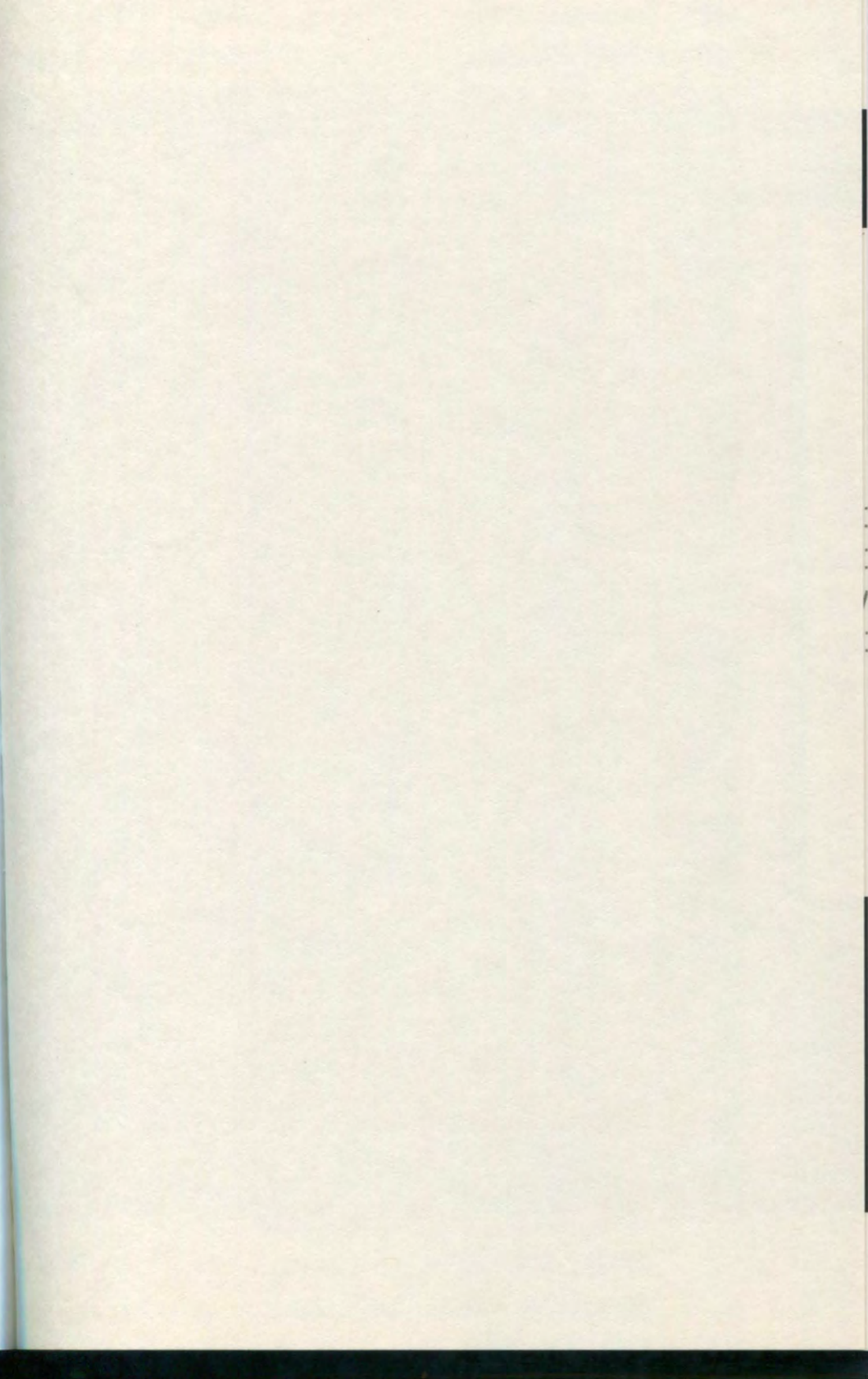


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Volume **II** -- Spring 1997



PECAN GROVE REVIEW

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1997

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view from a window

Meghan Fisher

Grey silk wisps of angel breath
Floating over and through
An icy blue sea
Great silver golden flashes
I am bedazzled
And the sense of a line
Is distorted where white
Liquid meets dark green
Stability
Oh, to be God and
See the bigger view
Than what I behold

Eclipse

Diane G. Bertrand

He never eclipses me.
He never steps
into my light.
He doesn't block
my path or
turn my hue orange
to fit his rainbow
He never eclipses me.

Both of us move
in the heavens,
sharing our space.
Both of us shine
in our own
special worlds.
Both of us crave
the tug of gravity
keeping us close,
keeping us moving
in the same direction.
Still,
He never eclipses me.

A PROMISE

for Jim Marshall

Glenn Hughes

Midnight. Unable to sleep
I try to lie still, try to focus on nothing.

And
three or four birds start singing
close by my window.

Birds singing
in the middle of the night?

The body is not solid;
the rock of Manhattan is not solid.
Buddhists chant and Christians shout.
The little boy lost in the woods sinks down.
But all this is a dream.

Tomorrow
when you wake up, you will know
why the birds of nothing
sang in the dark.

Wishing for a Wishing Well

Andrew Pohlmann

Sitting in the field alone, looking at the sky,
the clouds roll by.

A gentle breeze wafts across the field,
rustling the withering wheat crop.

Wishing for a well to wish in, I wish
for a drop of rain to drop by.

Wondering what will happen
to the wonderful wheat crop.

The dust drifts up, slowly slinking across the fields,
as a lone truck goes by.

The lowing of the cattle bellows across the wheat crop.

Spying a house, squatting amongst the trees,
a dry river goes by.

Wishing, wondering, hoping,
longing for my well,

my poor wheat crop.

The now dry breeze gently lifts my hair, as I sit alone
in my fields, and the days go by.

A View From Machu Picchu

Floyd Nickleberry

Azulpalpa wiped the sleep from his eyes and stretched vigorously. He peered out of the opening that served as a window to his hut upon another cold, but beautiful morning. He exhaled deeply. A breath of the cold mountain air always seemed to finish the job of waking him each morning. His heart pounded as he stared at the sight of Machu Picchu in the distance. The majestic beauty of the mountains left him speechless and deepened his desire to someday see the wonders that he had only heard about in stories. Just as Azulpalpa became immersed in his usual daydream, he heard the familiar voice of his mother calling him to breakfast.

"Azulpalpa, it's time for breakfast. Come and get it while it's hot."

Azulpalpa rushed to the spot his mother had prepared on the dirt floor. She had prepared his favorite breakfast of llama, potatoes, and corn cakes. Though his family was poor, there always seemed to be enough food, which was due largely to the hard work of his entire family. He ate quickly and when finished prepared for his day's work on the farm.

After Azulpalpa inhaled his food, he joined his father, who as usual had gotten up much earlier than he and was already at work. Without hesitation, Azulpalpa began to herd the young llamas into the makeshift corral that his father built. It didn't take long before they had the last of the llamas in the corral. With this job finished, Azulpalpa's dad thought it a good time to take a break.

As Azulpalpa and his dad sat there under a coca tree, they talked about his next job of inventorying the storehouses that held the maize and potatoes from the summer harvest.

"Azulpalpa, we must take an accurate count because in a few days, we must pay our taxes ."

"Father, do you think that I am old enough now to take the taxes to Machu Picchu this year?"

Azulpalpa's father did not respond immediately to the question from his son. He only sat there with a far-away look in his eyes. His thoughts turned to the many other times his son had asked the very same question.

"He is 18 seasons old this year. Maybe it is time for him to venture out and fulfill some of his duties as a man. After all, he is my only son, and will have to take care of his mother some day," his father thought.

Since his father had not responded, Azulpalpa sat there in silence and prepared to hear the same old negative answer that he had always heard. But suddenly, his father's whole demeanor changed and he put his arms around Azulpalpa and smiled broadly.

"Azulpalpa, you are now a man and I must treat you like a man. It is time that you take on responsibilities that a man must fulfill. I have raised you to be strong and independent. I know you are ready for your new role. You will take the taxes to Machu Picchu this year."

Azulpalpa couldn't believe what he had just heard. The excitement welled-up in him like a volcano ripe to explode.

"Thank you father! Thank you father! You won't be sorry. I will make you proud. "

With the energy of three men, Azulpalpa went through the storehouses and inventoried everything in half the normal time. He separated the percentage of all the produce that would serve as payment for their taxes. He prepared packs made from the hides of llamas in which to transport his important cargo to Machu Picchu.

Sweat poured from the brow of Azulpalpa as he packed the last of the potatoes and corn onto the llamas that would carry his cargo to Machu Picchu. It was unusually warm for a Fall morning. With the excitement of the trip still fresh in his mind, Azulpalpa hardly noticed the hint of tears welling up in the eyes of his mother. They were not tears of sorry, but tears of joy. Her son was now a man. She wanted to hug him, but knew it was something she could no longer do -- a man is not hugged by his mother. She settled for a long prideful stare and

muttered the words: "Be well my

son", as he led his llamas to the path that would take him on the first leg of his trip to Machu Picchu.

Azulpalpa had traveled many miles up the winding mountain road when suddenly he noticed that people were rushing past him, headed in the opposite direction. The people appeared to be panic-stricken as they discarded valuable possessions in order to hasten their retreat from Machu Picchu. Azulpalpa was perplexed and confused. He didn't know what was going on, but he was confident that whatever it was, he would be able to handle it.

After a while, the flow of people from Machu Picchu stopped and Azulpalpa was able to continue his journey towards the city of his dreams. He had only gone a short distance when he noticed another group of people running towards him.

"What's happening? Why is everyone in such a panic?" Azulpalpa asked of a stranger.

"The gods are angry at us." The stranger responded. "The gods have sent men with sticks that spit fire and smoke, with the sound of thunder. You must turn around and go back, if you want to live. Hurry! Hurry! They come right behind us."

Azulpalpa, still holding on to the llamas that held his family's taxes, was stunned, but curious nevertheless about the gods and the exotic men and weapons they had loosed upon his people. Because he was curious, he lingered for a bit too long.

The man that stood in front of Azulpalpa was a giant in his eyes, standing well over six feet tall and dressed in strange menacing looking clothing. Azulpalpa had never seen a man as large as the one who now blocked his path. His body seemed frozen in place and unable to respond to the desperation he felt inside. With all the strength he could muster, Azulpalpa suddenly snapped out of his spell and turn to run from what he now recognized as imminent danger. But as he turned, the giant spoke in a

loud and unfamiliar tongue. Some how, Azulpalpa knew that he meant for him to stay put and not run away. Slowly, he turned to face the monster that had him cornered. The stick that the man held in his hand was now pointed directly at him. If the people he had seen running away told the truth, this was the stick that spat fire and thunder. Azulpalpa thought it best not to test the power of the gods, so after he turned, he held perfectly still as the man approached him. Still unconsciously holding firmly onto his llamas and their cargo, the confidence that he exhibited only a day before had turned to despair.

The strange man spoke, but Azulpalpa didn't understand a thing he said. He was soon joined by a large number of other men who were dressed in similar clothing. The strange clothing blinded Azulpalpa when the sun struck it and he had to cover his eyes. The men forced Azulpalpa and all of the other people who had also been captured to give up their property. He only struggled mildly when they ripped the llamas away from his firm grasp. But he held on firmly to the gold "Huaca" that he wore around his neck, a parting gift from his father as a source of luck and to offer protection by the gods. Azulpalpa's resistance was in vain, as the men ripped the metal from his neck with little effort. They seemed very excited about anything that was made from the yellow metal. When some of the people resisted giving up the metal, they were brutally struck down.

"What value is this metal to them that it is worth a human life? But, why wasn't I struck down when I resisted as many of the others were. They were all old and helpless. Why did they have to kill them?" Azulpalpa thought.

The answers to Azulpalpa's questions came quickly. The second day after his capture, he was herded together with another group of young men. There was a group of the men holding their "firesticks" standing watch over them. They noticed any attempt by the young men to communicate with each other. After a day without food or water, a group headed by a large man with an even brighter set of

the strange clothing came into the area where the young men were being held. With him, was an old man of Incan ancestry who had somehow survived the slaughter of the older people. The man in the brightly shimmering clothing turned and spoke to the old man, who appeared to understand him. The old man shook his head vigorously in disagreement, but a firestick was placed under his chin and he was forced to do as he was told. The old man's words were shocking to the young captives.

"You are now all the servants of El Conquistador Pizarro. You will do as he tells you if you want to stay live," the old man said.

Azulpalpa was even more confused and frightened after hearing the old man's words. *"Who is this Pizarro and what is a conquistador? I'm just a poor peasant from the farm, who was just trying to pay the taxes for his family. Why would this strange man want me as his servant?"* he thought.

The reality of his situation was almost unbearable for Azulpalpa. He was now a slave for the conquistadors. They subjected him and the other young men to inhumane treatment. They worked long hours in the silver and gold mines, but never seemed to satisfy their captors thirst for the shiny metals. Where he had always had more than enough food back on the farm, the amount of food he was given was barely enough for survival. He knew that he would die if he didn't escape from the conquistadors.

It was a beautiful sunny day in the Andes, when Azulpalpa was instructed by his captors to retrieve water for the noon meal. Several of the captives, including Azulpalpa were sent to get the water with only one guard. Azulpalpa immediately thought that this could possibly be his chance to escape. He knew that the well from which he was to get water was surrounded by trees that could provide cover for his escape. He had been there on many other occasions and had mentally gone over his escape plan time after time. On clear days, the view from Machu Picchu provided a panoramic view of the whole valley. Azulpalpa was sure that he had pinpointed the exact location of his farm, many miles in the distance. All he

had to do now was to make his escape.

Azulpalpa was unprepared for the sudden commotion among his companions in the water expedition. In the blink of an eye, they scattered into the trees that surrounded the well. They also had plans to escape. Azulpalpa did not react quickly enough. He tried to run towards the security of the trees, but he could not outrun the reach of the sentry's firestick. The bullet struck him in his back. It knocked him forward and down into a ravine.

When Azulpalpa regained consciousness, he was in severe pain, covered with blood and lying face down in a small stream. He tried to move, but his legs would not work. Finally, he was able to turn himself over and look up towards the heavens. He prayed to the gods that they help him survive his ordeal. The gods would not answer his prayers.

Azulpalpa remembered the pride his father showed when he allowed him to deliver the taxes to Machu Picchu. He could still feel the firm embrace of his father and hear his words reminding him that he was a man. He could see the tears of his mother that he had so cleverly not acknowledged as he prepared to leave for his ill-fated trip.

He could see the faces of beautiful young women that danced before his eyes. Dressed in white, they danced, and they danced, and they danced, until they slowly faded into darkness.

Since You Fell Away

Diane G. Bertrand

My life hasn't been calm since you fell away.
I cling tighter to those I love.
I find a prayer upon my lips everyday,
and I can't look at your sons without seeing you.
In Aida's eyes I see the struggle and the loss.
I hardly knew you, but you haunt my every breath.

What were you thinking
before you claimed your last breath?
Did you scream for destiny to go away?
Did you cry at the thought of your sons' loss?
Did you mourn for everyone whom you love?
Did you grieve for those who would never know you?
Did you accept death to part you from Aida everyday?

I find myself searching for you everyday.
I hear voices whisper your name under every breath.
In faces of strangers, I want to discover traces of you.
I want someone to tell me you didn't truly fall away;
that you are still there for those whom you love.
I want your physical presence to push away my loss.

I wonder how your death could bring me this loss
when I can see my loved ones around me everyday.
I can touch the man whom I love most
and I can taste joy any moment I take a breath.
No one has succeeded in taking my life away,
yet life is more fragile now that I live it without you.

No one warned me about this grief I'd feel for you.
I can't find words to explain this type of loss.
Anyone else might have been taken away.
Now I live with the fear of tragedy everyday.
Too many emotions in the space of a breath--
all this, without being one who felt your love.

Now there's a part of me who will forever love
and cherish those memories others keep of you.
I will feel your spirit until I claim my last breath.
Hoping for moments when I don't burn from this loss,
I continue to search for new reasons everyday.
Why has my life changed so much since you fell away?

You fell away during an errand of love,
one last breath that sealed our loss.
You lost everyday in the moment we lost you.

(For Eddie Mazuca)

Stars of pain

Meghan Fisher

stars of pain
mingle quietly with
the soul of god
and angels' sorrow
emanate on high
if wings flapped
hard enough
perhaps an instance
of peace could
be found
alas, no such luck
we must find
that chaotic earth
is home
and heaven cannot
save us
but will help us
realize ourselves

Initiation

Earl McDonald

Kevin Freeman had always been uppity. That's why Steve decided to kill him. Kevin was one of the first of the blacks they let into the Air Force in his field. He got promoted fast but that was the secret plan. The secret quota system that put them in jobs that should have belonged to a white man. Steve didn't know about the plan back then when he first met Kevin. He didn't find out about it until he joined the retirees club. That's when he found out about the national Jewish conspiracy to put blacks and women into jobs that belonged to white men. Affirmative action plans they called them and said they were just trying to level the playing field for minorities. As if blacks and women were supposed to be equal. As if blacks and women did not have their place in the world ordained by God, a place that was subordinate to the white man.

Still, Steve did not think he would be able to really kill him or anyone else. When they told him it was a requirement to become an officer in the Club, he thought they were joking. They weren't though. They showed him the newspaper clippings of the "accidents" that had been part of their confirmation. They explained they only killed the people that didn't know their place, the uppity ones who had taken jobs from white men. They explained that they had to fight to keep the Jews from winning. These were Steve's friends and he knew they were speaking truth. They were people who understood that Steve would have had a much more successful career in the Air Force if the Jews in Washington hadn't screwed him to help their black friends. Steve slowly began to see that this conspiracy had kept him from all his dreams. He saw that Kevin had taken jobs that should have been his. He saw Kevin as an example of what was wrong with America. He

was determined that Kevin wouldn't keep him from getting this position.

Steve had wanted to be a on the basketball team in high school. He wasn't fast and he couldn't jump, but he could shoot. His dad had been a three letter man in high school and Steve wanted to be just like him. But his dad had played for a segregated, all white team. Steve's high school had just been integrated. The basketball coach made sure he got all the blacks that could play ball in Steve's school. All of them were fast and could jump. They could shoot as well as Steve and they could block any shot Steve tried to make. They took what should have belonged to him. Steve didn't make the team and became the manager. Three years he spent washing their uniforms and handing them towels. Chasing balls for them at practice. Kevin was a basketball player.

"Kevin, how the hell are you? This is Steve Masefield. Jerry told me you were in town. This is the fifth hotel I called looking for you."

"I heard you were on vacation in the mountains somewhere."

"I am. I talked to Jerry on the phone. He said you were going to Chattanooga and I thought you could drop by for a night since it's on the way"

Steve arranged to meet Kevin at the highway turn off. The guys at the Club had already talked to friends with the police and they would be the first ones on the scene. In fact, Tom Lilly would be the investigating sheriff's deputy and would make sure it was classified as an accident. Tom was a member of the club too. He had been vice president of the club when Steve first joined. One of the newspaper clippings had his name written on it.

Steve knew the mountain road well. He had driven it at least 20 times while he was planning the accident. He knew exactly which places were the best places to run Kevin off the road and he knew how fast he could drive the gravel mountain road.

Kevin showed up at the turn off right on time. The fool had always been punctual. Steve led him to a gas station and pointed at a dirt road on the left.

"Just follow the road until it dead ends, that'll be my place. I've got to pick up a few things."

"I'll wait."

"No, no need. Dotty is expecting you. I don't know how long this will take."

Kevin drove off. Steve called to make sure Tom Lilly was ready and then got in his old Ford pick up to catch Kevin. In no time, he caught up. Of course, he knew the road, Kevin didn't. Just before they came to the place Steve had chosen, Steve pulled up along side. Kevin started to slow down so he could get around. But Steve slowed down too. Kevin looked over at Steve to see what he was doing. Steve smiled and waved and then, he turned the steering wheel hard to the right. There was a crunch of metal and the sound of the tires sliding on the gravel. Then there was silence as Kevin's car flew off the side of the road into nothing.

Steve stopped the truck, got out, and looked down into the ravine. He saw Kevin hanging part way out of the driver side window. He wasn't moving. Steve looked at the damage to his truck. It was banged up but could still be driven. One of the guys in the club said he would fix it for free. Steve took out a small cigar and waited for the sheriff. He smiled.

the march

Nancy Sepulveda

my allies hate you
call you names
Nazi Liar Devil
He betrayed you they say
Anti-jew Anti-women Anti-life
Anti Anti Anti
i close my eyes ears mind
betraying my race, my sex, myself
(for you)
yet i am just another jew to you
marching down that straight and narrow--your loyal
follower
(even though i am slow, slower than the rest)

You are on top of a distant hill
Your arms outstretched---beckoning me to you
i scream in silence
trying to stifle my need for your protection
but i stray and sneak as a spy towards you
i climb the hill made out of the broken bones and skulls of
fools and martyrs
i lick your feet
i lick your legs
with the urgency of a child suckling his mother's breast
ah, i have been given life

(a slap)

i tumble down wrapped in bones and blood
landing in a dark ditch of dung and dirt
hurled back to the fence
barbed wire consoling and cutting me
i am bleeding
Death is coming someone wails
as we march on
towards the house with the chimney billowing out dark
thick clouds of smoke and ashes

they seem to want someone to help
but i don't
i want to die
i should die
i am slow slower than the rest
i need to die
and in whose hands better to die than in yours, Daddy?

Romeo Is Dead

for Bob C.

H. Palmer Hall

I was Capulet to his Romeo. My daughter
the target of his lust, just fourteen, ripened,
ready to rid herself of that slight tissue
that would marry her to a Parisian count.

Years later I read about him,
this Romeo, young handsome man
that I remembered still from school,
romantic, love writ large upon his face.

His Juliet still lived, settled into
matronly mediocrity, two sons
in law school, a daughter married to
a teacher at the local college.

Juliet

pickets abortion clinics in her spare time,
sells cosmetics for Mary Kaye, hosts
each year two tupperware parties for
a highly select few dozen friends.

But Romeo? He had a brighter life,
strutted his hour upon the stage.
I read about him in the local paper:
"Actor, 42 years old, best known
for playing a crack addict on Hill
Street Blues, of AIDS, New York,
September 13, 1982."

Romeo

is dead and Juliet doesn't care. She
reads the paper, smiles, thinks of him
beneath her balcony, dreams they married,
made love when she was just fourteen
and died together in the family tomb.

When the quilt came to our town,
I searched closely for his name and found it,
obscure, one among many, not at all
like the man who saw Juliet in the east
and thought he saw the sun.

Dislocated, Isolated

Hector Carrillo

Dislocated and isolated,
I cried in silence, stooped on a red bench.
There I was, ugly and ignored-
Like the crushed cigarette butt
that lay two feet away-
trampled on and so easily disposed.
My youthful life, meaningless, was bitterly
scattered
like the dispersion of fragmented tobacco leaves
under the pecan tree.
It was a faulty attempt to bury it-
My heavy foot was no match for the concrete.
The many pebbles coalesced with cement
withstood my every stomp-
The ground would not welcome my pain either.
There were no signs of ashes,
or my tears,
Both must have blown away,-
but the cigarette butt and I still remained;
dislocated, isolated.

Wishing for Words...

Sara Schurtz

Where have you gone?
Are you lost forever or just for now,
when I need you the most?

I search in vain for you-
but you are nowhere to be found.
I used to taste your sweetness on my lips,
hear your poetic beauty in my head,
and feel your power on my pen.
But now,
you swim around aimlessly in my head
like the jumbled letters in a can of alphabet soup.

Where have you gone,
you damn **words**?
Without you I am confused,
ignorant,
and powerless.
Without you, I am
 nothing.

Factor Unknown

Servando Pena

The clouds have lifted,
the curtains drawn;
in the dawn's new light
a child is reborn

Passion fills our hearts,
hearts pumped with new blood,
ignited with the flames
of our concern

Our heads are in the heavens
but our feet we keep grounded
we look to save the planet
starting with ourselves

We were the Generation X,
the unknown factor,
we were the confused,
in a world that didn't understand

They predicted we were doomed-
consigned to a computer abyss;
no soul, no passion
to keep us afloat

But no Machine rules our lives,
no cold calculating movement in our soul;
our life is forged in fire,
and grounded in desire

We fight for what we believe
as we strive to make things better
for our children and ourselves;
we are the guardians of the future.

Sweet Apple Nights

Liz Thompson

Sweet apple nights
drip juice into my thoughts
Sprinkle cinnamon-sugar
onto my Red Delicious eyes
Bathe me in pleasure when I bite
into luscious skin
Conceive hunger that drives me
straight to the core
Leaving behind
a sterile, seedless, empty
STEM.

Save the Babies

Ceann-Cinnidh

Some of us live in big white houses,
some of us live in small
Some of our names are written on blackboards,
some are written on walls

Some of our daddy's work in factories,
some of them stand in line.
Some of our daddy's buy us marbles,
some just buy cheap wine.

But at night you can't tell the Sunday suits,
from tattered overalls.
Then we're only children,
children one and all.

Some of us take our lunches in boxes,
some in paper sacks.
Some of us join in laughter,
some of us hear it at our backs.

Some of our mothers dress up rich,
some of them dress up poor.
Some of our mothers go to socials,
some of them are whores.

But at night you can't tell party dresses,
from hand me downs too small.
Then we're only children,
children one and all.

Some of us grow up handsome,
some of us grow up plain.
Some of us own the world,
Some of us just our names.

Some of our people die in misery,

some die in peace.
Some die for nothing,
but dying doesn't cease.

And at night you can't tell the fancy coffins,
from boxes in the hall.
Then we're only children,
children one and all.

The 9:30 Double Decker

Colleen Johnston

The bus bomb that exploded in London killed 17 people. There was so much other activity that once the charred bodies were removed from the now air conditioned bus, you saw how they were simply laid in rows upon the street. They were not covered. People were not kept away from looking at them. You, along with those that had the strength to look, saw the *precise* moment in time before the explosion. The dead each wore a some what similar expression. One not of agony or pain, but of the every day look that people so often wear. In this frozen moment, that you with great effort and those with great stomachs could see, were the different kinds of people that rode a 9:30 double decker through London. One dead woman still clutched her dead baby to her chest. The child's mouth was open where the woman's breast would have been. Another woman held various meats and black bread in her arms. The bobbies had to come to keep the birds away from her. A man seemed to lay in silent prayer while smoke still rose from his bald head. His wedding band still hung to the stump on his bloody, black remaining hand. Three uniformed school children looked like dolls thrown into the ashes of a fire. So perfect and innocent even in death. A teenager who sat by the window lay in smoking, tattered jeans. He or she no longer had a face, just a black skull with black teeth protruding, as if caught in a yawn, under the black sockets where his or her eyes once were. Glass was sticking up like tulips from the skull. Several of the bodies were just burnt skeletons smiling the black smile of death.

The bodies continued to be placed in the growing horizontal line. The bus still burned, witnesses and family members still cried, but all you could do was look on and pray. *Our Father who art in heaven, who could be so insane? Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, from this earth please take these souls to heaven. Give us this day a level head and forgive the staring mass. Lead us not into*

damnation. Forgive those who did this, and allow me that strength too.

The last body was placed onto the black pavement. A baby's body lay alone, stiff like a child's toy. Many focused on this statistic and wailed. Some that looked on tore their clothes. Others knelt in prayer.

A singular, piercing wail came from the line of bodies. A woman with the face of a silent scream, as that of a child, sat on the ground rocking one of the school children's scorched body. She rocked it and wept, her falling tears caused little puffs of steam to come from the crumbling body.

The fire, still not entirely out, was causing those that crowded with sick curiosity to sweat. You felt the perspiration rolling under your overcoat. You took it off and held it in your damp arms. You looked again at the lone child with its arms outstretched as if wanting to be picked up. You laid your black briefcase and umbrella down against a phone booth and walked toward the child. The bobbies came now to keep the crowd controlled, but let you by as if they didn't see you. You squatted before the child, the burnt plastic smell of its diaper piercing through your nostrils and into your brain.

Lord, you prayed. Take this child's soul into heaven now. Hold it in your loving arms, and let it live in paradise with you; safe, happy and loved. Do not judge this innocent child, and have mercy on those that killed it. I pray that you may love this child in heaven until I get there. Then Lord, with your mercy, I will pick up this child too; for I believe that was it's last wish. Have mercy on my soul.

You placed your coat gently over the child and then dissipated into the staring mass.

Summer Silence

Margaret Luevano

Cicadas call
Softly, softly
Warm air rustles
Among leaves and branches.
Moon and stars peep
Reticently from the heavens.
Flowers' sweet aroma
Taunt, yet escape the nose,
And hold tightly
The Secret.
Stillness --
Summer silence.

Ever moving children
Surrender in sleep
Never resting adults
Enjoy peace.
Light glows
Upon open porch.
Shadows and figures
Float, dance.
Rocking chair creaks
Wood against wood.
Not a word spoken,
Everything told.

One brief hour,
Everything known.
Flesh forgotten --
Exists.
Only the soul
Welcoming, enveloping
Becoming one
With the night.
Stillness --
Summer silence.

An Essay For Any Man Who Has Ever Been Called A "Sissy"

Jacob Padilla

As a small boy I fell in love with the *Nutcracker Suite*. I had seen a ballet company perform it on PBS and from that moment on I wanted to dance just like them. I asked my father if I could become a dancer like the ones on television. He simply smiled and said, "I can't let you become a 'ballerina', I don't want you to become a 'faggot'."

I did not understand what my father was saying at the time but looking back, now I do. Society taught him that masculine boys become "men", effeminate boys become "faggots". My father's goal in life was to ensure his son became a "man" and not a "faggot".

Remembering my childhood, I now realize why my father was worried about my masculinity at such an early age. I was not like the other little boys. I did not play with cars or trucks. I liked stuffed animals and making mud pies in the backyard. I preferred playing house with the little girls in the neighborhood. I did not like to rough-house or play war with the little boys. I was a quiet, sensitive boy who had a "Cabbage Patch Kid" that I adopted and named after myself. I liked to sing and dance and wanted to be on television. In the eyes of my father and most of American society, I was on highway 69 headed for "Faggotsville". Society wants clearly defined individuals to live their lives within a set of strictly defined parameters.

As an American male, I got my training for manhood from television, movies, and school. What they taught me is that real men are people like Rambo and G.I. Joe. From these mediums I learned that "real men" blow up, hurt, kill, over power the bad guy, and sleep with the prettiest blond girl they find.

At school, I was taught that little boys do not cry when they feel pain or loss, only little girls do that.

Little boys are to play outside, will be laughed at if they would rather play with a doll, and should like football and baseball. The only man I could identify with on television was Mr. Rogers. He was sensitive, thoughtful, and caring; not the typical male role model, but my role model.

I believe Mr. Rogers to be very masculine. He worked hard and became successful. He has had only one wife, and his children, grandchildren and children all over this country love and respect him. He was not a war hero or basketball player. He is a man who lived up to his responsibilities at home and in society. At home he raised his children. For his country, he taught children how to read, tie their shoes, and live virtuous lives with care, love and understanding. This is my idea of masculinity. Our culture must realize that manhood comes in all shapes, forms, and persuasions.

A masculine man is one who thinks, creates, and perpetuates all that is good in our society. Unfortunately those of us who are pacifists, negotiators, and creators of beauty are labeled as "sissies" or "wimps". American culture argues that they want their men to be responsible for their actions and loved ones yet our heroes are womanizers, killers, and athletes.

I, as a "non-masculine man", have come to the conclusion that in order to follow my true self I will not play American culture's version of the "man". I have to play man in my own way. As an adult "wimp", "pinko-faggot-leftist liberal", and many other choice names label me as a member of society. Never once have I been called a man.

I have reached the conclusion that I will never be like the majority of men in our culture. I will be looked at as odd and less of a man. People will speak ill of me and think up all sorts of new labels for me when I leave the room. Even though Americans will not accept my definition of manhood, I do. I understand that not everyone will tolerate or accept my ideas. Sometimes I wonder why God created men like me. In my short experience on this

planet, I have come to the conclusion that God made me the way he did because in His wisdom He realized that the world needed more men with low testosterone levels.

The world needs negotiators, poets, dancers, creators, and nurtures. God realized that some men have to be the thinkers and perpetuators of value, love, and kindness. This is my solace in a culture that refuses to call me a man. Yet, I have no solace for the pain I feel every time I watch a ballet recital. The little boy inside of me wants to be up on stage with them, and my soul mourns for the creativity and beauty that was never allowed to blossom because of my father's words..."I don't want you to become a 'faggot'".

O'Squash

Liz Thompson

Lonely,
 sitting in a pile
grouped
 with many copied facsimiles.
Dark, forest green.
Hoping,
 praying,
someone will pick him
from the clones that threaten to
drown him in a sea of similarities.
His ridges enclose a smooth olive skin.
Slightly bigger than the masses,
He draws admiration,
beckoning me to hold him,
feel him,
buy him,
before he rots away in a world that
has no room for
a squash.

Hands

Margaret Y. Luevano

Yes,
My hands are soft
And Brown.
My life,
Though not painless,
Has been easy.
I have had opportunity --
To think
To learn
To grow.

My hands are soft,
But beneath the softness
Lies the roughness of the
Great women before me --
Mi madre
Mis abuelitas
Y todas mis madres.

Yes,
My hands are soft,
But within them are infused
The strength
The pain
The labor
The hard work
Of my mothers.

Because of them,
My hands are soft.
Because of them,
I think.
Because of them,
I learn.
Because of them,
I grow.

And I can never forget
The Gift
They have given me
And my daughters to come--
Soft, Brown hands.

First Date

Cynthia Duenes

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for it to happen." I looked up and caught hold of the officer's stern, black eyes. He didn't believe me. The other three investigating officers busied themselves with the task of making a pot of coffee, which seemed to necessitate all of their cooperation. They kept grumbling about missing the Laker game.

"Ma'am, we can get through this night a whole lot fast if you just tell me what *really* happened. Now let's start all over from the beginning."

"I told you everything already. It was an accident. I didn't mean for it to happen. But he wouldn't stop. I kept telling him to stop, but he wouldn't listen to me. Please. I just want to go home. I tired and I want to clean up."

I looked down at my soaked Khaki skirt. There was mud splattered all over the skirt from where we had struggled. My white, cotton top was torn in the front where he ripped it open. I had managed to cover myself with a faded, blue shirt I always carried in the trunk of my car as I ran for help. My brown sandals were caked with thick mud. I felt so dirty. I don't think I will ever be able to wash away the filth that covers my body.

The smell of brewing coffee and smoke filled my senses as I rocked back and forth, crossing my arms to keep from shivering off from the hard, cherry wood chair. I closed my eyes and I lived that horrible moment immediately. Tears instantly started burning the corners of my eyes, falling freely without shame as I remembered his strong hands tearing at my clothes and his cold stare burning inside my soul as he thrust himself inside of me.

My whole body ached. I felt as if I had been hit by a train. Every joint in my body ached from the struggle just hours before. The sound of distant thunder shook me and brought me back to the scene. The rain had now stopped

to just a trickle, but a couple of hours ago it bore heavily onto the slick roads.

Robert had picked me up at my cousin Margaret's house for dinner and a movie. Robert was Margaret's friend from college. He had moved here several years ago when his father took office. My short visit to Greensboro had suddenly turned into an interesting weekend. I had not planned on going out, but Margaret had arranged the blind date with Robert. I was a little surprised and embarrassed, but I loved Margaret dearly, and I did not want to disappoint her. After all, it had been a whole year since I had gone out with any other man since my ex-husband, Thomas.

Margaret and I had stayed up the night before planning on what I would wear. I felt like a young girl again getting ready for her first, big date instead of a thirty-one-year old divorcee. We giggled and talked about the old days. Margaret was going to stay home and cook dinner for Mike, her fiancé.

He rang the door bell at six-thirty sharply. I was already impressed at his promptness. Thomas had never been on time for anything. Not even our wedding. I was a little nervous. I had not been out on a date in so long. How should I act? What should I say? I bit my lower lip in anticipation and took a deep breath as I opened the door to let Robert inside. His warm, friendly smile eased all my worries. He looked nice in his blue Levis and black turtleneck and loafers. Thomas would never be caught in loafers. If he didn't wearing his old, ragged sneakers, then he usually wore his black, cowboy boots. I'm glad I had decided to wear my Khaki skirt and white, cotton blouse. I was casual enough for a movie but fashionably acceptable for a first date.

We talked briefly in the living room. The conversation helped ease my nervousness. Margaret, as usual, led the conversation talking about the old days at the university. Robert reminded me about our dinner reservations so we left Mike and Margaret shortly after seven. The restaurant was just several blocks away so we arrived fairly quickly. Robert's sports car smelled like

his cologne, *Obsession*. The interior was spotless. It must be new, I thought as we pulled into the parking lot.

Dinner was pleasant. The conversation flowed smoothly. After two glasses of white Zinfandel, I was very relaxed. I felt as if I had known Robert all my life. We exchanged life stories. I found out that he had broken up with his girlfriend just three months ago. I was his first date, too. As we ran toward the parking lot, the drizzle from earlier had turned into a down pour. We ran quickly, but we still got wet. Robert grabbed an orange, beach towel from the back seat and began to dry me off. I smiled as I remembered how Thomas always got the car first, then he would pick me up at the front of the restaurant. He was a jerk in many ways, but his manners were always impeccable.

As Robert fidgeted with the stereo, I noticed that it was almost nine. I wondered if we would make the movie on time. The wine I had earlier started to have its affect on me. I leaned my head back on the seat, closed my eyes and slowly tapped the beat of the song with my foot. Robert's touch startled me. His cold hand was resting on my left knee. I wasn't quite sure how to handle the situation, so I left his hand there. I had not noticed before, but as I peered out into the night through the pouring rain, I noticed that we had driven away from town towards the cliffs that overlook the ocean. I looked at Robert and asked him where we were going. He smiled and said it was a surprise. I was so tired and sleepy from the wine that I did not think twice about his sudden change of plans. I started to make conversation with Robert hoping it would awaken me, but I noticed that he had himself suddenly grown quiet. Perhaps the wine had dulled his senses, too.

When Robert finally stopped the car, I was not quite sure where we had stopped. I heard the ocean waves crashing against the large boulders beneath the steep cliff. Instantly, I knew the location. It had been years since I had visited Greensboro, but I remembered coming out here as a child with Margaret during summer vacations. We used to look out to the sea and pretend we were great

explorers searching for lost treasures. As I stepped out of the car following Robert's lead, I noticed the rain had dwindled down to a gentle drizzle. Robert walked over and grabbed my hand.

"I brought you to my special place. I come out here when I'm sad and lonely," Robert said as he stared out into the ocean. We were standing close to the edge of the cliff, but Robert still continued to approach the edge. I stopped and pulled away. The cold, wet wind brought me to my senses and fear suddenly gripped my gut. Robert kept on talking not making any sense. I'm not sure that he was aware of me anymore. I started to turn away and get back in his car when he suddenly grabbed my damp hair and yelled at me.

"Where do you think you're going, bitch?" Are you going to leave me, too?" he said pulling my hair harder making me cry and scream.

"Robert, what. . .are you doing? Please let me go. You're hurting me," I cried but the more I pleaded, the harder he pulled. He continued to verbally abuse me. Instead of calling me by my name, he was now calling me Emma. I tried pleading with him, but he would not listen to reason. As he let go of my hair, he quickly turned me towards him. He held me with one hand as the other one tore my shirt open. He stared hard and started to touch my breasts. I cried and begged him to stop. The rain had started to pour again blinding me, but it did nothing to hinder his crude advances.

As if in some kind of a trance, Robert pushed me down on the hard, wet ground. With one quick motion, he had pushed up my skirt, torn my panties off and had thrust himself into me. I cried and tried to push him off. I dug my nails on the side of his face when he let go of my right hand to adjust himself. He screamed out in pain and instantly reached for his face. The dripping blood from his face distracted him long enough for me to push him off. I got up quickly not looking back and ran into the night. I was not sure where I was going, but I knew I had to run quickly. He cursed at me and started to chase me. I was half crazy with fear, but I ran as fast as I could. Chills

filled my bones as he grabbed me. He started to shake me violently. He cursed and hit me with his fist across my left cheek. Instant warmth filled my mouth and my lower lip quickly swelled. He started to yell at me and accused me of cheating. He grabbed me again and continued his ranting and raving. He was angry and could not accept my infidelity.

"I gave you everything, Emma. How could you leave me? I hate you. You are going to regret this for the rest of your life," Robert yelled. He was crazed with madness. He had no sense of who I was anymore. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a knife. My heart raced. The sound of a distant thunder distracted him for a moment. When he turned his back slightly towards me to face the ocean as if to find the source of the noise, something inside of me snapped, and I rushed forward with all my strength and pushed him off the cliff.

I killed him, but if I hadn't, he would have killed me. I didn't mean to harm him, but it was the only way. It was me or him.

Sgt. Ortiz continued to stare at me. He was convinced there was more behind my story. Being a stranger to him, he eyed me suspiciously and wondered why Robert Anderson, the mayor's son, was being accused of such a hideous crime. He sighed loudly and sat closer to me.

"Miss, you're going to need a lawyer present. Do you have one or do you need one provided for you?" he asked as I looked up. I saw Margaret and Mike rushing over to me. Relief and fear both fell upon my soul like a thunderous eruption upon the heavens.

* * *

Ode to Froot Loops

Carol Schliesinger

My senses become aware of each other
in a melody of taste.
Every morning Froot Loops
open my eyes to the world with
an indescribable energy.
Maybe it is the gigantic
amount of sugar
hugging every round, colorful piece of heaven
that make me feel
I am dreaming awake.

As time goes by
they turn into a curse;
they are vicious, desiring my mouth and
my taste like possessed addicts.
Debilitating my will to stop eating them.
Yet every morning I surrender
to these infernal little beings.
There is no end to this addiction,
I have started to eat them in bed.
There is no sense in denying it; I need help, I am a
Fruit Looholic anonymous.
I want to break free.

The doctor says that drinking milk with sugar
will replace the addiction, but it has not.
Apple Jacks, Corn Pops, Frosted Flakes,
I've tried them all. Not even Lucky Charms
have made me luckier.
Today I stand, and accept
the victorious taste that has
been by my side all my life,
it is stronger than me, and I cannot win.
I live with hope that every morning
I will be able to find them in the kitchen.
Waiting to be soaked in cold milk.

Apple Saucy

Nancy D. Sepulveda

Shiny and red
I laughed with my friends
in a big bright bowl
Red Ripe Ready
Fruit for the loons
Waiting Wanting
'til I got picked and polished
and felt the craving for my taste-but-not-in-the-old-
fashioned-way

oh worm
who whittled his way through my shiny red skin
robbed me of my seed
and let my juice flow
down my raw bloody side
Ripped and Ravished
I was naked
yet he slit sliced
slashed and mashed me into
a pitied pitted pulp
and jarred me into existence.
What I once was I will never be
for I have changed in consistency.
I now stand divided--
a rotted wretched core
and a sugared slop in a white-walled container.

Gracias Mama

Christopher A. Kypuros

Gracias Mama for being born.

Gracias Mama for picking *algodon*.

Gracias Mama *por limpiando casas*,
in the rich part of town

Gracias Mama for breaking your back - for me.

Gracias Mama for washing my clothes -
and ironing them.

Gracias Mama for spending your last *centavo* - on me.

Gracias Mama for putting up with daddy - for me.

Gracias Mama for my educacion.

Gracias Mama for teaching me how to speak -
both *lenguas*.

Gracias Mama for teaching me what "*el Profe*" can't.

Gracias Mama for never letting me forget-
where I came from.

Gracias Mama for being proud - of me.

Gracias Mama for being sacrificed - for me.

Gracias Mama for spanking me hard - *con carino*.

Gracias Mama for telling me you love me - all the time.

Gracias Mama for being there for me -
even when you couldn't.

Gracias Mama for curing me *con aguas calientes*.

Gracias Mama for loving God with all your heart -
yo tengo esperanza.

Gracias Mama for being a saint - and praying for me.

Gracias be to *Jesus* - for Mama.

Annalisa

Mario A. Garza

The summer when I was eight was the strangest summer of my childhood. Even though I'm only twelve now, I doubt I'll ever have a summer more eventful. That summer Annalisa moved into the white house across from mine. In May, the Reyes's moved out because Mr. Reyes found a better job in Houston. Two weeks later, early one morning, five trucks loaded front and back drove up to the house where more than fifteen people began unloading beds, dressers, couches, and boxes filled with belongings.

Caught in the traffic of all the people moving in and out of the house was a little girl sitting on the porch; her white dress almost blended into the white walls of the house. The only thing that drew attention to her was her orange brown hair that touched her shoulders hiding the doll she was holding near her head. Girls didn't really matter much to me then but from the moment I saw her I couldn't keep my eyes off of her.

On the other side of the porch was a man in a wheelchair who also looked as if he was in a world of his own--the girl's father. He stared out into the air, into what my father calls the nothingness, focusing on nothing. The girls world was make-believe, the man's was a world of emptiness.

I realized that I had been watching the house for more than thirty minutes and quickly ran to the back of the house to grab my fishing pole and the grocery bag that I used as my tackle box. I headed down the street and then to the left to the river only three blocks away. During the summers, when I was younger, I spent most of my time fishing, at least in the mornings when it was cool. My mother and father both worked at the factory so my older sister Magda would take care of me. Most of the time though, she didn't wake up until noon so I could have been kidnapped from my own livingroom and no one would have known.

I hadn't been fishing for more than twenty minutes before I ran out of worms. When I stood up and turned around, I was frozen by a white figure standing behind the tall green weeds. Before I could scream or even move, the figure moved away, becoming smaller and smaller beyond the tall weeds, but I knew it was the same girl I had seen across the street from my house.

Later, when I got back to my house from fishing, the little girl was sitting on the curb near the mailbox. And she spoke to me.

"I followed you to the river. I got scared because you saw me. My name is Annalisa."

"My name is Rodrigo." I turned and pointed to my house and said, "I live there."

"I like fishing. My *tios* have taken me fishing ever since I can remember, maybe even before that. I fish good for a girl, better than some boys."

Not more than five minutes after that, we were sitting underneath the shade of the big pecan tree in my front yard drinking Kool-Aid my sister made for us. Annalisa told me they had moved from El Paso because her mother had been laid off from the factory there. One of her *tios* lived here in Del Rio, so her mother thought he could find her a job. And she told me about her father.

"My dad can't walk or even move his legs. When he was in Vietnam he got shot and ever since then he's been in the wheelchair.

I looked over to the porch across the street at her father, Sam. It didn't seem his stare had moved an inch all morning. "Is he sleeping?"

Annalisa answered, "He never sleeps. If he does, it's only for thirty minutes because if he sleeps for a long time, he has bad dreams about the war."

I still wanted to know more. "Does he ever talk?"

"When he first came back, he used to, but then he started talking less and less until one day, he wasn't talking at all. Mamma says he'll get better, but all my *tios* say he's crazy because of the war." Annalisa stared across the street at her father.

I didn't know what to say, so I stayed quiet for a while, then I broke the silence. "I have a cousin who is deaf but you have to be careful not to say anything bad about him because he reads lips good."

Annalisa turned and smiled. "Well, he hears everything."

A couple of nights later, my mother played cards with Annalisa's mother, Connie, and her comadres while my father sat outside and drank beer with the men. It almost didn't seem fair that Annalisa and Connie were so normal, but Sam was so crazy. We sat behind the truck listening to the men talk. And we felt Sam's presence on the porch, staring into the nothingness.

Fishing

Earl McDonald

My father loves fishing. I never liked it.
So when I became old enough to decide at about 13 or so, I
stopped going.
But I was much younger then and
he seemed much older.
A lot of years have passed.
Now, I am much older and
he seems somehow to be much younger.
So this morning when he asked me,
I told him I would go with him.

I had never understood what pleasure he could find
watching lines that hardly ever moved on poles that hardly
ever bent and waiting for fish that hardly
ever bit.

But now sitting beside him on the bank of the muddy
Kankakee river, I begin to understand.
I watch waters as they slowly glide to meet other rivers
further down stream.
I stare at puffy white clouds and, just like a kid,
I imagine faces and things.
I see sparrows swooping and soaring. I hear water lapping
the bank and leaves rustling in the breeze.
I feel the warmth of the sun and cool of the wind.

We talk about politics and family and life.
We talk about everyday things and world
shattering events.
We have solutions for problems both large and small.
Most of the time, we agree. Sometimes, we don't.
Still, the poles don't bend and the fish don't bite.
But I don't care.

He had always said that catching fish was not the most
important part of fishing.
I had never understood. I understand now.
Being and living is the most important part.
Being with Dad and living.

To Prozac, and All of His Relatives

Maggie Solomon

We sometimes walk
through a moment,
or a year,
on the outside of
a glass-walled building,
seeing slightly distorted people
living their lives
inside the building,
unaware that the outside can see,
with a clarity and vision
that only comes
from being outside.
But only us watchers know
that the emotion and thought
is all that makes their
random actions, movements, and
conversations
have any meaning at all.
And so we watch, and
never understand what we see,
until the clouded window
is gone, and
the semi-reflective glass
is shattered,
and we enter,
however unwillingly,
into the world
that can't be seen,
into the feelings
that can no longer
be separated from living.

Oklahoma City 1995

Christina Leal

On the twelfth month I return home, my heart still throbbing, my pain still shown. A guarded fence and flowers remain. I shiver with rage at the infinite shame. One or our own pulled off this scheme; he murdered our children, swallowed their dreams. In echoes I hear the sirens, the blast--his selfish sin.; at daycare they loved to color--their crayons are now melted. I vision them riding tricycles for the first time, the last. Bubbles of sappy kisses left on mother's lips.

I witnessed the clouds rising in vengeance, billowing fiercely, darker than a bigot's sigh. An inferno devoured all that I had ever known, a generation vanished before my empty eyes. I glanced blindly down the broken street, (it was at least world worthy news: the explosion, stealing our city, all but me and you). My house was shaking, so was I; one hundred and sixty-nine die. I raced to the sight as fast as my car would accel. In my town of misery we had no speed limit. Tears overrode my senses as I passed the frantic scene: police on the edge of sanity, sobbing firemen a public request for sleeping bags (they ran out of body bags).

The Murrah Federal Building-a massacre in my backyard.

Did da Vinci Listen to His Mother?

Alan Cirlin

Ralph Weinstein had the soul of an artist. He longed to write poetry, compose music, to create great art. Instead he filed order forms for a company that manufactured machinery to shell sunflower seeds. His mother told him to always arrive at work ten minutes early, to never forget to wear a clean shirt, and to always look busy, so that one day he would go far in that company.

But Ralph was more interested in beautiful words than in efficient filing systems and would spend his free time reading and trying to write poetry.

His mother said, "Ralphie, I'm your friend. You know I want only the best for you, so trust me. You're wasting your time with all this writing. A Walt Whitman you're not. You should instead be thinking about getting to work early and making a good impression."

And Ralph listened to his mother and stopped writing poetry. Then one day he came home with a second hand violin and a book on how to write music. For months he poured over the books on composition he would borrow from the library and spend long evenings scratching out melodies on his violin.

His mother told him, "Ralphie, you're a good boy but you just weren't born a Jack Benny. Ralphie, you know I'm on your side. Take my advice--get rid of that fiddle and buy yourself a new shirt."

Not long after that Ralph put away his violin and signed up for a class in oil painting. He spent three nights a week at the local junior college and the other four in his room practicing what he had learned.

"Ralphie, Ralphie, Ralphie, just look at the mess you're making. Is this any way to treat your aged mother? To spend all your time away from home, or closed up in your room pretending to be Michelangelo? Why do you want to torture yourself like this? I'm your friend, Ralphie. I've lived a long time and I should know."

And when Ralph's mother died he put away his oil paints and decided to concentrate on advancing in his job so that his mother might have been proud of him. He came to work at least fifteen minutes early each day, and left at least fifteen minutes late. He always wore clean shirts and freshly pressed pants. He did his best to work hard and make a good impression. And one day he was replaced by an IBM collating machine.

While collecting unemployment Ralph returned to his poetry, his music, and his painting. And in a very short time and made a minor name for himself. Years later Ralph Weinstein was a celebrated poet, a highly popular composer, a world renowned artist, and had changed his name to Raphael Weston. He owned two houses, six cars, and a company that manufactured machinery to shell sunflower seeds.

Moral: A mother can be a boy's best friend and his worst business manager.

Baseball

Johnny Arnold

Hit, run, catch, throw, steal, ground-ball, fly-ball.

No-hitter, strike-out, home-run, double-play,
suicide squeeze.

This is baseball right?

Not quite, you missed:

The aroma of roasted peanuts,
hot-dogs, pretzels, beer, popcorn, ketchup,
mustard, and relish.

The sea of people moving,
clapping, screaming, chanting, jumping, eating,
drinking, sweating, hoping, painted faces, holding
signs, razzing the other team, and cheering the
home team on to victory.

The essence of grass,
moist, hot, and burning when ignited by a blistering
ball, or a diving catch.

The leather mitts,
reeking of tobacco laced saliva, dirt, and
scorched hide from a snared line drive.

The pine tar,
drowning the on-deck-circle, and dripping as it bakes
in the hot sun on the handles of the wooden bats.

The shriek of the ball,
as it explodes from the pitcher's hand and whistles
toward home plate.

The crack of the bat,
pummeling the ball into orbit, destination unknown.

The synchronized movement,
of nine fielders on every play,
connected by precise brain
waves, and can locate each other
without batting an eye.

The concentration,
on a play in the bottom of the 13th, after four hours
of the molesting sun, dirt flying, dives, falls,
slides,

cuts, scraps,
bruises, fans yelling, smelling the tantalizing
peanuts, hot dogs, pretzels, beer, popcorn, and the
score is tied 1-1.

Now you have it;

BASEBALL!

The Chocolate Factor

Colleen Johnston

It gleamed like the tinsel on a tree on Christmas morning; that wrapper, nearly blinding him, neatly fitted and folded around the dark, creamy, thick, delicious chocolate of the Four Banditos chocolate bar that was placed in the display window of Candy's Candy candy shop. The Four Banditos Bar had four scrumptious sections wrapped inside that shiny wrapper, and Simon knew it.

The first section he always ate was the smooth, pure rich milk chocolate section. Next, he would always move straight into the crunchy, munchy, chocolate that had bits of puffed rice that burst in his mouth like the gun John Wayne used in his movie *El Dorado*. He couldn't wait to bite slowly and rhythmically into the third section of white and dark whipped chocolate swirled together. With every bite, his mouth watered in anticipation for the next. Before the fourth section, Simon would always pause and stare at the remaining bit of sweet, dark heaven that awaited the warmth of his mouth like one would stare at a piece of captivating art hung in a museum. Then, he would take a huge breath and jam the remaining fourth piece of the Four Banditos Bar, that contained the bits of no less than five whole almonds, into every crevice of his waiting mouth. He would crunch and chew, and chew and crunch with his eyes closed savoring every flavor the chocolate bar brought forth to him.

Just staring at the display window made his mouth water. His body ached to have the chocolate inside him once again. His stomach grumbled its dismay at being empty. Simon touched the glass to the candy shop, continuing to stare lustfully at the chocolate.

"Hey you!"

The angry voice from behind him made him jump back three feet from the window.

"Hey kid, you wanna clean my window, you touchin' it like that! I tell you what, you put anymore fingerprints on that window and I'll personally watch you

clean it! How you like that, huh? Now, if youse was gonna buy sometin inside, tha'd be different - you gonna buy sometin kid?"

Simon stepped back away from Angry-Pete, that's what all the kids called him.

"I was just...I only wanted...I can't..."

"Simon!"

Another loud voice coming from behind Simon did not scare him, but made him want to cringe and crawl within himself as if trying to hide.

It was his mother, "Simon, is that you? I've been lookin' for you everywhere! I was about to go to the police department! One minute you're behind me, the next you're not. You made me crazy - you hear me - crazy with worry."

Simon looked down at his red plastic watch. It had only been eight minutes that he'd been away from his mother. He knew that for seven of those, she probably hadn't known he was gone. Then Simon's mother seemed to notice Angry-Pete standing behind her son with his hands on both hips, body weight shifted to one side.

"Oh, hello Pete. I didn't see you there. Did Simon do something wrong here? You look mad."

"No, no Ms. Pertelli," Angry-Pete said, straightening up and waving towards Simon's mother with both hands like someone would do when blowing away a bad smell.

"No, he was just touchin' my clean windows. You know, makin' prints. I'd just cleaned 'em." He pulled his arms into himself, wiped his nose with the cuff of his faded blue shirt and then crossed them.

"No harm done, though. No harm. He's a good kid you got there."

Simon's mother seemed satisfied with his answer, but Simon knew she would have to clear his name of any wrong-doing.

"Right, okay," she said. "He was just window lookin'. It's not like he could have bought the candy. He can't eat it. Found out yesterday from Doctor Sorenson that the caffeine and sugar aren't good for his heart.

They found somethin' wrong with his poor little heart. Can't have chocolate for a whole year, the doctor says."

His mother said this loud enough so the people a block away could hear it. Simon didn't care about this, so he turned silently toward the window display. He raised his hand to touch the glass one more time, but had remembered Angry-Pete's threat and instead, turned the wanting touch of his open hand into a silent wave of goodbye.

Mis Stacy-Adams

Christopher A. Kypuros

Stacy-Adams shoes have been around since 1875. For the Chicano, Stacy-Adams have been a cultural fashion statement from the Zoot Suit Era in the 40's to the Chicano movement of the 60's and 70's. In present times, Stacy-Adams are only worn by the few and the proud. In fact, some can even be seen in the classroom and campuses of colleges and universities on the feet of some ethnocentric souls. Over time, the shoes have been nicknamed "cockroach killers" because of their pointedness and their ability to kill anything in any corner. However, in the barrio, "Stacies" by name is as American as refried beans. *!Orale!*

Camino con estudiantes de diferentes colores.

In front, stride by stride, my Stacy-Adams.

La "universidad" se significa inteligencia...

But "my Stacies" scream out with culture.

Los anglos te miran con caras extrañas

but with pride I pass them nonchalantly.

Ellos dicen: !Vete pa'tras para Mexico, mojado!

With my Stacies planted firmly, I say:

"?Dondre crees que estas?"

"Who's the real illegal alien here?"

Pasa todo esto, pero siguen andando mis Stacies,

a la derecha,... a la izquierda...

They tell me I'm not white, not black.

Yo se, porque tengo sangre de Mejico en mis venas.

This blood runs from the top of my head,
to the tips of my Stacy-Adams.

Reflection of Mom

Debrah Fox

I had been jolted out of a deep alcohol induced sleep by the obnoxious ringing of my telephone. Who could be calling at 1:30 in the morning? Hopefully not one of my guests from the party. It was probably a friend calling from overseas. Maybe it was an alert. I could feel the chill on my face. It took me several seconds to reach into the cold morning air for the receiver. Bringing the receiver under the cover I shuddered as I placed the cold black plastic to my ear. "Hello," I mumbled.

"Deb?" It was my sister, Vick. "Deb, I've got some bad news."

Still half asleep, I pressed the receiver closer to my ear. "What's wrong?"

"Deb, it's mom."

I could hear the strain in her voice. Sitting up and pulling the covers around my shoulders I struggled to focus on what she had said. "Vick, what happened?"

"She passed away this morning."

"What do you mean? What's going on?"

"She got sick last night. Dad found her in the bathroom on the floor. It was a stroke. They called for an ambulance but it was too late. She never came out of it."

This was not happening. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Deb, the funeral is going to be Sunday. Can you be here?"

My mind was racing. I was trying to make sense of what she was saying.

"Deb, are you there?"

"Sure -- sure. I'll be there. I'll call later with the flight information." Slowly, I reached across the nightstand softly placing the receiver back on its cradle.

I had often wondered how I would react--how I was supposed to act if mom or dad died. I didn't know what I felt. I crawled back under the covers and pulled myself into the fetal position. What should I do?

"Deb?" It was Roni. She had stayed over from the party and hearing the phone ring had decided to investigate. "Is everything alright?"

"My mom...." I didn't even get the word out when I fell apart. The tears welled up and fell like waterfalls down my cheeks.

Roni put her arms around me. She didn't say a word; just held me tight. After what seemed an eternity I fell into a deep sleep.

I don't remember much about the next day except that Roni and Jan took care of everything. I must have been a bump just sitting there. Jan worked for Personnel on Fort Hood, so she took care of my emergency leave papers and airline ticket. She even signed me out on leave. Roni packed. She set up my uniform, polished the brass and shined my shoes. They must have driven me to the airport to make sure I got on the plane. As hard as I try to remember, it's absent from my mind.

Gazing out the porthole of the airplane the tears started flowing again. How could she go? She was only 50 years old -- just turned 50. That's too young. I was just getting to know her. I'm sure I told her I loved her when I was there for Thanksgiving.

Grandma Fisher and Ed, her husband, were at the airport to pick me up. We hugged each other as soon as I got off the plane. The tears just wouldn't stop. Ed gathered my bags, threw them in the car and shuffled Grandma and I off to the car. We finally pulled out onto the highway for the two hour drive home. It was the longest two hours I had ever spent in my life.

I began going over the conversation I'd had with Vick this morning when I called with the flight information. Seems Nikki Jo, our 13-year-old baby sister, had sensed something was wrong with mom the night she died. Nikki had been out in the recreation room with some of her friends and when she came in for a drink she went right to mom and asked her if she was alright. It couldn't have been three hours later when dad found mom.

Vick indicated that the hospital didn't do enough. She felt they could have saved mom but they let her go.

Considering that, I felt maybe it was better. I'd seen some of the effects of a

stroke. I couldn't picture mom having to suffer through something like that.

There was a light drizzle that Saturday evening on the drive from the airport. I remember watching the gray, dreary scenery flash by and started to recall why I was glad I didn't live in Indiana. On the other hand if I had lived here I would have spent more time with mom. Indiana wasn't so bad. I had to admit there were some pretty fond memories.

The summers were great for floating the river. Mom loved it. She was terrified of the water, no doubt a fear stemming from her brother's drowning. She'd make us promise we wouldn't rock the boat. We'd oblige by being careful. Sometimes dad just couldn't resist. He deserved all the cussing she gave him.

As soon as we were underway she'd be swinging that fishing line around for one of us to put a worm on the hook. No way was she going to get her manicured nails dirty. Worms were squirmy, dirty and yechy. Once baited, she'd plop her line into the water and patiently watch the bobber. She'd sit there prim and proper. Always had a cigarette in her free hand -- holding it like she was Greta Garbo. We never could get her to stop smoking.

She loved to go for drives. Her hand would be braced on the dash with her foot permanently on the imaginary brake. In the fall she would convince dad to pile us kids in the car and we'd drive through the State Park. She could spot a deer in an instant. She'd catch our attention and listen to us oohing and aahing.

The winter would promise a lot of inside activity. Mom would spread the puzzle pieces out on the dining room table and we would work on it for days. Sometimes we would play Aggravation and I would marvel at her picking up the marbles with her long painted nails. In her quiet times there was solitaire or a non-fiction book.

Spring time promised quiet walks in the woods, along river banks or the railroad tracks. Mom would pull

out the empty bread sacks and we'd set off to find mushrooms. Because she was always prim and proper, I would silently chuckle inside when I saw her wear work boots and a big burly coat. I think she liked hunting mushrooms more than eating them.

Where had the time gone? Here I was, only 30 years old and I felt 50. I had a tightness in my chest, legs that felt like lead weights, and a head full of swimming memories. I couldn't believe she was gone. We were just getting to know each other.

Mom was my main support when I joined the military. I think she envied the fact that I was not staying in Winamac, getting married, having kids and being tied down. My last visit was the first time I think she ever confided in me. There was a closeness I couldn't describe. Even a sadness in her voice. I wanted to make everything better for her. I saw her cry that night.

I guess I was trying to show her a little levity or a wild side of life when I asked her if she wanted to share a marijuana cigarette with me. Was I shocked when she agreed. She only took two puffs. I guess to say she did. It had always seemed to me that she was stifled -- that she was confined in a personality frame, unable to express her true feelings. I could relate.

Time has passed. I don't remember the year that I stopped crying when mom would come into my mind or her name came up in conversation. I guess I never really knew how much she meant to me. That I regret. I told her I loved her - but not how much. More disappointing to me is that I never felt I knew her.

Now in my quiet moments I enjoy playing solitaire, reading a book about the hereafter or a true story about someone fighting for the underdog. I daydream of hunting mushrooms, or floating down the Tippicanoe River. I find myself going the extra mile for people or going out of my way to make them feel special. That's when I feel her presence. I sure miss her. The consolation is that she's right here with me -- I try to be her reflection.

No. 9

Sara Schurtz

I lie awake at nights
with thoughts of you swimming in my head.
A deep pain keeps me up
unable to sleep...
But I don't know what it is.
Is it
confusion,
sadness,
or desire?
I want to cry
and
I want to claw this feeling
out of me, but
something won't let me.
This feeling lives within me-
sometimes without my consent,
but more often with
a dull sense of aching knowledge.
I want to apologize for my innocence
and I want to cry because of my purity
but why,
for what?

Accept me for what I am...
Know that I will never be your
everything,
but if you ever want a part of my
something,
I will be here waiting...
So would you consider calling me No.9
Even though I wasn't,
because I always want to be something to you,
even if that means being reduced to a
number?

Until It's Too Late

Lisa Kean

If I could put my voice on paper
I would say you anger me
Like thunder rolling in the storm.
Unfinished words drift around in my head.
You make me stand with clenched fists.
I want to hurt you until you hurt like I do.

If I could put my feelings on paper
I would tell you about my heart.
That it aches and aches until it
Can bleed no more.
I would tell you that I want to cry
Rivers through your soul.
Drift you out to sea
Until you are as lost as me.
Do you see how I hurt? Are you satisfied?
Can you see what pain I swallow until
The lump in my heart wants to explode?

If I could put my love on paper
I would tell you that it sits in a corner waiting.
So sad that the Heavens cry with sorrow.
They know that I can't have you, nor you me.
I want to tell you how I lay my head down
And cry for you, and remember you.
Your touch, your voice.
You with me, and I with you.
I want to tell you that I love you
But it's too late.

A Little Knowledge

Maggie Solomon

"...so give me a call when you get this message and we'll talk. It's really important and I need to talk to you tonight."

Maya hit the discard button and shut off the machine. Setting her purse on the table, she picked up the phone and listened to the dial tone as if it were speaking to her. With a mind-clearing shake of her head, she set the phone back in the cradle. She couldn't speak to Diane then, not yet. It had been months, it could wait another few minutes, or hours. She decided that she needed a cup of tea before she made the phone call, and with that thought she wound her way into the kitchen area of her cluttered one room apartment.

As she passed the mirror Richard gave her last year, she noticed that her hair was growing out from the desperate haircut she gave herself three months ago. The stringy strands catching on her shoulder made her face look gaunt, almost skeletal. She shut her eyes and felt along the wall until she reached the stove.

Tea and Sympathy, she thought, and mentally willed Richard to call her. Although he hadn't called in months. Hadn't written. Hadn't seen her. But he was there. There in the mirror, in the books he lent her, in the jacket she wore despite the sunlight streaming through the window. The jacket was almost a reward. Or a shield. Maybe it protected her from Diane's malice, which only hurt their friendship and never physically struck Maya herself.

Piercing the wall of calmness she had begun to build, the phone called her back to the living area. She hesitantly picked it up, knowing she wouldn't hear Richard; nonetheless, she listened for his voice. "Hello?" Softly, questioningly.

"Maya! You're home! I'm so glad to reach you, I didn't know if you'd call me back. In fact, I didn't really think you would. It's been so long. Why haven't we kept in touch?" Maya thought she could tell Diane a few things about why she hadn't called her, if she only had the

strength. She held the phone away from her ear, hoping she wouldn't Diane's chatter. "Are you there, Maya?"

"Yes. . . ," she whispered.

"Good. I don't want to keep you, but I do need to see you. There's some stuff you need to hear, but I can't tell you over the phone. Can we get together?"

No . . . no . . . no . . . "I suppose so. When?" Maya asked, hating herself for agreeing.

"Tomorrow? The coffee shop on Amsterdam? Three in the afternoon? It's about Richard, I do hope you'll come."

That's fine. I've got to go now, Diane." She hung up not knowing if Diane had heard her.

Maya returned to the kitchen, to her tepid cup of tea. She wished she could read tea leaves, she'd know if Diane had called because she'd heard the same rumors. Or did she have new information? Maybe she's heard where Richard was. Maybe she'd seen him. Maya doubted it, but for that reason she knew she would show up tomorrow afternoon. Maybe Richard wasn't where the gossip placed him, in an AIDS hospice upstate. Diane shouldn't be upset, her jealousy was outdated. Maya won Richard back when they all knew each other. Now the prize appeared tarnished.

* * * * *

The grass rolled under her feet, a conveyer belt moving her closer to a conversation she never wanted to have. "*You've got to go see him, Maya!*" The voice repeated itself unnecessarily. Of course she'd go see him, even without Diane's interfering advice. With the address she had taken from Diane (she hated her for being the one to have it) clutched in her hand, she took one more step toward the front porch of the mock-Southern colonial mansion where Richard lived. Glancing up, she saw him waiting in a metal latticed chair. It was like seeing a photograph that had sat in the sun, curled on the edges and faded in the middle. How could he look so much like the man she had loved, but still seem like a stranger?

They had all changed, she knew, in the months since he disappeared, but no one else reflected that inner disturbance physically. His cheeks were sunken in, his eyes were like a skeleton's gaping sockets, and she could see that he barely had the strength to sit up. There was no question that he had AIDS, but how had it progressed so quickly? She walked up to his side with the same feeling she experienced passing a homeless stranger on the street. Aversion with a disturbing undertone of curiosity. He looked up as her shadow chilled him.

"Hello, Richard."

"Maya! It's really you." He stood up and gestured for her to across from him in the shade. He placed a glass of chilled lemonade in front of her and sat down again.

"You got my letter then? She asked. "I'm glad it made it in time. I didn't want to shock you."

"Yes, I got it, but I don't think I really believed you would come."

"I had to come, Richard." Maya said. "I couldn't keep wondering constantly what had happened since that night."

"I almost don't know where to start." His leg moved up and down with nervous energy and she could tell that he wanted to be tapping his fingers. She almost reached over and put her hand on his knee to calm him down, but she grew afraid to touch him as her anger swelled up and over her, drowning the impulse.

"The beginning."

As they sat across from each other on the old porch, it was almost like they had never been separated, Maya thought, if she was willing to ignore a few small details. But then, as she waited for Richard to speak, she remembered some of the details and realized how far apart they had been for those months and how big the details were.

That night . . . Whatever reason he had for leaving couldn't excuse the bewildered fear that had choked her when she woke up and found herself alone the next morning. Everything that they had shared the night before hung in the cigarette smoke that still lingered in the air, but

his absence turned the beauty she might have found in the grey wisps into nauseated loathing. Self loathing. No matter what she told herself, Maya still knew that she had repulsed him. Or scared him.

"It wasn't like it seemed," he started. "I went to visit my sister, as you know, and while I was there I got sick. Really sick. The doctors didn't know what it was, until a million tests later they figured out it was a form of pneumonia. That wouldn't be so bad, except that it was the sort of pneumonia that kills people with AIDS."

"But you don't. . . ," Maya started to speak and stopped herself. *The trees were so pretty with leaves reflecting gold* ". . . and I don't want you to think that I ever lied to you, because I didn't know. I should have known, I should have been tested like they say, but I didn't, and I'm just terrified of what I might have done to you."

"Richard, why didn't you call? Write? Anything?" Maya knew she should be comforting him, saying the right things and making the right gestures, but the months of silence and emptiness just wouldn't stop haunting her. All she heard when he stopped talking was the silence of months of a phone not ringing and empty mailboxes. She couldn't hear the words she should have been saying.

"I did write, almost daily."

"I never got a letter."

"I know. They're upstairs. Dozens of them. I just couldn't send them. I knew what you must have been thinking. I left so early, never even said good-bye. After what we'd shared, that was unforgivable."

"So, what did we share, Richard?" She bit her lip and looked somewhere over his shoulder at that space between something and nothing.

"I don't know exactly. We've been friends so long, Maya. I love you, and I felt so close to you then. I thought you felt the same way. You know more about me than anyone else. I was the first person you told when you and Katie fell in love. No one else knew that. And when we were talking and I was crying and you held me. Nothing

ever felt that right. I don't regret that, but I do regret that I may have hurt you."

She looked at him, really looked, and saw that he was crying. Just a little bit. And her heart cramped inside of her chest, like it always did when she felt too much. "I don't regret it either." She could hear Diane's again, *"Richard has AIDS, and you probably do too. Aren't I glad you won that battle we fought for him. Even if I hated you for ages, you've got your punishment."* Diane knew so little. "And so far, there's nothing to worry about." She reached over and held his hand.

Father Buddha

H. Palmer Hall

I walked two clicks down Le Loi Street
to a school yard, a Buddha broken in the dust
shattered by a rocket meant for us,
and saw you sitting in his hand
tossing carved pieces of the statue's feet,
not even caring where they'd land.

What mattered was that I did not want to be
where and what I was and saw
that you had also had no choice. Some law,
legal in my case, chance in yours,
with no way out that you or I could see,
gave me a twelve-month, you a lifetime, tour.

We shared a cigarette and watched the smoke
rise into the red dust Pleiku air.
You grinned, blew smoke rings with the flair
that comes only when you're very young.
You told me I was on the Buddha's throat
and should beware the Buddha's tongue.

I remember that once, when the war was calm,
we laughed and played with shattered stone,
and know there can be no way to atone
for all the death, the wounds, the pain.
If you still live, rest quietly in Father Buddha's palm;
if not, sleep peacefully with all the dead.

Pecan Grove Review

Volume III

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Submissions in poetry, short fiction, and personal essay are now being accepted from St. Mary's University students and faculty for the next issue of **Pecan Grove Review**.

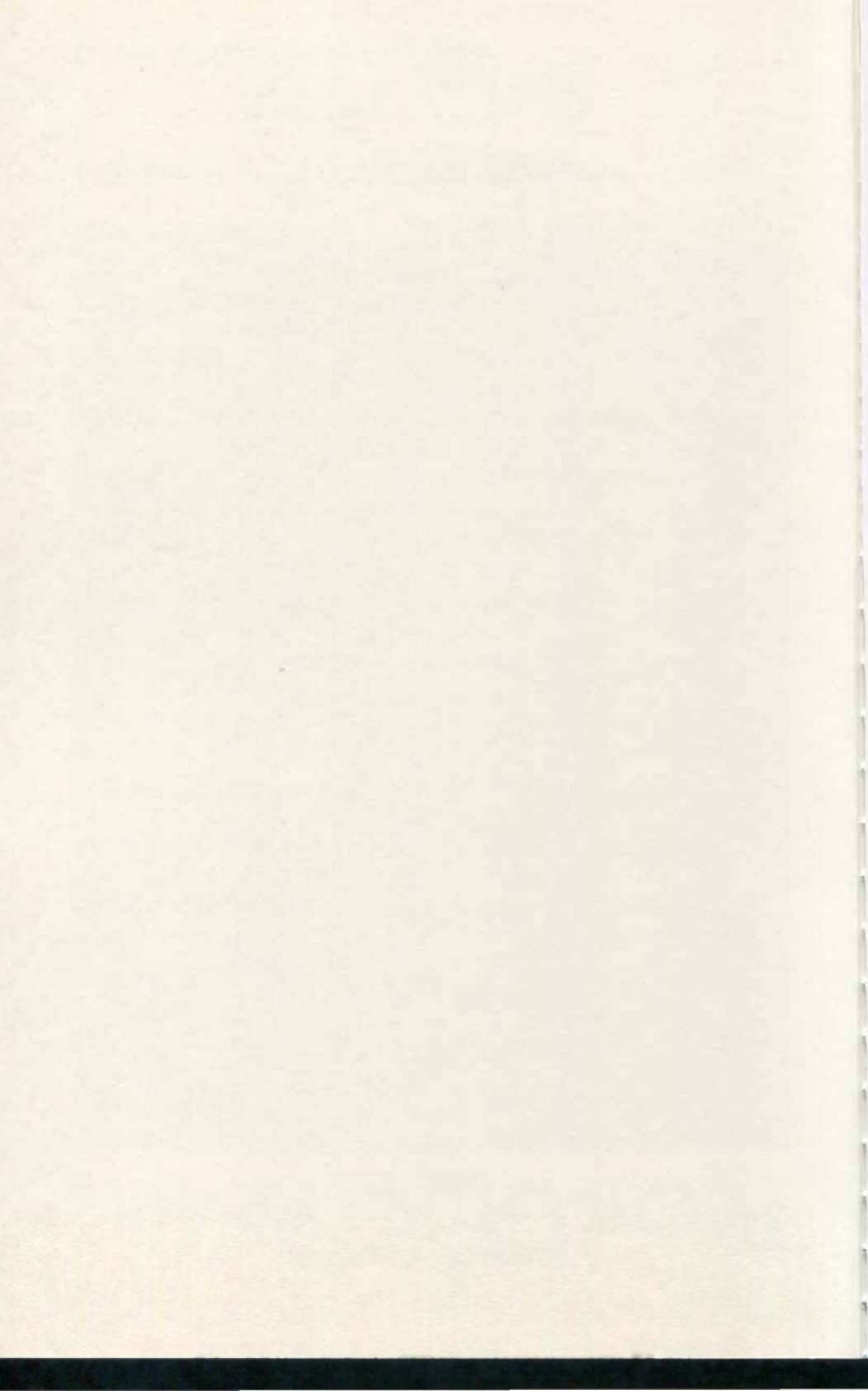
Each writer may submit up to three typed pieces. A limit of six pages of prose (per piece). Each poem no longer than 40 lines.

Deadline: October 1, 1997

Each entry must include: **Name**
Title of work
Category
Address
Daytime phone

Selected writers should be prepared to submit an IBM disk (WordPerfect 6.1 only) within ten days of notification.

Submit writing to:
Ms. Diane Bertrand, Faculty advisor
Office: CH 401
Phone 431-2003



St. Mary's University

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