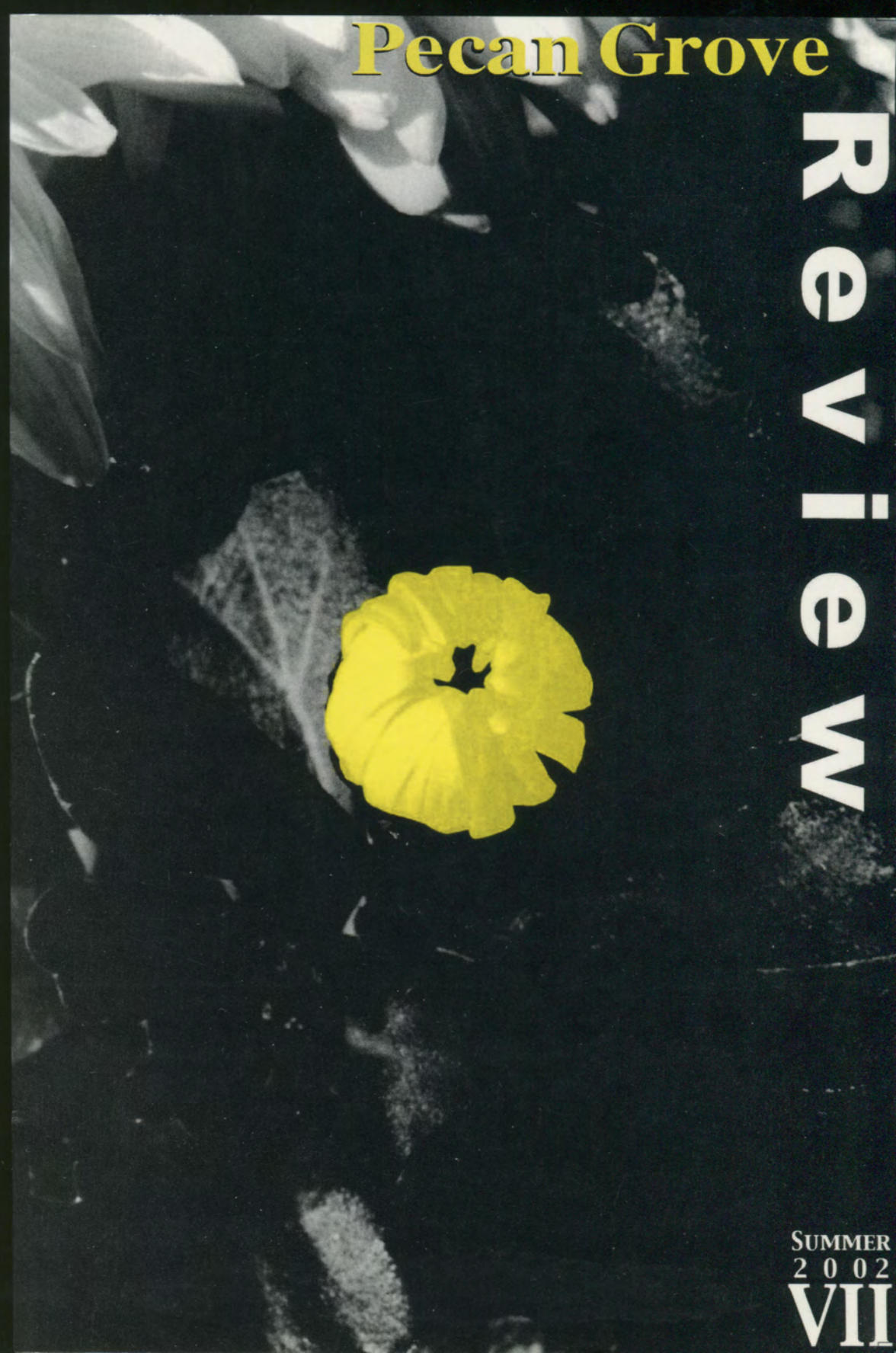
Pecan Grove Review



SUMMER
2002
VII

Pecan Grove Review: Volume VII
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A special note of thanks to all who submitted and to all those students who were involved in the very difficult process of selection.

Pecan Grove Review: Volume VII

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Pecan Grove Review is published annually by students and faculty associated with St. Mary's University. It is sponsored by the English Communications Department to encourage the development of thoughtful, literary voices.

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We dedicate this volume of Pecan Grove Review to the memory of our beloved colleagues and professors:

Sr. Christine Catron, Ph.D.
Fr. John Rechtien, Ph.D.

Intimations of Mortality

H. Palmer Hall

Our backyard is unkempt: wild garlic sprouts in bare
ground,
ivy grows over small bricked walls, dandelions
roar like small bits of froth in dry wind.
That space of land is our barometer.

An old ash tree, broken by a strong gust from a storm,
lies across a faded circle of dying turf, St. Augustine,
grass not native to this place. Bare patches bloom
where the dog digs for something.

I always think something is going on, some backward
looking on the part of old weeds, some desire
to make things return to the way they were
and, we all know, ought to be—

some old desire of the land, only scant inches of dirt
layered over caliche, over deep limestone, dry ground
never meant to sustain thick, dark green grass,
top soil cracked from lack of water—

something that wants out, wants to speak, that dreams
an old dream when the pressure rises to new highs
and heat washes over the persimmon trees,
bakes the new plantings. A dust

storm blows in from the west and green is toned down,
becomes a faded painting of what a lawn should be.
Small white flowers sprout at the tips of the garlic,
delicate blossoms that need little water.

Gifts Upon Your Passing

In memory of Father John Rechtien

Eric Cruz

Only memories see
your wide heart lost in
the ground. And I
remain looking, looking
for a man buried.

In my hands
rest your glasses
memories of what a grave
did to your eyes:
Quiet on your back, closed
eyes leaned a crease
across your face.

Your books left in a pile
opened with red ink
drying for years. Pity
me, holy man, in the effort
to read everything with red
to understand nothing but red
ink drying on a page.

That picture of you
black and white on the bench
smiling at the world.
Now shut off
my eyes blessed with a body
to pierce—
your image is just beyond
a blur.

reprinted from Through the Window, Pecan Grove Press, 2002

Procrastination (until the last moment I stood a broken man)

Cesar "turtle" Gutierrez

Nights waste briefly, the ever-passing moments
do not drag on;
the music passes furiously and the ever-passing mo-
ments do not drag on.
The conversations slay themselves term by term, typo
by typo, and the ever-passing moments do not drag on.

Tomorrow nears with ease and grace, ever-passing
moments do not drag on.

Notes fly by, words fly by, the ever-passing moments
do not drag on,
silence creeps by, words creep by, the ever-passing
moments do not drag on.

Absence makes the mind grow fonder but mind
the absence of the mind and
age makes the old man senile, makes the old bridge
creak and the ever-passing moments do not drag on.

No care, no worry, no care to worry about me.
No remorse, no despair, no worry to care about me.
The ever-passing moments do not drag on

the ever-passing moments do not drag on—

(leaving her room for class before the sun rises)

Richard Mavis

a boy scurries out of the glass door & speeds across the courtyard, unconcerned whether or not he is a man according to his friends - err, rather, the people he spends $5 of his time with occasionally.

his flip-flops snap at his feet as he walks across the cobblestones.

a pigeon, tamed by years of students passing but paying it no heed, bathes in the puddle that formed the night before by the rain that ruined the old lady's forgotten laundry hanging on the wire string in her backyard.

it buries its head & throws the water onto its back, and shakes it off with a collection of refreshed & compounded twitches.

smoke from a cigarette poised between two fingers, its owner standing on the third-floor balcony above the courtyard, spirals upward to join the co2 lingering just above the wet sidewalk all the way to the roof of the valley - the air here is thick like the mud not 2 feet from the bathing pigeon, off the cobblestones & under the bush.

a girl in purple pajamas rises out of her bed in this pre-dawn hour & closes her window because it's like a frozen hell in her room.

it closes with a glassy & metallic snap.

Abuela

Olivia Valdez

How could you leave us?
It was just like you to leave on your own terms.
You wanted to go,
but you could have stayed.
You were a strong mean woman who could fight,
but you must have wanted to go.
I know, I know
it wasn't your house anymore,
but a cold place with old people.
It wasn't your amigas anymore,
la flaca, la fea, la scarecrow,
but old nagging women just wanting to eat your ba-
nanas and crackers.
I know grandma it wasn't your style
to use a walker
or a pinche wheelchair
like you called it.
I know, I know
it wasn't your twelve-year-old telephone,
but a complicated piece of junk with no dial tone
I know grandma things changed
and you were not the same
your health,
your life.
You wouldn't have it any other way
you strong mean woman.
You left this life
because you couldn't let go of your old one.

Remembering Sister Christine

Sandra J. Vallejo

S ubtle smiles lit her face
I n the short span of a semester I knew her.
S pring 2000, my second at St. Mary's,
T eaching two of my classes, she was an
E arth angel sent to illuminate the
Recesses of my mind, first in

C atholic Authors, from Dante's Divine Comedy of
H eaven and hell, Percy's Moviegoer and
R antings of Motes in O'Connor's Wiseblood to an
I ntroduction to Media, a sampling of skills, from
S hooting snapshots and darkroom developing to a
T V public service spot about speedbumpalitis, an
I maginary disease and Printshop
N ewsletters created in the Treadaway lab to
E xams at semester end, her

C ool patience and selfless generosity,
A gift for my graduate studies,
T he Handbook to Literature I now treasure.
R eturning in fall, I learned of the loss.
O ur teacher, supporter, and friend, gone
N ow to Dante's heavenly realm.

Mama Josie's Hands

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

My first memory of my grandmother is an image of her hands working pins into a white lace dress she has made for me. I do not remember the occasion for the special dress—it could be Easter or my First Communion—but what I know is that she took great care to be sure it fit right. She also made certain there was enough hem so if I grew taller, I could still get another year's use from the dress. My grandmother, Josephine Gonzales, was a practical woman.

My mother tells me that "Mama Josie" made her wedding dress, and with the remaining fabric, sewed a Baptismal gown for her children. Seven of us Gonzales grandchildren wore the gown, and five great-grandchildren wore it many years later. When Mama Josie sewed something, it was high quality, made to last.

Today it is ten years since my grandmother died, and I realize that everything she did was made to last.

Josephine Gonzales was a person who was deeply committed to her family. She raised six sons and one daughter the hard way: by herself. Through the difficult days of The Great Depression and World War II, she held her family together. As a single parent, she took jobs where she could find them, and encouraged her children to find odd jobs too. In this way, she instilled a strong work ethic in her children that my father has since passed on to the seven of us.

She also worked as a seamstress, using a corner of her back bedroom and her sewing machine to create one-of-a-kind dresses for a variety of female customers. Her stitches were fine and strong, her designs fashionable. But the most amazing thing to me was that she rarely used a paper pattern to make dresses. She had a keen eye and often recreated dresses from newspaper ads or magazine pages that women brought to her.

When my father began his welding business, this "eye" for detail and an ability to create a metal frame from a picture or a few simple directions was another "gift" he received from his mother.

She was also a remarkable parent. My uncles told me that she wouldn't rest until she knew that each of her children were home, safe in their beds. Here was a mother who walked many blocks to meet her teenage son, T.K., if he was late getting off work. If her younger children weren't home when they were supposed to be, she walked the neighborhood and brought them home. She was a mother who used her wits in dealing with "rascal" sons, Gilbert, Charlie, and Joe. To keep them out of mischief, she would take their pants away because she knew it would keep them inside the house.

She was a mother who loved her children equally. She never wavered in her philosophy that none of her children should speak badly about another. Even when her sons were adults with wives and families of their own, she would admonish one for gossiping about another's bad luck. She expected her children to help one another. She emphasized the unbreakable bonds of *familia*. She lived by the ideal that a person does whatever she or he can for a family member, because he or she would do the same for you. This is the hallmark of my father's home and my home too.

My father tells me that Mama Josie cried on the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor because she knew her sons would have to fight in the war. It was a custom to put stars in the window to signify that someone in the home was serving in the war. She felt proud to paste four stars on her window, but she also put her faith in God to bring her sons, T.K., Raymond, Gilbert, and Charlie, home safely by lighting holy candles everyday. Later, when her younger sons, Joe and Alonzo, went to serve in Korea, she kept her candles burning and her prayers sincere for their safe return. My uncles

say that it was her faith and all those candles that brought them home without injury.

My uncles, T.K. and Raymond, started their mechanics business from the garage in my grandmother's house. Once they established themselves, and bought their first buildings as *Gonzales Garage*, and my father had opened, *Gilbert's Welding Service*, my grandmother developed two important traditions to keep her family intact. For over thirty years, my grandmother fixed breakfast at her house at 5:30 am every Saturday morning for her sons to eat together. Among their friends, there was no greater "honor" than to be invited to the Gonzales brothers breakfast. Even we children would show up every once in a while, sleepy, but hungry, just to gather round a table of good food and funny stories.

The other family tradition that began when Mama Josie's sons and her daughter, Mary, got married was the great *tamalada* every Advent. Mama Josie followed a "pinch and taste" recipe for making tamales and her daughters-in-law were eager to figure out her secret and attempted to write down the ingredients and methods. To me, the recipe was secondary to the family bonding that occurred on those chilly Sundays in December. I saw my uncles working just as hard as their wives, a testimony to gender equality within my grandmother's family. I learned from older hands than my own that I had to be patient with myself as I attempted new skills. We gossiped about those who didn't show up to work, but more often, Mama Josie told stories about my father and my uncles, or we discussed music, school events, or whatever movies were popular at the time. There was no generation gap around my grandmother's table because everyone was invited to speak out and share their opinion. The work went quickly with so many hands and so many voices to fill up the *tamalada* day.

Finally a great family feast was held every Christmas Eve, as Mama Josie gathered all her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren under her roof to celebrate the birthday of Jesus with hot tamales, *chile con carne*, rice and beans. Once again, we renewed our relationships as *familia*, connected by the woman whose family values were of the highest quality and made to last. She taught us how to hold our family together even when physical distances kept us apart.

I think about the last blue silk dress that Mama Josie made for me, and my teenage opinion that it wouldn't be "cool" for the prom. By then, I knew how to sew my own clothes, and because of what I had watched Mama Josie do with the sewing machine, a few pins, and her own creativity, I made my own one-of-a-kind prom dress that my girlfriends envied. I realize how much she truly taught me, not just about sewing, but about putting my family first. Through her example, I learned that hard work is a necessity to achieve anything of value.

Years later, my uncles still gather on Saturdays to eat together, my brother hosts the family *tamalada*, and I teach my daughter how to work a sewing machine. I smile when she sews doll clothes from a picture, and all she needs are her hands.

Abuela

Dominique Esparza

I often went to my abuela's house as a child.
Each time I walked into her house, the smell
of freshly brewed coffee filled the kitchen.
My grandmother sat in her chair,
and waited for me to walk over to her.
"Hola!" my grandmother would say
with a smile as she leaned over
to give me a hug and kiss on the cheek.
Later she would leave her chair and
walk to the counter where she carefully
kneaded dough for homemade tortillas.
Nobody made them with as much love as
she did. We all sat at the table and
shared them while she told stories
in Spanish, the only language she knew.

I remember staying with her after she
became ill. I would sit with her as she watched
her favorite novelas. I cherished every
moment. She soon passed on.
I still remember everything about her,
the way she smiled, the way she laughed, the way
she told stories, and showed her love.

Lonely Hands

For Grandpo

Olivia Bazan

I used to run
my fingers through his
tinsel-like hair
making my way
to his fat, round lobes
tugging on the white curly hairs
sprinkling the tiny mazes
crowding his ears

Those tired, worried eyes
seemed as if
they had been wrung out
by dry, old hands
filling with silent tears
Warm, salty drops slowly disappearing
among the crevices and folds
of his caramel-colored skin

With his face tightly cradled
by my five-year-old hands
I would play with his elastic-like skin
rub my girl cheeks against
his round face
that felt like rough tree trunks
Wrapping my arms
around his thick neck
never wanting to let go

I would close my eyes
inhale his sweet
combination of Old Spice and Polo
run my hands
against the silky embroidery
of his white guayaveras

All I have now
is a rough, grainy
headstone
to touch
and my lonely hands
lay limp

My Mother Braids My Hair This Morning

Michelle P. Pina

I can do it myself now, but
my mother braids my hair this morning

the ritual the same since I was a child
her palms draw my hair from my face
cooling my flushed skin

air rushes against my neck
when she separates the strands

her nails slightly snag
as her fingers twist through my unruly waves
pulling them into sleek submission

my hair rustles like clean sheets
as she gathers the ends between her fingertips

my mother smells like toast and Jergens lotion
as she reaches past me for the rubber band on the table
bringing my almost complete braid past my ear

she is done
my hair no longer weaving us together

Ode to My Hair

Amparo S. Morales

trailing down the small of my back
you tease others by swinging side to side.
whether down, in a braid or a bun
your weight towers from my head.

cascading down you flow like a waterfall.
you are my sweater in the chilly night
and my nuisance on hot summer days.

like a whip at the end of a scorpion
i put you in knots to tame your wild ways.
you are my lethal weapon when need be
and you make me sister to Rapunzel.

a ball without a chain is what you become
when i don't know what to do with you.
i would chop off all my curls for pestering me,
but i wouldn't be me without you.

At The Ice Skating Rink

Briana Bachus

Ed thought back while he skated around the ice and watched her raise the camera up to take a picture. He had had no warning that she would have asked him anywhere with her. He was amazed that she would have chosen ice-skating and flattered that she chose to share that with him. The camera flashed and she sent him around again for another picture. He remembered when he had met her. Father Stephan had introduced her as "and important member of our congregation". She had blushed and then taken him in to introduce him to everyone else. She showed him off well.

I watched him skate around the ice and wondered why he had agreed to come with me. I wondered why I had picked ice-skating. Why would I do that to myself? I watched him through the lens of the cheap disposable camera he had given me. He was so beautiful, why was he with me? I took a picture and sent him around again so that I could rest my right leg. It was killing me, but I didn't want him to know that. I had told Father Stephan that he was cute and he had introduced us. Hey that had to be good right? A blessing from the priest.

Ed remembered his surprise at seeing her beautiful car, a brand new BMW 330cI. He barely fit. He was so tall. He had eaten earlier thinking that they were going to ice skate first and that always makes him hungry. "Have you skated before?" he asked. "Not since my accident." She said. She never explained the accident, that's all it was. Just an accident as if spilling a glass of milk was just the same sort of accident. He knew better but wasn't going to say anything. "I'll teach you then." He told her. It made him feel good that he could show her something, and that she would let him teach her to do something like that. She intimidated

him really. She was already in her second year of college and he had just graduated high school. She had to be over 21. She always seemed so calm and in control, natural. Never giggly or stupid like the girls in high school. Her smile had a way of making him freeze to so that he would forget what he was going to say. She was almost pretty when she smiled. Not that she was ugly; she was cute. Not beautiful, cute.

I didn't even see him when I pulled up. He tried to open the door before I knew he was even there. He was so cute trying to squish into my car. Mari, my best friend, is even shorter than me, and was the last person to sit in the passenger seat so his knees were up to his chin. Naturally I asked him to make himself comfortable. Of course this meant that now he was sitting in the back seat. I was really nervous. I hadn't even expected him to go out with me. I was still in shock. Not that looks are everything, but I'm not used to ultra fine guys dating girls like me. He looks like Nicholas Cage only younger of course. I thought he was over 21 at least. Not thinking of course that usually military guys have just graduated high school. Unfortunately he had already eaten, so I suggest ice-skating first even though I was starving! He asked if I ice-skated before. I told him not since before my accident. Then I thought I should have said, "No, not in a while." I need to start reconditioning my responses. He said he would teach me, but I didn't point out to him that it would be different with me. I didn't want to bring that up until I could no longer avoid it. I thought he didn't know, that he just thought my sister had died and that I had been okay. That is why he was beautiful. I was just a girl when I talked to him. My life was as normal as anybody's in his eyes.

He stopped where she was standing after she had taken another picture. "Come on." She stepped back up on the ice and held onto his hands again. He skated backwards and she smiled. Her smile was so

different. Sometimes it would just light up her whole face all at once, and other times it would slowly creep from the corners of her mouth up to her eyes. Slow or fast it was still brilliant and she was smiling at him. "Hey, you're doing really well," he said. She was. He was surprised. He couldn't skate *that* well and he had two feet and he played hockey. "Thanks," she said. Then he caught a slight mischievous twist to her smile. Her foot slipped and they fell. There was laughter on both sides as they picked themselves up and tried again. "You did that on purpose," he said. She looked at him innocently. "Never," she said and waddled over to him to lean on his arm. "Are you okay?" he asked. "Of course." She said, and they left it at that.

I stopped taking pictures and skated with Eddie. I just liked listening to him talk though getting him to talk was the tricky part. That's why I ask lots of questions about airplanes. I will know everything about every airplane he knows about by the time I stop talking to him. He was telling me to glide. So I did, and he said I was doing really well. So I kept gliding and tripped him, the same sort of trip we use in karate. We both laughed. He knew I did it on purpose. I had to lean on him after that though. It takes a lot for me to fall. I don't think he wanted to be like everybody else and worry about every step I take so he took a while to ask if I was okay, and I told him, "Of course." I always am. No matter what.

The restaurant had been interesting he thought. That was when he really started to feel comfortable. It was different. There were peanut shells on the floor. The waitress knew her. He wasn't surprised when he thought about it. He would have recognized her if she had been anywhere once. She couldn't be somewhere without being noticed. It wasn't that she was coarse or boisterous. She was just cheerful, and sunshine, no matter how hard it tries to hide behind a cloud is always noticed. The waitress asked if they wanted drinks.

He couldn't have any of course, but she was welcome to one. She ordered water. He told her she could have gotten something if she wanted. She just laughed and said, "How old are you?" He blushed, and said, "18." "Really? I thought you were at least 21." "How old are you?" "17." She knew he'd be surprised. He was more than surprised as well as a little relieved. Now he was older, so he was under less pressure to impress her.

I can't believe I got lost on my date. It's not as bad as throwing up as I've done before I guess, but still. I felt horrible and stupid. He said it was okay, but I'm not so sure. The thing with Ed though is he doesn't say much but what he says counts. That's why it's a good thing he's going into engineering. He does things like insisting on taking a picture of me. He had somebody take a picture of us when I wasn't paying attention and he just put his arm around me and pulled me closer to him. But he doesn't ever say anything more. I don't know what to think. He seemed to be really interested in me, but I don't know if that was wishful thinking or if it was real.

At the ice-skating rink I left it all up to the expert. He told me hockey skates would be easier so I asked for those. It wasn't until I started putting the skates on and he asked me if they fit that what I had been worried about ever since it happened came up. I looked him in the eye and said, "You do know that my feet aren't real." He smiled and just said, "Yeah," in his Eastern accent. He was the first one to not care. He acted as if there was nothing wrong with me. It amazed me. I leaned on him the whole way to the rink, taking baby steps. Once on the ice I clung to the wall. He had to peal me off of it. It didn't take much convincing though. I was willing to give it a try. After all it had been my idea.

Ode to My Arms

Cyra S. Dumitru

There is an honesty about summer
when my arms come out of hiding,

rattlesnakes who have spent winter entwined
with woolen sleeves, leather jackets, each other

holding whatever heat they've harbored below
ground. The day comes when quiet tongues

smell the heat dropping from spring roots
and the two snakes untangle, find the edge

of self again, appetite for salty nights.
How they lengthen as they emerge, bare

themselves to whatever landscape they can travel.
First thing they do is rub hard until winter skin splits,

revealing veins pulsing like sling shots
and a complete skin thinned and turned

inside out, outgrown scars discarded.
To be as bold and supple as these arms,

ready to love what uncoils in the open
as well as the hidden and hurt,

ready to stretch toward something larger,
scent of ocean and trustworthy light,

in the way of all animals, reaching
beyond the human, beyond guile.

Hands

Michelle P. Pina

Rough, calloused
my father's hands
smelled like dirt and metal.
They would catch
my hair
like a brush that is too prickly.
His hands were warm
like a stone left in the sun all day.
His fingernails were ragged,
scratchy tips caused by nervous teeth.
His knuckles scarred,
pinched like a tangle of wires below his skin.

If not for your hushing eyes

for Jessica

Michael Anthony Romero

If not for your hushing eyes
that hush my brow and breathe me in,
into a walking-sleep,
I'd only be in the world again
sifting through pockets
and kicking the pebbles that decorate the street.

I picked you out once.
I picked you out like a lilac laughing
its sweet silence in summer's green
and you sat beside me in North Carolina,
in Carolina where the star lights beam
on the staggering trees and through,
on the blacktop, blue.

I can smell the rain now,
when we crack the windows and I let you in,
I let you in to a quiet room.
Still, our words are falling, but you never see
that when my lips are crawling
on my flushed cheeks, it's just me
being impressed with you.

Blank Face

Amparo S. Morales

shades of blue cloud my eyes
changing the world around me. no longer
can i feel the warmth of the sun, no more
pleasant dreams for me. shrieks fill my head
in the night and haunting laughter swirls
in my mind during the day. dawn brings
another miserable day and birds chirp
my death march. butterfly wings beat fast
matching the pace of my heart. i'm looking
looking, for what i lost somewhere on my path.
never will i be whole again until i can find
what slipped from my face
—my smile.

Breathe

Francesca Herrera

There is a dull aching, faintly felt.
The aching will fade,
what it represents will not.

I have a nervous feeling about
myself.
I almost can't breathe.
I hate this feeling.
I can't seem to breathe deep enough.
What is this?

My heart knows something is wrong,
but I can't put it into words.
And so I still struggle,
smiling on the outside,
quiet on the inside.
Just trying to breathe.

Cornflower

Cindy Torres Garcia

I had never given my heart to anyone before, but I know what it feels like now. Today, he had something to say.

His words went straight through it. My heart burst its blue color everywhere. I thought that it would look red like all the pictures I have seen, but instead it was a cornflower blue I have seen named only in my sixty-four-count box of crayons. It looked as though my fat blue veins pumped right through me and into my second world.

What should I do? Should I swim in my "blue" and pretend it is water in a swimming pool? I mean water looks blue most of the time, right? Maybe I should try to make it whole by freezing it into a heart again. I guess that is how people become cold-hearted; it was the only way they could pull themselves together.

Or maybe I should just wait until it all evaporates and there is no more left to give. I know some people who just boil it up in all their hate and purple-and-red bruised passion until they make "blue" steam itself away and all their lifeblood is gone.

I think that I will just roll myself around in it and start to finger paint instead. Everybody knows that the solutions to life's most puzzling questions lie in finger painting. What better way to become an artist than by painting with my heart? Doesn't that count? Maybe I am being too literal. Then again, there is no heart. It is a blue river with see-through parts where my tears seared their eyes.

What time is it? I'm thirsty. I'll drink it all up and make-believe that I am all better for his sake. For whose sake did I say? I must be stupid or too good to be true. People will tell me to trick it into the sink and pull the drain plug. I would then watch the blue swirl around and around, while the inside parts disappear into the city and the outer parts take their turn. Soon, the inner and outer parts of the swirl take the shape of the pipe only to lose their new shape when it makes contact with the rest of the world.

No, I think I will take a bubble bath so that maybe I can wash away my blue stains left from the hollow-eyed splash. The blue river will creep in, crawling inside itself, pushing its way across the clean floor and struggling up the ugly tub with its monster faces. It will lend itself to wash me only to drown me, or leave me for dead.

My last resort is all that is left. I will remember old times. I will remember when I was a child, back to when things were supposed to be simpler. I will take my cup of life, stab its blue face with a bendy straw, and sniff up as hard as I can a hollow eye and some blue parts through my right nostril. I will think that it hurts, but it will be too funny to cause any real pain. Maybe it will shoot up and back down, through to my other nostril. It will dribble out asking for me to laugh at myself for being so stupid. I will laugh and laugh.

I know what I need to do. To me, pain means I need to shrivel up inside of it until it is no longer pain; it becomes a blue bubble that can burst any minute. I will go inside my first world, the one I do not remember. The long, blue life-string feeds into me now, and I will not remember a thing.

Blue and Green Music (inspired by O'Keefe's painting)

Rebecca Reyes

I.
Lancing fiery tendrils
Spearing your inner ear
And hearing blue and green.

II.
Blazing blue-green fire
dancing to the unheard sound
of its own making.

(the hipster in red shoes)

Richard Mavis

the hipster in red shoes walked into the café and continued to the pacman machine, looking side to side as he passed by all the students reading madness numbers from their books. his karma was good & his pockets were empty. a drink would only cost him 50c but that's 2 games of pacman, 30 minutes spent in front of the screen jamming the joystick this way & that, munching dots & eating bluefaced ghosts with blinkless eyes. besides, the caffeine would keep him up all night, while the game would cement him sweet arcade-like dreams. "there must be something about it, though" he thought, "for there's this bitter bean juice everywhere, absolutely everywhere i look."

Middles

For Jake

Sandra J. Vallejo

I

he stands

in the middle of the road,
an average joe
trying to find middle ground,
but on either side siblings are found.

My middle child rebels against his fate
and meanings it creates,
but refrained from using his middle finger as a protest tool,
when forced to study the middle class or Middle East
in middle school.

I sympathize with my second of three
son of a middle

II

third of five
me

with my own middle wars to wage,
not of studying Middle Ages, but middle age,
with middle-aged spread wide and deep and
memories of knock you into the middle of next week.

Always the peacemaker, either too old or too young,
smack dab in the middle, fair to middlin' my son.
Play both ends against the middle, secret strategies
shared,
middles are much stronger when paired.

Stealer's Wheel sang in seventy-two
I'm Stuck in the Middle With You

News of the War, 1970

Melissa Sandy Vela

Char-
lies Viet-
Cong not
King
Kong,
fuz zy
screens
list names
repeated repeated repeated
casual ties
that
f
a
l
l,
raindrops
moist- ening
mud
with red valor.

The Warrior

Roberto Pachecano

"Oh my God!" the kid screams, his voice joining the discord of emotional lament. The kid is in shock. Partially dried, dark blood stains his forehead. Like the others seeking sanctuary from the terror plunging from the sky, he reacts instinctively by jumping into the first cubbyhole he can find. The density of the dust that hangs in the air chokes him as he struggles to breathe. The morning sunlight dims within seconds.

The sound of feet scurrying around outside the cramped quarters signals a sense of urgency. Men struggle in their attempts to escape the explosions. Those in charge bark orders for all to take cover, while at the same time assist with carrying the wounded.

The young man celebrated his nineteenth birthday only two days ago. He drank two beers in the German tradition—warm. Today, he inhales pulverized loam and can't stop coughing. The unbearable heat in the supposedly safe haven causes him to sweat, and he shakes uncontrollably from fear and anxiety.

"Damnation! It seems surreal," says another youth, newly arrived in the country the day before. He bit off part of his bottom lip, blood oozing down his chin; terror numbs his pain. The horror of the attack is starting to sink in.

"Goddamit! Here it comes again!" shouts the kid from inside the dusty asylum. He closes his eyes...

Americans, the world community, and even the terrorists who inflict the deadly blow, see the tragedy unfold before their eyes again and again, as television networks vie for exclusive interviews— "ratings" month has arrived early. The "surreal" images now appearing on live TV have trumped the Condit story.

I was on my way to school when I first heard the news about the attack on the World Trade Center. As a 53-year-old Vietnam Veteran medically retired because

of severe symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder incurred while serving with the Marines in the "lost" war, and exacerbated by working in the post office, I often listen to the songs of my youth played on the "oldies" station. Today was no exception. The program was interrupted by a news flash announcing that an airliner has crashed into one of the Towers.

My first reaction was to ignore the breaking news as just another unfortunate accident. Struggling to learn how to deal with catastrophic events which claim hundreds of lives, I had not been able to handle recent tragedies well. Columbine and Oklahoma City only enhanced the symptoms of my sickness. Now, I attempt to put mental distance between myself and things I can't control.

The radio station continues its regular programming, but the music is interrupted a second time. The news reporter strains to find the right words to describe the crash of a second airliner into the other tower. He is now referring to both crashes as a terrorist attack. The music stops.

"Terrorist!" "Terrorist!" echoes in my mind. I want to hear music so I press a different tuning button, then another, and another. The terrorists have taken over all the radio stations. I continue to press buttons—base, treble, clock, cruise control, wiper fluid, windows, getting more frustrated with each button. I punch the eject button on the tape player—Chopin's Concerto for Mandolin and Strings comes flying out like a bullet.

"Do not leave any cassettes in the tape deck," I tell my wife slowly and deliberately each time she uses the truck. She asks why? Now I know the answer.

I am enraged! I am under attack! I tighten my grip on the steering wheel. My knuckles turn white. The hair on my neck stands on end, and my skin stretches as oversized "goose" bumps rise. I begin to feel distressed, even smelling stagnant water...

"Incoming!" someone shouts. I run into the cistern bag as I fly out of my tent, knocking it over into

an old collapsed bunker now filled with stagnant water; the smell hangs heavy in the air. My toenails dig deep into the soles of my "jungle" boots as I dash, hunched at the waist, into a bunker. I feel a burning sensation at my fingertips as I claw my way into the deepest recess of the man-made hole while others come tumbling in.

Every Marine that enters the sandbagged sanctuary comes in yelling. Once inside, they shut up, close their eyes, and wait for the shelling to stop. Finally, the attack stops but not until after forty or fifty rockets have found their mark. We Marines wait in silence about five minutes. I open my eyes. It is dark both inside and outside the bunker. The ammo and fuel dumps sustain direct hits from rockets screaming across the DMZ. Fires burn out of control as smoke rises thousands of feet into the morning sky, dimming the sunlight.

All the other guys leave the bomb shelter. I remain in a fetal position, cowering in the corner with dried blood on my forehead, lungs filled with dust as I labor to breathe. Moments later, Marines begin to fill the dirt room again—a barrage of rockets continues. The earth vibrates as the explosions get closer and louder. My throat feels parched as I reminisce about my birthday celebration two days ago when I drank two warm beers....

The sound of honking horns from oncoming cars and the vibration of my truck as it bounces over the center-line bumps, shake me out of my trance. I pull into a service station and stop by the pumps.

Dazed and frightened, I get out of my truck and walk around it a few times, stopping at the windshield-water bucket. I dip my fingers into it and splash my face. The cool grimy, blackened-water soothes me, as I slowly regain my composure. I decide against returning home but continue on to school.

Now parked in the school lot, I sit and think about wanting to be with my wife and daughters. I miss

them. Soon everyone I have ever loved enters my thoughts. Yesterday, I would have hurried to the cafe to study. Today I take my time.

As I approach the cafe, I can see students through the windows bunched up in front of the TV sets, watching and listening to the events of this morning. I had never seen so many students in one place before today, except maybe on Fridays at the "Quad", as they prance around in their "Greek" colors.

The news has gotten worse as a third and fourth airliner also crash. The students stand mesmerized in front of the television sets. A few of them make inaudible comments, trying to make sense of the events unfolding before them. Each claims to know someone in New York or Washington DC. Whimpering sounds and muffled cries can be heard throughout the cafe. Students console and hug each other.

I walk along the back of the students and staff crowded twenty deep, stopping long enough to glance at the burning towers on TV. Watching the disaster makes me nauseous so I head for the closest bathroom.

"Hey, Roberto!" a young female student shouts as she walks toward me. This surprises me; she had never even acknowledged my presence before, even though we had shared several classes. "Can you believe what's going on?" she asks, now standing right in front of me. "This is, like, so unreal," she says without waiting for an answer. Her eyes reveal tears, and her lips quiver as she struggles further to contain her emotions.

I want to hug and comfort her, but I resist. I think of my daughters again and wonder who might be comforting them.

A few more students descend upon me, each with his own set of questions. They, too, do not wait for me to answer. Who are these kids? Why are they coming up to me? I then realize that these kids want some kind of assurance from me that everything will be all right. They so desperately want and need their parents. They

settle for me, the older guy, the warrior. If they only knew. I make a few comments about peace being elusive, and that it will be up to them to achieve it.

"Don't be afraid," I say. I encourage them to call home and talk to a loved one for reassurance. My next class starts in ten minutes; I excuse myself.

Peeking inside my class, I see only two classmates. They sit at their desks pretending to read, but I notice their eyes aren't moving; they seem troubled. Normally most of my classmates are seated by this time, so I decide to wait outside in the hallway.

There is strange silence in this deserted hall, usually teeming with students walking to and from their classes. The housekeeping lady walks by me, dusting the base board of the semi-dark hallway opposite me. She reaches the end and then walks back dusting my side.

"Excuse me," she says as she looks at me in an inquisitive way.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said, moving to the other side against the wall. For some reason, I feel safe in the hall. It reminds me of the bunker from long ago where I had once sought shelter from "incoming" rockets. *A burning sensation crawls up my fingertips, as I hold myself up against the wall.*

"I didn't mean that you were in my way. I just wanted to tell you that all classes have been canceled for the day."

"Classes are canceled," she tells my two classmates in the room. She continues to eye me, getting up very close to my face. What could she be looking at?

"What's that black-looking stuff on your face?" she asks, pointing at my forehead.

"Blood," I answered, wondering why the kids in the cafe hadn't noticed it.

Fable of Clouds and New Moon

(written in response to 9/11)

James Cervantes

The day the clouds went slumming
they got it all wrong.
They hung with fire instead of rain
and could not go home to brag of mud,
nor could they say
they were full of what spring desired.

Dogs walked through them, cocked their heads
at what stroked their bellies,
whined because they could not feel what they saw
and bit the fetid air,
or whined because they could not see what they felt
and bit the fetid air.

When the clouds rose,
they left no dew on the flanks of stones
and were as smoke
on the night of a new moon. Lovers
held back that love
and loved instead wisps of hair

in the light of the sun on the moon.

Castaway

Cyra S. Dumitru

My daughter's arm slowly wakens
following seven weeks of tight dreams
inside a cast, wakens into a new day
of planes piercing buildings, baths of falling ash.

Her arm stretches, thickens, begins to recall
its former life while we swim underwater,
back and forth, a ceremony of healing,
back and forth, as if weaving invisible

thread across a wide blue wound.
I have never seen my daughter so graceful:
amber-colored hair streaming radiant
seaweed behind her. She drops

into the underworld where sunlight
curves over and over like jump ropes,
offers both arms as if to comfort those
still there, those of us unready to return.

Snatches of Talk on a Walk

Sandra J. Vallejo

People die every day,
Is this where we begin?
Stop this killer I pray,
I'll see you at the end.

Is this where we begin
with walkers with walkers?
I'll see you at the end,
no kilometer markers.

With walkers with walkers
could take four hours
no kilometer markers
cumulus clouds bring showers.

Could take four hours
drenched and out of luck
cumulus clouds bring showers
nice weather for a duck.

Drenched and out of luck
signed up for a 5K,
great weather for a duck
walked eight miles you say.

Signed up for a 5K
T-cell count is low,
walked eight miles you say
can't afford to catch a cold.

T-cell count is low
people die every day,
can't afford to catch a cold
stop this killer I pray.

For Her

Laura Guerrero

I will lie behind her body, soft skin
harboring her sad storm, pouring rain.
I'll comfort her, rub her back, without
a storm of my own, firm
like ground to bounce against, another
will move away, falling silent.
I lay my palm to her back, as if
sucking tips of dribbled breath, holding it tight
to bounce it faster, smaller to its break.
She will not know she'll feel better.
She knows she'll break—her world will end.
But the new world will be born. She'll forget this fall
she made, that boy
that passed through, finally, sweating heart, into
the pores of her skin out her body. But now I'd
make her a jack-o-lantern, carve her
a smile, buy her a light bulb, turn it on,
because I, who let her rain on me, hail,
electrify my soil, is already numb
from my own weathering. She will not forget
he who made her think, the one
who made her love, follow his step, one
behind the other. But when her flesh
is polished over, a man will beg her to follow,
and she will not do it.
She will not follow one after the other,
or even her own heart. My friend will forget
as she is palm to back on another's flesh.
She'll teach her Earth to thicken its atmosphere, block
sun love, and be cooled without fluctuation,
icing all oceans. Even my ground
will thicken and together we'll be solid hearts,
smiling, laughing like the never broken.

For Tina

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Inside the basilica for Our Lady of San Juan,
the faithful come
asking for mercy,
for blessings,
for hope and for peace.

I sit among quiet whispers,
recall a smiling friend
who died before we would all know
the great leader she would be.

Instead, God called her
to lead us on the way to Him.
She'd go before us, prepare the way,
and her gentle life would show us,
Come follow me.

Does God prepare us
to meet Him by taking others first?
So that when our time comes,
we aren't surrounded by strangers?

Tina grew up in coastal places,
water as her sister,
sun as her mother,
sand and salt, her brothers.

She brings us to heaven
with words of gentle coaxing.
Swim in the salt water,
float in the waves.
Remember
the expanse of God's love
when we look upon the sea.

While Watching My Writer Friends

Vanessa Pedregon

In time.
In time.
The phrase repeats
itself behind familiar voices.
It's my only unextended
lifetime guarantee.
I need time enough to sit here
long enough
  to breathe in the sweet melody
of beat watches and blue rooms
  Ritalin kids and radiant women.

With patience.
  A familiar phrase behind repeating voices.
"It's all I need," my mother said.
Patience.
Enough patience to slide my dreams
  across the table
and hope for a better hand.

In time. With patience.
The phrases blaze inside my mind
  playing themselves like a broken record.
In time, with patience.
  Your beats and your blues
blind me and now you say it's my time.

In time
  with patience
and now it's mine.

But your beats fade to whispers
  your blues hide behind grays.
Ritalin kids run
the women crawl in dark corners
and before I can say,
  "My name is. . ."
time stole my patience.

When One Becomes Tired of Being Herself

Michelle P. Pina

Sometimes
she grew bored with being
Strawberry Shortcake.
Drinking tropical punch
eating a cupcake.
Sometimes
she wanted to dye her hair scarlet.
wear lingerie and Dorothy's ruby slippers
while drinking a strawberry daiquiri
and eating maraschino cherries.

Lean

Melissa Sandy Vela

Sick again
nausea-pills help her
swallow the food
her finger points no to,
and pulls out.
She doesn't want it,
the cream of the cheese,
the fat of fettuccini.
She dreams of her sausage legs
after she smells chocolate.
No, halfa cup of fiber cereal
moves, won't settle
on hips
fashioned for size zero

Asylum of a Dead Child

Eric Cruz

You have found one dream in this world, a place
where only shadows crawl. Death cannot turn
here, moonlight announcing how a body

without a face or spine or heart can still hold
darkness. It should be said that you were too
young to know. Still, there is one memory to tell:

Among the flowers, you hid where the wind had swept.
Every stem was bent. Every petal whispered its bloom for
miles. You jumped into color, body laced with pollen.

Butterflies remained airborne, earth warmed by wings.
They carried scents of dusk, scraping the sky for hours,
stretched by dust. For a moment they vanished, the world

had gone from night to day without notice. But their wings
were one heartbeat in darkness— you knew they had not left.
It was some time before you noticed how soft you were,

your perfumed skin cooled by an invisible flutter. You were
alive when the storm hit. Heaven pressed a hot thunder, the
long day angry— ready to spill the first tragedy upon night:

It was your footsteps in spilled ground, your torso turned
oddly black from mud. It was where your voice screamed
when it touched roots, worms and stones an echo of dark,

steamy vapors. It was how we went mad looking for you,
soaked in rage, our bones and muscles stuttering. It was what
followed the question: *If it rains forever, what then?*

Warhol

Gabriel Valdez

Abstract genius
or divine lunacy?
What truly bears the mark of prophecy
against that of infancy?
Interventions of mythical proportions
are assaulted with a precipitation of emotions.
It tastes like Chicken Noodle Soup.
The reality reflecting life
which is truly art,
art that is annihilating the soldiers
who faced a death by Cuisinart.
A moonlit morning symphony
is now complete with the stuttering jackhammers.

Remnants

Luis A Canuto

The deep sea of emptiness
Washes at the shores of my heart
Every wave takes a little tiny piece more
Into the sullen water

My heart searches
But nothing is to be found
My heart looks
But nothing is to be seen.

Only that beautiful image
Embedded within me
My inner eye reveals what is
So close, yet, so far away

My heart tries to escape the obscurity
But nothing escapes the emptiness.
It pretends the void does not exist
But its force easily overwhelms.

Nothing is left to do
But surrender to its might.
A dark cloud now engulfs my soul
Every reason for being lost in its depth

Its power replacing all
Leaving only remnants and memories floating astray.
Images, beautiful images
Memories, fond memories about the one I loved
So close, yet, so far away

Spinning Wheels in Drawhorn

Benjamin R. Domingue

Have you ever driven through the foggy marsh of southeast Texas on a summer night? In your mouth you can taste the soot of the oil refineries that light up the night with their perverted beauty.

Dustin Heinz and Roy LeRoy had spent the end of the summer in California, where the fog is clean, and fresh off the Pacific. School started on August fourteenth that year, and the two boys had returned from San Francisco at about three o'clock in the afternoon on August thirteenth, the day before they started ninth grade. They were back home in Drawhorn, where the fog feels like it is solid. Drawhorn is a small town centered in the middle of this seemingly bottomless swamp of southeast Texas.

Dustin and Roy were fourteen, and together they looked like a modern day Abbot and Costello. Dustin was scrawny, little, blonde headed, and still waiting for puberty. Roy looked like a little league catcher, but he didn't play baseball. They had spent the entire summer talking about Leslie Guidry and Kristen Prejean. Dustin even claimed to have seen Leslie's left nipple when it mistakenly fell out of her bikini top at the Drawhorn Municipal Swimming Pool, and he probably wasn't lying. Not thirty minutes after Dustin was home, Roy had hopped off of his bike in the street and let it free ride into the curb, flying gracefully into the air and crashing violently into Dustin's front yard leaving a huge rut.

"Dustin! Roy's here!" Mrs. Heinz was yelling from the kitchen. Mrs. Heinz was one of the nicest mothers in the neighborhood, and Dustin contended that she had invented Rice Crispy Treats, and sold the recipe to the Rice Crispies company.

Roy walked into the house through the back door. The only people who went to the front door were trick or treaters, and Mormons. "Hello Mrs. Heinz." he said. She always liked Roy, and thought that he was a good influence on her son. Roy peered into the living room looking for Dustin, but he wasn't there. Mitch Heinz, Dustin's dad, laid on the couch watching an old Roy Rogers film. Mitch's dad smoked a pack a day when Mitch was growing up in Drawhorn, and he still

does today. Winstons. Maybe that is why he always liked to watch Roy Rogers. Dustin always liked to tease Mitch about Mary Karr telling the story of the time Mitch tried to smoke chocolate rolled up in paper in her best-selling memoir, The Liar's Club. According to Mitch, Karr's story was a lie.

Without turning to see Roy, Mitch said in a strong east Texas accent, "He'ey Roy." It was almost as though he was speaking to the television, then he seemingly faded back into his coma. Dustin was in the bathroom sprinkling garlic salt on his little brother Colt's toothbrush. He was the best prankster in his class. When he was finished, Dustin walked past the living room and motioned for Roy to follow him into his bedroom. Dustin shut the door, slowly turned, and gave Roy an ice-cold look. Roy was anxious and said in a loud whisper, "I've got them!" Dustin quickly put his finger over his mouth. Apparently Roy's whisper wasn't soft enough. "Let's go," said Dustin.

The two of them walked out the back door after telling Dustin's parents that they were going to ride bikes, but as they shut the door you could still hear Mitch saying, "Roy! Clean up that rut you left in my front yard, and where ya'll goin'?"

After they got outside Roy said, "Hey! Let's ride by Jennifer's before we go out there."

"I don't know why you like riding by her house so much. It's not like we ever see her." Dustin replied.

Jennifer Rachel was the hottest girl in the neighborhood. She had long dark hair, and was about three inches taller than all the boys in her grade. At the middle school dances the boys would line up to stare at her butt in those tight fitting jeans when the DJ played "The Harlem Shuffle." Roy had kissed her once playing spin the bottle, but never a real kiss. They rode their bikes around the block, trying to jump every crack, and neglected newspaper on the sidewalks. They slowed down almost to a stop when they were getting to Jennifer's house. Roy stared in awe while Dustin was cracking up inside. It was regular for Roy to convince Dustin to ride by Jennifer's house, but they just never saw her. They finally made it to their destination, the drainage ditch. It hadn't rained in about two weeks, so the ditch was almost dry. They rode all the way down to the train tracks that pass under the overpass, left their bikes close to the tracks, and

climbed down into the ditch.

"Are you ready?" Roy asked.

"Yea! Hurry up before old man Withers catches us you fat ass."

Roy stood up and reached into his denim Velcro right pocket. He started singing "Bad" by Michael Jackson, put his left hand on his groin, spun around and pulled his right hand out of his pocket. There they were; an unwrapped, shiny, perfectly squared, pack of Marlboro Light cigarettes. Dustin gazed quickly with a smile, and then ripped the cellophane wrapping off and took out two smokes. The two boys crouched down in the ditch, lit the cigarettes, and enjoyed the late afternoon shade of the oak trees.

For fifteen minutes the boys felt like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. With the cigarettes neatly perched between their index and middle fingers, they spoke with deeper voices. They acted interested in the weather, and Roy even said something bad about the good ol' days, when Reagan was in office. Their daydreaming was quickly interrupted when the two looked up to see Officer Labouf standing behind them. He had crept up like a ninja, except that he was fat, and panting from walking the railroad tracks.

"Well hello boys!" Labouf said with an arrogant smile on his face. "Old man Withers called the station and said you was down here smokin.' Why don't you hand me them there Marlboros?" It was a question, but he didn't say it like it was one. The boys got out of the ditch and handed him their smokes. Labouf took the cigarettes and shoved them into his back left pocket, where he kept his can of dipping tobacco. The three of them walked down the tracks towards the parked police car, the two boys pushing their bikes along side Labouf. He put both of their bikes in the trunk and said, "Get in the back seat you two little criminals." Dustin and Roy thought they were going to be taken down to the police station, but they weren't that lucky. Officer Labouf turned on his red and blue flashing lights, and began to parading them through the neighborhood. He was going to drop the boys off at their homes.

Dustin and Roy almost soil themselves in the back seat. It was about 6:30, on a Sunday evening. They had just started burning the marsh, so the smoke wasn't so bad that people had gone inside. They rolled by the Gassen's house,

and Mr. Gassen saw the boys. Labouf waved to Mr. Gassen and said, "Say hello boys." After they passed the Boudreaux's, who were sitting in their front lawn swing, Dustin crouched down in the seat. He didn't want anyone else in the neighborhood to see him riding in the back of the cop car. Labouf peeked into the back seat and cracked a half smile at Dustin.

"I think I'm going to throw up. Roy, I'm going to throw up." Dustin was almost in tears. Roy just looked at him and thought; you pansy. "My dad is going to kill me." Dustin told Officer Labouf. The two boys pleaded for the officer to let them go and they would never smoke again, but his blood was too cold. There was nothing Dustin and Roy could say to change Labouf's mind. The car turned the corner onto Dustin's street and Mitch was in the driveway, just finishing washing Mrs. Heinz's car. When he looked up and saw the police car coming down the street with its lights flashing, he thought there had been some domestic violence down at the Reynolds' house. Dr. Reynolds had a young, plastic, fake model-looking wife that he liked to beat around. When Labouf drove up to the driveway the lights were still flashing. Mitch looked and only saw Roy. Dustin was still crouched down in the back seat.

"Dude. Your dad looks so pissed." Roy said. At that, Dustin started gagging in the back seat. Roy said, "Wait until you get out to throw up. Maybe your dad will have sympathy for you."

Dustin bolted out of the car for the house. Mitch let him run past. Roy sat quietly in the back seat while Mitch stared him down. Roy was waiting for smoke to start coming out of his ears.

"What's my boy up to?" Mitch asked. "Old man Withers saw your boy and the LeRoy boy smokin' down by the railroad tracks. I thought you might like to know what they was up to." Labouf's accent was so strong that Mitch could hardly understand him, but he thanked Officer Labouf and the two men shook hands, then the door shut and Labouf drove to Roy's house. Roy's parents weren't home, so Officer Labouf dropped him off and said, "Now Roy, you better tell your mamma and daddy that we caught you smokin.' I'm gonna call them tonight. So it would be best for you to tell 'em first." Roy told his parents when they got home, but Labouf never called. Roy was always a sucker to authority.

Meanwhile, back at Dustin's house, much worse was happening. When Mitch walked into the house, Mrs. Heinz asked in a frantic voice, "What's goin' on?"

"Where is that little shit? I'm goin' to beat him! The police caught him and Roy smokin' down by old man Withers' place!" Mitch was furious. He grabbed a bowl out of the cabinet, took out the pack of cigarettes that Labouf had given him, and started tearing. Mitch took the bowl and dumped the tobacco of eighteen cigarettes into it.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Heinz asked.

"He's gonna eat it! All of it! My dad smokes a pack a day. My brother smokes. And I'll be damned if I'm gonna let that little shit smoke while he lives in this house!" Mitch was sweating.

After vomiting in the bathroom, Dustin walked out pale, lips quivering, and wanting anything but to see his father. "Get in here!" Mitch screamed. Dustin walked into the kitchen. He was barefoot and the tile was cold.

"Eat it." Mitch said, and motioned to the bowl of tobacco. "You want to smoke cigarettes? Huh? You want to kill yourself? You wanna have a heart attack like your Uncle Kevin? Not in my house! You eat every last bit of it. Where did you get cigarettes from? That's a bonified guarantee to die. Do you think you are cool now? Huh? Since you smoke cigarettes? Are you and Roy cool now? Well you know what? You cain't stay at Roy's anymore!" Mitch went on, but Dustin had stopped listening. Colt walked into the kitchen in his white Hanes underwear and a camouflage T-shirt laughing at Dustin. "Get out!" Dustin screamed. Dustin was angry, embarrassed, humiliated, and scared. He felt he had been defeated. So he did the first thing that came to his mind.

Dustin got a spoon out, grabbed the bowl of tobacco, turned on the water faucet, and filled the bowl with water. He then sat down at the table, and looked up to stare at Mitch, who was staring right back at him. They were like two gunfighters waiting for high noon. Dustin's eye twitched. Then he took a spoonful, and shoved it in his mouth. He began to eat it all as fast as he could. As Dustin was chewing and swallowing tobacco and water, he looked up at Mitch and said, "Mmmmmm! This is good. You want some?" Dustin smiled with tobacco stuck to his teach, but he was

fighting back tears. He would not let his father know that he had been defeated. Mrs. Heinz started to cry and left the room. It was just Dustin and his father. He quickly finished the bowl, went to his room, and slammed the door.

After his parents left for the grocery store, Dustin sneaked outside and put his finger down his throat. He vomited all of the tobacco out of his system while the neighbors dog was barking through the fence. He then went back into his room a laid in bed. Just before he fell asleep he heard Colt squeal in the bathroom and start coughing. He screamed, "Somebody put garlic on my toothbrush!" Dustin, laying alone in the dark, smiled and wondered if he had any classes with Roy the next day. The fog was rolling in off the Gulf and Dustin faded off into sleep.

Street and My Life

Patipan Auprasert

Early morning.
Street looks empty same as my mind,
while I'm driving a car to the airport.
The traffic light is yellow,
but I've never known that
this yellow will be green or red
the rest of my life.
Then some cars merge on the same street
same as some ideas that merge on my thought.
It is like I reach the big junction which
has many ways to drive through,
but not for me.
Finally, I reach the airport and stop
all of my thought.
I decide not to care about the traffic
in my brain any more,
because I trust the navigator, my father,
who has seen many more traffic lights than I have.
I fly and say goodbye to my old street.

(lunch at the cosmic café)

Richard Mavis

the streets below stunk of glass & mixed media. i sat inside a multicultural room with rivers on the walls & books of buddhism or 'how to be' blablabla arranged & neatly stacked in an unvarnished wooden shelf. basmati rice lingered on the fork in my hands growing older, breath by breath - cars rolled by below without a thought of the magnificence going on above and they didn't care, either, and we didn't care about them, either, and none of us cared about anyone except the ones that we were with. a bird floated by without beating its wings just before two cars rammed into each other down below - "it would have sounded a lot cooler if cars were still made of steel" said the waitress behind the bar.

A Wreck on IH-35

Cesar "turtle" Gutierrez

The day beat on my head, my sweaty brow;
but I can not figure out the passion of the sun
other than my own misfortune. As the time
eked on inch by inch, it makes no sense why
far from pitiful me wastes so. So I sit, draining into
a black and hot abyss not seeking much more than
sanctuary and peace. I do not find it, I do not know it,
I do not remember it—for the day has been too long.
song by song, I hear thee—thy call, thy yell, thy tone,
thy remembrance. You have not left me but you are
not here. I am alone in a school of metallic fish burbling
their own case of existence, their own plea for mercy,
their own visualization of why they are left to bake.
They only move with the rest; the pace the same, the
mood the same, the pain the same, the anxiousness the
same, the tiredness all the same. We are not the same
persons, we are not family, we are not friends. We do
not know ourselves much less each other. But our goal
is something we all seek.
Our goal is home.

Las Tortillas

Olivia Valdez

soft savory glue
on the pallet of my mouth
pieces of love made warm
Las tortillas always welcome me home

starved and yet full of the city
I find sanction in my mother's hot kitchen
sitting at the table I smell my welcome engulfed in a furnace
inhale the beauty of my mother's overworked hands

as my lips ride slow wet waves
I envision my fill
bread and butter melting into each other

anticipation coats my skin, lips, fingers, and heart
my mouth waters
I watch the tortilla on the comal
it reminds me of hours spent in my kitchen
feeling trapped by time
and hungry inside

a taste of heaven
it travels straight into my soul
I close my eyes tasting minutes
days, weeks
of lost time

I chew not because I am hungry
but because I am empty
hurriedly, I take another bite
and slowly I fill

I hold a piece in my hand
and I can feel the warmth down to my toes
Las tortillas, I have always counted on
to welcome me home

Featuring students and faculty of St. Mary's University

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