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

01  Joseph L. Pikul, Jr. 27  Brenda Johnson
02  Ashley Brooke Wakeman 29  Rebecca Opstedahl
03  Todd VanDerWerff 31  Jessica Pikul
05  April Myrick 32  Dustin Jahraus
06  Rebecca Opstedahl 33  Michelle Selchert
07  Austin Gerald Tucker 34  Austin Gerald Tucker
09  Marcie Mizera 36  Sandy Buelow
10  Chad Robinson 37  Todd VanDerWerff
13  Laurie Troth 38  Katie Pavel
14  Ashley Brooke Wakeman 41  Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.
16  Katie Pavel 42  Bonnie R. Phelps
17  Todd VanDerWerff 45  Stacy Brunner
18  Patrick Grode 46  Patrick Grode
19  Molly Lefholz 48  Jason Currie-Olson
20  Laurie Troth 49  Heidi Mayer
22  Michelle Selchert 53  Chad Robinson
24  Jessica Pikul 55  Heidi Mayer
25  Brandon Semler 58  Joseph L. Pikul, Jr.
26  Jessica Pikul

Published by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange.
Prose

61 Jill Spindler Kratchovil
63 April Myrick
65 Molly Lefholz
71 Heidi Mayer
73 Todd VanDerWerff
76 Stacy Brunner
77 Katie Pavel

Regional

78 Lucretia Schmidt
79-85 Laura Briscoe

Witherington High School Writing Contest

86 Amethyst Thorpe
87 Stacey Noteboom
88 Lindy Hotchkiss
89 Dan Dziadek
90 Sarah Wells
92 Amy Finn
94 Scott Kessinger
Art

04 Brandi Lamster
08 Jacque Tuntland
11 Carole Weber
12 Sara Smith
15 Sara Smith
21 Allison Johnson
28 Adam Bertrand
30 Leigh Mueller
35 Carole Weber
39 Allison Johnson

40 Jacque Tuntland
44 Ann Adler
47 Lee Ritter
52 James Grav
54 Sara Smith
60 Jacque Tuntland
62 Carole Weber
70 Angela Paulson
75 Leigh Mueller
credits

Creative Director
James Grav

Art Directors
David Niemiec
Lee Ritter
James Walker

Production
Ann Adler
Andrea Clark
Austin Cragoe
Jeffrey Fejfar
Rebecca Feller
Crystal Hanson
Jodi Haufschild
John Kloster
Sarah Lanning
Jack Luckhurst
Marcie Mizera
Leigh Mueller
Terri Mulder
Anna Norton
Jessica Pfeifle
Tonya Russell
Jessica Schelske
Carole Weber
Brandon Winckler

Graphic Design Advisor
Tim Steele
Randy Clark
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
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 passioned 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=MC² 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
captured 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
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.

https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/oakwood/vol2/iss11/1
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 mohagany 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
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
"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 Bunson 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 withing 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 over-lit 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.
Ringing
Katie Pavel

Ringing. 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
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
dissolutely
dissolutely
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
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.
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—rumpled, 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's 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 puttter 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. Hunggrily, 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 volleyballs, 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, Hersheys 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.
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.