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REVIEW
XI

ST.
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The *Pecan Grove Review* staff would like to extend thanks to all who shared their literary works. The quality of the submissions received made the selection process very difficult; your talents are greatly appreciated.

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Poetry

Michael Lunberry

June 25, 2007: A Memorial for Dr. Jim Sauer

I found out the way a lot of us did,
the myriad us who merely passed briefly,
unforgettably,
beneath the gaze of your codifying eye, its
clarifying refractions of bewildering abstractions
landmarking for us a world of ideas,
making it navigable,

found out by a Monday morning e-mail obit I have had to
read twice over now, this news I might have known
was coming but didn't. How could I, could we,
in whom your remembered voice still resonates?
"What are the right questions? Why?"

You put us on the trail:
truth is not to stand on but reach for;
data, content, these are not for refuge,
God is blank, blank wrote blank, an EKG blanks blank;
start inside yourself, find a foothold in a question mark,
wrap your fingers around something solid,
start climbing;

recognize in yourself that primal thrust
upward, outward, beyond yourself,
that most human of desires, to transcend,
which blossoms prodigally into all others and
drives forward any life worth living
leaving a residual trail of created meaning
with an uncertain but clearly truthward trajectory—
in your case, with many new trails following,
learning.

I don't know how it was at the end. I imagine
long hours, a tedium of days, months
sunlight rising and falling like respiration in the window.
Time enough to prepare? Too much?
Finally, three days ago, another Gethsemane,
another broken Friday preceding
this week of low sky, this week of
uncertainty and umbrellas.
For now, the only an-
swers come as hopes:
that the medications helped;
that everyone had the humility
to say what needed to be said;
that you know we heard you;
that you are still climbing.

Dolores Garza

I'm Gone

Don't ask me, I ain't doin' no lame man's jig. Yo
Bowin' and scrapin' and all that jazz. No
Not me. I'm flyin'
Somewhere, someplace is where I'm tryin'

Where?
I don't know.

At an easy, groovy pace
A solid hot and out there place
Don't ask me, I ain't doin' no lame man's jig. Yo

Joe Tarver

and Plato wept...

it is a strange world we inhabit
a world of technology and answers
a world created by Lucretius and Euthyphro
with everyone ready and willing
to wrongly answer the questions
no Socrates is there to ask

it is a strange world indeed
full of pointless questions with pointless answers
and nothing ever really learned
nothing ever truly discovered
except our own mind-blowing ignorance
which we choose instead to ignore

a strange world this place we live in
for we are raised never to question
but we are taught the stories of the men that did
and we know them by heart
but we know they are simply fools
always asking, never answering
profoundly unhappy...
or so we assume

Amanda Guerra

Golden Goddess

I am a desert rose
Living in the harshest conditions.

I am the morning star,
Looked upon for guidance.

I am a saint,
Prayed to every night.
I am the harvest moon,
Bringing light to the world.

I am the soft rain,
That replenishes the earth.

I am the kiss of true love
Few will find me, but many will try.

I am a wild mare,
Never to be tamed.
I am the eternal flame,
Passion always burning.

I am oxygen,
Needed every waking moment.

I am freedom,
I live in every heart.

I am a legend,
My spirit will never die.

Leslie Plant

Titan

I was alone
On that beach.
Alone,
And the white fingers
Of the waves
Wrapped around my ankles.
The wet sand
Packed under my blistered feet
like a pedestal,
Or a lover's back.

I was a Titan
Alone
On the beach.
The sea,
Mount Olympus
Creeping up my thighs,
Turning me to stone.

Stoic and resolute
And then the recession ...
The sand giving way,
Sinking strength.

I was a shell
Amongst a thousand others
Broken by the grandeur
And the sea.

Yliana Flores

10 Ways of Looking at a Music Box

The box sat on top of the faded table, alone,
Smothered in dust.
Abandoned and silent.

She must have been bored one day,
She must have been a little curious,
When she found the silent music box.
She placed it in her lap.

The wood was smooth against his rough fingers,
Taking the tool, he carved into the freshly sanded wood.
As gently as his coarse hands allowed, he carved the dancer out.

Years of dust spilled over the edges, as she ran her hand over the surface.
She lightly ran a finger over each cut, tracing the dancer.

Using his bulky hands
he tenderly placed each gear in their proper place,
attaching the key to the side of the box.

She turned the key,
Winding the dusty gears,
Twisting them into place.

Carefully he placed the dancer on her stand underneath her gears,
Cautious, not to disturb her, he gently closed the lid.

She lay in the darkness, waiting in the perfect stance
Listening, for the turning of the key
And the ticking of the gears.
Waiting for her chance to dance.
Surrounding the empty room with music, she began to dance.
Turning on one leg, the other behind her in the air

Around and around, she danced
Until the music stopped, and once again, she just stood
Waiting never knowing when she would get to dance again.

Deborah Guidry

The Jetty

One fisherman
Half a mile out to sea
Grounds his feet on granite stones
Piled against the waves.

He throws out a line,
As patient as the philosophers,
Sun-etched wisdom
Creasing his face.
The still channel on his left,
The crashing waves on the right;
He is silent and unmoved
In a place of perpetual motion.

His shirt clings to his back
From the salt-drenched, gray air,
And the winds off the Gulf
Fill his ears like water in a shell.
The pull on his line
Calls to him, and his eyes,
Heavy with the silence of waiting,
Sharpen, drawing the sea into focus.

Whether the line slackens,
Or the battle begins,
His expression remains like the granite
Earthed beneath him,
Unchanging, solid, still.

Stoic fingers,
Stained with the scent of dead shrimp,
Make their minute adjustments
To the reel gripped in his fist.

The soft patter of rain
Creates a counter rhythm
To the faint thunder of waves
On the one side,
And on the other
The slow-moving wake of a ship
Passes through the channel,
Its originator long-gone.

Plato, too, waited for the idea of a chair
Before he sat.

Cyra S. Dumitru

Poetry opened a window in him, his
mother said

For student writers of all ages

He felt the window within, its vision and heft,
felt the pulse of the unspoken. Some days
he glimpsed his face in the closed glass,
smelled the mountains trying to break through,

heard splashing from a distant river.

One morning while he was reading a poem aloud,
a white bird flew through the classroom,
dropping feathers. The children dove

to the floor, claiming the fallen feathers,
and the window pane lifted inside the boy.
The view from the other side spoke
and he lifted his notebook and wrote.

Now the window stands open.
The boy can hear birds of changing colors
sing from the mountain trees,
and smell the small fish leaping in the river.

As he moves his pencil across the page,
words flow. Some days
he disappears. All you can see
is a notebook spinning with the breeze.

Rita Lopez

Pretty Lights

Dragging my step
rocks scrape the sidewalk
the sun almost sounds in its beaming
three more days for March said the radioman
only two miles left
everyday the books get heavier
every morning turning the corner at 7:10
I see her, sitting atop the sandy hill
with lacey flowery socks and the red dolly shoes
waiting for the bell to ring
with different colored hair bows
and daisy pins every time
and every morning the sun shines through her yellow curls
her chin in her hands her elbows on her knees
she watches me every morning from atop
I hold my breath and grip my books 'til my knuckles are white,
Like the radioman's song, the whole of Spring is in her face,
Her with the pretty lights over her head.

Rita Lopez

The Fig Tree

The day murmurs through the leaves

Each shade and shadow covers the fig tree shy

Little feet with torn sandals draw cursive in the rumbled earth beneath them

The watermelon dress dances as the sleeves brush the thick leaves

Pick the figs, drop the bucket by the well!

A voice strayed from beyond the torn screen door

The red ribbons and brown hair swing with sleep on the tattered hammock

As evening hangs its hues on the dry branches of the fig tree

Leslie Plant

Sketches

I am blonde
And all that it implies
With my
Too-short skirt
And my
Sailor speak
Drawing your attention
Away
From that which
I want
To keep
A tantrum and a tear
Encased in glass skin

She is frenetic.
Crazy
They call it
With pecan shaded ringlets
Around
The round of her face
Lackluster
From years
And years
Of lacking
Still a sketch
Of herself

Never filled in
She is an amazon
Jaw set square
In the jungle
With her chestnut mane
And the red fingernails
That claw their way
Out of the
Quicksand
And the baby's wrist
Held firmly
And a blind eye
To that which
Is lost
And lost

She was a red-head
And all that it implies
Muted fire
Girdled
In four-inch heels
How Great Thou Art
From the back pew
At church
And a cigarette
Snuck behind

A washing machine
With three marriages
And a few
Hung out on the line
To dry

Lily Skipper

Someone Else's Cigarette

Days are for somnambulence
inconsequential blocks of responsibility tied
to your fingertips

they dance when you move
but their squares lack grace.

I count my time by nights—
it's better that way

when we can let loose the repressions of today
and tomorrow
and yesterday

when resentment dissipates with

every mouthful of smoke we

blow away.

Andrew Fletcher
Amabote*

To
clop along
like Quixote,
with his
picayune eyes
and
wizened face,

in
search of
windmills
canvas-covered
like a
painter's easel,
the center
of an
artist's devotion.

To clop
after Quixote,
hoping that
he once
might
look back,
and be
my father.

**Latin: "I will love you."*

Deborah Guidry

The Rebel.

What did she rebel against
Sitting in her chair
In tenth-grade English?
Dark eyes flashed,
Her pen
Scurried across the page,
Throwing fantastic stories down
After the long-finished essay
Tossed carelessly under her chair.
“Never write incomplete sentences,”
Her teacher warned them.

Ever read Hemingway?
She thought, vehemence in her thoughts,
Mind racing with the blue ink, like blood,
Spreading its vitality across the page.
Fragments danced in her paragraphs,
Run-ons splayed through her thoughts,
Exclamation points, semi-colons scattered like flowers through her pieces—
Because school told her not to.

“I want to be a real writer,”
She declared in silence,
Her voice dead to any place but the page,
And threw off the shackles of school writing,
Following Faulkner, Kafka, Austen,
Pen scratching
Real writing on the page.

Stephanie Eve Vasquez

Untitled

Dear Friend

I Dance of handprints
 Crayola stains on white
 Craving for attention
 My creative mind explodes

I Dance of inspiration
 Glitter illuminates the painting
 Scribbled out X's and O's
 In light, you pointed to the road less traveled
 In darkness, that is what I took.

 With confidence, I know
 You look at me through
 Eyes of your own design
 Twisted trampled thoughts
 When I look at you
 I see eyes like mine

I Dance of endless opportunities
 My obsession
 Awakening desire to learn
 To dance the dance
 To understand, to be like
 You
 An administrator

Leslie Plant

Beautiful

I

I brushed long hair
Slowly,

Like a walk through daddy's hayfields.

The sound of horse-hair bristles
Releasing the lavender
Pat pat pat
On my knee

Swing low sweet chariot
We share a beat.

Mommy, am I beautiful?

A question

Set like a bubble on bow-tie lips.

I am gasping for air
Under its weight

Luminous, ominous weight

Beautiful

Yes

Like my past
Tossed about

On waves of her laughter,
Rolling on the lilting song.

II

Memories bounce and click,

One

Off the other.

Marbles,

Playthings that never were

Little, sharp shards of me,

Never of any harm.

They never snuck about

My fissures and veins,

Never hid in my jaw

And those thoughtless places.

No

They found their way

Out of me,

And Now

They are just my child's toy.

Recklessly and carelessly

Rolling in on the tide,

On the song

Shared.

Melissa Ann Romero

Broken Fear

From a distance,
I see the fear in my mother's eyes.
Fear of the aging that has left her so many scars.
A heart broken, only once,
But that was enough.
She looks to others but finds no comfort.
Banners pouring out words of regret
The stars that fall from it,
She fails to catch.

Tiffany Galvan

Why

As a child,
There are times you don't understand why—

Mommy, why is Tito in the hospital?
Mommy, why did Tito, Tio, and my friend go to heaven?
Mommy, why are people mean?
Mommy...
Mommy...
Why?

—Someday you'll understand why—
Why people hate people.
People love people.
Why people discriminate.
People communicate.
Or don't.

Why people—
Talk to one another.
Listen to each other.
Listen.
Listen.

As a twenty-one year old,
On the brink of adulthood,
There are times you don't understand why
But instead of asking why—

I listen.

I listen.

To the people who hate people,
People who love people,
People who discriminate,
People who communicate,
Or don't.

—Talk to one another.

Listen to each other.

Love one another.

Listen to the why,

Behind the why.

Michelle Salazar
Mother's Hands

She wakes day to day
Responsibilities tugging at her arm
The aroma of *café* sufficiently diffuses the air

Seeping into the senses that start the morning
"A *trabajar*"
She reminds herself

Of the life lesson her padres once taught her
She studies her hands
Massaging the pain;

Beginning stages of arthritis
She recounts *los labores*
Fields of Cotton, Cabbage, y *Nueces*

For over thirty years
She has picked
And her hands thirty years worn.

She wakes day to day
Responsibilities tugging at her arm
The aroma of *café* sufficiently diffuses the air

Seeping into the senses that start the morning

"*A trabajar*"

She reminds herself

Of the life lesson her padres once taught her

She studies her hands

Massaging the pain;

Beginning stages of arthritis

She recounts *los labores*

Fields of Cotton, Cabbage, y *Nueces*

For over thirty years

She has picked

And her hands thirty years worn.

Hunched over she picks the shells

Shells that prick between the new crop of

Alone she sits, picking.

Packing

Another shipment out

And still her hands labor

Her hands

Never quite as delicate,

But Strong with endurance.

Rough to the touch
But gentle with love.
Tears have soaked through
Cuts have scarred
Through the trials,
Her hands have provided.

Amanda Guerra

Inch Worm

The little inch worm climbs
A lonely green vine
To reach the blooming flower
His dream he hopes to find.

Slowly he moves
Inch by Inch
Each contraction
Seems like a cinch
Little do you know
It's a very big job
For a little inch worm
He may even sob.

Trying to see the flower
The sun blinds his eyes
So he closes them tight
Inching and inching he sighs.

Unsure it's still there
He hopes he's wrong
He must continue to inch,
Inch along.

Finally the top is clear as day
But where is the flower?
It wilted, wilted away.

No dream to taste
No sweetness to smell
All his time wasted
Gone to Hell.

Deborah Guidry

Old Woman Tending the Birds in her Garden

A ropey braid of wiry hair
Turned silver-gray with years,
Crowns her head like a veil
And trails down her back.

A bridal queen
In everyday regalia—
Straw hat, gloves,
Overalls and toe-holed tennis shoes—
Her only scepter a hand shovel
Caked in rich soil,
Her court nothing but sparrows
Hopping from branch to branch,
Bringing out the laugh lines
At the pool's edge of her eyes.
Her hands,
River-veined with time,
Reach up to fill the feeder,
Brushing the edge of honeysuckle
Grown golden and fragrant with her care.

It's as if she's always been this way,
Frozen in time,
A nymph, mothered and grandmothered,

As eternal as the rocks in her garden,
Unceasing,
Unending,
Unchanged.

Amanda Soto

Snow Falling Everywhere

The night was cold and dark.

Snow

began

to fall

slowly

softly

illuminating

the night

sky

landing

upon my

cheeks

and hair.

The smell of snow is in the air.

Christina Scarborough

I Know I Must Say Goodbye

Saying goodbye has been
weighing heavily on my mind.
The years we have spent together,
constantly growing,
have made such an impact.
There is a softness to you
that is difficult to let go of,
having become such a big part of me,
always clinging at my side.

But I know I must say goodbye to you
for the sake of my heart
and my new pair of jeans.
As well as for my family who have all
been deeply troubled,
seeing you constantly hanging around.
“This is not healthy for you!” they say,
as I try to shield you from them
and deny the truth.

But I know I have to get rid of you
with a succession of rabbit food,
or perhaps an eating disorder.
I don't know what will be
left of me once you're gone.
But today I will stand ... and squat,

and stand and squat,
turning my back on you forever.

I cannot allow our relationship
to expand any further.
Though, I know your absence will be hard on me.
Please don't resist
as you gradually vanish from my side
until all that is left are
lingering memories of saturated fats.

Melody R. Mejia

Music and Time

Sweet sounds of memories play a tune in my lonely ears
The beats of my heart plus my surroundings create a movement,
a routine: back and forth to come over me
back and forth into my past and present

Lips move to the detection of a catchy harmony,
making a lip singing almost too convincing.
Songs that make the moves natural,
almost too natural
The way you held my hand and guided me...

The floor our limit,
The light our guide,
The song our cue.

A sidestep of tragedy,
A turn of problems,
A dip of tears.

The moon shining upon the dance floor of instrumental life
Your eyes glistened,
as I hummed the song that made you cry.

Do you remember the old times?
Do you remember the steps?
Do you remember the tune we sang...

as we let go and let the music fade?
As we let go and let the lights dim out,
your eyes dry up.

Do you remember hearing time take over the turntable,
grab the mic, sing us off the dance floor...
forced us to sit and watch?

I do.
I know the song oh too well,
and I await your return.
Your shiny shoes, your hair gelled back.
Your bright eyes,
the ones that helped me realize you did hurt,
you did love.

And I await,
in hopes of replaying this song,
Our hit.
Our memories.

The ones we had danced to.
Fell to.
Sung to.

The ones that made my legs numb,
your feet light...
and made us both professionals.

Lorenzo Nichols
Sundial

The radiance
From the streetlight
Is my sun
Before it wakes

It casts my shadow
A crescent moon
Fast forward counterclockwise
Against the hard pebbled walk

Meeting lonely mist
I notice the sundial
We've created

Half a day
Six seconds long

Joe Tarver

Untitled by Happenstance

Lying awake at night
Distant thoughts
A simple payment
Transforms
suddenly
Uncertain future
Uncertain events
And who to blame
Me

I know what I need to do
I know what I need to do
I know I need to do it
I know I need to do it
Why am I not doing it
Why
Why
Me

And from essential
Lack of necessary
Maturity
Immaturity sets in
I just want
Someone to

Hold me
And tell me
Everything
Will be Alright

Joe Tarver

The Gallant Equilibrium

I held the door for a woman back in 1807.

She batted her eyelashes and thanked me for my kindness.

I held the door for a woman back in 1907.

She fumed, steamed, and damn near struck me.

I held the door for a woman back in 2007.

She noticed only long enough to throw a 'thanks' over a shoulder.

And the first asked the second:

"Why would you be so rude?"

And the second asked the first:

"Why let him oppress you?"

And the third said simply:

"Would you two shut up?"

"You're drowning out my iPod..."

Amanda Tillman

Unanswered Prayer

I have known the hand of man
From waltzing walk to lilting stand
An' from those intrigues I would be
A wall's flower for eternity.
From striding feet and laugh lips,
To sonorous voice and thrusting hips;
I want no man who plain can give
All that is small for one to live.

I mourn the partner faded away,
Lost deep among the ruins' decay
Who held my hand, of two deft feet,
Twain painters' eye and science sweet.
Who patronages, the stage, her call,
Kin to dusky notes and political falls.
In his hands, like all true gentleman,
Carnal knowledge of the poets' pen.

Marian Haddad

A Psalm for a Mother

Mother Mary, first mother, first light,
light in darkness, come to us. Our own mothers –
far away. Past light. Who is counting
the stars? The days? A child, perhaps, will
remember the odd night where Mother's voice
rang out as if afraid, or wounded. A call for us
to come. And I came, Mother, you standing
at the window. Mother, the wonderment of
a child then, you there, surprised by light.
Looking up at a star you pointed out. Calling
me to see. Wonder-ment and worship,
the star woke you into light, after a night of fear,
of wondering, after a night filled with the lost
look in your eye. Mother, the only things, I know
that heal, include light, light from light, and stars
and the Maker of them. I pray with you here
under a lit sky, I know you are there, Mother,
listening – among stars.

Rita Lopez

Walk

Weary in the face, frost on gloves and hat;
The shivers came, not from the shrill cold but from
Thoughts of walking—
Coins in one pocket, keys in another;
She built up the whole story as she
Wrinkled the lace on her sleeves.
I, at the foot of the steps only listened to her
Voice as she formed smoke with her breath.
Words stumbled through my lips but
Formed no plea or reply.
She shut the door and I walked away;
Weary in the face,
Coins in one pocket, ring in the other.

Cyra S. Dumitru

Ruth and the Grounding of God

My eyes search the faces of those who walk the long road
and I ask: where is the god greater than any homeland,
where is the god big enough to hold us all?

Would such a god live in the sword
of this passing soldier, in this grove
of olive trees, in the next horizon?

As dirt thickens my homeless feet,
a fire rises through dust, through my flesh,
more knowing than husband's heat:

suddenly I understand that wherever I go I am home --

God lives in the water that soothes our feet and
God lives in the clay which forms this cup.
If the bottom falls out of my bucket,

there is the plenty contained by the same god
who dwells in my own cupped hands,
in the hands of every thirsty traveler, every refugee.

Naomi and all her people are my people.
Every barren field and every green is homeland,
every horizon the center of God's shining world.

H. Palmer Hall

The Africa of Our Nightmares

“What nature doesn’t do to us
Will be done by our fellow man.”

—The Kingston Trio, fifty years ago

Four days, one hundred more people killed
in Kenya. The Rift Valley, home of Eve,
the woman who birthed us all, is a killing field.

Our ancient home, we who stand and say “I,”
suffers still for the sin of Adam’s Fall—an old
metaphor to explain why we suffer, why we die.

Not far away lie southern Sudan and Darfur, Uganda—
people herded into camps, exterminated. Cain kills
Abel all over again. Not just in Africa, not at all:

We have all had our turn under the eye, have slain
others in Guatemala, Gettysburg, Auschwitz, Santo
Domingo, Baghdad, Afghanistan: we are “Man.”

“Saul has killed his thousands; David his ten thousands”:
Philistines, Palestinians, Israelis, American Indians,
African Americans. James Byrd, Jr., died for our sins

and Matthew Sheppard and that boy or girl you saw
in uniform, headed for Iraq or, years ago, Vietnam,
now dead, maimed, disfigured. Weep, weep for all.

“A’—In Adam’s fall / We sinned all”—learned
over and over again, again, again. The staying strength
of metaphor, memory of old gods, of villages burned.

H. Palmer Hall

Not the Africa of Our Dreams

We say we care, make all the right and proper sounds,
pour money afterwards into rescue work, negotiate—
negotiate, talk the problems, talk and talk, all around

as if reason must and can prevail. Kikuyus and Luos
wander the streets of towns in the mother Rift, hate,
throw flaming tires and Molotov cocktails onto the roads.

Mobs move, killing, from house to house in Naivasha,
trap each other, die in homes made from packing crates.
The police commander says, "They were of school age."

We read newspapers, shudder, cannot bear to use the word
"savage." Beyond that, we know word-wounds suppurate
like infected gashes from germ-infested silvery swords.

Television shows us this: Kenya in flames. The same
country that went first into the gate, we knew would not hesitate
to win the civilization race, the famous, on-going uplift game—

out front, at least, that is, for the Africa of our daily dreams, the Africa of lions and elephants, of seabirds, storks and skates of ostriches, wart hogs, vervets and wildebeest. It seems

Kenya is no more civilized than, than ... us. In their wars they fight amongst themselves, tribal stuff. They prate about democracy in action like we who export war like cars.

Michael Lunbery

Tour of a Distant Apocalypse

*Entonces vi la cara de la voz
que toda la noche había hablado.*

Follow me down buried halls
lit by yellow skeleton light,
igneous paving mottled white,
low carbonized catacomb walls.

Don't mind the rattle in the drains;
engines overhead send roots
in blind subterranean pursuit
of hollow lithospheric veins.

That floating face you sometimes see
(which won't survive your photographs)
was a god—until the aftermath
of smoke dried up our piety

and left us blind encapsuled clouds
of breath and cooled memorious blood
beneath the fields of oily mud
that drowned the rage-bewildered crowds.

Then return and at your leisure say
if only fools would live this way.

Leslie Shively

Breakfast at Al Asad

*Iraqi desert at night;
Scheherazade
morning in moonlight*

Wind, icy nooks and crannies
inside hollows in my flak jacket,
fingers peeling from cold metal
an M16 slung heavily, thumping
across my back.

Sand, a dark moonscape pockmarked
with footprints and the shadows and piles
of old rubble. New construction promises
guarded with Cement, gleaming blue under
the desert moon.

Gravel, crunching quickly underneath
boots toward the generator drone,
leading me past the Light, a sodium
brightness casting out a perimeter
of false security.

Galley, a yellowing linoleum oasis
of plastic tablecloths and plastic chairs
hidden behind a maze of barriers.
Djibouti sentinels; uniforms askew,
nod smiling.

Juice, tart and sweet in its waxy container
sucked through a straw in the top with
scrambled and a crisp twenty minutes
of News; offered with thankfulness
and Hope.

Leslie Shively

Iranian Summer

*Memories pause
between my hands
Iran; now Iraq
with an M16*

Slipping out of the compound,
blacktop sticky hot on barefoot soles;
kids running along Reza Avenue.

Laughing and eating spicy
Persian rice; growing up
Christian, Muslim and Jew.

Haggling in the bazaar,
among blue jeans and dresses;
an occasional chador.

Vendors selling green plums,
crusty with sea salt
from door to door.

Picking cherries in the back yard;
watching sand color the sky yellow --
ahead of the storm

These are my memories of Tehran
without the terrorism
of fundamentalist reform.

Leslie Shively

Winter in Golistan

*snowflakes crack
in the silence of
the first blizzard*

Camels nibbled the last of the rose bushes
tumbling over the compound wall
long ago

Brisk December winds chattered the sand
blowing 'cross a two-storey spider glass
window

Mah'mad bustled about in the kitchen
clanking pots of steamed rice, his teapot
whistled low

A single street lamp flickered on in the dusk
its watery light signaling finally,
finally snow

Christine Duchouquette

Spider Web

The knotted spider web x X x X x landmine
camouflaged in the wilderness

The grasshopper plays his part
in nature's life cycle

Circles of life and death are completed
millions of times each day

Unfortunate grasshopper, he will never sing his melody again
the violin on his fragile leg will be eternally silenced
his lifesong will cease to play with a wave of the widow's baton

Amanda Guerra

Take Your Day

Committers of hypocrisy,
Take your day.
Raise your fist in glory,
Fix the games you play.
The dealer is keeping tabs,
He knows the amount you'll pay.
He'll keep an eye on you,
Don't try to get away.

I see you at your podium,
Making promises for today.
Planning out a war,
That left us in dismay.
With the facts you followed,
You lead the nation astray.
Hold your head up high,
Because you don't know what to say.

You speak of freedom,
Yet all we see is decay.
You tell the troops it's almost over,
And it will all be okay.
Mothers should hold their sons,
But instead they buy funeral bouquets.

You committer of hypocrisy,
They know your foul play.
We're on your footsteps,
You better start to pray.
Pass the laws you want,
We'll change them anyway.
So enjoy your last years in office
And take your day.

Kelly Gallo

The Outlets

Castles of Commercialism

Gleam outside the town.

They guard the vaults of the rich,

So spread the word around!

The Fortresses of Funds

Stand so strong and tall

Who dare challenge their might?

For it is he who will surly fall.

Now the keeps are open!!

The serfs and peasants flock,

To take the pretty shiny goods,

Leaving behind their hard earned stock.

The walls are now complete,

And the roads have been paved,

As gold as gold can be...

Yet people take caution, and remember

That all castles of made of sand,

Must slip into the sea... eventually;

And the Voodoo Child's words may come true,

You see...

All the gold in the world cannot buy peace of mind,

A lesson of course to be learned in time,

When the serfs look back to see the shadows,

Of the castles left behind...

Valeria Escobedo

Abuelito

Hugging the pillow at 3 a.m.
I lay in a moist puddle of realization.
Abuelito Don Chuy had passed.
Death would not settle in my head,
it bounced around trying to find acceptance.

As a child, I remember taking naps
with him in the afternoons.
Although I was so young, when I awoke,
I would carefully synchronize my breaths
with his so that we would always be together—
on the same pillow.

I was able to say goodbye to
him one last time in early March.
His bright blue eyes looked at me
Differently that evening,
As he asked me to adjust
the pillow on the bed he had
been confined to for a year.

"Te quiero mucho, Abuelito"

My last words were sealed with a final hug.
Every night, my head rests on my pillow
serving as the treasure chest of memories
that happily rest in my dreams with him.
Our hearts will always beat together.

Kelly Gallo

The Roman Soldier

Out in the wilderness a dog howled.
The Roman Soldier stooped low,
To pick up the helmet of his lost friend.
He looked into the trees hoping, wishing for light.
The smell of death trickled up to his nose,
And he felt he was being watched.

... He knew he was being watched.

Slowly walking backwards to camp,
Afraid to turn his back in fear of death,
The soldier gazed down at the bodies strewn across,
The cold , hard , Ground....
Wishing he were one...
Wishing it were over...

This was to be Rome!!!
This camp, he thought,
Was to light the way into the darkness.
(It seemed now the light had been extinguished)
And now he was lost in the forest of death.
The Glory of Rome rarely passed his mind.
It seemed so distant to him.
This soldier had only one thing on his mind.
FEAR...
The whole forest was that of fear....
Nothing Else.
He and his men, all could only think of fear.

They feared death...
...and then death came.
Like moments from a nightmare they came.
The soldiers, armed to the brim with shiny metals,
Had no chance.
They were, afraid... petrified, not only that,
But lost.
Lost in the forest of death,
For the glory of something so distant,
As if it were only a dream...
Lost in time.

Christine Duchouquette

History

The life, the history
Of *los indígenas*
Is sometimes skewed, so wrong
Far from the truth-romanticized

I took not a breath during their trying times
But perhaps they never eluded their struggle
Living in a home designated by the government
Like a working bee under the Queen's jurisdiction

The American Indians
They are our true forefathers
Territorial Europe invades and suddenly
I seek to know the past of the mestizos

Tell me about your mother
Your grandmother... Mother Earth
Where is the strength of these people?
It is in every fiery set of hazelnut eyes

Theirs is not a tale for the light-hearted
It is one full of pain and suffering
Endurance and history
A victory chiseled in blood

Jesus J. Sanchez

Spring of 1659

It has remained so, beneath the heavy sediments of time, layer upon layer of rubble, shades of grays and pinks, oranges and browns, sandwich what I dreamt was once a flourishing world, its face warmed by a much younger sun,

Here, my finger touches dusty centuries, scores the very matrix of lifetimes, the babble of bard-borne joy and grief, extinguished forever: I scrape, and scrape, scrape away the limestone, the earthy bone that holds my memories fast,

There! The dark band, do you see it? A pattern without replicate. Across 50 millennia, this precise gold-green shade occurs only here, in the band that corresponds to the year 1659: this was in her lifetime, or rather, at its end...

*... Not long, not long, the clock but puerile, that cool Spring of 1659,
I kissed your shadow-rippled silk, as you raced downhill towards the quarry
from whose stones Jericho was rebuilt, upon the grave of that humble protector,
who worshiped your smiling eyes,*

*I walked with you then, saw your foot, porcelain and delicate, press lightly upon
the soft clay earth, hair in your lovely face, kissing the wind, how you wore a green
dress, clover in hair, and a clump of selfheal grasped in hand; you were laughing
when you died,*

*Oh yes, I saw your green eyes fade to gray, and pressed your lips
with mine just before Death did the same...*

...I buried her there, in the golden green amidst the clarendon sediment that sits matched to the year,
1659.

Clayton Billadeau

Old Toes:

Slugs and Cheetahs

A snow-topped warrior stands crippled,

crooked, stable on a cane,

looking out across a shifting lake,

below an immortal mountain.

From the deck of his constructed home

he thinks of the days

when he moved—

the wind held the hands of fire

when he devoured the instable hunger of his youth.

Amanda Tillman

Tintinnabulum

Her name is written in my wrist
The casual flutter of eye lashes
And slow, lasting smile

Her hair was honey gold, and
Dirty brown, but her eyes,
Were swamp grass green.

She spoke to me in cautious tones,
Never quite as young, her few
years betrayed her, too.

She never ran, or rang, or rung,
Waiting with babies and tea,
On a life not allowed.

I watched her true rise and fall,
As scenery, movie, favorite fad;
Sand through my hands.

I never had the words to tell—
They faded with flashes—she
Was my temple bell.

Jessica Ramirez

Lost in a Dream

What I wanted was to find you
Somewhere in the middle of the ocean
Standing on water to guide men to their next destination

So I ran and I flew
To where the sky converges with the sea

What I needed was to touch you
But a dove flew when I reached out
And you were gone

So I walked on water
And right into a bar suffused with smoke

What I needed was for you to find me
In the shadows of crowds
To lead me away from suffocation

So I made happiness flow through me
With a smile that I made shine to guide you

What I needed was for you to touch me
But you came after I forgot my reason for smiling
And you still reached in the obscurity to find me

So I awoke in my room
Where you were nowhere to be found ...

Andrew Fletcher

The Widow Returns to the House

Of silence, sitting by the windowsill
And praying to the cadence of the rain;
Frail hands, worn and wrinkled, folded closed upon a cross
As though a flower pressed into a human book.

It keeps her place, in life and story;
Oftentimes she'll look toward her garden
To a marker as sacred in a book as old
And she'll smile quietly.

A grave neglected in the rain
Silently waiting for a friend
That soon will come, in tired, patient time,
An old book tattered, fraying, slowly closing;
Fine.

Valeria Escobedo

While on a Bench in London

The fog fills the sky of white
the wind howls to and fro
cold droplets of rain smack against the pavement
umbrellas bounce their way down the busy street

Standing tall and strong,
Its tarnished gold walls reflect on the Thames
Each reflection just as dazzling as the next
My eyes are filled with splendor

Like a grandfather to other buildings
It announces its authority
with each ring from Big Ben
The sound echoes through the city

The hands of its clock
Tell the story of time, past and present
Time cherished and wasted
Its essence has stolen my heart forever

Cristina D. Gonzalez

Not Soft Exactly

A R C H I N G.

Exhausted on a day of rest,
He stretches back across mon lit,
Cream skin
 pairing nicely with
White sheets.

(He claims that he reads fortunes from the cracks along my ceiling
 —a lovely trick—
But not the why I keep him.)

Like a cat he arches back,
Wrists posed for binding to mon lit,
But content am I to watch youth's skin
Grow taut for games
Of light and shadow.

Melody R. Mejia
Letters of Us

Paper cuts upon my heart
As I tear open miles of letters.
Letters, to make up the distance that came between us.
Months spent trying to master the method of receiving.
Failed upon the art of giving and succeeding.

Dry tongue.
Juicy lips.
Each letter replied to, sealed with a kiss.
Replied, to make up for all the ink wasted upon my senseless heart

My first grade self clinging, to the crumbled college letters.
Words like slot machines,
spinning on pages and endless stationary,
words trying to connect.

And then,
IT
HITS
ME

Jackpot...!

You simply,
You simply miss me.

Your signature faked upon each letter,
Duplicated on each page.
Your carbon copies do quite a number on me.

Fiction

Diane Bertrand

Trajectory

I look outside. I can hear the faint noise of those who can't wait until midnight.

And I tell myself not to go there, but every New Year's Eve, the fireworks' noise throws open a door to my past. I am forced again by the danger to return. I remember when we walked through the neighborhood where I lived when I was sixteen.

Perez Street was a familiar area to both Sergio and me. That late night the street seemed friendlier because our neighbors, their extended families, and various compadres had gathered on front porches, sidewalks, and along the curbs in front of their homes lighting fireworks, cracking open beers and yelling out for the New Year like it was a long lost friend.

Sergio and I were trying to act confident as we walked down the street. We had hoped that Nikki, the blondie who lived in the mysterious house on the corner, had invited over that big-chested cousin of hers. Once Sergio and I had been just freshmen and felt inadequate around girls like Nikki and her cousin, Pamela. That year we had driver's licenses, we were guys who knew the way high school worked, knew how to talk to girls—well, we thought so, anyway.

"Don't blow it," Sergio told me as we left his yard and walked down the street. "You always use big words. Nikki says you make her feel stupid."

"It's not Nikki I want to impress," I said. "You can have Nikki. I like to talk to Pamela."

“Well no woman wants you talking like a dictionary, Raymond, so keep it real, okay?”

That’s the way it was that night—the two of us joking. We had stopped to make fun of a little boy trying to get his sparklers to light. Every time his dad took a step closer with his cigarette lighter, the little boy’s hand shook harder. When the sparkler finally lit up and silver sparks danced around his fingers, the boy dropped the thing on the street.

Sergio laughed so hard, it made me keep laughing too.

Whole packs of firecrackers exploded like machine guns. Bottle rockets fizzled into the smoky skies. Noisy waves of fireworks and people screamed, “Happy New Year” all along the neighborhood.

“We missed the chance to kiss the girls,” Sergio yelled.

“You walk too slow!” I yelled back, the noise of the midnight rattle around us almost deafening. “Happy New Year! Happy new Year!”

I still tell myself that I actually heard a shot of silence within the fireworks’ noise. From every direction sparkled colors appeared like arrows.

Did Sergio grab me or did I grab him? Still I don’t know but we grappled together arm in arm, his body an uninvited weight against my chest and shoulders.

I thought he was kidding around. Then his life seeped across my hands in dark, sticky blood. Whoever shot off a gun into the air to celebrate a new year had no clue.

Everything blurs up at that point. The ambulance wails into the neighborhood. Sergio’s mom pulling his body from my

arms with screams that echo my own.

Then my ten year old son tugs on my arm. "Please, dad, why can't I go over to Wes's house tonight? His dad bought firecrackers for us to pop."

I look down and see a son I named Sergio. I want to tell him why. I want to explain how bullets fall from the sky on New Year's Eve disguised within a firecracker's noise.

I shake my head at my son; as I do every New Year's Eve night since that moment I realized Sergio was dead in my arms, and that trajectory is a learned principle.

Continuing to keep the vigil, I lock Sergio and his two sisters indoors where I can stay watchful; protecting them from any misguided crack, whistle or shot.

Dominique Vargas

Díoltas: Retribution

March 15, 1974

The End

Deaglan reflected for a moment on his murderous life and asked God for forgiveness. As the police broke down the front doors of the headquarters and rushed barriers he took a cigar from his pocket and lit it, wishing he could go to confession one last time. His life had been full of trips to the confessional booth. Each time he confessed to crimes of necessity, and now at the end of his life he had committed his first intentional crime of revenge.

June 8, 1954

The Prelude

His earliest memories were of his beautiful dark Irish mother humming out a passage before playing it through on her cello. Eva always practiced in secret. Music was the only thing she had left from her life before she was married. She came from a well connected, old British family with ancestral land grants in Ireland. Eva was raised as an accomplished young woman; she spoke several languages and loved music. She married Deaglan's father, Thomas MacAfee when they were both very young. He promised her happiness and freedom in America. However, Thomas spent his life trying to quench a thirst for alcohol but never succeeded. He was an angry man that focused all of his frustration on his wife and son.

August 20, 1964 6 p.m.

The Beginning

His first crime had been an act of passion. He was fourteen when he found himself standing next to his mother's darkly finished Italian cello, which had until very recently been in one piece. He knew what would happen next and he knew every bruise on his frail mother was his fault. Daydreaming had always been his downfall, but today his mother was the one who would pay for his inability to focus. He had been staring out the window at the sky instead of watching the street for his father's dirty visage stalking into the apartment building. His father had lost another in a string of many dead end assembly-line jobs and was simply coming home to take the rent money from one of Eva's many hiding places to finance his next binge.

Without warning, he burst through the door and immediately began to shout insults at Eva. Anger radiated from him as he ripped the cello from her hands and smashed it repeatedly on every available surface in the room. Then he grabbed her and shouted over her sobs and screams.

"Deaglan, go to your room!" she said between sobs. Even when she was in pain, her son always came first. That thought was the last coherent one that he had for some time. The world went grey and there was no sound for several moments. When the room came back into focus he realized that he was standing over his father's body. In his hand was the neck and scroll of the cello and it was covered in the same dark red liquid that now oozed from his father's crown. His mother was

crumpled in the corner still sobbing and when he tried to approach her she shrank away. He attempted to console her but she ran into her bedroom and shut the door. Deaglan was still too numb with shock to even feel hurt by her actions.

September 30, 1959

Union Work

Seamus Den, the old man who ran the union at the meat-packing plant was always hiring boys to come run errands for him. At nine the only thing Deaglan could trust was the \$10 a week that the old man gave him for running the pork chops, mutton, veal and sausages to their respective sides of town. That money always went to his mother to replace what his father drank away. Every week the same deliveries went to the same places but he knew that the packages could not have contained meat. They were neither cold nor heavy, but he never asked what was in them. It was old man Den's business, and questioning that would be questioning the money his mother desperately needed. Despite the secrecy Deaglan came to think of the Union as his family and Den as his father. The factory was more of a home than the flat ever could be.

The men there adopted Deaglan as their own, a younger brother perhaps and they were very protective of him. Each man shook his head at the way Thomas MacAfee treated his family. So they took it upon themselves to help Deaglan's mother raise him. They taught him the difference between right and wrong,

and how to take care of his family. The Union drew them together as sons of Erin and as brothers against a dangerous world.

August 20, 1964 8:28 p.m.

The Cover Up

Deaglan backed away from his father's body and ran from the room, which was now eerily quiet, to the factory. When old man Den saw Deaglan he beamed with pride however, as Deaglan breathlessly told him what had just happened at home, Den's expression changed. He and a few of the union men went back with Deaglan and helped him clean up the mess and dispose of the body. He even took time to talk to his mother, and though Deaglan could not understand their flowing Gaelic he knew that she would soon see that they were better off.

August 21, 1964 3:11 a.m.

The Purpose of the Union

Den believed that Deaglan had become a man the night his father died. As a man and a member of the Union he deserved to know the extent of the organization. The union was a cover for a network of Irish men involved in a counter movement against the mob, mafia, and even the police force. The packages that Deaglan and the other boys delivered were often money and weapon exchanges throughout the network. Den used young boys in order to avoid suspicion.

December 21, 1966

Christmas

Den took care of Deaglan and promoted him within the Union. Deaglan quit school the same year his father "disappeared" yet he was making more money than he could at a full time job. He bought his mother a new cello for Christmas that year.

February 26, 1967

The Breaking Point

Reporters and police swarmed a riot scene. The previous night had seen the worst violence between the Italians and the Irish in years. Each side suffered heavy losses and an even dozen cops were killed.

March 2, 1967

The Meeting

It had been raining for nearly two weeks. Den was to meet with the head of the Italians in order to discuss the sharp rise in violence that had resulted in the street riot. Deaglan and the union boys were tense and Den looked older with each passing day.

March 15, 1967

The Ides of March I

Den never came back from the meeting. The only man to survive was Aidan Gillpatrick, and he came back with a story

of shocking blood shed and betrayal. They were all ambushed by the Russian mob. Den and the Italians were outnumbered and unprepared.

July 2, 1970

Change in Leadership

After a few days of confusion and near chaos, Aidan was finally determined to be Seamus Den's successor. Aidan was not the charitable generous father figure that Den had been. He ran the union like the mob and changed the once tight knit family into a loose network of thugs always looking over their shoulders expecting to be betrayed. He was ruthless and handed out punishments more often than fair cuts.

October 7, 1972

Questioning Authority

Deaglan was not the first to entertain the possibility of a conspiracy, but he was the only one smart enough to keep his mouth shut about it. The only positive thing that came out of his father's death was his ability to keep things to himself. No visible emotion: cool, calm and aloof.

January 3, 1974

Conspiracy

Deaglan was however, the first to find actual proof of a conspiracy. Over four years of meetings in dodgy pubs and back alleys with informants that wished to hide their identities

his suspicions were confirmed. Aidan had made a deal with the Russian Mob and he gave them the information that led to the deaths of several important people in both the Italian mafia and the Irish Union, including old man Den.

March 15, 1974 7:14 p.m.

The Warning

Deaglan had started to approach men who were loyal to Den in the old days of the Union with his evidence against Aidan. Soon they would be able to make their move. He contemplated all of this as he walked home. He still lived with his mother but he had managed to procure a larger flat with a separate room just for Eva's music. As soon as Deaglan turned the corner he knew something was wrong. She always practiced in the evenings and Deaglan could count on the yellow glow of the lamp from the window and soft notes drifting down to the street. Tonight he was greeted with silence and darkness. He ran upstairs to the apartment door and found it ajar. He went straight to the music room and turned on the light. The lamp illuminated a scene of horror that would haunt Deaglan for the rest of his life. His mother's sheet music was ripped and strewn over the floor. Her cello was tossed in a corner with two strings broken and his poor beautiful mother was dead. Her body rested upon the music that she so dearly loved. A deep crimson seeped from her chest and erased the delicate notes from the pages. Deaglan turned from the scene, fell to his knees and vomited violently in the wastebasket. When he could stand again he gazed again at his mother and noticed a note tacked to her music stand. It was short and disgustingly clear.

“Forget Den. – AG” He had the audacity to sign his name to it. Deaglan decided at that moment that Aidan Gillpatrick’s final breaths would be drawn in excruciating pain.

Before he left the flat for what would be the last time, he cleaned his mother’s body and wrapped her in a white sheet. He put her in her bed and adored her with the lilies that she grew in a window box.

March 15, 1974 11:48 p.m.

The Ides of March II

On his way out of the apartment he loaded the revolver that old man Den had given him so many years before and picked up his wooden baseball bat. He calmly walked to the factory and into the union headquarters. Many of the men from the early days simply looked the other way as he entered. The ensuing violence was indescribable. In his wake he left men screaming pain with tears streaming down their faces. Human blood mixed with vats of pig blood as men fell to the ground. Teeth and pieces of flesh that Deaglan removed from each conspirator with his hands, his bat, and any carving knife he could get his hands on, tainted hundreds of pounds of ground sausage. Deaglan didn’t bother with secrecy and soon, concerned by the gun shots and yelling, someone down the street called the police.

Ever since he assumed power, Aidan had begun to build an elite inner circle which was consisted of men completely loyal to him. Deaglan took them all with powerful swings and raw rage. They did not stand a chance. However, Aidan was so confident that he could not be touched that he had not bothered to flee. Even when the approaching police sirens grew louder and

the negotiator began to bellow demands for surrender. When Deaglan entered the office unscathed, Aidan was shocked. He tried to flee but Deaglan walked around the desk and delivered a swift blow to his knees knocking him to the floor screaming in pain. The crunch of shattering knee caps echoed through the office. There was no honor in Aidan Gillpatrick's death. With a single shot Deaglan silenced his pathetically whimpered excuses.

March 15, 1974

The End

Deaglan sat in the large leather chair behind the Aidan's desk and asked God for forgiveness. As the police broke down the doors he put his bat on the desk and held a cigar in one hand and his revolver in the other. The State Police Troopers asked no questions after they demanded that he lower his weapon. Deaglan MacAfee let them shoot. No one would ever know his story or speak his name again.

Lily Skipper

She Was Always Waiting

The heat was oppressive, even in January. At night I'd wander aimlessly around the house, stripped to my underclothes. The fans were always on, the incessant whirring a familiar background noise. It was cooler outside, of course, but inside it was like the house had been drinking the heat all day, sucking it up as if it stopped, even for a moment, the wood would crumble into dust. It was a Sylvia Plath heat, the hell fire of our discontent.

I remember being attracted to her even then. The heat only seemed to intensify emotions. Lazily I drifted through the days, pulling my consciousness through curtains of humidity and all the while nursing a burning passion somewhere deep within my chest. I could feel it welling out of me, like a light that I had to keep covered lest it blind eyes for which it was never meant. It followed me everywhere; from store to store, library to library, coffee house to coffee house--day to day. I could hear it in the lyrics of Tom Waits and Gregorian Chants alike, a faint whisper hovering softly behind their voices. It was that little black speck at the corner of my eye on which I can never quite focus. On slow days at work, I'd pull out a book, and there it would be, printed on the page in Dostoyevski, Fowles, Hesse.

Eventually, I learned to live with it, but my eyes would trail her whenever she came into the store. I'd watch her hips sway through the comics, her mid-size breasts move seductively when she'd walk to the role-playing games, her tousled orange hair shine every time she stepped under the light on the bumper stickers. She always came back to Neil Gaiman though,

he was her favorite. She'd flip through issues of *The Sandman* and linger lovingly on the two-tone eyes of *Delirium*, one blue, one green. She might have been something from one of his stories. I was too afraid to imagine doing anything to her, or with her. Each time I tried to envision kissing her, my mind would go dark before our lips met; whenever I tried to imagine tearing off her clothes to throw dust on this raging fire, all I could see was an out of focus shape the color of skin.

Sometimes at dusk I could see her reflection staring at my back in the windows behind the counter. When that happened I couldn't breathe and the heat would creep into my lungs, searing them with her unbroken gaze. I craved her and yet her presence terrified me. I think she must have been perfect, at least I remember her that way. I could never pinpoint exactly what type of personality she seemed to have, maybe it was because as far as I can remember she never spoke a word. With most people who remain silent it's generally attributed to shyness, but nothing about her was shy. Her movements were Confidence Itself, her eyes told you exactly what she thought of you--and that's exactly what frightened me so much. When she brought a comic to the front and handed it to me to ring up, her eyes never left me. Her gaze bore into me, bashing my head again and again against the window, the counter, my sanity. I never said anything to her, I couldn't. My throat would constrict and I could feel her watching my pathetic attempts to swallow. When I faced her I would see minute movements of her eyes up and down my body and everywhere they touched I felt my skin tingle. I read hunger in her eyes, and it almost killed me.

When the thought of her became too much for me, lying awake at night, I'd try to imagine what kinds of things she was interested in, like normal people, whether or not we were compatible. I never succeeded. A flick of her hand would tell me she was a dancer. A prolonged and intense gaze at the vacuum cleaner would let me know she was a poet, and a wracking cough would break the news that she had lung cancer from smoking cigarettes and pot too long and she would die tomorrow, too stoned to know. My imagination ran wild with her. In sleep I would dream of black cats with her eyes, incredible monsters with her hair, or burn victims with her hips; burns given by explosions that I had caused. I never dreamed of her though, only parts of her. Her hands, her shoulders, her jaw line, never all at once. After these dreams I would wake in the night covered in sweat and moist between my legs, my own breasts tingling with longing

In the mornings I'd drag myself out of bed, put on makeup, and get ready for work. John, my coworker, would make jokes about getting the jumper cables from his car, a joke that grated on my nerves every time he said it, but I was used to that too. Little things always grated on my nerves. In every way as mediocre as his name, John's mediocrity annoyed me more than if he had been tyrannical. Sometimes, while I replaced purchased merchandise with back stock I imagined accidentally knocking over a shelf of comics and having John yell at me in a terrible rage. How could I have been so careless? He would scream. These daydreams made me smile.

In reality, John had a schoolboy crush on me. I'd watch him while he thought I wasn't looking, watch his kicked-dog

expression and hang dog eyes follow me around the store. It disgusted me and made my skin crawl. He gave my stomach the feeling of having eaten too much meat: heavy, bloated, as if it was a sock that screamed for its owner to take their swollen foot out.

She knew about it. She knew how he'd watch me, and how the bile would rise in my mouth every time he smiled at me in that way--the way. The way in which men can expel their lust. Her eyes smirked when she saw me shiver because of it, but not in a superior way. It was always as if she were a fellow sufferer. I couldn't stand to think about how many cat calls she must have gotten, my vocal chords would twist with rage at the merest hint of that thought. It was defilement, what people would do. Couldn't they understand the sacrilege they were committing? Some nights I'd lie awake raging at whoever shared her life. Faceless strangers that I couldn't hurt because they were made of anger and early morning dew. Those were the worst nights, the ones where I could hear the blood pounding in my ears and my breathing shake because somewhere out there was someone who knew her name.

Then came one night where I dreamt only of a maze. It was made of brain coral that was slowly melting away. I needed to find what lay at the end before it did, but the melting coral made the floor slippery, and soon I couldn't walk because I would fall every time I stood. In anguish I lay on the ground with the taste of salt water in my mouth and watched the maze fall away around me. Towards the end I couldn't look, I was sobbing because I had failed. When I looked up all that was left was her, watching me. It was the first time I had ever seen her complete and unbroken in my dreams, and I woke up screaming.

The next day I woke up sick. I couldn't even call into the shop to let John know that I wouldn't be coming in. I just had to hope that someone would eventually do it for me. My days were spent in somnolence, half the time I felt drunk, the other half I couldn't tell if the ground existed, or the bed I was on, or even my raging fever. Moving shadows that horrified and terrified me permeated my vision. They seemed to grow and shrink, change from laughing to scowling.

Sometimes they were menacing, and sometimes amused. Then there would be blackness. I realize now that these were nights, and in them only the heat crawled its way into my perception. It taunted me, hot breaths of cynicism caressing my cheeks. I had been burned by the sun without ever being under its searing eye. Sometimes I thought my skin was cracking, and often I thought I was going to shatter, but somehow I avoided it. I began to think I was made of glass, and so I tried not to let anything touch me, but something held me, and it drove me crazy. My arms were made of lead, shifting a finger was a sticky effort. My space was slicked with sweat but had no form of escape. At any moment I expected plants to erupt from my body, their roots digging deep into my skin and slowly splitting me apart. I almost welcomed it.

The next time I opened my eyes and could take in my surroundings for what they were, it was morning. The first thing I saw was a rose. I looked at it long enough and I could taste salt on my lips, my vision bursting into a thousand facets of which I was unable to keep track. The air around me was yellow and gray, the walls white. I didn't know where I was, but I could hear

pointed heels clicking importantly down the hall outside. It frightened me. Eventually I became aware of my mother curled in a near-by chair, asleep. I hadn't seen my mother in a while, not since the last holiday season, but I stayed rooted to the bed I was on. I attached some importance to it, like by staying still long enough it would help me know what the building was doing and how I came to be there. An hour later a nurse came in.

"The rose is wilting." I told her. She looked at it and frowned.

"It looks perfectly fine to me, dear. It probably just looks that way from across the room." she said.

"No. It's wilting. We need to do something about it."

She looked at me skeptically, but finally she sighed.

"I'll go get it some more water, hon." She left and then I noticed that my mother had woken up. She looked so relieved, and so small in the colorless chair. Her hair was disheveled and greasy, like she hadn't had time to wash it in several days. I wondered how long she had been there.

"Hey honey, how are you feeling?" She asked me.

"As good as I can feel in a hospital gown." I smiled.

"What happened exactly? Why am I here?"

"You got really sick. When John couldn't get a hold of you by that evening he got worried and went by your apartment. The moment he saw you he knew you needed medical help. He got you to the hospital and then called me. He did a lot for you." She looked at me pointedly. She knew how much I resented him. At that moment the nurse came back in with the watered rose and my clothes under her arm.

Here you go, sweetie. You can get dressed and then the doctor wants to see you. He'll ask you some questions and keep an eye on you for the next couple of days, but then your mom can come sign you out. I'm glad to see you're feeling better." She left and I glanced at my shirt. It was torn in places on the sleeves. I looked inquiringly at my mother, and saw that she suddenly looked uncomfortable.

"Why do my sleeves look like this? They were fine before."

"The fever made you a little hysterical, you ran into some things." She said, a little too quickly I thought. I frowned, but put the clothes on anyway. The doctor was jovial in that sickeningly fake way, but he told me what my problem was, I gave him the answers he seemed to want when he questioned me, and after a few days of being chauffeured between my room and his office, he announced that I was free to leave. As I waited for my mother to come sign me out, he handed me a container of pills.

"Here, take these, once every day, at the same time. They'll help make sure you don't have a relapse. If you have any negative problems be sure to let me know immediately, and we'll adjust the prescription or the dosage." The label said "Trifluoperazine." The lady at the front desk smiled at us as my mother and I headed toward her, and she pushed a sign out sheet towards my mom.

"Glad to see you're all better." I smiled my thanks. I glanced around at the hallway and watched a nurse push a man by in a wheelchair. He was in a straight jacket. My mother tugged on my sleeve then and started pulling me toward the door.

Outside, the sun momentarily blinded me. It was a good sort of blinding, the kind that makes you sneeze and then think about how much you want ice cream. The heat found me though. It melted the goose bumps off my skin, turned them into little pools of sweat that gathered in the hinges of my arms. I didn't turn to look at the hospital sign. I knew what it said and didn't need to be reminded that this wasn't the hospital that solved the physical problems. Instead, I hugged my mother with my eyes closed and caught the next bus headed to my apartment. Told her I'd be sure to call if I had any more problems.

When I got home the first thing I noticed was the dust. It was oppressive, I felt afraid to touch anything lest it make like a squid to get away from me, shooting out streams of my own skin as a defense mechanism. I didn't own a feather duster. On my way to the store I passed the comic shop and decided to peek in. I hoped they hadn't given my job away, but when I stuck my nose to the window all I saw was empty shelves. Empty shelves and more dust. It felt like someone punched me in the stomach. Maybe they had, I didn't really know.

At the store I bought the cheapest duster I could find and headed back home, feeling depressed and worried. Money was only my second problem, mainly I was afraid that I would never see her again. I would never see her shining hair again, her smirk, her eyes rolling wonderfully intrusively from my head to toes. I would never know her name.

The dust at home came away fairly easily, with the duster and Endust® combined, the problem was getting around objects. After I finished that I realized the rest of the house was dirty as well. Not even dirty: grimy, filled with grease in the corners,

smearred with humidity and liquid fat. I could feel it settling on my skin and boring in, sinking in. Weighing itself down and sticking to my eyelashes. I could almost taste it, an old, smoky flavor, like bacon left out too long.

I was midway through scrubbing the kitchen down when a knock sounded on the door. It was early evening and the dusk was settling around the house like a warm curtain, a sheet trying to smother you. I opened the door.

She stood there. Silent, like we were old friends. My palms sweated. My throat closed. My stomach clenched. I didn't breathe. I was too afraid, I knew that if I moved this beautiful illusion would be shattered into too many pieces and I would spend the rest of my life searching for them underneath the couch and in places that I couldn't get to with the duster.

She looked beautiful on my bed, beautiful against the covers, beautiful in the hazy lamp-light, the heat accentuating her awesome entirety. I felt her body under mine, my hand on her skin. I looked into her eyes, and even when I closed mine to kiss her lips, they still burned in my mind, one blue, one green.

Pamela Lopez

Delicate

It was raining as they left the clinic and hurried to the shelter of the car. It was evident that they were different people than they had been when they arrived earlier that morning. The ignition starts, and they wait quietly for the car to warm up; she can't stop crying.

He looks at her, wishing she would stop; her tears make him want to break down and cry as well. He turns away, silently gritting his teeth, wondering what happened behind the doctor's doors, heavily guarding patients from the evil men that lurked outside. He had spent the last three hours in the waiting room, unsure of the procedure or how it would affect her.

The waiting room was a bland shade of beige, crowded with un-comfortable black chairs. A television blasted some children's show, although no one was listening; he thought it was terribly inappropriate yet did not change the channel. He was glad there were no children allowed in the clinic today, due to the delicate disposition that the patients were in.

He was surrounded by people, all in similar situations. Some girls sat quietly with their mothers, fidgeting and moving around to find a comfortable position. Some girls sat with their boyfriends or husbands; some men were here by choice, others by obligation. One young guy who could barely pass for eighteen was wearing sunglasses and a hooded sweatshirt, trying un-successfully not to be noticed. Of course he stood out more than anyone else.

He couldn't help glancing at the clock every couple of minutes. What were they doing to her in the examination room?

Suddenly a young girl jumps up and quickly walks to the bathroom: morning sickness. He remembers how he had to stop the car in the dark rain earlier that morning so she could get sick too. This whole ordeal had been hard on her body. She used to be slender and active, and slowly she had metamorphosed into a bloated looking lethargic creature whose once cheerful nature was replaced by emotions that were out of control. He wonders if she'll return to her old state of body and mind after all this is over, he hopes so.

Of course he knows the change will come with time, if it was to happen at all. What if she remained in her moody state of mind that cried whenever something went wrong?

He remembered the very first doctor's appointment when their fears were confirmed. He saw the picture and squeezed her hand; it looked like a spot at five weeks. That night as they began their nightly routine before bed, they decided it would be for the best. They debated the pros and cons of each situation up until the parking lot of the clinic. They weren't ready to be parents yet: they weren't married; they barely had enough money to support themselves; they were both still in school; and both their parents were over-religious and never approve of the child.

As they walked in, her hand lay protectively over her belly as it had done subconsciously for the past couple of weeks. He'd gotten after her about that, she had her hand over her belly all the time: in public, at school, at work, and even at his parent's house. It was as if she was trying to make it obvious.

The doctors gave her a Valium to calm her nerves, it had just made her jittery and she confessed loudly that she was more

scared than she had ever been in her life. When she started to comment loudly on what she thought about Dr. Phil, who happened to be on the television at that moment, he shushed her and squeezed her hand.

He looked at the clock again; it felt as if time was standing still. He wondered again, what she would be like when she stepped out from behind the protective doors of the exam room. He knew this would affect her, but how much? How could he stay? How could he leave after this?

The doors open and she steps into the lobby with a weak smile on her face. He takes her hand and leads her back to the car. The dreary rain seemed reflect their moods.

The car has finally warmed up enough to drive, tears silently run down her face. Her eyes are sorrowful; her face has aged during the past four hours.

He wishes he knew what happened, but knows she will never talk about it; her hand is still on her empty belly. He knows she has and will change, he can see it already. As he puts the car into gear he realizes something, he's changed too.

With this revelation, he reaches for her hand and they drive home.

Michael Lunbery

Hands On Science

"Who threw this?" Ms. Bunton pinched the dead frog delicately between the tips of her thumb and forefinger and held it aloft toward the class. Behind her, on the chalkboard next to the partial list of internal organs the seventh graders were supposed to be digging for in their own frogs (small intestine, large intestine, liver, lung, heart, blad...) was a wet splotch larger than the frog that had made it. Rivulets of formaldehyde drained into the aluminum chalk tray below. "Who threw this?"

The classroom, which moments ago had resounded with shrieks and horrified laughter, was silent, the children all frozen by the glassy gaze of the animal that Ms. Bunton was pointing first at one side of the room, then the other, as if somebody might suddenly recognize it and confess.

David stood with a pin in his trembling hand.

Earlier, when the frogs had been distributed, he had been assigned the scalpel. But when, five minutes into the operation, he had still been unable to do any more than poke ineffectively at the pale green belly, his partner, Tiana, had suggested that he do the pins instead.

"The pins are easy," she had assured him. "I'll hold the flap back and you just pin it down."

At that point, she had already pinned down the hands and feet. David had felt guilty watching her, as if witnessing a crucifixion, but the pins did look easier than cutting skin—despite the muffled crunching sound they made going through the bones.

He handed her the scalpel and she set to work as coolly as a surgeon, unceremoniously slicing from the top of the frog's

chest downward, stopping just above the tiny crotch where David imagined he should see genitalia but didn't. Then she made two slices across, one at the top of her first cut and the second at the bottom, so that she incised a wide "I" into the belly. The blade made a barely audible tearing sound as it divided the thin skin.

As the wet chemical smell had grown stronger, David had clamped his lips and squinted his eyes, imagining vividly how a drop of frog juice might squirt out of some pressurized pouch in the frog's body and onto his face.

"Okay, pin," Tiana said. "Ready?"

David nodded meekly. Even in his revulsion at the sight and smell of the frog he was glad to have Tiana beside him. In all of their classes together, he sat directly behind her because their last names were nearly identical: Terra, Terry. The only possible reward for him in the whole of this disgusting project would be to watch her thin dark hands working gracefully, fearlessly. The rest of it—what it was her hands were gracefully doing—he could barely stomach.

Tiana pulled back one flap of skin with the tip of her scalpel. The inside of the skin was white and shiny and imbedded with purple veins that looked like a row of saplings in winter. She waited several seconds before reminding him, "You have to pin it down."

He hadn't even picked out a pin yet. He took up the box of pins and fingered them carefully, selecting one, then preferring another, looking for a longer one.

"They're all the same," Tiana said. "My hand's starting to hurt."

David tried to hurry. He knew that she cared about this Biology class more than he did, that she enjoyed it as much as he enjoyed Computer Science, their last class of the day together. There, Tiana would often need his help. A couple days ago, while he had been de-bugging her code, she had gone on passionately about cell division which, apparently, Ms. Bunton had covered that morning, though the idea sounded quite new to him. Tiana couldn't get over it.

"Do you realize?" she kept asking him. "That is happening inside us right now?"

He found a pin that looked microscopically longer than the others—hopefully long enough to keep his fingers away from frog flesh—and leaned over the victim. Mercifully, he could not see its face, but only the wide, gleaming throat. It seemed to have thrown its head backward as if in utter capitulation. Do your worst. David's first impression, when Ms. Bunton had dumped the frog out of the plastic bag onto their tray, had been that it was swollen with fat, but now he noticed how muscular it was. Under the lifted flap of skin was a bed of smooth pinkish-grey muscle.

"Has anyone found the heart?" Ms. Bunton had asked loudly, pointing with the chalk at the word she had just written on the still-undefiled chalkboard.

"We've got to hurry," Tiana said. "After the skin you still have to pin the stomach muscles and then we have to identify the organs."

"Tiana?" called Ms. Bunton confidently.

"Oh gosh," Tiana said under her breath. Then, loudly,

"No ma'am. We're still, uh ... David's pinning down the abdominal skin flaps."

"Miss!" said a girl in the front row. "I can't pin his feet. There's bones!"

Ms. Bunton's eyebrows wrinkled. "Tiana," she said, "while David is working on that, would you help Carla and Brian?"

David looked up from the frog. Don't leave me! he thought.

If Tiana had looked at him, she would have read the unspoken plea in his eyes, but she didn't, wouldn't. It had been his fault that she had let Ms. Bunton down; if she had been going it alone, she could have had this frog entirely dismembered by now. The failure, though not hers, exactly, stung. She also felt shame at abandoning David in his helplessness. But she had to go. Ms. Bunton had asked. And here David was trying to make her feel bad about it.

"Here," she said. "Take this." She moved aside so David could take the scalpel from her hand without letting the skin flap fall closed. When he didn't move, she said again, "Take it."

David clamped his lips tighter, locked his breath down deep in his lungs, and reached for the scalpel. But Tiana, anxious to get away, let go of the handle before he had a reliable grip on it. The next instant she was gone. The scalpel tumbled among his fingers and the skin flap started to fall shut. Panicked at the thought of having to start over, he jabbed the blade down with adrenal force, slicing clean through the skin flap, which fell closed with a plop, and neatly severing the frog's left hand.

He stared in mute horror at his work. Flesh: it was so messy, so nasty. Tiana talked about the body as if it were a machine, but it wasn't. It was soft, full of nerves and mystery, vulnerable to pain and rot. David shuddered and set the scalpel on the table. God give him a computer with its colored wire and circuits of silicon monocrystals that needed only a cool room and an occasional dusting, its programs a kind of magic built on clean logic, ones and zeros. He pushed the amputated hand to the side of the tray with the edge of the blade. It danced across the uneven surface of wax on the floor of the tray looking oddly like a rusted crown. Hopefully Tiana would not see it when she got back.

But Tiana had forgotten about David now and had happily taken over the dissection of Carla and Brian's frog while they looked on, amused. She secured all four legs, made the abdominal cuts and pinned back the layers of skin and muscle. She scissored open the thorax to reveal dark coagulations. "That's the heart," she said, pointing with the tip of the scalpel. "That... I think that's the lung. I have to check." She started flipping through the book to find the right page.

"What's that big grody thing?" asked Carla, not out of curiosity but to demonstrate disgusted disdain.

Tiana glanced at the frog. "Liver." And with one more look at the book, she said, "And, yes, that's the lung. There."

David, meanwhile, had stoically resolved to pin back the flaps all by himself by the time Tiana returned. He tried to ignore the paralyzing feeling that the frog could somehow feel all of this even though its smell clearly announced that it was

thoroughly pickled. It didn't help that he could imagine himself, like the frog, playing dead once all hope was gone. Distrustful of the scalpel now, he used the tweezers to peel back the one yet-undesecrated skin flap. With the other hand, he held the pin just over the right spot and then, with held breath, he closed his eyes and punched it through, burying the point in the wax below.

At the same moment, he heard a wet slap followed immediately by a startled yelp from Ms. Bunton. He jerked back from his frog with the sensation that the noise had resulted from the violence he had just done to it. Someone near him took in breath. A girl shrieked. Then several kids laughed, then others; then, it seemed, everybody. David looked up and noticed everyone looking at Ms. Bunton, or rather at the wet splotch on the chalkboard beside her.

Ms. Bunton leaned down out of sight behind her enormous black-topped desk and reappeared holding a frog. The animal's stomach had been gashed open chaotically and some of its entrails dangled. "Who threw this," she demanded calmly, and then again not so calmly. The class stared at her.

The sour pungency of formaldehyde had given Ms. Bunton a headache. She thought she could taste it in the back of her mouth. But she had the children's attention—perhaps for the first time all year. Rookie instinct told her to capitalize on it.

Slowly, like an actress playing the silence for dramatic effect, she set the frog back onto the chalk tray. She considered the opening words of her lecture which she hoped would be dispassionate and end with classmates quietly pointing out the perpetrator. I am not angry, she reminded herself. Neither am

I amused. Then, as she turned to come around her desk toward them, everyone saw the squiggle of intestine bouncing in the permanated tangles of her hair.

The class began to buzz. Then a girl near the front shouted, "Miss, it's in your hair."

Ms. Bunton stopped and looked at the girl, confused but concerned.

"Miss, Miss," the girl called, "Miss, look—it's in your hair," and she concluded with a giddy shriek.

Ms. Bunton suddenly understood the girl's general meaning, but overestimated the extent of her problem and flung both her hands up toward her hair, only to stop them in midair. She turned and ran stiffly back around her desk with both hands held up as if to steady something balanced on her head.

The class dissolved into chaos. David felt an arm shove into his ribs, sending him backward. A hand reached into his pan, plucked up his frog, and disappeared.

Recovering his balance, David stared in disbelief at the lone pin, his first and only accomplishment thus far, standing upright in the wax with a strip of torn frog skin clinging to it. Other than that one pin and the severed hand in the corner, the pan was, amazingly, empty. Relief swept through him, not over the loss of the frog—which seemed too significant a development for him to comprehend at the moment—but over the loss of responsibility for the frog. His no longer was the gory task of dismantling its marinated body. That had been swept from before him by the hand of fate. A silly smile blossomed unconsciously across his face and he looked around feeling light and giddy and almost ready to join in the happy anarchy.

During all of this, Tiana had been abandoned by the kids she was supposed to be assisting. Carla had fled to the other side of the room where she was giggling with two other girls. And while Ms. Bunton had been behind her desk squinting sidelong into a small mirror to extricate the intestine from her hair, the boy, Brian, had suggested to Tiana that he throw his own frog, the frog that Tiana had just meticulously dissected. In answer, Tiana had leaned over the tray as if to protect a fallen comrade. When she looked up, Brian was gone.

She turned now to look at David, wanting to share a disapproving shake of the head with a fellow grown up in the midst of all this childish nonsense. David was her only hope. He did not enjoy this class like she did, but she knew that he was smart in other ways and she trusted him for commiseration. But David was laughing with everyone else. When he noticed her unsmiling gaze turned on him, his smile dimmed a little.

Then she pursed her lips and her eyes darkened into a scowl and his smile died completely.

“What are you do-ing,” she mouthed noiselessly. She would have had to shout to make herself heard at that point and she did not want to add to the commotion.

As if in explanation, David shrugged and then tilted his tray toward her, revealing its lack of frog.

Her mouth formed a little O which David, his eyes widening, imitated. Then, unable to control herself—that had been her frog too, after all—Tiana did shout.

“David!”

Her timing was horrible luck. Ms. Bunton had recovered herself a moment earlier and was again holding up the frog. She

had just asked loudly for the third and, as it turned out, final time, "Who threw this frog?" Tiana alone, in horror over her betrayal, had missed it. The rest of the class had become more or less quiet in time for her accusatory cry to ring out with exquisite clarity.

The multitude of shocks and sensations that had flooded David's body over the last several minutes had numbed him and momentarily rendered his adolescent brain incapable of coherent thought. He honestly did not understand why everyone was suddenly looking at him, nor why Tiana was so upset about the lost frog—it hadn't been his fault, of course.

"Did you throw this frog, David?" Ms. Bunton asked sharply. She sensed the improbability of David Terry's being capable of such a thing, but her nerves were too jangled for her to trust her intuition just now.

During her miserable stint as a pre-med major she had boldly helped dissect a human cadaver, but frog guts in her hair had nearly sent her into hysterics.

She noticed David's empty tray.

"I saw him, Miss," came a voice from the back of the class. "I saw him throw it."

It was Bubba Wells who, had circumstances been different, would have been Ms. Bunton's prime suspect, no evidence necessary. The second week of class, he had super-puttied a remote-controlled speaker under her desk that released a surprisingly realistic farting noise—the first time as she reached across the desk for a paper, then again repeatedly when she bent over to look for it. After a private one-on-one interview with five students in the hallway, she had called out Bubba who, when assured that he would not be sent to the principal, produced the remote control for the device. She realized that it could be worse when, two weeks later, Susan, the Phy Ed teacher, discovered a

bumper sticker on her Miata that read, "I love my fake boobs!" Judging by the honks and thumbs-up she had been noticing from passing trucks, Susan guessed the sticker had been on for a few days. No one had been officially charged, but teacher's-lounge rumor had Bubba Wells tried and convicted. And then he had been suspended two weeks before Christmas for shouting "This ... is ... madness! This ... is ... Sparta!" while emptying a squirt gun full of ketchup in his remedial math classroom.

Around Bubba had gathered three other boys. In the tray on the table between them lay a barely recognizable frog carcass surrounded by strewn twists and lumps of mushroom-colored flesh.

"Me too," said one of the boys.

"We all saw him," said Bubba.

"Brian, Kenny..." said Ms. Bunton, blanking on the third child's name. "You boys—everyone, everyone—get back to your own desks!" The noise began as soon as the kids began to move. "And I want everybody quiet!" she shouted, barely in control of her own voice. "Absolutely quiet, do you hear me?" She wanted nothing more than to smack some rotten kid up-side the head, it didn't

matter which. She began rattling off a distracted lecture about how the school did not spend money to buy these frogs so that they could be thrown at chalkboards, knowing even as she spoke that it was not the sort of logic seventh-graders could appreciate. As she harangued, she made her way back to where David stood looking up at her, cringing. She felt that if she wanted to smack anyone it was David, whether he had thrown the frog or not.

David understood that something was now expected of him. He was being formally charged for throwing the frog. That had finally gotten through the stupefying clouds in his mind. Some sort of self-defense was necessary. "I... Somebody," he stammered. "Somebody took it." With that, he handed her his empty tray as proof of his statement.

Dumbly, she took it. It occurred to her that had the frogs and trays been marked with corresponding numbers her problem would have been solved, but who—really, who—could possibly have imagined that sort of thing would be necessary? Her anger flared again.

"He threw it, Miss," Bubba repeated.

"When I want to hear from you," she began sharply and raised the tray in front of her with a sudden upward thrust, like a silencing finger.

Something flew out of it. Something small. She looked up and saw what seemed like a tiny brown crown arcing toward her face. She jerked her head back and lost sight of it, but a moment later felt something cold land on her chest, tumble down behind her blouse, and come to rest between her breasts, caught in the lace of her bra. She grabbed the cold, wet thing, along with a handful of fabric, and yanked it away from her skin, feeling the release as her large motherly breasts flopped out of their confinement.

In that manner, she stumbled out of the classroom, yelling that everyone stay in their seats, down the empty hallway to the restroom where with a wad of toilet paper she recovered the bit of evidence that would eventually give her good enough reason at last to relocate Bubba Wells to someone else's Earth Science class.

Bubba, meanwhile, was holding David in a headlock with one arm and, with the other, was fending off blows from

Tiana, who was beating him about the head with a textbook. But David didn't care. Not really. He lay limply, his cheek squashed against the warmth of Bubba's chubby chest, sleepily imagining himself already in Computer Science writing code, white letters on a black screen, line after reassuring line.

Michelle Salazar

Favorite Pair of Jeans

Dolores squeezed and strained to fit herself into her favorite jeans, as she sat at the edge of her bed. “*Chingao* What’s happening to me? I’m puffing up like a *sopapilla*.”

Dolores stopped for a minute to rest from the struggle and threw herself back on the bed. She looked up to the ceiling as she laid there helplessly in bed and remembered what her *tía* Chaio said a few months ago, “*Mija* you need to stop eating the tortillas.” Dolores rolled her eyes when she pictured her aunt that day tending to the food with one hand on her hip. Her aunt had said that to her while she was making tortillas herself, for the dinner she was preparing for the whole *familia* that one evening. Still staring at the ceiling, without realizing it Dolores said aloud, “Yeah, great advice *tía*.”

Dolores again grunted and grunted to simply button the jeans, but the zipper just remained gaped and open wide. “Gosh! Even my *chones* are showing. I give up!”

Meanwhile, as she took her pants off, Dolores muttered, “I can’t believe while hundreds of modern women are taking advice from a magazine like *Shape*, I’m getting advice from my fifty year old *tía* Chaio. She contradicts the whole point of me losing weight by making tortillas, and right in front of me!”

Her *tía* Chaio was always like that. She always tried to give advice, but later did or said the total opposite. Dolores frustrated and flustered found another pair of jeans that were a bigger size. They were from last year, before she lost some weight. Dolores never thought she would go back to those jeans from

her fatter years. She got dressed and made her way to school. She attended Riverside Community College, which was fifteen minutes away from her house. She was in the nursing program.

As she arrived and made her way into class, she sat next to her friend Amanda, telling her the devastating story about her favorite jeans, and the fact that she was gaining weight. Amanda, unlike Dolores, had long straight brunette hair, hazel eyes, light complexion, and looked as thin as a toothpick. She always wore short skirts and heels, when they didn't need to wear scrubs. There were times when Dolores thought that Amanda made the scrubs look good. Sometimes, Dolores would come into class and say, "Dang girl, you have them heels on? Sheesh if I were to wear those, mama be walkin' back home in flipflops."

Professor Malcolm began speaking of various illnesses and different vaccinations available to patients, when Dolores drifted off into her worries about gaining weight. She couldn't help but think about what had happened to her earlier. She tried to focus on the professor, but every now and then she would get thoughts flying by: "tortillas, jeans, fat, lose weight." In her mind, she questioned what to do about her situation. She had money for a gym membership, she refused to work out at the gym at the community college, and she definitely did not want to walk around her neighborhood. She thought walking around her neighborhood would be too embarrassing. She could just imagine the viejos down her street just starring at her, as she walked. She imagined huffing and puffing down the street and people laughing at her.

"Maybe I can do something at home?" she thought to herself.

Then all of a sudden it seemed as if though a light bulb went off inside her head. A smile from ear to ear stretched across her face, as she sat up in her chair.

"That's it! I'll go to Ross, buy a cheap workout DVD, and workout at home," she thought to herself. She removed her daily planner from her purse and wrote in the daily detail to stop at Ross before going home.

Class let out and Dolores drove to a Ross down two streets from where she lived. She walked straight to the DVD and video section and began searching. "Belly Dancing," "Hip Hop 'Get With It' Workout," and "Salsa Craze Workout" were just a few titles she came across.

"Eh, I already know how to dance. I need something or some video that will really work me out," she told herself.

She kept flipping through the DVD's and videos until finally she came across "Taebo." She held the video as if she had won a gold medal in the Olympics.

"This is it," she said, "I can easily load this into Papi's VCR at home, in the living room, and I'll have a lot of space to move around."

Very happy with her find, Dolores purchased the video and rushed back home to begin working out.

When she arrived home, she told her mom, "Mom look what I found! I found a Taebo video at Ross, so I can workout. It was only \$5.99! Now I won't have to listen to *tía* Chaio tell me about 'stop eating tortillas *mija*, it's the tortillas *mija*." She imitated her aunt's voice so well. Her mother began to laugh and called her crazy.

"Oh, well that's good *mija*. Now you can look pretty and maybe go shopping for new clothes, eh?" her mother said with a heavy accent, encouraging her.

Dolores half smiled at what her mother said, especially taking in the "looking pretty" part. Dolores thought to herself, *Dang Mom! You really think I'm that ugly?*

"Okay mom, I'm gonna go change and I'm gonna work-out in the living room. If Papí and Chato come in you better tell me okay? I don't want them to see me 'cause you know how they are."

"*Sí mija, sí. I'll tell you.*"

Dolores went to change her workout clothes, loaded the video, and prepared the living room to provide herself more space to work out. Soon enough, she was off kicking and punching, huffing and puffing. She got to the part of the routine where she began doing leg lifts. She counted out loud with the video, "one and two, and three..." Her pace got faster until all of a sudden she was startled and looked behind her. She stood there with her hands on her hips, watching as her dad nudged her brother, as he was laughing.

"Papí? Chato? What are you two doing here? And where's mamá?"

"Mami's out back with the laundry. I rushed in 'cause I thought I felt an earthquake," said her brother. Chato laughed up a storm and made his father giggle a little, until they saw Dolores' face.

"Oh shut up Chato, *Cochino*, Go take a bath you smell."

"Yeah, listen to your sister. *Bañate*. Go take a bath," her father said.

Her brother and father had just arrived from work and were dusty from all the sawdust. Chato followed in his dad's footsteps, working as a carpenter. He was already twenty-eight

years old, still living at home, and helped out the family. He always loved to give Dolores a hard time.

Her brother waved his hands toward them, as in waving off their remarks. He made his way to the bathroom, leaving Dolores and her father to talk.

"Dolores, I didn't know you could lift you leg that high *mija*," he said with a smirk, as if joking around.

"Daaad! Go away! I'm trying to workout. Go help mami outside or something."

"Okay, okay. I'll go help your mother." He walked toward the back door. "*Vieja!* Where are you?" he called out.

Dolores just shook her head and sighed. She knew deep down inside both her brother and father always joked around with her, but they did get on her nerves. It never failed that her brother and father would pick on her weight and calling her "Big Girl." Dolores was just tired of being the "big girl." She wanted to be thin, healthy, and maybe find herself a boyfriend.

Dolores continued with the video and finished. Her mother had since walked into the kitchen.

"Mother? Where were you? I thought you were gonna tell me if Chato and Papí came in."

"Oh *mija*, I'm sorry. *Es que*, I had to go hang the sheets outside to dry."

"Chato was making fun of me. And so was dad. But not as much as Chato."

"*Mira mija*, you want me to hit 'em with my *chancla mija*? You tell me."

Dolores started laughing and forgave her mother. "It's okay mom. I'm gonna go take a shower so I can get ready to study and come eat."

Right as she finished her sentence, Chato came in and said, "Man

Dolores, you just finished working out and now you're gonna eat?" He laughed as he approached her.

"Shut up you idiot!" she said and she nudged him hard.

"Hey watch it *ese*! You don't have small hands!"

Dolores simply yelled, "You idiot!" as she trailed off into the hall way.

"Stop giving her a hard time *mijo*," Dolores' mom said. "*Te doy con una chancla*, I'll hit you with a chancla. *Mira*, look," she reached at her flipflop to show him.

"*Ya*, okay ma' I'm just kidding."

Dolores came out in her pajamas, with her hair rolled and pinned up, and entered the kitchen. She sat next to her brother and gave him a disgusted look, slightly regretting sitting next to him. The family began passing around the food and eating. Chato kept nudging Dolores, making her corn fall from the fork she was holding.

"Chato! Stop it!" She gave him a quick little punch on his upper arm.

"Hey watch it!" he said as he rubbed his arm. "Just because you started *Taebo*, don't think you're all bad."

"Whatever Chato!" she said back in response. She looked down at the plate and rolled her corn around, with her fork. All of a sudden, she felt as if she could not do the workout anymore. She felt dumb and thought she couldn't workout anymore with her brother always there teasing her. She looked up and to the side and said, "I'm not gonna do it anymore."

Her brother asked, "Not gonna do what anymore?"

"My workout video. All you do is tease me and all of you laugh. I'm just not gonna do it anymore. I'm always gonna be chubby."

Her mother looked at her and said, "*Mija*, don't talk like that. Don't listen to your brother. He doesn't know what he's talking about. *Dejalo*. Just ignore him. You can do it *mija*. Don't worry. After a couple of days or weeks, you'll see *mija*. It'll work."

"Yeah mom, but I don't know," said Dolores.

"Hey maybe I can do it too *mija*. You never know," her mom said with a little giggle and punching out her arms.

Everyone started laughing, and Dolores felt better. She didn't say much after that, but appreciated what her mother had said to her. She knew her mother cared. She looked down at her plate, still rolling her corn around. She looked to the side and noticed she had grabbed a tortilla. She immediately put it back in the tortilla holder. She laughed as she saw her dad reach for the tortilla and said, "*Nombre mija*, that's a good tortilla." She continued to laugh as he took a huge bite out of the tortilla.

After that night, Dolores worked out everyday after school, and even though she faced a couple teases here and there from her brother, she kept going. There were times when she thought about giving up, but she always had her mother there to encourage her.

She remembered a time when her brother came home and started teasing her a lot and interrupting her workout.

"Okay Chato! That's it! If you're so bad ass in making fun of me, why don't you try doing it? Huh?" she demanded.

"Hey! You're the one that wants to lose weight, not me sister."

"No, c'mon try it. See if you can last."

Knowing he wouldn't resist a challenge, Dolores pushed play on the remote and watched as her brother attempted the leg lifts. She counted out loud for him and after the fifth one he stopped.

"What's the matter brother? Can't handle it?"

"Hey I just got off work man," Chato said.

"Uh, huh. Whatever Chato. Look at you. You can't even catch your breath," she said rolling her eyes.

"Whatever dude," Chato said as he walked off.

Dolores just laughed and continued her workout.

After about a month had gone by, Dolores drew her favorite jeans out of her closet one morning, and looked back on that day she struggled. She thought to herself, "Man, I don't know if I can go through this again." She looked the pants over and stretched the waist of the pants a little and said, "Well, my regular clothes are fitting me better, and some even a little more loose." She shrugged her shoulders and said, "What the hell?"

Dolores took her shoes off, threw her pajama pants aside and attempted to get her favorite jeans on. She pulled up the jeans slowly passed her ankle, passed her knee, slowly passed the thighs, hurdled a little over the hips, and to her surprise they were on. "Okay," she thought, "now I gotta button them."

She brought the two sides closer and closer and to her amazement fastened the jeans.

"Oh my gosh!" she screamed. "I fit in them again!"

She ran to her mirror that stood tall compared to her. She turned from side to side, and even slightly all around to take a look at her butt. She had a lengthy, happy smile on her face.

She swung around, looking to see if anyone was watching.

Eh, mama looks good in these jeans. If I do say so myself,
Dolores said, winking at herself in the mirror.

Nonfiction

Университет

Diane Bertrand

Professor

for Sister Ann

She walks down the campus path, carrying a university's wealth in a canvas tote bag. Her ruby pin signifies over forty years in the classroom, but she enters with the optimism of a first year teacher. She shuffles through yellowed papers, worn from past lectures; tops them off, and places them on the lectern. She treats each student as a partner in the contract she upholds. She never forgets to make one person feel like part of the group or to make sure a group doesn't squander an individual's fortune. She presses literature into the mind like fragile leaves between pages. She points out the hidden pathways, the rivers among the roads less traveled; the cool shadows under zooming highways where creativity resides. Students scribble notes, balance contemporary on classic, and wonder against peers, politicians, and parental philosophies. Her wisdom is a shawl to drape the students' shoulders against the frosty, frantic world; but some lose it among thorns and walk away naked.

Clayton Billadeau

Pantsed

- INTRO -

It was senior year – high school, O’ahu Island Hawai’i. She was a traditional red – long, curly hair. She wore black, like Manson – Marilyn not Charles.

One time, she, Heather, accepted a dating proposal from my friend Jon, whose face wore his big nose well. Shortly thereafter, Heather was approached by some new-bee skater kid, who boxed out a Samoan one time, and so after everyone thought he was cool.

“Umm. Can we just be friends?” She asked. “I kinda wanted to be with this other guy.”

Jon, “Uhh. I guess.” He looked as though he were thinking, walking toward me. “Dude that sucks. I can’t believe she was my chick for five minutes,” head-tossing left and right in saddened dismay. Ha. I can’t imagine how he must’ve felt.

“Serious? What a bitch.” I didn’t touch him.

“That’s got to be the fastest relationship known to Man. What do I do now?”

“We call her Blue, dude,” I said. “And we talk about her – in front of her.”

“What? Blue?”

“Blue. She’ll never guess. Blue – in contrast to her hair. Blue like her icy cold soul.”

We laughed and walked away.

I had no respect for Heather afterwards. She was a mocking game, a treasure to ridicule, point, and laugh at. She was lame.

- PANTSING ONE -

The classrooms of our school resided in many long, two-story buildings – large rectangles planted toward the foot of an awesome hill. The hill towered us. The classroom doors and windows always remained open; the Hawai’ian weather air-conditioned the rooms.

Each building’s staircase had a gate – locked by the security at night, wide-open during school hours. Above the iron-gate, below the ceiling of the hall was an iron design, one that prevented students from climbing over closed gates.

At lunch one day, I passed a staircase where Heather, her new dude, and Heather’s equally ridiculous friend Jen sat and spoke.

“Hey Clayton,” Jen said.

Jen liked me, but thought I was lame because I never approached her in that way. Not long before, I had looked at her and saw a silly girl that I wouldn’t be interested in.

“What’s up?” I said, turning to their direction, the staircase.

“Where are you going?”

“I wanted to leave school. I had a test this morning. I have nothing else important to do today. I just want to go home.”

“Are you gonna skip?”

“Well sorta. It’s lunch. This school won’t stop me.” In fact, to escape from the school required little effort. The main road, a semi-highway, lied behind the rectangular buildings; the highway went to the Corps base where I lived. If not by incognito,

anyone could walk pass the administration building without being bothered. It was a lenient school; student's smoked Wowie in classrooms, blowing smoke through fans and door.

"Wanna hang out before you go?" Jen asked. She wanted me.

"Alright. I'll stay for a bit." I sat on a step above them. We talked and amused ourselves for a little while. I looked up eventually bored.

The bars of the iron-design-above-the-gates looped to the center, each side mirroring each other. One bar based the design, paralleling itself to the ground. It looked like something to hang from – one monkey-bar.

They were talking about stupid stuff. I wasn't really paying attention. I wanted to leave. I should've.

I jumped from the steps, grabbing the bar, swinging to a stop. I pulled up. They looked, continuing to speak. I pulled up again and again until I paced each one. I saw Heather stand from the steps under me.

My pants went down. I released my grip on the bar.

"Son of a..."

I saw what they saw. She had everything – got it?

I never wore a belt in those days. Maybe it would have been a good thing, protecting my stuff. Then again, if she pant-sexed me with a belt tight around my waist, I would have struggled anxiously to pull them back up.

I went red, tugging pants – left-hip, right-hip. The girls laughed, astonished. "Ahh, eww." Blue's dude reacted.

"I'm outta here." I said, walking, holding up my pants in fear of another attack. Jen tricked me, I thought. They had planned it. Well, who knows.

- INTRO TO PANTSING TWO -

A slope between groups of the rectangular buildings, near the bottom of the school's towering hill ran, tumbling downward to the main road. There were concrete steps that helped students deal with the walk of the hill. There, students gathered during lunch.

Joslin, a taller, thin mutual friend with gorgeous hips and legs, walked up to me.

"I heard about Heather pantsing you."

I smiled, blushing.

"She told me about your pubes." Inhaling, she smiled.

I smiled, blushing. Joslin looked excited. No girl before looked at me as excited as she. I couldn't really say anything.

"Um. Yeah. She got me – but I'll get her."

"Here," she said, gliding a paper with her number through the air. "Call me sometime. You know? To hang out."

I smiled without blushing. One eyebrow raised. I said, "Thanks, I will."

I never did.

- PANTSING TWO -

One lane half-circled off the main road, weaving between the rectangular buildings. No thru-traffic passed, but it allowed school maintenance vehicles and buses passage. The single lane branched from the main road at the administration

building. The lane connected again to the road on the opposite end of the campus. The buses picked up students at that end, the least built area of the school.

After school, students waited for the buses. Some waited from the second-floor of the rectangular buildings, hanging from the railings. Some students sat on the ground, talking. Others played tag, running, sometimes fighting. Even others stood and did what students did, waiting.

A bike rack stood center of the ruckus. I sat on the rack talking to those I knew. The weather was warm – breezy. The sun kept the wind warm. I felt a tug from behind, then ice and liquid.

I arched forward – belly out. My teeth shut. I smiled from the discomfort.

“What the?!”

I turned and saw Heather laughing, handling an empty cup now upside-down. The steady wind molded her black windbreakers to her legs. She slowed her retreat to a walk and returned back, smiling.

“Haha, sorry. I just had to do it.”

“That was cold.” I said, hopping off the rack, playing-off her cruel and insidious behavior with a smile.

She turned to Jen – both smiling. Jen’s eyes opened wide when she saw me close, behind Heather. Before Jen could say anything, the sun lit Heather’s purple panties into student laughter and mockery – everyone saw. Heather grabbed – her windbreakers gone from around her thighs and waist. She fell back like a board. All students stopped to watch and smirk.

Heather's face matched her hair, she lying flat, struggling to retrieve her pride. It was gone. She never bothered Jon or me again.

Lorenzo Nichols

Ring Back

The town we lived in had been built on oil. Because of this, the stately homes were closer to downtown along with the nicest parks. In our neighborhood all the houses were right angle, post – World War II modernist boxes of rectangles and squares in three different repeating styles originally built for the workers in the oil fields during the oil boom.

My two best friends and I each lived in a different style house. Stephen lived across the street from me in a chocolate brown frame house with a single vehicle carport on the front. Todd lived next door to him in an orange composite tile house with red trim and single vehicle carport. My house was a white upside down “L” with a long, wide driveway from the street to the two car garage. It was separated from the Pittmann’s grey wood house and beauty shop next door with a wall of mimosa trees that bloomed hot purple. Our street was called Cinderella, an irony not lost on me even at that age.

It was a warm day, the spring before I turned five. The three of us stood at the end of my driveway straddling our bikes as Stephen repeated with authority a trick he learned from his older brothers. Stephen and I engulfed big drinks of air, breathless from popping wheelies over the curbs that lined the end of the driveways to the street. These ramps sloped at the correct angle to pop the best wheelies because of their curved, sloping shape. Stephen had a dirt bike. He wasn’t afraid to ride it anywhere and through anything including the house with the front garden full of marigolds down the street. He performed tricks easily on his bike. Todd and I rode old fashioned bikes

with banana seats, but mine shone metallic red with red tires and yellow glitter smiley face seat. Todd parents bought him a blue bike with a blue seat and white handlebar grips. I always tried to keep up with Stephen, but Todd didn't. He didn't want to get into trouble. He usually rode behind us, careful to stay on the sidewalk like his parents told him.

The last of our group to get my training wheels off, I was proud that I could steer and ride steadily. Todd still wobbly steering still caused him accidents.

Stephen regained his breath first and continued arguing his point he introduced to us earlier.

"I swear it's true," Stephen said, his dirty golden curly hair framing his cherubic face. Skinny as a rail, his brother's hand-me-down clothes hung on him like on a hanger. His bike was a little too big for him, too.

"You shouldn't swear," Todd admonished, quickly turning his dark head around to see if anyone had heard. There was a slight flash in Todd's blue eyes. "That's taking God's name in vain."

This had been said before, but seriousness had not been my reaction. Religion was really the only major difference between the three of us. Questions about God were encouraged at my house. We were Presbyterians, which meant grape juice and wafers towards the end of the service, usually after waking from my Sunday morning nap. I never could understand why we each got such a small glass. It was always hot in that church and my childish intuition told me that people were thirstier than

that thimble of grape juice could quench. Todd and his family were Baptist and in Todd's house God's word was the law; the Bible and the ten commandments were strictly followed. Todd had even informed us that he had been saved to which Stephen asked, "Saved from what?" At Stephen's house, the word "God" was usually followed by the word "damn."

Stephen ignored Todd. "All you have to do is dial the last five numbers of your phone number from your phone and wait 'til you hear it ringing. Then you just hang it up and your phone will start ringing." Stephen was as good as the Electrolux vacuum salesman that had been at our house earlier that afternoon interrupting naptime. The salesman demonstrated my mother into a beautiful new brown canister vacuum with all the accessories, one that she still uses to this day. I too was ready to be talked into something and Stephen's pitch was persuasive.

The screen door slammed and my mother appeared outside the front door at the other end of the driveway next to the garage. She ran a hand through her shoulder-length chestnut hair. "I'm going to Mrs. Pittmann's for a few minutes if you need me," she announced. "Don't go too far." With that, she disappeared through the wall of hot purple blooms and into the Pittmann's house.

My mother did always have perfect timing.

"Let's try it," I suggested, pushing the kickstand of my bike down and climbing off. Stephen just laid his bike down and we both helped Todd get his kickstand down. It was hard to push into position because of the slight orange rust building up at the swivel point that needed oil.

We headed up the driveway to my house as Todd announced, "I am not allowed to use the phone." Stephen rolled his eyes and didn't say anything. "I don't want to get in trouble," Todd continued, but we ignored him, opening the door and letting ourselves into the house.

Once inside, I led my friends into the kitchen, just to the left of the foyer. We walked across the tile similar to the tile in my Sunday school classroom and every other public building and home in town. We approached the big black rectangle mounted on the wall next to the door to the garage. I pushed one of the oak chairs my grandfather had refinished underneath the phone to be able to reach it. Todd sat in another oak chair resting his head in his hands, his elbows on the table. Behind him was my mother's "Vogue Rattan" furniture in blue green that sat on matching green carpet in the living room. The matching green drapes were from J.C. Penney's downtown. The neighbors envied her because of this modern furniture and her sense of style.

"I don't think this is a good ideal," Todd warned anxiously, misusing the word which was common in our town because of the "Ideal" grocery store next to the park downtown. Most of the adults we knew used the word "ideal" to mean "idea."

Stephen sighed. "I'll do it," he said.

"No," I countered. "It's my house so I get to do it." With that, I climbed onto the chair, lifted the receiver from its cradle and began to dial our phone number. I waited as the dial spun back around after dialing the last six. A busy signal buzzed in my ear repeatedly. "It didn't work," I reported, disappointed.

"You're not doing it right," Stephen admonished. "You'd better let me do it."

"No, let me try again," I said.

"Don't dial the first two sixes," Stephen reminded me.

"Okay, okay!" Sheesh! Stephen thought he knew everything!

This time I concentrated and dialed slowly. Nine-six-oh-two-six. I waited for a moment and then the a ringing signal sounded in my ear. "It's ringing," I said to Stephen, unsure of what to do next.

"Hang up!" he commanded, and I hung up the phone.

Instantly, the phone began to ring. Todd ran through the kitchen, down the driveway across the street into his house before the phone rang a second time. I was frozen, stunned that it had worked. Stephen was beside himself, jumping up and down. "See! See! I told you that it worked!" he exclaimed.

The phone continued to ring, both of us forgetting that it had to be answered in order stop the ringing. A few moments later we heard sandals slapping in the driveway and almost immediately the screen door opened and my mother reappeared. "What are you all doing in the house?" she questioned as she moved to answer the phone. "Hello? Hello?" she said, still eyeing us.

This was too much for Stephen. He collapsed into gales of laughter, rolling around on the cool tile floor. Mom hung up the phone and looked at us, unsure whether to be angry or to smile and laugh. "What's going on here?"

I calmly, but timidly, explained to her what we had done. Stephen still lay on the floor, a pile of giggles. I suddenly became

aware that we could be in serious trouble as Todd had warned. Stephen's behavior didn't seem to be helping.

"You know the phone is not a toy," my mother reminded me. "If it got broken it would be very expensive to fix." These were the days when people still rented their phones from the phone company. Mother would figure out years later that we paid \$1,000 for that phone and didn't even end up owning it.

"What happened to Todd?" my mother asked us suspiciously, looking around the kitchen.

"He got scared and ran home," Stephen, now sitting in a chair, informed her. He turned to me. "Did you see him? He was faster than Evil Knievel!"

This caused my mother to laugh, breaking any semblance of anger she might have had. "Let's go make sure he's all right," my mother suggested. "I promised Doris I would bring her a recipe anyway," Mom added, referring to Todd's mother.

The three of us walked out of the house down to the end of the driveway. "You boys move your bikes into the yard, out of the driveway. I don't want someone to run over them."

We did as we were told and Stephen picked up Todd's bike to walk it across the street to his house. I helped him get the kickstand up so it wouldn't scrape the ground while we rolled it across the blue-black asphalt.

When we got to Todd's front porch, Mom rang the bell. A few moments later, Todd's mom opened the door, revealing Todd, caught like a deer in the headlights. He ran down the hall to his room as soon as he saw us.

"What was that all about?" Doris asked mystified, looking after Todd.

"I think I can explain," offered Mom. She looked at us. "Why don't you boys go see if Todd's okay."

The two of us brushed past Doris and went down the hall to Todd's room. We opened the door and looked around. Desk, dresser, bunk beds, but no Todd. We were turning to leave when we heard a muffled cry. We got down on our knees and peered under the bed. There was Todd, sobbing, on his stomach with his face in his hands.

"I'm going to hell!" he proclaimed, and dissolved into more sobs.

"Hey, man, calm down. Nobody even got mad," Stephen said happy to prove Todd wrong. "We didn't even get in trouble."

"Really?" Todd asked, unsure.

"For real and for true," I confirmed.

Todd seemed to brighten with this news. "Well," he said slowly, "let's go ride my train."

The three of us went back down the hall and into the living room where Todd's parents had set up his train. It was big enough for small children to ride and ran in an oval in the living room which held only a couch, a chair, a hassock, and a small Hammond organ that Doris played. Todd pretended to be the engineer, since it was his train. I was the passenger and Stephen was the robber hiding behind the armchair, preparing to stick up the train. Mom and Doris were talking in the kitchen while the man on the radio sang the refrain, "Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet." Then the phone started ringing and Stephen collapsed into laughter, but this time I joined him and a careful smile broke out across Todd's face.

Analisa Farias

Piojosa Priscilla Pena

For some reason we had an instant connection. We were best buddies and no one could separate us. We were Priscilla Pena and Analisa Farias the dynamic duo. I honestly thought we would be friends forever, but then one fateful day during recess she told Saul Martinez that I had a crush on him. That move ruined our friendship, and her reputation.

The white playground rocks made my brown leather sandals chalky and a few of the smaller pebbles had managed to lodge themselves underneath the straps. "I'm glad I didn't wear my new black tennis today, they would have gotten so dirty," I thought to myself. How could a mind concerned with new tennis, a mind so young and innocent, concoct a "game" that would bring her one time best friend to tears? I was wearing my Avon lipstick that day, of course it was a nude shade of a sample tube my Grandma Moy had given me, but needless to say, it added to my sense of authority that day.

"Okay guys, everybody come over here by the monkey bars." I always hated the monkey bars on the playground; I was so tall I could walk across them with my feet off the ground. "I have something really important to tell you all. It's a big secret though... a big secret about her (I pointed to my ex-best friend who played hop-scotch with the kid who always had dry boogers crusted around her nose). Joeric, the boy who bit me in pre-k, was my best boy friend and I knew he'd get all of the boys to listen. It worked. They left the tether ball court vacant and abandoned the jungle gym to attend my hate rally. I could feel the tension building and when I sensed the time was right, I blurted out, "PRISCILLA PENA HAS BUGS!"

A look of disgust splashed across their faces like a bucket of paint. No objections were presented to my third grade public

service announcement, but for some reason I didn't stop there. I was an overachiever back then, what can I say?

"Ya'll don't wanna get bugs do you?" I yelled.

"What happens when you get bugs?" Peter Van Ness asked.

He was the only white kid in our class and apparently had never experienced the wrath of *piojos* (head lice). Yes, I got their attention.

"My cousin had 'um once and they had to shave his head," said Jonathon Escobedo. "It was really gross. My tia tried to pick 'um out, but she said there were too many. So they just cut off all of his hair."

The girls in my class gasped at the thought of losing their precious locks.

"You see. I'm trying to protect you guys so you don't get them," I said with an innocent look.

"How do you know she even has them?" Chimed in Andrea Garcia.

"Because I saw them. That's how, stupid. If you have ever noticed she has white stuff in her hair all the time. Well, those are the eggs. So she is growing more and more bugs," I replied with a roll of my neck and a hand on my hip. "Bugs are gross. She is gross. So if anybody even gets close to her, even tries to talk to her... don't do it. Just to remind you, if me or Joeric see you talking to her, we get to punch you. Okay?"

"Okay Analisa," seemed to be the common response.

"Okay then. Starting now," I replied.

Recess wound down and it was time for us to return to our classroom to finish out the day. That was when I saw if my

plan worked. Sadly for Priscilla, it worked like a charm. No one wanted to use the same door she did to go into the building. Desks were pushed out of line to avoid touching hers. Cubbies adjacent to hers were emptied to avoid contamination. Anything she touched from books to pencils to the classroom sink were considered off limits if Piojosa Priscilla had touched them. This continued for the rest of the day and on into the next, then after the spelling test on Friday, the entire class refused to grade her paper. That's when Ms. Sherry caught on to my plan.

She took Priscilla out into the hallway and asked her if she knew why everyone was acting so strange. Really, if she didn't want us to hear what was going on she should have shut the door. I stared everyone down like Helga the bully from my favorite cartoon *Hey Arnold*. I didn't even have to say a word; they knew if they told ... somebody was gonna get it. Minutes later a teary eyed student walked back into the classroom, hand in hand with the woman I knew would be my demise (for the weekend at least).

I tried to smile innocently with the most angelic expression I could conjure up on such short notice. Surely she wouldn't believe the evil bug girl. I was Analisa, I never got in trouble. I was the exemplary classroom citizen. No way I was gonna go down for this.

Priscilla found her way back to her seat and Ms. Sherry made a beeline for my desk. She bent over, put her bony pale fingers on my shoulder and escorted me out into the hallway.

"Oh no," I mouthed.

"Priscilla told me what has been going on," Ms. Sherry began.

"Going on with what?" I asked.

"About the fight you guys had last week. And about the mean game you started."

"Game?" I tried to proclaim my innocence one last time, but figured I was defeated. "I didn't think she was gonna cry. It is her fault I had to do it anyway. Last week when we were walking back from art class she was behind Saul in line. Well you know how popular he is, and all of the girls like him, but I don't. Anyway, stupid Priscilla told him that I had a crush on him and now the whole class thinks I do. So, I'm not her friend anymore."

"Well I'm sorry that happened. But what you did was very mean and I need you to apologize," she said.

"Okay, fine. I said. I was relieved. Wow, I thought—I really wasn't going to get into big trouble. The only times I'd been to the principles office was to help with morning announcements, so showing up with a pink slip would have been disastrous. I felt that I was excused since this was my first offense. Not too shabby. I thought I was off the hook, until she added,

"I'm going to call your mom tonight and let her know what happened."

That was it. That was the moment. I knew I was in for it. My heart sank and my stomach stayed on the floor as I walked back to my desk. I mouthed an insincere "sorry" to the idiot who had ruined my squeaky clean record. The room fell silent and my attention could only focus on the hands of the clock that were whirling out of control. Before I knew it, the bell rang and I was escorted by the parent volunteer to my mother who was waiting patiently in her '89 Oldsmobile Callais.

"Hi Mija. Give me a kiss. How was your day? Do anything fun?"

"Hi Mom." I leaned over and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "It was fine."

"Just fine?"

"Yeah. Just fine." If I would have told her right then I probably would have gotten into less trouble. I could have told her about the witch Priscilla and why my retaliation tactic was so severe. Maybe she would have seen the great leader I was and commend me for my efforts to organize an entire classroom. Maybe not.

Finally, we made it home and I prayed a message wasn't waiting on the machine. My mom pushed open the wooden door to our duplex, threw her purse on the couch, placed her keys on the coffee table and marched toward the answering machine just like she did everyday (but today her routine was in slow motion). Her polished finger pressed the play button and I heard a glorious "No new messages."

"Whew," I thought. Maybe Ms. Sherry was bluffing. I began to relax. We sat down for dinner together and I ran to throw on my pajamas so we could watch TGIF just like we did every Friday. Then I heard the phone and my mother on it.

"Hello. Yes this is her mother. I'm fine how are you?" Then there was a long pause, followed by a series of gasps and apologies. She continued, "I'm so sorry Ms. Sherry, I will have a talk with her."

Panic and fear set in. It was at that moment I understood why children run away from home. "Stupid burglar bars," I thought.

"Analisa Marie Farias, get your butt in her right now little girl."

“Uh, I’m sleeping Mom,” was the first thing that I could think of.

“I don’t care what you’re doing. Get in here now.”

The tears began to roll down my face as I put on my Strawberry Shortcake slippers and walked down the hallway to the kitchen where my mom sat with her arms crossed. She never spanked me in my entire life, but it was just the look on her face and the tone of her scolding that terrified me. I tried to defend myself and claim it was a sort of self-defense. It didn’t work.

“What is wrong with you? Why would you do something like this?” She looked genuinely puzzled and I couldn’t really come up with a response. To be honest, I really don’t even remember how the rest of the conversation went. I just know, by the end of it, I felt like crap and I didn’t get to watch TGIF. That was the worst part of the whole thing. For the rest of the weekend I was punished and actually did “have time to think about what I did.”

On Monday, even though I was remorseful, I couldn’t help but laugh when the school nurse went from classroom to classroom with her popsicle sticks checking the heads of each student for bugs because parents heard about Piojosa Priscilla Pena.

Analisa Farias

Nombre Guey

When I was in kindergarten the teacher focused on teaching me how to spell my first and last name; it's a shame that my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Moran, didn't teach me how to pronounce my last name correctly. I had no problem with "Analisa" but it was the "Farias" that proved to be a bit more difficult.

It wasn't until my sophomore year in high school that my advanced Spanish teacher, Senora Del Rosario, pointed out that I had been emphasizing the wrong syllable for *mas o menos* the last sixteen years of my confused life. "Senorita Analisa, it's pronounced Fa-ri-as not Fa-rias and it has an *accento*," she sternly corrected me.

Que verguena. How embarrassing. But now I had an accent mark in my last name, how exotic.

From that moment forward, I jumped at every change I had to use my first and last name; I was introducing the world to a new me. The spirits of the gorgeous *mujeres* from the *telenovelas* (minus the five pounds of *maquillaje* on their faces) urged me to practice my name in the mirror with a raised eyebrow and a curious head tilt. Now I didn't have to explain that I was Latina, 100% Mexican-American. Questioning my background was now obsolete, all thanks to Senora Del Rosario. I wish she would have been around in middle school; that would have made my life a lot easier.

In a predominantly Mexican-American school where Anglos were the minority, it's safe to say that this above-average height *guera* stuck out like a limousine at the *pulga*. Towering about five inches over the rest of the population (including a few

staff members as well) with skin so white people would swear I had a pigment deficiency issue, it was hard to find somewhere to fit in. The white kids new I wasn't white because I had dark hair, green eyes, and a weird last name. The Mexican muchachos were baffled by my light skin, my colored eyes, and my Amazonian stature. At such a tender age I was subjected to a question that some people, even as adults, have trouble answering. "So... what are you?"

That's when I would think, "Why didn't one of my cousins go to the same school as me?"

With their dark skin and last names like Estrada and Perez, nobody would question them. If those kids saw my cousin Ray cruising with me in his custom lowrider with his bald head shining in the sun there would be no doubt that I was who I claimed to be. No such luck though. I had to define my identity on my own.

However, in middle school that was no easy task. So what did I do? I surrounded myself with girls that no one questioned. Surely, if I associated with the obvious Mexicanas then half of the work would be done for me simply through association. I mimicked their style of dress, mannerisms, and vocabulary. With such a strict mother at home it was very difficult to "fit in" since I was forbidden to wear half of the staples in their wardrobe. Pero I did the best I could to improvise.

I hid a tube of dark maroon Wet-n-Wild lipstick in my locker that I'd slather on right before class and rush furiously to rub it off in time to catch my ride home. Needless to say this led my mother to believe that I had a severe case of chapped lips. The can of Extreme Hold Rave Hairspray that sat in the far

corner hidden by my English book made my permed hair crunchy and created the perfect “nest” of bangs. Gigantic gold shrimp earrings completed (or at least I thought they did) every outfit I wore. Their unique style of dress proved to be the one area I could not even remotely recreate. Shirts that were already too short for them fit me like tube tops and the extra wide JNCO Brand jeans didn’t come in tall sizes. Chihuahua. Oh well, at least I had most of the look down.

To reinforce my Mexican-ness I’d toss out an “eeejo” or a “nah-ah” or a “nombre guey” in mid conversation. During class, especially Texas History, I’d volunteer to read aloud only when talk of Mexico was guaranteed in the text I was assigned. The other students, and even the teacher would marvel at my perfect pronunciation of last names and cities they had never heard of. I still find it muy comico that I could pronounce names of others, but had trouble with my own for a while!

Eventually, my goal was accomplished and I didn’t have to try so hard to establish myself with the ethnic population at my school. Then, just when my life was perfecto, it was time to enter a whole new world, high school. I thought I’d have to reinvent myself once more. Thankfully, this proved not to be the case. My high school was a tight knit multicultural community that encouraged differences and individuality. I loved it.

Learning about different cultures and seeing the passion and pride in the eyes of international students encouraged me to further embrace my roots. Realizing that we are just different colored threads that are woven into a beautiful, comforting blanket of creation was a turning point in my life. I no longer had

to dress a certain way or model myself after social stereotypes to make it easy for non-Mexicans to point me out in a crowd.

I hate to admit it, but the closest I've gotten to visiting the land of my ancestors is crossing the border to go shopping in Progreso, but even then I only stayed for the day. I could not point out on a map where my grandparents were born and my conversational Spanglish and emphatic rolling of my "rrs" is the closest I will get to my native tongue. But that's okay. I know who I am and I will gradually learn more about where I came from so that I can decide where *Senorita Fa-ri-as* is going in life.

Kyle Seymour

Wednesdays with Joe

I could see Brother Joe waiting for me, sitting just inside the door of the Marianist's residence. As I entered he rose to his full height of six feet and greeted me with, "Are you a firefighter, because I could set my watch by you." I had to laugh. He slowly led the way down the hall towards his room. He offered me the better of the two chairs in his room, and then carefully lowered himself into his. He smiled kindly, accentuating the lines around his mouth and the corners of his eyes. The room is small, but each wall is plastered with hundreds of pictures. People of all nationalities, ages, and genders smile from their places on the wall. Ten photo albums sit busting at the seams on the bottom of a small bookshelf. He sagaciously rocked back and forth in his chair, his wisps of white hair bobbed with each rock as he said, "Tell me about your week." I "adopted" Brother Joe through the Marianist Friends program, and have since spent numerous Wednesdays listening to his countless stories. It's strange though, often times I leave his quaint home feeling as if he is volunteering to keep me company instead of the other way around.

Although he was born in the small town of Wilkes-Berry Pennsylvania, he has traveled all over the country, and taught in many large cities. Becoming a brother gave him many opportunities he otherwise would not have had. He reminisced about his first encounter with the brother-hood, "When I was in the fourth grade, I altar served at the early mass. I would see twelve brothers at every mass, and their dedication impressed me." Throughout high school he told everyone that would listen about how he was Notre Dame bound, and that there was not a

soul on Earth who could shake him from that dream, but he felt a constant tug to join the Marianist Brothers. After the last game of his four year baseball career, it hit him. He was being called to do more than just go off to college.

He put this assertion to the test by telling his baseball pals in the dugout that he no longer wanted to go to Notre Dame, but wanted to become a brother. Instead of "razzing" him like he thought they would do, he clearly remembered their reactions. They all yelled, "Go for it Joe! You'll be a great brother!" The fact that the brothers had made such an impression on his teammates resonated deep inside his eighteen year-old heart.

That was all he needed.

I asked him if he was ever scared or nervous about the implications of making such a large decision at such a young age. He smiled and continued gently rocking back and forth in his seat as he pondered the question; "Actually, I was more thrilled than any other emotion. I accomplished my dreams by making that decision. I felt accepted. I felt worthy."

He loved the job description of being a brother as well. Although priests have the important responsibility of administering the seven sacraments, they are tied down with the concerns of running a parish. Brothers, on the other hand, are free to immerse themselves with the wellbeing of the community as a whole. "Different religious orders focus on certain ministries," he explained, "the Carmelites focus on the prayer life, the Augustinians focus on poverty, and the Marianists focus on education." So he was encouraged to develop his spiritual life, and spread his knowledge and ideas through teaching. He received his bachelor's

degree in Humanities from Daytona University and then ventured out into the world of teaching.

His first assignment, to “wet his feet,” was at Central Catholic High School in San Antonio. He fondly remembers the young men at Central Catholic, which was, at the time, an all boys school. His disclaimer was what he calls his three “F’s.” He is Firm, Fair, but Fun. Brother Joe quickly gained a reputation as a prankster, and was loved by all the students. He remembered one occasion in particular. “Many of the students went home for the weekend, and would return Sunday evening. I have never allowed them to return to their dormitories until after ten o’ clock, so they had to fraternize. There was one student how came back and looked like dog meat and begged to go to his room, so I let him go to bed early. The other students noticed, and complained that I was favoring him.”

“The following weekend the young man came back, again looking similar to what a cat would drag in, so I let him go to bed early. The students gave me a hard time, so I had to act. I gathered everyone together and told them to go up to the dorm and start getting ready, as if they were going to morning mass. The kids eagerly participated in the scheme, and rushed up to their rooms. Meanwhile I reset every clock, with the exception of the clock in the chapel, to six. I entered the dorm and proceeded to wake the kids as usual.” He laughed at this point, “You should have seen his face! He saw everyone else getting dressed, so he threw on his clothes and rushed downstairs. As soon as he left I told everyone to get in their pajamas and go to bed. I went down to the chapel, where he was waiting at the door and said,

“What are you still doing up! You should be in bed!” he looked so confused!” he chuckled. “He poked his head into the chapel and saw it was eleven. He nearly passed out! Needless to say, he never asked to go to bed early again!”

He had many other similar stories. He was never quick to punish, and when he did, his punishments were always “Firm, Fair but Fun.” He enjoyed teaching, and deftly handled every situation that was thrown his way, from wild first graders to pre-pubescent terrors. In 1972, though, it all changed.

His most rigorous challenge yet came with the integration of what might as well have been another species, girls. His first experience teaching the female gender cam during his freshman religion course. “I still clearly remember her. Her name was Mary. She was a little redheaded Irish girl, and you know how Irish women have such tempers! I was in the middle of a lecture when she leaned over to one of her friends and began to whisper. I thought that was so strange! Boys never, for the most part, talked in class, and *especially* not during one of my lectures.

So, in keeping with my habits, I asked her, ‘So, Mary, would *you* like to teach the class?’” he laughed and continued, “She stopped talking, looked at me, then slammed her book closed and stormed out of the room. Her friend, red-faced, began to sob silently to herself. I had never seen anything like it! After class her friend walked over to my desk and said, and I’ll never forget this, ‘I think you were very rude to Mary?’ she then turned away briskly and stomped off. My jaw must have been touching the desk!” he remembered that later on in the day he saw her at lunch, bought her a soda pop and apologized. He pointed to a picture of a pretty middle aged woman on the

wall and informed me that she still calls him every now and then. She's since had three kids, and lives in Omaha.

It was then that I realized that each picture on his "wall of fame" was significant in some way. A picture of a famous wrestler is taped to one wall with, "Best of luck Joe!" scribbled across it. Next to that picture is one of a female Captain in the U.S. Navy. Below is a picture of a beautiful woman wearing a crown with the caption, "Miss San Antonio" some pictures are in black and white, and yellow with age. Others are Polaroid's with smiling families. Throughout my many Wednesday's spent with him I have heard various stories, and have yet to scratch the surface of all the lives he's touched in some way or another. Often times someone will call while we're talking, he answers and after the pleasantries says, "Can I call you back, I'm with a good buddy of mine." I can't help but smile.

Before I finished our interview he stopped me and said, "If you have to write one statement about me, write that I am a big believer in the sixth sense." I looked at him quizzically thinking, "He can see dead people?" Catching my look he responded, "There are five senses right? Sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing, but the sixth is the most important. Do you know what the sixth sense is?" he asked. I shook my head no. He answered his own question with a grin, "the sense of humor!" I left, as usual with his contagious smile on my face.

Dominique Vargas

Portrait of an Afghan

The picture loaded slowly on the blank computer screen. Within half an hour ten percent of the picture had loaded. An hour later a notice window flashed in the middle of the download stating that the file had been damaged and would not display correctly. Most of the family—nearly ten adults and seven children stood crammed into the small room, waiting to catch a glimpse of my uncle. Almost two years had passed since anyone had seen him, including his wife and three children who were gathered at the front of the crowd.

When my aunt closed the notification window, she gasped. About half of the picture had downloaded and after a moment, everyone's reactions, except for the children, mirrored hers. They could not understand why they were told they were going to see a picture of Uncle Isaac and instead they were shown a stranger. An Afghan man with most of his head covered peered out of the picture. He was very thin and his painfully familiar eyes had sunk deeply behind his brow and cheekbones. His beard reached his chest, which looked strangely bulky compared to his thin shoulders and arms.

When his oldest son, Alex, realized he was looking at his father, he started crying.

"What's wrong with Alux?" Jonathon, his younger brother always said his name with a 'u' sound at the end. No one knew exactly what to say. When his question went unanswered, Jonathon panicked. If his older brother, who had eight whole years of wisdom, experience and intelligence, was crying, he knew something must be wrong. "Mommy," tears began to

pour down his face, "Mommy what's wrong with Alux, where's Daddy?"

My aunt attempted to answer but her voice cracked. I put my hand on her shoulder. We had been raised like sisters, close enough in age to have sleepovers, talk about boys and even fight over clothes.

"That is your Daddy, sweetie," I tried to say it with an even voice but I was still in shock. It was my Uncle, special agent in OSI, United States Air force. In the three years he and my aunt had been married, he had undergone other physical changes in order to work undercover. He once gained nearly 50 pounds of muscle to work with the secret service. A few months later he dropped it and most of his weight, in order to reach a lean 150 pounds, stretched over a 6'3 frame and dyed his hair orange in order to investigate suspected drug use amongst other servicemen. As dramatic as those changes were at the time, they were nothing compared to what we saw before us now.

He was sent to Afghanistan immediately following the September 11 attacks in 2001. He stayed for approximately nine months the first time. He missed the birth of his daughter and Jonathon's first tooth. He came home for exactly five months and during that time he told the family he would have to go back for a longer tour. He prepared us for the lack of information and little communication but he told us he would be safe. Half of a small grainy photograph made us question all of his assurances.

In the months following his deployment the family slipped back into a daily routine. His absence was conspicuous but we were so removed from the war, it was easy to go through

a whole day without even thinking about it. The first few months after the invasion, news reports from Afghanistan were few and far between. We knew that special agents were searching for Osama Bin Laden but we thought they would do so in coordinated military operations. Isaac was not allowed to reveal anything about his mission or location during his monthly phone calls, but we all assumed he was wearing a uniform and sitting in a guarded military outpost compiling evidence, pouring over maps and suggesting Bin Laden's probable location.

Instead we saw an incomplete, poor quality photograph of an emaciated, bruised stranger. He was standing in front of a vast field of bright orange poppies and flanked by several other men. Each of them, including my uncle, held an antiquated AK47. Later, after the shock had worn off somewhat, my grandfather, a veteran of the Air Force, assured everyone that he could see the outline of a Kevlar vest under my uncle's thin cotton clothes.

That was the only vestige of his military position. He was utterly alone in a foreign country amongst people who were considered "the enemy." My aunt's face said what we were all thinking: he was in mortal danger every day. If the other men in the picture discovered his identity he would surely be killed and it was very possible, as an undercover agent, that he could be killed by American troops.

For days and weeks, I wondered what he did from day to day. Were the other men in the picture also undercover Americans? Were they Afghan rebels? Did they follow Bin Laden? Or did they simply protect the poppies for the field's owner? My

uncle never told us. He never talked about his time in Afghanistan. Officially, three years of his life were spent there and a subsequent two years were spent in Iraq. Countless other times he couldn't tell us where he was going but we assumed it was in the Middle East somewhere.

After all the stress and fear my family has experienced, there have been few tangible results. I still wonder if my uncle thinks the time he spent there was worth it. When he came back on a special diet to combat malnourishment was he convinced he had accomplished something? When he sees news reports of deaths and destruction, does he consider it a failure? It seems more respectful to never ask these questions. He continues to serve without any visible objection and he rarely talks about it. However, when reports from the Middle East are shown on the national news, for a moment, just before he leaves the room, his eyes express the sadness once captured in that old picture.

Shirley J. Martyn

2002: A Survivor's Story

March, 2002

They say CBS will air some new video of the plane hitting the first tower this Sunday (March 10) at 9:00 p.m. The radio people think they've got a great debate – is this sensationalism or truly newsworthy? My answer? Who cares!

Why should I matter? I didn't die. I didn't lose a loved one. I was there, but since I'm alive and unharmed I don't matter. If I had died my family would have received somewhere between \$25,000 and \$100,000 – and gotten a lot of press. If I had rushed back into the burning building I could now be labeled "Hero." But I didn't. I have no medical training and my CPR certification expired years ago. So I'm not getting a nice fat check.. I'm not a hero. I got 3 ½ days to get over it. I returned to work September 18th, even though I had no office to report to.

The library was part of the FBI crime scene. The MP wouldn't even let us look in the windows or through the glass doors. What do librarians do without a library? Apparently they go to other libraries. Most of the staff got relocated to other libraries. Off we went in groups of twos and threes, off to some foreign location, to places we didn't really want to be.

The Department of the Army immediately deemed us as unessential, though their politically correct term is "non-mission critical." So they began a massive "Everybody out!" They relocated most offices elsewhere around the D.C.-Metro area. The

library staff was eventually assigned to the Taylor Building in Crystal City. Our book collection remained in the Pentagon, though.

In December, claiming we were delaying the reconstruction and renovations, the Powers That Be threw the library out of the Pentagon. The books landed (in poor condition) on the 4th floor of the Taylor Building – plywood book trucks which had been used to move the collection became the new permanent shelves for the library collection. There they remain gathering dust as the Titanic gathers moss, never to fully return to the Pentagon.

A month does not go by without Those In Charge telling us how disappointed they are in our behavior, particularly when we ask for anything requiring money. *There's a war going on, don't you know? How can you be so selfish and shallow, don't you know our soldiers are out there fighting for us?! How on earth can you think of depriving our soldiers so you can have some barcodes?!? We have to support our troops! There's no money for desk supplies, copy paper, or staples. Certainly no money for books!*

And so I sit, six months after the attacks began on September 11. Our future is still undetermined. Every thing we try to do runs into roadblocks ... after all we're not soldiers in uniform, what could we possibly contribute to the war effort?

Dumb librarians and their books....

April 2002

I went to the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial after the conference day was through. It's nice and powerful at points. I entered on the East 9:01 A.M. end and exited on the West 9:03 A.M. end, which had chain-link fencing with memorials, flowers, teddy bears, notes, a red Christmas wreath of bells, ribbons, and more – a makeshift memorial still exists, years after the bombing.

My eyes filled with tears. I turned around and quickly walked away. I was angry. I felt betrayed. It's been almost seven months after someone flew a plane into the Pentagon – where are our flowers? our memorial? No where. We don't get one. The Pentagon is being rebuilt!

*We can't possibly think of setting aside a space for flowers, bears, and ribbons! Those are for **girls!** – This is the Army! We live for planes striking our buildings and terrorist acts! What is your **civilian** problem?*

The Army has denied me a budget, a place, a secure job, any sort of support, and a sense of importance. I get a paycheck. I'm supposed to be happy. They kept the Pentagon disaster out of the news. They're too busy fighting overseas to care about things at home.

It's been a massive cover-up from Day One. Rumsfeld stayed in the Pentagon; he didn't evacuate. It was as if there really wasn't any disruption of military service. The media focused on New York. Now the Pentagon is nearly rebuilt. I guess they'll

be taking down all those signs from the elementary schools in the halls – you can't have any indications that a plane ever hit the building.

The people who still live with memories will get over it or they'll get RIF-ed. There will not be a wall of teddy bears and ribbons near the site – send those to New York. "There's nothing to see here!" and "Go back to your lives!" is the attitude. We won't have any tears. We will have a little memorial service this year, but we can't spend much time planning it – we're busy killing people. We need that money for bullets, tanks, and choppers, not for honorariums, increased security, or flowers. Something happened. Be grateful you're alive and get on living.

I hate the Army.

September 11, 2002.

1020 EDT

We just finished watching the ceremony at the Pentagon on TV. It was awful. Rummy was bragging about the troops and the heroes. Dubbya was thanking everyone who helped rebuild. Those with *physical* injuries were welcomed, encouraged, and prayed for. The benediction asked God to challenge us "when we arrive safely because we sailed too close to the shore." Have we not suffered enough? Is it wrong to take a safe path? More pain and heartache will come into our lives, I understand, but must we **ask** for additional challenges??

So very little mention of civilians who work in the Pentagon. So little concern.

"Everyone is back in the Pentagon!" Then why were we watching TV in Crystal City, FORBIDDEN near the ceremony? 184 people died at the Pentagon last year on this date. 184 people – and one library. The library is still on life support, but it is essentially dead.

This ceremony confirmed my suspicions about the Army. The Army did not acknowledge that mental or emotional trauma was an injury. General Meyer thanked those with physical injuries for their courage and determination. He even explicitly stated, *"physical injuries."* No hint that any psychological/emotional damage may have occurred.

Bush and Rummy indicated that the Pentagon is a "working building," NOT a memorial. *"The quick re-building of the Pentagon symbolizes America's determination to eliminate terror,"* they said. Thus proving my suspicion that the Army can't even fathom memorializing September 11 at the Pentagon. *No pretty memorials here with their tourists and ribbons and human elements.*

Am I really this unimportant?

*If you aren't in uniform then you can't help fight the war.
Get out of the way!*

Those damn gray-haired librarians in their tennis shoes are so impossible! The library director's boss actually said that in a meeting with other Important People.

I was only twenty-five.

Lisa Ann Garcia

Keep Moving Forward

in memory of Dr. Keith Russell

He planted the small seed in tilled soil and patted it down with his hands. The water from the hose was clear and fresh and fell on the seedling like cold rain on a hot summer day. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and smiled as the bright sun warmed his face. The smile came from the satisfaction of knowing he had done something good for someone other than himself. This was just a small part of life for Dr. Keith Russell and he loved it.

He was grateful for all that was given to him, and I'm pretty sure he lived every day of his life to the fullest. There is no way I could put into one word the many great things I can remember about Dr. Russell, except maybe one of his favorites; Outstanding!

Dr. Russell and I formed a friendship almost immediately. We had so many things in common that we wanted to talk about. Our grandmothers, and their traditions they passed down to each of us. His grandmothers Muscat grape pie and my Grandma Lugo's *Arroz con Leche*. He respected every culture imaginable, and savored the tastes and experiences of the different countries he visited.

Throughout his travels, he brought back chocolates, candy, breads and cheeses from Europe, Germany and China. We often laughed about how many times he passed some of the cheeses and other items back into the United States without

getting caught! He created simple yet delicious foods, one which consisted of fresh tomatoes, sea salt, sliced onions, fresh parmesan reggiano and a drizzle of olive oil which he often ate for breakfast while he was in Spain.

One of the many conversations that I always enjoyed was when we talked about his garden. We went over all of the varieties of peppers and tomatoes he had grown, and every season he would bring bags of the red and yellow beauties to share with all of the office staff. He purchased special varieties of Habanero chilies, Chile piquin and even grew grapes and corn in his backyard. He made fresh spearmint tea from mint in his herb garden, and even grew purple potatoes for his potato salad. Although my small garden consisted of small grape tomatoes, and a few carrots, his knowledge of planting and gardening never ceased to amaze me.

The day before Dr. Russell passed away I was sitting in his office having a discussion about my performance and I was complaining to him about how I didn't have enough time in the day to eat lunch. Our meeting ended up becoming a life lesson. He told me how much he loved his life; how every day he woke up excited about coming into work, "ready for the adventure, ready for the ride".

He told me I needed to take a break and walk the campus to enjoy nature, breath in and out and to smile; because he appreciated me smiling when he knew sometimes I really didn't feel like it. We ended our conversation and I came back to my

desk. A few minutes later he walked by my office and stood in the hallway until I stopped typing to look up at him. I slowly looked at him and gave him one of the biggest fake smiles ever imaginable, which made him laugh as he gave me a “thumbs up”. I laughed too and he walked down the hall and up the hill.

To me, Dr. Russell was one of those rare, genuine and sincere individuals that we cross paths with once in our lifetime. I feel privileged to have met him and blessed to have had a friend who made such an impact in my life. When he gave me his word, he kept it. He pushed people to the best of their abilities, to improve themselves and to think about giving without receiving.

To think outside the box, and for the students in the Bill Greehey School of Business to make the best of their God given talents to make a difference in the world around them. A world where simple acts of kindness are not random and people still believe in themselves and others.

When someone dies, everything gets very weird. We're shocked and speechless. It makes us upset, we cry, and makes us do some crazy things. It also makes us think. We reflect on our own lives, what we should have done, could have done, and would have done if “life” had not gotten in the way.

For most people, we realize that we have too many “should have's” in our lives and it makes us appreciate life even

more. Then, for a few weeks after a death, we actually go out and do what we said we would do and we don't procrastinate.

We live a little. We become adventurous and live like there is no tomorrow. We call old friends and make new ones. We say I love you more and mend old wounds. We take the long way home and indulge in foods we gave up years ago. But then, after a while, "life" gets in the way again, and we're back in our daily routines and forget about all we said we should, could and would have done.

Dr. Russell was one of the exceptions because he lived every day as it would be his last. He helped me realize that I don't want to live with any could have's, should have's or would have's. Life is too short for that. Dr. Russell was not only my boss. He was my friend and I truly miss him.

His big smile and our daily hand wave from his window. His black cowboy boots and golden Rattler t-shirt. "Good Morning Lisa" and great conversations.

His many words of wisdom and stories of growing up on a farm. His thumbs up and words of encouragement. A contagious enthusiasm and southern charm. His ability to capture a crowd and his endless love for his family.

In our last conversation, Dr. Russell gave me a simple suggestion that I will always remember. Every time I feel I've failed or life doesn't seem that it's going in the direction that it

should, or if I have to eat at my desk yet again, I'll smile to myself and remember what my dear friend told me. I'll keep moving forward.

About the Cover Art

The Very Stones Cry Out for a Tidal Wave of Justice (2)

Original Watercolor 18 x 24 inches 46 x 62 cm.

© Barbara Paleczny 2000

Of this painting, Sister Barbara Paleczny, SSND writes:

In view of the violence and pollution in our world, my prayer is clear, "A mighty stream of justice simply is not adequate for the task at hand. God, you are getting a terrible reputation in our land. You promise to bring justice. If you do not hear our prayer, at least hear the stones crying out! The very stones cry out! The very stones cry out for a tidal wave of just relations." Our compassion for those exploited needs a voice in the public realm, even for our own health. Public injustice calls for public lament.

<http://www.barbpaleczny.blogspot.com>

The *Pecan Grove Review* 2009 staff is grateful to Sister Barbara Paleczny for her permission to use her inspirational painting for the cover art of the St. Mary's University literary magazine.

