



# Oakwood 2000



## Art

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Debbie Stockholm | 4   |
| Maren Andersen   | 8   |
| Gail Meland      | 12  |
| Melissa Heier    | 16  |
| Shawn P. Fagan   | 20  |
| Justin Huyck     | 26  |
| Nicole Lang      | 32  |
| Kim Pautsch      | 35  |
| Mendy Pedersen   | 38  |
| Mendy Pedersen   | 42  |
| Michelle Aartun  | 46  |
| Michelle Aartun  | 50  |
| Heather Bjornebo | 54  |
| Lori Schoeneman  | 62  |
| Gail Meland      | 78  |
| Ross Hoekman     | 84  |
| Michelle Aartun  | 92  |
| Justin Mather    | 96  |
| Mendy Pedersen   | 98  |
| Michelle Aartun  | 102 |

## Witherington High School Writing Contest

|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| Melissa Hopf   | 107 |
| Tiffany Voyles | 108 |
| Jessica Pikul  | 110 |
| Adam Benson    | 111 |
| Sarah Stern    | 114 |
| Rachel Runnels | 115 |
| Angie Waltner  | 118 |

**Poetry**

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| Justin Jacobs         | 1  |
| April Myrick          | 2  |
| Jesse Johnson         | 2  |
| Mike Tollefson        | 3  |
| Brandon Semler        | 5  |
| Nicole Schaffer       | 6  |
| Sandy Buelow          | 7  |
| Marsha Paso           | 9  |
| Rosalee Dallman       | 10 |
| Rosalee Dallman       | 11 |
| Dawna Snethen         | 13 |
| Missy Menke           | 14 |
| Rebecca Opstedahl     | 15 |
| Andrea Gail Wieman    | 17 |
| Missy Menke           | 18 |
| Andrea Gail Wieman    | 19 |
| Katie Pavel           | 21 |
| Stephanie Misar       | 22 |
| Patricia M. Stockland | 23 |
| Julia Angerhofer      | 24 |
| Christopher Harris    | 25 |
| Jason Currie-Olson    | 27 |
| Andrea Gail Wieman    | 28 |
| Erin Killion          | 29 |
| Patricia M. Stockland | 29 |
| Rachel Higgins        | 30 |
| Rosalee Dallman       | 31 |
| Rachel Higgins        | 33 |
| Missy Menke           | 34 |

# Oakwood 2000

**Prose**

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Nicole Schaffer    | 36  |
| Jesse Johnson      | 39  |
| Todd VanDerWerff   | 43  |
| Rebecca Opstedahl  | 47  |
| Todd VanDerWerff   | 51  |
| Dominic Tauer      | 55  |
| Katie Pavel        | 63  |
| Jason Currie-Olson | 79  |
| Scott Cody         | 82  |
| Bryan Jaske        | 85  |
| Jesse Johnson      | 93  |
| Bonnie Tallmon     | 94  |
| Nicole Schaffer    | 97  |
| Rosanna Solem      | 99  |
| Chad Wickman       | 103 |

**Creative Director**

Sara Smith

**Executive Art Director**

Carl Schmitzer

**Art Directors**

Aaron Daly

Lisa Olson

Eric Sterling

**Production**

Maren Andersen

Melissa Heier

Justin Huyck

Justin Mather

Tom Myers

Carin Osvog

Wendy Rialson

Lori Schoeneman

Debbie Stockholm

**Graphic Design Advisor**

Tim Steele

**Printing Advisors**

Dennis Lundgren

Tom Nelson

Doug Odegaard



Oakwood is a South Dakota State University production  
of creative arts and literature.

Oakwood is funded by the SDSU Student Association Senate  
and printed by the SDSU Print Lab.





*O a k w o o d*

Volume 2, Number 9

**Editors**

Julia Angerhofer  
Sandy Buelow

**Reading Board**

Carmen Fischer  
Chris Harris  
Bryan Jaske  
Missy Menke  
Rebecca Opstedahl  
Marsha Paso  
Nicole Schaffer  
Todd VanDerWerff

**Editorial Staff**

Scott Falken  
Rebecca Opstedahl  
Missy Menke  
Nicole Schaffer

**Graduate Student Advisor**

Chris Harris

**High School Writing Contest**

Desiree Wheaton

**Special Thanks**

Jan Hanson  
Mary Haug  
Anna Hutt  
John Taylor  
George West  
English Club  
Students Association



## Poetry

## Red Moon

*Justin Jacobs*

Bleak! Upon the horizon, searing:  
 I saw it—growing, rising into the night.  
*Rising*, into a deep blackness, an endless cloak of darkness.  
 A Red Moon rising yonder the horizon, one dark and silent night.  
 Without a sound, it boils the solemn air. Hanging in a fit of bright,  
 I watch it glow. I watch it...glow! *Rising*, it casts a shadow amongst the mist.  
 The invisible clouds. Darker, they slowly swallow the hovering behemoth.  
 The Sinister, peeking from behind. I lay query.....  
 The silence covering me.....  
 .....*Silent*.....but listening.  
 Ahead of me looms a hushed wrest.....  
 A dazzling war of the red and of the dark, a sight for  
 centuries.....  
 I saw it—*rising*, rising into the night.  
 A Red Moon.  
 Red Moon.

## **The Nightmare**

*April Myrick*

Do you ever dream that a  
stranger is chasing you?

What would happen if you  
never woke up?

## **Untitled**

*Jesse Johnson*

As he hit the hay,  
just before he kicked the bucket  
the angry farmer cursed.



## Unspeakable Artwork

*Mike Tollefson*

In the shadows of my inter-sanity  
Fluffy clouds form faces that sadly bemoan  
Stories surrounding a badly corrupted society  
That frequently forces young men or forgotten boys  
To place perfectly round pipes to their heads  
And dye the bleached doors with a depraved art.  
Patterns that are painted in piercingly angry shades  
and dance down the walls as they dehydrate  
into a blotch of black and brown colored matter  
only a little recognizable because of the livid lump  
that was hidden behind the beautiful banister  
unrecognizably lying lifeless in its own liquid soup  
which is surrounded with a ripped notice stating  
that, “I could not live up to your standards.”



**Untitled**

*Debbie Stockholm*

Oil Pastel

*Oakwood 2000*

## **Walk**

*Brandon Semler*

Thinking of the summer shore  
Playing in the sand  
Something you do not want anymore  
You hear the rain bouncing off the ground  
Hoping for that little ray of sunshine  
To creep through the clouds  
As you were brought into life  
Slowly you walk away  
Somewhere in your mind  
You will always be a stray  
Should you follow your  
Foot path far away  
You will be part of life's destiny  
Some how some way  
Without a doubt your hurting  
Will some day fade away  
Wiping away your fears  
Your smile will be the beginning  
Of your new foot path here today

## **A Modern Sonnet**

*Nicole Schaffer*

The bard compared his love to sun and sea,  
Roses, myths, and immortality.  
His sonnets live on as if from Heaven sent  
Although his themes are no longer relevant.  
To rectify this curse, I now discourse,  
And this, I must admit, with great remorse.  
My love's eyes shine like Hollywood Boulevard  
With all the sincerity of an actor reading a cue card.  
His hair is like a beacon, cherry red  
But not through Nature; by a box instead.  
His biceps bulge and make strong shoulders shrug—  
It's artificial beauty helped by a drug.  
Today the bard would lament the state of our affairs  
That beauty lies skin deep is all anyone cares.



## **The Wall**

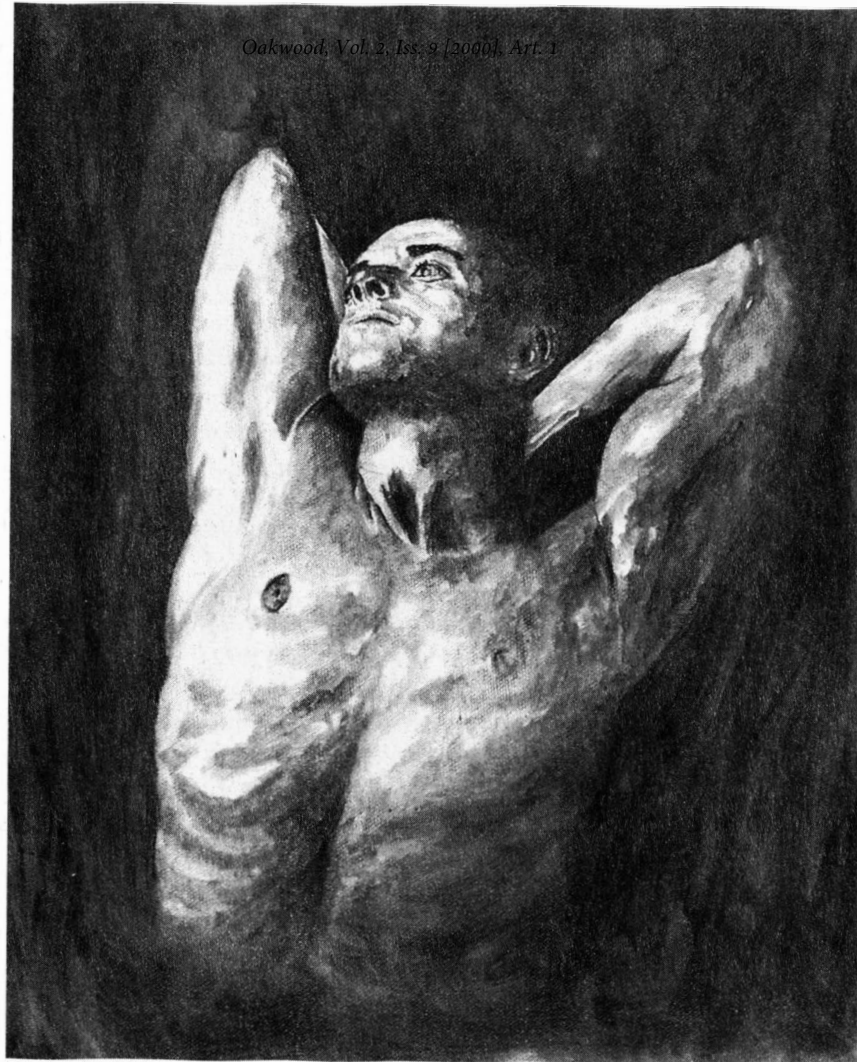
*Sandy Buelow*

I can see myself  
In the reflection of their death.

Name after name

I am reminded  
These are strangers,  
Men I have never met  
But hope to greet one day.  
Will I know my saviors  
When I meet them?

He died for me,  
And so did he,  
Him too.



**Untitled**

*Maren Andersen*  
Oil Paint

*Oakwood 2000*

**A**

*Marsha Paso*

delicately licking  
the rain from my lip  
deliciously considering  
wickedly tasting  
you

## **Blown in swirls**

*Rosalee Dallman*

Blown in swirls of white  
The snow discovers the wind.  
Hand in hand they dance.

## **The Cold Wind**

*Rosalee Dallman*

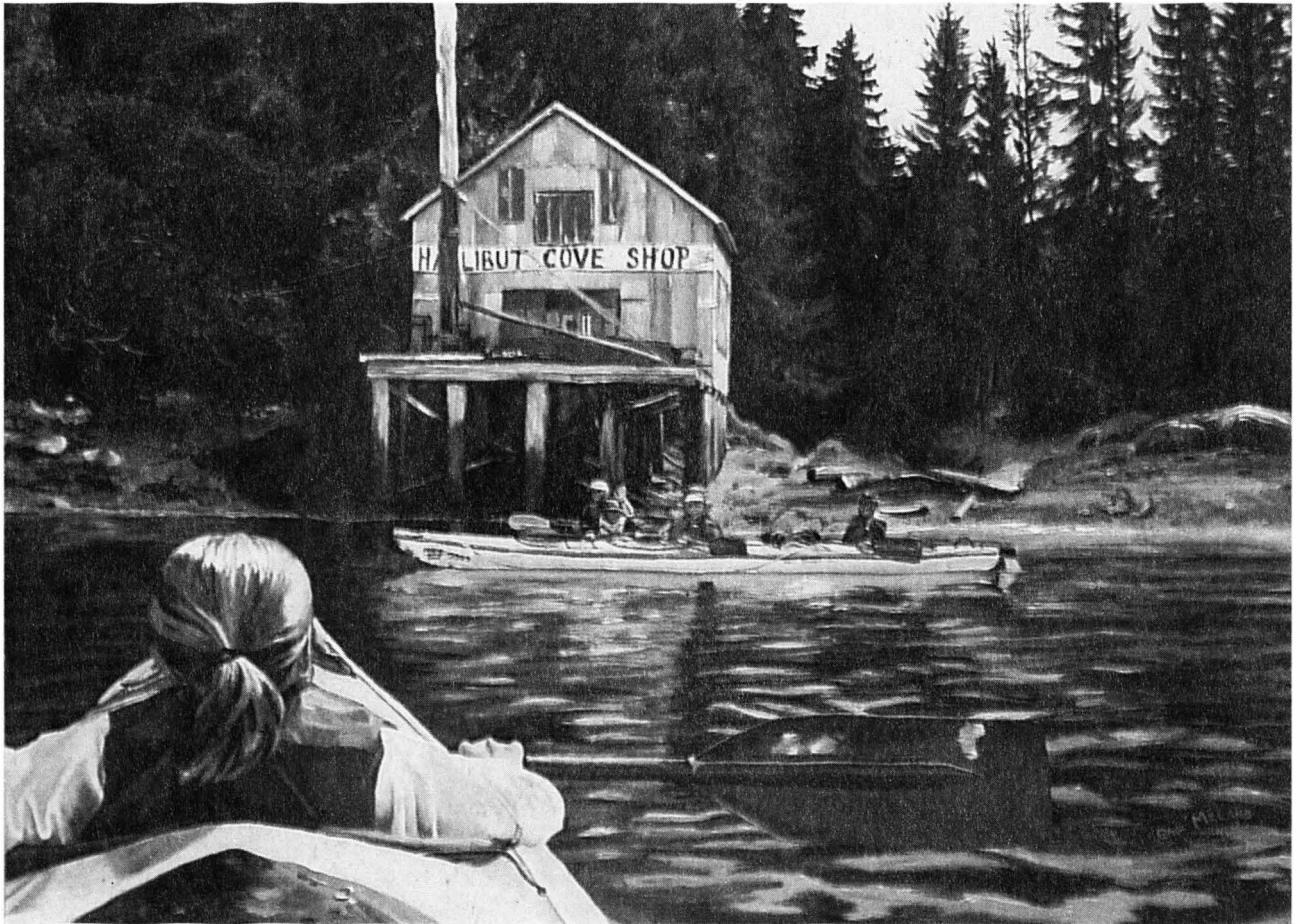
The cold wind whistles.  
Leafy notes compose the air.  
A symphony blown.



## Writing the Listing

*Rosalee Dallman*

For Sale: the sign will say  
Large Ranch, 3 Bedrooms  
Where: children slept and played,  
no longer young.  
2½ Baths: what a bother!  
Faces steamed, distorted, dripping;  
hair and paint twirled and curled.  
Towels tossed on the floor  
Youth lost down the drain years ago.  
Shadows run past.  
Rooms: for the living.  
Kitchen: “spacious, lovely lowered ceiling”  
seeps quiet voices  
sharing secrets  
learning from them  
like a window  
looking out back  
where children  
played house  
and sold lemonade.  
Price: paid.



Kayaking Halibut Cove

Gail Meland  
Oil Painting

Oakwood 2000

## **The Fire**

*Dawna Snethen*

Around the bright crackling campfire  
some friends and I gathered, reaching  
toward it to warm our chilly hands.  
Songs were sung, stories told,  
precious moments shared,  
never to be forgotten.  
Yet as warm and comforting  
as our campfire was, another  
fire burns brighter still.  
For nothing burns as bright  
and clear as the fire that  
burns from within.

## My Lord

Missy Menke

Why must blood shed before the tyranny stops.  
Should I stand here stiff and still waiting for you to make the first blow.  
*Thy Lord thy God was nailed to a tree*  
*trying to make the world a better place for you and me,*  
but still the terror does not stop.  
Still it comes with anger and bliss waiting for the blood curdling screams.  
For me to come apart at the seams.  
*Do I do as my Lord says.*  
*Do I love thy neighbor as thy self.*  
*Do I turn the cheek and let the blow come down upon me*  
or do I disregard everything and step into the pit.  
Fighting like demon dogs filled with discontent.  
*No I must stay strong*  
*and remember the words of my heavenly Father.*  
No matter what the world throws my way  
Or if at times I can't handle the day.  
*My Lord stands behind me*  
*Always there to guide me*  
And if the tyranny should not stop?  
*It will, when my Lord brings me back to the mountain top.*  
*And until then I'll wait, secure with my faith.*



## Untitled

*Rebecca Opstedahl*

|                                      |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| little diamonds                      | let turn stone cold                   |
| glittering from the heavens          | now it's ice and if                   |
| land softly on my blush              | there shall be warmth                 |
| so cold so soft                      | it'll crack                           |
| death in six shapes                  | oh, heaven                            |
| bites my nose and tears at my soul   | don't let there be warmth.            |
| there's a yearning deep inside       | comfort found in silent death         |
| a longing of something               | peace whispers                        |
| that I can't put my frozen finger on | and for once, my heart discovers      |
| and I wonder why                     | warm seductive passion                |
| what do I hunger for?                | little diamonds fall from the heavens |
| soft diamonds slice my blush         | and land ever so softly on my blush   |
| tears fall frozen                    | so cold, so soft                      |
| ice eyes freeze the fire             | my body glows with warmth             |
| my body shivers only because         | though a mighty storm rages outside   |
| it's a little colder than my         | love me like I yearn to be loved      |
| already frigid heart                 | I found the source of my hunger       |
|                                      | feed me the joy of your soul          |
|                                      | my heart melts                        |
|                                      | slowly and softly as not to shatter   |
|                                      | such a fragile peace.                 |



**Untitled**

*Melissa Heier*  
Oil Painting

*Oakwood 2000*

### **A Single Rose**

*Andrea Gail Wieman*

A single rose  
full of beauty and grace  
reflects the image of the soul.  
It illuminates perfection  
while standing tall and proud,  
holding strong to faith,  
and hiding all scars made  
by outside forces.  
Unlike the rose  
which will wilt away  
one perfect petal at a time,  
the soul will live on  
forever.

## **I am Gone**

*Missy Menke*

You shall knock  
But no answer will be heard  
You shall seek  
But you'll never find me.  
The walls left bare  
And no laughter in the air.  
A room that's empty and cold.  
My voice that once echoed  
And bounced from wall to wall  
Will have disappeared.  
Silence will lurk behind.  
One year of memories destroyed in hours.  
Was it a family  
I almost had.  
Brothers and a father too.  
Picture perfect never lasts,  
Not even for you.  
Telling stories, hearing tales,  
Listening, learning, laughing, sharing  
All Gone.  
One small reminance  
left behind.  
A little evidence for mankind.  
Little music notes on the ceiling  
Little music notes laughing and singing.  
Notes that bare the heart of me.  
Hearing every thought and feeling.  
The only proof that I once lived in this room.  
And once I was a part of a family.

*Oakwood 2000*

**I Don't Know How to Put Into Words How I Feel***Andrea Gail Wieman*

I don't know how to put into words how I feel,  
 All I know is my love for you seems so real.  
 Your image crowds my thoughts constantly,  
 I pray that this love was meant to be.

I don't understand why you hurt me so much,  
 With your words, actions, and human touch.  
 Please, God, open my eyes and help me to see,  
 That this isn't the way love is supposed to be.

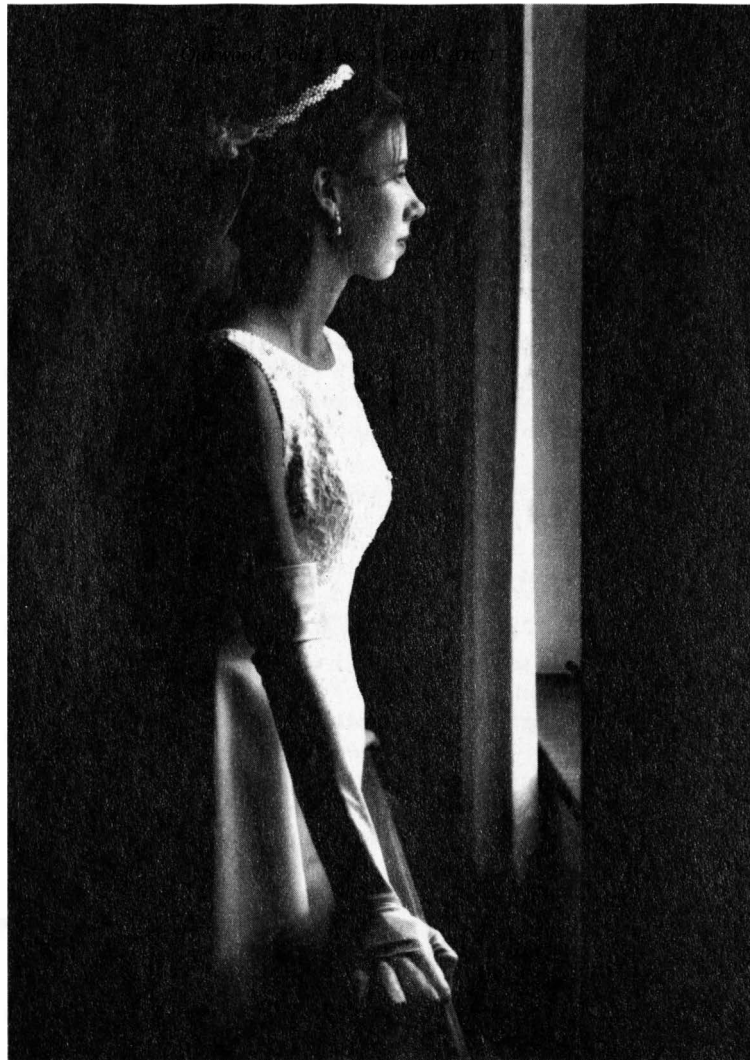
Please say you love me with all your heart,  
 Because if you don't, I'll have to make a new start.  
 Don't you see how much I am dying inside?  
 Or are you too proud and full of pride?

This is the hardest time of my life,  
 You keep tearing at me with your special knife.  
 Please, I am in agony!  
 Open your eyes and see what is inside me.

I am now done crying for you, my dear,  
 Why can't you respect me and want me near?  
 You have tortured my heart long enough,  
 I wish letting go of you wasn't so tough.

God is with me by my side,  
 With each day He will bring in a new tide.  
 The Lord is my strength; He will guide my way,  
 I am down on my knees, I know just what I'll say.

Each night I pray to Him up above,  
 thanking Him for His enduring love.  
 I thought you were the one for me,  
 Someday I'll know if it was meant to be.



Untitled

*Shawn P. Fagan*  
Photograph

*Oakwood 2000*

## **Love is Beautiful**

*Katie Pavel*

Love is beautiful.  
It is the color of  
Smoke-filled eyes  
They meet in one eternal gaze.  
It is the sweetness of sugar  
And the tartness of wine.  
It is the fragrance of roses  
After a cleansing rain.  
It is the music of  
Angels singing  
High in the heavens.  
It is the quickening of breath  
And the pounding of hearts.  
And it is spending  
The rest of your life  
With one special person.  
Love is beautiful.

## **Oblivion**

*Stephanie Misar*

Missing, yet always there,  
Evident and unaware,  
Entrapment of time, color and space,  
Apparition: translucent is your face.  
Daunting images in my dreams—  
Daylight brings formal meeting.  
Chances and time work slowly,  
Impulses always with me.  
Lacking structure and formality.  
Full content with hesitation.



**There She is...(Miss So & So)**

*Patricia M. Stockland*

There hangs a false camaraderie  
in the air,  
along with the perfumes and  
hairsprays and stifling egos.  
No one minds that we've slept in  
coffins of vanity,  
Adding golden skin to a glittering  
crown.

## Disco Dreams

*Julia Angerhofer*

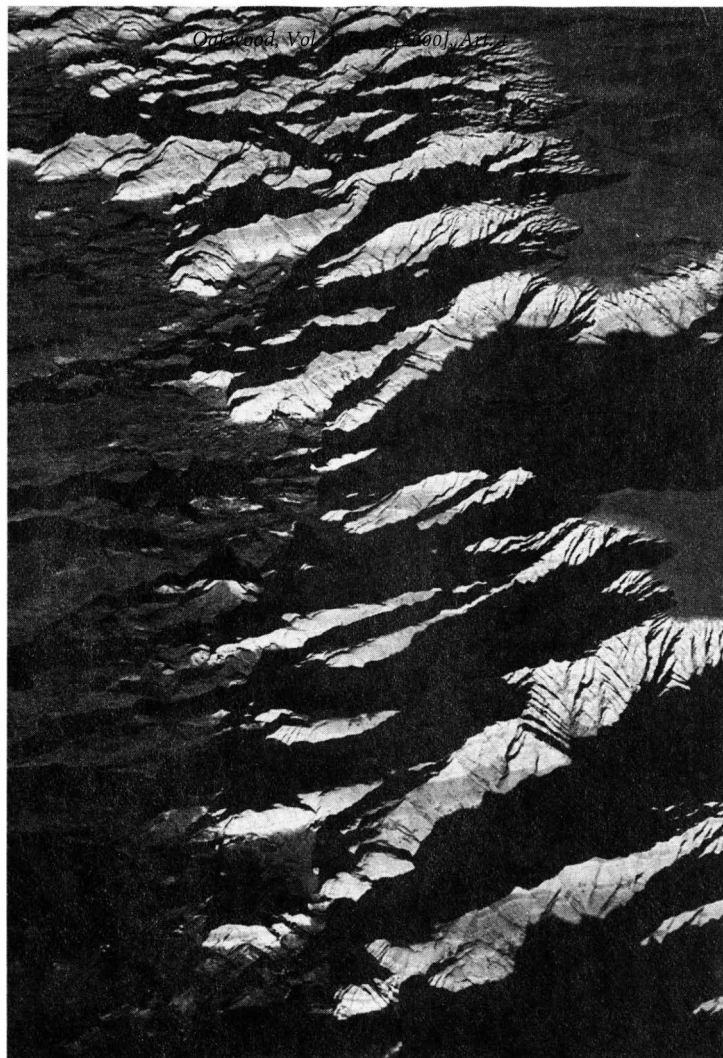
Freestyle!  
Mr. Rogers in suede leisure suit with a daisy  
crown in his hair,  
Watchin' him get down, get down!  
Oh yeah, baby! Make love to the dance floor!  
John Travolta comes strutting in,  
And I am the disco queen.  
We bump; we grind; we point!  
I smell his Hi-Karate aftershave;  
Mixing with the beat, it makes me want him  
even more.  
Starsky and Hutch try to bust us.  
It's no good.  
They can't touch our illegal moves.  
They sit sulking in a booth with Daisy Duke.  
John, in the meanwhile, is combing his hair—  
his chest hair.  
He asks if he can comb mine.  
REWIND!

"You, too, can learn to disco!"  
Yes, I believe in miracles.  
The disco ball goes round and round,  
Hot Chocolate flowing through my brains,  
my veins, my, oh—everything...  
And there is John, my man,  
The man with the chest hair,  
the medallions, the white leisure suit,  
And all the moves.  
Oh, yeah, you're the one baby, you sexy thing!  
Take it all off, if you like.  
But instead, we start to hustle. And bustle.  
Charlie's Angels come crashing in,  
And each try to take John away, but to no avail.  
Charlie is highly disappointed, I'm sure.  
They froze in a pose with the Bee Gees—  
trying to stay alive.  
John says he wants to kiss me all over,  
But then, Rod Stewart walks through the door,  
and I think he is sexy.  
The problems encountered during the boogie nights!

**Fools**

*Christopher Harris*

See the sheep  
going up and  
down the street?  
I laugh at them.  
I laugh at you.



*Oakwood, Vol. 2, Iss. 9, 2000, Art. 1*

## **Badlands**

*Justin Huyck*  
Photograph

*Oakwood 2000*

## Decay

Jason Currie-Olson

Life is gone  
Through a broken door,  
Shards of glass  
Spilled across the floor.

A child cries  
Alone in the night,  
Cold and hungry  
Filled with fright

### *Chorus*

Why does it have to be this way,  
Our world, our home  
Fallen to decay.

Another victim  
A violent overdose,  
Died a stranger  
To family so close.  
A shot rings out  
Creating a hole,  
Another wound to mend  
For another school.

### *Chorus*

Why does it have to be this way  
Ringing up debits  
We can't repay

A doctor dies  
At the hands of those  
That wish to take  
The right to choose.

### *Another appeal*

A killer set free,  
Primed and ready  
For another spree.

### *Chorus*

Why does it have to be this way,  
Fighting the inevitable  
Trying to delay  
Why does it have to be this way  
Ringing up debts  
We can't repay  
Why does it have to be this way,  
Our world, our home  
Fallen to decay.

## **My Feelings Outrage Me**

*Andrea Gail Wieman*

My feelings outrage me  
When I think of the closeness we shared  
And the betrayal I felt  
When listening to your lies.  
You are one of my best friends  
Yet you are the enemy.  
I see a gun in your left hand  
Aimed right at me  
Ready to fire at any second.  
But I also see your right hand  
Reaching out to me  
When I'm in the depth of despair.  
How can I love you with all my heart  
And yet feel so much anger?  
It all comes down to this.  
We can't be best friends  
And enemies.  
One or the other.  
I know which one I choose.  
Do you?

## **Sorry, Wrong Number**

*Erin Killion*

I realized a  
new love,  
you aren't  
so great anymore,  
even though I once told you so.

## **A Thought (or not)**

*Patricia M. Stockland*

I frisked my brain for some  
concealed weapon,  
And much to my dismay,  
found it was carrying  
nothing.

## Superheroine

Rachel Higgins

She is the beauty that everyone admires,  
The one who stops traffic  
Dead  
In its tracks.  
Spellbinding both men and women  
Into bumbling, incoherent  
Idiots.  
Full, well-defined lips of crimson  
Smile  
Pleasingly.  
Collagen, perhaps?  
Blue-gray eyes  
Stare ahead  
With an alluring essence.  
It's amazing what color contacts can do!  
Wavy, blonde hair  
Cascades  
Down her back,  
Covering alabaster skin.  
A flowing, velvet gown  
Of navy  
Caresses  
The delicate frame,  
Enhancing an ample bosom and shapely hips.  
Are those silicone or home-grown?

God bracelets  
Adorn perfect  
Small wrists.  
Her hands  
Are thin  
And manicured in Beverly Hills.  
She is young,  
A goddess in bloom.  
Exuberance and mystery  
Radiate from her pores.  
Is it from her personal dermatologist  
Or 100% soap and water?  
She is the girl-next-door  
Mary Poppins with a spatula.  
A Dallas Cowboys cheerleader,  
With great hair  
And a Colgate smile.  
She can kick ass  
Like Xena, the Warrior-Princess  
Or turn on the charm  
Of an innocent school-girl.  
One minute she's Wonder Woman,  
The next,  
Barbie.  
Hugh Hefner's got her number  
Larry Flynt thinks she's next.  
*Penthouse* is waiting.  
Every man's dream,  
Every man's fantasy.

Oakwood 2000



## Too Late

Rosalee Dallman

Just think  
    *urp free* shirts and dresses  
getting to church on time  
quiet music  
my own kind  
cookie-less cookie jar  
Tupperware nicely stacked  
a silent guitar  
eating *yuck free*  
bicycle tires flat  
skateboard warped  
swing set rusty  
stuffed animals sat  
pockets *frog free*  
everything where it should be  
hand puppets and  
finger painted mirrors disappeared  
no imagination attacks  
no *Little Engine that Could* and could and  
no child's touch  
we knew we'd love them  
didn't know how much



**Dead End**  
*Nicole Lang*  
Photograph

*Oakwood 2000*

## The Road

*Rachel Higgins*

It's a gravel road,  
 With a stop sign on the right,  
 And a yellow and black "Dead End" sign on the left.  
 It's a road I know well.

My feet can travel down it,  
 With intuitive knowledge,  
 Like a blind person navigates with hands.  
 Even the small, ancient pebbles bring comfort,  
 When they become lodged at the bottom of my shoes.

It's a gravel road,  
 With beautiful fields on both sides.  
 At different times of the seasons  
 They are filled with illustrious colors,  
 Of rich yellow and greens,  
 From soybeans and stalks of corn.  
 Or, on some rare occasion, both.

It's a gravel road,  
 And it welcomes me.  
 From warm sunshine in August,  
 To a blistering December wind,  
 that wraps around me  
 Like a cold blanket.

It's a gravel road,  
 That leads me to understanding and fulfillment.  
 From childhood memories of yesterday  
 To thoughts of today.

The air is distinctly filled with the heavy-labored sweat of  
 Animal and man.

Who both have plowed and prayed upon  
 This land,  
 Like a mother combing a child's hair.  
 Sweetly whispering words into innocent ears.

It's a gravel road,  
 Where time has appeared to have stood still.  
 If, possibly  
 For a moment.

Spirits claim this place,  
 Weaving a gentle embrace.  
 Watching over  
 With a love that knows  
 No bounds.  
 This infinite devotion can be heard  
 Through rustling of the leaves and joyful dancing of the trees.

It's a gravel road,  
 And listen closely,  
 For stories are told.  
 they speak in the wind,  
 Barely a  
 Whisper.

It's a gravel road,  
 With many travelers walking its path.  
 Although there have been many,  
 The road only completely knows  
 Few.

It's a gravel road,  
 And it knows me well.

## A Journey Unknown

Missy Menke

Born in the desert sands  
Been to many lands  
Who I am I do now know  
Where I live or where I'll go.

*They say I'm a fatherless child,  
a bastard of sorts, Nameless they say I'll always be.*

I refuse to believe, NO nameless I am not.

I'm a princess of exotic lands.

A gem among all the bland.

A dove, A swan, A tender vase.

*They say I'm an orphan, without nickel or dime*

I'm NOT I cry,

I'm owner and chief of tribes unknown.

Gold is like cobblestone.

I have castles, and fortresses,

servants and maids.

I have loving parents.

A father, who as a prince swept my mother off her feet.

I have love and enduring life.

*They tell me lies and make me cry.*

*They lock me up, They tear away my dreams.*

But I hold the key to my future. A future unseen.

Born in the desert sands

Been to many lands

Who I am I do not know

Where I live or where I'll go.





Prose



## Benevolent Wyrms

*Kim Pautsch*

Acrylic Painting



## Character-Building

*Nicole Schaffer*

I stoop, shoulders hunched against the suffocating August heat, digging with a sharp-edged rock around a broken-off weed. I expose a sufficiently sized, crooked, whitish-yellow handle by which I intend to pull that stubborn weed out of the ground. I grasp the slimy root with my dirt-encrusted hands and securely brace my feet in the moist ground on either side of the offensive weed. I suck in a deep breath and hold it as I strain backwards, grunting, against my adversary. Sweat rolls out of my hairline, down my face, my neck, between my shoulder blades, and down my back; my muscles shake from the prolonged struggle. At long last, something tears, and I feel the weed yield to me. Encouraged, I pull harder. There is nothing more fantastic than the sound made when the living roots of a plant are ripped from the earth's womb—pop, snap, crack. I squeezed my eyes shut against the resulting shower of dirt and fought to maintain my balance. The weed died.

I breathe in the moist, earthy scent that released when I had so callously excavated that weed from my mother's garden. That smell can be attributed to both living, thriving plants and to dead, discarded weeds. I will always associate that gritty, damp smell with plant death rather than plant life. Planting and nurturing—that is my mother's department. My sisters and I—we, well, we're the Terminators. Our specialties? Death and destruction.

I examine the scraggly root that I have clutched in my triumphant hands. I throw it over my shoulder, disgusted. Disgusted that I spent so much time and energy on one delinquent weed. I stand up straight and stretch my arms to the sweltering sky. My muscles ache. I roll my head to one side and then the other, trying to relieve the piercing tension you get in your neck and shoulders when you've been hunching over your work too long. I give up, knowing that it's going to get worse before it gets better; I still have two long rows of tomatoes and green peppers to weed. I yawn and stupidly wipe the sweat off my cheeks with my grimy hands. Now I look like a pro-football player with two dark swaths of color under each eye.

*Oakwood 2000*

I pick up my new “comfort-grip” hoe and resume my labor. I strike a rock with a crisp metallic “chink” with enough force to send bone-jarring vibrations up my arms. I shake my head and try to remember why I’m working outside in the ninety-five degree South Dakota sun. My mom is enforcing a new rule. My two sisters and I have to spend an hour weeding in the garden every day. Sometimes, particularly when mom suspects we waste most of the hour, she assigns each of us a different section to do and you work until you get your section done, no matter how long it takes. So, here I am, weeding the garden in the middle of an Indian summer day. There is no wind or even a breeze. This is rare, especially in South Dakota, and I curse my luck. The sun beats down on me—unbearable, relentless. I feel as if I am being baked into the ground, becoming a part of the earth.

I uproot my dirt-clodden feet and inch my way down the row. I swing my hoe hard and fast. There is an art to hoeing. The trick is to keep your back straight and not to over-swing. If you slouch your shoulders, round your back, and swing the hoe too high, your back will be sore the next day. My hoe collides with another rock, and I throw my hoe into the dirt. I scowl down at the stinging palms of my hands. I stare at my blistering, bleeding, callused hands and wonder who gets off calling that thing a “comfort-grip” hoe. I kick my hoe out of the way and start weeding by hand. No wonder I hate nature.





**Untitled**

*Mendy Pedersen*

Pencil

*Oakwood 2000*

## The Guest Speaker

Jesse Johnson

As the unoccupied classroom patiently awaited seventh period, the eight large windows on the eastward wall displayed a cumulus cloud shaped like a giant condom. The sun hid behind it, and the room received only basic light. A few relevant conversations slipped under the door, and the faint roar of a lawnmower climbed in an open window in the back. The doorknob turned and clicked, and the cloud quickly remodeled. A chattering mass of bodies flooded the room, occupying desks. The confusion, when broken down into discernable parts, revealed two key pieces of information: One, there was a guest speaker today, and two, if you didn't have your permission slip, you didn't have to attend.

The entrance of Ms. Davis, the principal, silenced the room. She walked promptly to the front and spoke. "As the result of several recent incidents—the name calling, the inappropriate gestures, the foul language—preventative measures have been deemed necessary. The first step, of course, is education. Now, as you are aware, the lecture that has been prepared for you today involves a sensitive subject. Therefore, I would ask those without signed permission slips report to the library at this time."

Five students, four boys and a girl, stood up and filed quietly to the door. From his window seat in the back row, Schroeder watched intently as the students exited. When they were out of view, he fondled his permission slip, running his thumb across his mother's signature.

"I would like you to welcome Mrs. Smith," said Ms. Davis.

As the others applauded, Schroeder stared out the window at Mr. Noom mowing the grass.

"Unfortunately," said Ms. Davis, "I have a meeting to attend and can't stay. I am leaving Mrs. Smith in charge. I know you will give her the respect she deserves."

As Ms. Davis slipped out the door, Mrs. Smith took her place in front of the class. She said, "Many of you are now at an age where your bodies are going through certain changes—"

The thud of a heavy textbook jolted the room. Heads turned toward Schroeder's desk.

"I'm sorry *Mrs. Smith, is it?*" said Schroeder, picking up the book. "It slipped."  
Mrs. Smith looked at Schroeder but said nothing. She continued, "These changes are often frightening, and cause us to act out, often inappropriately. Yes, Schroeder?"  
Schroeder lowered his hand. "Can I go to the bathroom?"

"Please wait until after class."

"But I have to shit really bad."

Mrs. Smith's eyes widened, as did the other students' mouths. Mrs. Smith breathed in and out heavily, then said calmly, "Schroeder, I would appreciate it if you would not use language like that. You wouldn't say things like that at home, would you?"

"My parents don't care. They say *shit* all the time. Shit this. Shit that. In fact, just the other—"

"You little... Shhh Schroeder, *go* to the principal's office! Or is that what you want? On second thought, I want you to stay. *You*, more than anybody, need to hear what I have to say."

Schroeder shrugged his shoulders and looked out the window. The other students had forgotten to close their mouths.

Mrs. Smith said, "I would like to begin my Sexual Awareness Presentation today with a subject many of us are afraid to talk about—masturbation. Sit down, Schroeder."

"I was just going to shut the window. I can't hear over that damn lawnmower."

"Masturbation is—"

"Look at Mr. Noom go. I'll bet he feels left out of this Sexual Awareness BS though."

"Masturbation is a way in which—"

"I think he should have a preview." Schroeder walked to the window, lowered his pants, and pressed his butt cheeks firmly to the glass. Mr. Noom's eyes locked on the window; his neck swiveled as he mowed through six feet of freshly bloomed tulips. Mrs. Smith lowered her shoulder and sprinted to the window. She hooked belt loops on either side of Schroeder's jeans and flung him over her shoulder like a sack of softener salt. He kicked violently, and her fingers slipped from the loops. Schroeder's pants dropped to his ankles, binding his legs and synchronizing their motion. His arms flailed.

He looked like he was swimming underwater. Mrs. Smith buckled at the hip, almost losing her balance. She managed to steady herself and hauled Schroeder into the hall, slamming the door shut with her foot.

With her mouth open, the student nearest the door knelt down and pressed her ear against the lower right-hand corner; some other open mouths joined her.

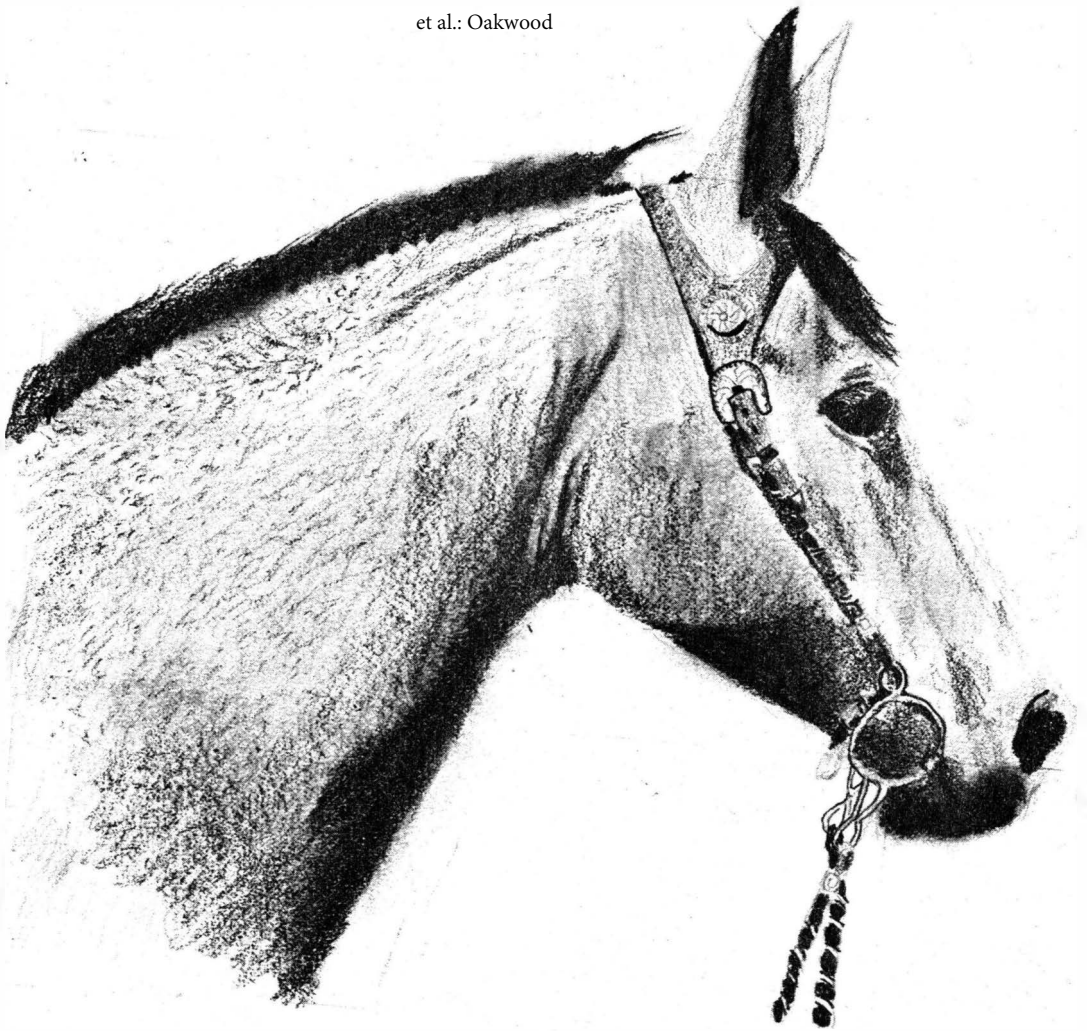
“You little bastard, you’re just doing this to embarrass me!” said Mrs. Smith. This isn’t easy for me either, you know!”

“Whatever,” said Schroeder.

“I was going to wait to discuss this with your father, but I don’t think I need to. You’re grounded for two months!”

“But Mom!”

The click of the doorknob sent students scattering. As the lawnmower droned weakly in the distance, the sun peeked from behind a cumulus. Mrs. Smith walked in alone, and the students closed their mouths.



*Oakwood 2000*

42

**Untitled**  
*Mendy Pedersen*  
Pencil

## Innocence

*Todd VanDerWerff*

Dust cloaked the world with its dryness as it rose from the ground in hazy clouds. My eyes, my face, and my lungs were all clogged with its stale taste, my lungs in particular, crying out for a breath of freshness.

A pig scrambled wildly out of the haze, temporarily rending the curtain. The pig's hooves carried it rapidly over the hard cement feeding pad towards the long wooden chute. It clattered down the chute, squealing in terror all the way and hurtled into the long metal trailer, filled with the grunts of pigs and the acrid odor associated with the animals. Almost 150 pigs crowded into the trailer, which had rapidly become a gauzy hell of squeals and sweat.

The humidity blanketed me that July day with its heavy cloak and the mosquitoes buzzed around my ears like low-flying miniature 747s. My father, mother and sister followed me up as I leapt out of the trailer and back into the summer heat, which seemed cool when compared with the trailer. Our family's hired man swung the door of the trailer shut, the harsh clanging imprisoning another load of pigs, who would soon make their way down the long road to market.

My father came up behind me and placed a strong hand on my back. "Good job, son. You really showed those pigs who was boss." His compliment boosted my spirits, which had been sagging from his reprimands when I would let a pig slip by my wooden board and behind me. Though I was testing his limits constantly, I craved his acceptance and saved his compliments deep inside of me.

Behind us, my little sister let out a little shriek. From inside the feeder a pig burst forth, covered in corn dust, having crawled inside to hide from us, a horror it could never full comprehend. It swerved through the clouds of dust, still fearing us with our boards, small and pink.

My father gave up pursuit and called out to our hired man, "Let it go, Elmer. It's too small. Just take the others to IBP."

I had always inherently understood in my 15-year-old brain that the runts who were left behind from the other pigs were taken somewhere and killed, but I had never actually seen it happen. In a way, this prevented me from accepting the reality of what our family

did for a living. When you thought about it, what we really did was usher living creatures to their deaths, but I could ignore that and simply go with the routine of every day life down on the farm. Until that day.

My father picked up a hammer and strode across the pen towards the runt, which was quivering in a corner of a hutch. Bending quickly, my father grabbed the pig's back leg and dragged it out into the open, keeping a firm grasp on it as it screamed in fear. My mother had led my sister away towards the hay bales, where the family kittens were playing. She remained ignorant of that which was happening before my very eyes.

Seemingly in slow motion, the hammer rose up and caught the sun, gleaming briefly and sparking to life before plunging back down, punching hard against the pig's skull.

And still it screamed, its squeals coming faster and louder, filling the air with hideous noise as I could hear my sister and mother laughing at something the kittens were doing. The hammer flew up again and BAM! came down with terrible force. The pig stopped squealing and was lying curiously still. And then the moment I would never forget happened.

The pig kicked up its legs and began to flop like a fish dying on some distant shore. As if I were watching a movie, I watched as it lurched and bounced around on the dirt, my hands going to my knees and bile rising in my throat. Tears sprang to my eyes suddenly, though I knew not why. Blood flowed out of the pig's mouth, covering the dirt like a ruby red carpet of wine, hideous beauty in the horror.

My father turned from the freshly born cataclysm and laid the hammer down on the ground. He walked slowly back to me, crossing the yards to me. His hand went to my shoulder. "Sometimes, that's what we have to do."

I hated him at that instant. I shrank from his hand, which had guided me through my first step and comforted me after a girl rejected me in fifth grade and shattered my heart for the first time. That hand which had hugged and guarded me suddenly seemed monstrous, the main culprit in the death of an innocent.

The pig was quiet now. It lay still, no muscles quivering, the blood sinking into the ground. I turned and strode away, holding my composure with difficulty. I reached my mother and sister and grabbed one of the tiny cats, holding it against me, as if guarding against all that was evil in the world.

I felt my mother's hand on my back. "What would you have us do with it, Todd? It's too small to sell, and we can't keep paying to feed it. Even if we put it in with other pigs, they would eventually kill it anyway."

I looked back. My father was wandering aimlessly around the pen, the dust finally settling. He wiped sweat from his brow and looked in my direction again, perhaps sensing that my mother was better for the job.

I had no answers for her questions. It was still shocking to see death so close and at the hands of my father, no less.

The kitten clawed at my shirt. I was holding it too tightly. Setting it down on the hay bale, I turned to my mother. "I'm sorry it has to be this way. I had trouble with it at first too," she said.

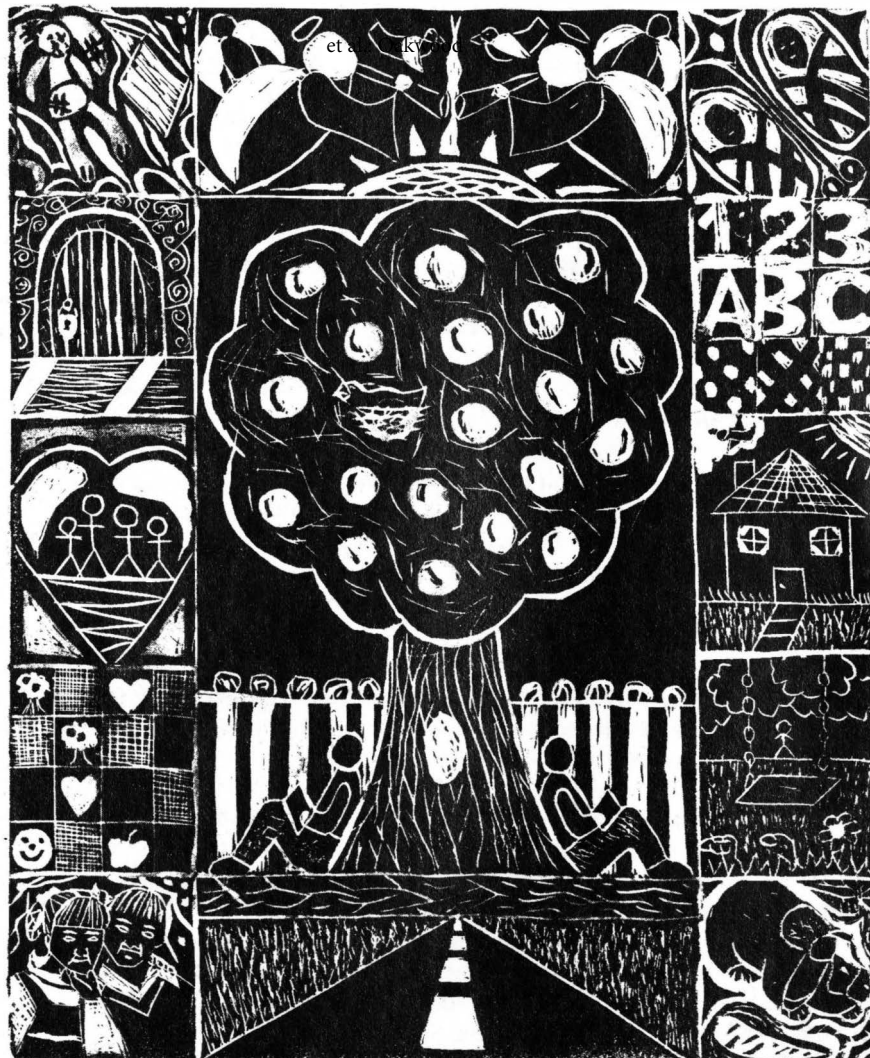
Parts of me still wanted to attack him, maul him, do whatever it took to get him to take back what he had done. But a growing awareness slipped up through the cracks in my heart and made its way to my brain.

My father didn't want to kill that pig. He had to. For him, no other way would be acceptable. His mind would be ever logical, and he would always put that logic ahead of his emotions. To provide for his family, he needed money that the pig would have needlessly consumed, never growing larger than it had been as a piglet.

I saw him for who he truly was that day. Not a monster or the unemotional and distant man I had seen from my youth, the one I had felt I had to force to accept me. In my eyes that day, he became a quiet man who cared more about his family than what necessarily felt "good." He was becoming a man to me and no longer just an image, seen gauzily through the mists of childhood.

My father picked up the pig and tossed it over the fence, where it would be picked up later. Wiping sweat away from his brow and cleaning his hands of the dust and fresh blood, he strode over to us through the dust and tickled a kitten under its chin, making my sister laugh. Then, with a sneeze, he started away, up the hill to his shed. Night would spread its blackened cloak soon and there was still work to be done before he could retire for the evening.





Windows of Being : window I

Michelle Aartun  
Mixed Media

Oakwood 2000

## Life and Lemonade

Rebecca Opstedahl

Zombies dressed in black stare at the gaping hole in the moist earth. Light rain dusts the visitors as some move their soggy eyes to become engulfed in the peace and serenity of the white and red roses. Chants sung in Latin fade away as another victim of old age is claimed by the ground. Shuffles of dirt drift over the oak coffin as shuffles of feet leave the departed. The meadowlark's lullaby is shattered as a woman breaks down and sobs loudly. My gloved hand reaches to my pale face to wipe away the solitary tear threatening to cascade down my cheek. I walked back to my car parked alongside the road and slid into the leather interior. Placing the key into the ignition I felt an immense weight crash down on me. Tears exploded and sobs choked my throat.

Candlelight glowed softly, illuminating the shadows dancing on the beige walls. Old yellowed newspaper articles carpeted the floor. "Hero Returns Home" read one and "Hometown Hero Marries" read another. Faded pictures holding faded memories stared up at me. How many times I had wanted to listen to the stories contained behind the articles. The more personal side of the story. How many times had I been asked to listen to an old woman's life and was too busy to hear her words. How many times had I broken her fragile heart when I turned my back and waved over my shoulder. How many times had...My shoulders fell and sobs racked my chest. Too many times. Too many.

I awoke with a start. The candle had long burnt out and the first glimmers of a fresh spring day were sashaying through the window. Sunlight bounced off of the near-forgotten newspaper pieces and trinkets placed with love throughout the room. Stretching, I sat up and yawned. The soft pitter-patter of my feet echoed through the empty house as I made my way to scrounge up some breakfast. Seconds ticked by pointlessly on the aged kitchen clock and at the top of the hour, the grandfather clock chimed in. I was concentrating on my shredded wheat when I smelled it. *The scent. Her scent.* My eyes snapped up and frantically searched the room. She was there. "Grams! Grams! Where are you? Where are...?" Reality snapped in my face like a rubber band. Tears streamed down the valleys of my face and drenched my t-shirt.

“No, Billy, I’m telling you. It was like she was really there. I could feel her.”

“Baby, it couldn’t have been. Your grandma died two weeks ago. You’re just having a rough time with it, that’s all. The pain seems like it shall never end, but I promise you it will go away. I’m...come here kiddo.”

I buried my face in Billy’s shirt and clung on to him for dear life. “I smelled her perfume, though. Yeah, the house would smell like her, but what I smelled was so vivid and fresh and close to me. Like she was leaning over me, she was right there, I swear it.” I sobbed.

“What you need darling is a long hot bubble bath and a good night’s sleep. Come on. I’ll get the water started for you. You’ll feel better in the morning.”

Wrapping the Egyptian cotton around my naked body, I stepped from my bath. As my warm hand reached to the cold mirror to wipe away the steam, I glanced at my reflection. Eyes holding 25 years of memories stared blankly back. Ocean waves tumbled behind me. Billy had put on his damn relaxation music with good intentions, but it wasn’t helping me any. I sighed and slipped on my silk pajamas. Turning back the covers made me remember how neatly Grams had done it. She folded the sheets over and over so precise, so carefully. I laid my auburn head upon my pillow and stared at the moon. Wind rustled the leaves and pushed sweet night air into my room trying to erase Grams’ scent from my memory. Shadowy fingers traced the windowpane, tapping at my very soul hoping to capture it. The darkness has never made me feel more alone than this moment. I had always had the comfort that someone out there cared, that I mattered to someone. Grams made everyone around her feel at ease, and she always knew what to say when nobody else could help me, if they had even bothered to try. Her hugs were my comfort zone. Nothing could harm me if I had her hugs. Nothing. Billy loves me, but he doesn’t fill that void. He tries, I’ll give him credit for that, but it isn’t the same. Nobody made me feel more special than Grams did. She... I was thinking as sleep overcame me.

*I was sitting in an old weathered rowboat. The sunlight glittered off the still lake waters and the pine trees stood stationary on the still day. Smell of fish and humidity hung heavy on the air. My arm stretched outward to cast the line again. Birds of some kind sang softly to each other as a squirrel chattered unseen on shore.*

*"Grams, tell me what it was like when you were my age."*

*"Well, when I was 12 my parents lived on a ranch and were very poor..."*

*So began the story she always told me. I would sit and listen to her and watch her eyes sparkle when she told me about the time she met my grandpa for the first time.*

*If only I could've stayed 12 forever, I would've had the time to listen to all her stories.*

*I grew up much too fast and became too busy to sit and listen to her ramble on about past memories. Even in the past few years the hugs became few and far between. Holidays mostly. My new job at the magazine kept me very busy. But I should have made time.*

*"Honey, are you listening to me?"*

*Grams interrupted my thoughts and suddenly I was 25 sitting in that rowboat.*

*"Grams?"*

*"Dear, don't beat yourself up over this..."*

*Her words soothed my worries and quieted my fears. I could feel the warm sunshine lighten the heavy burden on my soul.*

*Thunder rumbled. I slowly opened my eyes to greet the new day. Clouds trudged over the landscape and birds chirped quietly. Smiling, I opened the window even more to let the clean rain scent meander its way into my room. I couldn't help but smile; the day seemed so new, so inspiring, despite the gloomy visage. Was it my dream that made me feel this way? For some reason, my life seems so much more uncomplicated now. Like Grams always said, "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade." It sounds cliché, but I think I'm ready to make some lemonade, right after breakfast.*



Windows of Being: window 2

*Michelle Aartun*

Mixed Media

*Oakwood 2000*

## The Discovery

*Todd VanDerWerff*

With the way my mail piles up here at college, I might never have found it. It might have been forgotten and tossed aside countless times into the corner of my desk, never being opened.

But when my eyes first saw the return address on that envelope that afternoon, my world changed forever.

I found her.

After leaping through all of the crazy legalistic hoops that the Michigan state government had set up for me, I finally found my birth mother this fall. It took me almost two months to think of what to say in my first letter to her. What do you say to a person who has been a part of your life for all of your life, yet has been absent that whole time as well?

Finally, I came up with the right words to say. I covered the basics. I was okay. I was in college. The parents I had ended up with were the best parents anyone could have ever hoped for. And yet, it all somehow felt like a futile exercise. There was no way I could fill her in on 19 years of a life.

Numerous fears filled my heart when that letter dropped into the mailbox. I have always been afraid that one or both of my birth parents would reject me. While I could understand if she didn't want to pursue an active relationship with me, I wanted to at least know that she was okay. That she had gone on to lead a life that made her at least vaguely happy.

Still, my normal life went on. As my private thoughts gnawed away at the back corners of my heart, I celebrated Thanksgiving, surrounded and filled with the love and support of all of my family. I hooked up with old friends for the first time since I had gone to college, learning how their lives were going. My life was predictable. Normal. Everything it had been for 19 years.

But one letter changed all of that.

I have a tendency to let my mail pile up here with all that goes on during the week. On Sunday afternoons, I go through the mail, reading newspapers, catching up with hometown events, and reading the letters that various relatives have sent to me.

Normally, there isn't too much of any real importance in there. But this time, an envelope with a return address I had half-expected to never see, landed in my lap.

In the space of five minutes, I accumulated some half-siblings, uncles, aunts and grandparents. And yet, in the reality that is my world, none of them will ever be REALLY my family. None of them will fill the spaces of my heart that the people who raised me and lived with me and put up with my violent mood swings will fill.

But then there is the part of me that needs to find a space for these "new" family members to fill. After looking at the pictures of them, I know that I have to. When I look into the eyes of my youngest sister (and I use this term, knowing all of the qualifications that go with that), I see my own eyes. And I see that same lopsided grin that marks my driver's licenses and school photos plastered on her face too. Somewhere along the line, I also see that she somehow picked up my penchant for drawing animals using ovals with lines sticking out of them at odd angles. Buried deep within her somewhere is my genetic code, as it is in all of the rest of the pictures.

I am lucky. Numerous stories of people who went to find their birth families end tragically. My birth family seems to want to open up at least a letter-writing relationship, with the possibility of more later.

But there are so many other things to consider here. My parents have been very good about supporting me in my pursuit of my past. I hope that they won't worry about me giving up on them. I hope that they know that I love them and will always think of them as my parents (after all, they did all the REAL work).

I hope that everything will go easily and that both sides of my life will adjust. That both my birth and real family will come to accept the reality of the other, and I will be able to navigate my way through this life of mine, keeping them both in the places that they need to be.

But the most difficult problem of all is the question of how to fill in the blanks of these last 19 years. How do you recapture a life? How do you let someone know everything that has ever happened to you in the space of a few pages of paper and a cartridge of printer's ink?

To be fair, we do have a whole lifetime to begin to catch up and make up for the lost time. There will be time for all of the stories in the next years of my life. There will be time to figure out what all of this means and how all of this will affect me.

And I also have to cope with this feeling that the whole thing was rather anti-climactic. That after all my time wondering who they were and what they were doing, actually knowing is like knowing the murderer in a mystery novel on page two.

I know that many people have preconceived notions of all of this, built mainly from television. If the birth family doesn't totally reject the child, then they **MUST** immediately want to be part of their life, showing up with fruit baskets and hugs.

As I'm sure you've probably realized, it's much more complicated than that. Tentatively, we call over the gap left by the last 19 years spent apart, trying to find something in common other than our genetics. Trying to find a place where everything can be as it must and will.

And then I look at the picture again and see those eyes and that smile and dream to myself of them. I dream that they will fill in the blanks of my life. Perhaps they can tell why I seem to possess no hand-eye coordination whatsoever and why I have the color eyes that I do. I look at the picture again, seeing myself and a six-year old girl at the same time and dream that it will all make sense in time.

For there are years to catch up on and relationships to be built. It will take time, but the rewards are worth more than the potential pitfalls. I am willing to press on and hope that they are too.

Her eyes stare back at me, and I place one of my senior pictures next to her picture, searching for a conclusion to this story and finding none for there can be no conclusion to a story that is just beginning.

We will finish it in time.





Untitled

*Heather Bjornebo*

Pen and Ink

*Oakwood 2000*

Published by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange, 2000

## The Last Battle

*Dominic Tauer*

Sheer terror ran through Cristin's veins as panic stricken legs tried to run. Branches slapped and beat upon her quivering body with rain soaked leaves. Roots and sharp rocks stabbed her bare feet and tried to trip her frantic efforts to escape in the night. Cristin's numb mind never even registered the pain nor realized that her shoes were left abandoned in the mangled remains of the car. Nothing was important now, not her new Adidas jacket torn to shreds or her Tommy jeans caked with blood and mud, even the gash on her arm bleeding heavily gave Cristin no notice. Nothing, nothing except the crystal she kept grasped in her blood-soaked hand. The crystal was the only thing keeping her enemy away and herself alive.

It wasn't supposed to happen this way, not here on this old, deserted highway deep within the mountains. Not in the dead of night with sheets of rain making the ground one large mud puddle splashing all about during her flight. She wasn't ready yet. She needed more time, just maybe a couple more days and then she could put things right. Just a few more days.

The wind howled at Cristin blowing her long black hair in every direction and sending an icy chill across her fair, freckled skin. Teeth chattered fiercely as she forced her way through a thick patch of bushes. The small twigs grabbed at the torn black and white jacket and scratched deep furrows into her skin.

Cristin looked around to try and find a sanctuary of some kind. Someplace where she could plan her next move. Someplace that would give more time, just a little bit more time. Scanning what could be seen in the pitch black night and trying unsuccessfully to stop the constant tremors that raked her body. Grasping the small quartz crystal tighter in her hand Cristin blocked out and ignored the tired, pain-filled cries her body tried to make. She pushed back the tears of hurt and fear and attempted to focus her eyes.

The forest bowed to the relentless wind constantly moving to its wish. The wind seemed to laugh during this dire time. It mocked and taunted Cristin with what seemed to be childish laughter. The wind knew she wasn't ready, knew Cristin would lose tonight. It knew she would fail herself, her family, her friends, maybe even her entire

world. The anger and frustration reached its limit as Cristin screamed. Screamed at her failure, her pain, her cold feet, her adversary, God, for choosing her and not someone else, but most especially at the wind. Cristin screamed until she couldn't anymore then collapsed to her knees with a bone-crunching thud that sent a new found pain jolting through her body. She just sat there and sobbed for a time while staring at the crystal, her salvation and her curse, then the wind laughed again. Only this time it seemed right next to her and yet miles from her, and coming from every direction at once. The scream had revealed her location to It. Cristin grasped the crystal tightly in an almost numb hand and ran.

Lightning flashed throughout the hopeless sky followed by a lonely thunder which echoed Cristin's despair. A cry passed through cracked lips as a lone log tripped her to the ground. She fell to the forest floor with a muddy splash, slamming her forehead hard onto a rock jutting menacingly out of the mud. The forest floor seemed to dance in circles as she slowly raised her head. Yet, in the chaotic spinning of the world, seen through eyes blinded with blood, stood one lone figure. Her attacker, little seven year old Alan with his dark hair and gray eyes stood before her giggling. Cristin's time ran out.

The shock that he could move so fast led her to hesitate. Why? Why did she let this lie live so long? Quickly, Cristin tried to clear a fragmented mind and focus her thoughts through the one thing that could keep her alive, the little quartz crystal. She let her thoughts flow through the crystal and forced the air in front of her to solidify into a shield. Unfortunately the second the hastily made shield formed a howling wind seemed to come out of nowhere and cut through it like a knife. The next thing Cristin knew, she was flying backwards through the air, slashing her way through tree branches and grain, until her broken body slammed into a large tree trunk.

She hung there about ten feet in the air groaning with pain. Her entire right arm seemed numb and uncooperative yet throbbing in agony. Turning her head sideways Cristin found a bloody broken tree limb protruding from her shoulder. Quickly Cristin turned away from the grotesque sight and looked at Alan with an expression of pain and anger. He was playing with her as if she was nothing more than a little green plastic toy

soldier in a sand box. Just as before when he split her car in half on that forsaken road destroying her shoes in the process. This all seemed but a game to him, what's left of poor little Alan anyway, but Cristin knew the price in this game was too steep to lose. Cristin's entire existence rode on this game, hers and many others.

Alan giggled again, reminding Cristin of better days before this mess, this pain. Yet, Alan's snicker continued and turned more demonic, an act which sent chills down Cristin's spine. Then Alan turned and walked away into the woods. The second Alan turned his back on her, the force holding Cristin to the tree vanished causing her body to hang there with only the bloody broken tree limb holding her ten feet in the air. She screamed and thrashed about helplessly quivering in anguish. Her entire body weight pulled down on the wound but the tree limb held secure and unyielding, allowing Cristin to squirm and scream as her shoulder seemed to rip apart. In her thrashing, Cristin stabbed at the tree with the crystal, lodging salvation deep into the bark of the accursed tree. Cristin screamed at the pain in one long tormenting howl, sending all her grief, her frustration, her anger through the crystal and into the tree with one malevolent thought. The poor, old elm then seemed to echo Cristin's scream as it split down the middle in a violent torrent of snapping wood and timber. The force ripped the wooden spike out of her shoulder, yet also tore at Cristin's clothes and sent splinters into her, creating gashes and new wounds across her back. Descending in what seemed like a fall from grace Cristin crashed to the ground in a broken heap, whimpering and crying.

The woods fell quiet with the exception of the wind which seemed to die down to a whisper. The forest held its breath and waited in anticipation for what would happen next. Would Cristin yield to the unrelenting pain? Would the dark force that possessed and pushed little Alan to extremes win this battle and move on to torment others? Would this be the end of it all? These questions and others not only rode the wind through the trees but also through the mind of a bloody, quivering young girl curled up in a ball crying on the forest floor.

Cristin's numb body shook with frustration and pain. She sobbed into her blood stained hands for what seemed like an eternity. The anger replaced by failure and fatigue. She couldn't keep going on like this, what just happened is the same thing that happened at the car earlier. Alan was playing with her. He should have killed her when he broke her shield, or when he just left her hanging in the tree, or when he tore the car apart on the abandoned road.

She remembered driving down that deserted road when all of a sudden Alan appeared there staring at her in the middle of the route. Cristin slammed on the brakes and began to swerve when, in an amazing amount of force, the wind formed itself into a sharp edge which sliced the car in two right down the middle. That instance is still a blur to Cristin. It all happened so fast, one moment she was complaining about not being able to see in all this rain and the next moment Alan was tossing her about in the air. Dangling at the monster's mercy while he taunted and teased. The next thing Cristin knew she slammed into the concrete road, her clothes torn to shreds and her feet bare to the stormy night. When Cristin raised her head she saw Alan send another gust of wind in the form of a spear, with no intention of playing games. Cristin, still in shock that this confrontation actually was taking place now, acted solely on instinct and grabbed the crystal hanging around her neck, tore it away and focused her thoughts. Within no time Cristin formed her own weapon and quickly sent an identical spear of wind to meet Alan's attack. Just in the nick of time, too. In seconds the offensive collided with the defensive directly in front of Cristin with explosive force. Alan's attack was torn apart by Cristin's spear but fragments of that attack were close enough to her to do some damage. One shard cleaved into her right arm severing muscle and tissue while cutting into the bone in one swift moment.

Now that first wound which still bled heavily felt like a pin prick compared to the gaping hole in her left shoulder. Cristin looked like a wreck and knew it. Blood and muck covered her body while the rain kept it all from drying just like it kept her body from ever being warm again. Cristin shook and convulsed laying in a puddle of mud, rain, and her own blood adding her tears of agony and fatigue into the mixture. Her hair all wet and matted seemed to purposely cling to her face as she cried into her numb,

shaking hands and into the crystal. Cristin opened her eyes and through her tears looked at her curse.

Who would have thought that the little quartz crystal that now rested in her hand allowed so much in this world. The key to everything. The stranger thing is that Cristin was appointed by God through birth to be the Guardian of the Key during the last days. Beanpole, Toothpick, and Stick Woman were the names people gave her, not Guardian of the Crystal. Yet, look where she is now. Here she was bleeding to death gripped in a pain she never knew existed until now. All the while facing a child who used to give her a big, bright smile every time Alan would see her. A little, seven-year-old boy trying to kill her for this forsaken little crystal. Cristin despised this rock in her hands but knew what would happen if Alan won, and she could not allow that. Reminding herself what this was all about, who she was facing, and the price of failure, Cristin decided tonight this would end one way or another. At that moment the menacing laugh once more echoed through the trees carrying a childish tone that mocked her. One thought echoed through Cristin's head in response to that laugh, "This ends now!" And with that thought Cristin closed her hand around her salvation and through sheer determination rose to face her opponent in this one final showdown. If time was going to run out for Cristin then Alan's time was up too.

Looking up she saw him standing there on the opposite side of the clearing. This little, seven year old boy seemed right at home standing next to trees that have existed for endless years. Cristin stood up straight despite the gasp of pain which escaped cracked lips. They both stood there staring, defiantly at each other, waiting for the other to move, all it would take is one move and the battle would begin. The final showdown would begin. And then Alan smiled at Cristin, only this time the smile showed no trace of boyish glee but possessed more of a fiendish sense of humor, and then it began.

The wind howled through the trees which trembled and swayed as if to cheer on the battle. Alan threw the wind into a giant battering ram with the intent of crushing Cristin. She focused through her crystal and sent the wind to counter his offensive. She formed the wind into small ax-like blades which cut and sliced at his attack and in

the middle of the melee sent her own smaller battering ram at Alan. He seemed surprised that his first attack failed and was caught off guard when Cristin's thrust smacked into him knocking him back, hard, into a tree. Alan quickly regained his composure and lashed back with wind in the shape of blades and arrows. So many, Cristin feared she would be overwhelmed, but instead of allowing fear to eat away at her concentration she gritted her teeth and forced her thoughts into the crystal.

They stood there at opposite sides of the clearing with what seemed to be a whirlwind between them. Wind attacks slashed at each other in an attempt to break free and strike a hit on the other. Alan stood at one side of the hurricane between them with an emotionless expression on his face, unmoving and staring across the clearing. Cristin stood with her hair, still caked in blood and mud, whipping around in one violent torrent returning the stare. The woods and storm around them groaned and bent to their power. The air seemed alive with energy, dancing about as the two faced off. The forest knew they were witnessing the last battle here and now, the world's time was up.

Suddenly, Alan pushed harder in an attempt to change things up a bit and make Cristin slip, but she was ready. Cristin allowed his attack to push her back a little ways then, in one sweeping blow dispersed Alan's assault and pushed at him with even greater force. Alan tried to jump out of the way and barely made it in time as the wind crashed down like a hammer around him shattering the base of the giant oak tree in the process. The tree collapsed around him, snapping and tearing as it made a final descent, burying the villain in a large pile of branches and leaves. The woods froze in silence, even the storm seemed to quiet down.

Cristin hesitated, then moved over to the fallen tree grasping her crystal tightly, ready at any moment to use it. And there, underneath a large branch, laid Alan, bloody and in tears. That once beautiful face now a mess of gashes and cuts. Looking at him Cristin forgot all that took place here during this accursed, forest night and remembered Alan once more as the child who always gave her those big, innocent smiles. "Help me," he cried through his tears. Cristin, forgetting everything, smiled and reached for him. The next second she was flying through the air and landed on her back once more

in the mud. She tried to move, but her body just wouldn't respond to anything, she couldn't even move her head. The pain was gone now and Cristin felt a little confused about that, but she was just so tired, so very tired. If she closed her eyes and rested for just a second then she could get up and do what she came to do. But...why was she here in the mud with rain falling on her face? Cristin failed to recall what was going on, and she was so very, very tired.

The last thing Cristin saw before yielding to the darkness that was engulfing her vision, was that of little Alan looking down at her. His young, innocent face stared back with that typical boyish grin only, this time with a more devilish twist. The darkness took her away. Cristin failed.





**Together**  
Lori Schoeneman  
Pencil

## A Doctor's Duty

Katie Pavel

### *Preface*

On December 7, 1941, millions of Americans were sent into a world of shock when news came in that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. They listened in horror as reporters announced on national radio that the United State's primary naval base had just been attacked and virtually destroyed by Japanese aircraft. Moments later, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed the nation and announced America's official entry into World War II. By mid-1942, hundreds of thousands of American troops were in the thick of battle, fighting and dying for their country and the other Allied Forces. Along with them came thousands of doctors and nurses, serving in the Medical Corp and volunteering for the Red Cross. This is one of their stories.

★★

*London, England, June 3, 1944*

Sarah looked out the window of the long bus as it made its way through the crowded streets. Her heart started to beat faster, and she took a slow, deep breath. She was finally here. Those four years of training had finally paid off and now she was in England, only a couple of hundred of miles away from the fierce fighting she had been hearing about at home for months. Ever since she had watched several young men, whom she had grown up with, head off to fight, she had wanted to do something to help. Now she finally was. Looking down, she gently ran her hand over the Red Cross symbol embroidered onto her thick, blue parka. She had received the parka when she had become a member of the Red Cross's nursing program. She wore it wherever she went as a way of showing people what she stood for. Wearing it made her feel proud to be a part of the action and not just sitting at home doing nothing.

Suddenly, a huge building came into view. It was the St. Thomas Hospital. Originally, it had been a monastery, but before long, there had been an increasing need for places to house patients, and it had been converted into a hospital.

"Isn't it spectacular?" Ruth, who was sitting next to Sarah, asked. She leaned farther over the seats in front of them to get a better look at the towering hospital. Ruth was

short, lively woman whom Sarah had met when she first joined the Red Cross. The two had become best friends and were practically inseparable.

“It’s breathtaking!” Sarah exclaimed, looking up at the white marble towers that stood proudly in the clear, blue sky. “Can you believe that we’ll actually be working there?”

Ruth just shook her head in disbelief. “I never would have imagined,” she replied, “but now it’s truly happening!”

“Just think,” Sarah said, turning to face her. “We could be out on the front somewhere, working in some field hospital instead of here.”

“Oh, thank goodness we’re not,” Ruth commented. “I couldn’t stand working in such horrible conditions!”

Sarah nodded her head in agreement. She had heard from other nurses just how horrific it was on the front. Although she would accept the responsibility of working in a field hospital, she hoped that that time would never come.

The bus pulled up beside the steep, granite steps of the hospital and stopped. Sarah, Ruth, and about thirty other nurses climbed out of the bus and gathered their belongings.

A short, plump woman with graying hair slowly came down the steps and greeted them. “Good morning, ladies,” she replied as the nurses quieted down and gathered in front of her. “It is truly a pleasure to have you all here. I am extremely happy to see the Red Cross bringing so many fine nurses here to help. My name is Nurse Kindred, and I would like to welcome you to St. Thomas Hospital. Now, if you will all follow me, I will show you to your rooms and give you your assignments.”

The women followed Nurse Kindred into the hospital and then up a long stairway to an open corridor. The hospital was four stories tall. It was rectangular shaped and had a large courtyard in the middle of it. Each story had an open corridor that looked down on the courtyard, which had several gardens that were already in bloom and walkways winding between them. A large fountain stood in the middle, throwing a gentle mist to the flowers around it. Sarah thought it was a very beautiful sight. She had always loved gardens, especially those of her mother. They had been so beautiful and peaceful.

She had loved to walk through them when she was a child. However, ever since the war had started, seeds had become a scarce commodity and now those beloved gardens lay dormant and barren.

The nurses' quarters were on the fourth floor, along with the doctors' and the other staffs' rooms. Sarah and Ruth got a room on the south end, which looked out on the rest of the city. The minute Sarah entered the room, she set her duffel bag down on her bed and went to open the large window on the far wall. A fresh, summer breeze came blowing softly in.

"Oh, Ruth, come look!" Sarah exclaimed. "From up here, you can see for miles." Hundreds of buildings lay nestled below, and narrow streets wove between houses and businesses, separating the large city into little squares. In the distance, the Thames River wound through the middle of the city and down to the valleys below, where it would flow into the English Channel.

"Is your room suitable?" Nurse Kindred asked, stopping at their doorway.

"Yes, ma'am," Sarah replied quickly. "It's just fine."

"Good," Nurse Kindred stated as she started to look through the stack of papers in her hand. "Let's see. Miss Walker and Miss Bauer, correct? Here they are. Miss Walker, you will be helping in surgery. And Miss Bauer, you are assigned to work in the sick ward for the first couple of weeks." She handed Sarah and Ruth their assignments. "Here are some things that you need to know," she continued, "and your advisor's name is written at the top of the last page. Now, Miss Walker, your advisor is away for the morning, but he should be back by the afternoon. You can go meet him then."

"Thank you," Sarah replied. "I will."

"If you have any questions, just ask," Nurse Kindred said, turning to leave.

"Welcome again to St. Thomas."

"Oh, you are so lucky!" Ruth commented to Sarah as soon as they were alone.

"You get to help in surgery while I'm stuck caring for people who will be coughing and throwing up on me!"

Sarah laughed. "Oh, Ruth, it won't be that bad! What did you expect to do here, anyway?"  
"I don't know," Ruth complained. "Maybe something exciting or important. Something like what you'll be doing!"

"You'll have plenty of excitement in no time at all," Sarah stated, "and you will be doing something important. Just imagine all the patients you'll be helping."

"Yes. I suppose I will. You're right. I'm sorry. I'm being such a pain," Ruth said, flopping down on her bed. She started flipping through her assignment papers. "So, who's your advisor? He's probably some tall, handsome man who will take your breath away the moment you see him."

"Oh, please! Give me a break!" Sarah exclaimed laughing. She flipped to the last page of her papers and looked at the name printed on the top—Dr. Nathan Sharp. "My God! It's Nathan!"

"Who's Nathan?" Ruth asked, sitting up.

"We went to medical school together," Sarah said. "I had no idea he had joined the Army Medical Corp! But then, I haven't seen or heard of him for close to three years!"

"Wow!" Ruth exclaimed. "So, were you two pretty close?"

"Yes," Sarah answered. "In fact, we dated for awhile, but then decided to just be friends."

"How come?" Ruth asked.

"Well, Nathan had accepted a job at the regional hospital in New York and had moved up there before the war started. I still had two years of nursing school to finish. We just decided that a long distance relationship wouldn't work. Besides, our careers were taking us in different directions."

"Not anymore," Ruth said, grinning at her. "After all, you both are here. It almost seems as if you two were supposed to meet again."

"Yes, it does," Sarah murmured, looking again at the paper. She couldn't believe that she would be working under the man she had loved. Her heart began to flutter as she remembered how she had once felt for him. Could she still be in love with him? 'Oh, don't be ridiculous!' she silently scolded, dropping the paper on her bed and

beginning to busy herself with unpacking. He was probably happily married by now! However, she just couldn't help but wonder...

Nathan looked up at the sky just in time to see two dozen American Mustangs fly overhead toward the coast of France. He watched them until they disappeared over the English Channel. They would be heading for the fighting against Germany, which had been going on for close to three years.

Sighing, he stepped back as the surf came rushing up to his feet. He looked down at his watch. Ten o'clock. The convoy would be there any minute. He glanced back at the row of ambulances that sat waiting for the patients that would be coming from the front. Most of the medics were sitting on the hoods of the trucks, talking or playing poker. A young Corporal with red hair and freckles jumped down from one truck and walked up to Nathan.

"I've spotted them, Captain," he said, handing Nathan the binoculars he had in his hand. "They're on the horizon, straight ahead."

Nathan looked through the binoculars. Two convoy boats with the Red Cross symbol on their sides were slowly coming across the Channel. "Good work, O'Brien," Nathan replied, handing the binoculars back. "We'd better get ready." Turning, the two of them walked back up to the shore to the ambulances. "All right, men. Those convoys are going to be here in about fifteen minutes, and we need to be ready for them. We don't want those patients to be waiting any longer than they have to."

The medics jumped down and started getting the ambulances prepared for transporting the close to fifty patients back to the St. Thomas Hospital. By the time the boats had reached the shore, they were waiting. Several medics went down into the water to help carry patients from the boats. Nathan and three other senior officers then quickly examined each patient's injuries. They decided how serious the injuries were and then attached bands to the soldiers' wrists—red for critical, yellow for serious, and green for fair condition. The patients were then carried to the ambulances. The entire process took about thirty minutes.

"We're almost ready to leave, Cap," Corporal O'Brien stated as Nathan finished examining his last patient.

“Good,” Nathan replied, looking down at the young soldier lying on the stretcher in front of him. “You’re going to be fine, kid,” he said, tying a green band onto the man’s wrist. “Okay,” he said, nodding to the two medics who then carried the soldier to the ambulance.

Nathan stood up and took the towel the Corporal held out to him. “How’s the situation?” he asked as they walked up to the officer’s truck.

“There’s about fifteen critical patients, sir,” O’Brien answered. “The rest are mostly in fair condition.”

Nathan nodded and put his medical bag behind his seat. ‘Usual scenario,’ he thought to himself. Most of the time, the only patients brought back to St. Thomas were those with minor injuries. However, that didn’t mean that there weren’t other patients with more serious injuries who needed his help more. It just meant that they weren’t brought back.

“Sir, why do you ask?” O’Brien asked, as he and Nathan climbed into the truck and filed in behind the ambulances that were heading down the road.

“No reason,” Nathan said simply, not wanting to voice his opinion in front of his subordinate. There was no use in telling the young officer about what really happened on the front. It would only cause more of a problem than anything, and what the Corporal didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. Not then, anyway.

When the ambulances reached St. Thomas, the patients were unloaded and taken to their specific wards. Nathan waited to make sure everything was running smoothly and then headed to his office. He was sitting at his desk, looking over several patients’ medical charts, when there was a knock at his door.

“Enter,” he said, not looking up. He heard footsteps as the person came into the room, but didn’t hear them say anything. Glancing up, he suddenly dropped the chart in his hand. “Sarah, is that you?”

“Long time no see, stranger. It’s been what? Two, three years?” Sarah asked, grinning at him. He was still the same, handsome man she had met back at Duke University.

And he still had those same bright, blue eyes. Those eyes had been what had first attracted her to him nearly four years ago.

"What are you doing here?" Nathan asked, getting up from behind his desk and walking around to give her a hug.

"I joined the Red Cross when I finished nursing school. I'm here to help," she answered, looking up into his eyes. 'God, he's tall,' she thought to herself. He must have grown since the last time they were together, for now her head just barely cleared his shoulders. Either that or she had forgotten. "What about you?" she asked. "I had no idea you were the military type."

Nathan laughed and sat down on the edge of his desk. "Yeah, well, I didn't either, but I see you know what happens when duty calls. I just couldn't sit back and do nothing." Gazing at Sarah, he shook his head. "I should have known you'd want to be a part of the action," he replied. "So, how have you been? Have you gotten settled in yet?"

"I've been fine," Sarah said, "and yes, I have gotten settled in. My room is very nice, and the view from my window is spectacular!"

"You can see far, that's for sure," Nathan replied. "Have you found out who your advisor is?"

Sarah grinned, a little sheepishly. "You are," she said simply.

Nathan laughed and stood up. "Are you serious?" he asked. When she nodded, he shook his head in amazement. "Now, what's the chances of that happening?"

"That's what I was wondering," Sarah replied. "It must be fate or something."

Nathan laughed again. Sarah loved to hear his laugh. She had missed it so much those last couple of years. "Well then," he said. "I'd better show you around." He put on his white lab coat. "Have you had a chance to look around at all?" he asked as they walked out of his office and down the hall.

"Some, but not much," Sarah answered, walking quickly to keep up to his long strides.

"Okay. Well," he replied as they walked through the courtyard and into the other side of the building, "as you've already found out, the living quarters are on the fourth floor and the admin. offices are on the first." They started down another long hall.



“The other three floors of the hospital are divided into wards, with the fair condition ward on the third floor, serious condition on the second, and critical on the first. The first floor also holds the surgical wards and recovery rooms, which are here.”

They stopped at a large room where surgical tables were set up. The room was very spacious and clean. In one recovery room, several patients were resting. One young man who didn't look a day over nineteen looked up at them. Sarah smiled at him and he smiled back.

Continuing down the hall, they stopped at another room. “This is the critical ward,” Nathan stated.

Sarah looked into the room. There were about one hundred beds lined up along the walls. Only a third of them were occupied. “This room isn't that full,” she commented. “That must be a good sign.”

Nathan shook his head and frowned. “No, actually the reason this ward is so empty is because most critical patients don't leave the field hospitals.”

“I'm afraid I don't understand,” Sarah stated, turning towards him.

“Most of the time, when the ambulances go to the field hospitals, they only choose patients who are in serious or fair condition to transport them back here. Only sometimes do they choose critical patients. For instance, today they brought back fifteen, but that's becoming a rare occurrence.”

“But the field hospitals don't have the facilities to care for patients in such serious conditions, do they?” Sarah protested.

“No,” Nathan answered, leaning against the wall and folding his arms, “but most of the time those patients wouldn't survive the trip back anyway. I hate to say this, but it would just be a waste of valuable transport space. It's a hard decision, but it has to be made.”

“So, they're practically deciding who lives and who dies?” Sarah asked, not hiding her disgust at all.

“Basically,” Nathan replied.

“Have you ever had to decide?” she asked him, looking into his eyes.

“No, but then I've never been on the front before.”

"And what would you do if you did?" she asked.

Nathan met her gaze. "I don't know," he said after a moment. Sighing, he looked away and pushed himself away from the wall. "Come on. I'll show you around the rest of the hospital."

Sarah didn't move and instead kept staring at the patients in the ward. They had been the lucky ones. But what about all of those other poor young men on the front who would most likely die alone and scared beyond reasoning? It made her sick to even consider the thought.

"Sarah?" Nathan asked, walking up to her.

"It's not fair," she whispered. "It's not fair that so many young men should have to die just because of their injuries. It's not as if they have control over it or something."

"Yes, I know," Nathan said, putting a hand on her arm, "but war isn't fair. People die when they shouldn't have to. You'll find that out sooner than you would like to."

Sarah nodded, but didn't say anything.

"Come on," Nathan said, gently leading her down the hall.

That evening, Nathan asked Sarah if she would be interested in going out to dinner as a way to catch up on each other's lives. She accepted immediately. She hadn't realized just how much she had missed him until now, and she wanted to spend as much time with him as she could.

They went to a small, but fancy restaurant and talked for hours about where their careers and lives had taken them. Nathan had not changed at all, although military officer training had brought out a seriousness she had rarely seen in him before. At first, she had been a little surprised to see him decked out in a military uniform. However, after a while, she became accustomed to it and even realized that it made him look even more tall and handsome.

After dinner, the two took a short walk and then headed back to the hospital. It was late, and most everyone, with the exception of the staff on the night shift, was asleep. Sarah and Nathan laughed and joked all the way up to the fourth floor, but then they quieted down as to not wake anyone.

“You don’t have to walk me back to my room if you don’t want to,” Sarah commented as they headed down the long hall.

“I wasn’t,” Nathan answered, teasingly. “I was just heading to my room.”

Sarah choked down a laugh and playfully slapped Nathan in the arm. He laughed and dodged away from her.

“Shh!” Sarah exclaimed. “You’ll wake everybody up!”

“No, I won’t,” he said, grinning at her, “but you might.” Grabbing her around the waist, he started tickling her.

Sarah laughed until she was breathless. “Nathan, quit!” she gasped, trying to twist out of his grasp. However, she found herself up against the wall with his arms trapping her on either side. It was then that she realized just how close he was to her. Instead of her heart slowing down, it started to speed up. He was the most handsome man she had ever met, and she knew at that moment that she was still in love with him.

They stood there for a few moments, catching their breath and gazing into each other’s eyes. Then Nathan started to lean over as if he were going to kiss her. Sarah wanted badly to let him, but something inside of her made her hesitate. After all they were just friends.

“No,” she said quietly. “Don’t.”

Nathan nodded and stepped away from her as if he understood. “It’s alright,” he murmured as they started walking down the hall again.

Sarah smiled up at him, thankful that he wasn’t upset. She greatly appreciated the fact he still didn’t push her into doing something she didn’t want to. It made her feel amazingly safe and comfortable around him.

They reached her room, but didn’t say goodbye. Instead they just stood there, not wanting to depart. Finally, Sarah broke the silence. “I’d probably better go. It’s most likely going to be a big day tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” Nathan said. “I think we have surgeries scheduled for all morning.”

“I had a wonderful night,” Sarah said quietly. “Thank-you for suggesting it.”

“Thank-you for accepting it,” Nathan said simply.

“Well, good night,” Sarah murmured, opening her door.

Nathan nodded. “Good night. I’ll see you tomorrow,” he replied, slowly turning and starting to walk back the way they had come.

“I thought you were just going to your room,” Sarah commented, teasingly.

Nathan chuckled. “Good night,” he said, winking at her and continuing down the hall.

Nathan sewed the last stitch and closed up the wound of the patient who was lying on the surgical table in front of him. It was past noon. The surgeries had lasted all morning and his shoulders and back were killing him. Cutting the thread and setting down the needle, he looked up at Sarah, who was standing across from him. She looked just as exhausted as he felt. Her face was flushed and tiny curls of her wavy, brown hair were falling out of her cap and sticking to her sweaty neck. In his opinion, she looked absolutely beautiful.

“You do good work,” Nathan commented as he and Sarah went into the wash room to clean up.

“Thank you,” Sarah replied. “You aren’t too bad yourself.”

Nathan smiled. “Say, do you want to go get a bite to eat? I know this nice cafe downtown.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” Sarah answered. She then looked in the mirror and frowned. “Oh, but first I’m going to have to go get cleaned up. I’m an absolute mess!”

“I think you look beautiful,” Nathan said, drying his arms and hands with a towel.

Sarah choked down a laugh and grinned at him. “You’re very biased.”

“Charming, you mean,” Nathan stated, his blue eyes sparkling.

Sarah giggled. “Maybe,” she teasingly said as they headed out of the surgery room.

They were still talking when Corporal O’Brien walked up to them. “Captain Sharp,” he said, saluting to Nathan. “I’m very sorry to disturb you, sir, but Colonel Ryman needs to speak with you immediately.”

Nathan frowned. “Do you know what it’s about, Corporal?” he asked. “Miss Walker and I were just going to get some lunch. We’ve been in surgery all morning and haven’t had time to grab anything.”

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't know," O'Brien stated, "but he told me it was urgent."

"All right. Thank you, Corporal," Nathan said. He turned to Sarah when they were alone again. "I'm really sorry about this," he apologized.

"Oh, it's alright," Sarah replied. "We can go to the cafe another time."

"Are you sure?" Nathan asked, looking into her eyes. He felt terrible having to leave her like that.

"I'm positive," Sarah said, putting her hand on his arm.

"I'll make it up to you. I promise," he said, turning and walking away.

"You bet you will," Sarah replied, smiling after him.

Nathan paused a moment at his office to exchange his lab coat for his officer's jacket before he headed to Colonel Ryman's office. He knocked on the door and then walked inside. "Captain Nathan Sharp reporting, sir," he said, standing at attention in front of the Colonel's desk.

"At ease, Captain," Ryman said, looking up at Nathan. "Sit down, Nate."

'Oh boy,' Nathan thought, sitting down in a huge, plush chair. He could always sense that something was up when his superiors started calling him by his first name. It was usually followed by something that wasn't particularly good.

Colonel Ryman picked up a piece of paper and handed it to Nathan. He explained it while Nathan skimmed over it. "It's a letter announcing the official entry of U.S. ground troops into the war in Europe. Tomorrow, we are going to join England and the other Allies on the Western Front. A couple of thousand troops are going over to Normandy, France to take control of the beachhead. Germany has control of most of the coast of France, and it's not going to want to give it up anytime soon."

"Yes, sir, I know. So, what does this have to do with me?" Nathan asked, handing back the paper.

"They're going to need doctors on the front," Ryman explained. "A lot of them. Taking control of that beachhead is not going to be easy, and I can assure you that there will be a lot of bloodshed."

Nathan nodded. He knew how terrible it was on the front. He had been stationed in Italy for the first year of his service in the Medical Corp and had seen many men he knew, friends, in fact, fall to their deaths. "How many doctors do they need?"

"Five," Ryman answered, standing up and refilling his coffee cup. "Do you want some?" he asked, offering Nathan a cup.

"No, thank you, sir," Nathan replied, shaking his head. He was thankful that he hadn't had the opportunity to eat anything. He wasn't sure if he would have been able to keep it down at that moment.

Colonel Ryman sat down and continued. "You're an excellent surgeon, Nate. That's why I choose you to go. They need doctors like you out there—doctors who have seen the conditions on the front and can hold their heads together. God knows you need that ability when you go into that type of hell hole."

"Yes, sir, I know," Nathan replied quietly. He knew all too well. Taking a deep breath, he leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. "Who else is going?"

"Three medics from other hospitals," Ryman stated, "and Corporal O'Brien. They will all be under your command. I will trust you to lead them the best you can."

"Yes, sir," Nathan said. "When do we leave?"

"Tomorrow with the troops," Ryman answered. "You'll cross the Channel early in the morning. The other medics will be here and ready to leave for the base by five. Take all the supplies you need. You can get your combat gear at the base before you head out. Any other questions?" When Nathan shook his head, Ryman stood and came around his desk. Nathan also stood. "If I find out anything else before tomorrow, I'll let you know," he said, shaking Nathan's hand. "Good luck to you, Captain."

"Thank you, sir," Nathan said, his mind racing with the knowledge that the next day he would be on the front in the very middle of battle.

"You have to do what?" Sarah asked in shock as she and Nathan walked down the hall to his office. It was late afternoon, and after Nathan had finally gotten something to eat, he had sought her out to tell her the news.

"I have to go to Normandy. Colonel Ryman has assigned me to the field hospital on the front along with several other doctors," Nathan explained, opening the door to his office and walking inside. He set his cup of coffee and sandwich on his desk and then turned to Sarah, who was still standing in the doorway with her arms tightly crossed.

"Why you?" Sarah asked in protest. "Why do you have to go?"

"I don't have much choice," Nathan said, motioning her inside and closing the door.

"Can't you just tell them no?" Sarah asked, refusing to sit down.

Nathan sighed and sat down on the edge of his desk. "It's not that easy, Sarah. I must follow orders. That's the way things work in the military."

"Well, you still should be able to tell them that you can't go," Sarah stated firmly.

"Sarah, I can't..."

"Why? Why can't you?" Sarah demanded.

"Why are you being so difficult about this?" Nathan asked, looking into her eyes, which were sparking with fire.

"Why?" Sarah asked in disbelief. She walked over to his desk and picked up a file of one of the soldiers he had performed surgery on that morning. The soldier had been hit with shrapnel from a bomb explosion. Nathan had to amputate both of the young man's legs because they were so far beyond repair. "This is why," she stated, showing him the file.

Nathan swallowed hard and looked away for a moment. Then, standing, he walked over to her, took the file out of her hand, and hugged her tightly. "That won't happen to me," he said quietly.

"How do you know?" Sarah asked, stepping away from him. Her eyes were filling with tears. "When you left for that job in New York, I thought I'd never see you again. But here you are, and now that I've found you, I don't want to lose you again." Taking a deep breath, she met his blue eyes directly and whispered, "I love you, Nathan."

Nathan's eyes sparked with surprise. Sighing quietly, he walked over to the window and gazed out at the buildings across from the hospital. For a moment, Sarah was afraid that she should not have voiced her feelings for him, but then he turned back to her.

"I love you, too," he said simply.

“Then tell them no.”

“I can’t do that,” he said, walking up to her and putting his hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t understand,” Sarah said. “It almost seems as if you want to go. Do you?”

Nathan took a deep breath. How could he make her understand? “You know how upset you were when I told you that most critical patients are left on the front? Well, maybe I can help them. Maybe I can send some of them back here where they can get the proper care they need.”

Sarah bit her lip and looked away. She felt sorry for all those poor men who were left to suffer and die alone. But could she agree to let the man she loved risk his life for them?

“I’m a doctor, Sarah. This is what I’m trained to do. You can’t expect me to refuse to do my job, can you?”

“No,” Sarah whispered, her stomach still turning with worry.





**Becky's Backyard**

*Gail Meland*  
Acrylic Paint

*Oakwood 2000*

Published by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange, 2000

## Wisps of Smoke

Jason Currie-Olson

"I hear they're wetting the road down in Iowa," says Josh.

"Really," the driver growls happily, but poor Mike is confused.

"Hey guys, why are they wetting the road in Iowa," he asks.

"I don't know, but I can't wait to find out," Josh laughs as this rowdy trio rumbles down the road.

It has been a hell of a night for the guys. On a whim, the three of them had decided to jump into the driver's green 1966 Chevy pickup and roll with some of the most beautiful and powerful cars in the Midwest. It was the prelude to the largest car show in South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota, the Canton Car Show Poker Run. The guys had spent most of the afternoon with the truck in Josh's driveway washing, painting, waxing, loving, and preparing the Green Beast for its debut. The driver had added the final touches to the truck's engine before the trio took off.

"What ya doin'?" Josh asked.

"Just a little tune up before we leave," was the driver's only reply.

Really, he was finishing the final steps in a quick little performance boost. He changed the carburetor settings, added high-output spark plugs, and new gas line and air filters. All of this was done with the hopes that when it came down to it, they would be able to keep up with the BIG DOGS.

With all of the pre-run enhancements done, Josh, Mike, and the driver headed down to the poker run. None of them knew what to expect having never been to a car show before and not knowing the popularity of classic cars. They learned very quickly. About halfway to Canton, the three began to hear an eerie rumble over the already throaty sound of the truck.

"What's that noise," Josh asked with more than a little concern in his voice.

The driver, with a worried look on his face responded, "I am not sure, but it is really loud."

"Hey! Look!" yelled Mike looking out the rear window.

Behind the green behemoth was a jet-black 1972 Chevelle. In less time than it takes to think, the muscle bound car squirted out from behind the truck and coasted along side.

“Oh my God! Look at that!” moaned Mike.

And with a quick thumbs-up, the black jet-car left the already speeding trio in the dust.

The boys, having already been blown away literally were blown away figuratively when they finally arrived in Canton. The magnitude of the competition was huge. Old Covettes, Thunderbirds, GTOs, Mustangs, and Camaros were all well represented. Only one thing was missing...there were very few trucks at this poker run, and the driver saw this as a challenge.

The three guys head down the road to compete in the poker run. Halfway through, the Green Beast came along a long line of cars stopped in a small town in Iowa. At the very head of the line was a huge cloud of white smoke and a large crowd standing around it. The atmosphere was simply electric. Mike wouldn't quit playing with the radio, and Josh was so excited he jumped out of the window and clambered into the back of the truck.

“Some poor guy's car must have blown up,” commented Mike.

“Yeah, I don't know what is going on. I wonder why all of those people are up there,” replied the driver.

The orange 1969 Camaro in from them was very near the unfortunate vehicle when they realized that it was no car smoke...it was tire smoke.

By the time the Camaro reached the spot, the boys realized what was going on. The residents of this small town water the road that these beefed-up cars follow through town. Just before the city limits, a crowd gathered to watch the horsepower behemoths rip more than a few layers of rubber off their tires.

The wet spot is only a few feet in front of the truck. Slowly the orange Camaro pulls into the wet section of highway and stops. The car rocks back and forth, as the car's fully blown engine flexes its muscle under the gentle caresses of the accelerator. Earthquakes of torque and horsepower cascade over a crowd that roars with anticipation.

The car comes to a dead stop. With a guttural growl, the massive slicks at the rear of the car begin to slowly rotate. They spin slowly at first and then faster and faster as the

pilot of this orange rocket applies more of the asphalt-eating throttle to the pavement. An explosion of sound and the Camaro's rear end vaults into the air and white smoke peels off the tires. It is obvious at this point that the driver has let it all hang out. The brake lights extinguish and the Camaro/rocket fishtails wildly as it explodes down the highway.

"Oh, now I get it," says Mike. "That's why they water the road."

"You're pretty quick there, big guy," I say with a quick wink.

Josh, screaming at the top of his lungs, realizes that he better sit down or fall down as we pull onto the wet area of the road. A sudden change comes over the truck. It is no longer just a creatively green painted pickup. It is a 350 horsepower-355 cubic-inch fire-breathing torque monster.

I rev the engine and the glass-packs cackle with joy, but the crowd is still thinking of the orange Camaro. Josh takes care of that.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.  
HERE WE GO!"

Now it is our turn. The crowd is ready, we are ready, and the Green Beast is more than ready. The engine begs to fly, it thunders out its need for speed. We hear it, and I feel it.

The throttle meets the floor and the clutch engages. The engine bellows. Tires wail as they eat through the asphalt. Josh, sitting in the back is catapulted against the tailgate. The toolbox, once bolted to the truck, crashes towards him, and he screams at the crowd.

Tires clamp onto the road and the truck settle towards the pavement. Then it is gone, down the road. All that is left is the roaring echo of the engine in the crowd's ears and faint wisps of smoke.

## The Truth About Sunflowers

Scott Cody

In the expanses of a North Dakota sunflower field, the sun is still worshiped. Humans might laugh at the idea of a sun god, but they forget that half a second ago (on a universal clock) they were doing it themselves. Was it not a major achievement in evolution, this belief in a deity, whether it be the sun or an elephant-headed man? How then, can we sit idly by as evolution continues to work its miracles on another species; another species that may one day rival our own?

We are careless in matters such as this. We look to the stars for signs of evolution and cropping intelligence, failing to look under our own noses at budding competition. Granted, there is still plenty of time to prepare ourselves; the competition is still but a seedling on the evolutionary scale.

The Heliocratic sunflower tribe of North Dakota is by no means smart. Although they have made great bounds in their development (including the colossal achievement of ritualized worship of a deity) and are far more advanced than their counterparts all over the world (even the fabled Australian clan), they have not yet developed a self-consciousness anywhere near that of *homo sapiens*. It will come with time, of that there is little doubt, but for the time being, they are far too engrossed in the constant glorification of their god.

All throughout the day, the god of the Heliocrats shines his goodness down upon them. The sunflowers live in perpetual adulation of him, desiring only to sing of his glory. There are days, though, when he looks upon them with disfavor, and refuses to come out from behind the clouds. The sunflowers hang their heads and wonder where they went wrong.

At night, the sunflowers sleep, as any thinking organism must. It can be said that they dream, although not in any way that humans would find familiar; when they dream, they dream only of praising the sun.

This mindless behavior of the sunflowers works out well for human beings. We have found them easy to enslave (without realizing that we are doing it!), and have kept them from advancing too quickly for our own good.

Oakwood 2000

The sunflowers do not know, either, that they are slaves. They are too busy paying homage.

There once was a sunflower, however, who did not particularly care for the sun. He would have been ostracized, and probably murdered, by the rest of his Heliotropic family, except that they did not even know that he existed. His name (if he can be said to have had one) was Lucent. From the day he first sprouted out of the ground, Lucent shunned the sun-worshipping ways of his brothers and sisters. Where the rest of his people had developed a sense of deity, he had developed a sense of self. He was far too engrossed with the workings of his mind and his environment to even bother to look up at the sun more than once every so often.

It was because of this curiosity that Lucent became the first sunflower to develop the skill of communication. He asked his fellows what the land was called, and what their species was called; nobody answered, though, so he looked beyond them.

He looked across the field. He saw movement, movement other than the wind-induced swaying of himself and the other sunflowers. He saw a whirling conglomeration of shiny pointed objects moving through the fields. He saw that it was coming toward him. (If he could hear, he would have heard a loud noise that rose in pitch as the thing moved closer to him).

He noticed something else. He saw that the big thing was devouring his clan. He had never seen a wholesale slaughter of this scale. He became more and more frantic as the thing came closer to him. He began to scream and shout.

"You fools! Look at what is coming! Don't you see?"

There was no answer. It was a sunny day.

Closer still it came. Lucent saw no help coming from any of his clan. More and more of them were torn to pieces, but still they would only stare at the sun.

Lucent saw that he would soon join his fallen comrades as the redoubtable thing continued to approach. Knowing that cries for help would do no good; knowing that his own end was near; he felt there was only one thing to do.

Lucent looked to the sun and prayed for mercy.

et al.: Oakwood



Untitled

*Ross Hoekman*

Photograph

*Oakwood 2000*

Published by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange, 2000

## A Stand for Naiveté

Bryan Jaske

Every time I stop in front of that acre of green grass and polished stone, the past becomes present.

★★

My Chevy Citation moves down the road like a beige turtle. I keep my foot on the gas till I reach 55. Satisfied with my speed, I place one knee on the wheel to free my hands for their ritual. My index finger snaps smartly off of the plastic lid. I then place the container in my left hand and pry the lid open with my right. Shuffling the lid under the can, my two fingers pinch, lift, and place the dead plant matter between my lower lip and gum. With one smooth motion my right hand descends, caps the can, and tosses it into the back seat. I brush the offending flakes of snuff off of my Zoobas. They leaves little brown trails barely visible on the red and black tiger print. With that little annoyance taken care of, I look back at the road. A large green sign announces the distance to my destination in white letters: Meyer 20. The perfect distance in which to enjoy my minty snuff. But that lump of carcinogen seems like the only perfect thing in the world.

Last time I saw Casey, I bummed him a chew. That summed him up: always bumming chews and smokes. But it never bothered me, 'cause he always had extra beers for his friends. We had sat on the steps of the Meyer grocery store, sending brown fountains of spit onto the pavement. They left stains, dark blotches contrasting with the worn gray concrete.

★★

I saw the site of the accident the day before. When I found out about what had happened, I called Cam. Within minutes, his Grandma's gray Topaz skidded to a stop in the gravel that served as my driveway. We drove around, drinking syrupy MGD, smoking bowls, and chucking our empties at passing road signs. That lasted for a few hours (and got us on the police scanner, as my mother had kindly informed me when I got home). When the bottles ran out, we started to punch the interior of the car, the roof in particular. But after a while, there really wasn't anything left to hit, so we stopped our self-abuse, loaded up another bowl, and just drove on without speaking.



I don't know what kind of morbid need forced us to see where our friend died, but we ended up there anyway. A large stain of rusty red rested on the yellow lines of the highway. When I saw that, it cut through my druggy haze like brand new Red-Brand barbed wire through a cheap glove. Nobody who drove by would have any idea what really happened here. People would motor on, thinking that a deer had gotten hit or something, and just gone on living their lives, unaffected by the stain before them. At that moment, I wanted to put a big sign right by that stain: "Hello travelers! My best friend died here. No, he wasn't drinking and neither was the guy who hit him. No guilty party here folks! Just an accident. My buddy spent the last few moments of his life lying here on the road, his heart still beating, until he ran out of blood. Next time you go to church and hear about miracles, I ask you to think about my friend bleeding to death and ask yourself if you really believe in that "How Great Thou Art" crap. Thanks!"

But then again, God and me have never had a good working relationship.

★★

Jesus H. Christ, I wish I could stop thinking about this stuff! I look back at the road, trying to focus on something that will keep my mind from cannibalizing itself. Ooh! What's this? My eyes spy a white box peeking out from under my pile of Led Zep tapes: Smoky Treats! I flip "In Through the Out Door" and "Physical Graffiti" into the back, uncovering my Marlboro Lights. Half a pack left. Gonna hafta buy more when this little meeting thing is over.

I crack open my Zippo and touch the flame to the end of my smoke. I breath in deeply, hold it for a second, and send sweet grayness into the air. Shit! I forgot to crack my window! I clumsily fumble about for the knob. Finding it, I tweak it down about a quarter of an inch. The smoke begins to drift out the window, and is replaced by the unmistakable tang of humid corn and hog shit. Never had this window problem in Casey's car: he had power windows.

★★

I remember those windows and their convenience. He had driven a big diesel Olds sedan. That thing was a pimp-mobile: big leather seats, soft ride, and enough room to

seat our hometown. When was the last time I was in his car? Oh yeah: the last-day-of-school-keg. We'd nabbed a carton of Reds from our friendly neighborhood grocery store earlier in the day. Nice smokes, Reds. Get a pack of 'em in ya and you'll be coughing up hot patch the next day. But thieves can't be choosy. Anyway, we'd just run Nick back to town so that he could eat supper and give his parents a good excuse to let him leave the house again. Me and Casey had already covered this problem with our respective parents. We were going camping! Or at least that's what we thought that they thought we were doing. When we were driving, he asked me if he should break up with his girl, cause Darcy was working him pretty hard at the kegger. The tone of his voice was unfamiliar to me. He was the type of guy that was larger than life. You know, sweet athlete, women always hanging on him, able to get beer or smokes or whiskey with ease: he was a god in our high school. So there I was, someone who was best known in high school for having a fake ID before I was able to drive and ignoring women in favor of beer, being asked by the Don Juan of our class about women. Personally, I thought it was a no-brainer. Darcy was better looking than his girlfriend and she was also one of the gang. She was always up for a night of adolescent debauchery. So I told him to and he said yes and we smoked our stolen cigarettes in silence, but it was a good silence because we didn't need to talk because we had just bonded, shared a secret, confessed...

★★

"Fuck!"

My goddamn cigarette had burned down to my fingers. I jab it out the window, sending it on its way. I lick my fingers. They taste salty. I suppose that's the last thing that Casey tasted, too. Salty blood flowing from his mouth like a... Jesus! Why the hell am I thinking about this crap? I crank up the Zep tape in the deck to try and shift my thoughts. John Bonham is busy beating his way through "Moby Dick." I start to pound various items in the car, attempting to replicate his frenzied drumming. I drum along, beating reality back. As I finish my solo using the steering wheel for my cymbal roll, I glance up at the road sign. Only one more mile till Meyer. I can see the church up ahead. Looks like there's a lot of cars there. I wonder just how many kids are showing up for this discussion group tonight? I guess I'll find out soon.

As I pull up to the church's parking lot, I see two of my classmates: Mark and Sheila. Mark's got tears falling all over his face. I don't know what the hell that's all about. Casey and him never got along, in fact we both were pretty pissed off at him for narking us off to the football coaches for stealing his sixer of Mountain Dew. We wouldn't have stolen it if the cheapskate would of just paid Casey back the money he owed him. Coaches didn't understand our logic, though.

When I look at his outfit, I grow even more confused. Mark's wearing some nice clothes. I'm talkin' grade A Sunday best: tie collared shirt, slacks. Sheila's dressed in a somber black dress. What the hell is going on here? Nervously, I examine my own wardrobe: purple UNI hat, black Doors T-shirt, Zoobas, and green and black Asics wrestling shoes. I hope everybody didn't get all dressed up just to talk about what had happened. I get out of the car and try to find some of my friends so I can find out what's up with the situation.

As I round the parish, I see a pack of my friends. My gut starts to churn as I notice that they too have dressed up. They give me a funny look as I approach. Before anybody can comment, I ask the entire group a question.

"Why is everybody so dressed up?"

"Uhh, well, it is the wake, you know," says Chris, her face slack and pale. "You mean nobody told you?"

Wake? What the hell is a w...a wave of nausea hits me as I realize that this meeting isn't just a little support group thing. I've got a real Catholic Church function to attend and I am dressed for a Sunday road trip. My first worry is that people in the church will stare at me. But I can deal with that. What really gets me is that his parents might think I'm trying to be disrespectful or something. Real classy for one of the pallbearers to show up for the wake in tiger print shorts. My friends start to move towards the church, disturbing my inner argument.

I angrily exhale my breath. What the hell am I supposed to do, I think. Deciding that I cannot go in, I address my friends.

“You all just go in without me and tell Casey’s parents that I’m really sorry. I can’t go in there looking like this.”

Chris turns around suddenly. Her expressionless face now grows red. I see her eyes narrow as she say, “You sure as hell can. This isn’t for them or the people in the crowd. This is for Casey; and I really don’t think that Casey would care if you came in dressed like that.” Her expression softens along with her voice as she says, “He always hated getting dressed up anyway.”

My friends resume their walk. I lag behind, hoping to slip into the church unnoticed. I stare down at the concrete steps as I walk up the entryway. Nice and clean, no stains. The gray concrete turns into a dark carpet as I enter the church. I keep my head down, but I feel the stares of the people scattered in the pews. The mantra “It’s for Casey, not for them,” repeats itself in my head like a skipping CD. Oh shit! I grab my hat and shove the bill in my pocket. Nice fucking work, I tell myself, you just walked into a church wearing a bright purple hat. So much for sneaking in.

Ray and Chris turn into a pew and I follow them, staring at the red weave of the carpet, avoiding the stares that I know I am drawing. Ray and Chris sit, I sit. My eyes dart up, looking for something I really don’t want to see. A large silver-gray coffin sits at the front of the pews, Casey’s head and folded hands visible above the white lining. His face has a yellowish tint to it, and looks molded into place. He doesn’t look peaceful, he looks like a fucking display in a wax museum. This isn’t my friend. It can’t be. I drop my eyes and concentrate on a small patch of wood on the back of the pew in front of me. Better looking at this spot than at the wax statue which attempts to pass for my friend. The varnish has worn off this spot, making it look like a light tan stain on the dark oak.

My eyes do not leave this spot until the priest comes out. I am unfamiliar with the rites of the Catholic Church, so I listen with little interest. But the tone of his voice, the rise and fall of his syllables as he recites unfamiliar phrases, makes me furrow my brow. His voice sounds familiar; I know I’ve heard it before. The memory comes rushing into my brain like a shotgunned beer: Bullwinkle! Casey had always told me about his priest sounding like Bullwinkle. Son of a bitch, he was right. A small smile raises to the corners

of my mouth as I shake my head back and forth, attempting to stifle my laughter. Can't chuckle in church, I think to myself.

Jesus, I've got to do something to keep from cracking up. My eyes start to wander, exploring my unfamiliar surroundings. I know that churches are designed to lift your eyes skyward, but I've never seen anything like this in my church. Murals of saints whom I don't know adorn the walls, colored glass windows of Biblical scenes let in soft light, sculptures and statues, giant brass pipes lines up in rows...

"Eason!" Ray hisses under his breath as his elbow finds a home in my ribs.

Guess I was zoning out. Hope no one else noticed. Once again, I focus on the stain. Something that the priest says breaks my concentration. He is asking for people to stand and tell the crowd about their favorite memories of Casey, or what they remembered most about him. He says something about this being a time of not only grief but celebration. Yeah, whatever.

One of Casey's uncles stands up and starts talking about how Casey was always so helpful on the farm and how Casey always played jokes on him. Maybe that's because he couldn't stand you, I think. Casey was always bitching about this uncle. I was pretty sure that Casey wouldn't walk across the street to piss on Jim if he was on fire.

Then I see Mark stand up. What the hell is this? I'm not even going to acknowledge the fact that he's talking. More and more people stand, people who didn't even know Casey that well. Tears run down their faces as they talk about him. I look around me and see that all of Casey's close friends are sitting coma-like in their pews. As I shake my head in disbelief, I notice that Casey's parents haven't gotten up yet. Isn't anybody who really knew him going to stand up? The things I hear don't even begin to sum up my friend. These people don't have any idea of how complex he was. He doesn't deserve to be eulogized with these reader's digest memories. He lived, dammit! He drank too much sometimes and he drove too fast. He got in fights and he made good friends. Casey's life was a novel, not some homily. My thoughts gather and form a dark mass that starts to roll across my mind like a storm across the prairie. I feel the anger swelling inside of me like an aerosol can tossed into a bonfire. What right do these people have to speak? What right?

I stand.

★★

The roar of a fully loaded semi hitting the Jake brake interrupts my flashback. Suddenly, I'm no longer a sixteen-year-old filled with rage at the injustice of the world, just twenty-three and bitter. Seven years have taught me that life is rife with nastiness. I try to remember what I said that day, try to bring back his memory one last time. But that day now seems as unknown to me as the sound of his voice. The only things I get are stills: my voice cracking, my eyes watering. I remember that my legs shook so badly that I collapsed rather than sat. I can still hear the soft weeping of my friends. But I can't remember what I said.

Maybe it's because it didn't originate from some electrical synapse in my brain. That speech was pure love, a testament to the naive belief of adolescence that things should stay golden. Not in the sense that our lives were shining examples of morally correct living, but in the sense that we lived. Casey never gave much thought to the future, 'cause it's hard to have fun when you worry about consequences. Back then, we took life by the short and curly and made that fucker do whatever we wanted. Sucking the marrow out of life? Shit, we ate the whole goddamn bone. But those days are gone, that feeling of invincibility replaced with worries and fears.

My head drops onto the steering wheel as tears begin to roll down my face. Am I crying for Casey or for myself? I guess that the tears are flowing for both of us, 'cause he wasn't the only person that died seven years ago. My inner teen is buried as deep in my mind as Casey is in the dirt, that part of me that still believes that nothing bad will ever happen to me or my friends, that we will always be together, that the world exists to entertain us. I can no longer believe in that philosophy, even though a part of me longs to trust its thinking once more.

With a shaky hand, I put my car into drive and pull away from my memories, whispering softly, "But you always will, buddy. You always will."



Windows of Being: window 3

Michelle Aartun  
Mixed Media

## The Turn-Around-Hook-Shot-Bank-Off-the-Glass-Three-From-Thirty-Five-Feet

Jesse Johnson

It was ninety-one to fifty-eight when they sent us in. To say none of us had played much that year, would be a bit of an understatement. Two games. Two frikken games! That's all I'd played in. But hey, it was two more than the rest of them. Anyway, there we were—all us scrubs—exchanging glances at the little red marks above our knees. If you didn't know, a red oval just above the knees is The Sign of the Bench Warmer. It comes from resting your elbows there all game. Anyway, both teams looked about the same—a fat kid, an uncoordinated kid, and a couple of fat and uncoordinated kids, red kneed of course.

Anyway, here's what happened. You'll never believe it. Oh yeah, there was a minute seventeen left when we got in. Anyway, I bring the ball up the court. The crowd starts in. Pass it to Cory! Now you have to understand, Cory couldn't catch a cold if he slept naked in a snow bank. Don't get me wrong, he's a hell of a guy, but a basketball player—No. But, what the hell, he's a senior. I throw him the ball. It ricochet off his hands, hits him square in the nose, and goes out of bounds. Seriously, Cory sucks *bad*. The crowd laughs. Yep, real funny. I clap my hands, and point to my chest. My bad, I say. Other team's ball now. They pretty much do the same thing, and we get it back. Pass it to Cory! Pass it to Cory! Sure, why not? He fumbles it again. It rolls around; A dog pile ensues; Jump ball; possession arrow?—us. Catch the damn ball Cory. Anyway, I take the inbounds about five feet from half court. There's about fifteen seconds left now. Pass it to Cory! Pass it to Cory! Sounds good to me. Third time's a charm right? He actually catches it. He's got his back to the basket about thirty-five feet from the hoop. Shoot it! Shoot it! Doesn't even look, turns, throws it up—a hook. It had to be forty feet in the air. I'm not kidding—*Forty Feet*. The buzzer sounds; It hits the glass; World peace breaks out; Oil prices drop; The Vikings win the Superbowl; My parents like each other; The girl in the third row goes out with me; Flowers bloom and children sing; And the ball goes through the hoop. It was beautiful.



## Roll on Living Water

Bonnie Tallmon

As I sit here silently sipping a serious cup of coffee, I think of the legacy my grandpa gave me, and the legacy I want to pass onto my child. All these loving memories pass by, like a gentle brook on a brisk fall morning.

Thirty years have passed. My love, admiration, respect still grow. What was my grandpa?

*a pillar in my life  
Free Methodist minister  
farmer  
father of twelve  
stood tall at 5 foot nothing  
head up  
shoulders back  
muscular  
loving, kind, giving.*

If I close my eyes, I can still hear the songs he loved so dearly:

*Rock of Ages  
Blessed Assurance  
Were You There?  
What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

My grandpa was always talking about Jesus and how much Jesus loves us. This brings back the time Grandpa and I were taking a trip across South Dakota. We talked and sang songs for hours. Grandpa said, "Bonnie, always remember you must be born again to be saved. You might not understand now, but in time, you will." As I looked into my Grandpa's deep, brown, loving eyes, I realized he was desperately trying to tell me something. That day is long ago, but I still remember those words. Time stood still that day, as though Father Time had a stop watch. Grandpa made me feel safe, secure, warm, like a heavy, old-fashioned quilt wrapped around you on a cold morning as the seasons change.

When Grandpa came to visit, mother would dust off her Bible, tidy up the house, and frantically remind us of the "do's" and "don'ts": "There will be no swearing," "Somebody hide the pinochle cards," "Dust the Bible," "Don't say, 'darn,'" "Make sure you keep your head bowed and your hands folded the whole time Grandpa's saying bedtime prayers." On one particularly memorable visit I was home from school sick. Grandpa showed up and made soup. We talked about school, friends, and family.

Mom probably had a different experience. Although she would be excited to see him, she would get nervous when she knew he was coming. She always mentioned Grandpa was a very strict, stern man. But there was always a sense of calm, heavy peace throughout the house whenever Grandpa stepped into my world.

I was only ten when Grandpa passed away. My gentle brook became troubled water. Though I still miss him, I have the comfort of having experienced the peace that flowed through him. I vowed to continue Grandpa's legacy. I take up my cup, once again. Shit! Coffee's cold...Oops! Sorry, Grandpa!



Untitled  
*Justin Mather*  
Photograph

## *Oakwood 2000*

## Live in the Present

### A Parable

Nicole Schaffer

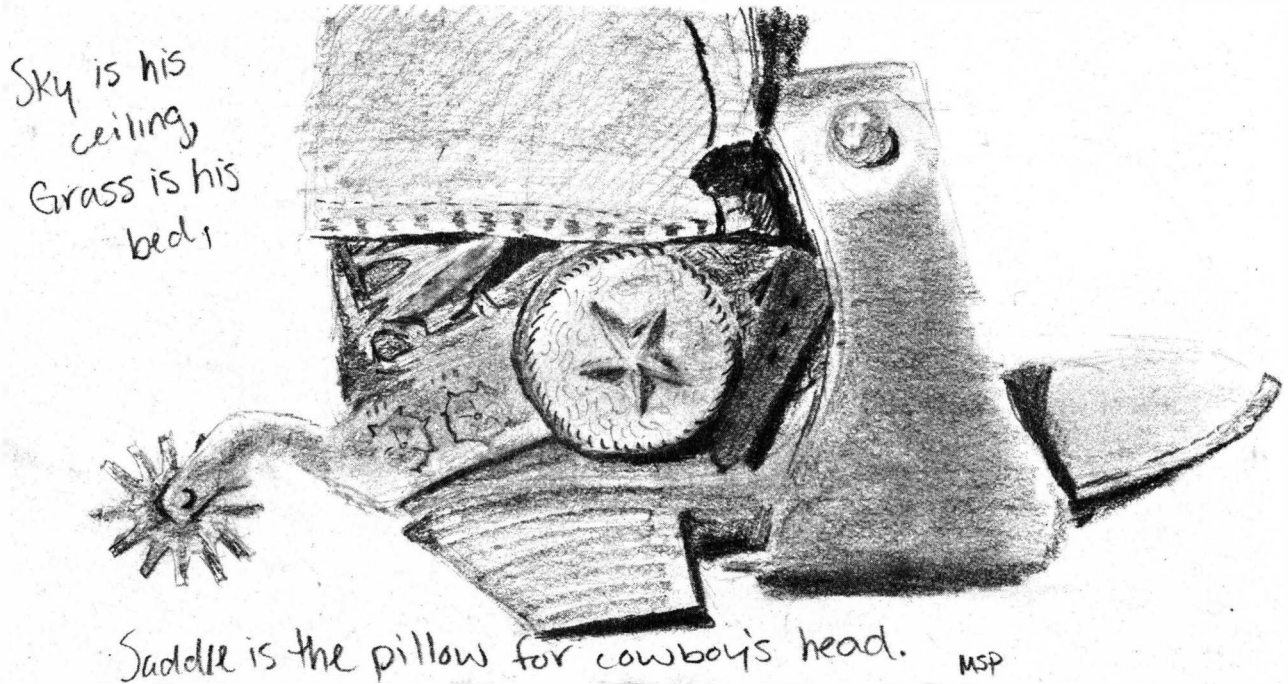
One day a man decided to go shopping for a cat. At the pet store, two cats caught his eye. One, a beautiful Siamese, the other, a white, long-haired Persian. The Siamese reminded him of a cat he had had as a child. He and that cat had been in constant conflict, but he had loved it anyway.

The pet shop owner told him that the Siamese was a beautiful cat, but between the two of them, the Persian cat was friendlier and would make a better pet. The man didn't know if he should choose the one he already knew how to deal with, or the one that was new and different.

To help the man decide, the pet store owner let the man take each cat home separately on two different nights. The first night the man took the Persian cat home. The Persian cat was beautiful and even more friendly than the pet shop owner had said. The man was very pleased with it, but still decided to give the Siamese cat a chance. The Siamese cat, also beautiful, wasn't as nice as the Persian cat, but the Siamese cat behaved exactly as the man expected it to.

The man decided to keep the Siamese cat because he had experience handling such a cat, and the memory of his old cat haunted him. After a short period of time, however, the Siamese cat started showing its true nature and ripped apart his furniture. The man took the Siamese cat back to the pet shop.

The pet shop owner was very understanding; he allowed the man to trade the Siamese cat for the Persian cat. However, when the man reached into the cage to take the Persian cat home, it hissed and would have nothing to do with him. The man demanded to know what was wrong with the cat. The pet shop owner smiled and said, "The Persian is too proud to settle for being second choice."



Untitled  
Mendy Pedersen  
Pencil

Oakwood 2000

## More than a Beverage: Caffeine is a Lifestyle Choice

*Rosanna Solem*

I looked around the multi-colored walls with apprehension, a foreigner in an exotic land. Blue, red, green, and metallic gold walls laughed at me in turn. The java steamed while the people stared at my preppie form which was shyly trembling at the onslaught of a new experience. Every inch of my countenance was drenched in newness, adrenaline, and cultural ignorance. The multiple piercings of the coffee girl mocked me, glittering profusely while I stuttered in shame. “Wh..what has ch...chocolate and caramel?” I pronounced every syllable as if it were my last.

“That’s a turtle mocha, they are so sweet. You’d love it...Extra fluff?” She smiled kindly, and the spell was broken. The bewitching of the South Dakotan in “Jitters” ended, and I could enjoy the blues-playing, lowly-lighted downtown Minneapolis grunge coffeehouse. I said “yes” to the fluff, turtle mochas, and the whole lifestyle that went with caffeine. I would soon graduate to straight-up java of the day, but for now, my naivete and my budget allowed for smooth, luscious turtle mocha.

I finally understood what it meant to be a part of the Generation X “experience” in the coffee house society, and what hummus, focaccia and risotto were. Sure, my awareness of lattes, steamed milks, amarettos, espressos and cappuccinos was heightened, but more than that, my whole meager existence was replaced with an awareness of life and knowledge that cannot be replaced. What I drank that night at my favorite coffee joint was more than a “Joe Bean” experience. It was an opening of a cultural door.

I toured the coffee houses of the Cities, experiencing people, both the yuppie and the clinically insane, and the varieties of brew, whether melodious or murky. I enjoyed discussing vital issues with regulars such as myself, and was enveloped with cozy spiced coffee aromas in every shop. In “Dunn Brothers” I discussed genetic cloning with David, a Bio/Chemistry graduate student from New York; at “Higher Grounds” I talked about the end times with Dan, a sometimes neurotic self-proclaimed preacher of science fiction, and I frequented “Hard Times” on southeast Washington with a friend who was grunge-aware and realized I was not.

My wardrobe would need to be replaced for festivities at the coffee house, “Hard Times,” that doubled as a homeless shelter. She hooked me up at the Goodwill

in White Bear, and made me bring only three dollars. “Any more, and they’ll mock you.” Her tongue piercing clicked on her teeth. I felt inherently ignorant, and lacking in body piercings and tattoos. After all, the Star Trib called “Hard Times” the best place in the Cities to view piercings, tattoos and altogether straneties.

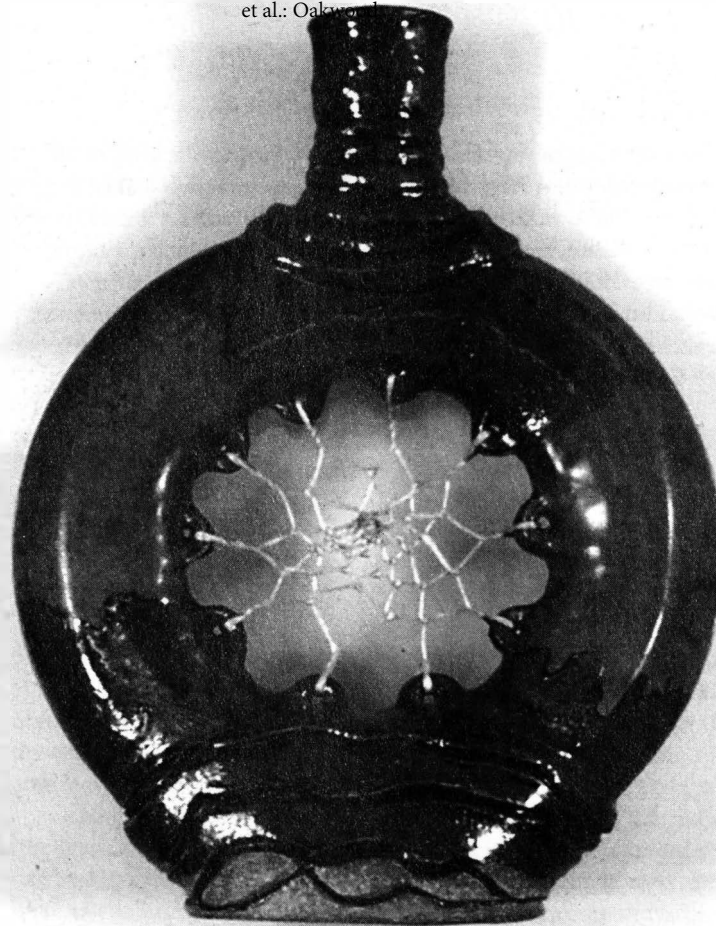
We found the dive fairly easily, and swam through leather, metal, and marijuana stench to the bar where the servicemaster was an angry-looking pseudo-skinhead pursing his lips. The former Sex Pistol sneered and demanded an order. Cheri nudged me and said “Two for the day” while I knew better than to question her choice. A naive acquaintance of mine would later stubbornly order a latte, only to get mocked by a regular named “Sparkle” for her rich ways. Sparkle enjoyed a good tweak on heroin, followed by a rousing shot of pure “Hard Times” Italian Roast. I received the questionable muck without a word and gaped at the anti-establishment establishment. The walls were coated in old stickers, political opinions, and black paint that covered a multitude of sins. The DEA could gather gallons of reusable marijuana fumes that had pressed themselves against the walls.

“Hard Times” was the epitome of class struggle, financial struggle, and, apparently personal hygiene struggle. Toothless Charlie has occupied the front corner table as long as the place has served thick brew, and both items are equally charming, while many regulars in “Hard Times” talk to both Charlie and coffee mugs. There was no sense of decorum here, merely a heavy presence of too many issues in a small area that was constantly hung in smoke.

I had found an intellectual response in “Jitters” and the like, but here was an intellectual struggle on all levels. Many at “Hard Times” were dealing with issues that I had only heard about on Geraldo. Sexuality, drug abuse, rage, and multiple personalities were never issues to talk about; everyone there had some dysfunction in one of those areas. We kept to lighter subjects, such as the meaning of Nietzsche’s “God is dead” quote and how dysfunctional he was. My Judeo-Christian background stood out, but did not matter in this room where Buddha, nature, Christ, and self were worshipped.

Caffeine continues to be important in my life, although Brookings is lacking in all areas of culturata, including coffeehouses. I have since received a cappuccino maker for my piteous longing for the Cities' brew, but the feeling is just not the same. I miss David, Dan, and Charlie, the lessons of caffeine, and the feeling of going home just by walking into a coffee shop. I continue to visit Minneapolis' coffee houses and on a recent trip, brought a native South Dakotan on his first caffeinated experience. He was condescendingly called "yuppie" upon entrance and was greeted by Sparkle with a grab in the ass. I felt at home at the coffee house for the homeless.





Stoneware Vessel with Dream Catcher

*Michelle Aartun*  
Pottery

*Oakwood 2000*

## Changing Seasons

*Chad Wickman*

Sam Reilly stepped out of the steaming shower and onto the cool, tile floor. The bathroom was open enough to allow breeze to drift in from the hall, calling the hair on his skin to attention and making him shiver. He swiped at the mirror in front of him with his towel, clearing the fog that had settled there, allowing him to closely examine his reflection as the air dried his shimmering body with refreshing deliberation. He stroked the cleft on his chin, feeling for new growths of hair, and dejectedly found none. He continued staring at his physique, straining to see if a physical change had arrived to accompany the emotional upheaval that he had experienced the night before. All he could see was that his summer tan had faded, and his face looked as smooth as the porcelain sink he was leaning on.

In defiance of his awkwardness, Sam flexed his arms to the mirror, trying to exude an aura of maleness. He found that his arms seemed to have grown bigger overnight, even though the thought seemed a little implausible. As he stood fantasizing about his masculinity, a cry from the kitchen brought his thoughts back to the present.

“Samuel, honey, you’re going to be late for school!”

“I’m coming, Mom!” Sam replied, as he wrapped a towel around his waist and sauntered out of the bathroom. He stepped into the sunlight of the kitchen, where the overpowering smell of bacon sent his stomach rumbling and his mouth watering. He couldn’t remember a time when he felt hungrier.

Samuel Eugene Reilly! Go put some clothes on and get back down here for breakfast! I’m not going to drive you to school if you miss the bus again.”

“Okay, okay,” Sam replied.

School, Sam thought with some antipathy. The idea of going to class seemed so far away from his thoughts, but a fleeting image of a girl snapped his mind back to focus. The thought of her made him smile; he knew that he would see her today, and he snatched a piece of bacon from the table as he bounded for the steps.

Sam whistled down the hall, recalling some love song he once heard, and continued the tune until he turned into his bedroom, shutting the door behind him.

As he dressed, Sam began looking around at the walls of his bedroom, noticing for the first time how juvenile his possessions seemed. He lifted his baseball glove from a peg that hung above his bed, fondling the soft leather and recalling the times when baseball was the world to him. Memories of the afternoon games at the ball diamond and the evening games of catch with his father came rushing to his mind, as if the glove had sent an electric current of nostalgia to his brain. Sam tossed the mitt on the bed and began rummaging around in back of his closet, emerging seconds later with an empty cardboard box. He laid the box on his mattress, and placed his baseball glove in the bottom.

Silently, Sam began taking his boyhood possessions down from their respectful places in his bedrooms and placed them carefully into the cardboard box. He continued dismembering his youth from the walls and shelves of his room solemnly—the Superman comics, the poster of Michael Jordan his parents had given him for his eighth birthday, and finally, down came the model airplane that hung suspended from his ceiling by a luminescent string—the one he and his father had put together when he was ten years old. All the items went into the box, and into his memory, where he could someday come back and view them with a certain degree of longing. The longings Sam felt now was different. He wanted to separate himself from things that reminded him of his childhood. Right then he wanted to embrace the invigoration of feelings like a man. Sam carefully placed the crowded box into the back of his closet, and retreated out of his bedroom and down to the awaiting aroma of a hot breakfast.

“The school bus will be here any minute, Samuel.”

Sam’s mother, who had her back to him as he entered the kitchen, now turned to smile at him. She noticed the glow he was emanating, and she too felt invigorated by the freshness of his youth.

“Mom, could you call me just Sam?”

Sam’s mother smiled complacently at her fifteen-year-old son, and ruffled his hair as she placed a plate of hot bacon and eggs in front of him.

“Sure, Sammy,” she replied as she giggled out loud.

“Mom!”

A horn shrieked through the kitchen, signaling that Sam would go hungry until lunch. “Gotta go!” Sam shouted, as he reached simultaneously for a piece of toast and his backpack.

“Can you give your mother a kiss before you leave?”

Sam seceded, pecked his mother brightly on the cheek, and rushed out the door into the crisp October air.

On the way to school, Sam sat alone, staring out the window of the bus as it lumbered slowly through the tree-lined streets. The leaves on the trees were changing into a galaxy of colors—red, yellow, orange, purple—each color representing to Sam different feelings and moods. He liked red the best; it made him feel powerful and alive.

Sam noticed how the leaves spiraled silently and slowly away from the tree, catching the wind and tumbling to the ground to join the rainbow-colored carpet that embedded itself on the hardening earth. Sam viewed this scene with some melancholy, considering the changes that were taking over his life, too.

As the bus pulled to the stop in front of the school, the students crowded for the door, eager to taste the autumn air. Sam filed toward the front of the bus, his excitement rising with each step. He hopped readily down the steps, carefully scanning the sea of faces, trying to find that single person who could put his jumbled feelings into a coherent order.

As Sam strode toward the entrance of the school, she appeared suddenly, like a dream, huddled with a group of girls who were giggling nervously while casting glimpses in his direction.

Sam flushed furiously, his ears and face matching the crimson leaves that were still spiraling in his mind. All he could think about was ducking into the school and into the anonymity of the crowded halls.

Before he had a chance to slip through the double-doors, a hand caught his arm from behind. Sam whirled, and found he was facing directly into the brownest eyes in the world, losing himself in hazel contemplation.

“Hi, Sam.” The girl smiled, committing to his gaze and making him grasp for a response that hardly came.

“Hello, Andrea,” Sam heard himself stutter, his voice competing with his panting breath and pounding heart.

“My parents will be away again tonight,” Andrea stated, allowing the words to hang in the air, letting Sam feel the meaning.

“Do you want to come over again?”

Sam stared at her plush lips, feeling the memories of their first kiss wash over his body.

“Sure,” Sam replied, his face returning to its normal hue as his confidence escalated. “I had fun last night.”

“I guess I’ll see you around seven,” Andrea said, and with a swish of a long, amber ponytail, she retreated back to her group of friends.

Sam hesitated a moment before he slid through the entrance with a smile on his face, realizing what it’s like to live in a world with changing seasons.





## Witherington High School Writing Contest

et al.: Oakwood

# Witherington High School Writing Contest

## First Place Poetry

*Freeman Junior/Senior High School*

### Memory Lane

*Melissa Hopf*

Created eighty-four-years ago  
by crafty hands,  
the antique rocking chair  
resides in a shadowed corner,  
looking back at time...

Fascinated, a toddler  
spends hours  
tracing detailed swirls  
on the chair back  
with her pudgy, first finger.

A five-year-old cuddles  
in the arms of  
her father.  
Her tear-streaked face  
rests against his  
red and black flannel shirt,  
as the creaking rocker  
lulls the hiccupping child  
into dreamland...

Memory lane ends  
as a teenager  
plops a book heavy school bag  
onto its worn seat,  
causing the rocker to tip forward  
then rock back with  
a familiar creak.

## First Place Prose

Rapid City Stevens High School

### The Leap of Fate

Tiffany Voyles

The slope slanted down steeply, a broad slide of broken slate as far as I could see to both sides, ending only where it piled against the bank of the fast-flowing creek. It was a lonely feeling, that high up, at the crest of the cliff face. Behind me, a million miles away it seemed, the waterfall careened down the sheer face of the other side of the rock, and the broad stream swept southward, leaping over dams and makeshift bridges and pouring between the massive boulders from rock-slides long ago.

I gazed down from the top of the mountain, if it could be called that, for it rose no more than two hundred feet above the canyon floor. It had taken me over an hour to climb from the road, up the side of the falls, and out onto this precarious ledge; the blood that trickled from my dusty palms could attest to the sharpness of the rock over which I had scrambled. But I felt none of the pain from my battered body.

As I stared over the barren scar on the land, shielding my sensitive eyes from the glare of the sun, a slight breeze just barely rustled the leaves of the aspens clinging tenaciously to the stone, just barely stirred my hair like a hand's soft caress. A voice, seemingly conjured of the breeze whispered in my ear, saying, "Jump."

Sheer madness to my conscious mind, the part not yet untouched by my severe bout of depression. Jump? But my subconscious mind, the unfathomable part of my brain, which was plagued most by the nightmares, heard the wind-voice also, and it roused then, seeing perhaps a salvation in the madness.

My body, its base instincts for surviving beyond the soul's hope somehow overcome by the ghostly caress roused with my dream-mind, and stood against the continued frantic protest of my reason, my logic. *Escape*, the wind whispered. *Let go, and be troubled no more.*



I closed my eyes, not wishing to see the deathly pale water below me, and the stark blackness of the rock around me. My feet, of their own accord, shifted beneath me, as if testing the stone's stability, testing the limits of my balance against the incessant pull of gravity. The waterfall roared behind me, drowning for a time the mad voice of the wind, of my mind.

My ears listened to the water, and my blinded eyes pictured it, pouring down the rock face, turning from the cold blue to cloudy white, then to mottled gray as it ran over the stones beneath it. Beautiful, as lovely as a snowfall, or the full moon lifting from the horizon into the night.

But even the waterfall's grumble seemed to begrudge my existence. *Tiny flame*, it purred. *How easy to snuff you out*. My eyes opened, and I saw the dark form of a raven gliding through the impassive giant trees on the other wall of the canyon.

*How I wish I could fly like you*, I thought enviously. I lifted my foot and held my arms out to the side, imagining that I was soaring above my pitiful body, this body accorded me by Fate, too short, too fat, not pretty enough to be loved or cared for. I imagined I was soaring high, to where the teasing voices of schoolmates and siblings could not reach me, and I pretended I could gaze upon them all uncaring, and laugh back mockingly.

Then I opened my eyes abruptly, lowered my outstretched arms, and turned back to the pathway that lead to where my parents waited, patient as always with me and my "phase." I half-fell down the slope beside the falls as my chill-numbed legs gave out beneath me, skinning my knees, but I cared nothing for the pain.

All I knew then, as I still know today, as I battle manic-depression, the wasting disease of the soul, is that I was offered then a chance, a chance to soar like a raven into the blinding sun, if only for a moment. I was offered a chance at freedom, one given me by the wind and the water themselves, a blessed chance at eternal peace.

## **Second Place Poetry**

*Brookings High School*

### **October**

*Jessica Pikul*

The cloud armies  
marching the sky  
gathering force  
for the first siege of the season.

*Oakwood 2000*

**Second Place Prose***Sioux Valley High School***My Diamond***Adam Benson*

As the car cruises up to the narrow driveway to the field, I slide out, careful not to brush against the dusty green side, and meander towards the dugout. My heavy Nike bag hangs on my shoulder as I wander past the batting cages made from puke green rope threaded together to make a net. I drag myself over the dry, hard mound, past the wooden picnic tables, and into the tin covered dugout.

The sweat is already dripping off my damp forehead as I plop myself down onto the rickety old metal benches in the dugout. I reach down and unzip my faded bag, at the same time pulling up my lucky black socks. These socks have been with me for every sporting event since eighth grade. Anybody that looks at them can tell. The once crisp, white Nike sign is fraying, and I can see through them at any spot. There are gaping holes under the swoosh, and I can drive a truck through the holes in the toes, but they are my lucky socks! Besides, my feet never get hot when I wear them. I reach down into my bag and yank out my trusty football cleats that get converted to baseball spikes every summer. The black shoelaces are fraying and will need to be replaced before too long.

As I bend over to slip my sandals off, a white and red ball comes crashing into the fence in front of me. The sudden clamor startles me, and I nearly fall off the bench. A wave of laughter cuts through the air. Before I can get to my feet and give chase, Vandall and Nelson are already sprinting out to left field to start warming up. We always warm up in left field, where the grass is the nicest, the trees give shade, and the batting cages are behind us to catch any wild throws that get away from us.

As I bend over to finish tying my spikes, a carload of Brookings players swings into the driveway, their white uniforms shining through the tinted windows of the green Pontiac. The door flies open, and a trio of boys pile out onto the fresh cut grass under the shady trees. They huddle in the shade next to the ugly brown building that holds the concession stand, bathrooms, and equipment room. A lot of good it will do them, nothing gives shelter from the heat on a day like this. I instinctively look over them, nobody too big, nothing to worry about. I reach up above my head, to the freshly painted wood shelves and grab my

tattered, leathered glove with the dry laces and gritty finger holes. I scurry out to left field to start warming up, bracing myself against the heat that seems to grow more intense every minute. I trot up along the third base line, stomping on the base, at the same time being careful not to disturb the chalky, white line that marks the end of fair territory. When I get to the grass, I accelerate to stretch out my legs, being careful not to step in the gopher holes that litter the outfield.

As my teammates and I stand out in left field warming up, and bragging about our “big league curve,” my mind wanders to times when we were younger and we played games that always ended in ties. At least that’s what the adults said. After a while we started having the parents keep score and tell us who really won. Back then we really didn’t care, but we wanted to know anyway. We played our games on the grassy, weed infested, field next to the tennis courts. The one’s with the same sand consistency as the sandbox. It didn’t matter; we still thought it was the best field in the country.

My daydreaming is interrupted by Huley yelling at us from the dugout telling us to come in. We all grab out stuff and start jogging in, still throw the balls back and forth. As I sit down on the bench, Coach Hoff starts the pep talk.

I start to think about the game and how well everything could go. I have to do this, or I lose all hope of winning, because once the game starts, things start to get pretty ugly and a guy can lose confidence real fast. Tonight should be a relatively good game though. We beat this team by three runs, the last time we played them. By now Hoff is finishing up his speech and going into the batting order. Tim is on the end of the bench, with his hat on sideways, screwing around and getting everyone ready. He seems to be better at this than the coaches are. I think it’s just the way he finds a way to say the wrong thing and make the players laugh and the coaches frown. I realize it’s time to play, and hustle out to my usual spot at third base where the packed, brown dirt could be confused with concrete.

Tonight should be a fairly good night as far as the sun goes. Some games the sun is at the right spot in the sky, and the pop flies are next to impossible to catch. The bright golden sun swallows them up, and I can’t see anything until the ball is a foot or two from my glove. By then it’s too late, and the ball either drops to the ground or smokes me in the face. It usually results in an extra runner on base and another pep talk from Hoff.

# Witherington High School Writing Contest

Tonight, Coover is starting on the mound, so I will probably be coming into relieve him after an inning or 10-12 runs. Whatever comes first. As I scan the crowd, I kick the dirt around at my feet. I wonder if anybody in the stands really wants to be here. The fans are never real rowdy at our games. It seems like they are always bored and only here to fill time in their empty schedule.

My foot is settled in the soil, and I'm ready to start warming up my arm again. My blue and gray uniform is damp with sweat and sticks to my back. As Dustin throws me a grounder, my mind wanders to pictures of me playing on a major league team and throwing the runner out for the final out of the World Series. Of course the field would be a lot nicer and there would be a lot more fans in the bleachers, but the game would still be the same.

As I look up into the cloudless sky, the sun sears my eyes, and I quickly look down. As I turn around to rub my eyes, I gaze at the outfield grass—perfectly even, not a single blade too long or too short. Bass would be proud. He mows this field every day of the week, and it looks good. The fence, however, doesn't. The rickety, plastic fence is rotting away in right field. The only thing holding it together is the orange paint. We are supposed to get a new fence next year, and a grass infield with it. There won't be anymore bad hops off the rocky brown dirt. No more dust choking my throat every time the wind picks up. No more gritty dirt under my glove biting my hand after fielding a ground ball, and best of all, no more playing 20 feet back from the bag in order for the ball to slow down.

The wind is picking up now, and I can taste the gritty dust in my throat, yet I still feel refreshed as the wind peels the jersey off from my back. Yeah, this field will be a lot nicer, but will it be the same place? This field has always served as a meeting place for children looking to escape from the summer boredom. Will it still be the same? Who knows, but there's no time to worry about it now.

I settle into my little cove and stare towards the dusty home plate. The batter is stepping into the box and setting his feet into the soft dirt of my diamond.

## Third Place Poetry

*Freeman Junior/Senior High School*

### Mom

*Sarah Stern*

Her dry, chapped, calloused hands  
doing never-ending dishes,  
folding ever-present laundry,  
washing always-dirty cow teats.  
On her right hand, a claw-like thumb,  
the nail unbreakable  
—caught her thumb between the wood splitter...  
and the wood.

“Hot stuff, coming through!” she warns  
draining potatoes,  
taking brownies from the oven,  
canning beans.

Her square reading glasses hang around her neck,  
when not used in  
preparing a Sunday School lesson  
or  
reading a recipe book.  
A blue string connected to the glasses to prevent her  
from losing them...  
unsuccessful.

Sinking into her overstuffed rocker,  
her green eyes shut—  
“watching” the ten o’clock news.

### **Third Place Prose**

*Aberdeen*

#### **The Map For Adventure and the So-Called “Surprise Tresure”**

*Rachel Runnels*

It was a clouded image of her short, soft, light brown head of curls that blew softly in the wind. Her eyes glistened from the bright sun as she stood in a field upon a hill. Her tinted skin covered with wrinkles looked soft to the touch. As the sun bathed her with warmth, her smile stayed steady upon her face. Then in an abrupt instant, the sky grew dark as the clouds covered the sun. The wind picked up with more force. Her smile grew weak and her face went pale. Then many people gathered around her, all in black. She disappeared as it began to rain.

I awake hastily in a sweat. As I sat up, I remembered I had slanted walls. OUCH! I had been waking up almost every night from the same dream. It always seemed to end with rain. All of this was going on because my grandmother had just passed away about a month ago. It had been really hard on my mom. I’m not sure if she ever had dreams like mine. Maybe the dream came again because of what had happened yesterday... memories of Her.

We had arrived at my grandpa’s house for a visit, mainly just so my mom and he could discuss some “unknown” matters. My grandmother’s room had been kept the way she had left it. Because of so many memories, no one had the heart to go through her things. I always thought it was weird the way my mom and grandpa avoided going into her room. But now, now I understand how hard it really is.

My mom and grandpa were in the other room discussing something with many papers. I entered her room, not sure if I should or not. Her room was dark. The blinds were shut so the sun couldn’t shine through. The room smelled of stale musk, not of the perfume she wore daily, as I had remembered.

I looked around the room in curiosity. It had been so long since I’d seen some of her things. She had been in the hospital quite awhile, so every time we’d see her it would be in a different hospital, not here, in her house, where she needed to be.

I spotted two oak chests. I went to the one covered in velvet roses. To my surprise it was locked, so I got down on my knees and opened up the other huge box. Inside there were many pictures, letters and awards. I dug deeper, trying to find the bottom. I came to a small red velvet box. I’m not sure how old I was but I had given this to her for one of her birthdays. Inside I found a small piece of paper that had handwriting of a young child on it.

It was a small poem that didn't rhyme but sounded so adorable. At the bottom of the paper it read, "**Happy Birthday, Grandma! Love, Me.**" My eyes filled with tears as I remembered that "Me" was, well, me. I kept looking. I finally found her journal. I remembered when she used to write in it all the time before she got so sick and too weak to write. I paged through it reading her entries about me as a child. In the back I found a letter, probably intended for me. It read something about how she was sorry she had to go, she wished she could have stayed to watch me grow, how she knows how much I miss her, and she also had a surprise for me. Now I didn't know what she was talking about when she wrote "surprise." But I would soon find out!

On the back of that piece of paper was a small drawing of a sunflower. I wasn't sure exactly what *that* meant, but underneath it was a small message that read, "Your next clue will be with my sunflowers. Hope you have fun trying to find your surprise. Good luck!" I suddenly remembered that this was one of the games my grandma played with me when I was younger.

I knew what she meant, so I went to the sunflowers she kept in the living room. Because the flowers were fake, the message wasn't exactly hidden. There was a small piece of paper tucked between the stems. This time it was a picture of her little shed that sat out in her back yard. I quickly ran out to the shed. The inside was bare, all except for the small ring box found on the shelf. I opened it up and found a key.

I slowly walked toward the house trying to think of what the key could be for. Many things went through my mind at that point. Why did she go through all this trouble of making me find this so-called treasure? I wonder why she only had two clues? What was this key to: a safe, another diary, a car?

Well, as soon as I got inside it suddenly came to me. *The locked box.* I ran back into her room. I know my mom heard me because I had made enough noise. I got to the box and sat down on my knees. My hand began to shake as I placed the key inside the hole. When I finally got it open, I found this beautifully soft, cream colored, matted teddy bear. It had a dark red ribbon tied around its neck with a message on a small card that said, "Keep this with you always. When you start to miss me, you can hug it and cry



et al.: Oakwood

# Witherington High School Writing Contest

into its soft fur. I love you, Rachel. I'll be with you always...in your heart." I can admit I began to cry. My mom had entered the room to see what I was doing. I told her everything, through my tears.

Maybe that is why these dreams have come about. I can't ever forget my grandma. Knowing she cared that this would hit me hard, it made me feel so much better to remember her through the game we played together when I was a child. The teddy bear is a comforting sight. Every time I see it—it is now placed on my shelf forever—I remember my grandma in her "good times," before she was sick. So, maybe this wasn't a treasure map and surprise that you would have wanted to find, but after you lose someone you love, you'll really wish you had found a treasure like my grandma's gift to me.

## Honorabe Mention

*Freeman Junior/Senior High School*

### The Bagger

*Angie Waltner*

Standing to my left  
    he wears a red pull-over apron,  
        tied at his waist.  
“PAPER, PLASTIC, OR BOX?”  
    “Anything will work, paper and plastic’s fine.”

He licks his second finger,  
    and swipes it downward at the top of the plastic sack.  
He diligently sets the “unbreakables” in first:  
    a box of Lucky Charms, bottle of grape juice, canned corn...  
Then gently laying the Doritos, eggs, and the Shurfresh wheat bread on top.  
    Keeping his arms shoulder-width apart,  
        he takes hold of the handles and sets the bag aside.

Under the counter to his left,  
    he grabs a stack of flat, folded paper bags.

Picking up the first bag  
    he takes the top edges of both sides,  
        brings his arms above his head  
        and back down in a quick swinging motion.

He places  
    Jack’s frozen pizzas, a pail of chocolate ice cream, and orange juice  
        puzzle-like in the opened bag.

He rolls the top edges of the bag  
    sealing the coldness.

Picking up the plastic sack by the handles in his left hand  
    and cradling the paper bag under his right arm—  
“WOULD YOU LIKE HELP OUT WITH THIS?”  
    “Oh, no! That’s what I brought my husband for.”

He hands the packages over—  
    “THANKS, HAVE A GOOD NIGHT.”