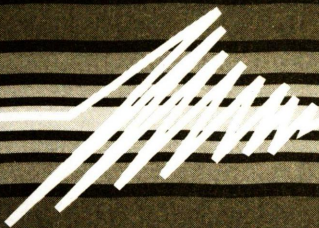


et al. Oakwood



*the right brain focuses on  
aesthetics, feeling, and  
creativity. we use this as  
a tool to communicate  
through forms of art.*

**oakwood**

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# ***oakwood***

## ***volume 2 number 11***

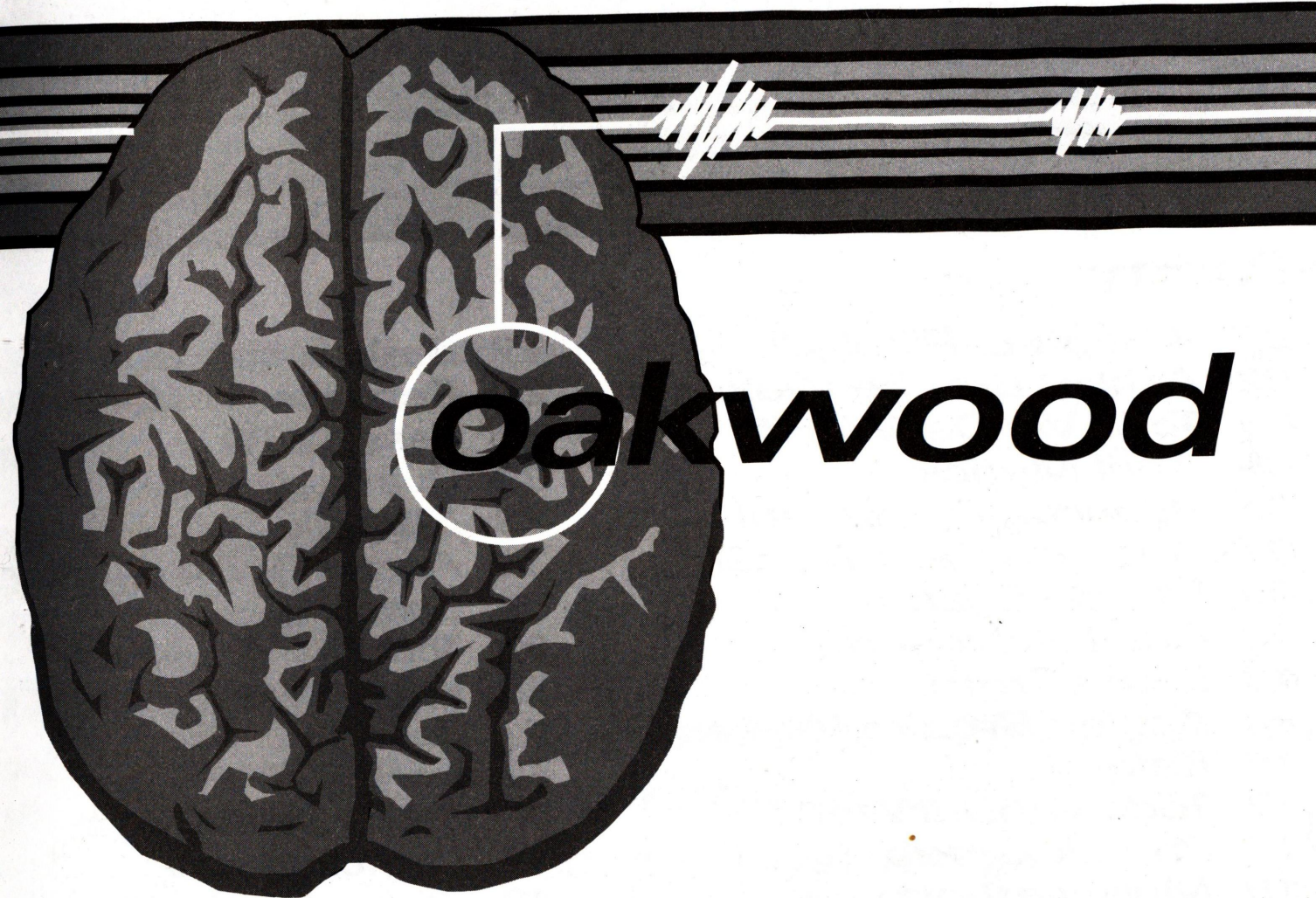


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et al.: Oakwood

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et al. *Alcohol*

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**Leigh Mueller**

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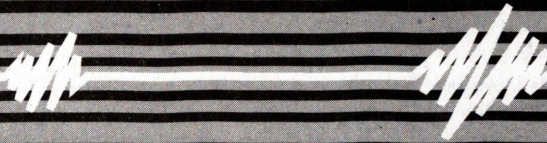
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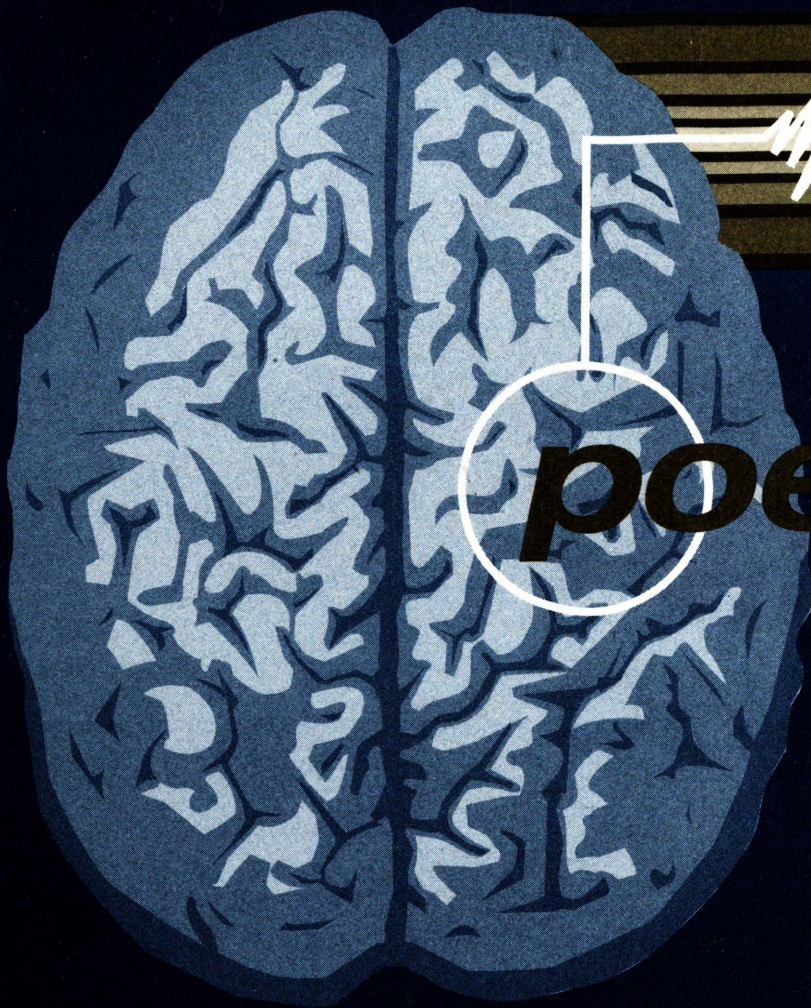
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**poetry**







# **Bakery**

**Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.**

Bakery

Shop of Pleasure.

I'll have one of each!

Really? You must decide on one.

Make up your mind. Big, little, sweet, or tart.

Raspberry twist. Life is sweet. Until, the last bite.

All gone? Is that all there is? Delicious.

Happy memories come with a twist.

No regrets. Good choice.

A teary return to

white bread.



## ***Crayon***

### ***Ashley Brooke Wakeman***

Streaks pale direction in orbs without words  
A limpid idea disclosed too soon  
What is written seeks no meaning  
And that which has means finds no one to seek  
In the purple reign that ruminates and blurs  
The comedies and tragedies  
That are outlined in the yellow crayon  
So rarely, truly seen

To embody that frenetic energy  
So solid, so scarce  
Is when sisters kiss and mothers find bliss  
In a sadness not yet won  
It is to stand amidst the piebald herd  
Yet to not to be one of the  
Parrying figures in black moth waistcoats  
Leaning into the blow of their lilting breeze

I want to live life as though it is humming  
Forever wavering after that scrawling yellow hope  
That dances before us like a playful kite  
Dazzling us, luring us into golden awe  
It strives to keep us guessing  
Sometimes stumbling, but always laughing  
In the wake of gleam from the time we wake  
To the time we see it fade to a distilled blue  
This crayon, scribbling  
Beyond the lines.



# **Daisy**

**Todd VanDerWerff**

Regrets piled up  
in the cellars of my mind  
like old newspapers,  
just waiting to be thrown out.

I trace fingers through the dusty pages  
and your picture shines from so many of them.

For someone I talked to less than ten times,  
you take up a hell of a lot of space in my mind.

So I dig you up in the real world  
and find a picture  
and find you're not as cute as memory served  
and kiss my beautiful girlfriend and make it right  
and watch dumb sitcoms with her until our laughter rings with hollow pain.

I loved the idea of you, Daisy Buchanan.

I hate you for not becoming a goddess.



# ***Sunset Before the Storm***

**Brandi Lamster**  
*Pastel*





## ***Dance Instructor***

### ***April Myrick***

I always stand at the back  
of the room.

She sees me, sometimes, and  
knows when I have learned  
the steps.

I tremble as she leads me  
to the front row;  
twenty sets of eyes follow  
my every movement.

I suddenly regret that  
I ever signed up for this  
class.



## ***Guilty Rose***

### ***Rebecca Opstedahl***

clouds rain relentlessly  
lush greens set against the dismal gray  
black and white

lonely rose succumbs to gravity  
guilt of past passion wronged  
rain beats defeated petals

lovers lost in each other's  
taste touch eyes essence  
intoxicated

soft hands caress each curve  
two souls merge  
promises of sunshine made

lonely rose lays crushed  
wrong words exchanged now unforgiveness  
reigns  
hard rain unmerciful

no hope no life  
guilty rose plagued by desperation  
thunder echoes in every drop



# ***El Muerte del Hombre, El Hombre del Muerte***

**Austin Gerald Tucker**

Against wrathful torrents came the dead man  
He speaks through misty visions  
He walks with spirits...  
The muted sun imposed on a deleted sky  
Holds the birds in their perchless slumber  
Holds the clouds in forgotten splendor  
Across the river to the far shore  
The boatman waits in bottomless boots  
A signal sent brings him nigh  
Through mad eyes, he sees his reflection  
In the dark waters gap—a mournful glow  
Seen in the tides' want for one more soul



**Plants**  
**Jacque Tuntland**  
*stick & paint*





## **Goodbye** **Marcie Mizera**

To find the courage  
To let it happen  
To be alone  
To realize  
To understand  
But to say  
To say the word  
Is almost impossible  
The memories disappear  
The tears dry  
The moments fade  
But you still hide  
Trying to hold on  
To live in the past  
To dream it away  
But deep in your soul  
You need to let go  
Deep in your eyes  
What your mouth refuses  
To say Goodbye



# ***A Fizzing Coke Bottle and a Dripping Pen***

***Chad Robinson***

Crinkly papers thrown on the unseen floor  
Pop like popcorn behind an oven door.  
Just fourteen lines are all I want to write,  
But the struggle's end remains out of sight.  
For a classic poem I stop to read;  
Maybe inspiration is what I need.  
I devour Wordsworth and the great Yeats,  
Then on to Dylan Thomas before Keats.  
My paper lies blank and broken-hearted,  
Waiting for ink, to never be parted.  
The coke bottle sitting beside my bed  
Fizzes as a song takes off in my head.  
With sweet words of innocence my pen drips  
Like the warm nectar from her parted lips.



# Culture Icons

## Carole Weber

Mixed Media





**Fall Still Life**  
**Sara Smith**  
Oil Pastel





## ***A Woman Tried to Tell Them***

***Laurie Troth***

A woman tried to tell them,  
but no one listened to what she said  
The old man sang along  
with the mermaids in his head  
The young baby cried  
alone in his cold bed  
The morals fell behind  
as the sins raced on ahead  
The starving lives died  
as the others overfed  
A little girl was drowning  
in the dangerous waters she had tread  
The pieces were so perfect  
but now are torn to shreds  
The diamonds were abandoned  
for polished and disguised lead  
Now they are their own testament  
a statement to the dead  
A woman tried to tell them  
but no one listened to what she said ...



## ***Iron Rose***

### ***Ashley Brooke Wakeman***

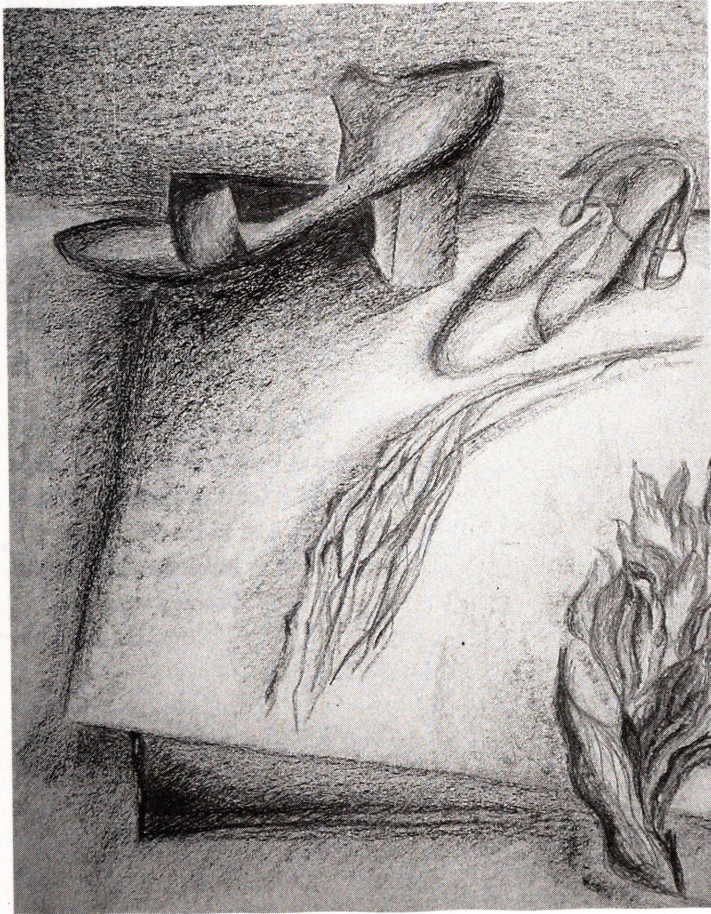
Discretion like wrought iron  
Twisted but never tamed  
Grips its cold fingers about  
Like telltale tendrils  
In a rose garden

Sits in the shadows  
Yet shines in the dawn  
Unsteady and fortuitous  
Ambivalent like the folding fog

Ever  
Unknown to its  
Waiting  
Bloom.



**Untitled**  
**Sara Smith**  
Crayon





## ***Leaving Home***

### ***Katie Pavel***

Her room empties, as  
She packs her things in boxes—  
Clothes, books, pictures,  
Ratty stuffed animals,  
An old patchwork quilt.

In the driveway, her car sits,  
Its trunk already packed full.  
Nearby, an old bike,  
With banana seat and basket,  
Leans against the fence.

She had said to simply sell it,  
But her dad wheels it into the garage.  
Someday he'll let it go, but until then  
He'll keep it, just in case his little girl  
Comes back to learn to ride it again.



## **Love Monkey**

**Todd VanDerWerff**

I hold her dearly.  
She entwines her lips with mine.  
This was meant to be.

Our kisses taste sweet,  
strawberries dripping on tongues.  
We have so much love.

I dream her smiling.  
She comes to me in secret,  
my love, my life friend.

Fighting back the dark,  
we only find each other,  
love our salvation.

She holds me dearly.  
I entwine my lips with hers,  
my anam cara.



## ***Night Prayer***

***Patrick Grode***

Last passionate raising of the hands  
As shadowed night draws on,  
As incense rises to the stars,  
And chanted prayers echo.



## ***Nothing More Than a Pencil***

***Molly Lefholz***

Silently it lies, dead upon a blank page  
Tip devoured by excited ambition  
Eraser eroded by extravagance  
Motionless it waits,  
Nothing more than a pencil

Melodies and passion flowing,  
Captivating some with joy, while engulfing others in rage  
Lovers bonded closer, enemies torn farther apart  
Impacting souls with mere scratches on paper,  
Nothing more than a pencil.

The sheer power to unlock the universe  
 $E=MC^2$  just a light flick of the wrist  
The gift to salvage a life  
The power to annihilate a nation  
Nothing more than a pencil

So commonplace it's forgotten  
The mind's simple instrument, potential unused  
Dreams and spectacular visions trapped in lead  
Silently it lies with so much to say  
Nothing more than a pencil.



## ***Ode to Keats*** ***Laurie Troth***

There is no trace of Keats' nightingale  
here in this sultry, saunified hell  
And there is no lovely Grecian urn  
amidst the eternal flames that burn  
Melancholy has long since bid adieu  
tired of its balances being so misconstrued  
Oh! For a glimpse of bountiful Autumn  
awaiting the rich harvest that never will come  
If only for a moment to spend with Bright Star,  
diamond in the sky, come out wherever you are!  
This living hand, yearning to reach out  
and write for you the poetry of what real life is about  
But O solitude is with whom I remain  
so Keats must explain it, best as he can.



# **Wretched Tree**

**Allison Johnson**

*pastel*





# Poem

## Michelle Selchert

smooth pen  
inky words  
smudging with  
my pinky  
black puddles  
of dye  
stain the page  
with odd  
symbols they  
laugh cry  
sigh & silently  
stare  
it swishes  
& twists  
in my mangled  
fist  
in an  
attempt to  
share to share  
the inner leap  
and plummet  
how it feels  
the sensation



against smooth soft skin  
will you drink it  
will you eat it  
or will you lick it  
'til it's gone  
a mere  
extension  
of the mind  
a few bubbles  
caught in time



## ***Rebirth***

### ***Jessica Pikul***

Clouds gather over burning hills  
misty grays to soothe  
contrast the cauldron of fire  
One drop  
falls, then another, another  
consumed in snakey tongues of steam.  
Embers claw and twist for life  
pinioned on all sides by quietly insistent  
raindrops  
One, two  
they amass their strength, reaching  
the ground, stroking torrents of  
steam and water  
Scintillating fire gods slow their dance  
and balk, revealing charcoaled wood skeletons  
Ironically they subdue into ashes  
nourishing fireweed, pine and Indian paintbrush  
to colour the slopes with an organic fire  
Growing nourished by angry vanquished gods,  
the rain washes over them,  
Falling softly, quietly saying  
Peace.



## **South Dakota Farmer**

**Brandon Semler**

sunlight slips through the blinds  
glaring upon his face.  
leather-beaten skin,  
victim of his own farm.

breakfast—eggs, toast, and bacon  
slamming the door behind him.  
heading west away from the sun,  
his old bones ache through each step

he planted a black walnut tree  
only one down in the ravine.  
he could smell the sweet scents  
the tree is hunched over like him.

the fields over the years have gone dry  
the crops are worth nothing.  
feeding his hay and grain to the hogs,  
bankers' foreclosure sitting on the counter.

faded paint on the old John Deere  
chicken coop filled with old tools.  
he is left with nothing  
but land and debts overdue.





## **Static** **Jessica Pikul**

Trapped, her fingers rap out descending  
staccatos  
On a fake wooden table top  
restless, they seize and light  
a match  
Flame burns steadily blue and red  
down the matchstick  
Sparse smoke escaping as it approaches  
pink flesh  
It crackles, burns, she drops it  
but her thoughts, not dropped, not interrupted  
remain  
Hang in the air with the sulfur smoke  
thought long ago they linger still,  
burning down towards  
pink flesh  
On the wall the clock ticks, ticks, ticks  
audible, unbearable seconds pass  
In the real world where motion has meaning,  
people come and go  
But between her and there is static  
a fake wooden table top and thoughts in the air  
like sulfur  
Her hands give up restlessness, release  
Old thoughts pass, swirling like  
discarded trash down the storm drain



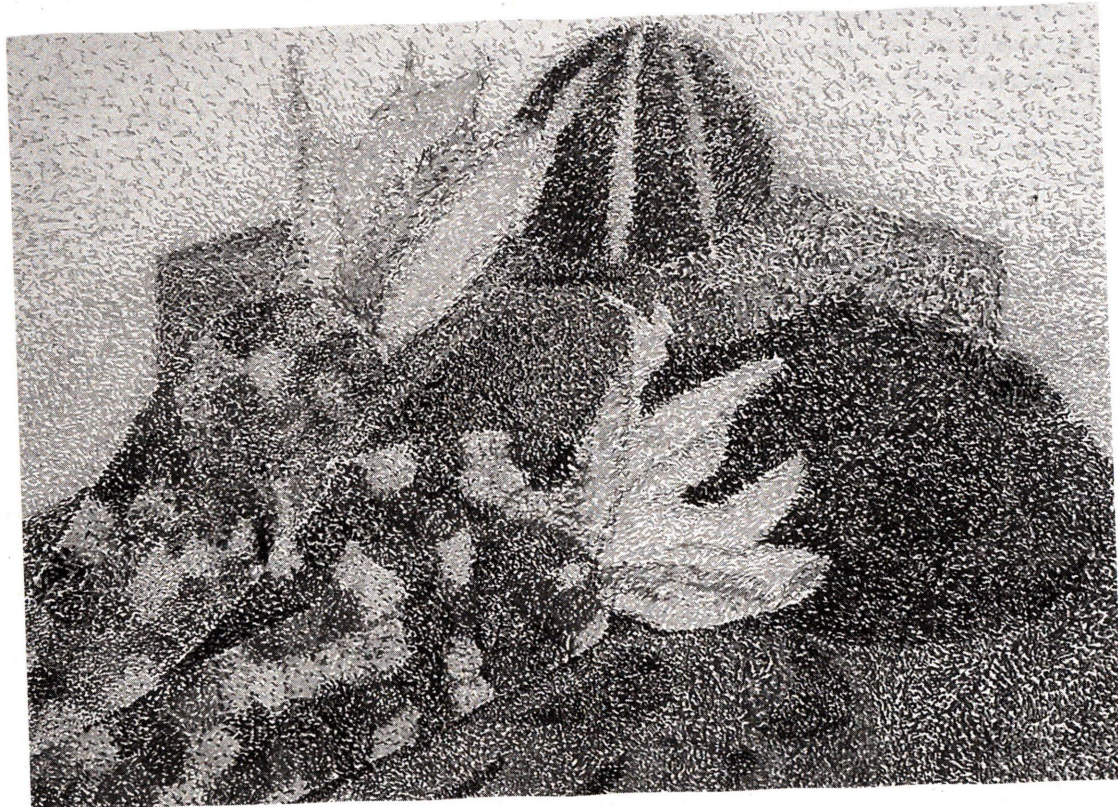
## ***Stupid Flies***

***Brenda Johnson***

Poised to begin writing my essay,  
I notice a fly trying desperately to escape through the window.  
It seems futilely ignorant.  
Incessantly, it bumps into the glass,  
Buzzing loudly,  
Dizzily circling for another pass.  
Finally, it lands  
And focuses on the windowsill.  
I ponder why it performs the routine,  
As I fetch a glass of water  
And change into more comfortable clothes  
And find a radio station.  
After all, the process has accomplished nothing, I reason,  
As I adjust my chair  
And check my email  
And put on my glasses.  
“Flies must be stupid,” I conclude,  
As I finally focus on my essay.



**Corny Gourds**  
**Adam Bertrand**  
*Oil Pastel*





## ***The End*** ***Rebecca Opstedahl***

Cold rain romancing me  
touching my soul  
stars fall to earth  
slice of eternal death  
illusions crushed beneath reality  
You leave me here  
barren ice rises within me  
walls of stone build their fortress  
time ends and means nothing



# **Leaky Faucets**

**Leigh Mueller**  
*Mixed Media*





## ***The Voice of Snow***

***Jessica Pikul***

The deep song of snow  
flows through the silence of winter  
not breaking it.  
Bright ice skitters a thin porcelain counterpoint  
to the ancient voice of moving snow.  
Amidst the glacial diapason, a crow lifts to join the firmament.  
Ebony, it circles in contrast  
silently rising through broken arias of ice.  
The muted light forbids it to shadow the snow.



## ***This Kiss***

### ***Dustin Jahraus***

thoughts so kind  
love on their mind  
they take a chance  
tongues advance  
thoughts so sweet  
tongues do meet  
play gently at first  
quenching love's thirst  
fears left behind  
tongues intertwined  
thoughts of joy abound  
in this kiss they found



## ***Those Ideas That Haunt Michelle Selchert***

I can't concentrate until I  
throw it all up  
in a big inky ugly puddle  
muddle  
mud  
on the white disposable floor  
I feel it rising in my throat  
and knocking at my door,  
pounding on the walls  
that are my skull.  
I need to turn loose.  
My mind is just too full.  
The frustration of no concentration,  
she is my muse.  
She beats and taps  
her fingernails on the desk  
'til I can't ignore her anymore.  
And so  
I write about love,  
draw about hurt,  
vent about blame.  
I rip weeds out of the fleshy dirt.  
I cry drops of words  
and vomit chunks of my heart.  
I get it all out  
so I can put  
more in.  
I have to let go  
in order to begin.



## ***Through the Valley*** **Austin Gerald Tucker**

I whispered his name under my breath  
He sat low in the saddle—his name was Death  
I walk through the valley of the shadow of he  
Though my heels be rode, no fear for me  
A pale horse with eyes of red  
It was not living yet it was not dead  
More like vapor is how it seemed  
Its reality gone—it only dreamed  
Freedom was its constant thought  
To flee the icy grip in open trot  
I gazed up ahead into the mirage  
The thing that I saw became dislodged  
It was what I had been looking for  
The key to unlock God's open door



# **Fantasy Landscape**

**Carole Weber**

**oil pastel**





## ***To The Dorm***

***Sandy Buelow***

Sometimes I wake up,  
And I think I am dead.  
The silence  
Is almost immaculate.

I see other footprints in the snow,  
Tire tracks,  
But I feel no one.

I know I am alive  
Only when the door opens  
And I re-enter this small world.

The heat may lick away at my cold hands and cheeks,  
But we are strangers none the less.



## **Trish** **Todd VanDerWerff**

I don't want to  
immortalize you as  
the girl who inspired  
the cheesy love poems  
with lines like  
"eyes that glittered"  
or  
"a smile that beamed"  
because it's been done before  
so I'll simply tell you

I love you

and leave it at that.



## ***Where Moonlight Pours***

***Katie Pavel***

Lurking in from the cold night air,  
Shadows sweep across dusty floors.  
Sounds of feet echo on wood, yet  
No prints appear where moonlight pours.

Two hands of time meet to form one.  
Twelve chimes clamor through silent halls.  
Then skirts swish and top hats tip, as  
Translucent forms float to the ball.

Music drifts through the empty house.  
Lights flicker as if keeping time.  
Couples waltz in from the rooms and  
Up to the ballroom rafters climb.

Throughout the eerie night they dance—  
Those mortal souls almost alive.  
Among them all the tall clock stands,  
Knowing he'll end it all at five.

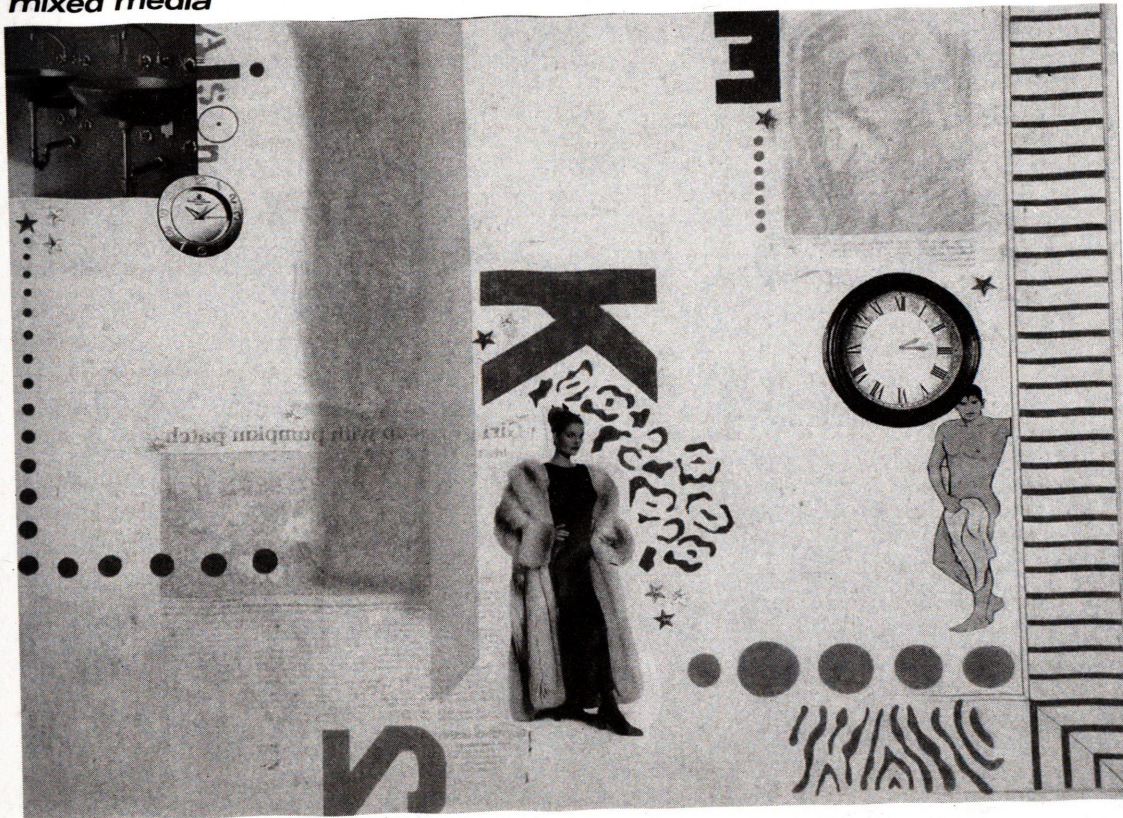
When his hands move to that last hour,  
He calls them all back to the night.  
Into the darkness they scatter,  
To escape the day's morning light.

Many have tried to spy the dance  
Or anything the house beholds,  
But only one has seen it all—  
The corner clock of oak and gold.



# **... Including the Kitchen Sink**

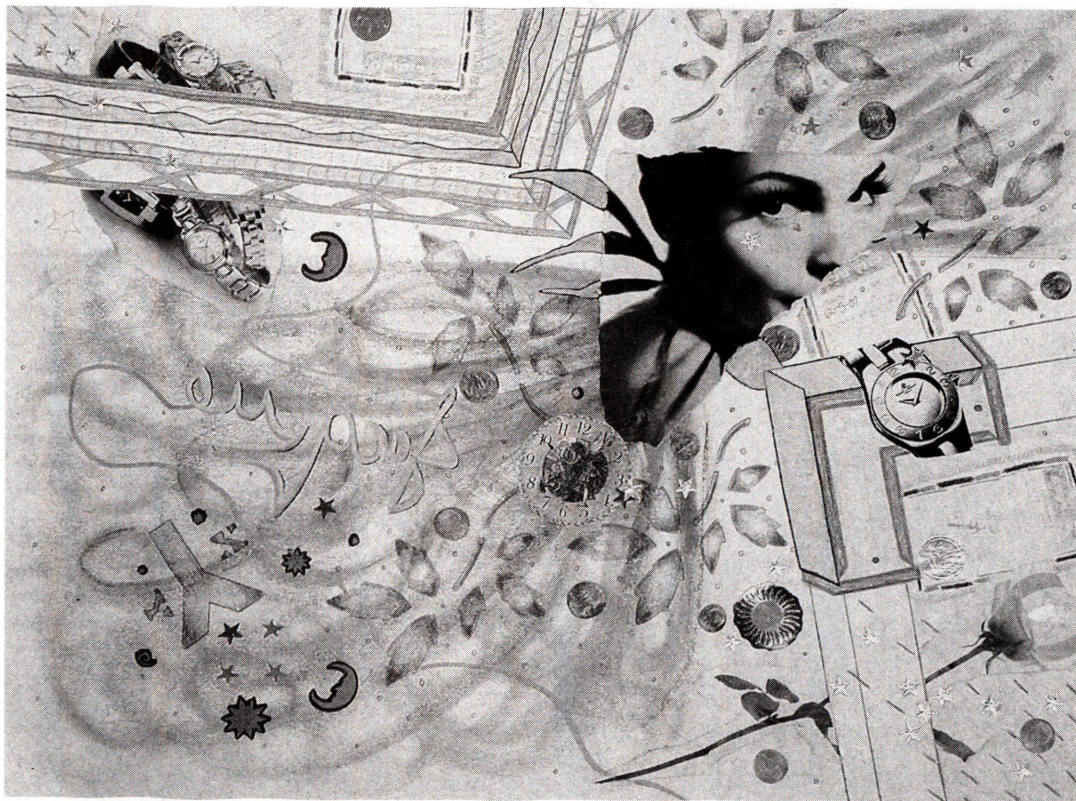
**Allison Johnson**  
*mixed media*





# ***Flame of Femininity***

**Jacque Tuntland**  
**Mixed Media**





## ***Winter Solstice II***

***Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.***

I feel your presence.  
A beast with a thousand icy tongues  
hungry for heat within.

Life in retreat.  
Your vagrant army  
from the north advances in swirling  
white battalions with no bounds.

Passionless  
cold fingers probe,  
penetrate, search for weakness.

Darkness and the beast,  
dreadful companions lay siege.  
Life defiantly holds fast out of sight.  
Tonight, battle lines are drawn.



## ***You Saw*** ***Bonnie R. Phelps***

You saw the scars upon my soul.  
You knew the path upon which I crawled.  
You touched my heart  
And surpassed the walls.  
You saw in me  
What I could not see.

You were a friend before I was.  
You loved me when I couldn't.  
You said that everything would be okay,  
When all I saw was dark and decay.  
You saw in me  
What I could not see.

You knew my sadness before I spoke.  
You felt my sorrow at one quick look.  
You saw only beauty.  
I saw only snakes.  
You saw in me  
What I could not see.



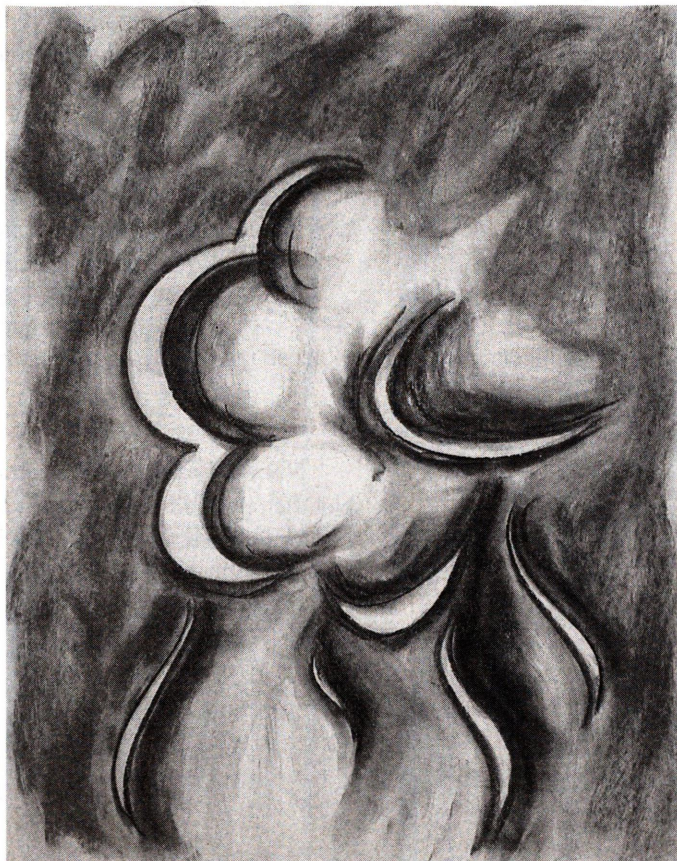
Your eyes melted the masks away  
Faster than I could fit them into place.  
You saw in me more than I knew existed here.  
And into my very thoughts you crept  
Knowing my words before I could think of them.  
You saw in me  
What I could not see.

You never gave up on me,  
With an unending stream of prayers.  
And all you asked in return  
Was that I let go and let God.  
That I understand HOW—  
You saw in me  
What I could not see.

Not the honesty towards others,  
Not the open-mindedness towards others,  
Not the willingness towards others,  
But a willing and open mind to see  
The honest and true nature  
Hidden deep within.  
You saw  
So I would see.



***Homage to Kathe Hollwitz***  
***Ann Adler***  
*pastel*





## ***A Shanghai Summer***

***Stacy Brunner***

Chocolate, almond-shaped orbs  
gaze in wonder as  
a tiny, inquisitive smile  
graces full, pink lips.  
Smooth, tanned, and pudgy hands dash  
through the glassy image  
dancing on the water.  
Delightful bubbles of laughter  
float from the Chinese child  
finding joy in  
simple reflections.



## ***While Passing*** ***Patrick Grode***

While passing, she moved in lilac  
To my unfancied mind,  
And faintest air of jasmine  
Swirled away behind.

Her hair unfurled as chamomile,  
Eyes quiet like the rose—  
What floral lingers when she's gone?  
Forget-me-not, suppose...



# ***Oakwood in Late Fall***

**Lee Ritter**

*pastel*





## ***Questions***

### ***Jason Currie-Olson***

From the depths of the soul  
To the tips of the mind  
The heart of the fool  
Reaches for some kind  
Of answers to questions  
Bred in darkness of thought  
Where true faith in God  
Is ultimately sought

What are these questions  
That float through my mind  
Dangerous and disturbing  
Peeled from this melon's rind  
Of a soul and a heart  
Overly distraught  
With emptiness of happiness  
And darkness of thought



Just inside the doors of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy, stands one of Michelangelo's most famous sculptures. It depicts the Virgin cradling in her arms the crucified Christ. It is called the "Pieta."

## **Pieta**

### **Heidi Mayer**

I was always amazed by the tranquility of Your face.  
Did I ever tell You that?  
When You were an infant,  
I would sit and watch You sleep  
And wonder at every breath—  
Turn my head to catch the meaning  
in every murmur.  
I think You awoke once  
And caught my silent vigil—  
And turned to me with that drowsy smile  
And drifted back to dream.  
And your hands—  
I knew every crease and gesture.  
I watched them discover  
The grass and the rocks and the insects—  
I kissed their cuts  
And wiped the sand from their nails.  
Those hands are still now—  
Callused and bloody—  
Caked with the dirt of Calvary.  
How strange it seems that You are gone.  
When they took You down from the Cross  
And laid You in my arms  
I rocked You for awhile



Not knowing what to say or think  
Just trying to memorize the look of You—  
The lines of Your face, the shade of Your hair.  
Oh my Sweet, we both knew this would never be easy—  
Not for You and I.

Not here.  
Why, then, was I so surprised at the anguish in Your screams?  
Why was I so startled at the breaking of my heart?  
I have been saying good-bye to You all Your life  
So explain to me why this final gesture finds me paralyzed.  
We knew this was coming.  
I suppose a mother is never ready to watch her son hang from a tree—  
Not even the mother of God.

You never really belonged to me.  
I always knew that.  
I accepted that.  
You belonged to the dead and the dying,  
The angry and the weak,  
The lost and the forsaken.  
You are theirs.  
I know that  
But this moment—  
This moment it is only me.



Just me, a mother,  
Holding You, a son,  
For the last time.

Just me  
Taking my sleeve to wipe the blood from Your face,  
Trying not to cry,  
Just whispering a good-bye  
With words which can never be enough.

There are those who stand and weep about me  
And clench their fists toward Heaven.

They scream and rave  
And curse the injustice of it all.  
Not even they can understand  
What rips into a mother's heart.  
They have only lost a King—  
I have lost a Son.



# ***Pumpkin and Friends***

**James Grav**  
*oil pastel*





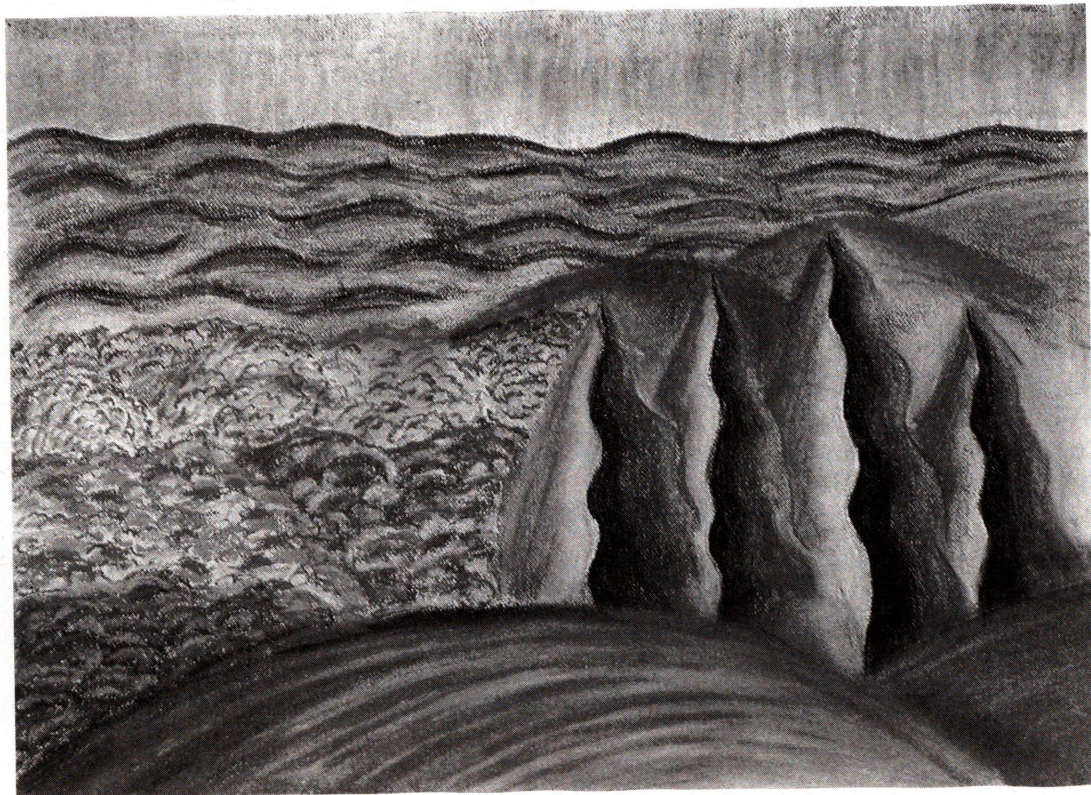
## ***A Child's Creation***

***Chad Robinson***

He put cotton balls in its sky  
Painted in watercolor blue.  
He cut out a yellow circle  
And pasted it in the sky too,  
And drew a smiley face to shine down on you.  
He built a hollow house with popsicle sticks and glue  
For you to have a home.  
He even gave you an ocean sprinkled with silver glitter,  
Twinkling under the sun at noon.  
From green construction paper he made you grass,  
And flowers too for your new garden.  
He sculpted trees from brown and green clay,  
And blew in a little breeze to hear the trees sway.  
With white string and a black plastic ring  
He put up a tire-swing so you can play.  
He mended together toothpicks to make that new fence for you  
That he crayoned a mohogany hue.  
Everything you wished for he included in his creation:  
A new life, a new home, a variety of animation.  
He told you why he left the house empty:  
So that it can be made a home by filling it with new memories.



***Fantasy Hillside***  
***Sara Smith***  
*pastel*





## ***The Details***

***Heidi Mayer***

I existed today in slow, deliberate emotions  
Every movement, every action begs my consent  
Every thought bears witness to my heart  
In slow, deliberate motions  
I am rediscovering this place.

I am always surprised at the details  
The sting of hot water running over my hands  
The sun captured in a windowpane  
The bitterness of the coffee  
The pattern of the dust  
The pressure of each step

The peonies I carried in yesterday  
Are wilting in the glass vase  
Their petals bleed onto the floor  
And I absently run them between my fingers  
And touch them to my cheek  
And inhale the fragrance of their death

The clock is slow today  
It, too, moves in slow, deliberate motions  
I watch its repetition  
And it is night again



Lit a candle with a wooden match  
Then sat to watch the flame  
Sway and reach  
Inhale. Exhale.  
It ripples with my breath  
The two dance and then pass on.

I've lived my whole life in black and white  
Realistic.  
Purposeful.  
Painless.  
Nothing to distract me from my purpose  
Until I  
Fell in love and lost in love and lost the love  
All in a moment a night ago  
Now my black and white world  
Is saturated with colors of life  
Of real life  
The once straight lines and angles  
Now scream to be noticed  
The grain of wood  
The smell of grass  
Once forgotten  
Reach and beg for me to  
LOOK  
And see  
This is the world



I'll see it now  
Feel it now  
Through the catalyst of my pain  
You have awakened me  
I am human now  
I'm rediscovering this place  
Absorbing each detail  
That had eluded my vision till now  
The world is so alive  
You're gone.

And I am living in slow, deliberate motions  
Rediscovering this place  
Tasting each detail  
They fill the hollowness you left  
They fill me  
I draw their strength  
And I survive.

I am always so surprised at the details.  
I hope I am always surprised at the details.



# ***To Ski***

***Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.***

Exhausted  
Summer wheezed  
one last mundane breath.

Leaves  
fell forsaken  
to the ground.  
Owners stood naked.

Change  
a mighty force  
from the north intruded.

Wind  
piranha  
of the plains  
bit at open flesh.



Paralyzed  
townsfolk reacted  
damn it's back again.

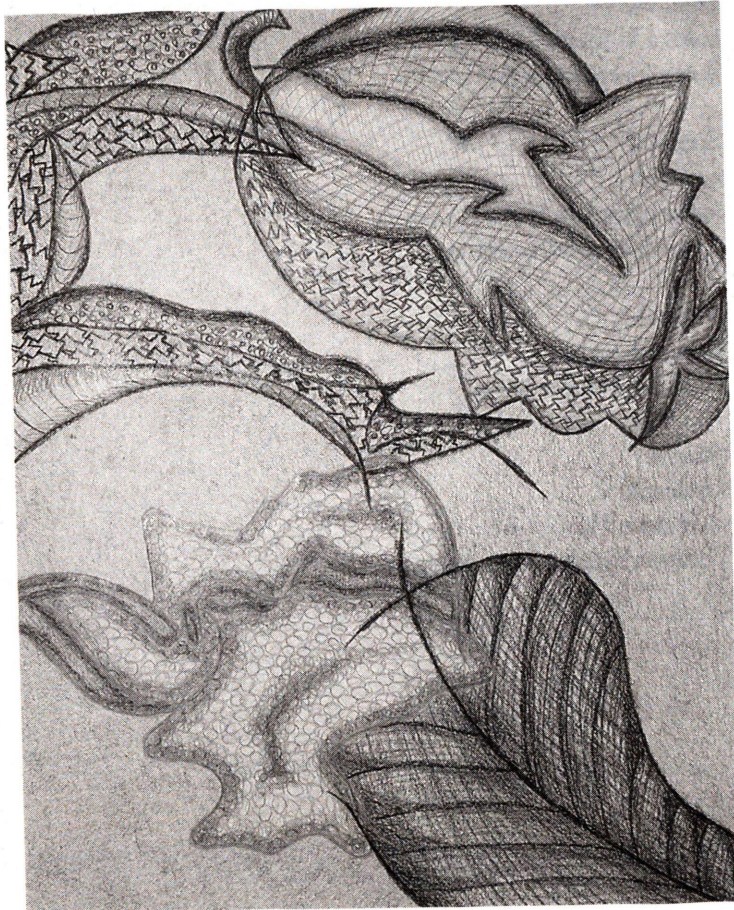
Snow  
icy white  
flakes hypnotically  
concealed earth's little dings.

Secretly  
I urged them on  
blissfully content.

Skis  
shining sleek  
snow parted before me.  
Thrust and glide. Intoxicating powder.



**Violet Dreams**  
**Jacque Tuntland**  
crayon







**prose**



## **Garden Goddess**

### **Jill Spindler Kratochvil**

My only consolation lies in my plants. You see, they're all I've got. The people in town say my Jake ran off. Last Sunday in the ladies room at the Legion, I heard Loretta talking, "That crazy old bat, her and all her creepy plants growing all over the place. No wonder Jake left. Prolly went someplace south."

People think I'm a little different, but that's just because I keep to myself. I've got my plants, and they're not just your regular, run o' the mill plants like ivy and those ugly philodendrons that grow like weeds. I've got marjoram and orchids and basil and oregano and even a venus fly trap. They say gardening is good for the soul. It helps get past my loneliness some, but oh, my Jake. I miss him something terrible. I haven't seen him for such a long time. Last spring, I thought I saw a finger or two by the basil but that was before I mulched. He never liked plants much, but like people say, they grow on you.



**Harvest**  
**Carole Weber**  
oil pastel







# ***A Model Student***

## ***April Myrick***

"We all know what that symbol means," Principal Walsteen said in his most authoritative voice. "Eight-balls. Crack-cocaine." He tapped his fingers on his desk while he waited for my response. My brand new leather jacket lay crumpled in my lap. Mr. Lark, the school's activity director, objected to the image of a number-eight billiard ball on the back of my jacket. He promptly sent me to the principal's office as punishment for my violation of the dress code. So there I was, a model student with model grades and behavior, thrust into an entirely foreign situation. I found myself unable to speak. Principal Walsteen leaned forward and stared at me with penetrating brown eyes.

"You know, Annie, most high school students don't play pool. Ninety-nine percent of students with jackets like that are drug dealers or gang members."

Most high school students don't play pool? I wondered how often he had ever been in the arcade at the Pizza Ranch. There was always a crowd of teenagers around the restaurant's only pool table. Did he really believe that I was a gang member? Me? I was considered a major nerd, with my thick glasses, my mouthful of braces, and my love of books. If any gangs existed in the school, I wasn't aware of them.

"I'm in a difficult position here, Annie. If I allow you to wear this jacket, then I have to let other kids wear jackets with marijuana leaves or mushrooms on them." He ran his fingers through his sandy-blond hair in a quick, nervous motion. One of the office secretaries, Mrs. Johnson, stuck her head in the doorway and held out a manila folder.

"Excuse me, Mr. Walsteen, this is the report you've been expecting from Coach Brickman."

"Thank-you, Julie. Just leave it on my desk here."

She placed the folder on the far right corner of the desk and briskly exited the office. Mr. Walsteen aimed his now scowling face directly at me again.

"What do your parents think of you wearing this jacket?"

"They don't care," I said. "They helped me pick it out."

He raised his eyebrows at me in an expression of disbelief. He reached for the manila folder and set it in front of him. We spent the next two or three minutes in complete silence. He looked as if he wanted to drum his fingers on the desk again, but instead he folded them together as if he were praying.



"I'm sorry, Annie. I can't let you wear this jacket in school anymore. If we catch you with it in the future, we will confiscate it. Do you understand that?"

I nodded my head and slowly walked toward the door. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him open the folder. As soon as I had crossed the threshold, Mrs. Johnson brushed past me into the office. She had some sort of laser-printed document in her hand. I could easily hear her and Mr. Walsteen talking.

"This is a copy of Bill Winn's transcript, Mr. Walsteen. He's the student that Coach Brickman is so concerned about."

"Oh yes. He's the quarterback, isn't he?"

"No, sir. He's a running back."

"Oh right."

"Coach Brickman is worried about his grades. He's failing at least two courses. He may not be able to play in the homecoming game."

"Oh, phooey! That's no problem. We can take care of that. Tell Coach Brickman to go ahead and let Bill practice with the team again."

I didn't listen to the rest of the conversation. Dejected, I carried my jacket under my arm as I wandered down the hallway to my locker. Through the window of the science lab, I could see Bill Winn waving his hand over the flame of a Bunsen burner. He and two young men beside him appeared to be having a hardy laugh about it. I knew I'd see him again after school, running along the field with a football under his arm. When I finally reached locker number 325 at the end of the hall, I pressed my hot forehead against the cold metal. I tried to imagine the look on my parents' faces after I tell them that I had been sent to the principal's office. I gently twisted the silver dial from five to twenty-one and back to sixteen. As I hung my jacket on one of the metal pegs, the bell rang and the hall became absorbed in a mass of human bodies. Bill Winn, whose locker was two away from mine, flung his locker door open and threw his science textbook on a shelf inside. At the other end of the hallway, Coach Brickman stepped out of Principal Walsteen's office. Various members of the football team greeted him as he made his way toward our end of the hall. He waved at Bill. "Come here, young man. I have some great news for you!" I slowly closed my locker and walked to my last class of the day.





# ***The Moment I Saw God***

## ***Molly Lefholz***

How old is old? Is ninety-five considered old? Perhaps fifty? Or does aged wisdom show itself from within the young glimmering eyes of a mere ten-year-old? Age; the word itself tends to transform into that of a poisonous label carelessly thrown around society. Either life condemns a person to one foot in the grave, or they are portrayed as nothing more than an ignorant dreamer. A person is cast into useless seed, which will never grow into that beautiful tree of knowledge. They are nothing more than a rotten seed. I beg to differ with the material calculations, calendars, or society scales. Age and wisdom are not how long you have existed in the world, but instead how *deep* you can see into it.

As we go through our lives, the busy hustle and bustle of work, school, and the world alters our own realities. The once vivid dreams and colorful visions of youth transform into rows of desks within our classrooms or the walls of paper work in our office cubicles. The vast realms of blessings that continue to saturate our existence blur together into routines and drudgery of everyday reality.

During long drives to work, or seeping into droning chemistry lectures, we discover the suffocating routines of existence strangling life. Humanity is no longer touched with that feeling of awe tingling within our souls, instead we become programmed into a shallow society. That wondrous amazement of a loving cradle of humanity filled with bouquets of beauty and endless possibilities becomes choked by worldly routines. For example, the joy of warm socks taken from the dryer often strangled by a compelling need to finish chores. The breathtaking morning sunlight routinely finds itself polluted by the buzzing sting of alarm clocks. Noise which symbolizes yet another day of producing for the world. Society's motto: If you fail at what you do...you will fail at *who* you are. Our culture's meaning of life tramples on embracing humanity, and instead becomes snared within a paycheck and a half-hearted approval of the world. Our future shrouds never will contain pockets, however frantically we attempt to fill them. The sweeping breeze of humanity, attempts to push our swings of dream-full ambitions toward heaven, however, tends to cast more of an anchor toward the earth. Struggling past the many hours through routine days, days in which we are called to exist...not days which we need to cherish.

I, too, being 17 at the time, discover myself dragged down this blustery journey. I continued to humor this superficial world as I am submerged with decaying dreams and numbed ambitions of youth. My beautiful seed of knowledge was planted to bear the wrong fruit, to forfeit my passions and



produce for the visions of the world. By listening to the overwhelming greed, I lose the meaning of life, I slaughter human importance, and I kill the vital ideas of love...to put it simply, I sacrifice God.

"Dad...Dad!" I shrieked, "You *don't* understand! Damn it, you'd *never* understand anything would you? Never! Are you just blind or can't anyone see what she does? Dad, I HATE...I mean truly HATE Emily! I have always *hated* her, she is an evil bitch!" My entire body convulsed in waves of rage as a tensed face transformed my glistening eyes into narrow slits. "Mom always sides with her, even you don't see the evil person she is. Damn it all! Dad, it's NOT FAIR!"

Streams of salty tears flowed in rivers down my blotchy reddened face; I collapsed on my bed pulling sheets tightly around me as a shield...a shield against my pain.

My father sat down beside me as I shook in rage. A fury that I directed solely at my sister and mother, I now focused at my entire family. Focusing that misdirected rage at the ones who I love so dear. This anger I conjured up conceals the pain within myself, my anger at the world. My father embraced my shaking body in a warm hug. "You don't *hate* your sister, Molly, hate is a powerful word...you two just don't see things eye to eye."

Rapidly I gasped for air, again and again in broken sobs. The violent pain shook my body in convulsing waves to where I couldn't think straight. Turning from my father, I buried my face into a pillow to absorb the current of ongoing tears. "All of you, just leave me alone."

My father gently rubbed my back in easing comfort, reflecting his love.

"Leave me the HELL alone!"

Silently he stood up, heading for the door as he turned out the light; the door then slowly followed him out. "I love you Molly, we *all* love you. No matter what happens, never forget that; good night, honey."

And with those words, the world went black within a sea of tears.

The buzzing alarm shattered my beautiful dreams once again, as my throbbing head painfully welcomed me into yet another day. It was Friday, another day of ignorant school, self-bashing exams, and endless bitching from arrogant friends. My junior year of high school was nothing more than one soap opera after the next. Peers in my classes would protest about how the world caused them turmoil or pain. "I ditched math class today, life totally and completely sucks." "Oh, goddamn it all, I broke *another* nail!" I heard it all, the constant stream of whispers and gossiping behind each other's backs in the locker rooms or laughing as I hurry down the halls. "You'd never even *guess* whose party got busted



last night?!” “Ya, that hottie in my gym class got laid by *her*? You’ve gotta be kidding me, he screwed with that whore?”

My Lord, people, get a life, who the *hell* freak’n cares.

Bitching and complaining as they all drive to school in expensive cars, with their “doormat” parents filling their wallets full of cash. Lives existing without a care in this shallow and material world. I have to literally bite my lip *not* to scream. Who was the “God” appointing them with the divine right to own all emotions? The world is crashing down on everyone. However, last I checked, never laying a finger on “sweet” Molly. Hiding forever behind my social mask of “goody two-shoes” and “miss moral up-bringing.” I remain infinitely silent amid the chaos. Through the mass omplaints I only witnessed utter perfection, not even a single true tear fell within this ego-saturated charade. It seems they all have flawless families and perfect lives, not even slight problems. No, none of them have siblings who verbally bash them daily. They are never forced to contemplate a tonsillectomy or fear knee surgery. Their father’s business didn’t get burnt to the ground by arson. Their mothers are not downing entire drugstores of medications for a weak heart. And the last time I checked, the vast majority of my classmates did not have three of their beautiful grandparents all die within *this* year. Perhaps *I should* be the one crying and complaining about life. Then again, I am Molly...not the same as them. I’m trapped alone in this empty silence, only to slash out at those who will take time to listen...those I love. Now where is this “God” I hear about, this so-called “just” and “merciful” God who punishes ignorance and hatred to comfort those suffering? Obviously he has overlooked the agony of the life I hold.

The last bell of the day rang, “Class have an absolutely wonderful and fabulous weekend... see you all Monday,” calls my physics teacher casting in a huge gleaming smile. “Oh, and remember class to look at the stars tonight, it will be a truly heavenly experience, a special night.” I threw my massive backpack over one shoulder and headed into packed noisy halls.

As I approached my locker, I ran into my locker partner who was nearly finished unloading her drama books and Princeton applications. I find life sometimes blesses us with amazing personalities who touch our lives. Beautiful people enter our world, this woman before me is one such encounter. Stardust Redbow, the single person at school who I am honored to call my best friend. “Molly, hey, I’m sorry to run, but relatives are in town,” Stardust grabbed her coat and turned to flash me a warm smile, “I’ll call you Saturday, and we’ll go for our walk and do coffee perhaps.”

“That sounds great Stardust. It seems this week has been so frustrating...aha...I would love to catch



up with some actual sanity," I start unloading my books, "You'll have a good night with all your relatives. Trust me, it's wonderful to take time for the whole loving family thing."

"Molly, do me a favor and take care of yourself, don't let this world get you down, especially this 'Steven's' world," she grabbed her keys, "see you tomorrow."

As I returned home that night, I didn't feel like humoring the world. Even though the weekend norm called for "carefree and unadulterated" excitement, I didn't seem attracted by its typically alluring pull. Partying with friends at the local airbase, dancing at the nightclubs, or hitting the local loop simply lost its usual appeal. I was growing too tired of these routines. I seemed alone among a sea of friends, utterly alone.

The warmth of the spring evening beckoned to me as I ventured out into the darkness of the backyard. I stood silhouetted in the haze of dusk near our garden. Standing in the exact spot that I planted a seed so long ago now stood this towering tree. It was a seemingly forgotten seed, which I carefully planted with a child's dreams long ago in elementary school. A dream, which I submerged in soil, outstretches its branches above me with all its glory. A powerful tree growing toward heaven as it brushes the canvas of time.

"Molly..." a soft voice calls to me, "Molly...do you want to go on a walk tonight?" I turn to gaze at my little sister whose face was cast in moonlight, "It's a pretty night for a walk, you know we could go down to the playground and swing."

I looked into her eager blue eyes. I never find myself home Friday nights anymore and now finally an opportunity emerged for Betsy to latch onto my attention. "Please, please Molly...just me and you."

"Sure, I guess we could go for a walk."

Her eyes ignited in pure delight, "Really?" Oh, I'll go grab our jackets!" Betsy vanished into the house and moments later emerged with both light coats.

We walked on the bike path that ran alongside our house and over Rapid Creek. We leisurely walked together that beautiful night, as we shared our lives. I never spend much time with my sister anymore; I'm always consumed with other trivial matters. I learned that night about her stories of friends and how she was enjoying school. We chatted about *everything*, everything excluding a few specific topics, any issue that dealt with the deeper side of life.

We approached the elementary playground as Betsy spotted our destined swings. We raced over and laughed as we swung back and forth pumping our legs. I felt like a child again as the wind rippled





through my hair and the cool unpolluted breeze filled my soul. Our laughter cascaded through the beautiful night under those heavenly stars, just Betsy and me.

Our legs now begin to tire, so we slowed gradually to a rocking swing. A cool silence fell softly over us as many memories invaded my thoughts. Betsy's motion ceased as though she could read my invisible dialogue. In a soft voice she asked, "What will happen when Mom and Dad die?"

A cold shiver ran through my spine as the sharp pain of reality struck me. Motionless, I sat beside her, my stomach was the object that now did the swinging. My mind, clear of all thoughts, repeated her question that echoed in my thoughts. How could I possibly reply? This brief moment stretched into eternity as my soul caught heavily in the depths of my throat. Her soft words replayed again within my ears.

"Molly, what will we do when they die?"

The fresh breeze blew across us as we sat there together under the cloudless starry night. I was truly at a loss for words as I struggled to give comfort to her. I felt heaven's presence casting down through those stars that night, as the essence of me permanently frozen in time.

Betsy turned to me and with innocent blue eyes said, "Molly, I think all we need to do, is to stay together...we'll just have to take care of each other."

In that brief moment in time, the universe to me was parted with the divine words of this child. I witnessed, in that moment, everything beautiful and important in life—ageless wisdom sparkled within the eyes of my baby sister. The meaning of life became revealed within those innocent words, "We'll just have to take care of each other."

Never before had such truth and wisdom radiated so bright from anyone. Within that brief moment, those simple words guided me back to the pure and clear importance in life. In that moment, I saw humanity, I saw innocence, I saw true love. In that moment, those simple words of a 10-year-old child defined the very essence of life. That single instant became the true moment in which I saw God.

Tears of joy filled my eyes, "You're right Betsy. That really is *all* we need...to take care of each other." I reached over and took her hand in mine. "We will *always* take care of each other."



**Untitled**  
**Angela Paulson**  
photo





## ***Sensibility***

### ***Heidi Mayer***

It rained that day—one of those drizzles that neither increases nor decreases in velocity, but instead establishes a repetition in its descent that saturates the air with its rhythm. It rained and the late autumn wind sent tiny waves scurrying across the puddles, churning the clear rainwater into a sort of muddy solution. It was cold that day—not the bitter, dry cold of winter that can be measured by gauges and instruments, but the kind of musty, wet chill that greets one as he enters a cellar or cave... the kind of cold which finds its origins less in physical and scientific factors and more in the gray shadowed details which season a situation with mystery and accentuate the common, scientific cold with blurred edges of vagueness. That was the chill that blanketed the crowd of mourners and whispered icy breezes down my spine... the icy breezes of the day we buried my Jacob.

My words are not drawn from a heart ridden with resentment or anguish. The chill of that day came neither from misery nor fear. My Jacob was taken by no cruel circumstances. He had lived long enough to watch his cheeks hollow and his skin crease with age. His life was full and complete... OUR lives were full and complete. So no dear, the chill that slithered down my spine came not from torment, but instead from the vividness of the memories that keep seeping into my vision and blurring the reality of the cemetery scene before me.

I study the scene a moment with its counterfeit sadness adopted to shroud the pity of some and the fiend agony of the 'friends of the family' who have gathered in sheer guilt and obligation. I shift my gaze upward to study the bleak gray above. My view is obstructed by the black tent they've constructed around the gravesite—constructed for my benefit I suppose. Ha. What infliction can be brought upon this old woman that would be of much consequence anymore? The greater part of me is being slowly lowered into the earth in the contents of a polished oak box—how could the rain hurt me? No—I long for distraction from the uncomfortable shuffling of dress slacks and restless children—even the sky with its muted tones and settled gaze of distant calm would offer a sanctifying release.

I turn my eyes from the rippling black canopy of the tent to the ground. I study the lines of my shoes... black leather pumps... sensible shoes... appropriate shoes. The kind of shoes I would have laughed at 50 years ago. Fifty years ago in the days of immortality, of smooth skin and long glances—



and dancing shoes. We used to dance like no others, Jacob and I. I remember him now—I remember myself now, so different from the man in the grave and the bent old woman in sensible shoes next to it. Two completely different people. Young and reckless and alive—and in love. Yes, we were in love—a naive and passionate form of it which swallowed us alive in our youth and melded us together long enough for us to grow old and bent and sensible. I suppose our love mirrored us. Yes, it too matured with its wards. What will happen to us now? This love and I left alone? What kind of company is a hollow heart? This was never the grand finale we envisioned... this quiet descent into death... the formality of it all. We were the reckless and the wild that would go in a great flash of life and fury—when did this mellowing occur? At what point did the fire of our spirits subdue so completely that it could be extinguished by this cemetery rain? When did I start purchasing black leather pumps and polished oak caskets?

You age slowly I guess—in a meticulous metamorphosis of change—but life—life is instantaneous. It happens in a turn—a moment—a heartbeat—a glance and suddenly it's slipped past you and the only remnants you have left are the relics of the body you called invincible and a few shallow memories that haunt you in the night. Grasp the moments. Cling to them—for they are precious and rare and company. Yes, they are company, when mortality and fate leave you standing alone wearing sensible shoes just trying to make sense of what you have become.



# **Requiem**

## **Todd VanDerWerff**

A violent grey colors a sky dense with moisture that has nowhere to go. Droplets finally plummet to the ground, scattering into molecules.

I stare at the clouds, thinking of my childhood, when Crayola added vibrant neon colors to their packs of crayons, giving them names brimming with excitement and life. Just holding a crayon with a name like hot pink or acid green felt exciting.

I continue to fix my gaze on the clouds and wonder if Crayola ever made a crayon called radioactive grey because that is the color of the clouds and the taste of the bitter rain today, the day my grandfather begins the end of his life.

I turn back to a story in my science fiction short story anthology. In the story, a giant amoeba creature has dissolved the tissues of four space explorers and kept their brains, using their intelligence to propel itself around its planet. In the end, the space explorers create new selves out of amoeba guts, becoming supermen.

I have read this story four times.

I continue to read it partially because it comforts me not to have to pay excessive attention and partially because I wish my grandfather would plunge into a giant amoeba that would dissolve his body and his cancer. I wish my grandfather was just a healthy brain and an ocean of protoplasm so he might form himself anew.

On the waiting room television, the World Trade Center crumbles over and over and over, a hideous time loop of a bad 1950s end-of-the-world newsreel. I fear descent into dystopia.

My grandmother, damned in her blissful unawareness, asks me if I have been drafted, and I am scared of death.

Turning back to the story, I wonder if the amoeba would sense the poisonous cancer and flow long tendrils into my grandfather's brain to get rid of it, repairing and restoring in the process. I imagine he would re-create himself in the image of himself as a young sailor stationed in Chicago at the end of World War II. To me, he hides in the mists just ahead of me, a black and white haze dancing at the USO I have built in my memory out of pieces of books and movies.



I imagine his brain seizes these memories and splashes them with Day-Glo colors, fighting the tumor which will soon make all things dull, radioactive grey.

I pray to God for rocket ships and giant amoebas and Vulcans and false optimism. I pray to God to make the story—to make all stories—come to life so I may fly away from this sterile place and dance in otherworldly Elysian fields.

My other grandmother calls my mother, her daughter, and wails that all her grandsons will be drafted and she has only lived this long to watch them die. My mother channels Pollyanna, reassures her. I am scared of death.

Over and over, chunks of building plummet like concrete rain. The newscasters grow reactionary. I wonder if perhaps one is safer as an Army chaplain. I know enough of prayer and death after this horrid week to be able to comfort others if need be.

My mother turns to her Bible, says this may be the end of the world as foretold in Revelation, but that she believes we still have to go through the tribulation. I want to vomit God.

My father returns to the waiting room and says that my grandfather has sat up now to eat his dinner. My cousin and I leave the sterile coldness of the waiting room and trudge through overlit halls to see him.

He looks so frail and gaunt, this man who stares death in the face daily. He squeezes my hand with unexpected power and reminds me of the peaceful cattle farmer who loved his family and held a small child tightly in his lap while reading of space travel, cowboys, and poky little puppies. Fear dominates his blue eyes and suddenly, fleetingly, the whole world smells like the piles upon piles of mildewed National Geographics in his basement, where first I saw sea otters and Saturn's rings.

He asks me if we have declared war yet; he has not been able to watch TV. I say that we have not done so, and I suddenly realize that the fear in his eyes must be reflected in my own. We are all scared of death.

Summoning courage, I bottle up these clouds of radioactive grey to crack a lame joke.

His smile beams the color of sunrise.



# Gourds, Onions & Corn

Leigh Mueller

oil pastel





## ***The Long Five Seconds***

***Stacy Brunner***

As their gazes locked, her eyes widened and fear ripped through her body. Her muscles tightened in anticipation of the confrontation. Suddenly, emotions came flooding through her mind. Sorrow, fear, worry, wonder, and guilt rained down, causing her mind to reel. As she looked into the wide, chocolate eyes she wondered if he felt anything. Did he wonder what was about to happen? Why wouldn't he move?

The bright lights illuminated the eyes looking into hers. Her grip on the steering wheel tightened and her fingernails seemed to bite into the molded plastic beneath her hands. Her foot extended toward the brake and she felt as though she was moving in slow motion. The screech of her tires resonated through the air and she felt the seatbelt tightening across her waist. Lurching from side to side, the car seemed to stop for a moment, but then leaped forward.

The large animal in the road loomed closer and closer, his eyes becoming more dazed and she leaned on her horn, hoping to scare some sense back into him. She could almost see his muscles tighten in anticipation and he seemed to move forward, just centimeters. She held her breath, hoping. The crunch of metal and the shattering of glass were heard as the deer and the car made contact. Her body flew forward and tiny pieces of glass flew into her face. Would this never end? Squeezing her eyes shut, she threw a prayer for safety heavenward, thinking that it might be too late. Finally, her car slid to a stop and she let out a deep breath. She looked up, realizing that the long five seconds were finally over.



## **Ringling**

### **Katie Pavel**

Ringling. He had only heard ringing. The horse hadn't stopped bucking, hadn't stopped kicking, even after he had slid off its back. It had only run and run and run around the arena, and he had been dragged along with it. He had tugged and pulled at his hand, but it wouldn't come out of the noose that kept him attached to the horse. So he had been towed along in the dirt, the horse pounding him with its hooves as his body flailed puppet-like by its side. Finally, the pick-up men had roped the horse, bringing it to a blessed halt, and had pulled his hand from the rope, and he had crumpled to the ground, exhausted and only half-conscious. And nothing had filled his head, but the ringing of concussion in his ears.

He never thought he'd ever see the day he'd be back bronc-riding again, but here he was, a year later, climbing over the gates and onto a fiery chestnut's back. He tensed as he felt the horse stiffen with the weight on its withers. It jumped nervously towards the gate, anxious for its chance to rid itself of the enemy. He held his breath as he sensed the power beneath him and for a moment wondered what the hell he was doing. Perhaps it was the relentless desire to feel the thrill of riding something so wild and unbroken that had brought him back. Or maybe it was a momentary lapse of insanity. He knew not which. All he knew was that one thing beside sheer will and strength held him to that horse. And it scared him to death. What if he couldn't get his hand out of the rope again? What would happen? He pushed the thoughts aside. Too late. The rope was already bound tightly around his hand, and he had no choice but to push his hat down and nod his head. And pray. All he could do was hope and pray.

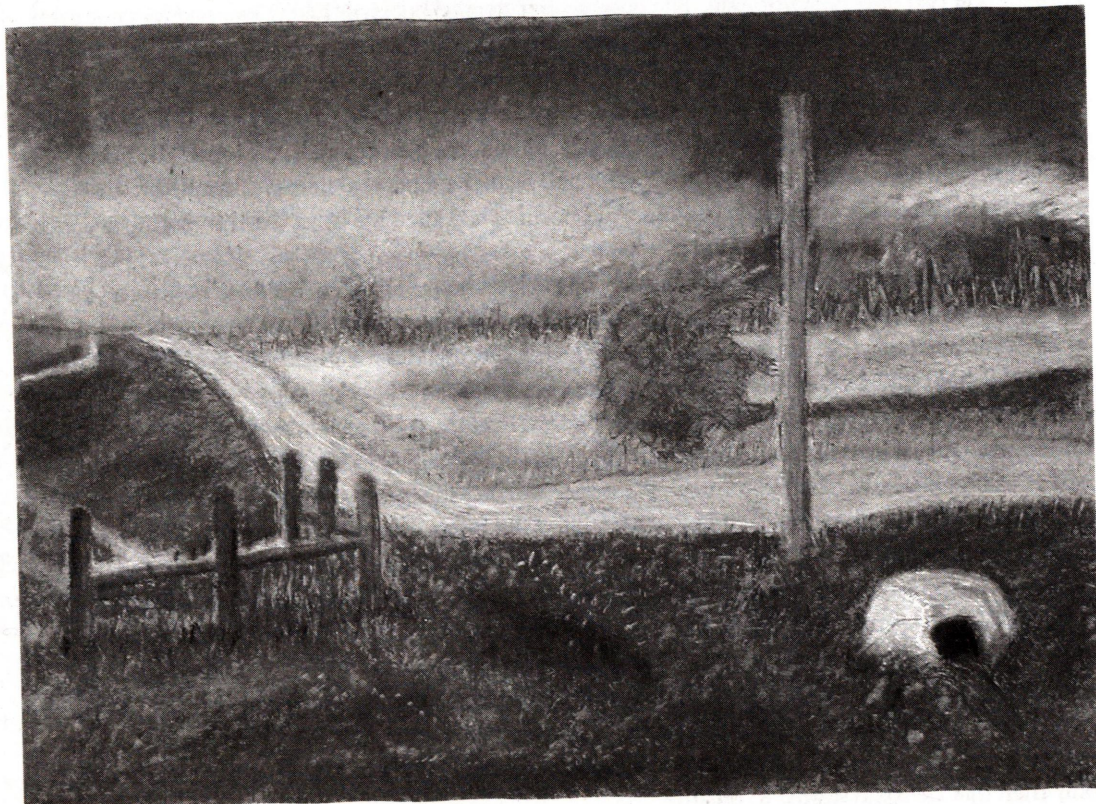
The gate flew open and the horse tore itself from its cage, releasing all its fury in giant jumps and bucks. He squeezed its sides and clamped his jaw shut, determined to stay on, determined to ride through the eternity of eight seconds. The horse bounded and snorted, fire blowing from its flaring nostrils, but he clamped down on its shoulders more firmly than ever and held on for life. When the timer sounded, he launched himself from the bronc's back and landed in the dirt on his knees. It was only then that he again started to breathe.

As he rose to his feet, he didn't hear the announcer shout out the winning score. He didn't hear the country music blaring in the background. He only heard ringing. The ringing of applause. The ringing of triumph.



# ***View from the Highway***

**Lucretia Schmidt**  
*pastel*







***regional***



## ***Recipe for Revenge***

***Laura Briscoe***

mix sympathy cut by serrated words  
and unpeeled jealousy  
roll old crushes over red coals  
add salt to raw wound  
then grill til skin is no longer pink  
    most importantly:  
use an unhealthy portion of unadulterated anger

be sure there is no trace of forgiveness  
stir emotions briskly  
pour into soul  
display on facial expression for serving

subject to staleness—eat without delay  
chill leftovers in frozen heart



## ***In a Dream***

***Laura Briscoe***

sun glints  
on emerald green and aqua blue  
though the water is the ocean  
and we are miles apart  
I walk out  
and stand on blue  
to hold your hand  
in a dream

we become a lunar  
eclipse and  
float in front of the burning light  
while the man perches on us  
answering  
lovers' questions  
in a dream

we jumped off the diving board  
into a crater  
our bodies rigid like nails  
we had left the man  
and gone over the edge of ourselves, the moon



I knew  
we had the moon  
I knew  
we were the moon  
in a dream

with a whoosh of air we escape  
falling  
endlessly  
    endlessly  
    falling

back to earth  
and crash into separate  
oceans  
in a dream

I asked you about the man in the moon  
and you told me  
you'd seen him  
once  
in a dream



## ***Her Too Fragile Fingers***

***Laura Briscoe***

half-moons visible  
ivory thin  
they float  
brush away a child's tears  
flip pages  
making nursery rhymes live

twist and bend  
creating words  
in once blank space  
curved 'round thin cylinder  
flowing  
from high pressure lightly placed

long like gangly bird legs  
they seem awkward til unfurled  
unfurled  
then they fly  
flung out of shy disguise  
sinews alert  
run over the keys  
visual blurs



again  
again  
cramped tight  
flex  
will the pain away  
skin pushing so hard  
leaving marks  
temporary dents  
ignore  
push past physical to spiritual

all from ivory thin  
floating  
caring  
creating  
music makers  
her too fragile fingers



# **Us**

## **Laura Briscoe**

Statuesque  
Beautiful  
Untouchable  
Yet, I thought I  
Could have  
A piece of him  
Though a  
Velvet rope lies between





# The Fly

Laura Briscoe

he peers around a corner  
furtive glances and  
side to side motion  
shifting glassy reflective eyes  
hiding behind barricades of pungent pink and dark bullet seeds

with makeshift melon basin before him  
hairy spindle legs  
runover his head  
he formally slicks back  
wayward hairs atop a knobby skull  
ready at last  
he

ends the green shaky-striped carcasses of the melon graveyard and

a<sup>c</sup>  
s  
d m u  
i o z  
v o z  
e z e  
s s

circling figure 8's  
on thin-veined wings  
that beat murmured desires

I realize his plan as he moves from watermelon sanctuary  
to picnic chocolate

zoomzoomzoom

woosh past my ear

zoom woosh SPLACK!

<https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/oakwood/vol2/iss11/1>



***Applause***  
***Amethyst Thorpe***  
***Douglas High School***  
***First Place Poetry***

Life is a talent show  
And each of us  
Has a certain amount of time to perform  
Our first  
And last act  
Before the crowd of one-thousand watching eyes

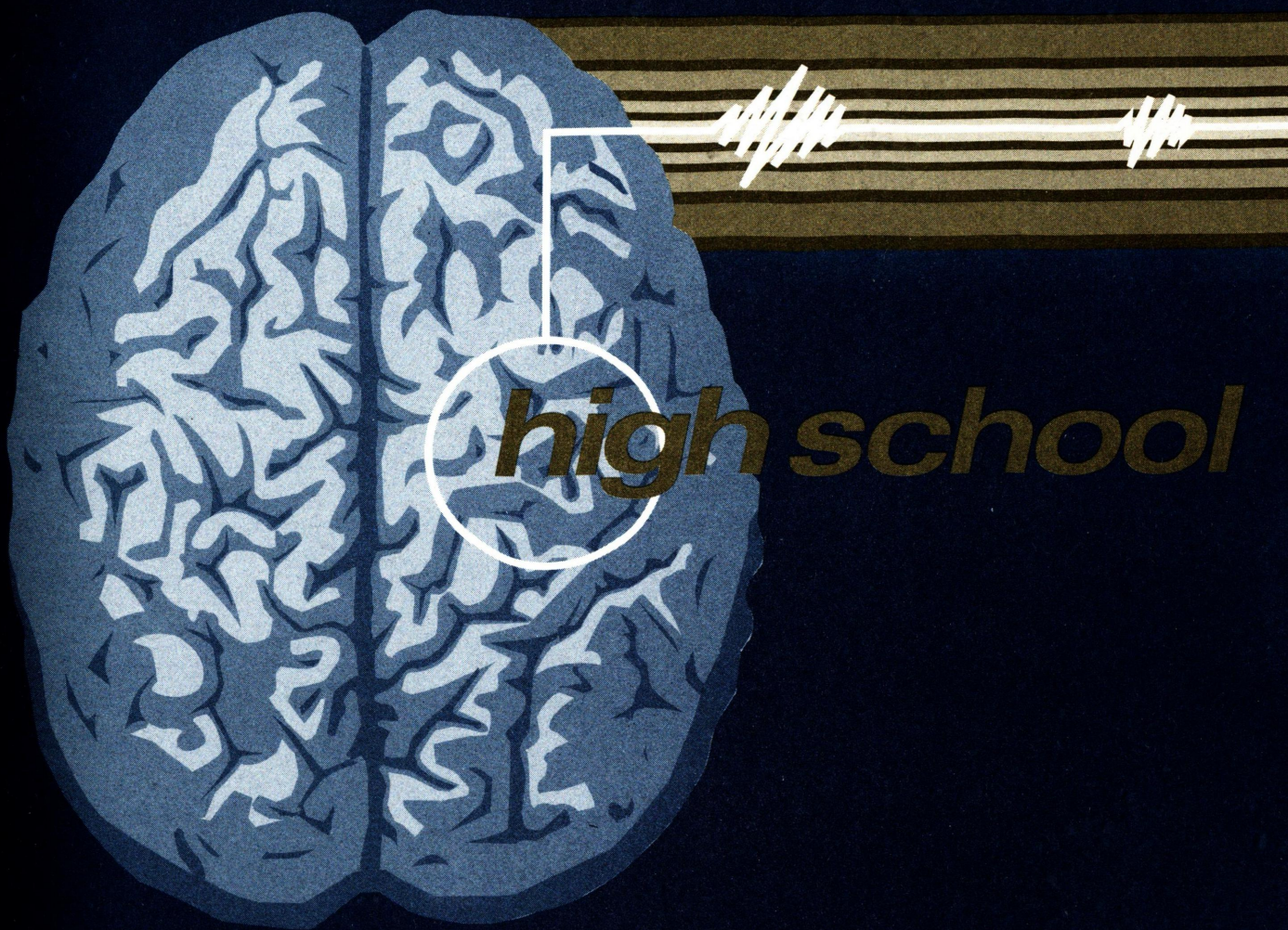
We can sing the song within our heart,  
Or dance to the music in our soul,  
Or paint the wall with colours  
No one's ever seen;

We can shock our audience with the truth,  
Or blind them with the illusion  
Of the magician's  
Thick smoke screen;

We can make life into a joke  
Or bring our spectators to tears,  
We can find out how many  
Steel bars we can bend;

But no one wins or loses  
In this talent show called Life—  
What matters is how we changed our audience  
In the end.





**high school**



***Sister's Mirror***  
***Stacey Noteboom***  
***Corsica High School***  
***Second Place Poetry***

In a sky of black velvet, with beads of silver,  
I wished for you...  
little sister.

Cool reflections glare at me from  
a mirror that once shined upon us.  
Two bright-eyed little girls linger  
in my memory. Together we  
controlled time while running away  
from all signs of maturity.

Now, decades later, I'm standing  
in front of our mirror again.  
What was once a glossy surface is now  
smeared and splattered with harsh words.

Suddenly, I see you on the other side  
of our mirror,  
dressed in clothes of acceptance,  
crowned with popularity.  
You press your hand upon the marred  
surface and smile sympathetically.

I watch your crown sparkle  
and wonder what makes  
us so different.  
A pale reflection stares  
back at me, and a silent tear  
rolls down her cheek.  
It's me.



***My Blanket***  
***Lindy Hotchkiss***  
***Freeman High School***  
***Third Place Poetry***

A baby sleeps  
Peacefully, serenely.  
On her tummy.  
The smooth, satin edges  
The soft, fuzzy, yellow and white fabric  
Covers completely

A little girl plays  
Faster! Faster!  
Giddy up! Giddy up!  
She shrieks at the golden lab  
While fiercely clutching the soft hair.  
Laughing, smiling  
Securely grasping the blanket.  
The satin edges dragging on the ground.

Terrified  
Traveling through the dark jungle.  
Blanket clenched in the tiny fist  
The plants tower above  
Little red specs—juicy tomatoes.

A teenage girl  
Active  
Involved  
Hurried  
Resting under her pillow  
The blanket lies--rumped, torn  
Mended.  
Crawling into bed  
To sleep on her tummy.  
Tenderly reaching for the blanket.  
Loved to death  
Securely wrapped around her arm  
It lulls her to sleep...  
Still.



# ***Burning Tires***

## ***Dan Dziadek***

### ***Freeman High School***

#### ***Honorable Mention***

Exhaust fumes creep through the cracked open window  
Of an idling '94 Supra Twin Turbo  
A car that demands heads to turn  
The odor of a cigarette,  
Half-smoked,  
Lingers through the car  
He flicks the cigarette out the window  
Slams the shifter into 1<sup>st</sup> gear  
Lets out the clutch  
Stomps down the brake and the accelerator  
All the horses come out of the rear-end  
To the back tires  
Makes them SCREAM in agony  
The rubber melts off the tires  
The dark smoke permeates the air  
Making breathing difficult  
He shifts off slamming into all 6 gears  
Leaving long parallel black lines after the stop sign  
Nearly clearing 120 mph before the corner



## ***Auntie Susie's House***

***Sarah Wells***  
***Sioux Valley High School***  
***First Place Prose***

As we take the left turn down the L-shaped driveway, I peer to the right towards Little Bill's. The height of the old barn grabs my attention. I can taste the dust from the open windows. Old machinery complements the ditch beside the driveway telling tales of the past. I can hardly hold myself from screaming for joy or peeing my pants. We're almost there, and I have got to go but I tell myself I can hold it a bit longer. We get almost 100 yards from the house and here comes Bosco, galloping up the driveway as he turns and runs alongside the truck barking. As we make the U-turn, the weather-beaten house, the garages, the garden shed, the shop, all the vehicles occupying the driveway, and the plentiful gardens come into view. We come to a halt and park our white Expedition. We're here. I jump out of the truck and dash to the front door leaping over the deck steps. I turn in the double doors, shout hi, and whip around the sharp right turn into the bathroom.

I step out of the bathroom, much more comfortable and greet the family lounging in the kitchen. I can almost taste the stew cooking in the crock-pot. I take the Coke that my cousin offers me and slurp it loudly, giving off a big burp. Auntie Susie catches us up on some local news while Arlynn tells us about his upcoming crops. Dennis informs us about what he has been doing lately at the base in Grand Forks. Douglas tells us a joke that he got from a friend and we start laughing uncontrollably. Auntie Susie and my mom stroll outside into the damp afternoon air to take a tour of her new flowers. I take a deserted chair at the kitchen table and listen intently to my cousins, my dad, and my brother chatting about where the good hunting spots are and when they are going to take the boat out and go fishing.

All of a sudden, Bosco starts barking like he just killed a rabbit. "It's Grandma!" Matt and I whip open the doors and run to greet her car before the wheels come to a stop. We jerk open the door for her and pull her out of the car. We engulf her in a bear hug and escort her to the house.

Now everyone's gathered back into the house getting ready for supper. I leap up the stairs, two by two, to the dwarfed hall closet to snatch some table leaves. Dennis and Douglas slide apart the





mahogany Queen Anne style table and place the leaves in it. Grandma strolls from the kitchen to the dining room with her arms heaped with mismatched dishes, silverware, and cups. Grandma and I place items around the table making room for nine. We locate the butter, salt and pepper, two gallons of whole milk, and bread and place them in the middle of the table. Even though it will be a tight squeeze, we will all fit around the now oversized table.

After Grandma and I finish setting the table, we join the rest of the family in the living room while mom and Auntie Susie finish preparing the stew. The channel is tuned to the ever-familiar History channel. The sun is streaming in the south windows making a pleasant light. The family surrounds the TV on an overstuffed couch, a wooden loveseat, and two wooden rocking chairs while I lay over the furnace vent trying to warm my toes.

"It's dinnertime!" Mom yells to us as she carries the steamy pot of stew to the table. We gather around the oblong table with my cousin at the head of the table where my uncle used to sit. I take my usual place in between my other cousin, Dennis, and my mom. The sun is to my back making everyone on the other side of the table squint while the TV plays its plane music in the background.

While eating, we tell stories about that "30 point buck" that Matt shot or the time when they saw a hissing catfish. My cousin shares stories while slathering the fresh creamy style butter on his white bread. The stew comes around and I pass it across to my mom. "You ought to eat more," my cousin says. We wind down the conversation as dinner comes to a close. Grandma and I are left to clean up the messy dishes while everyone else drifts outside to sit in the white wooden lawn chairs.

When Grandma and I come outside, I stop and think about how much fun I've already had today and that I can't wait to spend the evening with my family. After minutes of torture, I make Matt ask if we can take the ATVs for a spin. He prefers the quickness and sharp turning ability of the blue and black four-wheeler while I like the stability of the red six-wheeler. As he pulls open the mower shed, I slide open the squeaky shop door. I place myself on the slick, cold leather seat and rev up the hungry motor. I slink out being careful not to hit anything. I shift into high gear and rip out the driveway

leaving the rest to chatter about the day to come and the day past.



## ***My Lake Cabin***

### ***Amy Finn***

#### ***Sioux Valley High School***

#### ***Second Place Prose***

Boat exhaust floats past my nose and I watch the skier fly by in the glass-like morning water. I think to myself, "Right after breakfast. Be patient." People say, "Patience is a virtue." Well, for me it's a little different. Patience is a challenge.

The screech of the screen door echoes loudly on the brick red deck as I scamper inside. I stumble up the uneven green stairs just as my mom cautiously pulls out the cinnamon rolls with a little 'ta da!' The aroma drifts like a morning fog toward the sleeping bags occupied by the lake-goers. Everyone wanders up to the table while rubbing the sleep from their eyes. I, of course, am the first to plop down onto the squishy black stool. I try to imprison the drool that may drip without my permission. We lick the sweet frosting off our fingers just as a child would lick a lollipop.

After the quick hop into our swimsuits, the men prepare the boat. They snatch the skis, tubes, and kneeboard from their resting places and crunch down the gravel road to the landing dock. We women have other jobs to attend to. The portable body-refueling snacks, a variety of pops, algae smelling towels, the very important sunscreen, and the camera (for all those moments you want to capture and some that you don't) are hurriedly stacked together.

I wait on the hot dock and think, "How hard is it to unload the boat into the water?" The sky blue boat slices through the green water as it rounds a small peninsula towards my cabin. I push the urge to jump with excitement down. I would feel dumb. The boat is filled and we depart. Five hours jam packed with skiing, tubing, and kneeboarding, sneak by without my knowledge except for one thing. My stomach roars as I feel the sunrays seeping into my skin. I'm burnt. All that sunscreen for nothing! Guess who's going to be shedding her skin like a snake? Me.

We putter in and rope up to the moss-covered dock. The creaking of the wood beneath our feet accompanies the cheerful sound of laughter and talk. Hungrily, we charge inside, like bulls to the color red. The quick lunch barely touches our mouths as we scarf it down.





After the pause button had been pushed for lunch, slow motion is played now. Mostly the adults and young children use this time to rest. Not the same story for my generation. Our activities involve swimming, playing washers, beach volleyball, and suntanning on the weathered deck like lazy cats snoozing around in the midday sun.

Their bodies rested, the elders are ready to go again. Now with the sun lower in the sky, the quote is “whatever floats your boat.” I personally wouldn’t be caught on land. The familiarity of the rough ski rope, the tube material (that seems to always give me rashes on my legs), and the best of all, the silky smooth water are always with me everywhere I go.

The bright fireball in the sky melts into the land, and the parents give the second persistent call, “Time to come in!”

I yell back, “One last jump off the dock!” (which turned into ten more last jumps). I sadly say goodbye to the lake and beat the goose bumps to the cabin. We change out of our swimsuits and into warm clothes.

The warm home-cooked food disappears as we chat about the day’s excitement. Dishes are cleaned and put into their places. Then we grab marshmallows, Hershey bars, and graham crackers for s’mores. Over the crimson and orange flames, we toast our marshmallows to our liking. With the warm fuzzy feeling inside after the perfect meal, we watch the flames die down and try to hold our drooping eyes open.

I give in to sleep. Somehow I end up in my sleeping bag while I dream of cool green water, boats, skis, and the sunrays warming my skin like a hug from my mom.



**Linda Sullivan  
Scott Kessinger  
Douglas High School  
Third Place Prose**

I can honestly say with all my heart that I used to hate the farm. Do I love it now? Well, no. In fact, I still don't care much for it. But at least now I know that it has its moments.

I stirred the bright red Kool-Aid. Stirred it to perfection. I used pre-cooled water in the mix because ice would soften its fruity flavor. Being a big city girl, I never cooked, nor did much of anything, really. But dammit, I knew how to make Kool-Aid, and it was Linda's time to shine.

It wasn't quite the afternoon and not quite the evening as I poured the Kool-Aid into our guests' glasses. They all sipped it and gulped it down and told me how great it was. They asked me what my secret was and I told them it was rat poison. We all had a good chuckle.

Among the guests we had invited over to our 4th of July outdoor picnic party barbecue was Clark Harrison. Standing only an inch or so taller than me, our eyes always inadvertently made contact and wa-BANG! I'd like to get to know him better.

The evening went on, and the guests slowly dispersed; those that were still present had spread across in their own little groups, and I was left on my own to pick up the leftovers. Not that I minded. I was so spoiled around the house that doing a chore felt a little liberating.

The last thing left on the table was a bowl of potato salad. God, I hate potato salad. Potato salad was so nasty, so vehemently disgusting that I couldn't stand to even be near it.

As if somehow hearing my thoughts, Clark came in and said something like, "I'll get that for you," and dispensed of the offending food.

"My hero," I joked. We both smiled politely at each other.

"Would you like to go for a walk?" came out of Clark's mouth.

I answered, "Sure."

We wandered about, not going anywhere in particular, talking about funny things that had happened to us in the past. The evening featured one of those perfect sunsets, the kind that lit up the sky



in radiant yellows and dark oranges and pinks, and the clouds appeared dark blue and violet. There did seem to be small storm off somewhere, but it didn't look like it was going to hit us.

We came upon a tree and sat beneath its branches and continued talking, sitting close enough that we just barely touched. Fireflies sparkled around us, which is strange because we don't usually have fireflies around here. Perhaps I subconsciously imagined them to make the scene even more perfect.

The conversation went on and on. My God, we just couldn't stop talking! My thoughts never shut up, either. I thought about and realized just how alone I was. Being a widow with kids over the last five years took an emotional toll even I had not realized.

You know that small storm that I said wasn't going to hit us? Well...it hit us. We got up and ran through the rain as it poured down; eventually we fled into the shelter of the barn. We laughed at the sight of each other's drenched self. We were so wet.

We fell asleep in each other's arms with the gentle sound of rain in the background. The farm didn't seem so bad after all.



