be placing the top ten. There are a few muddy spots on the course today, but it's a little drier, closer to the bike path. There will be two signals: 'on your mark,' and the gun. Are we ready?"

There is a long moment of silence as everyone waits for the first signal. The only sound to be heard is the rustling of cloth in the breeze.

"RUNNERS! ON YOUR MARKS!" Tension.

CRACK

Everyone takes off running; it's an anticlimax to all the pre-race buildup. I can hear the other runners breathing and the thudding of footfalls on the turf. I'm on the outside of the pack when we round the first corner. I pass about ten guys as the pack starts to thin out into groups of five and six. We turn south, running next to the trees along the bike path. The Redfield coach is standing alongside, screaming at one of his runners.

"GET OUT OF THE ZONE! YOU'RE IN THE ZONE AND YOU DON'T WANT TO BE IN THE ZONE! NOW GET OUT OF THAT ZONE!"

The runner next to me mutters, "Psycho," and I break out laughing as I pull away. I reach the end of the trees and turn around to go back north along the bike path. My legs are beginning to get tired, and I can hear each breath rasp in and out of my throat. I nod to Mattson as he passes going the other way. As I come back up towards the soccer field, where we started, I can hear snatches of shouts and cheers:

"...here we go Andy!"

"...good work, Josh, keep it up..."

"Get up there with those guys, you're better than them!"

Now I'm next to the soccer field. It's a wee-bit muddy here, and I can hear my shoes squelching as they splatter me with mud and wet grass. The cheers dissolve into a vague, non-sensical smattering of words and syllables as I run past the crowd. The people are round, white blobs above blurs of color. My focus is on the blue-and-orange tank-top of the runner in front of me, who I'm slowly gaining on. We pass the field and come to the section along the softball complex. This is about a quarter of a mile of soft grass dotted with pine trees. I crank my speed up to about double what it was while I weave in and out among the trees. I feel good here; I've gotten my second wind. I splash back around the soccer field and go down the bike path once again. Now my legs are starting to hurt, my vision is fuzzy, and the only things I can hear are my breath wheezing in and out and my heart pounding in my chest. As I turn around to go up the bike path for the last time, finally, my legs lose most of their feeling. Taking advantage of this inability to hurt, I speed up a notch. I hit the swampy section by the soccer field again, pushing so I can be finished. I focus on the runner in front of me as I round the last corner. I know there are people along the sidelines shouting and screaming, but I can't see or hear them. I sprint toward the chute, passing the runner at the last moment -- almost collapsing. I stagger down the chute, smile at the girl who hands me my place card, and think fond thoughts of Arby's.

Bonnie, Amy's mom smiles at us. "If you get bored you can come in," she says. We sit with the most innocent smiles we can force. "Bye guys," she sings. "Bye!" We drive through our clenched teeth. Bonnie slips back into her house and Amy, Syd and I are alone. Suddenly the back yard begins to quiver. Amy looks at me and Syd cracks a smile. A gaping chasm appears, caused by the angered Earth. All at once we are swallowed.

Amy and I regain consciousness. We are each dressed in our silver space suits. I look up to see a strange Martian landscape. Purple mountains capped with orange snow form the circumference of the plain's lemon covered grass. A nebula swirls in the upper atmosphere creating a beautiful profession of colorful ribbons. A single falling star shatters the cloudiness of the Martian sky. A soft wind blows over us. We sound like Darth Vadar when our breathing is so exaggerated by the microphones in our space helmets.

"I don't think we are in Kansas anymore, Captain," Amy jokes.

A low rumbling noise begins.

"I don't think we're on Earth anymore, Doctor," I say worried

The low rumbling begins to get louder. The ground begins to shake. The doctor and I fall on our backs. We tremble uncontrollably, until, BOOM! From the ground sprouts a seven headed monster gripping yellow slime from every pore. It towers over us like a two-story building. It's back is riddled with protruding bones giving it the appearance of a gnarled rocky shore line. It's eyes glow with a golden color that makes the doctor and I sick. It sends a spine tingling scream at us and paralyzes us on our backs. One of its huge heads draws close and the doctor and I can feel its rancid breath through the fabric of our space suits. Its razor-like teeth protrude so much that they are at almost a ninety degree angle. We hope that its vision is based on movement; in which case it will not see us if we are still. But the doctor begins to cry, she feels that this will be our last adventure in space. Suddenly, the monster lunges at us. We leap out of its doomed path. It doesn't give up so easy. It pivots with remarkable speed and is ready to attack again.

"Adult!" yells Syd.

The Martian landscape morphs back to the backyard again. Okay, maybe none of this really did happen to us. Maybe our imaginations just created all of this. However, it did seem real to us. It was fantastic. We could be whatever we wanted to be, or nothing at all. It was something that we have never gotten tired of. We called it "The Game." As long as we all played, the new worlds never ceased to flow. Today was even better because "The Game" had two new characters, Jenna and Ryan.

With a screech, the sky blue van pulls up. Ryan is almost pushed out, and with a louder screech, the van pulls away. Ryan looks at us blinking. He knew that we were playing and he

wasted no time in joining us. His spurs began to clink against the heels of his boots. Gun smoke music began to play. An old western town sprouted up in the back yard. Ryan stands across from a desperado dressed in all black. He is holding Ryan's girlfriend, Amy Belle, hostage. Her soft blonde hair dances upon her shoulders in sharp contrast to the tear running down her cheek. "Unhand her, fiend," says Ryan. The desperado glares at him and they both knew there would be trouble. Syd takes Amy Belle aside so as not to be hit by a stray bullet. "Go for your gun," smirks the desperado while Amy Belle screams in terror. BANG! A single shot rings out through the west. The desperado falls dead to the ground. Ryan walks over to Amy Belle and clutches her close and goes to kiss her.

"Agh!" Amy yells and the old west town is washed away like an undried water color in the rain.

"What are you doing?" she asks.

"That's what always happens in the end. I'm sorry." Ryan makes puppy dog eyes and Amy hits him.

"Look, here comes Jenna," Syd smiles.

Jenna also knows this game well, and with her arrival, "The Game" shifts. A huge glass tower erects itself in the newly established city block. We are standing in a hallway in the building facing two apartments. One with the number eight, and the other with the number ten. Jenna is Amy's age, and she has hair the color of chocolate. She is a little anxious to be an adult, especially one with money. She begins to appoint the marriages. It's her favorite game to be married.

"Okay, Amy and Ryan Hokestraw," Jenna instructs.

"I'm keeping my name. I told you that last time," Amy growls.

"That explains a lot. Anyway, Amy Johnson and Ryan Hokestraw. That leaves, Dan and Jenna Cohen," Jenna smiles and Amy and I slap our foreheads and retreat to our separate apartments.

My apartment is an ugly brown with no windows. The wall paper is peeling off. It's dark and I believe that there is a mouse running along my foot. Jenna comes in and screams.

"Yuck!" she says. The apartment sees her unhappiness and shifts itself into a huge condo with two giant glass walls overlooking the city. It has white plush carpet and indirect lighting. The couch is leather, white leather. The end tables each have a Ming vase perched on them. *Tres* expensive. Jenna leaves. I stand there blinking. Jenna comes back in. Now her thin body is framed with a pink pant suit, with satin trim and a matching collar. Her hair is up in a french bun. She personifies the phrase "Working Girl."

"Wow, honey, I had a hard day at work today," she chirps.

"I can see that." I look at Jenna, who adorns three bags from Macey's. She hands me the bags and pauses in front of me. She looks at me and scoffs. Suddenly I am wearing a smoking jacket and holding a Bloody Mary. Amy bursts in.

"Jenna thought we agreed that we would be normal people this time," Amy yells.

"But I want to be rich," Jenna pouts. ^{et al.: Oakwood} "Here Fou Fou."

Amy sees me and my smoking jacket. "You're not helping at all, Dan."

"I didn't do it," I say in my defense.

Jenna begins to float aimlessly about the apartment followed by the enraged Amy and me. Jenna disappears into the bedroom and no sooner has she closed the door when she comes out into the kitchen wearing a satin evening gown with a white fur collar. She holds Syd, or Fou Fou, in one hand. Fou Fou has a bell on her neck and her ears are in curlers.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. Jenna's cell phone rings and she begins to chat.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. A butler enters with a needle-like mustache and hands her a platter of *hors d'oeuvres*.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. The butler hands Jenna a burgundy.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. I hand the butler the Macey's bags and Jenna hands the butler Fou Fou.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. A young woman comes in.

"It's time for your manicure, miss," she says.

"Jenna!" Amy yells.

"Madam." The butler is beginning to shake from holding things for too long. Jenna and I hand our drinks to the butler and Jenna starts her manicure.

"Jenna!" Amy yells. The butler collapses from exhaustion.

"Jenna!" Amy screams. Amy runs to the window and runs through it.

Jenna clutches her chest and screams with terror.

"My butler!" She screams. A giant monkey like head peers into the condo. A huge roar shakes the metropolis below. Amy Kong reaches her tremendous hand around Jenna's satin outfit. Jenna screams. Ryan begins to laugh.

"You are ruining my marriage, you big ape," scolds Jenna.

Amy Kong climbs to the summit of the building and holds Jenna tight. She lets out an Earth shattering roar and the enormous silver towers which composed the city begin to collapse upon themselves. A huge cloud of dust rises over the rubble. There is fire. There are screams. There are...

"Adult!" yells Fou Fou, I mean Syd, and the dust clears, several thousand buildings are engulfed by the earth. "It's time to go," says Ryan's mom, still talking on the cell phone.

Ryan is put into the light blue van and it begins to drive away. The neighborhood is transformed into a black alley of old London and, through the bars of the horse drawn jail cart, we see one of the most brilliant criminal minds of our century, plotting his escape.